

2021 Judicial Trauma Institute

Speaker Bios

Day 1:

Session 1: Breaking the Cycle for Solving for Pattern

David Cross, Ph.D., Rees-Jones Director, Karyn Purvis Institute of Child Development at TCU



David R. Cross, Ph.D., is the Rees-Jones Director of the Karyn Purvis Institute of Child Development at Texas Christian University, and a Professor in the TCU Department of Psychology. Dr. Cross leads the Institute in its triple mission of research, education, and outreach to improve the lives of children who have experienced abuse, neglect, and/or trauma. He has authored many peer-reviewed publications about issues regarding at-risk children, including those who have experienced early trauma. Dr. Cross earned his B.S. from California State University Fresno with a major in Psychology, and then attended The University of Michigan in Ann Arbor for graduate study, beginning in 1980. He earned an M.A. in Psychology and an M.A. in Statistics. He later earned a Ph.D. in Education and Psychology. In 1985, he accepted a position as Assistant

Professor in TCU's Department of Psychology. Dr. Cross' wife, Trudy, is a retired Kindergarten teacher and a practicing Grandmother. His daughter, Jennifer, graduated from TCU in 2003, and is an environmental project manager Seven Eleven Corp. His son, Nathan, is a former USMC Captain, and is now an Archivist for the Library of Congress.

Session 2: Equity as a Foundation for a Trauma-Informed Court

Aurora Martinez Jones, District Judge



The Honorable Aurora Martinez Jones is elected to the 126th District Court bench and is responsible for the oversight and administration of all Travis County Termination of Parental Rights civil lawsuits filed on behalf of the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services. She was sworn in on January 1, 2021 and prior to that, she was the Associate Judge dedicated to the Travis County CPS Courts since January 2, 2015. Judge Martinez Jones is from La Porte, Texas and attended college at The University of Texas at Austin. She then attended law school at The University of Texas School of Law and upon receiving her law license; she started her own law firm, The Martinez Jones Law Firm, PLLC. As an

attorney, Aurora Martinez Jones practiced primarily in child welfare law, juvenile justice, personal injury, probate, real estate, family law, and civil litigation. Judge Martinez Jones is Board Certified in Child Welfare Law and is a Child Welfare Law Specialist, Certified by the National Association of Counsel for Children. Judge Martinez Jones is the presiding judge for the Travis County Family Drug Treatment Court: Parenting in Recovery specialty court. She is the past Chair for the Texas Children's Justice Act Task Force, is the past President of the Austin Black Lawyers Association, is currently on the Board for the Child Protection Law Section of the State Bar of Texas, is on the Board for the Texas Association of Specialty Courts, is on the Board for the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (NCJFCJ), and is the

Texas State Coordinator for the National Association of Counsel for Children (NACC), among other leadership positions she holds in the community. Judge Martinez Jones and her husband, Mitchell Jones, are the proud parents of two precious little girls.

Cynthia Wheless, District Judge



Judge Wheless received her JD, 1991, SMU Dedman School of Law and is Board Certified in Juvenile Law. She was a member of SMU Law Review and received her BA in Government & Politics from UTD, 1988, cum laude. Previous work history includes IBM as a paid college intern, Haynes & Boone, LLP, and private practice at Wheless & Walker. In 1999, she was appointed as Juvenile Court Referee by the Collin County Juvenile Board. In 2004, Governor Rick Perry appointed Judge Wheless to the 417th Judicial District Court, a court of general jurisdiction which gives preference to juvenile cases. Judge Wheless was awarded the “Voice for Children Award” in 2006 by CASA of Collin County. Judge

Wheless has served as Co-Chairman of the Judicial Disproportionality Workgroup with the Supreme Court of Texas Permanent Commission on Children and Families; serves on the Judicial Commission on Mental Health and the Dual Status Task Force for the Children’s Commission. Judge Wheless also serves on the Texoma Regional Board for the Anti-Defamation League. She has been married to Judge Ray Wheless, 366th (Ret.) and Regional Presiding Judge, for 31 years. Together they have two beautiful boys, Ryan (age 25) and Dylan (age 22).

