

# Family and Juvenile Court Improvement Program, FJCIP



## 2022 Report to the Legislature



WASHINGTON  
**COURTS**  
ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE OF THE COURTS

Administrative Office of the Courts  
[www.courts.wa.gov](http://www.courts.wa.gov)  
[www.wacita.org](http://www.wacita.org)

## **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

<u>FJCIP Courts Update .....</u>	<u>2</u>
<u>Statewide FJCIP Team .....</u>	<u>2</u>
<u>FJCIP Capacity Building Self-Assessment .....</u>	<u>4</u>
<u>Looking Ahead for FJCIP .....</u>	<u>5</u>
<u>FJCIP Courts .....</u>	<u>7</u>
<u>Data Driven Approach .....</u>	<u>10</u>
<u>The Power of Local Data in FJCIP’s Approach .....</u>	<u>11</u>
<u>Data Insights from Across the State .....</u>	<u>12</u>
<u>FJCIP Courts After the Pandemic- Finding the New Normal .....</u>	<u>28</u>
<u>FJCIP Innovations .....</u>	<u>32</u>
<u>Family Reunification Month Celebrations .....</u>	<u>39</u>
<u>National Adoption Day .....</u>	<u>41</u>
<u>Trauma Informed and Hope Centered Court Practices .....</u>	<u>42</u>
<u>System Changes, Legislative Updates, and Case Law .....</u>	<u>44</u>
<u>Works Cited .....</u>	<u>51</u>

## FJCIP Courts Update

---

In 2008, the Washington State Legislature passed Second Substitute House Bill 2822, establishing the Family and Juvenile Court Improvement Program (FJCIP). The goal of the program was to reform and enhance court systems that manage family and juvenile cases, with a focus on improving the dependency system in Washington State.

From 2008 until 2022, the FJCIP provided ten participating courts with funding to partially support the cost of a dedicated FJCIP Coordinator who facilitates dependency court system improvement efforts. These coordinators help courts become learning organizations by gathering, analyzing, and sharing data with local dependency court partners. FJCIP courts also learn from each other through the FJCIP Community of Practice, where coordinators share information about local system improvement efforts and learn how to use the dependency data to drive system work.

In 2022, the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) received additional, ongoing funding from the Legislature to fully fund existing FJCIP Coordinators, expand the program to serve six additional courts, and to create a Statewide FJCIP Team to better support participating courts and to assess the impact of local court improvement programs on children, families, and professionals. The Statewide FJCIP Team started its work in late 2022 and has been actively assessing program needs, developing and delivering training to FJCIP Coordinators, supporting the coordinators, sharing research on what works, and administering the FJCIP contracts with courts.

## Statewide FJCIP Team

---

The Statewide FJCIP Team has created a clear mission, vision, and set of values to guide its efforts. The primary objective of the team is to cultivate learning communities that foster a culture of transformative change within the state. The overarching vision of the FJCIP is to establish a robust network of courts that actively collaborate with other systems, allowing for the development and evaluation of local innovations. Through this collaborative approach, successful initiatives can be scaled up and implemented statewide, resulting in improved outcomes for all families involved in the justice system.

***The mission of the Statewide FJCIP Team is to expand the capacity of local FJCIP court communities to transform systems and produce better outcomes for children and families.***

# Family and Juvenile Court Improvement Program, FJCIP

Based on the past success of the FJCIP, the Statewide FJCIP Team has developed a set of eight core components for local Family and Juvenile Court Improvement Programs. These core components serve as a blueprint for FJCIP courts, guiding their efforts to create a model dependency court. Through ongoing training and support provided by the Statewide FJCIP Team, these courts work towards implementing and enhancing each core component, ensuring the delivery of effective and efficient services to families involved in the dependency system.

## Family and Juvenile Court Improvement Program (FJCIP) Core Components:

1. Dedicated Judicial Leadership
2. Judicial and Cross System Learning
3. FJCIP Local Coordinator
4. Court Commitment to Continuous Quality Improvement
5. Community of Practice and Peer Learning
6. Cross System Collaboration
7. Create a Culture of System Change
8. Trauma-Responsive Support

*See our webpage for details:*

[Family and Juvenile Court Improvement Program \(FJCIP\) – Family and Youth Justice Programs \(wacita.org\)](https://www.wacita.org/fjcip).

The new funding has enabled AOC staff to develop robust trainings and one-on-one support for the FJCIP Coordinators to learn key skills to improve courts, including group facilitation, race equity training, change management, continuous quality improvement (CQI), and effective use of data. Some examples of trainings the Statewide FJCIP Team provided in the past nine months include:

- A comprehensive orientation program consisting of multiple modules designed to equip new local FJCIP Coordinators with the necessary knowledge and skills within their first month of joining the group.
- Specialized training sessions for FJCIP Coordinators on supporting judicial rotations within their respective local courts.
- Training in facilitation techniques, which featured a workshop on Liberating Structures and an extensive training series conducted in collaboration with the Dispute Resolution Center of Thurston County.
- Attendance at the 2023 Children's Justice Conference, which provided valuable networking opportunities and exposure to the latest developments in the field.
- Preparation for the implementation of the Keeping Families Together Act, House Bill (HB) 1227, ensuring that coordinators are well-informed and prepared for the changes introduced by this legislation.

## FJCIP Capacity Building Self-Assessment

---

With the help of a senior court researcher, the Statewide FJCIP Team conducted a self-assessment to understand the specific training and development needs of local courts participating in the FJCIP program. This assessment looked at different aspects of court operations, leadership, skills, and overall effectiveness through five dimensions and 33 items. Based on the assessment results, an action plan was created to guide the implementation of targeted interventions and training programs to improve court operations.

One important finding learned through the assessment was the need for additional support and training for FJCIP Coordinators in utilizing dependency data. Coordinators expressed a desire for training on effectively using data to communicate information and to address racial and ethnic disparities in the dependency system. In response, the Statewide FJCIP Team has introduced innovative strategies to provide ongoing data training and support for coordinators. This includes incorporating dedicated sections on data review and storytelling within regular FJCIP Community of Practice meetings. Additionally, the Statewide FJCP Team is actively developing training programs and tools to help coordinators understand how to integrate data into their efforts for continuous quality improvement. This will enable them to assess the effectiveness of local improvement initiatives and the overall system's work.

Another area of need identified by the self-assessment is having clearly defined duties and expectations for FJCIP Coordinators. With the expansion of the FJCIP to additional courts, the Statewide FJCIP Team developed a robust FJCIP Coordinator job description as a guide for local courts. Additional materials were created that illustrate what it means to be an FJCIP court and incorporate the role of an FJCIP Coordinator into their local system. One resource created for courts is the FJCIP Implementation Guide and Toolkit that has proved useful for both the expansion courts and existing FJCIP courts. The Statewide FJCIP Team developed a process to guide the program's expansion from ten to 16 courts by utilizing data from the Interactive Dependency Timeliness Report (iDTR), and guided by the program's mission and vision, they created a prioritization matrix. The matrix takes a variety of factors into account for court communities, including child population, disproportionality, representation of Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) Regions, and current dependency court performance indicators.

The Statewide FJCIP Team began meeting with courts to offer the opportunity to join the FJCIP in 2023. Currently two new courts, Grays Harbor Superior Court and Clark County Superior Court, have signed contracts with the AOC to join the FJCIP and build the program in their dependency court. The Statewide FJCIP Team will continue recruiting new courts into the program in 2023.

## Looking Ahead for FJCIP

---

To guide the FJCIP's expansion and development, the Statewide FJCIP Team created a four-year strategic plan for cross-system court improvement. A major component of the work ahead is the implementation of the Keeping Families Together Act (HB 1227), which goes into effect in July 2023 and requires significant changes to the way courts conduct the filing and initial shelter care phase of dependency cases. The Statewide FJCIP Team is working with FJCIP Coordinators to support effective implementation of HB 1227 in their court systems. These efforts include hosting local Keeping Families Together retreats, providing cross-system training, and identifying needed changes to court processes and procedures.

The Statewide FJCIP Team is also working with staff at the Washington State Center for Court Research (WSSCR) to identify the research and data currently available and what support and data is still needed in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the FJCIP's HB 1227 implementation work. Part of this work was done through the support of a statewide workgroup, the Family Well-Being and Community Collaborative (FWCC) Data and Assessment Workgroup.

A focus for 2023 and 2024 will be training the FJCIP Coordinators to understand how to use data for system improvement and applying continuous quality improvement principles to assess the impact of their projects. The Statewide FJCIP Team will create a data curriculum with supporting documents and templates to help courts translate their knowledge into practice.

As the number of FJCIP courts increases from ten to 16, the Statewide FJCIP Team is committed to assisting both existing and new courts in aligning their practices with the core principles of the FJCIP approach. At the same time, the team aims to enable courts to address local needs, foster collaboration, and learn from one another.

Under the leadership of the AOC, the Statewide FJCIP Team is working collaboratively with courts, local universities, national research experts, and other court partners to improve the quality and rigor of research projects relevant to dependency courts. Looking ahead in supporting the expansion and development of FJCIP courts, the Statewide FJCIP Team is following these steps as a guide:

1. **Develop a Research Support Team:** The Statewide FJCIP Team includes a dedicated researcher who has extensive training in research methods and specialized knowledge in applied research. This researcher brings expertise in participatory methods, including community-led and community-based participatory research, as well as proficiency in data collection procedures and the development of measurement tools. This support sets a solid framework for conducting rigorous and impactful studies.

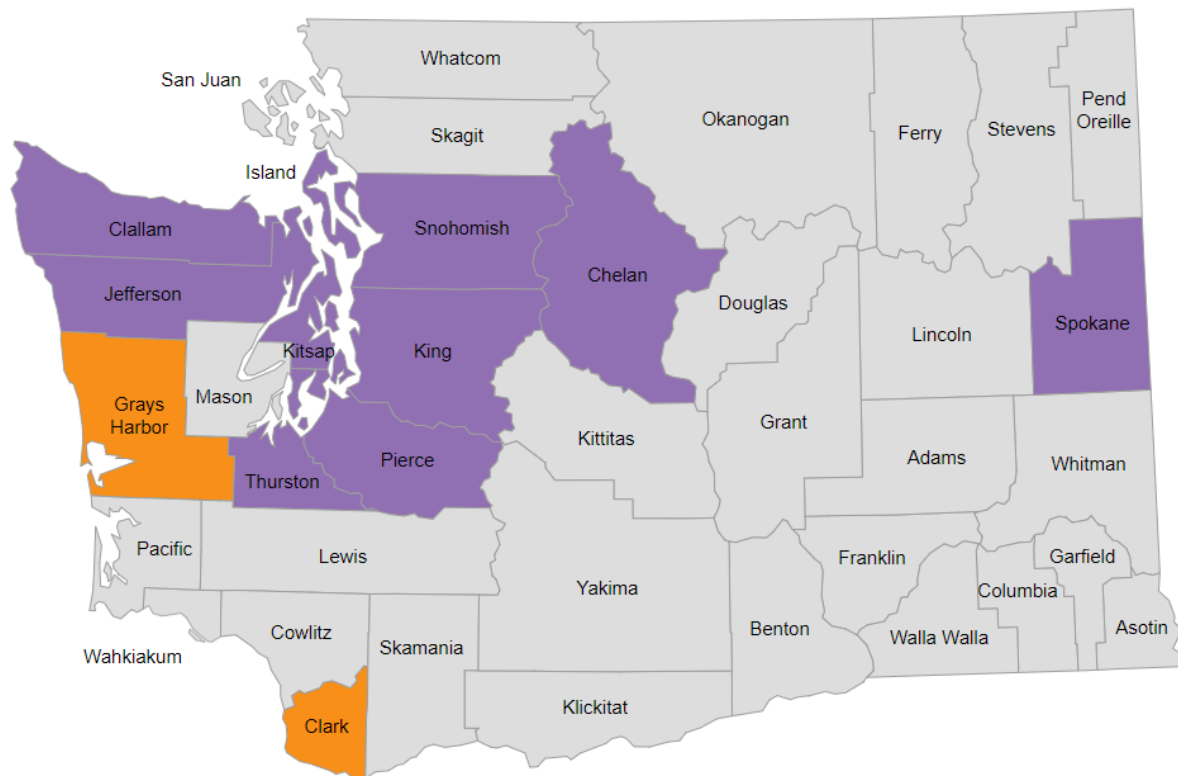
- 2. Engage Graduate Students:** The Statewide FJCIP Team collaborates with graduate students from the University of Washington (UW) School of Public Health. Through an Affiliation Agreement between AOC and the UW School of Public Health, these students are actively involved in the research process. This engagement provides students with a valuable opportunity to apply their academic learnings while assisting courts in conducting research and utilizing research findings to inform policy and practice.
- 3. Co-Design Research Projects:** The Statewide FJCIP Team fosters collaboration between dependency partners to co-design research projects that support innovation and implementation of new court practices. An example of this collaborative approach is supporting research work related to HB1227. By involving court staff, judges, lawyers, social workers, individuals with lived experience, and other court partners throughout the research process, the FJCIP ensures that research initiatives are inclusive and representative of the diverse perspectives within the dependency court system.
- 4. Collaborate with National Experts:** The Statewide FJCIP Team is coordinating research efforts with the national Capacity Building Center for Courts (CBCC) to get advice and guidance on development of a shelter care hearing observation tool and related training materials for potential observers, such as FJCIP Coordinators and research assistants, for HB 1227 and other projects. By working with national experts, the FJCIP ensures that its research initiatives are grounded in the latest knowledge and best practices within the field.
- 5. Co-Author Publications:** With additional research support, FJCIPs are well-positioned to promote local innovations and effective practices at both the local and state levels. This includes presenting research findings at conferences, publishing summaries of research on the court system's website, and co-authoring research papers and reports with court staff, judges, lawyers, graduate students, faculty members, and other court partners. These collaborative efforts ensure that research findings are effectively disseminated and utilized to inform court practices.



## FJCIP Courts

Currently, the FJCIP serves 12 counties in Washington State (Figure 1). These counties represent communities with varying socio-economic conditions, demographic makeups, and geographic locations, including urban, suburban, and rural areas. Together, these FJCIP courts handle approximately 71% of all dependency cases filed in the state<sup>1</sup>. This representation of diverse counties within the FJCIP program brings numerous benefits, including a more comprehensive understanding of program effectiveness across different settings and a capacity for collective problem-solving.

FIGURE 1:  
FJCIP COURTS IN WASHINGTON STATE



In FJCIP counties, there are variations in racial diversity and disproportionality rates. By considering the extent to which certain groups are overrepresented or underrepresented in the dependency system, the FJCIPs can develop tailored local strategies to promote equitable outcomes for all children and families involved in the child welfare system.

<sup>1</sup> Out of 7,305 open dependency cases filed between 2017 and 2023, approximately 71% (N=5,177) were filed in one of the FJCIP courts.



