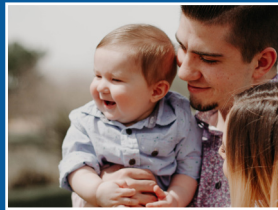




Children's Commission

SUPREME COURT OF TEXAS PERMANENT JUDICIAL
COMMISSION FOR CHILDREN, YOUTH AND FAMILIES



Children's Commission Meeting Notebook

November 14, 2025

Supreme Court of Texas
Permanent Judicial Commission for Children, Youth and Families

November 14, 2025

Meeting Notebook
Table of Contents

Meeting Agenda

Commission, Committee, and Collaborative Council Member List1

Minutes from September 26, 2025 Commission Meeting2

Fiscal Year 2026 Strategic Plan.....3

Fiscal Year 2026 Budget4



Friday, November 14, 2025

9:30 a.m. –11:30 a.m.

Virtual Meeting

Meeting Agenda

9:30 Commencement / Opening Remarks
First Order of Business – Adopt Minutes from September 26, 2025

9:40 Commission Member Changes

10:20 Office of Court Administration Update

10:40 Department of Family & Protective Services Update

11:10 Children's Commission Projects

11:20 Collaborative Council Announcements

11:30 New Business / Adjourn

Meeting Schedule: February 27, 2026 (in person)
May 8, 2026 (virtual)
September 18, 2026 (in person)
November 6, 2026 (virtual)

INSERT - TAB 1

CHILDREN'S COMMISSION MEMBERS

Hon. Debra Lehmann, <i>Chair</i>	Hon. Rosie Alvarado	Hon. Roy Ferguson	Hon. Aurora Martinez Jones	Vicki Spriggs
Hon. Rebeca Huddle, <i>Deputy Chair</i>	Erica Bañuelos	Hon. Angela Graves-Harrington	Daphny Milligan	Terese Stevenson
Hon. Eva Guzman, <i>Chair Emeritus</i>	Chantel Bedlington	Anne Heiligenstein	Hon. James Mosley	Hon. Thomas Stuckey
Hon. Harriet O'Neill, <i>Chair Emeritus</i>	Tymothy Belseth	Rep. Lacey Hull	Megan Ransom	Michelle Thompson-Janis
	Hon. Susan Brown	Dr. Julie Kaplow	Luanne Southern	Sen. Royce West
	Sheila Sturgis Craig	Brandon Logan	Hon. Ian Spechler	

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

<u>EXECUTIVE</u>	<u>SYSTEMS IMPROVEMENT</u>	<u>LEGAL PRACTICE & PROCESS</u>	<u>TRAINING</u>	<u>DATA</u>
Hon. Debra Lehmann, <i>Chair</i>	Hon. Rob Hofmann, <i>Chair</i>	Hon. Thomas Stuckey, <i>Chair</i>	Hon. Piper McCraw, <i>Chair</i>	Hon. Susan Brown, <i>Chair</i>
Hon. Rebeca Huddle	Chantel Bedlington	Mary Alvarez	Hon. Mark Atkinson	Chelsea Cornelius
Hon. Susan Brown	Dr. Gary Blau	Regina Anderson	Megan Barcak	Nathan Ezell
Hon. Rob Hofmann	Sarah Crockett	Mark Briggs	Lilly Dealbert	Dr. Monica Faulkner
Hon. Piper McCraw	Adrianna Cuéllar Rojas	Marcus Crosby	Barbara Elias-Perciful	Hon. Delia Gonzales
Hon. Thomas Stuckey	Anna Saldaña Ford	Cindy Dyar	Hon. Angela Graves-Harrington	Elizabeth Kromrei
	Hon. Leigh Mathews Rodriguez	Hon. Charles Griffin	Tiffany Greco	Hon. Robin Sage
<i>Staff:</i>	Katherine McAnally	Michelle Latray	Margaret Halpin	Vicki Spriggs
<i>Jamie Bernstein</i>	Gabriella McDonald	Crystal Leff-Piñon	Judy Powell	Sub Uppaluri
<i>Patrick Passmore</i>	Emily Miller	Amanda Lockhart	Kellie Price	Hon. Carlos Villalon
	Hon. Robin Sage	Kenneth Thompson	Juliana Reyes	<i>Staff:</i>
	Hon. Ian Spechler		Britny Rocha-Mendoza	<i>Brenda Kinsler</i>
	Sarah Worthington		Hon. Randy Shelton	<i>Jamie Bernstein</i>
		<i>Staff:</i>	Diane Sumoski	<i>OCA Advisory:</i>
		<i>Renée Castillo-De La Cruz</i>	Hon. Elizabeth Watkins	<i>Marcus Crosby</i>
		<i>Scott Cooley</i>		<i>Alejandra Peña</i>
		<i>Brenda Kinsler</i>	<i>Staff:</i>	
			<i>Milbrey Raney</i>	
			<i>Renée Castillo-De La Cruz</i>	
			<i>Andrea Vicencio</i>	

