

CHILDREN'S JUSTICE ACT TASK FORCE 2024 THREE- YEAR ASSESSMENT REPORT

Submitted by: Nevada Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Child and Family Services

Introduction:

This report will be presented to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration on Children and Families. Nevada's Children's Justice Act Task Force (CJA) is eager to present the Three-Year Assessment Report for 2024-2027.

Section 107(d) of the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act requires the CJA task force to provide a three-year assessment that reviews and evaluates the programs and policies that serve to investigate and handle cases of child abuse and/or neglect and make recommendations of training and policy in the State of Nevada.

The CJA Task Force provides funding to local agencies to improve their handling of these sensitive cases through best practices. The Task Force provides local agencies with the ability to provide their staff with training, new technology and other resources which may not be provided otherwise.

Additionally, the Division of Child and Family Services (DCFS), Nevada's Department of Health and Human Services, would like to thank the CJA Task Force members for their willingness to help with the completion of this report and for serving the children in Nevada. This Task Force has increased the knowledge of many professionals in the State of Nevada with best practices when it comes to the handling of child abuse and/or neglect cases.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

OVERVIEW OF THE CHILDREN’S JUSTICE ACT STATE TASK FORCE:.....3
2021-2023 CJA TASK FORCE GOALS3
HIGHLIGHTS OF PROGRESS MADE TOWARD GOALS4
PROCESS USED TO COMPLETE THE 2024 THREE YEAR ASSESSMENT.....8
2024-2027 CJA TASK FORCE GOALS13
CJA TASK FORCE IMPLEMENTATION PLAN.....14

OVERVIEW OF THE CHILDREN’S JUSTICE ACT STATE TASK FORCE:

The Nevada Children’s Justice Act (CJA) Task Force was established in February 1994 by the Administrator of DCFS. The purpose of the CJA Task Force is to make policy and training recommendations for systems improvements in:

1. The assessment and investigation of suspected child abuse and neglect cases, including cases of suspected child sexual abuse and exploitation, in a manner that limits additional trauma to the child and the child’s family.
2. The assessment and investigation of cases of suspected child abuse-related fatalities and suspected child neglect-related fatalities.
3. The investigation and prosecution of cases of child abuse and neglect, including child sexual abuse and exploitation; and
4. The assessment and investigation of cases involving children with disabilities or serious health related problems who are suspected victims of child abuse or neglect.

Additionally, the CJA Task Force makes recommendations for projects to be funded by the CJA annual grant award. CJA funding must support front-end efforts or intake and investigation phases of child welfare cases and must be made in each of the following funding categories:

- A. Investigative, administrative, and judicial handling of cases of child abuse and neglect.
- B. Experimental, model, and demonstration programs for testing innovative approaches.
- C. Reform of state laws, ordinances, regulations, protocols, and procedures.

2021-2023 CJA TASK FORCE GOALS

The goals reflect overarching areas in child welfare that the Task Force intends to focus on to improve the front end of the child welfare system. The Nevada CJA Task Force endorses the following goals to be supported by CJA grant funds for the Three-Year Period of 2021-2023:

Goal 1: Provide child protection workers and community partners “front end” specialty, discipline specific and advanced training. Training should be prioritized, but not limited to, child protection model assessments, Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA), sexual abuse, domestic violence, forensic interviewing, mandatory reporting, trauma-informed practices, substance use and co-occurring mental health disorders and training needs identified in collaboration with Court Improvement Program (CIP). *(ABC; see key below)*

Goal 2: Support the implementation of the Commercially Sexually Exploited Child (CSEC) Model Coordinated Response Protocol and provide training and support for the formation of Multidisciplinary Teams (MDT) and Task Forces. *(ABC)*

Goal 3: Support the establishment of new Children’s Advocacy Centers (CACs) or other multidisciplinary team approaches and improve the capacity of existing CACs to provide a multidisciplinary response for victims of child sex abuse and exploitation, physical abuse, and child victims with disabilities. (AB)

Goal 4: Fund technology requests to improve the investigation, assessment and prosecution of child abuse and neglect through use of latest technology and to support the use of new and existing training technologies. (B)

Goal 5: Identify new or needed changes to policy, regulation and/or legislation to meet requirements of federal program improvements plans and other federal and state initiatives. Support training and policy needs related to new or revised policy, regulation, and legislation. (C)

Key: Required categories for use of CJA funds:

A= Investigative, administrative, and judicial handling of cases of child abuse and neglect.

