

The mission of MCWAP is to assure that the state system is meeting the safety, permanency, and well-being of children and families through assessment, research, advocacy, and greater citizen involvement. Our goal is to promote child safety and quality services for children, youth, and families.

Maine Child Welfare Advisory Panel

March 6, 2026; 9 a.m. – 11 a.m.

Co-Chairs: Ahmen Cabral; Andrea Mancuso

Panel Coordinator: Jenna Joeckel

Minutes

9:00 a.m. - Welcome and Introductions:

Attendance: Jenna Joeckel, Andrea Mancuso, Ahmen Cabral, Michelle Westbrook, Maura Keaveney, Jamie Brooks, Beth Gagnon, Carlie Fischer, Melissa Hackett, Julie Smyth, Jean Haynes, Taylor Kilgore, Adrienne Carmack, Molly Owens, Kathryn Brice, Sarah Langevin, Erika Simonson, Esther Anne,

Guests of the Panel- Anastasia Quimby, Caroline Jova, Jenny Hinson, Kristina Famolare, Kaela Scott

Opening Statement:

Members shared the opening statement

We are a federally mandated group of professionals and private citizens who are responsible for determining whether state and local agencies are effectively discharging child protective and child welfare responsibilities. The mission of the panel is to assure that the state system is meeting the safety, permanency, and well-being of children and families through assessment, research, advocacy, and greater citizen involvement. Each of us brings to this table a different set of experiences and opinions. Every voice is valued, and all perspectives are needed. Our shared goal is to promote child safety and quality services for children, youth, and families. This is the task to which we continually commit ourselves, and we hold our relationships in trust.

Members participated in a review of the Panel Values Statement.

9:15 a.m. Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) Stakeholder Group Presentation

Jenny Hinsons, Deputy Director from the Office of Child and Family Services (OCFS), provided information about the CFSR Stakeholder Group to the Panel members. The presentation included information about the purpose of the CFSR, statewide assessment overview, stakeholder engagement, stakeholder groups, CFSR outcome measures, systemic factors, the onsite review process, the program improvement plan, and the Maine CFSR timeline. The presenter noted that in the past 25 years, every state has been required to complete a PIP. The presenter will send the presentation to the Panel Coordinator, and a copy of the presentation will be included in the minutes.

The stakeholder groups include 10-14 questions derived from ACF required responses and previous assessments on OCFS over the last few years including planning for safety, meaningful case planning, quality contacts, and services for families.

9:40 a.m. 2025 Justice for Children's Task Force Annual Report Presentation

Carolyn Jova, Family Division Manager, State of Maine Judicial Branch and Kaela Scott, GAL Services Coordinator, State of Maine Judicial branch provided a presentation on the 2025 Justice for Children's Task Force Annual Report. The presentation included an overview of the Task Force, meeting structure, recruitment and retention subcommittee overview and recommendations, and the continuing education subcommittee overview and initiatives. The presenter will send the presentation to the Panel Coordinator, and a copy of the presentation will be included in the minutes.

Members noted that many of the recommendations included in the annual report were recommended by members from MCWAP.

The 2025 Justice for Children's Task Force can be found Here: [2025 Justice for Children Task Force Annual Report.final](#)

10:15 a.m. MCWAP Housekeeping:

The panel voted on and approved the February minutes

The annual report is in the development process, and a draft will be shared with the Panel soon.

Carlie Fisher has been approved as a voting member of the Panel.

Nici Carbone has been hired as the new Judicial Branch liaison and will be joining the Panel.

An electronic vote took place. The CFSR Stakeholder group with OCFS will take place on April 10, 2026, at 2:30-4:30pm. An invitation has been sent to the Panel.

10:20 a.m. Subcommittee Updates:

Family Centered Policy & Practice – The subcommittee is reviewing prior recommendations, the status, and start to create a living history of the work of the Panel to support consideration of where new recommendations can be made. The subcommittee will also be partnering with OCFS to explore work around the Family Team Meeting process and will reach out to Panel members when the more intensive work is beginning. The next Family Centered Policy and Practice subcommittee meeting is next Wednesday (3/11) from 12-1pm.

