



# TASK FORCE ON THE DEPENDENCY AND NEGLECT COURT SYSTEM WORK PLAN 2023-2024

Milly Allen, Research Analyst  
Adopted on January 16, 2024



# BACKGROUND

## THE DEPENDENCY AND NEGLECT COURT SYSTEM TASK FORCE

Senate Bill 182 established the Task Force on the Dependency and Neglect Court System to study dependency and neglect court proceedings in Montana. Its responsibility is to determine whether a separate court system dedicated to these issues or the existing court system, with enhancements, would best serve children, families, and other participants involved in dependency and neglect court proceedings.

Committee membership includes legislators, experts, and stakeholders appointed in accordance with SB 182:

- Senator Ellie Boldman
- Senator Dennis Lenz
- Representative Jennifer Carlson
- Representative SJ Howell
- Judge Rienne McElyea – 18<sup>th</sup> Judicial District Court
- Jessica Finley – Missoula County Deputy Attorney
- Sargent Jon Kadner – Cascade County Sheriff’s Office
- Rachel Green – Health Care Policy Advisor, Governor’s Office
- Wamnee Ereaux – tribal member with experience relating to the Indian Child Welfare Act
- Jennifer Owen – a member of the public experienced with the dependency and neglect court system
- Kelly Driscoll – Family Defense Bureau Chief, Office of State Public Defender
- Nikki Grossberg – Child and Family Services Division Administrator, Department of Public Health and Human Services

The Legislative Services Division provides staff support to the committee:

- Milly Allen, Research Analyst – milly.allen@legmt.gov
- Jolanda Songer, Secretary – jolanda.songer@legmt.gov

# PLANNING YOUR WORK

## WORK PLAN

*A tool for the task force, its staff, and the public.*

The task force meets throughout the 2023-2024 interim session, concluding its work by September 15, 2024. This work plan provides an outline that helps the task force plan its work and assists Montanans follow that work.

SB 182 prescribes that the task force undertakes one study of dependency and neglect court systems; section 2, subsection (2) of the bill provides a framework for that study. The task force reports its findings and recommendations to the Governor, the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, and the 69<sup>th</sup> Montana State Legislature. It may draft legislation.

The Task Force on the Dependency and Neglect Court System has 0.2 FTE (full time equivalent) from its research analyst. It must decide how it would like to spend that FTE. Reports and presentations by state agencies or other entities require staff time to organize and process. Administrative work, like drafting task force communications and reports, also requires staff time.

At its January 16, 2024 meeting, the task force identified five priority areas for its study:

Task Force Priorities
Behavioral health for parents, including substance use disorder treatment
Alternatives and parallel paths to court, including family engagement, mediation, and prehearing conferences
Incarcerated parents
Separate court system for DN cases
Current and potential standards and best practices for DN cases in the current court system

## MEETING SCHEDULE

October 25, 2023

January 16, 2024

March 14, 2024

May 8, 2024

July 19, 2024 (*previously July 18, 2024 – date changed on January 16, 2024*)

September 12, 2024

# PUBLIC INFORMATION

## TASK FORCE WEBSITE

The task force’s legislative web page is the sole official repository of task information, including presentation aids, documents, meeting minutes, and exhibits. You may find it here: <https://leg.mt.gov/committees/other-groups/court-system-dependency-neglect-task-force/>

At that website, the public may also:

- Submit written public comment;
- Register to testify remotely; and
- Sign up for email communications from the task force.