



OKLAHOMA  
COMMISSION ON  
CHILDREN AND YOUTH



**SUPPORT  
PROTECT  
MONITOR**



**2019 ANNUAL PARB REPORT**



## WHAT IS THE POST ADJUDICATION REVIEW BOARD (PARB)?

The PARB is a group of informed local citizens that review juvenile court cases where a child has been removed from their home due to abuse or neglect. It functions in an advisory capacity to the court by making recommendations focused on ensuring the best interests of the child are met and trauma is reduced by helping identify and remove barriers to permanency. The PARB provides detailed oversight of the case including: accountability for parties, identification of community resources, as well as identifies, highlights and addresses barriers and systemic issues that negatively impact the child welfare, court, and foster care system.



## THE STATE OF OKLAHOMA AS PARENTS AND THE DEPRIVED COURT SYSTEM

The deprived court system is a formal legal system set up to protect dependent children from their legal primary caregivers due to confirmed abuse or neglect. Once the assistant district attorney files a deprived petition and the court rules in favor of that petition, then the child is deemed or adjudicated as deprived. This means that the State of Oklahoma, through Child Welfare Services and the courts are now responsible for the child. Hence the term Department of Human Services (DHS) custody or state custody. The number of children in state custody can vary from day to day. In the state fiscal year (SFY) 2019 4,416 kids entered out of home care and 4,889 left out of home care. However, on June 3, 2019 there were 4,525 open DHS court cases in Oklahoma that represented 8,289 kids.

Typically, children are placed in foster homes or kinship homes while the court is involved in their case and has custody. Kids can leave state custody by returning to their parents after a judge has determined the conditions which led to their removal have been corrected. They can also leave custody through adoption, after the parents parental rights have been terminated, or by turning 18. This is often called reaching permanence. The amount of time that kids are in state custody before reaching permanence varies greatly from one case to another. The average length of stay in custody in Oklahoma during SFY 2019 was 555 days or 18 months.

There are a lot of people involved in these deprived cases representing different interests and different goals. There are the parents, kids, parent's attorneys, kid's attorneys, court appointed special advocates (CASA), assistant district attorneys, judges, child welfare permanency workers and others. It is the judge's job to sort through all of these competing perspectives and make decisions on the progress and direction of the case.

The PARB can conduct interviews with all of the parties, as well as review court and child welfare documents, in order to make informed recommendations to the presiding judge. In this way the PARB supports, protects and monitors the entire deprived court system.

**In SFY 2019, on average, there were 8,000 children in out of home care represented in over 4,000 active deprived cases. The average length of stay in custody in Oklahoma during SFY 2019 was 555 days or 18 months.**

## PARB 2019: MOVING UP, MOVING FORWARD



Keith Pirtle  
PARB Program Manager

The Oklahoma PARB Program and volunteers took many steps up and forward in 2019. Oklahoma PARB saw a new PARB program manager starting in March, a dramatic increase in active PARBs across the state, an active state PARB, new relationships with the Oklahoma Department of Human Services (OKDHS), other partners, and additional training.

Keith Pirtle hit the ground running as the PARB program manager in late March of 2019. He arrived just in time to write the 2018 annual report, and helped with last minute details of the CASA/PARB Conference and the May 2019 State PARB Meeting. Keith helped focus

PARB members statewide to a vision of supporting, protecting, and monitoring. He quickly drove across the state to start a conversation and relationship with every local board chair and membership and has kept up that communication through regular memo's, e-mails and visits. Keith has completed his first round of assessment visits and is now helping with member recruitment, technical assistance and training. Keith is working with local communities, state PARBs and the University of Oklahoma to define and measure PARB outcomes and start the first ever PARB data system. Keith has also made it his mission to improve the professionalism and responsiveness of the state PARB office and enhance relationships with DHS and other critical state level partners. These efforts have provided results and we're looking forward to continued enhancement of the PARB program through volunteer and staff efforts.

The state PARB had three meetings in 2019 and discussed several issues. These included the need for better visibility, a new name, and continued commitment to tracking the PARB's recommendations and data.

The PARB Judicial Survey was also created and disseminated. The data was collected all during the summer of 2019. The valuable information collected due to this survey will be reviewed later in this report.

There were three meetings held by state PARB members to discuss kids at risk for continued abuse and neglect due to community isolation. This subcommittee of the state PARB, is hoping to work with other advocates and stakeholders across the state to address how to keep kids safe when they are pulled out of the public school system and community connections.

