

THE JUDICIAL CITIZEN REVIEW PROGRAM



Advantages of Judicial Citizen



- ◆ Ensures that there is a plan with appropriate goals and time frames reflecting efforts to be made to achieve permanency.
- ◆ Serves as a mechanism to assure that all aspects of the child welfare system are functioning correctly.
- ◆ Reduces the number of children in temporary placement, resulting in significant cost savings.
- ◆ Promotes community involvement in juvenile court proceedings in a positive, constructive manner.
- ◆ Serves as an independent, non-governmental review by citizens with a broad range of experience and knowledge that have the best interests of children as their concern.
- ◆ Aids in educating communities and in identifying and securing necessary resources for improving dysfunctional families.
- ◆ Increases coordination and cooperation between agencies serving children.
Cost-effective because it utilizes volunteers.
- ◆ Frees casework staff who might otherwise be conducting reviews to actually provide services to families.
- ◆ Instrumental in helping to develop new policies and procedures for the benefit of Georgia's child welfare system.

Why Permanency Planning?

Every child deserves a safe, permanent home. Unfortunately, each year thousands of children in Georgia are removed from their family homes due to abuse or neglect and are placed in foster homes on a temporary basis. Not only are they separated from their families; they must also learn to adjust to new surroundings—a new home, a new school, new friends, and a new emotional environment.

Most of these children will be moved to several foster homes before returning to their own home, placement with a fit and willing relative, or guardian, finding a permanent placement with a new adoptive family, or reaching adulthood on their eighteenth birthday.

Children, who do not have stable, loving homes are more likely to develop psychological problems as teenagers and adults. These abused and neglected children are also more likely to eventually participate in criminal behavior. The costs to both children and society are immeasurable.

A Solution...Judicial Citizen Review Panel

The Judicial Citizen Review Panels consists of a cross-section of volunteers from the community, appointed by the local Juvenile Court Judge. The purpose of the review is to ensure the children have a safe and permanent home as soon as possible. The volunteers receive 15 hours of specialized training from the Council of Juvenile Court Judges' staff. Once they complete the required training, they are sworn in as officers of the court. These volunteers meet once a month to review cases of children placed into foster care through the court. Each case must be reviewed no later than every six months. All parties are invited to attend the review so that the panels can review the progress or lack of progress in completing the goals of a court ordered case plan designed to achieve permanency for the child(ren).

Panels review the progress of the parent or custodian to see if they are meeting the established goals set by the court. The panel also monitors the work of the Department of Family and Children Services (DFCS), Mental Health or other agencies involved in the case to make sure that all necessary services are being provided to the family. They then make recommendations to the judge about what should happen next in the case. These recommendations can include, continuing the case in its present state, returning the child to his or her home or terminating the parents' or guardians' parental rights. The judge then considers the recommendations and, if he or she is in agreement with the panel, makes the recommendations part of the order of the court.

Judicial Citizen Review Panels work closely with the Department of Family and Children Services, natural parents, legal guardian, and the child(ren) to ensure compliance with the court ordered case plan and to make recommendations for any modifications. If reunification of the family is not possible, then the panel may make a recommendation for another form of permanency such as, adoption, placement with a fit and willing relative, or another planned permanent living arrangement. The Judge has final authority in all matters. If any party to the case does not agree with the recommendations of the panel, they may request a hearing before the judge.

Every child deserves a



safe, permanent home.

**Council of Juvenile Court Judges
230 Peachtree St. NW, Suite 1625
Atlanta, GA 30303
404-657-5020**

**Muscogee County Juvenile Court
Judge Warner Kennon, Sr.
Judge Andrew Dodgen
Government Center
100 101h St., 1st Floor East Wing
Columbus, GA 31902**

**Hours of operation:
8 a.m. - 5 p.m., Monday-Friday**

**For General Information:
Paige Wages
Panel Coordinator
706-225-3552
wages.jillian@columbusga.org**