Citizen Engagement Committee – The subcommittee has been experiencing some transition. Members are encouraged to be thinking about the upcoming survey that will need to be completed in the next year and share ideas for engagement. Members are also invited to join the subcommittee.

10:30 a.m. Adjourn

Next Panel Meeting: June 5, 9 a.m. – 11 a.m.

Office of Child and Family Services

Child and Family Services Review

Round 4



Understanding The Child and Family Services Reviews (CFSRs)



What is the purpose of the Child and Family Services Reviews?

The CFSRs enable the Children's Bureau to:

ENSURE conformity with federal child welfare requirements.

DETERMINE what is happening to children and families in the child welfare system.

ASSIST states in enhancing their capacity to achieve safety, permanency, and well-being for children and families.

How are we evaluated?

There are three ways we are evaluated:

1) Statewide Assessment (SWA)

2) Data Profile

3) Case Reviews

Part 1

Statewide Assessment



Preparation of evidence to demonstrate how well the state's child welfare system is functioning.

States and their partners complete 4 sections of the **Statewide Assessment**:

SECTION I. General Info

A list of participants in the statewide assessment process and a description of their involvement.

SECTION II. State Context

Descriptions of the state's vision and tenets of the system, cross-system challenges, and current initiatives.

SECTION III. Assessment of Child and Family Outcomes

Data/information to support positive outcomes in safety, permanency, and well-being.

SECTION IV. Assessment of Seven Systemic Factors

Data/information to support how well each systemic factor functions.

Stakeholder Engagement

The Statewide Assessment includes Stakeholder Engagement to help identify strengths and areas of need, validate suspected systemic contributions and identify new opportunities, and better understand the impact of our interventions and services.

States should engage the following:

- Legal community--(e.g. Attorneys for parents, children, and the child welfare agency; judges; court administrators; and the Court Improvement Program (CIP))
- Individuals with lived experiences (families and youth)
- Child welfare agency staff at various levels
- Individuals from Tribes
- Individuals from related state agencies—(e.g., education, mental health, healthcare, and law enforcement)
- Key child welfare system and community partners such as CASA, service providers, and foster and adoptive parents.

Stakeholder groups will meet January through April 2026.

Stakeholder Groups

Parents with Lived Experience

Youth Leadership Advisory Team (YLAT)

Resource Parents

Kinship Caregivers

Legal Community

- Attorneys General
- Guardians ad Litem
- Public Defense Services
- Judges

Academy of Pediatrics

Residential Providers

Tribal Partners

Agency Stakeholders

Other Key Partners

MCWAP

Ombudsman

Service Providers

- Substance Abuse
- Therapists
- Children's Advocacy Centers
- Maine Prevention Councils
- Domestic Violence

