The Indiana Model

How one state built GAL oversight from nothing — the steps, in order, and the Georgia playbook they make possible.

On January 1, 2025, Indiana switched on a system that had not existed the day before. From that date, a person could no longer be appointed as a guardian ad litem (GAL) in an Indiana custody case simply because a judge knew their name. The GAL had to be qualified under statewide guidelines, background-checked, trained — twelve hours before serving, six hours every year after — and listed on a public registry that any parent, lawyer, or judge can search. A standing committee of the Indiana Supreme Court oversees the whole structure, approves who gets on the list, and runs a complaint process that can take a name off it. Indiana built all of this recently, quickly, and almost entirely without legislation: a taskforce, a report, a public comment period, and a single Supreme Court order. This paper documents what Indiana built and — the part that matters most for Georgia — the exact sequence of steps by which it was built, each one mapped to the Georgia actor and vehicle that would perform the same step here. Indiana's lesson is not that reform is easy. It is that reform is a sequence, every step in the sequence is ordinary, and the sequence is now a matter of public record. We do not have to reinvent the wheel. Indiana published the wheel's assembly instructions.

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. Every fact about Indiana is taken from Indiana's own published sources — the Supreme Court's adoption order, the Guidelines themselves, the Office of Court Services' public pages, and the Oversight Committee's published meeting minutes — and listed in the Sources. Where Indiana's public record does not answer a question (most notably, what the system cost in total), this paper says so rather than estimating. 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. Indiana's story is, among other things, a story about GALs and judges building the structure themselves.

1 · What Indiana built, in brief

Four structures, all in force for civil family law cases — custody and parenting time in divorce and paternity cases, minor guardianships, third-party custody, adoptions, and visitation cases:

- **Standards with an owner.** The *GAL Guidelines for Civil Family Law Cases*, adopted by the Indiana Supreme Court by written order on October 17, 2024 (Cause No. 24S-MS-1) and effective January 1, 2025, set who may serve, what training is required, and what the job's duties are — including a written appointment order, mandatory in-person contact with the child, reports delivered at least ten days before the hearing, and a GAL file open to any party who asks. A companion Code of Ethics binds every GAL. The Guidelines apply to appointments made on or after January 1, 2025.
- **An oversight home.** The **GAL Family Law Oversight Committee**, established by the Supreme Court in June 2023 — before the rules it administers existed — oversees compliance with the Guidelines and Code of Ethics, approves or denies registry applications, grants or refuses training waivers, studies the Guidelines' effectiveness, proposes amendments, and addresses complaints. It is composed of judicial officers and practicing GALs from across the state, staffed by the

Children & Families Division of the Indiana Office of Court Services, meets at least every other month, and publishes its minutes.

• **A public registry.** To be appointed, a GAL must be on the **Indiana GAL Registry**, maintained by the Office of Court Services and the State Office of GAL/CASA and open to "judicial officers, attorneys, and the public." Entry requires an application, Committee approval, a child-protection-services history check for every applicant (attorneys included), a criminal background check for non-attorneys, and the required training. The registry is searchable and shows each GAL's name, contact information, and counties served.

• **A training floor.** Twelve hours of initial training across twelve specified topics — from investigative and interviewing skills to domestic violence, trauma-informed care, and the Code of Ethics — and six hours of continuing training every year after. A GAL who lets the annual hours lapse "is not qualified to be appointed" until they are made up. Experienced GALs (three years of service, or ten cases) could apply for a waiver of the initial course rather than be displaced by it.

• **A complaint route that is not the appointing judge.** A party to a case — only a party — may file a formal complaint alleging a violation of the Guidelines or Code of Ethics, online, in a window that opens sixty days after the final order and closes at one hundred eighty days. A three-member panel reviews complaints that state a claim; the GAL has thirty days to respond; a violation must be proven by clear and convincing evidence; outcomes run from dismissal, to an agreement to remedy the conduct (more training, supervised practice), to removal from the Registry with notice to the judicial officer. What the process deliberately does not do is change anyone's case: it polices the profession, and says so.

