Why DLA Performed This Audit

This audit reviews DFCS's compliance with select HB 151 foster care reform laws. Additionally, the audit determines whether DFCS's management structure over the foster care system is in line with best practices, reports permanency measures, and concludes as to the overall impact of foster care reform.

What the Legislative Auditor Recommends

1. OCS's director should implement procedures to ensure the annual staffing report is accurate.

2. OCS's director should implement procedures to ensure the annual recruitment and retention report is accurate and prepared in compliance with state law.

3. OCS's director should consider implementing a more comprehensive training program that is grounded in practical applications.

A Special Review of the Department of Family and Community Services (DFCS), Office of Children's Services (OCS) Implementation of Foster Care Reform Laws, Part 3

November 18, 2024

Audit Control Number 26-30097-25

REPORT CONCLUSIONS

The audit concluded that foster care reform did not effectively increase services for Alaskan children. Implementation of House Bill (HB) 151, along with other legislative efforts enacted from FY 16 through FY 23, failed to resolve the Office of Children Services' (OCS) labor challenges despite the legislature appropriating over $20.7 million of additional funding and authorizing 110 new frontline caseworker and support positions. High vacancies and turnover led to excess budgetary authority, which was used, in part, for other purposes.

Caseload limits, referred to as "caseload caps", could not be fully implemented due to a lack of workers. Of the 115 case carrying workers with at least seven months of experience as of March 2024, 80 workers (70 percent) exceeded the average caseload cap of 13 families, with 52 workers (45 percent) carrying between 20 to 48 cases.

As a result of HB 151, the number of training weeks increased from a minimum of two weeks to a minimum of six weeks; however, the training method switched from in-person to virtual. Around the same time training became virtual, OCS began hiring workers with "core competencies" rather than hiring workers with a college degree or prior work experience. The audit questions whether five weeks of virtual training and one week of mostly remote mentoring is adequate to turn new hires with core competencies into qualified frontline caseworkers.

When considering OCS's workload, policy makers and other stakeholders should recognize that statutory requirements for

Report Highlights (Continued)

4. OCS's director should continue to implement hiring best practices.

5. OCS's director should consider enhancing data to align with best practices and make recruitment and retention efforts more meaningful.

6. OCS's director should develop a forward-looking plan for addressing recruitment and retention challenges.

7. Department of Health's assistant commissioner of finance and management services should liquidate an unsupported $10 million encumbrance.

REPORT CONCLUSIONS (Continued)

OCS's annual recruitment and retention report understate OCS's workload. Specifically, the caseload data does not include cases managed by supervisors and other non-case carrying employees. As of March 15, 2024, 402 cases were assigned to 49 supervisors and other non-case carrying employees. Additionally, the report does not include secondary case assignments, which vary in the amount of work required and could resemble a primary assignment.

Auditors found that OCS's 2023 annual staffing report understated vacancies at the statewide and regional levels. Furthermore, the staffing report did not fully comply with statutory requirements, regional turnover statistics were not fully accurate, and supporting data was not consistently maintained by OCS staff.

A legislative consultant found that OCS's staffing report could be enhanced to better align with best practices. Furthermore, the consultant recommended changes to better align OCS management with best practices. Improving OCS's hiring process is critical to addressing labor challenges.

Federally required performance measures indicate that Alaska's children had lower permanency within the first two years than experienced nationally. Permanency after two years was generally consistent with national norms. Alaska's re-entry into foster care was better, or within, the national rates except during FFY 22. Placement stability rates were better than national rates in some years but worse in others.

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

LEGISLATIVE BUDGET AND AUDIT COMMITTEE
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January 21, 2025

Members of the Legislative Budget
  and Audit Committee:

In accordance with the provisions of Title 24, we have reviewed the activities of the Department of Family and Community Services, Office of Children's Services implementation of foster care reform laws and the degree House Bill (HB) 151 and other legislative foster care reform efforts improved services for Alaska's children. The attached report is submitted for your review.

DEPARTMENT OF FAMILY AND COMMUNITY SERVICES
OFFICE OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES
IMPLEMENTATION OF FOSTER CARE REFORM LAWS, PART 3

NOVEMBER 18, 2024

Audit Control Number
26-30097-25

This audit is the third and final audit of the State's implementation of foster care reform laws. Specifically, the audit reviewed the Department of Family and Community Services' compliance with select HB 151 foster care reform laws. The audit also determined whether the Department of Family and Community Services' management structure over the foster care system was in line with best practices, defined and reported permanency measures, and reviewed the overall impact of foster care reform.

We conducted this performance audit in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. Fieldwork procedures utilized in the course of developing the findings and recommendations presented in this report are discussed in the Objectives, Scope, and Methodology.

Kris Curtis, CPA, CISA
Legislative Auditor

ABBREVIATIONS

ACN	Audit Control Number
AS	Alaska Statute
CFSR	Child and Family Services Review
CISA	Certified Information Systems Auditor
CPA	Certified Public Accountant
DFCS	Department of Family and Community Services
DHSS	Department of Health and Social Services
DLA	Division of Legislative Audit
FFY	Federal Fiscal Year
FY	Fiscal Year
HB	House Bill
HIPAA	Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act
OCS	Office of Children's Services
RSP	Risk-Standardized Performance
SKILS	Standards, Knowledge, and Insight Leading to Success
SLA	Session Laws of Alaska

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ORGANIZATION AND FUNCTION

Department of Family and Community Services (DFCS)

Governor Dunleavy's Executive Order 121 split the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services into DFCS and the Department of Health effective July 1, 2022. DFCS includes the Office of Children's Services (OCS), Division of Juvenile Justice, Alaska Psychiatric Institute, and Alaska Pioneer Homes. DFCS's mission is to provide support, safety, and personal well-being for vulnerable Alaskans.

Office of Children's Services

According to OCS's website, OCS works to ensure the safety, permanency, and well-being of children by strengthening families, engaging communities, and partnering with tribes. OCS regional headquarters are located in Anchorage, Wasilla, Bethel, Fairbanks, and Juneau. Twenty-two child protection field offices are located across the state.

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BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Foster Care Defined

Foster care is a temporary placement setting that provides an opportunity to keep children safe while parents engage in services that may allow for reunification. When reunification is not possible, the Office of Children's Services (OCS) staff work to achieve other forms of permanency for a child, either through adoption, legal guardianship, or another planned living arrangement. During the audit period, an average of 91 children were removed from Alaskan homes and placed in foster care each month.[1] As of June 2024, there were 2,539 Alaskan children in out-of-home placement.[2]

Investigative Process for Child Protective Services

Within OCS, an allegation of child maltreatment is referred to as a "protective services report." Once a protective services report is "screened in" for investigation, OCS staff gather information regarding the allegation to make an informed assessment about whether the child is unsafe or at high risk of maltreatment by a parent or caregiver. An investigation involves evaluating present and impending danger and the extent of familial protective factors; determining whether to substantiate or not substantiate child abuse or neglect; assessing whether it is likely that the child will soon be unsafe; and determining what type of intervention is needed, if any.

If OCS staff determine that a child is unsafe or at high risk of maltreatment, a case is opened within OCS's Family Services section and staff work with the family to implement the least intrusive approach to keep the child safe—first with consideration of an in-home safety plan and last with consideration of an out-of-home placement.

If OCS staff determine that child protective services are not required, staff will finalize the assessment, close the case, and send the parent(s) a closing letter outlining the investigation's findings. Cases may be closed because staff determine the allegations of harm

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[1] The average was calculated based on March 2023 through February 2024 data from OCS's monthly statistics reports published on its website.
[2] Per OCS's monthly statistics report.

or maltreatment were not substantiated, the child is safe and is not at high risk of harm, there is no impending danger to the child, or a combination of factors.

Foster Care Reform

House Bill (HB) 151, known as "Children Deserve a Loving Home Act," was signed into law June 2018. The legislation added and amended laws to support the well-being of youth in foster care. Exhibit 1, on the following page, summarizes the most significant HB 151 provisions.

HB 151 required the Department of Family and Community Services to implement all provisions as expediently as possible and, depending on the provision, no later than 90 days, one year, or two years from the date the bill was enacted. For example, training on the reasonable and prudent parent standard was required no later than 90 days after the bill was enacted and caseload limits were required no later than two years after the bill was enacted.

The bill also required a legislative audit of OCS's compliance with the new reform laws.

Exhibit 1

House Bill 151 Significant Provisions	
HB 151 Provisions	**Implementation Deadline**
In the event an investigation occurs and protective services are not warranted, required OCS seek written consent from a child's parents or guardian to refer the family to a community organization for support services and make the referral if consent is given	September 5, 2018
Required OCS to prepare an annual recruitment and retention report	September 5, 2018
Empowered foster parents and caregivers to make parenting decisions using the prudent parent standard and required foster parents and caregivers be trained on use of the standard	December 4, 2018
Expanded the situations that require OCS staff search for an adult family member or a family friend for child placement; also required supervisors certify that searches were performed	December 4, 2018
Required OCS to prepare a staffing report if unable to meet training and workload limits	September 5, 2019
Required OCS to provide a minimum of six weeks of training	September 5, 2019
Required efforts to encourage and facilitate communication between separated siblings	September 5, 2019
Enacted a 45-day timeline for approval or denial of a foster care home license	September 5, 2019
Required OCS assist adult family members with obtaining a foster care home license, including any variances necessary to obtain the license	September 5, 2019
Allowed adult family members or family friends previously ineligible to be foster parents to obtain a waiver if at least 10 years have elapsed since the barring conduct occurred	September 5, 2019
Required OCS provide an individual 16 years of age or older, who has been in State custody for at least six months and is released from custody, with legal documents or with assistance in obtaining legal documents	September 5, 2019
Limited the workload of OCS case carrying employees	September 5, 2020

Source: HB 151 (SLA 2018).

Foster Care Reform and Other Legislative Actions

From FY 16 through FY 23 the legislature approved positions and funding for OCS's frontline social worker budget with the goal of reducing workload and improving recruitment and retention. Exhibit 2 shows the growth of OCS's frontline social worker positions. Significant changes in positions included 26 positions added in FY 16, 31 positions added in FY 18, 21 positions added in FY 19 (authorized as part of HB 151), and 26 positions added in FY 23.

Exhibit 2

OCS Frontline Social Workers Authorized Positions FY 15 through FY 23	
Fiscal Year	**Full Time Positions**
FY 15	452
FY 16	477
FY 17	476
FY 18	507
FY 19	530
FY 20	528
FY 21	528
FY 22	528
FY 23	555

Source: Compiled from Division of Legislative Finance enacted budget books.

Note: Exhibit 2 shows the net positions added each year, which includes positions transferred out.

HB 151 Limited Caseloads

Large caseloads and excessive workloads impair the ability of frontline caseworkers to provide quality services to children and families in a timely manner. Foster care reform attempted to improve services by limiting OCS caseloads as follows:

1. before the beginning of the employee's fourth month of work the employee may supervise not more than six families;

2. after the beginning of the employee's fourth month of work (but before the end of the employee's sixth month of work) the employee may supervise not more than 12 families;

3. for an employee, other than a new employee, the average statewide caseload is not more than 13 families for each worker.

Additionally, when an employee supervises families in a region where travel negatively affects the employee's ability to supervise families and the employee has worked for the department less than 12 months, the employee may not supervise the maximum number of families provided under items 1 and 2 above.

OCS Annual Report on Recruitment and Retention

HB 151 required OCS to annually submit a report on employee recruitment and retention that includes a five-year plan, caseload and turnover statistics, the number of children removed from home, and various performance metrics. Furthermore, if caseload limits or training standards were not met, OCS must prepare a staffing report to explain why the caseload limits and standards were not met. The staffing report must include vacancy metrics and a description of the recruitment and retention efforts.

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REPORT CONCLUSIONS

The audit concluded that foster care reform did not effectively increase services for Alaskan children. Implementation of House Bill (HB) 151, along with other legislative efforts enacted from FY 16 through FY 23, failed to resolve the Office of Children Services' (OCS) labor challenges despite the legislature appropriating over $20.7 million of additional funding and authorizing 110 new frontline caseworker and support positions. High vacancies and turnover led to excess budgetary authority, which was used, in part, for other purposes.

Caseload limits, referred to as "caseload caps", could not be fully implemented due to a lack of workers. Of the 115 case carrying workers with at least seven months of experience as of March 2024, 80 workers (70 percent) exceeded the average caseload cap of 13 families, with 52 workers (45 percent) carrying between 20 to 48 cases.

As a result of HB 151, the number of training weeks increased from a minimum of two weeks to a minimum of six weeks; however, the training method switched from in-person to virtual. Around the same time training became virtual, OCS began hiring workers with "core competencies" rather than hiring workers with a college degree or prior work experience. The audit questions whether five weeks of virtual training and one week of mostly remote mentoring is adequate to turn new hires with core competencies into qualified frontline caseworkers.[3]

When considering OCS's workload, policy makers and other stakeholders should recognize that statutory requirements for OCS's annual recruitment and retention report understate OCS's workload. Specifically, the caseload data does not include cases managed by supervisors and other non-case carrying employees. As of March 15, 2024, 402 cases were assigned to 49 supervisors and other non-case carrying employees. Additionally, the report does

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[3] Frontline caseworkers are defined in this report as those employees that supervise the care of children under the State's supervision or custody, work with families to prevent the removal of a child from the child's home, or investigate reports of harm, commonly referred to as "case carrying" workers.

not include secondary case assignments, which vary in the amount of work required and could resemble a primary assignment.

Auditors found that OCS's 2023 annual staffing report understated vacancies at the statewide and regional levels. Furthermore, the staffing report did not fully comply with statutory requirements, regional turnover statistics were not fully accurate, and supporting data was not consistently maintained by OCS staff.

A legislative consultant found that OCS's staffing report could be enhanced to better align with best practices. Furthermore, the consultant recommended changes to better align OCS management with best practices. Improving OCS's hiring process is critical to addressing labor challenges.

Federally required performance measures indicate that Alaska's children had lower permanency within the first two years than experienced nationally. Permanency after two years was generally consistent with national norms. Alaska's re-entry into foster care was better than, or within, the national rates, except during FFY 22. Placement stability rates were better than national rates in some years, but worse in others.

Detailed conclusions are found below.

Implementation of HB 151, along with other legislative efforts, did not resolve OCS's labor challenges and excess authorization was used, in part, for other purposes.

Overall, the audit found no compelling evidence that HB 151 met its intent: to improve training, reduce workloads, and improve retention of frontline caseworkers, thereby improving the outcomes for Alaskan children and families. Furthermore, other legislative actions to reduce workload did not have a significant impact.

HB 151, which attempted to restrict caseloads and improve training to alleviate caseworker burnout and turnover, was one of several legislative actions taken to address OCS's workload challenges. From FY 16 through FY 23 the legislature authorized an additional 110 new frontline caseworker and support positions (21 were authorized

as part of HB 151). The legislature also authorized additional funding for bonuses, mental health support, tuition reimbursement, and other retention incentives, for a total increase in personal services of $20.7 million.[4] Despite these actions, significant progress in addressing the labor issues did not materialize. OCS vacancies as of October 1, 2023, were 41 percent and turnover for the prior 12 months was 47 percent.

Vacancies and turnover resulted in excess budgetary authority in OCS's frontline social worker appropriations, which was used for a variety of purposes. As shown in Exhibit 3, some of the excess authorization was used each year to pay overtime ranging from just over $936 thousand to approximately $2.2 million.[5]

Exhibit 3

Frontline Social Worker Overtime FY 17 through FY 23	
Fiscal Year	**Amount**
FY 17	$ 936,265
FY 18	2,084,122
FY 19	2,221,768
FY 20	1,884,545
FY 21	1,508,125
FY 22	1,888,439
FY 23	2,177,216
Total	$12,700,480

Source: State of Alaska accounting system.

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[4] The total includes funding for the new positions and retention incentives, but does not include subsequent increases to salaries and benefits. Consequently, the personal services fiscal impact is understated.

[5] Auditors were unable to obtain FY 16 overtime as it was not separately identified in the accounting system.

During FY 16 through FY 23, OCS management transferred some of its excess budgetary authority to other OCS allocations. Annual transfers ranged from $400 thousand to $6.1 million. During the same period over $4.1 million was permanently transferred to other OCS allocations during the annual budget process. Additionally, OCS excess authorization was used to pay for retention incentives, such as bonuses and tuition reimbursement. The audit also noted that $2 million of the frontline social worker authorization was reserved to pay a Medicaid-related federal audit finding, $2.5 million was reserved to pay an anticipated federal Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) fine related to a 2021 cyberattack, and a total of $11 million was used to pay for the tribal compact.[6] The audit noted that the $2.5 million reserved to pay an anticipated federal HIPAA fine was part of $10 million of appropriations encumbered for that purpose. At the time of this audit, the federal government had not issued a violation and the $10 million encumbrance was not supported by a valid obligation. (See Recommendation 7 directed to the Department of Health)

OCS work measures have generally declined since 2015.

The OCS work measures shown in Exhibit 4 on the following page indicate that the provisions of HB 151, the additional 110 positions,[7] and retention incentives did not significantly increase foster care services for Alaskan children when compared to the level of services that existed in 2015, the year before positions began to be added. To the contrary, most work measures significantly decreased. However, reforms and financial incentives likely helped stabilize OCS labor problems.

[6] The Alaska Tribal Child Welfare Compact is an agreement between the State of Alaska and Alaska Tribes and Tribal organizations that recognizes the Tribes' inherent authority to provide child welfare services and oversee placement of children. The compact defines the services and support to be carried out by each Tribe within their services area, and outlines how information and resources are shared between the State and each Tribe. The compact was created to reduce the disproportionate number of Alaska Native children in State custody and improve outcomes for families statewide. The compact is a State/Tribal initiative that began in 2017 and was formally authorized in state law through HB 184, effective November 3, 2022.

[7] The largest increases in positions were 26 in FY 16, 31 in FY 18, 21 in FY 19, and 26 in FY 23.

According to OCS management, the decline in work measures is a positive indicator that shows OCS is effectively working with families. Auditors noted that other factors, such as staff shortages, turnover, and inadequate training, may also result in a decline in workload measures. The audit did not examine the cause of the work measure declines.

Exhibit 4

OCS Work Measures 2015 Compared to 2023			
Work Measure	**2015**	**2023**	**% Change**
Children in State Custody	3,698	3,733	↑ 1%
Children Removed from the Home	1,471	1,059	↓ 28%
Protective Service Reports Reviewed	16,557	20,498	↑ 24%
Protective Service Reports Assigned for Investigation	9,170	6,371	↓ 31%
Investigations Completed	7,759	6,009	↓ 23%
Investigations Completed with at Least One Substantiated Allegation	1,994	1,477	↓ 26%

Source: OCS statistical reports published on OCS's website.

Increased training was not tied to improved retention or increased competencies.

Per review of OCS training from 2019 through mid-December 2023, auditors confirmed that the number of training weeks increased from a minimum of two weeks to a minimum of six weeks as a result of HB 151; however, beginning in 2020, the method of training new staff switched from in-person to virtual. Around the same time staff training became virtual, OCS began hiring workers with "core competencies" rather than requiring a college degree or prior work experience. OCS management did not provide evidence to show that five weeks of virtual training and one week of mentoring was adequate to turn new hires with core competencies into qualified frontline caseworkers.

Hiring for core competencies was identified as a concern by the legislative consultant that reviewed OCS's management structure. The consultant stated:

> *Hiring solely based on competency with no actual child protection experience or education may be suitable in a state that has an intensive training program that includes both a grounding in the practice model and pre-service and in-service learning support to apply practice model theory to 'real life' practice. However, supervisors and frontline staff in interviews consistently indicated that the current OCS case manager training – [Standards, Knowledge, and Insight Leading to Success] SKILS – covers only the theoretical aspects of the work and is completed in entirety before new hires start managing cases. Once on the job, the support remotely located mentors and overwhelmed supervisors and co-workers can provide the new hire to compensate for inadequate training was reported to us as woefully insufficient for the majority of new hires, which is a major contributor to turnover among recently hired frontline workers.*

With foster care casework being person-centric, the audit questions whether training new staff using a virtual platform effectively equips new workers with the skills and confidence to carry out in-person job responsibilities, such as safety risk assessments, investigations, and home visits. Insufficiently trained caseworkers may increase turnover and negatively impact the outcomes for Alaskan children. (See Recommendation 3)

The audit noted that, starting in 2021, OCS began to encourage educational opportunities by reimbursing the tuition for employees who obtain an Occupational Endorsement Certificate in Child Welfare. This certificate program, offered by the University of Alaska Anchorage, provides training in child welfare practices and theory. From 2021 through the fall semester of 2024, 11 OCS workers completed the certificate and 19 were in progress.

Caseload caps have not been fully implemented due to high vacancies and turnover.

Workload restrictions for OCS frontline caseworkers, also referred to as caseload caps, were a foundational provision of foster care reform. Caseload caps were intended to improve turnover, reduce vacancies, and improve retention, thereby providing more consistent and effective services to children and families.

An objective of the audit was to evaluate the accuracy of OCS's annual recruitment and retention report, including caseload data. Auditors were unable to evaluate the caseload data in OCS's 2023 annual recruitment and retention report because OCS staff did not maintain support for the data reported. (See Recommendation 2) As an alternative to reviewing caseload caps reported in OCS's annual report, auditors obtained caseload data from OCS's information system and independently calculated the frontline worker caseloads as of March 15, 2024. Based on this analysis, the audit concluded that caseload caps have not been fully implemented due to high vacancies and turnover. Compliance with the three types of caseload caps is highlighted below.

- **Caseloads for workers with less than four months of experience are capped at not more than six families.** There was a total of 10 caseworkers in this category. Of these 10 workers, three exceeded the caseload cap of six families by one or two cases each in the Anchorage, Northern, and Southcentral regions.

- **Caseloads for workers with between four and six months of experience are capped at not more than 12 families.** There was a total of eight caseworkers in this category. Of these eight workers, two exceeded the caseload cap of 12 families by five cases each in the Anchorage and Northern regions.

- **Caseload caps for workers with at least seven months of experience are capped in terms of statewide averages (not more than 13 families on average).** For these caseworkers the overall statewide average caseload was 18.5 cases. Of the 115 workers with at least seven months of experience, 80 workers (70 percent) exceeded the statewide average caseload cap of 13 families,

with 52 workers (45 percent) having between 20 and 48 cases. Exhibit 5 shows the caseload average, by region, for frontline caseworkers with at least seven months of experience.

Exhibit 5

Frontline Caseworkers With at Least Seven Months Experience
Average Caseload by Region
as of March 15, 2024

Northern Region
18.1

Western Region
21.9

Southcentral Region
14.2

Anchorage Region
24.1

Southeast Region
14.5
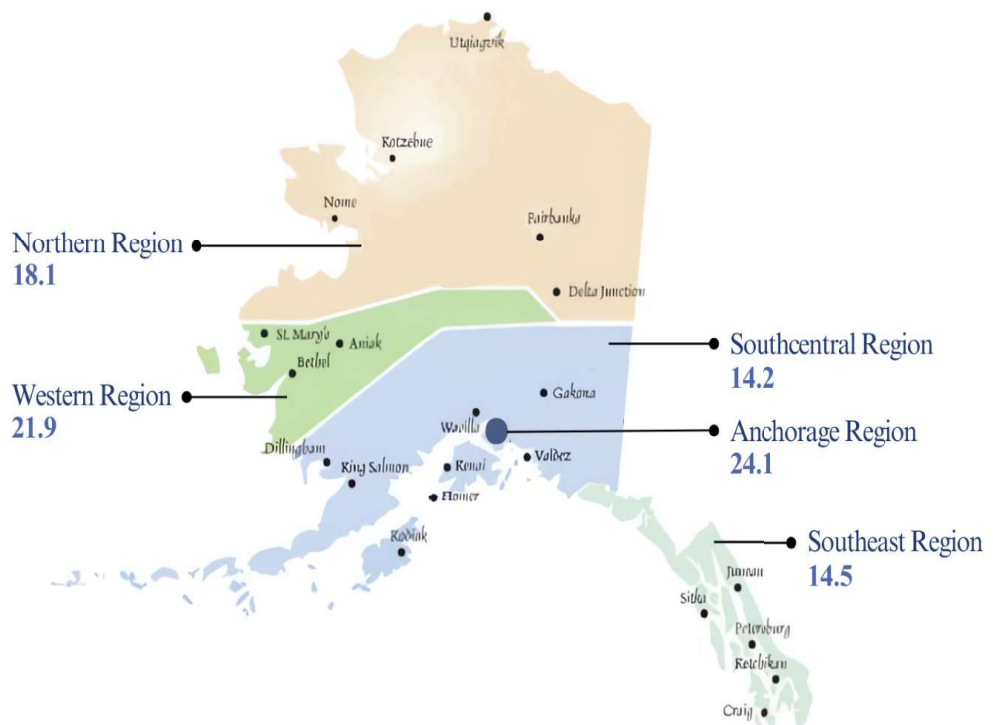
Source: Compiled from OCS's information system data as of March 15, 2024.

Per OCS management, many factors are considered when assigning cases, such as the number of children in a case, complexity of children's needs, geographic location, and the experience and prior history of a caseworker with a family.

Statutory requirements for OCS's annual recruitment and retention report understate OCS workload.

Policy makers and other stakeholders should be aware that caseload statistics in OCS's annual recruitment and retention report understate OCS's overall workload because AS 47.14.112(d)(1) only requires OCS to report the caseloads of its frontline case carrying workers. The audit found that, due to vacancies and turnover, cases that should have been assigned to frontline case carrying workers were, instead, assigned to and being worked by employees whose primary duties did not include case management. As of March 15, 2024, 402 cases were assigned to 49 supervisors and other non-case carrying employees.[8] These non-case carrying employees include protective services managers, protective services specialist IVs (supervisors), and some protective services specialist IIIs.

The OCS annual report also understates workload by not reporting secondary assignments. Each case is assigned a primary frontline caseworker; however, in instances where coordination of services between workers in different offices is needed, a secondary caseworker may also be assigned. According to OCS staff, secondary assignments vary in the amount of work required and could resemble a primary assignment.[9]

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[8] The 402 cases include cases assigned and actively worked and cases that were not actively worked and were temporarily assigned due to turnover.

[9] OCS's policy allows for the following services to be provided by a secondary worker to the case: emergency and non-emergency placements in another region or office jurisdiction, caseworker visits, initial investigations, and one time or short-term assistance. OCS's policy states that the Department of Family and Community Services expects all workers to manage each case with the same degree of care and oversight, regardless of whether the worker is assigned as primary or secondary to the case.

Exhibit 6 reports the average secondary caseload, by region, for frontline caseworkers by experience level as of March 15, 2024. Including secondary assignments in OCS's workload paints a more concerning picture of OCS resources. As shown in Exhibit 6, caseworkers in the Anchorage and Southcentral regions carried the highest number of secondary assignments.

Exhibit 6

Frontline Caseworkers Secondary Caseload Average by Region as of March 15, 2024			
Region	**0—3 Months Experience**	**4—6 Months Experience**	**At Least 7 Months Experience**
Anchorage Region	7.0	5.3	6.7
Northern Region	1.0	1.0	6.1
Southcentral Region	7.0	0.0	12.9
Southeast Region	0.0	0.0	4.8
Western Region	4.0	0.0	4.4

Source: Compiled from OCS's information system data as of March 15, 2024.

The annual staffing report could be enhanced to better align with best practices.

OCS is required by AS 47.14.112(b) to submit a staffing report to the legislature if the department is unable to meet the caseload caps mandated by HB 151. The purpose of the staffing report is to provide legislators data regarding OCS vacancies, turnover, recruitment and retention efforts, and funding needs.

An objective of this audit was to identify whether OCS's staffing report reflected best practices and whether it included all elements required by state law. A consultant hired to evaluate the annual staffing report concluded that OCS's staffing report did an effective job at tracking the number and location of vacancies, turnover, and exit reasons for case carrying staff, and generally complied with the requirements of state law. However, the consultant recommended

a number of report enhancements to make OCS's recruitment and retention efforts more meaningful and to better align OCS's efforts with best practices. Recommended enhancements included reporting time to fill vacancies, offer acceptance rate, new hire turnover rate, supervisor to staff ratio, and tenure in key positions. (See Recommendation 5) The consultant's full report, which includes an analysis of OCS's management structure, is included as Appendix A of this report.

OCS's 2023 staffing report understated vacancies at the statewide and regional levels.

An objective of the audit was to determine if OCS submitted a staffing report that was accurate. To evaluate the accuracy of the 2023 vacancy statistics, auditors independently obtained position data from the State's payroll system, recalculated vacancy rates, and compared the results to the OCS staffing report. The audit found not all the data was accurate.

Exhibit 7 on the following page summarizes auditors' evaluation of the vacancy statistics, which found discrepancies at the statewide level and at the regional levels. At the statewide level, OCS reported 81 vacant case carrying positions as of October 1, 2023, while auditors calculated 93 vacant case carrying positions—a variance of 12. At the regional levels, vacancies reported by OCS differed significantly from the rates calculated by auditors for the Northern and Southeast regions, both understated by 8.1 percent and 12.8 percent respectively. (See Recommendation 1)

Exhibit 7

Office of Children's Services Case Carrying Vacant Positions by Region as of October 1, 2023						
	OCS Reported			*Auditor Calculated*		
	Case Carrying Positions	Total Vacant	Vacancy Rate	FY 24 Budgeted Case Carrying Positions	Total Vacant	Vacancy Rate	Rate Difference
Anchorage Region	73	33	45.2%	75	35	46.7%	⬆ 1.5%
Northern Region	49	14	28.6%	49	18	36.7%	⬆ 8.1%
Southcentral Region	59	16	27.1%	60	17	28.3%	⬆ 1.2%
Southeast Region	20	7	35.0%	23	11	47.8%	⬆12.8%
Western Region	21	11	52.4%	21	12	57.1%	⬆ 4.7%
Statewide Total	222*	81	36.5%	228	93	40.8%	⬆ 4.3%

* In OCS's data 225 positions were reported in the turnover table, yet only 222 positions were reported in the vacancy and caseload tables.

Source: Compiled from OCS reported data and State payroll data.

OCS's 2023 annual employee recruitment and retention report did not fully comply with statutory requirements, regional turnover statistics were not fully accurate, and supporting data was not consistently maintained by OCS staff.

An objective of the audit was to evaluate the accuracy of OCS's 2023 recruitment and retention report. OCS is required by AS 47.14.112(d) to prepare an annual report on employee recruitment and retention that includes a five-year plan, as well as average frontline worker caseloads and turnover, the number of children removed from their homes, and various achievement data. The report is due to the legislature by November 15 of each year.

The audit found OCS created a five-year recruitment and retention plan in 2019 but did not amend the plan each year so that it continued to reflect a prospective five-year strategy. Instead, OCS provided a status of the 2019 plan each year. While statutory requirements do not explicitly require a forward-looking plan or annual amendments, the lack of a forward-looking strategy increases the risk that OCS may not be prepared to address current and future labor challenges,

thereby increasing the risk that challenges will continue. (See Recommendation 6)

Auditors evaluated the completeness and accuracy of the 2023 employee recruitment and retention report and noted that the report presented caseload and turnover statistics as of October 1, 2023, when statutes required the information be reported as of January 1, 2023, and July 1, 2023. Furthermore, the report's caseload information could not be verified because OCS staff did not maintain support for the information. (See Recommendation 2) Auditors independently calculated and evaluated caseloads as part of this audit; however, the caseload data evaluated by auditors was as of March 15, 2024, and not comparable to data presented in the 2023 report.

Auditors were able to confirm the accuracy of the report's achievement statistics, except for the number of children placed in a permanent living arrangement with a guardian, or biological or adoptive parent, which OCS did not include in the report. According to OCS management, being placed permanently with a guardian or biological or adoptive parent is the same as family reunification, which is reported elsewhere in the report. However, auditors noted that OCS does produce the statistic and it was readily available for inclusion in the 2023 report.

Exhibit 8 on the following page summarizes auditors' evaluation of the turnover statistics reported in OCS's 2023 employee and recruitment and retention report. At the statewide level OCS reported that the average turnover rate for frontline workers was 47.6 percent, which was generally the same as the 47.4 percent rate calculated by auditors. More significant differences in turnover rates were found at the regional levels. The largest variance was at the Southeast region, which was understated by 17.4 percent, and the Western and Anchorage regions, which were overstated by 9.5 percent and 5.1 percent respectively. (See Recommendation 2)

Exhibit 8

Office of Children's Services Case Carrying Positions Turnover by Region						
OCS Reported - FFY 23			*Auditor Calculated*			
Case Carrying Positions	Total Turnover	Turnover Rate	FY 24 Budgeted Case Carrying Positions	Total Turnover	Turnover Rate	Rate Difference
Anchorage Region 73	30	41.1%	75	27	36%	↓ 5.1%
Northern Region 49	28	57.1%	49	29	59.2%	↑ 2.1%
Southcentral Region 59	30	50.8%	60	31	51.7%	↑ 0.9%
Southeast Region 23	8	34.8%	23	12	52.2%	↑17.4%
Western Region 21	11	52.4%	21	9	42.9%	↓ 9.5%
Statewide Total 225*	107	47.6%	228	108	47.4%	↓ 0.2%

* In OCS's data 225 positions were reported in the turnover table, yet only 222 positions were reported in the vacancy and caseload tables.
Source: Compiled from OCS reported data and State payroll data.

Improvements to OCS's hiring process may help address labor challenges.

The Division of Legislative Audit hired a consultant to evaluate whether OCS's management structure was compliant with best practices and to make recommendations accordingly. The consultant conducted in-person and virtual focus groups, as well as individual interviews covering all five OCS regions. The consultant also conducted a qualitative analysis of focus group and interview meeting summaries. Based on the consultant's analysis, review of best practice literature, and 80 interviews with over 200 different staff from a cross-section of roles and responsibilities, the consultant identified seven best practices and 20 actionable components and identified whether the components were in place or in practice. The consultant then recommended improvements.

As shown in Exhibit 9 on the following page, the consultant made 14 recommendations that addressed supervision, culture and structure, and hiring. Recommendations related to hiring and training may help address OCS's labor challenges. (See Recommendation 4)

Exhibit 9

Legislative Consultant OCS Recommendations
Supervisory

1. More clearly define and communicate what is expected from managers at all levels of the organization.

2. Explore options for building upon existing strategies in place to provide additional supports to newly hired caseworkers as a complement to the support provided by supervisors and mentors.

3. Encourage teaming approaches to how Protective Services Specialist 1s and 2s manage cases.

4. Strengthen new caseworker training, "SKILS", by utilizing significant feedback from newly hired staff to enhance its value and effectiveness.

5. Ensure OCS staff know how to access up-to-date standard operating procedures.

6. Allow OCS staff more flexibility in scheduling and altering their travel schedule.

7. Follow through on work underway in the development of a standardized training program for OCS administrative and support staff.

Culture and Structure

1. "Close the loop" more consistently back to staff who provide input, suggestions, and feedback to management.

2. Communicate organizational changes in clear ways that provide people affected by the changes the information they need to understand why changes are being made, how the changes affect their specific job and function, and what they need to do differently from what they have been used to.

3. Explore ways to strengthen organizational data capacity and related protocols.

Hiring

1. Streamline the hiring process.

2. Expand and be more intentional about recruiting.

3. Expand the use of creative models to fill the vacancies of rural offices.

4. Continue updating Protective Services Specialist 1 and 2 job descriptions and related competencies to more accurately describe the nature of the job and include a link to a realistic job preview video.

Source: Appendix A.

The consultant also reviewed the management layers between a frontline social worker and OCS's director and made the following conclusions:

- OCS's organization layers generally do not contribute to inefficiencies.

- OCS's ability to provide adequate supervision of caseworkers is not perpetuated by OCS having too many managerial layers.

A copy of the consultant's final report is included as Appendix A of this report.

Performance measures for children in Alaska compared to national data were worse in some categories and better in other categories.

An objective of the audit was to compare Alaska permanency measures to the national performance data. National performance data communicate how the nation as a whole performed on a given data indicator. The national data are used as a reference point to determine if a state performed statistically better, worse, or no different from the nation after taking into account some of the factors over which states have little control.

Federal and state statutes, OCS's Child Protective Services Manual, and other federal resources define "permanency" as a legal, safe, and permanent home for a child. Permanency is the goal for every child involved in the foster care system. It can be achieved by:

- Reunification with the parent

- Adoption with termination of parental rights

- Guardianship with a permanent guardian

- Guardianship with a "fit and willing relative" while remaining in the State's legal custody

- Another planned permanent living arrangement while remaining in the State's legal custody

Data is compiled by the federal government that places permanency into five categories, which are reported in Exhibits 10 through 14.[10] These exhibits show Alaska data compared to national data. To adjust for factors over which states have little control, a risk-standardized performance (RSP) interval is used to determine whether a state's performance is statistically better, worse, or no different from national performance. For example, children of different ages have different likelihoods of experiencing an outcome (e.g. achieving permanency), regardless of the quality of care a state provides. Accounting for such factors allows for a fairer comparison of each state's performance relative to the national performance. According to OCS management, adjusting for such factors does not fully account for Alaska's unique demographics. OCS management stated that child welfare work in Alaska is more challenging than other states and using national averages is an unequitable measurement due to the differences in the way child welfare work must be performed in Alaska. As examples, OCS management cited Alaska's remote conditions, hazardous weather, vast terrain, lack of a statewide road system, and other geographical and seasonal challenges that impact child welfare services, as well as working with Tribes and adhering to the Indian Child Welfare Act.

