

Children's  
Commission®

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SUPREME COURT OF TEXAS PERMANENT JUDICIAL  
COMMISSION FOR CHILDREN, YOUTH AND FAMILIES

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**TRIAL SKILLS  
TRAINING  
STUDENT  
NOTEBOOK**

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DEVELOPED BY THE  
CHILDREN'S COMMISSION

Fall 2025

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# CHILDREN'S COMMISSION

The Children's Commission was created by order of the Supreme Court of Texas in 2007 to help improve the judicial handling of child protection cases through improvements in judicial practice; child welfare policy and legislation; technology; training; and court improvement pilot projects. Chaired by Supreme Court Justice Eva Guzman, Children's Commission membership includes officials from DFPS and CPS, non-profit foundation and state bar leaders, private attorneys, legislators, judges, and other leaders in child protection. The Children's Commission also consults with an advisory group that represents the many and varied disciplines involved in the child welfare system. The Commission's mission is to strengthen courts for children, youth and families in the Texas child-protection system and thereby improve the safety, permanency, and well-being of children.

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# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Children’s Commission would like to recognize the leadership and support of Hon. Debra Lehrmann, Supreme Court of Texas Senior Justice and Chair of the Children’s Commission; Hon. Rebeca Aizpuru Huddle, Supreme Court of Texas Justice and Deputy Chair of the Children’s Commission; and Hon. Piper McCraw, Chair of the Commission’s Training Committee and Jurist in Residence. Under their guidance, the Trial Skills Training has matured into virtual trainings as well as in-person trainings, both of which will serve to improve the caliber of legal services to Texas’ children and families. We are grateful for their leadership.

The Commission would also like to thank the following contributing authors and editors who collaborated to produce this Trial Skills Training:

Tina Amberboy  
Jamie Bernstein  
Hon. Karin E. Bonicoro\*  
Renée Castillo-De La Cruz  
Hon. Gary Coley\*  
Glenna Cordray  
Alice Emerson  
Anna Saldaña Ford  
Rob Galvin\*  
Joanna Guerrero  
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Milbrey E. Raney  
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Tiffany Roper  
Hon. Robin Sage\* (ret.)  
Leslie Strauch\*  
Mauro Valdez  
Hon. Elizabeth Watkins\*  
Trevor Woodruff\*  
LaRu Woody  
Mark Zuniga

\* Indicates individual is a founding member of the Trial Skills Training Faculty, whose generous commitment of time and ideas helped to develop the core curriculum of the program.

The Commission would also like to express its gratitude to Texas CASA and National CASA for providing the initial Harris-Price fact pattern, which formed the basis of this case scenario. Also, the Commission would like to thank Hon. Camile DuBose, who oversaw the initial development of this during her service to the Children’s Commission as the Training Committee Chair. Additionally, the Commission would like to thank our Trial Skills Training Faculty, who continuously devote their time and share their expertise in order to improve the skills of child welfare practitioners throughout the state and ensure that all parties have access to high quality legal representation.



# WELCOME

Dear Trial Skills Training Participants,

I want to extend my gratitude on behalf of the Supreme Court of Texas Children's Commission for your willingness to participate in the Children's Commission Trial Skills Training program to improve your legal representation skills, both inside and outside of the courtroom. Child welfare is one of the most important areas of law to our society and sense of justice. The right to family integrity is recognized as a constitutional substantive due process right under the Fourteenth Amendment, but it must be balanced with the duty to protect children and youth when their health, safety, and well-being are jeopardized.

When a family is involved in a child welfare proceeding, quality legal counsel is absolutely essential for all parties to ensure that the court strikes the appropriate balance between the rights and duties of all parties involved. A prepared and well-informed state's attorney can be instrumental in charting a legal course to help ensure timely permanency for a child. A well-trained parents' attorney can provide their client with information, guidance, and assistance to help them reunify with their child or identify as safe and suitable home with a relative. A zealous and educated child's attorney can mean the difference between a child languishing in foster care and finding a permanent home before turning eighteen.

While it is possible for attorneys to obtain a basic understanding of the issues a client may be facing, it can be more difficult to accumulate trial skills in this practice area. In 2013, the Children's Commission created a hands-on training to assist all attorneys working on child welfare cases. This training will be presented under the exceptional leadership of our Jurist in Residence, Judge Piper McCraw, and in partnership with our experienced and knowledgeable faculty.

The need for quality representation for Texas children and families remains unwavering. Thank you for the time and attention you are dedicating to this training. The Children's Commission truly appreciates your commitment to improving the delivery of legal services to the children and families involved in child welfare proceedings across Texas.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jamie Bernstein", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Jamie Bernstein  
Executive Director  
Children's Commission





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# FALL 2025

## TRIAL SKILLS TRAINING

**Thursday, September 4, 2025**

*Virtual Instruction*

<b>12:30 – 12:45 p.m.</b>	<b>Welcoming Remarks and Review of Program</b> <i>Jamie Bernstein and Renee Castillo</i>
<b>12:45 – 1:00 p.m.</b>	<b>Introduction of Participants, Faculty, and Commission Staff</b> <i>Renee Castillo</i>
<b>1:00 – 1:45 p.m.</b>	<b>Burdens of Proof and Required Efforts Findings in Child Welfare Cases</b> <i>Judge Robert Falkenberg and Michele Surratt</i>
<b>1:45 – 2:30 p.m.</b>	<b>Preparing for the Initial Contested Hearing: Requests for Court-Ordered Participation in Services and Adversary Hearings</b> <i>Tiffany Reedy and Belinda Roberts</i>
<b>2:30 – 2:45 p.m.</b>	<b>Break and Move to Breakout Groups</b>
<b>2:45 – 3:30 p.m.</b>	<b>Breakout Session: Required Efforts Practice Scenario</b> <i>TST Faculty</i>
<b>3:30 – 3:45 p.m.</b>	<b>Break and Move to Breakout Groups</b>
<b>3:45 – 4:15 p.m.</b>	<b>Case Strategy Brainstorming Sessions: Identifying Good and Bad Facts for the Initial Hearing</b> <i>TST Faculty</i>
<b>4:15 – 4:20 p.m.</b>	<b>Move back to Plenary</b>
<b>4:20 – 4:50 p.m.</b>	<b>Bringing it all Together: Adversary Hearing Prep Q&amp;A Session/Participant Quiz</b> <i>TST Faculty</i>
<b>4:50 – 5:00 p.m.</b>	<b>Closing Remarks and Announcements</b> <i>Renée Castillo</i>

# FALL 2025

## TRIAL SKILLS TRAINING

**Wednesday, September 10, 2025**

*Virtual Instruction*

<b>12:30 – 12:45 p.m.</b>	<b>Welcome and Overview</b> <i>Renee Castillo</i>
<b>12:45 – 1:30 p.m.</b>	<b>Identifying, Designating, Preparing, and Presenting Your Witnesses: Lecture and Discussion</b> <i>Mauro Valdez and Rob Galvin</i>
<b>1:30 – 2:15 p.m.</b>	<b>Conducting a Successful Cross-Examination Lecture and Demonstration</b> <i>Amanda Lockhart and Hon. Charles Griffin</i>
<b>2:15 – 2:30 p.m.</b>	<b>Break</b>
<b>2:30 – 3:00 p.m.</b>	<b>Preparing for Impeachment of a Witness Using Prior Inconsistent Statements</b> <i>Diane Sumoski</i>
<b>3:00 – 3:05 p.m.</b>	<b>Move to Breakouts</b>
<b>3:05 – 3:35 p.m.</b>	<b>Case Strategy Session: Preparing for Direct Examination of a Lay Witness</b> <i>TST Faculty</i>
<b>3:35 – 4:05 p.m.</b>	<b>Case Strategy Session: Preparing for Cross-Examination of a Lay Witness</b> <i>TST Faculty</i>
<b>4:05 – 4:20 p.m.</b>	<b>Break and Move to Plenary</b>
<b>4:20 – 4:50 p.m.</b>	<b>Bringing it all Together: Direct and Cross-Examination Prep Q&amp;A Session/Participant Quiz</b> <i>TST Faculty</i>
<b>4:50 – 5:00 p.m.</b>	<b>Closing Remarks and Announcements</b> <i>Renée Castillo</i>

