The Children’s Rights Project
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Children Have Rights!

Are you…

Under 18 years old?
• Do you think you need legal help?
• Does your child need legal help?
• Do you want to learn about your child’s rights?
• A teen parent who has questions about your legal rights?

Please leave a message on our Intake Line.
(213) 385-2977 ext. 500

Are you…

A parent, guardian, or foster parent?
• Teacher?
• Social worker?
• Mental health professional?

We encourage you to refer clients to our Intake Line.

The Children’s Rights Project of Public Counsel Law Center provides FREE legal services, direct representation, confidential advice, and social work advocacy for children, youth and families in Los Angeles.

If you read about something in this booklet that sounds like a problem you or your child is facing, please call us. We have a diverse team of experts who will work together to help you.
A great place to start.

Direct Legal Assistance

(213) 385-2977 or (800) 870-8090
Extension 500

Public Counsel staff and volunteers speak both English and Spanish. You will need to leave a message. A staff member will return your call on Mondays, Tuesdays, or Wednesdays when the line is open.

Sometimes a little bit of help can go a long way.

Brief Service

We provide general counsel and advice, information about resources, and referrals for child-related issues over the telephone. We welcome questions about matters such as:

- School-related issues
- Guardianships
- Juvenile delinquency
- Mental health services
- Immigration options for children
- Government benefits for children
- Adoptions
- Rights of foster youth
- Rights of teen parents
- Regional Center

We will assess your situation and explore your options.
Legal Services & Pro Bono Representation

Public Counsel offers free legal services to low income families and young people who live in Los Angeles County.

Depending on the case, we will schedule an appointment for the child involved to meet with a social worker and/or an attorney at Public Counsel.

Guidance or intervention by a social worker may help resolve the problem.

If necessary, the Children’s Rights Project will place your case with a staff attorney or volunteer attorney (called a pro bono attorney).

An attorney on your side.

It’s okay to ask for help. That’s why we’re here. It can take time to review your request, arrange an interview, and match a child’s needs with the appropriate attorney, so please call as soon as your problem starts.
The Children’s Rights Project of Public Counsel Law Center has several specialized programs to help serve the legal needs of children, youth, and families.

Public Counsel also has many informational booklets and flyers about our various programs that can help you with your needs, point you in the right direction, and answer some initial questions that you may have about your situation. These include:

- A Guide for Teens to Welfare & Health Care Programs
- Health Care & Teens
- Education: CA School Rights and Responsibilities
- Special Education
- Get the Truth About Teen Dating and Violence & Domestic Violence
- Immigration: What Teens Need to Know
- Is My Baby Safe? Straight Talk to Teen Parents on Child Abuse & Neglect
- Legal Issues For Teen Families
- Pregnant? A Teen Parent? Protect Your Future-Stay In School
- Sex? Choices For Teens
- So You Want to Become Emancipated?
- Statutory Rape: What You Should Know
- Teens in Foster Care & Their Babies
- Legal Guardianship of the Person and The Pro Per Guardianship Clinic
- Teen Legal Clinic
- Sealing Your Juvenile Records
- Understanding the Juvenile Delinquency System
- Peace of Mind Program
- Caring for Another Person’s Child
- Regional Center Basics

You can find all of these booklets online at www.publiccounsel.org or call our intake line to request a copy.
Adoption

Loving homes, forever families

The Adoptions Project

Public Counsel’s staff and hundreds of volunteer attorneys have helped thousands of families adopt children living in foster care. The Adoptions Project supports foster children through the legal steps to achieve the security of a home where they can grow up safe, strong, and healthy.

We provide free legal representation to people who are adopting children currently in the Los Angeles County foster care system. Families who are caring for a foster child and are ready to adopt are referred to the Adoptions Project by DCFS or by the child’s attorney.

Our staff and volunteer attorneys...

- Complete legal work necessary to finalize an adoption
- Help families obtain Adoption Assistance, MediCal, special education, mental health, Regional Center, and other benefits and services the child and family may need.

