“Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!”

Emma Lazarus, *The New Colossus* (1883) [59]

Dirigo … [61]

E Pluribus Unum … [62]

We the People … [63]

U.S. Constitution, Preamble - adapted

[re-]establish
JUSTICE.

JUSTICE, REBUILT.

The public obligation already exists.

“How can we help?” is how the conversation should start.

Help families. Help children. Protect their futures.

Redesign the judiciary around the people it serves.
Start with Maine’s children and families.

A companion to For Our Children and Families

JTforME.com/initiative/

NOVEMBER 2026 / RESEARCH, POLICY AND IMPLEMENTATION
Proposed reforms. Existing law and court orders continue to govern.

THE PUBLIC PROMISE

Make every step accountable.

The public obligation already exists. "How can we help?" is how the conversation should start. Every step should help families reach safety, practical support and fair decisions, while protecting children's stability and future. Children should be heard without carrying the adults' case. [4]

This blueprint proposes a **Maine Family Justice Service** within the Judicial Branch: coordinated support from first contact through implementation, built around independent adjudication. It connects the initiative to the staff, procedures and public measures needed to deliver it.

SIX PROPOSED SERVICE COMMITMENTS

01 CLEAR ENTRY

Understand the process, costs, deadlines and available help.

02 SAFE PARTICIPATION

Reach safety support, accessibility help and appropriate legal assistance.

03 A FAIR HEARING

Examine a neutrally investigated, challengeable record; understand the decision.

04 ACCOUNTABLE PROGRESS

Know the next action, responsible office and reason for delay.

05 WORKABLE ORDERS

See clear adult duties, dates, follow-through and implementation review.

06 VISIBLE CORRECTION

Find separate routes for legal review, professional concerns and service failures.

THE FIRST DECISION

Commission the legal and fiscal work for a bounded two-site pilot. Name the responsible office, publish the baseline and delivery plan, and fund the staff needed to test it. Preserve independent adjudication, emergency relief and meaningful review.

"Public" includes everyone entitled to use the courts. These are proposed service commitments; existing rights, case-specific duties and review deadlines continue to govern.

READ, USE AND CHALLENGE THE BLUEPRINT

Find the argument. Follow the plan.

Use this map in print or click a section. PDF bookmarks provide the full outline; every footer returns here.

01 **Purpose, safeguards and authority** 05-10

The initiative • the whole journey • coercive control • constitutional and Maine authority

02 **The public experience** 11-20

Entry • safety • evidence • hearings • children's participation • workable orders • professional roles

03 **Evidence, public duty and prevention** 21-27

Operational examples • clinical research • practical help • lived experience • prevention and its limits

04 **Delivery and accountability** 28-36

Service standards • oversight • AI • costs • measurement • rollout • model provisions • failure checks

05 **The public request** 37

Name the owner. Cost the work. Publish the test. Report the correction.

06 **Sources and research notes** 38-46

Primary law, clinical research and institutional models, with clickable references

THREE USEFUL READING ROUTES

Understand the proposal: Public promise, p. 3 / Coercive control, p. 7 / Public request, p. 37
Assess delivery: Service model, p. 11 / Costs, p. 31 / Roadmap, p. 33
Test the safeguards: Authority, p. 9 / Model provisions, p. 34 / Sources, p. 38

How to read the claims: current law defines existing authority; research informs the design; proposed commitments require lawful adoption, funding and evaluation. Numbered citations open the source notes.

CONNECTED TO THE INITIATIVE

From the initiative to daily service.

A companion to the current For Our Children and Families proposal on JTforME.com.

The initiative's rev9, published October 13, 2026, addresses whole-child history, workable orders, protected access and continuing improvement. This companion develops the service architecture and proposes substantive, neutral investigation of the history used in consequential decisions. The proposed Act's text remains unchanged. [1][2]

INITIATIVE FOUNDATION	BLUEPRINT APPLICATION
§§1 and 1-B History and improvement	A source-linked history grounded in substantive neutral investigation, with disputed claims, earlier findings, gaps and corrections clearly distinguished.
§§2, 3 and 17-B Access and assistance	Guided entry, navigation and coordinated services; integrate the proposed §3 office rather than create a duplicate bureaucracy.
§§6-A, 7 and 17-A Workable orders and review	Assign adult duties, keep elapsed time visible, and review whether ordered relief actually occurs.
§§8 and 11 Children and professional roles	Defined child-participation protocols and bounded specialist assignments.
§§14, 14-A, 15 and 17-C Accountability and capacity	A service dashboard, protected records, independent evaluation and a costed rollout.

The proposed **Maine Family Justice Service** is a working name for integrated delivery within the Family Division. Staffing and governance must be reconciled with the initiative's proposed Office of Family Mediation and Parental Protection and existing court services before adoption.

STATUS AND SEQUENCE

The initiative remains proposed legislation for public review. The broader one-to-five-year redesign complements its early implementation milestones; it does not postpone them. A more expansive mediation opt-out, discussed here, would require additional statutory and rule changes. [1][2][3]

Initiative overview | Full proposed Act | 2028 roadmap

FROM CASES TO PEOPLE

Design the whole journey.

A court's service obligations begin before a filing and continue after an order.

A parent may arrive afraid of losing a child, a home or control over what happens next. A child may face disrupted routines and questions they cannot answer. The institution must respond to that experience with understandable information, practical help and fair decisions that protect the child's future.

Maine's Family Division statute already directs a system responsive to families and children and authorizes court rules, case management, education and referral services. The Supreme Judicial Court has broad administrative authority. Those foundations permit serious redesign within lawful institutional boundaries. [4][5]

Start with "How can we help?" Ask what is unsafe, what the child needs and what practical barrier can be removed. Explain the next lawful step. Humane treatment must not depend on composure, deference or legal vocabulary.

Match intensity to need. A simple agreement, a complex property dispute and a coercive-control concern require different combinations of assistance and adjudication.

Use judicial time for judging. Trained staff manage scheduling, navigation and records. Qualified neutrals investigate material disputed history through disclosed methods. Authorized judicial officers decide credibility, admissibility, legal findings and remedies.

Make the next step visible. Every matter has an owner for its administrative progress, a next action, a responsible office and an explanation when time slips.

Measure the burden on families. Include costs, travel, lost work, repeated interviews, misunderstanding, safety and actual implementation, alongside court workload.

> ## Judicial independence protects the decision. It does not excuse an unusable service.

The national Family Justice Initiative supplies a relevant foundation for differentiated pathways and user assistance. These recommendations guide design; they do not establish that this particular model has already succeeded. [25]

COERCIVE CONTROL AND CONTROL BY PROXY

The court must never become an instrument of control.

Public authority must not become the means by which private domination continues.

After separation, court processes can extend coercive control through retaliatory filings, compelled contact, financial exhaustion, intrusive demands, threats involving children and obstruction of care. Research describes related patterns as legal, systems and post-separation abuse. [36][37]

Courts can amplify harm through fragmented records, forced interaction and prolonged restrictions without meaningful review. A 25-article scoping review documents system-enabled control and secondary victimization in mothers' experiences of family proceedings. [38]

Three questions that must remain distinct

QUESTION	RESPONSE REQUIRED / PROPOSED REFORM
Is a party misusing the process?	Assess conduct, purpose and harm using **context grounded in substantive, independent, neutral investigation**. Verify primary evidence, relevant witnesses and contrary material; disclose gaps. Repeated counsel-driven allegations and past findings lacking that foundation do not become verified history. Provide a meaningful opportunity to respond.
Is the institution amplifying harm?	**#StopHarmingOurKids** Audit workflow, delays, compelled interaction, access barriers and failures to implement protective decisions. Assign responsibility and verify that the harm is corrected.
Has a professional breached a duty?	**Replace Maine's Board of Overseers of the Bar** through lawful Supreme Judicial Court rulemaking: public-majority oversight, independent neutral investigators, separate prosecution and adjudication, transparent reasoned outcomes and meaningful review. Transfer functions, records and pending complaints through a defined transition preserving privacy and due process. [47]

CONTROL BY PROXY

Using an institution or another person to continue intimidation, surveillance, coercive financial pressure or interference with lawful care or relationships. Assess conduct against independently investigated history, applicable law and primary evidence; the description is not itself a legal finding.

DESIGN AGAINST MISUSE

Recognize the pattern. Preserve the hearing.

A safeguard against abusive litigation must not become a new weapon against the person seeking protection.

POSSIBLE MECHANISM	PROPOSED SYSTEM RESPONSE
Repeated proceedings used to exhaust	A source-linked chronology distinguishes what was alleged, independently examined and decided. Review duplication, legitimate need and harm; repetition is not corroboration.
Contact or surveillance through process	Safe communication preferences, protected addresses, separate waiting arrangements and tightly scoped information requests.
Financial pressure and care obstruction	Transparent costs, targeted disclosure, timely decisions on alleged misuse and implementable duties for school, health and care logistics.
A child or professional used as a proxy	Written role boundaries; no child messenger duties; disclose the basis of professional assertions used in deciding the case.
Institutional pressure to settle	No settlement quotas; confidential safety assessment, access to advice and prompt consideration of lawful mediation waivers.

A filing count, distress, an unsuccessful application or a disputed allegation does not by itself prove abuse. New safety evidence needs an accessible route to a judge. Restrictions on future filings require lawful authority, narrow scope, reasoned findings and review; they cannot become blanket exclusion from protection.

Maine law includes coercion in specified protection-from-abuse definitions. Separately, *Indorf v. Keep* requires extraordinary circumstances and clear litigation-process abuse for inherent-power fee sanctions; the Law Court vacated the fee award. Both points favor specific evidence over labels. [15][16]

ASSESS CONDUCT, WITHOUT A GENDER PRESUMPTION

Research includes survivor-mother samples and studies of men reporting legal or administrative aggression. These studies cannot establish comparative prevalence. Take every report seriously, assess the evidence and legal requirements, and avoid gender presumptions. [37][45]

CONSTITUTIONAL DESIGN

Keep the power to decide independent.

