



## Agency Recommendation Summary

The Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) requests \$5,605,000 (\$5,497,000 General Fund-State) and 20.0 full time equivalents (FTE) in the 2025-27 Biennial Budget to create a compliant investigations unit within the Licensing Division to address the licensing complexities for all childcare licensed providers statewide equitably, to maintain equitable workloads for licensing staff, meet required timelines, and holistically support provider compliance.

## Program Recommendation Summary

### 030 - Early Learning

The Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) requests \$4,781,000 General Fund-State and 20.0 full time equivalents (FTE) in the 2025-27 Biennial Budget to create a complaint investigations unit within the Licensing Division to address the licensing complexities for all childcare licensed providers statewide equitably, to maintain equitable workloads for licensing staff, meet required timelines, and holistically support provider compliance.

### 090 - Program Support

The Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) requests \$824,00 (\$716,000 General Fund State) in the 2025-27 Biennial Budget for the indirect administrative support.

## Fiscal Summary

Fiscal Summary <i>Dollars in Thousands</i>	Fiscal Years		Biennial	Fiscal Years		Biennial
	2026	2027	2025-27	2028	2029	2027-29
<b>Staffing</b>						
FTEs	20.0	20.0	20.0	20.0	20.0	20.0
<b>Operating Expenditures</b>						
Fund 001 - 1	\$2,462	\$2,319	\$4,781	\$2,319	\$2,319	\$4,638
Fund 001 - 1	\$358	\$358	\$716	\$358	\$358	\$716
Fund 001 - A	\$54	\$54	\$108	\$54	\$54	\$108
<b>Total Expenditures</b>	<b>\$2,874</b>	<b>\$2,731</b>	<b>\$5,605</b>	<b>\$2,731</b>	<b>\$2,731</b>	<b>\$5,462</b>
<b>Revenue</b>						
001 - 0393	\$54	\$54	\$108	\$54	\$54	\$108
<b>Total Revenue</b>	<b>\$54</b>	<b>\$54</b>	<b>\$108</b>	<b>\$54</b>	<b>\$54</b>	<b>\$108</b>

## Decision Package Description

DCYF administers the child care licensing statutory duties using a progressive enforcement strategy emphasizing the use of technical assistance as the first level of provider supports and compliance.<sup>[1]</sup> Enforcement responsibilities require DCYF licensors to monitor compliance while also inspecting licensing complaints. The compliance and complaint investigation workload activities limit licensors' ability and opportunity to provide adequate and culturally responsive technical assistance. This request creates a licensing unit separate from the monitoring compliance work, to address the licensing complexities for all licensed child care providers statewide equitably, maintain equitable workloads for licensing staff, meet required timelines, provide separation of duties that reduce risk of bias and conflicts of interest, and support provider compliance.

DCYF requests ongoing funding to create a new complaint investigations unit focused on child care providers, which aligns with the Licensing Division structure in the child welfare program, which has a unit dedicated to investigating Child Protective Services (CPS) complaints.

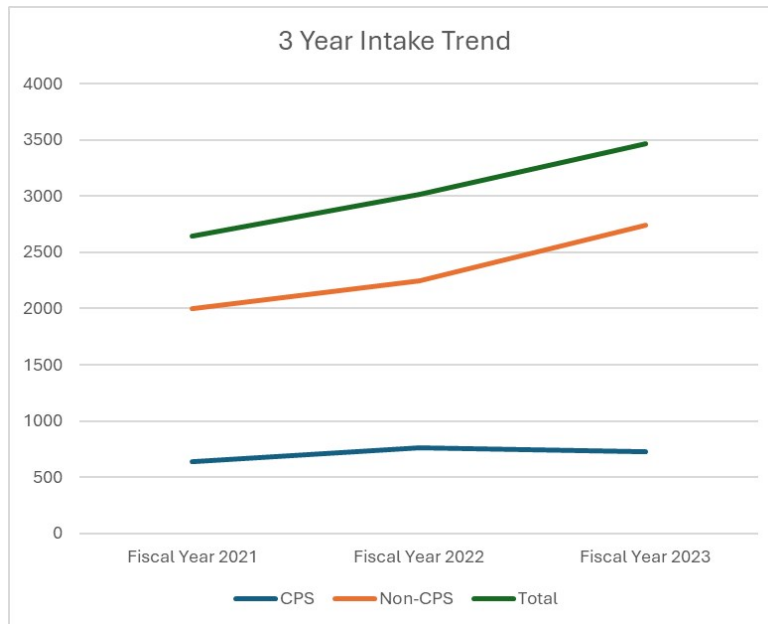
Child care licensors are the only DCYF staff who administer all aspects of licensing oversight, both compliance and complaint investigations, to over 6,000 licensed providers. This requires individual licensors to both build trusting relationships with providers for voluntary compliance and then investigate a CPS or Non-CPS complaint for that same provider. The lack of separation of duties creates unintentional but known issues such as conflicts of interest, rater-drift, and increased implicit and explicit bias during investigations. Licensors are increasingly asked to support providers through partnership to ensure technical assistance will support a viable licensed workforce to accommodate and support childcare access; to include requirements, grant support, system assistance and more from the time of application through the life of the license. This partnership can only happen if the licensor and child care provider have a relationship built on trust and open dialogue, which is jeopardized or destroyed when a licensor must inspect and investigate compliance and complaint issues, respectively, for a provider.

