



Administrative Office of the Courts



# Family & Youth Justice Programs 2023–2024 REPORT

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## Family and Youth Justice Programs

The Family & Youth Justice Programs (FYJP) at the Administrative Office of the Courts is dedicated to transforming the child welfare court system to help families thrive and to build more equitable and effective court communities. Through strategic initiatives and collaborative partnerships, FYJP works to ensure that dependency courts are equipped to administer justice and serve children and families with fairness and compassion.

Our efforts focus on four key areas:

- **Facilitating Collaborative System Change** – Convening dependency courts and system partners to address complex challenges and implement innovative solutions.
- **Enhancing Local Dependency Court Capacity** – Helping court communities develop effective practices and improve case handling and outcomes.
- **Improving Practice Through Training and Technical Assistance** – Equipping judicial officers and court partners with the skills, knowledge and tools necessary to achieve better results for children, youth and families.
- **Collecting and Analyzing Data for Continuous Quality Improvement** – Using data-driven insights to assess the effectiveness and impact of programs, policies, and training on families and court professionals.

FYJP's projects integrate these core elements to drive meaningful, lasting improvements in the child welfare court system. This report is structured around these themes, providing an overview of FYJP initiatives undertaken in 2023 and 2024, with concrete examples of their impact. A detailed summary of the Family and Juvenile Court Improvement Program (FJCIP), along with the program's financial report required by RCW 2.56.230, illustrates how these core elements integrate to create a successful and effective program.

This report also provides analysis of statewide administrative data collected by AOC, and findings from FYJP-led research and program evaluation. FYJP's system improvement work is significantly enhanced by a strong partnership with researchers from the [AOC's Washington State Center for Court Research](#) (WSCCR). To view current county and state level data about dependency court performance and outcome measures, we encourage you to access the public, online [Washington State Dependency Timeliness Dashboard](#) (the Dash). Developed and updated monthly by WSCCR, the Dash presents the annual report data required by RCW 13.34.820 in a superior, interactive format.

**Correction Note as of March 15, 2025:** We identified a typo in our original report related to the graphs depicting dependency filings in 2023. This has been corrected in Figure 1, Figure 5, and Table 2, with an updated data extract as of 2/1/2025. The text referencing these figures has also been revised. We apologize for any confusion and appreciate your understanding.

## Dependency Data Insights from Around the State

This section provides an overview of the current state of the child welfare court system. It begins with a presentation of court data highlighting trends in dependency filings over the past six years, with a focus on the demographics of the children involved and any shifts in these demographics at the state level. We also examine trends in dismissal rates, how children exited care in 2023, and whether exit pathways varied across racial and ethnic groups. Additionally, we explore the length of time children spent in care and assess the system's ability to meet federal case processing timelines, including those for fact-finding, initial review hearings, permanency planning, adoption, and achieving permanency within 15 months.

In addition to administrative data, this report presents findings from recent research and data collection on how the Keeping Families Together Act (House Bill 1227) is impacting court practices during Shelter Care hearings. House Bill (HB) 1227 was introduced with the key objective of keeping children with their families whenever it is safe, to minimize unnecessary foster care placements. The law encourages judges and legal professionals to develop safety plans that allow children to remain in their homes under appropriate supervision, as an alternative to being placed in foster care by default. Our analysis explores how court practices have evolved since the law came into effect on July 1, 2023. We compared Shelter Care hearings that took place both before and after the law's implementation, examining court records and conducting direct observations of hearings. Our analysis revealed that Shelter Care hearings have become more interactive, with a clear shift toward actively involving parents in the process and prioritizing proactive, family-centered approaches.

The report also incorporates insights from focus groups and interviews with parents and caregivers involved in the Early Childhood Court (ECC) program. The experiences of ECC families provide important guidance for other dependency courts, especially in how they support families with young children. Early childhood is a critical period for development, and disruptions during this stage can lead to significant and lasting effects on a child's emotional and mental health. By integrating these insights with data on trends in dependency filings, dismissal rates, and the court's ability to meet essential case milestones—alongside research on the effects of HB 1227—we can better identify areas where improvements are needed in the child welfare court system.

We invite you to read this report and reflect on how we can enhance collaboration among all systems involved in the dependency process. By working together, we can identify challenges, implement effective strategies, and ensure that the needs of children and families are met—not just from a legal perspective, but also emotionally and relationally. This holistic approach is vital for fostering a child welfare court system that truly supports families and prioritizes the well-being of children.

### ***Statewide Dependency Case Filings Declined 2018-2023***

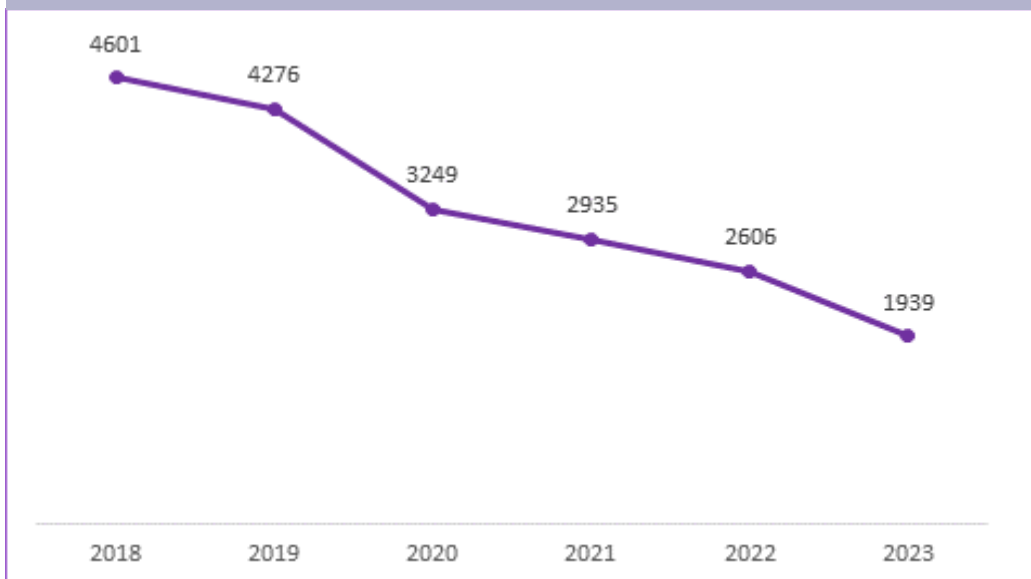
Figure 1 highlights a steady decline in dependency case filings for children aged 0-17 in Washington State from 2018 to 2023. After reaching a peak of 4,601 cases in 2018, filings decreased to a historic low of 1,939 in 2023. This decline includes a 24% drop during the COVID-19 pandemic, followed by consistent annual decreases of 10-11%, and a 25% drop between 2022 and 2023.



The observed decline in dependency filings is likely due to a combination of factors, and it is difficult to identify a single cause. Multiple changes in the system could have contributed, including the new removal standards and judicial findings required by HB 1227, which took effect in July 2023. However, the decrease in filings began well before this law was implemented. Other factors, such as COVID-era economic supports like child tax credits and childcare subsidies, as well as increased access to community-based family supports, may have played a role in reducing neglect. Additionally, interventions, such as the Department of Children, Youth and Families' (DCYF) Plan of Safe Care and the FIRST Clinic, might have helped reduce the number of cases entering the court system. We will continue to monitor these trends, and by working collaboratively with dependency partners, we can better understand the factors driving these changes.

However, the overall state-level decrease during this time does not tell the whole story. Some counties experienced either stable or increasing filing numbers, pointing to regional differences that require more nuanced attention. For example, Mason County had a 31% decrease in filings from 2021 to 2022, but then experienced a 19% increase from 2022 to 2023. In Snohomish County, there was a 41% drop from 2021 to 2022, but the decline slowed to just 3% between 2022 and 2023. In light of these regional differences, it's clear that courts need to adapt their strategies to local circumstances. This could include strengthening partnerships with local organizations that can provide community-based support, potentially reducing the need for dependency filings and/or removals.

**Figure 1: Statewide Dependency Court Filings, 2018-2023**

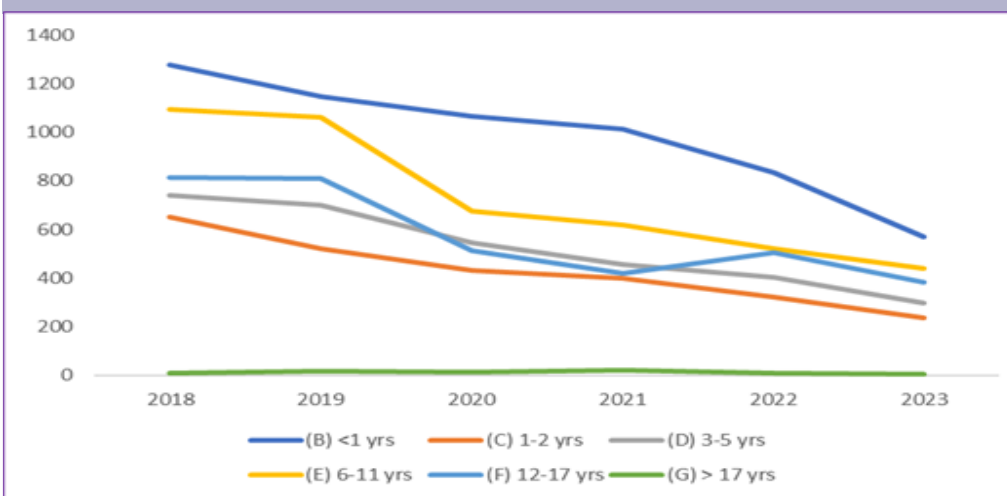


*Data source: iDTR: Court records from the AOC's Superior Court Management and Information System (SCOMIS) are matched with information from DCYFs FamLink system.  
Updated Data extracted: 2/1/2025*

## Infants Continue to be Largest Group Entering Dependency Courts

From 2018 through 2023, court data has consistently shown a decline in dependency filings across all age groups, as shown in Figure 2. For example, filings for infants have dropped by 55%, from 1,277 cases in 2018 to just 571 cases in 2023. The decline is even more notable among toddlers aged 1-2 years, with filings falling by 64%, from 652 cases to 235 during the same period. Additionally, filings for children aged 3-5 years and those in the 6-11 age group have each experienced a considerable reduction of 60%.

**Figure 2: Decline in Dependency Filings, by Age 2018-2023**



Data source: iDTR: Court records from the AOC's Superior Court Management and Information System (SCOMIS) are matched with information from DCYFs FamLink system. Data extracted: 07/05/2024

Even though dependency filings have steadily decreased across all age groups, infants have consistently represented the largest demographic entering dependency courts each year from 2018 to 2023. Their proportion of total filings increased from 27% in 2019 to 35% in 2021, before experiencing a slight decline to 30% in 2023 (see Table 1).

**Table 1: Dependency Filings, by Age 2019-2023**

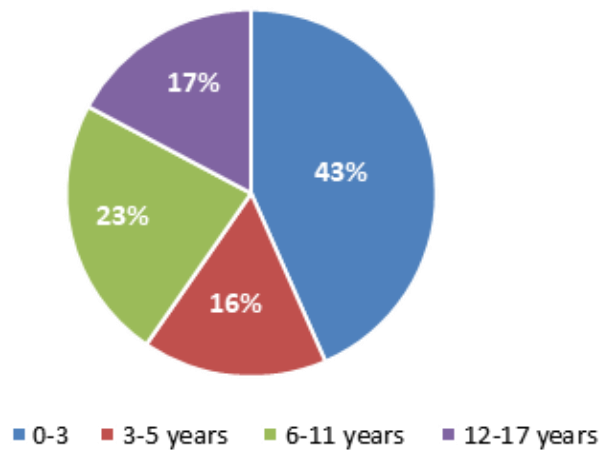
	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Age					
< 1 years	27%	33%	35%	33%	30%
1-2 years	13%	14%	14%	13%	13%
3-5 years	17%	17%	16%	16%	16%
6-11 years	25%	21%	21%	20%	23%
12-17 years	17%	15%	14%	18%	17%
>17 years	0%	0%	1%	0%	0%

Note: Due to rounding, the percentages may not sum to exactly 100%

Data source: iDTR: Court records from the AOC's Superior Court Management and Information System (SCOMIS) are matched with information from DCYFs FamLink system. Data extracted: 07/05/2024

When we group together the filings for infants (< 1 year) and toddlers (under 3 years old), collectively referred to as children aged 0-3 years, they represent 43% of all dependency court filings in 2023. This indicates that nearly half of the children entering the child welfare court system are in this very young age group (see Figure 3).

**Figure 3: Children 0-3 make up nearly half of 2023 Filings**



*Data source: iDTR: Court records from the AOC's Superior Court Management and Information System (SCOMIS) are matched with information from DCYFs FamLink system.  
Data extracted: 07/05/2024*

### ***Dependency Case Filings Trending Upward in 2024***

Starting in April 2024, dependency petition filings for all children began an upward trend compared to 2023. Between January and December 2024, there were 111 more cases filed statewide than during the same period in 2023.

To better understand how dependency petition filings changed between 2023 and 2024, we looked at monthly fluctuations for all children and, more specifically, for children aged 0-3 (see Table 2). It is important to clarify what these numbers represent—and what they do not. The figures reflect dependency petitions, not child removals. While some petitions lead to children being removed from their homes, others result in children staying at home under court oversight (in-home cases with conditions), and some filings are dismissed. The distinction between in-home and out-of-home cases is crucial because removals have significant and lasting effects on children and families, particularly for children aged 0-3, who consistently made up 39% to 47% of all filings in 2024.

**Table 2: Monthly Dependency Filings: All Children vs. Ages 0-3 (2023-2024)**

Month	All children (0-17)			Youngest children (0-3)			
	2023	2024	% change from 2023 to 2024	2023	2024	% change from 2023 to 2024	Share of total filings in 2024
Jan	189	156	-17%	78	70	-10%	45%
Feb	225	141	-37%	92	62	-33%	44%
Mar	236	172	-27%	107	76	-29%	44%
Apr	165	179	8%	84	74	-12%	41%
May	166	216	30%	67	84	25%	39%
Jun	132	155	17%	61	64	5%	41%
Jul	100	171	71%	39	66	69%	39%
Aug	166	173	4%	64	77	20%	45%
Sep	122	182	49%	43	78	81%	43%
Oct	146	204	40%	66	85	29%	42%
Nov	131	157	20%	50	68	36%	43%
Dec	161	144	-11%	57	68	19%	47%

*Note: Court Data extract 2/1/2025*

At the start of 2024 (January to March), dependency filings dropped compared to the same time in 2023, including cases involving the youngest children. For example, February 2024 saw a 37% decrease in total filings compared to February 2023, with a similar 33% drop for children aged 0-3.

In April 2024, the trend began to shift, but not in the same way for everyone. Overall filings started to rise compared to April 2023, but cases involving young children continued to decline at first. By May 2024, both groups saw increases compared to May 2023—overall filings rose by 30%, while filings for children aged 0-3 grew by 25%. June 2024 brought another difference compared to June 2023. Total filings went up by 17%, but filings for young children only increased by 5%.

However, July 2024 marked a significant turning point compared to July 2023, with a noticeable increase for both groups. Total filings increased by 71%, and filings for children aged 0-3 went up by 69%.

The biggest change came in September 2024 compared to the same month in 2023. Overall filings increased by 49%, but filings for young children jumped by an even larger 81%. In October, filings for all children increased by 40%, while cases involving the youngest children increased by 29%. In November, the upward trend continued. Filings for all children rose by 20%, while those for children ages 0-3 saw a slightly higher increase of 36%.



By the end of December, overall filings began to decline, dropping by 11% compared to the previous year. However, filings for children under age 3 continued to rise, increasing by 19%. By the end of 2024, younger children represented the highest proportion of dependency cases for the year, at 47%.

One important question we need to address is whether the trends in dependency filings align with the goals of HB 1227. This legislation prioritized reducing unnecessary removals, making it vital to understand how many filings result in removals versus in-home cases with conditions. Unfortunately, the current data does not provide this clarity. Tracking the proportion of cases resulting in removals versus in-home cases would provide a clearer picture of how well HB 1227's goals are being met. Additionally, we want to understand who is most affected by these filings. Specifically, we need to know which children are more likely to be removed from their homes compared to those who are allowed to stay home, and how race and ethnicity factor into these outcomes.

To address this gap, the next practical step is investing in and developing a robust data tracking system that differentiates between dependency filings leading to removals and those resulting in in-home cases with conditions. This enhanced data collection would help ensure that the system is truly moving toward keeping children safely at home whenever possible. Beyond tracking outcomes, legislators should consider additional measures to reduce both filings and removals. Strengthening preventative supports, such as family-focused programs and community-based services, can address root causes of dependency before situations escalate to court involvement.

In summary, while these data provide valuable insights into filing trends, they also highlight significant gaps in understanding the broader impact of the dependency system. As we move forward, expanding Washington State's ability to collect data and refining our approach will help the entire system make better-informed decisions that truly benefit children and families.

### ***Supporting Parents and Caregivers of Very Young Children***

The high proportion of dependency cases involving children aged 0-3 calls for dependency courts to ensure their practices are responsive to the needs of very young children and their families. This includes providing specialized training for judges and social workers, ensuring that they are well-equipped to meet the unique needs of these young children and their families. Implementing child-centered and trauma-informed approaches in court can also ensure that decisions prioritize the child's well-being and actively involve parents in the process. In 2024, FYJP worked with cross-system partners to develop comprehensive [guidance for courts on the harms of removal](#) across different stages of child development. Guidance for infants, birth to 1 year, and toddlers ages 1-2 years and 2-3 years, and preschoolers ages 3-5 years are currently available on the FYJP website.



Collaboration among dependency partners, including courts, DCYF, and community providers, will also be essential to creating a robust support network for families. Ensuring that families have access to developmentally appropriate and effective interventions like Nurse Family Partnership and Early Childhood Infant Mental Health services is critical. The elements of the Early Childhood Courts (ECC) approach can be

examined and adapted for use in other courts to better meet the needs of young children and their families.

The insights gathered from focus groups with parents and caregivers involved in Washington State's ECC program provide valuable recommendations that can improve the experiences of families in the broader dependency court system. While these recommendations come from the ECC, they can be applied to other dependency courts to better support families, especially those with very young children.