Tanya Rollins, MSW



Tanya Rollins received her BS in Psychology from Texas A&M University in 1990 and her MSW from Texas State University-San Marcos in 2007. Ms. Rollins is employed in the fields of child welfare and higher education. She has worked in the Texas child welfare system for twenty-nine thirty years in roles as an investigator, intake specialist, intake supervisor, training specialist, and training manager. Until May 2021, Ms. Rollins served as the Child Protective Services Disproportionality Manager for the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services. In this role, she was charged with examining the racial and ethnic disparities in the child welfare system while working

with internal and external partners to eliminate the disparities. She has been instrumental in the implementation of the Knowing Who You Are project in Texas. She has had the pleasure of providing consulting services to other states interested in implementing Knowing Who You Are. Ms. Rollins is an adjunct faculty member at Texas State University-San Marcos School of Social Work. She has presented at numerous national, regional, and state conferences on poverty, child welfare, racial and ethnic identity, and disparities in the child welfare system. Ms. Rollins holds the belief that we must unpack the “why” of all disparities that lead to poor outcomes for children and youth and develop strategic plans to eliminate the disparities. She is committed to engaging individuals and organizations in this important dialogue.

Session 3: Starting the Case with Family Strengths in Mind

Darlene Byrne, Chief Justice, 3rd Court of Appeals



The Honorable Darlene Byrne is the Chief Justice of the Third Court of Appeals of Texas since January 2021. Prior to that she served for 20 years as the presiding judge of the 126th Judicial District Court in Travis County beginning in January 2001. Prior to her election in 2000, she practiced for thirteen years in the areas of employment, commercial and governmental entity litigation. She is a Commissioner on the Texas Children’s Commission. She is a past President of the National Council for Juvenile and Family Court Judges and a past Judge of the Year of National CASA, Texas CASA and CASA of Travis County. She is a past recipient of the many local, statewide and national awards due to her work in the area of child welfare. She currently serves as co-chair of the Judicial Council for National CASA, is an Advisory Council member for TexProtects, Partnerships for Children, Carrying Hope and the Seedling Foundation, is the Chair of the Texas Statewide Collaborative for Trauma Informed Care, on the Editorial Review Board for NCJFCJ’s Juvenile and Family Court Journal and on the Advisory Committee for the #WeToo project for Courts. Judge Byrne is the founding judge of the Travis County Family Drug Treatment Court and the Travis County Model Court of Children, Youth and Families. She has served on many boards and committees related to law and child welfare as well as community organizations.

Denee Borchardt, Program Director, CASA of Tarrant County



University.

Denee’ Borchardt joined CASA of Tarrant County as the Program Director in August 2016. She oversees four teams of child advocacy specialists, who supervise the agency’s 400 CASA volunteers. During her tenure, Ms. Borchardt has been instrumental in bringing Collaborative Family Engagement and trauma-informed training to CASA of Tarrant County. Ms. Borchardt began her career in child protection in 2001 with the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services as an investigator, promoting to an investigative supervisor in 2005. She has expertise in the areas of evaluating child safety and risk, families in rural and urban communities, working jointly with law enforcement on severe physical and sexual abuse cases, human trafficking, and Trust-Based Relational Intervention (TBRI). Ms. Borchardt earned a Bachelor of Science from Tarleton State

Cindy Dyar, Staff Attorney, Travis County Office of Parental Representation



Until May 2021, Cindy Dyar was an attorney at the Travis County Office of Parental Representation in Austin, Texas. Previously, she was an attorney ad litem with the Travis County Office of Child Representation and a staff attorney at Texas RioGrande Legal Aid focusing on consumer, housing, and family cases. She graduated from the University of Michigan Law School, where she participated in the Child Advocacy Law Clinic and was the recipient of a full Darrow Scholarship.

Verlyn Johnson, Parent Liaison for Region 6, Parent Collaboration Group



Verlyn Johnson has been part of the statewide Parent Collaboration Group for 13 years, serving as Chair for the past two years. The Parent Collaboration Group is a forum designed to give voice, discuss and implement policy changes within the Children Protective Services, in order to help families achieve better outcomes and improved services. Ms. Johnson now serves as the parent representative for Region 6. In this role, she engages with parents who are involved with the Children Protective Services (CPS) and serves as a guide in helping parents successfully navigate this process. Ms. Johnson participates and facilitates monthly parent support groups for parents that have open cases within CPS. During her years of providing support to families, she obtained degrees in American Sign Language, mental health for youth and adults, as well as drug and alcohol counseling. She has also successfully navigated the child welfare system and utilized the services that CPS offered to help strengthen and empower her own family. Mr. Johnson was a member of the Disproportionality Taskforce and chaired her local disproportionality advisory committee; she is currently an active member of region 6 disproportionality advisory committee. She is also a member of the National Association of Social Workers. Ms. Johnson received her Bachelor of Arts Degree in Social Work, graduated cum laude, and acquired her Master's Degree in Social Work at the University of Southern California. She is currently a Doctoral Candidate at Cappella University. Ms. Johnson is an unfaltering advocate for parents and children in CPS. She is a strong leader that embodies an untiring energy and passion to the families that she serves. Her goal is to advocate for the voices that are often heard, but never responded to by lifting them up above the realm of policies.