Exhibits 10 through 14 compare Alaska's RSP data to national performance data for the five categories of permanency. Overall, Alaska's children had lower permanency within the first two years than experienced nationally. Permanency after two years was generally consistent with national norms. Alaska's re-entry into foster care was better than or within national rates from FFY 18 through FFY 21 and slightly worse than national rates for FFY 22. Placement stability rates were better than national rates in some years and worse in others. Auditors note that the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the delivery of services and should be considered when reviewing Exhibits 10 through 14. A brief analysis of the data precedes each exhibit.

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[10] Exhibits 10 and 13 do not have data reported through FFY 23, because those specific performance measures are not available until one or two years after the reporting year.

Permanency in 12 Months (entries): Exhibit 10 shows that Alaska's performance was statistically worse than national performance for the four years reported. Alaska's performance appears to trend downward with 32.0 percent of children discharging to permanency within 12 months of entering care in FFY 18 and 27.2 percent of children discharging to permanency within 12 months of entering care in FFY 21. With the decrease in national performance, Alaska's performance trends closer to national performance by FFY 21.

Exhibit 10
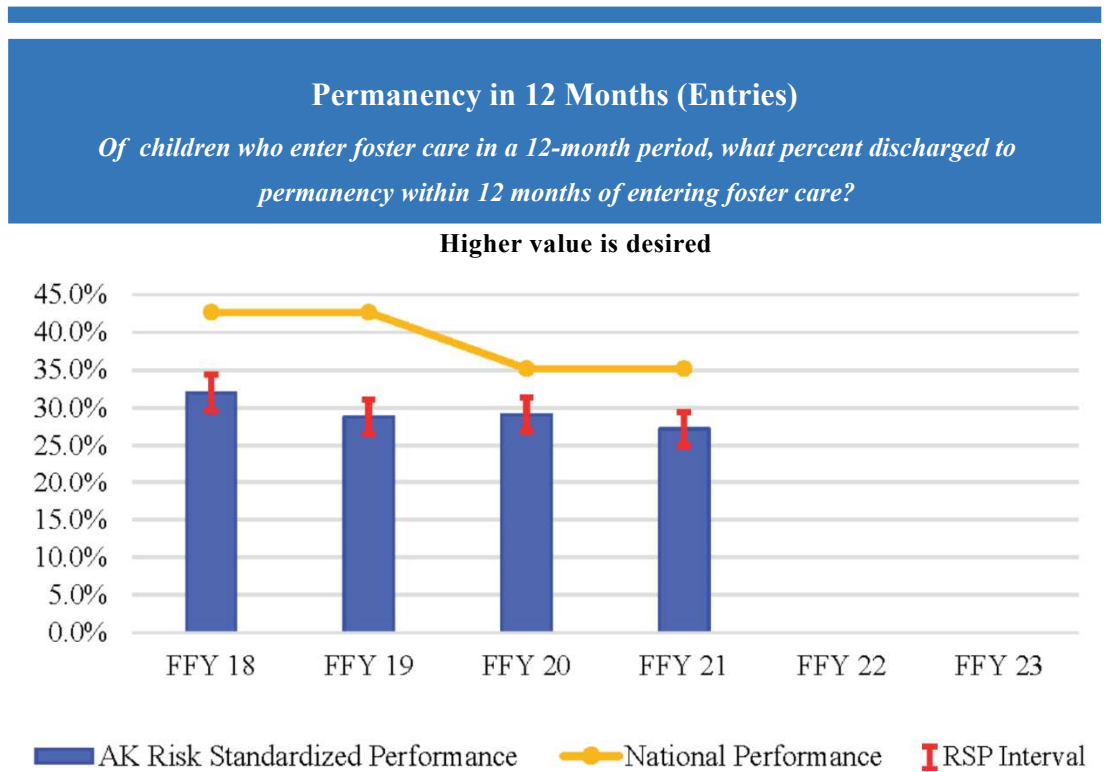
Permanency in 12 Months (Entries)

Of children who enter foster care in a 12-month period, what percent discharged to permanency within 12 months of entering foster care?

Higher value is desired

Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Children and Families, Children's Bureau, Child and Family Services Review Data Profile as of February 2024 for the State of Alaska.

Permanency in 12 Months (12—23 months): Exhibit 11 shows that Alaska's performance was statistically worse than national performance for the six years reported. From FFY 18 through FFY 23 between 32.4 percent to 39.3 percent of children who have been in foster care continuously between 12 and 23 months were discharged to permanency within 12 months.

Exhibit 11
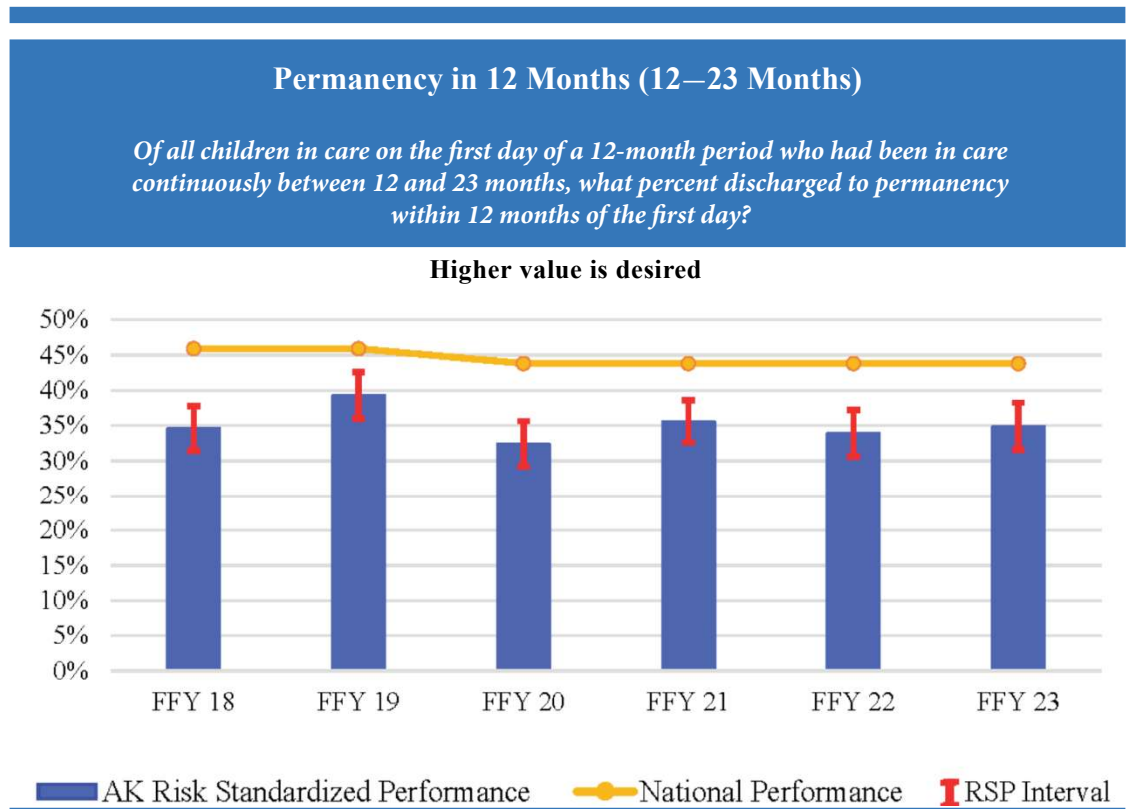
Permanency in 12 Months (12—23 Months)

Of all children in care on the first day of a 12-month period who had been in care continuously between 12 and 23 months, what percent discharged to permanency within 12 months of the first day?

Higher value is desired

Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Children and Families, Children's Bureau, Child and Family Services Review Data Profile as of February 2024 for the State of Alaska.

Permanency in 12 Months (24+ months): Exhibit 12 shows that, generally, Alaska's performance was not statistically different than national performance.

Exhibit 12
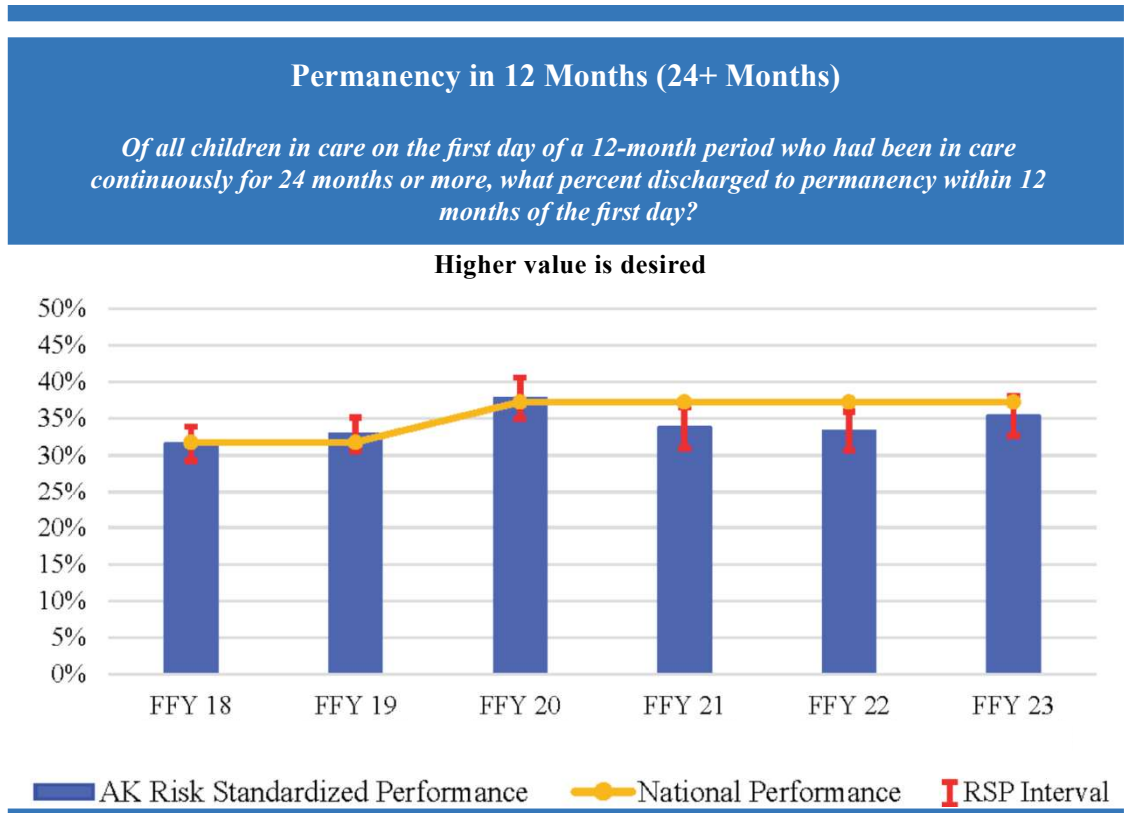
Permanency in 12 Months (24+ Months)

Of all children in care on the first day of a 12-month period who had been in care continuously for 24 months or more, what percent discharged to permanency within 12 months of the first day?

Higher value is desired

Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Children and Families, Children's Bureau, Child and Family Services Review Data Profile as of February 2024 for the State of Alaska.

Re-Entry to Foster Care: Exhibit 13 shows that Alaska's performance was statistically better than national performance in FFY 19, and statistically no different than national performance in FFY 18, FFY 20, and FFY 21. Although Alaska's re-entry rate decreased (improved) from FFY 18 to FFY 19, the re-entry rate trended upward (worsened) beginning FFY 20. There was a significant jump from 5.3 percent in FFY 21 to 8.3 percent in FFY 22 and Alaska's rates were statistically worse than national rates. Per OCS management, Alaska has historically lacked basic resources for treatment and services for families in need. The COVID-19 pandemic compounded that problem as service providers closed and never re-opened. Additionally, OCS management stated that the number of children with complex or high needs increased and resources that serve those children decreased, which resulted in children returning to foster care.

Exhibit 13
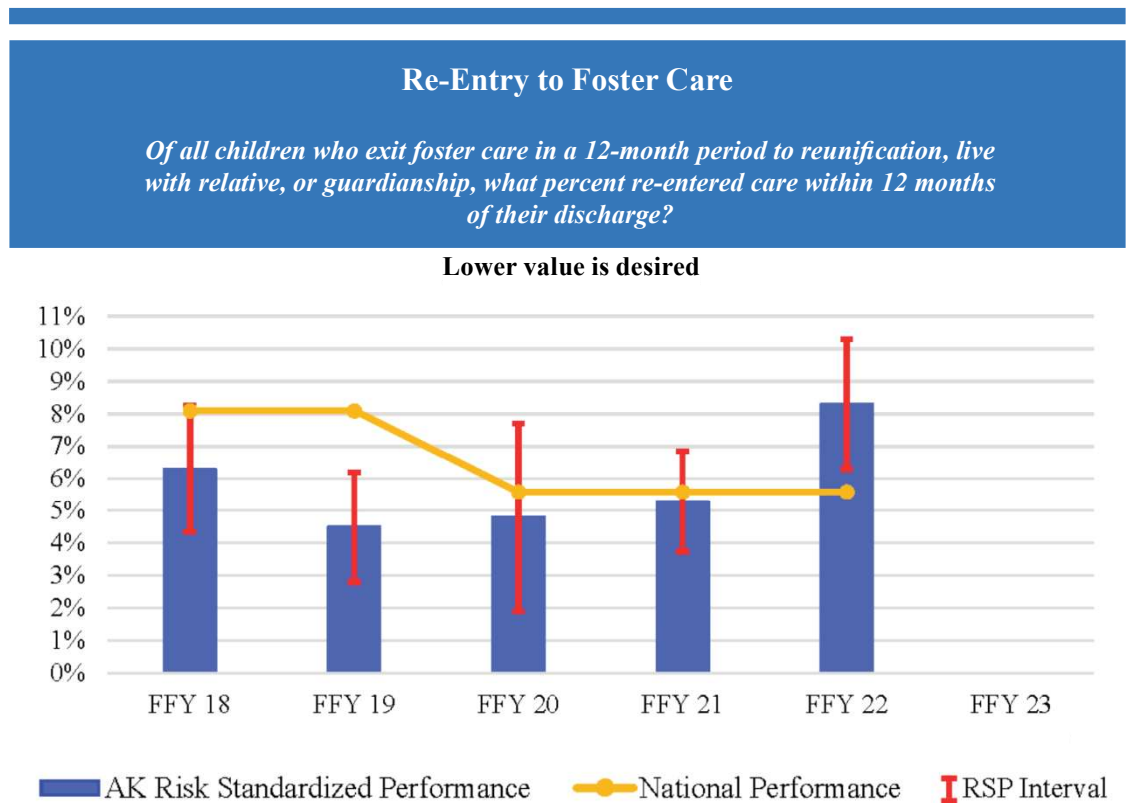
Re-Entry to Foster Care

Of all children who exit foster care in a 12-month period to reunification, live with relative, or guardianship, what percent re-entered care within 12 months of their discharge?

Lower value is desired

Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Children and Families, Children's Bureau, Child and Family Services Review Data Profile as of February 2024 for the State of Alaska.

Placement Stability (moves/1,000 days in care): Exhibit 14 shows that Alaska's performance was statistically better than national performance during FFY 20, when children moved placements 3.99 times out of 1,000 days. Performance trended higher (worsened) from FFY 18 to FFY 19, then again from FFY 20 to FFY 21 and FFY 22. Alaska's performance greatly improved in FFY 23 when children moved placements 3.58 times out of 1,000 days. Auditors inquired with OCS regarding factors that may have contributed to the increase in performance during FFY 23. Per OCS management, the department implemented a centralized hotline for providers to contact when providers have questions or basic needs, whereas previously providers would contact the OCS worker, who was often unavailable. The hotline connects the provider with a person much faster. Additionally, a change was made to involve OCS's medical unit earlier to assist in identifying necessary resources/care for the children and to help identify appropriate placements.

Exhibit 14
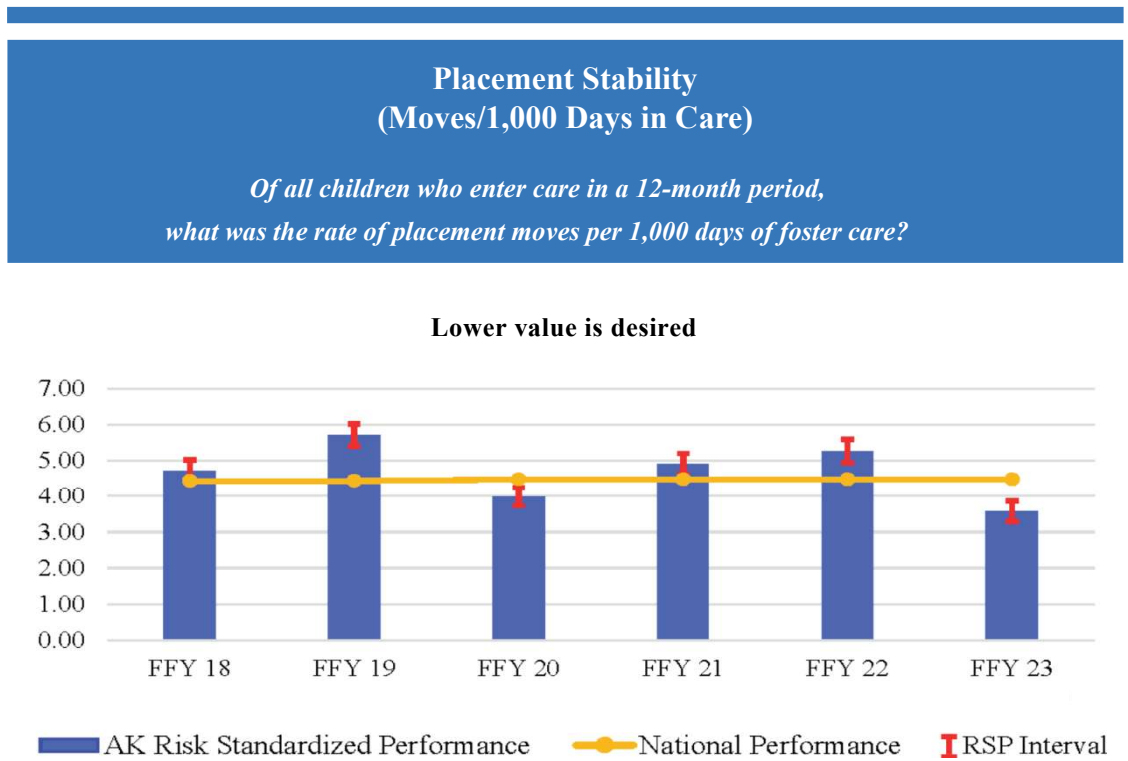
**Placement Stability
(Moves/1,000 Days in Care)**

*Of all children who enter care in a 12-month period,
what was the rate of placement moves per 1,000 days of foster care?*

Lower value is desired

Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Children and Families, Children's Bureau, Child and Family Services Review Data Profile as of February 2024 for the State of Alaska.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This audit is the third legislative audit of the Office of Children's Services' (OCS) implementation of House Bill 151. The prior audit of OCS identified recommendations, which are listed below. This audit did not evaluate progress in addressing these prior recommendations because OCS had insufficient time to address the recommendations due to the timing of this audit.

- OCS's director should improve training to ensure OCS staff follow procedures for background checks and address the safety risks identified by auditors.

- OCS's director should strengthen training and implement procedures to ensure application dates are entered accurately and consistently in OCS's information system.

- OCS's director should continue efforts to address staffing shortages to ensure foster home applications are processed and approved in a timely manner.

- OCS's director should implement procedures for documenting efforts made to assist individuals with obtaining important documents.

- OCS's director should continue efforts to address staffing shortages and ensure supervisors certify in writing whether OCS staff has searched for an appropriate placement with a relative or family friend as required by law.

- OCS's director should improve security over access to OCS's information system.

This audit makes seven new recommendations.

Recommendation 1:

OCS's director should implement procedures to ensure the annual staffing report is accurate.

Discrepancies were identified in OCS's 2023 staffing report vacancy statistics. At the statewide level, OCS reported 81 vacant case carrying positions as of October 1, 2023, while auditors calculated 93 vacant positions—a variance of 12. At the regional levels, vacancy rates reported by OCS differed significantly from those calculated by auditors for the Northern region and Southeast region, which were understated by 8.1 percent and 12.8 percent respectively.

Alaska Statute 47.14.112(b) requires OCS to prepare a staffing report as a result of the inability to meet training and workload standards. The report is to include information, such as the number of employees who vacated positions during the reporting period and the number of funded positions that were vacant.

According to OCS staff, there were no formal written procedures for the preparation and review of the annual staffing report, which contributed to the finding. The lack of procedures increases the risk of providing inaccurate information to policy makers.

We recommend OCS's director implement procedures to ensure the annual staffing report is accurate.

Recommendation 2:

OCS's director should implement procedures to ensure the annual recruitment and retention report is accurate and prepared in compliance with state law.

Caseload data that was included in OCS's 2023 recruitment and retention report could not be verified by auditors because OCS staff did not maintain support for the information. Additionally, the 2023 report presented caseload and turnover statistics as of October 1, 2023, when statutes required the information be reported as of January 1, 2023, and July 1, 2023. The audit also found material discrepancies with regional turnover rates. The largest variance was at the Southeast region, which was understated by 17.4 percent, and the Western and Anchorage regions, which were overstated by 9.5 percent and 5.1 percent respectively.

OCS management was unable to explain why the caseload and turnover statistics were not reported as of January 1, 2023, and

July 1, 2023. According to OCS staff, there are no formal written procedures for preparing the annual recruitment and retention report, which contributed to the deficiencies. The lack of procedures increases the risk that inaccurate information is reported to policy makers.

Alaska Statute 47.14.112(d) requires OCS to prepare an annual report on employee recruitment and retention, including a five-year plan. The report is to include:

1. the number of frontline social workers employed by the division, the annual average turnover rate of the workers, and the average caseload of the workers on January 1 and July 1 of that year;

2. the number of children removed from their homes;

3. the achievement of success measured by the following:

    a) rate of family reunification;

    b) average length of time children spent in custody of the department;

    c) rate of placement with an adult family member or family friend;

    d) number of children placed in a permanent living arrangement with a guardian or biological or adoptive parent;

    e) number of children released from the custody of the department.

We recommend OCS's director implement procedures to ensure the annual recruitment and retention report is accurate and prepared in compliance with state law.

Recommendation 3:

OCS's director should consider implementing a more comprehensive training program that is grounded in practical applications.

During 2020, OCS began hiring workers with "core competencies" rather than hiring workers with specific qualifications, such as a college degree or prior work experience, as a means to expanding the applicant pool. Around the same time, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, training of new staff switched to a virtual platform. Beginning 2020 through November 2023, new workers were provided five weeks of virtual training and one week of mentoring, often provided remotely. OCS did not collect evidence to demonstrate that six weeks of virtual/remote training adequately prepared new caseworkers hired with core competencies to proficiently provide services.

A legislative consultant hired to review OCS's management structure found the new training program focused on the clinical side of the work, but failed to incorporate practical aspects of the job. In addition, the consultant noted that interviewees described training as taking place remotely with reinforcement "on the job", limited mostly to remotely-delivered mentoring, and coaching by overburdened supervisors and/or overburdened coworkers. Other voluntary supplementary training was not helpful and was difficult to take, given high caseloads.

Alaska Statute 47.14.112(a) requires OCS to implement a longer training program for employees who supervise the care of children committed to the supervision or custody of the Department of Family and Community Services (DFCS). Without a rigorous training program that applies theory to "real life" practice, caseworkers may not be adequately prepared to provide services, which may contribute to higher turnover and lower outcomes.

We recommend OCS's director consider implementing a more comprehensive training program that is grounded in practical applications.

Recommendation 4:

OCS's director should continue to implement hiring best practices.

A legislative consultant hired to evaluate OCS management practices identified that OCS's process to hire staff, and, in particular, frontline caseworkers, was strongly out of alignment with best practices. Furthermore, the hiring process was not realistic, with newly hired caseworkers arriving on the job with little to no understanding of what the job actually entailed.

As communicated by the consultant, hiring best practices require agencies establish and implement realistic, streamlined, and standardized hiring processes. Not having a hiring process in line with best practices may cause major delays in hiring and prevents OCS from hiring many of the strongest candidates it attracts. Furthermore, hiring candidates that do not fully understand job duties increases turnover. Vacancies and turnover negatively impact the availability of services for Alaskan children.

The consultant recommended OCS management implement the following:

- **Streamline the hiring process.** The consultant found that it took around five months to hire caseworkers and communication with candidates over the course of that time was exceedingly poor. As a result, promising candidates dropped out of the process and took other job offers. The consultant recommended that OCS conduct a "business process reengineering" effort to change the processes to meet the needs of job applicants and hiring managers.

- **Be more intentional about recruiting.** The consultant found that being more intentional with its recruiting efforts and actively cultivating a pipeline of talent will help OCS develop a pool of qualified candidates to recruit into vacancies. The consultant recommended that OCS management consider expanding the college pipeline beyond current relationships with the University of Alaska, to include relationships with other universities in other states with a particular focus on social work programs.

- **Expand the use of creative models to fill vacancies in rural offices.** The consultant recognized the difficulty of recruiting frontline workers in rural communities and the lack of available housing in these communities. The consultant recommended that OCS expand its use of creative models to fill these vacancies. For example, OCS can expand its use of a "week-on, week-off" schedule to bring workers to rural communities and utilize State-provided housing.

- **Accurately describe the nature of the job.** The consultant found that many new hires did not understand the job duties prior to being hired. For example, some new hires thought that the position provided childcare, while other new hires thought the position worked primarily with children, when the position worked primarily with adults. The consultant recommended that job descriptions and related competencies be updated to more accurately describe the nature of the job. In addition, a link to a realistic video describing the job could help screen out potential applicants who may have the required competencies, but are not a good fit for the job duties.

In response to the consultant's report, OCS management stated that the division had begun to partner with DFCS's Talent Acquisition team to work on streamlining the hiring process. We recommend OCS's director continue to move forward with implementing hiring best practices as recommended by the legislative consultant.

Recommendation 5:

OCS's director should consider enhancing data to align with best practices and make recruitment and retention efforts more meaningful.

A legislative consultant was hired to determine whether the OCS staffing report was fully aligned with best practices. The consultant concluded that data contained in the staffing report and the recruitment and retention report could be enhanced to make recruitment and retention efforts more meaningful. Specifically, the following enhancements were recommended:

- **Time to fill vacancies:** This metric can be used to evaluate the efficiency of the hiring process and the effectiveness of recruiting strategies.

- **Offer acceptance rate:** This metric can show the success rate of recruitment strategies and provide insight into the clarity of job descriptions. For example, if positions garner high interest, but have low acceptance, it is possible the job descriptions do not accurately detail the specifics of the job.

- **New hire turnover rate:** This metric can show OCS the number of new employees that resign within three months, six months, and/or 12 months, compared to overall agency turnover, to determine if additional supports should be offered to new employees.

- **Supervisor to staff ratio:** While caseload data provides a metric for measuring frontline worker workload, a more accurate picture of supervisor workload can be determined by comparing the number of supervisors to frontline workers.

- **Tenure in key positions:** This metric shows the makeup of staff in key positions in ways valuable to decision-making and continuous improvement in a number of areas, including succession planning for leaders approaching retirement age, learning and development for staff in key supervision/management/leadership positions, and supervision and support strategies for teams of caseworkers. Best practice reporting on tenure includes both total tenure with the organization and how long people have occupied a given key position.

Alaska Statute 47.14.112(b) requires OCS to prepare a staffing report as a result of the department's inability to meet the training requirements and workload standards. The report must include vacancy metrics and a description of the efforts to recruit and retain employees. Furthermore, AS 47.14.112(d) requires OCS prepare and make available to the legislature an annual report on employee recruitment and retention that includes, in part, a five-year plan and employee turnover data.

The above metrics recommended by the consultant were not reported because the metrics were not specifically required by statute. A more data driven approach to evaluating recruitment

and retention may help identify gaps and challenges, which may allow OCS to more effectively address challenges.

We recommend OCS's director consider enhancing the data that is collected and reported to better align with best practices and make recruitment and retention efforts more meaningful.

Recommendation 6:

OCS's director should develop a forward-looking plan for addressing recruitment and retention challenges.

The audit found OCS created a five-year recruitment and retention plan in 2019 and did not update the plan each year to maintain a forward-looking five-year strategy. Rather, OCS provided a status of the 2019 plan as part of its annual recruitment and retention report.

Per AS 47.14.112(d), OCS must prepare and make available to the legislature an annual report on employee recruitment and retention, including a five-year plan for the division. OCS management did not interpret this statute as requiring a forward-looking plan each year.

The lack of a forward-looking recruitment and retention plan increases the risk that OCS may not be effectively planning to address the labor challenges, thereby increasing the risk that challenges will continue.

We recommend OCS's director develop a forward-looking plan for addressing recruitment and retention challenges.

Recommendation 7:

Department of Health's assistant commissioner of finance and management services should liquidate an unsupported $10 million encumbrance.

During 2021, the Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS) website was the target of a cyberattack. When the attack happened, DHSS management believed the department may be fined for a Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act violation and encumbered $10 million of appropriations to pay the potential fine. Of this amount, $2.5 million was encumbered from OCS's frontline workers allocation. At the time of this audit, the federal government had not issued a notice of violation and a valid obligation did not exist.

Alaska Administrative Manual 30.040 requires agencies to review encumbrances prior to year-end and to update and/or liquidate them as necessary. The only encumbrances that may remain at August 31 for prior year authorizations are those that represent valid obligations. Invalid encumbrances at year-end restrict the availability of funds for the future year and may cause financial reporting errors.

We recommend Department of Health's assistant commissioner of finance and management services liquidate the unsupported $10 million encumbrance.

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OBJECTIVES, SCOPE, AND METHODOLOGY

In accordance with Title 24 and Title 44 of the Alaska Statutes and a special request by the Legislative Budget and Audit Committee, we have conducted a performance audit of the Department of Family and Community Services, Office of Children's Services (OCS) compliance with specific foster care reform laws, overall impact of foster care reform, and the use of funding appropriated for that purpose.

Objectives

The audit objectives are as follows:

- Determine whether OCS implemented measurable workload standards for employees who supervise the care of children committed to OCS's supervision or custody, work with families to prevent the removal of a child from the child's home, or investigate reports of harm as required by House Bill (HB) 151.

- Determine whether OCS effectively implemented caseload caps on frontline case managers as required by HB 151.

- Determine whether a staffing report required by AS 47.14.112(b) was prepared and submitted to the legislature and confirm the accuracy of the information in the submitted report. In addition, determine whether the staffing report is based on best practices.

- Determine the accuracy of the most recent annual report on employee recruitment and retention required to be submitted under AS 47.14.112(d).

- Determine whether OCS's management structure is compliant with best practices. The evaluation should include, but not be limited to, a review of the management layers between a front-line social worker and OCS's director and answer the following questions:

  ➢ Do the organizational layers contribute to inefficiencies?

  ➢ Could the organizational chart be restructured to have fewer layers while still providing adequate supervision of caseworkers?

- What is causing delays in hiring OCS workers?

- Define "permanency" in the final audit report. Calculate and report permanency measures and compare the measures to national standards, as well as FFY 18 data. Measures should include:

  - <u>Permanency in 12 Months for Children Entering Care</u>: Of all children who enter foster care in a 12-month period, what percent were discharged to permanency within 12 months of entering foster care?

  - <u>Permanency in 12 Months for Children in Care 12—23 months</u>: Of all children in foster care on the first day of a 12-month period who had been in foster care continuously between 12 and 23 months, what percentage were discharged to permanency within 12 months of the first day?

  - <u>Permanency in 12 Months for Children in Care for 24+ months</u>: Of all children in foster care on the first day of a 12-month period who had been in foster care continuously for 24 months or more, what percentage were discharged to permanency within 12 months of the first day?

  - <u>Re-Entry to Foster Care</u>: Of all children who exit foster care in a 12-month period to reunification, living with a relative, or guardianship, what percentage re-entered care within 12 months of their discharge?

  - <u>Placement Stability</u>: Of all children who enter foster care in a 12-month period, what was the rate of placement moves per 1,000 days of foster care?

- Evaluate the overall impact of HB 151 and other legislative foster care reform efforts on OCS services.

- Identify and report on the amount of funding appropriated for foster care reform and use of those funds.

Scope

The audit examined the OCS 2023 annual report dated November 15, 2023, which covered the period October 1, 2022 through September 30, 2023, as well as OCS support for the report. The annual report included both the report on employee recruitment and retention, as well as the staffing report. Workload standards, also referred to as caseload caps, were calculated and evaluated as of March 15, 2024. Federal permanency measures were obtained from data compiled from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Children and Families, Children's Bureau, Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) Data Profiles as of February 2024 for the State of Alaska. Budget and expenditure information for OCS was obtained from FY 16 through FY 23. A legislative consultant evaluated OCS's management structure as of the fall of 2023 (mid-September through mid-December). Overall conclusions regarding the impact of foster care reform were based on the results of this audit, as well as the results of Part I and Part II audits, which were dated November 10, 2020, and November 21, 2023, respectively.

Scope Limitation

The audit could not evaluate the caseload data in OCS's 2023 annual recruitment and retention report because OCS staff did not maintain support for the reported data.

Methodology

To address audit objectives, auditors:

- Gained an understanding of child protective services and foster care by reviewing HB 151, and statutes and regulations governing training and workload standards, caseload caps, and reports to the legislature.

- Reviewed articles, reports, and documents issued by federal agencies and other state auditor offices, to gain an understanding of issues surrounding foster caseworker recruitment and retention, training, caseload, and permanency of children in care.

- Reviewed reports and documents issued by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Children and Families, Children's Bureau, to gain an understanding of CFSR's data profiles, federal data quality checks for data submitted by states, and various CFSR measures related to permanency and well-being of children in care.

- Obtained Alaska's CFSR data profiles from OCS management and compiled the data profiles for inclusion in the audit report.

- Reviewed OCS child protective services manuals to gain an understanding of written policies and procedures related to caseworker training, initial assessments and investigations, caseworker visits, secondary case assignments and out-of-town requests, and permanency goals and permanency planning.

- Conducted interviews, observations, and walkthroughs with OCS management and staff to gain an understanding of the following:

  - Workload standards implemented by OCS;

  - Data quality procedures over OCS's data information system;

  - Process for submitting foster care data to federal databases and passing federal quality checks;

  - Identifying and tracking case carrying and non-case carrying workers;

  - Caseworker assignments including primary, secondary, administrative, and supervisory assignments;

  - Caseload management and caseload caps;

  - Process for tracking worker vacancies; and

  - Methodologies for calculating worker caseload, vacancy, and turnover rates.

- Obtained and reviewed budget information from the Alaska Division of Legislative Finance's website and Alaska Office of Management and Budget's website to gain an understanding of OCS's budget, including position count and budget transfers.

- Generated and analyzed reports from the State's accounting system to gain an understanding of changes in OCS's authorized budgets and significant uses of funding from FY 16 through FY 23.

- Obtained and compiled statistical data on child protective services published on OCS's website for calendar years 2015 through 2023 to gain an understanding of OCS, including the number of children served, reports of alleged maltreatment received and reviewed, and investigations completed.

- Examined OCS personnel and position data from the State's payroll system and compared the information to OCS's support for vacancy and turnover information to verify the accuracy of OCS's 2023 annual report.

- Obtained case data and analyzed worker assignment information of open cases to determine the caseload counts and averages as of March 15, 2024. Data from the State's payroll system was also used in the auditors' calculation of worker caseloads.

- Contracted with a public sector consultant to:

  ➢ Evaluate whether OCS's management structure is aligned with best practices.

  ➢ Determine if organizational layers contribute to inefficiencies.

  ➢ Determine if the organizational chart should be restructured to have fewer layers while still providing adequate supervision of caseworkers.

  ➢ Determine what is causing delays in hiring OCS workers.

➢ Determine whether the staffing report prepared by OCS, as required by AS 47.14.112(b), was based on best practices and suggest improvements.

To gain assurance over the reliability of the consultant's work, an auditor observed eight of the group interviews conducted by the consultant.

Conclusions and recommendations from the consultant's report were reviewed and evaluated for inclusion in the audit report. The consultant's full report, which includes their methodology, is included as Appendix A of this report.

• Inquired with the Department of Administration's Division of Personnel and Labor Relations regarding select consultant findings and recommendations to gain an understanding of delays in the hiring process and efforts to improve the hiring process.

• Obtained and reviewed OCS's 2023 Annual Progress and Services Report, OCS's 2023 Staff Surveys Report, the Child Welfare Academy's FY 23 Annual Report, and the Citizen Review Panel's 2022—2023 Annual Report to gain an understanding of OCS's operations.

Payroll and financial accounting system internal controls were evaluated as part of the Division of Legislative Audit's annual financial audit. Generally, the internal controls were found to be operating effectively. Auditors reviewed federal data quality checks related to Alaska's CFSR data profiles and found the data profiles to be reliable for inclusion in the audit report. No other internal controls were tested as no other controls were found significant to the audit objectives.

APPENDIX SUMMARY

Appendix A: Analysis of Management Structure, Alaska Office of Children's Services Final Report issued by Public Consulting Group. This consultant was hired by the Division of Legislative Audit to evaluate whether Alaska's Office of Children's Services management structure was aligned with best practices.

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Analysis of Management Structure
Final Report
ALASKA OFFICE OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Public Consulting Group

Prepared for the Alaska Division of Legislative Audit

3/12/24, v2.0

PUBLIC CONSULTING GROUP

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Alaska Division of Legislative Audit (DLA) contracted with Public Consulting Group LLC (PCG) to evaluate whether the **management structure of the Office of Children's Services (OCS) is compliant with best practices.** The evaluation includes a review of the management layers between frontline social workers and OCS's director and an evaluation of related best practices. PCG conducted a thorough literature review of best practices and held more than 80 interviews with more than 200 OCS staff.

