

Overview

As commissioned by the Pennsylvania State Roundtable, the Office of Children and Families in the Courts (OCFC), in collaboration with the Benchbook Committee, has developed this Resource Companion second edition to assist new and experienced judicial officers in their efforts to help dependent children and their families. Used as an adjunct resource to the Pennsylvania Dependency Benchbook, the Resource Companion provides valuable information in seventeen topic areas. The topic areas and the resources were selected by trial judges currently overseeing dependency proceedings. The overarching goal of the Resource Companion is to provide a centralized location for information that can enhance understanding of many social, developmental, and interpersonal issues seen in dependency matters.

To achieve this goal, the Resource Companion provides:

- A Section Overview for each of the seventeen topic areas which highlights the documents contained within the section. In most cases, the Overviews highlight why the various sections are important and encourage judges to read the primary resources and the additional cited resources.
- Primary Resources: These articles, briefs, journals, and practice notes are provided in full text. They include articles identified by the committee as “core or essential reading” for all judges and judicial officers presiding in dependency matters. While not all-inclusive, they provide a general overview or foundational knowledge of the subject matter. The Benchbook Committee strongly recommends all judges and judicial officers review these articles. Committee comments are included in the additional notes section.
- Additional Resources: These articles, briefs, journals, and websites are provided by citation only. They include documents identified by the committee as being “highly recommended” reading. They are provided as additional information for those judges and judicial officers having an increased interest in a particular topic area. Committee comments are included in the additional notes section.

A recommended first step in using the Resource Companion is to read section overviews. The overviews provide general information regarding topical areas of knowledge that supports judicial decision-making as outlined in the Dependency Benchbook. Reading the overviews will assist in recognizing how the two documents complement one another.

After reviewing section overviews, readers are strongly encouraged to read articles identified as primary resources. These articles are generally broad in scope, providing an overview of the topic, but many also offer specific suggestions and guidance.

For enhanced understanding of a topic area, readers are directed to the additional resources found in most sections. These additional resources are provided in

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citation form only but are included as the committee believed they contain valuable information that can augment primary resource information.

Finally, the committee wants to be very clear regarding the intended use of this Resource Companion. The Resource Companion was created to provide general topic overview information. For obvious reasons, it does not provide every resource for every topic area. Instead, it contains only those articles reviewed by the committee and deemed core to judicial understanding. In addition, while the documents included as primary resources and those cited as additional resources are highly recommended by the committee, none are considered evidence in a proceeding. They were selected based on their general scope of information and should not be used as authoritative.

The committee strongly believes the use of Pennsylvania's Dependency Benchbook combined with this Resource Companion will greatly assist judges and judicial officers as they work to ensure safe, timely, permanent homes for abused and neglected children. The committee encourages all judges and judicial officers to fully utilize these documents and commends them for the work they do each and every day to help our most vulnerable citizens.

