

Jacquelyn O'Brien

Professional Summary

Respected legal advocate and systems leader with over 25 years of experience advancing child welfare reform, trauma-informed practice, and equity in public legal services. Proven track record of leading multidisciplinary teams, shaping policy, and driving institutional change. As Managing Director of CPCS's Children and Family Law Division, oversee statewide trial and appellate offices, mentor senior counsel, and collaborate with agency leadership to dismantle systemic barriers affecting children and families. Adjunct professor and published author committed to cultivating the next generation of justice-centered lawyers. Known for integrity, strategic vision, and unwavering dedication to the dignity and well-being of children.

Skills & Expertise

- Child Welfare Law & Juvenile Justice
- Trauma-Informed Legal Practice
- Strategic Leadership & Team Management
- Public Policy & Legislative Advocacy
- Equity-Centered Systems Reform
- Cross-Sector Collaboration
- Legal Education & Curriculum Design
- Investigations & Critical Incident Review
- Public Speaking & Media Engagement

Professional Experience

Managing Director – *Children and Family Law Division (CAFL)*

Committee for Public Counsel Services (CPCS), Boston, MA

March 2020 – Present

- Lead statewide oversight of four CAFL Staff Trial Offices and the CAFL Staff Appellate Office, ensuring high-quality, culturally humble representation for children and families in child welfare proceedings.
- Supervise Attorneys in Charge and Senior Trial Counsel; mentor leadership to promote trauma-informed, client-centered advocacy.
- Collaborate with CPCS executive leadership to advance division-wide goals, including systemic reform and equity initiatives.
- Shape policy and practice through strategic planning, interagency collaboration, and public engagement.
- Represent CAFL in statewide forums, legislative discussions, and cross-sector partnerships focused on improving outcomes for children.

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Adjunct Professor

Western New England University School of Law, Springfield, MA

January 2023 – Present

- Director of the Family Defense Practicum and instructor for the Child Protection Law Simulation Course.
- Developed the Family Defense Practicum syllabus and revamped the Child Protection Law Simulation course syllabus to incorporate trauma-informed advocacy, systemic analysis, and experiential learning.
- Facilitate weekly seminars and simulations that develop advanced advocacy skills in law students.
- Provide mentorship and individualized feedback to students, fostering critical thinking and ethical lawyering.

Attorney in Charge – CAFL Division

Committee for Public Counsel Services, Worcester, MA

October 2015 – March 2020

Interim Attorney in Charge

October 2014 – October 2015

- Managed a multidisciplinary trial office of attorneys, social workers, and support staff.
- Oversaw case assignments, staff evaluations, and office operations.
- Provided training and supervision in child welfare litigation and advocacy.

Supervising Staff Attorney – CAFL Division

Committee for Public Counsel Services, Worcester, MA

October 2012 – September 2014

- Supervised attorneys and contributed to staff development and training.
- Litigated Care and Protection, CRA, and Guardianship cases.

Staff Attorney – CAFL Division

Committee for Public Counsel Services, Worcester, MA

January 2012 – October 2012

- Represented children and indigent parents in child welfare proceedings.
- Served as faculty at CAFL trainings.

Attorney at Law

Law Office of Jacquelyn O'Brien, Worcester, MA

May 1996 – January 2012

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- Operated a private practice focused on child and family law, mental health law, and juvenile advocacy.
- Litigated complex cases including Termination of Parental Rights, Adoption, Guardianship, and Delinquency.
- Appointed as guardian ad litem; certified in Basic and Permanency Mediation.
- Mentored new CAFL attorneys and presented at professional trainings.

Partner

O'Brien, Whitcomb & Korman, Worcester, MA

January 1994 – May 1996

- Handled a range of family and juvenile law cases, including CHINS, Delinquency, and Mental Health matters.

Presentations

Presenter, National Association for Public Defense

Defending Families, Protecting Futures: The Frontlines of Defense Advocacy Skills Training

September 10–12, 2025 | Seattle, WA

- “A Genie on Your Shoulder: Appellate and Trial Lawyers Can Work Together to Reach a Client’s Goal”
- “Justice is a Team Sport: Leading Multidisciplinary Family Defense”

Delivering two sessions focused on collaborative advocacy and leadership in family defense to a national audience of public defenders, legal professionals, and policy advocates.

Publications

Hon. Brian Frane, Ann Narris, Esq., Jacquelyn O'Brien, Esq. (2023). *Chapter 7: Initiation of Care and Protection Proceedings*. K. Krywonis & A. Karp (Eds.), *Practitioner’s Guide to State Intervention in the Family* (2nd ed.). Massachusetts Continuing Legal Education.

Education

Western New England University School of Law, Springfield, MA

Juris Doctor, May 1993

Marist College, Poughkeepsie, NY

Bachelor of Arts in Political Science, cum laude, May 1990

Bar Admission Commonwealth of Massachusetts, December 1993