Where Indiana stands — one of five, and the newest

Precision matters here, because Indiana's achievement is sometimes overstated, including in early tellings of this project's own work: **Indiana is not the only state with all four structures.** Counted in full form from the same primary sources as this project's fifty-state survey, exactly **five** states hold all four — an oversight home, a public roster, a training floor, and a GAL-specific complaint route: **Colorado, Connecticut, Indiana, Maine, and New Hampshire.** Indiana's distinction is narrower, and stronger for being accurate:

• **It is the newest complete build.** The other four states assembled their structures over many years, piece by piece — Colorado's Office of the Child's Representative dates to 2000, New Hampshire's GAL Board and Maine's Review Board were built in earlier decades and amended since, and Connecticut's standing committee, eligibility list, and training rules accumulated inside its family-court rules over time. Indiana's complete package was adopted at once and took effect on a single date: **January 1, 2025**. It is the only one of the five whose entire construction is documented start to finish in current public records — which is precisely what makes it usable as a template.

• **It is the only one of the five scoped entirely to civil family law.** Colorado's, Maine's, and New Hampshire's structures span both the dependency and family tracks. Indiana built for the private custody track alone — dissolution, paternity, guardianship, visitation — and its complaint process expressly leaves dependency (CHINS/TPR) cases to the separate, older system. For a state like Georgia, whose gap is specifically in *custody* cases, Indiana is therefore the closest-fitting model of the five: it answers the exact question Georgia's custody families are asking.

• **It was built as one system, by one instrument.** A single Supreme Court order adopted integrated guidelines and a code of ethics in which the registry is a condition of appointment, the training floor is a condition of staying on it, and the complaint process enforces both — each piece

designed to hold the others up. Indiana shows the four pieces can be enacted as a single coherent act of court rulemaking — which is the form in which Georgia would most plausibly enact them.

2 · How they did it — the process, step by step

Indiana's framework was not a reaction to a single scandal, and it was not fast in the way headlines are fast. It took five years from first step to effective date — and almost all of that time was spent on the two steps reform efforts usually skip: studying the problem in the open, and standing up the institution before switching it on.

• **September 24, 2019 — the Court starts a study, not a rule.** The Indiana Supreme Court established its Innovation Initiative and, within it, a Family Law Taskforce: judges, law professors, mediators, family-law practitioners, and court-administration staff, chaired by a Court of Appeals judge. Its charge was research first — evaluate national court-reform literature and report findings and recommendations in writing.

• **March 2021 — the report names the gap.** The Taskforce's final report made nineteen recommendations. Recommendation #6 was GAL oversight: develop guidelines and a code of ethics for family-law GALs, with qualifications, training requirements, and a defined role. The finding underneath it was blunt — the Taskforce's national review found Indiana was "one of a small handful of states" with no GAL qualifications, no training requirements, and no established roles at all.

• **2021–2023 — drafting, with the profession in the room.** A Taskforce subcommittee drafted the Guidelines and vetted them with local and state bar associations and judicial committees. The draft was not written about GALs and judges from outside; it was written with them, which is one reason what followed was adoption rather than resistance.

• **2023 — the legislature takes the one step only it can take: money for poor families.** On the Taskforce's recommendation, the General Assembly amended the Domestic Relations ADR Fund statute (Ind. Code § 33-23-6 — a voluntary county fund fed by a $20 filing fee) so the fund may pay for GAL services for litigants with the least ability to pay (HB 1493, Public Law 151, effective July 1, 2023). Note what the statute did not do: create the standards. The standards were the Court's work. The legislature's contribution was aimed at the one thing courts cannot order into existence — a funding stream.

• **June 2023 — the oversight home is built first.** The Supreme Court established the GAL Family Law Oversight Committee a full eighteen months before the Guidelines took effect. The committee drafted the complaint process in its first months, long before there was anything to complain about under the new rules.

• **June–July 2023 — public comment, and real revision.** The proposed Guidelines were posted for thirty days of public comment. The subcommittee reviewed the comments and, in the Court's own words, made "significant revisions." The comment step was not decorative; it changed the text.

