

# MODEL COURT SUMMIT

Strategies to Support Safe  
and Stable Reunification and Prevent Re-Entry



# Agenda

December 12, 2025

9:00 AM - 9:05 AM	<b>Welcome</b>
9:05 AM - 10:15 AM	<b>NCJFCJ Presents</b> <b><u>The Role of the Judge in Ensuring Timely and Safe Family Reunification</u></b> (recording) Hon. Aurora Martinez Jones, 126th District Court, Texas Hon. Ramona Gonzalez, Retired, La Crosse County Circuit Court, Wisconsin Hon. John Romero, Retired, 2nd Judicial District, New Mexico Hon. Katherine Tennyson, Retired, Multnomah County Circuit Court
10:15 AM - 11:15 AM	<b><u>Pathways Home: Planning and Assessing Readiness for Reunification</u></b> (recording) Lydeah Mercado Negro, AAG, Oregon Department of Justice, Washington County Yvana Mols, Family Defense Attorney, Washington County Kathie Nicholas, ODHS Supervisor, Clackamas County Cathy Ouellette, Family Defense Attorney, Lane County Hon. Michele Rini, Washington County Circuit Court Jeff Tapia, CASA Supervisor, Washington County
11:15 AM - 11:30 AM	<b>Break</b>
11:30 AM - 12:30 PM	<b><u>Sustaining Safety in the Home Post-Reunification</u></b> (recording) Kevin Hupy, Family Defense Attorney Rob Wyman, Attorney Consultant-Judicial Engagement Team, Casey Family Programs Hannah Vaughn, AIC, Oregon Department of Justice
12:30 PM - 1:30 PM	<b>Lunch</b>
1:30 PM - 2:30 PM	<b><u>Building a Continuum of Post-Reunification Support</u></b> (recording) Christa Jensen, Program Manager, Iron Tribe Network Justine Kilsby, Treatment Analyst, Oregon Judicial Department Lisa O'Connor, Executive Director, Family Nurturing Center Holly Smyth, Parent Mentor, Family Nurturing Center
2:30 PM - 3:30 PM	<b><u>When to Let Go: Assessing Readiness for Case Closure</u></b> (recording) Hon. Valeri Love, Lane County Circuit Court Hon. Sarah McGlaughlin, Josephine County Circuit Court Hon. Matthew Muenchrath, Coos County Circuit Court
3:30 PM - 5:00 PM	<b>Local Strategic Planning Breakouts</b> Dedicated time for model court teams to assess and plan their local court improvement efforts.



Heidi Moon, Dependency Analyst

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Visit JCIP's webpage for materials

# MODEL COURT SUMMIT



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# Session Descriptions

December 12, 2025

## The Role of the Judge in Ensuring Timely and Safe Family Reunification

*National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (NCJFCJ)*

**Hon. Aurora Martinez Jones**, 126<sup>th</sup> District Court, Austin, Texas; **Hon. Ramona Gonzalez**, Retired, La Crosse County Circuit Court, La Crosse, Wisconsin; **Hon. John Romero**, 2nd Judicial District, Albuquerque, New Mexico; **Hon. Katherine Tennyson**, Retired, Multnomah County Circuit Court

This panel of judges will talk about the court's role in achieving and maintaining safe reunification. They will explore how judges can actively engage families, agencies, and court partners to facilitate systems reform, improve judicial decision-making, and promote a family-centered approach. Participants will learn the common challenges faced by families before, during, and after reunification, including inadequate parental preparation services, logistical difficulties, and systemic issues.

## Pathways Home: Planning and Assessing Readiness for Reunification

**Lydeah Mercado Negro**, Assistant Attorney General, Oregon DOJ, Washington County; **Kathie Nicholas**, ODHS Supervisor, Clackamas County; **Yvana Mols**, Family Defense Attorney, Washington County; **Cathy Ouellette**, Family Defense Attorney, Lane County; **Hon. Michele Rini**, Lead Juvenile Court Judge, Washington County Circuit Court; **Jeff Tapia**, CASA Supervisor, Washington County

The panel will explore key considerations in assessing a family's readiness for reunification, offering a high-level overview of best practices that promote both safety and successful reunification. The panel will also examine the distinct roles of the court and legal parties in advocating for and determining when reunification is appropriate and safe. Additional discussion topics will include transition planning, including family and parenting time, supporting child and family well-being, strengthening family connections, and addressing the concrete needs of families.

