

State of Alaska FY2020 Governor's Operating Budget

Department of Health and Social Services Children's Services Results Delivery Unit Budget Summary

Children's Services Results Delivery Unit

Contribution to Department's Mission

To work in partnership with families and communities to support the well-being of Alaska's youth and children.

Results

(Additional performance information is available on the web at <https://omb.alaska.gov/results>.)

Core Services

- Safety
- Permanency
- Well-being

Measures by Core Service

(Additional performance information is available on the web at <https://omb.alaska.gov/results>.)

1. Safety

2. Permanency

3. Well-being

Major RDU Accomplishments in 2018

FY2018 was the first year, since FY2012, that more children were discharged from foster care than removed from their homes and placed into foster care. In FY2018 13.3 percent more children were discharged to permanency than entered into foster care.

Fiscal Year	Removals	Discharges
FY2012	924	972
FY2013	1,051	949
FY2014	1,146	987
FY2015	1,625	1,123
FY2016	1,374	1,054
FY2017	1,421	1,371
FY2018	1,334	1,511

Work continued around improving and streamlining the intake of protective services reports. The intake unit was centralized within the Anchorage Regional Office and now staffs a call center with expanded hours seven days a week. The new centralized unit received and processed 22,253 reports in FY2018, a 21.3 percent increase over FY2017.

	Protective Services Reports	Screened Out	Screened In
FY2014	15917	8037	7880
FY2015	15952	7175	8777
FY2016	16889	7734	9155
FY2017	18340	8530	9810
FY2018	22253	11170	11083

Despite the increase in reports, the intake unit is answering calls with no wait time longer than two minutes and is also

regularly sharing protective services reports with Tribal partners through the Alaska Tribal Child Welfare Compact.

Key RDU Challenges

The Office of Children's Services provides a range of services that are heavily focused on responding to reports of maltreatment that have already occurred with a smaller portion of services geared towards preventing maltreatment. These services and supports include: prevention and early intervention services, child protective services safety assessments, foster care, family support and preservation services, adoption and guardianship, and permanency planning to ensure permanency is achieved and that children do not languish in the foster care system.

Every child welfare agency has challenges and no child welfare agency excels at every aspect of its mission. These challenges are due in large part to multiple factors: 1) The inability to predict or limit the volume of cases or families to be served. Office of Children's Services is statutorily required to respond to reports of child maltreatment, when these numbers continue increase, so does the workload. 2) The difficulty in maintaining adequate staffing levels to serve families; 3) The complex needs of families; 4) The lack of available behavioral health and family support services.

The Office of Children's Services adheres to the underlying philosophy of keeping children in their homes whenever it is safe to do so. If it is necessary to remove a child from their home, the Office of Children's Services must strive to reunite that child with their family as soon as possible. When permanency through adoption or guardianship is the only option, it should be timely, and adoptive parents or guardians should receive the appropriate support from the state to ensure long term stability and reduce the chance of reentry into the foster care system.

Although meaningful and important, child welfare work is complex and often emotionally taxing. The Office of Children's Services struggles to:

- Attract and retain qualified staff, particularly in rural office locations, that can meet the challenging demands including high caseloads.
- Direct available funds to invest in prevention and in-home services to keep families intact and prevent them from entering the system.
- Provide culturally relevant services statewide that meet families where they are at within their own communities.
- Adequately equip staff to work effectively, collaboratively, and sensitively with the 229 Alaska Native Tribes whose culture and values are not always well understood by staff.

Recruitment and Retention

Retention of staff is the number one challenge this agency faces. Without the necessary positions filled in so many offices statewide, the division's ability to meet state and federal requirements for family contact, worker visits with children, and worker visits with parents will and does greatly suffer. Those three requirements alone directly correlate to the likelihood of a family being successful or a child being reunified or achieving permanency in a timely fashion.

The Office of Children's Services turnover continues to be a challenge. The Office of Children's Services solicits feedback from staff about this issue through two primary methods: annual staff surveys and exit surveys. Reasons for leaving provided by outgoing staff are: lack of on-site supervisors at some locations, personal safety concerns, lack of access to available technology that would help improve success on the job, lack of office assistants and other support staff to assist with the vast amount of paperwork required by federal law, insufficient pay, high levels of stress, and in some cases just the nature of the work becomes too much to bear. Retention is not a challenge unique to Alaska, but one that has become "normal" for child welfare programs nationwide. The work requires uniquely qualified individuals with fortitude, and a diverse set of skills. Simply put, it is a job where the demands are high, the pay is low, the work is emotionally taxing, (as noted in staff exit surveys) and where staff face constant scrutiny.

Indian Child Welfare Act Compliance

The intent of the Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978 was to "protect the best interests of Indian children and to promote the stability and security of Indian tribes and families" (25 U.S.C. § 1902). The Indian Child Welfare Act sets federal requirements that apply to state child custody proceedings involving an Indian child who is a member of, or eligible for membership in, a federally recognized tribe. Alaska Native children are over-represented in Alaska's child welfare system. They are more likely to be reported for alleged maltreatment, they are less likely to be reunified timely, and more likely to ultimately have poorer outcomes of well-being while in care.

