

Children's Champion

Helping Children Soar

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Spotlight: 2-Year-Old Jayden

Jayden was born prematurely at 28 weeks old and spent the first two months of his life fighting for strength in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit at the hospital. His mother took him home from the hospital, but Jayden's first home was not a loving one.



After only a few months at home, he and his mother were involved in a car accident, and the car was totaled. Jayden's mother refused to take him to the hospital and instead went to his father's apartment. Jayden's parents—no longer in a relationship—began to fight, and his mother became increasingly aggressive. Jayden, a defenseless four-month old with developmental delays, became a pawn in their argument, and suffered serious injury at the hands of his mother who recklessly banged his head against the wall while snatching him from his father's arms. Jayden then dropped to the floor and suffered further trauma to his head.

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News from Judith



The District's annual budget debate affects all DC residents – but none are affected more than the 45,000 children who live in poverty, including the 2,000 in foster care and the tens of thousands with special health and education needs. For these children, government programs are literally the difference between staying safely at home or ending up in foster care. The difference between having a learning disability properly addressed or failing out of school and ending up in jail.

With the District facing a \$322 million budget gap for FY 2012, Children's Law Center knew that big cuts would have to be made. Given the effect even small cuts can have on children's lives, CLC made budget advocacy our top policy priority this Spring.

Serving more than 1,200 children every year gives Children's Law Center a unique lens through which to identify the impact of potential cuts. Our lawyers know, for example, that the Rapid Housing program works – keeping families together and foster youth from aging out into homeless shelters. We know the Grandparent Caregiver Program works, because we help grandparents step in to raise their grandchildren, rather than relinquish them to the foster care system, by securing financial assistance from the program.

Because of our work with the Mayor's office, CLC knew both programs were threatened. Jumping into action, our policy team was able to show the Mayor that both programs were cost effective – and neither was cut.

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Spotlight (continued)

The police soon intervened thanks to an emergency call placed by the neighbors, and Jayden was taken to the emergency room. After spending four days in the hospital, his father brought him home. Unfortunately, his father was unwilling to care for him, and returned Jayden to his mother's care after just one day. Jayden was quickly removed from his mother's care by the District's child welfare agency and taken to a group home where he lived for a month until his great-aunt volunteered to take him in.

Ms. M, Jayden's great-aunt, is a wonderful, caring woman who has already done much to help Jayden recover from the trauma he has endured in his young life. CLC helped her to win guardianship of Jayden so that he can stay with her permanently. CLC also worked with her and her family to determine that guardianship was a better choice than adoption, negotiated a higher subsidy rate that more accurately reflected Jayden's needs, and ensured that Jayden had all the health care and developmental supports he needed.

Today, Jayden is an energetic two-year-old who loves to play and is learning to explore his world. In the safe and loving home of his great-aunt—and with the help of CLC— he has found a place to thrive.

In Joe's Words: A Note from Joe Figini, Board Member

I never thought I would find myself here: an adoptive dad, on the Board of a legal services nonprofit, and co-chairing their annual Benefit. When I graduated from the University of Michigan Law School in 1990, I joined Shaw Pittman (now Pillsbury Winthrop Shaw Pittman) and was ready for demanding work and hours as a litigation associate. However, during my fourth year, Pillsbury made me a surprising offer: a six-month assignment as the first-ever loaned associate for the Legal Aid Society of DC. This experience would change my life forever.

My first day I defended a child support credit requested by the father of a little girl whose mother was no longer caring for her properly. On the third day, I represented a domestic violence victim who had small children and nowhere to move. I inherited a docket of dozens of child custody and landlord/tenant cases with a dizzying array of deadlines and court dates. The grave reality quickly set in – if I didn't help these clients, people could lose their homes and their children, or worse. Although I didn't sleep well for months, I experienced the daily joy of giving a voice in court to those who desperately needed it. Of all the experiences I had in that action-packed six months, it was my clients who remained positive and hopeful despite their difficult circumstances that taught me the most. A "thank you" from a grandmother who could now afford to support her grandchildren became the best form of compensation.

My time at Legal Aid sparked my passion for legal services work, and I spent many years thereafter taking on pro bono cases. I noticed that my work helping children always seemed to inspire me most. Today, I am honored to serve on the Board of Directors of such a worthy organization as Children's Law Center whose mission, each and every day, is to improve the lives of the District's most vulnerable citizens. Unsafe housing, lack of special education services, instability for children in foster care: these are issues that all of us, regardless of our politics and persuasions, can believe in and rally around. As an adoptive dad, they have become very personal to me because I realize that what CLC provides for its clients are the very same things I want for my son, and I know from personal experience how crucial the role of the lawyer is in laying the groundwork for them to happen.

And if you aren't sure of that last point, spend some time with a CLC attorney at the annual [Helping Children Soar Benefit](#) in September, or watch CLC's [videos](#) explaining the work firsthand – I promise you, it might change your life forever.

I'm so proud to chair this year's Benefit with Christine Kearns, managing partner of Pillsbury's Washington, DC office. Law firms like Pillsbury are the unsung heroes of the movement to provide free legal services to the most disadvantaged members of our community. We hope to see you at the Benefit!

News from Judith (continued)

However, the Mayor's proposed budget had other devastating cuts, both small and large. Two were of particular concern to the children we serve - \$3.4 million in children's mental health services and \$20.5 million for homeless services.

To prevent these devastating cuts we did what we do best – built relationships, provided accurate, detailed legal analysis, identified un-accessed federal funding, suggested alternative cuts, developed persuasive arguments and worked with our allies in the Council and the community.

