

OUR 10TH ANNIVERSARY



2015 Foster Youth and Alumni Leadership Summit Report

One united voice for change

WELCOME FROM MOCKINGBIRD'S LEADERSHIP



In solidarity

Dear Friends,

On August 25th and 26th, 2015, we celebrated a decade of leadership at our 10th Annual Foster Youth and Alumni Leadership Summit. At the Summit, 51 young people from across the state of Washington came together to build their advocacy skills and present their ideas for reform to influential policymakers. The Summit is attended by members of the Washington State Supreme Court Commission on Children in Foster Care, and also by audience members that included many legislators, representatives from state agencies and other branches of state government, nonprofit service providers, and advocates.

This report summarizes the reform ideas brought forth by each Mockingbird Youth Network Chapter for 2015-16. The youth and young adults' presentations combined research and data to describe the problems they identified, personal experiences that underscore the impact of these problems, and thoughtful solutions that will improve the situation. Their key points were honed through coaching from seasoned policy advocates during the Systems Reform Workshop and with many hours of preparation as a team.

The overall effect of the Summit was electric! Adult attendees reported being inspired to serve and to make changes in support of the young people who raised their voices. Youth and young adults were proud, empowered, and felt heard. The mood was hopeful, even given the serious challenges associated with foster care systems reform.

We will build on this momentum throughout our advocacy cycle. In the fall, we will focus on refining proposals, determining which reforms require legislative action and seeking champions, as well as working with partners to pursue rules and policy changes. In January, we will be ready for the 2016 legislative session and to mobilize our community for Youth Advocacy Day.

Throughout our year-long advocacy efforts, we strive to keep young people with experience in foster care or with homelessness at the decision-making table. These brave and dedicated young people deserve our committed support. In partnership with them, we are confident we will continue to achieve positive change.

In solidarity,

Hickory Gateless
President, Board of Directors

Laura Pierce
Interim Executive Director

Special thank you to Casey Family Programs and Children's Administration for supporting the printing and design of this report.



LITTLE MOCKINGBIRD

By Heaven Calvert

Go, little Mockingbird
Let your dreams soar
All the way across the land
From shore to shore

Spread your wings wide and fly
Don't be stopped by the questions why

You are loved, little Mockingbird
Please don't forget
You've left an impact
On everyone you've met

An impact is an impact
Be it good or bad
Whether the encounter
Leaves you happy or even sad

Fly far, little Mockingbird
You'll always be with me
In my heart forever
You and I will always be a we

I love you, little Mockingbird
And don't you forget it



**IF YOU CAN IMAGINE IT,
YOU CAN ACHIEVE IT.
IF YOU CAN DREAM IT,
YOU CAN BECOME IT.**

By Janell Braxton

I remember walking into my first few Summits as a participant, and later as a chapter leader. I would be so nervous my hands would shake. I'd feel sweaty and when someone would ask me a question I'd feel my throat close. I was terrified speaking in front of people—so at every Summit my group would practice our presentation endlessly.

During our practices, my heart would thump; I felt like it was going to jump right out of my chest. Then each time we'd change something or add something to our presentation, I'd feel even more nervous.

I was most excited for the moment when the presentation was finally over and I didn't have to speak again. My heart would calm down, my hands would stop shaking, and everyone in my group would say, "Good job!" and, "That was great!" It was encouraging to hear.

With each of the five Summits I've attended and the hours of practice that I've put in, I've grown more confident with public speaking, and now my words come from the heart.

All the practice gave me the courage to apply myself more in my personal life. I started working at a community college as an event organizer; and, let me tell you, I've never spoken in front of crowds of so many people as I did in that job. I learned to incorporate the skills that I gained from that work to Mockingbird and my chapter. I believed in myself, and started really "owning" my position as a chapter leader.

Being a part of The Mockingbird Society and the Summit has opened so many opportunities in my life. A few years ago I started traveling to Japan annually to speak about my foster care experience here in Washington state. I love to visit the foster youth there, tour Japan, eat some really different food, and see AMAZING artwork.

Like I said before, speaking in front of crowds used to terrify me—but now it comes easily because I know what I have to say is important—that any youth's voice is important. And that's why we're all here today.

Without the contributions, hard work, and dedication from all of you, we wouldn't be here in this room. We're here because of what you have to say. I want to hear what you have to say. So go on and be nervous. It's natural.

