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**Georgia Department of Human Services**  
Aging Services | Child Support Services | Family & Children Services

## Children's Justice Act

# State of Georgia Program Performance Report and State Grant Application

## May 2024

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**Georgia's Children's Justice Act Task Force**

**2024 CJA Three Year Assessment Report**

## Three-Year Assessment

Since 2005, the CJATF has completed five three-year assessments. The first, in 2009, focused on child sexual abuse training, mandated reporting, and practice regarding the appointment of representation for children in dependency cases. The second, in 2012, evaluated policy, practice, and training related to the handling of cases involving victims with special needs. The third, in 2015, addressed concerns related to reported inconsistencies in how various agencies respond to allegations of child abuse and neglect. The fourth was completed in 2018 and focused on the training provided to individuals who respond to and investigate all forms of child maltreatment to identify potential training gaps or barriers and opportunities to enhance best practices. The most recent assessment in 2021 focused on quality legal representation.

The goal of the 2021 three-year assessment was to improve quality legal representation for all parties in dependency hearings. The quality of child representation had been a long-standing interest of the CJATF and the subject of a potential collaborative opportunity that was explored in 2019 and again with several stakeholders during the development of the state's 2020-2024 Child and Family Service Plan (CFSP).

The CJATF 2024 three-year assessment continues the focus on improving quality legal representation, and relies on the research, evaluation, and recommendations of the 2021 assessment. In preparation for the 2024 assessment, the CJATF observed that the state's focus on quality legal representation was beginning to build momentum across jurisdictions, and it would be prudent to continue to prioritize the issue with CJATF support and funding to ensure sustained system improvements. The CFSP stakeholder interviews and statewide assessment also identified quality legal representation as an area of opportunity to improve permanency outcomes for children. For example, the Parent Attorney interviews noted that they will try to locate relatives for placement if a parent is not able to resume custody.

## HIGHLIGHTS OF PROGRESS

Funded FY2022-23 projects that addressed the QLR focus area described positive outcomes in their final reports, resulting in CJATF members providing continued funding support.

- The Georgia Center for Child Advocacy was funded to research and develop a forensic interviewing curriculum specific to attorneys as an innovative approach to improve the prompt and successful resolution of court proceedings, enhance the effectiveness of judicial and administrative action, and enhance the performance of court appointed attorneys, GAL for children, and other lawyers. Using lessons learned from the pilot project, GCCA is launching the Legal Trainings course in FY2024.
- The Office of the Child Advocate collaborated with the Supreme Court Committee on Justice for Children (J4C), DFCS, Chatham County, and the Chatham County Juvenile Court to create a pilot project designed to improve legal representation for children in dependency court through a dedicated child attorney office and title IV-E reimbursement funding.
  - In April of 2022, there were 172 children in care for more than 2 years. By March of 2023, that number had been reduced to 105.
  - The median length of stay in Chatham County has dropped since the creation of the Office. In September of 2021, median length of stay was 29.7 months, and by March of 2023, that number had dropped to 17.6 months.

- Other jurisdictions have expressed interest in this model of a children’s attorney office, and OCA has established a process for claiming title IV-E funds for legal representation that can be replicated as the project expands, which will enable OCA to provide incentives for counties to join.

### **3YA DEVELOPMENT PROCESS**

The TF meeting on September 20, 2023, focused primarily on the CAPTA Panel transition process and the role of the TF Coordinator. In December 2023, members of the Task Force met to review the performance report summaries of FY2022-23 CJA grantees to determine if/how QLR was supported based on the needs identified in the 2021 3YA. The TF also started discussions to determine the focus area of the 2024 3YA.

The next TF meeting on January 24, 2024, confirmed the decision to continue “Quality Legal Representation” as the focus area. TF members felt that there had not been sufficient time to evaluate the change in legal representation, and there were more efforts in place and in development that would further this initiative. The TF stated that they have not had adequate time to track data to see measurable outcomes across the state. When discussing the current projects, the TF discussed not having an “end game” identified except for what the newest policy states (i.e., inclusivity, diversity, etc.). The consensus was that they have not yet synthesized enough to determine outcomes. They did not want to overlook the long-term benefits of spending additional time to see the impact of this focus area. Jerry Bruce of OCA stated that they need to have better data, especially on title IV-E funding. Additionally, there are other areas that need to be explored. For example,

- Workforce – Expanding pilot in Chatham
- Standard of practice, training, institutional support for community of practice/resources

The focus includes workforce, specifically investments in attorney training and cross-disciplinary training models and improving standards of practice. There is a need to keep this topic at the forefront for children and parents to have competent attorneys. This topic promotes elevation and improvements needed to have a robust legal system statewide, including statewide representation and faster permanency, especially while legislative backing is present.

