

2025

Evaluation of the Washington State Children's
Representation Program 2025



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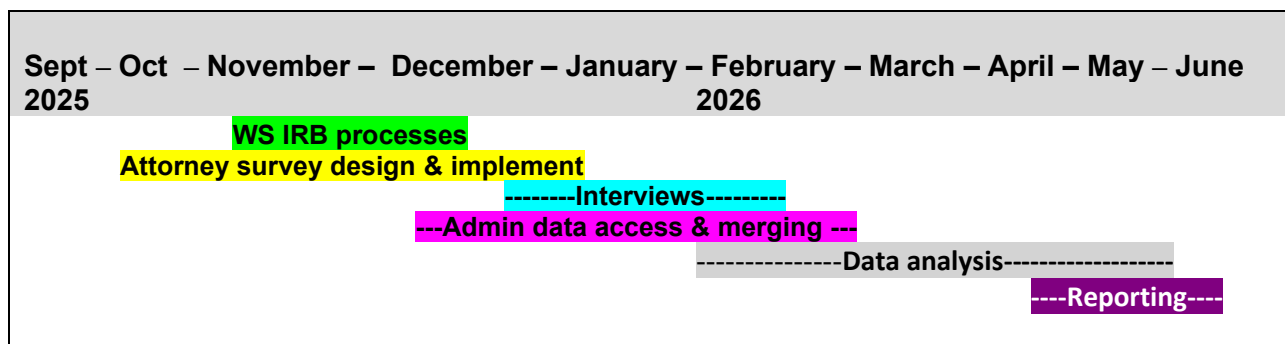
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1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2021, 2SHB 1219 was signed into law, amending RCW 13.34.212. The RCW’s new provisions expanded legal representation to include children below eight years of age when filing a termination of parental rights petition and to include all children ages eight to seventeen years, who are or are alleged to be dependent and those in extended foster care (EFC). The Office of Civil Legal Aid (OCLA) was assigned the task of implementing the children’s legal representation program throughout the state. RCW 13.34.435 directed the Administrative Office of the Court’s (AOC) Washington State Center for Court Research (WSCCR) to evaluate the impact of the Children’s Representation Program (CRP). The AOC contracted with Partners for Our Children (P4C), a research center at the University of Washington (UW) School of Social Work, to lead the preliminary evaluation of the statewide implementation of the CRP. The evaluation activities represent a collaboration between AOC/WSCCR and P4C and are conducted in consultation with OCLA. As part of its effort to support program improvement through performance analysis and reporting, WSCCR provides ongoing operational feedback to the CRP program and performance assessments to the Washington State Legislature. Highlights in key areas are addressed below.

The CRP process and outcomes evaluation activities include: a) analysis of survey data collected from CRP attorneys, b) qualitative interviews with CRP staff, community partners, and other stakeholders to explore implementation of the CRP and c) statistical analysis of administrative data to assess the effectiveness of the CRP to date. This collaborative evaluation research receives guidance from an advisory group of young adults with lived experience in dependency proceedings, and the UW research team participates in ongoing meetings with WSCCR researchers and OCLA leadership to ensure a shared vision for the study goals, shared understanding of the study design and clear expectations for the research process.

CRP Timeline of 2025–2026 Evaluation activities



This report describes the CRP structure, provides updates on the implementation of the program to date, summarizes efforts to engage stakeholders and gather input to strengthen the program as it is expanded statewide, describes program enhancements, and outlines planned process and outcomes evaluation activities. Key constructs for outcomes analysis include

placement stability, youth well-being, educational well-being, school performance and school stability. Evaluation activities to date have focused on (1) engaging stakeholders, (2) gathering materials and designing data collection instruments in preparation for the implementation and process evaluation and (3) finalizing the research design for the impact and outcomes evaluation. We expect to report results by summer 2026.

Implementation Update: Since July 2022, the CRP has been implemented in 20 of 39 Washington counties. As of October 2025, the CRP has served 3,220 youth with standards-based legal representation (SBLR) and has closed 1,678 dependency cases.

Recruitment Update: OCLA has recruited and trained 73 attorneys in 20 counties.

Implementation Timeline Update: While the original legislation, RCW 13.34.212, proposed a six-year implementation schedule to begin in January 2022 and end in January 2027, this was revised in 2024. The implementation schedule for the CRP's expanded right to counsel program is set by RCW 13.34.212(3)(c), with a hold on implementation at present. The expanded program will be fully operational in the following counties by the dates listed below:

- July 1, 2022: Cowlitz, Grant and Lewis.
- Jan. 1, 2023: Benton, Franklin, Kittitas, Walla Walla and Yakima.
- Jan. 1, 2024: Adams, Grays Harbor, Klickitat, Mason, Pacific, Skamania and Thurston.
- Jan. 1, 2025: Ferry, Pend Oreille, Pierce, Stevens and Wahkiakum.
- Jan. 1, 2030: Asotin, Chelan, Clark, Columbia, Douglas, Garfield, Lincoln, Okanogan, Spokane and Whitman.
- Jan. 1, 2031: Clallam, Jefferson, Kitsap, Skagit, Snohomish and Whatcom.
- Jan. 1, 2032: Island, King and San Juan.

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 LITERATURE REVIEW

To inform the research design for the CRP evaluation, WSCCR and P4C reviewed peer-reviewed literature on legal representation in dependency courts. Some existing research focused on standards-based legal representation and some on general representation, including attorneys and other child welfare professionals and, in some cases, parents. Studies used administrative data to assess outcomes such as placement and length of time to permanency, and gathered supplemental data from youths with lived experience, attorneys who represented children in dependency hearings and other stakeholders, such as social workers, CASA/GALs, or judges. As the summaries below illustrate, these studies helped clarify how legal representation may be implemented in dependency systems and offered examples of how to evaluate the effectiveness of children's representation.

