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**The BECCA Bill**

The “BECCA Bill,” passed by state legislature in 1995, was designed for parents to gain assistance from the courts to support their at-risk teenagers. The youth involved are often using or abusing substances, chronically run from the home, present mental health concerns, or are involved in other activities which might directly endanger themselves or others.



Parents, children, courts, law enforcement and DCFS can use this legislation to respond to family conflicts and assist families in crisis management and reconciliation.

The BECCA Bill consists of three petitions:

**1: AT RISK YOUTH (ARY):**

Through this process parents may petition the courts for assistance with their teen while the teen resides in their home. Court orders mandate the youth attend school, remain at home, abstain from all drug/alcohol use, follow a curfew, and potentially a list of other case by case directives. For a child to meet the requirements of an ARY petition they must meet at least one of three criteria:

- An individual who is under 18 and remains absent from the home for a period of more than 72 hours without parental consent;  
or
- Is beyond parental control such that behavior endangers the health, safety or welfare of the child or another person;  
or
- Has a serious substance abuse problem.

**2: CHILD IN NEED OF SERVICES (CHINS):**

The purpose of a CHINS petition is to temporarily place a child outside of the home in an attempt to repair family relationships and ensure child safety.

This temporary placement is only able to last 9 months and the petitioning party must provide a placement. CHINS petitions can be filed by a parent, youth, or DSHS. Under a CHINS petition, the parent and the child are required to attend counseling which includes family and individual counseling. Visitation between the parents and child occurs, along with a host of other possible services, to seek family reconciliation at the end of the 9 month period.

**3: TRUANCY (TRU):**

These petitions are typically filed by school officials and schools are mandated to file if a youth had seven unexcused absences in a month or ten in one year. These petitions require the youth to attend school every day, every period, on time and can also hold the parent responsible for chronic truancy.

In ALL petitions all parties are capable of being in contempt of court for violating the court order or failure to participate in court ordered services and can face sanctions if found in contempt by the court.

Role of the BECCA Probation Officer:

- Refer families to mandated and optional services.
- Work with school, treatment, and law enforcement officials to monitor youth and provide wrap-around services.

*Continued ... Role of the Probation Officer*

- Monitor court order compliance and make recommendations to the court for sanctions and modifications.
- Obtain information from collaborating agencies to inform the court.
- Conduct background checks.

**Who initiates the filing:**

**ARY** – Parent or Guardian

**CHINS** – Parent/Guardian, Youth, DSHS

**Truancy** – School

**How can a petition be filed:**

1. Download from web  
<http://www.spokanecounty.org/juvenilecourt/>
  2. Pick on up at Front Desk in Juvenile Court
  3. US Mail – call Julie Curtis 509-477-2459
- Should a youth violates the ARY Court Order (i.e. not attending school) the Parent, who must consistently monitor the At Risk Court Order, must then file contempt's to hold the juvenile accountable to the Juvenile Court Order.
  - In certain circumstances the Probation Officer may file a contempt on a parent or a child in either an At Risk or CHINS petition.

**ARY & CHINS – Information:**

- Contact Julie Curtis at 477-2459, or
- Visit : [www.spokanecounty.org/juvenilecourt](http://www.spokanecounty.org/juvenilecourt)
- Come to Juvenile Court to get information.
- Truancy Issues  
– Please contact school personnel.

**BECCA Statistics**

January - April 2007

**Child In Need of Services(CHINS)**

Average Caseload 30

**At Risk Youth(ARY)**

Average Caseload 109

**ARY – Males**

Average 42%

**ARY - Females**

Average 58%

**ARY Contempt Hearings**

Average 98

**ARY - Detention Bed Day**

Total 180



**CHINS**

**Success Story**

\*Jane is a fictitious name used to keep the identity of the youth anonymous and protect confidentiality.

I first met Jane\* in the Spokane County Juvenile Detention Facility in late summer of 2006. I was made aware that one of our At Risk Youth had been brought in on a bench warrant the previous evening. When I got to detention, Jane was on red flag status for the combative behavior that she exhibited during arrest and intake; this was believed to come from a withdrawal from illegal street drugs. Due to red flag status in detention, I had to meet with Jane in an attorney booth.



These booths are small, enclose the youth and separate us by a chain link fence window. Since this was the first time meeting with Jane, I initially needed to do an assessment.

Jane disclosed to me during the assessment that her grandparents had custody of her and her two younger sisters. They lived with her maternal grandparents in Spokane, Washington.

Her parents had lost custody of her at a very young age due to drug use and domestic violence. The initial years of living with her grandparents went well, according to Jane. She felt safe and her grandparents provided for her basic needs. During this time, her mother had sporadic visitation with Jane and her sisters.

However, as Jane got older she began to become more and more stressed and anxious due to her increasing volatile living situation. After a few years of peace and stability, Jane's mother discontinued contact and failed to appear at visitations and holidays. As time went on Jane stated that her grandfather became increasingly verbally and physically abusive. Jane's father had been out of the picture for several years at this point and she had no contact with his side of the family.

As a teenager Jane's grades fell below passing in all classes, she rarely attended school and self medicated with street drugs to cope with the pain she was experiencing at home. At this point, Jane's grandmother filed an At Risk Youth petition and Jane first made contact with the Juvenile Justice System.

This is the point in Jane's life when I met her. As she disclosed to me information, she lost control of her emotions and sobbed when we talked about home, school and her options. Her life had clearly been a series of emotional and physical struggles, which ultimately led her to self-mutilation and drug use. I told Jane about a Child In Need of Services Petition, which would allow her to live outside the home with a court-approved placement. Jane stated she had an Aunt and Uncle whom she liked but she had been denied contact with. She believed a grandparent of hers residing in a nursing home would have their contact information. Based on this

information we located the grandparent, contacted the Aunt and Uncle and filed a CHINS Petition.

Jane was placed with her Aunt and Uncle in the fall of 2006. Since that time she has remained clean from all non prescription substances, attended counseling to address her past and to cope with her childhood, re-enrolled in high school and is receiving A's and B's and is currently looking for a summer job. Jane has completely turned her life around with the support of her Aunt and Uncle and the BECCA Unit services.

**For Jane and all of our youth like her we must continue to use CHINS and ARY petitions to protect and advocate for Spokane teens.**

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