*Participants are encouraged to review Part 1 of the scenario provided in your materials in advance.*

## Sustaining Safety in the Home Post Reunification (presentation powerpoint)

**Kevin Hupy**, Family Defense Attorney; **Rob Wyman**, Attorney Consultant-Judicial Engagement Team, Casey Family Programs; **Hannah Vaughn**, Attorney in Charge, Oregon DOJ

This session explores how courts and system partners can support families as services taper off, ensuring safety is maintained in the home. Topics include evaluating in-home safety plans, distinguishing safety concerns from risk factors, and identifying when judicial intervention is needed. The session will highlight best practices for collaboration, communication, and proactive monitoring to prevent placement disruptions and respond effectively to emerging concerns.



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# Session Descriptions

December 12, 2025

## Building a Continuum of Post-Reunification Support

**Christa Jensen**, Program Manager, Iron Tribe Network; **Justine Kilsby**, Family Treatment Court Analyst, OJD; **Lisa O'Connor**, Chief Executive Director, Family Nurturing Center; **Holly Smyth**, Parent Mentor, Family Nurturing Center

This session introduces the concept of Resource Capital and its role in promoting family stability after reunification. Having a safety net and healthy support system is key in prevention and sustainability. Panelists will share practical strategies and tangible examples for helping families identify and strengthen natural supports.

## When to Let Go: Assessing Readiness for Case Closure

**Hon. Valeri Love**, Lane County Circuit Court; **Hon. Sarah McGlaughlin**, Josephine County Circuit Court; **Hon. Matthew Muenchrath**, Coos County Circuit Court

This session will explore how and when a judicial officer signs an order of dismissal, considering the requirements for in-home plans and expected outcomes. It will highlight the court's role in continued oversight and emphasize the importance of a thorough judicial inquiry into child safety prior to dismissal. The session will outline the specific information judges need from ODHS, CASA, and other parties to make informed decisions. Judges will also consider the bases for jurisdiction and how to assess whether those bases still exist.

### Webinar Information

- As a webinar attendee your video and audio will be disabled when you enter.
- For the best experience, please disable all open and background applications.
- If you did not have a join link, please [register again](#).
- New to WebEx? [How to join WebEx webinar](#)
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### Slido Information

- For individual viewers, a tab on the right of your screen will open to ask questions and participate in polling or quizzes.
- Those in watch parties can join here:



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Event Code: 3159210  
Pass Code: safetyinhome



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# Statewide Re-Entry Data

December 12, 2025

**Definition:** (Round 4) Of all children who exit foster care in a 12-month period to reunification, living with relative, or guardianship, what percent re-entered care within 12 months of discharge.

**Federal Standard:** 5.6% or below.

\*\* masked number to protect privacy (count below 5).

Counties with no score had no base population (below 20) to achieve an outcome.

Court	2024	# re-entries	2025 YTD (Q1 – Q3)	# re-entries
Baker	0%	0	0%	0
Benton	0%	0	14.8	**
Clackamas	16.8%	19 of 113	22%	15 of 69
Clatsop	0%	0	0%	0
Columbia	11.1%	**	20%	7 of 35
Coos	10.6%	**	4.2	**
Crook	0%	0	0%	0
Curry	9.5%	**	5.3%	**
Deschutes	11.5%	9 of 78	7.2	7 of 97
Douglas	12.3%	10 of 81	14%	19 of 72
Gilliam				
Grant	0%	0	0%	0
Harney	5.9%	**	6.7%	**
Hood River	0%	0	0%	0
Jackson	3.3%	**	6.4	9 of 140
Jefferson	0%	0	0%	0
Josephine	10.6%	**	8.5%	**
Klamath	4.3%	**	3.6%	**
Lake	0%	0	0%	0
Lane	11%	18 of 164	12.4%	25 of 201
Lincoln	8.3%	**	0%	0
Linn	8.6%	8 of 93	10.8%	9 of 83
Malheur	15%	9 of 60	8.3%	**
Marion	1.7%	**	5.8%	7 of 120
Morrow	0%	0	0%	0
Multnomah	6%	16 of 265	8.2%	20 of 245
Polk	8.6%	**	17.2%	**
Sherman				
Tillamook	33.3%	**	0%	0
Umatilla	10.3%	7 of 68	6.7%	**
Union	0%	0	0%	0
Wallowa	0%	0	0%	0
Wasco	7.1%	**	0%	0
Washington	6.4%	10 of 156	5.3%	10 of 188
Wheeler				
Yamhill	11.9%	**	16.7%	7 of 42
Statewide	8%	150 of 1869	8.3%	158 of 1811





