



2023 Colorado Child Welfare Workload Study Summary

Document Highlights

- Senate Bill 21-277 required the Colorado Department of Human Services (CDHS) and counties to create a funding model. This funding model will be used to inform the state of how much money is needed overall for counties to provide child welfare services to youth and families across Colorado. SB21-277 also funded a workload study that will inform a portion of the funding model.
- The last workload study (2014 and refined in 2016) said Colorado needed 610 additional child welfare staff (but focused only on caseworkers and supervisors). To date, we have funded 418.5 FTE and still have 191.5 of the original 610 to fund.
- The 2022 workload study initially found that across the entire State there is a need for an additional 284 total child welfare staff.
- Importantly, this study may not reflect true county-by-county staffing needs. Therefore, CDHS will spend the next several months talking to counties to get their individual and collective feedback on the methodology, the data and results to determine the right number of FTE (and money to pay for the FTE) so that we can include this dollar amount in the funding model.
- When the funding model is complete, CDHS will submit this information about the overall total amount of money the state needs to fund child welfare services to the Joint Budget Committee so that they have this information to make future decisions about funding for child welfare services.

Purpose: Senate Bill 21-277 prescribed steps for the Colorado Department of Human Services (CDHS) and counties to create a child welfare funding model to reflect the total resourcing needs for effective delivery of child welfare services across the state. That includes funding required for several different aspects of the child welfare system, such as:

- Adoption and relative guardianship support
- The independent living program for teens transitioning out of foster care
- Additional county child welfare staff to spend the needed time with children, youth and families
- Family and children's programs that support creating safety and well-being for families

One critical step to informing the future funding model is an updated child welfare workload study to determine how many caseworkers, supervisors, case aide and support staff are needed to do foundational child welfare casework. The workload study is a starting place to look at **only** the portion of county child welfare staff needed to work on casework, supervision, and support



for specific case types. The workload study does not make recommendations about child welfare-related staff outside the scope of the 242 Child Welfare Staffing line item. While deeply linked, the *funding model* and *workload study* are distinct initiatives.

Background: The last child welfare workload study was completed in 2014 and refined in 2016 by the consulting firm ICF. It is important to note that the 2014 study looked at caseworker and supervisor positions. The previous study ultimately indicated the need for 610 additional staff for county departments of human/social services. Those results were used to get funding in phases from the legislature to help cover the enormous gap in needed staff. Unfortunately, that need has only been partially met through what is referred to as, the 242 Child Welfare staffing line item, which provided incremental increases each year for Child Welfare staffing. When the funding was last approved in 2019, counties were still 191.5 positions understaffed.

Due to significant changes in state and federal child welfare laws, changing practice, and the increasing complexity of cases since the 2014 study, the General Assembly in 2021 passed SB21-277 requiring the completion of an updated workload study to inform the future funding model. CDHS in 2022 contracted with consulting firm ICF for the updated study and received their final deliverable on January 5, 2023. Using a standard methodology across all counties, the study includes an initial finding that the child welfare system as a whole would benefit from a total of 284 foundational child welfare staff above current funding levels to meet current caseloads, which includes caseworkers, supervisors, case aides, and case support staff positions working on specific case types.

Initial Findings: The study included several findings, including but not limited to:

- Across the entire State, there is a need for approximately 84 additional caseworkers, 13 additional supervisors, 132 additional case aides, and 55 additional case support staff, totalling 284 total child welfare staff needed to do foundational child welfare casework. These overall recommendations will change slightly in early 2023 as counties have been asked to complete a revised staffing survey to ensure as much standardization in responses across the counties. In addition, because many counties utilize caseworkers for case aide or support staff functions, it's important that there is flexibility in interpreting the staffing recommendations with this in mind.
- An initial finding that the need for staff varies from county to county, as some counties showed they needed additional staff based on the formula from the study, while other counties were shown as over-staffed in certain positions.
- The factors that add the most complexity and additional time for caseworkers to support an individual case include when a child is placed out of home in a residential facility, caregiver substance use disorder, presence of domestic violence, when a child is placed



out of state, and many more. These factors are not incorporated into the methodology but are important to consider when assigning cases to caseworkers to balance workload.

- Additional recommendations related to exploring improvements to workload, recruitment, retention, and morale, as well as system improvements related to data collection and Trails updates including completion of the Trails modernization project.

The workload study recommendations about specific child welfare staff are only a starting place that requires additional feedback and consideration to determine the appropriate next steps for the foundations of casework and supervision county staffing. Child welfare staffing looks different county-by-county depending on how individual departments utilize internal positions or contract out for specific functions.

There may be several reasons why counties may deviate from the levels recommended by the tool since the study offers a standardized methodology to examine county staffing levels. So far, state and county staff are exploring the findings for small and medium counties whose size demand unique staffing approaches. Similarly, there is work to be done to explore differences in staffing and contracting around prevention initiatives. In the coming months, CDHS and counties will provide a companion document to the ICF report that recommends any adjustments to the model to maximize accuracy of the suggested staffing levels. Furthermore, any adjustments based on additional exploration will be incorporated as outlined in the *Next Steps* section below. Therefore, it is critical that the workload study is not used in isolation. What we do know is that the State of Colorado must invest in additional child welfare staff to ensure the needs of our children and families can be fully met.

Next Steps: As outlined in SB21-277, the *workload study* must inform the upcoming child welfare *funding model* for SFY24-25. However, there are many more steps built in to figure out how the initial data may be adjusted and ultimately incorporated into the funding model. While the workload study provides an initial snapshot of foundational casework and supervision staffing needs of child welfare agencies across the state, it does not make recommendations about all child welfare staffing and practice. The child welfare funding model will determine the appropriate level of funding required to fully meet all state and federal requirements concerning the comprehensive delivery of child welfare services. It must include considerations of demographics, staffing, caseload and other factors to determine total staffing resources and allocations of resources by individual counties. Conversations within the Child Welfare Allocation Committee (CWAC) will also be critical for tying the funding model to our state's future goals for child welfare practice and strategy. CDHS has contracted with the Public Consulting Group as the vendor to develop the updated child welfare funding model.

Over the course of the next several months, CDHS and county departments of human/social services will continue to examine the workload tool and ICF's methodology and make



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recommendations for its incorporation into a larger child welfare funding model. This feedback will also be considered by counties and the State through the Child Welfare Allocation Committee's model evaluation group, which will determine how to best incorporate and, if needed, adjust the initial findings to build a robust financing model that can indicate overall and county-by-county resource need. Upon completion, the funding model will be submitted to the Joint Budget Committee to inform future decision-making around county resourcing, including any recommendations to increase the 242 County Staffing line item for the Fiscal Year 2024-2025.