

To: Matthew Billinger, Juvenile Justice Oversight Committee, Coordinator

Kansas Department of Corrections

From: Mary Ann Scali, Executive Director, The Gault Center

Re: Update JJOC grant funding: April 1, 2026 – June 30, 2026

Date: July 15, 2026

Accomplishments & Current Initiatives:

We have created incredible momentum toward building a specialized and statewide youth defense system during this term, with the Board of Indigents' Defense Services (BIDS) currently working toward securing funding for a pilot youth defense office in 2028. We have been excited to provide our leadership, expertise, technical assistance, and strategic support to help build relationships and the shared understanding needed to develop an effective youth defense system. We hope to sustain the impact of these efforts for Kansas by continuing to train Kansas defenders as they prepare to represent young people within the Board of Indigents' Defense Services (BIDS) and by continuing to facilitate and support the Statewide Youth Defense Workgroup as it is a critical component of building a sustainable youth defense infrastructure in Kansas.

On May 28, 2026, at the JJOC Reinvestment Committee meeting, Gault Center staff were honored to provide an update on the work accomplished thus far under the JJOC grant and present our budget request for 2027-2028. The Gault Center proposed two deliverables within that budget: ongoing training and technical assistance, as well as the continued facilitation and support of the Statewide Youth Defense Workgroup. Attached to the budget proposal were the examples of our work including the draft Kansas Youth Defense Standards and the link to the [Gault Center's Kansas Youth Defense webpage](#), as well as several letters of recommendation from Statewide Youth Defense Workgroup members supporting the continuation of the Gault Center's work in Kansas through 2028. The Gault Center is delighted with the progress we have made in partnership with Kansas leaders and looks forward to the opportunity to fully equip BIDS attorneys and leaders with the skills, knowledge, and infrastructure to maintain an effective youth defense system in Kansas.

Goal 1: Develop Kansas-Specific Youth Defense Standards

During this period, Gault Center staff met with the BIDS Executive Staff to discuss the next steps and the draft of the Kansas Youth Defense Standards. BIDS shared that its goals are to secure funding for a pilot youth defense program within their organization and to

promulgate the Kansas Youth Defense Standards as a component of best practices within their offices. The Gault Center provided a draft of the Standards as well as the attached “Voices from the Courtroom” companion piece, which complements each Standard with lived experience reflections from young people that demonstrate why the Standard matters and the consequences when its principles are upheld—or ignored. BIDS is reviewing the Standards internally, after which the Gault Center in partnership with BIDS staff will support the finalization of the Standards.

Goal 2: Statewide Youth Defense System and Workgroup

Statewide Youth Defense Workgroup

In support of the second objective, Gault Center staff continue to build and sustain the Statewide Youth Defense Workgroup. During this reporting period, the Gault Center team hosted our virtual Statewide Youth Defense Workgroup Meeting on May 8, where over 20 members from our workgroup were in attendance!

Because this meeting was the first time the workgroup had convened since our in-person September 2025 meeting, we invited workgroup members to share ways they had seen the [Five Years Later](#) report used effectively to advance a statewide youth defense system.

Members shared:

- “I use the report almost every day.”
- “Youth have validated [the report] through their own experiences. Young people are glad this issue is being brought up and would have liked that level of defense/representation when they were going through the system.”
- “It [the report] is a springboard to deeper conversations.”
- “We use [the report] to look through the eyes of those justice-involved when we make policy decisions.
- “We used this report to support our passage of the [rural loan forgiveness program](#).”
- “This [report] is a foundational document that reminds us of who we are working for and why we are doing this work.”

After hearing about the far-reaching impact of the report, Gault Center staff shared a report-out on the continued efforts to create the scaffolding and support for a statewide youth defense system, including:

- hosting the largest learning lab to date at the annual BIDS Conference in April (see additional information below),
- kicking off the BIDS Youth Defense Cohort and hosting a virtual training on adolescent development on May 7,

- bringing four Kansas defenders to Columbia, Missouri to certify them as Youth Defense Advocacy Program Trainers (see additional information below),
- continuing to host mentor sessions for Kansas defense leaders with youth defense leaders across the country,
- writing an [op-ed that was published in the Hutchinson News](#) on the critical importance of youth defense in Kansas, and
- launching our “Defending Futures: Youth Defense for ALL in Kansas” Coalition.

