

Role of Parents Representation Social Workers

Washington State Office of Public Defense Parents Representation Program

The Parents Representation Program was developed by the Washington State Office of Public Defense and the Washington State Legislature to enhance the quality of representation in dependency and termination hearings. RCW 13.34 codifies the right to counsel for a child's parents, guardian, or legal custodian involved in dependency and termination proceedings and provides that if a parent is indigent, counsel shall be appointed by the court. The Parents Representation Program is currently located in 31 of Washington State's 39 counties.

Key elements of the Parents Representation Program are the implementation of caseload limits (no more than 80 cases per a full-time attorney), professional attorney standards, access to expert services, ongoing training and support, and access to Program Social Workers.

Program Social Workers' primary purpose is be available to Program Attorneys to assist parents involved in dependency and termination proceedings in Washington State. Parents Representation Program Social Workers are resourced at one full time social worker per four full time attorneys. They are "Nonlawyer Assistants" under the RPC 5.3 of the Washington Courts Rules of Professional Conduct.

Professional Duties and Roles of the PRP Social Worker

Program Social Workers can have many duties and roles in support of parents. Please note this list includes most, but not all possible duties/roles.

Parent Supports

- Communicate, engage and motivate parents to participate in their case plans;
- Provide information/orientation on the dependency process;
- Assist parents in locating and obtaining court ordered services;
- Collaborate with Children's Administration Social Workers in enrolling parents in approved services;
- Attend court hearings as parent support;
- Provide on-going in-person visits to assess progress; and
- Assist parents in locating and obtaining concrete services (clothing, furniture, household goods, etc.).

Investigators

- Observe visits;
- Conduct relative searches;
- Assist attorneys in locating relevant child welfare research;
- Assist attorneys in researching Children's Administration Policies and Procedures;
- Review case files/discovery for attorneys;
- Conduct relative home-studies;

- Interview third parties;
- Assist attorneys in locating expert services;
- Assist attorneys in preparing alternative reunification plans; and
- Assist attorneys in contacting service providers.

Parent Advocates

- Assist parents in asserting their rights in dependency and termination process;
- Advocate for services, visits, etc;
- Communicate with service providers regarding parents' progress;
- Communicate with Children's Administration Social Workers regarding parents' progress;
- Communicate with CASA/GAL's regarding parents' progress; and
- Attend staffings.

Witnesses

- Act as a fact witness;
- Prepare declarations for court; and
- Provide home visits or other face to face contacts as part of court ordered safety plans.

Community Child Welfare Participants

- Participate in community child welfare and court improvement meetings;
- Provide Parents Representation Program Social Worker information to community groups; and
- Attend child welfare conferences.

Contact

Michael Heard, MSW
Social Services Manager
Parent Representation Program
Washington State Office of Public Defense
360-586-3164 ex111
Michael.Heard@opd.wa.gov

Jana Heyd
Managing Attorney
Parents Representation Program
Washington State Office of Public Defense
360-586-3164 ex118
Jana.heyd@opd.wa.gov