The CASA/PARB Conference was held May 3-4, 2019 in Norman. Around 65 PARB members were in attendance. The PARB track included information on specialty PARBs. These are the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA), the dually adjudicated, domestic violence, and transition age youth. The workshops were well attended.

The 2018 annual report was completed and submitted to the Oklahoma Commission on Children and Youth (OCCY) in May of 2019. The state PARB board made several recommendations on how to improve the annual report. This included having more quotes, promoting the PARB's efforts, sharing more PARB and child welfare data, as well as moving towards outcomes as much as possible. The 2019 annual report questionnaire was sent

out in December 2019 to all the local PARBs across the state. This included a request for their 2020 meeting dates, any membership changes, the usual data on the number of cases reviewed in 2019, volunteer hours, as well as other critical information for 2019. The open-ended questions were modified this year in order to gain insight into the training and other needs of the local PARB members.

Several new PARBs were started or restarted in 2019. This included a new board with new members in Choctaw county. A new Oklahoma County Mental Health Board was created to focus on kids who are in and out of multiple placements due to mental health and behavioral issues. This board will also conduct medication reviews, identify needed mental health services, and support foster parents with behavioral health plans. This is the first PARB of it's kind to focus on mental health issues in Oklahoma and the 7th local board in Oklahoma county. New boards were also started in Cleveland and Canadian counties. These counties are some of the most populous in the state. Tulsa county is now going strong after many years of sporadic efforts. Thanks to the efforts of Kim Rebsamen, Tulsa PARB Coordinator, and the many volunteers in Tulsa county, there are now 4 boards going strong in Tulsa who are not only making great recommendations but also receiving feedback on those recommendations and the changes in the case that were made.

2019 also saw the creation of a year-long set training calendar for 2019 and 2020. This calendar includes a new member training in either Tulsa or Oklahoma county every month. It also includes advanced level trainings happening regularly and audio and teleconference participation is now available.

### PARB: UP AND FORWARD



In March of 2019, PARB gained a new program manager named Keith Pirtle who launched a new vision for PARB: Support, Protect, Monitor.



In the summer of 2019, a PARB Judicial Survey was completed in efforts to collect valuable information about PARB and how it can improve.



The state PARB proposed to adopt the new name Citizens Review Board for Children and Youth.



Several new PARB boards were launched or restarted. A new Oklahoma county mental health board was also launched.



PARB created and launched a year long training calendar which features advanced level training events and audio/teleconferencing is available.

## THE PARB JUDICIAL SURVEY: AREAS OF OPPORTUNITY AND DEVELOPMENT

In June of 2019 a PARB survey went out to all juvenile court judges in the state. Twenty-one surveys were returned and compiled into a report. Many of the judges did not have a PARB that reviewed their cases. The survey covered questions related to judicial satisfaction and overall usefulness of a PARB. The findings were presented at a Juvenile Justice Oversight and Advisory Committee meeting in July of 2019, the judicial conference in August of 2019, and presented at the September 2019 State PARB meeting.

The results indicated some judges do find the PARB to be helpful, an important part of the process, and that PARB members do help identify unknown issues. Some judges indicated they were neutral about these questions while others saw room for improvement.

The survey also gave us an indication of how the judges felt about the appointment process and their level of interaction with PARB members. Again, judges were mostly satisfied with the appointment process and some judges interacted more with their boards than others.

The last few indicators clearly demonstrated the need to better engage judges, improve the training for the PARB members, and advance our overall recommendation process. While most of the judges reported that the PARB recommendations were helpful to the court, there

is clear indication that not all judges see the PARB's importance as part of the juvenile justice system. Efforts are currently under way to advance the PARB member training on writing effective recommendations and engaging judges.

Throughout the survey, the judges also indicated the skills or qualifications they believe the PARB volunteers should have. Some of them include:

- Life experience of many types is helpful.
- Retired teachers are good.
- Passion for caring for children
- Having members with knowledge of medical care, child welfare, and the court system.
- Knowledge of the deprived court system and understanding there are more parties involved than just OKDHS.
- Trauma training
- Having a child

They also believe that the PARB would have a greater impact if:

- PARB members were educated more effectively.
- PARB members attended court occasionally to become more familiar with the process.
- PARB members were trained on how to identify

areas of concern and had a checklist to follow.