B= Experimental, model and demonstration programs for testing innovative approaches.

C= Reform of state laws, ordinances, regulations, protocols, and procedures.

HIGHLIGHTS OF PROGRESS MADE TOWARD GOALS

Goal 1: Provide child protection workers and community partners “front end” specialty, discipline specific and advanced training.

- Maintenance of the Nevada Children’s Justice Task Force (2021/2022/2023).
- Forensic Interview Training was provided to MDT members in Clark County by the National Children’s Advocacy Center (2021/2022/2023) (NCAC).
- Two Law Enforcement Detectives from Elko and Eureka Counties participated in advanced forensic interview training (2021/2022).
- 38 MDT members from Washoe County attended the Crimes Against Children Conference (2021/2022).
- 21 members from Nye County participated in the 37th Annual Child and Family Maltreatment Conference (2021/2024).
- Two child welfare staff from Washoe County Human Services Agency attended the Cornerstone Advanced Forensic Interview Training (2023).
- Two child welfare staff from Washoe County Human Services Agency attended the Child Welfare League of America Annual Conference (2023/2024).
- 20 individuals, statewide, participated in the Handle with Care Conference (2022/2023).
- Nevada Institute of Forensic Nursing had three staff members (one nurse and two advocates) attend the End Violence Against Women International Conference on sexual assault, domestic violence and cycle of justice (2024).
- The Domestic Violence Coalition provided training to front end child welfare staff statewide (2022).
- Roadmaps and Handbooks were provided to Clark County Department of Family Services and

Washoe County Human Services Agency. The agencies distributed these materials to the child welfare staff, court houses and community partners to provide to families who are involved in the court process (2021).

- These materials were created as a part of Nevada’s Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) Round three Program Improvement Plan (PIP) in collaboration with the CIP. These materials were distributed to parents and community partners when a child welfare agency has taken legal custody of a child. The purpose of the handbooks and roadmaps were to support families and community partners regarding the court process and expectations of important activities if a child experiences a foster care episode.
- Trauma Informed Leadership Training was provided to 15 MDT members in Washoe County Human Services Agency (2022).
- 81 copies of the latest edition of “Child Welfare Law and Practice” were provided to multiple court partners who requested a copy. Below are the disciplines that were represented (2022):

Disciplines and counties served:

	Clark County	Washoe County	All other counties (rural)
CASA	2	1	0
Attorneys*	17	11	16
Magistrates/Masters/Judges*	3	5	16
Mediators	1	6	0
Other (unspecified)	0	2	1

*The attorney category includes public defenders, private attorneys, prosecution attorneys and attorneys’ staff. The magistrate/masters/judges section also includes court administration staff.

Goal 2: Support CSEC Protocol and formation of MDTs

- Supported CSEC protocol implementation in Nevada through collaboration with the Nevada CSEC Coordinator (2022).
- Provided funding for a CSEC database to increase collaboration and communication between community partners. (2021/2022).
- Five Washoe County child welfare staff attended the Shared Hope Juvenile Sex Trafficking Annual Conference (2023).

Goal 3: Support Children Advocacy Centers (CACs)

- Provided funding to furnish a conference room in March 2023 for the Southern Nevada Child Advocacy Center.
- Provided funding to purchase a “soft” interview room for the Great Basin Child Advocacy Center in March 2022.
- Each Child Advocacy Center that is a subgrantee provides a verbal and written update to the CJA Task Force, quarterly, on the grant as well as their successes and challenges quarterly.

