THE CLASS OF 1964 POLICY RESEARCH SHOP

Guardians ad Litem in the New Hampshire Court System: A Pilot Program
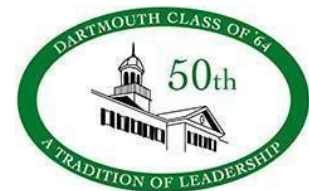
Presented to the New Hampshire Supreme Court
Heather Kulp, Senior Circuit Court Administrator

PRS POLICY BRIEF 2425_03
July 28, 2025

PREPARED BY:
Jesse Fitzelle-Jones
Lia Symer
Armita Mirkarimi

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2011, the New Hampshire legislature eliminated funding for Guardian ad Litem (GAL) services for indigent families in divorce and parenting cases, creating a two-tiered system where only those who could afford GAL services had access to them. Based on extensive interviews with key stakeholders, including GALs, judges, legislators, and experts from relevant states, as well as data analysis and comparative research, this report outlines findings and recommendations surrounding the reinstatement of the GAL fund through a pilot program in four New Hampshire courts.

Our research reveals several critical issues affecting the present GAL system in New Hampshire: (1) inadequate training and certification processes; (2) compensation challenges that have improved with recent rate increases but still create barriers; (3) a significant decrease in the number of GALs; and (4) an inequitable distribution of services across caseloads. Insights from Massachusetts, Vermont, Minnesota, and Maine reveal different models that could inform New Hampshire's approach, including Massachusetts' structured training and certification program and Maine's focus on settlement and mediation skills for GALs.

Recommendations that emerge from this research address immediate considerations for the design of the pilot program as well as longer term system reforms. These include: establishing a standardized, accessible training program; creating a liaison position between GALs and the court system; implementing regular communication channels between stakeholders; and developing clear metrics to evaluate the effectiveness of GAL services, with a particular focus on child wellbeing, case settlement rates, and court time saved.

1 INTRODUCTION

Guardian ad Litem programs allow impartial representatives appointed by the court to determine the best interest of a minor involved in abuse, neglect, divorce, and parental rights cases. The best interest may not always be the same as the expressed interest of the child or that of one or more parents. These representatives frequently come from a legal or mental health professional background, but other individuals with adequate educational and professional qualifications who complete required training and pass background checks can also become certified. New Hampshire has two main types of GALs: Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) and Board-certified GALs. CASA GALs' work centers on instances of abuse and neglect, whereas Board-certified GALs largely focus on divorce and parental rights cases. In New Hampshire, prior to 2011, cases involving families with one or more indigent parents as defined by state income thresholds were eligible for funding to cover the cost of appointing a Board-certified GAL. The financial crisis of 2008-2009 forced budget cuts in 2011, and the New Hampshire legislature passed H.B. 634, which eliminated the Guardian ad Litem fund.

With funds from the New Hampshire Bureau of Child Support Services (BCSS), the New Hampshire Supreme Court is now exploring the fund's reinstatement through a pilot program in four Family Division courts: Franklin, Keene, Rochester, and Laconia. The goal is to structure an updated, financially sustainable program that provides effective and efficient GAL services for indigent families.[2]

This report incorporates findings from court observation, data analysis, cross-state statute and structural comparisons, and interviews with key stakeholders, including GALs, judges, a legislator, a sociologist, and experts from comparable states. The insights gathered provide a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities in reinstating the GAL fund and offer recommendations for structuring an effective program in the immediate and long terms.

2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Although their effectiveness, training, and specific roles may vary, GALs are widely used across the country because of the valuable contributions they make in promoting child welfare in contested divorce and parenting cases. However, access to GALs is often limited by income, creating a "two-tier system" in which children from lower-income backgrounds (whose families may be unable to afford GAL fees) can be deprived of assessments of their best interests.[3] To address this disparity, New Hampshire maintained a "Guardian ad Litem Fund" prior to 2011, which covered GAL fees for divorce and parenting cases involving low-income families.[4]

Information about the impact of New Hampshire's former GAL fund on children in the state is limited, leaving open questions about the potential benefits of reinstating the fund. Moreover, there is an ongoing debate about when GALs should be appointed and how beneficial their involvement is in cases of parenting and divorce. Without rigorous metrics to assess GAL effectiveness, judges may struggle to make informed decisions about funding and resource allocation in complex cases. Additionally, legislatures have difficulties making informed decisions about the political economy of funding GAL services. We ask the following questions: How can the impact of GALs on divorce cases be measured, and what are the potential benefits of a GAL fund for low-income families in New Hampshire? How can NH sustain and even grow the number of GALs in the state? How can the Court decide the best allocation of resources and funding for GAL programs?

3 METHODOLOGY

We conducted a mixed-methods study, including state-by-state comparisons, expert interviews, courtroom observation, and quantitative data evaluation. By analyzing states with similar demographics and programmatic differences, our methodology aimed to uncover the advantages and limitations of each GAL model. Our approach combined qualitative insights from expert interviews and court observations with quantitative data analysis to provide a comprehensive view of the impact and sustainability of GAL programs. With these methods, we hoped to determine the efficiency and effectiveness of current and proposed GAL systems ahead of the upcoming pilot program.

3.1 INTERVIEWS

To gather comprehensive data on GAL programs, we conducted interviews with various stakeholders:

- **New Hampshire GALs:** Five certified and active GALs with diverse experiences working in the state of New Hampshire, including several who worked before and after the 2011 fund cut, explained typical case involvement, the benefits and drawbacks of having a GAL on a case, aspects of the past fund that could be reintroduced, and recommendations for the upcoming pilot.
- **New Hampshire Judges:** We spoke with three judges actively serving on family courts in New Hampshire. We sought to interview at least one judge that had served in the New Hampshire family courts since before the removal of the previous fund in 2011. Among other topics, they elucidated the criteria they use to determine whether to appoint a GAL to a case, how to define a successful case, and common themes of how a GAL influences case time and outcomes.
- **Social Worker:** A Supervising Attorney at the New Hampshire Legal Assistance Domestic Violence Advocacy Project provided a more family-centered lens to our research.
- **NH House Representative on Relevant Committees:** A representative who worked on the Subcommittee on Guardian ad Litem/Parenting Coordinator Role advised us on possible policy changes or structural reforms that could improve the program.
- **Court Administrators:** A court data expert provided insights into data collection and case management systems.
- **Out-of-State Experts and GALs:** GAL experts from Massachusetts, Minnesota, Maine, and Vermont provided information on how their respective states handle case assignments for indigent families, the mechanisms that other states have for monitoring GAL performance and ensuring accountability, and their states' continued education programs, among other important topics.

In total, we interviewed 23 individuals. These interviews were conducted either in person or via video conference and followed a semi-structured format, allowing for both standardized questions and flexible exploration of topics as they emerged. Interview transcripts were analyzed to identify common themes, challenges, and potential solutions related to GAL programs.

3.2 IN-PERSON OBSERVATION

In this study, we conducted a court observation in Keene, New Hampshire, focusing on family court proceedings. This first-hand observation provided insight into how judges may attempt to appoint a GAL for lower-income, self-represented families, and allowed us to compare proceedings in cases with and without legal representation. After the observation, we spoke with the judge to understand perspectives on the cases that we had seen and better understand how the judge approaches lower-income parties that could benefit from GALs, but currently cannot access their services.

3.3 CROSS-STATE ANALYSES

Along with interviews of New Hampshire GALs, we conducted an analysis of four different states with comparable demographics and culture: Massachusetts, Minnesota, Maine, and Vermont. We attempted to compare NH to states with similar economic, cultural, and demographic factors as shown relevant in past literature.[5] We guided our case selection across

dimensions such as population size, population density, geographic region, divorce rate, median income, and poverty rate. These states' GAL programs differed enough to create a substantive profile regarding their relative advantages and disadvantages. Our analysis also accounted for the different purposes for GALs across the states mentioned above.

Figure 1: State Demographic Comparison Table

State	Population	Population Density (population/mile)	Divorce Rate (divorces per 1000 per year)	Median Income	Poverty Rate
New Hampshire	1.4M	153.9	2.5	$95,628	7.2%
Vermont	.65M	69.8	2.3	$78,024	9.7%
Maine	1.4M	44.2	2.4	$71,773	10.4%
Massachusetts	7M	901.2	1.4	$101,341	10.4%
Minnesota	5.7M	71.7	N/A	$87,556	9.3%

Source: Table created with data from the U.S. Census Bureau and Center for Disease Control[6]

For each state, we conducted background research on its respective GAL program structures. Additionally, we conducted interviews with GALs or court administrators to understand GAL processes in the state more concretely. The goal was to obtain insights into the advantages and limitations of alternative GAL models. All non-New Hampshire interviews occurred over Zoom or Microsoft Teams and followed a semi-structured format.

3.4 DATA ANALYSIS

Finally, we conducted a quantitative analysis to better understand developments in the current New Hampshire GAL system. Using a divorce, separation, and parental planning dataset from the New Hampshire court system, our team was able to analyze trends in GAL assignment between 2000 and 2023. Several models were employed to better understand how GALs potentially impact the cases to which they are assigned. The findings of this analysis were subsequently used to inform suggestions for the pilot program.

In the remainder of the brief, we present the results of our analyses according to five broad thematic categories that emerged from our research. In Section 4, we discuss considerations surrounding funding and equity in the history and future of New Hampshire's GAL program. In Section 5, we present findings surrounding the retention and recruitment of GALs as relevant to the state of New Hampshire. In Section 6, we detail current interactions between GALs and the Court system, including the findings of our quantitative analyses of Court data surrounding case impacts of GAL assignments. In Section 7, we present the case study results indicating how other states have designed their GAL programs and what considerations emerge for New Hampshire. Finally, in Section 8, we enumerate recommendations for design and analysis of the Court's GAL fund reinstatement pilot program as well as longer-term suggestions for areas of improvement within the Court's usage of GALs more generally.

4   FUNDING AND EQUITY

This section details the past and present financial structures of GAL-related programs in New Hampshire. We discuss implications of the 2011 legislation, current payment methods for GALs and related concerns, and the context for the funding of the pilot program.

4.1 GAL 2011 FUND CUT

The 2011 elimination of the GAL fund has produced significant consequences for access to justice among economically disadvantaged families. Interviews with NH judges and GALs consistently characterize this policy change as creating a structural inequity in the judicial system, with financially secure families retaining access to qualified representation and investigative resources, while economically vulnerable families experiencing significant barriers to these same critical services, placing their children at heightened vulnerability.

Legislative analysis characterizes this disparity as particularly problematic because it disproportionately affects those with the greatest need for advocacy services.[7] The psychological impact of knowing appropriate but financially inaccessible interventions exist creates an additional burden for families already experiencing significant stress. Multiple judicial perspectives emphasized that financial barriers to GAL services represent a significant impediment to fact-finding processes essential for determining a child's best interests.

The systemic impact extends beyond direct service provision. An interview with an expert at the Domestic Violence Advocacy Project at New Hampshire Legal Assistance, which serves clients below established income thresholds, indicated a post-2011 reduction in GAL engagement. This has produced secondary effects on professional development within the legal aid community, as fewer practitioners gain experience collaborating with GALs. One advocate for domestic abuse survivors noted that the resulting practice environment has shifted toward increased reliance on legal counsel for functions previously performed by GALs.

Multiple stakeholders emphasized the efficiency implications for court operations, noting the increased burden on judicial resources when GAL services are unavailable. Some interviewees also noted potential "hidden costs" associated with the policy change, as self-represented

litigants may be less familiar with court procedures and, in some cases, may be less likely to settle, thereby impacting court resources.

Figure 2 displays the number of divorce and parental separation cases before and after the 2011 funding cut, broken down by cases without a GAL and those with a GAL funded either privately or by the state. The trends indicate not just the elimination of state-paid GAL appointments after 2011, but also a decrease in GALs in private pay cases. In addition to a decreasing case rate, this could also be related to several factors that align with the results of our NH GAL interviews, including more GALs finding payment to be less predictable after the fund cut (without the option of payment by the government) or fewer prospective GALs undergoing training.