COLLABORATIVE COUNCIL MEMBERS

Erin Argue	Mike Foster	Stephanie Madrigal	Susan Ramirez	Jamie Bernstein, <i>Executive Director</i>
Kristene Blackstone	Fedora Galasso	Gabriella McDonald	Tanya Rollins	Milbrey Raney, <i>Assistant Director</i>
Andrew Brown	Barbra Grimmer	Dr. Jill McLeigh	Johana Scot	Jessica Arguijo, <i>Communications Manager</i>
Sarah Crockett	Julia Hatcher	Hollie Mims	Andrea Sparks	Renée Castillo-De La Cruz, <i>Senior Staff Attorney</i>
Sheryl Draker	Catherine Henning	Kate Murphy	Kenneth Thompson	Scott Cooley, <i>Senior Staff Attorney</i>
Barbara Elias-Perciful	Kerrie Judice	Kellie Pittman	Amanda Vasquez	Tiffany Edwards, <i>Program Specialist</i>
Dr. Monica Faulkner	Norman Ladd	Judy Powell	Sarah Worthington	Brenda Kinsler, <i>Senior Staff Attorney</i>

STAFF AND JURISTS IN RESIDENCE

Chelsea Martinez, <i>Program Specialist</i>	Hon. Rob Hofmann, <i>Senior Jurist in Residence</i>
Patrick Passmore, <i>Finance Manager</i>	Hon. Piper McCraw, <i>Jurist in Residence</i>
Willette Sedwick, <i>Accountant</i>	
Andrea Vicencio, <i>Program Specialist</i>	

INSERT - TAB 2

Supreme Court of Texas Children's Commission

Meeting Minutes

Friday, September 26, 2025
9:30 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.

ATTENDANCE

Commissioners	Attended	Did Not Attend
<i>Chair</i> , Hon. Debra Lehrmann, Senior Justice, Supreme Court of Texas, Austin	✓	
<i>Deputy Chair</i> , Hon. Rebeca Huddle, Justice, Supreme Court of Texas, Austin		✓
Hon. Rosie Alvarado, Judge, 438 th District Court, San Antonio	✓	
Erica Bañuelos, Associate Commissioner for Child Protective Services, Texas Department of Family and Protective Services, Austin	✓	
Chantel Bedlington, Supervisor of the Kinship Navigator Program, ACH Services, Fort Worth	✓	
Corey Benbow, Chief Executive Officer, The Tax Box, Austin	✓	
Dr. Gary Blau, Executive Director Emeritus, The Hackett Center for Mental Health; and Senior Fellow, Children's Mental Health, Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute, Houston		✓
Hon. Susan Brown, Presiding Judge, 11 th Administrative Judicial Region, Houston	✓	
Sheila Craig, Consultant and Director (ret.), Texas Health and Human Services Commission, Austin	✓	
Hon. Roy Ferguson, Judge (ret., 394 th District Court), Alpine	✓	
Hon. Angela Graves-Harrington, Judge, 246 th Family District Court, Houston	✓	
Anne Heiligenstein, Senior Director Strategic Consultant, Casey Family Programs, Austin	✓	
Rep. Lacey Hull, Texas House of Representatives, Katy	✓	
Hon. Aurora Martinez Jones, Judge, 126 th District Court, Austin	✓	
Hon. James Mosley, Judge, 316 th District Court, Stinnett	✓	
Hon. Randy Shelton, Judge, 279 th Civil District Court, Beaumont	✓	
Luanne Southern, Chief Strategist for Behavioral Health, Texas Department of Family and Protective Services, Austin		✓
Vicki Spriggs, Chief Executive Officer, Texas CASA, Austin		✓
Terese Stevenson, Vice President, Grants, The Rees-Jones Foundation, Dallas	✓	
Hon. Thomas Stuckey, Associate Judge, Centex Child Protection Court South, Seguin		✓
Michelle Thompson-Janis, Director, Department of Social Services, Alabama-Coushatta Tribe of Texas		✓
Sen. Royce West, Texas Senate, Dallas		✓
Jurists in Residence		
Hon. Rob Hofmann, Judge, 452 nd District Court, Senior Jurist in Residence, Mason	✓	
Hon. Piper McCraw, Judge, 469 th District Court, Jurist in Residence, McKinney	✓	

