

Accreditation: 60-Day Report

June 21, 2023 – August 19, 2023

This 60-day report by the RI Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) is submitted to the General Assembly in accordance with Article 1 as amended of Public Law 2023-079. The report describes progress made in implementing the accreditation plan filed in accordance with RIGL 42-72-5.3 and includes any projected changes needed to effectuate that plan.

KEY ACTIVITIES

Execution of the Department's divisional project plans continues to be the primary focus the Department is nearing the final months of the "Self Study" phase of work with the Council on Accreditation (COA). As a reminder, the Self Study is the largest and longest component of the COA process wherein DCYF will implement its plans for policy, practice, programmatic, and operations changes to achieve all COA standards.

During the reporting period, the Department has continued its extensive review of its Department Operating Procedures, and the creation of new operating procedures where needed. In the end, the Department will have written or amended nearly 50 operating procedures. The Department has also been working with staff, foster parents and other stakeholders to prepare updated foster care regulations, which will be submitted for promulgation during the next reporting period.

Aside from the policy work, the Department worked during the reporting period to develop and publish new education materials targeted at birth parents and their children. This includes materials that will be provided to families at the time of investigation to help explain the process and rights and responsibilities of the family members. It also includes creating guidebook for parents and children who are receiving case management through the Department. The materials are being finalized and are slated to be put into practice in October and November.

The Department also has developed a new supervision framework and set of procedures for its supervision practices. The intent is to provide staff with clear and consistent supervision expectations that will help with workforce development, staff retention, and improved outcomes for our families. Four focus groups are scheduled in September with staff and supervisors across the Department at all levels, to help inform our final supervision framework. The Department intends to train staff and supervisors on the new procedures and launch the practice by the end of the year.

During State Fiscal Year 22 and State Fiscal Year 23, the Department reported each period on expenditures related to COA. The State budget continues to fully fund accreditation needs through its personnel expenditures and related necessities. Moving forward, this 60-day report

will only identify other resources identified to support accreditation standards beyond routine personnel costs.

The Department continues to work steadily toward achievement of accreditation by mid-2024. It is critical that the Director, who began in May, have the time to review all policy, program and operations changes and ensure that they are weaved within the Department's current and future priorities. Importantly, the Department also experienced two significant losses during the reporting period (the retirement of Deputy Director Kevin Aucoin and the unexpected passing of Chief Executive Counsel Patricia Hessler). Both individuals were highly involved in our accreditation work. The Director is actively hiring for a new Deputy Director, Chief of Staff, and Chief Executive Council; and the Department will work closely with COA as it is determined how these leadership changes may affect the COA timeline.

STAFFING PROGRESS

The Department continues its focus on backfilling existing vacancies, with an emphasis on filling vacant frontline positions. The Department currently has 623 FTEs, compared with 585 in October 2021, for a net gain of 38 employees.

The Department has 40 vacancies for social caseworkers in our Division of Family Services (DFS). All civil service exam lists for the Social Caseworker II position have been exhausted. A job posting is being made during the last week of August, with the civil service exam test scheduled for the end of September for 24 eligible applicants.

The Department has 18 vacancies for child protective investigators. The Division of Child Protective Services anticipates to onboard 6 new investigators in September and 5 in October. Two civil service exam dates are scheduled for the end of September for 38 eligible candidates.

In attempt to help reduce the number of frontline vacancies moving forward, the Department will implement Public Law 2023-201, signed into law on June 21, 2023, which establishes a pilot process to expedite hiring for Social Caseworker II and Child Protective Investigator positions at the Department. The one-year pilot commences on October 1, 2023.

In addition to these frontline vacancies, the Department has also repurposed three FTEs to support accreditation needs related to active contract management and workforce development. A new contracts compliance officer is scheduled to begin during the last week of August, and a new staff trainer will begin in late September. The Department is currently interviewing for the third position.

The Department also continues to look at attrition; see table below. As of June 20, a total of 34 employees have left the Department in calendar year 2023.

