



To: Texas Judges Who Hear CPS Cases

**From: The Honorable Robin Sage and The Honorable Dean Rucker,
Jurists in Residence, Supreme Court Children's Commission**

Date: April 20, 2016

RE: Changes at Department of Family and Protective Services; Increase in Removals

We know that by now most of you have heard or read about the impending changes at the Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS). Most notably, Henry “Hank” Whitman, a former chief of the Texas Rangers, has been appointed as the new Commissioner and Kristine Blackstone, with the Office of the Attorney General and formerly with DFPS, as the Assistant Commissioner for Child Protective Services. Commissioner Whitman will assume responsibilities at the agency upon Judge John Specia’s retirement on May 31, 2016. We are grateful for Judge Specia’s service and look forward together with each of you to establishing a strong and fruitful relationship with the new leadership team. In addition to the changes at the top of the command staff, there are other DFPS leadership positions that are changing as well.

As your Jurists in Residence, we understand that with broad system change comes a certain amount of angst. Please know that as the state and the child welfare system prepare for new leadership in many areas of the child protection system, you, as the judiciary responsible for handling these cases, remain a constant. We want to remind you that the Children’s Commission and we, as JIRs, are available should you have questions or need support in this time of great transition for our state.

It is possible that some courts may see changes in the number of petitions for removal, conservatorship and/or termination. Though some areas may see fewer petitions, it is likely there will be increases in many parts of the state. While this may impact your court significantly, your leadership and steady hand are needed now more than ever. Fulfilling your duties in holding all parties accountable and dutifully adhering to the standards set out in the Texas Family Code will continue to be a critical part of your higher calling in serving these particularly vulnerable children.

Next year will mark the 10th anniversary of the Children’s Commission and Texas has never needed its leadership as much as it does today. Justice Eva Guzman and the Children’s Commission staff are steadfast and reliable resources that are available to you, as needed.