Attending Committee Members & Guests

Tymothy Belseth, Spark Program Coordinator, UT Austin
Caitlin Brennan, Committee Clerk, Texas House of Representatives, Human Services Committee
Scott Cooley, Attorney at law
Sarah Crockett, Director of Public Policy, Texas CASA
Tiffany Crouch Bartlett, Legal Advocacy Projects Director, Texas Lawyers for Children
Adrianna Cuéllar Rojas, CEO, TexProtects
Cindy Dyar, Managing Attorney, Texas Legal Services Center
Anna Saldaña Ford, General Counsel, SJRC Texas
Emily Fankell, Chief of Staff for Representative Lacey Hull, Texas House of Representatives
Sierra Fischer, Director of Analytics, Texas Department of Family and Protective Services
Crystal Leff-Pinon, Director of Family Protection Representation, TIDC
Katherine McAnally, Attorney at law
Gabriella McDonald, Deputy Director, Texas Appleseed
Audrey O'Neill, Commissioner, Texas Department of Family and Protective Services
Judy Powell, Communications Director, Parent Guidance Center

Hon. Robin Sage, Judicial Engagement Team, Casey Family Programs
Sarah Worthington, Director, Texas Foster Youth Justice Project

Attending Collaborative Council Members

Sheryl Draker, Attorney at law
Mike Foster, Board Member, A World for Children
Julia Hatcher, President, Texas Association of Family Defense Attorneys
Kasey Jackson, VP Programs, Children's Advocacy Centers of Texas
Johana Scot, Executive Director, Parent Guidance Center

Office of Court Administration Staff

Marcus Crosby, Children's Court Program Manager
Megan LaVoie, Administrative Director
Jeffrey Tsunekawa, Director of Court Services

Attending Children's Commission Staff

Jessica Arguijo, Communications Manager
Jamie Bernstein, Executive Director
Renée Castillo-De La Cruz, Staff Attorney
Tiffany Edwards, Program Specialist
Brenda Kinsler, Staff Attorney
Chelsea Martinez, Program Specialist
Patrick Passmore, Finance Manager
Milbrey Raney, Assistant Director
Willette Sedwick, Accountant
Andrea Vicencio, Program Specialist

CALL TO ORDER AND OPENING REMARKS

Justice Debra Lehrmann called the meeting to order at 9:45 a.m. and welcomed Commission members and guests. Justice Lehrmann expressed her excitement about the coming fiscal year and thanked Commissioners for their continued engagement.

Membership Changes

Justice Lehrmann announced that Judge Aurora Martinez Jones is the current Chair of the Child Protection Law Section and that Judge Bill Harris rolled off the Commission when his term as Chair ended in June. Justice Lehrmann shared that Dr. Gary Blau, Judge Randy Shelton, and Corey Benbow will no longer serve as Commissioners as their second terms will expire this year. The Children's Commission and Justice Lehrmann honored Judge Shelton and Corey Benbow in person with certificates of thanks.

Justice Lehrmann reported that Ms. Hollye Pickett left her role at DFPS and will no longer serve on the Legal Practice & Process Committee. Also, Ms. De Shaun Ealoms left her role at DFPS and will no longer serve as a Collaborative Council member. Justice Lehrmann also shared that Ms. Sheryl Draker joined the Collaborative Council with specialized knowledge about Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Disorder (FASD).

