



# 2019-21 Biennium Budget Decision Package

**Agency:** 307 - Dept of Children, Youth, & Families  
**Decision Package Code-Title:** RC - Reduce Individual SW Caseloads  
**Budget Session:** 2019-21 Regular  
**Budget Level:** Maintenance Level  
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## Agency Recommendation Summary

The caseworker represents the most critical investment in the success of families involved in child welfare. Currently, high caseloads are leading to poor casework, increased placement into foster care, increased length of stay in care and high turnover. The department is also having tremendous difficulty recruiting and retaining foster parents. From intake to placement, DCYF is understaffed to maintain the ratios needed to most effectively serve the children of Washington State. By reducing caseload, DCYF can serve the children of Washington more quickly and comprehensively. Wait time at intake would be reduced, investigations would be more thorough, the length of time children spend in out of home care would decrease, and foster family recruitment and retention would increase. The Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) requests 343 FTEs and \$39.65 million in this biennium to reduce caseload for those at every point in our child welfare system.

## Program Recommendation Summary

### 010 - Children and Families Services

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## Fiscal Summary

*Dollars in Thousands*

Operating Expenditures	FY 2020	FY 2021	FY 2022	FY 2023
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<b>Operating Expenditures</b>	<b>FY 2020</b>	<b>FY 2021</b>	<b>FY 2022</b>	<b>FY 2023</b>
Fund 001 - 1	\$5,709	\$8,918	\$3,784	\$3,784
Fund 001 - 2	\$5,383	\$8,550	\$3,619	\$3,619
<b>Total Expenditures</b>	<b>\$11,092</b>	<b>\$17,468</b>	<b>\$7,403</b>	<b>\$7,403</b>
<b>Biennial Totals</b>		<b>\$28,560</b>		<b>\$14,806</b>
<b>Staffing</b>	<b>FY 2020</b>	<b>FY 2021</b>	<b>FY 2022</b>	<b>FY 2023</b>
FTEs	96.0	151.0	64.0	64.0
<b>Average Annual</b>		<b>123.5</b>		<b>64.0</b>
<b>Object of Expenditure</b>	<b>FY 2020</b>	<b>FY 2021</b>	<b>FY 2022</b>	<b>FY 2023</b>
Obj. A	\$5,762	\$9,078	\$3,847	\$3,847
Obj. B	\$2,268	\$3,570	\$1,513	\$1,513
Obj. E	\$173	\$272	\$115	\$115
Obj. G	\$231	\$362	\$154	\$154
Obj. T	\$2,658	\$4,186	\$1,774	\$1,774
<b>Revenue</b>	<b>FY 2020</b>	<b>FY 2021</b>	<b>FY 2022</b>	<b>FY 2023</b>
001 - 0393	\$5,383	\$8,550	\$3,619	\$3,619
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$5,383</b>	<b>\$8,550</b>	<b>\$3,619</b>	<b>\$3,619</b>
<b>Biennial Totals</b>		<b>\$13,933</b>		<b>\$7,238</b>

