

**KING COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC DEFENSE  
THE DEFENDER ASSOCIATION DIVISION**

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, WASHINGTON 98122

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**PSYCHOSOCIAL HISTORY AND PRE-SENTENCE REPORT**

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David Lopez is a personable and polite adolescent. He was engaged in each of our meetings and appeared open and honest in his reports. He asked appropriate questions and provided more detailed accounts when asked. David appears to be taking his juvenile court involvement seriously. At times, throughout our meetings he presented as sullen and hopeless about his current situation.

David reported his strengths include being “responsible, confident at times” and “good at reading and soccer.” He explained at times he feels driven and can usually focus on what he wants. He thinks his friends would describe him as “nice” and “chill.” David’s goals include finishing high school and attending a trade school program. He would like to work for “a big,” established company, like Boeing. He hasn’t thought about what specific job he’d like to do yet. David added attending church is important to him and he would like to continue attending with his family.

When asked about his current legal situation, David admitted, “I was hanging around the wrong people, maybe trying to show off, it was stupid to not be at school.” When asked what he might do differently in the future, David stated, “I want to make right decisions in the moment. I want to think twice (before doing something).” David acknowledged he will need help learning these skills, which is part of his motivation for attending the Seattle Boys School.

David has experienced a great deal of chaos, unpredictability and exposure to violence, especially compared to many children in the United States. The family’s decision to flee their home country to protect David from Honduran gangs was a necessary one. Unfortunately, David did not find complete safety here. He has experienced ongoing bullying at school and threats from older youth and adults in his neighborhoods. David minimizes these incidents, noting they are “bearable” compared to his experiences in Honduras.

I have concerns about David’s ongoing mental health symptoms, especially within the cultural context of two vastly different living environments. David should not be expected to tolerate negative interactions in the U.S. simply because they are “less” dangerous than the environment he fled. At times, David presents older than his young age. This is likely due to the very adult experiences he has had to endure. David wants to be safe and surrounded by family and friends who support his success. David is in even more need than other adolescents of protection, safety and predictability. This can be achieved through consistent, stable support by his family and community members. With this type of support, David can move beyond day-to-day survival and gain the necessary skills to thrive as he grows older.

**Background Information and Brief Family History**

David is the oldest of three siblings born to Rosa and David Lopez. David’s younger brother is Diego (currently 13 years old) and his younger sister is named Sarah (currently six years old). David and his father came to the United States in 2016, fleeing severe gang violence in his home country of Honduras. David described their journey, noting it was far too dangerous for his mother and younger

siblings to make the trip with them. The family plans to reunite in the future. David reported he and his father moved to Washington because his father has family here. David has three paternal aunts in the area and he is close to their husbands and cousins. He currently resides with his aunt, Sofia Martinez in the Seattle area. When asked, David reported his closest relationship is with his uncle, Martin. He explained when he is with his uncle he can “just be” and is at ease and comfortable around him.

There is a dearth of information regarding David’s early childhood. He reported he was born and raised in Honduras and remembers being with his family and attending school. He reported living in a very dangerous neighborhood and having to leave when he was just 12 years old. He reported, “they wanted to hurt me and my dad.” David reported gang violence in their neighborhood was quite common and he was taught to avoid certain areas and people. He explained that compared to his home country, his current neighborhoods in Washington (Seattle and Bellevue) are extremely safe, despite some of the negative interactions he’s had with peers and adults in these areas.

### **Mental Health, Substance Use and Medical History**

David does not present with any overt mental health disorders, he did however endorse some ongoing symptoms. David reported a history of sleep difficulties, including nightmares, waking up throughout the night and feeling tired, even when he has gotten adequate sleep. He reported his nightmares include getting shot, getting hurt or those close to him being hurt. He reported he often has trouble concentrating at school and finds it difficult to maintain focus, even when working on subjects he enjoys. David additionally admitted he has punched walls when he becomes upset. He reported this has happened “a few times,” but stated he normally takes a walk to calm down when feeling upset or sad.