- PARB members were trained in report writing
- PARB reviews were completed within a month of the court date and reports were submitted in a timely manner.
- PARB recommendations were more than "surface" statements, including meaningful suggestions addressing real issues in the case.
- PARB meetings were held at the same time as the deprived docket.
- The PARB was required to obtain information on behalf of the parents prior to issuing a recommendation.
- A representative of the PARB attended court to explain the recommendations given.
- The PARB was required to obtain information from all parties, not just OKDHS.
- Was aware of annual training that is available to juvenile court team members.

We are grateful to Felice Hamilton and the Administrative Office of the Courts for sending out the survey and collecting the information.

We appreciate Judge VerSteeg's encouragement with the Administrative Office of the Courts to make the survey possible and for facilitating a presentation on the results at the 2019 Summer Judicial Conference.

**"As a judge of the District Court in District 2, I am so proud of the work that the PARB provides in our district. I work more closely with the Beckham-Roger Mills PARB and always look forward to their yellow sheet reports. These are views from citizens of our area who are passionate in their service to our kids. Citizen input is a cornerstone in our system of justice. We rely on citizen jurors to decide our most important questions regarding liberty or property. It is equally important for citizen volunteers to provide that extra set of eyes to ensure that our children, caught up in the juvenile system, are properly cared for by that system. The PARB represents the "back stop" to make sure our children are protected. Local boards all over the state are truly doing the Lord's work in serving our kids."**

*- Pat VerSteeg, Associate District Judge*



## ANNUAL REPORTING FROM LOCAL PARB BOARDS

PARB VOLUNTEERS	315
DEPRIVED CASES REVIEWED	4,047
DELINQUENT CASES REVIEWED	458
CHILDREN INVOLVED IN REVIEWS	6,823
VOLUNTEER HOURS REPORTED	8,441
JUDICIAL DISTRICTS SERVED	25
BOARDS THAT REVIEWED 100% OF THE DEPRIVED CASES	27
MEMBERS ATTENDING TRAINING	146

In December of 2019 all local PARB chairs were asked to submit their board's activities for the annual report. Out of the 47 boards, 39 provided information for this report.

Each service provider listed below provides case information to PARB boards. The percentages listed show what percentage of the boards receive input from that entity.

DHS-Child Welfare	97%
CASA	68%
Foster Parent	34%
Judge	32%
Service Provider	29%
Attorney	24%
OJA	16%
Assistant District Attorney	13%
Tribe/Indian Child Welfare	13%
School Personnel	11%

## NARRATIVE RESPONSES FROM LOCAL PARB BOARDS

### What kind of obstacles are you experiencing regarding the functioning of your boards and the functioning of the deprived system?

- Late, missing, or insufficient reporting from child welfare specialists.
- Not receiving CASA reports in time for PARB meetings.
- Not having specific material items such as printers, yellow paper, white paper, and stamps.
- Court orders not in the court file and court files are often incomplete and when the most recent orders are not in the file, then the board does not know when the next court date is.
- PARB's want to know when the judges see their recommendations and would like better communication with OKDHS.

### What steps can be taken for their local PARB to function better?

- Local boards need to recruit more members and have a commitment from their members to attend meetings regularly.
- Members need a clear understanding of board meeting parameters.
- Faster resolution of cases – especially in ter-

mination cases.

- The ability to attend deprived court at least twice a year but are concerned judges will not approve it.
- Access to the KIDS database from OKDHS or to OCIS would provide needed information faster.
- Increased cooperation between the district attorney's office, public defender's office and PARB volunteers.

### What kind of information and/or training does your local PARB need to succeed?

- Drug abuse and domestic violence training within child abuse and neglect situations.
- How to conduct a monthly board review with proper documentation procedures to meet OCCY's expectations.
- What are the best ways to network with CASA?
- What is the focus of our questions asked in the summary of our recommendations?
- Regular updates on what services may be available to our children and/or parents.
- The need to better understand the role of the children's attorneys.
- Regular updates on any changes in the law

and OKDHS policies and rules.

- How to write a good recommendation.
- Training on appropriate medications, IEP's, 504 behavioral plans, psychological evaluations, medical reports, and counseling reports.
- The effects of trauma on kids.
- What is the Families First Act and its implication on child welfare cases?
- Contributions from foster care organizations and judges within the legal system.

