

## CFCR's Future: A Critical Moment of Transition



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# Council for Children's Rights

Dear CFCR Family:

As we mark the conclusion of our Children's Defense Team contract, CFCR's board and leadership have been diligently working to secure our organization's future. Over the past two months, we've engaged in open and sometimes difficult discussions with various stakeholders, including institutional funders, partner organizations, judges, former board members, donors, past employees, volunteer attorneys, and former executive directors of legal nonprofits. Our goal has been to explore sustainable ways to maintain impactful programming in today's complex nonprofit landscape.

During this time, we asked for your support—and you answered with generosity and encouragement. We are incredibly grateful for your continued support of our children, and going forward, we will continue to need the support of the Charlotte community more than ever to be able to continue to impact this community and bring positive outcomes to our children.

In our evaluation process, our central questions have been:

- *How can CFCR have the greatest possible impact on the most vulnerable children in Charlotte and across North Carolina?*
- *What scope and scale of organization can be sustainably supported by our donors, the legal community, and philanthropic foundations?*

Informed by the feedback we've received and our internal work over the past two months, the board has approved a strategic shift to a more focused, smaller and streamlined organization—one dedicated to protecting the rights of children in all areas of their lives, with special emphasis on education rights and mental health outcomes. This is a moment of transformation for our organization, and an opportunity to sharpen our impact by continuing our advocacy for children in foster care and supporting those with mental health needs.

As part of this realignment, the board has made the painful but necessary decision to wind down the Custody Advocacy Program (CAP), effective June 30. We understand how vital CAP has been to so many children and families since the program's inception in 1979 and are grateful for the thousands of staff, volunteer attorneys, and custody advocates whose unwavering commitment has helped shape a safer, more just world for vulnerable children and whose impact in the community will be felt for years to come.

As we move forward with this difficult decision, we are deeply saddened to have to say goodbye to our devoted CAP team members and additional dedicated staff who have been instrumental in driving our mission forward. All have demonstrated unwavering commitment, compassion, and expertise in their work, and we are grateful for their tireless efforts to support vulnerable children and families.

We also appreciate the individual connection so many of you have to CAP. We are working to ensure a smooth transition, including responsibly and in a compliant manner resolving all active cases and reaching out to our network of volunteer attorneys to ensure continuity wherever possible.

As CFCR looks ahead, we also want to share that, after nearly six years as Executive Director and 14 years of remarkable service, Heather Johnson has made the decision to step down. During her tenure, Heather has been a steadfast leader who strengthened our programs, expanded partnerships, and advanced CFCR's mission with compassion, wisdom, and integrity. Her impact on thousands of children and families in our community is immeasurable, and we are deeply thankful for her leadership.

Heather's last day with CFCR will be June 13, after which Karen Parker will take over as Interim Executive Director. Karen has over 35 years of experience working with nonprofit and governmental organizations in North Carolina and beyond, including serving as President and CEO of Safe Alliance in Charlotte for almost nine years. We are confident Karen will lead CFCR with the same heart and dedication that Heather has demonstrated during her tenure. The Board will commence a search for a permanent Executive Director promptly.

As we enter this next phase, we remain committed to our core mission and values in these extremely challenging financial times. These financial challenges and uncertainties are no different for CFCR. While we are optimistic about this new path going forward, the challenges of transitioning the organization, and finalizing financial commitment conversations that are underway remain critically important to ensure we can continue serving children in this community. **We need your continued support** to continue our mission. If you are willing to help during this time of urgent need, we welcome your outreach.

Thank you for your past, present, and continued support as we continue to stand up for the rights and well-being of our community's most vulnerable children.

**Keith Atkinson**  
President, Board of Directors  
Council for Children's Rights



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