

**2021
SOUTH CAROLINA
CHILDREN'S JUSTICE ACT TASK FORCE
REPORT**

**UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA
CHILDREN'S LAW CENTER**



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I. CJA Task Force Membership and Function

South Carolina has maintained an active Children’s Justice Act Task Force since 1994. The purpose and activities of the Task Force, as defined by its bylaws and federal statute, are as follows:

- To conduct an assessment of the state’s systems responding to abused and neglected children at three-year intervals;
- To adopt recommendations in each of the CJA categories;
- To work towards implementation of these recommendations;
- To recommend to the state’s grantee (S.C. Department of Social Services) projects to be supported by the CJA grant funds; and
- To express positions on legislation or state policy issues, consistent with its mission and recommendations.

The Task Force is governed by bylaws which were adopted in 1998. They were most recently revised on February 13, 2020 to include the newly established State Child Advocate as a designated member of the Task Force. In accordance with the bylaws, the Task Force meets at least quarterly. Standing committees are formed every three years to coincide with adoption of recommendations. Each committee meets at least quarterly, and as needed, to follow through with implementation of the recommendations adopted by the Task Force. All members are assigned to a committee. All Task Force meetings were held virtually during this reporting period.

The Task Force conducted a review and assessment of the state’s systems that respond to abused and neglected children in February 2018, leading to the formulation of recommendations for the 2018-2021 CJA cycle. As a result of priority topics identified through information gathered prior to the assessment workday, three corresponding committees for the 2018-2021 period were established:

- A. Assessment and Safety Committee
- B. Collaboration Committee
- C. Courts and Special Populations Committee

The Task Force is self-perpetuating through an election process held every three years. The membership period is three calendar years so that it overlaps accordingly with the CJA three-year cycle. This allows new members to be involved in the three-year assessment process and formulation of recommendations. Current members propose new members when necessary and prepare a slate of nominees, ensuring multidisciplinary and diverse membership. New members are elected for three-year terms by a majority vote of the Task Force. The Chairperson appoints members to fill vacancies that occur between general elections. Officers include a Chair and Vice-Chair who are also elected by the Task Force. Officers are limited to serving one three-year term. It is possible to elect someone to serve a second term in the same position, but not consecutively. This by-law was instituted to allow fresh leadership for every three-year cycle. Members for the 2018-2020 period were elected in October 2017. A member election was held in October 2020 for the three-year term that began in January 2021. The Task Force currently has 28 members, reflecting all required disciplines, eight of which were new members to the Task Force. The elected chair for the new term is Tom Knapp, the Executive Director of the SC

Network of Children’s Advocacy Centers. The new vice-chair is Trista Baird who is a Lieutenant with the SC Law Enforcement Division.

After the election and first of the year, the Task Force started transitioning to the assessment period and onto new groups and recommendations. The Task Force conducted its three-year assessment workday on February 26, 2021, leading to the formulation of recommendations for the 2021-2024 CJA cycle. As a result of the newly drafted recommendations, three corresponding committees for the 2021-2024 period were established. Members were asked to choose which of the three committees they preferred to work in or to indicate if they did not have a preference and were willing to be placed where most needed. Based on their preferences, members were assigned to the following committees:

- A. Training and Judicial Improvements
- B. Model Programming
- C. Child Protection Reform

Committee assignments were made prior to the April Task Force meeting so that recommendations could be finalized by the committee where the work will be executed.

The Children’s Law Center provides staff support to the Task Force, including logistical arrangements for meetings and research activities. In addition to the CJA Coordinator who assists with implementation of recommendations, an additional staff person is assigned to each committee to facilitate the meetings and act as a liaison between the Task Force groups and the CJA Coordinator. The Children’s Law Center also carries out training recommendations of the Task Force.

Attachment 1 includes a list of Task Force members with their titles, professional categories, and brief profiles. Attachment 2 contains minutes of the four meetings held during the past year. Current recommendations are in Attachment 3, and Attachment 4 includes the Task Force bylaws.

