



Children's Commission

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



Children's Commission Meeting Notebook

May 8, 2026

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

May 8, 2026

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

Friday, May 8, 2026
9:30 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.

Meeting Agenda

- 9:30 Commencement and Opening Remarks
First Order of Business – Adopt Minutes from February 27, 2026
- 9:45 Children's Commission Committee Discussion
- Systems Improvement
 - Legal Practice & Process
 - Training
 - Data
- 10:45 Department of Family & Protective Services Update
- 11:10 Office of Court Administration Update
- 11:25 Collaborative Council Member Announcements
- 11:30 New Business and Adjourn

Upcoming Meeting Schedule:

- September 18, 2026 (in person)
- November 6, 2026 (virtual)

INSERT - TAB 1

CHILDREN'S COMMISSION MEMBERS

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

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

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

COLLABORATIVE COUNCIL MEMBERS

Erin Argue	Julia Hatcher	Kellie Pittman
Kristene Blackstone	Catherine Henning	Judy Powell
Andrew Brown	Kerrie Judice	Susan Ramirez
Sheryl Draker	Norman Ladd	Tanya Rollins
Barbara Elias-Perciful	Stephanie Madrigal	Johana Scot
Dr. Monica Faulkner	Gabriella McDonald	Denise Smith
Mike Foster	Dr. Jill McLeigh	Andrea Sparks
Fedora Galasso	Hollie Mims	Kenneth Thompson
Barbra Grimmer	Kate Murphy	Amanda Vasquez
		Sarah Worthington

STAFF AND JURISTS IN RESIDENCE

Jamie Bernstein, <i>Executive Director</i>	Brenda Kinsler, <i>Sr. Staff Attorney</i>
Milbrey Raney, <i>Assistant Director</i>	Chelsea Martinez, <i>Program Specialist</i>
Jessica Arguijo, <i>Communications Manager</i>	Patrick Passmore, <i>Finance Manager</i>
Renée Castillo-De La Cruz, <i>Sr. Staff Attorney</i>	Elizabeth Schmidt, <i>Juvenile Justice Staff Attorney</i>
Scott Cooley, <i>Sr. Staff Attorney</i>	Willette Sedwick, <i>Accountant</i>
Tiffany Edwards, <i>Program Specialist</i>	Andrea Vicencio, <i>Program Specialist</i>
	Hon. Rob Hofmann, <i>Sr. Jurist in Residence</i>
	Hon. Piper McCraw, <i>Jurist in Residence</i>

INSERT - TAB 2

Supreme Court of Texas Children’s Commission

Meeting Minutes

Friday, February 27, 2026
9:30 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.

ATTENDANCE

Commissioners	Attended	Did Not Attend
<i>Chair</i> , Hon. Debra Lehmann, Senior Justice, Supreme Court of Texas, Austin	✓	
<i>Deputy Chair</i> , Hon. Kyle Hawkins, 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, Kinship Navigator Program Supervisor, ACH Child and Family Services, Fort Worth	✓	
Tymothy Belseth, Program Coordinator, Texas Institute for Child and Family Wellbeing, University of Texas at Austin, Austin	✓	
Hon. Susan Brown, Presiding Judge, 11 th Administrative Judicial Region, Houston		✓
Sheila Craig, Strategic Consultant, Austin		✓
Hon. Roy Ferguson, Special/Private/Visiting Judge, Arbitrator, and Mediator, Alpine		✓
Hon. Angela Graves-Harrington, Judge, 246 th Family District Court, Houston	✓	
Anne Heiligenstein, Senior Director Strategic Consultant - Texas, Casey Family Programs, Austin	✓	
Rep. Lacey Hull, Texas House of Representatives, District 138, Katy		✓
Dr. Julie Kaplow, Executive Director, Trauma and Grief Center, The Hackett Center for Mental Health, Houston	✓	
Brandon Logan, Executive Director, One Accord for Kids, Midland		✓
Hon. Aurora Martinez Jones, Judge, 126 th District Court, Austin	✓	
Daphny Milligan, Parent Representative, Waco	✓	
Hon. James Mosley, Judge, 316 th District Court, Stinnett	✓	
Megan Ransom, Chief Executive Officer, Texas Alliance of Child and Family Services, Austin		✓
Luanne Southern, Chief Strategist for Behavioral Health, Texas Department of Family and Protective Services, Austin	✓	
Hon. Ian Spechler, Administrative Law Judge, State Office of Administrative Hearings, Austin	✓	
Vicki Spriggs, Chief Executive Officer, Texas CASA, Austin	✓	
Terese Stevenson, President, 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		✓
Hon. Royce West, Texas Senate, District 23, Dallas		✓
Jurists in Residence		
Hon. Rob Hofmann, Judge, 452 nd District Court, Senior Jurist in Residence, Mason	✓	
Hon. Piper McCraw, Judge, 469 th District Court, Jurist in Residence, McKinney		✓
Attending Committee Members & Guests		
Stephanie Battaglia, Public Policy Specialist, Texas CASA		
Kristen Bell, Director of Operations, Texas Lawyers for Children		
Caitlin Brennan, Clerk, House Human Services Committee		
Cindy Dyar, Family Helpline Managing Attorney, Texas Legal Services Center		
Emily Fankell, Chief of Staff, Office of Representative Lacey Hull, Texas House of Representatives		
Hon. Angelica Jimenez, Judge, 408 th Civil District Court, San Antonio		
Crystal Leff-Piñon, Director of Family Protection Representation, Texas Indigent Defense Commission		
Vince Leibowitz, Chief of Staff, Office of Senator Royce West, Texas Senate		
Katherine McAnally, Senior Policy Analyst, Texas Indigent Defense Commission		

Anne Nagelkirk, Chief External Relations Officer, Texas CASA
Nicole, Parent, represented by Travis County Office of Parent Representation
Audrey O'Neill, Commissioner, Texas Department of Family and Protective Services
Kellie Price, Attorney, Kellie Price Law PLLC
Judy Powell, Communications Director, Parent Guidance Center
Hon. Robin Sage, Judicial Engagement Team, Casey Family Programs
Annelane Sallee, Law Clerk, Texas Foster Youth Justice Project
Sarahi Trevino-Martin, Social Worker, Travis County Office of Parent Representation
Jacquelyn Wilson, Chief Counsel, Travis County Office of Parent Representation
Sarah Worthington, Director, Texas Foster Youth Justice Project

