

JT FOR ME

Justice for Maine Families

PUBLIC STATEMENT
INDEPENDENT CITIZEN REFORM
SIGNED PUBLIC EDITION

WE THE PEOPLE | "... ESTABLISH JUSTICE ..."

A SPEECH FOR CHANGE

From Paper Rights to Justice That Works

"A right written on paper and a right a human being can actually exercise are not necessarily the same thing."

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Father - IT engineer - systems builder - citizen reform advocate

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My name is Justin Tahai.

I am a father.

I am an IT engineer.

I am a systems builder.

I am a two-time graduate of York County Community College.

And I am a citizen of Maine who learned something I wish I had never needed to learn:

A right written on paper and a right a human being can actually exercise are not necessarily the same thing.

A court order and an implemented court order are not necessarily the same thing.

Access to a courthouse and access to justice are not necessarily the same thing.

A process that eventually produces an answer and a process capable of protecting a child's one and only childhood are not necessarily the same thing.

That difference has occupied years of my life.

It has produced court records, filings, emails, open letters, public-accountability notices, articles, proposed reforms, software projects, and ultimately a documentary archive that grew past 108,000 pages.

And I want to begin by saying something important about those 108,000 pages.

I am not proud of the number.

It is not a trophy.

It is not a monument to persistence.

It is certainly not something any parent should ever have to reproduce.

It represents thousands upon thousands of moments in which human beings attempted to convert life into paperwork so that an institution might eventually understand what was happening outside its walls.

The public description of *Carpooling to Hell* calls it a documentary account of a roughly sixteen-year journey through Maine family court, built from an archive exceeding 108,000 legal-matter pages.

But there is a much simpler way to say it:

A child should not need 108,000 pages in order to have adults protect his relationship with his parents.

A parent should not need to become an amateur archivist.

A family should not need a document-management strategy.

A constitutional right should not require an information-technology department.

And justice should not become something that exists principally as an accumulation of PDFs.

I came to understand this through the language I already knew.

In managed IT services, when a customer tells you that something is broken, you do not establish the health of the system by pointing out that the help-desk portal successfully accepted the ticket.

You inspect the logs.

You check the timestamps.

You reproduce the failure.

You examine dependencies.

You determine who owns the next action.

You escalate when necessary.

And when somebody marks the ticket resolved, the most important question is very simple:

Does it work now?

My professional background has involved exactly those kinds of environments - Microsoft cloud administration, identity and access, networks, endpoints, troubleshooting, escalation, documentation, and owning problems from intake through actual resolution.

That work teaches humility.

Systems fail.

Good engineers know that.

People make mistakes.

Good engineers know that too.

The shame is not discovering a failure.

The shame is discovering a repeatable failure and deciding that protecting the reputation of the system is more important than correcting it.

Imagine telling a customer:

"Yes, your network is still down, but according to our internal procedure, everything was handled correctly."

Imagine telling a hospital:

"Yes, the medical record did not reach the doctor, but every department completed its assigned task."

Imagine telling an airline passenger:

"Yes, your luggage never arrived, but each individual database recorded an event."

We would recognize the absurdity immediately.

And yet government can sometimes fall into precisely that trap.

Everyone performed a role.

Everyone touched the file.

Everyone followed a piece of procedure.

Everyone can identify the next person in the chain.

And somehow the actual human problem survives them all.

That is not necessarily corruption.

It is often something more ordinary and therefore, in some ways, more dangerous:

a system without sufficient ownership of outcomes.

That is why my argument is not that every judge is bad.

It is not that every lawyer is bad.

It is not that every guardian ad litem, therapist, clerk, administrator, legislator, or public employee is bad.

That would be unserious.

I have encountered good people in these systems.

I have encountered people trying to do difficult jobs under enormous pressure.

Maine's own judicial reporting documents significant workload pressures, and its workload analysis has identified judicial staffing needs above authorized capacity.

So let us be adults about this.

A system can contain hardworking people and still produce harmful outcomes.