We give children the opportunity to be a part of a family, in a stable, permanent home full of love with a future filled with hope.
Education Rights

Public Counsel’s team of advocates specializes in all aspects of educational rights. We work on issues like:

- Poor quality and unequal school conditions and services
- Failure to properly identify students with disabilities or to provide a free and appropriate public education under the law
- Inappropriate and unfair discipline.
- Inappropriate or unfair “truancy tickets’ and other school/law enforcement issues.
- Discrimination against and exclusion of students with disabilities, race, sexual orientation, homelessness, or other protected status
- Retaliation against students who speak out for their rights

Public Counsel offers in-person intake appointments.

Call (213) 385-2977, ext. 500 to schedule a FREE, confidential, in-person appointment.

Juvenile Justice Educational Advocacy Clinic
Serving youth involved with the Kenyon and Inglewood Juvenile courts, including the STAR court, a specialized court for youth who are charged with prostitution-related offenses. Referrals for these clinics come from public defenders, panel attorneys, and Juvenile Court Judges.

Could this story be about you?

17 year old 12th grader Celia felt dumb in class, skipped school, and ended up in the delinquency system. After Probation Camp, she was ready to get her life back on track and go back to high school. But her local school refused to enroll her, claiming it was too close to the end of the year. She met with a Public Counsel social worker, who worked with a volunteer attorney to exercise Celia’s educational rights. She went back to high school, graduated, and is the first in her family to attend community college.
Developmental Disability Advocacy

Special needs children

Public Counsel staff and volunteer attorneys work on behalf of foster, adopted, and probation youth who have developmental disabilities, to enforce these children’s legal rights to treatment and services.

We help families gain the support and services they need to care for special-needs children.

Please contact us if you are a caregiver in need of help with such a child.

Elina could no longer walk. She needed a wheelchair, but her family could not afford one. The Children’s Rights Project made that possible. The staff at Public Counsel helped Elina and her family get not only her wheelchair, but the support she needed to get to and from school, where she loves to study art and history.
Public Counsel’s staff and volunteers provide free help to caregivers who want

to become legal guardians of children whose parents are unable or unwilling
to care for them. We help prepare legal documents for people who will be
representing themselves in court (“pro per” litigants) on matters related to:

- Petitions for Guardianship of the Person
- Petitions for Guardianship of the Estate ONLY where funds will be
placed in blocked bank account
- Petitions for Termination of Guardianship
- Petitions for Visitation in Guardianship matters
- Objections to Guardianship

We also provide information, referrals and advocacy on benefits and
services that guardianship families may need.

The Guardianship Clinic is located at the

Superior Court in downtown Los Angeles.

Assistance is available in English and Spanish.
Are you a parent who is terminally ill?  
Are you worried about your child’s future?

Jacob’s mother had terminal cancer, and during an ER visit, was hospitalized. A Public Counsel volunteer attorney had Jacob’s grandmother, Sara, named as Jacob’s joint legal guardian. Jacob’s mother passed away knowing that Jacob would be raised in a loving home. With Public Counsel’s assistance, Sara got Jacob enrolled in a school near her home and attends grief counseling with him.

Public Counsel can provide legal assistance to a terminally ill parent or parents, to establish a joint guardianship between a parent and another adult who will assume full responsibility for caring for the child after the parent passes away. We also offer social work support to bring stability into children’s lives.

The parent, child and future caregiver will also receive assistance with:

• Grief counseling
• Educational needs
• Government benefits
• Referrals for additional support services

Knowing that a legal plan exists for the continuing care of your child after you pass away will offer comfort to you and stability for your children.
Finding someone to trust.

Immigration Rights Issues for Undocumented Children

Public Counsel and volunteer attorneys provide legal representation to children who are eligible for Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS). Vulnerable children and youth who have been abused, neglected, or abandoned by their parents, or whose parents have passed away, may qualify for SIJS.

Our attorneys and social workers help assess if a child or youth could be eligible for SIJS, and help with the SIJS application process through the United States Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS).

