

Syllabus Texas Child Welfare Law (26438/5397)

Fall 2026

Friday: 9:00 AM - 12:00 PM

O'Quinn Law Building Room 213

Face-to-Face

I. Instructor Information

Email: TXCWLclass@gmail.com

Office: O'Quinn Law Building Room _____

Phone: 832-764-3149

Office hours: TBD. I will establish my office hours based on the class's needs after the beginning of the semester. On most days, I will leave time after class to meet.

II. Required Course Materials

O'Connor's 2025-2026 copy of the Texas Family Code. I would suggest if you are a 3L and plan on practicing family law to buy a hard copy. If not, the hard copies are quite expensive, and you can find the statutes online.

[Texas Constitution and Statutes - Home](#)

The guide for attorneys representing CPS, parents, or children.

[Tool Kit of Attorneys Representing the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services in Child Welfare Cases](#)

[2024 Tool Kit for Attorneys Representing Parents & Children in Child Welfare Cases](#)

[Texas Child Welfare Law Bench Book](#)

Please download and/or print the above guides prior to the first class.

Case Files

ITIO Harris-Price Case File (will be provided in class)

The creation and production of this Trial Skills Training Curriculum and related materials is funded by the Supreme Court of Texas Permanent Judicial Commission for Children, Youth and Families (Children's Commission) through the federal Court Improvement Program. The materials in this series should not be construed as an advisory or ruling by or from the Supreme Court of Texas on specific cases or legal issues. These materials are solely intended to address the improvement of the law, the legal system, and the administration of justice.

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www.texaschildrenscommission.gov for questions related to the copyright and/or to discuss the adaptation of these materials for training-related purposes. Please give the Children's Commission the opportunity to support your efforts with our resources.

III. Course Objectives and Learning Outcomes

By the end of the course, you will

1. have a knowledge of the cases and statutes that govern the child welfare system in Texas;
2. be able to relate this knowledge to the practical and ethical issues that arise in the practice of child dependency cases;
3. be able to integrate this knowledge of the law into the practice of child dependency by handling a mock case;
4. have knowledge of the non-legal aspects of dependency law; and
5. understand the policies that affect the child welfare system.

IV. Syllabus Changes

This document is a syllabus, not a contract. Therefore, it is subject to change. Any changes will be announced by me in class, posted on Canvas, or distributed via email to the entire class.

V. Reading Assignments

All assignments are subject to change based on the flow of the class. Any changes will be distributed as quickly as possible and will be announced in class, posted online, or distributed via email to the entire class. Be sure to check your UHLC emails on a regular basis.

VI. Class Preparation and Participation

You are responsible for being prepared for each class session. I call on students randomly and simulated interviews and court proceedings are part of your class participation. Your participation at all times can affect your grade in this class. Excellent participation (always prepared and providing insightful commentary for class and simulations) can raise your grade 1/3. If you are unprepared for two class sessions your grade will be lowered by 1/3.

VII. Class Attendance

Any student missing more than three (3) classes will be dropped from the course. There are no excused absences, so use your absences wisely.

VIII. Grading

Your grade in this course will be based on the following:

1. **Role plays and Class participation (20%):** client and witness interviews.
2. **Policy paper (15%):** Each student will be responsible for writing a policy paper on the child welfare system.
3. **Additional writing assignments (15%):** Trial binder including client interview notes, case file organization, motions, and a trial brief.

4. **Hearings (50%):** opening, closings, direct and cross examinations, legal arguments, and objections.

IX. Class Attire

For the final trial, you are required to dress the same way you would in practice. If you have concerns with being able to comply with the class attire, please see me after the first class.

X. Suggested Additional or Recommended Readings or Videos

Based on class flow and level of external legal knowledge (i.e. evidence and civil procedure), there may be some suggested additional or recommended readings or videos. If this occurs you will be provided this information via email or at the end of class. Any additional assignments will be designed to enhance your learning experience and litigation skills.

Below is an example of additional or recommended videos to enhance your litigation skills:

Next week we will be starting simulated hearings. If you have not taken evidence the below video may be of assistance in preparation for your simulation hearing.

[CC On-Demand MCLE: Trial Skills for Child Welfare Cases: Making and Responding to Objections](#)

[CC On-Demand MCLE: Trial Skills for Child Welfare Cases: Laying Your Evidentiary Foundation](#)

XI. The Use of Artificial Intelligence is Prohibited in the Course

The use of artificial intelligence (AI) is prohibited in this course. Using AI for any of your formal or informal assessments (simulations, papers, case file, briefs, motions, etc.) is not permitted. This prohibition applies whether the material is to be graded or ungraded. This prohibition applies whether the assessment, assignment or exercise is prepared in or outside of class. Your writings for this course are to be your own work composed without the aid of AI.