- A member from each of Nevada’s Child Advocacy Centers serves as a member at-large on the CJA Task Force.

Goal 4: Fund Technology

- Laptops and external CD/DVDs were purchased for staff at the Washoe County Child Advocacy Center. This updated technology allowed for interviews with suspects and child victims to be documented more thoroughly and accurately. This also allowed for the ability for workers to complete live-time documentation which increases the accuracy and timeliness of the documented child abuse and neglect case (2022).
- Laptops and workstations were purchased for child welfare staff in the rural counties of Nevada to provide caseworkers enhanced access to Nevada’s Comprehensive Child Welfare Information System (CWISS) virtually and office software to streamline case management and accurate safety decisions. (2022).
- Annual proprietary software was purchased to allow child welfare investigative staff to view interviews and recordings from the local Child Advocacy Center indefinitely (2022).
- Provided funding for a Vault Cloud System, which allows live forensic interviewing remotely (2023).
- Purchased a high-speed printer/copier for law enforcement (2023).

Goal 5: Changes to Policy, Regulation, and/or Legislation

- The Task Force has remained apprised of newly enacted legislation from Nevada’s legislative sessions in 2021 and 2023. The following new and modified legislation has been relevant to the Task Force and its current activities.
 - Legislation passed during Nevada’s 81st Legislative Session (2021).
 - NRS 432B.305: Adds new investigation determinations for caseworkers to be used in circumstances when an investigation cannot be completed. These determinations are “unable to locate or complete” and “administrative closure.”
 - NRS 424.277: New legislation that requires DCFS to license Receiving Centers that serve children who are victims of sexual exploitation.
 - Legislation passed during Nevada’s 82nd Legislative Session (2023):
 - NRS 432B:
 - Adds sections into NRS 432B outlining procedures for a court to determine whether to assign Guardian Ad Litem to a parent or other person responsible for the welfare of a child in certain situations.
 - Adds language of requirements for the child welfare agency and the courts to follow when a child is placed in a Qualified Residential Treatment Placement.

- Adds language of requirements for the child welfare agency, courts and facilities to follow when a child who is in the custody of the child welfare agency has either an emergency admission or a non-emergency admission to a mental health facility. *Changes proposed by the CIP.*
- NRS 432B.220, NRS 62C.015, NRS 62E and NRS 432C.110: Requires child welfare and certain entities in the juvenile justice system to screen children for commercial sexual exploitation.
- NRS 432B: Establishes Indian Child Welfare law in Nevada.
- NRS 217: Requires multiple entities to submit trafficking data to the Center for Analysis of Crime Statistics at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas who is required to develop a report with this data for Nevada's legislature.

PROCESS USED TO COMPLETE THE 2024 THREE YEAR ASSESSMENT

The CJA Task Force began the three-year assessment during the March 2023 quarterly Evaluation Subcommittee meeting and was finalized in the quarterly Evaluation Subcommittee meeting in February 2024. The meeting dates to complete this report were as follows, March 1, 2023, November 8, 2023, January 9, 2024, and February 7, 2024. Countless presentations and activities over the past three years have contributed to this report. Since 2021, Task Force members have been educated on the following topics:

Presentation from Nevada’s CIP Coordinators (August 10, 2021)

The CIP seeks to support children’s right to protection from abuse and neglect and was established in 1995. The CIP focuses its efforts on improving court handling of foster care cases, supporting children’s protection from abuse and neglect, avoiding unnecessary family separations, furthering permanency, and cultivating judicial leadership in these areas. The CIP funds have been used for the Juvenile Dependency Mediation Program, providing technology to the courts during the pandemic; conducting research and data analysis; educating the judicial, legal, and child welfare communities with conferences and training; and supporting local Community Improvement Councils (CIC).

