

JUVENILE LEGAL SYSTEM HANDBOOK



Understanding and Navigating the
King County Juvenile Legal System

2024 Edition



King County

This guide was developed by parents, system partners, and family advocates to help guide families through the system.

We hope this guide will help you better understand your role in the system and help you to get connected to any supports you or your child may need.

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TIPS FOR ADVOCATING FOR YOUR YOUTH

Ask questions. The legal system is complicated! It's OK to have many questions. If someone doesn't know the answer to your question, they can direct you to someone who does.

Attend and arrive on time for meetings and Court hearings. If you can't arrive on time, call the person or office with the people you have a meeting. Tell them about your schedule so they can call you when you're available.

Be present and supportive. Your child may have hurt you or another person. It may seem like their behavior is out of your control. This can be a chance for your child to get help and to rebuild your relationship. They might need several chances to learn. During this process, they need caring and supportive adults. If you can't be present, the system will also work with other adults that you authorize on your behalf.

Give your opinion in meetings and court. While it may feel awkward or scary, speak up at meetings to give input on your child's needs. Your opinion might be different than the attorney or probation counselor. Don't assume that people know or share information. Sometimes, professionals are legally not allowed to share information with each other.

Ask for what you need. When parents have a child involved in the legal system, they need a lot of support, like taking time off from work, advice, and childcare. The court wants you to participate and will do what it can to make sure you are able. Be sure to tell the professionals involved when you are having difficulties meeting your needs (such as housing, food, clothes) or getting to meetings. They will help direct you to resources and discuss your options.

Build respectful relationships with people involved with your child. The process will be stressful at times, and your ability to build relationships will help you and your child. If you feel disrespected or believe that you have been treated unfairly, contact the supervisor of the person involved.

Stay organized. The legal process can be very confusing. Many people will reach out to you wanting to help and they will have different roles. Write down the name, title, name of the office, and phone number of the people who are working with your child. You can ask for information in writing and in ways that are easiest for you to understand.



BASIC RIGHTS

This is just an overview. Talk to your child's attorney to learn more.

Your child has a right to be represented by a defense attorney. Your child's defense attorney represents your child's interests and decisions. They will advocate for your child to be released from detention and receive lesser charges. Tell your child to be honest with their defense attorney.

Your child has the right to remain silent and to have you and an attorney present during an interview with police.


If you/your child is undocumented, government departments and police in King County do not ask about immigration status. This information is not communicated, collected, or put into any database. If your child is undocumented, they will not be deported if arrested. King County is dedicated to welcoming and serving everyone regardless of their immigration status.

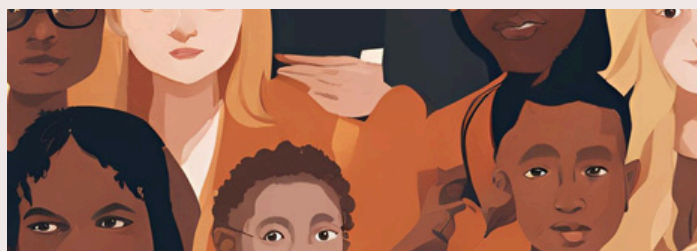
The professionals in the King County juvenile legal system have resources to connect immigrant families with specific resources as requested.

If you don't speak English, your child's attorney or Juvenile Probation Counselor can arrange a free interpreter. If you speak English but are more comfortable with an interpreter, please ask for an interpreter. It's better that you are comfortable and clear about the information.

If your child has a disability, they have legal rights to accommodations in detention, at court, and at school. If your child has a diagnosed disability, you can request accommodations from the juvenile detention center, the school and the Court. The CCFJC meets the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

If your child is lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer, the professionals in the departments of King County receive specialized training to be inclusive of LGBTQ+ youth. The more they know about your child's identity, the better they will be able to meet their needs. In juvenile detention, youth are separated based on their gender identity.

