



OFFICE OF FAMILY
REPRESENTATION AND ADVOCACY
Improving lives through outstanding advocacy

Three Years of Leading, Lifting-Up Families' & Learning: Moving Forward with Purpose

FINAL REPORT ON OFRA'S
2026 COMMUNITY
CONVENING

www.ofra.nm.gov | 505-222-9201



OFRA

INTRODUCTION

With thought partnership, planning support, and financial assistance from Casey Family Programs, and logistical support from NM CAN, the Office of Family Representation and Advocacy (OFRA) convened staff and community partners to highlight OFRA's development from the kernel of an idea many years ago, to its inception and its first 3 years of implementation. Most importantly, the convening also asked partners to engage in a live, anonymous polling process using Mentimeter to assess what OFRA should focus on in coming years and identify which growth opportunities had community support.



THE CONVENING

The convening was held at OFRA's offices in Albuquerque on June 24, 2026, from 4 to 6 pm. In addition to staff, other attendees included:

- members of the Family Representation and Advocacy Commission
- youth leaders
- tribal social workers
- OFRA contractors
- CYFD Protective Services staff and staff from the Office of Tribal Affairs
- Children's Court judges, hearing officers, court staff, and the Director of the NM Court Improvement Project
- members of the NM Legislature and their staff,
- staff from the Department of Finance and Administration
- Director of the Corinne Wolfe Center for Child and Family Justice
- staff from NM Kids Matter
- representatives from Managed Care Organizations and medical providers that serve OFRA clients
- media representatives
- other community partners

In total, nearly 100 people attended the convening. Of these, 51 participated in the polling process during the event.



POLLING PROCESS



After discussing OFRA's history, goals, and purposes, OFRA's Executive Director engaged participants in a polling process that was designed to:

- gauge attendee's knowledge of OFRA before and after the event
- prioritize OFRA's future activities by eliciting feedback and input that would help identify the most pressing needs of New Mexico's families
- prompt discussion of OFRA's practice model, principles, approaches, successes, and obstacles to full implementation
- identify current system challenges and how OFRA might be able to positively impact those challenges going forward



OPPORTUNITY FOR DIALOGUE

The live polling created an opportunity for a rich back-and-forth between the attendees and OFRA. As participants were polled, and responses projected live on a large monitor for all to see, the Executive Director was able to respond in real time to questions and ideas arising from the responses, to clarify attendees' meaning, and to expand on OFRA's current activities and future plans. The polling responses and conversation provided some key insights for OFRA's future:

- Attendees identified a broad number of overlapping family, child, and system needs. These needs point to a **family-support plus systems-focused agenda** for OFRA. Attendees also emphasized that effective advocacy for children, youth, and families depends on statewide services and concrete/tangible supports for families, faithful implementation of laws (like IFPA, CARA, and the Children's Code), and statewide adherence to OFRA's practice model.
- Attendees expressed **nearly unanimous support for expanding interdisciplinary services statewide**, suggesting a strong mandate to move from a pilot in central New Mexico to full rollout across the state.
- Attendees **strongly support preventive legal services** but need more details and information about the nature and scope of these services, including information about the proposed delivery model.



POLL RESULTS & IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

Familiarity with OFRA's Practice Model

At the beginning of the polling session, attendees were asked how familiar they were with OFRA's practice model (Cornerstone Advocacy and Interdisciplinary Legal Teams). At the end of the discussion period, attendees were asked if they felt more knowledgeable about OFRA's practice model. Attendees' responses are shown below, but can be summarized this way:

1. **82%** of attendees felt somewhat or very knowledgeable about OFRA's practice model at the beginning of the program; and
2. At the end of the program, **74%** felt more knowledgeable or much more knowledgeable about our practice model.



