

Washington Early Childhood Courts State Team

Purpose

The State Team provides strategic guidance and support to local and statewide Early Childhood Court (ECC) efforts. Comprised of staff from the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) and the Center for Children & Youth Justice (CCYJ), the State Team works closely with national ZERO TO THREE, current ECCs, and the State Advisory Board to advance Washington's priorities in serving infants, toddlers, and their families involved in the child welfare system.

Equity, reunification, and parent empowerment are centered throughout the State Team's efforts. The State Team is responsible for ensuring sites' alignment to core components outlined in [2SSB 5331](#) – which sets the standard for all ECCs operating in Washington State – as well as supporting the initiatives of the State Advisory Board. These include addressing racial disproportionality, elevating parent voice, and prioritizing reunification.

Role of the State Team

- Advocate that equity, parent voice, and family reunification are prioritized throughout all local and statewide efforts through policies, initiatives, and equitable representation in all aspects of the work
- Ensure the statewide expectations are integrated at current and emerging sites; work with ECCs to support their operations within a balance of local flexibility and the structures outlined by: 2SSB 5331, National ZERO TO THREE, and priorities identified by the State Advisory Board
- Serve as the communications hub of the initiative, including: facilitation of cross-systems collaborations to develop and promote partnerships across statewide initiatives; distribution of pertinent initiative updates to local, state, and national systems stakeholders; and management of public messaging regarding this initiative
- Support the development of, and provide guidance to, local and statewide oversight boards, including the State Advisory Board, Data Advisory Group, and local Active Community Teams
- Collaborate with National ZERO TO THREE, ensuring national directives are made known at the local and state level; provide guidance to National ZERO TO THREE on Washington-specific needs and local nuances
- Collaborate at both the local and state level, streamlining ECC efforts such as: data collection and assessment; strengths, challenges, and gaps in services; funding opportunities

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.

- Utilize and analyze local and state-level data to support ECC effectiveness, with a focus on racial disproportionality, equity, program success, and areas for improvement; support the development of benchmarks and other CQI measures to ensure court sites are meeting goals; provide guidance and support in areas of improvement
- Problem solve with local sites on identified challenges or barriers to alignment with the core components of the SBCT approach; as appropriate, conduct observations of family team meetings and court proceedings to support and inform training and technical assistance needs
- In collaboration with the State Advisory Board, build connections across state initiatives to develop relationships with emerging and existing programs, strengthening the network of services for infants, toddlers, and their families
- Identify and coordinate trainings that are reflective of local community needs and statewide priorities
- Support opportunities to optimize ECC sustainability, including state and federal funding streams and private philanthropic opportunities

State Team Members

The State Team is comprised of the following staff:

- **Statewide Coordinator** – split between two agencies, the Statewide Coordinators are responsible for directing and managing the broad vision of this initiative. While the roles are highly collaborative, some general delineations include:
 - **CCYJ** supports the larger convenings, is primarily responsible for staffing the State Team, managing policy and legislation, supports communication with and across sites, serves as the primary contact for ZTT, and oversees grant management
 - **The AOC** is primarily responsible for direct supports to sites, facilitating the development of site guidelines and processes, develop the overall training plan, and tracking training attendance by site staff and judicial officers
- **Continuous Quality Improvement Manager/Court Data Analyst** – working alongside ZTT, this role is responsible for all aspects of the data gathering and analysis for Washington State, including providing site-specific support, development and staffing of the Data Advisory Board, data reporting and analysis
- **Program Coordinator** – responsible for managing the communications, messaging, and coordination of the State Team and its activities

Role	Name	Agency	Contact Information
Statewide Coordinator	Sarah Burns	AOC Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC)	sarah.burns@courts.wa.gov
	Morgan Silverman	CCYJ Center for Children & Youth Justice (CCYJ)	msilverman@ccyj.org
CQI/Court Data Analyst	Arina Gertseva	AOC/Washington State Center for Court Research (WSCCR)	arina.gertseva@courts.wa.gov
Program Coordinator	Michelle Williams	CCYJ	mwilliams@ccyj.org

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.