A system can contain honorable professionals and still have perverse incentives.

A system can be under-resourced and still need accountability.

A person can make an honest mistake and still have a duty to correct it.

And an institution can deserve support while also deserving scrutiny.

Those ideas are not contradictions.

They are what mature government requires.

I am not asking you to distrust institutions.

I am asking institutions to become easier to trust.

That was the heart of the commentary I published in March 2026 about rebuilding confidence in Maine's public systems: confidence is strongest when people can see standards, timelines, performance, correction, and accountability for themselves.

Trust should be an output.

Not an instruction.

The same distinction matters in family court more than almost anywhere else because **children experience time differently from institutions.**

An institution thinks in docket cycles.

A child thinks in birthdays.

An institution sees thirty days.

A six-year-old experiences thirty bedtimes.

An institution sees a continuance.

A child experiences another season.

An institution sees an appeal period.

A child gets taller.

An institution sees a pending motion.

A child enters another grade.

An institution sees a case number that has existed for years.

A child experiences those same years as childhood itself.

That is why I have written repeatedly about the **weaponization of time**. My public series has focused on delay, procedural exhaustion, and what happens when even a favorable order does not become reality in time to matter.

And I want to be precise about the word weaponization.

Sometimes delay may be intentional.

Sometimes it is strategic.

Sometimes somebody benefits from it.

But sometimes no single person intends the ultimate harm at all.

The harm emerges from fragmented responsibility, crowded calendars, procedural incentives, unclear ownership, inadequate staffing, endless opportunity to defer, and the institutional habit of treating time as though it were neutral.

For a child, time is never neutral.

That may be the single most important thing I ask Maine to understand.

A delayed property dispute can eventually be compensated with money.

A delayed contract dispute can sometimes be remedied with damages.

You cannot order back age seven.

You cannot remand a childhood.

You cannot stay adolescence pending appeal.

There is no court order restoring the Christmases, soccer games, school mornings, bedtime conversations, illnesses, vacations, ordinary Tuesdays, and quiet rides in the car that have already passed.

Some losses can be compensated.

Childhood can only be lived once.

And that is why the difference between an order and implementation matters.

Suppose a court issues an order.

On paper, the proceeding may look complete.

But what happens thirty days later?

Was the order understood?

Was it served?

Could the parents actually follow it?

Did logistics make compliance impossible?

Did a school, provider, agency, or professional receive what it needed?

Was access restored?

Did somebody discover ambiguity?

Did a safety concern arise?

Did the family simply fall into a new procedural hole?

Who checks?

Who owns that question?

That is one reason the current public-review version of my proposed family-court initiative includes an early implementation review - generally within 30 to 45 days for covered orders - focused not on relitigating the entire case but on a simple systems question:

Is the order actually working?

That provision comes straight out of what engineering teaches us.

Deployment is not the same as successful implementation.

An order entered into a docket is not automatically an outcome in a child's life.

And a government that possesses enormous coercive authority should care enough to measure the difference.

The broader initiative is called "**An Act To Strengthen Maine Family Court Accountability and Protect Parent-Child Relationships.**"

Let me emphasize something I believe democratic reform requires:

It is a **draft**.

It is under public review.

It is not scripture.

It is not yet an official ballot measure.

And I do not expect every word I wrote to survive serious scrutiny.

Good.

It should not.

I am an engineer.

Red-team it.

Find the unintended consequence.

Find the ambiguity.

Find the provision that threatens due process.

Find the language that could undermine a legitimate safety intervention.

Find the burden I failed to anticipate.

Find the number that needs better evidence.

Find the procedural safeguard I overlooked.

Then show your work.

And let us improve it.

That is how grown adults should solve public problems.

The proposal presently includes early safety screening.

It proposes stronger procedural parity for people representing themselves.

It proposes clearer timing expectations.

It attempts to reduce endless interim litigation.

It addresses protections for children.

It proposes accountability and reporting.

It addresses parent-child relationship interference while attempting to preserve good-faith safety reporting.