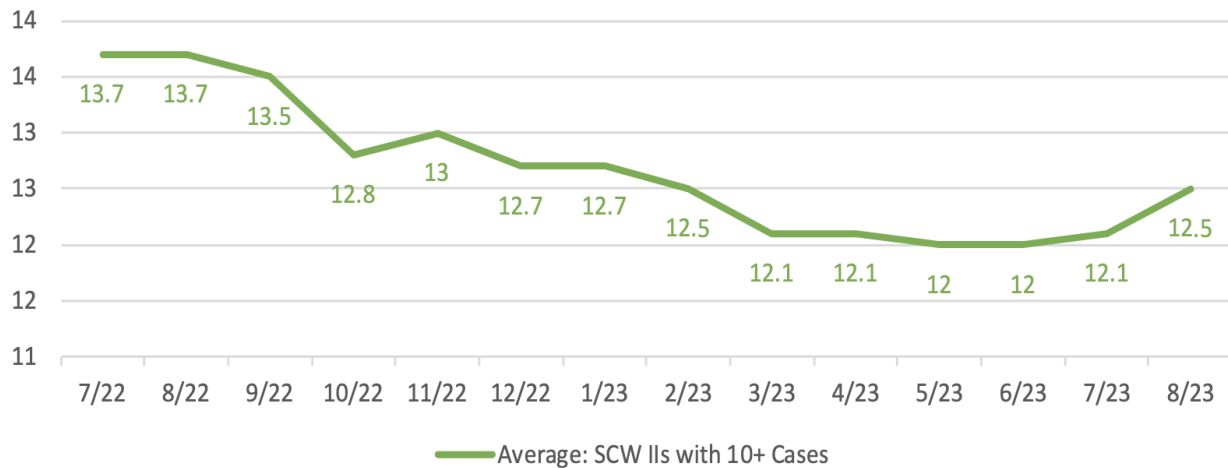
Table. Attrition of All DCYF Staff, by Calendar Year and Reason for Leaving

Reason for Leaving	Calendar Year					
	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Bumped	0	0	3	0	1	1
Deceased	2	1	2	0	2	2
Failure to Pass Probation	7	1	1	0	0	1
Leave Return	0	1	0	4	1	1
Resignation	25	31	26	27	62	21
Retirement	16	18	20	24	5	7
Termination	4	5	7	5	10	3
Transfer In State	28	36	21	19	29	15
Transfer Out of State	2	0	0	0	0	0
Total	84	93	80	79	110	51

CASELOAD INFORMATION

Figure 1 below shows the average number of families (cases) assigned to a DFS caseworker, by month. This figure depicts caseworkers carrying 10 or more cases to include only experienced workers and new caseworkers who are nearing the end of their probationary period.

Figure 1. Average Number of Cases Assigned to DFS Caseworker, by Month (10+ Cases)



