

ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE OF THE COURTS

JUVENILE DIVISION

2024-2025 UPDATE

EDUCATION & TRAINING

The Juvenile Division coordinated and hosted a wide range of trainings to strengthen the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. In the past year, team members provided legal, technical, and behavioral health training for:

- District & Circuit Judges
- Trial Court Administrators and Court Reporters
- Domestic Relations and Dependency-Neglect Attorneys ad Litem
- Parent Counsel and Office of Chief Counsel (DHS)
- Juvenile Probation Officers & Arkansas Juvenile Officers Association
- Juvenile Drug Court Coordinators
- CASA Staff & Volunteers
- Mediators & Court Management Program Participants
- Behavioral Health Summit and Community Mental Health Providers
- Circuit Clerks

"We are fortunate in the United States to have a stable and a durable democratic government. But we can't be complacent in assuming this good fortune will continue... It is the citizens of our nation who must preserve our system of government, and we cannot forget that."

Justice Sandra Day O'Connor

PROGRAMS

COURT APPOINTED SPECIAL ADVOCATES (CASA): In 2024, 23 local programs serving 75 Arkansas counties, supported by 115 staff and 1,255 volunteers, collectively advocated for 2,577 children impacted by the foster care system.

JUVENILE PROBATION OFFICERS (JPOs): Trained and certified 57 new officers in the past year, with specialized on-site support delivered across 5 Judicial Districts.

DEPENDENCY-NEGLECT ATTORNEY AD LITEMS (AALs): 28 contractors and 34 full-time AALs provided legal representation to 7007 children in dependency-neglect cases over the past year.

COLLABORATIVE RESOURCE CREATION

The Juvenile Services Division has continued developing resources for children and families who become court-involved. In collaboration with the Commission on Children, Youth, and Families and other stakeholders, the Juvenile Division created a Guidebook for parents as well as several videos to help families better understand and navigate court processes, which ultimately produces better outcomes for youth and families.

The Division Director and other stakeholders were also recently recognized for their work with the Child Advocacy Centers in developing the state's first Model Protocols for Multidisciplinary Teams who work with child victims. This groundbreaking effort strengthens the coordinated response to child abuse and improves outcomes for vulnerable children across the state.

ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE OF THE COURTS JUVENILE DIVISION 2024-2025 UPDATE

INNOVATIVE PRACTICE

Following guidance from the Council of Chief Justices and Council of Chief Court Administrators, the Administrative Office of the Courts established the Statewide Behavioral Health Administrator position. Arkansas is one of 19 states with this specialized position. The role was created without allocating a new position, instead strategically realigning existing staff capacity to meet the growing needs at the intersection of behavioral health and the courts. The Behavioral Health Administrator provides:

- Technical assistance to judges, probation officers, attorneys, and CASA programs on behavioral health resources.
- Cross-system collaboration with DHS, OSAMH, and community providers to address service gaps.
- Training and professional development in evidence-based practices (trauma, self-regulation, substance use, and co-occurring disorders).
- Strategic planning and data analysis to inform statewide initiatives

By embedding behavioral health expertise into the court system through an existing role, the AOC has strengthened its ability to support youth, families, and communities while ensuring fiscal responsibility and sustainability.

"We are fortunate in the United States to have a stable and a durable democratic government. However, in assuming this responsibility, we must preserve our system of government, and we cannot forget that,"
Justice Sandra Day O'Connor

FUNDING & SUPPORT FOR LOCAL COURTS

Over the past year, the Juvenile Division has delivered an unprecedented level of financial, educational, and other support to juvenile courts and juvenile stakeholders through subgrants, trainings, collaboration opportunities, and resource development.

- More than \$100,000 in 2024 and another \$100,000 in 2025 in Court Improvement Program Federal Funding : Awarded to all juvenile courts to support improvements in dependency-neglect proceedings, aimed at ensuring quality hearings and legal representation for families, as well as resources for court staff and families
- More than \$100,000 to support Juvenile Officer Development and Support: Awarded to delinquency courts to strengthen juvenile officer's productivity, education, technology, and court-based programming
- More than \$140,000 in Juvenile Drug Court Federal Subgrants: In partnership with the Specialty Court Program, funding for all juvenile drug courts to improve services, treatment, and support for participating youth
- More than \$100,000 in Federal Subgrants for Behavioral Health and Treatment Initiatives: In collaboration with the Specialty Court Program, funding for all juvenile courts to expand behavioral health treatment and other supportive services for court-involved youth
- Managed reimbursements to counties for Juvenile Officer Salaries in excess of \$4.5 million state appropriation for the salaries of approximately 250 juvenile officers, ensuring sustained local capacity to support youth and families
- Managed \$1.75 million state appropriation to local CASA programs