XII. Honor Code

The UHLC Honor Code applies to all aspects of this course. You are responsible for knowing all Honor Code provisions and for complying with the Honor Code. Please inquire if you have any questions regarding how the Honor Code's provisions apply to specific activities or situations related to this course. Your continuing enrollment in this course is deemed to be a pledge by you under the Honor Code to comply with the Honor Code in relation to this course and to comply with the instructions in the course syllabus.

XIII. Community and Wellness

This is an inclusive learning community.

At UHLC, we are committed to ensuring inclusive online and classroom learning spaces, where you'll be treated with respect and dignity, and where everyone is provided the equitable opportunity to participate, to contribute, and to succeed.

In this course, all students are welcome regardless of socio-economic status, age, race, ethnicity, disability, religion, national origin, veteran's status, sex, political affiliation, marital status and other identities that we each bring to class.

Inclusive learning spaces facilitate the innovation and creative thought that enhance student success. This success arises from the participation, support, and understanding of you and your colleagues. I encourage you to speak up and to share your views, but also understand that you are doing so in a learning environment in which we're all expected to engage respectfully and with regard to the dignity of all others.

If you feel like your class performance is impacted in any way by your experiences inside or outside of class, please reach out to me. I want to be a resource for you. If you feel more comfortable speaking with someone besides me, the Office of Student Affairs (OSA) is an excellent resource.

XIV. Permissive use of AI

General

Generative artificial intelligence is a form of machine learning that creates new and original output based on the data it has been trained on or has access to, employing algorithms to generate content in response to prompts. Examples of the technology include what are known as generative "large language models" (LLMs). Two well-known LLM implementations are ChatGPT and Claude. LLM output can include text, images, music, code, and more. This syllabus policy covers the textual output of generative LLMs (AI-Generated Work Product)—which can include computer code or programs and human-language content. Because AI-Generated Work Product can often mimic human intelligence, it could potentially be used as a substitute for a student's own work product. Such use is potentially problematic to the extent that it becomes a substitute for internalized student understanding of the material or creates a dependency on AI-Generated Work Product, which may be strictly prohibited in settings that include the bar examination.

Prohibition

Subject to the exceptions immediately below, your continuing enrollment in this course constitutes your pledge not to generate or to use any AI-Generated Work Product—whether from yourself or others—in relation to any assessment in this course. The term "assessment" means any graded or ungraded work product for this course that is submitted to the instructor, presented in a class session, or used in an oral or written graded assessment for this course.

Exceptions

The following AI-Generated Work Product uses are exceptions to the preceding prohibition. The exceptions' intent is to allow the generation and use of AI-Generated Work Product for specific, narrowly defined activities related to this course.

1. You may generate and use AI-Generated Work Product for class preparation, although you must disclose the full extent of that use if your instructor asks. You may generate and use AI-Generated Work Product for study supplements to aid with general understanding of course content. This could take different forms that include creating examples or explanations of a concept, generation of

diagrams and flow charts, “gamification” of course content, flash cards for study, or sample questions and answers.

2. You may generate and use AI-Generated Work Product for an outline that summarizes the course content.
3. You may use AI-Generated Work Product to check your originally drafted text for misspellings, grammar and punctuation errors, strength and clarity of prose, verbosity, effective transitional language and thesis sentences, word choice, excessive passive voice, and like things.
4. You may use AI-Generated Work Product for the purpose of language translation.

XV. Student Professionalism

Our classroom is a learning space where each student is treated with respect and dignity and where everyone is provided the opportunity to participate, contribute, and succeed. In this course, all students are welcome regardless of background or identity. I encourage you to speak up and share your views appropriately throughout the semester. I also expect every class member to remember that in this learning environment, we will engage respectfully and with professionalism toward each other. In the words of the [Texas Lawyer’s Creed](#), “[a] lawyer should always adhere to the highest principles of professionalism.”

Refer to the link to the student handbook for more information on the Code of Professionalism.
<https://www.law.uh.edu/jd/current/handbook.pdf#page=42>

XVI. Title IX/Sexual Misconduct Policy

Per the UHS Sexual Misconduct Policy, your instructor is a “responsible employee” for reporting purposes under Title IX regulations and state law and must report incidents of sexual misconduct (sexual harassment, non-consensual sexual contact, sexual assault, sexual exploitation, sexual intimidation, intimate partner violence, or stalking) about which they become aware to the Title IX office. Please know there are places on campus where you can make a report in confidence. You can find more information about resources on the Title IX website at <https://uh.edu/equal-opportunity/title-ix-sexual-misconduct/resources/>.

