



# Juvenile Dependency Interbranch Workgroup

## ***Our Mission is to:***

- Maximize existing resources through interbranch collaboration and cross-training programs;
- Advance the goal of providing appropriate support for the children and families in Oregon's child welfare system through a coordinated, interbranch effort to prioritize and promote initiatives and practices with demonstrated effectiveness; and
- Bridge the gap between existing statutory mandates and the rights and resources actually available to children and families at the risk of involvement or involved in Oregon's child welfare and judicial systems.

## ***Who We Are***

Workgroup members come from all three branches of state government and constitute the highest level of authority within the organizations they represent. The membership consists of legislators from both sides of the aisle, high-level state agency officials, and prominent juvenile court judges and attorneys. Aside from the legislative members, all members bring to the table their extensive experience and expertise in the child welfare and juvenile court systems. Specifically, members include the Chief Judge of the Oregon Court of Appeals and representatives of the Department of Human Services (DHS), Department of Justice (DOJ), Office of Public Defense Services (OPDS), the Oregon Judicial Department's (OJD) Juvenile Court Programs, the Oregon Commission on Children and Families, and the Oregon Law Commission. The efforts of the Workgroup to reach across political and interbranch boundaries to support and strengthen the work of the entire dependency system are strongly supported by Chief Justice Paul De Muniz and Governor Ted Kulongoski.

## ***Our Current Efforts***

### ***Legislative Advocacy***

There are three goals for the 2011 Oregon legislative session:

- 1) Prevent decreases in funding that negatively impact our mission.** The child welfare and juvenile court systems are legislatively and constitutionally mandated to provide services to the children and families of more than 13,000 abused and neglected children who enter Oregon's foster care system each year. Those services must continue regardless of whether funds are diminished.
- 2) Support legislative efforts to safely and equitably reduce the number of children in foster care.** There are many initiatives at work across Oregon that the Workgroup believes are demonstrating success and should be supported by the legislature.
- 3) Secure funding targeted at increasing the number of children and parents with legal representation at the first hearing scheduled in a dependency case.** When children are taken into DHS custody, parents are asked to appear in court to learn why their children were taken. In many counties in Oregon, parents have no attorney present to represent them at this shelter hearing. In most counties in which an attorney is present, the appointment of

legal representation is made during the hearing or a short time prior to the hearing, giving little to no opportunity for the attorney to review the file and meet with the client. If a special contract credit were awarded to attorneys for participation in shelter hearings, OPDS believes that such participation would increase and become the norm in most counties.

### ***Multi-Disciplinary Educational Programs***

Both DHS and JCIP have training resources. Current goals include sharing those resources to increase the number of multi-disciplinary educational program opportunities for all people who work in the juvenile dependency systems. Given budget shortfalls, it is vital that these systems collaborate as efficiently as possible to educate themselves and each other about how to implement best practices with fewer resources.

### ***Resource to Legislators***

The Workgroup invites legislators to use the Workgroup as a resource when they have questions about existing dependency laws, the substance of proposed bills related to our mission, and the impact of other bills on the child welfare and juvenile court dependency systems. Additionally, the Workgroup is developing a formal presentation for legislators explaining the basics of dependency cases.

## ***Our History***

Prior to the 2007 legislative session, concerned legislators met with members of DHS and juvenile court judges and attorneys in order to better understand what improvements were needed to make those systems efficient and just. A workgroup developed and advocated for eight pieces of legislation. Six of those bills were enacted in 2007. As a result, Oregon saw changes to laws regarding termination of parental rights, placement of children in foster care, child abuse reporting, the establishment of sensitive review committees, and broad legislation involving diligent efforts by the DHS regarding placement of siblings, visitation, face-to-face contacts, etc.

Legislation to improve attorney representation for children and parents was proposed but not enacted. Despite no funding to support reduced child/parent attorney caseloads, OPDS created an appellate section devoted to dependency cases and the Juvenile Law Resource Center. Together those programs increased the quality of parent representation at both the trial and appellate levels. Efforts to increase resources for child/parent attorneys, district attorneys, and DOJ attorneys representing DHS continue to be a priority.

In May 2009, Rep. Wayne Krieger and Court of Appeals Chief Judge David Brewer reformulated the group to begin planning for the 2011 legislative session and the Juvenile Dependency Interbranch Workgroup was established. The need for this Workgroup to remain active between sessions is apparent with budget shortfalls threatening to decrease resources already in place, the potential effectiveness of multi-disciplinary educational programs, the need to continually support successful initiatives around the state, and to educate the ever-changing legislative membership.