



**Washington State Supreme Court
Commission on Children in Foster Care
May 8, 2023
Meeting Minutes**

Members Present:

Justice Barbara Madsen, Washington State Supreme Court, Commission Co-Chair
Ross Hunter, Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) Secretary, Commission Co-Chair
Jim Bamberger, Director, Office of Civil Legal Aid (OCLA)
Judge Alicia Burton, Superior Court Judges' Association (SCJA) President Designee
Alyssa Connolly, Northwest Intertribal Council
Sydney Doherty, Coordinated Care of WA; Foster Care Physical/Mental Health Representative
Stacey Klim, Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI, on behalf of Veronica Gallardo, OSPI Designee for Chris Reykdal)
Larry Jefferson, Washington State Office of Public Defense (OPD) Director
Jeannie Kee, Foster Youth Alumni Representative
Laurie Lippold, Partners for Our Children
Jill May, Washington Association for Children & Families
Tonia McClanahan, Parent Advocate Representative
Representative Tana Senn, Washington House of Representatives
Rachel Sottile, Center for Children & Youth Justice (CCYJ)
Emily Stochel, Youth Who Has Been Reunified; College Success Foundation
Carrie Wayno, Attorney General's Office (Designee for Bob Ferguson)
Senator Claire Wilson, Washington State Senate
Bailey Zydek, Children's Representation Program Manager, OCLA

Members Not Present:

Jolie Bwiza, Tacoma Chapter Leader, Mockingbird Youth Network
Beth Canfield, Foster Parent Allies of Washington State
Mike Canfield, Foster Parent Alliance of Washington State (FPAWS)
Ryan Murrey, Washington Association of Child Advocate Programs (WACAP)

Guests Present:

Katie Anderson, Early Childhood Courts Statewide Coordinator, AOC
Sarah Burns, Statewide Innovation Coordinator, Family & Youth Justice Programs, AOC
Jacob D'Annunzio, Washington State OPD, Parents Representation Program
Patrick Dowd, Office of the Family and Children's Ombuds
Sydney Foster; Senior Policy Advisor, Human Services; Office of the Governor
Jenny Heddin, DCYF Assistant Secretary of Transformation
Allison Krutsinger, DCYF Director of Public Affairs
Carly Kujath, Office of Financial Management (OFM)
Natalie Lente, Executive Director, Mockingbird Society
Erin Shea McCann, Legal Counsel for Youth & Children
Carl McCurley, Washington State Center for Court Research, AOC
Alison Mendiola, Coordinator/Counsel, Senate Human Services, Reentry & Rehabilitation Committee
Jenn Nguyen, Statewide FJCIP Coordinator, Family & Youth Justice Programs, AOC
Matt Orme, Washington State Center for Court Research, AOC
Jim Theofelis, NorthStar Advocates
Commissioner Karl Triebel, Washington State Court of Appeals Division II

Laura Vogel, CIP Director & Training Specialist, AOC
Julie Watts, DCYF Government Affairs
Cheryl White, Washington CASA Association Executive Director

Staff Present:

Kelly Warner-King, Family & Youth Justice Programs, AOC
Susan Goulet, Family & Youth Justice Programs, AOC
Barbara Murphy, DCYF

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 1:01 p.m. Introductions and roll call were conducted virtually through the Zoom meeting chat box.

Jeannie Kee, Foster Youth Alumni Representative, provided a land acknowledgment.

Approval of the Minutes

Justice Madsen invited a motion to approve the March 2023 meeting minutes. The motion to approve the minutes passed.

2023 Legislative & Budget Updates

DCYF Highlights of the 2023 Legislative Session

Allison Krutsinger, DCYF Director of Public Affairs, provided the DCYF Legislative Update, focusing on highlights of the 2023 Legislative Session that are most relevant to the Commission.

