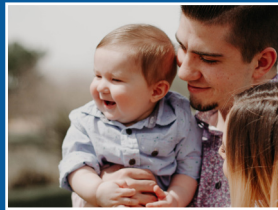




Children's Commission

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



Children's Commission Meeting Notebook

November 6, 2026

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

November 6, 2026

Meeting Notebook
Table of Contents

Meeting Agenda

Commission, Committee, and Collaborative Council Member List.....1

Minutes from September 18, 2026 Commission Meeting.....2

Fiscal Year 2027 Strategic Plan.....3

Financial Report4



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

Friday, November 6, 2026

9:30 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.

Virtual Meeting

Meeting Agenda

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- | | |
|-------|---|
| 9:30 | Commencement / Opening Remarks |
| | First Order of Business – Adopt Minutes from September 18, 2026 |
| 9:45 | Children's Commission Projects |
| 10:15 | Department of Family & Protective Services Update |
| 10:45 | Office of Court Administration Update |
| 11:15 | Collaborative Council Announcements |
| 11:30 | New Business / Adjourn |

Meeting Schedule:

- February 5, 2027 (In person) from 9:30 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.
- May 7, 2027 (Virtual) from 9:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.
- Sept 17, 2027 (In person) from 9:30 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.
- November 5, 2027 (Virtual) from 9:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.

INSERT - TAB 1

CHILDREN'S COMMISSION MEMBERS

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

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, <i>Deputy Chair</i>	Chantel Bedlington	Mary A. Alvarez	Mary Abbott	Hon. David Barkley
Hon. Susan Brown	Dr. Gary Blau	Mark Briggs	Hon. Mark Atkinson	Chelsea Cornelius
Hon. Rob Hofmann	Adrianna Cuéllar Rojas	Pam Delgado	Megan Barcak	Nathan Ezell
Hon. Piper McCraw	Lana Estevilla	Cindy Dyar	Barbara Elias-Perciful	Dr. Monica Faulkner
Hon. Thomas Stuckey	Anna Saldaña Ford	Hon. Charles Griffin	Hon. Angela Graves-Harrington	Hon. Delia Gonzales
	Olivia Longoria	Michelle Latray	Margaret Halpin	Dr. Catherine LaBrenz
<i>Staff:</i>	Hon. Leigh Mathews Rodriguez	Crystal Leff-Piñon	Judy Powell	Hon. James Mosley
<i>Jamie Bernstein</i>	Katherine McAnally	Amanda Lockhart	Kellie Price	Hon. Jamie Rawlinson
<i>Patrick Passmore</i>	Gabriella McDonald	Daphny Milligan	Andrea Requesnes	Julie Shores
	Emily Miller	<i>Staff:</i>	Julliana Reyes	Denise Smith
	Carol Self	<i>Scott Cooley</i>	Britny Rocha-Mendoza	Vicki Spriggs
	Hon. Ian Spechler	<i>Brenda Kinsler</i>	Hon. Randy Shelton	Sub Uppaluri
	AD Tincopa	<i>Renée Castillo-De La Cruz</i>	Milani Smith	
	Sarah Worthington		Hon. Elizabeth Watkins	<i>Staff:</i>
	<i>Staff:</i>			<i>Brenda Kinsler</i>
	<i>Milbrey Raney</i>		<i>Staff:</i>	<i>Jamie Bernstein</i>
	<i>Elizabeth Schmidt</i>		<i>Renée Castillo-De La Cruz</i>	<i>OCA Advisory:</i>
	<i>Chelsea Martinez</i>		<i>Milbrey Raney</i>	<i>Alejandra Peña</i>
			<i>Andrea Vicencio</i>	<i>Brittany Creech</i>

COLLABORATIVE COUNCIL MEMBERS

Erin Argue	Julia Hatcher	Kellie Pittman
Kristene Blackstone	Catherine Henning	Judy Powell
Andrew Brown	Kerrie Judice	Tanya Rollins
Sheryl Draker	Norman Ladd	Elizabeth Stephens
Barbara Elias-Perciful	Gabriella McDonald	Johana Scot
Dr. Monica Faulkner	Dr. Jill McLeigh	Denise Smith
Mike Foster	Hollie Mims	Andrea Sparks
Fedora Galasso	Kate Murphy	Amanda Vasquez
Barbra Grimmer	Alexandra Mylius	Britt Viebrock
	Ana O'Quin	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, September 18, 2026

9:30 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.