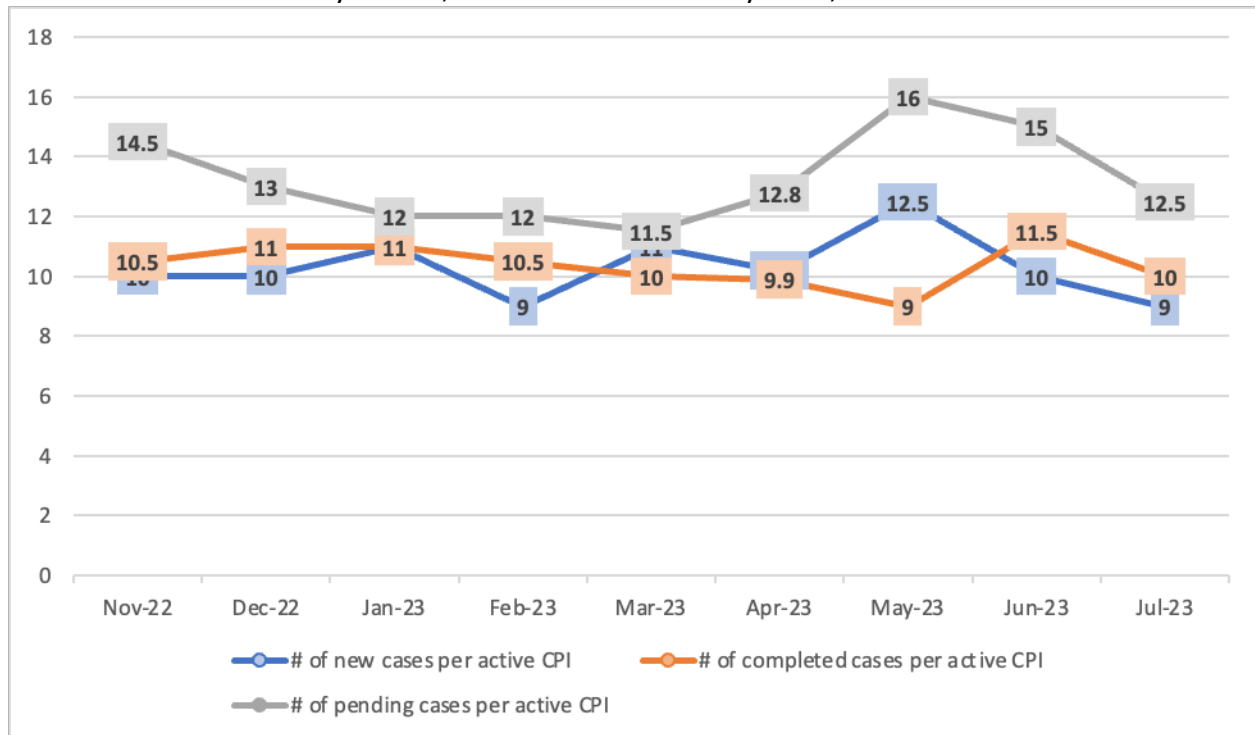
Source: RICHIST Rpt 164_FSU

As a comparison: on March 1, 2020, just prior to the pandemic, the Department had an average of 15.4 cases per caseworker; as of the beginning of August 2023, the Department was at 12.5 cases per caseworker. During the last reporting period, caseload sizes increased slightly, from 12.0 average cases to 12.5. Further decreases in caseload sizes are expected as the Department continues to fill its frontline vacancies.

COA’s personnel standard suggests that a DFS worker’s caseload “should have no more than 15 total families with no more than 10 children in out-of-home care.” The Department has adequate FTE resources available to meet the COA standard.

Figure 2 below shows that the Child Protective Services (CPS) investigators are receiving a median of 9 new investigations per month (blue line), which is a decrease from the 12.5 cases as reported in the previous 60-day report. The median number of pending cases per child protective investigator (CPI) is 12.5 (grey line), which is a decrease from the 16 as reported in the previous 60-day report.

Figure 2. Median caseloads (new, completed, and pending investigations per active CPI*), by month, November 2022 to July 2023, RI DCYF



Data notes: Source-RPT 259, 500

*Active investigator: investigator who had 8 or more investigations in a month.

As we continue to fill vacancies, the Department anticipates further caseload reductions for child protective investigators. COA’s personnel standard suggests that CPS investigators’ caseloads “generally do not exceed 12 active investigations at a time, including no more than 8 new investigations per month.” The Department has adequate FTE resources available to meet the COA standard.

NEXT STEPS

During the next reporting period, the Department expects to continue the Self Study, which is tentatively scheduled to conclude on December 18, 2023. Key activities toward completion will include:

- Finalization of all new and modified operating procedures.
- Submission of required changes to foster care regulations.
- Anticipated completion of several divisional improvement plans.
- Development of an annual risk assessment for the Department.
- Launch of the Department’s one-year pilot program for expedited civil service exams and hiring for Social Caseworker II and Child Protective Investigator positions.

The Department also will complete its Stakeholder Survey phase of accreditation during the next reporting period. In September, the Division of Family Services will be distributing the required stakeholder surveys to a randomized group of birth parents and youth/young adults (ages 14-20). This is the final stakeholder group that needs to be surveyed as part of the stakeholder survey accreditation step.