# Fifty States, Counted

What the whole country has built to oversee guardians ad litem — and the four structures Georgia has not built for custody cases.

Every state in this country appoints guardians ad litem (GALs) in children's cases. Every state has therefore had to answer the same four questions. Who oversees these appointees, beyond the judge who appointed them? Can a parent check a published list before trusting a name? Must a person complete defined training before doing this work? And if something goes wrong, is there a door other than the appointing judge's? This paper counts the answers. The project read the law of all fifty states — the official statute text, the statewide court rules, and the published pages of statewide programs and court administrations — and recorded, state by state, whether each of four basic structures exists. The counts are the finding: a statewide oversight home in 16 of 50 states; a public statewide roster in 9 of 50; a training floor in 44 of 50; a GAL-specific complaint route outside the appointing judge in 13 of 50. Georgia, for custody cases, has none of the four. The structures are not exotic. They are the ordinary machinery of an accountable profession, most of the country has built at least some of it, and two states finished major pieces of it in 2025 and 2026. This paper explains what was counted, what each structure is, what the middle answers honestly mean, and what the project asks Georgia to build.

## What this paper is — and is not

This is a systems paper from a grassroots project, written anonymously by design. It names no family, describes no individual case, and accuses no individual GAL of misconduct. It uses no county records material; every claim in it rests on the published law of the fifty states, read from primary sources and listed in the Sources. The standing frame of this project applies in full: the problem this series documents is rogue practice and missing oversight, not the GAL role itself, and not the many GALs who do careful work inside structures that give them too little support. Where a state's answer could not be established from primary sources, this paper says so rather than filling the gap — the gaps are reported in Section 4 and in the method note, because a count that hides its soft spots is not a count worth citing.

## 1 · What was counted, and how

The survey behind this paper covers all fifty states and both tracks on which GALs serve children: dependency cases (abuse and neglect, where the state is a party) and private custody cases (divorce and custody disputes between parents). Four structures were counted, each defined before the counting began:

- **Statewide oversight home** — a statewide office, or an independent board or committee outside the appointing court, charged with overseeing GALs in at least one track: setting or enforcing standards, credentialing, supervision, or discipline.
- **Public roster** — a published statewide list of GAL names that a parent can check: who is approved to serve, and on what qualifications.
- **Training floor** — required training set before or during service (a stated number of hours, a required course, or certification) on at least one track, by statute, statewide rule, or a statewide program or contract standard.

- **Complaint route outside the appointing judge** — a GAL-specific or program complaint or grievance procedure that runs to a body other than the judge who made the appointment. Ordinary attorney discipline is counted separately, for reasons Section 2.4 explains.

The counting rules were strict. A structure counted only where a primary source — official statute text, an official court rule, or a statewide program or court-administration page — establishes it. Where the sources showed a partial structure (a statewide rule administered entirely by local courts; a local or partial list), the state was recorded in the middle category, not rounded up. Where the primary sources did not establish an answer, the survey records "not established," not "no." The full fifty-row matrix, with the citation for every cell, is the project's research document *Fifty-State GAL Oversight Survey* (November 5, 2026), held in the project's Plan and Research files; this paper reports and explains its counts. The survey extends the project's Paper No. 2, *How Other States Do It*, which profiles five model states in depth; this paper's contribution is the complete map those profiles were drawn from. To this project's knowledge, no other organization — in Georgia or nationally — has published a fifty-state, primary-source count of GAL oversight. We're the only ones doing this.

## 2 · The four structures, one by one

### 2.1 · A statewide oversight home — 16 of 50

An oversight home is the address a system has when something about a GAL needs attention that is bigger than one case: a pattern of lateness, a credential that lapsed, a standard nobody is enforcing. In sixteen states, that address exists at the statewide level. Florida's Statewide Guardian ad Litem Office (Fla. Stat. § 39.8296) oversees and supports the circuit GAL offices in all twenty circuits. Minnesota's State Guardian ad Litem Board (Minn. Stat. § 480.35) sits in the judicial branch but is expressly not subject to the administrative control of the judiciary; its administrator hires, supervises, and disciplines GALs. Connecticut's Standing Committee on Guardians ad Litem and Attorneys for the Minor Child (Practice Book § 25-61A) approves the training curriculum, reviews the eligibility list annually, and administers removal from it. Maine's Guardian ad Litem Review Board (4 M.R.S. §§ 1551–1557) administers the state's GAL rules and handles complaints. The forms differ — an office, a board, a committee — but the function is the same: someone other than the appointing judge is charged with the profession as a whole.