Figure 2: Breakdown of Divorce, Separation, and Parental Planning Cases by GAL Type
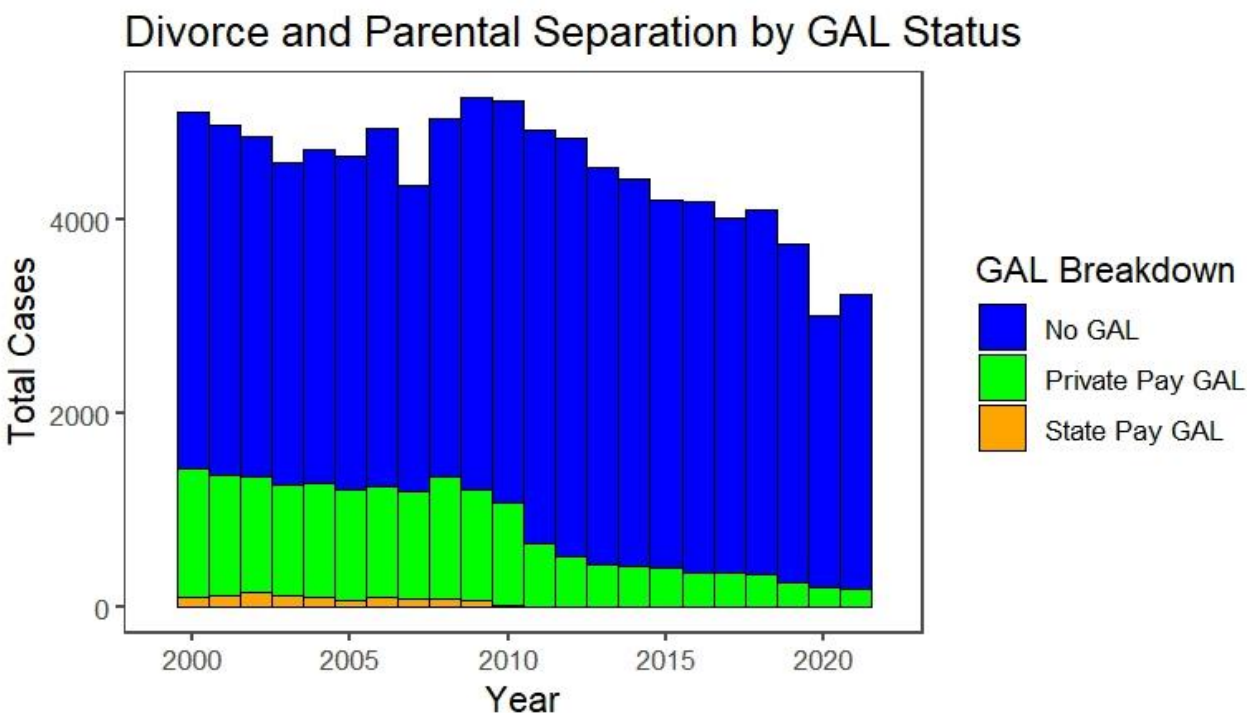
Source: Author Analysis of New Hampshire Court Data

4.2 GAL PAYMENT: CURRENT PROCESS AND CONCERNS

While no funds for GAL services for indigent families exist, the legal infrastructure for payment is still present. The New Hampshire Supreme Court Rule 48-A governs GAL payments.[8] Under the current ruling, GALs appointed to cases with indigent parties are limited to $125 per hour for time properly chargeable to a case. Travel time, including to and from court hearings and to or from meetings regarding a juvenile, are compensable and do not count towards the maximum fees set forth. Pursuant to RSA chapters 463 and 464-A, for guardianship cases, this maximum fee is $2,100. If needed, parties to the case can request a petition to exceed the maximum fee. This, however, must be approved prior to the GAL exceeding the guidelines and will only be granted if the administrative judge of the Circuit Court or the Chief Justice of the Superior Court

certifies the good cause and exceptional circumstances. Guardians ad litem also receive reimbursement for mileage expenses incurred while representing their client, using the current standard mileage rate set by the Internal Revenue Service. Reimbursement requests specify the exact number of miles traveled.

Compensation for GAL services has improved in recent years but remains a concern. One GAL detailed the history of GAL compensation in New Hampshire:

- In 2022, rates increased from $60/hour to $90/hour
- Travel time began to be compensated
- Recently increased again to $125/hour for both hourly work and travel[9]

According to another GAL, despite these increases, GALs frequently work more than the allotted hours on cases, particularly those involving abuse or neglect. The court has granted a limited amount of time to create reports, meaning many NH GALs end up donating large amounts of their time for the benefit of the children. GALs interviewed also stated that this tends to happen in times when children are in crisis, and the GAL may not have the time or wherewithal to go through the formal processes to receive payment for that time.

While most cases with indigent parents do not have GAL appointments, there is some evidence of informal arrangements between GALs and parents for reduced payments. One NH GAL involved in such arrangements stated: "There are lots of parents that have difficulty coming up with the funds to pay for my services, and so I am pretty happy to make arrangements with them in whatever way I can help them out." Furthermore, an occasional arrangement arises where the GAL becomes invested in the wellbeing of the child and continues with the case even when payment from the parent is unlikely or does not occur. This arrangement essentially functions as a pro bono case where the GAL investigates for the purpose of the child's wellbeing, despite knowing that they are donating their time.

Many NH GALs noted that they experienced difficulties in receiving payments for privately funded GAL services. These challenges can arise when a GAL makes a determination in the best interest of the child that may not be the desired outcome for the parent providing the majority of payments. Many GALs believe that this uncertainty regarding payments in the GAL system serves as a main cause of the dwindling number of active GALs in New Hampshire. Across interviews, GALs noted the difficulty of being paid and settling accounts with parents. One GAL noted that this struggle results in an added time cost, where GALs "spend hours billing, tracking time, sending out bills, and then chasing down money that we don't get paid for. And it's a waste of our time." Despite the fact that payment was a significant issue across interviews, the primary motivation expressed by most GALs for their work was the wellbeing of the children. Most GALs that worked in NH before the fund cut indicated that this funding challenge was less of a concern when payment stemmed from the government.

4.3 COMMITTEE SUPPORT FOR A FUND AND PILOT PROGRAM

In 2023, a Special Committee on the Family Division of the Circuit Court was commissioned "to investigate allegations of irregularities, including failure to follow or enforce statutes, unwarranted waiver of or failure to follow court rules, delay in rendering decisions, denial of due

process, and other procedural issues." Following written and oral testimony from stakeholders, an analysis of the GAL/Parenting Coordinator role was deemed to be necessary. The Subcommittee on Guardian ad Litem/Parenting Coordinator Role examined the current state of GALs in NH. It concluded that there is a need to address the gap left by the 2011 fund elimination, either through alternative funding methods or by restoring financial support for indigent parties.[10]

In response to the Subcommittee's findings, the Court is establishing a pilot program to provide GALs for cases involving indigent parents in four family courts across the state: Franklin, Keene, Rochester, and Laconia. The funds for this program come from the New Hampshire Bureau of Child Support Services (BCSS), an agency dedicated to ensuring children receive quality financial and parental support during events such as divorce. BCSS, in turn, uses federal funds from the Department of Health and Human Services Office of Child Support Services' Access and Visitation Mandatory Grant Program, which aims to increase non-custodial parents' time with their children. The goal is that increased funding for GALs will help low-income families create effective parenting plans and enhance parental engagement. Success of the pilot program will inform whether a similar state-wide program is implemented.[11]

According to N.H. Admin. Code Section Gal 503.10, a GAL appointed by a court and paid for with public funds cannot accept additional payment from any party unless authorized by the court. State funding is not available for a party whose income is 200 percent or more of the federal poverty level (a yearly income of $64,300 for a household of four as of January 2025[12]). Within a private fee arrangement, GALs must provide a written agreement detailing the parties responsible for payment, rate, method for calculating fees billed, and an estimated or exact cost to be charged. For these GALs paid directly by the parties, the hourly rate cannot be more than twice the rate for state-funded cases and cannot exceed 23 hours unless otherwise agreed by the parties.[13]

5 RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

This section details the current training and certification procedures for GALs in New Hampshire, as well as key challenges that emerge from the existing resource environment. In this context, we discuss our findings on the sustainability of GAL recruitment and retention in the state.

5.1 TRAINING AND CERTIFICATION

NH applicants must have either a bachelor's degree with at least 600 hours of relevant experience, an associate's degree with at least 1,000 hours of relevant experience, or an advanced degree beyond a bachelor's with at least 200 hours of relevant experience, all involving professional or volunteer work with children or incapacitated adults, as dictated by N.H. Admin. Code § Gal 303.01.

To become a GAL in New Hampshire, applicants must complete a court-specified course not to exceed 8 hours of training by the Guardian ad Litem Board, which operates under the NH Office of Professional Licensure and Certification. Under RSA 490-C:4, this training must encompass

instruction in a number of areas, including, but not limited to: the role of GALs, the dynamics of family groups, domestic violence, report writing, and techniques for gathering complete and reliable information. The applicant must also shadow a certified Guardian ad Litem in court for at least 4 hours. To renew a certification, a GAL must complete, among other renewal documents, continuing education requirements as approved by the GAL Board, pursuant to GAL401.09 (f). Certified GALs may receive up to 8 hours of continuing education credits for time spent allowing a prospective GAL to shadow them during their work for the court, creating an informal mentorship program.

Our interviews revealed significant concerns about the training and certification process for GALs in New Hampshire. One GAL with 23 years of experience in NH described the application process as "very convoluted" with "lax certification protocols." Different GALs reported varying processes for certification, indicating inconsistency in the system. Four of the GALs interviewed highlighted the "desperate need" for more GALs and indicated limited training opportunities (only two mandatory trainings that are not frequently offered or widely advertised) as a key factor in the dwindling numbers. According to three NH GALs, many attend certification and training programs in Massachusetts given the limited offerings in NH. To help improve this system, some GALs emphasized the need for more regular and widely advertised "GAL 101" basic training courses in NH.

Emerging from the lacking structural support and the formally structured shadowing program, interviewees built upon the mentorship requirements to create ongoing informal peer group systems. Three of our interviewees serve as frequent mentors that many aspiring GALs reach out to due to limited training. These three GALs indicated that their mentorship frequently expands beyond the four required hours of court shadowing, helping the GALs navigate complexities of the legal system that are underexplored in the formal NH GAL training. A GAL who underwent training more recently supplemented this narrative by detailing her own struggles in finding a mentor on her own and in practicing GAL work following certification.

Collaboration and knowledge sharing, however, are not operating efficiently, presenting challenges to those interested in beginning a career as a GAL. Four GALs noted that increased collaboration and community between GALs would be helpful to improve efficacy. Two individuals suggested implementing regular meetings between "cohorts" of GALs to discuss struggles and navigating the system. Additionally, greater communication between GALs and judges to discuss concerns and improve report writing was also brought up as a potential improvement. Communication was noted as a critical aspect of GAL development in comparable states like Massachusetts.[14] Multiple interviewees also noted that changes to the GAL system would benefit from having various stakeholders involved.

Interviewees particularly emphasized information on domestic violence as a lacking part of the training. An attorney for the Domestic Violence Advocacy Project at New Hampshire Legal Assistance particularly stressed the importance of recognizing domestic violence within any changes to the GAL system, noting that GAL experience on domestic violence issues varied greatly. The dynamics of power and control in abusive relationships can be pertinent to GAL work, but GALs need training to decipher and understand these for optimal child advocacy.

5.2 SHORTAGE OF GALS AND RECRUITMENT

Multiple interviews highlighted a severe workforce shortage in the New Hampshire GAL program. Both interviewees and statistical evidence indicate a dramatic reduction from approximately 260 GALs active before the fund cut in the state to 63 in the current system, representing a 76 percent decrease in available child advocates.

