

INSIDE:



From New York to Atlanta and beyond, Children's Rights is building community across the country



Victory for kids:
Texas court ruling
means major reforms
for children in
foster care

IN FOCUS:

Making Kids Homeless in Kansas



In September, the media reported the alleged rape of a 13-year-old girl sleeping in a child welfare agency office in Johnson County, Kansas. The story of this child — staying overnight in an office because Kansas' broken system lacked any housing for her — exemplifies a long-known danger. Kansas' child welfare system is, and has been for at least a decade, systematically failing to protect children in foster care in the custody of the state's Department for Children and Families (DCF).

In November, Children's Rights took action. The class action lawsuit we filed tells the stories of what the ten child plaintiffs named in the suit have endured — but they speak for thousands more.

The plaintiffs range in age from 7 to 17, and have been in foster care for anywhere from several months to nine years. They have all been subjected to disrupted housing conditions so extreme that they are essentially rendered homeless while under the care

of the state. They are pushed to the breaking point by being moved from place to place with little more than the clothes on their backs. The state pays more than \$900,000 a month to private agencies to treat children this way — with no accountability.

And things are getting worse. According to a 2018 study, which Children's Rights believes actually underreports the extent of the problem, housing instability for Kansas children is on the rise. Children are churned through new placements at a rate more than twice the national average, and the number of repeat placements has increased by 30 percent since 2016.

"Churning" in the Kansas foster care system dates back almost 20 years. This dangerous practice moves children from one foster care placement to the next — anywhere from ten to over 100 times while in DCF custody. Churning treats children



ON THE FRONTLINES

It was a tough year for America's children. The opioid crisis is driving up the number of children entering foster care, thousands of immigrant children remain in detention facilities, and government cuts to basic nutrition, health and anti-poverty programs put hundreds of thousands of kids at risk.

And our political system has for decades been indifferent. It doesn't matter who is in the White House, who has the majority in Congress or who occupies the state house. In red states, blue states and purple states the lack of meaningful and sustained investments to prevent harm to children goes back a long way. We spend less on children than almost any other developed nation. One-fifth of American children live in poverty, and they account for more than one-fifth of the homeless population. Each year about 2,000 American children die from child abuse or neglect and, on any given day, nearly half a million children are living in foster care.

It doesn't have to be this way. Liberal or conservative, Democrat or Republican, let's make 2019 the year we take this personally. Let it be the year we each say: "I am committed to children. I will hold my government accountable."

If we do, we can build a movement that will transform millions of young lives. Together we can build the just, compassionate society that our children so richly deserve.

Sandy Santana
Executive Director

Our Beating Heart

Recently, we decided to tell the story of Children's Rights through the lens of the children we serve. After all, kids are the beating heart of what we do. The result? A boxed set of four child-size books. These books may be small, but they tell a mighty story. The story of how we — with your support — are protecting hundreds of thousands of children each year.

Download the books at childrensrights.org/books



2018: A Year of Progress for Children



NATIONWIDE

We helped stop the illegal separation of immigrant children from their families.

We worked to protect the rights of LGBTQ youth in states across the U.S.

Our voice was heard in national press and media outlets as we spoke out for abused and neglected children.

IOWA

Our lawsuit shines a light on the inhumane practice of juvenile solitary confinement.

