

MAINE STATE LEGISLATURE

The following document is provided by the
LAW AND LEGISLATIVE DIGITAL LIBRARY
at the Maine State Law and Legislative Reference Library
<http://legislature.maine.gov/lawlib>



Reproduced from electronic originals
(may include minor formatting differences from printed original)



2022 Child Welfare Caseload and Workload Analysis

January 2022

Maine Department of Health and Human Services
Office of Child and Family Services

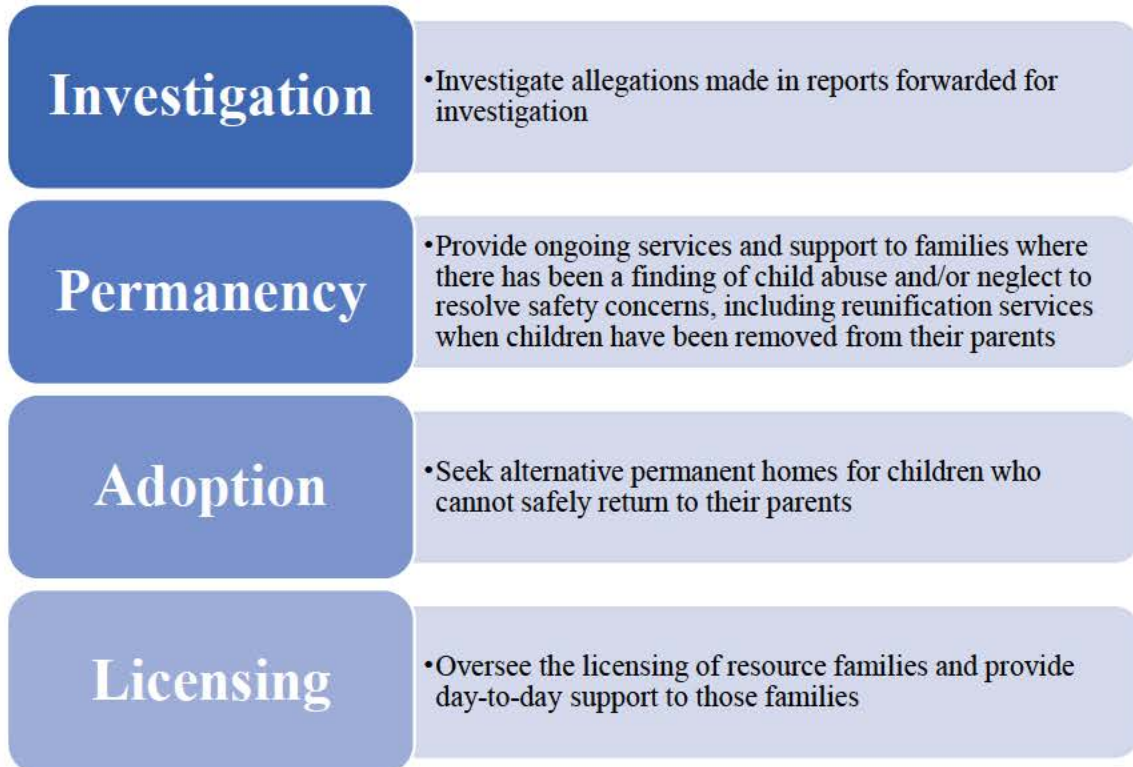
INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Reporting Requirement

Resolve 2019, Ch. 34 (introduced as LD 821 in the 129th Legislature) requires the Department of Health and Human Services “to review case load standards for child welfare caseworkers and develop standard case load recommendations with input from child welfare caseworkers and the Public Consulting Group (PCG) contracted by the Department.” It further requires that “the Department shall submit an initial report with its findings and recommendations on staffing in the Department’s child welfare program in relation to the standard case load recommendations no later than October 1, 2019 and subsequent annual reports by January 31st of each year beginning in 2020 and ending in 2030.” This is the 2022 report on caseload and workload for child welfare staff within the Office of Child and Family Services (OCFS).

