



**WASHINGTON STATE
OFFICE OF PUBLIC DEFENSE**

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May 2, 2019

Keoki Kauanoë
Father Engagement Services
Family Education and Support Services

Dear Mr. Kauanoë,

Thank you for requesting OPD's feedback on the proposal to forgive child support arrears of parents who are working towards the reunification with their children in care. OPD is grateful that your committee is looking into this.

When a child is removed from a parent and placed into foster care child support is often ordered (if not previously ordered). At the same time many families lose resources (housing, etc) when a child is removed from the home and are required to engage in services and visits. Many parents are unable to work much if at all during this time. If parents are successful in their services the next hurdle is finding suitable housing for themselves and their child(ren). Having arrears and current support adds an additional barrier to parents being able to afford to have their children returned home.

The RCWs allow dependency courts to reduce current support if asked by a party. In our experience this process is used to help some parents, but is often missed by the system. This process is not able to remove or reduce arrears. Some attorneys have had success working directly with support enforcement officers who understand what parents are managing in order to have their children returned to their care. However, this is not universal.

If parents had current support waived and arrears abated it would free parents to use their resources solely on reunifying with their children. In most cases the arrears are owed to the state and would not negatively impact parents, relative placements, or foster parents.

Thank you for your work on this!

Sincerely,

Jacob D. D'Annunzio
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