



# Nonprofits Vital to Recovery



## FOCUS ON DISPUTE RESOLUTION

On behalf of Resolution Washington, the statewide association of Dispute Resolution Centers (DRCs), please know we are thinking of you, and all of our national and state leaders, who are juggling a multitude of demands as we collectively navigate this time of crisis. The COVID-19 pandemic affects every level of society, and requires a comprehensive, creative, and community wide response. Washington's 21 nonprofit DRCs, which are organized and called to serve by RCW 7.75, have decades of experience **responding to the needs of our communities** with tailored dispute resolution, facilitation and education services. With the landscape changing daily, we are all adapting to meet those needs and support our staff and volunteers during this critical time.

We are here to help, and we want you and other leaders to know our centers are a resource for you and fellow Washingtonians. We also need your assistance in advocating for critical resources for Washington nonprofits, helping to ensure we have the necessary funding to continue to serve our communities.

With a commitment to serve, our Directors and their staff are working tirelessly to meet new demands and shift service delivery to virtual platforms. With Courts closed, families in isolation, and stressors mounting, conflict continues to permeate our communities. Our services are needed now and will be needed even more as conflict becomes increasingly pronounced in the coming weeks and months.

### DRCs provide the following value to Washington communities

- **Support equitable access to justice** through dispute resolution services in collaboration with the courts and independently for over 10,000 residents annually for free or fees according to ability to pay. We do not turn anyone away due to inability to pay, which is stipulated by RCW 7.75;
- **Preserve and support relationships** through mediation, facilitation, conciliation and conflict coaching, where 90% of all mediation clients report improvement in their situation;

- **Resolve disputes efficiently with self-determination** where the participants and those most affected decide the outcomes with informed, collaborative decision-making, including a 77% settlement rate for family mediation cases;
- **Train residents in effective communication**, facilitation and dispute resolution skills, additionally engaging 1,022 volunteers in delivering over 37,000 skilled service hours to communities last year; and
- **Promote civility and compassion** during times of conflict.

### In these unprecedented times, we are rising to the needs of our clients and neighbors by:

- **Continuing to support accessibility** of our services through development of virtual communication methods and by absorbing ramp-up costs and reducing or waiving fees based on income, with increased demand;
- **Shifting mediation** and other services to phone and online platforms to support confidential dispute resolution service provision that complies with the stay at home order;
- **Stepping forth to address civil court cases** through virtual mediation in order to reduce and prevent court case backlog when we can return to in-person gatherings;
- **Responding to requests for co-parenting mediation** in the time of COVID-19, when issues are evolving about health and safety protocols, child care, visitation, transportation, and adapted education;
- **Adapting with schools and juvenile justice partners** to continue to provide social emotional skill development and conflict resolution through virtual service delivery; and
- **Responding to emerging needs** with respect to landlord/tenant conversations, foreclosure mediation, strategic planning, and other community-based requests.



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Washington's DRCs are spread across the state to provide these services to all Washington residents. At the outset of this emergency we already were significantly underfunded. We know what level of funding we need to be sustainable, and have been working diligently in recent years to develop data and partners to support ongoing funding conversations in the Washington State Legislature and with State agencies. Like so many other organizations, we face further losses due to the closure of partner agencies, the cancellation of many of our usual ways of conducting business, and the abrupt halt of numerous fundraising efforts while honoring Governor Inslee's stay at home order.

## If any Washington DRC were to close or reduce its workforce due to hardship, our communities would be impacted.

- **Low-income and indigent clients** would be unable to access free and low-cost mediation and other dispute resolution services.
- Relied upon **programs would end. Services would be withdrawn** from long-term and recent collaborations supporting partners such as schools, juvenile courts, Tribes, human services agencies, community organizations, local and state government agencies, and the public at large - including families, foster and at-risk youth, and those on the edge of homelessness served by the DRCs.
- **DRCs would not be available to respond to emerging state needs** as we did during the housing crisis when we worked with the Washington State Department of Commerce to establish and implement mediation under the Foreclosure Fairness Act.
- **DRCs would not be available to support Washington Superior and District Courts** like we did in 2019, and every prior year since the mid-1980s - saving approximately 8,000 hours in court time through settled, court-referred mediations for an estimated value of \$6,164,750 statewide in 2019 alone. Programs like these are already severely underfunded due to insufficient and

shrinking revenue from court filing fee surcharges.

- **Unresolved conflict escalates.** DRCs support our respective communities to be safer, stronger, more unified, and more creative. Now more than ever our communities need the resources, processes, and skills to work together, to creatively problem solve, and to manage conflict in healthy, safe, and productive ways.

We hope you will join us in advocating for support for Washington's nonprofits and especially for the essential functions of our DRCS, helping our fellow residents to communicate and manage conflict effectively in this time of crisis. Thank you for your support, and for your leadership.

## Questions

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