



**Vermont Children's Justice Act Task Force
2024 Annual Reporting and Three-Year Assessment**

GRANT: Children's Bureau
Office on Child Abuse and Neglect
Children's Justice Act Grant FY 2024
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Vermont Children's Justice Act Task Force Membership Listing

Task Force Membership Designation	Name	Title	Organization	Relevant Background/Experience
Law Enforcement	Loretta Stalnaker	Chief Loretta Stalnaker	Royalton, Vermont Police Department	Loretta Stalnaker is the Chief of Police in Royalton, Vermont, a position she has held for seven years. Prior to that, she served with the Randolph Police Department for many years in various roles, including Officer, Sergeant, and Acting Chief. Chief Stalnaker is a retired member of the Army National Guard, having served 21 years before retiring in 2021. Throughout her law enforcement career, she has investigated numerous cases involving child abuse and neglect, and has worked closely with the Vermont Department for Children and Families (DCF) in a variety of capacities. She currently serves on the Vermont Criminal Justice Council's Domestic Violence Subcommittee and is an active member of the Windsor County Special Investigations Unit (SIU).
Criminal Court Judge	Allison Arms	Superior Court Judge, Honorable Allison Arms	Vermont Judiciary	Judge Alison Arms is a graduate of the University of Vermont and the University of Denver (Sturm) School of Law. She has been a dedicated civil servant for her entire career, practicing as a public defender for the Legal Aid Society in New York, New York, with the Chittenden County Public Defender's Office and the Federal Defender for the District of Vermont. Appointed to the Vermont Superior Court in 2011, Judge Arms has spent more than half her career on the bench presiding almost exclusively over the child abuse and neglect docket. She is a recipient of the David Jacques Award for Excellence in Juvenile Justice. Judge Arms was a member of the Chittenden County Family Treatment Court Executive Committee, who for more than a year and half successfully navigated the Vermont's Supreme Court's lengthy proposal process for the establishment of problem solving or treatment dockets, working closely with DCF social workers, defense attorneys, prosecutors, treatment providers and guardians ad litem for the creation of the Vermont Judiciary's only Family Treatment Docket in 2018.

Civil Court Judge	Kirstin K. Schoonover	Superior Court Judge, Honorable Kirstin K. Schoonover	Vermont Judiciary	Judge Kirstin K. Schoonover is a graduate of the University of San Francisco School of Law and Pomona College. She began her legal career as a public defender and later served as an assistant attorney general with Vermont's Department for Children and Families. In 2007, she joined Vermont Legal Aid, where she represented low-income Vermonters in a wide range of civil matters. Appointed to the Vermont Superior Court in 2015, Judge Schoonover has since presided over complex child and family cases. She is recognized for her thoughtful, evidence-based approach and her deep commitment to access to justice.
Prosecuting Attorney	Kristin Gozzi	Senior Deputy State's Attorney	Vermont Dept. of State's Attorneys and Sheriffs, Washington Co.	Kristin Gozzi is a Deputy State's Attorney in Washington County since 2007. She has a J.D. from the University of Oklahoma College of Law and is a graduate of the University of Oklahoma College of Medicine Interdisciplinary Training Program in Child Abuse and Neglect. Kristin created the interdisciplinary Washington County Youthful Offender Workgroup to plan for the 2018 changes in Vermont's Juvenile and Youthful Offender law and received the David Jaques Memorial Award in 2019 for Excellence in Youth Justice based on the protocol and systems created in that workgroup. Kristin worked with Judge Schoonover and juvenile clerks in 2019 to create a trauma-informed court experience for families and children. Kristin previously served on the pilot project implementing the Youth Assessment Screening Instrument (YASI) as a tool for Juvenile Delinquency cases; the Permanency Improvement Project Committee which worked to improve permanency outcomes and court experience for youth in the Juvenile system; the GAL Advisory Committee; and currently serves on the Advisory Committee on Rules for Family Proceedings.
Defense Attorney	Marshall Pahl	Deputy Defender General	Office of the Defender General	Marshall Pahl currently serves as Deputy Defender General and Supervising Attorney, leading the Juvenile Defender Office at the Vermont Office of the Defender General. With extensive experience at both trial and appellate levels, he has dedicated his practice to criminal defense, especially representing youth in juvenile justice matters.
Attorney for Children	<i>Under Recruitment</i>			<i>Please see information about recruitment efforts below.</i>

Child Advocate	Patti Randall	Executive Director	Rutland Children's Advocacy Center & VT Children's Alliance State Chapter	Patti Randall is the current director of the Vermont Children's Alliance (CAC State Chapter) and the Executive Director of the Rutland CAC.
Child, Youth and Family Advocate	Matthew Bernstein	Child, Youth, and Family Advocate	Office of Child, Youth and Family Advocate	Matthew Bernstein is the first Child, Youth, and Family Advocate for the State of Vermont. He was nominated to the position by Gov. Phil Scott in 2023 and confirmed by the Vermont Senate for a four-year term. Matthew and his family returned to Vermont in 2019 after 15 years in Albuquerque, New Mexico, where he was Senior Staff Attorney at Pegasus Legal Services for Children. In this capacity, he represented children in abuse/neglect and special education cases and engaged in a wide range of policy related to children, youth, and families. Matthew graduated with honors from the University of New Mexico School of Law in 2014 and is a former Bergstrom Fellow and Child Welfare Law Specialist as Certified by the National Association of Counsel for Children. He also holds a master's degree in United States history. Prior to attending law school, Matthew taught English, history, and economics at Amy Biehl High School in downtown Albuquerque. He is a former professor at Vermont Law School and Staff Attorney at Vermont Legal Aid.
Child, Youth and Family Advocate	Lauren Higbee	Deputy Advocate	Office of the Child, Youth and Family Advocate	Lauren Higbee holds an MSW from the University of Illinois at Chicago's Jane Addams College of Social Work. She was part of the school's Child Welfare Traineeship Project in 2010 to address workforce challenges and cultivate commitment to careers in child welfare. Lauren has direct service experience in child welfare and juvenile justice in Chicago, Philadelphia, and Vermont jurisdictions. She's held various roles connected to child abuse investigations, ongoing child welfare cases, adoption, post-permanency, truancy, juvenile probation, foster care and residential treatment program licensing, and more. Upon returning to Vermont, she worked with runaway and homeless youth and oversaw two youth shelters. Nearly a year into the Deputy Advocate role with OCYFA, she is dedicated to working on individual and systemic advocacy for children, youth, and families in Vermont's child welfare and juvenile justice systems.

Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA)	Robert Post	Programs Manager Court Improvement GAL Director	VT Court Administration	Robert Post is the Director of the Guardian ad Litem (GAL) Program for the Vermont Judiciary. Based in Montpelier, he oversees statewide coordination of the GAL Program, ensuring that children's voices are effectively represented in court proceedings. Robert is a Vermont Law School graduate.
Health Professional	Tracey Wagner	SANE RN VT SANE Board Pediatric Medical Director	VT SANE Board	Tracey Wagner has over 30 years of experience as a pediatric nurse, with a career spanning acute inpatient care, high-tech home care, visiting nurse services, and pediatric office settings. She has served in roles ranging from Nurse Educator to Assistant Nurse Manager. Tracey holds a master's degree in nursing and became a certified pediatric nurse in 2005. In 2009, she entered the field of forensic nursing and earned her national certification as a Pediatric Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE-P) in 2013. She currently serves as the Pediatric Clinical Coordinator for the Vermont SANE Program and as a Nurse Clinician with the Child Safe Program at the University of Vermont. In addition to her professional roles, Tracey is an experienced foster and adoptive parent, with a deep understanding of the needs of children with complex medical, emotional, and physical disabilities.
Mental Health Professional	Gary Marvel	Supervision & Re-Entry Coordinator Co-Director of VT Center for Prevention & Treatment of Sexual Abuse	VT Dept of Corrections Agency of Human Services	Gary Marvel holds significant expertise in current best practice for the supervision and treatment of adults with sexually harmful behaviors. Gary also has prior experience as a child welfare social worker, contributing to his comprehensive understanding of systems that support both accountability and rehabilitation.
Child Protective Services	Nancy Miller	Child Safety Director	VT DCF – Family Services Division	Nancy Miller has been with the Family Services Division since 2006, with experience in the front end, ongoing and JS populations-13 years conducting child abuse investigations and assessments and supervising that work. In her current role Nancy oversees policy and practice related to child safety interventions and child safety related decision making in the ongoing work. Additionally, Nancy provides consultation to the field and assists with training related to child safety.
Child Protective Services	Lindsay Barron	Director of Policy and Planning	VT DCF – Family Services Division	Lindsay Barron has been working in child welfare policy and practice for approximately 14 years. Lindsay supports policy development, implementation of new practices, and the upkeep of current policies/practices in Vermont's child protection and juvenile justice system. Lindsay oversees the Policy & Planning