### ***Clear Communication and Setting Expectations***

One of the most important lessons from these discussions is the need for clear communication and setting realistic expectations for families early in their case. Many parents and caregivers said they didn't fully understand how the ECC worked or how it fit into the larger dependency court process. Without clear guidance, they often felt lost or unsure of how the program could help them. One parent shared, "We didn't really know what the ECC was or how it could help us until someone explained it to us." Some caregivers said it would have been helpful to have a meeting at the beginning to explain the process and make sure everyone was on the same page. A dedicated session where an ECC Coordinator or DCYF caseworker walks the family through the ECC's support services—such as therapy, parenting classes, or substance abuse treatment—would help parents understand how these services directly support reunification with their children. Clear explanations of these programs upfront would make parents feel more informed and less anxious about the process.

This sense of confusion is not limited to parents enrolled in an ECC. Many parents enter the dependency court system without a clear understanding of what to expect. One way many dependency courts address this is by supporting Dependency 101 classes provided by local Parents for Parents programs. Evaluations show that participation in Dependency 101 increased parents' knowledge of and trust in the system and had a positive impact on case outcomes. Other opportunities to empower and prepare families to better understand the child welfare court system include one-on-one meetings and written guides or videos that provide clear information about what to expect from the dependency court process. In doing so, courts would support families better by giving them the tools they need to navigate the complex legal system.

FYJP created two animated videos that families can watch on a phone or other device to help them prepare for their dependency hearings and effectively participate in remote court hearings. These [accessible videos](#) are available in multiple languages on the FYJP website or by scanning a QR code that can be posted in court waiting rooms and shared with parents by attorneys, social workers, and others.

### ***Creating a Supportive Environment***

Another critical insight from the focus groups is the need to create a supportive, positive environment where parents feel comfortable communicating openly with caseworkers, attorneys, and court coordinators. Many parents highlighted the importance of having relationships with court professionals that are based on trust and collaboration. One parent mentioned, "I was able to build a relationship with my caseworker, and that made me feel supported through the ups and downs."

ECCs have coordinators who work directly with parents to address their concerns and help them access resources. One parent shared that when they felt overwhelmed by the court process, the ECC Coordinator stepped in to explain each phase and connected

them with community resources for housing and childcare. These types of personal connections not only reduce parents' anxiety but also empower them to take an active role in their cases.

This supportive approach can be applied to other dependency courts. Providing regular, personalized assistance helps parents feel more involved and less like another case number. It also promotes a collaborative environment where parents are encouraged to voice their needs and concerns. Parents who feel supported are more likely to attend court hearings, actively ask questions, and seek out services that can help them meet the court's requirements.

### ***Improving Family Team Meetings***

One of the strongest recommendations from ECC parents was to improve family team meetings, a key feature of the ECC model. Family Team Meetings are intended to bring together families, caregivers, and professionals to discuss the child's needs and create a support plan. While these meetings are designed to be collaborative, parents reported that they often feel they are not given enough opportunity to voice their opinions or that their needs are not fully addressed. For example, an ECC parent noted that during family team meetings, the professionals did most of the talking. "I felt like I was just there to listen, not to participate," the parent shared. Parents suggested that meetings could be improved by allowing more time for open discussion, providing clearer explanations of the goals of the meeting, and making sure the focus remains on the family's needs.

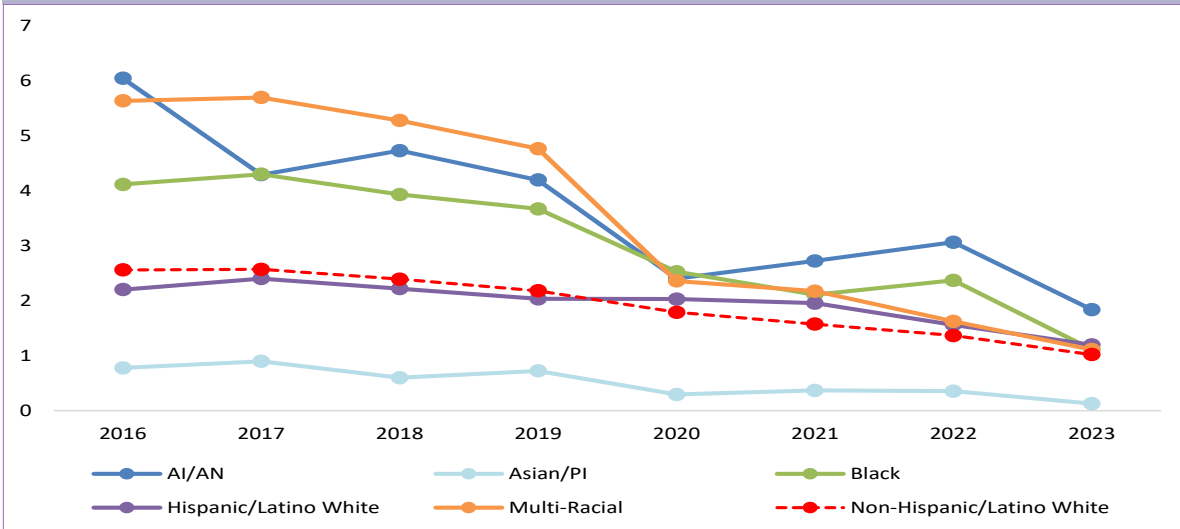
Dependency court systems should identify opportunities to improve how they listen to and engage families, such as in DCYF-led Family Team Decision Making (FTDM) meetings, structured case conferences, or more informal family check-ins.

Allowing parents to bring an emotional support with them to the meetings, such as a relative or community advocate, and ensuring that translators or language support services are available would go a long way toward ensuring that all families can fully engage in meetings about them. Finally, seeking feedback from parents about how well these meetings work for them is an effective way to assess whether the court system achieved its goals.

### ***Racial Disparities in Dependency Filings Persist Despite Case Declines***

While overall population-based filing rates decreased between 2016 and 2023, evidence of disproportionality persists (see Figure 4). American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) children, despite being a smaller population in absolute numbers, consistently faced higher filing rates. They ranked second highest from 2016 to 2019 and held the highest rates from 2021 to 2023. In 2023, their rate reached 1.84 filings per 1,000 children, compared to 1.02 for white children, highlighting systemic issues impacting AI/AN communities. Black children also experienced elevated filing rates, with the second highest rate in 2022 at 2.37 per 1,000.

**Figure 4: Trends and Disproportionality in Filings Rates per 1,000 children**



*Data source: iDTR: Court records from the AOC's Superior Court Management and Information System (SCOMIS) are matched with information from DCYFs FamLink system. Data extracted: 07/05/2024*

While the overall population-based filings rates have decreased over the past five years (Figure 4), the representation of certain racial and ethnic groups has remained remarkably consistent (Table 3). For example, Black children have consistently made up 5-7% of filings, American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) children represented 2-4%, and Hispanic children accounted for 16-19%. These percentages have fluctuated by no more than 3 percentage points, suggesting that despite overall declines, certain communities remain disproportionately impacted.

For dependency courts, this raises critical questions about equity. The consistent representation of various racial and ethnic groups indicates that the challenges these communities face remain, despite a steady decrease in the number of cases filed. As we move forward, it is essential to focus on initiatives designed to disrupt these patterns and establish a fairer system for all.

Courts must pay attention to these trends and work toward addressing any disparities. On the legislative side, increased funding for support services and mandates for data reporting can drive transparency and accountability.

**Table 3: Consistent Racial and Ethnic Demographic in Filings, 2019-2023**

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
<b>Race</b>					
White	48%	49%	46%	46%	48%
Black	7%	6%	5%	7%	5%
Black-Multi	9%	9%	9%	7%	8%
AI/AN	4%	2%	3%	4%	3%
AI/AN-Multi	12%	14%	15%	14%	13%
Asian/PI	3%	1%	2%	2%	1%
Hispanic/Latinx	16%	17%	18%	17%	19%
Multi-Other	2%	2%	2%	1%	1%

*Data source: iDTR: Court records from the AOC's Superior Court Management and Information System (SCOMIS) are matched with information from DCYFs FamLink system. Data extracted: 07/05/2024*

### ***Disproportionalities in Filings Differ Across Communities Over Time***

Disproportionality in dependency filings varies significantly across different communities and can change over time within the same community. For instance, in King County, the percentage of dependency filings involving Black children decreased from 28% to 20% between 2022 and 2023. However, this rate is still considerably higher than their 9% representation in King County's overall child population. In Chelan County, the percentage of multiracial children in dependency cases dropped dramatically from 26% in 2022 to less than 1% in 2023. Spokane County also saw a decline in Hispanic/Latino children involved in dependency filings, falling from 10% in 2022 to 7% in 2023.

Conversely, Skagit County faced an increase in disproportionality, with American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) children representing 23% of dependency filings in 2023, up from 21% in 2022, despite making up only 4% of Skagit's overall youth population.

An interactive way of tracking these changes is publicly available on Washington's [dependency dashboard](https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/wscrcr/viz/DependencyDashboard/MonthlyUpdates-CurrentYear), published by the AOC's Washington State Center for Court Research (WSCCR). The dashboard allows for dynamic analysis and visualization of trends over time. Analyzing these filing rates at the county level is essential for identifying areas that need attention in each community. By understanding the local situation, we can create solutions that are better suited to each area, helping to reduce dependency filings and support the well-being of children and families. This focused approach makes sure that resources go where they are needed most and that efforts to address disparities are shaped by the specific needs of each community<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Dependency Dashboard <https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/wscrcr/viz/DependencyDashboard/MonthlyUpdates-CurrentYear>. The map with population categories is created using the OFM approach, and any unknowns are excluded from the overall count.

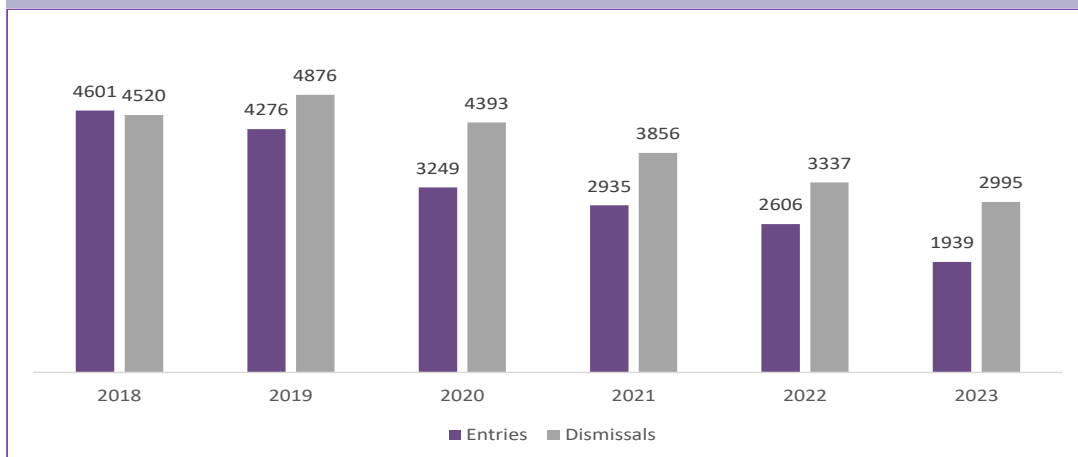


## Trends in Dependency Filings, Dismissals, and Children Currently in Care

Trends in dependency filings, dismissals, and the number of children currently in care each provide a unique lens through which we can better understand the functioning of the dependency court systems. The number of filings reflects the demand for court intervention to address concerns about a child's welfare. The number of dismissals represents how many cases are being resolved. The number of children still in care provides a real-time snapshot of how many children remain in care, and for how long. Together, these three measures illustrate the overall functioning of the dependency system. For instance, an increase in filings without a corresponding rise in dismissals or a decrease in the number of children in care may signal an overwhelmed system struggling to meet its responsibilities.

Figure 5 illustrates the relationship between filings and dismissals. In 2018, there were more new cases filed than cases closed, leading to an increasing backlog of cases. However, from 2019 through 2023, this trend reversed, with more cases being dismissed than new ones being filed. Many of these dismissals are viewed as positive outcomes, often resulting from successful reunifications with families, adoptions, or other resolutions that enable children to leave the system. However, it is essential to analyze the reasons behind these dismissals to ensure that cases are closed appropriately and in the best interests of the children involved.

**Figure 5: Filings and dismissals, 2018-2023**



*Data source: iDTR: Court records from the AOC's Superior Court Management and Information System (SCOMIS) are matched with information from DCYFs FamLink system. Data extracted: 2/1/2025*

In addition to filings and dismissals, another important measure is the number of open cases in the system. As of July 2024, there were 4,404 open cases, reflecting the ongoing workload within the dependency court system (see Table 4). These open cases include filings from 2020 to 2023. For example, 707 dependency cases filed in 2020 were still open, and 1,015 cases filed in 2021 are also active, with similar trends observed in the following years.

On average, these 4,404 cases were open for 817 days, or roughly 27 months. However, the length of time cases remain open varies significantly based on their filing date. Some cases may be resolved quickly, while others may take longer due to factors such as case complexity, the needs of the child, or challenges in securing appropriate placements. Some cases have been open since 2020, with an average duration of 1,444 days, or about 48 months, which is roughly four years (see Table 4).

**Table 4: Open Cases and Average Days Open by Filing Year**

	Filing Year				Total
	2020	2021	2022	2023	
Open cases					
Dependency	707	1,015	1,308	1,374	4,404
Extended Foster Care	12	31	33	44	120
Average days open					
Dependency	1,444	1,086	733	375	817
Extended Foster Care	1,522	1,086	765	372	779

*Data source: iDTR: Court records from the AOC's Superior Court Management and Information System (SCOMIS) are matched with information from DCYFs FamLink system. Data extracted: 07/05/2024*

For dependency courts, the average time that cases remain open—1,444 days, or about four years—raises several important issues. This number suggests that some children may need long-term support and resources, highlighting the importance of creating targeted interventions that cater to their specific situations. Additionally, such a long average duration could point to challenges within the system that slow down case resolution. Extended stays in care can significantly affect a child's emotional and developmental health, making it vital for dependency courts to look into why these cases take so long.

In this context, the reforms introduced by HB 1227 are particularly relevant. This legislation focuses on streamlining shelter care hearings to ensure they are conducted promptly, with a strong emphasis on prioritizing children's needs during their time in care. Moreover, HB 1227 prioritizes family reunification by promoting strategies that support families, ultimately facilitating quicker transitions for children back to their homes.

### ***How the Keeping Families Together Act is Transforming Dependency Practices***

In 2021, the Washington State Legislature passed HB 1227, also known as the Keeping Families Together Act (KFTA), to emphasize the importance of child well-being within their families and communities. Effective July 2023, KFTA introduced significant changes to shelter care court procedures in cases of child abuse and neglect. These changes include emergency removal standards, early notification processes, discovery procedures, assignment of counsel, safety assessments, in-home pre-fact-finding, prevention services, housing assistance, and placement considerations for relatives or suitable individuals. This shift in court practices not only reflects an intention to enhance the judicial process but also aims to reduce the length of stay in care.

To evaluate the impact of these policy changes introduced by HB 1227 on shelter care hearings, we conducted research analyzing how the quality of these hearings has evolved since the legislation's implementation.

Our research methodology combined direct observations of live shelter care hearings conducted via Zoom following the HB 1227 implementation, as well as detailed reviews of court hearing recordings from the period before the legislation. This dual approach allowed for a thorough evaluation of changes in court practices and procedures over time.

In partnership with the Capacity Building Center for Courts (CBCC), FYJP developed a Court Observation Tool designed specifically for shelter care hearings. The tool includes a detailed list of attendees at hearings, assessments of questions asked by judges, breadth and depth of discussion, judicial engagement, and involvement of attorneys and social workers. It also evaluates the active participation and advocacy of legal representatives, services ordered for parents and children, considerations related to the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA), accommodations for incarcerated parents, interpreter provisions, and placement decisions. Additionally, the tool records placement decisions, visitation, and family time details, along with efforts to prevent removal.

Before data collection began, this tool underwent extensive field testing, supported by graduate research assistants from the University of Washington's School of Public Health. We used an iterative process to refine the tool, collecting feedback from each observer and adjusting the tool accordingly. The students' contributions were vital, not only in testing the tool but also in helping us collect data from a total of 123 shelter care hearings across multiple counties, including Pierce (N=18), King (N=40), Clark (N=40), Snohomish, Thurston, Chelan, and Spokane. Of these hearings, we observed 44 in real-time via Zoom, while 80 were analyzed using audio recordings provided by the courts. Our analysis included 58 hearings conducted prior to the implementation of HB 1227 and 65 hearings held after its enactment, allowing us to identify shifts in court practices resulting from the legislation.

### ***HB 1227 Evaluation Results***

**Increased Hearing Duration:** Following the implementation of HB 1227, the average length of shelter care hearings increased from 78 minutes to 93 minutes, a 20% increase. This longer hearing time indicates that judges are dedicating more time to each case. While this can lead to better-informed decisions for families and children, it could also present challenges for courts, requiring additional resources and careful scheduling to maintain efficiency.

**Parental Attendance:** Following the law's implementation, there was a significant increase in parental attendance at shelter care hearings, rising from 69% to 86%, a 17-percentage-point improvement. This improvement indicates that efforts to deliver paperwork ahead of time and improve the notification process are paying off. Increased attendance at shelter hearings is a positive development, as engaging parents early in the process is essential for ensuring stronger connections between parents and the judicial process.

**Judicial Engagement:** After the implementation of HB 1227, there was a 45% increase in the frequency with which judges directly addressed parents during shelter care hearings, compared to pre-implementation levels. Judges are also more likely to discuss future steps in the court process, with a 14% rise in such discussions.

Additionally, interruptions by judges decreased by 12%, reflecting a shift toward more attentive listening and less interruption. This increased judicial engagement suggests a focus on open communication and collaboration with parents.

**Focus on Potential Harm:** The frequency with which judges discussed the potential harms of removing children from their families increased significantly after HB 1227's implementation, rising from 12% to 42%, a 30% increase. Judges also became 26% more likely to weigh the risks of removal against the potential harms of keeping children at home, and there was a 24% increase in documenting reasonable efforts to prevent removal. These shifts reflect a growing focus on carefully assessing the broader implications of removal decisions.