Attending Collaborative Council Members

Julia Hatcher, President, Texas Association of Family Defense Attorneys
Hollie Mims, Assistant Deputy Director - Community-Based Care Operations, Department of Family & Protective Services
Johana Scot, Executive Director, Parent Guidance Center
Denise Smith, Resource Coordinator, Texas Grandparents Raising Grandchildren

Office of Court Administration Staff

Marcus Crosby, Children's Courts 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, Senior Staff Attorney
Scott Cooley, Senior Staff Attorney
Tiffany Edwards, Program Specialist
Brenda Kinsler, Senior Staff Attorney
Chelsea Martinez, Program Specialist
Patrick Passmore, Finance Manager
Milbrey Raney, Assistant Director
Willette Sedwick, Accountant
Andrea Vicencio, Program Specialist

Welcome and Opening Remarks

Justice Debra Lehrmann called the meeting to order at 9:36 a.m. and welcomed everyone to the Children's Commission meeting. Justice Lehrmann expressed her gratitude for the perspectives each Commissioner brings to shared discussions as we work together to improve outcomes for children, youth, and families who experience the Texas child welfare system.

Justice Lehrmann announced that Justice Rebeca Huddle will no longer serve as the Deputy Chair of the Children's Commission and that Justice Kyle Hawkins will now serve in that role. Justice Hawkins introduced himself and expressed his enthusiasm at serving as Deputy Chair of the Children's Commission.

Presentation on Family Reunification

A presentation on family reunification was facilitated by Commission Assistant Director Ms. Milbrey Raney, and included Ms. Jacquelyn Wilson, Chief Counsel of the Travis County Office of Parental Representation (OPR); Ms. Sarahi Trevino-Martin, Social Worker with OPR; and Ms. Nicole, a parent with lived experience as a parent in a child welfare case who was represented by OPR. The panel presentation focused on Nicole's challenges and successes in her case and how her attorney and social worker collaborated to support her on a path to success reunification.

Key topics included addressing the impact of trauma on the parent client, including the impact of removal; the dynamics of family violence and Nicole's successful engagement with services; the importance of the quality of the services; and the supportive nature of the relationship between Nicole and her child's foster parents. The ensuing discussion with Commissioners focused on the value added to the client, the attorney, and the case by the social worker and the benefits of a multidisciplinary legal office. The presentation also highlighted the importance of high-quality legal representation, as well as the unique benefits of offices dedicated to parent and child representation.

Commission, Committee, and Staff Member Changes

Justice Lehrmann announced that Ms. Erica Bañuelos is leaving her role as CPS Associate Commissioner and will no longer serve on the Commission. Ms. Bañuelos will take on a new role for Special Projects at DFPS. Ms. Bañuelos was recognized for her longtime dedication and service in leadership roles at DFPS.

Justice Lehrmann shared that Ms. Sarah Crockett left Texas CASA and rolled off the Systems Improvement Committee and Collaborative Council. Also, Judge Carlos Villalon Jr. stepped down from the Data Committee and Judge David Barkley with the Eighth Region South Child Protection Court will now serve on the committee. Justice Lehrmann reported that Ms. Tiffany Greco left the Training Committee and that Ms. Andrea Requesnes, Vice President of Learning with the Texas Alliance, will now serve on committee.

Justice Lehrmann noted that Ms. Denise Smith joined the Collaborative Council on behalf of Grandparents Raising Grandchildren.

Lastly, Justice Lehrmann announced that Ms. Elizabeth Schmidt is the new Juvenile Justice Staff Attorney at the Children's Commission. This new position is funded by the Legislature to provide training and support to judges hearing juvenile justice cases.

Adoption of November 14, 2025, Meeting Minutes

Justice Lehrmann directed members to the November 14, 2025 Commission Meeting Minutes behind Tab 2 of the Meeting Notebook, distributed in advance of the meeting.

ACTION: Justice Lehrmann asked if there were any corrections to the minutes as written. Hearing none, after a motion and a second, the Commissioners voted to adopt the minutes for the November 14, 2025 Children's Commission meeting.

Children's Commission Staff Update

Ms. Jamie Bernstein announced that the Children's Commission Annual Report was released and is available on the Children's Commission website. Ms. Bernstein also shared that Children's Commission legal staff attended the recent Administration for Children and Families Region 6 Court Improvement Program (CIP) meeting, which includes Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas. Commission staff enjoyed learning from other states and gathering new ideas.

Ms. Brenda Kinsler reported on the Caregiver Notice Roundtable that was held in partnership with DFPS on November 17, 2025. At the roundtable, caregivers shared current challenges they were facing as well as successes, along with judges, attorneys, agency staff, and relevant child welfare stakeholders. The report contains recommendations for improvement in caregiver notice. To implement these recommendations, the Commission will form of a collaborative workgroup to help develop a pilot program, create practical tools, and identify sustainable improvements.

Ms. Schmidt shared that the Children's Commission identified a need for support for judges handling juvenile cases and secured funding through the 89th Legislature for a new juvenile justice attorney. The Commission will host a first of its kind Judicial Conference on Juvenile Justice exclusively for judges with juvenile jurisdiction over 2 days in August 2026 in Central Texas.

Mr. Scott Cooley gave a presentation on the newly released Pre-petition Legal Representation Survey Report. The report is available on the Children's Commission website.

Ms. Kinsler provided an overview of the newly formed Task Force on Evidentiary Issues which will study and make recommendations on several proposals related to evidentiary and procedural protections in suits filed by governmental entities alleging child abuse or neglect. The Commission will convene the time-limited task force comprised of individuals representing varied roles within the child welfare system, including the judiciary, parent representation, prosecution, behavioral health, and policy analysis to study certain

principal areas. It is expected that the task force will meet every other week until June 2026 when a report with recommendations will be provided to the Supreme Court of Texas.