# FALL 2025

## TRIAL SKILLS TRAINING

**Tuesday, September 16, 2025**

*In-Person Instruction*

8:00– 8:30 a.m.	<b>Welcome, Announcements, and Introduction of Participants, Faculty, and CC Staff</b> <i>Judge Piper McCraw and Renée Castillo</i>
8:30 – 9:15 a.m.	<b>Conducting a Successful Direct Examination: Lecture and Demonstration</b> <i>Judge Elizabeth Watkins</i>
9:15 – 10:00 a.m.	<b>Lay Witness Panel Discussion</b> <i>Judge Piper McCraw and CPI Caseworkers</i>
10:00 – 10:15 a.m.	<b>Break</b>
10:15 – 11:15 a.m.	<b>Foundations and Objections: Demonstrations and Q&amp;A Session/Participant Quiz</b> <i>Judge Piper McCraw, Michele Surratt, Mark Zuniga, and Jack Sigman</i>
11:15 – 11:20 a.m.	<b>Move to Breakouts</b>
11:20 – 12:05 p.m.	<b>Practice Sessions: Drills on Laying the Foundation and Admitting Documents</b> <i>TST Faculty</i>
12:05 – 1:05 p.m.	<b>Lunch</b>
1:05 – 1:10 p.m.	<b>Move to Breakout Groups</b>
1:10 – 2:40 p.m.	<b>*Practice Sessions: Direct Examination of Caseworker and Kathy Price</b> <i>TST Faculty</i>
2:40 – 2:55 p.m.	<b>Break</b>
2:55 – 4:25 p.m.	<b>*Practice Sessions: Cross Examination of Caseworkers and Kathy Price</b> <i>TST Faculty</i>
4:25 – 4:30 p.m.	<b>Move to Plenary</b>
4:30 – 5:00 p.m.	<b>Bringing it All Together: Direct and Cross-Examination of a Lay Witness Participant Debrief and Q&amp;A Session</b> <i>Judge Piper McCraw and TST Faculty</i>
5:00– 5:10 p.m.	<b>Closing Remarks &amp; Reminders</b> <i>Judge Piper McCraw and Renée Castillo</i>

# FALL 2025

## TRIAL SKILLS TRAINING

5:30- 7:30 p.m.

Reception

**\* Session is filmed. TST Faculty will review the video with participants and provide one-on-one feedback during the training, and individual performances may be provided to each participant, upon request, for their independent review after the training concludes.**

# FALL 2025

## TRIAL SKILLS TRAINING

**Wednesday, September 17, 2025**

*In-Person Instruction*

<b>8:00 – 8:15 a.m.</b>	<b>Morning Announcements and Introduction of Witnesses</b> <i>Judge Piper McCraw and Renée Castillo</i>
<b>8:15 – 8:45 a.m.</b>	<b>Lecture: Expert Witnesses: How to Qualify and Disqualify Expert Witnesses</b> <i>Doug Lowe and Jack Sigman</i>
<b>8:45 – 9:15 a.m.</b>	<b>Demonstration: How to Qualify Your Expert Witness</b> <i>Judge Elizabeth Watkins</i>
<b>9:15 – 9:45 a.m.</b>	<b>Demonstration: How to Conduct a High-Level Cross-Exam of the Opposing Expert Witness</b> <i>Rob Galvin</i>
<b>9:45 – 10:30 a.m.</b>	<b>Expert Witness Panel Discussion</b> <i>Judge Piper McCraw and Expert Witnesses</i>
<b>10:30 – 10:45 a.m.</b>	<b>Break and Move to Breakouts</b>
<b>10:45 – 11:15 a.m.</b>	<b>Case Strategy Sessions: Preparing for Direct and Using Exhibits to Your Advantage with Your Expert</b> <i>TST Faculty</i>
<b>11:15 – 12:45 p.m.</b>	<b>*Practice Sessions: Direct Examination Using Exhibits with Pediatric Fellows and Parent Therapists as Experts</b> <i>TST Faculty</i>
<b>12:45 – 1:45 p.m.</b>	<b>Lunch</b>
<b>1:45 – 2:15 p.m.</b>	<b>Case Strategy Sessions: Preparing for Cross-Examination and Using Exhibits to Your Advantage with Your Expert</b> <i>TST Faculty</i>
<b>2:15 – 3:45 p.m.</b>	<b>*Practice Sessions: Cross Examination and Impeachment of Experts Using Exhibits with Pediatric Fellows and Parent Therapists</b> <i>TST Faculty</i>
<b>3:45 – 4:00 p.m.</b>	<b>Break and Move Back to Plenary</b>

# FALL 2025

## TRIAL SKILLS TRAINING

**4:00 – 4:30 p.m.**      **Bringing it all Together: Direct and Cross-Examination of an Expert Witness  
Participant Debrief and Q&A Session**  
*Judge Piper McCraw and TST Faculty*

**4:30 – 4:45 p.m.**      **Closing Remarks & Reminders**  
*Judge Piper McCraw and Renée Castillo*

\* Session is filmed. TST Faculty will review the video with participants and provide one-on-one feedback during the training, and individual performances may be provided to each participant, upon request, for their independent review after the training concludes.



# FALL 2025

## TRIAL SKILLS TRAINING

**September 18, 2025**

*In-Person Instruction*

<b>8:00 – 8:15 a.m.</b>	<b>Morning Announcements</b> <i>Judge Piper McCraw and Renée Castillo</i>
<b>8:15 – 9:15 a.m.</b>	<b>Motions Practice in Child Welfare Cases</b> <i>Judge Piper McCraw, Tracy Harting, Amanda Lockhart, Tiffany Reedy</i>
<b>9:15 – 10:00 a.m.</b>	<b>Child Welfare Bench Trials Lecture</b> <i>Judge Watkins, Drake Mikeska, and Rob Galvin</i>
<b>10:00 – 10:15 a.m.</b>	<b>Break and Move to Breakouts</b>
<b>10:15 – 10:45 a.m.</b>	<b>Case Strategy Sessions: Preparing Your Required Efforts Argument for the Final Hearing</b> <i>TST Faculty</i>
<b>10:45 – 12:15 p.m.</b>	<b>*Practice Sessions: Reasonable Efforts Arguments at the Final Hearing</b> <i>TST Faculty</i>
<b>12:15 – 12:20 p.m.</b>	<b>Move to Plenary</b>
<b>12:20 – 12:50 p.m.</b>	<b>Bringing It Together: Courtroom Practice Debrief and Q&amp;A Session</b> <i>Judge Piper McCraw and TST Faculty</i>
<b>12:50 – 1:00 p.m.</b>	<b>Closing Remarks –Announcement of Objection Winners, and Evaluations</b> <i>Judge Piper McCraw and Renée Castillo</i>



# PARTICIPANT PRACTICE SESSION INFORMATION

## **PRACTICE SESSION INFORMATION FOR TRIAL SKILLS TRAINING PARTICIPANTS**

During the Fall 2025 TST Contested Hearing Practices Course (Contested Hearings Course), participants will focus on improving their everyday courtroom litigation skills. The first two half-days of instruction will take place on Zoom and will focus on preparing and strategizing for a contested hearing. Upon arrival at the in-person portion of the Contested Hearing Practices Course, participants will hone their practice skills in a simulated Adversary Hearing and Bench Trial.

This document contains all the logistical information needed to prepare fully for the Contested Hearings Course. Please read the following details so that you will know what to expect and how to take full advantage of the faculty resources and live witnesses who will be available to assist you in this intense and interactive litigation training.

### **MEETING ROOMS**

Participants will meet in the Main Zoom Meeting Room on our virtual instruction days and in the conference plenary room on in-person training days for all lectures and demonstrations. Participants will be sent to their assigned Breakout Rooms for Strategy and Practice Sessions.