David reported, as far as he knows his siblings are doing well. He denied knowledge of any serious mental health or medical concerns with other family members. David reported he has lost two close relatives, including his uncle approximately eight years ago and his grandmother approximately four years ago. He doesn’t know the details of their deaths, but reported he was very close with both of them when living in Honduras. He denied any history of domestic violence in his home and reported his parents have a very good relationship. David misses his mother very much, adding he talks to her “almost daily.”

David denied any history of physical, sexual or emotional abuse by family members, but asked if violence he has suffered from others outside his family counted as “abuse.” David described ongoing violence and threats of violence, both in Honduras and continuing after arriving in Washington. Most recently David was accosted by two other teens on the metro who threatened to beat him up and steal his belongings. David rode the metro bus to and from school and reported he has had other incidents on the bus. He stopped attending school for approximately four days, explaining he was afraid to ride the bus. David took the initiative to talk to the school about riding the school bus and they were able to arrange this for him. Since then he has not had any problems taking the bus to school and reported he has had perfect attendance since. He noted his attendance prior to having problems on the metro bus was also good. School records indicate David’s attendance at his current school, Seattle High School is much better than when he attended school at Bellevue High School last year.

David reported he first tried substances when he was approximately 14 years old. He was introduced to marijuana by friends and reported at his peak use, he was smoking marijuana twice a week.

Additionally, David has tried alcohol on a few occasions, Xanax twice and cocaine one time. He reported he did not like these other substances and stated his drug of choice was marijuana. David participated in a substance use (GAIN) assessment in October 2019. His reports during our interviews were largely consistent with what he reported at that time. Rachel Smith, CDP, who completed David's GAIN assessment recommended he participate in the Alcohol/Drug Information School available through Seattle Treatment Agency. The next class is scheduled for January 11, 2020. David is eligible to receive a reduced fee for the class of \$45. David's probation counselor, Jennifer Randall is checking to see if probation can help cover the cost of this class. David is interested in completing the program and reported he has remained substance free since becoming involved in the court process, recognizing any continued to use would interfere with his goal of successfully completing the court process.

David appears to be in good general health and he denied any ongoing medical concerns. He reported having surgery on his finger. When asked about this incident, David explained he was shot in the hand. The bullet reportedly struck his hand and grazed his shoulder. He woke up at the hospital and had to wear a cast for two months while his finger healed.

David has never taken, nor has he ever been prescribed psychotropic medication to address emotional or behavioral concerns. He denied any history of suicidal ideation or gestures, self-harming behaviors, running away from home, fire setting or animal cruelty. He further denied problems with depression, anxiety, hyperactivity, or psychotic symptoms. No evidence of any psychosis was observed during our meetings.

Although David denied specific concerns of depression and anxiety, he did endorse symptoms that are attributed to these disorders. Alternatively, these symptoms may be better explained by a diagnosis of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder. Given his history of chronic exposure to violence and ongoing symptoms it is worth exploring this further and if necessary, referred for trauma-specific therapy services.

David was referred to the Seattle Mentor Program by his probation counselor, Jennifer Randall and was assigned to mentor, Christian "Chris" Rodriguez. Chris and David have met three times since this referral was made (it should be noted Chris was out of town for a period of time and then illness and transportation issues prolonged the time between some of their meetings). David is extremely interested in Seattle Mentor's group program. He stated the group meets with adults who have been able to distance themselves from negative peer groups and make major lifestyle changes to be successful. He hopes to be able to learn skills to advocate for himself and remove himself from dangerous situations. David's insight into the benefits of this group and his ability to personalize these to his own struggles in quite impressive.

### **Academic and Social History**

David is currently enrolled as a 10<sup>th</sup> grader at Seattle High School. He attended ninth grade at Bellevue High School, in Bellevue, Washington when he was living with his father. David struggled academically and behaviorally at Bellevue. Additionally, David was dealing with intense bullying as he attempted to distance himself from the negative peers he was spending time with. The district planned to move David to Alternative High School, however David explained there was a student at Alternative that would be dangerous for him to be around, again explaining he was trying to remove himself from this specific group of boys. The family decided to move him to his aunt's home in Seattle, Washington where he could attend a school in a completely different district. Since arriving

to Seattle, David has continued to struggle academically, however, as noted, his attendance and relationships with other students has improved.

