

Songer, Jolanda

From: donotreply@mt.gov
Sent: Friday, March 1, 2024 11:45 AM
To: LEG Cmte-TFDN Comment
Subject: Public Comment for CSDN Task Force

Public Comments for Court System for Dependency & Neglect Task Force

Date: 1st March 2024 11:45

First Name:
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Subject:
Testimony on Citizen's Review Boards

Comment:

Greetings member of the Interim Committee on the DN Task Force: During public comment at your most recent interim committee meeting on January 16, Attorney Chase Rosario gave testimony on the benefits of Citizen's Review Boards (CRB) in child and family services cases which is already in statute, MCA 41-3-1000. As advocates who offer support to families struggling with their CFS cases, we believe that the Citizen's Review Board would have a great impact on the overburdens related to these cases. From what we understand from Chase's testimony, it sounds like these boards were implemented as a pilot and were very successful, thus plans were made to go statewide. The concept of CRB's along with the past success demonstrated during the pilot lead us to believe that CRB's could solve many of our current challenges: 1) CRB's can alleviate duplication and reduce work placed on the judiciary, as status hearings are shifted to CRB's under the oversight of the Judiciary. CRB's would help take on some of the work and reduce the time judges spend on case review. This could be a much more economical solution to the burdens of DN cases in the judiciary vs. a separate DN court. 2) CRB's would create consistency across the state in how CFS cases are handled, whether they are in rural or urban areas. Multiple CRB's would be made up of volunteer board members from across the state rather than neighbors who know the families. Thus, there would neutrality in review of cases. 3) Although Foster Care Review Boards are currently in place, members of these boards include representatives recommended by CFS. CRB's would be made up of volunteers who have a desire to see better outcomes for children. They would be trained in much the same way that CASA's are trained with Judiciary oversight, just as CASA's. 4) Children would likely move through foster care faster with citizen oversight. Currently, case oversight by the judiciary can be stretched out 6 months between hearings. CRB's could meet monthly to review the status of the case and help ensure that the case is moving forward. 5) Parents would have more frequent communication about their case since CRB's would not be stretched as thin as CFS caseworkers, thus alleviating some of the burden on CFS. 6) Recommendations by the CRB would be presented to the judge when making decisions, providing a neutral position so judges could make decisions about next steps. This would reduce judiciary time and provide another perspective. 7) CRB's focus would be on the overall case, including parental issues of how they are doing with the treatment plan, ensuring that timelines are met, and policies consistently applied.

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From: donotreply@mt.gov
Sent: Tuesday, March 5, 2024 11:20 AM
To: LEG Cmte-TFDN Comment
Subject: Public Comment for CSDN Task Force

Public Comments for Court System for Dependency & Neglect Task Force

Date: 5th March 2024 11:19

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Subject:
DN Court system

Comment:

Some jurisdictions could definitely benefit from a LOCAL specialized DN Court. HOWEVER, it is a grave mistake to have a centralized court, necessitating remote appearances. A central part (as recent legislation has tried to reflect) of success in DN cases is hands on, in person coordination. If everyone - lawyers, social workers, parents, judges, are remote, there is zero personal accountability or in person coordination. As courts have seen in all cases, it is far to easy for litigants to hop on zoom from their car outside the bar, and phone-in (literally) their appearance. Remote appearances can be accommodated in some situations, but creating a court - which now with present legislation - has to have immediate hearings; and then not allowing the court to personally assess the participants will be disastrous. Moreover, Judges know their communities, the local social workers, local resources. Having a one-size-fits-all Court for these essential cases is a solution in search of a problem.

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