

Child Dependency Courts

Maintaining the parent-child relationship during parental incarceration is crucial for both the child's well-being and the parent's rehabilitation.



For **PARENTS**, staying connected to their children can serve as a powerful motivator for rehabilitation and reintegration into the community. Strengthening these relationships supports family reunification post-release and reduces the risk of recidivism.

For **CHILDREN**, regular contact with an incarcerated parent helps preserve emotional bonds, reduces feelings of abandonment, and provides stability during a challenging time of separation. When parents are incarcerated far from home (as is often the case) it makes family time much more difficult.

Incarcerated parents face numerous challenges and barriers to navigating the child dependency court system.

Approximately **47%** of people in state or federal prison in WA are parents of minor children.

[Parents in Prison and Their Minor Children \(2016\)](#)

- **Services:** What treatment services and parenting classes are available to incarcerated parents can vary widely depending on correctional center. This can greatly impact the ability of a parent to participate in their case plan services, and ultimately reunify with their child.
- **Visitation:** The types and frequency of visitation varies among correctional centers. In-person contact visits in supportive and child-friendly environments are recommended to help mitigate the effects of parental incarceration.
- **Hearings:** Incarcerated individuals have the right to meaningful access to hearings, but this can be difficult to achieve. The ability to consistently attend scheduled court hearings via telephone or computer while incarcerated varies among courts and correctional centers.
- **Paperwork:** Incarcerated individuals often struggle to obtain, understand, and timely file legal documents, which can impact their ability to participate in legal proceedings. Access to printers/copy machines for making required copies of pleadings is difficult and sometimes impossible. Even though a party is indigent for court purposes, the DOC may still require payment for copies, creating another barrier.

DID YOU KNOW?

Washington is one of the few states with caregiver diversion laws that create specialty programs for parents or give parents priority access to diversion or alternative-to-incarceration programs such as drug treatment programs, electronic monitoring, or other community-based alternatives.
[RCW 13.34.030\(15\)](#)

Resources

-  [Washington Defender Association - Incarcerated Parents Project Dependency Resources](#)
-  [VINELINK \(State Prison & local jail inmate search\)](#)
-  [Federal Bureau of Prisons Inmate Search](#)
-  [Coping With Incarceration \(resources for children\)](#)

