

Resolution 12 In Support of Reauthorization of Court Improvement Programs

WHEREAS, the Conference of Chief Justices and the Conference of State Court Administrators recognize the importance of securing safe and permanent homes for children and the importance of moving children in state custody to permanent and safe homes as quickly as possible through the efficient and effective handling of child abuse and neglect cases; and

WHEREAS, the Conferences applauded the formation of the Pew Commission on Children in Foster Care, a nonpartisan, multi-disciplinary group dedicated to examining strategies for improving the child welfare system, and recognized the critical oversight role courts play in the system; and

WHEREAS, in consultation with the Conferences, the Pew Commission made court-related recommendations that focused on four general strategies: o Courts should adopt court performance measures to ensure that they can track cases, to increase accountability and to inform decisions about the allocation of court resources, and o Incentives and requirements should be established for effective collaboration between courts and child welfare agencies on behalf of children in foster care, and o Children and parents should have a strong voice in court and effective representation by trained attorneys and volunteer advocates, and o Chief justices and other state court leaders should lead efforts to structure courts to better serve children, to provide training for judges, and to promote more effective standards for dependency courts, judges, and attorneys; and

WHEREAS, the Conferences have made child welfare system reform a priority and undertaken a multi-year initiative to strengthen court oversight of child welfare cases; and

WHEREAS, the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 (P.L. 109-171) required and encouraged collaboration between courts and public child welfare agencies and authorized two new grants under the Court Improvement Program (CIP). One grant was dedicated to assisting courts to improve their training of judges, legal personnel, and attorneys handling child abuse and neglect cases. The other grant was dedicated to assisting courts in improving the timeliness of their efforts on behalf of children in foster care; and

WHEREAS, these CIP funds have been critical in accomplishing reform efforts, such as establishing and enhancing automated case tracking systems, developing data exchanges between the courts and child welfare agencies, implementing court performance measurements, providing training for judges and court personnel in both substantive law and issues impacting child development, and developing resources (e.g., benchbooks and benchcards) that assist judges in fulfilling their responsibilities; and

WHEREAS, although the courts have been able to leverage these federal dollars to accomplish reforms, more enhancements and reforms are needed; and

WHEREAS, the authorization for these two CIP grant programs expires on September 30, 2010; NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Conference of Chief Justices and the Conference of State Court Administrators strongly urge the Congress to reauthorize the CIP grant program dedicated to training and the CIP grant program dedicated to assisting courts to improve timeliness so that courts are able to sustain, enhance, and expand their reform efforts.

Adopted as proposed by the CCJ/COSCA Courts, Children, and Families Committee at the 2010 Annual Meeting on July 28, 2010.