



Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Office of Children, Youth, and Families

Caseworker Recruitment and Retention Study

June 4, 2024

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- Child Welfare Resource Center (CWRC)
- Pennsylvania Civil Service Commission, Office of Administration
- Office of Children and Families in the Courts (OCFC)
- Pennsylvania Children and Youth Administrators (PCYA)
- Pennsylvania Council of Children, Youth, and Family Services (PCCYFS)
- Pennsylvania Department of Human Services, Office of Children Youth and Families (OCYF)

We also appreciate the contributions of CCYA leadership and staff from the 10 Pennsylvania counties that participated on the Steering Committee for this engagement, sharing helpful information and context in Steering Committee meetings, stakeholder interviews and focus groups:

- Butler
- Centre
- Chester
- Delaware
- Fulton
- Jefferson
- Lycoming
- Montgomery
- Northampton
- Venango

Further, PFM thanks CCYA leadership from Allegheny, Tioga, and York counties for graciously providing their time and knowledge to inform our research of promising practices for application in other CCYAs.

Finally, we send a special thanks to the numerous CCYA caseworkers and administrative/fiscal staff who took time to participate in focus groups and/or respond to the employee survey. Their insights and feedback guide much of this report's findings, analysis, and recommendations.

An additional note: with sensitivity to the strong community sentiments that may attend discussion of the child welfare system, PFM chose to preserve anonymity of the officials and staff who spoke with us as we developed this report.

II. Executive Summary

Across Pennsylvania's 67 counties, more than 3,000 county-employed caseworkers and case supervisors dedicate themselves to ensuring the safety and well-being of the Commonwealth's children, youth, and families. These caseworkers – in concert with fiscal and administrative staff at county children, youth, and family agencies (CCYAs) – represent the backbone of the child welfare service delivery system in Pennsylvania, serving on the frontlines protecting vulnerable children and supporting stronger families.

CCYA caseworkers in Pennsylvania, however, are leaving the profession at an alarming rate – estimated “quit rates” for county child welfare workers are more than twice that of local government and state government employees (excluding education). The job of a caseworker, by its nature, is stressful and challenging. Further, comparatively low compensation levels – against the backdrop of one of the tightest labor markets in recent memory – exacerbate caseworker recruitment and retention pressures.

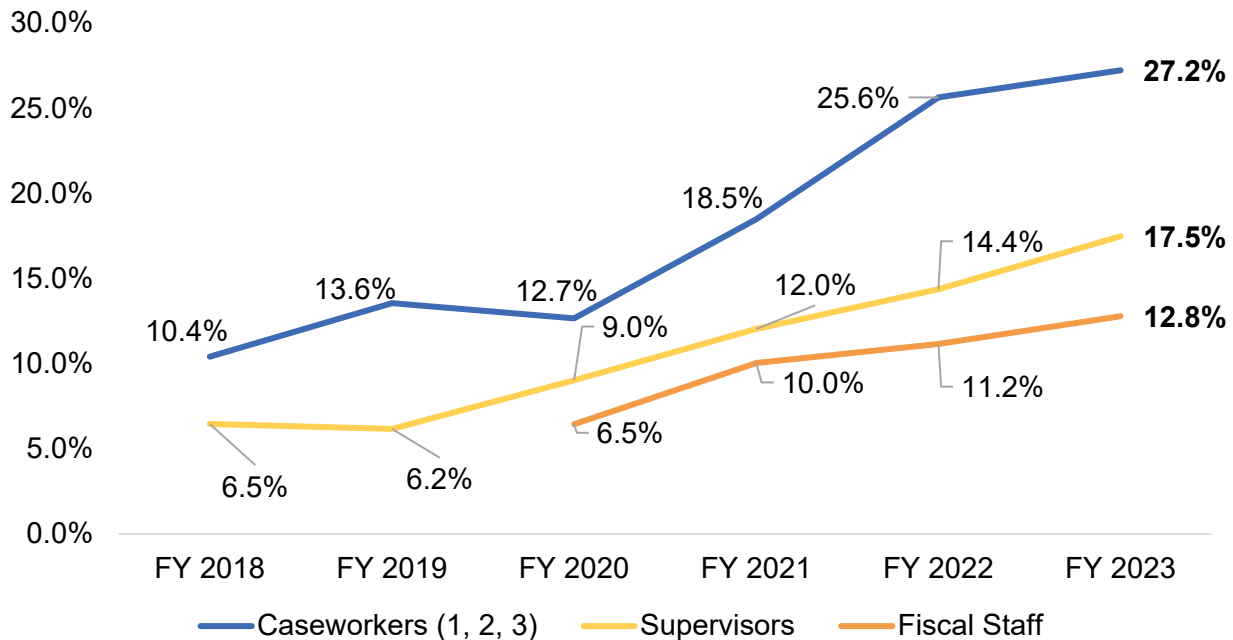
The issue is not new to child welfare agencies in Pennsylvania or elsewhere in the United States; child welfare agencies across the nation have wrestled for years with the challenges of recruiting and retaining child welfare workers. But in Pennsylvania, the situation appears to be worsening:

- More than one in four CCYA caseworkers (25.5 percent) left their jobs in FY 2023.
- Between FY 2018 and FY 2023, more than 3,500 CCYA caseworkers (including supervisors) separated from employment. Approximately half of these separations occurred within the first two years of service.
- Nearly a third (32 percent) of CCYA caseworkers surveyed (n = 136) reported applying for a position with another employer within the prior 12 months.
- Nearly one in five CCYA caseworkers (17.3 percent) hired in FY 2023 quit before the end of the fiscal year.
- Of the 878 CCYA caseworkers, supervisors, and administrators hired in FY 2018, more than four of five (81.3 percent) had separated by the end of FY 2023.
- Fewer than 600 new caseworkers were hired in FY 2023; prior to the pandemic, more than 800 caseworkers were hired each year.

As a result of persistent turnover and reduced hiring, vacancy rates for caseworker positions have nearly tripled between FY 2018 and FY 2023 – with more than a quarter (27.2 percent) of CCYA caseworker positions vacant as of FY 2023.



Statewide Vacancy Rates Through June 30, 2023¹



Higher caseworker turnover is associated with higher costs – human costs to children and families in the form of poorer outcomes, and financial costs to communities in the form of increased expenditures for service delivery.

- **Human Costs:** Higher rates of caseworker turnover is associated with lower rates of permanency, more changes in placement, longer stays in foster care, decreased likelihood of timely reunification, and increased rates of child injury and death.²
- **Financial Costs:** According to one estimate from FY 2019, the average daily cost of congregate care placement in FY 2019 was \$204.20; this would generate an annual expense of \$74,533 per child in congregate care.³

Caseworkers are leaving the profession for a multitude of reasons. Compensation is a key factor in caseworker attrition.

- In a survey of caseworkers at 10 CCYAs, more than nine in 10 respondents considered pay levels “very influential” or “influential” in whether they choose to remain with their agency.

¹ Data from OCYF Needs-Based Budgets (FY 2018 - 2023)

² *Multiple Placements in Foster Care: Literature Review of Correlates and Predictors*, Children and Family Research Center (2004). *The Unsolved Challenge of System Reform*, Annie E. Casey Foundation (2003). Sigrid James, “Why Do Foster Placements Disrupt?” *Social Service Review* (2004). Bonnie Marsh, “Caseworker Turnover: Why do child welfare caseworkers want to leave their jobs and what makes them stay?” (2020) *Social Work Doctoral Dissertations*

³ *2019 State Roundtable Report Congregate Care*. 2019. Pennsylvania Office of Children and Families in the Courts.



- In the same employee survey, 52 percent of caseworker respondents reported working a second job in the prior 12 months to supplement their income.

Yet compensation is not the only factor driving caseworker attrition. CCYA caseworkers must contend with stressful, traumatic, and dangerous working conditions.

- Nearly eight in 10 caseworkers surveyed (77.5 percent) characterized “my safety” as “very influential” or “influential” in whether they choose to remain with their agency.
- Nearly four in 10 caseworkers surveyed (39.4 percent) reported a situation where they felt physically unsafe as a result of performing their job in the prior 6 months.
- Nearly six in 10 caseworkers (56.8 percent) reported witnessing or experiencing a situation with a client that was personally traumatic.

Further, caseworkers must confront higher workloads from escalating vacancies and increased demand for child welfare services while contending with a multitude of administrative burdens and under scrutiny from an array of public stakeholders.

Caseworkers are often mission-driven, motivated by the desire to help children, youth and families. They value supportive relationships with their colleagues and supervisors. They wrestle with stress and trauma caused by seeing the aftermath of child abuse, exacerbated by overwhelming workloads. They do a difficult, job in which their success and job satisfaction depend heavily on collaboration with partners. And all of this occurs in an environment where CCYA staff often feel unappreciated, sensing that their successes are taken for granted while shortcomings are spotlighted.

With these dynamics in mind, this report presents a series of recommendations spanning the array of entities and factors that impact CCYAs’ success in recruiting and retaining staff. Recommendations are grouped into six themes: cross-cutting, compensation, recruiting, caseworker workloads, training, and safe, supportive workplaces.

Two key recommendations are an investment fund and an ongoing workgroup focused on improving caseworker recruitment and retention. Recommendations associated with the Recruitment and Retention Investment Fund (RRIF in the tables that follow) are designated with the symbol “*”, while recommendations associated with the Recruitment and Retention Working Group (RRWG) are associated with the symbol “†”.



#	Cross-Cutting Recommendations	RRIF	RRWG
1	Establish a Recruitment & Retention Investment Fund	-	-
2	Create an OCYF-CCYA Recruitment & Retention Work Group	-	-
3	Develop a Grant Clearinghouse	*	†
4	Pursue a Comprehensive Multi-Media Communications Strategy	*	†
5	Create a Guide to Best Practices in Contracting for Services	-	†
6	Legally Designate Child Welfare Caseworkers as First Responders	-	†
7	Develop Uniform Definition of a "Case"	-	†
8	Provide Stakeholder Trainings for Partner Organizations	-	†
#	Compensation Recommendations	RRIF	RRWG
9	Competitive Hiring Rates	-	†
10	Early-Career Wage Increases in Compensation Plans	-	-
11	Pay Compression Adjustments	-	-
12	Promotion Differentials	-	-
13	Overtime Pay for First-Line Supervisors	-	-
14	Premium Pays	-	-
15	Recruitment Incentives	*	†
16	Retention Incentives	*	†
17	Referral Incentives	*	†
18	Student Loan Repayment Assistance	*	†
19	Onsite or Subsidized Childcare	*	†
20	Expand Use of Caseworker 3s	-	†
#	Recruitment Recommendations	RRIF	RRWG
21	Strengthen Recruiting Relationships with Universities and Colleges	*	†
22	Expand CWEB Program	*	†
23	Develop Strategic Recruitment Plans	-	-
24	Enhance Transparency in Recruiting	-	†
25	Improve CCYA and Civil Service Communication	-	†



#	Caseworker Workload Recommendations	RRIF	RRWG
26	Make Strategic Technological Investments	*	†
27	Expand Use of Case Aides and Clerical Positions	-	-
28	Designate School District Caseworkers	-	-
29	Adopt Dedicated After-Hours Staffing	-	-
30	Improve Mandated Reporter Trainings	-	†
31	Improve ChildLine Designation of Child Welfare Referrals	-	†
32	Revise GPS Bulletin and Training	-	-
33	Increase Access to Prevention Services	-	†
34	Ensure Efficient Administrative Paperwork and Processes	-	†
#	Training Recommendations	RRIF	RRWG
35	Emphasize Mentoring Programs	-	†
36	Utilize Training Coordinators	-	-
37	Expand Training Offerings	*	†
38	Delay Assignment of Cases to New Caseworkers	-	†
#	Safe, Supportive Workplace Recommendations	RRIF	RRWG
39	Improve Safety Measures for Caseworkers	*	†
40	Offer Counseling and Peer Support	*	†
41	Provide Remote/Flexible Working Options	-	†
42	Implement Case Reviews and Decision-Making Support	-	-
43	Develop Positive Organizational Cultures	-	-

III. Report Methodology and Sources Consulted

In developing this report, PFM drew on a variety of sources to perform analyses and craft findings. These sources included:

- OCYF Needs-Based Budget personnel summaries from FY 2018 – FY 2023.
- Feedback from a Steering Committee of County Children and Youth Agency (CCYA) representatives and child welfare stakeholders across the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. The Steering Committee met eight times between July 2023 and February of 2024.
- On-site focus groups with CCYA employees, including caseworkers, supervisors, and administrators.
- A survey of current employees administered through an online survey platform; a total of 332 survey responses were received with a response rate of approximately 37 percent.
- Data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics program) and Job Openings and Labor Turnover Survey (JOLTS), as well as the U.S. Department of Labor's Occupational Information Network (O*NET).
- A review of academic, government, and think tank resources on caseworker recruitment/retention, as well as publicly available media reports.

Needs-Based Budgets and the “FTE Unit Approach”

The analyses conducted in this report use personnel summary data extracted from each county's annual Needs-Based Plan and Budget (NBB) reports spanning from fiscal year (FY) 2018 through FY 2023. These data, self-reported by each county, encompass a range of personnel-related metrics including positions, vacancies, compensation, separations, and other relevant data pertaining to the CCYAs.

PFM aggregated and analyzed the personnel data to evaluate the recruitment and retention experiences within individual CCYAs and across Pennsylvania. These analyses predominantly relied on county-reported units of full-time equivalents (FTEs), wherein part-time workers were considered as less than one FTE and each full-time employee accounted for as a full FTE.

Given that annual NBBs separately report the grant-funded portion of certain positions, PFM categorized vacancies and attrition through FTE units. This “FTE unit approach” combined FTE units associated with multiple unique employee ID numbers, accounting for individuals whose jobs were reflected in the dataset by multiple partial FTEs.

When calculating attrition (i.e., retention rates, turnover rates, and “adjusted turnover rates”), however, PFM deviated from the FTE unit approach. Instead, PFM counted each unique employee as a full value (i.e., one separation) – regardless of part-time or full-time status. For instance, a



separation by a part-time employee was treated as one separation, rather than 0.5 as per FTE allocation. This allowed PFM to measure the loss of all individuals from CCYA employment, rather than just loss of FTEs, minimizing the undercounting of turnover rates. Interns were excluded from all headcount, vacancy, and attrition analyses, as the time-limited nature of internships – though an important pipeline for recruitment – could distort attrition rates.

Limitations of the Needs-Based Budget Data

There are certain limitations within the Needs-Based Budget data. First, these data are self-reported, and the PFM project team did not validate or perform quality control on any data contained within the Needs-Based Budget personnel summaries.

Wherever possible, the PFM project team accounted for instances where employees' positions were reported as multiple partial FTEs to prevent double-counting in attrition analyses. Nonetheless, certain data entry errors, such as duplicate employee IDs listed with multiple reasons for attrition, or an FTE of zero in the dataset, remained unaddressed. PFM estimates that approximately 200 data entries – of 9,000 total – per fiscal year may contain errors. Further, PFM did not note any “directionality” in the potential data errors – that is, some data entry errors may result in the overcounting of attrition, while others undercount attrition, and the overall impact balances to a degree that does not impact data analysis meaningfully.

These errors are not necessarily evenly spread across counties; one county's NBB submission may have multiple errors while another has none. Accordingly, it is not anticipated that state-wide trends are materially skewed by these data errors, but some county-level trends may be.

Steering Committee

At the onset of this project, the PFM project team convened a Steering Committee that included representatives from OCYF, the University of Pittsburgh's CWRC, and PCYA, along with CCYA leaders. The Steering Committee met eight times between July 2023 and February 2024. In these meetings, the PFM project team presented preliminary findings and analyses and canvassed the group for feedback on analytical approaches and recommendations.

Focus Groups

PFM facilitated in-person and virtual focus groups with CCYA representatives from 10 of Pennsylvania's 67 counties between July 2023 and November 2023. Focus groups were held with frontline caseworkers, supervisors, fiscal/administrative employees, and agency leadership. Separate focus group sessions were conducted for different stakeholder groups, with discussions typically lasting between 60 to 90 minutes. Quotes and themes from the groups are discussed through this report, but all commentary has been kept anonymous and all identifying context shared in any quote has been removed. Focus group feedback also informed design of the employee survey discussed below.



Employee Survey

PFM designed, administered and analyzed an employee survey, which was circulated to all CCYA employees in the 10 counties participating in the project. The 60-question survey covered dimensions including job satisfaction, workload, organizational culture, professional development opportunities, and factors influencing retention decisions. The survey included multiple-choice questions, rating scales, and open-ended opportunities for respondents to provide commentary. Responses were kept anonymous and confidential, though as with the approach to focus group anonymity above, some anonymous quotes from survey respondents are noted in this report.

A total of 332 responses were received from staff members across the 10 focus CCYAs, for an approximate response rate of 37.4 percent among all staff members. Among caseworkers, the response rate was 26.8 percent. The quantitative insights from the survey responses enabled direct comparisons of multiple factors contributing to workforce dynamics across the state. Additionally, qualitative feedback obtained through the open-ended survey questions improved our understanding of the themes that emerged in focus group conversations with frontline caseworkers in CCYAs. The survey results facilitated exploration of themes and trends identified during focus group sessions, offering quantitative validation and comparison of qualitative findings and ideas.

U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

To contextualize employee turnover rates, PFM benchmarked CCYA caseworker turnover and “adjusted turnover” to publicly available data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics’ Job Openings and Labor Turnover Survey (JOLTS). Additionally, this report uses data and analyses from the U.S. Department of Labor’s Occupational Information Network (O*NET). The appendix of this report includes a section titled “Methodological Approach for Related Occupational Analysis” that provides a more detailed overview of methodology used for O*Net data and comparing CCYA compensation to compensation for other occupations.

Additional Data Sources

This report also incorporates supplementary data sourced from reports published by government agencies, child welfare industry think-tanks, scholarly journal articles, and media reports. These secondary data sources were utilized to provide broader context and enhance the depth of analysis.

IV. Child Welfare Service Delivery in Pennsylvania

Pennsylvania's child welfare system is responsible for ensuring the safety, permanency, and well-being of children in the Commonwealth who are at risk of abuse, neglect, or dependency. The system relies heavily on collaboration between state and county agencies, with each playing distinct roles in the process.

Organizational Structure

Child welfare in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania is characterized as a "state-supervised, county-administered" system, distinguishing it from states with a centralized, state-administered system.⁴ In Pennsylvania, counties provide child welfare services under the oversight of the state agency. Funding for child welfare services is distributed to County Children and Youth Agencies (CCYAs) in each of the Commonwealth's 67 counties: these agencies, in turn, fund child welfare services in accordance with state-specified guidelines.

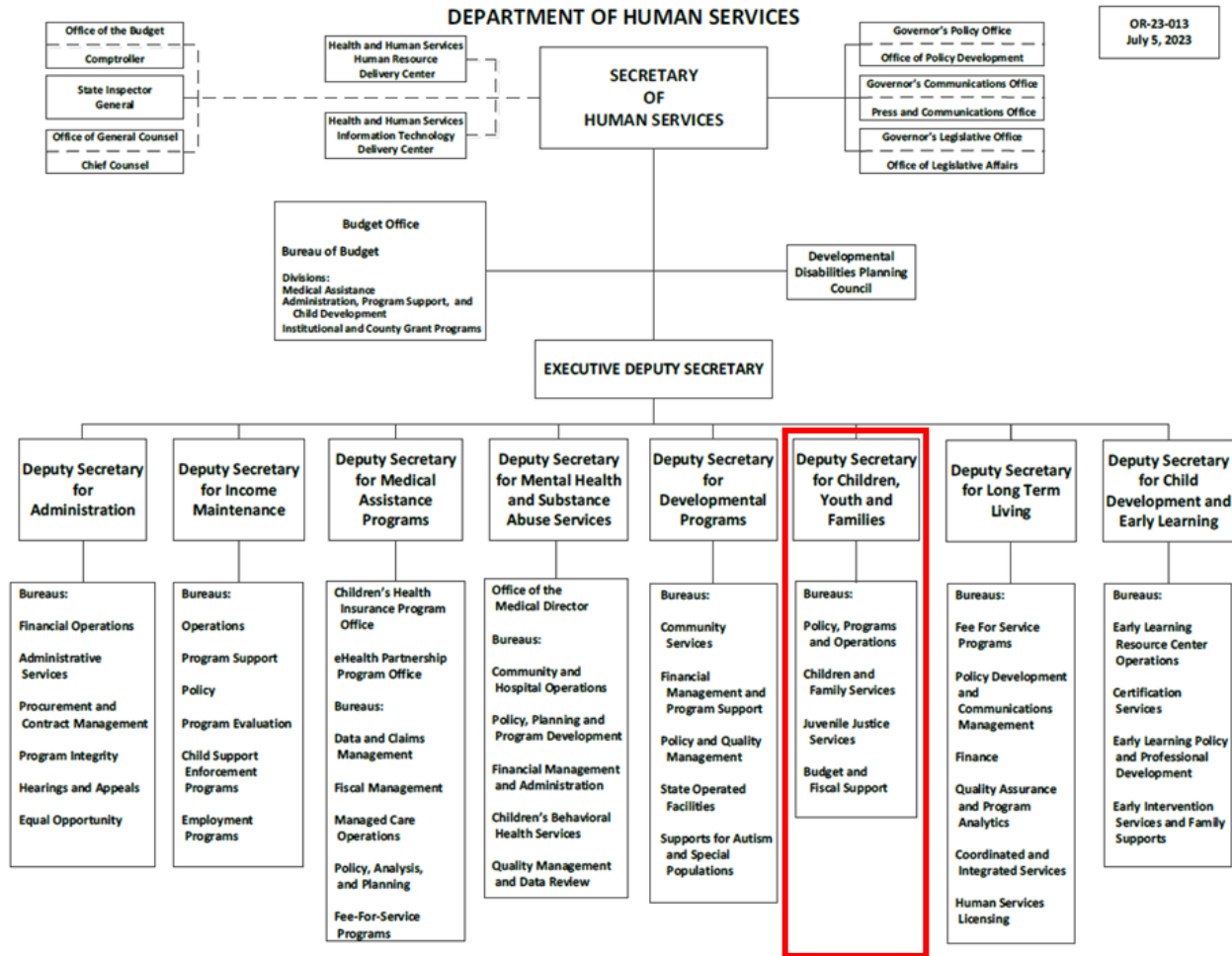
At the state level, child welfare services fall under the purview of the Commonwealth's Department of Human Services (DHS). As shown in the organization chart on the following page, DHS has eight deputy secretaries covering the following areas:

- Administration
- Income Maintenance
- Medical Assistance Programs
- Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services
- Developmental Programs
- **Children, Youth, and Families**
- Long Term Living
- Child Development and Early Learning

The Office of Children, Youth and Families (OCYF) is responsible for administering programs and policies related to child welfare. The Deputy Secretary for OCYF administers a budget of \$1.49 billion, according to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania's approved FY 2024 budget, and reports to the Secretary of DHS through the Executive Deputy Secretary.

⁴ Another term for this type of system is "state-mandated, county operated" system. Pennsylvania is one of 11 states with either a fully state-supervised, county administered or hybrid child welfare system.

Pennsylvania Department of Human Services: Organization Chart⁵

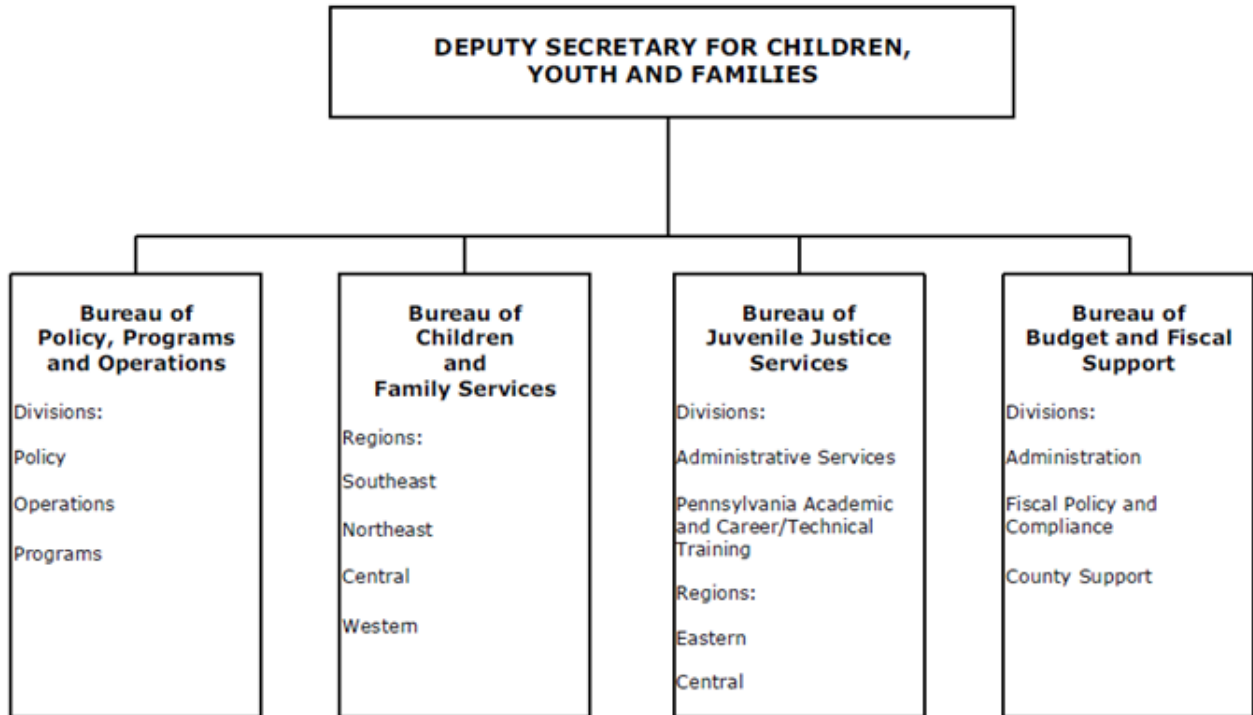


⁵ Executive Board Resolution NO. OR-23-013 July 5, 2023. <https://www.oa.pa.gov/Policies/Documents/Human%20Services.pdf>. Accessed April 1, 2024.



The Deputy Secretary for Children, Youth, and Families oversees four bureaus, as detailed in the organizational chart below.

Pennsylvania Office of Children, Youth, and Families: Organization Chart⁶



In this state-supervised, county-administered system, each of the Commonwealth’s 67 counties play a pivotal role in the administration of child welfare services in Pennsylvania. Each Pennsylvania county has its own CCYA.⁷ While the state provides funding and creates policies and regulations that CCYAs must follow, child welfare services in Pennsylvania are administered by county governments and their CCYAs.

This means that each Pennsylvania county has significant autonomy to decide the specifics on how they deliver child welfare services to residents. Each CCYA is led by an administrator, who holds primary responsibility for ensuring that their agency achieves desired outcomes and adheres to applicable state and federal requirements. Some CCYA administrators report directly to county commissioners, while others may instead report to a human services director who oversees the CCYA and other social service programs. Respective Commonwealth and county roles and responsibilities are outlined in the figure below.

⁶ Executive Board Resolution NO. OR-23-013 July 5, 2023. <https://www.oa.pa.gov/Policies/Documents/Human%20Services.pdf>. Accessed April 1, 2024.

⁷ Used interchangeably with Children and Youth Services (CYS) agency or CYS. Referred to as CCYA throughout this report.



Commonwealth Versus County Roles in Pennsylvania Child Welfare Services System

Commonwealth (OCYF)	Counties (CCYAs)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop policies and regulations governing child welfare services. • Provide oversight, technical assistance, and training to county agencies. • Allocate funding and resources to support county-level child welfare initiatives. • Monitor county compliance with state regulations and standards. • Receive allegations of abuse and neglect and transmit them to the investigative county agency. • Collaborate with other state agencies, stakeholders, and advocacy groups to improve child welfare outcomes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Receive reports of child abuse, neglect, or dependency and conduct investigations to assess the safety of children. • Provide or arrange for services to support families and ensure child safety, including foster care, family preservation services, and adoption services. • Collaborate with law enforcement, courts, health care institutions, schools, and community organizations to address the needs of children and families. • Make recommendations to courts regarding the placement and custody of children involved in dependency proceedings. • Maintain records and data on child welfare cases in their jurisdiction.

Counties may also contract with third-party providers to provide services. For instance, most counties contract with private provider agencies for out-of-home placement services such as foster care and residential or group-home placements. Counties may also contract for administrative support functions; for example, counties can contract out for fiscal staff to perform accounting and reporting functions as an alternative to hiring a county employee or as an interim solution to fill vacancies.

Counties can also outsource select case management functions, although there are some functions, such as intake, that by law must be provided by the CCYA and cannot be contracted out. Philadelphia’s Improving Outcomes for Children is an example of a CCYA contracting out the provision of direct case management services through a network of Community Umbrella Agencies



(CUAs) as a strategic approach to facilitate community-based child protective services.⁸ Other counties may contract for case management on a temporary basis to supplement county staff.

Funding Streams

A reimbursement system underpins the fiscal relationship between OCYF and CCYAs, with funding for Pennsylvania's child welfare system derived from a combination of federal, state, and county sources. Key funding streams include:

- **Title IV-E of the Social Security Act:** Provides federal reimbursement to states for a portion of the costs associated with foster care, adoption assistance, and certain services for children in out-of-home care. With the passing of the Families First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) in 2018, Title IV-E also provides optional funding for prevention services related to mental health, substance abuse, and in-home parenting skills programs. This funding will go towards children or youth in foster care, pregnant or parenting youth in foster care, and parents or caregivers of those youth.⁹ FFPSA also puts restrictions on state use of Title IV-E funds for congregate care placement, limiting the number of days that can be reimbursed to 14 unless the placement setting meets specific criteria.
- **Title IV-B of the Social Security Act:** Supports a range of child welfare services, including family preservation, reunification, and adoption promotion.
- **Other Federal Funding Sources:** Other federal funding sources include Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, Social Security Block Grant, Medical Assistance, and specific federal appropriations such as Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment. These funds must be applied to services that meet the criteria established by the federal funding sources.
- **State General Funds (Act 148):** Pennsylvania allocates state funds to support various child welfare programs, including those aimed at prevention, intervention, and family support services. State Act 148 funds are also used to fund portions of out-of-home placement services not covered by federal Title IV-E resources.
- **County Contributions (Local Share):** Counties contribute funding to support the operation of their CYS agencies and may also leverage additional resources (e.g., additional public or philanthropic grants, donations, etc.) to supplement state and federal funding received through the streams listed above.

In 2023, the total appropriation for county child welfare services in Pennsylvania was nearly \$2.1 billion, with the following state and federal allocations.

⁸ This approach is unique among Pennsylvania counties and requires a significant population base to execute at scale; as such, it is not relevant to most Pennsylvania counties, which are much smaller in size.

⁹ Title IV-E Prevention Program. The Administration for Children and Families. June 23, 2023. <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/title-iv-e-prevention-program>. Accessed April 2, 2024.



Funding Source	Allocation ¹⁰
Title IV-E – Child Welfare ¹¹	\$428,863,000
Title IV-B ¹²	\$1,000,000
Other Federal Sources (Social Services Block Grant, TANF, Medical Assistance, etc.)	\$146,204,000
State General Fund (Act 148)	\$1,488,233,000
Total	\$2,064,300,000

Act 30 of 1991 sets out the funding regulations for the Commonwealth and county shares of funding, which differs depending on the function. Counties invoice the state for reimbursement and use time studies to determine allocation of staff efforts and related funding across services and reimbursement levels. The table below shows the percentage of reimbursement counties may receive by category.

Service Type	Reimbursable Percentage ¹³
Adoption Services	100%
Emergency Shelter	90%
Community Residential and Group Home	80%
Foster Family	80%
Supervised Independent Living	80%
Child Protective Services (CPS and GPS)	80%
Information and Referral, Service Planning	80%
Counseling/Intervention	80%
Day Care, Day Treatment	80%
Residential (Institution) / Secure Residential	60%
Administration	60%
Juvenile Detention / Juvenile Act Proceedings	50%

Service Delivery

Generally, the child welfare system in Pennsylvania can be divided into six services provided to clients by CCYA caseworkers. The six service areas include:

- **Child Protective Services – Child Abuse (CPS):** Investigating reports of child abuse and neglect and taking appropriate action to ensure the safety of children.

¹⁰ General Assembly of Pennsylvania, House Bill 611, June 30, 2023.

¹¹ Does not include \$20 million in Title IV-E funds appropriated for general government administration and information systems.

¹² This appropriation is specified "Title IV-B – Caseworker Visits" and does not include the Title IV-B appropriation for Community Based Family Centers which falls under the PA Department of Corrections.

¹³ Pennsylvania Child Welfare Resource Center Annual Report, 2022-2023.

<https://www.pacwrc.pitt.edu/AnnualReports/AnnualReport2022-2023.pdf>. Accessed April 2, 2024.



- **Child Protective Services – General (GPS):** Investigating reports of children at risk due to factors other than abuse or neglect, such as inadequate supervision, parental substance abuse, or domestic violence.
- **Placement Services:** Providing temporary out-of-home care for children who cannot safely remain with their families, with the goal of reunification or permanent placement.
- **Adoption Services:** Facilitating the legal adoption of children who are unable to return to their birth families, either through foster care adoption or private adoption.
- **Family Preservation Services:** Offering support and resources to families in crisis to help them overcome challenges and maintain a safe and stable home environment for their children.
- **Permanency Planning:** Developing and implementing plans to achieve permanency for children, whether through reunification with their birth families, adoption, or placement with relatives or other caregivers.

CCYA Organization and Caseworker Responsibilities

In FY 2023, CCYAs budgeted for approximately 3,200 caseworker positions and 1,016 supervisor positions (including vacancies).¹⁴

While each CCYA is different, they are typically structured with several operational units staffed by caseworkers, supervisors, and managers. Depending on the unit structure, some caseworkers may be responsible for specific functions (e.g., Investigations or Ongoing¹⁵), while others may carry out a wider range of responsibility for their cases. The responsibilities of caseworkers within these units generally correspond with, and sometimes bridge, the six service areas listed above – caseworker responsibilities are highlighted in the following figure and explored in greater depth below.

¹⁴ Pennsylvania Child Welfare Resource Center Annual Report, 2022-2023. Page 4.

<https://www.pacwrc.pitt.edu/AnnualReports/AnnualReport2022-2023.pdf>. Accessed April 2, 2024.

¹⁵ “Ongoing” typically refers to a unit of caseworkers that handles cases that require ongoing services. Some counties use the term “Protective” to describe this type of unit.



CCYA Responsibilities

Intake	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Receive and screen reports of child abuse, neglect, or dependency
Investigations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Investigators evaluate allegations of child maltreatment and neglect
Case Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Develop case plans for children, youth, and families; coordinate appropriate services; and monitor progress toward goals.
Permanency Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Focus on moving children from out-of-home care to "permanency" via reunification with birth families, adoptions, or placement with relatives/kinship caregivers
Resource Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Recruit, license, and support foster families and kinship caregivers who provide temporary care for children who cannot remain safely with their birth families
Court Involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Serve as the CCYA's representative in court proceedings related to child welfare cases
Prevention and Support Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide services to "at-risk" families, including parenting education, counseling, and support services aimed at preventing abuse and neglect

The Intake function is responsible for screening reports of child abuse, neglect, or dependency. These reports may come in directly to the CCYA or through the state's child protective services intake, ChildLine. In some counties, Intake caseworkers do the initial investigations as well, while in others a separate Intake unit is responsible for taking calls, screening reports, and assigning cases. While CCYAs can contract out to third-party providers for most case management, fiscal, and operational



responsibilities, Intake is one function that must be provided directly by the county and cannot be contracted out.¹⁶

Caseworker responsibilities during the investigation process include:

- Conducting initial assessments and investigations of reports of child abuse, neglect, or dependency.
- Gathering information from multiple sources, including interviews with children, parents, caregivers, and collateral contacts.
- Assessing the safety of children and determining the level of risk they may face.

Based on the findings of the investigation and assessment, CCYA staff (a combination of caseworker, supervisor, and potentially manager) determine whether the family will continue involvement and receive ongoing services from the CCYA. This may take the form of in-home services or may require placement services (foster/kinship care or congregated care) if the child needs to be removed from the home.

Depending on the county, Case Planning and Management functions might be separated into in-home services and out-of-home placement. In some counties, cases will remain with the same caseworker beginning with intake, instead of being assigned to specific caseworkers or units for investigation or ongoing services.

Case planning and management responsibilities include:

- Developing individualized case plans in collaboration with children, families, and other service providers.
- Identifying strengths and needs of children and families and coordinating appropriate services to address them.
- Monitoring progress towards case plan goals and adjusting plans as necessary to ensure child safety and family stability.

Some counties designate caseworkers to an Adoptions Unit; however, because permanency planning occurs throughout the life of a case, all caseworkers are responsible for these functions to some degree. Permanency planning functions include:

- Working towards achieving permanency for children, whether through reunification with birth families, adoption, or permanent legal guardianship.

¹⁶ "The county agency shall be organized and staffed to ensure the following...2) Intake to services, including the following... (i) Provision of 24-hour, 7-day-per-week telephone access and capacity to respond to emergency requests for service. (ii) The direct investigation and assessment, by county agency staff, or complaints, requests, and referrals for service..." Pa Code Title 55 Chapter 3130 § 3130.31



- Coordinating with adoption workers, permanency specialists, and other stakeholders to facilitate timely and appropriate permanency outcomes.

In addition to serving families, caseworkers are responsible for aspects of court involvement, including:

- Preparing and presenting case information for court hearings (e.g., written reports and in-person testimony).
- Collaborating with attorneys, guardians ad litem, and other court personnel to advocate for the best interests of children.

While most counties contract with external providers for recruitment, training and licensing of foster families and homes, others perform these functions with in-house staff, typically via a Resource Unit that may also be responsible for identifying and supporting kinship caregivers.

Caseworker responsibilities also include crisis intervention and support for families in their care, referring to and coordinating with other service providers (such as mental health or substance use treatment), and meeting administrative requirements. Additional caseworker functions include:

- Maintaining accurate and up-to-date case records, including documentation of assessments, case plans, service referrals, and progress notes.
- Collaborating with other professionals and stakeholders, including educators, healthcare providers, law enforcement, and community organizations, to coordinate services and support for children and families.
- Providing crisis intervention and support to families during times of heightened stress or instability.
- Offering guidance and assistance in accessing emergency resources and support networks.

FY 2022 Child Welfare Statistics

Child Abuse and Neglect Reports (CPS):
39,093 (12.8% substantiated)

General Protective Services Reports (GPS):
165,295 (24.2% valid)

Unduplicated Number of Children Served in Foster Care Settings:
19,287

*Source: Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children,
State of Child Welfare 2023
<https://www.papartnerships.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/2023-SOCW-Pennsylvania.pdf>*

As noted above, Child Protective Services (CPS) and General Protective Services (GPS) serve distinct purposes with different criteria, regulations, and cases. CPS primarily addresses cases of abuse and neglect – to be classified as a CPS case, the alleged abuse must fall under the definition of child abuse as provided in the Child Protective Services law.¹⁷ GPS deals with a broader range of

¹⁷ Substantiated CPS reports will result in an individual being placed on the child abuse registry, which can impact their ability to work in childcare roles in the future.



concerns that may pose risks to children's safety and well-being, such as inadequate shelter, truancy, lack of appropriate supervision, and others. GPS services are intended to “protect the safety, rights, and welfare of children so that they have an opportunity for healthy growth and development” and to “assist parents in recognizing and remedying conditions harmful to their children and in fulfilling their parental duties in a manner that does not put their children at risk.”¹⁸ Additional distinctions between the two general types of case designation are shown below.

Child Protective Services

Purpose: Cases involving the abuse or neglect of children.

Criteria: CPS investigates reports of child abuse or neglect, including physical, sexual, emotional abuse, and neglect (such as failure to provide adequate food, shelter, or medical care).

Regulations: CPS operates under the laws and regulations outlined in Pennsylvania's Child Protective Services Law (CPSL) and related statutes.

Cases: Cases typically involve families in crisis situations where immediate intervention is necessary to protect the safety and well-being of children.

General Protective Services

Purpose: Children at risk due to factors other than abuse or neglect.

Criteria: GPS covers a broad range of concerns, including situations where a child's safety or well-being may be compromised due to factors such as inadequate supervision, parental substance abuse, or domestic violence.

Regulations: Bulletin 3490-19-02 “Statewide General Protective Services (GPS) Referrals” (GPS Bulletin) outlines the requirements establishing when a referral can be designated as a GPS report, screen-out protocols, and response times for GPS assessments.

Cases: The focus is on providing support and services to mitigate risks and improve family functioning while ensuring the safety of children.

¹⁸ Pa Code Title 55 Chapter 3490.22: § 3490.222.



VI. Caseworker Retention

Employers across industries in the United States are experiencing retention challenges stemming from labor market disruptions following the COVID-19 pandemic. These broader labor market shifts compound the difficulties faced by child welfare agencies that have long struggled with caseworker retention. Moreover, child welfare agencies throughout the country – not just Pennsylvania CCYAs – are reporting escalating turnover rates for caseworkers. As a result, many communities are experiencing increased financial costs in service delivery, and more importantly, children and families are experiencing suboptimal service delivery outcomes.

In the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania:

- Higher caseworker vacancy rates are correlated with poorer outcomes for children.
 - Between FY 2018 and FY 2022, caseworker vacancy rates nearly doubled from 10.4 percent to 18.5 percent.
 - Over the same period, the median time children and youth spent in foster care increased from 14.2 months to 17.3 months and the percentage of children reunified with families declined from 70.1 percent to 64.7 percent.
- According to one estimate from FY 2019, the average daily cost of congregate care placement in FY 2019 was \$204.20; this would generate an annual expense of \$74,533 per child in congregate care.¹⁹
- CCYA caseworker vacancy rates exceeded 27 percent in FY 2023.
- CCYA caseworker quit rates are more than twice the national quit rates for local and state government employees.²⁰
- Nearly one in three caseworkers surveyed reported applying for another position in the prior 12 months.

Historically Tight Labor Markets

In the pandemic's wake, employers across all industries have contended with an historically tight labor market that presents near-universal challenges with recruitment and retention. A tight labor market is one in which there are more job openings than unemployed workers to fill them. A metric to assess this relationship is the ratio between the number of unemployed persons and job openings. A lower unemployed persons per job opening ratio indicates a tighter labor market. When labor

¹⁹ 2019 State Roundtable Report Congregate Care. 2019. Pennsylvania Office of Children and Families in the Courts. <https://ocfcpacourts.us/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/2019-CC-WKG-Report-002390.pdf>. Accessed 4.14.24

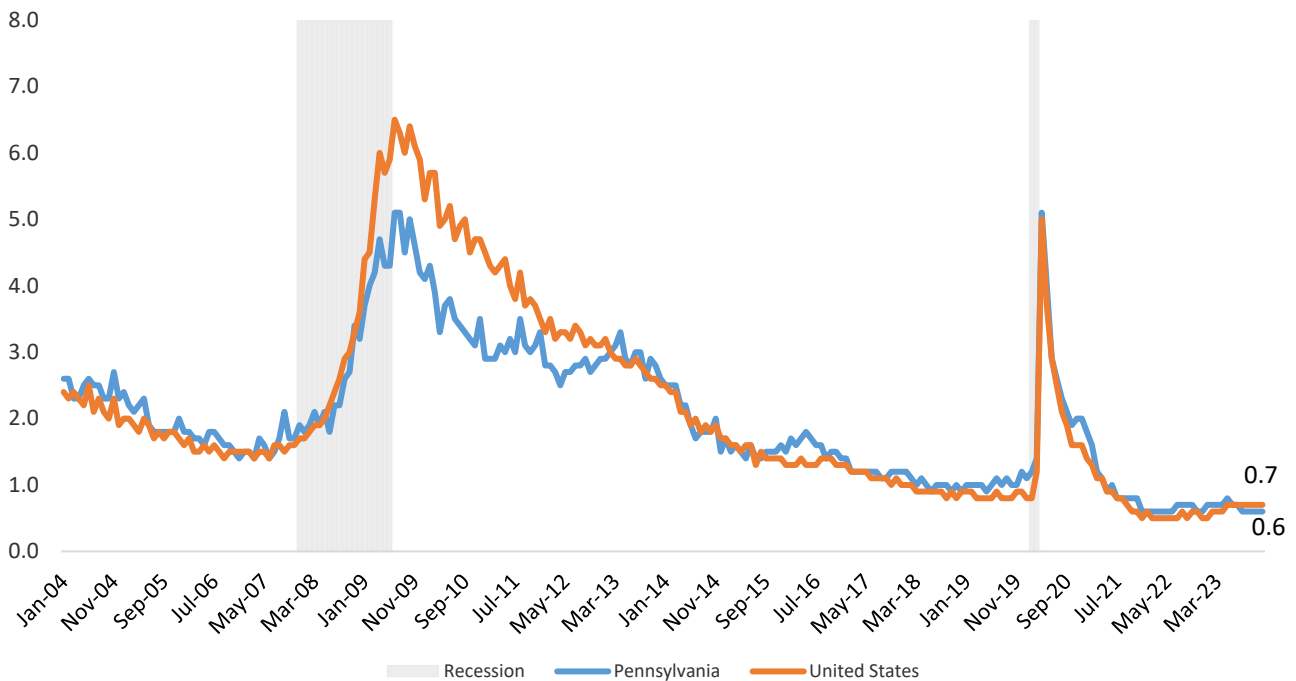
²⁰ Voluntary separations – or “quits” – are not tracked in the NBBs. In place of a quit a quit rate, PFM developed a metric called an “adjusted quit rate” to serve as a proxy for the quit rate, which is explained later within this chapter.



markets are tight, employers across an industry may experience difficulty in recruiting new employees and retaining existing employees.

As shown in the figure that follows, the unemployed persons per job opening ratio in December 2023 was near a multi-decade low. Across all industries, there was less than one unemployed person (0.7 person) per job opening in the United States. In Pennsylvania, labor markets were slightly tighter – with 0.6 unemployed persons per job opening. Consequently, employers across industries were experiencing challenges in hiring and retaining new workers even though labor market participation rates have returned to pre-pandemic levels.

Number of Unemployed Persons per Job Opening, Pennsylvania and United States, Seasonally Adjusted, January 2004 through December 2023²¹



While the national labor market unemployed persons per job opening ratio is 0.7, there is considerable variation in this figure across industries. For instance, in the construction industry, which is prone to fluctuations influenced by business cycles and external factors such as weather, the unemployment to job opening ratio stands at 1.7 as of January 2024. This means there are nearly two unemployed persons (1.7) for each job opening.

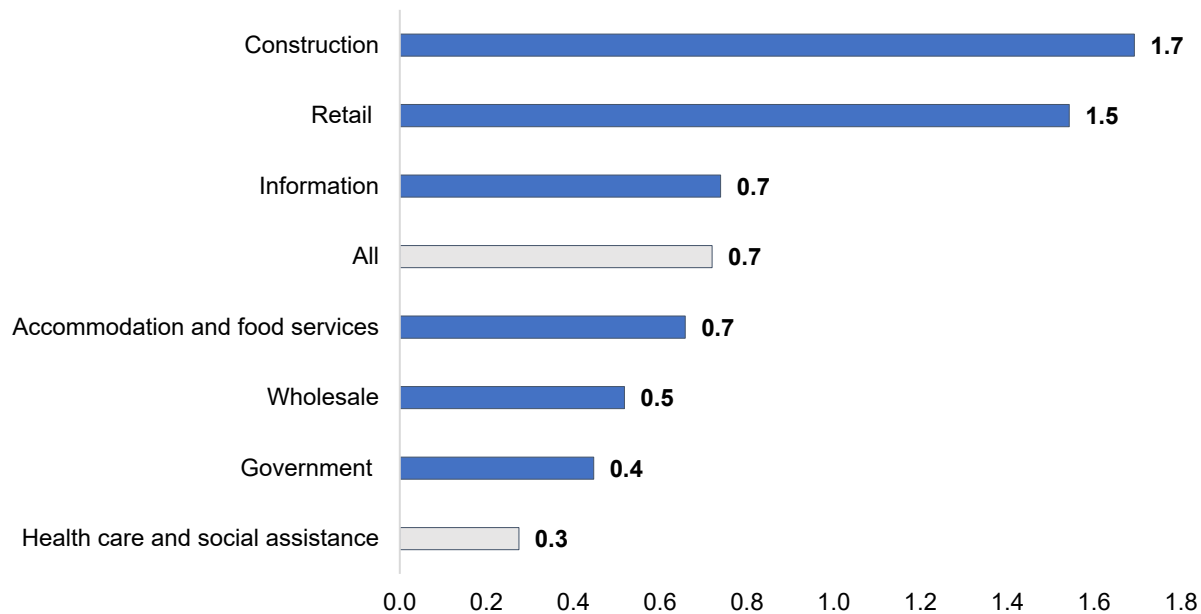
By contrast, the healthcare and social assistance and government industries, which encompass a significant portion of caseworkers, represent two industries with comparatively tight labor markets. These industries are characterized by materially lower unemployed person to job opening ratios. For example, the healthcare and social assistance industry has a ratio of 0.3 unemployed persons per

²¹ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Accessed March 7, 2024 at www.bls.gov



job opening. Stated another way, there are approximately three job openings for every unemployed person within the healthcare and social assistance industry.

Number of Unemployed Persons per Job Opening, Select Industries, United States, January 2024²²



Recruitment and retention challenges for child welfare caseworkers are not new. The Annie E. Casey Foundation, for example, reported that “for about 15 years prior to the pandemic, child welfare turnover rates hovered between an estimated 20 and 40 percent.”²³ Since the pandemic, however, many communities across the country have experienced heightened difficulties in recruiting and retaining caseworkers. Consider the following:

- **Texas:** In 2022, nearly one in three employees left the State Department of Family and Protective Services. Similarly, nearly 30 percent of caseworkers have less than one year of service with the agency.²⁴
- **Tennessee:** Between 2018 and 2022, the Tennessee Department of Children’s Services (DCS) reported that staff turnover jumped from 16 to 56 percent. A 2021 state audit found a 97 percent turnover rate among first-year case managers.²⁵

²² U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Accessed March 7, 2024 at www.bls.gov

²³ “How does turnover in the child welfare workforce impact children and families?” Casey Family Programs. August 29, 2023. Accessed April 14, 2024 at <https://www.casey.org/turnover-costs-and-retention-strategies/>.

²⁴ “One-third of Texas foster care caseworkers left their jobs last year as the agency continued putting kids in hotels.” The Edinburg Advocate. September 26, 2023.

²⁵ “Little to no support” Inside the 2022 staffing collapse at DCS and the plan to fix it.” Nashville Tennessean. March 9, 2023.



- **New York:** In 2022, the non-profit Council of Family and Child Caring Agencies – representing 58 private, non-profit child welfare agencies across New York State – reported that 42 percent of caseworkers left their positions.²⁶
- **Indiana:** The Indiana Department of Child Services lost 739 of its more than 2,100 case managers in FY 2023. Though the agency hired another 890 case managers, turnover last fiscal year exceeded a third of statewide staff.²⁷
- **North Carolina:** The North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services reported a statewide child welfare social worker turnover rate of 30 percent in 2023, with some counties experiencing turnover rates above 50 percent.²⁸
- **Missouri:** More than half the frontline staff working in the Missouri Department of Social Services' Children's Division left their jobs in 2022.²⁹

In Pennsylvania, multiple organizations have analyzed the issue of CCYA caseworker recruitment and retention. Nevertheless, the Commonwealth continues to report challenges in recruiting and retaining CCYA staff, including caseworkers and administrative personnel.

Cost of Caseworker Turnover

Higher caseworker turnover is associated with higher costs – human costs to children and families in the form of poorer outcomes, and financial costs to communities in the form of increased expenditures for service delivery.

A review of academic and industry literature suggest that higher levels of caseworker turnover is associated with the following suboptimal outcomes:

- Lower rates of permanency³⁰
- More changes in placement (i.e., instability)³¹
- Longer stays in foster care
- Decreased likelihood of timely reunification³²

²⁶ Sarkar, Susanti. "Turnover at private New York child welfare agencies reaches 'jarring' levels, Directors say," *The Imprint*, August 15, 2023. <https://imprintnews.org/top-stories/turnover-at-private-new-york-child-welfare-agencies-reaches-jarring-levels-directors-say>.

²⁷ "Case manager turnover remains a problem at Department of Children Services," *The Fort Wayne Journal Gazette*, December 2, 2023

²⁸ "North Carolina Child Welfare Workforce Study", North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, March 8, 2023. <https://www.ncdhhs.gov/cws172023/open>.

²⁹ Bates, Clara. "'This job is impossible': High turnover, low morale plague Missouri child welfare agency," *Missouri Independent*, September 19, 2022.

³⁰ Permanency refers to a permanent, stable living situation and is the end goal of a child welfare case plan. Permanency can be reunification with the family, as well as adoption or Subsidized Permanent Legal Custodianship/Guardianship (SPLC).

³¹ Placement, out-of-home placement, and foster care are used interchangeably in Pennsylvania to refer to a child who has been removed from their family home by the CCYA. These terms do not specify the type of setting that the child is placed in, which could include a foster family home, kinship home (home of a relative), group home, or institution.

³² Reunification in child welfare refers to a child returning to their family home (either closing their case or continuing to receive services to prevent future placement).



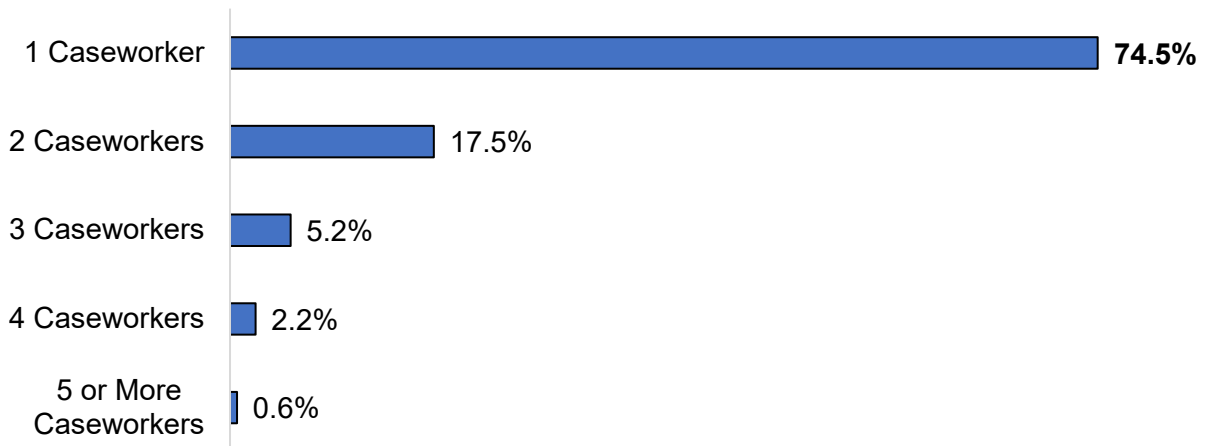
- Higher rates of child injury and death³³

Higher caseworker turnover results in multiple caseworkers serving the same client. That is, when a caseworker resigns, another – often, a less experienced caseworker – takes over the case. Studies suggest that fewer changes in the number of caseworkers assigned to a child increases the child’s chances of permanency (and lower costs for CCYAs). More inexperienced caseworkers tend to result in more placements – as opposed to finding ways to keep children in their homes.

A study of placements by caseworker staff in Milwaukee County (Wisconsin) in 2004, for example, found that cases served by one caseworker resulted in a greater likelihood of placement in a permanent home. Children served by one consistent caseworker had a 74.5 percent chance of being placed in a permanent home within one year. Yet when the case was handed off to one additional case worker (two total), the child’s chance of permanency dropped to 17.5 percent. If handed off to another caseworker (three total), the chance of permanency decreased further to 5.2 percent.³⁴

The figure below is based on data of 679 children entering and exiting to permanency in Milwaukee County from January 2003 through September 2004.

**Children Entering and Exiting Care to Permanency in Milwaukee County, Wisconsin
(January 2003 through September 2004; N = 679)**



In Pennsylvania, there is evidence of a correlation between escalating vacancy rates and an increase in the duration of foster care placements. Longer duration in foster care placement is considered a suboptimal outcome. For example, a 2016 study based on data from the 2011-2012 National Survey of Children’s Health found that children who spent time in foster care were:

³³ *Multiple Placements in Foster Care: Literature Review of Correlates and Predictors*, Children and Family Research Center (2004). *The Unsolved Challenge of System Reform*, Annie E. Casey Foundation (2003). Sigrid James “Why Do Foster Placements Disrupt?”, *Social Service Review* (2004). Bonnie Marsh, “Caseworker Turnover: Why do child welfare caseworkers want to leave their jobs and what makes them stay?” (2020) *Social Work Doctoral Dissertations*

³⁴ Flower, Connie; McDonald, Jess; and Sumski, Michael. “Review of Turnover of Milwaukee County Private Agency Child Welfare Ongoing Case Management Staff” (2005)



- Seven times more likely to experience depression.
- Six times as likely to experience behavioral problems.
- Five times as likely to feel anxiety.
- Three times as likely to have attention deficit disorder, hearing impairments, and vision issues.
- Twice as likely to suffer from learning disabilities, developmental delays, asthma, obesity, and speech problems.³⁵

Additionally, studies in child welfare consistently demonstrate that reducing instances of maltreatment and minimizing time children spend in the child welfare system are linked to decreased lifetime risks of substance abuse, unemployment, homelessness, and criminal convictions.³⁶

The figure that follows contrasts the CCYA caseworker vacancy rate versus time spent in foster care and the percentage of children reunified with their families within 12 months of removal from their homes (considered “timely reunification”). As caseworker vacancy rates trended upward between FY 2018 and FY 2022, so did the median number of months Pennsylvania children spent in foster care. Meanwhile, the timely reunification rate – the percentage of children reunified with their families within 12 months – dropped from 70.1 percent in FY 2018 to 64.7 percent in FY 2022.³⁷

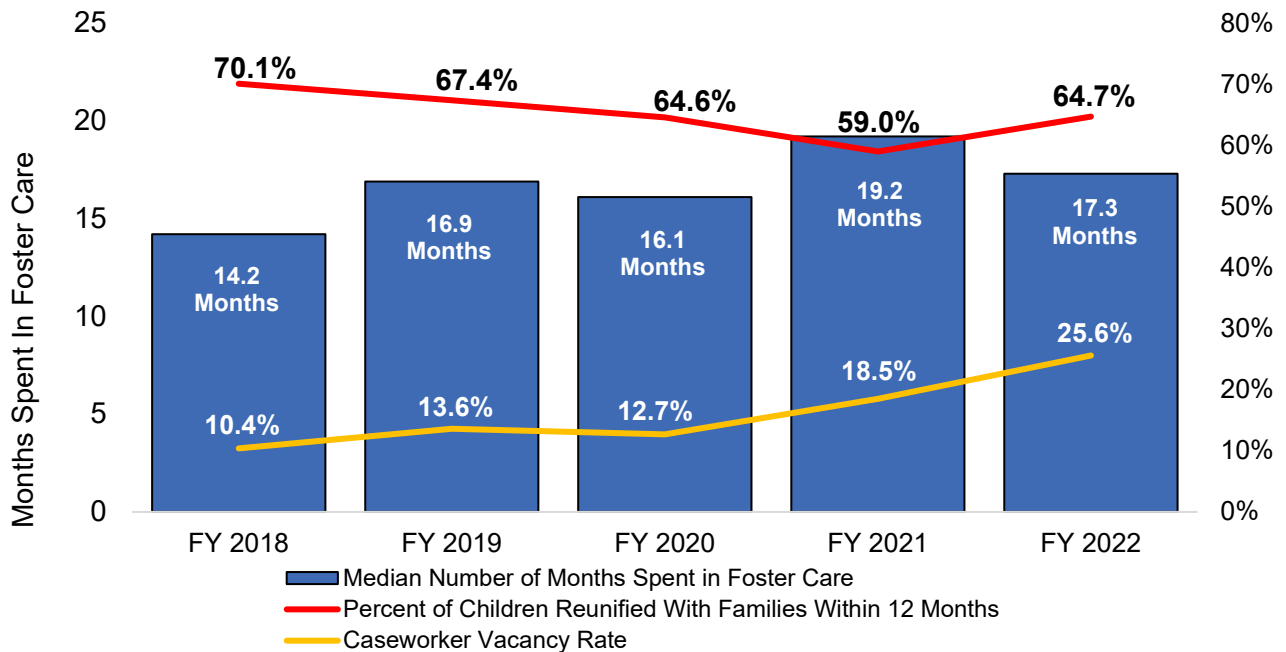
³⁵ Turney, Kristen et al. “Mental and Physical Health of Children in Foster Care,” *Pediatrics*, November 1, 2016.

³⁶ Ringel, Jeanne et al. “Improving Child Welfare Outcomes: Balancing Outcomes in Prevention and Treatment,” RAND Corporation. December 11, 2017.

³⁷ Data analysis based on data from Pennsylvania’s Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System reports (AFCARs) and OCYF Needs-Based Budgets



Trends in Caseworker Vacancy Rate vs. Trends in Timely Reunification and Median Months in Foster Care (FY 2018 – FY 2022)*



* Timely reunification rate and median months in foster care are calculated on a federal fiscal year basis (begins October 1). The caseworker vacancy rate reflects the Pennsylvania fiscal year (begins July 1).

Financial Costs of Turnover

Beyond negative outcomes for children and families, elevated caseworker turnover results in direct financial costs to agency – and county – budgets. Viewed holistically, these costs outweigh transitory savings that result from budgeted positions going unfilled.

Examples of direct financial costs of turnover include:

- Placement (longer time periods spent in out-of-home care)
- Employee overtime (from reduced headcount)
- Recruiting (e.g., hiring or referral incentives)
- Training (e.g., “Foundations”)



In addition, negative outcomes can also have a fiscal impact on the State's child welfare funding. OCYF, as the state child welfare agency, can be subject to federal financial penalties for not meeting certain outcomes.³⁸

One of the most overlooked direct costs of turnover is the cost of out-of-home placement, which occurs when a child is removed from their home. Out-of-home care is an expensive form of service delivery compared with other caseworker interventions, such as in-home services like parenting education or family therapy, or referrals for mental health or substance use disorder treatment. When caseworker caseloads spike, caseworkers have less time to dedicate to each case, which may result in longer – and more expensive – placements in out-of-home care.

The Commonwealth in FY 2020 allocated \$253.1 million in federal funds to foster care services for 8,338 children, or \$30,357 per child.³⁹ Among the range of foster care services, congregate and residential care are the most expensive placement options. A 2019 report from the Congregate Care Work Group of the Office of Children and Families in the Courts found that the average daily cost of a congregate care placement in FY 2019 was \$204.20, with rates as high as \$551.92 per day.⁴⁰ Using the average daily cost and assuming a child spends one year in congregate care placement, this results in a cost of \$74,533 (\$204.20 x 365 days) without adjusting for inflation over the past five years.