Justice Lehrmann announced that Mr. Scott Cooley will join the Children's Commission as a new staff attorney starting in October. Lastly, she shared that Ms. Audrey O'Neill was recently named as Commissioner of the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS).

Adoption of May 9, 2025 Meeting Minutes

Justice Lehrmann directed members to the May 9, 2025 Commission Meeting Minutes behind Tab 2 of the Meeting Notebook, distributed in advance of the meeting.

ACTION: Justice Lehrmann asked if there were any changes to the minutes as written. Hearing none, after a motion and a second the Commissioners voted to adopt the minutes for the May 9, 2025 Children's Commission meeting.

Children's Commission FY 26 Discussion

Ms. Jamie Bernstein referenced the Commission Report behind Tab 3 for updates on Children's Commission projects since the last meeting. Commission staff then presented the proposed FY 2026 Strategic Plan. Key discussion points are included below. Presentation slides are also available on the Children's Commission website.

Under Goal 1 [Collaboration], Ms. Bernstein shared that the Commission website will be updated to include resource pages for users such parents and caregivers. Ms. Bernstein explained that Strategy 5 was moved from Systems Improvement to Collaboration to emphasize the importance of including individuals with lived experience throughout the Commission's work.

Ms. Bernstein noted that Strategy 8 was expanded to include reunification and preventing repeat maltreatment and will include partnering with Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC), DFPS, and other stakeholders. Ms. Bernstein announced that under Strategy 10 the Commission will finish the resource on rights of survivors of sexual abuse in partnership with the Office of the Governor, Children's Advocacy Centers of Texas, DFPS, and others. Rep. Lacey Hull inquired about complex medical cases and Ms. Bernstein clarified that Strategy 10 is intentionally broad to allow for multiple resources to address distinct subpopulations and that complex medical cases can be prioritized under this strategy in the coming year.

Ms. Brenda Kinsler shared that the Legal Representation Committee identified attorney recruitment and retention as a priority for FY 2026. Ms. Renée Castillo-De La Cruz announced that the Parent Resource Workgroup identified the following as priority projects for the coming year: creating a Representing Incarcerated Parents Webinar, updating the Parent Resource Guide, and completing the Parent Voice Video Project. Ms. Kinsler reported that the Commission will convene a stakeholder roundtable focused on improving caregiver notice and engagement practices on November 17, 2025.

Ms. Milbrey Raney announced that the Commission will plan and host an in-person Child Protection Court Convening for the Child Protection Court judges and court coordinators in partnership with OCA. Ms. Castillo-De La Cruz reported on a proposed general attorney scholarship for FY 2026, which would provide funds for reimbursement of registration fees for attorneys to attend local, regional, and state trainings and conferences that are not already covered by existing scholarship opportunities.

Ms. Kinsler announced that during the 89th Legislature, OCA was appropriated funding to develop a case management system for statutorily defined specialty courts. This opportunity will also be used to modernize and upgrade the Child Protection Court Management System (CPCMS).

Mr. Patrick Passmore directed Commissioners to Tab 4 for the proposed FY26 budget. Mr. Passmore highlighted that in addition to the budget shared in the meeting materials, the federal Administration for Children and Families (ACF) awarded the Commission an additional \$20,000.

ACTION: Following discussion, Justice Lehrmann asked for a motion to approve the projects and associated expenditures. After a motion and a second, the Commissioners voted to approve the FY 2026 Strategies and Budget.

TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF FAMILY & PROTECTIVE SERVICES (DFPS) UPDATE

Ms. Audrey O'Neill shared that DFPS continues to focus on systemwide improvements such as the rollout of the Texas Child Centered Care (T3C) initiative. She highlighted the department's focus on the expansion of Community-Based Care (CBC), improving quality of consistency in investigations, implementing support for kinship placements especially as new verification standards are implemented, expanding daycare access for kinship caregivers, having meaningful engagement with families, and improving DFPS' partnership with the judiciary.