# Model Court Team Project

## Ensuring Safety and Stability of In-Home Plans

<b>Objective</b>	<b>To reduce re-entry and disrupted in-home plans.</b>
<b>Court Partners Collaboration</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><b>Model Court Team Partners:</b> Judge(s), Oregon Department of Justice, Oregon Department of Human Services-Child Welfare, public defenders, CASA, CRB, service providers, and parent mentor(s).</li></ul>
<b>Data</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Rate of Re-Entry (within 12 months of discharge) <a href="#"><u>ODHS Dashboard: Re-Entry</u></a> <a href="#"><u>ODHS Public Data: Re-Entry</u></a></li><li>Trial Reunification Success Rate *internal ODHS data, ask your local Permanency Consultant</li></ul>
<b>Data Analysis</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Conduct an internal assessment of individual cases to identify trends.</li><li>Invite feedback from families and community partners.</li></ul>
<b>Questions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>What were the key insights or takeaways from the Model Court Summit?</li><li>What is one small, actionable step you can take today to support successful family reunification?</li><li>Team Discussion Prompt: <i>In what ways can each of us, through our individual roles, collaborate more effectively to enhance the safety and stability of in-home placements?</i></li></ul>
<b>Reporting &amp; Recommendations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Develop an action plan with local strategies. *see examples</li><li>Re-evaluate and refine strategies in future meetings.</li><li>Each MCT member shares strategies and information within organization and with local community partners.</li></ul>
<b>Follow-Up</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Track quarterly data and measure improvement.</li><li>Continue feedback loops with community partners.</li></ul>
<b>Additional References &amp; Resources</b>	<a href="#"><u>Model Court Summit 2025 - Educational Materials</u></a>



# Model Court Team Project

## Strategies for Ensuring Safety and Stability of In-Home Plans

### Example Strategies

Our team, within our individual roles, will work together to improve the safety and stabilization of in-home cases.

### The Court

- **Judicial Review Scheduling**

The court will ensure that judicial reviews are scheduled promptly and occur at intervals that support appropriate and effective oversight.

- **Safety Plan Evaluation**

The judge will examine the safety plan and pose detailed questions to assess the stability and safety of in-home placements.

- **Issuance of Specific Orders**

The judge will issue specific orders as deemed appropriate based on the circumstances of the case.

- **Requests for Updates or Early Review**

The judge may direct ODHS to submit written update letters to the court and/or may request an early review by the Citizen Review Board (CRB).

- **Hearing on Contested Dismissal**

If any party opposes ODHS's recommendation to dismiss legal custody, the court will schedule a hearing to address the matter.

- **Case Closure Consideration**

The judge may consider setting a hearing or holding a closure ceremony to formally conclude the case.

### Attorneys

- **Client Communication During Trial Reunification**

Attorneys will maintain consistent communication with their clients before and throughout the trial reunification period to identify potential barriers and assess any additional service needs.

- **Participation in Family Meetings**

Attorneys will participate in Family Decision Meetings and Placement Prevention Meetings to provide legal insight and advocate for their client's perspective in the development of the safety plan.

- **Facilitation of Collaborative Meetings**

Attorneys will coordinate and facilitate regular meetings between their clients and ODHS to support case progress and ensure alignment on goals and expectations.



# Model Court Team Project

## Strategies for Ensuring Safety and Stability of In-Home Plans

Oregon  
Department of  
Human Services  
Child Welfare

- **Structured Decision-Making for Reunification**

ODHS will establish clear internal protocols and expectations surrounding reunification decisions, including:

- Enhanced transition planning with input from service providers, CASAs, attorneys, and support from resource parents;
- Timely and adequate notification to all parties regarding the intent to return the child home;
- Increased parental engagement to ensure understanding of the conditions for return and expected outcomes.

- **Pre-Reunification Family Decision Meeting**

ODHS will convene a Family Decision Meeting prior to reunification to support transition planning. CASA and legal representatives will be provided with ample notice to participate.

- **Development of Ongoing Safety Plans**

ODHS will collaborate with parents and their attorneys, as well as CASA, children's attorney, and Safety Service Providers (SSPs) to create individualized ongoing safety plans that reflect the unique needs of each family.

- **Review and Submission of Safety Plans**

- Ongoing safety plans will be reviewed every 30 days in accordance with policy and revised as necessary.
- When notifying the court of a child's return, ODHS will submit the current ongoing safety plan along with the change of placement letter.
- The most recent safety plan will also be submitted to the court and the Citizen Review Board (CRB) for scheduled reviews.