# Family and Juvenile Court Improvement Program, FJCIP

Below are some examples of the communities served by FJCIP:

- **King and Pierce Counties** have the highest share of Black children in their general child population (9% in King County and 8.5% in Pierce County), compared to other FJCIP counties. Between these two counties, King County has a higher disproportionality of Black children in the dependency system. For example, in 2020, Black children represented 9% of the child population in King County, but 20% of the dependency filings. The same year, in Pierce County, Black children represented 8.5% of the child population, but 10% of the dependency filings. Understanding the reasons behind the higher disproportionality of Black children in King County can inform targeted interventions aimed at reducing disproportionality and promoting equity in the child welfare system.
- **Clallam County** has the highest percentage of Native American/Alaska Native children of all FJCIP counties (10%). Clallam County is a home to several Native American tribes, including the Lower Elwha Klallam Tribe, the Jamestown S’Klallam Tribe, Quileute, and Makah Tribe. Of note, Native American/Alaska Native children are overrepresented in the dependency system in Clallam County. In 2020, Native American/Alaska Native children represented 10% of the child population, but 15% of the dependency filings. In a county with the highest indigenous population, it is important to build strong partnerships with indigenous organizations, tribal governments, and community court partners to enhance service coordination, information sharing, and resource allocation.
- **Clark County** includes a mix of urban areas and more rural or suburban communities. The city of Vancouver is the largest and most urbanized area in Clark County. However, outside of the urban center, the county mostly consists of smaller towns and communities. Clark County is not highly racially diverse compared to some other FJCIP counties. The majority of the child population is White (66%), followed by Hispanic/Latino (13%), multi-racial (10%), Asian (6.3%), Black/African American (3%), and Native American/Alaska Native children (1.2%). In 2020, Hispanic/Latino, multiracial, and Black children were overrepresented in the dependency system in Clark County (17%, 15%, and 12%, respectively).
- **Spokane County**, which includes the city of Spokane, is the least diverse of the FJCIP counties. White children make up a large majority of Spokane County’s child population (75%), while other racial and ethnic groups make up relatively smaller percentages, including 4% of Asian, 2.4% of Black, 2.3% of Native American/Alaska Native, and 7.3% of Hispanic/Latino children. Having a less diverse population can have implications for families of color, including less access to culturally competent resources and services, especially for families overrepresented in the child welfare court system. In 2020, in Spokane, there was a significant overrepresentation of multi-racial children, accounting for 32% of the filings, compared to 9% in the general child population.

- In **Grays Harbor County**, the majority of the child population is White (62%), followed by Hispanic/Latino (17%), multi-racial (9%), Native American/Alaska Native children (8%). Other racial and ethnic groups have relatively smaller proportions, such as Black children accounting for 1.3% and Asian/Pacific Islander children comprising 1.9% of the total child population. In the context of dependency petitions filed in 2020, there was an overrepresentation of Black children (3.4% of the dependency filing vs. 1.3% in the child population) and multi-racial children (19.3% vs. 9.1%, respectively). Conversely, Native American/Alaska Native (3.4% vs. 7.9%) and Hispanic/Latino children (8% vs. 17.4%) were unrepresented in the dependency system.

When the FJCIP community becomes more diverse, it opens up opportunities for collaboration and learning between different sites. Successful solutions implemented in one FJCIP county can serve as examples for others. By building on these successes and learning, FJCIP teams can be more effective in addressing the unique challenges faced by dependency courts across the state.

To keep track of progress, FJCIP courts regularly compare their local data with state benchmarks across different indicators, such as dependency filings, case flow, timeliness, dismissals, and dependency outcomes. This comparison helps FJCIP courts understand how they're performing compared to statewide standards. It also allows them to learn from other FJCIP courts. Sharing experiences, strategies, and challenges among FJCIP courts leads to shared learning and continuous quality improvement.

Many data indicators are broken down by race and ethnicity. This helps to understand performance differences among different racial and ethnic groups. FJCIP Coordinators prepare performance reports, which are shared with judges, commissioners, and other court partners to promote accountability, transparency, and continuous improvement in the dependency court system.

## Data-Driven Approach

---

The iDTR (Interactive Dependency Timeliness Report) is the primary data source for dependency courts in Washington State. This comprehensive database combines child welfare and court data to deliver a comprehensive overview of court case progress and outcomes.

Initially established in response to a legislative mandate in 2007 for annual performance reporting on achieving permanency for dependent children, the iDTR has undergone significant advancements. These include expanded data capture, enhanced data quality and timeliness, and the introduction of an online dashboard that provides a public-facing snapshot of state- and county-level data.

One of the key features of the iDTR is its ability to disaggregate data by the race and ethnicity of the child. This allows for a comprehensive analysis of how different racial and ethnic groups are experiencing the dependency system. By examining the data through this lens, court partners can identify disparities and work towards ensuring fair and equitable outcomes for all children involved.

For FJCIP Coordinators, the iDTR is an invaluable tool for performance monitoring. By tracking key indicators such as dependency filing rates, timeliness measures, placement decisions, and permanency outcomes, FJCIP Coordinators regularly assess the effectiveness of their interventions and communicate the results to their local teams. This iterative process allows for continuous quality improvement (CQI) and ensures that resources and services are directed where they are most needed.

The iDTR includes a training component. Through specialized training, FJCIP Coordinators develop a deeper understanding of the data and its implications, enhance their capacity to identify disparities, and drive positive outcomes for children and families involved in the dependency system.

Starting in 2023, the AOC will no longer produce a printed annual report; instead it is encouraging audiences to utilize the [Washington State Dependency Timeliness Dashboard](#), also known as The Dash!, to learn about dependency court performance and outcome measures. The dashboard serves as a transparent and accessible resource for the public, policymakers, and other court partners to gain insights into the performance and outcomes of the dependency court system in each county.

## The Power of Local Data in FJCIP's Approach

---

While statewide data provide an important starting point, it is critical to analyze data at a local level to understand the challenges, strengths, and opportunities unique to the community. Using data at the local level is a fundamental guiding principle of the FJCIP. At the heart of this principle is the understanding that the data are a foundation for continuous improvement efforts, allowing courts to track changes over time, evaluate the effectiveness of interventions implemented locally, and develop data-driven solutions.

Here are some examples of the questions explored at the local level:

1. What is the representation of different racial and ethnic groups among children in your dependency court? Is there any over-representation of certain groups compared to their representation in the general children population?
2. Does your court show any differences in the length of stay in care for different racial and ethnic groups compared to the statewide estimates?
3. Are there variations in the rates of reunification, adoption, or guardianship outcomes for different racial and ethnic groups in your court compared to statewide patterns?
4. How does your court's data on the length of time for permanency planning or achieving permanency outcomes vary for children from different racial and ethnic backgrounds compared to statewide trends?
5. Does your court show any discrepancies in meeting court hearing timelines, including timelines for review hearings, dispositional hearings, or permanency hearings, for cases involving children from different racial and ethnic groups compared to statewide numbers?
6. What are the factors that contribute to successful outcomes for children and families from different racial and ethnic groups in your court? Are there any best practices or interventions that have been successful in your court? Share your experiences and lessons learned with other FJCIP courts.



The Dash! [home link](#)

## Data Insights from Across the State

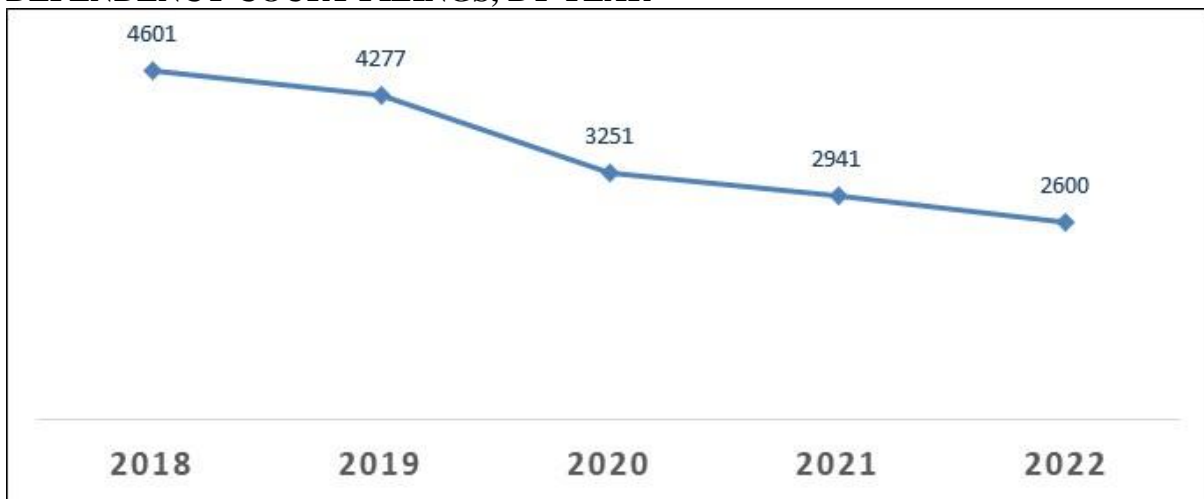
### Statewide Dependency Filings Trends, 2017-2022

Figure 2 shows the number of dependency cases filed in Washington’s courts annually for children (ages 0-17) for the last six years. Since 2018, at 4,601, the number of dependency filings has been declining annually, reaching a historic low in 2022<sup>2</sup>. The pace of decline accelerated during the COVID-19 pandemic (between 2019 and 2020), when the number of dependency petitions dropped 24% a year. The end of the pandemic, however, did not stop this decline. The number of dependency filings decreased from the prior year for both 2021 and 2022. The decrease observed from 2020 to 2021 was approximately 10% percent, and the decrease from 2021 to 2022 was 12%.

While the overall statewide trend shows a decline in court dependency filings, some counties show no change or an increasing trend over time. For example, Yakima County witnessed a 35% increase in dependency petitions between 2019 and 2021 and a 3% decrease between 2021 and 2022.

The regional variations are observed because different courts have different policies, practices, and demographics, all of which can influence the number of dependency filings over time. Therefore, when analyzing trends in dependency filings, it is important to take into consideration the local context and factors that may be contributing to variations in trends across different regions in the state.

FIGURE 2:  
**DEPENDENCY COURT FILINGS, BY YEAR**



Data source: iDTR: Court records from the AOC’s Superior Court Management and Information System (SCOMIS) are matched with information from DCYFs FamLink system.  
Data extracted: 2/6/2023

<sup>2</sup> Of the children who entered care in 2022, 42% had a reason for removal (or separation) that included drug abuse (either alone or in combination with another reason). Inadequate housing accounted for 11% percent of the removals (separations).

## Dependency Filings, by Demographics, 2018-2022

Table 2 shows dependency filings per year broken down by race/ethnicity, gender, and age. Although white children represented the largest share of the dependency filings over the past five years, their relative contribution decreased from 49% in 2021 to 47% in 2022.<sup>3</sup> The proportion of other racial/ethnic groups has not changed substantially over the past five years.

For example, the proportion of dependency filings involving American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) children has increased by two percentage points between 2021 and 2022 and the proportion of dependency filings involving Black children has decreased by two percentage points between 2021 and 2022. While the percentage of Black children petitioned to the court has decreased slightly in recent years, they are still overrepresented in the dependency system. It is also important to consider that trends can vary depending on the jurisdiction and time period being analyzed. For example, King County has witnessed an increase in the share of dependency filings involving Black children from 21% in 2021 to 27% in 2022. Pierce County also showed an increase in the proportion of filings for Black children from 8% in 2021 to 15% in 2022.

To better understand the reasons behind the increase in the share of Black children in dependency filings, it is useful to conduct further analysis and examine data on demographics, court practices, services availability and utilization, and other related factors in the community.

TABLE 2  
DEPENDENCY FILINGS, BY DEMOGRAPHICS

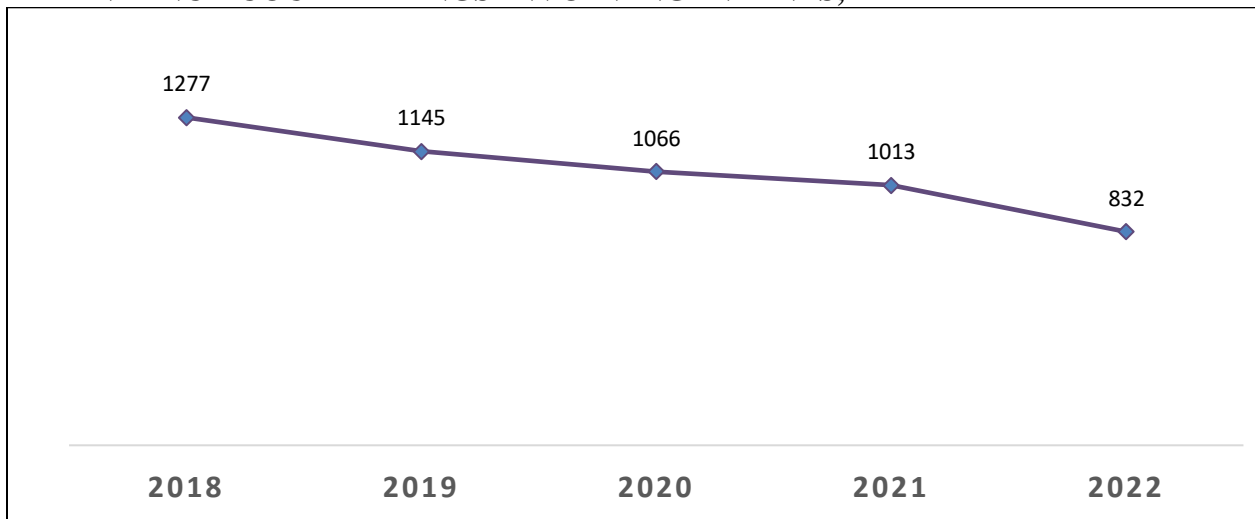
	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
<b>Race</b>					
White	49%	49%	49%	47%	47%
Black	7%	7%	6%	5%	7%
Black-Multi	9%	9%	9%	8%	6%
AI/AN	4%	4%	2%	3%	5%
AI/AN-Multi	11%	11%	14%	14%	13%
Asian/PI	2%	3%	1%	2%	2%
Hispanic/Latinx	16%	16%	17%	18%	16%
Multi-Other	2%	2%	2%	2%	1%
<b>Gender</b>					
Female	50%	50%	49%	49%	51%
Male	50%	50%	51%	51%	49%
<b>Age</b>					
< 1 years	28%	27%	33%	35%	34%
1-2 years	14%	13%	14%	14%	13%
3-5 years	16%	17%	17%	16%	16%
6-11 years	25%	25%	21%	21%	20%
12-17 years	16%	17%	15%	14%	18%
>17 years	0%	0%	0%	1%	0%

Data extracted: 2/6/2023

<sup>3</sup> Because 2022 population estimates disaggregated by race and ethnicity are not available, we are using 2020 estimates in this report. In 2020, white children (ages 0-17) made up 53% of the general youth population in WA, black youth 4%, Hispanic youth 23%, American Indian youth 2%, Asian youth 8%, and two or more races youth 9%.

The analysis of dependency filings by age reveals that cases involving infants (under the age of 1) consistently constituted the largest proportion of dependency filings each year since 2018 (Table 2). However, it is noteworthy that there has been a 35% decline in the number of filings involving infants between 2018 and 2022, with the figures decreasing from 1,277 to 832 (Figure 3).

