

Minutes

Maine Justice for Children Task Force

June 17, 2025, 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

Via Zoom

In attendance: Chief Justice Stanfill, Justice Lawrence, Chief Judge Davis, Ariel Piers-Gamble, Kaela Scott, Jamie Brooks, Mark Moran, Andrea Mancuso, Erika Simonson, Kelly Dell'Aquila, Amanda Brownell, Darcy Fisher, Xi Chen, Mike Sauschuck, Bobbi Johnson, Randall Liberty, Melissa Martin, Chris Bicknell, Travis Bryant, Michael Dixon, Bette Hoxie, Sarah Branch, Christine Alberi, Caroline Jova, and Joanna Davis (guest).

Welcome - Chief Justice Valerie Stanfill

- March 2025 minutes unanimously approved.

Citizen Review Panel Updates

- **Maine Child Death and Serious Injury Review Panel (CDSIRP)** - Dr. Nick Miles, Child Abuse Pediatrician, Spurwink Center for Safe and Healthy Families, CDSIRP Co-Chair and Erika Simonson, Child and Family Programs Coordinator, Maine Coalition to End Domestic Violence, CDSIRP Co-Chair
 - After 11 years as Chair, Mark Moran will be stepping down. Erika Simonson is the newly-elected chair and Dr. Miles will continue to be the vice-chair.
 - In March, there were multiple presentations to the panel rather than a case review, including from the Ombudsmen and CODE program.
 - The panel did not meet in April due to the Maine Judicial Branch Child Welfare Conference.
 - In May, the panel had intended to review a case involving an adolescent, but has deferred that review due to concerns from the Office of the Attorney General regarding an accompanying child protection case that is pre-jeopardy. The panel will be having ongoing discussions regarding the interplay of its case review and child protection cases more broadly.
 - In June, the panel officially voted in Erika Simonson as the new Chair. They then reviewed a case that included reporting failures by medical providers when a child presented with physical injuries.
 - The panel does not meet over the summer, but panel leadership will meet to finalize the Chair transition.
- **Maine Child Welfare Advisory Panel (MCWAP):** Andrea Mancuso, Esq., Public Policy Director, Maine Coalition to End Domestic Violence, MCWAP Co-Chair
 - In March, the panel received the annual reports from this Task Force as well as CDSIRP.
 - In June, the panel focused on learning more about Title IV-E funding and had Department experts present on the program and the funding formula. The panel also had further discussions on how to access IV-E funds for parent representation.
 - The panel also has had some membership changes:

- Melissa Hackett joined the Executive Committee;
 - Sarah Langevin joined the panel. She is a substance use provider, peer recovery support provider, and a parent with lived experience;
 - Jamie Brooks rejoined the panel as a parent with lived experience;
 - Chelsea Peters' role on the panel was shifted with her transition to Kids Legal; and
 - Betsy Boardman and Kelly Dell'Aquila have both departed the panel.
- The panel will not meet again until September, at which time they will have an in-person meeting at the CJC in Augusta.

Organizational Updates

- **Maine Supreme Judicial Court** - Chief Justice Valerie Stanfill
 - **Child Protection and Juvenile Process Specialist Vacancy:**
 - Betsy Boardman, who was the Child Protection and Juvenile Process Specialist at the Maine Judicial Branch for several years and who diligently and expertly staffed these Task Force meetings, has accepted a position as the Director of Training at PDS. She will be sorely missed at the Maine Judicial Branch, but we are certain she will do excellent work at PDS to continue to serve the youth of this state, just in a different capacity.
 - While her position with the Maine Judicial Branch is vacant, please contact our Family Division Manager, Caroline Jova, with any questions pertaining to this Task Force or juvenile and child protection process.
 - **Maine eCourts update:**
 - Androscoggin UCD and the Lewiston District Court juvenile docket successfully went live with Maine eCourts yesterday, June 16, 2025.
 - This was an incredibly important milestone for the Maine eCourts project.
 - **Parent Counsel:**
 - On April 23, the Maine Legislature enacted, as emergency legislation, *An Act to Address the Limited Availability of Counsel in Courts to Represent Indigent Parties in Matters Affecting Their Fundamental Rights*. This new law provides that when there is no attorney available through the PDS, PDS will pay for the appointment of an attorney not rostered by PDS as long as the attorney is qualified, has at least 3 years of legal experience relevant to the pending matter, and is willing to undertake the representation.
 - Although the MJB anticipates that there will be a small number of cases in which a non-rostered qualified attorney is available to represent an indigent party, any opportunity to reduce the number of cases with parties who lack legal representation should be taken.
 - **GAL Mentor Program:**
 - An Administrative Order to establish a GAL mentor program pilot project for GALs appointed to child protection matters was signed on May 9. Under this project, child protection GALs can submit a request to the Family Division for an initial one hour of mentor services, and experienced GALs, who are selected by the Chief

Judge to be rostered as mentors following an application process, are compensated at \$150 per hour to provide the mentoring services.

- The deadline for GALs to apply to become mentors was June 3 and the MJB received 13 applications. The Chief Judge is undertaking review of the applications.
- The project is funded by the Court Improvement Program federal grant, so the pilot project is limited to child protection cases.

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- **Maine Judicial Branch- Chief Judge Brent Davis**

- **District Court Judges**

- Judge Amy Dietrich has been sworn in and has completed her training and Judge Michael Roberts retired and has been sworn in as active-retired.