Professional pathways to GAL certification demonstrate notable variance, with recruitment channels lacking systematic organization. Some practitioners reported initial exposure through CASA involvement, while others transitioned from psychological or legal professional backgrounds. Some GALs mentioned significant communication barriers to recruitment strategies and needs assessments within the GAL infrastructure. Evidence suggests that increased public awareness initiatives regarding the GAL role could substantially enhance recruitment effectiveness.

The current resource constraints appear critical, with practitioners consistently characterizing the available GAL workforce as "very few and overburdened." Certification pipeline challenges were also evident, with one respondent identifying only a single recent applicant for certification who subsequently encountered training availability barriers. Multiple interviewees noted the significant psychological burden associated with GAL responsibilities as another possible reason for the programs dwindling numbers, citing vicarious trauma and stress resulting from engagement with complex family conflict situations.

A member of the Subcommittee on Guardian ad Litem/Parenting Coordinator Role has identified potential diversification of the GAL professional pool as a strategic objective, with particular emphasis on incorporating practitioners with mental health expertise. Throughout interviews, enhanced training protocols focused on domestic violence and abuse dynamics were consistently identified as priority areas for program development.

Our comparative jurisdictional analysis confirms that similar resource constraints exist in Maine, where stakeholders report insufficient GAL capacity and a particular lack of mental health practitioners within the system. Despite recognition that therapeutically trained GALs demonstrate enhanced understanding of child development nuances, recruitment of such professionals remains challenging.[15]

Our research findings yield several strategic recommendations for enhancing GAL recruitment:

- Development of accessible, systematized training infrastructure
- Implementation of regular compensation adjustments accounting for economic factors
- Enhancement of inter-system communication between GALs
- Expansion of court outreach and public information initiatives
- Integration of GAL training with existing professional development frameworks for child welfare practitioners

6 GAL-COURT INTERACTIONS

In this section, we interrogate the relationship between GALs and the Court system. Specifically, we present findings on whether and how GAL involvement in cases impacts court proceedings across the system as a whole and at the individual level for judges. After discussing results from our interviews, we present our quantitative analysis of Court data for the period of 2000 to 2023.

6.1 CASE FACILITATION AND EFFICIENCY GAINS

The interviews provided qualitative evidence regarding the operational effectiveness of GALs in family court proceedings. Interview findings indicate a positive correlation between GAL involvement and favorable case outcomes, particularly in the facilitation of settlements and reduction of litigation time.

A primary function identified across multiple interviews with judges was the mediatory role GALs served between high-conflict parents. When communication between parties has deteriorated, GALs function as translators of interests and needs, effectively identifying common ground that may not be apparent to the disputants themselves. Evidence from long-term practice with indigent families demonstrates that skilled GAL intervention can lead to settlement in many cases, thereby eliminating the necessity for extensive testimony in litigated hearings; for example, one GAL went a period of five years taking only cases involving indigent parties and "never had to testify once in that period within a litigated hearing—most cases settled just by taking info provided in reports."

Judicial perspectives consistently affirmed the efficiency of GALs in high-conflict scenarios, with particular emphasis on cases involving parental alienation where deliberate efforts to influence a child's perspective occur. While GALs are not universally perceived as conflict mitigators, several interviewees stated that GAL appointment correlates with expedited trial scheduling, reduced filing volume, and improved outcomes for the children concerned.

Quantifiable metrics for GAL efficacy emerged during the research, with settlement facilitation identified as a primary indicator of success. Analysis from neighboring jurisdictions suggests that GALs with mediation expertise can reduce time in court by 16-20 hours per case, while each case report typically requires only 9-10 hours of GAL work. These efficiency effects represent substantial resource conservation for both the judiciary and the families involved.[16]

6.2 INVESTIGATIVE ROLE AND JUDICIAL SUPPORT

Judicial decision-making appears to be influenced by GAL recommendations, as judges consistently report valuing the investigative capabilities that GALs provide beyond the courtroom. GALs effectively function as extensions of the court's investigative capacity, conducting factual examinations that reveal family dynamics not otherwise discernible in formal proceedings. This function proves especially valuable given that children's capacity for self-advocacy varies considerably based on developmental stage and circumstantial factors.[17] Importantly, judicial independence is maintained with decisions that incorporate GAL input as one of several determinative factors.[18]

The institutional respect accorded to GAL reports is evident across the legal system and across jurisdictions, with particular appreciation expressed by legal practitioners lacking specialized training in child development and family psychology.[19] Professional background diversity among GALs—including legal, educational, and psychological expertise—appears to correlate with effectiveness in the role.[20] Judicial observations suggest that manageable caseloads significantly impact GAL effectiveness, though current resource constraints make optimal caseload management increasingly difficult.

Judges explained that GALs are often appointed when parties cannot agree on parenting decisions, routines, or custody. Acting as neutral investigators and buffers, GALs mediate miscommunication and provide a balanced understanding of the family's circumstances. This is crucial in cases with self-represented litigants, who may not know what evidence to present. Judges emphasized that while attorneys may offer selective portrayals, GALs provide broader, more objective insights.

6.3 STRUCTURAL AND OPERATIONAL CHALLENGES

The independent contractor model currently structuring GAL services presents particular challenges for systemic efficiency and accountability. Research indicates minimal formal supervision and direction, with operations characterized as predominantly ad hoc and informally structured. Multiple stakeholders recommend implementation of enhanced oversight frameworks similar to the CASA system or comparable models in other jurisdictions, which could substantially improve GAL service quality and certification standards.

Judges described issues such as delays caused by late report submissions and the inefficiencies that arise when GAL findings are disputed. These disagreements can distract from core issues and prolong proceedings. Furthermore, judges indicated that there is significant inconsistency in the depth and quality of GAL reports. Some are thorough and helpful, while others are too brief to provide meaningful guidance. One judge specifically noted that non-attorney GALs may not fully grasp legal standards, which can compromise the reliability of their recommendations.

To improve consistency and accountability, judges suggested clearer standards for GAL reports and expanded training, particularly for non-attorney GALs to ensure they work within the relevant legal frameworks.

6.4 COURT DATA FINDINGS

In addition to the above observations, we also aimed to gain a bird's eye understanding of GALs' roles and impacts within the NH Court system utilizing quantitative data. By incorporating these analyses, we provide a broader perspective on trends and substantive effects. The focus of our analysis is on how a GAL may impact each individual case, and therefore the unit of analysis will be individual divorce and parenting petition cases.

This section also informs future data collection processes for the pilot program. We identify metrics that would have been beneficial to our analyses, and what may be missing that would advance future research. This is used to create a series of recommendations about how to develop data collection methods for the pilot program in Section 8 of our brief.

6.4.1 DATA COLLECTION METHODS

In order to collect the data, we worked with a Circuit Court Business Systems Analyst at the Circuit Court Administrative Office. The analyst pulled data from all of the family and circuit courts in NH. Our request included key variables in all divorce, separation, or parenting petition cases within the past 20 years, which were sent to our team in CSV format. For each variable or set of related variables, we were given a dataset with case numbers. We utilized these case numbers to merge the data and construct a singular, combined dataset for our analysis.

The variables requested from the Court included basic case information for all divorce and parenting petition cases like the Judge, Court, Case Type, Year, Parties/Age and Number of Children. We also asked for variables indicating whether a GAL was assigned to a case, the time to disposition for a specific case, the presence and structure of a parenting plan, and whether the case had an event code related to the GAL being paid through the GAL fund.

6.4.2 EXPLANATION OF DATASET

The data we received from the Court contained almost all the requested variables. Some fields like "judge" and "party age" were not available. The dataset contained several pages which were later merged into a master set. The first data set contained the case number, the case type, the filing date, the circuit court name, the court name, the original disposition type and description, the original disposition date, and the time to the original disposition, whether the case was reopened, the number of events on the case, and the number of children related to the case. The next page contained the case numbers for all the cases where there was an order appointing a GAL, and the date on which that order happened, which allowed us to know which divorce cases had a GAL attached to them. The next page similarly contained the case numbers for all the cases where there was a motion for payment from the GAL fund, and the date on which that order happened, which allowed us to know which GAL cases were state pay. The final page contained the case numbers of all the parenting plans created over the past 20 years and the date they were assigned, which gives us a view of how many parenting plans were created by case. For the pilot program, this data structure could potentially be streamlined, with all notable characteristics in one unified location.

In addition to the dataset, several caveats and necessary notes were included with the dataset from the court administrator. Notably, the court system has grown and evolved in various procedures and types of courts. According to the case notes, the "Superior Court had jurisdiction over marital cases until a Family Division location opened," and "most Family Divisions opened 2006-2013." Also of importance to our analysis is that more consistent disposition procedures were established in 2011, therefore cases disposed before 2011 may contain inconsistencies, outliers, and errors. Additionally, the motion for payment of GAL data may be incomplete. With regard to parenting plans, RSA 461-A went into effect in 2005, meaning that the form was created later that year, and the event code shortly after. Therefore, there is no data for parenting plan events prior to this time.

6.4.3 HYPOTHESES AND STATISTICAL TESTS

Our main hypothesis is that cases with GALs would be more effectively mediated, and therefore more streamlined. We measured the mediation and processing of cases in terms of the time to the original disposition, the rate of reopening of the case, the number of parenting plans on the case, and the number of events on the case. As shown in Figure 3, we hypothesize that cases with GAL assignments would have more agreements and therefore have faster times to their original disposition. Our next hypothesis is that the outcomes of these cases would be more stable, and therefore less likely to be reopened or have multiple parenting plans. Our final hypothesis is that following the 2011 GAL fund removal, there would be a markedly different legal ecosystem with the presence of fewer GALs.

Figure 3. Conceptual Framework of the Relationship Between GAL presence and our Dependent Outcome Variables
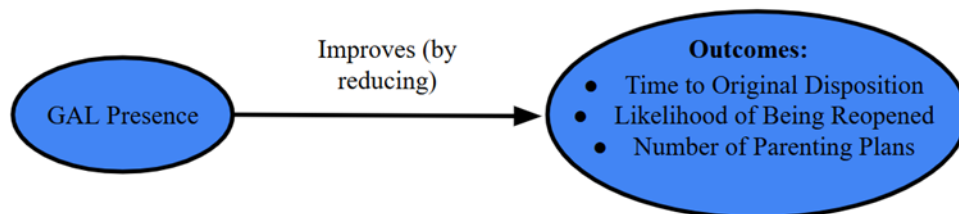
It is important to note that our analyses include all court cases from 2004 to 2024. During this time period, GALs were court appointed through the GAL fund through 2011 for indigent families in need but were also present in cases where families paid for the services throughout the entire time period (refer to Figure 2 above). In general, cases with GALs present represent more complicated cases and thus measuring the effect of GAL presence on our outcomes without controlling for case complexity may obfuscate the true effect of GALs on improving the efficiency of court case outcomes. We provide recommendations below on how to mitigate this during the pilot program.

6.4.4 TIME TO ORIGINAL DISPOSITION

To assess whether a GAL affects the time to the original disposition, we hypothesized that GAL assignment would lead to faster initial disposition time measured as fewer days to the initial disposition. We employed the statistical test, a t-test, to see whether there was a statistically significant difference, which compares the difference in means between two groups. The results of this t-test (as found in Figure 4) seem to contradict our hypothesis. The mean time to disposition in cases without a GAL was about 198 days. The mean time to disposition in cases with a GAL, however, was 416 days. This 218-day difference indicates that cases with GALs, on average, take a statistically significant ($p<.05$) longer time than cases without. However, we are not accounting for the complexity of the case in this test.

