



November 27, 2024

Dr. David Jackson, Executive Vice President and Provost
University of Nebraska
3835 Holdrege Street
Lincoln, NE 68583-0745

Dear EVPP Jackson,

Please find attached a proposal to create the Nebraska Children's Justice and Legal Advocacy Center. The program is administered by the College of Law, which has a strong partnership with the College of Arts and Sciences.

The Nebraska Children's Justice and Legal Advocacy Center is a newly established initiative that builds on the success of the Center on Children, Families, and the Law. It merges two existing programs: the Children's Justice Clinic at the College of Law and the Children's Justice Attorney Education Fellowship Program within the College of Arts and Sciences. By integrating these programs, the center aims to enhance interdisciplinary collaboration and expand its impact.

With \$1.2 million in recent funding, the University of Nebraska has increased law student participation in the Children's Justice Clinic and doubled the number of rural attorneys trained through the Fellowship Program. The resources for this merger are largely in place, and the center's heightened visibility is expected to attract further external funding, driving its mission forward.

The establishment of this new center has the approval of the Academic Planning Committee, and Executive Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, Dean Richard Moberly, and Dean Mark Button, and it has my approval. I am requesting you approve it and that it be reported to the Board of Regents at an upcoming meeting.

Sincerely,

Rodney D. Bennett
Chancellor

University of Nebraska-Lincoln
Academic Center

I. Descriptive Information

Name of Institution Proposing the New Center
University of Nebraska-Lincoln
Name of Current Programs
Children's Justice Clinic (College of Law) and Children's Justice Attorney Education Fellowship program (Center on Children, Families, and the Law – College of Arts and Sciences)
What Academic Administrative Unit currently oversees the program/center
College Arts and Sciences and College of Law
Physical Location, if applicable
College of Law
Proposed Name of Center
Nebraska Children's Justice and Legal Advocacy Center
Proposed Administrative Unit(s) that will oversee the Center
College of Law
As a result of the proposal, what percent of the Center's work is focused in the following areas?
<input type="checkbox"/> 40% <input type="checkbox"/> Research <input type="checkbox"/> 60% <input type="checkbox"/> Outreach <input type="checkbox"/> Both <input type="checkbox"/> Neither
Proposed Date for Implementation
<i>Upon approval, Fall 2025</i>

II. Details

A. Description of the Proposed Center

The Nebraska Children's Justice and Legal Advocacy Center (NCJ) will integrate and expand the work in the Children's Justice Clinic (CJC) and Children's Justice Attorney Education (CJAE) Fellowship Program. The CJC and CJAE were created as separate programs in 2017 and 2021 respectively through a partnership between the University of Nebraska College of Law and Center on Children, Families, and the Law.

B. Purpose of the Proposed Center

The University of Nebraska recently received \$1.2 million dollars allowing the CJC and CJAE to scale and unify current program initiatives. With the additional funding, the core activities and structure of each program will continue but we will increase the number of law students in the CJC and double the number of rural attorneys trained through the CJAE. Further, the NCJ will expand data collection efforts and become a centralized resource for information on juvenile attorney quantity and quality in Nebraska. Finally, a formalized model will be developed to improve rural attorney education in other states. Integrating both programs under one title is a natural outgrowth of the success achieved by the CJC and CJAE. Both programs employ a similar model of attorney education including three main components: 1) Intensive training, 2) Expert case consultation, and 3) Reflective practice. Further, both programs have similar goals to provide law students and attorneys with the knowledge and skills to advocate effectively in juvenile court; increase interest and competency to work in child welfare; and increase availability of high-quality legal services.

III. Review Criteria

A. Centrality to UNL Role and Mission

The Nebraska Children's Justice and Legal Advocacy Center serves to deepen the partnership between CCFL and the College of Law. Currently, the CJC and CJAE programs operate as separate programs. The proposed shift to titling the programs as the NCJ enhances its credibility and perceived worth with the external community as the NCJ expands its platform from the local and state communities to create a national impact.

