State of Alaska
FY2026 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 2024

The Office of Children's Services (OCS) 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. In 2024, tribal co-signers and the State agreed to continue expanding the compacting and refocusing of prevention efforts. An electronic tracking system called the Box was implemented to assist tribal co-signers and OCS in tracking all referrals.

Additionally, in 2024, OCS onboarded new tribal partners to the compact. Current partners now include; Aleutian Pribilof Islands Association, Inc., Arctic Slope Native Association, Association of Village Council Presidents, Bristol Bay Native Association, Central Council Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska, Chugachmiut, Cook Inlet Tribal Council, Copper River Native Association, Kawerak, Kenaitze, Knik, Maniilaq, Native Village of Eyak, Nome Eskimo Community, St. Paul, Sitka, Sun'aq Tribe of Kodiak, and Tanana Chiefs Conference.

OCS is finalizing the implementation of Alaska's Parent Advisory Committee (PAC). The PAC will be made up of ten parent leaders with lived experience of the child welfare system. They will partner with OCS leadership to provide feedback, participate in training, and other initiatives.

In response to secondary trauma and worker wellness, OCS has implemented a Critical Debriefing Model as well as Restoring Resiliency Reponses (RRR).

OCS has completed the evaluation of worker and supervisory training. Knowledge and Insights Leading to Success (SKILS), OCS's new worker training, was redesigned to include more in-the-field transfer of learning. New field staff training was extended to four weeks and provides more practical application of the safety assessment model. New year-long supervisor training program was also implemented.

- OCS updated regulations for Difficulty of Care Augmented Rates to allow for a level-three augmentation and a new assessment process.

- A Placement Search and Resource Family Support Unit (PSSU) was implemented to work in partnership with the Special Needs Hotline. The PSSU conducts centralized augmented rate assessments, administers the OCS respite program, assesses efforts to get children back to their home region, and provides other support services. On average, the PSSU responds to 130 requests for placement per month.

- Foster Care Base Rates increased 30 percent in July 2024.

- The centralized statewide Special Needs Hotline (SNH) for resource families, tribes, and staff was utilized an average of 400-500 times a month by resource families.

- The Independent Living Program (ILP) continues to serve all Alaskan foster youth aged 16 years and older who were in care on or after their 16th birthday and up to age 21. In 2024, this program served 833 youth.

- OCS hired a Wellness and Resiliency Officer to manage safety and wellness programming designed to address secondary traumatic stress for the agency. Accomplishments for this past fiscal year include implementing a crisis debriefing program to address secondary traumatic stress in the workforce, continuation of regional assessments of support and wellness of staff and developing regional plans to improve staff well-being, and expansion of Supervisor Facilitated Attuned Interactions (FAN), a reflective practice in leadership meant to improve supervisor-staff relationships and retention. To support its workforce, OCS sends interested staff through an Interdisciplinary Occupational Endorsement Certificate in Child Welfare at the University of Alaska Anchorage. This is a two-year commitment and has led to higher retention of employees going through this educational opportunity.

- The Medical Mental Health Unit (MMHU) has been documenting characteristics of complex youth and detailing gaps in the current continuum of care. This work is contributing to a larger statewide effort to meet the needs of youth with severe mental, behavioral, intellectual, and developmental disabilities, and complex medical needs. While there is much more work to do to adequately address this statewide issue, OCS is contributing to the solutions.

- OCS completed an evaluation of options to update its aging State Automated Child Welfare Information System (SACWIS) to a new system that meets federal requirements.

Key RDU Challenges

The Office of Children's Services (OCS) 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.
Siloed prevention efforts are a hindrance. Lack of social determents of welfare (housing, employment, etc.), lack of community-based services such as behavioral health and substance abuse treatment facilities are major barriers.

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.

OCS adheres to a 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, OCS strives 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. Adoptive parents and 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. OCS struggles to:

- Attract and retain qualified staff in both urban and rural office locations that can meet the challenging demands of the work, 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 OCS. Many exiting staff indicate the top reasons for leaving is workload, personal safety, the difficult nature of the work, and the lack of competitive salaries.

Employee safety continues to be a top concern for OCS. 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, will identify and address primary safety issues with infrastructure improvements, training, and gear. Along with continual safety training, the OCS Safety Team has updated emergency action plans for the 22 statewide offices and continued working toward a satellite-based radio device to improve communications for staff traveling in rural and remote locations.
OCS's 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 its end of life and options for a new system were explored this past fiscal year.

Significant Changes in Results to be Delivered in FY2026

The Office of Children's Services (OCS) anticipates improved service delivery related to safety assessment, service planning, and permanency because of the efforts underway to comply with the Performance Improvement Plan.