2.1.1 Children’s Representation and Outcomes – Literature Review

Research on the impact of legal representation, especially standards-based legal representation, in child welfare proceedings is lacking, despite some evidence that child representation in the dependency system leads to improved outcomes. One study examining the impacts of representation found that general attorney/CASA/GAL representation leads to increases in permanency and reunification, although the study did not disaggregate findings by type of representation (Eldred & Gifford, 2016). A pilot study of standards-based children’s legal representation conducted in Washington State (WSCCR, 2021) compared the dependency cases of 434 children in pilot sites to those of children involved in dependency court who were not assigned an attorney in comparison counties. The study found that children assigned an attorney were 45% more likely to be reunified, had 30% fewer placements and 65% fewer non-normative school transitions than children in the comparison group (WSCCR, 2021, page 1). Additionally, the study pointed to over \$1 million in cost savings attributable to the children’s representation pilot program.

Interdisciplinary Teams: Studies point to the impact and value of interdisciplinary teams in dependency cases. Typically comprised of an attorney, social worker and peer advocate, the team provides supports inside and outside of the court room including, but not limited to, support in housing, immigration and educational issues (Gerber et al., 2020). Interdisciplinary teams have been found to improve outcomes regarding permanency and length of out-of-home stay (Gerber et al., 2019; Gerber et al., 2020).

Standards-Based Legal Representation: To establish practice standards for children’s attorneys, the U.S. Children’s Bureau formed the National Quality Improvement Center on the Representation of Children in the Child Welfare System (QIC-ChildRep). QIC-ChildRep established a best-practices model for attorneys providing “stated-interest” legal representation in dependency cases. Utilizing randomized controlled trials, this model was evaluated in Georgia and in Washington State. Findings from the Washington QIC-ChildRep study suggest that, compared to youth who were represented by attorneys without specialized training, youth receiving representation adhering to the best-practice model were more likely to experience early exit from foster care (Orlebeke et al., 2016). In addition, attorneys using the best-practice model had more contact with foster parents and other caregivers. Cases involving best-practice attorneys also used non-adversarial case resolution options at a higher rate, including family team decision-making meetings (FTDMs).

2.1.2 Lived Expert Perceptions of Effective Representation – Literature Review

The literature includes studies that assessed the perspectives of lived experts to inform program development and evaluation. Several studies asked youths with lived experience of foster care about what they considered to be the important outcomes and most valuable elements of legal representation (Miller et al., 2018). One study found that communication, legal skills, attorney-client relationship, attitudes regarding foster care, frequency and nature of

contact, and foster care knowledge were some of the factors affecting youths' perceptions of effective counsel (Miller et al., 2018). Another study, utilizing data gathered from attorneys, noted the importance of developing relationships with clients, communicating clearly and informing clients of legal actions (Orlebeke et al., 2015).

This is consistent with Miller et al. (2017), who gathered data from youth in foster care who had been assigned an attorney. The youth pointed to ways to improve communication, interactions and relationships with their attorneys, including having their voices heard, being able to participate in the court process, more effective communication, and supportive exchanges with attorneys to demonstrate their helpfulness and care for their clients. A study with standards-based legal representation attorneys found that child-attorney contact was highest when first entering a case but contact decreased after one year (Zinn and Orlebeke, 2017). Existing research also indicates that youth who reported satisfactory experiences with attorneys also reported having better foster care experiences (Miller et al., 2017). Given consistent findings pointing to the importance youth place on the quality of their communication and interactions with their attorneys, this is a critical element of the planned CRP evaluation, and the design of the CRP attorney survey in particular.

2.1.3 Attorneys' Perceptions of Processes – Literature Review

Studies examining the experiences of attorneys who provide legal representation in dependency cases note inadequate compensation (Zinn and Orlebeke, 2017; Duchscher et al., 2017) and the need for additional support, such as training, manageable caseloads and support staff to help conduct investigations (Duquette and Darwall, 2012; Duchscher et al., 2017). A study by Duchscher et al. (2017) found that poor mental health and vicarious trauma are concerns for attorneys in their work. Attorneys reported that courts are often overwhelmed, making it difficult to schedule hearings. Furthermore, clients face a lack of resources, including in the areas of “mental health, academic, and family services” (2017, pages 44–47).

A qualitative study of child and youth engagement in judicial proceedings, based on interviews with legal professionals (Peters et al., 2025), identified nine considerations to enhance engagement: (1) early engagement/rapport-building, (2) youth age/expertise, (3) accommodating online interactions, (4) participation in important decisions, (5) cross-cultural engagement, (6) thoughtful courtroom design, (7) addressing transportation challenges, (8) effective communication and (9) post-hearing follow-through. The CRP process and outcomes evaluation is informed by this literature review. In particular, the attorney survey that P4C will launch to assess the CRP includes measures of attorney-client communication, engagement, transportation, participation of children and youth, as well as measures related to training, caseloads and support needs. Although mental health assessments are not included in the evaluation, questions about mental health and stress may be included in qualitative interviews with attorneys, program experts and related professionals.

2.2 CHILDREN’S REPRESENTATION PROGRAM – 2SHB 1219 AND RCW 13.34.212

Prior to the 2021 passage of Second Substitute House Bill 1219 (2SHB 1219), children and youth had the right to counsel only if they remained dependent six months after termination of parental rights. 2SHB 1219 amended the policy and procedure of assigning attorneys to youths in dependency and termination of parental rights proceedings. Specifically, 2SHB 1219 required that youths aged eight to seventeen years and participants in EFC be automatically assigned an attorney in a dependency case, and all children and youth be assigned an attorney when a petition to terminate parental rights has been filed, with representation guaranteed for both dependency and termination proceedings. CRP attorneys must follow Children’s Representation Practice, Caseload and Training Standards, adopted in 2022 by the Washington State Supreme Court Commission on Children in Foster Care (CCFC).