The figure on the following page illustrates the cost savings that can be achieved by reducing caseworker turnover. According to the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the direct costs of caseworker turnover can range from 70 to 200 percent of salary.⁴¹ This scenario does not represent the actual experience in any single CCYA, and cost savings presented are unlikely to be realized in a single year; however, this simple, illustrative analysis underscores how investments in reducing caseworker turnover can produce offsetting cost savings.

The scenario assumes a CCYA with 100 caseworkers and an average salary of \$49,000. The CCYA has a caseworker turnover rate of 30 percent, and the analysis assumes that the cost of turnover is 70 percent of salary, consistent with the lower end of the range provided by the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

When the turnover rate is halved in this illustrative scenario – from 30 percent to 15 percent – the CCYA generates \$514,500 in cost savings. Assuming that each new caseworker is hired at a starting salary of \$40,000 and that the costs for benefits and training of a first-year caseworker represent 50 percent of salary (adding another \$20,000 for a total of \$60,000), direct cost savings from reducing the turnover rate by half would fund 8.6 new caseworkers (\$514,500/\$60,000).

³⁸ Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) data indicators are the measures used to provide information on state performance around child safety and permanency outcomes.

³⁹ "Pennsylvania Fact Sheet 2021", Annie E. Casey Foundation. Accessed 3/27/2024 at <https://www.casey.org/media/pennsylvania-fact-sheet-2021.pdf>.

⁴⁰ "2019 State Roundtable Report Congregate Care," Pennsylvania Office of Children and Families in the Courts, 2019.

⁴¹ "How does turnover in the child welfare workforce impact children and families?" Casey Family Programs. August 29, 2023. Accessed 2/4/2024, <https://www.casey.org/turnover-costs-and-retention-strategies/>



**Illustrative Cost Savings from Reducing Caseworker Turnover
Assumes Reduction of Turnover Rate by 50 Percent**

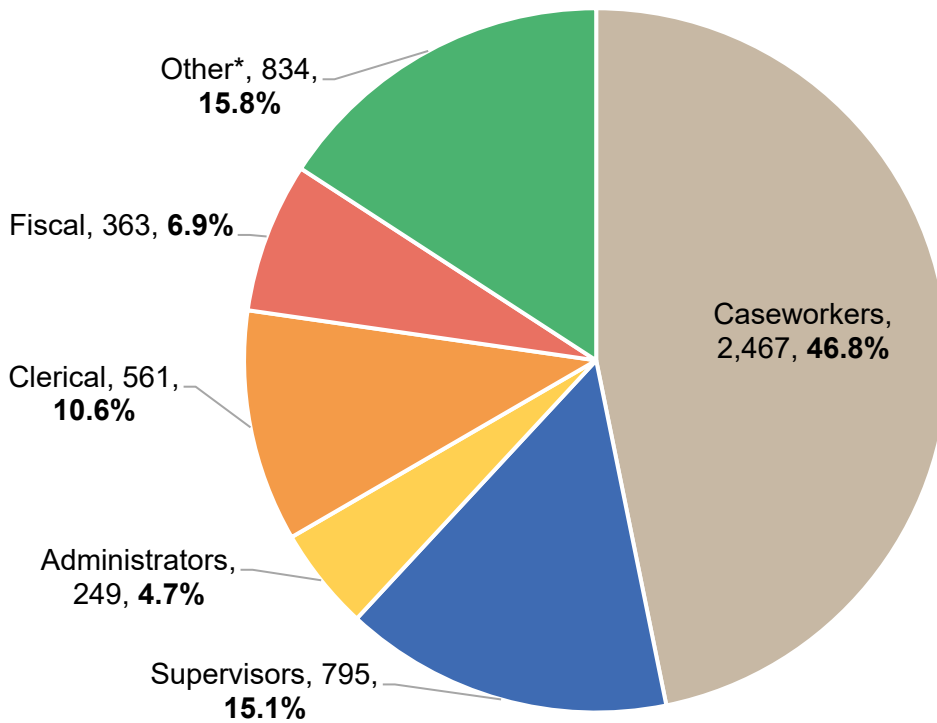
Illustrative Cost of Turnover Calculation		
Base Case		
Headcount (Caseworkers)	100	A
Turnover Rate	30%	B
Separations	30	C = A x B
Average Salary	\$49,000	D
Cost of Turnover (% of Salary)	70%	E
Cost Turnover (Base Case)	\$1,029,000	F = C x D x E
Reduced Turnover Scenario		
Headcount (Caseworkers)	100	G = A
Turnover Rate	15%	H
Separations	15	I = G x H
Average Salary	\$49,000	J = D
Cost of Turnover (% of Salary)	70%	K = E
Cost Turnover (Scenario)	\$514,500	L = I x J x K
Cost Savings		
Cost of Turnover (Base Case)	\$1,029,000	M
Cost of Turnover (Scenario)	\$514,500	N
Cost Savings	\$514,500	O = M - N



Pennsylvania Caseworker Vacancy and Retention Trends

As of June 2023, Pennsylvania CCYAs directly employed more than 5,000 full-time equivalent positions (FTEs) across the Commonwealth's 67 counties. Caseworker positions (i.e., Caseworker 1, 2, and 3) made up nearly half of the CCYA workforce – 2,467 FTEs. An additional 795 FTEs, approximately 15 percent of the CCYA workforce, were supervisors. Including supervisory positions, direct service staff comprised 62 percent of CCYA employees.

CCYA Workforce Distribution⁴²
Effective June 30, 2023



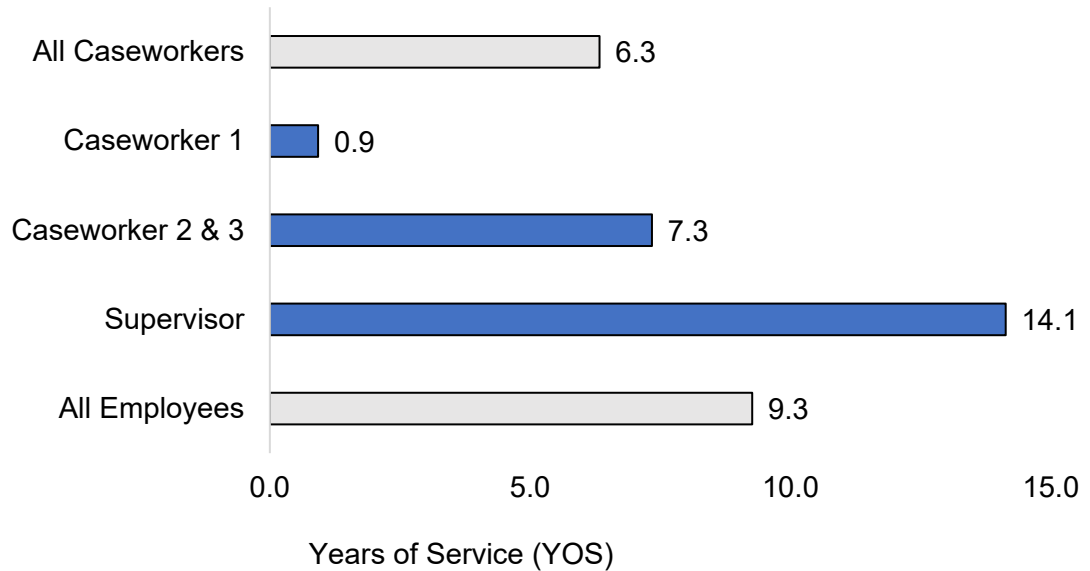
* "Other" reflects a combination of employees designated as facility staff (24 FTE), grant-funded staff (167 FTE), or other (643 FTE) in the Needs-Based Budgets.

As shown in the table that follows, the average tenure for all caseworkers at their current agency was 6.3 years of service as of June 30, 2023. The average supervisor possessed more than 14 years of service at their respective CCYA.

⁴² These figures reflect FTEs listed in the FY 2024 Needs-Based Budgets, and do not account for caseworker staff or other child welfare employees employed by third party agencies.



Average Tenure by Position as of June 30, 2023⁴³



According to the FY 2023 Needs-Based Budget, CCYAs in the Commonwealth’s 67 counties had 5,270 FTEs for 6,743 authorized positions across all job classifications (i.e., case working and non-case working positions). With 1,473 vacancies, CCYAs overall vacancy rate was 21.8 percent as of June 30, 2023. As shown in the table below, the vacancy rate has risen steadily in recent years, nearly doubling from 8.3 percent in FY 2018 to 17.4 percent in FY 2021 and approaching 22 percent (21.8 percent) in FY 2023.

Approved Total CCYA Headcount and Vacancies by Fiscal Year (All Positions)

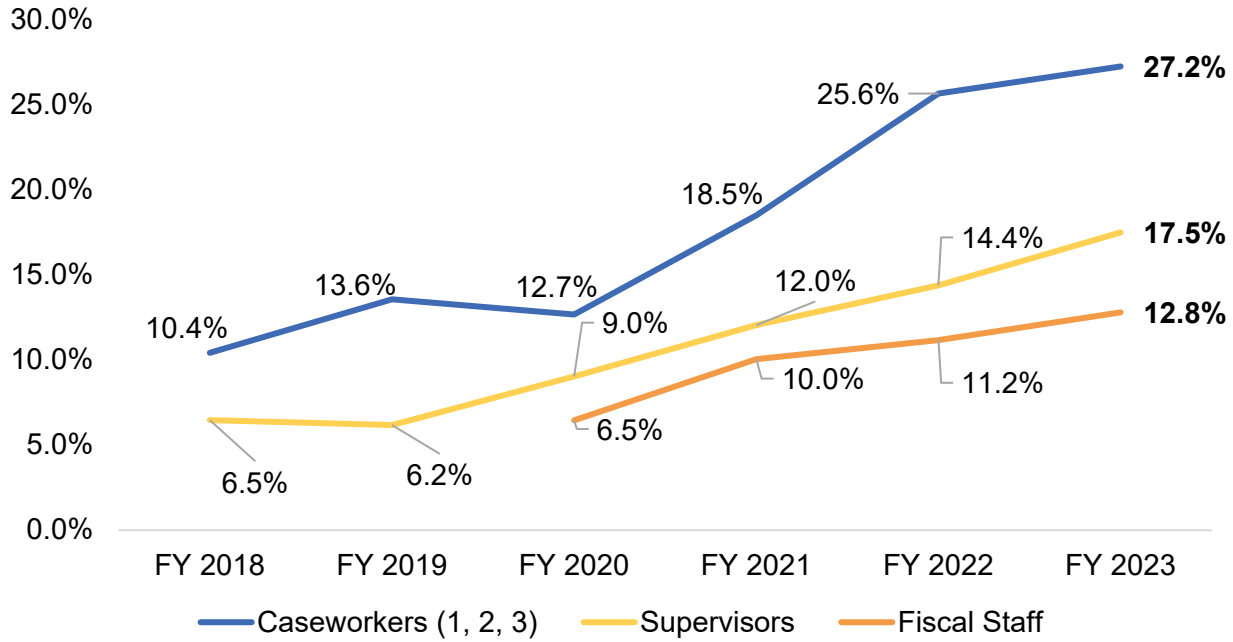
	FY 2018	FY 2019	FY 2020	FY 2021	FY 2022	FY 2023
Approved FTEs	5,711	6,568	6,685	5,948	6,898	6,743
FTEs at FY End	5,239	5,815	5,866	4,912	5,446	5,270
Vacancies	471	753	820	1,036	1,452	1,473
EOY Vacancy Rate	8.3%	11.5%	12.3%	17.4%	21.1%	21.8%

When focusing exclusively on caseworkers, the vacancy rate rises to 27.2 percent for FY 2023, more than two and a half times FY 2018’s rate of 10.4 percent. Supervisor positions follow a similar trend, with the vacancy rate almost tripling from 6.5 percent in FY 2018 to 17.5 percent in FY 2023. Vacancy data for fiscal staff were first collected in FY 2020 and reflect a similar upward trend from FY 2020 through FY 2023.

⁴³ Data from OCYF Needs-Based Budget (FY 2023).



Statewide Vacancy Rates Through June 30, 2023⁴⁴



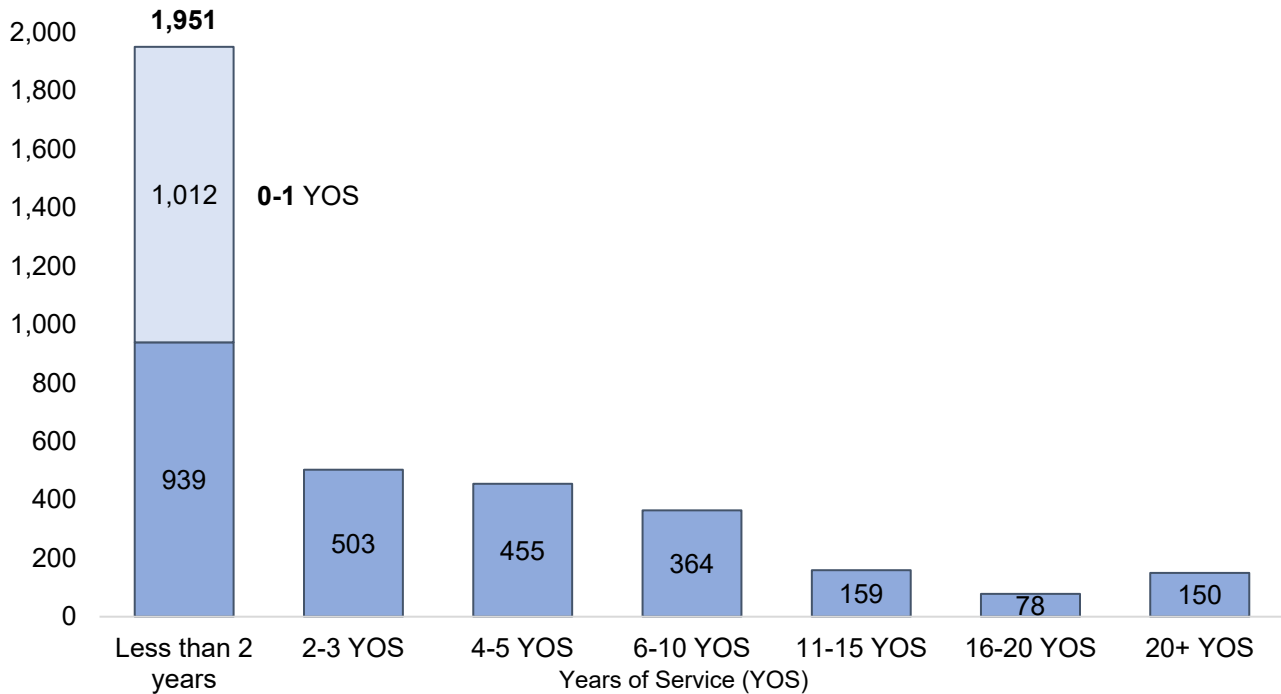
In the six years from FY 2018 through FY 2023, 3,789 caseworkers separated from their CCYAs, according to data from the personnel summaries of the Needs-Based Budgets. As shown in the figure on the following page, most CCYA caseworker/supervisor separations occur within the first five years of service.

Almost 2,000 separations – more than one in two (53.3 percent) separations overall – occurred in the first two years of service. Nearly eight of 10 (79.5 percent) separations occurred in the first five years of service. Accordingly, policy interventions that focus on early-career employees are likely to yield the highest return on investment in reducing caseworker turnover rates.

⁴⁴ Data from OCYF Needs-Based Budgets (FY 2018 - 2023).



FTE Separations by Years of Service, FY 2018 – FY 2023* Caseworker 1, 2, and 3s⁴⁵



*According to Needs-Based Budgets, 3,789 FTE caseworkers and supervisors separated between FY 2018 and FY 2023. Of these, 3,660 FTE had recorded start and end dates.

The available data suggest that most – if not the vast majority – of these early-career separations are voluntary resignations (i.e., “quits”) as opposed to retirements. Although the Needs-Based Budget (NBB) data do not record “quits” as a reason for separation, PFM approximated the number of quits by counting the following categories of separations listed in the NBB as “quits” – “relocation,” “transfers,” “returning to school,” and “other.”

To benchmark CCYA caseworker attrition experience against public sector employer data, PFM attempted to compare the CCYA caseworker “turnover rate” (number of separations for all reasons divided by headcount) and “quit rate” (number of quits divided by headcount). Because PFM could not precisely identify the number of quits in the NBB data, PFM developed an “adjusted turnover rate” – based on the definition of “quits” in the prior paragraph – to serve as a proxy for the quit rate. The adjusted turnover rate categorizes separations attributed to “relocation,” “transfers,” “returning to school,” or other, but excludes separations resulting from “retirement” or “death.”⁴⁶

Across all titles, the turnover rate for Commonwealth of Pennsylvania CCYA employees has increased from 16.1 percent in FY 2018 to 21.1 percent in FY 2023. FY 2022 represented a notable increase in separations, as the turnover rate spiked from 15.7 percent to 21.2 percent – mirroring trends in the macro labor market (i.e., “the Great Resignation”). Similarly, the adjusted turnover rate

⁴⁵ Data from OCYF Needs-Based Budgets (FY 2018 through FY 2023).

⁴⁶ In this analysis, part-time employees are counted the same as full-time employees to capture all individuals voluntarily departing from CCYA employment.



– a proxy for the quit rate – increased from 13.8 percent to 18.8 percent over the same six-year timeframe; again, this highlights the role of voluntary departures in driving overall vacancy rates.

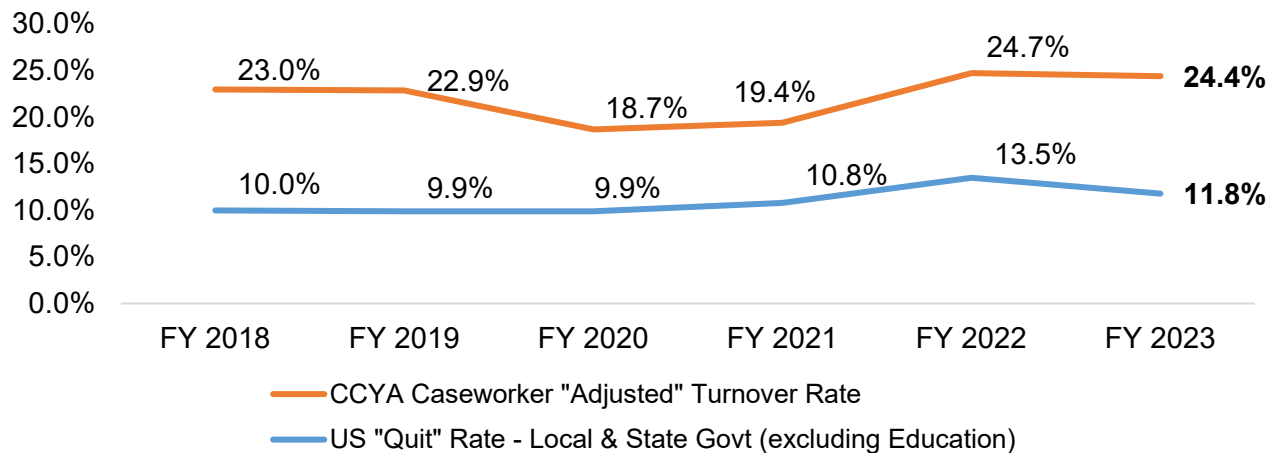
**CCYA Separations, FY 2018 – FY 2023
All Titles**

	FY 2018	FY 2019	FY 2020	FY 2021	FY 2022	FY 2023
Headcount	5,050	5,532	5,841	5,073	5,839	5,452
Separations	813	1,064	885	797	1,239	1,153
Quits/Other	694	927	762	645	1,073	1,017
Retirements	113	130	116	109	156	123
Death	4	7	7	9	9	7
Turnover Rate	16.1%	19.2%	15.2%	15.7%	21.2%	21.1%
Adjusted Turnover Rate	13.8%	16.8%	13.0%	13.4%	18.4%	18.8%

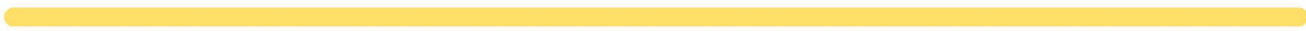
The figure that follows compares the adjusted turnover rate for CCYA caseworkers versus the national quit rate for state and local government employees, excluding education, from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Job Openings and Labor Turnover Survey (JOLTS). Since FY 2018, the CCYA caseworker adjusted turnover rate has consistently outpaced state and local government quit rates published through JOLTS.

In FY 2023, the CCYA caseworker adjusted turnover rate was 24.4 percent – in other words, nearly one in four CCYA caseworkers quit their job during the year. This figure was more than double the national state and local government quit rate of 11.8 percent during the same period.

**CCYA Caseworker Adjusted Turnover Rate Versus Local Government Quit Rate
Caseworker 1, 2, and 3s, FY 2018 Through FY 2023⁴⁷**



⁴⁷ Data from OCYF Needs-Based Budgets (FY 2018 through FY 2023).



Additionally, a substantial portion of CCYA caseworkers left their job within the same fiscal year that they were hired. This indicates a high degree of “churn,” where employees are hired and quickly resign. The figure below shows the one-year retention rate of newly hired caseworkers. In FY 2023, CCYAs hired 591 caseworkers 1, 2, and 3’s, according to personnel summary data in the NBBs. Of these 591 newly hired caseworkers, 102 (17 percent) separated before the fiscal year’s conclusion June 30, 2023. This pattern has held relatively constant over the past six years, though retention did improve slightly during the pandemic-influenced 2020 and 2021 fiscal years.

CCYA Caseworkers – One-Year Retention Rate⁴⁸

	FY 2018	FY 2019	FY 2020	FY 2021	FY 2022	FY 2023
New Hires (CW 1, 2, or 3)	787	795	890	545	607	591
Separations (CW 1, 2, or 3)	138	156	114	53	117	102
One Year Retention Rate	82.5%	80.4%	87.2%	90.3%	80.7%	82.7%

Over time, a high degree of churn can create a negative feedback loop – as more caseworkers leave CCYAs, the work becomes more challenging (e.g., with higher caseloads), which results in more caseworkers leaving. The table below presents a cohort analysis of caseworkers, supervisors, and administrators hired in FY 2018. Of the 878 CCYA caseworkers, supervisors, and administrators hired in FY 2018, less than one in five (18.7 percent) were still employed at their agency at the end of FY 2023. Caseworkers were least likely to stay.

⁴⁸ Data from OCYF Needs-Based Budgets (FY 2018 through FY 2023).



CCYA Cohort Analysis⁴⁹
Case-Supporting Staff Hired in FY 2018 Remaining with Their Agency in FY 2023

	Hired in FY 2018	Remained at end of FY 2023*	% Remaining
Caseworkers	779	121	15.5%
Supervisor	76	38	50.0%
Administrator	23	5	21.7%
Total	878	164	18.7%

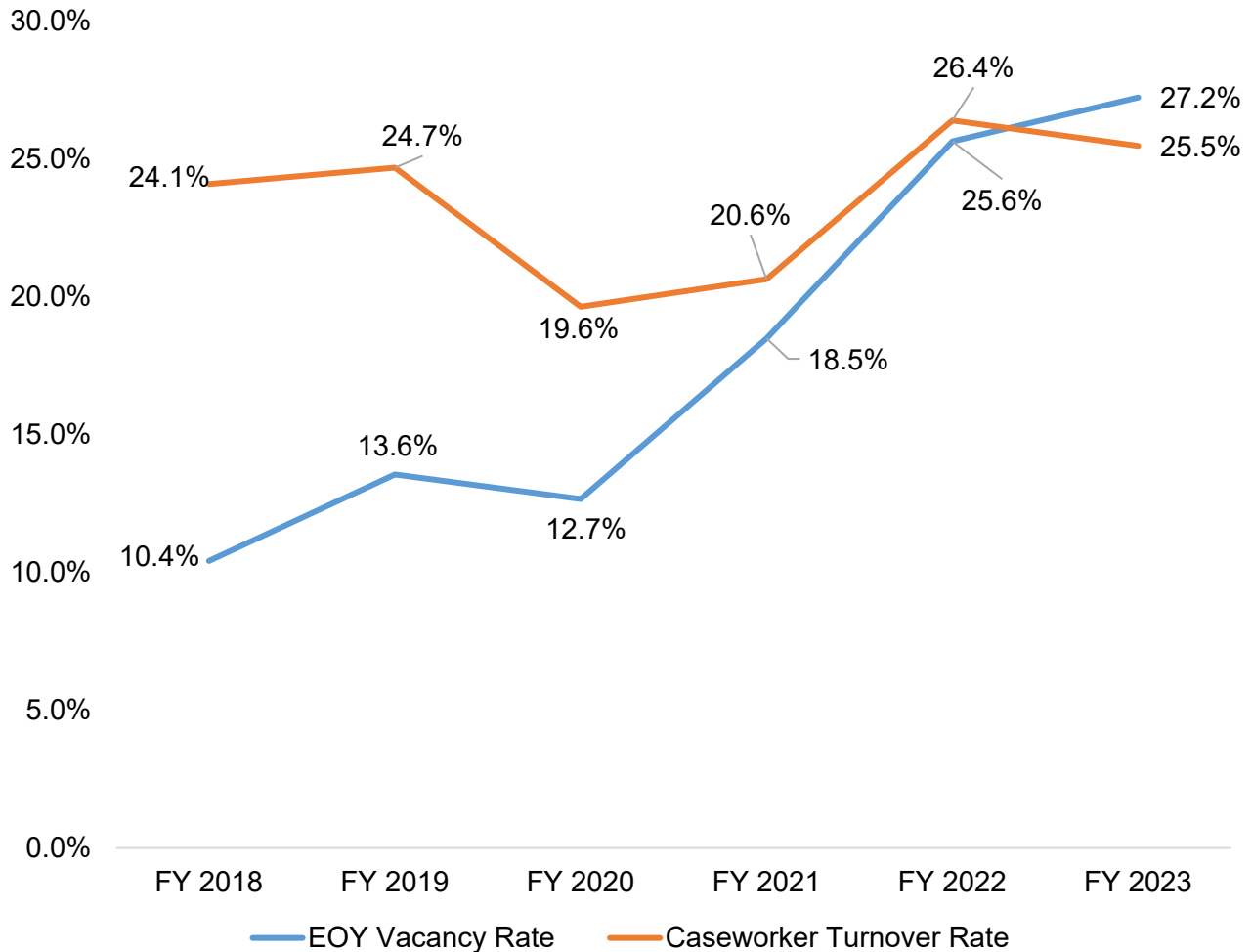
* Figure above reflects separations (e.g., quits and retirements). Employees who were promoted (e.g., from Caseworker 1 to Caseworker 2, or Caseworker 2 to Supervisor) are characterized as “remained,” but shown in the row of their title as of FY 2023. Analysis excludes any employees moved to grant-funded positions.

The Commonwealth’s turnover rate (headcount divided by all separations) also appears to be contributing to elevated CCYA caseworker vacancy rates. As shown in the figure below, CCYA caseworker vacancy rates increased from 10.4 percent in FY 2018 to 27.2 percent in FY 2023, while caseworker turnover rates posted a multi-year high in FY 2022 before declining slightly the following year.

⁴⁹ Data from OCYF Needs-Based Budgets (FY 2018 through FY 2023).



Caseworker FTE Turnover and Vacancy Trend Analysis, FY 2018 – FY 2023



Anticipating Attrition

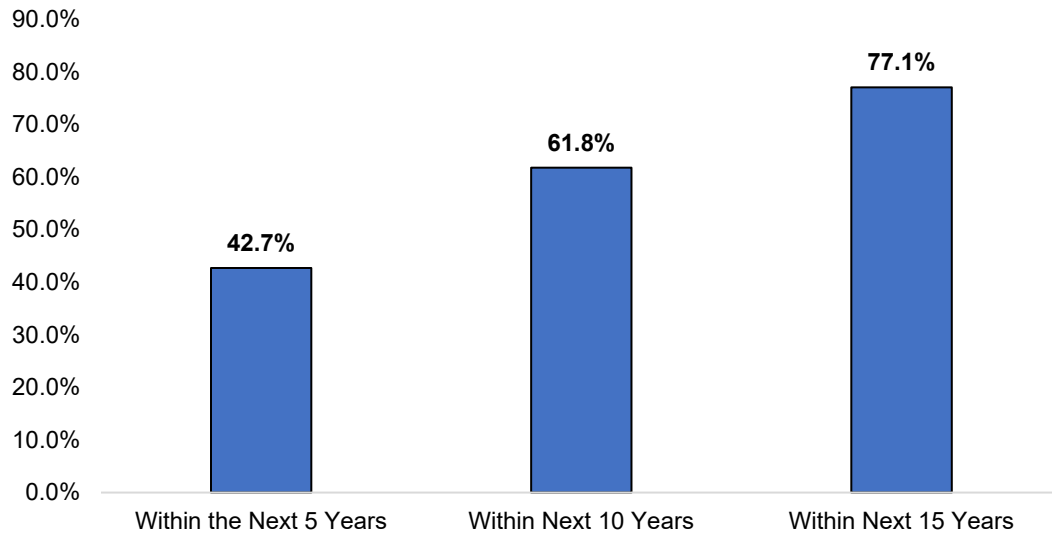
From a retention perspective, the principal challenge facing Pennsylvania CCYAs entails reducing the “churn” of early career employees. As noted previously, most separations appear to be voluntary resignations (i.e., “quits”) based on PFM’s analysis of NBBs. Not surprisingly, findings from the employee survey suggest that a high proportion of CCYA employees plan to separate from employment within the next five years and/or are presently seeking alternative employment opportunities.

As shown in the figure below, nearly 43 percent of survey respondents – including caseworkers and staff without caseload responsibilities – reported that they plan to separate from their CCYA via



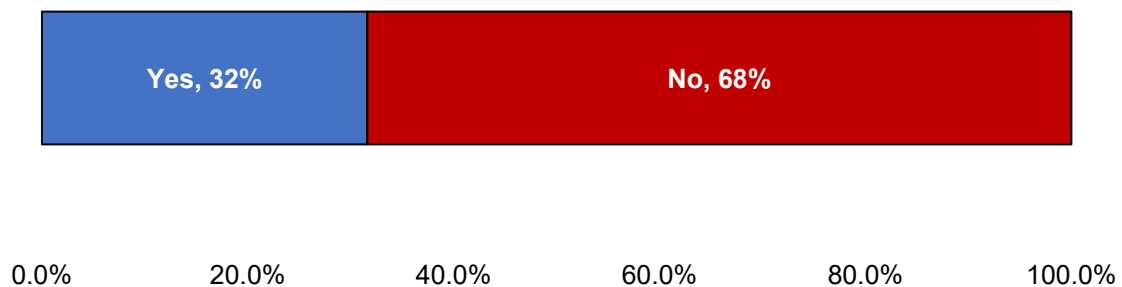
resignation or retirement within the next five years.⁵⁰ More than six in 10 survey respondents reported that they plan to separate in the next decade.

**“When Do You Plan on Leaving Your Agency – Either by Retirement or Resignation?”
All Survey Respondents (N = 288)**



Consistent with feedback received from focus groups, the employee survey suggests that employee dissatisfaction may be approaching an inflection point, with many employees actively seeking alternative employment. As illustrated in the figure that follows, nearly one in three caseworkers responding to the employee survey reported that they applied for a position with another employer within the past 12 months.

**“Have You Applied for Another Position with Another Employer with the Past 12 Months?”
Caseworker 1, 2, and 3s (N = 136)**

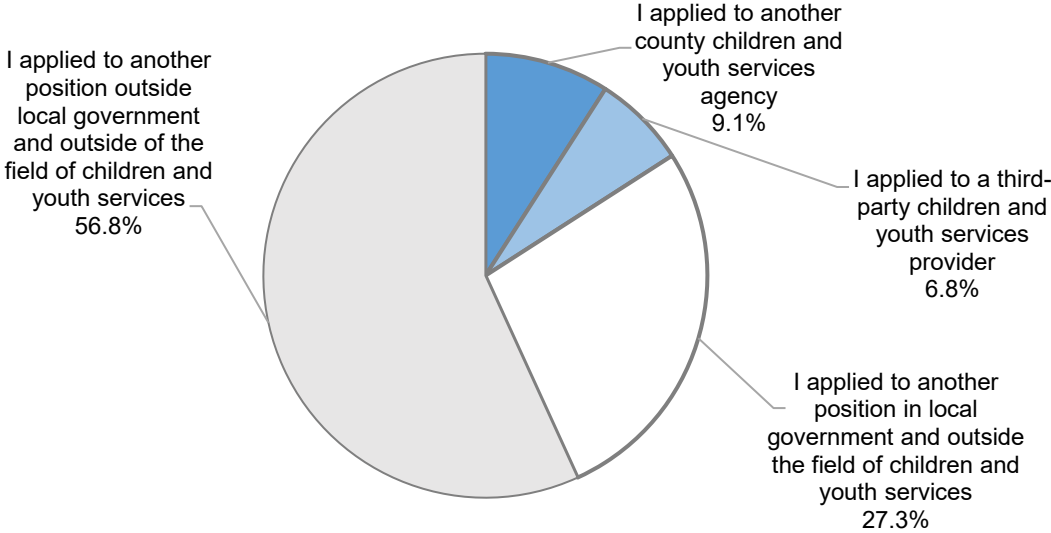


⁵⁰ Differences in responses to question “When do you plan on leaving your agency?” did not vary materially between caseworkers and employees without caseload responsibilities.



Among caseworkers who answered “yes” to applying to another position within the past 12 months, more than four out of every five applied to a position outside the field of children and youth services. Though a small sample size, this finding supports the notion industries and occupations outside the field of child welfare services are attracting caseworkers.

**“Have You Applied for Another Position with Another Employer with the Past 12 Months?”
Caseworkers Who Answered “Yes” (N = 44)**



The following chapter – “Factors Driving Caseworker Attrition” – will explore reasons for caseworker turnover.



VII. Factors Driving Caseworker Attrition in Pennsylvania

Multiple factors may contribute to individual employees' decisions to separate from employment. Compensation is often a major driver. But there are other variables as well – particularly within the field of child welfare – that influence an employee's decision to stay with their employer.

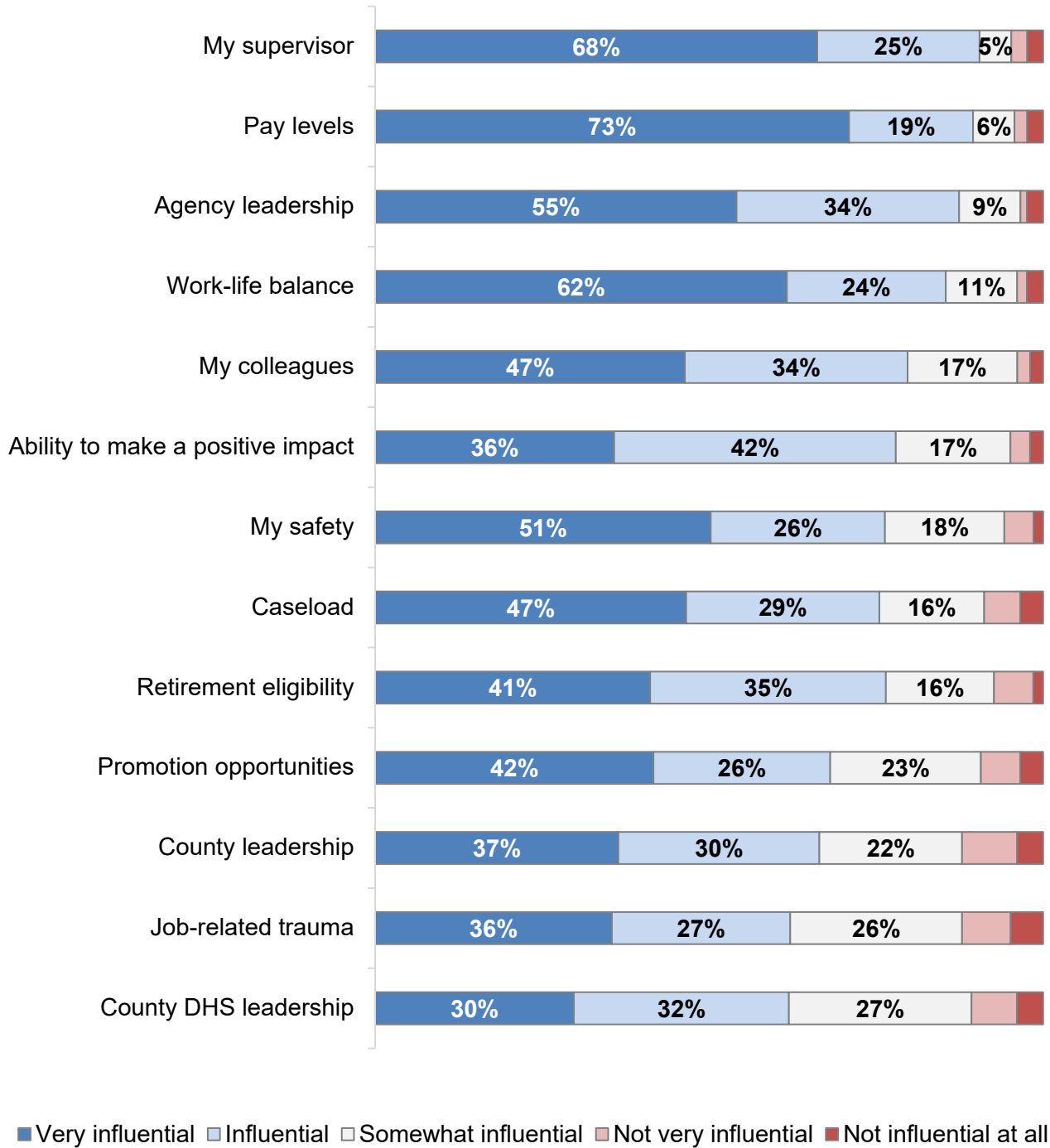
The employee survey explored the various factors that influence caseworkers' decisions to stay with or leave their CCYA. In one question, the survey asked respondents to evaluate 13 factors and rate how "influential" they were (or were not) in determining whether to remain with their current agency. Compensation emerged as the most influential factor, closely followed by factors related to supervision, working conditions, and organizational culture.

- Compensation ranked tied for first – 92 percent of respondents reported "pay levels" as "very influential" or "influential" in their decision to stay with their CCYA. Pay levels were ranked "very influential" by 73 percent of survey respondents, the highest ranking among the 13 factors surveyed.
- Tied with "pay levels" was "my supervisor" – 93 percent of respondents reported "my supervisor" as "very influential" or "influential" in their decision to stay with their CCYA; 68 percent of survey respondents reported "my supervisor" as "very influential," second highest of the 13 factors surveyed.
- The remaining top five most influential factors for decisions to stay with their CCYA (combined responses of "very influential" and "influential") were "agency leadership" (89 percent), "work-life balance" (86 percent), and "my colleagues" (81 percent).
- More than three quarters of survey respondents noted four other factors as "very influential" or "influential," including "ability to make a positive impact" (78 percent), "my safety," "caseload," and "retirement eligibility" (all with 77 or 76 percent).

The figure on the following page explores these and other factors impacting caseworker attrition as reflected in the employee survey.



**“What Factors Are Likely to Influence Whether You Choose to Stay at Your Agency?”
Case Aides Through Case Managers (N = 210)**





Based on employee survey results – as well as feedback from focus groups and stakeholder interviews – PFM distilled the factors that drive caseworker attrition into four broad categories:

- Compensation
- Organizational culture
- Working conditions
- Partner/stakeholder relationships

This chapter explores these broad categories in greater detail.

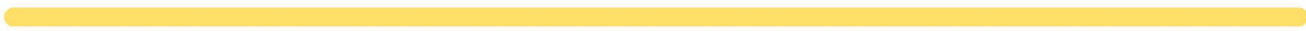
Caseworker Compensation

In every county PFM visited, focus group participants cited low compensation as a principal factor contributing to recruitment and retention pressures. This conforms with previous research performed on caseworker turnover in Pennsylvania. Taken from a 2017-2018 survey of 511 caseworkers in 33 Pennsylvania counties, the table below summarizes the most commonly selected reasons why caseworkers want to leave their jobs. Salary was the top answer and was referenced again in the third most common response (“My salary cannot support my college loan”).

Reasons Why Pennsylvania Caseworkers Want to Leave Their Jobs (2017 survey)⁵¹

Reason to Leave the Job	Number of Responses (N=511)	Percentage of Responses
Salary	269	52.6%
Work overload	252	49.3%
My salary cannot support my college loan	116	22.7%
Performance demands	111	21.7%
Time pressure	98	19.2%
Psychological strain	97	19.0%
Negative spillover from work to family	87	17.0%
Unfavorable work conditions	75	14.7%
Risks and hazards	68	13.3%
Hope	62	10.8%
Responsibility	51	10.0%

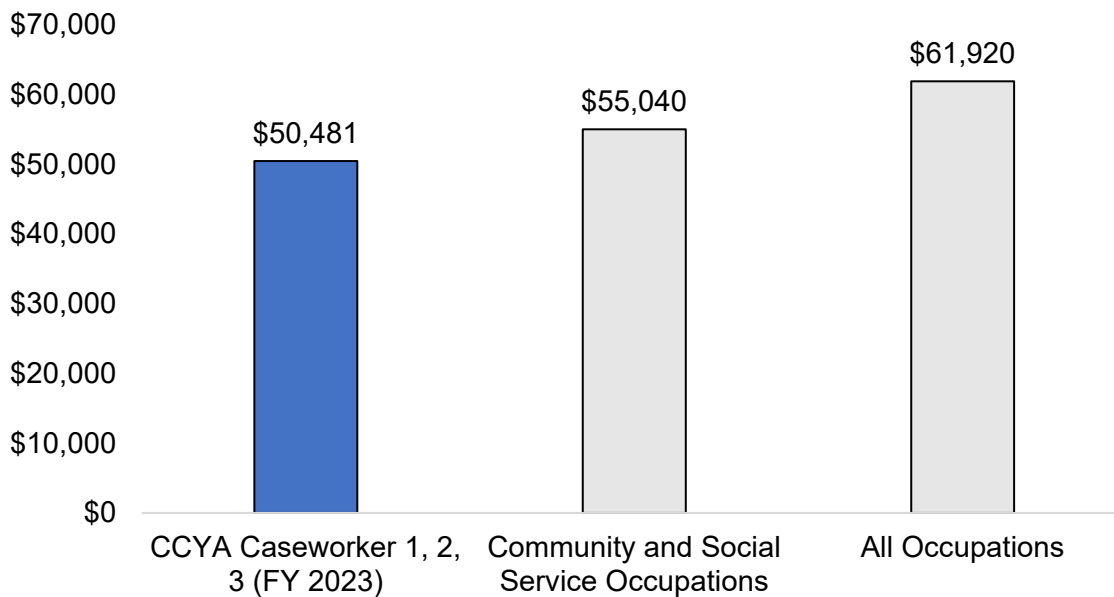
⁵¹ Bonnie Marsh, “Caseworker Turnover: Why do child welfare caseworkers want to leave their jobs and what makes them stay?” *Social Work Doctoral Dissertations*. 13. 2020. Pages 88-89. Accessed April 23, 2024 at <https://research.library.kutztown.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1014&context=socialworkdissertations>.



The employee survey conducted for this report (in the field during the fall of 2023) produced similar results – nine in 10 caseworkers reported that pay levels were “very influential” or “influential” factors in whether they would stay at their agency. By contrast, in a recent national survey, 57.6 percent of employees indicated satisfaction with their wages.⁵²

The figure below compares average child welfare caseworker pay with straight-time gross pay (i.e., excluding overtime) for social service and other occupations in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania using data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics’ Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics (OEWS) program. Across the Commonwealth, CCYA pay for Caseworker 1, 2, and 3 titles averaged \$50,481 in FY 2023, according to personnel summaries from OCYF Needs-Based Budgets. As shown in the figure below, average caseworker pay trails the Commonwealth-wide average for all occupations, as well as community and social service occupations generally.

Average Caseworker Pay (1, 2, 3) Versus Other Occupations in Pennsylvania⁵³



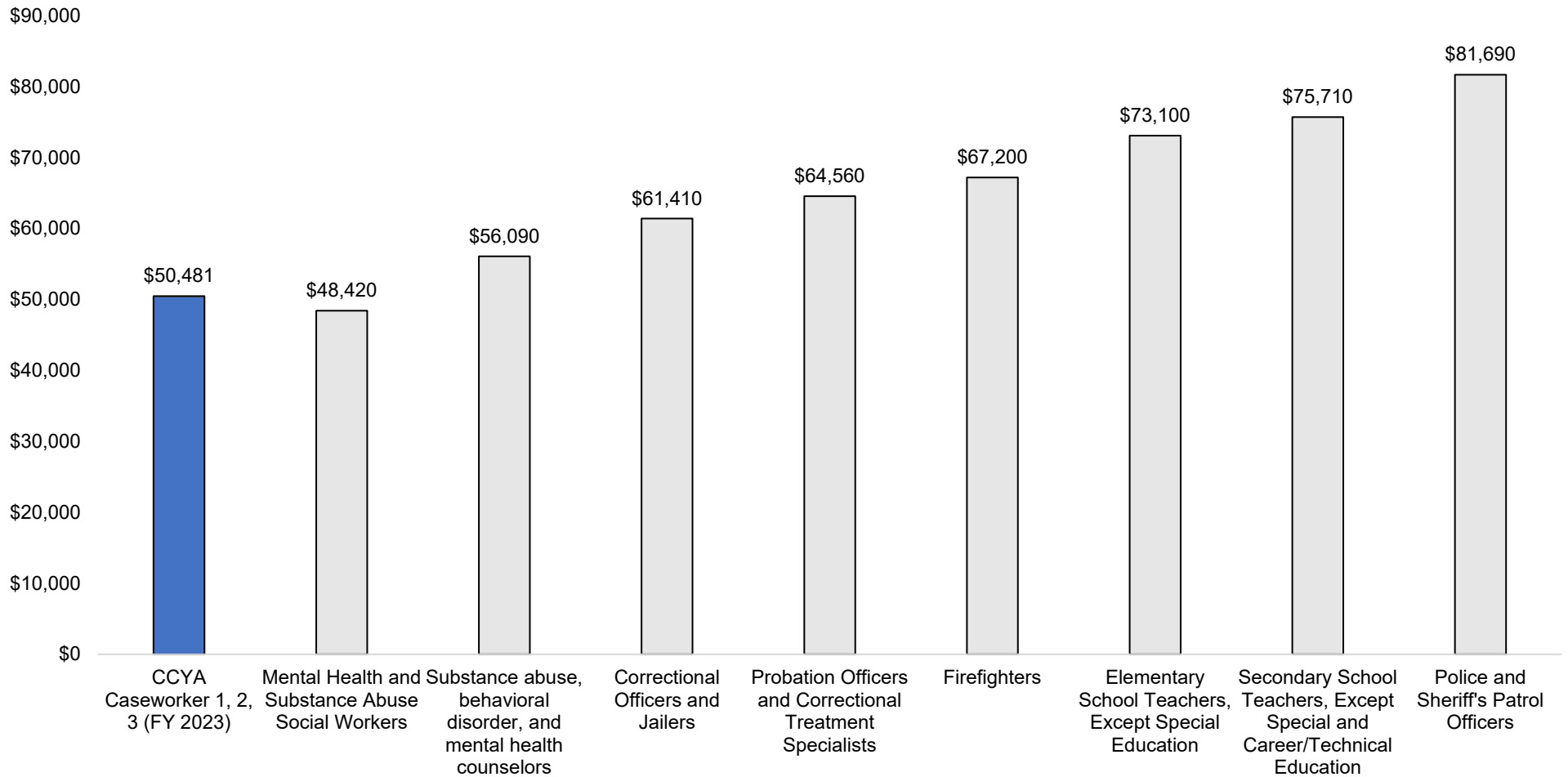
Further, as shown in the figure on the following page, CCYA caseworker average base pay levels are substantially lower than pay for other occupations in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania that provide direct services to children and families (though children, youth and family caseworkers earn slightly more than the average pay for mental health and substance abuse social workers).

⁵² Job Satisfaction 2023 Survey, The Conference Board

⁵³ Personnel Summaries, Needs-Based Budgets (FY 2023), US Bureau of Labor Statistics, Office of Employment and Wage Statistics (OEWS). OEWS data reflects straight-time, gross pay exclusive of premium pay effective May 2023. CCYA caseworker data effective FY 2023.



Average Caseworker Pay (1, 2, 3) Versus Other Occupations in Pennsylvania⁵⁴



⁵⁴ Personnel Summaries, Needs-Based Budgets (FY 2023), US Bureau of Labor Statistics, Office of Employment and Wage Statistics (OEWS). OEWS data reflects straight-time, gross pay exclusive of premium pay effective May 2023. CCYA caseworker data effective FY 2023.



Related Occupations Analysis

In a tight labor market, CCYAs must contend with other employers (including outside the child welfare and social work fields) that represent attractive employment alternatives for caseworker talent. Employee survey data indicate nearly one third of responding caseworkers applied for another position with another employer in the past year. This underscores the importance of addressing CCYA retention challenges. The following analysis demonstrates that CCYA caseworker compensation levels trail other occupations in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania requiring similar tasks, knowledge, education, experience, and job training.

To provide insight into labor market competition for CCYA caseworkers outside the field of child welfare, PFM utilized methodology from the U.S. Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration Occupational Informational Network (O*Net). O*Net groups all occupations into five "job zones" based on education, experience, and job training requirements; these "job zones" allow comparisons against roles with similar standards for applicant qualifications and training needs.⁵⁵

"Child, Family, and School Social Workers"⁵⁶ – a Job Zone 4 occupation – require a four-year bachelor's degree. Job Zone 3 occupations, by contrast, require an associate degree, while Job Zone 2 occupations require only a high school diploma according to the O*Net job zone criteria. The zones also vary by level of related experience and job training likely to be required. The figure on the following page provides additional criteria for each job zone, as defined by O*Net.

⁵⁵ For a more detailed explanation of methodological approach to the related occupational analysis, see the appendix of this report.

⁵⁶ CCYA caseworkers are most closely aligned with the federal Standardized Occupations Classification (SOC) system code for "Child, Family, and School Social Workers (21-1021).



O*Net Job Zone Criteria⁵⁷

Job Zone	Education	Related Experience	Job Training	Job Zone Examples
1	May require high school diploma or GED	Little or no previous work-related skill, knowledge, or experience is needed.	Employees in these occupations need anywhere from a few days to a few months of training. Usually, an experienced worker could show you how to do the job.	Food preparation workers, dishwashers, floor sanders and finishers, landscaping workers, baristas
2	Usually require a high school diploma	Some previous work-related skill, knowledge, or experience is usually needed.	Employees in these occupations need anywhere from a few months to one year of working with experienced employees.	Orderlies, customer service representatives, security guards, tellers, dental laboratory technicians
3	Usually require training in vocational schools, related on-the-job experience, or an associate degree	Previous work-related skill, knowledge, or experience is needed.	Employees in these occupations usually need one or two years of training involving both on-the-job experience and informal training with experienced workers.	Electricians, agricultural technicians, medical assistants
4	Usually require a four-year bachelor's degree (with some exceptions)	A considerable amount of work-related skill, knowledge, or experience is needed.	Employees in these occupations usually need several years of work-related experience, on-the-job training, and/or vocational training.	Real estate brokers, database administrators, graphic designers, cost estimators
5	Usually require graduate school (Master's, Ph.D., M.D, J.D)	Extensive skill, knowledge, and experience are needed.	Employees may need some on-the-job training, but most of these occupations assume that the person will already have the required skills, knowledge, work-related experience, and/or training.	Surgeons, pharmacists, lawyers, astronomers, biologists, veterinarians

⁵⁷ National Center for O*NET Development. O*NET OnLine. Accessed on March 2, 2023 at <https://www.onetonline.org/>



Despite education, experience, and job training requirements aligned to a Job Zone 4 occupation, average and median CCYA caseworker wage levels fall slightly above Job Zone 2 (high school diploma) occupations in Pennsylvania.

The figure below compares CCYA caseworker wage levels versus wage levels in each of the O*Net job zones, using straight-time gross pay data from OEWS as of May 2023. Average and median CCYA caseworker wages trail Job Zone 4 average and median wages by 41.4 percent and 40 percent, respectively. These comparisons do not account for more generous health and retirement benefits generally received by public sector employees, nor do they account for differences in tenure between CCYA caseworkers and employees in other industries.

Pennsylvania Average and Median Wages by Job Zone

Job Zone	Average Annual Wage (5/2023)	Median Annual Wage (5/2023)	CW Variance from Job Zone (Average Wage)	CW Variance from Job Zone (Median Wage)
1	\$39,912	\$38,927	26.5%	21.9%
2	\$48,110	\$46,460	4.9%	2.1%
CCYA Caseworker*	\$50,481	\$47,453	-	-
3	\$63,621	\$60,505	(20.7%)	(21.6%)
4	\$86,091	\$79,100	(41.4%)	(40.0%)
5	\$115,905	\$89,856	(56.4%)	(47.2%)

** Reflects Caseworker 1, 2, and 3 data as of June 2023*

Further, the figure below compares CCYA caseworker wage levels to a series of “related” occupations within Job Zone 4 in similar fields requiring comparable education, experience, and job training. As reflected in the table below, CCYA caseworker wages generally align with wage levels for “Rehabilitation Counselors” and “Community Health Workers,” yet trail wage levels for employees in the Child, Family, and School Social Workers occupation, as well as “Health Education Specialists” and “Probation Officers and Correctional Treatment Specialists” in Pennsylvania.



CCYA Caseworker Average and Median Wages Versus Related Occupations in Pennsylvania⁵⁸

Occupation	Number of Employees	Average Annual Wage	Median Annual Wage	CW Variance from Job Zone (Average Wage)	CW Variance from Job Zone (Median Wage)
CCYA Caseworker*	2,467	\$50,481	\$47,453	-	-
Child, Family, and School Social Workers	18,340	\$54,160	\$50,140	(6.8%)	(5.4%)
Related Occupations					
Rehabilitation Counselors	3,770	\$50,060	\$47,110	0.8%	0.7%
Community Health Workers	1,940	\$50,180	\$47,300	0.6%	0.3%
Health Education Specialists	2,320	\$73,670	\$72,490	(31.5%)	(34.5%)
Probation Officers and Correctional Treatment Specialists	4,390	\$64,560	\$62,900	(21.8%)	(24.6%)

* Reflects Caseworker 1, 2, and 3

The O*Net analysis, combined with the occupation-specific comparisons of caseworker pay against other jobs providing direct service to relevant constituencies, illustrate that CCYA caseworkers have opportunities to apply their education and experience to other occupations that present an opportunity for higher base pay. The employee survey results point to salary as a key driver of CCYA employees' decisions to remain with (or leave) their job and/or agency. Accordingly, where pay can be adjusted upward for CCYA staff, evidence from the related occupations analysis and employee survey suggest that such a move may improve recruitment and retention experience.

Employee Perspectives on Compensation

While many focus group attendees reported a strong affinity for their job, coworkers, and clients, low compensation levels – especially in relation to the trauma/stress of the profession – were frequently cited as a pressing retention challenge. As shown in the table below, when asked to rate the strengths of their CCYAs across 10 possible choices, survey respondents across all CCYA titles ranked compensation ranked near the bottom.

⁵⁸ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics (2023). Accessed February 23, 2024 at www.bls.gov



“What Do You Consider Strengths of Your Agency? (Check All That Apply)”
All Responses (N = 282)

Answer Choices	Responses
Opportunities to help children, youth and families	79.1%
Co-workers/colleagues	68.1%
Health benefits	67.4%
Retirement benefits	57.5%
Management/leadership	35.5%
Leave benefits	33.7%
Work/life balance	22.0%
Support for employees dealing with stress and trauma	21.3%
Opportunities for professional development and career growth	20.9%
Pay	13.8%
Other	3.9%

Multiple participants across multiple caseworker focus groups reported taking on outside employment to mitigate low CCYA pay. This finding was confirmed in the employee survey, where more than half of caseworkers reported working a second job to supplement their income.

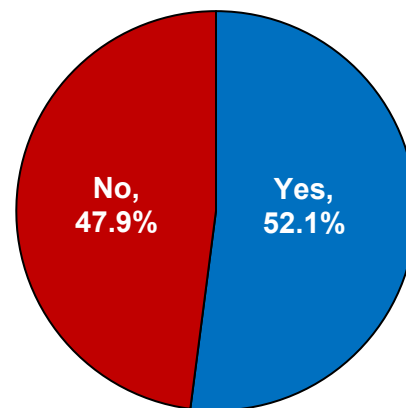
Select Focus Group Comments on Compensation

“[My agency] can’t keep people because they’re working two jobs.”

“I earned more money in one week as a bartender than in two weeks here [employed as a caseworker]”

“I’m still working at Aldi!”

“In The Past 12 Months, I Have Worked a Second Job to Supplement My Income”
Caseworker 1, 2, and 3s (N = 146)



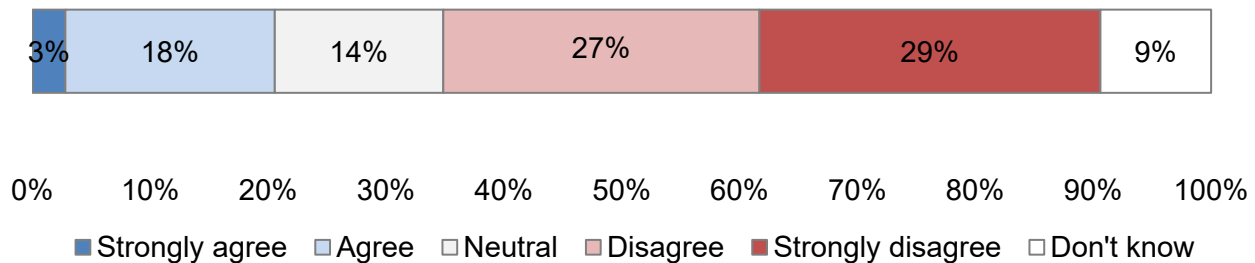
Relatedly, many focus group attendees and survey participants highlighted low caseworker pay levels as failing to reflect the risks associated with casework. As one survey participant commented “The pay is not high enough for the job we do. Law enforcement [officers] tell us all the time, they would never go into homes unprotected and especially for the pay we get.”

Compounding matters, most survey respondents – across all CCYA titles – reported that they could not reasonably estimate their future earnings. Just 22 percent of respondents indicated agreement that they could reasonably estimate future earnings, while 56 percent said otherwise. If employees



feel unable to reasonably project future earnings, they may consider alternative forms of employment they perceive as having higher pay or less stress.

**“When I Look at My Agency’s Pay Plan,
I Can Reasonably Estimate My Future Earnings in 5, 10, and 15 Years”
All Responses (N = 287)**



Focus group participants across multiple jurisdictions also reported the presence of pay compression. Pay compression occurs when there are insufficient pay differentials between a more tenured employee and newly hired employees (i.e., inexperienced people make almost as much as experienced people). Pay compression can also exist between employees across job classifications – i.e., there are insufficient pay differentials between non-supervisory and supervisory staff so that the former group is paid almost as much as or perhaps more (with overtime and other incentives) than the latter.

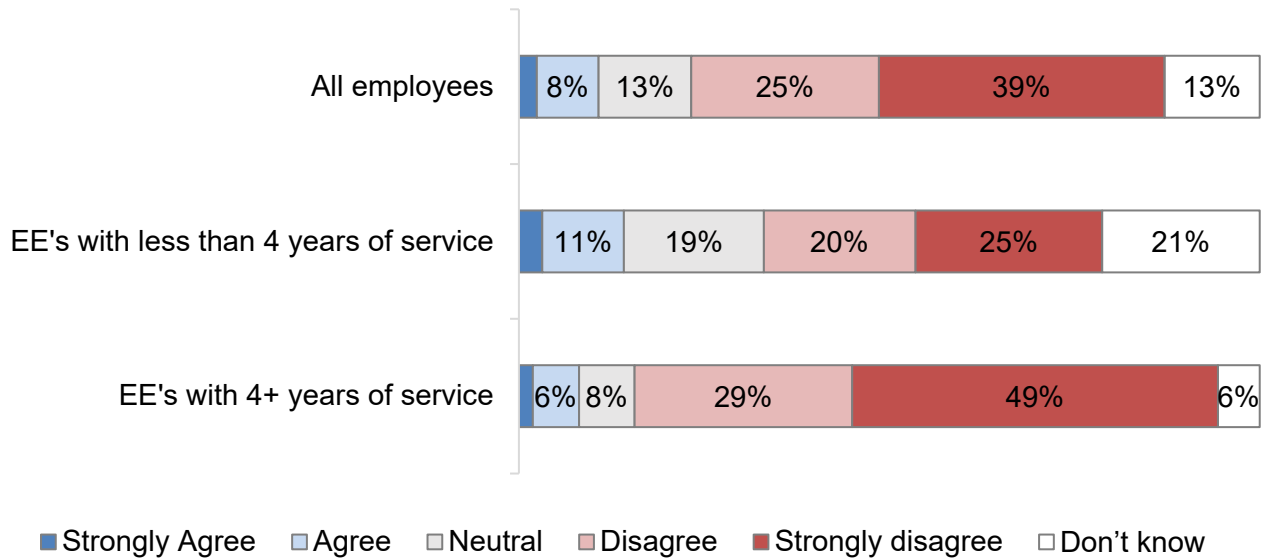
Some responses from the employee survey on the topic of pay compression include:

- *“Employees that have been here a long time do not make much more than new employees.”*
- *“The compression of salaries for experienced staff is a real issue. It creates a large amount of frustration.”*
- *“There needs to be higher salaries for staff who work in child welfare. There needs to be a difference between salaries of caseworkers vs. supervisor.”*

To gauge employee perspectives on pay compression, the employee survey asked CCYA staff to respond to the following statement: “There is enough of a difference in pay between an employee who has been with my agency for a long period of time, and an employee who was just hired.” As reflected in the figure that follows, 64 percent of respondents “strongly disagreed” or “disagreed” with this statement. Among employees with four or more years of service, approximately 78 percent of respondents “strongly disagreed” or “disagreed.”

