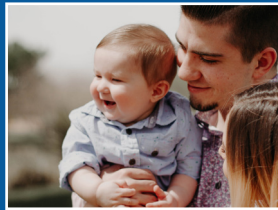




Children's Commission

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



Children's Commission Meeting Notebook

September 26, 2025

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

September 26, 2025

Meeting Notebook
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Thompson Conference Center
Austin, Texas

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

Meeting Agenda

- | | |
|-------|---|
| 9:30 | Check-In / Networking |
| 9:45 | Commencement / Opening Remarks
First Order of Business – Adopt Minutes from May 9, 2025 |
| 10:15 | Children's Commission Updates <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fiscal Year 2026 Strategies and Budget Presentation |
| 11:00 | Department of Family and Protective Services Update |
| 12:15 | Lunch Break |
| 12:45 | Office of Court Administration Update |
| 1:15 | Presentation on Legal Representation Data |
| 1:45 | Collaborative Council Member Announcements |
| 2:00 | New Business / Adjourn |

Meeting Schedule:

- Friday, November 14, 2025 (virtual)
- Friday, February 27, 2026 (in person)
- Friday, May 8, 2026 (virtual)
- Friday, September 18, 2026 (in person)
- Friday, November 6, 2026 (virtual)

INSERT - TAB 1

CHILDREN'S COMMISSION MEMBERS

Hon. Debra Lehmann, <i>Chair</i>	Hon. Rosie Alvarado	Sheila Sturgis Craig	Hon. Aurora Martinez Jones	Terese Stevenson
Hon. Rebeca Huddle, <i>Deputy Chair</i>	Erica Bañuelos	Hon. Roy Ferguson	Hon. James Mosley	Hon. Thomas Stuckey
Hon. Eva Guzman, <i>Chair Emeritus</i>	Chantel Bedlington	Hon. Angela Graves-Harrington	Hon. Randy Shelton	Michelle Thompson-Janis
Hon. Harriet O'Neill, <i>Chair Emeritus</i>	Corey Benbow	Anne Heiligenstein	Luanne Southern	Sen. Royce West
	Dr. Gary Blau	Rep. Lacey Hull	Vicki Spriggs	
	Hon. Susan Brown			

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

EXECUTIVE	SYSTEMS IMPROVEMENT	LEGAL PRACTICE & PROCESS	TRAINING	DATA
Hon. Debra Lehmann, <i>Chair</i>	Hon. Rob Hofmann, <i>Chair</i>	Hon. Thomas Stuckey, <i>Chair</i>	Hon. Piper McGraw, <i>Chair</i>	Hon. Susan Brown, <i>Chair</i>
Hon. Rebeca Huddle	Hon. Rosie Alvarado	Mark Briggs	Hon. Mark Atkinson	Hon. Rosie Alvarado
Hon. Susan Brown	Chantel Bedlington	Marcus Crosby	Tymothy Belseth	Chelsea Cornelius
Hon. Rob Hofmann	Dr. Gary Blau	Cindy Dyar	Denise Campbell	Nathan Ezell
Hon. Piper McGraw	Sarah Crockett	Hon. Charles Griffin	Barbara Elias-Perciful	Dr. Monica Faulkner
Hon. Thomas Stuckey	Adrianna Cuéllar Rojas	Crystal Leff-Piñon	Hon. Angela Graves-Harrington	Hon. Delia Gonzales
	Anna Saldaña Ford	Kenneth Thompson	Margaret Halpin	Elizabeth Kromrei
	Hon. Leigh Mathews Rodriguez	Janet VanderZanden	Judy Powell	Hon. Robin Sage
<i>Staff:</i>	Katherine McAnally	<i>Staff:</i>	Kellie Price	Vicki Spriggs
<i>Jamie Bernstein</i>	Gabriella McDonald	<i>Renée Castillo-De La Cruz</i>	Hon. Tracey Scown	Sub Uppaluri
	Emily Miller	<i>Brenda Kinsler</i>	Diane Sumoski	Hon. Carlos Villalon
	Hon. Robin Sage		Hon. Elizabeth Watkins	<i>Staff:</i>
	Hon. Ian Spechler			<i>Brenda Kinsler</i>
	Sarah Worthington			<i>Jamie Bernstein</i>
			<i>Staff:</i>	<i>OCA Advisory:</i>
			<i>Milbrey Raney</i>	<i>Darrell Childers</i>
			<i>Renée Castillo-De La Cruz</i>	<i>Marcus Crosby</i>
			<i>Chelsea Martinez</i>	<i>Alejandra Peña</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>Staff Attorney</i>
Sheryl Draker	Kasey Jackson	Kate Murphy	Kenneth Thompson	Tiffany Edwards, <i>Program Specialist</i>
Barbara Elias-Perciful	Kerrie Judice	Kellie Pittman	Amanda Vasquez	Brenda Kinsler, <i>Staff Attorney</i>
Dr. Monica Faulkner	Norman Ladd	Judy Powell	Sarah Worthington	Chelsea Martinez, <i>Program Specialist</i>

STAFF AND JURISTS IN RESIDENCE

Hon. Rob Hofmann, *Senior Jurist in Residence*
Hon. Piper McCraw, *Jurist in Residence*

INSERT - TAB 2

Supreme Court of Texas Children's Commission Meeting Minutes

Friday, May 9, 2025
9:30 a.m. – 11:30 a.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 a 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	✓	
Hon. Bill Harris, Chair, State Bar of Texas Child Protection Law Section, Paris		✓
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	✓	
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

Larissa Cartwright, Chief External Relations Officer, Texas CASA
Sarah Crockett, Director of Public Policy, Texas CASA
Adrianna Cuellar Rojas, CEO, TexProtects
Cindy Dyar, Managing Attorney, Texas Legal Services Center
Barbara Elias-Perciful, Director, Texas Lawyers for Children
Dr. Monica Faulkner, Director, Texas Institute for Child and Family Wellbeing
Hon. Delia Gonzales, Associate Judge, Dallas County Child Protection & Permanency Court
Hon. Charles Griffin, Associate Judge, Gulf Coast Children's Court
Jeremiah Joseph, JD Candidate, UT Law
Audrey O'Neill, Deputy Commissioner for Programs, Texas Department of Family and Protective Services
Hollye Pickett, CPS Associate Director of Permanency, Texas Department of Family and Protective Services
Judy Powell, Communications Director, Parent Guidance Center
Hon. Robin Sage, Judicial Engagement Team, Casey Family Programs
Kaysie Taccetta, Project Manager, Texas Child-Centered Care (T3C) System, Texas Department of Family and Protective Services

Kenneth Thompson, Fatherhood Program Specialist, Texas Department of Family and Protective Services
Sarah Worthington, Director, Texas Foster Youth Justice Project

Office of Court Administration Staff

Marcus Crosby, Children's Court Program Manager
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
Brenda Kinsler, Staff Attorney
Chelsea Martinez, Program Specialist
Milbrey Raney, Assistant Director
Andrea Vicencio, Program Specialist

CALL TO ORDER AND OPENING REMARKS

Justice Rebeca Huddle called the meeting to order at 9:30 a.m. and welcomed everyone to the second Children's Commission meeting of 2025. Justice Huddle thanked the Commissioners for attending and for all the work they do every day to support children and families.

Commission, Committee, and Staff Member Changes

Justice Huddle shared that Commissioners Karla Baker, Justice Robbie Partida-Kipness, Justice Julie Countiss, and Sasha Rasco have rolled off the Children's Commission. Justice Huddle welcomed Representative Lacey Hull and announced that Rep. Hull will serve as the Commission's new *ex officio* member from the Texas House of Representatives, having been recently appointed to the Children's Commission by the Speaker of the House. She also reported that attorney Ms. Katherine McAnally joined the Systems Improvement Committee.

Lastly, Justice Huddle shared that staff attorney Ms. Aimee Corbin left the Children's Commission. Ms. Jamie Bernstein will cover ongoing Systems Improvement projects until another attorney is hired.

Adoption of February 7, 2025 Meeting Minutes

Justice Huddle directed members to the February 7, 2025 Commission Meeting Minutes behind Tab 2 of the Meeting Notebook, distributed in advance of the meeting.

ACTION: Justice Huddle 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 February 7, 2025 Children's Commission meeting.

Children's Commission Committee Discussion

With respect to FY2026 planning, Ms. Bernstein indicated that the Commission plans to continue with the four core collaboration strategies in FY 26 and remains committed to making all resources, trainings, and guides available free of charge to judges, attorneys, and all other interested stakeholders via the Commission's website and through other communication mediums.

Ms. Bernstein shared that the Systems Improvement (SI) Committee met on April 17th and focused on strategies 7, 8, 10, and 11 for Commissioner feedback. To address strategy 7, the committee recommended increasing youth engagement in the Child Plan of Service. Committee members also suggested ad litem training on the importance of youth involvement in their Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANS) Assessment.

Ms. Bernstein reported that the SI Committee suggested expanding strategy 8 to include family preservation and reunification. Committee members also expressed interest in exploring other outcomes when minors live apart from their parents as well as how the Commission can increase support for the child welfare community and mental health resources in Refusal to Accept Parental Responsibility (RAPR) cases.

Ms. Bernstein shared the suggested ideas for strategy 10 which include training about the FACN network for child welfare judges and attorney ad litem; available spots and waitlists for Home and Community-based Services (HCS) placements; and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) payment issues for youth in care. For strategy 11, the Commission will host a roundtable focused on caregiver participation in court hearings in November 2025. Lastly, Ms. Bernstein announced that the Commission has submitted an exceptional item request to fund a juvenile justice attorney position, and that this request is currently pending before the Legislature.

Ms. Renée Castillo-De La Cruz shared that the Legal Practice and Process (LPP) Committee last met on April 25th. The LPP Committee would like to address quality hearings by focusing on evaluating the appropriateness of permanency goals and identifying ways to be more diligent about locating family. The Parent Resource Workgroup plans to collaborate with the Mediation Workgroup on a webinar about representing incarcerated parents, as well as complete a parent voice video project and create tri-fold brochures explaining safety plans and Parent Child Safety Placements.

