

# 2026 Legislative Updates: Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice

Published: Wednesday, 14 January 2026 19:36

Written by: Martín C. Muñoz

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Voices for Utah Children aims to make our juvenile justice and child welfare systems fairer and more equitable for everyone. It's exciting to see the incredible progress we've achieved over the past five years. Thanks to the dedication of lawmakers and the community, our system is now smaller, kinder, and more focused on supporting youth. Families are gaining better access to early intervention, which helps steer kids away from the courtroom and toward positive paths.

As we prepare for the 2026 General Session, we're excited to continue advocating for policies that truly prioritize the well-being of Utah's youth and families. Let's keep the energy going and make a real difference together!

*This blog will be updated as information becomes available. Last updated 1/16/26.*

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[\*\*HB51: Adoption Amendments, Sponsor Rep. Hall\*\*](#)

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House Bill 51 introduces significant updates to Utah's adoption laws, focusing on enhancing transparency, strengthening protections for birth parents, and improving oversight of adoption agencies. The bill establishes limits on the financial contributions associated with adoptions, broadens access to mental health support and legal representation for birth parents, and allows a designated period for revoking consent after birth. Additionally, it mandates that child-placing agencies operate as nonprofit organizations, restricts misleading advertising practices, and sets clear guidelines regarding the transportation of pregnant women to Utah for adoption purposes. Overall, this legislation aims to promote ethical adoption practices while prioritizing the welfare of children and safeguarding the rights of all families involved.

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## Juvenile Justice Priorities

### [HB188: Juvenile Justice Amendments, Sponsor Rep. Peck](#)

Under current law, the Nonjudicial Adjustment acts as an “off-ramp” that allows probation officers to divert youth away from formal court involvement for minor conduct. H.B. 188 introduces new restrictions on this off-ramp for youth involved in unlawful adolescent sexual activity or repeat drug possession, requiring these cases to go to prosecutor review instead of diversion. The bill also adds a new limit on expungement eligibility by preventing juvenile courts from granting expungement if a youth has been adjudicated or convicted of a controlled substance offense within the past two years. These changes together create a pathway where more youth are pushed into deeper system involvement earlier and face longer-lasting consequences later, even when the behavior involves substance use and could usually be addressed through services. While the bill might aim to promote accountability and consistency, its practical effect could be fewer diversion options, more formal court processing of repeat referrals, and less access to a clean slate.

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## BILL TRACKING AND EVENT OPPORTUNITIES

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## Bill Tracking

Subscribe to our Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice bill tracker to stay alert of bill updates and contact your legislators.

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Learn more about other bills on our [bill tracking page](#).

## Event Opportunities

### **Wednesday, January 21, 2026: Social Work Day on the Hill**

Engage with great community organizations at Social Work Day on the Hill and speak with Department of Professional Licensing (DOPL) about questions or concerns you might have about recent rulings.

- Utah State Capitol, Hall of Governors (first floor) from 11:00am-2:00pm.