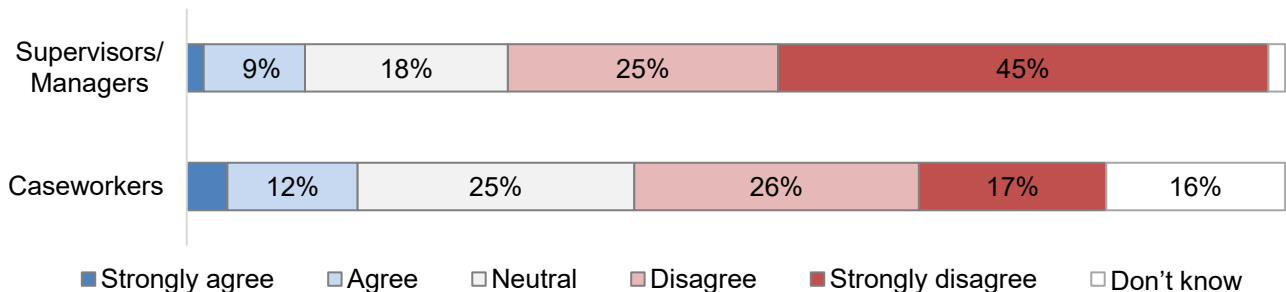


**“There is Enough of a Difference in Pay Between an Employee Who Has Been with My Agency for a Long Period of Time, and an Employee Who Was Just Hired”
All Responses by Tenure (N = 288)**



Relatedly, case-carrying staff were asked to evaluate the compensation increases associated with promotions. As shown in the figure below, approximately 70 percent of supervisors/managers “strongly disagreed” or “disagreed” with the statement “promotions come with appropriate compensation increases at my agency.” Among caseworkers – who would apply for these promotions – approximately 48 percent “strongly disagreed” or “disagreed” with this statement, with only 16 percent indicating some degree of agreement.

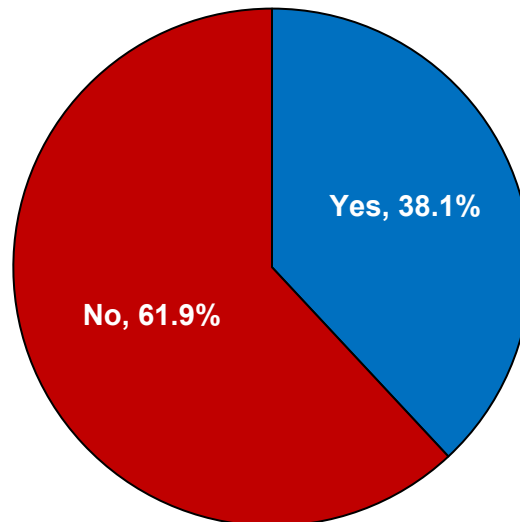
**“Promotions Come with Appropriate Compensation Increases at My Agency”
(N = 65 Supervisors/Managers, 135 Caseworkers)**



Real and/or perceived, low compensation improvements accompanying promotions – known as “promotional differentials” – likely limit the number of caseworkers seeking promotions. In survey responses, less than half of CCYA caseworkers reported that they planned to apply for a promotion the next time a suitable position is open.



**“I Plan on Applying for a Promotion the Next Time a Suitable Position is Available”
Caseworker 1, 2, and 3s (N = 134)**



The following bullets present some commentary from the employee survey regarding interest in promotion. While some commenters may view promotion to a supervisory or management role as a means of increasing pay and reducing stress, others have concerns regarding high workload and inadequate compensation:

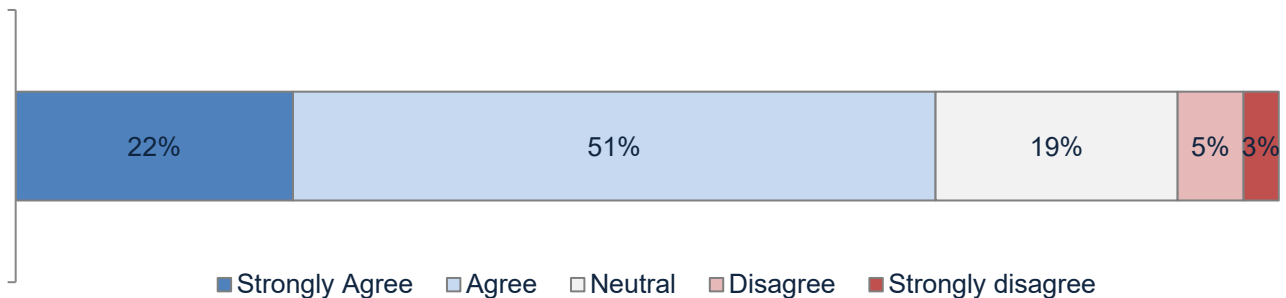
- *“At this point, if I were to apply for a new position and get the job, I'd be doing three jobs with no compensation.”*
- *“Pay is dismal in current position.”*
- *“The pay increase for a promotion is not worth the number of additional responsibilities a promotion level job is being offered. It would only be a 3 percent increase.”*
- *“I plan for the opportunity to be a part of the leadership team but not sure the added responsibilities will be worth the pay. I don't think I will receive a raise for becoming a supervisor.”*
- *“The pay from one position to the next is not worth the change in responsibilities and most people are already covering multiple positions.”*
- *“Because I can't imagine that I will be at the agency long enough to do this.”*
- *“I am unsure if I can be a caseworker long term.”*

In contrast to pay, survey respondents reported positive impressions of benefits packages provided by CCYAs. As shown in the figure that follows, more than seven in 10 survey respondents “strongly



agreed” or “agreed” with the statement “my agency offers a strong benefits package (e.g., retirement, health, paid leave) to employees.

**“My Agency Offers a Strong Benefits Package (e.g., Retirement, Health, Paid Leave) to Employees”
All CCYA Employees (N = 288)**



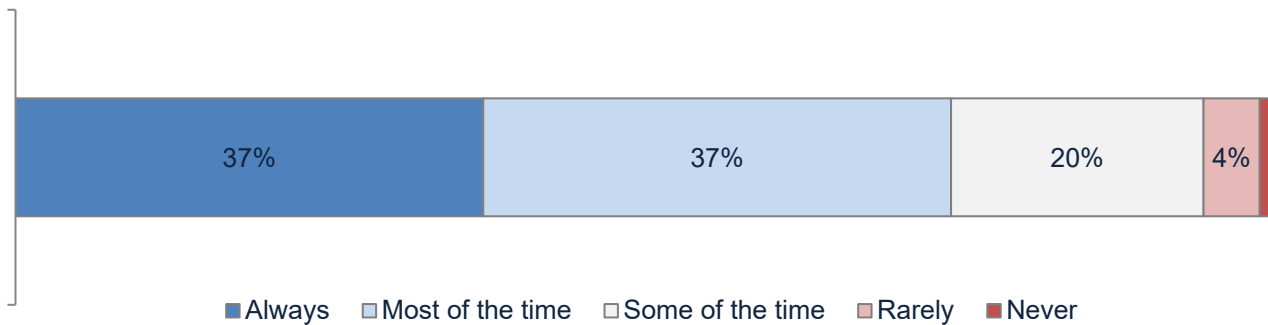
Some focus group participants reported feeling unable or reluctant to schedule paid leave. According to responses in the employee survey, however, more than three quarters of caseworkers reported that they can schedule and use their paid leave “always” or “most of the time.” Perhaps this inconsistency can be summed up by the following comments from the employee survey:

- *“When I take time, my work is not covered and it becomes overwhelming to prepare for the time out and to recover from the time out when I return to work.”*
- *“I can use it, but I will pay for it in the amount of work that has to be done before and after the leave.”*
- *“When you take time off you pay for it when you return.”*

Most caseworkers surveyed report that they can schedule paid time off. But staffing challenges and high caseloads generate stress for caseworkers preparing to take or return from paid leave.



**“I Am Able to Schedule and Use My Paid Leave, Including Vacation and Sick Leave, When it is Important to Me and/or My Family”
Caseworker 1, 2, and 3s (N = 134)**



Organizational Culture

In a profession where empathy, resilience, and dedication are essential, relationships within the workplace play a critical role in caseworker retention. Caseworkers’ interactions and experiences with peers and supervisors reflect the professional environment and profoundly affect employees’ well-being, job satisfaction, and longevity. Organizational culture (and its cousin, organizational climate) can shape these relationships and intra-office collaboration in meaningful ways. Establishing a stable, supportive culture that values employees as people and promotes trust and accountability can support caseworkers’ success and job satisfaction, making them more likely to stay with their agency.

Understanding Organizational Culture

Organizational culture “can be referred to as the glue that keeps an organization together. It is the silent code of conduct; it’s more about how things get done, rather than what gets done,” per a Society for Human Resource management blog post. “Culture is not a thing. It’s not something an organization has or doesn’t have. Culture is something an organization is.”⁵⁹

From a more academic perspective, organizational culture “can be understood as ‘the collection of values, beliefs, assumptions, and norms that guide activity and mindset,’” according to a Harvard Business School overview. Culture impacts numerous aspects of an organization’s functions and operations, from how staff and teams interact and collaborate, and norms and expectations around work-life balance and organizational response to mistakes by employees. Influencing these and other facets of an organization, a strong culture “can impact employees’ motivation, which, in turn,

⁵⁹ “Defining Organizational Culture,” Excerpted from Lizz Pellet, *The Cultural Fit Factor: Creating an Employment Brand That Attracts, Retains, and Repels the Right Employees* (SHRM, 2009). Accessed April 4, 2024 at <https://www.shrm.org/topics-tools/news/inclusion-equity-diversity/defining-organizational-culture>.



influences their work's quality and efficiency, ability to reach goals, and retention rates," as well as fostering creative problem-solving.⁶⁰

On the other hand, "an ineffective culture can bring down the organization and its leadership. Disengaged employees, high turnover, poor customer relations and lower profits are examples of how the wrong culture can negatively impact the bottom line."⁶¹

Though the terms organizational culture and organizational climate may be used as synonyms, some researchers distinguish between the two. For example, the Capacity Building Center for States highlights organizational culture and climate among five dimensions of organizational capacity. The Center cites literature defining organizational culture as "the shared behavioral expectations and norms in a work environment... the collective view of 'the way work is done.'" Organizational climate, meanwhile, "represents staff perceptions of the impact of the work environment on the individual. This is the view of 'how it feels' to work at the agency (e.g., supportive, stressful)."⁶²

Regardless of whether the distinction is drawn, in a strong culture "[e]mployees know how top management wants them to respond to any situation, employees believe that the expected response is the proper one, and employees know that they will be rewarded for demonstrating the organization's values."⁶³ Achieving this ideal requires emphasis across a spectrum of human resource activities, from recruiting and selecting applicants who will be a good fit for the organization's culture to reinforcing core values with training and development while rewarding and recognizing staff who represent those values.

The Society of Human Resource Management notes several factors that shape organizational culture:

- **Values:** Include emphasis on outcomes and results; people, teamwork, and collaboration; attention to detail; stability; innovation; and/or competition – in any case, if desired values are not consciously selected and promoted, there is the potential for conflicting values to fill the void.
- **Degree of hierarchy:** Can range from high to low, depending on the degree to which the organization emphasizes structure and authority (e.g., formal channels of communication, acceptance of challenges to authority).

⁶⁰ "How Does Leadership Influence Organizational Culture?" Catherine Cote, Harvard Business School Business Insights blog. March 2, 2023. Accessed April 4, 2024 at <https://online.hbs.edu/blog/post/organizational-culture-and-leadership>. Page 2.

⁶¹ "Understanding and Developing Organizational Culture," Society for Human Resource Management. Accessed April 4, 2024 at <https://www.shrm.org/topics-tools/tools/toolkits/understanding-developing-organizational-culture>.

⁶² "Organizational Culture and Climate," from A Guide to Five Dimensions of Organizational Capacity. Capacity Building Center for States. Accessed April 3, 2024 at <https://capacity.childwelfare.gov/states/topics/cqi/organizational-capacity-guide/organizational-culture-and-climate>.

⁶³ "Understanding and Developing Organizational Culture," Society for Human Resource Management. Accessed April 4, 2024 at <https://www.shrm.org/topics-tools/tools/toolkits/understanding-developing-organizational-culture>. Page 1.



- **Degree of urgency:** While some organizations may select the pace at which decisions are made and work is undertaken, others have less control because of environmental factors (e.g., legally imposed timelines for investigating reports of possible child mistreatment).
- **People orientation or task orientation:** An organization may place people first in decision-making, working from the premise that employees (and their satisfaction) drive performance; alternately, an organization may value tasks and processes as the key to performance and seek compliance first.
- **Functional orientation:** Focuses on whether an organization values research and development, marketing, engineering, or some other service as its core function; while employees from different functions in an organization may think their group drives organizational success, “leaders must understand what most employees perceive to be the company’s functional orientation.”
- **Organizational subcultures:** Beyond the dominant culture, subcultures may exist among smaller groups; these can support and contribute to organizational culture or can undermine it in some cases if not recognized and addressed.⁶⁴

While some of these factors would be expected to remain consistent across CCYAs (for instance, a relatively common degree of urgency driven by legal requirements and a strong sense of mission), variation in other factors can impact staff retention in ways including affecting relationships between caseworkers and their colleagues and supervisors.

In focus group discussions with staff and leadership across the Commonwealth, PFM experienced a variety of organizational cultures. In some counties, staff seemed generally happy with their jobs and workplace, even if they were dissatisfied with compensation and noted the stress and difficulties of child casework. In other locales, culture was less positive, with staff expressing distrust of leadership or indicating a perception that their agency did not value its employees. As suggested above, these variations centered heavily on staff’s relationships with their supervisors and colleagues.

Relationships with Peers

Academic studies identify peer support as a buffer against the effects of a stressful work environment, which in turn helps to keep caseworkers from leaving their jobs. In a 2020 study by the National Child Welfare Workforce Institute, nearly 60 percent of caseworkers cited “coworkers” as a reason they plan to stay in their jobs.⁶⁵

In a 2020 study, nearly 60 percent of child and family caseworkers cited ‘coworkers’ as a reason they plan to stay in the job.

⁶⁴ “Understanding and Developing Organizational Culture,” Society for Human Resource Management. Accessed April 4, 2024 at <https://www.shrm.org/topics-tools/tools/toolkits/understanding-developing-organizational-culture>. Pages 3-4.

⁶⁵ Sedivy, Jennifer A., Shauna Rienks, Robin Leake & Amy S. He (2020) “Expanding our understanding of the role of peer support in child welfare workforce retention.” *Journal of Public Child Welfare*, 14:1, 80-100.



This aligns with feedback from the caseworker and CCYA management focus groups conducted across Pennsylvania for this report: participants frequently described their colleagues as “family,” and as one of their primary reasons for staying in the job despite reported high levels of stress and low compensation. And 79 percent of employee survey respondents in case-related roles (case aides through case managers) selected “my colleagues” as an influential or very influential factor in decisions to stay at their current agencies.

Overall, 85.5 percent of employee survey respondents reported having positive, supportive working relationships with their coworkers. And when asked to identify various strengths of their agencies from a list of eight options, 68.1 percent of survey respondents chose co-workers and colleagues, second most behind agency mission (79 percent).

While relationships with peers may seem like something that must develop organically, as opposed to something that can be improved or influenced by policy initiatives or decisions by leadership, we identified several factors that can in fact contribute to building those relationships and can be strengthened by decision-making around policy and practice. These include policies that encourage teamwork and collaboration, opportunities to work together in person, creating a safe space to interact and share experiences, and occasions for camaraderie and morale building, among others.

Flexibility and the Hybrid Work Environment

Time spent in person together is one of the most influential contributors to strong peer relationships. The COVID-19 pandemic and the related expansion of opportunities to work from home has impacted the time that colleagues spend together, which may impede building of relationships important to staff retention. However, employees also value the opportunity for work-life balance that comes with remote work and flexible scheduling, so limits on working away from the office may contribute to attrition when staff can find other jobs that offer more opportunities in that regard. The relative value placed on time together in person versus the ability to work away from the office will frequently vary across individual employees, impacted by personal preference, family needs, and the like.

CCYAs have explored a range of approaches to implementing a hybrid work environment that balances these competing priorities: creating a space which caseworkers can learn from each other, support each other, and develop the strong bonds that have shown to be a critical retention factor, while also providing the flexibility that employees are seeking, with increased ability to work from home and to manage personal and family obligations through flexible scheduling.

Some counties require new caseworkers to come into the office every day early in their tenure, for instance for the first three to six months after hiring. While this can have benefits for a new cohort to meet each other, many caseworkers say that this can be a lonely and frustrating experience without other, more experienced workers in the office that they can learn from (these more experienced may have flexibility to work from home or are working in the field). Keeping new caseworkers in the office without their more tenured colleagues deprives them of opportunities to ask questions, learn from others, and get to know colleagues while in the office during their critical first few months on the job.



Some counties ask or require caseworkers and supervisors to come into the office on set days during the week. This may have the benefit of ensuring that caseworkers come in on the same day as their supervisor, or that there are caseworkers from different units in the office on any given day. On the other hand, this means that certain caseworkers may not ever have the chance to interact with each other, that caseworkers will not get to know other supervisors, or that supervisors may not have a chance to connect with each other.

Other counties may not have set days but may require staff to come in a certain number of days each week. The advantages to this arrangement include increased flexibility for caseworkers as well as the ability to meet different colleagues. However, the result may be that caseworkers may not see their supervisor in person regularly or may see wide variations in staff presence depending on the day.

None of the 10 counties reviewed for this report required all staff to be in every day; all offered some opportunity for working from home or flexible scheduling. Due to the amount of time that caseworkers need to be in the field, they may not end up spending much time in the office even when they are technically not working remotely. Even before the pandemic, some CCYAs were considering options for “hoteling” – having caseworkers sit at unassigned cubicles when in the office – in order to reduce the necessary amount of designated office space, while also investing in technology such as laptops, tablets, cell phones, and hotspots to facilitate work outside the office. As with peer relationships, the ability to work remotely has been shown to be a powerful retention (and recruitment) tool, supporting work-life balance and employee satisfaction and even increasing productivity by reducing the amount of time spent commuting to the office.

Due to peer relationships’ importance to retention, CCYA administrators need to consider how best to encourage and strengthen those relationships, both by providing opportunities and incentives to bring people together, as well as ways to build those relationships while allowing staff the flexibility to work remotely. One way to encourage staff to come into the office is to ensure that the office is a comfortable and productive place from which to work. This is not always the case, as focus group participants from a few of the sample counties highlighted unreliable technology and Internet service at their office locations. Other factors that contributed to staff not wanting to come into the office included feeling unsafe in their office locations, lack of parking or paid parking, poor heating/cooling, and lack of accessibility, among others.

Camaraderie, Morale, and Staff Appreciation

In focus groups, supervisors and leadership discussed strategies to encourage camaraderie, improve morale, and show appreciation, while caseworkers discussed which of these strategies they felt worked best. Some counties emphasized the need to find ways to build morale without investing a lot of money, while caseworkers shared that increases in compensation are the most effective form of recognition, as this indicates that CCYA and county leadership understand the value of their work.

Caseworkers also expressed that demonstrations of recognition and appreciation from leadership are effective if they are sincere, personalized, and meaningful. More generalized shows of appreciation



in the form of pizza and ice cream parties have less of an impact (especially as they require in-person participation).

Staff appreciation can also take the form of encouraging engagement throughout the agency. Asking staff what they want, and implementing some of that feedback, can go a long way toward showing that leadership is listening to and learning from staff. Similarly, team-building exercises and other types of events designed to build camaraderie will likely have more impact if they come from suggestions and engagement of staff (as opposed to from the top down).

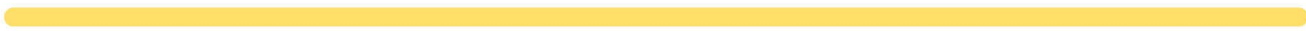
Collaboration and Teaming

Collaboration can be another key factor in developing a culture of trust, as well as having a positive impact on quality casework and outcomes for children. Casework teaming is a “model where caseworkers agree to partner and share responsibility for cases with colleagues in their unit in order to better support and work more effectively with families.”⁶⁶ Children, families, and case planning can suffer when a case transfers to a new caseworker – which can happen multiple times in an agency facing retention challenges. In addition to mitigating the impact of case transfers, having multiple caseworkers who are knowledgeable about a case and known to the family can improve the caseworker experience by offering built-in support and opportunities to develop creative solutions. In addition, teaming can reduce the stress of taking vacation or comp time, with the confidence that knowledgeable case coverage will be available.

Teaming can take different forms, such as visiting a family together or alternating visits, depending on the agency or specific case. Part of the teaming process is working together to develop a team approach and get to know each other’s working styles – all of which strengthens the peer relationships that are so critical to retention. Teaming is also a valuable training tool for new and experienced caseworkers alike, and “allows supervisors the flexibility to knit together the individual strengths of caseworkers and strengthen the entire team,” instead of having to balance the types of cases assigned to weaker or newer caseworkers.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ “How have counties in New York approached implementation of casework teaming?” March 22, 2021. Casey Family Programs. <https://www.casey.org/casework-teaming-ny-counties/> Accessed April 12, 2024.

⁶⁷ “How have counties in New York approached implementation of casework teaming?” March 22, 2021. Casey Family Programs. <https://www.casey.org/casework-teaming-ny-counties/> Accessed April 12, 2024.



Relationships with Supervisors

Multiple research studies suggest that strong support from supervisors improves caseworker retention. “Support” in this context represents a mix of instrumental (knowledge/skill) and affective (emotional) support.

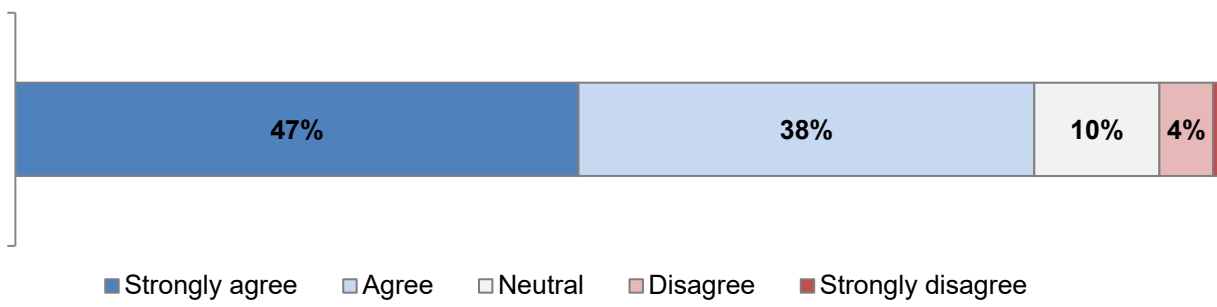
Results from the employee survey indicate that this holds true in Pennsylvania. County caseworkers cited their relationship with their supervisors as the factor most likely to influence whether they choose to remain at their agency, with 90 percent of case-focused staff (aides through managers) indicating that their relationship with their supervisor is influential or very influential on decisions about whether to stay at their agency.

Multiple comments on the employee survey express sentiments along the lines of “I would not be here if it weren’t for my supervisor.” Agency leadership (which is presumed to primarily reference the CYS administrator and deputy administrator positions but may include other leadership positions above the supervisor level as well) is close, with 87 percent choosing “Influential” or “Very Influential.”

“High supervisory support has been shown to reduce caseworkers’ desire to leave an organization”

Bonnie Marsh, “Caseworker Turnover: Why do child welfare caseworkers want to leave their jobs and what makes them stay?” (2020) *Social Work Doctoral Dissertations*

**“My Manager or Supervisor Provides Me With The Guidance, Support And Information I Need to Succeed In My Job”
Caseworker 1, 2, and 3s (N = 135)**



Caseworkers generally view their supervisors very favorably, with 85 percent agreeing or strongly agreeing that their manager gives them the support they need. Fewer than 5 percent disagreed, but survey comments and focus group feedback also reflected the influence of a poor employee-supervisor relationship on job satisfaction. In the words of one survey respondent, “My current manager has made me feel like I cannot ask her anything and that I am a nuisance...she is a strong contributor to why I cannot stand my job at this moment.”

Interestingly, employees’ perception of management and leadership may dim as the relationship becomes more distant, but the relationship also becomes less important to respondents. While 90



percent of case-focused survey respondents said their supervisor was influential or very influential in decisions to stay at their current job and 87 percent said the same about agency leadership, the numbers are lower for county Department of Human Services leadership (62 percent) and county leadership (66 percent). And while 73.8 percent of employee survey respondents agreed that leadership emphasizes the mission of helping children, youth and families, only 35.5 percent of respondents noted management and leadership as a strength of their agency.

In agencies where turnover has resulted in a wave of new promotions to supervisor, some focus group participants suggested that management training for newly promoted supervisors is insufficient; consequently, newly promoted supervisors may lack the training and/or experience necessary to be a positive factor in the caseworker experience. Supervisors and prospective supervisors likewise expressed a desire for more training to be effective at their jobs.

In terms of why the relationship with supervisors is so critical to retention, caseworkers discussed the various types of support – both professional and personal – that supervisors provide. For newer caseworkers, support related to training is key, such as opportunities to shadow on cases. Caseworkers at all levels brought up the importance of decision-making support at the supervisor level (as well as higher levels). Caseworkers particularly value the ability to talk through the decision-making process without being explicitly told how to proceed. Many who shared positive feedback about their supervisors emphasized the importance of feeling seen and listened to, as a person as well as a caseworker. Examples include allowing flexibility around working hours – such as shifting working hours to allow for daycare drop-off – and understanding for things like taking a call to make a doctor’s appointment during working hours.

When asked to select the importance of 10 different benefits or potential benefits to caseworker job performance and satisfaction, the top three selected were flexible scheduling, decision-making support, and virtual [remote] work. Nearly 90 percent of CCYA employee survey respondents said that decision-making support is important to their job performance and satisfaction. This underscores the importance of having supervisors who are free and available to provide case support. Likewise, some caseworkers expressed frustration with supervisors who did not have enough time for case reviews, due to the need for them to carry their own caseloads.

Building a Strong, Productive Organizational Culture and Climate

Counties with the most positive feedback about the caseworker experience, relationships with peers, supervisors, and leadership, and job satisfaction overwhelmingly used the word “trust” to define their agency’s culture. A culture of trust begins at the leadership level.

In 2019, the Los Angeles Department of Child and Family Services joined the National Partnership for Child Safety (NPCS), a quality improvement collaborative that “seeks to integrate the concept of safety science into the child welfare space... In the context of child welfare, safety science recognizes the complex nature of child welfare work and seeks to create a supportive environment where staff may share, ask questions, and learn from mistakes. In addition, it emphasizes system



accountability.”⁶⁸ L.A. DCFS leaders credit NPCCS with teaching them how to create a “learning organization” characterized by shared responsibility and building caseworker confidence in decision-making. The result has been a shift in department culture from a reactive, punitive environment to one of collaboration and support.

To achieve this in Pennsylvania, CCYA leaders have implemented strategies that foster a culture of trust, leading to a positive work environment that results in improved retention. Some counties have established cultures geared toward competency and trust. Others have historically been more focused on compliance and a more regulatory or punitive approach, which can be difficult to shift without appropriate guidance and modeling.

The counties with caseworkers and staff that expressed a culture of trust shared several aspects of the working environment that contributed to that culture, including:

- **Flexibility:** Understanding that caseworkers have personal lives that they need to deal with and allowing flexibility for things like school drop off, medical appointments, and personal phone calls. Leadership knows that the work will get done and does not micromanage.
- **Teamwork:** Caseworkers are encouraged to interact with others outside of their immediate supervisors. Supervisors may not have all the answers, but there is an environment of working together to ask for guidance, discuss approaches, etc. People help one another and provide support without “tallying” or judgement.
- **Decision-making support:** Supervision and coaching are prioritized. Caseworkers are encouraged and comfortable asking questions of supervisors, management, and leadership without judgement. Case reviews are opportunities for coaching and team decision-making and are not treated as punitive or interrogatory.

In addition to trust, another key factor of creating a healthy organizational culture is the perception of being seen and heard by management and leadership. Focus group participants indicated they value management efforts to gather feedback and understand caseworker and staff perspectives; indications that leadership is willing and ready to listen and incorporate that input helps to differentiate the culture from a “top down” style of leadership.

Creating a Safe Space

Caseworkers also emphasized the importance of the office as a “safe space” where they and their colleagues can share experiences and challenges without repercussions. This can support stronger relationships between coworkers and help mitigate stress and trauma experienced as part of the job (see more discussion of stress and trauma in the next section).

Lycoming County uses the Sanctuary Model, described as “a blueprint for clinical and organizational change which, at its core, promotes safety and recovery from adversity through the active creation of

⁶⁸ “DCFS at Work.” October 20, 2022. Volume 3, Edition 10. <https://dcfs.lacounty.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/DCFS-at-Work-Vol-3-Ed-10-1.pdf> Accessed April 14, 2024.



a trauma-informed community.”⁶⁹ An organization interested in implementing the Sanctuary Institute’s model receives an on-site needs assessment, followed by a five-day training for leadership to learn specific implementation steps and concrete tools. Elements of the model that came up in focus groups included:

- Promoting the building/office as a safe space, where people can feel comfortable being candid and sharing experiences and frustrations with peers, supervisors, and managers.
- Team meetings with time designated to discuss complex cases.
- An open-door policy where management will always listen, whether or not they agree.

Reflective Supervision

Caseworkers discussed case reviews and decision-making support as opportunities for teamwork, coaching, and improving the quality of casework. However, lack of quality supervision time (as a result of high caseloads and vacancies) or case reviews that are more interrogatory in nature can have the opposite impact and increase caseworker stress.

**Comment from
Employee Survey**

“At times, the agency superiors are too busy or delayed with other things which disrupts my casework needs.”

Reflective supervision is a style of supervision that emphasizes the importance of relationships over administrative compliance or performance evaluation and is designed to address the emotional impact of the work as well as assisting in developing critical competencies.⁷⁰ If implemented correctly, the use of reflective supervision can play a role in shifting the culture of a CCYA to one of learning, trust, and development. Best practices for reflective supervision include:

- Distinguishing it from administrative compliance and performance evaluation by setting up separate times for reflective supervision.
- Reflective supervision can happen in an individual or group setting.
- The environment and approach should be one of empathy and the creation of a “safe space,” without critical judgement (of self or others) and without disciplinary action (within the context of the reflective supervision).
- Managers and leadership should model the principles of reflective supervision in their interactions with supervisors.

⁶⁹ The Sanctuary Institute. “Training and Consultation.” <https://www.thesanctuaryinstitute.org/services/training-consultation/> Accessed April 14, 2024.

⁷⁰ “Reflective Supervision: What We Know and What We Need to Know to Support and Strengthen the Home Visiting Workforce.” Office of Planning, Evaluation, and Resource – Administration for Children and Families. July 12, 2022. <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/report/reflective-supervision-what-we-know-and-what-we-need-know-support-and-strengthen-home> Accessed April 12, 2024.



Shifting organizational culture takes more than just training, which must be modeled and reinforced by leadership at all levels. CWRC currently offers a supervisor training module which includes a section on Reflective Supervision. However, supervisors operating in an agency where leadership models top-down, punitive, or compliance-focused organizational culture may find themselves unable to successfully apply the principles that they learn in training.

The trauma-informed trainings that OCYF has been implementing across the state are focused on caseworker interactions with children and youth, but there are aspects of that training that should also be applied to interactions within an agency. If caseworkers are taught to interact with families and children in a way that they do not see modeled within their agency, this can have a negative impact on casework quality and contribute to an unsatisfactory and even traumatic organizational culture.

Working Conditions

In academic circles, the interplay between job-related stress/trauma and high caseloads is recognized as causing caseworker burnout, which in turn, is a driver of caseworker attrition. A recent study found that higher “work-related burnout” was associated with stronger intent by caseworkers to leave their current agency (i.e., negatively correlated with intent to stay).⁷¹

“Work-related burnout, a construct capturing the burden of the work intensity, has the strongest association with intentions to leave the workplace and child welfare in general, while personal and client-related burnout also played a role.”
(emphases added)

Source: Lushin, et al. “A burdened workforce: Exploring burnout, job satisfaction and turnover among child welfare caseworkers in the era of COVID-19.” *Children and Youth Review* (2023)

Focus groups and the employee survey surfaced similar, supporting themes. Job-related stress and trauma – compounded by heavy caseloads and administrative burdens – were identified as factors contributing to caseworker attrition. Caseworkers highlighted several aspects of the job that generate trauma, from casework (e.g., interactions with families, court appearances) to the work environment, where high caseloads, paperwork requirements and deadlines are primary stressors. Conversations about these topics included ideas to leverage technology to reduce and mitigate stress and trauma, remove barriers to efficient and high-quality casework, and improve opportunities for work-life balance.

Job-Related Stress and Trauma

One of the primary drivers of job-related stress and trauma – as voiced by caseworkers – is personal safety. The issue of personal safety was discussed in every caseworker focus group. Caseworkers reported experiencing vulnerability and concern for their personal safety in multiple situations – both on the job and in their personal lives:

⁷¹ Lushin, et al. “A burdened workforce: Exploring burnout, job satisfaction and turnover among child welfare caseworkers in the era of COVID-19.” *Children and Youth Review* (2023)



- Caseworkers enter unfamiliar settings where there may be weapons and/or dangerous substances (e.g., fentanyl).
- One caseworker reported a client broke into her home while she was there; others have reported being stalked.
- Caseworkers are especially recognizable and accessible in more rural settings with less population (grocery store, county fair, etc.).

These findings around personal safety were echoed in the employee survey. Among survey respondents, 77 percent of caseworkers indicated that their safety is “very influential” or “influential” as to whether they choose to stay at their agency.

Select Focus Group Comments on Personal Safety

- *“You can’t get people to work here if you can’t get caseworkers home to their families.”*
- *“We go into dangerous, horrible situations with a clipboard and a pen.”*
- *“Who wants to be put in a situation where you aren’t really safe, but you have no choice?”*

“What Factors Are Likely to Influence Whether You Choose to Stay at Your Agency?” Caseworker 1, 2, and 3s (N = 138)

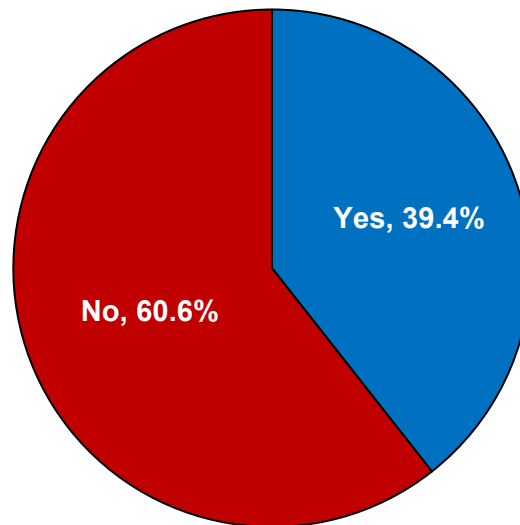


■ Very influential ■ Influential □ Somewhat influential ■ Not very influential ■ Not influential at all

Relatedly, more than one third of caseworkers who responded to the employee survey reported feeling physically unsafe as a result of performing their job duties in the prior six months.



**“In the Past 6 Months, Has There Been a Situation Where You Felt Physically Unsafe as A Result of Performing Your Job Responsibilities?”
Caseworker 1, 2, and 3s (N = 132)**



External trauma can also occur when child welfare caseworkers are responding to situations where a child has suffered or is experiencing abuse or other traumas, including unsafe or distressing living conditions, or parents in mental health crisis or drug addiction.

These situations can be especially difficult for newer caseworkers seeing a set of conditions or circumstances for the first time. External trauma may also be triggered for caseworkers who have experienced their own trauma or otherwise empathize with the situation (for instance, having children in their family the same age as a child suffering abuse).

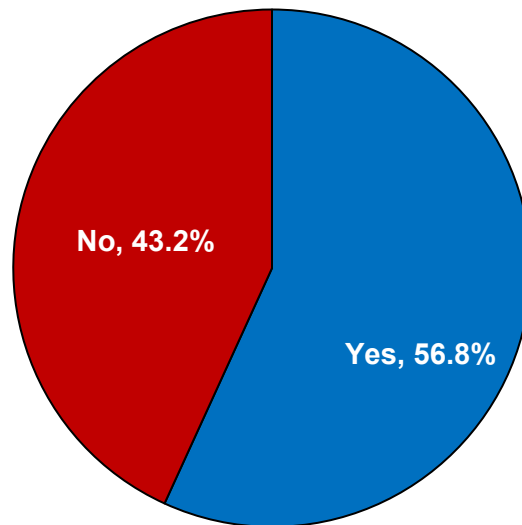
As shown in the figure that follows, among caseworkers who answered the question on the employee survey, 56.8 percent reported that they had witnessed or experienced a situation with a client that they felt was personally traumatic.

Comment from Employee Survey

“Day in and day out we are dealing with physical and sexual abuse of children, drug addiction, unmet mental health needs, domestic violence, homelessness, poor and unsanitary housing, just to name a few issues. The secondhand trauma and stress are part and parcel of the job. It is wearing on the hardest of employees.”



**“In the Past Six Months, Have You Witnessed or Experienced a Situation with A Client That You Felt Was Personally Traumatic?”
Caseworker 1, 2, and 3s (N = 132)**



In focus groups, caseworkers highlighted a certain irony – many were trained in techniques of “trauma-informed response” to support their clients through traumatic situations. However, caseworkers themselves could benefit from trauma-informed therapy as a result of the secondary traumatic stress they experience through their daily work.⁷²

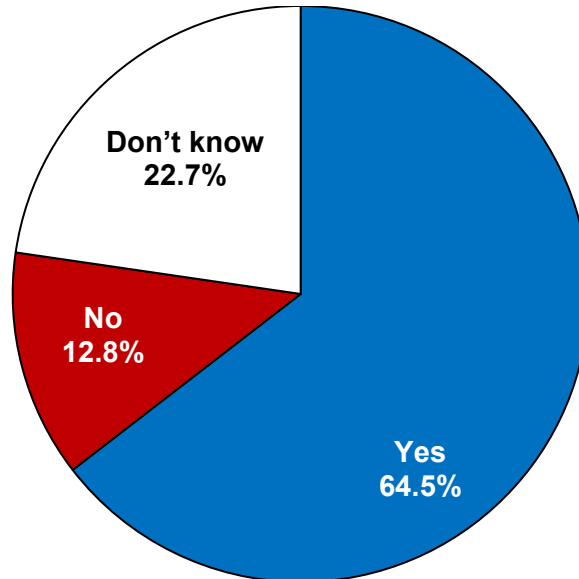
Consequently, many CCYAs have provided counseling to their caseworkers. In focus groups, caseworkers and supervisors spoke favorably about their experiences with counselors who were brought in to provide support for secondary traumatic stress. Focus group attendees reported that many CCYAs provided some sort of counseling or therapy, whether on-site or virtual, through a contracted psychologist. However, multiple focus group attendees also noted that these services were no longer available because of lack of funding, or an inability to find a qualified professional to provide the service. Further, many caseworkers reported they were unable to attend the counseling sessions – in large part because of their existing caseload demands.

Findings from the employee survey are consistent with these findings – while CCYAs offer trauma support services to most caseworkers surveyed, survey respondents did not generally view those as a strength of their agency. As shown in the figure below, most caseworkers who responded to the employee survey were aware of counseling services available to them, but only 21.3 percent of total survey respondents reported “support for employees dealing with stress and trauma” as a “strength” of their respective agencies.

⁷² Secondary traumatic stress refers to the trauma symptoms caused by indirect exposure to traumatic material, transmitted during the process of helping or wanting to help a traumatized person. (Center on Trauma and Children, The Secondary Traumatic Stress Informed Organization Assessment, University of Kentucky, 2014)



“Does Your Agency Provide Counseling Services to Caseworkers Who Experience Job-Related Trauma, Stress, or Burnout?”
Caseworker 1, 2, and 3s (N = 141)



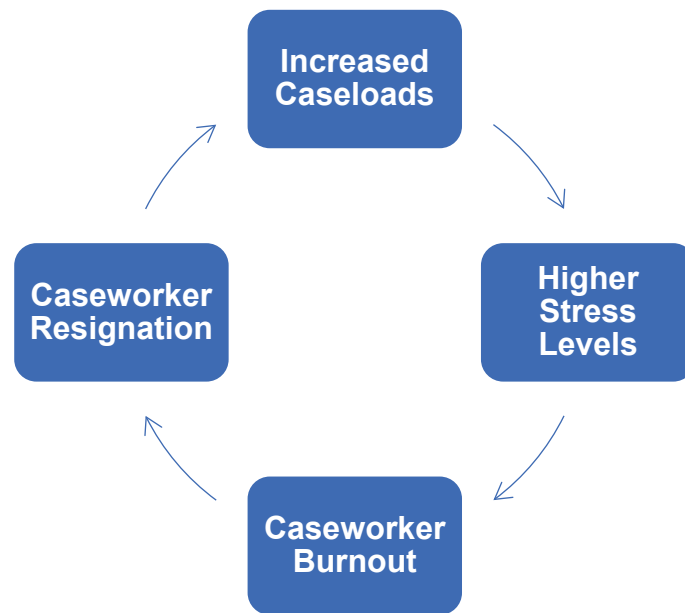
Some focus group attendees reported that supervisory staff were not supportive of counseling services for case-carrying staff, and at times discouraged or dismissed caseworker concerns about stress and trauma – further contributing to burnout.

High Caseloads

A common theme mentioned in every CCYA focus group – and validated by academic research – is the connection between high caseloads and caseworker attrition. One of the primary drivers of high caseloads is the number of caseworker vacancies that most counties are currently experiencing. The result is a vicious cycle – higher caseloads generate more stress, which causes higher levels of burnout, escalating resignations, and higher caseloads per caseworker.



Vicious Cycle Between Increased Caseloads and Turnover



High caseloads are driven by two factors. The first factor – turnover that drives higher vacancies – leaves fewer caseworker to handle existing cases, leading to an increase in cases handled per caseworker. The second factor is the demand for child welfare services. As demand for child welfare services increases, more cases are generated, contributing to a higher number of cases handled per caseworker.

Demand for services is driven not just by actual need, but by reporting activity. Helping catalyze the increased demand for child welfare services was the change in Pennsylvania’s Child Protective Services Law (CPSL) in 2015. Changes in the CPSL broadened the group of “mandated reporters” and expanded definitions of abuse, resulting in a surge of child abuse reports and investigations performed by local CCYAs.⁷³ The updated CPSL also includes “increase[d] penalties for those mandated to report suspected child abuse who fail to do so.”⁷⁴ The prospect of criminal penalties may lead to a sense of fear for not reporting, even if concerns do not rise to the level of abuse and neglect.

In 2013 and 2014, the Commonwealth saw fewer than 30,000 reports of child abuse and neglect annually. But reports spiked to more than 42,000 in 2015 and remained at least that high for five years, peaking near 47,500 in 2017. According to one source, most counties saw a “35% to 50% increase in the number of investigations they must complete” following changes in the CPSL.⁷⁵ With the pandemic’s onset in 2020, reports dropped back to 32,919 before rebounding over the past two

⁷³ “Mandated reporters” include those individuals who are legally required to report abuse allegations. Changes to the 2015 CPSL, for example, expanded the group of “mandated reporters” to include volunteers who work with children and higher education employees.

⁷⁴ Child Protective Services Laws, Pennsylvania Department of Human Services.

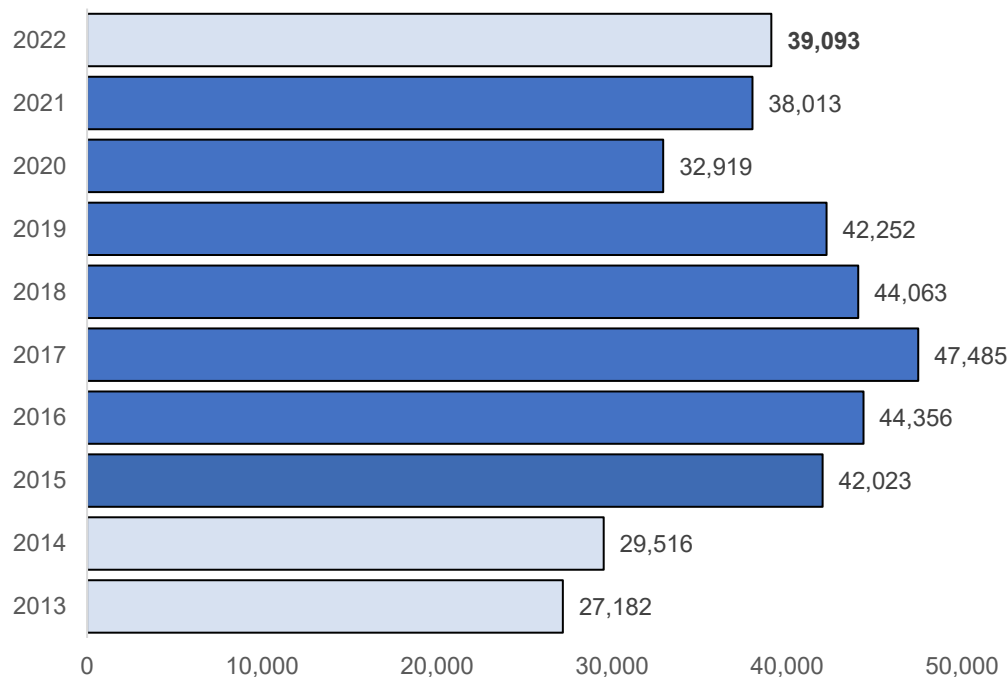
<https://www.dhs.pa.gov/KeepKidsSafe/About/Pages/CPS-Laws.aspx> Accessed March 15, 2024

⁷⁵ Bonnie Marsh, “Caseworker Turnover: Why do child welfare caseworkers want to leave their jobs and what makes them stay?” (2020) *Social Work Doctoral Dissertations*



years. More than 39,000 statewide reports of child abuse were made in 2022, a 43.8 percent increase from 2013 levels. Census estimates suggest Pennsylvania’s population grew approximately 1.5 percent over the same 10-year span.⁷⁶

Annual Child Abuse and Neglect Reports (AKA, CPS Reports) Statewide (2013 – 2022)⁷⁷



In the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, the two most common types of child abuse reports are classified as CPS reports (Child Protective Services) and GPS reports (General Protective Services). CPS reports represent instances of suspected child abuse and neglect and require a follow up visit within 24-hours by the local CCYA. GPS reports represent instances where child abuse is not suspected, but a follow-up assessment is warranted. For GPS calls, the CCYA can make the decision around whether a call warrants a response and the timeline of that response.⁷⁸

The public can make child abuse reports through two channels: a Commonwealth hotline called “ChildLine,” or county-run hotlines staffed by CCYA caseworkers.⁷⁹ When a report of abuse is reported through ChildLine – either by phone or via online reporting – the ChildLine caseworker

⁷⁶ Census data accessed April 23, 2024 at <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/PA/PST045222> (2022) and <https://data.census.gov/table/PEPPPOP2019.PEPANNRES?q=Pennsylvania%20Populations%20and%20People> (2013 estimate) and

⁷⁷ Data taken from 2017 and 2022 annual child protective services reports published by the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services.

⁷⁸ The Center for Children’s Justice. “Child Protection FAQ: ChildLine (PA’s Child Abuse Reporting Hotline)” May 2016. <http://www.c4cj.org/files/ChildLineFAQ52016.pdf>. Accessed April 14, 2024.

⁷⁹ Both ChildLine and county hotlines are considered part of the “intake” function for child welfare service delivery in Pennsylvania. Calls that come into ChildLine are reviewed and classified by ChildLine caseworkers, then passed on to the relevant CCYA’s Intake and Investigations unit.



determines how to classify the report (e.g., as a CPS, GPS, direct referral to law enforcement, etc.) and forwards it to the county with the determined classification.⁸⁰

When a report of child abuse is reported through a county hotline, CCYA caseworkers use the same intake characterizations to determine the appropriate response. In 2022, there were approximately four GPS reports (165,295) for each CPS report (39,093) reported through ChildLine and CCYA hotlines.⁸¹

CCYA caseworkers in focus groups highlighted that the way that ChildLine reports are referred to CCYAs can contribute to higher workloads and caseloads. The distinction between “workloads” and “caseloads” is important. In focus groups, caseworkers reported that time is expended on investigating ChildLine referrals – but often, these investigations do not result in formal “cases.” Therefore, caseloads carried by caseworkers may appear manageable, but caseworkers are still expending time and energy to investigate reports that may not result in the opening of an actual case.

Reflecting on Pennsylvania’s child abuse reporting process, CCYA caseworkers offered the following perspectives on ChildLine:

- There was a sense that among the reports received from ChildLine, too few cases are screened out by ChildLine caseworkers who must make their determination based on what they’re told in a telephone call. Because ChildLine workers do not have to prioritize or consider the capacity of agency caseworkers, they are likely to operate conservatively and accept a case for investigation if they are unsure how to classify the report, passing along the responsibility of prioritizing and decision-making to the CCYA (i.e., it is worse to screen a founded call than to let a questionable call go through for CCYA review, and doing the latter does not impact ChildLine staff workloads).
- Relatedly, CCYA caseworkers reported in focus groups that many calls classified as CPS by ChildLine – requiring a 24-hour response by a CCYA caseworker – could be characterized as GPS. When CCYAs receive a high volume of CPS calls via ChildLine, other caseworker activities are delayed because of the 24-hour response requirement. Moreover, some caseworkers expressed concern that potentially higher-risk GPS calls might be overlooked or deprioritized in favor of ChildLine-referred CPS calls that should have been GPS. As with the earlier point, CCYA caseworkers felt that ChildLine caseworkers err on the side of caution when determining whether a call warrants a CPS or GPS response.

The tension between ChildLine intake and the counties responsible for the investigation has been noted by other workgroups evaluating the child welfare system in Pennsylvania. For instance, a prior State Auditor General’s review included a recommendation to shift responsibility for determining the severity and designation of incoming cases back to counties. The report asserts, “ChildLine should act as a clearinghouse for the reports but should not assign the CPS/GPS designation as they have

⁸⁰ Anecdotal feedback suggests that while counties may occasionally contest a ChildLine classification, they typically accept and proceed with the original designation.

⁸¹ Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children, State of Child Welfare 2023. Accessed on March 25, 2024 at <https://www.papartnerships.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/2023-SOCW-Pennsylvania.pdf>



insufficient information with which to make those decisions. ... additionally, counties should determine the response time to assure safety, as they are best trained in investigations and the provision of child welfare services.”⁸²

Beyond referrals from ChildLine, caseworkers in focus groups also noted that CCYAs can continue to refine and improve decision-making around the types of cases that are opened while prioritizing and bolstering prevention and diversionary services. Some caseworkers expressed a feeling that their agencies accept too many cases for investigation – including some which appear to be false. This was attributed – in part – to newer caseworkers and supervisors with less experience in their roles.

Similarly, focus group attendees noted the pressure associated with evaluating referrals that appeared to be unsubstantiated. On one hand, time and effort was required to evaluate referrals likely to be false. On the other hand, caseworkers reported it is often difficult to rule out potential child abuse without an investigation. Consequently, caseworkers in focus groups advocated that CCYAs seek strategies to prioritize CPS and high-risk GPS cases, while limiting caseworker time spent on low-risk GPS cases that can be diverted or referred to other services.⁸³

While caseworkers in focus groups also noted that many referrals were not related to child abuse, these referrals still add to caseworker workloads and contribute to burnout. Caseworkers in focus groups reported many referrals related to other social services, such as housing issues or homelessness, lack of heat or utilities being shut off, parents with substance use disorders or mental health issues, or food insecurity, among others. In focus groups, caseworkers reported that the key supports and services families need may be lacking in their counties; if there are children involved, those cases are sent to CCYAs as a result.

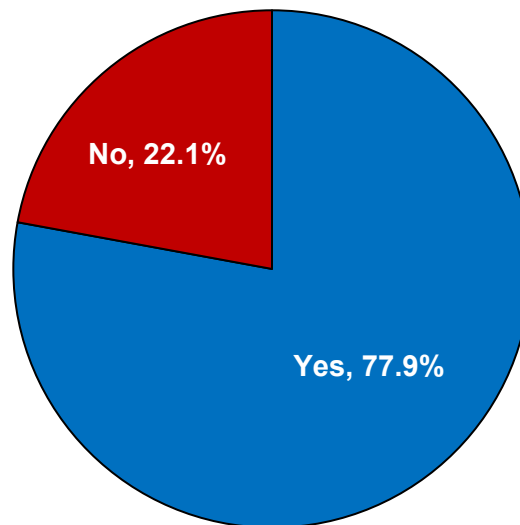
As a result of rising call volumes – and the subsequent increase in work and caseload, which can result from these calls – CCYA employees in all focus groups reported increases in the volume of work in recent years. The stress associated with the increased workload has been further compounded by increased caseworker vacancies.

⁸² State of the Child Action Plan: A special report by Auditor General Eugene DePasquale (2017). Page 17. Accessed April 8, 2024 at https://www.paauditor.gov/Media/Default/Reports/RPT_StateofChild_Action_Plan_051618_FINAL.pdf.

⁸³ Allegheny County has begun using Predictive Risk Modeling through a screening tool to determine which cases to screen in or screen out. The model identifies factors that would predict future referral or placement and is used in conjunction with caseworker decision-making. The result has been more effective screening in of high-risk referrals and screening out of low-risk referrals. While this use of predictive analytics may not reduce caseloads or caseworker time, it does ensure that caseworker time is used more effectively and prioritize high-risk cases to achieve better outcomes and reduce liability.



**“I Routinely Do Extra Work Outside My Usual Job Responsibilities
Because of Vacancies or Staffing Shortages at My Agency”
All Responses (N = 294)**



As reported in focus groups, in practice, caseload allocation is often determined by CCYA staffing capacity, with more experienced caseworkers assuming a larger number of cases and/or more complex cases with a larger number of children. This approach – akin to triaging in an emergency room – may lead to an uneven distribution of caseloads, with seasoned caseworkers taking a disproportionate amount of difficult, complex, and stressful cases that worsen burnout.

Focus group attendees shared that in their experience, high caseloads have a negative impact on child and family outcomes, a claim backed by research. Data from Federal Child and Family Services Reviews (CFSRs) indicate that “high caseloads and workloads negatively affected caseworkers' ability to achieve permanence goals, respond to maltreatment reports in a timely manner, efficiently file court documents and paperwork, and attend training (JBS International, Inc., 2020).”⁸⁴ As a result of excessive caseloads, the quality of case management declines, which can contribute to more children put into out-of-home placement and delays in achieving permanency.

An Illinois study found that “to complete all statutory and policy requirements for foster care cases, workers could have no more than 15 foster care cases per month. Investment in low caseloads was offset by reduced child removal, reductions in residential placements and shorter lengths of stay in foster care (McDonald, 2003).”⁸⁵ Relatedly, higher caseloads limit the amount of time available for more tenured caseworkers to train, coach, and mentor newer caseworkers. The figure that follows

⁸⁴ “Issue Brief: Caseload and Workload Management,” Children’s Bureau, September 2022. https://cwig-prod-prod-drupal-s3fs-us-east-1-s3.amazonaws.com/public/documents/case_work_management.pdf.

⁸⁵ “High Caseloads: How do they Impact Delivery of Health and Human Services?” Research to Practice Brief, Social Work Policy Institute, January 2010. <https://www.socialworkers.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=j4EjppqymtY%3D&portalid=0>



summarizes some of the impacts of high caseloads on CCYA staff and families served by caseworkers – in the words of caseworkers who responded to the employee survey.

Impacts of High Caseloads as Reported by Caseworkers

Comments from Employee Survey	
Quality of Care/Visits	<p><i>"I want to have thorough visits, but I have to think about the next family."</i></p> <p><i>"I used to be able to spend 1.5 hours with families - at the end of my time as a caseworker it became only 30 minutes."</i></p>
Career Advancement	<p><i>"Caseworkers' caseloads are extremely busy and intense and I've been told supervisors' caseloads are double, even triple that, so no thanks!"</i></p>
Ability to Take Leave	<p><i>"Due to the lack of employees and caseload amount, I am unable to use my paid leave."</i></p> <p><i>"A lot of hours need to be put in before taking vacation due to the high caseload and the need to catch up with work before leaving."</i></p>
Ability to Train New Caseworkers	<p><i>"Having high caseloads makes it difficult to train people on the job. Additionally, supervisors are also taking on caseloads and have less time to manage/develop new employees."</i></p>
Retention	<p><i>"After working here for almost 2 years, it is very apparent why CYS agencies are understaffed. We are underappreciated and underpaid, while dealing with caseloads that should warrant us getting paid overtime. We work late every night and barely have time for our families."</i></p>

From a policy and administrative standpoint, one of the challenges in measuring caseloads is the absence of a uniform, standard definition of a "case." Current state regulations "require that county caseworkers be assigned no more than 30 families,"⁸⁶ which is high compared to current best practices for caseload volume in child welfare. For comparison, the Child Welfare League of America suggests "a caseload ratio of 12 to 15 **children** per caseworker and the Council on Accreditation (COA) recommends that caseloads not exceed 18 **children** per caseworker" (emphasis added).⁸⁷

⁸⁶ "Pennsylvania's Children and Youth System: A Performance Audit Pursuant to House Resolution 426." Legislative Budget and Finance Committee. June 1999. <https://lbfcl.legis.state.pa.us/Resources/Documents/Reports/177.pdf> Accessed April 10, 2024.

⁸⁷ Chen, Joanne. "Research Summary: Caseload Standards and Weighting Methodologies," Academy for Professional Excellence, San Diego School of Social Work. October 2019. https://theacademy.sdsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/CWDS-Research-Summary_Caseload-Standards-and-Weighting.pdf



Pennsylvania workgroups have made similar recommendations around caseload levels, such as the 2018 “State of the Child” report’s recommendation that OCYF should revise its “regulation on caseload sizes from 30:1 to a range of 12:1 to 15:1.”⁸⁸

In the absence of a standard, uniform definition of a case by OCYF, counties develop their own definitions. In some counties, a case refers to an individual child, so the number of cases reflects the number of children with whom a caseworker is working. More commonly – but again, not universally – a case refers to a family regardless of the number of children involved.

The type of case also drives the amount of work through regulations and deadlines the CCYA must meet. As noted above, CPS cases must be investigated immediately with a visit to the child within 24 hours. GPS cases may be investigated immediately but there is no requirement and counties may decide when to visit to ensure that children most at-risk are prioritized.

Absent standard definition of a case, complexity goes unacknowledged. Cases are treated the same regardless of the number of children they involve, or other factors, such as service type, medical needs, mental and behavioral needs, etc.

Accordingly, two caseworkers with 10 cases each could be handling very different workloads if one has many families with multiple children or multiple challenges (e.g., mental health needs and substance use disorders). One employee’s caseload may be comparatively less time-consuming, stressful, and complex (e.g., GPS cases with single-child families), while another portfolio of 10 cases may be overwhelming (e.g., CPS cases and cases with multiple children and multiple social support needs).

OCYF has proposed revisions to Chapter 3131 regulations which will reduce caseload size requirements, specifically calling for a reduction in caseworker to family ratio to 1:20 in the first fiscal year of implementation and further to 1:10-15 by the third year and ongoing.⁸⁹ In addition, the Needs Based Plan and Budget bulletin has informed counties of OCYF’s intent to reduce the caseworker to family ratio, encouraging counties to increase their staffing complement to prepare for implementation of these updated regulations.⁹⁰

PCYA’s January 2018 position paper succinctly says, “It has been clear for many years that the current regulatory requirement of maintaining caseload sizes at 30 cases per caseworker is unrealistic. It is simply impossible for a caseworker to be able to effectively meet the requirements of providing services to families with these ratios.”

State of the Child Action Plan: A special report by Auditor General Eugene DePasquale. Page 20.
https://www.paauditor.gov/Media/Default/Reports/RPT_StateofChild_Action_Plan_051618_FINAL.pdf

⁸⁸ Pennsylvania Auditor General: State of the Child Action Plan. Page 20. Accessed April 8, 2024 at https://www.paauditor.gov/Media/Default/Reports/RPT_StateofChild_Action_Plan_051618_FINAL.pdf.

⁸⁹ Pennsylvania Department of Human Services. Pennsylvania 2024 Annual Progress and Services Report at page 360. Accessed May 23, 2024 at <https://www.dhs.pa.gov/docs/Publications/Documents/Child%20Youth%20and%20Family%20Service%20Plan/2024-Pennsylvania-Annual-Progress-Services-Report.pdf>.

⁹⁰ Needs Based Plan and Budget Bulletin Instructions and Appendices, Fiscal Year 2024-2025 Needs Based Plan and Budget, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Office of Children, Youth and Families. Page 44.



Administrative Burdens

Multiple reports analyzing Pennsylvania CCYA caseworker recruitment and retention have highlighted the contribution of administrative burdens to caseworker burnout, including the State of the Child Action Plan and the State Roundtable Report from the Caseworker Retention Work Group. The Action Plan notes that “caseworkers across the Commonwealth spoke ad infinitum about the burdensome and unnecessary information they must gather – and enter – within a tight timeframe for each case. Adding to the burden is the fact that one case could involve multiple children, meaning all the data must be collected for each child – plus each family member, each caregiver, each potential caregiver, and each person who has regular contact with the family.”⁹¹

Findings from CCYA caseworker focus groups and the employee survey suggest similar concerns. As two survey respondents commented:

- *“Managers and decision-makers who are making policies and decisions based on their time as caseworkers may not have a realistic view of how long it takes to complete paperwork and what it entails.”*
- *“Not everything is necessary – we have paperwork that is not required by the state, 2–3-page intake document that could be reduced to a paragraph and has information that is captured in other places or not necessary.”*

CCYA leadership generally acknowledged that state requirements are reasonable. But beyond the state requirements for responding to CPS cases and as suggested in the quotes above, agencies set additional policies related to paperwork and documentation. For instance, one county described a policy requiring caseworkers to submit paperwork within seven days – but it was noted that this was an agency policy only and not required for compliance with state regulations. Paperwork and documentation may also be artifices of prior regulations or policies, and no longer needed. Further, caseworkers may be burdened by outdated or inefficient processes imposed by courts or other county departments like finance or human resources.

Selection from State Roundtable Caseworker Retention Work Group

*“Through the OCYF county reviews, it was determined that while OCYF guidance was certainly needed to further examine this issue at the state level, conversations also need to occur at the local county level. While the majority of documentation is required by laws and regulations, **some is attached to local county policies and internal practice. It is recommended that counties review local documentation for duplication and current relevancy.**” (Emphasis Added)*

Source: 2019 State Roundtable Report – Caseworker Retention,” State Roundtable Caseworker Retention Work Group, Pennsylvania Office of Children and Families in the Courts

⁹¹State of the Child Action Plan: A special report by Auditor General Eugene DePasquale. Page 20. Accessed April 8, 2024 at https://www.paauditor.gov/Media/Default/Reports/RPT_StateofChild_Action_Plan_051618_FINAL.pdf.



In addition to reviewing paperwork to identify opportunities for streamlined data entry and reduced duplication, caseworkers suggested other opportunities to make documentation less of a burden. For instance, counties may use clerical staff or case aides to assist with some data entry.