### 2.2 · A public roster — 9 of 50

A roster is the simplest of the four structures: a published list of the names approved to serve, so that a parent handed a stranger's name can check it. Nine states publish one statewide. Indiana's GAL Registry is public and searchable by county, city, and name, and lists every family-law GAL approved by its Oversight Committee. Maine posts a public, searchable roster showing each GAL's qualifications. Connecticut publishes its statewide eligibility list, and its law requires the court to give the parties a written list of fifteen eligible individuals. A roster protects everyone it touches: parents can verify, judges appoint from a vetted pool, and GALs in good standing carry a credential that means something because it can be checked — and, as Section 5 shows, because it can be lost.

### 2.3 · A training floor — 44 of 50

A training floor is a stated minimum: this much preparation, in these subjects, before a person may investigate a child's life and recommend where that child lives. Forty-four of fifty states set one on at least one track. Connecticut requires twenty hours of pre-service training before eligibility and twelve hours every three years. Indiana requires twelve hours initially and six hours a year in family-law

cases. Idaho requires thirty hours of pre-service training in dependency cases. The floors vary in height and in which track they cover — a "yes" on one track often sits beside no floor at all on the other, and the survey's matrix says which, state by state. But the near-universality of the floor is itself the finding: the proposition that GAL work requires defined preparation is not a reform proposal. It is the settled practice of almost the entire country.

### 2.4 · A complaint route outside the appointing judge — 13 of 50

The fourth structure is the rarest, and the one a parent feels most directly. A complaint route outside the appointing judge means that when a parent believes a GAL has acted improperly, the complaint does not go back to the one person whose own appointment decision it implicitly questions. Thirteen states have a GAL-specific route. Maine's Review Board investigates written complaints under its GAL rules. New Hampshire's Guardian ad Litem Board must investigate and resolve written complaints and may revoke or suspend certification, order training, fine, or reprimand (RSA 490-C:4). Minnesota's Board takes written complaints and must report complaint, investigation, and discipline counts to the Legislature every year. Colorado's Office of the Child's Representative runs a formal complaint procedure with investigation and a written resolution. Twelve more states offer only ordinary attorney discipline — a route that judges the person as a lawyer, under professional-conduct rules rather than GAL standards, that takes no account of the GAL role, and that does not exist at all for the lay GALs and volunteers many states use. It is counted separately in this survey because it is a different thing from a door built for the purpose.