Ms. Renée Castillo-De La Cruz reported on recent engagement of the Legal Training Support opportunities by judges and attorneys. Commission staff assisted Judge Stephani Logue of the North Texas Child Protection Court with obtaining MCLE credit for a webinar on the intersection of child trafficking and child welfare law which was held on January 21, 2026. Ms. Castillo-De La Cruz then discussed legal training support for the Grimes County Child Welfare Course held in Navasota, Texas on February 26, 2026. The Commission assisted with agenda planning, venue fees, MCLE application, and speaker travel reimbursements for this hybrid event and provided on-site support as well. The course had a total of 39 registrants, and it provided 6.25 hours of MCLE, 1.5 hours of ethics, and TBLS certification and recertification legal education hours in the practice areas of Child Welfare Law and Family Law. The Commission also assisted Corpus Christi Bar Association with identifying speakers to provide a case law update and a session on dealing with secondary trauma and burnout for their child welfare training on March 6, 2026 and will also provide funds to cover speaker travel expenses.

Ms. Kinsler offered a brief presentation on the permanency-related data that was gathered through the 2025 Child Welfare Judges Conference registration survey. She also shared how the permanency-related data connects to the information from the recent Child and Family Services Review findings.

Lastly, Mr. Patrick Passmore announced that there was a \$9,000 increase to the budget since the Commission voted at the September 2025 Commission meeting, and that these funds were designated to support the new Task Force on Evidentiary Issues described above.

Office Of Court Administration (OCA) Update

Mr. Jeffrey Tsunekawa shared that OCA is in the procurement process for software services related to HB 5081, which requires the removal of personal identifying information of judges and court staff from the internet. Judges can request to have their personal information removed from public access at no cost; HB 16 extends the same protections to court and clerk staff. The display of unauthorized information of judges can result in criminal and civil charges.

Mr. Tsunekawa noted that OCA is working on performance measurements for district and county courts across the state, including clearance rates. OCA requested 11 new FTE regional data coordinators during the last legislative session to work with courts to collect

data on performance metrics across all 254 counties. He shared that OCA recently collected 100% of the clearance reports across the state. After sharing an initial report with the Legislature, OCA will evaluate data trends across the State.

Additionally, Mr. Tsunekawa reported that OCA is creating a statewide case management system for specialty courts, including Child Protection Courts (CPCs). This system will replace the current CPCMS system and OCA plans to put the new system in place by the end of 2027. He noted that the Judicial Council started to meet about priority topics for the upcoming legislative session. Four committees were created: data, judicial resources, family representation, and judicial compensation & retirement. Mr. Tsunekawa also highlighted OCA's other recent work, including a study on supported decision-making, digital court reporting, case level data, replacing the case management system for state appellate courts, and supporting business courts. Lastly, Mr. Tsunekawa shared that OCA is in the procurement process for a statewide bail system.

Texas Department Of Family & Protective Services (DFPS) Update

Ms. Bañuelos announced that DFPS' new 2026 Annual Plan was posted on the agency's website. She highlighted the name of the plan, "Empowering, Strengthening, and Supporting Families," and elaborated that the agency's commitment to strengthening families will come through meaningful engagement and services and support to families. Part of the new plan is to make families active partners who are involved with the decision-making process, recognizing that they are the experts in their lives. DFPS' 2026 Annual Plan's aim is to give families earlier access to services and better supportive interventions to impact their well-being. Broadly, the three pillars set out in the Annual Plan are to strengthen families through engagement, services, and support; develop and refine the case management services; and transform the workforce and infrastructure to enable better outcomes.

Ms. Bañuelos highlighted the importance of expanding and continuing to support kinship families, focusing on first placement with relatives at the time of removal. DFPS will expand support for kinship caregivers such as behavioral health services and caregiver education, launching a statewide kinship awareness campaign. Additionally, Rider 40 prompted DFPS updates to kinship manuals and resources, including working with the Kinship Collaboration Group on a video series for kin care providers and a planned podcast. DFPS will also collaborate with kinship caregivers to expand their support network and streamline the license application process. Finally, DFPS is exploring using Collaborative Family Engagement (CFE) and Family Group Decision-Making (FGDM) models and applying them to other areas as an additional way to engage with families.

She added that all of these efforts and resources will be shared with the Single Source Continuum Contractors in Community-Based Care areas.

Collaborative Council Member Updates

Ms. Julia Hatcher, President of Texas Association of Family Defense Attorneys, expressed concern about a form limiting legal representation. She provided the form to OCA and the Children's Commission staff, who offered to look into the matter further.

Ms. Kristen Bell, Director of Operations at Texas Lawyers for Children (TLC), shared that TLC created mental health message boards on their website for both lawyers and judges where mental health professionals can answer submitted questions. She also announced that TLC opened its trauma training to non-attorneys.

New Business

Justice Lehrmann shared that the remaining 2026 Commission Meeting schedule is as follows: May 8 (virtual), September 18 (in person), and November 6 (virtual).

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 1:25 p.m.

INSERT - TAB 3

REPORT TO THE COMMISSION

May 8, 2026

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 an annual report to the Supreme Court of Texas and a CIP strategic plan to the Administration for Children and Families (ACF). Children’s Commission membership includes standing positions for leadership from the Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS), Texas Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA), and the State Bar of Texas Child Protection Law Section as well as a Regional Presiding Judge. The Children’s Commission staff also collaborate with various partners, including, but not limited to, the Office of the Governor (OOG), the Office of the Attorney General (OAG), the Office of Court Administration (OCA), the Judicial Commission on Mental Health (JCMH), the Texas Juvenile Justice Department (TJJD), the Texas Education Agency (TEA), the Texas Alliance of Child and Family Services (TACFS), and the Texas Foster Youth Justice Project (FYJP).

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.

05/08/26 Update: The February 27, 2026 Children’s Commission meeting was held in person and streamed live. Video of the meeting is archived on the Commission’s YouTube channel and website. The Systems Improvement, Legal Practice & Process, Training, and Data Committees convened on April 16, April 17, April 14, and April 14, 2026 respectively to discuss new and ongoing projects.