And it asks the public a larger question:

How much authority should any system possess without proportionate transparency about what that authority actually produces?

Some sections will be controversial.

Then let us debate them.

But let us debate the actual language.

Let us debate evidence.

Let us debate measurable effects.

Let us stop pretending that refusing to examine a malfunction somehow protects the legitimacy of the machine.

I also want to say something directly to self-represented people.

Because I know what institutional language can do.

A person enters a legal system carrying the most important problem in his or her life.

Inside that system, the problem acquires a case number.

Then a docket entry.

Then a motion.

Then an objection.

Then a response.

Then a rule.

Then a deadline.

Then a transcript.

Then perhaps an appeal.

The transformation is necessary to some degree. Law needs structure.

But something dangerous happens when the institution becomes so fluent in its own language that it mistakes fluency for merit.

A person who cannot say res judicata still knows whether his child came home.

A mother who does not understand a citation format still knows whether an order was followed.

A father who cannot afford counsel still knows how many birthdays he missed.

A child does not need a law degree to know whether the adults around him made life safer or more frightening.

Legal expertise matters.

But expertise should make public service **more accessible**, not make the public more subordinate.

That is part of why I built ProSe as a legal-operations project aimed at reducing procedural complexity and improving clarity for people navigating the system, and why I have worked on a Maine-focused family-law language-model project.

These tools are not substitutes for lawyers.

They are not judges.

They should not decide families.

They are an expression of a principle:

Information asymmetry should not be mistaken for justice.

When government requires ordinary people to navigate complex systems, government has an obligation to care whether an ordinary person can realistically navigate them.

And here I need to take responsibility for something too.

I have written angry things.

I have sent too many emails at times.

I have filed too much at times.

I have spoken with an intensity that makes people uncomfortable.

There are sentences I would write differently today.

There are arguments I would sharpen.

There are assumptions I would qualify.

There are moments when pain was visible in my language.

I am not standing here asking anyone to declare Justin Tahai infallible.

Please don't.

That would violate everything I am arguing for.

Correct me.

Show me the record.

Show me the contradiction.

Give me the timestamp.

Give me evidence that I am wrong.

And when I am wrong, I have a duty to correct myself.

But apply that rule upward too.

To me.

To lawyers.

To judges.

To agencies.

To boards.

To legislators.

To governors.

To institutions.

Nobody should acquire immunity from correction by acquiring a title.

That is accountability.

Not humiliation.

Not vengeance.

Not intimidation.

Correction.

This is also why I have tried, throughout my public-accountability work, to distinguish allegation from finding, argument from fact, and inference from established record.

A complaint is not a finding.

An accusation is not proof.

A public official who is criticized still deserves fairness.

A lawyer who is accused of misconduct still deserves process.

A parent accused of wrongdoing still deserves process.

And a government institution accused of failure deserves the opportunity to answer with evidence.

My campaign's own public-accountability framework expressly recognizes those distinctions.

Because due process cannot be something we demand only for ourselves.

If due process is a principle, then it belongs to the people we are angry with too.

And that is where I hope this movement can be different.

I do not want a politics of destroying enemies.

I want a culture of correcting systems.

There is a sentence in Maine's constitutional tradition that should haunt every conversation about this subject:

Maine's Constitution promises that "right and justice shall be administered ... **promptly and without delay.**"

Not promptly when convenient.

Not promptly when the docket allows.

Not promptly unless the litigant runs out of money first.

Not promptly after childhood.

That promise exists because delay has always been understood as capable of defeating justice itself.

And today, with modern information systems, modern analytics, modern workflow design, modern communication, remote hearings, digital records, automated alerts, dashboards, secure portals, and all of the tools already used every day in the private sector, we should be asking a difficult question:

Why do we tolerate preventable administrative blindness in systems with consequences this serious?

Due process does not require inefficiency.

Judicial independence does not require opacity.

Professional discretion does not require immunity from measurement.

Public reporting does not require revealing private family information.

Technology does not have to replace human judgment.

Used correctly, it can help human beings notice when judgment has not been translated into action.

