

## **CHILDREN AND FAMILY AIDS ALLOCATION INCREASE**

The Department of Children and Families (DCF) distributes Children and Family Aids (CFA) to counties for services related to child abuse and neglect and to unborn child abuse, including prevention, investigation, and treatment. Funding may also be used for community-based juvenile justice services. Following a \$5 million increase in 2018, funding for the Children and Family Aids allocation is \$74,324,000.

Counties are extremely grateful for the increase in CY18; however, the child welfare system is still in crisis. The use of opioids and methamphetamines is contributing to a significant increase in child welfare referrals, out-of-home placement costs, and unacceptable caseloads for social workers, as well as the inability of counties to perform child welfare functions that adhere to best practice models.

In order for counties to effectively deal with this child welfare crisis and avoid costly errors, three things need to happen: worker to caseload ratios need to align with best practice, out-of-home care costs need to stabilize, and the state needs to increase its investment in the child welfare system for balance-of-state counties.

### Out of Home Care Costs

The current rate of increase in out-of-home care costs at the county level is unsustainable. From 2012 through Quarter 1 of 2018, the number of children in out-of-home care has increased by 39%, or 1,539 children. Thirty counties saw an increase in the number of children in out-of-home care of 40% or more; 20 counties experienced an increase of 80% or more, and 14 counties saw their out-of-home care numbers increase 100% or more. The median length of time children were in out-of-home care increased by a whopping 127% from 2011 – 2016 (from 157 days to 356 days). The largest driver of this out-of-home care growth is Wisconsin's opioid and meth epidemic.

From 2013 to 2017, out-of-home care costs have increased by 18%, from \$81.4 million to \$95.7 million. Thirty-four counties saw increases of 30% or more; 23 counties have increases of 50% or more; and 11 counties experienced out-of-home care cost increases of 100% or more. The \$14 million increase was all funded through the property tax levy.

### Caseload Standards

Current child protective services (CPS) workloads are unacceptable. Based on research commissioned by DCF, caseload standards such as those published by the Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) can be used in an evaluative sense to gauge the extent a child welfare

system is meeting its obligations. The following chart compares balance-of-state counties caseload ratios to recognized standards.

	CWLA	Division of Milwaukee Child Protective Services (court settlement)	Balance of State Counties
Cases Per Worker	Varies by worker type	11 (8 intensive in-home)	15
Children Per Worker	12-15	15	30
CPS Workers Per Supervisor	5	6	42 counties at 7 or more

The CPS system experiences negative outcomes for children and families when caseloads are too high:

- Increased worker turnover, which leads to longer periods in out-of-home placement.
- Counties are unable to meet standards set forth in the child welfare practice manual.

Based off of the above standards, as well as data from other county-administered states, the Wisconsin County Human Service Association (WCHSA) has developed caseload standards to determine how short-staffed Wisconsin's county child welfare agencies are (see attached). Based on those standards, counties are short 327 child welfare workers (1:10) and 145 supervisors (1:5). State funding needed to bring counties in line with caseload standards is over \$36.8 million.

### Cost Sharing

State aid increases in the children and family aids allocation pale in comparison to the increased levy put into child welfare services by counties. From 2009 to 2017, the CFA appropriation was essentially flat. Small increases in the appropriation were essentially pass-throughs for increases in foster care rates. A \$5 million increase was provided to counties in 2018. By comparison, from 2011 to 2016, counties have increased their levies for core child welfare functions from \$87.5 million to \$117.9 million, a 35% increase (\$30.4 million).

**CURRENT STATUS:** Wisconsin's child welfare system is in crisis. Counties are unable to meet their obligations which puts the state and counties at significant risk. With levy limits in place, counties are unable to continue to make significant investments in the system. The state, as a partner with counties in the operation of the child welfare system, needs to increase its support to ensure children and families are appropriately served in the CPS system.

### REQUESTED ACTION:

- Provide a \$30 million annual increase in the Children and Family Aids Allocation.
- Create a legislative oversight mechanism to regularly review CPS resource needs as part of the biennial budget process.

