CERTIFICATION OF ENROLLMENT

SENATE BILL 5761

Chapter 413, Laws of 2025

69th Legislature
2025 Regular Session

DEPENDENCY AND TERMINATION PROCEEDINGS—ATTORNEYS FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH—IMPLEMENTATION DELAY

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 27, 2025

Passed by the Senate April 24, 2025
Yeas 45 Nays 3

DENNY HECK

President of the Senate

Passed by the House April 22, 2025
Yeas 87 Nays 9

LAURIE JINKINS

Speaker of the House of Representatives

Approved May 20, 2025 1:24 PM

BOB FERGUSON

Governor of the State of Washington

CERTIFICATE

I, Sarah Bannister, Secretary of the Senate of the State of Washington, do hereby certify that the attached is **SENATE BILL 5761** as passed by the Senate and the House of Representatives on the dates hereon set forth.

SARAH BANNISTER

Secretary

FILED

May 21, 2025

Secretary of State
State of Washington

SENATE BILL 5761

AS AMENDED BY THE HOUSE

Passed Legislature - 2025 Regular Session

State of Washington 69th Legislature 2025 Regular Session

By Senators Frame and Nobles

Read first time 02/17/25. Referred to Committee on Ways & Means.

AN ACT Relating to developing a schedule for court appointment of attorneys for children and youth in dependency and termination proceedings; amending RCW 13.34.212; and creating a new section.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

Sec. 1. RCW 13.34.212 and 2024 c 25 s 1 are each amended to read as follows:

(1)(a) The court shall appoint an attorney for a child in a dependency proceeding six months after granting a petition to terminate the parent and child relationship pursuant to RCW 13.34.180 and when there is no remaining parent with parental rights.

(b) The court may appoint one attorney to a group of siblings, unless there is a conflict of interest, or such representation is otherwise inconsistent with the rules of professional conduct.

(c) Subject to availability of amounts appropriated for this specific purpose, the state shall pay the costs of legal services provided by an attorney appointed pursuant to (a) of this subsection if the legal services are provided in accordance with the rules of professional conduct, the standards of practice, caseload limits, and training guidelines adopted by the statewide children's representation work group pursuant to section 5, chapter 180, Laws of 2010 until such time that new recommendations are adopted by the

children's representation work group established in section 9, chapter 210, Laws of 2021.

(d) The office of civil legal aid is responsible for implementation of (c) of this subsection as provided in RCW 2.53.045.

(e) Legal services provided by an attorney pursuant to (a) of this subsection do not include representation of the child in any appellate proceedings relative to the termination of the parent and child relationship.

(2)(a) The court may appoint an attorney to represent the child's position in any dependency action on its own initiative, or upon the request of a parent, the child, a guardian ad litem, a caregiver, or the department.

(b)(i) If the court has not already appointed an attorney for a child, or the child is not represented by a privately retained attorney:

(A) The child's caregiver, or any individual, may refer the child to an attorney for the purposes of filing a motion to request appointment of an attorney at public expense; or

(B) The child or any individual may retain an attorney for the child for the purposes of filing a motion to request appointment of an attorney at public expense.

(ii) Nothing in this subsection changes or alters the confidentiality provisions of RCW 13.50.100.

(c) The department and the child's guardian ad litem shall each notify a child of the child's right to request an attorney and shall ask the child whether the child wishes to have an attorney. The department and the child's guardian ad litem shall notify the child and make this inquiry immediately after:

(i) The date of the child's 12th birthday; or

(ii) Assignment of a case involving a child age 12 or older.

(d) The department and the child's guardian ad litem shall repeat the notification and inquiry at least annually and upon the filing of any motion or petition affecting the child's placement, services, or familial relationships.

(e) The notification and inquiry is not required if the child has already been appointed an attorney.

(f) The department shall note in the child's individual service and safety plan, and the guardian ad litem shall note in his or her report to the court, that the child was notified of the right to

request an attorney and indicate the child's position regarding appointment of an attorney.