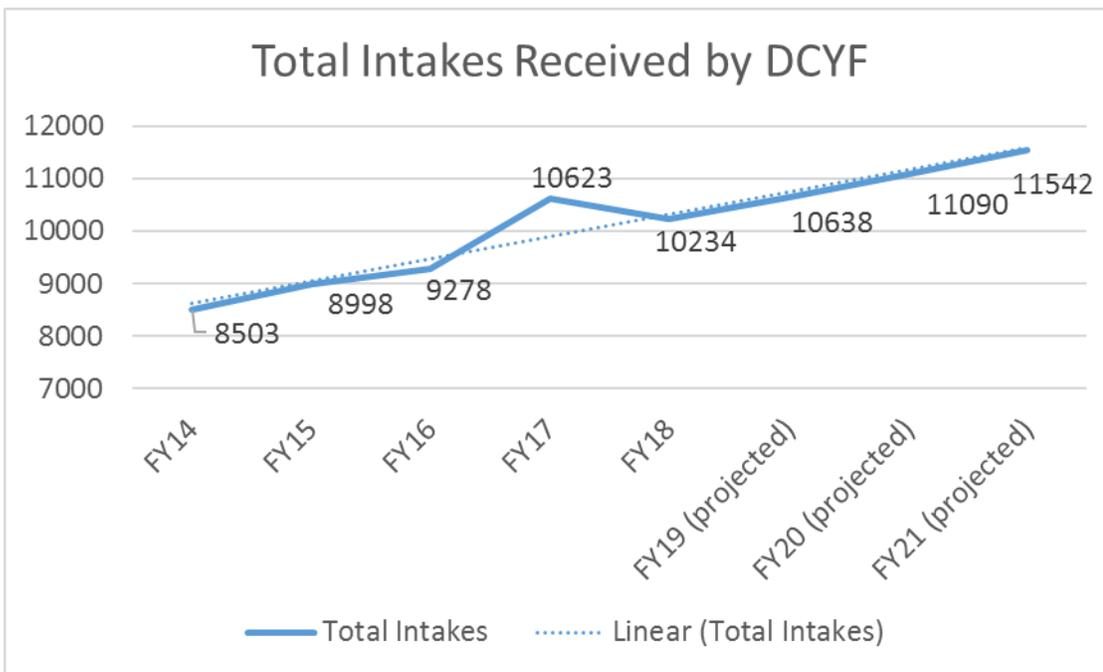
## Package Description

DCYF staffing ratios across its child welfare work exceed best practices, national standards and staffing ratios mandated by court settlements. These high workloads create an environment where children cannot be safe and are prevented from achieving permanency and ensuring their well-being. Additional staffing are needed throughout the system to alleviate these concerns.

### Intake

DCYF staff in centralized locations around the state receive telephone, mail, fax and email reports of child abuse and neglect, or allegations of licensing violations. DCYF staff receive these from the community and process intakes on a 24/7 basis.

The department has experienced a marked increase in the number of intakes received in the past several years, and is currently experiencing the largest number of intakes in the department's history. There has been no FTE increase for intake staff to match this need. The graph below depicts the increase in the number of intakes received over the last five fiscal years.



DCYF screens in intakes as “emergent” or “non-emergent.” The overall increase in intakes is attributed to a significant increase in “emergent” intakes, which not only require a more immediate response from field staff, but also require additional action and time spent by intake staff. Not only is the number of intakes increasing, the proportion of intakes requiring an immediate response are increasing dramatically. Currently, there are 95 FTES assigned to intake.

Fewer FTE resources means longer wait times, a significant number of abandoned calls (individuals reporting potential child abuse who hang up the phone rather than wait on hold), constituent complaints and staff frustration when they cannot meet the demand. The Office of Children and Family Ombudsman (OFCO) recently issued an adverse finding related to complaints from the community involving call wait times for intake. Information was gathered at Central Intake for a 10-month period in FY18. Although the average wait time was 5.8 minutes, the longest wait time for a caller was 78 minutes. Most concerning though, is the number of abandoned calls (hanging up instead of waiting on hold). Many of these are mandatory reporters, who simply cannot wait on the line and hang up in frustration, to call back another time, which may or may not happen. These abandoned calls are community members who summoned the resolve to contact the department about a family, and lost that resolve while waiting. 22.6 percent of callers hang up after an average of 6.7 minutes. Unfortunately, the department is unable to distinguish between callers who called back at another time, and those that simply gave up and never reported their concern.

Data is detailed below for one typical month (April 2018) for Central Intake alone.

- Received 7,846 phone calls. 2,720 calls – 34.7 percent – were abandoned. The department is unable to report out how many of these are duplicates from the same caller, or duplicates of the calls actually received (caller hangs up, but then calls back and connects later).
- Received 721 intake reports via police line, fax, email or USPS mail.
- Generated 5,982 intakes.