### **PRACTICE GROUPS**

**Virtual Instruction Days:** All of your breakout and strategy sessions during the virtual portion of TST will take place in three smaller groups based on your client base for the purposes of this training (Attorneys Representing DFPS, Parent Attorneys, and Attorney ad Litem for children (AALs)). Your Attorney Practice Groups by Client Base are as follows:

**Please take note of which client base you are assigned to. As indicated in your TST application, while we make every effort to place participants in their first-choice practice group, this is not always possible.**

**Attorneys Representing DFPS:** Ronke “Kay” Badmus, Kneshae Choice, Julia Hernandez, Anton Jones, Margaret Matheny, Rebecca Saldaña, Daniel Sierra, Alicia Willoughby, and Nanepo Yentoumane

**Parent Attorneys:** James Aaron, Monica Button, Caitlin Cornelius, Jennifer Delage, Veronica Lockett, Nisreen Mahesri, Katrina Parker, Keeli Rogers, and Jessenia Ruiz

**Attorney Ad Litem\*:** Surya Barrow, Christy Cauthen, Alyssa Flores, Angela Hindman, Christine MacDonald, Aemma McMurray, Dylan Moench, Teresa Morales, and Taylor Qualls

**\* AALs: PLEASE NOTE THAT WHILE, IN REGULAR PRACTICE, YOU MAY ALIGN WITH EITHER DFPS OR A PARENT BASED ON THE FACTS AND YOUR CLIENT’S DIRECTION, IN THE INTEREST OF TIME**

# PARTICIPANT PRACTICE SESSION INFORMATION

**AND WITNESS AVAILABILITY FOR THIS TRAINING, THE AAL GROUP WILL BE INSTRUCTED ON WHICH POSITION THEY WILL BE ADVOCATING FOR IN EACH SESSION. PLEASE PAY SPECIAL ATTENTION TO YOUR ASSIGNED PARTY POSITION FOR EACH PRACTICE SESSION.**

**In-Person Instruction Days:** The **first day of in-person instruction** will focus on direct and cross-examination of lay witnesses. In addition to conducting direct and cross examination of your witnesses, you will participate in a practice session focused on Laying Your Evidentiary Foundation, after which, you will be encouraged to use exhibits and make and respond to objections during your remaining practice sessions. On this day, each of the three practice groups will consist of 3 Attorneys Representing DFPS, 3 AALs, and 3 Parent Attorneys.

Your Practice Groups for this day are as follows:

**Practice Group 1:** Julia Hernandez, Christine MacDonald, Keeli Rogers, Nanepo Yentoumane, Alyssa Flores, Jessenia Ruiz, Ronke “Kay” Badmus, Christy Cauthen, and Caitlin Cornelius

**Practice Group 2:** Anton Jones, Teresa Morales, Jennifer Delage, Daniel Sierra, Angela Hindman, Margaret Matheny, Mary Folse, James Aaron, and Katrina Parker

**Practice Group 3:** Rebecca Saldaña, Dylan Moench, Monica Button, Alicia Willoughby, Surya Burrow, Veronica Lockett, Kneshae Choice, Taylor Qualls, and Nisreen Mahesri

On the **second day of in-person training**, instruction will focus on direct and cross-examination of expert witnesses, the use of exhibits, and making and responding to objections. You will meet in your case strategy and practice sessions based on your client base and will be provided practice tips based on the party you represent.

As a reminder, your Attorney Practice Groups by Client Base are as follows:

**Attorneys Representing DFPS:** Ronke “Kay” Badmus, Kneshae Choice, Julia Hernandez, Anton Jones, Margaret Matheny, Rebecca Saldaña, Daniel Sierra, Alicia Willoughby, and Nanepo Yentoumane

**Parent Attorneys:** James Aaron, Monica Button, Caitlin Cornelius, Jennifer Delage, Veronica Lockett, Nisreen Mahesri, Katrina Parker, Keeli Rogers, and Jessenia Ruiz

**Attorney Ad Litem:** Surya Barrow, Christy Cauthen, Alyssa Flores, Angela Hindman, Christine MacDonald, Mary Folse, Dylan Moench, Teresa Morales, and Taylor Qualls

The **last day of training** will include one final breakout for a strategy and practice session on making your reasonable efforts argument at a bench termination trial. You will return to the split practice groups from the first in-person day of training, which consist of 3 Attorneys Representing

# PARTICIPANT PRACTICE SESSION INFORMATION

DFPS, 3 AALs, and 3 Parent Attorneys for this final breakout. Please see the practice group assignments listed under the first day of in-person practice for your group assignments.

## VIRTUAL INSTRUCTION DAY 1 - SEPTEMBER 4, 2025

Zoom Link: <https://txcourts.zoom.us/j/81495214755>

*Be advised that participants should complete their review of all the Harris-Price Case Materials prior to the first day of the TST Contested Hearings Course in order to best prepare for faculty led discussions on hearing preparation and case strategy.*

### 1. REQUIRED EFFORTS PRACTICE SCENARIO

This session provides participants with an opportunity to review a fictitious fact pattern to identify issues related to reasonable efforts in a low-stakes learning environment. You will be given a few minutes to read over the case scenario and identify whether reasonable efforts were made by DFPS. TST Faculty will then lead a discussion with your breakout groups on whether reasonable efforts were made, what additional actions could constitute reasonable efforts, and what questions would you ask of the caseworker prior to and during a contested Adversary Hearing based on the provided scenario. Breakout groups will then return to the plenary to share their findings with each other. While not required, participants may find watching the [“Reevaluating Reasonable Efforts”](#) webinar beneficial as they prepare for this session.

### 2. CASE STRATEGY BRAINSTORMING SESSION: IDENTIFYING GOOD AND BAD FACTS FOR THE INITIAL HEARING

In this first strategy session, TST Faculty will lead each breakout group in a brainstorming session about the most strategic ways to present their legal and factual arguments in a contested Adversary Hearing\*. Participants should focus on documents related to the Ex Parte Hearing and Original Petition for Protection of a Child in the Harris-Price Case Materials to prepare for this session. ***AALs should assume that they represent all three children at the Adversary Hearing. Parent Attorneys represent Ms. Kathy Price at the Adversary Hearing.*** Additionally, while not required, participants may find watching the [“Successful Themes and Theories of CPS Cases”](#) bonus lecture beneficial as they prepare for this session.

***Participants are asked to have a few key case strategy points from your perspective (as an agency attorney, child’s Ad Litem, or parent’s attorney) to maximize your benefit from this Case Strategy Session.***

\* PLEASE NOTE THAT WHILE, FOR THE PURPOSES OF THE PRACTICE SESSIONS UTILIZING EXPERT WITNESSES, PARTICIPANTS ARE TO ASSUME THAT TMC OF THE CHILDREN WAS GRANTED TO DFPS AT THE ADVERARY HEARING, PARTICIPANTS SHOULD NOT OPERATE UNDER THIS ASSUMPTION AS THEY PREPARE FOR THE SIMULATED CONTESTED ADVERSARY HEARING THAT WILL TAKE PLACE DURING THE FIRST DAY OF THE IN-PERSON PORTION OF THIS TRAINING.

# PARTICIPANT PRACTICE SESSION INFORMATION

## VIRTUAL INSTRUCTION DAY 2- SEPTEMBER 10, 2025

Zoom Link: <https://txcourts.zoom.us/j/86217360936>

### 1. CASE STRATEGY SESSIONS ON DIRECT EXAMINATION OF A LAY WITNESS:

Participants will join their group breakout rooms for a strategy session on direct examination of a lay witness. Faculty members will lead participants in a group discussion and assist participants in selecting an issue to focus their line of questioning on (ex. reasonable efforts to prevent removal, facts necessitating removal, reasonable efforts to eliminate the continued need for removal prior to the adversary hearing, etc.) before providing participants with some time to gather their thoughts and prepare their questions for the direct examination practice session that will occur on the first day of the in-person training.

From this point forward during the Contested Hearings Course, please consider using each strategy session to focus on these three queries:

- (1) What is your ultimate goal for this witness? How does that tie into your theme and theory?
- (2) What evidence needs to come in from this witness to support your goal?
- (3) How can you craft your questions for this witness accordingly?

***Please have a few key questions or points prepared prior to each strategy session,*** understanding that these may change throughout the course of the training. This will ensure that participants get the most out of each strategy session.

**TST Faculty will provide a live demonstration showing participants how to establish a lay witness' credentials on the first day of the in-person training. Participants are to assume that the witnesses during the direct and cross-examination practice sessions have already testified to their background and should not focus on these preliminary questions.**

NOTE THAT THERE WILL NOT BE AN ADDITIONAL STRATEGY SESSION HELD PRIOR TO THE LAY WITNESS DIRECT EXAMINATION PRACTICE SESSION. PLEASE USE THIS TIME TO DEVELOP YOUR LINE OF QUESTIONING AND BRING YOUR PREPARED QUESTIONS WITH YOU TO THE IN-PERSON TRAINING.

# PARTICIPANT PRACTICE SESSION INFORMATION

## PARTY POSITIONS

Parent attorneys will be advocating against TMC and complete a direct examination of a faculty member playing Kathy Price.

Attorneys representing DFPS and Attorneys ad Litem (AAL) for the children will be advocating for TMC and will complete a direct examination of an actual caseworker acting as the Harris-Price CPI caseworker.