II. Annual Performance Report: May 2020 - May 2021

The South Carolina Department of Social Services is the state’s designated grantee for Children’s Justice Act funds. In accordance with one of the Task Force’s recommendations, the Department of Social Services contracted with the University of South Carolina’s Children’s Law Center to provide staff support for meetings and assist the Task Force in implementing its recommendations. This performance report covers Task Force activities from May 2020 – May 2021.

Evaluation efforts: With input from the Task Force, the Children’s Law Center has been making strides to implement innovative ways to evaluate and measure training objectives. In an effort to enhance and track the effectiveness of trainings provided by and hosted by the Children’s Law Center, a Research Scientist joined the staff. She is tasked with implementing periodic and longitudinal evaluations and developing and adjusting curriculum accordingly. She serves as a resource to the trainers on curriculum development, presentation methods, and adult learning principles. The evaluation process of the Children’s Law Center’s training programs will include the assessment of impact on the knowledge, skills, and practices of training participants.

Every training evaluation collects prior knowledge and post knowledge of the learning objectives; ratings of presenter dynamics and engagement; ratings of visuals and handouts; and solicited recommendations for improvement. The Research Scientist provides guidance on how to analyze training evaluations in order to utilize findings which will improve instructional design and delivery. Evaluation summaries are available upon request for all noted training programs. Follow-up surveys/interviews of training attendees three to six months following trainings to assess on-the-job utilization may be used in some cases.

Linkage with CFSP: As part of the Task Force’s assessment process in 2018 and 2021, South Carolina’s Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP) was a major component of aligning recommendations and statewide efforts. During both assessments, the Department of Social Services was asked to share their priorities/initiatives so that the Task Force could consider alignment with these initiatives in forming CJA recommendations. In 2018, the improvement plan focus areas that were given, as identified from the Child and Families Service Review, were safety improvement, improvement of child and family assessment and family engagement, timely permanency, improvement of well-being, staff development, and improvement of CQI. The Task Force identified safety and assessment as the focus areas that most align with the mission of CJA and therefore incorporated these items into the recommendations for the 2018-2021 period. In 2021, the focus areas included promotion of a safety culture while shifting to a child well-being system; improving staff knowledge and expertise; infrastructure improvement; and safety, permanency, and well-being outcomes that involve a safety intervention model. In addition, Department of Social Services (DSS) staff have kept the Task Force apprised of Program Improvement Plan progress, especially as it has pertained to safety and assessment. Task Force members have been invited to, and have participated in, stakeholder information-sharing and feedback sessions hosted by DSS.

Category A. Activities undertaken to improve the investigative, administrative, and judicial handling of cases of child abuse and neglect:

- **Provide training to Multidisciplinary Teams (MDT) on assessing children with limited communication skills and identify qualified resource professionals available for consultation.** (Recommendation 1.A)

In an effort to decrease the barriers to assessing children with communication limitations, the Task Force first identified a list of causes of limited communication to be targeted for training and resources: speech impairment, physical disability affecting speech, Autism Spectrum Disorder, intellectual disabilities, sight impairment, hearing impairment, and trauma-induced impairment. A full day training for child welfare professionals was planned for August 2020 so that school resource officers could also be available to attend. Because of the pandemic, the training was transferred to a live zoom webinar platform which presented its challenges as one of the presenters was blind. The webinar was offered in two segments on consecutive Friday afternoons in October. The sessions included topical experts on IDEA and ADA/IEP and 504 planning; autism; speech impairments and intellectual disabilities; visual impairments; deaf and hard of hearing; and trauma-induced communication barriers. The topical experts were also placed on a

resource contact list for consultation purposes. Attendees included a multidisciplinary audience of over 100 professionals. Evaluation results indicated that there was an increase in knowledge of all fourteen of the learning objectives, ranging from 37% to 77%. Comments were positive, such as: “This was a great training and I have learned so much just in the two hours. I’m looking forward to getting the resources and being able to implement this new knowledge into my work. Thanks for putting together an organized, helpful training! Looking forward to part 2 next week.” A complete summary of the training evaluation results can be found in Attachment 5. Both segments were recorded and continue to be offered as free training to participants who register on the Children’s Law Center training portal.