### How can the state PARB staff and state PARB members be more supportive of local board efforts?

- Additional office supplies and training materials are needed.
- Localized training and training videos.
- The state staff needs to meet with the judges in the counties that have a PARB.
- The state staff needs to address problems with court clerks and to continue to work on building better relationships with DHS.
- PARB forms need to be modified and updated.
- Allocate funding and resources to volunteer recruitment and retention efforts by adding items like flyers, social media boosts, and

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## NARRATIVE RESPONSES FROM LOCAL PARB BOARDS

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meet and greets.

### Please identify any systemic issues, concerns, or barriers your local PARB is experiencing.

- Boards are concerned about having adequate services and transportation provided in their areas.
- Many boards are reporting they are not receiving all the deprived cases for review that they should.
- Its harder to help our delinquent children due to very few services being available as well as the lack of funding for services including the Office of Juvenile Affairs (OJA).
- Local boards would like feedback from district attorneys and the judges involved with their recommendations.
- Boards are concerned that the termination rule of 15 out of the last 24 months needs to be followed better. They expressed it is not acceptable to have children in the system for more than 3 years.
- Would like to encourage a renewed effort to move away from the option of jury trials for adjudication.
- Members are concerned about the lack of termination of parental rights being filed and noted the delay in termination filings being difficult.
- It was noted local DHS workers must travel great distances to cover cases because secondary caseworkers are not allowed anymore.
- It was conveyed that local assistant district attorneys (ADA) have a lack of interest and knowledge regarding deprived cases.
- Children are being reunified with parents too quickly.
- The PARB is not well known and seems to

- have very little clout in some of the counties.
- The PARB is not in the curriculum that the foster parents hear and very few workers and attorneys know enough about the role of the PARB.
- Noted the number of mothers who are (or have been) in the Oklahoma judicial system birthing children with drugs in their system.
- Would like the state PARB staff to clarify legislation regarding access to confidential, yet pertinent information.
- Suggested the requirement of all judges in deprived cases to have training about child abuse.
- Requested the state PARB staff track training opportunities and attendance, as well as enforce any rules in place.
- Boards would like access to the educational resources available to them and where to find them.
- Many boards expressed their concern about the high turnover of OKDHS workers. It was noted to be an increasing problem that could be caused by the system being overwhelmed (which encourages mistakes).
- The boards reported a lack of services available in rural areas for children, especially those who are/were sexually abused, and for sexual abusers.
- The boards mentioned the lack of domestic violence services in the Tulsa area. They stated the wait list for services is often extensive and can significantly slow progress to permanency. In addition, it was noted access to child welfare records is very limited.
- It was recommended that child welfare history checks be conducted with the PARB applicants.
- It was noted there is a lack of knowledge by OKDHS staff concerning state and federal

laws related to education and the “educational” rights of children in foster care.

### What additional questions, comments, concerns, and feedback would you like to offer to the state PARB or state PARB staff?