				Leadership Team within FSD, which consists of policy, legislative/communications, quality assurance, system of care teams (foster and kinship care, interstate compacts, permanency planning, and post-permanency services), and practice subject matter experts (prevention, child safety, staff safety, and domestic violence). Lindsay received her bachelor's degree and master's degree from Duquesne University.
Individual Experienced in Working with Children with Disabilities	Melanie Hall	Health Systems Specialist	Vermont Department of Health (VDH), Children with Special Health Needs	Melanie Hall has worked with the Children with Special Health Needs (CSHN) Program for 5 years in both a medical social worker role and now as the lead for the Health Systems Team. CSHN is a public health program that serves families, care teams, and community partners to help them access resources and reduce barriers. Our area of focus is children and youth with chronic medical conditions and developmental disabilities.
Parent/ Representative of Parent Group	Larry Crist	Executive Director	VT Parent Representation Center	Larry Crist holds a law degree and MSW and brings over 45 years of experience in legal and social services across government and non-profit sectors. He has managed legal and mental health services in correctional, court, and community-based settings at the city, county, and state levels. Larry was the first Director of Vermont's Child, Foster, and Adoption Care Licensing Unit, later serving as Deputy Commissioner of the Department of Health and as Commissioner of the Department of Aging and Disabilities. He currently serves as the Executive Director of the Vermont Parent Representation Center.
Parent/ Representative of Parent Group	Shela Linton	Executive Director	Families United	Shela Linton is the Executive Director of Families United and has spent over 20 years leading community-based programs focused on family advocacy, health education, and support for individuals navigating complex systems. She holds degrees in psychology and chemical dependency from Keene State College and is a graduate of the Vermont Leadership Institute. Her professional background includes work in HIV/AIDS prevention, harm reduction, and recovery services, including co-founding the Windham County Turning Point Center and coordinating local health outreach efforts. Shela later established the Parent Advocate Program to assist caregivers navigating school systems, particularly in relation to student needs and educational access. She has also supported families involved with the child welfare system and helped strengthen collaboration between schools, service providers, and caregivers. Shela has contributed to numerous state and local

				advisory groups related to family services, youth programs, and access to supportive resources. Her leadership is grounded in personal experience, community connection, and a commitment to improving outcomes for children and families across Vermont.
Individual with Lived Experience	Arial Buaulac	Executive Director	Kingdon Recovery Center	Arial Beaulac is a person with lived expertise. She is a single mother of two teen boys and is in long-term recovery. Arial is the Executive Director of the Kingdom Recovery Center in St. Johnsbury, Vermont, which serves individuals with substance use disorder. She works with FSD on prevention efforts (referred to as Families Come First), co-chairs FSD's Prevention Implementation Workgroup, and sits on many other community meetings.
Individual with lived experience	Kelli O'Neill	Therapist	Private Practice	Kelli O'Neill holds an MSW from the University of Vermont and a BSW from the University of Maine, Orono. For the past 10 years, Kelli has practiced social work both in the states of Maine and Vermont, most recently as a Family Services Worker with the state of Vermont, DCF services. Currently, Kelli has her own practice as a child, adolescent, and adult therapist located in Barre, VT.
Individual Experienced in Working with Homeless Children and Youth	<i>Under recruitment</i>			<i>Please see information about recruitment efforts below.</i>

General Updates about Recruitment Efforts:

The individual currently serving in the **Defense Attorney** role has not officially stepped down; however, their attendance and participation in recent meetings has been limited due to competing demands. In light of this, we have initiated recruitment efforts to explore the possibility of double-filling the role in order to ensure consistent representation and engagement. Recruitment efforts for the Defense Attorney role have included outreach by task force members to professional connections via email, highlighting the group's work, focus areas, and available funding opportunities for grantees. In addition, a statewide inquiry was issued to Family Services Workers, which resulted in at least one response and a subsequent invitation being extended.

Recruitment for the **Attorney for Children** role has similarly involved email outreach to professional networks, with an emphasis on the task force's goals, discussion topics, and the opportunity for funded participation. In the meantime, we

appreciate that the Child, Youth, and Family Advocate currently serving on the task force brings prior experience representing children in another state, which has helped provide valuable perspective until the role can be formally filled.

Finally, the **Individual Experienced in Working with Homeless Children and Youth** role has newly become vacant and is actively under recruitment. To support this effort, we are collaborating with the Adolescent Policy and Practice Specialist within the FSD team to identify individuals who would be a strong fit for the task force. We have generated a list of promising candidates and are actively reaching out to invite their participation.

Functions, Rules and Meetings

Functions

The purpose of the Children's Justice Act Task Force (CJATF) is to assess and make recommendations for system improvement in the realm of investigative, administrative, and judicial handling of cases of child abuse and neglect, and support designation and appropriation of CJA funding. This mission requires a spirit of collaboration and a positive working relationship between the Department for Children and Families (DCF) and the CJATF. As such, each party in the collaboration has a specific role to play. The respective roles are:

The role of **The Department for Children and Families** is to:

- Administer the CJA Grant and assign the function of Grant Manager to a position within the Department for Children and Families.
- Facilitate the appropriate business office process of grant funding allocation, based on recommendations it receives from the CJATF.

The role of **Task Force Members** is to:

- Act with regard for the well-being and welfare of children, youth, and their families.
- Contribute to the review of applications for funding.
- Contribute to the CJA three-year assessment review process in their specific area of expertise.
- Adhere to state confidentiality requirements.
- Regularly attend and fully participate in all scheduled meetings or identify an individual who fulfills the same role designation to attend.
- Meeting Facilitation: The Meeting Facilitator shall preside at the CJATF meetings and perform duties as appropriate to the mission of the CJATF.
- Note taking: Members may be asked to take notes.

The role of the **State Coordinator/Grant Manager** is to:

- Work with Grants and Contracts unit and the DCF Business office to administer the CJA funds.
- Serve as program manager on CJA funded projects.
- Provide advice, guidance, technical assistance, and information regarding the expected role and function of the CJATF as mandated by the requirements of the CJA Program Instruction.
- Attend all CJATF meetings.
- Keep CJATF members apprised of the meeting schedules and distribute minutes and other pertinent mailings necessary for Task Force members to fulfill their responsibilities.

- Act as liaison between CJATF and the Federal Administration for Children and Families to facilitate communication.
- Act as liaison between CJATF and the Vermont Department for Children and Families to facilitate communication.
- Present financial reports to task force members' status of CJA funds available for allocation to future projects.

Meetings

- CJATF meetings will occur at least four times per year. They are currently occurring every month for one hour due to recent legislative initiatives requiring team input and scheduling challenges for a longer block of time.
- The State Coordinator/Grant Manager, in consultation with the Task Force, may schedule special meetings.
- The State Coordinator sets the agenda for the regular and special meetings with input from Task Force members.
- The Task Force coordinator shall document in minutes all regularly scheduled and special CJATF meetings, including any major decisions, action items, recommendations from the CJATF to the Department for Children and Families, and responses from the Department for Children and Families regarding recommendations previously submitted.
- Any major decisions, including the allocation of grant monies, recommendations and annual reports will be approved by a majority of a quorum vote. This may occur virtually during regularly scheduled or special CJATF meetings or through electronic communication with CJATF members. These decisions and correlating votes will be documented in minutes and saved as part of the TF permanent record.

