

ALLEGHENY COUNTY BAR ASSOCIATION

JUDICIAL CANDIDATE PLEDGE

I, Alyssa Burrell Cowan, a candidate for judicial office, have familiarized myself with the Code of Judicial Conduct and the Code of Civility, as promulgated by the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania. I have directed special attention to Canon 4 of the Code of Judicial Conduct, including Rules 4.1, 4.2 and 4.4. I agree to conduct my judicial campaign consistent therewith and further consistent with *Republican Party v. White*, 536 U.S. 765 (2002). I further pledge that all campaign advertising will be done fairly, accurately, truthfully, and will maintain the dignity appropriate to the judicial office which I am seeking.

Alyssa Burrell Cowan

Signature of Candidate

4/8/24

Date

ALLEGHENY COUNTY BAR ASSOCIATION JUDICIARY COMMITTEE
ACKNOWLEDGMENT AND AUTHORIZATION

As a candidate or potential candidate for Allegheny County Court of Common Pleas the Pennsylvania Appellate or Federal Courts, I hereby acknowledge and authorize the procedures of the Allegheny County Bar Association Judiciary Committee, including the following:

1. If I become a candidate, the Allegheny County Bar Association Judiciary Committee will make available to the public the Questionnaire, and my responses, except for the questions and responses which are acknowledged to be confidential, which information shall remain available only to the Committee.
2. My responses are provided without breaching client confidentiality as embodied in Rule 1.6 of the Rules of Professional Conduct.
3. If I become a candidate, the rating assigned to me by the Committee will be publicly announced. Ratings remain valid for 2 years but are subject to reevaluation upon request.
4. Should I receive a *Not Recommended* rating the Committee will endeavor to notify me prior to a public announcement. If I withdraw from the race, the rating will not be announced, and the questionnaires will not be published.
5. I hereby authorize the Pennsylvania Judicial Conduct Board, the Disciplinary Board of the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania, and the Pennsylvania Board of Law Examiners to transmit my entire file and record, including confidential information contained therein, to the Allegheny County Bar Association Judiciary Committee. I hereby specifically waive any confidentiality rights I may have in those records.
6. I hereby authorize the Judicial Conduct Board, the Disciplinary Board, and the Board of Law Examiners, or the equivalent, in any jurisdiction where I have practiced, been admitted to practice or have applied to either take a bar examination or for admission to the bar to transmit my entire file and record, including confidential information contained therein, to the Allegheny County Bar Association Judiciary Committee. I hereby specifically waive any confidentiality rights I may have in those records.
7. The Allegheny County Bar Association Judiciary Committee may change, during the course of my campaign for office, the original rating assigned to me for cause.

4/8/24
Date

Alyssa Burrell Cowan
Type or print name

Alyssa Burrell Cowan
Signature

ACBA JUDICIARY COMMITTEE QUESTIONNAIRE FOR LAWYER APPLICANTS

I am seeking a rating for the following court:

- Allegheny County Court of Common Pleas
- Pennsylvania Commonwealth Court
- Pennsylvania Superior Court
- Pennsylvania Supreme Court

1. State your full name and list any other name by which you have ever been known.

Alyssa Burrell Cowan
Alyssa Ann Burrell

2. Date and place of birth.

August 15, 1976
Columbus, Ohio

3. Are you a naturalized citizen? If so, give date and place of naturalization.

No

4. Family status:

a) Are you married? If so, state the date of marriage and your spouse's full name, including maiden name, if applicable.

Yes, I am married. My spouse is David Andrew Cowan. We were married on June 5, 1999 in Pittsburgh at St. Paul's Cathedral. My maiden name is Alyssa Ann Burrell.

b) Have you been divorced? If so, state the date, the number of the case and the court.

No, I have not been divorced.

5. Have you served in the military? If so,

a) Give dates, branch of service, rank of rate and present status;

No, I have not served in the military.

b) Have you ever been rejected or released from the armed services for reasons other than honorable? If so, give details.

No, I have never been rejected or released from the armed services.

6. List each college and law school you attended, including dates of attendance, any scholastic honors, and the degrees awarded. If you left any institution without receiving a degree, state the reason for leaving.

**Temple University Beasley School of Law
Philadelphia, PA**

Attended August 2001 to May 2004

Juris Doctor, May 2004

Rubin-Presser Social Justice Fellow; Henry J. Richardson Award for the Best Paper in International Human Rights Law

University of Pennsylvania

Philadelphia, PA

Attended August 1998 to May 2000

Master of Social Work, May 2000

American University,

Washington, DC

Attended August 1994 to May 1998

BA Anthropology, minor Art History

Magna Cum Laude, Phi Beta Kappa; Dean's List all semesters; Stafford H. Cassell Award

7. List all jurisdictions in which you have applied to take a bar examination, have applied for admission or have been admitted to practice. Include dates of admissions and if not admitted, give application dates and explain the outcome.

Bar of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, (2011)

District of Columbia Bar (2005)

State Bar of Maryland (2004)

8. List your professional mailing address and telephone number including the name of any associated law firm. Please also list any personal and professional social media usernames and/or handles and any websites you maintain or to which you know that your profile is shared.