Leah Lopez, Social Services Coordinator, Ysleta Del Sur Pueblo's Department of Behavioral Health



Leah Lopez is the Social Services Coordinator for Ysleta del Sur Pueblo's Department of Behavioral Health. She studied at Texas Woman's University where she obtained her BSW and continued her studies at the University of Texas at El Paso earning her MSW. She is licensed in the state of Texas with her LMSW. She began working for Ysleta del Sur Pueblo as an intern while in grad school and began employment right after graduation. She has served the Pueblo for over nine years; five of which have been in a supervisory role. She is non-tribal but has enjoyed working in such a close-knit community learning about culture, tradition and helping those in need. She has a passion for domestic violence advocacy, ending violence against women, trauma informed care, raising awareness and the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA). She is a member of The National Association of Social Workers (NASW), National Indian Child Welfare Association (NICWA), the Coalition to Stop Violence Against Native Women (CSVANW), and the New Mexico Tribal Indian Children Welfare Consortium (NMTIC) since May 2017. Ms. Lopez also serves on the Children's Commission's Statewide Collaborative on Trauma-Informed Care Implementation Task Force.

Elizabeth Watkins, Family Justice Director Williamson County Attorney's Office



Elizabeth Watkins is the Family Justice Director for the Williamson County Attorney's Office. She has over 23 years' experience in the litigation and protection of children and families. She began her career with Child Protection Services as an investigator and adoptions worker, then served as an Assistant District Attorney in Anderson County for over eight years. During her time with Anderson County, Ms. Watkins was responsible for the filing and litigation of all CPS cases, juvenile cases, and crimes against women and children. She has tried dozens of CPS cases in front of both the bench and juries, and prosecuted some of the toughest child assault cases, including first chair in capital murder trials.

She previously served as a Regional Attorney for the Department of Family and Protective Services, and is a member of the Supreme Court of Texas' Permanent Judicial Commission on Children's Legal Representation and serves as Trial Skills Faculty. As a faculty member from the onset, Ms. Watkins has provided CPS litigation instruction to attorney's from across the State, and drafted the foundational documents for the "Tool Kit for Attorneys Representing the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services in Child Protection Cases." Ms. Watkins has completed Trust Based Relational Intervention Course at the Karyn Purvis Institute. She has presented material for Texas CASA on trauma informed advocacy, served on a lecture panel for the 2016 CASA convention, lectured for the Karyn Purvis Institute regarding TBRI in the Courtrooms, and has testified before the Texas House Human Services Committee. Ms. Watkins is Board Certified in Child Welfare.

Session 4: Addressing Behavioral Health Needs with a Trauma-Informed Lens

Delia Gonzalez, Associate Judge, Child Protection and Permanency Court



Judge Delia Gonzales is originally from Victoria, Texas and graduated from Sam Houston State University in 1998 and graduated from Thurgood Marshall School of Law in 2002. Judge Gonzales practiced in the area of child welfare and family law for 15 years as an attorney and mediated family law and child welfare cases for 6 years.

Judge Gonzales is the Associate Judge Child Protection and Permanency Court in Dallas County through the Office of Court Administration. Judge Gonzales serves on multiple committees through the Texas Children's Commission and the National Center for Juvenile and Family Court Judges. In 2020, Judge Gonzales was awarded the Texas CASA Judicial Innovation and Leadership Award. Judge Gonzales has built the foundation and fundamentals for the court to assist children who are in the permanent custody of CPS to help the youth in her court obtain positive permanency, enhance outcomes for youth in care and address wellbeing issues.