16

Figure 4: GAL Assignment and Mean Time to Disposition Graph
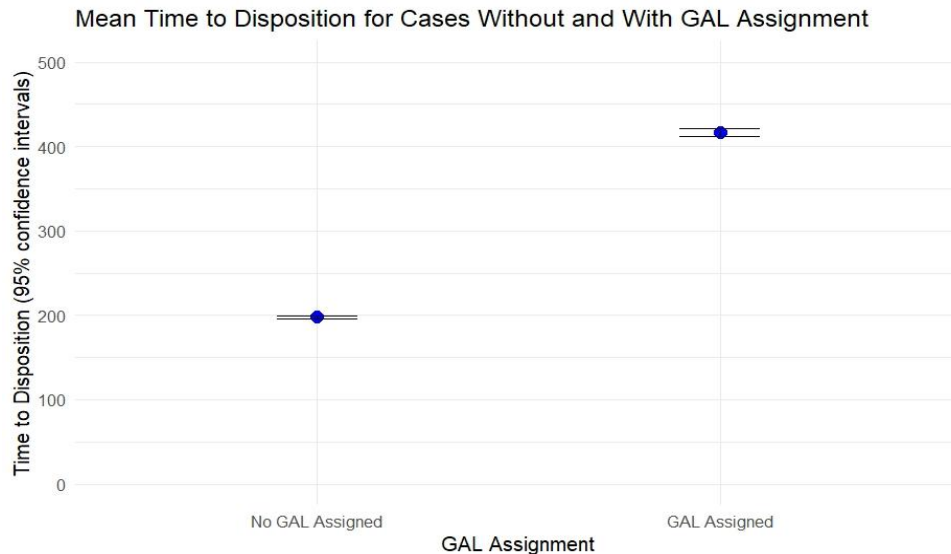
Source: Author Analysis of New Hampshire Court Data

We then conducted a multi-variate ordinary least squares (OLS) regression analysis. This type of analysis is used to understand the relationship between multiple independent variables and a dependent variable of interest (i.e., time to disposition in this case). By controlling for multiple independent variables, we can better isolate the true effect of our key independent variable (GAL assignment) controlling for other measures that are potentially associated with our dependent variable. The first model includes just the GALs presence variable. In model 2, we include as a control the number of events related to the case. In model 3, we add the additional control of the number of children related to the case. For ease of presentation, Appendix Table A adds the additional control for the court where the case was filed as Model 4. These controls were chosen because they are proxy indicators of the complexity of the case or can influence the time spent on the case. The results of this analysis (see Figure 5) show that our control variables reduce the effect of GAL appointment on the time to disposition, although cases with GALs take longer to disposition than cases without ($p<.001$). Overall, even when controlling for which court the case was filed in, the number of children within the family, or the number of filings (in Model 4, Appendix A), GAL presence was correlated with a statistically significant 95 days more time to disposition than cases without GALs. In Model 3, the R^2 value (.124) shows that 12 percent of the variation in time to disposition is explained by the variables in the model and indicates other factors not included in our model influence time to disposition. In Model 4, the R^2 value is .131.

17

Figure 5: Regression Analysis of GAL Assignment and Controls Predicting Time to Disposition

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
(Intercept)	197.667***	154.096***	146.573***
GAL Assigned	218.289***	100.069***	100.144***
Num Of Events On Case		1.144***	1.139***
Child Count At Filing			4.964***
Observations	106293	106293	106293
R²	0.075	0.124	0.124
Adjusted R²	0.075	0.124	0.124

Note: * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

Source: Authors calculations using New Hampshire Circuit and Family Court data

6.4.5 REOPENING

The relationship between GAL assignment and the rate of case reopening was also contrary to our expectation. We hypothesized that cases with GALs attached would have more stable outcomes, and, therefore less likely to be reopened. To test this, we again employed a difference in means t-test. The results indicate that cases with GALs assigned to them were, on average, more likely to be reopened. As seen in Figure 6, the mean reopening rate for cases without GALs was about 32 percent, while the mean reopening rate for cases with GALs was about 76 percent, indicating a higher reopening rate for cases with a GAL assigned.

Figure 6: GAL Assignment and Mean Reopening Rate Graph
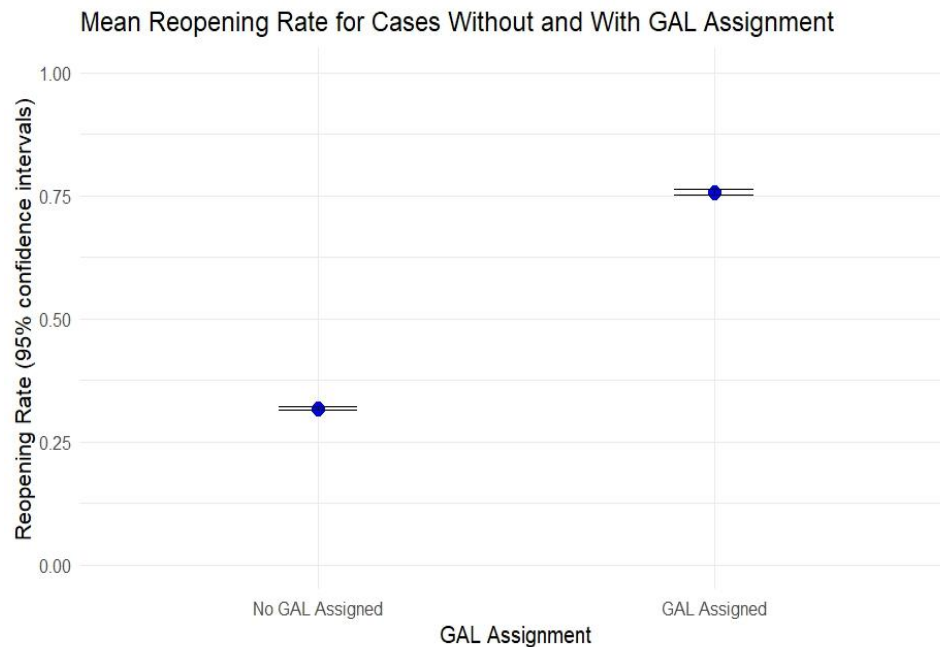
Source: Author Analysis of New Hampshire Court Data

Figure 7 presents another regression analysis, including the same controls as were previously included for the time to disposition model. As seen in Figure 7, while the controls mitigated the positive relationship between GAL assignment and case reopening, they did not eliminate the effect. With the controls, cases with GALs had a higher probability of reopening than cases without GALs, and this finding is statistically significant at the p<.001 level. Although the R^2 is higher in this regression (.245 in Model 3, .260 in Model 4 as seen in Appendix Table B), factors influencing reopening rates are excluded from the model. Appendix Table B includes controls for the court where the case was filed as Model 4.

Figure 7: Regression Analysis of GAL Assignment and Controls Predicting Reopening Rate

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
(Intercept)	0.317***	0.265***	0.179***
GAL Assigned	0.439***	0.436***	0.132***
Child Count At Filing		0.034***	0.016***
Num Of Events On Case			0.003***
Observations	106293	106293	106293
R²	0.117	0.120	0.245
Adjusted R²	0.117	0.120	0.245

Note: * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

Source: Authors calculations using New Hampshire Circuit and Family Court data

6.4.6 NUMBER OF PARENTING PLANS PER CASE

Similar to cases being reopened, we hypothesize that GALs would help create more lasting parenting plan agreements; we expect cases assigned a GAL will have fewer parenting plans associated with them on average. This is not to say that we expect cases with GALs to have 0 parenting plans, but rather that we expect individual cases to have less of a need to come back to court. However, like the previous hypotheses, the t-test and the regression model did not support this. As shown in Figure 8, the t-test showed a mean number of parenting plans for cases with no GAL of 1.3, whereas the mean number of parenting plans for cases with a GAL was 4.8.

Figure 8: GAL Assignment and Mean Number of Parenting Plans Graph
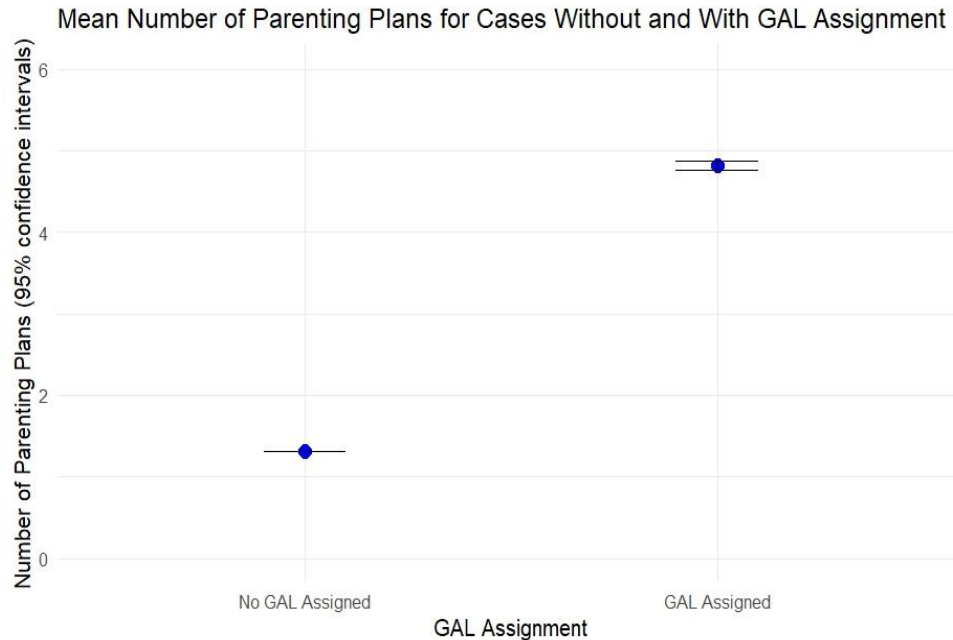
Source: Author Analysis of New Hampshire Court Data

We include the same controls as in previous regression models. As shown in Figure 9, the controls reduced the extent to which cases with a GAL predicted a higher number of parenting plans in half. However, they did not eliminate the effect. Model 3 indicates 1.387 more court filings with cases with GALs than those cases without, a decrease from 3.500 (Model 4 in Appendix Table C shows 1.250 more court filing). This result is statistically significant at p<.001. The R² is .330 in Model 3, (.343 in Model 4 as seen in Appendix Table C), indicating that factors influencing reopening rates are excluded from the model.

Figure 9: Regression Analysis of GAL Assignment and Controls Predicting Number of Parenting Plans

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
(Intercept)	1.313***	1.167***	0.620***
GAL Assigned	3.500***	3.491***	1.387***
Child Count At Filing		0.094***	-0.055***
Num Of Events On Case			0.016***
Observations	157623	157623	157623
R²	0.164	0.164	0.330
Adjusted R²	0.164	0.164	0.330

Note: * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

Source: Authors calculations using New Hampshire Circuit and Family Court data

20

Overall, these analyses show that our controls mitigated the effect of GALs on our court case outcomes, reducing the effect of GALs in half for all three outcome variables. Although contrary to our expectations, the effect of GALs remained statistically significant and showed a positive correlation with longer time to disposition, higher reopening rates, and higher number of parenting plans. We believe that our models lack a robust measure of case complexity and thus GAL assignment may be showing a spurious association. In future analysis, it will be important to include a robust measure of case complexity.

6.4.7 TIME ANALYSIS

Our next analysis aims to evaluate whether there were any substantial differences in the total number of events related to divorce and parenting petition cases before and after the 2011 GAL fund elimination. To mitigate the effect of new cases having less time to have significant events (i.e. reopening, new parenting plans, simply not yet concluding), the analysis was limited to 5 years before and after the removal of the fund. The year 2012 is considered the first year without the fund present. Limiting the analysis to these 10 years also reduced the effect of changing culture both generally and within the Court. We hypothesize that because of the GAL fund's elimination, cases after 2011 would on average, be more likely to have higher rates of reopening, more parenting plans, and a longer time to disposition because of less robust GAL presence in the system.

To test differences, we used three t-tests, which are visualized in Figure 10. The mean time to disposition in the years preceding the fund removal was about 309 days, whereas afterwards it was 252 days. The mean reopening rate was about 60 percent before the fund removal, and 48 percent after 2011. Finally, the mean number of parenting plans before the fund removal was about 2.9, whereas 1.7 plans were created on average after. Our hypotheses were not supported in these three tests, as the mean values for each of these variables were statistically significantly contrary to our expectations.