Allegheny County Law Department

Suite 300

445 Fort Pitt Blvd.

Pittsburgh, PA 15219

<https://www.facebook.com/alyssa.b.cowan> (personal)

<https://www.facebook.com/Cowan4Judge/> (previous judicial campaign)

9. Describe chronologically your law practice and experience after your graduation from law school, including:
 - a) Whether you served as clerk to a judge and, if so, the name of the judge, the court, and the dates of the period you were a clerk;
 - b) Whether you practiced alone and, if so, the addresses and the dates;
 - c) The dates, names and addresses of law firms or offices, companies or governmental

agencies with which you have been connected and the nature of your connection with each;
and,

Allegheny County Law Department

445 Fort Pitt Blvd., Pittsburgh, PA 15219

Assistant County Solicitor and Supervisor of the DHS Legal Unit, 3/2018-Present

Provide legal representation for Allegheny County Children, Youth, and Families (CYF) and litigate child welfare dependency cases in the Family Division of the Fifth Judicial District Court of Common Pleas. Monitor cases to ensure compliance with the Pennsylvania Juvenile Act and Adoption Act as well as federal statutes such as the Adoption and Safe Families Act and the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act. Represent the law department in Allegheny County's Interagency Heroin and Other Opioids Task Force and the Quality Improvement Center on Domestic Violence in Child Welfare pilot project. Review contracts in all services areas for the Department of Human Services. Manage a unit of sixteen attorneys providing legal representation to the Department of Human Services of Allegheny County.

University of Pittsburgh School of Social Work

4200 Fifth Ave. Pittsburgh, PA 15260

Adjunct Professor, 8/2022-Present

Teach graduate level courses to students in the Master's Degree in Social Work program. The fall semester course is "Advocacy and Lobbying." This course provides an overview of how nonprofit organizations can engage in effective public policy advocacy and lobbying on behalf of its mission and the people it serves. The spring semester course is "Children and Families at Risk." This course focuses on identifying risk factors and assessing risk to children, youth, families, and communities using a variety of theoretical approaches and knowledge of human development throughout the life course. Through readings, discussion, and several written assignments, students are expected to demonstrate an understanding of how both protective and promotive factors can help to mitigate risk factors present for children, youth, families, and communities considering the context of the broader social, cultural, political, and economic systems.

PA Statewide Adoption and Permanency Network (SWAN), Family Design Resources

471 JPLWick Dr., Harrisburg, PA

Legal Services Training Specialist, 1/2014-10/2017

Provided legal orientation and ongoing training to all SWAN paralegals as well as caseworkers and other child welfare professionals in sixteen counties. Developed and provided legal training at annual permanency conference and statewide quarterly meetings. Provided training, legal consultation, writing, and research support to all legally focused components of SWAN. Responded to SWAN Warmline inquiries from the public. Participated in PA's Statewide Workgroup on the implementation of the federal Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act as well as PA's Statewide Workgroup on Education Success and Truancy Prevention.

KidsVoice

437 Grant St. #700, Pittsburgh, PA

Staff Attorney, 8/2011-1/2014

Provided Guardian *ad litem* representation to dependent children in Allegheny County. Advocated for children's best interests in court and ensured that children received all needed services through the Allegheny County's Children, Youth, and Families. Monitored children's medical and mental health needs. Acted as children's educational decision maker for special education services in school and for the development and implementation of their Individualized Education Plans as required under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

Office of the Attorney General for the District of Columbia, Child Protection Section

Washington, D.C. 20001

Assistant Attorney General, 3/2005-6/2007; 6/2008-8/2009

Provided representation for the District of Columbia in civil child abuse and neglect, termination of parental rights, custody, and adoption cases in the Family Court of the D.C. Superior Court. Litigated child abuse and neglect cases in D.C. Superior Court and mediated cases as an alternative to trial. Monitored cases to ensure compliance with the D.C. Code and federal statutes such as the Adoption and Safe Families Act as well as the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children. Conducted legal and court trainings for newly hired social workers at D.C.'s Child and Family Services Agency.

American Bar Association Center on Children and the Law

1050 Connecticut Ave. NW #400, Washington, D.C. 20036

Research Attorney, 10/2004-3/2005; Legal Intern, 6/2003-12/2003

Evaluated recent statutory reforms to advise the Supreme Court of Ohio's Court Improvement Project on how to revise the child protection laws of the state. Completed fifty state review of statutes, case law, and rules regarding representation of children in child abuse and neglect hearings by attorneys rather than laypersons. Attended Senate Government Affairs Committee hearing on parental relinquishment of children to access mental health services and House Ways and Means Committee hearing on the Bush administration's flexible funding foster care proposal.

d) Any other relevant particulars.

10. Regarding your practice:

a) What has been the general character of your practice, dividing it into periods with dates if its character has changed over the years?

Throughout my career, I have concentrated on seeking various opportunities in child welfare law. When I entered law school, I had already acquired a Master's in Social Work and had child welfare experience so I planned on obtaining a law degree to further this interest. I always intended to utilize both of my degrees in my career. I was fortunate to receive a scholarship at Temple Law through the Rubin-Presser Social Justice Fellows program that allowed me to graduate with minimal debt and pursue a career in public interest law. This has allowed me to remain committed to and develop an expertise in child welfare law over the course of my legal career.

b) Describe your typical clients and mention the areas in which you have concentrated your practice.

At D.C. 's Office of the Attorney General and in my current position as Assistant County Solicitor, I have had government agencies as my clients.