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 Collaborative Council assists the Children’s Commission by providing information about local,

regional, and statewide issues that impact attorney and judicial practices in child welfare cases. The Collaborative Council is an advisory body comprised of child welfare stakeholders and subject matter experts from other child and family serving systems from across Texas, including advocates for children, youth, and families. There are approximately 30 Collaborative Council members at any given time.

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.

05/08/26 Update: Bi-weekly stakeholder calls, including updates and participation from agency staff and Collaborative Council members, continue to take place every other week. The most recent call was held on April 29, 2026. Information about upcoming training events, resources, and other announcements of interest are shared during each call.

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 announcements for scholarship and training opportunities, reports and resources, as well as the CIP grant application and grant recipient information. Important announcements shared in the Children's Commission Resource Letters are also distributed through the Commission's communication and social media platforms. The website is routinely updated for content and to highlight newly released reports and resources produced by or in collaboration with the Children's Commission.

05/08/26 Update: A new website is under development to allow for greater usability and access to available resources. The Children's Commission recently added several social media pages to further share Commission announcements and to expand awareness. Children's Commission social media platforms now include [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#), as well as [LinkedIn](#), [X](#), and [YouTube](#).

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 long-standing 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), 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 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. The Texas PIP was approved by the federal Administration for Children and Families in the summer of 2025. 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 the caregiver notification strategy began with a Roundtable Meeting in November 2025.

05/08/26 Update: Children’s Commission staff continue to actively participate in the CFRS process. This includes joining monthly PIP meetings with ACF and DFPS, initiating a caregiver notice workgroup to implement recommendations from the related November Roundtable meeting, and reviewing data related to permanency outcomes at the recent Data Committee meeting (see additional information below).

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 support that meet their individual needs.

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

Background: Hearing and learning directly from individuals with lived experience in the child welfare system is critical to the Children’s Commission goals of 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 spent preparing and presenting.

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.

05/08/26 Update: Commission staff continue to invite, include, and be informed by speakers with lived experience in Commission trainings, meetings, and other offerings. The February 27, 2026 Children’s Commission Meeting featured a panel on family reunification that included a parent with lived experience, her attorney, and her social worker. The presentation highlighted challenges and barriers as well as strengths to support successful and sustainable family reunification.

On March 13, 2026, the Commission hosted a Consortium on Trauma Informed Court Practices MCLE entitled “How Parent Mentor Programs Support Positive Permanency in Child Welfare Cases” which featured a parent with lived child welfare experience (see additional information below).

On March 31, 2026, the Commission hosted a webinar on Representing Deaf Clients which included Teresa Dell, the DFPS subject matter expert on deaf and hard of hearing issues. On April 30, 2026, the Commission hosted a webinar on Representing Incarcerated Clients in Child Welfare Cases, which featured Matilda, a Parent Partner at the Foster Care Advocacy Center with lived experience, who discussed legal considerations for attorneys representing incarcerated parents in child welfare cases.

GOAL II (SYSTEMS IMPROVEMENT)

Execute innovative projects aimed at encouraging fairness and justice for children, youth, and families; promoting judicial leadership in courts and communities; and expanding court and child welfare system capacity to support continuous, systemic improvement.

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

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

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, removal, 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.

05/08/26 Update: Between February 27 and May 8, 2026, a few examples of JIR activities include:

- Continued work as Immediate Past President for the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (NCJFCJ) and attended multiple Executive and other Committee Meetings
- Participated in monthly National CASA Judicial Leadership Council
- Attended Texas Center for the Judiciary Regional Conference, April 20-21, Galveston
- Chaired the Children's Commission Systems Improvement Committee Meeting, April 16, Virtual
- Attended NCJFCJ Juvenile Justice Conference, March 13-18, Minneapolis
- Chaired Task Force on Evidentiary Issues Meetings, March 11, March 25, April 8, April 22, Virtual; May 6, Austin
- Attended Juvenile Justice Committee Meetings, March 6, April 13, Virtual
- Chaired the Trial Skills Faculty Meeting, March 3, Virtual
- 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.

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

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 established 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 entitled *Building a Network of Trauma Informed Courts in Texas* on the work of these four courts, which was done in collaboration with the Children’s Commission. The four pilot court judges serve as mentors to participating judges. The Consortium convenes for bi-monthly MCLE presentations. Commission staff provide meeting support; continuing legal education credit, TBLS credit, and family violence hour credit as appropriate; and related online resources. Resources related to trauma-informed and trauma-responsive practices are updated regularly on www.TraumalInformedTexas.com.

05/08/26 Update: The Consortium on Trauma Informed Court Practices convened on March 13, 2026 for an MCLE entitled “How Parent Mentor Programs Support Positive Permanency in Child Welfare Cases.” Presenters Ms. Tiffany Maggret, founder and director of One Hope Village, and Heather, a parent with lived experience in a child welfare case and a graduate of the One Hope Village’s Parent Mentor Program discussed how Parent Mentor Programs provide support to parents experiencing the child welfare system, how parent mentor programs are structured and sustained, and how they can facilitate positive permanency outcomes in child welfare cases. Discussion also focused on how participating judges could work with local child welfare partners to create and sustain a parent mentor program in their communities.

Additionally, Commission staff participate in the Cross Systems Trauma-Informed Care (CSTIC) Initiative Workgroup at the Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC). Members are representatives from state agencies who are working on implementing trauma-informed practices in their agencies.

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

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

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 into 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.

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.

05/08/26 Update: 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. The most recent Steering Committee meeting took place on April 15, 2026. Discussion centered on expansion into additional DFPS Region 8B counties and how to fill existing capacity throughout the State. On April 28, 2026, the Commission hosted a meeting with Denton County judges, attorneys, and advocates to address expansion of the pilot into this additional Region 3W county.

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’s work.

05/08/26 Update: 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 2026. 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 experienced foster care as they navigate higher education. The workgroup continues to meet as needed.

The FC&Ed Data Subcommittee last met on April 7, 2026, to discuss the annual data exchange between DFPS and TEA. The subcommittee meets regularly to discuss 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: Create resources that address the unique needs of sub-populations of children and youth who experience foster care, such as victims of child sexual abuse.

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 better support children and youth who are at high risk of being subjected to sexual abuse or commercial sexual exploitation.