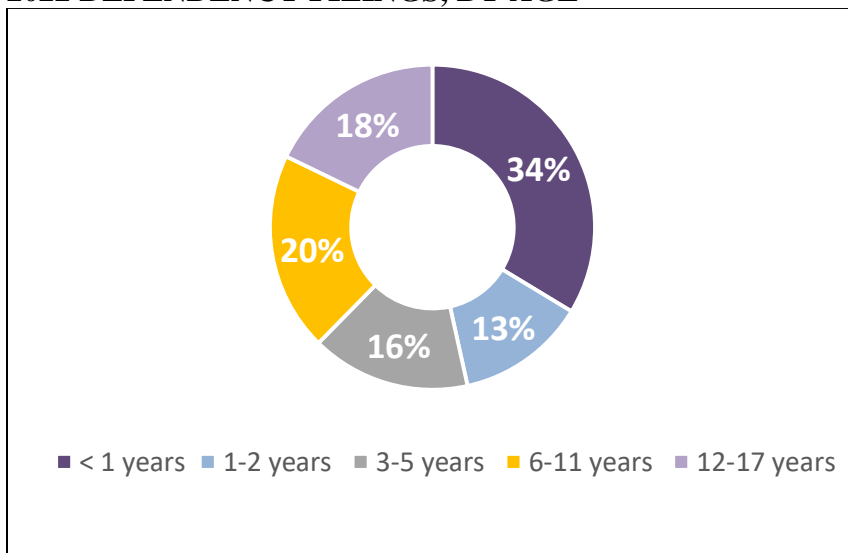
**FIGURE 3:**  
**DEPENDENCY COURT FILINGS INVOLVING INFANTS, BY YEAR**



Data extracted: 2/6/2023

In 2022, Washington's courts received a total of 832 dependency cases involving children aged 0-17, with infants comprising 34% of these cases (Figure 4). Additionally, when considering infants and toddlers together (ages 0-3), they accounted for 47% of all dependency filings. These statistics highlight the heightened vulnerability of younger children to child welfare court involvement.

**FIGURE 4:**  
**2022 DEPENDENCY FILINGS, BY AGE**



Data extracted: 2/6/2023

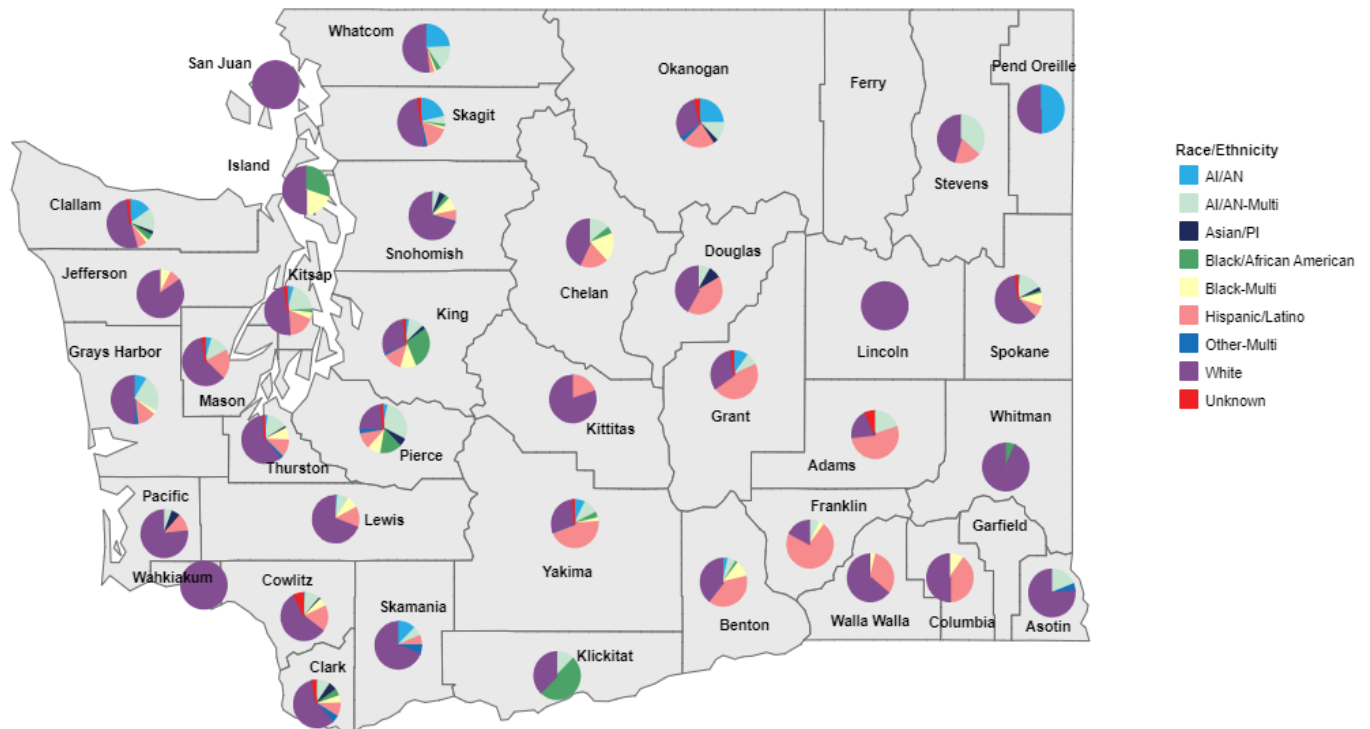
## County-Level Variations in Dependency Filings, by Race and Ethnicity

Figure 5 shows local variations in the proportion of dependency filings involving children of different racial and ethnic groups<sup>4</sup>. Regional variations in demographics can play a role in county-level variation in dependency filings. Counties with larger populations of specific racial and ethnic groups may have higher filing rates for those groups simply due to the greater number of children from those demographics residing in the county.

By considering county-level demographics, it becomes possible to identify disproportionalities. For example, in King County, the proportion of dependency filings involving Black children was 28% in 2022, which is three times the proportion of Black children in the general youth population of King County (9%). There has been a six-percentage point increase in the proportion of dependency filings involving Black children compared to 2021, when it was 22%. A similar upward trend was observed in Pierce County, where the proportion of dependency filings involving Black children increased from 9% in 2021 to 15% in 2022, representing a six-percentage point rise.

In Yakima, the proportion of dependency filings involving Hispanic/Latino children was 45% in 2022, indicating a six-percentage point decrease from 51% in 2021. Similarly, in Snohomish County, the proportion of dependency filings involving Hispanic/Latino children decreased from 13% in 2021 to 7% in 2022, reflecting a six-percentage point decline.

FIGURE 5:  
**2022 DEPENDENCY COURT FILINGS, BY COUNTY**



<sup>4</sup> Dependency Dashboard <https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/wscrr/viz/DependencyDashboard/MonthlyUpdates-CurrentYear>



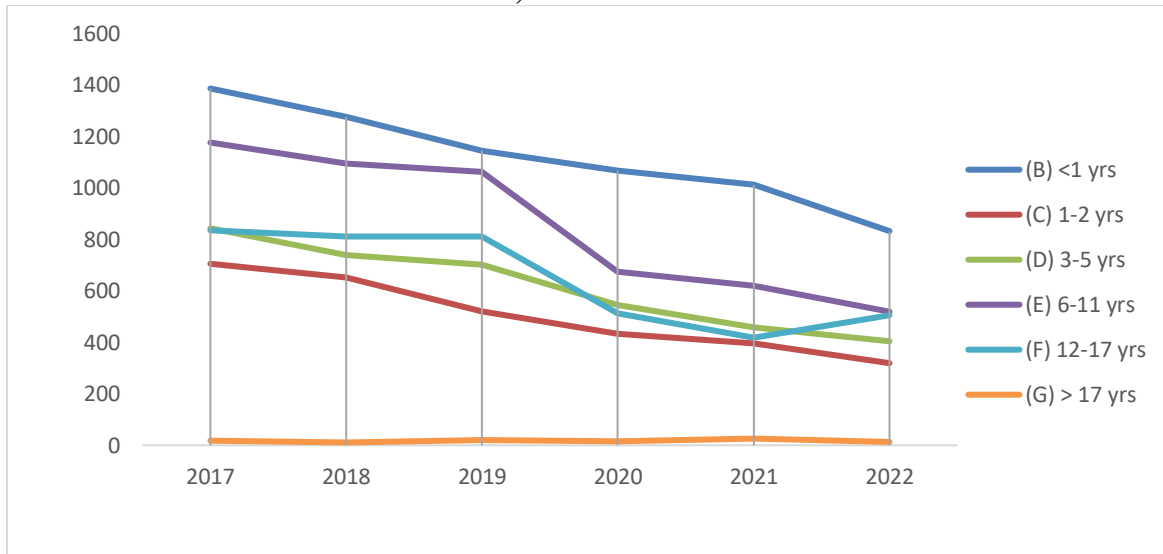
## Dependency Filing Trends, by Age

Figure 6 shows how dependency filings vary across different age groups (<1, 1-2 years old, 3-5 years old, 6-11 years old, 12-17 years old, and 17 years or older) statewide. Infants consistently account for the highest number of dependency petitions filed each year, although there has been a 40% decrease in petitions involving infants from 2017 to 2022.

For children aged 6-11 years, there was a 10% decline in filings between 2017 and 2019. This decline intensified to 25% between 2020 and 2022, likely due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. On the other hand, filings for children aged 12-17 years showed a declining trend from 2017 to 2021, but experienced an increase of 21% in 2022.

To have a more nuanced picture of the dependency filings, it is important to analyze the data at the county level. Local factors, such as demographic composition, socioeconomic conditions, and community resources can influence the patterns of dependency filings within each county. Local data enables planning for targeted interventions. For example, counties with a higher number of dependency filings for infants may require additional resources and specialized programs to address underlying challenges like poverty, substance abuse, and inadequate housing that contribute to child welfare involvement.

FIGURE 6:  
**2017-2022 DEPENDENCY FILINGS, BY AGE GROUP**



Data extracted: 2/6/2023

## Dependency Filing Rates, by Race and Ethnicity

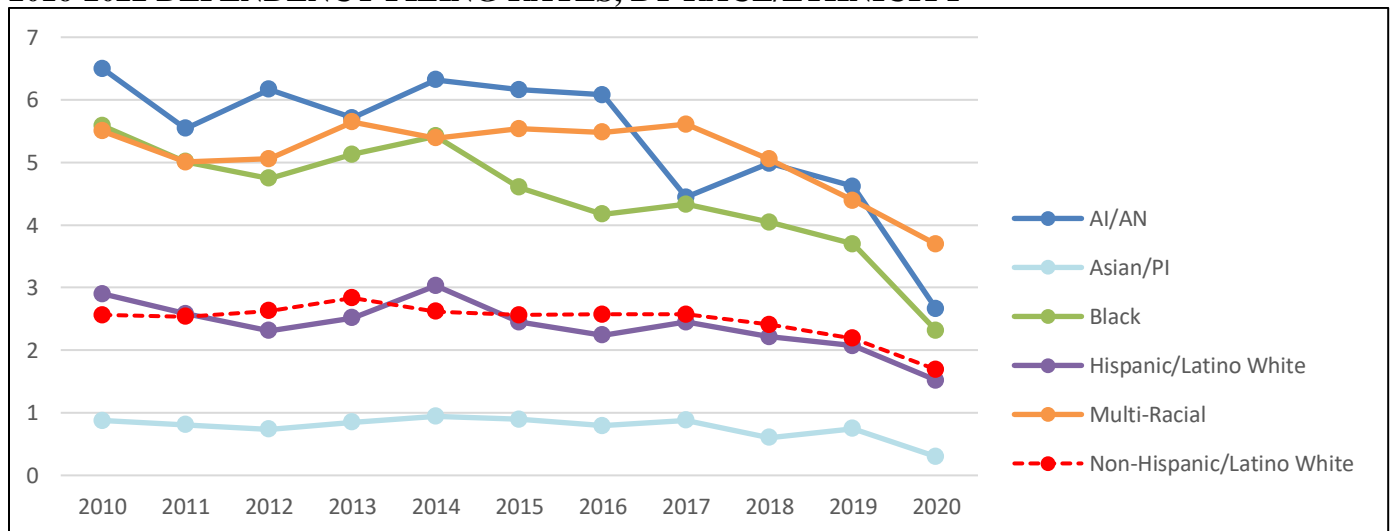
Figure 7 shows the number dependency petitions filed per 1,000 children (ages 0-17) in different racial and ethnic groups in Washington State. Over the past eleven years, the rates of filing have improved for all groups, but some groups continually had higher rates than others.

American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN), Black, and multiracial children consistently had higher filing rates compared to White, Hispanic/Latino, and Asian/PI children. From 2010 to 2016, AI/AN children had the highest filing rates. Since 2017, multiracial children had either the highest rates or rates comparable to AI/AN children (in 2018).

In 2020, the filing rate for AI/AN children (2.66 per 1,000) was 1.6 times higher than that of White children (1.69 per 1,000). The same year, the filing rate for multiracial children (3.69 per 1,000) was 2.18 times higher than that of White children and 1.4 times higher than that of AI/AN children. Asian and Pacific Islander children had the lowest filing rates every year from 2010 to 2020.

These data represent trends at the state level. It is also important to analyze the trends in filing rates at the county level to identify areas for improvement specific to each community.

FIGURE 7:  
2016-2022 DEPENDENCY FILING RATES, BY RACE/ETHNICITY



Data extracted: 2/6/2023

## Dependency Filings vs Dismissals, 2017-2022

Figure 8 shows the annual dependency cases filed in Washington's courts for children aged 0-17, in comparison to the number of annual dismissals over the past six years. Comparing dependency filings and court dismissals offers valuable insights into the functioning of the dependency system and facilitates the identification of potential areas for improvement.

The outcomes of dismissals have significant implications for the children and families involved in these cases. Depending on the circumstances, dismissals can lead to different outcomes. For instance, if a case is dismissed prior to termination, it means that the child may be returned to the parents' care. On the other hand, if a case is dismissed after the termination of parental rights, it indicates that the child may be placed for adoption.

In 2017 and 2018, the number of dependency petitions filed exceeded the number of dismissals, suggesting a growing caseload within the dependency court system. However, there has been a notable shift in the subsequent years. Following a peak in 2019, with 4,876 dismissals, the number of dismissals has consistently exceeded the number of filings. For example, in 2022, a total of 2,589 dependency petitions were filed, whereas the number of dismissals reached 3,317. It is essential to closely monitor and analyze these dynamics at the local level to capture variations and trends specific to each community.

FIGURE 8:  
**DEPENDENCY FILINGS AND DISMISSALS, 2017-2022**



Data extracted: 2/6/2023

## Exits from Out-of-Home Care

Within the dependency court system, there are multiple avenues for children to exit the out-of-home care such as adoption, emancipation, legal guardianship, and reunification with parents. In 2022, a total of 3,158 exits from out-of-home care were recorded<sup>5</sup>. Among these exits, 55% involved reunification with parents, 26% were through adoption, and 7% were achieved through legal guardianships (Table 9).

