

Overview

As commissioned by the Pennsylvania State Roundtable, the Office of Children and Families in the Courts (OCFC), in collaboration with the Benchbook Committee has developed this Resource Companion to assist new and experienced judicial officers in their efforts to help dependent children and their families. Used as an adjunct resource to the Pennsylvania Dependency Benchbook, the Resource Companion provides valuable information in fourteen topic areas. The topic areas as well as the resources were selected by trial judges currently overseeing dependency proceedings. The overarching goal of the Resource Companion is to provide a centralized location for information which can enhance understanding of many social, developmental, and interpersonal issues seen in dependency matters.

To achieve this goal, the Resource Companion provides:

- A Section Overview for each of the fourteen topic areas which highlights the documents contained within the section and connects the topic information to the Dependency Benchbook. In most cases, the Overviews reference specific chapters within the Benchbook and encourage judges to read not only the primary resources but also the additional cited resources.
- Primary Resources: These articles, briefs, journals, and practice notes are provided in full text. They include articles identified by the committee as “core or essential reading” for all judges and judicial officers presiding in dependency matters. While not all inclusive, they provide a general overview or foundational knowledge of the subject matter. The Benchbook Committee strongly recommends these articles be reviewed by all judges and judicial officers.
- Additional Resources: These articles, briefs, journals, and websites are provided by citation only. They include documents identified by the committee as being “highly recommended” reading. They are provided as additional information for those judges and judicial officers having an increased interest in a particular topic area.

A recommended first step in using the Resource Companion is to read section overviews. The overviews make the link between material contained within the section and material contained within the Dependency Benchbook. Reading the overviews will assist in recognizing how the two documents compliment one another.

After reviewing section overviews, readers are strongly encouraged to read articles identified as primary resources. These articles are generally broad in scope providing an overview of the topic but many also provide specific suggestions and guidance.

For enhanced understanding of a topic area, readers are directed to the additional resources found in most sections. These additional resources are provided in citation form only but are included as the committee believed they contain valuable information that can augment primary resource information.

Finally, the committee wants to be very clear regarding the intended use of this Resource Companion. The Resource Companion was created to provide general topic overview information. For obvious reasons, it does not provide every resource for every topic area. Instead it contains only those articles reviewed by the committee and deemed core to judicial understanding. In addition, while the documents included as primary resources and those cited as additional resources are highly recommended by the committee, none are considered as evidence in a proceeding. They were selected based on their general scope of information and should not be used as authoritative.

The committee strongly believes the use of Pennsylvania's Dependency Benchbook combined with this Resource Companion will greatly assist judges and judicial officers as they work to ensure safe, timely, permanent homes for abused and neglected children. The committee encourages all judges and judicial officers to fully utilize these documents and commends them for the work they do each and every day to help our most vulnerable citizens.