At the Statewide Adoption and Permanency Network, I provided legal trainings to paralegals, caseworkers, attorneys, hearing officers, and judges.

At Kids Voice, I had child clients in my roles Guardian Ad Litem and Medical/Educational Decision-Maker.

11. Regarding the last ten years:

- a) Did you appear in court regularly, occasionally, or not at all? If the frequency of your appearances in court has varied during this period, describe each such variance, giving the dates thereof;

In my current position as Assistant County Solicitor, I have appeared regularly in court two to three days per week. Prior to this position, I was providing legal trainings. Currently, I am supervising a unit of 16 attorneys and I appear less frequently in court, approximately two to four times per month.

In my role as Guardian ad Litem at Kids Voice, I appeared regularly in court twice per week. In my role as Medical and Educational Decision-Maker at Kids Voice, I appeared regularly in court once per week.

In my role as Assistant Attorney General at DC's Office of the Attorney General, I appeared regularly in court three days per week.

- b) What percentage of these appearances was in:

1. Federal courts: **none**

2. State courts of record: **PA Court of Common Pleas and DC's Superior Court**

3. Other courts: **none**

- c) What percentage of your litigation was:

1. Civil:

2. Criminal:

3. Family: **100%**

4. Orphans' Division:

- d) State the number of cases in courts of record you tried to verdict or judgment (rather than settled), indicating whether you were sole counsel, chief counsel or associate counsel.

Approximately 500 as sole counsel

- e) What percentage of these trials were:

1. Jury:

2. Non-jury: **100%**

12. Summarize your experience in court the last ten years, indicating:

- a) Whether your appearances in court were more or less frequent;

Over the last ten years, I have appeared in court regularly about two to three days per week. Currently, I am supervising a unit of 16 attorneys and I appear less frequently in court, approximately two to four times per month. I assumed the role of supervisor in August 2023.

- b) Any significant changes in the percentages stated in your answers to question 11(b), (c) and (e); and,

No

- c) Any significant changes in the number of cases per year in courts of record you tried to verdict or judgment (rather than settled), as sole counsel, chief counsel or associate counsel.

No

13. Describe five of the most significant litigated matters which you personally handled (give the citations if the cases were reported and docket numbers if unreported) by providing a capsule summary of each case and a succinct statement of what you believe to be the particular significance of the case; the party or parties whom you represented; the name of the Court, Judge and contact information if known of counsel for any other party; your role in the litigation; and the final disposition.

Adjudication Hearing for S.K.

Date: July 22, 2020

Name of Court: Court of Common Pleas of the 5th Judicial District

Judge: The Honorable David Spurgeon

Parent Advocate: Lauren Darbouze, Esq.

Darbouze Law Group

301 Grant St. #4300

Pittsburgh, PA 15219

(412) 849-6831

Parent Advocate: Jordan Berty, Esq.

Darbouze Law Group

301 Grant St. #4300

Pittsburgh, PA 15219

(412) 849-6831

Guardian ad Litem for S.K.: Lynda Vernon, Esq.

KidsVoice

437 Grant St., #700

Pittsburgh, PA 15219

(412) 391-3100

Summary:

S.K. was a 5 month old infant who presented to Children's Hospital with concerns related to head trauma. Her father reported that S.K. struck her head off of a door frame while carrying her the day before. He reported that she cried when this happened. Mother reported that S.K. was eating less and had a bump on her head. Upon examination, S.K. was found to have a left parietal skull fracture with a large adjacent hematoma, a possible healing corner fracture in the medial-posterior distal metaphysis of the left femur, and a possible corner fracture to the media metaphysic of the right proximal tibia. The attending physician reported that the injuries took place during the last few weeks when the child had not attended daycare due to the covid closures and was in the sole care of her parents.

As a result of these injuries, my client, Allegheny County Children, Youth, and Families (CYF), requested an Emergency Custody Authorization from the Court and the Court scheduled a Shelter Care Hearing. CYF filed a Dependency Petition alleging that S.K. was without proper parental care and control and that the parents' conduct placed the safety of S.K. at risk. I represented CYF in the Dependency Adjudication Hearing on 7/22/20.

At the Adjudication Hearing, there was testimony from three expert witnesses. Two of the expert witnesses testified on behalf of CYF's dependency petition. The third expert witness testified on behalf of the parents. The parents argued that the injuries were not caused by the parents and that the child had not suffered a corner fracture of the media metaphysic of the right proximal tibia. They argued that the child had injured herself from playing in a jumperoo and by throwing her head back into the doorframe.

This case was significant because it highlighted the importance of qualifying an expert witness in the right specialties when multiple experts are being presented to the Court. In many of my cases, I present physicians as expert witnesses and all the parties stipulate to their expertise in a particular area of the law. In this case, I went through a full voir dire of the two CYF witnesses from Children's Hospital. By taking the time to complete a full voir dire and admitting their CVs to the Court, I was able to highlight their expertise not only in their fields (radiology and pediatrics), but also request that

the Court qualify one of the witnesses as an expert in child abuse. The Court granted this request and noted in its adjudication findings that the witness was Board Certified in child abuse and had over 100 peer-reviewed publications relating to physical abuse. The Court contrasted that with the parents' expert who was a radiologist but primarily cared for adults and had no specific training in child abuse. The two witnesses I prepared presented as more credible and reliable resulting in the court adjudicating the child dependent based on clear and convincing evidence.

