



# SOUTH CAROLINA'S CHILDREN'S JUSTICE ACT



## WHAT IS THE CHILDREN'S JUSTICE ACT?

► The federal Children's Justice Act provides grants to states to develop, establish, and operate programs designed to improve the investigation, prosecution, and judicial handling of cases of child abuse and neglect, particularly child sexual abuse and exploitation, in a manner that limits additional trauma to the child victim. This also includes the handling of child fatality cases in which child abuse or neglect is suspected and some cases of children with disabilities and serious health problems who also are victims of abuse and neglect.

## CJA TASK FORCE

► To be eligible for CJA funds, states are required to establish and maintain a Task Force on children's justice. In accordance with federal statutory requirements, membership must be multidisciplinary and comprise of at least one slot for each of a multitude of disciplines. South Carolina has maintained an active Children's Justice Act Task Force since 1994. The purpose and activities of the CJA 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 the recommendations;
- To **recommend** to the state's grantee (DSS) **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.

## CJA FUNDING STRUCTURE

► South Carolina currently receives approximately \$255,000 annually in CJA funding. The SC Department of Social Services has been designated the state's CJA grantee and contracts with USC's Children's Law Center as recommended by the Task Force. The Children's Law Center receives the CJA funding to support the Task Force and assist in implementation of its recommendations. CJA grants are to be used to implement Task Force recommendations in the following three categories:

- A. **Investigative, administrative, and judicial handling of cases**
- B. **Experimental, model and demonstration programs**
- C. **Reform of state laws, ordinances, regulations, protocols and procedures**



## CJA ACCOMPLISHMENT HIGHLIGHTS FOR 2015-2018:

- Hosted a national expert on abusive head trauma to provide free training to law enforcement and prosecutors
- Provided specialized training for school resource officers
- Produced a recorded orientation training for multi-disciplinary team (MDT) members in child abuse investigations
- Provided combined mandated reporter trainings with ACEs training for clergy/faith leaders
- Initiated a new intensive child death training course for coroners
- Hosted trainings to address sexting and social media issues with child abuse professionals
- Released four public awareness campaign images on reporting child abuse
- Distributed and published a letter from the Task Force to attorneys about the harmful impact of court continuances to children
- Initiated a child sex trafficking case/data review project, implementing the findings in Children's Law Center trainings
- Supported the SCNCAC and its forensic interviewer peer review/mentorship program
- Supported the operations of the Children's Law Center to provide applicable resources and trainings

## CJA TOPICS OF PRIORITY FOR 2018-2021:

- Assessment of children with limited communication skills
- Compliance with Best Legal Practices
- Prioritization of court cases with children who must testify
- Creation of advanced multi-disciplinary teams (MDTs) to support high risk victims for recantation
- Intensive child death investigation training for coroners
- Improvement of safety plan protocol and implementation
- Usage of trauma-informed front-end assessments
- Improved coordination with schools following a report of child abuse by school staff
- Broadened collaboration between schools and Children's Advocacy Centers
- Establishment of a statewide collaborative response protocol, and amended statute, utilizing the Children's Advocacy Centers and the multi-disciplinary team approach

To learn more about the Children's Justice Act programs, please contact Mandy Bowden at [amandabowden@sc.edu](mailto:amandabowden@sc.edu) or 803-576-7233. The CJA Bylaws, members list, and current recommendations may be found at <http://childlaw.sc.edu/childtaskforce.shtml>