

## Washington State Judicial Branch 2022 Supplemental Budget Decision Package

**Agency:** Administrative Office of the Courts

**Decision Package Title:** Recruit AmeriCorps Members to Assist Local Programs

**Budget Period:** 2022 Supplemental Budget

**Budget Level:** Policy Level

**Agency Recommendation Summary Text:**

The Administrative Office of the Courts, on behalf of the Washington Association of Child Advocate Programs, requests pass-through funding for 20 AmeriCorps members to assist local child advocate programs with the recruitment of additional volunteers in their communities. These efforts would focus on expanding not only the number of volunteers, but also the diversity of the groups to better reflect the communities they serve.

**Summary:**

Operating Expenditures	FY 2022	FY 2023	FY 2024	FY 2025
001-1	\$0	\$266,000	\$266,000	\$266,000
<b>Total Cost</b>	<b>\$0</b>	<b>\$266,000</b>	<b>\$266,000</b>	<b>\$266,000</b>
Staffing	<b>FY 2022</b>	<b>FY 2023</b>	<b>FY 2024</b>	<b>FY 2025</b>
FTEs	0.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
<b>Object of Expenditure</b>	<b>FY 2022</b>	<b>FY 2023</b>	<b>FY 2024</b>	<b>FY 2025</b>
Personnel Costs	\$0	\$186,000	\$186,000	\$186,000
Training and materials	\$0	\$80,000	\$80,000	\$80,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$0</b>	<b>\$266,000</b>	<b>\$266,000</b>	<b>\$266,000</b>

**Package Description:**

The Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) seeks pass-through funding to the Washington Association of Child Advocate Programs (WACAP) for 20 AmeriCorps members statewide to assist local child advocate Guardian Ad Litem (GAL) programs in volunteer recruitment, screening, and on-boarding. AmeriCorps members will be housed in local programs throughout Washington with the full-time program coordinator providing project coordination and oversight at WACAP.

These AmeriCorps members will assist these 20 local programs in community-based recruitment activities, including attending community events such as county fairs, community days and other celebrations, scheduling speaking engagements to promote child advocates and the need for volunteers, develop and distribute recruitment

materials such as videos, brochures and signage, assist with local social media messaging and assist volunteers in getting prepared to take the next core training, including assisting with fingerprinting and registering them for the next statewide training.

The project coordinator at WACAP will assist local programs with finding appropriate members, coordinate regional and functional member teams and administer the federal AmeriCorps grant. The project coordinator will also be responsible for developing and administering a two-day AmeriCorps member orientation where the members will be introduced to their role and each other. Finally, each local program awarded an AmeriCorp member will also receive \$1500 to use towards the production of advocate recruitment materials.

**Current Level of Effort: If the proposal is an expansion or alteration of a current program or service, provide information on the current level of resources devoted to the program or service.**

Currently, local programs receive approximately \$3 million total in state funding, which comprises approximately 23 percent of the programs' organizational expenditures. The balance is mainly supported by local county funding (70 percent) and local fundraising efforts (2 percent.) There has not been an increase in state funding for local programs since 2007 when the initial \$4 million budget was established, but which has been subsequently cut by 25 percent over the last decade. Additional funding of \$310,000 per year to support statewide training, recruitment and technical assistance for local programs was completely eliminated and never restored.

**Decision Package expenditure, FTE and revenue assumptions, calculations and details:**

Each AmeriCorps member costs approximately \$20,000 per year; our request is for 20 members. The majority of this stipend will be covered by a federally-sourced Americorps grant; however, there is a 24 percent match requirement. It is these funds (\$20,000 X 20 = \$400,000 X .24 = \$96,000) plus a position to coordinate the effort (\$105,000 including benefits and standard FTE costs) that make up the bulk of this request. We are also requesting funds to train and on-board the members (\$20,000), travel reimbursement (\$15,000) and \$1,500 recruitment budget per site (\$30,000.) The total budget request is for \$266,000.