Participants may choose to use an exhibit from the Harris-Price Case File (copies of exhibits will be made available for participant use at the training), all of which will have been deemed admitted into evidence prior to this practice session, in furtherance of their line of questioning. Also remember to practice making objections and be prepared to respond if your line of questioning is objected to.

## 2. CASE STRATEGY SESSIONS ON CROSS-EXAMINATION OF A LAY WITNESS:

Participants will join their group breakout rooms for a strategy session on cross-examination of a lay witness. Faculty members will lead participants in a group discussion and assist participants in selecting an issue to focus their line of questioning on (ex. reasonable efforts to prevent removal, facts necessitating removal, reasonable efforts to eliminate the continued need for removal prior to the adversary hearing, etc.) before providing participants with some time to gather their thoughts and prepare their questions for the cross-examination practice session that will occur on the first day of the in-person training.

**NOTE: During the morning lectures, there will be a live demonstration on how to conduct a cross examination of a lay witness.**

From this point forward during the Contested Hearings Course, please consider using each strategy session to focus on these three queries:

- (1) What is your ultimate goal for this witness? How does that tie into your theme and theory?
- (2) What evidence needs to come in from this witness to support your goal?
- (3) How can you craft your questions for this witness accordingly?

***Please have a few key questions or points prepared prior to each strategy session, understanding that these may change throughout the course of the training. This will ensure that participants get the most out of each strategy session.***

# PARTICIPANT PRACTICE SESSION INFORMATION

NOTE THAT THERE WILL NOT BE AN ADDITIONAL STRATEGY SESSION HELD PRIOR TO THE LAY WITNESS CROSS-EXAMINATION PRACTICE SESSION. PLEASE USE THIS TIME TO DEVELOP YOUR LINE OF QUESTIONING AND BRING YOUR PREPARED QUESTIONS WITH YOU TO THE IN-PERSON TRAINING.

## **PARTY POSITIONS**

**Parent attorneys will be advocating against TMC and complete a cross-examination of an actual caseworker acting as the Harris-Price CPI caseworker.**

**Attorneys representing DFPS and Attorneys ad Litem (AAL) for the children will be advocating for TMC and will complete a cross-examination of a faculty member playing Kathy Price.**

Participants may choose to use an exhibit from the Harris-Price Case File (copies of exhibits will be made available for participant use at the training), all of which will have been deemed admitted into evidence prior to this practice session, in furtherance of their line of questioning. Also remember to practice making objections and be prepared to respond if your line of questioning is objected to.

*Reminder: All Direct and Cross Examination practice sessions will be recorded as part of your training experience. The Commission will collect all recordings at the close of each day and can send participants their recorded sessions (for posterity and/or to review) at the conclusion of the training.*



# PARTICIPANT PRACTICE SESSION INFORMATION

## DIRECT AND CROSS EXAMINATION OF LAY WITNESSES SEPTEMBER 16, 2025

**Please refer to the breakout assignments for Day 1 of the in-person training to determine which breakout room to go to for your practice sessions.**

### 1. LAYING YOUR EVIDENTIARY FOUNDATION PRACTICE SESSION:

In preparation for this session, participants are required to watch the “[Laying Your Evidentiary Foundation](#),” “[Making and Responding to Objections](#),” and “[Preserving the Record for Appeal](#)” webinars available on the [TST landing page](#) prior to the in-person TST Contested Hearings Course dates.

Following a live demonstration and Q&A session on laying the evidentiary foundation and objections practice, this practice session is meant to help participants feel more at ease with their foundation and objection skills. Since this is a skill set that many attorneys have difficulty with (or at least anxiety about), participants will take turns laying the proper foundation for various types of evidence and making and responding to objections.

For the purpose of this exercise, participants will select one of the following exhibits and attempt to admit it as evidence using testimony of a live witness:

- Kathy Price’s text to the Caseworker
- Caseworker’s text to Kathy Price
- Kathy Price/Caseworker email exchange
- Kathy Price/Caseworker email exchange
- Medical records on each of the three subject children (3 sets of business records)
- Photographs of Rose Price (2)
- Psychological Evaluation of Kathy Price
- Counseling Notes on Kathy Price

Participants are instructed to assume the exhibits have been pre-marked and circulated to opposing counsel ahead of time for review and should not spend practice time on these tasks.

Following this practice session, please assume that all evidence has been admitted in the Harris-Price case. **Each participant is required to use one of the above exhibits during at least one of the subsequent direct or cross examination practice sessions.** This will allow participants to develop and practice using an exhibit through a witness to support their case theme and theory.

The requirement to use exhibits with witnesses is designed to give participants all an opportunity to build their skill level and confidence to do this successfully in courtroom practice.

# PARTICIPANT PRACTICE SESSION INFORMATION

Please note that it is important to learn your local rules on admitting evidence for in-person and virtual hearings!

## **OBJECTIONS:**

Participants are encouraged to practice making and responding to objections during the Laying the Foundation exercise and during all direct and cross examination practice sessions. As Judge McCraw will elaborate “what happens in Trial Skills Training stays in Trial Skills Training” – so please don’t worry about making any mistakes!

**TST Faculty will be asked to select an individual from each of the three practice groups (AALs, Parent Attorneys, and Attorneys representing DFPS) to recognize for the best use of/response to objections at the end of the training. These three individuals will receive a Gift Card as a prize.**

## **2. DIRECT EXAMINATION OF A LAY WITNESS PRACTICE SESSIONS:**

*\* FOR THE PURPOSES OF THIS PORTION OF THE TRAINING, PARTICIPANTS SHOULD REFER TO THE HARRIS-PRICE CASE MATERIALS RELATED TO THE EX PARTE AND ADVERSARY HEARINGS TO PREPARE FOR THE CONTESTED ADVERSARY HEARING. FACTS FROM THE REMAINING COURSE MATERIALS SHOULD NOT BE REFERENCED TO DURING THE DAY’S PRACTICE SESSIONS.*

Participants will join their group breakout rooms and will each participate in a round of direct questioning of their lay witness. In groups of three at a time (one DFPS attorney, one AAL, and one Parent’s attorney), each attorney will take a turn questioning their client (either the CPI caseworker or Ms. Kathy Price) on direct, while opposing counsel practices their objection skills. Attorneys questioning on direct should be prepared to respond to any objections raised.

Faculty members will play the role of the judge. The judges will ask you to stop your closing statement practice at the 4 to 5-minute mark and give you immediate feedback and friendly coaching in front of your small group. Many former participants find this to be some of the most valuable time during their training, as your critique will assist you in improving your skills and your confidence, as well as provide you and your fellow colleagues with practice tips. Once you have completed your questioning and receive you in room critique on your line of questioning, you will step outside to receive a 1-on-1 feedback session from another TST Faculty member on your courtroom presence and mannerisms.

**Reminder: Participants are to assume that the witnesses during the direct and cross examination practice sessions have already testified to their background and should not focus on these preliminary questions.**

# PARTICIPANT PRACTICE SESSION INFORMATION

**Additionally, Participants must attempt to use one of the exhibits, all of which will have been deemed admitted into evidence prior to this practice session in furtherance of their line of questioning, in at least one practice session throughout the training.**

*This practice session will be recorded, and the recording will be provided, upon request, for the participant's personal review sometime shortly after the conclusion of the Trial Skills Training.*

### **3. CROSS EXAMINATION OF A LAY WITNESS PRACTICE SESSIONS:**

**\* FOR THE PURPOSES OF THIS PORTION OF THE TRAINING, PARTICIPANTS SHOULD REFER TO THE HARRIS-PRICE CASE MATERIALS RELATED TO THE EX PARTE AND ADVERSARY HEARINGS TO PREPARE FOR THE CONTESTED ADVERSARY HEARING. FACTS FROM THE REMAINING COURSE MATERIALS SHOULD NOT BE REFERENCED TO DURING THE DAY'S PRACTICE SESSIONS.**

Participants will join their group breakout rooms and will each participate in a round of cross-examination of their lay witness. In groups of three at a time (one DFPS attorney, one AAL, and one Parent's attorney), each attorney will take a turn questioning the opposing party's client (either the CPI caseworker or Ms. Kathy Price) on cross, while opposing counsel practices their objection skills. Attorneys questioning on cross should be prepared to respond to any objections raised.

