

EXECUTIVE ORDER 26-17

WHEREAS, the safety, well-being, and protection of Missouri's children is a priority for the State of Missouri; and

WHEREAS, the Department of Social Services is charged with the administration of child welfare services, family protective services, and foster care programs; and

WHEREAS, the Missouri child welfare system currently lacks a singular, universally accepted, and foundational definition of child safety, leading to disparate interpretations and safety practices across different jurisdictions, agencies, and partners; and

WHEREAS, establishing unified standards of safety is essential to ensuring clear and consistent guidelines to make decisions in the best interests of Missouri's children.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, MIKE KEHOE, GOVERNOR OF THE STATE OF MISSOURI, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and Laws of the State of Missouri, do hereby establish the Missouri Child Welfare Task Force as follows:

I. COMPOSITION

The Task Force shall consist of members appointed by the Governor representing the following categories:

- a. The Department of Social Services;
- b. Judicial branch administrative offices, including the Office of State Courts Administrator;
- c. The state legislature;
- d. Juvenile officers and juvenile court administration;
- e. State and local law enforcement agencies;
- f. Private child welfare agencies and foster care case management providers;
- g. Legal representatives, including guardians ad litem and juvenile court attorneys;
- h. Child welfare advocacy organizations; and
- i. Additional members designated by the Governor.

The Governor shall also designate a Chair and Vice Chair of the Task Force.

II. OBJECTIVES

The Task Force shall:

- a. **Develop Foundational Safety Definition and Standards:** Formulate and submit recommendations, including proposed executive directives and draft legislation, for a statewide child welfare safety definition to serve as the universal standard across the Missouri child welfare system.
- b. **Review and Recommend Alignment:** Review existing Missouri statutes, administrative regulations, DSS policies, and judicial court rules to identify gaps or contradictions with the proposed safety standards and recommend formal statutory and regulatory updates to align all guidelines with the safety framework.
- c. **Operational Integration:** Create recommendations regarding protocols and operational frameworks to embed the proposed safety standards into the daily practices of all child welfare partners, including Children's Division frontline staff, juvenile offices, court systems, and private providers.
- d. **Standardized Training and Education:** Develop recommendations for comprehensive, cross-disciplinary training modules for members of the child welfare system to ensure a shared language and a consistent application of the safety standards.

III. REPORTING

The Task Force shall submit recommendations to the Governor, the President Pro Tempore of the Senate, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, and the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Missouri by November 15, 2026, in advance of the convening of the 104th Missouri General Assembly.

IV. COMPENSATION

Members of the Task Force shall serve without compensation but may be reimbursed for necessary expenses incurred in the performance of their duties, subject to availability of funds.

V. DURATION

This Order and the Task Force shall dissolve on December 31, 2026.



IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and caused to be affixed the Great Seal of the State of Missouri, in the City of Jefferson, on this 25th day of August, 2026.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Mike Kehoe", written over a horizontal line.

MIKE KEHOE
GOVERNOR

ATTEST:

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Denny Hoskins", written over a horizontal line.

DENNY HOSKINS
SECRETARY OF STATE