Imagine a family justice system in which we could publicly answer questions like these:

How long are families waiting for temporary decisions?

How long for final resolution?

How often are cases continued?

How many cases remain unresolved beyond established benchmarks?

How often do implementation reviews identify problems?

How quickly are those problems corrected?

Where are staffing shortages creating measurable bottlenecks?

Where are self-represented parties abandoning valid claims because procedure became functionally inaccessible?

Where are children spending years inside unresolved adult conflict?

Not who won.

Not confidential allegations.

Not children's names.

System performance.

Because without measurement, failure becomes anecdote.

And when failure is dismissed as anecdote, every family experiencing it is told, in effect:

Maybe it is only you.

My archive taught me that this is one of the cruelest things a system can do.

It can isolate people inside repeatable failures by refusing to measure whether the failures repeat.

That brings me back to the 108,000 pages.

There is a phrase associated with that part of my work:

108,000 pages is not justice.

And I mean that literally.

More procedure is not necessarily more due process.

More documents are not necessarily more truth.

More hearings are not necessarily more resolution.

More professionals are not necessarily more accountability.

More years are certainly not more childhood.

A system should be judged partly by how much needless complexity an ordinary person must survive to obtain an ordinary result.

And when complexity becomes self-justifying, we have forgotten who the system is for.

The courthouse does not exist so that the public may provide work for the courthouse.

The public does not exist to validate a profession.

The People created institutions because institutions are supposed to serve human beings.

The seats belong to the People.

Not because the People should decide individual cases by mob rule.

Not because judges should fear unpopular decisions.

Judicial independence matters precisely because fair judgment sometimes requires resisting public pressure.

But independence from political retaliation is not independence from accountability.

The authority is held **in trust**.

And every person who exercises public power should remember the direction in which that trust flows.

I am asking Maine to choose something better.

Not perfect.

Better.

I am asking legislators to examine measurable family-court timelines.

I am asking the Judicial Branch to treat implementation as an outcome worth knowing.

I am asking the legal profession to examine incentives that can reward unnecessary conflict.

I am asking disciplinary institutions to understand that public confidence comes from visible independence and credible correction.

I am asking technologists to help make procedure understandable.

I am asking lawyers who know the system works well for many people to help identify where it plainly does not.

I am asking parents to stop treating children as instruments of adult warfare.

I am asking every advocate - including me - to remember that winning an argument is not the same thing as helping a child.

I am asking journalists to follow records beyond the dramatic allegation and into the administrative machinery where harm can quietly accumulate.

I am asking voters to reject the idea that systemic reform belongs to the political left or the political right.

Children do not develop on partisan calendars.

Due process does not have a party registration.

Government accountability is not conservative or progressive.

A functioning institution is not ideological.

And I am asking something of people who disagree with me.

Please do.

Disagree.

But engage the proposition.

Tell me where I am wrong.

Show me a better design.

Write a better initiative.

Build a better ProSe tool.

Design a safer implementation review.

Propose a better dashboard.

Find a way to protect children faster while preserving due process more completely.

Beat my idea with a better idea.

Nothing would make me happier.

Because this was never supposed to become a monument to my family.

The entire purpose is that another family should not need my archive.

Another father should not need my vocabulary.

Another mother should not need my technical skills.

Another child should not need to become the subject of a public-policy project simply because the adults and institutions around that child could not resolve conflict in developmental time.

I have sometimes been asked - directly or indirectly - why I do not simply let it go.

There is an answer in that question that troubles me.

We often praise persistence after institutions finally admit a historical wrong.

We make films about whistleblowers.

We erect memorials.

We teach children about people who refused to accept what everyone around them had normalized.

But while the refusal is happening, persistence can be described very differently.

Difficult.

Obsessive.

Angry.

Disruptive.

Unreasonable.

And sometimes the person raising the alarm really is wrong.

That is why evidence matters.

But sometimes the smoke detector is loud because there is smoke.

The answer is not to become angry at the smoke detector.