We then viewed our new educational video, [Youth Defense in Kansas](#), created in collaboration with Progeny youth leaders. This follow-up to the *Five Years Later* report, brings to life how young people experience the juvenile legal system and provides a powerful tool for educating decision-makers and advancing youth-centered reform efforts. The video can be found on the Gault Center’s webpage that highlights the journey of building a youth defense system in Kansas: [Establishing a Youth Defense System in Kansas](#). When asked to reflect on the impact of the video, workgroup members shared:

- “[There is a] consistent theme that youth want access to their attorney and information from their attorney that is easy to understand. (And also, the artwork from the report in the video is so great!)
- “Be engaged and communicate with the youth.”
- “That [creating a youth defense system is] going to take a call to action from policy makers, attorneys, and communities. And the message has power when it is directly from the voice of young people.”
- “It’s the art for me, the youth quotes read by youth and the call to action!”
- “Same thoughts, feelings, and situations that I experienced are still happening to our young people today . . . change needs to happen.”
- “It was very powerful to hear the voices behind the quotes, hearing real-life experiences.”
- “This gives power to our youths’ voices!”

We closed the substantive agenda with an announcement from BIDS Legislative Staff Attorney Rebekah Gaston and Assistant Director of Special Projects Karen Leve. They shared the exciting news that BIDS is fully on board with seeking funding for a pilot youth defense office in their organization and are working towards identifying next steps to make this a reality. The workgroup talked through opportunities to support BIDS and expressed their ongoing commitment to assisting in establishing a first ever youth defense pilot program in Kansas.

The workgroup will convene in person in December 2026. During this meeting, we will utilize our time together to discuss and strategize how we can leverage BIDS' efforts to create its pilot program. The workgroup will share progress on outreach efforts and strategies hear updates from BIDS, and plan for the 2027 legislative session.

Building Youth Defense Specialization

In April, Gault Center staff and Progeny youth leaders were invited to open the BIDS annual conference by hosting a learning lab for all attendees. We kicked off the conference hosting over 100 defenders, investigators, and staff members as they navigated the learning lab in Lawrence, Kansas. As always, the learning lab was incredibly impactful, helping attorneys and defense team members understand the importance of specialized youth defense, with participants sharing:

- “I wish there was someone guiding me through all of this.”
- “[I need] an advocate. A consistent lawyer.”
- “[There was a complete] rejection and an outward lack of concern. I cannot imagine going through that as a young child or teenager.”
- “This was a fabulous simulation. Frustration was real.”
- “[As an attorney I want to] try and help with the full picture. Helping clients connect the dots. Having good, updated resources packets that go to all youth and families.”
- “Nothing is as easy as you think and just because services are available does not mean they are accessible.”
- “I thought this was a powerful representation of how isolating it can feel when no one really knows you personally.”
- “What we [as defenders] can do: up to date resource packets, listening and building rapport, social workers working under attorney license, orientation on what to expect in attorney meetings, debrief and take extra time to explain what happened in court and what youth are supposed to do. “

After the learning lab, Progeny Youth Leaders and Gault Center Staff hosted a presentation on our “Defending Futures: Youth Defense for ALL” Coalition. We discussed the *Kansas Assessment*, the *Five Years Later* report, and premiered the new [educational video, Youth Defense in Kansas](#). Progeny Youth Leaders shared their perspectives on why youth defense specialization is important to them, what they would like attorneys to know about representing young people, and what their hopes are for the Defending Futures Coalition. After the presentation, the youth leaders received a standing ovation from the participants!! We are excited to continue to build from this beautiful video and grow the work of the Youth Defense for ALL Coalition.



Progeny Youth Leaders, Gault Center Staff, Brian Blalock and Kristina Tanner from Youth Law Center, and Angela Vigil from Baker McKenzie (who run the YExLS Lab).

