

KANSAS LEGISLATIVE RESEARCH DEPARTMENT

68-West-Statehouse, 300 SW 10th Ave.
Topeka, Kansas 66612-1504
(785) 296-3181 ♦ FAX (785) 296-3824

kslegres@klrd.ks.gov

<http://www.kslegislature.org/klrd>

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To: Legislative Budget Committee
From: Ashley Stites, Fiscal Analyst
Re: Child Welfare Investigations and Funding

The following summarizes the process and costs associated with child welfare investigations completed by the Department for Children and Families (DCF), including funding amounts for current efforts by DCF to locate missing foster care youth.

Background

DCF is responsible for assessing reports of abuse or neglect and determining whether DCF should become involved. If it is determined a child is unsafe, DCF makes a recommendation to the court regarding what action should be taken regarding the child's safety. If the child is adjudicated a child in need of care, DCF is responsible for ensuring the child's safety and well-being.

Intake and Investigation

The Kansas Protection Reporting Center (KPRC) evaluates all child in need of care reports received by DCF. KPRC staff take calls of reported abuse or neglect 24 hours per day and conduct an initial assessment to determine whether the report should be assigned for further investigation or assessment. Reports may be assigned for abuse, neglect, or Family in Need of Assessment (FINA). Reports that are assigned for abuse or neglect are investigated by DCF staff to determine the validity of the report and determine what services may be required. FINA assignments do not meet the criteria to assign for abuse or neglect and are reviewed by DCF to assess for other services.

A case finding is completed for each assigned abuse or neglect report. Generally, a case finding must be made within 30 working days from the date the report was assigned. The standard of evidence applied to all case finding decisions regarding abuse or neglect is preponderance of the evidence. Thus, a finding is affirmed if a reasonable person would conclude it is more likely than not that the alleged perpetrator's actions or inactions meet the statutory definitions for abuse or neglect.

A finding is substantiated if DCF staff determine:

- The facts and circumstances meet one of the required definitions for physical/sexual/emotional abuse, physical/medical neglect, lack of supervision, and/or abandonment of a child; and
- The perpetrator's actions, behaviors, or omissions occurred and there was an intent to commit the act that resulted in the harm, a reasonable person would have anticipated harm would occur to the child, or the harm was a result of failure of refusal to protect the child; and
- There was serious harm, injury, or deterioration to the child; or there was a likelihood of, or endangerment of, serious harm, injury, or deterioration to the child.

A case finding is not required for FINA assignments.

The below table includes the number of reports DCF assigned for abuse, neglect, or FINA and the number of affirmed or substantiated reports from FY 2012 to FY 2018.

REPORTS		
FY	Assigned	Affirmed/ Substantiated
2012	33,989	1,916
2013	35,863	2,086
2014	35,551	2,017
2015	36,611	2,104
2016	37,807	2,173
2017 ¹	37,445	4,327
2018	40,623	3,479

The below table includes investigation costs associated with child abuse, neglect, or FINA.

FY 2018 CHILD WELFARE INVESTIGATION COSTS²	
Program	Total Cost
Protection Reporting Unit	\$ 4,171,090
West Region Field Staff	6,566,308
Kansas City Field Staff	5,175,973
East Field Staff	5,558,161
Wichita Field Staff	5,531,958
Total	\$ 27,003,490

1 Two policy changes became effective starting in FY 2017. The evidentiary standard for the agency's findings of abuse or neglect changed from "clear and convincing" to "preponderance of the evidence" and the agency added an "affirmed" case finding.

2 Investigation costs include costs associated with investigating child abuse/neglect or FINA reports. Indirect Administrative costs are not included.

Funding for Investigations of Missing Foster Care Youth

Review of 2018 Legislative Session Funding Adjustments

In FY 2018, the Governor recommended adding \$75,000, including \$60,750 from the State General Fund, and 1.0 FTE position to hire an investigator to assist with locating missing foster care children. The 2018 Legislature approved the additional FTE position and decreased the funding for the new investigator's salaries and wages to a quarter of the fiscal year and added language lapsing any of the unspent State General Fund money appropriated for that purpose in FY 2018.

For FY 2019, the Governor recommended adding \$150,000, including \$121,500 from the State General Fund, and 1.0 FTE position for the investigator position. The 2018 Legislature concurred with the Governor's recommendation for FY 2019.

Update on Funding

DCF lapsed \$36,548, including \$29,604 from the State General Fund, of the funding for the Special Investigator position in FY 2018. The agency reported that \$3,757, including \$3,238 from the State General Fund was used for the investigator's salary for two pay periods in FY 2018. The Special Investigator position was filled on April 8, 2018, but the position became vacant on May 6, 2018. The position was filled again on July 29, 2018, and has remained filled since that time.

DCF's revised request for FY 2019 includes \$192,210 to fund two positions, a Special Investigator and a Public Service Administrator, and related cellular phone and travel expenses. The Public Service Administrator provides administrative support for DCF's Investigate Missing Foster Care Children subprogram and assists the Special Investigator with in-person searches. Year-to-date expenditures as of October 1, 2018, for the Special Investigator and Public Service Administrator total \$21,095.

In addition to hiring a Special Investigator, the agency conducted special searches in Kansas City and Wichita. During these searches, DCF partnered with foster care contractor staff and local law enforcement to target specific locations. The Kansas City search was conducted on September 7, 2018, and the Wichita search was conducted on September 14, 2018. The agency estimates that the expenses related to these searches total \$6,000. These searches resulted in the agency locating eight foster care youth.

Number of Runaway Foster Youth

The table below includes the average number of runaway foster care children in each DCF foster care region from FY 2012 to FY 2018.

AVERAGE NUMBER OF RUNAWAY FOSTER CARE YOUTH

FY	East	Kansas City	West	Wichita	Total
2012	14	11	8	17	51
2013	13	13	8	17	51
2014	12	8	7	20	47
2015	12	11	9	14	46
2016	16	19	9	19	63
2017	15	20	11	27	73
2018	15	25	16	25	81

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