

Accreditation: 60-Day Report

August 20, 2023 – October 18, 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

During the reporting period, the Department completed in October 2023 its Stakeholder Survey phase of accreditation. To complete this phase, the Department administered a voluntary survey developed by the Council on Accreditation (COA) to more than 1,600 stakeholders during this calendar year. Invited survey participants included a randomized group of birth parents and youth; all foster parents, all contracted providers, all advisory board members, many other community partners, and DCYF staff. The responses went directly to COA, who will review anonymous feedback with the Department when they conduct our site visit in 2024.

Execution of the Department's divisional project plans continues to be the primary focus the Department is the completion of the "Self Study" phase of work. 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 operating procedures, and the creation of new 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. The regulations are drafted and under internal review before submitting proposed policy for promulgation later this fall. A cost-benefit analysis for the public is also being created.

Aside from the policy work, the Department continues its work to complete several other COA projects:

- Developing, gathering, and publishing 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.
- Finalizing a new framework and set of procedures for supervision practices across the Department. 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. The Department held focus groups 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 for calendar year 2024.

- Refining community-based resource lists to support staff in connecting families to relevant resources.
- Completing several key plans for the Department, including:
 - A Risk Prevention and Management Plan, and related annual assessments,
 - A Community and Stakeholder Engagement plan for calendar year 2024, and
 - An interim Resource Development Plan as the Department prepares to engage with an external partner to conduct a comprehensive needs assessment related to its service array.

The Department continues to work toward achievement of accreditation by mid-2024. It is critical that the Director, who began in May of 2023, 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 experienced significant losses over the last few months, including the retirements of Deputy Director Kevin Aucoin and Assistant Director for Child Protective Services Stephanie Terry, and the unexpected passing of Chief Executive Counsel Patricia Hessler. Each of these individuals were highly involved in our accreditation work. During the last reporting period, the Department prioritized the hiring of a new Deputy Director, Chief of Staff, and Administrator to oversee the Division of Child Protective Services.

The Department is beginning discussions with COA to discuss how these changes have affected the overall COA timeline and may request to delay the tentative February 2024 site visit. The Department still anticipates achieving accreditation in Summer 2024.

STAFFING PROGRESS

In attempt to expedite the hiring process for frontline vacancies, the Department implemented 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 was to commence on October 1, 2023; however, the Department launched the pilot early, in August.

The Department continues its focus on backfilling existing vacancies, with an emphasis on its filling vacant frontline positions. As of Friday, October 20, the Department has 626 FTEs, compared with 585 in October 2021, for a net gain of 41 employees.

The Department has 40 vacancies for social caseworkers in our Division of Family Services (DFS). The State held two civil service exams for the Social Caseworker II position in September and October, with more than 240 applications received. Just 48 of the applicants were qualified to sit for the exam; ultimately, the Department was able to make 8 offers, 3 of which have been accepted.

The Department has 18 vacancies for child protective investigators. The State held three civil service exams for the Child Protective Investigator position in September and October, with 314 applications received. Just 76 of the applicants were qualified to sit for the exam; ultimately, the Department was able to make 10 offers.

In addition to these frontline vacancies, the Department repurposed three FTEs to support accreditation needs related to active contract management and workforce development. The new contracts compliance officer started August 27, the new staff trainer began September 24, and the senior epidemiologist who will support home-based services quality started October 8.

The Department also continues to look at attrition; see table below. As of October 20, a total of 58 employees have left the Department in calendar year 2023.

