



## CHILD WELFARE WORKLOAD MODEL LEGISLATIVE REPORT 2024-2025



Washington State Department of  
**CHILDREN, YOUTH & FAMILIES**

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# Washington State Department of **CHILDREN, YOUTH & FAMILIES**

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## Executive Summary

This report has been prepared by the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) in compliance with RCW 43.216.750. DCYF convened the technical work group in 2024 to review a new workload model and related data and developed a new workload model on the basis of workload and caseload for 2025. This report summarizes the recommendations of the technical work group and satisfies DCYF's reporting requirements for calendar years 2024 and 2025.

In 2022, ESSB 5693, Sec. 227 (34) provided funding for the department to contract for a child welfare workload study, which was required to include an evaluation of workload impacts required by state and federal law, and to make recommendations for staffing models and system improvements. The Legislature required that the study consider enacted laws, including HB 1227, The Keeping Families Together Act, as well as evaluate workload impacts related to changes in the application of state and federal laws as required under multiple State Supreme Court decisions. In 2022, DCYF contracted with the Public Consulting Group (PCG) to conduct the workload study. The Child Welfare and Indian Child Welfare Workload Study was released in 2023.

The 2025 Child Welfare Workload Model Report utilizes the [2023 PCG Workload Study](#), as well as additional input and validation from frontline staff of the data gathered from the PCG Workload Study. Based on the recommendations of the PCG Child Welfare and Indian Child Welfare Workload Study and further data analysis, the Technical Workgroup recommended developing a new workload model. This was accomplished by using what was developed in the PCG Workload Study and augmented with further data analysis and validation by Child Welfare and the Technical Workgroup. This report includes details about how the new workload model differs from the current model and why it will provide a more equitable way to estimate staffing needs moving forward.

This report provides official counts of average caseloads for each child welfare program area. DCYF administrators monitor state and regional trends to address workload distribution across and within programs and use this information to identify staffing needs.

The 2025 caseload analysis by the technical workgroup indicates a decrease in child welfare cases; however, the complexity of screened-in intakes and families served has escalated. This trend is attributed to the rise in mental health challenges and the ongoing fentanyl crisis. At the same time there has been an increase in the time required for child welfare staff to work on individual cases due to recent changes in state law and changes in the application of state and federal laws due to State Supreme Court decisions.

## Introduction

The number of children in out-of-home care has decreased by approximately half since the Department of Children, Youth and Families was created in 2018. As of Aug. 31, 2025, the number of children in foster care has declined to 4,569, marking a 6.7% reduction from the previous year. Despite the decrease in foster care numbers, the complexity of the cases has increased significantly.

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Overall, there has been a 3.4% reduction in child welfare caseloads since the 2024 workload report, which can be attributed to a 3% decrease in open cases and a .4% increase in case workers. As the number of children in out of home care has decreased, Family Voluntary Services (FVS) has seen a 32.8% increase in the number of families served. These statistics reflect the ongoing efforts to enhance child welfare services while addressing the intricate challenges that arise.

The new proposed workload model identifies and quantifies additional factors that increase workload for case workers when working with specific types of cases. The current workload model only took into consideration the additional time it takes for case workers to meet the requirement to provide “active efforts” when the Indian Child Welfare Act applies to the case.

The revised model incorporates additional workload considerations for applying the Indian Child Welfare Act, pursuant to recent State Supreme Court decisions, including in re the Dependency of G.J.A. which clarifies the departments legal obligations involving “active efforts” and reason to know when a child is or may be an Indian child. Additionally, it accounts for an increase in workload associated with cases involving children with disabilities, those requiring language interpretation or translation services, instances with three or more victims in Child Protective Services (CPS) investigations, Family Assessment Response (FAR), and FVS cases, situations necessitating removals, and scenarios involving staff with less than three years of tenure. DCYF’s Strategic Priorities for 2021-2026 calls for the agency to improve the quality and intention of our practice. In that work, our staff is our most valuable resource. The new proposed workload model accounts for the impacts of changes to laws, the application of laws and the changing landscape of case complexity for child welfare staff.

The technical workgroup’s recommendations for reducing turnover include establishing realistic caseload standards, capping caseload sizes, and focusing on employee wellness. The 2025 technical workgroup recommends the following changes to child welfare caseloads based on the new workload model.

