

**JUDICIAL WORKLOAD IN WASHINGTON
STATE DEPENDENCY CASES**

Washington State Administrative Office of the Courts
National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges

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Introduction

- How much time and resource allocation does it take to conduct effective hearing practice in dependency cases?
- How much time and resources allocation is necessary when substantive hearings are conducted consistent with the **RESOURCE GUIDELINES: Improving Court Practice in Child Abuse & Neglect Cases**,¹ the nationally recognized standards for best practice?
- How does the complex leadership role of the judge in dependency cases – one that includes on-the-bench and off-the-bench case specific tasks as well as court improvement and collaborative systems’ reform activities – affect time and resource needs?

These are the questions answered in a groundbreaking study of judicial workload and best practice implementation in dependency cases in the State of Washington. In partnership with the Washington State Court Improvement Project (CIP) and the Administrative Office of the Courts, the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (NCJFCJ) are conducting a multi-year assessment, including an evaluation of how judicial workload impacts dependency case practice and outcomes, called the Washington Workload Study. This report provides an overview of the findings obtained about judicial workload and judicial need in each project site, as well as an explanation of the research design and methods used. Practice reforms implemented to date as a result of the findings are summarized, and recommendations to address judicial workload and to align practice more fully with “best practice” guidelines are discussed.

Merely counting the number of dependency cases per commissioner or judge and the average time it takes to hear those cases does not fully reflect the work necessary to process dependency cases. **Dependency cases are complex and unique.** They require active and consistent court oversight, frequent court reviews, and a broad and active scope of inquiry from the bench, all within demanding state and federal time frames. Dependency cases also require collaboration among courts, child welfare agencies, and service providers, in addition to more community involvement than most other types of cases. As a result, to best determine what judicial resources are needed (judges and commissioners) in dependency cases, **Washington Workload Study applied an expanded approach to dependency workload measurement with the goal of providing a more complete picture of judicial workload** – one that accounts for the unique complexity of dependency cases, assesses the quality of hearing practice, and objectively determines judicial need. In addition, because of its focus on the “best practices” articulated in the **RESOURCE GUIDELINES**,¹ the approach not only focuses on the number of judges needed, but also generates recommendations about possible procedural and practice changes that may improve the efficiency and quality of dependency case processing.

Washington Workload Study Overview and Goals

- **Develop an effective way to assess judicial workload dependency cases through expanded methodology and workload assessment tools**
- **Assess judicial workload in the context of resource needs for implementation of court-based best practices**
- **Identify key elements, lessons learned, and overall recommendations [the study identified recommendations? Or recommendations were developed from what the study identified?] to help guide local, state and national reform efforts**

¹ **RESOURCE GUIDELINES: Improving Court Practice in Child Abuse & Neglect Cases**, National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (1995).

The Project Sites

King County (Seattle and Kent)

- Urban and suburban demographic
- 2009 Petition Filings: 619
- Two commissioners (one in Seattle and one in Kent) hear non-contested dependency hearings
- Commissioners hear dependency cases every day
- One judge oversees dependency pre-trials and trials full time
- One Family Treatment Court (FTC) judge in King County oversees dependency hearings for cases that are part of the FTC. These cases typically come in after adjudication, which means the FTC judge usually only oversees review and permanency hearings
- An estimated one-third to one-half of dependency trials are brokered out to one of the approximately 50 other judges in King County as needed due to schedules and conflicts
- Interviews with the judges indicated that they are assigned dependency trials approximately once or twice a month, constituting an average of 17% of their workload (range 10% to 25%)
- King County participates in the NCJFCJ's national Model Court Project (see www.ncjfcj.org for more detail)

Mason County (Shelton)

- Suburban and rural demographic
- 2009 Petition Filings: 59
- One commissioner hears non-contested dependency cases
- The commissioner hears dependency cases one afternoon per week
- Approximately 18% of the commissioner's overall workload includes both on- and off-the-bench activity related to dependency cases, with 82% of the commissioner's time spent on other case types and off-the-bench non-dependency related activity
- One judge oversees contested adjudications and TPR trials

Spokane County (Spokane)

- Urban and suburban demographic
- 2009 Petition Filings: 479
- Six commissioners oversee the majority of dependency hearings from shelter care hearings through the achievement of permanency
- Each commissioner is devoted to juvenile dependency cases one day a week.
- If the case goes to TPR, one of 12 judges will hear the TPR trial and follow the case through post-termination reviews
- Commissioners follow an adaptation of one family/ one judge model. One commissioner, based on rotation, handles all incoming cases and conducts the shelter care hearings. The initial commissioner then assigns the cases to the other commissioners. Once a commissioner receives a case post-shelter care hearing, the case stays with that commissioner²
- All of the six commissioners hear both dependency and juvenile delinquency cases

The commissioners do the majority of the work on dependency cases.

² In a more pure one family - one judge model, the judicial officer would hear the shelter hearing and all subsequent hearings on the same case.