XVII. Reasonable Academic Adjustments/Auxiliary Aids

The University of Houston is committed to providing an academic environment and educational programs that are accessible for its students. Any student with a disability who is experiencing barriers to learning, assessment or participation is encouraged to contact the Justin Dart, Jr. Student Accessibility Center (Dart Center) to learn more about academic accommodations and support that may be available to them. Students seeking academic accommodations will need to register with the Dart Center as soon as possible to ensure timely implementation of approved accommodations. Please contact the Dart Center by visiting the website: <https://uh.edu/accessibility/> calling (713) 743-5400, or emailing jdcen@Central.UH.EDU.

The Student Health Center offers a Psychiatry Clinic for enrolled UH students. Call 713-743-5149 during clinic hours, Monday through Friday 8 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. to schedule an appointment.

The A.D. Bruce Religion Center offers spiritual support and a variety of programs centered on well-being.

The Center for Student Advocacy and Community (CSAC) is where you can go if you need help but don't know where to start. CSAC is a "home away from home" and serves as a resource hub to help you get the resources needed to support academic and personal success. Through our Cougar Cupboard, all students can get up to 30 lbs of FREE groceries a week. Additionally, we provide 1:1 appointments to get you connected to on- and off-campus resources related to essential needs, safety and advocacy, and more. The Cougar Closet is a registered student organization advised by our office and offers free clothes to students so that all Coogs can feel good in their fit. We also host a series of cultural and community-based events that fosters social connection and helps the cougar community come closer together. Visit the CSAC homepage or follow us on Instagram: @uh_CSAC and @uhcupbrd. YOU belong here.

XVIII. Women and gender Resource Center

The mission of the WGRC is to advance the University of Houston and promote the success of all students, faculty, and staff through educating, empowering, and supporting the UH community. The WGRC suite is open to you. Stop by the office for a study space, to take a break, grab a snack, or check out one of the WGRC programs or resources. Stop by Student Center South room B12 (Basement floor near Starbucks and down the hall from Creation Station) from 9 am to 5 pm Monday through Friday.

XIX. Mental Health and Wellness Resources

The University of Houston has a number of resources to support students' mental health and overall wellness, including CoogsCARE and the UH Go App. UH Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) offers 24/7 mental health support for all students, addressing various concerns like stress, college adjustment and sadness. CAPS provides individual and couples counseling, group therapy, workshops and connections to other support services on and off-campus. For assistance visit uh.edu/caps, call 713-743-5454, or visit a Let's Talk location in-person or virtually. Let's Talk are daily, informal confidential consultations with CAPS therapists where no appointment or paperwork is needed.

Need Support Now? - If you or someone you know is struggling or in crisis, help is available. Call CAPS crisis support 24/7 at 713-743-5454, or the National Suicide and Crisis Lifeline: call or text 988, or chat 988lifeline.org.

The Texas Lawyers' Assistance Program ("TLAP") also supports law students who are dealing with stress, anxiety, depression, substance abuse, and other mental health problems. You can reach TLAP at any time at 1-800-343-8527. TLAP's website includes a page with links to sources about mental health that are of interest to law students: <https://www.tlaphelps.org/law-students>.

XX. Recording of Class

Students may not record all or part of class, livestream all or part of class, or make/distribute screen captures, without advanced written consent of the instructor. If you have or think you may have a disability such that you need to record class-related activities, please contact the Justin Dart, Jr. Student Accessibility Center. If you have an accommodation to record class related activities, those recordings may not be shared with any other student, whether in this course or not, or with any other person or on any other platform. Classes may be recorded by the instructor. Students may use instructor's recordings for their own studying and notetaking. Instructor's recordings are not authorized to be shared with anyone without the prior written approval of the instructor. Failure to comply with requirements regarding recordings will result in a disciplinary referral to the Dean of Students Office and may result in disciplinary action.

XXI. Resources for Online Learning

The University of Houston is committed to student success and provides information to optimize the online learning experience through our Power-On website. Please visit this website for a comprehensive set of resources, tools, and tips including obtaining access to the internet, AccessUH, Blackboard and Canvas; requesting a laptop through the Laptop Loaner Program; using your smartphone as a webcam; and downloading Microsoft Office 365 at no cost. For questions or assistance contact UHOnline@uh.edu.

XXII. First Class Reading Assignment

[Tool Kit for Attorneys Representing the Texas Department of Family & Protective Services in Child Welfare Cases](#)

Read Legal Essentials and Investigation sections of the above Tool Kit.