Adjudication Hearing for A.R., J.A.S., and J.S.

Date: August 5, 2020

Name of Court: Court of Common Pleas of the 5th Judicial District

Judge: The Honorable David Spurgeon

Parent Advocate: Brianna Herzing, Esq.

Juvenile Court Project

550 Fifth Ave.

Pittsburgh, PA 15219

(412) 350-0211

Parent Advocate: Lacy Scales, Esq.

500 Grant St., Suite 2900

Pittsburgh, PA 15219

(412) 278-7161

Guardian ad Litem for A.R., J.A.S., and J.S.: Morgan Moody, Esq.

K.idsVoice

437 Grant St., #700

Pittsburgh, PA 15219

(412) 391-3100

Summary:

This case involved a sibling group: A.R. age 5, J.A.S. age 10, and J.S. age 11. The children lived with their parents and their half-sister, B.S. age 3. Police responded to the family's home when they received a report that B.S. was not breathing. B.S. was transported to the hospital and pronounced dead that same day. B.S. presented with multiple injuries and the attending physician cited abuse and neglect over a prolonged period of time as the cause of death.

As a result of the injuries and death of B.S, my client, Allegheny County Children, Youth, and Families (CYF), requested an Emergency Custody Authorization from the Court for the three siblings and the Court scheduled a Shelter Care Hearing. CYF filed a Dependency Petition alleging that A.R., J.A.S., and J.S. were without proper parental care and control and that their parents' conduct placed the safety of the children at risk. I represented CYF in the Dependency Adjudication Hearing on 8/5/20.

This Adjudication Hearing was challenging for several reasons. First, both parents were incarcerated on charges of criminal homicide for the death of B.S. I needed to prove the seriousness of the case and facts at the Adjudication Hearing without turning it into the criminal trial. In addition, the parents' charges were still pending so I did not want to do anything at the Adjudication that would be detrimental to the criminal case. Second, the siblings did not have any local family members and had never been out of the care of their parents. The family members that they had the most affection for lived 480 miles away and were also primarily Spanish speaking. The siblings had a very basic understanding of Spanish. Lastly, the siblings themselves had not experienced physical abuse in their parents' home and were enjoying a comfortable middle-class lifestyle, but they had witnessed the abuse of their half-sibling B.S. over a long period of time. This resulted in them experiencing a high degree of emotional abuse and significant trauma. Emotional abuse is a difficult ground to prove in dependency adjudications especially when the trauma makes it difficult for the children to tell their story.

As a result of the specific challenges of this case, I worked to ensure that the CYF caseworkers familiarized themselves with all of the Spanish interpretation services available and that they prioritized foster families with some Spanish speaking skills who could assist the siblings with communicating with their relatives. In addition, I spent a great deal of time working on identifying and preparing the right expert witness to testify about the emotional abuse and trauma experienced by these kids. I did successfully identify a child psychiatrist who was qualified as an expert in child psychiatry at the Adjudication Hearing. This expert was able to provide testimony about how living in this home caused such a high degree of trauma to the siblings that emotional abuse would have occurred.

This case was significant because the expert's testimony was so compelling that the Court not only found clear and convincing evidence to adjudicate the siblings dependent, but also found that the facts of the case and the trauma endured by the siblings as witnesses to their sister's abuse rose to such a high level that any contact with the parents, including through virtual means, would pose a grave threat to the siblings' mental health. The Court ordered that the siblings should have no contact with their parents other than through written letters that would be reviewed by their caseworkers. The grave threat standard is a high burden requiring clear and convincing evidence to suspend visitation between children and parents and the Court must find that there are no practicable options that would permit visitation and protect the child.

Adjudication Hearing for C.D.

Date: April 15, 2019

Name of Court: Court of Common Pleas of the 5th Judicial District

Judge: The Honorable Michael F. Marmo

Parent Advocate: RaKeisha Foster, Esq.

Allegheny County Public Defender

542 Forbes Ave., #400

Pittsburgh, PA 15 219

(412) 350-2400

Parent Advocate: Mary Ellen McMeekin, Esq.

4636 Penn Ave.

Pittsburgh, PA 15224

(412) 682-7232

Guardian ad Litem for C.D: Emily Hammel, Esq.

445 Fort Pitt Blvd., Suite 503

Pittsburgh, PA 15219

Summary:

C.D. was a two month old infant whose siblings were already dependent children. Their mother had been involved with CYF for several years prior to C.D.'s birth. She had been court-ordered to participate in drug and alcohol treatment and intimate partner violence services (IPV). Mother had a history of several relationships involving IPV issues. When C.D. was born, the Court allowed him to remain in his mother's care until an IPV incident occurred between mother's paramour and his former paramour that placed C.D. at risk. Upon the report of this incident, CYF requested an Emergency Custody Authorization from the Court and the Court scheduled a Shelter Care Hearing placing the child in a relative's care. CYF filed a Dependency Petition alleging that C.D. was without proper parental care and control and that his parents' conduct placed the safety of C.D. at risk. I represented CYF in the Dependency Adjudication on 4/15/19.