A total of 436 dependency hearings were coded by judicial officers during the baseline assessment period:

- **King County: 322 hearings**
- **Mason County: 17 hearings**
- **Spokane County: 101 hearings**

General Practices Common across the Three Project Sites

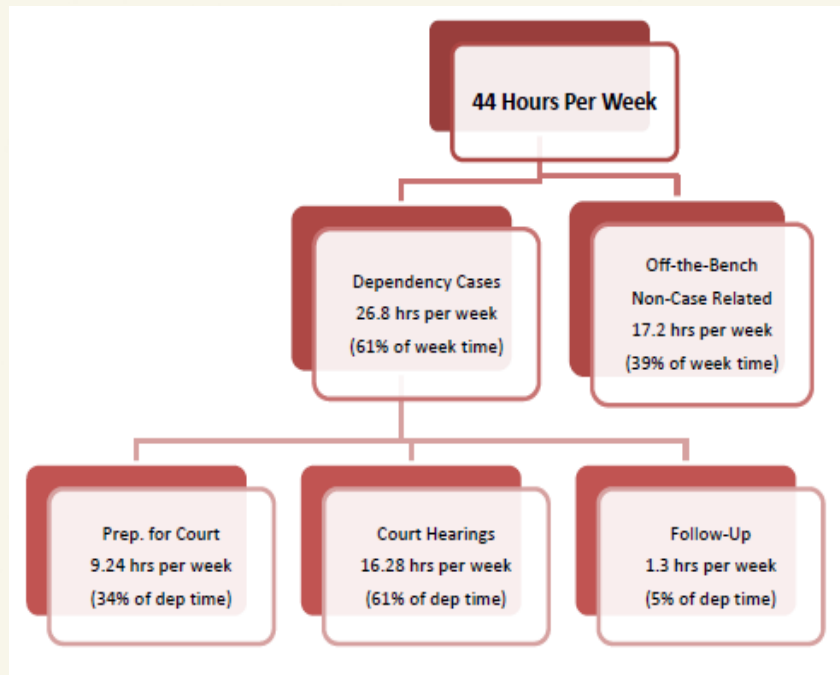
- Commissioners typically oversee cases from the start of the case through case resolution.
- Commissioners oversee all shelter care hearings.
- At the adjudication stage, the majority of cases in all three sites resulted in a stipulation to certain allegations or agreement to dismiss specific allegations.
- In a minority of cases in which an agreement is not reached, a judge conducts a contested adjudication trial. Once the contested trial is completed, if the child remains under the jurisdiction of the state, the case returns to the commissioner for all subsequent reviews and hearings.
- Judges typically preside over trials, most notably the termination of parental rights hearings (TPR hearings).
- Commissioners in Mason and Spokane Counties typically oversee more than one case type. At a minimum, commissioners oversee dependency cases and other juvenile matters (e.g., delinquency, truancy, child in need of care cases).

Allocation of Percentage of Time on Dependency Cases in Project Sites

Through an analysis of data sources, an average percentage of commissioners' time both on- and off-the-bench was calculated across all project sites³. Off-the-bench judicial time addressed three components – dependency case preparation and follow-up, non-dependency case preparation and follow-up, and “other” activities (e.g., administrative tasks, training and educational programs, outreach and collaboration efforts, personal leave, and lunch periods).

³ While estimates are not meant to be completely representative of a judicial officer's typical day across all study participants, they do reflect a snapshot of practice during the three-week baseline assessment from the perspective of those responsible for hearing the bulk of dependency related cases.