• **September 18, 2024 — the judges' conference votes, unanimously.** The Judicial Conference of Indiana's Board of Directors approved the Guidelines without dissent — the trial judges who would have to work under the system endorsed it before it bound them.

• **October 17, 2024 — adoption by order.** The Supreme Court adopted the Guidelines by written order under its constitutional authority to supervise the administration of the state's courts, with a future effective date. No bill, no signature campaign, no appropriation attached to the core framework.

• **November 2024 — the public is told before the system opens.** The Oversight Committee published a plain-language parents' guide — what a GAL is, what to expect, where the registry is, how complaints work — a month before the effective date.

• **Late 2024 — the workforce is brought in, not shut out.** Applications opened online. The State Office paid the background-check costs so compliance cost an applicant nothing. Serving GALs with experience could waive into the registry on their record. Judges received a model appointment order through the Domestic Relations Benchbook.

• **January 1, 2025 — go-live, prospective only.** The Guidelines govern appointments made on or after that date. No sitting GAL's pending case was disturbed; no family mid-case had the rules changed under them. The transition cost of the reform, for families, was zero by design.

• **2025 — the system runs in public, and publishes its numbers.** By February 7, 2025, about 220 GALs were approved and on the registry, with over 100 more in process. By October 3, 2025: 361 GALs on the registry, 78 applications pending. Training ran statewide — online modules from the State Office and regional in-person sessions delivered by Kids' Voice of Indiana, about 190 people trained by the fall. The online complaint form went live in the spring. When the Office cross-checked the state's case-management data against the registry and found about 44 people appointed to new cases without being registered, it did not announce a crackdown; it contacted them individually and brought them into the process. And in December 2025 the Committee's published minutes recorded its first-year complaint accounting with complete candor: three complaints received, none within the process's scope — two were dependency cases, which the process excludes, and one involved an appointment from years before 2025 — with more expected in 2026 as the filing window matures.

That last detail deserves emphasis, because it is the cultural heart of the model: Indiana's oversight body publishes minutes in which its own rollout problems — unregistered appointees, stalled applications, a county program that wanted to operate off-registry and was refused — are worked through in the open. Oversight that publishes its own friction is oversight a parent can believe in.

3 · The honest limits of the Indiana model

A template is only useful if its edges are visible. Indiana's framework has real ones, and this paper states them because Georgia should choose its version with eyes open:

• **It covers family law only.** The complaint process expressly does not apply to CHINS or termination-of-parental-rights cases — Indiana's dependency children remain under the separate, older GAL/CASA program system, and two of the first three complaints filed were turned away on exactly that ground. Indiana built accountability for the custody track and left the dependency track as it was.

• **The complaint door opens only after the case ends.** The sixty-to-one-hundred-eighty-day window after the final order is a deliberate design choice — complaints cannot become a mid-case tactic — but its cost is real: during the case, when the conduct is happening, the only route is still the appointing court.

• **Only parties may complain.** Grandparents, relatives, and advocates who watch a case from outside the caption have no standing in the process.

• **It cannot fix a case.** The process protects the profession's standards; it will not revisit a custody outcome, and it tells complainants so in plain terms at every step.

• **The total cost is not published.** No Indiana source states what the framework cost to build or what it costs to run. What is documented: administration through existing court institutions (the

Office of Court Services and the pre-existing State Office of GAL/CASA), a committee of sitting judges and GALs, state-paid background checks "until available funding is depleted," and GAL services themselves still paid case by case, as appointment orders apportion them — with the ADR Fund available for families who cannot pay. Anyone who quotes a total price for Indiana's system is estimating, and this project does not publish estimates as facts.

None of these limits is an argument against the model. Each is a design decision Georgia can copy, widen, or improve on — dependency coverage and mid-case safety valves are the two places where a Georgia build could honestly do better than the original.