Nathan Hoover, Senior Clinical Director, Behavioral Health Services, Superior Health Plan



Nathan Hoover is a Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC) and has worked in the behavioral health field for over 20 years. His past experience involves working with many populations including a focus on child and adolescents. This work occurred through the criminal justice system as a community supervision officer with the Lubbock County Adult probation department, the local mental health authority STAR Care in Lubbock Texas, and as part of Buckner Child and Family Services, a foster care child placing agency. He has worked for Superior Health Plan for the past 11 years in a variety of roles and currently serves as the Senior Director of Behavioral Health Services. Nathan has

completed trauma focused – cognitive behavioral therapy (TF-CBT) training and part of his current role is leading Superior’s trauma informed care (TIC) initiatives. He also co-chairs Superior’s committee on social determinants of health (SDOH).

Moshin Khan, MD, Assistant Professor of Psychiatry, UT Southwestern Medical Center; Rees-Jones Center for Foster Care Excellence



Mohsin Khan, M.D., is a pediatric psychiatrist who specializes in caring for children who are in foster care. He is a member of the highly-trained team of specialists who are part of the Rees-Jones Center for Foster Care Excellence at Children’s Health. Dr. Khan and his care team provide treatment and services to children and adolescents with complicated and serious medical, mental health and psychosocial problems. Many of the issues children in foster care face are rooted in childhood trauma. He is part of a team that provides support to children in group homes, or kinship families and provides a range of services that include diagnostic/medication assessments, developmental assessments,

individual and family psychotherapy, and parent-child interaction therapy. He believes in providing compassionate care and helping children who may have experienced trauma related to abuse and emotionally challenging situations during their young lives. Dr. Khan earned his medical degree at the Medical University of Lodz in Poland. He completed a residency in general psychiatry at Southern Illinois University School of Medicine and a fellowship in child and adolescent psychiatry at UT Southwestern.

Valerie Borum Smith, MD, MHP, FAAP Pediatrician, St. Paul Children's Services



Dr. Smith is a pediatrician at St. Paul Children’s Services in Tyler, Texas where she leads the Community-Centered Health Home Initiative. She is a graduate of the University of Texas Southwestern Medical School, completed her residency at Arkansas Children’s Hospital, and received her MPH from the University of Texas Health Science Center at Tyler. Dr. Smith is the inaugural American Academy of Pediatrics Child Welfare and Health Policy Fellow. She is the founder and chair of the Smith County Food Security Council and serves on the board of the East Texas Food Bank and the Northeast Texas Public Health District. She is co-chair of the Texas Pediatric Society Foster Care Committee and

serves on the TPS Executive Legislative Committee and Board of Directors and leads the behavioral health subcommittee for the Texas Medical Association. In addition, she serves as a consultant for Superior Healthcare on their Foster Care Centers of Excellence program. She is active in pediatric health advocacy and regularly testifies for the Texas legislature and authors editorials for the Dallas Morning News.

Day 2:

Session 1: Effects of Secondary Trauma and Tools for Addressing the Everyday and the Crisis Moments

Becky Morales, LCSW-S, Clinical Therapist, Colors of Austin Counseling Adjunct Assistant Professor & Adjunct Faculty Liaison, Steve Hicks School of Social Work, The University of Texas at Austin



Becky Morales is a bilingual Licensed Clinical Social Worker and Council-Approved Supervisor (LCSW-S). Currently, she provides individual therapy services in a group private practice setting through Colors of Austin Counseling, where she focuses her work in serving the Latinx population, and those impacted by depression, anxiety, cancer, medical illness, life transitions, and loss and grief. Additionally, Ms. Morales serves as Adjunct Faculty Liaison and holds an Adjunct Assistant Professor appointment at the Steve Hicks School of Social Work at The University of Texas at Austin. Ms. Morales has extensive professional practice in both direct service and administrative roles since becoming a social worker in 2003, and has focused her work in the areas of mental health, oncology, chronic illness and disability, and intimate partner violence. She holds a Master of Science in Social Work from The University of Texas at Austin, with a concentration in Administration and Planning. She was honored with the Charles I. Wright Distinguished Alumna Award from the Steve Hicks School of Social Work in 2016. In addition, Ms. Morales holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Liberal Arts from the University of St. Thomas, in Houston, Texas. Her Liberal Arts degree had a primary concentration of Political Science, and a secondary concentration of Communication.