Ms. Brenda Kinsler reported that the Legal Representation Committee (LRC) is focused on pre-petition legal representation in child welfare cases this year and is finalizing a statewide survey to help develop a shared understanding of what the representation currently looks like and what stakeholders envision for the future. Ms. Kinsler also shared that the Standards of Representation Committee will continue to develop a framework for the Texas Standards of Representation, with a goal of completing standards for attorneys for children in FY 2026.

Ms. Milbrey Raney announced that the Training Committee met on April 17th where after discussion, committee members decided to focus on developing priority training topics such as webinars on representing parents, supporting youth with behavioral health needs, and Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS). Podcast episodes on related topics were also discussed as an additional training method to educate on behavioral health issues for youth in care. Ms. Castillo-De La Cruz shared that the Training Committee would also like to focus on creating new training opportunities through the Commission's funding for local training support and judicial scholarships.

Ms. Brenda Kinsler shared that the Data Committee met on April 15th and determined that members would like to focus on the Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) process by addressing permanency outcomes. The Data Committee will explore ways in which the court

system and judiciary can play an active role in ensuring that there are appropriate permanency goals and that cases are resolved in a timely manner ensuring permanency for children.

Ms. Bernstein guided members to the financial report behind Tab 4 for an updated look at the budget for the current fiscal year. Ms. Bernstein ended the discussion by thanking Commissioners for their thoughts and input when it comes to these potential new projects for FY 2026.

TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF FAMILY & PROTECTIVE SERVICES (DFPS) UPDATE

Ms. Erica Bañuelos announced that DFPS launched Texas Child-Centered Care, known as T3C, and introduced T3C's Project Manager, Ms. Kaysie Taccetta. Ms. Taccetta proceeded to give a presentation on the implementation of T3C and what to expect going forward.

OFFICE OF COURT ADMINISTRATION (OCA) UPDATE

Mr. Jeffrey Tsunekawa shared that there were a record number of bills filed during the Legislative Session and that OCA reviewed and drafted 2,000 fiscal notes. Mr. Tsunekawa highlighted bills that recently passed in the House including House Bill (HB) 2216, HB 3783, HB 1151, and HB 3181. He also announced that SB 1938 passed the Senate. When the Legislative Session ends, OCA will provide a comprehensive summary of all bills passed during the session.

Mr. Tsunekawa shared that as part of OCA's budget requests, OCA was given approval for 11 data positions that will be assigned to judicial regions across the state to work with judges and clerks to help increase reporting for case level data. Also, a budget request for a statewide case management system for specialty courts was also approved.

Mr. Tsunekawa reported that OCA launched the E-court Data Program, allowing courts to send text reminders for court appointments. Tarrant County and Cameron County currently participate in the program and sent a combined 1.5 million texts through the program. He also shared that OCA is in the process of implementing two bills from the previous session, HB 2384 that uses performance measures to look at clearance rates, age of active cases, and cases disposed, as well as HB 1182 that addresses court reporting on caseloads.

Mr. Tsunekawa announced that Hon. Melissa McClenahan, Associate Judge of the Child Protection Court of Central Texas, retired and will be replaced by Hon. Jessica Devaney. He also shared that OCA continues to work on the Early Intervention Court Liaison (EICL) project with the Children's Commission. Lastly, he shared that Hon. April Propst, Associate Judge of the Taylor County Child Protection Court, received the Heart of a Champion Award at the Champions for Children Conference.

COLLABORATIVE COUNCIL MEMBER UPDATES

Ms. Barbara Elias-Perciful with Texas Lawyers for Children (TLC) announced that TLC developed a 15-hour MCLE course for legal professionals on trauma training program and that family violence hours were awarded for the training. TLC is hosting a dialogue for judges, attorneys, and other professionals who completed the training. Ms. Elias-Perciful guided members to the flyer on the last page of the notebook for more information.

NEW BUSINESS

Justice Huddle announced that the upcoming 2025 Commission Meeting schedule is as follows: September 26 (in person), and November 14 (virtual).

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 11:30 a.m.

INSERT - TAB 3

REPORT TO THE COMMISSION

September 26, 2025

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.

Background: The Children's Commission is a statewide, multidisciplinary collaborative body that includes high-level membership from the executive, judicial, and legislative branches of Texas government, along with child welfare partners in the non-profit and private sectors. The Children's Commission holds Commission meetings four times throughout each year. The Children's Commission receives federal grant funds which are used to operate the Commission as well as to fund meeting facilitation and travel reimbursement, training expenses and scholarships, and pass-through grants to sub-grantees.

The Children's Commission confers regularly with national organizations and other CIPs and submits annual reports to the Supreme Court of Texas and CIP strategic plans to the Administration for Children and Families (ACF). Leadership from the Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS), Texas Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA), the State Bar of Texas Child Protection Law Section, and a Regional Presiding Judge have standing positions on the Children's Commission. The Children's Commission staff also collaborate with various partners, including, but not limited to, the Office of the Governor, the Office of the Attorney General, the Office of Court Administration (OCA), the Judicial Commission on Mental Health, the Texas Juvenile Justice Department (TJJD), the Texas Education Agency (TEA), the Texas Alliance of Child and Family Services (TACFS), and the Child Protection Round Table.

The Systems Improvement, Legal Practice & Process, Training, and Data Committees are standing committees that meet before every Children's Commission meeting and oversee related Commission projects and initiatives.

09/26/25 Update: The May 9, 2025 Children's Commission meeting was held online on Zoom and archived on the Commission's YouTube channel and website.

The Training and Data Committees convened on August 28, 2025 and July 31, 2025 respectively, to discuss new and ongoing projects. All committee members were invited to join an All Committee Call on September 11, 2025 to learn more about Children's Commission proposed strategies and budget for Fiscal Year 2026. The Executive Committees meets on an ad hoc basis and convened on August 29, 2025 to review grant applications.

Objective: Collaborate with 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.

Background: The Children's Commission convenes an annual Collaborative Council meeting to elicit feedback from members about their areas of interest and priorities. The Children's Commission also conducts a bi-weekly collaborative call with DFPS, OCA, and Collaborative Council members as well as numerous other calls and meetings related to Children's Commission workgroups to provide consistent opportunities to collaborate, share timely information, assess engagement, and identify areas in need of improvement.

09/26/25 Update: Bi-weekly stakeholder calls, including updates and participation from agency staff and Collaborative Council members, continue to take place every other week. The annual Collaborative Council meeting will take place on September 26, 2025 in conjunction with the Children's Commission meeting and center around members' updates and priority areas of focus for the coming fiscal year.

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.

Background: The Children's Commission maintains a website that features published reports, guides, announcements, scholarships, training opportunities, and resources. The CIP grant application and grant recipient information are also included on the website. Announcements such as the Resource Letter are also distributed through the Commission's communication and social media platforms.

09/26/25 Update: The Commission website is routinely updated for content and to highlight newly released reports and resources produced by or in collaboration with the Children's Commission. While the website is designed for judges and attorneys, materials are often accessed by additional stakeholders such as parents and youth involved with the child welfare system. The Commission is currently restructuring the website to include additional webpages to highlight materials available to parents and youth.

The Children's Commission continues to develop utilization of social media platforms, expanding the LinkedIn business page, [Texas Children's Commission](#), and X, formerly Twitter ([@TXChildrensComm](#)).

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 DFPS on the Child and Family Service Reviews, Program Improvement Plans, Child and Family State Plans, and the Court Improvement Program Strategic Plans.

Background: The Children's Commission maintains a longstanding collaboration with the state child welfare agency, DFPS. The Children's Commission engages in ongoing participation with ACF and DFPS regarding the federally required Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP), Annual Progress and Services Report (APSR), Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) and Program Improvement Plan (PIP), and CIP Strategic Plan. The Children's Commission also maintains an Attorney Advisory Group comprised of experienced child welfare attorneys from across the state who have agreed to offer input and perspective on an *ad hoc* basis via email or conference call on matters of DFPS policy changes when requested by DFPS, or provide feedback on trends or practice issues and concerns.

Texas is currently undergoing Round 4 of the federal Child and Family Services Review, with increased emphasis on legal and judicial involvement in this round. On November 5, 2024, ACF presented a Final Report which addressed strengths in the Texas child welfare system as well as areas in need of improvement. Texas had 90 days from the issuance of the Final Report to submit a proposed PIP. To inform the development of the PIP, DFPS conducted breakout meetings on safety, permanency, and well-being with interested stakeholders from throughout the State on November 5-6, 2024; the Children's Commission staff participated in each of these meetings.

09/26/25 Update: Children's Commission staff continue to actively participate in the CFSR process. This includes conducting case reads as needed and facilitating collaboration with legal stakeholders. The Texas PIP was recently approved by the federal Administration for Children and Families. The approved PIP includes two strategies that directly involved the CIP: regular review of permanency data and caregiver notification of court hearings. The Data Committee will implement the permanency strategy, and a Roundtable Meeting will initiate the caregiver notification strategy.

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.

5. 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.

Background: The Jurist in Residence position was created to foster judicial leadership and promote greater expertise among judges hearing child welfare matters. The JIR develops relationships with retired and sitting judges, and acts as a consultant, trainer, and speaker to provide expert and seasoned judicial advice on matters affecting courts and legal system handling of child welfare cases and issues. JIR activities include continued emphasis on elevating judicial leaders with expertise and interests related to prevention of removal to foster care, child and family well-being, best practices, and enhancing child and family voice in child welfare system reform.

The Children's Commission has two Jurists in Residence: Hon. Rob Hofmann, Judge of the 452nd District Court in Mason County and Hon. Piper McCraw, Judge of the 469th District Court in Collin County. Both JIRs participate in multiple Children's Commission committee meetings, advise Commission staff, and engage in discussions about Community-Based Care, prevention and early intervention, placement capacity, and other issues.