Modern service architecture must strengthen meaningful participation and reliable findings.

AUTHORITY	DESIGN IMPLICATION AND LIMIT
Troxel v. Granville (2000)	Respect protected parental decision-making. The plurality's nonparent-visitation context does not supply a universal custody formula. [17]
Santosky v. Kramer (1982)	Before termination, the state must prove parental unfitness by at least clear-and-convincing evidence. That standard does not govern every interim parenting dispute. [18]
Boddie (1971) / M.L.B. (1996)	Money cannot foreclose the specific divorce and termination-appeal access addressed in these cases. They do not make every civil service universally free. [19][20]
Lassiter (1981) / Turner (2011)	Counsel and safeguards depend on the proceeding. Navigation augments assistance; it does not replace counsel where law requires representation. [21][22]
Tennessee v. Lane (2004)	Meaningful access to judicial services is central to the ADA framework. The blueprint proposes several access channels, not a supposed constitutional right to one platform. [23]
Caperton (2009)	An exceptional objective risk of bias can require recusal. Ordinary legal error and conduct allegations require their proper review routes. [24]

The proposed system leaves contested findings, admissibility, remedies and judicial decisions with authorized officers. Administrative staff cannot privately recommend who should win. Appeals remain independent. A service complaint cannot reverse an order or extend an appeal deadline.

A PROTECTED RIGHT TO PARTICIPATE

The institution should make the issue, relevant information, opportunity to respond and reasons for decision understandable. Clear workflows help deliver due process; they do not reduce its legal requirements.

MAINE AUTHORITY MAP

Put each decision in the right hands.

The core service redesign appears achievable within existing judicial structures. Each component still requires legal and fiscal review.

REFORM	PRIMARY ROUTE
Workflow, navigation, scheduling and assignment	SJC / Judicial Branch administration under 4 M.R.S. §§1 and 183; staffing and procurement subject to funding.
Substantive rights, confidentiality and mediation	Legislation, with coordinated court rules. Any expanded mediation opt-out must address 19-A §§251 and 1653(11).
Professional duties and conduct enforcement	SJC conduct and Bar Rules; regulator implementation. Preserve independence and fair disciplinary procedures.
Staff, legal assistance, neutral investigation and evaluation	Appropriations and lawful Judicial Branch authority; define qualifications, appointments, investigative powers, disclosure, challenge procedures and capacity through coordinated legislation or rules as required.
Case records and information sharing	Current access law and electronic court rules; explicit authority for each disclosure. Linked cases retain their distinct jurisdictions.
Merits review and remedies	Authorized judicial proceedings and appellate review. An ombuds or quality office has no power to change custody or protection orders.

Maine's constitutional provisions on prompt justice, separated powers and judicial authority guide the architecture. *In re Dunleavy* addresses the State's rigorous separation framework. Administrative modernization is not permission to move final family adjudication to an executive agency. [4][5][6][8][11][13]

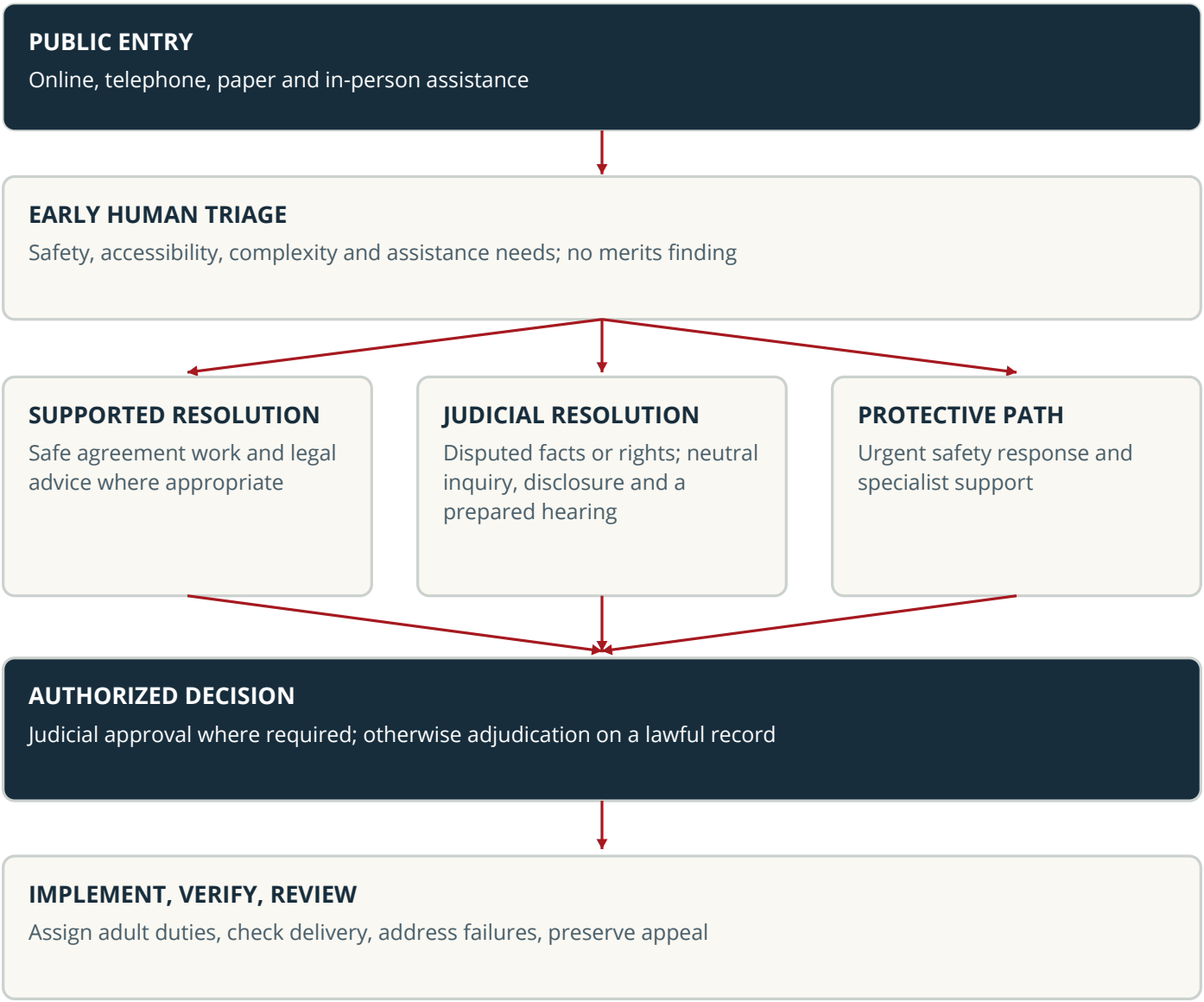
Important limit: §183(4) authorizes a particular magistrate pilot with both parties' consent. It is not a blanket experiment clause. No pilot may waive substantive rights, confidentiality, jurisdiction or evidentiary protections without lawful authority. [4]

A Maine example of learning: *In re Children of Destiny H.* revisited procedures for ineffective-assistance claims after experience exposed practical barriers. The judgment was affirmed; the lesson is that courts can revise procedure in response to evidence. [14]

THE REPLACEMENT ARCHITECTURE

One front door. Several lawful paths.

Assistance follows need. Every path preserves access to an authorized judicial decision.



Complex matters receive additional specialist support within these paths. Routing can change when circumstances change. Emergency relief is never held behind routine intake. Screening disclosures remain separate from adjudicative evidence unless lawfully introduced.

Service model proposed by JTforME, informed by family-pathway principles and risk-screening practice. [25][29]

THE FAMILY JOURNEY

A visible next step at every stage.

A proposed service standard for the entire experience, from first contact through correction and review.

WHAT THE PERSON NEEDS	SERVICE AND ACCOUNTABLE ROLE
Understand what to do and reach help	Navigator begins with “How can we help?”, explains options and checks whether assistance is actually available.
Participate safely	Safety specialist offers separate screening and a safe contact plan; urgent legal relief goes to an authorized officer.
Establish a reliable history	Qualified neutrals examine material disputed history; records staff preserve sources, investigative limits, corrections and opportunities to respond.
Know where the matter stands	Coordinator publishes the next event, required action, responsible office and delay explanation.
Resolve or be heard	Appropriate resolution assistance or a prepared hearing; no administrative veto over a lawful request for adjudication.
Protect the child’s participation	Defined specialist protocol, informed limits of confidentiality, no burden on the child to decide.
Understand the decision	Judicial officer gives findings, legal basis, practical obligations and review information.
Put the order into effect	Implementation coordinator checks adult duties and barriers; judicial officer decides enforcement remedies.
Correct error or service failure	Separate routes for appeal, conduct concerns and service complaints, each with its own rules and deadlines.

AN ACCOUNTABLE OWNER, NOT A HIDDEN DECISION-MAKER

A coordinator is responsible for administrative progress. The coordinator cannot resolve credibility, recommend custody through a private channel, modify an order or pressure a settlement.

ENTRY AND ACCESS

Make the front door understandable.

Offer a usable route even when a person is overwhelmed, has no lawyer or cannot safely use a shared device.

Begin with "How can we help?" Ask what changed, what is unsafe, what the child needs, whether an order is in place and what help would make the next lawful step possible. Maine's Family Division already has a statutory responsibility to respond to families' needs and support their children. This conversation serves that existing responsibility. [4]

The answers should guide information and referral. They should not silently select legal claims, waive rights or generate sworn allegations. Before submission, the person must understand what is being filed, who will receive it, and what information may become part of the court record.

Digital entry
Plain-language guided forms; accessible layouts; save-and-return; clear service and filing receipts; exact deadlines; visible fees and waiver information; safe notification preferences.