Informed by literature highlighting the impact of legal representation on important processes and outcomes for children and youth, a goal of 2SHB 1219 was to create meaningful access to the court process, protect children’s legal rights, gauge the child’s or youth’s stated interest, and communicate their wishes to the court in order to improve decision making (2SHB 1219, 2021, page 1). Additionally, because Black, Indigenous, and other children and youth of color are more likely to be removed from their homes and experience longer lengths of stay in out-of-home placement than their white counterparts, the authors of the legislation proposed that the systematic assignment of legal counsel would also result in more equitable outcomes for children, youth and families (2SHB 1219, 2021, page 2).

In May 2021, 2SHB 1219 was signed into law, amending RCW 13.34.212; made effective on July 25, 2021 in RCW 13.34.212(3). The RCW’s new provisions expand legal representation to include children below eight years of age when filing a termination petition and to include all children ages eight to seventeen years, when filing a new dependency petition or prior to a shelter care hearing. Children who become eligible by turning eight years of age or by becoming involved in a termination proceeding are offered representation at their next hearing. Attorneys assigned as legal representatives work with children and youth to effectively express their “experiences and position to the court, improving the court’s comprehensive decision making” (2SHB 1219, 2021, page 1). OCLA was tasked with implementing the CRP throughout the state, and AOC/ WSCCR was named as the evaluator to provide ongoing operational feedback to the program and performance assessments to the Legislature. AOC/WSCCR is contracting with P4C to complete this work.

2.3 PILOT STUDY

The passage of 2SHB 1219 was informed by a 2021 WSCCR CRP pilot study. In 2016, the Washington State Legislature requested a pilot implementation and study of an SBLR program intended to provide youth with legal representation from attorneys trained to represent the stated and legal interest of youths involved in dependency hearings. The program was

implemented by OCLA and evaluated by AOC/WSCCR. Once trained, attorneys were assigned to children and youth in dependency proceedings in Grant and Lewis counties. A total of 434 children were assigned an attorney during the pilot. The dependency cases of children within the pilot sites were compared to those of children involved in dependency court who were not assigned an attorney in the comparison counties of Douglas and Whatcom. Outcomes measured for the pilot study included permanency, placement stability and school stability. Difference-in-difference tests were used to compare the outcomes for the pilot and comparison groups. The pilot study found that children assigned an attorney were 45% more likely to be reunified, had 30% fewer placements and 65% fewer non-normative school transitions than children in the comparison group (WSCCR, 2021, page 1). Additionally, it was estimated that there was a cost saving of over \$1 million when comparing the two groups.

2.4 DEVELOPING STANDARDS AND PROCEDURES

At the request of the Washington State Legislature in Section 9, Chapter 210, Laws of 2021, the CCFC convened a workgroup of stakeholders, including attorneys, advocates, youths, professors of law and researchers, to develop and review the guidelines under which attorneys in the CRP operate in both dependency and termination case practice, case load limits and training. In September 2022, the CCFC adopted the proposed standards to be used by the CRP. The workgroup further recommended that the CCFC convene a children’s representation workgroup by July 2027 to review and revise the caseload standard, as needed. A workgroup is likely to be needed to consider caseload standards for the CRP, particularly given a recent Washington State Supreme Court order that statewide dependency caseload standards be lowered in two stages, first in July 2026 and again in July 2028.

3 THE CHILDREN’S REPRESENTATION PROGRAM MODEL AND STRUCTURE

3.1 OFFICE OF CIVIL LEGAL AID

OCLA is an independent agency within the judicial branch providing civil legal services to individuals with low income. It is responsible for ensuring that state-allocated funds and services are delivered properly throughout the state for civil legal aid programs, such as eviction defense.

OCLA maintains the CRP, which is tasked with implementing the expansion of children’s rights to counsel pursuant to 2SHB 1219 (2021). The CRP has the responsibility of “recruitment, training and oversight of attorneys providing standards-based representation” (2SHB 1219,

page 11). The program is required to implement RCW 13.34.212(3) using best practice models, data, and input from stakeholders, with special consideration to race and equity. According to OCLA, the CRP’s mission is to “underwrite and oversee the delivery of effective standards-based, trauma-informed and culturally competent attorney representation for children subject to dependency and termination proceedings in Washington State Children’s Representation Program.”

CRP training model: OCLA describes the vision for the CRP’s attorney training component as a unified educational system to empower and elevate children’s representation across the Washington State through three core pillars:

1. **Legal Expertise:** Children subject to dependency or termination of parental rights proceedings are entitled to quality legal representation from well-trained attorneys. Attorneys who practice in this field should be competent, dedicated and trained in applicable federal and state laws, regulations, policies, rules, court decisions and trial related skills.
2. **Trauma- and Developmentally-Informed Practice.** Children should be provided representation that is compassionate, understanding and accommodating. Attorneys should have a working understanding of child development, trauma and its impacts upon youth, youth needs and the various supports available to youth in the child welfare system.
3. **Anti-Racist and Pro-Equity Advocacy.** The program does not accept that systemic injustice against Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer, Intersex, Asexual, Plus (LGBTQIA+) communities is inevitable. Attorneys must recognize and, in consultation with their clients, investigate and raise issues related to race, immigration status, cultural background, sexual orientation, gender identity, socioeconomic status and trauma history.

Program structure: OCLA team consists of the CRP director, training and operations manager, three managing attorneys, an administrative support team and a recently-appointed Client Voice and Community Impact coordinator.

Leadership: The program director and the training manager have both practiced in the field of dependency and have extensive experience working with children and parents involved in the child welfare system.