Child Welfare Caseworkers

Child Welfare Supervisors

Child Welfare Leadership

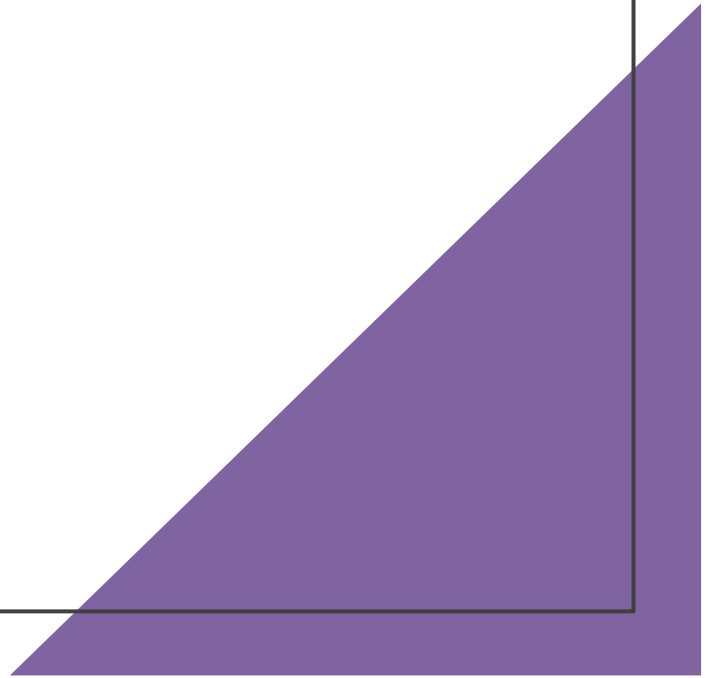
OCFS Data and IT Services

OCFS Executive Team

OCFS QI/QA Teams

Resource Home Licensing/Background Checks

CFSR Outcome Measures and Systemic Factors



What are the 7 Outcome Measures?

Safety Outcome 1: Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect.

Safety Outcome 2: Children are safely maintained in their homes whenever possible and appropriate.

Permanency Outcome 1: Children have permanency and stability in their living situations.

Permanency Outcome 2: The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children.

Well-Being Outcome 1: Families have enhanced capacity to provide for the children's needs.

Well-Being Outcome 2: Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs.

Well-Being Outcome 3: Children receive adequate services to meet their physical and mental health needs.

What are the 7 Systemic Factors

Statewide Information System: This factor assesses the effectiveness of the information system used by the state to track and manage data related to child welfare cases. A well-functioning system ensures that relevant information is accessible and can be used to inform decision-making.

Case Review System: This involves evaluating how well the state conducts administrative and court reviews of cases to ensure that children and families receive timely and appropriate services. It supports individualized case planning and helps monitor the quality of services provided.

Quality Assurance System: This factor examines the state's processes for monitoring and evaluating the quality of services delivered to children and families. It includes mechanisms for continuous quality improvement and feedback from stakeholders.

What are the 7 Systemic Factors

Staff and Provider Training: This assesses the training provided to staff and service providers to ensure they have the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively support children and families in the child welfare system.

Service Array and Resource Development: This factor evaluates the availability and accessibility of a comprehensive array of services that meet the diverse needs of children and families, including preventive services and support for those in foster care.

Agency Responsiveness to the Community: This examines how well the agency engages with the community and incorporates feedback from families and stakeholders into its practices and policies.

Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention: This factor assesses the effectiveness of the processes in place for recruiting, licensing, and retaining foster and adoptive parents, which is critical for ensuring stable placements for children.

Part 2

Onsite Review



Review of cases and interviews to assess substantial conformity on outcomes and systemic factors.



Case Reviews

Reading a case using the Onsite Review Instrument and Instructions to determine strengths and areas needing improvement for child and family outcomes. Case reviews include interviews with children and families to collect information that may be missing, confirm documentation, and obtain input on experiences.



Stakeholder Interviews

Group interviews to collect information needed to determine whether a state is in substantial conformity with the seven systemic factors.

Maine Onsite Review

Maine applied to conduct state led CFSR review. This means that, if approved, the Children's Bureau through the Administration of Children and Families (ACF) would allow Maine to conduct case reviews utilizing OCFS Quality Assurance staff. Maine has conducted state led CFSRs in the past.

The onsite review will take place October 1, 2026, through March 31, 2027.

The period under review (PUR) is October 1, 2025-March 31, 2027.

Stakeholder Interviews will take place November 2nd through 6th 2026. During this week, staff from the Children's Bureau will conduct interviews with stakeholders.

Part 3

Program Improvement Plan (PIP)



States determined not to be in substantial conformity are required to develop a plan to address areas needing improvement.



