

Agency Report
Department of Human Services
Child Welfare Staffing

Analyst: Laurie Byerly

Request: Acknowledge receipt of a report on child welfare staffing.

Recommendation: Acknowledge receipt of the report.

Analysis: The 2013-15 legislatively adopted budget for the Department of Human Services (DHS) included 113 new positions (85.24 FTE) to help improve Child Welfare staffing; positions were authorized beginning January 1, 2014. The budget report for SB 5529 (2103) contained a budget note directing the agency to report on its plan to allocate or reallocate new and vacant Child Welfare positions to target certain activities.

At the September 2013 meeting of the Interim Joint Committee on Ways and Means the agency shared a draft allocation of 80 new Social Service Specialist 1 positions across the state, by service district, and by function. The positions were shown as spread across work managing in-home ongoing safety plans, providing child protection (assessment) services, certifying foster families, and cultivating adoptions.

The current agency report indicates staff were hired and trained but that it is still too early to see the full impact of increased staffing levels. This is primarily due to the amount of classroom and on the job training required – a minimum of six months – before a caseworker is able to carry a full caseload. However, DHS does report improvements in several program activity metrics during 2014:

- A 19 percent increase in the number of face-to-face contacts with children in foster care
- A 21 percent increase in the number of face-to-face visits with children in home
- A 6 percent increase in the timely completion of assessments
- An 8.4 percent reduction in the number of children in foster care
- A projected increase in the number of finalized adoptions

Implementation of differential response and expansion of strengthening, preserving, and reunifying families services are also contributing to better program outcomes. DHS will continue to share staffing information and progress toward meeting desired program outcomes with interim and session legislative budget committees.

The Legislative Fiscal Office recommends acknowledging receipt of the report on child welfare staffing.