

Georgia Division of Family and Children Services

FY 2026 Annual Progress and Services Report

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Georgia's CFSP and most recent APSR documents can be viewed on the DFCS Federal Plans website: <https://dfcs.georgia.gov/data/federal-reviews-and-plans>.

Section A: Introduction

Introduction

The Georgia Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS) is committed, through its child welfare programs, to ensuring the safety, permanency, and well-being of Georgia's most vulnerable citizens. The APSR provides an annual update on the progress made toward accomplishing the goals and objectives in the Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP) ([section 432\(a\)\(2\)\(C\)\(i\) of the Act](#)). Completion of the APSR satisfies the federal regulations at 45 CFR 1357.16 by providing updates on a state's annual progress since the submission of the CFSP and planned activities for the upcoming fiscal year.

This 2025 APSR submission serves as the first report on the strategies and efforts undertaken by the state's child welfare system throughout the 2025-2029 CFSP reporting period. Georgia is accomplishing meaningful efforts toward improving child welfare services for children and families, and promoting safety, permanency, and well-being. Multiple agency efforts also promote the national and state priority to transform child welfare into a system that focuses on strengthening families and preventing child abuse and neglect.

Vision

Safe Children. Strengthened Families. Stronger Georgia.

Mission

Prioritize the safety of Georgia's children in the decisions we make and the actions we take. We strengthen families toward independence and build stronger communities with caring, effective, and responsive service.

Guiding Principles and Values

1. Commit to the safety of our children in the decisions we make and the actions we take.
2. Empower, strengthen, and support families on their path to independence.
3. Embrace a servant's heart with compassion.
4. Provide caring, responsive, and effective service.
5. Listen and respond to our constituents, communities, and each other.

6. Collaborate with our communities to create systems of support.
7. Develop a professional and efficient workforce that never stops learning and growing.

Organization

As authorized by state law O.C.G.A. §49-2-6, the Georgia Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS) is responsible for the administration of funding through titles IV-B (Subparts 1 and 2) and IV-E programs, the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) and the Chafee Foster Care Independence Program, and provides child welfare services to children and families through its child welfare programs to prevent and respond to child abuse, and ensure child safety, permanency and well-being. The child welfare programs are:

1. Prevention Services
2. Child Protective Services (Intake, Investigation, Family Support Services, Family Preservation Services)
3. Permanency Services (Foster Care and Adoption)

Georgia's child welfare system is state-administered and county-supervised. Direct services to children and families are provided through fourteen regions, covering 159 county departments, in accordance with state law and policy. The map of DFCS counties and regions can be viewed on the [dfcs.georgia.gov website](https://dfcs.georgia.gov). Regional Directors report to one of three District Directors – North, Metro, and South – who each report to the Deputy Commissioner for Child Welfare. The administration requirements can also be found in the Child Welfare Policy Manual, [Policy 1.0: Administration of Child Welfare Services](#).

Section B: Collaboration

Collaboration to Implement the Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP)

The Division seeks to continuously enhance collaborative efforts statewide and is committed to supporting substantial, meaningful, and ongoing constituent engagement at all levels. Engagement with constituents and stakeholders, and active listening to children, youth, and families with lived experience in child welfare, is critical to the success of the Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP). CFSP goals include building workforce and staff competency, increasing front-end supports for families, and improving information-sharing. During FY25, Division staff and leadership engaged with the agencies, organizations, and individuals who participated in the CFSP development and coordination process, and those who are integral to the success of Georgia's child welfare system.

- **Café 212** – The Division's bi-monthly, 30-minute, virtual professional development and networking opportunity for staff to learn from a variety of expert presenters. In 2024, staff received in-depth information on managing self-care and healthy lifestyles, improving leadership styles, working with multigenerational staff, and the Division's newest technology tools, including the Unite Us care coordination pilot project, the ARGO portal for service requests and authorizations, and the SHINES Case Notes search tool. Café 212 also provided a transfer of learning for staff on the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) and documenting compelling reasons, finding forever homes for children who are free for adoption with no identified resource, practice changes related to the Children's Bureau child support policies that further support family reunification, and essential services for youth aged 18 and older through the Chafee Services program.
- **Georgia CPS Medical Partnership** – Project ECHO is a free monthly, virtual lecture series that provides child welfare staff with up-to-date medical information via didactic lectures and case studies, utilizing medical experts from Children's Healthcare of Atlanta as trainers. Attendees achieve a greater understanding of how medical science and child protection interact, as well as basic medical terms that will aid them in working CPS cases. The 2025 curriculum includes topics on abusive head trauma, neglect, disclosure, failure to thrive, fractures, acute sexual assault, and long-term effects of trauma.
- **Safety Bridge** – a partnership between the Division and the Children's Healthcare of Atlanta (CHOA). The purpose is to increase child safety by coordinating and fully leveraging the strengths of CHOA staff, the DFCS CHOA liaisons, county DFCS staff, and state office subject matter experts in child maltreatment cases. The Safety

Bridge is used for child maltreatment cases identified by child abuse physicians at CHOA, particularly involving younger and non-verbal children with unknown maltreaters. An unexplained serious injury is a present danger situation and remains so until an explanation alters the seriousness of not knowing how the injury occurred or by whom. Because these cases are often complex and challenging, they require a multidisciplinary approach. The Safety Bridge process brings DFCS and medical staff together to create a strong safety plan that is supported by all parties. For medically diagnosed child maltreatment assessments at children's hospitals other than CHOA, the Safety Bridge Coordinator provides consultation and support to staff and child abuse physicians. A safety consensus form is completed and signed by all parties and uploaded to Georgia SHINES.

- **Georgia Parent Advisory Council** – The Division continues to recruit parents, foster caregivers, and adoptive parents to represent their region on the Georgia Parent Advisory Council (GA PAC). The GA PAC met six times in CY2024, and members participated in several stakeholder activities across the child welfare system, including the Strengthening Families Georgia Leadership Team, CFPSR PIP focus groups, the University of Georgia Embark conference, State of Hope application review team, a training webinar with Prevent Child Abuse Georgia, and the spring 2025 APSR Joint Planning Meeting on family engagement.
- **Georgia Peers Advocating for Change** – The Division's youth advisory board meets monthly with adult supporters to advocate for the interests and rights of youth in care and develop strategies and action items that improve outcomes for youth in care. GPAC also serves as a CAPTA panel and is one of several youth advisory boards in Georgia providing insight and guidance to organizations that serve vulnerable youth.
- **Citizen Review Panels** – Connecting child welfare system experts to pursue in-depth inquiries to improve the state's child welfare system. The Panels submitted recommendations to improve workforce retention, incentivize staff mental health, and enhance communication (North District); strengthen supervision and mentorship, support employee well-being, and consider retention bonuses at key milestones (Metro District); increase supports for kinship caregivers, and enhance communication with relative caregivers (South District); and, create referral pathways to connect youth to appropriate housing resources, prioritize foster youth in housing applications, and propose legislation to extend support services, including housing stipends, for youth aging out of foster care (GPAC/Youth Panel).
- **Department of Public Health** – Division staff participated in the Title V Maternal and Child Health Services Block Grant Needs Assessment to identify priorities to serve women, infants, children, and youth with special health care needs.

- **Medical College of Georgia** – The Division’s Office of Health Law and Policy is collaborating with medical provider partners to explore innovative approaches to increase timely diagnoses and treatment of autism among children in care.
- **Department of Education** – The Division’s innovative, interagency partnership created a bi-directional data exchange to ensure schools and child welfare staff can better serve students in foster care.
- **Public Housing Authorities** – The Division is building relationships with community partners to provide support services for youth receiving housing vouchers, including basic life skills, housing counseling, employment training, and career advancement.
- **Kin Caregiver, Foster and Adoptive Parent Support Groups** – The Division’s Caregiver Recruitment and Retention Unit and Kinship Navigator Program supports regular connections with placement agencies and support groups to share data and information, and to address concerns and questions for caregivers of children.
- **Joint Planning** – The Division convenes multiple stakeholder meetings each year, including quarterly stakeholder meetings in each of the 14 DFCS regions, that bring together DFCS staff, judicial partners, service providers, and other child-serving organizations to review data on performance and outcomes, and make recommendations for improvement. Georgia’s spring 2025 APSR Joint Planning Meeting invited 175 staff and stakeholders to learn best practices for “partnering with families to improve child welfare outcomes through family engagement”. The virtual meeting highlighted performance data from the recent Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) case review findings, and featured a panel comprised of a parent with lived experience, case manager, CASA program director, and service provider. Breakout sessions enabled participants to review a mock case and determine how to appropriately engage the family to achieve the best outcomes. Participants explored how authentic engagement with families can help build capacity, improve child welfare outcomes, and support reunification efforts. Feedback evaluations are consistently positive, and attendees are energized from the experience.
- **Court Improvement Program** – Ongoing collaboration through the standing monthly CIP/DFCS leadership meetings and data-sharing to develop the CFSR PIP and the CIP/DFCS joint project (Reducing Time to Reunification). Several DFCS program leaders serve as members of the Supreme Court Committee on Justice for Children (J4C), a multidisciplinary task force that supports and advises Georgia’s CIP. DHS/DFCS supported CIP in the application for federal funding to implement the Judicial, Court, and Attorney Measures of Practice (JCAMP) project, which would support observation, data collection and improvement efforts for the state’s child welfare court system.

- **Law Enforcement** – The Special Victims Unit (SVU) is a partnership developed in 2024 between the Division and law enforcement to locate missing foster children. Other duties of SVU are to respond to maltreatment in care involving CSEC-suspected, CSEC-confirmed, or CSAM-suspected foster children, unlawful adoptions, unlawful, unlicensed or unsafe non-foster-care placements, FBI-involved and GBI-involved cases, and non-resident missing children reported as possibly present in Georgia. The SVU team has experienced law enforcement on staff and collaborates regularly with local law enforcement agencies to provide training and guidance.

Additional descriptions of community engagement and collaboration are included throughout the report.

Collaboration to Develop the CFSR Program Improvement Plan (PIP)

Staff and stakeholders were invited to analyze CFSR performance data and share specific ideas for CFSR PIP goals and strategies that might lead to an improved state child welfare system. The Division coordinated with the Children’s Bureau to conduct 21 stakeholder interviews during February 2024. Participants included child, parent, and agency attorneys, CASA, service providers, foster and adoptive caregivers, youth and parents with lived experience, juvenile court judges, Georgia tribes, and DFCS staff across several program areas that address safety, permanency, and well-being. The Division also convened discussions with child welfare stakeholders to analyze CFSR data and performance outcomes at informal gatherings, annual regional stakeholder meetings, and formal convenings.

Performance data and outcomes were also shared at agency board meetings and with other state agency partners. Participants were provided with recent data from Georgia SHINES, QA case review findings, CFSR statewide data indicators and supplemental context data, and AFCARS data. In September and October 2024, the Division convened virtual 90-minute PIP Focus Group sessions with staff and stakeholders to review data from the CFSR case reviews, statewide data indicators, and findings from the CFSR Final Report, explore root causes, and develop strategies for improvement.

Focus group sessions were announced via email to stakeholders and staff, youth with lived experience and youth supporters, courts, CASA, and CIP, and service and placement providers. Sessions were also announced to parents, foster parents, and CASA via a popup banner on the CommuniCare portal; the popup banner included all session dates and the

registration information. In response to overwhelming interest among child welfare system partners, additional focus group sessions were added to ensure all interested individuals were able to attend.

A total of 264 participants attended the focus group sessions. Twelve sessions were scheduled for interested stakeholders to address safety, permanency, and well-being. Two additional focus group sessions were scheduled solely for birth parents, and four sessions were scheduled for DFCS staff to address agency-related root causes, barriers and solutions. A youth-only focus group session was convened during the September 2024 monthly GPAC youth advisory board meeting, with 10 participants at the meeting.

To better understand the specific barriers to timeliness of achieving reunification and adoption, DHS/DFCS General Counsel developed and disseminated a statewide survey in November 2024 to agency attorneys (Special Assistant Attorneys General, or SAAGs) on their actions in filing termination of parental rights (TPR) petitions. There were 75 respondents to the survey. Most respondents require that DFCS complete the TPR packet of information every time before filing the petition (76%), and 72% reported delays in TPR because DFCS had not provided the SAAG with the completed TPR information. Many SAAGs reported relying on the TPR packet for documentation for filing (72%) and factual information (68%). Less than half reported relying on the TPR packet for the legal basis for filing for TPR (40%) or documents for adjudication (40%). Respondents reported a wide range of time between receipt of the TPR packet from the case manager to then filing the petition – 12% file within two weeks, 40% file within 30 days, 16% file within 60 days, and 32% noted that time to file is dependent on the case. Primary reasons for delays in adjudication of TPRs were noted as court delays (n=44), other attorney conflicts (n=40), and service issues (n=64).

Georgia's Court Improvement Program (CIP) disseminated a statewide legal-judicial survey in December 2024 – January 2025. There were 194 respondents; 31% were judges and 69% were attorneys. The survey was developed to determine if hearings are held timely, how often timeline, tasks, and barriers to permanency are discussed during hearings, and how often permanency and TPR hearings are continued. CIP also held focus group sessions with judicial partners in March and April 2025, to hear about specific barriers with case planning, father engagement, and quality hearings. The most frequently cited reasons for continued permanency hearings: parent attorney unavailable, parent not present, child attorney unavailable, hearing will take longer than time allotted, new case manager not yet up to speed on the case, witness unavailable, case manager not present, and child not present. The most frequently cited reasons for continued TPR hearings: lack of service on parent,

witness unavailable, parent requests counsel, hearing will take longer than time allotted, and parent attorney needs more time to prepare.