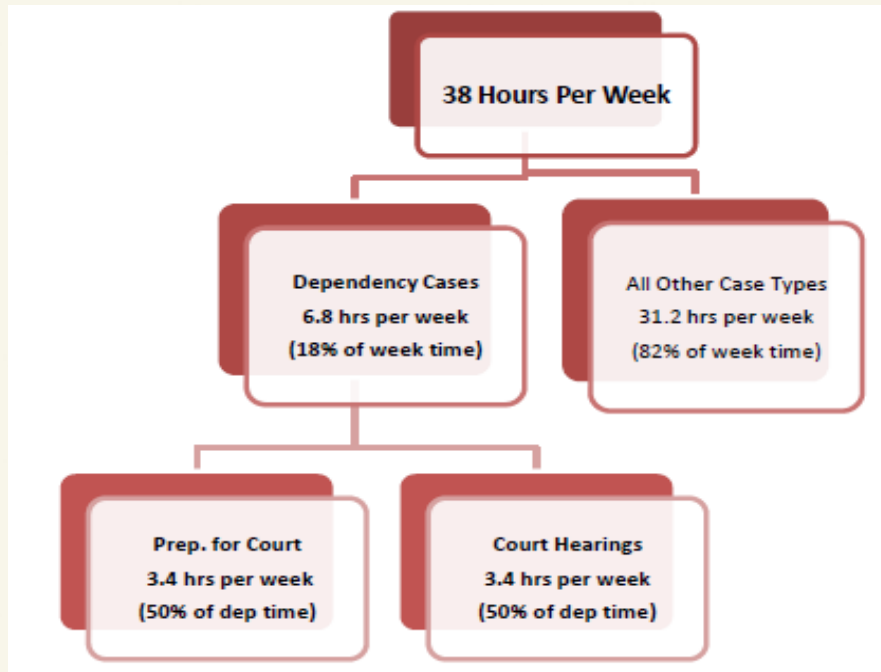
King County



King County

- Two commissioners oversee the majority of dependency cases in King County. The commissioner in Seattle has twice as many hearings per day compared to the judicial officer in Kent.
- The judge presiding over the Family Treatment Court (FTC) oversees dependency cases that are part of the FTC. Typically, cases enter the FTC post adjudication and the commissioner oversees subsequent review and permanency hearings.
- Due to scheduling challenges, conflicts and overall workload constraints, an estimated one-third to one-half of dependency trials in King County are distributed out to approximately 50 other judges. Brief interviews with three of 50 judges indicated that they are assigned dependency trials once or twice a month, constituting an average of 17% of their overall workload.

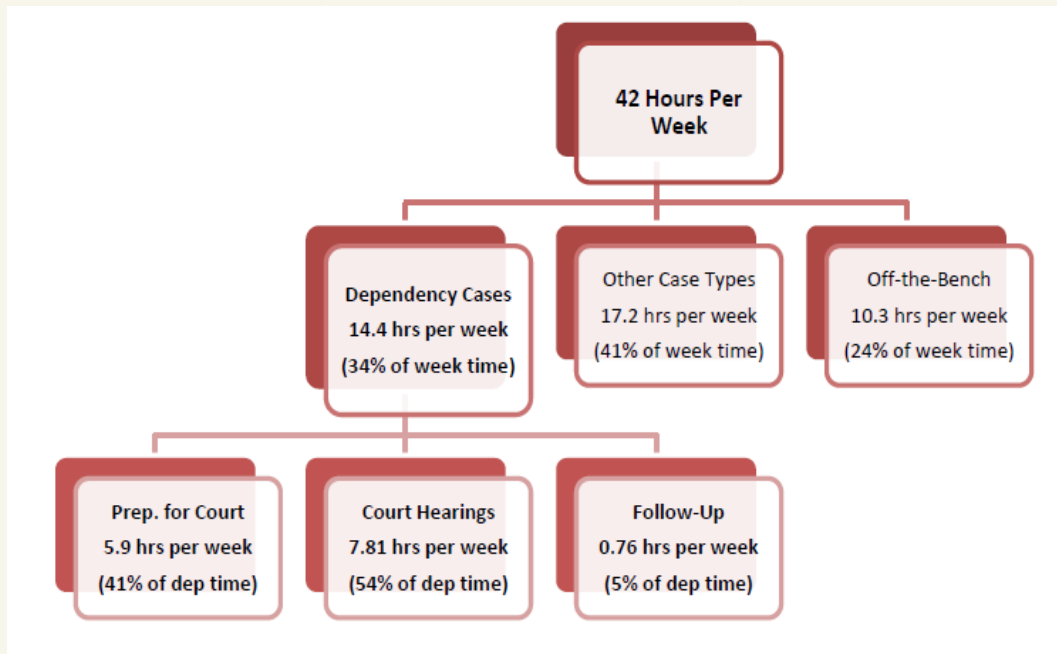
Mason County



Mason County

- One judge handles all of the contested adjudication and TPR trials. One commissioner handles all other aspects of dependency cases.
- Commissioner also hears other case types, including truancy, children in need of care, etc.

Spokane County



Spokane County

- Six commissioners oversee dependency cases from shelter hearings through the achievement of permanency.
- Commissioners also hear other case types (e.g., truancy, child in need of care, delinquency cases).
- If a case goes to a TPR trial, one of 12 judges will hear the TPR trial and follow the case through post-termination reviews.

Estimated Judicial Need across Project Sites

Judicial FTE Needs across Project Sites				
	FTE (AOC)	Additional FTE Needed for Basic Practice	Additional FTE for Better Practice	Additional FTE for Better Practice & Parent(s) in Court
King County	2.30	+1.39 (3.69 FTE)	+3.69 (5.99 FTE)	+5.50 (7.80 FTE)
Mason County	0.09	+0.05 (0.10 FTE)	+0.09 (0.18 FTE)	+0.13 (0.22 FTE)
Spokane County	2.00	+0.00 (2.00 FTE)	+0.00 (2.00 FTE)	+0.45 (2.45 FTE)