Technology

Several focus group attendees advocated for CCYA investments in technology that improves efficiency and reduces time spent entering or finding information. In the employee survey, several responses to the question “What technology or equipment would be helpful for you to have?” were not related to technology, but instead referenced adding administrative staff to assist with records management and preparation of case notes, letters, police reports, and other paperwork. As one survey respondent answered:

“A secretary that does all pertinent CAPS paperwork. I want to be free to meet families, investigate, and suss out needs. I think paperwork and CAPS clunkiness is a burden on my time that is not the work itself. It is work to compile what the work actually is. Minimizing the time needed to upload the work done is so important. I am not a data entry clerk. I am an investigator of child abuse and neglect.”

The State of the Child Action Plan also highlighted potential improvements, including streamlining of the Child Welfare Information System (CWIS) to identify missing items on forms so that county workers can correct them easily. OCYF leadership at the time agreed that changes within CWIS could contribute to reducing time spent on manual entry.⁹²

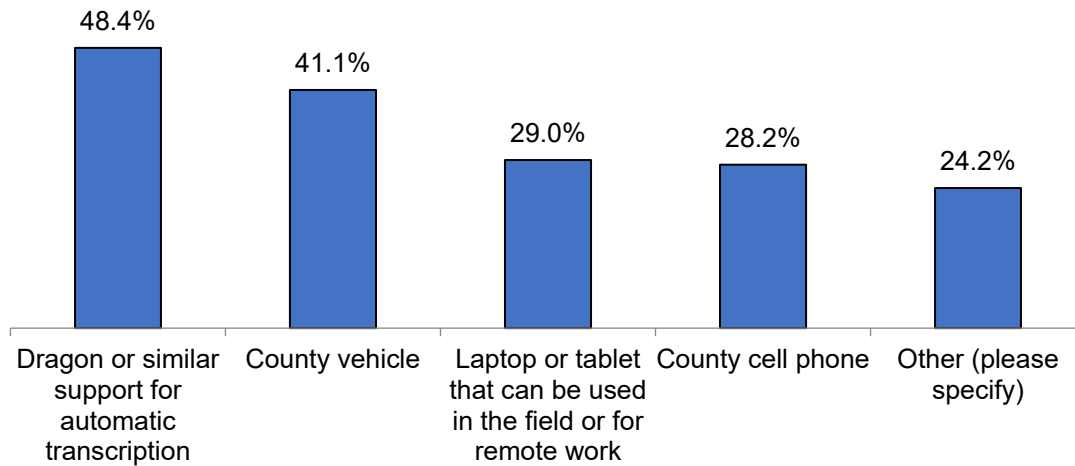
While the burdens of heavy workloads and caseloads – especially against the backdrop of escalating vacancy – can be overwhelming, caseworkers in focus groups noted that technological options could be helpful in managing caseloads more efficiently. For example, in response to the question in the employee survey “What technology or equipment do you [currently] have that is helpful?” the most frequent response was “Laptop or tablet that can be used in the field or for remote work.” This finding is consistent with focus group commentary, where caseworkers noted the ability to enter case notes while in the field and to perform tasks such as getting signatures, printing, or scanning forms without having to return to the office decreases the amount of time that they need to spend on paperwork and away from direct work with families. Other benefits include improving the accuracy of case notes and observations by recording them onsite instead of waiting until returning to the office, as well as potentially reducing overtime or extra hours needed to comply with paperwork and data entry requirements.

Additional technological options identified by focus group attendees that could improve efficiency – and reduce job-related stress – included transcription technology, wi-fi hotspots (or cell phones that can be used for reliable internet access), and electronic signature technology to enable signing of forms and case plans in the field.

⁹² State of the Child Action Plan: A special report by Auditor General Eugene DePasquale (2017). Page 21.



**“What Technology or Equipment Would Be Helpful for You to Have?”
Caseworker 1, 2, and 3s (N = 124)**



Emerging technology may also offer opportunities to expedite some time-consuming tasks. Allegheny and Washington counties use AI-enabled software (natural language processing) to let caseworkers analyze past files and notes for keywords. Not only does this potentially reduce “administrative burden by 20 percent,” according to the vendor, but it also allows supervisors to run queries on specific topics to assist in training and coaching, as well as helping caseworkers prepare for court and case reviews.⁹³

Partner/Stakeholder Relationships

Child welfare agencies’ success depends heavily on a network of capable, engaged, and supportive stakeholders, including the general public. Feedback from CCYA staff and leadership across the Commonwealth indicates challenges in developing and maintaining these networks, though the difficulties are not unique to Pennsylvania.

More than 60 percent of respondents to PFM’s staff survey agreed or strongly agreed that public perception is an important factor in their agency’s recruitment and retention efforts. But only 7 percent concurred that the general public understands the work children and youth services caseworkers do. In focus group feedback, CCYA staff indicated that this disconnect impacts morale and helps drive caseworker turnover. The survey and focus group responses align with research indicating that public perception of child welfare work affects caseworkers’ job satisfaction and intent to leave.

In every county PFM visited, focus group participants raised the 2023 arrests of child welfare workers in Lackawanna and Adams County, citing news coverage as damaging to the profession’s image and how they believe their work – and they – are perceived. While focus group participants indicated that the public perceives their work as “breaking up families,” they noted that decisions to keep children

⁹³ Fox-Sowell, Sophia, “Pennsylvania county taps natural language processing to help child welfare caseworkers,” Statescoop.com. September 22, 2023.

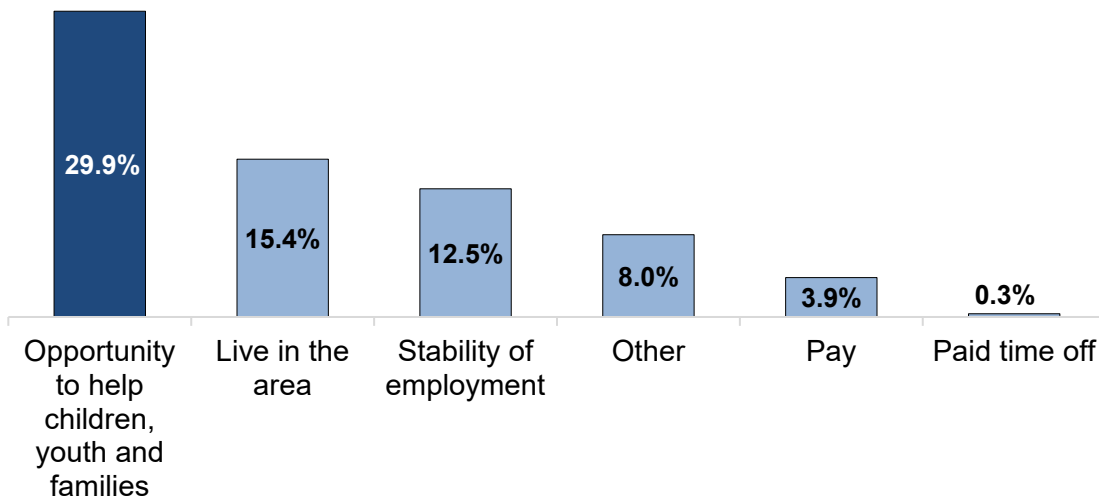


in potentially dangerous homes can also see negative community reaction, creating a no-win situation for CCYA staff.

Under the umbrella of the “general public” are a variety of external partners and stakeholders who help determine caseworkers’ working conditions and service efficiency, efficacy, and equity. Mutual understanding and strong relationships between CCYAs and stakeholders can affect CCYA staff job performance and satisfaction, as well as outcomes for children and families. But lack of cooperation, coordination and collaboration can have the opposite impact.

As noted earlier, low compensation and high workload undercut morale and drive attrition. These effects can be amplified if caseworkers (often mission-driven) see their efforts as not only unappreciated, but unsuccessful – employee survey results indicated that the opportunity to help children, youth and families is the main reason CCYA staff chose to join their agency, cited as the primary motivator by nearly 30 percent of respondents (almost twice as often as any other).

**“What Is the Primary Reason You Chose to Join Your Agency?”
All Responses (N = 311)**



External partners control or influence key elements of caseworkers’ working conditions, organizational culture, and day-to-day experiences on the job.

- **County commissioners** vote on compensation and pay plans – a primary driver of recruitment and retention – in public venues, making implied judgments about the relative value of children, youth and family services while allocating limited resources.



- **Local and state police** are investigative partners and can join home visits, particularly where there is reason to believe a crime has been committed and/or when child welfare staff feel unsafe or might benefit from an officer's perspective and authority.
- **The judiciary and legal community** – judges, court staff and attorneys – can ensure that child welfare workers are treated with respect in courtroom settings and enjoy consistent decisions and well-coordinated processes and paperwork.
- **Educators, school officials and hospital staff** can engage with caseworkers regarding children who may be victims of maltreatment or abuse, or who are currently receiving services.
- And **state officials** can provide support – through funding and technical assistance – that aligns with proclamations of appreciation.

While there are instances of collaboration with and among these partners throughout the Commonwealth, Pennsylvania caseworkers' and managers' general sense of being misunderstood and undervalued extends across the groups listed above. Employee survey and focus group feedback also reflected a perceived lack of respect and appreciation for caseworkers from attorneys, hospital staff, appointed county leaders, and/or county colleagues (e.g., finance/HR). In varying combinations in different locales, some or all of these were characterized as limiting CCYAs' ability to maximize efficiency and effectiveness, build a strong, positive organizational culture, and strengthen employee morale and performance.

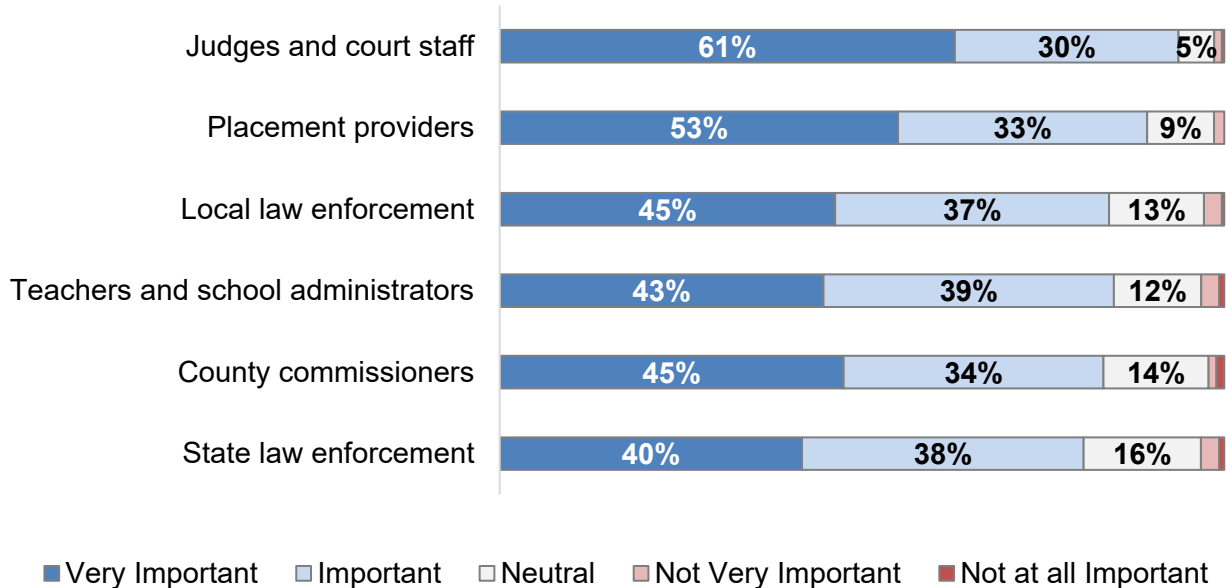
Key Partner Roles and Significance

Employee survey results indicate that Pennsylvania CCYA staff recognize the important ways various partners impact retention of child welfare workers: across six external partners, employee survey respondents rated all six highly for their importance to caseworker retention.



“For Caseworker Retention, How Important Are Your Agency’s Relationship and Collaboration with Each of the Stakeholders Listed Below?”

All Responses (N = 292)



County elected and appointed leadership and interdisciplinary colleagues

County commissioners set agency budgets and compensation plans, and focus group feedback indicated strong beliefs about the implications of these budgets in terms of how caseworkers are valued.

But county leadership goes beyond elected officials. Focus group participants and survey respondents also cited issues with county human services department leadership and/or county executives who they viewed as failing to advocate for them with commissioners. Appointed leaders or executives can also impact employee satisfaction with decisions affecting scheduling, remote work opportunities, technology access, or other departmental practices and policies, especially when CCYA staff do not perceive them as understanding the nuances of caseworker schedules, workload, and technology needs.

Further, county departments like human resources and finance can be productive partners with the proper resources and capacity, from creative recruitment efforts to prompt and accurate payment of invoices. Interdepartmental or interagency relationships frequently hinge on leadership, and 66 percent of survey respondents said county leadership is influential or very influential in whether they choose to remain with their agency.



Law enforcement

“Law enforcement agents play a pivotal role in the prevention and investigation of child abuse and neglect while helping to make communities safer for children and families,” according to the Casey Foundation.⁹⁴ And research has found that collaborative relationships between law enforcement and child welfare agencies can produce better results not just for children, youth and families, but for law enforcement personnel and child welfare workers. This includes but is not limited to investigations: on home visits, law enforcement officers can assist by keeping child welfare workers safe, assessing the situation as first responders, sharing information, and following protocols that minimize trauma to children.⁹⁵

But there is also a power imbalance between police and child welfare workers...if police call for a child welfare worker at a scene, a caseworker must go. But if a caseworker asks for a police officer on a home visit, the officer is not necessarily obligated to respond.

The interaction between child welfare professionals and law enforcement officers and investigators can impact outcomes for children and families, and thus influence caseworkers' job satisfaction. A review of working arrangements and relationships between child welfare staff and law enforcement officers in two Colorado counties reports that “the likelihood increases for children and families to get the services they need when CPS social workers and law enforcement officers work in a collaborative manner,” adding that law enforcement professionals and child welfare professionals also benefit from “better investigations, better interactions with the families, and supportive, complementary skills.”

The paper goes on to cite a study of a program for drug-exposed children that found only half of the children removed from their homes by law enforcement officers were referred to child welfare services when law enforcement officers were the sole investigators: “Collaboration not only emerges as the best strategy for providing a more holistic and integrated approach for meeting the needs of children and families, it promotes balance and bridges gaps in service delivery between and among helping agencies.”⁹⁶

⁹⁴ Child Welfare Information Gateway. (2018). What is child welfare? A guide for law enforcement. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Children's Bureau. Page 1. Accessed March 7, 2024 at <https://www.childwelfare.gov/resources/what-child-welfare-guide-law-enforcement/>.

⁹⁵ Child Welfare Information Gateway. (2018). What is child welfare? A guide for law enforcement. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Children's Bureau. Pages 3-4. Accessed March 7, 2024 at <https://www.childwelfare.gov/resources/what-child-welfare-guide-law-enforcement/>.

⁹⁶ Lindsey, Viola W., "Child Abuse Investigations: How CPS and Law Enforcement Engage in Collaboration" (2011). Loma Linda University Electronic Theses, Dissertations & Projects. 41. Pages 13-14. Accessed March 6, 2024 at <https://scholarsrepository.llu.edu/etd/41>.



Encouraging Collaboration through MDITs and CACs*

Pennsylvania’s Child Protective Services Law (CPSL) requires each county district attorney to convene a multidisciplinary investigative team (MDIT) that includes at minimum law enforcement, a CCYA representative, and a health care provider. OCYF has developed and updated a Model Set of Standards for MDITs, which must meet at least monthly and coordinate child abuse investigations between county agencies and law enforcement (participation by both is required by law).

The CPSL requires that MDIT protocols include “standards and procedures to be used in receiving and referring reports and coordinating investigations” and “a system for sharing investigative information obtained as a result of any interview” along with “any other standards and procedures that will help avoid duplication of factfinding efforts and minimize the trauma to the child.”

OCYF’s Model Standards encourage inclusion of additional parties on an MDIT, citing National Children’s Alliance standards that suggest incorporating a mental health professional, a victim advocate, and children’s advocacy center (CAC) staff if the county has a CAC. The OCYF standards note a long list of additional potential representatives, including guardians, solicitors, local and federal investigators, school personnel, and probation officers.

CACs offer “a separate, accessible, child-focused setting designed to provide a safe, comfortable, and neutral place where forensic interviews can be conducted and other CAC services can be appropriately provided for children and families” – centers may be located in a non-profit or county office, for example, and may be staffed by “an executive director, a forensic interviewer, a Pediatric Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner, a victim advocate, a scheduling assistant, a family advocate,” and other MDIT participants or stakeholders.

Sample documents in the MDIT model standards include interagency agreements/memoranda of understanding and protocols addressing coordination and facilitation of activities, information-sharing, conducting of forensic interviews, and other collaborative opportunities.

*Information and quotes from “Model Set of Standards for Pennsylvania’s Multidisciplinary Investigative Teams,” Pennsylvania DHS OCYF. Revised July 2021. Accessed March 14, 2024 at https://pccyfs.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Model-Set-of-Standards-for-Pennsylvanias-Multidisciplinary-Investigative-Teams_released-July-2021.pdf.

There is also a power imbalance between police and child welfare workers, as noted in literature and by CCYA staff – in one focus group session, a participant pointed out that if police call for a child welfare worker at a scene, a caseworker must go. But if a caseworker asks for a police officer on a home visit, the officer is not necessarily obligated to respond. Law enforcement is one of three entities



(along with a CCYA and a health care provider) required as a member of state-mandated county multidisciplinary investigative teams to be convened by county district attorneys (see sidebar on MDITs and CACs). In focus group feedback, CCYA staff did not reference these meetings often. When they did, they did not appear to regard MDIT meetings as productive or helpful.

Courts and the legal community

More than 90 percent of employee survey respondents deemed judges and court staff “important” or “very important” to caseworker retention. The importance of judges, court staff, attorneys and mediators to caseworkers’ success and family outcomes is recognized in various research, as well as in initiatives like the Pennsylvania Office of Children and Families in the Courts (OCFC) roundtable work on caseworker recruitment and retention.

“Like the child welfare agency, courts make life-altering decisions that affect families for generations; thus, collaboration and coordination between the courts and agencies are critical to truly strengthening the safety, well-being, and permanency outcomes for children and families,” according to a U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) brief on agency-court collaboration in Louisiana.⁹⁷ But this important decision-making is not always carried out in a coordinated, cooperative or collaborative manner: “Different staffing, structures, responsibilities, expectations, and communication between agencies and court systems can complicate or even stall collaborative efforts.”⁹⁸

Complicating this for caseworkers is the sense that they – not others in the judicial arena – will still be seen as responsible for outcomes. In the words of one CCYA focus group participant, “If something bad happens, it’s not the juvenile court master in the [news media].” Further, and short of disastrous outcomes that draw media attention, lack of collaboration and cooperation can still hamper caseworkers’ success in serving families; this can be damaging to retention in a field where the ability to make a difference for children and families is a primary motivator for staff.

The broader stakeholder community (e.g., service providers, education and medical professionals and staff, news media, and the “general public”)

Turning to the broader community, CCYAs have an array of potential collaborators: partner providers (private and non-profit, discussed in this report’s review of contracting for services); educators and school officials (particularly with regard to mandatory reporting and truancy); hospital staff; families served by the child welfare system; news media; state elected and appointed officials; and the

⁹⁷ Rhenda Hodnett, Ph.D., L.C.S.W., assistant secretary, Louisiana Department of Children and Family Services, Child Welfare Division; and Mark Harris, court improvement program coordinator, Pelican Center for Children and Families, New Orleans, Louisiana. “Louisiana: A Program Improvement Plan Made Successful Through Agency and Court Collaboration,” *Children’s Bureau Express* Sept. 2019 (Vol. 20, No. 7). Accessed March 8, 2024 at <https://cbexpress.acf.hhs.gov/article/2019/september/louisiana-a-program-improvement-plan-made-successful-through-agency-and-court-collaboration/3c6933b51b3e8910517620efe54bcb0e>.

⁹⁸ Child Welfare Information Gateway. (2023). Court improvement programs: Collaboration between child welfare agencies and the legal and judicial community. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Children’s Bureau. Page 2. Accessed March 11, 2024 at https://cwig-prod-prod-drupal-s3fs-us-east-1.s3.amazonaws.com/public/documents/cip_collaboration.pdf?VersionId=NycFA62mNDhkhZ59o6fTKHswHaZ2DQdL.



“general public” whose perception CCYA staff and management view as an important driver of recruitment and retention.

Aligned with the feedback received from CCYA staff across the Commonwealth regarding the importance of public perception to caseworker retention, research “has identified that the way in which child welfare workers believe they are perceived by society has an impact on the way in which they work and even on their intentions to remain employed.”⁹⁹

Utilizing an instrument known as the Perceptions of Child Welfare Scale, researchers found that child welfare workers’ and administrators’ job satisfaction and intent to leave their position can be negatively affected across four domains related to how they believe the public perceives them: blame, nature of the work, respect, and stigma. (Blame emerged in a study of public agency staff; it had not been present as a predictor in private worker validation studies.)¹⁰⁰

The Public Perceptions of Child Welfare Scale was designed to measure workers’ beliefs about how the public views their work. Results indicated four domains: blame, stigma, nature of work, and respect.

BLAME
When a child welfare tragedy occurs, workers can be targeted and often feel blamed directly by the media. This perceived blame can heighten workers’ feelings of job insecurity and cause them to consider leaving their jobs.

NATURE OF THE WORK
How workers perceive their jobs may influence turnover. Workers want meaningful work that makes a difference in the lives of others, and the correlation between higher perceived public respect and lower intent to leave the public child welfare job may reflect this need.

RESPECT
Although it is important for staff to feel respected from within their own organization, this study suggests the significance of respect within the social or public environment as well.

STIGMA
Stigma-by-association occurs when those in close contact with people who are socially devalued are also stigmatized. Child welfare workers experience this stigma due to their work with involuntary clients who are often vilified.

Public Perceptions of Child Welfare Scale¹⁰¹

Researchers also suggest that news media coverage – easily shared, reposted, and forwarded via various social media platforms – drives perception of child welfare workers by the public, which “has limited first-hand knowledge or experience with the social work profession. Thus, media portrayals of ineffective, untrained, and even cruel social workers influence the way the public views social workers, in general, and child welfare workers, specifically.”¹⁰² Making matters worse, child welfare workers’ role serving children and families in challenging circumstances can make them “subject to

⁹⁹ Charles Auerbach, Wendy Zeitlin, Astraea Augsberger, Catherine K. Lawrence, Nancy Claiborne, Societal factors impacting child welfare: Re-validating the Perceptions of Child Welfare Scale, *Children and Youth Services Review*, Volume 62, 2016. Pages 65-71. ISSN 0190-7409, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2016.01.020>. Abstract accessed March 13, 2024 at <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0190740916300202>.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Four factors and related graphic from National Child Welfare Workforce Institute’s one-page summary “Impact of Public Perception on Child Welfare Workers.” Based on Lawrence, C. K., Zeitlin, W., Auerbach, C., Chakravarty, S., & Rienks, S. (2018). Measuring the impact of public perceptions on child welfare workers. *Journal of Public Child Welfare*.

Additional note regarding “blame” emerging in public worker validation studies (not present in private worker studies) from abstract accessed March 13, 2024 at <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/15548732.2018.1508537>.

¹⁰² Charles Auerbach, Wendy Zeitlin, Astraea Augsberger, Catherine K. Lawrence, Nancy Claiborne, Societal factors impacting child welfare: Re-validating the Perceptions of Child Welfare Scale, *Children and Youth Services Review*, Vol. 62, 2016. Pages 65-71. Abstract accessed March 13, 2024 at <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0190740916300202>.



intensified media attention, especially surrounding the death of a child in care,”¹⁰³ or, for that matter, a child whose family has been reported to ChildLine or visited by caseworkers while the child remains in the home. In the absence of any routine messaging that emphasizes child welfare workers’ challenges, contributions and successes, occasional news cycles dominated by negative coverage would be the only information most daily news consumers have to go on.

Example of Child Welfare Disinformation



In the end, public perception does not just affect caseworkers’ and managers’ professional success and fulfillment; it can have direct impact on their working environments as well. “Public perceptions of child welfare workers influence organizational policy and practice.” Organizationally, negative attention can turn organizational climate and culture toward “tension, fear and distrust,” and “may also influence human resource decisions such as the hiring and firing of agency staff.” And a real or perceived public spotlight can even drive individual caseworker decisions – “for example, a worker may advocate placing a child in out of home care as a ‘safer’ placement option than preventative services in the home.”¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ Charles Auerbach, Wendy Zeitlin, Astraea Augsberger, Catherine K. Lawrence, Nancy Claiborne, Societal factors impacting child welfare: Re-validating the Perceptions of Child Welfare Scale, *Children and Youth Services Review*, Vol. 62, 2016. Pages 65-71. Abstract accessed March 13, 2024 at <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0190740916300202>.

¹⁰⁴ Charles Auerbach, Wendy Zeitlin, Astraea Augsberger, Catherine K. Lawrence, Nancy Claiborne, Societal factors impacting child welfare: Re-validating the Perceptions of Child Welfare Scale, *Children and Youth Services Review*, Vol. 62, 2016. Pages 65-71. Abstract accessed March 13, 2024 at <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0190740916300202>.



Focus on Rural Communities*

Of Pennsylvania's 67 counties, 48 are rural, according to the Pennsylvania General Assembly's Center for Rural Pennsylvania. These counties included nearly 3.4 million residents, or more than a quarter of Pennsylvania's population, in 2020. A U.S. Department of Human Services issue brief notes that "issues and circumstances affecting children and families in rural areas are different than those in urban and suburban areas, creating opportunities and challenges for child welfare professionals in rural practice."

Rural community strengths include the idea of social capital, "resources built over time through relationships and trust. In rural communities, people tend to have known each other for a longer period and have reciprocal relationships." These residents, connected by "informal networks of neighbors, churches, and civic groups," may be more likely than urban residents to help neighbors in need, including children whose caregivers are violent or dealing with substance use disorders, for example. But the brief also points to challenges in rural communities, where children have higher incidences of maltreatment and abuse than in major urban areas:

- Poverty and child poverty are greater in rural areas, which tend to have more intense and persistent poverty
- Education disparities exist, with fewer rural residents attaining college or postgraduate education
- Employment opportunities may be harder to find
- Substance use is a problem, with drug-related deaths higher in rural areas
- Child and family trauma may be more prevalent in rural and tribal areas "because of historical trauma, abuse and neglect, poverty, domestic violence, addiction, and the lack of trauma-specific and preventative services. There is a growing need for trauma-informed care in rural communities. Veterans and their families may be particularly vulnerable."
- Travel distances and lack of public transportation can make it difficult to access training, child visits, and visits with specialists, and access to mobile phone and Internet service may be limited

Child welfare staff may find it difficult to avoid nonprofessional interactions or relationships with clients and families in more close-knit rural communities, raising potential ethical concerns. And caseworkers must consider rural culture:

"[M]any rural residents have traditionally valued self-reliance, are wary of 'outsiders,' and may find the modern social service delivery model highly depersonalizing and clinical. A caseworker's well-meaning efforts to maintain professional distance from clients, for example, may come across as rude and impersonal."

Further, efforts to serve racially and ethnically diverse clientele may encounter obstacles like difficulty finding bilingual mental health service providers in the area. And "because rural areas tend to have fewer families who are willing and able to offer placement to LGBTQ youth, young people requiring out-of-home care are also at risk of being placed outside their communities."

* Quotes and information from Child Welfare Information Gateway. (2018). *Rural child welfare practice*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Children's Bureau. Accessed March 7, 2024 at <https://www.childwelfare.gov/resources/rural-child-welfare-practice/>. Exception is Pa. rural county count: "Rural-Urban Definitions," Center for Rural Pennsylvania. Accessed March 7, 2024 at <https://www.rural.pa.gov/data/rural-urban-definitions>.

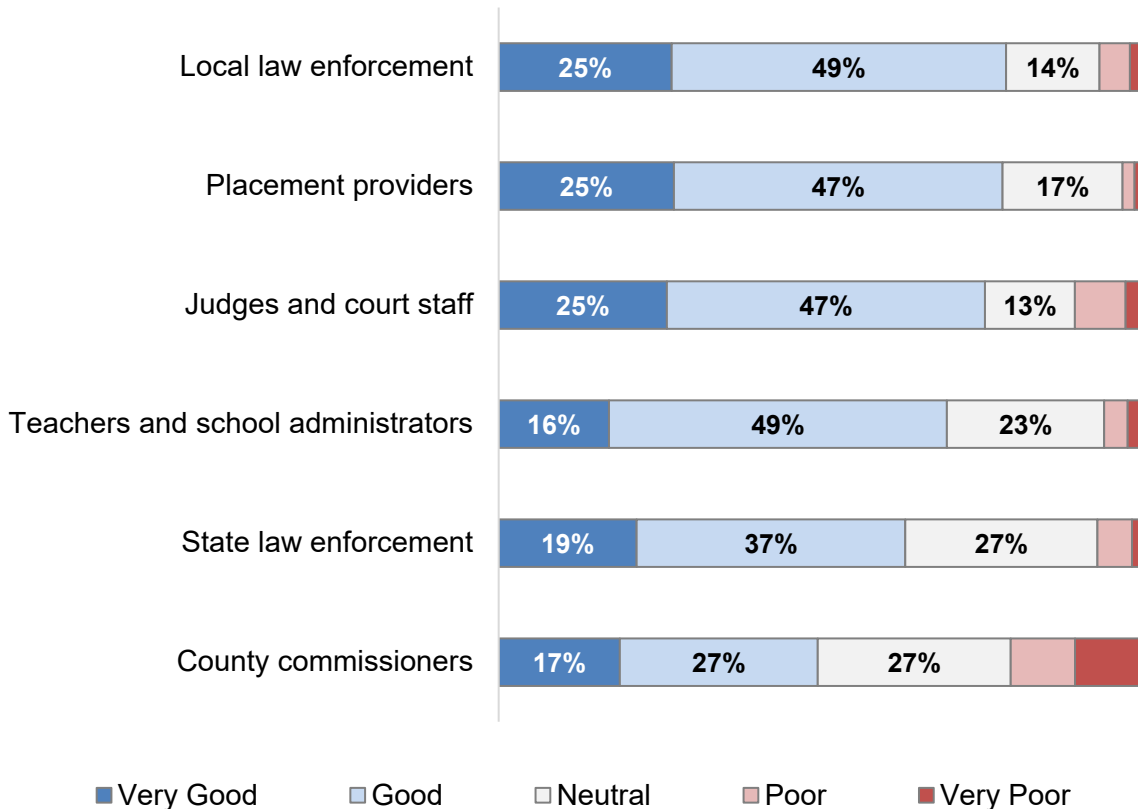


Experience in Pennsylvania

While three in five employee survey respondents characterized public perception as “important” or “very important” to recruitment and retention, they provided a bleak assessment of the public’s understanding of their work. Similarly, caseworker focus group participants cited poor public perception of their work as a job stressor and challenge to retention.

Along with sharing thoughts on general public perception of their work, CCYA staff participating in the employee survey rated relationships and collaboration with six key stakeholders. While survey respondents rated all six at or above 77 percent “important” or “very important” to caseworker retention, ratings for relationships and collaboration were not always strong. Still, a quarter of respondents scored their agencies’ relationships with placement providers, judges and court staff, and local law enforcement as “very good,” and four of the six stakeholders totaled at least 65 percent “good” or “very good” relationship and collaboration ratings. The two exceptions were county commissioners and state law enforcement (44.2 percent and 56.7 percent “good” or “very good,” respectively).

“Please Rate Your Agency’s Relationship and Collaboration with Each of The Key Stakeholders Listed Below”
All Responses (N = 292)





County commissioners – who often must balance community pressure for reduced spending and lower taxes against the need to ensure competitive and appropriate compensation for county staff – scored lowest for relationship quality in the employee survey. County commissioners also had the highest negative ratings. Nearly 18 percent of respondents characterized their agency’s relationship with commissioners as “poor” or “very poor.”

As indicated earlier, public perception can drive organizational decision-making. Public perception may impact county commissioners’ decision-making around compensation adjustments for CCYA staff; whether elected officials are motivated by public opinion or by legitimate concern for internal equity, focus group participants also indicated that commissioners express concern about providing raises for some county workers (i.e., CCYA staff) and not others.

Survey comments regarding commissioners reflected an awareness that they must address competing priorities and may benefit from more active state engagement; comments also noted roles played by appointed county and department leadership.

Focus groups identified commissioners as important to compensation; while commissioners may issue proclamations or participate in appreciation events for CCYA staff, these actions were characterized as frustrating by focus group participants who felt their pay did not reflect recognition of their efforts. Relatedly, CCYA staff generally indicated they do not believe commissioners fully understand what a child welfare agency does.

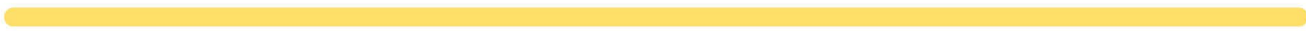
Department of Human Services and CCYA leadership were noted as important for their relationships with external stakeholders and as potential advocates or decision-makers regarding compensation and amenities like hybrid scheduling. Meanwhile, other county agencies and external stakeholders (e.g., finance and HR functions, law enforcement, courts) were highlighted as important to achieving effective coordination and cooperation.

CCYA Employee Survey Comments on County Leadership

- “County Commissioners should be educated on what the agency does.”
- “County Commissioners are either not aware of the grave issues with the Agency or they are choosing to ignore them. It's very concerning.”
- “The current Human Services and county leadership do not seem to value the importance of succession planning.”
- “The agency needs the state to set pay parameters for child welfare workers. The current process allows politics to come into play. The state blames the county, the county blames the state.”
- “Our County Exec refuses to consider telework and it is very apparent to all that he does not respect or prioritize our staff given the very challenging nature of our work.”

Source: Employee Survey

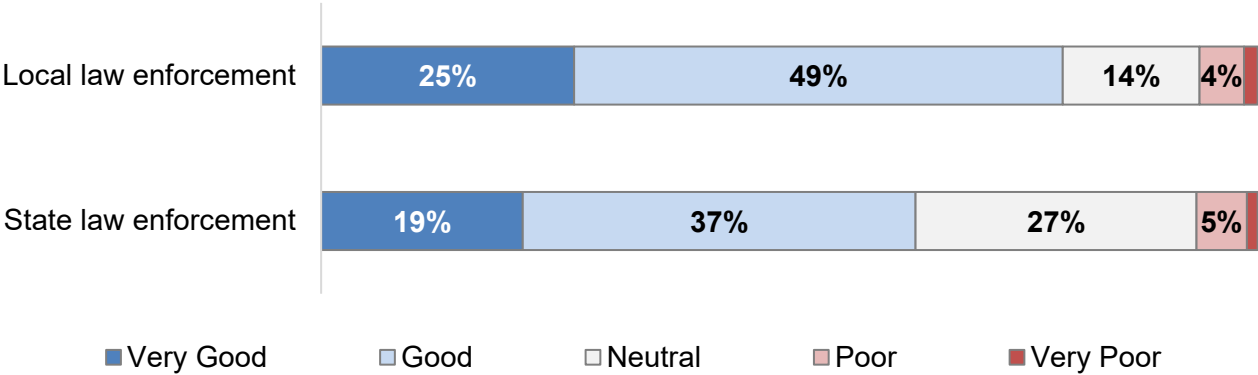
CCYA staff reported varying quality of relationships with law enforcement from county to county; along with local law enforcement, state police can also be a primary source of support in rural counties.



Focus group participants reported that their working relationships with officers and investigators can be shaped by relationships between CCYA/DHS leadership and stakeholder leadership (e.g., police chiefs). This highlights the importance of relationship-building for CCYA and DHS leaders, but there are challenges: leaders may be strapped for time and unable to dedicate themselves to outreach where caseworker shortages are severe. Further, leadership changes at CCYAs, human services departments, and/or law enforcement agencies can interrupt established relationships and potentially impact workflow as a result.

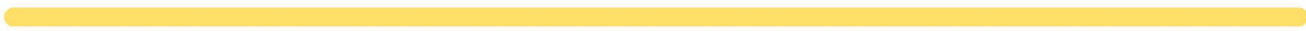
Local law enforcement rated higher than state law enforcement for relationships and collaboration, according to CCYA survey respondents. Local law enforcement was the best-rated among the six key stakeholders assessed, with 74.3 percent “good” or “very good;” state law enforcement – cited in some focus groups as more important in rural counties – totaled 56.7 percent for those two responses, lower than all stakeholders except county commissioners (state police also had a large contingent of “neutral” responses, likely reflecting the fact that CCYAs in urban areas are less likely to engage with state police). Around 6 percent of respondents rated relationships and collaboration with state and local law enforcement as “poor” or “very poor.”

**“Please Rate Your Agency’s Relationship and Collaboration with Each of The Key Stakeholders Listed Below”
All Responses (N = 292)**



In focus group discussions, CCYA concerns centered around personal safety (when police decline to accompany a caseworker on a home visit) and communication (the potential for an officer to disagree with and/or undermine caseworker decisions or authority). On the latter front, focus group participants reported that law enforcement personnel may lack knowledge regarding CCYA responsibilities and processes.

Developing deeper relationships between agency staff and police is helpful, according to focus group participants who reported that personal and/or professional familiarity with law enforcement improves caseworkers’ sense of personal safety and enhances cooperation and coordination. Interestingly, focus group discussions of law enforcement focused mostly on issues around having law enforcement present on home visits to support caseworkers’ sense of personal safety; while state law requires law enforcement and CCYAs to meet at least monthly as part of MDITs, the multidisciplinary investigative

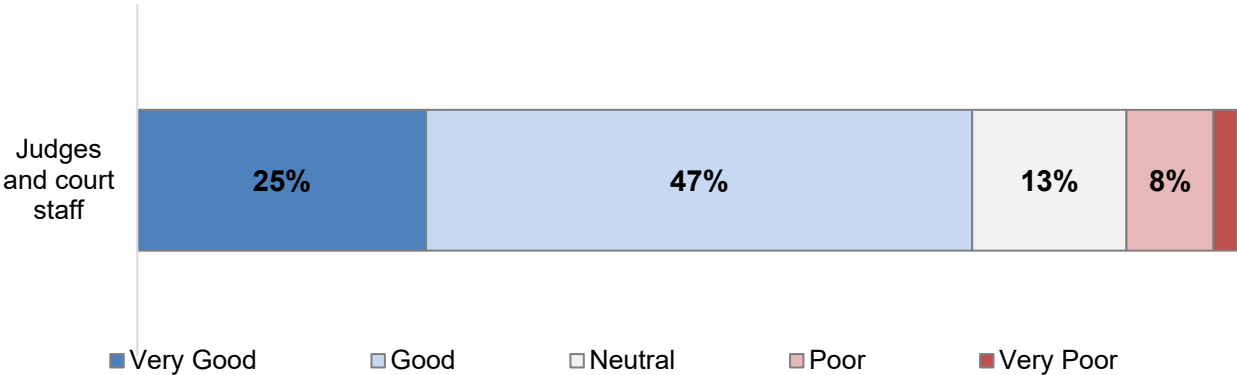


teams were rarely raised in discussions with CCYA staff (when mentioned, the context was usually unfavorable).

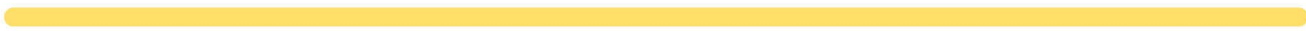
As with law enforcement, CCYA staff indicated varying satisfaction with the courts and legal community from county to county. Focus group participants also identified relationships between CCYA/DHS leadership and key stakeholders – particularly judges – as important to better working relationships for caseworkers engaging with the judicial system. Finally, focus group feedback indicated that CCYA staff feel judges and court staff lack knowledge and understanding of CCYA responsibilities and processes.

Judges and court staff – who ranked highest for importance to caseworker retention among CCYA employee survey respondents – were also highly rated for relationships and collaboration but generated strong feelings. Among the six stakeholders, judges and court staff received the fewest “neutral” or “don’t know” responses. More than 72 percent of respondents characterized relationships and collaboration as “good” or “very good,” second best of the six stakeholders just behind local law enforcement and ahead of placement providers. But 9.6 percent of survey respondents selected “poor” or “very poor,” the highest negative ratings of any stakeholder except county commissioners.

**“Please Rate Your Agency’s Relationship and Collaboration with Each of The Key Stakeholders Listed Below”
All Responses (N = 292)**



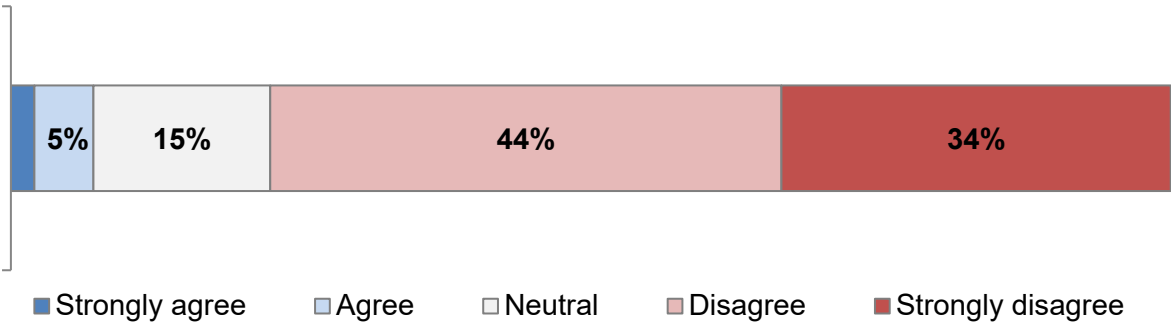
Despite the relatively positive ratings overall, courts were cited in focus group discussions (and interviews with state-level stakeholders) as a source of increased paperwork, as judges or court staff may impose specific preferences on caseworkers in addition to current processes, creating potential for duplication of information across multiple forms. Caseworkers and managers also related challenges building credibility with new judges and preparing for court hearings (including cross-examinations), particularly where judges, attorneys and/or court staff were seen as adversarial or unappreciative of child welfare workers’ perspective or recommendations. Relatedly, focus group participants indicated a lack of knowledge by judges and court staff regarding CCYA responsibilities and processes.



In focus groups and survey responses, CCYA staff expressed concern about their public perception and support from a variety of community partners including state elected officials, educators and other mandatory reporters, community leaders/organizations, and provider networks.

For example, caseworkers may be viewed as “breaking up families” or “baby snatchers” when removing children from dangerous situations – even though caseworkers go through extraordinary measures to keep families unified whenever possible. These negative public perceptions are amplified on social media like Facebook and TikTok, where dissatisfied clients or family members can air complaints and levy accusations (true or not) against caseworkers in forums where caseworkers are likely to see them. Bound by confidentiality, however, caseworkers and CCYAs cannot respond directly.

**“The General Public Understands the Work Children and Youth Services Caseworkers Do”
All Responses (N = 295)**



Arrests of Lackawanna and Adams County caseworkers during the summer of 2023 were cited in the vast majority of focus groups as detrimental to the child welfare profession and employees’ sense of how people see them. Both episodes were the subject of news media coverage at the charging stage (as of mid-March 2024, the Lackawanna County charges have been dismissed, and the county’s district attorney is appealing; Adams County defendants have asked the judge in their proceedings to draw on the Lackawanna decision). In line with research findings cited earlier, CCYA staff indicated a great deal of sensitivity to the potential impact of news coverage on public perception of them and their work, even when the counties in question were in a different area of the state. Concerns regarding criminal charges and liability can add to caseworkers’ stress and prompt thoughts of a shift to another profession, within or outside the social work sphere.



York Daily Record

3 Adams County Children and Youth workers charged with child endangerment

15-month-old Iris Mummert died at the hands of her mother, who alleges CYS workers did little to stop a preventable tragedy.
Aug 1, 2023

Scranton Times-Tribune

Five Lackawanna County child protection workers charged with endangering eight children, investigators charge

Five current and retired Lackawanna County Office of Youth and Family Services staffers endangered eight children...
Jun 28, 2023

In smaller counties, CCYA staff talked about the additional pressure of encountering clients at community events (notably, some of these encounters are positive) – working in a smaller population center or community where people are more likely to know one another and see one another at places like church or the grocery store can reduce caseworkers’ relative anonymity and privacy. Although they are proud of the work they do, CCYA staff members expressed a desire for more assertive and proactive community and communications outreach highlighting their contributions, combatting negative news media coverage and enhancing public perception of child welfare professionals and their work.

Best Practices

Collaboration emerges as the ideal in child welfare agencies’ relationships with external stakeholders, especially in literature focused on child welfare agencies’ interaction with law enforcement and the courts. Discussions contrast collaboration with cooperation and coordination; one study distinguishes them as follows:¹⁰⁵

Cooperative working arrangements ... across organizational boundaries are informal and lack rigid structure. Each agency functions separately and without consideration for the other’s goals; interactions are based on an as-needed basis. As such, partners in cooperative arrangements are not necessarily helpful in assisting each other to achieve their goals....

In coordinated arrangements, staff and administrators may alter their work hours to accommodate the needs of another agency, but each agency remains independent from the other. Communication roles and channels for interaction are more formalized, but each agency maintains its own set of goals, structure, and responsibilities; neither agency is accountable to the other....

[C]ollaboration requires a firmly established and active relationship to foster mutually improved outcomes.... Collaboration requires a willingness to work together that

¹⁰⁵ Lindsey, Viola W., "Child Abuse Investigations: How CPS and Law Enforcement Engage in Collaboration" (2011). Loma Linda University Electronic Theses, Dissertations & Projects. 41. Pages 17-18. Accessed March 6, 2024 at <https://scholarsrepository.llu.edu/etd/41>.



involves high levels of formal as well as informal contacts to achieve efficiency and quality service delivery.

The goal across various external partners, then, is to identify opportunities and methods for building active engagement focused on shared or common goals and outcomes, accommodating differences in agency perspective where necessary while building mutual accountability for achieving positive results for children and families.

Advocating system of care initiatives that seek improved outcomes through means including interagency collaboration and community-based approaches, the Capacity Building Center for States lists several foundational steps for collaboration:

- Identify potential partners
- Develop a shared vision, looking for congruence in missions
- Develop shared goals
- Establish a collaborative infrastructure, including a clear governance structure and specific strategic plan
- Nurture and grow the relationship, including through retreats or cross-training opportunities
- Communicate routinely and transparently, using common language and clarifying professional jargon while encouraging verbal communication along with written documentation to facilitate clear, productive exchanges¹⁰⁶

The report also offers guidance for assessing and evaluating new and existing collaborations and for addressing common challenges (e.g., understanding partner priorities, focusing on shared goals, maintaining regular and open communication).

As noted earlier, collaborative arrangements contribute not just to positive outcomes for children, youth and families and for child welfare professionals and their counterparts in law enforcement and the courts: “While engaged in the collaborative process, the two professions are exposed to opportunities to expand their knowledge and expertise about each other’s profession.... In addition to learning more about the law enforcement profession, CPS professionals have the opportunity to learn more about the criminal justice system; law enforcement professionals have the opportunity to learn about child development and family dynamics matters.”¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ “Building and Sustaining Collaborative Community Relationships,” Capacity Building Center for States. Pages 2-3. Accessed March 13, 2024 at https://capacity.childwelfare.gov/sites/default/files/media_pdf/building-collaborative-communities-cp-00147.pdf.

¹⁰⁷ Lindsey, Viola W., “Child Abuse Investigations: How CPS and Law Enforcement Engage in Collaboration” (2011). Loma Linda University Electronic Theses, Dissertations & Projects. 41. Pages 13-14. Accessed March 6, 2024 at <https://scholarsrepository.llu.edu/etd/41>.



With regard to law enforcement, Casey Family Programs sets out three models for child welfare agency and law enforcement engagement:¹⁰⁸

1. Minimal law enforcement involvement or coordination

- Most states have requirements for cross-system reporting and/or information-sharing among professional entities, so these standards serve as a minimum.

2. Joint collaborative child abuse and neglect investigations

- This may be a simple MOU between local law enforcement and a child welfare agency setting out responsibilities including how to initiate and share reports of abuse, conduct joint investigations, and share oral and written information; also important are protocols for any planning meetings for follow-up on investigations or service delivery.
- More highly structured forms of collaboration include multi-disciplinary teams or children’s advocacy centers, both of which are utilized in Pennsylvania.
- The Casey review notes that the presence of a police investigation increased the likelihood that the child maltreatment referral would be deemed “credible” and that services would be provided. Service provision also increased when law enforcement participated in case planning and when a multidisciplinary team was used.
- Examples of collaboration include:
 - New York hired retired law enforcement officers in Child Protective Services offices to share investigative skills and knowledge while mentoring and training child welfare staff. Texas took a similar tack by funding special investigator roles that allowed people with law enforcement experience to assist child welfare staff with investigations.
 - In Keizer, Oregon, a pilot project placed two CPS case managers at a police station; CPS staff and law enforcement would conduct parent interviews together regarding alleged abuse or neglect.

3. Sole law enforcement investigation responsibilities

- Florida is noted as the only example of this approach, with mixed results.

¹⁰⁸ “Are there good examples of how child welfare agencies are collaborating with law enforcement?” Casey Family Programs, updated January 2018. Accessed March 6, 2024 at https://www.casey.org/media/SComm_Models_Law_Enforcement_fnl.pdf Pages 2 through 5.



An evaluation of the various approaches in different jurisdictions identified the collaborative approach as optimal: “A collaborative effort between law enforcement and child protective services (CPS) is the preferred approach to investigating reports of child maltreatment.”¹⁰⁹

Research cites various methods of encouraging collaboration, including co-location of child welfare agency staff and law enforcement and cross-trainings to help officers and investigators and caseworkers better understand each other’s priorities, responsibilities, language and methods. Note, however, that “co-location, alone does not produce a collaborative arrangement. A willingness to synchronize time and contacts, share resources and ideas, and adjust activities is necessary to realize the full potential for collaboration.”¹¹⁰

CCYA staff members expressed a desire for more assertive and proactive community and communications outreach highlighting their contributions, combatting negative news media coverage, and enhancing public perception of child welfare professionals and their work.

Again, collaboration is cited as the ideal approach to ensuring that the courts and their primary participants (judges, court staff, solicitor, other attorneys, and caseworkers) achieve the best outcomes for children. The importance of these various parties is highlighted in the Office of Children and Families in the Courts’ tips for reducing caseworker stress in the courtroom – while ostensibly targeting caseworkers’ experience, suggestions like “ask if there is anything else you should know to render your decision” (for judges) and “review and practice questions with caseworkers” (for solicitors) would be likely contributors to better outcomes for children, youth and families while enhancing relationships and demonstrating respect and support.

Local collaboration between courts and child welfare agencies may be supported by a statewide focus. Pennsylvania’s most recent Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) indicates focus group participation by judicial and legal representatives, but there may be opportunity for enhanced collaboration. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ Capacity Building Center for Courts suggests benefits include developing and implementing strategies to achieve CFSR goals, and increased state child welfare agency effectiveness when working with courts on the Program Improvement Plan.¹¹¹

Structures for legal system participation include participation on planning committees to creating a CFSR legal-judicial subcommittee. Close collaboration at the state level aligns with the CFSR process

¹⁰⁹ “Collaboration with Law Enforcement Found to Enhance Abuse Investigations,” Children’s Bureau Express, Vol. 4, NO. 8, October 2003. Accessed March 6, 2024 at <https://cbexpress.acf.hhs.gov/article/2003/october/collaboration-with-law-enforcement-found-to-enhance-abuse-investigations/a108008f1b52c150517620efe54bcdb8>.

¹¹⁰ Lindsey, Viola W., “Child Abuse Investigations: How CPS and Law Enforcement Engage in Collaboration” (2011). Loma Linda University Electronic Theses, Dissertations & Projects. 41. Page 18. Accessed March 6, 2024 at <https://scholarsrepository.llu.edu/etd/41>.

¹¹¹ Child Welfare Capacity Building Center for Courts. 2015. How and Why to Involve the Courts in Your Child and Family Services Review: Suggestions for Agency Administrators. Washington, D.C.: Children’s Bureau, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Page 4. Accessed March 12, 2024 at https://capacity.childwelfare.gov/sites/default/files/media_pdf/court-involve-review-cp-00158_0.pdf.



goal of facilitating a deeper understanding of the strengths and needs of the entire child welfare system, not just the state agency with primary responsibility:

It is ... essential that courts and agencies share the responsibility for understanding their system's effectiveness and work collaboratively to make improvements where needed. The CFSR provides that opportunity and the impetus to engage in more effective problem solving than either the courts or agencies may be able to accomplish in isolation.¹¹²

As indicated above, CFSR participation can aid engagement on a state's Program Improvement Plan; in Louisiana, stakeholders from the judiciary and legal community "actually assumed leadership for two of the five PIP strategies: service array and quality legal representation."¹¹³

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Capacity offers an array of more than 70 measures on which to gauge court performance. The Judicial, Court, and Attorney Measures of Performance (JCAMP) cover five topical categories: family engagement; due process; high-quality legal representation; safety; and permanency. Each category includes three types of measures: court process; professional practice; and family experience.

Excerpt from JCAMP Quick Start Guide

	What they do	Example
Court process measures	Measure what happens in the court process, including before, during, and after court. Meant to serve as a starting point for measurement.	3.1 Do parent attorneys attend hearings?
Professional practice measures	Measure what judges and attorneys do during and between hearings.	3.5 How do parent attorneys ensure they provide high-quality legal representation?
Family experience measures	Measure how families experience and perceive the child welfare court system.	3.8 Are parents satisfied with their attorneys' representation?

Measures are not always presented as quantitative (e.g., are important issues discussed in hearings?) but many represent value prompts for discussion that could lead to quantifiable measures.

¹¹² Capacity Building Center for Courts (2016). *How and Why to Involve the Courts in Your Child and Family Services Review: Suggestions for Agency Administrators*. Children's Bureau, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Page 5. Accessed March 16, 2024 at https://capacity.childwelfare.gov/sites/default/files/media_pdf/court-involve-review-cp-00158_0.pdf.

¹¹³ Rhenda Hodnett, Ph.D., L.C.S.W., assistant secretary, Louisiana Department of Children and Family Services, Child Welfare Division; and Mark Harris, court improvement program coordinator, Pelican Center for Children and Families, New Orleans, Louisiana. "Louisiana: A Program Improvement Plan Made Successful Through Agency and Court Collaboration," Children's Bureau Express Sept. 2019 (Vol. 20, No. 7). Accessed March 8, 2024 at <https://cbexpress.acf.hhs.gov/article/2019/september/louisiana-a-program-improvement-plan-made-successful-through-agency-and-court-collaboration/3c6933b51b3e8910517620efe54bcb0e>.



Others, like how parents, children and youth feel they were treated, could be assessed via surveys. A JCAMP Quick Start Guide also recommends tracking demographic data (race, ethnicity, age, Indian Child Welfare Act status) to allow identification and remedying of disparate outcomes among different groups.¹¹⁴ Local courts – whether led by new or experienced judges – and CCYAs, as well as the legal community, may find the measures a valuable conversation-starter around how to emphasize and ensure quality service in the family courts.

The collaborative approach outlined above – establishing shared goals and working together to achieve them while being appreciative and respectful of different roles – should be applied to other stakeholders as well, including educators and school personnel and health care professionals and workers. By convening opportunities to talk about respective and mutual strengths and challenges with a focus on the long-term well-being of children, youth and families, CCYA leadership can establish themselves as community leaders and subject matter experts in their field (note that focus group feedback pinpointed DHS and CCYA leaders as key to establishing positive relationships with partner agencies).

This outreach should be expansive and include disciplines and organizations not traditionally considered part of the child welfare system but having the potential to create a stronger network of community support for families. These include local workforce boards and housing agencies, which were among non-traditional partners in El Paso, Texas which added to its Family Leadership Council, “a multi-system community collaborative with leaders from institutions of higher learning, hospitals, juvenile probation, child welfare, nonprofit agencies, the courts, and community groups.”¹¹⁵

A variety of online sources offer standard suggestions on media relations, including understanding the media’s goals, being clear about CCYA goals and message in reaching out to a reporter or outlet, developing relationships with reporters, and pursuing public service announcements. These are echoed and explored in the National Resource Center for Diligent Recruitment at AdoptUSKids’ Media Toolkit for Child Welfare Leaders. Beyond guidance for establishing strong media relations, the toolkit offers sample press releases, talking points, op-ed pieces, and blog posts regarding National Adoption Month.¹¹⁶

Some support along these lines was provided in the 2018 Caseworker Retention Workgroup report to the Office of Children and Families in the Courts’ State Roundtable. That year’s report included a media messaging guide for CCYAs that highlights a different relevant topic for each month of the year

¹¹⁴ Summers, A., Gatowski, S., & Fromknecht, A. (2022). *Judicial, Court, and Attorney Measures of Performance (JCAMP), Quick start guide*. Children’s Bureau, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Pages 1-3. Accessed March 21, 2024 at https://capacity.childwelfare.gov/sites/default/files/media_pdf/JCAMP%20Quick%20Start%20Guide.pdf. More information available at <https://capacity.childwelfare.gov/courts/topics/jcamp/judicial-court-attorney-measures-of-performance>.

¹¹⁵ Cook, R., Cusick, J., Schachtner, R., & Blocklin, M. (2023). *Child Welfare Community Collaborations Projects At a Glance*. OPRE Report 2023-333, Washington, DC: Office of Research, Planning, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, US Department of Health and Human Services. Page 4. Accessed March 13, 2024 at https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/opre/CWCC%20At%20a%20Glance%20Brief_2023.12.19.pdf.

¹¹⁶ “Media Toolkit for Child Welfare Leaders,” National Resource Center for Diligent Recruitment at AdoptUSKids. Accessed March 15, 2024 at https://ncwwi.org/files/Leadership_and_Management/media-toolkit-for-child-welfare-leaders.pdf.



with topics for consideration, a one-page media message planning tool, and an additional page of strategies and tips for pursuing publicity through internal and external vehicles.

CCYAs in smaller counties with limited resources may not have access to a county communications staff member, let alone an agency employee in that role. And while agency administrators can take the lead, where high vacancy rates leave them carrying other workload, they may not have the time or capacity to develop and implement meaningful media relations or social media strategies.

They also may not have received any substantive media relations training in preparing for their role in social work; one article on building child welfare agencies' capacity to work with the news media noted that, "Ultimately, schools of social work need to work with public child welfare agencies on media-related training and education on how to more systematically develop effective media outreach and proactive practices"¹¹⁷ to avoid an unproductive "circle the wagons" approach and enhance relationships with journalists who can impact public perception of child welfare work.

¹¹⁷ Katharine Briar-Lawson PhD and LMSW, Kelly Martinson MSW, Jen Briar-Bonpane LCSW & Kathryn Zox MEd and MSW (2011) Child Welfare, the Media, and Capacity Building, *Journal of Public Child Welfare*, Volume 5, 2011 – Issue 2-3. Abstract accessed March 16, 2024 at <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/15548732.2011.566754>.



VIII. Caseworker Training

Training and development programs represent important considerations for early-career retention. As noted previously, more than half of CCYA caseworker separations between FY 2018 and FY 2023 occurred during the first two years of service. Strong training and development programs have the potential to improve employee satisfaction, engagement, success, and retention through key early career junctures, when turnover is more likely.

Newly hired caseworkers in Pennsylvania receive standardized state-level training supplemented by county-level trainings developed and conducted by individual CCYAs. Employee survey feedback suggests opportunities exist for bolstering and expanding training offerings available to caseworkers.

Foundations and County Training

New caseworkers in the Commonwealth must attend training administered by the Child Welfare Resource Center (CWRC) at the University of Pittsburgh. Formally called Foundations of Pennsylvania Child Welfare Practice: Building Competence, Confidence, and Compassion and more commonly referred to as “Foundations,” the training requires 12 weeks to complete and is offered to new caseworkers at nine training centers across Pennsylvania multiple times throughout the year.

Caseworkers are fully paid during the course and are reimbursed for training-related travel expenses. Newly hired caseworkers are typically sent to Foundations at the earliest available training date, regardless of their time at their agency or their educational background. Foundations training is also available to college interns, and counties often encourage college interns to complete the trainings so they can begin work as a certified caseworker upon graduation.

The curriculum and format for Foundations training is dynamic – it has evolved over decades to account for new and emerging best practices, as well as changes in the field of child welfare service delivery. The current iteration of Foundations replaced the prior “Charting the Course” training after CWRC revamped its list of key competencies for caseworkers.¹¹⁸

The Foundations training consists of 10 sequential modules, eight of which require in-person attendance at a CWRC training center. Required online videos and readings must be completed before each in-person training session. The in-person modules also have corresponding field practice activities administered by a county-based training liaison. These field practice activities are meant to provide caseworkers hands-on experience to learn how their county performs essential casework functions; field practice complements the general high-level overview given by Foundations. In total, the training is 126 hours of learning, including 12 hours of field practice.

¹¹⁸ The shift from Charting the Course to Foundations was based on the revised child welfare competencies developed by a Competency Rewrite Workgroup, consisting of CWRC staff and representatives from OCYF, PCYA, CCYA staff, private providers, and other stakeholders. Discussed further in “Pennsylvania’s Child Welfare Competencies,” PA Child Welfare Resource Center. Accessed April 5, 2024 at <https://www.pacwrc.pitt.edu/pcwc/PDF/Competency%20Rewrite%20Guide%20-%202002-27-18.pdf>.



The table below summarizes each of the 10 Foundations modules (some modules have multiple components).

Foundations Modules

Module Number	Module Name	Type
1	Introduction to Child Welfare Practice	Online Only
	Recognizing and Reporting Child Abuse	Online Only
2	Introduction to Engagement	Online, Fieldwork, In-Person
	Introduction to Interviewing	Online Only
3	CPS and GPS	Online and In-Person
4	Safety Assessment	Online, Fieldwork, In-Person
5	Risk Assessment	Online, Fieldwork, In-Person
	Safety Risk Continuum	Online Only
6	Permanency and Concurrent Planning	Online and In-Person
7	Introduction to Dependency Court Practice	Online, Fieldwork, In-Person
8	Family Service Planning	Online and In-Person
9	Achieving Permanency	Online, Fieldwork, In-Person
	Educational Advocacy	Online Only
	Child Development	Online Only
	Personal Safety	Online and Fieldwork
	Self-Care	Online Only
10	Professional Development	Online and Fieldwork

The point at which a newly hired caseworker is assigned a case varies from county to county. For example, some CCYAs only assign cases to caseworkers who have completed Foundations training. While in training, caseworkers in these CCYAs participate in family visits and help with documentation but are not assigned cases in a lead role.

But CCYA caseworkers do not need to complete Foundations training before taking child welfare cases; they may begin taking on cases after they complete Module 4 – the safety assessment module – and are cleared for a full caseload after they complete Module 10.



Accordingly, in some CCYAs, newly hired caseworkers begin taking cases and go through Foundations training simultaneously. Some counties attempt to introduce newly hired caseworkers to the field by assigning them less complex cases. But often, as a result of high turnover and vacancy rates, early-career caseworkers are quickly assigned an overwhelming caseload – sometimes even before Foundations training is completed. As one survey respondent noted, “Because of staff shortages, training new caseworkers is rushed, and they are thrown into taking full caseloads by their six-month mark, when this job takes years to learn.”

