

February 23, 2017 Judge Blumstein and the 08 team, Brian Roffman (GAL MBIA attorney) and Brandon Bartley (GAL supervisor).

Judge Blumstein kicked off the meeting by speaking a bit about himself and his background. He thanked all the GALs for doing what we do. He stated that he has the least amount of experience in the room and wasn't asking for our sympathy but for our patience! He is working towards stability and consistency in the courtroom. He sees several common denominators in the cases before him: poverty, substance abuse, mental illness and mental deficiency. He sees the GAL as the impartial party on the case. If during a hearing he doesn't acknowledge the GAL or ask you to speak it is because he is focused on the case plan, reports, tasks, etc. He is not dismissing what you need to say- please advise the court you would like to speak. It is not a snub, he is just getting up to speed on his cases.

Several questions were asked to all the panelists.

1. What do you want to hear from the GAL?

- a. Brandon- everything! You provide the information we ultimately give to the Court.
- b. Judge Blumstein- that the child is in a good, safe placement. How are the caregivers/custodians.
- c. Brian- he wants to know when you are present for a hearing. He doesn't want GALs waiting 3 hours for a case to be called- he will try to get your case called if he knows you are there! He also wants to know what's going on in the case- email, text or call but keep him informed.

2. What are your pet peeves?

- a. Brian- if you want things to happen on your case, do things in a timely manner and "give me the FACTS". I can't get things done if you don't give me the information I need.
- b. Judge Blumstein- when the GAL program has been appointed on a case, but a GAL has not been assigned or the GAL is unable to report to the court how the child is doing. There are hearings which are time sensitive and the program needs to make sure the Judge can be given the necessary information.
- c. Brandon- when volunteers feel like they are a burden. "The more we hear from you the better".

If for some reason you are unable to do your monthly visit, let your supervisor know. They can get someone to do the visit for you!!

3. When do you consider changing the goal of the case plan?

- a. Judge Blumstein- within 12 months of adjudication of dependency and the parent is not in substantial compliance, we need to reconsider the goal. I also look at the length of time in the system and the age of the child.
- b. Brian- if we could get to the point where we follow the statute it would be amazing! Unfortunately, lots of things get in the way of permanency. We have to be able to prove the TPR by clear and convincing evidence.
- c. Brandon- it's difficult but there are signs during the case that the goal of the case plan is not being met and changing the goal is on the horizon. Notify your supervisor and attorney if you see these at the 6 month mark.

Make sure that referrals have been made! Sometimes referrals have been made but don't begin for an extended period of time due to a wait list.

4. How many 2nd chance case plans are sufficient?

- a. Judge Blumstein- the parties to the case plan are the parents and DCF. Although GAL is a party to the case, they don't often sign on the case plan although sometimes they do make modifications. Non-compliance is the genesis of the problem. Also need to consider if referrals have been made. They have 12 months to create their 2nd chances!!
- b. Brian- sometimes a parent has completed all their required tasks, but have not been able to secure housing or employment. In that case the Court can neither TPR the parent or reunify so the case continues.

5. When do you want our reports and what do you look for in them?

- a. Brandon- 2 weeks in advance because they must be filed 72 hours in advance of the hearing. I am looking for thorough information: placement, last visit, interactions between the caregiver/ custodians and children and the parents/children, school, medical, dental, your recommendations and the child's wishes. This is your chance to show your effort and work!!
- b. Judge Blumstein- 72 hours in advance. How the child is doing, are there other children in the home, what activities are they involved in and how are they doing in school.
- c. Brian- get your reports in early!! We can always add to them if there are any changes prior to the hearing.

6. What is your view on children attending the hearings? How often?

- a. Judge Blumstein- children are always welcome. Sometimes I will request they attend but we must balance with school. If important for a child to attend a hearing, I will try to schedule it around the child's school or activity. Don't get offended if a child tells you something and then changes their position when they come to Court. School will always take precedence.

7. What is your procedure if a child wants to meet with you privately?

- a. Judge Blumstein- I will meet with the child in the presence of the GAL. I won't meet with a child alone. My preference is to speak with the child in the courtroom sidebar.
- b. Brandon- let him know and he will tell the attorney. Try to ask the child what they wish to discuss with the Judge. If possible, the attorney can arrange for you and the child to speak to the Judge in chambers.
- c. Brian- let me know and that is the first thing I will mention during the hearing.

8. Do you want to hear from foster parents/caregivers?

- a. Judge Blumstein- YES!

9. Who do you want to hear from: the GAL or the CBIA? Who do you want to hear from first?

- a. Judge Blumstein- I want to hear from both and the order is not important.

10. How can we get a case set earlier than the JR? What triggers that?

- a. Brian- if there is a major issue let the supervisor and attorney know. If they need to set it for a hearing it can be handled- they will speak to the JA, set it on calendar and file a motion. Sometimes things can be done behind the scenes and a hearing isn't necessary.

11. Any tips or recommendations you can give us?

- a. Brandon- if a parent/custodian sees you as an adversary let them know who you are and what you do. Ask them their thoughts or goals for their child.
- b. Judge Blumstein- there is only a limited amount of time in court. Be clear in your recommendations and make a recommendation. Be specific. Capture the essence of your report up front.
- c. Brian- be careful about not becoming "the enemy or the best friend". You have to remain unbiased.