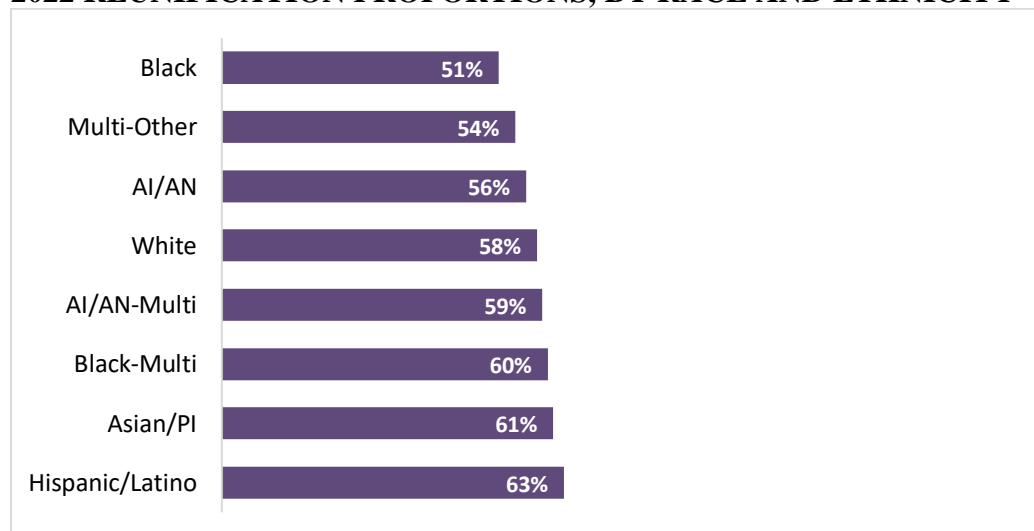
TABLE 9  
STATEWIDE EXITS BY TYPE, 2022

	N	%
Reunification	1,722	55%
Adoptions	809	26%
Emancipation	184	6%
Guardianship	232	7%

Data extracted: 2/6/2023

In 2022, the highest proportion of cases statewide that resulted in reunification was observed among Hispanic/Latino children, as shown in Figure 9. Specifically, 63% of cases involving Hispanic/Latino children ended with successful reunification. In comparison, the proportions of reunification for Black, American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN), and White children were 51%, 56%, and 58% respectively (see *Dashboard, Permanency outcome* [here](#)).

FIGURE 9:  
2022 REUNIFICATION PROPORTIONS, BY RACE AND ETHNICITY



Data extracted: 2/6/2023

<sup>5</sup> Calculated as the total number of FAMILINK placement exits in a given calendar year by exit outcome and month length of stay for all SCOMIS DEP/TER cases which were successfully merged back to the FAMILINK placement.

## Length of Stay in Out-of-Home Care

Length of stay in out-of-home care, measured in months, serves as an indicator of the system’s effectiveness. A shorter length of stay is generally considered better for the child, as it allows them to return to a stable home environment more quickly. Table 10 presents an overview of how long different exit types from the system typically take.

The length of stay varies depending on the type of exit. In 2022, for example, 41% of reunifications happened within 15 months. On the other hand, only 2% of adoptions were completed within the same timeframe (Table 10).

TABLE 10  
LENGTH OF STAY, BY EXIT TYPE, 2022

	Length of Stay in Months			Total
	<15	15-24	>24	
Adoptions	2%	12%	86%	100%
Emancipation	8%	7%	85%	100%
Guardianship	14%	17%	69%	100%
Reunification	41%	23%	36%	100%

Data extracted: 2/6/2023

The median length of stay is another commonly accepted measure of time spent in out-of-home care. Table 11 provides information on the median length of stay, measured in both days and months, for different types of exits. For reunifications, the median length of stay has increased from 16 months in 2018 to 18 months in 2022. In the case of adoptions, the median length of stay has risen from 32 months in 2018 to approximately 38 months in 2022, which is equal to about 1,168.5 days.

TABLE 11  
MEDIAN MONTHS AND DAYS TO OUTCOME, BY YEAR OF EXIT

	Exit Year				
	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
<b>Adoptions</b>					
Median days	992	1,041.5	1109.5	1,130	1,168.5
Median months	32	34	36	37	38
<b>Reunifications</b>					
Median days	501	518	561	579	553
Median months	16	17	18	19	18
<b>Guardianships</b>					
Median days	836	849	741	906	1,011.5
Median months	27	27	24	29	33

Data extracted: 2/6/2023

Figure 10 shows the median length of stay, measured in months, for reunifications in 2022 for different racial and ethnic groups. Among these groups, Hispanic/Latino children stayed the longest, with a median of 19 months. On the other hand, AI/AN children had the shortest stay, with a median of 13 months.

By keeping a close eye on the length of stay, local courts can find areas where they can improve. For example, if certain racial or ethnic groups tend to stay longer in out-of-home care, it might mean they need more targeted support services, resources, or different ways to speed up reunifications or other types of exits.

These findings can also help different groups work together at the local level. Child welfare, community organizations, and advocacy groups can collaborate by sharing and discussing the data. This way, they can have meaningful conversations and develop strategies to address disparities and make sure children of all races and ethnicities have fair outcomes.

**FIGURE 10:**  
**2022 MEDIAN LENGTH OF STAY (IN MONTHS), REUNIFICATIONS**



Data extracted: 2/6/2023

## Children Currently Served in Care

Monitoring the number of children currently in out-of-home care and the duration of their open dependency cases is critical for ensuring that cases are being processed in timely manner. Table 12 presents the number of children with open dependency cases based on the year they entered out-of-home care, along with the average duration of these cases.

Among the 5,547 currently open dependency cases, 14% (n=797) can be attributed to children who entered care in 2019. As of April 2023, these children have been in the system for an average duration of 1,387 days.

It is essential for courts to carefully analyze their local data to ensure timely processing and explore strategies to reduce the length of stay, ultimately aiming for the well-being and stability of the children involved.

**TABLE 12**  
**OPEN CASES AND AVERAGE DAYS OPEN, BY YEAR OF FILING**

	Filing Year				Total
	2019	2020	2021	2022	
<b>Open cases</b>					
Dependency	797	1,194	1,638	1,918	5,547
Extended Foster Care	47	35	48	42	172
<b>Average days open</b>					
Dependency	1,387	1,017	659	307	719
Extended Foster Care	1,380	1,045	686	305	856

*Data extracted: 2/6/2023*

## Fact-Finding Compliance

Fact-finding is one of the first major judicial events in the dependency process, and significant delays to fact-finding may prolong court involvement and increase the amount of time a child spends in foster care. Figure 11 illustrates the percentage of cases where fact-finding hearings were held within 75 days of the dependency filing.

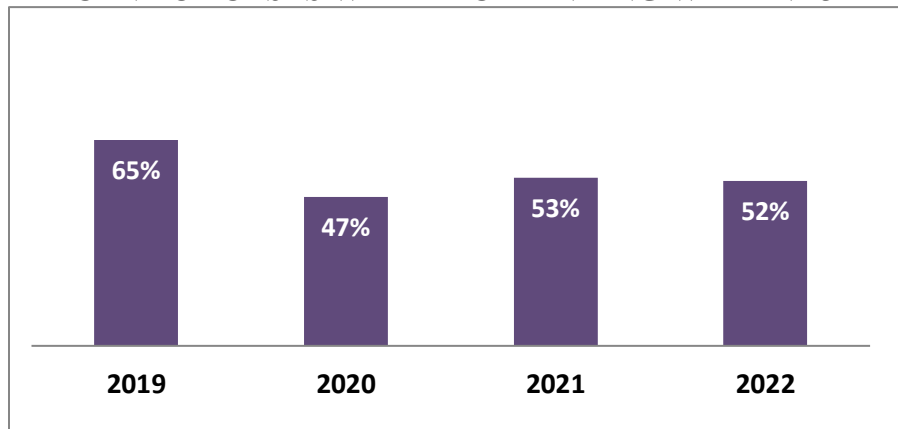
From 2019 to 2020, there was an 18-percentage point decline in the proportion of cases with fact-finding hearings within the specified timeframe, dropping from 65% to 47%.

This decline in fact-finding compliance cannot be solely attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic. While it is true that the pandemic introduced various challenges and disruptions to court proceedings, it is important to consider multiple factors that may have influenced the decline. It is worth noting that after the initial decline, fact-finding compliance rates experienced a modest increase in 2021 and remained relatively stable throughout 2022. This suggests that efforts were made to address the challenges and improve compliance; although, the specific actions taken may vary across jurisdictions.

When fact-finding compliance stands at 52%, like in 2022, it means that only half of the cases requiring such hearings were conducted within the required timeframe.

Consequently, the other half experienced delays in completing the fact-finding process. It is important to acknowledge that local numbers can vary when it comes to fact-finding compliance rates. By recognizing the variability of fact-finding compliance rates at the local level and actively monitoring and addressing them, courts can work towards improving outcomes for children and families involved in the dependency system.

**FIGURE 11:**  
**PERCENT OF CASES WITH FACT-FINDING WITHIN 75 DAYS**



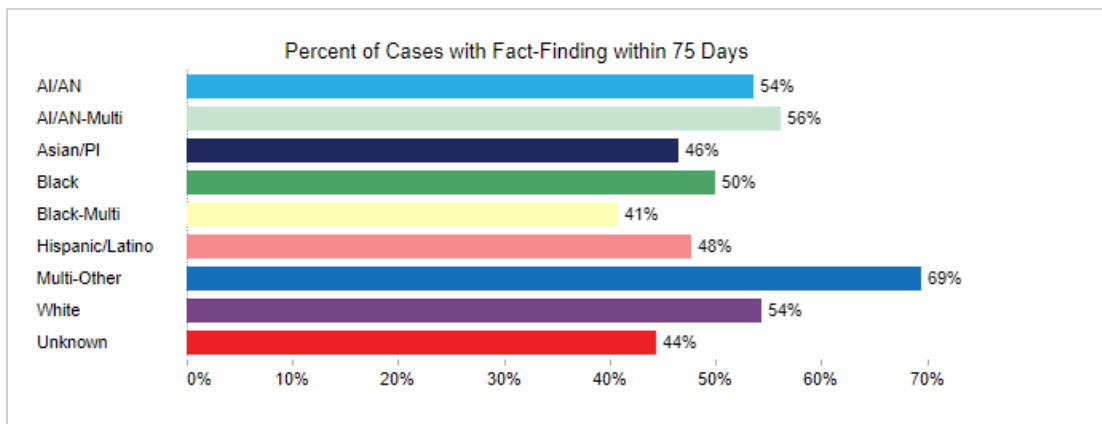
*Data extracted: 2/6/2023*



## Fact-Finding Compliance by Race and Ethnicity

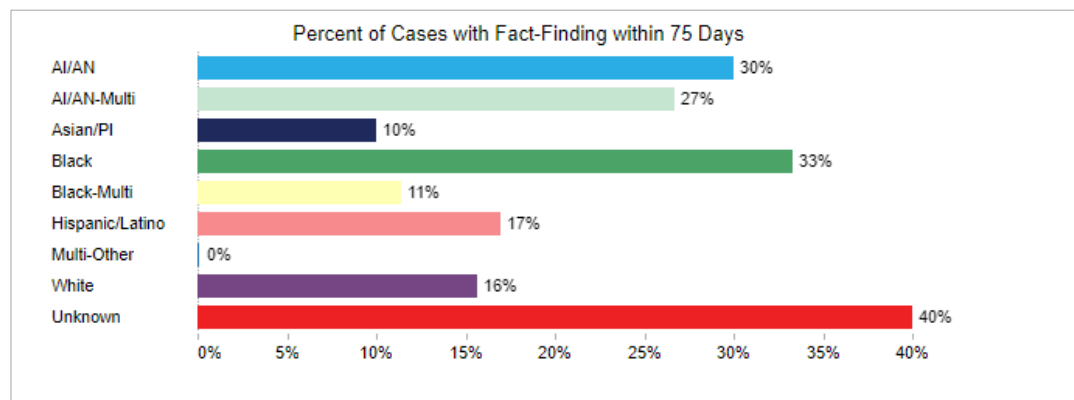
The rates of fact-finding compliance vary based on the race and ethnicity of children across the state. In 2022, Black, Hispanic/Latino, and Asian/PI (Pacific Islander) children were more likely to experience delays in the fact-finding process compared to children from other racial and ethnic backgrounds. Their compliance rates were 50%, 48%, and 46%, respectively. On the other hand, Multi-Other (multi-racial) children had a higher compliance rate of 69%. It is important to recognize these disparities and work towards addressing them to ensure equitable and timely access to the fact-finding procedure for all children.

FIGURE 12:  
**STATE: PERCENT OF CASES WITH FACT-FINDING WITHIN 75 DAYS**



Fact-finding compliance rates among racial groups also differ across different counties and over time. For example, in 2022, the fact-finding compliance rate for Black children in King County was 33%, which was higher than the rate of 16% in 2021. Similarly, the compliance rate for AI/AN (American Indian/Alaska Native) children in King County was 30% in 2022, showing an improvement from the 13% rate in 2021. These data highlight the progress made in meeting the fact-finding requirements for these specific racial groups within one county.