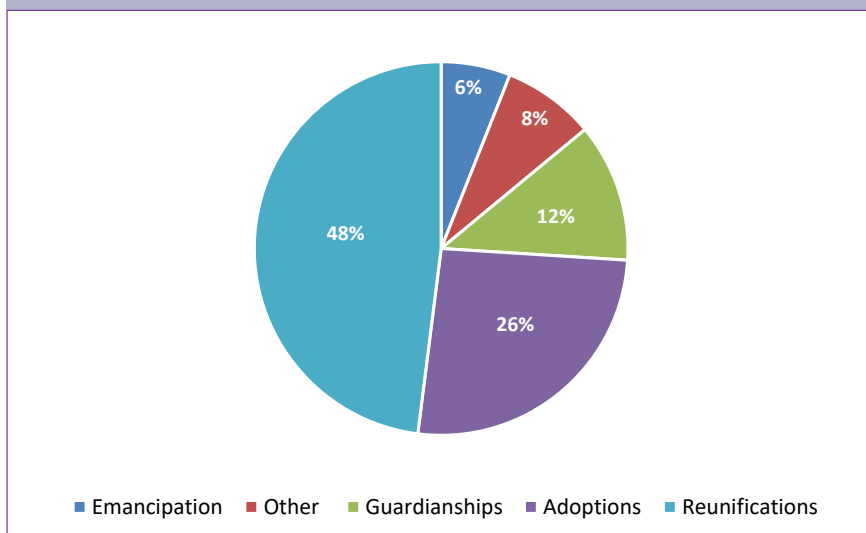
These findings indicate that evolving court practices may affect both the length of stay in care and placement decisions. To further evaluate the impact of HB 1227, we will continue tracking the cases we observed, focusing on how these changes influence the timeliness of proceedings and final case outcomes.

This ongoing analysis will help us determine whether the adjustments made during shelter care hearings are influencing the duration of care and the overall outcomes for children and families.

### ***Where Children Go and Their Length of Stay in Dependency Cases***

Within the dependency court system, there are multiple avenues for children to exit out-of-home care, such as adoption, emancipation, legal guardianship, and reunification with parents. In 2023, a total of 2,777 exits from out-of-home care were recorded. Among these exits, 48% involved reunification with parents, 26% were through adoption, 12% were achieved through legal guardianship, 8% were through emancipation, and 6% aged out of the system through emancipation<sup>2</sup> (see Figure 6).

**Figure 6: 2023 Care Exits: Where Did Children Go?**



Data extracted: 07/05/2024

<sup>2</sup> A small percentage of children also experienced other outcomes, such as transfer of custody to another relative or, in rare cases, passing away while in care, and extended services ended.

The 2023 data on foster care outcomes reveals notable differences by race and ethnicity. Although reunification was the most common outcome for all groups, Black children had the lowest reunification rate at 48%, compared to 54% for both Hispanic and Indigenous children and 53% for White children.

Indigenous children, on the other hand, had the highest guardianship rate at 32%, reflecting a greater reliance on community-based solutions when reunification isn't feasible. In contrast, only 11% of Black and Hispanic children, and 10% of White children, entered guardianship, indicating distinct pathways to stability for these groups.

The high guardianship rate for Indigenous children indicates that community-based solutions are more often favored or effective in their cases. This suggests that dependency courts should be aware of the cultural significance of guardianship within Indigenous communities and support these arrangements when reunification isn't possible.

Table 6, below, outlines the length of time children spent in foster care before exiting the system in 2023. It provides a breakdown of how long children remained in care based on their exit type, whether that was adoption, emancipation, guardianship, or reunification.

Reunification with a parent typically involved shorter stays in care. Nearly half (43%) of children who were reunited with their families left in less than 15 months. Another 24% left after 15 to 24 months, and 34% stayed more than 24 months. The longer stays suggest that while some children are reunited with their families quickly, others need more time to ensure they can return home safely. This extra time may be needed because of complex family situations, the need for additional support or services, or difficulties in resolving certain issues.

The majority of children who were adopted spent a significant amount of time in care, with 89% staying for more than 24 months. Only a small number (1%) were adopted in less than 15 months, and 10% were adopted after staying between 15 to 24 months. This suggests that adoption, compared to other outcomes like reunification, often takes more time to arrange. The extended duration may reflect the complexities of finding permanent homes for children, addressing any legal or familial challenges, and ensuring the child's best interests are fully considered before the adoption is finalized.

Youth who aged out of the system (emancipation) spent considerable time in care, with 91% staying for over 24 months. A small number (6%) left in less than 15 months, and 3% left after 15 to 24 months. This indicates that, for many youths transitioning to independence, the process can take several years before they are ready to live on their own.



**TABLE 5: LENGTH OF STAY, BY EXIT TYPE, 2023**

	Length of Stay in Months			
	<15	15-24	>24	Total
Adoptions	1%	10%	89%	100%
Emancipation	6%	3%	91%	100%
Guardianship	10%	20%	70%	100%
Reunification	43%	24%	34%	100%

*Data extracted: 7/5/2024*

Guardianships, which are intended to provide a safe and stable option for children to live with a relative if they are unable to return home, often take longer to arrange. Among the children who were placed in guardianships, 70% spent more than 24 months in care before this happened. About 20% were placed in guardianships after being in care for 15 to 24 months, and only 10% achieved guardianship in less than 15 months. Guardianship can involve more legal steps, compared to other exits such as reunification or adoption. For instance, guardianship orders might be temporary at first and subject to review or change, requiring time to finalize or confirm the arrangement. Legal processes may need to address concerns, such as the biological parents' ongoing rights or a child's complex medical or educational needs, all of which can delay the transition out of care.

### ***Dependency Case Timeliness Outcomes***

Federal requirements set timeframes for making decisions about a child's best interests, such as returning to the parents or moving towards adoption. Figure 7 shows data related to key timeliness measures over time, from 2019 through 2023.

**Fact-Finding:** The data shows the median time for fact-findings over the past five years, with the federal standard at 75 days. In 2019, the median was 66 days. However, the median time increased to 77 days in 2020, likely due to COVID-19 disruptions. In 2021, it decreased to 73 days, and by 2023, it returned to 75 days. Overall, the data shows that while there were fluctuations in the median time for fact-findings, including a notable increase during the pandemic, the median time generally remained close to the federal standard.

**First Review Hearing:** The data shows the median number of days for first reviews conducted within the federal standard of six months (approximately 180 days) after a child is placed out of home. In 2019, the median was 139 days, well within the six-month requirement. The median increased to 149 days in 2020, remaining comfortably within the standard. In 2021, the median rose to 146 days, still compliant with the federal guideline but showing a slight upward trend. This trend continued in 2022 with a median of 150 days and further in 2023, reaching 157 days. Despite the gradual increase in median days, all figures are within the six-month timeframe, reflecting ongoing compliance with the federal standard for timely reviews.

**Permanency Planning:** A permanency hearing should occur no later than 12 months after a child enters foster care. The consistent median of 10 months for permanency hearings each year indicates that these hearings are occurring well within the federal requirement of 12 months. This demonstrates stable and timely compliance with the standard, ensuring that permanency planning for children in foster care is handled appropriately and within the required timeframe.

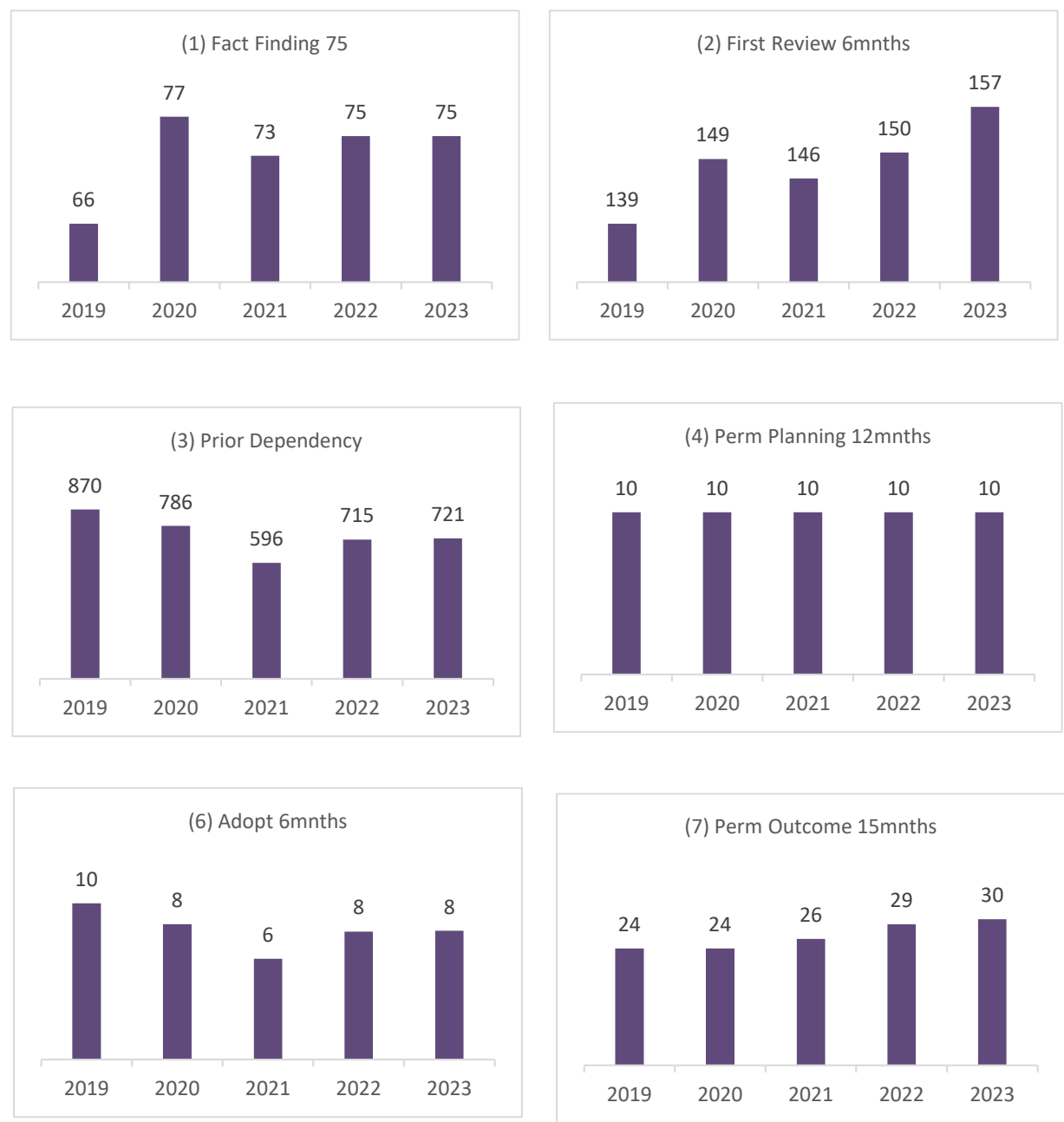
**Time to Adoption<sup>3</sup>:** The data shows variations in the median time for finalizing adoptions over the years. There was notable improvement from 2019, when the median was 10 months, to 2021, when it dropped to 6 months. However, in 2022 and 2023, the median time increased to 8 months. This indicates progress in reducing the time required to finalize adoptions; although, there has been some fluctuation in recent years.

**Permanency Services:** Permanency services should be provided within the first 15 months of a child entering foster care. The data reflects a gradual increase in the time needed to achieve permanency outcomes over the past five years. While there has been an upward trend from 24 months in 2019 to 30 months in 2023, this suggests that efforts are being made to address more complex cases and ensure thorough, thoughtful planning for each child. The increase might also indicate a stronger focus on achieving the best possible outcomes for children, even if it takes a bit longer.

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<sup>3</sup> While fast adoption can provide stability and reduce the time a child spends in foster care, it is crucial to ensure that the adoption process remains thorough and considers the best interests of the child. Balancing speed with quality is key to successful and supportive adoptions.

**FIGURE 7:**  
**THE MEDIAN NUMBER OF DAYS, BY OUTCOME**



Data extracted: 7/5/2024

# Family & Juvenile Court Improvement Program (FJCIP)

The mission of the Family and Juvenile Court Improvement Program (FJCIP) is to expand the capacity of local dependency court communities to transform systems and produce better outcomes for children and families. To accomplish this, the FJCIP builds a strong network of courts that form a continuous learning community and collaborate with system partners to improve local programs. Successful initiatives are then scaled up and implemented statewide, ultimately improving outcomes for all Washington families involved in the child welfare system.

## ***Establishment and Growth of FJCIP (2008-2022)***

In 2008, the Washington State Legislature passed [Second Substitute House Bill 2822](#), codified as [RCW 2.56.230](#), establishing the Family and Juvenile Court Improvement Program. The goal of the program is to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of juvenile and family courts, with a special emphasis on improving outcomes for dependency cases.

From 2008 to 2022, the FJCIP partially funded court improvement coordinator positions in ten dependency courts. These coordinators worked with judicial officers to facilitate multi-disciplinary groups and system improvement projects. The Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) managed contracts with the courts and provided opportunities for FJCIP teams to learn from each other through site visits and a community of practice. AOC staff, funded by the federal Court Improvement Program, provided training and support for coordinators to understand and use data from the Interactive Dependency Timeliness Report to inform their work. This limited investment in local courts had a positive impact, with FJCIP courts consistently outperforming non-FJCIP courts on case timeliness and outcome measures.

## ***Expansion and Statewide Support (2022-Present)***

In 2022, the AOC secured additional, ongoing funding from the Legislature to do the following:

- fully fund existing FJCIP Coordinator positions,
- expand the program to serve new courts, and
- create a Statewide FJCIP Team to better support FJCIP courts and to assess the impact of local court improvement programs on children, families, and the professionals that serve them.

The Statewide FJCIP Team is composed of the following AOC staff positions:

- One full-time FJCIP Statewide Coordinator, from Family & Youth Justice Programs,
- One full-time Principal Research Associate, from the AOC's Washington State Center for Court Research, and
- One half-time Administrative Assistant, from Family & Youth Justice Programs.

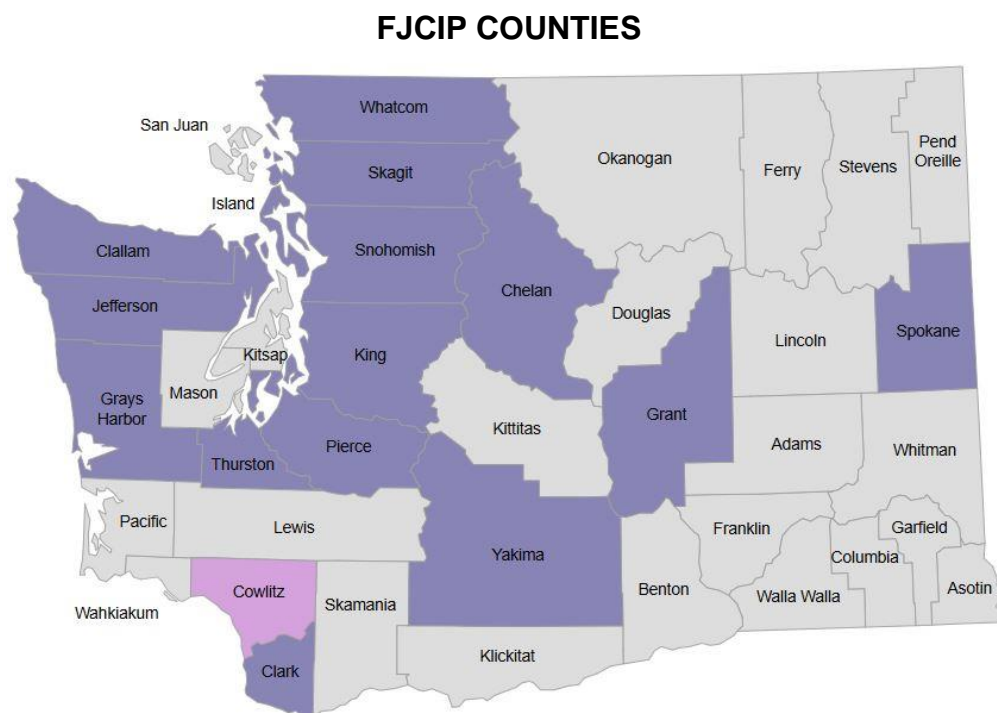
Over the past two years, the Statewide FJCIP Team has significantly expanded training and technical assistance to participating courts, onboarded six new courts, and

developed an implementation framework and core components for the program. This is part of a five-year strategic plan to establish the FJCIP as a robust learning community that fosters a culture of transformative improvement in local dependency court systems.

### ***FJCIP Courts***

The FJCIP program currently operates in 15 counties across Washington State and will be adding the final county, Cowlitz County, in 2025 (see Figure 8). Kitsap County withdrew from the FJCIP in 2023. Currently, participating FJCIP courts handle approximately 80% of all dependency cases filed in Washington State. They include urban, suburban, and rural communities, serving families from a broad range of racial, social, and cultural backgrounds. The courts are similarly diverse with different dependency caseloads, resources, and levels of service availability. Additionally, the Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) is organized into six regions, each of which has its own way of working with dependency courts and partners. This diversity is advantageous, as it provides valuable insights into the program's effectiveness across various contexts and enhances the ability to collaboratively address common challenges.

FIGURE 8:



FJCIP Coordinators help system partners focus on racial and ethnic disproportionalities and disparities in their local systems, with the goal of developing targeted strategies that improve equity for children and families. As new counties join, their coordinators bring fresh energy and perspectives that complement the experience of existing FJCIP Coordinators and enrich the entire program. When one FJCIP finds a successful approach, it can become a helpful example for others to follow. This teamwork boosts the overall effectiveness of the program, making it easier to address the unique challenges faced by dependency courts across the state. By sharing ideas and experiences, the FJCIP court community contributes to ongoing quality improvement.



## ***New FJCIP Courts***

Since 2022, six new counties joined the FJCIP, bringing their unique court system cultures and local contexts to the program.

**Grays Harbor:** Grays Harbor County boasts a rich Indigenous heritage with the Chehalis Tribe as its neighbor, and a significant rural population. In 2023, the county's dependency court had a caseload of 291 active cases, including 40 new dependency petitions filed that year. In 2022, multiracial children comprised 17% of the overall children population, but they accounted for 27% of dependency filings that year.

**Clark County:** Clark County consists of suburban and urban communities with a larger child population than neighboring rural counties and disproportionate child welfare court involvement among specific demographics. In 2023, Clark County's dependency court handled 726 active cases with 139 newly filed petitions. Hispanic/Latino children, who make up 13% of the population, are overrepresented in dependency cases, accounting for 23% of the petitions filed in 2023.

**Yakima County:** Known for its agricultural industry, Yakima County has a large Hispanic population. In 2023, there were 511 active cases, including 98 petitions filed with the court. Hispanic/Latino children were involved in 47% of these dependency petitions, which aligns with their 49% share of the population, indicating there is no overrepresentation of Hispanic children in dependency court. However, Black children are overrepresented, comprising 1% of the population but accounting for 4% of the petitions in 2022 and 2% in 2023.