Check the room.

There is another part of this conversation that reaches beyond family court.

It reaches into criminal justice.

Corrections.

Addiction.

Poverty.

Trauma.

Education.

Mental health.

And the way people with institutional power learn to think about human beings who possess less of it.

I do not believe understanding a person's history excuses that person from responsibility.

I do not believe trauma gives anyone permission to traumatize someone else.

I know better than that.

Accountability matters.

Boundaries matter.

Consequences matter.

Safety matters.

But justice without human understanding can become something dangerously close to sorting.

Good people.

Bad people.

Successful people.

Failed people.

Professional people.

Criminal people.

Educated people.

Ignorant people.

Worthy people.

Unworthy people.

Human life is more complicated than that.

Spend enough time listening to people's stories and patterns begin to emerge.

Childhood trauma can shape adolescent behavior.

Adolescent behavior can intersect with untreated mental illness.

Untreated mental illness can intersect with addiction.

Addiction can intersect with desperation.

Desperation can contribute to crime.

Violence experienced can become violence repeated.

Humiliation can harden into rage.

Abandonment can shape attachment and trust.

Poverty can constrain choices.

And harm can travel through families for generations unless somebody interrupts it.

Again:

Explanation is not exoneration.

But **understanding causation is how competent systems prevent recurrence.**

Any engineer knows this.

You can punish a server for crashing all day.

Or you can find out why it keeps crashing.

Human beings are infinitely more valuable than servers.

Surely our curiosity about cause should be at least as great.

And so I want to end not with another statute.

Not another case number.

Not another filing.

Not another statistic.

With a word.

A very small word.

A word children learn almost as soon as they learn to speak.

A word institutions sometimes mistake for hostility when it is actually a boundary.

NO.

A peaceful refusal to call preventable harm normal.
Or in any way acceptable for children and families.

No to cruelty acquiring legitimacy simply because it learns professional vocabulary.

No to gamesmanship being confused with advocacy.

No to unnecessary delay being described as neutral when one side or one outcome benefits from the passing of time.

No to treating developmental time as administrative inventory.

No to access that exists ceremonially but cannot realistically be used.

No to rights that remain pristine in doctrine while expiring in practice.

No to telling self-represented people that a courthouse is open while making meaningful participation functionally unreachable.

No to calling an order relief when nobody is responsible for determining whether the relief occurred.

No to calling an appeal meaningful when an ordinary person cannot practically obtain the record needed to exercise it.

No to an ethics culture - anywhere, in any profession - that becomes more instinctively protective of the profession than of the public the profession exists to serve.

No to everybody doing his or her job while nobody owns the outcome.

No to professional vocabulary erasing human consequence.

No to the suggestion that documenting a failure somehow created the failure.

No to confusing lawful authority with infallibility.

No to confusing institutional independence with insulation from evidence.

No to deference that has not been earned through accountable conduct.

No to silence when silence perpetuates a preventable harm.

No to leaving the next father alone in the maze.

No to leaving the next mother alone in the maze.

No to leaving the next child waiting while adults explain why nothing could be done sooner.

And let me be absolutely clear about what I mean by that word.

No is not violence.

No is not a threat.

No is not abandonment of law.

No is not a demand that I win.

No is the peaceful refusal to consent to a lie.

It is the refusal to call procedure justice merely because procedure occurred.

It is the refusal to call delay harmless merely because no individual wrote the words let the child suffer.

It is the refusal to call a right meaningful if ordinary people cannot exercise it.

It is the refusal to call a system accountable when accountability disappears precisely where authority becomes greatest.

It is the refusal to believe that professional status determines human worth.

It is the refusal to pretend that childhood waits.

I consider it a serious institutional blind spot that people entrusted with enormous authority over human lives can exercise that authority without sustained, structured time inside local correctional facilities listening to the people who live and work there.

I do not mean walking through for a tour.

I mean listening.

Sitting with people.

Listening to correctional officers too.

Listening to families.

Learning what happened before the arrest.

Before the addiction.

