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Child Welfare Caseload and Workload Analysis

2023 Report

Required by:

Public Law 2019, Ch. 34 (LD 821)

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

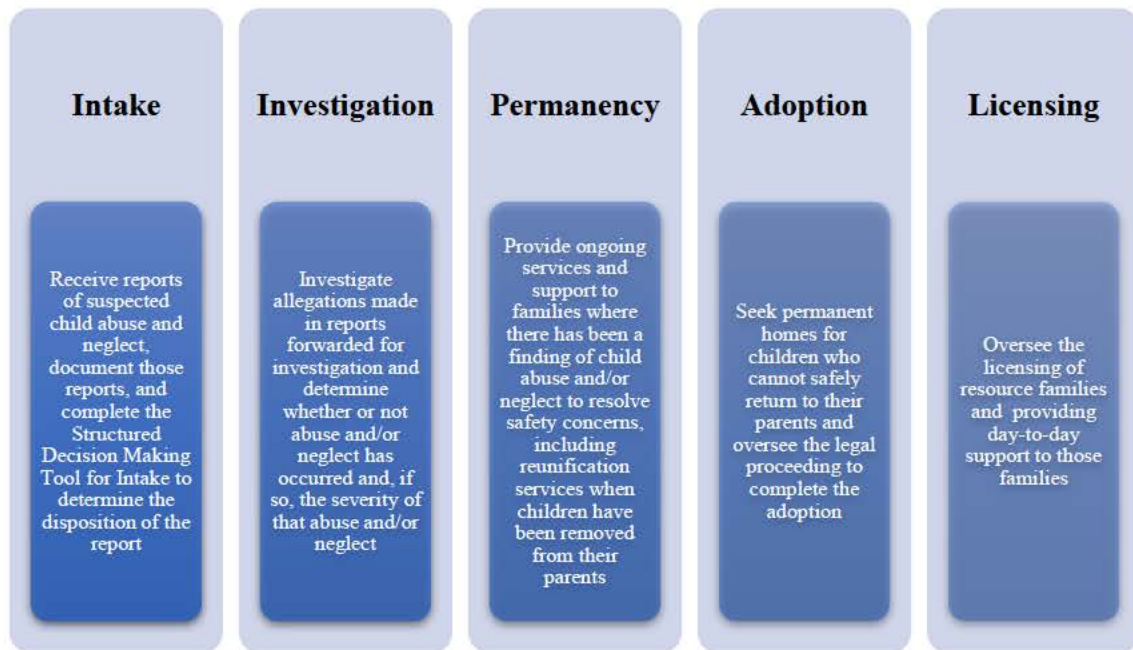
INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

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 2023 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 (PCG) collaborated to develop a workload analytic tool to determine OCFS’ workforce need. The workload analytic tool is specific to Maine and is based on factors which impact the 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. OCFS utilized the expertise of the Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) in establishing the distinction between caseload and workload¹ and has further refined

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

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 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 toward 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 statute, 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 2022 Number of Caseworkers	Workload Tool Recommended Caseworkers	Difference	District Caseworker Vacancies	Net Difference Accounting for Vacancies
1 – York	39	40.5	1.5	11	(9.5)
2 – Cumberland and Sagadahoc	41	60.1	19.1	5	14.1
3 – Androscoggin, Franklin, Oxford	62	93.7	31.7	11	20.7
4 – Knox, Lincoln, and Waldo	22	31.3	9.3	5	4.3
5 – Kennebec, Somerset	70	77.9	7.9	9	(1.1)
6 – Penobscot and Piscataquis	50	54.9	4.9	6	(1.1)
7 – Hancock and Washington	19	22.4	3.4	4	(0.6)
8 – Aroostook	31	27.8	(3.2)	1	(4.2)
Total	334	408.1	74.6	52	22.6

Of note, the model utilized in the above table calculates the total FTE (full time equivalent) of current positions and the need for additional FTEs. The December 2022 FTE calculations account for a reduction in case carrying capacity for caseworkers in their first year with OCFS. The FTE calculation does not count non-case carrying staff such as Intake caseworkers. The workload analytic tool results for December 2022 show a need for 74.6 FTE for casework. However, this analysis does not take into account current vacancies. Once vacancies are taken

into account, the net need is 22.6 FTE positions. Furthermore, the data for 2022 includes blended data taken both from the Maine Child Welfare Information System (MACWIS) and its replacement, Katahdin, which was implemented in late January of 2022.