The development of Georgia's CFSR PIP includes specific strategies to build staff capacity to make appropriate decisions that ensure child safety and achieve timely permanency, improve the quality of family engagement, increase relative/kin placements and preparedness to care for children, improve timeliness of documentation of placement changes, increase availability and quality of provided services, and improve timeliness to reunification and adoption. The PIP also includes specific strategies to develop and disseminate court preparation checklists for child and parent attorneys, to establish clear expectations for quality permanency hearings, strengthen legal practices by establishing clear legal expectations for child welfare attorneys with a SAAG Minimum Standards Guide developed by DHS/DFCS General Counsel, in partnership with the Attorney General's Office. Data collected during the PIP period will be shared with judicial stakeholders during regular stakeholder meetings in the regions, so that judges, attorneys, CASA/GAL, and DFCS staff can develop and monitor court-related interventions to improve local outcomes.

Collaboration to Provide Training and Technical Assistance

Region 14 offers the Motherhood and Fatherhood Programs where mothers and fathers participate in weekly parenting classes. The mothers are being taught parenting from The Nurturing Parenting Program Curriculum. The fathers are being taught from the 24/7 Dads Programs. The case managers managing the motherhood and fatherhood programs receive referrals from the case managers for participants in the programs.

Region 11

In CY2024, the region hosted several informational stakeholder meetings.

The judicial stakeholder meeting had 60 participants including Juvenile Judges, CASAs, SAAGs, GALs, law enforcement officers, county DFCS directors and staff. The agenda included the CFSR QA data, a presentation on SB 133 from DHS General Counsel, and a panel discussion featuring one of our juvenile judges, a CASA director, a SAAG, and a law enforcement investigator. The discussion was rich, and participants engaged in each topic throughout the meeting.

The educational stakeholder meeting had 71 participants including school personnel, domestic violence shelter staff, child advocacy center staff, family connections coordinators, core mental health providers, community partners from across the region, county DFCS directors and staff. The agenda included the CFSR QA data, an overview of the EPAC program, a mandated reporter training session, and ended with open discussion on ways to improve communication and services to children and families in the region. Participation and engagement was good.

The contracted service provider meeting had 38 participants including staff and providers that serve our area. The agenda included the CFSR QA data, an overview of COSTAR policy for assessments, feedback on service provision and assessments, and a panel discussion featuring three contract providers.

Section C: Assessment of Current Performance in Improving Outcomes

Georgia CFSR Child and Family Outcomes

CF SR Data Profiles

SWDI – Safety

Georgia received its Child and Family Services Review (CFSR 4) Data Profile in February 2025 based on AFCARS and NCANDS submissions as of 12-17-2024. The chart demonstrates Georgia’s risk standardized performance relative to the national performance on the two Safety Statewide Data Indicators (SWDI).

Indicator	Data Period	National Standard	Georgia	Statistically better (↑), worse (↓), or no different (<->)
Maltreatment in Care	22AB, FY22	9.07	4.15	↑
Recurrence of Maltreatment	FY22-23	9.7%	5.5%	↑

Source: Child and Family Services Review (CFSR 4) Data Profile, February 2025

Georgia’s SWDI performance continues to exceed the national performance for both Safety outcomes, Maltreatment in Care and Recurrence of Maltreatment. Maltreatment in Care measures the rate of children who are abused or neglected while under court jurisdiction. Georgia utilizes several strategies to reduce Maltreatment in Care, including regular evaluation of foster homes, a robust schedule of required in-person visits with the child(ren) in care, an emphasis on kin as a first placement, and ongoing training and supports for foster caregivers. Georgia’s strategies to prevent Recurrence of Maltreatment, which measures the percentage of children who are abused or neglected within 12 months of the initial victimization, include ongoing case management, providing aftercare and wraparound services to the family, and referrals to community agencies and organizations for additional supports (e.g., food assistance, childcare, housing expenses).

SWDI – Permanency

Georgia received its Child and Family Services Review (CFSR 4) Data Profile in February 2025 based on AFCARS and NCANDS submissions as of 12-17-2024. Georgia meets on one of the five SWDI measurements. The state’s risk-standardized performance is statistically no different on Re-entry to Foster Care. The state’s performance is worse than the national standard on Placement Stability and the three “Permanency in 12 months” measures.

Indicator	Data Period	National Standard	Georgia	Statistically better (↑), worse (↓), or no different (<->)
Permanency in 12 months (entries)	22B23A	35.2	28.7	↓
Permanency in 12 months (12 – 23 mos.)	24A24B	43.8	40.9	↓
Permanency in 12 months (24+ mos.)	24A24B	37.3	32.6	↓
Re-entry to Foster Care	23A23B	5.6	5.2	<->
Placement Stability	24A24B	4.48	5.37	↓

Source: Child and Family Services Review (CFSR 4) Data Profile, February 2025

Georgia utilizes CFSR data in conjunction with the State’s data profile (contextual data report), and data from the State’s Comprehensive Child Welfare Information System (CCWIS, referred to throughout the APSR as ‘Georgia SHINES’) in the development, planning, and monitoring of Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP) goals and other statewide child welfare initiatives. The Quality Assurance Unit utilizes the case review process and standards provided by the Children’s Bureau for the continuous measurement of the State’s performance in the areas of safety, permanency, and well-being. The case review data are used at the district, regional, and county levels to evaluate case practice and assist staff and leadership in making improvements to the provision of services for children and families. The CFSR Onsite Review Instrument (OSRI) is the only official instrument to be used in rating a case for CFSR determinations of substantial conformity. The OSRI contains the questions, applicability notes, instructions, and definitions, which provide more detailed information.

In 2024 and 2025, Georgia conducted a state-led CFSR which followed all Round 4 requirements for case reviews. Monthly case samples were screened for eligibility and then

provided to all regional and district directors to review and approve. Key review plan elements include:

- Evaluation of all 18 CFSR Items
- Utilization of 6-month Period Under Review
- Review of “newer” cases; cases in the sample must be open in the 1-2 months prior to a review (this will allow for evaluation of newer work, critical for the development of CQI and PIP strategies)
- Continued case-related interviews (children, parents, foster parents, case managers, supervisors, legal representatives, etc.)
- The continuation of 25 case reviews each month (15 Foster Care, 10 Family Preservation Services)

CF SR Case Review Data

Outcome / Item / Indicator	CF SR Standard	Georgia: Sept-Oct 2024 (29 FC / 20 FPS)	Georgia: Feb-Apr 2025 (45 FC / 30 FPS)
Item 1: Timeliness of Initiating Investigations of Reports of Maltreatment	95%	87%	90%
Safety 1: Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect	95%	87%	90%
Item 2: Services to Protect Child(ren) in Home and Prevent Removal or Re-Entry into Foster Care	90%	16%	20%
Item 3: Risk and Safety Assessment and Management	90%	43%	31%
Safety 2: Children are safely maintained in their homes whenever possible and appropriate	95%	39%	27%
Item 4: Stability of Foster Care Placement	90%	79%	69%
Item 5: Permanency Goal for Child	90%	61%	52%
Item 6: Achieving Reunification, Guardianship, Adoption, or Other Planned Permanent Living Arrangement	90%	24%	29%
Permanency 1: Children have permanency and stability in their living situations	95%	17%	22%
Item 7: Placement with Siblings	90%	83%	77%
Item 8: Visiting with Parents and Siblings in Foster Care	90%	53%	50%
Item 9: Preserving Connections	90%	55%	53%
Item 10: Relative Placement	90%	66%	62%
Item 11: Relationship of Child in Care with Parents	90%	43%	42%

Permanency 2: The continuity of family relationships is preserved for children	95%	52%	49%
Item 12: Needs Assessment and Services to Child, Parents, and Foster Parents	90%	18%	8%
Item 12A: Needs Assessment and Services to Children	90%	51%	39%
Item 12B: Needs Assessment and Services to Parents	90%	10%	4%
Item 12C: Needs Assessment and Services to Foster Caregivers	90%	59%	39%
Item 13: Child and Family Involvement in Case Planning	90%	36%	36%
Item 14: Caseworker Visits with Child	90%	61%	41%
Item 15: Caseworker Visits with Parents	90%	15%	25%
Well-Being 1: Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children's needs	95%	18%	8%
Item 16: Educational Needs of the Child	90%	62%	57%
Well-Being 2: Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs	95%	62%	57%
Item 17: Physical Health of the Child	90%	46%	51%
Item 18: Mental / Behavioral Health of the Child	90%	19%	21%
Well-Being 3: Children receive adequate services to meet their physical and mental health needs	95%	28%	25%

CFSR Safety Outcome 1: Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect

Item 1: Timeliness of Initiating Investigations of Reports of Maltreatment

Georgia SHINES Response Times for CY2024

	Alleged Victim Children Screened In	Met Required Response Time	Percent Met
North District (Regions 1-5)	27653	25126	90.86%
South District (Regions 6-12)	28992	26335	90.84%
Metro District (Regions 13-14)	23551	20412	86.67%

Source: DFCS Data Unit, Georgia SHINES

Child Welfare Policy 3.2: Making an Intake Decision requires that intakes are assigned to the Initial Safety Assessment (ISA) track for response within the following timeframes to ensure child safety and wellbeing. All response times are calculated from the date and time of the receipt of the Intake Report.

- Immediate: a present danger situation is indicated.
- 24 hours: an impending danger safety threat is indicated and there is no indication of a present danger situation.
- Five weekdays: child abuse (maltreatment) is indicated, however there is no indication of a present danger situation or impending danger safety threat.

Response times are monitored by supervisors and agency leadership at the county and regional levels. County, regional, and state-level data are generated twice weekly to identify trends and patterns in assigned cases and achieved response times. While there are some instances where families are unable or unwilling to be located, children may be visited at their current location at the time of the report or at school where they can be located easily; non-school age children may be visited at their current location or within the home. Visits can be announced or unannounced; parents may be contacted by phone to schedule a visit within the response time. Case managers are expected to report missed response times to identify areas for improvements. Staff supports include: daily logs to monitor response times; calendar reminders; daily cadences to discuss diligent efforts to meet response times; Regional Staffing Guides for supervisors to support meeting response time and to ensure quality assessment is being completed; and regular trainings on ISA policies.

Feedback received from the ISA trainings demonstrate that they are helpful for both new hires and veteran staff.

PROGRESS ON CFSP BENCHMARKS

The 2025-2029 CFSP described the following activities and benchmarks.

1. Agency leadership and supervisors will monitor response times at the county and regional levels to ensure initial safety determinations are completed in accordance with agency policy.
 - **Benchmark:** The Data Unit will provide weekly data reports to agency and regional leadership to identify trends in assigned cases and response times
 - **Benchmark:** County and regional leaders will schedule weekly and bi-monthly staff cadences to review data reports and address observed challenges

2025 Update: In 2024, the Data Unit continued to provide weekly data emails to regional leaders. Feedback from district and regional directors continues to be positive. The data are used to monitor performance indicators and drill down to performance within program areas; the data reports are useful for staff cadences and to pinpoint areas where practice can be improved. This work is ongoing.

CFSR Safety Outcome 2: Children are safely maintained in their homes whenever possible and appropriate (Items 2, 3)

Item 2: Services to Protect Child(ren) in the Home and Prevent Removal or Re-Entry into Foster Care

The DHS/DFCS Delivered Services Unit (DSU) provides Wrap Around Services, including transportation, behavior aid (supervision), crisis intervention, in-home targeted case management, and in-home intensive clinical or therapeutic services to prevent removal or re-entry to foster care.

Promoting Safe and Stable Families (PSSF) continues to be a resource for Georgia families in need of services to prevent removal or re-entry to foster care. PSSF in Georgia provides family support prevention and early intervention, home visiting, healthy relationships and co-parenting services. PSSF also provides family preservation services including placement

prevention, crisis intervention, relative caregiver supports, and substance abuse treatment. Additional details on Georgia's PSSF programs can be found at the [PSSF website](#).

In FY24, the Division received state funding to develop Community Action Treatment (CAT) teams. CAT teams are a behavioral healthcare resource for youth and intended to be an alternative to out-of-home placement for youth with a behavioral health condition, including substance abuse. During the initial program term, children will be referred to the CAT team program by DFCS staff, specifically child welfare intake staff, when a child or family is referred to DFCS for either investigation into a possible complaint or when a connection is made to family support services. This approach allows for DFCS to intervene and provide services to a child prior to their case escalating to the point of removal or placement in Out of Home Care (OHC) or a psychiatric residential treatment facility (PRTF). Upon successful completion, the youth's family will have the skills and support systems needed to maintain improvements made throughout the process.

Item 3: Risk and Safety Assessment and Management

The Division developed the ARGO Community Portal in Georgia SHINES to create a simple and efficient process for staff to complete service authorizations for support services. The ARGO Community Portal allows for service requests to be sent to all eligible providers and for those providers to respond directly through the portal. DFCS staff can then select from the responding providers willing to accept a request. This enhancement simplifies the service request process. Staff can request a service on the portal, select from a list of applicable and available providers in the portal, and choose one within 24-72 hours. ARGO also simplifies the document-sharing process so that staff can receive monthly case notes from the providers directly in the portal.