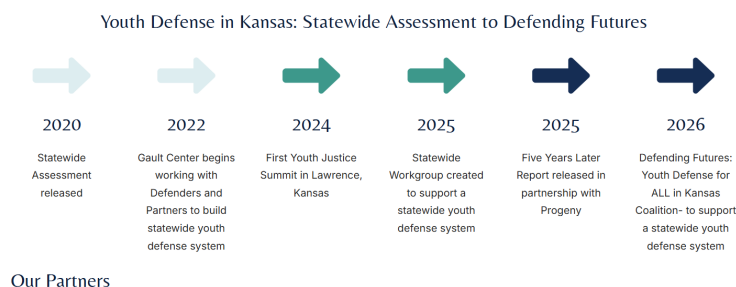
Finally, we want to share an example of the specialized training we are providing to BIDs attorneys to set the foundation for effective representation of young people as they build out their pilot project and ultimately the statewide system. Although not funded by this grant, (funded by KAG¹), in June, the Gault Center trained three BIDS defenders and one Kansas professor leading a law school clinical program through our specialized, nationally recognized training Youth Defense Advocacy Program Certification Course (YDAP). The YDAP Certification Course is an intensive “train-the-trainer” program that equips participants with skills to train youth defenders on the YDAP curriculum to be excellent legal advocates for young people. The YDAP Certification training took place on June 1-4 in Columbia, Missouri, and the Kansas attorneys joined 32 other youth defenders and 8 national experts from across the country. We were thrilled to welcome four Kansas attorneys to the cadre of certified Youth Defense trainers in the state of Kansas! The three-day course centers on adult learning theory, training instruction, and a comprehensive introduction to the YDAP training methodology. The Kansas Certified YDAP Trainers will become the new vanguard in Kansas for delivering high-quality, effective training to youth defenders across the state and will be leaders in developing the specialty of youth defense and supporting a strong youth defense community.

¹ KAG funding to the Gault Center will end on September 30, 2026.

Additionally, we are currently working to send a group of Kansas Defenders to Missouri State Public Defender's Youth in Court training, where certified YDAP trainers will spend two days focusing on fundamental youth defense skills. This training will take place August 12-14 in Columbia, Missouri.

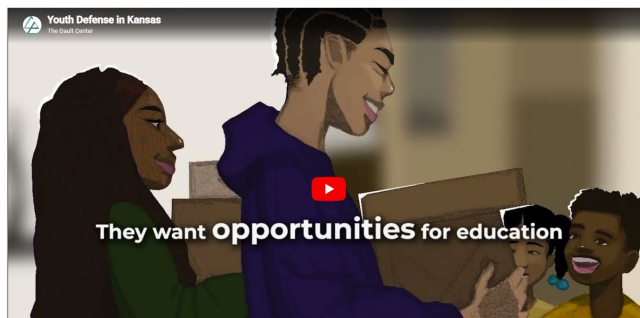
Finally, we are working with BIDS executive staff to send three individuals from BIDS to our annual Youth Defense Leadership Summit in October. This year's Summit will be held in Detroit, Michigan, and is the only national gathering for youth defenders and advocates. Summit provides a space for defenders and defense communities to hear about cutting-edge litigation strategies, collaborate on ways to effectively represent youth, and connect with defenders across the country.

We are delighted with the progress we have made over this grant period and are sharing snips from our [Kansas Website Page](#) that illustrate this progress:



Defending Futures: Youth Defense for ALL in Kansas

COALITION TO SUPPORT BUILDING A YOUTH DEFENSE SYSTEM IN KANSAS



Kansas Youth Defense in the News



[Kansas youth defense system needs investment | Opinion \(The Topeka Capital Journal\)](#)

Please see the op-ed written by Senior Youth Defense Counsel Sarah Johnson, celebrating March 18 as Kansas Public Defense Day, and encouraging the State of Kansas to fund a robust, statewide youth defense system.

"Public Defense Day is a critical moment to elevate the full scope of the conversation around the fundamental right to counsel by naming how it includes young people. . . . Now is the moment to fulfill the promises of Gideon and Gault by building a robust, statewide youth defense system. The future of Kansas' youth and, inherently, the future of this state compel decisive investment and unwavering commitment. We encourage Kansas to fulfill the principles of both Gault and Gideon by ensuring every child is afforded the defense — and the future — that the people of Kansas deserve."