Human entry
Telephone support, staffed courthouse help, paper filing support and assisted access in rural communities. A person must not need a smartphone, credit card or private broadband to participate.

Build accommodation into the service

Ask about language and disability needs at intake, confirm the plan before hearings and provide a route to correct failures. Test screen-reader use, keyboard navigation, low vision, cognitive load and translated instructions with actual users. A broken portal must not become a forfeited right; documented outages need lawful, published fallback procedures. [23]

Separate information from legal advice

Navigators can explain a process and help organize documents. Individualized legal advice belongs with appropriately authorized providers. Limited-scope lawyers and duty-counsel arrangements should be available at high-consequence decisions, with full representation where required by law or funded eligibility.

THE PORTAL IS ONE CHANNEL

Digital access should reduce burden. Remote participation must be suitable for the hearing, safety and accessibility needs; neither remote nor in-person attendance should be an automatic proxy for credibility or engagement.

DYNAMIC TRIAGE

Match service to risk and complexity.

A pathway assigns help and case-management intensity. It does not assign blame or determine entitlement.

PATHWAY	SERVICE MODEL
Guided agreement	Simple issues, adequate understanding and no identified unsafe bargaining condition: guided forms, a legal-information checkpoint and required judicial approval.
Supported resolution	Appropriate negotiation or mediation with legal assistance, clear scope, safe participation and ready access to unresolved-issue adjudication.
Judicial resolution	Define contested issues, investigate material disputed history through a scoped neutral process, disclose the basis and gaps, and provide a timely hearing.
Protective / urgent	Safety concerns, coercion or immediate child welfare needs: specialist support and prompt authorized judicial consideration.
Complex / coordinated	Overlapping systems or substantial needs: a defined team with separate jurisdictions, permissions and evidentiary boundaries.
Implementation / enforcement	An existing order is not working: identify the failure and necessary relief without unnecessarily restarting the entire dispute.

People receive an understandable explanation of their administrative path and can request human reconsideration. New evidence or changing circumstances can increase or reduce service intensity. A risk flag cannot become a custody recommendation or prove an allegation. [25][29]

SCREENING MUST NOT BECOME A SECRET SCORE

Disability, poverty, language, anger or a request for a judge cannot justify adverse merits treatment. Collect only necessary information and audit whether routing produces unequal access or delays.

SAFETY AND GENUINE CHOICE

Screen before creating settlement pressure.

Agreement is useful only when it is informed, lawful and safe.

Offer separate screening for coercive control, abuse, stalking, intimidation, financial pressure and safe communication. Repeat it at relevant transitions because risk can change. Screening directs support and urgent protection; it does not replace neutral investigation or establish a disputed fact. Emergency relief must not await a completed inquiry. [36]

Current law and proposed reform must stay distinct

Maine currently requires mediation referral before specified contested hearings involving minor children. Section 251 permits an affidavit-supported waiver for extraordinary cause and contains good-faith participation duties and sanctions. A policy of unrestricted voluntary participation is therefore an additional legislative proposal, not an existing entitlement. [7][8]

The immediate priority is prompt access to lawful waivers, safe formats and emergency relief. The additional reform option is voluntary mediation, without improper adverse inference from declining it. Adoption requires statutory and rule changes and sufficient hearing capacity. Failure to settle must not be treated as proof of parental unfitness.

The safety protocol

Explain confidentiality accurately. State what is private, what must be reported, what an emergency may require and what a valid court order can compel. Software cannot create a legal privilege.

Separate protected disclosures. Safety screening, advocacy and treatment records are not a shared household inbox. Any evidence relied upon for a decision must enter through lawful process.

Protect room to disagree. No quotas for settlement, contact, reunification or allegation outcomes. Good-faith safety reports and legitimate requests for a hearing remain protected.

DIFFERENT ROLES, DIFFERENT RECORDS

A mediator is not the merits fact-finder. A navigator is not an opposing party's investigator. A treating clinician does not become a custody evaluator through an informal referral. Publish each assignment and its limits.

CHILDREN'S EXPERIENCE

Hear the child. Do not make the child carry the case.

The child's needs and views deserve attention without assigning the child responsibility for the adults' decision.

Maine's best-interest framework considers a meaningful child preference alongside safety, continuity, relationships and other factors. A preference is not the only factor, and a child should not be made to choose a parent as the price of being heard. [7]

BEFORE PARTICIPATION	DURING AND AFTER
Explain the role	Tell the child, in suitable language, who is speaking with them, why, and who may hear what they say.
Choose the least burdensome suitable method	Use qualified, developmentally appropriate, non-leading methods under a defined role. Coordinate lawful use of existing interviews to reduce repetition; separate treatment from investigative evaluation.
Keep adult duties with adults	No child messenger, scheduling negotiator, blame courier, evidence collector or implementation manager.
Preserve fair use of information	Protect the child while providing lawful notice and a meaningful way to address information used in deciding the case.
Give closure	Explain what happens next in developmentally appropriate terms and identify support if participation was distressing.

Research on triangulation describes pathways involving loyalty conflict and self-esteem, with important differences across measures and families. It supports reducing the child's involvement in adult conflict; it cannot determine the correct order in an individual case. [35]

RELATIONSHIPS REQUIRE EVIDENCE AND SAFETY

Safe, supportive relationships should be sustained in practice. Neither gender, professional title nor a contested label establishes safety or entitlement. Examine the child's circumstances through evidence and appropriate neutral inquiry; identify unresolved facts instead of filling gaps with inherited labels.

EVIDENCE, INVESTIGATION AND PRIVACY

History must be investigated.

Context must be investigated, sourced and open to challenge. Advocacy, repetition and unexplained reliance on past findings cannot substitute for that work.

Use a disclosed, proportionate investigative plan for material disputed history. Investigators must be qualified, conflict-checked and independent of counsel's direction. Distinguish what was reported, what was examined, what is supported or disputed, and what a court has legally determined. Define scope and timing to protect safety and avoid unnecessary delay.

REQUIRED ELEMENT	WHAT THE RECORD MUST SHOW
Primary-source inquiry	Original sources, provenance, dates and completeness checks. Attribute each proposition; repetition across reports is not independent corroboration.
Competing explanations	Supporting, contradictory and potentially exculpatory material; alternative explanations tested; important leads pursued or unresolved.
Earlier findings	Underlying evidence, documented inquiry, procedural posture and current legal status. An unavailable investigative basis is not documented, not proven absent.
Scope, gaps and correction	Methods, limitations, unresolved questions and reasons for omissions. Preserve originals, dated corrections and an audit trail.
Fair response	Lawful disclosure of reports and material relied upon. Meaningful opportunities to answer, correct and challenge sources and methods.
Child and privacy safeguards	Qualified, age-appropriate, non-leading inquiry; avoid repeat interviews where unnecessary. Preserve privileges, protected disclosures, access limits and separate jurisdictions.

Authentication is distinct from truth, completeness and admissibility. Maine's electronic-record certification rules do not verify an account of events. Investigation creates no authority to override privilege, confidentiality or court-record access rules. [9][10][11]

INVESTIGATION INFORMS ADJUDICATION

Investigators report; judges decide. Lawful testimony remains available, and absent corroboration alone proves neither truth nor falsity. New safety concerns receive prompt consideration; emergency protection need not wait. Existing orders and binding findings retain their legal effect until changed through an authorized procedure. [46]

HEARINGS AND DECISIONS

A fair hearing that people can understand.

Simplification should remove unnecessary barriers while preserving reliable fact-finding and an opportunity to respond.

Before a hearing, each party receives an understandable statement of issues, deadlines and assistance. The packet distinguishes allegations, primary evidence, investigative conclusions, unresolved disputes and existing legal determinations. Disclose methods, material counterevidence and gaps through lawful procedures, with meaningful time and a route to respond.

The judicial officer decides admissibility, weight and relief. Reasons should identify the investigative foundation of material findings, address conflicting evidence and gaps, and state the legal effect given to earlier findings. A prior determination does not substitute for examining its basis where that inquiry is legally open. Review and finality rules remain applicable.

Interim restrictions need an accountable clock

A consequential interim order should identify its legal basis, investigative foundation and gaps, practical effect, review date and route for changed circumstances. A reassignment, fresh motion or changed provider should not erase the original elapsed time. Existing shorter emergency requirements and statutory waiting periods continue to govern.

IF A REVIEW IS OVERDUE	WHAT MUST FOLLOW
Administrative failure	Record the original date, cause, accountable owner and corrective action.
Continuing consequential restriction	Prompt judicial scheduling and a reasoned decision on continued necessity through lawful procedures.
New urgent evidence	An accessible emergency route; no requirement to wait for a dashboard or evaluation cycle.
Protective order still in force	No automatic expiration, custody change or restoration of contact simply because the institution missed a target.

TIME IS A SERVICE OBLIGATION

A missed target requires explanation, priority attention and correction. It cannot decide merits, reward rushed findings or deny a justified continuance. Fund the capacity needed to meet it lawfully.

AFTER THE ORDER

A decision is not delivery.

Justice includes whether the lawful remedy can actually occur.

An order should state who must do what, by when, through which safe communication method, with what transport or provider arrangements, and what happens if the primary plan fails. “Cooperate” is not a complete operational instruction where a recurring barrier is established.

Design the implementation loop

Assign adult responsibilities. Keep arranging appointments, transportation, record access, payments and scheduling with the responsible adults. Avoid open-ended mandates that depend on an unavailable service.

Verify feasibility. Identify cost, provider capacity, geography, disability, work schedules and protective constraints before assuming compliance is possible.

Check delivery. Use a focused review to determine what occurred, what failed, what is disputed and what judicial clarification is needed. Verify necessary facts, not continuous surveillance of family life.