B. Relationship of the proposal to the NU 5-year strategy

The goals identified in the NCJ align with the 5-year strategy. Specifically, the strategy includes addressing Nebraska workforce shortages. The NCJ plays a unique role in achieving this goal by increasing the number of practice-ready law students through clinical education and recruiting and retaining rural attorneys to serve in juvenile cases in our rural communities.

Similarly, since 2017, CCFL and Nebraska Law have illustrated how meaningful partnerships between University entities serve to create greater impact. The outcomes achieved by the CJC and CJAE were made possible through the partnership because CCFL and Nebraska Law have complementary expertise that collectively serves to improve juvenile court advocacy in Nebraska.

C. Consistency with the Comprehensive Statewide Plan for Post-Secondary Education

The goals of the NCJ align with the state's comprehensive plan for post-secondary education. Through clinical education and the fellowship program, NCJ's utilizes an innovative approach to educate law students and attorneys with the knowledge and skills necessary to be high quality advocates. The combination of intensive training, expert case consultation, and reflective practice is serving to transform advocacy. As a result, in less than two years, the program has fellows working in 55 of Nebraska's 93 counties, and most of those counties have fewer than 50 attorneys. Partnerships with state stakeholders play an integral role in program development and continued success. These partners include but are not limited to the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Probation, Court Improvement Project, and Nebraska Judiciary.

D. Evidence of Need and Demand

The CJC and CJAE were created as separate programs through a partnership between the University of Nebraska College of Law and Center on Children, Families, and the Law. Both programs shared the same innovative model to elevate and transform juvenile court advocacy. Integrating the CJC and CJAE under one title will enable expanded reach, impact, and effectiveness. With the additional funding secured, the Nebraska Children's Justice and Legal Advocacy Center (NCJ) will double the number of rural attorneys trained through the fellowship program, expand data collection efforts to become a centralized resource for information on juvenile attorney quantity and quality in Nebraska, and create a formalized model to improve rural attorney education in other states.

Uniformly, across the United States, rural communities severely lack access to attorneys. Data from the American Bar Association for the year 2020 revealed that 1,300 counties in the United States have fewer than one attorney per 1,000 residents, and many have no attorneys whatsoever. Nebraska shares similar statistics. Currently, 12 counties in Nebraska have zero attorneys and an additional 18 counties with three or fewer. Residents are required to drive for hours to access basic legal services to handle even routine matters. Despite efforts by many states to increase access to justice for rural America, a scarcity of rural attorneys continues. The stakes are compounded when rural children and families are involved in the juvenile court system due to the fundamental interests at issue. There is a lack of attorneys available to serve in juvenile court, and those willing may not have access to the necessary formal and informal training and support needed to become effective advocates in child welfare and youth justice. Without these supports, attorneys may opt out of juvenile cases, and as a result, outcomes for children and families deteriorate.

The CJC and CJAE's efforts to address this inequity have received national attention. See Michelle Paxton, *Preventing Legal Deserts in Our Rural Communities*, American Bar Association, Nov. 2023, <https://www.americanbar.org/groups/litigation/resources/newsletters/childrens-rights/fall2023-preventing-legal-deserts-in-our-rural-communities/>; Michelle Paxton, *Preventing Legal Deserts in Our Rural Communities: Insights from a Child Welfare Attorney Fellowship*, presented at annual meeting of the National Association of Counsel for Children, Aug. 2023. The American Bar Association and the National Association of Counsel for Children affirm the lack of momentum nationally to address rural deserts in child welfare and applaud the CJAE strategy as best practice.

Shifting both programs under a single title will simplify communication and make the program more accessible to participants, partners, and funders.

E. Organizational Structure and Administration

The Nebraska Children's Justice and Legal Advocacy Center will continue as a partnership between the Center on Children, Families, and Law and the College of Law. The program will be housed at the College of Law with the following staff:

- Director
- Associate Director
- Project Coordinator
- Project Manager
- Legal Assistant
- Mental health consultant
- Evaluator
- Graduate Research Assistant

Through the partnership, CCFL and the College of Law provide administrative and technical support as needed for program success. See Appendix A logic model.