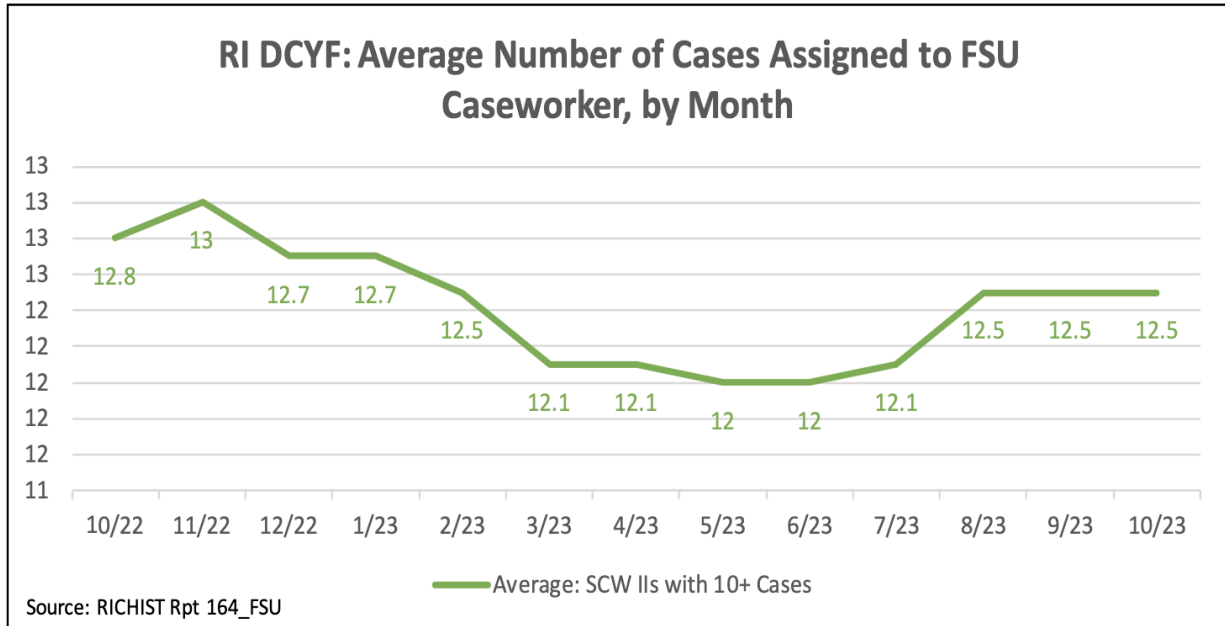
Table. Attrition of All DCYF Staff, by Calendar Year and Reason for Leaving

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	23
Retirement	16	18	20	24	5	7
Termination	4	5	7	5	10	6
Transfer In State	28	36	21	19	29	17
Transfer Out of State	2	0	0	0	0	0
Total	84	93	80	79	110	58

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)

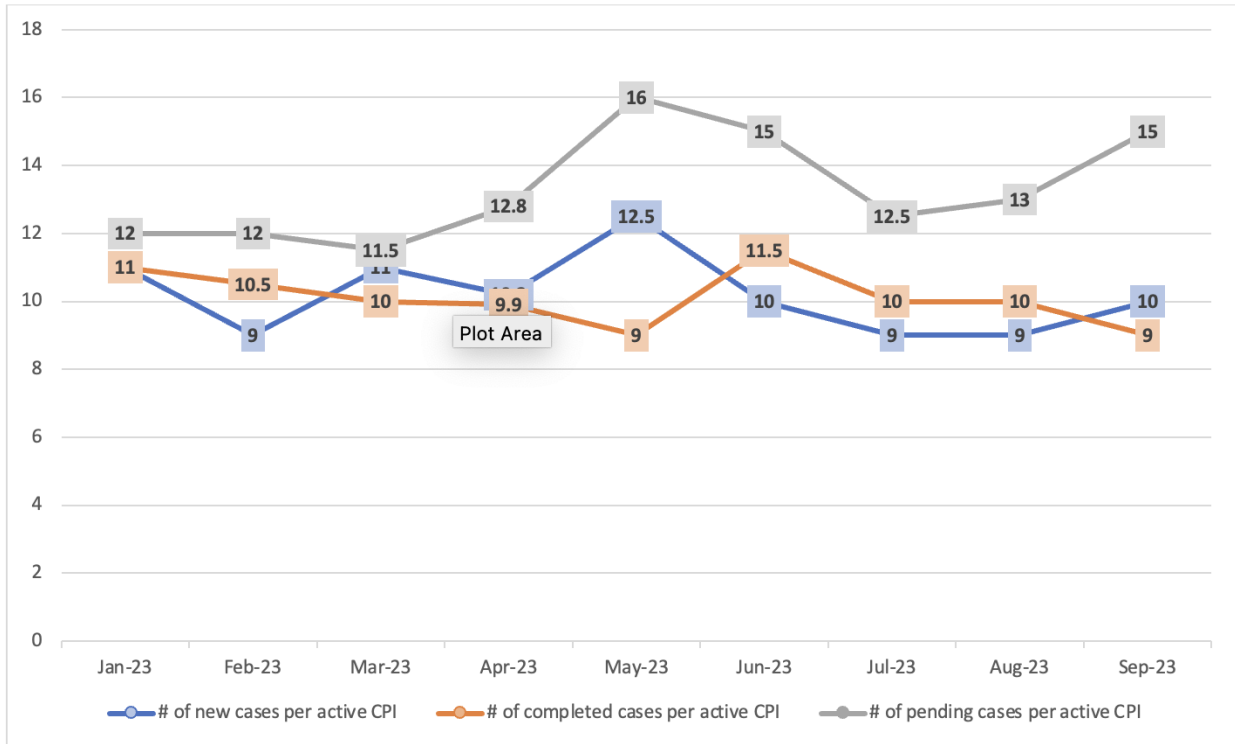


As a comparison: on March 1, 2020, just prior to the pandemic, the Department had an average of 15.4 cases per caseworker; as of the beginning of October 2023, the Department was at 12.5 cases per caseworker. During the last reporting period, caseload sizes remained the same. Further decreases in caseload 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 10 new investigations per month (blue line), which is an increase from the 9 cases as reported in the previous 60-day report. The median number of pending cases per child protective investigator (CPI) is 15 (grey line), which is an increase from the 12.5 as reported in the previous 60-day report.