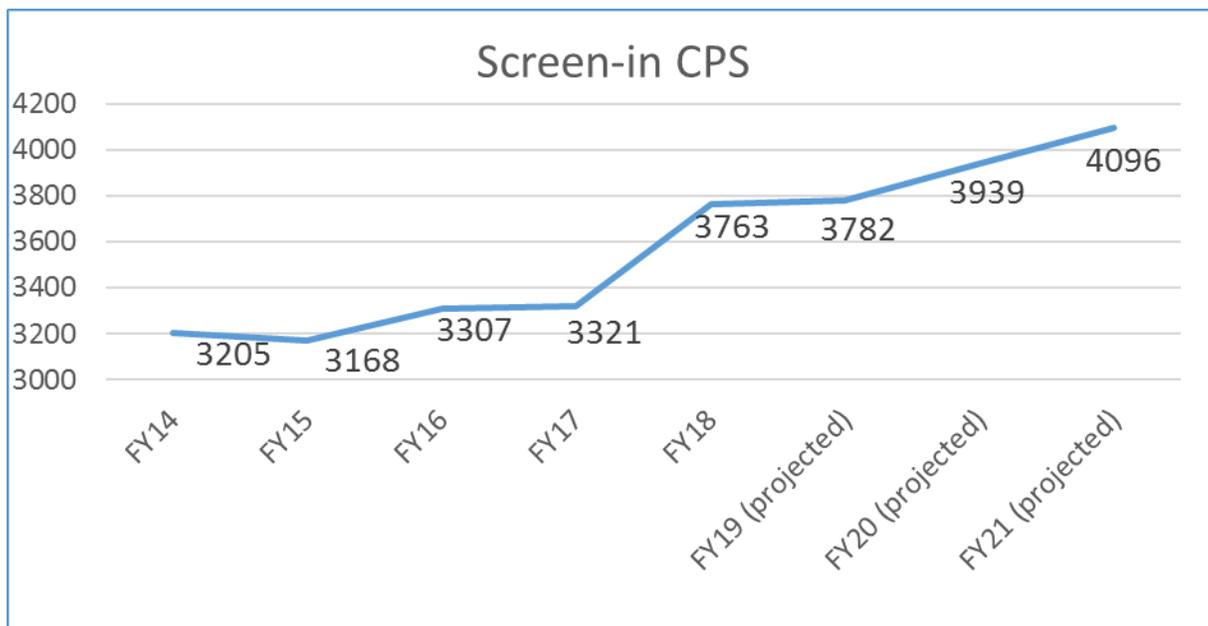
It is also important to note that the DCYF intake lines are not a typical call-center model, in which a representative spends time with a caller, generating work while having that telephone conversation, completing the work and moving on to another call. That representative spends a great deal of time with the caller soliciting known information about the family. The worker then gathers information from various databases,

including a thorough search for all family members and a review of history with the department, makes collateral phone calls, may have to consult with a supervisor, launches an input in the FamLink database, inputs gathered information into that database, and then makes decisions regarding screening. If the family has tribal affiliation, there are additional requirements to ascertain the child's tribal affiliation, and notify the tribe immediately that an intake has been received, and forward detailed information to the tribe. Also, if the intake is deemed to be emergent, the local office is notified within an hour of receiving the phone call, and may also be working with law enforcement if an immediate response is needed. That work is then reviewed and final approval is made by a supervisor. The worker does all of this while intakes continue to be received via the intake line.

In 2007, Walter MacDonald and Associates completed one of the most comprehensive workload studies of public child welfare systems, with specific recommendations, including proposing workload standards for intake staff. The standard MacDonald and Associates proposed in order to meet best practice standards was 61 intakes per month per FTE (1:61). The department is currently requesting an increase in intake staff in order to meet a 1:80 standard for intake workers statewide. In order to respond to the anticipated number of intakes received meeting the 1:80 standard, DCYF needs an additional 39 intake workers, 6 supervisors and 7 clerical support staff. This represents slightly more than a 50 percent increase in intake staffing, which is necessary to address increases in intake volume and long-standing high caseloads among intake workers. This will decrease wait times and decrease the number of abandoned calls.

The consequences of not funding additional workers, in an environment of an increasing number of intake call attempts, will be an even greater number of complaints by the community, including mandatory reporters; adverse findings by OFCO; impacts on staff morale; and ultimately, and most significantly, child safety concerns.