In this report, PCG provides best practice recommendations and answers the following three audit questions:

- Question 1: Do the organizational layers contribute to inefficiencies?
- Question 2: Could the organizational chart be restructured to have fewer "layers" while still providing adequate supervision of caseworkers?
- Question 3: What is causing delays in hiring OCS workers?

PCG conducted in-person and virtual focus groups and individual interviews in all five regions. In the expedited timeframe for this scope of work, our team conducted a **total of 80 interviews with more than 200 different staff** from a cross-section of roles and positions within OCS (licensing, protective services, administrative staff, etc.). PCG requested that OCS identify staff member interviewees from each of the three following categories specifically requesting that group interviews avoid including a staff person with their supervisor:

1. Individual contributor – does not supervise staff
2. Supervisor – supervises at least 1 staff person
3. Manager – supervises supervisors

Our team identified seven best practices relevant to these questions based on research coupled with our experience as a national leader in child welfare. We then outlined **20 specific, actionable components in relation to the best practices**. In this report, we offer a scoring of OCS's current state of "Component in Place" and "Component in Practice" as yes, partially, or no as specified in the table below.

	Definition	Yes	Partially	No
Component in Place	Does the component exist at OCS?	There is a policy or procedure that indicates the component is in place within OCS.	The component is informally in place, with no formal documentation.	The component is neither formally nor informally in place.
Component in Practice	Is the component being practiced at OCS?	The component is actively practiced throughout the agency.	The component is sometimes being practiced or practiced by some groups and not others.	The component is not being practiced anywhere in OCS.

Of the 20 components related to best practices, eight (8) were in place, 10 were partially in place, and two (2) were not in place. In addition, **two (2) components were in practice, 16 components were partially in practice, and two (2) components were not in practice.**

Below is a summary of our findings, including recommendations:

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SUPERVISORY BEST PRACTICES

The three best practices and 11 associated components that we identified in relation to supervision are as follows:

Best Practice	Component	Component in Place	Component in Practice
1.1 Implement a Supervisory Model or Framework	A written description of the agency's child welfare practice philosophy and approach.	Yes	Partially
	The functions and specific job responsibilities of child welfare supervisors are clearly defined and described.	Partially	Partially
	The agency has established and monitors manageable standards for child welfare caseloads.	Yes	Partially
	The agency's expectations for ongoing evaluation of case managers are clearly articulated.	Yes	Partially
	Supervisors are supported by management in their roles as unit leaders.	Partially	Partially
	Supervisors are included in the hiring, selection, and training process.	Partially	Partially
1.2 Establish and Maintain a Supervisory Span of Control	The supervisor to supervisee ratio is one supervisor to every five case managers.	Partially	Partially
1.3 Case Managers Feel Supported by Supervisors	Supervisors have education, experience, or a combination of both.	Partially	Partially
	Supervisors are available to staff both formally and informally.	Yes	Yes
	Supervisors utilize group supervision as a method to build case manager knowledge and establish a sense of teamwork.	Partially	Partially
	Senior management and supervisors provide regular recognition of supervisors and frontline workers' accomplishments.	Partially	Partially

Recommendations

After reviewing OCS practices against these supervisory best practices, the following recommendations for OCS continuous improvement emerged:

1. More clearly **define and communicate what is expected of people managers** at all levels of the organization. Inconsistencies were noted regarding supervisory practices (e.g., frequency and focus of 1:1 check-ins, availability to answer time-sensitive questions when workers were conducting remote home visits) and management practices (e.g., PSM 1 approaches to and philosophies regarding "skip level" contacts and relationship-building with caseworkers). Consider updating job descriptions to be more specific and clarifying expectations around supervisor-staff member routine communications and "skip level" contacts between managers and staff members two or more levels below them in the hierarchy. Continue building on efforts to provide all people managers with Facilitating Attuned Interactions (FAN) training and hold people managers at all

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levels of the organization accountable for demonstrating related reflective supervision behaviors and cultivating supportive supervisory relationships.

2. Explore options for building upon existing strategies in place to **provide additional supports to newly hired caseworkers** as a complement to the support provided by supervisors and mentors (e.g., lead worker model, supervisor focused exclusively on new hires, mentors located in field offices versus centralized location).

3. Encourage **teaming approaches to how PSS 1's and 2's manage cases**, including but not limited to conducting joint home visits, consulting with each other about complex case-related decisions, supporting and consoling each other through difficult experiences on the job, and getting answers to questions. While we understand staffing challenges make this difficult, benefits of teaming approaches to case management include strengthening worker comfort levels and physical safety during home visits as well as worker retention and engagement (e.g., the Gallup organization has identified "having a friend at work" as one of the top 12 reasons why workers stay at and commit to organizations that employ them). Worker teaming can also free up supervisor time and focus, as a subset of questions and consultation that otherwise would fall to supervisors (often in ad hoc ways that take supervisors out of the "flow" of their work) would be addressed by peers. While we recognize that OCS management may perceive some potential risks associated with peers providing counsel not fully aligned to agency policy and protocol, these risks can be minimized by coaching workers in teaming arrangements and/or encouraging teaming between more experienced and less experienced workers. Interviewees described receiving widely varying guidance from different supervisors and managers (e.g., PSS 4's and PSM 1's) related to caseworker teaming, including some caseworkers being told they were not allowed to conduct joint home visits with other caseworkers.

4. **Strengthen new caseworker training, "SKILS", by utilizing significant feedback from newly hired staff to enhance its value and effectiveness**. Interviewees described current training for new hires as taking place entirely remotely and exclusively before workers start managing cases, with reinforcement "on the job" limited to almost exclusively remotely-delivered mentoring (in person mentoring only happens when one of the six mentors across the state happen to be collocated with the new hire's they're assigned to mentor), coaching by overburdened supervisors and/or overburdened co-workers, and largely voluntary supplementary training that caseworkers described as not very helpful and almost impossible to take given pressures on them to "make their numbers" in the face of high caseloads. PCG recommends a revised model that combines in-person pre-service (delivered before starting to manage cases) training, mentoring with a required in-person component, shadowing of experienced workers (or if all workers in the office are new, the new hire's supervisor) and a mix of in-person and remotely-delivered in-service training continuing for the first few months.

5. **Ensure OCS staff know how to access up-to-date standard operating procedures** (SOPs) and desk manuals for administrative tasks (e.g., updating ORCA database, determining eligibility), which frontline workers and SSAs and administrative support staff can utilize in order to maximize the amount of time supervisors can devote to core supervisory activities vs answering procedural questions.

6. Allow OCS staff **more flexibility in scheduling and altering their travel schedule** so that bottlenecks and delays aren't created by going through the travel unit.

7. Follow through on work underway in the development of a **standardized training program for OCS administrative and support staff** that includes an onboarding training curriculum.

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CULTURE AND STRUCTURE BEST PRACTICES

The three best practices and five associated components that we identified in relation to organizational culture and structure are as follows:

Best Practice	Component	Component in Place	Component in Practice
2.1 Institute the Practice of Continual Quality Improvement	The agency has performance metrics for its services, which are tied to children and family outcomes.	Yes	Yes
	The agency has processes in place and staff capacity to produce, manage and analyze data reports. This can include dedicated time for all levels of staff to review data reports, discuss insights, and plan improvements.	Yes	Partially
2.2 Employ an Agency Wide Internal Communication Strategy	The agency has an internal communication plan.	Yes	Partially
	The agency has implemented two-way communication/open sessions between management and frontline staff.	Partially	Partially
2.3 Create Dotted Line Relationships Between Units	There is a shared understanding among staff and managers about how dotted line reporting relationships can be beneficial in practice.	Partially	Partially

Recommendations

After reviewing OCS practices against these culture and structure best practices, the following recommendations for OCS continuous improvement emerged:

1. **"Close the loop" more consistently back to staff who provide input, suggestions, and feedback to management**, communicating to them what was done with their input, what related decisions were made, and why those decisions were made so that frontline staff feel heard.
2. **Communicate organizational changes** in **clear** ways that provide people affected by the changes the information they need to understand *why* changes are being made, *how* the changes affect their specific job and function, and *what* they need to do differently from what they have been used to. Also, communicate changes in a **timely** way, using **multiple methods** and to the greatest extent possible (acknowledging that some changes – like changes in Federal or State legislation forcing changes in policy or practice -- may need to be communicated and implemented more rapidly than best practice would dictate) **repeatedly over the course of weeks or month** leading up to implementation of the change. As an example, frequently referenced in interviews of how current communication strategy does not appear to be meeting the needs of staff, the new performance evaluation system and related processes and procedures appears to have been communicated right before roll out and in an unclear and incomplete fashion, leading to inconsistent implementation of the new practice. While some organizational changes are being driven at the state level outside of OCS's control, a more focused effort to notify staff of policy and practice changes will help staff feel more prepared to implement changes in policy and practice.
3. **Explore ways to strengthen organizational data capacity and related protocols** to reflect the agency's heightened focus on managing to data since passage of HB151. Consider some combination of the following:
   a. Emphasize in dialogues with AK IT staff the importance and urgency of OCS gaining access to more modern and powerful analysis and reporting technology like Power BI or equivalent, given the heightened focus on data related to passage of HB151
   b. Hire more central office data analysis and reporting staff

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 c. Analyze management's ad hoc data requests from the past year or two (or a different timeframe that includes enough volume to allow patterns to be identified) and identify and develop more standardized reports that can be run at "the push of a button" (or at least with significantly less staff time needed as compared to ad hoc reports)

 d. Conduct a one-time "data clean-up" effort to strengthen data validity and staff confidence in centrally administered OCS data

 e. Review, update as needed, and communicate to staff across the state protocols for requesting data reports and self-service data reporting. Goals of protocols should be to empower field staff (e.g., PSM 2's, PSM 1's and Research Analysts) to "pull" their own data where it makes sense within clearly established boundaries, clarify timeframes and parameters for requesting ad hoc reports from central office data staff, and manage a transparent and realistic pipeline of requests for and work to provide new standardized reports.

HIRING BEST PRACTICES

The best practice and four associated components that we identified in relation to hiring are as follows:

Best Practice	Component	Component in Place	Component in Practice
3.1 Establish and Implement Streamlined Hiring Processes	Job descriptions lay out the required competencies and credentials. The agency has posted a Realistic Job Preview (RJP) that candidates can review and comprehend.	Partially	Partially
	The hiring process is streamlined to the minimum required steps so that candidates can progress quickly through the process.	No	No
	Hiring committees evaluate candidates using a consistent process based on a standard set of job competencies.	Yes	Partially
	The agency has a standard recruitment strategy.	No	No

Recommendations

After reviewing OCS practices against these hiring best practices, the following recommendations for OCS continuous improvement emerged:

1. **Streamline the hiring process.** We heard consistently from interview participants that that time to hire PSS 1's and 2's (i.e., the time from when a job is posted to when a candidate is hired) is somewhere on the order of five months and that communication with candidates over the course of that time is exceedingly poor (e.g., candidates not receiving any communication for a month or more related to the status of their application and interview process). As a result, interviewees noted a pattern of promising candidates dropping out of the process to take other job offers. PCG recommends that OCS conduct a "business process reengineering" (BPR) effort of a type applied routinely across industries and government agencies to make processes more efficient, with shorter timeframes, lower error rates, and better experiences by agency customers. In the case of hiring process, the people managing the process (generally a centralized Human Resources unit) need to meet the needs to sets of customers – job applicants and hiring managers. The following are typical steps followed in the kind of BPR process PCG feels is urgently needed in Alaska:

 a. **Identify process steps.** Steps are the discrete tasks within a process that have a specific stop and start. We start by charting the major process steps, identifying a specific start and finish point. In the example below, eligibility determination is the final output. Our understanding is that Alaska's hiring process has 27 steps, which is far in excess of best practice for a hiring process of this type.

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b. **Identify the actors and/or departments.** Look at the process across the different individuals or departments that play a role, then move the steps into appropriate swim lanes to help understand the bigger picture.

c. **Identify process checkpoints.** Most processes are not linear, and include various decisions points, quality checks, corrections, and rework. Identify these "checkpoints," and identify how often processes move along the various paths.

d. **Determine time estimates for each step.** For each step in the process, determine time estimates, either through observation, formal time studies, or discussions with subject matter experts. Document **process time**, which is the time required to manually complete tasks within a step, and **delay time**, which includes the amount of time that work remains untouched before entering a process step and the amount of time that a task is not *actively* being worked on after it has entered the process step.

e. **Determine the first-time yield for each process step.** To help identify areas for improvement, capture the **first-time yield** for each step. This represents the percentage of the time that a process step is done correctly on the first attempt.

f. **Determine the percent of value-add activities.** As a next step, differentiate between value-added activities and non-value added activities in each process step. **Value-added activities** are those that contribute directly to the end product/service and are worth the effort of doing. **Non-value added activities** are not worth the time or effort. These percentages are a product of external value add (is there a true value to the customer) and internal value add (how efficient are the process steps themselves).

g. **Determine data collection points.** Identify where data is collected throughout the process. This contributes to a deeper analysis of the data, and help an agency learn more about process efficiency and performance levels.

h. **Produce Process Scorecard.** The purpose of a Process Scorecard is to provide a quick snapshot of current inefficiencies and identify opportunities for improvement.

i. **Conduct root cause analysis.** Take *symptoms* uncovered through the process analysis and trace them to their *root causes* by asking "why?" as many times as necessary until analysis hits on causes that are *actionable*. Typical categories of root causes of process inefficiency include Process Flow, Work Efficiency, Leadership, and Environment. While these are not all-inclusive, they serve as a reliable starting point during root cause analysis. One other useful tool during this stage of analysis is root cause mapping, also known as **Fishbone Diagramming**. These visual representations of symptoms and causes keep front of mind the bigger picture of issues contributing to the problem.

j. **Conduct visioning and design**, which gets the BPR Team thinking about how the future might work and how close the organization is to making that future a reality. The focus here is on the "should be" rather than the "could be." Basic ground rules for Visioning Session participants include:
   i. Don't be restricted by present day realities
   ii. Don't consider costs
   iii. All ideas are good ideas
   iv. Look to the future
   v. Design ideal processes

k. **Gap analysis** involves comparing the current state to the future state and outlining the "gaps" between them. After having identified the gaps, the BPR Team determines necessary actions steps required to close the gap and the resulting implications.

l. **Options analysis** involves determining the feasibility and benefits of any given process improvement. At this point the process moves from what the process "should be" to what it "could be," taking into account constraints and the potential impact of each option. Consider developing a set of weighted criteria and then score each option based on those criteria. The end product is a ranked set of options for implementation. While additional decisions will need to be made when considering other environmental factors, this scoring method provides a more objective basis for choosing the best candidates for implementation. One way to rank improvement options is to complete a **Prioritization Matrix** which maps the anticipated benefit of an option to its ease of implementation. The

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BPR Team identifies the right location for each option based on ballpark estimates, identifying options that are high priority, medium priority and low priority in ways that get to priorities more quickly and efficiently, while with slightly less precision.

m. **Decision making and change planning.** Equipped with all of the completed tools for analyzing options for the "to be" process, the BPR team makes recommendations to management regarding the proposed way forward, identifying a backlog of change projects to effect the shift from "as is" to "to be" states for the hiring process.

While this process may appear laborious on its face, experienced BPR professionals can conduct this kind of analysis on a process like the state's process to hiring into vacant OCS positions in a matter of a few months with minimal disruption to current operations. The potential gains for Alaska are significant as an inefficient, five-month process to hire into vacant frontline caseworker positions is not sustainable if the state wishes to realize the gains envisioned by the legislators who passed HB151

2. **Expand and be more intentional about recruiting.** Actively cultivating a pipeline of talent likely to have the unique combination of core skills and mindset required for successful frontline child welfare casework can help agencies like OCS develop a pool of qualified candidates to recruit into vacancies when they open up, leading to quicker and higher quality applications than relying on less strategic, more passive recruitment strategies like relying on people to find job postings on state job boards, other general hiring platforms like Indeed or Monster, or general social media channels like Facebook or X. One avenue for OCS to consider is expanding the college pipeline beyond current relationships with the University of Alaska, including relationships with universities in other states with a particular focus on social work programs. We interviewed a number of workers who were drawn to Alaska from other states and shared their perspective that Alaska has a unique draw for people who love the outdoors and prefer to live and work close to nature not only for them but for others like them, and strategically partnering with respected university-level social work and other public service-focused programs and their job placement offices holds promise for helping OCS source for talent more efficiently and fill vacancies more quickly with candidates more likely to stay and thrive than many of its recent hires who have left in a matter of weeks or a few months.

3. Due to the difficulty of recruiting frontline workers from local communities and a lack of available housing in rural communities, which leads to vacancies in these communities not being filled in a timely manner, OCS should **expand the use of creative models to fill the vacancies of rural offices.** Examples of these models include:
   a. Letter of Agreement (LOA) Model: This model, successfully being used in the Nome field office, utilizes a 'week-on, week-off' schedule to bring workers into rural communities through a letter of agreement with OCS.
   b. Traveling caseworkers: This model, currently being utilized in Dillingham, fills frontline positions in rural field offices with staff based in larger field offices by allowing them to work an alterative work schedule, which typically involves one to two weeks of travel to the rural field office to conduct investigations and other face-to-face work per month.
   c. Utilizing state provided housing: Other agencies in Alaska, such as state troopers and police, provide housing to employees who are relocating to rural areas since there are housing scarcities in rural communities.

4. Continue updating PSS 1 and PSS 2 job descriptions and related competencies to **more accurately describe the nature of the job** and include link to realistic job preview video. This strategy can help decrease delays in hiring by screening out potential applicants who may "check the boxes" of the current competency set being used for hiring but are not fundamentally a good fit for the unique rigors and characteristics of the job. A number of supervisory and management-level interview participants told us that the current process requires them to interview these candidates even though early in interviews it is very clear that they are not a good fit for the job, and that these candidates are slowing down the process of getting to high quality hires with strong likelihood to stay and thrive.

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AUDIT QUESTIONS – PCG FINDINGS
Question 1: Do the organizational layers contribute to inefficiencies?

> **Finding: OCS's organization layers generally do not contribute to inefficiencies.**

The first question posed in the audit is whether OCS's organizational layers contribute to inefficiencies. Overall, PCG's assessment is that OCS's current number of layers both at the state and regional offices is generally in line with sister agencies across the country, and actually shaded toward having fewer layers than is the standard. **It is PCG's overall assessment that OCS's organizational layers generally do not contribute to inefficiencies.** However, in interviews PCG heard about inefficiencies within the management structure that aren't necessarily associated with the layers within the organization.

Best practice is for people at all levels of an organization to have the information, support, and resources they need to effectively do their jobs. The key to this practice is for people managers to have a clear understanding of what the organization expects of them as people managers. They then need to carry out their people management roles in ways that are consistent across the organization for which they receive support and are held accountable. This allows them to effectively support their teams including the case managers that serve the families of Alaska. It also allows the organization to do people management work efficiently because all people managers share the same understanding of their role and receive consistent support and accountability.

Question 2: Could the organizational chart be restructured to have fewer "layers" while still providing adequate supervision of caseworkers?

> **Finding: OCS's ability to provide adequate supervision of caseworkers is not perpetuated by OCS having too many managerial layers.**

The overall sentiment expressed in interviews was that layers within OCS are sufficient and not overly cumbersome. Most staff agreed they were able to easily communicate with their supervisor and they felt supported. However, supervisors themselves did not feel positioned for success as they generally had to balance supervisory tasks with managing their own caseloads, while training new staff who they felt are not adequately trained through Standards, Knowledge, and Insight Leading to Success (SKILS) and mentoring. They also expressed having to work overtime without additional compensation, in contrast with colleagues who are Protective Services Specialist 3. In some regions, supervisors described a culture of not being able to go to other supervisors or not feeling empowered to answer a question posed by another supervisor.

The following summarizes major challenges expressed in interviews by staff, both frontline and supervisors:

- Current work culture of OCS.
- Impact of vacancies on adequate supervision.
- Lack of clear and current policies and procedures to govern supervisors' levels of empowerment, expectations for collaboration, and other aspects of collaborative supervisory practice.
- Inadequate training or no training.
- Changes being made by the state office based on the perceptions of the needs of the regional staff or the downstream effects of the changes.
- Communication from the state office to the regional offices.

Overall, PCG does not see these expressed challenges as being created and perpetuated by OCS having too many managerial layers. Root causes instead appear more grounded in a lack of explicitly articulated, effectively communicated, effectively trained, and consistently reinforced leadership, management, and supervisory practices.

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Question 3: What is causing delays in hiring OCS workers?

> **Finding: Alaska's current process for hiring does not meet best practice standards. Hiring delays are caused by the hiring process being used for OCS staff, and particular frontline caseworkers, being neither realistic nor streamlined, two of the three hallmarks of a best practice hiring process.**

The final question asked by DLA focuses on what is causing delays in hiring OCS workers. This question is specifically focused on the causes of timing delays versus any potentially related staffing challenges associated with staff turnover and retention. Based on the evidence gathered, **PCG feels that Alaska's current process for hiring does not meet best practice standards**, and based on what we learned it appears that **planned changes to the process may actually move the process even further away from alignment with best practices**. Hiring delays are caused by the hiring process being used for OCS staff, and particular frontline caseworkers, being neither **realistic** nor **streamlined**, two of the three hallmarks of a best practice hiring process.

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BACKGROUND

The Office of Children's Services (OCS) within the Alaska Department of Family and Community Services (DFCS) is the state agency responsible for ensuring the safety, permanency, and well-being of children by strengthening families, engaging communities, and partnering with tribes. In short, OCS helps keep children safe, establishes permanency for children who have been removed from kin or relatives, ensures cultural continuity for children, and supports child and family well-being.

Like many of its sister agencies throughout the nation, OCS has experienced an increase in investigations of child abuse and neglect, an increase in the number of children in its care, and a shortage of staff throughout the agency. This combination of factors creates heightened risk of child endangerment or a child death.

OFFICE OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES'S ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

OCS is a large organization with many staff. The state office is responsible for functions that touch all areas of the state, including general program oversight, administration, and support. OCS has five regional offices spread across the state responsible for the provision of direct services available to Alaskan citizens. The regional offices are also responsible for regional oversight and administration.

Regional staff are assigned to field offices, which cover distinct parts of the region. There are 21 total field offices. Some field offices are assigned only one Protective Services Specialist (PSS) and/or Social Services Associate (SSA) based on the size of the area covered by that office. Supervisors shared that several field offices have not had an assigned staff for years due to difficulty hiring someone to be based in that area. This is particularly true for the more remote field offices.

State Office

OCS is led by a Division Director based in Anchorage. Four managerial staff report to the Division Director along with a Social Services Program Officer (SSPO). Each managerial position leads its own team. Most state office-led teams include staff at state and regional levels, with select exceptions.

On average, there are three layers between the bottom-most OCS state employee on the organizational chart and the Division Director. The greatest number of layers is five and the fewest number of layers is one (i.e., the Division Director's four direct reports).

Some state staff who are housed in regional offices and consider themselves to be regional staff actually report directly to someone at the state office. Examples include Eligibility Technicians responsible for determining eligibility for programs such as Title IV-E and Medicaid for OCS-served families in the region.

Regional Offices

Each of the five regional offices is staffed with various positions and ranks of staff, including administrative and protective services staff. The size of the regional offices varies widely in terms of the number of positions. The Anchorage office has the most staff. Each regional office is headed by a Protective Services Manager (PSM) 2. The PSM 2 reports directly to the state office through the Division Operations Manager.

Nearly all regional staff report up through the PSM 2. However, as discussed above, there are certain units that report to other supervisory or managerial positions housed in the state office. There is an average of

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2.5 layers between a frontline worker and the PSM 2 and 4.5 layers between a frontline worker and the OCS Division Director. The range between the actual number of layers varies from a minimum of two up to a maximum of six.

Isolating only the staff who are child welfare case managers – those classified as a PSS 1, 2, or 3 -- the average number of layers increases to 2.7 and 4.9 respectively. The majority of PSS 1s and 2s report up through a PSS 4, while the majority of PSS 3's report directly to either a PSM 1 or a PSM 2.

CHILDREN DESERVE A LOVING HOME ACT - HOUSE BILL 151

In 2018, Alaska's legislature passed the Children Deserve a Loving Home Act (also referred to as House Bill 151).[1] This Act made major changes to the state's child welfare system, including:

Overall duties of DFCS	Training and workload standards for DFCS	Foster care home licensing	Civil and criminal history background checks
Placement of a child in need of aid	Rights and responsibilities of foster parents	Completed investigations of reports of harm to a child	Providing information to a child or person released from the department's custody
	Empowering youth age 14 and older to participate in their case plans	Stengthened requirements for searching for relatives or friends of the family before placement with a foster parent	

The legislature provided significant financial resources to DFCS in order to meet the various requirements. In FY18, the agency was allotted 31 new positions with another 12 frontline case managers, three supervisor positions, and six support staff being added in FY20.

Children Deserve a Loving Home Act Audit Requirements

In addition, the Act mandated DFCS be subject to and agree to cooperate with a special audit in order to accept the financial and additional resources made to carry out the requirements of the Act. Given the staggered implementation of the various requirements, the audit was designed to take place over multiple years with specific objectives for each year.[2]

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[1] In FY23, the Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS) was restructured into two separate departments. The Department of Family and Community Services (DFCS) includes the Division of Juvenile Justice, the Alaska Psychiatric Institute, Alaska Pioneer Homes, and OCS. All references within HB 151 are to DHSS as it was passed prior to the department restructuring.

[2] Senator Natasha von Imhof. (November 18, 2018). Audit Request – Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Children's Services, per HB 151 (2018).

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FY19	FY20	FY21
• Did DFCS search for an appropriate placement? • Are supervisors certifying in writing that such search occurred? • To what degree did families provide consent for referral to community organizations? • Did DFCS provide foster parent training on the reasonable and prudent parent standard?	• Evaluate DFCS's progress in addressing prior audit findings. • Did the DFCS case manager document efforts were made and the reason why siblings were separated? • Did DHSS implement measureable workload standards and a longer training program? • To what degree are children placed with an unlicensed adult family member? • Did DFCS actively help individuals in custody age 16 or older obtain their birth certificate and other important documents? • Are foster care license applications approved or denied within 45 days?	• Evaluate DFCS's progress in addressing prior audit findings. • Has DHSS effectively implemented caseload caps on frontline case managers? • What should be included in a staffing report and has such a report been prepared and submitted? • Is the most recent annual report on employee recruitment and retention accurate? • Is DFCS' management structure over the foster care system in line with best practices?

The Division of Legislative Audit (DLA) within the State of Alaska Legislative Auditor published a Request for Proposals (RFP) to assist with two components of the FY21 audit. Specifically, the RFP sought a vendor to evaluate whether OCS's management structure complies with best practices including, but not limited to, a review of the layers of management between frontline social workers and the OCS director. The evaluation was to answer three specific questions:

- Question 1: Do the organizational layers contribute to inefficiencies?
- Question 2: Could the organizational chart be restructured to have fewer "layers" while still providing adequate supervision of caseworkers?
- Question 3: What is causing delays in hiring OCS workers?

Further, the evaluation was to include an analysis of the extent to which the staffing report prepared by OCS meets established best practices, and suggest improvements, if applicable.

After a competitive procurement process, Public Consulting Group LLC (PCG) was hired by DLA to perform this evaluation.

Staffing Positions Evaluated within the FY21 Audit

HB 151 implemented training and workload standards specific for "employees who supervise the care of children committed to the supervision or custody of the department…" Within OCS, there are three positions that fall under this definition:

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Position Classification	Position Supervised By
Protective Services Specialist 1 (PSS 1)	Protective Services Specialist 4 (PSS 4)
Protective Services Specialist 2 (PSS 2)	Protective Services Specialist 4 (PSS 4)
Protective Services Specialist 3 (PSS 3)	Protective Services Manager 1 (PSM 1) or Protective Services Manager 2 (PSM 2)

Nationally, the PSS 1, 2, and 3 staff positions are sometimes referred to as frontline workers (those who work directly with children and families), case managers, and case workers. These terms are used interchangeably with the PSS acronym throughout this report.

For the FY21 audit, PSS 1, 2, and 3 staff were the primary focus when evaluating the layers of OCS. Any evaluation of supervision was specific to the PSS 4 classification.

METHODOLOGY
PCG used a mixed method approach to conduct the evaluation of OCS's management structure and staffing report. For the management structure, PCG employed both qualitative and quantitative research.

LITERATURE REVIEW
PCG conducted a scan of available literature and online sources that spoke specifically to the management structure of child welfare agencies. While PCG found significant amounts of research on child welfare, it found minimal research specific to child welfare agency management structures (e.g., the number of layers and structure of those layers in high functioning child welfare agencies). More research was found regarding supervisory ratios, supervisory models, and the hiring and retention of child welfare workers. As a result, PCG zoomed out to find supplemental research on managerial layers in other public sector agencies as well as the private industry.

PCG also reviewed key documents and data provided by OCS describing staff roles, organizational charts, and hiring practices.

IDENTIFY BEST PRACTICES
PCG distilled evidence-based practices, lessons learned, and recommendations from the literature review and compiled best practices pertaining, but not limited to, the three evaluation questions. Examples of the organizations we drew on most in this work include:

- Annie E. Casey Foundation
- Child Welfare Information Gateway
- Colorado Department of Human Services
- National Child Welfare Resource Center for Management and Administration
- National Child Welfare Workforce Institute
- University of Southern Maine's Cutler Institute of Health & Social Policy
- US Government Accountability Office
- Western Carolina University, Department of Social Work

Best Practice Framework

In total, PCG identified seven best practices across the three questions. The best practices were broken down into 20 components to make evaluation and analysis easier.

Each component was evaluated along two dimensions, as defined in the table below:

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Evaluation Area	Definition	Yes	Partially	No
Component in Place	Does the component exist at OCS?	There is a policy or procedure that indicates the component is in place within OCS.	The component is informally in place, with no formal documentation.	The component is neither formally nor informally in place.
Component in Practice	Is the component being practiced at OCS?	The component is actively practiced throughout the agency.	The component is sometimes being practiced or practiced by some groups and not others.	The component is not being practiced anywhere in OCS.

Below are the best practices and components PCG identified, as related to analysis of management structure:

Supervisory Best Practices		
#	**Best Practice**	**Component**
1.1	Implement a Supervisory Model or Framework	A written description of the agency's child welfare practice philosophy and approach.
		The functions and specific job responsibilities of child welfare supervisors are clearly defined and described.
		The agency has established and monitors manageable standards for child welfare caseloads.
		The agency's expectations for ongoing evaluation of case managers are clearly articulated.
		Supervisors are supported by management in their roles as unit leaders.
		Supervisors are included in the hiring, selection, and training process.
1.2	Establish and Maintain a Supervisory Span of Control	The supervisor to supervisee ratio is one supervisor to every five case managers.
1.3	Case Managers Feel Supported by Supervisors	Supervisors have education, experience, or a combination of both.
		Supervisors are available to staff both formally and informally.
		Supervisors utilize group supervision as a method to build case manager knowledge and establish a sense of teamwork.
		Senior management and supervisors provide regular recognition of supervisors and frontline workers' accomplishments.

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Culture and Structure Best Practices		
#	**Best Practice**	**Component**
2.1	Institute the Practice of Continual Quality Improvement	The agency has performance metrics for its services, which are tied to children and family outcomes.
		The agency has processes in place and staff capacity to produce, manage and analyze data reports. This can include dedicated time for all levels of staff to review data reports, discuss insights, and plan improvements.
2.2	Employ an Agency Wide Internal Communication Strategy	The agency has an internal communication plan.
		The agency has implemented two-way communication/open sessions between management and frontline staff.
2.3	Create Dotted Line Relationships Between Units	There is a shared understanding among staff and managers about how dotted line reporting relationships can be beneficial in practice.

Hiring Best Practice		
#	**Best Practice**	**Component**
3.1	Establish and Implement Streamlined Hiring Processes	Job descriptions lay out the required competencies and credentials. The agency has posted an RJP that candidates can review and comprehend.
		The hiring process is streamlined to the minimum required steps so that candidates can progress quickly through the process.
		Hiring committees evaluate candidates using a consistent process based on a standard set of job competencies.
		The agency has a standard recruitment strategy.

FOCUS GROUPS AND INTERVIEWS

PCG conducted in-person and virtual focus groups and individual interviews in all five regions. **A total of 80 interviews were conducted with more than 200 different staff** from a cross-section of roles and positions within OCS (licensing, protective services, administrative staff, etc.). Interviewees were broken into three groups with many of the same questions asked across all levels within OCS. This allowed PCG to better compare the experiences and perceptions both within and across groups and regions.

PCG requested that OCS identify staff member interviewees from each of the three following categories:

1. Individual contributor – does not supervise staff
2. Supervisor – supervises at least 1 staff person
3. Manager – supervises supervisors

Our team informed OCS of the minimum number of staff to include in interviews, per region. We requested to speak to a subset of employees who are representative of each region in terms of tenure, attitudes and perspectives, and demographics. Group interviews were approximately an hour whereas 1:1 interviews were closer to 30 minutes.

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Specifically, we requested that any and all group interviews avoid including both a staff person and their supervisor – we did not want interviewees to be in the same room as their boss. Our goal was for each participant to feel comfortable speaking openly.

Limitations to data collection were present:

- The timeline for conducting interviews and reviewing OCS policy was expedited; our contract began in mid-September and all data interview and policy data needed to be collected by early November in order to meet the Preliminary Report deadline of first week of December.
- The team ran into travel limitations due to weather conditions (i.e., we were unable to hold in-person interviews in Kotzebue and instead conduct virtual interviews at a later date).
- Staff availability was a limitation at times. OCS staff made all efforts to accommodate our interview opportunities when we were on-site but some still could not make it, understandably, due to their schedules. PCG made every effort to make up any such interviews virtually at a later date.

DATA ANALYSIS

Following our data collection, PCG completed a **qualitative and quantitative analysis to determine whether the best practices were in place and in practice within OCS operations.**

We conducted a quantitative analysis of the organizational layers represented in the OCS regional office organizational charts[3] to inform our findings about whether the layers contribute to inefficiencies. We determined the average number of organizational layers between frontline OCS employees and the regional PSM 2 and between the frontline employees and the OCS Division Director. Additional quantitative analysis was completed to calculate the average supervisory and managerial ratios. Both analyses were completed using the organizational charts provided by OCS in November 2023 and were based on the positions listed on the charts, which did not indicate if the position was vacant or not.

The team's qualitative analysis involved digging into focus group and interview meeting summaries and extracting observations related to the three questions. All eight PCG team members who were on-site for the focus groups and interviews engaged in dialogue to identify key themes from the conversations, ensuring perspectives from staff in all regions and all levels were considered. The team then determined, through a consensus-based process, a score of yes, partially, or no for each best practice component and discussed the evidence to justify the scoring. The evidence to support PCG's scoring is detailed in the question sections included in this report.

STAFFING REPORT EVALUATION

PCG is contracted to comment on whether the staffing report prepared by OCS, as required by AS 47.14.112, is based on best practices and suggest improvements, if determined necessary. PCG compared OCS's staffing report to the legislative requirements dictated in AS 47.14.112(b) and determined whether OCS's report met legislative requirements. Additionally, PCG reviewed evidence-based practices in tracking recruitment and retention metrics and made enhancement recommendations for consideration.

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[3] See Appendix B: OCS Master Org Chart

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SUPERVISORY BEST PRACTICES

PCG identified three best practices applicable to supervision within management structure. Each best practice is identified below and then discussed further in the subsequent section.

#	Best Practice	Component	Component in Place	Component in Practice
1.1	Implement a Supervisory Model or Framework	A written description of the agency's child welfare practice philosophy and approach.	Yes	Partially
		The functions and specific job responsibilities of child welfare supervisors are clearly defined and described.	Partially	Partially
		The agency has established and monitors manageable standards for child welfare caseloads.	Yes	Partially
		The agency's expectations for ongoing evaluation of case managers are clearly articulated.	Yes	Partially
		Supervisors are supported by management in their roles as unit leaders.	Partially	Partially
		Supervisors are included in the hiring, selection, and training process.	Partially	Partially
1.2	Establish and Maintain a Supervisory Span of Control	The supervisor to supervisee ratio is one supervisor to every five case managers.	Partially	Partially
1.3	Case Managers Feel Supported by Supervisors	Supervisors have education, experience, or a combination of both.	Partially	Partially
		Supervisors are available to staff both formally and informally.	Yes	Yes
		Supervisors utilize group supervision as a method to build case manager knowledge and establish a sense of teamwork.	Partially	Partially
		Senior management and supervisors provide regular recognition of supervisors and frontline workers' accomplishments.	Partially	Partially

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BEST PRACTICE 1.1: IMPLEMENT A SUPERVISORY MODEL OR FRAMEWORK

Child welfare supervisors play a key role in the job performance and satisfaction for case managers. Their performance directly impacts the ability of a child welfare agency to deliver desired services and outcomes. As such, it is critical agencies develop and implement a model or framework that establishes the boundaries, requirements, and support needed for supervisors to be successful in their role.

