

**Justice Action Group
JAG Executive Committee**

January 26, 2026 – 3:00 p.m.

LOCATION: VIA Zoom

MINUTES

Participants: Hon. Andrew Mead, Hon. Ellen Gorman, Hon. Karen Wolfe, Charlie Dingman, Michelle Daeger, Courtney Beer, John Brautigam, Tim Pease, Chrissy Mann

I. Welcome/Introductions

II. Approval of Minutes from September 15, 2025. Minutes are approved.

III. Report from Chair – J. Mead

The E-courts initiative is rolling out and going well. Lewiston Criminal will be coming out soon. By the end of 2026, all courts will be online with e-filing. Lawyers and others who frequently file will be required to file electronically.

IV. Vice Chair's Report and Pro Bono Committee Report – J. Wolf

The first meeting of 2026 was 1/13 and identified some initiatives for this year. A sub-committee was created to study the creation of a pro bono engagement video, and the hope is to get it out to the Bar and also social media. The first meeting is Monday, February 2.

The ABA pro bono publico award season is open for nominations. They would like for the committee and JAG to consider nominating the UMaine School of Law. The nominations close on March 2nd. Courtney will help in any way possible. Justice Mead states that if the committee feels it's ready, to will circulate it to the entire JAG board and they will be the nominating entity.

V. ACP Chair's Report – E. Gorman

Regarding the funding cliff for both local and federal, Tom Fritchze reported at the last meeting that the good news is that there is only going

to be a 3.8% cut to the Legal Services Corporation Funding (LSC), but for PTLA that is an \$85,000 cut. There will be no layoffs right away, but open positions will remain vacant. If the State funding doesn't come through, there could be layoffs. Charlie continues to reach out to the Governor to discuss funding.

VI. Justice Systems Committee Report – John Brautigam

John is hoping that the Justice Systems Report that is circulated along with the agenda can serve as the report instead of taking up time on the during the meeting unless there is something on the report needs to be discussed.

John is not on the committee, but Ben Jenkins is and takes comprehensive notes and can provide them to Toni.

VII. Legislative Committee Report – Charlie Dingman

Charlie has left messages for the Governor's Chief of Staff and has not heard back. Charlie's next step is to contact the Deputy General Counsel Tim Feeley to see if he can help. Most likely, if we can motivate the legislature, the Governor will not stand in the way.

Once the budget hearings are scheduled, Justice Mead agreed to speak with the Appropriations Committee again in support of the budget requests. The providers are working on fine tuning talking points for Justice Mead to use during the hearings.

The providers have banded together to hire a coordinator for a part-time, short-term basis. They will be hiring Denise Kronstadt who is the currently the executive director of the Fund for Modern Courts in New York and she currently lives in Maine.

At their next meeting, they will start to plan Access to Justice Day. They will probably replicate what has been done in the past by having Justice Mead talk to the caucuses that will have them as well as having a presence in the Hall of Flags. The resolution is normally presented by friends in each chamber to declare Access to Justice Day and also for an officer to recognize the providers and judges that are present which will raise everyone's awareness of what they are doing and why. Justice Mead will then do a presentation to the Judiciary Committee on Access to Justice.

Some years, that has coincided with a public hearing on legislation to provider funding, but not this year. However, there will be opportunity when Justice Mead speaks to the committee.

Justice Mead asked if we have a list of champions and Charlies states there is a spreadsheet and it is divided up between the providers to keep people up to date on what is happening. Charlie states that they are planning other events to try to raise consciousness about the issue and on February 19 there will be a presentation in the Welcome Center with some of the providers.

In regard to the ATJ fair, Magistrate Wolf states that it was held on October 13, 2025. For 2026, the committee is offering to be involved in that to make it a bigger event. It is sponsored New Lawyers Section of the MSBA, but they want include practicing lawyers, including those who are the near the end of the career.

VIII. Executive Committee Organization Optional Updates:

NOTE: In response to earlier inquiries, representatives from individual provider organizations are more than welcome to attend Executive Committee meetings.¹

- **Maine Justice Foundation - Michelle Drager and Tim Pease**
Michelle Drager - IOLTA has run close to last year, just below at \$3.23 million versus last year at \$3.29 million. Subject to the Board's review, that means a supplemental distribution in February or March and also another contribution to the reserve fund. The goal is to bump it up for a rainy day.