**Figure 1. 2025 Workload Model Recommendations**

Child Welfare Program Area	“Case Loads” As of March 1, 2025	2025 Recommendation
CPS Investigation (INV)	13.3 cases per caseworker	6.4 new cases every 60 days
CPS Family Assessment Response (FAR)	13.7 cases per caseworker	7 new cases every 45 days
Family Voluntary Services (FVS)	9.5 cases per caseworker	5.5 cases
Family Reconciliation Services (FRS)	10.5 cases per caseworker	13 cases
Child and Family Welfare Services (CFWS, Legally Free, and EFC)	13 cases per caseworker	11.7 cases
Supervisor Ratios	Not currently tracked	Five (5) social service staff for new supervisors, and six (6) social service staff for experienced supervisors.
Clerical Ratios	1 clerical per 1.9 units	1 clerical to per unit

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## Caseload Recommendations by Program Area

### CPS Investigation

*Recommend an average of 6.4 new cases every 60 days per FTE.*

The 2025 workgroup recommends limiting CPS investigators to an average of 6.4 new intakes every 60 days. Considering the legislative changes over the last few years, such as HB1227 significant increase in reason to know cases, and the increase in substance abuse related cases, the average time to close a CPS Investigation is averaging 60 days. The current workload forecast assumes that each worker can take on 8 new cases every 30 days. This assumption has not been updated since the creation of DCYF, nor has consideration been given to accommodate the changes in workload, increased complexities, and staff turnover challenges.

### CPS-Family Assessment Response (FAR)

*Recommend an average of 7 new cases every 45 days per FTE.*

The 2025 workgroup recommends limiting FAR workers to an average of 7 new intakes every 45 days. Considering the same workload challenges as the CPS Investigation workers face, in addition, the families we serve in the FAR program rely heavily on caseworker support, concrete goods, and additional services to ensure the family can stay together and thrive. In the current economic environment Child Welfare is experiencing a shortage of available services and therefore can take caseworkers additional time to ensure they are able to find the appropriate services or concrete goods. In addition, on average a FAR case has 2.5 children, and each requires their own assessment, health and safety visits, and individual engagement. By limiting the number of new cases, the caseworker will have the time to better engage with the families and ensure their needs can be met. The current workload forecast assumes that each worker can take on 8 new cases every 30 days. This assumption has not been updated since the creation of DCYF, nor has consideration been given to accommodate the changes in workload, increased complexities, and staff turnover challenges.

### Family Voluntary Services

*Recommend an average of 5 cases per FTE.*

The 2025 workgroup recommends limiting FVS workers to an average of 5 cases. Family Voluntary Services (FVS) serves families who may be at the highest risk in the child welfare program. Children are almost always served in the family home, with intensive safety monitoring, continued assessment, and services provided to the family. If the children are being served in the home, the case “counts” as a single case, despite the number of children in the family. The intensive case management of FVS cases ultimately prevents out-of-home placement, which is better for families, better for children, and more cost-effective. The current caseload ratio for FVS cases is far too high and puts our families at greater risk due to caseworker lack of available time to engage and serve some of their most basic needs.

### Child and Family Welfare Services

*Recommend a maximum of 11.7 children in out-of-home care.*

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CFWS workers provide case management for individual children and youth in the care and custody of the Department. These children are placed in licensed foster homes or group care facilities or live in unlicensed relative or kinship placements.

Children may also be in the care and custody of the Department, but the worker monitors their safety and well-being while they live with their parents in an in-home dependency or a trial return home following a return from care.

Currently, CFWS workers have an average caseload of 13, a 5% decrease over the last year. There are fewer CFWS cases open, 6,757.64 as of March 3, 2025, versus 7,007.68 and 8 more FTEs working these caseloads. Over the last year, along with the decrease in caseloads, the CFWS workers have increased both kinship placements and guardianships, both efforts are more labor intensive than standard foster home placement. The 2024 workgroup recommends continuing to strive for a lower caseload to ensure these positive trends continue.

### Family Reconciliation Services

*Recommend a maximum of 13 cases.*

Family Reconciliation Services (FRS) are voluntary services requested by a youth or their family to serve runaway adolescents, or families experiencing conflict, with a focus on youth ages 12-17. These are short-term services, oriented toward immediate crisis management or referral to other long-term services in the community. Nearly all cases are closed within 60 days, but if the case is open past 60 days, policy does require that the FRS workers conduct monthly health and safety visits.