Excerpt from CJATF meeting minutes (5/13/2024):

“The Task Force recommended continued support for strategies that promote a more robust system of representation statewide. The TF is supportive of continued focus on QLR with increased competency among attorneys. The TF is supportive of continued efforts to pursue funding through the legislature to get QLR standards codified. The TF discussed the need for increased focus on evaluation of the CJA-supported efforts (including data) to support those efforts in broad system engagement and how they impact system changes that amplify QLR statewide. The TF discussed revision of the Statement of Need (SoN) for future grant funding to include requiring greater accountability and a plan for sustainability if the program is not funded in the future. Development of an online portal for grant submissions was suggested. The SoN and grant review documents should identify and prioritize training for parent, child, and guardian ad litem attorneys.”

Members noted that the grant funding is “planting seeds” and system improvements may not be observed for many years. The Task Force meetings included discussion on what information would be needed for the next 3YA, including a definition of quality and a standardized method to measure knowledge competency. Adequate data collection is needed to understand what “Quality Legal Representation” is. The TF stated that they need a statewide model for judicial handling (with low payment structure) and QLR (especially Category

C). The members stated they need a centralized way to draw down dollars (a database). They want to know how the IV-E dollars are being tracked, and this will tell them what the counties are doing. With the decision made, the TF wants 2024-2026 CJA funding proposals to address QLR Priorities, workforce development, standards of practice and policy, and institutional support.

The Task Force Coordinator is new in the role and working to develop tools to establish a baseline position in attorney knowledge and competency. The competency tool is based on the survey templates in the Judicial, Court, and Attorney Measures of Performance (JCAMP). Once identified, this baseline data can be used to evaluate future competency gains resulting from the CJA-supported projects. Data will be collected annually during the 3YA period to determine if the quality of legal representation has improved from the baseline, and if so, by how much and in which jurisdictions. The TF will consider additional data collection tools and resources at their annual retreat in fall 2024. Based on the discussion of the group, there is a need to develop and research data on the projects supported around the issue of QLR.

In FY25, the Coordinator will explore how to develop and implement a formal study, as suggested by the TF, to capture all aspects of QLR, including data. Regular and ongoing data collection, and an annual comprehensive review and evaluation of the data, will be scheduled with the TF at the fall 2024 planning retreat, so that information will be readily available for the 2027 three-year assessment submission.

### **Recommendations**

The CJATF reviewed and evaluated state investigative, administrative and both civil and criminal judicial handling of cases of child abuse and neglect, including child sexual abuse and exploitation, as well as cases involving suspected child maltreatment related fatalities and cases involving a potential combination of jurisdictions. In their review, along with the findings from the projects that were supported following the 2021 Three-Year Assessment, the CJATF made the following policy and training recommendations:

- *Category A:*
  - The annual funding announcement soliciting proposals for training activities should identify and prioritize training for parent, child, and guardian ad litem attorneys, including providing additional options for delivery (frequency, format) that expand training opportunities and include multidisciplinary options.
- *Category B:*
  - The State should continue to support development and institutionalization of an interdisciplinary model pilot project for dedicated child attorneys.
- *Category C:*
  - A study should be commissioned to explore the viability of a statewide oversight office for child, parent, and GAL attorneys, and to determine how it might be structured and implemented. The CJATF recognizes that it would likely require legislative action to establish a new agency/organization or add the responsibility for statewide oversight of one or more of these attorney groups to an existing entity.
  - Identification of alternative strategies for addressing the 'over reporting' of neglect primarily due to poverty issues, and alternatives for responding in these circumstances should be developed.
  - Alternative protocols should be identified to supplement the annual proposal

solicitation process and support a wider variety of more individually targeted training and professional development. For example, providing a financial incentive to attorneys who complete Child Welfare Law Specialist (CWLS) certification or covering travel costs that may be a barrier to attending a national training event on implementing interdisciplinary practice.