4 · The Georgia playbook — Indiana's steps, mapped

Georgia's starting point differs from Indiana's in one encouraging way: Indiana began from nothing at all — no qualifications, no training floor, no roles — while Georgia already runs a training requirement on its dependency side (O.C.G.A. § 15-11-104(f), training provided or approved by the Office of the Child Advocate) and already has a custody GAL rule to amend (Uniform Superior Court Rule 24.9). What Georgia lacks is everything Indiana added: the floor for custody, the registry, the oversight home, and the outside complaint door. Here is Indiana's sequence translated, step for step, into the Georgia actor and the Georgia vehicle each step requires.

- **Step 1 — Convene the study body.** *Indiana:* Supreme Court taskforce (2019). *Georgia:* the Supreme Court of Georgia or the Judicial Council of Georgia appoints a family-law GAL study committee — superior court judges, sitting custody GALs, family-law practitioners, and staff from the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) and the Office of the Child Advocate (OCA). Vehicle: Court or Council action. No statute needed.
- **Step 2 — Study and report, in public.** *Indiana:* the 2021 report and its Recommendation #6. *Georgia:* the committee examines Rule 24.9 as it actually operates, the dependency-side machinery Georgia already runs, and the models — Indiana first among them — and publishes recommendations. Vehicle: committee report to the Judicial Council and the Supreme Court.
- **Step 3 — Draft the standards and a code of ethics.** *Indiana:* Taskforce subcommittee drafts; Guidelines Rules 1–3. *Georgia:* draft amendments to Uniform Superior Court Rule 24.9 — qualifications, background checks, a stated training floor with continuing education, appointment-order requirements, reporting and file-access duties — plus a GAL code of ethics. Vehicle: Judicial Council drafting process for Uniform Rules.
- **Step 4 — Stand up the oversight home before the rules bind anyone.** *Indiana:* Oversight Committee created June 2023. *Georgia:* a GAL Oversight Committee constituted under the Judicial Council, staffed by the AOC — Georgia's judicial-branch administrative office, the functional counterpart of Indiana's Office of Court Services. Vehicle: Judicial Council action (a statute could entrench the committee, but Indiana shows a court-created committee can do the work). *Adaptation flag:* Indiana's committee leaned on a pre-existing State Office of GAL/CASA that ran the dependency system; Georgia has no equivalent office for custody, so the staffing home must be chosen deliberately — AOC is the natural analog, and OCA's dependency training infrastructure can be drawn on without merging the two tracks.
- **Step 5 — Take the money step in the same season.** *Indiana:* the ADR Fund amendment (2023). *Georgia:* the General Assembly is asked for the one thing the courts cannot supply — a funding mechanism for GAL services for families who cannot pay, whether by extending an existing court-fee fund or by a county-funding provision modeled on the dependency side (O.C.G.A. § 15-11-36(a)(4)). The registry's background-check costs need a named payer on day one; Indiana's State Office absorbed them. Vehicle: statute. *Adaptation flag:* Georgia has no

verified ADR-fund analog already earmarked for this purpose; the funding vehicle is a genuine legislative decision, and the playbook does not pretend otherwise.

• **Step 6 — Public comment, and revise.** *Indiana:* thirty days, significant revisions. *Georgia:* the proposed Rule 24.9 amendments are published for public comment through the Judicial Council and the Supreme Court, and the drafting committee revises on the record. Vehicle: the Council's and Court's established rule-comment practice.

• **Step 7 — Adoption by the Supreme Court, with judicial endorsement.** *Indiana:* unanimous Judicial Conference vote, then adoption by order (24S-MS-1). *Georgia:* the Judicial Council recommends the amended Uniform Rule; the Supreme Court of Georgia adopts it by order, with a future effective date; endorsement by the Judicial Conference of Superior Court Judges and the Council of Superior Court Judges mirrors Indiana's unanimity step. *Adaptation flag:* the route differs in form from Indiana's — Uniform Rules move on Judicial Council recommendation — but not in substance: this is court rulemaking, not legislation, exactly as in Indiana.

