



URGENT FUNDING REQUEST: LEGAL REPRESENTATION FOR INDIGENT PARENTS

BACKGROUND

Lokken & Associates, P.C. provides court representation in Salt Lake County to parents or guardians who are facing allegations of abuse/neglect or termination of parental rights before the Third District Juvenile Court and the Third District Court. Lokken has provided this service for 26 years. Child welfare cases are labor intensive and commonly involve mental health and substance use issues. In total, Lokken attends 70-100 hearings each week and maintains an ongoing caseload of approximately 350 families. As cases open and close over the course of a year, over 700 cases are billed annually. Each case requires a minimum of 13-15 hearings and can exceed 40 hearings, not including trials, appeals or other meetings. Child welfare actions involve constitutional rights and are complex. Most cases remain active for 15 to 18 months.

Lokken has 3 attorney vacancies. With only 6 attorneys remaining, Lokken is operating at a 33% deficit in attorney workforce. Lokken needs a minimum of 9 trial attorneys to continue to provide high quality **statutorily mandated services** to our Salt Lake County community. Salaries need to be upgraded to minimize turnover rates and retain attorneys.

URGENT FUNDING REQUEST

Lokken needs an immediate adjustment to its contract amount. The hiring landscape for attorneys has drastically changed. Lokken is experiencing a high rate of turnover and needs the ability to offer competitive salaries to retain current attorneys and to attract qualified candidates. Three 3 attorneys are needed to fill current vacancies.

- Current employee salaries are well below minimum starting salaries for Attorney General, Guardian ad Litem. An attorney salary at Lokken & Associates is approximately \$50,000.
- A review of salaries and caseloads for parental indigent defense from Uintah, Wayne, Tooele and Utah Counties show higher salaries and lower caseloads.

TURNOVER RATE OF 180%

From January 2019 to present, Lokken has experienced a 180% turnover rate. In the past two years, 13 attorneys have left the firm. Six departed for other county or state positions. Three were employed by the Attorney General's Office, one by the Office of Guardian ad Litem, one by the Utah County Attorney, and one by Salt Lake Legal Defenders. The remaining attorneys left to practice in different areas. On average, new attorneys are staying for fewer than two years, most times less. The job description requires that attorneys have the ability and desire to work with a challenging client base who suffer from a multitude of issues such as poverty, mental health, substance abuse and domestic violence.

It is common knowledge among other state and local agencies, (as well as private entities), that Lokken attorneys are well trained and require minimal additional training. This is especially so at the Attorney General or Guardian ad Litem offices. During Attorney General openings, it is not uncommon for Associate Attorneys General to encourage Lokken attorneys to apply for open positions. In Third District alone, there are currently 6 former Lokken attorneys who work for the Attorney General and Guardian ad Litem offices.

SUMMARY

Lokken cannot afford the loss of another attorney. Lokken must also encourage new hires to remain for longer periods of time. Lokken has previously been able to obtain and keep employees by offering valuable training and experience, but as their skills and experience increase, so does their marketability. Attorneys don't want to leave, it just becomes financially necessary for them to do so.

- Lokken needs to immediately fill three (3) attorney vacancies to be fully staffed.
- Lack of competitive starting or ongoing salary halts the hiring process, or forces the hiring of less than ideal candidates.
- Candidates for open positions are very aware of going rates of pay. Candidates will accept the position and then later decline, or be employed short term before leaving for higher pay.
- Low retention due to employees leaving for higher paying positions.
- Being in a constant state of training new attorneys is a significant drain in resources.
- Lokken handles complex legal matters in a trauma environment.