Presentation on new/modified legislation from Nevada 2021 legislative session (August 10, 2021)

NRS 432B.305: Adds “unable to locate or complete” and “administrative closure” to determinations made by caseworkers on investigations.

NRS 424.277: Requires the DCFS to license Receiving Centers that serve children who are victims of sexual exploitation.

NRS 432B.3903, NRS 432B.410 and NRS 432B.470: New legislation that allows child welfare agencies to obtain warrants to take a child into protective custody, modifies notice of court hearing process, and adds that jurisdiction includes where a child is domiciled – *changes proposed by the CIP*.

Presentation from Nevada’s Commercially Sexually Exploited Children (CSEC) Coordinator (November 09, 2021)

The CSEC Coordinator presented on the current efforts by the CSEC Coalition. The CSEC Coalition formed three subcommittees with the following goals:

- Developing and/or enhancing Multi-Disciplinary Teams around the state. Memorandums of Understanding were being created for the various local entities.
- Increasing External Engagement. Activities included reviewing the Nevada Rapid

- Indicator Tool (currently used by child welfare caseworkers) for screening children to determine if they are high-risk or confirmed victims of sexual exploitation, encouraging Juvenile Justice and school districts to consider using the screening tool and reviewing the tool to ensure inclusivity.
- Evaluating Funding, Data, and Sustainability through creating a state-wide database to obtain quality data for the CSEC population in Nevada.

Presentation from Health Management Associates (HMA) (January 04, 2022)

Health Management Associates, a consulting firm with locations nationwide contracted with DCFS on a project to support families and children in Nevada affected by domestic violence. Their work involved a preliminary needs assessment, developing an implementation plan for training, implementing the training and then conducting an evaluation. The project focus was on four areas:

- Assessing domestic violence rates and known risk and protective factors.
- Assessing organizational policies and practices of child maltreatment over time.
- Assessing child welfare services, staffing, and capacity.
- Assessing the collaboration between child welfare services and domestic violence organizations, court systems, law enforcement, and domestic violence advocates, as well as survivors of domestic violence.

Presentation from Nevada Coalition to End Domestic and Sexual Violence (April 05, 2022)

The Coalition presented a short video that delved into the long-term effects of trauma and how to advocate for trauma-informed practices. The video was intended for individuals who have gone through traumatic experiences. It discussed four hormones that, when present at high levels, can block physical and psychological pain. Additionally, the video shared growth factors that can serve as a robust support system, such as developing positive personality traits, the ability to reflect, developing a coping system, focusing on evidence-based trauma, compassion focus, and Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT). The video discussed guiding principles for a trauma-informed approach, which include safety, trustworthiness, transparency, peer support, collaboration, mutual empowerment, and sensitivity to cultural and historical gender issues.

Presentation from Nevada's CIP Coordinators (July 12, 2022)

The CIP Coordinator presented an update on the five-year strategic plan and ongoing efforts of the CIP. The goals include improving dependency courts by promoting continuous quality improvement, legal representation, and collaboration between the judicial branch, child welfare agencies, and tribes. The updated strategic plan, released in June 2021, focuses on six priority areas, including data sharing, reducing disparity and disproportionality, improving court quality, legal representation, timeliness to permanency, and a more inclusive approach. In Nevada, CIP has volunteered to participate in a reasonable effort study, which is being funded by the Office of Planning Research and Evaluation of the Children's Bureau, conducted by James Bell Associates. This study explores reasonable efforts in depth and is a pioneering step in this direction.

Presentation from Task Force Members who attended the Annual CRP Conference (July 12, 2022)

Two Task force members and one DCFS staff member attended the annual CRP Conference. They presented to the Task Force takeaway ideas and best practices for CRPs.