• **Step 8 — Build the registry and the parent guide before day one.** *Indiana:* registry plus parents' guide, November 2024. *Georgia:* the AOC builds a public, searchable custody-GAL registry — name, credential, courts served, training status — modeled on Indiana's (and on the registries profiled in this project's Paper No. 7), and a plain-language Georgia parent guide is published with it. Vehicle: AOC administration under the adopted rule.

• **Step 9 — Bring the workforce in.** *Indiana:* online application, state-paid checks, experience waivers, model appointment order. *Georgia:* applications open with a waiver path crediting experienced GALs — including those already serving under circuit-level programs and lists — background and child-abuse-registry checks, and a model appointment order circulated to superior court judges through the Council of Superior Court Judges. Vehicle: Oversight Committee and AOC administration.

• **Step 10 — Go live, prospectively, with training running.** *Indiana:* January 1, 2025; appointments on or after the date; LMS plus regional trainings. *Georgia:* the amended rule takes effect on a date certain, for appointments made on or after that date only; training is delivered through the Institute of Continuing Judicial Education and the State Bar's continuing-education infrastructure, with OCA's existing dependency curriculum as a foundation to build the custody course on. Vehicle: the adoption order's effective date; education providers' existing programs.

• **Step 11 — Open the complaint door, with the window written down.** *Indiana:* online form; party standing; days 60–180 after the final order; three-member panels; clear-and-convincing standard; remedy agreements up to registry removal. *Georgia:* the Oversight Committee operates the same process under the amended rule, and Georgia chooses its own scope with Indiana's edges in view — whether to include dependency appointments (through OCA coordination) and whether to add a mid-case safety valve Indiana lacks are the two decisions this paper flags for the drafting committee, not decisions this paper makes for it. Vehicle: the amended Rule 24.9 and Committee procedure.

• **Step 12 — Run it in public, and amend on a cycle.** *Indiana:* published minutes, registry counts, compliance by case-data matching, a standing revisions subcommittee. *Georgia:* the Committee publishes its minutes and an annual count — registered GALs, applications, complaints received and their outcomes — and the AOC cross-checks appointments against the registry as Indiana's office did. Vehicle: Committee practice under the rule; annual report to the Judicial Council, the Supreme Court, and the General Assembly's judiciary committees.

Two substantive adaptations deserve plain statement, because they are the places where copying Indiana word-for-word would fail. First, **the GAL's role differs**: Indiana's guidelines make the GAL a full party to the case; Georgia's Rule 24.9 makes the custody GAL the court's witness, with party-like powers only in defined respects. Indiana's qualification, training, registry, and complaint machinery transfers cleanly; its Rule 3 duties chapter would have to be re-drafted onto Georgia's role definition, not transplanted. Second, **Georgia's two tracks are held by different hands**: dependency GALs sit inside the Juvenile Code with OCA at the center, custody GALs inside the Uniform Superior Court Rules with no center at all. Indiana kept its two tracks separate and built only on the family-law side. Georgia can make the same choice and still transform custody practice — or treat the build as the occasion to give both tracks one oversight roof. Either is buildable. What is not buildable is the argument that nothing can be built: Indiana is the counterexample, dated January 1, 2025.

5 · Closing — the three asks, in Indiana's shape

This project's three asks have not changed: **a public registry** of who is approved to serve as a GAL; **a training floor with continuing education**; and **an oversight home that is not the appointing judge**, holding a real complaint process. Indiana is what those three asks look like when a state says yes — all three of them, in one framework, built by the courts themselves, in five years from a standing start and eighteen months from committee to go-live. Georgia is not being asked to experiment. It is being asked to follow a documented sequence whose every step has a named Georgia actor and an existing Georgia vehicle: a study committee, a report, a rule amendment, a committee, a registry, a funding statute, and a date. The children whose custody is decided on a GAL's recommendation cannot convene any of those. The adults who can are named in this paper. Indiana's justices, judges, and GALs have already shown them how.