**Skagit County:** Skagit County is a blend of rural and agricultural communities. In 2023, there were 201 active cases and 44 dependency petitions filed with the court. In 2023, Hispanic/Latino children made up 24% of the population, yet they were involved in 31% of the petitions, indicating a potential disparity. Multiracial children represented 18% of the population, but only 3% of the petitions involved multiracial children.

**Whatcom County:** Whatcom County's dependency court managed 246 active cases in 2023, with 48 new petitions filed that year. The data show overrepresentation of Indigenous and Hispanic children. While Indigenous children constitute only 5% of the county's child population, they were involved in 15% of dependency petitions. Similarly, Hispanic children, representing 12% of the overall child population, accounted for a disproportionate 24% of dependency cases filed that year.

**Grant County:** Predominantly rural, Grant County's dependency court managed 255 active cases, including 49 new dependency petitions filed in 2023. Several groups are overrepresented in Grant County, with Hispanic/Latino children, who make up 46% of the child population, involved in 55% of the dependency petitions filed in 2023. Additionally, Indigenous children, who constitute 2% of the child population in Grant County, were involved in 10% of the petitions in 2022, also showing overrepresentation.

## ***Family & Juvenile Court Improvement Program Framework***

The legislation that established the FJCIP was based on the principles of Unified Family Court (UFC), a model that has not been universally adopted in Washington State. To address the needs of Washington's diverse courts, the Statewide FJCIP Team developed eight core components and a new framework for the program. These components retain key elements of UFC principles while incorporating

dependency court best practices and lessons learned over the past 16 years of FJCIP operation. Approved by the Board for Judicial Administration in 2024, the FJCIP Core Components and Framework focus on continuous quality improvement, ensuring that successful local innovations can be scaled statewide, resulting in a more responsive and supportive child welfare court system for all children and families.

The eight FJCIP Core Components are:

1. Judicial Leadership
2. Judicial and Cross-System Learning
3. Dedicated FJCIP Local Coordinator
4. Court Commitment to Continuous Quality Improvement
5. Community of Practice and Peer Learning
6. Cross-System Collaboration
7. Culture of System Change
8. Trauma-Responsive Support

The Statewide FJCIP Team works closely with local courts to integrate these core components into their operations. Each year, the team provides training sessions that offer practical examples and hands-on projects, tailored to meet the unique needs of each court. Going forward, FJCIP courts will incorporate each core component through a step-by-step process, supported by ongoing evaluations designed specifically for each component. These evaluations will assess the effectiveness of implementation and the impact on court practices.

FIGURE 9:

## FJCIP Implementation Framework



To ensure alignment with the FJCIP model, the Statewide FJCIP Team will lead the evaluation process, gathering feedback from judges, professionals, and community partners. This feedback will help assess how well the core components improve court operations and outcomes for children and families in dependency court. The continuous evaluation process will allow courts to adjust their practices, fostering improvement to better meet the needs of the people they serve.

The results of these evaluations will be shared with the courts to help them monitor their performance and implementation. This feedback loop will enable courts to track their progress, identify areas for improvement, and ensure that their practices evolve to better support children and families in the dependency court system.

The FJCIP Framework (represented in Figure 9 above) provides a consistent approach to implementing the components of the program, ensuring that participating courts across the state follow the same guiding principles, while remaining flexible enough to adapt to the unique needs of each community. It is composed of the following elements.

At the center of the framework is the partnership between the local judicial leadership and the FJCIP Coordinator. The coordinator's skills and training support a shared commitment to system improvement and achieving positive outcomes for children, youth, and families.

Building an improvement-oriented court environment is necessary to implement and sustain system reform. The Statewide FJCIP Team helps courts assess and enhance their system's readiness to engage in change efforts. The ideal FJCIP court culture exhibits the following characteristics:

- Prioritizes cross-system collaboration and relationships.
- Embraces change and is willing to adapt.
- Has effective communication channels within the court and across partner organizations.
- Articulates values that align with FJCIP principles, including continuous quality improvement.

To enhance outcomes for the children, families, and professionals in dependency courts, the FJCIP promotes the following activities within and across courts:

- **Ongoing Judicial and Cross-System Learning:** The FJCIP requires judicial officers to engage in specialized training and provides opportunities for local court system partners to learn together. Annually, FJCIP courts host local, cross-system retreats designed to foster collective learning and collaboration.
- **Support for Courts to Operate as Learning Communities:** FJCIP courts are encouraged to become learning communities through the regular, intentional use of data to inform and continuously improve how the child welfare court system operates. This approach helps reduce racial disparities and better meets the needs of families and children.
- **Innovation:** FJCIP courts are encouraged to be creative and try out new processes and programs. The Statewide FJCIP Team provides technical support to evaluate progress, track implementation, and make adjustments as needed.

The Statewide FJCIP Team ensures that individual FJCIP courts are intentionally connected with each other to promote the sharing of innovative practices and opportunities. This occurs through a monthly Community of Practice for coordinators, shared training and resource opportunities, and peer learning. This interconnectedness allows courts to innovate, discover new and exciting training opportunities for their systems, and gain valuable insights from data to understand trends and developments across Washington.

Finally, the external factors that support full implementation of the FJCIP include adequate funding and policies that support FJCIP courts and initiatives, as well as coordination within the Administrative Office of the Courts between FYJP and WSCCR. Research support is crucial to the success of the FJCIP because it provides the tools courts need to make positive changes and encourages them to engage in self-reflection and data-driven decision-making.

## ***Statewide AOC Support for FJCIP Courts***

### ***Data-Driven Approach***

The FJCIP takes a data-driven approach to improving outcomes for children and families, helping courts become learning communities. By prioritizing the collection and analysis of relevant data, courts can make informed decisions tailored to the unique needs of their communities. This approach is not just about gathering numbers; it's about using data as a tool to diagnose issues, identify patterns, and develop effective strategies for improvement.

The FJCIP's work with courts is grounded in four key principles:

1. **Focus on Well-Being and Equity:** Our mission is centered around improving the well-being of children and families, with a strong emphasis on racial equity.
2. **Data is a Tool, Not the Solution:** We view data as a valuable tool for understanding and solving problems, not as the solution itself.
3. **Ongoing Engagement:** We engage with courts continuously, adapting our methods and strategies based on their evolving needs.
4. **Responsive Support:** We meet courts where they are and tailor our support to address their specific local needs.

The Washington State Interactive Dependency Timeliness Report (iDTR) is a database that combines child welfare and court data, providing a clear view of dependency case progress and outcomes. Created in 2007 to meet legislative requirements for reporting on timely permanency for dependent children, the AOC has expanded the iDTR's capacity significantly. It now offers more detail, improved quality, and an [online, public dashboard](#) that provides state and county-level data. It also enables users to break down data by race and ethnicity, identify disparities, and analyze how different groups experience the dependency system – critical information for courts seeking fair and equitable outcomes for all children.

FJCIP Coordinators are crucial to courts' effective use of data, ensuring that information is translated into actionable insights. Trained in the use of the iDTR, FJCIP Coordinators guide their systems beyond simple compliance checks. They use data to track court performance by monitoring key indicators like filing rates, case timeliness, placement decisions, and permanency outcomes. This information then drives

continuous quality improvement decisions, ensuring that interventions are effective and equitable, and that resources are used where they are most needed.

Over the past year, FJCIP Coordinators participated in three multi-session modules of FJCIP Data Training, totaling 19 hours. These training sessions were led by the Statewide FJCIP Team and shared insights from guest presenters, including Ryan Murrey from the [Washington Association of Child Advocate Programs](#), Jessica Cleeves from the AOC Educational Team, and Doug Savelesky and Jeannie Bennett from the Department of Children, Youth and Families.

The FJCIP recently introduced a new data visualization training program for Court Coordinators in the FJCIP and Collaborative Courts Programs, designed to boost their skills in presenting and understanding data. This program, our first of its kind, offered a well-rounded approach through three engaging sessions:

1. **Science of Visual Perception:** This module provided an understanding of how visual information is processed and interpreted, helping coordinators design visuals that are clear and easily understood.
2. **Practical Tips for Effective Visualizations:** This module focused on hands-on strategies for creating impactful data visualizations, offering techniques to present data clearly and effectively.
3. **Storytelling with Data:** This final module taught coordinators how to craft compelling narratives with data, enabling them to communicate insights and drive decision-making effectively.

Each session was carefully crafted to offer a blend of theoretical insights and practical, hands-on experience, ensuring a comprehensive approach to data visualization. As the first program of its kind offered by FJCIP, this initiative marks a significant milestone in establishing the program as a leading provider of data visualization training for court coordinators.

All the training sessions were designed with adult learning principles in mind, acknowledging that FJCIP Coordinators bring extensive experience and knowledge to their roles. These sessions promote collaborative learning and engagement, ensuring that the training is both meaningful and applicable to their work.

The Statewide FJCIP Team and FJCIP Coordinators worked together to develop the curriculum, making it relevant and interactive. As coordinators participate in the training, they identify and develop resources to support their local work and the broader system. The Statewide FJCIP Team supports this effort by creating and sharing tools like the [FJCIP Data Mapping Tool](#), which aids coordinators in utilizing dependency data effectively. Additional resources created over the past year, and future additions, can be found on the [Data Informed Courts webpage](#).

### ***FJCIP Coordinator Onboarding and Training***

The Statewide FJCIP Team followed recommendations from the National Center for State Courts on building a strong and healthy court workforce when developing its FJCIP Coordinator onboarding and support program. The Statewide FJCIP Team works with courts to encourage workplace flexibility; promote wellness and well-being; adequately compensate FJCIP Coordinators; provide professional development to



strengthen coordinator and judicial officer skills and knowledge; and help FJCIP Court Teams articulate a clear purpose in collaboration with families and community partners.

The Statewide FJCIP Team collaborates with court administrators to facilitate the hiring of FJCIP Coordinators. Working with local courts, the Statewide FJCIP Team developed resources to help courts recruit and hire coordinators with the skills and commitment to facilitate system change. Materials created for courts include a model job description and sample interview questions.

Once a local FJCIP Coordinator is hired, the Statewide FJCIP Team provides an extensive onboarding training program. FJCIP Coordinators and Court Administrators help design the onboarding program to provide the necessary professional development for new coordinators to understand their role within their system. New coordinators start with a three-module orientation that provides a high-level overview of their responsibilities. Additionally, new coordinators engage in weekly one-on-one meetings with the Statewide FJCIP Coordinator to review what they have learned and address any questions as they begin to facilitate cross-system coordination within the child welfare system. New coordinators then proceed to the FJCIP Data Trainings, which consist of four modules:

- 1) The FJCIP Coordinator's role in the dependency court system,
- 2) Dependency process and timeliness measures,
- 3) Understanding data quality and accountability, and
- 4) Continuous quality improvement and change management.

In addition, the Statewide FJCIP Team and FYJP trainers are now developing online versions of all four modules that can be used as an asynchronous, self-paced curriculum for new coordinators and others.

FJCIP Coordinators also learn how to use the [FJCIP Implementation Toolkit](#) to understand their local court system and assess the work ahead. Two months into their roles, the Statewide FJCIP Coordinator leads a day-long facilitated conversation with the local FJCIP Court Team, including the Judicial Officer, Court Administrator, and FJCIP Coordinator. This session completes the FJCIP Implementation Toolkit and marks the start of the local FJCIP with the new coordinator.

Supporting FJCIP Coordinators involves directly addressing system questions and concerns, and providing ongoing support. This includes offering technical assistance, one-on-one guidance, and providing training to develop the necessary skills, knowledge, resources, and connections for their roles in leading cross-system work within their local community.

The Statewide FJCIP Team fosters an intentional culture of belonging among participating courts. FJCIP courts regularly consult with and learn from one another, building relationships that foster a sense of belonging and trust. This collaborative environment promotes the sharing of resources, knowledge, and barriers, ultimately resulting in coordinators with the skills to support innovative and sustainable FJCIPs.

## ***FJCIP Local Court Improvements***

FJCIP Coordinators facilitate cross-system workgroups focused on improving local court processes and outcomes. Coordinators regularly use data and continuous quality improvement principles to help their courts identify system needs, explore options for addressing these needs, and implement effective interventions. The Statewide FJCIP Team supports these efforts with small grants and technical assistance.

Below are examples of some of the system improvement efforts that FJCIP courts have engaged in over the past two years. More details about these efforts and the accomplishments of each FJCIP court are available in Appendix B at the end of this report.

### ***Trauma-Responsive Courts***

The FJCIP recognizes that families who become involved with the dependency system have experienced significant trauma and adversity in their lives. FJCIP communities are educated about what it means to be a trauma-responsive system and the role of each member in creating a safe and healing environment for the children, youth, and families they serve. Part of having a trauma-responsive court is nurturing a healthy and safe working environment for professionals, many of whom experience secondary or vicarious trauma because of working in the dependency system. The FJCIP provided mini grants to courts to support trauma-responsive projects.

Many FJCIP courts have created trauma-informed courthouse spaces. For example, Spokane completed a two-day [Trauma Consultation with the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges \(NCJFCJ\)](#) that included court observations and interviews with cross-system partners and people with lived experience. Based on preliminary recommendations from the consultants, the Spokane court used its FJCIP mini grant to help make the following changes to the juvenile court facility:

- Provide children's sensory toys, coloring items, and books to make the lobby and courtroom spaces more child friendly,
- Install trauma responsive artwork and privacy curtains in meeting rooms, and
- Have hygiene products and diapers readily available for families.

Thurston County created a multi-disciplinary Trauma Informed Practice Workgroup that is dedicated to making their court spaces more trauma-responsive and improving the court's culture. The workgroup has engaged local businesses and Tribal groups to help make their waiting areas into family-friendly and culturally enriching spaces with murals depicting nature scenes. They used their mini grant to purchase furniture for the waiting area.

Pierce County's FJCIP hosted a free training for court and child welfare professionals to help them understand the differences between secondary traumatic stress, compassion fatigue, and vicarious trauma. Participants also learned how to recognize warning signs and personal triggers, understand why self-care is important, and develop a personal self-care plan.

### ***Protein for All***

The FJCIP partnered with Dr. Kristen Allott to help courts implement the [Protein for All](#) program in their courthouses. Protein for All provides free, high-protein snacks to court patrons to help alleviate the stress and anxiety that families often experience at court.

Research indicates that food insecurity and lack of access to food worsen addictions, mental illness, and poor decision-making. When individuals come to court without having eaten, emotionally reactive and uncivil behavior is more likely to occur. Protein for All compassionately addresses the essential need for nourishment, enabling people to make better decisions and be more fully engaged in the court process.

Dr. Allott updated the program's toolkit and the Statewide FJCIP Team provided one-time mini grants to help courts initiate or revitalize their Protein for All programs. For courts reinvigorating their programs, these grants have been a crucial addition to longstanding partnerships with their local food banks. FJCIP courts that have used the Protein for All mini grant report positive impacts on the families they serve and on professionals in the system. More information and photos from the local programs can be found in Appendix C at the end of this report.

The Statewide FJCIP Team is pursuing federal grant funding to provide ongoing support for local Protein for All efforts, and to evaluate how providing protein-rich snacks before hearings affects parental engagement and understanding of court processes. Through observational data and surveys of parents and attorneys, the team will explore whether this seemingly simple intervention enhances perceptions of fairness, supports better attorney-client communication, and fosters a more inclusive court environment.

### ***Cross-System Collaboration and Learning***

FJCIP Coordinators provide critical staffing and facilitation support that makes it possible for courts to operate cross-disciplinary groups that focus on system improvement. In many of the new FJCIP courts, judicial officers and coordinators have worked together to build these collaborations, sharing court system data and co-creating mission statements to identify local opportunities for improvement and innovation.

With leadership from the bench and the support of the FJCIP Coordinator, the Grays Harbor Dependency Team chose to meet more frequently, increasing from quarterly to monthly meetings. They also decided to create a Steering Committee that meets every three months to identify larger program objectives and direction. These changes have increased communication among system partners, with dedicated space and time for the team to gather and share information and updates between agencies. This has led to the development of workgroup objectives and goals to improve the county's dependency timeliness and outcome measures.

### ***Improving Indian Child Welfare Practice***

In late 2021, FYJP partnered with Casey Family Programs, DCYF and Tribal representatives to host the first Washington State ICWA Summit. Multi-disciplinary teams from nine counties attended and learned about the national ICW Courts movement, developments in Washington ICWA case law, and ICWA case data at the state and local level. As a result, three dependency court communities decided to develop their own Indian Child Welfare (ICW) dockets, with considerable facilitation and implementation support from their FJCIP Coordinators. In addition to Spokane's long-running ICW Court, Washington now has new ICW court dockets in Clallam, Pierce and Yakima Counties.

The Pierce County Juvenile Court launched its ICW Court on October 1, 2024. An Opening Ceremony that included honored Tribal guests, and capped more than three years of work by a cross-system workgroup, that was led by judicial officers and

supported by the FJCIP Coordinator. To help system partners determine the need for a dedicated ICW Court, the FJCIP Coordinator collected data to identify how many established ICWA cases and Reason to Know cases were on the court's docket. Washington State does not currently utilize ICWA and Reason to Know codes to track these case types, so the workgroup developed special court orders to categorize cases. Out of a total of 846 open cases in June 2024, Pierce County determined that it had 22 ICWA cases and 204 Reason to Know cases.

FJCIP courts are also helping to improve how all dependency courts handle ICWA cases. Specifically, local FJCIP Coordinators and team members have contributed to making the process for filing ICWA voluntary placement agreements (VPAs) more efficient and effective. The Statewide FJCIP Team created a cross-system statewide workgroup with participation from local FJCIP court staff, who provide information about how the current process works, describing challenges that exist and offering ideas for how to improve court forms and processes.

### ***Engaging and Supporting Parents***

FJCIP Coordinators help connect parents to people with lived experience in the dependency court system to provide support and education from someone parents are more likely to trust. FJCIP Coordinators work with the Parents for Parents program, managed by Akin, to offer Dependency 101 classes and access to parent mentors for dependency involved parents. In Island County, the FJCIP Coordinator and Akin worked together to create an alternative to the regular Parent for Parent program to meet the unique needs of their court community.

In Pierce County, the FJCIP Coordinator supports the Child Advocate Program's Early Engagement Guardian Ad Litem (EE GAL) project. This project uses specially trained GALs to build rapport and trust with children, parents, and relatives during shelter care, with the goal of ensuring that a child can be safely placed with parents or relatives with appropriate supports in place. The desired outcome of this new GAL role is to engage families earlier, leading to better outcomes for both children and families. The Pierce County FJCIP Coordinator is helping to track data on the impact of the EE GALs on placement and visitation as part of the ongoing quality improvement efforts for this project.