The CJATF continues to support recommendations that advance its long-standing priorities, including:

- Promoting and supporting the quality and consistency of the multidisciplinary response
- Promoting, supporting, and improving multidisciplinary education and training
- Improving the collection, exchange, and analyses of data
- Reducing trauma to child victims of abuse
- Ensuring that the handling of cases involving child victims with special needs is developmentally and culturally appropriate

The state is making substantial progress toward adopting these recommendations. The CJATF coordinator has developed a process that solicits proposals responsive to the Task Force priorities and is exploring opportunities to supplement the annual proposal solicitation process for a wider array of needed services. The coordinator is also working with Division leadership to identify strategies that separate poverty from neglect reporting. Finally, the state legislature has, as noted above, proffered bills and resolutions to address the recommendations.

Georgia's Children's Justice Act Task Force  
2021 CJA Three Year Assessment Report  
"Quality Legal Representation for Dependency Cases"

May 2021

Georgia's Children's Justice Act Task Force  
Three-Year Assessment Report  
May 2021

I. 2021 Three-Year Assessment Process

*Provide narrative detailing approach used by the Task Force, including:*

- *Participants*
- *Implementation*
- *Data sources or other resources used*
- *Tools or surveys, including how they were developed.*

The quality of child representation has been a long-standing interest of the Task Force and the subject of a potential collaborative opportunity that was explored in 2019 and again with several stakeholders during the development of the state's 2020-2024 Child and Family Service Plan.

In 2020, in response to recent changes in federal legislation allowing IV-E reimbursement for administrative costs related to legal representation, a stakeholder group (QLR Project) was convened and included, in addition to members of the Task Force, the Division's General Counsel, and representatives from the Court Improvement Program, Office of the Child Advocate, Georgia CASA and other relevant stakeholders to explore opportunities, evaluate current practice, and coordinate efforts among the various state plans to maximize the benefits of IV-E funding.

Approved in 2020, Georgia's state CAPTA Plan, revised in a collaborative effort between the Division and Georgia's CAPTA Panels, including the Task Force, the stakeholders identified above, and other community partners, also included a focus on child representation. This included establishing best practice standards and training for child attorneys/Guardian ad Litem (GALs) and promoting quality representation for children within the agency and among judicial partners.

These factors, reinforced by presentations at the annual CJA Grantee meeting in 2020, resulted in a Task Force decision to make quality legal representation the subject of its 2021 three-year assessment, with a scope that would include legal representation of all parties in child abuse and neglect cases.

Discussions began in earnest in August 2020 to develop an assessment plan. The Task Force decided that the first step would be to determine what constituted quality legal representation and to identify effective strategies that supported quality representation. To assist in this first step, Emory University law students conducted a fall research project on the subject. An outline of the assignment is attached as Exhibit 1.

The students' research results were presented to the Task Force and collaborative partners in November 2020. A copy of the presentation summarizing the results is attached as Exhibit 2. The full report is attached as Exhibit 3. The results informed the Task Force's 2021 assessment, identifying several opportunities that

could be explored.

Based on the students' research findings, the Task Force decided that it would conduct a survey of attorneys - parent, child (Including GALs), Special Assistant Attorneys General (SAAGs) that represent the child welfare agency, and juvenile court judges - to gather perceptions of the six strategies identified in the students' research findings as contributing to improved legal representation. This included:

- Formal system of statewide oversight
- Training and specialization
- Compensation
- Caseloads
- Local administrative, operational, and supervisory support
- Interdisciplinary practice

The intent of the survey was to inventory current practice and obtain feedback from attorneys and judges to identify the most promising and potentially viable strategies to promote and support quality legal representation in dependency cases.

#### Research Method

Beginning in December 2020, the Task Force met virtually 2-3 times each month through March 2021 to design and refine two survey instruments - one for attorneys and one for juvenile court judges.

#### *Attorney Survey*

The attorney survey included questions on the attorney's role/position, tenure, judicial circuit, potential strategies that may contribute to improving or supporting quality legal representation, compensation practices, professional development and training supports, and case practices. A copy is attached as Exhibit 4.