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.
- **If you work in or near the General Assembly or the Judicial Council:** the playbook in Section 4 is written to be used — every step names its actor — and the project can supply the Indiana source documents (the order, the guidelines, the minutes) by email.

Contact: georgiagalreform@gmail.com

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 Indiana fact in this paper was read in Indiana's own published sources on November 5, 2026: the Supreme Court's adoption order and news releases, the adopted Guidelines text, the Office of Court Services' program pages, and the Oversight Committee's published 2025 meeting minutes, from which all counts (approximately 220 registrants in February 2025; 361 in October 2025; about

190 people trained through Kids' Voice; three complaints received in 2025, none within the process's scope) are taken directly. The training figures at the center of the project — twelve hours initial, six hours annually — were verified against Rule 2 of the adopted Guidelines themselves, not against secondary accounts. The five-state comparison in Section 1 is the intersection of the four "full form" columns of this project's *Fifty-State GAL Oversight Survey* (November 5, 2026), machine-checked in the survey's ranking computation (Chart 8 data file, November 5, 2026): Colorado, Connecticut, Indiana, Maine, and New Hampshire are the only states whose cited primary sources establish all four structures in full form, and the scope and recency contrasts drawn among them are taken from those same per-state rows and sources. The Georgia mapping in Section 4 rests on the instruments it names — Uniform Superior Court Rule 24.9, O.C.G.A. §§ 15-11-104 and 15-11-36(a)(4), and the Judicial Council / Administrative Office of the Courts structure — as documented in this project's Georgia research files; it is a statement of who would have to do what, offered as a planning document, not a prediction and not legal advice. Where Indiana's record is silent — most importantly on total program cost — this paper says so and estimates nothing. Indiana's documents are living ones: the registry is updated continuously, the Committee's minutes continue, and a first amendment cycle for the Guidelines was already in preparation in late 2025; check the cited sources for the current state of each.

Sources

- Indiana Supreme Court, *Order Adopting Guardian ad Litem Guidelines for Civil Family Law Cases*, Cause No. 24S-MS-1 (October 17, 2024).
- *Indiana Guardian ad Litem Guidelines for Civil Family Law Cases* (adopted, effective January 1, 2025) — Preamble; Rule 1, Qualifications; Rule 2, Training; Rule 3, Roles and Responsibilities (rules.incourts.gov).
- Indiana Supreme Court news release, "Guardian ad Litem Guidelines adopted by Indiana Supreme Court" (November 20, 2024), and "Family Law Taskforce Shares Innovative Recommendations" (2021) (times.courts.in.gov).
- Indiana Office of Court Services: *GAL Guidelines & Code of Ethics*; *GALs for Civil Family Law Cases*; *Application Process*; *GAL Registry*; *The Complaint Process*; *Guardian ad Litem Family Oversight Committee* (in.gov/courts/iocs).
- GAL Family Oversight Committee, *2025 Meeting Minutes* (in.gov/courts/iocs).
- *Indiana Guide to Working with a Guardian ad Litem* (Indiana GAL Oversight Committee, Indiana Supreme Court, November 2024) (in.gov).
- Indiana Supreme Court, "Changes to the ADR Fund Plan" (August 29, 2023) (times.courts.in.gov); Indiana Judicial Branch Legislative Update, HB 1493 entries (February–March 2023) — Ind. Code § 33-23-6; Public Law 151 (2023).
- Georgia: Uniform Superior Court Rule 24.9; O.C.G.A. §§ 15-11-104, 15-11-36(a)(4); Georgia GAL Accountability Project, *Indiana GAL Process Research* (November 5, 2026) and *Fifty-State GAL Oversight Survey* (November 5, 2026), Plan and Research files.
- Project papers: Paper No. 2, *How Other States Do It*; Paper No. 7, *The Public's Professionals*; Paper No. 13, *Fifty States, Counted* — Georgia GAL Accountability Project, November 2026.

© November 2026 Georgia GAL Accountability Project. Share freely with attribution to the project. This paper is general information about a court system, not legal advice about any case.

Georgia GAL Accountability Project — georgiagalreform@gmail.com