The intake investigations statutory authority can be found in RCW 43.216 and policy found in Procedure 10.3.1. The procedure requires a timeline of 45 days. Due to the timeline, this work takes priority over any scheduled compliance monitoring and time away from direct provider supports. Licensing staff with high levels of complaints to investigate have historically struggled to meet other CCDF requirements and when licensors do meet CCDF requirements, it is reported that they are unable to provide the quality of technical assistance to assist providers in maintaining compliance or strive for quality improvement.

Table 1 demonstrates an observable steady increase in complaint allegations over the past three years, which directly increases a licensor’s workload.

**Table 1: Three-Year Intake trend**

	Fiscal Year 2021	Fiscal Year 2022	Fiscal Year 2023
<b>Licensing Division CPS</b>	640	763	726
<b>Licensing Division Non-CPS</b>	2002	2250	2742
<b>Total Complaints</b>	2642	3013	3468



In fiscal year 2024, 21 percent (535) of the total allegations (2578) screened-in as child abuse and neglect (CA/N) which required duplicating investigations by both the licensors for any potential licensing violations and LD/CPS worker for any potential child abuse and neglect violations, often requiring identical investigation strategies. It’s important to note that allegations that were not determined to be CA/N (2043) still required licensors to determine if a licensing regulation was out-of-compliance, requiring licensors to actively investigate all 2578 intakes. The complaint investigation workload directly limits licensor’s ability to meet CCDF monitoring timelines, provide detailed technical assistance, and impacts overall collaboration and support with the provider community.

While this is a continuation via separation of current work responsibilities, a complaint investigations unit will require systematic changes throughout child care licensing. Because caseload is directly assigned to licensing staff, complaint investigation caseloads cannot be represented as this unit will inspect all intakes including unlicensed complaints, which are variable. However, based on historical data and information provided by staff on time spent on licensing complaint investigation tasks, DCYF expects the complaint investigations unit workload to consist of no more than 12 complaints per FTE monthly.

Table 2 represents the percentage of time calculated for complaints in addition to non-case specific working hours (i.e. travel, staffing, training) divided by the number of working hours.

**Table 2: Complaint Investigations Unit Workload Estimate**

	Monthly Working Hours	Workload Capacity Hours (85 percent)	Case Work Hours (52 percent)	Non-Case Work Hours (48 percent)	Workload Hours Per Case	Monthly Caseload Capacity	Annual Caseload Capacity
<b>Individual</b>	152	129.20	67.18	62.02	5.45	12	144
<b>Team (18 FTE)</b>	2736	2325.60	1209.31	1116.29	5.45	221	2652

Note: Above table includes average two (2) weeks of leave per year and holidays.

It is anticipated that the complaint investigations unit will serve all licensed childcare providers as well as inspect unlicensed complaints.

[1] Contemporary Issues in Licensing: Enforcement Strategies with Licensed Child Care Providers (hhs.gov)

## Assumptions and Calculations

### **Expansion, Reduction, Elimination or Alteration of a current program or service:**

This request seeks to create a licensing compliant investigations unit dedicated to investigating all LD/CPS and Non-CPS intakes for all childcare licensed providers statewide.

