

**Justice Action Group Board of Directors Meeting
February 24, 2026 — 3:00 p.m.
Via ZOOM**

Present: Hon. Andrew Mead, , Hon. Karen Wolf, Hon. Darvin, Courtney Beer, Sue Roche, Michelle Draeger, Tom Fritzsche, Robyn Merrill, John Brautigam, Tim Pease, Lauren Wille, Arnold McDonald, Wendy Harlan

MINUTES

I. CONSENT AGENDA

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

- A. Welcomes, introductions
- B. Provider Reports (including Maine Civil Legal Services Fund Commission). The Reports will be incorporated into the permanent record of JAG proceedings.
- C. Approval of minutes: October 27, 2025 meeting minutes approved.

II. WORKING AGENDA

A. Report from the Chair (*J. Mead*):

- i. **Inventory review/updates:** The MSBA has approved a reduced fee for those attorneys who were part of Katahdin Counsel last year to attend the upcoming SJC Appellate Practice CLE. The fee is normally \$350 and will now be \$95 for KC-recognized individuals. We will send out an email to advise them of this opportunity.

The E-Courts is going well. By the end of 2026, all courts will be online with the new system.

- B. **Report from the Vice Chair/Pro Bono Committee (*Magistrate Judge Wolf*):** The committee has identified two major initiatives for 2026. First, plans were underway to submit a nomination on behalf of JAG for Maine Law for one of the ABA Pro Bono Publico Awards for 2026. The window to submit nominations is very short, however, and the application process is lengthy. After discussions with Dean Saufley, Courtney, and other representatives from the

law school, the Pro Bono Committee has elected to defer the nomination process for one year in order to have additional time work on the nomination planning and processes. A confirmatory vote was taken on the initiative to nominate Maine Law for the ABA Pro Bono Publico Awards. Unsurprisingly, the affirmative vote was emphatic and unanimous. The effort will be added to the JAG Inventory of Initiatives.

Second, the Pro Bono Committee will be exploring new possibilities to provide more visibility and attention to the importance of pro bono legal assistance to Maine's underserved and needy people and communities. A sub-committee has been formed and has already conducted two meetings with another scheduled. The group is currently focusing on video and social media content to illustrate what the Justice Action Group is, what it does, and how lawyers can become more active in pro bono efforts and initiatives.

According to Aria Eee, as of January 28th, 45 lawyers have submitted request for CLE credits for their pro bono work. The Pro Bono Committee will continue to get the word out that CLE credit is available for pro bono work.

- C. ACP: (*Justice Gorman*): - not present to report
- D. Legislative Committee (*Charlie Dingman*): - not present to report
- E. MSBA (*Suan Faunce*): - not present to report
- F. MTLA (*Crissy Mann*) - not present to report
- G. **MJF (*Michelle Draeger*):** - The audit is complete and the IOLTA numbers look good. The IOLTA funds are \$3.24 million this year which is just a bit lower than last year. The Board is meeting this week to consider supplement distribution and how to continue to reserve funds for a rainy day. The MJF conducted a successful awards event at the MSBA annual meeting as well as debuting their video on the Coffin Fellowship.

H. Open discussion/ New Business:

- **ICE updates**

Sue Roche, ILAP: A few days before ICE's "Operation Catch of the Day" occurred in Maine between January 21-24, ILAP learned that it was impending. ILAP contacted ACLU of Maine, the Refugee Human Rights Clinic at Maine Law, and the Maine Immigrations Rights Coalition to formulate a plan and to collaborate and communicate with each other during the surge. ILAP also reached out to Minnesota to review the circumstances of the recent ICE surge that recently occurred there.

Massachusetts has a program called "The Habeas Project." That project engages attorneys who are not able to take on pro bono work on a large scale but can offer "low bono" services with a substantially lowered rate to handle habeas cases. Fundraising efforts were undertaken to help underwrite fees and expenses for the low bono work. ILAP secured a list of those attorneys in Massachusetts and Maine (including in-house attorneys) who are willing and available to work on those types of cases.

During ICE's operation, roughly 200 people were detained. ILAP received requests from 70 people, but not all were eligible for habeas relief, and some had attorneys. Seventeen cases were actively pursued, and it is believed that all detainees have been released.

Sue recounted a number of instances where people had been picked up and detained under egregious circumstances. Racial profiling was obviously taking place. For the most part, these people had no criminal convictions and were in process of getting legal status.

Immigration judges were refusing in many instances to grant release bonds, and habeas hearings were required. Federal court judges were doing a great job in upholding the rule of law and holding ICE authorities accountable.

The ICE surge operation is over, but some local law enforcement authorities are turning people over to ICE after traffic stops. People are still fearful of further arrest and detention actions. Because we are a border state, we have always had border patrol and ICE officers present in Maine. ILAP historically has had a good communication relationship with some ICE officers, but recent actions have strained those relationships.

Mag. Judge Wolf: Judge Newmann was instrumental in developing a process to deal with the habeas petitions as quickly as possible. Magistrate Wolf provided a brief summary on the types of cases that have been appearing lately.

Tom Fritzsche, PTLA: PTLA follows a detailed set of Federal regulations regarding citizenship eligibility. They are allowed to service certain immigration statuses. They are approved by Congress and review by the Board of Directors of Legal Services Corp. In 2025, PTLA served 15 different statuses and had one client who was detained during ICE's recent operation and is thankful to ILAP for finding them counsel; they were released from detention quickly.

PTLA as well as other providers also provide "disaster" legal services. Other states have provided services like this regarding weather incidents and school shootings, but issues like immigration can be considered a disaster as well due to the impact to the community and the disruption it causes.

Robyn Merrill, MEJ: It's been heartening to see the response of the organizations that came together to support immigrants in our community.

Lauren Wille, DRM: DRM had gotten calls about increasing staffing shortages in the direct support and home health field as a lot of immigrants work in this field. They were not showing up to work because they were afraid to come to work, they were detained, etc.

- **Access to Justice Day**

Justice Mead: Charlie could not attend today, but he had indicated that we will follow the format of what was done last year. Providers will be set up in the Hall of Flags and will engage with legislators to explain their services and underscore their role in access to justice. Justice Mead will talk to both caucuses individually and address the Judiciary Committee in the afternoon.

Robyn Merrill, DRM: Some planning and details are still needed for Access to Justice Day, and the Legislative Committee will be meeting March 4. They have hired Denise Kronstadt as coordinator. The budget hearing was moved to Friday, February 27 at 10am and after that, they will focus back to planning Access to Justice Day. They will be tabling in the morning and have a sentiment read in both the House and Senate as well as a press conference mid-day in the Hall of Flags.

Justice Mead and Robyn discussed the services index sheet that is provided to legislator. Robyn reported that she will be sharing a fact sheet and map with legislators. The map shows how many people they served in the last two years by county, but also shows if we don't receive funding, how many fewer people we can serve by county. Senator Carney has been briefed on the effects that federal shortages will have on the providers and the need for the state to continue its funding.

- **Campaign for Justice update**

Tom Fritzche: They just closed the books for 2025 and the final total revenue is \$745,000 which is the highest total for the campaign ever.

- I. **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]