

Maine Justice for Children Task Force

Date: June 23, 2026

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Improving Safety, Permanency, and Well-Being for Children in the
Child Welfare System

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

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Task Force Meetings:

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

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Focus of Meetings:

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

Youth Voice in Court

- At the spring meeting, the Task Force heard from USM's Catherine Cutler Institute about a [Youth Leadership Advisory Team \(YLAT\)](#) project "**Nothing About Youth Without Youth: Elevating Youth Voice in Court.**"
 - YLAT is a dynamic group of young leaders and adult partners working together to improve outcomes for youth in foster care.
 - Feedback from a YLAT feedback session:
 - Young people need to understand that their voice matters and is powerful
 - Young people need support before, during, and after going to court
 - Knowing more about court processes - for example, when to speak and how, can be helpful
 - Knowing more about how to prepare and encouragement to prepare and participate can be helpful (hearing this message from a peer)

Nothing About Youth Without Youth: Elevating Youth Voice in the Courtroom

- Based on youth feedback, YLAT, in collaboration with the Maine Judicial Branch and child welfare practitioners, created [two short videos](#) that explain what to expect in court and how adults can help young people prepare.
- Following the presentation, Task Force identified the following additional action steps for collaboration:
 - Continue to share recordings, including with judges and as part of CASA/GAL core training
 - Coordinate additional court visits to acclimate youth to the courthouse

Parent Attorney & GAL Recruitment and Retention



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.

Parent Attorney & GAL Recruitment and Retention

- A total of 8 recommendations were made to the Task Force in late 2024 and early 2025.
 - A summary of each recommendation and the Task Force's discussion/action was included in the [2025 Task Force Report](#).
- Many of the recommendations have been implemented or have come to a natural conclusion. For example:
 - Electronic GAL billing
 - Exit interview protocol for parent attorneys, GALs, and AAGs
 - Student practice authorization for internships and externships with contract counsel supervised by PDS

Parent Attorney & GAL Recruitment and Retention

- The subcommittee continues to meet to follow up on recommendations that are still being explored. These include:
 - The recommendation that the Board of Overseers of the Bar establish the National Association of Counsel for Children (NACC) Child Welfare Specialist designation for Maine, and
 - The requirement that guardians ad litem accept pro bono or reduced fee referrals from the courts, as set forth in M.R.G.A.L. 2(b)(5) be eliminated.

Continuing Education Subcommittee

- Annual child protective conference (usually held during the Judicial Branch's spring administrative week).
- The conference offers no-cost training to child welfare stakeholders including parents' attorneys, GALs/CASAs, AAGs, tribal members, judges, and DHHS caseworkers.
- Conference offers training on strategies for professionals to better support children and families involved in the child welfare system.
- Funded by the federal Court Improvement Program (CIP) grant.
- Subcommittee that plans the conference includes representatives from the Office of the Attorney General, OCFS, PDS, AOC, and guardians ad litem.

2026 Conference: Trial Skills for Quality Representation

April 2 and 3, 2026

The 2026 conference was a virtual skills-based two-day course aimed at quality representation and advocacy.

The course was provided by the National Institute for Trial Advocacy focusing on:

- Direct and Cross Examination
- Exhibits and Impeachment

4:1 participant to faculty ratio

2026 Conference: Ethics Presentation

April 1, 2026

- The conference also included an ethics presentation on Artificial Intelligence in the context of a child welfare practice.
- Taught by a panel of experts including Deputy Bar Counsel, Suzanne Thompson.

2026 Conference: Credit Reported

- Credits reported for NITA courses:
 - 294.75 CLE hours
 - 191.75 CPE hours
- Credits reported for AI ethics presentation:
 - 36 CLE hours
 - 56 CPE hours

2027 Conference Planning

- Planning for the 2027 conference has started. The group met on June 10 and had a great brainstorming session to identify several possible topics for the conference.
- Two-day in-person conference. Historically, approximately 300
- Planning will continue in the coming months and we will keep the Task Force informed.

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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