Session 2: Learning from the Experts: A Panel Discussion on Lived Experience

Rob Hofmann, Judge, 452nd District Court



Rob Hofmann began his career of public service for the State of Texas in 1996, now serving as judge of the 452nd Judicial District in five Hill Country counties. In 2018, Judge Hofmann was appointed by the Supreme Court of Texas to serve as Jurist in Residence for the Children's Commission and later that year received the Texas CASA *Judicial Innovation and Leadership Award*. He is a Board Member of the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges and has served Texas as judicial representative at several national summits. He was awarded the 2020 Education Reach for Texans *John Emerson Award* for his leadership and commitment to improving educational outcomes for children in foster care. Judge Hofmann speaks often and works on numerous projects related to improving the child welfare system and was named 2011 *Big Voices for Little Texans Texas CASA Judge of the Year*. He is a member of the College of the State Bar of Texas and Sustaining Life Fellow of the Texas Bar Foundation. Judge Hofmann graduated from Texas A&M University and Texas

Tech University School of Law where he received the *Herschell L. Barnes Ambassador Award* in 2020. He and his wife are former foster parents and have two children.

Alexandria Fuller, Person with Lived Experience as a Youth in Foster Care



Alexandria Fuller is a Juris Doctor Candidate at Roger Williams University School of Law and holds a Bachelor of Arts from Texas Tech University. Ms. Fuller spent her late teenage years in the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) foster care system and “aged out” of care in 2013. She serves on the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN) Youth Task Force and the Statewide Collaborative on Trauma-Informed Care Implementation Task Force (SCTIC) and the SCTIC Policy & Practice Workgroup. Ms. Fuller also serves as a volunteer and liaison with Sondra’s Song, an organization that extends resources for individuals who have aged out of foster care. Ms. Fuller seeks to use her lived experience to support current youth

in foster care and reduce their traumatic experiences. She is focused on decreasing the high school dropout rate among youth in care and increasing the collegiate entry, retention, and graduation rates. Through her lived experience and career, Ms. Fuller hopes to cultivate support for foster youth aging out of care and, most importantly, reduce abuse within the system.

Monique Gonzalez, Experience as a Parent in the Child Welfare System



Monique Gonzalez is a proud mother of six children and has been married to her lucky husband since 2005. In 2015, she successfully navigated conservatorship through the Department of Family and Protective Services. Her children were removed due to allegations of abuse which were later ruled out. After actively engaging in services and incorporating tools necessary, they completed tasks required by the court and reunified in 2016 with all six of their children. Since then, she has actively helped to give a voice to parents by facilitating monthly meetings in Region 8 and by actively engaging in the Parent Collaboration Group. She has helped successfully raise attendance for a parent lead support group, called Parents Informing Parents (PIP), alongside Casey Family Programs in San Antonio. She collaborates with family court judges and Child Protection

Services (CPS) to make sure every opportunity is available to parents navigating the child welfare system. As a Parent Liaison in Region 8, she is the current Chair of the Parent Collaboration Group. She uses her experience to give parents a voice in the system. She has been asked to speak at several local and statewide events to bring the parent voice to the table. Mrs. Gonzalez has a very positive relationship with CASA, the Bexar County court judges, Child Protection Services, attorneys in the children’s court, and many other stakeholders. She works tirelessly to help educate parents on how to help themselves with the tools and information provided to them. Her mission is to ensure parents are strengthened by knowing their rights and connecting them to the services they need to navigate the system successfully towards reunification. She is very passionate about this and does it all on a volunteer basis because she wants to make sure no one is ever as confused as she and her husband were when they went through

the legal process. Her goal is to continue to empower parents and make a difference in the lives of as many families as she can.

Leroy Berrones Soto, Person with Lived Experience as a Youth in Foster Care



Leroy Berrones Soto, is currently 26 and a master’s student, studying Public Affairs with a concentration in Public Administration at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV), and projected to graduate March 2021. Mr. Berrones Soto works as a Student Project Associate for GEAR UP College in ACTION! under the UTRGV Office of College Access and K-12 Partnerships. In August 2019 Leroy obtained his bachelor’s degree in Criminal Justice at UTRGV.

Leroy was born in Rio Bravo, Tamaulipas, Mexico, and is the second oldest of his siblings. He spent most of his early to late teenage years in the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) foster care system, around 5 years total. He experienced 6 foster home placements, a shelter, and a kinship care placement during his time in the child welfare system.

Leroy’s last foster home before “aging-out” into college, provided an enormous amount of support, from both his foster parents’ and the foster care agency staff. This placement prioritized supporting his educational goals, leadership positions in school, and various extracurricular activities that supported his lifetime goals. Normalcy activities contributed to Leroy’s belief that all young people deserve access and supports to the same opportunities he had, more importantly to opportunities that fit their individual life goals.