05/08/26 Update: A 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 April 6, 2026 to finalize the resource. The Commission staff is currently working on a design for the resource and anticipates it will be available this Summer.

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, managing all invitations, RSVPs, travel reimbursements, preparing a meeting agenda and related materials, supporting the moderator, and producing a written report within about 4 to 6 months following the Round Table event.

05/08/26 Update: There are no updates during this reporting period.

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 support 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 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.

05/08/26 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 next PCFC meeting will take place on May 14, 2026. 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.

The Children's Commission will also host an in-person Judges' Meeting on Community-Based Care in DFPS Region 3E, which includes Collin, Dallas, Ellis, Fannin, Grayson, Hunt, Kaufman, Navarro, and Rockwall Counties on May 15, 2026 in McKinney. A related attorney meeting is scheduled on May 7, 2026 via Zoom. These discussions are designed to engage legal professionals and provide a solutions-oriented approach to the receivership process in the region.

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. Informed by input from the Juvenile Justice Committee, the Children’s Commission requested an exceptional item to expand its work to include juvenile justice. The 89th Regular Legislature provided funding for additional capacity at the Children’s Commission to support judges and attorneys handling juvenile justice matters.

05/08/26 Update: Registration is now open for the inaugural Judicial Conference on Juvenile Justice (JCJJ). It will be a first-of-its-kind conference designed exclusively for Texas judges who preside over juvenile justice cases. JCJJ will take place in Round Rock, Texas on August 17-18, 2026. JCJJ will include 11 hours of training total; MCLE and TBLS credit will be requested. Sessions will be tailored to focus on judicial practice and will include the following topics: juvenile crime trends, determinate sentence and certification cases, specialty courts for juveniles, risk-need-responsivity, sex offenses, engaging parents/guardians, juvenile boards, an update from leadership at the Texas Juvenile Justice Department (TJJD), and a moderated judicial discussion.

The Juvenile Justice Committee continues to meet regularly to provide insight on the development of the judicial conference and to share updates on what is occurring juvenile courts across Texas.

Additionally, the Children’s Commission is partnering with the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) to feature content on dual status youth at the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) Foster Youth Conference. Commission staff will attend the conference on July 14, 2026 in Allen, Texas.

Lastly, Commission staff met with staff from The Council of State Governments Justice Center on April 20, 2026 to explore other opportunities for funding and technical assistance for juvenile justice initiatives. The next meeting is scheduled for May 11, 2026.

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 ensure that court proceedings safeguard due process, promote child and family engagement, and produce quality legal representation outcomes for the children and families involved.

05/08/26 Update: The LRC met on April 17, 2026. The committee discussed the pre-petition legal representation survey report and concluded that the data are best put to use by organizations that are actively involved in the pre-petition effort, such as the Family Early Defense Network. The LRC will revisit the issue in the future if there is a need for additional involvement by the committee. The main area of focus for the remainder of FY2026 and into FY2027 will be attorney recruitment and retention in child welfare law. The committee identified potential strategies to support targeted recruitment such as: identifying attorneys from other legal fields (appellate, criminal, corporate, family law areas) through local lawyer groups and bar associations to generate awareness of child welfare law; offering to appear at CLE events to explain what attorneys do in this area of law, and identifying through the State Bar Child Protection Law Section or through the Texas Board of Legal Specialization attorneys who could speak in different areas of the state to present an introductory course or produce a professional promotional video highlighting child welfare law practice. These ideas are all being considered by the LRC in furtherance of this ongoing effort.

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

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

Background: Though the Texas Family Code requires attorneys for parents and children 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.

05/08/26 Update: The Standards Committee is currently drafting standards for attorneys representing children. The committee most recently met in person on February 5-6, 2026 in San Antonio to continue drafting Phase 3 (Preparatory), and Phase 7 Permanent Managing Conservatorship (PMC). The full committee will meet next on September 16-17, 2026 in person.

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

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

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 attorneys who successfully pass the exam.

05/08/26 Update: Applications for the 2026 Child Welfare Board Certification Exam closed on April 30, 2026. Six individuals applied for certification. Applicants will be notified this summer of their eligibility to take the fall exam, which will take place over a two-day period in October 2026. 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 Workgroup, 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, 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.

05/08/26 Update: The Parent Resource Workgroup developed the outline for a webinar entitled “Representing Incarcerated Parents” which was hosted by the Children’s Commission on April 30, 2026. Additionally, a subcommittee of Parent Resource Workgroup members will review and develop updates to the Parent Resource Guide (PRG). The subcommittee’s first meeting will take place on May 28, 2026.

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.

The Family Helpline continues to address a critical gap in legal services for families navigating child welfare issues by providing legal information to individuals at all stages of CPS involvement, including investigations, Family-Based Safety Services (FBSS), conservatorship cases, and post-case concerns. The Helpline also serves relatives and caregivers who often play key roles in children's lives but may lack access to legal guidance. While a small portion of callers are represented by counsel, the vast majority are unrepresented and face barriers such as financial limitations, geographic isolation, or limited access to legal resources.

05/08/26 Update: From October 1, 2025, through March 31, 2026, the Helpline completed 764 calls, assisting 649 adults and impacting 1,278 children. Calls originated from 107 Texas counties, along with 28 out-of-state inquiries related to DFPS matters, demonstrating the program's broad reach.

Caller demographics reflect the populations most affected by DFPS involvement, with approximately 78% of callers identifying as parents, 18% as relatives, 3% as unrelated individuals, and less than 2% as youth. Among callers with questions about open CPS cases (76% of calls), the majority were in the investigation stage (58%), followed by Temporary Managing Conservatorship (25%), Family-Based Safety Services (8%), and smaller percentages across other stages. Among callers not currently involved in an open case, most questions related to closed cases, child safety concerns, or general family law issues.

Child Protective Investigations remained the most frequently discussed topic, raised in approximately 74% of all calls. Callers at various stages of DFPS involvement continued to seek clarification regarding investigation findings, potential future involvement, and how investigation outcomes may affect ongoing 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.

