

ELEVATING THE VOICE OF CAREGIVERS: THE CAREGIVER'S REPORT TO THE COURT

Highlighting caregiver
perspectives in judicial
decision-making

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Caregiver's Input in Child Welfare Hearings



Purpose and Legal Framework

Caregiver Report Importance

The Caregiver's Report enables caregivers to provide information about the child or youth directly to the courts before a court hearing.

Legal Rights and Notices

RCW 13.34.096: Right to be heard—Notice. mandates caregivers get timely notice and the right to be heard in court.

Permanency Planning Hearings

RCW 13.34.145 defines hearings that assess child welfare and permanency progress.

Annual Progress and Services Report (APSR) Federal Requirements 2025 ANNUAL PROGRESS AND SERVICES REPORT (APSR)

Federal APSR requirements emphasize caregiver input to meet child safety and well-being goals.



Report Use and Focus



Context and Intent

The report captures detailed observations about the child's emotional, physical, educational, and behavioral status to aid court decisions.

Use in Legal Proceedings

The report is submitted before court hearings and becomes part of the official court record for judicial review.

Focus on Child's Best Interests

The report must exclude unrelated commentary about biological parents to maintain focus on the child's welfare.



Report Content and Process



Information on the Caregiver's Report



Caregiver's Report to the Court

CHILD'S NAME [REDACTED]	LEGAL CASE NUMBER [REDACTED]
HEARING DATE [REDACTED]	COUNTY WITH LEGAL JURISDICTION [REDACTED]
CAREGIVER NAME/PERSON PROVIDING INFORMATION [REDACTED]	CHILD'S ASSIGNED CASE WORKER [REDACTED]
TYPE OF PLACEMENT <input type="checkbox"/> Kinship (Licensed or Unlicensed Relative and Suitable Others) <input type="checkbox"/> Foster Home	LENGTH OF TIME AS CHILD'S CAREGIVER [REDACTED] Days/Months/Years _____
SUPPORT TO FAMILY (Check all that apply.) <input type="checkbox"/> Temporary foster care <input type="checkbox"/> Available to be a support to the family after reunification <input type="checkbox"/> Available to provide an adoptive or guardianship home	CHILD COURT PARTICIPATION Was the child or youth invited to participate in court? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No If no, explain [REDACTED]

Instructions:

- The courts want to hear from you and your perspective is critical to providing a more complete holistic view of the child or youth to the court.
- Please complete and return via email, US Postal Service, or in person 2-3 weeks before the hearing to the child or youth's assigned case worker and/or guardian ad litem/CASA.
- Please feel free to include a photo of the child or youth (optional).

TOPICS

Section 1: Wellbeing Activities and Connections

1. Describe the child or youth's interests, talents, participation in extra-curricular activities/events:
[REDACTED]
2. Describe any interests, talents, participation in extra-curricular activities/events the child or youth would like to participate in but is **NOT** able to do:
[REDACTED]
3. Describe child or youth's interactions with friends, peers, and siblings:
[REDACTED]
4. Describe child or youth's interactions with positive adults (i.e., coaches, teachers, church, mentors, other relatives):
[REDACTED]

- General Information
- Well-being Activities and Connections
- Culture, Community, and Racial Identify
- Family Time
- Emotional and Behavioral Health
- Medical and Dental
- Education (Pre-school - high school)
- Additional Information

Effective vs. Ineffective Contributions

Helpful Contributions

Focus on Child's Well-being

Caregiver reports emphasize observations related to the child's emotional and physical health.

Use of Objective Language

Reports should be objective and respectful, avoiding judgment or speculation about the child's behavior.

Providing Specific Examples

Including specific examples like mood changes and school performance adds valuable context.

Supporting Judicial Decisions

Factual, child-centered information helps judges prioritize the child's needs and permanency planning.

Unhelpful Contributions

Avoiding Harmful Content

Reports should not include personal attacks, speculation, or irrelevant details that harm the child's well-being.

Not Include Parent Information

A caregiver's report should not include information related to a child's biological parent that is not directly related to the child's well-being.

Submission



Submission Process

The report is typically filed ahead of time and submitted either:

- Directly to the court clerk
- US Postal Service
- Case worker
- Guardian ad litem/CASA

Include Case Name and Number

Reports must clearly state the case name and number to ensure proper identification and routing.

Use Coversheets for Filing

A coversheet should accompany reports to facilitate filing and verify official record inclusion.

Submit Reports Early

Reports should be submitted in advance of hearings to allow timely review by all parties involved.

Use Standardized Forms

Standardized departmental forms ensure report consistency and completeness across all submissions.



Importance and Encouragement



Why the Report Matters



Caregiver Voice in Court

The report ensures caregivers have a meaningful voice by sharing insights on the child's daily life and emotional health.

Support for Permanency Planning

It offers a holistic view of the child's needs, aiding permanency planning and improving child welfare outcomes.

Federal Reporting and Compliance

The report contributes to federal APSR reporting, helping agencies meet child welfare goals and standards.

System Collaboration

It strengthens cross-agency communication and stakeholder engagement as outlined in strategic plans.

