

Enhanced Legal Representation

In 2017, the Pennsylvania State Roundtable selected *Enhanced Legal Representation* as a core component of the Family Engagement Initiative (FEI). The FEI is designed to assist select counties in furthering collaborative efforts to enhance family engagement practices within the child welfare system.

Research has clearly identified the link between high quality legal representation and positive child welfare outcomes. In order for a judge to make the best possible decision about families, it is critically important that he or she receive the most accurate and complete information possible from and about all parties.* Therefore, competent, well-trained attorneys directly impact outcomes for families served.

The PA State Roundtable recognizes quality legal representation as a key component to ensure safety, timely permanence and well-being of children. Between 2009-2016 the State Roundtable's Legal Representation Workgroup made great strides to enhance legal representation. The Workgroup's accomplishments include: trainings for attorneys; a parent video; a children's court activity book which explains court proceedings; and Standards of Practice for attorneys.

The FEI legal representation component is grounded in PA State Roundtable's approved Standards of Practice. While all Standards are important, the FEI focuses on the four core identified standards, as each is research supported.** FEI counties must choose at least two of the four identified standards to address during the first year of FEI implementation. County's will design their own goals, objectives and strategies based on these standards.

Four Core Standards of the Family Engagement Initiative

CLIENT RELATIONSHIP & CONTACT

CASE PREPARATION

ADVOCACY

**ATTORNEY FEEDBACK
MECHANISM**

*U.S. Department of Health and Human Services ACYF-CB-IM-17-02

** PA State Roundtable Standards of Practice & ABA Standards of Practice for Lawyers Representing Child Welfare Agencies



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CLIENT RELATIONSHIP AND CONTACT

A dependency system's legal representation model should guarantee a commitment to attorneys building relationships and having meaningful, regular contact with their clients before, during and after court proceedings. In addition, attorneys should ensure their clients understand court proceedings and orders.

CASE PREPARATION

A dependency system's legal representation model should ensure adequate case preparation and planning including: thorough knowledge of the case, file reviews prior to court and preparation of witnesses and evidence. In addition, consultation with clients before court hearings is critical to ensure their position is accurately portrayed to the court.

ADVOCACY

A dependency system's legal representation model should promote well-reasoned and thoughtful advocacy for all clients and ensure clients' wishes are known to the court. Advocacy for the client should occur both inside and outside of the courtroom.

ATTORNEY FEEDBACK MECHANISM

A dependency system's legal representation model should ensure a structured mechanism to regularly provide feedback to attorneys.

