

# OFFICE OF THE STATE PUBLIC DEFENDER



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To: Montana Public Defender Commission  
From: Kristina Neal, Conflict Coordinator  
RE: Report to the Commission

### UPDATES

Conflict cases: For FY 2014, I appointed counsel in an estimated 5,000 cases. Actual numbers will be released after the agency closes its books and records.

Structural Changes: The Conflict Coordinator Office has become its own program (Program 3). This ensures that all conflict cases are paid for and managed separately from Program 1 and Program 2. Previously, the Conflict Coordinator Office operated independently from the other two programs but was dependent upon Program 1 for payroll and operating expenses, and dependent upon Programs 1 and 2 for payment of conflict contractor costs. With the creation of Program 3, my office now maintains its own budget and true transparency for the management of conflict cases.

The creation of Program 3 also assists in the management and tracking of civil costs, most specifically DN costs. In a "typical" DN proceeding, Program 1 will usually represent the "offending" parent. Then, the other parent, or parents, and the child, or children, are referred to my office. Therefore, Program 3 handles the majority of the OPD's DN clients. The creation of a separate program will make it easier to track these costs. In FY 2014, I appointed counsel in approximately 1,700 DN cases, or almost 35% of the total conflict appointments.

Training and Contract Attorney meetings: On July 10, Wendy Johnson and I traveled to Bozeman and attended a DN training, "Child Welfare Law and Practice." Numerous contract attorneys from around the state attended. The next week, Wendy, Bill Hooks, and I traveled to Billings for a "meet and greet" with available contract attorneys. We reserved a conference room and made ourselves available to contract attorneys to stop during the lunch hour to meet us and offer comments, suggestions or questions. We had approximately 15 attorneys attend and felt encouraged by their support and involvement. Wendy and I have plans to travel in the near future to Kalispell and Polson to arrange similar informal gatherings.