Voting

- Each member of the CJATF shall have one vote.
- Voting will take place in person at the meetings, phone in attendance, or electronic communication with a response time set by the coordinator.
- A quorum for the transaction of business shall consist of one more than half of the current membership of the CJTF. The members in attendance at a meeting where a quorum is not present, may elect (by majority vote), to proceed with the business of the meeting subject to ratification when a quorum is present at the next meeting.
- Any member who directly or individually may benefit from a grant application before the CJTF shall abstain from discussion and voting on the matter.
- Any member with a conflict of interest in an issue being considered by the CJTF, shall make a declaration to that effect, and abstain from further discussion and voting on that issue.

Meeting content

The Children's Justice Act Task Force (CJATF) agenda for the calendar year from May 2024 to May 2025 outlines a series of meetings focused on improving child welfare practices and policies. Below is a detailed summary of the agenda topics for each meeting:

May 29, 2024

- **Introductions and Ice Breaker:** Members share their favorite summertime activities.
- **CJA Program Instructions Overview:** Presentation of the CJA Program Instructions (PI) via a slide deck.
- **Annual Report and Three-Year Assessment:** Review and discussion.
- **CJA Website Mock-Up Review:** Evaluation of the proposed website design.
- **Discussion & Vote on Recommendations:** Focus on four workgroups:
 - Standardized recording and storage agreements with SIUs.
 - Centralized substantiation review.
 - Secondary considerations for name placement on registry.
 - Revisiting grant agreements and RFPs for new agreements.
- **Additional Topics (if time permits):** Review recordings data and other states' secondary considerations processes.

June 26, 2024

- **Welcome and Introductions:** Updates on membership and recruitment.
- **Announcements:** Submission of VT's CJA Annual Report & Three-Year Assessment, recent Children's Bureau activities, and legislative updates.
- **Legislative Discussions:** S.190/Act 89 and future planning for H.696.
- **Q&A Session:** Open floor for questions.

July 31, 2024

- **Welcome and Introductions:** Introduction of new members.
- **Announcements:** Response from the Children's Bureau on VT's reports and updates on Act 154 & Child Protection Registry Reform Workplan.
- **Tabled Topics:** Operating agreements, legislative planning, and future agenda building.

August 28, 2024

- **Welcome and Introductions:** Recap of previous meeting and updates.
- **Policy Updates:** Review of draft preponderance of the evidence practice guidance.

- **Workgroup Scheduling:** Focus on recordings workgroup.
- **Child Welfare Summit Reminder:** Registration details.

September 25, 2024

- **Focus on Operating Agreements:** Review past agreements and discuss future proposals.
- **Consideration of Other States' Functions:** Discussion and potential vote on subcommittee proposals.

October 23, 2024

- **Three-Year Assessment:** Follow-up on incorporating lived experiences and recommendations.
- **Strategic Planning:** Linkage with CFSP/FSD's 5-Year Strategic Plan and CPR reform work.

November 20, 2024

- **Welcome and Introductions:** Updates on legislative report submission and planning for 2025 meetings.
- **Grantee Report:** Presentation by Vermont Children's Alliance.
- **Discussion and Next Steps:** Open floor for planning.

December 18, 2024

- **Welcome and Introductions:** Brief updates.
- **Grantee Report:** Presentation by Vermont Forensic Nursing Program.
- **Discussion and Next Steps:** Open floor for planning.

February 26, 2025

- **Welcome and Introductions:** Invitation to public meeting portion of VCAB.
- **Legislative Discussion:** H.193 walkthrough and testimony.
- **Open Discussion:** General CJATF topics.

March 26, 2025

- **Welcome and Introductions:** Announcement of 2025 Child Welfare Summit.
- **Quality Assurance Discussion:** Overview of CFSP, APSR, CFSR, and PIP with Carlie Thibault.
- **Open Discussion:** Focus on family voice perspectives and court involvement.

April 30, 2025

- **Stakeholder Invitations:** Discussion on inviting guest participants for Act 154 work.
- **Review of Secondary Considerations:** Introduction of policy materials from other states.
- **Collaborative Work:** Planning and guidance for future collaborative efforts.

Throughout the year, the CJATF meetings focus on legislative updates, policy reviews, strategic planning, and collaborative efforts to enhance child welfare practices. The task force engages with various stakeholders and experts to ensure comprehensive discussions and informed decision-making..

Membership and Attendance Overview

Over the past year, the Children's Justice Act Task Force (CJATF) has continued to evolve, with notable changes in membership and meeting dynamics.

Membership Additions:

- **Civil Court Judge:** We are pleased to welcome a sitting Civil Court Judge who also serves on the Vermont Judiciary's Family Division Oversight Committee. This addition brings a wealth of judicial experience and oversight expertise to the task force.
- **Person with Lived Experience:** A new member with lived experience as a parent involved with Child Protective Services (CPS) has joined the task force. She is also the Executive Director of a local recovery center, providing valuable insights from her personal background and professional expertise in recovery and family support.
- **Chief Loretta Stalnaker:** Joining us from the Royalton Police Department, Chief Stalnaker is renowned for her award-winning work in collaborative responses to individuals in mental health crises. She is well known for her strong partnerships and problem-solving techniques, which will greatly benefit the task force's efforts in addressing complex child welfare issues.

Membership Improvements:

- **New Members:** The task force previously welcomed eight new members, enhancing its range of expertise. These members include:
 - **Advocate and Deputy Advocate** from Vermont's Office of Child, Youth and Family Advocate.
 - **Deputy State's Attorney** specializing in Family/Juvenile Justice/CHINS docket.

- **Executive Director of Families United.**
- **Health Systems Specialist** for children with special health needs.
- **Executive Director of Vermont Children's Alliance.**
- **Criminal Court Judge** with extensive experience in child abuse and neglect cases.

Attendance and Meeting Dynamics:

- **Attendance Challenges:** During the 2024-2025 calendar year, attendance at meetings has occasionally dropped off. To address this, we are exploring shifting meeting times to better accommodate the diverse schedules of our members.
- **Facilitation and Coordination:** The addition of a facilitator/co-coordinator has continued to improve meeting facilitation, agenda planning, and communications.

Future Recruitment and Considerations:

- **Youth Voice:** We are exploring ways to include youth voice in our discussions. This includes utilizing Task Force members to act as liaisons with youth in the community and the Youth Advisory Board (YAB). The YAB is a collaborative group within Vermont's Department for Children and Families (DCF) that gives current and former foster youth a voice in improving the foster care system. It aims to empower youth, build leadership skills, and work with DCF leadership to promote positive change. The YAB includes Youth Leaders who help facilitate meetings and Youth Members who provide insights and advocate for policy changes.
- **Recruitment Goals:** We continue to aim for the recruitment of additional members, including a child's attorney and prosecuting attorney, to further diversify expertise.
- **Exploration of New Categories:** We are considering adding more individuals with lived experience to provide firsthand perspectives on child welfare issues.
- **Meeting Attendance Strategy:** We are exploring the possibility of current members assigning back-ups to ensure consistent attendance and participation in meetings.

Overall, the CJATF remains committed to enhancing its membership and operational effectiveness, while adapting to the needs of its members to better address child welfare challenges..

Prior Year Performance Report

May 2024 to May 2025

Guardian ad Litem Program

In Vermont, by statute, a Guardian ad Litem (GAL) is assigned to each child involved in a CHINS (child in need of care or supervision) child. It is imperative to have a well-staffed and well-trained pool of volunteers to ensure the delivery of competent and effective advocacy to assist the court as well as state and community stakeholder partners in the adjudication of cases involving abuse and neglect of children. Continued education and professional development for the GAL's is a large part of preparing them for service.