A supervisory model or framework enables supervisors to understand their job responsibilities and performance expectations. It also provides the basis for training and coaching to help supervisors develop knowledge, skills, abilities, and mindsets to meet or exceed performance expectations. The overall goal of a supervisory model is to "build and sustain effective child welfare supervision by radically improving the ability of supervisors and the [agency]…to serve the needs of children and families in [its] cities, states, and tribes."[4]

Functions and Specific Job Responsibilities of Child Welfare Supervisors

Research has identified three overlapping functions and specific job responsibilities of child welfare supervisors: [5]

Category	Function	Responsibility
Administrative	Implement organizational objectives and help to ensure the quantity and quality of work achieves the standards expected by the agency.	• Recruit, select, and train (or arrange for training) staff. • Identify, evaluate, and manage frontline practitioners' performance. • Facilitate communication and collaboration. • Build and maintain working relationships with other units in the agency. • Manage caseloads in the supervisor's unit. • Manage their own time and workflow. • Manage time and workflow of the people they supervise. • Monitor frontline practitioners' work. • Provide leadership to their unit. • Provide leadership within the organization. • Anticipate, address, and manage change within the unit. • Anticipate, address, and manage change within agency. • Interpret and influence the organizational culture within the unit. • Provide leadership within the community. • Influence the agency. • Use the management information system (MIS).
Educational	Help staff learn what they need to know to carry out their jobs.	• Communicate job responsibilities, expectations and priorities to people they supervise. • Provide regular case reviews and staffing.

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[4] University of Southern Maine. (2009). *Building a Model and Framework for Child Welfare Supervision.*
[5] The Colorado Department of Human Services in conjunction with the National Child Welfare Resource Center for Management and Administration. (1994). *Standards for Supervision in Child Welfare*.

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Category	Function	Responsibility
		• Address ethics in caseworker practice and model professional and supervisory ethics. • Promote evidence-informed practice. • Develop and monitor frontline practitioners' family-centered practice competence. • Promote and support frontline practitioners' self-reflection, critical thinking, and case decision-making. • Demonstrate culturally competent supervision and develop and monitor frontline practitioners' cultural competence. • Facilitate ongoing professional development for frontline practitioners. • Support frontline practitioners in staying current with child development knowledge. • Help frontline practitioners apply new knowledge from training, workshops, coaching, and other professional development in their day-to-day practice. • Continuously seek out professional development for themselves to strengthen their supervisory practice and stay current on all aspects of evidence-informed, culturally competent, and family centered child welfare practice.
Supportive	Creating a psychological and physical climate that enables staff to feel positive about the job.	• Prevent and address stress, secondary traumatic stress, and burnout for frontline practitioners. • Anticipate issues related to frontline practitioner safety and manage risk. • Build and maintain morale and enhance frontline practitioners' job satisfaction. • Prevent and address stress, secondary traumatic stress, and burnout for themselves as supervisors.

These functions and job responsibilities are drawn from a report by Colorado Department of Human Services in conjunction with the National Child Welfare Resource Center for Management and Administration. They align closely with functions and responsibilities documented in *Building a Model and Framework for Child Welfare Supervision*, co-authored by researchers at the National Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice and Permanency Planning and National Child Welfare Resource Center for Organizational Improvement, respectively (citations included on the previous page).

Research further suggests that the most effective agencies identify competencies for each function, which serve as the foundation for professional development and performance accountability that help supervisors and managers continuously improve skills, knowledge, abilities, and mindsets for effective supervision and management.

Components of Best Practice 1.1: Implement a Supervisory Model or Framework

A best practice supervisory framework considers the following components:

1. A written description of the agency's child welfare practice philosophy and approach.

2. The functions and specific job responsibilities of child welfare supervisors are clearly defined and described.

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3. The agency has established and monitors manageable standards for child welfare caseloads.

4. The agency's expectations for ongoing evaluation of case managers are clearly articulated.

5. Supervisors are supported by management in their roles as unit leaders.

6. Supervisors are included in the hiring, selection, and training process.

The following sections describe each component and PCG's assessment of the extent to which OCS current practice aligns with industry best practice.

Component 1: A written description of the agency's child welfare practice philosophy and approach.

The supervisory practices employed in an agency should support its child welfare philosophy and approach. This philosophy and approach should incorporate state and federal regulatory requirements governing the programs as well as the agency's desired outcomes. An agency can set a supervisor up for success by clearly documenting in writing the following elements and how they relate to expectations for the agency's people managers:

Agency Mission, Vision, and Values	Practice Principles	Standards of Professional Practice
Strategies, Methods, and Tools to Integrate Principles, Values, and Standards of Professional Practice into Daily Practice		

Component 1: Current State Assessment Against Best Practice

Component in Place	Yes	Partially	No
Component in Practice	Yes	**Partially**	No

Evidence to Support Assessment

- OCS has a written mission, vision, guiding principles, and core values. There is a two-page summary of these elements available online and posted in each state and regional office.
- OCS's practice model for its child welfare system is posted on the OCS website. The model generally aligns with the outcomes required by the Federal Child and Family Services review (CFSR).[6] The practice model posted online is dated 2009 and **has not been updated** to reflect the current OCS mission and guiding principles.
- OCS has developed manuals for the majority of positions or types of work. The manuals include processes and regulations for the various programs within OCS's purview. As regulations change, amendments are developed and are intended to be included in the manual for reference. In focus groups, frontline staff, both non-administrative and administrative, consistently described these manuals as outdated (e.g., amendments adopted more recently than the stated effective dates have not been inserted into reversioned and current manuals). A number of focus group participants made reference to manuals with effective dates of 2013 still being used as reference materials. Additionally, there is no manual currently provided for SSAs. These staff play critical support roles in the agency, including in at least one region serving as formal observer to and documenter of supervised child-parent interactions, with the SSAs' documentation included in court records to support a child's placement.

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[6] Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) statewide data indicators provide performance information on states' child safety and permanency outcomes

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Component 2: The functions and specific job responsibilities of child welfare supervisors are clearly defined and described.

As discussed earlier in this section, there are three different but overlapping functions that together constitute best practice child welfare supervision. Best practice is for child welfare agencies to clearly define and describe functions and responsibilities that align to those noted above.

Component 2: Current State Assessment Against Best Practice

Component in Place	Yes	**Partially**	No
Component in Practice	Yes	**Partially**	No

Evidence to Support Assessment

- Each position within OCS has a performance evaluation. As such, the functions of the PSS 4 are documented, and performance is assessed against them.
- Each job title within OCS also has a job description that is included in online postings for vacant positions and a class specification that describes job responsibilities in more detail. While the job description includes a description of duties and related competencies, the description is high level and the competencies are not specific to supervision (e.g., accountability, adaptability, decision making, creative thinking, resilience). The class specification includes a more detailed description of job responsibilities specific to supervision, including supervising staff work, evaluating performance, helping staff manage their caseload, staff observations and training, staffing cases, and recommending policies and procedures.
- OCS has worked with organizational partners to define behaviors people managers throughout OCS are expected to exhibit, including partnering with the Department of Public Health and the Erickson institute to train supervisors in Facilitating Attuned Interactions (FAN) for building supportive supervisory relationships and reflective supervision.
- The majority of PSS 4s interviewed described carrying a caseload either equivalent to or exceeding the PSS 1s and 2s they supervise. This is largely the result of vacancies. Some PSM 1s also described carrying cases, often particularly complex or challenging cases. The class specification states PSS 4s can "handle particularly complex cases" but does not otherwise mention the carrying of a caseload.
- The class specification leans heavily towards the administrative functions of the position, with a smattering of educational responsibilities and less focus on supportive functions.
- In focus groups, administrative supervisors consistently reported their classification description has not been updated to reflect the various duties they are currently carrying out.

Component 3: The agency has established and monitors manageable standards for child welfare caseloads.

Adequate and manageable caseload sizes not only benefit case managers but also supervisors. When caseloads are too high, a supervisor is unable to effectively monitor case activities and progress, which can hinder the agency from meeting its desired outcomes. Additionally, when supervisors are assigned too many case managers, they are unable to develop strong professional relationships and perform the various job responsibilities in a way that benefits the supervisee, the supervisor, the agency, and the community.

Component 3: Current State Assessment Against Best Practice

Component in Place	**Yes**	Partially	No
Component in Practice	Yes	**Partially**	No

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Evidence to Support Assessment

- At the time of this report, case manager caseloads consistently exceeded the standards established through HB 151. These standards are:
  - Four months of tenure: No more than six families
  - Four months of tenure to six months of tenure: No more than 12 families
  - After six months of tenure with no travel impacts: No more than 13 families
  - Six to 12 months of tenure with travel impacts: Between six and 12 families
- The primary reason why caseloads are higher than established standards is staffing vacancies. There is little OCS can do to reduce frontline staff caseloads to the standard outside of hiring additional staff, retaining current staff, and having supervisors and managers carrying caseloads.
- In interviews, some frontline staff expressed their caseloads have improved since the passage of HB 151, while others noted their caseloads as having either stayed level or increased. Given turnover rates among frontline workers (PSS 1's and 2's), the subset of interviewees able to comment on the impact of legislation passed 5 years ago also represents a minority of frontline workers as the majority were hired into OCS more recently than 2018. Variation between offices and teams generally appears to correlate with rates of churn and vacancy among frontline staff as well as supervisors and PSM 1's in the office (as in many cases these supervisory staff members have been carrying cases as well to try to alleviate caseload pressures on frontline staff to the extent possible).
- PCG consistently found, however, that interviewees reported caseload standards for *new* employees are not met consistently due to high vacancy rates.
- HB 151 made provisions for workers with less than 12 months of experience when they supervise "families in a region where travel negatively affect the employee's ability to supervise families." These staff have caseloads limited to between six and 12 families. This provision is not extended to those who have been a worker for over 12 months. Staff of all levels discussed challenges related to travel. These challenges are related to but not solely due to Alaska's geographic makeup. Challenges noted but not accounted for in the caseload standards include:
  - OCS lacks the infrastructure to easily travel and visit families, including housing and well-maintained boats and snow machines. When conducting emergency visits, it is at times necessary for case managers to sleep at schools or other public facilities not set up to house people overnight. People also consistently contrasted the travel and lodging resources available to state troopers with those available to OCS frontline workers.
  - Staff are not authorized to organize their own travel. This adds time and complexity to the travel process and at times results in delays putting further pressure on staff ability to meet investigation and family support standards (e.g., monthly visits to children in OCS care).
- Many field offices outside of regional hubs have been chronically understaffed or completely vacant. As a result, families in these areas do not have a local case manager. Rather, their cases are staffed by workers in other offices who have to complete time consuming and burdensome travel to perform home visits. It is difficult to maintain caseload standards when offices are severely understaffed or completely vacant for long periods of time.
- Staff discussed the value of staffing their caseload with colleagues, both in their own team and in other units. This value includes being able to assist one another in conducting family visits when traveling throughout a given region (thereby limiting the need for OCS to send multiple workers to the same area), keeping each other safe when conducting high risk visits, and forging family relationships with multiple workers which strengthens continuity if one of the workers leaves their position. A number of workers noted joint caseload staffing as having been encouraged in the past but actively discouraged currently.
- HB 151 mandated DFCS prepare and submit an annual staffing report that discusses its ability to meet the training and workload standards. This report is a part of the larger annual report required under Alaska Statute 18.05.020.

Component 4: The agency's expectations for ongoing evaluation of case managers are clearly articulated.

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Evaluating case manager performance is a critical responsibility for all supervisors. When handled well, with consistency and equity, it can support employee development and improve the delivery of client services. Supervisors should be supported and empowered to address staff performance. Staff evaluations should also be monitored to ensure equity across all members of a team as well as across staff with similar job roles. An agency can help supervisors carry out this function by creating specific, well-defined criteria and standards against which staff performance is assessed and providing supervisors training and other professional development supports to conduct effective performance evaluation discussions and documentation.

Component 4: Current State Assessment Against Best Practice

Component in Place	Yes	Partially	No
Component in Practice	Yes	Partially	No

Evidence to Support Assessment

- The Alaska Department of Administration (DOA) mandates all staff have their performance evaluated through an annual performance evaluation process. The DOA conducted a pilot process in 2020 with the aim to subsequently roll it out statewide.
- Interviewed participants noted a new performance evaluation process had been rolled out. However, they felt the new process, including changes in the evaluation criteria, was not well communicated. Staff are unsure about what is required of them because of either poor or a lack of training. It is unclear to PCG whether communication and training on the new process was primarily the responsibility of OCS, DFCS, or DOA.
- In addition to inadequate communication and training, a number of participants reported they did not have performance evaluations completed and communicated to them.
- Failure to complete and submit performance evaluations can directly impact a worker's pay since interview participants reported to PCG any increase in the pay or consideration for promotion (e.g., from PSS 2 to PSS 3) is based on performance documented in formal performance evaluations.
- Staff also discussed how performance evaluation standards are in place but are inconsistently policed and applied. This inconsistency extends to tracking of performance evaluation completion as well as staff monitoring for fair and consistent application of evaluation standards. Some staff reported having evaluations completed by their direct supervisors only to be overridden by managers with whom they rarely, if ever, interacted.

Component 5: Supervisors are supported by management in their roles as unit leaders.

Supervisors play a key role as the unit leaders for their teams. It is a pivotal intermediary role between senior management and frontline staff -- they have insights into current practice at the frontline generally not held by those in senior management and have a firsthand understanding of frontline practice issues and practitioners' and clients' needs and concerns. They play critical roles in frontline staff retention, all the while in many cases juggling supervisory responsibilities with managing their own substantial caseloads. Like all workers, supervisors need strong support from their own direct supervisors to be able to thrive in their roles.

Component 5: Current State Assessment Against Best Practice

Component in Place	Yes	Partially	No
Component in Practice	Yes	Partially	No

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Evidence to Support Assessment

- Most supervisors indicated feeling supported by their direct manager, who is typically the PSM 1 in the regional office.
- Supervisors across all five regions and unit types expressed feeling overwhelmed. Many supervisors are carrying caseloads to cover vacancies in their units. They are providing on-the-job training to supplement SKILS training provided to case managers and translate it from theory into practice. In some instances, supervisors perform general case manager duties, such as home visits in field offices throughout the region, to help cover for vacant positions.
- Many supervisors discussed not feeling adequately supported by state office staff. An example of feeling unsupported is when the state office designs and implements a change to policy or procedure supervisors perceive as not being helpful to their work or the work of people they supervise. A number of interview participants described their perception that statewide changes are at times fully designed and implemented without any input from field staff. We also heard a state office manager describe leading a change process impacting new workers across the state without consulting staff in the regions, expressing they had the information they needed at state office to be able to design and roll out the changes. Interviewed PSS 4s discussed they see state office-driven changes as generally based around the state office's perception of what the frontline staff need and not based on actual need "on the ground". Supervisors also described examples of team members recommending changes to regional management or state office staff and being either overruled by a manager (either regionally or state office) or placated but ignored ("I might as well have thrown my recommendation in the trash"). PSS 4s in multiple regions described managers often fail to provide the "why" behind a decision to overrule a suggested change.
- Supervisors and staff also discussed the newly created PSS 3 role. This position has more advanced knowledge of social work principles but does not supervise staff. To become a PSS 3, one must apply. In focus groups, participants discussed this role was created as a promotional job role, with more pay, a potentially lighter caseload, and no supervision or training responsibilities. An unanticipated consequence of adding this additional job classification is staff hired into the position generally earn a higher wage than a supervisor when accounting for overtime and not being part of the state's supervisor union. When supervisors discussed this pay and responsibility discrepancy with managers, they reported managers had no intention to reevaluate the role and related discrepancies at this time. As a result, many supervisors have discussed applying for these positions when they become available or requesting to demote, and many PSS 3s interviewed expressed little to no interest in taking on supervisory responsibilities.

Component 6: Supervisors are included in the hiring, selection, and training process.

From screening applicants to participating in interviews, supervisors can provide invaluable feedback on the potential fit of applicants and potential for growth into the role. They can also help provide a realistic description of the job to interviewed applicants, which can help reduce the potential that a new worker leaves due to a lack of adequate understanding of the job they're being hired to do. When it comes to training, supervisors are uniquely positioned to provide day-to-day guidance on how to perform the practical side of the job. This is particularly important when formal training programs like SKILS cover only the clinical aspects of the frontline case management and do so before new hires have any opportunity to carry out core job functions.

Component 6: Current State Assessment Against Best Practice

Component in Place	Yes	Partially	No
Component in Practice	Yes	Partially	No

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Evidence to Support Assessment

- The PSS 4 job description specifically states persons in this role will be either an independent or part member of a hiring team, which will interview applicants as well as make recommendations for new hires, promotions, and transfers. Supervisors noted in practice they may or may not be included on the hiring panel for a vacancy on their team.
- DFCS is currently in the process of changing the hiring process to make it more centralized. As a result of this, all hiring will be done at the Commissioner's office and the hiring manager will not be involved.
- Supervisors currently play a significant role in training new workers, both administrative staff and frontline case managers, as formal training is either non-existent or inadequate. For example:
  - There is currently no training program specific to the job duties and responsibilities for OCS administrative and frontline support staff, such as SSAs. Some administrative staff have desk manuals, however interviewees stated consistently manuals for their jobs have not been updated in many years. Other administrative staff reported having no desk manuals. Training for these staff members therefore falls either to the supervisor or to other staff in the unit.
  - All frontline case managers go through a virtual training program called SKILS. Prior to the pandemic health emergency, this training was conducted in-person in Anchorage. Both supervisors and case managers discussed how SKILS training solely focuses on the clinical side of the work (the practice model) but fails to incorporate practical aspects of the job. As a result, when workers come out of training, they lack significant knowledge and skills needed to carry out their day-to-day responsibilities. Training in practical aspects of the job falls either to the supervisor or to others in the unit. This can potentially have negative effects for several reasons:
    - The current job description for PSS 4s does not mandate the individual has any child welfare experience or education. As such, it is possible the supervisor does not have adequate practical experience to meaningfully provide training.
    - Not every worker or supervisor has the skills to be a trainer. In addition, workers asked to help train new colleagues may have work habits that don't align to best practice and should not be spread to new staff members.
    - There needs to be thoughtfulness and intentionality when pairing a new worker with a seasoned worker to learn a specific task. If not, the worker may be exposed to something they are unprepared to learn either due to a lack of knowledge or experience which can cause confusion or feelings of being overwhelmed.
  - HB 151 also mandated DFCS create a corps of employee mentors for case managers. The mentor role is intended to support new case managers after they exit training and up through the first six months on the job. Their support is to help reinforce what trainees learned in SKILS as well as practice the practical side of the job. However, at present, there are six mentors, all centrally located in Anchorage, and they are to support all new workers throughout the state.
    - While mentors were previously case managers, some supervisors and staff mentioned the support mentors provide is in line with the SKILS training and not necessarily how things are done outside of the training room.
    - Some new staff shared it was confusing for them that their supervisors and mentors were not aligned in the application or use of various concepts or methods.
    - Mentors themselves noted frustration they are not able to provide the level of in-person support to new workers feeling it is really needed, particularly given the limitations on the amount of training and hands-on supports PSS 4s can provide due to the factors noted above (carrying cases themselves) and below, as well as in some cases not being located in the same regions as staff they supervise.
- Supervisors noted consistently they recognize and take seriously their responsibility to support and coach new employees. However, they also discussed how difficult it is to fulfill these responsibilities in the way they both want to and is needed because they are carrying their own caseloads and taking on other duties. Additionally, some supervisors discussed how not being co-located with new staff can be difficult to provide support (e.g., all but one of Western Region PSS 4s live in Wasilla,

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and staff in smaller field offices are generally supervised by PSS 4s located in the regional office, often hours and/or a plane flight away). These factors weigh heavily on them and have depressed their morale.

BEST PRACTICE 1.2: ESTABLISH AND MAINTAIN A SUPERVISORY SPAN OF CONTROL

> Quality and supportive supervision is more likely to occur when a supervisor has a defined span of control, consisting both of responsibilities and the number of staff supervised. Spans of control can improve supervision of not only case managers but also of case manager supervisors.

A supervisory span of control provides established boundaries for the different tasks and responsibilities within scope for a supervisor. The span can also establish a maximum limit on the number of case managers for which the supervisor is responsible. A well-defined span of control creates the conditions that allow for a supervisor to deliver quality and supportive supervision. Westbrook & Croley-Simic argue "the quality of supervision is the most significant predictor of job satisfaction for case managers" and supervisory support plays a key role in staff retention.[7] A U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) report supports the argument that supervisors drive staff retention when they identified a lack of supervisory support as well as actual time to supervise led to retention challenges as early as 2003.[8]

Establishment of Supervisor Ratios in the United States

The current best practice for supervisor-supervisee ratios is 1:5. This best practice has been in place since at least 1994 and continues to be cited in national research and by state agencies today. The best practice was established by the Child Welfare League of America's Standards of Excellence for Child Welfare Services and the Council on Accreditations Standards for Public Agencies.

Some states have formally established supervisor ratios for their child welfare case managers or reference the best practice ratios in formal reports.[9] These include:

- Arizona: A 2003 Office of the Auditor General Report cited a goal of having the 1:5 ratio. It stated the Department would need to hire 25 more supervisors to reach the 1:5 ratio.
- Florida: The 2018 Child Protective Investigator and Child Protective Investigator Supervisor Educational Qualification, Turnover, and Working Conditions Status Report indicated the current supervisor ratio was 1:5.
- Indiana: The 2019 Annual Staffing and Caseload Report cited the current supervisor ratio was 1:5.
- Kansas: 2020 Special Committee on Foster Care Oversight Report cited the current supervisor ratio was 1:5.
- New Hampshire: The Division for Children, Youth and Families has a policy outlining Standards for Supervision. It does not reference supervisor ratios.
- Pennsylvania: Supervisor ratios are codified in Pennsylvania Code at 3130.32. Statute mandates that the average supervisor to case manager ratio not exceed 5 case managers to every 1 supervisor.
- Virginia: The 2018 Improving Virginia's Foster Care System Report mentioned the 1:5 supervisory ratio.

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[7] Westbrook, T. M. & Crolley-Simic, J. (2012). *Perceptions of Administrative and Supervisory Support in Public Child Welfare.*

[8] US Government Accountability Office. (2003). *Child Welfare: HHS Could Play a Greater Role in Helping Child Welfare Agencies Recruit and Retain Staff.* GAO-03-357.

[9] Several of the reports mentioned above reference Delaware, New Jersey, and Tennessee as having supervisor ratios, however, we were unable to locate these ratios.

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Points of Consideration Regarding Supervisory Spans of Control

There are several points of consideration when agencies seek to drive changes to supervisory spans of control:

- A supervisor can supervise a greater number of staff when they are primarily responsible for answering questions and solving rudimentary problems.[10] However, supervisors who need to direct tasks, provide intensive support, and problem solve for critical or complex situations benefit from supervising fewer people and having fewer job responsibilities, thereby reducing supervisor overload and increasing quality of staff supervision.
- Additional staff need to be hired when job responsibilities that still need to be completed (e.g., administrative responsibilities) are shifted away from supervisors to free them up to focus on core supervisory tasks.
- Lowering staff-to-supervisor ratios may require hiring more frontline supervisors, which in turn leads to a more hierarchical organization, particularly if additional senior managers are needed to maintain manageable spans of control higher up the organizational chart. Increased hierarchy can in turn lead to:
  - Increased communication challenges due to there being more organizational layers between executive leadership and frontline practitioners.
  - Delays in decision-making due to increased requirements for upstream decision approval.
  - Budgetary pressures due to the need to pay for additional supervisory and management positions.

  It is worth noting that while we have seen other states (e.g., Texas) struggle with this in the past when legislatures authorized funds to hire frontline staff without initially authorizing funds to hire a proportionate number of supervisory and management staff, we do not see this risk applying to OCS at this point. As noted below, we heard supervisors (PSS 4's) in interviews consistently describing their span of supervision as manageable, *particularly* if fully staffed versus facing high PSS 1 and 2 vacancy rates (as supervisors would be freed up to focus on people management versus having their focus split between managing their own cases, ramping up a steady stream of new hires, and supporting current case managers reporting to them).
- Staff-to-supervisor ratios below best practice levels can bring negative unintended consequences as well, including reduced employee empowerment, decreased delegation, and increased micromanagement.

Managerial Ratios

There is little research on the number of staff a child welfare manager should supervise. Managers are defined as the individuals who supervise frontline supervisors. Many of the same arguments are made for why a limited span of control should be in place for supervisors apply to managers. The critical role of the supervisor means they too should be provided with quality and supportive supervision.

A managerial or executive position should have fewer direct reports as they move up in the organization. When executives or senior managers have too many direct reports, they are more prone to create communication difficulties and increase the amount of time needed to respond to critical decisions.

McKinsey & Company provide two ratios for managers:[11]

- Managers who have a high level of individual responsibility and work with direct reports who have more variation in their roles: 1:6 to 1:7.
- Managers who are a leader in the agency, who have to make strategic decisions, and who manage employees with a large number or multiple areas of responsibility: 1:3 to 1:5.

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[10] ERC. (2014). *Span of Control: How Many Employees Should Your Supervisors Manage?*
[11] McKinsey & Company. (2017). *How to Identify the Right "Span of Control" for your organization.*

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Components of the Best Practice 1.2: Establish and Maintain a Supervisory Span of Control

This best practice pulls in Best Practice 1.1. Component 2 (the functions and specific job responsibilities of child welfare supervisors are clearly defined and described), in addition to two unique components for it itself.

Component 1: The supervisor to supervisee ratio is 1:5.

The current nationally accepted ratio for child welfare supervision is five case managers to one supervisor.

Component 1: Current State Assessment Against Best Practice

Component in Place	Yes	Partially	No
Component in Practice	Yes	Partially	No

Evidence to Support Assessment

- The current organizational charts[12] provided by OCS indicate the average PSS 4 supervisor ratio is 1:5.8. These organizational charts indicate PSS 4 fully staffed supervisory ratios can range from one to eight direct reports.
- Most supervisors stated if they weren't carrying a caseload and were fully staffed, their supervisory workload would feel manageable to them.
- Most supervisors further indicated they are aware of what supervisory ratios "should be" regardless of whether or not there is a formal, centralized policy mandating a specific ratio.
- State office staff indicated among state office teams supervisory ratios fluctuate regularly without any apparent strategic rhyme or reason. This phenomenon was attributed to a stated mindset of "we do what needs to be done to get the work done." As an example, when managerial staff leave, their tasks appear to be divided up among the remaining managers to perform until a new person is hired without apparent focus on the strategic rationale for the evolving portfolios of work. In some instances, the vacant position stays vacant for long enough that new managerial portfolios become the "new normal". This approach has created some broad, varied units with staff who are not performing like job duties.
- Per the reviewed organizational charts, the average manager to supervisee ratio is 1:4.5, with fully staffed managerial spans of supervision ranging from one to 10 staff, though the number of staff doesn't correlate to the number of programs or functions within the manager's oversight.

BEST PRACTICE 1.3: CASE MANAGERS FEEL SUPPORTED BY SUPERVISORS

> Supervisor support is one of the most critical factors in the job satisfaction and retention of case managers. Support within all three supervisory functions – administrative, educational, and supportive – provide a strong foundation from which a case manager can more successfully and confidentially carry out their daily responsibilities.

Frontline supervisors play a key role in the retention, job satisfaction, and performance of the people they supervise, and investing in development and support of supervisory staff is therefore a major "lever to pull" when seeking to maximize effectiveness and consistency of frontline practice. Supervisors perform better when they themselves have the education, training, and experience needed to provide adequate support.

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[12] See Appendix B: OCS Master Org Chart

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Given the legal and regulated nature of child welfare work, case managers benefit when their supervisor is able to provide support and guidance grounded both in the practice model as well as the supervisor's own experience as an expert practitioner. Supervisory support can be formal, through scheduled and structured supervision, as well as informal, through drop in visits, phone calls, or messaging in a platform such as Microsoft Teams or Slack. Supervisory support can be clinical or technical in nature, focusing on "doing the job right", and can also take the form of more general encouragement and emotional support. Furthermore, supervisory support can be hands on where a supervisor demonstrates effective practice in action or goes on a family visit with a worker, or more focused on empowerment, where the supervisor provides space for staff to take action and make decisions independently while "having their back".

Supervision spans beyond disciplinary strategy to facilitating people-centered growth conversations that make staff feel like individuals, rather than "a cog in the machine". Sometimes support may be as simple as reaffirming a decision or providing a space for the worker to ask a question without feeling intimidated. For new workers or workers struggling with caseloads, more intensive support, such as helping work a case alongside a worker, may be necessary to encourage forward movement and promote a sense of teamwork and unity in helping serve the children and families in the agency's care. Often, a feeling of validation from a supervisor can be the difference between an employee persevering and them walking out the door.[13]

Components of the Best Practice 1.3: Case Managers Feel Supported by Supervisors

Much of this best practice comes back to Best Practices 1.1. and 1.2 – the establishment of a supervisory model and supervisor spans of control. These two best practices establish the foundation necessary for a supervisor to have time and the mental energy to support their staff. Specific components of Best Practice 1.3. include:

1. Supervisors have education, experience, or a combination of both.
2. Supervisors are available to staff both formally and informally.
3. Supervisors utilize group supervision as a method to build case manager knowledge and establish a sense of teamwork.
4. Senior management and supervisors provide regular recognition of supervisors' and frontline workers' accomplishments.

Component 1: Supervisors have education, experience, or a combination of both.

Quality supervision is largely grounded in a solid foundation in both the clinical nature of the work and experience with providing direct service to children and families. While a combination of both will provide the strongest foundation for supervisors, meeting one or the other as a minimum qualification can also provide an on-ramp for the supervisor into the field and supervisory role. This is provided that some combination of managers and peers can help the new supervisor ramp up in either clinical or experiential aspects of the role where they are comparatively weak at the outset.

One caution for this component is experience and education alone do not correlate to an effective case manager becoming an effective supervisor. Promotions into a supervisory position should not solely consider an employee's experience and education but also strongly consider whether the employee has good relationship and communication skills and other best practice supervisory competencies.

Component 1: Current State Assessment Against Best Practice

Component in Place	Yes	Partially	No
Component in Practice	Yes	Partially	No

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[13]Quality Improvement Center for Workforce Development (n/d/). The Importance of Supporting Supervisors.

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Evidence to Support Assessment

- In recent years, DOA has moved from credential-based to competency-based hiring. For supervisors, there are five competencies that, as noted above, are not specific to supervisory practice. Minimum qualifications can be proven through any combination of education and/or experience. There are no actual formal education or experience requirements for a supervisor.
- The current PSS 4 position description states the individual must be able to role model proper behavior and act as a staff consultant and subject matter expert. It also states the individual must have "considerable knowledge" in social work, casework management, and human behavior. However, like the job description used for hiring, there is no quantification on the number of years of experience or education an individual must have to be in this position.
- In interviews, staff across OCS expressed their perspectives that there are supervisors (or managers who supervise them) who lack the experience necessary to carry out their job. Staff who are supervised by a managerial level supervisor with particular frequency expressed in interviews that their supervisor had never done their specific job and struggled on some level to understand what they do. Staff in these positions typically had fairly niche-like responsibilities not carried out by many, if any, other staff members in the organization. PCG often sees managers responsible for an array of cross-cutting programs or functions versus direct client-management not knowing all the processes and policies for the individuals they supervise, and we have found best practice to consist of managers in these situations doing whatever they can to gain at least a baseline understanding of the work their direct reports do (e.g., through shadowing or dedicated Q&A time). We did not hear interviewees or managers state these practices as being generally applied.
- Participants in interviews shared their perception that employees are often promoted without having experience in managing people or without having demonstrated competencies required to manage people effectively. The perception is these individuals are often promoted because they are the only option or "the last person standing." Many staff also expressed the perception that promotions are at times based on favoritism by the PSM 2 or higher-level managers versus a consistent application of stated standards and criteria for promotion.
- Case managers who have supervisors with less experience often seek guidance from other supervisors with more experience. However, even many of those case managers expressed in interviews that they appreciated their current, new supervisors being interested in talking through the challenges the worker was facing, listening to their concerns, and being thought partners on working through challenges.
- The majority of staff interviewed expressed overall satisfaction with their current supervisor while also describing previous supervisors as not as skilled, competent, or supportive.

Component 2: Supervisors are available to staff both formally and informally.

Best practice is for supervisors to be available to workers both formally and informally while also coaching supervisees to be able to carry out their roles with increasing independence as they gain experience and confidence. Examples of best practice support include:

- Regularly meeting during a scheduled time. This demonstrates a commitment by the supervisor to the supervisee and serves as a time for supervisors to focus on both the educational and supportive elements of supervision. The cadence for this meeting can vary based on the agency and the unit. Formal meetings should be structured and should be driven by both the case manager's own agenda as well as items needed to be discussed by the supervisor.
- Providing timely, ad hoc support through problem solving and answering questions. In general, a case manager needs to problem solve or staff a case or situation with their supervisor in that particular moment because they are actively working that case. It is unrealistic to expect a supervisor to be available the exact moment 100% of the time. However, it is realistic for a supervisor to provide a timely response or a suggested path for support by others. Timely need not be defined at an agency level but should be defined by supervisors within their unit so case managers know what to expect in terms of response time.

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Component 2: Current State Assessment Against Best Practice

Component in Place	Yes	Partially	No
Component in Practice	Yes	Partially	No

Evidence to Support Assessment

- The majority of staff interviewed described their supervisors as providing quality support, both formally and informally, generally in line with best practice.
- With a few exceptions (generally seasoned staff who expressed an ability to operate with a high level of independence), staff stated they meet on a regular, scheduled basis with their supervisor for a formal check-in. This included PSS 4s meeting with their own direct supervisors. The reported cadence of the meetings was weekly, with a minority of staff mentioning meeting every other week and a small number mentioning meeting formally once a month.
  - o Administrative staff and state office staff were more likely than case management staff to mention not meeting on a regular schedule with their supervisors.
- Interview participants almost universally stated that their supervisor, or at least a supervisor if theirs was not available at the time, was available when needed or had a plan in place for when they are unavailable. Staff recognized supervisors may not always be available due to their own schedules, but supervisors were reported as generally responding as quickly as possible when they become available.
  - o Staff also discussed how supervisor accessibility was impacted by the current vacancies and the resulting need for supervisors to carry their own caseloads.
- Supervisors across regions consistently noted in interviews how important it was to them to be available to their staff. The majority mentioned having an open-door policy, literally when they are in the office, and figuratively when they are working in a different location than the staff they supervise. Staff can communicate with remote supervisors via Microsoft Teams, email, and by cell phone.
  - o Staff in more remote offices mentioned how remote supervision at times is made challenging by connectivity issues.
- PSS 4s are generally allowed and expected to travel four times per year to visit staff whose base of operations is in an office other than their own. The travel allotment is not the same at the managerial level and in the state office (e.g., one manager who supervises staff in multiple offices noting only being authorized for one trip per year). Managers discussed their willingness to forego travel to allow frontline supervisors to travel more frequently. The downside to this is the frontline supervisors in field offices may not see their own direct supervisors in-person with any consistency. Another downside to the current travel limitation is new staff working in other field offices may not be able to get the in-person support needed to get them fully up to speed. This has led to turnover and slow ramp up to full capacity to fulfill the role.
- Accessing supervisors was identified as being particularly challenging in the rural areas given that cell service was not reliable or even available at times. Staff discussed how needing to use the landline at the client's home was not ideal due to the non-private nature of the environment.

Component 3: Supervisors utilize group supervision as a method to build case manager knowledge and establish a sense of teamwork.

Group supervision or case staffing is the practice of discussing cases together within a supervisor's unit. Teaming or group supervision is a best practice that has been in place in a number of states across the nation for many years. The New York State Office of Children and Family Services, for example, has implemented teaming in multiple counties since 2011. There are several benefits to this practice:[14]

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[14] Casey Family Programs. (2021). What has been New York's Experience with Casework Teaming?

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1. It provides the opportunity for all case managers within a team to learn from one another by creating an environment for peers to share their own knowledge. This can help promote job satisfaction.
2. It reduces potential stress from case managers in feeling that they are the only individual who can help address the problems on their cases. This is particularly helpful in times when caseloads are high or when a case is complex.
3. It allows the team to fill in for one another and provide better service and support to these families. This is because the case manager who is stepping in has some knowledge of the situation. It can also allow other team members to meet with families in more remote locations.
4. It promotes a shared sense of responsibility.

Component 3: Current State Assessment Against Best Practice

Component in Place	Yes	Partially	No
Component in Practice	Yes	Partially	No

Evidence to Support Assessment

- This component was noted as not being in place because PCG has not seen any OCS mandate or guidance for the practice to be performed. In interviews many supervisors nevertheless noted this practice as being one they and their peers engage in routinely.
- The majority of PSS 4s discussed holding a standing morning huddle or team meeting either daily or weekly to discuss their units' cases (in Investigation and Assessment (I&A) this tended to manifest as a daily huddle, while in Family Services (FS) it more commonly manifested as a weekly team meeting). These meetings were noted as including elements like staffing for the week (or day) and discussing any questions or concerns around a given family's circumstances. Some supervisors expressed they used this time to provide informal training on specific situations or circumstances.
- Some regional offices or larger units within a regional office hold monthly all-staff meetings where important office or unit level communications are shared.
- In interviews, some frontline staff as well as supervisors described the state office as trying to limit or prohibit group supervision or case staffing. Other staff described regional management as discouraging or prohibiting workers from discussing or collaborating on working a case. This limit was described as being driven by efforts to maintain confidentiality and "make our numbers" (e.g., visiting families at a frequency required by regulations). Some workers expressed confusion about this because all workers throughout the agency are bound by the same confidentiality requirements, and more seasoned workers also described past joint collaboration on case management as hugely beneficial to their work. This is particularly important to address as most case workers stated the first person they reach out to for questions is a peer. Peer-to-peer communication and collaboration is a key and best practice for case workers to get assistance in ways that ideally complement the support they receive from supervisors.

