



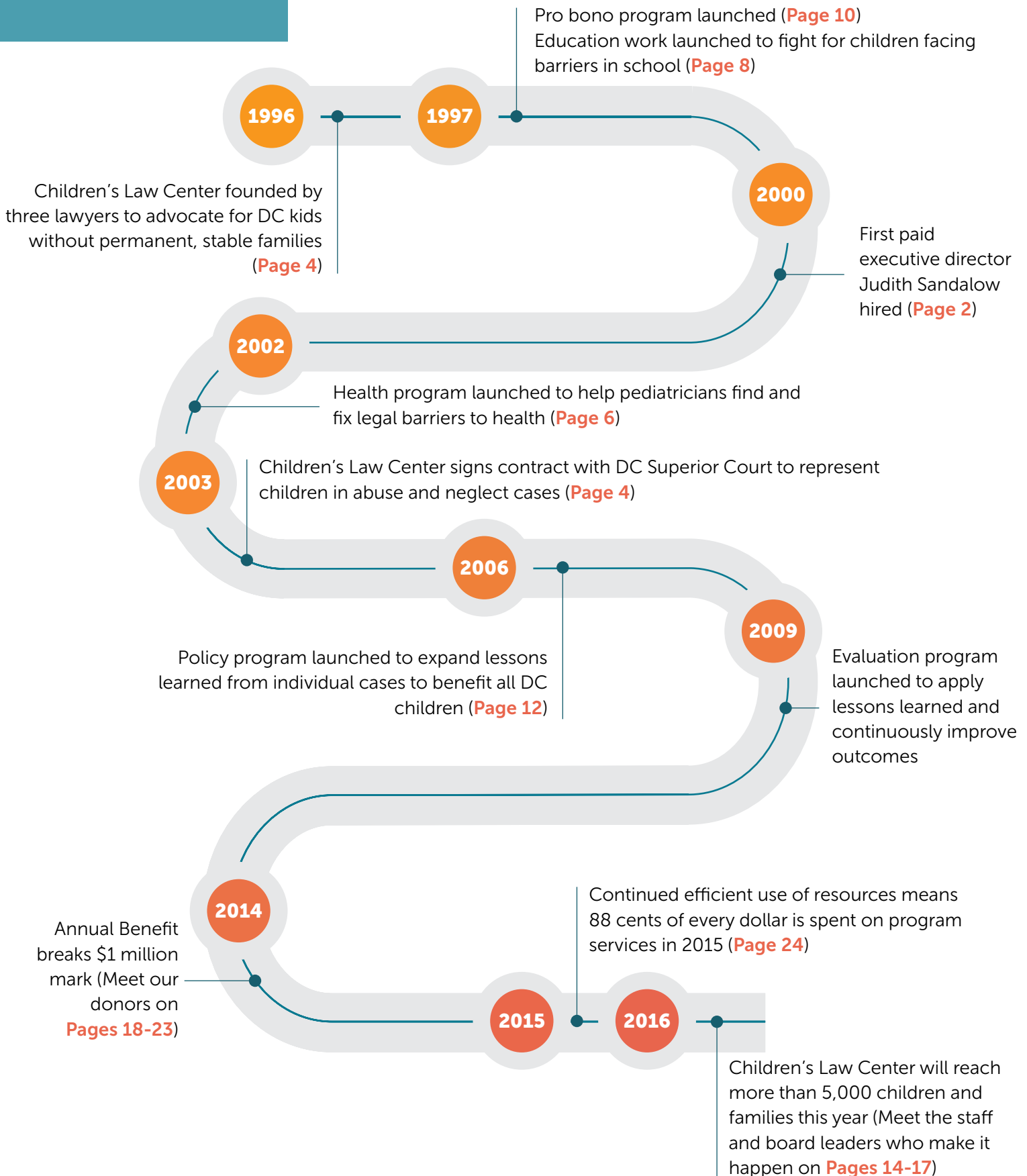
dc's
**CHILDREN'S
LAW CENTER**
20 YEARS • 1996-2016

We helped Tai's grandmother gain custody of her in 2010 and then made sure her school could address Tai's learning disabilities. They're both still doing well today.*



Contents

Almost 30,000 children and families are better off today because of Children's Law Center's 20 years of legal advocacy.