All three items of DCYF's Child Welfare Agency Request Legislation passed, although, the requests were not fully funded, so DCYF will need to adjust implementation accordingly. The request legislation included the following:

- (1) HB 1204 – Family Connections (\$1.308M)
- (2) SB 5256 – Housing Access and Supports (\$5.255M)
- (3) SB 5124 – Guardianship Assistance Program (\$2.609M)

DCYF Related Bill Highlights that Passed included:

- (1) HB 1168 – Parent Substance Exposure (\$2.312M, at HCA)
- (2) HB 1188 – Child Welfare Services/DD (\$148K)
- (3) SB 5515 – Child Abuse and Neglect (\$831K)
- (4) SB 5683 – Child Specific Licenses/Indian Children (\$3.47M)
- (5) HB 1580 – Children in Crisis (\$303K)

Housing Access and Supports Decision Package, which was almost fully funded, included:

- (1) Youth Housing Support Services (\$2.374M)
- (2) Housing Access and Support – SB 5256 (\$5.255M)

Combined In-Home & Transition Services Decision Package included:

- (1) Combined In-Home Services (\$9.693M)
- (2) YV LifeSet (\$4.176M)

Caregiver Placement Supports Decision Package included:

- (1) Caregiver Placement Supports (\$21.9M)

D.S. Compliance *Decision Package* was almost completely funded and included:

- (1) Adolescent Transitional Housing (\$4.962M)
- (2) Implementation and Monitoring (\$1.207M)
- (3) Hub Home Model (\$4.496M)
- (4) Licensing Standards (\$1.650M)
- (5) Referrals and Transitions (\$4.543M)
- (6) Therapeutic Foster Care (\$5.263M)
- (7) Qualified Residential TX (\$2.125M)

Licensed Kinship Placements included:

- (1) Licensed Kinship Placements – staffing:
 - Kinship Caregiver Engagement Unit (\$1.826M)
 - Maintain Licensing Staff Ratios (\$2.97M)
- (2) Initial License Maintenance Payment (\$14.664M)

Family Time *Decision Package* included:

- (1) Family Time (\$16.332M)

Prevention *Decision Package* included:

- (1) SUD Prevention (\$3.014M)
- (2) Home Visiting Funding Increase (\$8.56M)
- (3) Home Visiting Slot Expansion (\$1M)

Rising Strong included:

- (1) Rising Strong Operating & Sustainability
 - One-time funding for a grant to a non-profit organization in Spokane with expertise in the Rising Strong model (\$1.1M)
 - One-time funding to lead development of a sustainable operating funding model for programs using the Rising Strong model that provides a family-centered drug treatment and housing program (\$150K)
- (2) Rising Strong West (\$13.356K)

Child Welfare – Other Investments included:

- (1) Continue Prevention Pilot (\$1.742M)
- (2) Foster Youth Mentoring Pilot (\$750K)
- (3) Children’s Advocacy Centers (\$750K)
- (4) Child Placing Agency Incentive Rate (\$538K)
- (5) Modify SSI Reimbursement Process (\$159K)
- (6) Foster Care Maintenance Payment Increases (\$5.161M)
- (7) Independent Living Services (\$1.5M)
- (8) Foster Care Educational Outreach (\$920K)
- (9) The Breakfast Group (\$250K)

Jacob D’Annunzio asked: “How will the shift to HCA for addressing prenatal substance exposure impact the Plan of Safe Care or DCYF’s involvement in the work? Allison responded that DCYF’s work there will continue, and they hope to continue to expand it.

When asked if there will be additional Family First Prevention and Services Act money available to fund prevention services, Secretary Hunter replied that FFPSA are federal funds that Washington is not able to use yet because DCYF lacks the technology to track and report the required data. However, DCYF has funds available to pay for more of those services.

More detailed information regarding Allison's legislative update is available in her PPT slides, which will be sent out to Commission members following the meeting. Commission members may contact Allison at allison.krutsinger@dcyf.wa.gov with additional questions.

