

## Region V Legislative Committee Summary Report 2021

We want to highlight 1 successful change and 3 recommendations from Region V:

First the success:

The Region 5 panel identified an inconvenience in court case scheduling that affected nearly everyone involved in the system where a list of cases was slated to occur during a 4-hour block. There was no specific time for the case, just a window of time. We reached out and met with Shelly Tubbs (District 5 trial court administrator) and Debra Alsaker-Burke (the prior Coordinator with the Judicial branch of the Supreme Court) and together we were able to facilitate change in the scheduling procedures to markedly reduce time spent waiting at the court house.

Recommendation #1:

During the file reviews we found that 79.7 % of parents have substantial substance abuse issues. Methamphetamines was identified as the primary drug used by those parents. The Panel discovered that 54% of parents and a high number of children presented with a diagnosed mental illness and many others were noted to need an assessment for diagnosis. We found parents are required to attend and complete programs without confirmation of success, or compliance with program or medication usage.

Our research into solutions to help address this issue led to our ***recommendation of the implementation of a Child Protection Court which follows the family Drug Court Model*** but would be expanded to all child protection cases involving mental illness and substance abuse. This is an evidence-based model that has the power to address these issues. It operates exactly like the family drug court. It has a specialty court with a coordinator and meets more frequently. It also offers individualized care, incentives, and direction. Utilization of a CP Court model would boost performance measures to improve accountability, enhance and increase the legal representation of children and their parents, improve case-flow management, and strengthen the management information systems.

Recommendation #2:

We recently reviewed a file regarding 3 kiddos in our system. This case went through the first 12 months at which time termination was recommended. The petition for termination was filed 16 months later. The hearing for termination was 8 months later. Permanency plan for adoption was made. The decree was entered 2 months later. The mother appealed 1 month after that. This case has gone on for 39 months before the appeal. Unfortunately, this is not an isolated case. These delays hinder the children's healing, keeping them a victim.

Our review found that we usually meet the deadline to file, but completion for termination takes a very long time. The road block stems from the case leaving the jurisdiction of the local court and moving to the attorney general. ***Region V Review Panel recommends current judicial standards be reviewed and a procedure be created to mandate completion of parent rights termination process within 60 days.***

Recommendation #3:

According to an article published in Mental Health and Foster Care, up to 80 percent of children in foster care have significant mental health issues, compared to approximately 18-22 percent of the

general population. The Healthy Foster Care American Initiative identifies mental and behavioral health as the “greatest unmet health need for children and teens in foster care.” A study by the Foster Care Institute, found that many foster parents felt they did not have the necessary and honest information by their caseworkers needed to properly care for the child placed in their home. (<https://www.fosterfocusmag.com/articles/foster-parent-retention-revisited>)

This next recommendation is born out of a deep thorough analysis and represents over 700 hours of donated work from Region V and other panel members from across the state. It has been endorsed by the statewide CRP leadership Committee unanimously. This recommendation is a proposal that incorporates a multitude of concerns and solutions from our analysis. It is a way to bring cultural change to our system, help everyone involved in the system and bring access to needed services for Idaho's foster children. It is a way to stop being trauma reactive and start being trauma proactive

***The recommendation is to develop and establish a Shelter Care Assessment Center (SCAC) where a child's needs are met, assessed, and an individualized guidance plan for each child is developed by professionals.*** This plan will help guide and coordinate legal parents, social workers, foster parents, and others in meeting the needs of the child. We believe this will improve foster parent retention and safety, improve foster children's healing and function, improve social worker retention and workloads, promote re-unification in a timelier fashion, decreasing case times and reentries, and provide timely access to needed services. With the assessments and assistance offered by the SCAC, the 180 children in our district who had 2 or more placements would have the supports they need to avoid being moved to another placement. For the whole state 1,201 or 41.9 % of kids would have the supports they need to avoid being moved (data is from IDHW).