Development of the CFSR PIP includes a strategy to improve performance on Safety Outcome 2 with the implementation of Practice and Safety Exchanges (PSE). The PSEs will be quarterly virtual learning labs targeting supervisors with a focus on building skills and knowledge around decision-making, including diligent efforts, family engagement strategies, safety planning, concurrent planning, exceptions to file TPR, and requirements for purposeful contacts. The QA/CQI Unit will develop a resource library of materials and disseminate related educational briefs following each PSE session that reinforce the information provided. Supervisors will complete post-session evaluations to assess learning gains. The strategy will also target case managers with monthly "Pieces of Practice" (POP) sessions that deeply explore different safety and permanency-related topics and the policy requirements that support best practice.

PROGRESS ON CFSP BENCHMARKS

The 2025-2029 CFSP described the following activities and benchmarks.

1. Monitor performance of Community Action Treatment (CAT) teams to determine success at preventing entry into foster care for youth with complex needs.
 - **Benchmark:** The CAT teams will serve a minimum of 60 individuals each year.
 - **2025 Update:** During FY2024, 165 children were referred to the Health Connect America (HCA) program, and 104 children in 27 families were served. From Sept 2023 - April 2024 (most recent data available), 44 children and their families were served by the local CAT team. Additional details can be found in [Section D: Update to the Plan for Enacting the State's Vision](#)
2. Provide Argo training to educate staff on correct use of the portal.
 - **Benchmark:** 100% of new case managers will complete the Argo portal training.
 - **2025 Update:** *This benchmark is completed.* In CY2024, Argo was embedded into the Division's New Worker Training course curriculum so that all new case managers will receive the training as part of their onboarding process. The Division's Learning Management System (LMS) recorded 50 additional completions of Argo training in CY2024.
3. Recruit service providers to increase and enhance the accessibility of needed services that address identified concerns, particularly in rural and historically underserved areas.
 - **Benchmark:** At least one contracted service provider for each program area will be available in every region, prioritizing recruitment in areas with the highest need.
 - **2025 Update:** In December 2024, the Delivered Services Unit (DSU) developed a needs analysis to identify the unmet service needs statewide. DSU, in collaboration with Field Operations, disseminated the survey in January 2025 to frontline staff in each region to determine if there are service providers available to address the specific needs of families and children, if those services are appropriate quality, and what specific unmet service needs are noted. Over 450 responses were received. DSU analyzed the data from the Needs Assessment and utilized the findings to initiate 16 new SFY2026 contracts with provider agencies that will serve the specific needs identified by the respondents. DSU also met with existing providers to expand their current contracted services into additional counties as identified by the assessment results. The needs assessment and contract development will be repeated during the SFY2027 contract renewal and onboarding period.
4. The number and percentage of successful PRE staffings will be tracked and monitored quarterly by the regional C3 Coordinators to determine efficacy in preventing out of home placements and quality of safety plans.

- **Benchmark:** At least 50% of PRE staffings will successfully prevent an out of home placement.
 - **2025 Update:** Regional data show 384 PRE staffings held in Q3 of CY2024 (*the most recent data available*). Some regions report fewer PRE staffings due to utilization of SBAR (Situation – Background – Assessment – Recommendation) in staffings. When held, PRE staffings often result in obtaining custody. PRE has evolved into a discussion of efforts needed for reunification and conditions for return. In cases where PRE calls did not result in removal, leadership guidance and recommendations to locate kinship options were provided. Staff report that the process is beneficial to discuss ideas and identify safety threats.
NOTE: This benchmark will be removed from future CFSP updates due to the change in how PRE staffings are utilized.
5. Partner with Unite Us to develop a proactive outreach and referral system that serves 100 families per month.
- **Benchmark:** Provide community wide care coordination for 100 families each month under the Unite Us closed loop referral technology platform.
 - **2025 Update:** Within the first two months of launch, DFCS has helped 1,095 Georgians address social needs, projecting to serve over 6,500 Georgians in the first year of service. Statewide, 635 Georgians accessed the Public Resource Directory completing 1,159 resource searches. Additional details can be found in [Section D: Update to the Plan for Enacting the State’s Vision](#).

CFSR Permanency Outcome 1: Children have permanency and stability in their living situations (Items 4, 5, 6)

Item 4: Stability of Foster Care Placement

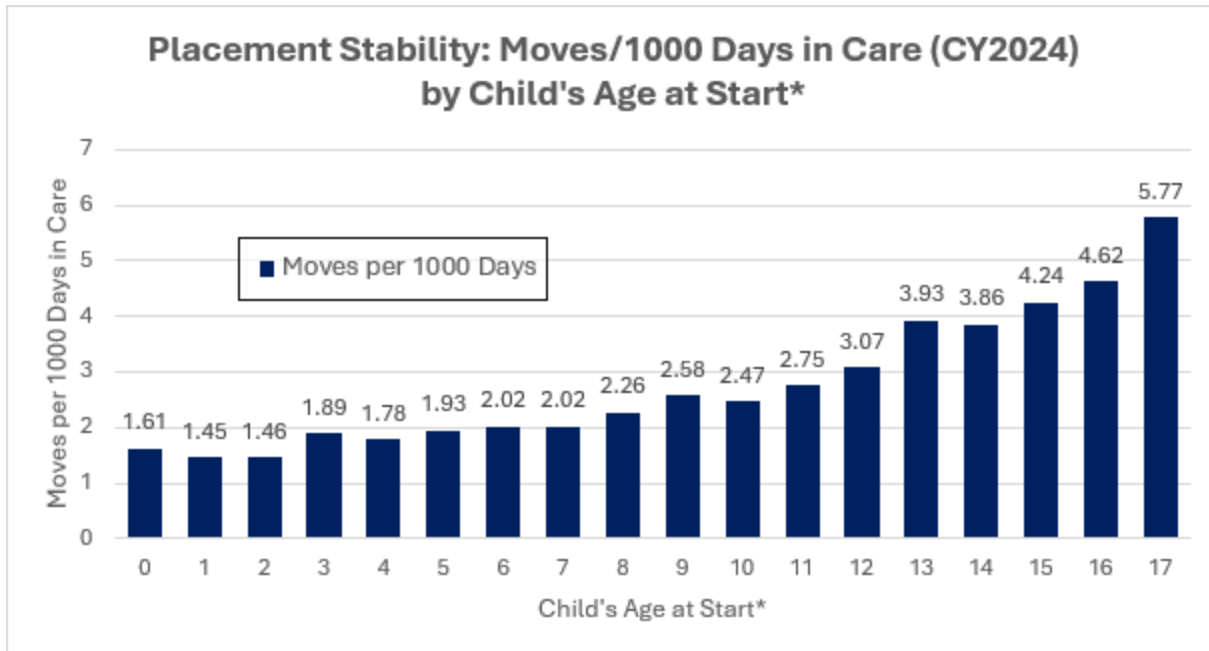
The below chart demonstrates the number of placement moves per 1,000 days in care during CY2024. Children 13 and older are more likely to have three or more moves compared

to children age 0-12. [The child's age is calculated as the age on the first day of the calendar year (2024) for children already in care, or the child's age upon entry (during CY2024)]

Region 2

In the first quarter of 2025, Region 2 held 35 PAUSE calls and only seven resulted in a disruption (20%).

All PAUSE staffing requests from the counties in region 2 are filtered through the region's Treatment Field Program Specialist (FPS). She does an exceptional job at ensuring she reaches out directly to the placement to listen to all their concerns. She then does her best relay that information to county leadership in hopes of preserving the placement. The FPS facilitates all the regional PAUSE staffings and does a wonderful job at ensuring the placement, county staff, and even the child (when appropriate) can express their concerns without judgment. As a result, majority of region 2 disruptions have been salvageable. This has allowed the child(ren) to remain in their placement where additional services are typically implemented to prevent another disruption.



Source: DFCS Data Unit, Georgia SHINES

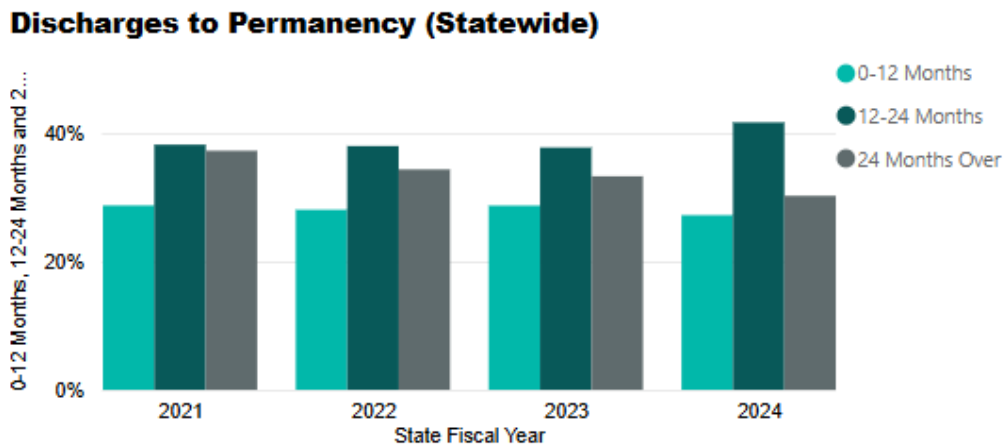
The Division continues to hold PAUSE (Placement Assistance Utilizing Stability Exploration) staffings within each county to stabilize placements that are nearing disruption; the Complex Care Coordinator at the state office is engaged with PAUSE to secure stable placements for children with complex needs. The coordinator often partners with the Treatment Field Program Specialist in the regions to identify resources for high-need youth. Staff note that PAUSE calls result in better outcomes when the placement is incorporated into the discussion, and when placements are unable to be preserved, staff can ensure that services are transitioned into the new placement. This work is ongoing.

Item 5: Permanency Goal for Child

The development of the CFSR PIP includes strategies to improve timeliness of achieving appropriate permanency goals. Case managers will receive additional training and tools to make appropriate safety decisions via quarterly PSE virtual learning labs and monthly POP sessions. DHS/DFCS General Counsel will develop and disseminate a Minimum Standards Guide for SAAGs. The General Counsel will also collaborate with CIP to develop and disseminate a court preparation checklist for attorneys that describe information and actions required for quality hearings, including identification of the specific safety threat that requires continued out-of-home care and identification of which remaining case plan goals can be completed while the child is in the home.

Item 6: Achieving Reunification, Guardianship, Adoption, or APPLA

The below chart demonstrates the percent of children who exited foster care to reunification with family, custody to relatives, guardianship, or adoption from SFY 2021-2024. The percentage of exits for children in care between 12-24 months increased in SFY2024 compared to previous years, while the percentage of exits for children in care 24 months or longer continues to decline.



Source: DHS/DFCS Data Dashboard

The development of the CFSP PIP includes strategies to improve timeliness of achieving appropriate permanency goals. The Division’s Permanency Unit will implement the ‘Priority Until Safe at Home (PUSH)’ and ‘No Place Like Home’ Initiatives to decrease the average time to permanency for children in foster care over 24 months, with support from the Court Improvement Program’s Cold Case Project.

PROGRESS ON CFSP BENCHMARKS

The 2025-2029 CFSP described the following activities and benchmarks.

1. Track and monitor available placements for youth with complex needs.
 - **Benchmark:** By 2029, the state will develop or expand placement options for youth with complex needs.

The DHS Commissioner provided testimony during the 2025 legislative budget hearings that hoteling for youth in foster care has decreased 77% over the past two years. In FY2022, DFCS housed 1,007 youth in hotels when no other suitable placements were available. That number dropped to 712 in FY2023, and 235 in FY2024. The average number of youth placed in hotels per day in FY2022-23 was between 60-90 on any single day. In FY2024, the average number of youth per day in a hotel or office setting was seven, and the highest number of youth placed in a hotel/office on a single day was 19 (October 2024).

On any given day, 15,650 children are in foster care in Georgia. DFCS spends an average of \$2,650 per month for each child in out-of-home care. More children are entering foster care with complex mental or behavioral health needs. Placement providers are challenged with recruiting and retaining staff and with budgetary constraints. Due to the state FMAP rate, approximately 34% of youth in care are eligible for title IV-E reimbursement, but only two weeks of congregate care is reimbursable under title IV-E, with exceptions for centers for Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC) and Qualified Residential Treatment Programs (QRTP). In 2024, Georgia launched two new placement options in 2024 to serve youth with complex needs.

- Grace’s Place – a state-of-the-art facility for adolescent survivors of sexual exploitation and human trafficking. The facility provides housing and transitional living, mental health counseling, medical services, and treatment planning
- Murphy-Harpst is contracted to serve 10 children and youth with significant emotional and behavioral health needs in a QRTP in Cedartown, GA

2. Track and monitor the percent of TPRs filed for eligible children within 15 months of entering care, and the percent of cases with a documented exception to file TPR.

- **Benchmark:** By 2029, at least 50% of children eligible for TPR will have an exception to file documented in the case record by the 15th month in care.

	Youth Eligible for TPR	Compelling Reason Documented	Timely TPR Petition Filed
CY2023	5,420	1,958	376
CY2024	5,171	2,548	463

Source: DFCS Data Unit, Georgia SHINES

Data from Georgia SHINES shows that 36% of youth eligible for TPR in CY2023 had a documented exception to file, and that increased to 49% in CY2024.