ATTENDANCE

Commissioners	Attended	Did Not Attend
<i>Chair</i> , Hon. Debra Lehrmann, Senior Justice, Supreme Court of Texas, Austin	✓	
<i>Deputy Chair</i> , Hon. Kyle Hawkins, Justice, Supreme Court of Texas, Austin		✓
Hon. Rosie Alvarado, Judge, 438 th District Court, San Antonio		✓
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	✓	
Yolanda Cortez-Mares, Chair, State Bar of Texas Child Protection Law Section, Austin		✓
Sheila Craig, Strategic Consultant, Austin	✓	
Lana Estevilla, Associate Commissioner for Child Protective Services, Texas Department of Family and Protective Services, Austin	✓	
Hon. Roy Ferguson, Special/Private/Visiting Judge, Arbitrator, and Mediator for Family Law and Civil Cases, 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, 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 Liaison, Department of Family and Protective Services, 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, Vice President, Grants, The Rees-Jones Foundation, Dallas		✓
Hon. Thomas Stuckey, Associate Judge, Centex Child Protection Court South, Seguin	✓	
Michelle Thompson-Janis, Director, Department of Social Services, Alabama-Coushatta Tribe of Texas	✓	
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

Camille DiGaimo, Law Clerk, Texas RioGrande Legal Aid
 Dr. Monica Faulkner, Director, Texas Institute for Child & Family Wellbeing, University of Texas at Austin
 Hon. Marisa Flores, Judge, 224th Civil District Court
 Lauren Lacefield Lewis, Special Projects Director, Texas Department of Family and Protective Services
 Vince Leibowitz, Legislative Director, Office of Hon. Royce West, Texas Senate, District 23, Dallas
 Gabriella McDonald, Deputy Director, Texas Appleseed

Anne Nagelkirk, Chief External Relations Officer, Texas CASA
Audrey O'Neill, Commissioner, Texas Department of Family and Protective Services
Ana O'Quin, Public Policy Director, Texas CASA
Andrew Powers, Operational Planning Manager for State Hospital Capacity, Health and Human Services
Kellie Price, Attorney at Law, Kellie Price Law, PLLC
Dee Smith, Intern, TexProtects
Denise Smith, Resource Coordinator, Texas Grandparents Raising Grandchildren
Sarah Worthington, Director, Texas Foster Youth Justice Project

Attending Collaborative Council Members

Kristen Bell, Director of Training and Operations, Texas Lawyers for Children
Sheryl Draker, Adoptive Parent
Mike Foster, Founder, Foster Angels
Barbra Grimmer, Child Welfare Policy Coordinator, Texas Council on Family Violence
Julia Hatcher, President, Texas Association of Family Defense Attorneys
Catherine Henning, Director of External Relations, Children's Advocacy Centers of Texas
Kerrie Judice, Director of Policy and Advocacy, TexProtects
Hollie Mims, Director of Operations and Stakeholder Engagement, DFPS Office of Community Based Care Transition
Alexandra Mylius, Executive Director, First3Years
Kellie Pittman, President, Texas Foster Family Association
Amanda Vasquez, Division Chief of Program Innovation, Child Support Division, Texas Office of the Attorney General
Britt Viebrock, Program Success Manager, National Angels

Office of Court Administration Staff

Kim Benitez, Director, Specialty Courts Division
Brittany Creech, Children's Courts Program Liaison
Megan LaVoie, Administrative Director

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
Elizabeth Schmidt, Juvenile Justice Staff Attorney
Milbrey Raney, Assistant Director
Willette Sedwick, Accountant
Andrea Vicencio, Program Specialist

CALL TO ORDER AND OPENING REMARKS

Justice Debra Lehrmann called the meeting to order at 9:46 a.m. and welcomed everyone to the September Children's Commission meeting. Justice Lehrmann extended her gratitude to all in attendance for contributing their time and insights to today's meeting. She also shared regrets on behalf of Justice Kyle Hawkins who was unable to attend the meeting due to an unavoidable conflict.

Commission, Committee, and Staff Member Changes

Justice Lehrmann welcomed two new Commissioners to the Children's Commission, Ms. Lana Estevilla, Associate Commissioner for Child Protective Services and Ms. Yolanda Cortes-Mares, Chair of the Child Protection Law Section of the State Bar of Texas.

