

**Justice Action Group Board of Directors Meeting
October 27, 2025 — 3:00 p.m.
Feeney Conference Room-Cumberland County Courthouse**

Present: Hon. Andrew Mead, Hon. Ellen Gorman, Hon. Karen Wolf, Andrea Shaw, Nell Brimmer, Courtney Beer, Sue Roche, Michelle Draeger, Tom Fritzsche, Robyn Merrill

VIA Telephone: Charlie Dingman, Lauren Wille, Tim Pease

MINUTES

I. CONSENT AGENDA

(These will be considered based on written materials distributed with the Agenda.)

- A. Welcomes, and introductions**
- B. Approval of minutes:** JAG Board, February 25, 2025 meeting. Minutes accepted and incorporated into the permanent record.

II. WORKING AGENDA

- A. Report from the Chair (*J. Mead*)**
 - i. Inventory review/updates** – sent most recent Inventory. Courtney will email Toni changes to leadership.
 - ii. Reconfiguring JAG: More than just a communications hub, a “think tank,” and advocacy platform?** Justice Mead has ideas how to reconfigure JAG. To do this, we need more personnel and resources with means more funding. He will be sharing ideas in the future.
 - iii. Jennifer Lechner is back as Executive Director of the Cumberland Bar Association.** Jennifer is currently head of the ATJ Commission in North Carolina which is very successful.
 - iv. Internationally Trained Lawyers Task Force (see Report).** There is a relatively small number of internationally trained lawyers who are not currently approved to take the Maine bar exam. A task force had been created that worked very hard and produced a comprehensive and complex grid for how we can allow

facilitate the addition of internationally trained lawyers to the Maine bar. Their June Report has been widely shared and reviewed by a number of committees. The SJC is currently reviewing the challenges and benefits of admitting internationally trained lawyers to the Maine bar.

- v. The Court is also looking into ways to expand the current student practice rules. Students can currently make appearance in court under existing rules and approvals even before they take the bar exam. The Chief and Justice Connors are spearheading this effort and would welcome any comments or suggestions by the providers.

Maine eCourts rollout progress. Region 3 is going live with criminal. Additional civil modules are going live as well. The plan is that by the end of 2026, all location swill be live with eCourts. Draft amendments to the Maine Rules for Electronic Systems (MRECS) will likely be published for public comment in the near future.

- C. **Report from the Vice Chair/Pro Bono Committee (*Magistrate Judge Wolf*).** On October 15th, J. Wolf attended an MSBA New Lawyers Section Pro Bono fair. It was small but very energetic and well attended by law students.

On October 22, the Pro Bono Committee had a “Why Do Pro Bono?” webinar meeting for the Cumberland County Bar Association. Jennifer Lechner and Reid Hull put it together and this is the third installment. They presented the program at the Inns of Court in both Augusta and Bangor last year. The YBA and the PCBA are interested but they have not heard back yet. One of the committee’s targets are in-house counsel and there is now a connection at the Association of Corporate Counsel (ACC) which frequently puts things like this together to help get a networking event set up.

In the committee’s last meeting, they discussed raising money to sponsor an entity such as the law school or JAG for another rural access fellowship position. The fellowship event has been very

successful and not just at their year-long fellowship but for staying in rural areas afterwards.

- D. **ACP: (*Justice Gorman*)** The next legislative session is coming up and the providers are hopeful that the Governor will agree to give her support to a bill to avoid a loss of funding. There is an increase of anger, anxiety, and panic due to the government shutdown. Despite everything, the providers are doing an excellent job.
- E. **ILAP: (*Sue Roche*)** Things have progressively gotten worse. On the policy side, they are dealing with changes to executive orders; strategies have had to be changed overnight. Some of the policies are then challenged and many are not lawful. Getting information to the community is challenging because people aren't sure what applies to them and what will be enforced or not.

Regarding ICE, workplace raids and the stopping of individuals in public have been occurring regularly. Many people, including unaccompanied minors, are being picked up despite having had an asylum application for years. Another really challenging thing is the lack of transparency of where individuals are being held. This presents extraordinary challenges even where an attorney is already representing the client.

