

## Introduction

### The Children's Mental Health and Trauma Practice Kit's Purpose and Organization

Welcome to the Children's Law Center's Children's Mental Health and Trauma Practice Kit, updated as of May 2018. This Practice Kit aims to provide DC child welfare practitioners with easy access to materials to better understand their client's mental health and provides tips on advocating for clients experiencing mental illness. This Practice Kit is primarily designed to serve as a resource for Guardians *ad litem* ("GALs") and attorneys advocating for youth in DC's foster care system.

In previous iterations, we aspired to make the Children's Mental Health and Trauma Practice Kit a "one-stop-shop" for information pertaining to mental health service provision and resources for children and adolescents in the foster care system. In this edition, we endeavored to make the Practice Kit more user-friendly. We streamlined the Practice Kit to include only the most salient information that may be pertinent to your client work. In reorganizing this Practice Kit, we deliberately removed those attachments that can be found online; in their place, we created documents with links to the relevant websites where you can find particular resources online. If there are particular documents we have determined to be of utmost importance that are not readily available online, we selectively included them as attachments to this Practice Kit. We believe these changes will enhance your user-experience as you navigate this Practice Kit. If you are seeking particular resources that are not included in this Practice Kit, please contact Children's Law Center's Helpline to request the specific documents.

For ease of use, we have divided the Practice Kit into different sections based on key topical issues (*i.e.*, mental health & foster care in D.C., accessing mental health services, inpatient hospitalizations and psychiatric residential treatment facilities, etc.). Each section includes: 1) a Section Overview document which summarizes the documents and material included in the section folder and provides a brief summary of the legal citations and resources you may need to reference for more information on the topic; 2) any tips sheets, information sheets, or worksheets the Children's Law Center has created on the topic for practitioners' use; and 3) website links for any relevant external resources you may wish to access directly. The Table of Contents provides a comprehensive landscape of the Practice Kit's offerings for ease of use.

We have attempted to locate the most current and up-to-date information in all of the areas covered in this Practice Kit to ensure the information is current as of May 2018. However, the landscape frequently changes. As such, practitioners should independently verify the currentness of guidance and materials contained in this Practice Kit before employing these resources in practice.

We hope you find the contents of the Children's Mental Health and Trauma Practice Kit useful, and appreciate feedback as to how we can improve this resource in years to come.