If your child reports abuse or neglect to people like teachers, counselors, social workers, case managers, advocates, (excluding defense attorneys), these adult have to tell Child Protective Services (CPS). It is common for youth to share this information with professionals in the legal system. [Learn more about this process](#) 



THE DEPARTMENTS AND PROFESSIONALS IN THE JUVENILE LEGAL SYSTEM

The juvenile legal system is made up of many King County departments and partnerships with community organizations. **Each organization has extensive information on their websites.** Click on the names of organizations to learn more and to contact them.



01 Police Departments

Police Officers: in King County, there are different police departments in each city (like Seattle Police, Kent Police, Renton Police, Federal Way Police, etc.) and the King County Sheriff's Office, which serves unincorporated parts of the county. All King County police agencies send their police reports to the Prosecuting Attorney's Office for charges to be filed.

02 The King County Prosecuting Attorney's Office

Prosecuting Attorney: In court, the Prosecuting Attorney will work to prove that the charges against your child are right, to advocate for community safety, and to represent the impacts on victims. They will be at all hearings. They will also talk to your youth's attorney about the charges and to negotiate resolution. Sometimes, a different Prosecuting Attorney will attend each hearing.

Victim Advocate: The Victim Advocates gives information, support, and referrals for the person(s) who was harmed by a youth's alleged offense, including family members. Contact them at (206) 477-3035 vau.juvenile@kingcounty.gov

03 The King County Department of Public Defense

Defense Attorney or Public Defender: If your youth is charged with a crime, they will be assigned to a defense attorney. This attorney's job is to represent your youth in court, to give your youth legal advice. The attorney's job is to advocate for what your youth decides - they represent your child, not you. Your youth's attorney is not allowed to share information with you that your youth doesn't want to share. This can include information about the alleged incident, potential witnesses, and/or information about your youth's background.


Mitigation Specialists and Paralegals work with your child's defense attorney. Their job is to help support the attorney's work.

04 [King County Superior Court - Juvenile Court](#)

Juvenile Court is a department within King County Superior Court. It is separate from Juvenile Detention, the Department of Public Defense and the Prosecuting Attorney's Office.

Judges oversee court hearings to make sure that legal rules are followed. The judge decides if your child is guilty or not guilty of a crime. They decide when your child will stay in detention and what your child will be ordered to do to complete their sentence. You and your child will only have contact with a judge during court hearings. You can talk directly with the judge at your child's court hearings.

Juvenile Probation Counselors (JPCs): every youth who begins the court process is assigned a JPC to help identify youth's needs, connect them with services and support, help them follow the judge's orders and report back to the judge in court. The main goal is to support your child and family through the process while providing resources and promoting a safe and healthy future.

If you know the youth's JPC, you may [contact them directly](#). For more information about the role of JPCs, [visit this web page](#). 

05 [King County Department of Adult and Juvenile Detention \(DAJD\)](#)

DAJD is a separate department from Juvenile Court that operates juvenile detention. DAJD staff that work with youth include registered **nurses, mental health professionals, medical assistants, teachers, juvenile detention officers, restorative justice coordinators, orientation and assessment specialists, recreation coordinators, volunteer coordinators, and corrections supervisors**

[Detention status and hearing information](#)

If you have questions about youth detention or court dates, [call 206-263-9595](#). [You can speak to someone 24/7.](#)

COMING TO COURT




The Clark Children and Family Justice Center (CCFJC) is where your court hearings are held. It is a public building and everyone is welcome.

Hours

8:30 am to 4:30 pm, closed 12:15 to 1:15 pm, Monday through Friday
Building access open 7 am to 5 pm, Monday through Friday

Address


[1211 East Alder Street](#) 
Seattle, WA 98122-5593

Parking

There is a parking garage for visitors. You can get a validation for FREE parking at the Resource Center.

Bus

King County Metro routes 3 and 4 serve the area.

[Metro's Online Trip Planner](#) 




When you arrive

You will pass through a security screening station as you enter the courthouse.

Everyone entering the court is required to go through a metal detector.

Weapons are not allowed in court, including guns, knives, tools, and other weapon-like materials. If an object that raises safety concerns is found by security personnel, they will hold the item for you and you can pick it up again when you leave the building.