CRP oversight: Managing attorneys monitor and oversee contracted attorney performance to ensure that attorneys are abiding by the practice, caseload and training standards established by the CCFC. They also provide technical support and assistance to attorneys engaged in the practice.

Client voice and community engagement: In 2024, OCLA created and hired a Client Voice and Community Impact (CVCI) coordinator. This position serves the program’s statutory obligation to ensure that its work is informed by best practice models, including the involvement of youth

and young adults impacted by the child welfare system under RCW 2.53.025(1), and by engaging those communities impacted by CRP services to receive feedback on agency services and guidance on programmatic priorities and objectives. Additionally, the CVCI coordinator has administrative duties that directly impact the quality of contracted attorney performance and competence.

Training: Before representing a child or youth in a dependency proceeding, an attorney should understand applicable federal and state laws and regulations, court rules, ethical duties, trial skills, interviewing skills and relevant social science, including trauma, and child and adolescent development. Attorneys receive initial and ongoing training on these topics along with training in cultural humility, the impact of systemic racism, and disproportionate and disparate outcomes experienced by Black and Indigenous children, and by LGBTQIA+ youth. Contracted attorneys are required to complete over 40 hours of web-based, self-paced training within 90 days of the start of their contracts, although most elect to complete their required training prior to their contract start date. Structured online training covers content that includes Children’s Representation in Washington State, Child Welfare Law in Washington State, The Indian Child Welfare Act, Holistic Representation, Representing Transition-Aged Youth, Immigration in Child Welfare, Psychotropic Medications for Children in Foster Care, Education in Child Welfare, Reinstatement of Parental Rights, Pregnant and Parenting Youth, and Collateral Proceedings.

Recruitment Update:

OCLA has recruited and trained 73 attorneys within 20 counties.

Conference: Regularly scheduled conferences offer the opportunity to gather representatives from the parties involved in dependency hearings, including parents’ attorneys, children’s attorneys, and parents and youth with lived experience, to learn and share their perspectives on the dependency system. This conference provides continuing legal education and foregrounds the voices of lived experts in dependency.

3.2 CHILDREN’S REPRESENTATION PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

3.2.1 Children’s Representation Program Implementation Update

Since July 2022, the CRP has been implemented in 20 counties. As of October 2025, approximately 3,220 children have been represented by OCLA-contracted attorneys.

3.2.2 Implementation Schedule

OCLA was initially tasked with creating a schedule for the implementation of the CRP across Washington counties over a six-year period, prioritizing those counties that lacked policies for assigning attorneys to children in dependency cases and/or that had significant racial disproportionality in dependency cases relative to the county population. OCLA used these

guidelines to develop the implementation schedule and to identify the counties for scheduled implementation. Data on disproportionality and BIPOC children were gathered from the Interactive Dependency Timeliness Report (IDTR) ([DependencyDashboard | Tableau Public](#)) and used to develop the implementation schedule.

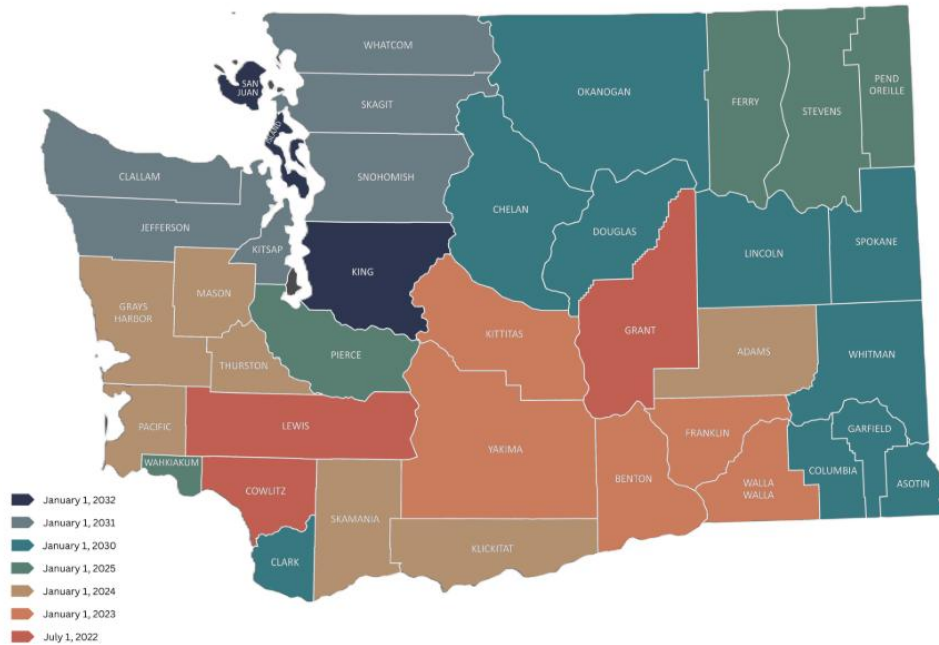
While the original legislation, RCW 13.34.212, proposed a six-year implementation schedule, beginning in January 2022 and ending in January 2027, this was revised in 2024. The implementation schedule for the CRP's expanded right to counsel program is set by RCW 13.34.212(3)(c). The revised schedule by county and the dates on which the expanded program will be fully operational are listed in Table 1, while Figure 1 shows the revised county map with each county's implementation date.

Table 1: Implementation Schedule Table

New Counties	Date of implementation	Total Counties
Cowlitz, Grant and Lewis	1 July 2022	3
Benton, Franklin, Kittitas, Walla Walla and Yakima	1 January 2023	8
Adams, Grays Harbor, Klickitat, Mason, Pacific, Skamania and Thurston	1 January 2024	15
Ferry, Pend Oreille, Pierce, Stevens and Wahkiakum	1 January 2025	20
Asotin, Chelan, Clark, Columbia, Douglas, Garfield, Lincoln, Okanagan, Spokane and Whitman	1 January 2030	30
Clallam, Jefferson, Kitsap, Skagit, Snohomish and Whatcom	1 January 2031	36
Island, King and San Juan	1 January 2032	39

Once implementation within a county is complete, courts within that county are responsible for assigning legal representation for eligible dependency and termination cases. Upon implementation in a given county, all children who are eligible or who become eligible are provided legal representation.