PIP Development

States and stakeholders:

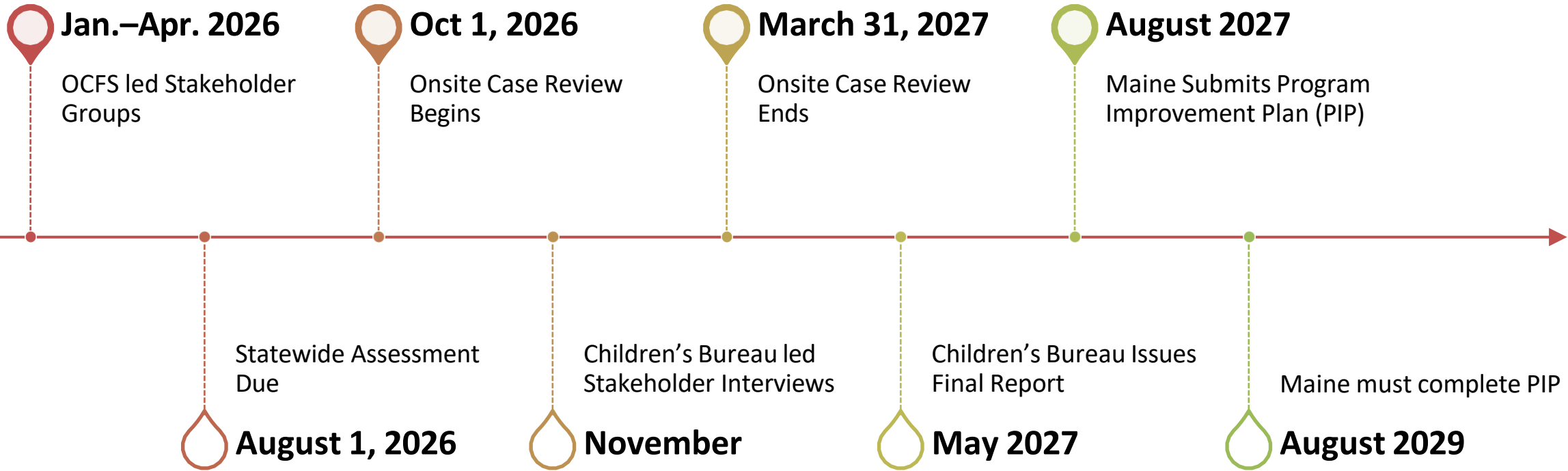
- Conduct root cause analysis.
- Identify cross-cutting themes.
- Develop interventions that address root causes and themes.



PIP Implementation and Monitoring

- States have 2 years to implement their PIP and are monitored on its impact.
- After implementation of the PIP, states have an additional 18 months to achieve PIP measurement goals.

Maine CFSR Timeline



Questions?

If you have any questions, please
contact Jenny Hinson

Jenny.Hinson@Maine.Gov

For more information on the CFSR:

[CFSR Fact Sheets](#)

Justice for Children Task Force 2025 Annual Report

Caroline Jova, Esq., Family Division Manager,
Maine Judicial Branch

Kaela Scott, Esq., GAL Services Coordinator,
Maine Judicial Branch



Introduction

- **Mission:** Enhance child welfare outcomes for children in Maine.
- **Task Force Composition:**
 - Chaired by the Chief Justice of the Maine Supreme Judicial Court.
 - Includes representatives from Maine's judicial, legislative, and executive branches.
 - Also includes advocates, foster parents, and child welfare professionals.
- **Key Mandate:** Identify systemic improvements and collaborate on solutions to improve outcomes.

Meetings

1

Task Force Meetings:

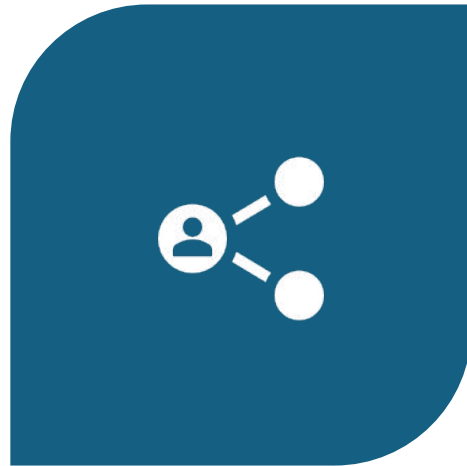
- Held quarterly, typically in March, June, September, and December.
- Virtual format.