Executive Director's Letter

Our first year of operation was bleak for DC's kids. In 1996, almost 8,000 were in the child welfare system because of abuse and neglect allegations. Thousands sat in classrooms without learning basic skills. Lawyers had brought class-action lawsuits against every government agency serving children, from child welfare to special education to mental health. But no organization fought for individual children or had the skills to help the government implement reforms.

That's what prompted three dedicated family lawyers – James Marsh, Diane Weinroth and Ken Noyes – to join forces. They imagined an organization with the expertise and legal skills to fight for children in foster care.

Children's Law Center has come a long way since then – as have the District's children. But our work is far from finished.

We grew from a small group of dedicated legal advocates to a sustainable, 100-person strong organization comprised of the best and brightest lawyers, social workers and investigators dedicated to giving each child they meet a fighting chance. And we extend our impact through the strategic work of our policy, communications and appellate teams and the guidance and generosity of a strong board of directors.

Like the children we fight for, we needed help to build a strong foundation. In 2000, for example, when expenses outpaced income, a grant from the Federal Communications Bar Association gave us time to draft a business plan for future growth.

From the start, we realized children needed more than permanent families to thrive. That's why we grew from an early focus on child welfare to take a broader approach that looks at the whole child and what he or she needs to grow up with a stable family, good health and a quality education.

1996



Children's Law Center
reaches almost **200** children
& families in its first year

Today



We fight for
5,000+ children and
families each year

We have helped almost 30,000 children and families since our beginning – and now reach 1 out of every 9 children in neighborhoods where we're needed most. More important than the numbers: each child and family we help is better positioned for success. It's not just my opinion. We are breaking ground in the legal services community with our increased focus on evaluation. These results show our interventions are effective.

We haven't accomplished this alone. Over the years, our network of supporters has grown as local philanthropists like Mariella Trager introduced us to more caring and generous donors than I can name.

We've partnered with about 2,000 pro bono attorneys to reach more children than we could on our own. Many other partners – judges, pediatricians and families – trust us to be the voice for children at risk of being left behind. And our work with government leaders and advocates enables us to push for broader policy reforms to benefit all DC children.

There is still work to do. Despite DC's recent prosperity, many children are being left behind. This is especially true for children in Wards 7 and 8 who continue to live in extreme poverty, struggle with trauma and do poorly in school.

Still, the progress we have made together makes me optimistic about the future. Today, DC children are more likely to be screened for developmental delays in the youngest years when intervention can do the most good. Our schools are making progress. And if something goes wrong and a child can no longer live with her parents, she is more likely to be placed with a relative than with strangers.

As Children's Law Center looks to the next 20 years, we will continue to innovate and advocate to meet the changing needs of children in our city. And while we find solutions to system-wide issues we will continue to fight, child by child and family by family, to ensure our most vulnerable children can thrive.

Thank you for being a part of our children's success. We couldn't do this without you.

Judith Sandalow
Executive Director



*Children's Law
Center will continue
to innovate and
advocate to meet the
changing needs of
children in our city."*

Family

1996



77,000+
children
living in DC

3,000
DC children
growing up
in foster care

200 children
helped by
Children's Law Center

Today



115,000+
children in DC

1,000 DC children
live in foster care

2,800+
helped yearly by
Children's Law Center
to create
stable families

Our Work: Then & Now

In 1996, almost 8,000 children were under the watch of the DC government because of allegations of abuse and neglect – and almost 3,000 children languished in foster care without much hope of joining a forever family. Many children were raised by grandparents and other relatives who navigated a complex child welfare system with little support.

Children's Law Center opened its doors with the goal of ensuring that every child in foster care had the support of a stable, loving family. In 2001, with the help of the Skadden Fellowship Program, we expanded to help children caught up in high-conflict custody cases where domestic violence threatened their safety.