Before the violence.

Before the failure.

Before the person standing before the State became a docket number.

Not to excuse wrongdoing.

To understand humanity.

Because anyone empowered to judge human beings should know more about human beings than what survives after life has been compressed into a case file.

Many people there may not use academic or institutional vocabulary to describe those experiences at a doctoral level.

But many know, with a kind of education no university can reproduce, which harms become generational.

They know what abandonment can become.

They know what violence can become.

They know what addiction can become.

They know what humiliation can become.

They know what happens when adults fail children and those children become adults carrying wounds nobody interrupted.

They may need accountability.

They may need boundaries.

They may need consequences.

But they do **not** need to be spoken down to.

There is an old maxim worth remembering:

"Never look down on someone unless you are helping them up."

And as I stated in my November 2025 motion-to-amend record:

The privileged often seem to confuse indignation for fear; they are not the same.

That sentence was not an attempt to convert my own criticism into fear. I was describing the indignation I perceived from people in positions of authority who did not appreciate being challenged - particularly from the bench.

That distinction matters. Indignation from a person with power can become dangerous when it is paired with ignorance of the human consequences of a decision. A judge may be irritated, offended, or indignant at being questioned. But irritation is not fear. Offense is not fear. Indignation is not fear. Institutional displeasure at scrutiny is not evidence that the person asking hard questions is dangerous.

A robe does not make a person omniscient. Judicial authority does not make a person incapable of error. Respect for the bench does not require pretending otherwise. When scrutiny itself becomes the supposed offense, wounded pride can become judgment.

Haughtiness is not wisdom. Institutional offense is not a substitute for an answer.

The greater the authority entrusted to someone, the greater - not lesser - the obligation to hear uncomfortable facts, confront evidence, correct error, and remain capable of distinguishing criticism from threat. Justice cannot depend upon whether the people administering it enjoy the criticism they receive. It must depend upon whether the criticism is true, whether the evidence supports it, and whether preventable harm is still occurring while everyone argues about tone.

So I will end where 108,000 pages eventually led me.

No to professionalized cruelty.

No to access theater.

No to paper rights without practical remedy.

No to delay masquerading as neutrality.

No to a parent-child relationship being told to wait for a system whose calendar will never matter as much as the child's.

No to everybody having authority while nobody accepts responsibility.

No to a public being told to respect institutions that are unwilling to measure whether they are producing justice.

No to leaving the next family with 108,000 pages and calling the existence of those pages due process.

No - not because I reject law.

Because I believe law can be better.

No - not because I reject our courts.

Because our courts matter too much to accept preventable failure as inevitable.

No - not because I believe I am always right.

Because no human being, including me, should be beyond correction.

No - not because this belongs to one father, one mother, one child, one case, one judge, one lawyer, one court, one party, or one campaign.

Because childhood belongs to no institution.

Because public power belongs to the People.

Because dignity belongs to every human being.

Because justice, if the word is to mean anything, must eventually become real in the lives of the people to whom it is promised.

Not only for my family, but for Everyone - NO.

/s/ Justin A. Tahai

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JT FOR ME - Justice for Maine Families

www.JTforME.com

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PUBLIC SOURCE & METHOD NOTE

Open the record before debating the conclusion.

This speech synthesizes Justin Tahai’s published public-accountability writing, public records, official Maine sources, professional and educational background, the public-review family-court initiative, the ProSe and Maine Family Law LLM projects, and the documentary themes of *Carpooling to Hell*.

It is intentionally written as civic advocacy rather than a litigation brief. A complaint, allegation, public statement, referral, or grievance is not an adjudicated finding. Policy proposals are proposals, not current law. Adverse material, corrections, source boundaries, and public records should be reviewed on their own terms.

Public record & evidence

JTforME.com - Evidence, Sources + Proof, Corrections

Reform proposal

JTforME.com - Initiative - rev08a public-review draft

Public commentary

JTforME.com - Articles & Public Commentary

Memoir / documentary project

JTforME.com - *Carpooling to Hell*

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