



**To:** Texas Judges Who Hear CPS Cases

**From:** The Honorable Robin Sage, Jurist in Residence, Office of Court Administration

**Date:** May 30, 2014

**RE:** Texas Child Protection Specialty Courts

Many of you are aware that Texas has a number of specialty courts that solely hear Child Protective Services (CPS) cases. Since September 2013, the number of these specialty courts has increased significantly, so I'd like to take this opportunity to update you about our Child Protection Courts (CPCs) and to introduce you to the new judges.

**Q: What are the Child Protection Courts (CPCs)?**

A: Originally, the specialty child protection courts in Texas were created to assist general jurisdiction trial courts, primarily in rural areas, in managing their child abuse and neglect dockets. The CPCs have been so successful that they have been expanded to include non-rural areas where high caseloads need attention.

CPCs exclusively hear CPS cases. CPC judges receive specialized training regarding the foster care system, child and youth trauma and development, and CPS procedures. These courts use the Child Protection Court Management System (CPCMS), developed and supported by the Office of Court Administration (OCA). CPCs are often asked to try new and innovative practices in their courtrooms. Because of the smaller dockets, specialized training, and case management offered by CPCMS, the CPC courts are in a position to address relevant and critical due process and well-being issues in greater depth than courts with large, diverse dockets.

**Q: How are the CPC judges selected and what resources support them?**

A: Like the child support court or Title IV-D associate judges, CPC judges are appointed by the State's Regional Presiding Judges and either are employed by OCA or are appointed as visiting judges by the Regional Presiding Judge.

The presiding judge, with the approval of the host county commissioners' court, designates a host county for the court that provides a courtroom, office quarters, and office furniture and equipment for the judge and his or her staff.

**Q: What is the authority of a CPC judge?**

A: CPC Judges may either be associate judges or former or senior judges who are eligible to serve on assignment under Chapter 74 of the Government Code. Because they are not elected judges, associate judges have somewhat limited authority. Any decision made by that associate judge may be appealed de novo to the referring court. In a de novo appeal, because the case is presented without regard to the prior hearing, CPCs using associate judges often do not use official court reporters except in final hearings.

Instead they use a software program to mechanically record the proceedings. On the other hand, in those courts where former or senior judges preside, a final judgment is appealable straight to the applicable Court of Appeals.

**Q: How many CPCs are there in Texas?**

A: There are now 20 CPCs across Texas (some CPCs have more than one judge hearing cases). For a map of the counties served by CPCs, please click here: [Map of Texas Child Protection Courts](#). CPCs cover 118 counties and according to OCA, cover approximately 35-40% of CPS dockets statewide.

**Q: Who are the new CPC judges?**

A: Since 2013, the following judges have been named to CPCs:

- Oswin Crisman, Region 1 Child Protection Court
- Kara Darnell, South Plains Foster Care Court No. 2
- Melissa DeGerolami, Brush Country Child Protection Court
- Katrina Griffith, Associate Judge for the CPS Project Court of Harris County
- Deane Loughmiller, Northeast Texas Child Protection Court No. 2
- Melissa McClenahan, Child Protection Court of Central Texas
- Cheryl Mabray, Child Protection Court of the Hill Country
- Roy Quintanilla, Three Rivers Cluster Court No. 2
- Tracey Scown, Child Protection Court of West Texas

These judges join the other CPC judges:

- Eric Andell, Brazos River Valley Cluster Court No. 1, Three Rivers Cluster Court No. 1
- James Belton, Child Protection Court of the Rio Grande Valley East
- Alyce Bondurant, North Texas Child Protection Court
- Sam Bournias, Brazos River Valley Cluster Court No. 2
- Sylvia Chavez, Child Protection Court of the Permian Basin
- John Delaney, East Texas Cluster Court (Brazos County)
- David Dunn, Southeast Texas Cluster Court
- Paul Gallego, 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Administrative Judicial Regions Cluster Court
- Jack Graham, Northern Panhandle Child Protection Court
- Kevin Hart, South Plains Foster Care Court No. 1
- Cathy Morris, Child Protection Court of South Texas
- P.K. Reiter, East Texas Cluster Court (Grimes, Leon, and Madison Counties)
- Ginny Schnarr, Northeast Texas Child Protection Court No. 1
- Charles Van Orden, Centex Child Protection Court
- Carlos Villalon, Child Protection Court of the Rio Grande Valley West
- Jerry Winfree, East Texas Cluster Court (Montgomery County)

For contact information for all of the CPC judges, please click here: [Child Protection Courts Contact Information](#)