
Strengthening Youth Defense Project

A Project of the Maine Commission on Public Defense Services

Purpose

The purpose of this three-year project is to strengthen Maine's youth defense system, which will result in improved outcomes for youth. To achieve this goal, this project aims to improve the quality and availability of counsel to represent youth in the juvenile legal system, build robust training for youth defenders, and recommend policy and practice reforms consistent with national best practices, the protection of constitutional rights, and the purposes of the Maine Juvenile Code.

Description

The project will track and analyze court and related system data, best practices, and information from youth and system professionals in order to evaluate the youth defense system in Maine. The project will identify areas for improvement; provide training to youth defenders; and make recommendations for revisions to standards of practice for youth defenders, system changes, and the potential establishment of Maine's first youth defense public defender office.

Project activities include:

- Reviewing recent court cases and records;
- Researching information and national best practice standards for youth defenders;
- Reviewing and recommending updates to the current standards of practice for youth defenders;
- Developing trainings for youth defenders;
- Identifying and working to address barriers to accessing counsel for youth and their families;
- Reviewing and analyzing data related to legal system involvement to identify racial and ethnic disparities;
- Engaging youth and families with lived experience in Maine's court system to share their stories and provide recommendations for improvements; and
- Surveying youth defenders to gather input and insights to inform standards and recommendations.

Expected outcomes include:

- Revised standards of practice which incorporate national best practices for youth defenders;
- A training library of top-quality trainings for youth defenders; and
- Recommendations for better supporting youth and their families, including improving access to counsel for youth and reducing the incarceration of youth in Maine.

Implementation Team

The [Maine Commission on Public Defense Services](#) has partnered with Roisman Law, the Clinics at Maine Law, and Place Matters at the University of Southern Maine to execute the project. The project partners will engage youth with lived experience to co-design and co-lead some of the project activities throughout the duration of the grant. [RFP# 202501006 - Strengthening Youth Defense Consultant]