### **Child Protective Services (Investigation and Family Assessment Response)**

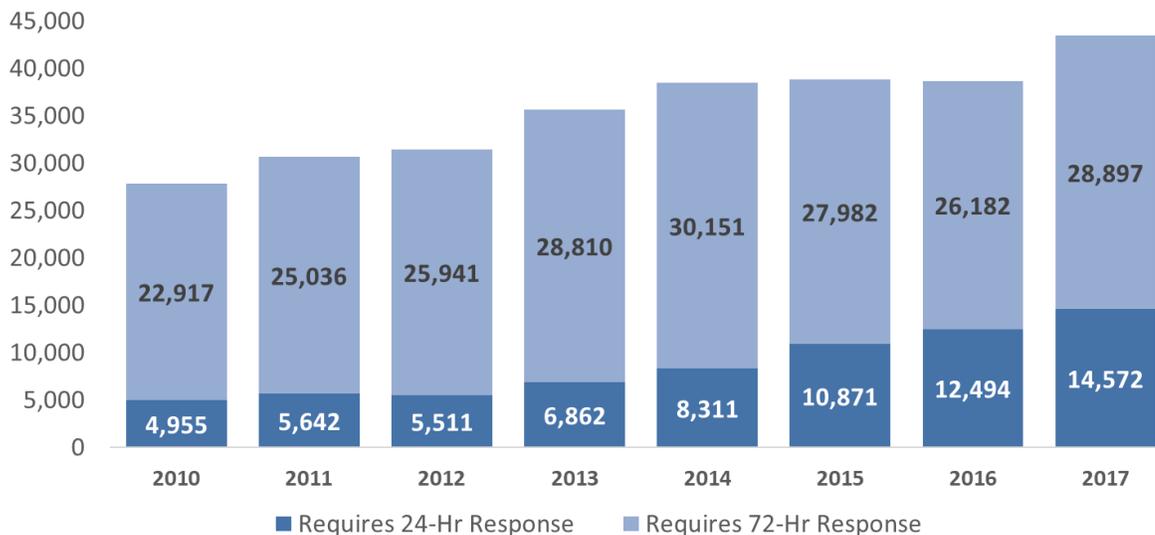


As a result of the increase in intakes, the department struggles with the accompanying workload for these screened-in intakes alleging abuse and/or neglect of children and youth. The number of intakes screening in for response has increased by 17% in the last four years.

The largest increase in this piece of work are those allegations that are more serious, requiring a 24-hour “emergent” response. These intakes require the investigator to make face-to-face contact with all victims identified in the intake within 24 hours of receipt of the intake call. This includes the time it takes to the intake worker to process the intake, including all the work identified in the intake section above, and assignment to an investigator in the local field office, who then makes efforts to locate the child within the required time period.

### Intakes Requiring a Face-to-Face Contact by Response Time

Screened-In Reports



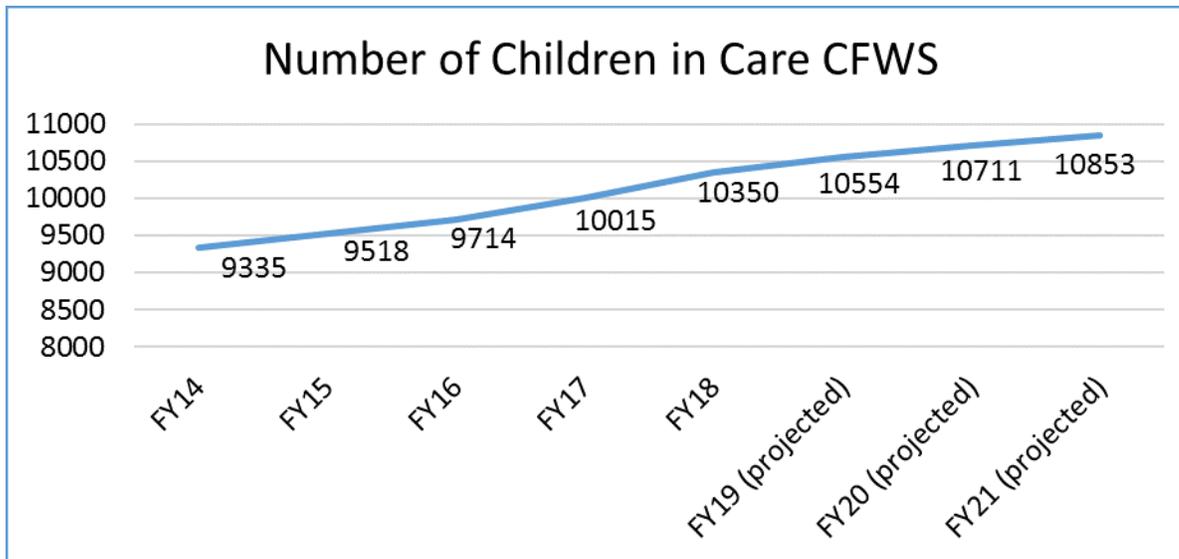
In FY18, there were 8.6 intakes per FTE. Increasing the number of CPS staff to 8 intakes per month, would enhance child safety. The workload is more manageable, and outcomes are improved, including the Department’s ability to meet requirements for timely response and closure of cases within statutory time frames. Ultimately, though, this enhances child safety and provides for greater responsiveness for families served by CPS.