- **Face-to-Face Contact Requirements**

- ODHS will comply with face-to-face contact requirements both prior to and the day following the child's return home.
- Contact will continue at a frequency and intensity appropriate to the family's needs, exceeding minimum policy standards when necessary.

- **Placement Prevention Prior to Disruption**

Before disrupting an in-home plan, ODHS will hold a Placement Prevention Meeting unless immediate action is required due to present danger.

- **Supportive Relationships with Resource Parents**

ODHS will encourage continued connection and support between the child and the resource parent, including opportunities for parent-to-parent meetings or facilitated introductions.



# Model Court Team Project

## Strategies for Ensuring Safety and Stability of In-Home Plans

### CASA

- **Participation in Family Meetings**

CASAs will attend Family Decision Meetings and Placement Prevention Meetings to offer input and advocate for the child's best interests in the development of the safety plan.

- **Ongoing Home Visits and Reporting**

CASAs will continue conducting regular home visits and will submit reports summarizing their observations and assessments.

- **Advocacy for Support Services**

CASAs will identify and advocate for additional supports as needed, including physical resources and natural support systems.

- **Recommendations for Structured Interventions**

CASAs will recommend structured interventions—such as family meetings or review hearings—when appropriate to support the child's safety and well-being.

### Citizen Review Board

- **Review of Trial Reunification and In-Home Cases**

The Citizen Review Board (CRB) will review cases involving children on trial reunification.

- **Assessment of Family Supports**

The CRB will ask targeted questions to evaluate whether parents and children have sufficient supports in place to maintain safety and stability.

- **Recommendations Based on Concerns**

If concerns are identified, the CRB may recommend modifications to the safety plan and/or request a judicial review to ensure appropriate oversight.

### Oregon Department of Justice

- **DOJ Case Collaboration Enhancement**

The Department of Justice (DOJ) will increase the frequency of case reviews and collaborative meetings with caseworkers to support ongoing case staffing and oversight.

### Parent Mentors

- **Ongoing Client Support**

Parent Mentors will maintain consistent communication with clients to provide encouragement, guidance, and emotional support.

- **Navigation of Services**

Parent Mentors will assist clients in identifying and accessing additional services to meet their individual needs.

- **Building Support Networks**

Parent Mentors will help clients develop and strengthen their personal support networks, including both formal and informal resources.



### No One Should Parent in Isolation: Building Social Recovery Capital

Lisa O'Connor — Family Nurturing Center

#### Why It Matters

90% of supports end when reunification or treatment cases close.

Families need natural, community-based connections that last beyond the case.

Social recovery capital = trust, belonging, and consistent human connection.

Children are the community's responsibility — none of us should have to parent alone.

***“Isolation is the enemy of stability. Connection is prevention.”***

#### Three Concrete Takeaways

##### 1 Start Connection Early

- Bring peers, mentors, and community partners into reunification or recovery planning from the beginning.
- Ask parents, “Who’s in your circle?” and help identify natural supports.
- Early alignment builds consistency, trust, and shared accountability.

##### 2 Pair Emotional + Practical Supports

- Meet tangible needs and emotional needs together.
- Example: when delivering food, clothing, or furniture, ask “How are you holding up?”
- Every encounter is an opportunity to strengthen trust and belonging.

##### 3 Build Post-Case Connection

- Keep doors open once the case closes — connection doesn’t have an end date.
- Maintain **voluntary contact** through:
  - Family nights and community events
  - Alumni parenting or support groups
- YMCA or Recovery Café passes, open gym, and park programs
- Those small check-ins and invitations keep families connected and resilient.

***“Reunification isn’t the finish line — it’s the handoff to community.”***



# Building a Continuum of Post-Reunification Support Social Recovery Capital Handout

## No One Should Parent in Isolation: Building Social Recovery Capital

Lisa O'Connor — Family Nurturing Center

### Where to Build Community Wellness

Community Setting	Examples of Connection Opportunities
Parks & Recreation	Family nights, youth sports, community gardens, outdoor movie nights, volunteer days.
Parenting & Family Groups	Play & Learn groups, Circle of Security, Conscious Discipline, peer mentor meetups.
Libraries	Storytime, bilingual playgroups, parenting workshops, community resource tables.
Gyms / YMCAs / Community Centers	Family memberships, recovery-friendly fitness classes, family swim nights.
Faith & Cultural Communities	Shared meals, cultural celebrations, childcare co-ops, recovery-friendly congregations.
Recovery Networks	Recovery Cafés, AA/NA meetings, SMART Recovery, family-friendly sober events.
Schools & Charter Programs	Family engagement nights, neurodiversity clubs, bilingual outreach events.