Knowing where to go

Stop by the [Resource Center](#), if you are not sure where your hearing is. 

We are happy to help you navigate to your location and connect you with any services you may need.

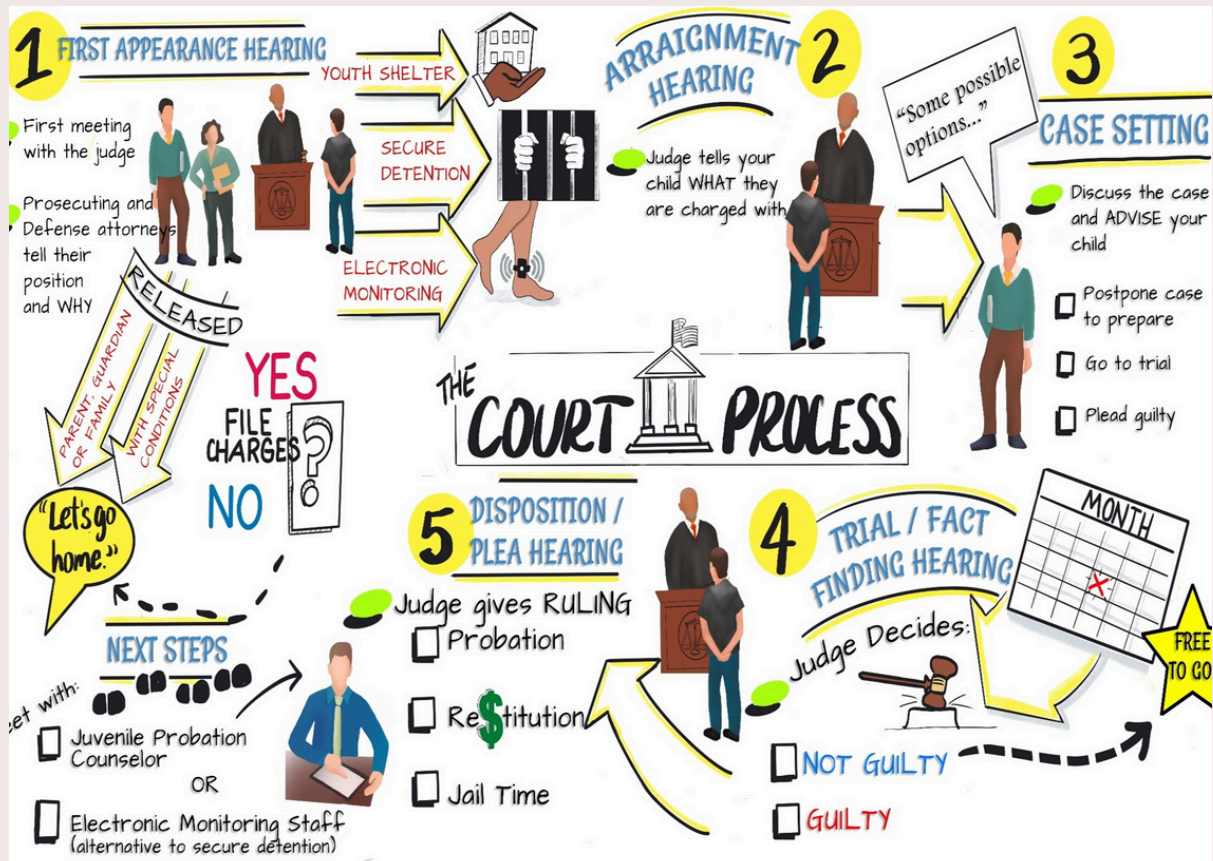
TIP: Be prepared to wait
You may wait several hours before being called into Court.

THE COURT PROCESS

The juvenile court process can take a few weeks to several months. **Everyone will have a different experience.**

You'll get a letter mailed to you with the charges against your child and the court date. It's important that the Court has a mailing address where they can reach you. If you don't have a stable address, give them a friend or family member's address.

Your child may not need to come to each hearing. Ask your child's attorney. They will tell you the next court date they need to attend. Your child's probation counselor can also give you information about when your child is scheduled to come to court.