Recommendations for caseload sizes for this program area were higher than other program areas because not all families choose to follow through after the original request for services, and the cases are open for a shorter period. The program is also cost-effective, as it can prevent youth from entering out-of-home care, or the worker seeks to return youth in crisis temporarily placed in out-of-home care back to their families. To ensure the caseworker has the necessary time to provide the needed services and engagement, the 2025 workgroup recommends no more than 13 cases per worker, an average we are currently able to achieve.

### Supervisor Ratios

*Recommendation of five (5) social service staff for newer supervisors, and six (6) social service staff for experienced supervisors.*

The technical workgroup recognized that newer supervisors require additional support and coaching, resulting in a recommendation of five social service staff to one supervisor. The definition for what constitutes a new supervisor was operationalized by the first technical workgroup as those supervisors with less than two years' supervisory experience with specific program knowledge, or three years' supervisory experience with no specific program knowledge.

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Given the amount of mandatory training required by supervisors, additional time spent to prepare new employees to serve the clients, and ensure staff are kept up to date on new policies, procedures, and best practices it is critical we maintain the recommended supervisor ratios.

Supervisor turnover is one of the costliest to the agency, given their tenure and overall knowledge of child welfare. Keeping to the recommended ratios limits our risk of turnover and disruption to their staff.

## Clerical Ratios

*Recommendation of one clerical to one (1) social service units.*

Because clerical staff who support child welfare units are not case carrying, the importance of clerical support staff is sometimes overlooked. Additionally, it is difficult to determine the current state of clerical staff ratios, as not all offices assign clerical to a unit, but have a clerical pool, with a wide range of functions within the office, and not direct service to a particular unit.

Turnover is also prevalent among clerical and administrative positions in child welfare. This critical part of the child welfare workforce is usually the first to encounter DCYF clients and newly hired child welfare staff in the offices. Their work ranges from direct interface with clients and new staff to providing a range of office, program and case supports to regional and field workers. Turnover among clerical staff has been on the increase since 2019.

By assigning a clerical staff per caseworker unit, it frees up the caseworker to focus on critical areas of case management such as engagement, providing services, and preparing for court when necessary. Assigned clerical staff will support their team to liaise with clients, provide technical assistance, and conduct functions that would otherwise fall on the social service staff. Social service staff, including supervisors, must be supported by the availability of various clerical support.

In summary, the 2025 technical workgroup used the newly developed workload model, along with detailed data analysis to determine these program recommendations. The following section explains the new workload model design and implementation approach.

## 2025 Child Welfare Workload Report

### Changes Increasing or Decreasing Workload Demand

Here are the key changes that have affected workload in 2025 and the strategies we are implementing to address them in the coming year:

- DCYF has initiated a targeted FAR case review to assess the efficiency of **transferring FAR cases with services to an identified FVS worker**, rather than requiring the FAR worker to provide ongoing services while also managing intake. If this approach proves efficient, it will enable DCYF to better track the number of families receiving services and prioritize those FAR cases over 45 days without services. Currently, the limitations of our case management system, FamLink, prevent us from accurately tracking this data. This change is expected to have a neutral impact on overall workload.

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- The rise in kinship care and guardianship has increased the workload for out-of-home case workers due to the extensive guardianship process. To address this additional workload, we may incorporate guardianship as a new complexity in the workload model starting in 2026. We will evaluate this addition to measure its impact on workloads and identify opportunities to streamline the process, mitigating some of the challenges it creates.
- Under ICWA, when DCYF has reason to know that a child is or may be an Indian child, DCYF has a legal obligation to make active efforts to prevent the breakup of the family. Recent state supreme court decisions and federal rules have clarified how we must treat cases when we have “reason to know” legal obligations to make active efforts. These decisions have increased workload. The new model assigns up to an additional 86% weighting to ICWA cases, but we still lack reporting for “reason to know.” Drawing from field feedback and court experience, we anticipate a significant increase in cases in which ICWA applies. Additionally, the workload tied to ICWA cases has grown, and we plan to report a measured workload increase for 2025 once the report becomes available.
- HB1227 has caused an increase in both the number of relative search requests and the time required for cases. Workers fairly evaluate each family that comes forward for placement and involve them in other potential support throughout the dependency. Properly engaging, vetting, and assessing relatives for potential placement or support for the child or family demands additional hours, especially in cases with an exceptional number of interested parties.
- Increased staffing alone will not solve the issue; we are actively implementing a multi-faceted approach to streamline processes. The largest and most time-consuming initiative, the separation of policy and procedure, is currently underway. This effort will clearly distinguish between the two, making updates to each more efficient as policy is what is required by RCW, WAC or Public Law and procedures are how we meet those requirements. Because all cases and families are not the same, procedures are completed based on the circumstances of the case. Additionally, we are surveying front-line staff to identify which policies, procedures, and RCWs create extra or unnecessary workload and to gather suggestions for improvement. We expect to receive the survey results by early 2025 and will begin prioritizing tasks based on the findings.