Workload Analytic Tool

In 2019, OCFS and contracted provider Public Consulting Group collaborated to develop a workload analytic tool to determine OCFS’ need for additional staff. The workload analytic tool is specific to Maine and is based on factors which impact of work required of OCFS child welfare staff based on federal guidelines, state statute and regulations, and OCFS policy. The tool also accounts for the specific work of different types of caseworkers, including:



Caseload and Workload Definitions

In the 2019 report, OCFS set forth definitions of the terms caseload and workload to guide the Department’s work related to LD 821. OCFS utilized the expertise of the Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) in establishing the distinction between caseload and workload¹ and has further refined the definitions in the ensuing years.

Caseload = Cases / Workers: The number of cases (children or families) assigned to an individual caseworker in a given time period. Caseload reflects a ratio of cases (or clients) to staff members and may

¹ Child Welfare Caseload and Workload: A Synthesis of the Evidence Base, Current Trends and Future Directions (2018).

be measured for an individual caseworker, all caseworkers assigned to a specific type of case, or all caseworkers in a specified area (e.g., agency or region).

Workload = (Case Counts x Time Needed to Handle Cases) / Time Available for Casework: The development of reasonable workload standards helps to guide an organization towards the establishment of caseload expectations. In order to understand how many cases a caseworker can effectively manage, one must first understand the work inherent in each case and the time necessary to complete all parts of the work, as well as any expectations which do not directly serve children and families but are required when carrying cases.

It is important to note that there are no universally accepted standards for caseload and workload among child welfare entities throughout the country. Each state has its own statutes, regulations, policies, and guiding principles which impact both caseload and workload, making it nearly impossible to equate the work of child welfare staff in two different jurisdictions.

RESULTS

District - Counties	December 2021 Number of Caseworker Positions	Needed Number of Caseworkers	Difference
1 – York	47	46.6	(0.4)
2 – Cumberland	59	58.8	(0.2)
3 – Franklin, Oxford, Androscoggin	61	74.1	13.1
4 – Sagadahoc, Lincoln, Knox, Waldo	23	30.4	7.4
5 – Kennebec, Somerset	63	74.5	11.5
6 – Piscataquis, Penobscot	55	60.0	5.0
7 – Hancock, Washington	24	23.4	(0.6)
8 - Aroostook	32	29.2	(2.8)
Total	364	397.0	33.0

The workload analytic tool results for December 2021 show a need for 33 additional caseworkers. The current number of caseworkers (364) includes positions added in three separate initiatives since 2019; however, the workload analytic tool results demonstrate that those allocations of positions have not been sufficient to meet the actual need for caseworkers within Maine’s child welfare system.

Vacancies

During calendar year 2021, OCFS averaged a vacancy rate among caseworkers of 5.2% of all caseworker positions. While there are scholarly articles on the impact of vacancies and the national data on these topics is limited, a 2004 study from the American Public Human Services Association (APHSA)² found vacancy rates of nearly 10% among caseworkers. OCFS recognizes that vacancy directly impacts the work of OCFS staff.

OCFS employs a full-time recruitment and retention specialist and continues to work diligently to recruit qualified applicants to fill caseworker positions. As with other employers throughout the state and nation, OCFS has, at times, found it difficult to attract qualified candidates in the current job market.

Alternative Response

The Alternative Response Program (ARP) is a longstanding service in Maine that has provided a response on some low to moderate-severity reports of alleged abuse and/or neglect. In 2021, the decision was made to end the ARP contracts after careful consideration by OCFS regarding its statutory duty to investigate all reports. Based on this work, OCFS concluded that referring appropriate reports (even those of low to moderate severity, which were the

² Report From the 2004 Child Welfare Workforce Survey (2005).