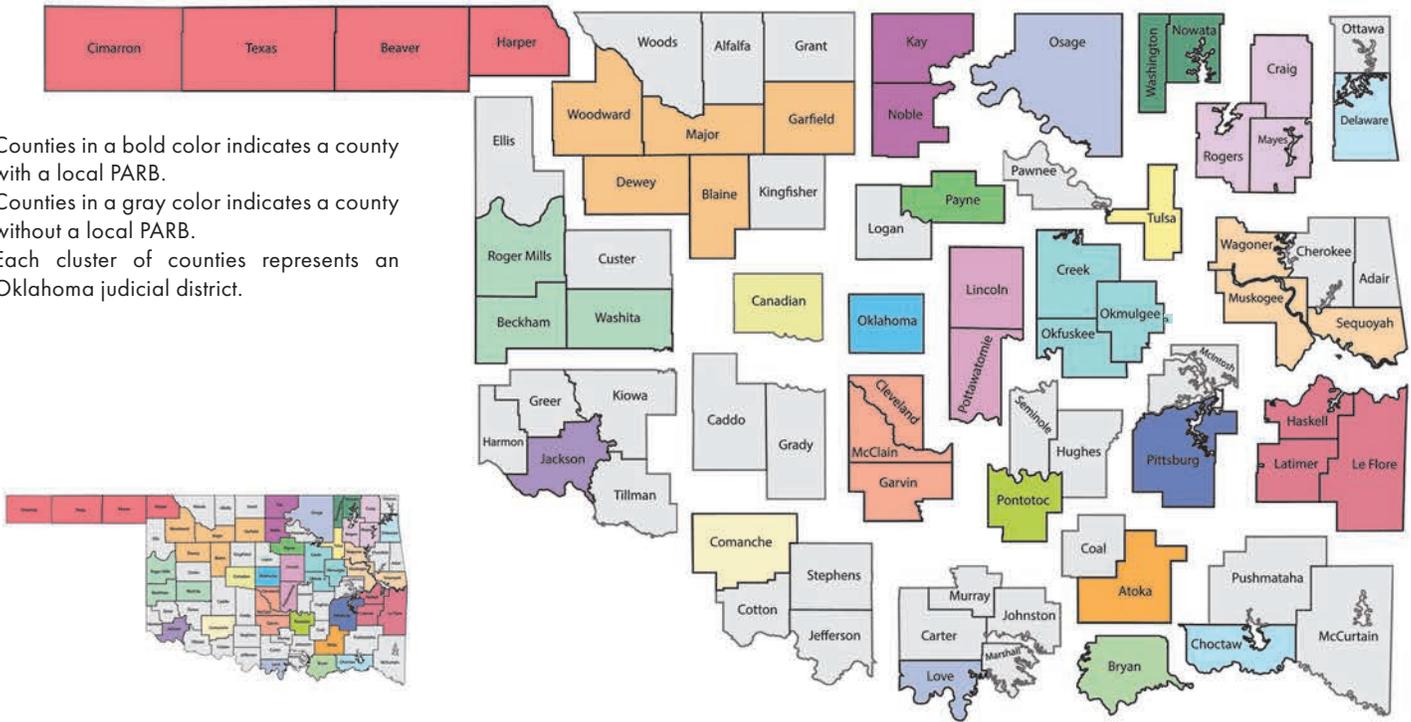
- When cases have been open long term with no real progress, what can we do besides request for the case to speed up?
- One board reported they rely heavily on their county workers and their supervisor.
- Another board requested that the chairpersons get together and share how their boards operate and exchange information.
- It was noted the mileage reimbursement and the application process has been slow and challenging in the past but now it is fixed.
- Pittsburg County stated that their Judge Mindy Beare has been supportive of PARB and spoke with their board on how they could be the most helpful to her with their recommendations in the deprived cases.
- One board stated that OKDHS has stepped up and provides supervisors to attend meetings to address any concerns they have.
- It was stated that CASA is providing reports along with the tribes.
- One board said, “Thank you for your support and guidance and for always being available and willing to help maintain our local board, as well as addressing state-wide issues that impact the lives of Oklahoma children and families.”
- Another board stated our county has been great to be a part of and all the other PARB members enjoy being a part of the committee as well.

**“As a former administrator in child welfare, I always appreciated the role of the PARB in the system. However I didn’t truly appreciate the expertise, commitment, and hard work that the PARB members have for improving the lives of children AND the system until I became a member. The boards are an important and necessary part of public child welfare systems.”**

*- Lynda Arnold, Current PARB Member in Oklahoma County and Former Child Welfare Director for the State of Oklahoma*

## EXPLODED VIEW: PARB LOCATIONS WITHIN OKLAHOMA JUDICIAL DISTRICTS

- Counties in a bold color indicates a county with a local PARB.
- Counties in a gray color indicates a county without a local PARB.
- Each cluster of counties represents an Oklahoma judicial district.



District 1: Beaver, Cimarron, Harper, Texas

District 2: Beckham, Custer, Ellis, Roger Mills, Washita

District 3: Greer, Harmon, Kiowa, Jackson, Tillman

District 4: Alfalfa, Blaine, Dewey, Garfield, Grant, Kingfisher, Major, Woods, Woodward

District 5: Comanche, Cotton, Jefferson, Stephens

District 6: Caddo, Grady

District 7: Oklahoma

District 8: Kay, Noble

District 9: Logan, Payne

District 10: Osage

District 11: Nowata, Washington

District 12: Craig, Mayes, Rogers

District 13: Delaware, Ottawa

District 14: Pawnee, Tulsa

District 15: Adair, Cherokee, Muskogee, Sequoyah, Wagoner

District 16: Haskell, Latimer, LeFlore

District 17: Choctaw, McCurtain, Pushmataha

District 18: McIntosh, Pittsburg

District 19: Bryan

District 20: Carter, Johnston, Love, Marshall, Murray

District 21: Cleveland, Garvin, McClain

District 22: Hughes, Pontotoc, Seminole

District 23: Lincoln, Pottawatomie

District 24: Okfuskee, Okmulgee, Creek

District 25: Atoka, Coal

District 26: Canadian

**“I appreciate the PARB’s close analysis of the cases. The reports help me identify important issues that need to be addressed. We do not have a CASA in every case. For the cases that we do not have a CASA, the PARBs help fill the gap to a certain extent. For cases with a CASA, the PARB’s contribution is like having ‘a belt and suspenders.’”**