F. Partnerships with Business

Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services: Provides training and consultation support at no cost.

Nebraska Office of Probation: Provides training and consultation support at no cost.

Education Rights Counsel: Contract to provide training and consultation support for law students and rural attorneys.

Nebraska Indian Child Welfare Act Coalition: Contract to provide training and consultation for rural attorneys.

Nebraska Judiciary: Program support through promotion and design feedback.

Lancaster County: Contract for Guardian ad Litem appointments.

Casey Family Programs: Program consultation.

G. Collaborations with Higher Education Institutions External to the University

The NCJ anticipates collaborations with higher education institutions as a formalized model for rural attorney education is developed. For instance, Loyola Law School in New Orleans is familiar with the CJC and CJAE and their Dean would like to develop a similar program. Ultimately, the NCJ will partner with state and national stakeholders to develop a program model to include training guides, curriculum manuals, evaluation tools, and coaching.

H. Constituencies to be Served

The NCJ is a natural outgrowth of the success achieved by the current programs at the University of Nebraska. The NCJ will annually serve a minimum of 34 law students and attorneys, the children and families program participants represent in juvenile court, and state and national stakeholders partnering with the Center to improve juvenile court advocacy. This integrative model of attorney education includes three essential components to transform advocacy:

- Intensive Training. Each year, law students and rural will attorneys receive extensive education in federal and state child welfare laws along with invaluable information and insight into the subjects necessary to

become strong advocates: including but not limited to trauma, child development, substance use, domestic violence, mental health, and complex family dynamics.

- Expert Case Consultation with psychologists, attorneys, child welfare practitioners, probation officers, social workers, mental health practitioners, as well as parents and young adults with lived experience in juvenile court. Consulting with child welfare and youth justice experts allows law students and rural attorneys an opportunity to address complex legal questions in their cases while integrating social and psychological factors to increase their advocacy skills for underrepresented communities.
- Reflective Practice allows participants to reflect on personal biases, thoughts, and feelings about their cases and use this expanded awareness to make better decisions. This type of reflective experience has been empirically shown to promote ethical practice and decrease vicarious trauma. When provided in combination with training and consultation, it increases law students and lawyers' interest and commitment to serving in juvenile court.

The additional funding received facilitates three significant changes.

1. The funding will expand and train two cohorts annually doubling the number of rural attorneys receiving the necessary knowledge, skills, and supports to be high quality advocates. In the CJAE's first two years, 49 Nebraska rural attorneys applied to participate in the program and the program experienced a 45% increase in applicants for year two. This illustrates the CJAE is filling a need, and the evaluation data reveals the model produces high quality attorneys committed to practicing in juvenile court.
2. With expanded leadership, the NCJ will create a mechanism to monitor the accessibility and quality of representation in juvenile cases more consistently. This data will be used to improve state accountability, assess program impact, expand program support, and research dissemination. Utilizing this information, the NCJ would introduce a data dashboard integrating attorney availability and quality metrics.
3. The NCJ will create, package, and launch a national model for practicing rural attorneys. The American Bar Association and the National Association of Counsel for Children affirm the lack of momentum nationally to address rural deserts in child welfare and applaud the CJAE strategy as best practice.

I. Anticipated Outcomes, Significance, and Specific Measures of Success

Funding from our private donors require annual formal updates and evaluation reports that inform. In addition, the attached logic model (Appendix A) and evaluation plan (Appendix B) provide the framework for program goals and evaluation.

1. Recruit attorney Fellows, who demonstrate a focus and commitment to rural communities to participate in the program, and graduate 24 CJAE Fellows annually who have increased their knowledge and skills to provide holistic legal representation in juvenile court.

The NCJ will follow the same model implemented with the CJAE but double the number of attorneys benefiting by the program by facilitating two cohorts annually. CAJE Fellows report one important benefit of the program includes the positive relationships developed with colleagues across the state. These relationships are nurtured by maintaining the size of each cohort to 12 attorneys. The NCJ will recruit and mentor Fellows through four in-person workshops, expert case consultation, and reflective practice. Each cohort will include a balance of county attorneys, juvenile defense attorneys, parent defense attorneys, and Guardians ad Litem. Success will be evaluated using several criteria including but not limited to, increase in knowledge and skills, increased interest and confidence in juvenile legal practice, decreased professional burnout and vicarious trauma symptoms, and more reliance on reflection and social support based coping mechanisms through formal assessment and self-reflection.