only reports referred to ARP) was not in keeping with OCFS' charge. In order to quantify the impact on workload for child welfare staff, OCFS conducted a careful examination of the number of staff required to complete the work if each appropriate report of alleged abuse and/or neglect was investigated by an OCFS caseworker. As a result of that work OCFS sought and was granted 15 new caseworker positions in P.L. 2021 Ch. 398 (10 positions effective 1/1/22 and 5 positions effective 7/1/22). These positions are not included in the December 2021 count of caseworkers, but once hired, they will not reduce the needed number of caseworkers since OCFS has already begun and will continue to assume that work from the ARP contractors. Although the ARP contracts do not end until 6/30/22, providers are reporting high vacancy rates (around 70%) and difficulty hiring staff to fill positions. As a result, OCFS has sent far fewer low to moderate-severity reports of alleged abuse and/or neglect to ARP in recent months and that work has instead been completed by caseworkers. That trend is likely to continue due to the current job market and the anticipated end of the contracts, but the impact on OCFS staff will be moderated somewhat by the hiring of the first 10 of the 15 caseworkers allocated in P.L. 2021 Ch. 398. OCFS will seek to hire for the remaining five positions as soon as the funding is available.

Katahdin

During 2021, one of the primary efforts of OCFS was the continued development of a new Comprehensive Child Welfare Information System (CCWIS) named "Katahdin." Katahdin is designed to improve efficiencies and the process through which staff document cases.



In order to ensure the functionality and usability of Katahdin, frontline staff have been involved in all stages of the system's development. In late 2021, OCFS began delivering a comprehensive training on the new system to all child welfare staff. Katahdin successfully went live, on budget and on time, on 1/18/22. While training and development has impacted the workload of staff (and it is likely those impacts will continue as staff learn and become familiar with the system in early 2022), this investment of staff time will pay significant dividends in the streamlining of work, the reduction of paper record keeping, and elimination of time-consuming tasks such as scanning documents for electronic discovery.

Safety Science

Also in 2021, following the tragic fatalities of several Maine children, OCFS engaged with Casey Family Programs and Collaborative Safety to conduct a review utilizing the Safety Science model. Safety Science originated in safety-critical industries, including aviation, health care, and nuclear power and takes a system approach to examine the interactions between internal and external components of the system and make recommendations for improvements.

One common theme among several of the recommendations that resulted from this work was the need to improve the ability of OCFS staff to make decisions regarding child safety by ensuring they have access to as much information regarding the family as possible. OCFS has developed a plan to implement each of the recommendations that resulted from Collaborative Safety's report and is currently working with mental health professionals to address effective communication and coordination in child welfare cases, collaborating with partners in law enforcement and the medical community to improve information sharing when there is suspected abuse and/or neglect, removing unnecessary and/or redundant tasks in the investigation process, and examining national best practices related to standby and after-hours coverage for child welfare, as well as investigation timeframes. Frontline OCFS staff are playing a vitally important role in OCFS' efforts regarding standby coverage and assessment timeframes. Any adjustments made to the procedures regarding standby and assessment are likely to have an impact on caseworker workload in the future and the workload analytic tool will be revised as needed.

Policy and Training

During the last year OCFS has continued efforts to improve the guidance provided to staff, both through policies

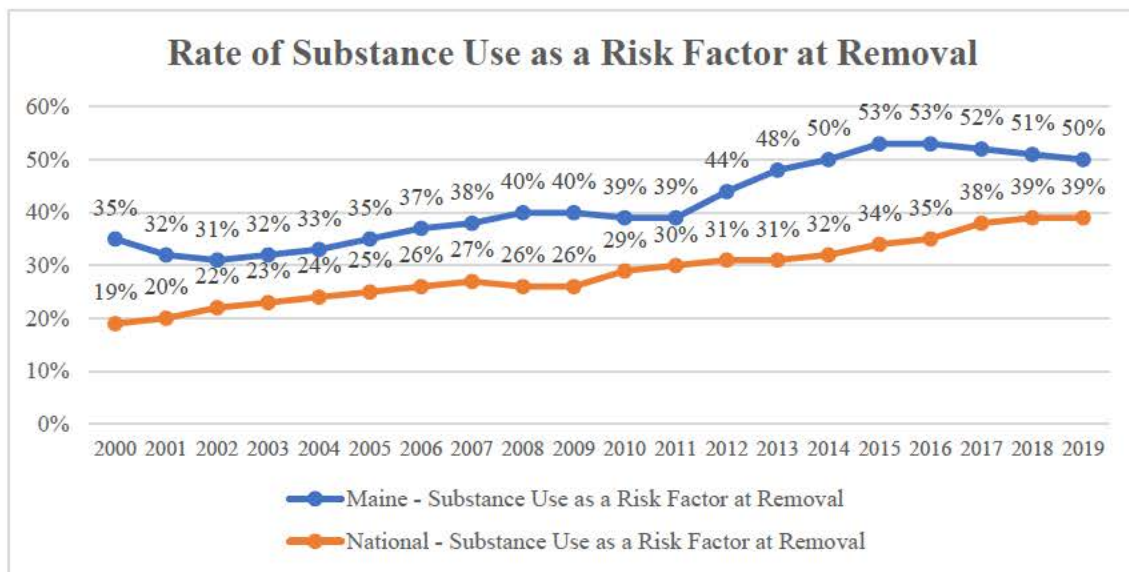
and training. OCFS issued several revised policies in 2021 in collaboration with the Cutler Institute at the University of Southern Maine with plans to continue this work in 2022 until all policies are updated.