Ms. O'Neill emphasized that DFPS closely watches factors related to child fatalities and recidivism. She also addressed questions about funding and data collection related to transition-aged youth and young adults' discharge from Supervised Independent Living programs (SILs). When asked about fatherhood initiatives, Ms. O'Neill confirmed that DFPS will have a new, more expansive initiative aimed at engaging fathers.

Ms. O'Neill addressed DFPS' self-evaluation report related to the Sunset Review process and highlighted these key issues in the report: consistency in quality of investigations, challenges with capacity, access to services, and addressing workforce shortages with a focus on implementing retention initiatives.

Ms. Erica Bañuelos and Ms. Sierra Fischer gave a presentation on data outcomes which is available on the Children's Commission website. Ms. Bañuelos highlighted that older youth coming into foster care in need of mental health services are a major focus for DFPS, as well as continuing to reduce the number of youth in Residential Treatment Centers (RTCs) by providing hands-on support for their kinship caregivers.

OFFICE OF COURT ADMINISTRATION (OCA) UPDATE

Ms. Megan LaVoie shared statewide data from OCA, including that family cases increased at the district court level and reached a clearance rate of 108%. At the county level, the clearance rate reached 105%. Ms. LaVoie reported that the next HB 2384 performance measure report is due for fiscal year 2025 on November 1, 2025. She also shared that according to the CPCMS there have been over 31,000 hearings in FY 2025 and that OCA will be transitioning to a new case management system for CPCMS, child welfare, and specialty courts. Also, Ms. LaVoie announced Mr. Daryll Childers' retirement at the end of September.

Ms. LaVoie expressed her gratitude to the judges involved in the Early Intervention Court Liaison Program that reached its completion. She then shared that the implementation of HB 5081

invokes civil and criminal penalties for data brokers who share judges' personal information online, and that OCA is in the process of identifying a company which can assist with removal of a judge's personal information from the internet. Ms. LaVoie updated that OCA's court reminder program is free of charge and currently being utilized in 13 counties across the state with 80 counties waiting for implementation.

Ms. LaVoie announced a new initiative which will prioritize case-level data, allowing OCA to follow cases from start to finish with more detail than aggregated data allows. This will facilitate OCA's goal of having accurate criminal case data by late 2026. Lastly, Ms. LaVoie shared that the legislature approved funding for three more interpreters to serve in the Remote Interpreter Program.

PRESENTATION ON LEGAL REPRESENTATION DATA

Director of Family Protection Representation at the Texas Indigent Defense Commission (TIDC) Ms. Crystal Leff-Piñon presented on the state of legal representation in Texas child welfare cases. Ms. Leff-Piñon highlighted a focus on improving indigent defense in adult cases and described how the 88th Legislature charged TIDC with family protection representation and TIDC's related efforts since that time. Additionally, Ms. Leff-Piñon emphasized the importance of attorney responses to two current statewide surveys regarding court-appointments so that data on attorneys' hours, pay, and motivations related to child welfare cases is accurate.

COLLABORATIVE COUNCIL MEMBER UPDATES

Ms. Sarah Worthington with Texas RioGrande Legal Aid Foster Youth Justice Project (FYJP) announced the release of a guide for minors living apart from their parents. She also shared that after receiving funding from the Moody Foundation, the FYJP will soon launch a website update.

Ms. Tiffany Crouch Bartlett with Texas Lawyers for Children referred Commissioners to a handout regarding their pending trauma training on October 30, 2025.

Ms. Julia Hatcher with Texas Association of Family Defense Attorneys shared her concerns with inconsistent implementation of recently enacted bills.

NEW BUSINESS

Justice Lehrmann announced that the final 2025 Commission Meeting will be held virtually on Friday, November 14, 2025.

The 2026 Children's Commission Meetings are scheduled as follows: Friday, February 27 (in person), Friday, May 8 (virtual), Friday, September 18 (in person), and Friday, November 6 (virtual).

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 1:46 p.m.

INSERT - TAB 3

GOAL I (COLLABORATION) | ADMINISTER THE COURT IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM (CIP) FUNDS TO ASSESS CURRENT AND FUTURE NEEDS OF THE COURTS, PROVIDE A FORUM FOR MEANINGFUL COLLABORATION, ENCOURAGE CONTINUOUS QUALITY IMPROVEMENT, AND PROMOTE BEST CHILD WELFARE AND COURT PRACTICES TO IMPROVE THE CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM.