Office of Public Defense (OPD) Budget Items

Larry Jefferson, Director of OPD, provided a list of 2023-2025 Parent Representation Budget Items in the meeting materials. He reported that OPD asked for \$44M, and they received \$40M. With their funding, they will be able to fund existing programs and fund a couple more. The OPD budget items discussed included:

- Pre-Filing Representation (\$2M): Maintains pre-filing representation in existing areas, and expands pre-filing representation to additional counties.
- Voluntary Placement Advice Hotline (\$2M): Establishes a voluntary placement advice hotline to assist parents in this critical phase of the child welfare process. Parents will be paired with a pre-filing representative so they can access legal advice. Partnership with DCYF will be needed to let parents know that the hotline exists and how to access it.
- Social Work Contracts (\$872,000): Adds up to six social work contracts to assist the Parent Representation Program contracted attorneys in dependency and termination cases.
- Parents for Parents Program (\$2.8M): Increases funding for the parent for parent peer support program. This will enable parents with lived experience to earn a better wage doing this work.
- Vendor Rate Increase: Increases vendor rates on average 15% in FY24 and 10% in FY25 across multiple programs, including the Parent Representation Program.

Larry also reported that OPD has made exciting new additions to their office. Shrounda Selivanoff is the new Social Services Manager for OPD's Parent Representation Program and Tonia McClanahan took a new position as OPD's Parent Voice Advocacy Manager. In addition, OPD is partnering with formerly incarcerated people to help them transition back into society. OPD is also now representing cases in which defendants have been found not guilty by reason of insanity. Commission members may contact Larry at larry.jefferson@opd.wa.gov with questions.

Child Welfare Advocacy Coalition (CWAC) Highlights

Laurie Lippold provided a list of CWAC Budget Priorities and Support Items for the 2023 Legislative Session in the meeting materials, and she discussed some of the highlights of that list as follows. Laurie noted that there was considerable alignment between the priorities of child and family advocates and state agencies this session. In particular, she highlighted HB 1204, SB 5256, and SB 5683. She also explained CWAC's legislative advocacy process, led by Laurie and co-chair Jim Theofelis. The group meets regularly during the legislative session to identify the legislation and budget items to support, then the CWAC monitors, strategizes, and promotes them together. The following were CWAC priority issues this session:

- Kinship Navigators (\$2.467M): Kinship navigators received \$2.467M. In addition to navigators at DCYF, there will be more kinship navigators around the state, and King County will have two. Evaluation of the model will continue. Let Laurie know if you have any questions, and she will get you connected to who you need.
- Rising Strong (Capital) (\$13.356M): Funding was secured to create a Rising Strong program on the west side of the state. Representative Lisa Callan helped to secure a site with Evergreen Recovery.
- Family Resources Centers (\$10M): Family Resource Centers did not receive as much funding as they hoped for, but \$10M will go to fund centers around the state.

- SSI Child Welfare (HB 1405): HB 1405 is a bill that became a proviso that prevents the child welfare system from using a young person's SSI survivor benefits to pay for the cost of care.
- Voluntary Placement Agreements (HB 1295): As Larry mentioned, \$2M was received for legal consultation through a Voluntary Placement Advice Hotline.

Laurie was asked what overarching themes she detected in the past session. She reported that there was a strong focus on keeping families together, a commitment to young people in care and making their experience more positive, and a focus on ensuring that people leaving systems of care don't end up homeless. Commission members may contact Laurie at laurielippold@gmail.com with questions.

Senator Wilson, Chair of the Senate Human Services Committee and Vice Chair of the Senate Early Learning and K-12 Education Committee, shared her perspective that we need to invest in prevention. The hope is, as we invest early on, there will be fewer dollars we have to spend in the long run. She also believes that it is our job to create spaces at the table for youth and family voices to be heard. Senator Wilson is also thankful to have Representative Senn, Chair of the House Human Services, Youth, & Early Learning Committee, as a partner on the House side.

AOC Family Treatment Court Team

Kelly shared that the AOC received partial funding (\$1.18M of the \$2.1M requested) to support staffing of the statewide Family Treatment Court Team. The funds will enable the AOC to sustain the work of the statewide team and add a Lived Expert position. Kelly also noted that the FTC program recently created a workgroup focused on transportation resources and how to get them to rural communities.

Office of Civil Legal Aid (OCLA)

Jim Bamberger expressed his appreciation to Senator Wilson, Representative Senn and the Legislature for their continued focus on justice and the quality of life of children. Jim shared that the Legislature has been supportive of OCLA as it moves to identify, recruit, train and retain attorneys in new counties. The program received a 17% increase in 2024, and 13.5% increase in 2025.