CCYA caseworkers do not need to complete Foundations training before taking child welfare cases. Pennsylvania caseworkers are allowed to start taking cases after they complete Module 4 – the safety assessment module – and are cleared for a full caseload after completing Module 10.

A 2020 workload report by the State of Maine’s Health and Human Services Department noted that “[c]hild welfare work is complex, and it takes a significant amount of time for workers to gain the experience and knowledge necessary to function effectively with a full caseload of families and children. Until a caseworker has established significant experience in the field it is likely that the work will take them longer to complete when compared to more experienced staff.”¹¹⁹ Maine now factors in the years of experience of workers when assigning caseloads and deciding staffing levels as part of an effort to keep caseloads at appropriate levels for early career caseworkers.

In addition to the Foundations training, counties also provide their own new caseworker trainings. The specific material covered, length, and format in each of these county-level trainings vary considerably among CCYAs, but they are often focused on hands-on learning. After the initial training in the first year, CCYA caseworkers must complete 20 hours of training a year to maintain their credentials. CCYAs are responsible for arranging these trainings.

The training requirements for supervisors and managers are less defined and structured than those for newly hired caseworkers. While there is a formal certification course (Foundations of Supervision, or FOS) for newly promoted supervisors, there is no training required before promotion to supervisor. The only training requirement is that the FOS is completed in the first year as a supervisor. The FOS course itself consists of 48 hours of instructor-led training, 11 hours of asynchronous instruction (videos that caseworkers can watch on demand), and six hours of field work. FOS topics include professional boundaries, collaboration within the agency and with external partners, the role of agencies in the broader child welfare system, using child welfare data, workforce enhancement, coaching and performance oversight, as well as strategies for managing and adapting to change.

After completing FOS, supervisors can elect to take additional advanced supervision skill courses through CWRC, which include trauma-informed supervision, data-driven decision making, workforce development, implementing change, and leadership skills.

¹¹⁹ “Child Welfare Caseload and Workload Analysis” Maine Department of Health and Human Services. January 31, 2020.



Employee Insights

In focus groups, caseworkers highlighted the following strengths of the Foundations training:

- How to perform and navigate administrative processes (i.e., “paperwork”)
- Scenario exercises and role playing
- In particular, Modules 4 and 5 (safety and risk assessments) were noted in multiple focus groups as imparting skills and techniques that caseworkers use regularly while in the field.

Foundations is also open to non-casework staff, which has enabled clerical and fiscal staff to better understand caseworkers’ roles. One CCYA administrator reported that sending her county’s clerical and fiscal staff to Foundations training improved cross-collaboration to support casework.

Further, across multiple focus groups, caseworkers, supervisors, and administrators reported that moving some Foundations trainings online has helped their staff attend training without having to drive long distances, especially coming from rural counties. The continuation of virtual Foundations training opportunities represented another theme reported in multiple focus groups of CCYA staff.

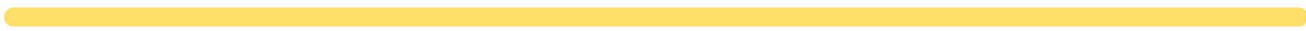
Feedback On Foundations Training from Employee Survey

- “Training was helpful because it offered the opportunity to experience role-playing of certain scenarios that caseworkers experience.”
- “The Foundations training is a great resource for learning the important aspects of casework.”
- “State training does a good job of preparing caseworkers for the paperwork, and the academic portion of the job.”

In focus groups and comments from the employee survey, the most frequently noted critique of the Foundations training was that it does not include enough training in the field. As one caseworker noted in the employee survey, “Theory is one thing, but practical application of the theory can be very different once you are in the community and conducting home visits.” This sentiment was shared by focus group participants, one of whom emphasized the necessity of hands-on training before noting “you don’t get that in Foundations.”

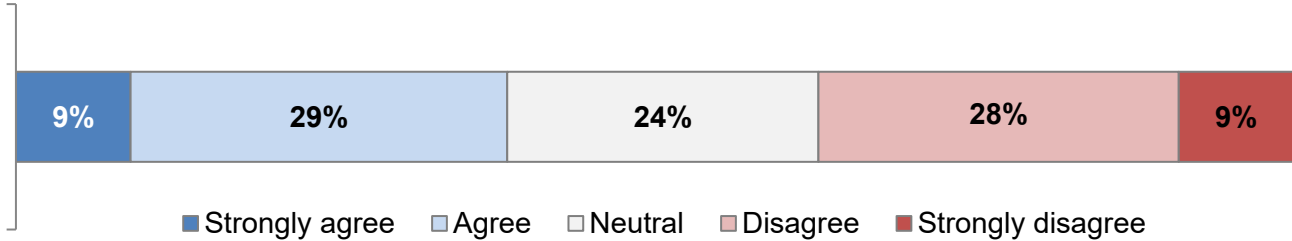
Of the 126 total hours of training in Foundations modules, less than 10 percent occur in the field. These field activities also include a large paperwork component, which can take away from the time a caseworker-in-training actually spends “in the field.” As one caseworker succinctly noted in the employee survey, “I don’t think classroom training can sufficiently prepare anyone for this job.”

Another potential area to bolster in the Foundations training – noted multiple times in focus groups by longer-tenured employees – was communication skills. For example, new caseworkers were perceived as being uncomfortable making phone calls or engaging in face-to-face communication with clients.



As the name suggests, Foundations training is essential in equipping newly hired caseworkers with the core skills they need. Yet early career caseworkers in the employee survey expressed mixed opinions as to whether Foundations training sufficiently prepared them for the rigors of the profession. As illustrated in the figure below, approximately 38 percent of caseworkers with fewer than five years of service (n=78) reported that they “strongly agree” or “agree” that the Foundations training sufficiently prepared them for their jobs. Almost as many respondents – approximately 37 percent of caseworkers with less than five years of service – reported that they “disagree” or “strongly disagree” that Foundations training sufficient prepared them for their jobs.

**“State Required Training (Foundations) Sufficiently Prepared Me for My Current Job,”
Caseworker 1, 2, and 3s With Less Than Five Years of Tenure (N = 78)**



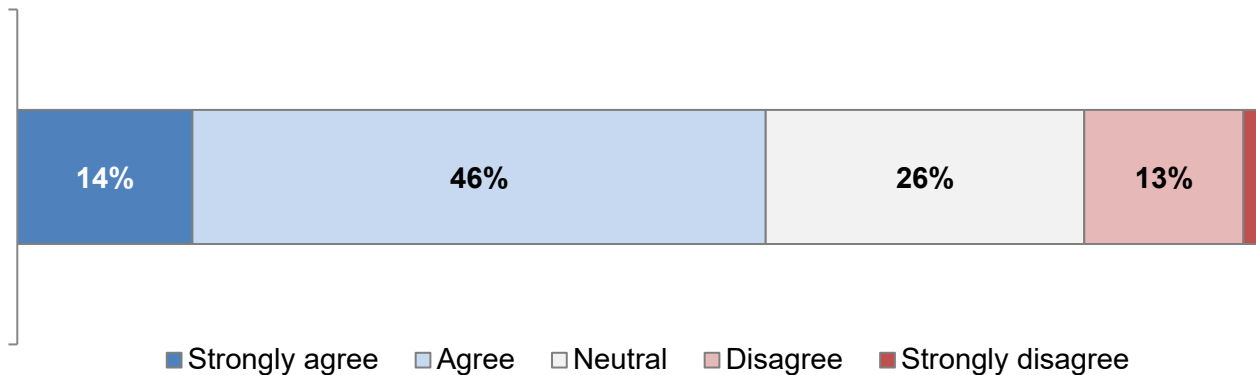
In addition to the 12 hours of Foundations field practice conducted with county mentors, counties also provide their own new caseworker trainings. Across the 10 focus group counties, there are a wide range of certification processes, requirements, and procedures for caseworkers starting their careers.

Early career caseworkers generally reported positive impressions of county-level caseworker trainings. When asked if they felt their county’s certification process prepared them for their job, approximately 60 percent of newer caseworkers (those with less than five years of tenure) agreed or strongly agreed, indicating significantly more satisfaction with local training than the broader state-required curriculum.

Positive comments from survey respondents regarding their county-level training programs emphasized hands-on learning and working alongside more experienced colleagues. As one caseworker wrote in the employee survey, “I was given significant shadowing experience when starting at this county, which was a good way of preparing me for this position.”



**“My County’s Overall Certification Process Sufficiently Prepared Me for My Current Job”
Caseworker 1, 2, and 3s With Less Than Five Years of Tenure (N = 78)**



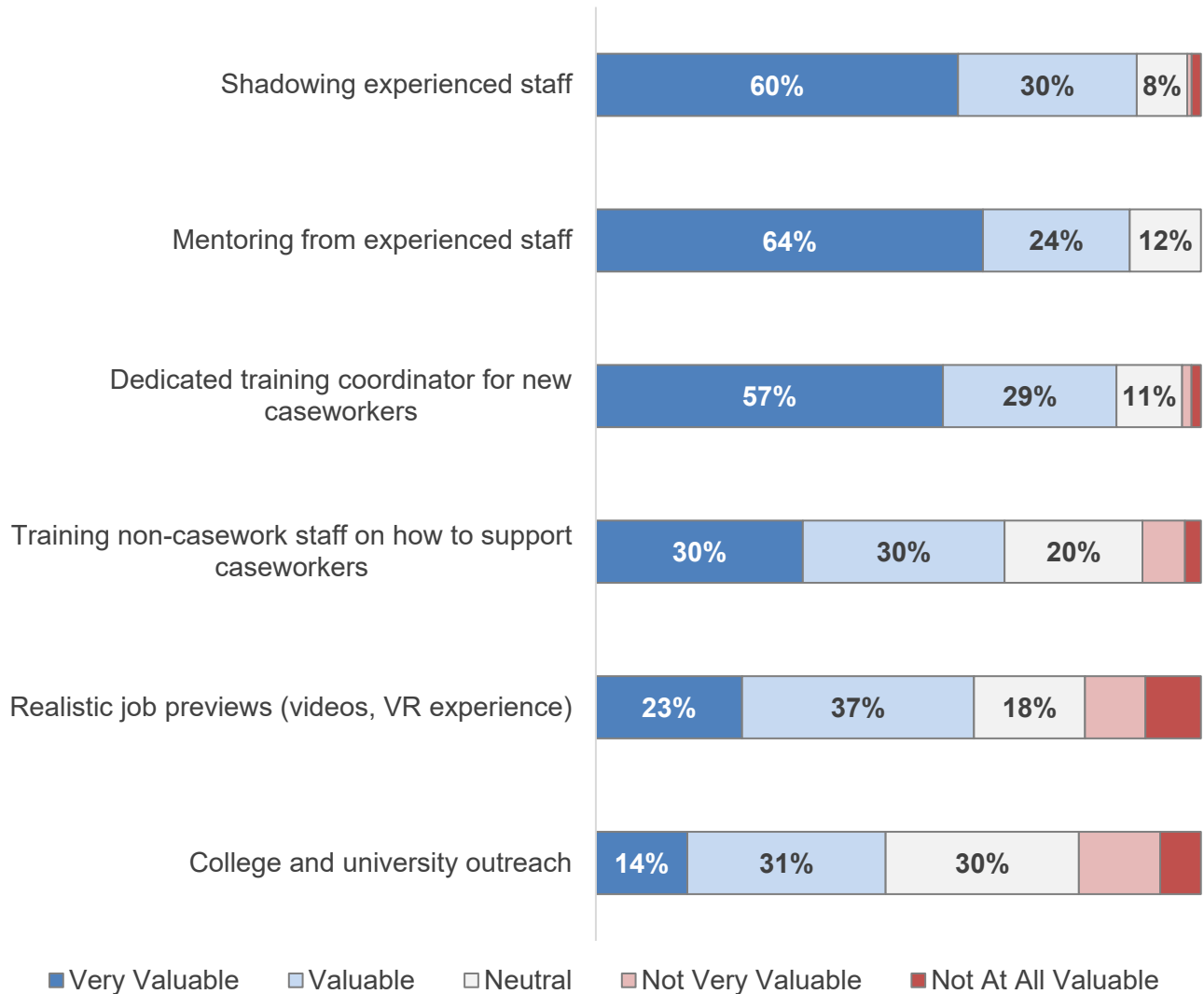
In focus groups and the comments from the employee survey, case-carrying staff identified four types of county-level trainings as particularly useful in the performance of caseworker duties:

- **De-escalation training:** This training included live actors and mock scenarios that taught caseworkers signs of dangerous situations and increased their awareness of different risks.
- **Substance awareness training:** Caseworkers valued practical trainings that prepared them for what they would see in the field in situations in which drugs were involved.
- **Trauma training:** Trauma training has been used by caseworkers to help clients as well as to support other caseworkers after a traumatic incident in the field.
- **Critical thinking skills:** Focus group participants also spoke highly of the critical thinking skills training curriculum.

More generally, the figure below highlights some approaches that caseworkers would find valuable in preparing newly hired caseworkers for success. “Shadowing experienced staff” rated the highest, with 90 percent of responding caseworkers reporting shadowing as “very valuable” or “valuable.” “Mentoring from experienced staff” and “dedicated training coordinator for new caseworkers” also rated highly, with more than 80 percent of respondents characterizing these training approaches as “very valuable” or “valuable.”



“Please Rate the Following Options Based on Their Value in Preparing New Caseworkers For Success”
Caseworker 1, 2, and 3s (N = 125)

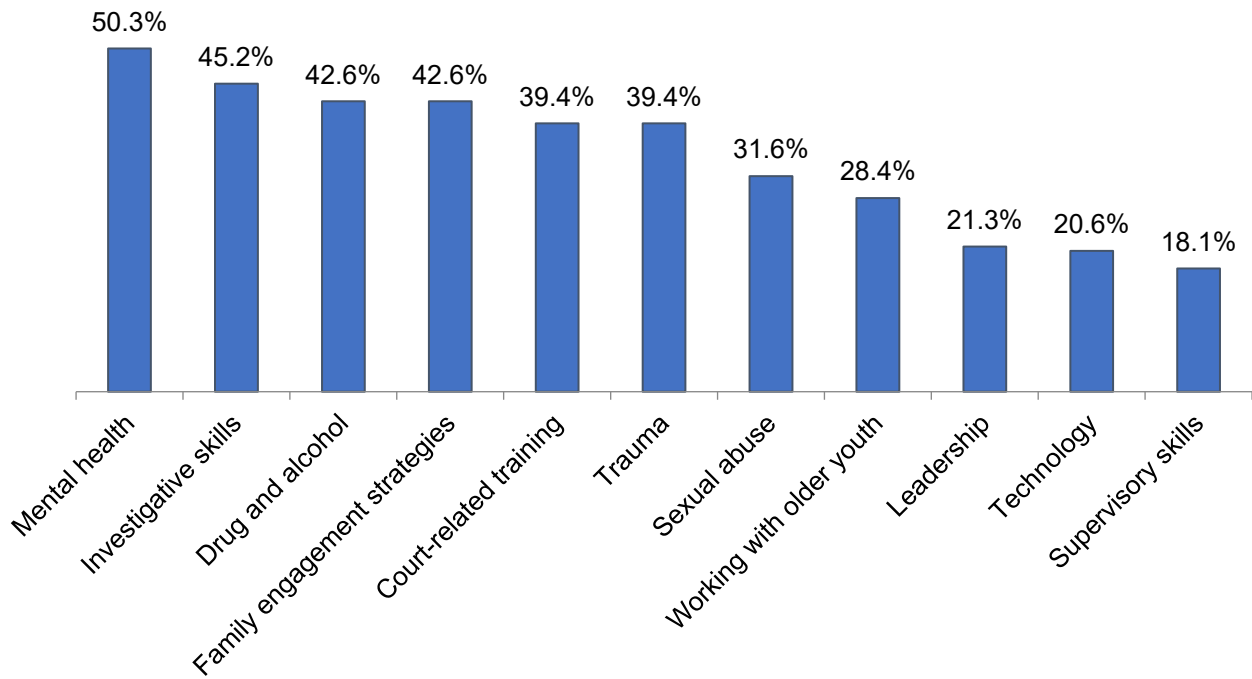


Looking beyond existing training approaches and material, the employee survey asked caseworkers about the subject areas where they would want additional training. As shown in the figure below, more than 50 percent selected “mental health” trainings, followed by “investigative skills” (45.2 percent), “drugs and alcohol” (42.6 percent), and “family engagement strategies” (42.6 percent).



“What Specialized Training Would Help You Feel More Comfortable in Your Job? (Check All That Apply)”

Caseworker 1, 2, and 3s (N = 155)

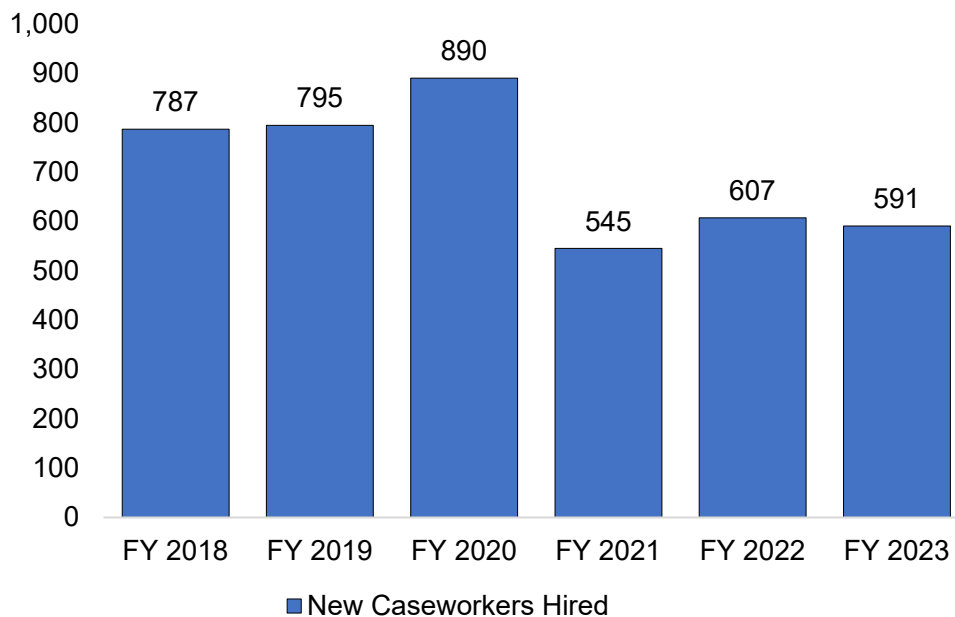




IX. Caseworker Recruitment

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, Pennsylvania CCYAs – like many employers across multiple industries across the country – have experienced challenges in hiring new caseworkers; while turnover has increased in recent years, the number of new hires has declined. Between FY 2018 and FY 2020, Pennsylvania CCYAs hired an average of 824 new caseworkers annually. In the three years since that time, CCYAs hired an average of 581 caseworkers annually.

**New Caseworkers Hired by Fiscal Year
Caseworker 1, 2, and 3s**



This chapter explores caseworker recruitment channels and employee motivations for joining a CCYA – that is, how do potential employees hear about caseworker jobs and why do they become caseworkers? Analyses on these topics are presented primarily through findings from the employee survey and focus groups, accompanied by a discussion of the two hiring processes available to Pennsylvania counties: the Commonwealth’s civil service system or a local-option merit hire process.

Noting the COVID-19 pandemic’s impact on child welfare recruitment, a National Child Welfare Workforce Institute (NCCWI) brief asserts that the pandemic’s impact (including increased anxiety about home visits, difficulty finding child care and elder care support, and stress and burnout) came “at a time when there is an increased need for skilled professionals, calls for social justice, and competition for social workers.”¹²⁰ Other dynamics cited in the report include fewer high school and college graduates, differences in generational work styles and priorities, and new worker expectations

¹²⁰ “Child Welfare Recruitment Brief,” Children’s Bureau, National Child Welfare Workforce Institute. 2022. Page 3. Accessed April 20, 2024 at https://ncwwi.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/NCWWI-Recruitment-Brief_508.pdf.



regarding flexibility and telecommuting; these are accompanied by longstanding concerns like high workloads, paperwork and bureaucracy, low salaries, concern regarding racial and social injustice in child welfare systems, and a lack of resources to ensure families' success.

“Some recruitment considerations have not changed: mission and meaning, flexibility, and money,” according to the NCCWI, which encourages leaders to increase emphasis on creating a positive culture that values staff and focuses on learning instead of punishment or blame, flexible workplaces (e.g., remote work, flexible schedules) that take steps to support work-life balance and professional advancement, and proper compensation, including benefits – “Programs need to think broadly about financial incentives.”¹²¹

Employee Perspectives on Recruitment

Focus group and stakeholder meeting participants highlighted university pathway programs as one of the most important recruitment channels for newly hired caseworkers. The Child Welfare Education for Baccalaureates (CWEB) program provides tuition subsidies and fellowships for students entering their senior year at 15 college programs across the Commonwealth in exchange for a commitment to work at least one year in a CCYA.

After 22 academic years, the program has produced 1,371 graduates and CWEB graduates have served in 93 percent of Pennsylvania counties, according to the University of Pittsburgh School of Social Work.¹²² The program has generated 1,339 graduates in 21 years – an annual average of 64 graduates per year – representing slightly more than 10 percent of new caseworker hires in FY 2023. In focus groups, non-CWEB college graduates from other area universities were also cited as potential recruits.

In addition to CWEB, Commonwealth and federal funds also support the Child Welfare Education for Leadership (CWEL) program. CWEL provides full-time study for any CCYA caseworker, supervisor, or manager who meets basic minimum qualifications.¹²³ CWEL attendees must obtain approval for leave from their CCYA, and receive a salary, tuition support, and expense reimbursement for their graduate studies. CWEL graduates represent 19 percent of the Pennsylvania child welfare workforce; as of 2023, the program has operated for 28 academic years and produced 1,673 graduates.¹²⁴

¹²¹ “Child Welfare Recruitment Brief,” Children’s Bureau, National Child Welfare Workforce Institute. 2022. Page 4. Accessed April 20, 2024 at https://ncwwi.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/NCWWI-Recruitment-Brief_508.pdf.

¹²² “Child Welfare Education and Research Programs 2022-2023 Executive Summary,” University of Pittsburgh School of Social Work. Page 2. Accessed April 20, 2024 at https://www.socialwork.pitt.edu/sites/default/files/executive_summary_2022_2023_final.pdf.

¹²³ E.g., two years of experience with the same CCYA, required undergraduate coursework, and satisfactory performance evaluations.

¹²⁴ “Child Welfare Education and Research Programs 2022-2023 Executive Summary,” University of Pittsburgh School of Social Work. Page 2. Accessed April 20, 2024 at https://www.socialwork.pitt.edu/sites/default/files/executive_summary_2022_2023_final.pdf.



The Commonwealth establishes minimum requirements for caseworker roles; though counties may opt to set their requirements higher, this appears to happen rarely if at all. As indicated in the figure at right, there is considerable flexibility available to applicants seeking to qualify for a starting caseworker position, but the 12 hours of college credit remains constant throughout all pathways to qualification. One employee survey respondent raised concerns about 12-credit-hour requirement: “Let’s get people in and then train them. Twelve college credits in a human service field is not necessary for hiring.”

In stakeholder interviews, PFM heard of past discussions regarding revising or relaxing caseworker minimum qualifications, but these reportedly failed to yield consensus among county and OCYF officials. Lowering the bar for entry could generate understandable and justifiable concerns given caseworkers’ important and sensitive roles, but there may be opportunities to expand the avenues by which potential applicants can gain the skills and knowledge new hires need to be successful.

One example of experience already serving as an equivalent to education is CCYAs’ hiring of caseworker aides as possible future caseworkers. Caseworker aides were also cited in the focus groups and employee survey as a potential pipeline for caseworker recruits. Caseworker aides perform ancillary tasks in support of caseworkers that ease workloads (e.g., transporting clients) while gaining experience that positions them to progress to a caseworker position. In the employee survey, more than three of four (75.5 percent) of survey respondents across all titles said they “strongly agree” or “agree” that case aides and/or interns are a useful pipeline for recruiting new employees to their agency, further underscoring the value of college career pathway programs.

Minimum requirements for currently posted Pennsylvania CCYA Caseworker 1 opening on governmentjobs.com as of April 2024

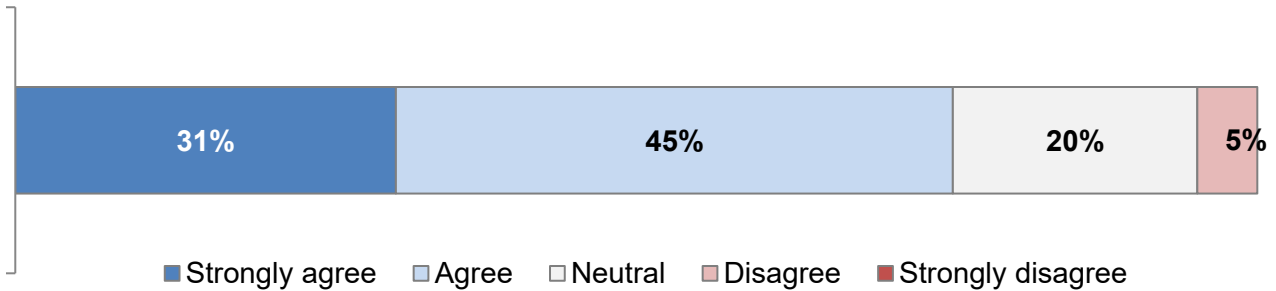
QUALIFICATIONS

Minimum Experience and Training Requirements:

- Two years of experience as a County Social Services Aide 3 and two years of college level course work which includes 12 college credits in sociology, social welfare, psychology, gerontology, criminal justice, or other related social sciences; **or**
- A bachelor's degree which includes or is supplemented by successful completion of 12 college credits in sociology, social welfare, psychology, gerontology, criminal justice, or other related social sciences; **or**
- Any equivalent combination of experience and training which includes 12 college credits in sociology, social welfare, psychology, gerontology, criminal justice, or other related social sciences and one year of experience as a County Social Services Aide 3 or in a similar position performing paraprofessional case management functions.
- Candidates may apply within two months of graduating with a bachelor’s degree.

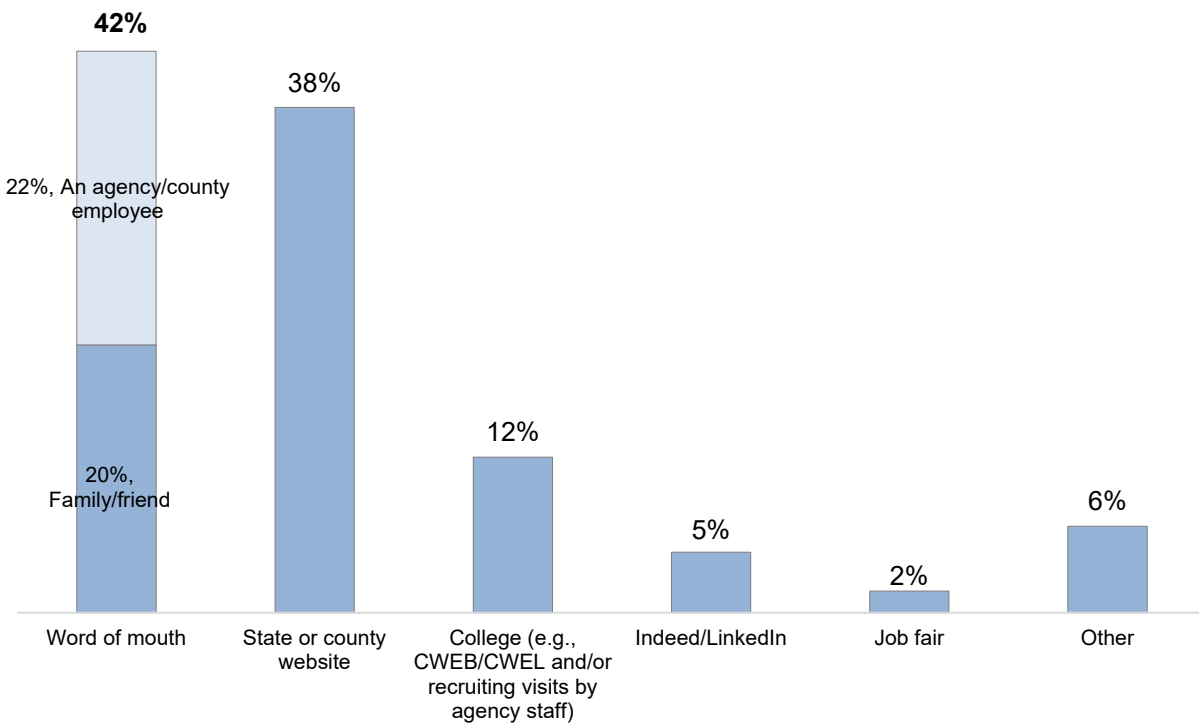


“Case Aides and/or Interns are a Useful Pipeline for Recruiting New Employees to My Agency”
All Responses (N = 310)



The employee survey also identified personal networks and contacts as one of the most important recruitment channels for CCYA talent. As evidenced in the figure below, more than 40 percent of survey respondents reported that they learned about their agency from an “agency/county employee” or “family/friend.” Also of note, 12 percent of survey respondents reported that they learned about the agency through college (e.g., CWEB/CWEL and/or recruiting visits by agency staff).

“How Did You Learn About Your First Job at Your Agency?”
All Responses (N = 311)

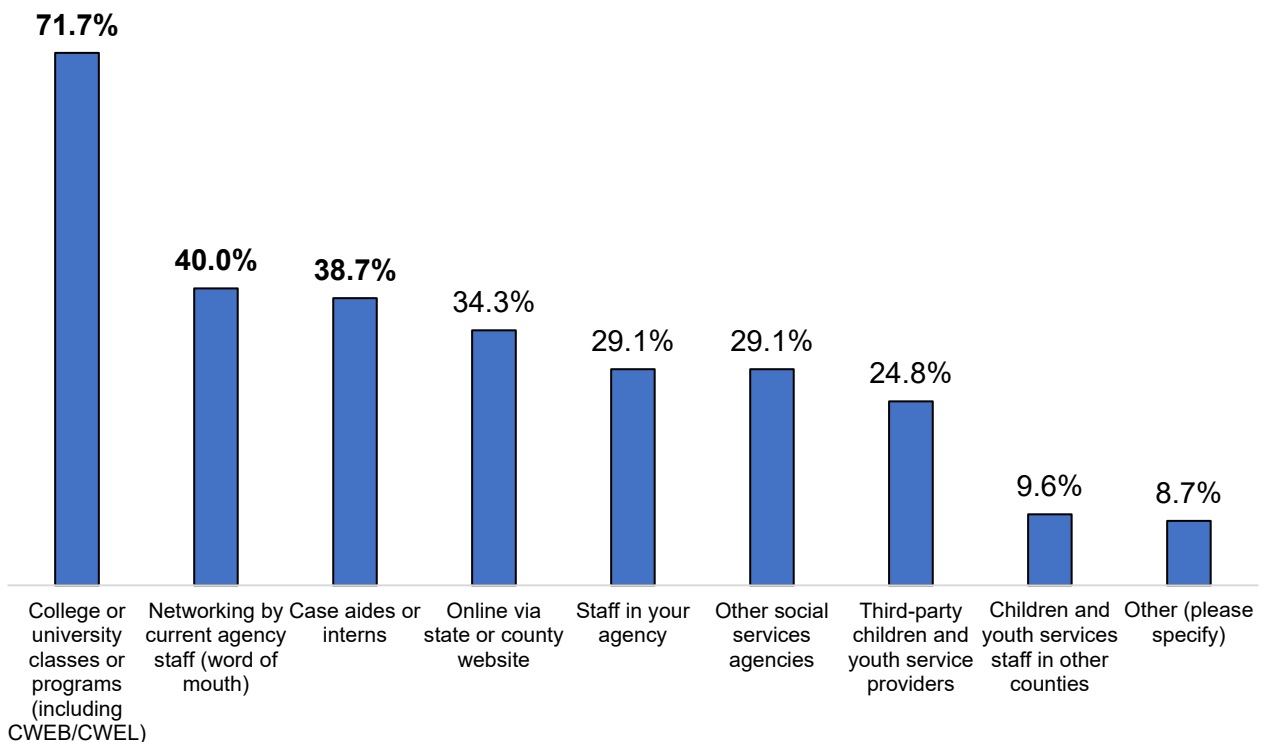




From a recruitment perspective, therefore, current employees serve as ambassadors for their CCYAs and can play a significant role in attracting prospective applicants. Higher levels of current employee satisfaction can potentially bolster and improve recruitment efforts.

Further, in the employee survey, direct service positions – i.e., case aides, caseworkers, case supervisors, and case managers – were asked to select three options that they believe are the best places/approaches to recruit new employees. As shown in the figure below, the top three recruitment channels identified by survey respondents included colleges and universities (including CWEB/CWEL), networking by current agency staff, and case aids/interns. This finding conformed with feedback gleaned from focus groups, where CCYA leaders reported that college recruiting has proven a successful recruitment channel.

**“Please Select the Three Options You Believe Are the Best Places/Approaches to Recruit Strong Candidates for Your Position”
Case Aides Through Case Managers (N = 230)**



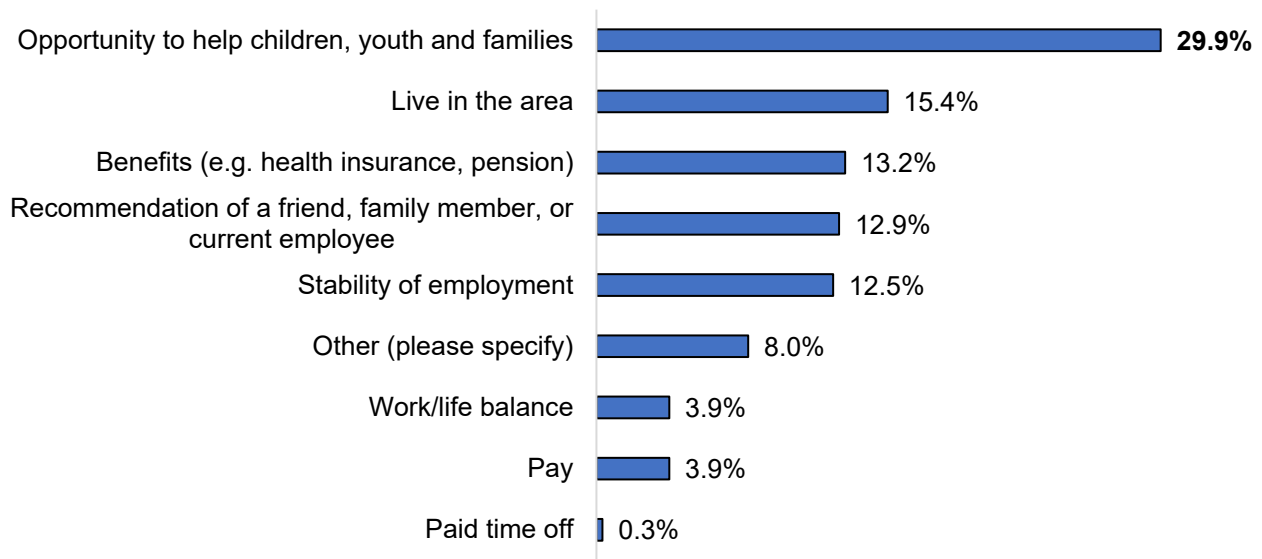
Multiple factors may influence why an employee decides to enter the caseworker field generally and/or seek employment with a particular CCYA, but the primary reason reported by survey participants was the opportunity to help children, youth and families. As shown in the figure below, 29.9 percent of survey respondents (across all job titles) selected that option, almost doubling the next most frequent response, which was geographic convenience. Benefits, recommendation of a



friend/family member/current employee, and job stability rounded out the top five responses. Pay and work/life balance trailed well behind (each selected by just 3.9 percent of respondents).

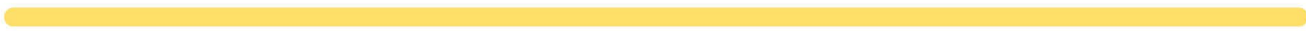
The common theme here is that non-economic factors – particularly, the sense of mission and purpose associated with helping children, youth and families – represent important considerations in employment decisions by CCYA employees. This has implications for recruitment messaging to be developed by CCYAs and OCYF and aligns with National Child Welfare Workforce Institute findings regarding factors potential recruits want to see in a workplace. While a “livable and fair salary” is on the list, so too are “Positive stories of family, child, or youth successes.... Positive organizational climate and culture... [and a] positive and strong mission with a foundation of racial and social justice, family preservation, and family-centered strengths-based practices.”¹²⁵

**“What is the Primary Reason You Chose to Join Your Agency?”
All Responses (N = 309)**



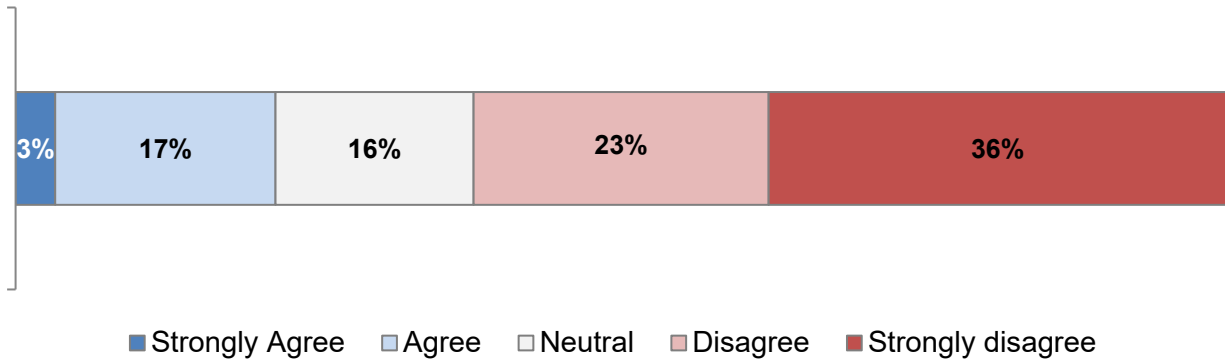
One way of viewing the chart above might generate a conclusion that prospective caseworkers do not prioritize pay, but note the survey only includes people who chose to work at CCYAs – it is also possible that potential employees who want or need a higher salary are choosing other jobs. Fifty-nine percent of survey respondents (all titles) “strongly disagreed” (36 percent) or “disagreed” (23 percent) that their agency’s starting caseworker pay is sufficient to attract a strong pipeline of caseworkers. Only 20 percent indicated agreement that pay is sufficient for successful caseworker recruitment.

¹²⁵ “Child Welfare Recruitment Brief,” Children’s Bureau, National Child Welfare Workforce Institute. 2022. Page 4. Accessed April 20, 2024 at https://ncwwi.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/NCWWI-Recruitment-Brief_508.pdf. Note these themes also emerge as primary considerations in employee retention and are discussed in that context later in this report.



"Starting Pay for a Caseworker at My Agency is Sufficient to Attract a Strong Pipeline of Caseworkers"

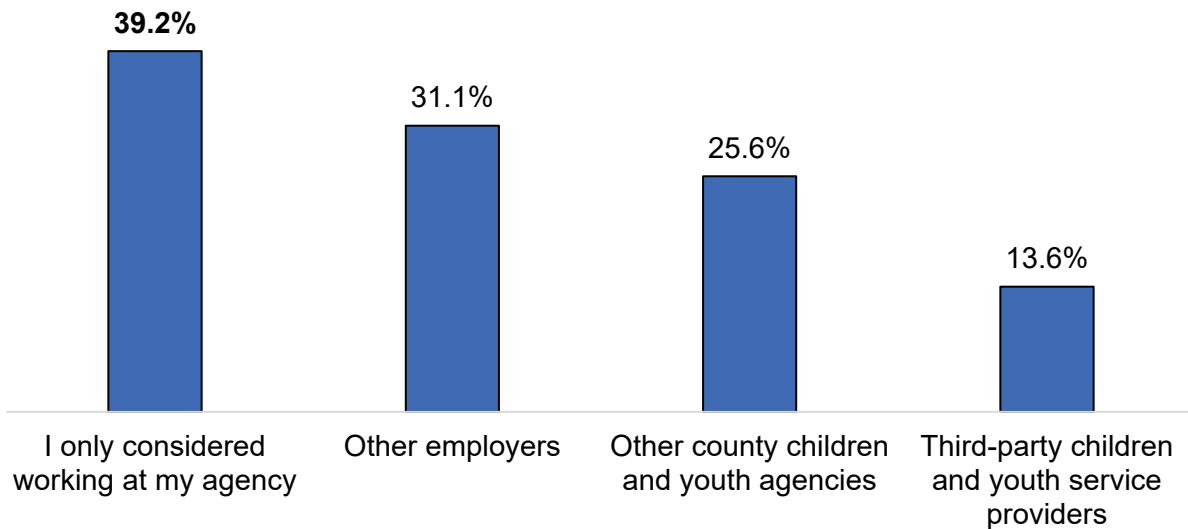
All Responses (N = 287)



Despite the concerns around starting pay, nearly four in 10 survey respondents across all titles reported that they “only considered working at my agency.” This may relate to the emphasis on mission highlighted earlier.

“Did You Consider Other Employers Before Choosing Your Agency?”

All Responses (N = 309)



Staff were given the option to write in the name of other employers they considered. Of the 96 written responses, 40 reported they were specifically looking for county jobs (such as mental health or aging) and 24 said they were looking at human services and social work broadly. Twenty indicated they sought private employment unrelated to children and youth services.



These results help reinforce mission as a primary driver for those who choose CCYA employment: the opportunity to help people is central. But the focus on county work also points to the value of benefits (e.g., pension and health insurance) and job stability, while a focus on working at a particular agency may relate to geographic convenience and/or the recommendation of a friend, family member and/or agency employee.

Compensation rated low among survey respondents as a reason for joining their agency but emerges as a primary concern related to retention. As noted earlier, the employee survey does not include people who chose not to pursue CCYA employment because they want or need more pay than casework offers.

As OCYF and counties determine how to address the question of compensation, there are likely opportunities to place other appealing factors – mission, community, benefits, job stability – front and center in recruiting materials to increase the likelihood of attracting candidates who will accept an offer of employment in a compensation-competitive and employee-friendly market. And the Commonwealth and its counties might increase the pool of qualified applicants by increasing opportunities to gain needed skills and knowledge outside a college classroom.

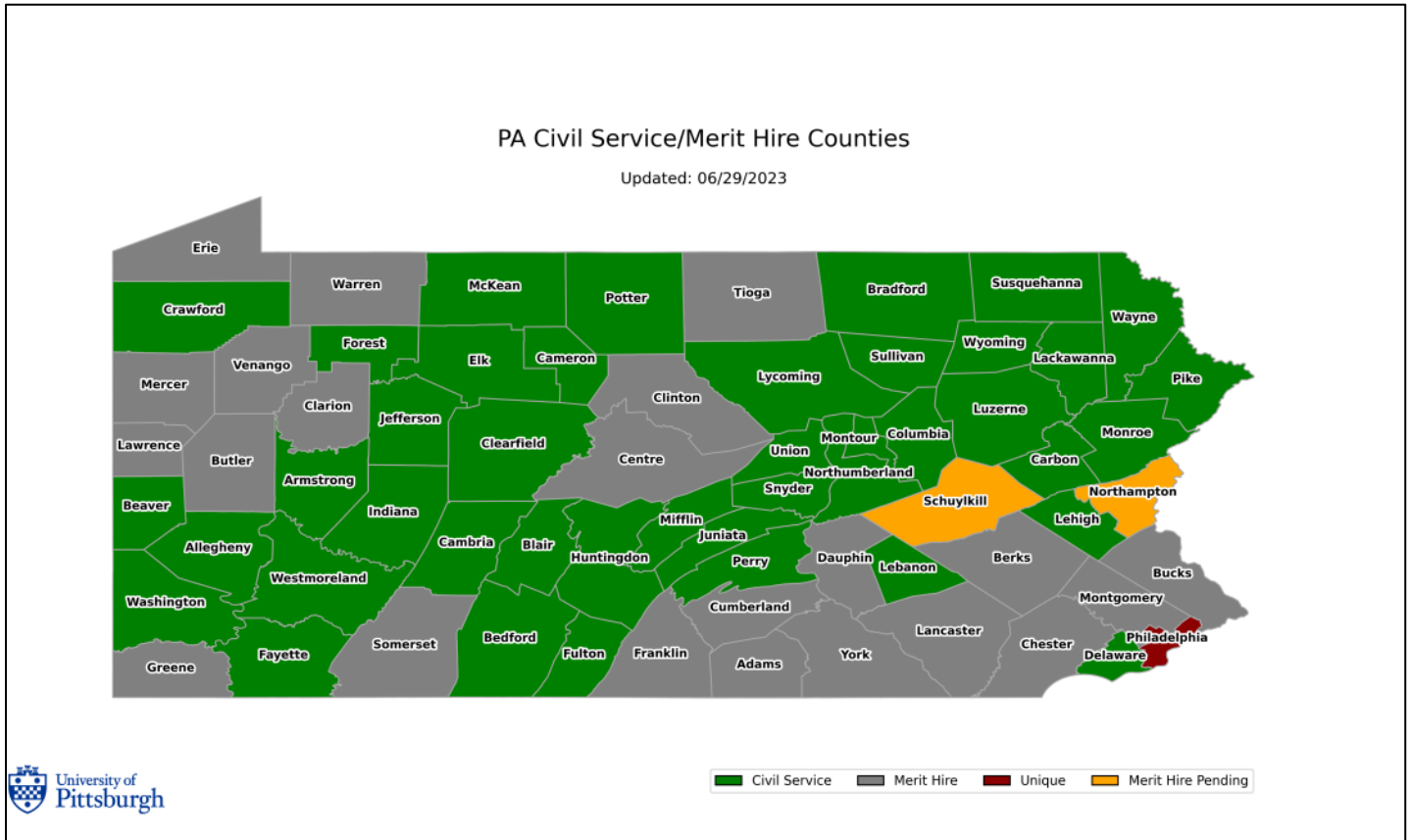
Two Hiring Systems: State Civil Service and County Merit Systems

Pennsylvania counties may hire through one of two distinct models and processes: the Commonwealth’s civil service system or a local merit hire system. The default option is the state system, but counties may opt into a local merit hire approach. A mid-2023 map included in a report by the Children’s Welfare Resource Center (CWRC) indicated 42 counties operating within the system governed by the State Civil Service Commission; excluding Philadelphia,¹²⁶ 22 counties have adopted local merit hire systems (green shading) and two others were transitioning from the state system to local merit hire operations (yellow shading) as of June 29, 2023.

¹²⁶ Philadelphia represents a unique situation because most caseworkers would be employed not by the county, but by community umbrella agencies (CUAs); the City also operates under its own civil service system.



Map of Civil Service Versus Merit Counties¹²⁷



Civil service and merit hire systems follow similar steps common to public sector recruitment and hiring processes, including:

- Position requisition, approval and posting
- Candidate screening
- Assessments and interviews
- Candidate selection

While the two approaches are similar in many regards, the local merit option may offer counties more opportunity to expedite early stages of the recruitment and selection process, as discussed later in this section.

¹²⁷ Map accessed April 20, 2024 at https://www.socialwork.pitt.edu/sites/default/files/2023_06_29_civil_service.pdf.



State Civil Service System¹²⁸

Hiring for positions in the Commonwealth's civil service system is conducted by CCYAs in coordination with the Governor's Office of Administration.¹²⁹

The hiring process for child welfare caseworkers in Pennsylvania begins with a request from a CCYA to the Commonwealth's Bureau of Talent Acquisition Intake Section with a position request. The position description must be verified unless it has been reviewed in the past year. The Intake section will generate a requisition for the position, ensuring alignment of the job description with minimum specifications and qualifications. The Bureau of Organizational Management approves the job description (estimated at about 10 days), and a posting is then typically prepared within 48 hours, with another two days allotted for approval by the CCYA hiring manager.

Positions must be posted for at least 14 days on the Commonwealth's NEOGOV system; applicants may view job descriptions and apply online via governmentjobs.com, an established clearinghouse for local government positions. After the 14-day minimum posting period, the Commonwealth's Evaluation Unit reviews all applicants for minimum education and training, assigning scores based on information provided by applicants.¹³⁰ A list of eligible applicants is forwarded to the requesting CCYA, which is responsible for selection and hiring.

During the posting period, counties are not able to see applications arrive in real time, limiting their ability to conduct immediate outreach to qualified candidates. This is especially important in an employee-friendly job market where employers are competing for talent and early contact may make a difference in securing a candidate's interest. One local merit CCYA leader reported reaching out to qualified candidates immediately on receipt of their application to let them know of the agency's interest in them.

While a strict "rule of three" applied until 2018, requiring counties to select from the three highest-scoring candidates, state officials reported that has been adjusted allow CCYAs to use larger lists so long as candidates selected for consideration meet minimum standards (e.g., a CCYA may adopt a "rule of seven" and hire from among the seven top-scoring candidates if all satisfy minimum scoring requirements). A veteran's preference also applies; if one or more of the highest-scoring applicants is a veteran, a veteran must be selected. Further, if a county has a stated preference for hiring county residents, hiring managers must exhaust the list of qualified applicants from within the county limits before interviewing candidates from other areas. A list of eligible candidates is valid for three months, and a county may hire from a list of eligible candidates for a position without reposting the position

¹²⁸ Civil service hiring process description and performance data drawn from PFM virtual interview with Pennsylvania Governor's Office of Administration, November 13, 2023.

¹²⁹ "Effective Thursday, March 28, 2019, civil service recruit-to-hire employment functions transferred to the Governor's Office of Administration (OA) (i.e., job application, job posting, eligibility review, qualification determination, civil service hire/selection policy, reinstatement, transfer and reassignment policy, examination score and result, civil service employment record, veterans' preference, ADA accommodation, etc.)." Accessed March 21, 2024 at <https://www.scsc.pa.gov/faqs/Pages/General-Commission-FAQs.aspx>

¹³⁰ This applies to positions open to external applicants; for positions only available to current CCYA or county employees, the posting is not reviewed for accuracy and appropriateness by the Office of Administration until a candidate is selected. Commonwealth staff then vet the posting and applicant before hiring can proceed. State officials advise this is most common for Caseworker 2/3 and supervisory roles, while Caseworker 1 postings are usually available to external applicants.



(i.e., when a caseworker position becomes available, and the county has a list available from recent posting of another vacancy).

Counties are responsible for background and reference checks and must report the results of their selection process to the Office of Administration, with any candidate withdrawals verified in writing. Background checks and other information provided by applicants are verified by the Intake Division. Unofficial transcripts are accepted for degrees (a convenience for candidates), and applicants are notified regarding their eligibility/ineligibility for consideration, with an appeal process available.

Commonwealth officials reported an average time to fill of 58.4 days in November 2023 with an average of 72 days for 2023 to date.¹³¹ Process time had decreased from 82 days in July 2023 as summertime distractions waned and staff grew more comfortable with a relatively new system (recruitment responsibility for employees in the Commonwealth’s Civil Service system was recently transferred to the Governor’s Office of Administration in a move intended to improve efficiency). A Society for Human Resources article noted the average time to fill open roles in 2023 “increasing to 47.5 days, with media, manufacturing, education and hospitality among the areas reporting much longer times.”¹³² While CCYA leaders and staff tended to characterize the system as slow, this may reflect performance in the prior organization structure and during transition, when staff were still learning to deliver efficient and effective service under new guidelines.

County-Commonwealth interaction requires time at most stages; state officials indicated the time from initial call to posting was approximately 15 days (with a goal of 10), followed by the required 14-day posting and another five days for the state to compile and review a list of eligible applicants and send it to the county. From there, counties are free to interview and select the best candidate; the Commonwealth reports it typically requires another three to five days to verify applicant information and county hiring selections. While counties control little of the process timing, Commonwealth officials noted in November that their analytics showed the longest piece of the recruitment and hiring process was the interviewing phase at 25 days – this is a CCYA responsibility requiring counties to identify interview panels, establish a set of interview questions, and block time for interviews.

Local Merit Systems

Counties adopting local merit systems – which require a vote of commissioners and approval from the Commonwealth Department of Human Services – generally do so under the auspices of improving recruitment and hiring performance. For example, a Franklin County news release announcing that county’s shift to local merit predicted the new approach would “reduce delays in

¹³¹ Time to fill measures the duration from when a job requisition is initiated (the first step in filling an open position) to when a candidate is hired; time to hire measures the amount of time between a candidate’s submittal of an application and their hiring. Both are useful measures, but time to fill offers a more holistic view to help identify bottlenecks throughout the internal/administrative components of the hiring process. As noted earlier, performance data is drawn from interview with Governor’s Office of Administration staff.

¹³² “Recruiters Say Their Job Got a Little Easier in 2023,” Roy Maurer, Society for Human Resource Management. January 9, 2024. Accessed April 26, 2024 at <https://www.shrm.org/topics-tools/news/talent-acquisition/recruiter-nation-report-2023-2024>.



filling positions, give the county more flexibility in the hiring process, allow the county to give preference to qualified county residents, and improve the timing and efficiency of hiring.”¹³³

Minimum requirements for caseworker and other CCYA positions do not change under local merit systems, as these are tied to state and federal funding. Further, all counties have salary boards under state law; these boards consist of the county commissioners and controller, or commissioners and treasurer where there is no controller. The board is responsible for setting the number and compensation of county jobs. State law provides that as a county salary board considers number and salary of positions reporting to a particular county officer or agency, the officer or agency executive shall also sit as a member of the board.¹³⁴

There are potential advantages to utilizing the local merit system. For one, a CCYA can see and evaluate applicants in real time rather than waiting almost three weeks to identify good candidates (14-day posting and five days for Commonwealth staff to vet applicants and provide an eligible candidate list). Further, there is no “rule of three,” although the intended outcome of local merit systems is the same. For example, Cumberland County’s local merit selection process disqualifies anyone not meeting minimum qualifications as a first step; this is done by the County’s Human Resources Department. The process manual suggests sorting remaining candidates into lead, possible, and clearly not qualified groups, then interviewing lead candidates first (“The number of candidates actually interviewed will vary but a general guideline would be to interview three to five lead candidates”). If no good choices are found, possible candidates may be reviewed and considered.¹³⁵

Employee Feedback on Civil Service and Merit Systems

PFM assessed responses from survey participants with less than five years of tenure regarding perception of hiring processes and systems – this was done to ensure that data reflected relatively current experience and not perceptions of outdated processes. This group of respondents generally characterized the hiring process as straightforward and easy to understand, irrespective of the hiring system in place at their county. Hires in civil service counties (vs. local merit) were slightly less likely to say their agency’s process was straightforward and easy to understand, but even then, nearly three of four respondents agreed.

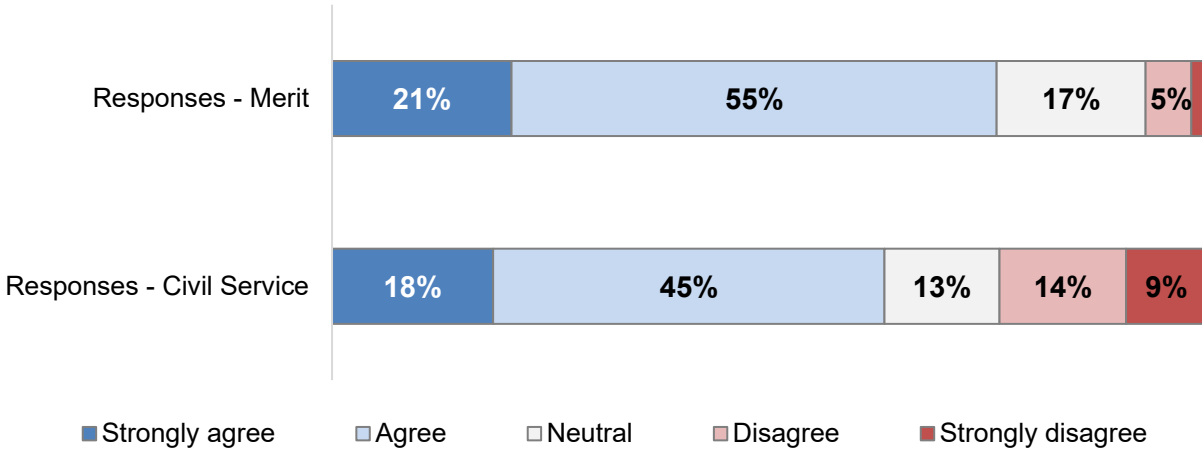
¹³³ “Franklin County adopts new system for hiring employees,” Herald-Mail Media (Hagerstown, Md.) staff reports. July 6, 2015. Accessed March 28, 2024 at <https://www.heraldmillmedia.com/story/news/local/2015/07/06/franklin-county-adopts-new-system-for-hiring-employees/45166081/>.

¹³⁴ 16 Pa. Stat. § 1622, 1623 and 1625.

¹³⁵ “Merit System Policy and Procedure Manual,” County of Cumberland, Pennsylvania. October 15, 2020. Pages 10-11. Accessed March 27, 2024 at <https://www.cumberlandcountypa.gov/DocumentCenter/View/36822/Merit-System-Policy-and-Procedure-Manual>.

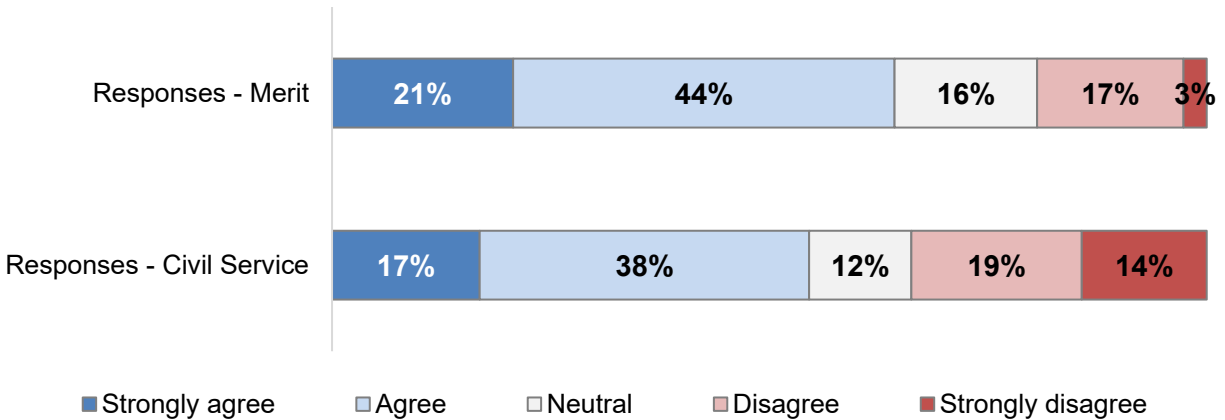


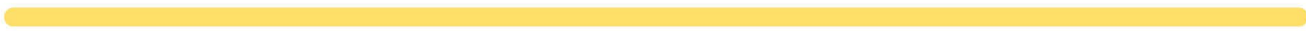
“My Agency’s Hiring Process Was Straightforward and Easy to Understand”
All Employees with Less Than 5 Years of Tenure (N = 229 Merit, 76 Civil Service)



While recent hires rated agency hiring processes as straightforward and easy to understand, they showed a greater divide over process timeliness between local merit and civil service counties (the latter, it should be noted, also have a relatively small sample size in the cross tabulated results). Approximately 65 percent of local merit county respondents characterized their agency’s process as timely (“strongly agree” or “agree”), while about 51 percent of civil service county respondents felt the same way. And civil service county respondents were much more likely to disagree that their agency’s hiring process was timely – one in three said it was not, while only one in five merit system caseworkers said their process was not timely.

“My Agency’s Hiring Process Was Timely”
All Employees with Less Than Five Years of Tenure (N = 227 Merit, 77 Civil Service)





Employee commentary highlighted common challenges related to timeliness, such as prolonged waits for agencies to initiate interviews post-application, delays in receiving contact after interviews, and extended waiting periods for commencement, clearances, and salary board approval.

Selected Employee Commentary

Merit System

“I applied in January of 2021 and didn’t hear back until April.”

“We lose candidates due to the need for approval by commissioners.”

“My hiring process was ‘fast tracked’ and it still took 2 months from applying to my date of hire.”

“It took a couple of months for me to get hired and I have seen other people take different jobs because the county took too long.”

“It took them two months to call me for an interview, when they called me, I actually forgot I placed an application. Once I had the interview it took another month to inform me, I got the job.”

Civil Service

“It took months to get a response back and after the interview I waited months to hear back.”

“It was a very long wait once I got my Civil Service test scores even though I scored well.”

“It took wayyyyy too long. I took the test in November and did not start until 3/1.”

“Process is too long. I interview people and if selected they start 2 months later.”

“It made me think that I wasn’t going to be hired after waiting 3 months for the offer letter.”

These comments underscore the importance of timely, seamless recruitment experiences for caseworkers across both systems. Although the delays often occur at similar steps in the recruiting process, the reasons for the delays likely vary between counties. Administrators in Civil Service counties, for instance, reported that the Commonwealth is slow to post new positions and takes days to pull a candidate list.¹³⁶ One supervisor called the process “a hindrance rather than a help.” On the other hand, counties in merit systems run their own hiring processes, even when short-staffed. This can leave them vulnerable to delays when the agency is overworked.

¹³⁶ As indicated in the earlier discussion of the Commonwealth’s civil service system, these impressions may derive from past experience under a different organization structure and approach; Commonwealth data indicate steady improvement in hiring and selection turnaround over the latter half of 2023 as staff grew more accustomed to recent changes in oversight and processes.



X. Considerations in Contracting for Services

Child welfare services need not be delivered solely by the public sector – components of the system are provided by third-party contractors at the state and local level across Pennsylvania and the United States. This is particularly common in the foster care, kinship care, and independent living areas of child welfare service delivery. Any decision to contract services, however, is an important one and comes with requirements for success. These include:

- Conducting appropriate stakeholder engagement
- Developing goals and metrics for provider performance
- Evaluating and sharing responsibility and risk between the agency and service provider (risks may have legal and/or fiscal implications)
- Utilizing payment approaches that promote agency goals
- Ensuring a strong system for monitoring and managing provider performance (including service quality and invoicing)

By state law, a CCYA employee must perform the intake performing CPS investigations and GPS assessments as appropriate and determine proper next steps.¹³⁷ All other aspects of a CCYA can be contracted, including financial management services.