Mr. Berrones Soto has 8 years (and counting) of leadership, advocacy, and consulting experience; on a local, state, and federal level, with a variety of stakeholders, while always prioritizing youth and young adult engagement at every level. He has collaborated with many Texas organizations such as with Texas Permanency Outcomes Project (TXPOP), DFPS workgroups and conferences, Texas Bar Continuing Legal Education (Texas BAR CLE), and Coalition for Empowering Children and Families.

Leroy has been awarded national recognition and internship and fellowship opportunities, such as the Certificate and Letter of Special Congressional Commendation (2016), Congressional Foster Youth Shadow Program in Washington, D.C. (2016), FosterClub’s Outstanding Young Leaders Program (2016), just to name a couple!

Since May 2018, Leroy was hired as a National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD) Reviewer, a federal consultant role with JBS International Inc., a sub-contractor of the Children’s Bureau an office of the United States Administration for Children and Families.

A dream of Leroy’s since childhood was to become a United States citizen and in April 2013, USCIS granted Leroy his Permanent Residency through the Special Immigration Juvenile Status (SIJS) program and in March 2019 he became a Naturalized U.S. Citizen. As a citizen he is excited to practice his right to vote, to help lift the voices of the unheard and to continue to contribute to the betterment of his community and our nation’s child welfare community.

Session 3: Judicial Panel on Developing a Trauma-Informed Court

Rosie Alvarado, Judge, 438th District Court



Elected in 2017, Judge Rosie Alvarado serves the citizens of Bexar County, Texas in the 438th District Court hearing a wide assortment of civil matters. In addition to her duties as a district court Judge, Judge Alvarado manages a restorative care court, called PEARLS Court. The mission of PEARLS Court is to invest in female girls ages 14 to 18 who have been placed in foster care. PEARLS Court supplies therapeutic care, case management, life skills training, programming, and mentoring. Appointed by the Texas Supreme Court, Judge Alvarado serves as a Commissioner on the Texas Children's Commission. She also serves on the Bexar County Juvenile Court Board, and is the Chair of the Bexar County Children's Court Oversight committee within the Bexar County district courts administration. Judge Alvarado was licensed to practice law in 2002, and during the course of her practice focused on personal injury, family law and federal civil trial law. She earned her BA in biology from St. Mary's University and her law degree from St. Mary's University School of Law, in San Antonio. She is licensed to practice law in all Texas courts, and in the United States District Court for the Western and Southern districts of Texas. Judge Alvarado has received recognition and awards, including the La Prensa Foundation Salute to Outstanding Women in Action and the Northside Education Foundation Pillar of Character Award. When not serving the citizens of Bexar County, she is an engaged and proud mother of two teens. Her hobbies include cycling and fitness, gardening, writing, and adventuring (skiing, white water rafting, hiking, camping, and scuba diving).

Carol Clark, Senior Judge



Judge Clark presided over the 321st District Court in Smith County from 1999 until retiring in 2018. Prior to taking the bench, she worked in private practice in Tyler. She also worked as CPS Caseworker for three years before earning her law degree in 1981. Judge Clark has been board certified in family law since 1993. Early in her judicial career, she became frustrated with the low number of successful reunifications with parents and/or family in the child welfare system as well as the services available to help parents and children in highly contested family law cases. After meeting Dr. Karyn Purvis of the TCU Institute of Child Development, Judge Clark started down the path to developing a trauma-informed court system. Ultimately, the local child welfare system including caseworkers, CASA, attorneys, and mental health providers became a team trained in science-based, trauma-informed methods. Parents, caregivers and children are now provided services that are scientifically researched and known to be effective. Judge Clark earned her bachelor's degree in elementary and special education from Texas Christian University and her Doctor of Jurisprudence from Baylor University. She is a native of Fort Worth and has been married to former District Attorney of Smith County A.D. Clark III for 45 years. Her hobbies include quilting and knitting, and she loves dachshunds.

Katrina Griffith, Associate Judge, Harris County Child Protection Court



Katrina Griffith graduated from the University of Houston Law Center in May of 2005. Right after passing the bar she became a partner in Chatman & Griffith, PLLC that later became known as The Griffith Law Firm, PLLC. The primary focus of her law practice was CPS ad litem appointments. In 2011, Judge Griffith became one of the first Child Welfare Law Specialists in Harris County through the National Association of Counsel for Children. In February 2014, she was appointed the Associate Judge of the newly created Harris County CPS Project Court now known as the Harris County Child Protection Court. Her docket consists of CPS permanency managing conservatorship (PMC) cases. Judge Griffith has created specialty dockets to assist children aging out of care and transitioning to DADS guardianship. Her philosophy for the PMC docket is to hear them often and keep them accountable. This has translated into a reduction in the number of children in PMC status and a reduction in the length of stay post-termination in Harris County.