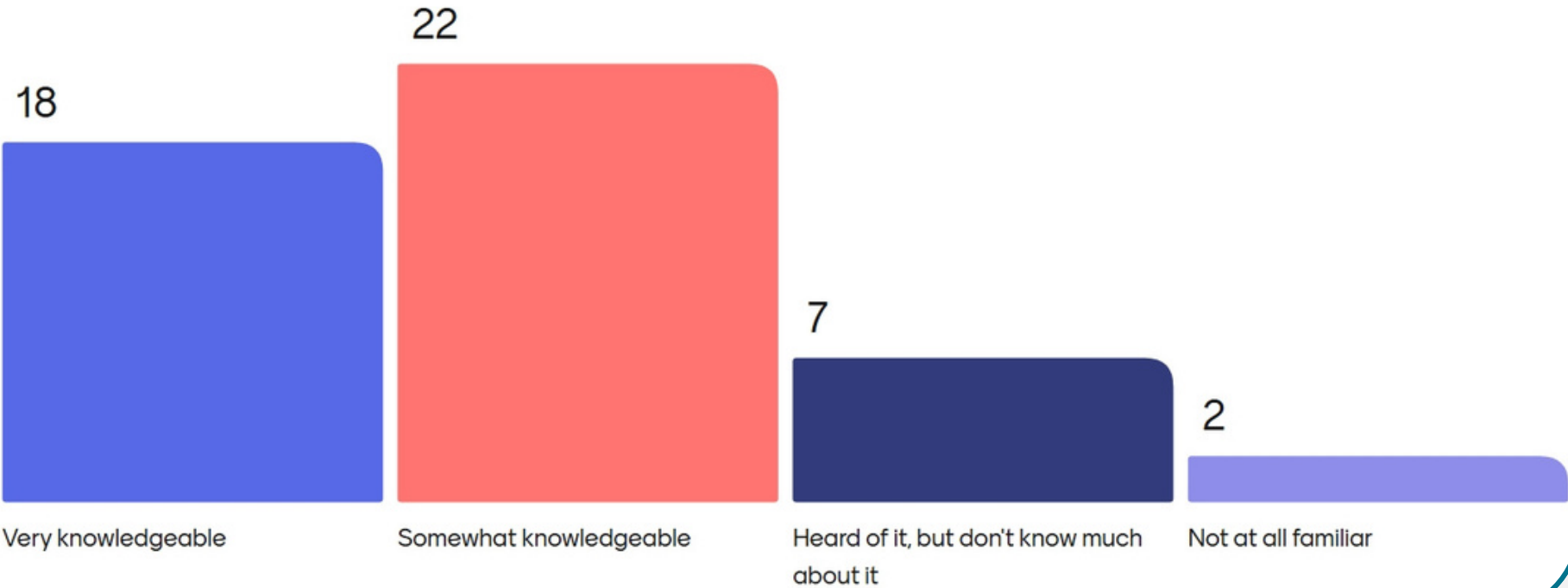
KEY TAKEAWAY

Taken together, the key takeaway for OFRA is that continuous and varied approaches to communicating our approach to representing children, youth, and parents is needed for stakeholders to understand what we do and why, and when our practice falls short of or exceeds expectations for practice outlined in our practice manual. Increased understanding by stakeholders should lead to more informed feedback and enhanced support for our model.