The attorney survey was deployed via Survey Monkey on March 18, 2021. Invitations from the Task Force to participate in the survey were distributed through several constituent email groups, including:

- From the office of the Attorney General at the request of DFCS Deputy Director and General Counsel to Special Assistants Attorney General (SAAGs) in 159 counties
- From the office of the Georgia State Bar to attorneys in its Child Protection & Advocacy Law Section
- From the State Coordinator, Georgia, National Association of Counsel for Children to the Georgia Child Welfare Law Specialists group
- From a parent attorney Task Force member to a Parent attorney email group

Attorney survey responses were collected through April 23, 2021.

#### *Judge Survey*

Two slightly different versions of the survey for juvenile court judges were developed. A paper version was developed and distributed at the mandatory Juvenile Court Judges Conference May 2-5, 2021 attended by 90-

100 judges representing Georgia's 49 judicial circuits. An online version was deployed on Survey Monkey May 5, 2021, and an email invitation to participate was distributed with a survey link was to juvenile court judges in 49 judicial circuits by the coordinating Council of Juvenile Court Judges of Georgia.

The survey for judges included questions on tenure, caseload, attorney retention, judicial circuit, perceived quality of advocacy in the courtroom by different parties, potential strategies that may contribute to improving or supporting quality legal representation, attorney compensation practices, and professional development and training supports. Copies of both surveys are attached as Exhibits 5 and 6.

Paper survey forms submitted by judges were entered in Survey Monkey. Results of both the attorney and judge surveys were downloaded from Survey Monkey for data analysis in SPSS and Excel.

### Survey Response

A total of 261 individuals responded to the attorney survey and 56 to the juvenile court judge survey. As of 2020, there were approximately 520 members of the Georgia Bar's Child Protection and Advocacy section, 295 SAAGs, and 150 juvenile court judges in Georgia. While the survey response was relatively modest, attorney survey respondents represented every judicial circuit, and judge respondents represented about 30 of the state's 49 circuits.

### Key Survey Findings

In addition to the students' research findings, the results of the attorney and judge surveys support opportunities for Task Force advocacy and support. For analysis purposes, attorney survey respondents were grouped into the following categories:

- SAAGs (87 respondents)
- Child, parent, and GAL attorneys (130 respondents)
- Other respondents (27 respondents; results should be interpreted with caution)

The key survey findings regarding improvement and support of quality legal representation are presented in this document. A final comprehensive report on survey findings will be available in June 2021.

Both the attorney and judge surveys asked how much each of specific operational practices and compensation measures would contribute to improving and supporting quality legal representation by attorneys in dependency cases if available or more readily available. Response options were on a five-point scale: none (1), not very much (2), some (3), very much (4), a great deal (5), and N/A.

The operational practices rated highest across the four groups were access to information resources, access to case-related professionals and experts, and interdisciplinary teams. Unsurprisingly:

- Judges and other attorney survey respondents tended to rate a formal system of statewide oversight and Georgia standards of practice higher than did SAAGs or parent, child, or GAL attorneys.
- SAAGs tended to rate a guaranteed maximum caseload lower than the other respondent groups.

These are likely because SAAGs have an existing formal system of oversight and standards, and most SAAG respondents (84%) had full-time hourly contracted positions.

Table 1. Average Ratings on Operational Practices

Operational Practice	SAAGs		Parent, child, or GAL attorneys		Other attorney survey respondents*		Juvenile Court Judges	
	N	Mean	N	Mean	N	Mean	N	Mean
Formal system of oversight (statewide)	80	2.33	121	2.91	8	4.00	49	3.22
Georgia-specific standards of practice	81	2.94	120	3.58	8	3.88	49	3.59
Guaranteed minimum caseload	80	2.04	120	2.73	7	1.57	49	2.63
Guaranteed maximum caseload	81	2.51	120	3.48	8	3.00	49	3.29
Improved access to information resources (e.g., legal databases, subscriptions)	81	3.40	121	4.35	7	3.29	49	3.49
Improved access to experts, case-related professionals (e.g., social workers, investigators)	81	3.68	121	4.40	7	3.71	49	3.94
Interdisciplinary case teams (e.g., investigator, mental health professional, education advocate, client peer support)	81	3.26	121	4.07	8	4.38	47	3.87
More timely case assignments	81	2.00	119	2.84	7	2.57	48	2.23
Translation services and other accommodations for clients	81	2.67	120	3.27	7	3.43	49	3.06

\*These included a few judges, court staff attorneys, legal services and third-party attorneys, and other advocates/staff.

