

Co-Chair Gorsek, Co-Chair Sollman and Members of the Committee:

My name is Alan Reynoldson and I am an attorney practicing juvenile law in Lincoln County, Oregon. Over the last 28 years, a large portion of my practice has been focused on court appointed defense including the juvenile matters. I started doing Juvenile dependency before the federal Safe Families Act went into effect and I have experienced several incarnations of CSD, SOSCF, and finally, DHS. Without a doubt, Parent Child Representation Program, PCRCP, has had the biggest impact on my ability to help my clients, whether it be parents or children.

Under the old defense paradigm, I was compensated for a few finite activities. Those activities included the appointment to a case through jurisdiction and then I received an amount for attending Case Review Hearings, Permanency Hearings and participating in Citizens Review Board hearings. Numerous other agency meetings and supervisory activities that were important and very time consuming were uncompensated. While there was good reason to be involved in my clients lives beyond these specific events, the system was not set up to foster this level of representation. In fact, a recent audit of Oregon's process found an inherent conflict of interest when employing this approach to representation.

PCRCP has had a tremendous impact on my ability to help clients. Reduced caseload means that I can focus more attention on each client as their needs come and go. I can do whatever is needed to help my clients go home or get their children back into their care. I can spend time with each client and help identify their needs and then advocate strongly for DHS to provide services that meet those needs. Additionally, the freedom to provide whatever service the parents need to help the case close has been helpful for me in that I spent years practicing family law as well. One of the major roadblocks to DHS leaving a case is a lack of permanent custody arrangements for children. As a PCRCP attorney, I am now able to help my clients prepare the family law documents and get the process started including temporary orders that provide safety and security for the children without DHS assistance.

Case managers are an invaluable part of the PCRCP program. Under the old program, I was all by myself unless I could petition the court for funds to acquire this type of assistance. There were not many people out there that had the day-to-day expertise to be much help. In Lincoln County we are fortunate enough to have case managers that have extensive experience in local services and agencies. Our full-time case manager was the executive director of CASA for over 20 years. Our second case manager, who also does work in Benton County, has a great deal of experience dealing with schools and child service agencies. Together these two provide as much help to my clients as I do. The attorneys in this county work well together and on many occasions, we find ourselves discussing which parent would get the most benefit from case manager assistance. Case managers help clients get to meetings, fill out applications and provide direction and insight into some of the more challenging aspects of living in this world. One of our case managers is particularly gifted at finding places for clients to live. I have had several clients who were living on the streets or in cars that found places to live. Once they had a place to live their life got traction and they were able to move forward.

I realize PCRCP is expensive. But so is prolonged involvement with DHS and repeated engagements when services do not work. When attorneys and case managers can become this involved in our clients lives, we help them overcome the difficulties that place them in care to begin with and would greatly reduce the likelihood of repeated involvement.

Child clients are especially benefited by PCRCP level of representation. Many of my clients have never had an advocate whose sole purpose in their life is to help them achieve their needs and goals. In the past I tried very hard to talk to my child clients, but I did not have the time to really invest myself in their needs. I have numerous clients that I have had for almost 10 years. Their parents are out of the picture and the state is basically raising them. DHS does not make a particularly good parent. The support and insight I am able to offer through PCRCP provides a certain security and reassurance that helps these kids grow up.

Having practiced under the old system and now the PCRCP system, I am completely convinced that the PCRCP approach is vastly superior and provides an opportunity for better and stable results. I have had several clients and cases that would make an interesting read in a book. I have one young lady who had a baby two years ago and then struggled for almost a year with numerous issues. Almost one year later she started treatment and then entered a vocational training program. She found a place to live and ultimately received her driver's license. DHS had announced intention to change the plan to adoption and begin termination proceedings. My involvement with this client made it clear that her trajectory would make a termination trial unwinnable for the state. She is now on track to have her child returned to her completely in the next few months.

PCRCP application in rural environments like ours is challenging only because of distances and limited services being available. I believe employing this approach in large Metropolitan areas would be significantly more effective. There are numerous services available in the Portland Metro area as well as Eugene, Springfield, Salem and Medford. Having attorneys who are experts in the services and case managers supporting them would certainly be a game changer.

In the bigger picture, PCRCP structure gives us more level footing with DHS and the attorney general's office. Salem PCRCP is building a structure of support for us including consulting, assistance with strategy and support with forms that we would not normally have. All of this makes us much more effective.

I believe it is critical for the legislature to budget PCRCP as a permanent fixture in the dependency advocacy arena. Not only will it help fix the Oregon families who need the help, it will provide efficient allocation of services and ultimately save tax dollars.

Respectfully submitted:

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "AD Reynoldson".

Alan D Reynoldson