At the Adjudication Hearing, I needed to develop a record of mother's continued struggle with IPV issues and remaining out of volatile relationships that put her children's safety at risk. Mother's participation in services was on and off over the years and CYF had a long history with her. Mother would engage in services and make progress toward reunification with her children at times and then other times she would fall back into a pattern of IPV in her relationships. This

required testimony from a number of caseworkers who could explain how they worked with mother over the years to provide her with services to ensure a safe living environment for her and her children. On the other hand, C.D.'s father was different than the other children's fathers and CYF did not have a long history with him. This required me to prove that the circumstances that led to C.D.'s removal were serious enough to warrant a dependency adjudication and continued placement outside of the home.

In this case, C.D. was removed from his parent's care because C.D.'s father shot at his former paramour and her new paramour from the window of the apartment he was sharing with C.D. and C.D.'s mother. The former paramour of C.D.'s father was in the parking lot of the apartment complex with her new paramour and somehow C.D.'s father discovered they were there, poked his head out of the window of the apartment to exchange words which led to an exchange of gunfire between C.D.'s father and his former paramour's new paramour. His former paramour's new paramour was injured as a result and C.D.'s father was arrested. C.D. and C.D.'s mother were in the apartment when this incident occurred. At the Adjudication Hearing, it was also learned from the testimony of the responding officer that C.D.'s father kept his weapon in a box of C.D.'s diapers and pulled the weapon from the diaper box to shoot at his former paramour and his former paramour's new paramour.

This case was significant because the circumstances of C.D.'s removal highlighted the complexities of families struggling with IPV issues and how difficult it can be to adjudicate these issues in a courtroom. In this case, C.D.'s mother was not directly involved in the incident between C.D.'s father, father's former paramour, and the former paramour's new paramour. Yet, the fact that she was involved in yet another relationship with a volatile man who readily engaged in IPV with his former paramour did put her and C.D. at risk in the moment of the shooting as well as in the future if C.D.'s father regularly resorts to using his weapon when he is upset. Proving this risk by clear and convincing evidence required witnesses who could testify to the unique challenges that survivors of IPV confront in new relationships and how difficult it can be to improve outcomes for families struggling with IPV issues.

Adjudication Hearing for D.K.

Date: April 29, 2020

Name of Court: Court of Common Pleas of the 5th Judicial District

Judge: The Honorable David Spurgeon

Parent Advocate: Lacy Scales, Esq.

500 Grant St., Suite 2900

Pittsburgh, PA 15219

(412) 278-7161

Parent Advocate: Shannon Steele, Esq.

101 Smithfield St.

Pittsburgh, PA 15222

(412) 392-0209

Guardian ad Litem for D.K.: Lynda Vernon, Esq.

KidsVoice

437 Grant St., #700

Pittsburgh, PA 15219

(412) 391-3100

Summary:

D.K. was an 11 year old child who came to the attention of CYF because of his mother's active drug abuse and significant drug abuse history. D.K.'s mother had been in and out of several drug and alcohol treatment programs over the previous two years. She had been arrested on drug related charges and she had two roommates who died of overdoses. D.K.'s mother also moved frequently between Allegheny, Beaver, and Butler counties. Throughout all of this,

D.K. bounced back and forth between his mother's care and his aunt's care. As a result, he was behind academically and not up to date with his medical care. In addition, his aunt needed financial assistance in order to continue caring for him.

As a result of this history, CYF requested an Emergency Custody Authorization from the Court and the Court scheduled a Shelter Care Hearing formally placing D.K. with his aunt. CYF filed a Dependency Petition alleging that C.D. was without proper parental care and control and that the parents' conduct placed the safety of C.D. at risk. I represented CYF in the Dependency Adjudication Hearing on 4/29/20.

At the Adjudication Hearing, D.K. 's mother stipulated to the grounds for dependency regarding her ongoing drug abuse and need for treatment. She also agreed with D.K. remaining in her sister's care and testified that her sister has been a great help to D.K. over the years and he is comfortable in her home. D.K. 's aunt also agreed to allow mother to visit D.K. liberally and she would be available to supervise D.K.'s visits so that she would not be visiting with him under the influence.

This case was significant because of the position that D.K. 's father took at the Adjudication Hearing and the resulting need for extensive testimony from the family members. The position of D.K.'s father was that he was a ready, willing, and able parent for D.K. even though he had never cared for D.K. Father wanted D.K. removed from his aunt's home and placed with him. D.K. 's father was also openly hostile to the aunt in the court setting. As much as possible, I try to avoid having family members testify in dependency adjudications in order to prevent strain on their familial relationships especially when there is already strain present. Unfortunately, that was unavoidable in this case.

Given father's position, I needed to have the family members testify about D.K. 's father's history with Daniel from birth to the present. I also had to carefully cross-examine father as his statements directly conflicted with the testimony of the various family members. D.K.'s father's hostility towards the family members, judge, and other attorneys grew throughout the hearing requiring the Court to intervene numerous times. Ultimately as a result of the testimony and cross-examination, the Court did find D.K. dependent and also found that father did not have a significant bond with DK.

Adjudication Hearing for S.D.S.

Date: April 8, 2020

Name of Court: Court of Common Pleas of the 5th Judicial District

Judge: The Honorable David Spurgeon

Parent Advocate: Brianna Herzing, Esq.

Juvenile Court Project

550 Fifth Ave.

Pittsburgh, PA 15219

(412) 350-0211

Parent Advocate: Lacy Scales, Esq.

500 Grant St., Suite 2900

Pittsburgh, PA 15219

(412) 278-7161

Guardian ad Litem for S.D.S.: Rhonda Anderson Marks, Esq.