- **PC Filings Update**

- From January 1, 2025, to June 6, 2025, there were a total of 398 new child protection filings statewide. For the same time-period during 2024, there were 419 new filings. This represents about a 5% decrease in new filings.

- **GAL/CASA Update**

- Upcoming CASA training -The next training for CASA volunteers is scheduled for August 11th through the 15th.
 - Next GAL Core Training for new GAL applicants will be during fall admin week which is October 20th.

- **Office of the Attorney General- Ariel Piers-Gamble, Assistant Attorney General, Chief of the Child Protective Division**

- The Child Protective Division currently has on staff 26 trial attorneys (with one vacancy in Bangor), one appellate attorney, three supervising paralegals across four offices, three interns, one high school job-shower starting this week, and a full-time law student over the summer.
 - The Child Protective Division has had recent training from immigration attorneys through Casey Families, ILAP, and the ABA, a presentation on education law and its intersection with child protection cases, as well as a presentation from Melissa Martin and Shira Burns on CAC interviews and evidence best practices.

- **Office of Child and Family Services at DHHS- Bobbi Johnson, Director**

- Bobbi has been doing office visits and has 18 visits set up for June and July.
 - OCFS is close to finalizing its strategic plan.
 - This legislative session, OCFS submitted three bills, but tracked 50-60 bills affecting OCFS services.
 - The Commissioner's office is actively monitoring any federal changes on all DHHS operations.
 - OCFS has hired Jenny Hinson, who will be joining OCFS on July 14th as Deputy Director. She will supervise a couple of programs but will primarily oversee implementation of the strategic plan.
 - OCFS is continuing to work solutions for kids in hotels and emergency departments in order to move those children to more appropriate settings. DHHS is trying out a new

model for a wrap-around, short term foster placement which would act as a stepping stone for a longer foster placement.

- DHHS has completed the required training required as part of the psychotropic medications settlement and is actively working on finalizing revised policies.
- The Title IV-E audit and Child and Family Services Review are both upcoming later this year.
- OCFS is actively working to recruit new staff and on staff retention. OCFS is specifically focusing attention on the turnover in Lewiston.
- Michael Dixon asked Bobbi about the reported uptick in child fatalities in 2024. Bobbi noted that there is a dashboard that is available that tracks this kind of information: <https://www.maine.gov/dhhs/ocfs/data-reports-initiatives/child-fatality-reporting>.

There was also a fatality data update presentation to HHS that provided information (see [recording](#); see [slides](#)).

- **Maine Commission on Public Defense Services** - Jim Billings, Executive Director, Maine Commission on Public Defense Services; Molly Owens, Chief, Parents Counsel Division, Maine Commission on Public Defense Services; Darcy Fisher, Deputy Executive Director, Maine Commission on Public Defense Services
 - Betsy Boardman has joined PDS as their new Training Director as of July 14th. PDS has hired a new staff parent attorney and PDS is currently interviewing for a second staff parent attorney. Due to budget constraints, there will be no more positions created until more funding is made available.
 - 100 attorneys attended PDS's parent attorney training during the spring administrative week, including some programming at Sunday River.
 - Taylor Kilgore, resource counsel for PDS, is continuing to assist Lewiston District Court in appointing parent attorneys, but reports that there are delays in appointment orders from that court.
 - PDS's Parent Counsel Division also meaningfully participated in the legislative session this year, which is a new role for that division.

Strategic Plan Updates

- **Continuing Education Subcommittee:** Caroline Jova, Family Division Manager, Maine Judicial Branch
 - During its meetings to plan the 2025 child protection conference, the Continuing Education Subcommittee identified the increasing conflict that families, lawyers, and Department staff are facing on a daily basis. Therefore, the subcommittee identified a need to learn how to deal with high conflict cases and individuals with the ultimate goal being better outcomes for the families and children in Maine. Accordingly, the Maine Judicial Branch hosted a two-day conference titled "Improving Family Outcomes Through Effective Communication in High Conflict Cases" on April 3 and 4, 2025. Throughout the two-day conference, the High Conflict Institute and others presented strategies and information on how to provide high quality and effective legal representation in cases where there is often conflict between various parties to the case.

- There were approximately 250 participants each day.
- The following credits were awarded for the April 2025 conference (approximate):
 - Total credits awarded: 2,060 credits
 - Continuing Legal Education (attorneys): 965 credits
 - Continuing Professional Education (Guardians ad litem): 587 credits
 - Legal Ethics: 163 credits
 - Continuing Judicial Education (judges): 345 credit
- **Parent Attorney/GAL Retention and Recruitment Subcommittee:** Kaela Scott, GAL/CASA Services Coordinator, Maine Judicial Branch
 - The subcommittee continues to meet monthly. With Betsy's transition to PDS, Kaela will be the contact person for this subcommittee.
 - The subcommittee continues to identify and discuss possible recommendations that the subcommittee has not yet presented to the larger task force.
 - The subcommittee also will be working through the feedback it received after presenting its recommendations to the Task Force, so that it can present updated recommendations/information at a future meeting.
 - Kaela will be sending an email to all those presently receiving the calendar invitations to confirm their continued interest in the subcommittee. If anyone is interested in joining the subcommittee, please contact Kaela.

2025 Meeting Dates: September 16th, December 16th

Subcommittee Meeting Schedule:

- Continuing Education Subcommittee: TBD
- Parent Attorney/GAL Retention and Recruitment Subcommittee: First Monday of the month from 12:00 to 1:00 p.m.