### Key Messages

- Community engagement is prevention.
- Connection doesn't end when the case does.
- Every family deserves a circle of belonging.

***“Community isn’t the reward for doing well — it’s the resource  
that makes doing well possible.”***

# MODEL COURT SUMMIT

Strategies to Support Safe and Stable Reunification and Prevent Re-Entry



# Pathways Home: Planning and Assessing Readiness for Reunification

## Scenario Part 1

### The Case of Maya and Jordan, Part 1

**Background:** Maya (age 6) and Jordan (age 4) were removed from their mother, Tasha, 10 months ago due to concerns of chronic neglect, substance misuse, and unstable housing. Jurisdictional bases for dad: the father engages in criminal activity which interferes with his ability to safely parent his children; the father is currently incarcerated which makes him unable to parent the children; despite prior services being offered the father has been unable to ameliorate the circumstances; the father failed to provide the medical, dental, and emotional needs for the children. Jurisdictional bases for mom: the mother's substance use interferes with her ability to safely parent the children; despite prior services being offered, the mother has been unable to ameliorate the circumstances; the mother failed to provide the medical, dental, and emotional needs for the children.

This is the children's second removal. The children were removed from both parents, Tasha and Rodney, almost 2 years ago. Rodney is currently incarcerated and getting out of prison in 6 months; he hopes to reunify with his family. Parents completed the 1270 forms and ICWA does not apply. The children are placed with their maternal aunt who has been a consistent and nurturing caregiver. Tasha has a history of being in foster care as a teenager, substance use disorder, intermittent employment, and limited family support.

#### Progress Since Removal:

- Tasha completed a 90-day inpatient treatment program and is now in outpatient treatment. Mother relapsed 6 days ago and was not honest about it. Parties were made aware by mother's treatment program.
- Tasha is residing in transitional housing and has part-time employment.
- Tasha is participating in parenting classes and consistently attends weekly supervised visits, which have recently transitioned to unsupervised community visits.
- The children are bonded with their aunt but express excitement about visits with their mother.
- The children have video visits with their dad once or twice a week.
- The children visited with their dad in-person twice, with the help of their paternal grandmother.
- The aunt is willing to continue supporting reunification but has also expressed concern about Tasha's ability to maintain stability long-term.
- Rodney has completed parenting programs while incarcerated and participated in drug and alcohol meetings.

**Current Status:** The court is approaching the 12-month permanency hearing. The caseworker has submitted a report recommending a trial return home with intensive in-home services. (NOTE: which was likely submitted to the court prior to mother's relapse).



[Visit JCIP's webpage for materials](#)

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## Pathways Home: Planning and Assessing Readiness for Reunification

### Scenario Part 2

#### The Case of Maya and Jordan, Part 2

**At the Permanency Hearing:** Tasha, the mother, acknowledged she had a recent slip. She also shared that she remains committed to recovery and participation in her treatment. After discussion in court, the judge continued legal custody of the children with ODHS and ordered an in-home plan in Tasha's care.

**Safety Plan:** All parties agreed that Tasha's substance use disorder continued to interfere with her ability to provide safety for her children. Parties agreed to a safety plan of:

- In-home placement with Tasha;
- Two safety service providers, a cousin and a neighbor, would each visit the home every other day, ensuring a visit occurs every day;
- ODHS would continue to ensure that the children's medical and dental needs were met by reminding Tasha of appointments and reviewing their records; and
- ODHS would be in touch with the transitional housing case manager bi-monthly to get updates on housing and any change in status.

**Court Orders:** The Court ordered Tasha to continue to participate in her substance use disorder treatment as recommended by the treatment provider, currently intensive outpatient. It also ordered Tasha to communicate any changes in her housing status to ODHS.

The Court declined to make orders regarding Rodney but scheduled a review in 5 months to address his pending release and the plan at that time.