Just know that one day after all the long hours of prepping, practicing, and returning every year to do this all over again, you'll know that you are a part of something big. And you can reach your goals. If you have dreams to travel, you'll accomplish that. If you have ideas to change the foster care system, you'll make them become a reality. If you just want me to be quiet and get on with your day, well that's about to happen too! Your voice is important and the Summit is a great place to feel heard, valued, and appreciated.

I'd like to end on a quote that my Nana always told me and that I always remember when other people doubt me or make me feel like my dreams are too far out of my reach: "If you can imagine it, you can achieve it. If you can dream it, you can become it."

“We're here because of what you have to say. I want to hear what you have to say.”

SYSTEMS REFORM WORKSHOP

Advocacy in Action

The Systems Reform Workshop offers youth an opportunity to practice the proposals that they intend to present to the Supreme Court Commission on Children in Foster Care. The youth practice in front of panels of policy advisors, which include child welfare experts, state agency staff, legislative aides, Mockingbird staff and alumni, and others who provide the youth with insightful feedback.



“It takes courage and commitment to share your personal stories and personal experiences.”

Andi Smith
Office of Governor Jay Inslee

“I always get so much from this event and love to see the difference between the first and second day presentations.”

Cindy Bricker
Administrative Office of the Courts

“You can see policy makers having lightbulb moments throughout chapter presentations.”

Daniel Strauss
Office of Senator David Frockt

“It's amazing to see the chapter presentations evolve from passionate ideas to polished and convincing policy recommendations.”

Katie Kaiser
College Success Foundation

Thank you to our Systems Reform Workshop Policy Advisors for their time and expert guidance as they helped young people prepare for presentations to the Supreme Court Commission on Children in Foster Care!

Systems Reform Workshop Policy Advisors:

Violet Banks, *Mockingbird Alumni*
Mireya Beltre, *Children's Administration*
Cindy Bricker, *Administrative Office of the Courts*
Jon Brumbach, *Wilson Strategic*
Patrick Dowd, *Office of Family and Children's Ombuds*
Chori Folkman, *Legal Counsel for Youth and Children*
Barb Geiger, *Children's Administration*
Sandy Hart, *Casey Family Programs*
Carrie Hennen, *King County Committee to End Homelessness*
Katie Kaiser, *College Success Foundation*

Peggy Lewis, *Children's Administration*
Laurie Lippold, *Partners for Our Children*
Mary Meinig, *Private Citizen*
Ben Miksch, *Washington Low Income Housing Alliance*
Sophie Sullivan Proebsting, *Private Citizen*
Andi Smith, *Office of Governor Jay Inslee*
Genevieve Stokes, *Office of Representative Ross Hunter*
Daniel Strauss, *Office of Senator David Frockt*
Mary Van Cleve, *Columbia Legal Services*
Trai Williams, *Mockingbird Alumni*

CHAPTER VOICE

Youth-Inspired Solutions



Require LGBTQ Sensitivity Training for Foster Parents

SPOKANE CHAPTER

Given that many foster youth identify as LGBTQ, the Spokane Chapter feels it is important for all foster parents to have the knowledge and skills to support this population of young people. Currently, it is optional for foster parents to attend trainings to learn how to work with and support LGBTQ youth in care. It is important for young people to feel accepted and respected! By making LGBTQ sensitivity trainings mandatory and not optional, our state will take an important step in ensuring that LGBTQ youth are placed in homes that are better equipped to welcome and care for them.

“Feeling accepted and understood in your home is an important part of everyday life. Assuring these trainings are attended will make foster homes more competent and inviting.”

– Britney, Spokane Chapter Member



Increase Access to an Attorney for Children and Youth in Foster Care

YAKIMA CHAPTER

Currently, Washington state is rated as one of the worst states when it comes to providing legal counsel to children and youth in foster care. The way counsel is assigned is not consistent across the state and has been referred to as “justice by geography.” While the Yakima Chapter believes that all foster children and youth should automatically be provided an attorney when they enter foster care, the Chapter also realizes the proposal is a difficult one to fund. At this time, the goal of the Yakima Chapter is to require the automatic appointment of an attorney to all children age 12 and older.