Figure 10: Time Period Analyses Graph
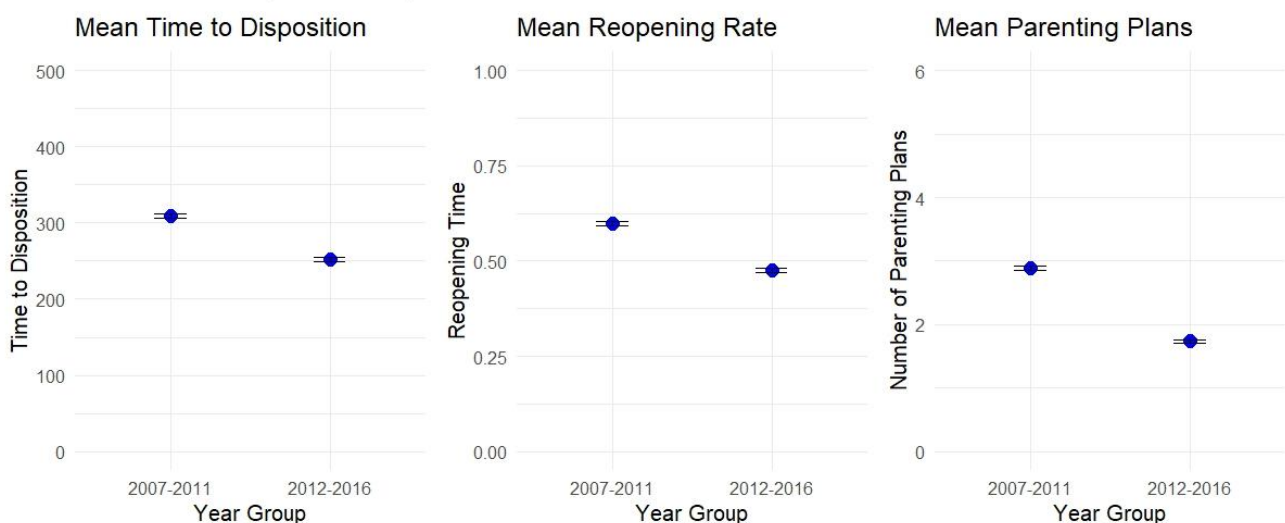
6.4.8 QUANTITATIVE DATA CONCLUSIONS:

Our quantitative results do not support our original hypotheses. There does not seem to be substantial evidence in the data that indicates a relationship between GAL appointments and reduced numbers of parenting plans, case reopening, or time to disposition. The relationship seems, in many respects, to be going in the opposite direction given the data available in the court system. However, we contend that there is omitted variable bias as indicated by our R^2 value and in particular we believe we lack a robust measure of case complexity. Therefore, we do not think GALs increase these outcome measures but rather cases with GALs appointed are already more complex, difficult, or unstable. Although some controls for the complexity and difficulty of cases were included in our models, these are only vague indicators. GAL assignment itself is associated with cases where it is difficult to ascertain the situation. Furthermore, many of the GAL attached cases include families with the resources to pay for services. This may also mean they have more resources (both monetary and time) to pursue drawn-out or complex cases in court. Overall, judges have a much better idea of the complexities that are less easily ascertained by these court data variables. With this in mind, we present a new conceptual framework taking into account case complexity in Figure 11.

This analysis highlights the need for more qualitative feedback in any future study of the topic. Additionally, more measures and data points, particularly those related to case complexity, are needed to understand the true relationship between having a GAL on a case, and more broadly how a GAL fund could improve case and child outcomes. Further, while the analyses here indicate that Court processing times may be more efficient without GALs, these data should not be mistaken to indicate the impacts of GAL appointments for outcomes at the child and family level. Future data initiatives as discussed in Section 8.1 could more effectively evaluate the outcomes of justice served in these cases. Such studies would provide a true evaluation of the subjective perceptions GALs, Court administrators and judges hold about GAL efficacy for cases and families.

Figure 11. Updated Conceptual Framework of Relationships Between GAL Assignment and Dependent Variables
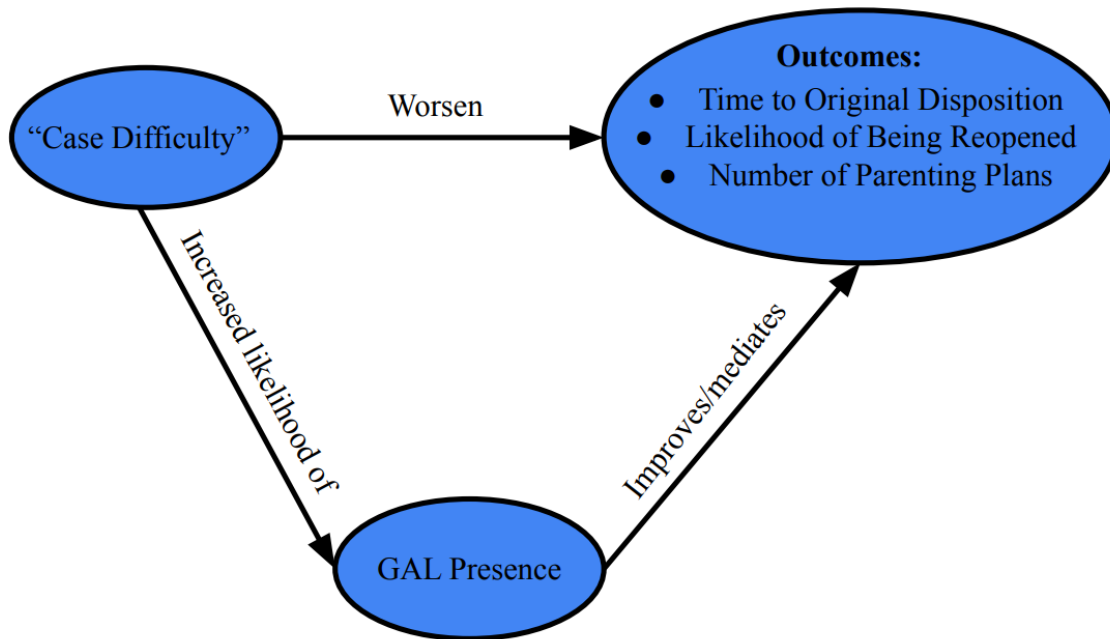
7   STATE COMPARISON FINDINGS

In this section, we examine the GAL systems of several other comparable states, along with the relative advantages and disadvantages of each program. Using background research and interview findings, we present each state in comparison to New Hampshire. This analysis informed a set of potential recommendations for the pilot program as well as for the GAL system in New Hampshire as a whole.

7.1 MASSACHUSETTS

Massachusetts emerged as an essential state of comparison, especially given that multiple NH GAL interviewees contrasted New Hampshire's system with Massachusetts'. Massachusetts shares a border as well as a significant cultural and economic exchange with New Hampshire, meaning policies may be more easily adapted across contexts. GALs described Massachusetts as having "incredibly comprehensive trainings" and "all-day workshops with some amazing presenters." One Massachusetts GAL described their system as having standardized training, with "four conferences a year" and regular and accessible GAL trainings.

The GAL system in Massachusetts separates the GAL role into several different types. The type most equivalent to its New Hampshire counterpart is a Category E GAL, who acts as an investigator who gives reports to the court on a narrowly defined issue.[21] Massachusetts currently has a program for low-income families to have Category E GALs appointed to cases and paid for

by the state. Similar to New Hampshire, custody agreements are made and signed by the judge with the best interest of the child in mind.[22]

Massachusetts has a very defined system of training and reports, owing to their chapter of the Association of Family and Conciliation Courts (AFCC).[23] This defined system came out of years of work building up concrete systems of guidelines. In this process, limited standards developed into more programs for training, report writing, and interviewing.[24] The Massachusetts Association of Guardians ad Litem (MAGAL) had a large role in this change as well. Currently, MAGAL and AFCC co-host a training program each year with judges present. These trainings aid in addressing issues arising with GAL work, and aid GALs in crafting their reports.[25] Alongside this rise in more defined training and procedures, the GAL pool in the state also changed from being composed primarily of psychologists to now mostly legal professionals.[26] Having a strong board in MAGAL and well-structured training from the AFCC also allows for GALs to provide feedback to the court on issues they face.[27]

Interviewees reported that the report writing recommended by the AFCC can lead to GAL reports that are long and difficult to compose. Some GALs report that this means they are unable to be paid for some components of their work. Purportedly, some GALs (none of whom were interviewed) are even "intimidated" by the amount they need to write. Judges vary in the ways they interpret and follow the findings of the report,[28] though there was a consensus that the report findings are highly respected and valued.

GALs in Massachusetts are required to do a certain amount of state pay cases each year. The judges receive their name from the list of Category E GAL and offer cases where the families cannot pay to the GAL.[29] One GAL reported issues with the payments through the court, including a lack of knowledge of the payment system within court bureaucracy which leads to difficulties in disbursing funds.[30]

Several elements of the Massachusetts GAL system could potentially be carried over to New Hampshire. This may include general improvements to the GAL system with closer ties to the AFCC, more comprehensive training, and more frequent communication. Including the above elements may improve the effectiveness of the money being spent by the state on GAL programs, including the pilot program.

7.2 MINNESOTA

Minnesota and New Hampshire are demographically similar in certain aspects. Economic indicators like the median income ($87,556 in MN, and $95,628 in NH) and poverty rate (9.3 percent in MN, and 7.2 percent in NH) are quite similar between the two states. Minnesota, however, is less densely populated and has a much larger population.[31] Minnesota does not have a 2022 divorce rate as supplied by the CDC.[32]

Minnesota custody law also examines the "best interest of a child" through Minnesota Statute *§518.17 (2024)*, which outlines various metrics through which the court conducts such evaluations. Many of these metrics are similar to what is found in NH Statute § 461-A:6 (2024), which also details metrics for the best interests of the child in determining parental rights and responsibilities. Both states overlap in prioritizing the health of the child and the parents' ability

to supply consistent care. Additionally, they consider the capacity of each parent to adequately share in custody of the child. The two states also note the presence of domestic abuse as a determining factor in deciding parental placement. Most of the differences between the statutes relate to the exact wording of these broader themes. Minnesota is somewhat more centered on the child's needs whereas the New Hampshire statute focuses more on parental capacity.

The Minnesota GAL system functions very differently from that of New Hampshire, in part because a Minnesota GAL functions somewhat differently than a New Hampshire GAL. New Hampshire employs a contractor model, where the New Hampshire office of Professional Licensure and Certification oversees the Guardian ad Litem Board. The Guardian ad Litem Board then certifies GAL. Minnesota, by contrast, is more centralized.[33] The Minnesota Guardian ad Litem Board acts similarly to the Minnesota Board of Public Defense, in that it is essentially a nonprofit operating within the government. There is an executive director who reports directly to the Board, whose 7 members are appointed by the Governor and the Minnesota Supreme Court. In their position, members make recommendations to the court and are a stakeholder on major issues. This also means that the Board has a budget set by the state.[34]

Experts report discrepancies in the availability of GALs across MN districts, which may relate more to geographic challenges than to the structure of the GAL system.[35] There is not necessarily a shortage of GALs in MN on a state-wide level, however in many areas there are some pay-related vacancies and challenges. Stakeholders reported that people sometimes leave the program for higher-paying roles in county child protective services.[36]

Minnesota transitioned to a stronger board model in 2010, and the transition is still ongoing and evolving.[37] The Minnesota model used to involve GALs as contractors under the judicial branch, and now they are direct employees.[38] One noted benefit of the shift from independent contractors to employees was an increased capacity to direct and follow the work of GALs. Purportedly, these changes also increased the quality and accountability of GAL services. The Board also improved the speed at which evolution and adaptation can take place, which is aided by a diversity in perspectives. Furthermore, at the beginning of the new GAL system, there were difficulties with low wages and funding. These problems continue to persist now, to a lesser extent.[39] Tensions between the statutes defining Minnesota GALs and the construction of the GAL program exist within the new system, however.[40]

Years after the transition to the board model, in 2018, the Minnesota Office of the Legislative Auditor (OLA) investigated the GAL system and found that there were deficiencies in the operation of the program.[43] Key findings included (but were not limited to): a lack of clarity in the GAL role, a dearth in consistent standards, an unclear complaint resolution process, and workforce shortages. Recommendations included: clarifying and formalizing guidelines for GALs, working more with the legislature on funding and financial oversight, and formalizing the complaint resolution process. This report led to many improvements within the MN GAL system, including a learning management system to track GAL training progress, as well as a case management system to better monitor GAL activities in 2019. Additionally, in 2020, the MN GAL Board was successful in its effort to work with the legislature to improve funding, allowing it to hire more staff to handle the rising caseload.[44] These reports highlight the capacity and

ability of the Board in being more accountable to the public and nimble enough to enact changes in concrete ways.