Objective: Utilize the CIP funds to execute the strategies of the Supreme Court of Texas Children's Commission.

1. Strategy: Provide regular updates to the Children's Commission and the Systems Improvement, Legal Practice & Process, Training, and Data Committees about Commission initiatives.

Objective: Collaborate with high-level state and judicial leaders, as well as with multidisciplinary child welfare stakeholders, to maintain productive dialogue aimed at strengthening the child welfare system.

2. Strategy: Engage with the Collaborative Council and participate in and provide forums and opportunities for child welfare stakeholders to partner and to share information about child welfare practices, policies, needs, and strengths.

Objective: Communicate Children's Commission areas of focus through easily to access, user-friendly resources for judges, attorneys, and child welfare stakeholders.

3. Strategy: Develop, maintain, and enhance usability and function of the Children's Commission website, social media, print and online materials, and other communication mediums.

Objective: Confer regularly with the Department of Family and Protective Services on federal plans, audits, and requirements as mandated by federal program instructions.

4. Strategy: Confer with the Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) on the Child and Family Service Reviews, Program Improvement Plans, Child and Family State Plans, and the Court Improvement Program Strategic Plans.

Objective: Support efforts to encourage fairness and strengthen engagement of children, youth, and families in the Texas child welfare system so that they receive services and supports that meet their individual needs.

5. Strategy: Emphasize the importance of engaging children, youth, and parents in case planning and court processes, and include individuals with lived experience in system improvement efforts.

GOAL II (SYSTEMS IMPROVEMENT) | EXECUTE INNOVATIVE PROJECTS AIMED AT ENCOURAGING FAIRNESS AND JUSTICE FOR CHILDREN, YOUTH, AND FAMILIES; PROMOTING JUDICIAL LEADERSHIP IN COURTS AND COMMUNITIES; AND EXPANDING COURT AND CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM CAPACITY TO SUPPORT CONTINUOUS, SYSTEMIC IMPROVEMENT.

Objective: Encourage judicial leadership through Jurist in Residence (JIR) support to ensure that judges are equipped to make well-informed decisions and conduct hearings that will contribute to better outcomes for children, youth, and families.

6. Strategy: Utilize Jurists in Residence to promote best practices to the judiciary and support the legal and child welfare systems through judicial leadership and expertise.

Objective: Support efforts to build capacity to address complex mental health needs and embed a culture of trauma-informed care in the Texas child welfare system.

7. Strategy: Engage stakeholders in the child welfare, juvenile justice, and mental health systems to apply principles of trauma-informed care and address gaps in services for children, youth, and families with complex mental health needs.

Objective: Support statewide efforts to transition from a reactive child welfare system to a prevention-oriented system that aims to maintain child safety and keep families together.

8. Strategy: Engage judges and lawyers in systemic efforts to prevent child abuse and neglect, address safety concerns while maintaining family preservation, and encourage timely reunification.

Objective: Encourage the improvement of education outcomes for children and youth in foster care, leading to a more productive and stable adult life.

9. Strategy: Identify opportunities to develop sustainable partnerships between legal, child welfare, and education stakeholders to identify and address the educational needs and goals of children and youth who experience foster care.

Objective: Promote awareness of and provide training, resources, and support so that judges and lawyers can assist in preventing and responding to the specialized needs of children and youth in foster care.

10. Strategy: Create resources that address the unique needs of sub-populations of children and youth who experience foster care, such as victims of child sexual abuse.

Objective: Create opportunities to bring together subject matter experts, judicial and executive branch leaders, and key policy makers to examine important and urgent issues, and to identify recommendations and solutions.

11. Strategy: Work with DFPS and other child welfare stakeholders to identify critical and urgent topics for Round Table discussions and hold Round Table events as needed.
12. Strategy: Engage stakeholders in the legal system in statewide efforts to develop and expand placement capacity, including kinship care and the rollout of Community Based Care.

Objective: Address the needs of children and youth who experience both the child welfare and juvenile justice systems and encourage cross-system partnerships through judicial leadership.