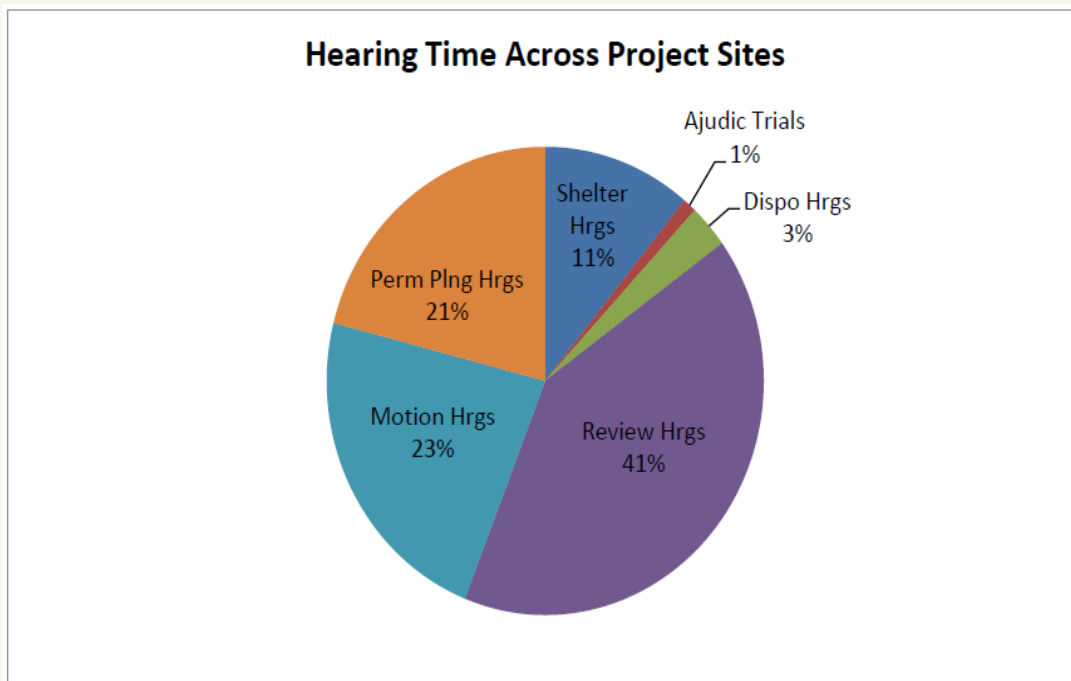
As the table above indicates, in both Mason and Spokane Counties, further judicial time might not be necessary. Note, however, that Spokane may need an additional 0.5 FTE to support best practice for substantive hearings with parents present in court. With a best practice orientation, parent(s) should be strongly encouraged to attend and participate in all hearings (see *RESOURCE GUIDELINES*). In practice, hearings in which parent(s) are actively engaged require significantly more judicial time spent in hearings. However, more intensive and longer hearings have a significant impact on the overall amount of time needed to resolve a dependency case from the shelter hearing to the final permanency outcome.

In King County, and in Seattle in particular, there needs to be more dedicated judicial time for dependency cases. At a minimum, it appears that an additional 3.5 FTE (for a total of 5.99 FTE) in judicial time is necessary, especially when you consider the dependency cases that are handled by other judges in King County. Overall, the commissioner in Seattle is hearing more than twice the number of dependency hearings than the commissioner in Kent. In response to the judicial workload assessment and to begin to address efficiency concerns, King County has added another judge part-time to dependency cases in order to reduce the commissioners' workload. A new mediation program has also been implemented.

Adding judicial resources, strengthening the court process, identifying non-hearing alternatives that can be implemented (e.g., mediation), and maximizing the efficiency of practice from all aspects of the system (attorney practice, caseworker practice, service provision, etc.) will support judicial workload within best practice guidelines.

Dependency Hearings

The average number of hearings per day across all project sites was 10, with a range of six hearings in Mason County to 18 hearings per day in King County. Overall, the majority of hearings were review hearings (41%), followed by motion hearings (23%) and permanency planning hearings (21%).



Hearing Type x Average Time x Quality of Hearing

The overall average time taken in each hearing type is outlined below. Shelter care hearings are generally longer than the other hearing types. The only factor that impacted the hearing discussion was the level of discussion related to the court reports. Factors that were discussed in court reports were also discussed more in the hearing.

Hearing Type	Average Time (in minutes)	Average Time with Substantive Discussion	Average Time with Substantive Discussion Contested	Average Time with Substantive Discussion Non-Contested
Shelter Care	33	63	84	33
Disposition	16	30	--	25
Review	18	22	56	20
Permanency	16	22	80	15

Shelter Hearings across All Project Sites

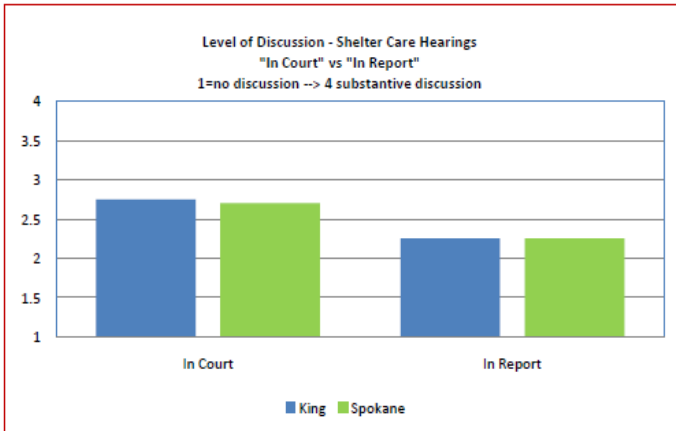
Shelter Hearing: Average Length of Hearing

King County: 30 minutes

Mason County: ----

Spokane County: 38 minutes

- Only one shelter hearing was observed in Mason County during the assessment period. The shelter hearing was a long hearing and may not be representative of more general practice.
- On average, shelter hearings were twice as long as all other hearing types.



