

## **Parent Representation Committee to meet June 3**

June 2, 2016

The Mississippi Parent Representation Committee will meet at 10 a.m. June 3 to discuss funding for pilot programs that provide legal representation to parents facing the possibility of having their children taken away and standards for attorney representation.

The quarterly meeting of the Parent Representation Committee will be held in the office of the Attorney General in Room 1307 of the Walter Sillers Building at 550 High Street in Jackson.

The Parent Representation Committee, chaired by Rankin County Court Judge Thomas Broome, is working to develop a program to provide legal representation for low income parents whose children come into the custody of the Youth Courts and the Department of Human Services due to allegations of abuse or neglect.

The meeting will begin at 10 a.m. with updates on the pilot programs that operate in Youth Courts in Adams, Forrest, Hancock, Harrison and Rankin counties. The pilot programs provide free legal representation for low-income parents in Youth Court hearings in which allegations of abuse or neglect could result in court-ordered removal of children from parents' custody. The committee is working to sustain those programs and hopes to create two more pilot programs for parent representation in DeSoto and Lafayette counties. However, the Parent Representation Committee has not yet been able to secure funding for new programs. The existing programs are funded by Casey Family Programs and a federal grant overseen by the Administrative Office of Courts.

The Committee is expected to discuss laws adopted during the recently concluded legislative session and their implications. New laws address parent representation and termination of parental rights. House Bill 772 states, in part, "If the court determines that a parent or guardian who is a party in an abuse, neglect or termination of parental rights proceeding is indigent, the youth court judge may appoint counsel to represent the indigent parent or guardian in the proceeding."

The Committee has spent about two years drafting standards of practice for attorneys representing parents in child protection and termination of parental rights proceedings. The Committee is expected to finalize those standards during the June 3 meeting. The Mississippi Judicial College and the University of Mississippi School of Law have worked with representatives of the American Bar Association Center on Children and the Law and the University of South Carolina School of Law Children's Law Center to draft standards of practice.

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