

**Texas Association for Court Administration (TACA)**

# Effective Representation in Child Welfare Court: A View from the Bench

Presented by :

- Honorable Cheryll Mabray, Child Protection Court of the Hill Country (Llano, Burnet, San Saba, Blanco, Mills, Lampasas and Coryell Counties)
- Original presentation given August 6, 2025 at Advanced Family Law-Child Abuse and Neglect Workshop with Kellie Price (DFPS), Honorable Angela Graves-Harrington, 246th District Court (Houston), Honorable Aurora Martinez Jones, 126th District Court (Austin), and Honorable Cheryll Mabray
- Permission granted for use of Power Point.

COURT EXPECTATIONS

What do you  
expect from  
attorneys  
appearing in  
your Court?



## **PET PEEVES AND BAD PRACTICES**

- Appearing in Court unprepared.
- Not talking to other parties prior to making requests before the Court and/or not timely responding to other parties.
- Not visiting child or parent clients before Court or waiting until they are at Court to try and counsel clients.
- Failing to read court reports or other motions that the Court has read in preparation for the hearing.
- Not playing the role of the lawyer. Court requires motions to be filed and procedure to be followed.
- Not sharing rules and procedures of the Court (for virtual appearances especially) including demeanor and behavior in the Courtroom.
- Failing to use CURRENT attorney fee voucher forms.
- Appearing (or being scheduled to appear) in multiple hearings (or meetings) at the same time without coverage or notice to the Court. This includes attendance at mediation.

MAKING JUDGES HAPPY

How can  
attorneys  
make their  
case before  
you?



## **TIPS FOR SUCCESS IN THE COURTROOM AND BEST PRACTICES**

- Comply with the statutory requirements of the Family Code.
- Follow all Local Rules in whichever courts you appear.
- Maintain compliance with all CLE requirements.
- Always be professional to everyone (including court staff).
- Cite authority for any unusual requests being made to the Court.
- Present possible solutions for challenges and problems in cases that are presented to the Court.
- Be timely in starting negotiations for resolutions in cases. Do not wait until you are too close to your deadline.
- Meet with your clients directly and do not always delegate this connection.



CHALLENGES IN OUR CASES

What are some of the most difficult situations you deal with in Court?



## **TIPS FOR ATTORNEYS WORKING CHALLENGING CASES**

- Think outside the box and try and look for different types of resources for services.
- Work hard to try and not get too emotionally entangled with the case or with your client.
- Do not be afraid to help hold other parties accountable, especially when it may eventually need to come to the Court's attention.
- Take care of yourself to avoid burnout.
- Consider meeting your client where they are at and how they need to be supported for success in their case.
- When appropriate, consult with colleagues or mentors about working through certain challenges.
- Seek guidance from reliable resources and organizations, such as the SCOTX Children's Commission, including their Bench Books and Toolkits.
- Learn areas that intersect child welfare cases like social security/disability issues, special education issues, and immigration issues.



What do you  
foresee as  
upcoming  
issues in  
your  
jurisdiction?



## ISSUES ON THE HORIZON

- Community Based Care and working with Single Source Continuum Contractors
- Statutory changes after the 89<sup>th</sup> Legislative Session
- Possible changes with a new Commissioner of the Department of Family and Protective Services
- The need to promote the practice of child welfare law.
- Maintaining robust appointment lists.
- Cuts in grant funding to partner organizations relied on by child welfare systems.
- The Federal Lawsuit, *M.D. v. Abbott*

Questions?  
&  
Thank you!

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