

**State of Alaska**  
**FY2021 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**

Ensuring the safety, permanency and well-being of children by strengthening families, engaging communities, and partnering with tribes.

**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 2019**

Alaska has one of the highest rates in the nation of children in foster care placed with relatives. Whereas the last published national data profile from 2017 indicated that 32 percent of children in foster care are placed with relatives, Alaska's rate is consistently nearly ten percent higher. This is also an outcome area where Alaska Native children in the foster care system are actually faring better than their non-native counterparts. The Office of Children's Services attributes this success to the support and assistance from Tribal partners, who, through the Tribal Child Welfare Compact, have been providing relative searches for their member children in foster care and helping to contribute to a higher number of children successfully placed with relatives.

<b>Extended Family Placements</b>		<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>
Alaska Native Children in Foster Care	#	490	556	733	795	803
	%	<b>42%</b>	<b>42%</b>	<b>49%</b>	<b>55%</b>	<b>52%</b>
Non-Native Children in Foster Care	#	380	493	512	458	431
	%	<b>46%</b>	<b>48%</b>	<b>48%</b>	<b>49%</b>	<b>49%</b>

The Office of Children's Services Independent Living program continues to serve all Alaskan youth ages 16 years and older who were in care on or after their 16th birthday and up to age 21. Alaska has seen an increase in the population of eligible youth from 594 youth in FY2015 to 730 eligible youth in FY2019. Currently, 307 of these youth reside in foster care. The Independent Living program has intensified its efforts to address the needs of youth in custody, providing targeted trainings and educational opportunities so that they are more self-sufficient and independent when they exit care. This has dramatically reduced the need for emergency services for former foster youth, which typically demands significant resources to manage. In FY2019, 51 youth in foster care graduated from high school, ten former foster youth graduated from college and a total of 67 youth, the highest number ever, benefited from an Educational or Training Voucher program. Between FY2004 and FY2011, just six foster youth alumni successfully graduated from a training or college degree program. From FY2012 to FY2019 the program graduated 38 foster alumni.

## **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 toward 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 continually increase, so does the workload; 2) the difficulty in maintaining adequate staffing levels to serve families; 3) the complex needs of families; and 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.
- Adequately refer or assist families to access the services they need to address the behaviors or conditions that result in children being unsafe.
- Provide culturally relevant services statewide that meet families where they are at within their own communities.
- Direct available funds to invest in prevention and in-home services to keep families intact and prevent them from entering the system.
- 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 and worker visits with children and parents will and does greatly suffer. These 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, less likely to exit foster care in a timely manner, 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 Child Welfare 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 successfully recruit native foster homes.

### **Significant Changes in Results to be Delivered in FY2021**

- High case worker turnover continues to be the number one barrier to achieving timely and acceptable outcomes based on national standards for children in the State's child welfare system. In FY2019, the Office of Children's Services experienced a 45.9 percent caseworker turnover rate. The Office of Children's Services leadership has worked diligently to implement caseworker flexibility in choosing offsite home bases with week on week off work schedules in offices with chronic vacancies, retention bonuses, continuing education opportunities, and flexible leave scenarios related to traumatic work experience.
- The Office of Children's Services participated in a major federal onsite review in May 2017. As a result of the findings from this review, the Office of Children's Services negotiated with the federal Administration for Children and Families for over two years on the development of a Program Improvement Plan. The Program Improvement Plan was approved by the Children's Bureau on June 30, 2019. Key strategies include the development of competency based evaluations for workers and supervisors to demonstrate basic skill level before transitioning off of probationary status; and collaboration with courts to enhance parental engagement.
- Alaska is in the process of drafting a Family First Prevention Services Title IV-E Prevention Program Plan proposal. Upon approval of its prevention plan, by the federal Children's Bureau, the Office of Children's Services will collaborate with Tribal Title IV-E partners to pilot the process of opening a limited number of in-home services cases aimed at assisting teen parents, first time parents, young families or families with babies exposed to substances with accessing evidenced based services to prevent the removal of children into foster care.

<b>Contact Information</b>
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**Children's Services  
RDU Financial Summary by Component**

*All dollars shown in thousands*

	FY2019 Actuals				FY2020 Management Plan				FY2021 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
<b>Formula Expenditures</b>												
Foster Care Base Rate	16,535.0	0.0	5,237.0	21,772.0	14,783.3	0.0	6,218.1	21,001.4	14,783.3	0.0	6,218.1	21,001.4
Foster Care Augmented Rate	1,197.1	0.0	244.7	1,441.8	1,252.6	0.0	368.5	1,621.1	1,252.6	0.0	368.5	1,621.1
Foster Care Special Need Subsidized	8,642.3	3,721.5	430.6	12,794.4	6,479.2	3,700.0	532.1	10,711.3	6,514.2	3,700.0	532.1	10,746.3
Adoptions/Guardians	20,520.5	0.0	18,700.6	39,221.1	21,561.2	0.0	17,464.3	39,025.5	21,561.2	0.0	17,464.3	39,025.5
<b>Non-Formula Expenditures</b>												
Children's Services Management	5,607.4	0.0	3,286.3	8,893.7	5,963.4	300.0	3,732.0	9,995.4	5,892.7	302.7	3,400.3	9,595.7
Children's Services Training	1,012.0	0.0	793.0	1,805.0	1,283.8	0.0	874.0	2,157.8	1,283.8	0.0	874.0	2,157.8
Front Line Social Workers	36,741.3	111.1	26,540.4	63,392.8	43,329.7	127.8	25,829.8	69,287.3	43,816.1	129.4	27,932.2	71,877.7
Family Preservation	2,874.6	3,571.7	8,532.1	14,978.4	2,844.7	3,995.9	8,612.8	15,453.4	2,771.4	3,995.9	9,812.8	16,580.1
<b>Totals</b>	<b>93,130.2</b>	<b>7,404.3</b>	<b>63,764.7</b>	<b>164,299.2</b>	<b>97,497.9</b>	<b>8,123.7</b>	<b>63,631.6</b>	<b>169,253.2</b>	<b>97,875.3</b>	<b>8,128.0</b>	<b>66,602.3</b>	<b>172,605.6</b>

**Children's Services**  
**Summary of RDU Budget Changes by Component**  
**From FY2020 Management Plan to FY2021 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>
<b>FY2020 Management Plan</b>	<b>91,824.6</b>	<b>5,673.3</b>	<b>8,123.7</b>	<b>63,631.6</b>	<b>169,253.2</b>
<b>One-time items:</b>					
-Family Preservation	0.0	-73.3	0.0	0.0	-73.3
<b>Adjustments which continue current level of service:</b>					
-Children's Services Management	-70.7	0.0	2.7	-331.7	-399.7
-Front Line Social Workers	486.4	0.0	1.6	602.4	1,090.4
-Foster Care Special Need	35.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	35.0
<b>Proposed budget increases:</b>					
-Front Line Social Workers	0.0	0.0	0.0	1,500.0	1,500.0
-Family Preservation	0.0	0.0	0.0	1,200.0	1,200.0
<b>FY2021 Governor</b>	<b>92,275.3</b>	<b>5,600.0</b>	<b>8,128.0</b>	<b>66,602.3</b>	<b>172,605.6</b>