

BECOME PART OF THE CHILDREN'S ADVOCACY INSTITUTE



What is the Children's Advocacy Institute?

The Children's Advocacy Institute (CAI) was founded in 1989 as a part of the Center for Public Interest Law at the USD School of Law. Through its academic component, CAI trains USD Law students to be effective child advocates, and provides three unique clinical opportunities. CAI also trains attorneys to engage in Dependency Court practice through a variety of continuing legal education courses.

In addition to its academic offerings, CAI is one of the nation's preeminent child advocacy law firms. Active at the state and federal levels, CAI promotes the health, safety, and well-being of children and youth through legislative and regulatory advocacy, impact litigation, research and public education projects. CAI's professional staff consists of three attorneys in San Diego, one attorney/policy advocate in Sacramento, and one attorney/policy advocate in Washington, D.C.



Children's Advocacy Institute



How can I become part of CAI?

USD Law students have the unique opportunity to participate in CAI's academic program:

- 1) The first element to CAI's academic program is the substantive course **Child Rights and Remedies**, offered only in the fall semester. Taught by Professor Robert Fellmeth, this is a three-unit survey course covering issues, politics, laws and cases impacting the rights of children and youth. Among other things, students study principles in dependency and delinquency law, tort issues relevant to children, and current constitutional issues affecting children's rights.
- 2) Second, students who have completed or are taking **Child Rights and Remedies** are eligible to take the **Child Advocacy Clinic**.

What is the Child Advocacy Clinic?

USD's **Child Advocacy Clinic** is one of the few law school programs in the nation that allows law students to directly represent children in court, advocate for their receipt of appropriate services and accommodations, *and* work on local, state or national policy issues vital to children's interests. The **Child Advocacy Clinic** offers three distinct clinical opportunities:

- 1) **Dependency Clinic**. USD Law students assist attorneys from Children's Legal Services of San Diego or Dependency Legal Services of San Diego in the representation of abused and neglected children or their parents, respectively, in Dependency Court proceedings.
- 2) **Delinquency/At-Risk Youth Clinic**. Working under the supervision of attorneys from the San Diego County Public Defender's Juvenile Unit, USD Law students advocate on behalf of delinquent youth in order to ensure they receive the educational, mental health, physical health, and other services they need while they are under the jurisdiction of the Juvenile Court.
- 3) **Policy Clinic**. USD Law students work with CAI attorneys on current advocacy projects, such as state and federal legislative or regulatory advocacy, impact litigation, legal research, or public education projects.

Tell me more about the Dependency Clinic.

- Dependency Clinic interns are assigned to work with experienced attorneys from Children's Legal Services of San Diego or Dependency Legal Services of San Diego, and assist those attorneys in the representation of children or parents in Dependency Court, where all decisions are made as to the legal rights of children who are found to be abused or neglected. Placement with the County Counsel's Juvenile Division may also be available. Dependency Clinic students are exposed to a wide variety of experiences, such as interviewing clients and witnesses; presenting evidence during bench trials; preparing briefs and memoranda; participating in settlement conferences; conducting field work with investigators; and making court appearances as necessary and appropriate.
- **Dependency Clinic interns must work at least 16 hours per week with their supervising attorneys.** In addition, interns in the Dependency Clinic meet as a group once per week for a one-hour classroom component.
- Students interested in participating in the Dependency Clinic must be enrolled in or have completed Evidence and Civil Procedure, in addition to Child Rights and Remedies. The Dependency Clinic, which is offered in both the Fall and Spring semesters, is a 4-unit clinic.

Tell me more about the Delinquency/At-Risk Youth Clinic.

- Delinquency/At Risk Youth Clinic interns advocate on behalf of delinquent youth in order to ensure they receive the appropriate educational, mental, physical, and other services they need while they are under the jurisdiction of the Juvenile Court. Interns review comprehensive case files of youth to identify areas of need and then advocate on the youth's behalf with regard to issues such as school discipline, special education services, school placement, mental health assessments/services, and health care, in order to protect the youth's rights with regard to those matters and to address underlying issues that might be contributing to the youth's delinquency.
- **Delinquency/At-Risk Youth Clinic interns must work at least 16 hours per week at the Public Defender's Office.** In addition, interns in the Delinquency/ At-Risk Youth Clinic meet as a group once per week for a one-hour classroom component.
- Students interested in participating in the Delinquency/At Risk Youth Clinic must be enrolled in or have completed Evidence and Civil Procedure, in addition to Child Rights and Remedies. The Delinquency/At Risk Youth Clinic, which is offered in both the Fall and Spring semesters, is a 4-unit clinic.

Tell me more about the Policy Clinic.

- The Policy Clinic offers students a chance to pursue a research, writing, and/or advocacy project on a variety of issues, such as foster care, child abuse, children's health care, juvenile justice, education, etc. These projects include petitioning an agency to adopt or amend regulations, drafting model legislation, conducting research and position papers relevant to pending legislation, researching and writing reports on child-related issues, and participating in impact litigation, among other things.
- The Policy Clinic, which is offered in the Fall, Spring, and Summer semesters, can be taken for 1, 2, or 3 units.

How do I sign up for Child Rights and Remedies?

Child Rights and Remedies is offered **only in the fall semester**. To take the course, you must register for it during the online registration process that will take place in the spring semester. Child Rights and Remedies is a prerequisite to participation in the Child Advocacy Clinic.

How do I sign up for Child Advocacy Clinic?