Justice Lehrmann shared her appreciation for the years of service on the Commission contributed by Judge Rosie Alvarado and Ms. Sheila Craig, both of whom will roll off the Commission. Justice Lehrmann presented Ms. Craig with a certificate signed by the Supreme Court of Texas to thank her for her service and Judge Alvarado was honored in absentia.

Justice Lehrmann announced that Ms. Regina Anderson, Mr. Kenneth Thompson, and Mr. Marcus Crosby left their positions and will roll off the Legal Practice and Process Committee. She also reported that Ms. Stephanie Madrigal and Ms. Susan Ramirez have rolled off the Collaborative Council and Ms. Alexandra Mylius and Ms. Britt Viebrock will continue to represent those organizations on the council.

Adoption of May 8, 2026 Meeting Minutes

Justice Lehrmann directed members to the May 8, 2026 Commission Meeting Minutes behind Tab 2 of the Meeting Notebook.

ACTION: Justice Lehrmann asked if there were any changes to the minutes as written. Hearing none, after a motion and second, the Commissioners voted to adopt the minutes for the May 8, 2026 Children's Commission meeting.

CHILDREN'S COMMISSION UPDATE

Ms. Jamie Bernstein introduced the proposed strategic plan for the upcoming year and noted that Commission staff will provide an overview of each strategy and related project envisioned for FY 2027. Key highlights are included below.

Regarding the Commission's strategies on collaboration, Ms. Bernstein shared that the Commission would continue to meet on a quarterly basis, alternating in person and online. Ms. Milbrey Raney added that the Collaborative Council is the Children's Commission's advisory body where members share local, regional, and statewide issues that impact attorney and judicial practices in child welfare cases. The Commission hosted the Council's annual meeting earlier this morning, where members shared their top priorities for the coming fiscal year. The bi-weekly calls and annual meeting are part of the Commission's ongoing effort to provide consistent opportunities for collaboration with child welfare partners.

Ms. Bernstein reported that the Commission recently updated the Children's Commission website, with notable changes including a new webpage dedicated to resources for Parents, Caregivers, and Youth as well as the reorganization of the training materials so judges can directly link to the bench book and toolkits. Additionally, in an effort to reach a wider audience, the

Commission will expand its social media presence on the following platforms: Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, X, and YouTube.

Regarding Systems Improvement strategies, Ms. Raney announced that the Commission will assemble a workgroup to develop a resource on visitation that will promote a shift to the concept and terminology of “family time.” The workgroup will also identify promising practices that encourage reunification and positive permanency.

Ms. Bernstein reported that under strategy 10, the Foster Care and Education Committee will focus on developing resources related to early childhood education for children age 0-5. Additionally, TEA, DFPS, and the Commission will host the 2026 Foster Care Summit on December 2-3, 2026.

Ms. Bernstein announced that in FY2027, the Commission will partner with the Texas Alliance of Child and Family Services to host a roundtable meeting on Community-Based Care. The goal for the roundtable is to bring judges and Single Source Continuum Contractors together to identify what is working and areas in need of improvement.

Ms. Elizabeth Schmidt shared that the Children’s Commission plans to convene the Juvenile Justice Advisory Council in the fall of FY2027. The council is an advisory body comprised of juvenile justice professionals and subject matter experts from other child and family serving systems across Texas. The purpose of the Advisory Council is to inform the commission of local, regional, and statewide issues that impact attorney and judicial practices in juvenile justice cases. The Children’s Commission will also seek opportunities to partner with other organizations, such as the Judicial Commission on Mental Health, to collaborate and expand outreach to judges and other legal professionals.

Ms. Schmidt shared that in FY2027, the Commission will create webinars that are relevant to juvenile law practice, beginning with an overview of the juvenile justice system in November. The Commission will continue to develop juvenile bench cards and judicial resources.

Regarding the Legal Practice and Process Committee’s goals, Mr. Scott Cooley reported that the Parent Resource Committee will focus on releasing the Prelitigation Guide, providing information for parents and caregivers navigating an investigation by DFPS. The Committee will also produce parent voice videos that will provide information on topics including an introduction to common child welfare legal terms and parents’ rights, what to expect in court, and the attorney-client relationship. Lastly, the committee will update the Parent Resource Guide.

Mr. Cooley announced that the 2026 Bench Book updates are nearly completed, and hard copies of the fully updated version will be released for distribution to judicial attendees at the October 2026 Child Welfare Judges Conference. This year’s Bench Book includes a new bench card on Caregiver Notice and Engagement.