Narrative description of program/activity-

- Statewide Interagency Structured Decision-Making (SDM) Conference and Training. On September 13, 2024, Vermont Guardians ad Litem hosted the annual statewide interagency child welfare summit. This years summit brought over two hundred Vermont child welfare stakeholder partners including Guardians ad Litem, Judges, Attorneys, DCF workers, Judiciary staff, community organization and folks with lived experience. The day long in person conference was hosted by Heather Meitner, Director of Child Welfare, Evident Change.
- The overarching goal of this conference was to continue training our systems professionals on SDM which in child welfare is a research-based framework designed to improve the consistency, transparency, and quality of decisions made by child protection professionals. It provides a set of standardized tools and guidelines that help assess risk, determine service needs, and support the safety and well-being of children and families.
- Ultimately, SDM in child welfare helps child protection agencies make better, fairer decisions by combining professional judgment with structured tools. This leads to improved child safety, reduced recurrence of maltreatment, and more effective use of resources

The current Task Force recommendation(s)/goal(s) that are addressed by this activity-

- This activity relates to the CJA recommendation considering investigating and the judicial handling of cases of child abuse and neglect by offering support to groups and programs within our systems.

The CJA Required Category (A, B, or C) that is addressed by this activity- A

Description of evaluation work related to this activity, including outputs and outcomes:

Evaluation Methods-

- The main evaluation method used for this training was a series of local follow-up meetings at each courthouse in the fourteen counties of Vermont to have a smaller discussion on SDM and how its being used and how practices may have shifted since the conference.

Outputs-

- A better trained and more capable network of child welfare professionals in Vermont

Outcomes-

- Using SDM in child welfare has been associated with multiple positive outcomes, including improved child safety and risk management, reduced recurrence of maltreatment, early identification of safety concerns, greater consistency and fairness in decision-making, more consistent decisions across workers, increased transparency and accountability, improved access to services across all populations, more efficient use of resources, and better case outcomes.

How evaluation results are used (i.e., monitoring, program improvement, dissemination, etc.)

- The evaluation results will be used to identify gaps in implementation, refine tools and procedures, measure effectiveness, monitor fairness and service accessibility across populations, understand trends over time, support data-driven policy development, promote accountability and transparency, and inform internal quality improvement across systems.

The Vermont Children's Alliance

Narrative description of program/activity

- **Shield Our Children from Harm Conference:** Shield Our Children from Harm conference brings together a multidisciplinary audience of professionals involved in the investigation, prosecution, and treatment of child maltreatment. Each year experts share cutting edge knowledge, research, and education on best practices in all aspects of child maltreatment.
- **2024 CAC Director Training:** For the CAC Director training, the Northeast Regional Child Advocacy Center (NRCAC) provided sessions focused on addressing secondary

traumatic stress and strengthening leadership skills. Tom Tremblay presented on approaches to trauma-informed leadership and fostering effective multidisciplinary collaboration between Vermont's Child Advocacy Centers (CACs) and Special Investigation Units (SIUs). In addition, representatives from ICE/HSI shared information about federal support and coordination in Vermont's response to human trafficking.

- **Hope Changes Everything Conference:** Hope Changes Everything is a two-day conference focused on Child Abuse, Exploitation and Trafficking. This conference provides training and education to law enforcement, mental health clinicians, prosecutors, social workers, Child Welfare professionals, medical providers and school personnel by several nationally known presenters.
- **Statewide training from IROC2 for Online Safety:** MDTs and CAC staff statewide gained knowledge to promote responsible use of digital tools while also obtaining the wisdom to prevent negative, irresponsible, and malicious digital behaviors and trends
- **Zero Abuse Project training: Adverse Childhood Experiences & Comprehensive Trauma Informed:** MDTs attended the Zero Abuse training to increase the community's collective ability to support individuals who have experienced traumatic events through the provision of supportive trauma-informed strategies and services.
- **Forensic Interview training:** CJA funding supported forensic interview training for a new Rutland County detective and Orange County staff
- **Forensic Interview equipment upgrade:** Windsor County, Windham County, and Caledonia received upgrades to their forensic interview equipment

Sub-grantee implementing the program/activity (if applicable)

1. Attendance at CAC Director training, Zero Abuse, and IROC2 was statewide
2. Hope Changes Conference was attended by Washington County (OUR House)
3. Forensic Interview Training was attended by Child First Advocacy Center/Rutland and CAC at the Orange County Parent Child Center/Orange
4. Forensic Interview Equipment upgrades took place at CACs of the Family Place/Windsor, Windham County Safe Place/Windham, Caledonia County Child Advocacy Center/Caldonia

The current Task Force recommendation(s)/goal(s) that are addressed by this activity. : Improve the process by which the state responds to cases of child abuse and neglect

The CJA Required Category (A, B, or C) that is addressed by this activity- A

Description of evaluation work related to this activity, including the following (as appropriate):

- Evaluation Methods: Surveys conducted by presenters and VCA at the end of each training to determine changes in knowledge, attitudes, skills etc
- Outputs:
 - Provided forensic interview training, online safety training and Adverse Childhood Experiences and Trauma Informed Training to MDT members. Provided statewide training to CAC Directors on secondary traumatic stress and trauma informed leadership as well training from attending conferences like Shield our Children from Harm and Hope Changes Everything. Additionally, VCA supported the purchase of forensic interview equipment for three CACs.
- Outcomes
 - 11 attendees statewide attended the Shield Our Children from Harm Conference. The conference brings together a multidisciplinary audience of professionals involved in the investigation, prosecution, and treatment of child maltreatment.
 - 10 CAC Directors attended the CAC Director training and gained skills related to addressing secondary traumatic stress and enhancing leadership capacity. Tom Tremblay presented on trauma-informed leadership and strategies for promoting respectful and effective multidisciplinary collaboration between Vermont CACs and SIUs. The training also included a presentation from ICE/HSI on federal support for human trafficking response efforts in Vermont.
 - Windsor County CAC was able to upgrade their forensic interview equipment to ensure reliable and complete interviews.
 - One attendee from Washington County attended the Hope Changes Everything Conference where they learned more about Child Abuse, Exploitation and Trafficking.
 - Statewide training from IROC2 for Online Safety
 - 25 attendees statewide gained knowledge to promote responsible use of digital tools while also obtaining the wisdom to prevent negative, irresponsible, and malicious digital behaviors and trends

- Zero Abuse Project training: Adverse Childhood Experiences & Comprehensive Trauma Informed
 - 12 attendees statewide increased their ability to support individuals who have experienced traumatic events through the provision of supportive trauma-informed strategies and services.
- Forensic Interview training
 - Two attendees received forensic interview training to learn developmentally appropriate, non-leading techniques that elicit accurate information from child victims while minimizing trauma and maximizing the reliability of evidence.
- Forensic Interview equipment upgrade
 - Two CACs received upgrades to their forensic interview equipment to ensure reliable and complete interviews.

How evaluation results are used (i.e., monitoring, program improvement, dissemination, etc.)

While directly linking training or equipment to judicial outcomes is challenging, our evaluation data informs our work through:

- Tracking prosecution statistics - provides an overview of case handling over time. For example, in 2024, 100 cases were accepted for prosecution, resulting in 11 convictions, 2 acquittals, and 31 pleas, compared to 102 accepted cases with 29 convictions, 4 acquittals, and 87 pleas in 2023. This data helps us observe fluctuations in the judicial process.
- OMS feedback from clients and MDT members helps refine CAC services and training needs.
- Aggregate data contributes to a broader picture of child maltreatment cases in Vermont. Notably, NCAttrak data showed a rise in convictions from 11 in 2022 to 28 in 2023, followed by the previously mentioned figures in 2024.
- Positive feedback on training and equipment informs decisions about resource allocation and priorities.

SANE Program

Pediatric forensic nurses provide unique, trauma-informed medical care and evidence collection for pediatric victims of child sexual abuse and child physical abuse. This project will enhance the clinical skills of pediatric forensic nurses through providing nationally

recognized best-practice professional development. This will improve the clinical care provided directly to pediatric patients who are victims of child sexual and physical abuse.