- **Incorporate Best Legal Practices (BLP) into ongoing trainings for GAL, OID & DSS attorneys.** (Recommendation 2.A)

The Best Legal Practices (BLP) guide serves as a reference for professionals involved in child welfare proceedings and is intended to promote uniformity in processing child abuse and neglect cases statewide. An administrative order issued by the Chief Justice of South Carolina on May 31, 2018 recommends its use. In accordance with training requirements outlined in the guide, the Children’s Law Center and the Department of Social Services were to provide training to attorneys involved in family court child abuse and neglect cases. The CIP program conducted mandatory trainings in 2019 for DSS, GAL, and SC Office of Indigent Defense (OID) attorneys and the Task Force was involved with planning the evaluation process. Findings were shared with DSS, the GAL programs, and the OID program so that they could more effectively organize internal trainings.

The CIP training team developed a curriculum to help supervisors and case managers prepare for court. BLP themes were present in much of the curriculum and the previous extended evaluation results were used to identify focus areas. The supervising attorneys were also tasked with ensuring the county DSS attorneys for the area they supervise use the curriculum to conduct “lunch and learn” refresher trainings with the human services staff. The CIP program continues to ensure that BLP elements are present in every training they conduct for this audience, regardless of the topic.

- **Provide training with DSS & GAL attorneys on recognizing signs of stress on children who must testify and prioritizing the scheduling of those cases accordingly.** (Recommendation 3.A)

The Task Force previously started collecting data on the prevalence of children testifying in South Carolina family courts. This data collection was interrupted as courts were shut down for most of 2020. As courts started utilizing virtual platforms in lieu of in-person appearances, this may have opened the door to addressing some of the CCTV technology restraints that were discovered pre-pandemic. With the widespread use of virtual platforms over the past year, perhaps there will be more creative ways to address children’s testifying needs.

In conjunction with the Task Force, the Children’s Law Center created a one-

day training curriculum for DSS and GAL attorneys on child testimony in family court. In addition to presenting the statewide testifying and CCTV data that was collected, the training included pretrial motion procedures, including the use of closed-circuit television or presentation of child hearsay through S.C. Code § 19-1-180, and the process of effective child witness preparation. The training provided techniques and strategies focused on reducing the stress and trauma endured by children having to appear in the courtroom setting and on reducing the risk of possible recantation. The training was planned to be held regionally four times in March of 2020 so that attorneys would have easier access to the training. DSS made this training mandatory for all of their attorneys, and GAL programs were also sending their attorneys. The first training was held in Greenville as planned but the subsequent three trainings were postponed at the time due to the COVID-19 directives. The training was then rescheduled in a two-part live webinar format, once in July 2020 and once in August 2020. Seventy-three DSS and GAL attorneys were trained during these webinars and the feedback received was very favorable. Evaluation results indicated that there was an increase in knowledge of all 13 of the learning objectives, ranging from 21% to 62%. One attendee commented: *“These two trainings were absolutely wonderful! As a newer attorney, I haven’t had a lot of practice with questioning children or preparing them for trial. I will use these strategies throughout my work – this was so helpful- thank you!”* See Attachment 6 for the webinar agenda and an evaluation analysis.

In another effort to help reduce trauma for children that must testify, the Children’s Law Center updated some children’s court notebooks that were last printed in 2003. A coloring book company was used to create the books and the content was reviewed by several professionals in the field. Two thousand copies of the family court notebooks were printed and distributed to DSS, GAL, and CACs throughout the state (see Attachment 7). Another version of the notebook for general sessions (criminal) court was also updated, reviewed, and will be printed in June 2021. This version will be distributed to CACs and solicitors’ offices for statewide use as well. There are plans for both books to be translated in Spanish and a limited number of those printed to have available upon request.

Category B. Steps taken to establish experimental, model, or demonstration programs:

- **Develop an experimental model of a “Level 2 MDT” to provide intervention and support up to court for high risk victims for recantation.** (Recommendation 4.B)

This recommendation is essentially about having MDTs trained to understand the risk factors for recantation by child victims so that it can be reduced, and to respond appropriately when it does happen. The Children’s Law Center continues to ensure that this issue is incorporated into applicable trainings that are offered. Specifically, the six-hour virtual training, “Child Sexual Abuse Investigations: the Basics,” which was offered to DSS investigators and law enforcement officers during the past year, has an emphasis on multidisciplinary coordination. The occurrence of recantation is among the dynamics of child sexual abuse that are addressed, as well as how to

coordinate efforts when a recantation occurs during the course of an investigation. In addition, there is language in the newly adopted SC Child Abuse Response Protocol that dictates in the event of a recantation, that a case review should immediately be scheduled with the MDT assigned to the original investigation, including the child's therapist and the prosecutor if assigned. Because the protocol will be reviewed yearly for any revisions, the sections that address response to recantations may be expanded with more detail in the future.