Use proportionate enforcement. Distinguish inability, ambiguity, justified safety concerns and proven noncompliance. Preserve notice and an opportunity to respond before coercive remedies.

Close the loop. Correct the order or service failure, assign the next act and set a review date when needed. Do not require a full restart for every implementation defect.

The initiative already proposes early implementation review in §17-A and workable orders in §6-A. The service model supplies the coordinator, evidence of delivery and escalation process those duties need. Maine’s existing law also provides enforcement mechanisms. [2][7]

REVIEW RIGHTS REMAIN SEPARATE

A service complaint, implementation meeting or professional grievance does not automatically stay an order or extend an appeal deadline. Navigation must direct people to the correct legal procedure and current deadlines.

Related JTforME research: Order Implementation [44]

PEOPLE AND PROFESSIONAL ROLES

A coordinated team with explicit boundaries.

Provide shared specialist capacity according to need, rather than assigning every professional to every family.

FUNCTION	RESPONSIBILITY	BOUNDARY
Navigator	Orientation, forms, accommodations, referral	Legal information; advice only if separately authorized.
Case coordinator	Scheduling, routing, next steps, escalation	Owns administrative progress; no merits recommendation.
Safety specialist	Screening, safe participation, protective referrals	No automatic credibility finding; separate protected record.
Legal assistance	Advice and representation at defined needs	Independent duties to the actual client.
Mediator	Bounded resolution assistance when appropriate	No coerced agreement or undisclosed merits channel.
Child / clinical specialist	Authorized child participation, treatment or evaluation	Separate roles; disclosed scope and lawful reports or testimony.
Neutral investigator	Scoped source inquiry; competing explanations, counterevidence and gaps	Qualified, conflict-checked and independent of counsel's direction; no binding findings.
Records specialist	Integrity, indexing, service status and permissions	Cannot determine admissibility or truth.
Judicial officer	Findings, law, relief and enforceable decisions	Independent adjudication within jurisdiction.
Implementation / quality staff	Delivery checks and system improvement	Cannot change orders; audit service and lawful process.

Each appointment must explain how it helps the child or family and define scope, conflicts, funding, deadlines and review. Parties may identify sources and challenge the work; neither side controls it. Fund competence, candor, diligence, source verification and fair response while protecting essential clerk and hearing services. [12]

LEARN FROM SYSTEMS ALREADY IN USE

Borrow components. Test the outcomes.

A working program is evidence of feasibility. It is not automatically evidence of safety, fairness or lasting improvement.

Singapore: multidisciplinary family work

The Family Justice Courts' Therapeutic Justice approach combines judicial leadership with specialist support and continuity. Its 2025 reporting includes a survey of 142 lawyers about the model. Those responses describe professional perceptions, not an independent controlled assessment of child outcomes. [27][28]

Adapt: continuity, coordinated expertise and attention to practical future arrangements. **Guard against:** treating disagreement, distress or insistence on evidence as unwillingness to heal. "Therapeutic" cannot mean compulsory agreement.

Australia: early screening and specialist pathways

Lighthouse invites eligible parties to complete voluntary risk screening and uses specialist triage, including the Evatt pathway for appropriate high-risk matters. The Australian system legally separates the questionnaire responses from opposing parties and the officers deciding the case. [29]

Adapt: early safe screening, specialist support and separation of screening from adjudication. **Guard against:** assuming Australian confidentiality rules already exist in Maine, or treating a risk category as proof of abuse.

Alaska: early assistance and focused resolution

A published evaluation of the Early Resolution Program compared selected ERP cases that settled with comparable regular-track matters, examining disposition, staff work and later modification motions. The design is relevant, but selection into settlement limits causal conclusions. [30]

Adapt: front-loaded help and evaluation of repeat work as well as speed. **Guard against:** a settlement quota, exclusion of difficult families or declaring success from cases that were easiest to resolve.

THE MAINE TEST

A component should advance only when it improves a defined service outcome without sacrificing safety, participation, access or legal quality. Publish the failures alongside the gains.

DIGITAL AND PROCEDURAL LESSONS

A modern interface is only the beginning.

Usability research and small pilots are valuable precisely because they can reveal where a redesign fails.

MODEL	LESSON	LIMIT
Arizona pathways pilot	The 2026 order requires a bounded program, defined measures, evaluation and reports. [31]	An authorized pilot is not an established improvement in family outcomes.
British Columbia CRT	Guided public dispute services and regular participant feedback demonstrate an operational digital model. [32]	Its 2024-25 survey had 487 responses from about 11,000 invitations (4%). Different case types and self-selection limit transfer to family justice.
Utah ODR usability study	Observed tests identified barriers in registration, document use and the move from paper notice to online process. [33]	Sixteen participants across two rounds; small-claims debt workflow. Not a trial showing improved parenting-case outcomes.
National family-justice framework	Pathways, assistance and performance measures provide a common design and evaluation foundation. [25][26]	Recommendations must be tested in the local legal, staffing and service environment.

Design tests before buying a platform

Ask a person with limited time, a basic phone, a language need or a disability to complete the actual task. Observe where they lose information, misunderstand a deadline or cannot obtain help. Test the notice that gets them to the portal, not just the portal itself.

Procure improvements in completed tasks and reliable records. Require accessibility, exportable data, auditable access controls and support for people using paper or telephone. A vendor demonstration is not an acceptance test.

> **Digitizing a confusing process does not make it fair.**

EVIDENCE AND ITS LIMITS

Evidence that changes the design.

Four findings inform the service model. Each must lead to a practical design choice and a test of whether it helps.

01 Keep children out of adult conflict.

Research links conflict between parents, parenting difficulties and child adjustment. Studies of triangulation identify loyalty conflict and self-esteem as relevant pathways. **Design response:** reduce messenger roles, repeated questioning and pressure to choose sides. [34][35]

02 Recognize when procedure becomes control.

Reviews and measurement studies document legal and administrative tactics through which abuse can continue after separation. **Design response:** assess patterns through neutral investigation, protect safe participation and provide a fair route to challenge alleged misuse. [36][37][38][45]

03 Offer support that has been tested.

The randomized New Beginnings study found benefits in parenting and some child mental-health outcomes, with differences across groups. **Design response:** offer suitable, tested supports and evaluate their results in the families actually served. [39]

04 Protect safe, stable relationships.

AAP guidance emphasizes safe, stable, nurturing relationships in buffering childhood adversity. **Design response:** support continuity, practical caregiving and predictable routines consistent with safety and the child's circumstances. [40]

WHAT THIS EVIDENCE CAN ESTABLISH

These findings inform the design. They do not validate this blueprint, decide an individual custody case or establish how often courts enable abuse. Research designs and populations differ. Test safety, participation, burden and implementation; child well-being research requires appropriate consent, privacy protections and ethical review.

PUBLIC DUTY AND THE FIRST CONVERSATION

“How can we help?”

The public obligation already exists. This is how the conversation should start.

The cover’s civic words lead to a practical standard: welcome people who need help, take responsibility for institutional failure and work across roles to protect families and children’s futures. This is how the blueprint applies those commitments to public service. [59][61][62][63]

CIVIC COMMITMENT	WHAT IT MEANS IN THE SERVICE
Welcome people in need	Start with a safe conversation, clear information and useful assistance. Distress, poverty or unfamiliarity with legal language must not become a barrier to humane treatment.
Dirigo: lead	Name an accountable owner. Fund the work, remove avoidable barriers and act on failures rather than passing the family between offices.
E Pluribus Unum: shared purpose	Coordinate assistance around the family while preserving independent professional roles, privacy, lawful authority and fair adjudication.
We the People: establish justice	Ground consequential decisions in substantive neutral investigation, lawful evidence and fair response. Check whether the process protects children and helps the family move forward.

People who know helplessness and fear understand why a clear explanation, a safe choice and useful help matter. Their experience should shape the service, including its response to unanswered calls, confusing notices and referrals that lead nowhere.

Maine’s Family Division already has a statutory responsibility to provide justice responsive to families and supportive of their children. The service model gives that responsibility practical form through staff, resources, fair procedures and accountable follow-through. [4]

AUTHORITY AND KNOWLEDGE CARRY DUTY

Authority, education and professional experience carry an inherent duty to serve with care. Ask what is needed; explain choices; deliver or arrange help; identify who must act; verify what changed.

Lived experience should shape the questions and standards. Substantive neutral investigation tests disputed facts; evaluation tests whether the institution’s response helps.

PRACTICAL ASSISTANCE AND SAFE PARTICIPATION

Make help reachable.

A referral is a step toward assistance. The service must track whether usable help actually arrives.

WHAT THE PERSON NEEDS	PROPOSED RESPONSE AND FOLLOW-THROUGH
Material stability	Identify food, housing, income, childcare and transport needs. Explain eligibility and cost; connect to funded help and record waiting lists, unmet need and safe alternatives.
Protection from coercion or violence	Offer a private, safe contact route and specialist assessment. Arrange appropriate advocacy and urgent legal consideration; do not recast deliberate control as ordinary mutual conflict.
Support with parenting or health	Offer suitable, tested parenting and clinical services. Check availability, access and fit. A generic class or completed treatment does not establish safe contact.
A reliable account of disputed events	Commission scoped, conflict-checked neutral investigation. Examine original sources, contrary evidence and the basis of earlier findings; disclose gaps and provide a fair response.
An understandable next step	Give clear information, language and disability support, access to appropriate legal help and a named contact. Record who will act and when.
An order that can work	Identify practical barriers, safe arrangements and responsible adult duties. Confirm delivery and route necessary clarification or change to an authorized judicial officer.

CDC's prevention frameworks combine material and parenting supports with survivor advocacy and protective measures. Assistance should match the actual need. Urgent protection and appropriate help must not wait for a completed merits investigation. [57][58]

HELP MUST PRESERVE AGENCY

Optional assistance must not become a condition of reaching a hearing or seeking protection. Declining an optional offer does not itself establish unfitness. Explain privacy and reporting limits; a referral creates no new right to share protected records. Existing lawful orders remain in force until changed through an authorized process.

