

# D. Jean Ortega-Piron '81

**Guardian and Deputy Director, Division of Guardian and Advocacy  
Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS)**

*Based in Chicago; 17 years with DCFS, the past 10 as guardian; staff of 75, plus 400 state-authorized agents for consent purposes.*

## **Your job responsibilities:**

As DCFS Guardian, I have been appointed by the director of the Department of Children and Family Services to serve as guardian of the person of all those children committed to DCFS by the juvenile courts of the state of Illinois or voluntarily surrendered by their parents/guardians for the purpose of adoption.

Essentially, the DCFS Guardian

possesses the legal responsibility to make all the decisions a parent would normally make on behalf of a minor to ensure his or her health, safety, security and well-being, which include but are not limited to decisions involving medical treatment, admission to psychiatric hospital programs, and administration of psychotropic medications, as well as the many routine decisions that parents are called upon to make involving the care of minors. A cadre of authorized agents—specially trained, tested and registered in the Secretary of State's Office and located throughout the state—assist in providing consents to decisions made on behalf of our wards.

My operating philosophy is informed by the perspective of what is truly in the best interest of a particular child/family. Its most



easily understood application can be simply stated: Is this the decision you would make for your own child or loved one?

As division director, I oversee six DCFS programs and services: the Consent Unit; Legal Services (for foster children), the Administrative Hearings Unit, the Advocacy Office for Children and Families, Immigration Services, and the Incarcerated Youth Program.

## **A professional achievement of which you are particularly proud:**

I am particularly proud of the fact that I have been given the freedom to create a division within DCFS that historically did not exist, that is singly focused upon children, and that whatever my staff or I do we can “keep the focus on the kids.”

## **A particularly challenging case you have handled:**

Bioethical medical decisions have been quite challenging in recent years. As the legal guardian of children in state custody, I have many medically complex children under my wardship. Last year, a hospital asked if I would consent to a Do Not Resuscitate (DNR) order for a baby with a terminal illness. The mother did not want me to consent. Since this consent is an ultimate decision, I do consider the parents' wishes, and so I refused to consent. The hospital then worked with the baby's guardian ad litem to file a motion to give limited guardianship to the hospital so that its staff could consent to the DNR

while I would remain guardian for everything else. I appeared in court to explain why I made the decision had. The guardian ad litem's motion was denied.

## **Reflections on your role in government:**

At times, when trying to assist an individual child or family, I do become frustrated with what sometimes appears as the “slow turning of the wheels of government,” but then I refocus and remember that I have been given a special privilege to serve children and am truly blessed.