



JUNIOR LEAGUES OF NEW JERSEY
STATE PUBLIC AFFAIRS COMMITTEE
Women building better communities

TESTIMONY ON THE NEW JERSEY CHILD PLACEMENT REVIEW BOARDS
Presented Before the Assembly Human Services Committee
May 13, 2010

The State Public Affairs Committee (SPAC) of the Junior Leagues of New Jersey represents over 3,000 women in this state who are trained volunteers. In the 1970s SPAC focused all its efforts on child welfare, and educated itself about child advocacy including the citizen reviews first started in South Carolina. SPAC and all of the Junior Leagues of New Jersey were the catalysts for the creation of the Child Placement Review Act of Feb 27, 1978, sponsored by the late Senator Alexander Menza. It was SPAC and the Junior Leagues that formed partnerships with many organizations, notably the two that would later merge to form ACNJ, that ensured this legislation was passed. New Jersey thus became the 2nd state in the nation to adopt citizen reviews, due to the efforts of the Junior League.

The CPR Act of 1978 was fully adopted in 1982, and was revised in 1999 and 2004. The language of the law is very clear. Child Placement Review Boards, staffed by volunteers, are to conduct initial reviews and periodic reviews. These periodic, or follow-up reviews are vital in catching critical issues such as physical and sexual child abuse, suicidal behaviors, and other serious matters that would have been missed otherwise. Child Placement Review Boards are still as instrumental in stopping kids from falling through the cracks today as they were 30 years ago, particularly because of these follow-up reviews.

As trained advocates, SPAC is dismayed that a Judicial Directive can alter a law so fundamentally and take away the follow-up review by CPR Boards. SPAC questions the legality of a Directive trumping a Law. Furthermore there is a serious concern that overburdened judges will hold hearings that are less comprehensive than those being held by CPR boards, and that they might then inadvertently overlook critical issues. Children might not confide in a judge in the same way that they confide in members of a review board, and because there might not be sufficient time to go through mountains of paperwork for each case – something willingly done by CPR Board volunteers - under this new Directive, scrutiny of a child's case could easily be lost. Also, the Child Placement Advisory Council remains the only outside child advocacy organization with the capability of obtaining accurate data and of evaluating the policies and procedures of DYFS. We risk losing valuable oversight in this state if CPR Boards are not able to continue their work under the CPR Act.

The Junior League trains its members – all volunteers - to become civic leaders. A former Junior League and SPAC member sits on this committee – Assemblywoman McHose. The first chair and vice-chair of the Child Placement Advisory Committee were a former Junior League President and a SPAC Chair. Junior League members continue to use their skills and training as volunteers to sit with compassion and intelligence on Child Placement Review Boards. Other factors might have changed, but what has not changed is that these are still trained volunteers, getting paid nothing for their services, helping the most vulnerable children in our society. CPR volunteers serve an average of 5.7 years and provide consistency in the lives of these children, judges on the other hand serve for usually a couple of years and then move on. CPR Boards are as valuable today as they were in 1978, and there is no cost saving in having them do less of a job. These children deserve the best we can give them, and amazingly the best we can give costs the state next to nothing. Thank you.