Because grandparents, relatives and foster parents are an important source of love and stability for DC children, we also began to help caregiving adults who wanted to give children a permanent home through adoption, custody or guardianship.

Today, family is still at the center of our approach – but it is not all we do. We also address inadequate schooling, unmet mental health needs and poor health that prevent children from thriving.

Whether a judge appoints us to represent a child whose family is unstable, a pediatrician calls us because a child has health problems or a parent reaches out because her child isn't learning in school, we fight to get them the support they need to have a happier childhood and to thrive.

Meet Kenya

Kenya was 22 when we met her more than 10 years ago. She faced a tough decision: should she leave college to care for her two youngest brothers or focus on her future?

Kenya's brothers, ages 1 and 6 years old, lived with their 86-year-old great-grandmother. When she was unable to continue caring for them, the boys, Isaiah and Elijah,* were placed with a foster family.

The situation was familiar to her. When Kenya was 9, a tip came into DC's child abuse hotline that her mother, who struggled with addiction and mental illness, was neglecting her. Kenya ended up in foster care. Now, years later, Kenya saw her brothers taken away.



"Being a child in foster care myself, I understood the importance of keeping family together," she says. "Back then they didn't do family visits. My mom wanted to see us and would come by school and snatch us. We really struggled."

Kenya decided to put college on hold and raise her brothers.

She made her case to her family, DC's child welfare agency (CFSA) and the family court judge. She was up to the task but no one else agreed. The way they saw it, she was putting her own future in jeopardy.

The judge referred Kenya to Children's Law Center.

"I had to fight two systems: CFSA and also my own family who didn't want me to take the boys," she says. "But Children's Law Center was a listening ear...And they weren't just my attorneys: I remember Children's Law Center helping me find an apartment, helping me shop for furniture on the weekends. There were hearings and meetings almost every day."

Eventually, Kenya was cleared to take in Elijah and Isaiah.

"The boys and I moved into our place in 2003, just before Christmas," Kenya says. "I was getting the boys ready every morning. Getting them home from school. Juggling everything. It was eye opening."

After two years of motions and meetings, Kenya adopted Elijah and Isaiah – who she now calls her sons – with her Children's Law Center attorney at her side.

Today, Kenya and the boys are doing great. Elijah is a senior in high school and preparing for college. Isaiah is on the honor roll. And Kenya now has a 2-year-old who looks up to his big brothers.

Though Kenya put her dreams on hold, she eventually returned to them. She now works for a local non-profit helping people in crisis get on their feet.

"I won't say it was easy," Kenya says. "But for me, carrying a picture of my boys has been my motivation. It helps me understand: all things aren't perfect, all things aren't always going to be perfect, but I got this."

Health

1996



282 DC children died before reaching their 20th birthday

Mental health treatment for DC children **limited to institutional settings**

Doctors go it alone to address children's health problems

Today



90% reduction in children's deaths in DC

Children's mental health services **offered in schools, homes and the community**

Children's Law Center lawyers **onsite at 6 health clinics**

Our Work: Then & Now

Almost 300 children died before their 20th birthday in 1996. Thousands more were exposed to abuse and neglect but little was known about its impact on their health. Children with mental health needs were often placed in institutions far away from their families.

Today, child deaths have dropped 90 percent – a bright spot. Still, when we look deeper, troubling health problems remain, especially for children exposed to trauma and those with unmet mental health needs. And DC's poor children fare significantly worse than their wealthier peers on virtually every health measure.

That's why Children's Law Center quickly expanded to ensure children in foster care and others exposed to violence get the healthcare and mental health services they need. We also began legal advocacy to address unsafe housing conditions and other causes of poor health that couldn't be improved by medicine alone.

In 2002, Children's Law Center turned to the District's leading children's health philanthropist, Diana Goldberg, and the Meyer and Cafritz foundations to pioneer one of the first medical-legal partnerships in the nation. We are now onsite at six health clinics run by Children's National, Mary's Center and Unity Health Care.

Children's Law Center has grown to help more than 1,500 children and their families with health concerns each year – from making sure landlords clean up toxic mold to fighting for appropriate counseling for a grieving child.