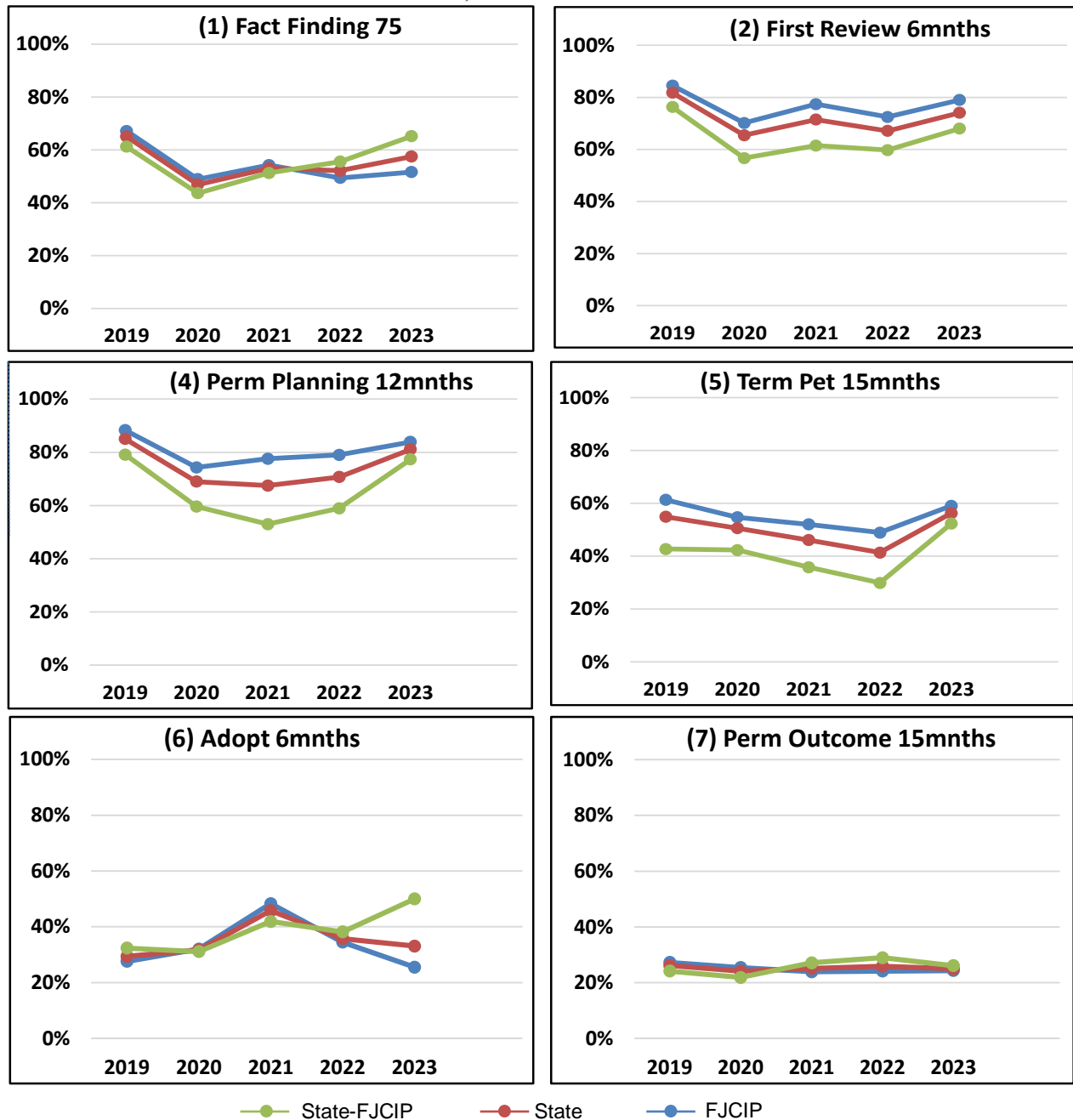
FIGURE 13:  
**KING: 2022 PERCENT OF CASES WITH FACT-FINDING WITHIN 75 DAYS**



## FJCIP Summary Outcomes: Rate of Compliance

Figure 14 shows the rate of compliance across six indicators of dependency case timeliness for FJCIP courts compared to the state. Over the last four years, FJCIP counties outperformed the rest of the state in compliance rates for 1) first review within 6 months, 2) permanency planning within 12 months, and 3) termination petition within 15 months. For fact-finding within 75 days, adoption within 6 months, and permanency outcomes within 15 months, FJCIP courts performed similarly or slightly worse than the state (2023 does not have complete data yet).

FIGURE 14: SUMMARY OUTCOMES, FJCIP vs STATE



Data extracted: 2/6/2023

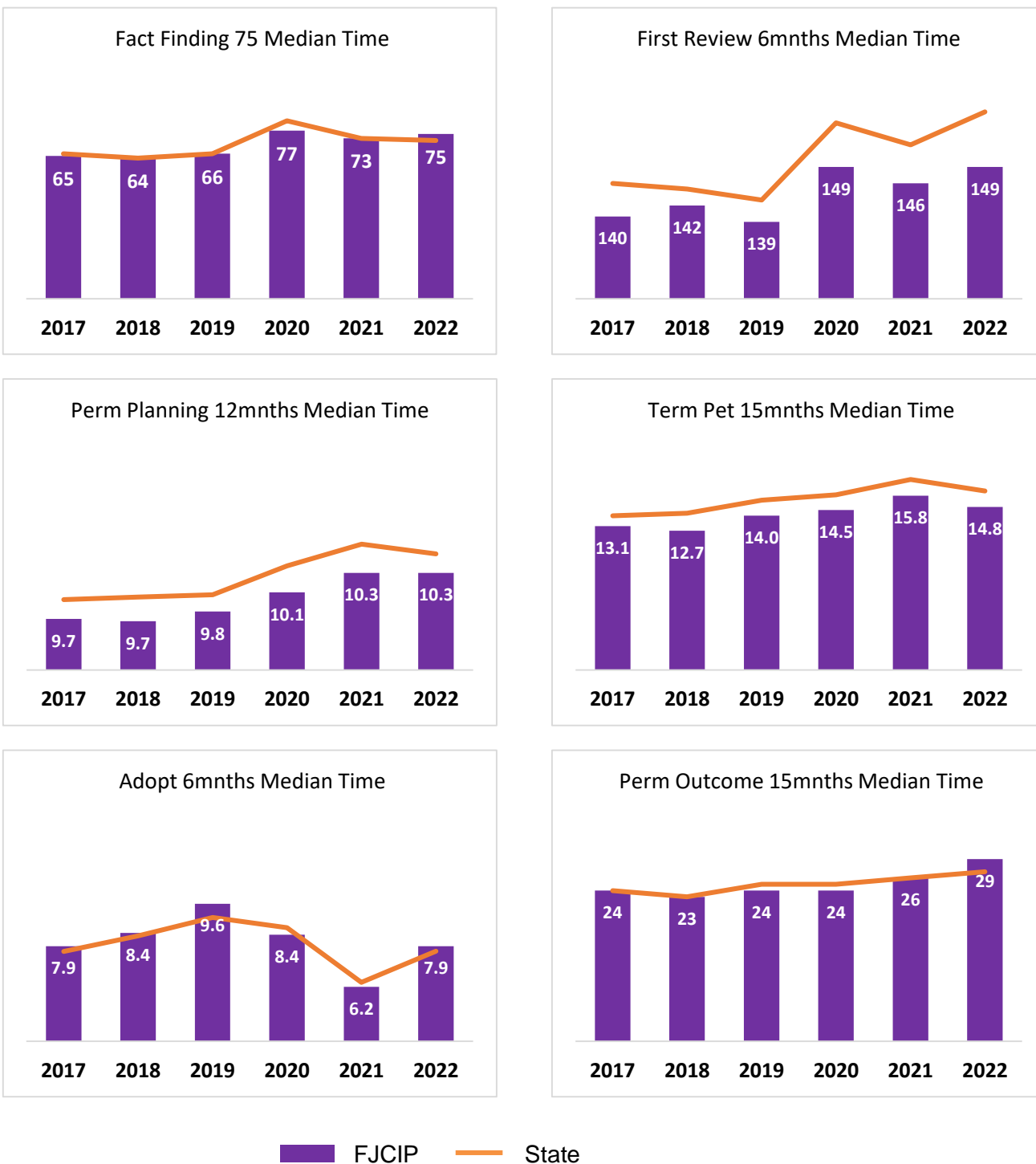
## *Timeliness Summary Outcomes*

Figure 15 illustrates the performance comparison between FJCIP counties and the state benchmarks regarding dependency timeliness indicators.

1. **Fact-Finding:** The law mandates that fact-finding hearings should be completed within 75 days of a child placed in out-of-home care. During the period from 2017 to 2022, the median number of days to fact-finding hearings in FJCIP counties was below 75 days, except in 2020 when it increased slightly to 77 days.
2. **First Review Hearing:** An important part of the process is the first review hearing, which is supposed to occur within six months of a child placed in out-of-home care. Between 2017 and 2019, the median number of days from the petition to the first review hearing was about 140 to 139 days. In 2022, this time increased to 149 days. Despite this increase, it still meets the requirement of happening within six months. It is noteworthy that each year from 2017 to 2022, FJCIP courts consistently outperformed the state in terms of meeting the timeliness standards for the first review hearing.
3. **Permanency Planning:** A permanency hearing should occur within 12 months of placement. The median time to the permanency hearing was consistently less than 12 months between 2017 and 2022, indicating compliance with this requirement. As illustrated in Figure 5, FCJIP courts were consistently overperforming the state annually between 2017 to 2022.
4. **Termination of Parental Rights:** The median number of months in out-of-home care prior to TPR petition was consistently less than 15 months between 2017 and 2020. However, in 2021, this duration increased to approximately 16 months before subsequently returning to around 15 months in 2022.
5. **Adoption Time:** In 2017, the median time to adoption was approximately 8 months. By 2019, the median time to adoption time increased to 10 months, then decreased to 8 months in 2020. In 2021, it further decreased to 6 months, only to rise again reaching nearly 8 months in 2022.
6. **Permanency Outcomes:** The Washington State Legislature has set a goal of achieving permanency before a child has spent 15 months in out-of-home care. Between 2017 and 2021, the median length of time to permanency was consistent, around 23 and 24 months, but it increased to 26 months in 2021 and to 29 months in 2022.

# Family and Juvenile Court Improvement Program, FJCIP

FIGURE 15:  
THE MEDIAN NUMBER OF DAYS, BY OUTCOME



Data extracted: 2/6/2023

## FJCIP Courts After the Pandemic - Finding the New Normal

Over the past two years, FJCIP courts have worked to adjust to a new, post-pandemic state of operations. For many courts, dependency hearings have transitioned from virtual to hybrid, meaning participants can appear in-person or electronically. This approach offers flexibility for parents' schedules and increases access to court for parents with transportation challenges and people who are incarcerated or participating in in-patient treatment.

As courts have become more comfortable with virtual platforms, they have found creative ways to run hearings and engage participants. Many courts report using breakout rooms to enable attorneys to meet confidentially with their clients. Because many families are not physically waiting in the lobby for their hearings to be called, courts have developed online tools and resources for the Parents for Parents program to connect with parents, including virtual Dependency 101 sessions and providing parents with tips for attending their remote court hearings. Recognizing that virtual hearings are likely here to stay, the AOC's Family and Youth Justice Programs (FYJP) worked with court partners, including lived experts, to create videos for parents and other court participants with instructions and trouble-shooting tips for successfully participating in remote hearings: [Videos – Family and Youth Justice Programs \(wacita.org\)](https://wacita.org).

Highlights of current innovations and practices seen in different FJCIP courts include:

- Utilizing Parents for Parents to create supporting documents about appearing remotely for hearings and utilizing Dependency 101 to help educate parents on the hearing process, both remote and in person.
- Offering parents a choice of how they want to appear at hearings, either by remote or in person appearance.
- Assistant Attorneys General returning in person to hearings, especially trials.
- Creating processes for hybrid hearings and for when attorneys should be present in person with their clients.
- Returning to in-person shelter care hearings, when able, to help early engagement with parents, allowing early access to resources and support.

**VIDEOS: Getting Ready for a Dependency Hearing**



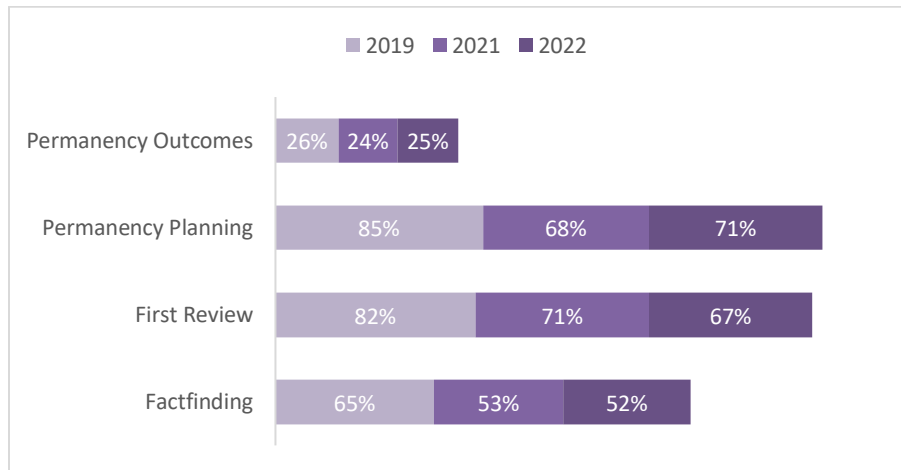
## System Staffing and Family Time Challenges

In the aftermath of the pandemic, many communities and employers are struggling to recruit and retain employees. Washington State courts and the child welfare system are not exempt from these challenges. FJCIP courts report retention issues for various professional positions including, DCYF caseworkers, parent counsel, child advocates and assistant attorneys general. This is a concern for courts because research has shown that turnover of child welfare professionals negatively affects the timeliness of cases. Turnover also compromises the ability of DCYF caseworkers to effectively serve families when remaining caseworkers are forced to shoulder the burden of increased caseloads when colleagues leave.

In Washington State, fact finding, first dependency review, permanency planning hearing, and permanency outcomes were all impacted. Changes in case workers disrupt relationships and have implications for effective delivery of court services.

FIGURE 16:

### PRE & POST PANDEMIC- CASE TIMELINESS INDICATORS & OUTCOMES



Data extracted: 2/6/2023

FJCIP courts report turnover in various areas in the system negatively impacts the families being served. Some impacts include trial delays (because newly appointed attorneys need time to prepare for trial), decrease in termination petition filings, delays in timely reunification, high social worker caseloads, and fewer Family Time visitations. Additionally, FJCIP courts report a lack of civility and the need to rebuild relationships among professionals after large amount of turnover.

The lasting impact of COVID restrictions is especially evident in Family Time visitation, according to conversations with system partners across Washington. When a child is placed out of the home, keeping families connected through visits and other contact is a legal requirement of the dependency system. In response to the Governor's emergency orders, in-person visits between parents and children and between siblings were largely suspended during the first year of the pandemic. This forced many contracted Family Time providers, who provided transportation and visit supervision, to lay off staff or shut down their businesses, resulting in a shortage of contractors to facilitate in-person visits.

Despite these challenges, Family Time visits are largely occurring in-person and the provider network is rebounding in many areas.

A silver lining of the pandemic is the expanded capacity and willingness of the system to utilize virtual options, such as video calls and texts, to support family relationships. Creative examples FJCIP courts are seeing for Family Time visitations post pandemic include:

- Nightly phone calls or text messages.
- Visitation in the community in public locations to lower the need for supervision.
- For monitored visitations, making the setting as natural as possible and providing supplies and activities for the families, making them less invasive.
- Family Time visitation in-person for parents who are incarcerated.
- When a parent is located far away from a child, the parent has an option to send a present for the visitation and the child opens it on Zoom.

## *Complexity of the Families Entering the Dependency Court System*

After a peak in Washington State dependency filings in 2017, the number of filings has continued to trend downwards. When the pandemic hit in 2020, Washington State saw 24% fewer filings than the prior year. As communities began to return to a new normal, the trend of lower filings continued, making about half the petitions filed in 2022 as compared to the peak in 2017.

Courts are reporting cases that families with a dependency petition filed in 2022 generally have more complex issues than the cases prior to the pandemic. Some FJCIP courts report their local DCYF offices have applied new practices and policies to strengthen services provided to families who come to the attention of Child Protective Services (CPS), prior to filing a dependency. This is likely a factor in the decline in filings, and a contributing factor to the increase in the complexity of issues that families bring to court when they need additional support from the court system.

The FJCIP courts report they are seeing dependency cases with increased use of fentanyl, an opioid, while the most troubling trend they are seeing is the combination of fentanyl with other drugs such as methamphetamines. The [Washington State Health Care Authority reports](#) that opioids and poly-substance use are causing a public health and community crisis across the nation (2023). Misuse and addiction can result in serious medical, social and financial problems for families. Review of the University of Washington's research on the [Methamphetamine trends across Washington State](#) shows that over half of drug poisonings involved methamphetamines and one or more opioids (ADAI, 2023). Snohomish, King, Pierce and Spokane Counties saw methamphetamine poisoning rates increase seven-fold or more in 2021-2022 versus 2003-2004.