Presentation from Task Force Chair & CJA Coordinator regarding the Children's Bureau feedback on the 2022 annual CJA report (October 04, 2022)

The Task Force discussed the feedback and how to implement the recommendations made by the Children's Bureau. Ideas included:

- Explore adding a parent representative with lived experience to the Task Force membership.
- Support the next CFSR and PIP, specifically related to the three safety outcomes.
- Provide more detailed information, such as survey results and pre/post-training tests, including the type of training and the percentage of the targeted population who received training.

Short video presentation regarding Nevada's Children's Advocacy Centers (CACs) (October 04, 2022)

The Task Force watched a short video about Nevada's CACs and their impact on Nevada's Children.

Presentation on Round 4 regarding the Children Family Services Review (CFSR) (January 10, 2023)

DCFS staff presented an overview of the CFSR, round 4. These reviews take place every five years, on average. The CFSR includes comprehensive case reviews of individual cases, which involve interviews with case participants and community partners throughout the state related to key performance measures and systemic factors that drive the PIP action steps. The purpose of these reviews is to identify areas where improvements can be made and to ensure that quality improvement services are continuously utilized throughout the state.

Presentation about CFSR Safety Outcome Items 1, 2 and 3 (January 10, 2023)

DCFS staff discussed Nevada's current CFSR data for Safety Outcomes Items 1, 2 and 3.

Initial Planning for Nevada's 3-year assessment (March 1, 2023)

During the Taskforce Evaluation Subcommittee meeting, the members discussed and planned for Nevada's upcoming three-year assessment. To utilize CJA funds effectively, the subcommittee prioritized direct services (training and technology), CSEC protocol implementation, and improved data collection of CSEC victims. They also suggested adding a parent representative with lived experience to the task force. The subcommittee emphasized the importance of supporting the child and family services review, particularly on safety outcomes and interim report narratives, to address the lack of clear and specific data in these areas.

Video presentation of CJA 101 (May 4, 2023)

The Task Force was shown a video about CJA and the goals and expectations of the Children's Bureau. The Children's Bureau has emphasized the importance of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) all while ensuring that individuals with lived experience are included in all aspects of their work. To achieve this, various task forces have ensured that each group is appropriately represented and included. While the responsibilities of task force members may differ amongst grantees based on their bylaws, they are expected to attend meetings regularly and contribute their knowledge and expertise to discussions and activities as well as participate in ongoing assessment processes actively.

Presentation from Task Force Chair & CJA Coordinator regarding the Children's Bureau feedback on the 2023 annual CJA report (October 10, 2023)

The Task Force discussed the feedback made by the Children's Bureau.

Presentation from Task Force Members who attended the Annual CJA Conference (October 10, 2023)

Two Task Force members attended and reported back to the full Task Force, the highlights from the Annual CJA Conference including:

Discussing the work of Ira Chesnokov who is an accomplished author, researcher, lecturer, and President of the NTI Upstream. He is also a Clinical Pediatrics professional at the University of Illinois' College of Medicine.

A session dedicated to the well-being of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer (or sometimes questioning), Intersex, Asexual and Others (LGBTQIA+) youth in child welfare. These youth are often misunderstood, and their needs are not being met despite being severely underrepresented in the welfare system.

Discussion regarding Nevada's 3-year assessment (November 8, 2023)

A Task Force subcommittee reviewed the three-year assessment goals and provided feedback ultimately amending and approving recommended goals to take back to the Task Force.

The Task Force approved and updated CJA's 3-year assessment goals (January 9, 2024)

During the discussion one member asked how the Legislation would be monitored in Nevada. Suggestions were made regarding the Task Force adding a Legislative Subcommittee before the 2025 Legislative Session.

Presentation on new/modified legislation from Nevada 2023 Legislation Session. (January 9, 2024)

Senate Bill 148: *Changes proposed by the CIP.*

- Adds sections into NRS 432B outlining procedures for a court to determine whether to assign Guardian Ad Litem to a parent or other person responsible for the welfare of a child

- in certain situations.
- Adds language of requirements for the child welfare agency and the courts to follow when a child is placed in a Qualified Residential Treatment Placement.
- Adds language of requirements for the child welfare agency, courts and facilities to follow when a child who is in the custody of the child welfare agency has either an emergency admission or a non-emergency admission to a mental health facility.