## Workload Model Background

### Overview

Since 2022, DCYF has collaborated with internal and external experts to refine a child welfare workload model. This new model builds off the 2023 Child Welfare and Indian Child Welfare Workload Study and integrates specific staff efforts, time availability, and caseload and complexity data to forecast staffing requirements. This approach anchors these predictions in the actual time needed for various case types, allowing for the assessment of legislative and policy changes on staffing. The model will evolve through ongoing collaboration with regional and program staff to capture position-specific needs and leverage Random Moment in Time (RMT) survey insights for accurate staffing projections.

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The new model is designed to be flexible, reflecting client and family commitments, program results, and policy objectives. Tailored to each program area, the model is dynamic, ensuring it aligns with work outcomes, which are regularly evaluated and modified for continuous improvement.

### Weaknesses of the Current Workload Model

The current workload model has three major weaknesses. First, the model's allocation of 174 available hours per month does not account for essential non-client-facing activities such as annual leave, sick time, holidays, and professional development requirements. Second, the current model does not account for changes in laws, policies, procedures, and legal requirements.

Third, the model does not account for the different efforts required for different out-of-home case types with the exception of a 30% weight for cases that are determined to be Indian Child Welfare, a 50% weighting for Courtesy Supervision Sending and Receiving and ICPC WA is Receiving. The 2023 Child Welfare and Indian Child Welfare Workload Study recognizes how the distinct demands of these various programs could lead to a more equitable distribution of work and improve overall staffing efficiency. The new proposed model has been revised to account for these different program workloads separately and promotes a more balanced and sustainable work environment for all staff members and contributes to safer, healthier outcomes for children and families.

## New Workload Model and Methodology

### Overview

The new proposed workload model presents a dynamic approach to staffing, distinct from traditional caseload models. It calculates staffing needs by evaluating the actual time available for duties, the duration of each task, and the number of cases, rather than comparing staff numbers to case numbers. This method aims to provide an objective basis for staffing needs by considering all factors that influence the completion of work, including mandatory training. This ensures that staffing levels are directly correlated to specific tasks and activities.

The new model integrates three principal metrics:

- The average "work time available" for each full-time employee (FTE), which includes time spent on non-client-facing activities.
- The time required to perform essential job functions, as determined by the 2023 workload study and subsequent focus groups.
- A rolling 12-month historical case count, which is instrumental in forecasting future caseloads and budgetary requirements.

By integrating these metrics, the model more accurately projects staffing needs, ensuring that resources are aligned with demand.

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## Child Welfare Case Types and Casework Categories

In child welfare, each main program is associated with a distinct workload model that outlines necessary staffing. This model is updated and reassessed on a regular basis. It does not account for staff involved in policy development, training, or operational support within the agency. The model measures the programs and casework categories listed below.

### Child Welfare Programs included in the new workload model

- Intake Decision
- CPS Investigations (CPS INV)
- Family Assessment Response (CPS FAR)
- Family Voluntary Services (FVS)
- Family Reconciliation Services (FRS)
- Child Family Welfare Services (CFWS) (Out of Home/Foster Care/Kinship Care and In Home Care)
- Legally Free/Adoption
- Extended Foster Care (EFC)
- Courtesy Supervision
- Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC)
- Tribal Payment Only

### Child Welfare Casework Categories

- Adoption/Guardianship Processing
- Arranging Family Time (Visitation)
- Assessment Tools and Activities
- Case Consultation and Case Reviews
- Computer Documentation
- Conflicts, Appeals and Grievances
- Contacts
- Intake Assessment (IA)
- Participate in Court Hearings
- Prepare for Court Hearings
- Review, Screening, and Case Mining
- Safety Decision/Safety Planning/Assessment Findings
- Service Plans
- Service Referral, Coordination or Provision
- Team Meetings
- Transportation of Client
- Travel

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### Available Hours

The first step in the workload calculation is determining the average number of hours workers have available each month to dedicate to casework activities. As stated previously, the current model calculations use 174 available hours per month, our new model uses the following calculation.