Additionally, treatment professionals have stated that people using fentanyl and other substances are harder to engage due to reasons such as homelessness, inability to detox, availability of medically assisted treatment for fentanyl use, and the lack of sober living options being available after inpatient treatment.

Confronted with limited scientific research and serious concerns about the safety of children exposed to Fentanyl, system professionals find it challenging to determine how to keep children safe in home and when visiting with parents. Collaboration between DCYF and the courts can help balance safety concerns and stigma, resulting in Family Time plans that are consistent and adjust for the parent as they build their own capacity to provide safety for their children during visits.

Local communities, courts, and FYJP have responded to concerns about the trends of fentanyl use by participating in and offering trainings, and attending conferences to learn more. Examples include:

- Island County Court provided training with their GAL program on Fentanyl.
- Family Treatment Court's statewide team provided several resources and webinars to their courts and system partners on fentanyl and risks with second hand exposure.
- Early Childhood Courts offered a webinar recording: [Washington State Consultation with Dr. Kaitlan Baston](#) on the use of Fentanyl in Washington.



## FJCIP Innovations

---

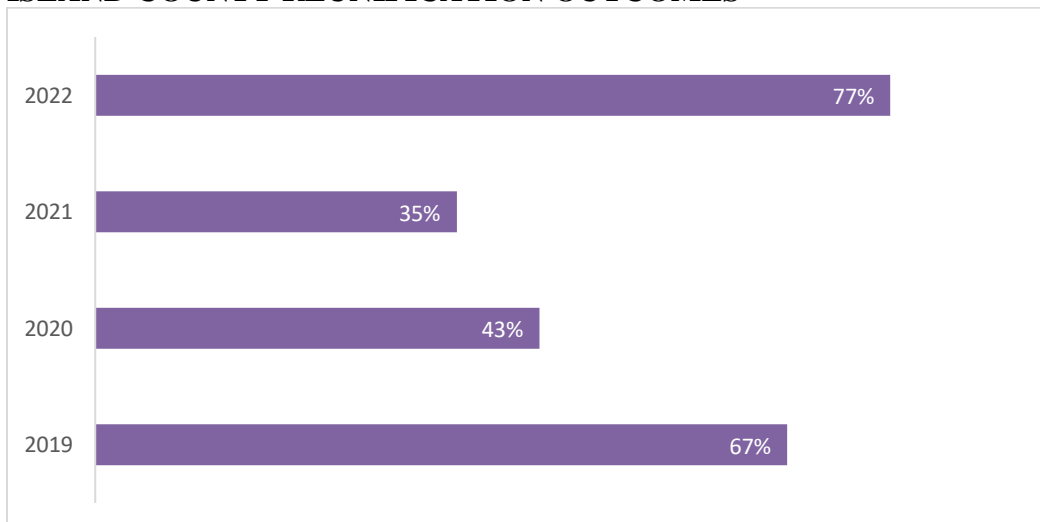
Family and Juvenile Court Improvement Program (FJCIP) courts strive to create learning organizations for their court community. Through the use of the dedicated FJCIP Coordinator, courts have an avenue to make large system improvements. FJCIP Coordinators lead cross-system workgroups focused on improving court processes and outcomes locally. The coordinators regularly use data and continuous quality improvement principles to help their courts identify, implement, and create effective changes. What is learned in the local courts is brought to the statewide level through the Statewide FJCIP Team and local coordinators' participation in statewide workgroups. FJCIP Coordinators participate in the Family Well-Being Collaborative (FWCC) and subgroups. Their knowledge of what is happening locally and in other FJCIP courts brings a different perspective for the statewide leaders in those groups, while bringing back to their local courts what they are learning at the state level.

Some highlights of work led by the FJCIP courts range from workgroups, to policy changes, to understanding and improving the quality of data, to statewide code work.

### *Island County Family Reunification Court*

Island County launched their Family Reunification Court (FRC) at the end of 2020. Family Reunification Court is a voluntary program that provides parents with more “face time” with the judge, access to additional services, and a problem-solving approach that helps families address difficulties on the path to timely reunification. Parents meet with the court more frequently, weekly to monthly, depending on their need; as compared to coming to court every six months in traditional dependency cases. Family Reunification Court is held on a separate docket from regular dependency cases, and families are served by a dedicated FRC team. Family Reunification Court and their practices have shown to help close cases with successful reunification, even for cases that have been in the system longer.

FIGURE 17:  
**ISLAND COUNTY REUNIFICATION OUTCOMES**



Data extracted: 2/6/2023

The Island County FJCIP Coordinator collaborates with the FRC coordinator on data collection and program analysis efforts. The FJCIP Judicial Officer hears the FRC cases and supports the work done through the program.

Island County also utilizes “Dependency Timeline Tracker Reports” that are prepared by the FJCIP Coordinator and shared with the judicial officers for each hearing. The purpose of the reports is to provide a general update on the status of the case, including how long the case has been open, where the child is placed, a list of past hearings, what the permanency plan is, and if the case is meeting the dependency process timelines for hearings and permanency.

## *Pierce County Docket Management*

The FJCIP Coordinator, in conjunction with the Judicial Officers, facilitated the Pierce County Docket Workgroup which included representatives from dependency court partner groups. The FJCIP team observed additional hearings being added in 2022 and the dockets running long. The FJCIP team looked into their data to review why this was occurring, and they learned it was due to the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) findings needing to be made on the record, in addition to the 30-Day Shelter Care hearings being heard on the record. The Docket Workgroup then set a goal to explore ensuring meaningful hearings, while managing docket time efficiency.

Some of the strategies implemented by the Docket Workgroup were the creation of “talking points” for all court partners, judicial officers doing “docket calls” at the top of a docket to discern if there were contested cases or cases needing more time, and not calling cases that were stricken.

The Docket Workgroup took the approach to address things on the margins, before taking a bigger shift if things did not improve. Currently, overall docket efficiency has improved. The workgroup is prepared to continue to monitor the dockets and reconvene in September after seeing the impact of the implementation of HB 1227.

## *Kitsap County Shelter Care Process*

Prior to 2022, Kitsap County did not have a written shelter care process. The outdated procedure was based on institutional knowledge of those in the system with no way to consistently relay that process to new professionals. Additionally, the practice in Kitsap County was to assign attorneys at the first hearing and set the matter over until the next dependency court day. This process was not consistent with changes needed for the Keeping Families Together Act (HB 1227).

Kitsap County’s Dependency Court Commissioner and FJCIP Coordinator participated in the statewide Meaningful Shelter Care Workgroup, led by AOC’s FYJP staff, in which information on best practices under the changes for HB 1227 was presented. Kitsap County created a workgroup of system partners to develop and implement a new shelter care process, utilizing suggested practices by the state workgroup, to align with the upcoming changes required by HB 1227.

The workgroup was comprised of representatives from different court partners and worked with the court on a written shelter care process and supporting orders and documents. The FJCIP Coordinator facilitated the meetings and documented the process as the team developed it. The shelter care process was then shared in the large court improvement meetings, on the website, and by email to all involved in the early stages of dependency cases.

After implementing their new shelter care process, the FJCIP Coordinator collected data to assess the impacts and effectiveness of the new process, which was shared regularly with partners and in the court improvement meetings.

## ***Snohomish County Racial Disparity Workgroup***

Snohomish County is working to address racial inequities in their court. The Snohomish County Table of Ten convened a Racial Disparity Workgroup, and that workgroup is arranging a training for all court partners on understanding microaggressions and the ways in which those behaviors can contribute to disparate outcomes for parents in dependency court. The FJCIP Coordinator presented to the cross-system Table of Ten a comparison of racial and ethnicity data for the court's dependency population, as compared to the larger community's census data. As the group discussed the disparity between the two populations, they agreed on the need to act. The FJCIP Coordinator now facilitates a committee that is focused on addressing racial and ethnic disparities in their court through training and other projects.

## ***Spokane County Quality Virtual Hearings***

In the spring of 2021, Spokane County partnered with the National Center for State Courts (NCSC) to study the experience of families and court professionals in virtual child welfare hearings to better understand the experience of parents, caregivers, youth, attorneys, and caseworkers, and to identify promising practices supportive of effective and efficient virtual hearings in response to COVID-19. The study was funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Inc. The project involved multiple data collection activities, including virtual hearing observations, interviews with older youth, surveys of parents or caregivers who participated in virtual hearings, and surveys of court professionals, including attorneys and case workers. The results informed the Spokane County dependency court community about what is working, highlighted potential barriers to quality and meaningful virtual hearings, elevated family voice, and identified areas for further improvement. Throughout the study, NCSC released findings through a series of brief publications, including "[Survey Results from Spokane, WA](#)" (NCSC Study of Virtual Child Welfare Hearings: Survey Results from Spokane, WA May 2021)".

## ***Statewide Dependency Treatment Court Codes***

FJCIP Coordinators identified the need to differentiate and track the experiences of families enrolled in therapeutic courts and those with cases heard in standard dependency court. They participated in a workgroup with FYJP staff and court partners to develop statewide coding for Family Treatment Court and Early Childhood participants in Washington State. The workgroup looked at what tracking was already

available in the state through the Interactive Dependency Timeliness Report (iDTR) and the data that AOC's Statewide Family Treatment Court and Early Childhood advisory teams needed to collect. Codes were created that would work with the court systems used in Washington State to pull into the iDTR, allowing the data to be included or separated out from other dependency data. To help with implementation and consistency in the tracking, suggested forms with the new codes were created and provided to the courts. Ultimately, the goal of this project is to develop pattern forms that will be available to all courts on the state website.

## *Clallam County ICWA Court and Community Engagement*

Clallam County Court is actively seeking to best serve their community and foster inclusion with the opening of the state's second ICWA-focused dependency docket. Clallam County has joined Spokane County as one of only two courts in Washington State, and the 17th in the nation, to offer an Indian Child Welfare focused court. Information about ICWA Courts and their locations across the country can be found on the [National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges \(NCJFCJ\) website](#).

Clallam County used data from the Interactive Dependency Timeliness Report (iDTR) to identify the race and ethnicity of children served by the court and to understand the disproportional rates in their cases. The court improvement team reviewed what changes they could make to best serve the children and families in their court system. Ultimately, the team responded with the implementation of an ICWA-focused dependency docket in April 2022. To learn more about disproportionality in Clallam County, go [here](#).

The court holds monthly pre-hearing collaboration conferences and a monthly ICWA dependency calendar that focuses on the needs and legal standards required to adhere to ICWA guidelines. The court focuses on the ongoing use of Local Indian Child Welfare Advisory Committees (LICWACs), as well as a shared understanding of active efforts, qualified expert witness criteria, and cultural humility. Prehearing conferences begin with an opening exercise to set the tone for the space; this may include drumming, singing, cultural awareness presentations, or a land acknowledgment.

Implementation of the ICWA Court in Clallam County has shifted the court's relationship with local tribes to a collaborative partnership serving Native families. This has been accomplished by creating enhanced listening spaces for ICWA matters and a shared understanding of the generational trauma caused by forced removal of Native children by government agencies. The partnership sought to expand understanding of tribal perspectives and increase involvement, discussion, and mentorship. The FJCIP Coordinator helped facilitate the team's work with the AOC and NCJFCJ to create meaningful systemic change to address the disproportional representation of Native American children in their system.

The key to connecting with the tribal community was authentic tribal collaboration and partnership. Clallam County strives for cultural humility, providing a space for tribes to be heard and providing space for tribal voices to be an integral part of court hearings and work, while also providing physical space in the courtroom. Tribal partners have a literal and figurative "place at the table" in all hearings in the Juvenile Courtroom, as

# Family and Juvenile Court Improvement Program, FJCIP

signified by a “Tribe” plaque identifying their seat. Clallam County purposely created a more welcoming space to share viewpoints, lived experience, and a place for tribal elders to speak and share knowledge with their court and community.

Clallam County has made many additions to their courtroom to show the collaboration with the tribes. Tribal flags were donated to be displayed outside the courtroom where dependency cases are heard. At the local ICWA conference, items were presented by tribes to be put in the courtroom for the ICWA hearings. Tribal gifts, including blankets, drums, sage, cedar, and an eagle feather, are prominently displayed in the courtroom during hearings. Maps of tribal lands are hung on the courtroom wall to help identify tribal affiliation and as a reminder of the tribal community’s support of a child.



Four local tribes donated their nations’ flag to display near the courtroom entrance for the ICWA Court: (right to left) *Makah Tribe, Quileute Tribe, Jamestown S’Klallam Tribe, and Lower Elwha Klallam Tribe.*



Tribes have a place at the table in all hearings in the Juvenile Courtroom. A specialized plaque was made to signify the invite to the table.

# Family and Juvenile Court Improvement Program, FJCIP

Tribes are welcomed to be a part of the pre-hearing conference that begins with a reminder of why they are there. The court team plans an opening exercise prior to each pre-hearing conference with activities such as drumming, singing, land acknowledgements, and space for tribes to present. Then the tribes speak first about the family during the pre-hearing conference. By intentionally building relationships with the tribes, Clallam County is better able to partner together on trainings and court improvement work.

To help enhance their shared understanding as an ICWA court team, eight court partners from Clallam County, including their FJCIP Coordinator and judicial officer, attended an ICWA Court Retreat in June of 2022 in Duluth, Minnesota. This retreat addressed how to cultivate power-sharing partnerships between tribes and families. The retreat shared a collective understanding of Tribal collaboration and Indian family empowerment. Read more about the retreat [here!](#)

The conference provided the space to build relationships with other courts that are trying to work on implementation and the running of ICWA courts. Clallam County learned from other courts through their descriptions of what their process was. They talked to the court team from Duluth about what they have in the courtroom; then they worked on how to implement what they learned into the court and courtroom they were preparing.

Clallam County Court held a two-day Inaugural ICWA Conference for the Olympic Peninsula on August 24-25, 2022. The event included three sessions of speakers and events targeted for the general community participants and one session focused on tribal partner engagement. Their FJCIP Coordinator was instrumental in the events of both days.

The Clallam County Commissioner and the FJCIP Coordinator participated in a panel discussion at Peninsula College in Port Angeles, alongside six area Tribes. The conversation focused on the untold story of Indigenous child removal in the United States, the nation's first-ever government-endorsed truth and reconciliation commission (which investigated the devastating impact of Maine's child welfare practices on the Wabanaki people), how Native families are impacted by child welfare laws in Washington and in Clallam County, and the development of the ICWA docket in Clallam County Court. Read more about this [here!](#)

Clallam County is just one example of how FJCIP courts utilize the resources provided by the state for the local courts to respond to the needs of the families and create court improvement projects that impact the community as a whole.

## *Pierce County Early Engagement Guardians Ad Litem Pilot Project*

Pierce County Juvenile Court's Child Advocate Program created a new Early Engagement Guardians Ad Litem role, with the specific goal of engaging parents to establish relationships and gather information early in a dependency case. This information is used to identify family, friends, and community resources who can support visitation, placement, and services for children and families. The program embraces the presumption that children do best when with their family, and when they can have as much time as possible with their parents and family members in their communities.