- 3.5 – 4.0 reflects a “Substantial Discussion” rating provided by judicial officers. In none of the sites was overall discussion rated as 3.0 or higher.
- The highest best practice ratings of discussion levels, across both sites, were obtained for “parent(s) rights,” “current placement of the child,” and “service to parents.”
- The lowest ratings of discussion levels, across both project sites, were obtained for “ICWA inquiries and findings.”

RESOURCE GUIDELINES & Key Best Practices – Shelter Hearing

	1 (Not Addressed) to 4 (Substantive Discussion)			
	King		Spokane	
	Court Discussion	In Social Report	Court Discussion	In Social Report
Parents’ Rights	3.13	2.10	3.00	2.06
Current Placement	3.03	2.50	3.08	2.50
Relative Resources	2.42	1.91	2.42	1.97
Services to Child	2.33	2.08	2.33	2.08
Services to Parent(s)	3.14	2.66	3.06	2.61
Child Well Being	2.58	2.89	2.65	1.90
Visitation (parent and sibling)	3.03	1.73	2.97	1.74
ICWA Inquiries and Findings	1.91	2.06	2.00	2.03
Overall Average Rating per Project Site	2.70	2.24	2.69	2.11
Overall Average Rating	Court Discussion: 2.70 Social Report: 2.18			

Review Hearings across All Project Sites

Review Hearing: Length of Hearing

King County: 17 minutes

Mason County: 27 minutes

Spokane County: 17 minutes

- Across all project sites, review hearings, on average, lasted approximately 20 minutes.
- In addition to review hearings, motion hearings averaged 20 minutes (see next page for further discussion of motion hearings).

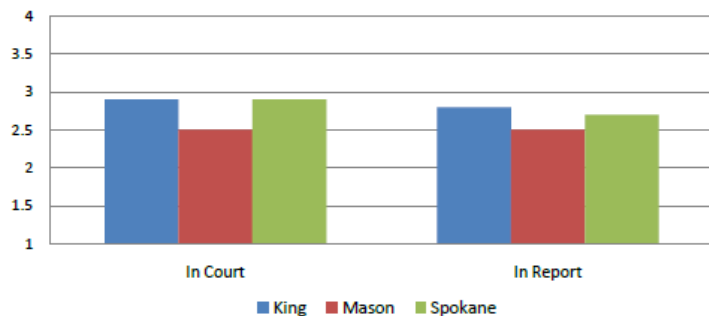
- 3.5 – 4.0 reflects a “Substantial Discussion” rating provided by judicial officers. Across all sites, the overall level of discussion never reached a rating of 3.0, which would indicate sufficient discussion.

- In Mason County, the level of discussion related to both “In Court” and “In Report” was less than in King and Spokane Counties.

- In King and Spokane Counties, the highest rated best practice was “child well being.” In Mason County, the highest rated best practice was “visitation.”

- Lowest rated practice area across all sites was review of the “timeframes for achieving permanency.”

Level of Discussion - Review Hearings
“In Court” vs “In Report”
1= no discussion --> 4 substantive discussion



RESOURCE GUIDELINES & Key Best Practices – Review Hearing

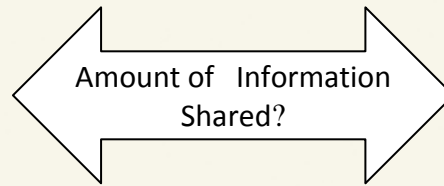
	1 (Not Addressed) to 4 (Substantive Discussion)					
	King		Mason		Spokane	
	Court Discussion	In Social Report	Court Discussion	In Social Report	Court Discussion	In Social Report
Permanency Goal	3.05	2.86	2.25	2.71	2.93	2.78
Progress on Case Plan	3.03	3.06	2.43	2.57	3.01	3.00
Adequacy of Case Plan	2.98	2.73	2.14	2.43	2.88	2.68
Review of Child Placement	3.03	3.12	2.50	2.43	2.94	2.95
Child Well Being	3.16	3.04	2.71	2.71	3.07	3.00
Visitation (Parent and Sibling)	2.76	2.45	3.20	2.00	2.74	2.45
Timeframes for Achieving Permanency	2.65	2.24	2.14	2.14	2.57	2.28
Overall Average Rating per Project Site	2.95	1.95	2.48	2.43	2.88	2.73
Overall Average Rating	Court Discussion: 2.77 Social Report: 2.37					

