

# County of Santa Clara

Social Services Agency

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**DATE:** February 6, 2024

**TO:** Honorable Board of Supervisors

**FROM:** Damion Wright, Director, Department of Family and Children's Services

**SUBJECT:** DFCS Staffing Ratios

At its February 6, 2024 meeting, the Board of Supervisors requested DFCS provide information regarding best practices and recommendations for DFCS staffing ratios for typical case types and by unit.

The Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 521 2023 Memorandum of Agreement – Section G.9 reflects the current DFCS staffing levels for most work units by specifying the number of cases assigned to each social worker, pay differentials for different types of work, and defines the number of staff that are needed for certain program areas as the total number of cases in an area increases or declines.

This report back describes DFCS's current staffing levels as well as the caseload requirements under the County's labor agreements and how DFCS tracks workload. DFCS plans to conduct additional analysis into optimization of staffing ratios and will provide information on that topic in upcoming quarterly reports to Board of Supervisors.

At a high level, there are several factors that impact the appropriate level of staffing including:

- Number of children and families currently served;
- Specific programming needs of the children and families being served;
- Legal, practice, and policy requirements for how children and families are served; and
- Labor contract requirements.

Staffing in DFCS has shifted over time in response to changes in the above factors. In order to meet changing community needs and to ensure balanced caseloads, DFCS prioritizes hiring in critical, mandated areas directly connected with safety and risk, and works with SEIU and the County Employees Management Association (CEMA) when it is necessary to shift staffing to ensure children are safe.

Current Workload Standards: How DFCS Tracks Workload and the Requirements under the Current Labor Contracts

DFCS utilizes weekly reports tracking caseload standards across the department. Social workers are paid an “over-standard” stipend should they have a caseload above the standard for a designated time period as required in the labor agreement with SEIU.

DFCS employs a diverse workforce, and staff are often assigned based on a family’s identified language needs. Bilingual workers are paid a bilingual differential and have a lower 80% caseload standard if they have a fully bilingual caseload, as required in the labor agreement with SEIU.

DFCS tracks and monitors caseloads and referrals to respond to changes needed.

The information below provides contractual caseload standards in each program area. DFCS will continue to ensure hiring and training to maintain staff in essential areas and to support partnership with SEIU and CEMA if shifts in staffing are needed.

#### *Child Abuse and Neglect Center (CANC)*

Calls regarding allegations of child abuse or neglect are made to the CANC. Social Workers and other DFCS staff answer calls to the hotline twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, document the reporting party’s concern, and determine if the concern warrants an in-person investigation.

The CANC consists of six units with 32 Social Worker II/III screeners in total. There are currently two vacancies for which hiring processes have been initiated, and two staff on leave. There are no caseload standards in the CANC. In February of 2024, there were 2,557 calls to the CANC, which the social worker screeners answer and complete the required documents following each call.

Because calls to the CANC have been increasing, DFCS is working to increase capacity at the CANC. DFCS is adding an additional unit to the CANC to support the higher call volume, which occurs during the swing shift hours of 12 p.m. and 7 p.m. DFCS also recently split the function of the After-Hours and Weekend CANC teams, removing their responsibility to respond to emergency response referrals, which allows these teams to 1) focus on just receiving calls and processing child abuse and neglect referrals, including any follow up needed; and 2) process written cross-reports by law enforcement, Suspected Child Abuse Reports (SCARS), and other ways the community can engage the CANC to review the need for an in-person response.

#### *Emergency Response (ER)*

If an alleged abuse or neglect referral to the CANC warrants an investigation, then the referral is assigned to an ER social worker who will meet with the child, parents, and any other key contacts. These staff complete Structured Decision Making safety and risk assessments to determine the appropriate level of intervention, including but not limited to partnering with parents to identify resource needs and services, safety planning, or determine whether removal of children is the appropriate option to address immediate risk and safety concerns. In evaluating risk and developing safety plans, if appropriate, ER social workers must interview all children and family members and identify any family for connections and potential placement. ER social workers will also convene Child and Family Team (CFT)

meetings to engage and ensure family voice in the process for decision making.<sup>1</sup> ER operations are 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

ER consists of 17 units of six Social Worker II/IIIs per unit (not including the night shift). As of this writing, there were 109 total social worker positions in ER, of which 30 are vacant. Caseload standards are determined by total number of referrals assigned per month.