2. Create, develop, and promote information on the rural attorney program through presentations, publications, and consultation.

The beginning stages to launch a national model for practicing rural attorneys includes research and promotion. In the next two years, the NCJ's Director will craft and deliver presentations and publications to local, state, and national partners. The goals of these endeavors will be twofold: 1) examine the gaps in rural advocacy in Nebraska and other states and 2) create awareness and disseminate data surrounding the unique challenges for

rural attorneys practicing in juvenile court. In addition, these efforts will include strategic efforts to identify and nurture relationships with state senators to foster long-term sustainability through state funding. Ultimately, these efforts will build toward the NCJ nurturing partnerships with national experts, including Casey Family Programs, that have experience and expertise in program packaging and dissemination.

3. Analyze and disseminate data on Nebraska juvenile representation and quality.

The CJAE was inspired after research revealed inadequate representation for rural children and parents involved in juvenile court. Other state and national entities track important data surrounding family child well-being measures including health, education, economic stability, and juvenile court involvement. Similarly, the Nebraska Bar Association and Nebraska Attorney Services collect data on attorney availability. Thus far, these efforts are siloed and do not examine how the data informs the other or propose solutions. The NCJ will utilize the data collected through our own research methods and in partnership with other entities collecting community data including but not limited to Nebraska Children and Families Foundation, Voices for Children, and Nebraska State Bar Association to create a publicly accessible dashboard and reports on access and quality of Nebraska juvenile representation.

J. Potential for the Center to contribute to Society and Economic Development

Of the 5,547 attorneys with an active law license living in Nebraska, only 7% live in rural communities. The need for high-quality attorneys in juvenile court is exacerbated given over 60% of the petitions filed for abuse or neglect originate in rural areas. According to the judiciary, most of Nebraska's rural communities do not have enough attorneys skilled in child welfare; 12 counties have none. Recruiting and retaining lawyers to serve in juvenile cases is not merely about addressing immediate legal needs but is a strategic investment in the long-term social and economic health of our rural communities. Further, by ensuring children and families receive high quality representation and access to rehabilitative services, we will significantly enhance societal contributions and promote economic development.

K. Adequacy of Resources:

1. Faculty/Staff

Current personnel include director, project manager, project coordinator, evaluator, and mental health consultant. In addition, through the partnership, NCJ has access to a variety of experts within CCFL and the College of Law for consultation.

2. Physical Facilities and Equipment

Given the expanded personnel, the majority of NCJ personnel will relocate to office space in the basement of the College of Law. Technology expenses including laptops, monitors, etc. are included in the program budget.

3. Budget Projections:

Recent grants ensure the NCJ has full funding for two years. Additional funding for sustainability is anticipated through one or more of the following methods:

1. Pending grants.
2. Federal funding. The Director and the Department of Health and Human Services are negotiating an agreement to access federal IV-E dollars to support the NCJ's rural attorney fellowship program (CJAE).
3. State funding (not general state-aided university funds). New funding appropriated by the Nebraska state legislature toward these specific programs. The amount of state funding would be contingent upon how much can be accessed through Federal IV-E funds.
4. Current funders. Our funders have shown steadfast commitment to the Children's Justice programs since their inception, consistently providing additional grant support as needed.