Figure 1: Implementation Schedule Map



[Children's Representation Program | Office of Civil Legal Aid](#)

4 RESEARCH AND EVALUATION ACTIVITIES

WSCCR was established in 2004 by the Washington State Supreme Court to conduct empirical research to support court processes and participants. It is housed within the AOC. As directed by the legislature, WSCCR oversees the evaluation of the CRP. Evaluation activities focus on (1) engaging stakeholders, (2) implementation and process evaluation and (3) impact and outcomes evaluation.

4.1 ENGAGING STAKEHOLDERS AND LIVED EXPERTS

4.1.1 Lived Experience Expert Input on Processes

RCW 13.34.435 calls upon WSCCR to convene stakeholders, including young people with lived experience in foster care and dependency. WSCCR completed interviews with young people and several parents' and youth's attorneys. Both young people with lived experience and attorneys emphasized that the program evaluation should focus on process factors such as the attorney-client relationship and youth satisfaction with services. Individuals with lived experience suggested that children and youth involved in dependency proceedings be offered peer support from those who have previously been involved in the dependency process and who could provide additional support, information and guidance. This approach is often used for parents involved in dependency, with parent allies serving as peer support. WSCCR gathered

input from contracted CRP attorneys recruited at the 2024 *Families Stronger Together* conference. Some attorneys suggested offering the CRP to children younger than eight years of age, having received requests from their clients' younger siblings to also represent them. OCLA indicated that this feedback is consistent with previous feedback.

4.1.2 Engaging Stakeholders to Identify Outcomes to Study

In accordance with 2SHB 1219 and RCW13.34.212(3), WSCCR was directed to engage young people with lived experience with dependency cases to assist in identifying relevant outcome measures and measurement methods with regard to attorney assignment, and short- and long-term impacts of the SBLR/CRP.

WSCCR completed 10 individual interviews with young people with lived experience. Recruitment was achieved through outreach to organizations that often engage with youth involved in foster care and dependency. Young adults were recruited through a flyer distributed by points of contact at each organization. All interviews with youth were completed via Zoom, although in-person options were offered. Young adults who completed the interview were compensated for their time with a \$50 gift card for a store of their choice. Participant recruitment also occurred through snowball recruitment, with individuals who completed an interview informing other youth of the opportunity.

4.2 LIVED EXPERIENCE STAKEHOLDER FINDINGS

Interviews with young adults with lived experience provided salient insight into the dependency case process. Based on their experiences, youth shared their perspectives on the types of information youth should know, concerns youth may have, and how the attorneys, systems and providers could best support youth with dependency cases.

Young adults identified relevant outcomes to evaluate the effectiveness of the CRP, including placements, case and court processes, attorney relationships and interactions, life and normalcy, education and demographic impacts. Importantly, in each of these domains, young people underscored that assessing the feelings and perceptions of the children and youth is as important as measuring quantifiable data such as the number of placements, school grades or returns to the child welfare system. That is, understanding the youths' perceptions of their experiences is as important as collecting quantitative measures of outcomes.

With regard to data collection methods and data sources, the young adults emphasized the importance of directly asking youths involved in dependency hearings about their experiences. They emphasized that dependency process measures should include asking about their relationship with their attorney and their ability to understand information about their case progress and status. They suggested collecting information from youth via surveys or interviews, and that reported data should be disaggregated by demographic characteristics to

allow for subgroup analysis; in particular, youth noted the importance of disaggregating by race and LGBTQIA+ status.

See Appendix A for a full list of these recommended outcomes, process measures and methods suggestions. This stakeholder feedback has informed process evaluation and outcomes evaluation planning activities currently underway and reported on below.

4.3 CRP ACTIVITIES UPDATE AND PROGRAM INNOVATIONS AND IMPROVEMENTS

4.3.1 Standards-based Required Training

Since hiring a dedicated training manager in 2023, OCLA has worked to improve the CRP contracted attorney training program, to ensure compliance with the Representation of Children and Youth in Dependency Cases Practice, Caseload, and Training Standards adopted by the CCFC. In 2024, OCLA revised its onboarding training and implemented the Children's Representation Training Academy. The CRP Academy introduces new contractors to legal and non-legal concepts divided into 11 separate courses. Each course is designed to expand the attorney's knowledge, skills and legal practice.

Attorneys are required to complete readings on Child Welfare Law and Practice (Redbook), relevant sections of the Revised Code of Washington (RCW), Washington Administrative Code (WAC), United States Code (USC), Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), case law, Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) policies, and other select articles that are available online. New contractors are also required to watch videos, many of which can be submitted for CLE credit, and to interact with external websites and training modules, and complete a number of knowledge checks and practice application hypotheticals. In total, CRP Academy training takes over 40 hours to complete.

Training enhancements: In addition to seeking feedback from persons with lived experience with the dependency system, OCLA has obtained input from CRP attorneys who have completed CRP training and assignments. As each county is a member of a specific implementation cohort, OCLA has been able to take tailored action at the cohort/county level, based on feedback received. For example, during one recruitment period, it was noted that attorneys were not accepting unaccompanied/undocumented minor case types due to a lack of subject matter knowledge regarding special immigrant juvenile status (SIJS). To address this issue, the CRP recruited and hired an expert to provide statewide virtual SIJS training. This provided immediate relief to the affected children in that county. The CRP also connected the attorneys in question with experienced legal professionals who were willing to walk the attorneys through the process. The contracted CRP attorneys expressed appreciation for this supplemental training and support that helped them represent unaccompanied and undocumented minors.