Similarly, OCFS has engaged with the Cutler Institute to improve training opportunities for staff. An improved Foundations Training for new casework staff was implemented with the assistance of the Cutler Institute and efforts are underway to continue to expand the availability and accessibility of training for all staff.

One continued area of focus is the need for additional support for child welfare supervisors who play a vital role in guiding the work of caseworkers. In 2021, OCFS began the development of a supervision framework with the assistance of the Cutler Institute. The framework includes a Supervisor Academy training curriculum and additional ongoing guidance to supervisors to support their work as they navigate policy and practice expectations. This initiative will be completed and implemented in 2022.

Permanency and Reunification

As in the 2021 report, OCFS wants to highlight the impact of reunification on the workload of staff. OCFS continues to reunify children who enter state custody at a rate that is in line with the national average, around 50%.



In Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2021, 50% of all exits from OCFS custody were to reunification. At the same time, OCFS is not currently meeting federal goals regarding permanency. The federal goal is for 40.5% of children who enter foster care to reach permanency within 12 months, currently OCFS is achieving permanency for 32.5% of children in that timeframe. There is likely a correlation between the work required to achieve reunification and time that children remain in State custody. OCFS believes that parental substance use, in particular, is contributing to children remaining in state custody for longer periods of time before achieving permanency. OCFS is committed to reunifying children with their parents whenever safely possible and when a case involves parental substance use it takes an average of three months more to achieve reunification when compared with a case that does not involve substance use. In FFY 2019 (the most recent year for which data is available), 50% of all removals had parental substance use as a risk factor, nationally this number was 39% in the same time period. Since 2000 there has been a significant increase in the percentage of child removals with substance use as a risk factor.

The interplay of reunification, the time to permanency, and parental substance use illustrates the complexity of child welfare work and the numerous factors which impact the work of OCFS’ frontline staff. OCFS remains committed to reunification whenever safely possible and that commitment, along with a combination of internal and external factors, will continue to drive the need for permanency caseworkers now and into the future. OCFS is also dedicating staff time to ensuring children reach permanency as expeditiously as possible through the

implementation of Permanency Review Teams in each district Office. The teams monitor cases to ensure barriers to permanency are addressed.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also illustrated the complexity of the effort to understand workload within child welfare. The pandemic has had an impact in across the child welfare system, which includes providers who serve children in custody and parents, attorneys and Guardians ad Litem, and the courts. For example, over the last few years, there have been some delays in the court process due to court closures and scheduling difficulty. OCFS has worked collaboratively with the Judicial Branch to address these delays and prioritize the scheduling of child welfare matters, but the impact of COVID-19 on the courts has undoubtedly rippled to impact OCFS staff and parents and children involved with the child welfare system.

PLANNING FOR 2022

In 2022, OCFS will continue work with the Cutler Institute to update policies and improve training opportunities for staff, as well as engaging staff in the process to examine and revise afterhours/standby coverage procedures and staffing, streamline investigation activities, and consider any needed revision to the expected timeline to complete an investigation.

This year will see the implementation of the Katahdin system and the end of the Alternative Response Program. OCFS has hired the first 10 caseworkers allocated in the budget to complete the work previously done by ARP and will be hiring the final five caseworkers in July, as authorized in the budget.