P.O. Box 433

Irwin, PA 15642

(412) 353-9585

Summary:

S.D.S. was a two year old toddler who presented to Children's Hospital with a concerning bruise to his cheek. Upon

examination, S.D.S was found to have a sustained a parietal and occipital skull fracture. S.D.S's mother reported that she works a nightshift Monday through Friday and her cousin usually provides care to S.D.S. Mother also reported that she utilizes other babysitters as well. The attending physician was not able to provide a timeframe for the injuries.

As a result of these injuries, my client, Allegheny County Children, Youth, and Families (CYF), requested an Emergency Custody Authorization from the Court and the Court scheduled a Shelter Care Hearing. CYF filed a Dependency Petition alleging that S.D.S. was without proper parental care and control and that the parents' conduct placed the safety of S.D.S at risk. I represented CYF in the Dependency Adjudication Hearing on 4/8/20.

At the Adjudication Hearing, there was testimony from an expert witness who had examined S.D.S. I asked for the Court to qualify this expert as an expert in child abuse. The expert testified that S.D.S. had bruising to the left side of his face and left ear that appeared to be from a handprint, two skull fractures, and a healing leg fracture. The expert testified that mother's explanation that S.D.S sustained these injuries as a result of a fall in the bathtub was not consistent with the injuries presented. The expert testified that these injuries would not have result from an accident, but would have been from blunt force trauma and would have caused substantial pain to S.D.S. The expert was unable to provide a specific timeframe for the injuries other than that they could have occurred up to a few weeks prior to the examination.

This case was significant because it involved multiple potential perpetrators of the injuries to S.D.S. I needed to provide testimony to the Court addressing all of the potential perpetrators as well as the specifics about the injuries and the possible timeframes for the injuries. Not surprisingly, mother's position was that neither she nor any of the caregivers caused any of these injuries; rather, the child obtained them by an accidental fall in a bathtub. However, Pennsylvania child protection law does not require a specific perpetrator to be identified, but rather focuses on the type of injuries that the child has sustained. In addition, there was additional witness testimony that mother had admitted to seeing her cousin use physical discipline with her own children and that mother knew that her cousin had an active CYF case herself so she should have at least been alarmed when S.D.S. obtained these injuries in the cousin's care.

14. If a substantial period of your practice has been before administrative boards, commissions or agencies during the past ten years, identify the boards, commissions or agencies before which you have practiced and estimate percentages of practice time devoted thereto.

15. If a substantial portion of your practice has been before Appellate courts during the past ten years, identify the Appellate Courts before which you have practiced and estimate percentages of practice time devoted thereto.

16. Have you ever held judicial office? If so, give dates and details, including the court involved, whether elected or appointed, periods of services and a description of the jurisdiction of each of such courts with any limitations upon the jurisdiction of each court indicating the time(s) that you were the subject of a Motion or Petition for Recusal.

No, I have never held judicial office.

17. Have you ever held public office other than judicial office? If so, give details, including the office, whether elected or appointed and the length of your service, giving details.

No, I have never held a public office.

18. Have you ever been an unsuccessful candidate for elective, judicial or other public office? If so, give details, including dates.

Yes, I was an unsuccessful candidate for the Court of Common Pleas in 2021.

19. Have you ever been engaged in any occupation, business or profession other than the practice of law or the holding of judicial or other public office? If so, give details, including dates.

I obtained my Master's Degree in Social Work in 2000. Upon graduation, I began working as the Coordinator of the Field Center for Children's Policy, Practice, and Research at the University of Pennsylvania. In that position, I also worked as part of an interdisciplinary team where I was the social work member of that team. Our team would conduct evaluations of children and families to make recommendations in permanency and custody hearings. I also participated in various research projects and co-taught a graduate student course entitled, "Education for the Professions: The Intersection of Law, Social Work, and Medicine."

20. Are you now an officer or director or otherwise engaged in the management of any business enterprise?

- a) If so, give details, including the name of your enterprise, the nature of the business, the title or other description of your position, the nature of your duties and the term of your service.

No, I am not.

- b) it your intention to resign such positions and withdraw from any participation in the management of any such enterprises if you are elected and confirmed? If not, give reasons.

21. Are you under any ongoing federal, state or local investigation or indictment for possible violation of a criminal statute? If so, give details.

No, I am not.

22. Have you ever been charged or convicted of any violation of a local, state or federal law, any misdemeanor or felony, court martialled, been granted immunity from prosecution, been held in contempt of court or been the subject of a final protection from abuse order? If so, give details. Do not include summary traffic offenses.

No, I have not.

23. Has a tax lien or other collection procedure been instituted against you by federal, state or local authorities? If so, give details.

No, there have not been.

24. Have you ever been sued by a client? If so, give details.

No, I have not.

25. Have you ever been a party to or otherwise involved in any other legal proceedings? If so, give the particulars. Do not list proceedings in which you were merely a guardian *ad litem* or stakeholder. Include all legal proceedings in which you were a party in interest, a material witness, were named as co-conspirator or a co-respondent and any grand jury investigation in which you figured as a subject or in which you appeared as a witness.

No, I have not.

26. Have you ever been disciplined or cited for a breach of ethics or unprofessional conduct by, or been the subject of a complaint to, any court, administrative agency, bar association, disciplinary committee or other professional group? If so, give the details.

No, I have not.