	Contractual Agreement		Current Average Caseload
Emergency Response	SW II	8 to 12 referrals	8-13 referrals per social worker per month over the last four months
	SW III	10 to 15 referrals	

Recently, DFCS and SEIU conducted an ER pilot project related to the number of referral assignments within a month. Following the pilot, there was agreement to move forward on a contract amendment process to reduce the contractual maximum number of referrals from 12 to 10 for Social Worker IIs and from 15 to 12 for Social Worker IIIs. This appears to generally align with the current capacity of ER staff.

#### *Dependency Investigations (DI)*

DI social workers support a handoff from ER when a child has been removed or an out of custody petition has been filed for court intervention due to abuse or neglect. DI social workers are involved with families through the court process and disposition or outcome for the family. DI social workers also hold CFT meetings with the family for placement and case planning purposes. DI social workers also are conducting assessments for both children and parents to evaluate the case status and to connect the family to appropriate resources and supports.

DI consists of four units of five Social Worker II/IIIs per unit for a total of twenty social worker positions. As of this writing, there is one vacancy. Caseload standards are determined by family unit.

	Contractual Agreement		Current Average Caseload
Dependency Investigations	SW II	4 cases	3-4 cases
	SW III	5 cases	

Note: If bilingual social worker, then caseload is set at 80% of standard, reducing both social worker classes by one case.

#### *Safety and Well-Being (Continuing)*

Safety and Well-Being social workers support the ongoing work with families who have court intervention and are involved on average for six to 24 months or until the child returns home successfully to parent(s) or there is a plan of permanency in guardianship or adoption

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<sup>1</sup> CFT meetings include the parents, child if age-appropriate, the DFCS social worker, and any additional supportive individuals such as service providers and family or friends as identified by the parents or older child.

with family, non-relative extended family members or a Resource Family approved caregiver. Safety and Well-Being social workers conduct assessments of safety and risk and work on case planning with children and parents in an effort to successfully reunify children with family, when it is safe for child.

Safety and Well-Being consists of 14 units for a total of 87 Social Worker II/III positions. As of this writing, there are 13 vacant positions. Caseload standards are determined by total number of children.

	Contractual Agreement		Current Average Caseload
Safety and Well-Being	SW II	14 to 16 children	10 to 12 children
	SW III	16 to 18 children	

Note: If bilingual social worker, then caseload is set at 80% of standard, reducing both social worker classes by two children.

#### *Non-Court (Voluntary) Services*

Social workers in the non-court/voluntary team support children and families for six to 12 months to provide supports, address concerns and transition the family to supportive community-based services. These social work staff conduct home visits for assessments of safety and risk using the Structured Decision Making tools and work on case plan goals with families. They also hold CFT meetings to support decision making. Some children remain in the home with the parents and some family members voluntarily place their child while working to address issues that brought them before DFCS.

Non-Court/Voluntary Services consists of five units for a total of 24 Social Worker II/III positions. As of this writing, there are currently five vacant positions due to five social workers who transitioned to DI. Caseload standards are determined by total number of children.

	Contractual Agreement		Current Average Caseload
Non-Court	SW II	14 to 16 children	14 to 18 children
	SW III	16 to 18 children	

Note: If bilingual social worker, then caseload is set at 80% of standard, reducing both social worker classes by two children.

#### *Non-Minor Dependent (NMD) Program*

This team of social workers work with youth who were in a Family Reunification or Planned Permanency case at the time they turned 18 years old and elected to voluntarily remain under the court's jurisdiction. These youth are often referred to as non-minor dependents, or NMDs. NMDs receive a monthly stipend while satisfying the court's requirements to remain in the program, such as seeking employment, working towards their education, or training in a vocational field.

NMD consists of two units of 12 Social Worker II/IIIs each for a total of 24 social worker positions. As of this writing, there is one vacant position. Caseload standards are determined by total number of non-minor dependents.

	Contractual Agreement		Current Average Caseload
Non-Minor Dependent	SW II	14 to 18 children	12 children
	SW III	16 to 20 children	

Note: If bilingual social worker, then caseload is set at 80% of standard, reducing both social worker classes by two children.