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

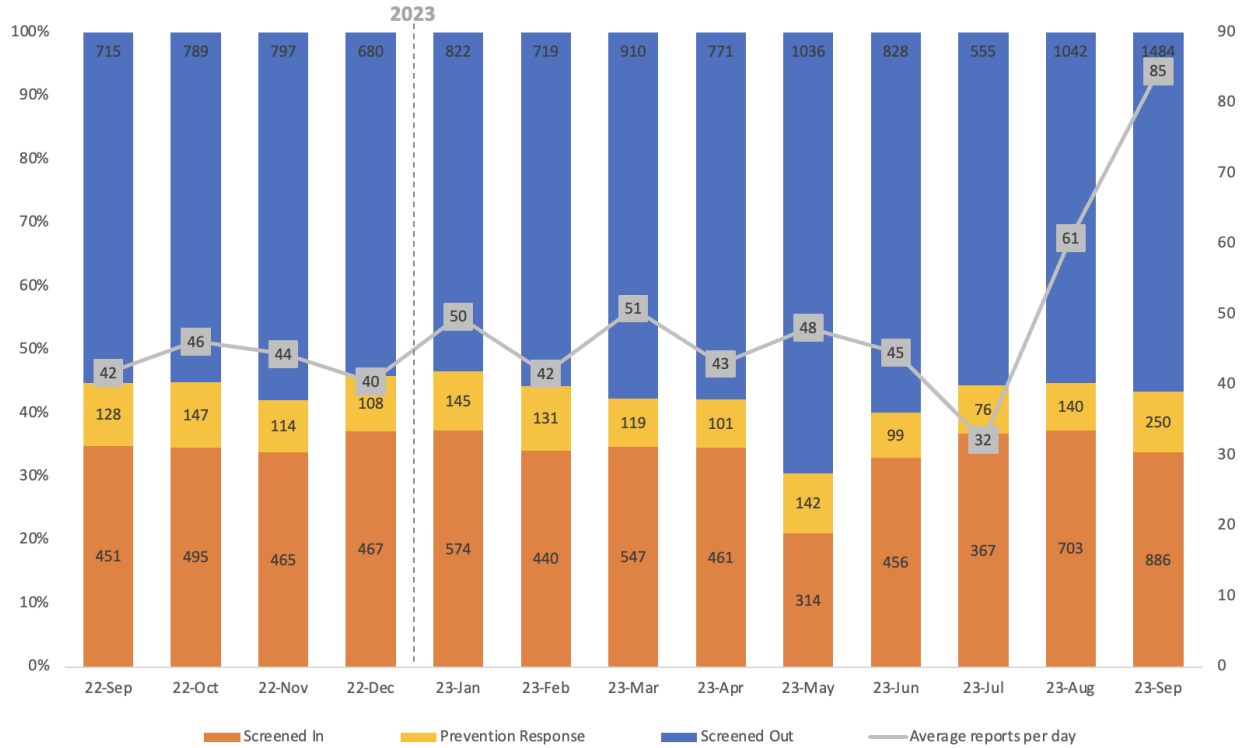


Data notes: Source-RPT 259, 500

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

The increases are attributable to a steep rise in call volume seen to the Child Abuse and Neglect Hotline over the past two months. Figure 3 below contains data on CPS reports, by screened in and screened out, and the average number of CPS hotline reports over time. The Department received an average of 61 reports per day in August 2023 and 85 reports per day in September 2023—dramatically higher than other months over the past year. As a comparison, the Department received 42 reports per day in September 2022.

Figure 3. CPS Reports, by Screening Disposition, and Average CPS Reports per Day, by Month, September 2022 to September 2023, RI DCYF



Data notes: Source-RICHIST RPT 718

The Department will continue to monitor the CPS reports to determine how workload might affect future hiring needs. As we continue to fill existing 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 complete a large majority of its Self Study elements; the Self Study is tentatively scheduled to conclude on December 18, 2023.

In November, a few of the Department’s divisions—including Management Information Systems, Management & Budget, Contracts, and the Division of Performance Improvement—will begin to upload evidence of completion to the COA portal. Other divisions will follow in December.