

# IN THE SUPREME COURT OF TEXAS

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Misc. Docket No. 06-9169

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## ORDER APPOINTING FOSTER CARE CONSULTATIVE GROUP

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1. At the state and national level, child welfare reform efforts are underway to improve outcomes for children who have been abused or neglected. As a gatekeeper for families in crisis, the judiciary plays an essential role in improving court practice in child protection cases.
2. In September 2005, Texas judicial and executive branch leaders attended the National Summit on the Protection of Children. The delegation made a number of recommendations, including the recommendation that the Supreme Court of Texas consider the creation of a statewide, multi-disciplinary commission to specifically address the goals of ensuring safety, well being and permanency of children in foster care.
3. In March 2006, the Court appointed the Task Force for Child Protection Case Management and Reporting (“Task Force”) to recommend and implement technology solutions to accurately track and analyze child protection cases. The Task Force has submitted to the Court its report, *Strengthening Texas Courts for the Safety, Permanency, and Well Being of Children in Foster Care*, recommending strategies to foster meaningful multi-disciplinary collaboration, enhance judicial leadership, develop and implement technology solutions, and explore potential funding sources. A key Task Force recommendation was the creation of a statewide commission for children and families to advance these and other initiatives.
4. The Court has solicited the input of key community stakeholders concerning the creation of a statewide commission for children and families. This input demonstrates overwhelming support for such a commission, which community stakeholders believe would enhance their work by promoting best-practice standards, enhancing training for judges and attorneys, and providing a forum for leadership and collaboration.
5. The recent expansion of federal grants awarded for the Court Improvement Project (“CIP”) has increased the need for court involvement and oversight of efforts to improve outcomes

for children and families.<sup>1</sup> A statewide commission for children and families would provide a forum to oversee and coordinate these and other grants, thereby increasing efficiency and making the best use of our state and federal resources.

The Court agrees that a statewide commission for children and families is essential to improved permanency planning and outcomes for children in foster care, and hereby appoints a Consultative Group to advise the Court on the optimal structure, organization and membership of such a commission.

Accordingly, the Court HEREBY ORDERS:

The appointment and creation of a Consultative Group<sup>2</sup> that will

1. research models for effective statewide commissions, particularly those that oversee and administer federal grants;
2. recommend an organizational structure for a statewide commission for children and families, including best practices for oversight of the Court Improvement Project federal grants;
3. recommend membership criteria, including terms and proposed rotations, to ensure that the commission is effective, broad-based, and multi-disciplinary;
4. develop a proposed plan and timeline for launching the commission; and
5. draft and submit a final report to the Court reporting the Consultative Group's findings and recommendations by March 1, 2007.

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<sup>1</sup> The Court Improvement Project began in 1993 when the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services awarded to the Court its first CIP grant, referred to as the "Basic CIP Grant," to increase efficiencies in the state courts by assessing how courts are implementing federal and state law requirements related to foster care and adoption proceedings, and planning for system improvement. The Basic CIP Grant was authorized by the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1993, Pub. L. No. 103-66 (reauthorized in 1997, 2001, and 2006). In September 2006, the Court received two new grants: the "CIP Training Grant," to provide training for judges, attorneys and other legal personnel in child welfare cases and to conduct cross-training with child welfare agency staff and contractors; and the "CIP Data Collection and Analysis Grant," to improve data collection to ensure that the safety, permanence and well-being needs of children are met in a timely and complete manner. The CIP Training Grant and CIP Data Collection and Analysis Grant were authorized by the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005, Pub. L. No. 109-362. For more information on the Court Improvement Project, see the website for the National Child Welfare Resource Center on Legal and Judicial Issues, a service of the Children's Bureau of the Administration of Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, *available at* <http://www.abanet.org/child/courtimp.html>.

<sup>2</sup> The Consultative Group will serve as a Subcommittee of the Supreme Court Task Force on Foster Care, which will provide staff and administrative support.

The following members are HEREBY APPOINTED:

**Honorable Camile Dubose**, Associate Judge, Child Protection Court of South Texas  
**John Edwards**, Executive Director of the State Bar of Texas  
**Stewart W. Gagnon**, Partner, Fulbright & Jaworski  
**Anne Heiligenstein**, Executive Commissioner for Social Services  
**Joyce M. James**, Assistant Commissioner of Child Protective Services  
**Carolyn Rodriguez**, Texas State Strategy Director, Casey Family Programs  
**Honorable Dean Rucker** 318<sup>th</sup> District Court; Presiding Judge, Seventh Administrative  
Judicial Region  
**Honorable John J. Specia, Jr.**, 225<sup>th</sup> District Court

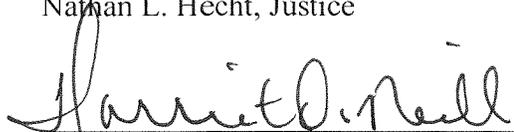
The Honorable John J. Specia, Jr. is designated Chair of the Consultative Group.

The Honorable Harriet O'Neill, Justice, Supreme Court of Texas, is designated as the Court's liaison to the Consultative Group.

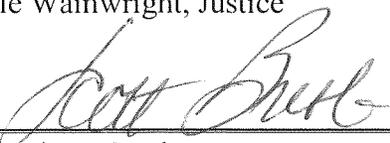
BY THE COURT, IN CHAMBERS, this 18<sup>th</sup> day of December, 2006.

  
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Wallace B. Jefferson, Chief Justice

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Nathan L. Hecht, Justice

  
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Harriet O'Neill, Justice

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J. Dale Wainwright, Justice

  
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Scott Brister, Justice

  
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David M. Medina, Justice

  
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Paul W. Green, Justice

  
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Phil Johnson, Justice

  
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Don R. Willett, Justice