

CHILDREN'S ADMINISTRATION
Supervised Visitation



2015-17 BIENNIAL BUDGET

Request	FY16	FY17	15-17
FTE	10.0	10.0	10.0
GF-State	\$4,116,000	\$4,116,000	\$8,232,000
Total	\$4,200,000	\$4,200,000	\$8,400,000

DECISION PACKAGE SUMMARY

The Children's Administration (CA) requests 10.0 FTEs and \$8,232,000 GF-State and \$8,400,000 Total Funds in the 2015-17 Biennium to ensure supervised visitation can occur between children, in out of home care, and their parents. By funding this request, CA is expected to maintain and increase reunification by promoting the parent-child bond.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Over time, the expectations around visitation between biological families and their children or siblings in out of home care have increased. Research indicates that an increased number of visits, especially with younger children, maintains the parent-child bond and encourages reunification. Throughout the years, the standard number of visits between parents and children has increased from once a week to twice or three times a week. In some cases, the courts expect infants and younger children to have visits five times a week. Historically, if supervision was needed during a visit, social workers would attend. However, as the expectation regarding the number of visits has increased and other case management and documentation requirements have been placed on social workers, CA has increased its reliance on contracted visitation supervision. This has led to increased costs, for which CA has only received a fraction of the necessary funding. The burgeoning costs are now threatening other vital CA services, such as behavioral treatment for foster children, staffing levels, and front-end services designed to prevent placement or promote reunification. Between State Fiscal Years 2012 and 2014, visitation expenditures increased \$4.2 million (\$12.9 million to \$17.1 million). For State Fiscal Year 2015, CA is working on cost containment within supervised visitation. Without containment, CA projects to spend almost \$20 million on facilitating supervised visitation. Furthermore, applying cost containment strategies to supervised visitation (as is necessary in Fiscal Year 2015) can negatively impact CAs ability to meet requirements for sibling visitation set forth in the Braam settlement. Supervised visitation remains difficult to control due to factors such as a desire to promote the family bond, pressure from attorneys and the courts to promote familial relationships, and concern over liability associated with moving to unsupervised visitation.



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PROPOSED SOLUTION

CA is pursuing a multi-prong solution to the issue of supervised visitation. Outside of this request, CA is issuing additional training and guidance to social workers regarding the need for supervised versus unsupervised visitation and appropriate transition from one to the other. CA will continue to look for parties related to the case that may be able to provide the transportation to and supervision of the visit such as family members or friends and foster parents. In addition, we will be working with outside partners such as the courts and providers regarding appropriate visitation schedules and types.

This request focuses on securing resources so that supervised visitation, when appropriately used, does not negatively impact the other services CA must deliver. In addition, this request will allow CA to pilot some different approaches to the supervision of visits. These will include supervision of visitation by CA employees, enhancement of visitation with evidenced-based or promising practices to promote parenting skills and reunification, and technological innovations such as the use of video conferencing technology to facilitate visiting across distances. Additional investment will also assist CA to be compliant with the Braam settlement agreement.

Research has demonstrated that visitation or family time between parents and children placed outside the home is critical to both reunification and the children's adjustment to their placement. Multiple studies have found that visitation reduces the sense of abandonment that children experience when placed in out of home care. Additional studies have found that children who have frequent visits with their parents exhibited fewer behavioral problems and showed less anxiety and depression. In a study of 922 children in San Diego, children who visited with their mother were approximately 10 times more likely to be reunified (Davis, et al 1996). That study concluded that, "the evidence gathered by the current and other studies of the crucial importance of parental visiting speaks loudly for even stronger allocations of fiscal and professional resources to foster care practice in order to maximize the benefits inherent in parental visiting" (p. 381).

CA proposes hiring ten Social and Health Program Consultant 1 workers, which will allow CA to pilot staff-conducted visits in two to three offices. In addition, CA will contract for additional evidence based services to be applied alongside visitation. The cost for staff is detailed in the staffing model and totals \$1.8 million of the total request for the 2015-17 Biennium. The remainder of the resources will be for a combination of evidenced based practices and to cover the increase in visit costs due to higher caseloads and increased visit frequency.

EXPECTED RESULTS

The budget request supports DSHS Goal 3: Protection – Each individual who is vulnerable will be protected. The decision package is essential to implementing the CA's Strategic Objective 3.2: Percentage of children in placement who received a visit to evaluate their health and safety during a calendar month they were in care will increase.



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This decision package supports the Results Washington Goal 4: Healthy and Safe Communities - Fostering the health of Washingtonians from a healthy start to a safe and supported future.

CA will continue to supply supervised visitation as expected by the courts and parents without negatively impacting social worker workload. By supporting regular visits and enhancing the quality of the visitation service, CA will increase the chances for family reunification. Funding this request will also allow CA to meet its Braam performance measure related to sibling visits.

STAKEHOLDER IMPACT

Stakeholders are extremely interested in the issue of supervised visitation. They are particularly concerned with unfunded cost increases in this area and the threat to other services provided by CA. CA will convene a group of stakeholders and service providers to work with us on developing the visitation pilots. They are very supportive of this proposal.



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