Provider capacity and direct assistance require funding beyond navigation.

WHAT SUBSTANTIVE SUPPORT CAN ACHIEVE

Support can change outcomes.

Selected studies inform service choices. Their results are specific to the intervention, population and outcome measured.

01 Connect new families to practical help.

The **Family Connects** randomized trial assigned 4,777 births; 531 children were evaluated at five years. Brief nurse visits, needs assessment and resource connections were associated with **227 versus 338 emergency visits and hospital overnights per 100 children: 33% fewer events**. Counts include repeat events and care unrelated to abuse. The CPS-investigation reduction was uncertain at 95% confidence (P=.09). One community and a follow-up subsample limit generalization. [50]

02 Support children through separation.

The **New Beginnings** trial randomized 240 families and followed 218 six years later. Past-year mental-disorder prevalence was **11.0% in the mother-plus-child program versus 23.5% in controls**, a 12.5-percentage-point difference. The selected, predominantly White sample limits generalization; the mother-only diagnostic comparison was not significant. This supports suitable assistance, not compulsory reconciliation or contact. [51]

03 Make safer housing possible.

A **Domestic Violence Housing First** study analyzed data from 344 survivors. Housing advocacy and flexible funding were associated with **greater housing stability, safety and fewer mental-health symptoms over two years** than usual services. This nonrandomized comparison may reflect other differences between participants. It did not estimate homicide prevention. [52]

04 Address material hardship.

A state-policy study associated a **10-percentage-point increase in a refundable state earned-income tax credit, relative to the federal credit, with 241 fewer neglect reports per 100,000 children annually**. The 95% interval was 33-449 fewer. The observational analysis included screened-in reports regardless of substantiation, with children counted once annually; reporting and other policy changes may affect the estimate. [53]

KEEP EACH RESULT ATTACHED TO WHAT WAS STUDIED

These studies measure different outcomes. Do not add their percentages, equate fewer reports with proven safety, or turn a clinical-program result into a count of deaths this judiciary redesign would prevent.

PREVENTION AND HONEST ACCOUNTING

Investigate harm. Measure help.

Present harm and future risk require serious action, reliable evidence and transparent limits.

What fatality tracking can tell us

The Center for Judicial Excellence's 2023 collection recorded **944 victims** in U.S. parent or parental-figure killings identified through news mentioning divorce, separation, custody, visitation or support, from 2008 through June 30, 2023: **925 minors and 19 adult children**. Some deaths preceded court involvement. The collection identifies cases for investigation; it is not a complete national census, a current rate or proof that courts caused every death. [48][49]

Read positive findings with the wider evidence

A **2024 review for the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force covered 25 trials and 14,355 participants**. It found no demonstrated benefit or insufficient evidence for direct or proxy maltreatment outcomes within its primary-care prevention scope, principally before known maltreatment or its signs. It did not evaluate every economic policy or protection response. A **2025 South Carolina nurse-home-visiting trial**, enrolling 5,670 participants, found no significant improvement in its primary mortality/injury/abuse-concern composite through age two. [54][60]

What we can say about preventing deaths

A 2014 nurse-home-visiting follow-up suggested fewer deaths from causes classified as preventable, including sudden infant death syndrome, unintentional injury and homicide. Deaths were few and mortality was not an original hypothesis. A later, broader follow-up left the child-mortality result statistically uncertain (P=.09). Neither analysis establishes how many custody-related killings this redesign would prevent. [55][56]

Protect the years that follow

American Academy of Pediatrics guidance identifies safe, stable, nurturing relationships as buffers against adversity. Early experiences can influence later health and functioning; a child's future is not predetermined. Support safe relationships and practical stability, and evaluate immediate safety alongside longer-term well-being. [40]

A NEUTRAL REVIEW OF MISSED OPPORTUNITIES

Establish what was known, what substantive investigation occurred, what lawful action was available and why help or protection failed. Test allegations and prior findings against their evidentiary basis. Track actual safety and unmet need; fewer complaints or investigations alone cannot prove improvement.

SERVICE COMMITMENTS

Put the institution on an accountable clock.

These are proposed pilot targets for validation and staffing, not current Maine deadlines or automatic remedies.

SERVICE EVENT	ILLUSTRATIVE PILOT COMMITMENT	IF MISSED
Urgent safety request	Immediate routing under applicable emergency procedures; ordinary intake cannot delay relief.	Escalate through the emergency process, not a routine queue.
Assistance or accommodation request	Acknowledge within 1 business day; confirm responsibility and the next step.	Supervisor review and a safe alternate contact.
Routine navigator contact	Offer substantive contact within 3 business days of a complete assistance request.	Publish age and capacity reasons; offer another channel.
Initial service plan	Aim for an initial pathway and assistance plan within 10 business days, subject to necessary information.	Explain the barrier, owner and revised administrative date.
Consequential interim order	Set a review date when issued; comply with law and prioritize urgent changed circumstances.	Judicial scheduling and explanation; no automatic merits change.
Implementation review	Apply adopted requirements; rev9 proposes a 30-45 day review framework with exceptions and urgency safeguards. [2]	Record actual delivery, obstacles and judicial action needed.

Track time to usable help as well as contact. Count abandoned filings, unresolved needs, waiting lists and repeated resets. A quick acknowledgment does not establish delivery. Explain barriers, identify the responsible office and keep waiting periods and safety-related extensions visible.

RIGHTS OUTRANK THE METRIC

No individual case-disposal quotas, custody ratios or settlement targets. Additional time needed for fair participation must be explainable, not punished. A target becomes useful only when the institution has capacity to meet it lawfully.

GOVERNANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Independent judging. Accountable service.

Keep four review routes distinct, visible and easy to find.

ROUTE	PURPOSE	LIMIT
Service complaint	Delay, inaccessible forms, missed accommodation, record-processing or scheduling failure.	Cannot alter an order or adjudicate disputed merits.
Judicial / professional conduct	Alleged conduct within the regulator's jurisdiction.	Not a substitute for preserving legal issues or filing an appeal.
Judicial review / appeal	Correct legal or factual error through the authorized procedure.	Applicable standards, deadlines and jurisdiction still govern.
Independent quality evaluation	Identify patterns in delay, access, safety, spending and implementation.	No power to dictate merits or reward particular case outcomes.

Create a proposed **Family Justice Quality and Outcomes Office**, or a comparably independent function, with a published non-merits charter. Its leadership, funding, protected data access and reporting obligations should reduce conflicts between operating the program and evaluating it.

Include compensated public participation: people with differing family-court experiences, survivors, fathers and mothers, disability and language-access representatives, rural users, young-adult perspectives and professionals. Recruit beyond the loudest cases. Participation must not require disclosing a child's confidential history.

Make a complaint produce help and correction

Give a receipt, identify the office with authority, explain any referral and report status. A substantiated service failure needs an owner, corrective action and follow-up. Anonymous aggregate patterns can trigger an audit without becoming public findings about a named person.

NO SUPER-JUDGE

Oversight may audit the quality of a process and report systemic problems. It cannot overturn a parenting decision, pressure a judicial officer about a pending case or convert a public satisfaction score into discipline. [5][6][13]

TECHNOLOGY AND AI

Automate the burden. Keep judgment accountable.

Technology should make process more usable and evidence more traceable. It should not become a hidden adjudicator.

PROPOSED POLICY	EXAMPLES
Allowed only with safeguards and verification	Navigation, forms, scheduling, transcription support, duplicate detection, accessible explanations and nonbinding chronology drafts.
Restricted to evaluated pilots	Record summarization, workflow forecasting and triage assistance; test errors, omissions and unequal effects before any use.
Prohibited for merits decisions	Automated credibility or parental-fitness scoring, custody recommendations, hidden behavioral profiles, emotion or deception inference, and autonomous findings.

The policy is a proposed restriction, not a description of existing statewide Maine AI law. Every approved system should have a public purpose statement, accountable owner, data-access limits, retention policy, human-review point, known failure modes and shutdown procedure.

Buy a service the public can leave

Retain control of records. Require exportability, documented interfaces, role-based access, lawful retention and a tested recovery plan. Court records must not train commercial models or be resold.

Require audit rights. Test security, accessibility, language accuracy and harmful output. Vendor secrecy cannot prevent the court from examining a system it depends on.

Keep paid platforms from becoming a tollbooth. Provide a free public route to essential functions. Any required proprietary service needs transparent authority, cost and indigency protection.

Treat source fidelity as mandatory. Link each material proposition to its source; separate allegation, investigative support, dispute and legal status. Preserve contrary evidence, gaps and corrections. Repeated claims or old findings cannot silently become verified history; AI is not a neutral investigator.

A HARD BOUNDARY

This proposed policy bars automated custody judgment, whether disclosed or hidden. Authorized judicial officers remain responsible for reasons and findings on the lawful record.

COSTS WITH VISIBLE ASSUMPTIONS

Fund the service. Show the arithmetic.

Fund practical help and protect children's futures. These 2026-dollar planning scenarios are not fiscal notes or validated forecasts.

ANNUAL OPERATIONS / BOTH SITES	LEAN	BASE	EXPANDED
Additional FTE staff Fully loaded personnel cost	10 × $130k $1.30M	12 × $145k $1.74M	15 × $170k $2.55M
Operating / training support	$0.25M	$0.35M	$0.50M
Independent evaluation	$0.20M	$0.25M	$0.35M
Subtotal	$1.75M	$2.34M	$3.40M
Planning contingency: 15%	$0.2625M	$0.351M	$0.510M
Illustrative annual total	**$2.01M**	**$2.69M**	**$3.91M**

The base case provides **12 full-time-equivalent (FTE) positions across both sites**: four navigators, two coordinators, two safety specialists, one records specialist, one implementation coordinator, one child-participation specialist and one operations lead. Fully loaded personnel costs include salary, employer benefits and payroll costs. Validate roles and workload before staffing.