June is Family Reunification month in Washington State. Courts and communities across the state host events to celebrate and recognize the hard work that families do to be reunified. The FJCIP supports Family Reunification events by offering courts Family Reunification Celebration mini grants, providing support for planning, and sharing resources and information for grants and event details. The FJCIP Statewide Team helped update the Family Reunification Day Toolkit, which is available to all courts. The toolkit supports courts with planning, donations, creating partnerships, and media outreach. The updated toolkit provides more in-depth information and resources to support courts during the planning process, including sample donation letters, activity ideas, outreach tips, and location considerations.

### ***Using the Science of Hope to Support Families and Improve Court Culture***

In 2024, Spokane County hosted its fourth annual Hope Summit, designed to bring together key partners from the dependency system for learning and relationship-building. The event was coordinated by the FJCIP, which worked closely with cross-system partners to gather input on the topics for the Summit. A survey conducted by the

quarterly Dependency Working Group revealed that workforce well-being was a top priority. This feedback helped shape the agenda, with an emphasis on building hope and compassion within teams to better support families. The Summit featured Dr. Christopher Freeze, national expert on the science of hope, who shared how hope-centered leadership can reduce burnout and improve well-being in the workforce. Participants also completed a pre-Summit survey that helped guide the discussion and identify actionable next steps based on hope scores.

The Summit included activities to illustrate the importance of teamwork and hope-centered leadership, and concluded with a discussion about Spokane's Local Improvement Plan, where participants committed to incorporating the lessons learned into their practice. The FJCIP Coordinator compiled the feedback into a report, which was shared with the Juvenile Court Committee and Dr. Freeze, who also provided post-Summit consultation to support the implementation of hope-centered leadership and data evaluation efforts.

In June 2024, many FJCIP courts participated in Hope Week, an event led by FYJP to introduce court and child welfare leaders to the Science of Hope. The coordinators engaged in conversations about how hope could be used to improve the culture of dependency courts and reduce the high rates of turnover and burnout among child welfare professionals. In September 2024, staff from four FJCIP courts participated in Hope Navigation, a year-long program that provides training and technical assistance to support the implementation of hope-centered projects in organizations and communities. FJCIP hope-navigation project ideas include creating hope-centered court programs and changing the way professionals talk with families to focus on building hope and a sense of belonging.

### ***Connecting to Community Resources***

In Chelan, the FJCIP Coordinator participates in a project that brings together local law enforcement, people with lived/living experience of drug use, and service providers to engage in a "codesign" process to identify regional solutions to drug use. The project aims to develop relationships and establish lines of communication across organizations with diverse and varied perspectives, so that people impacted by substance use disorder can be connected to resources and/or diversion from legal impacts, death, or other negative outcomes. As a result of being part of this work, the FJCIP Coordinator has been able to build connections for the court by sharing information, suggesting and facilitating relationships and alliances, and dispelling misinformation that could have created unnecessary barriers.

### ***FJCIP Statewide Initiatives***

The Statewide FJCIP Team helps create opportunities for FJCIP courts to contribute to system-wide improvement efforts. Through active participation in statewide initiatives and workgroups, FJCIP Judicial Officers, Administrators, Coordinators, and system partners help shape broader system operations while learning from other counties. This engagement ensures local perspectives inform statewide policy and court improvement projects, increasing the effectiveness of statewide improvements in Washington State's non-unified court system.

FJCIP Coordinators contribute to workgroups like the Family Well-Being Community Collaborative (FWCC) by sharing court-level insights, helping shape system process and policy changes, and informing the development of effective tools and resources for



local courts. This continuous feedback loop between local courts and statewide improvement efforts strengthens the system, allowing courts to learn from each other and inform best practices that improve outcomes for children and families.

An example of this process is the statewide Fact-Finding Exceptional Circumstance Workgroup, facilitated by the Statewide FJCIP Team. This workgroup, which included FJCIP Coordinators, Judicial Officers, Court Clerks, as well as partners from the Attorney General's Office, Office of Public Defense, and Office of Civil Legal Aid, focused on addressing gaps in tracking dependency fact-finding hearings that extend beyond the required 75-day timeline.

The workgroup identified the need for additional coding to better track extensions granted due to exceptional circumstances, such as discovery-related delays, ICWA-related issues, court availability, and party unavailability. They developed a new coding structure to capture these categories, ensuring courts can more accurately track and report cases with exceptional circumstances. This initiative will improve consistency in case tracking, provide a more accurate representation of court processes, and support court improvement efforts at both the local and state levels.

Another way that FJCIP courts are supporting statewide system improvement is through the FWCC Guardianship Workgroup. Local FJCIP courts identified confusion about how minor guardianship cases should be handled. They determined that the challenges were driven by complications arising from legislative changes to DCYF processes and a growing need for modifications and terminations of guardianships post-dependency, often without attorney support for parents. Additionally, there are issues with consistently disseminating updated information within the court system.

To address these challenges, the FJCIP Statewide Team helped to form a state-level Guardianship Workgroup within the FWCC. Co-facilitated by DCYF staff and the Statewide FJCIP Coordinator, the workgroup includes members from across the state, with approximately half representing the FJCIP court community. The workgroup has conducted an analysis of the legislative changes since 2019 and plans to develop data-driven resources and tools to help local courts improve guardianship practice across the state.

### ***FJCIP Capacity Building Self-Assessment***

To assess strengths and identify areas for improvement within FJCIP, the Statewide FJCIP Team developed the FJCIP Capacity Building Self-Assessment Tool. This tool, used by FJCIP courts, includes five dimensions and 33 items that help local court teams evaluate opportunities to enhance the program's effectiveness and strengthen local leadership and staff capacity.

The results of the 2024 assessment demonstrate notable progress in key areas:

- **Resources to Sustain FJCIP Work:** The percentage of respondents reporting adequate resources (e.g., staff, facilities, technology) to support FJCIP work increased from 63% in 2023 to 100% in 2024.
- **Adequate Funding:** The proportion of respondents indicating sufficient funding rose from 75% in 2023 to 94% in 2024, signaling strong financial capacity.
- **Access to AOC Staff for Research Support:** Access to research support from the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) improved from 89% to 95%, reflecting robust research support.



However, the self-assessment also highlighted areas needing further attention, particularly regarding racial and ethnic disparities. In 2024, only 39% of FJCIP court communities reported assessing the root causes of these disparities and implementing local initiatives to address them, up from 22% in 2023. While this shows progress, more work is needed in this area. Additionally, only 45% of FJCIP Coordinators consistently disaggregate data by race and ethnicity to analyze disparities at the local level, a figure that has remained largely unchanged from 44% in 2023. Collaboration between leadership, court professionals, and system partners to improve outcomes for marginalized communities, including Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), remains at 44%.

While improvements have been made, addressing racial and ethnic disparities remains a priority. The FJCIP Statewide Team is using these results to develop targeted training for FJCIP Coordinators. This training will focus on effectively utilizing data to identify disparities and facilitating difficult conversations within court communities to address inequities.

### ***Looking Ahead for FJCIP***

To guide the development and expansion of the FJCIP, the Statewide FJCIP Team created a comprehensive five-year strategic plan. The plan focuses on providing support for building a cadre of dedicated, highly trained court coordinators focused on enhancing local court communities, and using data, research, and insights from FJCIP courts to inform and strengthen the entire dependency court system.

In June 2024, many FJCIP courts participated in Hope Week, engaging in discussions with other child welfare leaders on court culture. The focus of these conversations was how courts can leverage the science of hope to address burnout and turnover among child welfare professionals, ultimately fostering a culture shift within the system. Several FJCIP courts have also invested in training coordinators and other staff to become Hope Navigators, who will help build awareness of hope science and implement hope-centered projects in their court communities.

Looking ahead, in early 2025, the Statewide FJCIP Team will collaborate with FJCIP Coordinators to host FJCIP Cross-System Retreats. These retreats are designed to bring together system partners to develop strategies that enhance cross-system collaboration and learning. Follow-up strategic planning will help identify ways to improve court culture and working relationships, particularly in the post-pandemic environment. Funding allocated by the Legislature in July 2024 will support these retreats within local court communities, ensuring the continued success of this initiative.

Additionally, starting in 2025, the Statewide FJCIP Team will work with FJCIP training staff and courts to establish a uniform onboarding process for new FJCIP dependency judicial officers. This program will ensure that judicial officers receive the necessary training mandated by RCW 2.56.230. The training will support the implementation of FJCIP Core Component 1, which requires that FJCIP judicial officers be specifically trained to promote cross-system collaboration and drive system improvements in their courts. The onboarding program will also be made available to any judicial officer statewide who wishes to learn more about dependency court and leadership, thereby supporting all courts, not just those participating in FJCIP.

## FYJP Program Activities for 2023-2024

The following section provides an overview of the breadth of dependency court improvement work undertaken by the Family and Youth Justice Programs in 2023 and 2024. These programs are supported by a combination of state funds, federal grants, including the Court Improvement Program (CIP) and Family Treatment Court (FTC) grants, and small grants from private funders.

### ***Collaborative System Change***

A key role that FYJP plays in system improvement is convening courts and system partners to identify and address complex issues and challenges.

#### ***Family Well-Being Community Collaborative (FWCC)***

The [Family Well-Being Community Collaborative](#) (FWCC), a standing committee of the Washington State Supreme Court Commission on Children in Foster Care (CCFC), is dedicated to keeping families safely together while addressing inequities in the dependency court system. By convening system partners through action-oriented workgroups, the FWCC develops innovative tools, training, and resources to enhance court practices and improve family outcomes.

Co-chaired by the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) Assistant Secretary for Partnerships, Prevention, and Services and the FYJP Manager, the FWCC includes over 80 members statewide, representing judicial officers, attorneys, court administrators, child advocates, social workers, academics, caregivers, and individuals with lived experience. In 2024, the FWCC convened five times to discuss system-wide issues, legislative updates, resource gaps, and new initiatives.

The FWCC's primary impact is realized through action-oriented workgroups that translate policy and system challenges into practical solutions. These workgroups incorporate input from frontline professionals and individuals with lived experience to develop tools and system improvements beneficial to both practitioners and the families served by the courts. Each workgroup is facilitated by an FYJP staff member and maintains a publicly accessible online hub containing meeting notes, resources, and tools.

The FWCC played a crucial role in preparing court system partners for the implementation of the Keeping Families Together Act (HB 1227), which took effect on July 1, 2023. Anticipating the need for coordination and interdisciplinary training, workgroups were formed to identify the legal and procedural changes required by the new law. These workgroups produced statutory crosswalks, toolkits, and training materials, including a Harm of Removal Map and an interactive judicial decision-making guide, which are publicly available on the FYJP website.

FWCC members disseminated the tools and resources statewide through multidisciplinary conference presentations, webinars, and training sessions for judicial officers and DCYF staff. This collaborative effort strengthens cross-system partnerships and has formed a robust foundation for coordinating future system reform initiatives.

The FWCC currently operates the following workgroups:

- **Harm of Removal Workgroup:** Developing resources and training to help court communities assess and mitigate the harm associated with child removal in dependency cases.
- **Guardianship Workgroup:** Identifying challenges and developing practical tools to enhance the use of minor guardianships and improve family outcomes.
- **Engaging Parents at Shelter Care Workgroup:** Informed by parents and youth with lived experience, this group is developing resources to provide meaningful support and foster hope for families at the outset of dependency cases.

Several new workgroups will also be launched in 2025. These include:

- **Child and Youth Trafficking Workgroup:** Analyzing the anticipated impacts of Senate Bill (SB) 6006 (effective July 1, 2025) on dependency courts and developing resources, tools, and training to support implementation.
- **In-Home with Conditions Workgroup:** Developing standardized court procedures for filing, monitoring, and maintaining cases where children remain in the home with court-imposed conditions.

### ***Supreme Court Commission on Children in Foster Care***

During 2024, the Washington State Supreme Court Commission on Children in Foster Care (CCFC) undertook a strategic review and redesign of its role and structure to better align with current system needs. In collaboration with the CCFC co-chairs, Justice Barbara Madsen and DCYF Secretary Ross Hunter, the FYJP Manager, Kelly Warner-King, provided leadership in coordinating this effort, including oversight of contracted facilitators.

Established in 2004 by the Washington State Supreme Court, the mission of the CCFC is to ensure that all children in foster care have safe, permanent families that support their physical, emotional, intellectual, and social well-being. The CCFC also serves as the cross-system advisory body for the AOC's federally funded Court Improvement Program (CIP). Recognizing evolving perspectives and challenges in the child welfare court system, Commission members and system partners initiated updates to its purpose, structure, principles, governance, and staffing to better serve children, youth, and families involved in the child welfare and non-offender dockets of Washington State's courts.

In March 2024, the Commission convened a strategic in-person retreat attended by 30 Commission members and partners. This gathering generated key insights and established next steps for the re-visioning process. Subsequently, a workgroup of Commission members was formed to evaluate models from other states and Supreme Court commissions, and to develop a set of recommendations for a full Commission vote in 2025. FYJP continues to support this initiative, including funding the consultants engaged in the process. Once finalized, these governance and structural recommendations will be presented to the Washington State Supreme Court for approval, alongside an exploration of funding mechanisms to support necessary staffing positions.

## ***Sharing the Science of Hope***

Since 2020, FYJP has collaborated with leading researchers, Dr. Chan Hellman and Dr. Angela Pharris, to explore how Washington State courts can utilize the science of hope to improve well-being for families, staff, and communities. This effort began with a four-hour virtual webinar on the Power of Hope and its implications for the child welfare court system, which was attended by over 400 participants. To further advance these concepts, FYJP established the [Science of Hope Community of Practice](#), engaging professionals from courts, child welfare, education, and other youth- and family-serving agencies interested in integrating hope science into their organizations and communities.

Building on insights from the Community of Practice and inspired by [Hope Rising Oklahoma](#), FYJP staff, professionals from various agencies, and individuals with lived expertise collaborated on an initiative to establish Washington as a hope-centered state. In 2024, this group launched the [Hope Rising Washington website](#) and hosted Dr. Hellman for a week-long series of Science of Hope events. These events included free public awareness sessions on both sides of the state; a hope-centered leadership forum attended by leaders from DCYF, the courts, AOC, and other key organizations; a workshop on enhancing dependency court culture through hope science; and an event at the Ballmer Foundation featuring the Governor, policy leaders, and members of the Washington State Prenatal-through-25 (P-25) Behavioral Health Workgroup.

Research indicates that hope-centered organizations benefit from reduced staff burnout and improved employee retention. Courts and judicial officers recognize the potential of hope science to improve well-being for individuals — clients and staff alike — and enhance court system culture and collaboration. Local dependency courts, led by Spokane and Kitsap Counties, have started to integrate the science of hope into their dependency court practices, with FYJP providing critical support to nurture hope and improve working relationships among dependency court parties.

In September 2024, FYJP staff and over 40 partners across the child welfare court system participated in the first statewide Hope Navigator training with Dr. Hellman and Dr. Pharris. Over the following year, participants will implement science of hope projects in their local dependency court communities with technical assistance and evaluation support from FYJP and Hope Rising Washington.

## ***Framework for Engaging Lived Experts in System Reform***

The Equity and Engagement Framework serves as a strategic roadmap for effectively and authentically engaging individuals with lived experience in efforts to improve the dependency court system. The development of this framework was initiated in response to recommendations from Lived Experts who contributed to the Washington State Racial Justice Consortium's 2022 action plan for child welfare courts. These recommendations underscored the necessity of incorporating the perspectives of young people, caregivers, and parents directly impacted by the child welfare court system in the design and implementation of policies, practices, and programs.

Over the past two years, FYJP has convened a group of Lived Experts—including parents, former youth, and caregivers—to co-develop structured processes for training, funding, and administratively supporting individuals with lived experience to effectively participate in system change initiatives. This work has been supported by funding from Casey Family Programs and the National Center for State Courts (NCSC).

In addition, the co-design team has facilitated two national communities of practice for child welfare courts in collaboration with NCSC.

In 2025, FYJP and the co-design team plan to publish a comprehensive report outlining the framework and its key components. The framework will be piloted by FYJP, and its implementation will be evaluated to support continuous quality improvement.

Key Components of the Equity and Engagement Framework include:

- Contracting and Payment of Lived Experts.
- Recruitment and Onboarding.
- Monthly Training and Skill-Building Opportunities.
- Monthly Reflective Practice.
- Language Glossaries.
- FYJP Staff Agreements and Training.

### ***Dependency Language Glossaries***

As part of the Equity and Engagement initiative, the co-design team identified the need to revise child welfare system language to improve collaboration with Lived Experts and enhance system equity. With the support of NCSC, a cross-system workgroup was established to develop two language glossaries. This workgroup includes representatives from the DCYF, the Office of Public Defense (OPD), the Office of Civil Legal Aid (OCLA), and Lived Experts.

The first glossary is an acronym glossary designed to define commonly used child welfare acronyms in plain language. The second glossary provides definitions for frequently used terms and suggests alternatives for language that system participants may find harmful or confusing. Both glossaries will be made accessible to all individuals interacting with the child welfare system. Additionally, a QR code and webpage link will be provided, allowing users to submit acronyms or terms for inclusion and clarification.

The Equity and Engagement Framework represents a critical step toward ensuring meaningful participation of individuals with lived experience in shaping child welfare court policies and practices. This initiative reflects the state's commitment to fostering a more inclusive and equitable dependency court system.

### ***FYJP Training and Technical Assistance***

Family and Youth Justice Programs (FYJP) is committed to advancing judicial excellence in dependency law and ensuring Washington State court communities are equipped to serve children and families effectively.

### ***High-Potency Synthetic Opioids Training - Implementing SB 6109***

Passed by the Legislature in 2024, [SB 6109](#) required courts to give great weight to the lethality of high-potency synthetic opioids (HPSO) and public health guidance from the Department of Health (DOH) related to HPSO when making determinations about child removal and placement at different points in a dependency case. The Legislature directed the AOC to “develop, deliver, and regularly update training for judicial officers and dependency court system partners regarding child safety and the risk and danger presented to children and youth by high-potency synthetic opioids and other substances impacting families.” Additionally, SB 6109 expanded the list of required judicial training



topics for courts participating in the Family and Juvenile Court Improvement Program (FJCIP) to include substance use disorder and the risk and danger posed to children, use of the child safety framework, and legal standards of removal for child abuse or neglect.