“We would like to continue to build the momentum of automatically appointed attorneys to children, which includes well-trained attorneys who have case limits.”

– James, Yakima Chapter Member

CHAPTER VOICE

Youth-Inspired Solutions



Create a Host Home-Inspired Community for Youth in Extended Foster Care

OLYMPIA CHAPTER

The Extended Foster Care (EFC) program has produced fantastic results for foster youth and alumni in Washington state. However, the success youth experience in Supervised Independent Living Placements (SILPs) varies. The Olympia Chapter would like Children's Administration to introduce the Host Home model as a new SILP option for EFC youth. Host Home models connect safe community volunteers who have an extra room in their home with young people who are looking for affordable, supportive housing. The model allows young people to have a voice in choosing who they live with. Additionally, it provides youth with opportunities to build positive, lasting relationships with their hosts, connects them to community, and reduces feelings of loneliness and isolation.

“We would still require host homes to have training, background checks, meetings, and case management so that no one falls through the cracks.”

– Chanel, Olympia Chapter Member



Implement the Mockingbird Family Model in Pierce County

TACOMA CHAPTER

Foster youth want to be safe in their homes and in their communities, and the Tacoma Chapter sees the Mockingbird Family Model (MFM) as a promising avenue to safety and normalcy for foster youth. Youth would be able to access the Hub Home provider when respite care, crisis care, or other support is needed. The MFM will also benefit foster parents, as they have a 97 percent satisfaction rate when they are part of an MFM constellation. The MFM has already proven itself a successful model in other regions in Washington, as well as in other states and countries. The Tacoma Chapter would like to engage with the Children's Administration in implementing the model as quickly as possible.

“We want Children's Administration to commit to implementing the Mockingbird Family Model constellations to better support foster families, improve outcomes for youth, and increase safety and stability in foster care.”

– Marquis, Tacoma Chapter Member

CHAPTER VOICE

Youth-Inspired Solutions



Evaluate and Create More Oversight of Group Care in Washington

EVERETT CHAPTER

The Everett Chapter is asking that a formal evaluation of group care in Washington state be completed to better understand the experiences and outcomes of foster youth in these settings. The last evaluation of group care was conducted in 2007, so up-to-date information about foster youth in group care is limited. The Everett Chapter would like an evaluation to focus on the quality of group care, lengths of stay, outcomes and permanency rates, demographics, and services provided to foster youth while in group care. The Chapter believes that formally evaluating group care in Washington will not only provide the information our state needs to improve the experiences of youth, but will also continue to make Washington a national leader on this critical issue.

“When the state takes us from our family, it’s supposed to protect us and keep us safe. We want to know that this is the case for all foster youth going into group care.”

– Melisa, Everett Chapter Member



Increase Foster Youth Access to the College Bound Scholarship

SEATTLE CHAPTER

The Seattle Chapter wants to expand the College Bound Scholarship eligibility for youth in foster care and make financial support for higher education more accessible and less confusing to navigate. The Seattle Chapter proposes that:

- Foster youth who earn their GEDs become eligible for the College Bound Scholarship.
- Foster youth have a longer period of time to begin accessing the scholarship and a longer window to use the scholarship.
- Youth in tribal and international foster care be eligible for the scholarship.
- Eligibility for the scholarship be aligned with the promises made in the Youth Opportunity and YEAR Acts, which allow many juvenile records to be sealed so that young people can obtain housing and employment and access education.

Education creates opportunities for our future.

“We are asking for the College Bound Scholarship to honor foster youth with their GEDs, allow youth a longer time to enroll in college and to use their scholarship, align with the goals of the YEAR Act, and enroll all foster youth, including those in tribal and international foster care.”