The Minnesota GAL Board collects data on GAL activity. The system is primarily used to evaluate GAL performance and includes metrics for court report compliance, court attendance, and child contacts. This data is primarily used to track GAL compliance, and not to assess the effectiveness of GAL programs.[42]

The Minnesota GAL Board model has allowed for more oversight and accountability within the GAL system. The training and monitoring of GALs has ostensibly improved service and allowed for more growth and improvement overall. While New Hampshire is a smaller state, there may be benefits to creating a board that operates in a similar way. This method could improve outcomes per public dollar spent as well as provide data on the impact of public funds for GAL programs in a more concrete manner.

7.3 MAINE

Maine offers another instructive model for guardian ad litem services that could inform New Hampshire's program. Maine's structure provides insights on consistency in training, oversight, and accountability, addressing several challenges currently facing New Hampshire's GAL program.

The Maine GAL system requires all GALs to hold either an approved mental health professional license or an attorney's license.[45] Those interested in serving in Family Matters (Title 19-A) or Probate (Title 18-C) cases must complete an 18-hour training, while those working in Child Protection (Title 22) cases must undergo a 23-hour training.[46] This training is provided by the Administrative Office of the Courts and the Maine State Bar Association and occurs over a four or five day period, covering relevant statutes, child development, trauma-informed advocacy, mental health, substance abuse, and court procedures. Once listed on the roster, GALs must complete at least six hours of approved continuing professional education annually. Additionally, they must accept at least one pro bono or reduced-fee case referral from the Maine Judicial Branch each year to maintain their status.[47]

The compensation for GALs depends on the source of payment. According to Rule 5, section (k)(1), GALs whose fees are paid by private parties are compensated at an hourly or flat rate determined by the court's Order for Appointment of Guardian ad Litem.[48] If a GAL is paid with state or county funds, they must complete necessary reporting forms for time and billing.[49] GALs appointed to serve pro bono are still required to file a final invoice documenting the hours worked on the case. All other GALs are paid according to the appointment order or in line with JB-05-05.[50]

The maximum number of reimbursable hours and fee amount is set by the presiding judicial officer after consulting the parties and is specified in the court's appointment order. If a GAL exceeds the approved hours, they must obtain court approval, which must be reflected in an amended order using the judicial branch's approved form.[51] The maximum hours allowed vary based on the type of hearing. For example, according to JB-05-05, as amended on July 30, 2020, a GAL may be reimbursed for up to 10 hours for a summary preliminary hearing and up to 20

hours for a termination of parental rights hearing. GALs paid by the judicial branch receive the same hourly rate as attorneys appointed to represent parents in child protection cases, which is currently $150 per hour.[52]

A central component of Maine's system is the Guardian ad Litem Review Board, which operates under the authority of the Maine Supreme Judicial Court. Consisting of eight rostered GALs and four public members, the Board is responsible for establishing and enforcing professional standards, investigating complaints, and maintaining a roster of GALs eligible for appointment. The Board's oversight helps ensure a high level of professionalism and accountability, reducing concerns about inconsistent practices. Similarly, the New Hampshire Guardian ad Litem Board oversees credentialing and discipline of New Hampshire's GALs.

In Maine, cases under the Child and Family Services and Child Protection Act must have a GAL funded by the court. However, for parenting and divorce cases, pursuant to Title 22, section 4105, subsection 1, "indigent legal services" do not include the services of a GAL. As such, the Maine Commission on Indigent Legal Services, which provides representation to indigent criminal defendants, juvenile defendants, and children and parents in child protective cases, does not fund GAL services.[53] Thus, similar to New Hampshire, Maine occasionally cannot fund GAL placements for indigent families. However, according to the Maine GAL we interviewed—who helped draft the state's GAL legislation and currently serves on the Review Board—the expectation that lawyers perform pro bono work, combined with the requirement to complete pro bono cases for GAL roster renewal, has contributed to a culture in which the GAL community perceives less of a "two-tier" system than what was described by GALs in New Hampshire.

In summary, while both states face challenges in funding GAL services for indigent families, Maine's integration of pro bono requirements helps mitigate disparities in access to representation. New Hampshire could potentially benefit from adopting elements of Maine's system, particularly in strengthening training programs, enhancing oversight mechanisms, and fostering a culture of pro bono service.

7.4 VERMONT

Vermont presents an alternative structural model for GAL services with potential applications to New Hampshire's program redesign efforts. In contrast to New Hampshire's professional contractor approach for parenting and divorce cases, Vermont employs a solely volunteer-centered framework administered through professional coordination within the Vermont Judiciary infrastructure.[54] Although the Vermont GAL program largely focuses on cases relating to child abuse or child neglect, the volunteer recruitment, training education, and hierarchical structure can inform potential changes for the NH program.

A distinguishing organizational characteristic of Vermont's program is its regional coordinator system. These paid, professional coordinators serve as intermediaries providing supervision, support, and procedural guidance to volunteer GALs throughout their jurisdictions. Vermont maintains multiple distinct regional coordinator positions responsible for defined geographical service areas, ensuring comprehensive statewide coverage. Each coordinator manages between 30-45 volunteer GALs, allowing for effective oversight and individualized support. This hierarchical structure ensures consistent implementation of standards and practices across

Vermont's predominantly rural geography, which shares significant demographic and geographic characteristics with New Hampshire. Interviews with two Vermont GALs both revealed the importance of this regional coordinator position in the success of the program, as they serve as a direct, easily accessible point of contact for GALs. Both interviewees indicated that their regional coordinator aids recruitment efforts by holding information sessions for prospective GALs. These coordinators also connect GALs with new cases and conduct regular meetings for GALs.

The GAL program has no requirements for its volunteers; anyone, regardless of education level, can undergo training. Prospective GALs must complete a virtual, no-cost, three-day training focused on child abuse and child neglect cases.[55] After the training, they must shadow an experienced GAL through a case. One GAL highlighted that the regional coordinator plays an active role in pairing new GALs with a mentor to support their required shadowing and mentorship training—an approach that contrasts with reports from New Hampshire GALs who noted they had to secure a mentor on their own. Additionally, Vermont requires GALs to complete hours of continuing education annually to maintain certification, with training opportunities consistently available through the court system's educational infrastructure. The Vermont GAL interviewees highlighted the success of another training opportunity, the Annual Guardian ad Litem Conference, which gives GALs the opportunity to gain advice from and build connections with other Vermont GALs.

Volunteer recruitment and retention strategies constitute another noteworthy element of Vermont's approach. The program employs targeted community engagement initiatives, including collaboration with community organizations, educational institutions, and professional associations. One interviewed GAL indicated that she found the GAL program through a television advertisement. Another GAL found the program through a public radio broadcast.[56] Recruitment materials emphasize the opportunity for meaningful community service while providing carefully structured support systems for volunteers. This includes regular group meetings, advanced training opportunities, and recognition events acknowledging volunteer contributions. These elements collectively enhance volunteer satisfaction and program retention rates.

Efficient resource allocation is apparent in Vermont's operational model. While New Hampshire has experienced a dramatic 76 percent reduction in available GALs, Vermont has maintained relative stability in its advocate numbers, despite comparable fiscal constraints. The Vermont program currently maintains approximately 250 active volunteer GALs statewide, providing services in approximately 1,400 cases annually across family, probate, and criminal proceedings involving minors. This volunteer-based approach demonstrates sustainable service delivery despite limited financial resources, with program costs primarily directed toward professional coordinator salaries and training infrastructure rather than case-specific compensation.

Procedural standardization represents a significant programmatic strength. Vermont utilizes uniform protocols for GAL appointment, case assignment, and court reporting. Court appointment orders clearly delineate GAL responsibilities, timelines, and reporting requirements. The program employs standardized report templates designed to ensure comprehensive coverage of relevant factors while maintaining focus on best interest determinations. This standardization

enhances both efficiency and effectiveness of GAL interventions while reducing procedural variability across jurisdictions within the state.

While wholesale adoption of Vermont's volunteer-centered model may present implementation challenges given New Hampshire's historical structure and institutional framework, strategic incorporation of specific elements—particularly regional coordination mechanisms, standardized mentorship and training protocols, and volunteer recruitment methodologies—could substantially enhance New Hampshire's existing system.

8   RECOMMENDATIONS

In this final section of results, we synthesize our research findings across methodologies to provide recommendations regarding the future of the GAL program in New Hampshire, both in the immediate term for the upcoming pilot and in the longer term.

8.1 PILOT RECOMMENDATIONS

Understanding the impact of GAL assignments to cases is critical to forming a better understanding of cost-benefit tradeoffs and determining future resource allocations for GALs in the state of New Hampshire. As discussed in Section 6.4, establishing a clear benefit of GAL assignments to families and to the Court is challenging with existing data. While judges and child welfare advocates often note their utility, we did not find a study that could quantitatively measure the benefits to child welfare of having a GAL attached to a case during our literature review.

The pilot project offers an opportunity to causally evaluate the ways in which state funding for GALs impacts families, including through stability in parenting plans, consistent child support payments and increased parental engagement, and the Court. Such a study could also provide solidified evidence of any program benefits and thereby help when crafting legislative funding priorities. Across several interviews, stakeholders noted that a primary challenge to studying GAL impacts under normal conditions is random assignment and the creation of a control group. For an experimental study to have validity, and be able to establish causal relationships between concepts, there needs to be an experimental group and a control group for which all other variables are held equal. Judges exercise discretion in GAL assignments and, given limited or non-existent public funds, may only assign them in cases with the greatest perceived need for ethical reasons. These cases where judges assign GALs appear to be those with more complexity. To assess the efficacy of GALs, it is important to compare cases of similar complexity with and without GALs assigned. Given underlying priors about GAL efficacy, judges may similarly be unable or unwilling to withhold GALs from pertinent cases. This makes it hard to ordinarily evaluate the impact of a GAL as separate from factors causing the assignment in the first place. Given the finite nature of the funding, the pilot poses fewer barriers to ethically conduct a true experimental evaluation while maintaining validity through preserving judicial discretion. All research, however, must continue to account for privacy concerns when it comes to analyzing the impacts of a GAL intervention in court. Actions such as interviews, obtaining financial information, or asking for records and documentation, can potentially intrude on families already experiencing a traumatic event and should be approached with care and consent.

The recommendations below specifically relate to GAL appointments and data collection during the pilot. They are driven by best social science practices for experimental design to evaluate the effects of providing GAL funds for indigent families and, therefore, the efficacy of the pilot. The below aims to support the collection of data that would allow researchers to draw a link between GAL assignment and case outcomes (whether positive or negative) and assist in crafting legislative funding priorities.

8.1.1 PILOT DESIGN AND GAL APPOINTMENT PROTOCOLS

The most important element in designing the pilot for ultimate evaluation is to preserve randomization of the treatment – i.e. the funded appointment of a GAL. This randomization will provide the cleanest comparison between the "treated" and "non-treated" to determine the efficacy of GALs for indigent families across a range of metrics. In practice, this means separating the decision to appoint a GAL (and the judicial discretion associated therewith) from the actual appointment. In other words, the goal is to identify the effects of judges' GAL (non-) appointments across cases that receive and do not receive a GAL.