Services that could be or are contracted by Pennsylvania CCYAs include:¹³⁸

- **Ongoing Case Management:** Covering engagement with children, youth and/or families and provision of and/or connection to necessary supports and services, ongoing casework is traditionally and typically provided by counties. A 2022 audit of Jefferson County’s contract for case management indicated that DHS officials reported five counties in the Commonwealth contract the case management function.¹³⁹
- **Placement Services:** The most common occurrence of outsourcing child welfare services in Pennsylvania occurs across the menu of services required when a child must be removed from the home (e.g., foster care, kinship care, independent living and/or congregate care).
- **In-Home Services:** Most children who are in the child welfare system are not separated from their families; instead, children and families often receive services while remaining in the home. Examples include parenting support and education, individual and family counseling,

¹³⁷ As noted earlier in this report, Child Protective Services (CPS) and General Protective Services (GPS) serve distinct purposes with different criteria, regulations, and cases. CPS primarily addresses cases of abuse and neglect – to be classified as a CPS case, the alleged abuse must fall under the definition of child abuse as provided in the Child Protective Services law. GPS deals with a broader range of concerns that may pose risks to children’s safety and well-being.

¹³⁸ This report does not consider Philadelphia’s Community Umbrella Agency model, as it requires scale and capacity that would likely be difficult to achieve in most Commonwealth counties with smaller populations and less population density.

¹³⁹ “Amended Fiscal Reports for Fiscal Years: July 1, 2017 to June 30, 2018 and July 1, 2018 to June 30, 2019, Jefferson County Children and Youth Agency,” Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Department of the Auditor General, p. 22. <https://www.paauditor.gov/Media/Default/Reports/chiJeffersonCountyCYS013122.pdf> Accessed February 21, 2024.



or referrals for substance use or mental health treatment. Within the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, in-home services are often contracted out by CCYAs.¹⁴⁰

- **Fiscal Services:** Financial services (e.g., budgeting, financial reporting, accounts payable, auditing) for child welfare services can require expertise related to federal funding and accompanying operational standards and requirements. In Pennsylvania, counties sometimes contract for fiscal services on a permanent basis, but more often use a scaled-back approach that employs interim services and training for new county staff. While not the primary focus of this discussion, fiscal services are mentioned here because of the potential for conflicts of interest if provider selection is not thought through.

Regardless of contracting model selected, county agencies remain ultimately responsible for performance and outcomes. As one stakeholder noted in a virtual interview, “Those are still your kids. They’re still your responsibility.”¹⁴¹

Service Models for Contracting Out

Various motivations drive decisions to contract for child welfare services. A U.S. Department of Health and Human Services report on privatization of caseworker services summarized the following common reasons for contracting out:

- Potential for better service quality for children, youth and families
- Reduced costs resulting from increased competition and greater client choice
- Increased flexibility available to third-party providers
- A greater sense of mission and responsiveness to client needs among nonprofits
- Facilitating a marked change in agency organizational philosophy and culture
- Opportunities to engage smaller community-based providers
- Ability to bring in new capacity quickly while limiting government growth

“[P]rivatization of human services has generally been prompted by political leaders and top program managers responding to an increased demand for improved performance of government services and a belief that contractors can provide higher quality services more cost effectively,” the report notes, citing three broad objectives typically driving privatization:

“(1) better outcomes for children and families;

¹⁴⁰ “Issue Brief: In-Home Services to Strengthen Children and Families,” U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Administration, Bureau for Children & Families, April 2021.

¹⁴¹ PFM virtual interviews with child service delivery stakeholders in Pennsylvania conducted in February of 2024.



(2) attainment of system performance goals, including but not limited to the expansion of services, increased flexibility, more local community control, and cost effectiveness; and

(3) the alignment of fiscal and programmatic goals through the introduction of fiscal risk and/or performance-based payment mechanisms.”¹⁴²

Interviews with people engaged in and familiar with casework contracting decisions in Pennsylvania counties suggest that these factors may be cited in counties’ decision to contract, but that a primary driver of the decision to contract stems from challenges in staffing CCYAs.

Feeling pressure to maintain or reduce taxes and budgets, and facing persistent recruitment and retention issues in CCYAs, county commissioners could reasonably be expected to opt for an appealing solution: contracting for better quality at a lower price. However, privatization is not necessarily less expensive, and service quality hinges largely on vendor selection, a clear scope of services and performance standards, and robust contract management. Privatization initiatives that are rushed, poorly designed, and/or not managed well are likely to suffer as a result and may work counter to their intended purpose.

Approaches to contracting out child welfare service delivery in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania include:

- **Contracting all child welfare services (except mandated investigations/assessments) directly to one or more third parties:** All child welfare services outsourced to a third party, with exception of mandated investigations and assessment. As noted earlier, a February 2022 audit of contracting for case management services in Jefferson County indicated that only five other counties in Pennsylvania were contracting for ongoing case management. But OCYF staff report there is no central repository of information regarding various counties’ contracts for services related to child welfare.
- **Strategic outsourcing of targeted services, with some services kept in-house:** Pennsylvania stakeholders and industry literature suggest this approach has been in use for more than a quarter century; it often involves keeping intake and ongoing services in-house and provided by CCYA staff while outsourcing placement functions like foster care, kinship care, congregate care and independent living to third-party providers. All or some combination of these services are outsourced in most counties across the Commonwealth, in line with industry literature that speaks to targeted contracting of services for groups with common sets of needs.

Provider services may be delivered via state contract; perhaps most prominent of these arrangements is the Statewide Adoption and Permanency Network (SWAN) contract for services including child and family profiles, child-specific recruitment of placement

¹⁴² “Child Welfare Privatization Initiatives – Assessing Their Implications for the Child Welfare Field and for Federal Child Welfare Programs – Topical Paper #2, Program and Fiscal Design Elements of Child Welfare Privatization Initiatives,” U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation. Sept. 2007. Pages 2-3.



opportunities, child preparation, placement, finalization and post-permanency services. Also cited in the Commonwealth's 2020-2024 Child and Family Services Plan is the Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention program offered through the Pennsylvania Family Support Alliance, providing resources for parents, caregivers, and professional staff.¹⁴³

While contracting out of placement services is common, this approach may extend to ancillary services intended to address client needs. For example, the 2020-2024 CFSP highlights counties that utilize third-party services to provide transportation support in locales with limited access to public transportation: "Tioga County provides gas cards and offers rides to families in need of programming. Bucks and Franklin Counties contract with Lyft and Rabbit Transportation."¹⁴⁴

- **Staff augmentation:** Under the staff augmentation approach, primary responsibility for all services remains in-house, but contractor staff serve alongside county staff in comparable roles. Functions remain in-house, but supplemental staffing is provided by a third party. An example of this is found in this section's York County case study. While OCYF may provide high-level technical assistance to CCYAs, its engagement is limited by the requirement that only county personnel perform investigations and assessments.
- **Shared services:** CCYAs may join forces to deliver child welfare services via "joinder" or partnership – this approach can be beneficial across a variety of local government services by increasing economies of scale and minimizing overhead (e.g., combining two smaller agencies can reduce the need for management staff). As explored and attempted over the past decade or two, though, the tactic has not borne fruit for Pennsylvania child welfare agencies in the few instances noted for PFM by Pennsylvania Children and Youth Administrators (PCYA) and OCYF staff. In one instance, three counties (Lycoming, Crawford and Sullivan) attempted a shared-services approach across multiple DHS services via a separate legal entity, but CCYA services were split off after reported disagreements regarding location, accessibility and allocation of services. As an additional challenge, even a combination of two or three small counties would be unlikely to have a service constituency sufficient to achieve economies of scale sufficient to bring down expenses, according to PCYA leadership.¹⁴⁵
- **All services delivered in-house by county staff:** OCYF staff indicate that it is rare for a CCYA to utilize county staff for delivery of the full menu of child welfare services, though it might occur in smaller counties.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴³ "2020-2024 Child and Family Services Plan," Pennsylvania Department of Human Services Office of Children, Youth and Families. June 28, 2019. Pages 13 and 60.

¹⁴⁴ "2020-2024 Child and Family Services Plan," Pennsylvania Department of Human Services Office of Children, Youth and Families. June 28, 2019. Page 58.

¹⁴⁵ PFM interview with PCYA, February 1, 2024.

¹⁴⁶ Communication from Erazo, M. Pennsylvania Office of Children Youth and Families. May 20, 2024.



Pennsylvania counties may take several paths in outsourcing components of their children, youth and family services. These are highlighted in matrix form and discussed further below.

CCYA Service Contracting Approaches in Pennsylvania Counties

Model	Pros/Cons	Fiscal Considerations	Example in Practice
All CCYA services provided via contract with third party*	<p>Pros: Counties may be able to access larger pool of resources via third-party contractor; ability to rapidly change personnel and workplace culture</p> <p>Cons: Where recruitment and retention are difficult, contractors may have the same issues; county still responsible for contract monitoring</p>	2019 Rate Management Task Force report found that provider expenses were difficult to project (actuals frequently 5 percent or more under budget); provider employee compensation may not compare to county pay and benefits	A recent state audit found only five counties contracting for ongoing case management services
Services provided via statewide contract	<p>Pros: Removes need for county procurement</p> <p>Cons: Counties may be less able to tailor services to their specific needs</p>	Counties' ability to negotiate on points of local interest may not be addressed in statewide contract, but CCYAs may achieve savings via increased purchasing power with larger contract	SWAN contract
Some functions outsourced, others provided by CCYA	<p>Pros: Counties can target services best suited to provider capabilities</p> <p>Cons: County still responsible for contract monitoring; smaller counties may lack sufficient cases to allow distribution of risk across case pool</p>	Smaller case pool likely to prevent managed care approach – reimbursing providers for services rendered reduces incentive to move children through and out of system quickly	Most common (includes contracts for adoption, foster care/placement, and in-home services); York County contracts with providers based on strengths and county needs
Staff augmentation: functions provided by CCYA with mix of county and contracted staff	<p>Pros: Counties retain operational control/oversight</p> <p>Cons: Potential compensation differences between county personnel and contractor staff; county still responsible for contract monitoring</p>	May be more costly for county; time for contract administration/oversight should be considered as well	York County
Shared services: two or more agencies share staff and/or contract jointly with third party	<p>Pros: Counties can access knowledgeable, experienced staff while limiting direct responsibility for recruitment and achieving economies of scale</p> <p>Cons: Potential competition for scarce resources, disagreements over service equity (e.g., location/accessibility)</p>	May pose challenges around compensation equity, cost-sharing, and varying policies/processes across CCYAs	Dauphin County caseworkers and finance staff serve other counties (Cumberland for caseworkers, York for finance)
All functions in-house	<p>Pros: Full county control of all functions, no reliance on third parties</p> <p>Cons: County is fully responsible for ensuring proper staffing and resource allocation</p>	County has most direct control over expenditure levels; not subject to changes in contractor rates	Uncommon; may occur in smaller counties

* Except investigations/assessments



In evaluating the pros and cons of privatizing any service, it is important to consider that success in contracting relies heavily on preparation, program design, and execution. Programmatic and fiscal outcomes will suffer in any arrangement that does not involve appropriate stakeholder engagement, identification of performance standards, and attentive, effective contract management.

While industry literature acknowledges potential budgetary savings as a motivator for privatization efforts, this is not typically true. According to a U.S. Department of Health and Human Services report, “research on privatization efforts ... found that in most cases, overall spending increases with privatization.”¹⁴⁷ Service providers bring their own administrative overhead and may pay their staff more in lieu of pension benefits.

“Research on privatization efforts...found that in most cases, overall spending increases with privatization.”

- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2007)

Service providers may also bring more capacity and sophistication to the negotiating table and the contract management process; OCYF officials relayed a story of one CCYA staffer who contacted the Commonwealth to ask whether the agency could request vendor receipts to validate requests for payments, a standard practice in any accounts payable function.

Further challenging cost-saving potential, especially for smaller counties, is the limited population of cases they will bring, though those cases may represent a wide variety of child, youth and family needs. As noted above, a primary argument for potential savings is the ability to employ a managed care approach wherein the provider can spread risk across a large population of cases. Even in small groups, Pennsylvania counties are unlikely to represent a large enough population to support managed care, leaving the more standard direct reimbursement as the primary path. And this limited caseload may leave CCYAs reliant on single providers of specific services because there are too few cases to allow spreading of workload across multiple vendors.

In the end, the decision to contract requires identifying and mitigating risks on a variety of fronts, remembering that “the more responsibility the public agency gives to private providers, the more dependent they are on their performance. Partnership, accountability, and trust become key features of the new system.”¹⁴⁸ PCYA, for instance, points out several areas in which risk can be a factor:

- **Potential conflicts of interest:** e.g., a third party is contracted to provide youth and family services and also contracts to provide fiscal services such as budget development or accounts payable; or a county staff member does not have direct supervision over the contractor, so the contractor rather than the county is in charge of the department.

¹⁴⁷ “Child Welfare Privatization Initiatives – Assessing Their Implications for the Child Welfare Field and for Federal Child Welfare Programs – Topical Paper #1, Assessing Site Readiness: Considerations about Transitioning to a Privatized Child Welfare System,” U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation. Sept. 2007. Page 4. Accessed March 11, 2024 at https://aspe.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/migrated_legacy_files/42531/report.pdf.

¹⁴⁸ “Child Welfare Privatization Initiatives – Assessing Their Implications for the Child Welfare Field and for Federal Child Welfare Programs – Topical Paper #1, Assessing Site Readiness: Considerations about Transitioning to a Privatized Child Welfare System,” U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation. Sept. 2007. Page 2. Accessed March 11, 2024 at https://aspe.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/migrated_legacy_files/42531/report.pdf.



- **Loss of control and liability:** e.g., the potential impact of third-party access to county data systems, which may house confidential information.
- **Insurance implications:** e.g., coverage for the county related to provider activity.
- **Legal/operational questions:** e.g., will provider staff testify in court, or will that be expected of county staff?
- **Vendor size/scale:** smaller vendors may lack the capacity to provide the breadth and/or depth of services the county requires, leaving the marketplace to large providers and removing the element of competition.¹⁴⁹

In light of these varied concerns, privatization may be thought of not as a “service model, but rather a systemic reform that involves several design elements (contracting method, cost claiming and reimbursement, service delivery system, contract monitoring, etc.), all of which must be designed and aligned in order to operate efficiently and effectively.”¹⁵⁰

In particular, it should be noted that privatization is not necessarily a solution to staffing issues; as with the need to maximize budget resources, it can be tempting to believe that outsourcing will solve the staffing problem. Absent other adjustments (e.g., changes in compensation, recruiting approaches and/or organizational culture), simply asking a third party to execute the same task the same way is not a panacea. This is particularly true in light of the small and dwindling caseworker applicant pools reported by many Pennsylvania counties. However, as the Pennsylvania Council for Children, Youth and Family Services (PCCFYS, an organization representing contract service providers) observed, “You’re hopefully buying some expertise” in the recruiting arena, as well as capacity to pursue more robust and creative recruitment activity.¹⁵¹

A U.S. Department of Health and Human Services report highlights the need for responding to broader recruitment and retention challenges even with contracted services:

Private agency workers experience the same frustrations that public agency workers experience such as high stress, lack of career advancement opportunities and lack of educational preparation for child welfare work.... Early results indicate that ***simply transferring case management and decision making to the private sector may not improve case outcomes without adequate social, health and mental health resources and foster and adoptive homes in communities, and qualified agency staff that are offered ample supports.***¹⁵² (emphasis added)

Already a key driver of caseworker recruitment and retention, employee compensation may be another complicating factor for privatizing. A 2019 Pennsylvania Department of Human Services Rate

¹⁴⁹ PFM interview with PCYA leadership, February 1, 2024.

¹⁵⁰ “Child Welfare Privatization Initiatives – Assessing Their Implications for the Child Welfare Field and for Federal Child Welfare Programs – Topical Paper #1, Assessing Site Readiness: Considerations about Transitioning to a Privatized Child Welfare System,” U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation. Sept. 2007. Pages 2-3.

¹⁵¹ PFM interview with PCCFYS leadership, February 28, 2024.

¹⁵² “Child Welfare Privatization Initiatives – Assessing Their Implications for the Child Welfare Field and for Federal Child Welfare Programs – Topical Paper #1, Assessing Site Readiness: Considerations about Transitioning to a Privatized Child Welfare System,” U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation. Sept. 2007. Page 4.



Methodology Task Force report on foster and residential services found that third-party providers' average salaries for caseworkers were not higher than county salaries (and in some cases, were likely lower) and offered substantially less in the way of benefits.¹⁵³ While OCYF officials suggest that the 2019 report's data is outdated in the wake of recent labor market and compensation shifts, assessing pay and benefits for contracted workers is essential when compensation is driving recruitment and retention issues – if pay is already low, offering a smaller compensation package (including benefits) is unlikely to achieve improvements.

¹⁵³ "Report of the Recommendations of the Rate Methodology Task Force to the Department of Human Services," Pennsylvania Department of Human Services Rate Methodology Task Force, August 19. Accessed February 27, 2024 at <https://pccyfs.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/PARateMethodologyTaskForce-Recommendations2019.pdf>.



Case Study: York County*

York County's two-step strategic approach to contracting placement and some casework services began about a decade ago when internal departments handled a broad array of services, including non-caseload work such as foster home licensing. Serious staffing shortages and performance and licensing concerns prompted a first step toward privatization with selection of multiple providers to take on placement-related services. CCYA staff who chose to remain with the county were shifted to casework to address a backlog of cases – “the quickest way” to allocate more resources to addressing mounting of the then-new CPSL, according to the York County CYF administrator.

While CCYA staff tended to remain in their jobs through the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, by 2021 the agency was seeing a new wave of recruitment and retention difficulties, prompting a decision to contract some case management work. In response, York County's CCYA selected three current service providers to augment its casework management services, with each provider assigned cases that align with their respective area of focus (e.g., an independent living provider would be assigned teenagers likely to benefit from the provider's other services along with case management). Notably, the county was able to bypass a potentially long and complex procurement process and reduce risk by selecting current service providers for expansion of existing partnerships.

Provider staff caseloads are capped under the contracts; staff performing or managing casework (presently three casework supervisors and eight caseworkers) must complete required CWRC training and are treated as county staff (e.g., provided with a county badge, enter reports in county system, participate in meetings, testify in court). All caseworkers, whether county or contract, operate on a hybrid schedule that requires an office presence twice a week.

The move to contract some case management generated concern among agency staff, who viewed it as a potential step toward outsourcing their jobs. Management response included highlighting the benefits available through county employment and noting that agency staff could apply for openings with providers (at present, providers have successfully retained their staff, so no such openings have occurred – meanwhile, York County has been able to staff about 50 percent of its 97 budgeted caseworker positions).

CYF Administrator Stauffer notes several lessons learned in the shift to contracted services, including:

- Importance of outreach to partners: York County communicated with law enforcement, courts, and other key partners about the move to contract ongoing services, including a focus on confirming that contracted casework staff carried all the authority and responsibility of agency staff.
- Value of spreading work across multiple providers to minimize agency risk: “It's easier if a provider is having some trouble; if they only do a few services, it's easier to hold them accountable,” CYF leadership said.
- Critical role of financial and quality assurance functions: York County's outsourcing contracts are monitored for performance and billing by a strong fiscal services department and quality assurance function that comprise approximately two dozen staff, according to agency leadership (note this complement is equal to nearly a quarter of the CCYA's budgeted caseworker positions).

*PFM telephone interview with York County CYF administrator, February 12, 2024.



Keys for Contracting Success

Well-planned and executed properly, contracting for services can work for Pennsylvania CCYAs. For example, case studies for York County (previous page) as well Jefferson and Tioga Counties (subsequent pages in this chapter) illustrate instances where contracting out can support child welfare service delivery in Pennsylvania. At the same time, however, there are pitfalls that must be avoided, or counties may find themselves no better off than they were before.

In industry literature and interviews with Commonwealth and local officials, PFM identified several keys to success that generally track with the principles of good public procurement. These include identifying goals, engaging stakeholders, and managing risk through procurement and implementation.

Identifying Goals

To begin, counties should identify why they are considering privatization, and how they expect the county and its stakeholders to benefit: “[S]ites must ask themselves why they want to privatize a service or a service system – what they want this new system to achieve and why they expect private agencies to outperform the existing public system.”¹⁵⁴

Without clear and realistic goals, it will be difficult to generate a proper scope of services and performance standards; without these, contract management will be difficult at best. As indicated earlier, goals often center around the potential for improving service delivery, reducing costs, and/or addressing recruitment and retention challenges. But these outcomes are not guaranteed and should be carefully evaluated to ensure reasonable expectations for success.

Especially in smaller populations, it may be difficult to predict overall results from quarter to quarter, year to year, or beyond. A former state district judge and leading voice in the discussion of privatizing child welfare services spoke to the complexities of addressing this challenge across a much larger group:

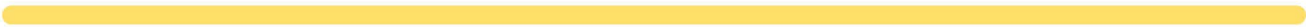
“It’s very difficult to manage human services through performance-based contracts,” McCown said. “It’s hard to state what the right incentives are. We want kids to go home, except when we don’t. We want kids to go with relatives, except when we don’t. You’re making case-by-case decisions and nobody knows what the right numbers are.”¹⁵⁵

Similarly, a PCCFYS official characterizes social work as “shades of gray – it’s very easy to measure black and white but it’s hard to measure shades of gray.”¹⁵⁶ A suggested response is tracking outputs (measures of activity like home visits) that are likely to contribute to achievement of service and fiscal goals – this is discussed further in the “Managing Risk

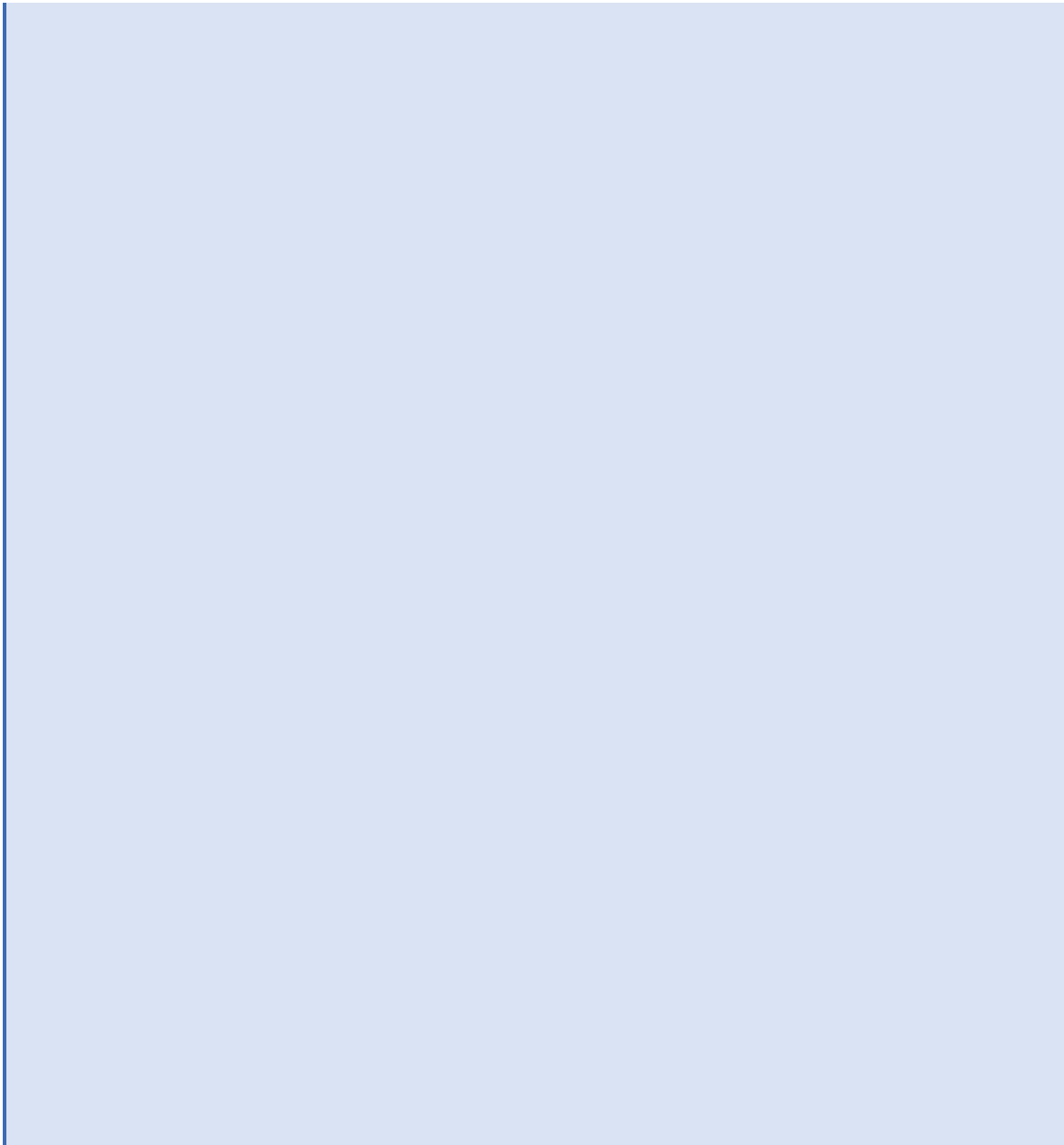
¹⁵⁴ “Child Welfare Privatization Initiatives – Assessing Their Implications for the Child Welfare Field and for Federal Child Welfare Programs – Topical Paper #1, Assessing Site Readiness: Considerations about Transitioning to a Privatized Child Welfare System,” U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation. Sept. 2007. Page 5.

¹⁵⁵ Thompson, Laura Marie, “Despite Warnings, the Texas Legislature Plans to Privatize Much of the Child Welfare System.” Texas Observer. March 3, 2017. Accessed February 27, 2024 at <https://www.texasobserver.org/despite-warnings-texas-legislature-plans-privatize-much-child-welfare-system/>.

¹⁵⁶ PFM interview with PCCFYS leadership, February 28, 2024.



Through Procurement and Implementation” section below, following a case study from Jefferson County that highlights the importance of quality contract negotiation and management.





Stakeholder Engagement

Whether involved in the development of goals (a preferred approach) or engaged as to how goals will be achieved, key stakeholders must be consulted in the course of preparing to contract for services. This can be done via formal avenues like focus groups or surveys, augmented by a concerted effort to reach out to political, professional and community networks.

A report for the U.S. Department of Human Services identified challenges in a Kansas child welfare privatization effort when communication and engagement were not prioritized:

“Many key stakeholders were not meaningfully involved in planning and design efforts early on. Because of this, faulty implementation decisions were made. Moreover, several external stakeholders including the courts were unclear about the distinct roles and responsibilities of the public and private agencies.”¹⁵⁷

The report highlights a variety of stakeholders for consideration, and these inform the list below:

- **Children and Families:** including parents/youth receiving services, foster/adoptive parents and/or associations representing them.
- **CCYAs:** agency staff must be leaders of conversations around privatization because of their firsthand knowledge of the situation and the likelihood that they will be depended on by any entity providing services.
- **County human resources, procurement, legal, finance and audit functions:** these oft-overlooked services are critical to planning and delivering a smooth transition to private service delivery, from ensuring a quality scope of services and a well-developed contract to providing a competitive, effective procurement and instituting proper financial controls. While human resources staff will be less engaged in a wholesale ongoing outsourcing of a service (e.g., foster care), they would be important to the employee transition process and would likely be interested in comparing contract staff's compensation to that of similar county roles from time to time as part of a larger market scan. And they may engage in situations where contract and county staff coexist if conflicts arise.
- **County commissioners:** across the Commonwealth, the final decision to contract CCYA services (except for intake assessment/investigation and recommendation) rests with county commissioners; it is incumbent on county elected leaders to ensure that the other stakeholders on this list have been engaged, and commissioners should be provided with transparent, helpful data and communication by process participants.
- **Unions/employee organizations:** as noted earlier, employee concerns regarding job loss, compensation and/or working conditions are common in privatization discussions; these should be acknowledged and addressed with clear, consistent and timely communication

¹⁵⁷ “Child Welfare Privatization Initiatives – Assessing Their Implications for the Child Welfare Field and for Federal Child Welfare Programs – Topical Paper #1, Assessing Site Readiness: Considerations about Transitioning to a Privatized Child Welfare System,” U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation. Sept. 2007. Page 5.



even when there are no formal labor agreements in place (in that case, the agreements will likely address the issue or at least provide an approach for addressing it).

- **Courts:** engagement should include not just judges and court staff, but the family law community and monitors of court-negotiated agreements.
- **Law enforcement:** local law enforcement (city and county) should be notified of outsourcing any service where providers might be contacted by police in the course of performing their work (for example, York County’s move to contract casework included notification to law enforcement agencies that the contract staff would be representing the CCYA and carrying county-issued identification).
- **Service providers:** including various agencies (for-profit, non-profit, other public agencies) across not just the spectrum of children, youth, and family services, but the broader service community as well (e.g., mental health, substance use disorders).

Managing Risk Through Procurement and Implementation

As mentioned above, procurement and legal staff are critical players in any successful public procurement. They should support the effort with careful review of local, state, and federal procurement requirements (where applicable because of funding). Counsel will also be needed in discussion of legal considerations such as staff responsibility for testifying in court and associated liability.

The contract scope should be vetted for potential conflicts of interest, including any situation where a service provider might be asked to approve payments to themselves or manage budgets from which they are paid. It should also be evaluated for accessibility to community providers – a CCYA’s willingness and ability to divide service responsibility among multiple small providers may help build community capacity and avoid reliance on a single vendor.

Contract scope should also be clear regarding the county’s policy, process, and performance expectations. From the county’s overall strategy for serving children, youth and families to more granular issues like identifying which forms a contractor will use (e.g., the contractor’s preferred format or the county’s), county and CCYA officials must use the scope of services to articulate clear, reasonable requirements for prospective vendors.

As suggested earlier, this can be challenging, particularly with regard to developing measures. A PCCFYS official related an approach that focuses on measures of activity (e.g., home visits) – “You have to figure out what’s measurable and will help you get to the right outcome” – but also reported utilizing post-service outcomes as measures (e.g., percentage of youth avoiding placement three, six and 12 months after placement prevention services).¹⁵⁸

In any case, performance standards should be as specific as possible; for instance, “performing home visits” does not speak to frequency, but “performing weekly home visits” does, and the standard carries even more specificity if paired with required curriculum or engagement. Where multiple

¹⁵⁸ PFM interview with PCCFYS leadership, February 28, 2024.



providers are used to provide a service, results can be compared and performance can drive assignment of future work.

Standards for payment are another important item identified by PCCYFS leadership, who noted that billing can be done in time increments but the county and contractor must still determine what is billable (e.g., only visits with families, additional time logged arranging support services, etc.). As contractors would still be expected to cover costs, limitations on what is billable should be reasonable or would likely generate higher hourly rates to cover unbilled work.

In line with earlier references, Pennsylvania counties will generally be hard-pressed to access the cost-saving benefits most often promoted by privatization advocates. While the literature speaks to evidence-based and managed care approaches as means of reducing expenses and distributing risk across a large population, smaller counties are likely to lack the requisite resources, population and cases to support economies of scale. This is a significant obstacle:

[S]mall scale initiatives present challenges with regard to financial risk. If planners are considering introducing financial risk into contracts, the size, case mix, and scope of services matters. By including a broad and heterogeneous group of persons and broad array of services, the risk of the most severe and costly cases can be spread over a large number of less costly cases. The more risk the contractor bears, the more important it becomes to ensure an adequate caseload size.¹⁵⁹ (emphasis added)

Thus, Pennsylvania counties seeking to contract for ongoing child welfare services (casework) are generally left with a reimbursement approach wherein a service provider delivers services, then invoices the county for services delivered per contract terms.¹⁶⁰ A potential side effect of this approach is minimizing the contractor's incentive to manage cases closely and places more responsibility on the county for contract and quality assurance monitoring. Where prospective payment (i.e., a retainer provided before services are rendered) is considered, it should be given legal review and assessed to ensure that prospective payment would not exceed the value of services rendered and require any recovery by the county.¹⁶¹

After careful evaluation of responses to the county's procurement solicitation (via requests for proposals and/or any other process required by law or deemed appropriate), contractor proposals can be scored on criteria that align with the project's established goals. Pricing can be negotiated based on county service experience and labor market conditions, and provisions for monitoring and auditing contractor performance and billing can be established, but the county must then assume the long-term challenge of managing the contract to track service and financial performance.

This can be a hidden challenge when the focus is on staffing direct service roles including caseworkers – relieving a staffing challenge in one area can create a new one in another area as the

¹⁵⁹ "Child Welfare Privatization Initiatives – Assessing Their Implications for the Child Welfare Field and for Federal Child Welfare Programs – Topical Paper #2, Program and Fiscal Design Elements of Child Welfare Privatization Initiatives," U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation. Sept. 2007. Page 5.

¹⁶⁰ Placement services such as foster care are typically billed on a per diem basis.

¹⁶¹ PCCFYS leadership notes that some counties have initiated privatization of services via a "program funding" approach that sets a not to exceed cap on payments (e.g., \$X/month), but that this approach is generally only used for a project's first year or two to gather data and better set performance standards for ongoing work.



contract creates a need for trained, qualified staff to monitor and manage the agreement. As an OCYF official said, “You may lose 10 caseworkers, but you need to add four program specialists” to monitor performance.¹⁶² Even with the best contractor, this responsibility cannot be overlooked; children in the child welfare system remain the responsibility of the county serving them, regardless of whether services are contracted, and key stakeholders including the public and elected officials could be expected to hold the county responsible for any undesirable outcomes.

Relatedly, strong financial internal controls (e.g., monitoring budgets, reconciling invoices and payments, performing regular audits) and the staff capacity to implement them are essential to making certain the county and its constituents are getting what they pay for. These areas should receive particular attention where ongoing casework is contracted; OCYF staff report that while the Commonwealth has strong internal controls standards for subrecipients providing placement services, it has not established comparable requirements in place for outsourcing of ongoing services.¹⁶³ As indicated in the variations between counties featured in this section’s case studies, absence of standard guidance may invite mismanagement, even when county officials operate with good intentions.

¹⁶² PFM telephone interview with OCYF officials, February 5, 2024.

¹⁶³ PFM telephone interview with OCYF officials, February 5, 2024.



Case Study: Tioga County*

Tioga County contracts a broad swath of human services activities – the county’s children and youth assistant administrator says the shift began with fiscal services and then incorporated services for people with disabilities or mental health challenges before expanding to include county children and family services.

The current contracting approach includes ongoing operations in a hybrid structure: county staffing includes administration, an intake manager, three supervisors, and 12 caseworkers, while the contract provider employs two managers, four supervisors and 16 caseworkers. This mix is shifting as the county moves some contract employees to county employment to address Commonwealth instructions that ChildLine staff can only communicate with county employees (and not with contract staff).

Agency leadership reports that Tioga County’s recruiting and retention have improved of late, and that challenges tend to impact contractor and county alike: “We haven’t noticed a huge difference between [contractor] efforts and county efforts.... If one side is suffering, the other side is suffering.”

Even in a long-term and stable relationship, there is potential for conflict between county and provider staff around compensation and culture, as staff work side by side. The issue of communication with ChildLine staff was noted because contracted employees used their contractor email addresses rather than being issued county email addresses. Contractor compensation packages may lean more toward pay than benefits, creating potential for real and/or perceived inequities and resulting dissatisfaction. A provider’s preferred approach – in Tioga County’s case, an open-office concept – may not align with the preferences of county leadership or staff and require changing at the county’s direction. And county staff may feel community allegiances (“skin in the game”) that contract staff from elsewhere do not.

Contracting for services should not be undertaken lightly, an agency official notes: “It requires so much infrastructure to even attempt.” With the same provider delivering fiscal and child welfare services in Tioga County, leadership says the county has implemented rigorous review of invoices prior to payment – all expenditures over \$300 are reviewed by DHS management based on caseworker justification. If approved by the county’s DHS, invoices are forwarded to county commissioners for review and approval before payment can be processed.

In the end, a Tioga County CCYA official suggests that counties considering privatization take a thoughtful, methodical approach, recognizing their responsibility and accountability (legally and in the public eye) to children and families receiving services: “Be wary of a magic pill. Really, really know what you want out of this ... because it all comes back to you.”

*PFM telephone interview with Children and Youth Assistant Administrator, Tioga County Department of Human Services, March 5, 2024.



XI. Recommendations

There is no “one-size-fits-all” approach to improving caseworker or CCYA employee recruitment and retention experience. Each of the Commonwealth’s 67 CCYAs have a different – and unique – constellation of challenges, needs, and experiences. Accordingly, the recommendations that follow should be viewed as a menu of options.

Some of the recommendations that follow are directed towards OCYF. Others are directed towards CCYAs. Others will require collaboration between OCYF, CCYAs, and/or other stakeholders in the Pennsylvania child welfare community, including local and state elected officials and legislators. Not all recommendations will be applicable, viable, or appropriate to each CCYA. However, the goal is that each CCYA will find some recommendations listed below helpful in bolstering employee satisfaction, which in turn, may improve recruitment and retention experience.

Many of the recommendations listed in this report will require funding. Accordingly, the first recommendation listed – the creation of a **Recruitment and Retention Investment Fund** – establishes a funding mechanism to implement many of the recommendations in this report carrying fiscal impact. Depending on the recommendations selected, these costs may be phased in over a multi-year period to lessen their immediate financial effects. As noted previously, reduced caseworker turnover is associated with improved child and family outcomes. Improvements in these outcomes, such reduced time spent in congregate care, may generate cost savings that help offset investments in caseworker recruitment and retention.¹⁶⁴

Further, many of the recommendations listed in this report will require continued collaboration and effort between OCYF, CCYAs, and community stakeholders in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania child welfare community. Accordingly, the second recommendation listed – a **Recruitment and Retention Work Group** – is designed to serve as a collaborative body to inform and guide implementation of measures that will improve CCYA recruitment and retention experience.

¹⁶⁴ See “Caseworker Recruitment” chapter, section “Employee Perspectives on Recruitment.”



Summary of Recommendations

Recommendations are grouped into six themes: cross-cutting, compensation, recruiting, caseworker workloads, training, and safe, supportive workplaces, with the subsequent pages providing additional detail for each recommendation presented.

Recommendations associated with the Recruitment and Retention Investment Fund (RRIF in the tables that follow) are designed with the symbol “*”, while recommendations associated with the Recruitment and Retention Working Group (RRWG) are associated with the symbol “†”.

#	Cross-Cutting Recommendations	RRIF	RRWG
1	Establish a Recruitment & Retention Investment Fund	-	-
2	Create an OCYF-CCYA Recruitment & Retention Work Group	-	-
3	Develop a Grant Clearinghouse	*	†
4	Pursue a Comprehensive Multi-Media Communications Strategy	*	†
5	Create a Guide to Best Practices in Contracting for Services	-	†
6	Legally Designate Child Welfare Caseworkers as First Responders	-	†
7	Develop Uniform Definition of a "Case"	-	†
8	Provide Stakeholder Trainings for Partner Organizations	-	†
#	Compensation Recommendations	RRIF	RRWG
9	Competitive Hiring Rates	-	†
10	Early-Career Wage Increases in Compensation Plans	-	-
11	Pay Compression Adjustments	-	-
12	Promotion Differentials	-	-
13	Overtime Pay for First-Line Supervisors	-	-
14	Premium Pays	-	-
15	Recruitment Incentives	*	†
16	Retention Incentives	*	†
17	Referral Incentives	*	†
18	Student Loan Repayment Assistance	*	†
19	Onsite or Subsidized Childcare	*	†
20	Expand Use of Caseworker 3s	-	†
#	Recruitment Recommendations	RRIF	RRWG
21	Strengthen Recruiting Relationships with Universities and Colleges	*	†
22	Expand CWEB Program	*	†
23	Develop Strategic Recruitment Plans	-	-
24	Enhance Transparency in Recruiting	-	†
25	Improve CCYA and Civil Service Communication	-	†



#	Caseworker Workload Recommendations	RRIF	RRWG
26	Make Strategic Technological Investments	*	†
27	Expand Use of Case Aides and Clerical Positions	-	-
28	Designate School District Caseworkers	-	-
29	Adopt Dedicated After-Hours Staffing	-	-
30	Improve Mandated Reporter Trainings	-	†
31	Improve ChildLine Designation of Child Welfare Referrals	-	†
32	Revise GPS Bulletin and Training	-	-
33	Increase Access to Prevention Services	-	†
34	Ensure Efficient Administrative Paperwork and Processes	-	†
#	Training Recommendations	RRIF	RRWG
35	Emphasize Mentoring Programs	-	†
36	Utilize Training Coordinators	-	-
37	Expand Training Offerings	*	†
38	Delay Assignment of Cases to New Caseworkers	-	†
#	Safe, Supportive Workplace Recommendations	RRIF	RRWG
39	Improve Safety Measures for Caseworkers	*	†
40	Offer Counseling and Peer Support	*	†
41	Provide Remote/Flexible Working Options	-	†
42	Implement Case Reviews and Decision-Making Support	-	-
43	Develop Positive Organizational Cultures	-	-

Cross-Cutting Recommendations

The first series of recommendations touch multiple subject areas and themes. Accordingly, these recommendations are designated as “cross-cutting” and address resources, policy changes, implementation coordination, and avenues for increased collaboration between the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and CCYAs.

The first two recommendations in particular – the Recruitment and Retention Investment Fund and the OCYF-CCYA Recruitment and Retention Workgroup – are closely intertwined with funding of subsequent recommendations listed throughout this chapter.

1) Establish a Recruitment and Retention Investment Fund

The Commonwealth should establish a Recruitment and Retention Investment Fund for direct investment in initiatives that may improve caseworker recruitment and retention. The Recruitment and Retention Investment Fund would be seeded with OCYF funds and reimburse CCYAs for activities that can be characterized as solutions to the Commonwealth’s caseworker recruitment and retention challenges. The Recruitment and Retention Investment Fund would fund one-time or



limited-duration initiatives (e.g., one or two years) and cover a range of personnel and non-personnel costs. Many of the recommendations with a fiscal impact – including the recommendations in this report designated with an asterisk (*) – would be eligible for funding through the Recruitment and Retention Investment Fund.

Recommendations from this report that would be eligible for Recruitment and Retention Investment Fund support would include, but are not necessarily limited to, the following:

- Grant clearinghouse
- Comprehensive multi-media communications strategy
- Recruitment incentives for CCYA staff
- Retention incentives for CCYA staff
- Caseworker referral incentives
- Student loan assistance
- Subsidized childcare
- Expansions in the CWEB program
- Investments in technology used by caseworkers
- Safety measures for caseworkers
- Counseling and peer support
- Capital improvements and programming that support collaboration (e.g., collocation of caseworkers and partner staff, CAC development)

The Recruitment and Retention Investment Fund could also serve as an “innovation fund” – i.e., a funding mechanism to develop and implement county-level best recruitment and retention practices via pilot programs. Potential pilot programs and promising practices could be identified in the OCYF-CCYA Recruitment and Retention Workgroup (see Recommendation #2), evaluated by the Workgroup, and if deemed successful – scaled through support from the Recruitment and Retention Investment Fund.

There are some models – both within the Commonwealth and from neighboring states – that can inform development and implementation of the Recruitment and Retention Investment Fund. In Pennsylvania, “special grants” are provided to counties for start-up funding around special child welfare projects and programs (though these do not appear to be focused on recruitment and retention issues). These grants indicate an existing mechanism for evaluating and funding proposals from counties that could be used as a framework for the proposed Investment Fund.



Outside of Pennsylvania, the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services launched a \$15 million grant program “to help public children services agencies recruit and retain frontline caseworkers and supervisors” in 2022. In the Ohio program, funds can be used for initiatives including signing and/or retention bonuses, student loan and/or tuition payments, local media campaigns, activities supporting organizational culture and climate, supervisor coaching or training, and acquisition of innovative technology to ease administrative workload and improve training.¹⁶⁵

Pennsylvania has already taken important steps toward funding recruitment and retention improvements in other professions – an example is the Pennsylvania Department of Education’s recent announcement of \$1.5 million in small grants (individual award maximum of \$20,000) “to recruit future special education professionals by engaging them in authentic, experiential learning opportunities in support of students with disabilities.” The same announcement noted the new Pennsylvania Student Teacher Support Program, which “provides up to \$15,000 to eligible student teachers... [to] help address the teacher shortage in Pennsylvania and fill staffing gaps for critical education positions....”¹⁶⁶ Similarly, the Commonwealth recently announced a tuition reimbursement program for emergency medical technicians and paramedics – designed to reduce financial barriers for emergency medical responders who wish to enter the field.¹⁶⁷

Building on these precedents, OCYF should develop dedicated funding for CCYA recruitment and retention. Coordination and feedback with the OCYF-CCYA Recruitment and Retention Workgroup (see Recommendation #2) will be critical to identifying the most impactful initiatives, dispersing funds in a timely manner, and evaluating the initiatives that generate the most successful outcomes.

2) Create an OCYF-CCYA Recruitment and Retention Work Group

For at least the past decade, various studies and stakeholders have proposed solutions to Pennsylvania’s child welfare worker recruitment and retention challenges. Despite the quality of many of these ideas – and implementation of some – the Commonwealth has been challenged to move forward in comprehensive and strategic fashion around caseworker retention.

To address this, OCYF should lead formation of a workgroup to formalize Commonwealth-county collaboration around CCYA retention. Meeting at least quarterly with prepared agendas and dedicated subgroups, this workgroup should include OCYF leadership and a sampling of CCYA leaders and be co-chaired by a Commonwealth official and a CCYA administrator. Other organizational participants should include: PCYA, CWRC, and CCAP. The workgroup may also request additional organizational participants to support their efforts on a consistent or ad hoc basis, such as PCCYFS, OCFC, and representatives from law enforcement, health care, education, and other social service sectors.

¹⁶⁵ “ODJFS Announces Grant to Agencies for Caseworker Recruitment and Retention,” Ohio Department of Job and Family Services. June 24, 2022. Accessed April 25, 2024 at <https://dam.assets.ohio.gov/image/upload/jfs.ohio.gov/RELEASES/pdf/ODJFS-Announces-Grant-to-Agencies-for-Caseworker-Recruitment-and-Retention.pdf>.

¹⁶⁶ “Shapiro Administration Announces \$1.5 Million In Grants To Grow Special Education Teacher Workforce,” Pennsylvania Pressroom. April 19, 2024. Accessed April 25, 2024 at <https://www.media.pa.gov/pages/education-details.aspx?newsid=1457>.

¹⁶⁷ [Pa. launches \\$1M tuition reimbursement program for EMTs, paramedics \(ems1.com\)](https://www.13news.com/news/pa-launches-1m-tuition-reimbursement-program-for-emts-paramedics)



The new workgroup will take point on many of this report's recommendations – for example, recommendations that may be associated with this workgroup are denoted with the symbol “†” in the pages that follow – as well other salient recruitment and retention issues that may emerge over the course of the workgroup's deliberations. An additional early task should be reviewing past recommendations (e.g., State of the Child and the OCFC reports) to identify any that should be pursued for adoption (including any needed updates to reflect current circumstances and environment).

The types of practices and initiatives that would be addressed in the Recruitment and Retention Work Group would include, but are not necessarily limited to:

- Surfacing and evaluating best practices for funding through the Recruitment and Retention Investment fund (Recommendation #1).
- Developing a comprehensive multi-media communications strategy.
- Drafting policy guidance and documents, such as a guide to best practices in contracting for services, legally designating child welfare caseworkers as first responders, developing a uniform definition of a case, and stakeholder trainings for partner organizations.
- Compensation approaches to address the immediate and pressing recruitment and retention challenges, including some potential non-traditional approaches such as student loan assistance and subsidized childcare.
- Improvements and better coordination between state and county caseworker recruitment and hiring efforts and processes.
- Strategies designed to lessen caseworker workloads, improve caseworker efficiency, and reduce caseworker burnout.
- Enhancements to caseworker training.
- Measures to improve caseworker working conditions and create a safe, supportive workplace for all CCYA employees.

The statewide workgroup will offer not just an opportunity for counties to share and suggest best practices; it will also provide a Commonwealth-wide view of CCYA successes and challenges. Where common themes are identified, the Commonwealth can help take a lead role in promoting these themes and providing resources and leadership to spread their use. These efforts can be reinforced through regional offices, which should serve as workgroup liaisons to CCYA leadership unable to participate in every regular meeting.



3) Develop a Grant Clearinghouse*†

* Denotes recommendation may be funded through Recruitment and Retention Investment Fund (Recommendation #1)

† Denotes recommendation can be addressed through OCYF-CCYA Recruitment and Retention Work Group (Recommendation #2)

OCYF should develop a public-facing grant information clearinghouse – a single webpage that would introduce CCYA leaders to the variety of potential funding streams available to them. Relatedly, OCYF should dedicate staff resources – perhaps at the regional level – to help ensure that counties have the technical expertise needed to maximize various funding streams.

Pennsylvania state agencies offer grant opportunities to local governments. So, too, do philanthropic and federal entities. While some of these sources focus directly on child welfare, others may emphasize related or supporting activities of partner agencies and thus have the potential to support CCYAs' work as well.

For example, the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency (PCCD) offers federal crisis intervention funding that supports community outreach, behavioral health training for court personnel, and other initiatives that could easily dovetail with CCYA work.¹⁶⁸ The Commission also administers the “Endowment Act,” 2013 legislation that set aside \$48 million in funding for preventing child sexual abuse or assisting victims of child sexual abuse; multi-disciplinary investigative teams (MDITs) intended to support collaboration between CCYAs, local law enforcement, local health care professionals, and other key partners; victim service organizations serving children who experience sexual abuse; and training of mandated reporters or people who treat victims of child sexual abuse. A 2022 report shows 41 grants totaling \$5.8 million were awarded, ranging from \$49,364 to \$390,404; since 2015, the program had awarded 283 grants totaling \$23.8 million.¹⁶⁹

Additionally, capacity-building and technical assistance may be available through federal initiatives or philanthropic organizations like the Annie E. Casey Foundation. But information on these various sources is not gathered and presented in a manner that would be easily accessible to busy CCYA leaders, nor is it likely that all Pennsylvania counties have the time and ability to consider strategic use of various funding streams, including braiding and blending multiple funding sources to maximize local resources.

Building and maintaining a clearinghouse of this nature will require resources from OCYF. Because this is not a current staff function, the need to find or add capacity to incorporate this function may mean that this recommendation requires a longer lead up to implementation.

¹⁶⁸ Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency, “All Action Items for Consideration at the March 13, 2024 Meeting.” Accessed April 26, 2024 at <https://www.pccd.pa.gov/AboutUs/Documents/Commission%20Awarded%20Grants/March%2013.%202024.pdf>.

¹⁶⁹ “Institution of Higher Education Monetary Penalty Endowment Act Annual Report 2022,” Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency. Accessed April 26, 2024 at <https://prdpccd.pwpca.pa.gov/Justice-Research/Pages/2022-Endowment-Act-Annual-Report.aspx>.



4) Pursue a Comprehensive Multi-Media Communications Strategy*†

* Denotes recommendation may be funded through Recruitment and Retention Investment Fund (Recommendation #1)

† Denotes recommendation can be addressed through OCYF-CCYA Recruitment and Retention Work Group (Recommendation #2)

As described in detail previously, public perception and partnership with public stakeholders represent critical factors in CCYA retention.¹⁷⁰ Local CCYAs could also benefit from state-level support in caseworker recruitment efforts. Accordingly, OCYF should develop a comprehensive multi-media communications strategy aimed at both recruiting new caseworkers, as well as improving perception of child welfare work as whole.

Within Pennsylvania's state-run, county administered system, county governments – through CCYAs – take on the primary responsibilities around recruiting casework staff. But there may be economies of scale for certain recruiting activities at the state level, particularly in the areas of engagement with higher education, public recruitment campaigns, and capacity for analysis to determine the most effective recruiting approaches. Recruiting efforts at the state level could be coordinated to support – and complement – county-level recruitment efforts.

Additionally, child welfare workers' focus group feedback indicated a sense that their work is mischaracterized and undervalued. As illustrated previously, nearly 8 in 10 CCYA employees (79 percent) “disagreed” or “strongly disagreed” with the statement “the general public understands the work children and youth caseworkers do.”¹⁷¹ This disconnect with how caseworkers view their work – and how it is perceived by the public at large – can impact caseworker morale. And to the degree the perception is true, it may undermine child welfare workers' success engaging with the public and partners who underappreciate caseworkers' important role.

A comprehensive communications strategy aimed at enhancing public perception of county child welfare agencies and their dedicated caseworkers is not a new idea in Pennsylvania or elsewhere; 2022 news coverage of caseworker staffing shortages in Allegheny County mentions PCYA “asking for a state-level advertising campaign to recruit more workers.”¹⁷² The OCFC Caseworker Retention Workgroup also addressed communications and public engagement with recommendations and templates. And organizations like the National Child Welfare Workforce Institute offer guidance and support around a “We Are Child Welfare” campaign that promotes child welfare workers' important role and how communities can offer support.¹⁷³ The campaign includes infographics and draws on a communication guide with strategies for building community support, strengthening the child welfare workforce, and improving partnerships and collaboration while changing perceptions of caseworkers and the families they help.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷⁰ See “Factors Driving Caseworker Attrition” chapter; section “Partner/Stakeholder Relationships.”

¹⁷¹ See “Factors Driving Caseworker Attrition” chapter; section “Partner/Stakeholder Relationships.”

¹⁷² “Allegheny County caseworker staffing shortage hurts kids and families, caseworkers say,” Kate Giammarise, 90.5 WESA (radio). Accessed April 23, 2024 at <https://www.wesa.fm/politics-government/2022-09-02/allegheny-county-caseworker-staffing-shortage-hurts-kids-and-families-caseworkers-say>.

¹⁷³ “We Are Child Welfare” website, National Child Welfare Workforce Institute. Accessed April 24, 2024 at <https://ncwwi.org/we-are-child-welfare/>.

¹⁷⁴ “NCCWI Communications Guide: How to Advance Organizational Goals Through Effective Messaging, Storytelling, and Public Relations,” National Child Welfare Workforce Institute. Pages 3–4. Accessed April 23, 2024 at <https://ncwwi->



Principal elements of a communications strategy should include the following elements, at a minimum:

- **Statewide recruitment and public education campaign:** Launch a public campaign that highlights the essential services provided by county child welfare agencies and underscores the invaluable role of caseworkers in delivering these services. Use success stories from both clients and caseworkers to humanize the profession and showcase positive outcomes. The campaign should utilize traditional and news media – potentially including signage, billboards, and newspaper and television coverage to include paid and earned stories (the latter initiated by the communications team rather than by the media outlet). It should also incorporate online and social media, using hashtags to promote posts.

As one potentially applicable model, OCYF may look at recent recruiting efforts by the Pennsylvania State Police. The Pennsylvania State Police launched a campaign focused on showing the diversity of roles in police work.¹⁷⁵ Their campaign includes ads on billboards, streaming services, radio, TV, and social media. A similar campaign – administered by OCYF, with input from CCYAs through the OCYF-CCYA Recruitment and Retention Workgroup – could highlight the importance and value of what caseworkers do while directing interested applicants to recruitment channels.

- **Consistent message:** Develop a standardized presentation for use by PA DHS, OCYF, and CCYA leadership when engaging with community groups and key stakeholders. This presentation should effectively communicate the mission, services, and accomplishments of child welfare agencies, while also addressing common misconceptions and concerns. This approach can be combined with outreach to community groups such as churches, service clubs, neighborhood groups, high school and community college student organizations, etc. to encourage dissemination of the message. While standardized, the presentation should allow for some tailoring to reflect local concerns and priorities.
- **Regional media roundtables:** Organize regional roundtables for OCYF and CCYA staff with local news media representatives. These forums can facilitate open dialogue and transparency, provide insights into agency operations and value, and foster constructive relationships between child welfare agencies and media outlets. They will also position regional staff and/or designated communications professionals to support local communications work through one-on-one or small-group interactions, offering more support to CCYA administrators who may not feel they have time to pursue the outreach on their own.
- **Social media monitoring and response:** Implement a robust social media monitoring system to track public sentiment and address any misconceptions or concerns promptly. The state should actively engage with the public through social media channels, providing

dms.org/index.php/resourcemenuresource-library/change-implementation/1581-ncwwi-communications-guide-how-to-advance-organizational-goals-through-effective-messaging-storytelling-and-public-relations/file.

¹⁷⁵ Meadville Tribune. "Pennsylvania State Police launch ad campaign to attract more recruits." March 12, 2024. Allied News, alliednews.com



accurate information and addressing inquiries or criticisms as appropriate. This may require dedicated personnel focused on promoting consistent, positive messaging across the Commonwealth rather than having OCYF weigh in on specific cases. The latter would be left to individual counties as appropriate, though OCYF communications staff might provide strategic guidance for counties responding to difficult situations.

- **Crisis communications training:** In line with the above, the communications effort should include provision of crisis communications training and support to OCYF staff and CCYA administrators, as well as county communications staff where available. This training should include preparation for managing potential crises, crafting effective messaging, and conducting media interviews. Additionally, OCYF should provide sample press releases and offer news and social media training to equip staff with the necessary skills to effectively communicate during times of crisis.
- **Create ambassadors:** The most credible messengers are often third parties; toward this end, a component of the public outreach and marketing effort should be developing a cadre of community leaders across the Commonwealth who can help carry the message forward. County commissioners are at the forefront by virtue of their dual role – setting budgets and policy, but also speaking as an authoritative voice in the electorate’s eyes. Other local elected and appointed officials are also potential advocates; so, too, are educators, pastors, and businesspeople, and of course the families who have benefited from CCYA services.

Overall, this effort will likely require additional funding resources, potentially including communications staff, outside communications vendors, and advertising placement expenses. Further, practitioner input must be incorporated, with the OCYF-CCYA Recruitment and Retention Work Group (Recommendation #2) serving as one potential mechanism to incorporate input, insights, and guidance from CCYA case-carrying staff and administrators.

5) Create a Guide to Best Practices in Contracting for Services[†]

[†] Denotes recommendation can be addressed through OCYF-CCYA Recruitment and Retention Work Group (Recommendation #2)

OCYF should coordinate with PCYA and PCCYFS to develop a guide for contracting services, including guidance on stakeholder engagement, planning, procurement, and contract management. The guide should also include sample scopes of service and highlight potential conflicts or pitfalls along with successful practices; it should be paired with training at PCYA and OCYF conferences and convenings.

In discussions with CCYA and OCYF staff and other stakeholders, a common theme emerged around the need for building procurement, contracting and contract management knowledge and capacity at the county level. As explained previously in this report, PCYA has compiled some valuable information along these lines, including discussion of potential issues such as data security, liability, and fiscal accountability.¹⁷⁶ But the guidance is not formalized or comprehensive. CCYA staff, county

¹⁷⁶ See “Considerations in Contracting for Services” chapter.



commissioners, and counties' finance and procurement staff would benefit from standardized guidance regarding effective contracting for children and family services.

One concern raised during interviews with stakeholders was that developing sample contract language may fail to incorporate local needs or expose the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania to additional liability. To address this, the key parties – OCYF, PCYA and PCCYFS – could adopt an approach similar to one utilized in California. There, a statewide managed care contract requires all managed care plans “to enter into (memoranda of understanding, or MOUs) with counties and third-party entities ... to contractually ensure the provision of whole-system, person-centered care.” The contract includes children in foster care, among other groups.

The California Department of Health Care Services provides a County Child Welfare MOU Template in two components: a base template containing provisions that must be included in all MOUs, and bespoke (i.e., customized) templates specific to contractual relationships and programs applicable under the MOU. Required provisions include standards for training and education about MOU requirements and services covered, care coordination, quarterly meetings for quality improvement, data-sharing and confidentiality, and dispute resolution. Optional language includes provisions designed to encourage increased alignment and coordination between contract partners.¹⁷⁷

6) Legally Designate Child Welfare Caseworkers as First Responders[†]

[†] Denotes recommendation can be addressed through OCYF-CCYA Recruitment and Retention Work Group (Recommendation #2)

OCYF should seek legislative and gubernatorial support for formal recognition of the Commonwealth's child welfare caseworkers as first or emergency responders.

A mention of first or emergency responders may conjure images of police, firefighters, emergency medical technicians and medical personnel, among others. But Pennsylvania's child welfare workers perform their jobs in some of the same circumstances as people in professions traditionally viewed as first responders. CCYA caseworkers are called to dangerous environments to investigate possible criminal activity. They must perform their jobs amid a variety of hazards (e.g., firearms, fentanyl) and assist people experiencing a diverse range of challenges.

Yet this component of casework is not reflected in the professional standing child welfare workers are accorded by the general public or their elected representatives.

Other states have designated child welfare caseworkers as first responders and shown that tangible benefits accruing to caseworkers through emergency responder designation need not be in the form of direct compensation. In June 2020, amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, North Carolina designated child protective services workers and adult protective services workers as “Emergency First Responders.”¹⁷⁸ Recognizing that “face-to-face contact is often essential for child protective services,” this designation ensured that caseworkers would get access to the personal protective equipment

¹⁷⁷ County Child Welfare MOU Template Post-Release Webinar,” California Department of Health Care Services. December 5, 2023. Pages 5 and 9-12. Accessed April 22, 2024 at <https://www.dhcs.ca.gov/Documents/MCQMD/County-Child-Welfare-MOU-Template-Post-Release-Webinar.pdf>.

¹⁷⁸ Yost, Scott D. RHINO Times. “DSS Protective Services Workers Are Now Emergency Responders” June 8, 2020.



(PPE) such as masks and face shields that were also being provided for health care workers and others requiring face to face interactions. Child welfare leaders and legislators in additional states – e.g., New Jersey – have advocated for child welfare caseworkers to be classified as first responders to access mental health services.¹⁷⁹

Inclusion in the ranks of first responders can also bring legal protections for caseworkers, for whom personal safety is a recurring concern. In 2022, Illinois advanced a bill, with support from the governor, which would increase penalties for individuals “who commit crimes against Illinois Department of Childhood and Family Services (DCFS) employees. Under the proposed legislation, DCFS employees would have the same protections as police, firefighters, private security employees, correctional officers, and community policing volunteers. The legislation allows for a person who causes great bodily harm or permanent disability or disfigurement to a DCFS employee to be charged with a more serious Class 1 felony as opposed to a Class 3.¹⁸⁰

In developing a strategy to advocate for recognition as first responders, OCYF may consider the key factors that align with first responder designation, including:

- Direct interaction with crisis situations as the first professionals to respond to reports of child abuse, neglect, or other emergencies involving children. Caseworkers assess the safety of children in high-stress situations and make critical decisions to protect their welfare.
- The knowledge and training necessary to handle emergencies, assess risks, and provide immediate support to children and families in crisis, as well as the expertise in child development, trauma-informed care, and crisis intervention that equips them to effectively navigate complex situations.
- The risks to personal safety that caseworkers face while carrying out their duties, including encountering hostile individuals, entering unstable environments, and managing volatile family dynamics while experiencing traumatic incidents and stress.
- The vital role caseworkers play in protecting vulnerable children from harm, ensuring that situations do not escalate, and intervening and providing services to prevent future incidents.

