



IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT:

Miriam Krinsky
Children's Law Center of Los Angeles
323-980-1712
krinskym@clcla.org

New Project to Aid Foster Youth at Risk for Delinquency

LOS ANGELES, CA – The Children's Law Center of Los Angeles (CLC) announced today that Susan Abrams will join their staff in September, 2005 as an Equal Justice Works Fellow, under sponsorship of the Morrison & Foerster Foundation. This fellowship will support and promote CLC's recent efforts to bring about enhanced advocacy and systemic reforms on behalf of abused and neglected youth who cross into the delinquency system. Ms. Abrams, a graduate of Harvard Law School, will work on a project designed to improve advocacy on behalf of these youth at risk and to advance research and reform in this field.

“Once foster children transition into the juvenile justice system, their past is often forgotten, and they move from being viewed as a victim to being labeled an offender,” said CLC Executive Director Miriam Krinsky. “When that happens, they lose access to a number of invaluable services and resources. We appreciate the support Equal Justice Works has extended to the Children's Law Center in addressing the many problems foster youth experience when they are at risk of crossing from dependency into delinquency.”

Each month, approximately 130 foster children in Los Angeles County have contact with law enforcement. Roughly one third of them will cross over into the juvenile justice system. Within two years of leaving foster care, one in five of all former foster youth will be incarcerated.

In the past, California law has prohibited joint oversight by the dependency and delinquency courts. Effective this past January, however, new legislation provides a unique opportunity for counties to experiment with new approaches in dealing with cross over children.

Cosponsored by CLC and the California Judicial council, AB 129 provides the option of piloting a dual jurisdiction approach, so dependency status does not automatically terminate when a foster child enters delinquency. Under the new law, counties can experiment with concurrent jurisdiction or putting dependency jurisdiction on hold.

“Ms. Abrams' fellowship marks a significant step in formally bridging the two systems,” remarked Denise C. Herz, Associate Professor in the Cal State - Los Angeles School of Criminal Justice & Criminalistics. “Her work will be instrumental to reform in this area.”

“Many children enter the foster care system with emotional, behavioral, developmental, and physical health problems stemming from their early experiences. It is not uncommon for foster youth to act out their frustrations,” Ms. Abrams said. “I am excited that the Equal Justice Works Fellowship will enable me to contribute toward positive change in the lives of abused and neglected youth.”

The Equal Justice Works (formerly NAPIL) Fellowships Program was launched in 1992 to address the shortage of attorneys working on behalf of traditionally under-served populations. Recognizing that many obstacles prevent committed attorneys from practicing public interest law, including the dearth of entry-level jobs and daunting educational debts, the program provides financial and technical support to lawyers working on innovative and effective legal projects. The two-year Fellowships offer salary and generous loan repayment assistance, a national training and leadership development program, and other support.