Separate one-time technology allowance: $2M-$6M. This provisional scenario covers integration, intake, records, security, accessibility and rollout. Replace it with scoped requirements and bids. Recurring licensing, hosting and maintenance require separate costing; they are not included in the annual totals above.

Separately funded: neutral investigation, expanded legal representation, judicial capacity, facilities and specialist treatment are excluded. Parenting programs, practical assistance and community providers also need capacity, eligibility and funding plans. Navigator positions do not fund the services they refer to. Cost these needs before launch; avoid double counting or inferring a statewide price.

THE DECISION RULE

Authorize discovery and a bounded appropriation first. Require a formal fiscal note, clear deliverables, procurement review and spending reports. Scale only when capacity and benefit are demonstrated. Do not promise that the program pays for itself.

Arithmetic: FTE staff × fully loaded annual personnel cost + operations + evaluation, then 15% contingency. Annual totals are rounded. The columns are alternative scenarios, not additive funding requests.

THE PUBLIC SCORECARD

Measure what families actually receive.

Track help delivered, unmet need and children's safety and future.

MEASURE	PAIRED QUALITY CHECK
Access and completion	Track abandoned and returned filings, help requests, accommodations and interpreter needs; do not count only successful portal users.
Support actually received	Track unmet need, eligibility, waiting time and usable help delivered. Record optional refusals without treating them as parenting findings.
Time to meaningful event	Report medians, upper-tail waits and unresolved matters, alongside record completeness, fairness and reasons for delay.
Family and court cost	Separate public cost, legal fees, expert/GAL expense, travel, child care and lost work; pair savings with access and legal quality.
Safety and process-enabled control	Review serious incidents, compelled interactions, alleged misuse and screening failures; distinguish allegations from findings.
Implementation and recurrence	Check whether ordered acts occurred; examine returns at 6, 12 and 24 months without treating every justified modification as failure.
Legal quality	Audit investigative independence, source checks, contrary evidence, gaps, correction and response rights alongside reasons, reversals and remands. Do not reward particular allegation or custody outcomes.
Experience and equity	Ask whether people were heard, respected and understood the process. Analyze differences by pathway and relevant access needs.
Workforce and technology	Monitor capacity, turnover, training, outages, filing failures and AI errors; count work shifted to other offices or families.

Validate these proposed measures against independent safety outcomes. Fewer complaints or investigations alone cannot prove improvement; reporting and detection practices also matter. [26][54]

PUBLISH THE DENOMINATOR

Show eligibility, service receipt, response and missing data. Suppress small cells and protect privacy. Averages and low-response surveys are incomplete.

IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION

Start now. Replace carefully.

Immediate service improvement and longer institutional redesign need coordinated timelines.

The early implementation clock

REV9 PROPOSES	BLUEPRINT DELIVERABLE
30 days	Identify executive and operational owners, backups and an initial controlled register of work and failures.
90 days	Publish a costed plan, available baseline, data definitions and legal-coordination work.
120 days	Begin a bounded operational pilot under lawful authority.
180 days	Put ownership, event tracking and escalation into use; publish the first privacy-safe dashboard.
12 and 18 months	Independent operational/fiscal assessment, followed by broader child-and-family impact evaluation.

These are the initiative's proposed milestones from its lawful effective date, not existing deadlines. Do not confuse a first bounded test with a completed statewide transformation. [1][2]

The transformation horizon

Year 1: map the actual journey with users and staff; establish baseline measures; resolve authority, confidentiality and funding; select two different pilot sites; test navigation and manual tracking before major procurement.

Years 2-3: run the integrated pathways, retain meaningful comparison data and publish adverse effects. Examine staff work, cost, safety, fairness, implementation and recurring litigation.

Years 4-5: expand components supported by results, revise or stop the rest, and fund continuing evaluation. Later adapt the architecture to other dockets with their own rights, users and risks.

EVALUATE BEFORE CLAIMING VICTORY

Pre-register the questions and measures. Use matched contemporaneous comparisons where feasible, with historical baselines and transparent limits. An evaluator independent of program delivery should publish negative findings. No experiment may withhold required protection, counsel or a hearing.

DISCUSSION DRAFT PROVISIONS

Define the service and its limits.

Model concepts for coordinated legislative and SJC drafting. They are neither enacted language nor a substitute for section-by-section legal review.

1. Purpose and accountable service

In covered Family Division matters, deliver the existing duty of responsive justice through safe, accessible, understandable and timely service. Ask what help is needed, identify a responsible office and track actual assistance. Preserve impartial adjudication, burdens of proof, evidentiary protections and review. Optional support shall not become a condition of a hearing or urgent protection. Other proceedings retain their governing law.

2. Role separation

A navigator or coordinator may provide authorized information, arrange assistance and manage administrative progress. That role does not authorize adjudicative findings on disputed merits, alteration of an order, individualized legal advice without appropriate authorization, or undisclosed communication concerning disputed merits. Contested decisions remain with the authorized judicial officer.

3. Administrative pathways

Early assessment may identify service, accessibility, complexity and safety needs. Assignment governs case-management resources only. It is not evidence, creates no presumption concerning a person's credibility or parenting, and does not change a burden of proof. Provide understandable notice and timely human reconsideration, with protection for confidential screening disclosures.

4. Investigated history and protected records

Material disputed history shall receive substantive, proportionate inquiry by a qualified, conflict-checked neutral. Disclose primary sources, competing explanations, contrary evidence, earlier findings' investigative basis, gaps and corrections. Provide lawful notice and challenge before merits reliance without delaying authorized emergency relief. Preserve mandatory reporting, privileges and separate access rules for screening, mediation, advice, treatment and evidence; investigation creates no new disclosure authority. Existing orders and binding findings retain legal effect until changed through an authorized process.

REQUIRED COORDINATION

Integrate these concepts with rev9 §3, existing Family Division services and court-record rules. Do not establish competing offices or a single unrestricted family record. Related proceedings retain their separate jurisdiction and governing law. [2][4][11]

DISCUSSION DRAFT PROVISIONS

Control misuse without closing the courthouse.

Protect genuine safety reporting, legitimate advocacy and the ability to obtain timely adjudication.

5. Process-enabled coercion

Provide a fair route to review alleged procedural abuse. Examine conduct, lawful purpose and harm against history tested through substantive neutral investigation, with contrary evidence and gaps disclosed. Sanctions or filing restrictions require authority, notice, response, reasoned findings and proportionality. Preserve authorized temporary emergency relief, required service and prompt hearing or review. Filing count, distress or an unsuccessful claim alone is insufficient. Preserve judicial access for urgent or continuing safety concerns, material new information and lawful review. [46]

6. Interim-order and implementation review

A material interim restriction shall identify its basis and an appropriate review date, consistent with controlling law. A missed review triggers accountable explanation and priority scheduling, not automatic expiration or a parenting presumption. Orders shall assign practical adult duties, dates, safe communication, contingencies and review where needed. Staff may verify delivery but may not modify relief.

7. Informed resolution; proposed expanded choice

An additional reform option would make mediation participation voluntary and prohibit improper adverse inference from declining it. This requires express amendments to 19-A §§251 and 1653(11), coordinated rules and capacity for hearings. Until adopted, improve screening, safe formats and prompt lawful waiver decisions within existing requirements. In every model, agreement must be informed and settlement may not be a staff or judicial quota. [8]

8. Quality, spending and technology

Require a public service scorecard, independent evaluation, a non-merits complaint route and transparent spending. Essential participation must have an accessible public route. Prohibit automated credibility or parental-fitness scoring, custody recommendations and autonomous merits findings, whether disclosed or hidden. Approved systems must be auditable, records portable and sensitive data protected from unauthorized secondary use.

Drafting rule: choose the narrowest effective lawful remedy. Preserve judicial independence, due process, statutory protections and review. Prevent abusive methods and institutional failures while leaving each family's merits to lawful adjudication. [6][15]

CHALLENGE THE REDESIGN

A new system must answer harder questions.

Modern language is not proof of better practice. Build ways to detect failure before scaling it.

FAILURE MODE	CONTROL AND EVIDENCE TO DEMAND
Distributed power becomes invisible	Publish role boundaries and decision logs. Administrative labels cannot become secret merits findings; provide human challenge and audit.
Safety language becomes a custody shortcut	Require case-specific evidence, substantive neutral inquiry and judicial reasons. Neither a screening label nor an unexamined past finding substitutes for investigated facts. Preserve urgent protection and a fair response.
Therapeutic work becomes coercion	Use defined roles, informed participation and a route to adjudication. Do not equate anger, flat affect or refusal to settle with unfitness.
Speed becomes a quota	Pair timeliness with participation, safety, record quality and correction. Investigate the slowest cases and publish reasons for exceptions.
Vendors create new compulsory costs	Require public alternatives, indigency protection, transparent total cost, data portability and termination assistance.
Data becomes surveillance	Collect the minimum necessary; separate permissions and research consent. Publish aggregate institutional performance, not childhood dossiers.
Success is defined by easy cases	Publish eligibility, exclusions, attrition, missing data and unequal outcomes. Compare similar cases and examine recurring work.
The redesign weakens existing capacity	Resource staff transition and legal assistance. Track whether help merely shifts workload or delays to another office.

Stop or revise a component when it creates serious unmitigated harm, suppresses access, produces material data failures or lacks a lawful basis. Immediate protective action must not wait for the annual evaluation. Publicly explain the correction without exposing private families.

> **Accountability belongs in the design, including accountability for this design.**

THE PEOPLE'S CALL TO ACTION

STAND THE FUCK UP. SPEAK OUT. ALL RISE.

Help families. Help children. Protect their futures.

