



Kentucky should...

ensure every child and parent in child welfare cases have quality legal representation

Access to quality legal representation ensures the rights of Kentucky kids and parents are protected and reduces the amount of time children spend in foster care by improving permanency outcomes. When attorneys are supported by a multidisciplinary legal team, including social workers and peer mentors, families receive not only strong advocacy in court but also help navigating challenges outside of it, improving long-term stability.

For years, families, judges, attorneys, and child welfare leaders have identified the need to improve representation in dependency, neglect, and abuse (DNA) proceedings.

A 2025 Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) survey of Kentucky judges who hear DNA cases cited low compensation, challenging caseloads, and lack of local attorneys as primary causes of guardian ad litem (GAL) and court appointed counsel (CAC) shortages.

In the districts where a judge responded to the AOC survey, 2 out of 3 reported a decrease in attorneys in all or some of their counties within the past 5 years.

Blueprint for Kentucky's Children Policy Solution:

Strengthen family legal representation and improve outcomes by creating a statewide office for family representation.

The decline in available attorneys, combined with scarcity of specific training, limits what attorneys can do for each child or family.

Adequate representation of families results in:

- shorter stays in foster care
- more frequent family visitation
- improved judicial decision making

To support families, attorneys, and judges, an office of family representation should:

- ✓ Centralize attorney oversight and accountability, provide training and mentorship, and enforce performance standards
- ✓ Recruit, contract with, and adequately compensate qualified attorneys, with caseload caps and pay tied directly to caseload size
- ✓ Include social workers and peer mentors to help families navigate non-legal challenges

By reforming Kentucky's approach to family legal representation, we can reduce delays, support stronger family connections, and ensure every child and parent has the consistent advocacy they deserve.