05/08/26 Update: Commission staff attended monthly ICWA meetings hosted by DFPS on March 19 and April 16, 2026. A new component to the monthly meetings includes a presentation by DFPS to the tribes. The March meeting included a "CPS 101" presentation, and the April meeting included a presentation entitled "Better Understanding Child Protective Investigations." Commission staff also attended an ICWA and Tribal-State Agreement Refresher Course hosted at the Ysleta Del Sur Pueblo on April 17, 2026, and provided an ICWA Primer presentation to Texas CASA by request on April 22, 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.

05/08/26 Update: The 2026 Child Welfare Law Bench Book Advisory Committee convened on May 1, 2026. The Bench Book will be updated based on recommendations from the Advisory Committee and feedback from the judiciary in the coming months. The updated version will be shared in print at the October 2026 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 distributing the tool kits to ensure they are readily available to practitioners.

05/08/26 Update: Both the Tool Kit for Attorneys Representing Parents and Children and the Tool Kit for Attorneys Representing DFPS are in the final editing stages and are projected to be available as free, downloadable PDFs for print, and as an online interactive resource on LawBox this Summer. The Commission plans to distribute printed copies of the tool kits at future child welfare training events, including the State Bar of Texas Advanced Family Law Course Child Abuse and Neglect Workshop in August.

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

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

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.

05/08/26 Update: The Caregiver Notice Workgroup convened on April 6, 2026 for an initial meeting. The workgroup was formed to support implementation of recommendations from the Texas PIP and the Children’s Commission November 2025 Roundtable Meeting, which identified caregiver notice and participation in court hearings as an area in need of improvement.

The workgroup’s charge is to develop and implement solutions to improve caregiver notice and engagement, including a judicial bench card, stakeholder training, and methods to track caregiver presence and participation in hearings. Initial discussion focused on barriers to caregiver participation, including timely notice, access to hearings, and clarity regarding the caregiver’s role, as well as the need to establish baseline data measures.

These efforts are intended to complement ongoing work related to hearing notification, including the Notice and Engagement system, which continues to expand. In FY2026, 147 new users signed up (from October 1, 2025 to present), bringing the total number of users to 2,720. To date this fiscal year, the system sent 10,613 hearing notifications in child welfare cases.

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

Background: This new strategy is designed to facilitate a focus on educating judges and enhancing attorney best practices early in a child welfare case. A narrowly tailored service plan is essential to the success of parents' efforts to address the safety concerns that led to the removal of their children from the home. By addressing issues specific to each parent in the unique circumstances of the case, narrowly tailored plans can also increase parental engagement, reduce fatigue and financial burden, improve targeted skills, and avoid "box-checking" of service plan requirements. Increased legal and judicial understanding of the importance of specific plans will serve to facilitate positive permanency and support family reunification.

05/08/26 Update: The Service Planning Workgroup includes judges, DFPS and SSCC representatives, court-appointed attorneys who represent parents and children, County/District Attorneys, CASA, and a parent with lived experience. The workgroup's first meeting took place on April 30, 2026, with introductions and high-level discussions of the scope, mission, and timeline of the project. Workgroup members also identified various systemic issues, concerns, and potential solutions to improve service planning throughout the State.

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

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

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.

05/08/26 Update: The Mediation Workgroup meets on an *ad hoc* basis. There are no updates during this reporting period.

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

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

Background: 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 impact the child welfare system. The purpose of the committee is to provide a forum to discuss judicial considerations on changes to child welfare law, policy, and rule.

05/08/26 Update: There are no updates during this reporting period.

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 and execute the upcoming annual Child Welfare Judges Conference (CWJC) as well as to begin the initial planning for the following fiscal year’s 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.

05/08/26 Update: In partnership with the Texas Center for the Judiciary, the Children’s Commission will host the Commission’s 19th annual Child Welfare Judges Conference on October 26-28, 2026 in Georgetown, Texas. Based on feedback from the 2025 conference and input from the CWJC Curriculum Committee, Commission staff have developed the conference agenda, refined the topics, and identified potential speakers. Commission staff are in the process of confirming speakers and plan to provide 15 sessions of Continuing Judicial Education, including Family Violence credits and ethics hours. A national keynote speaker has been confirmed.

The Children’s Commission will partner with DFPS staff to provide county level data at the conference for up to 13 concurrent regional breakouts (see additional information below). Additionally, this year’s conference will offer breakouts related to the regional status of Community-Based Care. Other planned topics are “A View from the Appellate Bench;” addressing mental health and behavioral health challenges for parents and youth and young adults; an OCA Update; a DFPS Leadership Update; a presentation on statewide data trends; a panel on Research-Driven Therapies; and a panel on Dual Status Youth.

Children’s Commission and TCJ staff communicate regularly to plan details for the conference.

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 over half of all Texas counties.

05/08/26 Update: This year the Commission will offer an in-person training for the Child Protection Court judges and their court coordinators, known as the Child Protection Court Convening, on July 15-17, 2026, in Round Rock, Texas. This training is planned and hosted in partnership with OCA.

Based on feedback from the 2025 conference and input from the CPC Convening Curriculum Committee, Commission staff developed the conference agenda, refined the topics, and contacted speakers. The curriculum will include several joint sessions for the CPC judges and coordinators on topics which are germane to both audiences, as well as separate training tracks for each group. Commission staff will plan the joint sessions as well as the judicial curriculum, and OCA will design training tailored for the court coordinators. A moderated discussion of current issues is planned for each group. The curriculum will provide Continuing Judicial Education, TBLS, family violence, and ethics hours. Confirmed speakers include members of the judiciary, TIDC staff, and OCA staff. A national keynote speaker has been confirmed.

Commission staff met with the Children's Courts Program Manager on April 23, 2026 and will continue to meet regularly to plan details for the conference.

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 are recruited and trained at each event. Extensive internal and external Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) process and outcome evaluation is involved with each event.

05/08/26 Update: The Fall 2026 Trial Skills Training will focus on Contested Hearing Practices. It will consist of two half days of virtual instruction and 2.5 days of in-person instruction during the month of September 2026 in San Marcos, Texas. The Commission accepted applications for the training throughout the month of April and will notify applicants of participant selections by late May 2026. The Trial Skills Training Faculty convened in March 2026 to begin planning for an advanced course offering in 2027. A subcommittee of the faculty will convene to further develop proposed course materials for the full faculty's consideration.