#### *Dually Involved Youth (DIY) Unit*

Welfare and Institutions Code (WIC) § 241.1(a) provides that whenever a youth falls within the care of both WIC § 300 (Child Dependency) and WIC § 602 (Juvenile Justice), the county child welfare services department and the probation department shall determine which system will serve the best interest of the youth and the protection of the community. The agencies will collaboratively present a joint recommendation to the juvenile justice court, and the court determines the appropriate status for the youth. Both DFCS and the Juvenile Probation Department (JPD) have an agreed upon court-supported protocol for WIC § 241.1(a) cases. A joint system recommendation is formed to restructure judicial oversight for youth with dependency and juvenile justice cases.

The DIY Unit consists of six social workers who team with five JPD probation officers, three youth advocates, one DIY liaison, and one behavioral health clinician. As of this writing, there are no vacancies. The DIY Unit does not have a contractual caseload standard, but generally they have similar staffing levels as the Safety and Well-Being social workers, which is adjusted for bilingual social workers.

#### *Recruitment Unit*

Recruitment Unit social workers engage with the community to increase awareness of becoming a resource parent, and to provide the necessary information for families interested in becoming a resource family. Additionally, Recruitment Unit social workers work with the families to assist with the completion of the application package until the full packet is complete, at which time they transfer the family to an RFA social worker. The Recruitment Unit consists of one unit of six social workers. At the time of this writing, there are no vacant positions, and there is no caseload standard.

#### *Resource Family Approval (RFA)*

RFA social workers work with resource (foster) families to aid in the approval for placement of children, and support caregivers being approved to support care for children, among other duties. RFA consists of four units for a total of 23 Social Worker II/III positions, of which two of the social workers are RFA investigators who investigate allegations of abuse or neglect made regarding an RFA parent. There are currently no vacant positions and there are no caseload standards in RFA. As of this writing, the RFA program has 566 resource families either in the process of being approved or currently approved.

### *Family Finding Unit*

The Family Finding Unit receives referrals from case carrying social workers to assist locating families for children to potentially be placed with or to help create lasting, life-long connections, as well as conducting relative notifications. The Family Finding Unit consists of six Social Worker II/IIIs. As of this writing, there are two vacant positions, and there is no caseload standard for this unit. The Family Finding Unit conducted relative notification and family finding referrals for 100 families in February of 2024.

### *Placement Units*

The Placement Units finds placements at resource family homes or other placement options (e.g., Short-Term Residential Therapeutic Program, commonly referred to as STRTPs) for youth removed from their homes or who are in between placements. The Placement Unit consists of nine Social Worker II/IIIs and two social services analysts. As of this writing, there are two vacant positions. There is no caseload standard for this unit.

### *Adoption Unit*

This unit works with resource families or relatives who are in the process of adopting a child whose parental rights were terminated by the juvenile dependency court. The Adoption Unit consists of one unit of seven Social Worker II/IIIs and one Social Worker I. As of this writing, there are no vacant positions. Contractual standard is to have a minimum of five social worker II/IIIs. Current caseload ratio is 35 families per social worker.

### *Post Adoption Unit*

Families who adopt children through the juvenile dependency court are supported by Post Adoption Unit social workers who provide services and assistance with Adoption Assistance Program monthly stipends. The Post Adoption Unit consists of one unit of five social worker II/IIIs. As of this writing, there are no vacancies. There are no caseload standards for the unit. The unit supports approximately 2,250 families. Current contract notes that DFCS will ensure a minimum of five Social Worker II/IIIs supporting post adoption services.

### *Child and Family Team (CFT) Unit*

The function of the CFT Unit is to provide children and their families with an opportunity to have their voices heard and participate in decision making regarding safety and stability of children with the support of their natural support system, community partners, service providers and child welfare staff. The CFT Unit consists of one unit of 12 social services analysts. As of this writing, there are no vacant positions, and there are no caseload standards. Social services Analysts conduct 12 to 15 CFTs per month, which includes consultations with the social worker prior to and after the CFT, as well as writing the plan developed during the CFT.

### *KinGap/Probate Unit*

The function of the KinGap/Probate Unit is to support families who have a legal guardianship of a child who was involved with the juvenile dependency or probate courts with referrals and case management services. The KinGap/Probate Unit consists of one unit of six Social Worker II/IIIs. As of this writing, there are no vacant positions. The

KinGap/Probate Unit has a mixed caseload of KinGap, Non-Related Legal Guardianship (NRLG), and Non-Court Extended Foster Care (NC-EFC). Caseload standard is no more than 130 children assigned to a social worker at any given time and no more than 25 of those can be NRLG or NC-EFC.