Manageable caseloads are often cited as a factor in worker retention. The CPS program is often how new staff enter the Department. These new staff then seek to transfer quickly to another program, or leave state service altogether when they find workload to be oppressive. Lowering the CPS caseloads to a 1:8 ratio will increase worker retention in the CPS program. Analysis conducted by the Research and Data Analysis section in the Department of Social and Health Services demonstrated that an average CPS worker can be expected to close 8 cases a month. Maintaining the 1:8 ratio also ensures that a backlog of cases isn’t created. In order to respond to the anticipated number of intakes received meeting the 1:8 standard, DCYF needs an additional 52 CPS workers, 8 supervisors and 8 clerical support staff.

### Child and Family Welfare Services

The number of children in the department’s care and custody has also increased significantly, without an accompanying increase in staff. As caseloads rise, workers cover a greater number of children and families, and permanency suffers. A public child welfare system struggling to achieve permanency creates pressure points in various parts of the system. A greater number of children in foster care impacts placement resources, including added pressure on foster parents, increased hotel stays for children when appropriate placements cannot be identified, and the expense of foster care maintenance payments. Courts and Court Appointed Special Advocate/Guardian ad Litem programs are overwhelmed when permanency is not achieved. Workers have a

greater number of children and families to service, resulting in worker stress and burnout, and ultimately worker turnover. All of this contributes to an overall negative impact on the welfare of Washington's foster care children.



National standards for child welfare caseloads are between 12 to 15 cases per worker (Child Welfare League of America). Washington State has previously agreed to the much more conservative standard of 1:18 cases per worker as part of the Braam Settlement agreement. There are currently 573 FTE CFWS workers. Forty-three percent of case-carrying CFWS staff have caseloads at or greater than 20, and 15 percent of CFWS staff have caseloads at 25 or greater. Conversely, over fifty percent of CFWS workers have a caseload under 1:18. These workers have lower caseloads generally because they are either new workers, experiencing some kind of leave (like maternity leave), work in a small, rural office, or have capped caseloads do to special programs like family treatment courts.

In order to respond to the anticipated increase in caseload and meeting the 1:18 standard, DCYF needs an additional 154 workers, 22 supervisors and 26 clerical support staff this biennium. Of those staff, slightly more than 100 are required just to meet the 1:18 standard and the others are to respond to anticipated increases in caseload.

## Assumptions and Calculations

### Expansion or alteration of a current program or service:

See attached documentation of prior biennial expenditures for Central Intake.

### Detailed assumptions and calculations:

See detailed calculations attached.

### Workforce Assumptions:

FTE information attached.

## Strategic and Performance Outcomes

### Strategic framework:

This measure works to support healthy and safe communities. With more social worker support, DCYF can continue to ensure that every youth in WA is able to grow and learn in the best conditions possible.

**Performance outcomes:**

The department expects the following outcomes:

- \*Shortened call wait times and less missed calls.
- \*Quicker CPS investigation timelines.
- \*Increase success in permanency outcomes.

**Other Collateral Connections****Intergovernmental:**

Not applicable

**Stakeholder response:**

Stakeholders are anticipated to support this proposal.

**Legal or administrative mandates:**

The BRAAM Settlement requires a lower Caseload than our current average. This package would support our efforts to be in compliance with the law.

**Changes from current law:**

Not applicable

**State workforce impacts:**

Not applicable

**State facilities impacts:**

Not applicable

**Puget Sound recovery:**

Not applicable

**Reference Documents**

- B19-21 DP Staffing Model.xlsm
- B19-21 DPStaffingmodel1.xlsm
- StaffingBackup.xlsx

**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