The Office of Children's Services has diligently and collaboratively worked with Tribal partners in a systematic and structured manner for the past 20 years primarily, but not exclusively, through the ongoing efforts of the Tribal-State Collaboration Group, which meets regularly both telephonically and in-person. The Office of Children's Services has increased the training efforts to support culturally appropriate practices, some of which are done jointly with Alaska Native representatives, and have in recent years been engaging Tribes in a practice model and policy development and implementation plans. Ultimately, however, the data has changed very little over time. At the front line caseworker level, there is still a struggle to communicate effectively, understand the various cultural nuances and traditions, and are to successfully recruit native foster homes.

Significant Changes in Results to be Delivered in FY2020

The Office of Children's Services participated in a major federal onsite review in in May 2017, As a result of the findings from this review, Office of Children's Services has been in negotiations with the federal Administration for Children and Families over the development of a Program Improvement Plan. This Program Improvement Plan is being designed in collaboration with community stakeholders to improve federally required outcomes involving the safety, permanency and well-being of children. The plan is anticipated to be approved by July 1, 2019.

Through the department's 2016-2020 Strategic Plan to "Transform Child Welfare in Alaska," and the Alaska Tribal Child Welfare Compact developed in partnership with Tribes and Tribal organizations, the agency will further enhance collaboration with Tribes to help refer families to Tribal services whenever possible, aide the Tribes in creating enhanced or new infrastructure to grow their programs and to, whenever possible work in a government to government fashion that respects and defers to Tribe's inherent expertise when it comes to serving their families.

High case worker turnover continues to be an issue for the Office of Children's Services due to the emotionally demanding nature of the work and high caseloads. When a caseworker departs employment, it takes over 190 days to recruit, hire and train the newly hired caseworker that can carry a full caseload. A high level team within Department of Health and Social Services is addressing retention and recruitment through specific strategies that may include continuous recruitment, retention bonuses, education compensation programs and flexible leave scenarios related to traumatic work experience.

Contact Information
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**Children's Services
RDU Financial Summary by Component**

All dollars shown in thousands

	FY2018 Actuals				FY2019 Management Plan				FY2020 Governor			
	UGF+DGF Funds	Other Funds	Federal Funds	Total Funds	UGF+DGF Funds	Other Funds	Federal Funds	Total Funds	UGF+DGF Funds	Other Funds	Federal Funds	Total Funds
Formula Expenditures												
Foster Care Base Rate	15,652.4	0.0	4,745.9	20,398.3	12,933.3	0.0	7,218.1	20,151.4	12,933.3	0.0	7,218.1	20,151.4
Foster Care Augmented Rate	1,195.4	0.0	271.5	1,466.9	1,037.6	0.0	368.5	1,406.1	1,037.6	0.0	368.5	1,406.1
Foster Care Special Need Subsidized	11,693.9	3,952.2	988.8	16,634.9	6,479.2	4,000.0	1,232.1	11,711.3	6,479.2	4,000.0	532.1	11,011.3
Adoptions/Guardians	19,925.1	0.0	17,706.8	37,631.9	21,561.2	0.0	15,484.3	37,045.5	21,561.2	0.0	15,484.3	37,045.5
Non-Formula Expenditures												
Children's Services Management	6,655.7	0.0	4,058.8	10,714.5	7,406.7	0.0	4,469.0	11,875.7	7,485.2	0.0	4,515.6	12,000.8
Children's Services Training	776.3	0.0	563.8	1,340.1	902.2	0.0	874.0	1,776.2	902.2	0.0	874.0	1,776.2
Front Line Social Workers	36,516.5	68.7	23,087.4	59,672.6	42,093.1	75.3	23,699.5	65,867.9	43,382.5	77.8	25,079.8	68,540.1
Family Preservation	2,815.2	3,540.0	7,766.4	14,121.6	3,686.4	4,045.9	9,592.8	17,325.1	3,686.4	4,045.9	9,592.8	17,325.1
Totals	95,230.5	7,560.9	59,189.4	161,980.8	96,099.7	8,121.2	62,938.3	167,159.2	97,467.6	8,123.7	63,665.2	169,256.5

Children's Services
Summary of RDU Budget Changes by Component
From FY2019 Management Plan to FY2020 Governor

All dollars shown in thousands

	<u>Unrestricted Gen (UGF)</u>	<u>Designated Gen (DGF)</u>	<u>Other Funds</u>	<u>Federal Funds</u>	<u>Total Funds</u>
FY2019 Management Plan	90,499.7	5,600.0	8,121.2	62,938.3	167,159.2
One-time items:					
-Children's Services Training	-83.0	0.0	0.0	-62.6	-145.6
-Front Line Social Workers	-1,273.9	0.0	0.0	-696.2	-1,970.1
Adjustments which continue current level of service:					
-Children's Services Management	78.5	0.0	0.0	46.6	125.1
-Children's Services Training	83.0	0.0	0.0	62.6	145.6
-Front Line Social Workers	2,563.3	0.0	2.5	2,076.5	4,642.3
-Foster Care Special Need	0.0	0.0	0.0	-700.0	-700.0
FY2020 Governor	91,867.6	5,600.0	8,123.7	63,665.2	169,256.5