Senate Bill 183: Requires child welfare and certain entities in the juvenile justice system to screen children for commercial sexual exploitation.

Senate Bill 444: Establishes Indian Child Welfare law in Nevada.

Senate Bill 389: Requires multiple entities to submit trafficking data to the Center for Analysis of Crime Statistics at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas who is required to develop a report with this data for Nevada's Legislature.

Discussion regarding Nevada's 3-year Assessment (February 7, 2024)

The Task Force discussed the expectations for Nevada's three-year CJA assessment based on the findings. The evaluation seeks to improve the understanding of the current child welfare system and provide guidance for CJA programming. The CJA Task Force is required to review and evaluate the state's handling of child abuse and neglect and make recommendations accordingly. The new Nevada CJA goals align with these requirements.

2024-2027 CJA TASK FORCE GOALS

The goals reflect overarching areas in child welfare that the Task Force intends to focus on to improve the front end of the child welfare system. The Nevada CJA Task Force endorses the following Goals to be supported by CJA grant funds for the three-year period of 2024-2027:

Goal 1: Provide child protection workers and community partners “front end” specialty, discipline specific and advanced training. Training should be prioritized, but not limited to, child protection model assessments, Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA), sexual abuse, interpersonal violence, forensic interviewing, mandatory reporting, trauma-informed practices, substance use, and co-occurring mental health disorders and training needs identified in collaboration with CIP. *(ABC; see below)*

Goal 2: Support the implementation of the Commercially Sexually Exploited Child (CSEC) Model Coordinated Response Protocol and provide training and support for the formation of Multidisciplinary Teams (MDT) and Task Forces. *(ABC)*

Goal 3: Support the establishment of new Children’s Advocacy Centers (CACs) or other multidisciplinary team approaches and improve the capacity of existing CACs to provide a multidisciplinary response for victims of child sex abuse and exploitation, witness to interpersonal violence, physical abuse, and child victims with disabilities. *(AB)*

Goal 4: Fund technology requests to improve the investigation, assessment and prosecution of child abuse and neglect through the use of latest technology and to support the use of new and existing training technologies. *(B)*

Goal 5: This task force will monitor policy, regulation and/or legislation regarding child abuse and neglect trends and when appropriate collaborate with other parties and/or entities to support new and/or revised policy, regulation, and legislation. *(C)*

Key: Required categories for use of CJA funds:

A= Investigative, administrative, and judicial handling of cases of child abuse and neglect.

B= Experimental, model and demonstration programs for testing innovative approaches.

C= Reform of state laws, ordinances, regulations, protocols, and procedures.

CJA TASK FORCE IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

Training will be prioritized, but not limited to, child protection model assessments, ICWA, sexual abuse, interpersonal violence, forensic interviewing, mandatory reporting, trauma-informed practices, substance use, and co-occurring mental health disorders and training needs identified in collaboration with the CIP. The CJA Task Force will support training needs identified as a result of legislation passed during Nevada's 83rd Legislative Session in 2025.

This Task Force will continue to support the implementation of the CSEC Coordinated Response Protocol. The Division is undergoing an evaluation of recent CSEC efforts to determine what should be focused on next to continue the implementation of the protocol.

The Task Force will be exploring ways to increase opportunities to achieve Goal 3, including further collaboration with Carson City's viability of establishing a new Child Advocacy Center. The Task Force will continue to support other activities, including technology for "front end" investigative CPS staff. The Task Force will continue to award subgrants yearly to applicants who applied for funding that will further enhance all goals of the Task Force.

An identified goal for the 2025-2029 Child and Family Services Plan is to improve relationships with court partners and child welfare agencies. The Task Force will continue to collaborate with the DCFS and the CIP to identify activities for this goal.

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