Since the law went into effect, FYJP has engaged in the following activities to support judicial and system learning about HPSO and child safety.

### Updates to Existing Resources

FYJP collaborated with system partners to update key tools and training materials to reflect the statutory changes introduced by SB 6109. Updated resources include the [iDecide](#) tool, [Legal Standards Comparison Chart](#) and the online judicial training [Shelter Care Hearings Module](#).

### Partner with Department of Health

FYJP has worked closely with the DOH to develop and disseminate the required public health guidance for judicial determinations in child welfare cases involving synthetic opioids. This ongoing partnership ensures that courts have access to the latest health guidance and training materials to support informed decision-making. Additionally, FYJP participates in a workgroup with DOH and DCYF to ensure courts receive updated guidance as new public health information becomes available.

### Develop and Deliver HPSO Training and Judicial Education

- **Annual Dependency Judicial Training Academy:** The 2024 Dependency Judicial Academy dedicated substantial content to opioid-related risks in child welfare cases. FYJP partnered with public health experts, poison control specialists, and addiction treatment providers to present on key topics, such as:

- Risks of fentanyl exposure and accidental ingestion in infants and toddlers.
- Impact of synthetic opioids on parental behavior.
- Harm reduction strategies and overdose prevention.
- Utilization of Medications for Opioid Use Disorder (MOUD).
- Strategies for engaging families affected by opioid addiction.

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*“Fentanyl information  
was so important  
and timely.”  
-2024 Academy Participant*

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In 2025, the Judicial Academy will continue to include opioid-related content developed in collaboration with DOH and treatment experts.

- **Safety Summit Project:** FYJP is incorporating opioid-related training into the [Safety Summit Project](#), the primary platform for cross-system child safety training. The existing Safety Summit curriculum has been updated to reflect the latest research and best practices in assessing child safety in cases of parental opioid use.

Plans are underway to develop Safety Summit 2.0, offering advanced training for court professionals on addressing opioid-related threats to child safety. In 2025, FYJP and system partners will host a Safety Summit specifically for Family Treatment Court and Early Childhood Court teams to improve their practice



around assessing child safety and case planning with families facing opioid-related challenges.

- **Statewide Webinar:** In September 2024, FYJP hosted a statewide webinar in partnership with DOH to provide judicial officers and system partners with an overview of the newly developed Washington State Public Health Guidance on High-Potency Synthetic Opioids. The webinar also provided a forum for addressing questions related to its application in dependency cases. The [recorded webinar](#) is available on the FYJP website, along with written responses by DOH to questions posed during the live webinar.
- **Judicial Community of Practice (JCoP):** The November 2024 session of JCoP was dedicated to discussing public health guidance for opioid-related cases. This session, open exclusively to judges and court commissioners, featured DOH experts who addressed questions and provided insight into how the guidance could be applied in removal and placement decisions.
- **FYJP Webpage on High Potency Synthetic Opioids:** FYJP added a new [HPSO webpage](#) to its public website, providing a one-stop location to access the public health guidance, training resources, and links to opioid-related data and dashboards.
- **Training and Support for Family Treatment Courts (FTC):** FYJP provides training and technical assistance for FTC teams related to HPSOs and effective treatment options, including Medications for Opioid Use Disorder (MOUD). By addressing the complex needs of families affected by opioids, FTCs help mitigate the epidemic's impact on children, families and communities.

## ***Judicial Training***

### ***Annual Dependency Judicial Training Academy***

FYJP conducts an [Annual Dependency Judicial Training](#) for judges and commissioners overseeing dependency and child welfare cases. These training academies equip judicial officers and Family and Juvenile Court Improvement Program (FJCIP) court staff with critical knowledge of dependency statutes, case law, relevant policies, research, and judicial best practices. The training ensures that judicial officers have the necessary expertise to make informed decisions impacting children and families within the dependency system.

FYJP training staff collaborates with a diverse group of dependency judicial officers from across the state to design the academy curriculum. Sessions are led by subject matter experts, including representatives from the Attorney General's Office (AGO), the Office of Public Defense (OPD), the Office of Civil Legal Aid (OCLA), the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF), as well as judicial officers, parents with lived experience, and national experts.

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*"Truly inspirational,  
challenging, and  
collegial..."*

*-2023 Academy Participant*

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Within Washington State's non-unified court system, the Annual Dependency Judicial Training Academy plays a vital role in supporting effective judicial practice. Given that judicial officers transition on and off the dependency bench at varying intervals, as determined by local court leadership,

this training serves as a primary resource for many judicial officers. While attendance at the training academy remains voluntary, it represents one of the most comprehensive,

dependency-specific educational opportunities available for trial-level judges and commissioners from state and tribal courts, FJCIP Coordinators, and appellate-level judicial officers from the Court of Appeals and the Supreme Court.

In May 2024, FYJP hosted the virtual three-day day [2024 Dependency Judicial Training Academy](#), with a total of 38 participants. The training focused on strengthening court capacity to make child safety decisions that appropriately balance child protection with the preference for family preservation. Topics included emerging trends in child welfare, overdose fatality data, and innovations from FJCIP courts. A panel of attorneys provided [updates on recent state legislation and appellate case law](#) impacting dependency proceedings. FYJP also partnered with medical and toxicology experts to present in-depth sessions on high-potency synthetic opioids, such as fentanyl, and the implications of parental substance use in dependency cases.

Additional sessions addressed the harms of family separation and strategies for supporting LGBTQIA+ youth in out-of-home care.

The academy further featured peer problem-solving discussions and guidance on how judicial officers can support their court communities in times of tragedy, including child fatalities.

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*“The breakout sessions were extremely helpful to see how others are handling Shelter Care Hearings...”*

*-2024 Academy Participant*

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### ***Judicial Community of Practice***

The [Judicial Community of Practice \(JCoP\)](#) is a monthly, virtual peer-learning forum designed for judicial officers handling child dependency and family law cases. Led by FYJP’s expert [Jurists-in-Residence](#)—retired judicial officers with extensive experience in dependency proceedings—JCoP provides a confidential space for judicial officers to engage in discussions, ask questions, and exchange insights with their peers.

Each JCoP session is structured around a specific topic and is accompanied by a [Dependency Practice Tip](#) document, which includes relevant resources distributed prior to the session. This format ensures that participating judicial officers have access to practical, research-based guidance to enhance their decision-making and courtroom practice.

Topics addressed in JCoP sessions during 2023 and 2024 included:

- Prenatal and perinatal substance use.
- Extended foster care.
- Enhancing systems through partnerships with lived experts.
- Making quality findings in dependency cases.
- Protective factors for family well-being.
- Community-based services and their impact on families.
- Special Immigrant Juvenile Status.
- Access to nutrition programs, including "Protein for All".

## Cross-System Training and Technical Assistance

### Safety Summit Project

In partnership with the DCYF, the AOC established the [Safety Summit Project in 2021](#). Originating from DCYF's Program Improvement Process (PIP), Safety Summits provide local court jurisdictions with high-quality training on safety framework practices within the context of a guided, change management process that includes organization, planning, action, and evaluation phases. Safety Summits revolve around a half-day training event that focuses on helping local dependency court systems develop a shared understanding of how to assess and talk about child safety. This training teaches entire court systems how to effectively apply safety framework principles to crucial aspects of cases (safety assessment, safety planning, conditions for return, family time, and case planning) in tangible ways that ultimately result in a more effective dependency system and better outcomes for families.

Importantly, the Safety Summit event is delivered by a cross-system team of trainers, including FYJP, DCYF, Washington State's Office of Public Defense (OPD), and the Washington Association of Child Advocate Programs. **Safety Summits have been held in eight Washington counties and have trained over 950 people.** Most recently, Clark County held a Safety Summit in January 2025 with 120 attendees.

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*"The desire for collaboration and a common [safety] language was very impactful to me."*

*-Snohomish County Safety Summit Participant*

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### [Pre- and post-hearing quality evaluations](#)

were conducted in four of the original Safety Summit counties (Kitsap, King, Pierce, and Chelan) by Dr. Alicia Summers from the Capacity Building Center for Courts. The evaluation found clear evidence of statistically significant positive changes in the depth and breadth of safety discussions held at 72-hour hearings, and in the quality and quantity of safety-related information submitted to the court prior to the hearing.

### Harm of Removal Training and Tools

With the 2023 enactment of the Keeping Families Together Act (HB 1227), Washington became one of the first states in the nation to statutorily require courts to consider the likely harms a child will experience if removed from their home.

FYJP partnered with OPD, DCYF, and the Parents for Parents program to develop an

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*"The harm of removal mapping has been truly pivotal to our work... this tool has been a game changer!"*

*-Webinar Participant*

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introductory training entitled "[There's No Place Like Home: Understanding Harm of Removal in Child Welfare](#)." The training has been delivered to a variety of Washington audiences, including judicial officers, court staff, attorneys, case workers, child advocates, parents and youth with lived experience in child welfare, and community providers. In September 2024, the presentation was offered as a plenary session for the National Association of Counsel for Children virtual conference.

In November 2024, FYJP hosted a statewide webinar version of the training, attended by over 240 people, which introduced participants to the concept of harm of removal in

child welfare and provided an overview of the [Harm of Removal Map](#), a tool developed by FYJP to describe the various life and developmental domains of children and youth that are impacted by removal. The webinar was recorded and is available for viewing on the FYJP website.

In partnership with the FWCC Harm of Removal Workgroup, FYJP is in the process of creating a set of [guidance documents](#) for use by court systems to help identify, assess, and mitigate the potential harmful impacts experienced by children as a result of being separated from their family of origin. Using the developmental milestones defined by the Center for Disease Control as a framework, the group will eventually produce nine documents that cover birth to age 21. Currently, guidance is available for children from birth through 5 years old.

### ***Keeping Families Together Act (HB 1227) Implementation***

In 2023, FYJP staff trained over 3,000 people across the state on implementation of the Keeping Families Together Act (HB 1227) through virtual and in-person training events. Many of these events were hosted in partnership with DCYF. Audiences included appellate court judicial officers and staff, state court judicial officers, court administrators, child advocates, parent attorneys, child attorneys, parents with lived experience, DCYF unit supervisors, DCYF's Indian Child Welfare Subcommittee, tribal members, and medical staff.

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*"This [training] answered so many questions I had about what to expect and it was so helpful to work through the scenarios."*

*-HB 1227 Retreat Participant*

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### ***Statewide Training Coordinator Affinity Group***

FYJP helps to facilitate the Training Coordinator Affinity Group, a collaborative forum for professionals responsible for training and professional development in organizations engaged in Washington State's dependency court system. This group fosters innovation, streamlines efforts, and reduces redundancies across public agencies, ensuring a coordinated approach to professional development. Member organizations include the Attorney General's Office, the Office of Civil Legal Aid, OPD, DCYF's Office of Tribal Relations, and the Parents for Parents program at Akin.

The Training Coordinator Affinity Group convenes remotely every other month, providing a platform for discussing collaboration opportunities, sharing training materials, and developing common training objectives. Key accomplishments include the collaborative revision of multiple chapters in the [Washington State Juvenile Non-Offender Benchbook](#) and the creation of interagency, asynchronous training modules now used by attorneys, judicial officers, DCYF staff, and other system professionals. By promoting coordinated efforts and standardizing training resources, this group enhances the quality and consistency of professional development across Washington's non-unified dependency court system. Through strengthened partnerships, the Affinity Group has fostered deeper connections between agencies and their training programs.

### ***Enhancing Local Dependency Court Capacity***

FYJP works with local courts to build their technical and organizational capacity, with the objective of improving case handling and achieving better outcomes for children and families. In addition to supporting the FJCIP courts, FYJP provides training, technical

assistance, and evaluation support to Collaborative Courts. These specialized court programs share key characteristics, including a trained multidisciplinary team, increased family engagement, and enhanced connections with service providers and community resources.

### ***Early Childhood Courts***

Early Childhood Courts (ECCs) are therapeutic, team-based court programs designed to serve families with children ages birth to 3 years old. Authorized by [RCW 2.30.100](#) and aligned with the national Safe Babies™ approach, ECCs prioritize reunification and focus on families disproportionately impacted by the child welfare system. These courts employ a trauma-informed model that engages parents as partners and connects families with culturally responsive early childhood services to support parent-child relationships.

Currently, ECCs operate in five counties—Clark, Kitsap, Pierce, Thurston, and Spokane—through funding from a five-year federal grant provided by the Health Resources and Services Administration. FYJP collaborates with the nonprofit Center for Children & Youth Justice (CCYJ) to administer the grant and provide training and data support. Additionally, the Makah Tribe and Lummi Nation are working with FYJP and CCYJ to integrate ECC components into their tribal court systems.

Local ECC teams include a dedicated judicial officer and a full-time coordinator who receive specialized training for effective court operation. FYJP provides on-demand training for judicial officers new to the ECC bench, while coordinators undergo extensive onboarding with the Statewide ECC Coordinator and Zero To Three, the national technical assistance provider. Furthermore, ECCs have received training on racial equity and engagement with tribal families through the National Indian Child Welfare Association (NICWA). FYJP also facilitates a monthly ECC Community of Practice, where site coordinators exchange resources and insights.

The ECC State Advisory Board, comprised of leaders and lived experts from child welfare, the court, and the early childhood services community, provides strategic guidance for the program. Current priorities include expanding access to Early Childhood Infant Mental Health services, increasing enrollment—particularly for Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) families, and developing a sustainable funding strategy for ECCs.

Similar to the FJCIP program, FYJP's Collaborative Courts Team includes a researcher from AOC's Washington State Center for Court Research (WSCCR). This researcher assists local courts in identifying, collecting, and utilizing data to measure and enhance program effectiveness. In 2023 and 2024, ECCs employed a drop-off analysis to examine participant entry trends, informing targeted recruitment strategies to increase enrollment.

The Collaborative Courts researcher also analyzes ECC data to evaluate the overall impact of the program and how well it is meeting stated goals. Preliminary evaluations indicate that ECC participants experience higher reunification rates than children of the same age whose cases are handled in the standard dependency system. This effect is particularly pronounced among BIPOC families enrolled in ECCs.



## ***Family Treatment Courts***

Family Treatment Courts (FTCs), also referred to as Family Recovery Courts (FRCs), are specialized dependency dockets designed to address cases in which parental substance use is a significant factor. Washington State has 20 county-level FTCs, in addition to several Tribal Healing to Wellness Courts. These courts utilize a multidisciplinary team—including judicial officers, attorneys, Department of Children, Youth, & Families (DCYF) representatives, treatment professionals, and community partners—to provide families with comprehensive support and access to treatment. FTCs offer services such as housing assistance, job training, and education programs, promoting stable recovery and safe reunification.

In 2020, the AOC received a three-year federal grant to enhance FTC operations statewide. This initiative aimed to improve adherence to best practices, increase enrollment, and expand services, particularly in rural areas. Through this effort, FYJP established a statewide team and engaged key system partners, including the Healthcare Authority, DCYF, and housing service providers, to address critical service and funding gaps. In 2023, the Legislature allocated funding to sustain statewide support for FTCs.

FYJP's Collaborative Courts Team provides ongoing training and technical assistance to FTCs. FYJP maintains an online training series for judicial officers, coordinators, and team members, offering practical tools and video resources. Additionally, in 2023 and 2024, FYJP collaborated with the Washington State Association of Drug Court Professionals (WSADCP) to provide FTC- and ECC-related training at its annual conference. The 2024 WSADCP conference included a dedicated half-day for Collaborative Courts teams, covering topics such as the effects of removal on infants and toddlers and the application of Washington State Public Health Guidance on High-Potency Synthetic Opioids in dependency cases. FYJP staff also conducted workshops on toxic stress and strategies to support families in treatment court settings.

The Collaborative Courts Team facilitates the FTC Steering Committee, a cross-sector group working to address systemic service and funding gaps. The committee operates through dedicated workgroups, co-led by subject matter experts, and currently focuses on two priority areas: increasing stable housing access for families and developing sustainable transportation solutions for rural court communities.

Since 2021, the Housing & Child Welfare Subcommittee has collaborated with DCYF, public housing authorities, and nonprofit organizations to establish a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) expanding housing voucher access for child welfare-involved families. This initiative, contingent upon enhanced supportive services, secured partial legislative funding in 2023, with continued efforts to fully fund the program. The subcommittee is also working to ensure judicial officers and court partners understand available housing resources and the process for ordering DCYF assistance in securing stable housing for parents.

Recognizing that lack of transportation is a significant barrier to parents' participation in court-ordered services, particularly in rural areas, the Transportation Work Group was established in 2023 to identify sustainable solutions. The group initiated a pilot program in Yakima County, leveraging a human-centered design process to define local needs and seek funding. The resulting framework serves as a model for replication in other rural communities statewide and will be shared with FTCs across the state.



Through these initiatives, FYJP continues to advance best practices in dependency courts, strengthen Collaborative Court operations, and support families in achieving safe and stable reunification outcomes.

### ***Indian Child Welfare Courts***

Indian Child Welfare (ICW) courts or dockets are specialized judicial forums designed to uphold the welfare of Native American children by ensuring compliance with federal and state ICWA laws, engaging tribes, and operating with cultural humility. These courts provide a structured approach in which judicial officers, attorneys, and caseworkers collaborate with tribal representatives to safeguard the best interests of Native American children while respecting tribal sovereignty, cultural values, and traditional practices. ICW courts are particularly critical in Washington State due to the historic and ongoing disproportionate involvement of Native American children in the dependency court system.

Until recently, Washington had only one ICW court, located in Spokane County. In 2021, the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC), in partnership with Casey Family Programs and the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, convened the Washington ICW Court Summit. This event, attended by multidisciplinary court teams from across the state, aimed to educate judicial partners and encourage the establishment of additional ICW courts. As a result, Clallam, Yakima, and Pierce Counties have since implemented dedicated ICW dockets, joining Spokane County in advancing best practices for Native American children and families.

FYJP provides ongoing data analysis, facilitation, and technical assistance to courts in the process of developing ICW dockets. The Collaborative Courts Team supports individual courts in their implementation efforts and is working to establish a statewide framework to connect ICW court teams and link them to national resources. Planned initiatives for 2025 include a Washington State ICW Court Summit and the formation of an ICW Advisory Group, which will provide guidance to ICW courts and support broader statewide efforts to enhance ICWA compliance and best practices across all dependency courts.

# APPENDIX A

## FJCIP Financial Report

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[RCW 2.56.230](#) requires the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) to compile an annual financial report comparing FJCIP court level spending plans to actual expenditures.