09/26/25 Update: Between May 9 and September 26, 2025, a few examples of JIR activities include:

- Continued work as President for the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (NCJFCJ) and attended multiple Executive and other Committee Meetings
- Attended annual NCJFCJ Annual Conference, July 21-23, Chicago
- Chaired the Children's Commission Training Committee Meeting, August 28, Virtual
- Participated in the Executive Committee Meeting, August 29, Virtual
- Chaired the Children's Commission Trial Skills Training Faculty Meeting, September 2, Virtual
- Chaired the Children's Commission Trial Skills Training, September 16-18, Round Rock
- Participated in calls with Commission leadership and staff regarding various issues

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.

6. 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.

Background: The Children's Commission initiated a Statewide Collaborative on Trauma-Informed Care (SCTIC) in 2017 to elevate trauma-informed policy and practices in the Texas child welfare system by developing statewide strategies to support system reform, organizational leadership, cross-systems collaboration, and

community-led efforts with data-informed initiatives. Based on the work of the SCTIC, the Children's Commission published a final report in February 2019 entitled *Building a Trauma-Informed Child Welfare System: A Blueprint*.

The Children's Commission initiated the Consortium on Trauma Informed Court Practices in August 2024 to provide a statewide judicial forum for discussion and education about trauma-informed and trauma-responsive court practices. The Consortium further broadens the reach of the SCTIC by sharing and expanding the work of the four Trauma Informed Court Pilot judges and their court teams. The Texas Center for Child and Family Studies issued a [report](#) on the work of these four courts, which was done in collaboration with the Children's Commission. These four judges serve as mentors to participating judges and meet on a bi-monthly schedule. Commission staff provides meeting support; continuing legal education credit, TBLS credit, and family violence hour credit as appropriate; and related online resources. Additionally, resources related to best practices on trauma-informed and trauma-responsive courts are updated regularly on www.TraumaInformedTexas.com.

09/26/25 Update: The Consortium on Trauma Informed Court Practices convened on May 15, July 30, and September 12, 2025. On May 15, Hon. Cheryl Vaughan, Associate Judge of the 8th Region North Child Protection Court, presented "Strategies for Parent Notebooks and for a Family-Supportive Courtroom." She discussed best practices for creating parent notebooks and designing phased service plans for parents to support their completion of services in a structured manner. Judge Vaughan also shared strategies on how to effectively engage with parents in the courtroom, communicate about the court's expectations, and take a teamwork approach with parents, all with the goal of supporting families. Together, these approaches supported parents, moved families towards unsupervised visitation and reunification more quickly, and encouraged permanency.

On July 30, Hon. Carlos Villalon Jr., Associate Judge of the Child Protection Court of the Rio Grande Valley West, presented on his nine years presiding over a trauma-informed court and how his court team's philosophy, practice, and projects have evolved. This "Ask the Expert" session began with the 2014 designation by the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges as a Model Court and developed into trauma-informed training for the court team and external stakeholders, partnerships with two nearby universities, regular court and community events for children and youth in care, and institutionalized support for parents both inside and outside of the courtroom.

Finally, on September 12, Ms. Adrienne James, M.S. Ed., B.S. CJ, provided a training on "Using Parent Advocates to Support Reunification in Child Welfare Cases." This presentation and discussion addressed strategies for how to create comprehensive support for parents in child welfare cases with very young children so that families can be reunified whenever it is safe to do so. Additionally, Ms. James facilitated discussion on how to effectively engage with parents, provide support to help them overcome hurdles to regaining conservatorship, and speed up the process for obtaining a permanent placement for the child.

Additionally, Commission staff participates in the Cross Systems Trauma-Informed Care (CSTIC) Initiative Workgroup at the Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC). Members are representatives from state agencies such as TJJD, TIDC, and the HHSC, who are working on implementing trauma-informed practices in their agencies. Commission staff attended the CSTIC Initiative Workgroup meetings on May 21, July 16, and September 17, 2025.

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.

7. Strategy: Emphasize the importance of engaging children and youth in the case planning and court process as well as promote normalcy and include young adults with lived experience in statewide system improvement efforts.

Background: Hearing from youth and families with lived experience in foster care is critical to the Children’s Commission goals of improving the child welfare system by increasing awareness, encouraging judicial leadership, promoting best judicial and attorney practices, and informing policy and practice affecting child welfare in Texas. The Children’s Commission aspires to expand systems-level engagement of youth and family members with lived experience in child welfare and seeks to prioritize and encourage participation by compensating them for contributing their time and expertise to Children’s Commission efforts. In furtherance of these goals, the Children’s Commission created a lived experience participation policy so that participants are compensated for their time and preparation.

The Children’s Commission underscores the importance of educating judicial leaders and child welfare professionals on age-appropriate activities for children and youth in foster care through an emphasis on normalcy. The Children’s Commission continues to support and promote awareness of the Texas CASA [guide](#) entitled *Normalcy Matters: A Guide to Supporting Children & Youth in Texas Foster Care*, as well as a companion [video](#). The guide and video are hosted as resources on the Commission website.

09/26/25 Update: By invitation of the Texas Alliance of Child and Family Services, the Children’s Commission is participating in a planning committee for a pending Roundtable on best practices for engaging people with lived experience in shaping policies and practices and developing recommendations for how child and family serving organizations can best foster meaningful and impactful engagement. The Roundtable is tentatively scheduled for early December 2025.

Additionally, Commission staff continues to invite, include, and be informed by speakers with lived experience in Commission trainings, meetings, and other offerings.

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 and address occurrences of child abuse and neglect while maintaining family preservation.

Background: The Children’s Commission collaborates closely with DFPS on the implementation of the Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA). FFPSA restructures federal child welfare funding, particularly Title IV-E and Title IV-B of the Social Security Act, which Texas uses to pay for services for children in foster care and their families. FFPSA seeks to reduce entry in foster care, to limit the use of congregate care, and to increase access to behavioral and mental health services. The Children’s Commission collaborates with Casey Family Programs, DFPS, and other state and national workgroups on best practices for implementation of all FFPSA provisions, including the development of IV-E prevention programs and court involvement in encouraging a prevention approach.

In 2021, DFPS’ Prevention Early Intervention (PEI) division (which now operates as Family Support Services at HHSC) proposed creating a new position for an Early Intervention Court Liaison (EICL) in three jurisdictions. PEI partnered with the Children’s Commission and OCA to identify Texas communities that would benefit from the Court Liaison position. This position acts as a special assistant to the court, serves to identify and connect family support programs to the local Child Protection Courts and community, and offers a judicial perspective within community stakeholder meetings. The pilot sites for the court liaison positions are Galveston, Bell, and Lubbock Counties. The Commission contracted with Texas A&M University to conduct a formal evaluation of the pilot program.

During the 87th Texas Legislative Session, House Bill (HB) 3041 created a Family Preservation Services pilot program, referred to as the Texas Family First (TFF) pilot. Pursuant to Texas Family Code §§ 262.401 - 262.417,

DFPS must provide family-focused preservation services to children and families who are at imminent risk of having a child removed from the child's home and placed in conservatorship due to a continuing danger. The TFF pilot operates under direct court supervision and DFPS is directed to utilize federal Title IV-E funds for services. TFF services are available in the following pilot areas: DFPS Regions 1, 2, 3W, 6A, 8A, and 8B.

09/26/25 Update: OCA and DFPS agreed to renew the EICL pilot for 2024-2025. Alternative funding was not identified and the EICL positions will phase out in August 2025.

Children's Commission staff meet monthly with DFPS staff from Investigations, Family-Based Safety Services, Data and Evaluation, Legal, and Finance departments on the Texas Family First Pilot Implementation Steering Committee. During meetings, DFPS provides updates on steps taken to implement the pilot. In October 2024, TFF expanded into Harris County. TFF services became available starting in March 2025 in Bexar County, with the three Children's Court judges hearing TFF cases.

In 2024, DFPS entered into a contract with the Commission to conduct regional trainings on the Texas Family First Pilot and Reasonable Efforts (see Strategy 24 for more information). The TFF training content covers the TFF pilot, including defining the eligible population, providing details on the current progress, and clarifying many questions related to referrals, referral sources, and time limitations. Recent trainings were conducted in DFPS Region 6A (Houston) and Region 8A (San Antonio). The TFF pilot is expected to expand to several other counties in Region 3W this Fall, and the Commission facilitated an informational meeting on September 2, 2025 with judges in those counties for DFPS to explain the pilot services and model.

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 in an effort to identify and address the educational needs and goals of children and youth who experience foster care.

Background: Since the inception of the Education Committee in 2010 and the release of the Texas Blueprint in 2012, the Children's Commission has convened a multidisciplinary, statewide effort aimed at improving education outcomes for children and youth in foster care. The Foster Care and Education (FC&Ed) Committee was established in 2015 to continue the implementation of the Texas Blueprint recommendations. The FC&Ed Committee utilizes a project-centered model. The FC&Ed Committee will continue to develop priorities and provide oversight for the statewide effort. As projects are identified, small groups will each meet periodically with a defined scope, deliverables, and a timeline. The core principles of strengthening collaboration between the education, courts, and child welfare systems, developing cross-training opportunities, and encouraging data-driven decision making remain fundamental to the FC&Ed Committee model.

09/26/25 Update: The FC&Ed Committee last met on July 8, 2025, and discussed legislative changes that may impact students in foster care, creating resources for younger students, and continuing to develop tools to support implementation of the Every Student Succeeds Act. The next meeting will take place on September 30, 2025.

TEA, DFPS, and the Children's Commission are currently revising the 2022 Foster Care and Student Success Guide with updated resources and edits for publication in 2025. This guide is designed to support Texas schools and child welfare professionals in addressing the educational needs of students in foster care.