In FY25, the Division surveyed staff to identify reasons for the lack of compelling reason documentation. SAAGs were also surveyed to determine the primary reasons for lack of timely filing of TPRs. Based on the findings, a small workgroup was convened to explore how

to address the noted barriers for staff and attorneys. The team met several times during the year to discuss the statutory and policy requirements for TPR documentation, and reasonable timeframes for completing the TPR packet. The development of the CFSR PIP includes specific strategies and action steps to strengthen staff decision-making capacity, and will provide robust training efforts on compelling reasons and concurrent planning.

3. Provide targeted training for juvenile court judges and parent/child attorneys on achieving timely permanency.
 - **Benchmark:** provide up to ten permanency-focused training opportunities annually for judges and attorneys, prioritizing PIP implementation sites and jurisdictions with the highest need.

The Office of the Child Advocate, along with Georgia CASA and the DFCS Training and Professional Development Unit, offered 12 Multidisciplinary Child Abuse and Neglect Institutes (MDCANI) in CY2024, providing permanency-focused training to approximately 579 professionals, including over 220 attorneys and judges. MDCANI was provided in Regions 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, and 13. MDCANI offers legal attendees a full year's worth of CLE hours for attending.

Georgia's Court Improvement Program will support the state's CFSR PIP by developing and disseminating a court preparation checklist for parent attorneys and child attorneys in Fulton, DeKalb, Cobb, and Richmond counties. The checklist will describe information and actions required for quality hearings, including identification of the specific safety threat that requires continued out-of-home care and identification of which remaining case plan goals can be completed while the child is in the home. CIP will provide training for attorneys using the checklist to increase knowledge and understanding. CIP will also develop and disseminate a survey for juvenile court judges statewide to identify a baseline for attorney practices that will be targeted in the hearing preparation checklists for SAAGs, parent attorneys, and child attorneys.

CFSR Permanency Outcome 2: The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children (Items, 7, 8, 9, 10, and 11)

Item 7: Placement with Siblings

The Division works to increase sibling placements unless there is an identified safety or well-being issue that prevents placement together. Permanency Field Program Specialists (FPS)

within each region review waivers for separation and follow up with counties to assist with practice guidance. Temporary sibling separation waivers must have the final approval by the County Director, and permanent sibling separation waivers must have the final approval by the Regional Director. Permanency FPS conduct staffings every 30-60 days on all youth that are placed separately from their siblings to discuss steps taken to place siblings together, present barriers to sibling placement, and whether a permanent sibling separation waiver is appropriate.

The Office of Provider Management (OPM) maintains contracts with Child Placing Agencies (CPA) to develop foster homes for children needing placements, including two CPA providers that develop homes specifically for sibling groups.

Finding permanency for larger sibling groups and children with multiple service needs such as mental health, medical fragility, and delinquent behaviors can be difficult, as well as identifying a caregiver with the capacity to care for these children while deciding about permanency. Subsequently, children with complex needs are often placed in group home settings which makes the possibility of them maintaining permanent sibling connections even more difficult. The Division's Complex Care Coordinator is working with regional leadership and placement providers to address this issue.

Item 8: Visiting with Parents and Siblings in Foster Care

The Division makes concerted efforts to ensure visitation between a child in foster care and their family, and that their close connections are preserved. In addition to traditional face-to-face visits, the Division has seen an increase in virtual visits via Zoom, FaceTime, and other tech platforms. QA case reviews document good practice related to the quality of visitation. There continue to be challenges with transportation. When children are placed outside of their legal county, or when parents/caregivers relocate, the challenge remains to find providers who are able and willing to travel several hours for visits. Respondents to the January 2025 Delivered Services Unit survey revealed that nearly all regions need more transport services, including in the metro areas. DSU is working with providers to identify barriers and identify solutions. This work is ongoing.

Item 9: Preserving Connections

QA reviewers noted strengths when children were able to maintain contact with extended relatives, including siblings not in foster care. Reviewers also noted strengths in cases where children remained in place or in close proximity to their removal community, or in the same school setting after foster care entry. Reviewers noted areas of improvement related to case managers conducting assessments to determine what the child's important connections

are, and ensuring a clear path to maintain those connections, not leaving the effort solely to the foster caregivers to ensure those connections are maintained. The Permanency Unit, along with the Kinship Unit and regional leadership, are supporting staff in addressing these issues. This work is ongoing.

Item 10: Relative Placement

Voluntary Kinship policies are utilized in partnership with CPS Investigations. Diligent efforts to place children with relatives start at the beginning of the case and are ongoing until all relatives are assessed or ruled out. Staff continue to ask the children and other family members about possible relatives who might be willing to serve as placement. Staff also work to ensure that the relatives have drug screens, criminal background checks, and fingerprinting completed prior to placement; however, sometimes kin have extensive criminal backgrounds and/or CPS history that prohibits them from being a resource.

The Division has in place a specialized Kinship Unit to support kin, address complaints, and provide guidance to staff. The Kinship Unit works closely with the Caregiver Recruitment and Retention Unit (CRRU) to address barriers to placement, get homes approved and monitor kinship placements. CRRU holds monthly support calls for kin caregivers to hear from the Division, receive answers to questions and concerns, and learn about resources and upcoming training events. Regions hold weekly cadences to address issues and ensure accountability. The Kinship Navigator portal also supports relative caregivers in obtaining resources to successfully care for children and ensure that relative placements are appropriate and maintained.

Georgia SHINES is undergoing a system enhancement for the kinship assessment, which will limit incorrect policy assessments and foster home denials. The updated timeline for implementation of the kinship separate standards is October 2025. Modifications and updates of the NTDC right-

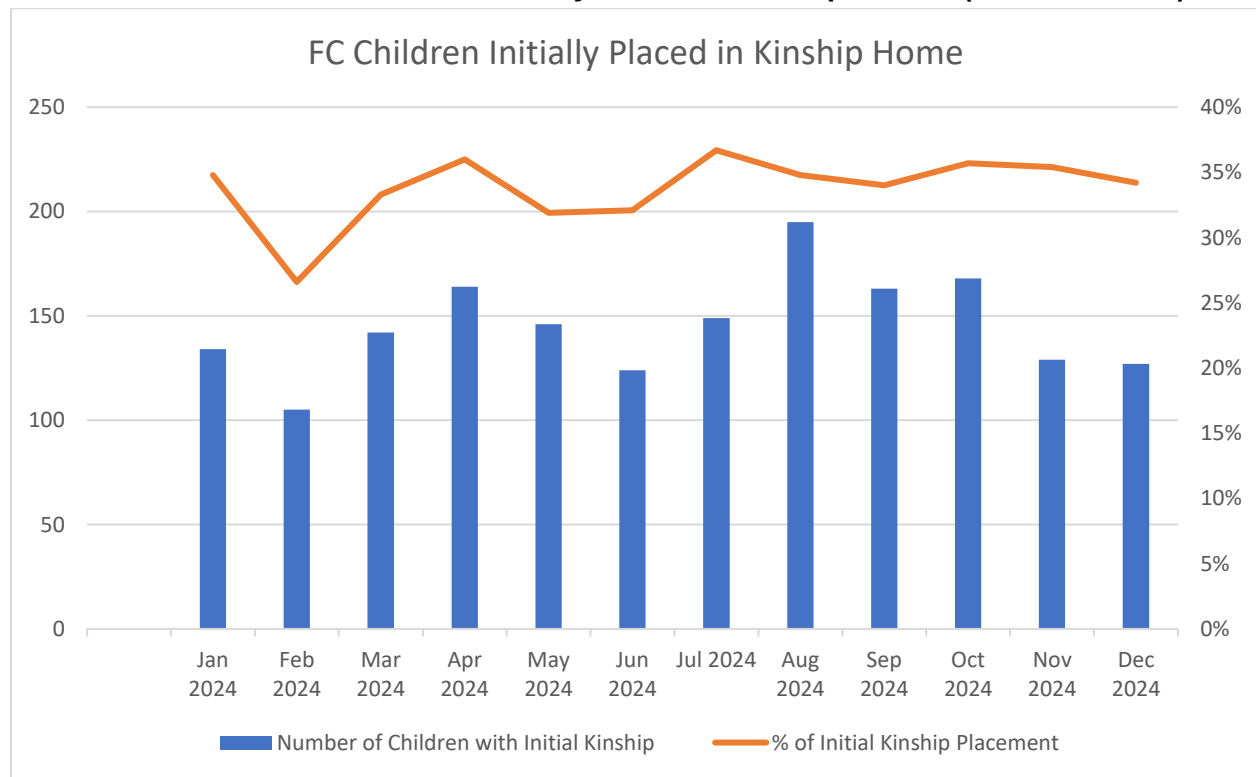
Region 3

Kinship is handled differently being that our Judge gives temporary custody to relatives and allows the parents the opportunity to work a case plan and reunify with their children, alleviating the need for children to go into foster care. The biggest barrier to doing this in Floyd (and other counties) is the lack of financial assistance for the caregivers. The flip side of this is that many children are kept out of foster care by doing this being that 85% of Floyd's FPU cases are court-ordered and have children placed with relatives. Children remain with their family with whom they have a bond, making the adjustment of being placed out of their home a little less traumatic. In the event that the parents are not successful in completing their case plan, permanent guardianship is given to the kinship caregiver. The region utilizes Restoration Rome and Family Resource Center as supportive resources for the kinship caregivers. DFCS always attempts to connect relatives with support for themselves and the children.

From the Foster Care perspective, many relatives just don't want to be full foster parents, or they don't want to complete the process and are fine just getting the enhanced relative rate. Case managers work with CRRU in collecting documentation and guiding families through the kinship process when interested.

time Kinship themes are underway and schedule for release in conjunction with the release of the kinship separate standards. These efforts will facilitate more relative placements for children in care.

Number of Foster Care Children Initially Placed in Kinship Homes (Jan - Dec 2024)



Source: DFCS Data Unit, Georgia SHINES (LENSES report)

One-third of children in care are initially placed with kin caregivers (33.8% in CY2024). The CRRU team works closely with potential relative resources identified through diligent search efforts to ensure they have the supports to become a caregiver for a child so that a subsequent placement move is into a kinship home.

Item 11: Relationship of Child in Care with Parents

DFCS and the Court Improvement Program (CIP) are actively exploring opportunities to increase father engagement, including efforts to make the legitimization process more

efficient for putative fathers. House Resolution 753 (2025) establishes the House Study Committee on the Affordability and Accessibility of Georgia’s Legitimation Process, among other study committees.

Legitimation is a legal action which is the only way, other than by marrying the mother of a child, that the father of a child born out of wedlock in the State of Georgia may establish legal rights to his child. Without legitimation, fathers have no right to custody or visitation with the children (although the laws say they have the obligation to support them financially). Without legitimation, mothers have sole custody of children born out of wedlock. Also, children born out of wedlock do not automatically have the right to inherit from their fathers. Fathers have the right to file a petition for legitimation. If the petition for legitimation is granted, fathers have the right to ask the court for custody and visitation and the child has the right to the father’s inheritance. The father can file a Petition for Legitimation in Superior Court in the county where the biological mother lives. The mother must be formally notified, and she has the right to attend the court hearing.

QA case reviews note slightly higher performance ratings for father engagement compared to previous years. This observation may be due to the sustained efforts by the Division to engage putative fathers and encourage legitimation. Joint planning meetings have highlighted the need to understand and engage parents throughout the dependency process and encourage relationships with their children in care. Regular convenings with staff, stakeholders, and parents with lived experience have supported an increase in performance on this measure.

PROGRESS ON CFSP BENCHMARKS

The 2025-2029 CFSP described the following activities and benchmarks.

1. Increase available placements for sibling groups to be placed together.
 - **Benchmark:** By 2029, the state will develop or expand placement options for sibling groups.

In 2024, OPM facilitated eleven monthly meetings with CPA providers. OPM shared data around the current placement needs with CPA providers and reminded providers of the importance of recruiting homes to support the current placement needs for the division, including sibling groups. The Office of Provider Management (OPM) maintains contracts with two CPA providers that develop homes specifically for sibling groups.

In 2024, OPM contracted with a CPA provider to develop homes to accommodate emergency placements for Fulton and DeKalb counties. The CPA developed six foster homes to support emergency placements. While these homes are not solely for sibling groups, they are available if needed.

2. Support judicial efforts to promote and maintain positive nurturing relationships between children in foster care and their parents.

- **Benchmark:** provide up to ten permanency-focused training opportunities annually for judges and attorneys.

The Office of the Child Advocate, along with Georgia CASA and the DFCS Training and Professional Development Unit, offered 12 Multidisciplinary Child Abuse and Neglect Institutes (MDCANI) in CY2024, providing permanency-focused training to approximately 579 professionals, including over 220 attorneys and judges. MDCANI was provided in Regions 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, and 13. MDCANI offers legal attendees a full year's worth of CLE hours for attending.

The Court Improvement Program, along with the Office of the Child Advocate, Georgia CASA, and the CEASE Clinic at the University of Georgia School of Law, co-hosted the Child Welfare Summit from December 4-6, 2024, with 559 attendees. The Summit offered comprehensive training and connection opportunities for child welfare professionals, including lawyers, judges, Court Appointed Special Advocates, service providers, legal aid providers, delinquency and CHINS practitioners, foster parents, law enforcement, school social workers, educators, and policymakers. The Summit also provided 12 CLE hours for judges and attorneys, including 3 Trial Hours, 1 Ethics Hour, and 1 Professionalism Hour.