(g) At the first regularly scheduled hearing after:

(i) The date of the child's 12th birthday; or

(ii) The date that a dependency petition is filed pursuant to this chapter on a child age 12 or older;

the court shall inquire whether the child has received notice of his or her right to request an attorney from the department and the child's guardian ad litem. The court shall make an additional inquiry at the first regularly scheduled hearing after the child's 15th birthday. No inquiry is necessary if the child has already been appointed an attorney.

(3) Subject to the availability of amounts appropriated for this specific purpose:

(a) Pursuant to the phase-in schedule set forth in (c) of this subsection (3), the court must appoint an attorney for every child in a dependency proceeding as follows:

(i) For a child under the age of eight, appointment must be made for the dependency and termination action upon the filing of a termination petition. Nothing in this subsection shall be construed to limit the ability of the court to appoint an attorney to represent the child's position in a dependency action on its own initiative, or upon the request of a parent, the child, a guardian ad litem, a caregiver, or the department, prior to the filing of a termination petition.

(ii) For a child between the ages of eight through 17, appointment must be made upon the filing of a new dependency petition at or before the commencement of the shelter care hearing.

(iii) For any pending or open dependency case where the child is unrepresented and is entitled to the appointment of an attorney under (a)(i) or (ii) of this subsection, appointment must be made at or before the next hearing if the child is eligible for representation pursuant to the phase-in schedule. At the next hearing, the court shall inquire into the status of attorney representation for the child, and if the child is not yet represented, appointment must be made at the hearing.

(b) Appointment is not required if the court has already appointed an attorney for the child, or the child is represented by a privately retained attorney.

(c) The statewide children's legal representation program shall develop a schedule for court appointment of attorneys for every child in dependency proceedings that will be phased in on a county-by-county basis over ((~~a seven-year~~)) an 11-year period. The schedule required under this subsection must not add more than 1,250 cases each fiscal year and:

(i) To the extent practicable, prioritize implementation in counties that have:

(A) No current practice of appointment of attorneys for children in dependency cases; or

(B) Significant prevalence of racial disproportionality or disparities in the number of dependent children compared to the general population, or both;

(ii) Include representation in at least:

(A) Three counties beginning July 1, 2022;

(B) Eight counties beginning January 1, 2023;

(C) Fifteen counties beginning January 1, 2024;

(D) Twenty counties beginning January 1, 2025;

(E) Thirty counties beginning January 1, ((~~2026~~)) 2030;

(F) Thirty-six counties beginning ((~~in~~)) January 1, ((~~2027~~)) 2031; and

(iii) Achieve full statewide implementation by January 1, ((~~2028~~)) 2032.

(d) In cases where the statewide children's legal representation program provides funding and where consistent with its administration and oversight responsibilities, the statewide children's legal representation program should prioritize continuity of counsel for children who are already represented at county expense when the statewide children's legal representation program becomes effective in a county. The statewide children's legal representation program shall coordinate with relevant county stakeholders to determine how best to prioritize this continuity of counsel.

(e) The statewide children's legal representation program is responsible for the recruitment, training, and oversight of attorneys providing standards-based representation pursuant to (a) and (c) of this subsection as provided in RCW 2.53.045 and shall ensure that attorneys representing children pursuant to this section provide legal services according to the rules of professional conduct, the standards of practice, caseload limits, and training guidelines

adopted by the children's representation work group established in section 9, chapter 210, Laws of 2021.

NEW SECTION. **Sec. 2.** If specific funding for the purposes of this act, referencing this act by bill or chapter number, is not provided by June 30, 2025, in the omnibus appropriations act, this act is null and void.

Passed by the Senate April 24, 2025.
Passed by the House April 22, 2025.
Approved by the Governor May 20, 2025.
Filed in Office of Secretary of State May 21, 2025.

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