

Summary of Snohomish County Juvenile Dependency Court Hearings

72 Hour Shelter Care Hearing

A judge decides whether it is safe for the child/ren to remain in the parents' care or whether the child/ren should be placed in out-of-home care. The focus of the shelter care hearing is to protect the child/ren and offer ways for the parent to address the issues that led to the state's involvement. The court considers an appropriate visitation schedule for the children and parents and a service plan (such as mental health and/or substance abuse evaluations or parenting classes). At this time, the court cannot order parents to engage in any service in which the parent does not want to engage.

Dependency Preliminary Hearing

About 21-30 days from the shelter care hearing, the court holds a preliminary hearing. This is a date setting hearing and the court does not hear contested matters. The court sets new preliminary hearing dates if necessary, and sets or confirms a fact finding date.

Dependency Fact Finding Hearing

A trial held in front of a judge to determine whether the state can prove the allegations in the dependency petition. This trial must be held within 75 days within the filing of the dependency petition unless there are exceptional reasons for not doing so. At this hearing, the parties can present evidence to the court. The parties may enter an agreed order of dependency, instead of having a trial.

Dispositional Order

Within fourteen days of the dependency's establishment, the court enters a dispositional order, unless there is good cause to have the hearing at a later date. In a dispositional order, the court decides whether the child/ren will be returned home or remain in the state's custody. If the child/ren remain in the state's custody, the court determines whether the child/ren will be placed with a relative, a person suitable to care for the child/ren that isn't a licensed foster parent, or with foster parent(s). The court will also determine which services the parents are to complete in order to attempt to correct the issues that led to the child/ren's removal. The court will also enter a visitation schedule.

If an agreed dependency order entered, the dispositional order is generally included as part of the order. If the case goes to trial and the court decides the state proved the dependency petition, then the dispositional hearing is generally scheduled by the judge who heard the evidence at trial.

Initial Progress Review Hearing (IPR)

In Snohomish County, IPR hearings are held regarding children who have been found dependent. The initial review hearing is set six months from the beginning date of the placement episode or no

more than ninety days from the entry of the disposition order, whichever comes first.

Permanency Planning Review Hearing (PPR)

A PPR must be held within twelve months of the child/ren's removal from a parent. The court, at these hearings, must order a permanent plan for the child/ren such as return home, adoption, guardianship, or third party custody. The court also reviews services for the parent, placement, and visitation.

Termination Fact Finding

If a child is not able to be safely returned home in a reasonable time period, DSHS will file a termination of parental rights petition unless there is good cause not to do so. A termination trial is held in front of a judge, without a jury. At this trial, the state must provide the elements of the termination statute and show that it is in the child's best interest for parental rights to be terminated. Parents have a right to present evidence at this trial and to be represented at no expense to themselves. Parents may choose to relinquish their parental rights instead of going to trial. Often, if a parent relinquishes their parental rights, they enter into an Open Adoption Agreement with the prospective adoptive parents (which is a separate legal document from the relinquishment documents).

Family Drug Treatment Court (FDTC)

The FDTC is designed to improve the safety and well being of children in the dependency process by providing parents access to drug and alcohol treatment, weekly judicial monitoring of their sobriety and individualized services to support the family.

Unified Family Court (UFC)

UFC coordinates a family's dependency court case with a related family law case. In coordinating these cases, the court hopes to reduce the number of different courtrooms a family must attend, expedite case resolutions and assure more consistent rulings and recommendations. In addition, UFC cases are provided access to a Family Law Facilitator. The Family Law Facilitator provides assistance with the needed forms and information on the family court procedures.