Vacancies directly impact the work of OCFS staff. During 2022, OCFS continued its efforts to recruit and retain qualified staff, while facing the hiring challenges experienced in human services throughout the state and the nation. The vacancy rate among Maine’s child welfare staff in December 2022 was 12.3 percent. OCFS has also noted that other jurisdictions are reporting vacancy rates as high as 35-50 percent of their child welfare workforce. OCFS attributes its comparatively lower overall vacancy rate to initiatives directed toward recruitment and retention, including \$5.00 per hour stipends for child welfare staff implemented in 2018, Workforce Wellness Teams established in each District in 2019, efforts to update and improve policies and training under the Cooperative Agreement with the University of Southern Maine, and a new initiative in 2022 that provided one-time \$1,000 retention and recruitment incentives for current child welfare caseworkers hired as of September 1, 2022, and remaining on staff as of November 19, 2022. In addition, all new child welfare supervisors, caseworkers, and case aides hired from September 1, 2022, through November 19, 2022 (and remaining on staff as of November 19) received a \$1,000 incentive payment.

Caseworker Staffing 2018-2022

Point in Time	Dec 2018	Dec 2019	Dec 2020	Dec 2021	Dec 2022	Change 2018-2022
Total Positions	351	365	398	414	445	+94/ +27%
# Filled	325	347	385	383	388	+63/ +19%
# Vacancies	26	18	13	31	57	
% Vacancies	7.4%	4.9%	3.2%	7.5%	12.8%	

OCFS is committed to continuing its efforts to hire and retain qualified professionals for child welfare roles. OCFS continues to employ a full-time recruitment and retention specialist who works in collaboration with child welfare leadership and the District offices to recruit qualified applicants.

Afterhours and Children’s Emergency Services (CES)

In 2021, the Department worked with Casey Family Programs and Collaborative Safety, LLC to conduct a Safety Science review of child fatalities that occurred that year. The resulting report included seven key recommendations for child welfare to incorporate into ongoing system improvement efforts. One of those recommendations was continued examination of national best practices regarding standby and after-hours coverage. Child welfare leadership is committed to

engaging with staff on system improvement and heard from field staff about their concerns regarding the demands of providing after-hours coverage. In response, OCFS convened a workgroup of staff to explore these concerns and develop recommendations and solutions. In 2022, OCFS sought and received funding in the budget to create the CES Unit and began hiring when the funding became effective in July 2022. Implementation of the unit, which includes 16 caseworkers and three supervisors, began in the fall of 2022 and full implementation is expected by spring. To date, 14 of the 16 caseworker positions and all 3 supervisor positions are filled.

Another significant change that resulted from the Collaborative Safety recommendations was the establishment of a staff workgroup to address investigation timeframes and assessment tasks. This workgroup included strong representation of District staff including caseworkers and supervisors. The group partnered with Casey Family Programs and the Capacity Building Center for States to conduct a scan of national best practices regarding timeframes and required investigation activities. Information was also gathered from the federal Administration for Child and Families via their information gateway. Through this work it was established that there are no widely accepted national best practices based in evidence and/or research for investigation timeframes and assessment tasks.

The workgroup ultimately developed 11 recommendations which were provided to OCFS leadership. The most significant recommendation was to increase the investigation timeframe from 35 to 45 days. 10 of the 11 recommendations were accepted and leadership messaged the changes and timeline for updates to policy and practice to all child welfare staff in November. The only recommendation that was not accepted was instead addressed through updates to the existing Child Protection Intake Policy. Currently updates to the CPS Investigation Policy and the Katahdin system are underway and expected to be completed by mid-year. As part of implementation, staff will receive updated training and support around the changes.

It is anticipated that the efforts undertaken in 2022 to lessen the impact of afterhours and CES coverage on staff, reduce redundancy, and ensure that timeframes align with policy and practice expectations will have a positive impact on the wellbeing of OCFS' field staff, making these positions more attractive to prospective employees and improving the job satisfaction of current and future staff.