[Visit JCIP's webpage for materials](#)

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## Speaker Bios

December 12, 2025

**Honorable Ramona A. Gonzalez** made history in 1995 when she became the first woman and the first person of color elected to the La Crosse County Circuit Court in Wisconsin. Born in the Dominican Republic, she immigrated to the United States as a child, carrying with her a deep appreciation for democracy and civic responsibility. She earned her bachelor's degree in political science from Loyola University Chicago and her J.D. from Marquette University Law School. Before her election to the bench, she worked in private practice and served as a court commissioner. Her election filled the vacancy left by her mentor, Judge Peter Pappas, and marked the beginning of a judicial career defined by service, equity, and leadership. Throughout her tenure, Judge Gonzalez became a nationally recognized voice in juvenile and family law. She served as president of the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (NCJFCJ), becoming the first foreign-born person to hold that role. Her work has focused on issues such as child welfare, immigration, LGBTQ+ youth, and domestic violence. She has also contributed to the Wisconsin Anti-Human Trafficking Task Force and the Wisconsin Judicial Committee on Child Welfare. After nearly 30 years on the bench, Judge Gonzalez retired in July of 2025.

**Kevin Hupy** is a family defense attorney at Hupy Law in Clackamas County, practicing primarily in dependency law representing parents and children. Kevin previously practiced in Douglas County at Umpqua Valley Public Defender, and for several years was Resource Counsel for the Oregon Public Defense Commission, where he provided the agency with subject-matter expertise in juvenile and civil commitment practice.

**Christa Jensen** is the Program Manager at Iron Tribe Network. Christa Jensen serves as the Program Manager at Iron Tribe Network. She has been clean and sober for six years and has worked in the recovery field for nearly five years. During her time with Iron Tribe Network, she has partnered with the Oregon Department of Human Services (ODHS) and developed working knowledge of resources and community partners across six counties. Christa is passionate about supporting individuals struggling with addiction. Drawing from her own lived experience, she is able to inspire hope and demonstrate that a better tomorrow is possible.

**Honorable Aurora Martinez Jones** is the State District Court Judge responsible for the administration and management of all Child Welfare cases in Travis County Austin, TX, and her bench is also a designated Travis County Juvenile Court. She has extensive experience advocating for parents and children in the child welfare system, oversees the Travis County Family Drug Treatment Court—Parenting In Recovery program, presides over the Travis County Dual Status Youth Court and runs a trauma-informed court. Judge Martinez Jones is committed to progressive approaches to supporting the children and families who appear in her court. She is Texas Board Certified in Child Welfare Law and is a Child Welfare Law Specialist, Certified by the National Association of Counsel for Children. She is the current Chair for the State Bar of Texas Child Protection Law Section and just completed seven years of service on the Board for the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges.

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**Justine Kilsby** is a Dependency and Family Treatment Court Analyst at the Oregon Judicial Department. Justine specializes in Family Treatment Courts who started with OSCA's Court Programs Division in November of 2023. She is currently focused on training to improve court practices, dependency data systems, and providing statewide expansion, best practice support, training, and coordination for the 13 FTCs in Oregon. She has previously worked as an ODHS Child Welfare CPS worker and Addiction Recovery Team Lead, for AMR as an EMT in Clackamas County doing 911 response and running the swift water rescue team, and as a copy editor. Justine's passion is serving people in the nexus of substance use disorders, dependency, state agencies, and equitable health care access.

**Honorable Valeri Love** was appointed to the Lane County Circuit Court in Eugene, Oregon in 2011. Born and raised in Hawaii, she graduated from Punahou School and moved to Oregon to attend Linfield College and later Willamette University Atkinson Graduate School of Management and College of Law. Before her appointment to the bench, she practiced law in both the criminal and civil arenas. As a judge she has handled civil and criminal cases as well as served as the judge for the Lane County Adult Treatment Court, Veterans Court and Mental Health Court. Judge Love currently serves as the Chief Juvenile Judge and hears dependency and delinquency matters as well as presides over Lane County's RAP-JTC (Recovery and Progress - Juvenile Treatment Court) Court program. Outside of the courtroom, she devotes her time to various groups and organizations including the Tribal, State, and Federal Court Forum, Department of Justice Trafficking Intervention Advisory Committee, National CASA Judicial Leadership Council, National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (NCJFCJ): Juvenile Law Advisory and Military committees, JCIP Advisory Committee, JDIP Advisory Committee and serves as the Co-Chair for the Juvenile Engagement and Leadership Institute (JELI) Education Subcommittee and Vice Chair of the Judicial Conference Judicial Leadership and Education Committee. In her free time, Judge Love enjoys spending time with family and friends, cooking for others, dancing hula, and spoiling her dogs.