An emergency or first responder designation for child welfare staff would also lend itself well to the broader communications and marketing outreach presented previously in Recommendation #4 (Comprehensive Multi-Media Communications Strategy).

7) Develop Uniform Definition of a “Case”[†]

[†] Denotes recommendation can be addressed through OCYF-CCYA Recruitment and Retention Work Group (Recommendation #2)

OCYF should explore developing a uniform definition of a child welfare case. The absence of a uniform case definition presents a challenge to decision-makers and leadership in measuring

¹⁷⁹ Flanagan, Brenda. “Should caseworkers who investigate child abuse be considered first responders?” NJ Spotlight News. April 15, 2019

¹⁸⁰ Gov. Pritzker Announces Support for Legislation to Protect Social Workers. Illinois.gov Press Release. January 6, 2022.



workloads – a salient factor in caseworker retention – and inhibits the effective allocation of resources to reduce caseworker caseload to more manageable levels.

Currently, county CCYAs determine how they define a case. Some counties define a case by number of families (regardless of the number of children), while others define cases by number of children served. Because there is no standard definition of a case, the complexity is not addressed. Cases are treated the same – regardless of number of children, or other factors, such as service type, medical needs, mental and behavioral needs, etc.¹⁸¹ OCYF has begun efforts to address this issue, including moving away from the term “case” to the preferred term “family” and proposing revisions to Chapter 3131 regulations around recommended caseloads. In addition, the proposed 3131 regulation advises counties to establish and implement written policies on the assignment of cases to new staff and staff reassigned as direct service workers. The Recruitment and Retention Workgroup could be tasked with supporting counties in developing a methodology for defining family or caseload and how to adjust caseload ratios to reflect the complexity of families being served and other workload considerations.¹⁸²

Outside the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, some jurisdictions have implemented “caseload weighting methodologies.” These caseload weighting methodologies allow for the definition of a case broadly, but also weight cases based on criteria like complexity and duration of services to better manage caseworker workloads.

As an example, Washington State’s Department of Children, Youth, and Families implemented a “workload methodology that applies different weighting based on the type of case” which is used to calculate child welfare caseloads.¹⁸³ This allows the Department to define certain cases by child – and others by family – depending on case type. This methodology accounts for the nature of different cases such as intake (“intensive, short-term services focused on assessment and immediate safety concerns”), children in out-of-home care (foster home, group home, or with family/kinship care), or receiving in-home services (longer period of involvement with the family with a focus on safety planning).¹⁸⁴ Then the Department assigns recommended caseload ranges based on case type and weighted score. This example illustrates how data can inform regulation and, in the case of Pennsylvania, provide guidance to counties to be able to better monitor and report on caseworker workloads.

8) Provide Stakeholder Trainings for Partner Organizations[†]

[†] Denotes recommendation can be addressed through OCYF-CCYA Recruitment and Retention Work Group (Recommendation #2)

Strong relationships between CCYA workers and their partners in other professions are critical to caseworker success and satisfaction. Despite relatively positive ratings in survey responses, CCYA casework staff and leadership in focus groups offered less-than-glowing reviews of their relationships with partners including law enforcement, attorneys and court staff, and stakeholders from the health

¹⁸¹ See “Factors Driving Caseworker Attrition” chapter; section “Working Conditions.”

¹⁸² Communication from Erazo, M. Pennsylvania Office of Children Youth and Families. May 20, 2024.

¹⁸³ “Child Welfare Workload Model Report to the Legislature – December 2020” Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.



care and education sectors. A general theme was a perceived lack of respect, appreciation or understanding toward child welfare workers.

As highlighted in this report's discussion of partner and stakeholder relationships, collaboration (beyond cooperation and coordination) can produce better outcomes for children, youth and families, and for caseworkers and law enforcement officers as well. The same holds true for family outcomes when child welfare agencies and courts collaborate.

Collaboration, though, depends on shared goals and a mutual understanding of the different roles and priorities stakeholders bring to the table. Professional "languages" or jargon may complicate communication, which should be regular and open. Missions may seem to conflict in ways that outweigh their congruence. Processes may not dovetail well. And misunderstandings can cut both ways: while CCYA staff perceive (most likely accurately in at least some scenarios) that they are misunderstood and unappreciated, there may also be opportunities for improving child welfare workers' understanding and appreciation for their partners' perspectives.

To overcome these challenges, OCYF, CWRC and other appropriate stakeholders (including Multidisciplinary Investigative Team or MDIT participants) should convene stakeholders from different professions for regular discussions around relationship-building and collaboration. At the regional or Commonwealth level, this can come in forms including inter-profession training sessions regarding new laws and funding opportunities or requirements. At the local level, literature suggests that cross-training or even retreats can support collaboration built on a shared vision and goals and a clear governance structure and strategic plan.

Compensation Recommendations

As a state-supervised, county-administered child welfare system, CCYA wages and benefit levels are determined at the discretion of county governments in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. While up to 80 percent of compensation costs may be reimbursed to CCYAs by OCYF, factors and considerations pertaining to CCYA compensation vary considerably across counties. Some of these factors include:

- **Regional labor markets:** Wage levels, labor talent pools, and competing employers are not consistent across the Commonwealth. For example, labor market dynamics are different in Philadelphia than in Erie County. Accordingly, variation in compensation across employees performing similar work in different jurisdictions across the Commonwealth is to be expected.
- **Financial condition:** Also known as the "ability-to-pay," local governments have different levels of financial resources available at their disposal to fund operations and provide wage increases for employees. Local governments with stronger tax bases and well-managed expenditure and liability levels will have more funding available to provide higher wage levels.



Relatedly, local governments – depending on geography, socio-economic demographics, organizational structure, and other factors – may provide a different mix of services to constituents. Different mixes of service delivery can result in varying amounts of funding available for employee compensation.

- **Local labor relations:** Counties have different approaches to determining wage and benefit levels. Some counties, for example, may set wages according to a “pattern” (in collective bargaining or outside of bargaining) where CCYA employee compensation is linked to compensation levels received by other employees. Moreover, human resources departments may seek to maintain established pay relationships across job classifications. As a result, increases in caseworker compensation may necessitate increases to other county job classifications as well – influencing decisions to adjust CCYA compensation levels.
- **Differences in workforce demographics:** Counties across the Commonwealth will have different workforce demographics and compositions. Some CCYAs, for example, may face a “retirement bubble” – where a larger portion of the workforce comprises more-tenured employees, while other CCYAs may experience higher degrees of early-career “churn” by newly hired caseworkers. Different solutions may be applicable for each situation. Similarly, some CCYA operations incorporate a mix of third-party service providers and non-county employees in the delivery of child welfare services – which may influence the applicability of the promising practices listed below for each CCYA.

Each of the compensation practices listed in the pages that follow have a particular emphasis on improving retention during the first two years of service – the career juncture when the majority of separations from CCYA employment occur.

9) Competitive Hiring Rates

[†] Denotes recommendation can be addressed through OCYF-CCYA Recruitment and Retention Work Group (Recommendation #2)

Hiring rates for entry level caseworkers should be competitive with other jobs requiring similar education and experience. As a benchmark, CCYAs should consider aligning caseworker hiring rates – including Caseworker 1, 2, and 3 as well as supervisor, manager, and administrative positions – with the minimum hiring rates listed in the “Commonwealth of Pennsylvania’s Local Government Classification Pay Plan Breakdown for DHS/DDAP/Aging PEMA Funded Agencies.”

As of July 1, 2023, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania allows for reimbursement of 80 percent of personnel costs up to the following hiring rates:

- Caseworker 1: \$44,010
- Caseworker 2: \$49,839



- Caseworker 3: \$56,900¹⁸⁵

Some CCYAs, however, publicize hiring rates below the maximum allowable hiring rates. Again, 80 percent of personnel costs are reimbursed up to a \$44,010 hiring rate for Caseworker 1, \$49,839 hiring rate for Caseworker 2, and \$56,900 hiring rate for Caseworker 3. For example, if a county government hiring Caseworker 1s at \$40,000 raised the starting pay to \$44,010, this would result in an incremental increase in base pay of \$4,010 (\$44,010 - \$40,000). In this illustrative scenario, the county would be responsible for 20 percent of incremental cost in base pay – totaling \$802 – with OCYF covering the balance (\$3,208).

As noted previously, CCYA caseworker compensation levels trail other occupations in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania that require similar tasks, knowledge, education, experience, and job training.¹⁸⁶ Similarly, only 20 percent of employee survey respondents responded that they “strongly agreed” or “agreed” with the statement “starting pay for a caseworker at my agency is sufficient to attract a strong pipeline of caseworkers.”¹⁸⁷

Any increase in starting pay, however, should account for potential pay compression impacts on more senior personnel. Any revision to the pay plan should maintain appropriate pay differentials between entry-level and more tenured employees.

10) Early-Career Wage Increases in Compensation Plans

CCYAs should build automatic pay increases into compensation plans early in a career – ideally, tied to key career junctures where greater percentages of employees separate from employment. As noted previously, approximately half of caseworker separations occur within the first two years of service and the majority occur before five years of completed service.¹⁸⁸

Accordingly, CCYAs should consider building automatic wage increases within the first five years of service that exceed the standard “merit” or “step” increases within their compensation plans.¹⁸⁹ The timing of these automatic wage increases is designed to create a financial incentive for caseworkers to stay with the CCYA during a timeframe when many consider separating employment.

Consider the following illustrative example. Assume that a county government has a pay range where caseworkers typically receive annual 3 percent merit increases. The CCYA may consider shifting to a 5 percent increase after one year of completed service – coinciding with the career juncture where most caseworker separations occur. The annual increase would be 3 percent thereafter. The table below presents an illustrative example of what this revised pay scale through the first five years of

¹⁸⁵ Local Government Classification Pay Plan Breakdown for DHS/DDAP/Aging/PEMA Funded Agencies Commonwealth Allowable Reimbursement Maximums July 1, 2023.

¹⁸⁶ See “Factors Driving Caseworker Attrition” chapter; section “Caseworker Compensation.”

¹⁸⁷ See “Caseworker Recruitment” chapter, section “Employee Perspectives on Recruitment.”

¹⁸⁸ See “Caseworker Retention” chapter; section “Pennsylvania Caseworker Vacancy and Retention Trends.”

¹⁸⁹ CCYA’s across the Commonwealth have varying compensation plans. Some County compensation plans are based on pay ranges – with an entry and maximum. Employees move through the pay ranges when they receive annual wage increase – often called “merit increases,” which are provided on their anniversary date – or at least in years in which the County government can afford them. Other County compensation plans use pay scales with “steps.” Employees advance one step according to a predetermined period of time (often, though not always, after one year of service) until the top step of the pay scale is reached.



service, assuming a starting rate of \$40,000. The blue shading reflects the career juncture (Year 2) where the additional 5 percent increase in is provided.

**Illustrative Caseworker Pay Scale
Includes 5.0% Base Pay Retention Pay in Year 2**

Year	3.0% Step Increases	3.0% Step Increases + 5.0% in Year 2
1	\$40,000	\$40,000
2	\$41,200	\$43,260
3	\$42,436	\$44,558
4	\$43,709	\$45,895
5	\$45,020	\$47,271

This type of pay structure is found in some local government law enforcement positions, where non-competitive automatic promotions – e.g., Police Officer I to Police Officer II – are built into the pay scale and accompanied with an additional pay increase.

As with adjustments to starting pay, any increase in early-career CCYA pay should account for potential pay compression impacts on more senior personnel. Any revision to the pay plan should maintain appropriate pay differentials between entry and more tenured employees.

11) Pay Compression Adjustments

CCYAs should consider pay compression adjustments to address pay compression, where present. The results from the employee survey suggest that employees in multiple CCYAs may experience pay compression. For example, as presented previously, approximately 78 percent of CCYA respondents (all employees) “strongly disagreed” or “disagreed” with the statement, “There is enough of a difference in pay between an employee who has been with my agency for a long period of time and an employee who was just hired.”¹⁹⁰ As one survey respondent commented, “the compression of salaries for experienced staff is a real issue. It creates a large amount of frustration.”

In response to such concerns, pay compression adjustments can better align compensation with tenure and improve CCYA compensation relative to other positions in industries/professions that compete for CCYA talent. Pay compression adjustments direct compensation towards more tenured employees by accelerating them through their respective salary ranges or pay scales.

In addition to bolstering the retention experience of more tenured personnel, compression adjustments can support the retention of early career caseworkers. More than half of employee survey respondents “strongly disagreed” or “disagreed” with the statement, “When I look at my agency’s pay plan, I can reasonably estimate my future earnings in 5, 10 and 15 years.”¹⁹¹ Compression adjustments – especially when paired with a fixed step schedule – can provide a clear

¹⁹⁰ See “Factors Driving Caseworker Attrition” chapter; section “Caseworker Compensation.”

¹⁹¹ See “Factors Driving Caseworker Attrition” chapter; section “Caseworker Compensation.”



and transparent compensation pathway for employees, and signal that they can expect predictable future wage growth.

The table below provides an illustrative example of how a pay compression adjustment could be implemented. The scenario assumes a CCYA has 35 caseworkers all on the same pay range. The starting pay is \$40,000. The practice of this illustrative CCYA – again, this example is not based on the experience of an actual CCYA – has been to provide periodic ad hoc wage adjustments that move caseworkers through a pay range.

In this scenario, employees are moved from a pay range to a step schedule with fixed 3 percent steps and a 5 percent early-career wage increase (consistent with the previous promising practice listed – “early career wage increases in compensation plans”). As shown below, the base pay cost of a compression pay adjustment is \$92,593. Again, according to OCYF reimbursement rules, 80 percent of these costs are likely to be reimbursed to the CCYA.

Illustrative Caseworker Compression Adjustment

Year of Service	Number of Employees	Average Base Pay	New Scale	Pay Cost*
1	9	\$40,000	\$40,000	\$0
2	8	\$40,500	\$43,260	\$22,080
3	6	\$41,000	\$44,558	\$21,347
4	3	\$42,000	\$45,895	\$11,684
5	1	\$44,000	\$47,271	\$3,271
6	1	\$44,000	\$48,690	\$4,690
7	2	\$47,000	\$50,150	\$6,300
8	3	\$47,250	\$51,655	\$13,214
9	1	\$48,000	\$53,204	\$5,204
10	1	\$50,000	\$54,800	\$4,800
Total	35	-	-	\$92,591

* Costs reflect changes in base pay only. Additional cost factors for fringe benefits (e.g., FICA, pension, healthcare formulas based on a percentage of salary) or other “roll-up” costs (e.g., overtime, pay premiums linked to a percentage of salary) are not included.

Again, the above example is illustrative and not based on the actual experience of any individual CCYA. Individual CCYA experience will vary and depend on multiple factors, such as tenure of existing employees. Additionally, structural adjustments to compensation plans – including pay compression adjustments – may require substantial financial outlays. Accordingly, phasing in these adjustments over a multi-year timeframe may be a consideration.

12) Promotional Differentials

CCYAs should ensure that there are appropriate promotional differentials between caseworker positions (i.e., Caseworker 1, 2, and 3) as well as between caseworkers and case supervisors. Promotional differentials are increases to base compensation that accompany a change in job title or



promotion. They create financial incentives for employees to progress into more advanced positions with greater responsibility and complex duties.

Establishing appropriate financial incentives for promotion will encourage high-performing caseworkers to seek promotion to supervisor, bolstering the quality of the supervisory applicant pool. Further, given the importance of supervisors in caseworker retention, improving the quality of supervisors may also have a positive effect on caseworker retention rates.¹⁹²

In the absence of appropriate financial incentives, high-performing non-supervisory employees may opt not to apply for supervisory positions. Insights from the employee survey suggest this may be the case in multiple CCYAs. As one survey respondent commented, “Most supervisors probably make less than caseworkers, all things considered.” Among caseworkers, only 16 percent of survey respondents “strongly agreed” or “agreed” with the statement, “Promotions come with appropriate compensation increases at my agency.” Approximately seven in 10 supervisors/case managers who participated in the employee survey responded “strongly disagree” or “disagree” to the same statement.

13) Overtime Pay for First-Line Supervisors

Another financial disincentive for promotion to supervisor is the absence of overtime pay for many caseworker supervisors. Accordingly, CCYAs should consider providing overtime for first-line supervisors.

While overtime pay practices for supervisors vary across the Commonwealth, multiple respondents to the employee survey explicitly noted the lack of overtime for supervisors as a disincentive for promotion. Consider the following comments from the employee survey:

- *“I make more as a caseworker with overtime. It would be a pay cut to be a supervisor.”*
- *“Supervisors will often make less than senior caseworkers or caseworkers who work overtime.”*
- *“Supervisors don’t get overtime pay. If I work overtime, maybe I can pay my bills this month.”*
- *“Supervisors make less money than caseworkers. They have no opportunity for overtime and do not get paid well.”*

Providing overtime for first-line supervisors is common among other local government professions – particularly public safety. For example, local government police, fire/EMS, and corrections departments typically provide overtime for first-line supervisors.

14) Premium Pays

CCYAs should consider implementing pay premiums linked to work performed outside of regular business hours. Caseworkers are often required to work outside of regular business hours; other

¹⁹² See “Factors Driving Caseworker Attrition” chapter; section “Organizational Culture.”



public sector professions provide pay premiums for work outside regular business hours. Examples of such premiums include:

- On-call pay
- Shift differentials
- Holiday pay

Attendees in multiple focus groups raised the importance of on-call pay, in particular. Focus group attendees highlighted the stress around being on call because of the uncertainty as to whether they will be called to work, and the associated implications (i.e., long work hours). One caseworker reflected in a focus group that while on call, one needed to “structure your life around the job.”

CCYAs have different on-call pay structures. Some counties do not offer on-call pay at all; others provide pay premiums that vary according to the time in which the caseworker is required to be on call. For example, one county reported the following on-call pay structure: \$75 per weekday, \$250 per weekend. PCYA and OCYF could help develop a review of common practices for counties to consider.

15) Recruitment Incentives*†

** Denotes recommendation may be funded through Recruitment and Retention Investment Fund (Recommendation #1)*

† Denotes recommendation can be addressed through OCYF-CCYA Recruitment and Retention Work Group (Recommendation #2)

Using resources from the Recruitment and Retention Investment Fund (Recommendation #1), CCYAs should consider providing recruitment incentive payments for hard-to-recruit CCYA positions, including caseworkers. The recruitment incentive payments would be lump sums, not included in base pay. Payments should be linked to service with the agency – e.g., \$1,000 at hire, \$1,000 at six months, \$1,000 at 18 months, and \$2,000 at 24 months (i.e., \$5,000 over two years in this example). These payments would be dispersed over the two years where caseworkers are at greatest risk of separation.

Given the historically tight labor market, employers across multiple industries – and multiple professions – are providing recruitment or signing incentives to newly hired employees. Within the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, multiple jurisdictions have provided recruitment incentives to caseworkers in recent years:

- Blair County: \$1,500 (hires with no experience) and \$4,000 (hires with more than two years' experience at another agency) payable at hire. Requires a two-year commitment.¹⁹³

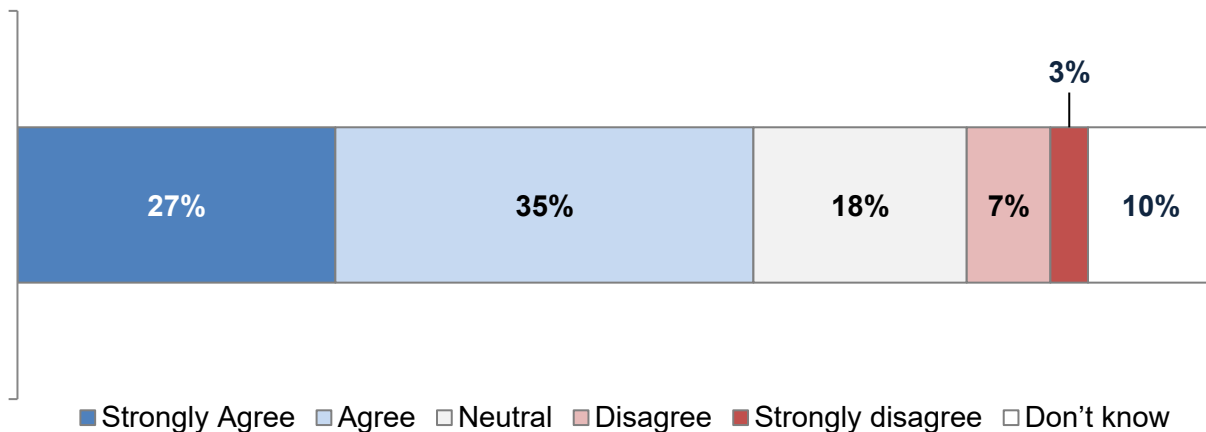
¹⁹³ Online job description, County Caseworker 1 (Local Government) - Blair County C&Y. Access on April 27, 2024 at <https://www.governmentjobs.com/careers/pabureau/jobs/newprint/3998537>



- Delaware County: \$3,000 recruitment incentive.¹⁹⁴
- Lancaster County: \$5,500 payable in three installments – \$1,000 payable after 90 days; \$2,250 after 180 days; and \$2,250 after 180 days.¹⁹⁵
- Montgomery County: Ten percent of salary payable after 90 days of employment.¹⁹⁶
- Westmoreland County: \$2,200 paid in two equal installments.¹⁹⁷
- York County: \$2,000 to \$4,000 depending on the position.¹⁹⁸

Additionally, feedback from the employee survey indicates that more than six in 10 respondents view “signing bonuses” (i.e., recruitment incentives) as effective tools for recruiting caseworkers.

“Please Respond to the Following Statement: ‘Signing Bonuses Are Effective in Recruiting New Caseworkers’”
All Responses (N = 286)



¹⁹⁴ Press Release, Delaware County Department of Human Services, “Delaware County Department of Human Services to Hold Career Fair at the Delaware County Intermediate Unit in Morton,” April 21, 2023. Accessed on April 27, 2024 at <https://www.delcopa.gov/publicrelations/releases/2023/hsajobfairmorton.html>

¹⁹⁵ “Lancaster County to offer sign-on incentive for new caseworker hires, bonuses for SEIU staff,” Lancaster Online, December 2, 2021. Accessed on April 27, 2024 at https://lancasteronline.com/news/politics/lancaster-county-to-offer-sign-on-incentive-for-new-caseworker-hires-bonuses-for-seiu-staff/article_13a5ef28-531b-11ec-9c3a-d7129e092fb2.html

¹⁹⁶ Press Release, “Montgomery County Announces Sign-On Bonus for New Hires,” July 20, 2022. Accessed on April 27, 2024 at <https://www.montgomerycountypa.gov/CivicAlerts.aspx?AID=3901#:~:text=The%20amount%20of%20the%20one.of%20employment%20with%20the%20County>

¹⁹⁷ “Bonuses OK’d to help fill vacant Westmoreland Children’s Bureau caseworker posts,” July 15, 2022. Accessed on April 27, 2024 at <https://triblive.com/local/westmoreland/bonuses-okd-to-help-fill-vacant-westmoreland-childrens-bureau-caseworker-posts/>

¹⁹⁸ “York County to Spend \$1 Million to Up Staffing, Give Bonuses in Children, Youth, & Families,” *York Daily Record*, January 25, 2002. Accessed on April 26, 2024 at <https://www.ydr.com/story/news/2022/01/25/york-county-american-rescue-plan-funds-bonuses-children-youth-families/6636181001/>



16) Retention Incentives*

* Denotes recommendation may be funded through Recruitment and Retention Investment Fund (Recommendation #1)

† Denotes recommendation can be addressed through OCYF-CCYA Recruitment and Retention Work Group (Recommendation #2)

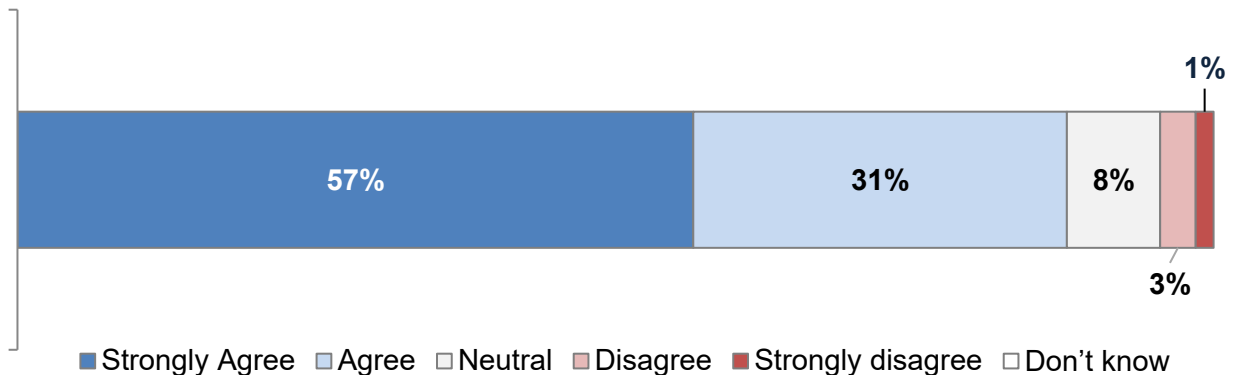
Using resources from the Recruitment and Retention Investment Fund (Recommendation #1), CCYAs should consider providing retention incentive payments for hard-to-recruit CCYA positions, including caseworkers. While recruitment incentives provide lump payments to new CCCYA hires, retention payments are designed to create incentives for existing employees to remain with their agencies.

The retention incentive payments would be lump sums, not included in base pay, and should mirror the recruitment incentive program. As with recruitment incentives, payments should be linked to prospective service – e.g., \$1,000 at the onset of the program, \$1,000 at six months, \$1,000 at 18 months, and \$2,000 at 24 months (i.e., \$5,000 over two years in this example).

Retention incentives represent another compensation tool that employers are using to improve retention for hard-to-retain positions in a historically tight labor market. Within Pennsylvania, York and Westmoreland counties, for example, have provided retention incentives to existing CCYA staff, in concert with recruitment incentives. Outside Pennsylvania, Maine is providing three \$1,000 lump sum incentive payments (\$3,000 total) across 20 job classifications (including caseworkers) in calendar year 2024.¹⁹⁹

Additionally, findings from the employee survey support the efficacy of providing retention incentives to bolster caseworker retention. As reflected in the figure below, nearly nine in 10 survey respondents (across all CCYA titles) “strongly agreed” or “agreed” with the statement “retention bonuses are effective in retaining tenured employees.”

“Please Respond to the Following Statement: ‘Retention Bonuses Are Effective in Retaining Tenured Employees’” All Responses (N =269)



¹⁹⁹ Press Release, “Department of Health and Human Services to Deliver Recruitment and Retention Payments to Child Welfare Staff This Month,” State of Maine Department of Health and Human Services, February 8, 2024.

<https://www.maine.gov/dhhs/news/department-health-and-human-services-deliver-recruitment-and-retention-payments-child-welfare-staff-thu-02082024-1200#:~:text=The%20three%20one%2Dtime%2C%20lump,between%20January%20and%20December%202024>



17) Referral Incentives*

* Denotes recommendation may be funded through Recruitment and Retention Investment Fund (Recommendation #1)

† Denotes recommendation can be addressed through OCYF-CCYA Recruitment and Retention Work Group (Recommendation #2)

As employees represent ambassadors for the CCYAs – about one in 5 CCYA employees reported learning about their agency through an employee – OCYF should consider funding and implementing a referral incentive pool.²⁰⁰ A referral payment would create an incentive for existing employees to assist in recruitment efforts. The employee who refers the candidate would receive a cash payment. The total cash payment would total \$2,500, payable in three parts:

- \$500 when the referred employee is hired.
- \$1,000 when the referral completes one year of service.
- Another \$1,000 when the referral reaches two years of completed service.

Multiple children and youth agencies across the country have implemented caseworker referral incentives, including multiple counties in California (e.g., San Mateo and San Bernadino), the State of Ohio, and Westmoreland County in Pennsylvania.

18) Student Loan Repayment Assistance*

* Denotes recommendation may be funded through Recruitment and Retention Investment Fund (Recommendation #1)

† Denotes recommendation can be addressed through OCYF-CCYA Recruitment and Retention Work Group (Recommendation #2)

OCYF should consider a student loan repayment assistance program, funded – at least in part – through the Recruitment and Retention Investment Fund (Recommendation #1). According to the Education Data Initiative, average student loan debt totaled \$37,338 per borrower in 2021 (most recent data available) – more than doubling from approximately \$18,200 in 2017. Moreover, 20 years after entering school, more than half of student borrowers still owe at least \$20,000 on outstanding loan balances.²⁰¹

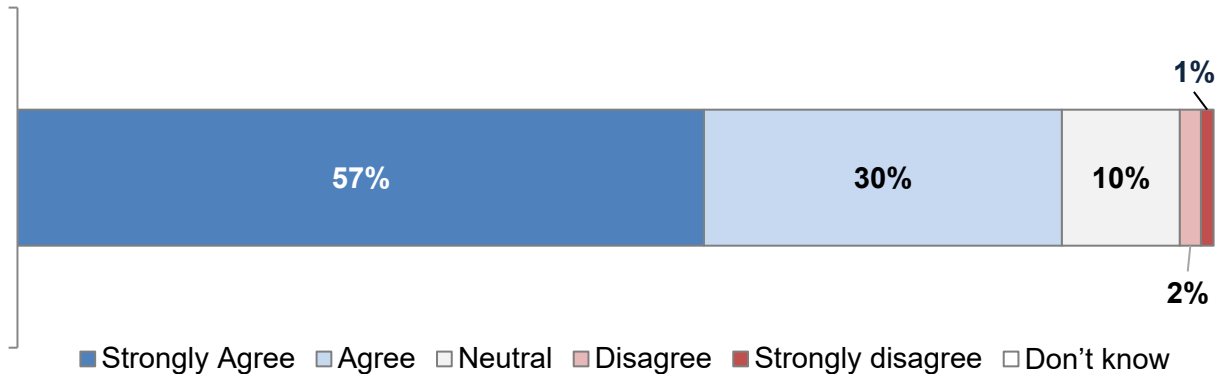
Many prospective employees are seeking employers who provide some form of student loan assistance as part of a total compensation package. Results from the employee survey support this assertion. As shown in the figure below, approximately 87 percent of survey respondents (all titles) indicated that student loan assistance would represent an effective recruitment tool.

²⁰⁰ See “Caseworker Recruitment” chapter; section “Employee Perspectives on Recruitment.”

²⁰¹ Hanson, Melanie. “Average Student Loan Debt” EducationData.org, May 22, 2023. Accessed on April 28, 2024 at <https://educationdata.org/average-student-loan-debt>



**“Please Respond to the Following Statement: ‘Providing Student Loan Forgiveness Would Be an Effective Recruitment Tool’
All Responses (N =288)**



In addition to recruitment, student loan assistance can be structured in a way to incentivize retention – particularly early in a career. For example, disbursements can be issued in the first two years of service, when many caseworkers choose to separate from employment.

There are various models for student loan forgiveness in other public sector professions. For example, the federal government provides up to \$50,000 in student loan forgiveness for licensed social workers through the National Health Services Corps Loan Repayment Program. The program requires a two-year commitment, and participants must practice in an underserved community.²⁰²

Alternatively, the State of Texas’ Peace Officer Loan Repayment Assistance Program represents an example of a state-wide loan assistance program. Under Texas’ program, state law enforcement officers receive annual loan repayment assistance that is the lesser of \$4,000 or 20 percent of the unpaid eligible loan balance. The total benefit is capped at \$20,000 over a five-year period.²⁰³

OCYF’s loan assistance program can blend elements of the federal and Texas loan forgiveness programs. OCYF could provide a loan assistance benefit – generally in line with the terms of the Texas program, up to \$4,000 in assistance to current and new employees – but provide an enhanced benefit for caseworkers who work or agree to work in underserved areas.

19) Onsite or Subsidized Childcare

OCYF may consider funding onsite or subsidized childcare programs – as a pilot program – through the Recruitment and Retention Investment Fund (Recommendation #1). While subsidized childcare (onsite or through a reimbursement program) may not be appropriate for all CCYAs, feedback from

²⁰² National Health Service Corps, “National Health Service Corps Loan Repayment Program, Fiscal Year 2024 Application and Program Guidance,” March 2024. Accessed on April 22, 2024 at <https://nhsc.hrsa.gov/sites/default/files/nhsc/loan-repayment/lrp-application-guidance.pdf>

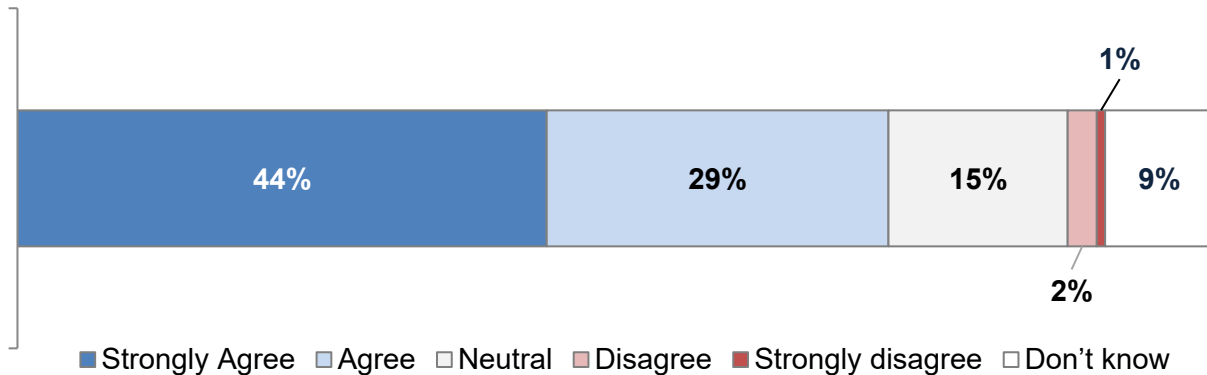
²⁰³ Texas Administrative Code, Title 19, Part 1, Chapter 23, Subchapter H. Accessed on April 23, 2024 at [Texas Administrative Code \(state.tx.us\)](https://www.texas.gov/legislation/texas-administrative-code/state.tx.us)



caseworkers in focus groups and the general employee survey suggest it may be an effective recruitment and retention tool in some communities.

Multiple participants in caseworker focus groups highlighted a lack of affordable childcare – coupled with the demands of an unpredictable work schedule – as significant causes of stress, contributing to burnout. Many focus group attendees also noted setting up informal childcare arrangements where caseworkers would care for each other’s children on scheduled days off or if called into the field after hours. Consistent with this finding, more than seven in ten employee survey respondents reported that subsidized childcare would improve caseworker recruitment and retention.

“Please Respond to the Following Statement: ‘Providing Subsidized Childcare Would Improve Caseworker Recruitment and Retention,’”
All Responses (N =287)



In the general labor market, many private and public sector employers have implemented onsite or subsidized childcare – recognizing the service as a valued benefit for an important cohort of employees. The federal government, for example provides subsidized, independently operated childcare centers in multiple General Services Administration buildings throughout the country.

Any pilot program developed around subsidized or onsite childcare should be carefully reviewed to ensure that it conforms with appropriate personnel laws and regulations and is not structured in a manner to be considered a discriminatory employment practice. Similarly, additional review would be required to ensure that county and Commonwealth employers have appropriate liability coverage.

20) Expand Use of Caseworker 3s

CCYAs should consider the expanded use of Caseworker 3 positions to provide additional opportunities for professional advancement as part of a more formalized caseworker career pathway. Caseworker 3 positions provide a pathway for advancement for caseworkers who may not desire to advance towards supervisory positions. They can also serve as a pipeline for employees with interest in supervisory and/or agency management/leadership roles.

Career ladders can foster employee compensation increases over time in tandem with the acquisition of additional experience, skills, and/or job responsibilities. A career ladder is a pathway within an



organization where employees advance to higher levels of responsibility and compensation once they meet predetermined criteria – e.g., certifications, experience, demonstrated skills acquisition, etc. Competitive promotional examinations and processes can also be layered into career ladder programs, thereby linking entry-level and supervisory positions in a coherent pathway to promotions.

Some potential responsibilities of a Caseworker 3 include:

- Functioning as lead caseworker on difficult, complex cases.
- Performing supervisory duties in the absence of a case supervisor.
- Coaching, guiding, and mentoring new caseworkers.
- Performing other specialized duties (e.g., training coordinator) beyond casework.

According to data provided by OCYF, only 34 of the Commonwealth's 67 CCYAs incorporate Caseworker 3 positions into their compensation plans. Other CCYAs may benefit from adding this compensation structure. Any change to county compensation plans, however, should account for potential pay compression impacts on employees in supervisory positions; any revision to the pay plan should maintain appropriate pay differentials between Caseworker 3s and supervisory or managerial positions.

Recruiting Recommendations

The subsequent series of recommendations focuses upon recruiting strategies and the recruitment process. Multiple recommendations listed below may be appropriate for inclusion in the Recruitment and Retention Workgroup portfolio (Recommendation #2) and funding through the Recruitment and Retention Investment Fund (Recommendation #1).

21) Strengthen Recruiting Relationships with Universities and Colleges*†

** Denotes recommendation may be funded through Recruitment and Retention Investment Fund (Recommendation #1)*

† Denotes recommendation can be addressed through OCYF-CCYA Recruitment and Retention Work Group (Recommendation #2)

CCYAs – with assistance of OCYF – should strengthen recruiting relationships with universities and colleges in Pennsylvania (and, for some counties, institutions in neighboring states). Many CCYAs across the Commonwealth have established partnerships and connections with local colleges and universities for recruitment purposes, with varying degrees of success. In focus groups, some CCYAs reported that they did not prioritize outreach to area colleges or universities because they lacked staff availability to do so. This is understandable, given the staffing constraints faced by many CCYAs. Yet as noted previously, college or university programs represent one of the most fruitful recruitment channels for caseworkers.²⁰⁴

²⁰⁴ See "Caseworker Recruitment" chapter.



Some specific practices that CCYAs can use include:

- **Coordinate with OCYF and Recruitment and Retention Workgroup:** The Recruitment and Retention Workgroup is a potential vehicle to coordinate regional outreach to colleges and universities, particularly in identifying advocates who may have time and capacity to do classroom visits or take on other tasks, easing the burden on staff-constrained CCYAs. OCYF may also be able to provide support in planning and strategizing around these efforts. Internally, CCYAs need to have succession plans for managing these vital relationships and should strive to develop multiple points of contact within a given institution, as turnover can make relationships difficult to maintain over time.
- **Place agency internships on college department's internship lists:** Colleges and universities often maintain an internal list of internship opportunities for current students. These lists can be used by professors to refer interested students, or may be directly referenced by students themselves. Agencies should enquire to their local universities' and community colleges' career centers and academic departments' administrative staff to determine whether such a list exists or can be established.
- **Offer non-CWEB internships:** Some students may want to try child welfare work without the commitment of a CWEB contract. Others may be interested in CWEB but might not have the qualifications to be eligible for the program (which requires students to be social work majors in their senior year). Offering non-CWEB internships can help agencies expand their potential pool of recruits while also reaching students at earlier points in their college careers.
- **Give seminars and presentations in classes:** In both focus groups and the employee survey, current caseworkers reported first learning of child welfare work specifically through presentations given by CCYA staff in their college classes. These presentations not only increase knowledge of child welfare work but can also build trust and improve perceptions of the system among students. CCYAs should connect with professors teaching child welfare (and adjacent) classes to find opportunities to talk about the work of children and youth agencies in front of students. Messaging can promote a CCYA as a place to work and should also align with themes from the broader communications and marketing campaign proposed in this report regarding child welfare work as a profession.
- **Expand outreach to criminal justice majors:** PFM identified multiple CCYAs that had begun or were considering recruiting outreach to criminal justice majors. Some of these agencies have already hired criminal justice students as caseworkers and interns. Criminal justice students learn many skills applicable to children and youth casework but may not know they are qualified for this line of work or consider it as a primary option.

Additionally, CCYAs may leverage support from CWRC, since CWRC has a unique position as a program of the University of Pittsburgh and as a contracted provider of training and technical assistance for CCYAs. CWRC is well-positioned to assist with direct engagement and relationship-



building with universities, in coordination with OCYF. CWRC may also be an effective liaison between CCYAs and higher education, given their relationships with social work schools.

22) Expand the CWEB Program*†

* Denotes recommendation may be funded through Recruitment and Retention Investment Fund (Recommendation #1)

† Denotes recommendation can be addressed through OCYF-CCYA Recruitment and Retention Work Group (Recommendation #2)

The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania should consider expanding the Child Welfare Education for Baccalaureates (CWEB) program by offering two years of tuition coverage and expand eligibility into students studying outside the field of social work.

The State Department of Human Services (DHS) contracts with the School of Social Work at the University of Pittsburgh to administer CWEB, which is covered up to 75 percent by federal Title IV-E as an eligible training cost. The program, which provides social work students with an educational fellowship in return for accepting employment in a CCYA upon completing their degree, represents a critical recruitment caseworker recruitment pathway.

Yet the 2022-2023 academic year saw just 32 CWEB program graduates – about half of a caseworker for each Pennsylvania CCYA. In addition, of the 2021-2022 cohort that recently satisfied their one-year work requirement, only 38 percent chose to remain in their agencies past one year, indicating that there is an opportunity to improve retention of program participants.²⁰⁵

- **Expand CWEB to two years of tuition coverage:** Currently, the CWEB program covers a student's senior year tuition at the in-state rate in exchange for the student agreeing to hold CCYA employment for at least one-year post-graduation. Other states have similar incentives for those pursuing careers in child welfare, but some states offer more tuition support in exchange for a longer contract of service (e.g., New York and Kentucky). OCYF should consider adding an additional year of tuition support (in exchange for an additional year of service) as an option for CWEB students. Not only would this potentially entice more students, but it would encourage them to consider child welfare earlier in their college career. Comprehensive data comparing one- and two-year programs are not available, but offering both options could alleviate concerns that two-year contracts would deter students.
- **Expand eligibility:** Consider opening CWEB benefits to non-social work majors, such as those who fulfill the education requirements for CCYA employment but are not currently eligible for CWEB benefits because they are not pursuing a degree in social work. This includes criminal justice majors, sociology majors, psychology majors and others in related fields. These students can fulfill the specific academic requirements of CWEB (one child welfare course, field work internship, course content in cultural diversity/racial equity, and completion of Foundations) without being social work majors.

²⁰⁵ The Pennsylvania Child Welfare Resource Center Annual Report 2022-2023. University of Pittsburgh [annual_report_2022_2023_final.pdf \(pitt.edu\)](https://www.pitt.edu/~ccwrc/annual_report_2022_2023_final.pdf) pg. 23. Accessed April 2, 2024



23) Develop Strategic Recruitment Plans

One recruiting best practice identified by PFM in conversations with CCYAs was the creation of strategic recruitment plans that govern recruitment, as well as succession of management and leadership roles. CCYAs may consider implementing the following actions as part of their strategic plans moving forward.

- **Succession planning with DHS department head and commissioners:** Engaging county commissioners in agency succession planning could ease salary board approval and help accelerate start dates. Planning for leadership, management, and supervisor positions can help prepare for transition, including identifying and providing training for potential successors with time to shadow and learn from the person leaving the position. One county mentioned providing a retirement incentive if staff stated their intention to retire the following year to ensure that they have enough time and preparation to fill and transfer the position.
- **Rapid engagement after applications and interviews:** Counties should devise a plan to stay in touch with applicants throughout the hiring process. Key points to engage candidates include acknowledging receipt of an application, setting expectations for decision making timelines after interviews, and reaching out to extend job offers and on-boarding materials. Without contact, candidates can assume they have not advanced in the process and may pursue and accept other positions. Note this opportunity may be limited in counties operating under the State Civil Service System.
- **Maintain internal candidate lists:** When CCYAs identify promising candidates but do not or are not able to offer them positions, they can instead add them to an email outreach list for future positions. Then, when CCYAs have a vacancy, they can immediately send the new listing out to people who have previously expressed interest in CCYA employment.
- **Recruit among former staff:** Direct service staff attested that former agency employees would consider returning to their jobs, particularly if there was a bump in pay. If an agency is raising its pay rates, there should be a proactive attempt to recruit back former employees. Other agency changes, such as changes in leadership, benefits, or remote work opportunities might also trigger recruitment outreach to former staff. Former staff could be added to an internal candidate list or agencies could perform more targeted outreach tailored to former staff.
- **Engage employees for candidates and recruiting ideas:** Forty-two percent of surveyed staff reported first learning about their jobs through word of mouth. In addition, 40 percent of surveyed staff indicated that recruiting by current employees was one of the top three ways to find qualified candidates. Current casework staff have many promising recruiting ideas that are specific to their agencies and their local context. Administrators should engage caseworkers for their ideas and for their potential as ambassadors of CCYA recruitment.

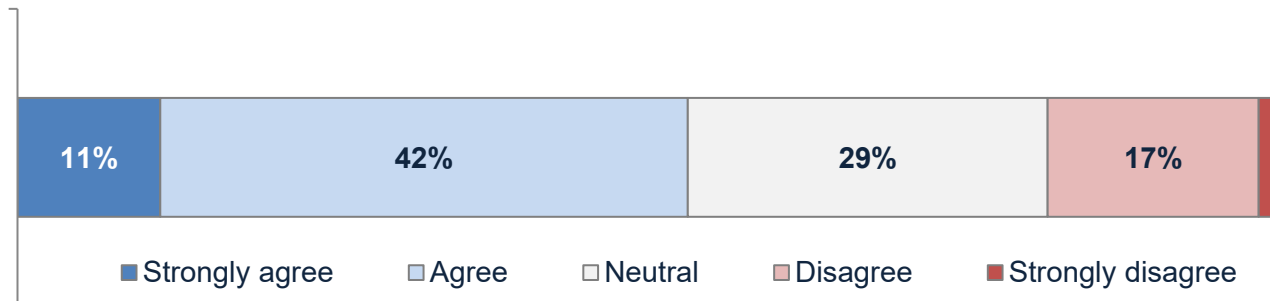


24) Enhance Transparency in Recruiting[†]

[†] Denotes recommendation can be addressed through OCYF-CCYA Recruitment and Retention Work Group (Recommendation #2)

The ability to recruit individuals who understand what the job entails can impact retention, so it is important for CCYAs to be clear about the realities of life as a child welfare worker. In focus groups, one topic that came up frequently was whether the realities of the job are fully conveyed throughout the recruiting process, beginning with the job description, and continuing through the interview process. As shown in the figure below, barely one in two applicants (53 percent) agreed that their agencies' hiring process gave them an accurate understanding of their job.

“My Agency’s Recruitment and Hiring Process Provided Me With an Accurate Understanding of My Job”
All Responses (N = 202)



Based on a review of position descriptions for caseworkers, PFM identified several opportunities to provide a better picture of what the job entails:

- **Emphasize the public service nature and goals of children and youth work in job postings:** Job postings should help candidates understand the principles of CCYA work, such as family unification and stabilization. Agencies can attract motivated applicants by highlighting the values that caseworkers strive to uphold – as noted in this report’s findings, caseworkers are mission-driven.
- **Explain the benefits package in job descriptions and in interviews:** CCYAs should ensure that they discuss benefits with applicants in an easy-to-understand way. In addition to showing salary information, agencies can help candidates understand the value of retirement benefits, health benefits, paid time off, other fringe benefits, and any financial incentives offered.
- **Highlight promotion opportunities and career paths:** In many counties, Caseworker 1s are eligible for promotion to Caseworker 2 (along with a corresponding raise) after six months to a year. Some agencies also have Caseworker 3 positions available – which are non-supervisory, lead positions. Potential applicants should be made aware of the opportunities that will be available to them early in their career at a CCYA.
- **Avoid “bucket” recruiting with other county DHS departments:** Through focus groups, PFM noted that some counties post generic caseworker jobs to recruit candidates for



caseworkers across multiple county human services agencies. This practice is confusing and misleading for applicants with no interest in children and youth work whose applications may nonetheless be routed to CCYAs. In focus groups, PFM heard reports of candidates showing up to interviews and not being aware that they were interviewing for a child welfare position. Agencies can avoid wasting valuable time by ensuring that their job postings are listed separately, which helps filter out candidates who are not interested in working with children, youth, and families.

- **Increase transparency of expectations in job postings:** Current CCYA staff indicated that job postings may omit crucial information about the role of CCYA caseworkers. Specifically, caseworkers noted that some job listings make no mention of working overtime or on-call and instead portray the position as a predictable 35-40 hour a week job. In addition, some do not mention or emphasize that caseworkers make regular in-person contact with clients, and that a significant part of the job is working with parents and families in addition to children. Omitting this type of information means that candidates who are unwilling to perform some of the essential functions of casework will apply and will only learn after an interview (or later) that they are not the right fit for the position.

While transparency is essential to ensuring that candidates are willing and able to fulfill case functions, agencies should be cautious about deterring applicants. Research on realistic job previews shows that they are most helpful in providing role clarity and improving perceptions of the organization's honesty but can be harmful by lowering perceptions of organizational appeal.²⁰⁶ Hence, CCYAs should think about how their process can provide more clarity and transparency for applicants without harming perception of the work that they do.

25) Improve CCYA and Civil Service Communication[†]

[†] Denotes recommendation can be addressed through OCYF-CCYA Recruitment and Retention Work Group (Recommendation #2)

Through the Recruitment and Retention Workgroup (Recommendation #2), opportunities exist to improve communication with the Pennsylvania Office of Administration around recruiting processes. Improved communication between these two parties may reduce hiring times.

CCYA staff in focus groups indicated some frustration with hiring through the Commonwealth's civil service system, characterizing it as slow and inefficient – these concerns are not uncommon when dealing with large, bureaucratic organizations serving a broad, diverse constituency. PFM found staff in the Governor's Office of Administration to be responsive, helpful and equipped with hiring process data that could inform productive conversations toward expedited hiring.

For example, the Office of Administration regularly tracks and updates the following information for each County's recruitment process:

²⁰⁶ Graef, Michelle. "Realistic Job Previews." February 19, 2020. University of Nebraska – Lincoln, Center on Children, Families & the Law, pg. 3



- Time to fill (requisition to onboarding)
- Time to hire (application to onboarding)
- Time that passed at each step of the recruitment process

Reviewing these data with CCYA and OCYF leadership on a routine basis (perhaps as a standing agenda item for the proposed Recruitment and Retention Workgroup) would promote discussions of challenges and opportunities for improvement. For instance, the longest stage in the hiring process timeline per Commonwealth data is the time required to interview and select candidates, a county-level responsibility. General discussion of such analysis and provision of specific CCYA data to agencies can aid broader development of best practices like pre-booking interview panel members' calendars and ensuring that interview questions and scoring rubrics are developed in advance.

Another question the group should address as a priority is whether CCYAs in the civil service system can “see” qualified applicants earlier in the recruitment process. This is one area where CCYAs using the local merit hire system have a distinct advantage over their civil service counterparts: local merit agencies have real-time visibility regarding applicants for openings, whereas civil service counties must wait an estimated 19 days before they see any applications (14 days for posting, five days for the Commonwealth to prepare and deliver the candidate list).

PFM found CCYA leaders using local merit systems said they improved hiring success by contacting qualified candidates as they submitted application materials; this is a best practice in an employee-friendly labor market and could offer a local merit county an early lead in competition for a skilled caseworker who also applies for a civil service opening at another CCYA.

One option might be a delegation of authority for CCYAs to access the Commonwealth's NEOGOV system on a read-only basis to view applicant information during the posting period; this would level the playing field in terms of early outreach, and the Commonwealth could retain authority and responsibility for back-checking (perhaps on a spot basis as CCYAs demonstrate capacity and proficiency) that hiring decisions align with Commonwealth law and civil service rules.

Caseworker Workload Recommendations

High workloads contribute to caseworker burnout, and ultimately, attrition. Accordingly, the recommendations in this section discuss approaches to reduce CCYA caseworker workloads, including leveraging basic and emerging technology, alternative approaches to deploying staffing and improving processes around how child welfare cases are generated – particularly through ChildLine.



26) Make Strategic Technological Investments*†

* Denotes recommendation may be funded through Recruitment and Retention Investment Fund (Recommendation #1)

† Denotes recommendation can be addressed through OCYF-CCYA Recruitment and Retention Work Group (Recommendation #2)

CCYAs and OCYF should strategically invest in technology that will allow staff to work efficiently and effectively in the field, as well as in the office or from home – potentially lessening the risk of burnout, a major contributor to caseworker attrition. This technology acquisition effort can be supported through the Recruitment and Retention Investment Fund (Recommendation #1) with the goal of easing caseworkers' workloads.

Technology can be viewed in two broad categories. The first is basic technology used to enter documentation, capture signatures, complete and print reports and paperwork, and communicate with families, supervisors, and staff.

The second is emerging technology, such as AI tools for use in compiling or finding case information, decision-making tools, and other uses that may not yet be identified.

Basic Technology

In the category of basic technology, key needs for caseworkers include the following.

- A laptop or tablet that includes the following features:
 - Compatible with the county's electronic case management system, so information can be easily transferred.
 - Electronic signature technology and a touchscreen so that caseworkers can easily get signatures in the field.
 - Sufficient battery to use in the field, plus car charger or portable charger (charger bank and cord).
 - Wireless hotspot (via phone or portable device) so that caseworkers can access the internet and necessary systems.
 - Recording capability.
- Smart phones (need to have texting capability).
- Dictation or "voice-to-text" software or applications for transcription of notes.
- Portable printer/scanner available for field visits where printing or scanning forms may be necessary.

In addition to technology that will improve the ability to work remotely, CCYAs interested in encouraging or requiring staff to spend more time in the office should ensure that office locations



have reliable internet and workspaces that make it easy for staff to access the tools and systems that they need, such as reliable and accessible phone and laptop charging at desks, working printers, etc.

Emerging Technology

In the category of emerging technology, some counties have begun to use artificial intelligence (AI) technology to facilitate increased efficiency. Allegheny and Washington counties use AI-enabled software (natural language processing) to let caseworkers analyze past files and notes for keywords instead of manually reviewing. Not only does this potentially reduce “administrative burden by 20 percent,” according to the vendor, but it also allows supervisors to run queries on specific topics to assist in training and coaching, as well as helping caseworkers prepare for court and case reviews.²⁰⁷ Other potential uses include data analysis and decision-making tools.

Counties should engage caseworkers to understand what would work best for them and be responsive to those needs when purchasing technology and making decisions around policy for technology use. In addition, CCYA leadership should work with county commissioners to understand their priorities and connect them to specific investments. Finally, any exploration of AI software applications would need to be discussed with OCYF to determine whether a Commercial-Off-The-Shelf (COTS) exemption is needed and to confirm that any proposed technology would not conflict with the Child Welfare Case Management system.

27) Expand Use of Case Aides and Clerical Positions

Counties should consider adding or expanding the use of case aides for tasks that do not require caseworkers’ knowledge or experience. Case aides can provide support in key areas that allow caseworkers to focus more time on quality visits and decision-making rather than administrative or support functions. Several counties mentioned transportation as a current case aide responsibility or an area where it would be helpful to have additional case aides. CCYAs are responsible for transportation in cases where a child is attending their “home” school but is placed in a foster or kinship home outside the district, sometimes requiring significant time to travel between the child’s placement home and school.

CCYA leadership should engage caseworkers, supervisors, fiscal staff, and others in a discussion of how case aides and clerical staff can be best engaged. This represents another opportunity to hear from caseworkers about the aspects of their job that they feel would benefit from support. Engaging caseworkers in the conversation is also important to ensuring buy-in, since caseworkers and supervisors will need to provide guidance and direction to those supporting positions.

Expanding the use of case aides can also be beneficial to recruitment and hiring. Recruiting for a case aide position can have advantages over recruiting for caseworkers, such as expanding the field of potential hires beyond the requirements needed to apply as a caseworker. Hiring case aides also builds a pipeline for future caseworkers, as case aides can gain applicable experience if they are

²⁰⁷ Fox-Sowell, Sophia. “Pennsylvania county taps natural language processing to help child welfare caseworkers” September 22, 2023. Statescoop.com.



interested in becoming a caseworker in the future. As with interns, this also means that if case aides apply as caseworkers, they are already familiar with what the job entails and are potentially more likely to stay on longer once they are hired.

28) Designate School District Caseworkers

Counties where school and school district referrals are major caseload drivers should consider establishing designated school district caseworker positions to mitigate school-based reports. These designated school district caseworkers would work closely with school personnel to manage the flow of referrals coming from school systems by helping families receive needed support services as a caseload reduction strategy. According to the 2022 Pennsylvania Child Protective Services Annual Report, truancy is the fifth most common type of valid GPS allegation and accounts for 8.3 percent of substantiated GPS allegations statewide.²⁰⁸

Multiple counties in the focus group sample have already implemented some form of school-based caseworker position. In these counties, caseworkers maintain an office in a school and help build understanding and relationships with school staff and teachers. They accept referrals for services from staff, students, and parents, in some cases assisting families with needs that might otherwise evolve into GPS assessments. Caseworkers and administrators in these counties believe that having school-based workers helps save time, effort, and money by minimizing the number of reports flowing in from schools while also building stronger relationships and trust.

Counties reported that in-school workers could address reports without opening a formal case by working directly with students and families to solve issues affecting the student's academic and overall potential. School-based units often offer the following services, among others:

- Truancy prevention
- Home contact with families
- Presentations to faculty and parents
- Individual contact with students
- Summer outreach programs

Lycoming began collocating caseworkers in school district buildings beginning in 2002. By 2015, Lycoming “had caseworkers located in every county school district...In many cases, teachers will notice that an elementary-school student is having truancy problems or has worn the same clothes three days in a row and will suggest that the caseworker in the district talk with the child and the

²⁰⁸ Pennsylvania Department of Human Services. “Child Protective Services 2022 Annual Report.” May 2023. p. 30 [2022-PA-CHILD-PROTECTIVE-SERVICES-REPORT_8-10-2023_FINAL.pdf](#). Accessed 4.20.24



family. Often, the caseworker will refer the family to needed services – all without the family ever becoming an official part of the system.”²⁰⁹

In addition, basing positions in schools allowed one CCYA to access additional funding streams. In Lycoming, the school-based caseworkers are referred to as mental health liaisons and are funded through the county mental health department. Schools themselves may also have mental health funding streams that could be used to support the placement of caseworkers in schools. CCYAs should reach out to their local school systems – with support from OCYF regional staff – to build these relationships to better manage their incoming caseload and diversify funding streams.

29) Adopt Dedicated After-Hours Staffing

Counties with a sufficient number of cases might consider establishing a dedicated after-hours shift or unit for intake and investigations staff. Benefits include the ability to reduce or eliminate on-call staff, which has the potential dual benefit of saving money as well as improving work-life balance by removing the on-call requirement for caseworkers. According to one county focus group, after-hours shift positions can appeal to staff by allowing caseworkers to spend more time with family or enjoy other benefits of flexible, predictable scheduling.

Establishing an after-hours shift can have other benefits, including safety. For instance, if two caseworkers are scheduled after hours, they can go out to investigations in pairs for increased safety. Similarly, after-hours caseworkers can potentially establish relationships with law enforcement that they can call on for after-hours investigations.

Counties considering adding an after-hours shift should do an analysis to determine whether it would make sense to implement or pilot this type of structure. Some of the factors to consider in an analysis include:

- Direct costs of on-call staffing that would be replaced by an after-hours shift.
- Data analysis of call times to determine whether the anticipated number of cases would warrant shifting caseworkers from the current structure to an after-hours shift or whether the shift would require hiring new staff.
- Impact of current on-call time on current caseworker satisfaction and attrition, as well as whether current staff would be interested in switching to an after-hours shift.
- Potential challenges such as the need to ensure after-hours caseworkers can participate in department- or agency-wide meetings without regularly needing to rearrange their schedules.

²⁰⁹ State of the Child Action Plan: A special report by Auditor General Eugene DePasquale. Page 24. Accessed April 8, 2024 at https://www.paauditor.gov/Media/Default/Reports/RPT_StateofChild_Action_Plan_051618_FINAL.pdf.



30) Improve Mandated Reporter Trainings[†]

[†] Denotes recommendation can be addressed through OCYF-CCYA Recruitment and Retention Work Group (Recommendation #2)

OCYF and CWRC should work together to identify opportunities to revise or supplement mandated reporter trainings (as well as online resources that mandated reporters might access for information) to provide more clarity on how and what to report. The goal would be to improve mandated reporter training to reduce the volume of unsubstantiated child abuse reports – without jeopardizing child safety.

This process should include a review of available ChildLine data for information on the call types and outcomes (e.g., screened-out, unsubstantiated, etc.) to inform training examples or scenarios. In addition, OCYF and CWRC should incorporate training on implicit bias as well as opportunities to incorporate prevention services as an alternative to reporting as a child abuse or neglect concern.

CWRC currently provides training to mandated reporters in Pennsylvania – individuals legally obligated to report abuse or face potential consequences. CWRC's training is mandatory for most mandated reporters, including “all persons applying for a license or certification issued by a Department of State licensing board; certain operators of institutions, facilities, or agencies that care for children and are subject to supervision by the Department of Human Services; and certain foster parents.” Some mandated reporters may receive the required training through their organization (for example, school districts).²¹⁰

The list of mandated reporters was expanded following CPSL revisions in 2014, which was followed by a steep increase in incoming child welfare reports. Understandably, mandated reporters are inclined to over-report, rather than risk being held accountable for ignoring potential abuse. The resulting influx of calls strains both ChildLine and CCYAs. In addition, mandated reporters are often unaware of the realities of investigations and what happens to children and families after a report is made. Even when allegations are not substantiated, investigations can be stressful and traumatic for families involved while also contributing to the negative external perceptions of child protective services.

New York State recently revised its mandated reporter training to include a training on implicit bias to prevent calls based on race and poverty. The updated training also includes education on “the impact of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) on children and families, designed to prevent inflicting additional trauma by unnecessarily subjecting a family to a child protective services investigation.”²¹¹ The new training will also help mandated reporters identify when a family could instead be supported through other resources. This is aligned with an approach that other states, such as California,

²¹⁰ Lenzi, Jamie. “Sweeping Pennsylvania Child Protective Services Law Changes.” C&W Journal. July 29, 2015. <https://www.c-wlaw.com/journal/sweeping-pennsylvania-child-protective-services-law-changes>. Accessed April 22, 2024.

²¹¹ New York State Office of Children and Family Services. “New York State Office of Children and Family Services Launches Updated Mandated Reporter Training.” February 15, 2023. <https://ocfs.ny.gov/main/news/article.php?idx=2456> Accessed April 22, 2024.



Connecticut, and New Hampshire, have begun to adopt, shifting the mandated reporter model to a “mandated supporter” approach.²¹²

Reforming mandated reporter training into mandated supporter training represents a fundamental shift towards a more proactive and holistic approach to child welfare. Instead of solely focusing on identifying and reporting suspected instances of child maltreatment, mandated supporter training emphasizes building relationships with families and connecting them with the resources and support they need. This approach recognizes that many families facing challenges may not be at immediate risk of harm to their children but could benefit from assistance in accessing community services and supports.