[CFSR Well-Being Outcome 1: Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children's needs \(Items 12, 13, 14, and 15\)](#)

Item 12: Needs Assessment and Services

CQI analyses with staff and stakeholders for the CFSR Statewide Assessment and PIP development identified root causes for low performance on this item are often due to challenges in obtaining needed assessments and services timely, including trauma

assessments, and contacts with collaterals to assess progression and ensure services remain appropriate.

Item 12A: Needs Assessment and Services to Children

The Division routinely collaborates with stakeholders (e.g., MAAC, EmpowerMENT, Bethany, nSoro Foundation, and the University of Georgia Fanning Institute) to engage ILP-eligible youth and provide needed supports and services. Data are provided to county leaders weekly that provide a detailed summary of case management practices, including monthly child visits and upcoming and overdue assessments. QA/CQI analyses for the CFSR Statewide Assessment and PIP development noted a root cause of lower performance is often due to challenges in obtaining needed assessments and services timely. Development of the CFSR PIP includes strategies to recruit additional service providers to areas of high need, and to expand the provision of services among currently contracted providers to better meet the needs of children and families.

Item 12B: Needs Assessment and Services to Parents

Parental needs are assessed through a combination of informal and formal means. Informal assessment may include regular, quality discussions with the parents regarding their needs and whether any services in place are effective in meeting those needs, observations of parent's demeanor, of their home environment and of their interactions with the children, and the use of collateral contacts to inform the needs assessment. Formal assessments most often include Comprehensive Child and Family Assessments (CCFA), mental health, substance abuse, domestic violence, and parental fitness assessments.

QA/CQI analyses for the CFSR Statewide Assessment and PIP development noted a root cause for lower performance on this item is often due to lack of quality engagement with parents. QA reviews identified cases that failed to demonstrate adequate discussion with parents regarding allegations, additional issues of the case, permanency planning, service provision, and behavioral change necessary to adequately assess needs. Development of the CFSR PIP includes strategies to build staff capacity to make appropriate decisions that ensure child safety and achieve timely permanency.

Item 12C: Needs Assessment and Services to Foster Parents

With the assistance of the Caregiver Recruitment and Retention Unit (CRRU) and Child Placing Agencies (CPA), the needs of foster parents are regularly assessed and met across the region. CRRU team members discuss foster parent experiences and identified needs at each re-evaluation (during home visits and contacts prior to home visits). CRRU team members are accessible to foster parents around the clock via cell phone, email, or text. When an issue arises, the CRRU team member responds to the foster parent and then reaches out to placement case managers, supervisors, county directors, or other agency or community resources to identify assistance. The CRRU teams have a strong working relationship with the caregivers in their region and often act as a liaison between the foster parents and other agency staff.

Regions also hold a monthly Foster Parent Call where updates and training are provided to participants, and an opportunity to express any concerns or ask questions is available to foster parents at the end of the call. Feedback provided by foster parents following the calls has been positive. The PAUSE process creates an additional opportunity to address foster parent needs as it relates to specific youth when the placement is at risk. The individuals on the PAUSE call can identify and implement additional services to stabilize the placement and support the foster parent. The Division continues to work with providers to improve timely assessments and enhance service availability and accessibility for foster caregivers.

Item 13: Child and Family Involvement in Case Planning

QA case reviewers noted issues impacting this item included a failure to consistently engage families in case planning, a lack of evidence of family input into the written case plan, a lack of regular contact with case participants, and failure to engage in quality discussions that allow the opportunity to discuss family

Region 8

In CY2024, the Regional Support Network provided training to the case managers (CM) and supervisors (SSS) during monthly Summits to increase parent engagement.

Staffings held between CMs and SSS discuss parent engagement progress and barriers. SSS are encouraged to provide guidance to the identified barriers.

Both Permanency and CPS Cadence have mini-Parent Engagement Training components. Bi-Weekly Permanency Cadences discuss barriers and guidance to engagement.

Parent engagement is included in the Regional Case Manager Learning Academy.

CQI meets monthly to discuss parent engagement. The region's strategy is Monthly Staffing. The CQI team looks for the engagement piece in the staffing to determine the appropriate movement of a case. Thus far, the barrier is having several new case managers understand what quality parent engagement is and how often it should be done. Through the Regional Support Network and Supervisors, hopefully, this area will become a strength.

strengths and needs, as well as evaluate case plan progress. The most recent QA review noted improved performance on this measure, particularly with children and mothers.

The Division identified strategies during the development of the CFSR PIP to improve parent participation in case plan development and monitoring through increasing timeliness of Family Team Meetings and enhancing guidance for purposeful contacts. Case managers will be shadowed during regular field observations to assess the quality of case plan monitoring at each home visit and discussion of the strengths and challenges of the case plan during the visit. Additional strategies are being discussed within regional QA and CQI teams.

Item 14: Caseworker Visits with Child

QA case reviewers noted strong performance on this item. Data reported in the annual Monthly Caseworker Visit reports show that case managers are meeting the “Every Child Every Month” goal to visit children in foster care at least once per month, with more than half of those visits occurring in the child’s residence, as required under PI-12-01. Georgia continues to exceed the requirement that 95% of children in care receive at least one monthly caseworker visit, and at least 50% of the visits occur in the child’s residence. Data are available through the [Child Welfare Outcomes Report](#).

Item 15: Caseworker Visits with Parents

QA case reviewers identified several issues impacting this item, including gaps in contacts with parents between the initial response time and follow-up visits as well as when cases transferred from one program to another; not increasing the frequency of visits with parents when deemed necessary based on the case circumstances; and lack of engagement with live-in paramours and step-parents. Frequency of visits can be a challenge when parents are not able to be located.

Strengths related to this item include observations of the family’s interactions and private discussions with the parents that were relevant to the reasons for agency involvement. CQI teams are developing strategic tools for staff to use in preparation for parent visits. QA Reviews have noted in cases where fidelity to the CQI strategy was maintained, the case rated a strength on items related to quality parental engagement. This observation has reinforced the alignment of quality performance with CQI-developed engagement tools for case managers and supervisors.

CFSR Well-Being Outcome 2: Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs (Item 16)

Item 16: Educational Needs of the Child

Georgia has committed resources to improve student performance and increase access to educational support services. The Division's Educational Programming, Assessment and Consultation (EPAC) Unit provides 50 Regional Academies and over 25 Statewide Academies each year. Regional Education Academies provide training and engagement opportunities in the counties and are facilitated by the regionally assigned Education Support Monitor. Information shared during Regional Academies is often region- and county-specific and may include guest presenters who represent the local school systems and organizations within the area. Staff and attendees learn about local data, resources, and educational supports available for youth in care.

EPAC also reviews Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), averaging 80 per month, to ensure they are current and appropriately meeting the needs of the youth. EPAC data shows that 85% of reviewed IEPs are appropriate. If the incomplete or inappropriate accommodations are affecting the youth's ability to learn or attend school, the Education Support Monitor will initiate a meeting with the case manager and/or school and schedule an IEP meeting to address the situation.

EPAC established a contract in 2024 with Tutor.com so that all children and youth in foster care have access to individualized tutoring. Tutors can assist with homework, improve writing skills, help students study for tests, and review difficult concepts. This service will be monitored to determine how free access to tutoring is supporting youth.

QA case reviewers noted several areas of need that were not addressed through services/supports or monitored adequately, including attendance concerns, poor academic performance, ADHD/behavioral concerns, and follow-up to address developmental delays. EPAC is collaborating with the QA review team to better understand these areas and develop specific strategies to address them. Development of the CFSR PIP includes specific efforts by EPAC to provide training and supports to Family Preservation Services case managers that will assist parents in advocating for their child's academic achievement. This work is ongoing.

CFSR Well-Being Outcome 3: Children receive adequate services to meet their physical and mental health needs (Items 17 and 18)

In 2022, the Division created an Office of Health Law and Policy (OHLP), which includes a Foster Child Passport Team and an Appeals Team. The primary goal of the Appeals Team is to advocate for children who are insured under the Amerigroup Georgia Families 360 (Medicaid) plan to ensure compliance. The OHLP attorneys review claims, dispute decisions, file appeals, secure reversals, and negotiate resolutions. The team also provides specific training and education to DFCS field staff on all types of appeals, including psychiatric residential treatment facility (PRTF) admission denials and discharges, medical treatments including dental services, and non-PRTF psychological assessments and treatments. In CY2024, OHLP reviewed 2,417 denials, discharge, or other decision/change affecting medical benefits. There were 846 administrative appeals to Medicaid CMO and 322 fair hearing requests to OSAH. OHLP reviews PRTF, PIMHT, dental benefits, pharmacy/prescription drug coverage, and support services (therapy/skills training). The OHLP notes that more medical treatment denials are being overturned by Medicaid CMO after the filing of an administrative appeal, and more children in foster care are gaining access to medically necessary treatment because OHLP appeals the denials. Timeliness of service provision has also improved because the medical treatment appeals are administered effectively.

In 2024, the Wellness, Programming, Assessment, and Consultation (WPAC) Unit sent quarterly psychotropic medication reports to county and regional directors in March, June, September, and November to raise awareness about the number of children in their regions on prescribed psychotropic medications during the previous quarter. The report included pharmacy data claims for foster care children enrolled in Amerigroup. WPAC continued to facilitate the escalated psychotropic medication process. WPAC received and processed a total of 675 medication consents with 90% (605 consents) returned to the facility within 24 to 48 hours of receipt. The total excludes medication consents that were sent back to the Crisis Stabilization Unit (CSU) due to error and no response from CSU as well as the consents received with only over the counter medications. The medication consent email box is monitored seven days a week—including evenings and holidays—allowing CSU to submit requests for foster care youth requiring treatment and stabilization.

Weekly emails were sent to each county and regional director with a list of newly entered youth in care with missing Medicaid applications. WPAC screened Georgia SHINES for initial Medicaid applications using the removal report. The unit was able to verify applications

submissions for 4,589 cases out of 5,945 (77%) within the first two weeks of the child entering foster care.

DHS is working toward completing a contractual arrangement for a medical advisor to review psychotropic medication protocols, among other duties. This effort is ongoing.

The Office of Information Technology (OIT) provided guidance to staff on the newly re-established access to the [Georgia Health Information Network \(GaHIN\)](#) including eligibility for access to the GaHIN Portal, how to access the GaHIN Portal for a child in foster care, content available in the GaHIN Portal, and the resources available in case staff need support. GaHIN is a nonprofit organization dedicated to creating a healthier Georgia through the use and exchange of electronic health information. GaHIN is the state-designated entity for health information exchange (HIE). GaHIN facilitates the use and secure exchange of patient health information, so providers have the information they need at the point of care, resulting in improved quality of care, better health outcomes and reductions in cost.

Item 17: Physical Health of the Child

Georgia's Child Welfare Policy 10.11 requires ensuring each child receives a Health Check within 10 calendar days of entering foster care. Georgia SHINES data shows that 28% of children in CY2024 received a health check within the first 10 days of foster care and 84% received a health check within six months of entering foster care. The policy also requires ensuring each child has a physical examination at least once a year in addition to all Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic and Treatment (EPSDT) consistent with the recommendations for preventive pediatric health care. Data also show that 78% of children in care on 1/1/2024 received an annual exam (EPSDT) during the year. (7,676/9,851). Mobile health care providers are available in many regions of the state to assist with providing the recommended screenings, exams, and immunizations; however, some regions report that the mobile providers often cancel or reschedule due to not having a minimum number of appointments. The Division is partnering with health care providers to explore opportunities that will improve timeliness of health care screenings.

In CY2024, the WPAC Unit gained access to the Georgia Registry of Immunization Transactions and Services (GRITS). Every week, using the removal report, WPAC screened each child newly entering foster care through GRITS to obtain their school immunization form 3231. WPAC reviewed 5,945 children's cases and uploaded 3,466 current immunization records (58%) into Georgia SHINES. Additionally, 1,582 historical immunization records were uploaded for foster care children (26%). The remaining children did not have immunization records available in GRITS. The unit also screened SHINES for

initial Medicaid applications using the removal report, successfully verifying 4,589 application submissions (77%).

Regions obtain the Georgia SHINES report on overdue health checks monthly and identify opportunities to complete health checks for children. Amerigroup hosts resource fairs to provide information about available medical and mental health services for youth in foster care. The newly created DFCS Health Services Coordinator (HSC) positions are highlighted as key roles within the State Office Well-Being Unit, tasked with guiding practice, monitoring service delivery, and providing technical assistance and training to field staff.

Item 18: Mental/Behavioral Health of the Child

Georgia's Child Welfare Policy 10.12 requires a referral for a trauma assessment within 10 calendar days of entering or re-entering foster care for children five years of age and older. Referrals are completed timely by the case manager, but due to delays in service provision related to provider waitlists or lack of providers, the assessments are not completed timely. Georgia SHINES data shows that 11% of children in care at least 10 days in CY2024 received a trauma or behavioral health assessment within the first 10 days of foster care (337/2,934), and 75% (6,522/8,648) received an assessment within six months of entering foster care.

To create uniformity and increase the quality of assessments, the Division has begun the development of a trauma assessment template and guidance document, with an expected release date in CY2025. A training plan will be developed thereafter to ensure providers and staff are knowledgeable about the updates. This work is ongoing.