In practice, we strongly recommend that appointment procedures in all four pilot courts proceed in two stages. In the first stages, all judges indicate a decision to appoint or not appoint a GAL for cases both with and without indigent families (i.e., for all cases that come before the judge). In the second stage, for those cases with indigent families, the Court would use a randomized coin flip to determine whether to fund the GAL or not until pilot funds run out. This can be done electronically in an excel file, for example, or manually. In the eventual analysis, this means there will be a group of cases for whom a GAL would have been appointed with unlimited funds, creating a best case for comparison.

If the pilot were to proceed by appointing GALs in all cases in which judges request them until funds run out, there would only be second-best methods of evaluating how cases that did not receive a GAL would have fared had judges wished and been able to appoint a GAL funded by the Court.

Although the proposed method of randomization may suggest a withholding of GALs from cases in which the services are perceived to be critical, the pilot will already provide GALs to those cases which would not ordinarily receive them randomly (i.e. before or after funds run out), and our proposed method could therefore be equally justified. If the above is infeasible, there are certain second-best practices that could be implemented to allow for alternative analyses.

There are two other design considerations that would allow for the most effective analysis as feasible for the Court. First, it would be most helpful if judges in any or all other courts not part of the pilot were to also indicate cases that would merit a GAL appointment (regardless of indigent family status) during the pilot period. This would allow further comparison and help address potential concerns that the pilot courts have fundamentally different dynamics. Second, if possible, judges' decisions about appointment of a GAL in Stage 1 would ideally occur prior to the judge having information about whether parties are indigent (i.e. "need-blind" appointment).

8.1.2 PILOT DATA COLLECTION

To facilitate the analyses rendered possible from the above design, certain metrics and data will need to be collected during the pilot in addition to those that are standardly collected by the Court in such proceedings. These would need to be established as part of the reporting infrastructure in advance of the pilot commencing. To streamline processes described in Section 6.4, the Court may wish to create a separate repository for all pilot program data, including the new metrics discussed below as well as those already collected (i.e. the stability of parenting plans, the rates of child support payments, Judge, Court, Case Type, Year, Parties/Age and Number of Children, and the number of event codes related to the case). Importantly, the dataset should include all divorce cases during the period regardless of the Court location, GAL appointment status or whether the family qualifies as indigent.

1. **Appointment Metrics**
   a. *Qualitative Reasoning from the Judge:* For each case, the judge should indicate in one sentence or paragraph within the case file the reasoning behind their decision to appoint or not appoint a GAL, allowing for qualitative coding.
   b. *Complexity Scores from the Judge:* One of the largest barriers to study in the original data section was understanding what cases were more complex and thus would take longer, be more likely to have a less stable parenting plan, and encounter more ex-parte proceedings. This was difficult, because cases that are more complicated are typically more nebulous, potentially leading to GAL assignment by a judge looking to better understand the case. While loose indicators like the number of filings on a case exist and have been shown to partially mitigate the assignment paradox of GAL cases being less stable, they are ultimately only rough indicators. Without clear ways of assessing case difficulty on a quantitative level, quantitative findings from this study will either be counterintuitive or simply incorrect. Thus, it could be beneficial to have judges give a "score" of case complexity for cases in which they do and do not assign a GAL. The scale would be 1 to 5 with 5 indicating the most complex cases. It will be important to consider that such a score invites certain kinds of biases and variation across actors, and that judges may align scores with a perceived threshold for GAL appointment.
2. *Demographic Data*
   a. *Financial Information for Parties:* While the Court may be constrained in information it can collect, any financial information about the parties would help analyses aimed at, among other things, a) understanding patterns of GAL appointments in unconstrained funding environments, b) how demographics shape the efficacy of GAL appointments for case outcomes and c) whether there is an income threshold of efficacy. We specifically recommend that the Court collect a measure of yearly income as a first priority as well as net assets if possible.
   a. *Demographic Information for Parties:* While the Court may be constrained in information it can collect, any demographic data (i.e. age, race, gender, urban-rural classification, and education) would help elucidate potential factors impacting GAL assignment, case complexity and case outcomes. Further, GAL biases and assumptions could potentially impact their work. These data would

allow future researchers to control for demographic factors to isolate the impact of the funded GAL.

3. **Outcomes Data**
   a. For the Court/GALs
      i. *Specific GAL Attached to Case:* Across interviews there were references to large variations in the quality of GAL work and reports. The effect, therefore, of having a GAL assigned to these cases may vary based on the specific GAL. To account for this effect in the study of the pilot program, it will therefore be important to track the cases that have been assigned to each GAL through the inclusion of a measure indicating the name of the GAL.
      ii. *Judicial Satisfaction with GAL Report:* For reasons similar to the above, judges could rate GAL reports from very unsatisfactory to very satisfactory as a measure of quality and efficacy on a scale of 1 to 5 with 5 being very satisfactory.
      iii. *GAL Fund Withdrawals:* The Court could track the amounts of withdrawals from the GAL fund and the dates associated with these withdrawals. This metric would provide a) another potential measure of GAL efficacy through hours spent over the course of each case and b) a method of tracking any issues arising with payment processes, which current GALs have indicated to be an existing challenge.
   b. For the Parties/Children
      i. *Party/Parent Experience Survey:* Although Court processing metrics provide one view of justice served for parties in divorced parenting cases, any analysis should also forefront those who have lived experience with the program. Such a survey would help tease out experiences, procedural vs. substantive perceptions of justice and trust in the Court. With a relatively limited commitment of resources compared to linking administrative data (see below), the Court could investigate the efficacy of the pilot for those it serves. Judges interviewed indicated a concern that case outcomes impact how parties view the role of the GAL and therefore that individuals may conflate court experiences with case success. Nonetheless, through a question on the resolution of individuals' cases, it would be possible to better observe this possible dynamic. Further, research could compare the experiences of those with and without a GAL assignment even amidst the subgroup of those experiencing a negative case outcome. Further, if GAL assignments were to create more conflict for some or all parties, this would be worth knowing to inform ongoing resource commitments.
      ii. *Domestic Violence Cases:* Domestic violence is of critical importance when considering any issues regarding the wellbeing of children and families. Thus, when studying child welfare systems, such as family court, and the impact of any interventions such as GALs funding, it is critical to examine any overlay with domestic violence. For example, the Court could enable matching of case parties with filed orders of protection.

       iii.   *Other Court and Administrative Data:* Although challenging, the Court could consider other ways in which to link parties involved in divorce proceedings with other Court data (i.e. other cases appearing before the Court) or administrative data (i.e. Department of Education absence rates) to further contextualize the longer-term impacts of GALs/case resolution on family and child wellbeing.

8.1.3 OTHER PILOT RECOMMENDATIONS

Several other short-term recommendations emerged from our research, which could help ensure the successful implementation of the pilot for all system stakeholders.

1. **Interview GALs associated with the districts**
   a. One of the most important stakeholders in this pilot study is the GALs themselves. The extent to which they feel like this program supports them is critically important to whether instituting a GAL fund long-term will substantially impact recruitment and retention. Additionally, conversations with GALs will help answer questions regarding how to streamline bureaucratic procedures and whether cases with indigent families were substantively different in ways that require system modifications to better accommodate them.
2. **Discuss potential benefits with judges and legal administrators involved in the pilot program**
   a. To fully understand the reasoning and metrics behind the decisions made by the pilot program judges, it is important to discuss how they view the role of GALs and the program's benefits. Understanding their judicial prerogatives is important to understanding why a GAL may have been assigned, and how judges view them and their reports. Such conversations will help future researchers better frame the qualitative and quantitative data they collect.
3. **Examine the broader impact on the family legal system**
   a. From interviews with GALs and other legal professionals in New Hampshire, it is clear that the removal of the GAL fund did not just impact GALs, but the legal system more broadly. Any analysis of reinstating funds should thus account for potential positive or negative ripple effects on the larger community.
4. **Enable court clerks to effectively distribute funds**
   a. In states that had programs to fund GALs for indigent families, such as Massachusetts, our research revealed issues with withdrawal from the fund. The difficulties of navigating this process with the clerks were such that one GAL decided that it was not worth their time. Training and resources for timely payment may be crucial to system sustainability.

8.2 LONG-TERM RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on our interview and case study findings, we also provide several longer-term recommendations for New Hampshire's GAL program and any potential reinstated GAL fund. These focus primarily on sustaining GAL effectiveness through improved training, recruitment

and retention infrastructures within the state as well as better communication of expectations across the Court and GAL communities.

1. **Establish a structured, accessible training program**
   ○ Create a basic "GAL 101" training course for new GALs
   ○ Develop regular continuing education opportunities
   ○ Partner with existing institutions (UNH, Granite State College) to facilitate training
   ○ Include specialized training on domestic violence, abuse, and child development
2. **Improve administrative processes**
   ○ Create a dedicated liaison position between GALs and the court system
   ○ Standardize payment procedures across courts
   ○ Ensure clear communication about certification requirements
   ○ Establish a centralized system for assigning pro bono or funded GAL cases
   ○ Create clear systems of data collection and accountability for GAL activity
3. **Implement regular communication mechanisms**
   ○ Create meetings at regular intervals between GALs, judges, and court administrators
   ○ Include court clerks in discussions about processes and procedures
   ○ Establish a feedback system for continuous improvement
4. **Develop clear metrics to evaluate GAL effectiveness**
   ○ Track settlement rates for cases with GALs versus those without
   ○ Measure court time saved through GAL interventions
   ○ Monitor family satisfaction and child wellbeing outcomes
   ○ Assess the complexity of cases using a standardized scale
5. **Diversify the GAL pool**
   ○ Actively recruit mental health professionals
   ○ Create pathways for social workers and therapists to become GALs
   ○ Ensure interdisciplinary training that benefits both attorney and non-attorney GALs
   ○ Consider integration of volunteer GALs with paid regional coordinators
6. **Review and update GAL report requirements**
   ○ Consider eliminating mandatory preliminary reports when unnecessary
   ○ Establish clear guidelines for report length and content
   ○ Allow for supplemental reports rather than completely new ones when circumstances change
7. **Ensure sustainable funding**
   ○ Consider restructuring fee caps
   ○ Set regular cost-of-living adjustments for GAL rates
   ○ Based on results of the pilot, create a dedicated funding source for indigent GAL services
8. **Consider alternative models for GAL employment, monitoring, and training**
   ○ Investigate the possibility of a New Hampshire chapter of the AFCC
   ○ Investigate the possibility of alternative models similar to the Minnesota GAL Board

9 CONCLUSIONS

In this brief, we have utilized stakeholder interviews, quantitative analyses and case studies to evaluate the current state of the New Hampshire GAL system in anticipation of the upcoming pilot program. We present findings on funding and economic equity issues, given the current lack of a GAL fund for indigent families. We also detail various challenges GALs face, which impact recruitment and retention across the system. In our analysis of GAL-Court interactions, quantitative data and interviews yield mixed results on the extent to which GALs improve case outcomes. We present several case studies of GAL programs in comparable states, which provide a roadmap for new GAL policies in New Hampshire. Finally, we discuss, among other short and long-term recommendations, how future experimental research and evaluations are needed to more clearly determine the impacts of GAL assignments on cases, court functioning, and family and child wellbeing.

While compensation rates have improved, administrative barriers, inconsistent training, and a lack of organized communication continue to challenge the NH GAL system. Looking to neighboring states provides valuable models for improvement: Massachusetts offers structured training and accountability measures; Maine demonstrates the importance of settlement-focused GALs; and Vermont's volunteer-based regional coordinator model presents an alternative approach to addressing GAL shortages and standardizing training. Vermont's system is particularly relevant given New Hampshire's similar rural demographics and judicial challenges. Implementing elements of Vermont's regional coordinator structure could help address the training inconsistencies and support needs identified by New Hampshire GALs, while potentially expanding the pool of available advocates through a hybrid professional-volunteer model. Additionally, we learned from Minnesota that a more centralized and empowered GAL board could potentially bring about efficiency improvements.