The Higher Education Guide Workgroup is currently updating the Texas Higher Education Foster Care Liaison Information & Reference Guide. This guide was last published in 2017 and is utilized by higher education professionals to support young adults who have experienced foster care as they navigate higher education. The

workgroup continues to meet on a monthly basis. The most recent meeting was held on September 3, 2025.

A FC &Ed Data Subcommittee met on August 11 and September 4, 2025 to discuss the annual data exchange between DFPS and TEA. The subcommittee will meet again on September 30, 2025 to identify top priorities for the exchange and use of data on educational outcomes for children and youth in 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: Partner with national, state, and local leaders to better support children, youth, and families with specialized needs such as addressing sexual abuse and complex medical cases.

Background: The Children's Commission partners with many key stakeholders with a goal of raising awareness on addressing specialized issues and needs that children and youth in foster care may experience such as sexual abuse, physical abuse, and running away. This year, the Children's Commission, in partnership with the Office of the Governor, DFPS, Children's Advocacy Centers of Texas (CACTX), and other stakeholders, is developing a resource highlighting the relevant laws aimed at protecting children who survive sexual abuse. The goal is to improve judicial handling of child welfare cases where children and youth are at high risk of being subjected to sexual abuse or commercial sexual exploitation.

09/26/25 Update: The workgroup charged with developing a resource to clarify the rights of children who experience sexual abuse is led by Hon. Selina Mireles, Associate Judge of the 4th & 5th Administrative Judicial Regions Child Protection Court. The resource is designed to help child survivors and their caregivers to identify and understand their legal rights. The resource will include information on Responding to Concerns of Child Sexual Abuse, Rights During an Investigation, In Court Proceedings, and Ongoing Safety and Protection. The workgroup met on June 13, August 7, and September 4, 2025 to review and refine the draft resource.

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.

Background: Round Table discussions are designed to address key, urgent issues affecting the Texas child welfare system through a facilitated, half-day program. The topics vary year to year and the number of Round Tables hosted each year also varies according to the interest of stakeholders and issues demanding attention. The Children Commission's role typically consists of forming a small workgroup to discuss the overall purpose, creating an invitation and distribution list, securing a venue, handling all invitations, RSVPs, travel reimbursements, and producing a written report within about 4 to 6 months following the Round Table event.

09/26/25 Update: During the CFSR, the federal Administration for Children and Families found that practices in Texas regarding notice of court hearings to caregivers vary widely across regions and counties. There is no consistent tracking method for the notifications, and it is unclear who is responsible for giving notice. Many caregivers who participated in the CFSR did not know they have a right to be heard at the hearings.

The Roundtable Meeting is intended to bring together individuals with subject matter expertise on these issues to address challenges, strengths, and opportunities for improvement. The agenda for the meeting will include an overview of the law and policy considerations and discussions on identifying and addressing the barriers to consistent implementation as well as developing a uniform solution for notice to be provided to caregivers.

Planning is underway for a Caregiver Notification of Court Hearings Roundtable Meeting on November 17, 2025

in Austin. A Save the Date was sent on September 12, 2025 to invited participants, including judges, attorneys, court liaisons, DFPS/SSCC staff, CASA advocates, and other subject matter experts.

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.

Background: Placement capacity is an issue across the state of Texas, both in urban and rural areas. Judges and attorneys are key partners in identifying gaps and encouraging community supports to provide safe and stable placements for children who experience foster care. Additionally, Community-Based Care (CBC) continues to roll out across Texas. In the CBC model, most Child Protective Services duties will transfer to a local service network led by a Single Source Continuum Contractor (SSCC). Several initiatives at the Children's Commission aim to engage the legal and judicial communities in efforts to develop placement capacity statewide.

09/26/25 Update: Children's Commission staff serve on the Partners for Children and Families Committee (PCFC), the advisory body for the rollout of Community-Based Care in Texas. The most recent PCFC meeting occurred on August 14, 2025. The committee oversees multiple workgroups with a focus on the following topics: intake and investigations, Community-Based Care, placement, services and supports, foster care and kinship policy, and contracts.

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.

Background: The Dual Status Task Force was formed to establish a common, statewide definition(s) for the population, identify resources needed to meet the needs of dual status youth, and make other recommendations as may be necessary to improve outcomes for dual status youth. The [Dual Status Task Force Report](#) was released in December 2021 and captured recommendations that were formulated over an eighteen-month period, beginning in July 2019. The report contains various recommendations for agency coordination, data, definitions, legal representation and advocacy, judicial practices, and training that highlight the unique needs of this population of youth.

In FY2024, the Children's Commission created a juvenile justice committee to study broader issues related to children and youth involved with the Texas juvenile justice system.

09/26/25 Update: The Juvenile Justice Committee last met on June 30, 2025 to discuss the exceptional item request from the 89th Regular Legislative Session and the additional capacity at the Children's Commission to support judges and attorneys handling juvenile justice matters. The commission is currently hiring for a juvenile justice attorney to develop the program.

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.

Background: When a family is involved in a child welfare proceeding, quality legal counsel is essential for all parties to ensure that the court strikes the appropriate balance between the rights and duties of all parties involved. The Children's Commission has maintained a Legal Representation Committee (LRC) since its inception. The committee exists to identify training needs, advise child welfare system stakeholders on best legal and judicial system practices, evaluate proposed statutory amendments, assess the quality of legal representation throughout the state, and to help ensure that court proceedings safeguard due process, promote child and family engagement, and produce quality legal representation outcomes for the children and families involved.

09/26/25 Update: The LRC last met on August 8, 2025. This year, the LRC identified pre-petition legal representation programs as the priority area of focus. To inform the committee about existing capacity and community needs, the committee members decided to formulate a statewide survey. The committee discussed the survey at the August meeting and finalized priority areas of focus for FY2026. The prepetition legal representation survey launched on September 2, 2025 and will remain open until October 15, 2025. The target audience for the survey is judges, attorneys, CASA, DFPS/SSCC staff, service providers, and other child welfare professionals.

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: Support development and adoption of Standards of Representation for attorneys representing parents, children, and DFPS in child welfare cases.

Background: Though attorneys for parents and children are required by the Texas Family Code to become familiar with the American Bar Association (ABA) standards of practice for attorneys who represent parents and children in abuse and neglect cases, Texas does not require compliance with the ABA standards as a condition of appointment. Additionally, Texas has not adopted its own standards of practice for court-appointed attorneys. The Children's Commission 2018 Legal Representation Study surveyed stakeholders regarding the effect that the lack of enforceable standards of practice has on the legal representation of parents and children. Across stakeholder groups, participants demonstrated a high level of confidence that the creation and enforcement of standards would improve the quality of representation, including 70% of responding court-appointed attorneys indicating that standards would have a positive effect.

The Children's Commission Child Welfare Law Standards of Representation Committee (Standards Committee) is charged with drafting proposed standards to submit to the State Bar of Texas. Hon. Roy Ferguson, retired Judge of the 394th District Court, is the Committee Chair; Hon. Debra Lehrmann, Senior Justice of the Supreme Court of Texas is the Executive Chair; and Professor Stephanie Tang of the Baylor University School of Law

serves as the Reporter. Committee members were selected for their expertise in child welfare law and represent jurisdictions across Texas.

09/26/25 Update: The Standards Committee is currently drafting standards for attorneys representing children. The committee most recently met in person on September 18-19, 2025 to continue drafting standards for Phase III (Preparatory), Phase IV (Conciliatory and Alternative Dispute Resolution), Phase V (Adversarial), and Phase VI (Post-Trial Appellate Phase). The committee next meets via Zoom on November 6, 2025.

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

16. Strategy: Assist the Texas Board of Legal Specialization (TBLS) Advisory and Exam Committees in efforts to certify Texas attorneys as specialists in child welfare law.

Background: In 2017, the Supreme Court of Texas officially recognized Child Welfare Law as the 20th area of certified legal specialization. Children's Commission staff serve on the Exam Commission, which is responsible for drafting and grading the certification exam. The Children's Commission provides reimbursement scholarships to cover application and exam fees for TBLS Child Welfare Law exam applicants who successfully pass the exam.

09/26/25 Update: The 2025 Child Welfare Law exam is scheduled for October 6, 2025. There are 9 examinees registered for the exam. The Children's Commission will continue to reimburse exam fees for attorneys who pass the exam and become certified, as detailed on the Commission's website.

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 the parent resource guides to sustain efforts to increase parental understanding and engagement in the child welfare system.

Background: The Children's Commission supports a Parent Resource Group which is comprised of parent mentors, parent advocates, parents' attorneys, DFPS staff, and other interested stakeholders. Prior to establishing the Texas Legal Services Center Family Helpline (see Strategy 18 for additional information), the Children's Commission partnered with the University of Texas and other stakeholders to produce the Parent Resource Guide, which is available in print and online on the Children's Commission website as well as on many other stakeholder websites, in both English and Spanish.

09/26/25 Update: The Parent Resource Workgroup met on June 26, 2025, to review current projects and finalize priority areas of focus for FY2026. In addition to releasing a Pre-Litigation Guide, updating the Parent Resource Guide (PRG), and completing a Parent Voice Video project, the workgroup will collaborate with the Mediation Workgroup to develop a webinar focused on representing incarcerated parents in child welfare cases. Meetings to plan for the parent voice video and webinar will take place in October 2025.

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.

Background: In 2017, the Children's Commission partnered with the Texas Access to Justice Commission and the Children's Justice Act to fund the Texas Legal Services Center (TLSC) to establish the Family Helpline for Strong Families and Safe Children (Family Helpline). The Family Helpline provides easy, statewide access for parents and family members to basic information, education, and resources addressing parental rights as they relate to Child Protective Investigations, the provision of Family-Based Safety Services (FBSS), Parental Child Safety Placements, Texas Family Code Chapter 34 non-parent agreements, termination of parental rights,

custody, access, visitation, service plans, the court's role in conducting hearings and oversight, right to legal counsel, non-offending parents, minor parents, incarcerated parents, survivors of family violence, intergenerational issues, and other situations.

