

# Washington State Judicial Branch

## 2025-2027 Biennial Budget

### Parents Representation Client Emergency Fund

**Agency:** Office of Public Defense

**Decision Package Code/Title:** 1G – Client Emergency Fund

**Agency Recommendation Summary Text:**

The Office of Public Defense (OPD) requests funding to respond to emergency safety issues and other urgent needs that arise for indigent clients served by the Parents Representation Program. Examples include securing short-term safety for parent clients experiencing domestic violence, as well as covering emergency moving services, utility bills, transportation, and food assistance. Failure to quickly and effectively address these needs can adversely impact a client's dependency case and their ability to successfully reunify with their children.

**Fiscal Summary:** Funding is requested for the Parents Representation Program client emergency funds.

	FY 2026	FY 2027	Biennial	FY 2028	FY 2029	Biennial
<b>Staffing</b>						
FTEs	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
<b>Operating Expenditures</b>						
Fund 001-1	\$50,000	\$50,000	\$100,000	\$50,000	\$50,000	\$100,000
4E Federal Reimbursement .1984	(\$10,000)	(\$10,000)	(\$20,000)	(\$10,000)	(\$10,000)	(\$20,000)
<b>Total Expenditures</b>						
<b>State Request</b>	<b>\$40,000</b>	<b>\$40,000</b>	<b>\$80,000</b>	<b>\$40,000</b>	<b>\$40,000</b>	<b>\$80,000</b>

*OPD is a subrecipient (DCYF) of federal Title IV-E funding. Certain child welfare-related expenditures, including legal services, are eligible for partial federal reimbursement. State funding appropriated to implement this decision package is projected to generate federal Title IV-E reimbursement as noted above.*

**Package Description:**

**Background and Current Situation**

OPD Parents Representation Program clients are all indigent. During the course of their dependency case some clients experience emergencies that require immediate funding to address safety issues or other urgent needs. Examples include securing short-term safety for parent clients experiencing domestic violence, as well as covering emergency moving services, utility bills, transportation, and food assistance.

The 2024 supplemental budget provided one-time funding to address these client emergency needs (\$10,000 for Fiscal Year 2024 and \$40,000 for Fiscal Year 2025). Parents Representation Program managing attorneys and supervisors review and approve contractors' requests for assistance on a case-by-case basis consistent with OPD's client emergency fund policy, with a goal of same-day approval for the most urgent situations. The client emergency fund policy is attached to this decision package.

Based on early usage data, the funding is achieving its desired goals. From May 7, 2024 to end of Fiscal Year 2024, OPD received 25 emergency fund requests from contractors and approved 16 requests at a total cost of \$8,609. Approved

expenditures range from \$40 for food to \$1,550 to retrieve a client's impounded vehicle. In the first month of Fiscal Year 2025, OPD received 10 requests and approved nine. These range from \$30 for gas to \$1,000 for housing-related fees.

**Problem**

The 2024 Legislature provided one-time funding to address client emergencies, but the need is continual and requires ongoing funding.

The Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) occasionally is unresponsive or bogged in bureaucracy when a parent needs assistance, even when DCYF policy requires a service to be provided. Sometimes the need for assistance is emergent, cannot wait, and is related to the parent's legal strategy for a successful family reunification. OPD has observed that the parent's legal defense team is in a better position to ensure quick, effective response to emergency needs, if funding is provided to do so. Failure to quickly and effectively address these needs can adversely impact a client's dependency case and their ability to successfully reunify with their children.

The 2024 supplemental budget provides one-time funding (\$10,000 for Fiscal Year 2024 and \$40,000 for Fiscal Year 2025) to address these emergency needs. Further legislative action is required to extend the client emergency funding into the 2025-2027 biennium.

**Proposed Solution**

OPD requests \$50,000 in Fiscal Year 2026 and \$50,000 in Fiscal Year 2027 to cover emergency needs of dependency clients. Ongoing funding will allow OPD's Parents Representation Program to continue to quickly resolve urgent needs for parent clients working to reunify their families in the dependency process.

**Fully describe and quantify expected impacts on state residents.**

Providing OPD with emergency funds to assist parent clients in dependency cases will address immediate safety concerns and other urgent needs of the impacted parents. The Legislature has declared the family unit to be a fundamental resource and has determined that supporting family reunification is in the interest of all residents of the state. RCW 13.34.020.

**Explain what alternatives were explored by the agency and why this was the best option.**

OPD contractors attempt to access emergency services through DCYF, often to no avail. Over the years, DCYF has proven to be unwilling or unacceptably slow to respond to the emergency needs of dependency-involved parents. The emergency funding appropriated to OPD in the current biennium is being used effectively and efficiently to help parents address emergencies that could impact their dependency case.