Narrative description of program/activity

- CJA funds are used to provide foundational and clinical education to pediatric forensic nurses in Vermont. This education includes a foundational educational course for prospective pediatric forensic nurses and at least one continuing education opportunity for currently credentialed pediatric nurses. Forensic nursing education is offered through a multi-disciplinary team approach, focused on the role that pediatric forensic nurses have in the coordinated community response to identification, evaluation, assessment and response to child abuse and maltreatment.
- Between May 2024 and May 2025 the Vermont Forensic Nursing Program's Pediatric Clinical Coordinator conducted planning and preparation for the annual pediatric forensic nursing training course, including recruitment and course registration support of RNs, making course curriculum and content adjustments, and presenter/faculty engagement and scheduling. The Vermont Forensic Nursing Program (VFNP) offered its Adult/Adolescent annual educational course over 4 days in October of 2024. The Adult/Adolescent SANE portion of the course provides the required introductory learning for the Pediatric SANE portion of the course, which is scheduled for May 2025. The 32 hour pediatric portion of the course is developed and led by VFNP's Pediatric Clinical Coordinator Tracey Wagner, and built on a foundation of pediatric nursing practice to enable nurses to obtain and document a medical history and physical examination, to recognize and document child sexual and physical abuse, and to implement a treatment and discharge plan that incorporates nursing diagnosis and facilitates a multidisciplinary team approach for holistic care of a vulnerable child.
- VFNP also hosted a multidisciplinary training series available to all pediatric SANEs: MDT Responses to Female Genital Mutilation on January 9th and MDT Responses to Strangulation Parts 1 and 2, on March 26th and April 2nd.

Sub-grantee implementing the program/activity (if applicable)

N/A

The current Task Force recommendation(s)/goal(s) that are addressed by this activity-

- This activity relates to the CJA recommendation regarding continuing support to groups and programs dedicated to investigating, and the judicial handling of child abuse and neglect, such as GAL's, SANE's, and CAC/SIU's. This support could include providing grant monies towards technological maintenance and upgrade for things like audio-visual recording of forensic interviews, and SANE test kits; or towards training for detectives and social workers who conduct child abuse

investigations, and SANE nurses and GALs to approach their respective roles in a manner which will reduce trauma and ensure procedural fairness.

The CJA Required Category (A, B, or C) that is addressed by this activity: A

Task Force recommendations in Area A are supported by these activities. Area A indicates priority for “continuing support to groups and programs dedicated to investigating, and the judicial handling of child abuse and neglect, such as GAL’s, SANE’s, and CAC/SIU’s.”

Description of evaluation work related to this activity, including outputs and outcomes:

- Evaluation Methods: The Vermont Forensic Nursing Program evaluates the foundational educational course activities via two methods: 1) Participants who complete the pediatric forensic nursing course receive a post-course evaluation asking them to rate the improvement of their knowledge and skills in responding to child abuse and maltreatment as a result of completing the course. Course evaluations highlight specific areas of expertise developed as a result of completing the course. 2) The Vermont Forensic Nursing Program also tracks the number of nurses who complete the annual training course and continue on to achieve credentialing as pediatric forensic nurses, as well as the number of hospitals or clinics which have resulting growth in the number of credentialed pediatric nurses available to provide care
- Outputs: The Vermont Forensic Nursing Program will train 7 new pediatric forensic nurses at its annual pediatric forensic nursing certification course.
- Outcomes: The activity enhances and standardizes clinical knowledge and practice of pediatric forensic nurses in Vermont, as well as expands the workforce of pediatric forensic nurses in Vermont who contribute to the assessment and handling of suspected cases of child abuse and maltreatment. As of 1/1/25 there were 25 credentialed pediatric SANEs (SANE-P) and 22 RNs who had either completed the pediatric forensic nursing certification course working toward credentialing. (Nurses have 2 years to meet credentialing requirements upon completion of the certification course.)

How evaluation results are used (i.e., monitoring, program improvement, dissemination, etc.):

- Results from the educational course evaluation are used to inform and improve ongoing educational activities such as monthly case review and future educational course offerings, as well as contribute to the maintenance the Vermont Forensic Nursing Program’s status as an approved provider of nursing continuing professional development by the Northeast Multistate Division, (an accredited approver of continuing nursing education by the American Nurses Credentialing Center’s Commission on Accreditation).

Description of any activities undertaken in the last year to link/align the State's CJA work with work related to the State's Annual Progress and Services Report (APSR) and/or Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP).

- The DCF Family Services Division Director of Policy and Planning, who is responsible for division policies, managing the Title IV-E Plan, and coordinating and leading to the creation of Vermont's Annual Progress and Services Report and Child and Family Services Plan, attends the Children's Justice Act Task Force meetings regularly. In March 2025, the Task Force received a presentation on the CFSP, APSR, CFSR, CFSR PIP — and how they are all connected; A brief overview of the key areas of focus outlined in the last CFSP; An overview of the proposed CFSR PIP areas of focus/goals and The SDM Court Hearing Guide as a primary strategy to reduce custody entrance rates. Of particular note was information about how family voice is included in these processes and FSD's efforts to involve Family Court Judges, GALs, and Deputy State's Attorneys to improve identification of danger and decision making related to child safety and court involvement.

Vermont's 2020-2024 Child and Family Services Plan

Vermont's 2022 Annual Progress and Services Report

Vermont's 2023 Annual Progress and Services Report

Vermont's 2024 Annual Progress and Services Report

Linkage to Court and Legal Representation Improvement Work

The Programs Manager from the Court Administrator's Office is an active member of the CJA Task Force, providing valuable insights and expertise.

During this three-year assessment period, the Programs Manager will share updates on current court improvement projects and relevant data from the court system. This information helps identify potential connections between the Task Force's work and the Court Improvement Program (CIP).

As part of the Three-Year Assessment, the Vermont Children's Justice Act Task Force recommended collaborating with the Justice for Children Task Force or the Court Improvement Program to enhance the quality of legal representation for children and families in Vermont. Although this goal has not yet been fully realized, progress is being made. A CJA Task Force member proposed legislation, H.193, which focuses on establishing a child and parent legal representation working group. The February Task Force meeting featured a presentation on this significant bill, generating enthusiasm among members and a desire to continue discussions on this important topic..

[H.193: An act relating to a child and parent legal representation working group](#)

Prior Year Line-Item Budget Expenditure

\$118,216.37

IV. FY24 Line-Item Budget Expenditures

FY23 CJA Line-Item Budget Expenditures			
Grantee	Grant Number	FAIN	Amount
DCF	Admin	2203VTCJA	\$2,109.70
DCF	Admin	2303VTCJA	\$5,613.70
Total			\$7,723.40
Vermont Children's Alliance	03440-28484-VTCA-CJA-FY23	2203VTCJA	\$39,172.00
Vermont Children's Alliance	03440-28484-VTCA-CJA-FY24	2303VTCJA	\$37,552.23
Total			\$76,724.23
Vermont Network Against Domestic & Sexual Violence	03440-28486-VNADSV-CJA-FY23	2001VTCJA	\$2,418.64
Vermont Network Against Domestic & Sexual Violence	03440-28486-VNADSV-CJA-FY23	2102VTCJA	\$2,941.76
Vermont Network Against Domestic & Sexual Violence	03440-28486-VNADSV-CJA-FY23	2203VTCJA	\$14,225.60
Vermont Network Against Domestic & Sexual Violence	03440-28486-VNADSV-CJA-FY24	2303VTCJA	\$3,384.74
Total			\$22,970.74
Vermont Guardian Ad Litem	03440-28485-MOU-GAL-CJA-FY23	2203VTCJA	\$10,798.00
Total			\$10,798.00
Total expenditures using 2001VTCJA1			\$2,418.64
Total expenditures using 2102VTCJA1			\$2,941.76
Total expenditures using 2203VTCJA1			\$66,305.30
Total expenditures using 2303VTCJA1			\$46,550.67
Total of all Expenditures			\$118,216.37

Application for Proposed Activities

Vermont Forensic Nursing Program:

Narrative description of proposed program/activity:

- The Vermont Forensic Nursing Program will utilize CJA funds to enhance the education and training of pediatric forensic nurses across the state. This initiative includes a foundational educational course designed for prospective pediatric forensic nurses, as well as at least one continuing education opportunity for currently credentialed pediatric nurses. The program adopts a multidisciplinary team approach, emphasizing the critical role pediatric forensic nurses play in the coordinated community response to child abuse and maltreatment. The pediatric forensic nursing course covers a comprehensive range of topics, including:
 - Fundamentals of forensic nursing
 - Sexual violence and physical abuse
 - Victim responses and crisis intervention
 - Multidisciplinary collaboration
 - Medical forensic history taking and documentation
 - Observing and assessing physical examination findings and specimen collection
 - Medical forensic photography
 - Discharge and follow-up planning
 - Legal and judicial procedures
- Through this targeted education, the program aims to equip pediatric forensic nurses with the skills and knowledge necessary to effectively identify, evaluate, assess, and respond to cases of child abuse and maltreatment, thereby strengthening Vermont's overall child protection efforts.

