

Washington State Judicial Branch

2025-2027 Biennial Budget

Service Capacity for the Incarcerated Parents Project (Pass-through funding to the Washington Defender Association)

Agency: Office of Public Defense

Decision Package Code/Title: 1Q – Svc. Capacity-Incarcerated Parents

Agency Recommendation Summary Text:

The Office of Public Defense (OPD) requests \$220,000 to expand capacity of Incarcerated Parents Project (IPP) to help incarcerated parents maintain and strengthen family connections. The nonprofit Washington Defender Association (WDA) hosts the Incarcerated Parents Project and will hire a paralegal to assist the IPP Resource Attorney who currently implements the project without support staff.

Fiscal Summary: Funding is requested for WDA to add paralegal support for the Incarcerated Parents Project.

	FY 2026	FY 2027	Biennial	FY 2028	FY 2029	Biennial
Staffing						
FTEs	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Operating Expenditures						
Fund 001-1	\$105,000	\$115,000	\$220,000	\$115,000	\$115,000	\$230,000
Total Expenditures						
	\$105,000	115,000	\$220,000	\$115,000	\$115,000	\$230,000

Package Description:

Since 2019 the Legislature has funded the Incarcerated Parents Project (IPP) at the nonprofit Washington Defender Association (WDA). Funding is appropriated to the Washington State Office of Public Defense (OPD) and is passed through to the WDA, which currently employs one IPP Resource Attorney to help parents maintain family relationships while they are incarcerated in prisons throughout the state.

The IPP’s mission is to, “[e]nd family separation caused by parental incarceration in Washington State.” The IPP is the only dedicated resource in the state that supports incarcerated parents and their families along with the public defenders who represent them in the child welfare, juvenile, and criminal legal systems.

The IPP Resource Attorney currently provides more than 300 case consultations each year and responds to numerous inquiries from incarcerated parents and their attorneys for sample pleadings related to the intersectionality of parenting and courts. Limited staffing leads to long response times and unnecessary delays in court proceedings for impacted families. Paralegal support will add capacity for timely response to pro se inquiries, editing and finalizing sample pleadings and resources, and providing research assistance.

The IPP Resource Attorney also serves as the primary author of numerous amicus briefing related to incarcerated parents’ interests ranging from prison policies directly impacting a parent’s constitutional right to a meaningful relationship with their children. In addition, the IPP Resource Attorney develops and delivers statewide and national training for public defense attorneys and others in the justice system who can assist incarcerated parents. Paralegal support will allow the IPP Resource Attorney to focus on these areas of advocacy.

OPD requests funding to allow WDA hire a full-time paralegal to assist the IPP Resource Attorney.

Fully describe and quantify expected impacts on state residents.

This decision package ensures that the Incarcerated Parents Project (IPP) can respond efficiently to hundreds of requests each year from incarcerated parents and their public defense attorneys. Incarcerated parents will receive timely services to help them maintain meaningful connections with their children.

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

1. OPD inquired about WDA's ability to further raise member dues, use reserve funds, and secure grants. This alternative was rejected because WDA has utilized these alternative fund sources to their maximum capacity.
2. OPD considered leaving WDA to take their request directly to the Legislature. OPD rejected this alternative because the request is well-aligned with OPD's mission and vision. OPD historically has included WDA requests for pass-through funding in an agency decision package, including the 2019 request that initiated state funding for the Incarcerated Parents Project

What are the consequences of not funding this request?

Not funding this request leaves the Incarcerated Parents Project with insufficient resources to efficiently respond to client requests. Not funding this request could delay critical legal resources for incarcerated parents who are trying to stay connected with their children.

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

This decision package increases pass-through funding to the Washington Defender Association for the Incarcerated Parents Program, which first received state funding in 2019 and is currently funded at \$150,000 per year.

Decision Package expenditure, FTE and revenue assumptions:

Staffing Assumptions : N/A

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

Use Standard Costs?

No.

If No, Explain Additional Costs	Round to Nearest \$1,000				Description/Assumptions
	FY 26	FY 27	FY 28	FY 29	
Contracts	\$105,000	\$115,000	\$115,000	\$115,000	OPD will contract with WDA to provide paralegal support for WDA's Incarcerated Parents Program.

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

Fair and Effective Administration of Justice

WDA's Incarcerated Parents Project helps public defense attorneys and families address the unique needs of incarcerated parents in child welfare, juvenile, family law, and criminal legal proceedings.

Accessibility

Families at risk of separation or who already are separated due to the incarceration of a parent face unique barriers in accessing services and maintaining family connections. The vast majority of families lack financial resources to access legal resources.

Access to Necessary Representation

Incarcerated parents do not have a right to counsel unless a dependency action is occurring. This project assists incarcerated parents and their families in understanding their rights and the legal processes available to support their family relationship.

Sufficient Staffing and Support

This decision package provides funding for the Washington Defender Association to sufficiently staff its Incarcerated Parents Project.

How does the package impact equity in the state?

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

This decision package benefits families that are at risk of separation or who already are separated due to the incarceration of a parent. This population is low-income and disproportionately BIPOC.

Describe the how the agency conducted community outreach and engagement.

The IPP Resource Attorney interacts on a regular basis with incarcerated parents and their families, who rely on timely IPP legal support services.

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 mitigates existing disproportionate impacts. The requested funding supports timely assistance for incarcerated parents and their families, many of whom are from communities of color that are disproportionately impacted by the criminal legal and child welfare systems.

Are there impacts to other governmental entities?

No

Stakeholder response:

WDA supports this decision package and has received requests for expanded services from families and incarcerated parents.

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?

Visit the WDA - IPP website to learn more about the Incarcerated Parents Project and see available resources.

» [Incarcerated Parents Project - Washington Defender Association \(defensenet.org\)](https://defensenet.org)

Office of Public Defense
Policy Level – 1Q – Svc. Capacity-Incarcerated Parents

Are there information technology impacts?

No

Agency Contacts:

Sophia Byrd McSherry
OPD Deputy Director for Government Relations
360-878-0550
Sophia.byrdmcsherry@opd.wa.gov