

**Office of the Child's Representative**  
**2009 Joint Judiciary Hearing Fact Sheet**

Contact: Theresa Spahn, Executive Director, 303-588-0122  
or Sarah Ehrlich, Staff Attorney, 303-860-1517, x 1

**What is the Office of the Child's Representative (OCR)?** The OCR is the state agency mandated to represent the best interest of all children in the Colorado court system. **Ninety-six percent (96%)** of the OCR's budget is directly spent on attorney services for children. The remaining 4% is used to administer the state agency, which consists of a staff of eight employees who oversee approximately 250 attorneys. The OCR represented approximately 19,000 children in the last year in dependency and neglect, delinquency, paternity, truancy and dissolution of marriage cases.

**Who are the children represented?** Seventy-two percent (72%) of the 19,000 children are victims of serious child abuse and neglect. The majority of children reside in foster care and require attorney services for the entire life of a case. D&N cases are filed in every county in the state, and these children are removed from homes all over the state. Children also receive attorneys in delinquency, truancy, and high conflict divorce cases.

**What is the mission of the OCR?** The OCR was created by the state legislature in 2000 to improve representation for Colorado's most vulnerable children by providing competent and effective legal services. The legislation was sponsored by Sen. Norma Anderson and Rep. Kay Alexander.

**Who are the OCR attorneys?** The OCR attorneys are skilled in pediatric and juvenile law, and provide attorney services at a cost-effective rate of \$65 hour. These attorneys live and work in the same communities as the children they represent, and are available to speak with legislators to discuss the challenges these children face. They are known in the legal community as Guardians ad Litem, or GALs.

**What is a GAL expected to do in every case?** The attorney must visit each child in placement. Usually, there is more than one child per case and they are often placed in different care. Required responsibilities of the GAL include: maintain contact with the child in placement; independently investigate the facts of the case; attend all court hearings (there may be as many as 13 hearings per year in a case, 13 is the current average in Adam's County); attend ancillary hearings such as special education hearings or child support hearings; prepare for and litigate contested hearings; and attend staffings. A staffing is a meeting between the GAL, caseworkers, therapists and other individuals that work with the child. Critical treatment and placement decisions are often determined at staffing.

**What is the average cost per case for the state?** The average cost of an OCR case is \$1,242 per year. The average time spent on a case is 19 hours.

**OCR performance audit of GAL services:** The Office of the State Auditor conducted a performance audit of the OCR and Guardian ad Litem services in 2007. No substantive findings were discovered as part of this audit. The audit found that of all GALs sampled, 100% visited the children in placement, 98% of GALs were properly appointed, and attorneys attended 99% of their hearings. There were no findings in complaints, billing and training. The auditors acknowledged that Colorado was a nationally recognized leader in the delivery of attorney services. A copy of the audit report from is available at <http://www.leg.state.co.us/OSA/coauditor1.nsf/ReportPublicDept?OpenForm> under the Judicial Branch.

**What the OCR can do for you:** The OCR may serve as a resource to legislators by providing information and answering questions concerning children's issues and GALs. The OCR welcomes comments and questions from legislators regarding attorney issues and any other topics involving children or the office, including complaints, legislation or specific information concerning children or GALs in a legislator's community.