KANSAS

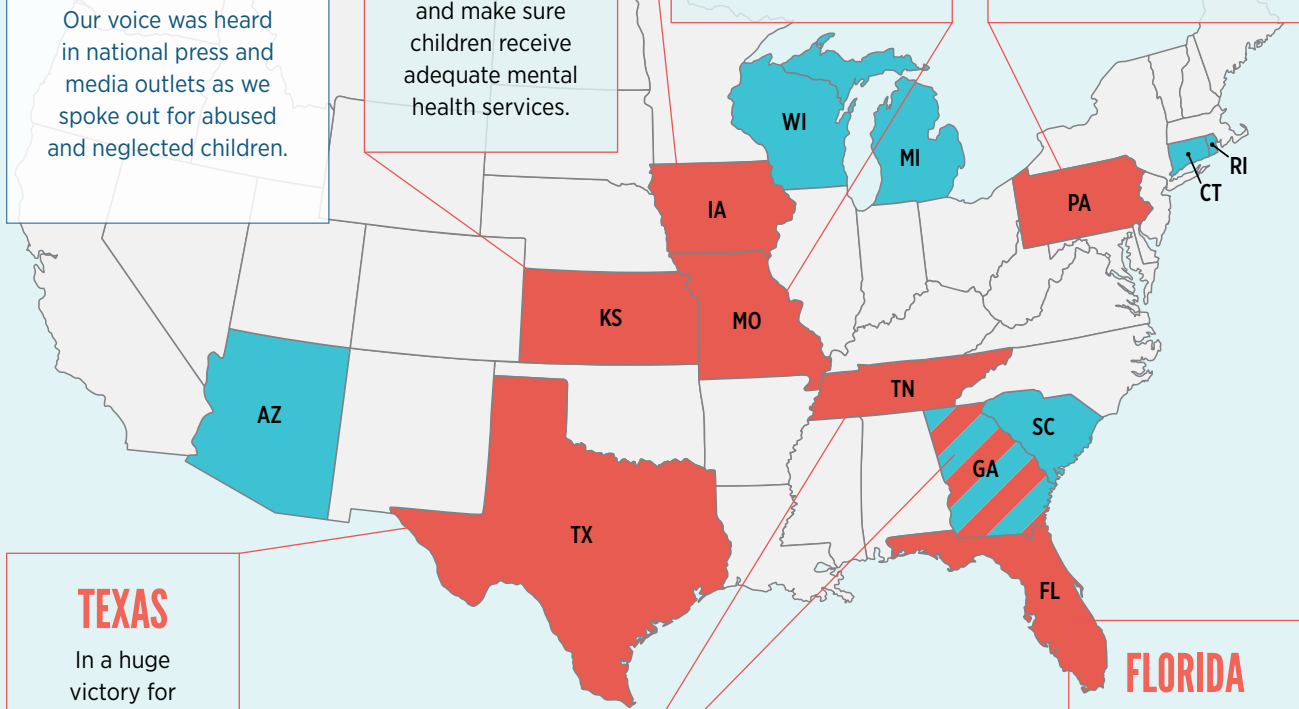
We are taking legal action to stop the traumatizing practice of night-to-night placements and make sure children receive adequate mental health services.

MISSOURI

Our groundbreaking lawsuit exposes the use of psychotropic drugs as “chemical straightjackets.”

PENNSYLVANIA

Our report investigates systemic dangers and inadequate education for youth in residential foster care.



TEXAS

In a huge victory for children, a judge required reforms to a woefully inadequate child welfare system.

TENNESSEE

Our landmark case led to the overhaul of the child welfare system — and is now a model for the nation.

GEORGIA

Our new office brings hope to over 180,000 children in the South's child welfare system.

FLORIDA

Our case targets abusive housing practices and insufficient mental health care.

AND IN CONNECTICUT, SOUTH CAROLINA, GEORGIA, MICHIGAN, MILWAUKEE, RHODE ISLAND AND ARIZONA

we are holding governments accountable for reforming their broken child welfare systems.

Out & About for Children's Rights

2018 was an eventful year for Children's Rights. A committed group of supporters gathered to defend the rights of children across the country. Check out some of our favorite moments here.

Celebrating and Shining a Light in NYC and Atlanta

Children's Rights hosted not one, but two benefits in 2018. Our annual Benefit & Inspiration Awards in NYC honored **Sixto Cancel**, CEO of Think of Us; the technology platform **Box.org**; and **Lee Gelernt**, the Deputy Director of ACLU's Immigrants' Rights Project. Our inaugural Atlanta benefit honored **Kate Atwood**, founder of Kate's Club; **Trenny Stovall**, Director of DeKalb County Child Advocacy Center; and **George McKerrow**, co-founder and CEO of Ted's Montana Grill. Thank you to our amazing event co-chairs and many supporters who made both benefits a success!



NYC 1. Speaker **Padma Lakshmi** **2.** Board member **Chiara Mai** and Friends **3.** (Left to right) Board members **Lewis Tepper**, **Alice Rosenwald**, **Honorable Bryanne Hamill**, **Alan Myers**, **Jerry E. Garcia**, Board Chair **Megan Shattuck**, Executive Director **Sandy Santana**, **Chiara Mai**, **Bethany Pristaw**, and **Jay Galluzzo** **4.** **Leslie Odom Jr.** from *Hamilton* **5.** Board member and gala co-chair **Molly Gochman** and husband **Michael Armilio** **6.** Children's Rights staff **7.** Gala co-chairs **Kelli Shaughnessy** and **Jim Stanton** **8.** Honoree **Sixto Cancel**, Young Professional Leadership Council member **Lexie Gruber**, and guests **Front cover: Padma Lakshmi** and emcee **Jordan Roth**.

ATLANTA 9. **Greg Hecht**, National Advisory Council Member and Southeast Steering Committee Chair **10.** Award Presenter **Laura Seydel** **11.** Steering Committee Member **Jo Ann Herold** and guest **12. Jason J. Carter**, Partner, Bondurant Mixson & Elmore

We Get By with Help from Our Friends

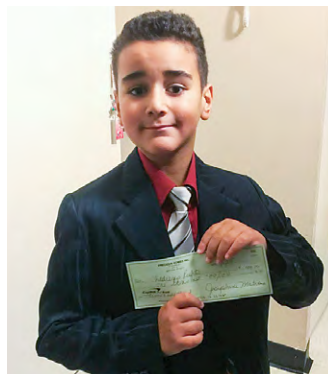


Children's Champion Ride:

In partnership with longtime Children's Rights Board member **Dan Galpern**, we held our first-ever #RideForKids, cycling to raise money for children in state foster care, education, immigration, and juvenile justice systems.