We're hoping that the governor will allow the LD 1971 bill go into effect that will prohibit local law enforcement cooperating with ICE when they're not required to.

Courtney states that the Refugee and Human Rights Clinic at the law school has adjusted their priorities and doing some of the work as before and some of the border work. They're helping anyone who they can.

- F. **Legislative Committee (*C. Dingman*):** The providers are working together to advocate for funding in the upcoming 2nd legislative session. The Civil Legal Services Fund Commission changed how they might divide the one-time \$3 million funding. The providers agreed with the Commission that the entire amount would be made available in the first year rather than disbursed unevenly over two

years. They are currently in the process of planning and scheduling meetings with several key legislatures as often as possible as well as working on a letter to the governor. Advocating will continue as in the recent past. There has been uptick in the level of involvement in the provider community at the State House. Senator Carney and others are championing the cause.

Access To Justice Day will be on March 19, assuming that there is space in the Hall of Flags and nobody at the Legislature objects to it.

Robyn Merrill shares that there is a part-time project coordinator position open (10 hours/week) and it will help support their efforts. It will start from now to the end of session.

G. MSBA (*Susan Faunce*): not present to report

H. MTLA (*Crissy Mann*): not present to report

I. MJF (*Michelle Draeger*): There was an increase by \$200,000 which is a substantial increase from the prior year (up to \$3.2 million) which means there will be another supplement distribution to providers. MJF has been trying to bolster their reserves, banks have already indicated plans to reduce rates.

In North Carolina, the legislature passed the bill regarding IOLTA accounts. Some organizations have shuttered as a result. This was attempted in NH but failed. There is no indication that that will happen here.

J. Law School/Cumberland Legal Aid Clinic (*Courtney Beer*): In January, all of the clinics are fully enrolled for the spring. A couple of weeks ago, starting on Wednesday night, there is a legal clinic in Fort Kent.

A detention attorney and outreach attorney has been hired. CLAC is working with ILAP on this project. There are walk-in hours so people can ask general questions.

- K. Legal Services for the Elderly (*Andrea Shaw*):** Jaye Martin retired and John Brautigam has taken over. Charlie Soltan is chair.
- L. Pine Tree Legal Service (*Tom Fritzsche*):** [NOTE: Transcription efforts were hampered by the audio quality of the conference call.]

Among other things, Pine Tree Legal Assistance has expanded its walk-in intake hours over the last twelve months and has posted hours and locations when staff are available for in-person case intake at our six offices and at a few other locations, in addition to intake through our phone system and other avenues by which prospective clients seek help.

One of Pine Tree's largest sources of funding is the Legal Services Corporation, which is a federally funded non-profit corporation that issues competitive grants for legal aid to low-income people in each state and U.S. territory, and in Washington, D.C. LSC's funding during the last quarter of 2025 is not affected by the current federal government shutdown, but new appropriations are needed to fund LSC grants in January 2026 and beyond. What those appropriations will be is not yet known, but LSC has a history of strong bipartisan support from Members of Congress.

- M. Maine Equal Justice (*Robyn Merrill*):** Ben Gaines is the new Legal Director. Efforts are being undertaken to assist and inform people who are likely to be affected if SNAP benefits are suspended in November.

The need for assistance in numerous areas including evictions and immigration issues continues to be great. Maine Equal Justice is working closely with PTLA and the other providers to deliver direct services. Maine Equal Justice anticipates some cuts due to HR1, some cuts coming up sooner than others.

- N. Volunteer Lawyers Project (*Nell Brimmer*):** Jim Mitchell (Bangor) retired from VLP. A replacement has been hired and will start in a few weeks. VLP is also looking at training and picking up on leading CLEs. The VLP is also looking at piloting a program to

train community helpers to be legal navigators. By January, will also be hiring a new staff attorney.

O. Open discussion/ New Business:

P. 2026 JAG Executive Committee and Board meeting dates:

Board:

February 24, 2026 - Portland (Feeney Conference Room)

October 26, 2026 - Portland (Feeney Conference Room)

[ALL MEETINGS at 3:00]

Executive Committee:

January 26, 2026 -_Via Zoom

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

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

[ALL MEETINGS at 3:00]