Faculty members will play the role of the judge. The judges will ask you to stop your closing statement practice at the 4 to 5-minute mark and give you immediate feedback and friendly coaching in front of your small group. Many former participants find this to be some of the most valuable time during their training, as your critique will assist you in improving your skills and your confidence, as well as provide you and your fellow colleagues with practice tips. Once you have completed your questioning and receive your in room critique on your line of questioning, you will step outside to receive a 1-on-1 feedback session from another TST Faculty member on your courtroom presence and mannerisms.

#### **PARTY POSITIONS:**

**Parent attorneys** will be advocating against TMC and will cross-examine the CPI Caseworker. Parent Attorneys represent Ms. Kathy Price at the Adversary Hearing.

**Attorneys representing DFPS and AALs** will be advocating for TMC and will cross examine Kathy Price.

**Reminder: Participants must attempt to use one of the exhibits, all of which will have been deemed admitted into evidence prior to this practice session in furtherance of their line of questioning, in at least one practice session throughout the training. If time permits, please**

# PARTICIPANT PRACTICE SESSION INFORMATION

also attempt to “approach” the witness with one of the admitted exhibits if it will assist with the line of questioning.

*This practice session will be recorded, and the recording will be provided, upon request, for the participant’s personal review sometime shortly after the conclusion of the Trial Skills Training.*

## DIRECT AND CROSS EXAMINATION OF EXPERT WITNESSES

SEPTEMBER 17, 2025

**Please refer to the breakout assignments for Day 2 of the in-person training to determine which breakout room to go to for your practice sessions.**

**\* FOR THE PURPOSES OF THIS PORTION OF THE TRAINING, PARTICIPANTS ARE TO ASSUME THAT TMC WAS GRANTED AND SHOULD REFER TO THE HARRIS-PRICE CASE MATERIALS RELATED TO THE STATUS HEARING THROUGH THE TRIAL PHASE TO PREPARE FOR THE FINAL HEARING.**

### 1. STRATEGY AND PRACTICE SESSIONS ON DIRECT EXAMINATION OF AN EXPERT WITNESS:

The strategy session goals for direct examination listed above will guide the conversation as participants prepare their questions on day two of the Contested Hearings Course. Participants are encouraged to choose separate topics on which to question the witness. While practice groups will consist of all members of the same client base, participants are still encouraged to practice their objection skills during these practice sessions.

There will be a Demo preceding this strategy session on how to establish an expert witness’ credentials, so please start your questioning with the assumption that your witness has already been qualified and has testified to their background.

#### PARTY POSITIONS

**Attorneys representing DFPS and AALs will advocate for Termination of Parental Rights** as to the child, Rose Price, and will complete a direct examination of a Pediatric Fellow or Pediatric Nurse Practitioner playing Dr. Jane Jones.

**Parent attorneys will advocate against Termination of Parental Rights** and will complete a direct examination of a licensed therapist playing Ms. Price’s therapist, Consuela Counselor. For this session, all parent attorneys will be representing Ms. Kathy Price.

NOTE: Please recall that prior to the Final Trial on the Merits, the parties entered into a MSA agreement as to the two older children, Ben and Robert. Agreed orders have been entered as to these two children and they have been severed out of this cause.

# PARTICIPANT PRACTICE SESSION INFORMATION

During the direct examination, **Attorneys representing DFPS and AALs** may choose to use one of the children's ER reports or one of the photos of Rose Price, all of which will have been deemed admitted into evidence prior to your practice session.

**Parent's Attorneys** may choose to use Kathy Price's psychological evaluation or the counseling session notes, both of which will have been deemed admitted into evidence prior to your practice session. This is a good opportunity for attorneys to practice "handling" a document, "approaching" the stand, and questioning a witness.

Faculty members will play the role of the judge. The judges will ask you to stop your closing statement practice at the 4 to 5-minute mark and give you immediate feedback and friendly coaching in front of your small group. Many former participants find this to be some of the most valuable time during their training, as your critique will assist you in improving your skills and your confidence, as well as provide you and your fellow colleagues with practice tips. Once you have completed your questioning and receive you in room critique on your line of questioning, you will step outside to receive a 1-on-1 feedback session from another TST Faculty member on your courtroom presence and mannerisms.

*This practice session will be recorded, and the recording will be provided, upon request, for the participant's personal review sometime shortly after the conclusion of the Trial Skills Training.*

## **2. STRATEGY AND PRACTICE SESSION ON CROSS EXAMINATION OF AN EXPERT WITNESS:**

The same strategy session goals will guide the conversation as you prepare your cross-examination questions. TST faculty will assist participants in choosing separate topics on which to question the witness. This is the last practice session with live witnesses, and it is devoted to cross examination and impeachment of an expert and follows a lecture on Conducting a High-Level Cross Examination and a demonstration on the skill. While practice groups will consist of all members of the same client base, participants are still encouraged to practice their objection skills during these practice sessions.

### **PARTY POSITIONS:**

**Parent attorneys** will be advocating for reunification and will cross examine a Pediatric Fellow or a Pediatric Nurse Practitioner on the medical examination of Rose Price. For this session, all parent attorneys will be representing Ms. Kathy Price.

**Attorneys representing DFPS** will be advocating for Termination of Parental Rights as to the child, Rose Price, and will cross examine Kathy Price's therapist, Consuela Counselor, who is in support of reunification.

# PARTICIPANT PRACTICE SESSION INFORMATION

**AALs** will be advocating for reunification in this exercise and will use their cross-examination skills to challenge the Parent Therapist, who has changed their mind about reunification.

**\*AALS: PLEASE NOTE THAT YOU ARE ADVOCATING FOR REUNIFICATION IN THIS PRACTICE SESSION!! ADDITIONALLY, YOU WILL BE TAKING MS. COUNSELOR ON CROSS ABOUT HER CHANGE IN POSITION FROM REUNIFICATION TO TERMINATION.**

**Parent Attorneys:** Cross Examination questions may revolve around inconsistencies in the medical exhibits. For example, the inconsistent description of the pattern bruising on Rose Price (the ER report on Rose Price says that the pattern bruises are on her left buttock, but the photo shows the bruising only on the right buttock), or about how accurately the doctor can testify to the age of Rose's bruising or her diaper rash at the time of your ER examination, etc.

**AALs:** In this session, Ms. Counselor will not support Kathy's reunification after all (despite earlier documentation and opinion that reunification with Rose would be fine as long as housing is in place, the therapist will say that she ultimately decided that Kathy just doesn't have enough safety and stability in her relationships and housing to be successful. Additionally, Kathy did not mention her positive drug test for cocaine in her therapy sessions, and Consuela only became aware of the positive drug test and Kathy's refusal to submit to the Department's request for a subsequent hair strand test and sporadic submission to requests for random drug testing about a month ago).

For those wishing to practice with exhibits, participants may want to attempt to use Kathy Price's psychological evaluation or the counseling session notes (already deemed to have been admitted into evidence) to impeach Ms. Counselor.

**Please note that while outside of the training, some AALs might not align with the Respondent Mother's position that she should retain parental rights, for the purposes of practicing the skill, please compose questions for the Parent Therapist accordingly.**

The change in position for this exercise is meant to help practitioners think about the case from both sides.

**Attorneys representing DFPS:** For this break out practice session, Consuela Counselor is still in support of a return of Rose to her mother, Kathy Price, or, in the alternative, that Kathy Price maintain possessory conservatorship of Rose. This is a good session to use Kathy Price's psychological evaluation or the counseling session notes (already deemed to have been admitted into evidence) to impeach Ms. Counselor.

Faculty members will play the role of the judge. The judges will ask you to stop your closing statement practice at the 4 to 5-minute mark and give you immediate feedback and friendly

# PARTICIPANT PRACTICE SESSION INFORMATION

coaching in front of your small group. Many former participants find this to be some of the most valuable time during their training, as your critique will assist you in improving your skills and your confidence, as well as provide you and your fellow colleagues with practice tips. Once you have completed your questioning and receive you in room critique on your line of questioning, you will step outside to receive a 1-on-1 feedback session from another TST Faculty member on your courtroom presence and mannerisms.

## REASONABLE EFFORTS ARGUEMENT

SEPTEMBER 18, 2025

**Please refer to the breakout assignments for Day 3 of the in-person training to determine which breakout room to go to for your practice sessions.**

### 1. REASONABLE EFFORTS PRACTICE SESSIONS:

*Note: The Reasonable Efforts practice sessions will be recorded as part of your training experience. The Commission will collect all recordings at the close of each day and can send participants their recorded sessions (for posterity and/or to review) at the conclusion of the training.*

Pursuant to [Tex. Fam. Code § 161.001](#), the court may order termination of the parent-child relationship only if the petitioner proves by clear and convincing evidence that: (1) a ground for termination exists; (2) that DFPS made reasonable efforts to return the child to the child's home but a continuing danger in the home prevented the child's return; and (3) that termination is in the best interest of the child.