The "Actual Expenditures" below show the costs to counties for FJCIP Coordinator salaries and benefits. The "Contracts" portion shows the contracted amount between each county and the AOC. For most counties, the contracted amount covers the full cost of salaries and benefits for state fiscal year 2024. However, cost predictions indicate that, without increased funding, the current FJCIP budget will not be sufficient to fully fund coordinator contracts in fiscal year 2026.

During fiscal year 2025, FJCIP will fully utilize funding for local dependency courts, reaching the legislative goal of 16 FJCIP court communities.

The Statewide FJCIP's approach to onboarding courts at a manageable pace allowed for technical assistance, training, and support for onboarding courts into the program. Funds that were not allocated to FJCIP Coordinator costs were made available based on expressed needs in fiscal year 2024. For example, courts received \$5,000 for start-up costs to equip new FJCIP Coordinators with necessary technical equipment for facilitation, data, and continuous quality improvement work. Items purchased by local courts included:

- Laptops with docking stations.
- Monitors.
- Headsets and webcams.
- Paid Zoom and Canva accounts.
- Resources for remote and in person facilitation of cross system court improvement work.

As courts were onboarded at different times, funds not utilized for FJCIP Coordinator salaries were reallocated for projects to support FJCIP courts, such as Protein for All programs, trauma-responsive support within courthouses, and family reunification celebrations. These projects help courts connect with clients and communities, fostering a shared purpose. FJCIP continues to seek ways to support trauma-responsive initiatives.

**FJCIP Expenditures FY2024**

<b>County</b>	<b>Actual Expenditures</b>	<b>Spending Plan</b>
	<b>Reimbursed by AOC</b>	<b>Contracts</b>
Chelan	Salary and Benefits: \$56,629.96 Total: \$56,629.96	<b>\$56,630</b>
Clallam	Salary and Benefits: \$54,423.92 Total: \$54,423.92	<b>\$91,164</b>
Clark	Salary and Benefits: \$86,095.49 Total: \$86,095.49	<b>\$100,000</b>
Grays Harbor	Salary and Benefits: \$104,021.03 Total: \$104,021.03	<b>\$104,700</b>
Island	Salary and Benefits: \$42,260.63 Total: \$42,260.63	<b>\$53,202</b>
Jefferson	Salary and Benefits: \$30,586.65 Total: \$30,586.65	<b>\$38,309</b>
King	Salary and Benefits: \$130,000.00 Total: \$130,000.00	<b>\$136,000</b>
Kitsap	Salary and Benefits: \$43,034.17 Total: \$43,034.17	<b>\$124,514</b>
Pierce	Salary and Benefits: \$128,718.46 Total: \$128,718.46	<b>\$131,730</b>
Skagit	Salary & Benefits: \$13,170.63 Start-Up Costs: \$4,750.95 Total: \$17,921.58	<b>\$25,000</b>
Snohomish	Salary and Benefits: \$134,231.85 Total: \$134,231.85	<b>\$135,464</b>
Spokane	Salary and Benefits: \$74,888.02 Total: \$74,888.02	<b>\$75,000</b>
Thurston	Salary and Benefits: \$72,429.47 Total: \$72,429.47	<b>\$78,000</b>
Whatcom	Salary and Benefits: \$0 Start-Up Costs: \$3,779.06 Total: \$3,779.06	<b>\$35,000</b>
Yakima	Salary and Benefits: \$26,466.87 Start-Up Costs: \$3,447.01 Total: \$29,913.88	<b>\$39,000</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$1,008,934.17</b>	<b>\$1,223,713.00</b>

The additional funding allocated to the AOC starting in 2022 enabled AOC's Family and Youth Justice Programs to develop the Statewide FJCIP Team that has grown the program and provides support, training and technical assistance to the courts. This funding covers salary and benefit costs of the following staff:

- Full-time Senior Court Program Analyst,
- Full-time Principal Research Associate, and
- Half-time Administrative Secretary.

Additional program costs included travel, mini grants, contract to revise Protein for All materials, and conference registration and associated costs.

<b>Statewide FJCIP Expenses</b>	<b>Actual Expenditures</b>
<b>Salary and Benefits of Statewide FJCIP Team</b>	\$353,086.47
<b>Program Costs</b>	\$11,186.08
<b>In-State Travel – Court Support</b>	\$1,551.89
<b>Training and Professional Development – Statewide FJCIP Team and Courts</b>	\$15,340.51
<b>Protein for All – Program Revision</b>	\$33,261.11
<b>Trauma Responsive Mini Grants</b>	\$18,755.36
<b>Family Reunification Day Mini Grants</b>	\$2022.35
<b>WA State Conferences for FJCIP Judicial Officer and Coordinator attendance</b>	\$24,051.61
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$459,255.38</b>

## APPENDIX B

### Local FJCIP Innovations

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This appendix highlights innovative efforts of local Family and Juvenile Court Improvement Program (FJCIP) courts to enhance dependency court operations, improve cross-system collaboration, and support families and children involved in dependency cases. These initiatives demonstrate a commitment to culturally responsive practices, early engagement, and systemic improvement.

#### Chelan County

##### ***CLEARs Project – Connecting Community Resources***

The Community-Law Enforcement Aligning in Response to Substance Use (CLEARs) Project facilitates collaboration among law enforcement, individuals with lived experience of drug use, and service providers to address substance use disorder (SUD) through regional solutions. The FJCIP Coordinator has participated in the CLEARs work as a representative of the Chelan Superior Court.

Initial achievements of this community co-design process include:

- Establishing project goals to improve individuals' interactions with the justice system and enhance access to services for families with substance use issues.
- Conducting learning conversations with diverse community partners, including local officials and service coordinators, to identify resource gaps and foster collaboration.

The Chelan FJCIP Coordinator met with the mayor of Wenatchee, Chelan County commissioners, the economic development director, housing/homelessness coordinator, the Chelan/Douglas Counties Parents for Parents coordinator, the executive director of the local CASA program, and the local PCAP/Pathways to Parenting coordinator/director. While all respondents are doing important work to support children and families, the process identified a serious lack of connection and information sharing between the different organizations.

The FJCIP Coordinator's role in bridging communication gaps and fostering relationships has strengthened support systems for children, families, and community partners involved in the dependency court.

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#### Clallam County

##### ***Annual Olympic Peninsula ICWA Conference***

For the past three years, Clallam County Dependency Court has hosted the Annual Olympic Peninsula ICWA Conference each October to bring together court and Tribal partners. The event is co-designed by a planning committee composed of system and Tribal representatives and facilitated by the FJCIP Coordinator. Court calendars are adjusted to allow full participation by judicial officers and court partners. Flyers and

event details are shared widely to foster engagement, relationship-building, and collaborative learning.

In 2023, the conference was held at Peninsula College's Ṡaṡk'wustəṡáwtx̣w House of Learning Longhouse, where members of the Jamestown S'Klallam and Lower Elwha Klallam Tribes opened the day with drumming. The Port Gamble S'Klallam Tribe presented The Honorable Commissioner Elizabeth Stanley with their Tribal flag for display in the Family and Juvenile Services Courtroom. Tribal Elder Michael Lowe led a cultural wellness activity, teaching attendees to make "worry baskets" from hemp fibers and yarn.

Key presentations included:

- **ICWA History and Policy Updates:** Liz Muller, Co-Chair of the Tribal State Workers Group and former Vice Chair of the Jamestown S'Klallam Tribe, shared the history of ICWA and updates to Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) policies.
- **U.S. Supreme Court's *Brakeen* Decision:** A panel debriefed the decision, emphasizing its significance for ICWA and Tribal sovereignty.

The 3rd Annual Conference was held on October 15, 2024, at Field Hall in Port Angeles, Washington.

### ***Indian Child Welfare (ICW) Docket Monthly Trainings***

Clallam County offers monthly cross-system ICW training sessions, planned by the FJCIP Coordinator. Topics covered in 2024 included:

- **Makah Museum Cultural and Resource Center:** Theresa Parker detailed the center's cultural preservation efforts and provided free passes and culture workshop opportunities for dependent children and their caregivers.
- **Jamestown S'Klallam Tribe's Healing Center:** Presenters Molly Martin and Joshua McCool discussed services offered by the healing center, including medically assisted opioid treatment, behavioral health support, primary health and dental care, and childcare.

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## **Grays Harbor County**

### ***Building the FJCIP and Cross-System Collaboration***

Grays Harbor Superior Court hired its first FJCIP Coordinator, David Lindeen, in May 2023. With support from the Statewide FJCIP Coordinator, Grays Harbor has established the FJCIP as a central hub for dependency court operations, encompassing communication, trial scheduling, data presentation, and special events planning.

Key initiatives include:

- Hosting Family Reunification Day, Adoption Day, and an HB 1227 Retreat to foster relationships among cross-system partners.
- Transitioning from quarterly to monthly dependency team meetings, with a Steering Committee meeting every three months to guide program objectives.



- Developing workgroup objectives to enhance dependency timeliness and outcomes.

A workgroup was created to support attorney representation for children and youth through the Office of Civil Legal Aid (OCLA). Objectives include ensuring timely attorney appointments and creating a system to track attorney availability. Grays Harbor continues to foster cross-system collaboration, build communication goals, and assess program operations to improve outcomes.

### ***Enrichment and Training Program***

In collaboration with system partners, Grays Harbor FJCIP is developing a fifth-Wednesday enrichment and training program. Presenters from partner agencies will provide cross-system learning opportunities to inform court partners about best practices and available services. A Steering Committee launched in April 2024 is setting program goals and training objectives.

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## **Island County**

### ***Supporting Parents for Parents***

To assist parents navigating dependency cases, Island County offers a monthly Dependency 101 class. With the previous Parent for Parent (P4P) program unstaffed for over a year, the FJCIP Coordinator assumed class facilitation responsibilities. Unfortunately, the program experienced low attendance, so the FJCIP Coordinator partnered with Akin's Statewide Family Impact Manager to provide interim support and connect parents with virtual Dependency 101 classes. Plans are underway to develop a long-term solution for supporting court-involved families, including employing neighboring P4P programs for Island County cases. In the meantime, the FJCIP Coordinator developed informational packets for families, including videos and instructions for parents participating in virtual hearings.

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## **Jefferson County**

### ***Cross-System Collaborative***

With a fully funded FJCIP Coordinator, Jefferson County launched quarterly Cross-System Collaborative meetings in late 2023. Participants include DCYF, the Office of Public Defense, the Attorney General's Office (AGO), Tribes, and service providers. Key accomplishments include:

- Developing a name change process for older youth in care, leveraging prior work by King County.
- Hosting a one-day retreat in May 2024 focused on HB 1227 and SB 6109 implementation. Participants from different agencies had the opportunity to voice their questions and concerns, and to engage in a round-table discussion on improving outcomes for court-involved families through community collaboration.

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## King County

### ***Training for Judicial Officers and Court Partners***

The King County FJCIP supports dependency training for Juvenile Court Judges. In December, new dependency and juvenile offender judges participated in a two-day training covering:

- Dependency processes (e.g., shelter care hearings, mediation, and reviews).
- Intersecting legal frameworks (e.g., ICWA, UCCJEA, and family law).
- Court operations, resources, and technology.
- Specialized topics, such as Special Immigrant Juvenile Status and Vulnerable Youth Guardianship.

New judges were also invited to attend a half-day informational session on Family Treatment Court (FTC) and to observe the FTC docket.

The FJCIP Coordinator also works with judges and court personnel to host training sessions on issues related to effective dependency court operations. Training topics have included:

- Name Change Procedures for Dependent Youth.
- Updates on Local Rules and Procedural Manual.
- Trial Assignments.
- Dependency-Family Law Crossover.
- DJA ShareFile Replacement.

### ***Cross-System Improvement***

Identifying the need for more cross-system collaboration to address court operations issues, the FJCIP instituted quarterly meetings with supervisors from cross-system partners to provide space for in-depth discussions and collective problem-solving. A workgroup was formed to explore setting shelter care hearings on Fridays and addressing the imbalance in filings between the Kent and Seattle courthouses. These efforts align with King County's goal to enhance cross-system collaboration and court operations.

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## Pierce County

### ***Creation of ICW Court Docket***

In 2024, Pierce County launched a specialized ICW Court. Development was guided by a workgroup including Tribal members, court partners, and leadership from Judges Shelly Speir-Moss and Clarence Henderson Jr. The ICW Court began operations on October 1, 2024, presided over by Commissioner Ingrid McLeod. Key steps in development included:

- Establishing a case categorization process to track ICWA, Reason to Know, and Non-ICWA case data.

- Collaboration with Tribal partners, including Pierce County's Tribal Liaison and Puyallup Tribal Court Judges.
- Garnering the support of the Pierce County Superior Court's Executive Committee.
- Support from Casey Family Programs for financial and technical assistance.

### ***Training for Dependency Court Professionals***

The Pierce County FJCIP Coordinator supports ongoing training for the dependency court community. In 2024, training opportunities included:

- **Secondary Trauma and Self-Care:** Focused on child welfare professionals, the training addressed vicarious trauma and the importance of developing self-care strategies.
- **All Things Parentage:** Highlighted the county's coordinated parentage program, a partnership between the dependency court and the county's prosecutor's office, which reduces time to establish parentage and engages fathers.
- **Parent for Parent Lunch & Learn:** Part of a regular, quarterly meeting with Parent for Parent (P4P) and the dependency court community, this training was designed to encourage participation in P4P programs and share the unique support that Parent Allies provide to parents with open dependency cases.

### ***Early Engagement GAL Program***

The FJCIP supports the implementation of innovative projects in Pierce County dependency court, including the Early Engagement Guardian Ad Litem (EE GAL) program. The program was piloted in 2022 with the goal of supporting families during the early stages of dependency cases. By assigning GALs at the filing stage, the program fosters connections, expedites placement, and enhances visitation recommendations.

The EE GALs seek to build rapport and trust with children, parents, and relatives to ensure that a child can be safely placed with parents or relatives with appropriate support in place, and they do the following:

- Attend shelter care hearings, early FTDMs, Case Conferences, 30-day shelter care status hearings and fact-finding hearings.
- Vet relatives for placement, supporting visits, supporting child and other family connections.
- Support relatives to start the home study process.
- Assess visitation, location, and level of supervision to make recommendations, including steps to safely liberalize visitation.
- Look for appropriate services and make referrals.

The EE GAL program has expanded to cover all four DCYF offices in Pierce County, and data is being tracked to evaluate the program's impact on child placement and family time, and to support continuous quality improvement of the program.

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## Snohomish County

### ***Safety Summit and Action Planning***

In April 2024, Snohomish County hosted a Safety Summit to develop a shared understanding of child safety and create an action plan for improving the court's safety practice. The event was planned by the FJCIP Coordinator in collaboration with a cross-system Safety Summit team. The event was attended by over 120 court and system partners, resulting in an action plan for the community.

Three workgroups were created to implement the action plan, focused on:

- Expanding access to social services.
- Enhancing safety planning.
- Improving how the court communicates with parents about safety and court expectations.

### ***Cross-System Collaboration Refresh***

The Table of Ten, Snohomish County's long-standing cross-system collaboration, underwent a revamp to improve engagement. Rotating agenda-setting responsibilities and inviting guest speakers have increased productivity and member ownership.

### ***Training Initiatives***

To address secondary trauma and self-care, the FJCIP Coordinator facilitated an online training with Coordinated Care. Additional training plans include reviving a lunch-and-learn series and coordinating the sharing of training opportunities with the community via email. These efforts aim to offer monthly community-focused presentations and trainings to the dependency court community.

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## Spokane County

### ***Trauma-Informed Consultation with NCJFCJ***

This initiative originated from the 2023 Hope Summit in Spokane County and aimed to integrate trauma-informed practices into court hearings and courthouse environments. The local Family and Juvenile Court Improvement Plan (FJCIP) identified specific goals to achieve these objectives. Spokane County conducted a two-day Trauma Consultation with the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (NCJFCJ), during which staff observed court hearings, toured the courthouse, and interviewed various court partners in small groups categorized by agency (e.g., AGO, DCYF leadership and staff, judicial officers, and others). A final trauma consultation and recommendation report is pending.

Based on preliminary recommendations, the FJCIP Trauma Responsive Supports Mini Grant was used to fund the purchase of:

- Children's sensory toys, coloring items, and books for child-friendly lobby and courtroom spaces.
- Trauma-responsive artwork and privacy curtains for enhanced meeting room safety.

- Hygiene products and diapers.

### ***Annual Hope Summit***

In February 2024, Spokane County hosted the fourth annual Hope Summit, emphasizing workforce well-being, hope-centered leadership, and compassionate team systems. Key developments included:

- A survey to gather input for the Summit's agenda, highlighting workforce well-being as a priority.
- Dr. Christopher Freeze's presentation on Hope-Centered Leadership, supported by pre-Summit hope measurement surveys.
- A practical exercise, "Hope-Centered Teaming in Action," illustrating the resilience of collaborative teams under stress.

Participants committed to implementing actionable insights into their practice. Feedback from the Summit was compiled into a report for the Juvenile Court Committee. Post-Summit consultation hours with Dr. Freeze were utilized to integrate hope-centered leadership principles into the court system.

### ***Expanding Early Childhood Court (Safe Baby Court)***

Spokane's Early Childhood Court (ECC) expanded significantly in 2024, addressing barriers to program access for families in diverse central zip codes. The court added a third ECC team to serve this demographic and committed to expanding ECC to all seven dependency court teams. Implementation training for the entire dependency court system is underway, reflecting the court's dedication to inclusive and effective practices.

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## **Thurston County**

### ***Trauma-Informed Practice Workgroup***

Thurston County's Trauma-Informed Practice Workgroup continues to focus on creating a trauma-informed court culture. Key accomplishments in 2024 include:

- Partnering with local businesses and Tribal groups to enhance waiting areas with family-friendly and culturally enriching elements.
- Utilizing the Trauma Responsive Supports Mini Grant to purchase family-friendly furniture for the court waiting areas.
- Offering targeted training, including "Education Stability of Foster Youth" and "Vicarious and Secondary Trauma."

Thurston County will work with the Administrative Office of the Courts' Family and Youth Justice Programs to host a Safety Summit in early 2025, integrating principles of hope science.



## APPENDIX C

### FYJP Support for Trauma Responsive Dependency Courts

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The Family and Juvenile Court Improvement Program (FJCIP) offers dependency court communities technical assistance and small grants to create a more trauma-responsive system that nurtures hope for children, youth, and families. In 2024, these resources enabled dependency courts across the state to provide tangible support to families in the form of protein-rich foods, trauma-informed court spaces, and community celebrations.