**Figure 2. Average Monthly Work Hours Available**

Average available hours per month calculation inputs	Hours per month
Average monthly work hours available	174
Less average monthly Washington state holiday hours	-8
Less average monthly leave hours	-12
Less average monthly sick hours	-8
Sub-total available work hours per month for case work	146
Less non-case specific hours (meetings, 1:1's, paperwork, etc.)	-14.6
Less average monthly training hours	-7.4
Average monthly hours available for case work <sup>1</sup>	<b>124.1</b>

### Time to Handle Casework

The allocation of time is a pivotal factor in managing workload effectively. The hours available each month are finite, so it is important to account for the time demands of various case types. For instance, event-driven cases, such as those necessitating intake decisions, have specific time requirements for completion. In situations involving children placed outside their homes, time calculations are made per child, not per family unit, ensuring a thorough and individualized approach to each case.

The time dedicated to all other casework activities is determined by the average duration spent on these tasks, as evidenced by sampled cases. The time standards for case types are dynamic and will escalate as the number of activities deemed mandatory increases. Mandatory activities are defined as those essential for the monthly management of a case or for reaching a conclusive decision, like completing a Child Protective Services (CPS) investigation. These standards encompass both the time mandated by laws and policies for certain tasks and the time required for all additional activities that are necessary to provide comprehensive service to a case. This structured approach to time management ensures that each case receives the attention it requires, within the constraints of available resources.

**Figure 3. Hours Needed Per Case Type and Category Per Month**

Child Welfare Casework Categories	Intake	INV	FAR	FVS	FRS	CFWS	CS Sending & ICPC WA Sending	CS Rec	ICPC - WA Rec	Legally Free	EFC	TPO
Adoption Processing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.60	0	0.01
Arranging Family Time (Visitation)	0	0	0	0	0	0.20	0.20	0	0	0.20	0.10	0.07

<sup>1</sup> Varies from PCG Workload Study details available upon request

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Child Welfare Casework Categories	Intake	INV	FAR	FVS	FRS	CFWS	CS Sending & ICPC WA Sending	CS Rec	ICPC - WA Rec	Legally Free	EFC	TPO
Assessment Tools and Activities	0	2.10	1.60	1.50	0.20	0.20	0.20	0	0.18	0.20	0	0.01
Case Consultation and Case Reviews	0.01	1.27	1.04	2.90	0.30	0.40	0.40	0	0.40	0.40	0.20	0.13
Computer Documentation	0.31	2.00	1.62	2.20	2.00	2.10	1.60	0.50	1.00	1.00	1.00	0.35
Contacts	0.25	5.06	3.05	5.80	2.30	3.50	2.30	1.20	1.34	1.50	1.50	0.17
Eligibility Determinations	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.01
Intake Assessment	0.47	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Licensing and Monitoring	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.01
Participate in Court Hearings	0	0	0	0	0	0.30	0.30	0.00	0	0.10	0	0
Prepare for Court Hearings	0	0	0	0	0	1.40	1.40	0.00	0	0.47	0	0
Review, Screening, and Case Mining	0.22	0.40	0.32	0.20	0.20	0.20	0.20	0.02	0.03	0.10	0.10	0.01
Safety Decision/Safety Planning/Assessment Findings	0	3.50	1.08	0.70	0	0.60	0.54	0.06	0	0.40	0.30	0
Service Plans	0.01	0.48	0.60	2.24	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Service Referral, Coordination or Provision	0	1.60	2.00	2.60	1.60	1.90	1.90	0.00	0.01	0.63	2.00	0.22
Team Meetings	0	0.40	1.44	0.50	0.30	0.60	0.54	0.06	0	0.60	0.10	0.02
Transportation of Client	0	0.32	1.05	0.20	0	0.50	0.45	0.05	0	0.50	0.50	0
Travel	0	2.22	1.42	3.14	1.80	2.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.20	1.80	0.01
Monthly Hours Required for Standard Casework	<b>1.3</b>	<b>19.4</b>	<b>15.2</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>8.7</b>	<b>13.9</b>	<b>11.0</b>	<b>2.9</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>7.9</b>	<b>7.6</b>	<b>1.0</b>