Component 4: Senior management and supervisors provide regular recognition of supervisors' and frontline workers' accomplishments.

Praise and recognition are a best practice way to continuously improve organizational culture, morale, and retention. Positive reinforcement and acknowledgement should ideally come not only from supervisors but from all levels of management in the organization. When given, praise should be specific and tied to a direct action taken by the person whose actions are being praised.

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Component 4: Current State Assessment Against Best Practice

Component in Place	Yes	Partially	No
Component in Practice	Yes	Partially	No

Evidence to Support Assessment

- There are no explicit requirements in the job description for supervisors or managers to offer praise. However, the supervisor training plan includes a module on providing feedback. Most feedback training includes both positive and constructive feedback.
- Some interview participants described receiving praise. Supervisors were more likely than senior managers or case managers to mention providing praise, with praise generally described as provided publicly (e.g., in unit meetings) versus privately. Supervisors and frontline staff did not mention receiving praise from anyone other than their direct supervisor.
- Some frontline staff shared they were chastised when making decisions, such as changing a visitation schedule or altering travel plans for visiting families in remote locations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

8. More clearly **define and communicate what is expected of people managers** at all levels of the organization. Inconsistencies were noted regarding supervisory practices (e.g., frequency and focus of 1:1 check-ins, availability to answer time-sensitive questions when workers were conducting remote home visits) and management practices (e.g., PSM 1 approaches to and philosophies regarding "skip level" contacts and relationship-building with caseworkers). Consider updating job descriptions to be more specific and clarifying expectations around supervisor-staff member routine communications and "skip level" contacts between managers and staff members two or more levels below them in the hierarchy. Continue building on efforts to provide all people managers with Facilitating Attuned Interactions (FAN) training and hold people managers at all levels of the organization accountable for demonstrating related reflective supervision behaviors and cultivating supportive supervisory relationships.

9. Explore options for building upon existing strategies in place to **provide additional supports to newly hired caseworkers** as a complement to the support provided by supervisors and mentors (e.g., lead worker model, supervisor focused exclusively on new hires, mentors located in field offices versus centralized location).

10. Encourage **teaming approaches to how PSS 1's and 2's manage cases**, including but not limited to conducting joint home visits, consulting with each other about complex case-related decisions, supporting and consoling each other through difficult experiences on the job, and getting answers to questions. While we understand staffing challenges make this difficult, benefits of teaming approaches to case management include strengthening worker comfort levels and physical safety during home visits as well as worker retention and engagement (e.g., the Gallup organization has identified "having a friend at work" as one of the top 12 reasons why workers stay at and commit to organizations that employ them). Worker teaming can also free up supervisor time and focus, as a subset of questions and consultation that otherwise would fall to supervisors (often in ad hoc ways that take supervisors out of the "flow" of their work) would be addressed by peers. While we recognize that OCS management may perceive some potential risks associated with peers providing counsel not fully aligned to agency policy and protocol, these risks can be minimized by coaching workers in teaming arrangements and/or encouraging teaming between more experienced and less experienced workers. Interviewees described receiving widely varying guidance from different supervisors and managers (e.g., PSS 4's and PSM 1's) related to caseworker teaming, including some caseworkers being told they were not allowed to conduct joint home visits with other caseworkers.

11. **Strengthen new caseworker training, "SKILS", by utilizing significant feedback from newly hired staff to enhance its value and effectiveness**. Interviewees described current training for new hires as taking place entirely remotely and exclusively before workers start managing cases,

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with reinforcement "on the job" limited to almost exclusively remotely-delivered mentoring (in person mentoring only happens when one of the six mentors across the state happen to be collocated with the new hire's they're assigned to mentor), coaching by overburdened supervisors and/or overburdened co-workers, and largely voluntary supplementary training that caseworkers described as not very helpful and almost impossible to take given pressures on them to "make their numbers" in the face of high caseloads. PCG recommends a revised model that combines in-person pre-service (delivered before starting to manage cases) training, mentoring with a required in-person component, shadowing of experienced workers (or if all workers in the office are new, the new hire's supervisor) and a mix of in-person and remotely-delivered in-service training continuing for the first few months.

12. **Ensure OCS staff know how to access up-to-date standard operating procedures** (SOPs) and desk manuals for administrative tasks (e.g., updating ORCA database, determining eligibility), which frontline workers and SSAs and administrative support staff can utilize in order to maximize the amount of time supervisors can devote to core supervisory activities vs answering procedural questions.
13. Allow OCS staff **more flexibility in scheduling and altering their travel schedule** so that bottlenecks and delays aren't created by going through the travel unit.
14. Follow through on work underway in the development of a **standardized training program for OCS administrative and support staff** that includes an onboarding training curriculum.

Additional Observations

- Staff discussed how the staffing challenges led the agency to focus more on the urgent aspects of child protection, such as removing children from homes. The focus on these urgent aspects has reduced work in prevention and at-risk activities that can ultimately lead to child and family stability. In turn this could bring down caseloads and also strengthen or improve the reputation of OCS.
- Supervisor effectiveness was noted as being impacted by several factors:
  - Supervisor availability decreased as additional responsibilities were added to them.
  - Supervisors were asked to cover for other supervisors in a different office, which made it difficult to provide adequate and timely supervision given the juggling of responsibilities across offices.
  - A supervisor's ability to supervise more than the national average was identified as being dependent on the tenure of the staff on the team. For example, supervising six new workers would require more intensive support than supervising two new workers and four seasoned staff.
- Supervisors are assigned to a Supervisory Development Plan (SDP), which outlines a variety of steps and training that must be completed. Training is provided through the State of Alaska's supervisor academy. Supervisors indicated that these trainings focused mostly on the administrative functions of the job and neglected the soft skills that are also needed for supervisors to be successful. They provided feedback that the most useful supervisory trainings were optional, supplemental trainings offered by the Supervisor Union.
- There are mandatory consultations, which is standard nationally. However, OCS mandates that PSSs go to their supervisor for lower stakes activities (e.g. drug test order or safety plan) that can be a hindrance due to difficulties in contacting a supervisor from the field. This can translate to staff feeling micromanaged and also create delays when supervisors aren't available.

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CULTURE AND STRUCTURE BEST PRACTICES

PCG identified three best practices that were applicable to culture and structure. Each best practice is identified below and then discussed further in the subsequent section.

#	Best Practice	Component	Component in Place	Component in Practice
2.1	Institute the Practice of Continual Quality Improvement	The agency has performance metrics for its services, which are tied to children and family outcomes.	Yes	Yes
		The agency has processes in place and staff capacity to produce, manage, and analyze data reports. This can include dedicated time for all levels of staff to review data reports, discuss insights, and plan improvements.	Yes	Partially
2.2	Employ an Agency Wide Internal Communication Strategy	The agency has an internal communication plan.	Yes	Partially
		The agency has implemented two-way communication/open sessions between management and frontline staff.	Partially	Partially
2.3	Create Dotted Line Relationships Between Units	There is a shared understanding among staff and managers about how dotted line reporting relationships can be beneficial in practice.	Partially	Partially

BEST PRACTICE 2.1: INSTITUTE THE PRACTICE OF CONTINUAL QUALITY IMPROVEMENT

> A culture of continual quality improvement can help an agency hone its practices and policies to improve child and family outcomes. High-performing agencies continually measure children and family outcomes and tie agency success to those outcomes. Managers and staff review key data indicators regularly in case reviews and treatment plan meetings to inform decision-making.

The fundamental goal of child welfare agencies is to seek better outcomes for children and families. To advance effective, positive change, best practice is for agency leaders to execute an agenda for continual quality improvement towards child welfare best practices. Establishing a plan for continual quality improvement has many organizational benefits. It cultivates:

- Accountability to agency goals
- A pathway to goal attainment
- Development of standard data tracking tools and templates
- Empowerment of frontline staff in being a part of the solution (not just the problem)
- Generation of staff professional development opportunities
- A shared organizational mindset that envisions an evolved, future-state agency

A plan would include developing an agency-wide approach for tracking and evaluating agency performance. The Annie E. Casey Foundation's report on 10 practices for building a high-performing agency recommends

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agency performance metrics be tied to children and family outcomes and agency goals.[15] In essence, if it's important – measure it. Timely outcome reports are regularly reviewed by management and frontline staff alike to make sense of current outcomes. Teams should regularly ask themselves: "Are children and families better off because of agency intervention?" To ensure involvement at all levels of the organization, agency performance metrics should be reinforced by supervisors in their check-ins with supervisees and in staff trainings.

A best practice continual improvement agenda embraces innovative ideas for improving the current state of agency services and creates space for improvement plans to be developed and shared. Managers and frontline staff should have a strong understanding of how their roles and ongoing responsibilities directly impact performance outcomes. Managers can empower frontline staff by involving them in the development of improvement ideas, especially improvements that would directly impact the way they do their jobs. Frontline staff work directly with community members and are confronted daily with ever evolving community needs, and as a result often have more insights into ways to strengthen policies, procedures, and methods grounded in a better understanding of current practice, organizational culture, and community realities than that possessed by managers who are farther removed from the "front line".

Components of the Best Practice 2.1: Institute the Practice of Continual Quality Improvement

Component 1: The agency has performance metrics for its services, which are tied to children and family outcomes.

The agency has established a set of performance metrics measuring the intended activities and outcomes of the agency's services. These metrics tie directly to the agency's mission and how children and families are faring.

Component 1: Current State Assessment Against Best Practice

Component in Place	Yes	Partially	No
Component in Practice	Yes	Partially	No

Evidence to Support Assessment

- OCS's main data system -- ORCA -- serves as the data warehouse from which employees can pull data. The state office has a data unit headed by a Data Processing Manager, with multiple IT and research staff. This team is responsible for creating reports.
- All levels of staff who were interviewed reported there are metrics against which performance is assessed.
- Interview participants – and particularly frontline case workers and their direct supervisors -- talked about how from their perspective the office has become increasingly data-focused in recent years. Many noted, however, that they see this focus as lacking nuance and compassion, focused more on "just moving the numbers" through pressure on case workers and punitive measures (e.g., making paid time off conditional on "making the numbers" for the preceding month) versus engaging in dialogue with frontline staff about the "why" behind the numbers. This includes why it is exceedingly hard to conduct high quality casework given current caseloads and restrictions on teaming approaches to managing cases, why a lack of supportive transportation infrastructure gets in the way of workers planning and executing optimally efficient visitation schedules to families in remote locations, why a case worker felt compelled to cancel a previously scheduled home visit, etc. In addition, interview participants noted frustration that managers did not adequately recognize or engage them in dialogue about things like:

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[15] Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2015). *10 Practices: A Child Welfare Leader's Desk Guide to Building a High-Performing Agency.*

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- o The complexity of families OCS is serving
- o Families consisting of human beings who may not always act in ways desired or documented in case plans
- o What case workers themselves need to stay motivated and energized in the face of these challenges

- Staff expressed a desire to be able to provide the "why" to explain the reason why a metric was not met, which is permitted in the CFSR review (the Federal case review process used to monitor each state's child welfare practice and drive accountability for states to continuously improve their outcomes and related practices and procedures). Interviewed staff also expressed frustration that there isn't a consistent mechanism for them to provide reasons why until after a case is officially reviewed.

- Performance metrics also do not adequately take into consideration the geographic complexity of Alaska, the lack of adequate OCS infrastructure and resources to operate optimally in this geographically complex environment, the negative unintended consequences of well-intended policies and procedures (e.g., those for managing state worker travel), and the resulting barriers to meeting metrics established to apply generically to all states and environments regardless of geography. For example, case managers are no longer able to book their own travel or alter it to adjust to unfolding circumstances (e.g., shifting weather patterns, emerging safety concerns). Initial travel is booked through administrative staff in the Office but any emergency changes, such as being unable to get to one village due to weather, must be processed by another unit outside of OCS. As a result, a case manager may be unable to get to a family for a monthly visit or a timely removal, which in turns impacts metrics. Additional barriers to OCS "meeting its numbers" and achieving stated desired outcomes for children and families relate to a lack of child welfare infrastructure in more remote villages or larger towns near remote villages which disproportionately affects native Alaskan children in OCS's care. Examples include a lack of transportation resources like well-maintained boats and snow machines, lack of staffed offices (or any geographically proximate offices at all), and a lack of geographically proximate foster homes (whether relative kin or unrelated).[16] Interview participants reported that this combination of factors leads some children who otherwise would be removed from a potentially dangerous home to remain in the home against the better judgment of the case worker, leads other children to be moved from short-term emergency placements into a series of other placements far from their home villages in ways and with frequencies that go against CFSR standards, and gets in the way of case workers establishing the kinds of consistent relationships with families and children that regular, consistent visits allow (and that are incentivized and measured by key OCS and CFSR metrics). Case workers serving families in remote locations consistently contrasted the lack of infrastructure and resources available to them with the resources available to state troopers who similarly serve and oversee the same remote locations.

- The treatment of metrics as black and white may stem from HB 151's annual report on employee recruitment and retention. This report specifically ties employee retention and turnover to the achievement of success in the following five measures:
    - o Rate of family reunification
    - o Average length of time children spent in custody of DFCS
    - o Rate of placement with an adult family member or family friend
    - o Number of children placed in a permanent living arrangement with a guardian or biological or adoptive parent.
    - o Number of children released from the custody by DFCS

While these measures align loosely with the federal Child and Family Services Review (CFSR)[17] outcomes focused on safety, permanency, and wellbeing, tying these measures to staff recruitment and retention may make it very challenging for OCS to be successful in meeting the measures as there is no direct link between staffing and the measures. Further, OCS is limited in certain factors impacting their ability to recruit and retain staff, such as pay, benefits, and the overall hiring process.

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[16] Schreck, C. (2023, July 21). State and Local Agencies Face Desperate Shortage of Foster Homes.
[17] Child & Family Services Reviews (CFSRs) | The Administration for Children and Families (hhs.gov)

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Component 2: The agency has processes in place and staff capacity to produce, manage, and analyze data reports. This can include dedicated time for all levels of staff to review data reports, discuss insights, and plan improvements.

Best practice is for staff positions and processes to be established to collect and analyze key performance indicator data and produce data summary reports on a regular basis. Data reports summarizing the current state of key performance indicators are generated on a regular basis. These reports are user-friendly, timely, and produced on a standard template.

Component 2: Current State Assessment Against Best Practice

Component in Place	Yes	Partially	No
Component in Practice	Yes	Partially	No

Evidence to Support Assessment

- Focus groups with managers indicated that data reports generated from ORCA are reviewed regularly in management meetings.
- The data team presents standardized data reports to and prepares ad hoc data reports for the Director's office. It was unclear from interviews how data is then communicated from the Director's office to the regional offices. It was clear from interviews with regional and field office staff, however, that data reports are used to hold frontline supervisors and staff accountable for performance against metrics, as described above.
- In interviews, Investigation and Assessment case managers and supervisors most frequently discussed using data to assess workload, specifically when assigning new investigations. Data is routinely reviewed in daily Investigation and Assessment regional team morning meetings. Examples of data reviewed in the meetings include the number of cases that came in the previous day and how many were handled.
- The Office does request and obtain reports on data outside of standard performance metrics. These reports are typically produced by Research Analysts from the larger Data Processing Manager's team. In interviews, staff reported that sometimes supervisors or managers try to pull their own data, which make take hours of work to do manually, rather than asking Research Analysts to create reports that can be generated routinely in a standardized fashion. It was also reported that some reports may not be entirely accurate because of a lack of quality control on coding used to generate reports and pressures on Research Analysts due to the volume of ad hoc reports being requested.
- The manager who oversees quality assurance has a team that conducts surveys with OCS staff, including climate surveys, all-staff surveys, and exit interviews. These data are then summarized in reports presented to OCS management. In general, interview responses from state office staff showed that state office is generally aware of major issues reported in interviews with frontline supervisors and staff (e.g., low pay compared to other jobs in the community with lower stress levels and time commitments) but that the case managers and other frontline staff and supervisors in the field do not generally feel that their voices are being adequately heard. As discussed earlier, there is also a perception that the state office implements changes and new processes based on its own perception of problems and not on what the field staff actually need or want. There is also a perception that changes are rolled out agency-wide without adequate piloting and refinements based on pilot findings (e.g., PSS 3 roles and the LOA staffing program, an alternative staffing model that consists of utilizing workers, who do not reside within a community in which they work, to work using a 'week on, week off' schedule within those communities).

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BEST PRACTICE 2.2: EMPLOY AN AGENCY WIDE INTERNAL COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

> Communication is the backbone of every agency. Effective communication provides all employees an opportunity to understand the purpose behind decisions being made, information needed to act in ways aligned to agency vision and mission, and guidance to work in accordance with expectations and best practice.

A best practice communication strategy establishes a well-planned, regular cadence of communication that utilizes audience-tailored mechanisms to provide all employees information on why decisions are being made, how decisions affect them and their clients, and how to act in ways that allow the agency to meet its mission, vision, and goals. The strategy takes into account information needs and preferences at all levels in the agency and across all agency sub-populations.

Components of the Best Practice 2.2: Employ an Agency Wide Internal Communications Strategy

Component 1: The agency has an internal communication plan.

An internal communication plan provides an agency with a clear and visual roadmap for how to deliver communications throughout the organization. A communication plan should house all the logistics and the overall strategy for the agency's communications, including between the various organizational layers as well as between staff. Important topics to cover include:[18]

- **Timing**: When communication should be provided, including insights on how to ensure the content is provided to the right people at the correct time.
- **Frequency**: The frequency with which the communication should be provided, such as one-time or recurring. If recurring, the plan should include the frequency for updates.
- **Channel**: The communication channel(s) used to share the communication and if the channel varies based on what is being communicated.
- **Pattern**: The individual providing the information and if the information should be shared one-on-one, in a small group setting, etc.
- **Style Guide**: A style guide includes things like the messaging style, formats, and best practices when communicating.[19]

An effective communication plan establishes consistency in an agency's internal communication, enabling staff to become familiar with the types of content shared in consistent formats, which strengthens communication effectiveness and efficiency. It errs on the side of "overcommunicating" information while preventing information overload by communicating key messages through different "push and pull" communication vehicles (e.g., email, staff meetings, hard copy posting in offices, audio/video messages, centrally accessible intranet content).

Communicating the "Why"

Effective managers communicate the "why" behind their decisions and actions. By providing explaining the rationale for decisions, managers increase understanding and motivation for staff to follow through on what is being asked of them.[20]

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[18] Cote, C. (2023). Communicating Direction to Your Organization: 5 Dimensions to Consider.
[19] Blink. (n/d/). 10 Effective Organizational Communication Strategies for the Modern Workplace.
[20] Duarte, N. (2020). Good Leadership is About Communicating "Why".

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Component 1: Current State Assessment Against Best Practice

Component in Place	Yes	Partially	No
Component in Practice	Yes	Partially	No

Evidence to Support Assessment

- The default channel used for most communications was reported in interviews to be email. Several staff indicated that email communications are often not adequately timely, with content being provided either immediately prior to a change with no time for questions to be asked or after a change has already been implemented.
- The state office puts out a monthly newsletter that is published with information related to the prior month (the December newsletter covers November). Interview participants talked about how the newsletter is not generally helpful because it is already outdated by the time it is published.
- Some offices, both field and regional, also have all-staff meetings that are conducted in a hybrid fashion allowing for staff to join in-person or remotely. It was unclear from interviews whether the information conveyed at all-staff meetings is shared consistently with those who were not in attendance (e.g., emailed in a written format for staff to reference post-meeting).
- The current communication strategy does not appear to be meeting the needs of staff, particularly when communicating organizational changes. For example, staff discussed how the new performance evaluation system was communicated right before roll out and that the communication was unclear and incomplete, leading to inconsistent implementation of the new practice.
- Interview responses indicated that OCS leans towards under-communicating information rather than overcommunicating information (which is more in line with best practice). Agencies as large as OCS with programs as complex as theirs generally fare better when they default to communicating information. A long-established marketing adage suggests a person needs to hear a message at least seven times before they can process and retain it.[21] This is particularly true of new information, which first needs to be brought into awareness, before being contextualized, critically examined, and internalized for action. By repeating information using multiple channels, an agency is more likely to help its employees move through the various phases of learning.[22]

  Awareness → Critical Thinking → Internalization for Action
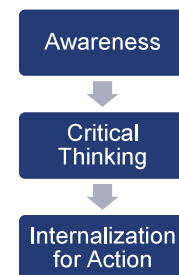
  Strategies for effective communication include:
  1. Making the message simple. This includes making the message short, clear, concise, and to the point. Make it easy to read.
  2. Don't presume because you're bored with sharing it, workers are bored of hearing it.
  3. Use multiple communication channels.

- Many staff expressed frustration that communications from the state office often lack explanations of reasons why changes are being made. This includes omitting information about the expectations and goals of the change and how the changes fit into an overarching organizational strategy. One example was that the majority of frontline staff invited to interviews with PCG did not know why they were being invited. When asked, some indicated that they were there because of HB 151 but they did not know specific goals of the interviews, the audit in general, and why they were selected to participate.

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[21] Duncan, C. (2021). Why Repetition in Internal Communication is Very Important.
[22] Conner, S. (2018). Say it 7 Times: The Art of Overcommunication.

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Component 2: The agency has implemented two-way communication/open sessions between management and frontline staff.

One best practice way to enhance communication in an agency is by implementing opportunities for two-way communication. Information cannot only flow one way -- from the top of an agency down through the hierarchy to frontline workers. People feel more empowered, receptive, and motivated to take action on information and directives communicated to them when they feel they have been given adequate opportunities to provide input into, ask questions related to, and discuss implications of information and directives being conveyed to them. It also helps the person delivering the message to clarify that message.

Effective agency management teams develop opportunities and spaces for frontline workers and supervisors to share their concerns, suggestions, and feedback, and then act on that information – when appropriate – or communicate clearly and openly why they will not act on that information – when needed.[23, 24]

Component 2: Current State Assessment Against Best Practice

Component in Place	Yes	Partially	No
Component in Practice	Yes	Partially	No

Evidence to Support Assessment

- In general, frontline staff indicated that it doesn't feel that it consistently has adequate mechanisms or opportunities to engage in dialogue with management about changes in policies, procedures, and practices that affect how they go about their work and serve children, families, and communities. Interviewed staff discussed wanting more opportunities to meaningfully engage with management and that the current opportunities felt superficial.
- OCS has expanded participation in an all-staff committee that is comprised largely of frontline staff and supervisors. Both the Division Director and the Division Operations Manager attend this meeting and present to the committee.
- Many frontline staff indicated in interviews that they rarely see their upstream managers when working in their home office, and that if they are asked to interact with managers two or more levels above them "it's never about anything good". Some staff reported that managers will only speak to or seek out specific workers and that there isn't a universal interaction with all staff on a regular basis other than "being seen" on the floor. Staff members who voiced these perceptions often paired them with a perception that managers "play favorites". Some staff members also shared a perception that when PSS 4s are promoted they lose connection over time with the day-to-day realities "on the ground" and display significantly less empathy for what case workers are dealing with.
- When interviewed themselves, PSM 1s and 2s reported widely differing philosophies when it comes to skip-level contacts with frontline staff, with a minority indicating a philosophy of "walking the shop floor" and being intentional about checking in with workers casually when in the office, while others shared that they intentionally shy away from interactions with frontline workers out of a desired to "not undermine the authority of supervisors". PCG's overall impression was summed up succinctly by an interview participant who described manager behavior (as well as overall agency approaches to work) as "consistently inconsistent".
- Staff also indicated in interviews that state office staff rarely visit regional or field offices, even if co-located in the same town/city or even building. It is important to note that in the case where offices are not co-located, this may be due to budget constraints, as discussed in earlier sections of this report. OCS has noted in its annual workforce report to the legislature that "OCS leadership is attending regional all staff meetings to engage with staff across the state, listen to their concerns,

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[23] Blink. (n/d/). 10 Effective Organizational Communication Strategies for the Modern Workplace.
[24] Jolaoso, C. (2023). 10 Tips for Effective Communication in the Workplace.

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and provide updates on leadership activities." Staff interview feedback may indicate a desire to interact more frequently with OCS leadership in more informal settings in the flow of work versus more formal settings.

- Staff in regional offices discussed how there is an agency-wide perception that frontline workers who don't "toe the party line", who "rock the boat", or who aren't in the "in crowd" are slow or unable to be promoted. Several interview participants across regional offices report being advised to stay quiet until they are promoted to a PSS 4 role, at which time they can start to "go against the party line".
- Frontline staff and supervisors reported consistently in interviews that there was no ability for them to provide anonymous feedback to agency leadership. The only channel they reported available to them is providing feedback directly to their supervisor, with little to no ability to circumvent the chain of command.

BEST PRACTICE 2.3: CREATE DOTTED LINE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN UNITS

> "Dotted line" relationships between units and case managers facilitate work alignment, efficient and effective utilization of resources, and cross-organizational collaboration. Successful dotted line connections support cross-team and cross-functional efficiency and breakdown silos, which can ultimately improve child and family outcomes.

Traditionally "dotted line reporting" refers to secondary management relationships, in which a manager may provide feedback and assign work to an employee who has a direct supervisory relationship with a different manager.[25] Dotted line reporting particularly relevant to child welfare organizations is dotted line relationships between units and case managers, as case managers are assigned to specific units while families move between units as their family situations progress.

By allowing for dotted line relationships, case managers in separate units are better able to share details on a family, ensure a smooth handoff of key information, eliminate chances of duplicative work, and allow for more coordinated oversight. This can ultimately result in the most efficient use of capacity and expertise.

Dotted line relationships can have many advantages, including:[26]

1. **Work Alignment**: When an employee has work assignments overseen by a manager other than their supervisor, that secondary manager is better positioned to provide specific, firsthand feedback on the specific help and resources needed to assist the family.
2. **Improved Resource Utilization**: When cases are transferring between units, the management lifts are lower effort for the manager directly involved in a case who has a more complete picture of the family's needs than for the direct supervisor who will need orientation to the case before adding value.
3. **Increased Team Cohesion and Knowledge Sharing**: These relationships encourage employees to interact with colleagues outside of their units to collaborate on shared families and also provide exposure to the types of tasks performed by the other units. This in turn allows case managers to better understand all of the various services that OCS provides, allowing them to fully support families.

These kinds of dotted line relationships, however, require a culture of open, timely and proactive communication between people in formal and dotted line supervisory roles to maintain consistent messaging to, support of, and oversight of case managers whose families interact with different units.

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[25] Imperial College London. (n/d). Dotted Line Management.
[26] Springworks Team. (2023, August 21). *What is dotted line reporting? Here Are Pros & Cons*. Springworks Blog.

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Components of the Best Practice 2.3: Create Dotted Line Relationships Between Units

Component 1: There is a shared understanding among staff and managers about how dotted line reporting relationships can be beneficial in practice.

Component 1: Current State Assessment Against Best Practice

Component in Place	Yes	Partially	No
Component in Practice	Yes	Partially	No

Evidence to Support Assessment

- Interview participants indicated that relationships between frontline staff and supervisors are generally collaborative with some exceptions that appeared to be specific to a small number of units. While relationships are generally positive, however, there is little routine interaction between case management staff across units. Supervisors were more likely to indicate some coordination between units.
- The largest challenge identified in interviews is that frontline staff feel very siloed. They do not generally understand the work that other units complete, which can result in families not receiving access to all services that might be available to and a good fit for them. It can also create duplicative work when a unit receives a family's case from another unit -- when the receiving unit case manager does not adequately understand the types of actions taken by the transferring unit they may repeat the same actions. This appears to be particularly true for more specialized units, such as Eligibility Technicians.
- Frontline staff reported that they do not generally see a need to go to another supervisor for support as their own supervisor is nearly always available. When a supervisor is out, frontline staff in interviews reported that there generally is a plan established and communicated for who the team's case managers can go to for support.
- Frontline staff also reported that they infrequently take initiative to contact managers above their supervisor as OCS's culture is hierarchical and that the expectation is to follow the chain of command. Supervisors play a key role in the chain of command by translating information both up and down the chain. Interview participants voiced an exception to this "rule", however – when interview participants reported their direct supervisors as being new and/or not adequately understanding the work they do, staff reported being comfortable skipping over their supervisor to ask questions of upstream managers or turning to them for support. We heard this exception voiced by both state and regional/field office staff.
- A number of people reported meeting collectively on a frequent basis with colleagues serving the same or similar functions. Examples included Administrative Managers, permanency specialists, and mentors. In each case interviewees reported that these routinized statewide meetings had resulted in good collaboration.

RECOMMENDATIONS

4. **"Close the loop" more consistently back to staff who provide input, suggestions, and feedback to management**, communicating to them what was done with their input, what related decisions were made, and why those decisions were made so that frontline staff feel heard.
5. **Communicate organizational changes in clear** ways that provide people affected by the changes the information they need to understand *why* changes are being made, *how* the changes affect their specific job and function, and *what* they need to do differently from what they have been used to. Also, communicate changes in a **timely** way, using **multiple methods** and to the greatest extent possible (acknowledging that some changes – like changes in Federal or State legislation forcing changes in policy or practice -- may need to be communicated and implemented more rapidly than

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best practice would dictate) **repeatedly over the course of weeks or month** leading up to implementation of the change. As an example, frequently referenced in interviews of how current communication strategy does not appear to be meeting the needs of staff, the new performance evaluation system and related processes and procedures appears to have been communicated right before roll out and in an unclear and incomplete fashion, leading to inconsistent implementation of the new practice. While some organizational changes are being driven at the state level outside of OCS's control, a more focused effort to notify staff of policy and practice changes will help staff feel more prepared to implement changes in policy and practice.

6. **Explore ways to strengthen organizational data capacity and related protocols** to reflect the agency's heightened focus on managing to data since passage of HB151. Consider some combination of the following:

    a. Emphasize in dialogues with AK IT staff the importance and urgency of OCS gaining access to more modern and powerful analysis and reporting technology like Power BI or equivalent, given the heightened focus on data related to passage of HB151

    b. Hire more central office data analysis and reporting staff

    c. Analyze management's ad hoc data requests from the past year or two (or a different timeframe that includes enough volume to allow patterns to be identified) and identify and develop more standardized reports that can be run at "the push of a button" (or at least with significantly less staff time needed as compared to ad hoc reports)

    d. Conduct a one-time "data clean-up" effort to strengthen data validity and staff confidence in centrally administered OCS data

    e. Review, update as needed, and communicate to staff across the state protocols for requesting data reports and self-service data reporting. Goals of protocols should be to empower field staff (e.g., PSM 2's, PSM 1's and Research Analysts) to "pull" their own data where it makes sense within clearly established boundaries, clarify timeframes and parameters for requesting ad hoc reports from central office data staff, and manage a transparent and realistic pipeline of requests for and work to provide new standardized reports.

Additional Observations

- Frontline staff expressed concerns about going to a supervisor other than their own for approval. They indicated that when they went to other supervisors, they were given only guidance and not actual full or final approval for an action to be taken or decision to be made. This was perceived to be a concern that the questioned supervisor would be stepping on the toes of the worker's direct supervisor.

- Some supervisors indicated that they didn't feel that they had the autonomy or authority to carry out their responsibilities efficiently. Some of this may stem from supervisors having less years of experience and a desire by the manager to ensure that the work was being done appropriately.

- Supervisory and frontline staff discussed how new managerial positions have been added, making that layer larger. They indicated that these positions were reclassified from vacant positions within the frontline and support staff layers. The goal of the positions was to have the manager do innovative work, however, the focus group participants perceived that this hadn't come to fruition.

- Interviewed staff within the Foster Care Licensing unit reported that they felt like they were a separate part of the organization isolated from other units whose work they support or otherwise connect with. These comments felt less related to gaps in business processes or other task-related aspects of work than to more relational aspects of work like feelings of connection with a larger purpose and solidarity and spirit of teaming with colleagues in other units. Research by organizations like Gallup and Culture Amp have shown a connection between these kinds of relational gaps and gaps in staff engagement, morale, and retention.

- Several challenges were identified that appeared to be a result of lack of documentation or poor communication:
    o Different licensing standards were applied to different households, which hindered the placement process.

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- o A supervisor check-in tool was created to assist supervisors in gathering a more holistic view of how their PSS staff were doing. The tool was identified as being helpful but not being consistently utilized across supervisors or offices.
- o There were inconsistences with the resources being offered or made available to families across units and even within units.
- The establishment of new pilot programs requires a significant amount of work on supervisors. As a result, they have less time to do their own work, which can then impact their availability to staff.
- Frontline staff discussed some challenges they have had with newly created units that are intended to help them by removing certain tasks, like finding placements. Specifically, the staff discussed how the new units will ask them for information that the unit staff has access to, like ORCA screenshots. As a result, frontline staff were having to do extra work, rather than less.
- Frontline staff discussed the retention bonuses that were made available and how there was a lack of communication and clarity when they were offered. Pay was identified as a challenge in the majority of focus groups and this may be a topic that is continually discussed by staff with supervisors and managers. While OCS may not be able to directly impact pay, it is important that there be routine communication about any actions that the division is taking to advocate for staff pay.
- Impact of the new Biden administration rules may help ease kin foster care licensing, specifically reducing the look back period for background checks, by adopting simpler licensing standards for kin family homes compared to the previous policy requiring kin family homes to go through he same stringent licensing process as licensed family foster homes, which created unnecessary barriers to kinship care. Additionally, this rule requires states to provide the same level of financial assistance to kinship homes that other foster care providers receive. This may help OCS establish more kinship care foster care placements in remote locations, with potentially disproportionate benefits to native Alaskan children and their families and communities.[27]

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[27] US Department of Health and Human Services. (2023, September 27). HHS Announces Historic Child Welfare Package to Expand Support and Equity in Child Welfare System.

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HIRING BEST PRACTICES

PCG identified one overriding best practice applicable to the addressing delays in hiring. This best practice is summarized below and then discussed in more depth in the section that follows.

#	Best Practice	Component	Component in Place	Component in Practice
3.1	Establish and Implement Realistic, Streamlined, Standardized Hiring Processes	Job descriptions lay out the required competencies and credentials. The agency has posted an RJP that candidates can review and comprehend.	Partially	Partially
		The hiring process is streamlined to the minimum required steps so that candidates can progress quickly through the process.	No	No
		Hiring committees evaluate candidates using a consistent process based on a standard set of job competencies.	Yes	Partially
		The agency has a standard recruitment strategy.	No	No

BEST PRACTICE 3.1: ESTABLISH AND IMPLEMENT REALISTIC, STREAMLINED, STANDARDIZED HIRING PROCESSES

> Streamlining and standardizing hiring processes and conferring hiring decision-making authority on people deeply familiar with jobs to be filled enables organizations to hire in a timely way the candidates generally suited to the job and likely to stay and thrive.

Public child welfare as a whole faces significant challenges recruiting, training, and retaining child welfare professionals.[28] An essential part of building an effective workforce in a child welfare agency is implementing an effective hiring process. The process should be realistic, streamlined, and standardized.

An effective hiring process is **realistic** when **candidates understand what the role will require of them and what it will be like to work in the role and organization.** A job description provides a candidate one of the first impressions about an organization and the specific role. A well-written job description lays out practical expectations and required skills of the position in a concise, compelling manner.[29] Another way to make the hiring process realistic is by providing applicants a Realistic Job Preview (RJP) -- a clear and accurate picture of the work that they will be doing in that role, and the environment in which they will be doing it. Best practice is for a candidate to have access to a RJP before an interview (or if possible even before submitting an application to the job) so they can make a more informed decision about if the job will be a good fit for them and vice versa. Ultimately, the goal is for a candidate to opt out of the role before being hired, trained, and then deciding it isn't a good fit. An RJP can be developed in a variety of formats, but a video, no more than 30 minutes in length, is a common format for child welfare agencies. The National Child Welfare Workforce Institute recommends that an RJP include both the substantive (e.g., working with children, working with families, removal of children, neglect, physical abuse, sexual abuse, court work, and

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[28] Child Welfare Information Gateway. (n/d). Recruitment.
[29] Herrity, J. (2022, September 30). 10 Best Practices for Streamlining Your Hiring Process.

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working with others, such as law enforcement) and process elements (e.g., job-related stress, paperwork, documentation, computer skills, after-hours work, time management, workload) of the job.[30]

An effective hiring process is **streamlined** when **competitive candidates can progress quickly through the hiring steps and bureaucracy in hiring decisions is kept to a minimum.** Before jobs become vacant, the agency can support recruitment efficiency by maintaining an online repository where interested candidates can upload their resume and credentials. Doing so establishes a pipeline of applicants who can be engaged as soon as a job vacancy appears.[31] Once candidates apply, they should feel like their time and effort is respected by the agency since this is a representation of how they can expect to be treated as an employee.[32] Effective agencies communicate with candidates regularly about the status of their candidacy and what they should expect in terms of timeframes.

The number of steps a candidate passes through before reaching a formal job offer -- including an efficient background check process -- should be kept to a minimum. This is beneficial for both the candidate and the agency as the candidate can progress through the process quickly while the agency is able to fill positions quickly while avoiding significant direct and indirect hiring costs associated with a drawn-out process. The agency also is likely to hire stronger candidates, as the stronger the candidate is, the more likely they are to have competing job offers, and the more likely they are to be lost to the agency in the course of a drawn-out process. Harvard Business Review notes many companies have adopted a "consensus-based hiring culture, often rooted in the fact that colleagues don't want to hurt each other's feelings" that wastes precious time and money.[33] Rather than consulting with all staff who will be involved in a new hire's success, a focused hiring committee of two to four individuals, representing diverse perspectives and knowledgeable about the specific role being hired into, should be given ultimate decision-making authority for a particular vacancy.