### **Detailed Assumptions and Calculations:**

One-time funding is requested to purchase equipment for new employees in FY2026 for the proposed 20 FTEs in the amount of \$144,000.

The ongoing funding requested for the Licensing Complaint Investigations Unit effective in FY2026 for 20.0 FTEs is \$2,731,000 (\$2,677,000 GF-S) per fiscal year.

Of the proposed \$2,731,000 ongoing funding request, \$412,000 (\$358,000 GF-S) is requested to support the administrative infrastructure.

### **Workforce Assumptions:**

To address the workload complexities of serving both job functions, monitoring and investigations for approximately 6,000 providers statewide, individual units have attempted to adjust their work in creative ways such as designating one licensor for all complaints, rotating complaints between licensors as they are assigned, or even quarterly rotations of job duties. In all cases, it was found that the workload was simply too variable with unknown complaints to adequately address the problems, maintain equitable workloads, and meet required timelines. Thus, the best option to address these issues is to create a complaint investigations unit, separate from the compliance work.

#### **Licensing Division (LD): FTE per year-**

1 FTE (WMS 2) Administrator \$180,491 – will oversee the complaint investigations team

1 FTE (AA 3) Administrative Assistant 3 \$103,970 – administrative support

2 FTE (SHPC 4) Social and Health Program Consultant 4 \$329,886 – unit supervisors

1 FTE (SHPC 3) Social and Health Program Consultant 3 \$152,100 – complaint investigations staff and team lead

15 FTE (SHPC 2) Social and Health Program Consultant 2 \$2,107,558 - complaint investigations staff

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### **Historical Funding:**

There is no funding provided in the enacted budget to implement this new unit.

## Strategic and Performance Outcomes

### **Strategic Framework:**

This request will support improving quality and intention of practice, improve quality and availability of provider services, and align with division and program goals. In other areas of licensing (areas with a child welfare focus), DCYF has found that where neutral licensing staff inspect complaints and licensors remain the primary contact for technical assistance, trusting relationships are maintained and the fear of retaliation is limited. In addition, investigations are more objective, complete, and unbiased.

### **Performance Outcomes:**

Maintaining a licensor workload with no higher than an 80 percent workload will allow licensors to spend needed time on providing increased technical assistance and customer service while anticipating vacancy workload: If one FTE becomes vacant, having no higher than an 80 percent workload would allow other licensors within that unit to absorb much of the work temporarily until that position is filled. Currently, licensing staff carry an average workload of 84.72 percent. By implementing a complaint investigations unit, the licensor workload will reduce by approximately 78 percent, making the 80 percent workload goal attainable throughout the state.

Additionally, with the increased availability and quality of licensing technical assistance, providers should report a higher level of satisfaction as well as a reduction in licensing complaints over time. Monitoring timelines will be met annually, resolving audit findings. Licensors should report higher job satisfaction, which may result in increased staff retention. Other benefits:

- Removes the variable workload (complaints) from childcare licensors which will:
  - increase timeliness and quality of licensing support and monitoring and,
  - increase licensor retention.
    - Increased trust and willingness by providers to partner with licensing staff through technical assistance:
  - lowering non-compliance findings over time and,
  - increase provider retention.

## Equity Impacts

### **Community Outreach and Engagement:**

DCYF has heard from childcare providers the need for improved cultural responsiveness, including spending more time providing technical assistance, and the need for language access services. This decision package will help DCYF integrate and operationalize childcare provider's feedback and needs. Having a separate unit to investigate complaints will support this approach as licensors will have more capacity to work with providers. Providers have shared that the investigation process is lengthy and confusing because it is difficult to understand the roles and processes. The proposal for a separate complaint investigations unit has been shared with the union (SEIU 925) and the provider community, and both are supportive. DCYF has heard from childcare providers the need for improved cultural responsiveness, including spending more time providing technical assistance, and the need for language access services. This decision package will help DCYF integrate and operationalize childcare provider's feedback and needs. Having a separate unit to investigate complaints will support this approach as licensors will have more capacity to work with providers. Providers have shared that the investigation process is lengthy and confusing because it is difficult to understand the roles and processes. The proposal for a separate complaint investigations unit has been shared with the union (SEIU 925) and the provider community, and both are supportive.

