



Lean Analysis: Streamlining Juvenile Proceedings

In October 2016, an interdisciplinary working group recommended that the Judiciary consider various proposed improvements to the child abuse and neglect docket, including:

- Increase **time allocated for hearings**, and schedule subsequent hearings from the bench at the temporary care hearing in consultation with courtroom scheduling staff
 - Improve training for all stakeholders on **mediation and collaboration**
 - Establish a pilot program to **hold a “collaboration hearing”** prior to the temporary care hearing
 - Assign a judicial master or person with similar authority to coordinate services and foster collaborative resolutions to disputes
 - Assign a guardian ad litem
 - Encourage prosecutors to withdraw emergency care petitions if parents comply with substance abuse treatment or other needed services
 - In cases where there is noncompliance with services, the judicial master (or similar individual) can prepare a report for the judge outlining placement and treatment options, risk factors, and recommendations
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Overview

In 2017, the Supreme Court tasked the State Court Administrator’s Office with pursuing the recommendations put forward by this working group. Unfortunately, unanticipated and prolonged staffing uncertainties hampered efforts to implement these recommendations.

Position

Upcoming staffing changes will enable the Judiciary to advance this project and pursue implementation of these recommendations.

With financial and technical assistance from the Department of Environmental Conservation, the Judiciary convened an interdisciplinary working group in October 2016 to explore improvements to abuse/neglect proceedings. The group analyzed how courts schedule and resolve matters from inception of the case up to merits hearings.

The working group included a judge, a court clerk, a public defender, a prosecutor, an assistant attorney general, four DCF employees, and 2 guardians ad litem.

During its weeklong analysis, the group concluded that:

- Courts often fail to reserve sufficient time when scheduling temporary care hearings, and default times vary from county to county (ranging from 15-minute blocks to 30-minute ones)
 - While recent increases in abuse/neglect filings contributed to delays in filing initial case plans, other factors also caused delay, including whether the bench and bar work collaboratively
 - The process of requiring each party to obtain medical and educational information is inefficient; delays could be mitigated if all parties received these essential documents timely
 - Needlessly inflammatory affidavits impede settlement
 - Judges should conduct hearings with improved direction, collaboration, and efficiency
 - Hearings are sometimes rescheduled because attorneys can’t reach their clients to remind them about the hearings; many clients lack access to reliable phone services
 - Courts underutilize conditional care orders
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Background

For More Information

Patricia Gabel, State Court Administrator

patricia.gabel@vermont.gov