An effective hiring process is considered **standardized** when **an agency has implemented a structured, repeatable process with clearly defined roles, responsibilities, and template tools.** Leaders of effective agencies work with their Human Resources (HR) partners to establish centralized recruitment and hiring infrastructure and processes and roll them out consistently to all teams. It is important for agency leaders to work alongside HR leaders to address hiring challenges so that HR is actively involved in improving the agency's hiring and provides staff capacity as available. This collaboration yields a "division of labor" that centralizes tasks that don't require expert knowledge of the specific position and benefit from consistently repeated process execution (e.g., pre-screening against clear-cut predetermined criteria, background checks, reference checks) while engaging people close to and intimately familiar with the job in tasks requiring that knowledge (e.g., customizing job postings to accurately reflect the role and environment, realistic job preview, interviewing promising candidates).

A key area of standardization is **candidate recruitment.** A standard recruitment strategy should be established that lays out the recruitment goal, the tactics hiring managers can use to attract applicants, and the ways HR supports the process. The goal of a best practice child welfare recruitment strategy is to attract applicants that demonstrate alignment with the agency's child welfare practice model and have lived and/or professional experience with the communities most disproportionally represented in their local child welfare system[34]. Recruitment language should be developed with an inspiring call to action that is written using basic, non-technical language and showcases the job benefits that speak to desired applicants, such as the opportunity to help your local community, make meaningful connections, travel across the state, and benefit from growth opportunities. Updating the relevant job information on the external HR system used for managing candidate applications should be a preliminary step to ensure any outdated or incorrect language is removed, as it is one of the first ways a candidate gauges an agency. Jobs should be posted broadly beyond the agency's website to get a diverse pool of candidates' interest. Those posting locations should be chosen strategically to cultivate the desired type of applications.[35] Job boards hosted by in-state

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[30] National Child Welfare Workforce Institute. (2011). Realistic Job Previews.
[31] HCM Works. (2018, August 20). Just-in-Time Staffing Explained: What are the benefits?
[32] Herrity, J. (2022, September 30). 10 Best Practices for Streamlining Your Hiring Process.
[33] Tarki, A., Cowen, T., & Ham, A. (2022, July 11). It's Time to Streamline the Hiring Process.
[34] National Child Welfare Workforce Institute (2023). CFPM Recruitment and Selection Best Practices.
[35] National Child Welfare Workforce Institute (September 2023). Work With Purpose Child Welfare Professional Recruitment Toolkit.

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and out-of-state universities and relevant professional organizations as well as social media advertisements are powerful tools for connecting with job seekers and providing direct links to job postings on your website.

Another key priority for standardization is **candidate evaluation**. Hiring committees should evaluate candidates using a consistent rubric based on a pre-established set of job competencies that are relevant to and customized for the role. For each staff role, the agency should document the required and preferred knowledge, skills, abilities, and credentials. These job competencies can be used as the basis for evaluating candidates' resumes, applications, and interview performance. Considering the significant, and often invisible, role personal biases have in hiring decisions, standard competencies and evaluation processes influence the hiring committee to focus on the factors having a direct impact on staff performance, as opposed to irrelevant factors such as demographic characteristics.[36] An interview protocol should be developed for a specific staff position to help hiring managers consistently describe the interview instructions and focus on the key skills and abilities in their interview questions. Hiring committees should reference the established job competencies as they are observing the candidates.

PCG's review of interview responses led us to a clear conclusion that the process Alaska is using to hiring staff, and in particular frontline caseworkers, is strongly out of alignment with best practices, causing major delays in hiring, and preventing OCS from hiring many of the strongest candidates it is attracting. One striking indicator reported to PCG by multiple interview participants is that time to hire (i.e., the time from when a job is posted to when a candidate is hired) is somewhere on the order of five months. We heard consistent reports of poor communication with candidates over the course of that time and a pattern of promising candidates dropping out of the process to take other job offers. These reports validate this audit's focus on delays to hiring.

We also heard consistent reports that add up to a hiring process that is not **realistic**. Newly hired PSS 1s and 2s consistently arrive on the job with little to no understanding of what the job actually entails. Many of them leave within weeks or months of being hired. Those that stay reported in interviews that they understood what they were getting into and had relevant prior experience (e.g., child welfare experience in other states, more than 10 years of experience in emergency room nursing or behavioral health). We heard further reports describing a process that is not **streamlined**. It takes experienced administrative staff members in regions more than two hours to post a new job; the same task can take a newer administrative staff member upwards of five hours. We heard multiple reports that formal job offers to strong candidates endorsed by hiring panels were delayed by a week or more due to a single staff member who "owns" that centralized task being out on paid time off. Recent hires reported that they went months without any communication about where their candidacy was in the process and next steps.

We also heard from interview participants in regional and field offices that, despite the other burdens on their time, they would like to be more involved in the hiring process to ensure that candidates receive realistic job previews and that those moved forward in the process have a fighting chance of succeeding in the role. They then proceeded to share with PCG their understanding that the process was being changed to make it more centralized in ways that they feared would exacerbate the problems the current process was already facing. PCG's assessment is that delays in hiring can be successfully addressed through the following:

- A focused effort to slim down and improve a hiring process described to us as having 27 steps, taking up to 5 months from submitted application to hiring decisions, and more often than not resulting in hiring of candidates poorly prepared and a poor fit for the role of caseworker. Under *Recommendations* below we describe in more detail the kind of process improvement effort we feel could benefit OCS and their state partners who manage its hiring process. The effort we describe aligns with process improvement best practices in wide use across many industries and government agencies.
- Improved recruitment and sourcing strategies to cultivate pipelines of job-ready candidates for OCS casework roles, using proactive strategies to connect with people from both across and outside of Alaska. We give examples of these kinds of strategies under Recommendations below.

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[36] Knight, R. (2017, June 12). 7 Practical Ways to Reduce Bias in Your Hiring Process.

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Components of the Best Practice 3.1: Establish and Implement Realistic, Streamlined, and Standardized Hiring Practices

Component 1: Job descriptions lay out required competencies and credentials. The agency has posted an RJP that candidates can review and comprehend.

Best practice is for job descriptions to spell out required knowledge, skills, abilities, credentials, and tasks in ways that give candidates a clear understanding of the job they're applying for and what they would be expected to do. In addition, best practice is to provide candidates an accurate RJP prior to applying – ideally – or by the time they receive an interview – at the latest.

Component 1: Current State Assessment Against Best Practice

Component in Place	Yes	Partially	No
Component in Practice	Yes	Partially	No

Evidence to Support Assessment

- Recently, the Alaska Department of Administration, Personnel and Labor Relations made changes to job descriptions changing minimum qualifications for the PSS series from credential-based to a series of competencies. Applicants need to document how their combination of education and/or experience has provided them with competency in those areas. As of the date of this report, the 10 competencies are:

General Competencies	Minimum Qualification Competencies
Decision making	Analytical thinking/problem solving
Self-management	Customer service
Teamwork	Integrity/honesty
Stress tolerance	Interpersonal skills
	Oral communication
	Writing

- The latter six competencies are the same across the PSS series and the language used to describe the competencies is the same regardless of the division or agency in which the PSS will be hired. For example, a PSS 1, 2, and 3 in OCS has the same written description of the competencies as a PSS 2 in the Department of Corrections, Division of Health and Rehabilitative Services. This is regardless of the fact that the types of individuals with whom the PSS will be working are different and that the skills needed for the two positions are also different.
- A major change with the transition to the competency model is that there no longer is a specific education or experience qualification. As a result, candidates can be competitive for PSS positions without any child protection experience or training.
- Feedback in interviews indicated that many new hires do not meaningfully understand the job they were hired into. For example, some new hires thought that the position was for childcare or security.

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Some workers have also stated that they thought they would be working primarily with children but they instead found themselves working with parents, many of whom are wary of or overtly hostile towards them.
- OCS offers two RJPs on its Employment Opportunity webpage. These videos are not referenced on the job description nor are there links to the videos on the job description. In contrast, the OCS Practice Model and Core Values are provided as links on the job description, which shows that there is no technical barrier to including links to RJP videos.

Component 2: The hiring process is streamlined to the minimum required steps so that candidates can progress quickly through the process.

The number of steps a candidate has to pass through before reaching a formal job offer is kept to a minimum, including a streamlined application, interview process, and background check. Hiring decision-making authority is given to a focused hiring committee of individuals with a deep and nuanced understanding of the job being filled.

Component 2: Current State Assessment Against Best Practice

Component in Place	Yes	Partially	No
Component in Practice	Yes	Partially	No

Evidence to Support Assessment
- In interviews, management and supervisory staff expressed consistently that the current hiring process has many steps, is administratively arduous, takes a long time to play out (we consistently heard "around five months"), and has poor communication throughout. Specific information shared in interviews included:
    - There are 27 distinct steps to complete a new job posting. An experienced person who does this task frequently can complete the 27 steps in roughly two hours when they are uninterrupted, while it can take an inexperienced person up to five hours.
    - If a job posting has an error, even one that is minor and easily corrected, DFCS HR will send the posting back to the state office, who will then send it back to the regional office for correction. Once the posting is corrected, HR places the updated posting at the very end of the queue to be worked.
    - Supervisors and managers reported that it can take up to three weeks from the point at which a hiring committee notifies HR of a desire to hire a candidate for HR to notify them they can start calling references.
    - Alaska mandates that all reference checks be conducted by phone. If the hiring manager cannot reach a reference by phone, they must contact the selected candidate and ask for another reference.
    - Supervisors discussed waiting to post a position because they knew another case manager would be leaving and they would prefer to post all positions at once due to the hiring delays.
    - Vacancies within HR have exacerbated delays in hiring process steps "owned" by HR itself. From interview responses by supervisors and managers, it appears that there are hiring process steps that currently can only be completed by a single individual, and if that individual is out of the office the process stalls until their return.
- The current volume of vacancies within OCS at the regional level is creating work overload for the one to two administrative staff who are responsible for completing hiring process steps, which is contributing to overall delays in hiring.
- We heard variation in experiences of internal staff applying for different positions within Alaska state government. Two examples are as follows:
    - One staff stated that because they were previously an Eligibility Technician within the Division of Public Assistance, their application could be used to apply for the equivalent

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position with OCS. They then completed two interviews and were offered the job three weeks after the second interview.

- o Another reported that when they, as a current OCS employee, applied for a different internal OCS position they were required to fill out a completely new application. It took between three and four weeks for them to find out if they were going to get an interview. Overall, it was three months between when they initially applied and when they were to start in the new role.
- Overall, the process for a person to apply for an OCS job is time consuming and onerous. In addition to standard job application form on which the applicant documents their education, experience, and professional work history, each applicant must also complete a supplemental questionnaire with six questions in total, four of which must be answered in narrative form speaking to their experience in a professional situation within the past five years on four of the six competencies.

Component 3: Hiring committees evaluate candidates using a consistent process based on a standard set of job competencies.

Best practice for a candidate evaluation process is grounded in competencies outlined in the job posting. This allows a hiring committee to evaluate a candidate's fit for a job based on the job-relevant experience and education versus more subjective factors susceptible to bias.

Component 3: Current State Assessment Against Best Practice

Component in Place	Yes[37]	Partially	No
Component in Practice	Yes	Partially	No

Evidence to Support Assessment

- With the transition to competency-based hiring, all candidates are screened against the same competencies previously identified for the position. At the end of interviews, a panel documents in writing how the candidate either meets or does not meet the competency. This process can be cumbersome given that the PSS series has six minimum qualification competencies, but it does generally align with best practice.
- Challenges arise when competencies used do not fully or accurately align with what is needed in the role, as is currently the case with those used for hiring into PSS positions. Some supervisors shared in interviews that they have felt forced to recommend for hire into PSS 1 or 2 positions individuals they felt strongly were not a good fit for the job and were unlikely to thrive and stay (one example cited was a candidate whose only experience was as barista and then manager at a coffee shop). They noted that they in most cases were right, and new hires left OCS after a few weeks or, at most, months. Supervisors noted that the current competency model for PSS 1 and 2 positions makes it easy for candidates to show on paper that they are good fit simply by using "buzz words" or words that are used in the competency description. As a result, it can be difficult for hiring panel members to clearly document a lack of fit for the role, even if there was evidence in the interview that they were unlikely to be successful.
- Even with candidates being assessed against the same competencies, supervisors reported in interviews examples of disagreement amongst hiring panel members on the interpretation of the position's competencies and candidates' educational or experiential fit.
- Hiring solely based on competency with no actual child protection experience or education may be suitable in a state that has an intensive training program that includes both a grounding in the practice model and pre-service and in-service learning support to apply practice model theory to

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[37] OCS reported that the Department is transition to a centralized hiring process in late-2023. As a result, some of the information contained in this evaluation may no longer be relevant with that change.

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"real life" practice. However, supervisors and frontline staff in interviews consistently indicated that the current OCS case manager training – SKILS – covers only the theoretical aspects of the work and is completed in entirety before new hires start managing cases. Once on the job, the support remotely located mentors and overwhelmed supervisors and co-workers can provide the new hire to compensate for inadequate training was reported to us as woefully insufficient for the majority of new hires, which is a major contributor to turnover among recently hired frontline workers.

- When posting a job for a position that is not standard or common, the hiring manager can select the competencies that they feel are necessary for the job. However, they may only select from an approved list of competencies versus being able to create new competencies that may be necessary for the role.

Component 4: The agency has a standard recruitment strategy.

Best practice is for agency HR managers in partnership with program subject matter experts to develop and roll out a multi-faceted recruitment plan that hiring managers together with HR can use to promote the benefits of the job to a diverse candidate pool and attract a steady pipeline of desired applicants with good fit for the job and the organization.

Component 4: Current State Assessment Against Best Practice

Component in Place	Yes	Partially	**No**
Component in Practice	Yes	Partially	**No**

Evidence to Support Assessment

- Staff in interviews indicated that while HR has a unit called "recruitment", its only responsibility is to screen incoming applications.
- All job openings are posted on Workplace Alaska, the State of Alaska's online recruitment system. In addition, OCS has a link on its webpage to Workplace Alaska as well as a document that highlights the six most frequently recruited positions and another link to the 44 jobs that are housed within OCS.
- Staff in some focus groups stated that a job may occasionally be posted to social media but that this is not a common or routine practice. It was reported that the main social media platform used is Facebook, whose user base tends to be an older demographic. As a result, OCS positions may not be advertised on social media platforms suited to demographics commonly targeted for frontline child welfare positions.
- When asked, supervisors indicated that they are not allowed to participate in recruitment efforts, that it is not an approved part of their job. This includes connecting with local schools or colleges to make local connections which are generally considered best practices in other states.
- The current PSS 1 and 2 job descriptions state that OCS is committed to building a "diverse, equitable, and inclusive work environment" and one where they "celebrate and value the diversity of their employees, partners, and families [they] serve."[38] PCG has not seen or heard in interviews evidence of a current recruitment strategy with specific strategies focused on diversifying the workforce to better reflect the population OCS services. We also are not aware of any pay differentials or other kinds of incentives aimed at attracting Native Alaskans or other people of color into the OCS workforce. Failing to have a workforce that is representative of the population served can increase negative perceptions of the agency among the communities it serves. It can also increase risk of the kinds of unconscious bias and disparate treatment that national research has shown to have led to the kinds of disproportionate representation in state care of black, brown, and native tribal children and youth also evident in Alaska, as illustrated by the disproportionate

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[38] State of Alaska Protective Services Specialist 1/2/3 – Kotzebue (PCN 069397M)

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representation of Native Alaskan children and youth in its care as compared with the state's general population.

- Staff indicated that OCS is generally represented at local job fairs, but it is unclear to PCG who represents OCS at these job fairs. One way to provide a realistic job preview would be to have PSS staff attend and speak with the individuals at the job fair.
- OCS does not currently appear to be consistently utilizing creative recruitment methods that might better market its jobs to either non-traditional applicants or to younger workers coming into the workforce. For example, colleges across the United States consistently graduate individuals inspired by traveling and helping people. The unique geography of Alaska allows these individuals the opportunity to travel to very different communities. In interviews, PCG met a number of such individuals who reported needing to work hard to find out what opportunities might exist in Alaska, which suggests that more proactive recruitment on the part of OCS and its HR partners might bear fruit.
- OCS currently has a pipeline with the University of Alaska in place to source social work students, though in interviews we did not get a strong sense about the relative success of filling positions through this pipeline with students who end up staying and thriving at OCS. Establishing a strong pipeline with state universities is generally considered a best practice for sourcing of frontline child welfare case workers; as noted above, building similar pipelines with industry leading social work programs at universities in the lower 48 states might help OCS bolster its talent pipeline further.
- Alaska government has recently implemented SHARP (Strengthening Healthcare Access Recruitment Program), a retention program which provides incentives to a limited number of staff members who enter into a contract in which in return for a commitment to the organization they receive an enhanced increase percentage each year for three years. At present, it is only available for PSS staff and the budget is only one-million dollars. PCG was told in interviews that the program's modest budget currently allows for 60 individuals in total across Alaska government, not just OCS. As a result, the program is both limited in who can benefit as well as how many employees can enter into a SHARP contract.
- Outside of SHARP and pay differentials for posting in locations that are particularly remote and/or have particularly high cost of living, PCG is not aware of any other incentives to either attract or retain staff. Examples of the kinds of incentives utilized in other state include stipends for being hired out of a pipeline college, paying off or contributing to repayment of student loans, stipends for continuing job-related education (e.g., working toward bachelors or masters of social work), etc.

RECOMMENDATIONS

5. **Streamline the hiring process.** We heard consistently from interview participants that that time to hire PSS 1's and 2's (i.e., the time from when a job is posted to when a candidate is hired) is somewhere on the order of five months and that communication with candidates over the course of that time is exceedingly poor (e.g., candidates not receiving any communication for a month or more related to the status of their application and interview process). As a result, interviewees noted a pattern of promising candidates dropping out of the process to take other job offers. PCG recommends that OCS conduct a "business process reengineering" (BPR) effort of a type applied routinely across industries and government agencies to make processes more efficient, with shorter timeframes, lower error rates, and better experiences by agency customers. In the case of hiring process, the people managing the process (generally a centralized Human Resources unit) need to meet the needs to sets of customers – job applicants and hiring managers. The following are typical steps followed in the kind of BPR process PCG feels is urgently needed in Alaska:
    n. **Identify process steps.** Steps are the discrete tasks within a process that have a specific stop and start. We start by charting the major process steps, identifying a specific start and finish point. In the example below, eligibility determination is the final output. Our understanding is that Alaska's hiring process has 27 steps, which is far in excess of best practice for a hiring process of this type.
    o. **Identify the actors and/or departments.** Look at the process across the different individuals or departments that play a role, then move the steps into appropriate swim lanes to help understand the bigger picture.

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p. **Identify process checkpoints.** Most processes are not linear, and include various decisions points, quality checks, corrections, and rework. Identify these "checkpoints," and identify how often processes move along the various paths.

q. **Determine time estimates for each step.** For each step in the process, determine time estimates, either through observation, formal time studies, or discussions with subject matter experts. Document **process time**, which is the time required to manually complete tasks within a step, and **delay time**, which includes the amount of time that work remains untouched before entering a process step and the amount of time that a task is not *actively* being worked on after it has entered the process step.

r. **Determine the first-time yield for each process step.** To help identify areas for improvement, capture the **first-time yield** for each step. This represents the percentage of the time that a process step is done correctly on the first attempt.

s. **Determine the percent of value-add activities.** As a next step, differentiate between value-added activities and non-value added activities in each process step. **Value-added activities** are those that contribute directly to the end product/service and are worth the effort of doing. **Non-value added activities** are not worth the time or effort. These percentages are a product of external value add (is there a true value to the customer) and internal value add (how efficient are the process steps themselves).

t. **Determine data collection points.** Identify where data is collected throughout the process. This contributes to a deeper analysis of the data, and help an agency learn more about process efficiency and performance levels.

u. **Produce Process Scorecard.** The purpose of a Process Scorecard is to provide a quick snapshot of current inefficiencies and identify opportunities for improvement.

v. **Conduct root cause analysis.** Take *symptoms* uncovered through the process analysis and trace them to their *root causes* by asking "why?" as many times as necessary until analysis hits on causes that are *actionable*. Typical categories of root causes of process inefficiency include Process Flow, Work Efficiency, Leadership, and Environment. While these are not all-inclusive, they serve as a reliable starting point during root cause analysis. One other useful tool during this stage of analysis is root cause mapping, also known as **Fishbone Diagramming**. These visual representations of symptoms and causes keep front of mind the bigger picture of issues contributing to the problem.

w. **Conduct visioning and design**, which gets the BPR Team thinking about how the future might work and how close the organization is to making that future a reality. The focus here is on the "should be" rather than the "could be." Basic ground rules for Visioning Session participants include:

    vi. Don't be restricted by present day realities

    vii. Don't consider costs

    viii. All ideas are good ideas

    ix. Look to the future

    x. Design ideal processes

x. **Gap analysis** involves comparing the current state to the future state and outlining the "gaps" between them. After having identified the gaps, the BPR Team determines necessary actions steps required to close the gap and the resulting implications.

y. **Options analysis** involves determining the feasibility and benefits of any given process improvement. At this point the process moves from what the process "should be" to what it "could be," taking into account constraints and the potential impact of each option. Consider developing a set of weighted criteria and then score each option based on those criteria. The end product is a ranked set of options for implementation. While additional decisions will need to be made when considering other environmental factors, this scoring method provides a more objective basis for choosing the best candidates for implementation. One way to rank improvement options is to complete a **Prioritization Matrix** which maps the anticipated benefit of an option to its ease of implementation. The BPR Team identifies the right location for each option based on ballpark estimates, identifying options that are high priority, medium priority and low priority in ways that get to priorities more quickly and efficiently, while with slightly less precision.

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z. **Decision making and change planning.** Equipped with all of the completed tools for analyzing options for the "to be" process, the BPR team makes recommendations to management regarding the proposed way forward, identifying a backlog of change projects to effect the shift from "as is" to "to be" states for the hiring process.

While this process may appear laborious on its face, experienced BPR professionals can conduct this kind of analysis on a process like the state's process to hiring into vacant OCS positions in a matter of a few months with minimal disruption to current operations. The potential gains for Alaska are significant as an inefficient, five-month process to hire into vacant frontline caseworker positions is not sustainable if the state wishes to realize the gains envisioned by the legislators who passed HB151

6. **Expand and be more intentional about recruiting.** Actively cultivating a pipeline of talent likely to have the unique combination of core skills and mindset required for successful frontline child welfare casework can help agencies like OCS develop a pool of qualified candidates to recruit into vacancies when they open up, leading to quicker and higher quality applications than relying on less strategic, more passive recruitment strategies like relying on people to find job postings on state job boards, other general hiring platforms like Indeed or Monster, or general social media channels like Facebook or X. One avenue for OCS to consider is expanding the college pipeline beyond current relationships with the University of Alaska, including relationships with universities in other states with a particular focus on social work programs. We interviewed a number of workers who were drawn to Alaska from other states and shared their perspective that Alaska has a unique draw for people who love the outdoors and prefer to live and work close to nature not only for them but for others like them, and strategically partnering with respected university-level social work and other public service-focused programs and their job placement offices holds promise for helping OCS source for talent more efficiently and fill vacancies more quickly with candidates more likely to stay and thrive than many of its recent hires who have left in a matter of weeks or a few months.

7. Due to the difficulty of recruiting frontline workers from local communities and a lack of available housing in rural communities, which leads to vacancies in these communities not being filled in a timely manner, OCS should **expand the use of creative models to fill the vacancies of rural offices.** Examples of these models include:
   a. Letter of Agreement (LOA) Model: This model, successfully being used in the Nome field office, utilizes a 'week-on, week-off' schedule to bring workers into rural communities through a letter of agreement with OCS.
   b. Traveling caseworkers: This model, currently being utilized in Dillingham, fills frontline positions in rural field offices with staff based in larger field offices by allowing them to work an alterative work schedule, which typically involves one to two weeks of travel to the rural field office to conduct investigations and other face-to-face work per month.
   c. Utilizing state provided housing: Other agencies in Alaska, such as state troopers and police, provide housing to employees who are relocating to rural areas since there are housing scarcities in rural communities.

8. Continue updating PSS 1 and PSS 2 job descriptions and related competencies to **more accurately describe the nature of the job** and include link to realistic job preview video. This strategy can help decrease delays in hiring by screening out potential applicants who may "check the boxes" of the current competency set being used for hiring but are not fundamentally a good fit for the unique rigors and characteristics of the job. A number of supervisory and management-level interview participants told us that the current process requires them to interview these candidates even though early in interviews it is very clear that they are not a good fit for the job, and that these candidates are slowing down the process of getting to high quality hires with strong likelihood to stay and thrive.

Additional Observations

- The most consistent challenge identified in focus groups for both hiring and retention was compensation and benefits. Assuming that a PSS 1 comes in at the bottom of the pay range in Anchorage, their monthly salary would be $4,566. This is nearly $1,000 higher than the average

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salary for an equivalent position in a sample of six states. Of the states, Alaska's pay is the second highest following Massachusetts at $4,823/month. Both Montana and New Mexico pay less than $3,000 per month.

- o While Alaska's pay may be high, it is not perceived as being high enough for the complexity of the work being complete or the complex and intensive nature of the job.
- o Alaska does not currently offer any type of additional compensation for workers who speak a language other than English. Spanish-speaking staff will assist their colleagues with translation to help avoid using interpreter services, which can be difficult to use and time consuming. A report by the GAO speaks to how inadequate pay can make it difficult to recruit qualified bilingual staff or staff who are sensitive to local cultures.[39]
- Many supervisors and managers discussed the benefits available for new workers. New employees are eligible for Tier IV benefits, which are not perceived to be as good as previous tiers. This may make recruiting staff more difficult.
- Many supervisors and frontline staff choose to be dues-paying members of a state union. The supervisors' union is different than the frontline staff members' union. Interview participants reported that the union for supervisors has negotiated worse health insurance benefits and has higher dues fees than the union for frontline staff. Supervisors (e.g., PSS 4s) also do not get paid for overtime work, in contrast to PSS 1s, 2s and 3s. As a result, when employees who choose to be union members are promoted, they end up paying more in dues and lose access to overtime payments to supplement core salary, which impacts their take home pay. A number of supervisors noted that they make less than most PSS 3s, which they reported as a drag on supervisor morale as well as a disincentive for frontline staff members to pursue promotion to supervisor (this sentiment was echoed by a number of interviewed frontline staff members). In addition, a number of supervisors and managers talked about the supervisors' union representing supervisors throughout all of Alaska's government departments. A number of interviewed OCS supervisors noted that a few years ago they asked their union to advocate for bonuses due to the high PSS 4 vacancy rate and additional work that supervisors were taking on. This ask by OCS supervisors was voted down by the membership at large because not all supervisors across all departments were doing additional work to justify bonuses.
- Frontline and supervisory staff indicated that the public's perception of OCS is a primary cause for delays in hiring more case managers. This was particularly emphasized in, but not limited to, Anchorage. Public perception is not an issue seen only in Alaska – child protection agencies throughout the nation struggle with this challenge. Frequently public child welfare professionals are labeled as "baby snatchers" and their organization as the "department who takes children." A negative public perception may also be tied to the disproportionate number of Native Alaskan children who are in OCS's custody, particularly when compared to the demographics of the OCS PSS 1 and 2 staff.
- Several staff shared a perception that OCS's commitment to diversity and cultural competency is false. Staff receive basic training but there is no follow-up training or training that speaks more specifically to Alaska's Native population.
- OCS has made changes in the PSS series to encourage retention, namely the creation of the PSS 3 position. In contrast, support staff have limited or no promotional opportunities. The only way for these individuals to move up is if an administrative supervisor leaves or if they leave that unit for another, either within the division or in another state agency.
- **Staff retention as a root cause and solution to the staff vacancy challenge:**
  - o **Reduce administrative burden:** Administrative expectations on caseworkers are a significant cause and result of unreasonable workloads and staff burnout. Managers should partner with caseworkers to examine existing work policies and processes, looking for potential areas of duplication, tasks where the required effort outweighs the utility of the end results, and inefficient uses of tools and technology.[40] Low-value processes and resources should be phased out to create more streamlined processes.

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[39] US Government Accountability Office. (2003). *Child Welfare: HHS Could Play a Greater Role in Helping Child Welfare Agencies Recruit and Retain Staff.* GAO-03-357.
[40] https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubpdfs/case_work_management.pdf

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- o **Flexible workplace policies:** Supportive child welfare agencies offer telework options and a level of flexibility in work schedules. The ability for caseworkers to commute from home directly to client residences for family meetings and take client calls remotely from home is a huge advantage for staff, particularly in rural settings where commuting between home, the office, and client sites can take an excessive amount of travel time. Caseworkers have experienced an improvement in their productivity as a result of these policies. Workers have experienced more time to engage with families, decreased driving time, and less stress than when they are in the office.[41] A child welfare agency should develop and implement a remote work policy evenly across all staff roles to the extent possible. The COVID-19 pandemic overturned many previously accepted notions about the types of work that can be done remotely, and which need to be done in the office. There are strategies for implementing a remote work policy with supervisors and client-facing staff alike. Maintaining remote and virtual work options can be a key factor in staff retention.
- OCS could include flexibility in the interview and hiring process to assign new hires to either IA or FS, including potentially shadowing after hire to provide new hire with the ability to make an informed choice between the two units, giving the new worker more input in their position.

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[41] https://www.aecf.org/resources/10-practices-part-one

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AUDIT QUESTIONS – PCG FINDINGS

QUESTION 1: DO THE ORGANIZATIONAL LAYERS CONTRIBUTE TO INEFFICIENCIES?

Finding: OCS's organization layers generally do not contribute to inefficiencies.

The first question posed in the audit is whether OCS's organizational layers contribute to inefficiencies. Overall, PCG's assessment is that OCS's current number of layers both at the state and regional offices is generally in line with sister agencies across the country, and actually shaded toward having fewer layers than is the standard. **It is PCG's overall assessment that OCS's organizational layers generally do not contribute to inefficiencies.** However, in interviews PCG heard about inefficiencies within the management structure that aren't necessarily associated with the layers within the organization.

Best practice is for people at all levels of an organization to have the information, support, and resources they need to effectively do their jobs. The key to this practice is for people managers to have a clear understanding of what the organization expects of them as people managers. They then need to carry out their people management roles in ways that are consistent across the organization for which they receive support and are held accountable. This allows them to effectively support their teams including the case managers that serve the families of Alaska. It also allows the organization to do people management work efficiently because all people managers share the same understanding of their role and receive consistent support and accountability.

QUESTION 2: COULD THE ORGANIZATIONAL CHART BE RESTRUCTURED TO HAVE FEWER "LAYERS" WHILE STILL PROVIDING ADEQUATE SUPERVISION OF CASEWORKERS?

Finding: OCS's ability to provide adequate supervision of caseworkers is not perpetuated by OCS having too many managerial layers.

The second question PCG was asked to investigate through this audit was whether the organizational chart can be restructured to have fewer "layers" while still providing adequate supervision of caseworkers.

In interviews, overall sentiment expressed to PCG was that layers within OCS are sufficient and not overly cumbersome. Most staff agreed they were able to easily communicate with their supervisor and they felt supported. However, supervisors themselves did not feel positioned for success as they generally had to balance supervisory tasks with managing their own caseloads, while training new staff who they felt are not adequately trained through SKILS and mentoring. They also expressed having to work overtime without additional compensation, in contrast with colleagues who are PSS 3s. In some regions, supervisors in interviews described a culture of not being able to go to other supervisors or not feeling empowered to answer a question posed by another supervisor.

The following summarizes major challenges expressed in interviews by staff, both frontline and supervisors:

- Current work culture of OCS.
- Impact of vacancies on adequate supervision.
- Lack of clear and current policies and procedures to govern supervisors' levels of empowerment, expectations for collaboration, and other aspects of collaborative supervisory practice.
- Inadequate training or no training.
- Changes being made by the state office based on the perceptions of the needs of the regional staff or the downstream effects of the changes.
- Communication from the state office to the regional offices.

Overall, PCG does not see these expressed challenges as being created and perpetuated by OCS having too many managerial layers. Root causes instead appear more grounded in a lack of explicitly

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articulated, effectively communicated, effectively trained, and consistently reinforced leadership, management, and supervisory practices.

QUESTION 3: WHAT IS CAUSING DELAYS IN HIRING OCS WORKERS?

> **Finding: Alaska's current process for hiring does not meet best practice standards. Hiring delays are caused by the hiring process being used for OCS staff, and particular frontline caseworkers, being neither realistic nor streamlined, two of the three hallmarks of a best practice hiring process.**

The final question asked by DLA focuses on what is causing delays in hiring OCS workers. This question is specifically focused on the causes of timing delays versus any potentially related staffing challenges associated with challenges in staff turnover and retention. Based on the evidence gathered, PCG feels that Alaska's **current process for hiring does not meet best practice standards**, and based on what we have been told it appears that **planned changes to the process may actually move the process even further away from alignment with best practices.** Resulting hiring delays are caused by the hiring process being used to hire OCS staff, and particular frontline caseworkers, being neither **realistic** nor **streamlined.**

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OCS STAFFING REPORT EVALUATION

AS 47.14.112(b) requires OCS to submit an annual staffing report to the legislature as an addendum to its annual legislative report, which is required under AS 18.05.020. The staffing report need only be submitted if OCS is unable to meet the training and workload standards. In the staffing report, OCS needs to explain why it was unable to meet the standards, as well as provide the following information:

    (1) the number of employees who vacated positions during the reporting period;

    (2) the number of funded positions that are vacant;

    (3) a description of efforts made to recruit and retain employees;

    (4) if the department determines additional employee positions are necessary to meet the standards, the number and cost of the additional positions;

    (5) if the department determines additional funding is necessary to meet the standards, the amount and purpose of the additional funding; and

    (6) the effects on a child and the child's family of the department's inability to meet the standards.

These requirements vary slightly from HB 151, which requires the staffing report to contain why OCS is unable to meet workload standards, the amount of funding necessary to meet the standards, and the effects of a child and the child's family of not meeting the standards. Additionally, the caseload standards established in HB 151 are as follows:

OCS Tenure	Caseload Size
Less than four months	No more than six families
Four – six months	No more than 12 families
Six months or more	No more than 13 families [42]

In this section, PCG evaluates whether the staffing report prepared by OCS, data from which is included in the sub-section below, meets the requirements in AS 47.14.112(b) and is based on best practices. PCG also suggests improvements where determined necessary.

OCS STAFFING REPORT DATA

The tables below show the data provided in OCS's FY23 staffing report in Attachment A. This report uses the number of workers available for assignment in each of the HB 151 longevity categories to calculate OCS's current case carrying capacity. It then contrasts this capacity with the actual number of open cases to illustrate the additional number of PCNs (positions) that would have to be available for assignment to achieve compliance with the HB 151 caseload standards.

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[42] When an employee supervises families in a region where travel distances negatively affect the employee's ability to supervise families and the employee has worked for the department for less than 12 months, the employee may not supervise more than six or 12 families.