– Morgyn, Seattle Chapter Member

REPORT TO THE SUPREME COURT COMMISSION ON CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE

Thank you to our Commission members for their commitment to youth-driven solutions



Attending Commission Members

Justice Bobbe Bridge (ret.), *Center for Children & Youth Justice, Co-Chair*

Connie Lambert-Eckel, *Children’s Administration, in place of Assistant Secretary Jennifer Strus, Co-Chair*

Jim Bamberger, *Office of Civil Legal Aid*

Mike Canfield, *Foster Parents Association of Washington State*

Karen Dinan, *Washington State Attorney General Designee for Bob Ferguson*

Judge Kitty-Ann van Doornick, *Designee for SCJA President-Judge Jeffrey Ramsdell*

Kristy Healing, *Northwest Intertribal Court System*

Representative Ruth Kagi, *Chair of the Early Learning and Human Services Committee*

Jeannie Kee, *Foster Youth Alumni Representative*

Joanne Moore, *Director of the Office of Public Defense*

Tonia Morrison, *Parent Advocate Representative*

Ryan Murrey, *Executive Director, Washington State CASA*

2015 ADVOCATE OF THE YEAR

The Advocate of the Year award recognizes participants in the Mockingbird Youth Network who demonstrate exemplary leadership, passion for advocacy, and dedication to the mission of The Mockingbird Society. This year the award was renamed The Jim Theofelis Advocate of the Year Award, in honor of our founding Executive Director and his 15 years of dedicated service to Mockingbird.

Youth are nominated by their peers, and staff members select the winners. The Advocate of the Year has the opportunity to shadow a legislator or government official for one day during the following legislative session as a reward for their hard work.

The 2015 Advocate of the Year is Heaven Calvert, Yakima Chapter Leader. Heaven has been involved with the Yakima Chapter for almost two years.

One of Heaven's fellow chapter members had this to say about her: "The reason she stands out among Yakima chapter members, firstly, is because I can see how much she engulfs herself into the work that needs the most attention. Secondly, she has that shy and reserved demeanor about her, yet she still engages in regular meetings and group discussions with no hesitation. Thirdly, she has the qualities every good leader should have." Another chapter member said that Heaven "has powerful and knowledgeable insights that she shares at the group meetings she attends. She deserves this award."



HEAVEN CALVERT

Yakima Chapter



During the 2016 legislative session, Heaven will have the opportunity to shadow Washington State Representative Maureen Walsh, Ranking Minority Member of the Early Learning and Human Services Committee and champion for our young people.

REPRESENTATIVE MAUREEN WALSH

Ranking Minority Member of the Early Learning and Human Services Committee

16th Legislative District

2015 HONORABLE MENTIONS



JAMES SHEARD

Seattle Chapter



MIKHAIL STEWART

Olympia Chapter



ESSENCE HARRIS

Tacoma Chapter



EDEN HOTTMAN-NANCE

Everett Chapter



LOVELLA FULTON

Spokane Chapter



THE HEART AND SOUL OF MOCKINGBIRD

*By Kim Justice
Vice President, Board of Directors*

This Summit is a testament to our community's commitment to help vulnerable children and youth. And it's proof that young people have the power to shape public policy and also shape our minds. Their stories transform the way we think about children who have been in foster care.

That youth voice is the heart and soul of The Mockingbird Society.

At Mockingbird, young people are teachers. They educate the community on the realities of the foster care system and what it's like to go without a safe, stable home.

They are leaders, at the forefront of advocacy efforts and involved in decision-making at every level of the organization.

They are pioneers, taking charge of their own destiny while also working to make the future a brighter one for the next generation.

They are partners. Working as employees within the organization, and in partnership with adults.

They are the experts. It's young people, sharing their personal experiences and ideas, and having the courage and confidence to speak truth to power that changes hearts and minds.

This is the Mockingbird way, and it's a powerful model—in supporting the development of young people, in changing policies, and in improving public perceptions of youth.

The truth is that professional, adult advocates cannot do our jobs well without young people's ideas and voices. Even the best policy wonk cannot know what young people need. The Mockingbird approach is rooted in the conviction that young people are a part of the solution and have the right to be involved in shaping the policies that will affect them.

And it works. Through the advocacy of young people, in collaboration with adults and this entire community, we have succeeded in changing both policies and practices to improve foster care and end youth homelessness. We've extended foster care to age 21, increased housing support for young people on the street, allowed kids to visit their siblings, protected young people from over-medication, and much, much more. Many of those reforms began as issues young people presented at this Summit.

We've had a lot of success, but the work is far from over. The young people's proposals make it clear that we have much more to do to ensure that young people reach adulthood healthy, supported, and with full opportunity to thrive in life.