In this strategy session, TST faculty will lead a discussion aimed at assisting participants in identifying the best facts to support their reasonable efforts argument for a final trial where termination is being sought.

In preparation for this session, it is suggested, but not required, that participants watch the [“Reevaluating Reasonable Efforts Findings”](#) webinar replay available on the [TST landing page](#).

Following a 30-minute strategy session on reasonable efforts arguments, participants will be given 4 to 5 minutes to provide closing arguments focused on the reasonable efforts prong in a termination trial in the *Harris-Price* case.

# PARTICIPANT PRACTICE SESSION INFORMATION

***For this simulation, assume that termination grounds and best interest of the child have already been argued before the court and all that is left to present to the court is your argument on reasonable efforts.***

## **PARTY POSITIONS:**

**Parent attorneys** will argue that DFPS did not make reasonable efforts to return the child to the child's home prior to the commencement of the trial and/or, that if DFPS's efforts were reasonable, there is not a continuing danger in the home that prevents the child's return.

***Parent attorneys may choose to represent either Kathy Price or Ryan Smith for this exercise.***

**Attorneys representing DFPS** will argue that DFPS made reasonable efforts to return the child to the child's home prior to the commencement of the trial, but despite those efforts, a continuing danger in the home prevented the child's return.

**AALs** may align with either the parent or DFPS when providing their reasonable efforts argument during closing statement as to the child, Rose Price.

Faculty members will play the role of the judge. The judges will ask you to stop your closing statement practice at the 4 to 5-minute mark and give you immediate feedback and friendly coaching in front of your small group. Many former participants find this to be some of the most valuable time during their training, as your critique will assist you in improving your skills and your confidence, as well as provide you and your fellow colleagues with practice tips.

While additional TST Faculty Members may join each Breakout Room as an observer, this session will not include a 1-on-1 feedback session.

*This practice session will be recorded, and the recording will be provided, upon request, for the participant's personal review sometime shortly after the conclusion of the Trial Skills Training.*

**CONCLUSION OF TRAINING: CONGRATULATIONS!**



# TRAINING COMMITTEE CHAIR

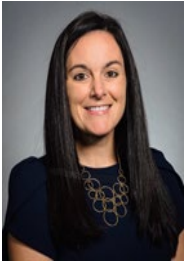


**Judge Piper McCraw** was appointed by Governor Abbott in 2015 to the 469th District Court in Collin County. Prior to her appointment by Governor Abbott in 2015 to the 469th District Court in Collin County, Piper McCraw was an assistant district attorney for Collin County where she was a misdemeanor court chief then later a member of a felony trial team. After leaving the Collin County DA's office, she joined McCraw Gantt, PLLC. In her experience, Judge McCraw has handled a wide variety of cases and tried over a 150 jury trials. She is a charter member and board member of both the Collin County Women Lawyer's Association and the Curt B. Henderson American Inn of Court. Judge McCraw is also proud to serve as Vice Chair and a Commissioner on the Texas Children's Commission as well as the Chair of the Children's Commission Training Committee. Prior to taking the bench, she was a member of the Collin County Criminal Defense Lawyer Association Board of Directors and the State Bar of Texas Grievance Committee. Judge McCraw received a BBA from Southern Methodist University, a JD from Texas Wesleyan University School of Law (now Texas A&M School of Law), and is double board certified in Family Law and Child Welfare Law by the Texas Board of Legal Specialization. She lives in McKinney with her husband, Mark, and three children.

**Judge Piper McCraw**  
469<sup>th</sup> District Court  
Collin County  
[pmmccraw@co.collin.tx.us](mailto:pmmccraw@co.collin.tx.us)



# TST FACULTY BIOS



**Amanda Lockhart** is in private practice. She represents parents, children, and intervenors in cases involving Child Protective Services in Robertson and surrounding counties since 2011. She also represents clients in family law, criminal law, and general litigation. Amanda is a member of the State Bar of Texas Child Protection Law section, the Child Welfare Law Advisory Commission, and a part of various committees through the Children's Commission. Amanda earned her law degree from the University of Arkansas and is Board Certified by the Texas Board of Legal Specialization in Child Welfare Law.



**Belinda Roberts** currently offers mentoring and support to child welfare practitioners. She currently serves as the Mental Health Public Defender for the Travis County Assisted Outpatient Treatment program. Prior to that, she served as an Assistant Attorney General as the lead civil attorney representing the State of Texas in human trafficking cases. For over 10 years, she was in private practice and represented parents, children, and families in child welfare cases in Travis and surrounding counties. Belinda is an active member of the State Bar of Texas Child Protection Law and Family Law Sections, the Texas Board of Legal Specialization Child Welfare Law Exam Commission and is a past Chair of the Court Appointed Family Attorneys (CAFA) Section of the Austin Bar Association. Belinda is also a member of the Travis County Women Attorneys Association and Texas Lawyers for Children. She earned her law degree from Rutgers School of Law-Camden and is Board Certified by the Texas Board of Legal Specialization in Child Welfare Law.



**Judge Charles Griffin** presides over the Gulf Coast Children's Court. The Court currently hears child protection cases in Harris and Matagorda Counties. Before his appointment Judge Griffin collectively represented the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services for more than 15 years as its Records Management Attorney and as a prosecutor in Potter, Brazos and Harris Counties. He also represented parents and children in child protection cases while in private practice in Dallas, Texas. Judge Griffin is a member of the State Bar of Texas's Child Protection Law Section. He is Board Certified in Child Welfare Law and serves as a member of the Child Welfare Law Advisory Commission of the Texas Board of Legal Specialization.



**Diane Sumoski** received her B.A. from Franklin and Marshall College, and her JD, cum laude, from Cornell Law School. She is a Clinical Professor of Law and the Director and Supervising Attorney of the W.W. Caruth, Jr. Child Advocacy Clinic and Institute for Children's Rights at SMU Dedman School of Law. As the Clinic Director, she represents and supervises law students in their representation of children in the child welfare system as the children's guardian and attorney ad litem. The Clinic also represents youth through age 26 who have aged out of care. Ms. Sumoski has represented women and children in family law matters on a pro bono basis for virtually the entirety of her 30+ year legal career, including during her 26 years of practice at Carrington, Coleman, Sloman & Blumenthal, L.L.P., where she was a

# TST FACULTY BIOS

litigation partner. Ms. Sumoski served on the Board of Directors of the Dallas Bar Association from 2009-2016, has been listed in Best Lawyers in America since 2010, and has held numerous leadership positions in the Litigation Section of the ABA, including Director of its Public Service Division. Ms. Sumoski was a member of the inaugural Texas Board of Legal Specialization's Child Welfare Law Exam Commission. She currently serves on the standing Training Committee of the Texas Supreme Court Children's Commission.



**Doug Lowe** served as the elected Anderson County Texas Criminal District Attorney from 1999 to 2014. Since leaving office, Doug has focused on studying and investigating white collar crime and corruption. The Association of Certified Fraud Examiners certified him a fraud examiner in 2014. Prior to taking office as district attorney Doug practiced civil law in Palestine, Texas, and the Texas Board of Legal Specialization designated him as a certified personal injury trial lawyer. In 2015, Doug was appointed by Texas Governor Gregg Abbott as a Commissioner to the Texas Lottery Commission where he set policies for the Texas Lottery and supervised the Charitable Bingo Divisions. In 2019, to fulfill a dream of an island life adventure, Doug moved to the American Samoa and worked for the territory's Attorney General as a felony prosecutor. He returned to Texas in 2020 to establish a private law practice focusing on risk management, fraud investigations, and trials. His undergraduate degree and law degrees were awarded by the University of Houston. He received a Masters of Law in Risk Management from the Texas A & M School of Law in December of 2018. Doug has been involved with the Trial Skills course since its inception.