Case Counts

In the new proposed workload model, case counts are derived from a rolling 12-month average to accurately reflect the seasonality and emerging trends within Child Welfare work as recommended by the 2023 workload study. This approach addresses the limitations of the current model, which relied on a static point-in-time count that did not account for these variables.

DCYF analyzed cases that exceeded the standard policy duration. These cases were awaiting actions such as police reports or court filings or were pending closure. DCYF has adjusted the time allocation for these cases to reflect the actual workload more accurately. Specifically, for FAR cases exceeding 45 days, a portion was found to be receiving services like those in FVS cases. Therefore, the time assigned to these FAR cases has been adjusted to align with the FVS workload hours.

In the case of region 4 Intake Decision numbers include Central Intake case counts, which is a dedicated 24/7 team whose cases are counted as part of region 4 but staffed out of headquarters.

The case counts represented in the table below are from March 2024 through February 2025.

**Figure 4. Case Count and Type by Region**

Case Type	Total	Reg 1	Reg 2	Reg 3	Reg 4	Reg 5	Reg 6
Intake Decision (Screened In + Out + % Abandoned)	14,788	1,516	920	1,474	7,020	2,051	1,806
CPS Investigation Count of Intakes Open	3,240	607	499	325	594	531	684
Family Assessment Response (FAR) Count of Intakes Open	3,148	621	300	334	612	498	783
Family Voluntary Services (In-Home and OOH)	573	92	115	103	85	96	82
Family Reconciliation Services (In-Home and OOH)	284	31	27	38	45	57	86
Out of Home Care (OOH, In-Home, CS, ICPC, TPO)	6,855	1,293	806	924	1,073	1,236	1,523
Legally Free/Adoption (OOH)	759	146	75	62	162	96	218
Extended Foster Care (OOH)	664	94	79	57	138	112	184
<b>Totals</b>	<b>30,311</b>	<b>4,401</b>	<b>2,821</b>	<b>3,317</b>	<b>9,729</b>	<b>4,677</b>	<b>5,366</b>

### Case Complexity

The 2023 workload study identified additional case characteristics to consider when calculating the overall time to handle cases. In the current workload model ICWA cases are weighted at 1.30 vs. 1.0 regardless of program (except TPO). The Technical Workgroup utilized the analysis done in the Addendum to the Legislative Report\_WA DCYF CW & ICW Workload Study to determine the ICWA weightings.

After further data analysis and validation the Technical Workgroup made the final ICWA recommendations in Figure 5. The new proposed workload model utilized a number of case characteristics as mentioned in the PCG Workload Study and upon further data analysis and validation with the field, the Technical Workgroup recommends the additional weightings by case characteristic as shown in Table 5.

The main reason for some of the variances by program is based on parental involvement, for example on ICWA cases when the parents are no longer involved much of the ICWA related workload is reduced down to one person vs. 3 or more.

**Figure 5. Case Types and Characteristics**

Case Characteristics	CPS INV	FAR	FVS	FRS	Out of Home Care	Curt Sup	Adoption – Legally Free	Extended Foster Care
ICWA Cases	1.86	1.86	1.86	1.55	1.86	1.86	1.18	1.18
Disability Flags Present	1.48	1.48	1.48	1.48	1.48	1.48	1.48	1.48
Language (Not English)	1.32	1.32	1.32	1.32	1.32	1.32	1.32	1.16
3 or more victims by Intake Type	1.54	1.54	1.54	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Removal	1.54	1.54	1.54	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a <sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Some weighting and complexities may vary from PCG Workload Study, details available upon request.

## Workload Informs Caseload Recommendations

The 2023 workload study recognizes a distinction between caseload and workload within child welfare services. Workload is defined as the amount of time required for cases multiplied by the number of cases, divided by the available time caseworkers need to complete their duties.