13. Strategy: Prioritize areas in need of improvement in the handling of juvenile justice cases as well as recommendations developed by the Dual Status Task Force.

GOAL III (LEGAL PRACTICE & PROCESS) | ASSIST TRIAL AND APPELLATE COURTS, JUDGES, AND LEGAL ADVOCATES TO ENSURE THAT CHILDREN, YOUTH, AND FAMILIES INVOLVED WITH CHILD WELFARE EXPERIENCE A LEGAL SYSTEM IN WHICH THEY HAVE ACCESS TO JUSTICE AND THEIR RIGHTS ARE PROTECTED.

Objective: Improve legal representation so that parents, children, and DFPS experience high-quality court proceedings.

14. Strategy: Convene and support a Legal Representation Committee to sustain efforts to ensure high-quality legal representation for parents, children, and DFPS.

Objective: Encourage standards of practice for attorneys representing parties in child welfare cases so that attorneys throughout the state provide high-quality legal representation.

15. Strategy: Develop Standards of Representation for attorneys representing parents, children, and DFPS in child welfare cases.

Objective: Raise the level of understanding and expertise for attorneys by highlighting opportunities for specialization in child welfare law.

16. Strategy: Support efforts to certify Texas attorneys as specialists in child welfare law.

Objective: Develop resources to help parents involved in the child welfare system to navigate the process, encourage authentic parent engagement, and ensure parental rights are protected.

17. Strategy: Convene and support a Parent Resource Workgroup and maintain parent resource guides to sustain efforts to increase parental understanding and engagement in the child welfare system.

18. Strategy: Support efforts to provide early and reliable access to information and resources for Texas families through programs such as the Texas Legal Services Center Family Helpline.

Objective: Strengthen the legal and judicial response in child welfare cases so that Native American children, youth, and families stay connected to their community, culture, customs, and beliefs.

19. Strategy: Establish and support meaningful relationships with federally recognized Tribes and promote awareness, education, and application of the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA).

Objective: Ensure availability of high-quality judicial and attorney resources and tools that provide clear, relevant information about law, policy, and best practices.

20. Strategy: Maintain a comprehensive Bench Book for judges hearing child welfare cases.

21. Strategy: Maintain tool kits for attorneys representing parents, children, and DFPS in child welfare cases.

Objective: Improve and expand engagement of families and caregivers in court hearings so that court hearings are higher quality and more meaningful for the families and children involved.

22. Strategy: Support increased child, family, and caregiver engagement in the court process, including through the use of technology.

23. Strategy: Identify and encourage legal and judicial practices that support narrowly tailored service planning for children and families.

Objective: Promote the value of mediation in child welfare cases, including opportunities to achieve timely permanency and increase efficiency in child welfare cases.

24. Strategy: Establish an understanding regarding the availability and usefulness of mediation services in child welfare cases.

Objective: Support innovation and encourage best practices for Texas courts hearing child welfare cases.

25. Strategy: Track and assess the impact of changes in law, policy, and rule affecting the legal process in child welfare cases.

GOAL IV (TRAINING) | OVERSEE AND DEVELOP JUDICIAL AND LEGAL TRAINING EFFORTS AT ALL LEVELS OF PRACTICE THAT IDENTIFY AND PROMOTE BEST PRACTICES TO IMPROVE OUTCOMES AND ESTABLISH AND MAINTAIN A WELL-INFORMED JUDICIARY AND BAR.

Objective: Provide high-quality training and resources that encourage judicial leadership both within the courtroom and in the broader child welfare community.

26. Strategy: Plan, fund, conduct, and evaluate judicial training through conferences, online content, and events.

27. Strategy: Support specialized training for the Child Protection Court (CPC) program, judges, and support staff.

Objective: Provide high-quality training and resources, along with information for attorneys representing parents, children, and DFPS, as well as other advocates and stakeholders.

Children's Commission Strategic Plan Fiscal Year 2026

- 28. Strategy: Provide practical, experiential trial skills training that offers attorneys an opportunity to develop their skills in a small-group, low-stakes environment.
- 29. Strategy: Create and maintain online content that offers information and guidance on relevant child welfare law issues.
- 30. Strategy: Partner with statewide organizations to offer training to attorneys and advocates who serve children and families in child welfare cases throughout Texas.