Regarding FY2027 Training Committee strategies, Ms. Raney shared that the 19th annual statewide Child Welfare Judges Conference will be held in late October. The 2026 conference

will feature legal topics such as standards of review; a view from the appellate bench; and addressing unknown or absent parents. Ms. Raney also reported that under strategy 27, Commission staff will continue to host the Child Protection Court Convening in partnership with the Office of Court Administration, with the next event planned as a virtual convening in the summer of 2027.

Ms. Renée Castillo-De La Cruz announced that the Commission will continue to host an annual Trial Skills Training (TST) course and that the TST faculty are developing material for an advanced course offering in FY2027.

Ms. Castillo-De La Cruz shared that under strategy 32 the Children's Commission will continue to offer assistance for proposed community, county, or regional child welfare-related legal training for judges and/or attorneys in the upcoming fiscal year. Commission staff are currently working with the Bexar County Children's Court Attorneys Association on planning their 1st Annual Ad Litem Seminar on October 30, 2026 in San Antonio.

Regarding strategies falling under the Data Committee, Ms. Brenda Kinsler reported that the Data Committee will continue to examine questions related to services provided to children and families in child welfare cases. Some notable areas of focus will be to prioritize the availability of services across different areas of the State, parents' ability to access and complete court-ordered services, and the use of in-home and wraparound services.

Ms. Kinsler shared that in FY2027, the Children's Commission will provide grant funding to the Office of Court Administration for two initiatives designed to support the safety and continuity of Texas Child Protection Court operations. This includes grant funding for GPS-enabled panic buttons for Child Protection Court judges and coordinators who travel throughout multi-county jurisdictions, providing an additional safety measure and supporting continuity of court operations. An additional grant will address the shortage of court reporters for the Child Protection Courts.

Mr. Patrick Passmore guided attendees to the FY2027 budget report behind Tab 4 of the Meeting Notebook. Mr. Passmore noted the 2026 expenditures and estimated carry forward amount. He highlighted that operating expenses are up 8% from 2026 due to the need for updated equipment and the new juvenile justice work conducted by the Commission.

ACTION: After discussion, Justice Lehrmann asked for a motion to approve the projects and associated expenditures. After a motion and second, the Commissioners voted to approve the FY2027 Strategies and Budget.

TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF FAMILY & PROTECTIVE SERVICES (DFPS) UPDATE

Ms. Lana Estevilla shared that as of July 27, 2026 there were no children without placement in DFPS conservatorship. Ms. Estevilla also highlighted that a primary focus for DFPS is the federal initiative known as A Home for Every Child. She detailed that DFPS' approach to this initiative is to strengthen family preservation services through early intervention, expand recruitment and

retention of foster families across Texas, increase the number of verified kinship providers, and use real-time data to identify placement needs for children.

Commissioner Audrey O'Neill noted the emphasis at DFPS on the importance of kinship placement as the first placement after removal. She reported that 83% of children in care are currently placed in home-like settings. Commissioner O'Neill announced that DFPS staff were trained in Hope Science and that she was pleased to learn that Child Protection Court judges and coordinators received a similar presentation on this topic at the July 2026 Child Protection Court Convening.

Commissioner O'Neill shared that like all state agencies, DFPS received instructions for the 90th Legislature to reduce their budget by 3%. As part of DFPS' compliance with this requirement, it will eliminate the Texas Family First (TFF) Pilot Program. Commissioner O'Neill shared that this decision was not made lightly by DFPS and she expressed hope that the program might continue in the future. She announced that DFPS will submit a related exceptional item request to restore the TFF funding. Commissioner O'Neill shared the positive impact of the TFF pilot on families and that she hopes to expand post-permanency programs and Family Group Decision Making resources as well.

Ms. Luanne Southern shared that effective October 1, the medical team at DFPS will be consolidated into one division. Commissioner O'Neill announced that as of November 1, 2026, Empower will transition services to Our Community Our Kids (OCOK) and Texas Family Care Network (TFCN).

PRESENTATION ON TERRELL CENTER FOR YOUTH

Ms. Southern, along with Andrew Powers, Operational Planning Manager for State Hospital Capacity at the Health and Human Services Commission, and Lauren Lacefield Lewis, Director of Special Projects at DFPS, gave a presentation on the recent opening of the Terrell Center for Youth. The Terrell Center for Youth opened on September 1, 2026 to address very high acuity needs, including children without placement. The full update and presentation can be found here: [September 18, 2026 Meeting Materials](#).