09/26/25 Update: In the past six months, the Family Helpline answered 903 substantive calls, with Child Protective Investigations continuing to be the most discussed topic. Between June and August, Helpline attorneys conducted outreach across Texas, prioritizing counties where the Helpline received fewer than five calls in the past two years. During these visits, attorneys distributed nearly 8,000 wallet cards, rack cards, and posters directly to CPS and SSCC offices, public and law libraries, courthouses, district clerk offices, CASA programs, service providers, and parent resource centers in 49 counties: Wise, Montague, Clay, Lampasas, Llano, Lee, Burleson, Brazos, Madison, Grimes, Washington, Nacogdoches, Rusk, Gregg, Harrison, Panola, Shelby, San Augustine, Sabine, Denton, Tarrant, Dallas, Kendall, Bexar, Jack, Parker, Hood, Somervell, Erath, Palo Pinto, Young, Archer, Baylor, Knox, Haskell, Jones, Shackelford, Taylor, Callahan, Eastland, Stephens, Throckmorton, Comal, Hays, Anderson, Cherokee, Wilson, DeWitt, and Victoria.

Outreach materials also included rack and wallet cards for the Family Help Link, a free, 24/7 online intake and referral system launched in January to assist Texans facing legal challenges that affect the health and stability of children. Current referral partners for the Family Help Link include Disability Rights Texas, Legal Aid of Northwest Texas, Texas Advocacy Project, and Texas Rio Grande Legal Aid's Foster Youth Project.

Helpline attorneys are also developing new resources for TexasLawHelp.org, including a comprehensive resource and legal guide for kinship caregivers, as well as a series of articles on navigating Child Protective Investigations, the Administrative Review of Investigation Findings process, and Family-Based Safety Services cases.

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).

Background: The Children's Commission supports partnering with system stakeholders to promote ongoing knowledge and understanding of ICWA and its significance. The Commission also works with national ICWA and leading organizations on understanding and implementation of the related Federal Rule and Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) Guidelines. The Children's Commission also partners with DFPS in supporting tribal/state collaborative meetings and collaborates with the Capacity Building Center for Courts and the participants of the CIP ICWA Constituency Group. Commission staff maintain contact with the three federally recognized Tribes in Texas and continue to communicate any resources that may be helpful.

09/26/25 Update: Tribal/state collaborative calls hosted by DFPS reconvened on August 21, 2025 after a summer break. The group continues to discuss plans for an in-person ICWA Summit in November 2026.

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.

Background: The Children's Commission maintains the Texas Child Welfare Law Bench Book (Bench Book) that outlines the state and federal statutory requirements for judges handling child welfare cases, including topical sections and checklists. The Bench Book also highlights special issues and includes best and promising practices. It is updated annually with new information, as needed, and is disseminated to judges at training events

and upon request. The Bench Book is also hosted on the Children's Commission website and through LawBox, both versions of which can be accessed at no cost through the Commission website.

09/26/25 Update: The 2025 Child Welfare Law Bench Book updates will focus on incorporating legislative changes throughout. The updated version will be shared in print at the October 2025 Child Welfare Judges Conference. An online version will be available shortly thereafter.

21. Strategy: Maintain tool kits for attorneys representing parents, children, and the Department of Family and Protective Services in child welfare cases.

Background: The Children's Commission's Tool Kit Committee is responsible for updating the Tool Kit for Attorneys Representing Parents and Children in Child Welfare Cases, and the DFPS Representation Subcommittee is responsible for updating the Tool Kit for Attorneys Representing DFPS in Child Welfare Cases. At the conclusion of each legislative session, each committee meets to develop a plan to review, edit, and update the tool kits to ensure they reflect current case law, statutory law, and best practices. The committees also develop and review plans for publicizing and distributing the tool kits to ensure they are readily available to practitioners.

09/26/25 Update: Commission staff are currently working on updates to both the Tool Kit for Attorneys Representing Parents and Children and the Tool Kit for Attorneys Representing DFPS. Edits will focus on legislative changes from the 89th Regular Legislative Session. The updated versions are projected to be available in March 2026 on the Children's Commission webpage as free, downloadable PDFs for print and as interactive resources through LawBox. Additionally, the commission will distribute printed copies of the tool kits at child welfare training events.

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 and family engagement through the use of technology, including the use of the Office of Court Administration (OCA) Notice and Engagement tool.

Background: All parties involved in child welfare cases continue to struggle with securing consistent and timely notice of scheduled court hearings from DFPS. This issue also impacts caregivers and may result in an inability to attend and participate in scheduled court hearings. The Notice and Engagement tool involves using non-confidential case data to provide email notice to users about upcoming hearings. OCA will market the Notice and Engagement tool and periodically re-issue announcements, survey users on the usefulness and effectiveness of the system, and monitor the system login and search information. Notices will be monitored to evaluate whether the correct hearing data are populating according to search criteria. Reports/data are produced by OCA and provided to the Children's Commission.

09/26/25 Update: The number of Notice and Engagement system users continues to increase. During FY2025, 174 new users signed up (from October 1, 2024, to present) through the Notice and Engagement system to receive hearing notifications, bringing the total number of users to 2,554. Hearing notifications were sent for 6,682 hearings, with a total of 23,551 notifications sent to date this fiscal year. These figures reflect a 7.2% increase in users and a 10.8% rise in notifications sent compared to the same period in FY2024.

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

23. Strategy: Establish an understanding and framework regarding availability and cost of mediation services and promote the training and support necessary to raise the quality and usefulness of mediation in child welfare

cases.

Background: Mediation is used in child welfare cases throughout Texas and can be an effective and financially prudent method of resolving cases. Though the use of mediation to resolve child welfare cases prior to trial has become widely accepted, the Children's Commission is exploring whether mediation is being underutilized in child welfare cases because mediation often occurs too late in the case timeline for the benefits of increased compliance to be realized.

09/26/25 Update: The Mediation Workgroup meets on an *ad hoc* basis and there are no updates in this reporting period.

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

24. Strategy: Build capacity in the legal system to implement the Texas Family First Pilot and improve practice regarding Reasonable Efforts determinations.

Background: Reasonable Efforts findings are required by federal and state law in child welfare hearings. Neither federal nor Texas law defines reasonable efforts. To do so would be a direct contradiction of the intent of the law which requires determinations to be made on a case-by-case basis. In Texas, the child welfare agency must make reasonable efforts to maintain the family unit, to prevent or eliminate the need for removal, to return the child home, to safely reunify the child and parent, and to finalize permanency. Additionally, the child welfare agency must document all reasonable efforts made. During the 88th Regular Legislative Session, new reasonable efforts legislation was passed which effected all child welfare statutory hearings and added a third prong to findings in termination of parental rights final hearings (with a few statutorily defined exceptions). Providing training to expand knowledge of and encourage high-quality hearings regarding Reasonable Efforts determinations is critical for judges, attorneys, DFPS, other child welfare advocates, and stakeholders in order to implement the new laws and encourage positive case outcomes.

09/26/25 Update: Throughout FY2025, the Children's Commission, in partnership with DFPS, offered Texas Family First and Reasonable Efforts training events at no cost for members of the legal and child welfare community. Commission staff traveled to DFPS Region 3E (Dallas) on May 13, Region 6A (Houston) on August 15, and Region 8A (San Antonio) on August 26. Fictional scenarios facilitated hands-on practice with making legal arguments related to reasonable efforts. In regions that do not have the TFF pilot services available, Commission staff were joined by the Child Protection Law Section of the State Bar. At the May convening, the Section presented additional free child welfare MCLE content on topics including Case Law Update, Risks and Reward, Mediate-Don't Litigate, and Tapping Resources for Aging Out Youth. These regional trainings occurred in every region of Texas and are now completed.

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

Background: The Children's Commission created a new committee focused on legislative and policy matters in FY2024. The purpose of the committee is to provide a forum to discuss judicial considerations on changes to child welfare law, policy, and rule. The Legislation and Policy Resource Committee (LPRC) convenes on an *ad hoc* basis and will continue to act as a resource on the impact of legislative changes as well as changes in DFPS Policy and court rules that effect child welfare.

09/26/25 Update: The Legislation and Policy Resource Committee (LPRC) last met on June 5, 2025 to discuss the bills that passed in the 89th Regular Legislative Session. The 89th Regular Legislative Session Update webinar was held on July 29, 2025, and is available in the On-Demand Training and MCLE section of the Children's Commission website, along with the accompanying PowerPoint presentation.

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.

Background: The Children’s Commission collaborates with the Texas Center for the Judiciary (TCJ) to design specialized judicial education and training opportunities for active, retired, and former Texas appellate, district, and county court at law judges, as well as associate judges and court personnel through its grant with TCJ. Throughout the fiscal year, TCJ and the Children’s Commission partner to plan the annual Child Welfare Judges Conferences (CWJC). The Child Welfare Judges Conference is the Commission’s largest annual in-person judicial training. Planning and funding activities include designing curricula and conference agendas, speaker support, determining the budget and number of attendees, participating in planning meetings, surveying participants, and evaluating the process and event both internally and externally for future planning.

In addition to providing in-person judicial training, the Commission has online training content available for judges to access at their convenience, many of which offer Family Violence Credit Hours and/or TBLS hours in addition to MCLE and ethics hours.

09/26/25 Update: The 18th Annual Child Welfare Judges Conference will be held on October 27-29, 2025. Designed for judges who devote a minimum of 15% of their docket to hearing civil child welfare cases, judges from across the state who handle child welfare cases attend the conference, including Child Protection Court judges; district, county court-at-law, and associate judges; and appellate judges.

Based on feedback provided by the CWJC Curriculum Committee, Commission staff secured speakers for identified topics and met with each panel and speaker to develop their presentations and related materials. Commission staff also meet regularly with TCJ staff regarding conference and speaker logistics. Most recently, Commission staff met with TCJ staff on August 11, 2025 to discuss preparations for Regional Breakouts.