Bailey Zydek, Program Manager for OCLA's Children's Representation Program (CRP), reported the program has phased into eight counties as part of its HB 1219 program expansion, and they are recruiting in the next CRP counties that will go live on January 1, 2024. The implementation schedule is being revised and OCLA will provide a report to the Legislature outlining the changes needed by October 1, 2023. Challenges continue to be having a pool of qualified attorneys who are willing to carry child representation contracts and go through the extended training that is required. The CRP is excited that a salary increase can be offered, as they think that will help address this challenge.

Next Steps:

- Susan will send Allison's DCYF Legislative Update PPT slides to the Commission.

AOC's Public Dependency Data Dashboard Demonstration

Matt Orme, Senior Research Associate at the AOC Washington State Center for Court Research (WSCCR) provided a demonstration of the AOC's public dependency data dashboard. He noted there are two ways to access the dashboard: (1) by going to the Washington Courts [WSCCR webpage](#) and clicking on Dependency Dashboard, or (2) by going to the [FYJP website](#) and then to Court Improvement, FJCIP, Data Dashboard. He then noted the [dashboard homepage](#) includes information about the dependency reporting program, including new dependency dashboard

information for 2023; that data on the dashboard are updated monthly, quarterly, and annually; and that the dashboard provides the public data in the following main areas:

1. Current year dependency timeliness measures updated on a monthly/quarterly basis.
2. Measures and filings for prior years.
3. 2015-2022 filings and filing rates, and 2022 dependency measures.
4. Race/Ethnicity data for prior years' filings and measures by race/ethnicity, and filing rates by demographics for prior years.
5. 2018-2023 Permanency Outcomes by demographics, point-in-time median length of stay, and placement discharge type.

The dashboard homepage also includes tips for navigating the dashboard, and Matt noted that using the circles at the bottom and going left to right will help a user to navigate through the dashboard. Matt then demonstrated what is available by going to each of the main areas.

Presentation and conversation included the following key takeaways:

- Between 2017 – 2022, dependency filings have dropped almost 50% and the rates of Termination of Parental Rights petitions show a similar decrease.
 - Commission members commented on the pandemic's impact on referrals and the opportunity we now have to engage the community in conversations about ways to keep children safe while living at home.
 - Secretary Hunter noted that many other states have also experienced reductions in child welfare case filings over the last five to ten years, and that a reduction in child poverty has driven a lot of the change. The number of child abuse reports are down and substantiated abuse is down significantly. He offered to provide a future presentation on child abuse and neglect reports and filings.
- Matt shared the new demographic data functions of the public dashboard, which allow users to filter data by the race/ethnicity and ages of children with dependency cases. He also demonstrated the ability to compare data from individual counties to each other and to the state.
 - A question was asked about how the data will categorize gender non-conforming youth and children. This database will reflect how DCYF chooses to classify gender, as that information is imported from FamLink and is based on self-report.
- The Permanency Outcomes section allows users to look reunification rates and the median length of stay in out-of-home care.
- The data sources that feed into the public dashboard are the same as the Interactive Dependency Timeliness Report (iDTR) - court data comes from court management systems for each superior court, and that data is matched to selected data from DCYF's FamLink system.
 - It was noted that what we measure can contribute to system players acting in certain ways, for example, the focus on timeliness as a key indicator of a court's effectiveness.
 - Carl McCurley shared that the iDTR has evolved from a 2007 legislative mandate to track and report on case permanency timelines established by state and federal laws. Perhaps a new mandate could help direct more attention to other measures that are more relevant to the current dependency landscape.

Commission members may contact Matt at matt.orme@courts.wa.gov or Kelly if they have questions or would like to have an individual demonstration for their agency.

Commission Workgroup Orientation – Family Well-Being Community Collaborative
Kelly Warner-King, Manager of AOC's Family & Youth Justice Programs (FYJP) and Co-Chair of the Family Well-Being Community Collaborative (FWCC), provided an orientation to and overview of the FWCC. She shared the [FWCC webpage](#), which includes information about the

FWCC's mission and vision, membership, workgroups, meeting schedule, meeting notes, and more. She then explained the FWCC's mission and vision, which can be viewed [here](#). The FWCC and its workgroups have been focused on preparing dependency courts and court partners for implementation of the Keeping Families Together Act (HB 1227), which will go into effect on July 1, 2023. She then demonstrated some of the tools and resources that are available on the [Keeping Families Together Act webpage](#) of the FYJP website, which are a result of that work.