Meet Noah

We met Cheryl in 2012 when her son Noah was 4 years old. Despite having the best doctors in town, Cheryl grew increasingly alarmed because Noah's life was in danger – all because his school couldn't appropriately monitor his Type I diabetes.

"I thought diabetes would be easy for the schools to handle," Cheryl says. "But I was wrong."

Without proper monitoring, Noah frequently went into a diabetic crisis during the two-hour bus ride to his assigned school. And once Noah was at school, the school nurse couldn't handle his diabetes. As a result, he kept landing in the emergency room.

"I can't tell you how many times I got frightening calls from the school nurse saying: Noah is in crisis and we're going to have to call an ambulance," Cheryl says.

In addition to putting Noah's life in danger, it put his educational future in jeopardy. Noah had developmental delays, so every day away from school was an obstacle to catching up with his classmates. But his out-of-control health meant Noah missed school day after day.

That's when Cheryl was referred to Children's Law Center and met Renee Murphy, one of the attorneys with our medical-legal program Healthy Together.

"Renee was amazing. I call her my Navy Seal," Cheryl says.

First, Renee worked with Children's National medical staff to understand exactly what Noah needed for his diabetes. She got copies of medical orders and treatment plans so the school had all the information they needed. Then, she started pushing Noah's school to ensure all the staff were properly trained in diabetes care.

When it became clear that the bus ride was too long to keep him safe, Renee helped Cheryl identify a school closer to home that was a better fit for Noah's needs. Once Noah was assigned to his new school, Renee continued to advocate for an on-site nurse skilled in diabetes care.

Within a month, Noah's new school trained its teachers and other staff in diabetes care. The school also came up with a plan to address his developmental delays.

The plan worked. Noah's diabetes went from out of control to a condition that was being more carefully managed. And because Noah was in class every day, "he went from being a boy who was difficult to understand to a boy who is speaking, answering questions and beginning to read," Cheryl says.

It's been four years since then. Noah has had some additional health concerns but is on a much better path



than when we met. And, with training from Children's Law Center, Cheryl has become an even more skilled advocate for her son.

"Noah is a fighter," Cheryl says. "He tells me he is going to college one day... And you know, I believe him. It's not just my opinion, his doctors believe that, his teachers believe that, and everyone who knows Noah believes that."

Education

1996



Fewer than 50%
of students graduated
from high school

**DC limits early
intervention services**
to infants & toddlers
with severe delays

Students with
special needs
segregated in
self-contained
classrooms

Today



65% of DC public school
students graduate

**Early intervention
expanded** to infants
& toddlers with
moderate delays

1,800+ kids helped by
Children's Law Center
with educational needs
each year

Our Work: Then & Now

In 1996, children weren't faring well in DC's public schools. Their educational outcomes fell each year. Many entered kindergarten with unaddressed developmental delays. The situation was worse for kids with learning, physical or emotional disabilities.

There have been many attempts to improve the schools since then. The good news is educational outcomes have improved for DC's younger children. In 2008, DC became the first place in the country to provide pre-K for all 3- and 4-year-olds. More infants and toddlers receive early intervention, getting critical help to children with developmental delays when it makes the most difference. But our schools still struggle to educate at-risk children, including those in foster care and those with special needs.

From the beginning, Children's Law Center advocated so DC schools provide the special education children need. Today, we also reduce unnecessary suspensions and expulsions so children learn in classrooms every day. And with the support of the Morrison and Foerster Foundation, we help infants and toddlers start school ready to learn by addressing developmental delays.

For children in foster care, we fight so they can stay with trusted adults in a familiar school no matter where they move. For older teens in care, we get them support to complete high school and start college or job training.

Today, Children's Law Center continues to fight so all children in DC get the education they need to thrive. We now help over 1,800 children with their educational needs each year.

Meet RJ

We first met RJ* five years ago when he was 15. For as long as he could remember, his life was filled with chaos – at home and at school.

The chaos at home affected RJ at school. He had a hard time sitting still and would bolt from class without warning. Sometimes, he had outbursts and called his teachers names, leading to a number of suspensions.