On the compensation measures, full-time position with benefits; higher pay; and financial incentives for additional training, certifications, or specializations and for meeting specified professional development recommendations or requirements were rated highest across all four groups.

- Compensation rates based on attorney experience, expertise, and/or specializations were rated somewhat higher by SAAGs and parent, child, and GAL attorneys compared to the other groups
- Variable compensation rates based on case complexity was rated higher by parent, child, and GAL attorneys compared to the other groups

Table 2. Average Ratings on Compensation Measures

Compensation Measure	SAAGs		Parent, child, or GAL attorneys		Other attorney survey respondents		Judges	
	N	Mean	N	Mean	N	Mean	N	Mean
Compensation rates based on attorney experience, expertise, and/or specializations	81	3.93	121	3.98	8	2.88	47	3.60
Equal payment for in-court and out-of-court work/time	80	2.18	121	3.29	8	2.38	47	3.09
Financial incentives for additional training, certifications, or specializations	81	3.46	121	4.08	8	3.38	47	3.81
Financial incentives for meeting specified professional development recommendations or requirements	81	3.26	121	3.92	7	3.14	47	3.60
Full-time position with benefits	81	3.32	119	3.48	8	3.13	47	4.17
Higher pay	80	4.41	120	4.38	8	3.00	45	4.51
Variable compensation rates based on case complexity	81	2.81	121	3.72	7	1.86	47	3.09

Both surveys also asked whether specific professional development supports and training topics “would contribute a great deal” to improving and supporting quality legal representation in dependency cases if available or more readily available to attorneys.

The top three (most often checked) professional development supports for improving and supporting quality legal representation were consistent across attorney groups and judges and included:

- Trial skills, motions practice, and evidence training specific to dependency
- Specialized training in child welfare dependency law
- Georgia-specific practice materials and forms

Table 3. Professional Development Supports

Professional Development Support	SAAGs	Parent, child, or GAL attorneys	Other attorney survey respondents	Total attorney survey respondents	Judges
Trial skills, motions practice, and evidence training specific to dependency	72.5%	83.6%	75.0%	79.0%	84.1%
Specialized training in child welfare dependency law	66.3%	74.6%	100.0%	72.4%	84.1%
Georgia-specific practice materials and forms	55.0%	81.1%	75.0%	71.0%	72.7%
Case consultation with peers	37.5%	55.7%	50.0%	48.6%	29.5%
Child Welfare Law Specialist certification	30.0%	51.6%	62.5%	43.8%	47.7%
Role-specific, pre-appointment training	27.5%	37.7%	62.5%	34.8%	40.9%
Peer community/network support	26.3%	39.3%	37.5%	34.3%	38.6%
Organized mentoring/coaching	23.8%	31.1%	62.5%	29.5%	43.2%
Guidance and feedback from supervisors	10.0%	19.7%	62.5%	17.6%	22.7%
Formal client feedback mechanism	12.5%	14.8%	50.0%	15.2%	22.7%
Total responses	80	122	8	210	44

The training topics that would most improve or support the quality of representation differed between the two survey groups. The top three (most often checked) across the attorney groups were:

- Ongoing case law and legislative updates
- DFCS policy and practice
- Evidence and trial skills

Judges also had DFCS policy and practice in their top three, but their other two top training topics were:

- Specialized training in child welfare dependency law
- Legal strategies to expedite permanency