**Judge Elizabeth Watkins** is an Associate Judge for the Child Protection Court of the Concho Valley. She was the former Family Justice Director for the Williamson County Attorney's Office. She has over 23 years' experience in the litigation and protection of children and families. She began her career with Child Protection Services as an investigator and adoptions worker, then served as an Assistant District Attorney in Anderson County for over 8 years. During her time with Anderson County, Elizabeth was responsible for the filing and litigation of all CPS cases, juvenile cases, and crimes against women and children. She has tried dozens of CPS cases in front of both the bench and juries, and prosecuted some of the toughest child assault cases, including first chair in capital murder trials. She previously served as a Regional Attorney for the Department of Family and Protective Services and is a member of the Supreme Court of Texas' Permanent Judicial Commission on Children's Legal Representation and serves as Trial Skills Faculty. Elizabeth has completed Trust Based Relational Intervention Course at the Karyn Purvis Institute. She has presented material for Texas CASA on trauma informed advocacy, served on lecture panels for trauma informed courtrooms, lectured for the Karyn Purvis Institute regarding TBRI in the Courtrooms, is a N.E.A.R. Science trainer and has testified before the Texas House Human Services Committee. Elizabeth was in the inaugural class to become Board Certified in Child Welfare. Ms. Watkins has 21-year-old twins, a son in graduate school for Psychology, and is married to her law enforcement husband, who investigates child crimes.

# TST FACULTY BIOS



**Judge Gary Coley** served as Judge of the 74th District Court from 1999 – 2025, when he stepped down from the bench to focus on mediation and arbitration while continuing to sit as a visiting judge by assignment. In addition to this work, he works of counsel at Cherry Johnson Siegmund James. Judge Coley has served through the Supreme Court of Texas Permanent Judicial Commission for Children, Youth & Families in various roles, and in 2016, he was appointed to serve as a Commissioner to the Children’s Commission. Among other civic and professional activities, he is a member of the American Board of Trial Advocates (ABOTA), the Judge Abner McCall Inn of Court, and Rotary Club. Additionally, he was instrumental in the formation of the Heart of Texas Human Trafficking Coalition. Prior to being elected, Judge Coley was a partner at Frederick & Coley and served as a prosecutor in the McLennan County District Attorney’s Office. From 2000-2004, he taught Juvenile Justice as an adjunct faculty member at Baylor Law School, and he resumed that role in 2018. Judge Coley obtained his B.B.A. from Texas A&M University and J.D. from Baylor University School of Law.



**Jack Sigman** has been practicing professionally for 34 years. He joined the law firm of Castagna & Scott, PLLC in October 2022 where he defends clients involved in personal injury claims, automobile accidents, and trucking accidents. From 2019 - 2022 Jack worked in construction litigation at Gerstle Snelson, LLP. From 1997 - 2019 Jack was in private practice at Sigman and Sigman, LLP with his wife Pam. His areas of practice included commercial litigation, CPS, family, and juvenile law litigation. Jack's legal career started at the Austin civil defense firm of Wilson, Groenheider, and Burns. Jack has tried over 20 jury trials, 350 bench trials, and over 200 administrative hearings, including many child welfare matters where he represented parents and children. In October 2020 Jack became a member of the American Board of Trial Advocates (ABOTA). He is a founding member and life fellow of the Austin Bar Foundation, a member of the Austin Bar Association, and a former director of the Austin Bar Association’s Civil Litigation Section. Jack also completed his mediator training in 2022. Jack is a former Northwest Little League (NWLL) President. Jack received his undergraduate from the University of Texas and Juris Doctorate from Texas Tech University. Jack and Pam are parents to two sons, Jackson and Walker.



**Kellie Price** is the Special Projects Attorney for the Department of Family and Protective Services. She began practicing child protection law in 2013 as an Assistant County Attorney in El Paso. She joined DFPS in 2016 as a Regional Attorney and moved to the Appellate Unit in 2020. She is part of the inaugural class of attorneys to become Board Certified in Child Welfare Law by the Texas Board of Legal Specialization in 2018. Kellie serves on the CLE and membership committees for the Child Protection Law Section and the Texas Children’s Commission’s Training Committee. Kellie graduated from the University of Texas School of Law in 2007 and became licensed that same year. She is known for her love of Peloton and paper planners.

# TST FACULTY BIOS

Photo  
Unavailable

**Laura Valdes** is in her 9<sup>th</sup> year as an Assistant District Attorney in the CPS Division of the Bexar County District Attorney's Office. Prior to joining the District Attorney's Office, Laura was in private practice for 8 years. One of her primary focuses of practice included representing parents and children experiencing the child welfare system. She earned a Bachelor's degree in Criminal Justice from the University of Texas at San Antonio in 2003, a Juris Doctorate from St. Mary's School of Law in 2006, and she is admitted to practice before the Texas Western District Court.



**Mark Zuniga** is a staff attorney with the Texas Justice Court Training Center. Previously he was with the Travis County's Office of Parental Representation. Prior to his work in Travis County, Mark was an appellate attorney for the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services. Prior to joining the Department, Mark was the Senior Attorney for the Civil Division of the Hay County Criminal District Attorney's Office, and before that Mark was in private practice. He graduated from the University of Texas School of Law in 1999.



**Mauro Valdez** is the Chief of the CPS Division in the Bexar County District Attorney's Office. Mauro joined the District Attorney's Office in January of 2019 and currently oversees child welfare litigation for Bexar County. In that role, he led a modernization effort to move to digital files and increase automation. Mauro is also a frequent speaker at CLE trainings on a wide range of Child Welfare topics. He currently serves as a Faculty Member of the Texas Children's Commission's Trial Skills Training. Prior to joining the District Attorney's office, Mauro was the DFPS Managing Attorney for Region 8 (San Antonio) from 2015 to 2019. In that capacity, he oversaw an office that provided direct representation for CPS in 26 counties, presented frequently at CLE trainings, and was also involved in reviewing pending bills during legislative session. Mauro also provided legislative training updates to DFPS caseworkers and ad litem and served on the Hotdocs workgroup tasked with updating the form libraries.

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**Rob Galvin** received his B.A. and J.D. from the University of Texas. While in law school, he competed in numerous interscholastic competitions and won a national title. Rob was inducted into the Order of the Barristers in 1999. During this time, he discovered his passion for advocacy; working for Broadus Spivey while under the tutelage of Francis Pan only served to further ignite that passion. Over the past 21 years, Rob has tried cases to the jury, many more to the court, and written and argued appeals.



# TST FACULTY BIOS



**Judge Michelle Moore** the presiding Judge of the 314th Juvenile District Court and the Administrative Judge of the Juvenile Courts. She also presides over the teen drug court called S.O.A.R., Sobriety Over Addiction and Relapse. Prior to taking the bench in 2019, Judge Moore worked at the Harris County Attorney's Office (HCAO) in the Child Protection Division where she was Court Chief of the 315th District Court. Before coming to the HCAO, she represented TDFPS in Cameron and Dallas counties. Judge Moore is from Houston, Texas, and she earned her undergraduate degree from Prairie View A&M University and law degree from University of Houston Law Center.



**Michele Surratt** has been a Managing Attorney for the Department of Family and Protective Services since September 2021 and was previously a Special Litigation Attorney since November 2006. She graduated cum laude with a B.A. in Psychology from University of Texas at Dallas and holds a J.D. from Texas Tech University School of Law. Michele has worked as a solo practitioner in Odessa, a Professor for Legal Assistance Program at Odessa College, an Assistant Ector County Attorney (1998-2004) and as an Assistant Collin County Criminal District Attorney (1996-1998). She has served on the Board of Directors of the Texas Young Lawyers Association and as President, Vice President, and Treasurer of the Ector County Young Lawyers Association. She has volunteered with the Odessa Crime Stoppers, where she was honored with an Award for Support and Dedication in 2003; the Odessa Teen Court, where she has served on the Board of Directors, as Treasurer and as a Volunteer Judge; the Center for Crisis Advocacy, where she has served on the Board of Directors; and the Safe and Drug Free Schools, where she has served on the Advisory Counsel. She has been recognized with the President's Award of Merit (2005-2006 and 2006-2007) and the Standing Ovation Award. She has also contributed to continuing education of the Texas State Bar as Course Director for Federal Court Practice (2006, 2007) and the New Lawyer Course (2007). Michele has presented at numerous conferences and trainings. She is the chair of the Children's Commission DFPS Representation Subcommittee and of the State Bar of Texas Child Protection Law Section's CLE Committee.



