Child Protection: Dependency Courts

Judges and court personnel are uniquely positioned to identify and help children who have been abused, neglected, or exploited as well as those who are at risk of victimization. Juvenile and family courts play a critical role in preventing victimization and working to achieve safe, stable, and permanent homes for children.

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) works to ensure that court personnel have the skills to address the complex needs of these children and their families. The Office also aims to provide youth with access to well-trained volunteer advocates who represent their best interests.

Program

Court Appointed Special Advocate Program

This program recruits and trains volunteers who serve as fact finders, monitors, and facilitators in child dependency cases. These court appointed special advocates and guardian ad litem volunteers help ensure that abused and neglected children and those in foster care do not get lost in the legal or social service system and are placed in safe, permanent homes. The funding also supports a national court appointed special advocate membership and accreditation program.

In 2019, local programs across 49 states and the District of Columbia served more than 271,000 children.

Training and Technical Assistance

Child Abuse Training for Judicial and Court Personnel Project

OJJDP provides training and technical assistance to judicial, legal, and social service professionals to improve their response to child abuse cases, including cases of children who are victims of domestic child sex trafficking, and families impacted by opioids. To better serve children and families, the project also teaches practitioners how to coordinate information and services across the juvenile justice and child welfare systems.

For More Information