Goals and objectives of the program/activity:

- The Vermont Forensic Nursing Program aims to enhance the statewide availability of specialized and trauma-informed forensic medical care for child victims of abuse and maltreatment. This goal is pursued through the comprehensive training and continued education of pediatric forensic nurses. Key objectives of the program include:
 - Providing a foundational educational course for prospective pediatric forensic nurses in Vermont, thereby expanding the workforce of specialized, trauma-informed clinicians equipped to address the complex needs of child victims.

- Offering at least one continuing education opportunity for currently credentialed pediatric forensic nurses to further refine their clinical skills and expertise, ensuring they remain at the forefront of best practices in forensic medical care.
- Through these efforts, the program seeks to strengthen Vermont's capacity to deliver effective and compassionate care to child victims, ultimately contributing to improved outcomes in the identification, evaluation, and response to child abuse and maltreatment..

Proposed sub-grantee to implement the program/activity (if applicable):

N/A

Explanation of the extent to which this project/activity contributes to the reform of State systems handling of cases of child abuse and neglect:

The Vermont Forensic Nursing Program plays a pivotal role in reforming state systems by enhancing and standardizing the clinical knowledge and practices of pediatric forensic nurses. By providing specialized training and education, the program ensures that nurses are equipped with the latest techniques and protocols for conducting forensic examinations, documenting findings, and collecting evidence. This standardization and enhancement of exam procedures contribute to more accurate and reliable investigations of child maltreatment cases.

An expanded and well-supported pediatric forensic nursing workforce is crucial for improving the assessment and handling of suspected cases of child abuse and neglect. By fostering a consistent and trauma-informed approach, the program helps ensure that child victims receive compassionate and effective care, while also supporting the legal and judicial processes with precise and thorough documentation. Ultimately, the Vermont Forensic Nursing Program strengthens the state's capacity to protect vulnerable children and enhances the overall effectiveness of the child protection system..

The current Task Force recommendation(s)/goal(s) that would be addressed by this activity:

- This activity addresses the Task Force recommendations in Area A: The Vermont Children's Justice Act Task Force recommends continued support to programs such as the Vermont Forensic Nursing Program, the Guardian ad Litem program and the Vermont Children's Alliance through grant awards to provide resources such as education, training and equipment upgrades for those that are involved in the investigation of child abuse, and the judicial handling of children who are the victims of child abuse and neglect.

Description of proposed evaluation methods related to this activity, including desired outputs and/or outcomes:

The program utilizes two evaluation methods for the above activities:

1. Participants who complete the Vermont pediatric forensic nursing course will receive a post-course evaluation assessing the improvement of their knowledge and skills in responding to child abuse and maltreatment as a result of completing the course. Course evaluations highlight specific areas of expertise developed as a result of completing the course.
2. The Vermont Forensic Nursing Program will track the number of nurses who complete the course and continue on to achieve credentialing as pediatric forensic nurses, as well as the number of hospitals or clinics which have resulting growth in the number of credentialed pediatric nurses available to provide care.

The Vermont Children's Alliance:

Narrative Description of Proposed Program/Activity:

- **Statewide Training and Continuing Education Units (CEUs):** The program will provide statewide training and CEUs for Child Advocacy Center (CAC) Directors, Special Investigation Units (SIUs), and Multi-Disciplinary Teams (MDTs). This initiative aims to enhance child advocacy centers and other multidisciplinary programs to effectively serve child victims and their families, thereby minimizing trauma.
 - **Training for CAC Directors:**
CAC Directors will receive specialized training to support their oversight and responsibilities, including staffing, Multi-Disciplinary Team investigations, and detailed, accurate reporting. The training will focus on full-service planning for clients and managing the various tasks involved in providing services as a Child Advocacy Center.
 - **Basic Forensic Interview Training:**
The program will offer statewide basic forensic interview training for CACs, SIUs, and MDTs. This training is designed to develop skills and techniques for conducting developmentally appropriate interviews with child victims of abuse or neglect, reducing the likelihood of reinterviews and preventing re-traumatization.
- **Equipment Replacement, Upgrade, and Support:** The program will replace and upgrade equipment for forensic interviews and investigative services as needed for law enforcement and MDT members, ensuring that all CACs and SIUs have reliable

forensic interviewing equipment. Additionally, support and/or purchase of equipment will be provided for use in the identification, assessment, investigation, and prosecution of child abuse and neglect in Vermont.

Goals and Objectives of the Program/Activity:

- The program aims to enhance the capabilities of Child Advocacy Centers (CACs), Special Investigation Units (SIUs), and Multi-Disciplinary Teams (MDTs) through comprehensive training, education, and equipment support. By improving oversight and management practices, particularly for CAC Directors, the program seeks to ensure effective service delivery and accurate reporting. Training will focus on developing interview skills necessary for conducting sensitive and developmentally appropriate forensic interviews, thereby minimizing trauma for child victims.
- Additionally, the program will evaluate training activities to assess outcomes and improvements in handling cases of child abuse and neglect. Ensuring access to reliable forensic interviewing equipment is a key objective, supporting effective investigations and the overall identification, assessment, and prosecution of child abuse and neglect cases. Through these efforts, the program aims to foster a more informed and cohesive child protection system, ultimately improving outcomes for vulnerable children and families in Vermont.

Proposed sub-grantee to implement the program/activity:

- Most activities will be offered statewide but there will be opportunities for sub-grantees, especially for forensic interview equipment upgrades.

Explanation of the extent to which this project/activity contributes to the reform of State systems handling of cases of child abuse and neglect:

- The proposed project and activities significantly contribute to the reform of state systems handling cases of child abuse and neglect by enhancing the capabilities and coordination of Child Advocacy Centers (CACs), Special Investigation Units (SIUs), and Multi-Disciplinary Teams (MDTs). Through comprehensive statewide training and Continuing Education Units (CEUs), the program aims to equip professionals with advanced skills and knowledge, fostering a more informed and cohesive approach to child protection. By focusing on developmentally appropriate forensic interview techniques, the project reduces the likelihood of re-traumatization, ensuring that child victims are treated with sensitivity and care. Additionally, the replacement and upgrade of forensic interviewing equipment ensure that investigations are conducted efficiently and effectively, supporting accurate assessments and prosecutions. The program's emphasis on evaluating training outcomes and system improvements further ensures that practices evolve in response to emerging needs and challenges, ultimately leading to a more responsive and effective state system for handling cases of child abuse and neglect.

The current Task Force recommendation(s)/goal(s) that would be addressed by this activity:

- The Vermont Children's Justice Act Task Force recommends continued support to programs such as the Vermont Forensic Nursing Program, the Guardian ad Litem program and the Vermont Children's Alliance through grant awards to provide resources such as education, training and equipment upgrades for those that are involved in the investigation of child abuse, and the judicial handling of children who are the victims of child abuse and neglect.