This Early Engagement Pilot Project has been well received by dependency court partners in Pierce County and has had success in providing additional support to families at a crucial time, when the case is newly filed. The role was first piloted in the Puyallup DCYF Office, with plans to incorporate all four DCYF Offices (including Parkland, Lakewood, and Tacoma) in 2023.

The FJCIP Coordinator collaborates regularly with the Early Engagement Guardians Ad Litem (EE GALs), as well as dependency court partners, to facilitate relationship building and communication between the EE GALs and parties. When introducing new concepts to dependency work, such as the Early Engagement GAL Pilot Project, it is important for all court partners to understand this role and how this work differs from what court partners might be used to. For example, EE GALs have the flexibility to explore placement options quickly, in hopes that children are placed with family/fictive kin as soon as possible. Additionally, community resources are explored to help ensure child safety when children are remaining in home with parents. As a result of the Early Engagement GAL Pilot Project, the FJCIP Coordinator facilitates a twice monthly Early Engagement Network meeting that is open to all court partners. This networking group helps connect people in this work to various community supports which can be helpful in keeping families supported during the dependency process.

## *King County Preferred Name Workgroup*

The King County Dependency Court facilitated a group of system representatives in the Youth's Preferred Name Workgroup. The workgroup, was led by Judge Cindi Port and assisted by the FJCIP Coordinator, who scheduled meetings, took minutes, and coordinated group email communication, and finalized proposed forms. The purpose of the workgroup was two-fold: 1) to develop a process wherein youth in a dependency action will have their preferred name listed in the Department of Judicial Administration's (DJA) KC-Script and the Superior Court's case management (KCMS) systems and on the caption of any form/order; and 2) to develop a process wherein youth in a dependency action may pursue a legal name change through a Superior Court civil action instead of utilizing District Court, which does not permanently keep their records. The processes and forms were approved by the Chief Judge Committee for implementation. The FJCIP Coordinator works with the DJA to provide and track the number of dependency cases approved to apply for a type-2 name change filing. An informal training was held on May 3, 2023, to apprise dependency professionals of these new available resources for youth in the King County system.

## *Snohomish Family Law Parent Guide*

Snohomish County utilized their FJCIP Coordinator to develop a resource for parents to help them obtain a parenting plan to allow for the dismissal of their dependency case. This guide explains the process and provides tips for identifying services and writing declarations, and provides an expanded legal resource list. This guide was created and rolled out through the work of the FJCIP Coordinator.

## *Family Reunification Month Celebrations*

---

June is Family Reunification month in Washington State. Courts and communities across the state host events to celebrate and recognize the hard work that families do to be reunified. The FJCIP supports Family Reunification events by offering courts Family Reunification Day mini-grants, providing support for planning, and sharing resources and information for grants and event details. The following are examples of Family Reunification events that took place in 2022.

## *Chelan County Family Reunification Day*

At Chelan County's Family Reunification event in 2022, parents shared their stories of reunification and how they were able to overcome obstacles in the process. Many families participated and the court partner turnout was encouraging. They did a T-shirt fundraiser and many participants sported their "People Change, Families Reunite" T-shirts at the event. There was food for everyone, as well as booths from many of their community resources. Each family received a gift basket or two to take home. Below are some snapshots from the event.





## Kitsap County

Kitsap County held a Family Reunification Celebration at two local parks in 2022. The event was supported by the FJCIP Coordinator and co-designed with support from the dependency court partners, providing parents that had their children reunified with resources to continue to engage and support their families. Families left with gift baskets, books, tickets for things to do with their families in the community, and community resource guides.



## Pierce County

Pierce County held its Family Reunification Celebration on July 21, 2022, in-person at a local park. The event was planned by dependency system partners and was well attended and well supported. Event highlights included: an appearance by Rhubarb the Reindeer (the Tacoma Rainiers' mascot), CC the Bear (Coordinated Care's mascot), Twisty Dog Balloons, family photos, a bounce house, pizza, cake, gift baskets for all families, gift card raffle for all families in attendance, backpacks for kids, "People Change – Families Reunite" water bottles, and a family "thumb print" craft. Community tables included Coordinated Care, Early Learning, and Amara—all of whom offered additional "congratulatory gifts" for families. Below are some snapshots from the event:



## *Spokane County*

Spokane County hosted their Court Reunification Day Celebration (RDC) on July 8, 2022, in the Jury Lounge on the Spokane County Campus. The RDC committee included the FJCIP Coordinator, Parents for Parents program manager, Children's Home Society, Spokane Parent Advocacy Network (SPAN) representative, DCYF staff, parent attorneys, and GAL/CASA staff. The committee met and discussed past years' celebrations and how to improve it to be the most beneficial, memorable, and trauma responsive celebration for parents and children. News reporters from The Spokesman Review and KXLY radio station attended the celebration and interviewed families. Judicial officers, Coordinated Care, and superheroes such as Batman and Spiderman, were all in attendance as well. Each family received a "family time" tote bag which included age-appropriate activities they can do together, a teddy bear, and Certificate of Reunification.

## *Jefferson County*

Jefferson County celebrated their first Reunification Day on August 20, 2022. Reunification Day is the celebration of families reuniting through the dependency court process. Jefferson County established volunteers and organizations to help facilitate Reunification Days for the years to come. A Reunification Day Planning Committee was organized by Jefferson County's Parents for Parents Coordinator, and included the GAL Program Coordinator, FJCIP Coordinator, and Foster Supports volunteers. The committee organized the event to include a land acknowledgement and speeches by the Dependency Commissioner, the Juvenile Court Administrator, and the Parent for Parents Coordinator. Event activities celebrated families, and included face painting, a bouncy castle, a photobooth, and a watermelon eating contest. Spiderman even made an appearance. Tickets for community activities were gifted as prizes to families, and every child received a teddy bear. Reunification Day was highly supported in Jefferson County, and the court is excited for it to become a successful annual event.

## *National Adoption Day*

---

In November, many of Washington courts host National Adoption Day events. Courts and communities across the state engage in these events celebrating adoptions. The Statewide FJCIP Team provides planning and resource support, and local FJCIP Coordinators help with planning and facilitating the day's events.

Two of the FJCIP courts had articles in the news about their celebrations for their families. The articles, and additional resources, can be found here: [Washington State Courts - National Adoption Day](#). Celebrations around the state included bringing in speakers, teddy bears, pinwheels, sensory boxes, balloons, and creative things to help make the day special.

## Trauma Informed and Hope Centered Court Practices

The AOC's Family and Youth Justice Programs (FYJP) and the FJCIP focus work with courts on being trauma informed, understanding well-being, and implementing the hope theory. Through this work, cultures shift in Washington's court system.

FYJP is working with system partners to infuse the science of hope into the practices and culture of our system. The goal of the hope work is to engage interested system partners to identify ways they can influence positive outcomes and shift the system by creating hope-centered organizations that promote the well-being and resilience of professionals, families, and communities they serve. [Dr. Chan Hellman](#), renowned hope science expert and researcher and founder of the Hope Research Center at the University of Oklahoma, said "Hope is the belief that the future will be better than today and you have the power to make it so." With this belief, FYJP facilitates the Hope Community of Practice as a multi-system approach to reach those in Washington's dependency system. The Hope Community of Practice includes representatives from agencies around the state. To learn more about this group or to join the listserv, visit FYJP's [Hope Science webpage](#).

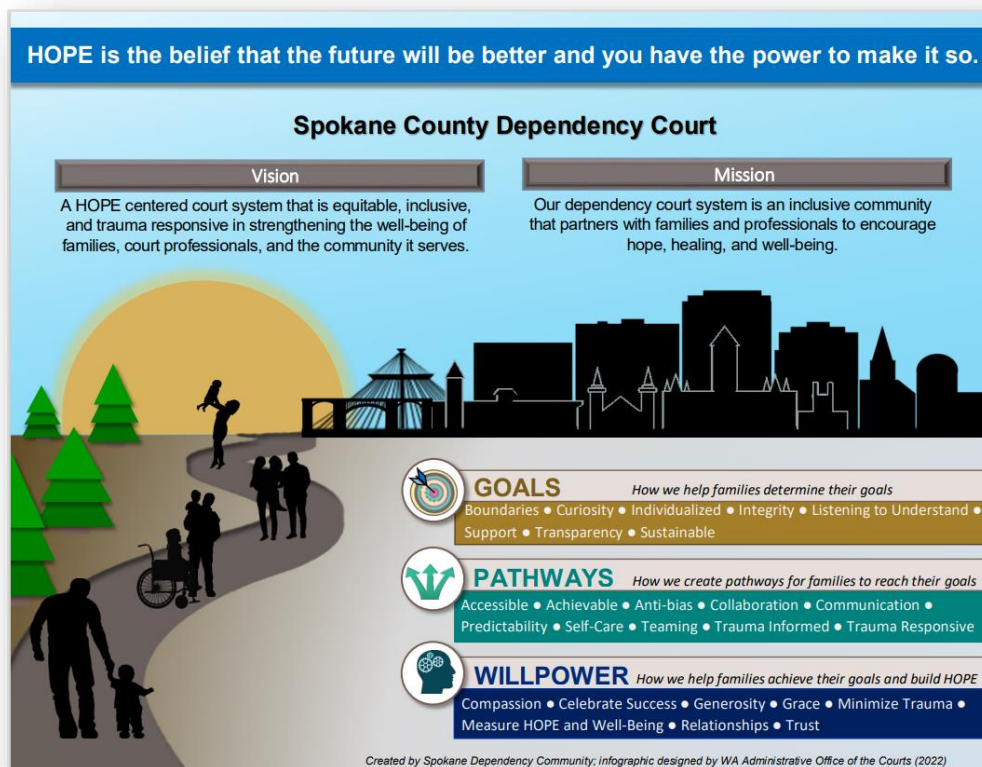
In August 2022, FYJP offered The Power of Hope webinar and recording to the dependency community. It was a two-hour webinar open to all dependency court and system partners across the state to learn together about how organizations can become hope-centered and contribute to the well-being and resilience of professionals and the families and communities they serve. This free webinar event featured Dr. Chan Hellman. Dr. Hellman shared the surprisingly simple science of hope and described his work with child welfare agencies and court systems in other states that have used hope science to make statistically significant improvements, such as reducing burnout for staff and increasing the trust and engagement of families. The materials and information from the webinar are available [here](#), including a full recording of the training. FJCIP courts around the state are working on various practices to be trauma responsive and hope centered for their families.

Thurston County implemented a workgroup specifically dedicated to making Thurston County a more trauma-informed court. In 2021, Thurston County successfully hosted four continuing education opportunities: 1) Suicide Prevention, 2) Adult Trauma & Self Care, 3) Adolescent Resiliency during COVID, and 4) Mental Clarity in the Midst of Change. In 2022, topics for continuing education presentations include discussions about generational trauma, equity and disproportionality, how homelessness produces and exacerbates trauma, and self-care practices for professionals with secondary trauma. Thurston County has a Trauma Informed Practices Group that strives to offer trainings that are relevant to what their court partners might be experiencing.

Spokane County held its second Hope Summit in February 2022 hosted by the AOC, in partnership with DCYF, with a focus on Safety. From the Summit, action items were created to implement over the following year. From the action items, Spokane created opportunities for professionals to hear success stories to increase hope. Quarterly Dependency Working Group meetings provide an opportunity to share a "celebrating success" story by a designated organization. Another action item worked

# Family and Juvenile Court Improvement Program, FJCIP

on and incorporated into the 2023 Hope Summit was using motivational interviewing to learn about a family directly from the parent at the beginning of the case. Spokane County is using action items from the trauma informed assessment they completed to assist in planning their upcoming summit. They created mission and vision statements that incorporate the theory of hope in their work. Through the support of FYJP, they created an infographic to share their work with the community and court partners (to download the infographic click here: [Spokane County Hope Infographic](#)). The FJCIP Coordinator has an integral role in convening a court partner workgroup to plan the Hope Summit and facilitate the day.



Clallam County, through the assistance of their FJCIP Coordinator, has started to engage the community to support creating a trauma informed space in their dependency courtroom. The vision for Clallam County as a court is to increase the capacity to reduce the compounding trauma experienced in a court setting. They believe that a step in this direction is to modify the court environment itself. This project is aimed at achieving their vision through introducing family friendly, trauma informed art.

Fostering belonging in courthouses can include using artwork that represents the diverse community. The AOC, through the Washington State Minority and Justice Commission, offers artwork that courts can use in their courtrooms at no cost. To view the available artwork, click here: [Free Artwork!](#)

## System Changes, Legislative Updates, and Case Law

The FJCIP and FYJP help the system adjust to system changes, legislative updates, and case law. The work being done in 2021 and 2022 is highlighted below.

### *Safety Summits*

In partnership with DCYF and other court partners, FYJP developed and delivered [Safety Summits](#) to seven local court communities. These summits provided court systems with high-quality safety training within the context of a guided change management process that included organization, planning, action, and evaluation phases. Court system partners worked together to create strategic plans to implement the safety framework in their local jurisdictions.

Safety Summit strategic plans included action items to support implementation of the safety framework. Some examples from participating FJCIP courts are:

- Creation of identified questions all parties know may be asked at every hearing when a child is out of home. Reinforcing the use of safety framework language during hearings.
- Including the safety assessment/plan to the court report for review hearings.
- Creation of concrete targets and benchmarks for families, so parents and court partners share an understanding of what needs to happen for a child to return home or to move to less restricted Family Time visitation.
- Display of the blue triangle that visualizes the safety framework concept during court.
- Incorporate safety framework training into existing training schedules.
- Cheat sheets for the safety framework language and use.
- Training and mentoring of new professionals to use the safety framework language in their court presentations.
- Preparation is completed timely to allow Family Time expansion and decisions to be made during a hearing.

Project sites can be found here: [Changing Safety Practice](#).



## ***Guardianships, HB 1747***

The FJCIP and FYJP staff worked with the local court communities to understand the changes to guardianships that came with the passing of HB 1747. An infographic ([link](#)) was created to help share a simple diagram of the two types of guardianships offered through dependency cases. The FJCIP brought in a DCYF trainer for the FJCIP Coordinators to have individualized to their positions training on the differences in the guardianships and what they may see. FYJP staff also provided a similar training at the Judicial Community of Practice specialized for the dependency court judges. Resources were made available to all on the FYJP website ([link](#)).

## ***Strengthening Parent-Child Visitation During Child Welfare Proceedings, HB 1194***

In 2021, [HB 1194](#) changed the way dependency courts evaluate and order family time by requiring justification for supervision and monitoring. According to the bill, visitation should occur in the least restrictive setting and be unsupervised unless the threats to the child require the constant presence of an adult to ensure the child safety. The presumption that visits become unsupervised starts at the 30-day shelter care hearing, then at each review hearing, permanency planning hearings, and with all orders authorizing continued shelter care.

Our child welfare system is working towards safely increasing unsupervised, familiar, and consistent visitations together. The process takes collaboration between the courts, DCYF, and other system partners.

