

For Immediate Release

**Department of Juvenile Justice Secretary and Legal Needs of Children Commission
Honored at Florida's Children First Miami Reception in June
'Crossover to Justice Project' Introduced, Florida Bar Past Presidents Featured at Event**

Miami, Fla. – Child advocates, elected officials, judges, community and business leaders and five Florida Bar Association Past Presidents witnessed the introduction of the “[Crossover to Justice Project](#)” and honored the “Child Advocate of the Year” at this month’s Florida’s Children First (FCF) Miami-Dade County awards reception and fundraising event.

The event, created by the statewide advocacy organization focused on protecting the legal rights of at-risk and foster care children and hosted at the law offices of Carlton Fields in Miami, welcomed more than 100 advocates and supporters.

“Attendees learned about the important work their peers have been doing in support of child advocacy,” said FCF Executive Director Christina Spudeas, who hosted the event along with FCF President and South Florida children's rights attorney Howard Talenfeld. “They saw firsthand the vital gap the ‘Crossover to Justice Project’ serves in areas essential to children in the dependency system, and they celebrated advocates doing important work for Florida’s at-risk kids.”

Sponsored by The Florida Bar Foundation and Greenberg Traurig, the Crossover to Justice Project empowers the voice of crossover youth, to create and sustain a working network of resources and advocates to provide support and accountability to crossover youth. The project also promotes children’s access to counsel in dependency proceedings. The project is housed at the Law Offices of Miami-Dade Public Defender Carlos J. Martinez and is overseen by EJW fellow Hasti Barahmand, Esq.

Barahmand also represents crossover youth identified as requesting and in need of additional legal representation and liaising within the court system as well as administrative legal matters such as educational services, housing placements, and health care services.

Also at the event, Secretary Wansley Walters of the Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) was among the Miami 2013 “Child Advocate of the Year” honorees. Secretary Walters pioneered juvenile justice services in Miami-Dade County.

The event also recognized the original commission of The Florida Bar Commission on the Legal Needs of Children. The group was formed by Bar President Edith Osman in 2002 to issue a report and recommendation on improving the legal representation for Florida children. Chaired by Judge Sandy Karlan, the commission is composed of leadership from the GAL, judges, legislators, and dependency experts. Along with Edith Osman, Florida Bar Past Presidents Miles McGrane, Edward Blumberg and American Bar Association Past President Stephen Zack attended.

“The commitment to help Florida’s kids transcends all areas of Florida’s legal profession, from first-year attorneys to the most respected leaders in our industry,” Talenfeld. “It was important to honor Miami-Dade County’s most ardent advocates – and support kids in the process.”

All proceeds benefit Florida's Children First. To learn more, visit www.FloridaChildrenFirst.org.

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About Florida's Children First

Florida's Children First is the leading statewide child advocacy program, serving as a "watchdog" agency, holding DCF and others accountable, and helping them do a better job at protecting the children who need their services. A nonprofit organization, FCF seeks meaningful and sustainable improvements in all child-serving systems, with a special emphasis on the foster care system. The organization is based in Coral Springs and has offices in Tampa and Jacksonville, and works all over the state.

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