

Fiscal Year 2026 Proposed Strategies

SUPREME COURT OF TEXAS CHILDREN'S COMMISSION



FY 2022 –FY 2026 Strategic Plan

Five Goals:

- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.



Committee Structure

	Systems Improvement	Legal Practice & Process	Training	Data
Strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jurists in Residence • Children's Mental Health • Prevention & Family Preservation • Education • Specialized Needs • Round Table Discussions • Placement Capacity • Dual Status and Juvenile Justice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal Representation • Standards of Representation • Legal Specialization • Parent Resources • Family Helpline • Tribal/State • Bench Book • Tool Kits for Attorneys • Family Engagement • Service Planning • Mediation • Legislation & Policy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Judicial Training • Child Protection Courts • Trial Skills Training • Online Content • Attorney Training • Judicial and Attorney Resource Letters • Judicial and Attorney Scholarships • Local Training Support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data-Driven Areas of Focus • Data Trends • Child & Family Services Review • Annual Data Presentation • Data Collection and Information Sharing

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.

Collaboration

- 1 Provide regular updates to the Children's Commission and the Systems Improvement, Legal Practice & Process, Training, and Data Committees about Commission initiatives.
- 2 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.
- 3 Develop, maintain, and enhance usability and function of the Children's Commission website, social media, print and online materials, and other communication mediums.
- 4 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.
- 5 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.

Systems Improvement

- 6 Utilize Jurists in Residence to promote best practices to the judiciary and support the legal and child welfare systems through judicial leadership and expertise.
- 7 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.
- 8 Engage judges and lawyers in systemic efforts to prevent child abuse and neglect, address safety concerns while maintaining family preservation, and encourage timely reunification.*
- 9 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.



Systems Improvement

- 10 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.*
- 11 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 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.
- 13 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.

Legal Practice & Process

- 14 Convene and support a Legal Representation Committee to sustain efforts to ensure high-quality legal representation for parents, children, and DFPS.
- 15 Develop Standards of Representation for attorneys representing parents, children, and DFPS in child welfare cases.
- 16 Support efforts to certify Texas attorneys as specialists in child welfare law.
- 17 Convene and support a Parent Resource Workgroup and maintain the parent resource guides to sustain efforts to increase parental understanding and engagement in the child welfare system.
- 18 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.
- 19 Establish and support meaningful relationships with federally recognized Tribes and promote awareness, education, and application of the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA).



Legal Practice & Process

- 20 Maintain a comprehensive Bench Book for judges hearing child welfare cases.
- 21 Maintain tool kits for attorneys representing parents, children, and DFPS in child welfare cases.
- 22 Support increased child, family, and caregiver engagement in the court process, including through the use of technology.*
- 23 Identify and encourage legal and judicial practices that support narrowly tailored service planning for children and families.*
- 24 Establish an understanding regarding the availability and usefulness of mediation services in child welfare cases.
- 25 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.

Training

- 26 Plan, fund, conduct, and evaluate judicial training through conferences, online content, and events.
- 27 Support specialized training for the Child Protection Court (CPC) program, judges, and support staff.
- 28 Provide practical, experiential trial skills training that offers attorneys an opportunity to develop their skills in a small-group, low-stakes environment.
- 29 Create and maintain online content that offers information and guidance on relevant child welfare law issues.



Training

- 30 Partner with statewide organizations to offer training to attorneys and advocates who serve children and families in child welfare cases throughout Texas.
- 31 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 Support attendance at state and national judicial and legal conferences and training events.
- 33 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.

Data

- 34 Apply data-driven decision-making to Children's Commission projects, initiatives, deliverables, and areas of focus.
- 35 Utilizing all available data sources, analyze trends in child welfare data such as referrals, investigations, removals, and exits.
- 36 Analyze data collected during the Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) to develop targeted strategies aimed at improving permanency outcomes for children.*
- 37 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.
- 38 Partner with OCA to support the maintenance, enhancements, data collection, impact, and usability of a case management system.



Thank You!
