



Empowering families with high-quality legal representation

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Director's Message: The Power of Community

I recently returned from a national conference with renewed appreciation for something we don't talk about enough: the power of community.

There is something uniquely sustaining about being in a room with people who understand this work. People who know why a seemingly small change in practice can matter enormously to a family. People who understand the frustration of watching systems move too slowly, the importance of getting representation right, and the persistence it takes to keep pushing for something better. At the conference, I was reminded that I am part of a community of people who share not only a commitment to children and families, but a belief that we can—and must—do this work differently.

It made me wonder: Are we creating that same sense of community for the parents and children navigating the child welfare system?

Too often, the child welfare experience is isolating. Families are surrounded by professionals, agencies, attorneys, courts, and service providers and still feel very much alone. Parents are expected to navigate complicated systems and make significant changes in their lives while often feeling that the people around them are evaluating them rather than standing with them.

Children can experience that isolation too. Being removed from home can mean being separated not only from parents and siblings, but from schools, neighborhoods, friends, and the people and places that make life feel familiar

Community cannot solve every challenge in child welfare. But it can change how families experience those challenges. It can help people feel seen, heard, supported, and capable of moving forward.

That is part of what I hope we are building through the Family Defense Council—not simply a network of like-minded people, but a connected community committed to learning from one another, sharing what works, and providing excellent representation and meaningful support to every family.

Let me know what you think. WendyS@getsunlight.org

Resources — New + Newly Discovered

Focus on Connections

 **Siblings** Relationships are Sacred: Benefits of Sibling Placement and Contact [ABA Webpage](#)

 **Kin** [Legal Toolkit](#)

 **Community** is the Key to Real Change in Child Welfare [The Imprint](#)

Family Defense in the News

 NY Governor Signs Law to End Anonymous Reporting [The Imprint Article](#)

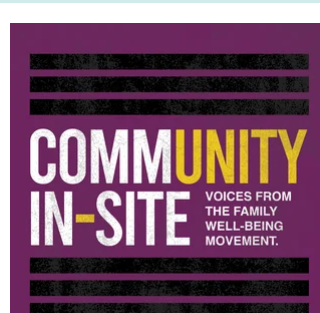
 Cook County's [Family Preservation Legal Advocacy Program](#) is working

 Missouri Governor establishes the [Missouri Child Welfare Task Force](#)

 [Feds Expand Funding](#) for Experimentation With Predictive Algorithms in Child Welfare Cases

Listen in

[How Do We Build Public Assistance Programs So Families Grow Beyond Them](#) with Commissioner Clarence Carter and Valerie Frost



The Think Tank

Dr. Michael Raz's new book [Breaking Families, Making Families](#) explores the dark side of adoption policy.

Families in the United States experience child abuse investigations, the removal of children from their homes, and the termination of parental rights at higher rates than peer countries. Yet this does not make them safer and comes at a cost.

Drawing on original archival sources, legislative documents, and oral histories, Raz argues that adoption is not the inevitable solution to a child welfare system in crisis, maps the political history of this shift in child welfare policymaking—exemplified in the passage of the 1997 Adoption and Safe Families Act—and proposes future reforms.

Dates & Deadlines

2026-2027 Conferences Snapshot

Sept 16-17: [ABA National Conference on Parent Representation](#) (Virtual)

Oct 6-8: [The Kempe Center's Global Gathering for the Future of Child Welfare](#)

Oct 14-16: [NACC Conference](#) (Virtual)

Nov 4-7: National Legal Aid and Defender Association [NLADA](#)

Apr 4-7: NICWA [Protecting Our Children](#)

Do you have news, a podcast or event to share?

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