



NEW JERSEY STATE BAR ASSOCIATION

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July 28, 2020

The Honorable Phil D. Murphy
Post Office Box 001
Trenton, New Jersey 08625

Re: Prioritizing Parenting Time for Foster Children

Dear Governor Murphy:

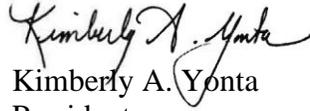
Please accept our appreciation for your leadership and dedication during this difficult time during the COVID-19 pandemic. We also extend gratitude to the hard work of your administration in carrying on with essential business in the wake of the stay home order issued on March 21, 2020, and the subsequent continuation of those orders. State employees are now facing a new challenge in maintaining their important work while complying with the mandated furlough requirements. We are writing to bring attention to the unintended consequences of these measures upon children in foster care and their families.

Many children and parents have had remote contact only, if any, in situations where children are in state custody, since the initial Order in response to the COVID-19 pandemic was issued. Only last week has in-person parenting time commenced. With the furloughs of DCPD employees, the long anticipated in-person visits have been put off in some cases, due to the reduced staffing. It is our concern that these weeks that have turned into months without time for the parent-child bonding will have a detrimental effect on parents and children, and that there may be unforeseen future interruptions in this important connection between parents and children. We have attached the Advocates for Children of New Jersey's article "Emphasizing the Importance of Family Visits for Children Living in Foster Care," in order to stress the importance of family visits from several different viewpoints. <https://acnj.org/emphasizing-the-importance-of-family-visits-for-children-living-in-foster-care/>

It is our request that in-person family time be prioritized as essential work in the event there are future obstacles that preclude this necessary contact from occurring. We also urge the administration to take measures that attempt to remedy the past interruption in family time and services by encouraging the Department of Children and Families to implement policies such as recommending extensions of time for reunification in lieu of recommendations for goals of adoption for those families impacted by these unfortunate circumstances.

Thank you for your attention and consideration in these matters.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kimberly A. Yonta". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "K".

Kimberly A. Yonta
President

cc: Sen. Stephen M. Sweeney
Asw. Craig Coughlin
Comm. Christine Norbut Beyer
Asst. Comm. Carmen Diaz-Petti
Angela Scheck, NJSBA Executive Director