The tools and resources include a Court Readiness Toolkit, iDecide tool, and a one-page informational flyer regarding HB 1227. These tools are available to all courts, and the FWCC is working with both FJCIP and non-FJCIP courts to prepare for HB 1227. Next week, staff is going to Mason County Superior Court, which is a non-FJCIP Court, to train them on the Court Readiness toolkit. In addition, "Cross System Kickoff for the Keeping Families Together Act" trainings are being provided to DCYF Regions 1-6 in the months of May and June. More information about the work of the FWCC and its workgroups is available for viewing by going to the FWCC Meeting Notes or going to the HUBs for each individual workgroup. Also the FWCC has convened a Data & Evaluation group to help develop a plan for collecting, monitoring and evaluating the impacts of HB 1227 statutory changes on local court system practice and state-level outcomes for children and families. Dr. Arina Gertseva, of the Washington State Center for Court Research (WSCCR), is the point person for this work, and she is currently working with University of Washington professors and graduate students to develop a court observation tool.

Justice Madsen suggested it would be helpful to Commission members to have an update from the FWCC and its workgroups in the minutes. Kelly said the FWCC wants to keep people informed, and they would be happy to explore something that will meet the Commission's needs.

Upcoming Events

Mockingbird Youth Leadership Summit – Save the Date: August 1, 2023

Natalie Lente, new Executive Director of The Mockingbird Society, introduced herself to the Commission. Commission members welcomed her, and Jim Theofelis, founder of The Mockingbird Society, expressed his gratitude for her leadership at Mockingbird and in the community.

Natalie reported the date of this-year's Mockingbird Youth Leadership Summit will be August 1, 2023. The event will be held at the Double Tree Hotel in SeaTac, and there will also be an option to attend the Summit virtually. Mockingbird will send additional information to the Commission as it becomes available. A save-the-date calendar invite will also be sent out to Commission members following the Commission meeting.

Family Reunification Celebrations

Tonia McClanahan, Co-Chair of the Family Reunification Day Celebrations Steering Committee (along with Co-Chair Judge Jeffrey Bassett of Kitsap County Superior Court), and Jenn Nguyen, AOC's Statewide Family & Juvenile Court Improvement Plan (FJCIP) Coordinator, gave an update about what is being planned for this year's Family Reunification Celebrations.

Jenn shared a slide presentation, which included the following data:

- In March 2023, the number of current Dependency Cases open in Washington was 7235, and those children had a median length of stay of 721 days;
- For 2022, in Washington State the percentage of reunifications over time was 58% and the median length of stay in care was 18 months; and
- A breakout of families being reunified in Washington State by race, gender and age.

She reported this data was obtained through the AOC's public Dependency Dashboard ([The Dash!](#)) that Matt Orme demonstrated earlier in the meeting. Tonia reported that 14 counties have confirmed

that are planning to host family reunification celebrations in 2023, including Clark, Chelan/Douglas, Jefferson, King, Kitsap, Mason, Pierce, Skagit, Snohomish, Spokane, and Thurston Counties. Members of the Steering Committee have tasked themselves with getting four additional counties on board for this year. The AOC is again offering \$200 mini grants to help counties cover celebration expenses. To provide additional incentive, OPD is also offering a \$200 reimbursement for reunification celebrations, including reimbursing counties for transportation to attend celebrations in other counties if their county is not hosting its own event. The organizers in Mason County will be giving away a car again this year.

Commission members discussed how powerful these events are, especially when judicial officers can attend. Commission members and interested parties were also encouraged to attend these celebrations whenever possible. More information, including event dates and details, can be found on the AOC's [Family Reunification Day webpage](#).

Next Steps:

- Susan will send a 2023 Mockingbird Leadership Summit save-the-date calendar invite to the Commission.
- Susan will send the link to AOC's Family Reunification Celebrations webpage to the Commission.

