

County Counsel's Dependency Division

The Dependency Division is the largest by size, and is currently budgeted for 100 attorneys. It is divided into six sections, and each section is supervised by a Section Head. The six sections are composed of three trial sections, the Appellate Section, the Outstation and Back-up Section, and the North County Section. The division handles approximately 13,000 dependency cases involving approximately 32,000 children. The division will also handle approximately 500 appellate matters annually.

The primary mission of the Dependency Division is the litigation of dependency cases involving allegations of child abuse and neglect. The Office of the County Counsel, through this division, represents the Department of Children and Family Services ("DCFS"). DCFS is the agency charged with initiating petitions under Welfare and Institutions Code Section 300 requesting the juvenile court to intervene in the lives of children who are alleged to be victims of child abuse. On average, DCFS will file 30 new petitions each day. The Dependency Division also supports DCFS in a range of programs and initiatives targeted to improve the dependency system.

The Dependency Trial Sections staff 19 dependency trial courts, the mediation courts, and the DCFS Intake and Detention Center, which is responsible for initiating the dependency cases by the filing of a dependency petition. The dependency trial courts will typically handle over 20 schedule hearings each day. The court calendar is supplemented by the initial petition hearings on newly filed cases.



The Outstation and Back-ups Section staffs 17 DCFS regional offices, the After-hours project, and the DCFS Command Post, where child abuse referrals are initially investigated. Attorneys assigned to this Section provide a wide range of advice related to existing and emergent dependency cases and investigations. This section develops and delivers extensive social worker training programs in dependency law and related issues.

The North County Section services one dependency trial court, and the DCFS regional offices in the San Fernando Valley, Santa Clarita, Palmdale, and Lancaster. The trial court is located in Lancaster and is the busiest dependency trial court both by numbers of hearings and dependent children.

The Dependency Division Appellate Section handles juvenile dependency appellate matters on behalf of DCFS. This section files responsive briefs and answers to writs filed by parents and children. The appellate section also reviews cases for possible appellate action and will file an affirmative writ in circumstances where social services believes the court's order may place a child at risk or where appeal would not be feasible due to time considerations. The Appellate Section seeks publication of appellate opinions and works with other counties to seek de-publication of unfavorable published opinions.

Assistant County Counsel James M. Owens is the Division Chief of the Dependency Division.

For additional information, please call: (323) 526-6100.