4.3.2 Conference Convening

One important element of the CRP model is that it brings together attorneys with stakeholders and community partners to share perspectives and subject matter expertise. In September 2024, OCLA, in collaboration with the Office of Public Defense and Parents for Parents, hosted the *Families Stronger Together* conference in Yakima. This gathering was a unique convening of parties involved in dependency hearings, including parents' attorneys, children's attorneys, parents and youth with lived experience, and others who were brought together to learn about and share their perspectives on the dependency system. The conference provided continuing legal education with case law updates and content on ethics, equity, personal development, mental health and legal procedure. In addition to formal training topics, the gathering also brought forth the voices of those involved and impacted by dependency, providing a unique perspective for professionals working in the dependency system. The interweaving of different parties outside of the court room is an innovative way to drive positive growth and change through the sharing of information and experiences.

4.3.3 Mentorship

An element of standards-based children's representation is the value of support, supervision and mentorship provided to attorneys. The CRP is piloting a structured mentorship program to bridge the gap between theory and practice. It aims to strengthen the advocacy skills of attorneys new to dependency practice in Washington State under a traditional, structured mentorship model. Seasoned contracted attorney mentors provide advice, guidance and technical assistance on such themes as knowledge and skill building; equity, diversity, and inclusivity; and socialization and orientation.

4.3.4 Program Improvement: Youth Peer Support Coordinator

Feedback from young people with lived experience in dependency and extended foster care highlighted the need for peer support throughout the dependency process. Youth indicated that having a person with lived experience to help them navigate the system or process events would contribute to their understanding of the process and to feeling supported through the experience. OCLA acted on this feedback to create the CVCI coordinator position. A primary responsibility of the CVCI coordinator is to continue to engage with young people with lived experiences and to conduct outreach in communities most impacted by the dependency process. The coordinator will develop a proposal for the creation of a peer support group for youth experiencing out-of-home care.

4.4 CRP – RESPONSIVE TO PROGRAM NEEDS

Process improvements are ongoing as the CRP program is implemented in more counties. OCLA has also helped CRP contracted attorneys at the individual level, such as by supporting them to meet caseload standards expectations. In one example, OCLA provided support for one attorney to ethically reduce their caseload of 130. This was achieved by supporting the attorney

to transition their cases over a 3-month period, thus facilitating a warm handoff of cases in a manner that addressed youth and counsel concerns. Such examples illustrate how OCLA uses feedback to stay in step with and responsive to the children and youth being served and the attorneys providing representation.

4.5 EVALUATION – NOTICE OF BID

In June 2024, the AOC released a Notice of Bid for qualified vendors with expert understanding of the Washington State child welfare system to develop an outcomes evaluation plan, complete data sharing agreements and lead the Institutional Review Board process. P4C, a research center housed within the School of Social Work at the University of Washington, was awarded the contract to complete the outcomes evaluation activities. It will contribute to the preliminary evaluation of the statewide implementation of the CRP to assess the extent to which it advances the goals of Second Substitute House Bill 1219. Additionally, the P4C team will contribute to the design of a long-term evaluation and performance reporting plan for the statewide program to track standards adherence and to assess longer-term youth-level outcomes. The process and outcomes evaluation activities described below are ongoing, and the contract has been extended.

4.5.1 Research Teams

The process and outcomes evaluation activities represent a collaboration between the AOC/WSCCR and P4C, with research teams working in collaboration with OCLA. The P4C team has also convened an advisory group of young adults with lived expertise to provide input on the CRP evaluation design and measurement instruments, and to provide input on interpreting findings and implications.

4.6 IMPLEMENTATION & PROCESS EVALUATION

The process evaluation is intended to document the development and implementation of the CRP throughout Washington State. The goal of the formative process evaluation is to provide timely feedback to the CRP through an examination of data collected to support and strengthen the program and its effectiveness as it is implemented statewide. Areas of focus include understanding the strengths and limitations of the CRP as conceptualized, describing the roll-out of the program to date, understanding participants' experiences of the program, and identifying ways to enhance the program to better meet its goals. The process evaluation tracks and documents program elements including supportive supervision, competitive compensation, and recruitment and retention of diverse pools of qualified attorneys and staff.

Recruitment and Retention Update:

To date, the CRP has been successful in recruiting and retaining skilled attorneys; however, it is becoming increasingly challenging to do so. A significant challenge is that the CRP attorney salary is not sufficiently competitive with comparable positions, such as attorneys who

represent parents for the Office of Public Defense. The CRP credits the comparatively lower caseload standard for children vs. parents for the program’s ability to attract qualified counsel despite this pay discrepancy. However, by 1 July 2026, the caseload standards for parents’ attorneys be reduced to match that of children’s attorneys. At that point, the CRP will lose any competitive edge in recruitment and retention. The caseload standards for both children’s and parents’ attorneys will be reduced again by 1 July 2028, putting the CRP in the position of recruiting for a large number of attorneys at the same time as the OPD. Unless CRP salaries are increased to match those that the OPD is funded to offer, it is likely that CRP recruitment efforts will suffer and the program may have to resort to hiring less experienced attorneys for complex child and youth cases. This, in turn, will have implications for training, support, supervision and mentorship within the CRP.

Questions that the process and outcomes evaluation seeks to address:

1. How is the CRP being implemented?

This formative evaluation will analyze descriptive program data regarding service numbers, survey data gathered from participating attorneys, and qualitative interview data with community partners and others. The findings will inform the expansion of the CRP across Washington State.

2. How are dependency process measures impacted by standards-based legal representation for dependent youth?

This question hypothesizes that the assignment of a CRP attorney to dependent children and youth facilitates a more positive process and outcomes experience across a range of domains, compared to those children and youth who lack counsel.