Description of proposed evaluation methods related to this activity, including desired outputs and/or outcomes:

- The proposed evaluation methods for this activity will focus on both quantitative and qualitative measures to assess the effectiveness and impact of the training and equipment upgrades on the handling of child abuse and neglect cases. Desired outputs include the number of training sessions conducted, the number of participants receiving Continuing Education Units (CEUs), and the quantity of upgraded forensic interviewing equipment distributed to Child Advocacy Centers (CACs), Special Investigation Units (SIUs), and Multi-Disciplinary Teams (MDTs).
- To evaluate outcomes, pre- and post-training assessments will be administered to participants to measure improvements in knowledge and skills related to child advocacy and forensic interviewing techniques. Surveys and interviews with CAC Directors and MDT members will be conducted to gather feedback on the training's relevance and applicability to their roles. Additionally, case reviews will be performed to assess changes in practice, such as the reduction in the number of reinterviews required for child victims, indicating a decrease in re-traumatization.
- The evaluation will also track system-level improvements, such as increased collaboration among multidisciplinary teams and enhanced reporting accuracy. By analyzing these outputs and outcomes, the evaluation aims to provide insights into the program's effectiveness in reforming state systems and improving the overall handling of child abuse and neglect cases. Regular reporting and feedback loops will ensure that findings are used to refine and enhance future training and program activities.

The Vermont Guardian ad Litem Program

Narrative Description of proposed program/activity:

- Child Welfare Summit: Interagency conference and training which will bring together judges, family services workers, attorneys and advocates to take a close look at the decisions which lead to children being removed from their home due to child abuse and neglect. The training will be part 3 of a series looking closely at the

Structured Decision Making (SDM) tools utilized by Family Services Division to assess safety and risk, and a newly released guide for courts designed to unify language and understanding across disciplines regarding the assessment of safety and risk for children. The following groups will be invited: judges, Deputy State's Attorneys, GAL's, attorneys who represent parents and children Family Services Division staff and community stakeholders.

The Vermont Court SDM Guide and Guide and the SDM Court Reference Sheet were developed by a collaborative workgroup consisting of judges, FSD, and our partners at Evident Change over a period of eight months. These guides were born from recommendations from the legislatively commissioned UVM study on the drivers of custody rates in Vermont, and are meant to help us all understand the linkages between statute and practice and increase objectivity and consistency around the state.

Goals & Objectives:

- The goal of the Child Welfare Summit is to train the participants on the use of the SDM tools, on the basics on risk assessment and danger identification, create unified language for better informed decisions in the courtroom and increased collaboration amongst all parties towards the goal of safer outcomes for children and families.

Area of Impact: A

How will the proposed project(s) contribute to reform/improvement?

- The activity will inform stakeholders and parties on how to uniformly apply objective standards for identifying danger and assessing risk, thereby improving outcomes for children and families.

What current Task Force Recommendations/goal would be addressed?

- This activity will address the Vermont CJA Task Force recommendation to support efforts such as the SDM Bench Guide or other innovative approaches for the speedy resolution of civil and criminal proceedings related to child abuse and neglect cases.

Description of proposed evaluation methods related to this activity, including desired outputs and/or outcomes:

- Vermont is closely watching our entrance rates of children into custody. The Bench Guide was developed to help reduce children coming into custody unnecessarily. The effectiveness of this program may be loosely tied to future custody entrance rates.

- Additionally, a preconference learning objective summary and evaluation combined with a post training evaluation will measure how participants gained knowledge and understanding of risk and safety assessment and the use of the SDM tools, particularly the Bench Guide.

Explanation of the extent to which this program/activity contributes to the reform of State systems handling of cases of child abuse and neglect:

- The Child Welfare Summit represents a significant initiative aimed at reforming Vermont's handling of child abuse and neglect by fostering a collaborative and informed approach among key stakeholders. By bringing together judges, family services workers, attorneys, and advocates, the summit seeks to address the critical decisions that lead to children being removed from their homes due to abuse and neglect. The focus on Structured Decision Making (SDM) tools and the newly released guide for courts is designed to unify language and understanding across disciplines, ensuring that assessments of safety and risk for children are consistent and objective.
- The summit's goals and objectives emphasize training participants on the use of SDM tools, risk assessment, and danger identification, while promoting unified language for better-informed courtroom decisions. This approach aims to increase collaboration among all parties involved, ultimately leading to safer outcomes for children and families. By standardizing the application of objective criteria for identifying danger and assessing risk, the summit contributes to improved decision-making processes, reducing the likelihood of unnecessary removals and enhancing the protection of children.
- The activity aligns with the Vermont CJA Task Force recommendation to support innovative approaches like the SDM Bench Guide, facilitating the speedy resolution of civil and criminal proceedings related to child abuse and neglect cases. The proposed evaluation methods include monitoring custody entrance rates to assess the program's impact on reducing unnecessary removals. Additionally, preconference and post-training evaluations will measure participants' knowledge and understanding of risk and safety assessment and the use of SDM tools, particularly the Bench Guide. These evaluations will provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of the summit in achieving its objectives and contributing to the reform of state systems handling child abuse and neglect cases..

The current Task Force recommendations/goals that would be addressed by this activity:

Area A.

- The Vermont Children's Justice Act Task Force recommends continued support to programs such as the Vermont Forensic Nursing Program, the Guardian ad Litem program and the Vermont Children's Alliance through grant awards to provide resources such as education, training and equipment upgrades for those that are involved in the investigation of child abuse, and the judicial handling of children who are the victims of child abuse and neglect.

The Vermont Children's Justice Act Task Force

Goals & Objectives:

- The Vermont Children's Justice Act Task Force has made significant strides in reforming Vermont's handling of cases of child abuse and neglect, with notable progress in forensic interviewing recording and storage protocols. A legislative report on this topic was submitted to the Vermont Legislature in November 2024, marking a key milestone in these efforts. Over the past year, the task force has diligently balanced its monthly agendas to focus on programs receiving CJA grant awards, the statewide Child and Family Services Review, and the subsequent Program Improvement Plan, alongside reforms to Vermont's Child Protection Registry. As we approach the next legislative session, the task force is poised to spotlight further reforms, inviting additional stakeholders to contribute to this critical work.

Central to these efforts is Act 154, which serves as the legislative foundation for child protection registry reforms. Pursuant to Act 154 of 2024, the Department for Children and Families (DCF), in collaboration with multiple partners, is tasked with submitting a report to the Legislature by October 1, 2025. This report will detail progress on establishing a centralized internal substantiation determination process, creating rules for substantiation categories—those that result in name placement on the child protection registry and those that do not—and developing a more nuanced approach to child protection levels, which provide a timeframe for how long an individual must wait before requesting a review to have their name expunged from the child protection registry.

These topics will be explored in dedicated sessions, ensuring a coordinated review and integration. Stakeholder engagement is integral to every phase of the project, with the Children's Justice Act Task Force serving as the primary stakeholder body. Monthly meetings and subcommittee workgroups will gather input and validate progress, with participation from various agencies and organizations, including Voices for Vermont's Children, the Agency of Education (AOE), the Department of Mental Health (DMH), the Child Development Division (CDD), and others. Special efforts are being made to include the voice of lived experience, particularly youth who have experienced abuse and/or neglect, and individuals and caretakers who

have experienced an investigation and may have had their name placed on the child protection registry. This collaborative approach ensures that diverse perspectives are considered, enhancing the effectiveness of the reforms.

The task force's commitment to reform is evident in its comprehensive approach, which aims to improve outcomes for children and families, as well as safety for children and vulnerable Vermonters. As Vermont moves forward, the task force's focus on these areas will continue to drive meaningful change in the state's handling of child abuse and neglect cases.

Area of Impact: A, B, C

Contributes to Reform/Improvement:

The Task Force plays a pivotal role in reviewing and monitoring the system's response to child abuse and neglect, identifying gaps and areas for potential improvement. Its membership includes a diverse array of professionals and stakeholders who collectively represent the child abuse and neglect response system, including law enforcement, judiciary, legal professionals, child advocates, and individuals with lived experience. This broad representation enables the Task Force to leverage a wide range of perspectives and expertise, facilitating a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities within the system. By engaging directly with those who are both directly and indirectly involved in child protection, the Task Force is uniquely positioned to drive targeted reforms that enhance the protection and support of vulnerable children and families. Through collaborative efforts, the Task Force aims to improve policy and practice, ensuring a more responsive and effective approach to handling cases of child abuse and neglect.

What current Task Force Recommendations will be addressed?

Area A.

