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## Chief Justice Highlights Pilot Program to Improve Child Welfare

### *Vigo, Marion County At-Risk Youth and Family Pilot Programs Prove Successful*

(Indianapolis) – In yesterday's State of the Judiciary address, Indiana Chief Justice Loretta Rush touted a Vigo County public defense pilot program that resulted in speedier case resolutions and a significantly higher percentage of successful family reunifications by providing parents and their lawyers with additional case management support. It was funded by a special appropriation made by the General Assembly to the Commission on Court Appointed Attorneys (CCAA) in 2021.

"The longer a child lingers in the system without permanency, the longer their lives are upended," the Chief Justice said in her address to Indiana's General Assembly and the Governor. "The sooner parents understand what they need to do and take advantage of services, the quicker children can be reunited with their families or placed in a permanent home such as through adoption."

Additionally, a juvenile early intervention program conducted in Marion County's public defender office resulted in juvenile detention rates at disposition dropping from 21% to 3% by working with clients and their families early in the process, prior to the initial hearing. The cases involved in the pilot program also resulted in fewer delinquency findings than non-pilot cases.

These programs were funded by an initial appropriation of \$2 million dollars in 2021. Considering the funds saved from fewer placements and treatment expenses, the CCAA is confident that the program has saved the state significant funds. The Vigo County Program has now been fully funded at the county level, once the County Council recognized how increased legal support to parents resulted in county savings and better outcomes for families.

“We’re grateful to the General Assembly for funding this program, and we’re proud of the results for Indiana’s families,” said Mark W. Rutherford, CCAA chair. “This is a perfect example of how an ounce of prevention can be worth a pound of cure in Indiana’s child welfare system. Families generally want to do the right thing, and a well-trained public defender with adequate resources can be transformational in encouraging family healing and self-sufficiency.”

In addition to the programs in Vigo and Marion County, the CCAA has funded pilots with similar goals in Monroe, Gibson, and Washington Counties. Results will be released from those programs upon their conclusion.

“These five counties have Chief Public Defenders who stepped up to take advantage of this opportunity to make their local public defense system more efficient,” said Derrick Mason, CCAA executive director, “In Indiana, the public defense system is very much a partnership between the state and the counties, and the Chief Public Defenders in Marion, Vigo, Monroe, Gibson, and Washington Counties should be commended.”

For further information, click [HERE](#) to view a document outlining the project results.

See the Commission’s website (<https://www.in.gov/ccaa/>) for further information. Follow the Commission on “X” at @IndianaCCAA.

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