## 3 · The map in one picture

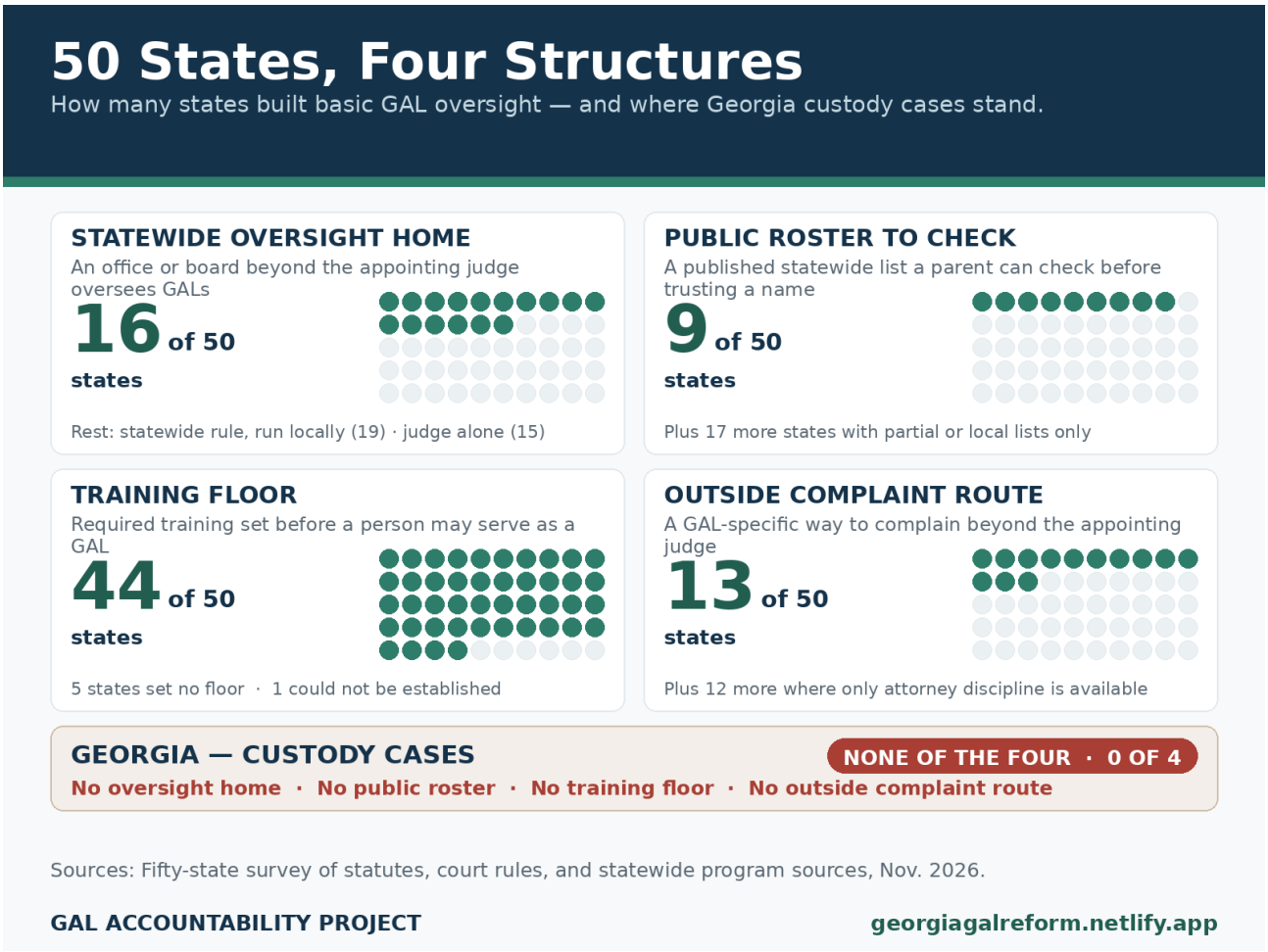



*Chart 7: fifty states, four structures. Each dot is one state. The chart's data source is the survey described in Section 1; per-state citations are in the survey's matrix.*

Read together, the four numbers describe a country that has built GAL oversight unevenly but unmistakably. The training floor is nearly universal. The oversight home and the roster exist across whole regions. The independent complaint route — the structure that most directly changes what happens when something goes wrong — is the one the fewest states have built, which is an argument for building it deliberately rather than an argument that it cannot be built. And at the bottom of the chart sits the comparison this project exists to make: for custody cases, Georgia has none of the four.

## 4 · The middle answers, stated honestly

A count is only as good as its treatment of the states in between, and most states are in between on at least one structure. Nineteen states set GAL standards in one statewide rule but leave all administration to local courts — Ohio is the strongest example, where the Rules of Superintendence require every court to keep a public list of approved GALs, run a complaint process, and review its list annually (Sup.R. 48.07), all without any statewide office. Seventeen states have partial or local rosters only: lists that exist court by court or program by program, some published and some not shown to be public. On training, five states' cited sources set no floor (Alaska, New Jersey, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania), and one state's floor (South Dakota) could not be established from primary sources; three "yes" answers rest on softer instruments — a statewide program

requirement in Vermont, contract requirements in Hawaii, and practice guidelines in Maryland — and are flagged as such in the survey. On complaint routes, the honest summary is that this is the least visible field in the entire survey: of the thirty-seven states with no GAL-specific route, twelve offer attorney discipline only, nine affirmatively provide none in the cited sources, and in sixteen states no outside route could be established from the statewide sources at all — a local rule or program manual may hold one that a statewide survey cannot see. The project reports those states as "not established," and the counts in this paper are counts of what the published law establishes, not claims about what exists nowhere.

## 5 · Built now: Indiana 2025, Utah 2026

None of this requires imagining a new invention. The two newest builds are dated within the last two years. Indiana's framework for family-law GALs took effect January 1, 2025: a Supreme Court GAL Oversight Committee oversees compliance with statewide GAL Guidelines and a Code of Ethics; a public, searchable Registry lists every approved GAL; family-law GALs complete twelve hours of initial training and six hours annually; and a party may file a formal complaint with the Oversight Committee after the final order, with outcomes that include removal from the Registry — the roster and the complaint route reinforcing each other, because a list the public can check is also a list a GAL can be removed from. Utah's build is newer still, enacted with 2026 effective dates: a Guardian Ad Litem Oversight Committee (Utah Code § 78A-2-104.5, effective May 6, 2026), supervised by the Judicial Council, oversees the statewide GAL program, and its scope expressly reaches the private GALs who serve in custody cases; a formal complaints rule (UCJA Rule 4-906.03, effective June 22, 2026) routes a written complaint to the GAL Director for investigation and decision, appealable to a three-member panel of the Oversight Committee. Two states, two different designs, one conclusion: the machinery is buildable, on purpose, by legislation and court rule, right now.