Shopping for a Cause: **Kelli Shaughnessy**, founder of SSSY Designs, hosted a shopping party with 100% of proceeds going to support Children's Rights. Learn more at [instagram.com/ssy_designs](https://www.instagram.com/ssy_designs).



Rocco, one of our youngest supporters, hosted a lemonade stand and raised \$1000 for Children's Rights.

Friendraiser: Children's Rights gathered new supporters at the African American Museum in Philadelphia. Top: Event co-host **Reshma Moorthy** and Children's Rights Board member **Alan Myers**. Bottom: Event co-host **Allen Riddick** and wife **Crystal Cummins**.



We are pleased to introduce our new Children's Rights Board member, **Anne Robinson**. Anne is Managing Director, General Counsel, and Corporate Secretary of Vanguard, and brings her passion for protecting children across the country. Welcome!

Lexie Gruber, member of our Young Professional Leadership Council, shared her story on Instagram in order to support the inaugural Children's Rights Fellowship, which will provide five former foster youth with the opportunity to intern at Children's Rights in Summer 2019. Want to support the fellowship? Become a monthly donor at [childrensrights.org/member](https://www.childrensrights.org/member)!



lexiepg • Following

lexiepg I am living a life that I never could have dreamed of when I was in foster care. And that's all because of an internship I had. When I was 19 years old, I had the life changing opportunity to participate in a competitive internship in Congress for former foster youth. My internship led to a job on Capitol Hill, an invitation to testify before Congress, and allowed me to make an impact on a national level. I want to make sure other former foster kids have similar opportunities.

IN FOCUS: Making Kids Homeless in Kansas

(continued from page 1)

like packages on a conveyor belt: forced to find a place to sleep for a night or two anywhere a bed, couch, office conference room, shelter or hospital can be found. The vicious cycle can go on for days, weeks or even months.

The *Kansas City Star* quoted Lori Ross, a long-time Missouri child advocate, describing how constant churning dehumanizes already traumatized children: “What one-night stays do is make it very clear to the child that they have zero value to anyone. You aren’t valuable enough to have stuff. You’re not valuable enough to go to school.”

In addition to the devastating emotional and psychological impact, research shows that repetitive night-to-night placements also have a direct impact on children’s normal brain development, and can cause developmental and neurological damage that may be irreparable.

Children entering foster care are by definition traumatized and need mental health care. Yet administrative barriers within DCF, delays, and long waits for mental health services mean that children are being deprived of the treatment they need.

Churning is deeply tied to the problem: the trauma makes the need for mental health services even more urgent, while the very nature of churning creates barriers. Haphazard and unpredictable placements make it hard for kids to make or keep appointments.

The story of M.L., one of the plaintiffs named in the suit, is all too typical. M.L. is 17 years old. She entered foster care when she was six and was eventually adopted along with her sister. They were sexually assaulted repeatedly by their adoptive foster father but stayed in that home for three years before re-entering DCF custody. Since then, DCF has moved M.L. more than 42 times. Once, for an entire week, she was forced to sleep in agency offices. Despite being diagnosed with PTSD and bipolar disorder, M.L. has not received consistent medically necessary mental health treatment. She has run away on several occasions and been the victim of sex trafficking.

Traci Dotson, a social welfare student at the University of Kansas, sees the state’s shortcomings through a very personal lens. She is herself a survivor of Kansas’ foster care system.

“From 15 to 17 years of age I was in the custody of DCF. I am now working to change a broken system from the inside out. Our state is setting records for the number of children in custody; that’s a record to be ashamed of. This lawsuit can deliver real, tangible relief for children who desperately need it. But even by just bringing this case to court, Children’s Rights is telling the world that Kansas is not protecting our most vulnerable children. People are finally talking about this. That’s the beginning of real change.”

The World Just Got a Little Better

A 2018 court decision is good news for the 12,000 children in permanent foster care in Texas. In October, the 5th Circuit Court of Appeals upheld major parts of an earlier ruling by a district court judge finding that the children in the care of the state’s broken, unconstitutional system “almost uniformly leave state custody more damaged than when they entered.” Children’s Rights and Texas co-counsel, Yetter Coleman LLP and Haynes and Boone LLP, brought the suit in 2015.

The appeals court agreed that

the state was deliberately indifferent to the systemic flaws threatening the safety of children, and that while in the child welfare system many children experience concrete harm.