- **Continue to support the SC Network of Children's Advocacy Centers including organizational capacity and infrastructural resources.** (Recommendation 5.B) The Task Force promotes growth of children's advocacy centers in South Carolina by supporting the South Carolina Network of Children's Advocacy Centers (SCNCAC), the accredited state chapter of the National Children's Alliance. CJA funds are used in part to provide office space, equipment, supplies, and limited administrative support to the Network's staff. The Network's Executive Director, the Chair of the Task Force, is appointed by the Network's Board of Directors. Children's advocacy centers (CACs) are identified in South Carolina law (S.C. Code § 63-11-310). The CAC model is proven to significantly improve the investigative handling of child abuse cases and is considered best practice in the response to child abuse cases. The Task Force continues to provide assistance and support as CACs and their programs continue to progress. South Carolina has 17 primary and 10 satellite CACs. Together, these 27 CACs served over 10,001 children in calendar year 2020 which, due to the COVID pandemic, is an approximate 6% decrease over 2019. However, over the past 5 years, South Carolina CACs have served 46,960 children, and the 10,001 served in 2020 represents a 23% overall yearly increase over the past 5 years. There are 3 additional satellite CACs in development which includes the possibility of a mobile unit. As a result of the 5-year development plan project, a full-time CAC/MDT Development Coordinator oversees development and provides support for new satellite CACs and MDT development in underserved areas of SC. In addition, SCNCAC staff consist of an Executive Director, General Counsel, Program Director, and an Administrative Coordinator. In 2020 the SCNCAC focused on continuing to remove barriers to services for kids and MDT partners, improving collaboration, and increasing training opportunities for CAC and MDT professionals during the pandemic.

Outcomes Measurement System (OMS) Report for CACs in South Carolina: This report is an analysis of yearly OMS data collected by all CACs in South Carolina. South Carolina CACs participate in the OMS to help them to evaluate their programs, to increase the quality of services provided to children and families, and to improve the collaborative efforts of multidisciplinary team (MDT) members. Through OMS, CACs ask caregivers of children served by CACs and their MDT members standard survey questions to measure how well they are providing healing, justice, and trust to children and families in South Carolina.

CAC Development Plan: In 2020, work continued to fully implement the recommendations in the SCNCAC 2018 CAC Development Plan. The plan provides an overview of the CAC coverage in South Carolina in 2018 and uses

information on population, partner agencies, tribal organizations, inter-county collaborations, per capita personal income, driving distances, projected caseloads, and CAC capacity to ensure critical growth and development through recommendations. The five-year project includes: the creation of two new fully-accredited regional CACs and expansion of coverage areas for six of the current member regional CACs into rural and economically disadvantaged areas; the creation of nine new satellite CACs operated and developed by current member CACs; creation of multidisciplinary teams in all counties where they do not currently exist; and creation of one mobile CAC initiative to provide services to four counties in the Pee Dee region who currently have limited CAC services.

Statewide CAC Database: In 2019, SCNCAC launched a statewide CAC database to help prevent duplication of services; better allocate mental health, medical, and other resources; and provide necessary data to monitor the implementation of recommendations in the CAC Development Plan. In 2020 a project began to integrate the SCNCAC statewide CAC database with the DSS CAPSS System to automate DSS referrals to CACs for services.

Forensic Interview Peer Review Program: The South Carolina Network of Children's Advocacy Center's (SCNCAC) statewide forensic interview peer review program is designed to provide forensic interviewers with an opportunity to review forensic interviews, discuss specific interview techniques, provide feedback regarding the quality of the interview, documentation, and review relevant research. SCNCAC facilitates a number of regional forensic interview peer review sessions each year across South Carolina and one statewide session with training in Columbia. Due to the COVID-19 crisis, almost all peer review sessions were converted to an online virtual format and are continuing in a virtual platform into 2021.