2

Focus of Meetings:

- Updates on child welfare system status and workforce needs.
- Action steps and strategic plan initiatives.

Parent Attorney & GAL Recruitment and Retention Subcommittee



CHALLENGE: RETENTION AND RECRUITMENT OF PARENT ATTORNEYS AND GUARDIANS AD LITEM (GALS).



RECOMMENDATIONS: THE SUBCOMMITTEE'S RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE TASK FORCE WERE PRESENTED AND REVIEWED BY THE TASK FORCE IN JANUARY AND MARCH 2025.

Recommendation #1

- *“PDS, the MJB, and the OAG should implement an exit interview protocol for parent attorneys, GALs, and AAGs who are no longer working with the protective custody docket. Survey results should be shared with the Task Force on an annual basis.”*
 - A GAL exit survey has been created and will be disseminated to GALs who request to resign from the roster.
 - The survey has also been shared with the Maine Commission on Public Defense Services (PDS), and they have expressed interest in an exit survey.
 - Office of the Attorney General already has an exit interview protocol and has shared its data with the subcommittee.
 - Data will be shared with the Task Force at large annually.

Recommendation #2

- *“Ask that the Board of Overseers of the Bar establish the National Association of Counsel for Children (NACC) Child Welfare Specialist designation in Maine. The purpose of offering this designation to attorneys practicing child welfare law in Maine is to provide them with an optional opportunity to deepen their expertise; PDS agrees this designation should not become a requirement.”*
 - This request must be made to the Board of Overseers of the Bar for consideration, pursuant to Rule 7.4 of the Maine Rules of Professional Conduct.
 - The subcommittee is presently discussing the best way to move this request forward.

Recommendation #3

- *“The Maine Supreme Judicial Court should amend the civil and criminal court rules to allow students of an ABA-accredited law school to receive student practice authorization for internships and externships with contract counsel supervised by PDS.”*
 - The Maine Supreme Judicial Court launched a pilot program to conditionally authorize law student externs to provide public defense services under the supervision of PDS contract counsel, effective December 18, 2024. See [Administrative Order JB 24-03](#).
 - Representatives of Maine Law have indicated that interest in this program is starting to build and have offered to gather and share data with the subcommittee.
 - The pilot program expires on September 5, 2026, unless sooner modified or extended.

Recommendation #4

- *“The MJB should prioritize implementation of an electronic billing system for guardian ad litem billing.”*
 - On August 13, 2025, the MJB transitioned to electronic submission of GAL vouchers, using either eFileMaine (in courts that have implemented Maine eCourts) or ShareFile (for all other courts). Vouchers are now also being internally processed at the MJB using ShareFile.
 - Additionally, the MJB is exploring the implementation of a more robust electronic payment module for GAL vouchers. Meetings to begin mapping out such a system have begun, but implementation is still a few years away given the need for more funding and the limited capacity of the MJB’s Information Technology department due to the statewide implementation of Maine eCourts.

Recommendation #5

- *“The Maine Judicial Branch should eliminate the requirement for GALs to submit a motion for prior approval to exceed the legal stage hourly cap for billing and should instead allow GALs to submit a justification for any hours above the cap at the time the voucher is submitted. The justification would be reviewed for reasonableness (akin to the process adopted by PDS).”*
 - The MJB noted that the current presumptive caps and pre-approval process is an important fiscal control for responsible cost management of GAL services.
 - Additionally, the MJB expressed concern that review for reasonableness after the services had been performed could result in GALs providing services for which they are not ultimately compensated, if the invoiced amount is determined to be unreasonable. One way to mitigate this risk is to allow for more frequent submissions of GAL vouchers, similar to PDS’ permitted billing frequency, but the MJB is not currently resourced to process more than the approximately 6,000 vouchers that are submitted annually. As outlined in recommendation #4, the MJB is taking steps toward a robust billing system that could potentially allow for more frequent voucher submissions.