The pilot program in four New Hampshire courts offers an opportunity to implement selected recommendations and evaluate their effectiveness before a potential statewide reinstatement of the fund. By addressing the issues identified in our interviews—particularly around training, administration, communication, and efficacy metrics—and by incorporating successful elements from neighboring states, New Hampshire can develop a GAL program that effectively serves all families, regardless of income, and ultimately better protects the interests of children involved in family court cases.

10 REFERENCES

1. Interview with Court Representative.
2. Ibid.
3. Beyea, Alison A. and Frank D' Alessandro. "A Voice For Low-Income Children: Evaluating Guardians ad litem in Divorce and Parental Rights and Responsibilities Cases." *Children, Youth, & Families*. 29 (2002). https://digitalcommons.usm.maine.edu/cyf/29.
4. The General Court of New Hampshire. "H.B. 634-FN – As Introduced. An act relative to payment of guardian ad litem and mediator fees in marital cases where the parties are indigent," 2011. www.gencourt.state.nh.us/legislation/2011/HB0634.html.

5. Jaggers, Jeremiah W, Emily Beerbower, David Kondrat, Matthew C Aalsma, and James A Hall. "Contextual Factors Influencing Recommendations for Service Provision by Guardian Ad Litem and Court-Appointed Special Advocates." *Families in Society* 99, no. 3 (2018): 244–55. https://doi.org/10.1177/1044389418784963.
6. U.S. Census Bureau. "QuickFacts: Vermont." Accessed November 4, 2024. http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/VT/PST045223.; U.S. Census Bureau. "QuickFacts: New Hampshire." Accessed June 23, 2025. www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/NH/PST045223.; U.S. Census Bureau. "QuickFacts: Maine." Accessed June 23, 2025. http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/ME/PST045223.; U.S. Census Bureau. "QuickFacts: Minnesota." Accessed June 23, 2025. http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/MN/PST045223.; U.S. Census Bureau "QuickFacts: Massachusetts." Accessed June 23, 2025. https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/MA/PST045224.; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics. "Divorce Rates by State: 2019-2022." Accessed November 10, 2024. www.cdc.gov/nchs/pressroom/sosmap/divorce_states/divorce_rates.htm.
7. Interview with New Hampshire State Representative
8. New Hampshire Judicial Branch. "Rule 48-a. Guardians Ad Litem Fees -- Indigent Cases and Parental Notification Cases." https://www.courts.nh.gov/rules-supreme-court-state-new-hampshire/rule-48-guardians-ad-litem-fees-indigent-cases-and-parental.
9. Interview with NH board-certified guardian ad litem.
10. Special Committee on the Family Division of the Circuit Court. *Interim Report of the Special Committee on the Family Division of the Circuit Court*. State of New Hampshire General Court, 2023.
11. Interview with Court Administrator.
12. Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program. "Federal Poverty Guidelines for FFY 2025." https://liheapch.acf.hhs.gov/profiles/povertytables/FY2025/popstate.htm.
13. Justia. "N.H. Rev. Stat. Section 461-A:16." https://law.justia.com/codes/new-hampshire/2023/title-xliii/chapter-461-a/section-461-a-16/.
14. Interview with Massachusetts GAL.
15. Interview with Maine GAL and family law attorney.
16. Ibid.
17. Interview with NH board-certified guardian ad litem.
18. Ibid.
19. Interview with Massachusetts GAL.
20. Interview with NH judge.
21. Massachusetts Court System. "Guidelines for Guardians ad Litem." 2015. Accessed January 26, 2025. https://www.mass.gov/doc/guidelines-for-guardians-ad-litem/download.
22. Commonwealth of Massachusetts. "Filing for Child Custody or Parenting Time in Massachusetts." 2025. Accessed January 26, 2025. https://www.mass.gov/guides/filing-for-child-custody-or-parenting-time-in-massachusetts.
23. Interview with Massachusetts GAL.
24. Ibid.
25. Ibid.

26. Ibid.
27. Ibid.
28. Ibid.
29. Ibid.
30. Ibid.
31. U.S. Census Bureau. "QuickFacts: New Hampshire." Census.gov. Accessed November 4, 2024. www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/NH/PST045223.; U.S. Census Bureau. "QuickFacts: Minnesota." Census.gov. Accessed June 23, 2025. http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/MN/PST045223.
32. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics. "Divorce Rates by State: 2019-2022." https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/pressroom/sosmap/divorce_states/divorce_rates.htm. Accessed June 23, 2025.
33. Minnesota Guardian ad Litem Board. "About Us." Accessed January 4, 2025. https://mn.gov/guardian-ad-litem/.; New Hampshire Office of Professional Licensure and Certification. "Guardian ad Litem Board." Accessed January 4, 2025. https://www.oplc.nh.gov/guardian-ad-litem-board.
34. Interview with Minnesota GAL expert.
35. Ibid.
36. Ibid.
37. Ibid.
38. Ibid.
39. Ibid.
40. Ibid.
41. Ibid.
42. Ibid.
43. Office of the Legislative Auditor, State of Minnesota. "Guardian ad Litem Program: 2018 Evaluation Report." March 2018. Accessed March 12, 2025. https://www.leg.mn.gov/docs/2018/other/180389.pdf.
44. Office of the Legislative Auditor, State of Minnesota. "*Guardian ad Litem Program: Update to 2018 Evaluation Report*." January 2019. Accessed March 12, 2025. https://www.auditor.leg.state.mn.us/ped/updates/2019/galb.pdf.
45. State of Maine Judicial Branch. "Information for Guardians Ad Litem." www.courts.maine.gov/info/gals.html.
46. Ibid.
47. Ibid.
48. Board of Overseers of the Bar, State of Maine. "Rule 5. Standards of Conduct." https://mebaroverseers.org/regulation/bar_rules.html?id=652165#:~:text=(1)%20Rates%20for%20Guardians%20ad,hours%20worked%20on%20the%20case.
49. Ibid.
50. Ibid.
51. Ibid.
52. State of Maine Supreme Judicial Court. "Administrative Order JB-05-05 (A. 11-21)." www.courts.maine.gov/adminorders/jb-05-05.pdf.
53. Maine State Legislature. "Title 4 - Judiciary, Chapter 37 - Maine Commission on Indigent Legal Services." https://legislature.maine.gov/doc/6290.

54. Vermont Judiciary. "Guardian Ad Litem Program." www.vermontjudiciary.org/programs-and-services/guardian-ad-litem-program.
55. Ibid.
56. Kanell, Beth. "Advocating for a Miracle: Guardian ad Litem volunteers are a voice for children when the need is greatest." *The North Star Monthly*, 26 Sept. 2024, www.northstarmonthly.com/features/guardian-ad-litem-volunteers-are-a-voice-for-children-when-the-need-is-greatest/article_a70dd56a-911b-11ee-8a2e-835bf517640c.html.

11 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

12 APPENDICES

Appendix A: Extended GAL and Time to Disposition Regression Table

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
(Intercept)	197.667***	154.096***	146.573***	148.780***
GAL Assigned	218.289***	100.069***	100.144***	95.574***
Num Of Events On Case		1.144***	1.139***	1.147***
Child Count At Filing			4.964***	4.144***
Circuit Court Name1st Circuit - Coos County				-18.716**
Circuit Court Name2nd Circuit - Grafton County				-32.647***
Circuit Court Name3rd Circuit - Carroll County				55.400***
Circuit Court Name4th Circuit - Belknap County				-0.012
Circuit Court Name5th Circuit - Sullivan County				4.879
Circuit Court Name6th Circuit - Merrimack County				-19.147***
Circuit Court Name7th Circuit - Strafford County				-30.298***
Circuit Court Name8th Circuit - Cheshire County				-16.767**
Circuit Court Name9th Circuit - Hillsborough County				1.439
Circuit Court NameBelknap Superior Court				-18.463**
Circuit Court NameCarroll Superior Court				9.292
Circuit Court NameCheshire Superior Court				38.460***
Circuit Court NameCoos Superior Court				-82.678***
Circuit Court NameHillsborough Superior Court Northern District				31.825***
Circuit Court NameHillsborough Superior Court Southern District				23.779***
Circuit Court NameMerrimack Superior Court				8.023
Circuit Court NameRockingham Superior Court				2452.805***
Circuit Court NameStrafford Superior Court				4.940
Circuit Court NameSullivan Superior Court				-24.807**
Observations	106293	106293	106293	106293
R^2	0.075	0.124	0.124	0.131
Adjusted R^2	0.075	0.124	0.124	0.131

Note: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Source: Authors' calculations using New Hampshire Circuit and Family Court data

Appendix B: Extended GAL and Reopening Rate Regression Table

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
(Intercept)	0.317***	0.265***	0.179***	0.164***
GAL Assigned	0.439***	0.436***	0.132***	0.112***
Child Count At Filing		0.034***	0.016***	0.014***
Num Of Events On Case			0.003***	0.003***
Circuit Court Name1st Circuit - Coos County				0.108***
Circuit Court Name2nd Circuit - Grafton County				-0.010+
Circuit Court Name3rd Circuit - Carroll County				-0.016*
Circuit Court Name4th Circuit - Belknap County				0.029***
Circuit Court Name5th Circuit - Sullivan County				0.031***
Circuit Court Name6th Circuit - Merrimack County				-0.015**
Circuit Court Name7th Circuit - Strafford County				-0.014*
Circuit Court Name8th Circuit - Cheshire County				-0.043***
Circuit Court Name9th Circuit - Hillsborough County				-0.045***
Circuit Court NameBelknap Superior Court				0.098***
Circuit Court NameCarroll Superior Court				0.070***
Circuit Court NameCheshire Superior Court				0.163***
Circuit Court NameCoos Superior Court				0.171***
Circuit Court NameHillsborough Superior Court Northern District				0.027***
Circuit Court NameHillsborough Superior Court Southern District				0.140***
Circuit Court NameMerrimack Superior Court				-0.031***
Circuit Court NameRockingham Superior Court				0.123
Circuit Court NameStrafford Superior Court				0.015+
Circuit Court NameSullivan Superior Court				0.185***
Observations	106293	106293	106293	106293
R²	0.117	0.120	0.245	0.260
Adjusted R²	0.117	0.120	0.245	0.260

Note: * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

Source: Authors' calculations using New Hampshire Circuit and Family Court data

Appendix C: Extended GAL and Parenting Plan Regression Table

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
(Intercept)	1.313***	1.167***	0.620***	0.364***
GAL Assigned	3.500***	3.491***	1.387***	1.252***
Child Count At Filing		0.094***	-0.055***	-0.056***
Num Of Events On Case			0.016***	0.017***
Circuit Court Name1st Circuit - Coos County				1.512***
Circuit Court Name2nd Circuit - Grafton County				0.220***
Circuit Court Name3rd Circuit - Carroll County				1.387***
Circuit Court Name4th Circuit - Belknap County				-0.006
Circuit Court Name5th Circuit - Sullivan County				0.280***
Circuit Court Name6th Circuit - Merrimack County				0.013
Circuit Court Name7th Circuit - Strafford County				-0.034
Circuit Court Name8th Circuit - Cheshire County				0.130*
Circuit Court Name9th Circuit - Hillsborough County				0.177***
Circuit Court NameBelknap Superior Court				-0.078
Circuit Court NameCarroll Superior Court				-0.032
Circuit Court NameCheshire Superior Court				1.530***
Circuit Court NameCoos Superior Court				0.120
Circuit Court NameHillsborough Superior Court Northern District				0.603***
Circuit Court NameHillsborough Superior Court Southern District				0.258***
Circuit Court NameMerrimack Superior Court				0.111*
Circuit Court NameRockingham Superior Court				-1.504
Circuit Court NameStrafford Superior Court				-0.107+
Circuit Court NameSullivan Superior Court				-0.181+
Observations	157623	157623	157623	157623
R²	0.164	0.164	0.330	0.343
Adjusted R²	0.164	0.164	0.330	0.343

Note: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Source: Authors' calculations using New Hampshire Circuit and Family Court data