

Vermont Judicial Commission on Family Treatment Dockets

Draft Principles

1. **Safety.** In every child protection case when a petition is filed, appropriate services should be identified as soon as possible to take immediate steps to screen for substance abuse, mental health, and trauma with a goal of early intervention. The window between intervention and service delivery must be shortened in all areas of the State. Services to families should be tailored to their needs and specific safety threats, and evidence-based.
2. **Timeliness.** Attention to and emphasis on the quality of the initial affidavit with focus on consistency of State's Attorneys' review of substantiated risk is most important. Children should be removed from their homes only when there is an imminent risk to the well-being of the child.
3. **Due Process.** Attorneys representing parents and children have difficulty protecting the rights of their clients when challenged with excessive caseloads and inadequate resources. Further disruptions in these cases occur from changing judicial assignments and transfer of cases between SA and AG offices. Local cultural habits and norms create unhelpful pressures and inconsistent administration of case-flow. We must emphasize quality, training and consistency in judicial assignments and attorney representation. We must increase the amount of time allocated for hearings and schedule hearings from the bench. Vermont children and families are best served by collaborative, non-adversarial process and we must consider mediation and other ADR processes outside court time. We must improve training and opportunity for collaboration. All parties to the CHINS cases should commit to collaborate in the best-interests of the child.
4. **Permanency.** We must increase the opportunity for parent-child contact. The focus in a CHINs Proceeding should be reunification of the family when it is in the child(ren)'s best interests.
5. **Well-being.** Availability, consistency, manageable caseloads, outcome-oriented practices, and maintaining a focus by all branches of government on the safety and welfare of children are our priorities for improving the well-being of children and families in Vermont's child protection judicial system.