Survey, interview and administrative data analysis will evaluate the following key measures:

- CRP implementation indicators (e.g., fidelity to standards, hiring targets, clients served)
- Youth participation in court (assessed based on attorney survey responses)
- Attorney perceptions and self-reported behaviors (e.g., training and preparation, ability to follow standards, engagement of children and youth, communication with clients, pursuit of clients’ stated interests)

4.6.1 Attorney Survey

The process evaluation includes a survey of attorneys currently contracted to OCLA to represent children and youth through the CRP. The research team will coordinate with OCLA to recruit and distribute the electronic survey to all attorneys who have participated in the CRP since the program’s inception, and the survey will be self-administered in winter 2025–2026 through a secure online survey tool (Redcap).

Survey instrument

OCLA and WSCCR collaborated to develop the attorney survey, with input from the lived experience advisory group. The development of the attorney survey was informed by measures developed and disseminated through the Judicial, Court, and Attorney Measures of Performance (JCAMP) (Summers, 2022), a Capacity Building Center for the Courts evaluation of legal practice initiative. These measures included engagement, due process, high quality legal representation, safety and permanency.

4.6.2 Qualitative Interviews with Staff and Community Partners

The P4C research team will conduct qualitative interviews with community partners and subject matter experts. These will take place in person, by phone or by remote videoconferencing over Zoom, in winter of 2025–2026 and spring 2026.

4.6.3 Data Share Agreements

Data from multiple agencies, including the AOC, the Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) and the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) will be quantitatively analyzed to evaluate outcomes. Data share agreements (DSAs) have been signed between P4C and DCYF, and pre-approval has been sought from the OSPI. All data transmissions made in support of this project shall meet or exceed the data security requirements of the relevant agencies. In the event of a data transmission policy conflict between agencies, the more secure transmission method will be utilized. No transmission of data will be made outside of the agreed upon secure shell protocol (SSH) version. All DSAs will describe the process for securely transmitting data between the relevant entities and the timeline for these transmissions.

CRP research and evaluation activities follow Washington State IRB approval processes. A WSIRB application has been submitted and is currently under review.

4.7 OUTCOMES EVALUATION

WSCCR is directed to conduct an evaluation of the CRP to assess its impact on youth outcomes. The analysis will investigate the effect of standards-based legal representation for dependent youth on child and youth outcomes. This study hypothesizes that the assignment of a CRP attorney for dependent children and youth will be associated with more positive outcomes than for those not assigned counsel.

The legislature has specified the outcomes it deems important and has directed WSCCR to seek input from stakeholders regarding those. In addition to input from young people with lived experience in foster care and dependency, the research focus is informed by the literature review.

The legislature determined that CRP outcome measures should include both short- and long-term impacts on family reunification, number of placement changes and placement with kin. Additional youth outcomes, as described in the legislation, include time to permanency, school stability and contact with parents and siblings. The extant literature supports assessment of the outcomes noted in legislation and points to recidivism (i.e., a new petition being filed during the case or after the case closure; Duquette & Darwall, 2012) as an additional possible case outcome. Finally, as described in this report, WSCCR has met with stakeholders to help identify additional relevant outcome measures. These stakeholders include young adults with lived experience, CRP-contracted attorneys and parents' attorneys.

The outcomes evaluation aims to examine the impact of the CRP on these outcomes. As directed by legislation, data collected will be disaggregated by demographic characteristics including, but not limited to, race, ethnicity, age and geography.

4.7.1 Outcomes Analysis: Research Design and Measures

The first step in the outcomes analysis is the integration of court data administered by AOC (Odyssey and Superior Court Management Information System [SCOMIS]) and Washington's Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (FamLink, managed by DCYF). Once linkages are completed, the P4C/AOC research team will transmit the identified data to OSPI. The OSPI data will enable an evaluation of educational outcomes, as directed by the legislature. Specifically, we will link educational testing data from the OSPI Test Information Distribution Engine (TIDE) data system (educational assessment data) with enrollment and disciplinary data from the Comprehensive Education Data and Research System (CEDARS). Both data systems are managed by OSPI. The P4C/AOC research team will securely transmit the relevant identified Child Welfare data to OSPI. Once the linkage has been completed, OSPI will securely transmit a de-identified version of the linked data to the project database for analysis. P4C is currently collaborating with WSCCR to identify the CRP participant group and relevant comparison groups for a quantitative analysis of preliminary outcomes associated with participation in the CRP. To identify dependency cases with CRP attorneys, the research team is integrating and aligning AOC administrative data and locally held data from each county in which CRP has been implemented.

4.7.2 Key Constructs for Outcomes Analysis

Key constructs include placement stability, youth well-being, educational well-being, school performance and school stability.

Outcome measures (and data sources) for inclusion in this study include:

- Permanency (FamLink); time to permanency
- Length of stay in out-of-home care (FamLink); days at each placement
- Placement moves (FamLink); placement move rate

- Institutional placements (FamLink); placement setting
- Relative placements (FamLink); placement with relative caregivers
- Runaway (FamLink)
- Average runaway days (FamLink); total runaway days
- Medical home (FamLink)
- Early-intervention service (FamLink)
- Delinquency/new offender referral (AOC)
- Court referral for truancy or other non-offender behavior (AOC)
- School suspension/expulsion (OSPI); time in detention
- Grade point average (OSPI)
- Kindergarten readiness (OSPI)
- School continuity (OSPI)
- Turnover (OSPI)
- Student flow (OSPI)
- Truancy (OSPI)

4.7.3 Statistical Analysis

The P4C research team will collaborate with WSCCR and OCLA to determine the time frame for the quantitative analysis of the effectiveness of the CRP and to identify CRP participants in intervention counties in which the program has been implemented. The analytic sample will include all children and youth eight years of age and over in the intervention counties who were assigned an attorney through the CRP. As of October 2025, over 3,200 children and youth have been represented through the CRP. The comparison group will include children and youth aged eight years and over with dependency cases in comparison counties but who were not assigned an attorney through the CRP. Given that the CRP has, to date, been implemented in approximately half of the counties in Washington State, we expect a comparable number of intervention and comparison cases for this preliminary analysis.

