



Juvenile Law Committee

Georgia Juvenile Code Revision Project
Past Present and Future
August 2005

History

In early 2004 the Juvenile Law Committee (JLC) began a project to revise the Georgia Juvenile Code. Initiated by a request from then President of the Council of Juvenile Court Judges, the Honorable Robin Nash, the JLC was in a unique position to undertake this project. Currently, the juvenile code is difficult to use, lacks clarity, and does not reflect research-based best practices. More importantly, the code does not meet the needs of the Juvenile Courts and the legal practitioners who serve the courts.

After the submission of a proposal in September 2004, the Georgia Bar Foundation generously awarded the JLC a \$40,000 grant to begin the Juvenile Code revision project. The JLC has hired Attorney Soledad McGrath to serve as the primary reporter, and secured the participation of the Honorable Velma Tilley of Bartow County Juvenile Court to serve as an expert consultant and editor.

Progress to Date

To date, significant progress has been made. Extensive research began in November 2004 with a focus on investigating the strengths and weaknesses of the current code, researching model codes, and researching best practices in juvenile law through a review of national resources and juvenile codes from other states. In addition, in early March 2005, the JLC held focus group meetings to identify specific areas of concern among practitioners. Recently the committee received a one-year grant extension to the work of this project, and currently the primary reporter is working on drafting and reorganizing the code. To ensure on-going public participation in this project, the JLC provides monthly updates and opportunities for feedback through its website at www.juvenilelawcommittee.org.

The JLC is committed to the improvement of jurisprudence in the area of juvenile law. It is uniquely positioned to coordinate the Juvenile Code Revision Project and to build consensus among the various stakeholders who work with the code in courts across Georgia. The JLC hopes to further this unique role through its current participation in the legislative Study Committee on the Juvenile Code created by the Senate Resolution (SR) 161, signed into law by Governor Perdue on May 5, 2005. Current committee Co-Chair Amy Howell and Immediate Past Co-Chair Elizabeth Reimels represent the JLC on this committee.

Future of Project

The goal of the Juvenile Code Revision Project is to create a research-based, evidence-based best practices-based, comprehensive, and well-organized model juvenile code for Georgia. By summer 2006, the committee plans to widely distribute the completed Model Georgia Juvenile Code. To reach this end, the JLC would like the SR 161 Legislative Study Committee to continue its work through 2006. This would allow the critical stakeholders an opportunity to provide feedback on the JLC model code and collaborate on revisions to be introduced during the 2007 legislative session.

In addition, the JLC has spent approximately 60% of its grant funds and will exhaust those funds by early 2006. In the interest of consistency and continuity the JLC would like to continue to retain the critical services of its Primary Reporter. This reporter would be able to assist with drafting the revisions suggested by the stakeholders and also to serve as an expert for the legislative process during the 2007 session.

Conclusion

The State Bar Younger Lawyers Division Juvenile Law Committee believes a revised and reorganized juvenile code will better fulfill the purpose of the juvenile courts, which in turn will result in better outcomes for Georgia's children. Ultimately, the goal is to provide Juvenile Courts with the legal tools to better and more effectively meet the goal of the juvenile code: to protect and restore the well-being of at-risk children.