

STATEMENT OF SUPPORT FOR APPROVAL OF CHILD WELFARE LAW
SPECIALIST CERTIFICATION IN THE STATE OF OHIO

To: Commission on Specialization

Please accept this letter with the attached signatures to demonstrate support for the Committee on Specialization to create a designation of Child Welfare Law Specialists in the State of Ohio.

First and foremost, **the public interest would be well served** by the Child Welfare Law Specialist certification in Ohio. In 2012 there were 12,804¹ children who had been removed from their families due to allegations of abuse, neglect or dependency. Quality legal representation protects the rights of children and their families and has also been shown to expedite the court's administration of justice.²

The designation of child welfare specialist **would enhance the level of skill and expertise in this area of law and improve the professional competence of lawyers**, which in turn would **enhance the public access to appropriate legal services, elevate the practice of child welfare law and improve the quality of representation received by children and families**. This specialization would include attorneys working for public children service agencies, prosecutor offices, attorneys for parents and children, and guardians ad litem.

There are a significant number of attorneys that regularly practice in the field of child welfare law who would benefit from this designation. There are hundreds of attorneys working in one of Ohio's 42 public defenders offices, as well as within the 88 public children's service agencies and/or prosecutors office that regularly practice in the area of child welfare law. In addition, there are approximately 1,330 attorneys working as assigned counsel and 990 attorneys working as guardians ad litem,³ as well as 78 juvenile

¹PCSAO Factbook, 2013-2014, 11th edition

² Child Law Practice, Helping Lawyers Help Kids, (2009) Vol. 28, No. 7

³ Ohio Public Defender's Commission Reimbursement Report on Abuse Neglect and Dependency cases from July 2013-August 2014. (*Individual attorneys may be included in both categories*)

court judges⁴ and 243 juvenile court magistrates.⁵ As such, there is more than sufficient interest in Ohio to warrant the designation of Child Welfare Law Specialist.

Appropriate standards of proficiency have already been established for the Child Welfare Law specialization as well as a training manual⁶ for attorneys that provides all the needed information for the specialization exam. Currently, there are 39 States that have now approved the certification program set forth and accredited by of the National Association of Counsel for Children, and the American Bar Association. This program is also endorsed by the National Council on Juvenile and Family Court Judges (NCJFCJ) and Ohio currently has 3 seated Judges on the NCJFCJ board and two of whom are currently serving as officers of the organization.

There is an adequate program of continuing legal education in Child Welfare Law, as the U.S. Children's Bureau and state Court Improvement Programs support ongoing training presentations in this field, as well as online and web-based education, complemented by local programs delivered in Ohio by numerous law offices and law schools that include: Ohio State University's Moritz College of Law's Clinic, Justice for Children; Capital University's National Center for Adoption Law and Policy and Family Advocacy Clinic; and Case Western Reserve University's Family Law Clinic.

The designation of Child Welfare Law as a specialization field would further the orderly growth of specialization by lawyers in Ohio, as the Child Welfare Law Specialist certification program fulfills a critical public need, is well supported by the child welfare community in Ohio, and is proven effective in jurisdictions nationally, with over 565 Child Welfare Law Specialists practicing in courts across the country.⁷

Child welfare law is a unique area of law that requires a comprehensive understanding of state criminal, juvenile and family court law, federal, and administrative law, state and local court rules, principles of child and adolescent development, the impact of trauma and effective interventions and supports for children and families. The professional legal field and their clients would be well served by this important designation.

⁴ www.Ohiojudges.org

⁵ Supreme Court of Ohio,

⁶Child Welfare Law and Practice, Donald N. Duquette & Ann M. Haralambie (2010)

⁷<http://www.naccchildlaw.org/default.asp?page=certification>

For all these reasons, THE UNDERSIGNED, urge the Commission on Certification of Attorneys as Specialists to approve Child Welfare Law as a field of law subject to specialization designation in the State of Ohio.

Thank you for your consideration.

Signature

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Supreme Court Registration number

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