REGION 13

Region-wide, the number of overdue health checks has seen significant improvement. In January 2024, the region reported 490 overdue initial and 404 ongoing health checks.

By October 2024, those numbers dropped to 131 overdue initial and 196 ongoing.

Clayton County showed the most dramatic improvement, reducing initial overdue checks from 258 in January 2024 to just 7 by May 2024.

CFSR Systemic Factors

Statewide Information System (Item 19)

Item 19: Identification of Information

Data are entered timely and are routinely checked for accuracy and completeness. The State’s CCWIS system (Georgia SHINES) records important demographic information for all children/families, foster care placements, and permanency goals for children in care. Georgia’s Child Welfare Policy Manual requires data updates into Georgia SHINES within 72 hours of occurrence.

The development of Georgia’s CFSR PIP includes specific activities to improve timeliness documentation of placement changes. The DIS team will implement several processes to educate staff about data entry requirements, develop specific processes and tools to ensure staff are able to document placement changes timely and accurately, and monitor data timeliness and accuracy with SHINES reports, case reviews, and over-the-shoulder support.

DIS is coordinating with the Data Unit, the Care Coordination and Treatment Unit (CCTU), and Georgia SHINES to develop resources and guidance on data entry expectations. DIS will also schedule monthly “data days” in each region to address trends, including timeliness of placement. DIS will review placements with staff, address reasons for any delays, and correct errors in case record data entry.

Data Quality

The below table demonstrates initial error-free data entry percentages from January through December 2024, prior to DIS review and correction. Accuracy of all elements is above 90%.

	Demographics	Person Characteristics	Legal Status	Placement Location	Goals for Placements (Permanency Goals)
Jan-24	99.83%	99.70%	99.66%	98.14%	92.73%
Feb-24	99.70%	99.64%	99.43%	98.45%	92.64%
Mar-24	99.64%	99.79%	99.58%	98.19%	92.33%
Apr-24	99.79%	96.40%	99.75%	98.50%	93.06%

May-24	99.79%	98.69%	99.80%	98.44%	92.78%
Jun-24	99.75%	98.88%	99.71%	98.56%	93.76%
Jul-24	99.73%	99.15%	99.66%	98.09%	93.94%
Aug-24	99.84%	99.02%	99.77%	98.36%	92.95%
Sep-24	99.80%	99.02%	99.45%	97.73%	91.96%
Oct-24	99.78%	98.42%	99.85%	98.47%	92.22%
Nov-24	99.70%	99.16%	99.58%	98.57%	92.67%
Dec-24	99.73%	98.57%	99.78%	98.16%	93.54%

Source: DFCS Data Unit, Georgia SHINES

After the DIS work with the case managers, the error-free data percentage reaches 100% in these measures, ensuring that the Division maintains accurate and complete information on the demographics, person characteristics, legal status, and placement location (address) of every child in foster care.

Case Review System (Items 20-24)

Item 20: *Written Case Plan Developed Jointly with the Parents*

Georgia’s Child Welfare Policy Manual requires developing written case plans for children in foster care by engaging the parents/guardians during the family team meetings. Georgia SHINES data from CY2024 shows 95.5% of case plans were completed within 60 days.

The Division does not have strong supporting evidence that parents are routinely involved in the development of their case plans. The development of Georgia’s CFSR PIP includes specific activities that will increase staff competency to utilize Family Team Meetings (FTM) for engaging parents in case planning. The QA/CQI Unit will facilitate live learnings (known as “Practice and Support Exchanges”) for frontline staff, supervisors, and county leadership through a review of current cases to improve the quality of family engagement in case plan

development. FTM training is also offered regularly to staff through the Training and Professional Development Unit; classes are popular and fill up quickly.

Item 21: Timely Periodic Reviews

Georgia law (O.C.G.A. §15-11-102) requires an initial periodic review hearing to be held within 75 days following a child's removal from their home. Georgia SHINES data from CY2024 shows 92% of initial periodic reviews were held within six months of the child entering foster care (11,849/12,235), and 90% of subsequent reviews were held within six months from the prior review (11,025/12,235).

Georgia's Court Improvement Program (CIP) disseminated a statewide legal-judicial survey in December 2024 – January 2025. There were 194 respondents; 31% were judges and 69% were attorneys.

Region 4

The Regional Support Network team offers training to promote quality visits to mothers and fathers. Regionally, there has been a strong push to encourage more father engagement. Family team meetings are held initially and as needed throughout the life of the case, per policy. The region's parental engagement is discussed during staffing each month. If for some reason a parent is not engaged, the barriers are discussed, and solutions are brought up on how to overcome those barriers. Because families have different challenges and strengths, region 4's counties have found that an individualized approach works best for each family. Their strengths and needs are discussed, and a case plan is implemented to better serve the family.

Butts County's strategy is to plan at the end of each month for the upcoming FTM. By doing this, Butts County can engage parents on day 1 of each month. The case managers collaborate with providers to ensure the case plan services in place are meeting the needs of the parents and behavior changes are occurring. Butts County modifies the service needs as identified and discusses all progress with parents on a continuous basis. The region meets monthly with the county leaders to complete cadence regarding pacing goals for parent contacts.

	Always	Often	Sometimes	Never
Initial periodic review is held within 75 days of the child entering care	37%	52%	11%	0%
Initial permanency hearing is held within 12 months of the child entering care	77%	19%	4%	0%

Source: Georgia Court Improvement Program

The Division continues to collaborate with CIP to obtain administrative court data on hearings within the statutorily required time limits. This work is ongoing.

Item 22: Timely Permanency Hearing

Georgia law (O.C.G.A. §15-11-102) requires a permanency plan hearing to be held within nine months of the date the child is considered to have entered foster care for children under seven years of age at the time the dependency petition is filed (and any siblings that enter care at the same time). A permanency plan hearing must be held no later than 12 months after a child seven years of age or older is considered to have entered foster care, unless a sibling group enters care at the same time and at least one member of the group is under seven years of age at the time the dependency petition is filed, then the permanency plan hearing for the entire sibling group shall be held no later than nine months after the children are considered to have entered foster care.

Georgia SHINES data from CY2024 shows 94% of initial permanency hearings were held within 12 months of the child entering foster care, and 93% of subsequent permanency hearings were held within 12 months from the prior review.

Item 23: Filing Termination of Parental Rights (TPR) Proceeding

Georgia’s Child Welfare Policy Manual requires termination of parental rights to align with state and federal laws. There are several alerts within Georgia SHINES that notify staff when there is an upcoming or overdue issue for children who have been in care for 15 of the most recent 22 months without a TPR filed or voluntary surrender. These systems are in place to ensure that if TPR isn’t filed by the 15th of the most recent 22 months of a child’s stay in foster care, there must be documentation to support a compelling reason.

	Youth Eligible for TPR	Compelling Reason Documented	Timely TPR Petition Filed
CY2023	5,420	1,958	376
CY2024	5,171	2,548	463

Source: DFCS Data Unit, Georgia SHINES

The development of Georgia’s CFSSR PIP includes specific strategies to improve the functioning of this item, including establishing clear legal expectations for agency attorneys (referred to as Special Assistant Attorneys General, or SAAGs). DHS/DFCS General Counsel will develop and disseminate a SAAG Minimum Standards Guide to set expectations for attorneys. This guide will serve as a manual to provide information, forms, and tools for attorneys to prepare for permanency hearings, including staffing requirements, compelling reasons, filings, continuances, and concurrent plans. The guide will provide action steps for SAAGs when the TPR packet is not available (e.g., due to case manager turnover) and how/when to file after receipt of the information. The Minimum Standards Guide is expected to be completed and disseminated statewide by December 2025.

The below chart shows the average time, in months, from a child’s entry into care to the date of TPR to the finalization of adoption.

Year	Entry to First TPR	Entry to Second TPR	TPR to Adoption	Average Time to Adoption
2018	20.88	23.44	11.99	35.53
2019	21.22	24.66	12.73	37.34
2020	22.33	25.67	14.15	39.89
2021	24.63	27.8	13.82	41.6
2022	26.48	29.39	13.14	42.49
2023	23.15	27.89	12.86	40.80
2024	23.92	28.87	13.27	42.06

Source: DFCS Data Unit, Georgia SHINES

Georgia’s Court Improvement Program (CIP) disseminated a statewide legal-judicial survey in December 2024 – January 2025. There were 194 respondents; 31% were judges and 69% were attorneys. The survey inquired about several topics, including timeliness of periodic reviews and permanency hearings, content of hearings, and reasons for continuances.

	Always	Often	Sometimes	Never
TPR Petition is filed when a child has been in foster care for 15 of the last 22 months	4%	39%	54%	3%
TPR hearings ever continued	4%	23%	72%	1%

Source: Georgia Court Improvement Program

The most frequently cited reasons for continued TPR hearings: lack of service on parent, witness unavailable, parent requests counsel, hearing will take longer than time allotted, and parent attorney needs more time to prepare.

Item 24: Notification of the Right to be Heard

Georgia Code §15-11-109 requires DFCS to give written notice of the date, time, place, and purpose of the review or hearing, including the right to be heard, to the caregiver of a child, the foster parent of a child, any pre-adoptive parent, or any relative caring for a child. The written notice shall be delivered to the recipient at least 72 hours before the review or hearing, except in the case of preliminary protective hearings or emergency hearings when such notice is not possible, by United States mail, e-mail, or hand delivery. Each county has a process in place for providing notice to caregivers, relying on the child welfare agency (case manager or administrative staff) or the agency attorney. A February 2025 survey of 172 foster/adoptive caregivers found that 62% of the respondents regularly received notice of upcoming hearings.

QA case reviewers complete stakeholder interviews as part of the case review process; 494 stakeholders were interviewed in CY2024, including 56 foster caregivers. Of those caregiver respondents, 68% rated the agency’s effectiveness in providing notice of upcoming hearings or panel reviews as Good or Excellent.

The Division’s CRRU team is working to identify improvements in notifications to caregivers, and the Division will collaborate with the Office of Technology and Georgia SHINES to develop a system that tracks the date that the notice is sent to each caregiver. Per the state statute, the notice includes language that the caregiver has a right to be heard. The agency’s technology modernization efforts include the CommuniCare portal, which provides a

calendar of activities and email notices to caregivers about upcoming events, including court hearings. This technology will also support uniformity in notification.

Quality Assurance System (Item 25)

Item 25: Quality Assurance System

Georgia continues to operate an identifiable quality assurance (QA) system that is in place in the counties/regions where the services included in the CFSP are provided and the system evaluates the quality of services, identifies the strengths and needs of the service delivery system, provides relevant reports, and evaluates implemented program improvement measures. The case review system utilized by the QA team is high-functioning and directly models the CFSP process, in that cases are not only reviewed for compliance, but case specific interviews are conducted for each case to offer a thorough, comprehensive assessment of the state's true performance with regards to federal requirements related to work with families. There have not been any areas of concern identified for the QA system.

Stakeholder engagement throughout the QA process utilizes surveys to gather information related to service delivery and systemic factors. Stakeholders can participate in both the case specific interviews and their overall assessment of the child welfare system. Stakeholders are asked to provide a rating of Excellent, Good, Fair or Poor in applicable areas based on their role with the agency. For example, a service provider would be asked case-specific questions about the family with whom they work. In addition, this same service provider would be interviewed as a stakeholder and asked questions related to their overall services, relationship, and collaboration with others across the child welfare system.

Stakeholders include but are not limited to:

- Legal stakeholders (judges, SAAG (Special Assistant Attorney General), CASA (Court Appointed Special Attorney), GAL (Guardian Ad Litem), Citizen Panel Member, etc.)
- School personnel (teachers, counselors, principals, etc.)
- Law Enforcement
- Medical Providers (doctors, dentist, hospitals)
- Mental Health Providers (therapists, counselors, hospitals)
- Homestead/Parent Aide Providers
- Other service providers (substance abuse, Domestic Violence, parenting classes)
- DFCS Case Manager/Supervisor

The QA team consistently provides comprehensive evaluative data and trend reports that document conformity with standards that address safety, permanency, and well-being. As CCWIS enhancements are planned and implemented, the data will be available for use by the QA/CQI teams and shared with staff and stakeholders as appropriate.

CFSR Online Monitoring System (OMS)

The QA/CQI teams routinely utilize the range of reports available in OMS to assist in analysis of review findings. The QA/CQI teams rely on the OSRI report to pull de-identified review guides for distribution each month. Completed OSRI review guides are distributed to applicable county, regional, and district staff.

The Ratings by Case report is utilized for preparation for case debriefs as needed.

The State Rating Summary report is used to pull the data for each month's state "trend charts" (statewide data is generated from the State Rating Summary and then filtered by district and region as needed). The QA/CQI team can also pull county level reports from the State Rating Summary resource if needed.

The Face Sheet and Participants Interviewed reports are used to track the number and type of participants engaged regularly through the review process.

The QA/CQI teams regularly use the 18 Item Specific reports to look at breakdowns of performance for each measure within the items and to evaluate case practices (strengths and areas needing improvement). The analysis of information from these reports is used to develop statewide trend reports, CQI strategies, and the content for the regional focus groups. Also, the Item specific reports are shared with relevant state-level entities. For example, the Item 1 rating summaries are shared with the Safety Unit and the Item 16 summaries are shared with the state EPAC (Educational Programming, Assessment and Consultation) unit.