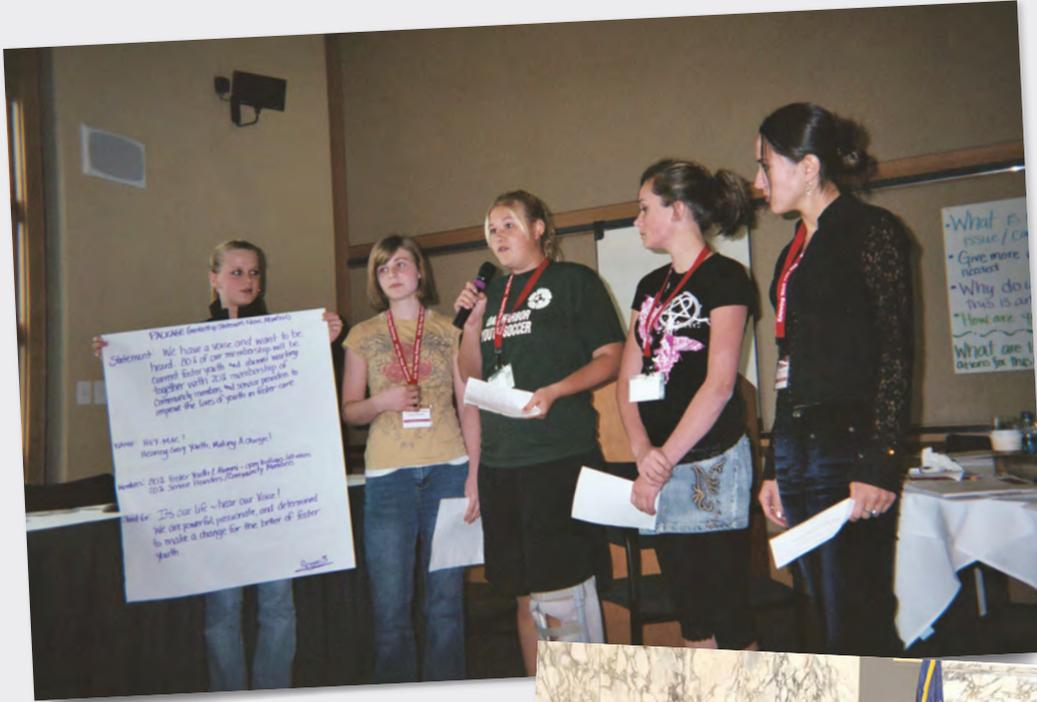
“They are leaders...They are pioneers...They are partners...They are the experts.”

CELEBRATING 10 YEARS OF ADVOCACY WITH OUR COMMUNITY PARTNERS



A DECADE OF LEADERSHIP

Over the past 10 years, youth proposals presented at the Summit have resulted in major reforms, created workgroups, and changed practice and policy. We honor the commitment of the young people we work with and the advocates and lawmakers who made these reforms possible!



2006

first ever summit

Summit Topics

- Strengthen Transition and Independent Living Supports and Services
- Keep Siblings Together in Care
- Keep Youth Connected to Their Culture

Advocacy Achievements

- Foster Youth Achievement Act – first effort to allow 50 youth per year to remain in foster care to age 21 (passed in 2006)
- Independent Youth Housing (passed in 2007)

2007

Summit Topics

- Elevating Youth Voice
- Expand participation at the Summit to Foster Youth Statewide

Advocacy Achievements

- Healthcare to 21 – allows all youth exiting foster care to receive health coverage (passed in 2007)
- Verifiable Washington identification card for foster youth (passed in 2007)



A DECADE OF LEADERSHIP



2008

Summit Topics

- Sibling Visitation
- More Support for Kinship Care
- Notify Foster Youth of Rights at Age 12
- Equal Benefits for Federal and State Foster Care

Advocacy Achievements

- Fostering Connections – extends the Foster Youth Achievement Act (passed in 2009)
- Notification of Rights in Foster Care (passed in 2009)
- Sibling Visits – prevents restrictions on sibling visits as a form of punishment (passed in 2013)

2009

Summit Topics

- Surprise Health and Safety Placement Visits
- Region-to-Region Case Transfers
- More Youth Input on Placements
- Legal Representation for Foster Youth
- Foster Care to College Mentoring Program

Advocacy Achievements

- Notification of right to legal counsel in dependency hearings (passed in 2010)
- Unannounced Visits – allow randomly-selected foster homes to receive unannounced health and safety visits from a social worker (passed in 2011)