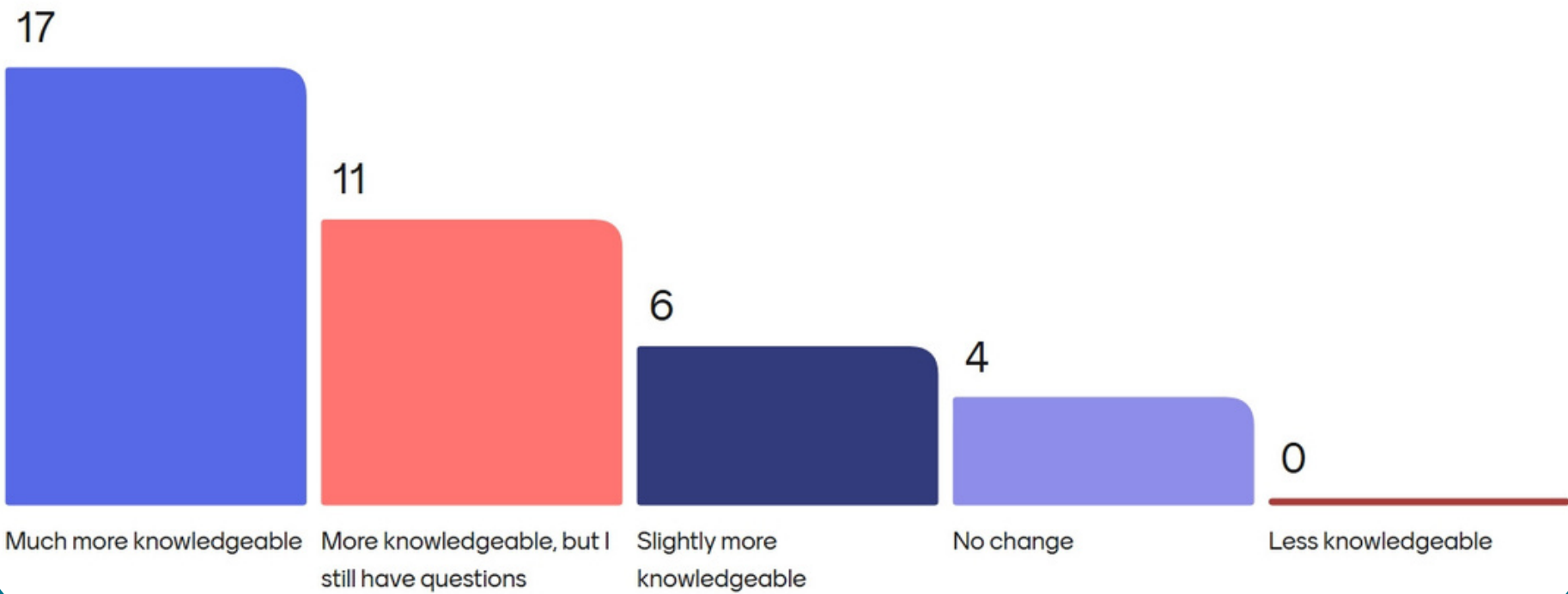


POLL RESULTS

How familiar are you with OFRA's practice model (Cornerstone Advocacy and Interdisciplinary Legal Teams)?



After today's event, do you feel more knowledgeable about OFRA's approach (practice model)?



URGENT AND IMPORTANT ISSUES

Attendees were asked three questions related to urgent and important issues.

- ? WHAT IMPORTANT ISSUES DO YOU THINK OFRA SHOULD FOCUS ON TO HELP FAMILIES IMPACTED BY NM'S CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM?
- ? WHAT IMMEDIATE STEPS DO YOU BELIEVE OFRA SHOULD TAKE TO BETTER MEET THE NEEDS OF CHILDREN, YOUTH, AND PARENTS?
- ? WHAT IS THE URGENCY AND IMPORTANCE OF IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF LEGAL REPRESENTATION?



IMPORTANT ISSUES



WHAT IMPORTANT ISSUES DO YOU THINK OFRA SHOULD FOCUS ON TO HELP FAMILIES IMPACTED BY NM'S CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM?



Attendees' answers to this open-ended question were varied, but certain common and overlapping topics arose, as demonstrated by the word cloud generated during the convening:



