

Children's Justice Act Task Force (CJATF)
Thursday, September 10, 2026 | 12:00–1:00 PM
Act 108

1. Welcome & Introductions

- Name and pronouns
- Role and organization
- Brief introduction / ice breaker

2. In Attendance

- Kate Bailey, Voices for Vermont's Children
- Lindsay Barron, DCF-FSD
- Matthew Bernstein, Office of the Child, Youth, and Family Advocate
- Trisha Black, Addison County Child Advocacy Center
- Lynn-Renee Brochu, Orleans County Child Advocacy Center / Special Investigations Unit
- Stefanie Comstock, Spectrum Youth Services
- Kristin Gozzi, Washington County Deputy State's Attorney
- Alicia Hanrahan, Agency of Education
- Jennifer Harris, DCF-FSD
- Lauren Higbee, Office of the Child, Youth, and Family Advocate
- Kerrie Johnson, Office of the Defender General, Juvenile Division
- Hannah Marble, DCF-FSD
- Gary Marvel, Department of Corrections
- Meghan Masterson, Kid Safe Collaborative
- Kim McManus, Department of State's Attorneys and Sheriffs
- Dr. James Metz, UVM Medical Center
- Nancy Miller, DCF-FSD
- Kelli O'Neill, LICSW
- Domenica Padula, Attorney General's Office, Criminal Division
- Justin Pinard, Center for Technology Essex
- Jennifer Poehlmann, Center for Crime Victim Services
- Samantha Prince, Vermont Children's Alliance / Windham County Child Advocacy Center / Special Investigations Unit
- Patti Randall, Vermont Children's Alliance
- Sarah Shine
- Stephanie Slayton, The Family Place (Windsor County CAC)
- Lindsey St. Amour, Disability Rights Vermont
- Tracey Wagner, UVM Medical Center
- Britaney Watson, The Root Social Justice Center
- Michelle West, DCF-FSD

3. Agenda/Information from Matthew Bernstein, Office of the Child, Youth, and Family Advocate, and Chair of the Act 108 Working Group:

Why was this working group created?

- Vermont has had the highest rate of reporting in the US for at least ten years.
- Vermont has a low rate of “post-response services” such as “mental health services, substance misuse treatment, family therapy, child care, parenting education, and resources to assist families living in poverty” compared to other states.
- Mandatory reporters often feel unclear about their obligations to report.
- DCF capacity is impacted by call volume.

Who is on the working group?

- 13 members, listed in Act 108, including lived experience, schools, medical and community providers, DCF, law enforcement, and designated agencies.
- There are / will be multiple avenues for community feedback, including CJA.

What will the working group do?

- Make a preliminary presentation to four legislative committees by April 1, 2027.
- Issue a final report by October 1, 2027.
- The final report will make “findings” and “recommended legislative proposals.”
- The legislature will decide what to do from there.

What questions are the working group considering?

- What defines the kind of abuse and neglect that mandated reporters are required to report? How should Vermont statute define abuse/neglect and who should report?
- How is training conducted?
- What are DCF's policies?
- How can Vermont improve transparency, understanding, and due process for reporters and reportees?

What feedback can community members provide?

- What are you struggling with in terms of mandatory reporting?
- What is working well?
- What specific changes would you like to see to the mandatory reporting process?
- What would you like to stay the same about mandatory reporting?

Sources:

- [33 V.S.A. § 4912](#): Definitions
- [33 V.S.A. § 4913](#): Reporting Abuse of Children
- Working Group [Website](#)
- Shared Act 108 [email address](#) to send feedback
- Chair's [email address](#)

4. Group Input & Discussion

- A group member clarified that the group is a collective working group and not solely that of the Family Services Division (FSD) or the Office of the Child, Youth, and Family Advocate (OCYFA).
- A group member raised questions about the volume and types of reports received and whether mandated reporting training requirements could be tailored by profession, particularly for therapists balancing reporting obligations with maintaining therapeutic relationships.
- A group member noted that the data presented was from NCANDS and that the group should review the specific reporting categories to ensure Vermont's submissions are accurate.
- Mandated Reporter Training: The group discussed whether mandated reporter training should be required statutorily on a recurring basis. A group member noted that Vermont Registered Nurses are not currently required to complete the training, while New York requires annual training. Another group member noted that some states have statutory requirements for regular or annual training. The new mandated reporter training is available on the DCF website.
- A group member noted an increase in reports involving Vermont children being exposed to AI-generated CSAM online. The group discussed the difficulty of determining whether CSAM is AI-generated, given the increasingly realistic nature of AI-generated images.
- A group member raised questions about the classification of online abuse involving out-of-home perpetrators and the intersection with existing definitions and regulations. The group also discussed the need to educate and engage in discussions surrounding concerns related to AI-generated CSAM.
- A group member requested more detailed data on accepted and unaccepted reports, including the types of concerns reported and the categories under which reports are accepted. It was noted that examining unaccepted reports could help assess potential over-reporting.
- A group member asked how Vermont's reporting rates and outcomes compare with other states and whether lower reporting rates correlate with child safety outcomes. Another group member noted that research addressing this issue is available.

- A group member suggested developing one-page or pocket-sized resources to help mandated reporters determine when to report, along with public messaging such as “when in doubt, reach out.” The group member also suggested exploring a consultation or warm line and promoting the free mandated reporter training.
- A group member noted that some states ask callers whether they are seeking to make a child abuse or neglect report or are seeking support for a family. The group could explore a similar approach to help assess the need for a consultation line.
- A group member noted that a 2024 law review article addresses several of the issues raised and will be sent to DCF for posting. (Posted on the Act 108 website and linked [here](#)).
- A group member asked how unaccepted reports are currently stored.
- A group member supported exploring a consultation line and noted that connecting families with community resources could reduce reports based primarily on financial hardship rather than abuse or neglect.
- A group member asked whether the group will make recommendations regarding data collection and retention.
- A group member noted that retention of unaccepted reports is a complex issue, particularly given young people’s interest in accessing information about their histories. The group also discussed the importance of retaining information long enough to identify patterns of chronic neglect, child torture, or human trafficking. DCF does not currently have a record retention policy to address this.
- A group member questioned whether mandated reporter letters are required by statute or policy and whether they are useful to reporters or could be eliminated to reduce administrative burden.
- A group member emphasized the need to distinguish between reports that are screened out with no further action and those that are screened out but referred to an ongoing worker for consideration in an open case.
- A group member identified “screened out but to be considered in an open case” as an important decision point. Another group member noted that the process can create frustration and misunderstanding among mandated and non-mandated reporters.
- A group member raised the need for greater clarity around definitions and questioned whether the group should consider defining intrafamilial child torture.
- A group member emphasized the importance of considering patterns over time when screening reports involving chronic neglect, child torture, and human trafficking, as a single report may not independently establish the concern.

The next Children’s Justice Act Task Force Meeting will be held on Monday, October 5, 2026, from 12:00-1:00 PM.