### TALKING POINTS:

- The Wisconsin Department of Children and Families (DCF) estimates more than 80% of open child welfare cases are either driven by or complicated by drug and alcohol abuse.
- The number of Wisconsin children removed from their home because of caretaker drug abuse rose 119% from 2011 – 2016 (from 577 to 1,261).
- A 2018 analysis by the Wisconsin Institute for Law & Liberty found a strong relationship between the number of opioid hospitalizations and the number of kids entering out-of-home care.
- County tax levy currently represents 63% of funding for child welfare services; counties are required to match the CFA allocation at 9.89%. The county overmatch rate is currently over 1600%.
- County staffing patterns are far short of meeting caseload standards recommended by the Child Welfare League of America, as well as the standards in place for the Division of Milwaukee Child Protective Services.
- The Annie E. Casey Foundation's *10 Practices: A Child Welfare Leader's Desk Guide to Building a High-Performing Agency* recommends ensuring "that public and private caseworkers with in-home and out-of-home cases have reasonable caseloads, visit frequently, have adequate resources for families and follow the agency's practice model." Unfortunately, caseworkers in Wisconsin have unreasonable caseloads and are unable to follow Wisconsin's child welfare practice model.
- Of the 32 states which were the subject of class action lawsuits between 1995 and 2005, 64% were required to address issues concerning caseworkers, such as adequate staffing, maximum caseloads, and enhanced training and supervision.
- An Illinois study found that investments in staff (lowering caseloads) was offset by reduced child removal, reductions in residential placements, and shorter lengths of stay in foster care.
- The Governor's Opioid Task Force recommended an increase in the Children and Family Aids allocation to allow counties to hire additional staff.
- The number of mandates placed on child welfare workers has increased in recent years.
- Counties are having difficulty meeting the needs of children and families due to inadequate staffing, lack of funding, and lack of placement options for children.
- The liability exposure in Wisconsin's child welfare system is unacceptable. In discussing the pressures on the current system it is no longer "if" something bad happens, it is "when" something bad happens.

Children and Family Aids Issue Paper  
Page 4

- A review of system resources on a biennial basis will ensure the system has sufficient resources to properly serve children and families and avert the need for a significant increase in funding in a single biennium.

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Wisconsin County Human Service Association

## Caseload Standards for Child Protective Services

Updated: September 4th, 2018

The Wisconsin County Human Service Association (WCHSA) recognizes the importance of maintaining reasonable workloads for child protective services (CPS) caseworkers and their supervisors<sup>1</sup>. Unlike the majority of other states with county-administered child welfare systems, Wisconsin currently lacks having state-level caseload standards for CPS workers, a determination of statewide staffing needs through a comprehensive workload study, or comparable state-level recommendations related to workload. In light of this critical gap, WCHSA endorses the standards detailed below<sup>2</sup> as a basis to evaluate the status of Wisconsin's child welfare system and its resource needs<sup>3</sup>.

### Recommended Caseload Standards

The recommended caseload standards for child protective services are as follows:

Service Type	WCHSA Recommended Caseload / Workload
Supervision	<b>1 supervisor</b> per 5 case carrying CPS workers.
Ongoing	<b>10 active cases</b> per case carrying CPS worker, with no more than <b>15 children</b> .
Initial Assessment	<b>11 active assessments</b> per 1 worker at any given time with no more than <b>6 new assessments</b> assigned during a one month period.
Access	<b>8 newly assigned reports</b> per day per worker.
Foster Parent Licensing	<b>8 active home studies</b> for general foster homes. <b>6 active home studies</b> for relative homes (including "like-kin").

It should be noted that the caseload is based on new and active cases assigned to a worker at any given time. In other words, new cases should not be added unless a comparable number of cases have been closed, assuming that a worker has a full caseload.

For the purposes of these standards, a "case" means an assigned family case that likely often includes more than one child.

Although these standards are useful in evaluating statewide resource needs, each county is in the best position to speak to local needs. For example, it is recognized that the staffing structure for child protective services varies from county to county. Several (especially less populous) counties may have staff who perform services in one or more service type and may also service cases from other program areas (i.e., juvenile justice services, children with special needs). Many counties also operate on less than a 40 hour workweek. These and other operating variations may impact how the standards apply to particular counties.