## 6 · Georgia: none of the four, for custody

Georgia's position requires one precision, stated plainly because the project insists on it everywhere: the zero in this paper is a custody zero. On the dependency side of the same courthouses, Georgia has built a piece of one structure — pre-appointment training administered or approved by the Office of the Child Advocate is required for dependency GALs (O.C.G.A. § 15-11-104(f)), and Georgia CASA's forty-hour curriculum serves non-attorney advocates. Georgia therefore knows how to set a training floor for the people who represent children. It has set one — for one track.

For custody cases, the whole of the structure is Uniform Superior Court Rule 24.9. Custody GALs are supervised by the appointing judge; the rule's remedy for a GAL who should not serve is a motion for disqualification addressed to that same judge (Rule 24.9(8)(h)). There is no published statewide list of custody GALs — approval is handled court by court, and a parent given a name has no official list to check it against. Rule 24.9 states training expectations but sets no hour floor and no continuing-education requirement for custody GALs. And there is no GAL-specific complaint route at any level: outside the case itself, the only door is a State Bar complaint against a GAL who happens to be an attorney, judged as an attorney. No oversight home, no public roster, no training floor, no outside complaint route — zero of four, in the track where the GAL's recommendation can decide where a child lives between two parents, each of whom is paying for the process and neither of whom chose the appointee.

## 7 · The remedy: three asks, mapped to the map

The project's three asks were not designed in the abstract; each one answers a structure this count found missing, and the mapping is one to one.

- **A public GAL registry** answers the roster count (9 of 50). Every Georgian approved to serve as a custody GAL, on one published, checkable list — the structure Indiana, Maine, Connecticut, and six other states already run.
- **A training floor, with continuing education** answers the training count (44 of 50). Defined hours, defined subjects, before appointment and renewed in service — the structure Georgia itself already maintains on the dependency side.
- **An oversight home that is not the appointing judge** answers the oversight count (16 of 50) and carries the complaint count (13 of 50) with it: a statewide body that holds the registry, enforces the floor, and receives complaints about GALs — so that a concern about an appointee is heard somewhere other than the office that appointed them.

Nothing in the three asks is untested. Each element is in operation today in states whose children's cases are every bit as confidential as Georgia's; confidentiality protects the child and the case, and none of these structures touches either. What they publish is the professional: names, qualifications, standards, and complaint counts.

## 8 · What the project asks Georgia to do

Build the four structures, starting with the three asks. Enact or adopt by rule a public registry of custody GALs, a training floor with continuing education, and an independent oversight home with a real complaint process — using Indiana's 2025 framework and Utah's 2026 enactments as current, working drafts of what the finished product looks like, and Georgia's own dependency-side training structure as proof the state can run such machinery. Forty-four states have set a training floor. Sixteen have built the oversight home. Thirteen have opened the outside door. Georgia's custody families are asking for nothing their neighbors do not already have — and the children whose lives are decided in these cases cannot wait for the structures to arrive by accident. They have never arrived by accident anywhere. Every state on the filled side of every count in this paper built its structure on purpose. Georgia can be next, and this project — the only organization in Georgia doing this work — will keep counting, publishing, and asking until it is.

## What you can do

Two kinds of help matter most right now:

- **Answer a survey.** The project runs separate anonymous surveys for parents who have had a GAL in a Georgia case and for professionals who work alongside GALs. Surveys carry no phone number and ask for no child's name or case details. The surveys ask for good experiences as well as bad.
- **Share an experience — through the anonymous surveys.** Experiences reach this project only through its anonymous surveys, which ask for no name, no email address, and nothing that identifies a child. The project does not accept accounts by email. Patterns are the point; no single story is published as fact on its own.

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Project email only. This paper was published anonymously by the project; no individual is named as its author, and no family's case is described in it.

