

Court Action

The first hearing in any truancy action is the “**preliminary hearing**.” At the preliminary hearing, the court will hear evidence from the school district, the parents, and the student to determine whether the allegation of truancy is (more likely than not) true. If it does determine the student truant, the court will enter a written order directing the student to go to school. The court may also enter other orders to compel compliance with the truancy law, such as obtaining a substance abuse evaluation.

If the student successfully obeys the court order and goes to school without any unexcused absences, they most likely will not be called back to court for any additional hearings.

However, students and parents who willfully violate the court order and continue to have unexcused absences will be summoned back to court for a “**contempt hearing**.” When a student or parent is held in contempt, the court may impose a coercive sanction to correct the student’s attendance issues. The court may order a student to write a report, do community service, or spend time in juvenile detention.

The court may order a parent to do community service or even pay fines of \$25.00 for each day their child misses class. Children are only entitled to legal counsel once they face the threat of confinement.

Depending on the student’s attendance after the contempt hearing, future “**review hearings**” may be necessary to review the student’s progress towards his/her attendance goals.

Questions

If you have questions, or want more information:

1. **Call your School District.**
2. **Call the Prosecutor’s Office at (206) 296-9035.**
3. **Call Juvenile Court at (206) 205-2527 or 205-9716.**
4. **Go to the Prosecutor’s Office Web page at www.metrokc.gov/proatty and click on Truancy.**

Parent Resources

Family Reconciliation Services	1-800-562-5624
Children’s Home Society	206-695-3200
Youth Eastside Services	425-747-4937
Crisis Line	1-800-244-5767
Peace Council Mediation	206-328-5908
Seattle Mental Health	206-324-0206
Valley Cities Counseling	253-939-4055

Alternative Formats

206-296-9067 TTY Relay: 711

or e-mail becky.gifford@metrokc.gov

A Parent’s Guide To The Becca Bill



*Help Keep
Our Kids In School
And Open The Door
To Their Future*



A publication of the
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Norm Maleng, Prosecuting Attorney

In the State of Washington, it is the law that school attendance is required for all children ages 8 through 17 if enrolled in public school. The law can also apply to children ages 6 and 7 if the parent enrolls a child in public school. Everyone should see to it that no child falls through the cracks.

As parents, you have a very difficult job of trying to manage the lives of your children. There exists no greater challenge than addressing the many difficulties that will confront your children as they grow. However, one issue has the potential to affect them for the rest of their lives — their education. Let's work together to keep them in school.

The Becca Bill

(RCW 28A.225 — Washington State Compulsory School Attendance and Admission Law)

Washington's truancy law, often termed "the Becca Bill," is intended to stop truancy before it becomes a problem. The law requires only one thing of students: attend school. If a student does not attend school, the law requires the school district to take action.

■ One (1) or Two (2) Unexcused Absences

After a single unexcused absence, the school must contact the parents. This is generally done by phone or letter. After a second unexcused absence, the school is required to schedule a conference with the parent and student to discuss solutions to the truancy problem.

■ Five (5) Unexcused Absences

If a student has five (5) unexcused absences in a month, the school may take stronger steps to end the truancy problem. The school may file a petition with the King County Superior Court, enter into a written truancy agreement with the family, refer the family to a "community truancy board" if one exists, or take other reasonable action. A community truancy board is comprised of citizen or school volunteers who help to resolve individual truancy cases.

■ Seven (7) and Ten (10) Unexcused Absences

Court action is required when a student has seven (7) unexcused absences in a month or ten (10) in a year. The truancy law requires that school districts file a petition in Superior Court against the student, parent, or both. After a petition is filed, several things may happen with a student's case. Depending on the circumstances of each individual case, a student's petition may not be immediately heard in juvenile court.

Attendance Workshop

A case may first be sent to an attendance workshop. The King County Superior Court workshop is an opportunity for students and parents to avoid going to court if the parties enter into an agreement that a student will attend school. At the workshop, the Deputy Prosecuting Attorney will discuss the Becca Bill and the legal and social consequences of future truancy. In addition, trained facilitators will speak separately with the students and parents on what may be causing the truancy, effective communication, and what the school district can do to help. At the end of the workshop, the parent and student will work with the facilitators to draft an agreement about specific things each person can do to help get the student back in school.