## **Background**

Wisconsin counties have become increasingly concerned about the status of child protective services. Recent years have seen a surge in the number and complexity of cases due to the opioid and methamphetamine epidemics. The number of children requiring placement in out-of-home care has increased significantly, overwhelming placement capacity. Mandates that increase the time to complete reports and perform casework continue to multiply. Rising pressures on frontline caseworkers and their supervisors appear to be driving high turnover in many counties, which can have a significant impact in the time it takes to either reunify children with their parents or, as necessary, achieve another safe and permanent outcome. All of these factors are driving Wisconsin's child welfare system to an inevitable breaking point.

State funding plays a critical role in ensuring Wisconsin's CPS system is adequately staffed so that a breaking point is never reached. The State shares liability for the CPS system, along with assuring compliance with federal performance benchmarks. With local costs exploding and counties under state-imposed levy limits, state-level funding is often the only viable option for addressing the need for additional funding. Yet, Wisconsin's lack of caseload standards or a comprehensive workload study has deprived legislators of key information for making resource decisions. This may be a factor as to why Wisconsin has not increased supports to its child welfare system to the extent other states have in response to the recent drug epidemics.

With rising urgency to address these issues, WCHSA created a special committee in August of 2018 to develop caseload standards that could be used to evaluate CPS resource needs in Wisconsin. The committee created the above standards based on extensive research of national standards and discussions with CPS administrators, front-line workers and other subject matter experts throughout the state.

## **Purpose**

The caseload standards herein endorsed are an important step in evaluating the status and resource needs of Wisconsin's child welfare system. The standards will be used as a basis for determining WCHSA's request to the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families (DCF), the Governor and the Legislature for the 2019-21 biennial budget. They also will be a resource for counties wishing to use them to evaluate local staffing needs.

## Further Recommendations

These caseload standards can play an important short-term role in identifying the level of resources necessary to bring stability to Wisconsin's CPS system. They are not, however, an effective long-term substitute for the state-level action necessary to ensure Wisconsin's CPS system continues to have the resources and capacity to meet its obligations to children and families. For that to happen, we recommend the following:

1. Wisconsin DCF formally adopt these standards or work in partnership with WCSHA to develop different standards – without creating requirements pertaining to caseload sizes that are not fully funded at the state-level. DCF already has standards which it recognizes for the Division of Milwaukee Child Protective Services (DMCPS) and uses as a basis for its biennial funding requests to the Legislature. Counties, legally constrained by tax-levy caps and already overmatching state child welfare funding requirements by 1,600 percent, are not in a position to shoulder an additional funding mandate. Thus, caseload standards should either be adopted as a non-enforceable practice guideline (similar to the current Wisconsin Child Welfare Model for Practice) or be fully funded at the state-level.
2. Wisconsin DCF, during the next biennium, complete a comprehensive CPS workload study. The evaluation should have the purpose of both identifying statewide CPS staffing needs along with the state-level funding required to support counties in meeting those needs. States that have initially adopted caseload standards have followed-up with comprehensive workload studies, which provide a more precise way of evaluating staffing needs.
3. An appropriate State agency complete a report for the Legislature in conjunction with the biennial budget process that provides a basis for determining statewide CPS resource needs based on changes in trends and mandates. Along with other information (i.e., changes in the number of children in out-of-home care, changes in out-of-home care provider rates), the report should include an analysis of statewide CPS staffing needs (either through caseload standards or a workload evaluation). Currently, as a matter of routine, such an evaluation of resource needs is completed only for DMCPS.

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<sup>1</sup>The following benefits of reasonable child protective services caseloads are among those which have been identified by the Federal Children's Bureau: (1) Permitting workers the time they need to engage in aspects of the child welfare processes that require frequent worker-client contact; (2) Workloads and caseloads have been linked to performance on Federal Child and Family Services Reviews and achievement of safety and permanency outcomes; and (3) Manageable workloads may help agencies retain workers who would otherwise opt to leave as a result of feeling overloaded. See Child Welfare Information Gateway Issue Brief, "Caseload and Workload Management", July 2016, Children's Bureau/ACYF/ACF/HHS.

<sup>2</sup>This document and the standards therein were approved by the WCHSA Executive Committee on September 6th, 2018.

<sup>3</sup>*Research commissioned by the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families supports the conclusion that caseload standards can be used in an evaluative sense to gauge the extent to which a state's child welfare system is adequately meeting its obligations for serving children and families. See: University of Wisconsin School of Social Work Memo regarding Case Ratio Standards in Child Protective Services. October 27, 2016.*