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## **State Constitutional Amendment in Florida Introduced to Protect Rights of Youth in Foster Care to Counsel**

*Juvenile Law Center strongly supports the amendment, urges commissioners to support Proposal 40*

**Tallahassee, FL** (January 24, 2018) – A proposed amendment to the state constitution of Florida would ensure that children in the foster care system have access to counsel. Today, Juvenile Law Center joined partners in the state and nationwide calling on the Florida Constitution Revision commissioners to support this move, which is known as Proposal 40. A hearing will be held on Proposal 40 [tomorrow](#).

“We believe that the right to counsel in dependency matters is crucial to ensuring that children’s voices are heard and that their rights are protected,” said Jennifer Pokempner, Child Welfare Policy Director at Juvenile Law Center. “We think that it is essential to ensuring that system-involved children have the best chances possible. We want that right protected in every state – it is what the youth of Florida deserve.”

Florida’s advocacy coalition [Foster Fairness](#) is leading the charge in this effort, maintaining that the constitutional amendment is the best way to protect the rights of children in the child welfare system. The group also notes that [the cost of providing lawyers is outweighed by the savings](#), and an independent analysis has shown a positive financial impact for the state.

Ultimately, the decision to advance this move is in the hands of the Florida Constitution Revision Commission. Foster Fairness and other partners across the state and country are calling on advocates for youth in foster care to make calls in support of this move.

“The right to counsel in child welfare matters is necessary to a fair and functioning child welfare system,” continued Pokempner. “Having this right in the state constitution ensures that youth can rely on the assistance of counsel and that it is truly embedded in the law and practice of the state. Juvenile Law Center strongly supports the inclusion of this amendment in Florida’s constitution, and we applaud the advocates working to make this protection a reality.”

*Juvenile Law Center advocates for rights, dignity, equity and opportunity for youth in the foster care and justice systems. Founded in 1975, Juvenile Law Center is the first non-profit, public interest law firm for children in the country. We fight for youth through litigation, appellate advocacy and submission of amicus (friend-of-the-court) briefs, policy reform, public education, training, consulting, and strategic communications. Widely published and internationally recognized as leaders in the field, Juvenile Law Center has substantially shaped the development of law and policy on behalf of youth. We strive to ensure that laws, policies, and practices affecting youth advance racial and economic equity and are rooted in research, consistent with children’s unique developmental characteristics, and reflective of international human rights values. For more information about Juvenile Law Center’s work, visit [www.JLC.org](http://www.JLC.org).*

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