**BEST INTEREST HEARING REPORT WRITING GUIDELINES**

**CASA KANE COUNTY**

**1. HEADING**

* Case Number(s)
* Temporary Custody Date (also known as Shelter Care Hearing Date)
* Adjudication Date
* Disposition Date
* Last PRH Date
* Date of Goal Change
* Hearing Date - date scheduled for the Termination of Parental Rights/Best Interest Hearing
* Purpose of Hearing – Termination of Parental Rights/Best Interest
* Month/Day/Year format is consistent - MM/DD/YYYY - such as 02/14/2016

**2. IN THE MATTER OF**

* All children are listed, using their full names
* Format: Children listed in birth order from oldest to youngest
* Format: First Name Last Name
* Correct date of birth for each child is listed - using MM/DD/YYYY format
* Correct age of each child, as of the date of the hearing, has been calculated to years
* Calculate in months for children under two years of age

**3. INTERVIEWED**

* Include only those interviewed since the last court report
* Include only those whose information you utilized in the findings section of this court report
* List in alphabetical order by last name
* List person's name and relationship to child
* For the parent(s), caseworker(s), and other professionals (e.g., teachers, therapists)
* Format: First Name Last Name
* Example: Jason Harris Legal Father of Ben Harris
* For foster parents, including relatives who are foster parents
* Format: First Name Last Initial
* Example: Carol H. Maternal Aunt, Foster Mother of Ben Harris
* People interviewed more than once are listed just once
* Do not include visits to children
* Do not include meetings with the Advocate Supervisor

**4. REPORTS and MATERIALS REVIEWED**

* Include only reports and materials reviewed since the last court report
* Include only those reports and materials that you used in the findings section of this court report
* List date (MM/DD/YYYY) and title of each report
* Example: 01/25/2020 Police Report, 01/30/2020 Individual Education Plan
* List in chronological order
* List the name of the person associated with the report or material
* If the case involves multiple children and a report is associated with only one child, include the name of the child who was the subject of the report
* If no reports or materials were reviewed, entered "No reports or materials reviewed at this time." under this section's heading

**5. DATES OF ALL CHILD VISITS**

* Accurately list dates for all child visits throughout the entirety of the case:
* Format: MM/DD/YYYY
* If multiple children in the case:
* List children by birth order from oldest to youngest
* List visits by child (Format: First Name Last Name)
* If visit dates are same for all children involved, only list the visit dates once.
* If visits were in-person and virtual, list them grouped together by type per child
* If a child visit is not completed, provide good-cause explanation such as minor refuses visit, minor on run, minor was ill.

**6. ICWA (Indian Child Welfare Act)**

* State that the case does or does not have Indian Child Welfare Act Involvement
* If there is involvement, detail who identified Native American heritage, when that information was provided, and all known follow- up completed by DCFS/SAO.

**7. CASE HISTORY**

* As brief as possible, includes all facts relating to why the case came into care
* Written in paragraph format
* Written in past tense
* When a date is used in a sentence, used the full date
* Example: January 29, 2016, instead of 01/29/2016

**8. FINDINGS**

* Findings describe events, observations, and other information
* Written in paragraph format
* When a date is used in a sentence, the full date is used.
* Example: January 29, 2016 instead of 01/29/2016
* Include a Findings section for each child
* Heading for each child is in bold text
* Start with children, oldest child first
* Each child’s section is a narrative that includes the following six sections in order to provide the judge with a complete but concise picture of the child:
* Child’s Physical Safety & Welfare
* Development of Child’s Identity
* Child’s Familial, Culture and Religious Background
* Child’s Sense of Attachment
* Child’s Wishes
* Child’s Community Ties
* Child’s Need for Permanence
* The Uniqueness of Family & Child

**9. RECOMMENDATIONS**

* Written in numbered list format

1. The Court find that it is in [Child’s First Name & Last Name] best interest for the parental rights of [Parent(s) First Name & Last Name]be terminated and that the minor be free for adoption.
2. The Court proceed to Permanency Review Hearing instanter and should consider the permanency goal of adoption for the minor(s).
3. Court finds at the Permanency Review Hearing that minor(s) remain a ward of the court and make the following additional findings:
4. Custody and guardianship remain with DCFS.
5. Client Service Plan and services are appropriate.
6. Agency has, or has not, made reasonable efforts.
7. Other recommendations to be focused on.

* Recommendations for each child should be grouped together

**10. WRITING AND MECHANICS**

* Times New Roman 12-point font
* Left-justified margin
* Case Number(s) and page number in the footer of every page
* Double spaced between headings and paragraphs
* Use upper and lowercase throughout, except for section headings which are all upper case
* Use third person when referring to what the CASA/GAL observed or asked - "CASA/GAL observed . . ." or "It is CASA/GAL's understanding that . . ."
* Used full date in the body of the report; February 2, 2018 not 02/02/2108
* Avoided use of long quotes
* Proofreading has been done as evidenced by
* Accurate spelling throughout with careful attention to accurate spelling of people's names
* Accurate use of homophones - such as “there” and “their” and “right” and “write”
* Accurate use of capitalization
* Accurate use of punctuation
* Accurate use of the apostrophe
* Accurate use of "in regard to" - not "in regards to"
* No missing words
* No abbreviations (e.g., Illinois not IL)
* No contractions (e.g., did not instead of didn't)
* No use of "I" or "we" or "our"