

# Children's Rights

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**<https://www.childrensrights.org/cr-spreads-message-on-overuse-of-psychotropics-for-kids-in-foster-care/>**

## Public Facing Advocacy Writing

Sara Bartosz, lead counsel at national advocacy organization Children's Rights, shed light on the failure of many states to properly oversee the administration of psychotropic medications to kids in foster care during the recent American Bar Association (ABA) Annual Meeting in Chicago.

Bartosz was a panelist on I Feel Like a Zombie: Legal Ethics and Overuse of Psychotropic Drug Use among Children in State Custody. [The session](#) served to educate lawyers on how the issue affects thousands of young people in foster care across the United States and what attorneys can do to be watchdogs for kids.

Children in foster care often exhibit behaviors related to the trauma they have endured. Rather than receiving therapeutic counseling to treat underlying issues, kids are too frequently given powerful psychotropic drugs to control their behavior. The drugs can have side effects like drowsiness, tremors and weight gain. And many states lack oversight mechanisms to monitor crucial details like how many drugs are being prescribed to each child and the collective [impact](#).

Too many of these kids experience multiple moves between foster homes and changes in caseworkers, and consequently don't have one consistent person in their lives who knows their history and can watch out for their well-being, Bartosz said. We need to work together to change this.

Bartosz told attendees that they can help children by acting as watchdogs to ensure state agencies: maintain comprehensive and up-to-date medical records on each child; consistently provide mandated mental health screenings and follow-up treatments; ensure appropriate informed consent processes occur before children are prescribed medication; and establish red flags such as multiple drugs and dosages above recommendations that would trigger further review.

Other panelists included Judge Ernest S. Gray, Orleans Parish Juvenile Court of New Orleans and Dr. Michael Naylor, a child psychiatrist with the Institute for Juvenile Research at the University of Illinois at Chicago. The discussion was moderated by Chicago Tribune reporter David Jackson, who has conducted investigations on disadvantaged youth.

The panelists noted that while many children may benefit from medications, states must assure the availability of quality mental health care and therapeutic treatments for childhood trauma in order to combat the over-reliance on powerful drugs.

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