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TABLE 1: REGIONAL DISPLAY OF OCS STAFFING – QUARTER END 10/01/2023

Region	Case Carrying PCNs [43]	Total Cases	No Caseload (Vacant)	6 Caseload (Months 1-3)	12 Caseload (Months 4- 6)	Full Caseload (13) (>=7 Months)	Total FTEs Available for Assignment [44]	% of FTEs Available for Assignment	Total Case Carrying Capacity	FTEs Short	Actual Caseload
Anchorage	73	812	33	9	5	26	35	48%	452	28	23
Northern	49	431	17	9	3	20	27	55%	350	6	16
South-central	59	589	14	7	5	33	41	69%	531	4	14
Southeast	20	181	7	5	0	8	10	52%	134	4	18
Western	21	193	12	0	1	8	9	42%	116	6	22
Statewide	222	2206	83	30	14	95	122	55%	1583	48	18

TABLE 2: CASELOAD ANALYSIS

Statewide	Prior 4 Quarter Average	Quarter End 10/01/2023	Difference
Case Carrying PCNs*	224	222	-2
Total Cases	2097	2206	109
No Caseload (Vacant)	73	83	10
6 Caseload (Months 1-3)	22	30	8
12 Caseload (Months 4-6)	11	14	3
Full Caseload (13) (<7 Months)	121	95	-26
Total FTEs Available for Assignment**	141	122	-19
% of FTEs Available for Assignment	63%	55%	-8%
Total Case Carrying Capacity	1837	1583	-254
FTEs Short	20	48	28
Actual Caseload	15.0	18.1	3.1

TABLE 3: PRIOR FOUR QUARTER TURNOVER (10/1/2022-10/1/2023)

Region	ALL PCNs [45]	Total Turnover [46]	Turnover Rate	Case Carrying PCNs	Total Turnover	Turnover Rate	Non-Case Carrying PCNs	Total Turnover	Turnover Rate
Anchorage	184	66	35.9%	73	30	41.1%	111	36	32.4%
Northern	99	46	46.5%	49	28	57.1%	50	18	36.0%
Southcentral	134	60	44.8%	59	30	50.8%	75	30	40.0%
Southeast	48	12	25.0%	20	8	40.0%	28	4	14.3%
SO	102	17	16.7%	-	-	-	102	19	18.6%
Western	42	23	54.8%	21	11	52.4%	21	12	57.1%
Statewide	609	224	36.8%	222	107	48.2%	387	119	30.7%

[43] Case Carrying PCN's = PSS 1 and 2 including any PSS 1, 2, and 3s and advanced PSS 3s, less Intake, less ORCA, less IL, includes adoption, permanency specialists
[44] Full time employees (FTEs) available for assignment based on an average caseload of 13 cases per frontline social worker
[45] Positions exclude on call and non-permanent staff
[46] Turnover is defined as number of positions who left during the prior 4 quarters combined

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ANALYSIS OF OCS STAFFING REPORT

The table below compares the content of the staffing report to the legislative requirements in 47.14.112(b):

#	Legislative Requirement	Component In Place	Analysis
1	The number of employees who vacated positions during the reporting period	Yes	This metric is shown by OCS in Table 3. The metric is split into total turnover for all positions and also shown as case carrying positions versus non-case carrying positions
2	The number of funded positions that are vacant	Yes	This metric is shown by OCS in Tables 1 and 2. Table 2 shows the total number of vacant positions and Table 2 shows the same metric by OCS region
3	A description of efforts made to recruit and retain employees	Yes	Several recruitment and retention efforts are described that highlight OCS's attempts to build a strong, resilient workforce. The OCS Workforce Workplan USSG Framework was included in Attachment C.
4	If the department determines additional employee positions are necessary to meet the standards, the number and cost of the additional positions	Partially	Table 1 shows the number of additional employee positions necessary to meet the standards, however, the estimated cost of the additional positions is not included in the legislative report
5	If the department determines additional funding is necessary to meet the standards, the amount and purpose of the additional funding	No	No information was provided regarding the funding necessary to meet the standards, nor the amount and purpose of the additional funding.
6	The effects on a child and the child's family of the department's inability to meet the standards	Yes	The legislative report acknowledges a high turnover rate among PSSs directly impacts outcomes for children and families in Alaska, and provides several outcome measures the Department uses to track outcomes for children and families.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STAFFING REPORT ENHANCEMENTS

In order to most effectively address the workplace challenges faced by OCS, it's important to have a data-driven approach to identify where gaps and challenges are. While the OCS report does an effective job at tracking the number and location of vacancies, turnover rate, and exit reasons for case carrying staff, there are data enhancements that could be considered to make recruitment and retention efforts more meaningful and align better with best practices:

1. **Time to fill vacancies:** This metric can be used to evaluate the efficiency of the hiring process and the effectiveness of recruiting strategies.
2. **Offer acceptance rate**: This metric can show the success rate of recruitment tactics as well as provide insight into the clarity of job descriptions. For example, if positions garner high interest but

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have low acceptance, it is possible the job descriptions do not accurately detail the specifics of the job.

3. **New hire turnover rate:** This metric can show OCS the number of new employees that resign within three months, six months, and/or 12 months compared to overall agency turnover to determine if additional supports should be offered to new employees.

4. **Supervisor to staff ratio:** While caseload data provides a metric for measuring frontline worker workload, a more accurate picture of supervisor workload can be ascertained by comparing the number of supervisors to frontline workers.

5. **Tenure in key positions:** This metric shows the make-up of staff in key positions in ways valuable to decision-making and continuous improvement in a number of areas, including succession planning for leaders approaching retirement age, learning and development for staff in key supervision/management/leadership positions, and supervision and support strategies for teams of caseworkers. Best practice reporting on tenure includes both total tenure with the organization and how long people have occupied a given key position (e.g., PSM 1 or 2, PSS 1 or 2, PSS 4). It also makes thoughtful use of statistical analysis approaches like mean, median, mode, and elimination or spotlighting of outliers to provide a meaningful "at a glance" view of the full population serving in key positions.

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APPENDIX B: OCS MASTER ORG CHART

Department of Family and Community Services
Children's Services Management
Office of Children's Services
Director's Office

Division Director
06-9269
R27 PX
Anchorage

Deputy Director
06-9299
R25 PX
Anchorage

Social Services Program Officer
06-1581
R21 CL
Anchorage

Social Services Program Administrator
06-4502
R23 CL
Anchorage

Division Operations Manager
06-3041
R24 CL
Anchorage

Administrative Operations Manager 2
06-0621
R23 CL
Anchorage

Mental Health Clinician 4
26-1024
R23 CL
Anchorage

Data Processing Manager 1
06-9304
R22 CL
Anchorage

Nurse Consultant 2
06-4606
R26 CL
Wasilla

Social Services Program Administrator
06-3871
R23 CL
Juneau

Program Coordinator 2
06-1735
R20 CL
Anchorage

Social Services Program Coordinator
06-9144
R20 CL
Anchorage

Program Coordinator 2
06-9169
R20 CL
Anchorage

Social Services Program Coordinator
06-3949
R20 CL
Juneau

Social Services Program Officer
06-9400
R21 CL
Anchorage

Social Services Program Officer
06-3089
R21 CL
Anchorage

Protective Services Manager 1
06-3792
R21 CL
Anchorage

Social Services Program Officer
06-3421
R21 CL
Anchorage

Protective Services Manager 2
06-3074
R22 CL
Wasilla

Protective Services Manager 2
06-9296
R22 CL
Anchorage

Protective Services Manager 2
06-4505
R22 CL
Juneau

Protective Services Manager 2
06-4506
R22 CL
Anchorage

Protective Services Manager 2
06-4507
R22 CL
Anchorage

Social Services Program Officer
06-4614
R21 CL
Juneau

Accountant 2
06-3707
R16 CL
Juneau

Accountant 3
06-1346
R18 CL
Juneau

Administrative Officer 2
06-0662
R19 CL
Juneau

Project Assistant
06-1901
R16 CL
Wasilla

Social Services Program Coordinator
06-3944
R20 CL
Juneau

Social Services Program Coordinator
06-3709
R20 CL
Juneau

Social Services Associate
26-1005
R12 CL
Fairbanks

Social Services Associate
26-1006
R12 CL
Wasilla

Social Services Associate
26-1004
R12 CL
Wasilla

Social Services Associate
06-3941
R12 CL
Anchorage

Department of Family and Community Services
Office of Children's Services
Children's Services Management
Director's Office (cont.)

Deputy Director
06-9299
R25 PX
Anchorage

Program
Coordinator 2
06-1735
R20 CL
Anchorage

Social Services
Program Administrator
06-3871
R23 CL
Juneau

Social Services
Program Coordinator
06-4588
R20 CL
Juneau

Program
Coordinator 1
06-4625
R18 CL
Juneau

Program
Coordinator 1
06-9294
R18 CL
Juneau

Program
Coordinator 1
26-1009
R18 CL
Juneau

Program
Coordinator 1
06-3972
R18 CL
Juneau

Social Services
Associate
06-3196
R12 CL
Juneau

Social Services
Associate
26-1016
R12 CL
Juneau

Social Services
Program Officer
06-3068
R21 CL
Juneau

Community Care
Licensing Specialist
3
06-9273
R20 CL
Anchorage

Community Care
Licensing Specialist
3
06-4567
R20 CL
Fairbanks

Protective
Services Specialist
3
06-4636
R19 CL
Juneau

Social Services
Program
Coordinator
06-3457
R20 CL
Juneau

Social Services
Associate
06-3011
R12 CL
Juneau

Social Services
Program Officer
06-0300
R21 CL
Wasilla

Social Services
Program
Coordinator
PCN TBD
R20 LTNP
Juneau

Public Health
Informaticist 2
PCN TBD
R20 LTNP
Juneau

Social Services
Program
Coordinator
06-4637
R20 CL
Juneau

Social Services
Program Officer
06-4564
R21 CL
Wasilla

Program
Coordinator 1
06-1794
R18 CL
Juneau

Social Services
Associate
06-3946
R12 CL
Anchorage

Project Assistant
06-0661
R16 CL
Juneau

Eligibility
Technician 2
06-4611
R12 CL
Juneau

Project Assistant
06-3112
R16 CL
Juneau

Protective
Services Specialist
4
06-1350
R20 CL
Juneau

Social Services
Program
Coordinator
26-1026
R20 CL
Anchorage

Social Services
Associate
06-9157
R12 CL
Wasilla

Social Services
Associate
06-4568
R12 CL
Fairbanks

Social Services
Associate
06-9132
R12 CL
Anchorage

Social Services
Associate
26-1010
R12 CL
Anchorage

Social Services
Associate
06-4663
R12 CL
Juneau

Social Services
Associate
06-3769
R12 CL
Wasilla

Mental Health
Clinician 4
26-1024
R23 CL
Anchorage

Safety Officer
06-3711
R18 CL
Anchorage

Program
Coordinator 2
06-8383
R20 CL
Anchorage

Data Processing
Manager 1
06-3304
R22 CL
Anchorage

Research
Analyst 4
06-3962
R21 CL
Juneau

Research
Analyst 1/2/3
06-4570
R13/16/18 CL
Juneau

Research
Analyst 1/2/3
06-3705
R13/16/18 CL
Juneau

Social Services
Program
Officer
06-9320
R21 CL
Anchorage

Information System
Coordinator
06-3926
R18 CL
Anchorage

Social Services
Program
Coordinator
06-9171
R20 CL
Anchorage

Information System
Coordinator
06-3934
R18 CL
Anchorage

Social Services
Program
Coordinator
06-9168
R20 CL
Anchorage

Department of Family and Community Services
Office of Children's Services
Children's Services Management
Director's Office (cont.)

Division Director
06-9269
R27 PX
Anchorage

Administrative Operations
Manager 2
06-0621
R23 CL
Anchorage

Accountant 3
06-1346
R18 CL
Juneau

Accountant 2
06-3707
R16 CL
Juneau

Social Services
Program Officer
06-4614
R21 CL
Juneau

Administrative
Officer 2
06-0662
R19 CL
Juneau

Administrative
Assistant 3
06-9314
R15 CL
Anchorage

Administrative
Assistant 3
06-0642
R15 CL
Juneau

Office
Assistant 2
26-1027
R10 CL
Anchorage

Office
Assistant 2
06-3028
R10 CL
Juneau

Social Services
Program
Coordinator
06-9138
R20 CL
Juneau

Project Assistant
06-3948
R16 CL
Juneau

Eligibility
Technician 2
06-9340
R14 CL
Juneau

Eligibility
Technician 2
06-0660
R14 CL
Juneau

Social Services
Program
Coordinator
06-3075
R20 CL
Juneau

Accounting
Technician 2
06-4610
R14 CL
Juneau

Social Services
Associate
06-3704
R12 CL
Juneau

Program
Coordinator 1
06-3396
R18 CL
Juneau

Social Services
Program
Coordinator
06-3944
R20 CL
Juneau

Project Assistant
06-0659
R16 CL
Juneau

Accounting
Technician 3
06-4609
R16 CL
Juneau

Accounting
Technician 2
06-4516
R14 CL
Juneau

Accounting
Technician 1
06-0641
R12 CL
Juneau

Accounting
Technician 1
26-1007
R12 CL
Juneau

Accounting
Technician 1
06-3671
R12 CL
Juneau

Accounting Clerk
06-3702
R10 CL
Juneau

Department of Family and Community Services
Office of Children's Services
Front Line Social Workers
Anchorage Regional Office

Family Services

- Protective Services Manager 2, 06-4506, R22 CL, Anchorage
- Office Assistant 2, 06-3082, R10 CL, Anchorage
- Social Services Associate, 26-1020, R12 CL, Anchorage
- Protective Services Manager 1, 06-4633, R21 CL, Anchorage
- Office Assistant 3, 26-1021, R11 CL, Anchorage
- Protective Services Specialist 3, 06-4504, R19 CL, Anchorage

Protective Services Specialist 4 (R20 CL, Anchorage):
- 06-3018
- 06-4626
- 06-3125
- 06-3928
- 06-9393

Protective Services Specialist 3 (R19 CL, Anchorage):
- 05-3712
- 06-3417
- 06-4547
- 06-4543
- 06-9153

Protective Services Specialist 1/2 (R15/17 CL, Anchorage):
- 06-9335
- 06-3374
- 06-3870
- 06-3890
- 06-3100
- 06-3370
- 06-9271
- 06-9155
- 06-3931
- 06-4628
- 06-4627
- 06-3432
- 06-9279
- 06-3428
- 06-4629
- 06-9315
- 06-3425
- 06-9154
- 06-3764 (highlighted)

Social Services Associate:
- 06-4622, R12 CL, Anchorage
- 26-1013, R12 CL, Anchorage
- 06-3938, R12 CL, Anchorage
- 06-3390, R12 CL, Anchorage

Administrative Support Unit

- Administrative Officer 1/2, 06-3586, R17/19 CL, Anchorage
- Administrative Assistant 3, 26-1025, R15 CL, Anchorage
- Administrative Assistant 2, 06-3161, R14 CL, Anchorage
- Office Assistant 2, 06-3156, R10 CL, Anchorage
- Office Assistant 2, 06-3899, R10 CL, Anchorage
- Office Assistant 2, 06-4607, R10 CL, Anchorage
- Office Assistant 2, 06-4385, R10 CL, Anchorage
- Office Assistant 1, 06-3924, R8 CL, Anchorage
- Office Assistant 1, 06-3921, R8 CL, Anchorage
- Office Assistant 1, 06-3035, R8 CL, Anchorage
- Office Assistant 1, 06-9286, R8 CL, Anchorage
- Office Assistant 3, 06-4670, R11 CL, Anchorage
- Office Assistant 1, 06-3863, R8 CL, Anchorage
- Office Assistant 1, 06-3964, R8 CL, Anchorage
- Office Assistant 1, 06-4660, R8 CL, Anchorage
- Office Assistant 1, 06-3923, R8 CL, Anchorage

- Social Services Program Coordinator, 06-3944, R20 CL, Juneau
- Administrative Assistant 2, 06-4640, R14 CL, Anchorage
- Accounting Technician 1, 06-3063, R12 CL, Anchorage

Department of Family and Community Services
Office of Children's Services
Front Line Social Workers
Anchorage Regional Office (cont.)

ASPIN Unit

Protective Services Specialist 3
06-4636
R19 CL
Juneau

Project Assistant
06-4624
R16 CL
Anchorage

Social Services Associate
06-4671
R12 CL
Anchorage

Social Services Associate
06-4623
R12 CL
Anchorage

Social Services Associate
06-4621
R12 CL
Anchorage

Team Decision Making

Protective Services Specialist 3
06-9133
R19 CL
Anchorage

Protective Services Specialist 3
06-9134
R19 CL
Anchorage

Protective Services Specialist 3
06-9135
R19 CL
Anchorage

Office Assistant 2
06-9131
R10 CL
Anchorage

Family Services

Protective Services Manager 2
06-4506
R22 CL
Anchorage

Protective Services Manager 1
06-3878
R21 CL
Anchorage

Protective Services Specialist 4
06-4544
R20 CL
Anchorage

Protective Services Specialist 1/2
06-9366
R15/17 CL
Anchorage

Protective Services Specialist 1/2
06-3409
R15/17 CL
Anchorage

Protective Services Specialist 1/2
06-3098
R15/17 CL
Anchorage

Protective Services Specialist 1/2
06-9390
R15/17 CL
Anchorage

Social Services Associate
26-1011
R12 CL
Anchorage

Protective Services Specialist 1/2
06-3927
R15/17 CL
Anchorage

Protective Services Specialist 4
06-3430
R20 CL
Anchorage

Protective Services Specialist 3
06-4541
R19 CL
Anchorage

Protective Services Specialist 3
06-9196
R19 CL
Anchorage

Protective Services Specialist 3
06-9280
R19 CL
Anchorage

Protective Services Specialist 1/2
06-9270
R15/17 CL
Anchorage

Protective Services Specialist 1/2
06-3922
R15/17 CL
Anchorage

Protective Services Specialist 4
06-9392
R20 CL
Anchorage

Protective Services Specialist 1/2
06-3932
R15/17 CL
Anchorage

Protective Services Specialist 1/2
06-9272
R15/17 CL
Anchorage

Protective Services Specialist 1/2
06-9267
R15/17 CL
Anchorage

Protective Services Specialist 1/2
06-3022
R15/17 CL
Anchorage

Protective Services Specialist 1/2
06-9194
R15/17 CL
Anchorage

Social Services Associate
06-9309
R12 CL
Anchorage

Protective Services Specialist 4
06-3891
R20 CL
Anchorage

Protective Services Specialist 3
06-9367
R19 CL
Anchorage

Protective Services Specialist 3
06-9365
R19 CL
Anchorage

Protective Services Specialist 3
06-3057
R19 CL
Anchorage

Protective Services Specialist 1/2
06-3929
R15/17 CL
Anchorage

Protective Services Specialist 1/2
06-9292
R15/17 CL
Anchorage

Social Services Associate
26-1012
R12 CL
Anchorage

Administrative Assistant 2
06-3747
R14 CL
Anchorage

Social Services Associate
06-3942
R12 CL
Anchorage

Social Services Associate
06-3939
R12 CL
Anchorage

Social Services Associate
06-4546
R12 CL
Anchorage

Social Services Associate
06-3748
R12 CL
Anchorage

APPENDIX A
(Continued)

Department of Family and Community Services
Office of Children's Services
Front Line Social Workers
Anchorage Regional Office (cont.)

Quality Assurance Unit

Social Services Program Officer
06-3421
R21 CL
Anchorage

Social Services Program Coordinator
06-9937
R20 CL
Anchorage

Social Services Program Coordinator
06-9145
R20 CL
Anchorage

Research Analyst 3
06-1351
R18 CL
Anchorage

Social Services Program Coordinator
06-9318
R20 CL
Anchorage

Social Services Program Coordinator
06-9319
R20 CL
Anchorage

Office Assistant 2
06-9317
R10 CL
Anchorage

Mentor Team

Protective Services Specialist 4
06-9167
R21 CL
Anchorage

Protective Services Specialist 3
06-9357
R19 CL
Wasilla

Protective Services Specialist 3
06-9369
R19 CL
Anchorage

Protective Services Specialist 3
06-9182
R19 CL
Anchorage

Protective Services Specialist 3
06-9156
R19 CL
Anchorage

Protective Services Specialist 3
06-9371
R19 CL
Juneau

Protective Services Specialist 3
06-4550
R19 CL
Wasilla

Social Services Program Administrator
06-4502
R23 CL
Anchorage

Protective Services Manager 1
06-3792
R21 CL
Anchorage

Centralized Intake

Protective Services Specialist 4
06-9162
R20 CL
Anchorage

Protective Services Specialist 1/2
06-9161
R15/17 CL
Anchorage

Protective Services Specialist 1/2
06-3427
R15/17 CL
Anchorage

Protective Services Specialist 1/2
06-3746
R15/17 CL
Anchorage

Protective Services Specialist 1/2
06-9292
R15/17 CL
Anchorage

Office Assistant 2
06-9316
R10 CL
Anchorage

Protective Services Specialist 4
06-9290
R20 CL
Anchorage

Protective Services Specialist 1/2
06-3270
R15/17 CL
Anchorage

Protective Services Specialist 1/2
06-3045
R15/17 CL
Anchorage

Protective Services Specialist 1/2
06-3185
R15/17 CL
Anchorage

Protective Services Specialist 1/2
06-9292
R15/17 CL
Fairbanks

Protective Services Specialist 1/2
06-3877
R15/17 CL
Anchorage

Protective Services Specialist 4
06-3715
R20 CL
Anchorage

Protective Services Specialist 1/2
06-3960
R15/17 CL
Anchorage

Protective Services Specialist 1/2
06-3269
R15/17 CL
Anchorage

Protective Services Specialist 1/2
06-4540
R15/17 CL
Anchorage

Protective Services Specialist 1/2
06-3875
R15/17 CL
Anchorage

Protective Services Specialist 1/2
06-3763
R15/17 CL
Anchorage

Protective Services Specialist 4
06-3879
R20 CL
Anchorage

Protective Services Specialist 1/2
06-3959
R15/17 CL
Anchorage

Protective Services Specialist 1/2
06-9193
R15/17 CL
Anchorage

Protective Services Specialist 1/2
06-3021
R15/17 CL
Anchorage

Protective Services Specialist 1/2
06-4513
R15/17 CL
Anchorage

Protective Services Specialist 1/2
06-3027
R15/17 CL
Anchorage

Protective Services Specialist 1/2
06-9338
R15/17 CL
Fairbanks

APPENDIX A
(Continued)

Permanency

Department of Family and Community Services
Office of Children's Services
Front Line Social Workers
Northern Regional Office

Protective Services
Manager 2
06-4507
R22 CL
Anchorage

Protective
Services
Specialist 4
06-3102
R20 CL
Fairbanks

Protective Services
Specialist 1/2
06-4552
R15/17 CL
Fairbanks

Social Services
Associate
26-1003
R12 CL
Fairbanks

Social Services
Associate
26-1002
R12 CL
Fairbanks

Social Services
Associate
06-3750
R12 CL
Fairbanks

Protective Services
Specialist 1/2
06-3350
R15/17 CL
Fairbanks

Social Services
Associate
26-1015
R12 CL
Fairbanks

**Administrative
Support Unit**

Administrative
Officer 1/2
06-3115
R17/19 CL
Fairbanks

Accounting
Technician 1
06-4638
R12 CL
Fairbanks

Accounting
Technician 1
06-9268
R12 CL
Fairbanks

Accounting
Technician 1
06-3036
R10 CL
Fairbanks

Office Assistant 4
06-3037
R12 CL
Fairbanks

Office Assistant 1
06-4665
R8 CL
Fairbanks

Office Assistant 1
06-3730
R8 CL
Fairbanks

Office Assistant 1
06-3856
R8 CL
Fairbanks

Accounting
Technician 1
06-3867
R12 CL
Fairbanks

Office Assistant 1
06-4605
R8 CL
Fairbanks

Administrative
Assistant 2
06-3623
R14 CL
Fairbanks

Office Assistant 2
06-4639
R10 CL
Fairbanks

Department of Family and Community Services
Office of Children's Services
Front Line Social Workers
Northern Regional Office (cont.)

Protective Services Manager 2
06-4507
R22 CL
Anchorage

Protective Services Manager 1
06-3014
R21 CL
Fairbanks

Protective Services Manager 1
06-3016
R21 CL
Fairbanks

Protective Services Specialist 3
06-9396
R19 CL
Fairbanks

Protective Services Specialist 3
06-4553
R19 CL
Fairbanks

Protective Services Specialist 3
06-3954
R19 CL
Fairbanks

Protective Services Specialist 4
06-4551
R20 CL
Fairbanks

Protective Services Specialist 1/2
06-3217
R15/17 CL
Fairbanks

Protective Services Specialist 1/2
06-3182
R15/17 CL
Fairbanks

Protective Services Specialist 1/2
06-3749
R15/17 CL
Fairbanks

Protective Services Specialist 1/2
06-9160
R15/17 CL
Fairbanks

Social Services Associate
06-9321
R12 CL
Fairbanks

Protective Services Specialist 3
06-3140
R19 CL
Fairbanks

Protective Services Specialist 4
06-3462
R20 CL
Utqiagvik

Protective Services Specialist 1/2
06-9341
R15/17 CL
Anchorage

Protective Services Specialist 4
06-3893
R15/17 CL
Anchorage

Protective Services Specialist 1/2
06-3180
R15/17 CL
Utqiagvik

Protective Services Specialist 1/2/3
06-3933
R15/17/19 CL
Utqiagvik

Social Services Associate
06-3855
R12 CL
Utqiagvik

Protective Services Specialist 4
06-4159
R20 CL
Kotzebue

Protective Services Specialist 1/2/3
06-3418
R15/17/19 CL
Kotzebue

Protective Services Specialist 1/2/3
06-9397
R15/17/19 CL
Kotzebue

Protective Services Specialist 1/2/3
06-9356
R15/17/19 CL
Kotzebue

Protective Services Specialist 1/2/3
06-3172
R15/17/19 CL
Anchorage

Protective Services Specialist 1/2/3
06-4600
R15/17/19 CL
Kotzebue

Social Services Associate
26-1022
R12 CL
Kotzebue

Protective Services Specialist 4
06-3200
R20 CL
Fairbanks

Protective Services Specialist 3
06-9360
R19 CL
Fairbanks

Protective Services Specialist 1/2
06-3876
R15/17 CL
Fairbanks

Protective Services Specialist 1/2
06-3188
R15/17 CL
Delta Junction

Social Services Associate
06-3206
R12 CL
Delta Junction

Protective Services Specialist 1/2
06-3751
R15/17 CL
Fairbanks

Protective Services Specialist 4
06-9324
R20 CL
Fairbanks

Protective Services Specialist 1/2
06-9394
R15/17 CL
Fairbanks

Protective Services Specialist 1/2
06-3433
R15/17 CL
Fairbanks

Protective Services Specialist 1/2
06-9368
R15/17 CL
Fairbanks

Protective Services Specialist 1/2
06-3434
R15/17 CL
Fairbanks

Protective Services Specialist 1/2
06-4191
R15/17 CL
Fairbanks

Protective Services Specialist 1/2
06-4558
R15/17 CL
Fairbanks

Protective Services Specialist 4
06-3047
R20 CL
Fairbanks

Protective Services Specialist 3
06-4556
R19 CL
Fairbanks

Protective Services Specialist 1/2
06-3271
R15/17 CL
Fairbanks

Protective Services Specialist 1/2
06-3407
R15/17 CL
Fairbanks

Protective Services Specialist 1/2
06-4192
R15/17 CL
Fairbanks

Protective Services Specialist 1/2
06-4533
R15/17 CL
Fairbanks

Social Services Associate
06-3857
R12 CL
Fairbanks

Protective Services Specialist 4
06-3950
R20 CL
Fairbanks

Protective Services Specialist 1/2
06-3436
R15/17 CL
Fairbanks

Protective Services Specialist 1/2
06-3073
R15/17 CL
Fairbanks

Protective Services Specialist 1/2
06-3765
R15/17 CL
Fairbanks

Protective Services Specialist 1/2
06-3766
R15/17 CL
Fairbanks

Protective Services Specialist 1/2
06-3159
R15/17 CL
Fairbanks

Social Services Associate
26-1001
R12 CL
Fairbanks

Protective Services Specialist 4
06-3412
R20 CL
Fairbanks

Protective Services Specialist 3
06-3997
R19 CL
Fairbanks

Protective Services Specialist 1/2
06-3957
R15/17 CL
Fairbanks

Protective Services Specialist 1/2
06-9195
R15/17 CL
Fairbanks

Protective Services Specialist 1/2
06-3066
R15/17 CL
Fairbanks

Protective Services Specialist 1/2
06-4657
R15/17 CL
Fairbanks

Protective Services Specialist 1/2
06-9395
R15/17 CL
Fairbanks

Social Services Associate
06-3389
R12 CL
Fairbanks

Protective Services Specialist 4
06-3770
R20 CL
Nome

Protective Services Specialist 1/2/3
06-9322
R15/17/19 CL
Anchorage

Protective Services Specialist 1/2
06-4659
R15/17 CL
Anchorage

Protective Services Specialist 1/2
06-9398
R15/17 CL
Nome

Social Services Associate
26-1023
R12 CL
Nome

Protective Services Specialist 1/2/3
06-4554
R15/17/19 CL
Anchorage

Protective Services Specialist 1/2
06-3947
R15/17 CL
Anchorage

Protective Services Specialist 1/2
06-3356
R15/17 CL
Nome

Office Assistant 1
06-3039
R8 CL
Nome

APPENDIX A
(Continued)

Eligibility Unit

Social Services Program Coordinator
06-3075
R20 CL
Juneau

Eligibility Technician 4
06-2278
R17 CL
Wasilla

Eligibility Technician 2
06-4644
R14 CL
Wasilla

Eligibility Technician 2
06-4647
R14 CL
Wasilla

Eligibility Technician 2
06-3955
R14 CL
Wasilla

Eligibility Technician 2
06-3265
R14 CL
Wasilla

Eligibility Technician 2
06-8075
R14 CL
Wasilla

Administrative Unit

Protective Services Manager 2
06-3074
R22 CL
Wasilla

Protective Services Specialist 3
06-4652
R19 CL
Wasilla

Protective Services Specialist 4
06-3368
R20 CL
Wasilla

Protective Services Specialist 3
06-9278
R19 CL
Wasilla

Office Assistant 2
06-4672
R10 CL
Wasilla

Protective Services Specialist 1/2/3
06-3790
R15/17/19 CL
Kenai

Office Assistant 2
06-3384
R10 CL
Wasilla

Administrative Officer 2
06-3114
R19 CL
Wasilla

Administrative Assistant 2
06-4641
R14 CL
Wasilla

Administrative Assistant 2
06-3858
R14 CL
Wasilla

Administrative Assistant 2
06-3970
R14 CL
Wasilla

Accounting Technician 1
06-4009
R12 CL
Wasilla

Accounting Technician 1
06-9362
R12 CL
Wasilla

Accounting Technician 1
06-9287
R12 CL
Wasilla

Accounting Technician 1
06-4608
R12 CL
Wasilla

Accounting Technician 1
06-9328
R12 CL
Wasilla

Office Assistant 2
06-9288
R10 CL
Wasilla

Accounting Technician 1
06-9373
R12 CL
Wasilla

Accounting Technician 1
06-4602
R12 CL
Wasilla

Department of Family and Community Services
Front Line Social Workers
Office of Children's Services
Southcentral Regional Office

APPENDIX A
(Continued)

Department of Family and Community Services
Front Line Social Workers
Office of Children's Services
Southcentral Regional Office (cont.)

Protective Services Manager 2
06-3074
R22 CL
Wasilla

Protective Services Manager 1
06-9289
R21 CL
Kenai

Protective Services Specialist 3
06-9136
R19 CL
Wasilla

Protective Services Specialist 3
06-9291
R19 CL
Wasilla

Protective Services Specialist 4
06-3408
R20 CL
Kodiak

Protective Services Specialist 1/2
06-3034
R15/17 CL
Wasilla

Protective Services Specialist 1/2
06-9342
R15/17 CL
Kenai

Protective Services Specialist 1/2
06-3046
R15/17 CL
Wasilla

Protective Services Specialist 1/2
06-9188
R15/17 CL
Wasilla

Protective Services Specialist 1/2
06-4539
R15/17 CL
Wasilla

Protective Services Specialist 4
06-4537
R20 CL
Kenai

Protective Services Specialist 3
06-9344
R15/17 CL
Kenai

Protective Services Specialist 1/2
06-4634
R15/17 CL
Kenai

Protective Services Specialist 1/2
06-3197
R15/17 CL
Kenai

Protective Services Specialist 1/2
06-9190
R15/17 CL
Kenai

Protective Services Specialist 1/2
06-4536
R15/17 CL
Kenai

Protective Services Specialist 4
06-3139
R20 CL
Kenai

Protective Services Specialist 1/2
06-9189
R15/17 CL
Kenai

Protective Services Specialist 1/2
06-9284
R15/17 CL
Kenai

Protective Services Specialist 1/2
06-4648
R15/17 CL
Kenai

Protective Services Specialist 1/2
06-3789
R15/17 CL
Kenai

Protective Services Specialist 1/2/3
06-4535
R15/17/19 CL
Kenai

Protective Services Specialist 1/2
06-3767
R15/17 CL
Kenai

Protective Services Specialist 1/2
06-9343
R15/17 CL
Kenai

Protective Services Specialist 4
06-9152
R20 CL
Homer

Protective Services Specialist 1/2/3
06-9389
R15/17/19 CL
Kodiak

Protective Services Specialist 1/2/3
06-3141
R15/17/19 CL
Homer

Protective Services Specialist 1/2
06-9148
R15/17 CL
Homer

Protective Services Specialist 1/2
06-3070
R15/17 CL
Wasilla

Protective Services Specialist 1/2
06-3745
R15/17 CL
Wasilla

Protective Services Specialist 1/2
06-3189
R15/17 CL
King Salmon

Administrative Assistant 2
06-3080
R14 CL
Kenai

Social Services Associate
06-9147
R12 CL
Wasilla

Social Services Associate
26-1017
R12 CL
Kenai

Social Services Associate
06-3058
R12 CL
Dillingham

Social Services Associate
06-3143
R12 CL
Kenai

Social Services Associate
06-9387
R12 CL
Kenai

Social Services Associate
06-3109
R12 CL
Kenai

Social Services Associate
06-3859
R12 CL
Kenai

Department of Family and Community Services
Front Line Social Workers
Office of Children's Services
Southcentral Regional Office (cont.)

