

ANNUAL REPORT OF CHILDREN'S
LAW SECTION
2002-2003

JENNIFER A. PILETTE-CHAIR

The Children's Law Section of the State Bar of Michigan has been active in many areas during the last membership year. A summary of that activity is outlined below.

Meetings

The Council for the Section met monthly. Interested parties and section members were often in attendance. Guests have included Lynne Martinez, the Children's Ombudsman, members of the ABA task force on Delinquency, persons interested in addressing the issues of permanent guardianship in Michigan and officers of the National Association of Council for Children on the issue of a national certification for child's counsel.

The Council discussed issues involving juvenile legislation including juvenile competency, juvenile guardianship, Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) and the Children's Ombudsman legislation.

The section established committees (legislative, newsletter, annual meeting and membership) as well as the post of Section Librarian. The Section has also begun to market tapes and conference materials provided at its trainings. An Amicus committee was also established to handle such appellate requests. The Council filed an Amicus at the request of the Michigan Supreme Court in In re CAW.

The Council again opted for a business rather than a program meeting at the State Bar Annual meeting due to traditional low attendance of the Section at the Annual Meeting. The Council chose to focus on trainings during this membership year. The Council also took required steps to increase section dues in the 2003-2004 membership year, which was approved by the section membership at the annual meeting of September 2002.

Legislation

The Section, through representatives, met with members of the State House and Senate regarding issues involving standards for juvenile competency. As noted above many other bills were discussed after current information was provided by the lobbyist to this Section.

Court Rules (MCR)

The Section has been involved in the recent amendments to the court rules which were adopted in May, 2003. spent much of the early part of 2003 involved in trainings on the amendments to the court rules affecting juvenile practice. Members met in several sessions to discuss these rules.

Publications

In conjunction with the U of M Children's Resource Center the Section publishes the Child Welfare Law Journal several times a year.

Trainings

The Section was involved in a number of training events during the 2002-2003 membership year, most notably the (First) Annual Training and Awards Dinner of the Children's Law Section held on Saturday, March 1, 2003 at the Ashman Court Hotel in Midland, MI. Training included presentations by Rosalind Folman, PhD ("Children in Foster Care"), Professor Jennifer Rene from Georgetown School of Law ("Ethics in Juvenile Court"), Frank Vandervort JD ("The New Michigan Court Rules") and a viewing of the Section's mock Indian Child Welfare Act Trial tape. The Section also held the first Annual Dinner with Ellen Toomey from the Rocky Mountain Children's Law Center giving the keynote speech on "Effective Child Advocacy". The first Child Advocate of the Year Award was presented to William Ladd, JD. Mr. Ladd, a 23-year practitioner in the area of children's advocacy, is a past chair of this Section and is counsel of record in a number of prominent Michigan Appellate decisions, of most recent note, In Re AMB. The Section conducted several other trainings in June of 2003 in conjunction with the University of Detroit Law School. The Section assisted in sponsoring Judge Charles Gill as a keynote speaker at the University of Michigan Children's Conference held in October 2002.

2002-2003 MEMBERSHIP YEAR

Many exciting programs and topics are being considered in the next membership year. Changes to the Newsletter are being discussed to make it more accessible to the membership. A "vision statement" has already been developed for the Section. Plans are being made for the second annual mid-winter training and awards dinner.

General Information

Meetings of the Council are generally held on the first Wednesday following the first Monday of the month at 5PM at locations to be announced. Unless the Section is in closed session these are open to all members of the Section. Information will now be able to be located at the State Bar Listserve for the Children's Law Section located at childrens@lists.michbar.org. Members of the council or section are welcome to call into meetings.

The email for Rebekah Visconti, Chair for the 2003-2004 State Bar Membership Year, is viscontir@michigan.gov

It has been an honor and a pleasure to serve as Chair of the Section over the past year and a half.

Please join us for Section activities during the coming year.