**Decision Package Justification and Impacts**

**How does this package contribute to the Judicial Branch Principal Policy Objectives identified below?**

**Fair and Effective Administration of Justice.**

Our experience in recruiting volunteers tells us that recruiters are more successful in recruiting volunteers that share a common experience or identity. Our desire and hope is to recruit a diverse group of AmeriCorps members that will enable us to recruit a more diverse pool of potential advocates who more closely resemble the children and families we serve.

It's no secret that historically, our advocates are predominately white, straight, retired women. However, one of the things we quickly began to notice as we were doing our

on-line trainings over the past year was the increasing diversity of the volunteers. When we asked the participants, they told us it was because now that the training was online, it was much easier to fit it in their schedule and they could take the training from the comfort of their home.

We believe that having recruiters that look like the people we're trying to recruit as child advocates coupled with the accessibility of our on-line training will result in a substantially more diverse volunteer pool.

### **Accessibility.**

See discussion above.

### **Access to Necessary Representation.**

State and Federal law require that abused and neglected children have someone to represent their best interests in court when they are subjects of a dependency proceeding:

#### *RCW 13.34.100(1)*

The court shall appoint a guardian ad litem for a child who is the subject of an action under this chapter, unless a court for good cause finds the appointment unnecessary.

#### *42 U.S.C. § 5106a(b)(2)(A)(xiii)*

...provisions and procedures requiring that in every case involving a victim of child abuse or neglect which results in a judicial proceeding, a guardian ad litem, who has received training appropriate to the role, including training in early childhood, child, and adolescent development, and who may be an attorney or a court appointed special advocate who has received training appropriate to that role (or both), shall be appointed to represent the child in such proceedings.

There are approximately 8,500 children with open an active dependency in Washington State. Currently, 45 percent of the children have a volunteer advocate assigned; 25 percent are assigned to staff GALs, 25 percent to attorneys, and 5 percent waiting for an advocate. Staff caseloads range from anywhere from 40-70 children per FTE, and sometimes in excess of 100 children per FTE. Adding additional staff was eliminated as an option due to the associated cost of personnel. The only way we can expand the number of children served is with more volunteers.

### **Commitment to Effective Court Management.**

Our volunteer advocates each represent 2-3 children and contribute at least 5-10 hours per month per child. Even at the lower end of this equation, the efficiency of the program effectively doubles the hours of advocacy one paid staff guardian ad litem can provide. Combine this with the volunteer's focus on one child/sibling group at a time, and the child advocacy program is unsurpassed in both efficiency and effectiveness. As the number of available volunteers advocates increase, staff caseloads decrease. The results in better overall best interest advocacy for those served by both volunteers and staff.

**Sufficient Staffing and Support.**

With limited budgets from both the state and county, our local child advocate programs have been forced to prioritize case and volunteer management over volunteer recruitment, especially during the pandemic. This proposal seek to “inject” a new recruitment class of volunteers to revitalize child advocacy in Washington State.

**What is the impact on other state agencies?**

Enhanced opportunity for partnerships and co-recruitment endeavors with other organizations seeking “volunteers” in child welfare – e.g., foster parents, child serving and placing agencies like Treehouse and Amara.

**What is the impact to the Capital Budget?**

N/A

**Is change required to existing statutes, Court rules or contracts?**

N/A

**Is the request related to or a result of litigation?**

N/A

**What alternatives were explored by the agency and why was this option chosen?**

Over the years, we’ve experimented with various types of strategies. Most recently and prior to the pandemic, WACAP brought in a consultant for one of our Program Development Meetings to assist programs in developing a volunteer recruitment strategy for their local program. While programs reported learning a great deal from the meeting, subsequent follow up and data collection revealed not much had changed. When asked, most reported that the information was beneficial, but they simply did not have the time necessary to do the actual recruiting with the demands of high caseloads and volunteer management.

**What are the consequences of not funding this request?**

Fewer available volunteers means that staff take on higher and higher caseloads or more children are placed on a waitlist.

**Other supporting materials:**

N/A.

**Information technology:** Does this Decision Package include funding for any IT-related costs, including hardware, software, services (including cloud-based services), contracts or IT staff?

☒ No

☐ Yes