The Children’s Commission will continue to partner with DFPS staff to provide county level data at the conference (see Strategy 36 for additional information). Commission staff met with DFPS staff on July 14, 2025 regarding the Regional Breakouts and related data preparation and dissemination.

This year’s curriculum includes traditional topics such as a Legislative Update and an OCA Update. Additionally, this year’s CWJC will feature a best practices series covering all of the statutory hearings; a panel on kinship caregivers; and panels about supporting parents through challenges related to substance use, family violence, housing, and employment. The curriculum is expected to provide approximately 13-15 hours of Continuing Judicial Education, a minimum of 4 hours of Family Violence credits, and ethics hours.

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

Background: Child Protection Courts were created to specialize in the management of child welfare dockets. Like child support court associate judges, these associate judges are appointed by their regional presiding judges and are OCA employees. The goal for CPC dockets is to help children and families achieve safety, permanency, and well-being in a timely manner. The Children’s Commission partners with OCA to provide training and other

support for CPCs to conduct hearings and manage cases. There are currently 30 CPCs and 1 Harris County Child Protection Court; these courts hear child welfare cases exclusively and their jurisdiction covers 60% of all Texas counties.

09/26/25 Update: With input from the CPC Convening Curriculum Committee and in partnership with the Children's Courts Program Manager at OCA, Commission staff coordinated the curriculum for this year's Child Protection Court Convening. A full day virtual convening was held on July 18, 2025 for the CPC judges and court coordinators.

This year's conference included 5 plenary presentations for the judges and court coordinators, as well as two breakout sessions for each audience, one of which was a moderated discussion of current issues. Panel presentations included legislative updates, data and reporting requirements, best practices for courtroom management, issues specific to rural jurisdictions, and a moderated discussion with regional presiding judges. The curriculum provided Continuing Judicial Education, TBLS, and ethics hours. Speakers included members of the judiciary, TIDC staff, and OCA staff. 28 CPC judges and 31 court coordinators attended the convening.

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

28. Strategy: Provide practical, experiential trial skills training that offers attorneys an opportunity to develop their skills in a small-group, low-stakes environment.

Background: Trial Skills Training (TST) is a hands-on training designed to improve the litigation skills of child welfare law attorneys in order to raise the caliber of legal services to children and families in child protection cases. The TST is directed by Hon. Piper McCraw, Children's Commission Jurist in Residence. Trial Skills Training is held once a year and offers up to 20 MCLE (Minimum Continuing Legal Education) hours, including ethics hours. Since its inception in October 2013, the Children's Commission has hosted numerous TSTs with a focus on jury trial preparation presented by a volunteer faculty comprised of highly experienced judges and attorneys from across the state.

In September 2024, the first iteration of the Trial Skills Contested Hearing Practices Course was held, which shifted the focus of the training to improving contested hearing practice skills. Each TST program has a competitive application process and is limited to no more than 27 attorneys. It includes a fictional child welfare case fact pattern with a complete case file covering all Texas-specific statutory hearings building up to final trial. TST provides parent, child, and attorneys representing DFPS numerous litigation exercises in child welfare law and includes lectures and demonstrations from trained faculty comprised of seasoned attorneys and judges which are followed by personal critiques and coaching. Caseworkers, Pediatric Fellows and/or Pediatric Nurse Practitioners, and Parent Therapists serve as live witnesses. Materials are updated and new faculty is recruited and trained with each event. Extensive internal and external Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) process and outcome evaluation is involved with each event.

09/26/25 Update: The Fall 2025 Trial Skills Training Contested Hearing Practices Course included 2 half days of virtual instruction on September 4 and 10, 2025, and 2.5 days of in-person instruction on September 16-18, 2025, in Round Rock, Texas. 25 participants completed the virtual portion of the course, earning 6.75 hours of MCLE credit, with 1.0 ethics hours. Participants who completed the in-person portion of the course earned 17.75 hours of MCLE credit, with 1.25 ethics hours. Additionally, in preparation for the training, participants were asked to view 3.0 hours of MCLE focused on evidentiary skills. New sessions at this year's training included Lay and Expert Witness discussion panels and a Required Efforts Practice Scenario. Practice sessions were also expanded to accommodate the larger TST cohort.

29. Strategy: Create and maintain online content that offers information and guidance on relevant child welfare law issues.

Background: The Commission develops and hosts regular webinars to address current and emerging issues as well as gaps in training in order to educate child welfare attorneys, judges, and stakeholders across the state. These webinars focus on topics most relevant to the legal and judicial communities which may also be relevant to child welfare partners, parents, youth and young adults, and family members of those experiencing the child welfare system. All of the Commission's web-based content is archived and is available on the On-Demand Training and MCLE webpage. Additionally, the Commission has initiated a new training method in the form of a podcast entitled Children's Commission Conversations in order to provide readily available education on child welfare matters, including law, policy, and practice.

09/26/25 Update:

The Commission hosted a webinar entitled "Representing Children with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities in Child Welfare Cases" on May 30, 2025. The panel discussed diagnosis, testing, and treatment for children with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD) and considerations for judges and attorneys in child welfare cases.

On June 24, 2025, the Commission hosted a webinar entitled "Supporting Reunification in Child Welfare Cases." The webinar provided insights into barriers and strengths as children and families navigate the complexities of the child welfare system and work towards successful reunification.

On July 29, 2025, the Commission hosted a webinar entitled "Texas 89th Regular Legislative Session Update." The webinar provided an overview on House and Senate bills related to child welfare law, the statutes affected, and the effective date.

On August 22, 2025, the Commission hosted a webinar entitled "Trial Skills for Child Welfare Cases: Jury Trial Basics." The webinar offered practice tips on how to prepare for a jury trial in a child welfare case.

The Commission has produced the first three episodes of its podcast, which were posted on the Commission's website in Spring 2025. The topics included an introduction to the Commission and its resources; pre-petition legal advocacy; and the importance of preserving sibling connections. Episodes in production include an introduction to Mental Health First Aid in the courtroom and best practices for visitation.

30. Strategy: Partner with the State Bar of Texas, DFPS, and other organizations to offer training to attorneys and advocates who serve children and families in child welfare cases throughout Texas.

Background: In partnership with the CLE branch of the State Bar of Texas, TexasBarCLE, the Children's Commission produced MCLE courses on child welfare and related issues to provide training for court-appointed attorneys and attorneys representing DFPS in child welfare cases. From 2012 through 2019, the Children's Commission partnered with TexasBarCLE to produce numerous MCLE trainings; these live broadcasts are archived in the TexasBarCLE's Child Welfare [Practice Area](#) in their Online Classroom. Both the live and archived recordings of these child welfare-related webinars are available at a reduced rate to attorneys representing children and parents, and there are scholarships available through the State Bar for attorneys who represent DFPS and need financial assistance to access this training. The Commission also worked with TexasBarCLE in 2022 to produce "Building Better Youth Outcomes: The Importance of Being Trauma Informed." Some or all of the content of these webcasts and archived webinars may be considered in some jurisdictions to satisfy the educational requirements for court-appointed attorneys under Texas Family Code §§ 107.004 and 107.0131.

At this time, the Commission's partnership with TexasBarCLE involves participation in the State Bar of Texas Child Protection Law (CPL) Section's Curriculum Committee and supporting that Section through scholarships to the annual spring Advanced Child Protection Law Course, which was expanded to include a half-day "101" course, as well as the annual summer Child Abuse and Neglect Workshop during the Advanced Family Law Course. Additionally, the Children's Commission partners with DFPS and TDCOA to provide training for attorneys representing DFPS.

09/26/25 Update:

Commission staff attended the Child Abuse and Neglect Workshop at the Advanced Family Law Conference on August 6, 2025 in San Antonio. Commission Staff Attorney Brenda Kinsler provided a child welfare legislative update with DFPS Special Projects Attorney, Kellie Price. Additionally, at the conference Commission staff distributed over 100 folders containing a one-pager listing available Commission resources, "Sam and the Search for Spots" coloring books, and copies of brochures on father's rights and attorney duties.

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.

Background: The Children's Commission maintains an electronic distribution list and regularly publishes Resource Letters about emerging, relevant, and changing policy, laws, practice, and training opportunities. While Jurist in Residence (JIR) Letters are specific to Texas judges, the Resource Letter reaches over 3,500 attorneys, judges, court staff, and stakeholders to relay pertinent child welfare related information. All Letters are available on the Children's Commission website.

09/26/25 Update: Several examples of Jurist in Residence (JIR) Letters and Judicial and Attorney Resource Letters (JARLs) issued between May 2 and September 8, 2025, include:

- [9/8/2025: Upcoming Webinar: Ties that Bind- Supporting Kinship Care](#)
- [9/2/2025: Pre-petition Legal Representation Survey](#)
- [8/28/2025: Educational Resources for the 2025-2026 School Year](#)
- [7/30/2025: Attorney Scholarships to TexasBarCLE's Civil Appellate Practice 101](#)
- [7/29/2025: Jurist in Residence Letter: Registration Now Open for the 2025 CWJC](#)
- [7/24/2025: Upcoming Webinar: Trial Skills for Child Welfare Cases: Jury Trial Basics](#)
- [7/7/2025: Children's Commission Webcast: Texas 89th Regular Legislative Session Update](#)
- [6/20/2025: June is Reunification Month](#)
- [6/12/2025: Attorney Scholarships for TexasBarCLE's Child Abuse and Neglect Workshop](#)
- [5/28/2025: Introducing the Children's Commission Conversations Podcast](#)
- [5/23/2025: National Foster Care Month](#)
- [5/16/2025: Upcoming Webinar: Supporting Reunification in Child Welfare Cases](#)
- [5/9/2025: Upcoming Webinar: Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities in Child Welfare Cases](#)
- [5/2/2025: Family Help Link](#)

32. Strategy: Support attendance at state and national judicial and legal conferences and training events.

Background: The Children's Commission administers various judicial and attorney scholarship opportunities throughout the fiscal year, including but not limited to: (1) the TexasBarCLE Annual Advanced Child Protection Law Course; (2) the TexasBarCLE Advanced Family Law Child Abuse and Neglect One-Day Workshop; and (3) the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges Juvenile Justice Conference and Annual Conference. For all scholarships, the Children's Commission determines scholarship criteria and deploys an application process that includes pre- and post-conference evaluations to identify or confirm the knowledge gained and new practices that scholarship recipients plan to implement and/or change. The surveys also inquire about additional topics of interest to help inform planning for future conferences. All attorney applicants for Commission scholarships must currently represent DFPS or take appointments on a child welfare docket, be in good standing with the State Bar of Texas and with their primary judge, and commit to completing a post-event survey from the Commission.