Objective: Ensure that judges and attorneys are knowledgeable and aware of educational opportunities in order to employ best practices in conducting hearings and in providing legal representation.

- 31. Strategy: Develop and distribute information to judges and attorneys that communicates best practices or changes in law, policy, or practice and informs judges and attorneys of trainings and other relevant events.
- 32. Strategy: Support attendance at state and national judicial and legal conferences and training events.

Objective: Support local, county, and regional child welfare leaders and organizations to enhance knowledge and share expertise throughout their jurisdiction.

- 33. Strategy: Provide training and technical assistance to increase training opportunities to local attorneys, judges, and advocates who serve children and families in child welfare cases.

GOAL V (DATA) | OPERATIONALIZE DATA-DRIVEN DECISION-MAKING THROUGH CONTINUOUS QUALITY IMPROVEMENT AND AN ANALYSIS OF PUBLICLY AVAILABLE CHILD WELFARE AND COURT DATA TO IDENTIFY LEGAL PROCESSES AND PRACTICES THAT PRODUCE DESIRED OUTCOMES, AS WELL AS WHICH PRACTICES NEED IMPROVEMENT.

Objective: Use child welfare, court, and other data to improve safety, permanency, and well-being outcomes for children and youth in foster care.

- 34. Strategy: Apply data-driven decision-making to Children's Commission projects, initiatives, deliverables, and areas of focus.
- 35. Strategy: Utilizing all available data sources, analyze trends in child welfare data such as referrals, investigations, removals, and exits.

Objective: Equip courts with relevant and actionable data to strengthen the administration of child welfare cases.

- 36. Strategy: Analyze data collected during the Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) to develop targeted strategies aimed at improving permanency outcomes for children.
- 37. Strategy: Partner with DFPS to provide tailored data presentations on state, regional, and local challenges and opportunities and encourage data-driven systemic improvements and collaborative efforts.

Objective: Study the efficacy of virtual or hybrid court hearings in child welfare cases and develop training, tools, and resources designed to maintain the benefits of technology.

- 38. Strategy: Partner with OCA to support the maintenance, enhancements, data collection, impact, and usability of a case management system.

INSERT - TAB 4

**Children's Commission
Fiscal Year 2026 Budget**

FISCAL YEAR 2026 ESTIMATED FEDERAL/STATE REVENUE

Estimated Fiscal Year 2025 Carry Forward	\$	1,430,019
(+) Estimated Fiscal Year 2026 Federal Distribution	\$	2,738,517
(+) Fiscal Year 2026 State Appropriation	\$	368,787
(+) Casey Family Programs	\$	10,000
Projected Funds Available for FY 2026	\$	4,547,323

FISCAL YEAR 2026 PROPOSED BUDGET

	Budget
Operating	\$ 1,556,818
Commission Projects	\$ 568,200
<i>Systems Improvement</i>	157,000
<i>Legal Practice and Process</i>	65,700
<i>Training</i>	292,500
<i>Juvenile Justice (GR)</i>	53,000
Scholarships	\$ 67,500
<i>Appellate Law Section Boot Camp</i>	7,500
<i>Child Protection Law Section</i>	12,500
<i>General Attorney Scholarship</i>	5,000
<i>General Judicial Scholarship</i>	5,000
<i>NCJFCJ - Judicial Scholarship</i>	30,000
<i>State Bar CAN CLE</i>	7,500
Grants	\$ 546,322
<i>DFPS: Regional Attorney Training</i>	12,000
<i>TCCFS: PMC Pilot Study</i>	83,364
<i>TIDC: Title IV-E</i>	130,962
<i>TCJ: Judicial Training</i>	239,996
<i>TLSC: Family Helpline</i>	80,000
Total Proposed Expenditures	\$ 2,738,840

ESTIMATED FISCAL YEAR 2026 ENDING BALANCE

Projected Funds Available for FY 2026	\$	4,547,323
(-) FY 2026 Proposed Expenditures	\$	(2,738,840)
Estimated FY 2026 Carry Forward	\$	1,808,483

