



Arizona Governor Doug Ducey signs historic law to appoint an attorney to every child in foster care; Unanimous reform protects child abuse victims

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PHOENIX – Senate Bill 1391, sponsored by Arizona Sen. Nancy Barto, passed the Arizona legislature unanimously and today was signed into law by Arizona Governor Doug Ducey. The momentous law gives every child in foster care legal representation.

Gen Justice Chief Counsel, Rebecca Masterson, the architect of the bill, said, “When a child enters foster care, a court case is initiated. Parents are appointed lawyers to protect their rights, the Arizona Department of Child Safety is appointed lawyers, yet the victim in the case – the abused child – was not given legal representation. Lawmakers from every corner of our state stood arm-in-arm to remedy this injustice for Arizona’s abandoned and abused kids.”

Research shows that children with attorney representation in their court cases exit foster care up to 3.5 times faster, without affecting rates of family reunification. Children who can safely return home do so while children who need families are adopted quicker and with fewer delays.

“We can put a million laws on the books to ensure a child’s time in foster care is safe and temporary, but without an attorney to argue the law on a child’s behalf, the law means nothing,” says Darcy Olsen, Gen Justice Founder and CEO. “An attorney with a legal and ethical duty to the child is among the most important protections we can give a child who has been abandoned or abused. Representation is a cornerstone of the American justice system.”

SB1391 guarantees children the legal representation necessary to protect their rights. For example, Arizona law requires the Department of Child Services search for a child’s relatives and extended family right away. If this

law is violated, the child's attorney can immediately work to ensure compliance. Similarly, if a child goes [missing](#) from the system, the child's attorney must advocate on behalf of the child to ensure search and rescue.

About Gen Justice

[Gen Justice](#) is an award-winning charitable organization working to mend the broken child protection system through nonpartisan policy changes and a pro bono Children's Law Clinic.

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