Table 4. Training Topics

Training Topic	SAAGs	Parent, Child, or GAL Attorneys	Other attorney survey respondents	Total attorney survey respondents	Judges
Ongoing case law and legislative updates	78.8%	82.8%	75.0%	81.0%	63.0%
DFCS policy and practice	63.8%	82.8%	75.0%	75.2%	67.4%
Evidence and trial skills	71.3%	68.0%	87.5%	70.0%	58.7%
Specialized training in child welfare dependency law	58.8%	67.2%	87.5%	64.8%	73.9%
Legal strategies to expedite permanency	55.0%	65.6%	62.5%	61.4%	69.6%
Other topics relevant to child welfare (e.g., immigration, homelessness, education advocacy, reasonable efforts)	35.0%	56.6%	50.0%	48.1%	47.8%
Trauma-responsive practice	26.3%	51.6%	62.5%	42.4%	39.1%
Virtual practice/remote representation skills	22.5%	28.7%	0.0%	25.2%	26.1%
Diversity, equity, implicit bias, inclusion	8.8%	24.6%	50.0%	19.5%	26.1%
Total Responses	80	110	20	210	46

In summary, these findings support Task Force recommendations and efforts related to strategies that will:

- Increase attorney access to dependency case resources (information and experts)
- Increase the use of interdisciplinary teams in dependency cases
- Offer incentives to encourage attorneys to seek additional training, certifications or specializations and meet professional development recommendations/requirements
- Increase attorney access to professional development supports and training in the following areas:
  - Trial skills, motions practice, and evidence training specific to dependency
  - Specialized training in child welfare dependency law
  - Georgia-specific practice materials and forms
  - Ongoing case law and legislative updates
  - DFCS policy and practice
  - Evidence and trial skills
  - Specialized training in child welfare dependency law
  - Legal strategies to expedite permanency

## II. Policy and Training Recommendations

*Outline policy and/or training recommendations that resulted from the assessment and will guide the work of the Task Force for the next three-years.*

The objective of the Task Force's 2021 Three-Year Assessment was to identify opportunities to promote and support strategies identified in the assessment as having the potential to improve the quality of legal representation for children and parents in dependency cases.

The survey was designed to explore status and interest in the following:

- Formal system of statewide oversight
- Local administrative, operational, and supervisory supports
- Training and specialization: Certifications, pre-appointment training, and professional development
- Compensation structure: Statewide/local levels, benchmarks, and incentives
- Caseloads limits: Minimum and maximum
- Interdisciplinary team model: Practice of teaming lawyers with workers from other disciplines, such as social workers, educational advocates, mental health professionals, and parent peer advocates, to expedite permanency

Overall, survey responses suggest that there are several opportunities, some inter-related or inter-dependent, that meet the objectives of the Task Force and either rise to the level of a recommendation or present additional opportunities to explore that the Task Force will include in their plans for the next three years. Those recommendations include:

*Category A. Improving investigative, administrative, and judicial handling of cases of child abuse and neglect, including child sexual abuse and exploitation, as well as cases involving suspected child maltreatment related fatalities and cases involving a potential combination of jurisdictions, such as intrastate, interstate, Federal-State, and State-Tribal, in a manner which reduces the additional trauma to the child victim and the victim's family and which also ensures procedural fairness to the accused.*

Survey questions relating specifically to training and professional development revealed several opportunities to support identified training needs, whether pre-appointment, certifications, or on-demand options to acquire specialization; keep up-to-date on federal initiatives and changes to state law and policy; and/or enhance practice skills. Specifically related to professional development, the Task Force recommends that the annual document soliciting proposals for training activities identify and prioritize training for parent, child, and guardian ad litem attorneys that meet these objectives, including providing additional options for delivery (frequency, format) that expand training opportunities and include multidisciplinary options. In the survey results, the Task Force identified several training opportunities it would recommend supporting, such as trial

skills, motions practice, and evidence training specific to dependency; role specific pre-appointment training; etc.

Access to CJA funds can be limited for specialized training and professional development opportunities for individuals or small groups by the annual solicitation and contracting process currently used. To increase access to funds, it is recommended that alternative protocols be identified to supplement the annual proposal solicitation process and support a wider variety of more individually targeted training and professional development. For example, providing a financial incentive to attorneys who complete CWLS certification or covering travel costs that may be a barrier to attending a national training event on implementing interdisciplinary practice.

The Task Force has several long-standing priorities and interests that include multidisciplinary training for a wide spectrum of professionals involved in the handling of cases of child abuse and neglect. These projects, supported by CJA grant funding, will be required to incorporate content relevant to their target population into their proposed plans for 2022-2024 that will support improvement in the quality of legal representation.