Our efforts made a difference. The funds for children's mental health were partly restored and homeless services for families were protected – victories that will save many lives.

Now that the District's economy is recovering and revenue is increasing, Children's Law Center will work with the Mayor and the Council to invest this revenue in improving opportunities for our most vulnerable children and building a stronger city.



Pictures from CLC's Inaugural Speaker Series Event



Mr. Woodward speaks to the crowd about his experiences at *The Washington Post* and uncovering stories.



Mr. Woodward with CLC staff and Advisory Board. (From left to right) Sidley Austin Associate Jill Caiazzo, CLC Executive Director Judith Sandalow, Bob Woodward, CLC Board Member, Advisory Board Chair and Jones Day Partner Carmen McLean, American University's Jessica Waters, Williams & Connolly Associate Beth Levene, Hunton & Willams Associate Alisa Van Cott, and CLC Pro Bono Director Evelyn Becker.



SunTrust's Michael Phung and John Brasseux speak with CLC Executive Director and Mr. Woodward. Special thanks to SunTrust for underwriting this event.

Bob Woodward Kicks Off Children's Law Center's Speaker Series

Tuesday night, Bob Woodward spoke to a crowded room at Washington SunTrust Headquarters as part of Children's Law Center's inaugural Speaker Series. An event hosted by CLC's Advisory Board, the Speaker Series aims to bring together the CLC community to hear from prominent Washingtonians in conversations about law, politics and life in the nation's capital. The three-part series features Woodward, Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor and a panel discussion on pro bono opportunities.

Mr. Woodward spoke colorfully about his career as a journalist and author, sharing anecdotes from his meetings with presidents and confidential sources alike. Having covered politics in the District for four decades, Mr. Woodward's unique perspective lent itself to an interesting conversation about the changing relationship between journalism and politics.

What keeps Bob Woodward up at night? Secretive government was his simple answer. He warned that lack of openness in government is one of the largest and potentially most dangerous problems our society faces today.

He also compared his strategy for reaching the truth on a given issue to CLC's focus on the whole child. Whenever he covers a White House issue, for example, Mr. Woodward conducts interviews at the CIA, State Department and Pentagon as well, always looking for the big picture. Mr. Woodward commended CLC for its innovative and successful approach of focusing on the whole child's well-being – ensuring a solid foundation of family, health and education – rather than on the single legal problem that arises, a method similar to his own approach to investigative reporting.

The next speaker series event will be a panel discussion on pro bono opportunities at CLC (July 19th, 5–7pm), an event aimed at summer law firm associates. October 26th, Justice Sonia Sotomayor will share her thoughts on the justice system.

Learn more about the events [here](#).
Registration for both events is available [here](#).



Pro Bono for Summer Associates: It's Never Too Early to Start

Many law students, including those who go into private firm practice, came to law school to uphold the best tradition of the bar: a commitment to public service and equal justice. At the same time, summer associates are frequently looking for opportunities to meet with clients, get out of their offices, and learn more about the DC community. Pro bono work is a great opportunity to further all of these goals. Although summer associates generally cannot represent a client in court, there are still terrific opportunities to get involved and learn more about pro bono work in DC.



Here are some ideas:

Help out an attorney at your firm who has an existing pro bono case.

Attorneys at your firm working on pro bono cases would probably love help with factual investigation and legal research. Family law cases often involve significant factual investigation, including witness interviews, background checks, and client meetings. Ask the pro bono partner or coordinator at your firm to direct you to someone handling a case in your area of interest.

Go to DC Superior Court over your lunch hour. Spending time at DC Superior Court (555 Indiana Avenue, NW) is an eye-opening experience for anyone interested in handling pro bono cases in DC. Domestic Relations proceedings are open to the public, and most Judges take lunch from 1:00 p.m. to 2:30 p.m. You will also see first-hand the need for pro bono attorneys in family law cases: more than three out of four plaintiffs in custody cases are pro se.

Sign up for CLC's summer associate event and learn more. On July 19, 2011, from 5:00 pm to 7:00 pm, CLC is hosting an open house and panel discussion for summer associates. Attorneys who serve as mentors to pro bono attorneys in caregiver representation, guardian ad litem, and special education cases will talk about opportunities to get involved. Check in with an Advisory Board member at your firm, learn more about the event on our [website](#), or contact [Jessica Gelin](#) to RSVP.

"Lunch and Law" with CLC Next Call on September 14th



Did you know that special education is consistently the most common referral from DC health clinics? Are you interested in learning more about ADHD—one of the most common learning disabilities— and

special education services in the District? Please join CLC on **September 14, 2011** at **12:30pm** for "Lunch & Law."

CLC's Health Access Project Director Tracy Goodman and Supervising Attorney Lauren Onkeles will present "**ADHD: When and How to Seek Special Education Services.**"

To join the conference call, please dial **605-562-3000** and enter code **964021#**.

Our final "[Lunch and Law](#)" for the year (**The First 72 Hours: When a Child is Removed from the Home for Abuse or Neglect**) will be held on November 16, 2011 at 12:30pm.

Upcoming Training

Caregiver Representation Pro Bono Attorney Training

Tuesday, June 21, 2011, 1:00pm - 5:00pm
(Check-in will be at 12:45pm)

White & Case LLP
701 13th Street, NW

Please RSVP to [Melanie Jaskolka](#)
or call (202) 467-4900 x586

Do you have new or gently used school supplies? Please consider donating them to our clients.



[Click here to learn more.](#)



Children's Law Center works to give every child in the District of Columbia a solid foundation of family, health and education by providing free legal services and advocating for citywide changes.

www.childrenslawcenter.org