

RCW 13.36.040 Hearing—Establishing guardianship—Exceptions—Conversion of dependency guardianship to guardianship. (1) At the hearing on a guardianship petition, all parties have the right to present evidence and cross-examine witnesses. The rules of evidence apply to the conduct of the hearing. The hearing under this section to establish a guardianship or convert an existing dependency guardianship to a guardianship under this section is a stage of the dependency proceedings for purposes of RCW 13.34.090(2).

(2) A guardianship shall be established if:

(a) The court finds by a preponderance of the evidence that it is in the child's best interests to establish a guardianship, rather than to terminate the parent-child relationship and proceed with adoption, or to continue efforts to return custody of the child to the parent; and

(b) All parties agree to entry of the guardianship order and the proposed guardian is qualified, appropriate, and capable of performing the duties of guardian under RCW 13.36.050; or

(c) (i) The child has been found to be a dependent child under RCW 13.34.030;

(ii) A dispositional order has been entered pursuant to RCW 13.34.130;

(iii) At the time of the hearing on the guardianship petition, the child has or will have been removed from the custody of the parent for at least six consecutive months following a finding of dependency under RCW 13.34.030;

(iv) The services ordered under RCW 13.34.130 and 13.34.136 have been offered or provided and all necessary services, reasonably available, capable of correcting the parental deficiencies within the foreseeable future have been offered or provided;

(v) There is little likelihood that conditions will be remedied so that the child can be returned to the parent in the near future; and

(vi) The proposed guardian has signed a statement acknowledging the guardian's rights and responsibilities toward the child and affirming the guardian's understanding and acceptance that the guardianship is a commitment to provide care for the child until the child reaches age eighteen.

(3) The court may not establish a guardianship for a child who has no legal parent unless the court, in addition to making the required findings set forth in subsection (2) of this section, finds one or more exceptional circumstances exist and the benefits for the child of establishing the guardianship outweigh any potential disadvantage to the child of having no legal parent. Exceptional circumstances may include but are not limited to:

(a) The child has special needs and a suitable guardian is willing to accept custody and able to meet the needs of the child to an extent unlikely to be achieved through adoption; or

(b) The proposed guardian has demonstrated a commitment to provide for the long-term care of the child and: (i) Is a relative of the child; (ii) has been a long-term caregiver for the child and has acted as a parent figure to the child and is viewed by the child as a parent figure; or (iii) the child's family has identified the proposed guardian as the preferred guardian, and, if the child is age twelve years or older, the child also has identified the proposed guardian as the preferred guardian.

(4) Upon the request of a dependency guardian appointed under chapter 13.34 RCW and the department or supervising agency, the court shall convert a dependency guardianship established under chapter 13.34 RCW to a guardianship under this chapter. [2010 c 272 § 4.]