Administrative Assistant 2 — 06-3663, R12 CL, Wasilla

- Social Services Associate — 06-9276, R12 CL, Wasilla
- Social Services Associate — 06-3364, R12 CL, Wasilla
- Social Services Associate — 26-1019, R12 CL, Wasilla
- Social Services Associate — 06-3547, R10 CL, Wasilla
- Social Services Associate — 26-1018, R12 CL, Wasilla

Protective Services Manager 2 — 06-3074, R22 CL, Wasilla

Protective Services Manager 1 — 06-3015, R21 CL, Wasilla

Protective Services Specialist 4 — 06-9358, R20 CL, Wasilla
- Protective Services Specialist 1/2 — 06-3170, R15/17 CL, Kenai
- Protective Services Specialist 3 — 06-9186, R19 CL, Wasilla
- Protective Services Specialist 1/2 — 06-9355, R15/17 CL, Wasilla
- Protective Services Specialist 3 — 06-9354, R19 CL, Wasilla
- Protective Services Specialist 1/2 — 06-9331, R15/17 CL, Wasilla
- Protective Services Specialist 1/2 — 06-3365, R15/17 CL, Wasilla
- Social Services Associate — 06-3449, R12 CL, Wasilla
- Protective Services Specialist 1/2 — 06-9146, R15/17 CL, Wasilla

Protective Services Specialist 4 — 06-9359, R20 CL, Wasilla
- Protective Services Specialist 3 — 06-4922, R19 CL, Wasilla
- Protective Services Specialist 3 — 06-4651, R19 CL, Wasilla
- Protective Services Specialist 1/2 — 06-3020, R15/17 CL, Wasilla
- Protective Services Specialist 3 — 06-9187, R19 CL, Wasilla
- Protective Services Specialist 1/2/3 — 06-3194, R15/17/19 CL, Wasilla
- Protective Services Specialist 1/2 — 06-3411, R15/17 CL, Wasilla
- Social Services Associate — 06-9386, R12 CL, Valdez

Protective Services Specialist 4 — 06-3126, R20 CL, Wasilla
- Protective Services Specialist 3 — 06-9346, R19 CL, Wasilla
- Protective Services Specialist 3 — 06-9283, R19 CL, Wasilla
- Protective Services Specialist 3 — 06-9348, R19 CL, Wasilla
- Protective Services Specialist 3 — 06-9345, R19 CL, Wasilla
- Protective Services Specialist 1/2 — 06-4534, R15/17 CL, Wasilla

Protective Services Specialist 4 — 06-4532, R20 CL, Wasilla
- Protective Services Specialist 3 — 06-8485, R19 CL, Wasilla
- Protective Services Specialist 1/2 — 06-3744, R15/17 CL, Wasilla
- Protective Services Specialist 1/2 — 06-3422, R15/17 CL, Wasilla
- Protective Services Specialist 3 — 06-9184, R19 CL, Wasilla
- Social Services Associate — 06-3866, R12 CL, Wasilla

Protective Services Specialist 4 — 06-3691, R20 CL, Wasilla
- Protective Services Specialist 3 — 06-1805, R19 CL, Wasilla
- Protective Services Specialist 1/2 — 06-9351, R15/17 CL, Wasilla
- Protective Services Specialist 1/2 — 06-9349, R15/17 CL, Wasilla
- Protective Services Specialist 1/2 — 06-9350, R15/17 CL, Wasilla
- Protective Services Specialist 1/2 — 06-9347, R15/17 CL, Wasilla
- Protective Services Specialist 1/2 — 06-9149, R15/17 CL, Wasilla
- Protective Services Specialist 1/2 — 06-3202, R15/17 CL, Wasilla
- Social Services Associate — 06-3860, R12 CL, Wasilla

Protective Services Specialist 4 — 06-9183, R20 CL, Wasilla
- Protective Services Specialist 1/2 — 06-9330, R15/17 CL, Wasilla
- Protective Services Specialist 1/2 — 06-3940, R15/17 CL, Wasilla
- Protective Services Specialist 1/2 — 06-9353, R15/17 CL, Wasilla
- Protective Services Specialist 1/2 — 06-9352, R15/17 CL, Wasilla
- Protective Services Specialist 1/2 — 06-9329, R15/17 CL, Wasilla
- Protective Services Specialist 1/2 — 06-3243, R15/17 CL, Wasilla
- Social Services Associate — 06-9361, R12 CL, Wasilla

Department of Family and Community Services
Office of Children's Services
Front Line Social Workers
Southeast Regional Office

Administrative Support Unit

Protective Services Manager 2
06-4505, R22 CL, Juneau

- Protective Services Specialist 4 — 06-3951, R20 CL, Juneau
  - Protective Services Specialist 3 — 06-3065, R9 CL, Juneau
  - Social Services Associate — 06-3108, R12 CL, Juneau
  - Social Services Associate — 06-3864, R12 CL, Juneau
  - Social Services Associate — 26-1008, R12 CL, Juneau
  - Social Services Associate — 06-3154, R12 CL, Juneau

- Protective Services Specialist 3 — 06-3069, R19 CL, Juneau

- Protective Services Specialist 4 — 06-3192, R20 CL, Ketchikan
  - Protective Services Specialist 1/2/3 — 06-3029, R15/17/19 CL, Ketchikan
  - Protective Services Specialist 1/2 — 06-3403, R15/17 CL, Ketchikan
  - Protective Services Specialist 1/2 — 06-9399, R15/17 CL, Craig
  - Protective Services Specialist 1/2 — 06-3710, R15/17 CL, Ketchikan
  - Protective Services Specialist 1/2 — 06-3873, R15/17 CL, Juneau

- Protective Services Specialist 4 — 06-3465, R20 CL, Juneau
  - Protective Services Specialist 3 — 06-3882, R19 CL, Juneau
  - Protective Services Specialist 1/2 — 06-3741, R15/17 CL, Juneau
  - Protective Services Specialist 1/2 — 06-3213, R15/17 CL, Juneau
  - Protective Services Specialist 1/2 — 06-3708, R15/17 CL, Juneau
  - Protective Services Specialist 1/2 — 06-3897, R15/17 CL, Juneau

Protective Services Manager 1
06-3186, R21 CL, Juneau

- Protective Services Specialist 4 — 06-3096, R20 CL, Juneau
  - Protective Services Specialist 1/2 — 06-3025, R15/17 CL, Juneau
  - Protective Services Specialist 1/2 — 06-3956, R15/17 CL, Juneau
  - Protective Services Specialist 1/2 — 06-3402, R15/17 CL, Juneau
  - Protective Services Specialist 1/2 — 06-4658, R15/17 CL, Juneau
  - Protective Services Specialist 1/2 — 06-3898, R15/17 CL, Juneau

- Protective Services Specialist 4 — 06-3971, R20 CL, Juneau
  - Protective Services Specialist 1/2 — 06-3195, R15/17 CL, Petersburg
  - Protective Services Specialist 1/2 — 06-3171, R15/17 CL, Sitka
  - Social Services Associate — 06-9305, R12 CL, Sitka
  - Protective Services Specialist 1/2 — 06-9374, R15/17 CL, Wrangell
  - Protective Services Specialist 1/2 — 06-3048, R15/17 CL, Juneau
  - Social Services Associate — 06-9388, R12 CL, Petersburg

- Protective Services Specialist 4 — 06-3743, R20 CL, Ketchikan
  - Protective Services Specialist 1/2/3 — 06-9323, R15/17/19 CL, Ketchikan
  - Social Services Associate — 06-3030, R12 CL, Ketchikan
  - Social Services Associate — 06-3966, R12 CL, Ketchikan
  - Protective Services Specialist 1/2 — 06-3117, R15/17 CL, Ketchikan
  - Protective Services Specialist 1/2 — 06-3862, R15/17 CL, Craig
  - Social Services Associate — 06-9306, R12 CL, Craig

Administrative Support Unit
- Administrative Officer 1 — 06-3771, R17 CL, Juneau
- Office Assistant 2 — 06-5062, R10 CL, Juneau
- Administrative Assistant 2 — 06-3609, R14 CL, Juneau
- Office Assistant 1 — 06-3031, R8 CL, Juneau
- Social Services Program Officer — 06-4614, R21 CL, Juneau
- Eligibility Technician 2 — 06-4596, R14 CL, Juneau
- Eligibility Technician 2 — 06-4646, R14 CL, Juneau

Department of Family and Community Services
Office of Children's Services
Front Line Social Workers
Western Regional Office

Administrative Support Unit

Permanency

Protective Services Manager 2
06-9296
R22 CL
Anchorage

Protective Services Manager 1
06-3201
R21 CL
Bethel

Protective Services Specialist 3
06-9303
R19 CL
Bethel

Social Services Associate
06-3191
R12 CL
Saint Mary's

Social Services Associate
06-4664
R12 CL
Aniak

Social Services Associate
26-1014
R12 CL
Bethel

Administrative Officer 1
06-9295
R17 CL
Bethel

Administrative Assistant 2
06-3164
R14 CL
Bethel

Protective Services Specialist 4
06-3072
R20 CL
Anchorage

Protective Services Specialist 4
06-4548
R20 CL
Bethel

Protective Services Specialist 4
06-3060
R20 CL
Anchorage

Protective Services Specialist 4
06-3198
R20 CL
Bethel

Protective Services Specialist 4
06-3951
R20 CL
Juneau

Protective Services Specialist 1/2/3
06-8324
R15/17/19 CL
Anchorage

Social Services Associate
06-3179
R12 CL
Bethel

Protective Services Specialist 1/2
06-3900
R15/17 CL
Anchorage

Protective Services Specialist 1/2
06-3895
R15/17 CL
Bethel

Protective Services Specialist 1/2
06-3375
R15/17 CL
Anchorage

Protective Services Specialist 1/2
06-9326
R15/17 CL
Anchorage

Protective Services Specialist 1/2/3
06-9150
R15/17 CL
Anchorage

Social Services Associate
06-3193
R12 CL
Bethel

Protective Services Specialist 1/2/3
06-4650
R15/17/19 CL
Bethel

Protective Services Specialist 1/2/3
06-3205
R15/17/19 CL
Anchorage

Protective Services Specialist 1/2
06-4549
R15/17 CL
Anchorage

Protective Services Specialist 1/2
06-9327
R15/17 CL
Anchorage

Protective Services Specialist 1/2
06-3896
R15/17 CL
Anchorage

Social Services Associate
06-3064
R12 CL
Bethel

Protective Services Specialist 1/2/3
06-9325
R15/17/19 CL
Anchorage

Protective Services Specialist 1/2/3
06-9185
R15/17/19 CL
Anchorage

Protective Services Specialist 1/2
06-3729
R15/17 CL
Bethel

Protective Services Specialist 1/2
06-9297
R15/17 CL
Bethel

Protective Services Specialist 1/2
06-3214
R15/17 CL
Bethel

Protective Services Specialist 1/2
06-9298
R15/17 CL
Bethel

Protective Services Specialist 1/2
06-9151
R15/17 CL
Bethel

Social Services Associate
06-4555
R12 CL
Bethel

Protective Services Specialist 1/2/3
06-3894
R15/17/19 CL
Bethel

Protective Services Specialist 1/2/3
06-4649
R15/17/19 CL
Bethel

Protective Services Specialist 1/2/3
06-3880
R15/17/19 CL
Bethel

Department of Family and Community Services
Office of Children's Services
Front Line Social Workers
Foster Care Licensing / Independent Living
Program / Nursing

Nursing Unit

Nurse Consultant 2
06-4606 R26 CL
Anchorage

Project Assistant
06-4616 R16 CL
Anchorage

Nurse Consultant 1
06-4604 R24 CL
Wasilla

Nurse Consultant 1
06-4601 R24 CL
Fairbanks

Nurse Consultant 1
06-4603 R24 CL
Anchorage

Mental Health Clinician 3
06-4642 R21 CL
Anchorage

Office Assistant 2
06-9363 R10 CL
Wasilla

Independent Living Unit

Protective Services Specialist 4
06-1350 R20 CL
Juneau

Protective Services Specialist 3
06-9301 R19 CL
Fairbanks

Protective Services Specialist 3
06-9140 R19 CL
Wasilla

Protective Services Specialist 3
06-9142 R19 CL
Fairbanks

Protective Services Specialist 3
06-9143 R19 CL
Anchorage

Protective Services Specialist 3
06-9302 R19 CL
Anchorage

Protective Services Specialist 3
06-9334 R19 CL
Wasilla

Protective Services Specialist 1/2
06-9141 R15/17 CL
Juneau

Office Assistant 2
06-9313 R10 CL
Anchorage

Licensing Unit

Social Services Program Officer
06-3068 R21 CL
Juneau

Community Care Licensing Specialist 3
06-4567 R20 CL
Fairbanks

Community Care Licensing Specialist 2
06-3902 R18 CL
Fairbanks

Community Care Licensing Specialist 1
06-4557 R16 CL
Fairbanks

Community Care Licensing Specialist 1
06-9181 R16 CL
Fairbanks

Community Care Licensing Specialist 1
06-4655 R16 CL
Fairbanks

Community Care Licensing Specialist 1
06-3369 R16 CL
Fairbanks

Community Care Licensing Specialist 2
06-3370 R18 CL
Ketchikan

Community Care Licensing Specialist 1
06-9175 R16 CL
Juneau

Community Care Licensing Specialist 1
06-3367 R16 CL
Ketchikan

Community Care Licensing Specialist 2
06-4524 R18 CL
Fairbanks

Community Care Licensing Specialist 1
06-9180 R16 CL
Bethel

Community Care Licensing Specialist 1
06-3012 R16 CL
Bethel

Community Care Licensing Specialist 1
06-4819 R16 CL
Bethel

Community Care Licensing Specialist 3
06-9273 R20 CL
Anchorage

Community Care Licensing Specialist 2
06-3077 R18 CL
Wasilla

Community Care Licensing Specialist 1
06-9177 R16 CL
Wasilla

Community Care Licensing Specialist 1
06-9285 R16 CL
Wasilla

Community Care Licensing Specialist 1
06-9332 R16 CL
Wasilla

Community Care Licensing Specialist 1
06-9333 R16 CL
Wasilla

Community Care Licensing Specialist 2
06-9274 R18 CL
Kenai

Community Care Licensing Specialist 1
06-9178 R16 CL
Kenai

Community Care Licensing Specialist 1
06-3398 R16 CL
Kenai

Community Care Licensing Specialist 1
06-9179 R16 CL
Wasilla

Community Care Licensing Specialist 1
06-4653 R16 CL
Wasilla

Community Care Licensing Specialist 2
06-9176 R18 CL
Anchorage

Community Care Licensing Specialist 1
06-4545 R16 CL
Anchorage

Community Care Licensing Specialist 1
06-3903 R16 CL
Anchorage

Community Care Licensing Specialist 1
06-9173 R16 CL
Anchorage

Community Care Licensing Specialist 1
06-9337 R16 CL
Anchorage

Community Care Licensing Specialist 1
06-9174 R16 CL
Anchorage

Community Care Licensing Specialist 1
06-3366 R16 CL
Anchorage

Community Care Licensing Specialist 2
06-3176 R18 CL
Anchorage

Community Care Licensing Specialist 1
06-3119 R16 CL
Anchorage

Community Care Licensing Specialist 1
06-3976 R16 CL
Anchorage

Community Care Licensing Specialist 1
06-9172 R16 CL
Anchorage

Community Care Licensing Specialist 1
06-3883 R16 CL
Anchorage

Office Assistant 2
06-3033 R10 CL
Anchorage

Agency Response from the Department of Health

Department of Health

OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER

Anchorage
3601 C Street, Suite 902
Anchorage, Alaska 99503-5923
Main: 907.269.7800
Fax: 907.269.0060

Juneau
P.O. Box 110601
350 Main Street, Suite 404
Juneau, Alaska 99811-0601
Main: 907.465.3030
Fax: 907.465.3068

THE STATE of ALASKA
GOVERNOR MIKE DUNLEAVY

RECEIVED

MAR 1 9 2025

LEGISLATIVE AUDIT

March 19, 2025

Ms. Kris Curtis, CPA, CISA
Legislative Auditor
Division of Legislative Audit
P.O. Box 113300
Juneau, AK 99811-3300

RE: Confidential Management Letter, Department of Health (DOH), for Department of Family and
        Community Services Office of Children's Services Implementation of Foster Care Reform Laws Part 3

Dear Ms. Curtis,

The Department of Health (DOH) appreciates the opportunity to review and provide feedback to the
recommendation shared in the preliminary audit letter dated February 27, 2025.

Recommendation No. 7
The Department of Health's assistant commissioner of finance and management services should liquidate an
unsupported $10 million encumbrance.
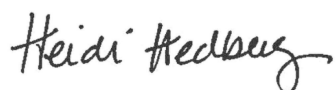
DOH does not concur with the recommendation or the finding. The $10 million encumbrance is using the
Departmental Support Services Information Technology budget. The Department of Health and Social Services
(DHSS) transferred authority from numerous budgets subject to lapse at fiscal year-end, as authorized by the
legislature, which involved the reduction of one budget authority and the increase of another. Once a budget
transfer occurs, the budget authority of the reduced budget is relinquished and is not attributed as still existing
under another budget elsewhere. Further, DHSS complied with the statewide Alaska Administrative Manual 30
Encumbrance requirements for establishment, management, and review. The DOH maintains this
encumbrance's establishment and current active status is allowable as a contingent liability and shall remain
active until the ending of FY2025 unless either department is contacted by the Office of Civil Rights in the
meantime. This audit opinion is placing additional restrictions on the department than are present in established
budget permissions and statewide guidance.

Thank you for giving the Department of Health the opportunity to provide additional insight into this topic.
Please contact Terra Serpette at 907-465-6333 if you have any questions or concerns.

Ms. Kris Curtis, CPA, CISA
March 19, 2025
Page 2 of 2

Sincerely,

Heidi Hedberg
Commissioner

cc: Pam Halloran, DOH Assistant Commissioner
        Raquel Solomon-Gross, DOH FMS Deputy Director
        Micah Jones, DOH Finance Officer
        Terra Serpette, DOH FMS Division Operations Manager

Agency Response from the Department of Family and Community Services

Department of Family and Community Services

OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER

THE STATE of ALASKA
GOVERNOR MIKE DUNLEAVY

March 17, 2025

RECEIVED

MAR 1 7 2025

LEGISLATIVE AUDIT

Christine Lumba
Legislative Auditor
Division of Legislative Audit
P.O. Box 113300
Juneau, AK 99811-3300

RE: Department of Family and Community Services (DFCS), Office of Children's Services (OCS) Implementation of Foster Care Reform Laws Part 3 Preliminary Report

Dear Ms. Lumba:

The Department of Family and Community Services (DFCS) appreciates the opportunity to review and provide feedback to the associated conclusions, findings, and recommendations as shared in your preliminary audit report. Upon review of the report, DFCS submits the following response.

Conclusion 1

Implementation of HB151, along with other legislative efforts did not resolve OCS's labor challenges and excess authorization was used in part for other purposes.
DFCS partially agrees with this conclusion. DFCS agrees that HB151 did not resolve OCS's labor challenges. Although OCS supports the caseload standards and strives to achieve them, a law does not increase the available workforce in Alaska nor the retention challenges that have plagued the nation's child protection workforce for decades. Those challenges were only exacerbated by the pandemic.

This field is incredibly complex. There is an extreme emotional toll from the trauma exposure. Workers frequently experience a plethora of emotionally challenging and traumatic situations and making life altering decisions that can cause stress, frustration, and exhaustion. Alaska's vast geography and unpredictable weather make the work even more difficult when compared to child welfare systems in the lower-48. Workers report that they are underpaid for the high demands of the job, particularly given the dangerous and volatile situations they encounter.

DFCS disagrees that excess HB151 authorization was used in part for other purposes. Movement of funding between components throughout a fiscal year is a standard operating process. The transfers referenced in this report are unrelated to HB151.

Conclusion 2

<u>OCS work measures have generally declined since 2015.</u>
DFCS does not agree with this conclusion. Exhibit 4 on page 13 shows some general data points that are not work measures, and without additional context could be misleading. Data points are extremely valuable, but they do not tell the whole story; they are only one indicator of a much larger picture. Though numbers on the exhibit may show a decline, they are not an adequate indicator of work measures. They do not demonstrate the increases in workload due to the heightened complexity of needs our clients face. Parents, children, youth, and families experience a myriad of social issues that are difficult to serve. The data points in the exhibit do not capture the complexity of cases coming to the attention of OCS. Another factor not captured is the continual imposition of additional administrative requirements imposed through federal and state law. It is important to note that this audit period was during a global pandemic that caused extreme challenges to serve families, both in Alaska and across the country. Communities did not permit outside visitors, service providers closed their doors, many permanently, and there was unprecedented turnover and vacancies. Youth behavioral health suffered nationwide. These factors should be taken into consideration when looking at any data during this period.

Conclusion 3

<u>Increased training was not tied to improved retention or increased competencies.</u>
DFCS disagrees with this conclusion. The narrative inaccurately implies that OCS's training is a virtual platform and minimized the volume of training provided. As noted in the auditor's report, in 2020 training transitioned to a virtual platform. This was *temporary*, and solely due to the global pandemic. As soon as it was safe to do so, OCS resumed its comprehensive training program which includes online training, virtual training, in-person training, on-the-job training, shadowing, and mentorship. Given the demands in service delivery and the workforce, OCS's training program is under continuous evaluation and adjusts to meet the needs of its workforce and an ever-challenging child welfare landscape.

While the consultant hired by the legislative auditors identified hiring for core competencies as a concern, their opinions were based on short interviews with a variety of staff and indicated minimal understanding of the full training array offered by OCS. While Alaska has a population of applicants with a variety of educational, health, social services, and work-related experiences to fill positions, we have not received a large quantity of applicants. Ongoing assessment of OCS's training program takes into consideration the experience of hired staff and modifications are made to better meet their additional training needs. In the past few years, OCS has updated the frontline worker training, added pre and post testing, and makes ongoing modifications based on employee feedback. OCS has redesigned leadership training, Supervisor Core, added reflective supervision training, and improved Coaching Supervisors to Best Practices. OCS is committed to continuous quality improvement of its training programs.

Conclusion 4

<u>OCS management has been unable to implement caseload caps.</u>

DFCS partially agrees with this conclusion. DFCS does not agree with the data or conclusions in this section of the narrative. The methodology used by the auditors is not clear and may not account for critical factors that are unique to ORCA and the child protection system, such as:

- Not all open cases in ORCA require case management services.
- All open cases in ORCA require a primary assignment so case carrying staff may be assigned to a case as primary, but only for administrative services.
- Case carrying PCNs may change.
- Caseload counts are fluid and change daily.

Determining caseload counts requires extensive knowledge of these factors and how to determine which cases are countable. Due to the fluidity of the data, it cannot be replicated. The existing database system, ORCA, is a legacy system, and there are factors that need to be taken into account when using it to track data, including those set forth above. Further, it is a very time intensive task.

DFCS agrees that offices at times, due to staffing and certain geographical locations, have been unable to assign cases under gradual caseload numbers. This does not support the conclusion that management is unable to implement caseload caps. DFCS and OCS strive to meet the requirements of HB 151. At the same time, it is important to note that OCS is mandated to serve families. No one family is the same. Every family has individualized complexity, and one family could present highly intricate, challenging, and acute needs. This fact is not accounted for in caseload averages or caps. It should be highlighted that despite vacancies OCS maintained a high percentage of compliance with caseload caps and that is a data point to celebrate.

DFCS agrees that the support for the OCS report was not properly maintained and has already remedied this by preparing written steps on how to prepare the report to support consistent data.

Conclusion 5

<u>**The annual recruitment and retention report understates OCS workload.**</u>
DFCS disagrees with this conclusion. OCS is required to serve families in need and each case must be assigned. In some situations, to alleviate burnout for staff and align with HB151 caseload caps, cases are assigned to supervisors as primaries. This assignment ensures that oversight of the family is occurring while waiting for a front-line worker to be assigned or hired. Supervisory assignments were not part of HB151 and therefore should not be included here. Supervisory assignments may occur as part of regular business practice due to complexity or continuity for the family.

In many situations, cases are assigned to supervisors to ensure oversight of the family. Often this is done to ensure assignments to new staff were within the caseload cap. Workload is not understated by not reporting secondary assignments. Secondary assignments are not counted towards a caseload count. Secondary workers may have limited responsibilities for a case, and they do not resemble primary assignments as assumed by the auditor. Counting secondary assignments as equivalent to a primary assignment invalidates true caseload counts. The ORCA system is a legacy system and has limitations impacting data collection, including those discussed above. It is important to note that OCS will need an updated case management system to stay in compliance with federal requirements and ensure access to federal revenue.

Conclusion 6

The annual staffing report could be enhanced to better align with best practices.
DFCS disagrees with this conclusion. As noted in the consultant's report, OCS's staffing report did an effective job at tracking the number and location of vacancies, turnover, and exit reasons for case carrying staff and complied with the requirements of the law.

Conclusion 7

OCS's 2023 staffing report understated vacancies at the statewide and regional levels.
DFCS disagrees with this conclusion. The methodology utilized here is not in alignment with industry practice. The auditor independently obtained position data from the state's payroll system and recalculated rates to compare with OCS's staffing report. Calculating this way may not consider staff moving between PCNs, promotions, how a case-carrying PCN is determined, changes to a PCN, or the need to omit cases opened for administrative purposes. Therefore, the small variance of 12 is attributable to the differing methodology and fluidity of this data as opposed to an understatement of vacancies.

Conclusion 8

OCS's 2023 annual employee recruitment and retention report did not fully comply with statutory requirements, regional turnover statics were not fully accurate, and supporting data was not consistently maintained by OCS staff.
DFCS partially agrees with this conclusion. DFCS agrees that the supporting data was not consistently maintained by OCS staff. OCS now has written guidance on the process, which remedied that finding.

DFCS disagrees that the recruitment and retention report did not fully comply with statutory requirements. HB151 does not require a "forward-looking plan"; HB 151 requires a five-year plan. The term "forward-looking plan" is a term created by the auditor and inserted into the report; DFCS repeatedly requested for this term and conclusion to be removed. OCS has met and continues to meet the law's five-year requirement by operating a fluid recruitment and retention plan that has no end date and provides for regular and ongoing modifications to meet the current demands of the workforce. OCS has implemented several successful programs that have contributed to a decreased turnover rate, from 59% to 37%. While OCS continues to fill positions and still has vacancies in some offices, turnover in the positions filled has slowed. This is evidence of efforts made to retain staff. OCS has continued to look for creative ways to fill vacancies but is challenged by the workforce shortage the rest of Alaska faces.

It should be noted that OCS' calculation of the average turnover was 47.6 and the auditors found 47.4 which only differed by 0.2. This is not statistically significant enough to warrant a finding.

Conclusion 9

Improvements to OCS's hiring process may help address labor challenges.

DFCS partially agrees with this conclusion. In its response to the Analysis of Management Structure, OCS stated its disagreement with many of the report's recommendations, primarily due to the practices already in place. The consultants that prepared the management report detail gathered their information from brief interviews with staff with minimal additional supportive information. Many interviews were large groups that impeded staff's ability to offer feedback or only consisted of a couple of questions. This methodology resulted in notable gaps of information represented, leaving a vast number of existing practices omitted in the report. The Management Structure report recommended the following:

- **Streamline the hiring process:**
  Prior to this review, OCS has partnered with DFCS's Talent Acquisition Team to streamline the hiring process. Many aspects of hiring are governed by the State of Alaska Department of Administration and outside the control of OCS.
- **Be more intentional about recruiting:**
  Prior to this review, OCS had been actively working to identify creative ways to recruit qualified staff and this will be an ongoing effort. OCS has implemented student stipends, partnered with DFCS's Talent Acquisition Team, and is consistently present at job fairs across the state. Exploration of creative recruitment options already is, and will continue to be, an ongoing effort of OCS.
- **Expand the use of creative models to fill vacancies in rural offices:**
  OCS already uses Letters of Agreements, but it is limited on flexibility due to state-determined restrictions that are outside of OCS's authority. OCS has traveling caseworkers, flexible scheduling, and housing in two regions. Additional housing in remote areas would require a budget increment to address this challenge. OCS is subject to limitations set by the state.
- **Accurately describe the nature of the job:**
  It is important to note that a portion of the hiring process is required by the state and out of the control of OCS. Many aspects of hiring for some positions have been transferred to the Talent Acquisition Team, and OCS continues to partner with them on recruitment. Realistic job preview videos already exist and are posted on OCS's webpage. These were completed in partnership with our Staff Advisory Board as a direct request of frontline staff. A large portion of job descriptions have been updated in the last two years and others remain in process.

Conclusion 10

Performance measures for children in Alaska compared to national data were worse in some categories and better in other categories.
DFCS partially agrees with this conclusion. DFCS partially agrees with some of the general statements in this narrative, but not with the context in which it is being used. Data, while valuable, is one piece of a very complex system. Alaska, like all other states, performs better on some national averages and less on others. The narrative states that Alaska is lower than the national average on timely permanency; however, it does not reflect that Alaska reunifies families *more* than the national average. While every case is different, in many cases, reunifying a family is a preferable outcome over quick permanency. Additionally, child welfare work in Alaska is undeniably more challenging than the other states. No other state handles child welfare work in the remote conditions, hazardous weather, sheer size Alaska's geography, and many other unique challenges that Alaska alone experiences. Alaska continually addresses with the federal government that using national averages is an inequitable measurement due to the vast differences

in the ways child welfare work must be performed which includes collaborating closely with 229 Tribes, Tribal stakeholders, and adhering to the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA).

OCS offers the following response to the report recommendations:

Recommendation 1

OCS's director should implement procedures to ensure the annual staffing report is accurate.
DFCS agrees with this recommendation. OCS's Administrative Operations Manager has completed written steps on how to prepare the report to support consistent data.

Recommendation 2

OCS's director should implement procedures to ensure the annual recruitment and retention report is accurate and prepared in compliance with State law.
DFCS agrees with this recommendation. OCS's Administrative Operations Manager has completed written steps on how to prepare the report to support consistent data.

Recommendation 3

OCS's director should consider implementing a more comprehensive training program that is grounded in practical applications.
DFCS disagrees with this recommendation. OCS's training program is constantly evaluated, and modifications are implemented as necessary due to the changing demands of service delivery and workforce. This has been OCS's customary practice prior to the enactment of HB151 and will continue into the foreseeable future. Additionally, several courses have recently been modified and the comprehensive training program encompasses online training, in-person training, on the job training, shadowing, and mentorship.

Recommendation 4

OCS's director should continue to implement hiring best practices.
DFCS partially agrees with this recommendation. In its response to the Analysis of Management Structure, OCS stated its disagreement with many of the report's recommendations, primarily due to the practices already being in place. The consultants that prepared the management report detail gathered their information from brief interviews with staff with minimal additional supportive information. Many interviews were large groups that impeded staff's ability to offer feedback or only consisted of a couple of questions. This methodology resulted in notable gaps of information represented, leaving a vast number of existing practices omitted in the report. The Management Structure report recommended the following:

- **Streamline the hiring process:**
  DFCS partially agrees with this recommendation. Prior to this review, OCS has already partnered with DFCS's Talent Acquisition Team to streamline the hiring process. Many aspects of hiring are governed by the State of Alaska Department of Administration and outside

the control of OCS.

- **Be more intentional about recruiting:**
  DFCS partially agrees with this recommendation. Prior to this review, OCS had been actively working to identify creative ways to recruit qualified staff, and this will be an ongoing effort. OCS has implemented student stipends, partnered with DFCS's Talent Acquisition Team, and is consistently present at job fairs across the state. Exploration of creative recruitment options is and will continue to be an ongoing effort of OCS.

- **Expand the use of creative models to fill vacancies in rural offices:**
  DFCS partially agrees with this recommendation. OCS uses Letters of Agreements, but it is limited on flexibility due to state-determined restrictions that are outside of OCS's authority. OCS has traveling caseworkers, flexible scheduling, and housing in two locations. Additional housing in rural areas would require a budget increment to address this challenge. OCS is subject to limitations set by the state.

- **Accurately describe the nature of the job:**
  DFCS partially agrees with this recommendation. It is important to note that a portion of the hiring process is required by the state and out of the control of OCS. Many aspects of hiring for some positions have been transferred to the Talent Acquisition Team and OCS continues to partner with them on recruitment. Realistic job preview videos already exist and are posted on the webpage. These were completed in partnership with our Staff Advisory Board as a direct request of frontline staff. A large percentage of job descriptions have been updated in the last two years and others remain in process.

Recommendation 5

<u>**OCS's director should consider enhancing data to align with best practices and make recruitment and retention efforts more meaningful.**</u>
DFCS disagrees with this recommendation. Enhancing data to align with best practices is not a requirement of HB151, and the recommended best practices do not align with the unique situation in Alaska. The consultants that prepared the management report detail gathered this information from brief interviews with staff with minimal additional supportive information. OCS has an extensive recruitment and retention plan that is frequently reviewed and updated to align with the current needs of the workforce. Staffing shortages are not unique to the Office of Children's Services and unfortunately high-turnover rates have plagued the nationwide child welfare workforce for many years. The number of applicants for all jobs in state government greatly decreased since the pandemic and have not yet rebounded. Recruitment and retention are and continue to be a very high priority to the agency and department.

While the department does not agree with this finding as it pertains to HB151, DFCS is continually looking at efficiencies in agency processes including recruitment and retention. Through a Governor's initiative, the Talent Acquisition Team was established to create efficiencies in recruitment, increase candidates experience, and provide a streamlined hiring process for the department. DFCS is the first department to implement a recruitment strategy of this caliber and is doing so in a phased approach; OCS is the first division to begin using this new candidate centric streamlined process.

- **Time to fill vacancies:** - The TA process includes multiple tracking elements with Key

Performance Indicators (KPI's) established. Tracking includes, but is not limited to; vacancy date, request to recruit submission date, submission to post, candidate referral counts and dates, dates to interview, reference dates, candidate dispositions, onboarding, post hire survey dates and results.

These allow the department to adjust the process, job postings, position descriptions, pre-interview criteria, interview questions and our KPI's to ensure we are continuously developing a candidate centric process that reduces redundancy and allows unbiased hires in a quick and efficient manner while maintaining compliance with state and federal requirements.

- **Offer acceptance rate -** The TA process includes multiple tracking elements each with KPI's established. Tracking includes but is not limited to; vacancy date, request to recruit submission date, submission to post, candidate referral counts and dates, dates to interview, reference dates, candidate dispositions, onboarding, post hire survey dates and results.

  These allow the department to adjust the process, job postings, position descriptions, pre-interview criteria, interview questions or even our KPI's to ensure we are continuously developing a candidate centric process that reduces redundancy and allows unbiased hires in a quick and efficient manner while maintaining compliance with state and federal requirements.

- **Supervisor to staff ratio –** Data on the number of supervisors over the frontline workers (Protective Services Specialist 1-3) is available in monthly reports provided by the Employee Planning & Information Center (EPIC) within the Department of Administration and on the DFCS SharePoint site. Current data shows the average ratio of supervisor to Protective Services Specialist 1-3 frontline staff is 4:6.
- **Tenure in key positions –** The department's Human Resource Unit began developing a Succession Planning Policy and Training using Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) best practices as a foundation and adjusting to the State of Alaska's Personnel Rules. This paired with the annual evaluation process which includes a Learning and Development Plan will position the agency to successfully ensure operations continue without interruption as staff transition out of DFCS.

Recommendation 6

<u>**OCS's director should include a forward-looking plan for addressing recruitment and retention challenges over the next five years in the annual recruitment and retention report.**</u>
DFCS disagrees with this recommendation. HB151 does not require a "forward-looking plan"; HB 151 requires a five-year plan. OCS has met and continues to meet the five-year requirement by operating a recruitment and retention plan that has no end date and providing annual updates. Successful recruitment and retention plans are fluid and must allow for regular and ongoing modifications to meet the current demands of the workforce. The OCS recruitment and retention plan is indefinite, regularly assessed, and updated to meet current and foreseen needs. It has consistently housed multi-year efforts which are reported on annually. The plan is updated to address challenges and successes.

Recommendation 7

Department of Health's Assistant Commissioner of Finance and Management Services should liquidate an unsupported $10 million encumbrance.
DFCS disagrees with this recommendation. The recommendation is for another state agency; it is not appropriate for DFCS to respond.

Please contact Nancy Miller at 907-465-6891 if you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Kim Kovol
Commissioner

CC:
> Marian Sweet, DFCS Assistant Commissioner
> Nancy Miller, DFCS Finance Officer
> Kim Guay, OCS Director

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Legislative Auditor's Additional Comments in Response to the Department of Health

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

LEGISLATIVE BUDGET AND AUDIT COMMITTEE

Division of Legislative Audit

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legaudit@akleg.gov

April 11, 2025

Members of the Legislative Budget
  and Audit Committee:

I have reviewed the Department of Health commissioner's response to the audit report. Nothing contained in the response causes me to revise or reconsider the report conclusions or recommendations.

The commissioner states that the $10 million encumbrance represents a valid obligation because it is a "contingent liability" and refers to the State's administrative manual as support for the conclusion. Nothing in the State's administrative manual can override generally accepted accounting principles, which defines an encumbrance as *Commitments related to unperformed (executory) contracts for goods or services.*[1] Encumbrances recorded in the state accounting system are used to properly report the categories of fund balance for the general fund. Encumbering the budget without a valid obligation leads to financial statement misstatements.

It has been almost four years since the department's cyber attack and the federal government has not contacted the department regarding a possible fine. Again, if there is not a valid obligation as of June 30th, an encumbrance must be liquidated.

In summary, I reaffirm the report conclusion and recommendation.

Sincerely,

Kris Curtis, CPA, CISA
Legislative Auditor

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[1] National Council on Government Accounting Statement 1 Sec. 91.

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Legislative Auditor's Additional Comments in Response to the Department of Family and Community Services

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

LEGISLATIVE BUDGET AND AUDIT COMMITTEE

Division of Legislative Audit

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April 8, 2025

Members of the Legislative Budget
and Audit Committee:

I have reviewed the Department of Family and Community Services (DFCS) commissioner's response to the audit report. Nothing contained in the response causes me to revise or reconsider the report conclusions or recommendations. I offer the following comments to address the commissioner's disagreements with specific audit conclusions and recommendations.

The commissioner disagrees that excess authorization was used, in part, for other purposes; however, the State accounting system provides clear evidence to support the audit conclusion. The legislature authorized 110 new frontline social worker and support positions as part of foster care reform for a total budgetary increase of $20.7 million. The positions were fully funded despite the Office of Children's Services (OCS) continued vacancy rate, which led to excess budgetary authority. The extra budget was used for a variety of purposes. Non-foster care related purposes included $2.5 million for a federal fine associated with the 2021 cyber-attack and $2 million for a Medicaid-related federal audit finding.

The commissioner disagrees that work measures have generally declined since 2015, stating that Exhibit 4 lists data points, not work measures. The performance indicators included in Exhibit 4 help communicate the degree to which OCS work level has changed since foster care reform. As such, the data serves as a starting point for understanding the impacts of vacancies and turnover.

The commissioner takes exception to the training conclusion and states that the narrative inaccurately implies that OCS's training was a virtual platform and minimized the volume of the training provided. As described on page 13 of the audit report, auditors reviewed training from 2019 through mid-December 2023. During that time, training was mainly virtual and was limited as described in the report. This conclusion was confirmed by a legislative consultant that reviewed OCS's training during the fall of 2023.

The commissioner disagrees that "OCS management has been unable to implement caseload caps." However, that conclusion is not in the report. The report states "Caseload caps have not been fully implemented due to high vacancies and turnover." The commissioner goes on to state that the methodology used by auditors to calculate caseloads was not clear. The commissioner failed to acknowledge that auditors met with program staff and management and fully vetted the methodology. The concerns the commissioner lists were considered by auditors who worked closely with OCS staff to obtain reliable data. The data overwhelmingly showed that, due to the high rate of vacancies and turnover, the caseload caps mandated by HB 151 could not be consistently met. HB 151 required that workers with at least seven months experience be limited to managing, on average, no more than 13 families. The audit found that 70 percent of these workers exceeded the cap and that 45 percent of the workers were managing between 20 and 48 cases. With vacancies at 41 percent and turnover at 47 percent, it is puzzling that the commissioner disagreed that OCS was not meeting caseload caps.

The commissioner disagrees that "The annual recruitment and retention report understates OCS workload." However, again, that conclusion is not in the report. The report states "Statutory requirements for OCS's annual recruitment and retention report understate OCS workload." This conclusion highlights for policy makers that the annual report does not communicate OCS's full workload. The annual report does not disclose cases managed by supervisors because statutes only require OCS to report caseloads of its frontline case carrying workers. Further, secondary assignments are not included in the report. According to OCS staff, secondary assignments vary in work and can resemble a primary assignment.

The commissioner disagrees with the legislative consultant's conclusion that the annual staffing report could be enhanced to better align with best practice, but does not include her basis for disagreement. The consultant's recommendations appear to be practical suggestions to better inform the recruitment process. The commissioner disagrees with the recommendation but goes on to list actions OCS has taken since the consultant's review to enhance recruitment and retention data.

The commissioner disagrees that the 2023 staffing report understated vacancies at the statewide and regional levels. She is critical of the audit methodology; however, auditors worked closely with OCS staff to review OCS staff's support for the information and re-perform the calculations. Auditors took into consideration all of the elements listed by the commissioner.

The commissioner disagrees that the recruitment and retention report did not fully comply with statutory requirements despite the fact that the 2023 report included information as of October 1, 2023, when statutes require information be reported as of January 1st and July 1st. The report did not comply with those statutory requirements. Further, the commissioner disagrees with the recommendation to implement a forward-looking strategy to help address OCS recruitment challenges, stating that HB 151 did not require such a strategy. The audit conclusions specifically highlight that such a plan is not specifically required by HB 151; it is recommended in light of OCS's 41 percent vacancy rate and 47 percent turnover rate.

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The commissioner only partially agrees with the conclusion that improvements with OCS's hiring process may help address labor shortages, stating that the consultant's methodology resulted in notable gaps of information. She then states that prior to the consultant's review, several of the recommendations were already in the process of being implemented. This response is incorrect. The legislative consultant conducted their review in the fall of 2023. OCS began to partner with DFCS's talent acquisition team in January 2024. The commissioner also states that OCS has realistic job videos available on the OCS website. The consultant noted that the videos were not linked in the job postings and, as such, were of limited value to the recruitment process.

In summary, I reaffirm the report conclusions and recommendations. The audit provides important information for policy makers to use when considering how to help OCS meet its mission.

Sincerely,

Kris Curtis, CPA, CISA
Legislative Auditor

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE   DIVISION OF LEGISLATIVE AUDIT

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE, DIVISION OF LEGISLATIVE AUDIT   149   IMPLEMENTATION OF FOSTER CARE REFORM LAWS PART 3
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