“This ruling gives hope that the state of Texas will finally invest the resources it needs to properly serve the most vulnerable children in its care,” said co-counsel Paul Yetter.

With the court-ordered reforms, the state will increase the number of caseworkers overall while reducing their exorbitantly high caseloads.

The state will also be required

to improve its woefully deficient investigations practices and take the actions necessary to keep kids safe.



Q/A WITH HOLLI HINES EASTON

ATLANTA STEERING COMMITTEE MEMBER

Children's Rights celebrated the opening of our new Southeast office — located in space donated by law firm Hall Booth Smith — by hosting an awards benefit in Atlanta on November 16. The event was a huge success, thanks to the efforts of a dynamo steering committee of local community leaders and advocates in Atlanta. Here we talk to Holli Hines Easton, committee member and co-chair of the benefit. Holli is managing director of BFG Marketing, a full-service advertising agency representing major brands including Coca-Cola and Progressive Insurance.

CR: What made you want to get involved with Children's Rights?

A dear friend invited me to an introductory session with Children's Rights staff, and I was just blown away by the severity of the problems kids face. It was an eye-opener. And the staff! So passionate and articulate. The meeting ran two hours and I didn't want it to end.

CR: How does being a mother affect your perspective on child welfare?

I pray every night for my kids to be healthy, happy and safe. There are children out there who are not any of these. When my children can stomach the realities — and that will be soon — I will be introducing them to Children's Rights. I want them to be aware. I want us involved as a family.

CR: Why is it so important for CR to have a strong presence in Georgia and the South?

I am not from the South, but I have lived here for a long time. I am proud to call it my home. But Georgia is in many ways a difficult place for young people. It ranks 42nd in state child welfare rankings nationwide. Atlanta's airport is the busiest in the world, but it is also a major international hub for sex trafficking. Our public school system is the 35th worst in the country.

CR: What would you tell someone looking to get involved in Children's Rights?

I'd tell them about the look on the faces of the people at our benefit as they learned about all the children who are not healthy, not happy, not safe. There



Holli Hines Easton, left, with Children's Rights Atlanta Benefit Honoree George McKerron and National Advisory Council Member Karyn Froseth

were no devices out. No one spoke. Once you hear their stories and see what a difference Children's Rights can make — I defy you to look away. I know I can't.

Stay informed!
Sign up for Southeast updates at
childrensrights.org/southeast



UNSAFE AND UNEDUCATED:

INDIFFERENCE TO DANGERS IN
PENNSYLVANIA'S RESIDENTIAL
CHILD WELFARE FACILITIES

CHILDREN'S
RIGHTS
PROTECTING KIDS,
PROVIDING HOPE.

EDUCATION
LAW CENTER

Download your copy of the report at
childrensrights.org/unsafe

Investigation: Children Face Abuse and Indifference in Pennsylvania

A new report by Children's Rights and the Education Law Center raises grave concerns about the safety and educational opportunities of youth in residential foster care in Pennsylvania.

The number of children living in Pennsylvania group facilities exceeds the national average. Too often, because of a woeful lack of oversight, they suffer verbal, physical, and sexual abuse and mistreatment from staff and other children. Yet the state continues to ignore repeated reports of violence and mistreatment — and uses taxpayer dollars to put children in harm's way.

But the harm doesn't stop there. Children's educations are also being largely ignored: most of them attend

"on-grounds" schools located at or near the residential facilities, instead of at a nearby public school. These schools often lack even the basics of a decent education, with children of various ages mixed in one classroom and a curriculum that relies heavily on worksheets. Sometimes, students cannot even receive high school credit for their work because the coursework at these schools is not recognized.

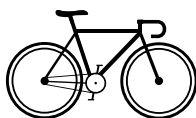
The report was released in December, and early response from the media and advocates has been one of outrage. Pennsylvania's children deserve what every child deserves: safety and security at home, and educational opportunities at school. Pennsylvania owes them no less.

SAVE THE DATE

**MAY 5,
NYC**

TD FIVE BORO BIKE TOUR

Join the Children's Rights charity team
in the TD Five Boro Bike Tour
on May 5th, 2019.



Register at
development@childrensrights.org

**OCTOBER 28,
NYC**

2019 CHILDREN'S RIGHTS BENEFIT & INSPIRATION AWARDS

Mark your calendars and stay tuned
for more information about our annual gala.

Purchase pre-sale tickets and sponsorship at
childrensrights.org

All proceeds from our events sponsor advocacy and legal action
to protect abused and neglected children across America.

To make a gift to Children's Rights, visit www.childrensrights.org and click "Donate Now."



www.childrensrights.org

**CHILDREN'S
RIGHTS**
PROTECTING KIDS.
PROVIDING HOPE.