#### Protein for All

The FJCIP partnered with Dr. Kristen Allott to create an updated toolkit designed to assist courts in implementing the [Protein for All](#) program in their courthouses. This toolkit offers professionals an overview of the program's history and the scientific principles behind it. It guides them through the steps of initiating and implementing the program, building support and allies, securing funding, and collecting data.

In the Protein for All [Toolkit](#)<sup>1</sup> authored by Dr. Kristen Allott, she highlights how courts are increasingly at the forefront of addressing our nation's mental health crisis. Research indicates that food insecurity and lack of food access worsen addictions, mental illness, and poor decision-making. When individuals come to court without having eaten, emotionally reactive and uncivil behavior is more likely to occur. This, in turn, contributes to burnout, secondary trauma, and addictions among court officials who manage these emotionally charged situations throughout the day (Allott, 2024).



Dr. Allott explains that mental health is inherently complex. Extended periods without eating shifts our cognitive processes from the responsive cortex to the reactive limbic brain. This is particularly evident in individuals with primary and secondary trauma, mental illness, addictions, or burnout. Protein for All is a program that compassionately addresses the essential need for nourishment, enabling people to make decisions using their responsive cortex and be more fully engaged in the process.<sup>2</sup>

The FJCIP provided one-time mini grants to help courts initiate or revitalize their Protein for All programs. For courts revitalizing their programs, these grants have been a crucial addition to longstanding partnerships with their local food banks. The following are some creative ways courts have utilized this funding to adapt and enhance their programs in response to post-pandemic changes in court operations.

- Snack packs for families in dependency court. Each snack pack has four high protein snacks in it along with a flyer educating recipients on the benefits of protein to the brain and their thinking abilities.
- Food resources are shared with families coming into court.

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<sup>1</sup> Access the Protein for All Toolkit here: [Protein for All - Family and Youth Justice Programs \(wacita.org\)](#)

<sup>2</sup> Learn more at [KristenAllott.com/courts](#), <https://www.proteinforall.org/>, and <https://www.wacita.org/protein-for-all/>

- Larger portions of peanut butter and soups were purchased for families concerned about food scarcity at home, to take with them.
- Snack bags were made to give out to lawyers, Department of Children, Youth & Families (DCYF) employees, Guardians Ad Litem (GALs), and other court partners to share with their clients. Each bag contains a small flyer with information about the importance of fueling your brain.
- A basket of protein-rich snacks, Liquid IV hydration packs, and water bottles available to all during dependency and shelter care dockets.
- To-go bags for clients who come into court to take with them when they leave.
- Having food out and available for the children and youth served through the court, who arrive hungry and need to eat to help them focus on their sessions, meetings and court.



In just a few months, the FJCIP courts have utilized the mini-grant funding and are already reporting positive impacts on both the families they serve and the professionals within the system. FJCIP Coordinators reported the following results:

- *“These small snack bags have provided nutrition to families, but the act of offering food to someone can also be a way to strengthen connections. This has a positive impact on our overall court culture.”*
- *“The items purchased were divided between our court programs and have already made such a meaningful impact for our small county. As we see across the state, the number of clients we serve who are experiencing homelessness and food insecurity has skyrocketed.”*
- *“With a high poverty level and a high number of individuals/families experiencing food insecurity, most of the clients served in our Juvenile Court struggle with these issues. Individuals and families must be present and ready for court by 9AM or 1PM, and many times in between for scheduled appointments with*

*attorneys and probation staff. Many of them come without eating breakfast and/or lunch. As a result, they utilize the public vending machines in our main lobby or go without. The vending machines provide candy, chips and soda and nothing of nutritional value.”*



Utilizing the toolkit and mini grants, courts have been able to provide families in their courthouses with protein rich foods. FJCIP Coordinators used their understanding of the families served by their courts to ensure that the protein-rich foods had enough variety to meet the needs of toddlers, children, and adults, as well as accommodating food sensitivities. Coordinators loaded up their vehicles to bring this bounty to their courthouses.

Feedback from court system partners has been overwhelmingly positive:

*“Parents enrolled in our Family Treatment Court are offered snack packs when they show up to court. Their children, who often come to court with their family, are given snacks too. The kids are so excited to get jerky sticks and protein bars.” –Clark County*

*“Office of Public Defense (OPD) social workers have taken protein snacks to hand out to clients when they meet in-person. One OPD social worker talked about meeting with their client at a homeless camp and how the client hadn’t eaten recently. The snack packs were gratefully received by this person.” –Clark County*

*“All our court programs have expressed how helpful this grant has been, and we are hopeful to be able to apply for it in the future.” –Jefferson County*

*“Prior to receiving the Protein for All mini grant, our court used a small amount of general fund money to purchase healthy snacks, water, and sports drinks for clients visiting our juvenile probation lobby. However, we were not able to purchase enough to open it up for all court visitors. We anticipate higher engagement levels and lower no-shows resulting from the ability to have healthy snacks and drinks for all people who utilize juvenile court services. We also anticipate a higher level of in-person participation in court and other appointments, as well as a lower level of hunger driven distraction. The ability to provide healthy snacks and drinks will also make our court a more welcoming environment.” –Yakima County*

*“Families often face uncertainty about the court process and its duration. Our court campus, unfortunately, lacks accessible and affordable snacks and drinks. Yet, Protein*



*for All stands as a beacon of hope and sustenance, providing vital support to parents and families experiencing stress, hunger, and thirst as they prepare for their court appearances, which can often stretch for hours. The quality and variety of offerings have been greatly appreciated, especially by those with food sensitivities and dental issues.” –Spokane County*

*“Protein for All has helped parents feel respected as people and not just another case; to know that someone is thinking of their individual needs as well. I have seen it soften parents to know that we care and are trying to help them out. It also helps to calm nerves when they have a chance to take a breath, to eat and drink when they may not have been able to in days. It also provides comfort and something to do while they wait for their attorney.” –Parent Attorney*

FJCIP Coordinators have reported positive impacts from the Protein for All programs. The success in providing essential resources to families has resulted in a noticeable increase in demand, highlighting the program’s effectiveness and the community’s trust in efforts to support families. However, with the growing need, FJCIP-funded resources are depleted quickly. Protein for All serves not only the families in dependency courts but everyone who enters the courthouse, including youth served by our Juvenile Courts.

In 2025, the Administrative Office of the Courts’ Family and Youth Justice Programs (FYJP) plans to evaluate the impact of Protein for All on families and youth through a combination of surveys, interviews and court observations.

Food banks are a valuable addition to local Protein for All programs, serving as a resource for snacks and a way to connect the court and families with services in the community. Unfortunately, some food banks struggle to provide healthy, high-protein foods needed for program. As a result, Protein for All one-time mini grants have supplemented the essential support provided by foodbanks, offering additional resources directly within the courthouse.

With ongoing funding, courts would be able to provide the necessary food for the program, rather than relying on foodbanks and community partners to allocate precious resources. Continued funding would also ensure sustainability, allowing every family who enters juvenile court to receive a protein rich snack, thereby helping them to better engage in their case and creating a more trauma-responsive court system.



## Trauma Responsive Supports

The FJCIP awarded mini grants to help courts develop trauma-responsive projects within their courthouses. These courts are intentionally designing their physical spaces, acknowledging and meeting basic needs, and creating procedures to better accommodate individuals with trauma backgrounds.

During the 2024 Annual Dependency Judicial Training Academy, Tiffany Sudela-Junker, a Regulation and Resilience Coach and founder of Extraordinary Parenting LLC, presented on ways that courts can effectively respond to critical incidents and support children and families who have experienced trauma. Following the training, she provided FJCIP Coordinators with a resource list of sensory items designed to help children and adults regulate their emotions in the courtroom. Several FJCIP courts purchased sensory items, fidget toys, crafts for kids, and stress balls in order to serve families and children in a more compassionate and responsive manner.

Many parents in dependency court are striving to rebuild their lives and families while recovering from substance use disorders, homelessness, and mental health challenges. Court staff recognize that the high cost of essential items like hygiene products, feminine products, diapers, and baby wipes makes it difficult for these parents to obtain what they need. Some courts used their trauma-responsive funds to help parents access these essentials, as well as clothing, planners, and string backpacks to help carry items.

Several FJCIP courts are engaged in ongoing projects to make their courthouses feel safe and welcoming to all who enter. Courts utilized the funding to purchase culturally appropriate artwork, furniture, and signage for lobby spaces. One court purchased a special table to allow the judicial officer to sit at the ground level with court participants for their ICW docket.

FJCIP courts are increasingly interested in shifting court culture to be more aware of and responsive to families' needs. The Annual Dependency Judicial Training Academy introduced judicial officers to the idea of promoting parent-child bonding by giving families children's books, encouraging parents and children to read together. Inspired by the training, several courts used their grants to purchase books for children and their parents.

The FJCIP hopes to continue this important work and share resources with all dependency courts across Washington State.





## Family Reunification Month Celebrations

June is Family Reunification month in Washington State. Courts and communities across the state host events to celebrate and recognize the hard work that families do to be reunified. The FJCIP supports Family Reunification events by offering \$200 mini grants to all dependency courts in the state and providing support to communities in planning and advertising their events.

### ***Family Reunification Day Toolkit***

The FJCIP worked with the statewide Reunification Day Advisory Committee to update the Family Reunification Day Toolkit, which is available to all courts. The toolkit supports courts with event planning, seeking donations, creating partnerships, and media outreach. Additions to the toolkit included sample donation letters, activity ideas, outreach tips, location considerations, and more. The new toolkit is available here: [Family Reunification Day Toolkit 2024](#).

### ***King County Family Reunification Celebration***

King County celebrated its 15<sup>th</sup> Annual Reunification Day on June 8, 2024, at Gene Coulon Park in Renton. The event honored families and communities who have worked together to reunify children and youth with their parents involved in dependency actions. It was a fun-filled day supported by many community members, featuring food, fun, and family activities for all attendees.



The Reunification Day Committee teamed with Casey Family Programs to hold a joint event. Many families, including 58 children and professionals from 14 different agencies and departments, came out to celebrate. Families participated in face painting, caricature portraits, terrarium building, painting seashells, and playing games to win prizes. Families were also able to take home a number of goodies.

### ***Pierce County Family Reunification Celebration***

Pierce County's Reunification Celebration took place on June 27, 2024, at Wapato Park in Tacoma. The event was attended by 16 reunified parents, 37 reunified children, 31 court professionals, and volunteers, including 3 judicial officers. Community tables offered resources from organizations such as Amara, Seattle Children's Mental Health Referral Service for Children and Teens, Multicultural Child-Family Hope Center, Coordinated Care, Early Support for Infants and Toddlers, and Pierce County Early Childhood Network.

The Pierce County Planning Committee, comprised of numerous system partners, organized a fun-filled day for the community. Highlights included appearances by Rhubarb the Reindeer, mascot of the Tacoma Rainiers, and CC the Bear from Coordinated Care, as well as balloon artists, face painting, and a bounce house for the kids.

Reunification Day 2025 is scheduled for June 27, 2025.

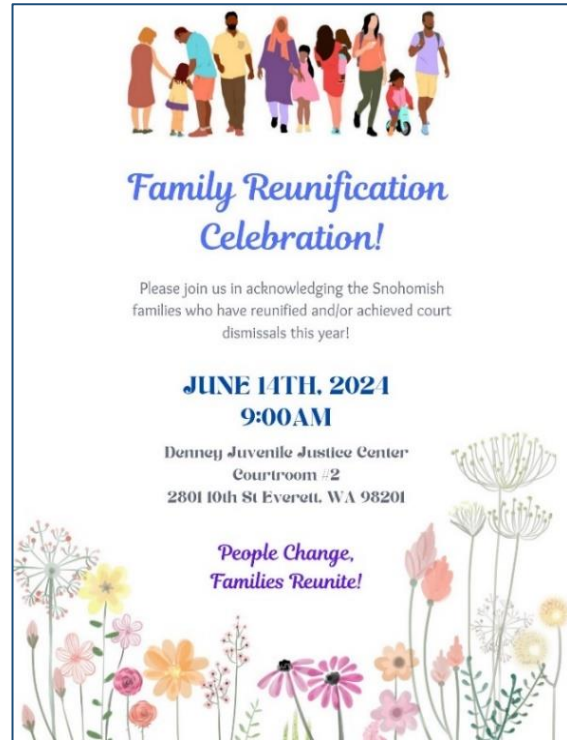


Presiding Judge Clarence Henderson, Jr. pictured with Rhubarb from the Tacoma Rainiers.

## ***Snohomish County Family Reunification Celebration***

On June 14, 2024, in the courtroom (and via Zoom), Snohomish County celebrated families who were recently reunited or their children were returned home. Family supporters, AAGs, Parent Attorneys, CASAs, Social Workers, Parent Allies and court staff/judicial officers gathered with the families and had refreshments. Each child got a package from CASA with a teddy bear.

The Judge Jon Scott read the proclamation making June National Reunification Month and highlighted the accomplishments of individual parents while awarding them certificates of reunification.



Following the court celebration, Snohomish County held its 13th Annual Reunification Picnic. The picnic is hosted by Ann Brice, a Snohomish County parents' attorney, with help from local service agencies and partners. Approximately 100 people enjoyed an afternoon with Webbly the AquaSox mascot, face painting, crafts, games, and cake.

Judge Patrick Moriarty issued a press release prior to the celebration, and KING 5 News aired a story about the program, highlighting one of the reunified families. Watch it here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HLYrnub9TZY>.



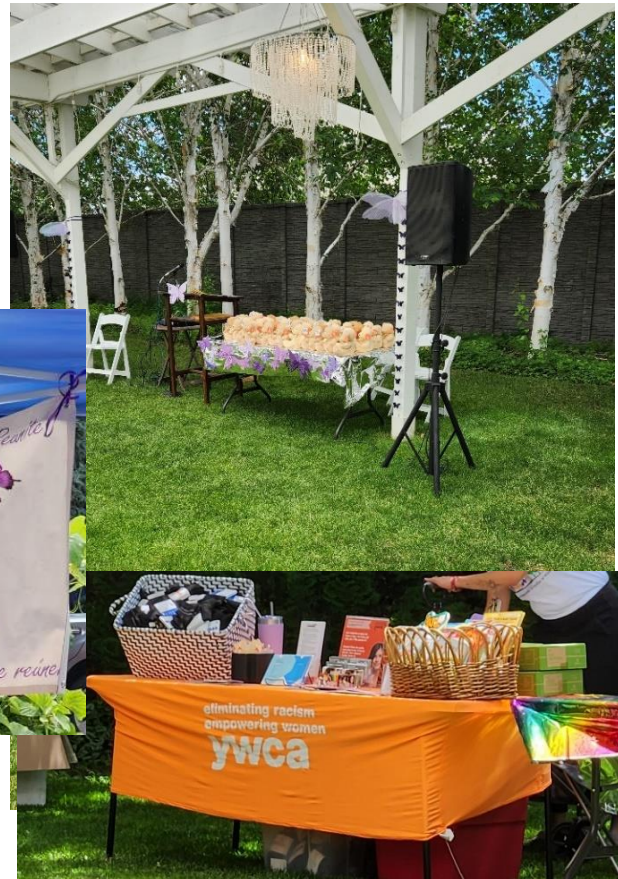
## ***Yakima County Family Reunification Celebration***

Yakima County hosted Family Reunification Day on June 27, 2024, at the Cascade Gardens. Twelve families were recognized for their achievements with gift bags, T-shirts, and teddy bears for the children. Vendors offered resources and fun gifts for the families.

The vendors included PCAP, YWCA, Casey Family, and OIC.

The event was catered by Fiesta Foods.

The Yakima County Family Reunification planning team and OPD Parent Attorney Rebecca Dombcik dedicated time and creativity to make the day special for families who worked hard to reunify with their children.



## **National Adoption Day**

In November, many Washington State courts host National Adoption Day events. The Statewide FJCIP Team provides planning and resource support, and local FJCIP Coordinators help to plan and facilitate local events.

More information: [National Adoption Day Planning](#)

## ***Clallam County National Adoption Day Celebration***

On November 16, 2023, Clallam County held their 13th Annual National Adoption Day Celebration. In preparation for National Adoption Day, Commissioner Elizabeth Stanley and the FJCIP Coordinator worked together to prepare for the day, which included a local proclamation.

On November 13<sup>th</sup>, Valerie Brooks of the Child Advocate Program (CAP) and Guardian Ad Litem (GAL) Coordinator, along with DCYF's Adoption Specialist, Sherri Dobbins Jones, made a guest appearance on the Todd Ortloff Radio Show.<sup>3</sup> The appearance on

<sup>3</sup> Radio Pacific Inc, KONP News Radio 101.7 FM in Port Angeles, WA. Website Recording: <https://www.myclallamcounty.com/episode/11-13-2023-sequim-high-play-clallam-county-child-advocates-robert-lamm-from-chicago/> See minute lapse from 15:47 to 33:58. Accessed November 2023.

the radio was advertised by Peninsula Daily News<sup>4</sup> on the November 10<sup>th</sup>, and an announcement for the National Adoption Day celebration was made by the Sequim Gazette<sup>5</sup> on November 15<sup>th</sup>. Announcements of the event were also posted on the Administrative Office of the Courts' website<sup>6</sup> and the Dave Thomas Foundation's National Adoption Day website<sup>7</sup>.

The celebration was complete with a message from Commissioner Elizabeth Stanley, along with adoptive parents, two adoptions as part of the festivities, calm boxes donated by Mariposa House for adoptive children, information sharing by Coordinated Care staff, and refreshments provided by the local GAL Program.



<sup>4</sup> Peninsula Daily News Correspondent (2023, November 10) "Todd Ortloff Show Guests this Week," *Peninsula Daily News*.

<sup>5</sup> Sequim Gazette Staff (2023, November 15) "Clallam County to Celebrate National Adoption Day." *Sequim Gazette*

<sup>6</sup> Washington Courts (2023) 2023 Adoption Day Events by County. URL: <https://www.courts.wa.gov/newsinfo/adoptionDay/?fa=adoptionDay.events> Retrieved November 2023.

<sup>7</sup> National Adoption Day (2023) Filter for Registered Events by State and County. <https://www.nationaladoptionday.org/events/clallam-county-national-adoption-day-2/> Retrieved November 2023.



### ***Pierce County National Adoption Day Celebration***

Pierce County Juvenile Court celebrated National Adoption Day on November 17, 2023, with 12 children adopted from foster care. The courtroom was decorated specially for this day, with each adopted child receiving a teddy bear. Additionally, there was a family photo booth and celebratory cake for all in attendance.



Pierce County celebratory courtroom on National Adoption Day.