Victim Advocate Training Program: The South Carolina Network of Children's Advocacy Center's (SCNCAC) statewide victim & family advocate training program is designed for victim and family advocates who are working with children and families within a South Carolina Children's Advocacy Center. The victim advocate training program includes multiple regional sessions and one statewide session in Columbia. In 2019, the SCNCAC finalized the initial Victim Service Provider (VSP) curriculum which is a blended learning course for CAC/MDT Victim Advocates in South Carolina. The program has been approved for core VSP certification in SC and meets training requirements for Victim Advocates in the National Children's Alliance CAC accreditation standards. There were two sessions conducted in 2020 which were converted to a live virtual format due to the pandemic.

TF-CBT and Telehealth Delivery Training Program: SCNCAC collaborated with Project BEST to complete a statewide mental health needs assessment to identify strengths and gaps, clarify priorities, and inform quality improvement for mental health services provided to children and families at CACs. The assessment identified a need for additional therapists trained in Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (TF-CBT) and delivery of the TF-CBT model via Telehealth. SCNCAC was then awarded a private endowment grant to collaborate with CACs of North Carolina on a training project to train CAC clinicians in the Carolinas. The first Cohort began in

December of 2020 and the second Cohort will be later in 2021.

Safe Babies Courts: SCNCAC worked with statewide stakeholders in 2020 to assist with development and full implementation of the Safe Babies Court (SBC) Team approach in three South Carolina counties where CACs are the host sites and explored opportunities to expand the SBC model to other counties. A main goal of this project is to connect very young children and their families with needed supports and services to advance health and well-being to help prevent future abuse and neglect.

SCNCAC Connect: During 2020, SCNCAC focused efforts on moving technical assistance, training, and other support services to a virtual format in response to the pandemic, increased online training offerings through our eLearning portal, and developed a professional networking tool designed to connect Children's Advocacy Center and Multidisciplinary Team professionals across South Carolina. The system, that launched in December, allows SCNCAC member CAC/MDT professionals to ask questions, post documents, and engage in focused online discussions.

Ongoing Training and Technical Assistance: Other training initiatives that are available upon request include the "Building Resiliency in CACs & MDTs" training and the "Board Member Boot Camp." During 2020, SCNCAC conducted 56 events which were attended by 1,021 CAC, MDT, and other professionals. These events ranged from large training sessions to smaller technical assistance, peer review, and information sessions. Due to the pandemic, almost all of these events were virtual. CAC staff and Multidisciplinary Team (MDT) partners from across the state attended to meet licensing, professional development, accreditation, or other requirements for the professional work they do.

- **Continue to support the operation of the Children's Law Center which is a training and information resource center for professionals involved in child maltreatment proceedings. Operations include implementing the training recommendations in collaboration with the Task Force and providing research and logistical support to the Task Force.** (Recommendation 6.B) Task Force Recommendation 6.B calls for the operation of the Children's Law Center, a training and information resource center for professionals involved in child maltreatment proceedings. The Children's Law Center was originally established upon the recommendation of the Task Force and continues to function as its staff support and training arm. The University of South Carolina School of Law administers the Children's Law Center as a model program to enhance the knowledge and skills of all professionals involved in child abuse and neglect proceedings, leading to better outcomes for children. The mission and functions of the Children's Law Center reflect the CJA goals of improving investigative and judicial handling of child abuse and neglect cases and enhancing the effectiveness of court-appointed attorneys and guardians ad litem. The Children's Law Center is able to access other funding sources to complement CJA funds, thus providing a comprehensive array of services. The Children's Law Center offers a variety of training programs on child maltreatment to child protection caseworkers, family

court staff, guardians ad litem, law enforcement officers, prosecutors, and other child-serving professionals. The Children’s Law Center also trains professionals who are mandated by law to report suspected child abuse and neglect.