Review Hearings and Motion Hearings

Given the issues addressed in some of the observed hearings, the difference between review and motion hearings raises an interesting question ... **if review hearings were longer hearings with more substantive information and discussion, would additional motion hearings still be needed?**

Motion Hearings					
	Percentage of Docket Devoted to Motion Hearings	Average Number of Motion Hearings Per Day	Average Length of Time Per Motion Hearing	Average Length of Time on Motion Hearings Per Day	Most Common Reasons for Motion
King	23%	5.50	20 minutes	110 minutes (1.83 hrs)	*Continuance* Placement Visitation Parent Rights Contempt Vacate/Withdraw Attorney To Dismiss
Mason	12%	0.67	20 minutes	14 minutes (0.23 hrs)	
Spokane	26%	2.60	18 minutes	47 minutes (0.78 hrs)	

Review Hearing

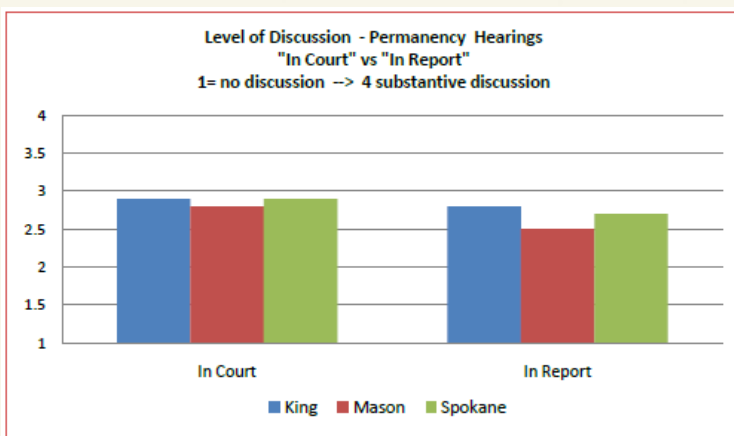


Motion Hearing

The use of motion hearings appears to be common practice in both King and Spokane Counties, where motion hearings are second only to reviews on the docket. Two of the most common reasons for motions are *placement* and *visitation*-items which are best practice discussion topics in review hearings. Both King and Spokane indicate close to sufficient discussion of child placement and slightly less than sufficient discussion of visitation in review hearings. A more substantive discussion of both of these items in review hearings might result in fewer motion hearings. This could be both a resource and an efficiency issue. In King County, where there are fewer resources, adding additional resources might enable the courts to have longer hearings with more substantive discussion and more frequent reviews. This might diminish the number of motions hearings. In Spokane, where there are more judicial resources, this may indicate a need for greater time spent in hearings to further discuss the issues so that motions are less common.

Permanency Planning Hearings across All Project Sites

- Across all project sites, permanency hearings, on average, lasted approximately 16 minutes.
- 3.5 – 4.0 reflects a “Substantial Discussion” rating provided by judicial officers. Across all sites, the overall level of discussion did not reach 3.0, indicating none of the sites reached sufficient discussion levels of all items.
- In King and Spokane Counties, the highest rated best practice was “final permanency goal” and “child well being.” In Mason County, the highest rated best practice was “parents’ progress” and “identified steps to achieve final permanency.”
- The lowest rated best practice across all sites was the discussion of “15 of 22 months/compelling reasons,” an ASFA required discussion regarding reasons for or against termination of parental rights.



RESOURCE GUIDELINES & Key Best Practices – Permanency Hearing

1 (Not Addressed) to 4 (Substantive Discussion)

	King		Mason		Spokane	
	Court Discussion	In Social Report	Court Discussion	In Social Report	Court Discussion	In Social Report
Final Permanency Goal	3.24	3.08	2.83	2.60	3.25	3.06
Current Placement	3.03	3.08	2.25	2.00	3.00	3.02
Parents' Progress – Goals	2.95	2.74	3.50	3.00	3.02	2.82
Barriers – Achieving Final Permanency	2.90	2.46	2.50	2.75	2.86	2.48
Identified Steps to Achieve Final Permanency	2.67	2.24	3.00	2.25	2.73	2.32
Child Well Being	3.20	3.18	2.20	2.00	3.06	3.09
15 to 22 months / Compelling Reasons	1.57	1.72	2.00	1.00	1.62	1.69
Overall Average Rating per Project Site	2.79	2.64	2.61	2.23	2.79	2.64
Overall Average Rating	Court Discussion: 2.73 Social Report: 2.50					

Summary of Key Findings

How time is spent:

- Pre-hearing preparation and post-hearing follow-up account for a significant portion of judicial workload, with the time spent on pre- and post-hearing work more than half that spent on the bench in hearings
- More time is spent in Shelter Care Hearings than all other hearing types (an average of 34 minutes), but according to the judicial officers in the study, 63 minutes would be required for substantive discussion

Judicial officers' report of time needed for substantive hearing practice ...