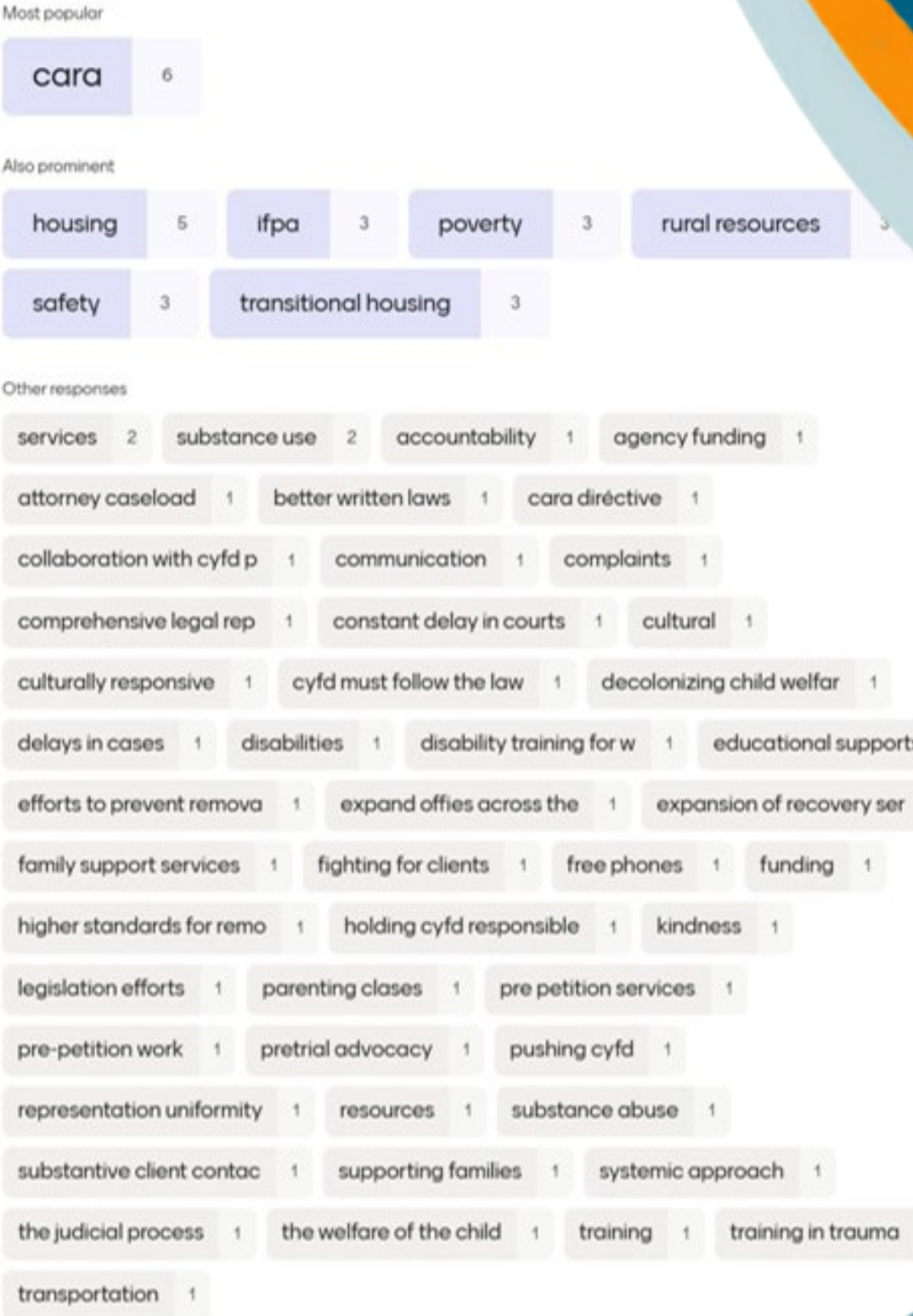
IDENTIFY STEPS



The second open-ended question asked attendees to keep the identified concerns in mind and identify immediate steps OFRA should take to better meet the needs of children, youth, and parents.



Though the responses were varied and included some unique answers, many themes emerged, including: providing meaningful family supports, statewide expansion, pre-petition services, increased funding, expanded and improved interdisciplinary legal services (by expanding the number of statewide interdisciplinary staff, hiring more attorneys, reducing attorney caseloads, reducing attorney administrative tasks by obtaining a case management system), ensuring client contact/creating more meaningful relationships with clients, increased awareness and advocacy around disability inclusion, collaboration with other agencies and ongoing public/stakeholder education about the efficacy of OFRA’s model, service accessibility, and training programs.



URGENCY AND IMPORTANCE

? The third question asked attendees how urgent improving the quality of legal representation of children, youth, and parents in the child welfare system felt to them.

Of the **46** who responded, **36** said it was extremely urgent, 9 said it was urgent, and 1 said it was important but not urgent.



No one responded that it was neither urgent nor important/things should continue as they are.

Taken together, we believe the need to improve the quality of legal representation is urgent and can be accomplished by the methods identified by participants: increasing funding to allow OFRA to open a total of five offices with interdisciplinary legal services in all cases across the state and appropriate administrative/litigations supports in all offices; and recruiting, retaining, and intensively training and supporting more staff attorneys, legal support staff, social workers, and family peer support navigators.

The feedback makes clear that by taking these steps (as envisioned in the planning and creation of OFRA by the Legislature), many of the critical issues facing children, youth, and parents can be better addressed through lower caseloads, a case management system and other litigation and administrative supports, and increased client contact.

