



Washington State Office of Public Defense Parents Representation Program

What Has Been Achieved by Lowering Caseloads for
Parents Attorneys

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Why was the Parents Representation Program Started?

- **1999 Report for Legislature: State of Parents' Attorneys**
 - Excessive Caseloads, Low Pay
 - Little Time to Communicate with Parents or Help them Engage
 - Frequent Continuances & Case Delays



OPD Parents Representation Program

- Pilot 2000-2005
- Expanded to 2/3 of state--6,700 Open Cases by 2007



Key to the Program

- **Caseload standard of 80 cases per full-time attorney**



Standards

- **Counselor-at-Law**
 - Having Enough Time for Open, Frequent Attorney-Client Communication
- **Services & Visitation**
 - Encourage Early Engagement
 - Enforce Services Availability
 - Advocate for Visitation
- **Case Advocacy**
 - Preparing Cases Timely
 - Avoiding Continuances
 - OPD Social Workers



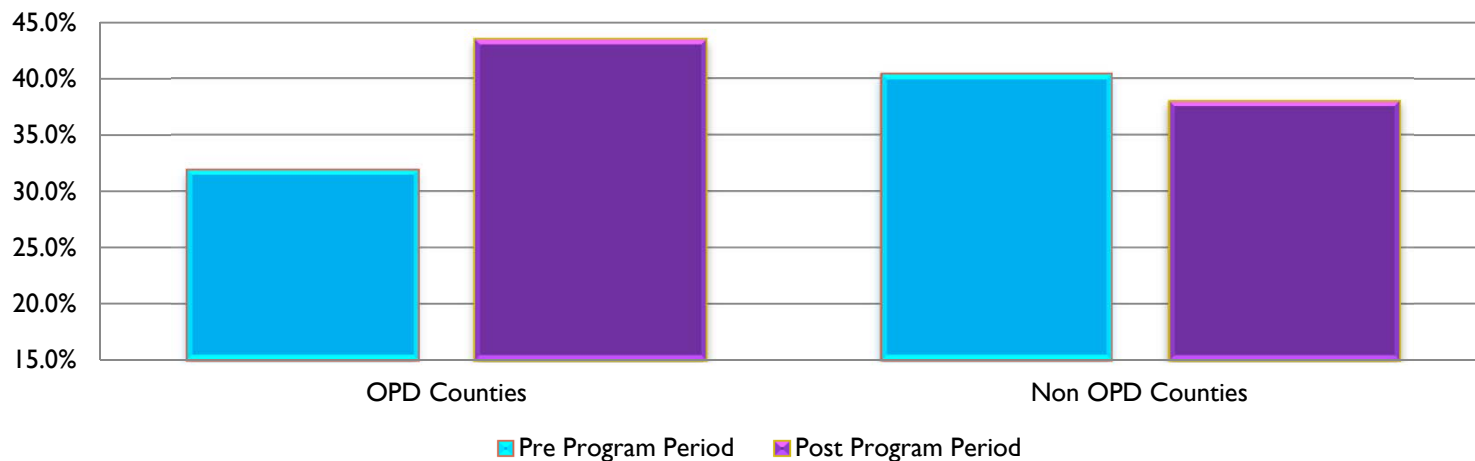
Impacts

- Better outcomes for children
- Better outcomes for families
- Better fiscal outcomes for the state

Evaluations and Data

2010 and 2011 OPD and Washington State
Center for Court Research Data

OPD Program Counties Improved Reunification Rates While Non Program Counties Did Not





Washington's Parents Representation Program Helping Children in Child Welfare System Reach Permanency

KEY MESSAGES

- The Parents Representation Program is helpful in moving children from the child welfare system to permanent homes.
- The Parents Representation Program cuts the time it takes for children to reach permanency:*

Reunifications occur
1 MONTH sooner**

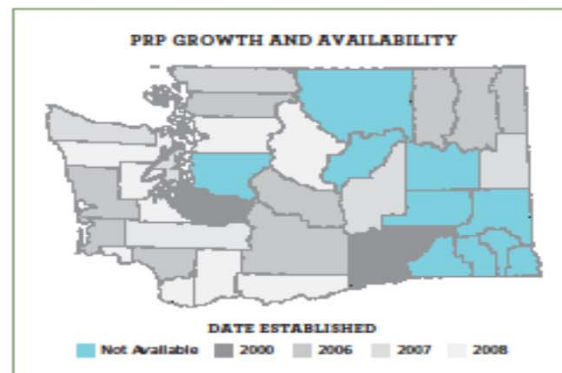
Adoptions and Guardianships
occur **1 YEAR** sooner**

*Based on a projection of statewide implementation on a cohort of children entering care in 2007 **Approximations

Summary

Legal representation in juvenile court has been recognized by most states as an essential protection for parents when children have been removed from their custody. A 1999 study called into question whether parents in Washington were receiving adequate legal representation in processes that have significant consequences for parents and children.¹ The Parents Representation Program (PRP) was developed by the Washington State Office of Public Defense (OPD) and the Washington State Legislature to enhance the quality of defense representation for parents in dependency and termination hearings. The program aims to reduce the number of continuances requested by attorneys, limit caseloads (no more than 80 cases per attorney) and supports their work by ensuring attorneys have reasonable time to prepare cases and work with clients. The program provides social workers, expert resources, periodic trainings, and oversight through OPD. Piloted initially in three counties in 2000, the program has now expanded to 25 counties across the state. See Map.

¹ Washington State Office of Public Defense (1999). *Costs of Defense and Children's Representation in Dependency and Termination Cases*. Olympia, WA: Author.



In 2010, Partners for Our Children at the University of Washington conducted a study on the impact of PRP, looking at the program's influence on the speed with which children are reunified, adopted or enter guardianships.²

² To date, the PRP is the only program of parental representation in juvenile dependency proceedings known by the authors to have been the subject of evaluation research.

Impacts on Foster Care Caseload

Estimated Impacts of Parents Representation Program on Licensed Foster Care Caseloads