Shelter	63 minutes (compared to 33 minutes for status quo)
Disposition	30 minutes (compared to 16 minutes for status quo)
Review	22 minutes (compared to 18 minutes for status quo)
Permanency	22 minutes (compared to 16 minutes for status quo)

Total workload estimates:

- To maintain average level or status quo hearing practice, King County would need the equivalent of 1.4 FTE judicial officers to meet current workload needs. Mason County is nearly completely staffed, but could use the equivalent of 0.05 additional FTE judicial officers to meet current workload needs, while Spokane County needs no further judicial officers to maintain current workload levels.
- In order to accommodate the time needed for substantive discussion in hearings, King County would need the equivalent of 3.7 FTE judicial officers. Mason County would need the equivalent of 0.13 additional FTE judicial officers, while Spokane County would need the equivalent of 0.45 additional FTE judicial officers.

Practice issues and challenges identified:

Drawing on the workload assessments, some common issues identified with practice and workload improvement were:

- **Thoroughness and Timeliness**
 - Reasonable efforts findings were rarely made orally in court
 - Continuances were fairly frequent, with the primary reason for continuances being delayed report submission
 - Specific issues are not addressed thoroughly in hearings (e.g., ICWA, visitation (parent and siblings), services to children, compelling reasons, and timeframes for achieving permanency)
- **The Use and Availability of Reports**
 - Overall lack of consistency with respect to the use and availability of reports in hearing practice (e.g., reports are not consistently read in advance of hearings; reports are not delivered in timely fashion in advance of hearings; reports do not consistently address the key issues that should be addressed for specific hearing types)
 - Lack of judicial consistency of holding the agency accountable for the delivery of timely and substantive reports
- **Engagement of Parties**
 - Overall, parties were rarely present in court
 - Overall, parties were rarely engaged in hearings

Research Design and Method Used

Washington State's judicial workload assessment applied an expanded approach to dependency workload measurement with the goal of providing a more complete picture of judicial workload in dependency cases. Building on the strategies used to determine judicial workload generally,⁴ the research team worked with judicial officers in King and Mason Counties to determine how best to assess judicial workload.

The data collection tools were developed and tested over several months. Initial instruments were then tested and reviewed again by the judicial officers and research team to determine coding integrity and inter-rater reliability. Further changes were made as necessary, additional training on instrumentation undertaken, and the data collection instruments were finalized.

Weighted Caseload

- Case events were identified and the time spent on each event, as well as the frequency of each event, was determined.

Judicial Survey

- A judicial stakeholder survey was designed to supplement information obtained from the daily time logs. It was composed of a series of questions that asked judicial officers about their overall workload across all hearing types, as well as their workload more generally across dependency cases (i.e., workload in the aggregate rather than the "real time" work captured by the time logs).

Judicial Time Logs

- The time logs served as a tool for capturing the actual time spent by judges hearing dependency cases on various activities, on a daily basis, for a designated period of time.
- **On-the-Bench Judicial Time Log:** For each of the main dependency hearing types (preliminary protective, adjudication, disposition, review, and permanency), a list of key issues was outlined on judicial time logs. Judges were asked to note whether discussion of the issue occurred, and to rate the level of discussion in the hearing for each of the key issues on a four point scale, ranging from "Not Addressed," "Limited Discussion (Statement Only)," "Sufficient Discussion," and "Substantial Discussion." One time log was filled out by the judicial officers for *each* hearing of the specified types.

The active involvement of judicial officers in each project site was critical to the overall design and implementation of the workload assessment.

Judicial officers provided important insight into the hearing process, including the factors that may influence the court's ability to implement best practice standards.

Judicial officers' contributions to instrumentation not only facilitated the development of judicial time logs that could generate an accurate picture of the time and activities sufficient for dependency court practice, but also the development of the instruments that were capable of obtaining a measure of what is needed to code substantive hearing practice.

⁴See Hardin, H., Yuan, Y, Larsen, J., Gatowski, S., & Rubio, D. (2008). *Court Performance Measures in Child Abuse and Neglect Cases: Guide to Judicial Workload Assessment*. U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Children's Bureau: Washington, D.C. Available at: <http://www.ojjdp.ncjrs.gov/publications/courttoolkit.html>

- **Off-the-Bench Judicial Time Log:** The off-the-bench judicial time log included both case-related dependency activities and non-case related dependency activities. It also allowed for the tracking of non-dependency related activities. The time log allowed judges to indicate the amount of time spent doing each of the activities on any given day. The instrument was designed to be completed at the end of every day for a specified period of time.

Court Hearing Observation Form

- Captured the content and process of each type of hearing, as well as the depth of discussion in each hearing. The court observation forms, in conjunction with the judicial time logs, were used to assess current practice.

Case File Review Form

- A case file review process was used to better understand practice and workload in the project sites. Information reviewed included hearing dates, the number of and reason for continuances, parties present at each hearing and the level of detail included in case plans/court reports.

