

**JOINT BUDGET COMMITTEE BILL****SUMMARY OF H.B. 16-1193:  
CONCERNING GRANTING ELECTRONIC ACCESS TO COURT INFORMATION TO ATTORNEYS  
UNDER CONTRACT WITH THE OFFICE OF RESPONDENT PARENTS' COUNSEL.**

**Prime Sponsors:** Representative Hamner and Senator Lambert

**Bill Summary**

The bill grants attorneys that are under contract with the recently created Office of Respondent Parents' Counsel electronic access to two court databases, the name index and register of actions, so that they can represent their clients. The bill would take effect July 1, 2016, when the attorneys' contracts with the Office become effective.

**Fiscal Impact**

This bill does not have a fiscal impact.

**Background Information***Respondent Parents' Right to Counsel*

The Colorado Children's Code<sup>1</sup> defines when a child is "dependent" or "neglected", under what circumstances a child can be removed from his or her home and placed in the temporary custody of a county department of social services, and under what circumstances the court may terminate a parent-child legal relationship. A parent or guardian who is a respondent in a dependency and neglect (also called "D&N") case has the right to be represented by counsel at every stage of the proceedings; a respondent parent or guardian who is indigent has the right to counsel at State expense. Counsel for respondent parents plays a critical role in protecting parents' constitutional and legal rights and providing complete, accurate, and balanced information to the courts.

*Oversight of Respondent Parents' Counsel*

Historically, the State Court Administrator's Office has paid for court-appointed counsel to represent indigent parties who are respondent parents in D&N actions. Pursuant to S.B. 14-203 and H.B. 15-1149, a new independent agency within the Judicial Branch has been established to ensure the provision and availability of high-quality legal representation for respondent parents involved in D&N proceedings. The Office of Respondent Parents' Counsel began operations January 1, 2016, and all existing and new state paid respondent parents' counsel appointments will be paid by this new Office as of July 1, 2016.

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<sup>1</sup> See Title 19, Colorado Revised Statutes.