OFFICE OF COURT ADMINISTRATION (OCA) UPDATE

Ms. Megan LaVoie announced that with funding from the Legislature, OCA was able to hire Ms. Kim Benitez as OCA's first Specialty Courts Division Director. Ms. LaVoie also shared that OCA recently welcomed Ms. Brittany Creech as the new Children's Courts Program Liaison. Ms. LaVoie reported that OCA is currently finalizing requirements for the specialty courts case management system with a goal for the new system to be in procurement by February 2027.

Regarding OCA's judicial privacy system initiative, Ms. LaVoie stated that OCA is working with the internet security company Ironwall to remove active and retired judges' personal identifying information from the internet. She shared that this service is free of charge for judges and is also available to court staff for a discounted rate.

Ms. LaVoie reported that the Judicial Council met earlier today and made 24 recommendations for the legislative session. Ms. LaVoie highlighted several of the most relevant recommendations for the Commission. The Judicial Council recommended that a permanent COLA increase be established for judges, along with a one-time annuity at retirement for retired judges. The council recommended that OCA establish and fund a statewide appellate managed assigned counsel program that can also provide support to trial attorneys. Lastly, Ms. LaVoie announced that the council would also like to establish a grant program to fund staff attorneys at the trial court level and increase the number of staff attorneys in the courts of appeals.

COLLABORATIVE COUNCIL MEMBER UPDATES

Ms. Kristen Bell with Texas Lawyers for Children (TLC) announced that in an effort to help with recruitment and retention of child welfare attorneys, TLC now hosts regular online “office hours” for attorneys to ask for help, resources, or guidance.

NEW BUSINESS

Judge Hofmann announced that the upcoming 2026 Commission Meeting is scheduled for November 6 (virtual). Judge Hofmann shared the upcoming 2027 Commission Meeting schedule as follows: February 5 (in person), May 7 (virtual), September 17 (in person), and November 5 (virtual).

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 1:32 p.m.

INSERT - TAB 3

GOAL I (COLLABORATION) | ADMINISTER THE COURT IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM (CIP) FUNDS TO ASSESS CURRENT AND FUTURE NEEDS OF THE COURTS, PROVIDE A FORUM FOR MEANINGFUL COLLABORATION, AND IMPROVE COURT PRACTICES IN CHILD WELFARE CASES THROUGHOUT THE STATE.

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

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

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

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

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

3. Strategy: Develop, maintain, and enhance usability and function of the Children's Commission website, social media, print and online materials, and other communication mediums.
4. Strategy: Distribute resource letters that communicate best practices or changes in law, policy, or practice, and inform judges, attorneys, and other interested stakeholders of training opportunities and announcements.

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

5. Strategy: Confer with the Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) on the A Home for Every Child Initiative, Child and Family Service Reviews, A Home for Every Child, Child and Family State Plans, and the Court Improvement Program Strategic Plans.

Objective: Support efforts to strengthen engagement of children, youth, and families.

6. Strategy: Include and engage individuals with lived experience in system improvement efforts.

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

Objective: Encourage judicial leadership to ensure that judges are equipped to make well-informed decisions and conduct hearings that support positive outcomes for families.

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

Objective: Build awareness and capacity in the courts to address complex mental health needs and encourage trauma-informed and trauma-responsive practices in the Texas child welfare system.

8. Strategy: Engage stakeholders within and across systems to address gaps in services for children, youth, and parents with complex mental health needs.

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

9. Strategy: Engage judges and lawyers in systemic efforts to prevent child abuse and neglect, address safety

concerns while maintaining family preservation, promote family time, and encourage timely reunification.

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

10. Strategy: Maintain partnerships between legal, child welfare, and education stakeholders to identify and address the educational needs and goals of children and youth who experience foster care.

Objective: Promote awareness 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.

11. Strategy: Create resources that address the unique needs of certain populations of children and youth who experience foster care.

Objective: Create opportunities to bring together subject matter experts and key decision makers to examine important and urgent issues, and to identify recommendations and solutions.

12. Strategy: Identify critical topics for Roundtable discussions and hold related events as needed.
13. Strategy: Engage stakeholders in the legal system in statewide efforts to develop and expand placement capacity, including kinship care and Community-Based Care.