Dashboard Reporting Tool (DRT)

2024 Caregiver Notification and Caregiver Reports

Court Name	Adequate and Timely Notice was given to the Child's Caregiver		Court Received a Caregiver Report	
	Yes	No	Oral Report	Written Report
Adams	55			
Asotin				
Benton	120	1		40
Chelan	382	3	37	
Clallam	244		43	10
Clark				77
Columbia				
Cowlitz	691			28
Douglas	103		19	5
Ferry				1
Franklin	51			
Garfield				
Grant				
Grays Harbor	459		19	30
Island	26		11	6
Jefferson	119	1	27	30
King	1698	17		247
Kitsap	435	1	81	15
Kittitas				
Klickitat	46			2
Lewis	174		2	4
Lincoln				
Mason	127		4	51
Okanogan				
Pacific	15			5
Pend Oreille				
Pierce	1133	5	369	107
San Juan	10			
Skagit	385		12	55
Skamania	28			
Snohomish	397	1	12	136
Spokane	1628	3	92	99
Stevens	62	1		4
Thurston	668	6	12	34
Wahkiakum				
Walla Walla	65		4	
Whatcom	14			
Whitman				15
Yakima	1			5
Grand Total	9136	39	744	1006



Problem Solving and Conclusion



Strategies to Encourage Submission



Education and Training

Educate caregivers about their rights and provide clear instructions for completing reports to empower participation.

System Support

Use early form distribution, automated reminders, and integration into meetings to facilitate timely submissions.

Stakeholder Collaboration

Judges, attorneys, and clerks should coordinate to check report submissions and include them in court files.

Tracking and Motivation

Monitor submission rates and share data on report impact to motivate caregivers' continued engagement.

Identifying and Solving Barriers

Common Barriers

Barriers such as lack of awareness, time constraints, and report confusion reduce caregiver report quality.

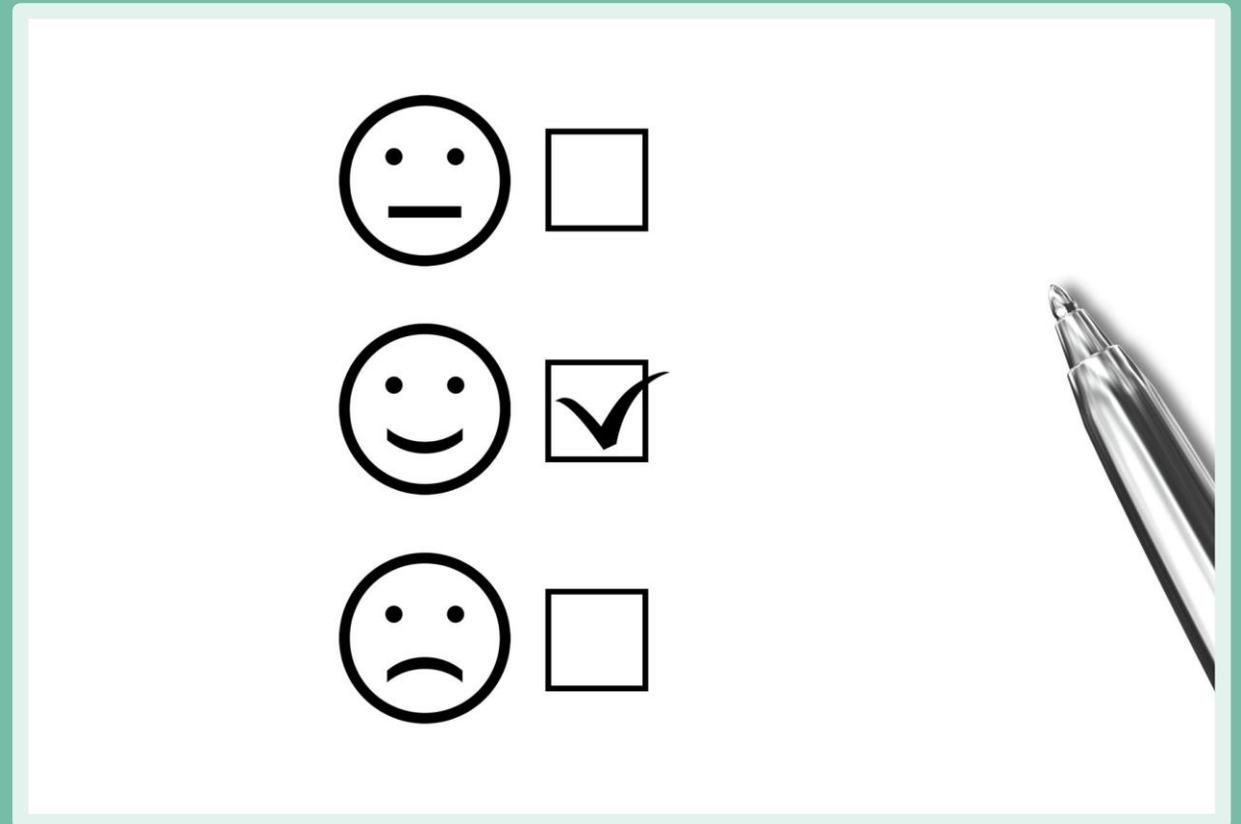
Targeted Solutions

Simplified forms, and integration with casework improve report consistency.

Problem-Solving Mindset

Adopting a problem-solving approach enhances engagement and ensures caregivers' voices are heard.

Others.....





Closing

Advocacy Through Caregiver Reports

Caregiver reports empower voices in child welfare, ensuring children's needs are effectively represented in court.

Promoting Collaboration

Encouraging agencies, courts, and caregivers to collaborate fosters a responsive and effective child welfare system.

Call to Action

Focus on improving consistency of submission and use of caregiver reports.



Call to Action:

Every voice matters.

When caregivers are heard, children are better seen.

Every report counts.

Consistent submission and documentation strengthen outcomes.

Every role is vital.

Judges, attorneys, caseworkers, and caregivers—together, we shape a system that protects and uplifts.

Final Call to Action:

Let's commit to building a child welfare system where caregiver voices are not just welcomed—but expected, respected, and reflected in every decision we make.