

Chief Justice's Task Force on ACEs-Informed Courts Issues Final Report



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RALEIGH — The Chief Justice's Task Force on ACEs-Informed Courts has issued its [final report](#). The report memorializes the work of the ACEs Task Force and provides recommendations for further integration of trauma-informed care. The report is the product of collaborative work of a dedicated group of justice and allied professionals, diverse in every respect.



"It has been an honor to work with a dedicated group of justice and allied professionals," said Task Force co-chairs NCAOC Director Ryan Boyce and District Attorney Ben David in a letter to Chief Justice Paul Newby. "We are Republicans, Democrats, and Independents, reflect racial diversity, and hail from metro and rural areas from the mountains to the sea. While we work in an adversarial system, we put aside our differences in the interest of North Carolina's citizens. We relied heavily upon our personal experiences, as well as science and faith, and looked to best practices from around the state and country."

In March 2021, Chief Justice Newby established a [Task Force](#) to combat ACEs-Adverse Childhood Experiences and Adverse Community Environments. The North Carolina Administrative Office of the Courts (NCAOC) was asked to lead this effort with the mission of "enabling Judicial Branch stakeholders to understand the impact on children of exposure to ACEs at an early age; and to develop strategies for addressing adverse consequences within the court system."

The [Task Force members](#) were representative of all stakeholder groups within our court system: judges, prosecutors, defense attorneys, clerks, law enforcement, private attorneys, and child-representatives, as well as academic leaders. This talented, experienced, and diverse group was supplemented with an advisory group made up of subject matter experts as well as representatives from law schools, universities, the Executive Branch, and private foundations. The work of the Task Force and its advisory committee made the work relevant, scalable, and sustainable. Continuous training and monitoring of outcomes, facilitated by the Bolch Institute at Duke Law School and UNC's School of Government, will ensure that the work of the Task Force outlives individual efforts.

Highlights From the Report

Some of the accomplishments of the Task Force highlighted in the Final Report include:

- The creation of an ACEs Bench Card
- Two new advanced certifications (child welfare and juvenile justice) for district court judges in juvenile court were developed in collaboration with the UNC School of Government
- A new in-person half-day Customer Service in the Public Sector class including the ACEs Bench Card and trauma-informed practices for all Judicial Branch employees
- The announcement of Safe Babies Courts are being piloted in five locations in North Carolina over the next three years (starting in November 2023)
- A new on-demand, trauma-informed training will be launched for all Judicial Branch employees

Relying on the work of Drs. Vince Felitti and Robert Anda, the Task Force explored how both Adverse Childhood Experiences and Adverse Community Environments intersect with the criminal, civil, and family courts in North Carolina. Just as science enables us to solve cases, we can now utilize it to prevent crime from occurring. Over the last two years, eight regional meetings were held around the state. The problems judicial officials encounter at the courthouse are bigger than we can tackle alone. We were introduced to wonderful examples of how leaders from other parts of the community confront ACEs and build resilience by working collaboratively with court officials.

An expanded understanding of vicarious trauma, often experienced by the justice professionals who work in various court settings, requires that support for court employees exist in conjunction with services to families through the justice system. If everyone in the justice system – from officers on the street to judges on the bench and everyone in between – is well cared for, they will serve the citizens in a more professional manner.

[View the Final Report](#). Learn more about the [Task Force on ACEs-Informed](#)

[Courts.](#)

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About North Carolina Judicial Branch

The [North Carolina Judicial Branch](#) is an equal and distinctively separate branch and core function of government. More than 7,000 Judicial Branch employees statewide administer justice in courthouses in North Carolina's 100 counties. The [Judicial Branch budget for FY 2021–22](#) was \$672.4M, 86.2% of which is used to pay salaries and the remaining 13.8% is used for operations. The Judicial Branch receives only 2.59% of the overall State budget.

About North Carolina Administrative Office of the Courts

The North Carolina Administrative Office of the Courts (NCAOC) is the administrative agency for the [North Carolina Judicial Branch](#), providing administrative services to help the North Carolina court system operate more efficiently and effectively, taking into account each courthouse's diverse needs, caseloads, and available resources.

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