The public obligation already exists. "How can we help?" is how the conversation should start. The People are who these institutions serve. Require practical assistance, substantive neutral investigation, fair decisions and accountability for what happens next.

Seats of authority, higher education and professional experience carry an inherent duty to use knowledge and power in service of others. That responsibility must be visible in how children and families are treated: "freely and without sale;" "promptly and without delay."

> **We should never look down upon others unless we are helping them up.**

FOUR COMMITMENTS TO DEMAND

DEMAND	THE PUBLIC RESPONSE REQUIRED
Name the owner	Identify accountable leadership and meaningful roles for court users and staff.
Fund the help	Cost qualified staff, neutral investigation, practical assistance and provider capacity; publish eligibility and the pilot budget.
Publish the test	Set baseline measures, service commitments, safety safeguards and independent evaluation before rollout.
Correct the failure	Show what help arrived, what remains unmet, what harm occurred and what changed. Publish failures alongside gains. Continual Process Improvement practices, already proven throughout the private sector, must be adopted immediately.

No "moore" games with children's lives.

FOR OUR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

JTforME.com/initiative/

Public Review Center | Reform Desk

Read the proposal and submit a specific improvement. Keep identifying child information and private case records out of public channels. Proposed policy; not an official petition. [1][41][42][43]

SOURCE NOTES / METHOD

Evidence, authority and further reading

Primary law, institutional models and selected research underpin the factual statements. Proposed design choices are labeled as proposals.

Editorial review: November 21, 2026. This is a selected research synthesis, not an exhaustive systematic review or a determination about any private case. Case summaries preserve their context. Program descriptions and stakeholder surveys are distinguished from outcome studies. Cost figures and service targets are illustrative assumptions.

Revised public edition, linked to the initiative's rev9 proposal. This companion does not amend the proposed Act. The prevention expansion separates lived experience, historical fatality tracking, intervention results and proposed delivery standards. NLM indexing and PMC hosting provide access, not endorsement. Sources identify designs, limitations and material follow-up findings.

01. JTforME. For Our Children and Families: initiative overview, rev9 (13 Oct. 2026).

Primary campaign source. Proposed legislation and public review; no enactment or ballot qualification claimed.

Read source

02. JTforME. Proposed Act: An Act To Strengthen Maine Family Court Accountability and Protect Parent-Child Relationships, rev9.

Operative proposal, including §§1-B, 3, 6-A, 14-A and 17-A-C. A companion blueprint does not amend this text.

Read source

03. JTforME. Initiative 2028 Roadmap and Outreach, rev9 (13 Oct. 2026).

Campaign planning document, including legislative route and contingency planning; dates are goals.

Read source

04. 4 M.R.S. §183. Family Division of District Court.

Opening paragraph: responsive family justice and SJC rulemaking. §4 is a narrow consent-based magistrate pilot, not general authority to suspend law.

Read source

05. 4 M.R.S. §1. Judicial administration, supervision and budget.

Administrative authority supports redesign within lawful jurisdiction and appropriations.

Read source

06. Constitution of Maine, art. I, §19; art. III; art. VI, §1.

Prompt justice, separation of powers and judicial authority. These provisions do not decide every proposed reform's constitutionality.

Read source

SOURCE NOTES / 2

Sources and reading notes

07. 19-A M.R.S. §1653. Parental rights and responsibilities.

Safety, best interests, meaningful child preference, no gender preference, abuse safeguards, enforcement and mediation.

Read source

08. 19-A M.R.S. §251. Mediation.

Covered contested matters require referral; affidavit-supported extraordinary-cause waiver, good-faith obligations and sanctions must be addressed in reform drafting.

Read source

09. Maine Rules of Civil Procedure (effective 1 June 2026), Rules 92 and 100-127.

Includes family mediation, case management, limits on nonfinancial discovery, waiting periods, hearings and review.

Read source

10. 2026 Me. Rules 04. Amendment to M.R. Evid. 902(13)-(14) (effective 1 Nov. 2026).

Qualified certification and notice for certain electronic records/copied data. Authentication is distinct from truth, relevance and hearsay.

Read source

11. Maine Rules of Electronic Court Systems (effective 31 Jan. 2026).

Governs electronic filing and access. Use current rules for protected records and access roles.

Read source

12. Maine Judicial Branch. Court rules and amendments.

Official index for checking the operative versions of conduct, civil, evidence and electronic court rules.

Read source

13. In re Dunleavy, 2003 ME 124, ¶¶6-9, 838 A.2d 338.

Maine separation of powers and judicial self-governance. Not a family-court misconduct decision.

Read source

14. In re Children of Destiny H., 2024 ME 66, ¶¶19, 38-40.

Termination-case due process and experience-based revision of ineffective-assistance procedures. Judgment affirmed.

Read source

15. Indorf v. Keep, 2023 ME 11, ¶17.

Inherent-power fee sanctions require extraordinary circumstances and clear litigation-process abuse. Fee award vacated.

Read source

16. 19-A M.R.S. §4102(1). Definitions of abuse.

Includes specified coercive conduct. A clinical or policy description is not automatically a finding satisfying statutory elements.

Read source

SOURCE NOTES / 3

Sources and reading notes

17. Troxel v. Granville, 530 U.S. 57, 65-73 (2000) (plurality).

Fit-parent decision-making in a nonparent-visitation dispute; no universal parenting-time formula.

Read source

18. Santosky v. Kramer, 455 U.S. 745, 747-48, 769-70 (1982).

At least clear-and-convincing proof of the state's allegations of parental unfitness before termination; not a rule for every custody or interim-order issue.

Read source

19. Boddie v. Connecticut, 401 U.S. 371, 374, 382-83 (1971).

Indigent access to the state-monopolized divorce process; not a universal waiver of all civil litigation costs.

Read source

20. M.L.B. v. S.L.J., 519 U.S. 102, 123-28 (1996).

An unaffordable record fee could not bar review of a parental-rights termination judgment.

Read source

21. Lassiter v. Department of Social Services, 452 U.S. 18, 31-32 (1981).

Federal appointed-counsel analysis is contextual; state law can provide greater protection.

Read source

22. Turner v. Rogers, 564 U.S. 431, 447-49 (2011).

Context-specific civil contempt: notice, financial information, opportunity to respond and express ability-to-pay finding. Navigators do not displace required counsel.

Read source

23. Tennessee v. Lane, 541 U.S. 509, 531-34 (2004).

Title II ADA and access to judicial services; does not mandate any particular technology.

Read source

24. Caperton v. A.T. Massey Coal Co., 556 U.S. 868, 884-87 (2009).

Exceptional objective risk of bias required recusal; adverse rulings alone do not establish constitutional bias.

Read source

25. NCSC, IAALS and NCJFCJ. Principles for Family Justice Reform (2019).

Expert institutional framework for pathways, support, safety, evaluation and technology; not an effectiveness trial.

Read source

SOURCE NOTES / 4

Sources and reading notes

26. National Center for State Courts. Family justice performance measures.

Measures time, pending-case age, complexity, fairness, court and participant costs. Does not validate this blueprint's proposed targets.

Read source

27. Singapore Courts. Therapeutic Justice.

Operational model launched in October 2024: judge-led, multidisciplinary family work. A process description is not causal evidence.

Read source

28. Singapore Courts. Annual Report 2025, p. 27.

Survey of 142 lawyers reports perceptions. It does not measure representative family outcomes or independently establish child safety.

Read source

29. Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia. Lighthouse: information for parties.

Voluntary screening, specialist triage and separation of screening responses from deciding officers and opposing parties under Australian law.

Read source

30. Marz, S. Faster and as Satisfying: An Evaluation of Alaska's Early Resolution Triage Program. Family Court Review 57(4), 478-490 (2019).

DOI: 10.1111/fcre.12441. Comparison of selected settled ERP cases with regular-track matters; selection limits causal conclusions.

Read source

31. Arizona Supreme Court. Administrative Order 2026-11 (28 Jan. 2026).

Authorizes a Family Court Pathways pilot with measures and evaluation. Authorization is not proof of success.

Read source

32. British Columbia Civil Resolution Tribunal. Annual Report 2024-2025, Appendix B.

Participant survey: 487 responses from approximately 11,000 invitations (4%). Different jurisdiction and case types from parenting adjudication.

Read source

33. Butler, S., Mauet, S., Griffin, C.L., and Pish, M. The Utah Online Dispute Resolution Platform: A Usability Evaluation and Report (2020; revised 2021).

Authors' usability evaluation: two testing rounds, 16 participants. Identified barriers in small-claims debt workflow; not a family-court outcome trial.

Read source

SOURCE NOTES / 5

Sources and reading notes

34. van Dijk, R., et al. A meta-analysis on interparental conflict, parenting, and child adjustment in divorced families: Examining mediation using meta-analytic structural equation models. Clinical Psychology Review 79, 101861 (2020).

115 samples, 24,854 families. Mostly small, heterogeneous associations; pooled correlational evidence. DOI: 10.1016/j.cpr.2020.101861; PMID: 32512420.

Read source | 2021 corrigendum, PMID 34183202

35. van Dijk, R., et al. Triangulation and child adjustment after parental divorce: Underlying mechanisms and risk factors. Journal of Family Psychology 36(7), 1117-1131 (2022).

135 children in 77 families, two years; indirect pathways and differing informant results. DOI: 10.1037/fam0001008; PMID: 35771503.

Read source

36. Spearman, K.J., Vaughan-Eden, V., Hardesty, J.L., and Campbell, J. Post-separation abuse: A literature review connecting tactics to harm. Journal of Family Trauma, Child Custody & Child Development 21(2), 145-164 (2024; online 2023).

48 US/Canadian articles; legal, economic and systems abuse. No population prevalence estimate. DOI: 10.1080/26904586.2023.2177233; PMID: 38784521.