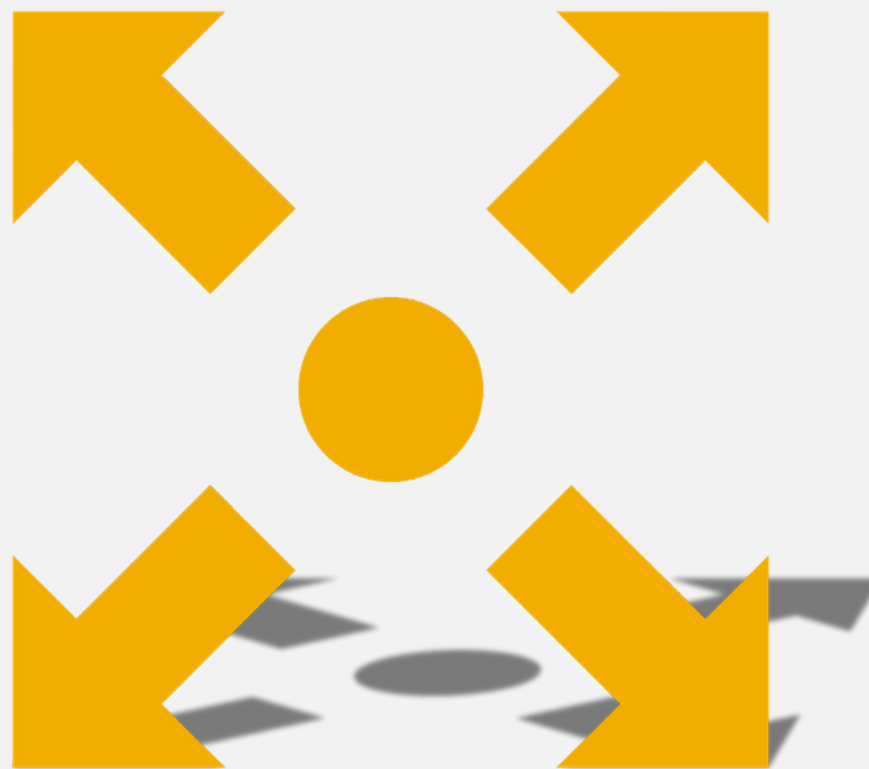
COMMUNITY SUPPORT FOR EXPANSION

Given the responses to the preceding questions about urgent and important issues, it should come as no surprise that attendees expressed strong support for OFRA expanding its interdisciplinary services to all parents statewide and to expanding its services to include preventive interdisciplinary legal consultations.



EXPANDING INTERDISCIPLINARY LEGAL SERVICES (IDLS) STATEWIDE, TO ALL RESPONDENTS

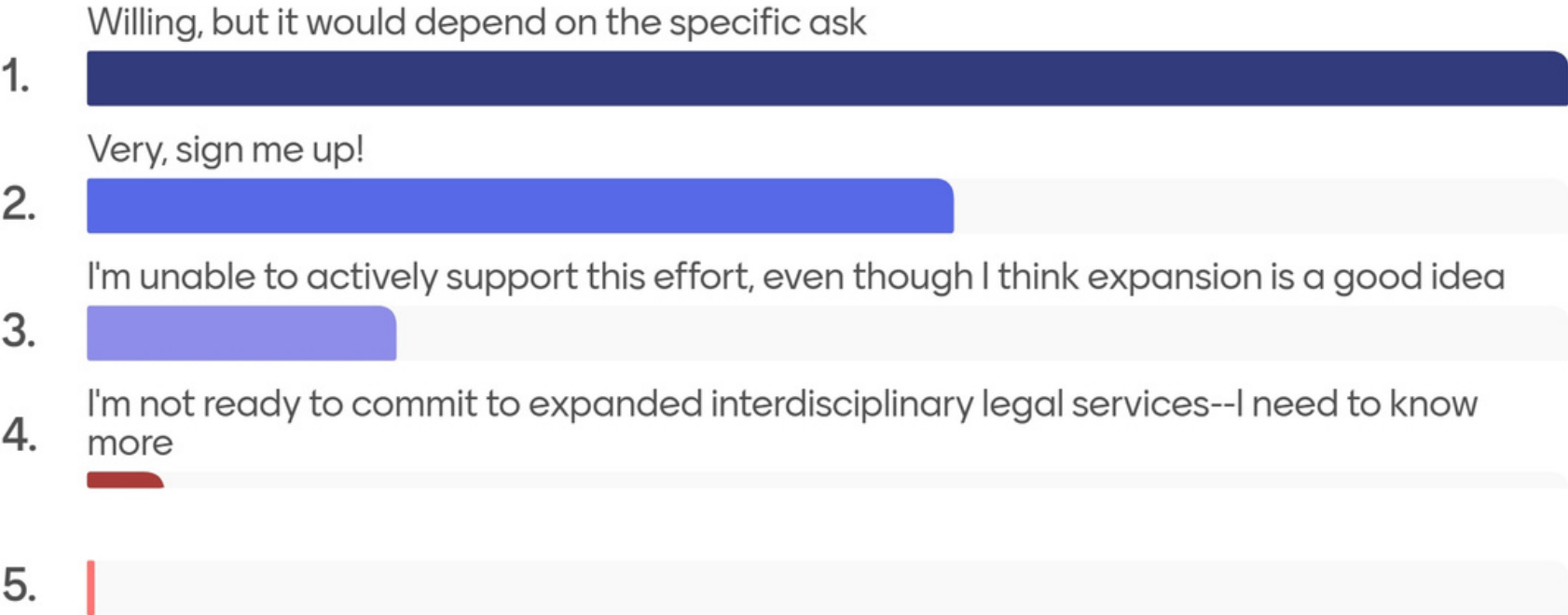
- **90%** of those who responded **strongly agreed** that “interdisciplinary legal services (IDLS) should be expanded statewide,” and 10% agreed. No one disagreed, strongly disagreed, or needed more information before deciding about interdisciplinary legal services.