David was placed in the seventh grade upon arriving to the U.S. He was enrolled for seventh and eighth grades at Middle School in Bellevue. David was initially enrolled in the ELL (English Language Learner) program at Middle School. David now speaks English very well but appears to have difficulty with colloquial language and other concepts he has not been exposed to yet. He was able to ask for clarification during our conversations and at times, still needed words or phrases repeated and explained to him.

David reported school in the United States is very different from school in Honduras, noting the most significant difference are the subjects taught in school. He stated he likes school and likes learning, but does not like waking up early and does not like the bullying he has experienced. David has been suspended twice from school, both in the ninth grade at Bellevue. He was suspended once for being intoxicated at school (marijuana use) and one time for fighting with another student. There have been no known behavioral referrals since attending Seattle High School.

David has never been assessed for Special Education services, nor has he ever been served on a 504-Plan for behavioral concerns. David presents as a bright teenager, however his academic performance in school does not reflect this. It may be beneficial to refer David for Special Education testing or seek an alternative school setting where he can receive more individualized academic instruction. David is very interested in attending the Washington Boy's School (WBS), a highly structured educational program "with an emphasis on student discipline and personal responsibility to provide a positive, safe and secure learning environment." The WBS program is six months long and is located in Covington, WA. The application process is extensive. David and I are currently working on his application for the January 2020 enrollment. It should be noted the program has strict eligibility requirements regarding juvenile court involvement, including "no felony convictions" and being "free of pending legal matters." I should also note the following session is in July 2020, which may be a more realistic option given David's current court involvement.

While pursuing the WBS program, there are two other options worth considering, including JobCorp, which has four campuses in Washington state and several in neighboring states as well. Each location offers educational and varying vocational skills programs. Alternatively, Seattle Secondary Program (SSP) offers two "alternative" school programs through the District; the Performance Center (PC) is located on the SSP campus and their Online School; a structured, supportive online program. SSP is "based on research of the best educational practices in the nation." Their mission states, "We believe all students can thrive and excel in a learning environment where each student is known well, connections are made between learning and student goals, and students have positive adult and community experiences and support."

I would support any of these three options and believe David would benefit from the support they offer, although David is most interested in WBS. I have had several past clients successfully complete the WBS program. It is worth noting the WBS provides intensive aftercare services through the use of mentors from the youth's community to help ensure a successfully transition back home. Youth learn a variety of life skills in addition to academics and credit retrieval. I believe it would be a hugely beneficial program for David and I am glad to know he is interested in attending the program. David's teachers and probation counselor agree this is an ideal program for David to attend. Additionally, David's current mentor, Mr. Rodriguez has agreed to support David through the program as a WBS mentor.

David reported he spends most of his time with family members and a few friends he knows from school. He enjoys reading; mostly “realistic fiction.” David also likes to be outside playing soccer with his uncles or working with his father. He has never played on a soccer team, but is very interested in playing for a community league. More recently, David has been on electronic home monitoring, spending most of his time at home watching movies.

**Evaluator**

I hold a Bachelor of Science degree in Social Work with an emphasis in Child and Adolescent Mental Health as well as a Master of Social Work degree from New Mexico Highlands University. I am a Licensed Independent Clinical Social Worker in the State of Washington (#LW00009501). As a clinician, I have over 17 years of experience in social work, conducting mental health assessments and providing individual, family and group therapy. I have extensive experience working with high risk youth and adults in a variety of inpatient and outpatient settings. I have worked with hundreds of clients both in and outside the criminal justice system. I am qualified and have been trained in using the American Psychiatric Association’s Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM 5) to assess and diagnose mental disorders, including substance use disorders. I am currently employed by the King County Department of Public Defense; The Defender Association Division as a Mitigation Specialist and have served hundreds of clients in that capacity.

The following documentation was reviewed regarding David:

- Cumulative student file obtained from Seattle High School

Respectfully submitted,



Valarie Mitchell, MSW, LICSW  
Mitigation Specialist/Forensic Social Worker