If you are interested in the Child Advocacy Clinic, meet with Prof. Jessica Heldman or Elisa Weichel ASAP to get your name on our lists for future semesters. Our Clinic spots are limited and fill up quickly. During each registration period, Jessica or Elisa will notify students on the lists regarding availability in the clinics of their choice and describe additional application procedures, if applicable. Once you are admitted to a Clinic, you will receive a permission slip which you will bring to the Records Office to register for the Clinic.

How can I get more information?

Contact Prof. Bob Fellmeth, Prof. Jessica Heldman, or Elisa Weichel for more information. Feel free to visit them at CAI's offices (located at the rear entrance of the Legal Research Center), email them at cpil@sandiego.edu (Prof. Fellmeth), jheldman@sandiego.edu (Prof. Heldman), or eweichel@sandiego.edu (Elisa), or call them at (619) 260-4806. More information about CAI can also be obtained on our website — www.caichlldlaw.org.

What do past USD Law students say about the Children's Advocacy Institute?



Every time I walk into the Children's Advocacy Institute, I feel like I've arrived home. Meeting and working with Prof. Fellmeth, Elisa Weichel, and other staff members has been a true pleasure. I've learned so much about dependency law, education law, and child advocacy through the dependency clinics, as well as my involvement with the student organization ACE. I look forward to applying the knowledge I learned from CAI once I become an attorney and hope I make a difference in children's lives. — **Holly McCord**, 2014 Co-Recipient of the James A. D'Angelo Outstanding Child Advocate Award; 2013 Recipient of the Joel and Denise Golden Merit Award in Child Advocacy



My involvement with CAI was the highlight of my law school career. I highly recommend CAI's Dependency Clinic to anyone interested in getting practical experience in a courtroom setting. — **Matthew Felder**, 2013 Co-Recipient of the James A. D'Angelo Outstanding Child Advocate Award



"Before entering law school, I had a curious interest for child advocacy law. After having the opportunity to learn the importance of child advocacy law under the direction of Professor Fellmeth and participate in CAI's dependency clinic while in law school, I now have a passion for child advocacy and plan to focus my legal career in this area of the law. Without a doubt, CAI has made a huge impact in my life and is an invaluable program at the USD School of Law." — **Georgia Gebhardt**, 2013 Co-Recipient of the James A. D'Angelo Outstanding Child Advocate Award; 2012 Recipient of the Joel and Denise Golden Merit Award in Child Advocacy



"Working with the Children's Advocacy Institute was the highlight of my law school career because I got to see firsthand the enormous impact those of us in the legal field can make in the lives of children who otherwise may not have a voice in determining their futures." — **Alexandra Byler**, 2012 Co-Recipient of the James A. D'Angelo Outstanding Child Advocate Award



"Starting law school at USD, I was most excited about the Child Advocacy Institute at USD. Professor Fellmeth encouraged my interest in juvenile law through his course and by graciously allowing me to pick his brain on international issues relating to juvenile dependency. My participation in the Dependency, Delinquency, and Policy Clinics reinforced my desire to pursue a career in Juvenile Dependency and gave me the perfect platform to apply for jobs and interview in the field. I am glad to say I now represent children in Juvenile Dependency full time, and I owe a big thanks to CAI for getting me here!" — **Sarah Shelvy Vaona**, 2012 Co-Recipient of the James A. D'Angelo Outstanding Child Advocate Award



"Participating in the [CAI] clinics taught me a great deal about child advocacy, and has put me in a position to continue advocating for foster youth in the future. I believe directly representing foster youth has given me a foundation in child advocacy law that will allow me to advocate for children at the policy level....I believe through statutory reform, many issues that foster youth face can be addressed before they ever manifest in the life of a child." — **Brenden Shaw**, 2011 Co-Recipient of the James A. D'Angelo Outstanding Child Advocate Award



"Working with Elisa and Bob was both rewarding and eye opening. My experience working for CAI exposed me to the everyday fight on the ground by working side by side with the volunteers, lawyers, and social workers who dedicate themselves to helping children on a daily basis as well as the behind the scenes fight to change policy and legislation at the local, state, and federal level. The work the center does on behalf of children in San Diego, California, and the Nation is invaluable." — **Phil Ciccarelli**, 2010 Co-Recipient of the James A. D'Angelo Outstanding Child Advocate Award



"What children need and deserve isn't always what they get. The seriousness of that disparity was driven home through my CAI experience and that keeps me involved in the fight for the well-being of neglected and abused children. Being a part of an organization that has impacted the lives of so many children was tremendously rewarding and educational. My experience at CAI is the driving force behind my desire to continue to make a difference in the lives of abused and neglected children." — **Lauren Yip**, 2009 Co-Recipient of the James A. D'Angelo Outstanding Child Advocate Award



Children's Advocacy Institute Child Advocacy Clinic Application

Name: _____

Phone: _____ E-Mail: _____

1. I expect to graduate in (month/year) _____ / _____.

2. I completed *Child Rights and Remedies* in Fall _____ or

I will be enrolled in *Child Rights and Remedies* in Fall _____.

3. I prefer to participate in the (check all that are appropriate):

_____ Policy Clinic (1, 2 or 3 units)

_____ Dependency Clinic (4 units)

_____ Delinquency Clinic (4 units)

4. I am interested in the Child Advocacy Clinic because:

**Please complete this form and return it to Prof. Jessica Heldman
or Elisa Weichel in the CAI offices (rear entrance of the LRC).**

Please note that you can add **Child Rights & Remedies** to your schedule during the online registration process, but you must obtain a signed permission slip from Jessica or Elisa and bring it to the Law School Records Office in order to add the **Child Advocacy Clinic** to your schedule.

THANK YOU!