"Looking back, I realize I was angry... and I felt like no one was listening to me," RJ says.

RJ's home situation worsened and he was taken into foster care.

That's when a family court judge appointed one of Children's Law Center's attorneys, Allison Green, to be RJ's *Guardian ad litem*. Her first goal was to make sure he had a safe, supportive place to live.

But Allison's focus quickly turned to problems at RJ's school. RJ's high school was in the process of expelling him. And his repeated suspensions caused him to miss many days of school without any option to make up his work, leading him to fail several classes. RJ was on the road to dropping out.

Allison knew that like many kids in foster care, RJ's behavior could be related to the trauma he experienced. The first step toward getting him the right school support was to have him evaluated.

Parents have the legal right to make educational decisions for their children, including permission for evaluations. But RJ's mother wasn't in a position to make these decisions because of her personal circumstances. Without her, RJ's educational progress was stalling.

The law allows children to have another adult make educational decisions if their parent is not available. Allison found just the right person: a former mentor from the Big Brothers program who RJ trusted. With some persuading, RJ's mom consented. An education lawyer from Children's Law Center, D.D. Davis, took on the role of helping RJ's Big Brother navigate the school bureaucracy. RJ now had a supportive team fighting on his behalf.

"I finally felt like I had a voice and my team was listening to me," RJ says.

RJ was at long last reevaluated. He qualified for extra support at school to help him learn. He got tutoring to make up for time lost to suspensions. He also got an aide who could step in whenever RJ needed help settling down.

Still, RJ and his team became convinced that the history of conflict with his current school meant he couldn't succeed there. It was a bumpy road to get him into an appropriate school, but RJ eventually landed at Dunbar High School.



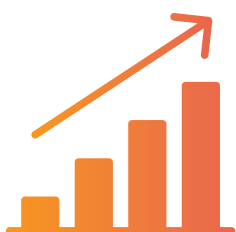
It was the right fit. After such a long journey, RJ finally graduated in 2015. He even made the honor roll in his final year. It seemed like an amazing turn around for a young man who was failing just a few years before – but it was really the result of steady support and hard work.

Today, RJ is studying to become a computer technician and has an IT internship. His future looks bright.

"My journey has been challenging," RJ says with a smile, "but my life is great now."

Pro Bono

Since 1996



2,000 attorneys
volunteered with
Children's Law Center

Nearly **200**
law firm, corporate
& solo office partners

Tens of millions
of dollars in pro bono
legal counsel donated
to DC families

Our Work: Then & Now

Children's Law Center launched its Pro Bono Adoption Project in 1997 to expand the number of children who could exit the abuse and neglect system to join a permanent family. With just a handful of staff at the time, we recognized the need to mobilize more lawyers to make a dent in the enormous backlog of foster children waiting for legal help. Our first pro bono partners – Akin Gump and Hogan and Hartson (now Hogan Lovells) – agreed to take adoption cases with training and mentoring from Children's Law Center.

Flash forward to today. The good news is that Children's Law Center has grown to be the largest non-profit legal provider in DC, helping thousands of children, parents and caregivers each year. Still, the vast majority of people in family court do not have lawyers – leaving them without the expert help they need when life-altering decisions are made about their children's future. The same is true when it comes to education and housing. Pro bono lawyers help us fill this gap.

Children's Law Center now partners with hundreds of pro bono lawyers each year. Our dedicated partners take cases that are life changing – always for the children and families they represent and often for the pro bono lawyer as well. We provide them with world class mentorship, training and written materials to achieve the best outcomes for their clients.

These pro bono lawyers represent grandparents who step up to give their grandchildren loving homes and parents who are fighting to ensure their children get the special education support they need to learn. They are appointed by judges to give children a voice in contentious custody battles and help parents sue landlords when dangerous conditions harm a child's health. Their legal advocacy has helped thousands of DC children join stable families, achieve better health and gain a quality education.

“

Your staff provide tremendous training to pro bono volunteers. Children's Law Center's sophisticated and talented lawyers are leaders in their fields, which gives me great confidence that our lawyers will receive outstanding guidance.”

