



## MEDIA ADVISORY

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### AMERICAN BAR ASSOCIATION TO VOTE ON MODEL LAW STRENGTHENING LEGAL PROTECTIONS FOR ABUSED AND NEGLECTED CHILDREN

#### *Model Act Would Prompt States to Adopt Uniform Protections for Children in Abuse, Neglect and Dependency Proceedings*

**WHAT:** The American Bar Association's policy-making House of Delegates will vote on the *ABA Model Act Governing the Representation of Children in Abuse, Neglect, and Dependency Proceedings* at its Annual Meeting in Chicago. The Model Law represents a significant step forward in the representation of children in dependency hearings.

The Model Act mandates that lawyers be assigned to represent all children involved in child welfare proceedings, and improves the quality of such legal representation by setting clear performance guidelines that are in line with the ABA Standards of Practice for Lawyers Representing a Child in Abuse and Neglect Cases and the ABA Model Rules of Professional Conduct. Currently, the legal representation of children involved in these proceedings varies widely depending on state law.

This Model Act was co-authored by First Star, a national non-profit organization committed to strengthening the rights of abused and neglected children, the ABA Section of Litigation's Children's Rights Litigation Committee, the Bar-Youth Empowerment Program of the ABA Center on Children and the Law and advocates nationwide. The Act is being sponsored in the House by the ABA Section of Litigation and the ABA Standing Committee on Legal Aid and Indigent Defendants - it is report 103. Please see the full text of the Act and related ABA documents at: <http://www.abanet.org/litigation/standards/>.

The ABA Model Act would grant children involved in dependency proceedings the right to client directed counsel and allow their voices to be heard and their positions considered by those charged with determining their futures. The Model Act is supported by dozens of advocacy organizations nationwide.

**WHEN:** **August 3, 2009, 9:00 am** at the ABA Annual Meeting at the Hyatt Regency Hotel Chicago. The ABA House of Delegates will vote on the Model Act in the Grand Ballroom, Gold Level, East Tower.

**HISTORY:** In 2007, First Star conducted the first-ever comprehensive analysis of all 50 states' and the District of Columbia's right to counsel laws and published the "*Report on a Child's Right to Counsel*." This report card found that nearly half of U.S. states fail to provide legal representation for abused and neglected foster children, leaving them without a voice during judicial proceedings that profoundly impact their futures. The report has been relied upon by advocates, legislators, and policy makers nationwide as the preeminent authority on this subject. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition of this report is scheduled for publication in partnership with the University of San Diego's Children's Advocacy Institute early this fall.

#### *About First Star*

*First Star is a national 501(c)(3) that improves the lives of America's abused and neglected children by strengthening their rights, illuminating systemic failures, and igniting reform to correct them. We pursue our mission through research, public engagement, policy advocacy, and litigation.*

*To learn more, visit [www.firststar.org](http://www.firststar.org).*