



## National Center for Youth Law

February 21, 2019

ABA Center on Children and the Law  
Mark Hardin Award for Child Welfare Legal Scholarship and Systems  
Change

c/o Mimi Laver  
740 15th Street, 8th Floor  
Washington, DC 20005

Re: Mark Hardin Award for Child Welfare Legal Scholarship and  
Systems Change

Dear Members of the Selection Committee:

I write to endorse whole-heartedly the nomination of Bill Grimm for the 2019 Mark Hardin Award. Over the past 7 years I have witnessed that through tremendous skill, advocacy, and care for children a person can completely change how children in foster care are treated. Bill has taken a leadership role in national and state efforts to ensure that foster children receive psychotropic medications only when appropriate and administered properly. Every year, tens of thousands of foster youth suffer damage to their health as a result of being unnecessarily prescribed multiple psychotropic medications. Bill has paved a path forward for reform despite powerful opposition, ridicule for raising the issue, harmful beliefs that children were ‘damaged’ and the fear of challenging the authorities of doctors that is so commonly held in our society.

I began working with Bill as a policy clerk during my graduate studies. During his work with foster children in [Nevada](#), Bill learned of the dangers and misuses of psychotropic medications leading to hospitalizations, life-long side effects, and in some cases, the death of foster children. What I admire most about Bill is that he always puts the voice and experience of children first. This became a central tenant to our success. The first summer we worked together Bill launched into a very detailed research campaign on psychotropic medications. In just three months we conducted confidential qualitative interviews with dozens of current and former foster youth impacted by psychotropic medication. Bill made sure we asked what they thought [would be helpful policy solutions](#) – and now today a majority of the youth’s suggestions are set in California code.

We also conducted interviews with doctors, judges, researchers, dependency attorneys, parents and caregivers, former group home staff, nurses, and others to learn what they noticed and what they thought would help. Bill seemed to know everyone in the field! Not only did he know everyone, they respected him. These conversations brought forward a small but mighty coalition.

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We reviewed federal and state laws, policies, guidance and letters from various administrations, and program manuals. We completed reviews of nearly 13 states seeking any policies that set out [red flags](#) or oversight and monitoring of the use of the drugs with children in care. Bill also had me review nearly every psychotropic medication drug label to see 1) if it was approved for children 2) if it had a black box label warning 3) what the known side effects are 4) does it have addictive properties 5) are there known withdrawal effects etc. The findings were horrifying. Bill knew that states were not in compliance with the federal laws requiring oversight, monitoring, and therapeutic services.

Bill's research strategies were thorough and effective. We dove into research studies, journals, and the few existing multi-state studies available on the topic. In just a few months we knew more about the experiences of foster youth, the medications and existing policies than most people in the country! Those few months changed the course of my career. I knew I wanted to continue to work with Bill who had always put the interests of children first, performed quality and thorough research, had a deep understanding of the field AND could out bowl and out paddle any of us in our summer office events AND had a number of M&M chocolate dispensers in his office. I did not know then what I know now, that Bill's leadership would change California's policies and practice into the most comprehensive set of policies in the country.

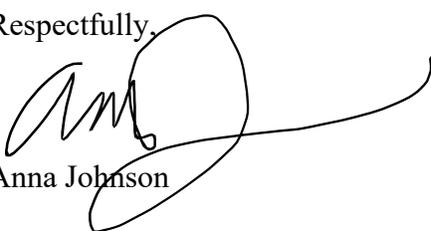
With a strong research and knowledge base Bill, alongside foster youth, began advocating for reforms at the California Child Welfare Council, on the State Expert Panel, and in the award-winning San Jose Mercury News investigation "[Drugging Our Kids](#)," ultimately proposing a set of state level policies.

Bill drafting legislation for six bills and three budget requests that had unanimous legislative support and all but one was successfully signed into law. Since the passage of the bills and budget items, Bill has continued meetings with the administrative offices to ensure implementation moves forward. He has provided trainings at national and state conferences of various disciplinary fields. Today, California is one of the only states with a decreasing trend in the use of psychotropic medications and use of multiple antipsychotics with foster children. This is a direct result of Bill's trust in the voices and experiences of children in foster care, his deep knowledge of federal and state law, his lasting relationships with so many across all disciplines in the field and his relentless pursuit of system reform that will provide every child with the love and support they deserve.

Bill's work has also spurred advocacy so that there are now two federal court class action law suits raising the legality of overmedication. Every day I am inspired Bill's passion, commitment and vision. He used his voice when others in the field wouldn't, couldn't or were ignored. I have learned so much from him about human decency, advocating for the rights of children, the child welfare field, and the possibility to change hearts and minds for the better. Bill set out to make sure that not another child would experience the permanent harms of overmedication.

Thank you for your consideration of Bill Grimm for this award.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Anna Johnson', with a long, sweeping flourish extending to the right.

Anna Johnson