Don Salzman, Pro Bono Counsel, Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom LLP

2015 Pro Bono Partners

Pro bono attorneys and staff from these law firms and companies volunteered more than 43,000 hours on behalf of Children's Law Center in 2015 – providing more than \$11 million in legal advocacy for DC's most vulnerable children and families.

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The Advisory Board Company
Aetna
Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld LLP
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Mayer Brown LLP
McDermott Will & Emery LLP
Milbank, Tweed, Hadley & McCloy LLP
The Law Offices of Pamela J. Miller
Miller & Chevalier Chartered
MK Family Law
The Mokodean Law Firm

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Orrick, Herrington & Sutcliffe LLP
Paul Hastings LLP
Paul Weiss Rifkind Wharton &
Garrison LLP
Pierce Atwood LLP
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Policy



Children's Law Center played a leading role in these major policy initiatives, improving the lives of thousands of children in the District:

2001: First guardianship statute in US helps kids exit foster care to live with extended family

2006: Grandparent subsidy established to help low-income families raise grandchildren

2007: DC passes law to help relatives & caregivers secure legal custody when parents can no longer care for children

2010: DC extends financial support for adopted children to age 21 to increase adoption of teenagers

2013: DC advances children's mental health by expanding school-based clinics & improving oversight of Medicaid managed care organizations

2014: Historic law improves quality & timeliness of special education services

2015: Medicaid regulations & legislation increase mental health screening & treatment by pediatricians

Our Work: Then & Now

When Children's Law Center opened its doors, no DC government agency adequately met children's needs. Thousands of children were being warehoused in foster care without the hope of finding a permanent family. Children with mental health needs went without help until crises hit – and treatment was mostly limited to institutional settings. Public schools failed to educate thousands of children with special needs who reached adulthood without skills to live independently.

That's why Children's Law Center began to partner with the Mayor, District agencies, the DC Council, Superior Court and children's advocates to reform these institutions and find city-wide solutions to better address children's needs. Our policy recommendations are grounded in what we have learned from representing tens of thousands of children and their families over the years.

For example, from its start Children's Law Center pushed DC's child welfare agency to reduce the number of children languishing in foster care by finding more grandparents, aunts, uncles and other kin who



In 2012, Children's Law Center released a blueprint for reforming DC's mental health system.



Former Mayor Vincent Gray signed a law to help grandparents raise children at risk of entering foster care.

could raise them. But the law didn't fully recognize extended family relationships. In response, we helped create a new legal relationship – guardianship – which provides financial support without forcing relatives to adopt and become legal parents when their true relationship was that of a grandparent, aunt or cousin. In 2001, DC became the first jurisdiction in the country to have a guardianship statute.

These early successes led Children's Law Center to launch a formal policy program in 2006 with the support of Betsy Karel and the Trellis Fund. Since then, we've helped change dozens of laws and policies and worked with the DC government to improve their practices so children could thrive.

Today, our policy advocacy focuses on three areas:

→ **Mental Health:** Despite progress, thousands of DC children cannot access quality mental health care. Children's Law Center continues to advocate for effective services, additional funding and an end to the fragmentation that prevents children from getting care. This includes expanding community options, particularly in schools.

→ **Child Welfare:** We continue to push for improvements in DC's child welfare system to prevent abuse and neglect in families, ensure children in foster care get the services they need, and support extended family and foster parents to provide loving, stable homes.

→ **Education:** We advocate to ensure children with special needs and those impacted by trauma or in foster care get the education they need to thrive. We also work to reform truancy laws and school discipline practices so every student can be in school every day.

Children's Law Center's policy successes build on thousands of hours of testimony, research, meetings and outreach with District leaders on behalf of children. We also secure media coverage to build political will and shine a bright spotlight on the District's successes and failures in meeting children's needs.

Whether it is pressing agencies to better prepare older youth who age out of foster care or ensuring pediatricians screen for children's mental health needs – our policy advocacy has delivered real results that have improved all children's lives.



Former DC Councilmember David Catania introduced groundbreaking special education reforms in 2014.