Measuring Judicial Workload and Calculating Judicial Need

Judicial workload in the Washington Study was calculated based on an equation that uses number of judicial officers, number of hearings, an average hearing time, estimates of time spent on-the-bench and off-the-bench, estimates of time required for average or sufficient practice, estimates of time required for substantive or “best” practice, and an estimated number of judicial work days. Data sources for the calculation variables were: Data provided by the Washington State AOC regarding available workdays, FTEs, etc.; completed judicial time logs (both on and off the bench); data from the case management information system; and judicial focus groups and stakeholder surveys.

For more detailed information on the research design and the data collection instruments, see:

***Measuring Judicial Workload in
Dependency Cases: Lessons Learned
from Washington State***

Examples of Practice Reforms

Collaborative Trainings: Strategic planning and focus group sessions with project site judicial officers and court officials based on the baseline workload assessment findings identified the need for collaborative training. These trainings could ensure that all stakeholders understand what is occurring and what needs to be occurring at hearings, including the importance of consistency and engagement of stakeholders in hearings. In addition, training for social workers and attorneys on the best practices outlined in the *RESOURCE GUIDELINES* may better prepare parties to answer the questions asked of them in hearings. In Seattle, where dependency cases are regularly assigned to other judges who do not typically hear dependency cases, training on *RESOURCE GUIDELINES* best practices may be especially valuable.

Increase Efficiency and Thoroughness of Hearings: From the baseline workload findings, judicial officers and other stakeholders in each project site identified the following strategies as ways to increase the efficiency and thoroughness of hearings:

- Develop a parent notification and engagement plan, as well as a foster parent engagement plan;
- Convene a judicial meeting to discuss issues surrounding engagement of parties;
- Explore alternate appearance methods;
- Make verbal reasonable efforts findings in court, ensuring through discussion in court of ASFA and timelines for achieving permanency;
- Increase discussion of relevant best practice issues;
- Hold social workers accountable for late reports; and
- Set specific deadlines for mutually agreed issues

King County: Workload changes included adding another judicial officer to pilot a one-family/ one-judge approach to case processing whereby one judge oversees the case from start to finish. The addition of the judicial officer allows for a 20% reduction of the workload of the original judicial officer, who had been overseeing the majority of the cases. A second project involved developing and implementing a mediation program. The mediation program has the potential to impact workload in multiple ways and is being assessed as an ongoing reform. Coordination between the workload study and King County Model Court activities will continue, with special attention to how performance and decision outcomes may differ for racial and ethnic groups involved in the dependency court. King County will also meet with attorney stakeholders to obtain commitments for additional resources and to discuss more efficient scheduling practice in order to reduce attorney-related continuances.

Mason County: As part of the training and strategic planning process, the commissioner and stakeholders have made changes to their calendaring procedures. Mason County is also focusing on improving the substance of hearings, with researchers already noting marked changes in hearing practice after the baseline workload assessment, including an increase in discussion of key issues during hearings (i.e., relative placements, child well-being) and an increase in findings made on the record. There has also been an improvement in the timeliness and substance of reports.

Spokane County: The court is planning to convene a judicial and stakeholder forum to discuss the baseline workload assessment findings and to identify areas in which they feel training, revision of practice, and reallocation or addition of resources might be needed to improve workload and dependency practice.

Conclusions

Across the three study sites, shelter care hearings currently last 33 minutes. For substantive hearings conducted consistent with the *RESOURCE GUIDELINES*, these hearing require substantially more time – 63 minutes. Substantive shelter care hearings require just over an hour to include substantive discussion of best practice topics. For contested cases, the time needed is even greater – 84 minutes on average. This is significantly more than what is being allocated currently.

Similarly, the average disposition hearing takes 16 minutes, but a substantive hearing would require 30 minutes on average, nearly twice as long. Permanency hearings last 16 minutes on average and require 22 minutes for substantive discussion, but contested permanency hearings require 80 minutes on average.

This study took into account not only the time in hearings that judges must accommodate, but the duties outside of hearings that require judges' time, such as active and consistent court oversight, frequent court reviews, and a broad and active scope of inquiry from the bench. What the study found for the three sites was that in Spokane, further judicial time might not be necessary. Although, in Spokane may need an additional 0.5 FTE to support best practice for substantive hearings with parents present in court. The *RESOURCE GUIDELINES* recommends that parent(s) should be strongly encouraged to attend and participant in all hearings. In Mason County, there may be some need for additional judicial time, but the need is not great. In King County, and in Seattle in particular, there needs to be more dedicated judicial time for dependency cases. At a minimum, it appears that an additional 3.5 FTE in judicial time is necessary. In response to the work of this study, the Seattle court has begun to address efficiency concerns. King County has added another judge part-time to dependency cases in order to reduce the commissioners' workload. A new mediation program has also been implemented.

The next steps of this project are to follow-up on these three study sites as well as across the state to assess how practice interventions and initiatives are affecting judicial workload and outcomes for children and families in Washington State.