IV. Appendix

- A. Nebraska Children's Justice and Legal Advocacy Center - Logic Model
- B. Nebraska Children's Justice and Legal Advocacy Center - Evaluation Plan

TABLE 1: PROJECTED EXPENSES - NEW ORGANIZATIONAL UNIT

	FY2024-25 Year 1		FY2025-26 Year 2		FY2026-27 Year 3		FY2027-28 Year 4		FY2028-29 Year 5		Total	
	FTE	Cost	FTE	Cost	FTE	Cost	FTE	Cost	FTE	Cost	FTE	Cost
Personnel												
Faculty	0.10	\$ 18,240	0.10	\$ 18,788	0.10	\$ 19,352	0.10	\$ 19,932	0.10	\$ 20,530	0.10	\$ 96,842
Non-teaching staff:												
Professional ¹	1.00	\$ 143,000	1.00	\$ 147,290	1.00	\$ 151,709	1.00	\$ 156,260	1.00	\$ 160,948	1.00	\$ 759,207
Graduate assistants											-	\$ -
Non-teaching staff:												
support ²	1.00	\$ 53,200	1.00	\$ 54,796	1.00	\$ 56,441	1.00	\$ 58,132	1.00	\$ 59,877	1.00	\$ 282,446
Subtotal	2.10	\$ 214,440	2.10	\$ 220,874	2.10	\$ 227,501	2.10	\$ 234,324	2.10	\$ 241,355	2.10	\$ 1,138,495
Operating												
General Operating	\$	50,000	\$	50,000	\$	50,000	\$	50,000	\$	50,000	\$	250,000
Equipment											\$	-
New or renovated space											\$	-
Library/Information Resources											\$	-
Other ³	\$	78,000	\$	78,000	\$	78,000	\$	78,000	\$	78,000	\$	390,000
Subtotal	\$	128,000	\$	128,000	\$	128,000	\$	128,000	\$	128,000	\$	640,000
Total Expenses	2.10	\$ 342,440	2.10	\$ 348,874	2.10	\$ 355,501	2.10	\$ 362,324	2.10	\$ 369,355	2.10	\$ 1,778,495

¹ Salary and benefits for new Associate Director position.

² Salary and benefits for new Legal Assistant/Paralegal position.

³ Funding to provide training and consultation for an additional cohort of rural attorneys.

