

County of Santa Clara

Social Services Agency

353 West Julian Street
San Jose, California 95110-2335



DATE: February 6, 2024

TO: Honorable Board of Supervisors

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

SUBJECT: A.4a – DFCS Staffing Levels

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At the December 19, 2023 Special Meeting of the Board of Supervisors, the Board requested a report on how to right size and rebalance staffing levels using the best tools and mechanisms inside DFCS to align with workload (request A.4a), as well as a report regarding staffing levels and caseloads at DFCS currently, information on the staffing changes necessary to align with Board direction, and a proposal to the Board on steps to achieve appropriate staffing levels – unit by unit (request A.5). This memorandum provides information related to both requests.

As of the end of January 2024, DFCS has 662 staff and 107 vacancies, for a total of 768.5 authorized positions. Of these 662 filled positions, there are 304 social workers and 71 social work supervisors. The vast majority of these social work staff provide services in the following key program areas:

- **Child Abuse and Neglect Center (CANC)** - 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, document the reporting party's concern, and determine if the concern warrants an in-person investigation. If social work staff are unavailable to answer an incoming call, DFCS data office specialists will answer the call to document the report and route the information appropriately and timely to social work staff, or have a social worker take over the call if the matter is urgent.
- **Emergency Response (ER)** – If alleged abuse or neglect warrants an investigation, then a referral is assigned to an ER social worker who will meet with the child, parents, and any other key contacts, review information, and assess the allegation. These staff do assessments for safety and risk and determine the need to provide services, file a court petition, or the need for an immediate removal. ER social workers develop safety plans with families and must interview all children and family members and identify any family for connections and potential placement. Child and Family team (CFT) meetings are held to engage and ensure family voice in the process for decision making. Operations are 24 hours per day, 7 days per week.

- **Dependency Investigations (DI)** – DI social workers support a handoff from Emergency Response 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. CFT meetings are held with family for placement and case planning. There is an assessment for all children and parents to support connection to resources and supports.
- **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 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 when safely possible.
- **Non-Court/Voluntary services** - Social workers in the voluntary team support work with 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 and work on case plan goals with families. CFT meetings are used for 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.
- **Resource Family Approval (RFA)** – RFA social workers work with resource (foster) families to approve their homes for placement of children and support caregivers being certified to support care for children, among other duties.
- There are additional social workers throughout the department who work with transition age youth and/or non-minor dependents or provide supportive services for various other programs.

Please refer to the chart below of both vacant and filled positions from Fiscal Year 2020-21 through Fiscal Year 2023-24 for social work staff in the primary case carrying units within DFCS:

Point in Time as of July 1st	FY21		FY22		FY23		FY24	
	Filled	Vacant	Filled	Vacant	Filled	Vacant	Filled	Vacant
Child Abuse and Neglect Center (CANC)	30	3	36	0	25	14	29	6
SWS	4	0	4	0	2	4	4	1
SWIII/II	26	3	32	0	23	10	25	5
SWI	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Emergency Response (ER)	92	14	92	9	112	29	123	29
SWS	13	0	13	0	16	3	18	1
SWIII/II	74	11	72	8	89	25	97	25
SWI	5	3	7	1	7	1	8	3
Dependency Investigations (DI)	29	6	40	5	26	8	16	2
SWS	5	1	6	0	3	0	2	1
SWIII/II	24	5	34	5	15	7	14	1
SWI	0	0	0	0	8	1	0	0
Safety & Well-Being (Continuing)	118	20	154	9	105	25	124	9
SWS	17	0	18	0	13	3	14	0
SWIII/II	66	18	103	8	81	13	81	7
SWI	35	2	33	1	11	9	29	2
Resource Family Approval (RFA)	29	0	29	0	29	1	27	2
SWS	4	0	4	0	4	0	4	0
SWIII/II	25	0	25	0	25	1	23	2
SWI	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Non-Court Services (Voluntary)	26	4	30	2	33	2	33	3
SWS	3	1	4	0	4	1	5	0
SWIII/II	21	3	24	2	27	1	26	3
SWI	2	0	2	0	2	0	2	0
Total:	324	47	381	25	330	79	352	51

DFCS has an embedded, labor contract-based balancing process for staffing levels as workloads for most work units are specified by workload standards outlined within the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) [2023 contract](#) – Section G.9. These standards identify the number of cases assigned to each social worker, pay differentials for different types of work, and define the number of staff that are needed for certain program areas as the total number of cases in an area increases or declines.

There are several processes that have to be continually monitored and/or completed to determine appropriate level of staffing including but not limited to:

- Number of children and families served;
- Specific programming need;
- New legislation and policy requirements;
- Child welfare standards, including both legal requirements and evidence-based best practices; and
- Union negotiations

DFCS continues to work towards balancing all levels of work and meeting the increasingly complex demands of child welfare. Staffing in DFCS has shifted over time due to the above mentioned factors, fluctuations in the numbers of children and families in need of services, as well as evolving laws, policy, research, and practice. In order to meet changing community

needs and to ensure staff are supported with balanced caseloads, DFCS prioritizes hiring in critical mandated areas directly connected with safety and risk. In recent years, DFCS management, in partnership with SEIU 521 and CEMA, have also collaborated more effectively to be able to shift staffing resources in particular areas when needed to address impacted areas. In January 2024, for example, DFCS management engaged with labor partners to shift (2) social work supervisors and (10) social workers to support DI services, which have grown in need due to the recent increase in court interventions and the relatively higher numbers of vacancies in these teams. DFCS will closely monitor trends and collaborate with line staff and labor partners to rebalance staffing levels when needed while honoring labor agreements.

DFCS has increased total staff positions from 730 on July 1, 2019 to 768.5 on July 1, 2023. The increase in positions were primarily social work staff to support caseload, workload and supervisory ratios. DFCS continues to fill vacancies directly impacting workload ratio standards in the SEIU contract and to meet the needs of children and families.

DFCS is focused on recruitment, hiring and retention in support of the workforce. DFCS has 69 social worker and five social work supervisor vacancies to fill as of January 22, 2024. DFCS' retention rates were 94.8% for FY 2023 and 95.8% to date for FY 2024. In keeping with a similar trend over the last several years, in FY 2024, most employee movement (135 instances) were staff transfers to other DFCS positions (59) and promotions within DFCS (26).

DFCS management engages with staff on a continuous basis including working with SEIU, regularly sending information on current staffing levels, identifying needs, and engaging SEIU and CEMA through meet and confers as appropriate. DFCS will continue to monitor community and workforce needs and engage in processes to support appropriate levels of staffing across all program areas to best serve child and families.