*Are you under 18 years old and unmarried?*
*Are you living with someone other than your parents?*
*Are your parents deceased, or have they abused or abandoned you?*
*Were you born outside of the United States?*
*Do you have questions about how you might obtain a green card?*

The Special Immigrant Juvenile Status Project may be able to help.

Rigo was 16 and had run away from home to avoid abuse. He went to live with his adult brother, Sano. Sano and Rigo called Public Counsel's intake line. Public Counsel was able to help Sano obtain legal guardianship of Rigo. Because Rigo had been abused by his parents, Public Counsel also helped Sano with the process of obtaining Special Immigrant Juvenile Status for Rigo, and then a green card. Rigo is living with his brother in a safe home with love and care.
Transitioning Foster Youth

Ensuring a smoother transition into adulthood.

Public Counsel provides legal and social work services to foster youth between the ages of 14 and 23. Foster youth qualify for education subsidies, transitional housing, social service support, and other benefits. We help foster youth access these benefits and assess whether legal assistance is necessary.

Early Intervention

Are you a foster youth between the ages of 14 and 18 or are you in grades 9-12?

Are you living in East or South Los Angeles, or attending Fremont or Roosevelt High School?

We will help you make plans and set goals for your educational future and create a Transitional Independent Living Plan (TILP) and an Individualized Transition Plan (ITP). We want to help you finish high school, plan for college or a vocational career, and achieve long-term success in your life.

Pregnant and Parenting Teens

For the sake of your child

Public Counsel provides social work support and legal advocacy to pregnant and parenting teens. Teen parents face many challenges.

The Children’s Rights Project can help with

- Education
- Access to government benefits
- Housing options
- Medical care
- Mental health care
- Custody
- Paternity
- Child support
- Visitation
We have workshops and know your rights booklets on issues relating to:

- Dating violence
- Child abuse
- Statutory rape
- Parenting while in foster care
- Consent and confidentiality of medical treatment
- Education rights
- Reproductive rights
- Teens and foster care

Guardian Ad Litem Program

Through the Guardian Ad Litem Program, Public Counsel works with the Dependency Court and private attorneys to ensure effective legal representation for a child who is injured while in the foster care system. We recruit and train volunteers to act as guardians ad litem to protect the best interests of foster children who are plaintiffs in civil cases.

Are you a teen mom or dad who wants to understand your legal rights and the rights of your child?

Would it be helpful to have someone to talk to?

Call our Intake Line:
(213) 385-2977, ext. 500.

Melina was 16 when she had her son, Manuel, and they needed a place to live. Public Counsel helped Melina secure housing and medical care so Manuel can grow up safe and healthy.

Guardian Ad Litem Program
The Children’s Rights Project

The goal of Public Counsel’s Children’s Rights Project is to empower children and families to address their wide-ranging legal needs in civil matters. Our multi-disciplinary staff utilizes a comprehensive approach to tackle the difficult issues faced by many of Los Angeles’ children.

Public Counsel supports all stakeholders involved in our programs. We provide for free:

- Technical support to lawyers, policy makers, and service providers who work directly with children, youth, and their families.
- Trainings for parents, health, mental health and social service providers, and volunteers on children’s rights.
- Trainings for volunteer attorneys, bench officers, and court personnel on children’s rights.
- Presentations and discussions at schools and community agencies with youth and families about legal issues and rights.
- Publications related to the various programs of the Children’s Rights Project.

Public Counsel Law Center is the public interest law office of the Los Angeles County and Beverly Hills Bar Associations. The largest pro bono law firm in the United States, Public Counsel serves as the Southern California affiliate of the Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights Under Law. Public Counsel serves those in need by providing legal representation and matching financially eligible clients with volunteer attorneys.

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While this publication is designed to provide accurate and current information about the law, readers should contact an attorney or other expert for advice in particular cases, and should also consult the relevant statutes and court decisions when relying on cited materials.

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You may find this booklet and other Public Counsel booklets at www.publiccounsel.org (First click on “Practice Areas”; second, click on “Children’s Rights”; third, click on “Publications”)

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