

# CONSOLIDATED COURT PROCEEDINGS FOR CROSSOVER YOUTH



Center for  
Juvenile  
Justice  
Reform

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The way that family and juvenile court proceedings are structured can have a significant impact on youth and families. This is especially true for individuals dually involved in dependency and delinquency matters. In a siloed system, youth and families may be challenged to attend multiple court hearings on different dates, comply with various sets of court-ordered conditions, and maintain relationships with the parties involved in each system. To better serve crossover youth and families, the Crossover Youth Practice Model (CYPM) encourages jurisdictions to implement a more integrated approach to court processing. Three effective strategies that CYPM sites across the U.S. have utilized to minimize burdens on youth and families and maximize system resources include: Dedicated Dockets, One Family/One Judge Models, and Pre-Court Coordination.

**Dedicated Dockets:** In this model, a particular court and court personnel (e.g., judge, prosecutor, public defender, etc.) are designated to hear all dually-involved cases. This allows court personnel to become familiar with the special needs of dually-involved youth and ensure that they receive the services they need. Juvenile justice staff, child welfare social workers, and attorneys are required to attend the hearings and facilitate interagency communication pre- and post-hearing.

**One Family/One Judge Models:** Under this approach, a single judge hears the dependency, delinquency, and any other family court matters for

all children and youth within a family. Many jurisdictions that utilize this model also require continuity of counsel for both the dependency and delinquency cases.

**Pre-Court Coordination:** This model requires that the team of individuals serving the youth and their family come together prior to each court hearing to review the status of the case and develop a single set of recommendations addressing the child welfare and juvenile justice issues. While the youth and family may appear before different judges in separate dependency and delinquency matters, the goal is for child welfare and juvenile justice staff to coordinate with one another as much as possible. This includes the creation (or modification) of a single case plan that identifies services to meet the needs of the youth and family, while addressing youth and community safety/risk issues. The assessment conducted and case plan developed as part of this process are shared with and used in all courts.

## Examples from the Field

### *Dedicated Docket: Prince George's County, Maryland*

While implementing the CYPM in 2013, Prince George's County, Maryland Circuit Court Family Division under the leadership of the Honorable Judge Cathy Serrette, and Magistrate's Althea Jones

and Kristin Hileman-Adams recognized the importance of the court's role in collaborating to produce better outcomes for youth who cross over between the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. The court saw itself not just as a leader and convener in this change process but also as a partner that could improve how cases were managed.

To achieve these goals, the Circuit Court Family Division created a dedicated Crossover Docket. Once a youth identified as having crossed over from child welfare to juvenile services becomes dually adjudicated, the court assigns the ongoing oversight of the case to one of two dedicated crossover magistrates or to the judge who has been handling the dependency case. The case is specifically assigned to the magistrate or judge who is also overseeing the dependency proceedings. This alignment of court assignment ensures one magistrate or judge has full knowledge about the youth and family in all delinquency and dependency post adjudicatory proceedings. To ensure continuity of information exchange prior to adjudication, the court case file is flagged as “crossover” when being filed by the State’s Attorney. This flagging ensures the overseeing judge knows to review the other court file as they are presiding over the case in the early stages. The same assignment process occurs if the delinquency adjudication occurs before the dependency adjudication. To further support this approach, the court also developed a judicial benchbook supplement designed to orient all judges and magistrates on the dedicated docketing process and the various types of court orders common in crossover cases.

A primary benefit of the model is that it allows one magistrate or judge to oversee all aspects of a youth’s journey post-adjudication in the court systems, thereby enhancing inter-agency communication and lessening the burden on youth and families. Indeed, since launching the dedicated

docket, parties have noted improved system integration and coordination. Given this positive impact, Prince George’s County Circuit Court has provided training and peer mentoring to other courts in Maryland on the development of a dedicated docket for dually-involved youth.

### ***One Family/One Judge Model: Yavapai County, Arizona***

Years before adopting the One Family/One Judge model, the Honorable Judge Anna Young, the Presiding Juvenile Court Judge in Yavapai County, Arizona saw the potential benefit of consolidating the region’s juvenile court processes. As a dependency-only judge for half of the county, Judge Young recalls being in the dark on the existence of delinquency cases when a crossover youth was brought before her on a dependency matter. Only after reading the court reports would it be revealed that such monumental life events – such as a delinquency petition or time in detention – were taking place concurrently in a youth’s life.

This gap in knowledge began to close when the county implemented the One Family/One Judge model in January 2013. At that point, the court began consolidating hearings for dependency and delinquency cases. The immediate changes impacted initial detention hearings, which local child welfare staff started to attend for the cases of youth who had crossed over. With one judge on the bench familiar with the needs of both the youth and family in the context of their delinquency and dependency proceedings, all parties experienced better coordination around release planning.

Today, delinquency and dependency matters in Yavapai County are scheduled together whenever possible, so that families do not have to appear in court more often than necessary. Since Yavapai is geographically a large county, and hearing the cases together may throw off the regular court schedule for

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other stakeholders, the judge allows the County Attorneys to appear telephonically rather than drive several hours for one case. Both the judge and court partners are careful to maintain a firm line between delinquency and dependency matters when necessary, and since implementing this new structure, the court has not experienced any exchange of information that would potentially pose a conflict in one case or lead to recusal.

The goal of the One Family/One Judge approach is to increase the efficiency of the proceedings while allowing a judge to hear a youth's case and story in a broader context. Ideally, families see this growing relationship with the judge as a positive one, and come to view the court as a partner, not an adversary, in the case of their youth who has crossed over. The implementation of the CYPM in Yavapai has served as a support to this court process by streamlining case management practices between the Departments of Child Safety and Probation.

***Pre-Court Coordination: Mahoning County, Ohio***

Operating a dedicated docket or One Family/One Judge model is not always feasible for a number of reasons, such as demands on resources and staffing. When this is the case, the CYPM recommends that jurisdictions implement a pre-court coordination process. Mahoning County Ohio, decided to expand the application of the pre-court coordination process to the courts. With feedback from line staff, the Honorable Judge Theresa Dellick, Magistrate's Richard White and Jeralyn Mercer settled on a two-magistrate/one family model as the best way to meet their needs. The process creates an opportunity one-week prior to the date of a hearing for the designated crossover dependency and delinquency magistrates to come together to conduct a review of the case files for a crossover youth. This process results in a judicial information sharing process that ensures a collective understanding of a youth's status and any procedural issues for cases on the following week's docket.

This process has helped to reduce duplication of court orders and the number of people managing the cases of crossover youth, and has provided for the greater continuity of information exchange and relationships with youth.

Handling cases in this manner has provided families with a more coherent and beneficial experience in dealing with the system. When the two magistrates refer to each other by name, the family senses they are not being treated as an anonymous entity in a bureaucracy, but rather cared for by a system with their interests at heart.

**Conclusion**

While the CYPM encourages the development of an integrated court process, achieving such is a challenge. However, as evidenced by the communities highlighted in this bulletin court integration is achievable and serves in the best interest of youth. If one of the highlighted models is not an option for your community, the CYPM encourages the exploration process to identify what strategy is the best fit for your jurisdiction.

**Questions? Contact Us!**

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