First Appearance

Held the first business day after your child has been detained. A JPC or defense attorney will call you to tell you when you can be present for the hearing. If you are not available to come in person, you can join by video.

During the hearing you will not be able to talk to your child. The prosecuting attorney and your child's defense attorney will tell the judge what their positions are and why. Your child's Juvenile Probation Counselor will also be present. The judge might ask to hear from you.

At the hearing, the judge will decide whether your child is released, stays in detention, or goes home on Electronic Home Monitoring with an ankle device. The judge will make this decision based on the charges against your child and the risk of safety to your child or others.

After the hearing you will be directed to meet with a JPC or, if your child was assigned to be on electronic home monitoring, you will meet with EHM Staff.

The Prosecuting Attorney will decide if they're going to file charges against your child. If they don't file charges, you and your child don't have to go to Court again. If the PAO is filing charges, the judge will tell you at the Arraignment Hearing.

Arraignment

Arraignment is when the judge tells your child what the Prosecuting Attorney is charging them with. For minor offenses, arraignment will be in the a meeting room with your child and their defense attorney. For more serious offenses, arraignment will be in the courtroom. Most people plead "not guilty." The next hearing, a "Case Setting Hearing", will be scheduled.

Case Setting

Case Setting is a meeting between your child and their defense attorney. The purpose of this meeting is for your child and their defense attorney to discuss the case and for the defense attorney to advise your child about the options available and to help your child decide what option to take.

Your child, with their defense attorney's help, will decide to plead guilty, schedule a trial, or postpone the hearing for more preparation. Depending on this decision, the defense attorney will schedule a trial date, a new case setting date, or a plea date.

Case Setting Hearings are often "continued", which could be requested by any party. This means the meeting is being rescheduled for date in the future. When there is a "continuance", you and your child don't need to be there.

Competency

A Competency hearing is set when the judge decides if your child is "competent" to be tried. Not all youth will have this type of hearing. "Competency" means your child understands the court process and is able to help their attorney defend them. A child can't be tried if they're not competent. If your child is not competent, your child might be sent to a psychiatric hospital to become competent. Also, the judge might dismiss the case, meaning there will be no trial and no charges against your child.

Omnibus

This hearing is used to prepare for the Fact-Finding (trial). It is usually held in the week before the trial. At this hearing, the prosecutor and defense attorney tell the judge if they're ready to go to trial. If the attorneys need more time to get ready for the trial, the judge might delay the trial. If the attorneys are ready for trial, they will give the judge the information they need to run the trial. The judge might also resolve outstanding issues that need to be decided before the trial can go forward.

Fact Finding (Trial)

The “Fact-Finding Hearing” or Trial is the hearing when a judge decides whether your child is guilty or not guilty. There are no juries in juvenile court; the outcome is decided by the judge. For the judge to decide that your child is guilty, the prosecuting attorney must provide enough evidence to show “beyond a reasonable doubt” that your child is guilty of the crime. If your child is found guilty, the next hearing will be a “Disposition Hearing”.

Disposition/Plea

These two hearings are often combined. During the Plea hearing, the youth and attorney are presented with the charges that have been negotiated and agreed upon between Defense and Prosecution. The youth then formally pleads guilty to the charges.

“Disposition” in the juvenile legal system is the same as “Sentencing” in the adult system. During the disposition hearing, the Prosecutor, Defense, and JPC will each give their recommendations. The youth and guardian will also give their input.

Finally, the judge will give a ruling on the disposition (sentence). The Disposition order outlines what your child must do to successfully complete the process. The judge considers what they think will help your child learn accountability, what will keep the community safe and what will help your child improve their behavior. Examples include probation, counseling, community service, restitution (paying back money), and jail time. If your child doesn’t follow the rules in the disposition order, your child may have to see the judge again and they might order further consequences. The court staff will give your child a copy of the disposition order after the Disposition hearing.

Restitution

If the judge orders your child to pay restitution (paying money back for an offense committed), the judge might schedule a Restitution hearing. This is when the judge decides how much money your child has to pay back. The court has job programs to help your child work to earn the money they need to pay back.

