



March 31, 2020

RE: Interim Report from the Office of Civil Legal Aid (OCLA) and the Washington State Center for Court Research (WSCCR)

Dear Interested Legislative Leaders:

The 2017 Washington State Legislature directed OCLA to engage WSCCR at the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) to conduct a comparative study assessing the impacts and potential costs savings associated with early and automatic appointment of attorneys for children in dependency cases (Laws of 2017, Ch. 20, Sec 28).

The study was designed with two treatment counties (Grant and Lewis)¹, and two comparison counties (Whatcom and Douglas) in which attorneys were provided to children per usual practice. Through data sharing agreements with the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) and the AOC, researchers obtained and matched data for all children in the study and examined differences in several outcomes between the two groups.

The Legislature wanted to understand (1) whether and to what extent providing standard's based legal representation (SBLR) to dependent children affects the timeline of the dependency processes (i.e., time to permanency), (2) whether and to what extent the provision of SBLR to dependent children affects child-level outcomes in multiple domains, and (3) whether and, if so, how much savings might be achieved by providing SBLR for children in dependency cases. These questions are being examined through a mixed-methods (quantitative and qualitative) research project.

Attached you will find our preliminary report to the legislature. The analysis presented in this preliminary report compares the average change from the two years pre-implementation to the two years post-implementation, in the two treatment counties, to the average change over the same time period in the two comparison counties for all outcomes assessed. The preliminary data indicates that there was an estimated 22 percentage point increase in the rate of permanency for treatment counties compared to comparison counties over the study period. Data regarding outcomes in multiple domains is still being gathered for analysis. The results of those findings, along with the final results of the impact on rate to permanency as a result of SBLR will be released in the final report to the legislature in December 2020.

¹ All new dependency cases in treatment counties were assigned an attorney who had been provided with specialized training and held to performance standards regarding caseloads, contact with children, and other legal practice considerations.

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If you have questions, please contact Dr. Carl McCurley at carl.mccurely@courts.wa.gov or Jill Malat at Jill.Malat@ocla.wa.gov.

Sincerely,



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