

Washington Early Childhood Courts State Advisory Board

Purpose

The Washington Early Childhood Courts State Advisory Board is a high-level decision-making group across the state's child welfare system and community partners, leveraging their expertise in early childhood services to inform Washington's Early Childhood Court (ECC) efforts.

Equity, reunification, and parent empowerment will be centered throughout the Board's efforts. This includes addressing racial disproportionality; elevating parent voice; and prioritizing reunification as the primary outcome. Additional priorities include: supporting current and emerging ECC sites; paving a path for financial and structural sustainability; incorporating ECC priorities into current state initiatives; and advocating for legislative or policy changes that provide meaningful support for infants, toddlers and families involved in Washington's child welfare system.

Role of the Advisory Board Members

- **Ensure equity, parent voice, and family reunification** are prioritized throughout all ECC processes
- Collaborate with the State Leadership Team and the Data Advisory Group to provide **oversight, guidance, and advocacy** to support ECC expansion; **develop benchmarks** to maintain alignment to core components outlined in [2SSB 5331](#)
- **Provide recommendations** regarding emerging trends impacting the child welfare field, and support in addressing identified gaps and trends in services
- **Build connections across state initiatives** to develop relationships with emerging and existing programs, strengthening the network of services for infants, toddlers, and their families
- Provide subject-matter expertise to **advocate for statewide, systemic changes** that support the implementation and expansion of ECCs in Washington, including in areas of legislation, philanthropy, and service provision
- Leverage subject-matter expertise and professional network to **advocate for legislative priorities and policy changes** that further support the goals of ECCs while addressing gaps in resources
- **In collaboration with the Data Advisory Committee, utilize data** to support ECC effectiveness, with a focus on racial disproportionality, equity, program success, and areas for improvement

What is an Early Childhood Court (ECC)?

An Early Childhood Court (ECC) is a therapeutic court utilizing the Safe Babies Court Team™ (SBCT) approach in their program structure and operations. ECCs take a team approach to addressing child welfare cases involving families with children under the age of three.

[2SSB 5331](#) standardizes ECCs across WA to align with research-based core components known to provide positive outcomes for babies, toddlers, and their families.

- **Support opportunities to optimize ECC sustainability**, including an understanding of local, state and federal funding streams and private philanthropic opportunities

Commitment

State Advisory Board members are asked to meet quarterly and participate in 1.5 to 2 hour-long meetings, virtually or in-person. Participation in workgroup projects or individual consultation may be additionally requested.

What Guides our Work

In Washington State, we are led by our Mission, Vision, and Values statements:

- **Mission:** To promote lasting, positive outcomes for parents, infants, and toddlers in the child welfare system by transforming the court process to be parent-centered, relationship-based, racially and culturally equitable, and collaborative
- **Vision:** Parents, infants, and toddlers are safe, healthy and thriving in communities where equity, relationships, and collaboration are celebrated.
- **Values:** Collaboration, community, empowerment, hope, relationship, integrity

More about the Safe Babies Court Team Approach

Early childhood experiences shape children’s brain development and have life-long impacts on their social, emotional and physical well-being. Timely and appropriate interventions help maltreated babies and families heal.

In Washington State, children under the age of three made up 42% of dependency cases filed in 2018.¹ That same year, of all children who entered care in the state, 25.6% were infants under 1 year, the second-highest rate in the country.² We know that families of color are disproportionately involved in Washington’s child welfare system. Overrepresentation in dependency case filings are especially evident among American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) and Black children under the age of three.³

The Safe Babies Court Team™ (SBCT) approach is a community engagement and systems-change initiative focused on reducing trauma and improving how courts, child welfare and child-serving organizations work together to support young children in, or at-risk of entering, the child welfare system. Pierce County spearheaded this work in Washington State based on the SBCT approach with support from ZERO TO THREE, and through a funding opportunity by the US Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), three new sites have been established in Kitsap, Thurston, and Spokane counties. This work will be supported by 2SSB 5331 – a bill that codifies a standard of practice for early childhood court programs, and sets into statute the core components of the SBCT approach.

¹ Orme, M., McCurley, C., Bricker, C., Sanford, R., Wang, W. (2019) Dependent Children in Washington State: Case Timeliness and Outcomes, 2018 Annual Report. Olympia, WA: Center for Court Research, Administrative Office of the Courts. <https://www.courts.wa.gov/subsite/wscrr/docs/2018DTR.pdf>

² Children’s Bureau. 2018 Child Welfare Outcomes Report Data. <https://cwoutcomes.acf.hhs.gov/cwodatasite/enteredCare/index>

³ Orme, M., McCurley, C., Bricker, C., Sanford, R., Wang, W.