CCFC Strategic Planning

Kelly referred members to the May 1, 2023, memo that was included in the meeting materials, and she introduced Jenny Heddin, DCYF Assistant Secretary of Transformation, to share information about DCYF's strategic planning initiative.

Jenny reported that, like most agencies, DCYF went into survival mode during the pandemic. Now, the agency is taking a fresh look at the strategic plan that was created before the pandemic and refining their goals to be more specific in each area of the plan. For example: the agency's goal of reducing the number of children and youth in out-of-home care by 50% - while they have made significant progress, they are adding more specificity about the outcomes they want for children and families. DCYF is also adding prevention goals, with a plan to better articulate the specific outcomes they are trying to prevent. Overarching goals for the agency focus on racial equity and social justice and removing disproportionality, as well as goals around how the agency operates as related to the quality and availability of services and practice. Once the strategic plan and goals are refined, the agency will develop theories of change and a logic model to help orient all 4,600 employees to the desired outcomes. Some key aspects of DCYF's strategic plan overlap with the work of the Commission, like DCYF's employee recruitment and retention goals, which include improving relationships with court partners. DCYF is excited to work with the CCFC to consider how to work together to make progress on shared goals and outcomes.

Secretary Hunter explained that DCYF and the Commission should aim for specific goals that can be measured and expressed in numbers. He shared the following quote from his email signature line: *"When you can measure what you are speaking about, and express it in numbers, you know something about it; when you cannot express it in numbers, your knowledge is of a meager and unsatisfactory kind; it may be the beginning of knowledge, but you have scarcely in your thoughts advanced to the stage of science."* — Lord Kelvin

Justice Madsen shared the idea that the CCFC host a summit, to be held every other year, in which we identify a discrete set of priorities and goals for the state's child welfare court system. Informed by DCYF and other agencies and organization's priorities, we'll seek common ground and aspiration. Then we can identify the roles to be played by everyone in the system. When we come

back together after two years, we should be able to assess if we've moved the needle, if we need to change the goals, and if everyone is taking on their responsibilities. This is a way to commit ourselves publicly to improving the system and making the CCFC a place to be accountable, as well as share information. The co-chairs agree that this seems like a good role for the Commission to play.

Discussion addressed the following points:

- We should re-think the name and charter of the Commission. The current version is reminiscent of the Adoption and Safe Families Act. It needs to be updated to reflect what we, collectively, have learned since then.
- The FWCC is a good example of how the Commission can work – identify a body of work that is a priority for us, figure out what role this group can play, do the work and measure our impact.
- We will need more resources, including staffing, for the Commission and the summit.
 - DCYF and AOC will work together to agree on a consultant to help us identify what is working well, what barriers exist and how we should operate together.
 - Appreciative Inquiry is a useful tool for this kind of exploration.
 - A collaborative effort with transparency about how the Commission will function is important.
- The Commission should also serve as a forum to identify the resources available in other areas and systems that can help us address the needs that families face in child welfare, such as poverty and preventing removal.
- We can harness the collective power of people in this room to substantively improve the system.
- This group can help bring some consistency and predictability in a de-centralized court system.
 - We should consider the quality of hearings and judicial decision-making, given the reality of short judicial rotations, the lack of required training and large caseloads.
 - How can we improve the information judicial officers have about the children and youth on their cases – informing them about well-being issues such as health, education, and social and cultural connections. Perhaps a dashboard with this information?
 - Representative Senn asked if we're missing data about how often judicial officers' decisions go against DCYF's recommendations.

It was agreed that a co-design group of CCFC members will work with the consultant to develop a plan for revising the name, charter and structure of the Commission and outlining the summit structure.

Kelly also reminded Commission members about the “Continuing Upwards from the Summit” virtual conference, which starts tomorrow.

Next Steps:

- Kelly and Jenny will work together to find a consultant and schedule a future co-design meeting.

Closing & Adjournment

Justice Madsen thanked everyone for their attendance. She looks forward to seeing everyone at the Mockingbird Youth Leadership Summit on August 1, 2023, and at the next Commission meeting on September 11, 2023.

Adjourned at 3:58 p.m. by Justice Barbara Madsen.