

Washington State Judicial Branch 2024 Supplemental Budget Parents Representation Client Emergency Funds

Agency: Washington State Office of Public Defense

Decision Package Code/Title: BF – Client Emergency Funds

Agency Recommendation Summary Text:

The Office of Public Defense (OPD) requests ongoing funding to address emergency safety issues and other urgent needs that occasionally 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. (General Fund-State)

Fiscal Summary:

	FY 2024	FY 2025	Biennial	FY 2026	FY 2027	Biennial
Staffing						
FTEs	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Operating Expenditures						
Fund 001-1	\$10,000	\$40,000	\$50,000	\$50,000	\$50,000	\$100,000
Total Expenditures						
	\$10,000	\$40,000	\$50,000	\$50,000	\$50,000	\$100,000

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.

Problem:

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 needed as a part of the parents’ legal strategy for a successful reunification. OPD has observed that the parent’s legal defense team is in a better position to ensure quick, effective responses to emergency needs, if funding is provided to do so.

OPD is not currently allotted any funds to respond to the emergency needs of parent clients. 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.

Unresolvable emergency situations also can create considerable tension and stress for parents, as well as for their legal counsel. Parents Representation Program contracted attorneys and defense social workers cite work stress as a primary reason they decline to accept and choose to leave public defense positions.

Proposed Solution:

OPD is requesting \$10,000 in FY 2024 and \$40,000 in FY 2025 to cover emergency needs of dependency clients. Appropriated funds will allow OPD’s Parents Representation Program to quickly resolve urgent needs for parent clients involved in the dependency process.

If this decision package is funded, OPD Parents Representation Program managers will establish criteria for providing assistance and will review contractors’ requests for assistance on a case-by-case basis, with a goal of same-day approval for the most urgent situations.

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 chosen.

OPD contractors have attempted to access emergency services through DCYF, 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.

What are the consequences of not funding this request?

Failing to fund this request will negatively impact 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:

Additional Costs	Round to Nearest \$1,000				Description/Assumptions
	FY 24	FY 25	FY 26	FY 27	
Goods and Services	\$10,000	\$40,000	\$50,000	\$50,000	OPD Parents Representation Program managers will review/approve requests to fund emergency assistance for parent clients. Ongoing.

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.

Access to Necessary Representation

Addressing safety and other urgent needs of 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.

Are there impacts to other governmental entities?

No.

Stakeholder response:

OPD contractors and community child welfare organizations have stated that they support this small funding request.

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?

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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