Modification

If your child violates the rules of their probation, their JPC will schedule a Modification hearing with the judge. The JPC recommends what the judge should change about your child's disposition order.

Detention Review


During a Detention Review, the Judge considers the custody status of the youth. The youth/Defense, Prosecutor, or JPC can make a request to change a youth's detention status. Judges can move the youth from secure detention to EHM, from EHM to secure detention, or release a youth.

IF YOUR YOUTH IS ARRESTED



If the police arrest your child, they can either send your child home and your child may have to come to court later OR they take them to detention for these reasons:


1. They think your child committed a crime with a gun.
2. They think your child assaulted a school staff person, administrator, or teacher.
3. There's a warrant out for your child's arrest.
4. They think your child was threatening another person or was in a situation that could hurt someone or cause serious property damage.

For a list of offenses that could lead to police taking your child to detention, see the [Juvenile Detention Intake Criteria](#). 

The law requires the police to connect youth under 18 with a lawyer before they question a youth, when they detain a youth based on probable cause, or when they request that the youth consent to a search of their person, property or vehicle. Consultation with a lawyer can be by phone or in person. Youth cannot be interviewed in detention by police without a lawyer present.

IF YOUR YOUTH IS BROUGHT TO DETENTION



If the police take your child to detention, they'll drive your child to the [Clark Children and Family Justice Center at 1211 E. Alder St in Seattle](#). 

If you have questions about youth detention or court dates, call [206-263-9595](tel:206-263-9595). You can speak to someone 24 /7.

Medical check: A nurse will check your child when they arrive. If they have concerns about your child's health or mental health, your child may be taken to a hospital for evaluation. A nurse will call parents within 24 hours to find out more about their health history and needs, including learning about any medication your child may be taking. If your child is taking any medication they will receive it from the nurse while in detention. Once your child is housed in secure detention, they will have access to the health clinic 24 hours a day.

IF YOUR YOUTH IS BROUGHT TO DETENTION



A Screening Juvenile Probation Counselor (JPC) will call you.

They will listen to your concerns, answer your questions and help you understand next steps. You may share information you think they should know about your child. For example, if your child has a disability or is living homeless, you should tell them.

The Screening JPC will share this information with staff from Juvenile Detention, the Court, the Prosecuting Attorney's Office, and the Department of Public Defense.

The Screening JPC will take the information they learned from you, your child, and police. Then they will look at the Court rules to see if your child must stay in detention or can go home.

Usually, your child will have to stay in detention if:

- Police think your child committed a serious crime
- The Court is worried about public safety if your child is in the community
- The Court is worried your child might hurt themselves

The Screener will tell you what will happen next based on your child's situation. If your child is already involved with a JPC, the JPC will work with you on next steps. How long your child will have to stay in detention depends on your child's situation and the decisions made by the Judge.

If your child was arrested for family violence:

If your child is accused of violence against a family member, they may be eligible to be able to stay at the **Family Intervention and Restorative Services (FIRS) Respite Center** instead of staying in detention. FIRS is an alternative to formal court and detention.

The FIRS Center is located in the same building as juvenile detention but it is not secure detention. It is unlocked and staffed by a community organization. The Screener and the Judge can decide if youth can move to the FIRS Center.

Once enrolled in FIRS, your child and your family work on an de-escalation and counseling to safely reunite. Families are offered free in-home family counseling, mental health services, drug and alcohol services, and the Step-Up Program, which specifically addresses adolescent family violence.

To learn more, please call **the FIRS team main line at [206-263-9001](tel:206-263-9001)**.

IF YOUR YOUTH IS BROUGHT TO DETENTION



If your child is sent to secure detention, detention staff search your child to make sure they aren't bringing in prohibited items. Your child takes a shower and staff give them a clean set of clothes. Staff also give your child a set of clean sheets and blankets. Your child is given a security bracelet with their identifying information. Their clothes and personal belongings are kept in safe storage.