09/26/25 Update:

National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges Training: The NCJFCJ 88th Annual Conference was held on July 20-23, 2025, in Chicago, Illinois. The Commission awarded 7 reimbursement scholarships to qualified judges.

Advanced Family Law One-Day Child Abuse and Neglect Workshop: The Child Abuse and Neglect One-Day Workshop was held on August 6, 2025, in San Antonio, Texas. The Commission awarded 43 registration scholarships for attorneys to attend the live event. Additionally, 27 registration scholarships were awarded for the webcast replays, which will occur later in the fall.

Civil Appellate Practice 101: The Civil Appellate Practice 101 was held on September 3, 2025, in Austin, Texas. The Commission awarded 7 registration reimbursement scholarships for attorneys to attend the live event. Additionally, 10 registration reimbursement scholarships were awarded for the webcast replay, which will occur on October 8, 2025.

Judicial Scholarship Request: The judicial scholarship provides funds for reimbursement of conference registration for judges who need financial assistance to attend conferences which are not already covered by existing scholarship opportunities. The commission continues to provide this opportunity to qualified judges. On August 28, 2025, Training Committee members and Commission staff discussed ways to disseminate information about the judicial scholarship opportunity.

Objective: Support county, state, and national child welfare leaders and organizations to enhance knowledge and competency and share experience and expertise with and throughout Texas.

33. Strategy: Provide training and technical assistance to and collaborate with local jurisdictions.

Background: The Children's Commission provides various types of support for child welfare partners and stakeholders including meeting facilitation and support, travel reimbursement for meeting and training event attendees, presentations by Children's Commission staff as requested, and assistance with securing speakers for local, regional, state, or national events, as appropriate. Children's Commission staff also serve on many other stakeholder workgroups and subcommittees formed under the leadership of its child welfare partners.

Providing assistance to local jurisdictions will help the Commission to expand its capacity to meet requests for training support, bring trainings to jurisdictions, and increase opportunities for attorneys in child welfare cases to qualify for and/or remain on court appointment lists. To address these needs, the Children's Commission created a new Legal Training Support opportunity.

09/26/25 Update: Applications for Legal Training Support are accepted on a rolling basis, must relate to safety, permanency, or well-being for children and families involved with the child welfare system, and must identify a judicial sponsor. The Commission has received applications for Legal Training Support in Grimes and Hidalgo counties. Commission staff are currently in planning stages with these applicants for trainings in early 2026.

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.

Background: In FY2025, the Children’s Commission added a strategy to embed the application of data into new and ongoing Children’s Commission projects. Incorporating data into other projects will operationalize the commitment to Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI). This strategy will also supplement any standalone data projects.

09/26/25 Update: At the Data Committee meeting on July 31, 2025, the committee received a detailed overview of the Program Improvement Plan process from the following DFPS staff: Liz Kromrei, CPS Director of Services, and Julie Shores, DFPS Division Administrator, Federal and State Quality Assurance. Ms. Kromrei and Ms. Shores reported that the plan was in the final round of approval. The committee also continued its review of the federal Child and Family Services Review Final Report and the February 2025 data profile, with discussion focused on leveraging available data to identify and address permanency challenges. In addition, the committee developed four survey questions related to permanency and the length of time children remain in care, which are included in the registration process for judges attending the Child Welfare Judges Conference in October 2025. Data gathered from the survey will be reviewed by the committee to help guide future projects.

35. Strategy: Utilizing all available data sources, analyze trends in child welfare data such as referrals, investigations, removals, and exits.

Background: The Data Committee is committed to identifying and analyzing available data that could enhance courts’ understanding of statewide trends in relevant benchmarks and whether the trends correlate with the changes made to the Family Code or to DFPS policy.

09/26/25 Update: Mr. Dennis Driskell, Systems Analyst at DFPS, offered to provide a brief training for the committee on the use of DFPS’ online Data Book, which can then be used to analyze Legislative Budget Board (LBB) performance measures and identify data trends related to the length of time children remain in care, as well as issues that may contribute to those delays. The training will be scheduled as part of an upcoming meeting. The committee also discussed examining trends related to the impact of Texas Child-Centered Care (T3C) on placement stability.

36. Strategy: At the annual judicial conference, partner with DFPS to provide a statewide data presentation as well as tailored data presentations on state, regional, and local challenges and opportunities and encourage data-driven systemic improvements and collaborative efforts.

Background: On an annual basis, DFPS and the Children’s Commission partner to offer statewide data as part of a DFPS leadership plenary presentation as well as to provide data for the Regional Breakouts to members of the judiciary at the annual Child Welfare Judges Conference, which is hosted by the Commission in partnership with Texas Center for the Judiciary. The Regional Breakout sessions provide the opportunity for judges to meet

with Regional Directors from Child Protective Investigations and Child Protective Services as well as regional Systems Improvement Specialists to discuss region-specific data elements and permanency outcomes. Due to the expansion of Community-Based Care (CBC), Single Source Continuum Contractors responsible for case management and placement are also included in the regional breakout presentations with judges serving in CBC catchment areas, beginning in 2020.

09/26/25 Update: The October 2025 Child Welfare Judges Conference Regional Breakouts will incorporate feedback from previous conferences in order to increase gains in knowledge and facilitate higher-level discussion and problem-solving. Jurisdictional data gathered by DFPS will be shared with judicial attendees prior to the CWJC so that they can prepare for their Regional Breakout discussion. These discussions with Investigations, DFPS, and SSCC staff on regional data outcomes facilitate a greater understanding of safety, permanency, and well-being outcomes at the regional and local levels as well as possible ways to continue to facilitate improved outcomes in these areas.

To prepare for the 2025 Regional Breakout Sessions, Commission staff met with DFPS staff on July 14, 2025 and with TCJ staff on August 11, 2025 regarding compiling and sharing regional and county data.

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.

37. Strategy: Partner with OCA to support the maintenance, enhancements, data collection, impact, and usability of the Child Protection Case Management System (CPCMS), including integrating CPCMS with other data systems.

Background: CPCMS is a case management system which is unique to Child Protection Courts and has been in use since 2009. OCA staffs a CPCMS Advisory Council of CPC judges, OCA staff, and Children's Commission staff to identify and discuss various enhancements and issues. User-generated problems and enhancements are routed through the Advisory Council, which also advises on data collection and reporting features of CPCMS. The Children's Commission regularly collaborates with OCA on the status of CPCMS' functioning, problems, and enhancements.

09/26/25 Update: Recent updates to the CPCMS system were released on May 7, 2025. In addition to performance improvements and maintenance updates, several new features were introduced to enhance usability and case tracking. These included the alphabetization of non-child parties on the Case Summary page and a fix allowing users to remove additional hearing types from existing hearings. A drop-down list was added to Adoption Orders to track whether an adoption was granted to a relative, fictive kin, or non-relative. The system also introduced "Reinstatement of Parental Rights" as a new final order, hearing type, and discharge reason. To improve clarity, the respondent service method "Certified" was updated to "Certified Mail," and "Out of County" was added to the Incarceration Type field.

The CPCMS Advisory Council met on August 1, 2025 and approved upgrades to CPCMS for the next scheduled update on September 16, 2025. This release will resolve an error caused by the word "Adoption" appearing in non-adoption cases on the Case Summary page and ensure respondents are properly listed on the "Order Establishing Parent-Child Relationship." Updates to the Respondent page will allow null values for the "Waived Right to Counsel" status and introduce two new counsel status options: "Not in opposition" and "Not indigent." Search results will be refined to prevent rescheduled hearings from appearing as the next hearing. The system will also remove the requirement for a date of service when "Cite by Publication" or "Cite by Posting" is selected. Additionally, a new procedural order will allow CPCMS to track the outcomes of appealed cases that are returned to a Child Protection Court.

During the 89th Legislature, OCA was appropriated funding to develop a case management system for statutorily defined specialty courts. After careful consideration, this opportunity will also be used to modernize and upgrade both the CPCMS and CSCMS systems. This initiative will ensure continued support for child protection courts while aligning with broader efforts to enhance case management capabilities across the judiciary.

