



## Washington State Office of Civil Legal Aid

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### **STATEWIDE CHILDREN’S REPRESENTATION PROGRAM TO LAUNCH JILL MALAT NAMED AS PROGRAM MANAGER**

Longtime children’s justice attorney, Jill Malat, was named as manager of Washington State’s new Children’s Representation Program. The program was established with passage of [Senate Bill 6126](#) by unanimous votes in both the House and Senate this past legislative session. The bill requires appointment of attorneys to represent “legally free” children who have not been adopted or achieved some other form of legal permanency six months following termination of their parents’ legal rights. Attorney representation must meet practice, caseload and training [standards](#) previously developed by a Children’s Representation Working Group convened by the Administrative Office of the Courts in response to legislative request and endorsed by the Washington State Supreme Court’s Commission on Children in Foster Care.

“I am pleased that Jill has agreed to lead the effort to implement this important new legislation. She has a long history of providing effective legal representation for children and others involuntarily involved in the justice system,” said Jim Bamberger, Director of the Office of Civil Legal Aid, the state judicial branch agency charged with administration of the new program. “As a former public defender, statewide children’s representation resource attorney and, most recently, in her capacity as an advocate for the civil legal rights of children, Jill has proven herself to have a command of the issues involved and the ability to work with a broad spectrum of stakeholders to make sure that the promise of legal justice embedded in this bill is realized in practice,” Mr. Bamberger observed.

Legislation creating the Children’s Representation Program comes on the heels of a series of reports and media profiles highlighting Washington State’s systemic failure to provide attorneys to children caught up in child welfare proceedings without any legal voice of their own. A [King 5 series](#) produced by reporter Susanna Frame documented the failure of Washington State to appoint attorneys for children in dependency and termination proceedings and the consequences experienced by these children. A series by reporter John Stang in [Crosscut.com](#) also explored these issues and called for reform.

This past session, Senator Steve O’Ban, R-Pierce County, sponsored SB 6126 to direct the appointment of attorneys to represent certain children in these child welfare cases. Working closely with Representative Roger Goodman, D-Kirkland, sponsor of an identical bill in the House, Sen. O’Ban carefully secured strong bipartisan support for a final bill that requires the appointment of attorneys for children who have not achieved permanent placement six months following the termination of their parents’ legal rights.

“We say these children are 'legally free' because their parents' rights have been terminated and they have not found a permanent adoptive home. In reality, they are 'legal orphans.' Many languish for years in the child welfare system without any legal voice of their own. They will have that voice now, and I am confident this will make a real difference in their lives for years to come, "said O’Ban. "As a prime sponsor of the bipartisan legislation that established this first state-funded Children's Representation program, I could not be more pleased to know that Jill Malat will manage the program. Jill is capable, experienced and has my absolute trust and confidence.”

“I am honored to be asked to develop and manage the new Children’s Representation program at the Office of Civil Legal Aid,” said Ms. Malat. “The children for whom attorneys will be appointed are some of the most vulnerable in our state. Effective legal representation will ensure that they have the ability to meaningfully participate in the legal proceedings that will impact every aspect of their lives and determine their future success. I look forward to working with children’s attorneys across the state and a broad array of stakeholders to ensure a timely, effective and strategic approach to implementing this important program and documenting the difference it makes in the lives of these children.”

The Office of Civil Legal Aid is an independent judicial branch agency established by the Legislature to administer and oversee the state’s investment in providing civil (non-criminal) legal assistance to more than two million low income Washingtonians on matters that often affect their basic needs. The Children’s Representation Program established by SB 6126 becomes effective on July 1, 2014.

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