The newer Practice Performance Report has been especially beneficial to the QA/CQI teams by providing a summary of practice performance for all 18 items across all cases within a selected review period. This report provides a simple approach to assess contributing factors to performance (for example breakdowns of assessment versus service provision performance, engagement scores for mothers versus fathers, and frequency versus quality of visits). The Practice Performance Report is used to develop educational materials, statewide performance presentations, and focus group content.

Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI)

Evaluation and implementation of program improvement measures are promoted through the state's CQI efforts. Each region has an assigned QA Specialist to assist the CQI teams with educational needs related to CFSR. CQI teams include frontline staff and supervisors, county leadership, and the regional C3 Coordinator. CQI teams are operational in all fourteen regions and the Child Protective Services Intake Communications Center (CICC). CQI teams use Gilbert's Behavior Engineering Model to conduct root cause analysis. This model includes six categories within two domains that indicate the areas that influence the work: Environment (Expectations and Feedback; Tools and Resources; and Incentives and Consequences) and Individual (Knowledge and Skills; Capacity; and Motivation). Each team also uses a Performance Improvement Process planning worksheet to develop and evaluate strategies. This process consists of five phases: Performance Analysis, Cause Analysis, Intervention Selection and Development, Implementation and Change Management, and Evaluation. When developing interventions, CQI teams create a Quality Improvement Plan (QIP). Once the performance problem and cause have been analyzed, the strategy is included in the QIP, as well as how it will be measured, and its expected outcome. CQI training is provided to individual teams on an as needed basis to ensure they understand and can effectively use the CQI tools and resources.

QA/CQI Information Sharing

In FY2024, QA case reviewers began sharing the review guides for children age 14 and older with the GA-RYSE/Chafee Unit. The QA Unit shared 27 case reviews in CY2024. The review guides help to determine the quality of services (ILP, permanency needs, educational, health, and mental/behavioral health). The GA/RYSSE unit reviews the findings from the case reviews to identify needed supports or training that will improve outcomes for ILP-eligible youth. This work is ongoing.

The development of the CFSR PIP included several opportunities for QA/CQI information sharing during CY2024. The Federal Plans Unit presented these data at numerous stakeholder convenings, including the Together Georgia provider conference, the SAAG annual meeting, and the CIP Justice for Children committee. The regional CQI managers shared local QA case review data and trends at their annual regional stakeholder meetings. The QA Unit manager shared data and trends during the Division's annual APSR joint planning meeting, which included parents with lived experience on the presenter panel and members of the state's CAPTA citizen review panels. Program leaders are encouraged to share information on the QA/CQI process with their staff and stakeholders, including parents, caregivers, and other system partners.

Staff and Provider Training (Items 26-28)

Item 26: New Staff Training

Staff are getting registered and completing the New Worker Training timely. The median number of days between hire date and enrollment into training is seven days. New case managers begin classroom training (Fundamentals) within 21-25 days of hire and complete the course within 75 days. Of the 659 new case managers enrolled into the academy training in CY2024, 446 completed the certification within 120 days of hire, and 312 completed the full certification – including field practice activities and supervisory sign-off – within 120 days of hire. 220 of the 659 new hires resigned from the agency before completing the training and certification process.

Participants are requested to respond to a staff training preparedness survey upon completion of the course. In CY2024, 87 respondents (less than a 15% response rate) provided the following data:

- I. Were you provided with an overview of the requirements and expectations of the new worker training sequence for Social Services Specialist?
 - a. 83/87 (95%) Respondents reported yes
- II. Were you assigned a Field Practice Coach?
 - a. 39/87 (45%) responded yes
- III. Did the training on Georgia SHINES prepare you to perform required data entry functions?
 - a. 46/87 (53%) responded yes
- IV. The Training was realistic to the reality of the work?
 - a. 53/84 (63%) Either Strongly Agree/Agree
 - b. 28/84 (33%) Either Disagree/Strongly Disagree
- V. The training provided sufficient practice opportunities in the curriculum.
 - a. 57/84 (68%) Strongly Agree/Agree

Region 1

Between January – March 2025, the region offered Trust-Based Relational Intervention (TBRI) training and support to DFCS staff and caregivers to enhance their understanding of how relational trauma impacts a person’s developing brain, body, biology, belief system, and behaviors.

A 4-part training series was offered as well as lunch-and-learns, and a TBRI podcast club was created. These opportunities included school professionals, DFCS staff, caregivers, and CASA.

R1’s C3 Coordinator has assisted 20 caregivers and professionals in applying for TBRI Practitioner training that will be hosted this October 2025.

To further develop staff, the region created a monthly, hour-long learning platform, “Power Hour”. Topics were created and led by county staff and included staff sharing personal accounts of how they overcame challenges when working with families, how to co-create Family Plans and the value of Action Plans, and having persons with lived experience sharing alongside their DFCS support team how they were able to partner together to address parental substance use disorder, link to necessary services, and provide deep support to parents through supportive accountability. Each call included approximately 80 participants, including case managers and supervisors, and county and regional leadership.

- b. 28/84 (32%) Disagree/Strongly Disagree
- VI. Did the new worker training prepare you with the knowledge and skills needed to perform your job duties?
- a. 53/83 (64%) Yes
 - b. 30/83 (36%) No

The QA Unit completed stakeholder interviews with 348 DFCS staff in CY2024. Effectiveness of initial case manager training and preparedness was rated Good/Excellent by 54% of case managers and 50% of Supervisors.

The Training and Professional Development Unit continues to analyze the findings of the preparedness surveys to identify areas of improvement and find ways to increase response rates. This work is ongoing.

Item 27: Ongoing Staff Training

Continuing professional development opportunities are available and accessible to all staff. Training hours are available through conferences, summits, and DFCS provided courses. Courses are available in both in-person and virtual formats through the Learning Management System (IOTIS). The Division's career pathway requires staff to complete 20 hours of professional development training annually to be eligible for a promotion. In CY2024, 60% of employees (2,072 individuals) completed 0-19 continuing professional development hours, and 40% completed 20+ hours.

New supervisors must complete required DHS leadership training within 45 days of hire/promotion: DHS 117 (Leadership and Influence) DHS 102 (Skills for Successful Supervision), and OCP 810 (child welfare Supervisor Academy training). In CY2024, 73 supervisors were hired or promoted. Of those, 51 completed OCP 810. Six of the new supervisors resigned before completing the supervisor training. The median number of days from hire/promotion to completion of the training is 129 days.

The Supervisor Academy curriculum was completely updated in FY24. It is an immersive, practical, relevant learning experience for all new Social Services Supervisors and taught by former supervisors and county directors. This curriculum is also implemented in partnership with the supervisor mentor program. Supervisor Mentors sit-in throughout the modules to serve as experts to provide experiential knowledge and feedback to classroom participants and carry forward that knowledge during the individualized mentorship sessions. The supervisor mentor program focuses on the educative, administrative and supportive

functions of supervision to help support retention of both supervisors and front-line case managers.

The QA Unit completed stakeholder interviews with 348 DFCS staff in CY2024. Effectiveness of ongoing case manager training was rated Good/Excellent by 68% of case managers and 57% of Supervisors.

The Division offers multiple opportunities for ongoing staff training to support the goals of the state's CFSP and CFSR PIP, including SHINES Shorts, which are short videos on the Learning Management System that highlight updates to the CCWIS system, and Café 212, the Division's bi-monthly, 30-minute, virtual professional development and networking opportunity for staff to learn from a variety of expert presenters.

Item 28: Training for Foster Parents, Adoptive Parents, and Facility Staff

Foster and Adoptive Caregiver Training

The Caregiver Recruitment and Retention Unit (CRRU), in partnership with the Training and Professional Development Unit, announced the statewide rollout of a new research-based, pre-service training for Georgia caregivers in February 2024. The National Training and Development Curriculum (NTDC) replaces the IMPACT foster parent pre-service training.

NTDC has been adapted to address the needs of Georgia families and equips potential foster, kinship, and adoptive parents with the information, resources, and tools needed to parent a child who has experienced trauma, separation, or loss. NTDC also gives parents access to information and resources needed to continue building their skills once they have a child in their home through Right-Time Trainings (RTT). The NTDC Train-the-Trainer course and RTT are available online through the Division's learning management system for on-demand accessibility.

In CY2024, 468 facilitators were trained to deliver the curriculum (train-the-trainer course), and from July 2024 to December 2024, 1,070 caregivers across the state received the new NTDC pre-service training. Caregivers completed a pre- and post-assessment, a tool comprised of 21 NTDC theme-based questions, designed to gauge a caregiver's own level of knowledge and growth before and after pre-service training, while also identifying potential areas where additional support may be needed. Of all the themes offered in the curriculum, 83% of caregivers who completed the pre-assessment strongly agreed that

having access to services and supports was viewed as a sign of strength for both children and the parent. After completing the training, this number increased to 90% of all caregivers who strongly agreed. The second most valued parenting characteristic was related to appreciation for diversity and other world views. When asked in the pre-assessment if a child would feel welcomed and respected in their family, 79% of caregivers strongly agreed. This number increased to 89% when asked again in the post-assessment.

From July-December 2024, 506 RTT modules were attempted, and 437 were completed (86%). The RTT course module, Sensory Integration, had the highest completion rate of 100%, followed by Family Dynamics at 97% completion, and Preparing for Adulthood with a completion rate of 95%. More caregivers accessed the RTT, Accessing Services and Supports, than any other course module, which is consistent with the strongly supported views towards services and supports by caregivers from the pre- and post-assessment. However, Accessing Services and Supports was completed at a rate of only 68% (the least completed course of all RTT's).

Resource Development (RD) staff must verify that all approved foster caregivers obtain a minimum of fifteen (15) hours of Continued Parent Development (CPD) each calendar year. Foster caregivers can obtain hours from personal growth and development activities (e.g., counseling, support groups, stress management, nutrition, etc.) and through the Georgia Center for Resources and Support, which offers several live trainings each month and hundreds of on-demand courses tailored to specific needs of children and families. TBRI trainings are encouraged for caregivers to support caring for youth with behavioral or complex needs. The Caregiver Coaching Academy continues to assist caregivers with obtaining their ongoing CPD hours by providing caregivers with one hour of training for each session they attend.

The QA Unit completed stakeholder interviews with 494 stakeholders in CY2024, including 56 foster caregivers. 81% of respondents rated initial foster caregiver training as Good or Excellent, and 94% rated ongoing caregiver training as Good or Excellent.

Initial CPA/CCI Staff Training

New case management staff of licensed agencies (CPAs) and facilities (CCIs) are required to complete a 40-hour Foundations classroom training. The Office of Provider Management (OPM) team monitors training compliance. At the conclusion of each training course, participants are assessed on their knowledge. A passing score is 80%. When CM staff don't complete the training by the required deadline, a non-compliance letter is sent to the agency, advising that the staff member is not able to continue serving in a CM role until the

training has been completed. These individuals are required to be removed from the CM role and reassigned to another position within the agency.

OPM requests participant feedback via surveys to determine if the Foundations course trained them adequately to do their job. In the most recent survey, 99% of child welfare workers and 98% of supervisors said it did. OPM regularly reviews the feedback to make enhancements to the Foundations training.

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
CPA/CCI staff required to complete RBWO Foundations	117	86	148	129	192
CPA staff completing the course by the end of the calendar year	83	71	108	125	148

Source: DFCS Office of Provider Management

Ongoing CPA/CCI Staff Training

OPM holds a monthly partnership meeting with all CPA providers, and quarterly partnership meetings with CCI and ILP providers. These partnership meetings are held in a virtual format. In these meetings, OPM provides training on various topics, technical assistance, policy updates and discusses trends related to program operation. Feedback from providers suggests that they find the trainings beneficial, and the trainings meet the attendees' expected goals.

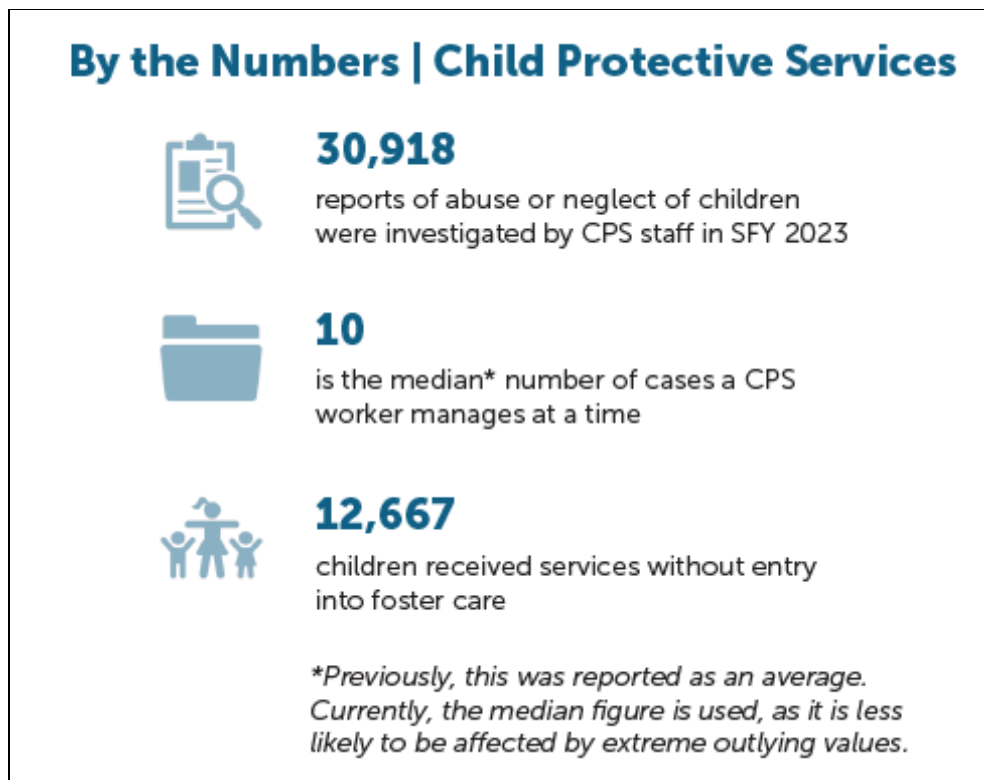
When child welfare policy is newly developed or updated, the information is shared throughout the agency and to providers via the GA+SCORE website. This site is a single point of access for foster caregivers, RBWO providers, and DFCS staff. GA+SCORE also provides direct links to training registration for RBWO Foundations, NTDC and Train-the-Trainer, Reasonable and Prudent Parenting, Every Child Every Month, Casey Life Skills Assessments, and others.