*Category B. Experimental, model, and demonstration programs for testing innovative approaches and techniques which may improve the prompt and successful resolution of civil and criminal court proceedings or enhance the effectiveness of judicial and administrative action in child abuse and neglect cases, particularly child sexual abuse and exploitation cases, including the enhancement of performance of court-appointed attorneys and guardians ad litem for children, and which also ensure procedural fairness to the accused*

Of special interest to the Task Force was the interdisciplinary team approach identified by the research project as an effective strategy for improving legal representation. This interest was also driven in part by the participation of several Task Force members on a quality legal representation work group involved in a developing an interdisciplinary model pilot project. To gauge interest and support for this approach, a question was included on the survey to assess whether the interdisciplinary model would be seen by attorneys and judges as a practice that would contribute to the quality of legal representation. Responses that this would contribute “very much” or “a great deal” indicated significant support by child and parent and GAL attorneys, (78.5%), SAAGs, (42.0%) and judges (64.8%). As a result, the Task Force recommends promoting and supporting innovative practices that utilize more collaborative approaches to representation, such as an interdisciplinary model.

*Category C. Reform of state law, ordinances, regulations, protocols, and procedures to provide comprehensive protection for children, which may include those children involved in reports of child abuse or neglect with a potential combination of jurisdictions, such as intrastate, interstate, Federal-State, and State-Tribal, from child abuse and neglect, including child sexual abuse and exploitation, while ensuring fairness to all affected persons.*

Survey responses also suggest that there was both a need and appetite for some level of formal system of statewide oversight for child, parent, and guardian ad litem attorneys to establish practice standards to improve both quality and consistency and to provide equitable and on-demand access to resources and training. The Task Force is recommending that a study be commissioned, and funded by the CJA grant, to explore the viability of this opportunity to determine how this might be structured and implemented, recognizing that it would likely require legislative action to establish new agency/organization or add the responsibility for statewide oversight of one or more of these attorney groups to an existing entity.

### III. Incorporating New Recommendations into Task Force Activities

*Provide preliminary information on activities that will be undertaken over the next three years to address recommendations*

The survey conducted by the Task Force yielded a great deal of information that will need additional analysis, not only to provide further insight into findings that were the basis for recommendations but to also identify additional opportunities that may have the potential to inform planning over the next few years.

With respect to the study on the viability of establishing a statewide entity to serve as a centralized organization, Task Force activities in the first year will include development of a framework for the study that includes entity role, responsibilities, structure, barriers, champions, fiscal requirements, etc. and identify/select a qualified individual or entity to conduct such a study. During the second year, the study would be conducted, results analyzed, and identify viable options for consideration. In the third year, based on preferred option, the Task Force would develop a plan for implementing recommended path forward.

With respect to training, the Task Force recognizes that it is necessary to inventory training and professional development opportunities currently available to develop a plan for addressing unmet needs identified in the survey. This inventory will include costs, objectives, target audience, requirements, national, state, and local focus and/or entity responsible, etc. Data gathered in year one will inform training activities and projects supported in years two and three. This includes encouraging priority projects to incorporate content that supports or enhances the quality legal representation for all parties involved while reducing trauma experienced by victim and ensuring fairness to the accused.

The Task Force will also revisit its protocol for identifying and selecting sub-grantees as well as exploring more effective methods of evaluating sub-grantee performance.

With respect to supporting experimental, model or demonstration programs with the potential to improve the quality of legal representation, the Task Force will explore innovative practices that support quality representation and take an active role in identifying sub-grantees that may be interested in implementing a pilot project. One such opportunity is the concept of ‘organized mentoring/coaching’, either as a project within a vertical organizational structure (single judicial circuit) or as a peer-to-peer mentoring project between one or more jurisdictions).

“Higher pay” was a frequent comment expressed in open-ended questions and reflected in several compensation-related questions in the survey. The Task Force will consider doing some additional analysis or working with another group interested in looking at this issue, as compensation rates were a related factor in several questions on the survey, such as incentives or higher rates for specialization or based on expertise and or experience.

*A special thanks to the many Task Force members who contributed to the three-year assessment...*

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