

Justice Action Group Board of Directors Meeting
February 25, 2025 — 3:00 p.m.
Feeney Conference Room, Cumberland County Courthouse

Present: Hon. Andrew Mead, Mag. Wolf, Charlie Dingman, Hon. Peter Darvin, Courtney Beer, Michelle Draeger, Thomas Fritzsche, Ellen Gorman, Wendy Harlan, Robyn Merrill, Sue Roche, Lauren Wille

VIA Telephone: Kathryn Reid and Tim Pease

MINUTES

I. CONSENT AGENDA

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

- A. Welcomes and introductions
- B. Providers reports (also Maine Civil Legal Services Fund Commission): Reports incorporated into the permanent record.
- C. Approval of minutes: JAG Board, October 15, 2024 meeting.
Minutes accepted and incorporated into the permanent record.

II. WORKING AGENDA

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

- i. **Inventory review/updates:** Everything is status quo. No new JAG initiatives.
- ii. **Katahdin Counsel Review of reporting process:** The numbers have rebounded since the COVID era, but we would still like to see further improvement. The Board of Overseers annual registration form provides a quick and simple opportunity for reporting pro bono service efforts and requesting KC recognition, but we haven't the huge increase in numbers of participating attorneys that we expected. If anyone has suggestions for motivating more attorneys to participate, please let us know. Justice Mead spoke about Katahdin Counsel at the MSBA Winter meeting in an effort to get the word out.

The law school has changed number of pro bono hours for graduation to 50 instead of 80 to be consistent with Katahdin Counsel.

- iii. **Update on Odyssey Case Management System and e-filing:** Tyler Technology has renamed their system to Enterprise Systems. The Judicial Branch will continue to use the moniker “E-courts” as the overarching name for our case management and e-filing systems. A major rollout of the criminal module has taken place in Region 3. The JB will continue to ensure that the E-courts procedures will not be a obstacle to people who need access to the court system.
- iv. **VLP Pro Bono Fellowship:** Is rolling along with have seven new members some who recently attended law court arguments. Participants receive detailed instruction on substantive law and procedure as well as receiving high level mentoring. The VLP will pause the program in 2026 to review and evaluate the program and consider merging the program with other training programs throughout the state.
- v. **Certification of Foreign Trained Lawyers Task Force:** The Task Force has submitted their report to the SJC and the SJC has asked various committees to weigh in on the proposals. . The Court will conduct a review after receiving recommendations from the committees and other interested parties.
- vi. **Legislative funding efforts:** Justice Mead and Charlie Dingman spent afternoon with the Appropriations Committee. Charlie will address the funding initiatives during his Legislative Committee update.
- vii. **ABA National ATJ Meeting:** This major annual meeting of ATJ commissions and interested individuals occurs in the Spring of each year. The Justice Action Group is frequently mentioned as one of the very earliest ATJ action groups. We haven’t been able to send a representative in recent years due to a lack of funding. We should

explore avenues of funding to resume sending a representative from JAG to this major roundtable event.

- B. **Report from the Vice Chair/Pro Bono Committee (*Magistrate Judge Wolf*):** The Pro-bono Committee was instrumental in the recent promulgation of Rule 5(f) by the Law Court. Rule 5(f) has been approved for a pilot program. For every 3 hours of pro bono completed through a legal aid provider, up to 1 CLE credit is earned up to a limit of 3. Justice Mead and Magistrate Wolf announced the promulgation at the MSBA Winter Bar meeting where it was met with a fair amount of excitement. In April, Board of Overseers will have a Zoom lunch and learn program to explain how participate in the program.

The Pro Bono Committee continues its outreach program including Inns of Court in Portland on Feb. 11th. Present for that were representatives from Pine Tree Legal, VLP (Beth Richardson), ILAP, LSE, DRM, and M. Cadwallader. The next networking event will occur at the Ballou Inns of Court in Bangor on March 12.

In the fall, efforts will continue with networking lunch and learn sessions at PCBA, CCBA, YCBA. On April 3, the committee will sponsor an in-house council pro bono reception panel discussion at Pierce Atwood. There will be three speakers: Peter Gutterman, Dave Canary (UNUM), Erica Blau (AIG).

We have welcomed new members to the committee: Kathryn Reid (VLP) – Vice Chair, Michele Gentry (ILAP), Susan Wiggins (GAL), Jeff Lovitz (VLP), Sharon Barney (Pine Tree), Dave Canary (UNUM). People are asking to join the committee.

The committee is exploring nominating various organizations for the ABA Pro Bono Publico award.

- C. **ACP: (*Justice Gorman*):** The ACP meets for an hour each month to discuss the goings-on in each provider organization including reviewing challenges, reporting recent accomplishments, and consideration of sharing resources (including training

opportunities). Per the reports, everyone is stretched thin and the Federal government issues are presenting profound challenges in some sectors.

- D. **Legislative Committee (C. Dingman):** Charlie: Presented testimony on the biannual budget responding to the fact that all that is there is the \$1.3 million in the General Fund that was added to the baseline and pointing out the missing \$2 million will create a cliff at the end of this fiscal year. We also laid out our request for substantially more than that to (\$6.4 million and \$9.3 million) keep moving toward the Justice Index standard over an extended period of years. It was late in day before everyone could testify.
Robyn: We held a lunch and learn in the State House for legislators. It was well attended. The lunch and learn was outgrowth of a series of open houses that were held across the state before the legislature convened. We have some excellent champions on Appropriations and Judiciary Committees
- E. **MSBA (President Susan Faunce or designee):** No one present to report.
- F. **MTLA (Walt McKee or designee):** No one present to report.
Justice Mead shared that the Maine Trial Lawyers Association annual all-day seminar will be held on Friday, March 14, 2025 at the Hilton Garden Inn in Freeport, Maine beginning at 8:30 a.m.
- G. **MJF (Michelle Draeger):**
IOLTA is at the highest rate ever at \$3.3 million for 2024. Not sure what will happen with future rates. We let providers know that we were able to provide a supplemental distribution. For context, for fiscal year 2024 \$1,039,000 for grants was budgeted. The supplement distribution is just under \$1.5 million. Budgeted grants for fiscal year 2025 are predicted to be just under \$2 million. If rates are steady, there will an additional distribution this time the following year. We are mindful of the fact a fiscal crisis could be upon us and we worked to rebuild the reserve which is up to almost \$1 million.
- H. **Open discussion/ New Business:** Nothing reported

I. Future Meetings of the JAG Board:

Oct. 15, 2025 – 3:00 – Portland – Feeney Conference Room

Future Meetings of the JAG Executive Committee:

Mar. 24, 2025 – 3:00 – Augusta – SJC Conf. Room

May 27, 2025 – 3:00 – Augusta – SJC Conf. Room

Sept. 15, 2025 – 3:00 – Augusta – SJC Conf. Room