



Supreme Court of Appeals of West Virginia

News

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New Educational Video Explains Abuse and Neglect Procedure

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CHARLESTON, W.Va. – The Supreme Court of Appeals of West Virginia today released a new educational video designed to outline and explain the process followed in child abuse and neglect cases.

Like the process itself, the video emphasizes the need to protect children and provide them with a safe environment while also providing parents information about how to work toward a potential goal of reunifying their families if possible.

“Child abuse and neglect cases are the most critical and important cases we deal with in the legal system,” said Chief Justice Bill Wooton. “They can also be the most complex and emotionally fraught cases as well, so it is important to clearly explain and educate people about this important process and the goals it is designed to achieve.”

The video explains step-by-step what happens when a parent is charged with child abuse and neglect. It emphasizes the need to protect children and provide them with a safe environment, while also explaining the processes in place that can allow a parent to regain custody of their child, provided they demonstrate they are no longer a risk and accomplish the benchmarks that are set for them.

The video was produced over the past year using grant funds provided by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

“Protecting children is the highest priority of our court system,” said Supreme Court Justice Tim Armstead, who was serving as the Court’s chief justice during much of the video’s production.

“We know that – if they are safe – children are happiest growing up in their own homes,” Justice Armstead said. “Unfortunately, there are many cases, such as those involving physical or sexual abuse, where that is not possible. But for those cases in which it may be possible to reunify families, this video will serve as a tool to help educate people about this process and emphasize the importance of every step involved in it.”

The video is available online here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w6sQov7rF1U>.

“This video will provide an excellent resource for parents in assisting them to navigate the abuse and neglect process, and it will ultimately support more positive outcomes for our state’s children, which is the primary goal of the Court Improvement Program,” said former Twenty-Second Judicial Circuit (Hampshire, Hardy, and Pendleton Counties) Circuit Judge C. Carter Williams, who was chairman of the Court Improvement Program (CIP) during the video’s production.

The CIP oversees federal grants to improve the safety, timely permanency, and well-being of children and to protect due process for families in child abuse/neglect and juvenile cases. The grants are from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ Administration for Children and Families.

There were 5,286 child abuse and neglect cases filed in circuit courts in 2023, about 13 percent of the total case filings that year. At the Supreme Court, there were 251 abuse and neglect appeals filed in 2023, slightly over 43 percent of the total filings.ⁱ

As the number of abuse and neglect cases has risen, so has the need for foster homes. West Virginia had 6,080 children in foster care as of Dec. 31, 2024, according to the state Department of Human Services.ⁱⁱ If families can be safely reunited, there is less need for foster homes.

The video was produced by the Supreme Court Public Information Office. It is 100 percent funded through Grant Award No. 2301WVSCIP from the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Administration for Children and Families. The content of this video represents the collective professional judgment of the scriptwriters and should not be considered authoritative statements or interpretations of the law by the Supreme Court of Appeals of West Virginia.

ⁱ 2023 Annual Statistics Report of the West Virginia Court System
<https://www.courtswv.gov/sites/default/pubfiles/mnt/2024-04/2023annualStats.pdf>.

ⁱⁱ [Child Welfare Dashboard](#)