

WHEN IS THE COURT INVOLVED?

The court becomes involved with families when DCFS files a petition with the court after removing a child from his or her home due to safety concerns.

After getting information from DCFS, the child's attorney, the parents' attorneys, and any other parties to the case, the judge is responsible for deciding what is in the child's best interest.

The judge sets the goal of the case, which is usually to reunite

a child with the parent or custodian from whom he or she was removed. The judge monitors whether the parents and DCFS are following the case plan and court orders.

The judge also must determine a final and permanent placement for the child within a year from when the child was first removed. Case circumstances or the child's best interests may create the need for additional time.

CAN I PARTICIPATE IN COURT HEARINGS?

Foster parents, pre-adoptive parents, or relative caregivers are entitled to the opportunity to be heard in court hearings. A relative caregiver is a relative who has been taking care of the child while the child has been in foster care.

DCFS is required to provide notice to foster parents, pre-adoptive parents, and relative caregivers of any court hearing

with respect to a child in their care.

If you are not a foster parent, pre-adoptive parent, or a relative caregiver, you must file a motion with the court to get permission to attend and be heard. Or you may contact the DCFS caseworker, the parent's attorney, or child's attorney and ask to be called as a witness.