This metric assists in developing reasonable workload standards, which are crucial for setting realistic caseload expectations. Understanding the intricate details of each case and the time necessary to address all aspects of the work, including those not directly related to serving children and families, is essential for determining how many cases a caseworker can effectively manage.

On the other hand, caseload is the number of cases assigned to a caseworker within a specific timeframe, representing the ratio of cases to staff members. This can be measured on an individual level, for case workers handling a particular type of case, or across a defined region or agency.

The Council on Accreditation (COA) previously recommended universal standard for caseloads, however, the council no longer utilizes that approach because state laws, regulations, and operational guidelines, which affect both caseload and workload vary from state to state.

The 2023 workload study highlights the shift to a more nuanced approach that considers variations in policies and procedures across programs. The new proposed model includes both caseload and workload metrics to inform caseload recommendations. This approach acknowledges the diverse and complex nature of child welfare work and strives for a more equitable distribution of cases among case workers.

## Child Welfare 2025 Workload Calculations Methods and Proposal

### *Method to estimate CPS Intake*

The current CPS FTE forecast does not contain any limitations on the ratio of cases per intake social worker, nor does it contain any limitation on the number of hours each social worker is available per month.

The total number of FTEs needed is roughly based on a 12-month average of previous FTE values and assumes that future fiscal years will have the same number of FTEs needed. The current intake forecast does not rely at all on Caseload Forecast Council forecasts.

The proposed CPS Intake FTE forecast contains assumptions about the average available hours per month per intake social worker, the average processing time per call (regardless of whether calls are screened in), and the percentage of all calls to DCYF intake centers that are nonduplicate abandoned calls that would have resulted in phone screening. For each forecasted month, the total number of accepted calls and nonduplicate abandoned calls are multiplied by the assumed processing time to produce the estimated total work hours per month, then divided by the number of assumed available worker hours and averaged over a 12-month period to produce the estimated number of FTEs needed per fiscal year.

### *Method to estimate CPS INV and CPS FAR*

The current CPS FTE forecast assumes a ratio of eight cases per social worker every 30 days, and that each social worker is available to work on cases for 174 hours per month.

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The total number of FTEs needed is calculated by taking the average monthly CPS caseload for each fiscal year—using Caseload Forecast Council forecasts for future dates—and dividing it by 8, for each type of social worker. The number of FTEs already authorized is then subtracted, resulting in the number of additional FTEs needed.

The proposed CPS FTE forecast assumes certain ratios of cases per Investigation social worker and cases per FAR social worker, as well as the number of available hours per worker per month. These assumptions are converted to an estimate of the average processing time for each type of case.

For each case type, and for each forecasted month, the CPS caseload values are multiplied by the average processing time to produce the estimated total work hours per month, then divided by the number of available worker hours and averaged over a 12-month period to produce the estimated number of FTEs needed per fiscal year.

*Method to estimate all other case types*

The current FTE annual forecast for all other case types does not exist, these positions are staffed based on individual legislative decision package requests. The proposed FTE annual forecast for FVS, FRS, and all other Out of Home case types would be estimated by calculating the time estimated per case type per region, then dividing this total by available hours and applying a percentage to remove staff churn assumptions. Requests to increase or decrease the FTE for these case types would continue to be made via individual legislative decision packages.

*2025 Workload Model Staffing Requirements*

In addition to the proposed calculation changes, the new workload model includes staffing assumptions for all staff who support casework. Including, but not limited to, clerical, meeting facilitators, discovery units, active efforts team members, quality assurance, CQI staff, and others. By including these positions, the model evaluates all aspects of case management to ensure we are properly staffed to serve the clients.

**Figure 6. 2025 Workload Model FTE Results by Program**

Program	Calculation Data Points	FTE count	Comments
All Workers	Number of Workers Needed	1,916	n/a
All Workers	Current SSS2 & SSS3 Workers	1,118	n/a
All Workers	Current Support Staff	439	n/a
All Workers	Overall Staffing Shortfall	<b>359</b>	n/a
CPS Investigations	Number of Workers Needed	510.0	n/a
CPS Investigations	Current SSS2 & SSS3 Workers	249.5	n/a
CPS Investigations	Current Support Staff	135.9	n/a
CPS Investigations	<b>CPS Inv Staffing Shortfall</b>	<b>124.6</b>	n/a
CPS FAR	Number of Workers Needed	450.1	n/a
CPS FAR	Current SSS2 & SSS3 Workers	179.9	n/a
CPS FAR	Current Support Staff	125.7	n/a
CPS FAR	<b>CPS FAR Staffing Shortfall</b>	<b>144.5</b>	n/a
FRS	Number of Workers Needed	21.8	n/a
FRS	Current SSS2 & SSS3 Workers	25.9	n/a

