

Commission on Children's Justice public hearing is April 20 in Hattiesburg

April 16, 2012

The Mississippi Commission on Children's Justice will conduct a public hearing April 20 from 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. at the Trent Lott Center on the University of Southern Mississippi campus in Hattiesburg.

This Commission is holding public hearings to gather information regarding the protection and education of children under the jurisdiction of Youth Courts. The hearing is the third to be held by the Commission. Hearings were held last year in Jackson and Oxford.

Mississippi Supreme Court Justice Randy G. Pierce of Leakesville, Commission co-chair, and Court of Appeals Judge Virginia C. Carlton of Columbia, who leads a subcommittee devoted to education issues, will give opening remarks.

The program of invited speakers is as follows:

- **9 a.m.**, Nadine Coleman, Director of the Petal School District's Center for Families and Children, and Tammy Miller, Department of Human Services field operations director for the Division of Family and Children's Services, are expected to talk about early intervention for infants and toddlers in troubled families.
- **9:40 a.m.**, Martha Bloomquist, Model Court Liaison for the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, will talk about judicially led systems reform.
- **10:35 a.m.**, Hattiesburg Public Schools Superintendent James Q. Bacchus will talk about the impact of Youth Court involvement on education.
- **10:55 a.m.**, Mario Johnson, independent living coordinator for the DHS Division of Family and Children's Services, will facilitate a discussion by people who grew up in the Mississippi foster care system.
- **11:30 a.m.**, Forrest County Court and Youth Court Judge Michael McPhail will discuss innovative approaches which are working.
- **12:15 p.m.**, Rankin County Court and Youth Court Judge Thomas Broome will talk about the plight of parents who deal with issues such as removal of children from their custody and termination of parental rights without benefit of legal representation.

Chief Justice Bill Waller Jr. appointed the Commission to study the administration of justice in Youth Court and provide suggested improvements.

The Mississippi Supreme Court created the Commission on Children's Justice in April 2006. The Supreme Court reestablished the Commission in June 2010, directing that it develop a statewide comprehensive approach to improving the administration of justice in Youth Courts in the area of child protection; coordinate the three branches of government in assessing the impact of government actions on children who are abused or neglected; and recommend changes to improve children's safety, strengthen and support families, and promote public trust and confidence.

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