WILLINGNESS TO SUPPORT



In the follow-up question, most respondents were willing or very willing to support future efforts to expand IDLS, with a much smaller number unable or not yet ready to actively support these efforts:



IN PART DUE TO THIS COMMUNITY/STAKEHOLDER RESPONSE, WE ARE SEEKING ADDITIONAL FUNDS IN OUR FY28 BUDGET REQUEST TO OPEN A SECOND OFFICE IN THE SOUTHERN PART OF THE STATE, WHICH WOULD INCLUDE STAFF TO PROVIDE IDLS IN 4 COUNTIES.

EXPANDING TO INCLUDE PREVENTATIVE LEGAL SERVICES

91.6% of those who responded to this question indicated support for OFRA expanding its services to include preventive legal services. Of these, 38% had some questions about the best methods, creating an opportunity for the Executive Director to describe various forms of preventive legal services and to briefly describe the pilot project that OFRA previously proposed, which would involve interdisciplinary legal consultation services for families that are being investigated by the state child welfare agency, but against whom a petition had not been filed yet.

Do you think OFRA should expand its services to include *preventive* legal services designed to keep children safe without removal or filing?



EXPANDING SERVICES TO INCLUDE PREVENTATIVE LEGAL SERVICES



When asked, **82%** of those who responded **were willing to support OFRA's efforts to provide preventive interdisciplinary legal services:**

How willing are you to support OFRA's efforts to provide ***preventive*** interdisciplinary legal services?



OFRA'S RESPONSE--SEEKING FUNDING FOR PREVENTION



The attendees' responses to these last two questions have compelled OFRA to seek budget support for a three-year, 4-county pre-petition pilot project designed to stabilize families through legal and social welfare assessments, educational opportunities, and supported action planning and referrals, that will prevent child abuse, neglect, and entry into foster care.

If funded, the program will engage an independent evaluator to assist with assessing the efficacy of the project.



4 COUNTIES

Bernalillo, Sandoval, Valencia, and Cibola Counties



3 YEARS

Legal and social welfare assessments, triage, and supported referrals for legal and social services



STABILIZE FAMILIES

Hotline, educational opportunities, supported action planning, and warm hand-offs.



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Conclusion

Turning shared priorities into action.



The 2026 Community Convening affirmed both the progress OFRA has made in advancing interdisciplinary, family-centered advocacy and the broad community support for expanding these services statewide. Attendees' feedback underscored the urgency of strengthening legal representation, deepening stakeholder understanding of OFRA's practice model, and investing in preventive and pre-petition supports that stabilize families before crises escalate. The insights gained through live polling and discussion provide a **clear roadmap: continue clarifying OFRA's approach, expand interdisciplinary teams across New Mexico, prioritize meaningful client engagement, and pursue the resources necessary to reduce caseloads and enhance statewide implementation.** These collective perspectives will guide OFRA's next phase of growth as it works to improve outcomes for children, youth, and families across the state.



*Thank you to the attendees,
partners, and community members
who helped shape this path forward.*