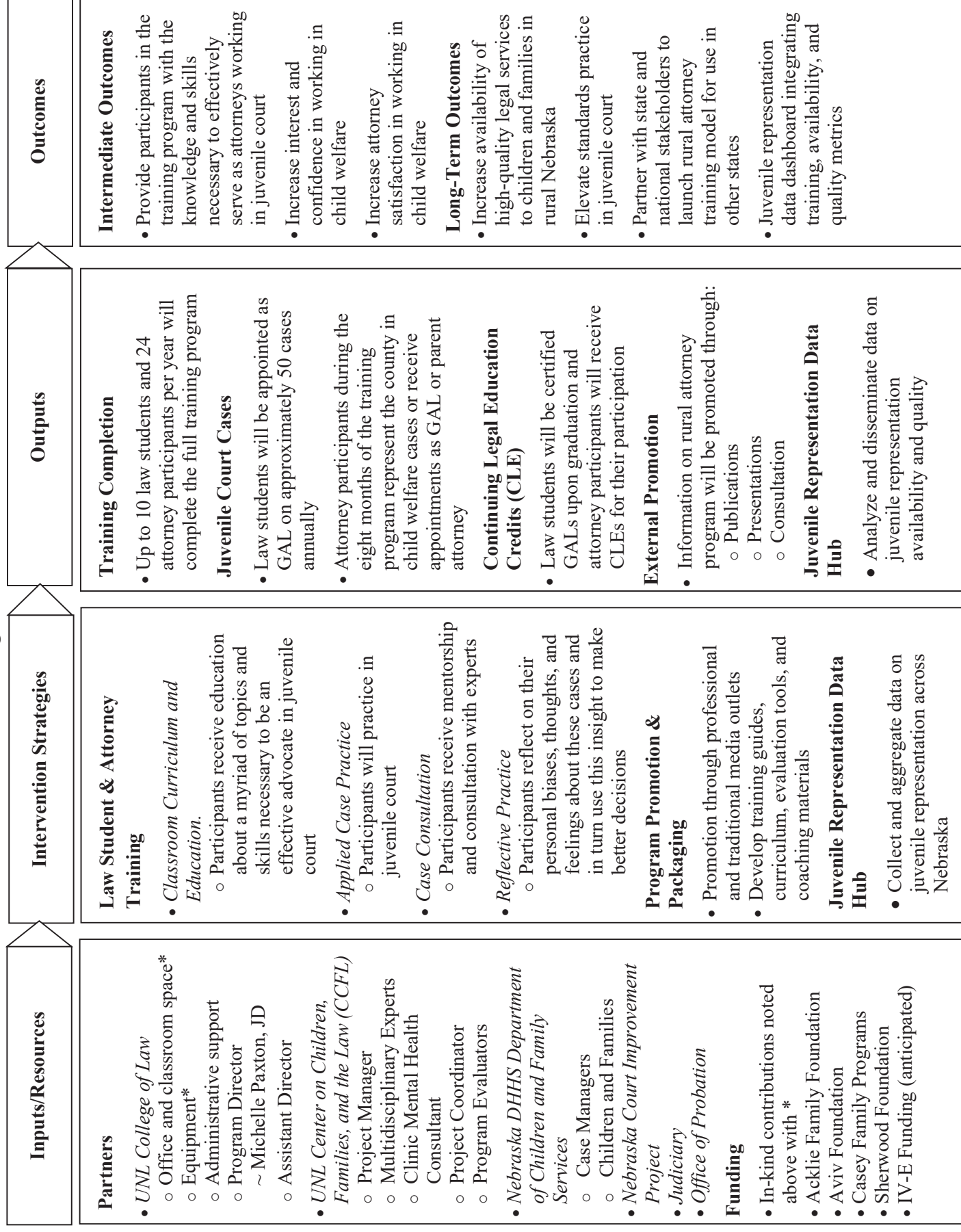
TABLE 2: REVENUE SOURCES FOR PROJECTED EXPENSES - NEW ORGANIZATIONAL UNIT

	FY2024-25 Year 1	FY2025-26 Year 2	FY2026-27 Year 3	FY2027-28 Year 4	FY2028-29 Year 5	Total
Reallocation of Existing Funds						\$ -
Required New Public Funds						\$ -
1. State Funds						\$ -
2. Local Funds						\$ -
Tuition and Fees						\$ -
Other Funding						\$ -
1. Aviv Foundation ¹	\$ 300,000	\$ 300,000				\$ 600,000
2. Sherwood Foundation ¹	\$ 300,000	\$ 300,000				\$ 600,000
3. Other External Grants and Contracts ²			\$ 192,832	\$ 192,832	\$ 192,832	\$ 578,496
Total Revenue	\$ 600,000	\$ 600,000	\$ 192,832	\$ 192,832	\$ 192,832	\$ 1,778,496

¹ Foundation funding available and expendable in the years represented.

² Grants & Contracts that will be secured to ensure sustainability. Funders have shown steadfast commitment to the programming, consistently providing additional grant support as needed.

Nebraska Children's Justice and Legal Advocacy Center Logic Model



NEBRASKA CHILDREN'S JUSTICE AND LEGAL ADVOCACY NCJ EVALUATION PLAN

The purpose of the proposed Nebraska Children's Justice and Legal Advocacy NCJ (NCJ) program evaluation will be to assess the implementation of the NCJ's programming and assess progress toward the NCJ's goals. The goals of the NCJ are to increase the number of juvenile lawyers with the knowledge and skills necessary to provide high-quality legal services, to elevate the standards of practice in juvenile court across Nebraska, to partner with state and national agencies to launch the attorney training model for use in other states, and to launch a juvenile representation data dashboard that integrates attorney training, accessibility, and quality data in one place. The program evaluation will include both a process and outcome to track the effect of increased knowledge, confidence, and connection developed through the NCJ's model on professional well-being and availability for juvenile court cases.

The process evaluation will assess implementation of programming to document what work is being done, the applicants and participants in the NCJ programs, and participant satisfaction with the NCJ programs. We will rely on NCJ records, surveys, focus groups, and key-informant interviews. The process evaluation will yield information about the successes and challenges of the NCJ to serve as feedback that can be used to inform changes to implementation.

