



To: Texas Judges Who Hear CPS Cases

From: The Honorable Robin Sage, (ret.)
Jurist in Residence, Office of Court Administration

Date: January 18, 2013

RE: Permanency Summit Follow-up

I hope you found the Permanency Summit to be as helpful and inspiring as I did. I'm encouraged by the overwhelmingly positive feedback we have received from participants. Almost without exception, we hear that participants left the conference not only inspired to make changes in their jurisdictions, but also equipped with strategies and tools to do so. Some courts are bringing more children into court and others have rearranged their dockets to improve efficiency and continuity. For example, one district judge changed his docket and assigned to an associate judge all hearings for children in permanent managing conservatorship to promote closer case oversight and to allow those children to see one judge.

The Children's Commission is dedicated to supporting courts in their efforts to improve their hearing practices, and we are especially committed to bringing more children to court. A few jurisdictions suggested that a video featuring youth in foster care that explains what court is like and what to expect would be helpful to youth who might feel intimidated or reluctant to attend court hearings. The Children's Commission is working with Texas Appleseed and the Texas Center for the Judiciary to develop this video.

While having children in court is ideal, it may not always be possible so we also encourage you to use video conferencing. The Children's Commission has a growing video conferencing project that has connected several courts with Residential Treatment Centers, allowing youth to participate in hearings via video conference. Another tool that can help ensure you're hearing from the youth on your docket is to use a Youth Court Report (example attached). Also attached is an open letter by two Houston Judges to foster youth that explains their right to have their voice heard. Judges Mike Schneider and Angela Ellis have posted the letter in their courtroom and hand it out to caseworkers, ad litem, and youth at each hearing.

Texas Appleseed and Casey Family Programs are also committed to continuing the work we began at the Permanency Summit. Someone from Texas Appleseed may be in touch with your court so see how we can support you. As we all improve our practices surrounding court hearings, we hope you will share success stories and suggestions for overcoming obstacles. Thank you to everyone who left the Permanency Summit committed to doing more to ensure children have a voice in their future, which not only helps everyone involved make better decisions but also is just the right thing to do.