The providers have provided their reports for the MCILS report which is for the Joint Commission on Judiciary and sending this week. In addition, the annual awards ceremony will be held at the MSBA Winter Bar meeting this week as well as the Coffin appreciate event. The video for the Coffin Fellowship Legacy will be previewed this week as well. The 30th Coffin Fellow will be announced this year.

¹ The providers have historically designated a rotating representative from the provider ranks to attend the EC meetings in addition to the ACP counsel representative.

Tim Pease – Tim was the co-chair of the Campaign for Justice two years ago and now the providers are now heading that up so it's no longer under the Maine Justice Foundation umbrella

- **Law School/Cumberland Legal Aid Clinic – Courtney Beer** – no report presented
- Maine Trial Lawyers Association – No one present to report.
- Pine Tree Legal Assistance – No one present to report.
- Volunteer Lawyers Project – No one present to report.
- Maine State Bar Association/Lawyers in Libraries - No one present to report.
- Legal Services for the Elderly - No one present to report.
- Maine Equal Justice - No one present to report.
- Immigrant Legal Advocacy Project - No one present to report.
- Disability Rights Maine - No one present to report.

VIII. **ICE Updates:** Checking with Committee regarding how ICE is affecting access to justice and what the challenges are.

- **E. Gorman** – Sue Roche has reported monthly what is happening in her office. Another group that Justice Gorman is part of called Lawyers in Favor of the Constitution has also been offering their services for whatever is needed. Recently, the ACLU and ILAP are willing to take the services of any lawyer to do habeas petitions or detention petitions. Even though previously, both the Refugee and Human Rights Clinic and ILAP have been reluctant to access outside untrained assistance, the numbers are problematic and they are getting positive results from Judge Newman that allowing more lawyers to help and they are stepping up. Sherriff Joyce spoke out against ICE when they took one of his employees and in response ICE moved detainees from Cumberland County which means that lawyers no longer have access to the detainees in Maine. What may happen is that there are less opportunities for Maine lawyers to do detention and habeas petitions in Maine.
- **Courtney Beers** – This morning there was a provider meeting with VLP, PTLA, and the Maine Law School clinics and was informed by ILAP and ACLU to discuss preparedness issues such as financial

and family powers of attorney in case something happens. They created a plan to ensure that all agencies are not duplicating services, only complementing each other. VLP is ready to take on any pro bonos who want to do that work. There are forms online that attorneys can fill out to sign up. VLP is streamlining their intake process. They are also trying to distribute that information to community agencies that are providing support to the families, including food deliveries.

The detention work that the clinics were leading along with ILAP to do consultations with detainees in Maine facilities is changing now by trying to figure out where they are to do their habeas and bond hearings. Maine attorneys can still that work out of state because it falls under immigration law. Justice Gorman states there is still difficulty getting in touch with detainees outside of Maine. Sue stated that in some of the places there are being held, attorneys have to set up an interview by telephone and there is a 2-way verification process which makes it difficult.

Another access to justice-type issue is that people do not want to go to court for any type of action (housing, safety, etc.) because they are afraid to leave their homes. Justice Mead states that the court has a long-standing policy regarding ICE in that the court will not help or hinder their process and no arrests in the court. If any authorities are entering the courthouse, they have to surrender their weapons at the door and be in plain clothes. Justice Gorman ask if someone can call and ask for their hearing to be remote due to fear of leaving the home and Justice Mead states that they can do that and its at the judges' discretion to grant the request.

John Bautigam states that if the suggestion that the client is afraid to go into court is not working, the suggestion may be that the client feels unsafe driving to and from the court. Justice Mead will bring that nuance up with the Court.

X. 2026 JAG Executive Committee and Board meeting dates:

Board:

October 26, 2026 - Portland (Feeney Conference Room)

[ALL MEETINGS at 3:00]

Executive Committee:

March 16, 2026 - Augusta (SJC Conference Room at CJC)

September 21, 2026 – Portland (SJC Conference Room, 3rd Floor, CCCH)

[ALL MEETINGS at 3:00]