Website and resource materials: The Children’s Law Center maintains a website containing online publications, training information, additional resources, and links to related organizations. Staff develop and distribute resource materials on child protection and prosecution of child abuse and neglect. The Children’s Law Center also responds to individual requests for information and technical assistance from professionals in the field. The online training portal for mandated reporters is offered to anyone at no cost. In response to the pandemic, additional information materials related to child abuse reporting during virtual schooling and quarantining were created and accessible through the homepage of the website. Another new addition recently added to the website is a page with tools and resources for law enforcement for identifying and investigating child sex trafficking. The website address is <http://childlaw.sc.edu>.

ChildFirst training: CJA funds are used to assist with the delivery of ChildFirst, a comprehensive training program on forensic interviewing of children. This is an intensive five-day course in which students learn the necessary skills to conduct an investigative interview—also known as a forensic interview—of a suspected child abuse victim. This interactive course combines lectures and demonstrations and is supplemented with homework assignments and a written examination at the end of the course. Participants also must conduct a 30-minute interview of a professional actor playing the role of a sexually abused child after which the interviewer is critiqued by a professional forensic interviewer and a group of fellow students. End of course and follow-up evaluations, along with feedback from prosecutors, indicate this training is significantly improving the quality of forensic interviews. As many states were forced to cancel their Child First trainings or rely on Zero Abuse Project faculty to conduct the trainings virtually, South Carolina independently hosted Child First via a virtual platform. They were able to host three ChildFirst trainings in this manner during this reporting period, in October of 2020 and February and April of 2021.

Child Death Investigation Training:

The Children’s Law Center hired a new law enforcement trainer in January of 2020 to provide one-day trainings on investigating child deaths to law enforcement and child welfare investigators. These trainings were transferred to a virtual platform and each course was broken into three segments over the course of three afternoons to continue to provide training opportunity for these investigators. During this reporting period, this three-part course was offered 11 times, with approximately 25-30 investigators in attendance for each course.

- **Coordinate and provide yearly intensive training for SC Coroners on child death investigations.** (Recommendation 7.B)

The Children’s Law Center was made aware of a free training on “Responding

to an Unexplained Child Death,” offered by the National Criminal Justice Training Center of Fox Valley Technical College. The course was originally secured to provide training in the Lowcountry rural area of the state for coroners, DSS investigators, and law enforcement on April 2, 2020. The course was at registration capacity of 60 people with a waiting list. The course was cancelled due to COVID-19 travel restrictions and was eventually made available virtually. Fox Valley Technical College let us know so that we could notify the registered participants regarding the virtual opportunity, and 24 professionals from South Carolina were able to attend.

Category C: Activities undertaken to reform state laws, ordinances, regulations, protocols, or procedures:

- **Improve coordination with schools following a report by school staff by clarifying confidentiality requirements and ensuring timely sharing of safety plans.** (Recommendation 10.C)

The Task Force’s publication, *“Information Sharing with School Personnel: Understanding what and when information can be shared by the SC Department of Social Services,”* which was previously added to the mandated reporter resources at the Children’s Law Center, continues to be distributed and available to school personnel.

- **Establish a statewide collaborative protocol for the response to child abuse and neglect cases utilizing the CACs and the multidisciplinary team approach.** (Recommendation 11.C) / **Review and reform the CAC statute 63-11-310 to support the collaborative response to child abuse and neglect.** (Recommendation 13.C)

In conjunction with the South Carolina Network for Children’s Advocacy Centers (SCNCAC), the Task Force assembled a statewide stakeholder advisory group involving child serving agencies to collaborate on drafting a statewide child abuse response protocol. The protocol is a written document outlining the procedures to be used in investigating and prosecuting cases arising from alleged child abuse and the methods to be used in coordinating services. The purpose of the protocol is to ensure a multidisciplinary response to child abuse and neglect that utilizes Children’s Advocacy Centers and multidisciplinary teams. After incorporating input, the final protocol was updated and made available on the SCNCAC website in September of 2019. The protocol can be viewed and downloaded at www.cac-sc.org/protocol.