### **Disproportional Impact Considerations:**

The primary reason for requesting funding to create the complaint investigations units' is to start advancing racial equity in DCYF's licensing practice by building a more human-centered holistic approach to serving childcare providers' needs through culturally relevant licensing services, such as increasing time spent on language access services. Additionally, the creation of the complaint investigations unit will be developed in partnership with childcare providers through planned outreach and engagement. The Licensing Division is committed to continued racial equity exploration and related practice improvements. The complaint investigations unit will align with this priority and continue to work through multiple strategies including continuous quality improvement efforts assessments of systematic inequities.

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### **Target Communities and Populations:**

The child care provider workforce population comprises predominantly of women from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds. Removing complaints as an unknown variable will allow licensing staff to increase technical assistance to childcare providers, requiring additional language

and cultural services. The Licensing Division is currently improving the data collection and reporting in this area and therefore, it is unknown how many providers list a language other than English as their primary or preferred language. Given the data we have, approximately 16.6 percent of providers in the state list a language other than English as their primary language. While DCYF employs licensing staff who speak other languages, a reduced workload will allow more time for not only language translation but also cultural support.

**Table 3: Provider Primary Language**

	<b>Provider Count</b>	<b>Percent</b>
<b>Primary Language English</b>	2595	43.00 percent
<b>Primary Language Other Than English</b>	1001	16.59 percent
<b>Primary Language Not Recorded</b>	2439	40.41 percent

Additionally, this request will increase Tribal expertise in licensing processes, resulting in better system collaboration and coordination.

**Community Inputs and Incorporation:**

In addition to licensor input, as described above, the Early Learning Advisory Council (ELAC) referenced the need to increase communication, improve relationships, and provide additional levels of transparency. Meeting minutes from the June 14<sup>th</sup>, 2023, meeting quoted:

- “The biggest themes for us are consistency across the board, transparency with communication, and relationships” and
- “Providers have a fear of getting written up. Licensed providers and family homes should not fear licensors. They should be working with providers to find solutions.”
- “We are hoping to open lines of communication in a different way and strengthen relationships across the early learning division. There needs to be more opportunities to have a dialogue about things providers are seeing and hearing from licensors and the childcare contact center.” [061423\\_PS\\_MeetingMinutes.pdf \(wa.gov\)](#)

During the August 9<sup>th</sup>, 2023, ELAC provider support meeting, one member stated, “Do licensors have a certain time frame on when they need to respond to emails/phone calls made? I don’t know when to escalate situations.” [080923\\_PS\\_MeetingMinutes.pdf \(wa.gov\)](#)

These comments and thoughts provide general support for the creation of a unit to investigate complaint.

**Other Collateral Connections**

**HEAL Act Agencies Supplemental Questions**

Not Applicable.

**Puget Sound Recovery:**

Not Applicable.

**State Workforce Impacts:**

Not Applicable.

**Intergovernmental:**

Not Applicable.

**Stakeholder Impacts:**

There may be reluctance from some childcare providers, due to existing working relationships. Providers may experience hesitation and fear when someone new from DCYF enters their program; especially during a high stress situation such as a complaint investigation. However, this request is made using feedback from the childcare provider community, including comments made during the ELAC Provider Supports Subcommittee, which is identified above.

**State Facilities Impacts:**

Not Applicable.

**Changes from Current Law:**

Not Applicable.

**Legal or Administrative Mandates:**

Not Applicable.

**Governor's Salmon Strategy:**

Not Applicable.

**IT Addendum**

**Does this Decision Package include funding for any IT-related costs, including hardware, software, (including cloud-based services), contracts or IT staff?**

No

**Objects of Expenditure**

Objects of Expenditure <i>Dollars in Thousands</i>	Fiscal Years		Biennial	Fiscal Years		Biennial
	2026	2027	2025-27	2028	2029	2027-29
Obj. A	\$1,655	\$1,656	\$3,311	\$1,656	\$1,656	\$3,312
Obj. B	\$579	\$579	\$1,158	\$579	\$579	\$1,158
Obj. E	\$36	\$36	\$72	\$36	\$36	\$72
Obj. G	\$48	\$48	\$96	\$48	\$48	\$96
Obj. J	\$144	\$0	\$144	\$0	\$0	\$0
Obj. T	\$412	\$412	\$824	\$412	\$412	\$824

## Agency Contact Information

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