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during 2015.*





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The wise counsel, strong engagement and generous support of our board members allows Children's Law Center to advance its programs and continuously innovate to meet the needs of DC's children.

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The DC Public Schools and Children’s Law Center share a common goal: to make sure every child is learning in school and getting the education that helps them succeed. We also agree that while the schools are a much better place, there is more to do if we are going to achieve that goal.”

Dr. Nathaniel Beers, Chief Operating Officer, DC Public Schools

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Family court judges rely on Children's Law Center's legal advocacy to help us protect the best interests of children in our courtrooms."

The Honorable Lee F. Satterfield,
Chief Judge, DC Superior Court

Children's Law Center and Unity Health Care staff confer at Unity's Minnesota Avenue Clinic. Children's Law Center now has medical-legal partnerships with Children's National Health System, Mary's Center and Unity Health Care in six health clinics across DC.



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Dr. Denice Cora-Bramble, Chief Medical Officer and Executive Vice President of Ambulatory and Community Health Services, Children's National Health System

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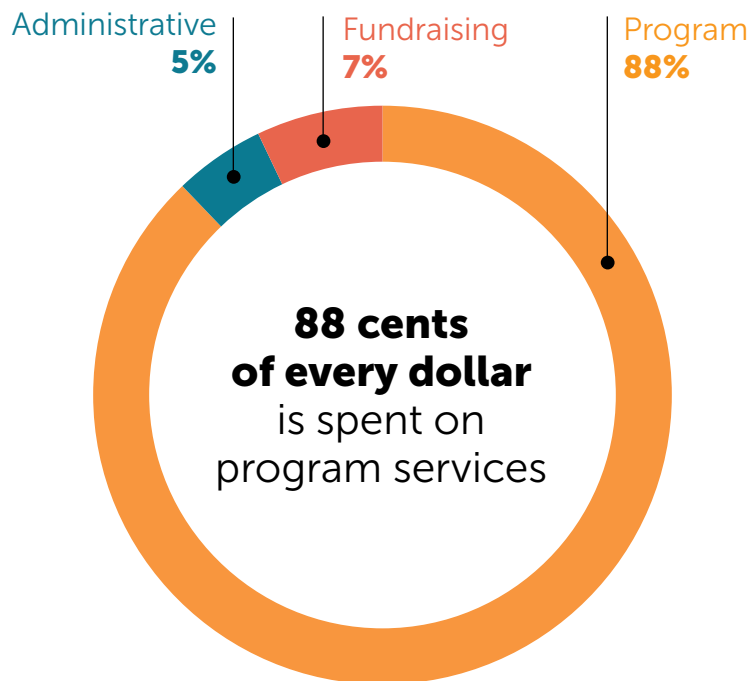
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Revenue & Support

DC Court Contractual Service.....	\$5,947,212
Grants	\$1,181,600
Contributions	\$1,670,452
Donated Goods & Services	\$320,346
Other Income	\$35,696
Total Revenue & Support.....	\$9,155,306

Expenses

Total Legal Programs	\$7,914,976
General and Administrative	\$463,940
Fundraising	\$627,652
Total Expenses	\$9,006,568





For 20 years, Children's Law Center has fought so every child in DC can grow up with a loving family, good health and a quality education. Judges, pediatricians and families turn to us to be the voice for children who are abused and neglected, who aren't learning in school, or who have health problems that can't be solved by medicine alone. With 100 staff and hundreds of pro bono lawyers, we reach 1 out of every 9 children in DC's poorest neighborhoods – almost 30,000 children and families since our founding in 1996. And we have multiplied this impact by advocating for city-wide solutions that benefit all children.

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Children's Law Center works hard to protect our client's confidentiality and we have changed some names as identified in the text. All other details are true.

Unless otherwise noted, all DC-wide statistics mentioned in this report are from the 1996 and 1997 KIDS COUNT databooks and the current KIDS COUNT Data Center, published by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. Historical special education numbers are from the 1999 report, *A Time for Action*, from DC Appleseed. Current education data are from the Office of the State Superintendent of Education.



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