INSERT - TAB 4



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

**Children's Commission
Adjusted End of Fiscal Year 2025 Financial Report**

FISCAL YEAR 2025 FEDERAL/STATE REVENUE

Fiscal Year 2024 CIP Carry Forward	\$	1,229,007
(+) Fiscal Year 2025 CIP Distribution	\$	1,863,710
(+) Fiscal Year 2025 COLA Payment	\$	91,124
Fiscal Year 2025 CIP Funds Available	\$	3,183,841

FISCAL YEAR 2025 OTHER REVENUE

	Contract Amount	Contract Reimbursement
(+) 2025 Casey Family Programs Contract	\$ 10,000	\$ 5,000
(+) FY2024 - 2025 DFPS Training Contract	\$ 425,130	\$ 163,469
Fiscal Year 2025 Other Income	\$ 435,130	\$ 168,469

FISCAL YEAR 2025 EXPENDITURES

	Budget	Expenses To-date	Anticipated Expenditures**
Operating	\$ 1,541,810	\$ 803,186	\$ 573,948
Commission Projects	\$ 188,800	\$ 31,085	\$ 72,374
<i>Systems Improvement</i>	\$ 40,000	\$ 1,841	\$ -
<i>Legal Practice and Process</i>	\$ 76,400	\$ 27,702	\$ 11,716
<i>Training</i>	\$ 72,400	\$ 1,542	\$ 60,658
Scholarships	\$ 82,000	\$ 25,939	\$ 32,875
<i>Appellate Law Section Boot Camp</i>	\$ 7,500	\$ 825	\$ 6,675
<i>Child Protection Law Section</i>	\$ 10,000	\$ 9,075	\$ -
<i>General Judicial Scholarship</i>	\$ 5,000	\$ -	\$ 5,000
<i>NACC - Annual Conference</i>	\$ 10,000	\$ -	\$ -
<i>NCJFCJ - Judicial Scholarship</i>	\$ 30,000	\$ 5,739	\$ 12,000
<i>State Bar CAN CLE</i>	\$ 7,500	\$ -	\$ 7,500
<i>TBLS - CWL Specialization Exam Fee Waiver</i>	\$ 2,000	\$ 1,800	\$ 200
<i>TDCAA - Conference</i>	\$ 10,000	\$ 8,500	\$ 1,500
Grants	\$ 481,240	\$ 279,556	\$ 201,684
<i>DFPS Regional Attorney Training Support</i>	\$ 12,500	\$ -	\$ 12,500
<i>OCA - CIP Technology Project</i>	\$ 128,279	\$ 22,226	\$ 106,053
<i>OCA - CPC Visiting Judge</i>	\$ 13,000	\$ 1,933	\$ 11,067
<i>Texas Center for the Judiciary (TCJ)</i>	\$ 232,460	\$ 195,910	\$ 36,550
<i>TLSC Family Helpline</i>	\$ 95,001	\$ 59,487	\$ 35,514
	\$ 2,293,850	\$ 1,139,766	\$ 880,881

CURRENT FINANCIAL STATUS

Fiscal Year 2025 CIP Funds Available	\$	3,183,841
(-) Fiscal Year 2025 Expenditures to Date	\$	(1,139,766)
(-) 2025 Contract Expenses	\$	(163,304)
(+) Fiscal Year 2025 Contract Expense Reimbursement	\$	168,469
(+) Fiscal Year 2025 Contract Expense Receivable	\$	261,661
(-) FY2025 Anticipated Expenditures	\$	(880,881)
Estimated Carry Forward FY 2025	\$	1,430,019

** Reduction to budget categories that will not materialize in FY2025 -
\$279,243.70

September 16, 2025

**Children's Commission
Proposed 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

Children's Commission Grant Summaries

Fiscal Year 2026

Organization:	Texas Center for Child and Family Studies (TCCFS)
Project:	Permanent Managing Conservatorship (PMC) Court Study
Strategic Category:	Systems Improvement, Data
Grant Amount:	\$ 83,364
Project Description:	<p>In partnership with University of Texas at Arlington, TCCFS has engaged in qualitative evaluation of the PMC court model since 2020. However, to date there has been no research or evaluation that can produce causal evidence of whether the model is an effective intervention for improving permanency and well-being outcomes for children and youth in PMC.</p> <p>TCCFS secured federal funding to conduct a three-year study measuring the effectiveness of the PMC courts compared to traditional courts, with a special focus on outcomes among children in PMC with disabilities. The outside funding covers limited year-one activities of interviews with key stakeholders to get feedback on data collection tools.</p> <p>CIP funding would expand the study by covering personnel costs to allow for the collection of data on a group of children and youth in PMC to capture baseline data and make any needed modifications to study protocols (e.g., recruitment) and data collection tools before scaling up the study. This step will be critical to ensure continuous quality improvement and feasibility of the larger study, which has the potential to impact statewide systems improvement efforts.</p>
Project Activities:	<p>Phase 1 (Project Installation - First 6 Months): During the first six months, the project will be set up by creating a detailed study protocol, developing evaluation tools, obtaining Institutional Review Board (IRB) ethics approval, recruiting a study advisory board to initiate continuous quality improvement, and refining the implementation and evaluation plan.</p> <p>Phase 2 (Pilot - Second 6 Months): In the following six months, the study will be piloted by assessing the feasibility of the protocol through recruiting and collecting data from children in Dallas, Harris, Tarrant, and Travis counties, refining data collection tools, and engaging in continuous quality improvement through ongoing data collection and analysis, interviews with key stakeholders, creating a fidelity database, and holding meetings with the study advisory board.</p>
Use of Funds:	Personnel, Benefits, Contractual
Prior Funding:	2020-2023

Children's Commission Grant Summaries

Fiscal Year 2026

Organization:	Texas Center for the Judiciary (TCJ)
Project:	Child Welfare Judges Conference
Strategic Category:	Training
Grant Amount:	\$259,641.00
Project Description:	<p>TCJ will conduct the 2025 Child Welfare Judges Conference (CWJC). The three-day conference will be held on October 27-29, 2025, at the Sheraton Austin Georgetown Hotel and Conference Center. Training topics will include mental health, legislative updates, best practices for improving the timeliness of courtroom proceedings, supporting family engagement, service array, and resources for families. Typically, 85-100 judges attend the conference. Preparation includes collaboration with the Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS), Texas CASA, and Single Source Continuum Contractors.</p> <p>TCJ will also begin the planning process for the 2026 Child Welfare Judges Conference.</p>
Project Activities:	<p>TCJ will participate in periodic planning calls with the Children's Commission and OCA. TCJ will communicate with attendees about reservations, process reimbursements, work directly with speakers to facilitate travel, and develop program descriptions. Additionally, TCJ will prepare materials including conference programs, signage, and a conference app as well as apply for, track, and reconcile MCLE and family violence hours for conference participants. At the conclusion of the conference, TCJ will prepare and distribute conference evaluations, and provide results to the Children's Commission.</p>
Use of Funds:	Personnel, Benefits, Travel, Supplies, Contractual, Other
Prior Funding:	2010-2025

Children's Commission Grant Summaries

Fiscal Year 2026

Organization:	Texas Department of Family & Protective Services
Project:	2026 DFPS Legal Conference
Strategic Category:	Training
Grant Amount:	\$12,000.00
Project Description:	The training provides agency attorneys (and assistant district and county attorneys via video playback) with MCLE that addresses the unique training needs of attorneys who represent DFPS.
Project Activities:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Select conference site; - Meet with planning committee to brainstorm topics and speakers; - Finalize topics, speakers, and agenda, send out registration materials, and room reservation links to attendees; - Finalize details with conference site, submit for MCLE accreditation, send updated agenda to the Commission; - Hold event and record presentations; - Upload presentations to SharePoint for assistant district and county attorneys, send out post-event survey; and - Meet with planning committee to discuss survey results and begin process for 2027 conference, if grant is awarded.
Use of Funds:	Travel, Contractual (Venue, Audio/Visual)
Prior Funding:	2016-2025

Children's Commission Grant Summaries

Fiscal Year 2026

Organization:	Texas Indigent Defense Commission
Project:	Title IV-E: Advancing Legal Advocacy for Families
Strategic Category:	Legal Practice and Process
Grant Amount:	\$130,962
Project Description:	<p>Texas has underutilized a significant amount of available federal Title IV-E funds for legal representation in child welfare cases due to the decentralized nature of its legal representation system.</p> <p>In January 2025, the Texas Indigent Defense Commission (TIDC) entered into an MOU with DFPS to provide technical support to enhance the process to claim IV-E funds. However, TIDC's family protection representation division lacks the capacity to fully address these challenges and support better utilization of federal funds.</p> <p>A dedicated staff person is critically needed to create educational materials, provide technical assistance and training to county stakeholders and DFPS staff, review reimbursement requests, encourage counties to use funds for family representation, collect data, and identify program improvements, serving as the essential link to establish a robust Title IV-E program that meets the needs of a state as large as Texas.</p>
Project Activities:	TIDC will collaborate with DFPS, provide outreach to counties, create informational and educational materials, provide trainings, offer technical assistance to counties and DFPS, collect data, and continuously evaluate the program to determine needed improvements.
Use of Funds:	Personnel, Benefits, Travel, Supplies, Equipment, Other
Prior Funding:	None

Children's Commission Grant Summaries

Fiscal Year 2026

Organization:	Texas Legal Services Center (TLSC)
Project:	Family Helpline
Strategic Category:	System Improvement, Data
Grant Amount:	\$80,000
Project Description:	TLSC's Family Helpline was established in 2017. The Family Helpline assists Texans who have legal questions regarding the child welfare system and child safety. When a caller dials the phone number, their call is answered by a child welfare attorney. Family Helpline attorneys are available Monday – Friday from 9 a.m. – 6 p.m. Central. The goal of the helpline is to improve safety and stability for children, and to empower families through education about their legal rights and court processes. The Family Helpline serves all 254 counties in Texas.
Project Activities:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provide one-on-one legal education, information, and referrals to approx. 1,250 individuals in Texas regarding child welfare involvement or child safety. This will be tracked and measured using Legal Server case management software. - Present legal trainings on topics related to child welfare law a minimum of four times per fiscal year with a goal of reaching at least 10 attorneys or professionals per presentation. - Provide child welfare content for TexasLawHelp.org with a minimum of 2 self-help kits or articles per year. - Collect data regarding the child welfare system – including the caller's role, type of case, issues discussed, trends, and areas for improvement; this data will be reported on to the Commission twice per year. - Distribute at least 1,000 outreach materials to entities across the state (i.e., local courts and clerk's offices, local public libraries and law libraries, CPS offices, CASA offices, local parenting class providers, drug treatment and rehabilitation centers, child advocacy centers, medical provider offices, and law enforcement offices). - Create a separate Family Helpline extension for attorneys seeking legal information and procedural assistance to better represent their clients at any stage of DFPS involvement.
Use of Funds:	Personnel & Benefits
Prior Funding:	2017-2025

