



Judge Brandy Hallford,  
Williamson County Court at Law One

Legal Essentials and Beyond for Representing  
Parents and Children in Child Welfare Cases

## COURSE DESCRIPTIONS

Friday, January 12, 2024  
8:30 a.m. - 3:45 p.m.

Williamson County Justice Center  
405 Martin Luther King  
Georgetown, Texas 78626

**8:30 – 9:00 am**

### **Session One**

#### Welcoming Remarks, Overview of Program, and Texas Indigent Defense Commission Child Welfare Law Spotlight Videos

*Speaker: Hon. Brandy Hallford, Judge of Williamson County Court-at-Law One*

The Honorable Brandy Hallford, Judge of Williamson County Court-at-Law One, will discuss the importance of high-quality legal representation for children and parents on the child welfare docket. She will also provide an overview of the curriculum and describe the qualifications needed for attorneys to be considered eligible for the court appointment wheel in Williamson County. Finally, Judge Hallford will share the recent videos filmed by the Texas Indigent Defense Commission of attorneys and judges in child welfare law speaking about the challenges and rewards of working in this area.

**9:00 - 10:00 am**

### **Session Two**

#### Child Welfare Case Overview: What Attorneys Need to Know About Statutory Hearings and Deadlines

*Speaker: Brenda Kinsler, Managing Attorney for Regions 4, 5, and 7, Texas Department of Family and Protective Services*

An overview of a child welfare case will be provided from investigations through various final outcomes. The presentation will include a review of statutory requirements, some recent legislative changes, highlights of the new reasonable efforts requirements, and required court findings.

*15 minute break*

**10:15 – 11:45 am**

### **Session Three**

#### Nuts and Bolts of Parent and Child Representation in Child Welfare Cases

*Speakers: Ryan Palmquist, Attorney and Partner, Fifield, Brown and Palmquist, LLC; and Mark Zuniga, Staff Attorney, Texas Justice Court Training Center*

This presentation will review the specific statutory duties and responsibilities of court-appointed attorneys in child welfare cases, along with best practice tips, in the following areas: Duties for Both Parents' and Children's Attorneys; Additional Duties for a Child's Attorney; Duties of a Child's Attorney Appointed in the Dual Role; Duties for an Attorney Appointed to an Alleged Father; Duties for an Attorney Appointed to Represent an Unknown Parent, Unlocated Parent, or Parent Who Has Been Served by Publication; and the new duties related to Residential Treatment Centers and Qualified Residential Treatment Programs.

*15 minute break*

12:00 – 12:30 Lunch (provided)

**12:30 - 1:30 pm**      **Session Four**  
Preventing Attorney Burnout

*Speaker: Leigh De La Reza, Attorney and Partner, Noelke, Maples, St. Leger Bryant, LLP*

This session will explain the elements of vicarious trauma secondary traumatic stress, compassion fatigue and burnout, as well as strategies for attorneys to prevent and counter vicarious trauma and attorney burnout so that they can build resiliency, keep longevity in the field, and cultivate a healthy approach to their courtroom practice and well-being.

*10 minute break*

**1:40 – 2:40 pm**      **Session Five**  
Evidence: Getting it In, Keeping it Out, and Preserving the Record for Appeal

*Speaker: Mark Zuniga, Staff Attorney, Texas Justice Court Training Center*

This course will address evidentiary issues that are specific to child welfare litigation, including the admissibility of hearsay statements from children about abuse, video interviews of children at a Children's Advocacy Center, government documents and Department documents generally, the removal affidavit, and drug tests. The admission of evidence that was not produced in discovery, the potential use of evidence that was in the court's file but not formally admitted, and issues concerning the Fifth Amendment privilege against self-incrimination will also be covered. Finally, this course will focus on preserving evidentiary issues for appellate review, both for review of evidence that was admitted or evidence that was excluded.

*5 minute break*

**2:45 – 3:45 pm**

**Session Six**

**Child Welfare Legislative and Case Law Update**

*Speakers: Kellie Price, Special Projects Attorney, Texas Department of Family and Protective Services; and Rebecca Safavi, Appellate Attorney, Texas Department of Family and Protective Services*

A high-level overview of recent child-welfare related legislation and case law will be provided, with a focus on statutory entitlement to an attorney; dismissal deadlines; notice of appeal, de novo hearings, and related deadlines; and reasonable efforts requirements.

**3:45 pm**

**Closing Remarks and MCLE information**

*Speaker: Hon. Brandy Halford, Judge of Williamson County Court-at-Law One*