

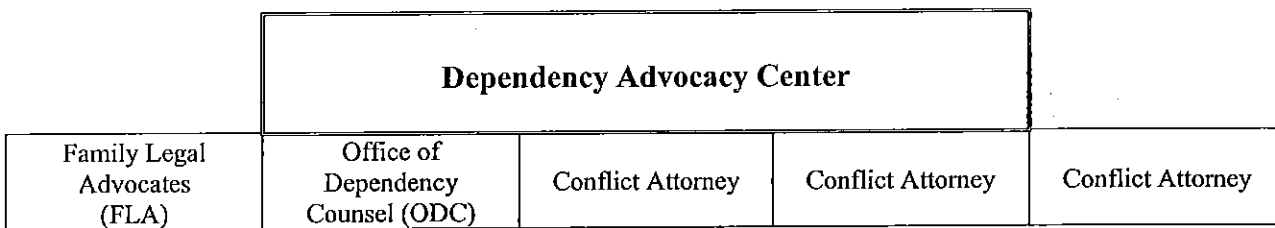
DEPENDENCY ADVOCACY CENTER



Mission Statement

Dependency Advocacy Center provides zealous legal representation to indigent clients in the juvenile dependency system to promote timely reunification and preservation of families in a safe, healthy environment. DAC believes that every parent and child entering the dependency system has a right to be treated with dignity, compassion and respect.

Structure



Pursuant to its contract with the State of California, Dependency Advocacy Center (DAC), a nonprofit organization, provides free legal services to over 1800 indigent parents and children in Santa Clara County. The structure of DAC is that of an umbrella organization with one Executive Director. Within DAC, there are five segmented, independent law offices—FLA, ODC, and three Conflict Attorney offices. FLA and ODC are law offices each having a designated supervising attorney, six staff attorneys, one social worker, plus support staff. Conflict Attorneys are stand-alone attorneys operating independently. DAC also employs eight mentor parents as part of its Mentor Parent Program, comprised of parents who were formerly in the dependency system, reunified with their children, and had their cases dismissed. The mentor parents provide guidance to current clients.

Representation Philosophy

The trauma experienced by families involved in the juvenile dependency system is real and the parties must be afforded effective counsel to assist them in making sound legal decisions. The role of a parent's attorney is a challenging one. Our clients are typically in a state of distress when we meet them, often with limited capabilities to understand why their family has been disrupted and brought to the attention of the juvenile dependency court. Establishing trust at the earliest possible stage in these proceedings is critical as timelines for reunification are strict and unforgiving.

As parents build confidence in their attorneys, they increasingly rely on the attorney's expertise. DAC attorneys understand the various trajectories cases can take and make recommendations to clients based on their experience of the juvenile dependency system and knowledge of the law. DAC attorneys have achieved success through the effective use of mediations and other informal settlement negotiations. Frequently, however, cases will involve significant factual and legal disputes and will be litigated. Collaboration and zealous advocacy are not mutually exclusive and DAC attorneys often reach the best results for their clients by using their advocacy skills in a collaborative setting.