27. Currently or within the past five (5) years have you suffered from any medical or other condition which could affect or impair your judgement, reliability or ability to perform the essential functions of the functions of the judicial position you are seeking. If so, describe.

No, I have not.

28. Do any circumstances exist that would affect your ability to perform the function of the position you seek or fulfill the term of office? If so, please explain.

No, there are not.

29. Furnish one (1) writing sample that reflects your analysis of a legal problem or issue.

Please see attached.

30. List all bar associations and professional societies of which you are a member and give the titles and dates of any offices which you have held in such groups. Please also identify any leadership role you have held in such groups.

Allegheny County Bar Association
Attorneys Against Hunger Committee Member
Allegheny County Bar Association Bar Fellow
Pennsylvania Bar Association Children's Rights Committee Member
American Bar Association

31. List your experiences in teaching and lecturing, including law school, continuing legal education and to non-legal audiences.

As a Legal Services Training Specialist with the Statewide Adoption and Permanency Network, I provided the following trainings to an audience of paralegals, caseworkers, attorneys, hearing officers, and judges:

- Beyond the Bond: The Needs & Welfare Analysis in a TPR
- Choosing the Permanency Goal(s)
- Conquering the Courtroom
- CPSL Amendments: Old Values, New Protections
- Crossing Borders: Immigration Issues in the Child Welfare System
- Fostering Connections Revisited
- Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008
- ICWA Then and Now: Complying with the New Regulations
- Meeting the Educational Needs of Children in Foster Care
- Opening Doors: Children of Incarcerated Parents
- Overview of the Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening
- Pathways to Permanency-Legal Mandates of Act 55 and Fostering Connections
- The Road to Success: Legal Issues for Transitioning Older Youth

- Terminations of Parental Rights Demystified

As a Legal Services Training Specialist with the Statewide Adoption and Permanency Network, I provided the following trainings to an audience of resource families:

- Fostering Connections Revisited
- Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008
- Meeting the Educational Needs of Children in Foster Care
- Opening Doors: Children of incarcerated Parents
- Overview of the Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening
- Pathways to Permanency-Legal Mandates of Act 55 and Fostering Connections
- The Road to Success: Legal Issues for Transitioning Olde

At the University of Pittsburgh as an adjunct faculty member, I have taught "Advocacy and Lobbying" which provides an overview of how nonprofit organizations can engage in effective public policy advocacy and lobbying on behalf of its mission and the people it serves. I have also taught "Children and Families at Risk" which focuses on identifying risk factors and assessing risk to children, youth, families, and communities using a variety of theoretical approaches and knowledge of human development throughout the life course.

At the University of Pennsylvania, I co-taught a graduate student course for law, medical, and social work students entitled "Education for the Professions: The Intersection of Law, Social Work, and Medicine," that examined the professional education and work relationships among these disciplines.

32. List all organizations other than bar associations, professional associations or societies of which you are or have been a member, including civic, charitable, religious, educational, social and fraternal organizations.

**Member of East Liberty Presbyterian Church
Jewish Community Center Member
Penn Alumni Interview Program Volunteer
Hello Neighbor Refugee Family Mentor**

33. List any honors, prizes, awards or other forms of recognition which you have received (including any indication of academic distinction in college or law school) other than those mentioned in answers to the foregoing questions.

See question #6

34. State any other information which may reflect positively or adversely on you or which you believe should be disclosed.

35. Why do you wish to become a Justice or Judge? What strengths do you possess that would particularly well qualify you for such a position?

Since the 2021 judicial elections, I continue to pursue opportunities to become a Judge in the Court of Common Pleas in order to ensure that every family and child interacting with the court system in Allegheny County has access to fair, equitable, effective, and timely justice. In Allegheny County, there are approximately 1400 children in out of home placements through the child welfare system and 1600 secure detention admissions through the juvenile delinquency system. Children in both systems deserve timely and appropriate interventions focused on ensuring their safety and maintaining their well-being. Over the course of my career, I have developed the skill set needed to make a valuable contribution and be effective in the role of Judge in the Family Division of the Fifth Judicial District.

My career has been focused on child welfare law. I have local, state, national, and international experience in this field. I have worked as both Guardian ad Litem and Assistant County Solicitor in child welfare cases on the local level. I have provided trainings on a variety of child welfare laws across the state of Pennsylvania and have also participated in statewide workgroups dedicated to improving outcomes for court-involved youth. In my work at both the ABA Center on Children and the Law and the Field Center for Children's Policy, Practice, and Research at Penn, I have participated in child welfare research projects at the national level. Internationally, I have presented twice at the International Society of Family Law World Conferences; 2000 in Brisbane Australia and 2017 in Amsterdam, Netherlands.

As a professional with both a law degree and a master's degree in social work, I am able to navigate the complex legal and emotional aspects of working in the Family Division. Families and children appear in the courtroom in crisis often having experienced significant trauma in their lives. My professional experiences have allowed me to develop skills in active listening and empathy. This gives me the ability to de-escalate high stress situations in order to resolve conflict rather than exacerbate it. My goals as a Judge would be for families to have the opportunity to be heard on a level-playing field in the courtroom, to leave their hearings with confidence in the system, and to have peace with the result whether it is their preferred outcome or not.