A DECADE OF LEADERSHIP



2010

Summit Topics

- Children in Need of Services (CHINS) petition revision
- Random Drug Testing for Foster Parents
- Transportation to Dependency Hearings
- Adequate Notification of Dependency Hearings
- Mental Health Evaluations for Foster Parents
- Mandatory Allowances for Youth in Foster Care

Advocacy Achievements

- Extended Foster Care – first “opt-in” to federal Fostering Connections Act, for youth pursuing their high school diploma or GED (passed in 2011)
- Unannounced Visits – allow randomly-selected foster homes to receive unannounced health and safety visits from a social worker (passed in 2011)

2011

Summit Topics

- Timely Responses from Social Workers
- Extended Foster Care Expansion
- Maintaining Sibling Connections
- Protecting Youth from Mental Abuse
- Normalcy – Protecting Overnight Stays for Foster Youth
- Workgroup for Pregnant and Parenting Youth in Foster Care

Advocacy Achievements

- Extended Foster Care – youth pursuing college or vocational education (passed in 2012)
- Sibling Visits – prevents restrictions on sibling visits as a form of punishment (passed in 2013)
- Pregnant and Parenting Workgroup (formed in 2012)



A DECADE OF LEADERSHIP



2012

Summit Topics

- Encouraging Family Connections
- Extended Foster Care Expansion
- Better Outcomes for Youth Transition Plans
- Savings Accounts for Youth Aging Out of Care
- Overmedication Prevention
- Sibling Visit Protection

Advocacy Achievements

- Extended Foster Care – youth participating in programs to break down barriers to employment (passed in 2013)
- Sibling Visits – prevents restrictions on sibling visits as a form of punishment (passed in 2013)
- Medication Management – requires a second opinion for any prescription of an antipsychotic (passed in 2015)

2013

Summit Topics

- Extended Foster Care Expansion
- The Prudent Parent Standard
- Alternatives to Psychotropic Medication
- Normalcy for Youth in Care
- High School Continuity
- The Permanency Pact

Advocacy Achievements

- Extended Foster Care – youth working 80 hours or more per month (passed in 2014)
- The Prudent Parent Standard – empowers foster parents to make decisions involving normal childhood activities (passed in 2014)
- Medication Management – requires a second opinion for any prescription of an antipsychotic (passed in 2015)



2014

Summit Topics

- Extended Foster Care Expansion
- Overmedication Prevention
- Group Home Placement Reform
- Help Undocumented Youth in Care Receive Legal Status
- Pre-Licensure Training for Foster Parents
- Youth Involvement in Foster Parent Training

Advocacy Achievements

- Extended Foster Care – youth with documented medical conditions (passed in 2015)
- Medication Management – requires a second opinion for any prescription of an antipsychotic (passed in 2015)





The Mockingbird Society

Improving foster care | Ending youth homelessness

OUR SINCEREST THANKS TO OUR GENEROUS

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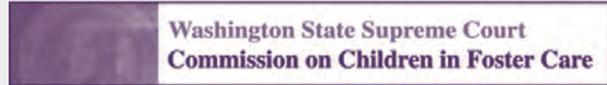


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About Us

The Mockingbird Society

The Mockingbird Society is an advocacy organization that works with young people and families to improve foster care and end youth homelessness. Our youth programs train young people who have been homeless or in foster care to be their own best advocates. By doing so, they change policies and perceptions that stand in the way of every child having a safe and stable home. Our family programs advocate for innovation in the way services such as foster care are delivered. Together, our solutions focus on improving the social service systems that ultimately serve thousands of children, youth and families each year in Washington and beyond.

The Washington State Supreme Court Commission on Children in Foster Care

The Washington State Supreme Court Commission on Children in Foster Care's mission is to provide all children in foster care with safe, permanent families in which their physical, emotional, intellectual, and social needs are met. The Commission's goals are to:

- Monitor and report on the extent to which child welfare programs and courts are responsive to the needs of the children in their joint care.
- Broaden public awareness of and support for meeting the needs of children and families in foster care.
- Institutionalize collaboration beyond the terms of office of individual agency directors and elected officials.

The Commission can achieve its goals through initiating policy decisions and needed legislative and court rule changes.

mockingbirdsociety.org