**Honorable Sarah McGlaughlin** has been a judge in Josephine County since her appointment to the bench in October 2019 and currently serves as the Family Court Judge. Judge McGlaughlin is a member of several committees focusing on improving the practice of juvenile delinquency and dependency, including the Juvenile Court Improvement Program Advisory Committee. Judge McGlaughlin worked with a team of dedicated court partners to launch Josephine County's first family treatment court, named BEAR Court (Building Engagement to Achieve Reunification), which saw its first graduates in September 2025. Prior to joining the bench, she served Josephine County as a deputy district attorney. As a Southern Oregon native, she is honored to serve the community she grew up in.

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**Lydeah Mercado Negro** is an Assistant Attorney in Charge with the Oregon Department of Justice. For the past six years, she has represented the Oregon Department of Human Services and remained committed to public interest law. Before joining the ODOJ, she served communities through Legal Aid Services of Oregon and St. Andrew Legal Clinic. She mentors first-generation students and lawyers through the Oregon State Bar, Lewis & Clark Law School, and Portland State University's Explore the Law program. Outside of her work, she is an avid angler and enjoys spending time with her family.

**Kathie Nicholas** has been working for ODHS for almost 27 years. Kathie started her career in Multnomah County as a permanency caseworker. She is currently supervising a teen permanency unit at the Oregon City office. Kathie has a master's degree in social work and was part of the child welfare partnership with Portland State University.

**Yvana Mols** (she/her) is Vice President and Shareholder at Hillsboro Law Group in Washington County, Oregon, where she has worked doing Juvenile Dependency and family law since 2017. Yvana represents both parents and children involved in dependency cases, using her educational backgrounds in Education and Philosophy and previous career in academia to benefit her clients. She loves education and enjoys helping clients understand the complicated legal landscape when collaborating about the best way to address their current challenges. Yvana came to Oregon from Atlanta, Georgia in 2015 and immediately fell in love with this place. She first became involved with the Oregon legal community through the Oregon New Lawyer's Division (ONLD) and continued to volunteer with them since then through becoming Chair in 2022. When not working or volunteering, Yvana enjoys travelling throughout the Pacific Northwest, working in fiber arts, and spending time with her young family.

**Honorable Matthew Muenchrath** attended Creighton University and continued on to earn his law degree from Willamette University College of Law. While in law school he became a commissioned officer in the Navy Judge Advocate General (JAG) Corps where he continues to serve as a reservist holding the rank of Captain. Judge Muenchrath was in private practice from 2001 to 2023 serving a variety of clients mainly in Coos County Circuit Court representing indigent defense clients, juvenile dependency clients, handling domestic cases and estate planning matters with an emphasis on trial work. He served as municipal judge in Reedsport, Coquille, and Myrtle Point municipal courts. He is a former city mayor, city councilor, foreign exchange student host and community action board member. He enjoys promoting live music, scuba diving, art, outdoors, baseball and is a food/travel enthusiast. He makes his home with his family in Coos Bay, Oregon.

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## Speaker Bios

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**Cathy Ouellette** is an attorney for parents and children in Lane County, Oregon. She has been practicing law for over two decades in this capacity. She is also a Child Welfare Law Specialist certified by the National Association of Counsel for Children and also currently serving as the State Coordinator for the same organization. She is a strong advocate and mentor in her community.

**Lisa O'Connor** is the Chief Executive Officer of Family Nurturing Center. With more than 25 years of experience in nonprofit management, Lisa pours her whole heart into helping families thrive in Southern Oregon. Since stepping into the role of CEO in 2015, she has guided Family Nurturing Center through a decade of tremendous growth—expanding services, building a new Family Campus, and strengthening systems to better support children and families. Lisa currently serves on the Oregon Health and Education Collaborative Board, where she represents the voices of families and providers in shaping statewide policy and practice. She also serves on the Oregon Association of Relief Nurseries Board, helping to advance trauma-informed, family-centered care statewide. Within Family Nurturing Center, Lisa is both chief strategist and chief cheerleader—inspiring staff, volunteers, and partners while fostering a culture rooted in compassion, collaboration, and excellence. As the agency's lead fundraiser, she cultivates meaningful partnerships to deepen impact and sustain essential programs for children and families across the region. Outside of work, Lisa loves spending time with her four adult children and enjoys traveling, camping, listening to live music, and riding her motorcycle.

**Honorable Michele Rini** is a graduate of Lewis and Clark Law School and passed the Bar in 1992. For the beginning of her career, she handled criminal defense, juvenile, and assorted family law and probate matters. In 2006, Judge Rini was hired as a full time Hearings Referee/Pro Tem Judge in Washington County focusing primarily in Juvenile Court but also hearing Landlord Tenant, Support Enforcement, and the Small Claims Motion Docket. Around 2016 Judge Rini was assigned exclusively to juvenile court, and in 2021, she was appointed to the bench where she now sits as the Lead Juvenile Court Judge.