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's podcast entitled Children's Commission Conversations provides readily available education on child welfare matters, including law, policy, and practice. Podcast episodes feature informal discussions with experts on key topics in child welfare. Each episode provides education and practical insights to inform and support judges, attorneys, and others who serve Texas children, youth, and families involved in the child welfare system.

05/08/26 Update: On March 31, 2026, the Children's Commission hosted a webinar entitled "Representing Deaf Clients in Child Welfare Cases." This webinar covered best practices for representing deaf clients throughout a child welfare case. On April 30, 2026, the Children's Commission hosted a webinar entitled "Representing Incarcerated Parents in Child Welfare Cases." This webinar focused on legal considerations and best practices for representing incarcerated clients throughout a child welfare case.

The Commission's podcast episodes are posted on the Commission's website and are available on Spotify and Apple. The most recent episode focuses on navigating the attorney-client relationship when representing DFPS. A complete list of episodes can be found on the Children's Commission [Conversations webpage](#).

30. Strategy: Partner with statewide 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. 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 half-day "101" course offerings, 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 TDCAA to provide training for attorneys representing DFPS.

05/08/26 Update: The State Bar of Texas Child Protection Law (CPL) Section hosted their annual 101 and Advanced Child Protection Law Course offerings on April 8-10, 2026 in Georgetown, Texas. In addition to the traditional CPL 101 course, a 101 Child Welfare Appeals course was added this year and ran concurrently with the CPL 101 training. Both of the 101 offerings on April 8, 2026 had approximately 50 registrants, and the Advanced Course held on April 9-10, 2026 had approximately 200 registrants. The Children's Commission provided registration scholarships for all three course offerings.

The 2026 Child Abuse and Neglect CLE (CAN Workshop) will take place on August 12, 2026, in San Antonio.

The course agenda and registration information is available on the TexasBarCLE website. The Children's Commission will provide registration scholarships for this course.

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 Children's Commission 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 relays pertinent child welfare related information and reaches over 3,300 attorneys, judges, court staff, and stakeholders. All letters are available on the Children's Commission website.

05/08/26 Update: Several examples of Jurist in Residence (JIR) Letters and Children's Commission Resource Letters issued between February 20, 2026 and April 27, 2026, include:

- 4/27/26: [Reminder: Fall 2026 Contested Hearing Practices Course Application Deadline is Thursday, April 30, 2026](#)
- 4/23/26: [May Webinar: Representing Children in Child Welfare Cases](#)
- 4/16/2026, Jurist in Residence Letter: [Save the Date: 2026 Child Welfare Judges Conference](#)
- 4/2/2026: [Trial Skills Training Opportunity: Fall 2026 Contested Hearing Practices Course](#)
- 4/1/2026: [Kinship Support & Licensing Information Services](#)
- 3/30/2026, Jurist in Residence Letter: [Casey Family Program's Texas Judicial Leadership Convening](#)
- 3/19/2026: [April Webinar: Representing Incarcerated Clients in Child Welfare Cases](#)
- 3/12/2026: [Office of Community-Based Care Transition Survey](#)
- 3/10/2026: [Jurist in Residence Letter: Judicial Scholarship Opportunity: NCJFCJ 89th Annual National Conference](#)
- 3/4/2026: [Now Available: Pre-petition Legal Representation Report and Caregiver Roundtable Report](#)
- 2/26/2026: [March Webinar: Representing Deaf Clients in Child Welfare Cases](#)
- 2/20/2026: [Attorney Scholarships to TexasBarCLE's Child Protection Law Courses](#)

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 (NCJFCJ) 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.

05/08/26 Update:

The Advanced Child Protection Law Conference: The State Bar of Texas CPL Section hosted its 8th Annual Advanced Child Protection Law Course on April 8-10. The Commission awarded 41 registration scholarships for qualified attorneys to attend the live “101” and Advanced courses and to watch any scheduled webcast replays.

National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges Training: The NCJFCJ 89th Annual Conference will take place on July 19-22, 2026, in Nashville, Tennessee. The Commission awarded 8 reimbursement scholarships to qualified judges.

Advanced Family Law One-Day Child Abuse and Neglect Workshop: The Child Abuse and Neglect One-Day Workshop will be held on August 12, 2026 in San Antonio, Texas. The Commission plans to award scholarships to qualified attorneys.

Attorney Scholarship Request: The attorney scholarship provides funds for reimbursement to attorneys for conference registration fees to attend recognized local, regional, and state trainings related to the practice of child welfare law, outside of the trainings that are already addressed by current Commission scholarships. The Commission continues to provide this opportunity for qualified attorneys.

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 awarded one scholarship to the Rise26 Conference, which will take place on July 20-23, 2026 in Nashville, Tennessee. The Commission continues to provide this opportunity for qualified judges.

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

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

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, county, and regional jurisdictions will help the Commission to expand its capacity to meet requests for training support, provide tailored trainings to attorneys and judges in their own 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 the Legal Training Support opportunity. 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.

05/08/26 Update: Commission staff provided legal training support for the Grimes County Child Welfare Course held in Navasota, Texas on February 26, 2026. The Commission assisted with agenda planning, venue fees, MCLE application, and speaker travel reimbursements for this hybrid event. The course had a total of 39 registrants, and it covered topics including the Statutory Duties and Responsibilities of Attorneys Representing Children and Parents, an ICWA Primer, Case Law Update, Motions Practice, PAL Benefits, Programs, and Resources for Older Youth in Care, and a panel moderated by Hon. Andrea James, Associate Judge of the Second Region Child Protection Court No.2, on “Thinking Outside the Box” to work towards better outcomes for children and families. The course was approved by the State Bar of Texas for a total of 6.25 hours of MCLE, with 1.5 hours of ethics, and was approved for TBSL certification and recertification legal education hours in the

practice areas of Child Welfare Law and Family Law.

Commission staff also provided legal training support to the Corpus Christi Bar Association for their child welfare training held on March 6, 2026. Assistance was provided in the form of identifying speakers to provide a case law update and a presentation on handling secondary trauma and burnout. The Commission also provided speaker travel reimbursements for identified speakers.

