

## **September 10, 2019: Meet Judge Angelica D. Zayas**

Judge Zayas thanked all the GAL volunteers for their time and efforts.

- Judge Zayas recommends that we speak clearly, make a record, and use our passion when we speak in court -- but have evidence to back it up what we say.
- **What do you want to hear from the GAL?**  
She appreciates all of the GALs being there for the children and attending Court. We bring a different perspective than the attorneys. She wants to know what the children are thinking, feeling, and what makes them happy. Humanize the kids, tell her about normalcy activities. She wants to know anything the children want her to know or that you think she needs to know.
- **What are your pet peeves?**  
No food, no gum, no drinks, and no cell phones. Maintain professionalism. Don't use acronyms. (Too many mean the same thing; i.e., SAO -- Stay Away Order or State Attorney's Office).
- **Reports: when do you want them, what do you look for, and how much detail do you want?**  
I want them in advance -- I will read whatever I get. I want updates from issues raised in the last hearing. I want them to include what I need to know. Please have the GAL attorney or supervisor email my JA a soft copy.
- **What is your view on children attending court? What is your procedure if a child wants to speak with you privately?**  
I prefer that children attend school, but if they want to come, then have them attend. If children wish to speak to me, they need to be able to articulate their need, what they want, and why. I will listen but will not meet with a child alone. I will ask another adult (preferably the GAL) to join us. I won't meet separately if there are objections from other parties. The GAL knows when children should/should not attend a hearing.
- **How do you feel about foster parents/ caregivers attending the hearing?**  
They have great perspective about the daily life of the children. If there are issues, they should be addressed at staffings, rather than in Court.
- **When discussing how the children are doing or what is going on -- do you want to hear from the GAL or the MBIA (Manifest Best Interest Attorney)?**  
I want to hear from the GAL about daily issues, the well-being of the child, normalcy, extracurricular activities. The attorney addresses the legal issues.
- **What do you recommend we do when parents are in compliance but haven't gained insight?**  
Depends on the case! Parents have rights and statutes govern what a Judge is able to do.

- **When the GAL and MBIA think a child needs a specific service but DCF/Agency don't think it's necessary - what should we do?**  
I will ask you for evidence of why the service is necessary and if possible, put on an expert.
- **Is it OK for GALs to appear by phone? Any special procedure?**  
The Judge doesn't really care for it because the courtroom is chaotic, and it is difficult to hear and determine who is speaking. She would really like you to be present if the child is attending the hearing. She also understands that appearing is not possible all the time, and if you must appear by phone, let your attorney know in advance so arrangements can be made.
- **How do you feel about GALs passing notes to MBIA during a hearing?**  
Fine -- as long as it isn't disruptive.
- **Do you always ask to hear from the GAL?**  
YES, I do. I have an order that I use in the courtroom, starting with DCF and working around the room. I want to know from you how the child is doing. If I don't ask you, speak up!
- **Any special rules for your courtroom?**  
Treat it like a courtroom -- dress properly, be professional, no gum, food, drinks, or cell phones.
- **How many last chance case plans are sufficient? When do you consider changing the goal?**  
Depends on the case and "how close is close"! I change the goal when it is apparent that the goal isn't working.
- **As a Judge, are you able to ask therapists to write more detailed reports about the parents and their progress in services?**  
Yes, and I have.
- **When you have complicated/long cases, what do you look for regarding relevant without becoming overwhelmed?**  
I take detailed notes and have a great memory.
- **What do you recommend we do if an agency/case manager is uncooperative or unresponsive until right before the hearing?**  
Reach out to the case manager, your supervisor, or your attorney. Try to staff the case with the agency. If all fails, have your attorney file a motion and set it on calendar. I will always ask if you tried to resolve the issue prior to putting it on calendar.
- **What tips do you have for us to be great advocates?**  
Know your case, the issues, history, etc. If you tell me there is a problem, suggest a solution, if you can.
- **Is there anything you would like to implement or change?**  
Not yet, but if there is something that you know isn't working, let us know.

- **Do you make decisions/ findings on trials the same day as the trial?**  
Haven't had any trials yet in dependency. But in other divisions, if it was a 1-day trial, I usually had findings by the end of the day.
- **How has your experience been so far?**  
Different than Delinquency and Family. I enjoy speaking with the children. I have toys, books, and a closet of gently used clothing in my courtroom for CHANCE victims. I really enjoy that, too!