OCS leadership will focus on identifying processes within the agency where efficiencies can be gained to improve Alaska's child welfare services.

In an effort to refocus on the essentials of Child Welfare and improve outcomes, OCS will be implementing several new initiatives in FY2026 as well as expanding on current initiatives.

Firstly, OCS will be finalizing the statewide initiative of the Strengthening Investigations and Assessment (IA) model as well as retraining regional staff that are already utilizing the model. OCS initially launched this initiative in FY2021 in Wasilla, Anchorage, and Fairbanks. The model has resulted in a reduction to the backlog of open initial assessments and efficiencies in documentation.

OCS will designate a unit of staff specifically to assist in covering offices with multiple vacancies and contract services will be put in place to alleviate the day-to-day duties of caseworkers. This 'Relief Team' will be comprised of several Protective Services Specialists and a lead supervisor. Additionally, to alleviate the documentation burden on front-line staff, OCS will be creating a documentation team designed to enter data into the OCS database. Contracts will also be put in place to assist with telehealth, monthly visits with parents, and case plan development.

Contact Information

Contact: Marian Sweet, Administrative Services Director
Phone: (907) 465-1613
E-mail: marian.sweet@alaska.gov

Children's Services
RDU Financial Summary by Component

All dollars shown in thousands

	FY2024 Actuals				FY2025 Management Plan				FY2026 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	13,368.9	0.0	3,888.3	17,257.2	21,396.5	0.0	5,629.4	27,025.9	21,396.5	0.0	5,629.4	27,025.9
Foster Care Augmented Rate	3,964.9	0.0	857.7	4,822.6	3,941.4	0.0	882.5	4,823.9	3,941.4	0.0	882.5	4,823.9
Foster Care Special Need	9,036.2	0.0	273.0	9,309.2	8,798.9	3,799.2	632.1	13,230.2	8,798.9	1,676.6	632.1	11,107.6
Subsidized Adoptions/Guardians	22,459.8	0.0	22,427.8	44,887.6	21,842.2	0.0	23,764.3	45,606.5	21,842.2	0.0	23,764.3	45,606.5
Non-Formula Expenditures												
Tribal Child Welfare Compact	4,481.7	0.0	0.0	4,481.7	5,000.0	0.0	0.0	5,000.0	5,000.0	0.0	0.0	5,000.0
Children's Services Management	6,202.9	285.3	3,434.1	9,922.3	7,767.8	675.5	4,064.1	12,507.4	6,531.1	346.4	4,000.4	10,877.9
Children's Services Training	1,205.2	0.0	650.0	1,855.2	743.1	0.0	731.6	1,474.7	741.2	0.0	729.5	1,470.7
Front Line Social Workers	45,705.0	29.6	27,522.8	73,257.4	47,109.5	109.3	31,179.6	78,398.4	44,392.5	110.1	29,398.4	73,901.0
Family Preservation	1,144.6	3,329.6	9,731.5	14,205.7	3,277.6	3,995.9	10,084.6	17,358.1	3,277.6	3,995.9	10,084.6	17,358.1
Facility ROM	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	3,251.8	0.0	2,219.8	5,471.6
Totals	**107,569.2**	**3,644.5**	**68,785.2**	**179,998.9**	**119,877.0**	**8,579.9**	**76,968.2**	**205,425.1**	**119,173.2**	**6,129.0**	**77,341.0**	**202,643.2**

Children's Services
Summary of RDU Budget Changes by Component
From FY2025 Management Plan to FY2026 Governor

All dollars shown in thousands

	Unrestricted Gen (UGF)	Designated Gen (DGF)	Other Funds	Federal Funds	Total Funds
FY2025 Management Plan	**114,277.0**	**5,600.0**	**8,579.9**	**76,968.2**	**205,425.1**
Base for structure changes:					
-Facility ROM	3,251.8	0.0	0.0	2,219.8	5,471.6
One-time items:					
-Children's Services Management	-1,150.0	0.0	-335.0	0.0	-1,485.0
Adjustments which continue current level of service:					
-Children's Services Management	-11.3	0.0	5.9	-46.0	-51.4
-Children's Services Training	-1.9	0.0	0.0	-2.1	-4.0
-Front Line Social Workers	-2,430.4	0.0	0.8	-1,646.2	-4,075.8
-Facility ROM	3,251.8	0.0	0.0	2,219.8	5,471.6
Proposed budget decreases:					
-Children's Services Management	-75.4	0.0	0.0	-17.7	-93.1
-Front Line Social Workers	-286.6	0.0	0.0	-135.0	-421.6
-Foster Care Special Need	0.0	0.0	-2,122.6	0.0	-2,122.6
FY2026 Governor	**113,573.2**	**5,600.0**	**6,129.0**	**77,341.0**	**202,643.2**