By equipping mandated reporters with the skills to provide guidance, advocacy, and assistance to families, rather than solely acting as reporters, the mandated supporter perspective enables a more active role in preventing child maltreatment and promoting family well-being. Some states have implemented alternatives to the child welfare hotline (often referred to as “helplines” or “carelines”), while others have coordinated with 211 or added prompts to connect callers with community services “if the caller is seeking family support (such as assistance with clothing, food, and utilities) rather than reporting maltreatment.”²¹³ A similar model in Pennsylvania could help transition the state towards a more preventative approach to child abuse.

31) Improve ChildLine Designation of Child Welfare Referrals

† Denotes recommendation can be addressed through OCYF-CCYA Recruitment and Retention Work Group (Recommendation #2)

OCYF should establish and monitor performance metrics for ChildLine to assess the accuracy of screen-ins and identify opportunities for additional training or decision-making tools. The designation of incoming child welfare referrals can impact a county’s capacity to prioritize and respond to the most critical CPS cases as well as high-risk GPS cases referred to the CCYA. In focus groups, county caseworkers lamented the number of cases “screened in” by ChildLine that turned out to be unsubstantiated.

Data support these concerns: in FY 2022, only 12.8 percent of 39,093 CPS reports were substantiated, meaning that almost seven of every eight reports were not. Put another way, Pennsylvania caseworkers investigated more than 34,000 reports of serious child abuse that were not substantiated. Rates were slightly higher for the 165,295 GPS reports recorded. Of those, 24.2 percent were deemed valid, meaning nearly 125,000 GPS reports were invalid.²¹⁴

Caseworkers in multiple focus groups specifically mentioned ChildLine referred cases screened as CPS, when they only met GPS thresholds. In other instances, information or law enforcement referrals were improperly categorized. These comments align with findings of the 2019 Pennsylvania Child and Family Services Review Program Improvement Plan report, which noted that “through

²¹² “How can hotline data help child protection agencies better support families?” Casey Family Programs. August 8, 2022. <https://www.casey.org/hotline-data/> Accessed April 14, 2024.

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ “State of Child Welfare 2023,” Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children. Accessed May 6, 2024 at <https://www.papartnerships.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/2023-SOCW-Pennsylvania.pdf>.



analysis of Pennsylvania child abuse hotline policies, a sampling of approximately 1700 GPS referrals, and conversations with CCYA administrators and staff, it was identified that due to ChildLine not screening out any calls concerning a child, there were some GPS referrals being sent to CCYA that did not meet the regulatory definition of a GPS report.”²¹⁵

The State of the Child Action Plan report also highlighted these concerns in 2018. The report explained that when calls are received by ChildLine, workers who may lack front-line experience designate referrals as CPS or GPS based on information gathered during the call. Child welfare workers indicated that many cases are being incorrectly coded as CPS calls (which require investigation within 24 hours), leading to unnecessary time constraints and paperwork. The 2018 report recommended that counties (rather than ChildLine) “determine the severity and designation of incoming cases” and make the CPS/GPS designation, which would require a statutory change.²¹⁶

OCYF’s response was that using ChildLine improved consistency as to how reports were evaluated and centralized data collection for incoming reports; while that may be true, consistency and accuracy are all the more difficult to maintain in a world of remote work. ChildLine job postings indicate the opportunity to work from home up to three days a week, meaning referrals may be done in the midst of distractions and/or without the benefit of immediate access to a supervisor or colleague for guidance with a difficult case.

Along with the challenge faced by ChildLine workers who must designate calls for attention based solely on a telephone conversation or electronic report comes another complicating factor: conflation of difficult family circumstances with child abuse or maltreatment. Families across the country are reported to child protection hotlines not due to imminent risk of harm to their children, but rather because of poverty-related issues, such as the lack of access to safe housing and other essential community services that support child-rearing. This disproportionate focus on families experiencing poverty-related stressors can lead to an over-surveillance of these families, exacerbating the stressors they face within their households. Other states, such as Indiana, have made comprehensive changes to their child welfare hotlines. By examining hotline data, Indiana’s Department of Child Services (DCS) discovered patterns indicating a high proportion of calls being screened in for investigation but resulting in no substantiated cases of maltreatment. This prompted the agency to revise its structured decision-making tool and hotline prompts, redirecting callers seeking family support to community services rather than initiating investigations.²¹⁷

OCYF should consider implementing a similar screening tool for incoming calls to ChildLine. Some in Pennsylvania already employ these types of decision-making tools, such as Allegheny County. Since August 2016, the Allegheny County Department of Human Services (DHS) has employed the

²¹⁵ PA Office of Children, Youth, and Families. “Pennsylvania Round Three Child and Family Services Review Program Improvement Plan” page 37-38. Revised July 2019.

²¹⁶ State of the Child Action Plan: A special report by Auditor General Eugene DePasquale.

https://www.paauditor.gov/Media/Default/Reports/RPT_StateofChild_Action_Plan_051618_FINAL.pdf Accessed April 8, 2024

²¹⁷ “How can hotline data help child protection agencies better support families?” Casey Family Programs. August 8, 2022.

<https://www.casey.org/hotline-data/> Accessed April 14, 2024.



Allegheny Family Screening Tool (AFST) to bolster its child welfare call screening procedures, with a primary aim of enhancing child safety.

The AFST, a predictive risk modeling tool, swiftly assimilates and evaluates hundreds of data points for each individual involved in a report of child maltreatment. Drawing from Allegheny’s DHS Data Warehouse, the tool generates a Family Screening Score predicting the likelihood of future engagement with child welfare services. This score, when combined with traditional information, aids in predicting the potential need for out-of-home placement of a child. Higher scores correlate with increased probabilities of future placement, prompting mandatory investigation when surpassing a set threshold. While the score complements clinical judgment, it does not dictate investigative decisions and is solely utilized in call-screening processes, ensuring confidentiality and privacy.²¹⁸

32) Revise GPS Bulletin and Training

OCYF should revisit the GPS bulletin to provide additional clarity and guidance around GPS screen-outs, with the goal of reducing the volume of cases and improving county practices related to GPS calls. The Statewide General Protective Services Referrals Bulletin (GPS Bulletin), last updated in September 2020, is OCYF’s guiding document for CCYAs regarding GPS cases. CCYAs are balancing high vacancy rates, heavy workloads, newer caseworkers, and concerns about personal and agency liability – all of which affect decisions around how and whether to respond to GPS cases.

The State of the Child Action Plan addressed the inconsistencies in how counties handle GPS cases and determine what is considered “screened out.” In the report’s example, some counties require a visit to the family while others consider a GPS referral screened out “if the allegations do not rise to the level of requiring an investigation and the referral is closed without contacting the child or family.”²¹⁹ The report recommends that OCYF define the term screen-out “to ensure consistent workflows across the state regarding referrals.”

Another report, written by the Special Committee on Child Separations – a committee of the Philadelphia City Council – discussed the impact of GPS calls on children and families, with examples such as a school district that “threatened to call ChildLine on parents who couldn’t afford their child’s lunch money.”²²⁰ The report went so far as to state that “neglect should be removed from the state law defining child abuse and should no longer be subject to (Child Protective Services) investigations” and that the law should be amended to state that “Any family condition that can be remedied through the provision of concrete help, including but not limited to, direct cash assistance, food, clothing, housing assistance and/or childcare, shall not constitute neglect and shall not be cause for (an) investigation.”

In revising the GPS bulletin, OCYF should consider these concerns and invite comments from CCYAs and other stakeholders. In tandem with revising mandatory reporter training, the state should consider

²¹⁸ “Allegheny County Screening Tool.” Allegheny County website. <https://www.alleghenycounty.us/Services/Human-Services-DHS/News-and-Events/Accomplishments-and-Innovations/Allegheny-Family-Screening-Tool> Accessed April 2, 2024.

²¹⁹ ²¹⁹ State of the Child Action Plan: A special report by Auditor General Eugene DePasquale (2017). Page 17.

https://www.paauditor.gov/Media/Default/Reports/RPT_StateofChild_Action_Plan_051618_FINAL.pdf Accessed April 8, 2024

²²⁰ Strong, Kim. “Stinging report attacks Pennsylvania’s child welfare system.” York Daily Record. April 26, 2022.



implicit and structural bias that may impact CCYA decision-making around how to respond to and prioritize GPS cases. Ultimately, it is the CCYA's decision, but the state should provide a consistent, evidence-based framework for critical thinking and the factors to consider in that decision-making process.

33) Increase Access to Prevention Services[†]

[†] Denotes recommendation can be addressed through OCYF-CCYA Recruitment and Retention Work Group (Recommendation #2)

As discussed throughout this report, the overwhelming workload thrust onto child welfare caseworkers is a leading cause of the Commonwealth's recruitment and retention challenges. As suggested above, a large part of this workload burden comes from social issues, such as substance abuse and homelessness, which could be addressed by other government services, agencies, or funding.

The Commonwealth must take a holistic approach to evaluating the upstream causes of demand for CCYA services and be equally comprehensive in building up the array of the state's social safety net. This includes preventing more families from needing CCYA services while also better equipping CCYAs to focus on proactive outreach services in their communities.

The state should work to increase access to prevention services by streamlining referrals from CCYAs and ensuring that families are able to access mental health and substance abuse resources before they enter the children and youth system. For public benefits and services, expanding access can take many forms such as altering eligibility thresholds, expanding benefit amount or duration, or increasing outreach to connect families with the services they are eligible to receive. The departments can also consider how they can streamline program applications and increase data sharing to ensure families receive all benefits across different departments and programs. Some counties already implement a "no wrong doors" approach to all county DHS services, which allows an individual or family to be easily transferred between agencies by sharing information and, often, co-locating within the same office building. In addition, the state could develop a "helpline," that families and community members can use to connect to services before calling a child protection hotline.

Caseworkers throughout the state expressed feeling like CCYAs were treated as a "catch all" for any social service situation in which a child was involved. In focus group conversations, caseworkers emphasized that substance use, homelessness, and poverty drove many of the GPS reports coming into their counties. The 2022 Pennsylvania Child Protective Services Report confirms these anecdotes. Of the total 89,733 valid GPS concerns in 2022, a total of 35,615 (or 39.7 percent) were attributed to either caregiver substance use (17,121), homelessness/inadequate housing (8,818), inadequate basic needs (5,557), inadequate health care (2,776), or child substance use disorder (1,343).²²¹ These types of GPS concerns could be prevented by dedicated outreach by CCYAs before reaching the level of child abuse or neglect.

²²¹ "State of Child Welfare 2023," Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children. Accessed April 18, 2024 at <https://www.papartnerships.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/2023-SOCW-Pennsylvania.pdf>.



Pennsylvania DHS should pursue braided funding streams between CYS, mental health, and drug treatment services to incentivize collaboration between these agencies and build out more prevention services. In addition, the state must ensure that all DHS functions are sufficiently staffed and funded so that more families do not end up in the “catch all” of children and youth services. If other DHS agencies and service providers are suffering from similar recruitment and retention issues, then they will struggle to build and maintain quality prevention services that are needed to alleviate the CYS workload. This joint approach is essential; OCYF alone cannot solve the lack of adequate prevention services for child abuse and maltreatment.

However, statewide policy efforts are not the only way to help support families in need. The state must also reduce barriers that keep counties from providing prevention services, create incentives for CCYAs to create outreach programs, and provide guidance on programs that have a proven return on investment.

In addition, counties themselves can mitigate referrals and build better relationships with their community by creating outreach and prevention units. One county in the focus group already reported successfully implementing an outreach unit that offers a range of public-facing services. Their programs are explicitly open to any family with children and are offered in-home and in public locations. Programs and services offered by the outreach unit include:

- Family group decision-making
- Individualized parenting education
- Budgeting classes
- Support finding and maintaining housing
- Attending and organizing public events
- Connections to an array of community services and resources
 - The unit maintains a list of community resources such as food banks, toy drives, and clothing drives that they can provide to any family in need. The list also helps keep caseworkers informed of the services offered within the community.

Caseworkers and administrators reported that this program improved their relationship with community organizations and boosted their public image by letting them be seen in the community supporting families with preventative work.



34) Ensure Efficient Administrative Paperwork and Processes[†]

[†] Denotes recommendation can be addressed through OCYF-CCYA Recruitment and Retention Work Group (Recommendation #2)

Almost all caseworker focus groups discussed the burden of paperwork and the impact on the time that they were able to dedicate to quality visits and time spent with children and families, an issue that is not limited to Pennsylvania. OCYF and CCYAs should undertake organized and collaborative efforts – through the Recruitment and Retention Work Group (Recommendation #2), for example – to review existing paperwork requirements, as well as continuing efforts on prior studies’ recommendations related to reducing documentation requirements and streamlining data entry.

The State of the Child Action Plan proposed steps to reduce the amount of time that caseworkers spend on paperwork. These included giving CCYA caseworkers authority to receive necessary medical, drug-and-alcohol treatment and school records without requiring releases; reducing unnecessary mandated data that must be entered for each case into counties’ case-management systems and allowing more time for entry of mandated data; and improved Child Welfare Information Solution (CWIS) changes to improve automation and caseworkers’ ease of use.²²²

A publication by the Child Welfare League of America found that when examining workload studies done in 29 jurisdictions, “study findings showed that 63–76% of worker time was used in serving children and families, a significant percentage of this time was used for case-related activities that took the workers away from direct contact with the children and families.”

“Caseload and Workload Summary.” Child Welfare League of America <https://www.cwla.org/our-work/practice-excellence-center/workforce-2/caseload-workload/>

The OCFC’s Caseworker Retention Workgroup issued relevant recommendations around the same time, and OCYF responded by taking several steps to assess, understand and streamline documentation, including visiting CCYAs, revising specific documentation requirements, and reviewing regulations.²²³ Yet CCYA staff continue to report frustration with paperwork burdens.

Responsibility for addressing this challenge does not lie solely with the Commonwealth, though child welfare workers surely see their share of state-mandated forms and assessments. Another primary challenge is paperwork and bureaucracy instituted at the local level. This may come from outside agencies, including courts that can impose their own unique processes and requirements. But CCYAs and partner county departments must look within their own operations to determine whether they are as efficient, effective and equitable as possible.

CCYA leadership acknowledge that much of the paperwork burden is generated internally; at least some of this is created in the process of gathering information required by the Commonwealth or federal government. Where counties are left to their own devices to develop such processes, some will likely be outstanding while others may not be ideal. This reality extends to key administrative functions like human resources and finance; PFM heard stories of outdated policies and processes (including one county’s requirement for paying travel expenses with checks issued pre-trip) that

²²² State of the Child Action Plan: A special report by Auditor General Eugene DePasquale. Pages 14, 19 and 21. Accessed April 8, 2024 at https://www.paauditor.gov/Media/Default/Reports/RPT_StateofChild_Action_Plan_051618_FINAL.pdf.

²²³ Cordaro, Linda and Shara Saveikis. “2019 State Roundtable Report Caseworker Retention.” June 2020.



suggest an opportunity to streamline local operations. CCYA leaders may also want to verify that individual employees have not adopted their own processes or methods for tracking and reporting information outside of or in addition to established approaches (while well-intended, these efforts can duplicate or even interfere with ongoing work).

To that end, a focus of the Recruitment and Retention Workgroup recommended in this report should be an ongoing focus on reducing paperwork. This workgroup should review existing requirements, how information that is collected by counties flows through to OCYF, and whether there are opportunities to reduce duplication and streamline documentation. Beyond high-level reviews of Commonwealth systems and requirements, this effort should engage regional offices to work through individual CCYA, court and county processes, providing technical assistance for implementation of best practices.

Several other recommendations in this report have an added benefit of reducing the paperwork burden for caseworkers; these strategies include increased administrative support, caseworker teaming, and technology that enables caseworkers to dictate notes or multitask while in the field.

Training Recommendations

The subsequent series of recommendations pertain to caseworker training and early career development. From a retention perspective, training and the transition to assuming cases independently is particularly important given that a large proportion of caseworker separations occur during the first year of service.

35) Emphasize Mentoring Programs

CCYAs should consider implementing mentoring programs to benefit both new and experienced caseworkers. While some counties may benefit from informal peer mentoring, these connections may be difficult for agencies to deliberately cultivate. Several counties discussed developing structured mentoring programs, such as a “buddy program” between caseworkers. This practice allows each caseworker to have a go-to person to ask questions that are not case-related.

As noted by the Center for Advanced Studies in Child Welfare, peer support is invaluable for relaying information, discussing personnel issues, and providing mutual support.²²⁴ Increased peer support can also remove some of the workload on supervisors and help build community, especially as workplaces become more virtual. Mentorship can help build trust and camaraderie between employees who may have joined at different times or who work in very different units, facilitating sharing of institutional knowledge and helping younger caseworkers who see CCYA work as a career. In addition, mentors offer caseworkers an avenue to seek advice and feedback from someone who

²²⁴ “Supervision: The Key to Strengthening Practice in Child Welfare.” Center for Advanced Studies in Child Welfare. Practice Notes, Issue #22. Winter 2009. https://ncwwi.org/files/Supervision_Perf_Management/Supervision_-_key_to_strengthening_practice_in_CW.pdf



is not their direct supervisor, which gives them an important outlet if they do not work well with their current supervisor (and an additional helpful outlet if they do).

In one county, mentors (who were required to have at least two years of experience) were compensated with a \$1,000 stipend for taking on a new mentee. In effect, this program was able to support new caseworkers while rewarding and retaining more tenured staff. Stipends for mentoring programs could be provided through the Recruitment and Retention Investment Fund (Recommendation #1) but should be evaluated for long-term sustainability at the local level.

Mentor programs (with or without a stipend) can provide valuable coaching and feedback for new caseworkers. Mentors can also benefit through discussion of cases and even shadowing or supporting casework as appropriate. CCYAs should be clear in setting expectations for potential mentors regarding the time they should be prepared to invest in mentoring and might consider developing incentives based on the amount of experience that mentors have.

36) Utilize Training Coordinators

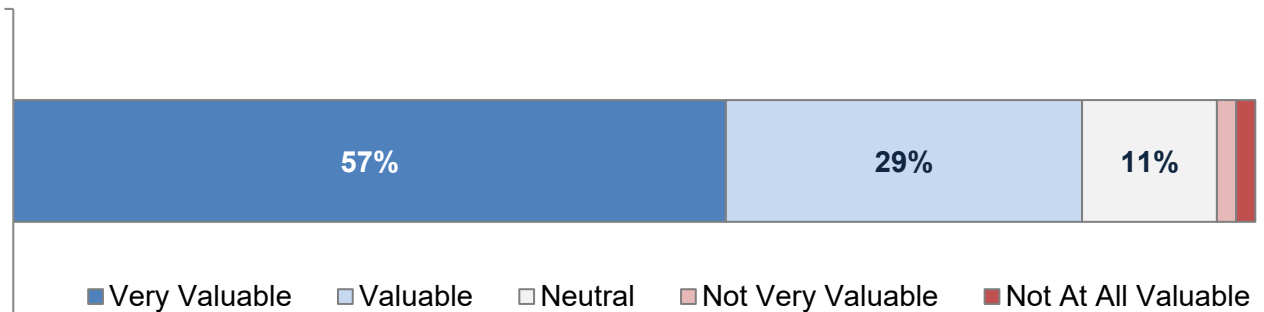
CCYAs may consider formalizing a training coordinator position, using a Caseworker 3 position where possible, to provide a pay increase corresponding to the role's increased responsibility.

Having a dedicated training coordinator can be a valuable training and retention tool for new caseworkers. One county in the sample group reported creating a Training Coordinator Caseworker 3 position to manage caseworkers early in their careers. The training coordinator carries a small caseload and uses those cases to bring new hires on field visits and teach them documentation processes and procedures. The coordinator is a dedicated resource a new caseworker can go to when they have questions.

An additional strength of this model is that it allows new caseworkers to form connections and camaraderie with each other as they go out on visits and work on cases together. This camaraderie can improve retention by developing peer support. A structured training position can also remove some of the burden from Caseworker 3s, who in many counties are expected to train new caseworkers in addition to managing their existing caseload. When asked to rate the potential value of training coordinators in preparing new caseworkers for success, 86 percent of caseworkers rated training coordinators as very valuable or valuable.



**“Please Rate the Value of the Following in Preparing New Caseworkers for Success:
Dedicated Training Coordinator for New Caseworkers”
Caseworker 1, 2, and 3s (N = 136)**



37) Expand Training Offerings*†

* Denotes recommendation may be funded through Recruitment and Retention Investment Fund (Recommendation #1)

† Denotes recommendation can be addressed through OCYF-CCYA Recruitment and Retention Work Group (Recommendation #2)

A caseworker’s job is dynamic, with changing challenges; counties should review current trainings to assess whether they are meeting the needs of caseworkers.

In Pennsylvania, certified caseworkers must complete 20 hours of training a year to maintain their qualification. CCYAs are often responsible for securing these trainings to help their workers with their certification. However, these trainings can be a mixed bag for caseworkers. In focus groups, it was clear that caseworkers find some of these trainings more useful than others. They emphasized that the required hours need to be useful to their work given the amount of time and the impact on their other responsibilities. As one caseworker commented in the employee survey, “We already offer so many trainings. Workers don’t have the time to attend or benefit from them.”

Comment from Employee Survey

“There was once a mock training with actual actors that still has a profound effect on me. I never forgot things that were pointed out that I as a Caseworker missed and how it could cause real harm to myself and/or a child. More trainings like that would be beneficial.”

“We already offer so many trainings. Workers don’t have the time to attend or benefit from them.”

From feedback in focus groups, a few existing trainings were highly praised as useful and informative. Agencies can review a variety of options for future training areas that their staff find most valuable.

- **De-escalation training:** Employees spoke highly of the de-escalation training which teaches caseworkers how to identify potential dangers and minimize risk to personal safety through “verbal de-escalation strategies.” These strategies prevent potentially dangerous situations from escalating into physical confrontation/violence.²²⁵

²²⁵ De-Escalation/Safety. Service Access and Management Inc. website. <https://www.sam-inc.org/sam-consulting/safety-training/2-uncategorised/60-de-escalation-safety>. Accessed April 21, 2024.



- **Drug training:** Caseworkers valued practical drug trainings that prepared them for what they would see in the field.
- **Trauma training:** Trauma training has been used by caseworkers to help clients as well as to support other caseworkers after a traumatic incident in the field.
- **Critical thinking skills:** CCYA administrators, in particular, spoke highly of the critical thinking skills training for employees.

38) Delay Assignment of Cases to New Caseworkers[†]

[†] Denotes recommendation can be addressed through OCYF-CCYA Recruitment and Retention Work Group (Recommendation #2)

Wherever possible, CCYAs should increase the amount of time that a new caseworker works at the agency before being assigned their own cases. This additional time would be spent doing Foundations training, as well as shadowing experienced caseworkers, sitting in on case reviews to learn critical thinking skills, supporting caseworkers as part of a team, and completing documentation in parallel with supervisors. A longer training period would also facilitate cross-training caseworkers across a range of units and case types.

CCYAs vary in their approach to training new caseworkers and to assigning cases. Some focus group participants said the speed at which new caseworkers are assigned their first cases in a primary role depends heavily on capacity and vacancy rates. Counties struggling with high vacancy rates and high caseloads described assigning cases to new caseworkers as soon as they completed the first five modules of Foundations training.

Some county leadership discussed the importance of increasing the time that new caseworkers spend doing shadowing, field training, completing additional Foundations training models, and working on cases together or in parallel with their supervisors or Caseworker 3s in order to gain valuable experience before taking cases on their own. Further, caseworkers discussed that being assigned cases too early could lead to issues such as lack of confidence which they have observed to impact retention. The more time new caseworkers have to observe firsthand how their peers and supervisors handle different situations, the more confidence and experience they will have going into their first case.

Focus group participants discussed the value of shadowing caseworkers in various units, working on a wide range of case types, and with different supervisors and working styles. In counties where employees are cross-trained to learn all units, caseworkers develop a breadth of knowledge that allow them (and their agency) to be more flexible. Cross-trained workers can help support colleagues in understaffed units and are also able to pursue opportunities for promotion that may arise in different units. Tenured caseworkers explained that this flexibility helps prevent burnout and attrition, as they can change units rather than leave their agency altogether. Cross-trained caseworkers are also better able to collaborate and understand how other units use the information and forms they generate through their work.



Additional training can support higher quality casework, which can in turn impact the well-being of children and families as well as the cost to the county. Extending the amount of time that caseworkers are able to train alongside their peers is a best practice which may seem like a luxury that some counties cannot afford with their current level of vacancies. However, once recruitment allows, counties should consider waiting up to six months to give caseworkers their first independent cases. During their training periods, caseworkers should continue supporting their supervisors, peers, and training managers, participating in case reviews, completing paperwork, and filling a “teaming” role to benefit the caseworkers and supervisors doing the training, mentoring, and shadowing.

Safe, Supportive Workplace Recommendations

Working conditions – in particular, creating a safe and supportive workplace – represent another critical area for caseworker retention. The recommendations that follow explore options for bolstering caseworker safety, providing critical support services, and creating a work environment that reduces stress and the potential for burnout.

39) Improve Safety Measures for Caseworkers*†

** Denotes recommendation may be funded through Recruitment and Retention Investment Fund (Recommendation #1)*

† Denotes recommendation can be addressed through OCYF-CCYA Recruitment and Retention Work Group (Recommendation #2)

CCYAs and OCYF should implement solutions to address caseworker safety concerns, including building relationships with law enforcement and policy changes such as teaming on investigations.

Having caseworkers perform field visits in teams – either with another caseworker/supervisor or law enforcement officer, when staffing levels allow – was a common focus group suggestion for improving caseworkers’ safety. Building relationships with law enforcement through education and open communication can be helpful in ensuring that law enforcement have knowledge of how to support child welfare caseworkers appropriately as needed. This is particularly necessary because several counties mentioned a lack of support from law enforcement, so there is a need to overcome the challenges and perceptions on both sides in order to ensure the safety of both children and caseworkers.

Training can be helpful in recognizing signs of potential violence or escalation, and caseworkers use this information to identify when to take additional steps to ensure their safety before intervening. For example, North Carolina’s guidance to caseworkers includes how to recognize signs of domestic violence and how to mitigate risk through strategies such as having law enforcement accompany a caseworker, working in pairs, and having access to a cell phone. Along these lines, more than one employee survey respondents suggested using “panic button” technology that would enable caseworkers to alert law enforcement. Georgia recently implemented use of the Click Safe app for its social workers. By pressing a button on a fob caseworkers transmit a signal to their phone, which then “silently notifies the agency’s call center, where a trained operator contacts the nearest 911



center with details on the alarm, a description of the employee, the location, and a request to rush law enforcement officers to the scene.”²²⁶

40) Offer Counseling and Peer Support*†

* Denotes recommendation may be funded through Recruitment and Retention Investment Fund (Recommendation #1)

† Denotes recommendation can be addressed through OCYF-CCYA Recruitment and Retention Work Group (Recommendation #2)

Because of the positive feedback around individual and group counseling to deal with stress and trauma, counties should continue seeking opportunities to provide access to professional and peer support. These opportunities may include:

- A counselor who can provide individual sessions upon request. This could take the form of scheduling virtual sessions or having set times during the month to be available for in-person visits in CCYA offices.
- A counselor who provides group sessions on a regular basis (weekly/bi-weekly/monthly). Caseworkers and supervisors could meet separately, or units could meet together.
- Establishing formal peer mentoring programs or work discussion groups for CCYA staff. In a mentorship program, newer caseworkers are matched with experienced caseworkers or supervisors who are not their direct supervisor. By leading individual or group discussions where caseworkers can share their stressors, peer mentors can “support ongoing self-assessment regarding the personal impact of child welfare work and may assist the mentee in recognizing unhealthy changes in functioning and accessing additional support.”²²⁷
- Accessing counseling or feedback as a health benefit or through an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is another option that should be promoted by CCYA leadership.

If possible, CCYAs should seek counselors or therapists with knowledge of child welfare or similar backgrounds. This will better position them to address the secondary trauma of working with children and families in potentially traumatic, dangerous, and disheartening situations, as well as being able to address the stresses that come with working long or unpredictable hours, managing interpersonal relationships, and other aspects of work-life balance.

The more successful a CCYA is at fostering a culture of trust, where discussion of mental health is not stigmatized and seeking support is encouraged, the more likely staff are to use these resources when they are available. Leaders can use several strategies to encourage and promote the use of counseling and peer support resources. These include:

²²⁶ “Georgia social workers get unique safety app.” Georgia Department of Human Services, Division of Family and Children Services. December 3, 2018. <https://dfcs.georgia.gov/press-releases/2018-12-03/georgia-social-workers-get-unique-safety-app> Accessed 4.18.24

²²⁷ Secondary Trauma and Child Welfare Staff: Guidance for Supervisors and Administrators. The National Child Traumatic Stress Network. https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources/secondary_trauma_child_welfare_staff_guidance_for_supervisors.pdf Accessed April 21, 2024



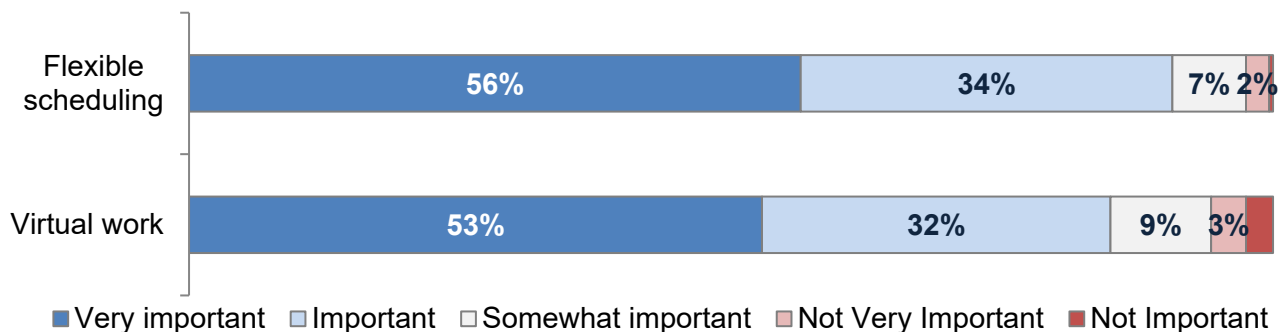
- Educating employees about what resources exist and how to access them through ongoing messaging.
- Emphasizing the philosophy of a “safe space” where conversations and participation in counseling remain confidential.
- Providing comfortable physical spaces for counselors and group sessions, as well as places where staff might go to have confidential conversations or phone calls.
- Emphasizing the fact that EAP services are completely confidential and that nothing is reported back to leadership at any level, including even a record of EAP use.
- Creating a supportive environment where managers and supervisors are knowledgeable about resources for struggling employees.
- Empowering managers and supervisors to offer accommodations such as flexible work hours or discreet office space.

41) Provide Remote/Flexible Working Options[†]

[†] Denotes recommendation can be addressed through OCYF-CCYA Recruitment and Retention Work Group (Recommendation #2)

CCYAs – working through the Recruitment and Retention Workgroup (Recommendation #2) – should consider implementing more remote/flexible working options. A common theme from focus groups and the employee survey is that remote/flexible working options are important elements of caseworker job performance and satisfaction.

“Please Select the Importance of Each Benefit or Potential Benefit to Your Job Performance and Satisfaction”
All Responses (N = 280)



There are several options that would allow staff and agencies to access the benefits of both in-person and remote work, without jeopardizing retention of staff who feel strongly about the need for flexibility. These include extending core office hours, organizing in-person days around specific tasks (such as reflective supervision or case review opportunities), and allowing caseworkers to coordinate development of working schedules.



Flexibility in the workplace is a critical requirement and expectation in today's world. Caseworkers specifically expressed the importance of having the option to work remotely at least some of the time, as well as the ability to shift hours when needed for things like childcare or medical appointments. While there are aspects of child welfare that will require staff to work outside of regular hours in order to respond promptly, be available for decision-making support (supervisors), and complete paperwork to meet compliance requirements, there are also aspects of the job that enhance the ability for a flexible work schedule.

Even before the pandemic led to an increase in work from home opportunities, child welfare caseworkers and leadership were starting to examine opportunities to increase efficiency by reducing the time staff needed to come into the office. One example is a "hoteling" approach that accommodates working in the field and reduces the need for dedicated desk space by assuming that not all caseworkers will be in the office every day.

CCYAs have several options to consider when thinking about flexibility and remote work. Engaging caseworkers at various points in their career and taking their preferences into consideration would be beneficial to county leadership deciding what policies to put in place that will meet employee needs and increase retention without negatively impacting the quality of casework, compliance with regulations, and a sense of community.

Extending "core office hours" is one option that counties might consider in terms of flexibility. For example, New Jersey expanded core office hours to 7 a.m. to 7 p.m., "which allows employees to organize their work hours around personal and family obligations, and provide services to families outside of traditional business hours."²²⁸

Most CCYAs would agree that a hybrid working environment, in which caseworkers spend some time working in the office as well as time working from home and in the field, is ideal in terms of meeting the needs of leadership and employees. Research has found that structuring in-person work around specific tasks is beneficial, as opposed to assigning arbitrary days or requirements for in-office time. In addition, allowing case management units to structure in-office time around supervision or decision-making support would provide additional flexibility and ensure that staff are in the office together and able to be productive during that time. So too would assigning new caseworkers to multiple units so that they can be in the office with their unit and get to know other caseworkers and supervisors, while still having an opportunity for remote work.

Within a successful culture of trust, where caseworkers and supervisors are given the capacity to choose when they will be in the office, there should not be a punitive aspect to in-office or remote time, as long as performance is not affected.

²²⁸ "How are child protection agencies navigating and addressing workforce challenges?" Casey Family Programs. August 29, 2023. <https://www.casey.org/workforce-challenges-strategies/> Accessed April 20, 2024.



42) Implement Case Reviews and Decision-Making Support

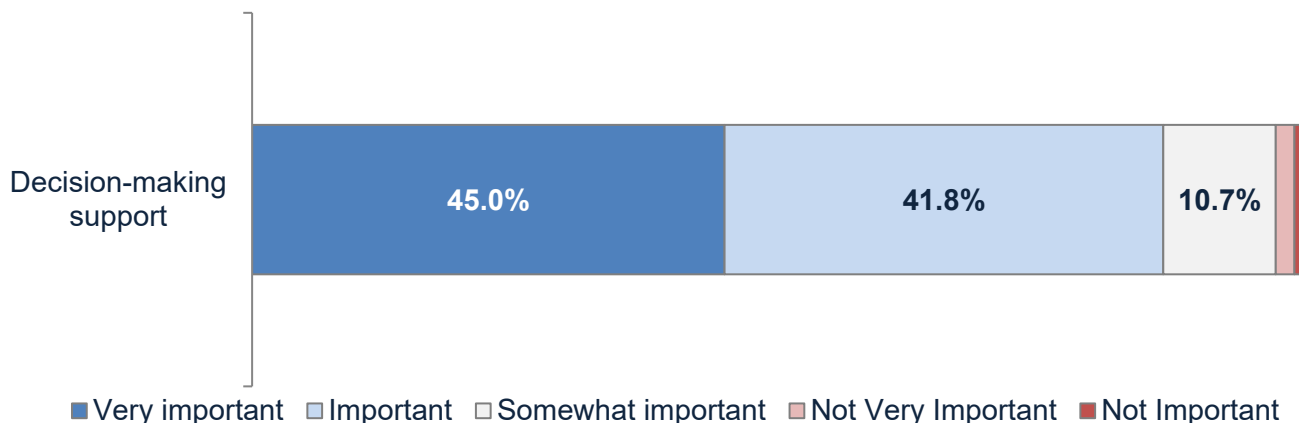
Caseworkers highlighted decision-making support as a key retention factor in both the employee survey and in focus groups. CCYAs should implement best practice approaches such as group supervision and collaborative decision-making to foster the development of critical thinking skills. These approaches should be coupled with periodic evaluations to ensure that caseworkers feel supported and so that supervisors and managers can receive feedback on the process.

In focus groups and the employee survey, caseworkers cited case review sessions as fundamental to their continued learning and development, allowing them to learn from the thought processes of those in management while reducing stress around decision-making. Employees reported that case reviews helped them feel like they were part of a team and made them feel that there was mutual understanding between the supervisors and managers overseeing them.

While some counties had positive experiences, others described case reviews or similar conferences as stressful events where they did not feel listened to and which did not serve to strengthen the bonds with supervisors or act as learning and coaching opportunities. Focus group participants in some counties noted that supervisors or caseworkers were left out of reviews of their own cases. This exclusion left them feeling scrutinized, unsupported, and unable to understand the thought process behind decisions about their cases.

Caseworkers said they most appreciated case reviews where they learned how their managers and supervisors thought through difficult case situations. In addition, they expressed a desire to not be placed under a microscope or second-guessed on every decision or detail of a case. It is crucial that CCYA employees continue to have opportunities for the support and learning that case reviews offer, as 87 percent of all employees said decision-making supports would improve their job performance and satisfaction.

“Please Select the Importance of Each Benefit or Potential Benefit to Your Job Performance and Satisfaction”
All Responses (N = 280)





A study published in a 2018 edition of the *Clinical Social Work Journal* underscored the importance of case reviews as a part of supervision for child welfare workers, as they focus on education and practice rather than administrative tasks. The study noted that “the process of [case review] is essential to child welfare practice, because it prompts reflection and builds analytical thinking skills needed to address complex situations involved in child protection.”²²⁹ Pennsylvania CCYAs should offer instructional case reviews to all direct service staff to ensure that workers continue to develop as caseworkers while feeling more satisfied and supported in their positions.

Group supervision, which brings together supervisors and case workers to discuss cases and therefore creates an environment for both learning and decision-making, represents one commonly used approach to case reviews. Group supervision also addresses one of the issues that came up frequently in caseworker focus groups, which is inconsistency between supervisors. Group supervision provides a space for discussion to potentially increase consistency, as well as an opportunity to better understand how caseworkers and supervisors make decisions.²³⁰

One county discussed a similar approach, where supervisors from different units come together to discuss specific cases and work through any disagreements they might have. Key elements of group supervision include “protecting time for the task” (designating a set time and not letting other meetings or duties interfere), being able to voice opinions (there does not have to be agreement, but everyone should be allowed to share their opinion) and using the opportunity to teach critical thinking skills and explain the “why” behind specific decisions.

Group supervision does not include managers or administrators in the decision-making process. While there may be roles for leadership in some case review conversations, there is a risk that doing so may result in a less candid environment. One county discussed a review process that had evolved from being a tool for working a difficult case to being more of an interrogation (“why did you take this approach?”) after managers became involved in the process. Through a more collaborative group decision-making process, managers have an opportunity to model the interactions that they want to see between caseworkers and families.

OCYF should support incorporating these principles into supervisor and leadership training and develop assessments that counties can use to determine whether they are following case review best practices. Employee surveys could also be used to inform CCYA leadership as to whether caseworkers are finding the review helpful and whether they are viewed as coaching and decision-making supports or whether they are seen as more interrogatory and/or punitive in nature.

43) Develop Positive Organizational Cultures

CCYAs and OCYF should be intentional in working to develop positive organizational cultures built on trust, collaboration, and a sense of shared responsibility. While creating a positive organizational

²²⁹ “Infusing Clinical Supervision Throughout Child Welfare Practice: Advancing Effective Implementation of Family-Centered Practice Through Supervisory Processes” *Clinical Social Work Journal*, Volume 46. August 2018. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10615-018-0672-7>.

²³⁰ “How have counties in New York approached implementation of casework teaming?” *Casey Family Programs*. March 22, 2021. <https://www.casey.org/casework-teaming-ny-counties> Accessed April 20, 2024.



culture can be difficult if an agency has historically functioned in an environment where building and modeling trust are not prioritized, there are several steps that counties and the state can take to begin shifting the culture of the system.

Model at the state level: Shifting organizational culture is primarily a matter of leadership approach and priorities. It may be difficult for a leader who has not experienced a culture of trust to recognize what goes into creating and sustaining this type of workplace. OCYF can demonstrate aspects of organizational culture it wants to see CCYAs create, by modeling that culture through interactions between OCYF and CCYAs. In several counties, CCYA staff mentioned feeling as though the state is over-scrutinizing the counties instead of providing teaching and support. The state should model staff appreciation by recognizing the good things that counties are doing. In their interactions with CCYAs, regional offices should model open-door policies, listening to feedback, coaching, and learning opportunities.

Comment from Employee Survey

“As a seasoned employee, with almost twenty-two years of experience, my biggest struggle in the past two years is the feeling that our Regional reps are no longer a support, but are, in fact, seeking out reasons to punish and censure.”

New Jersey’s Department of Children and Families (DCF) implemented several strategies to successfully stabilize its workforce, reducing the vacancy rate to 2.5 percent in 2022 from 14.5 percent in 2005. One of the highest priorities was developing a positive organizational culture and peer support. This included the creation of a commissioner-level office of Staff Health and Wellness within the department to facilitate these efforts and establish “staff health and wellness as one of the agency’s four major priorities to achieve DCF’s transformational goals.”²³¹

The department also recognized the importance of transparency and communication between leadership and staff as a significant factor of staff retention. Key components of DCF’s approach to open lines of communication include:

- Direct lines of communication between frontline staff, supervisors, and leadership.
- Forums for group communication.
- Weekly all-staff virtual meetings to provide real-time information to staff and address their concerns directly.
- An Office of Advocacy which supports frontline staff, investigating staff questions and concerns about practice or policy. Staff can submit questions via telephone or confidential

²³¹ “How does New Jersey maintain a stable child welfare workforce?” Casey Family Programs. February 7, 2022. <https://www.casey.org/new-jersey-staff-turnover/> Accessed April 20, 2024.



email, which “provides a level of protection for staff who do not want their identity exposed to leadership.”²³²

CCYA leadership must commit to building a culture of trust: CCYA leaders have a responsibility to guide their agencies into an organizational culture built on trust and collaboration. In some cases, this requires an active “unlearning” of practices that are more punitive, micromanaging, or “top-down” in nature. CCYA leaders can take key steps to implement this type of culture while mitigating concerns about liability, compliance, and caseworker competency. These include:

- Implementing coaching and mentoring programs that pair caseworkers with experienced mentors or coaches who can provide guidance, support, and feedback. Early coaching and counseling, emphasizing openness to mistakes and growth, supports the shared responsibility that grows into a collaborative organizational culture.
- Encouraging caseworkers to engage in peer learning activities, such as case consultations, joint case reviews, or community of practice groups can further promote collaboration as well as linking a culture of trust with a culture of competency that values critical and creative thinking.
- Recognize and reward caseworkers who demonstrate competency in their work, which can help reinforce desired behaviors and motivate others.
- Seeking 360-degree feedback, including anonymous assessments of supervisors and administrators to collect information on strengths and opportunities, which individuals can use to address their own areas for growth.

CCYA leaders who are looking for a model to support the development of an organizational culture built on trust might consider the Sanctuary Model described in this report. The model may not be a good fit for every county, but the philosophical underpinnings around trust may be applicable even outside implementation of this specific program.

Be purposeful in developing opportunities to build morale, encourage camaraderie, and show appreciation for staff. Embrace opportunities to build camaraderie among CCYA employees. Staff appreciation efforts and opportunities for staff to get to know each other should not be viewed as “nice to have” but as an investment in staff retention and employee satisfaction.

Morale-building becomes part of the culture if this is implemented correctly. If the organizational culture does not encompass appreciation for staff that is truly felt and modeled by leadership, no amount of morale-building activities will have the desired impact of improving worker well-being and retention.

²³² Ibid.

XII. Appendix

Methodological Approach for Related Occupations Analysis

The following section details the methodology used by PFM to identify a set of occupations similar to CCYA caseworkers using federal Standardized Occupations Classification (SOC) system codes. The SOC system, developed and administered by the U.S. Office of Management and Budget, is a classification system that categorizes all workers into one of 867 occupations.²³³

The SOC code that best aligns with the CCYA caseworker job description is "Child, Family, and School Social Workers (21-1021)," which is defined as the following:

Involve providing social services and assistance to enhance the social and psychological well-being of children and families, as well as to optimize children's academic functioning. Duties may include assisting parents, arranging adoptions, finding foster homes for abandoned or abused children, and addressing issues such as teenage pregnancy, misbehavior, and truancy in schools.²³⁴

Sample job titles within this occupational code include case manager, caseworker, child protective services social worker (CPS social worker), family protection specialist, family service worker, foster care social worker, and school social worker.

To compile a set of occupations that reasonably align with the "Child, Family, and School Social Workers" SOC code – the proxy for a CCYA caseworker – PFM used the "related occupations" methodology developed by U.S. Department of Labor's Occupational Information Network (O*NET). O*Net is a comprehensive system developed by the U.S. Department of Labor Employment and Training Administration that provides information on over 900 occupations within the U.S. economy. O*NET uses two criteria to establish a list of related occupations for each Federal standardized occupation classification (SOC):

- **Empirical Relatedness Score/Rank:** This score is calculated using several statistical models that consider the tasks, knowledge domain (field), and alternate titles associated with each occupation. This rank helps to gauge how closely different occupations are related to one another based on what people do, what they know, and what they are called.
- **Expert Rank:** After generating the empirical relatedness rankings, a team of experts evaluates the top-ten related occupations for each occupation within the standardized occupational classification system. These experts rely on their extensive knowledge and experience to further refine the list based on industry insights and professional judgment.

²³³ US. Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Standard Occupational Classification," available online at: [bls.gov/soc](https://www.bls.gov/soc) . Accessed on April 1, 2024.

²³⁴ O*Net, "Child, Family, and School Social Workers," available online at: [onetonline.org/link/summary/21-1021.00](https://www.onetonline.org/link/summary/21-1021.00). Accessed on April 1, 2024.



The figure that follows displays the top 10 occupations²³⁵ – and their rankings – most closely related to the “Child, Family, and School Social Workers” SOC code by Empirical Relatedness and Expert Rank. A total of thirteen occupations are shown.

Top Ranking Occupations Related to Child, Family, and Social Worker SOC Code²³⁶

Occupation Code	Related Occupation	Empirical Rank	Expert Rank
21-1023	Mental Health and Substance Abuse Social Workers	1	1
21-1013	Marriage and Family Therapists	2	2
21-1022	Healthcare Social Workers	3	3
21-1014	Mental Health Counselors	4	11
21-1015	Rehabilitation Counselors	5	4
21-1093	Social and Human Service Assistants	6	5
11-9151	Social and Community Service Managers	7	6
21-1094	Community Health Workers	8	7
19-3033	Clinical and Counseling Psychologists	9	12
21-1011	Substance Abuse and Behavioral Disorder Counselors	10	13
21-1012	Educational, Guidance, and Career Counselors and Advisors	11	8
21-1091	Health Education Specialists	13	9
21-1092	Probation Officers and Correctional Treatment Specialists	14	10

Narrowing the Related Occupations List by Job Zone

While the related occupations methodology developed by O*NET includes occupations that are based on similar skills and fields, it does not directly include the level of education and related experience – key factors when comparing labor market competition and compensation. To account for levels of education and training required, the related occupations are filtered further by “job zone.”

A job zone is a group of occupations that are similar in:

- How much education people need to do the work,
- How much related experience people need to do the work, and
- How much on-the-job training people need to do the work.²³⁷

As illustrated in the table that follows, there are five job zones – with occupations in Job Zone 1 requiring “little or no preparation needed” and occupations in Job Zone 5 requiring “extensive preparation.” Job zones are determined based on each occupation’s level of education, related experience, job training, and specific vocational preparation (SVP) range.²³⁸

²³⁵ The figure displays all occupations that were included as a top 10 in either the empirical or expert rank.

²³⁶ National Center for O*NET Development. O*NET OnLine. Accessed on April 2, 2024 at <https://www.onetonline.org/>

²³⁷ Additional information on Job Zones can be found here: <https://www.onetonline.org/help/online/zones>

²³⁸ Specific Vocational Preparation (SVP) “is the amount of lapsed time required by a typical worker to learn the techniques, acquire the information, and develop the facility needed for average performance in a specific job-worker situation.”

Job Zone 1: SVP below 4.0 (Short demonstration up to an including 3 months of specific vocational preparation)

Job Zone 2: SVP greater than 4.0 and less than 6.0 (Over 3 months up to and including 1 year of specific vocational preparation)

Job Zone 3: SVP greater than 6.0 and less than 7.0 (Over 1 year up to and including 2 years of specific vocational preparation)

Job Zone 4: SVP greater than 7.0 and less than 8.0 (Over 2 years up to and including 4 years of specific vocational preparation)

Job Zone 5: SVP greater than 8.0 (Over 4 years of specific vocational preparation)



O*Net Job Zones²³⁹

Job Zone	Job Zone Description
Job Zone 1	Occupations that need little or no preparation
Job Zone 2	Occupations that need some preparation
Job Zone 3	Occupations that need medium preparation
Job Zone 4	Occupations that need consideration preparation
Job Zone 5	Occupations that need extensive preparation

The figure that follows provides additional criteria for each job zone – including education, related experience, job training, and examples of occupations. The “Child, Family, and School Social Workers” SOC code, which is being used as the proxy for a CCYA caseworker in Pennsylvania, is classified as belonging to Job Zone 4 – designated by the blue shading in the figure that follows.

O*Net Job Zone Criteria²⁴⁰

Job Zone	Education	Related Experience	Job Training	SVP Range	Job Zone Examples
1	May require high school diploma or GED	Little or no previous work-related skill, knowledge, or experience is needed.	Employees in these occupations need anywhere from a few days to a few months of training. Usually, an experienced worker could show you how to do the job.	Below 4.0	Food preparation workers, dishwashers, floor sanders and finishers, landscaping workers, baristas
2	Usually require a high school diploma	Some previous work-related skill, knowledge, or experience is usually needed.	Employees in these occupations need anywhere from a few months to one year of working with experienced employees.	4.0 to < 6.0	Orderlies, customer service representatives, security guards, tellers, dental laboratory technicians
3	Usually require training in vocational schools, related on-the-job experience, or an associate degree.	Previous work-related skill, knowledge, or experience is needed.	Employees in these occupations usually need one or two years of training involving both on-the-job experience and informal training with experienced workers.	6.0 to < 7.0	Electricians, agricultural technicians, medical assistants
4	Usually require a four-year bachelor's degree (with some exceptions)	A considerable amount of work-related skill, knowledge, or experience is needed.	Employees in these occupations usually need several years of work-related experience, on-the-job training, and/or vocational training.	7.0 to < 8.0	Real estate brokers, database administrators, graphic designers, cost estimators
5	Usually require graduate school (Master's, Ph.D., M.D, J.D)	Extensive skill, knowledge, and experience are needed.	Employees may need some on-the-job training, but most of these occupations assume that the person will already have the required skills, knowledge, work-related experience, and/or training.	Above 8.0	Surgeons, pharmacists, lawyers, astronomers, biologists, veterinarians

As illustrated in the figure below, six positions closely related to the Child, Family, and School Social Worker SOC code by Empirical Rank and Expert Rank are also located in Job Zone 4. Two of these occupations are excluded from the analysis, even though they are in Job Zone 4. Social and Human

²³⁹ National Center for O*NET Development. O*NET OnLine. Accessed on April 2, 2024 at <https://www.onetonline.org/>

²⁴⁰ National Center for O*NET Development. O*NET OnLine. Accessed on April 2, 2024 at <https://www.onetonline.org/>



Service Assistants often serve in supporting positions to caseworkers, while Community Service Managers have supervisory or managerial responsibilities.

The remaining four occupations – Rehabilitation Counselors, Community Health Workers, Health Education Specialists, and Probation Officers and Correctional Treatment Specialists – share similar education requirements, related experience, and job training as CCYA caseworker. The positions are shaded blue in the subsequent table.

Job Zones for Select Related Occupations²⁴¹

Occupation Code	Related Occupation	Empirical Rank	Expert Rank	Job Zone
21-1021	Child, Family, and School Social Workers	-	-	4
21-1023	Mental Health and Substance Abuse Social Workers	1	1	5
21-1013	Marriage and Family Therapists	2	2	5
21-1022	Healthcare Social Workers	3	3	5
21-1014	Mental Health Counselors	4	11	5
21-1015	Rehabilitation Counselors	5	4	4
21-1093 ²⁴²	Social and Human Service Assistants	6	5	4
11-9151 ²⁴³	Social and Community Service Managers	7	6	4
21-1094	Community Health Workers	8	7	4
19-3033	Clinical and Counseling Psychologists	9	12	5
21-1011	Substance Abuse and Behavioral Disorder Counselors	10	13	5
21-1012	Educational, Guidance, and Career Counselors and Advisors	11	8	5
21-1091	Health Education Specialists	13	9	4
21-1092	Probation Officers and Correctional Treatment Specialists	14	10	4

Related Occupations – Compensation Comparisons

The SOC Code for each of these occupations is as follows:

- Rehabilitation Counselors:** Counsel individuals to maximize the independence and employability of persons coping with personal, social, and vocational difficulties that result from birth defects, illness, disease, accidents, aging, or the stress of daily life. Coordinate activities for residents of care and treatment facilities. Assess client needs and design and implement rehabilitation programs that may include personal and vocational counseling, training, and job placement. Sample of report job titles: Employment Advisor, Employment Services Case Manager, Employment Specialist, Human Services Care Specialist, Job

²⁴¹ National Center for O*NET Development. *O*NET OnLine*. Accessed on April 2, 2024 at <https://www.onetonline.org/>

²⁴² Social and Human Service Assistants "Assist other social and human service providers in providing client services in a wide variety of fields, such as psychology, rehabilitation, or social work, including support for families. May assist clients in identifying and obtaining available benefits and social and community services. May assist social workers with developing, organizing, and conducting programs to prevent and resolve problems relevant to substance abuse, human relationships, rehabilitation, or dependent care." As these occupations typically provide assistance to caseworkers, this occupation will be excluded from this analysis.

²⁴³ Occupation codes located within job family "11" are classified as "Management." 11-9151 includes occupations that "Plan, direct, or coordinate the activities of a social service program or community outreach organization. Oversee the program or organization's budget and policies regarding participant involvement, program requirements, and benefits. For this reason, this occupation will be excluded from this analysis.



Coach, Rehabilitation Counselor, Rehabilitation Specialist, Vocational Case Manager, Vocational Placement Specialist, Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor (VRC).

- **Community Health Workers:** Promote health within a community by assisting individuals to adopt healthy behaviors. Serve as an advocate for the health needs of individuals by assisting community residents in effectively communicating with healthcare providers or social service agencies. Act as liaison or advocate and implement programs that promote, maintain, and improve individual and overall community health. May deliver health-related preventive services such as blood pressure, glaucoma, and hearing screenings. May collect data to help identify community health needs. Sample of report job titles: Community Health Advisor, Community Health Representative, Community Health Worker, Lay Health Advocate, Peer Health Promoter.
- **Health Education Specialists:** Provide and manage health education programs that help individuals, families, and their communities maximize and maintain healthy lifestyles. Use data to identify community needs prior to planning, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating programs designed to encourage healthy lifestyles, policies, and environments. May link health systems, health providers, insurers, and patients to address individual and population health needs. May serve as resource to assist individuals, other health professionals, or the community, and may administer fiscal resources for health education programs. Sample of report job titles: Certified Diabetes Educator, Certified Health Education Specialist, Community Health Education Coordinator, Diabetes Educator, Health Educator Specialist, Health Educator, Public Health Educator.
- **Probation Officers and Correctional Treatment Specialists:** Provide social services to assist in rehabilitation of law offenders in custody or on probation or parole. Make recommendations for actions involving formulation of rehabilitation plan and treatment of offender, including conditional release and education and employment stipulations. Sample of report job titles: Correctional Treatment Specialist, Juvenile Probation Officer, Parole Agent, Parole Officer, Probation Officer.²⁴⁴

Based on the analysis of relatedness and job zone classification, PFM selected four occupations for comparison with the Child, Family, and School Social Worker occupation. Each occupation is within the top 10 of Empirical or Expert Rank and is in Job Zone 4.

²⁴⁴ Ibid



Occupations for Comparison with Child, Family, and School Social Workers²⁴⁵

Occupation Code	Related Occupation	Empirical Rank	Expert Rank	Job Zone
21-1021	Child, Family, and School Social Workers	-	-	4
21-1015	Rehabilitation Counselors	5	4	4
21-1094	Community Health Workers	8	7	4
21-1091	Health Education Specialists	13	9	4
21-1092	Probation Officers and Correctional Treatment Specialists	14	10	4

²⁴⁵ National Center for O*NET Development. *O*NET OnLine*. Accessed on April 2, 2024 at <https://www.onetonline.org/>



Glossary

Act 148: Act 148 is the system of reimbursement through which state funds are provided to support county child welfare and juvenile justice in the Commonwealth of PA. State Act 148 funding is allocated through the Needs-Based Plan and Budget (NBPB) process, and the Special Grants Initiative (SGI) which was established in 2009 to incentivize prevention services.

AOPC: Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts. Led by the court administrator, with offices in Harrisburg and Philadelphia. Their main responsibilities include:²⁴⁶

- Ensuring accessible and safe courts for all citizens
- Recommending court system improvements and program innovations directly or collaboratively
- Representing the court system to citizens, at all government levels, and with the media and providing all with reliable information
- Reviewing operations, providing policy guidance and assisting 60 president judges and district court administrators in local court management
- Developing and maintaining information technology, such as case, financial and administrative management systems
- Providing legal services and, when appropriate, legal representation to system personnel
- Managing administrative functions, including finance and human resources
- Conducting statewide continuing education programs for judges and staff

CCAP: County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania. Serves as the voice of Pennsylvania counties. “CCAP provides county leaders with information and guidance related to legislation, education, media, insurance, technology and many other issues that help create and maintain crucial services for residents throughout the state.”²⁴⁷

ChildLine: Toll-free hotline available and staffed 24 hours a day to receive reports of suspected child abuse and general child well-being concerns by phone as well as electronically. ChildLine is responsible for transmitting information received through these reports to the appropriate investigating agency.”²⁴⁸

CPSL: Child Protective Services Laws. Legislation enacted in 2013 to change the way Pennsylvania responds to child abuse reports. CPS Laws “expand and further define mandated reporters and the reporting process, increase penalties for those mandated to report suspected child abuse who fail to do so, and provide protections from employment discrimination for filing a good faith report of child abuse.”²⁴⁹

²⁴⁶ “Judicial Administration,” Office of the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania. <https://www.pacourts.us/judicial-administration> Accessed March 15, 2024.

²⁴⁷ County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania website, <https://www.pacounties.org/who-we-are> Accessed March 15, 2024

²⁴⁸ ChildLine website. <https://www.dhs.pa.gov/KeepKidsSafe/Resources/Pages/ChildLine.aspx> Accessed March 15, 2024

²⁴⁹ Child Protective Services Laws, Pennsylvania Department of Human Services. <https://www.dhs.pa.gov/KeepKidsSafe/About/Pages/CPS-Laws.aspx> Accessed March 15, 2024



CWRC: The Pennsylvania Child Welfare Resource Center is a collaborative effort of the University of Pittsburgh, School of Social Work, the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services, and the Pennsylvania Children and Youth Administrators. CWRC provides services including training for caseworkers, supervisors, mandated reporters, and other child welfare professionals; technical assistance to CYAs and child welfare stakeholders; research and evaluation; resource coordination, and others.

Family First / FFPSA: Family First Prevention Services Act. Signed into law in 2018, Family First expands child welfare funding to cover prevention services, authorizing “new optional title IV-E funding for time-limited prevention services for mental health, substance abuse, and in-home parent skill-based programs for children or youth who are candidates for foster care, pregnant or parenting youth in foster care, and the parents or kin caregivers of those children and youth.”²⁵⁰

Permanent Legal Custodianship (PLC): Permanent Legal Custodianship (PLC) is a permanency option for children who cannot return to their home and for whom adoption is not a suitable option, or who have a caregiver that they have resided with for over six months who is willing to accept legal responsibility but unwilling or unable to adopt. Once the court has awarded custody to a permanent legal custodian, the child is no longer considered to be in substitute care. PLC does not require termination of parental rights. Also referred to as Subsidized Permanent Legal Custodianship (SPLC).

Needs-Based Plan and Budget (NBPB or NBB): The Needs-Based Plan and Budget is the process used to determine the service level of need in each county and to develop funding allocations to ensure that the needs of the children and families being served are met. PFM aggregated and analyzed personnel summary data extracted from each PA county’s annual Needs-Based Budget (NBPB) reports spanning from fiscal year (FY) 2018-2023. The data is self-reported by county and contains a range of personnel-related metrics including positions, vacancies, compensation, separations, and other relevant data pertaining to the County Children and Youth Agencies (CCYAs). PFM used the aggregated data to evaluate the recruitment and retention experiences of employees within individual CCYAs.

PCYA: Pennsylvania Children and Youth Administrators. PCYA aims to “enhance the quality of service delivery for children, youth and their families by providing for its members:

- A forum for the exchange of information
- Assistance in educating the general public and its constituencies
- An environment of support for the Association membership”²⁵¹

PCCYFS: Pennsylvania Council of Children, Youth and Family Services. PCCYFS is a statewide member organization of private child welfare service provider agencies. “PCCYFS works on behalf of its members to break down barriers and build relationships between counties and service providers. PCCYFS identifies system efficiencies to enhance services and service delivery in ways that make

²⁵⁰ Title IV-E Prevention Program. Children’s Bureau, Administration of Children and Families. <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/title-iv-e-prevention-program> Accessed March 15, 2024.

²⁵¹ Pennsylvania Children and Youth Administrators website. <https://www.pcy.org/about-us> Accessed March 15, 2024.



the client's experience more seamless. When special needs and issues arise, PCCYFS leverages the resources of its provider members to quickly identify the best resources to address the challenge and achieve successful resolution."²⁵²

SWAN: Statewide Adoption and Permanency Network. SWAN is a partnership among public and private agencies, judges and the legal community, foster and adoptive parents to build a better collaborative adoption process in Pennsylvania. SWAN serves children in the custody of county Children and Youth agencies who have a goal of adoption.²⁵³

Title IV-E: Title IV-E of the Social Security Act is the Federal program which funds the Federal Foster Care Program for out-of-home care for children until the children are safely returned home, placed permanently, or placed in other planned arrangements. Title IV-E also provides program funding for Independent Living as well as the Adoption Assistance Program, which provides funds to states to facilitate the timely placement of children. Following the Family First Prevention Services Act, Title IV-E has been expanded to include funding for Prevention Services that meet the necessary criteria.

²⁵² Join as a Member, Pennsylvania Council of Children, Youth, and Family Services website. <https://pccyfs.org/joining/> Accessed March 15, 2024

²⁵³ Adoption in Pennsylvania. Pennsylvania Department of Human Services. <https://www.dhs.pa.gov/Services/Children/Pages/Adoption-in-PA.aspx> Accessed March 15, 2024.