



Strategic Plan
2021-2023

MISSION

Children's Law Center, Inc. ("CLC") protects the rights of children and youth and seeks to improve the systems that serve them in order to help them overcome barriers and transition into adulthood, to better advocate for their needs, and to successfully contribute to society.



STATEMENT OF VALUES

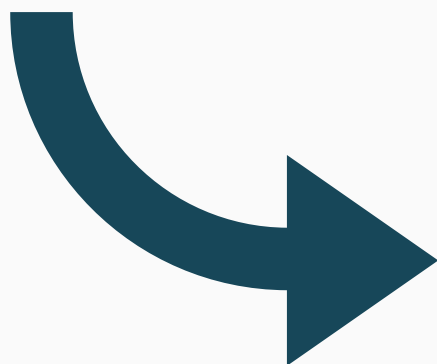
- Children and youth are entitled to have meaningful access to zealous representation and advocacy ensuring they receive due process and equal protection at every stage of the proceedings.
- Children and youth must be treated equitably across settings regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, geographic origin, religion, disability, or economic status.
- Our systems should promote and utilize adolescent development research to properly address the needs, characteristics, and assets of children and youth rather than relying on modalities used for adults.
- All children and youth must have access to educational programming that promotes social, behavioral, and academic achievement.



Introduction

CLC was established in 1989. It is a non-profit legal service center. It provides individual legal representation to children and youth; and through public policy work, training and education, impact litigation, and juvenile defender support services seeks to improve the systems that serve children and youth. CLC offers services in Kentucky and Ohio and collaborates with other regional and national organizations on a variety of topics.

CLC began the development of a new strategic plan in late 2019. As part of the planning process, interviews were conducted with key community stakeholders. When asked, the majority of those interviewed supported CLC dedicating more resources to systems change work. See the attached 2020 Children's Law Center Research Report Executive Summary. Given the current state of society in 2020, systems change is essential. The planning also included updating the mission and statement of values and background work on revenue development and infrastructure and board development. Three priority focus areas were identified for this plan.



PRIORITY FOCUS AREAS

- 1. Mission/Program*
- 2. Revenue Development*
- 3. Board Development*

Mission/Program

CLC believes that systems that equitably serves children and youth strengthens communities and empowers children and youth to successfully transition into adults and meaningfully contribute to society. Through training and education, impact litigation, and public policy advocacy, CLC has identified three issues ripe for systems change to which it will devote programmatic resources during the life of this strategic plan. Within each of the following issues, the racial and ethnic disparities that exist will be explored and addressed.

- The right of children and youth to have qualified and competent counsel.
- Significantly reducing youth populations in the adult court system.
- Eliminating the use of exclusionary discipline practices in schools.



Revenue Development

CLC will grow unrestricted and restricted funds that support the CLC's mission through annual giving, major gifts, special events, and targeted grants. CLC will make the commitment to provide education, expertise, and support to enable the board and staff to increase participation in revenue growth.

Board Development

CLC will increase board engagement and diversity by:

- Better utilizing the skills and talents of board members by defining roles and discussing interests and committee leadership and engagement.
- Strengthening infrastructures and governance by reviewing and updating CLC's by-laws, charters and committees with a long-term goal of establishing a Governance Committee.
- Establishing a Diversity and Inclusion Committee that recommends recruitment and inclusion strategies.



2020 Children's Law Center Research Report

Executive Summary

OVERVIEW

CLC began the development of a new strategic in late 2019 – as part of the planning interviews with key stakeholders were completed in early 2020. CLC believes systems that advocate and defend children strengthens our community and enables children to become adults who can successfully contribute to society. With that in mind, the interview questions focused on systems change and exploring the concept of CLC dedicating additional resources to systems change.

Twenty-seven interviews were conducted by CLC staff and board members. Eleven judges, seven attorneys and nine organization/government leaders were interviewed in early 2020. The texts in italics are direct quotes from some of the interviews. These quotes represent common themes we heard from those that were interviewed. All names and identifiers of those interviewed have been kept confidential.

The Executive Summary provides the overarching themes, trends and key findings from the interviews. Jane Page-Steiner, President of JPS Nonprofit Strategies developed the research process and wrote the Executive Summary

Overarching Findings from All Interviews

Should CLC focus more resources on systems change?

- Majority responded yes – CLC should focus more resources on systems change
- *“Yes, it should be a combination of policy, litigation, and education.”*



- *“Yes. There are not many organizations doing this type of work. In one county, CLC is probably the only organization addressing youth-related issues from a systemic perspective.”*
- *“CLC can be instrumental in making an impact where individual defenders cannot”*
- Some responded with the caveat *“that it is extremely important for CLC to keep their foot also in direct representation as that best guides any policy work.”*

When asked about the importance of specific issues where CLC felt it could have an impact -what do you think?

- Majority believe all three issues are important.
- **Right to Counsel**
 - Majority said really important or important.
 - *“Kids need representation”*
 - *“Even in the juvenile justice system where they all get an attorney, it is still important to ensure attorneys are doing a good job. The GAL system is built to not do a good job.”*
 - *“Cabinet has limited resources so only the most egregious cases are getting attention so there are a lot of things that are being ignored”*
- **Exclusionary Discipline in Kentucky**
 - Majority said really important or important.
 - *“If it involves a child with special education needs, then it is critical.”*
 - *“Very important- believes there is often more to this than meets the eye-just because there is racial disparity - but doesn’t mean the “causal” behavior isn’t a problem.”*
- **Youth in Adult Court**
 - Majority said really important or important.
 - Some discussed racial & ethnic disparities.
 - *“There are disparities in the charges, the plea deals that are offered white youth and minority youth, and the punishments levied on/the ongoing court involvement with white and minority youth.”*
 - *“Someone needs to identify new policy on how we handle serious misconduct by young adults (18-21). Focus on policies like blended sentences for young adults, or more reentry and services for Youth in adult court who age out of DJJ.”*

When asked how CLC can best pursue system change – education, policy advocacy and/or litigation?



- Majority felt all three could be viable strategies for systems change.
- *“Some combination of all of the above. Policy change often does not come without education.”*
- *“When people are educated about the juvenile justice system, they tend to be interested and appalled at what goes on, but they generally do not know its happening.”*
- *“Yes. There is a huge need in the policy and legislative arena because the people who are making the laws are not very well versed on kids’ issues.”*
- *“Litigation is often the answer, although it doesn’t make a lot of friends it is the fastest and most effective way to get one’s attention and then push for change.”*
- *“Yes, litigation would likely have the biggest impact as it has a huge impact on a particular individual and has the ability to stimulate other changes.”*

Common themes in responses

- Lack of resources overall
- There are gaps in the systems that serve children
- Concerns about access to civil legal services for those in poverty
- Racial and ethnic disparities are having an impact on children who are in the education, juvenile and justice systems
- Some resistance to the idea of racial and ethnic and disparities
- Education rights identified as big gap -especially for children with disabilities
- General consensus that kids need attorneys across all systems
- Some worry that if CLC focuses systems work - local, on the ground work would be impacted
- When systems don’t communicating well each other – it can cause harm to the children they serve