- i. The Vermont Children's Justice Act Task Force recommends continued support to programs such as the Vermont Forensic Nursing Program, the Guardian ad Litem program and the Vermont Children's Alliance through grant awards to provide resources such as education, training and equipment upgrades for those that are involved in the investigation of child abuse, and the judicial handling of children who are the victims of child abuse and neglect.
- ii. The Vermont Children's Justice Act Task Force recommends ongoing participation in workgroups, presentations and conversations related to the improvement of the investigative, administrative, and judicial handling of cases of child abuse and neglect, such as the standardization of recording and storage of forensic interviews and

the development of new quality assurance processes such as centralized substantiation review.

Area B.

- i. The Vermont Children's Justice Act Task Force recommends support for efforts such as the SDM Bench Guide or other innovative approaches for the speedy resolution of civil and criminal proceedings related to child abuse and neglect cases.
- ii. The Vermont Children's Justice Act Task Force recommends collaboration with the Justice for Children Task Force or the Court Improvement Program on improving the quality of legal representation for children and families in Vermont.

Area C.

- i. The Vermont Children's Justice Act Task Force recommends ongoing participation in workgroups, presentations and conversations related to the reform of state laws, policies and procedures which provide comprehensive protection for children while ensuring fairness to all affected persons, such as efforts to develop a secondary layer of consideration prior to name placement on the child protection registry and continued observation and discussion of H.661, as the changes in law are put into place.

Evaluation Methods:

- The program coordinator will explore the use of periodic anonymous surveys to evaluate effectiveness of meeting structure, agenda topics, and special committee work in carrying out the mission and goals of the CJATF.

Outputs:

- Task Force membership completes yearly recommendations, annual applications, reports and Three-Year Assessments as required
- funds directed appropriately
- attendance at the Annual Grantees Meeting

Outcomes:

- Increased knowledge and awareness of membership about issues across the system of response to child abuse and neglect
- System improvement through supportive funding of needed programs
- System improvement through membership's participation in CJATF, whereas information obtained can be brought back to various disciplines, organizations, and agencies positioned to respond to child abuse and neglect in Vermont.

Proposed Line-Item Budget

\$ 72,304.97 - 2403VTCJA1

\$ 25,836.33 - 2303VTCJA1

FY25 CJA Proposed Line Item Budget			
Grantee	Grant Number	FAIN	Amount
DCF	Admin	2403VTCJA1	\$4,304.97
DCF	Annual Meeting	2403VTCJA1	\$2,000.00
DCF	Annual Meeting	2303VTCJA1	\$250.00
Total			\$6,554.97
Lived Experience	N/A	2303VTCJA1	\$1,843.00
Lived Experience	N/A	2403VTCJA1	\$1,000.00
Total			\$2,843.00
Vermont Children's Alliance	03440-28484-VTCA-CJA-FY24	2303VTCJA1	\$1,619.77
Vermont Children's Alliance	03440-28484-VTCA-CJA-FY25	2403VTCJA1	\$39,000.00
Total			\$40,619.77
Vermont Network Against Domestic & Sexual Violence	03440-28486-VNADSV-CJA-FY24	2303VTCJA1	\$10,840.86
Vermont Network Against Domestic & Sexual Violence	03440-28486-VNADSV-CJA-FY24	2403VTCJA1	\$30.00
Vermont Network Against Domestic & Sexual Violence	03440-28486-VNADSV-CJA-FY25	2403VTCJA1	\$13,970.00
Total			\$24,840.86
Vermont Guardian Ad Litem	03440-28485-MOU-GAL-CJA-FY24	2303VTCJA1	\$7,381.64
Vermont Guardian Ad Litem	03440-28485-MOU-GAL-CJA-FY25	2303VTCJA1	\$3,901.06
Vermont Guardian Ad Litem	03440-28485-MOU-GAL-CJA-FY25	2403VTCJA1	\$12,000.00
Total			\$23,282.70
Total FY25 CJA Budget			\$98,141.30

Assurance Letter



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Commissioner's Office
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Waterbury, VT 05671-1080
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Agency of Human Services

June 18, 2025

Joe Bock, Acting Commissioner
Administration on Children, Youth and Families
Mary E. Switzer Building
330 C Street, SW Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Acting Commissioner Bock,

This letter is provided in support of Vermont's application for the FY 2025 Children's Justice Act Grant available to states under the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA). Thank you for your consideration of this application. Vermont remains steadfast in its commitment to enhancing the safety and well-being of children impacted by abuse and neglect, and the Children's Justice Act grant funds are instrumental in sustaining and advancing these efforts.

Vermont received the FY 2024 CAPTA State Grant and continues to comply with the requirements stipulated in Section 106(b) of the Act. The State has maintained a multidisciplinary Task Force on Children's Justice, which has been pivotal in driving meaningful reforms, including significant progress in child protection registry reform. This reform work, initiated by Task Force recommendations, aims to improve the accuracy and fairness of the registry, ensuring better protection for children while safeguarding the rights of individuals involved.

The Task Force's recommendations have led to important legislative changes in Vermont's child protection system, underscoring the value of their work in promoting child safety. We look forward to the continuation of this group and their ongoing contributions to enhancing child protection in Vermont. Vermont will make such reports to the Secretary as may reasonably be required, including an annual report on how assistance received under this program was expended, with particular attention to the areas described in paragraphs (1) through (3) of Section 107(a). The State will maintain and provide access to records relating to activities under CJA, ensuring transparency and accountability in the use of grant funds.

Furthermore, Vermont will participate in at least one Federally initiated CJA meeting each year that the grant is in effect. We are authorized to use grant funds to cover travel and per diem expenses for two CJA representatives (CJA Coordinator and Task Force Chairperson) to attend the meeting when held in person.

Thank you for your continued support.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "CWinters".

Chris Winters, Commissioner
Department for Children and Families



Certification Regarding Lobbying

CERTIFICATION REGARDING LOBBYING

Listen

Certification for Contracts, Grants, Loans, and Cooperative Agreements

The undersigned certifies, to the best of his or her knowledge and belief, that:

(1) No Federal appropriated funds have been paid or will be paid, by or on behalf of the undersigned, to any person for influencing or attempting to influence an officer or employee of an agency, a Member of Congress, an officer or employee of Congress, or an employee of a Member of Congress in connection with the awarding of any Federal contract, the making of any Federal grant, the making of any Federal loan, the entering into of any cooperative agreement, and the extension, continuation, renewal, amendment, or modification of any Federal contract, grant, loan, or cooperative agreement.

(2) If any funds other than Federal appropriated funds have been paid or will be paid to any person for influencing or attempting to influence an officer or employee of any agency, a Member of Congress, an officer or employee of Congress, or an employee of a Member of Congress in connection with this Federal contract, grant, loan, or cooperative agreement, the undersigned shall complete and submit Standard Form-LLL, ``Disclosure Form to Report Lobbying," in accordance with its instructions.

(3) The undersigned shall require that the language of this certification be included in the award documents for all subawards at all tiers (including subcontracts, subgrants, and contracts under grants, loans, and cooperative agreements) and that all subrecipients shall certify and disclose accordingly. This certification is a material representation of fact upon which reliance was placed when this transaction was made or entered into. Submission of this certification is a prerequisite for making or entering into this transaction imposed by section 1352, title 31, U.S. Code. Any person who fails to file the required certification shall be subject to a civil penalty of not less than \$10,000 and not more than \$100,000 for each such failure.

Statement for Loan Guarantees and Loan Insurance

The undersigned states, to the best of his or her knowledge and belief, that:

If any funds have been paid or will be paid to any person for influencing or attempting to influence an officer or employee of any agency, a Member of Congress, an officer or employee of Congress, or an employee of a Member of Congress in connection with this commitment providing for the United States to insure or guarantee a loan, the undersigned shall complete and submit Standard Form-LLL, ``Disclosure

Form to Report Lobbying," in accordance with its instructions. Submission of this statement is a prerequisite for making or entering into this transaction imposed by section 1352, title 31, U.S. Code. Any person who fails to file the required statement shall be subject to a civil penalty of not less than \$10,000 and not more than \$100,000 for each such failure.

Signature

Chris Winters

Title: Commissioner

Organization: Department for Children and Families