Read source

37. Gutowski, E.R., and Goodman, L.A. Coercive Control in the Courtroom: the Legal Abuse Scale (LAS). Journal of Family Violence 38(3), 527-542 (2023; online 2022).

Measure development with 222 survivor-mothers. A 14-item research scale, not a judicial diagnostic instrument or representative prevalence study. PMID: 35611345. DOI: 10.1007/s10896-022-00408-3.

Read source

38. Wilde, S., Sheeran, N., and Douglas, H. The psychological impact on mothers who have experienced domestic violence when navigating the family court system: a scoping review. Psychiatry, Psychology and Law 31(4), 764-791 (2024; online 2023).

25 included articles. Themes include system-enabled control, secondary victimization and longer-term distress. Sample/context limits matter. PMID: 39118786; PMCID: PMC11305050. DOI: 10.1080/13218719.2023.2214927.

Read source

39. Sandler, I., et al. Randomized Effectiveness Trial of the New Beginnings Program for Divorced Families with Children and Adolescents. Journal of Clinical Child & Adolescent Psychology 49(1), 60-78 (2020; online 2019).

830 parents; active comparator; benefits differed across groups. Not a trial of court redesign. DOI: 10.1080/15374416.2018.1540008; PMID: 30644774.

Read source

SOURCE NOTES / 6

Sources and reading notes

40. Garner, A., Yogman, M., and AAP committees. Preventing Childhood Toxic Stress: Partnering With Families and Communities to Promote Relational Health. Pediatrics 148(2), e2021052582 (2021).

Clinical policy synthesis on protective relationships, not an individual diagnosis or proof that litigation necessarily causes permanent injury. DOI: 10.1542/peds.2021-052582.

Read source

41. JTforME. Initiative Public Review Center.

Public policy review channel. Observe the site's privacy and submission boundaries.

Read source

42. JTforME. Reform Desk.

Companion public research and institutional-accountability work.

Read source

43. JTforME. Judicial Systems Lab: Measure the Process.

Related citizen-journey and operational-measurement work; advocacy analysis, not binding law.

Read source

44. JTforME. Rights on Paper: Order Implementation.

Related implementation analysis. Public claims should remain tied to specific evidence and current law.

Read source

45. Hines, D.A., Douglas, E.M., and Berger, J.L. A self-report measure of legal and administrative aggression within intimate relationships. Aggressive Behavior 41(4), 295-309 (2015).

611 help-seeking men and 1,601 population-sampled men; self-report measurement, not findings in individual cases or cross-gender prevalence comparisons. DOI: 10.1002/ab.21540.

Read source

46. 19-A M.R.S. §§4108-4109. Temporary protection orders and hearings.

Express authority for specified ex parte temporary protection, with service, hearing and modification procedures. Process-abuse safeguards must preserve lawful emergency relief.

Read source | Hearing procedures: §4109

47. Maine Judicial Branch. Board of Overseers of the Bar; Maine Bar Rules, Rules 1-2, 9 and 13-14.

The existing court-created regulator has lawyer and public members and established investigation and review procedures. Structural replacement is this blueprint's proposal; it requires lawful court rulemaking and a defined transfer of functions.

Read source | Current Bar Rules

SOURCE NOTES / 7

Sources and reading notes

48. Center for Judicial Excellence. Child Safety First: Preventing Child Homicides During Divorce, Separation, and Child Custody Disputes (2023).

Full report pp. 6, 10, 12-16; executive summary pp. 3, 6-7. News-based parent/parental-figure homicide collection: 944 victims through June 30, 2023, including 925 minors and 19 adult children. Victims are not incidents; retrospective preventability classifications are not judicial findings.

Read source | Executive summary

49. Center for Judicial Excellence. U.S. Child Murder and Divorce: A Snapshot.

Collection includes news references to divorce, separation, custody, visitation or child support, including killings before court involvement. No complete national census, court-user risk denominator or causal estimate of this redesign's effect.

Read source

50. Goodman, W.B., Dodge, K.A., Bai, Y., Murphy, R.A., and O'Donnell, K. Effect of a Universal Postpartum Nurse Home Visiting Program on Child Maltreatment and Emergency Medical Care at 5 Years of Age. JAMA Network Open 4(7), e2116024 (2021).

Randomized trial: 4,777 births; 531-child evaluation sample. Emergency visits plus hospital overnights: 338 versus 227 events per 100 children (P=.001). CPS investigations: 44 versus 27; P=.09, with a 95% interval including no effect. DOI: 10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2021.16024; PMID: 34232300.

Read source | PubMed record

51. Wolchik, S.A., Sandler, I.N., Millsap, R.E., et al. Six-Year Follow-up of Preventive Interventions for Children of Divorce: A Randomized Controlled Trial. JAMA 288(15), 1874-1881 (2002).

240 families randomized; 218 followed. Past-year mental-disorder prevalence at six years: 11.0% in the mother-plus-child arm versus 23.5% in controls (P=.007). Selected, predominantly White sample; mother-only diagnostic comparison not significant. Distinct from source 39. DOI: 10.1001/jama.288.15.1874; PMID: 12377086.

Read source

52. Sullivan, C.M., Simmons, C., Guerrero, M., et al. Domestic Violence Housing First Model and Association With Survivors' Housing Stability, Safety, and Well-being Over 2 Years. JAMA Network Open 6(6), e2320213 (2023).

Nonrandomized comparative study of 344 survivors. Housing advocacy and flexible funding were associated with greater housing stability, safety and fewer mental-health symptoms over 24 months. Selection and other unmeasured differences limit causal attribution. DOI: 10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2023.20213.

Read source

53. Kovski, N.L., Hill, H.D., Mooney, S.J., et al. Association of State-Level Earned Income Tax Credits With Rates of Reported Child Maltreatment, 2004-2017. Child Maltreatment 27(3), 325-333 (2022).

Observational policy comparison, 689 state-years. A 10-percentage-point refundable state-credit increase, relative to the federal credit, was associated with 241 fewer neglect reports per 100,000 children (95% CI: 33-449 fewer). Screened-in reports regardless of substantiation; children deduplicated annually. DOI: 10.1177/1077559520987302; PMID: 33464121.

Read source

SOURCE NOTES / 8

Sources and reading notes

54. Viswanathan, M., Rains, C., Hart, L.C., et al. Primary Care Interventions to Prevent Child Maltreatment: Evidence Report and Systematic Review for the USPSTF. JAMA 331(11), 959-971 (2024).

25 randomized trials, 14,355 participants. Defined primary-care prevention scope, principally without known maltreatment or its signs; most interventions included home visits. No benefit demonstrated or insufficient evidence for direct/proxy maltreatment outcomes. CPS reports pooled OR 1.03 (95% CI 0.84-1.27). DOI: 10.1001/jama.2024.0276; PMID: 38502070.

Read source

55. Olds, D.L., Kitzman, H., Knudtson, M.D., et al. Effect of Home Visiting by Nurses on Maternal and Child Mortality: Results of a 2-Decade Follow-up of a Randomized Clinical Trial. JAMA Pediatrics 168(9), 800-806 (2014).

Exploratory Memphis follow-up: preventable-cause mortality estimate at age 20, 1.6% versus 0% (P=.04); all-cause child mortality difference not significant. Mortality was not an original trial hypothesis; few events. Read with the later analysis in source 56. DOI: 10.1001/jamapediatrics.2014.472; PMID: 25003802.

Read source

56. Donelan-McCall, N.S., Knudtson, M.D., and Olds, D.L. Maternal and Child Mortality: Analysis of Nurse Home Visiting in 3 RCTs. American Journal of Preventive Medicine 61(4), 483-491 (2021).

Later, broader follow-up of the original trials, not independent replication. Memphis preventable-cause child-mortality comparison P=.09. Reviewed abstract and available primary journal excerpts; complete results tables were not available. DOI: 10.1016/j.amepre.2021.04.014.

Read source

57. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. A Public Health Approach to Child Abuse and Neglect (28 July 2025).

Prevention framework includes economic support, childcare, parenting assistance, home visiting and interventions addressing consequences and recurrence. It does not estimate this blueprint's effect.

Read source

58. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. A Public Health Approach to Intimate Partner Violence (22 Oct. 2026).

Combines economic and housing supports with survivor advocacy, protective measures and treatment. Match interventions to safety needs; the framework is not proof of a particular custody outcome.

Read source

59. Lazarus, Emma. The New Colossus (2 Nov. 1883). National Park Service, Statue of Liberty National Monument.

Public-domain poem. Closing five lines used as a civic epigraph. Source 4 separately identifies Maine's existing Family Division service responsibility. NPS page updated 9 April 2026.

Read source

SOURCE NOTES / 9

Sources and reading notes

60. Swanson, K., Ayers, S., Oviedo, D., et al. Intensive Nurse Home Visiting and Early Childhood Outcomes: A Randomized Clinical Trial. JAMA Pediatrics 179(8), 857-866 (2025).

South Carolina trial enrolled 5,670 Medicaid-eligible pregnant participants. No significant improvement in the primary composite of mortality or health-care use associated with major injury or concern for abuse/neglect through age two. Program, setting and follow-up matter. DOI: 10.1001/jamapediatrics.2025.1600.

Read source

61. Maine Secretary of State. The Great Seal of the State of Maine.

Identifies Dirigo as Maine's motto. The cover uses it as a civic call for leadership, linked here to accountable public service.

Read source

62. National Archives. Original Design of the Great Seal of the United States (1782).

Documents E Pluribus Unum, "Out of Many, One." This blueprint applies that civic theme to coordinated public service while preserving independent roles and lawful authority.

Read source

63. National Archives. The Constitution of the United States: A Transcription, Preamble.

The Preamble includes "We the People" and "establish Justice." The cover's "[re-]establish JUSTICE" is an expressly marked editorial adaptation, not a verbatim constitutional quotation.

Read source