Recommendation #6

- *“The University of Maine School of Law should return to offering the child protection class each year and consider adding a clinic that is focused on child protection. The Maine State Legislature and/or PDS should provide financial support to establish and maintain this clinic to ensure sustainability. Additionally, the University of Maine School of Law should partner with PDS to ensure that the curriculum qualifies as the minimum standards training required for PDS.”*
 - A child protection course is being offered the 2026 Spring semester. Maine Law intends to continue to offer this course, provided a qualified adjunct professor is available and willing to teach the course.
 - PDS is exploring the creation of a course that could satisfy the PDS minimum standards requirements to be rostered as a parent attorney.
 - Maine Law does not currently have a child protection clinic, but its general practice clinic does occasionally accept referrals of child protection cases, particularly cases that do not involve a change in custody. The establishment of an additional clinic specialized only in child protection cases would require significant funding and infrastructure that is not currently available.

Recommendation #7

- *“The pay rate for Title 22 GALs and Parent Counsel should be re-evaluated and increased at least every two years to meet or exceed statewide, regional, and national cost-of living adjustments, inflation rates, and market rate trends for legal services.”*
 - Legislative action is needed for a pay increase.
 - PDS advocates for pay increase to parent attorneys. MJB advocates for parity in payment among parent attorneys and GALs.
 - PDS offered to provide information regarding any advocacy by PDS for further increases to the hourly rate for parent attorneys.

Recommendation #8

- *“The requirement that GALs—alone among all other practicing attorneys in the State—accept pro bono or reduced fee referrals from the courts, as set forth in M.R.G.A.L. 2(b)(5), should be eliminated.”*
 - The Task Force determined that changes of this nature must be made to the Guardian ad Litem Review Board, in its capacity as the advisory committee on the Maine Rules for Guardians Ad Litem.
 - Subcommittee is discussing next steps, which include a subcommittee member presenting this recommendation to the GAL Review Board at an upcoming Board meeting.



Continuing Education Subcommittee

- Annual child protective conference (usually held during the Judicial Branch's spring administrative week).
 - Planning begins September of the preceding year.
- Strategies for professionals to better support children and families involved in the child welfare system.



Planning Phase

Planning begins September of the preceding year.



Annual Child Protective Conference

Usually held during the Judicial Branch's spring administrative week.



Strategic Goals & Outcomes

Strategies for professionals to better support children and families involved in the child welfare system.

2025 Conference:

Improving Family Outcomes Through Effective Communication in High Conflict Cases
April 3 and 4, 2025

The 2025 Conference featured the High Conflict Institute and presented on topics such as:

- ✓ Flipping the Script in High-Conflict Cases: Understanding High-Conflict Personalities
- ✓ Conflict Tolerance
- ✓ Using a Structured Proposal Method for Reaching Agreements
- ✓ Managing High Conflict Personalities in Court (Judge Only)
- ✓ Communication Between Teams/Groups



2026 Conference:

Trial Skills for Quality Representation

April 2 and 3, 2026

- The 2026 conference will be a virtual skills-based two-day course aimed at quality representation and advocacy.
- The course will be provided by the National Institute for Trial Advocacy focusing on:
 - Direct and Cross Examination
 - Exhibits and Impeachment
- 6:1 participant to faculty ratio.

Conclusion

The Task Force's initiatives are driving system-wide improvements.

Collaborative work has a lasting effect on Maine's child welfare system.

Ongoing efforts will continue to strengthen the system and support Maine families.

Questions?

Thank you for your time and attention.

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