



## Media Release

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### Statement: Historic Foster Care Ruling Strengthens Rights of Foster Youth in Washington State

For the first time in Washington State's history, an appellate court has ruled this week that failure to appoint counsel to a foster youth violated the youth's legal rights. The case found that the Pierce County juvenile court misapplied due process law by understating the youth's interests in his case as well as the risk of error in the case. In the case, *In re the Dependency of J.A.*, the appellate court found that the government's financial interests did not outweigh the interests of J.A. in having legal counsel.

*The following is a statement from **Casey Trupin**, Coordinating Attorney with the [Children & Youth](#) project at Columbia Legal Services (CLS):*

"Columbia Legal Services is proud to have represented this youth on appeal and laud the court for finding that 'the interest in protecting [him] far outweighed any administrative or fiscal burden that appointment of counsel for J.A. might have entailed.' All children and youth like J.A., whose lives are now completely controlled by the state and the courts, should have a legal advocate to advise them and fight for their rights."

Tuesday's decision offers up more momentum in the fight to strengthen the rights of foster youth in our state and comes on the heels of recent legislation (SB 6126) that provides legal representation to the most vulnerable foster children and youth in Washington State. The decision in the case can be found here: <http://www.courts.wa.gov/opinions/pdf/D2%2045134-4-II%20%20Unpublished%20Opinion.pdf>

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