

RCW 13.34.090 Rights under chapter proceedings. (1) Any party has a right to be represented by an attorney in all proceedings under this chapter, to introduce evidence, to be heard in his or her own behalf, to examine witnesses, to receive a decision based solely on the evidence adduced at the hearing, and to an unbiased fact finder.

(2) At all stages of a proceeding in which a child is alleged to be dependent, the child's parent, guardian, or legal custodian has the right to be represented by counsel, and if indigent, to have counsel appointed for him or her by the court. Unless waived in court, counsel shall be provided to the child's parent, guardian, or legal custodian, if such person (a) has appeared in the proceeding or requested the court to appoint counsel and (b) is financially unable to obtain counsel because of indigency.

(3) At all stages of a proceeding in which a child is alleged to be dependent, the child has the right to be represented by counsel. Counsel shall be provided at public expense subject to the phase-in schedule as provided in RCW 13.34.212.

(4) If a party to an action under this chapter is represented by counsel, no order shall be provided to that party for his or her signature without prior notice and provision of the order to counsel.

(5) Copies of department records to which the child and the child's parents have legal access pursuant to chapter 13.50 RCW shall be given to the child or child's counsel, and the parents, guardian, legal custodian, or his or her legal counsel, prior to any shelter care hearing and within 15 days after the department receives a written request for such records from the child or child's counsel, and the parents, guardian, legal custodian, or his or her legal counsel. These records shall be provided to the child's parents, guardian, legal custodian, or legal counsel a reasonable period of time prior to the shelter care hearing in order to allow an opportunity to review the records prior to the hearing. These records shall be legible and shall be provided at no expense to the child or child's counsel, and the parents, guardian, legal custodian, or his or her counsel. When the records are served on legal counsel, legal counsel shall have the opportunity to review the records with the client and shall review the records with the client prior to the shelter care hearing. The department shall make every effort to provide all other discoverable material to the child's parent, guardian, legal custodian, or his or her legal counsel prior to any shelter care hearing. [2021 c 211 § 10; 2021 c 210 § 2; 2017 3rd sp.s. c 6 § 303; 2000 c 122 § 10. Prior: 1998 c 328 § 3; 1998 c 141 § 1; 1990 c 246 § 4; 1979 c 155 § 42; 1977 ex.s. c 291 § 37.]

Reviser's note: This section was amended by 2021 c 210 § 2 and by 2021 c 211 § 10, each without reference to the other. Both amendments are incorporated in the publication of this section under RCW 1.12.025(2). For rule of construction, see RCW 1.12.025(1).

Effective date—Short title—Finding—Intent—2021 c 211: See note following RCW 13.34.040.

Findings—Intent—2021 c 210: "(1) The legislature recognizes that dependency proceedings determine many critical aspects of a child's future, including whether the child may remain at home with their family, whether and how often the child sees their parents and siblings if they do not remain with their family, where the child attends school, and how long the child remains in state care. Children

and youth, regardless of age, have many legal rights at stake in these proceedings, including a right to maintain family relationships, a right to freedom from harm, and a right to reasonable safety. Standards-based representation by a well-qualified attorney can be invaluable in protecting and advancing the child's legal rights and, where articulable, stated interests. Attorneys can advise and assist children and youth in presenting their experiences and position to the court, improving the court's comprehensive decision making.

(2) The legislature further recognizes that appointing attorneys to provide standards-based legal representation for children and youth in dependency proceedings has been shown to result in more timely permanency for children and youth, increased school and placement stability, and increased contact with parents and siblings.

(3) The legislature finds that the current system for child legal representation is inadequate and has resulted in a patchwork system that varies by county leading to many children and youth not having equal access to the court process. This is particularly true when significant events, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, result in sudden changes to court rules and procedures.

(4) The legislature further finds that black and indigenous children and youth and other youth of color are much more likely to be removed from their parents' care, placed into foster care, and remain in the child welfare system longer than white children. Systemic racism contributes to this overrepresentation and to the lack of meaningful access to the court process for children and their families. It is the intent of the legislature to ensure that any expansion of legal representation actively combat this disproportionality." [2021 c 210 § 1.]

Effective date—2017 3rd sp.s. c 6 §§ 102, 104-115, 201-227, 301-337, 401-419, 501-513, 801-803, and 805-822: See note following RCW 43.216.025.

Conflict with federal requirements—2017 3rd sp.s. c 6: See RCW 43.216.908.

Severability—1990 c 246: See note following RCW 13.34.060.

Effective date—Severability—1979 c 155: See notes following RCW 13.04.011.

Effective dates—Severability—1977 ex.s. c 291: See notes following RCW 13.04.005.

Notice of rights: RCW 26.44.105.