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 Commission’s commitment to Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI). This strategy will also supplement any standalone data projects.

05/08/26 Update: At the April 14, 2026 Data Committee Meeting, the committee built on prior discussions regarding permanency practices and data-informed decision-making. The Committee discussed how existing data sources, including CFSR findings and the judicial survey responses, can inform the development of practical, court-facing resources. The Committee discussed the potential use of a permanency goal reassessment tool, including the possibility of testing the tool in select courts. The Committee also considered how data may support related efforts, including caregiver notice projects and potential court observation work conducted by other commission workgroups.

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 corollate with the changes made to the Family Code or to DFPS policy.

05/08/26 Update: At the April 14, 2026 committee meeting, DFPS provided an overview of the February 2026 CFSR Data Profile, including updates on permanency measures, safety outcomes, and ongoing data quality efforts. The presentation included discussion of key permanency indicators, such as permanency within 12 months and outcomes for children who have been in care for extended periods, as well as measures related to recurrence of maltreatment and placement stability. DFPS also provided context regarding recent data quality efforts and noted that updated methodologies may result in changes to previously reported performance measures as historical data is refreshed. The Committee discussed the role of these data points in informing broader conversations regarding permanency outcomes and system performance.

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

36. Strategy: Analyze data collected during the Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) to develop targeted strategies aimed at improving permanency outcomes for children.

Background: The Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) includes permanency measures that examine whether permanency goals remain appropriate to a child’s circumstances over time and whether children achieve permanency within expected timeframes. CFSR findings have identified recurring themes related to

delays in achieving permanency, including delays in changing permanency goals when circumstances warrant and systemic factors that contribute to children remaining in foster care longer than necessary. Reviewing CFSR permanency data allows the Children's Commission and the Data Committee to better understand factors affecting timeliness to permanency and to consider data-informed approaches that may support courts in addressing delays and promoting appropriate permanency outcomes for children in foster care.

05/08/26 Update: At the meeting on April 14, 2026, the Data Committee discussed the February 2026 CFSR data profile, including how Texas compares to national performance. Conversation focused on the continued appropriateness of permanency goals over time, factors associated with delays in achieving permanency, and how CFSR data, in combination with other information, may inform the development of resources to support courts. The committee will build on these insights as it considers practical tools and guidance to promote timely and appropriate permanency outcomes.

37. Strategy: Partner with DFPS to provide tailored data presentations on state, regional, and local challenges and opportunities and encourage data-driven systemic improvements and collaborative efforts.

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 DFPS staff as well as Single Source Continuum Contractors responsible for case management and placement in Community-Based Care areas to discuss region-specific data elements and permanency outcomes.

05/08/26 Update: The October 2026 Child Welfare Judges Conference Regional Breakouts will incorporate feedback from the 2025 conference and the 2026 Curriculum Committee members in order to increase gains in knowledge and facilitate higher-level discussion and problem-solving. Jurisdictional data will be gathered by DFPS and shared with judicial attendees and SSCC representatives prior to the CWJC so that they might prepare for their Regional Breakout discussion. This year, the discussions will be judicially-led and will start with a focus on regional data and improving outcomes before continuing to discuss priority regional issues that have been identified prior to the conference by judicial registrants. These judicial discussions with 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 identify possible ways to continue to facilitate improved outcomes in these areas.

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

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

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.

05/08/26 Update: Work on identifying a new specialty courts case management system continues to move forward. OCA held several meetings with subject matter experts to inform and refine system requirements, with additional meetings scheduled in May 2026. These efforts are expected to bring the requirements phase to completion and position the project for the next stage of development.

INSERT - TAB 4

**Children's Commission
Fiscal Year 2026 Financial Report**

FISCAL YEAR 2026 FEDERAL/STATE REVENUE

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

FISCAL YEAR 2026 EXPENDITURES

	Budget	Expenses To-date	Anticipated Expenditures
Operating	\$ 1,556,818	\$ 680,974	\$ 875,844
Commission Projects	\$ 577,200	\$ 33,432	\$ 543,768
<i>Systems Improvement</i>	\$ 157,000	\$ 8,703	\$ 148,297
<i>Legal Practice and Process</i>	\$ 74,700	\$ 16,138	\$ 58,562
<i>Training</i>	\$ 292,500	\$ 8,590	\$ 283,910
<i>Juvenile Justice</i>	\$ 53,000	\$ -	\$ 53,000
Scholarships	\$ 67,500	\$ 4,647	\$ 64,553
<i>Appellate Law Section Boot Camp</i>	\$ 7,500	\$ 885	\$ 6,615
<i>Child Protection Law Section</i>	\$ 12,500	\$ -	\$ 12,500
<i>General Attorney Scholarship</i>	\$ 5,000	\$ -	\$ 5,000
<i>General Judicial Scholarship</i>	\$ 5,000	\$ -	\$ 5,000
<i>NCJFCJ - Judicial Scholarship</i>	\$ 30,000	\$ 3,762	\$ 26,238
<i>State Bar CAN CLE</i>	\$ 7,500	\$ -	\$ 7,500
Grants	\$ 546,322	\$ 183,522	\$ 362,800
<i>DFPS Regional Attorney Training Support</i>	\$ 12,000	\$ -	\$ 12,000
<i>TACFS - Data</i>	\$ 83,364	\$ 12,387	\$ 70,977
<i>Texas Center for the Judiciary (TCJ)</i>	\$ 239,996	\$ 129,451	\$ 110,545
<i>Texas Indigent Defense Commission</i>	\$ 130,962	\$ -	\$ 130,962
<i>TLSC Family Helpline</i>	\$ 80,000	\$ 41,684	\$ 38,316
	\$ 2,747,840	\$ 902,574	\$ 1,846,966

CURRENT FINANCIAL STATUS

Funds Available for FY 2026	\$	4,547,323
(-) Fiscal Year 2026 Expenditures to Date	\$	(902,574)
(-) FY2026 Anticipated Expenditures	\$	(1,846,966)
Estimated Carry Forward FY 2027	\$	1,797,783

