

people

Fighting For Children

Howard Talenfeld has made his career as a zealous advocate for Florida's at-risk children and adults. The name partner with Fort Lauderdale law firm Colodny, Fass, Talenfeld, Karlinsky, Abate & Webb, Talenfeld protects their rights by litigating for those harmed by others, as well as pushing for institutional change in Florida's foster care, juvenile delinquency and mental health systems.

Yet, one of his proudest accomplishments remains the founding in 2002 of Florida's Children First, the state's leading non-profit child advocacy organization. Celebrating its 10th anniversary, FCF's board recently elected Talenfeld to his sixth term as its president.

He also helped found Florida Youth SHINE, which supports former foster kids who have "aged-out" of the state system – and who help lobby lawmakers to better fund and assist abused, neglected and foster kids.

Talenfeld himself has lobbied state leaders, whether to increase funding to train volunteer attorneys and guardians ad litem working with abused and neglected children, or to pay for mandatory legal representation of children in dependency court. His hundreds of hours spent volunteering each year have earned Talenfeld the Pro Bono Lawyer of the Year Award for the 17th Judicial Circuit in Broward County, the Florida Bar's President's Award of Merit the Bar's highest honor and the Russell Carlisle Award for his relentless child advocacy work on behalf of Legal Aid of Broward County.

Not surprisingly, Talenfeld is a tenacious attorney for his at-risk clients. In a 2000 case stemming from foster-care abuse, he won a class-action settlement that almost tripled the funding for child welfare services in the county. The win also helped get passed a state law requiring local school boards to transport foster children to the same school when they move to a new home. Talenfeld assisted in the writing of Florida's Foster Children Bill of Rights, Florida's pilot project on representation of foster children



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in Dependency Court, and Florida's breakthrough interagency education bill for foster children.

Talenfeld has sued state agencies and private care providers that have harmed – and in some instances, killed – children and adults under their care. His arguments have led to state reform and improvements of its practices and policies regarding care for the state's most vulnerable children and disabled adults.

Among his many cases, Talenfeld recently negotiated a \$3 million settlement for a young Broward County boy who suffered severe brain injury when county workers failed to act on warnings of parental abuse. He successfully employed federal civil rights statutes that helped penetrate Florida's sovereign immunity policy and enable clients to receive awards above the state's \$300,000 statutory limit.

As a respected expert who's interviewed frequently by CNN, *Prime Time Live* and *20/20*, Talenfeld recently was featured in *Florida Super Lawyer Magazine*. One of his most heart wrenching damage cases continues to be followed closely in the New York Times.

A Pittsburgh native, Talenfeld studied business at the University of Miami, and in 1979 graduated from its School of Law. He began his career as a litigator in commercial and personal injury law. The sibling of a mentally disabled younger sister, Bess's influence on him helped guide Talenfeld to his chosen area of law.

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