36. What do you consider a significant achievement in your life outside your profession?

First, I would like to start with my children, Annie and Liam, and how proud I am to be their mother; however, I am going to devote most of this response to my work as a Docent with The Frick Pittsburgh. To address my children first, I am a proud parent of two children: Annie age 16 and Liam age 14. Outside of my professional career, they are the joys of both my life and my husband's life. We have relished being their parents and enjoy seeing them grow up into caring, intelligent, and joyful individuals. Annie is an avid reader, learner of languages, Irish dancer, fiddle player, and tennis player. Liam is a proud student, lover of all things soccer-related, bagpipe player, and an Irish dancer as well. Needless to say, we spend a great deal of family time enjoying their various activities together. Juggling very active children and a busy career is always challenging, but I love both and am proud of how I have managed over the years.

Personally, a significant achievement of mine outside of my professional work has been completing and passing the training to be a certified Docent at The Frick Pittsburgh. The Frick Docents provide tours of the Frick family's home, Clayton, in Point Breeze to the public. When we moved back to Pittsburgh from Washington, D.C., I decided to apply for the Docent training program because I love history and learning about the art and architecture of the city where I live. As a family, we enjoy visiting historic sites in our own community and especially when we travel to other regions and cities so I thought the docent program would be a great opportunity to build a relationship with a historic site in my own community.

The Frick Docent program requires an application and being accepted into their training program. The Docents are expected to have an in-depth knowledge of the history of the Frick family, history of Pittsburgh during the Gilded Age as well as the history and significance of the art, architecture, and furnishings of the property and Art Museum. I completed approximately eighty hours of training in the program as well as final exam and test tour. I was trained in 2012 and conducted regular tours on the weekends and holidays until 2018. In 2018, I went on leave from the program because my children were becoming more and more busy with their travel sports programs on the weekends, but I still maintain a close connection with the Frick community and am welcome to resume my work there whenever I choose to do so.

37. Please identify specific efforts you have made, or been involved with, to support equality and inclusion in the legal profession.

When I worked with the Pennsylvania Statewide Adoption and Permanency Network as a Legal Services Training Specialist, we worked to ensure that issues of diversity and gender equality and inclusion were integrated into all of our trainings. Our trainings were offered to caseworkers, paralegals, attorneys, hearing officers and judges. All of the trainings were approved for CLE credits and were offered across the state so they reached a wide audience of legal practitioners.

Specific examples of how I integrated issues of diversity and inclusion into our trainings is the work I did to update the "Crossing Borders: Immigration Issues in the Child Welfare System" training and the "Opening Doors: Children of Incarcerated Parents" training.

The "Crossing Borders" training provided an overview of how immigrant families involved with the child welfare system face considerable obstacles to effective communication and access to services. Sometimes local

child welfare caseworkers and attorneys need to work across different cultures and even international borders and their training leaves them ill-prepared to do so. I worked to design a training that would help to remove barriers in engaging immigrant families by highlighting steps child welfare professionals can take to work through their potential bias, cultural misunderstandings, and language difficulties. By developing skills, for example, such as becoming more familiar with the services that consulates can provide, those working on behalf of children will be able to more effectively engage immigrant families in the permanency planning process through the courts. It is incredibly important for child welfare systems to be responsive to and inclusive of all family members in order to better support children's overall well-being.

The "Opening Doors" training was designed to highlight the legal issues in working with incarcerated parents and to explore how practice can be improved to increase engagement of incarcerated parents with permanency planning for their children. For this training, I added a number of statistics to highlight the racial disparities in the criminal justice system. For example, I highlighted the fact that nationally people of color are incarcerated in state prisons at a rate five times that of whites. Moreover, the disparity is even worse in several states resulting in 1 in 20 adult black males being incarcerated in those states. I would then lead a discussion on what factors contribute to these disparities in incarceration rates and issues such as the role of implicit bias, stereotypes in decision-making, and structural disadvantages in communities of color would emerge. We would then discuss what impact this has on the children involved in the child welfare system. When child welfare systems fail to engage incarcerated parents and when those incarcerated parents are overwhelmingly black men, black children lose the chance to have that emotional support and connection to their identity more often than their white counterparts.

In my current position, I represent our office in the Quality Improvement Center on Domestic Violence in Child Welfare pilot project being conducted here in Allegheny County. In brief, the project is focused on implementing an Adult and Child-Survivor Centered Approach with six main principles, one of which is equity. The equity value is to work towards racial, ethnic, and gender equity in practice and in families' access and outcomes.


As a part of this project, all members participated in a two day workshop with Joyce James Consulting. The workshop was designed to enhance awareness around issues of racial equity and to develop a shared understanding of the factors that contribute to racial inequities. Some of the discussion points included understanding the institutional and structural racism in the child welfare system and courts; understanding the importance of community engagement to improve outcomes; and increasing the capacity of participants to improve outcomes for all.

Another component of this project for me has been participation in a workgroup developing an IPV glossary to be used across Allegheny County's Department of Human Services, the Fifth Judicial District, and DHS-contracted providers. The completed glossary that we have developed utilized thoughtful language choices that are person-centered and strengths-based. We have utilized gender inclusive language throughout the glossary. The goal is to use words that respect and acknowledge someone as a whole person and highlights that people are the experts in their own lives.

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The undersigned certifies that the statements made in this questionnaire are true, complete and correct to the best of his/her knowledge and belief and are made in good faith.

Alyssa Burrell Cowan
Type or print name


Signature

4/8/24
Date

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