Multivariate regressions will be conducted, using either logistic and ordinary least squares (OLS) regression, depending on the operationalization of the dependent variables of interest. We will study the effect of CRP attorney assignment on dependent variables, including model covariates and control variables. When feasible, we will create dichotomous variables (e.g., yes/no; intervention/control) for ease of interpretation, as these can be more intuitively understood. Using regression analysis, we will have the option to conduct hierarchical regression analysis to assess the relative contribution of different groups of variables on the

dependent variables of interest. Given the relatively large sample size, we expect to have ample power to detect effects.

The planned quantitative analyses will include both descriptive and inferential statistical analyses. Descriptive statistics will describe the implementation of the CRP to date, by summarizing available program data, service numbers, demographic data and regional differences. Data from the attorney survey will be summarized and reported in aggregate. Descriptive program implementation findings will inform the development and improvement of the CRP as it is fully implemented across the remaining counties over the coming years.

Analyses of CRP program effects will include descriptive statistics for the variables of interest, bivariate correlation analysis and tests of multicollinearity. Multivariate analyses of dependent variables of interest, such as permanency, placement stability and school stability, will include logistic and OLS regression, including covariate and control variables. Findings from these analyses will test the study hypotheses and offer evidence regarding the effectiveness of the CRP in improving key outcomes and processes. Supplemental hierarchical regression analyses will allow the research team to assess the relative impact of different groups of variables on the dependent variables. Depending on the availability of demographic data and sample sizes, additional analyses by subgroups will enable the comparison of the experience and the effectiveness of the CRP by subgroup, such as race/ethnicity, age and gender.

4.8 EVALUATION SUMMARY

Following legislative directives, process and outcomes evaluation work is being conducted using participatory methods, in collaboration with community partners, and with input, perspectives and guidance from individuals with lived experience and expertise. The evaluation activities aim to support Washington State's CRP and the goal of ensuring equal and informed access to the legal system, recognizing the importance of effective legal representation for children and youth in the dependency system. Evidence points to the importance of client-directed representation (i.e., children- and youth-stated interests) and the value of standards-based legal representation (Duquette et.al., 2021). The evaluation research activities planned over 2025 and 2026 aim to advance evidence-informed policy and services by evaluating the effectiveness of the state's CRP to date and informing the implementation of this initiative state-wide.

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6 APPENDIX A

Stakeholder summary recommendations regarding CRP outcomes, process measures, and methods

Placements

- Safety in placements
- Length of time to permanency
- Length of time in the dependency system
- Decrease in moves
- Stable home
- Success rate of reunification
- Increase in kinship placement
- Reason for placement change (e.g., if youth was moved from foster care to kin or kin to kin)

Case and court processes

- Length of time to case closure
- Case closure with youth desired outcomes
- Tracking youth's understanding of court
 - How well did you understand?
 - Are you confused about anything?
 - What questions do you have?
 - Do you feel heard?
- Return to the system after case closure?
- Success/effectiveness of attorney
 - Possibly gathered using youth satisfaction with case closure as a measure of success/failure

Attorney

- Number of attorneys during the duration of the case
- Frequency of communication/check-ins with attorney
- Frequency at which youth was unable to reach the attorney
- Timing of check-ins
 - Before court
 - After court
 - Intermittent/as needed
- Length of time to communicate with attorney
 - Length of time to reach the attorney
 - Length of time for attorney to return contact
- Quality of time/communication with attorney
 - Topics discussed during communication

- Whether the attorney is intentional about their time with the youth
- Not rushed
- Beneficial to youth by providing information or support
- Attorney accountability/effectiveness of representation
 - What did the youth need/want to be voiced? A youth suggested that this question should be asked of the youth as well as of the attorney. If they matched then it would be a good indication of the attorney's success.
- It was suggested that youth complete a satisfaction survey regarding their relationship with the attorney to capture information about the attorney-client relationship and how pleased youth were. They suggested the survey be anonymous to ensure there were no retaliations.
 - Do the attorney and youth get along?
 - Does the youth feel safe to share/connect with the attorney?
 - Does the youth feel represented?
 - Is there something more the youth needed?
 - Is there something better the attorney could have done?
 - How comfortable was the youth with the attorney?
 - Did the youth have concerns?
 - How honest was the youth with the attorney?
 - What was the perceived honesty of the attorney?
 - Is the attorney being contacted by the youth?
 - Is the attorney responding in a timely manner?
 - Is the attorney responding to questions asked?
 - Is there clear communication?
 - Were decisions made without the youth's input?

Life and normalcy

- Stability/stable relationships
 - Routine, standard, normative relationships youth can count on
 - Contact with siblings
- Sustained friendships, familial relationships
 - Contact with friends and family
- Ability to engage and explore hobbies or have regular social events (e.g., a sleepover with friends or birthday celebrations)
- Presence of support network
 - Someone the youth is comfortable speaking with
 - The youth feels protected
 - The youth feels supported
- Reduced or no in CPS calls
- Reduced or no calls to law enforcement
- Reduced or no crisis service calls
- Reduced or no emergency hospital visits

Education

- Academic performance
 - Grades
 - Attendance
- Ability to participate in regular school events and activities (e.g., field trips, sports, school dance, clubs)
- Decrease in school changes

Demographic Impacts

- Impact of attorney assignment on
 - people of color
 - LGBTQ+