The outcome evaluation will assess the effectiveness of the NCJ and its programs by tracking progress towards its goals. We will rely on administrative records, NCJ records, surveys, focus groups, and key-informant interviews to measure the impact of the NCJ programs on juvenile cases across Nebraska, juvenile justice system stakeholders' perceptions of access to and quality of lawyers in juvenile court, and participants' knowledge and skills, confidence and interest in juvenile law, future professional plans, and professional well-being. Finally, we track new inquiries from agencies and professionals in other rural counties and states.

See the tables on the next pages for more details about the data sources and indicators for each NCJ component and associated goal.

Process Evaluation			
Outcome	Sample	Data Source	Indicators
Improve and implement educational component	Program Schedules	NCJ records	Curriculum content, curriculum content
Improve and implement expert consultation component	Program schedule and calendar	NCJ records	Case consultant areas of expertise, availability, attendance
Improve and implement reflective practice component	Program schedule and calendar	NCJ records	Reflective Practice schedule
Improve and implement integrated mental health consultant component	Program participants	NCJ records	Attendance at reflective practice
	Program participants; Clinic Mental Health Consultant	Focus groups, key-informant interviews,	Student feedback on role of clinic social worker; Clinic Social Worker description of role
	Clinic Mental Health Consultant	NCJ records	Clinic Social Worker schedule
Share model with state and national agencies and leaders in juvenile attorney training	NCJ Director, Assistant Director, Program Manager, and Clinic Administrator	NCJ records, key-informant interviews	Number of media stories, number of presentations, number of publications, outlet of coverage, time spent on manuals

Outcome Evaluation			
Outcome	Sample	Data Source	Indicators
Provide participants in the training program with the knowledge and skills necessary to effectively serve as attorneys working in juvenile court	Program Participants	Pre-post knowledge assessment	Increased scores about child welfare, juvenile court processes, and trauma-informed practices
	Program Participants	Survey	Perceptions of knowledge and skills gained
	Clinic Records	GAL Reports	Quality of legal advocacy in GAL reports, including areas discussed, recommendations made, and representation of child voice
Increase interest and confidence in working in child welfare	Program Participants and Alumni	Application, survey	Self-reported number of hours worked per week in juvenile court increases
	Program Participants and Alumni	Survey	Self-reported interest in incorporating child juvenile law into practice; self-reported practice areas
	UNL College of Law students	Career Development Office records; Clinic records	Number of students each year who indicate interest in juvenile law, family law, and child advocacy; number of second year law students who express interests in any clinic and in CJC

	Program Participants and Alumni; UNL College of Law Alumni	Survey	Self-reported confidence representing best interest, interacting with child in need of legal services, advocating in and out of court
Increase attorney satisfaction in working in child welfare	Program Participants and Alumni	Survey	Measures of work-related stress, vicarious trauma, and self-reported coping mechanisms
	Program Alumni	Survey	Self-reported number of hours worked per week in juvenile court after program
	Program Participants and Alumni	Survey	Self-reported interest in incorporating child juvenile law into practice; self-reported practice areas
Increase availability of high-quality legal services to children and families in rural Nebraska	Program Applicants, Participants, and Alumni	Applications; Surveys	Self-reported counties of work; concentration of program alumni per county across Nebraska increases each year
	Nebraska Juvenile Judges	Survey	Perceptions of quantity and quality of juvenile court lawyers available in county
Elevate standard of practice in juvenile court	Nebraska Juvenile Judges; Juvenile system stakeholders	Survey; Key-informant interviews	Perceptions of standards of practice in juvenile court
	Administrative Office of the Court	Administrative records of all juvenile law cases in NE each year	Monitor overall average case progression and outcomes in juvenile court cases; compare counties with Program-trained attorneys to those with no Program-trained attorneys
Partner with state and national stakeholders to launch rural attorney training model for other states	NCJ Records; NCJ Director and Assistant Director	Administrative records; Key-informant interviews	Contracts, meetings scheduled, and contacts with state and national agencies