Health care staff then interview your child and conduct a physical and mental health screening. Detention staff will not drug test your child while in detention, but Juvenile Probation from Superior Court may.

Next, your child meets with an **Orientation and Assessment Specialist** who interviews your child, explains their rights, rules, what to expect, and decides the safest living hall for your child to live in based on gender identity, age, size, and other history, like the alleged offense and your child's past behavior.

Your child's safety is the number one priority of juvenile detention staff. If another child in detention threatens the wellbeing or safety of your child, juvenile detention staff address it. Juvenile detention staff aren't armed with weapons of any kind and do not use physical punishment, harassment, threats, harm, or humiliation. Staff are trained to use de-escalation techniques before using restraints or force.

If youth feel their rights have been violated, they are encouraged to immediately file a grievance. Detention Supervisors review all grievances, investigate, and respond within 24 hours. Grievances are confidential.



VISITING YOUTH IN DETENTION

Staying in contact with your youth is important. There are three ways to stay in contact with a youth in detention

Phone

Youth in detention cannot receive phone calls but they may make free phone calls to parents and guardians.

They can place collect calls to others on a regular basis. The collect call fees are charged to the receiving party.

Video Visit

Video visitation allows parents and guardians to visit youth without traveling or waiting in long lines. All video visitation is free. Video visitation is hosted through Securus Video Visitation and can be accessed using your own computer, tablet, or smartphone. **Details for signing up for video visits and the hours and guidelines for video visits are at the [DAJD website](#).**



In Person Visit

Family members and attorneys may visit youth in detention at the Clark Children and Family Justice Center. Family may include parents and guardians, as well as siblings under the age of 12, and other persons approved by probation.

Visiting hours and guidelines for in-person visitation are found at the [DAJD website](#).



PROGRAMS AND SERVICES FOR YOUTH IN DETENTION



HEALTH SERVICES

Youth receive medical, substance abuse, and behavioral health treatment through an on-site clinic that operates through partnerships with Seattle Children's Hospital, University of Washington Schools of Medicine and Psychiatry, and community-based mental health organizations. Health clinic staff address each youth's medical and mental health needs. They may treat the youth on-site or refer them to an outside facility. Youth are also offered sexual health services, dental services, and vision care.



EDUCATION

Youth in secure detention attend school every weekday provided by Seattle Public School Interagency Academy. They learn reading, language arts, mathematics, science, and life skills as appropriate for their age, school progress in the community, and prior level of achievement. Special education lessons are available. Youth may also work towards their G.E.D. in the detention school. Classes are mandatory.

SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL, SPIRITUAL

Library

The King County Library System has a branch within the detention area. Youth have access to over 6,000 reading materials and a computer lab.

Chaplaincy and religious services

Religious services are available weekly. Youth may request chaplains from any religion to visit and support them while they are in detention.

Recreation

Examples of programs and activities provided by community organizations include: Yoga, Chess, Photography, Fitness. Youth also have access to MP3 players and tablets.



ALTERNATIVES TO DETENTION & COURT

Alternative to Secure Detention Electronic Home Monitoring

Youth are placed into the Electronic Home Monitoring (EHM) Program as an alternative to secure detention. The judge decides if EHM is an option for your youth.

On EHM, youth are given an ankle monitor that provides information on their location at all times.

Youth are allowed to leave their home with permission to continue activities such as attending school, counseling, work, and more.

This option allows your child to remain in their home and community instead of being in secure detention.

If your child is part of EHM, you will meet DAJD staff. Staff include Placement Specialists, who help set your child up with the monitoring device, and then the Community Surveillance Officers, who monitor youth on EHM to make sure they're following court rules and are successful remaining in the community.

Your child's schedule will be discussed and approved by DAJD staff.



Alternative to Court Diversion

When police submit a referral to the prosecutor, the prosecutor decides to file a legal case with the Court OR to refer your child to a diversion program if they are eligible.

Diversion holds youth accountable for their actions while addressing the causes of their behavior. These programs partner with community organizations to support youth and families. When youth complete these programs, they do not have a criminal record.

Below are diversion programs offered by Juvenile Court (The prosecutor may offer other diversion options operated by community organizations.)

