



STATE OF CONNECTICUT DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Public Hearing Testimony
Appropriations Committee
February 19, 2020



GOVERNOR'S BUDGET ADJUSTMENTS FOR THE FISCAL YEAR ENDING JUNE 30, 2021

Good morning Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Formica, Representative Lavielle and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Vanessa Dorantes and I am the Commissioner of the Department of Children and Families (DCF). With me today are various Department staff who are here to assist in answering questions for committee members.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you regarding the Governor's recommended budget adjustments for fiscal year (FY) 2021 for the Department of Children and Families. This budget allows the Department to build upon the successes we have achieved under the current administration. The budget meets the Department's needs in order to continue to ensure the safety and well-being of the state's children while providing support to maintain the gains we have made on the Juan F. consent decree outcome measures.

DCF's responsibilities are wide-reaching in both the scope of services provided and the numbers of children and families served. The Department's mandates cover child protection and family services, children's behavioral health, prevention, and educational services. At any point in time, DCF serves approximately 26,000 children and 12,000 families across its programs and service array. There are 1,900 investigations and 2,300 family assessments underway on any given day. From 2015 to 2019, the department saw an increase of 18.1% in the number of Careline calls, having received 105,126 calls in calendar year 2019. These calls have increased due to enhanced mandated reporting laws, which broadened the pool of mandated reporters and increased the penalties for failures or delays in reporting.

DCF is in the midst of implementing several new program initiatives initially proposed by the Governor in his FY 2020-2021 biennial budget. These include an Integrated Family Care and Support (IFCS) Program that will allow families to receive community interventions, funded by the Department, without the need to open an ongoing child protective services case. Also, a revised case management protocol is being put in place for the DCF Voluntary Services Program. We appreciate the support we have received from the Legislature in approving these new programs. We are certain that the ability to access supports through these programs will improve the lives of those served. Families will no longer be deterred by the perceived stigma of being on the DCF caseload, leading them to seek help much earlier and potentially averting a crisis.

DCF is also in the planning phase of the state's Family First Prevention Plan required under the federal Family First Prevention Services Act. This is an exciting new initiative that incentivizes states to invest funding in lower cost prevention services, with the belief that early

intervention will reduce the need for more serious and expensive interventions in the future. The Department has engaged hundreds of stakeholders from outside the agency and formed six workgroups that are informed by this collective expertise. The work product of those workgroups will be used to create the prevention plan, which will ultimately be submitted to the federal Administration for Children and Families for approval. Previous to Family First, states were only reimbursed for services provided to children being served out of the home at the highest levels of care. Now, states will be able to be reimbursed for providing services to families while their children remain safely at home and before issues escalate.

DCF recently reached a pivotal step towards exiting the Juan F. Consent Decree. The federal Court Monitor has pre-certified the outcome measure related to maintaining reasonable caseloads for workers. This was achieved with the strong support of Governor Lamont, the Office of Policy and Management (OPM) and this Legislature. Over the past eighteen months, the Department initiated a predictive hiring schedule that anticipates normal staff attrition and the seasonal caseload fluctuations that DCF experiences. The time from the date a job vacancy occurs until a replacement worker has been trained sufficiently to take on a full caseload is four months. The ability to maintain workers' caseloads within Consent Decree standards directly impacts the quality of the casework our workers can perform. Stable staffing ratios equates to better safety decisions, risk assessments and timely intervention for children and families. Governor Lamont's recommended FY 2021 budget supports this practice.

DCF's FY 2021 proposed budget is both a roadmap to achieve the goals of our Department, as well as confirmation that headway is being made in realizing those goals. The following are the major areas of budget adjustments for the Department.

The first grouping of adjustments is to the Personal Services and Other Expenses accounts, which are being reduced by a net total of \$3,315,902. This is comprised of

1. The transfer of funding, in the amount of \$3,250,813, from DCF to the Department of Administrative Services and OPM to implement the centralization of Human Resources functions
2. An increase of \$26,893 for salary adjustments resulting from bargaining unit agreements approved in the 2019 Legislative Session
3. The addition of two positions to conduct child abuse registry checks of youth camp employees age eighteen and older, in the amount of \$95,882
4. The addition of half-year funding for seven nursing and clinical positions to support licensure of the Albert J. Solnit Children's Center by the Department of Public Health, in the amount of \$328,040
5. Reductions of \$407,904 under the Personal Services account, and \$108,000 under the Other Expenses account, related to discontinued use of the Eckerd Rapid Safety Feedback

child welfare predictive analytics system in favor of newly validated and implemented Structured Decision Making tools

These adjustments allow the Department to meet its mandates, while achieving savings by removing duplicative efforts.

The next major series of budget adjustments is related to caseload-driven expenditures. The Department's guiding words for engagement are "Stay Home, Go Home, Find Home," and the proposed budget is an illustration of this practice being fulfilled. The Department's continued efforts to strive to have children placed in family settings, which is also a primary principle of the Family First legislation, allows for a significant reduction in dollars spent in the Board and Care for Children - Short-Term and Residential account. At the same time, increased funding in the Board and Care for Children - Adoption and Foster accounts is recommended, consistent with an upward trend in the number of children served in family settings. Funding is adjusted in the No Nexus Special Education and Individualized Family Supports account to reflect recent expenditure trends.

1. The net impact of these various adjustments is a savings of \$886,846, as follows
2. An increase in the Board and Care for Children – Adoption account of \$2,517,006
3. An increase in the Board and Care for Children - Foster account of \$1,294,381
4. A decrease in the Board and Care for Children – Short-Term and Residential account, in the amount of \$5,213,494
5. An increase in the No Nexus Special Education account of \$694,514
6. A reduction in the Individualized Family Supports account, in the amount of \$179,253

Additional recommended adjustments include an additional \$90,575 across several grant funded accounts to realign funding to address the impact of the increased minimum wage for employees of private providers from OPM's Private Providers account to DCF's budget, a reduction of \$83,264 in the Workers' Compensation Claims account to reflect a declining number of claims paid, and a reduction of \$350,000 in the Youth Transition and Success Programs account.

Thank you again for the opportunity to speak about the Department's budget adjustments and some of the advancements we have made due to your support. My staff and I welcome the opportunity to address your questions both today and when we meet with the Human Services Subcommittee. Please feel free to contact me or any of my staff with questions or concerns.