

MICHIGAN SUPREME COURT



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2012 CHILD WELFARE AWARD WINNERS ANNOUNCED TODAY Foster Care Review Board recognizes honorees for helping children in foster care

DETROIT, MI, October 22, 2012 – The Foster Care Review Board today announced the recipients of its 2012 Child Welfare Awards, which recognize exceptional services to children and families in the state’s child welfare system.

Michigan Supreme Court Justice Mary Beth Kelly will present the awards at the FCRB’s annual awards breakfast at the Lexington Lansing Hotel on November 9 at 8:45 a.m.

FCRB Program Manager Jim Novell explained that the awards “are presented annually to recognize exceptional work on behalf of abused and neglected children and their families.”

Matt Miller of the Michigan Department of Human Services, Emmet County, was named **Foster Care Worker of the Year**. Nominated by attorney Shawn Cordes-Osborne, Miller was commended as a caseworker who goes above and beyond his position, often and in many ways, to provide parents and children the best possible services. He was cited as an excellent example for all case workers, displaying a positive attitude with even the most difficult clients and circumstances.

The **Lawyer-Guardian Ad Litem of the Year Award** was presented to Rockford attorney **Ginny Mikita**, who was nominated by Kent County Foster Care Review Board member Jan Foxen. Mikita was commended for her “great compassion” and concern for the children she serves. She is described as committed, persistent, and fully involved with her child clients while advocating for their best interests. She is also involved with the Kent County drug court planning team and the Kent County Trauma Awareness Task Force. In addition, Mikita trains new attorneys assigned to child abuse and neglect cases.

Judy and John Wright of Lake Orion received the **Foster Parents of the Year Award**. Jennifer King and Nancy Robertson of the Ennis Center for Children nominated the Wrights for their long-term commitment to caring for children in foster care with special medical needs; the Wrights were also praised for helping birth parents to be reunified with their children. Of special note was the Wrights’ care of a critically ill infant placed in their home; the infant’s pediatrician declared, “I credit [the baby’s] survival to the foster mom, who works tirelessly on her behalf, defying the odds and the doctors who thought she would not survive.”

The **Parent Attorney of the Year Award** was presented to **John Ceci** of Livingston County. Attorney Susan Spagnuolo-Dal, who nominated Ceci, described him as “more dedicated to his clients’ needs than anyone I know.” Ceci continually sharpens his practice skills through continuing education and freely shares his expertise with other lawyers, Spagnuolo-Dal said. “Without John Ceci, the welfare of children in Livingston County would be greatly diminished,” she wrote.

Judge Susan Dobrich received the **Jurist of the Year Award** for her work as a family court judge in Cass County. Nominated by juvenile referee Leigh Feldman, Dobrich was commended as “one of the best probate judges in Michigan.” The judge was also praised for her leadership in the state’s child welfare system; she has served on numerous child welfare state committees and task forces to improve outcomes for children and families, Feldman noted. Dobrich also founded a family drug treatment court for Cass County, which has operated for 10 years. In 2011, the judge was appointed by Governor Snyder to the Michigan Women’s Commission.

The FCRB, which was created by the Michigan legislature in 1981, serves as a statewide system of third-party review of the foster care system. The program is administered by the State Court Administrative Office, the administrative agency of the Michigan Supreme Court. Citizen volunteers serve on the FCRB’s 30 local review boards throughout the state. Local boards review randomly chosen child abuse and neglect cases; the boards assess how these cases are being handled by courts, the Department of Human Services, and private child welfare agencies.

For more information about the FCRB, and for information about volunteering, visit <http://courts.michigan.gov/Administration/SCAO/OfficesPrograms/fcrbp/Pages/default.aspx>.

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