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

Not funding this request risks negatively impacting family reunification. Parents involved in the dependency system will not receive timely assistance to address safety and other urgent needs, which will likely derail or delay their ability to reunify with their children. Failing to fund this request will contribute to damaging stress for the families involved as well as for their OPD-contracted defenders.

**Is this an expansion or alteration of a current program or service?**

No.

**Decision Package expenditure, FTE and revenue assumptions:**  
**Staffing Assumptions**

Job Title Classification	#s of FTE Round to Nearest Tenth				Workload Assumptions/Description
	FY 26	FY 27	FY 28	FY 29	
No FTEs	0	0	0	0	

**Use Standard Costs?**

No.

If No, Explain Additional Costs	Round to Nearest \$1,000				Description/Assumptions
	FY 26	FY 27	FY 28	FY 29	
Goods and Services	\$50,000	\$50,000	\$50,000	\$50,000	Client emergency fund to respond to safety issues or other urgent needs of indigent parent clients, consistent with OPD policy.

**How does the package relate to the Judicial Branch principal policy objectives?**

**Fair and Effective Administration of Justice**

With funding to timely address urgent needs of parent clients, OPD-contracted counsel and defense social workers will be able to ensure that their clients have the best opportunities to reunify with their families.

**Accessibility**

This decision package supports the judicial branch's commitment to accessibility by providing emergency funding to clients regardless of cultural, linguistic, ability based, or other characteristics.

**Access to Necessary Representation**

Addressing safety and other urgent needs of indigent parent clients helps the clients fully engage in their legal strategy and improves their ability to meaningfully access the court process.

**Commitment to Effective Court Management**

Parents encounter many barriers that limit their ability to fully participate in the dependency court process. These barriers are often out of view of the court. Providing OPD with funding to address parent clients' urgent needs will reduce delays that disrupt the court process and will help parents fully engage in the court process.

**How does the package impact equity in the state?**

**Address any target populations or communities that will benefit from this proposal.**

Parents who have safety concerns or other urgent needs during their dependency and termination proceedings will have access to client emergency funding.

**Describe the how the agency conducted community outreach and engagement.**

Over many years OPD has heard from Parents Representation Program contractors and other child welfare advocates that parent clients have emergency needs that are not addressed by DCYF or other community-based resources.

**Consider which target populations or communities would be disproportionately impacted by this proposal.  
Explain why and how these equity impacts will be mitigated.**

This decision package does not disproportionately impact any communities. All Parents Representation Program clients involved in dependency and termination proceedings will have equal access to client emergency funds.

**Are there impacts to other governmental entities?**

No.

**Stakeholder response:**

The OPD Advisory Committee voted at its September 12, 2024 meeting to approve this decision package. OPD contractors and community child welfare organizations have stated that they support this decision package.

**Are there legal or administrative mandates that require this package to be funded?**

No.

**Does current law need to be changed to successfully implement this package?**

No.

**Are there impacts to state facilities?**

No.

**Are there other supporting materials that strengthen the case for this request?**

- OPD's Client Emergency Fund policy.  
See Attachment A: 1G – Client Emergency Fund – Policy
- See [ECS-and-FFPSA-Brief\\_FINAL-4.13.23.pdf \(chapinhall.org\)](#), a Chapin Hall - University of Chicago April 2023 report titled Economic and Concrete Supports: Evidence-Based Services for Child Welfare Prevention. The report notes that:  
“Economic and material hardship (for example, having insufficient resources to meet basic needs, experiencing economic shocks, and experiencing housing instability) are some of the most consistent and significant predictors of child welfare involvement (Hunter & Flores, 2021; Kim & Drake, 2018). Increased access to economic and concrete supports is associated with decreased risk for neglect and physical abuse (Brown et al., 2019; Farrell et al., 2018; Kovski et al., 2022). This suggests inadequate economic resources are a key family stressor that should be addressed when aiming to prevent child welfare involvement and out-of-home care placement. Importantly, Black, Latino, and Native American families are disproportionately more likely to face material hardship and economic instability due to longstanding systemic conditions and structural racism (Shrider et al., 2021), both inside and outside the child welfare system (Dettlaff & Boyd, 2020). This has likely fueled disproportionate child welfare system involvement among these families, particularly for Black and Native American families. Consequently, it is crucial to consider how to best meet families' economic and concrete support needs to prevent child welfare involvement and more equitably serve families.”

**Are there information technology impacts?**

No.

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