The court has an obligation to default to unsupervised visitations due to the presumption defined by the bill. To ensure capacity to facilitate these visitations, DCYF has initiated transportation only contracts. They also started the Network Administrator Model in Regions 1 and 2 to assist with consistency in contractors picking up the referrals and providing more consistency to the Family Time visitation contract process.

On July 21, 2021, FYJP partnered with the Office of Public Defense, the Attorney General's Office, Washington Association of Child Advocate Programs, and DCYF to deliver a virtual training and Q&A session on HB 1194, Strengthening Parent-Child Visitation During Child Welfare Proceedings. This training taught system partners about the changes in the bill that resulted in the need for a change to practice, court inquiries, and information being shared for hearings if a party believes the visit should be supervised or monitored.

The Family Well-Being Collaborative (FWCC), developed a workgroup to take off from the training and bring the practice change into practice. The Family Time and HB 1194 Implementation Workgroup works to assess and monitor how aspects of HB 1194 are being implemented, including provision of initial visits and changes to supervision levels. This group works to develop projects to improve the quality of Family Time. Currently the workgroup is working on a process to create guidance through the [iDecide](#) tool for the new court inquiries to support judicial officers.

## *Judicial Rotations*

Judicial rotations are a long-standing issue with dependency courts in Washington. With our de-centralized court system, there is no standard for minimum terms for dependency court judicial officers. The FJCIP promotes stable leadership and minimum 2-year terms for judicial officers. In 2023, half the FJCIP courts will have a change in one or more judicial officers on the bench, partially due to judicial rotations. Dependency is some of the most important work in the court system but one of the most challenging rotations for judges. Having long, stable judicial leadership is effective, especially when coupled with a dedicated FJCIP Coordinator for dependency. To help support the transition of the FJCIP courts, the Statewide FJCIP Coordinator and FYJP staff put together a training for local FJCIP Coordinators on their role in the transition, providing a space for the coordinators to come together and get training and peer support. A [judicial one pager](#) was provided to the coordinators to share with oncoming judicial officers to share the latest training and resources for the incoming judges. Resource sharing such as this helps FJCIP courts to have well-trained judicial officers, meeting the program requirement to have 30 hours of dependency-related training within the first 6 months from taking on the role of a dependency court judge.

We know well-trained, stable judicial leadership impacts the families involved in the court system. Research by H. Hunter for the Council of State Governments, [Courting Judicial Excellence in Juvenile Justice: A 50-State Study \(csgjusticecenter.org\)](#), states it well. It says Juvenile court judges are the most important public figures in the juvenile justice system—their decisions impact whether hundreds of thousands of youth each year become court involved and for how long, whether they are involuntarily removed from their homes and communities, and what services they receive. Judicial Officers are able to shape the culture, policies, and practices in our dependency court system when they are trained and remain stable in their court systems.

The FJCIP promotes trained judicial officers and stable leadership. The 2023 FJCIP Capacity Self-Assessment indicated that, of those surveyed, 89% reported there is a commitment from leadership to support FJCIP work in their court, and similarly that there is a dedicated judicial officer with the capacity to actively participate in FJCIP work. Additionally, of those surveyed, they report that 88% believe that leadership actively promotes an innovative culture within their court. The FJCIP connects judicial officers with an FJCIP Coordinator to help create a court culture that utilizes their data to understand their system and works to improve processes and programs based off this data.

## *Keeping Families Together Act, HB 1227*

In July 2023, the Keeping Families Together Act (HB 1227) took affect creating significant statutory changes for dependency cases. These new provisions will shift focus to the front-end of cases and require judicial officers to make additional inquiries into what efforts were made to prevent removal, what efforts have been made to reduce the harm to children who are removed from the home, and what efforts are continuously being made to place children with a relative/suitable other.



**KEEPING FAMILIES TOGETHER**  
Court Community Initiative

# Family and Juvenile Court Improvement Program, FJCIP

Through the work of the [Family Well-Being Community Collaborative \(FWCC\)](#), FYJP has been working hard over the last year to prepare Washington dependency courts, with particular attention paid to ensuring that courts understand and apply the new laws. The FWCC houses multiple cross-system workgroups dedicated to creating practical solutions for successful implementation of HB 1227 in court systems. The workgroups meet on a consistent basis to crosswalk the HB 1227 statutory changes with current dependency law to identify the new legal standards, inquiries, findings, and changes in current process that will result from HB 1227 (see workgroup [HUBs](#) for more information). These “statutory crosswalks” are being utilized by FYJP in the development of two primary tools that will be available for all court systems—the Court Readiness Toolkit and iDecide.

Family & Youth Justice Programs has created a robust set of tools for planning and implementing HB 1227 that aligns with HB 1227’s statutory changes. The [HB 1227 Court Readiness Toolkit](#) provides a systematic way for local court jurisdictions to assess their current shelter care process, identify changes needed to comply with the new law, and implement them.



The [iDecide](#) tool was created by FYJP, in collaboration with statewide system partners, as a web-based application to support successful implementation of HB 1227. iDecide contains interactive judicial decision-making components that provide step-by-step instruction on applying the new law. It also includes guidance, resources, and training that support HB 1227 implementation.

Through the development process, the FJCIP Coordinators have viewed and provided feedback on the implementation tools and their use. This process has assisted in developing the tools. The tools are available to FJCIP Coordinators, as well as to those in the state that have the capacity to work through the process with their court team.

Regional cross system trainings were provided to all counties in Washington on HB 1227, encouraging cross-system collaboration for local implementation of HB 1227. The trainings were offered by the AOC through FYJP staff partnered with DCYF. More information on these training can be found on our [here](#), including recordings from the trainings.

FJCIP courts were offered financial and technical support to utilize the training and tools to implement HB 1227 in their courts. The FJCIP Coordinators have supported the development of the tools and have an opportunity to use the tools to help their courts change management process to apply the statutory changes required by HB 1227. Each court was provided funding to host an in-person, cross-system retreat to support their implementation work. The FJCIP Coordinators are the instrument for these courts to work collaboratively with their court partners through this process.



## Trainings and Programs Offered to Support Local Courts

In the spring of 2022, the Court Improvement Program (CIP) partnered with the Capacity Building Center for Courts (CBCC) to develop content and co-sponsor the [Washington Judicial Academy on Reasonable and Active Efforts](#). A total of 24 judicial officers from 12 different Washington counties attended this two-day, highly interactive on-line academy. The training provided instruction in federal and Washington black letter law, the art of making reasonable efforts and active efforts findings, and conducting sufficient “reason to know” inquiries. Judicial officers learned new skills to prevent the unnecessary removal of children from their homes and to make sure that those who are removed are returned to their parents or achieve permanence as quickly and safely as possible. The “Black Letter Law” and “Reason to Know Inquiry” sections of the academy were recorded and are now available online.

The [Attorney Academy on Reasonable and Active Efforts](#) was also developed by the CBCC and is based on the design of the Judicial Academy. When judicial officers who attended the judicial academy were informed that the CBCC was seeking states to pilot the attorney version of the academy, there was unanimous support for the Washington CIP to pursue this opportunity. There was agreement that providing attorneys with a similar training would support judicial officers’ efforts to improve the quality of reasonable and active efforts practice. FYJP was pleased to again partner with the CBCC to host two sessions of the Attorney Academy on Reasonable and Active Efforts in 2023 (March and June). The need for attorney training on the law of reasonable and active efforts, and how to make effective arguments to the court, was primarily generated by recent Washington Supreme Court decisions and the upcoming implementation of significant state legislation.

As part of participation in the academy, judicial officers completed an 11-question multiple choice pre-post knowledge quiz, administered by the CBCC, which tested their skills and knowledge around making reasonable and active efforts findings. Twenty-four (24) of the 29 Academy participants (83%) completed both the pre and post assessment of knowledge. Those 24 judicial officers demonstrated knowledge gain on the post-Academy assessment; scores increased 2.6 points on average. Judicial officers also reported plans to apply what they learned by asking specific questions, making specific findings, and in other ways.

The impact of participation in the Judicial Academy on Reasonable and Active Efforts on judicial inquiries will be assessed by Dr. Alicia Summers from the CBCC through a pre- and post-training hearing quality evaluation. Eight judicial officers who attended the academy have volunteered to work with Dr. Summers to submit to hearing recordings (Shelter Care and Permanency Planning) for the evaluation.

Additional trainings/resources for judicial officers were shared with courts.

- [WA Guide on Reasonable & Active Efforts](#)
- [Reason to Know Inquiry](#)
- [2022 Judicial Academy HUB](#)
- [Reasonable & Active Efforts Discussing L.C.S. & J.M.W Infographic](#)

## *ICWA Court Trainings*

Washington currently operates two ICWA courts, in Spokane and Clallam counties, with a third ICWA court expected to launch in Yakima County by the end of 2023. ICWA Courts have emerged as an intervention to work directly with American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) families with the goals of reducing disproportionality and improving outcomes for Native children and youth in out of home care. ICWA courts are focused on five core principles: judicial leadership, data collection, ICWA training, tribal stakeholder collaboration, and gold standard lawyering and social work. Courts that implement ICWA courts can improve the experience of Indian families and tribes appearing in their court, while also streamlining ICWA court processes for a more efficient dependency court.

To support good ICWA practice and to encourage the implementation of new ICWA Courts in Washington, the virtual Washington ICWA Court Summit was held on October 25, 2021. This was a joint effort of the [National Council of Family & Juvenile Court Judges](#), [Casey Family Programs](#), and the AOC's Family & Youth Justice Programs. AOC staff supported each court that attend by providing their court's data by race and disparity in filing rates for Native American families. Following the Summit, Clallam County moved forward with implementation of an ICWA Court, and Pierce County continues discussion around how to implement the work in their court system.

In September 2023, Washington State's three [ICWA courts](#) and their tribal partners attended Casey Family Program's ICWA Court Collaborative VI and the [Pacuaya Aqui ICWA Conference](#) in Tucson, AZ. Teams spent four days collaborating, learning the spirit and letter of [ICWA law](#), and hearing about innovative ICWA practices happening nationally. Washington teams also collaborated with their national ICWA court peers to learn how other courts have tailored their court process to better meet the special needs of both Indian families and ICWA case requirements.

## *Early Childhood Courts in Washington*

---

There are six Early Childhood Courts (ECC's) in Washington. Five out of six of these ECC sites also have FJCIP Coordinators. FJCIP Coordinators at these sites have been instrumental in getting these ECC sites prepared to launch. Efforts FJCIP Coordinators have made to help their court prepare to launch include: working with their court administration and judicial officers to find court calendar time to set aside specifically for dependency cases with children ages 0-3; introducing OPD supervisors, attorneys for parents, GAL supervisors, and the AAG who oversees these cases to the purpose/intent of Early Childhood Courts; and pulling data from the iDTR that reflects or supports the need of an ECC in their county.

FJCIP Coordinators not only help at the start of an ECC site but also provide ongoing support to ECC site coordinators, especially in regards to data. FJCIP Coordinators assist in training ECC coordinators on how to access and utilize the iDTR. FJCIP Coordinators also help track and ensure that their court clerk's office is using the ECC court codes accurately, and they help resolve any errors that may occur. For example, one of the Washington ECC sites has an ECC site coordinator who is not a court employee, so they do not have access to all the data other site coordinators have access to. The FJCIP Coordinator assists that ECC site coordinator in entering or looking up data that would be asked of an ECC site coordinator that is a court employee.

## *Family Treatment Court Team*

---

Washington State has 20 Family Treatment Courts (FTCs) in 19 counties. Initially modeled after Adult Drug Courts, FTCs show similar positive outcomes. Research studies demonstrate that when FTCs operate with fidelity to the model, they are more effective than traditional dependency courts at getting people into treatment faster, retaining them in treatment, supporting completion of treatment, reunifying families, reducing children's time out of home, and preventing a child's return to care. Like other programs in Washington's decentralized court system, the state's FTCs function independently of one another and have inconsistent funding, staffing, and training resources.

AOC's grant-funded FTC Project Team was established in 2021 to provide the support and guidance local FTC sites need to best serve participants. The team has provided real-time and online training regarding Best Practice Standards, created data collection/analysis and change management tools, responded to technical assistance requests, and was instrumental in securing an MOU between DCYF and public housing associations for dedicated units for child welfare involved families. Thanks to the Washington State Legislature, state funds will sustain the FTC Project Team's support to FTC courts across Washington in 2023 and beyond.

## Works Cited:

---

- Casey Family Programs. (2023). Casey Family Programs. Retrieved from <https://www.casey.org/>.
- Chan Hellman, TEDxOklahoma City. (2021). The Science of Power of Hope. Retrieved from [https://www.ted.com/talks/chan\\_hellman\\_the\\_science\\_and\\_power\\_of\\_hope](https://www.ted.com/talks/chan_hellman_the_science_and_power_of_hope).
- Peninsula Daily News. (2023). Indian Child Welfare Act, Documentary Focus of Stadium Generale. Retrieved from <https://www.peninsuladailynews.com/news/indian-child-welfare-actdocumentary-focus-of-stadium-generale/>.
- The Council of State Governments Justice Center. (2022). Courting Judicial Excellence in Juvenile Justice: A 50-State Study. Retrieved from <https://csgjusticecenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Courting-Judicial-Excellence-in-Juvenile-Justice-A-50-State-Study-2.pdf>.
- The National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges. (2023). About ICWA Courts. Retrieved from <https://www.ncjfcj.org/child-welfare-and-juvenile-law/icwa-courts>.
- University of Washington Addictions, Drug, and Alcohol Institute. (2023). Methamphetamine Trends Across Washington State. Retrieved from [https://adai.washington.edu/WAdata/methamphetamine.htm#death\\_trends](https://adai.washington.edu/WAdata/methamphetamine.htm#death_trends).
- Washington State Administrative Office of the Courts. (2023). Family and Youth Justice Programs. Retrieved from <https://www.wacita.org/>.
- Washington State Administrative Office of the Courts. (2023). National Adoption Day. Retrieved from <https://www.courts.wa.gov/newsinfo/adoptionDay/?fa=adoptionDay.news>.
- Washington State Administrative Office of the Courts. (2023). Washington State Minority and Justice Commission Artwork. Retrieved from <https://www.courts.wa.gov/?fa=home.sub&org=mjc&page=artwork&layout=2&parent=res>.
- Washington State Center for Court Research. (2023). Washington State Dependency Timeliness Dashboard. Retrieved from <https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/wscrr/viz/DependencyDashboard/MonthlyUpdates-CurrentYear>.
- Washington State Health Care Authority. (2023). State Opioid and Overdose Response (SOOR) Plan. Retrieved from <https://www.hca.wa.gov/about-hca/programs-and-initiatives/behavioral-health-and-recovery/state-opioid-and-overdose-response-soor-plan>.

67<sup>th</sup> Legislature. (2021). House Bill 1194- Child Welfare Proceedings- Parent-Child Visitation. Retrieved from <https://lawfilesexternal.wa.gov/biennium/2021-22/Pdf/Bills/Session%20Laws/House/1194-S2.SL.pdf?q=20210721075836>.