**Honorable John Romero** served as a District Court Judge in the Children's Court Division of the Second Judicial District Court in Albuquerque, New Mexico for 17½ years. His docket included juvenile justice and child welfare cases. Judge Romero is Co-Chair Emeritus of New Mexico's Children's Court Improvement Commission and serves on various court improvement workgroups. Judge Romero was the first judge in the country to be recognized as a Certified Child Welfare Law Specialist by the ABA-accredited National Association of Counsel for Children. He served on the Board of Directors of the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (NCJFCJ) for eight years and was Board President from 2018 – 2019. Judge Romero is a joint member of NCJFCJ and the National American Indian Court Judges Association. He has served as lead faculty on NCJFCJ National Judicial Training Institutes numerous times. He is a member of the University of New Mexico Law School class of 1985.

# MODEL COURT SUMMIT



Strategies to Support Safe  
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**Holly Smyth** is a Parent Mentor at the Family Nurturing Center. Holly Smyth is a person in long-term recovery who has personally navigated the child welfare system. She holds multiple credentials that support her work in addiction recovery and peer support, including a forensic peer endorsement that highlights her unique ability to assist individuals involved in complex systems. She is currently a fifth-year senior at Oregon State University, nearing the completion of her undergraduate degree in Human Development and Family Science with a minor in Sociology. Holly works at The Family Nurturing Center as a Parent Mentor, where she supports mothers engaged with the child welfare system. For the past five years, she has been dedicated to helping women navigate various systems. Holly is deeply passionate about her work and takes great pride in the mother she is today. She finds joy in the meaningful connections she builds with her children and within her community. In her free time, she enjoys being in nature, hunting for waterfalls, and playing musical instruments with her kids.

**Jeff Tapia** is the Managing Supervisor of Washington County CASA, providing service to youth in foster care for over the past seven years through the support of Court Appointed Special Advocate volunteers. Prior to joining CASA, he found reward in assisting families as an immigration attorney, in particular watching youth-clients flourish into young adults through the DACA program. That passion found a new home with CASA in 2018. In his current role, Jeff supports a team of supervisors as well as his own CASA volunteer case load.

**Honorable Katherine Tennyson** retired from the Multnomah County Circuit Court in June 2019 and now serves as a Senior Judge. As a judge, Katherine was part of the Multnomah County Family Law Bench which is a unified family court hearing cases on a one family, one judge model including juvenile, protection orders, child custody and parenting time, division of assets and all types of probate matters. Prior to taking the bench in 2002, Katherine worked for 18 years as a lawyer in a small firm where a part of her practice was the representation of parents and children in juvenile dependency matters, including termination of parental rights trials. Katherine is a 1984 graduate of Lewis and Clark Law School and was admitted to practice in both Oregon and Washington in 1984. She is the 2015 recipient of the Oregon State Bar Wallace P. Carson Jr Award for Judicial Excellence and received an OWLS Roberts-Diez Award in 2019. Katherine is a Past President of the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges and frequently teaches nationally at NCJFCJ sponsored trainings. She often teaches on a variety of topics related to families in Oregon as well.

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**Hannah Vaughn** is a current Attorney in Charge in the Child Advocacy and Protection Division of the Oregon Department of Justice. Hannah received her undergraduate degree from the University of Oregon before going on to obtain her juris doctorate from Gonzaga University School of Law. Once barred, Hannah worked as a Deputy District Attorney in both Jackson and Multnomah counties before joining CAPD in 2018. Hannah practiced as a full-time case carrying AAG for four years before moving into a supervision role in the division. Hannah lives in Portland with her husband, two young daughters, and dog, Remy.

**Rob Wyman**, JD, MSW, is an attorney consultant with the Judicial and National Engagement Team at Casey Family Programs. His team works to safely reduce the number of children and youth in the foster care system by advancing Lawyer and Judicial Leadership, Building High Quality Legal Representation, Strengthening the Front Door of the Court, and promoting ICWA as the Gold Standard of child protection practice. Rob went to the University of Denver to attain an MSW and JD, specializing in the representation of children and youth in the foster care system. Rob worked at The Defender Association in Seattle for 12 years, and supervised attorneys representing parents and youth in the dependency division for eight years. He also co-directed the Court Improvement Training Academy, for the Court Improvement Program in Washington State.