Carlos Villalon, Associate Judge, Child Protection Court of the Rio Grande Valley



The Honorable Carlos Villalon Jr. was appointed as Associate Judge for the Child Protection Court of the Rio Grande Valley West on June 4, 2012, and presides over child welfare cases in both Hidalgo and Starr Counties. He has served as a Commissioner on the Texas Children's Commission and currently serves on the Commission's Statewide Collaborative on Trauma-Informed Care ("SCTIC") Implementation Task Force. His court is also an active participant in the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges' Implementation Sites Model Courts Project and the Child Protection Court Dual Status Pilot. Judge Villalon earned his bachelor's degree in Political Science from the University of Texas- Pan American in 1991; and after teaching middle school students for two-years in La Joya, Texas, followed his post-graduate education at St. Mary's University- School of Law where he earned his Doctor of Jurisprudence degree in 1997. His career as an attorney has spanned both the private and public sectors with an emphasis in Child Advocacy, Indigent Representation, Family Law, and Bankruptcy Law. His previous public service includes practice as an Assistant Criminal District Attorney, Assistant Attorney General, and Regional Attorney with the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services.

Session 4: Implementation and Sustaining the Effort

Darlene Byrne, Chief Justice, 3rd Court of Appeals



The Honorable Darlene Byrne is the Chief Justice of the Third Court of Appeals of Texas since January 2021. Prior to that she served for 20 years as the presiding judge of the 126th Judicial District Court in Travis County beginning in January 2001. Prior to her election in 2000, she practiced for thirteen years in the areas of employment, commercial and governmental entity litigation. She is a Commissioner on the Texas Children’s Commission. She is a past President of the National Council for Juvenile and Family Court Judges and a past Judge of the Year of National CASA, Texas CASA and CASA of Travis County. She is a past recipient of the many local, statewide and national awards due to her work in the area of child welfare. She currently serves as co-chair of the Judicial Council for National CASA, is an Advisory Council member for TexProtects, Partnerships for Children, Carrying Hope and the Seedling Foundation, is the Chair of the Texas Statewide Collaborative for Trauma Informed Care, on the Editorial Review Board for NCJFCJ’s Juvenile and Family Court Journal and on the Advisory Committee for the #WeToo project for Courts. Judge Byrne is the founding judge of the Travis County Family Drug Treatment Court and the Travis County Model Court of Children, Youth and Families. She has served on many boards and committees related to law and child welfare as well as community organizations.

Peter Sakai, Judge, 225th District Court



On November 7, 2006, Judge Peter Sakai was elected with nearly 60% of the entire Bexar County vote to the 225th District Court bench and was the highest vote-getter among the contested judicial races. In 2010 and 2014, Judge Sakai was unopposed for reelection for his second and third term of office. He is the first Asian-American to sit on a District Court bench in Bexar County. Through Judge Sakai’s leadership, Bexar County leads the state in the adoption of foster children. For his efforts, former Governor George W. Bush recognized Judge Sakai and his model court on the Governor’s Committee to Promote Adoption. Judge Sakai was born and raised in the Rio Grande Valley in South Texas. He received his BA and JD from the University of Texas at Austin. He has been a Chief Prosecutor for the DA’s Office and is an experienced trial litigator. He was appointed Associate Judge of the 289th District Court (Juvenile Court) and for 11 years was the Presiding Judge for the nationally renowned Bexar County Children’s Court. Judge Sakai is widely recognized as a community leader and child advocate with numerous local, state and national awards.

Jeff Cox, Senior Data Analysts, Texas Alliance of Child and Family Services



Jeff Cox joined the TACFS team as the Senior Data Analyst in September of 2020. Prior to his role with TACFS, Mr. Cox worked for four years at Statewide Intake, the abuse and neglect hotline with the Texas Department of Family and Protective services, as an intake specialist and supervisor. He has eight years of operations management and data analysis experience working in private sectors from green energy tech start-ups to independent restaurant groups. Mr. Cox earned his Bachelor's degree in psychology from Texas Tech University.