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Program	Calculation Data Points	FTE count	Comments
FRS	Current Support Staff	5.6	n/a
FRS	<b>FRS Staffing Shortfall (overage)</b>	<b>(9.7)</b>	<i>These resources will help offset FVS</i>
FVS	Number of Workers Needed	104.2	n/a
FVS	Current SSS2 & SSS3 Workers	55.8	n/a
FVS	Current Support Staff	26.9	n/a
FVS	<b>FVS Staffing Shortfall</b>	<b>21.5</b>	n/a
Intake	Number of Workers Needed	151.3	n/a
Intake	Current SSS2 & SSS3 Workers	114.6	n/a
Intake	Current Support Staff	0.4	n/a
Intake	<b>Intake Staffing Shortfall</b>	<b>36.3</b>	n/a
CFWS Workers	Number of Workers Needed*	678.1	n/a
CFWS Workers	Current SSS2 & SSS3 Workers	540.4	n/a
CFWS Workers	Current Support Staff	167.9	n/a
CFWS Workers	<b>CFWS Staffing Shortfall (overage)</b>	<b>(30.1)</b>	<i>*The number needed calculation does not include additional ICWA / Reason to know weighting due to reporting issue. We will adjust the number (higher) once the reporting issue is resolved.</i>

### 2025 Workload Staffing Need Assumptions

The new workload model, focused on time to complete work versus caseload, calculated a staffing shortfall of 360 staff. DCYF Child Welfare will put forth a decision package that will use a 10 year ramp up model to achieve this staffing shortfall.

This includes Social Service Specialist 3s, Clerical support and 1.0 FTE WMS band 2 is requested to run the internal workload model to allocate FTE across regions and assignments, analyze the child welfare workload data, update the internal child welfare workload model and develop the workload annual report to the Legislature.

### Future improvements to Workload Model

- Conduct workload studies on Guardianship, FTDMs, clerical support.
- Build workload assessment tool to measure change impacts, positive or negative.
- Build and implement regional workload allocation reporting and tool.
- Process for Random Moment Time Survey each biennium.

## Child Welfare Retention & Recruitment Efforts Related to Workload

In 2025, the Child Welfare Retention and Recruitment team achieved significant progress in both recruitment of new staff and retention of current staff. Here are some of the highlights:

- Monitored and tracked vacancies statewide by region and office, addressing challenges in high-vacancy offices.
- Implemented a consistent statewide onboarding process to enhance new employee experiences and support professional development.

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- Increased hiring flexibility by enabling candidates to enter entry-level positions (Social Service Specialist 1) to fill vacancies faster.
- Established Social Service Specialists 4 Lead (SSS4) positions to provide coaching and practice support for staff post Regional Core Training (RCT), complementing Quality Practice Specialists' policy and practice support.
- Partnered with DCYF Administrative Services Division to offer contracted mental health support for CW staff impacted by workplace trauma or critical incidents.
- Launched the Social Work Licensure Training & Support Program to provide clinical supervision hours, aiding staff retention by supporting licensure.
- Conducted stay interviews and analyzed exit interviews to identify additional strategies for retaining and supporting child welfare staff.
- Collaborated with Research and Data Analysis (RDA) to implement management feedback surveys, enabling staff to give anonymous input on leadership, safety, and workplace improvements.
- Appointed leaders within each Child Welfare region to address racial equity and social justice, supporting staff in navigating related complexities.

## Conclusion

This report is a critical tool to aid in providing understanding to the agency and the policy makers regarding the intricacies and complexities of ensuring we are providing the right staffing levels for DCYF Child Welfare.

As policies are improved to evolve Child Welfare and enhance outcomes for our clients, as caseloads change, as processes are streamlined, the department appreciates the opportunity to present new, innovative ideas to manage workload and to update the Legislature on the improvements we are making on behalf of our clients.

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