Family Intervention and Restorative Services (FIRS) – A program for families who are affected by youth domestic violence.

Juvenile Probation Counselor Diversion – Youth and family will meet with a JPC who will help coordinate services and help the youth fulfill these services. Even though a JPC is involved, the youth does not go to court or have charges filed.

Community Accountability Boards (CABs) – CABs which are panels of community volunteers who meet with the youth and make plans with the youth and their family for services that will address the incident that led to the referral.

OTHER LEGAL OPTIONS TO GET HELP

[At Risk Youth \(ARY\), Child In Need of Services\(CHINS\), and Truancy](#)

These programs are operated by Family Court, which is a department of Superior Court. ARY/CHINS programs help parents who are worried about their child's behavior and safety and want to get help from the Court to keep their child safe.

The Truancy Program is initiated by the school district and is intended to work collaboratively with families to get youth back on track to a successful educational plan.

[At Risk Youth Petition \(ARY\)](#)

A parent/guardian can file an ARY Petition to get help from the court to maintain the care, custody and control of a child and to help resolve family conflict. The court can order a youth to follow rules and enroll in services. Case managers support families and refer to programs that strengthen reconciliation.

[Child in Need of Services \(CHINS\)](#)

A CHINS petition can be filed by a parent/guardian, youth, or DCYF. If there is a serious conflict that cannot be resolved while the child resides at home, the court can allow for up to 6 months of temporary out-of-home placement while the family works towards reunification.



[Truancy & Education Reengagement](#)

In Washington, school districts are required by law to file a "Truancy Petition" with the court no later than the seventh unexcused absence in a month or no later than the tenth unexcused absence in a year.

A Truancy Petition is a civil petition that is supposed to reengage students with their education. The law also requires that the school district attempt interventions to help eliminate or reduce unexcused absences.

In King County, the goal of the Truancy and Education Reengagement Process is to work with school districts and families to remove the barriers to school attendance and help youth have what they need in order to thrive in school.

The court will decide if the youth needs to come to court as a result of a Truancy Petition. Before a court hearing, youth and families are invited to community supports. The Education Reengagement team strives to keep young people out of the truancy court process through community partnerships, education reengagement workshops, pretrial conferences, mentorship, youth advocates, community referrals, and alternative educational programs.

Truancy matters may also be handled by a Community Truancy Board at the district level.



SUPPORT FOR YOUTH AND FAMILIES

Community partnerships and programs are essential to helping youth who are court-involved stay connected to and engaged in community.

King County Juvenile Court Services partners with many community organizations and community members to connect youth and families to a network of programs, interventions, and mentors.

[The Justice Bobbe J. Bridge Resource Center](#) 

Connects you to any help you may need. Visit online or in person at CCFJC.

[Youth Support Resources app](#) 

Provides information about resources in King County.

Resources may be filtered by type of service, age, and desired travel distance.

A full list of programs and services, with ways to enroll or get involved, is on the [Juvenile Court Services website](#). 

You can also access most forms, including forms to seal your juvenile record.

THANK YOU.

Content adapted from the “King County Juvenile Justice Resource Booklet” developed by Juvenile Justice 101, “A Family Guide to Pennsylvania’s Juvenile Justice System Developed by the Family Involvement Committee of the Pennsylvania Council of Chief Juvenile Probation Officers” and the Parents of Incarcerated Children Bill of Rights from the Texas Juvenile Justice Division.

Review, feedback, and consultation on the 2020 edition: King County Superior Court Juvenile Court Services, the King County Department of Public Defense, the King County Prosecuting Attorney’s Office, the Performance, Strategy and Budget Office, King County & Seattle Public Health, the King County Department of Adult and Juvenile Detention, Best Starts for Kids, The King County Behavioral Health and Recovery Division, the King County Family and Youth Council, Anita Asphy, Shalynn Coleman, Christal Fields, Alrick Hollingsworth, Karisa Morikawa, John Rogers, LaTonya Rogers, and Lynette Todd.

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[Learn more about Juvenile Court](#)