*- Judge Theresa Dreiling, District Judge*

**Tulsa County PARB members have really gone above and beyond this last year. It is exciting to see the interest taken by the many volunteers dedicating their time to ensure permanency outcomes for the children involved in deprived cases and their recommendations are appreciated in assisting the court and the parties with giving guidance to achieve permanency outcomes.**

*- Tera Snelson, Court Case Manager*

## PARB: SUPPORTS, PROTECTS, MONITORS



In SFY 2019 DHS received 81,249 reports of abuse or neglect, in which 138,907 children were alleged victims. Of these, 15,809 child victims were confirmed. In SFY 2019 on average, there were 8,000 children in out of home care represented in over 4,000 active deprived cases. These kids stayed in DHS custody and out of a permanent home on average for one and a half years. The Deprived Court System in Oklahoma that is designed to take care of these kids is sustained by a massive statewide infrastructure of attorneys, child welfare workers, foster parents and more. This infrastructure represents a large cost to the state of Oklahoma. Oklahoma Child welfare alone spent \$480,480,160 during SFY 2019 and employed just over 3,000 Full Time Equivalencies (FTE's). In the early 1980's the Oklahoma Legislature realized that this critical and large system needed a citizen watchdog group to support and monitor it and therefore created PARB. PARB has an annual budget of \$260,000 and is supported by 2.5 FTE's. Even with this small paid staff and budget the 300 volunteers identify and address individual and systemic issues that might otherwise be missed by the larger system.

## PARB: THE JOURNEY AHEAD

PARB volunteers and staff are now looking at 2020 and the decade ahead by taking specific steps and setting new goals. For example, steps have been taken to work with a research and evaluation group.

This project will create PARB's first ever database so that we can begin to collect information on our recommendations and on our membership. In addition, staff are developing training and technical assistance to create a more consistent review process statewide. This will also include efforts to create more specific and thorough court recommendations.

PARB Boards will be encouraged to look beyond the case review and focus on relationships with other juvenile court entities and identify and address more systemic issues. We also hope to support DHS, foster parents and Judges in new and creative ways. Many PARB volunteers have served for decades. It is critical that these members share their knowledge with new PARB volunteers and mentor the next generation.

We are also hoping to partner better with Oklahoma's native tribes in order to improve our ICWA oversight efforts and possibly start Tribal PARB Boards over the next few years. Another goal for the not too distant future is to add more specialty PARB Boards across the state. These include Boards focused on ICWA cases, domestic violence, mental health, and transition age kids. Currently these specialty boards only exist in Oklahoma and Tulsa Counties. We are hoping to expand these boards to other urban counties such as Canadian and Cleveland Counties.

In its 38 years of existence, Oklahoma's PARB Program has seen its ups and downs. Just like the juvenile justice system that it monitors, PARB must be vigilant to grow on its strengths and address its weaknesses. We must not rest on our progress from 2019 but continue to look for ways to improve our efforts and become even more relevant to the system that we support, protect and monitor.

**“Our agency leadership is incredibly excited about the opportunity to strengthen our partnership with PARB members. Sharing the same vision for Oklahomans involved with the judicial and child welfare systems will be the driving factor as we collaborate to better serve our children and families. The voice of the PARB will be instrumental as we continue to align our efforts and focus on best practices for safe and timely permanency for children.”**

*- Maghan Ruark, Programs Administrator  
Permanency, Prevention and Well-Being  
Oklahoma Department of Human Services*

**“I often say child abuse is a community problem best addressed by a community response. Just as our CASA volunteers step up on behalf of communities, so do PARB volunteers. They are there, working passionately behind the scenes, giving their time and energy reviewing cases involving Oklahoma's most vulnerable children. For their efforts, we give thanks.”**

*-Sheryl Marseilles, Chief Executive Officer  
Court Appointed Special  
Advocates Association (CASA)*

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