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

14. Strategy: Prioritize areas in need of improvement in the handling of juvenile justice cases as well as cases involving dual status youth.
15. Strategy: Encourage a juvenile justice system that supports best legal and judicial practices, creates a learning community among juvenile courts, and promotes judicial leadership.

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 children, parents, and DFPS experience high-quality court proceedings.

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

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

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

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.

18. Strategy: Convene a Parent Resource Committee and develop parent resources such as guides to provide information about the child welfare system.

19. Strategy: Support efforts to provide early and reliable access to information and resources for Texas children, youth, and families.

Objective: Strengthen awareness so that Native American children, youth, and families stay connected to their community, customs, and beliefs.

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

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

21. Strategy: Maintain a comprehensive Bench Book for judges hearing child welfare cases.
22. Strategy: Maintain toolkits for attorneys representing children, parents, and DFPS in child welfare cases.

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

23. Strategy: Support increased engagement of children, parents, and caregivers in the court process, including through the use of technology.
24. Strategy: Identify and encourage legal and judicial practices that support narrowly tailored service planning for children and parents.

Objective: Promote awareness and understanding of developments affecting child welfare and juvenile justice proceedings in Texas courts.

25. Strategy: Track changes in law, policy, and court rules to support education and implementation efforts.

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 and juvenile justice communities.

26. Strategy: Plan, fund, conduct, and evaluate judicial training through conferences, online content, and events.
27. Strategy: Support specialized training for the Child Protection Court program, judges, and support staff.

Objective: Provide high-quality training content for attorneys representing children, parents, DFPS, and 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.
29. Strategy: Create and maintain online content that offers information and guidance on relevant child welfare law issues.
30. Strategy: Partner with statewide organizations to offer training opportunities to attorneys who represent children, parents, and DFPS.

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

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

32. Strategy: Provide training and technical assistance to increase local training opportunities for attorneys, judges, and advocates related to child welfare cases.

GOAL V (DATA) | OPERATIONALIZE DATA-DRIVEN DECISION-MAKING THROUGH CONTINUOUS QUALITY IMPROVEMENT AND AN ANALYSIS OF PUBLICLY AVAILABLE CHILD WELFARE AND COURT DATA TO IDENTIFY BOTH STRENGTHS AND AREAS IN NEED OF IMPROVEMENT.

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

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

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

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

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

36. Strategy: Promote court preparedness and continuity of operations in child welfare proceedings during emergencies through the use of technology, training, and other resources.

INSERT - TAB 4

**Children's Commission
Fiscal Year 2027 Financial Report**

FISCAL YEAR 2027 FEDERAL/STATE REVENUE

Estimated Fiscal Year 2026 Federal Carry Forward	\$	2,049,074
(+) Fiscal Year 2027 Federal Distribution	\$	2,738,517
(+) Fiscal Year 2026 UB - State Appropriation	\$	17,718
(+) Fiscal Year 2027 State Appropriation	\$	368,787
Funds Available for FY 2027	\$	5,174,096

FISCAL YEAR 2027 BUDGET

	Budget
Operating	\$ 1,705,003
Commission Projects	\$ 731,239
<i>Systems Improvement</i>	\$ 166,000
<i>Legal Practice and Process</i>	\$ 147,900
<i>Training</i>	\$ 208,500
<i>Juvenile Justice (GR)</i>	\$ 208,839
Scholarships	\$ 103,000
<i>Child Protection Law Section</i>	\$ 20,000
<i>General Attorney Scholarship</i>	\$ 10,000
<i>General Judicial Scholarship</i>	\$ 10,000
<i>NCJFCJ - Judicial Scholarship</i>	\$ 45,000
<i>State Bar CAN CLE</i>	\$ 6,000
<i>TDCAA</i>	\$ 12,000
Grants	\$ 594,651
<i>DFPS: Regional Attorney Training</i>	\$ 12,000
<i>OCA: Court Reporters</i>	\$ 82,500
<i>OCA: GPS Panic Buttons</i>	\$ 12,000
<i>TIDC: Title IV-E</i>	\$ 124,815
<i>TCJ: Judicial Training</i>	\$ 253,336
<i>TLSC: Family Helpline</i>	\$ 80,000
<i>TRLA: Foster Youth Justice Project</i>	\$ 30,000
	\$ 3,133,893

CURRENT FINANCIAL STATUS

Funds Available for FY 2027	\$	5,174,096
(-) FY2027 Budget	\$	(3,133,893)
Estimated Carry Forward FY 2028	\$	2,040,203