## A note on method — and on limits

Every state's row in the underlying survey was built from primary sources only: official statute text, official court rules, and statewide program or court-administration pages; the full citations are in the survey's fifty-row matrix and its regional research files (batches 1–6, November 5, 2026). The headline counts were computed from the fifty completed rows and machine-checked against them. Two citations in the survey were flagged for a confirming re-pull before any publication quoted them, and the re-pull was run for this paper. Tennessee's dependency training provision, § 37-1-149(a)(2), is cleared: the sentence requiring a GAL to "receive training appropriate to that role prior to such appointment" was verified against the Tennessee General Assembly's own bill file for the 2004 act that added it (HB 3541 / SB 3451, 103rd General Assembly, enacted as 2004 Public Chapter 584) and against the consistent compiled text; this paper in any event relies on Tennessee only as one of forty-four states in the training count. New Mexico's custody statute, § 40-4-8, remains partially flagged: the direct official statute page on NM One Source could not be retrieved in the re-pull, so this paper quotes nothing from that section and relies on it for no claim beyond New Mexico's survey row (appointment by the appointing court in contested custody; no training requirement stated), which is consistent with the codified text as reproduced in full-text sources and quoted in a published New Mexico appellate opinion. The survey's own limits apply to this paper in full: complaint routes are the least visible field (sixteen states "not established"); negative findings are source-bound — "no" means the cited statewide sources create no such structure, not that no local rule anywhere adds one; several states do not use a best-interests GAL at all on one or both tracks (New York's Attorneys for the Child, Maryland's child's counsel, California's minor's counsel), and the survey describes the structure that actually exists in each; Utah's oversight provisions are stated as enacted, with their 2026 effective dates. Laws and rules change; check the cited source for the current text.

## Sources


- GAL Accountability Project, *Fifty-State GAL Oversight Survey* (research document, November 5, 2026) — the fifty-row matrix, per-state primary citations, and research files (batches 1–6) from which every count in this paper is computed. Project files, Plan and Research.
- Oversight homes: Fla. Stat. § 39.8296 (Statewide Guardian ad Litem Office); Minn. Stat. § 480.35 (State Guardian ad Litem Board); Conn. Practice Book §§ 25-61A, 25-62 (Standing Committee on GALs and AMCs); 4 M.R.S. §§ 1551–1557 (Maine GAL Review Board).
- Rosters: Indiana GAL Guidelines for Civil Family Law Cases and GAL Registry, Office of Court Services (in.gov/courts/iocs); Maine GAL Roster and Review Board (courts.maine.gov); Connecticut Judicial Branch statewide GAL/AMC eligibility list and Public Act 14-3 (jud.ct.gov); Ohio Rules of Superintendence 48–48.07, esp. 48.07(A) (supremecourt.ohio.gov).
- Training floors: Conn. Practice Book § 25-62(b) (20 hours pre-service; 12 hours per three years); Indiana GAL Guidelines, Rule 2 (12 hours initial; 6 hours annually); Idaho Juvenile Rule 35 (30 hours pre-service, dependency); Tenn. Code § 37-1-149(a)(2), as added by 2004 Public Chapter 584 (HB 3541 / SB 3451, capitol.tn.gov).
- Complaint routes: Maine Rules for Guardians Ad Litem, Rule 9; RSA ch. 490-C, esp. § 490-C:4 (New Hampshire GAL Board); Minn. Stat. § 480.35, subd. 8 (annual complaint reporting); Colorado Office of the Child's Representative, Formal Complaint Procedure; Chief Justice Directive 04-06; C.R.S. § 13-91-101 et seq.

- Indiana 2025 framework: Indiana GAL Guidelines for Civil Family Law Cases (eff. Jan. 1, 2025); GAL Oversight Committee, Registry, and GAL Complaint Process, Office of Court Services (in.gov/courts/iocs).
- Utah 2026 enactments: Utah Code §§ 78A-2-104.5, 78A-2-705, 78A-2-803 (le.utah.gov); UCJA Rule 4-906 and Rule 4-906.03 (eff. June 22, 2026); Utah Courts Private Attorney GAL page (utcourts.gov).
- Georgia: Uniform Superior Court Rule 24.9, incl. (8)(h) (gasupreme.us); O.C.G.A. § 15-11-104, incl. (f) (dependency GAL appointment and OCA-approved training); Office of the Child Advocate, Guardian ad Litem (dependency proceedings) (oca.georgia.gov).
- Project papers: Paper No. 2, *How Other States Do It*; Paper No. 7, *The Public's Professionals* (rosters); Paper No. 4, *The Shield* — Georgia GAL Accountability Project files, November 2026.

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