Katahdin

In January of 2022, OCFS implemented a new Comprehensive Child Welfare Information System (CCWIS) named "Katahdin." Katahdin was designed to improve efficiencies and the process through which staff document cases. In order to ensure the functionality and usability of Katahdin, frontline staff were involved in all stages of the system's development.

Katahdin was delivered on-time and on-budget, replacing the Maine Automated Child Welfare Information System which was over 20 years old. Implementation included extensive training and support for staff. Since go-live, OCFS information technology staff and the contracted developers with Katahdin have worked closely with staff and stakeholders to provide additional training and support to meet user needs, as well as continuing to gather feedback to modify and refine the system to improve functionality.

Policy and Training

During the last year, OCFS has continued efforts to improve the guidance provided to staff, both through policies and training. In 2019, OCFS reinstated its Cooperative Agreement with the University of Southern Maine (USM) with the goals of utilizing their research in child welfare policy to update existing policies and trainings and utilize technology to modernize the delivery of policies and trainings for staff. This included updating OCFS' procedures for drafting, revising, and approving new and revised policies. This new process, implemented in 2020, includes staff as a key part of the policy development process, both through workgroups and the solicitation of comments and input from all staff on draft policies.

Since this work began, revisions have been completed and implemented on the following policies:

- Background Checks
- Collaboration
- Family Team Meetings
- Human Trafficking and Commercial Sexual Exploitation
- Immunization
- Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children
- Permanency
- Placement with DHHS Employees
- Safe Haven
- Safety Planning
- Staff Safety and Critical Safety Cases
- Substance Exposed Infants

Several policies are in the process of review and revision, including:

- Adoption
- Child Protective Investigation
- Disclosure
- Domestic Violence
- Entry into Care
- Family Standards for Foster and Adoptive Care
- Indian Child Welfare (ICW)
- Intake
- LGBTQIA+
- Psychotropic Medication
- Supervision
- Youth Transition

USM has also worked under the Cooperative Agreement to redesign the Foundations Training provided to new child welfare caseworkers. The redesign expanded the training from five to seven weeks, tailored content for each of the two major categories of caseworkers (investigation

and permanency), incorporated the latest in adult learning theory, expanded the use of both classroom and e-learning training content, and enhanced the opportunities for staff to develop skills and knowledge first-hand through increased job shadowing experiences. Since the new Foundations Training was implemented in early 2022, OCFS has also collaborated with USM to seek feedback from staff on the training that has informed ongoing efforts to continually improve the training offered to new caseworkers.

OCFS, together with stakeholders, has also recognized the need for additional training and support for supervisors as they guide the work of caseworkers. OCFS has undertaken the development of a supervision framework in partnership with USM. This framework includes the Supervisor Academy training curriculum and additional guidance meant to support the work of supervisors as they navigate policy and practice expectations of their caseworkers. OCFS and USM are working methodically to develop this critically important support for supervisors and expect this initiative to be completed in early 2023.

PLANNING FOR 2023

Additional information on OCFS' plans for the coming years is available in the [Child Welfare Annual Report](#) released in January of 2023. Specific to workforce, in 2023, OCFS plans to continue work with USM to update policies and improve training opportunities for staff. This includes implementation of changes to the Intake and Investigation policies in response to the Collaborative Safety recommendations. OCFS leadership will also continue to engage directly with staff to gather feedback on both successes and additional opportunities to improve the experience of field staff.

OCFS will also monitor implementation of changes including updated policies, trainings, and timeframes to ensure staff have the information and support they need to be successful. Child welfare has also implemented a system of Safety Science reviews of situations involving critical incidents. Safety Science allows for a comprehensive review of the case and any related history in a manner that avoids hindsight bias and instead focuses on thoughtful system improvement efforts. The Safety Science team was fully implemented in 2022 and has conducted 13 full process reviews. These reviews will continue to inform additional efforts to improve the child welfare system both for staff and for children and families in 2023 and beyond.

OCFS leadership recognizes the ongoing dedication of child welfare field staff, particularly over the last year as they have faced ongoing and challenges and changes, including an increased vacancy rate in child welfare, Katahdin implementation, updates and improvements to policies and training, and ongoing efforts to help families address concerns regarding parental substance use. OCFS is grateful for the commitment of field staff to ensuring that Maine families are safe, stable, happy, and healthy.