

State of Alaska FY2024 Governor's Operating Budget

Department of Family and Community 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.

Core Services

- Safety
- Permanency
- Well-being

Major RDU Accomplishments in 2022

- The Office of Children's Services continued to work in partnership with Alaska Native Tribes and Tribal organizations to implement the Tribal Child Welfare Compact and a total of five service agreements related to initial and ongoing relative searches, safety walk-through of potential foster homes, assisting potential foster parents in the foster care licensing process, facilitation of family visits, and prevention.
- After over two years of negotiation, Alaska's federally mandated Performance Improvement Plan, resulting from a 2017 federal review, was approved in June 2019. The Performance Improvement Plan is in place for two years and requires extensive efforts from all levels of the agency with quarterly progress updates to the Federal Children's Bureau to demonstrate practice improvement activities. Due to COVID-19, the Performance Improvement Plan has been extended for an additional year. Despite the challenges of implementation of activities due to COVID-19, the Office of Children's Services met four goal items in 2021: efforts to prevent removal from the home, timely establishment of permanency goals, timely achievement of permanency, and caseworker visits with parents. In FY2022, Alaska implemented each strategy contained in the PIP and successfully met two additional goals, stability in foster care placement and child and family involvement in case planning. Though strategies from the PIP have been implemented, goal measurement will continue into December of 2023.
- The Office of Children's Services has created a centralized statewide Special Needs Hotline for resource families, tribes, and staff to utilize for accessing commodity needs for children in care. The hotline is currently staffed with a Social Services Program Coordinator, a Project Assistant, and a Social Services Associate. These staff are handling multiple e-mails and phone calls to connect Resource Families with commodity needs for children placed in their home. The unit has expanded to now include Child Care, vacation travel for children in care, and Individualized Service Agreement funds.
- The Office of Children's Services' Independent Living (IL) 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. In late December 2020, in response to the COVID-19 crisis, Congress authorized one-time, time-limited expansion of program eligibility criteria for youth and awarded additional COVID-19 relief funding to states' Chafee Independent Living programs. The Supporting Foster Youth Through the Pandemic Act was administered through OCS' Independent Living Program. Over the course of the program, OCS was able to support youth directly, awarding 220 youth grants for financial assistance for rent, insurance, transportation, and more. In FY2022, OCS' IL Program was also able to expand a grant with Facing Foster Care in Alaska (FFCA) to enhance resource distribution and conduct a public awareness campaign to widely spread information about resource availability. FFCA was able to award 203 grants to eligible youth. Further, through the increased partnership with the IL program, FFCA and the Office of Youth Empowerment completed microlearning videos for youth. In FY2022, OCS initiated a partnership with Kawerak Tribal Association to support educational and life skills programming via Kawerak's ePortfolio project. The Berkley Center for Teaching and Learning documents that ePortfolio has been used to facilitate, document, and archive student learning. The ePortfolio project supported participation of 15 youth from the Bering Strait Region in a six-month project to learn about themselves, their Tribal heritage, and developing skills to plan for their future. Combined, these efforts work to dramatically reduce the need for emergency services for former foster youth.

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 due to multiple factors: 1) The number of available foster homes has significantly decreased; 2) It is difficult to maintain adequate staffing levels; 3) The complex needs of families along with children's complex mental and behavioral needs; and 4) The shortage of available family support services.

The Office of Children's Services adheres to the philosophy that prioritizes 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, in both urban and 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 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.

Workforce recruitment and retention continues to be an ongoing challenge for the Office of Children's Services. Many exiting staff indicate the top reasons for leaving is workload, personal safety, difficult nature of the work, and the lack of competitive salaries.

Employee safety continues to be a top concern for the Office of Children's Services. Staff are threatened with bodily harm and are sometimes physically assaulted by clients. Efforts have been made to improve the physical safety of each field office. The addition of a new safety team, including a Safety Officer and a Program Coordinator 2, and safety task force, within the agency will identify and address primary safety issues with infrastructure improvements, training, and gear.

The Office of Children's Services' workforce also continues to be challenged with the lack of appropriate technology resources to do the job effectively and efficiently. Alaska's current child welfare system is at end of life and options for a new system are currently being evaluated.

Significant Changes in Results to be Delivered in FY2024

- The Office of Children's Services anticipates improved service delivery related to safety assessment, service planning, and permanency as a result of the efforts underway to comply with the Performance Improvement Plan.

Contact Information

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

All dollars shown in thousands

	FY2022 Actuals				FY2023 Management Plan				FY2024 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	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	18,289.3	0.0	5,536.6	23,825.9	18,289.3	0.0	5,536.6	23,825.9
Foster Care Augmented Rate	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	1,252.6	0.0	250.0	1,502.6	1,252.6	0.0	250.0	1,502.6
Foster Care Special Need Subsidized	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	8,798.9	3,799.2	1,232.1	13,830.2	8,798.9	3,799.2	1,232.1	13,830.2
Adoptions/Guardians	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	22,976.2	0.0	23,527.0	46,503.2	22,976.2	0.0	23,264.3	46,240.5
Non-Formula Expenditures												
Children's Services Management	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	6,365.3	318.6	3,800.3	10,484.2	6,613.3	560.5	3,864.5	11,038.3
Children's Services Training	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	911.1	0.0	709.6	1,620.7	911.1	0.0	709.6	1,620.7
Front Line Social Workers	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	44,855.2	102.4	29,305.9	74,263.5	45,676.5	104.3	29,835.0	75,615.8
Family Preservation	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	3,177.6	3,995.9	10,380.6	17,554.1	3,177.6	3,995.9	9,284.6	16,458.1
Tribal Child Welfare Compact	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	5,000.0	0.0	0.0	5,000.0	5,000.0	0.0	0.0	5,000.0
Totals	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	111,626.2	8,216.1	74,742.1	194,584.4	112,695.5	8,459.9	73,976.7	195,132.1

Children's Services
Summary of RDU Budget Changes by Component
From FY2023 Management Plan to FY2024 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>
FY2023 Management Plan	106,026.2	5,600.0	8,216.1	74,742.1	194,584.4
One-time items:					
-Family Preservation	0.0	0.0	0.0	-1,096.0	-1,096.0
-Subsidized Adoptions/Guardians	0.0	0.0	0.0	-262.7	-262.7
Adjustments which continue current level of service:					
-Children's Services Management	248.0	0.0	241.9	64.2	554.1
-Front Line Social Workers	821.3	0.0	1.9	529.1	1,352.3
FY2024 Governor	107,095.5	5,600.0	8,459.9	73,976.7	195,132.1