

EARL CARL INSTITUTE FOR LEGAL & SOCIAL POLICY, INC.

JUVENILE JUSTICE PROJECT

The Institute began the “ECI Juvenile Justice Project” (JJP) in November of 2009, through a grant from the State Bar of Texas Litigation Section, to address the rising number of student ticket cases faced by students accused of school misconduct by training attorneys to represent students involved in these criminal cases. The project soon expanded to hire an attorney to provide direct legal representation to students in Class C Misdemeanor cases, including truancy, pending in Justice and Municipal Courts in Texas. These cases generally involve in-school behaviors that have been criminalized rather than handled by schools as student code of conduct violations. Due to ECI advocacy efforts with other likeminded organizations, in 2013 the Texas Legislature enacted laws that virtually eliminated use of school tickets for in-school behavior disciplinary matters and in 2015 passed laws decriminalizing truancy.

Beginning December 2013, the program was revamped to begin what is called the JJP Disproportionate Minority Contact (DMC) Project. This expansion of the JJP addresses the issue of disproportionate minority contact, through a holistic approach, by providing legal representation to children who are in multiple systems including the criminal justice system, disparate educational systems, the mental health system and foster care system. The project currently has the following three components: (1) representation (2) training for community organizations and attorneys involved in these systems, as well as policy advocacy through education for lawmakers, and (3) participation in impact litigation.

The project provides information to the legislators, schools, and the larger community about the long term effects on students that stem from criminalizing ordinary school misconduct.

The project is supervised by a licensed attorney who oversees all aspects of the cases with the assistance of Thurgood Marshall School of Law students. It offers TMSL students the opportunity to serve as student attorneys, who conduct client interviews, develop case strategies, conduct investigations, gather evidence, prepare pleadings and represent individual juveniles.

This project has no income qualifications and is currently funded through a grant from the Houston Endowment as well as Law School support. The project has also been awarded an Equal Justice Works Fellow to oversee the representation through 2016.

Our geographic service area is generally Harris County and its contiguous counties (Brazoria, Galveston, Chambers, Liberty, Montgomery, Fort Bend, & Waller). We do not have any income guidelines associated with this project. Intake is conducted Monday through Friday from 9:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. by calling 713.313.1130 or 713.313.1139 or by emailing jjpatty@tsu.edu with the subject line “INTAKE”.