**Judge Robert Falkenberg** presides over the Child Protection Court of South Texas, comprised of Bandera, Gillespie, Kendall, Kerr, Medina, Real, and Uvalde counties. He received his law degree from St. Mary's School of Law where he served on the St. Mary's Law Journal, and received his B.A. in English from Texas State University. Prior to his appointment, Judge Falkenberg owned a private practice focusing primarily on child welfare and family law. Judge Falkenberg is active with the Supreme Court of Texas Children's Commission and is a Fellow of the Texas Bar Foundation. He has presented for Advanced Family Law, Texas District and County Attorney's Association, Texas District Clerk's Association, Children's Commission, and the Hill Country CASA Annual Ad Litem Seminar on child welfare issues. Judge Falkenberg is a published author and he resides with his wife and children in the Texas hill country. Together they have backpacked, fished, and camped in several mountain ranges throughout the United States.

# TST FACULTY BIOS



**William Drake “Drake” Mikeska** is a Managing Attorney for the Department of Family and Protective Services, Region 8. He obtained his undergraduate degree in Communications from Texas A&M University, his law degree from St. Mary’s University School of Law and is certified by the Texas Board of Legal Specialization in Child Welfare Law. In his free time, Drake enjoys watching his children play soccer, watching all things Texas A&M sports related, and spending time outdoors. In 2023, Drake joined the Children’s Commission Trial Skills Training Faculty.



**Tiffany Reedy** has served as the Managing Counsel for the Child Protection Services and Disability & Elder Law Divisions at the Harris County Attorney’s Office since January 2021. She was an Assistant County Attorney for Harris County from December 2008 until January 2021 and was a Regional Attorney for the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services for five and a half years prior to joining the Harris County Attorney’s Office. Tiffany has presented on numerous topics related to the practice of child welfare law and is a featured presenter on the Texas District and County Attorney’s Association (“TDCAA”) *Fundamentals of Child Welfare Law* online training course. She obtained a J.D. from Texas Southern University, Thurgood Marshall School of Law. Tiffany has been a member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc since 1996.



**Tracy Harting** is a TBLS and NACC certified Child Welfare Law Specialist. Tracy is the Director of the Williamson County Attorney's Family Justice Division. She accepted this position after decades as an attorney in private practice representing parents, children, and families in Travis, Williamson, Caldwell, Hays, Bell, Gonzales, Guadalupe, and Comal counties. She is a former foster parent and an adoptive parent of two. Tracy obtained a B.A. from Southwestern University, a J.D. from the University of Houston, and an M.P.A. from Texas A&M Corpus Christi.

## IN MEMORIAM

**Clint A. Harbour**

**August 14, 1975-August 30, 2024**



**Clint Harbour** served as a member of the Children’s Commission Trial Skills Training Faculty from 2014 to 2024. Clint was as an Assistant Attorney General, representing the State of Texas in condemnation cases and coordinated the trial advocacy training for the Office of the Attorney General. He also taught trial skills at the University of Texas School of Law in Austin. More importantly, he was a good husband, father, and friend.



# 2025 CONTESTED HEARINGS COURSE

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## 2025 Post Event Survey QR Codes

Virtual Training (September 4 and 10, 2025)

Post-Event Survey: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/FKQ66RV>



In Person Training (September 16-18, 2025)

Post-Event Survey: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/FL5K7LZ>





## Travel Reimbursement Request Form Guidelines

### January 1, 2025

The Texas Court Improvement Program (CIP) is federally funded and thereby governed by the reimbursement policies of the Children's Commission and the Supreme Court of Texas. All travel expenses will be paid in accordance with the following policies.

*Reimbursements for personal expenses, alcoholic beverages and gratuities are not allowed.*

#### Reimbursement Forms

Please complete the Children's Commission Travel Reimbursement Request Form in full, sign and date. Forms with the supporting receipts attached may be submitted by email or mail to the following:

E-mail: Willette Sedwick [commission.accounting@txcourts.gov](mailto:commission.accounting@txcourts.gov)

Mail: Supreme Court of Texas Children's Commission  
P.O. Box 12248  
Austin, TX 78711

#### Match Form

The Children's Commission Match form **MUST** also be completed to prevent delay in processing requests for reimbursement.

#### Transportation

Travelers are required to select the most cost-effective mode of transportation. Original receipts are required for transportation expenses such as parking, airfare, rental car, taxis, and shuttles.

#### Transportation Options

*Mileage Calculation* – Travelers may be reimbursed .70 cents per mile for travel by personal automobile. In determining route, the traveler must select the most cost-effective, reasonably safe, shortest route; however, may choose an alternative route according to the road conditions and/or the quickest route. To claim mileage reimbursement, requests must include driving directions generated by a mapping service such as MapQuest, Google Maps, etc. The mapping service attachment must include:

1. The traveler's headquarters address (start of trip travel) and the meeting destination;
2. line by line driving directions;
3. Includes the total one-way mileage.

*Rental vs. Personal Vehicle* - Travelers are responsible for determining the most cost-effective means of ground transportation. The maximum reimbursable amount for ground transportation is determined by using the Comptroller of Public Accounts mileage calculator found here: <https://fmx.cpa.texas.gov/fmx/travel/mileage/>

*Rental Car* - Reimbursements will be made only for the vehicle type/class with the lowest rate. A copy of the original receipt is required and must include the name of the rental company, the name of the traveler, the start and end date of the rental agreement, itemization of expenses incurred, and proof of payment.

*Airfare* - Reimbursement may not exceed the cost of the lowest available airfare (Economy seating or similar) between the traveler's headquarters location and duty point. Reimbursement will not be made for upgrades or early check-in/boarding. Receipts must include the name of the traveler, airline, ticket number, class of transportation, travel dates, and proof of payment. Itineraries/confirmations that show cost but not payment will not be reimbursed.

### **Incidentals**

Original receipts are required for incidental expenses (ie. baggage fees, gasoline, internet access, tolls).

### **Meals**

Meals are reimbursed according to the rates set by the General Services Administration. Refer to [www.gsa.gov](http://www.gsa.gov) for the daily maximum meals allowance.

- Non-Overnight Travel: Traveling outside of designated headquarters for six consecutive hours or more may be reimbursed for meals not to exceed \$36.
- Overnight Travel: Meal expenses incurred for overnight travel are reimbursable up to the maximum GSA rate for the destination location. The first and last day of travel is calculated at 75 percent of the daily maximum meal allowance set by the GSA.
- Travelers may only claim meals that are not provided as part of an event. For example: at a conference, where lunch is provided to attendees, the traveler may not claim reimbursement for lunch.

### **Lodging**

Please refer to [www.gsa.gov](http://www.gsa.gov) for daily maximum lodging allowances. If you are traveling outside of your designated headquarters, the single occupancy rate plus applicable taxes for your hotel room will be reimbursed for arrival on the day before the conference or meeting through the night after the conference or meeting ends. Additional room nights, guests and incidental expenses are not reimbursable.

If you have any questions or need assistance completing the form, please contact Willette Sedwick at [commission.accounting@txcourts.gov](mailto:commission.accounting@txcourts.gov).

***All reimbursement claims must be submitted within 45 days of travel.***

## CHILDREN'S COMMISSION

P.O. Box 12248 ~ Austin, TX 78711

512-463-1310

### REIMBURSEMENT REQUEST

*Please Allow 30 days for processing.*

#### PAYEE INFORMATION:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Social Security Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

City/State/Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

#### BUSINESS PURPOSE: Please provide brief description of conference or training attended.

Attended the Fall 2025 TST Contested Hearing Practices Course held on September 16-18, 2025, in Round Rock, TX

**Note: Refer to travel guidelines for maximum lodging and meals allowances. Receipts and supporting documentation must be attached, including mileage calculation between headquarters and conference location.**

Date	Mileage			Airfare	Rental Car	Taxi/Shuttle	Parking/ Tolls	Meals	Lodging	Misc.	Total
	Distance	Rate	Cost								
		0.70									
		0.70									
		0.70									
		0.70									
		0.70									
		0.70									

**Total**

#### I CERTIFY THAT:

1. The amounts listed are actual expenses paid personally by me for the purpose stated.
2. I have not been nor will be reimbursed from any other source for any of the expenses listed.
3. This request is correct to the best of my knowledge.

Payee Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**This form may be e-signed and sent to [commission.accounting@txcourts.gov](mailto:commission.accounting@txcourts.gov). All required supporting documentation should be scanned and attached in email with form. Or, send completed form and all required documentation (tape small receipts to standard-size paper), to:  
PO Box 12248, Austin, TX 78711**

For Commission Use Only

Commission Approval \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

COMBJ \_\_\_\_\_

