

RECORD IMPOUNDED

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SUPERIOR COURT OF NEW JERSEY
APPELLATE DIVISION
DOCKET NOS. A-0399-21
A-0400-21

NEW JERSEY DIVISION
OF CHILD PROTECTION
AND PERMANENCY,

Plaintiff-Respondent,

v.

C.L. and H.R.,

Defendants-Appellants.

IN THE MATTER OF THE
GUARDIANSHIP OF D.R.,
a minor.

Argued February 6, 2023 – Decided February 10, 2023

Before Judges Haas and Mitterhoff.

On appeal from the Superior Court of New Jersey,
Chancery Division, Family Part, Hudson County,
Docket No. FG-09-0124-21.

Ryan T. Clark, Designated Counsel, argued the cause for appellant C.L. (Joseph E. Krakora, Public Defender, attorney; Ryan T. Clark, on the briefs).

Adrienne Kalosieh, Assistant Deputy Public Defender, argued the cause for appellant H.R. (Joseph E. Krakora, Public Defender, attorney; Dianne Glenn, Designated Counsel, on the briefs).

Meaghan Goulding, Deputy Attorney General, argued the cause for respondent (Matthew J. Platkin, Attorney General, attorney; Sookie Bae-Park, Assistant Attorney General, of counsel; Meaghan Goulding, on the brief).

Melissa R. Vance, Assistant Deputy Public Defender, argued the cause for minor (Joseph E. Krakora, Public Defender, Law Guardian, attorney; Meredith Alexis Pollock, Deputy Public Defender, of counsel; Melissa R. Vance, of counsel and on the brief).

PER CURIAM

Defendants C.L.¹ and H.R. are the biological parents of D.R. Defendants appeal from the September 15, 2021 judgment of guardianship terminating their parental rights to the child. Defendants contend that the Division of Child Protection and Permanency (Division) failed to prove each prong of N.J.S.A. 30:4C-15.1(a) by clear and convincing evidence. The Law Guardian supports the termination on appeal as it did before the trial court.

¹ We refer to defendants and the child by initials to protect their privacy. R. 1:38-3(d)(12).

Based on our review of the record and applicable law, we are satisfied that the evidence in favor of the guardianship petition overwhelmingly supports the decision to terminate defendants' parental rights. Accordingly, we affirm substantially for the reasons set forth by the trial judge in her comprehensive written decision rendered on September 15, 2021.

We will not recite in detail the history of the Division's interactions with defendants and D.R. Instead, we incorporate by reference the factual findings and legal conclusions contained in the trial judge's decision. We add the following brief comments.

The guardianship petition was tried before the trial judge over the course of multiple days.² The Division presented overwhelming evidence of defendants' parental unfitness, including the uncontradicted testimony of an expert in psychology. The Division established, by clear and convincing evidence, all four statutory prongs outlined in N.J.S.A. 30:4C-15.1(a).

In her thorough opinion, the trial judge concluded that termination of defendants' parental rights was in the child's best interests, and fully explained the basis for each of her determinations. In this appeal, our review of the judge's

² Neither defendant appeared at the trial, although both were represented by counsel. Defendants called no witnesses.

decision is limited. We defer to her expertise as a Family Court judge, Cesare v. Cesare, 154 N.J. 394, 413 (1998), and we are bound by her factual findings so long as they are supported by sufficient credible evidence. N.J. Div. of Youth & Fam. Servs. v. M.M., 189 N.J. 261, 279 (2007).

Applying these principles, we conclude that the judge's factual findings are fully supported by the record and, in light of those facts, her legal conclusions are unassailable. Children are entitled to a permanent, safe and secure home. We acknowledge "the need for permanency of placements by placing limits on the time for a birth parent to correct conditions in anticipation of reuniting with the child." N.J. Div. of Youth & Fam. Servs. v. C.S., 367 N.J. Super. 76, 111 (App. Div. 2004). As public policy increasingly focuses on a child's need for permanency, the emphasis has "shifted from protracted efforts for reunification with a birth parent to an expeditious, permanent placement to promote the child's well-being." Ibid. That is because "[a] child cannot be held prisoner of the rights of others, even those of his or her parents. Children have their own rights, including the right to a permanent, safe and stable placement." Ibid.

The question then is "whether the parent can become fit in time to meet the needs of the children." N.J. Div. of Youth & Fam. Servs. v. F.M., 375 N.J.

Super. 235, 263 (App. Div. 2005); see also N.J. Div. of Youth & Fam. Servs. v. P.P., 180 N.J. 494, 512 (2004) (indicating that even if a parent is trying to change, a child cannot wait indefinitely). After carefully considering the evidence, the trial judge reasonably determined that defendants were unable to parent D.R. and would not be able to do so for the foreseeable future. Under those circumstances, we agree with the judge that any further delay of permanent placement would not be in the child's best interests.

Affirmed.

I hereby certify that the foregoing
is a true copy of the original on
file in my office.



CLERK OF THE APPELLATE DIVISION