After establishing a statewide child abuse response protocol, the next step was to seek legislation that would require its use as a statewide minimum standard. The Child Abuse Response Protocol Act was signed into law by the Governor of South Carolina on May 6, 2021. The legislation requires the use of the protocol as developed by the SCNCAC and the Children’s Justice Act Task Force. These groups are also tasked with developing and providing training on the protocol. The law also requires the protocol to be publicly available and reviewed annually by a Governor appointed review committee. The latter portion of the bill amended the current CAC statute to strike language that states: “Nothing in this section requires the exclusive use of a Children’s Advocacy Center.” It also adds the requirement for CACs to be fully

accredited with the National Children’s Alliance (NCA) or to be an associate/developing or affiliate member of the SCNCAC and be actively pursuing full accreditation with the NCA within the next two years.

The enacted legislation can be viewed here:

https://www.scstatehouse.gov/sess124_2021-2022/bills/229.htm

Another advantage to this process is that it has created multiple opportunities to educate legislators on the Children’s Justice Act Task Force and Children’s Advocacy Centers, and what they do.

- **Broaden collaboration between schools and the CACs both at the MDT level and in the follow up from a mandated report.** (Recommendation 12.C)

The Task Force has been working with the SCNCAC to encourage the involvement of schools with local CAC multidisciplinary teams (MDTs) at their member CACs. Two county MDTs were identified that had strong and consistent representation from the local school districts. These two school-based members were invited to come and speak at a CAC Directors’ Meeting in August 2020. One was the director of student services in her school district and the other was the Medicaid administrator for her district. They, along with their CAC Director in their MDT, provided discussion for the other directors on the benefits of the school personnel involvement and logistically how the collaboration is successful. The school representatives offered their assistance to any counties that may have been presented with barriers to achieving school involvement on their own MDT. The effort to broaden this collaboration will continue, as school representatives are encouraged to be invited and participate on MDTs in the SC Child Abuse Response Protocol.

To help facilitate this relationship during the challenges of the pandemic, CACs were encouraged to reach out to their local schools to try to identify an appropriate representative and to invite them to an offered virtual training session by the SCNCAC. This training, which included the Children’s Law Center’s presentation of “Recognizing and Reporting Child Abuse and Neglect in the COVID-19 Pandemic”, was developed for CAC/MDT Coordinators and Advocates to engage school personnel in the MDT process. The training defines their role as a mandated reporter and exploring how their role has shifted because of COVID-19 and virtual learning. Signs of child abuse and neglect in virtual learning environments were also addressed.

- **Provide support for any child abuse legislation that the Task Force deems will improve the state’s response to abused and neglected children including NAS babies.** (Recommendation 14.C)

The Task Force tracked the following bills during the course of the year that were related to CJA topics. Members provided input about such legislation when appropriate.

The following bills were enacted and passed during the 2020-2021 session:

Child Abuse Protocol – H.3209 / S.229

South Carolina Child Abuse Response Protocol Act: Requires multidisciplinary teams involved in child abuse investigation and prosecution to follow the protocol.

Family First Implementation - H.3567 / S.441

Brings South Carolina into conformity with the federal Family First Act passed in 2018. It adds a definition in the Children's Code for "Qualified Residential Treatment Program;" to amend sections relating to investigations of institutional abuse and restrictions on foster care placements; to require assessment, case planning, and judicial review for children placed in qualified residential treatment programs; and amends sections relating to permanency planning.

The following bills have crossed over but are pending:

Kinship/Fictive Kin - H.3214 / S.222

Defines "fictive kin" and provides that fictive kin are eligible to be foster parents under the kinship foster care program.

Extension of Foster Care to 21 - H.3509 / S.221

Establishes an extended foster care program and related procedures to enable certain children in the custody of DSS on their eighteenth birthday to continue to receive services and supports from the department until the age of twenty-one.

Sex Buyer Penalties - H.3224 / S.224

Increases the penalties for solicitation of prostitution, establishing or keeping a brothel or house of prostitution, or causing or inducing another to participate in prostitution. Establishes the affirmative defense of being a victim of human trafficking.

Safe Harbor for Minor Victims - S.230

Provides that minors engaged in commercial sexual activity or trafficking are presumed to be doing so under coercion or as the result of a reasonable fear of a threat. Provides an affirmative defense of these victims and for expungement for these victims.

Intimate Partner Violence - H.3210

Amends the Protection from Domestic Abuse Act to revise the definition of "household member" to include persons presently or formerly in a dating relationship and to define "dating relationship."