Service Array and Resource Development (Items 29-30)

Item 29: Service Array

Promoting Safe and Stable Families (PSSF) continues to be a resource for Georgia families in need of services to prevent removal or re-entry to foster care. PSSF in Georgia provides family support prevention and early intervention, home visiting, healthy relationships and co-parenting services. PSSF also provides family preservation services including placement prevention, crisis intervention, relative caregiver supports, and substance abuse treatment. Additional details on Georgia’s PSSF programs, including family reunification and adoption promotion services, can be found at the [PSSF website](#).

Child Protective Services (CPS) staff investigate reports of child abuse and neglect and work with caregivers, law enforcement, and judicial partners to ensure the safety of Georgia’s most vulnerable citizens. When an allegation of child abuse or neglect is confirmed, case managers partner with families and community organizations to address issues that affect child safety in the home. In most cases, DFCS can work with families to address the safety concern and stabilize the home environment.



SOURCE: Department of Human Services SFY2023 Annual Report

The state provides an array of services to support children and families through a continuum of public and private agencies, organizations, and funding sources. During CFSR4

stakeholder interviews, gaps were noted for services relating to transportation and housing in rural areas, substance abuse services, particularly for fathers, specialized services for children with complex needs, and ABA therapies for children with autism disorders. Stakeholders also expressed concerns about long waiting lists and the quality of some of the services. Assessments and services for parents is an area of concern for the Division, with ongoing exploration of barriers and solutions.

The development of Georgia's CFSR PIP includes specific activities that will increase the availability of services to address unmet needs and increase the quality of available services. The Delivered Services Unit developed a needs assessment in December 2024 and released it statewide in January 2025. The needs assessment surveyed frontline staff, supervisors, and county directors to better understand the specific needs of the communities and gaps in service provision. Over 495 responses were received.

Responses were requested for each DFCS region and program area:

- Homestead Services – therapy, counseling, kinship assessment, bonding and attachment assessment, crisis intervention, and behavior aid
- Parent Aid – in-home support, group parent classes
- Wrap Around Services – transportation, behavior aid (supervision), crisis intervention, in-home targeted case management, and in-home intensive clinical or therapeutic services
- Child and Family Comprehensive Assessments (CCFA)
- Prevention of Unnecessary Out-of-Home Placement (PUP) – assessments (parental fitness, domestic violence, substance abuse, etc), psychological and psychiatric evaluations, neuro-psychological evaluation, psycho-sexual abuse evaluation, counseling
- Drug Screens
- Early Intervention Services

DSU is working with current service providers to identify effective strategies that will increase capacity and remove barriers to expansion in regions where quality services are available but cannot serve all families timely. DSU is also recruiting new providers to address the specific unmet program areas needed in each region. The needs assessment will be disseminated annually to monitor progress in service availability.

Georgia's CFSR PIP also includes specific strategies to increase relative placement resources. In November 2024, child welfare policy was updated to reflect the waiver of non-safety standards for kinship placements. Upon completion of enhancements to Georgia SHINES, the Caregiver Recruitment and Retention Unit (CRRU) will coordinate with the

Policy Unit to provide staff learning sessions on relative placements and approval requirements. Regional CRRU teams will coordinate with field operations to provide ongoing training and support to ensure staff are making diligent efforts to identify relative placements for children. CRRU teams will support regional staff to adhere to protocols for converting relative placements to foster home.

By the Numbers | Foster Care and Adoption Services



15,878

children were in foster care at any point during SFY 2023



38%

of children in foster care were placed with a relative in SFY 2023



1,810

is the total number of children eligible for adoption in SFY 2023



18

is the median* caseload for a foster care caseworker



1,296

children were adopted by new families and given permanent homes

**Previously, this was reported as an average. Currently, the median figure is used, as it is less likely to be affected by extreme outlying values.*

SOURCE: Department of Human Services SFY2023 Annual Report

Georgia's System of Care

[Mindworks Georgia](#) (formerly known as the Interagency Directors Team [IDT]) consists of more than 20 representatives from state agencies and non-governmental organizations that serve children with behavioral health needs. Subject matter experts come together to create a state plan, set collective objectives, and work with data within a dynamic system. Mindworks Georgia serves as the state director-level, multiagency working group of the Behavioral Health Coordinating Council and is responsible for developing and implementing the system of care framework in Georgia. Mindworks Georgia is charged with creating an integrated approach to policy and practice within the child and adolescent system of care and is an important player in the Georgia System of Care infrastructure.

The Behavioral Health Coordinating Council is chaired by the commissioner of the Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities and is composed of commissioners from each relevant state agency, as well as legislators, consumers, consumer family members, and the state ombudsman. The council ensures the coordination of overlapping behavioral health services, funding, and policy within the state and among state agencies.

Local Interagency Planning Team (LIPT) Collaboratives create a feedback loop between Mindworks Georgia and LIPTs to address regional issues and provide a regional opportunity for collaborative learning and service coordination. LIPTs consist of mandated local or county-level child serving agencies and partner participants that work with families to improve and coordinate services for youth with a mental health diagnosis. They are spearheaded by a volunteer chairperson and are present in almost every county.

The Center of Excellence for Children’s Behavioral Health, within the Georgia Health Policy Center at Georgia State University, provides project management and backbone organizational support, as well as data collection, program evaluation, and objective research and policy and financial analysis to support Mindworks Georgia and the state’s system of care. Current projects include a funding framework, Georgia Thrive (Infant-Toddler Court Program), and mental health access in pediatrics.

Item 30: Individualizing Services

The state provides an array of services to support children and families through a continuum of public and private agencies, organizations, and funding sources. During CFSR4 stakeholder interviews, challenges were identified with individualizing services, particularly in case plan development, families in rural communities, and for children with complex needs, including autism disorders. Stakeholders also expressed concerns about long waiting lists and the quality of some of the services.

The Division developed a survey to obtain feedback from foster and adoptive caregivers on a variety of metrics relating to their involvement with the child welfare system. In February 2025, 172 caregivers responded to the survey.

		Excellent / Good	Fair/Poor
CAREGIVERS	How responsive was DFCS and other providers to your specific racial and cultural needs?	73%	24%
	How well did DFCS and other providers make sure you received the services and supports you requested?	60%	39%
	How satisfied are you with the services and supports offered to you by DFCS?	72%	25%

Source: DFCS Lived Experience Survey, February 2025

Agency Responsiveness to the Community (Items 31-32)

Item 31: Ongoing Consultation

Georgia convenes multiple stakeholder meetings each year. These convenings are opportunities to engage child welfare system partners in the assessment of the goals and strategies of the Division, identify strengths and needs of the system, and determine the best course of action to make adjustments as needed. Convenings are often scheduled to provide information on the state's CFSP and CFSR goals to targeted audience, including legal and judicial partners, CASA, foster and adoptive caregivers, service providers, CAPTA Panel members, and others. Attendees are provided opportunities to have in-depth discussion on available child welfare data and encouraged to use their personal or professional lens to make recommendations for improvements. Comments and ideas resulting from these convenings are included in the APSR and incorporated into strategic planning for the state's child welfare system.

Provider meetings are routinely held with the Multi-Agency Alliance for Children (MAAC), Together Georgia, the Adoption and Foster Parent Association of Georgia (AFPAG), the Foster Stronger Coalition, and others. The Commissioner also participates in Supreme Court of Georgia's Justice 4 Children Committee, Safe Harbor Commission, and the First Lady's Children's Cabinet.

Each of the 14 regional C3 Coordinators host at least one regionwide stakeholder meeting and four quarterly service array-focused meetings per year. Invited providers are from the CPAs and CCIs, school boards, law enforcement, mental health and substance abuse, Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities (DBHDD), Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ), and other community agencies to discuss the region's performance on the CFSR performance outcomes, service gaps, and ongoing partnerships. They also discuss policy, practices, processes, and other issues/concerns. Feedback from meeting organizers demonstrates that the service array meetings have been helpful in creating a platform to share information and strengthen partnerships with the community partners and providers. Comments and ideas resulting from these convenings are included in the APSR and incorporated into strategic planning for the state's child welfare system.

The Division continues to promote feedback loops with the field, judges, medical providers, educators, and the CAPTA Panels. DFCS continues to work with the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities (DBHDD), the Office of the Child Advocate (OCA), and the Department of Public Health (DPH) regarding Plan of Safe Care and ways to enhance practices. DFCS has regular meetings with partners including OCA, the Court Improvement Program (CIP), DBHDD, DPH, Department of Education (DOE), and the

Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA). Monthly meetings are held with providers including the Multi-Agency Alliance for Children (MAAC) and members of Together Georgia, as well as locally based providers from around the state. Comments and ideas resulting from these convenings are included in the APSR and incorporated into strategic planning for the state's child welfare system. DFCS attends and presents at CIP meetings to talk with judges about their concerns and provide clarification regarding agency policy and practice. CIP has provided feedback on direct case involvement bringing both concerns and successes to the agency along with recommendations. DBHDD, DOE, and DPH have provided feedback from direct involvement with agency staff and families that are served. This feedback is used to support staff in the counties and address challenges collaboratively.

CAPTA Citizen Review Panels

In 2023, the state's CAPTA panels transitioned from existing state entities (the CPS Advisory Committee, CJA Task Force, and Child Fatality Review Panel) to a regionally based model, expanding participation to more areas of the state and a variety of stakeholders. Georgia's regional panels are currently established in the three DFCS administrative districts - North, Metro, and South. Each of Georgia's district panels has 10-14 active volunteer members who live and/or work within their panel's district. Members represent various professional disciplines, including mental/behavioral health, secondary and post-secondary education, military, social work, family violence prevention, legal/judicial, forensic assessment, and youth advocacy. The fourth panel is comprised of youth and young adults from across the state with lived child welfare experience. The first all-panel retreat was held in August 2024 to share performance and outcome data, and to introduce community partners and stakeholders. At the retreat, the panels decided on areas of inquiry and meeting schedules. During FY25, the panels received data and presentations from DHS/DFCS program leaders and subject matter experts. The spring all-panel meeting was held in April 2025, where the panels shared progress and updates on their inquiries and made recommendations for improving the state's child welfare system. Panel recommendations are included throughout the CFSR PIP, CFSP, and APSR, including strategies to improve workforce retention and increase relative/kin placements for children in foster care.

Technology Modernization

As part of the agency's technology modernization effort and in response to requests from foster parents and CASAs, the Division launched CommuniCare statewide in January 2024. CommuniCare is a set of interconnected web portals specifically designed to support and enhance child welfare programs. It serves three primary user groups – Court Appointed

Special Advocates (CASAs), foster parents, and parents – and seamlessly integrates with Georgia SHINES to ensure efficient and secure data management and communication. CommuniCare features include chat capabilities, multi-channel notifications, mobile friendly access, secure data management, child data and case documentation access, document upload and sharing, calendar sharing, and appointment creation. There were 3,076 unique CommuniCare users in CY2024. The Division contracted with the University of Georgia in FY2024 to evaluate the portal utilization and make recommendations to increase awareness among staff and other users.

Child Fatality Review

The mission of the Georgia Child Fatality Review Panel is to provide the highest quality of child fatality data, training, technical assistance, investigative support services, and resources to any entity dedicated to the well-being and safety of children to prevent and reduce child abuse and injury fatalities in the state. This mission is accomplished by promoting accurate identification and reporting of child fatalities, evaluating the prevalence and circumstances of both child maltreatment and child fatalities and developing and monitoring the Statewide Child Injury Prevention Plan. The state Child Fatality Review Panel, each county-level multidisciplinary review committee, their functions and membership requirements are established in O.C.G.A. § 19-15-1 through -6. The DHS/DFCS Commissioner is an ex officio member of the state CFR Panel and the DFCS County Director or their designee is a member of each county CFR committee. Recommendations for prevention are developed by the CFR committees and shared with the state CFR Panel, judicial circuits, and the State Legislature.

Court Improvement Program

The Division has monthly leadership calls with the Court Improvement Program to review concerns, share data, and collaborate on solutions to improve permanency outcomes. CIP has provided feedback on direct case involvement, bringing both concerns and successes to the agency along with recommendations. DFCS staff also participate in the Justice for Children committee of the Georgia Supreme Court, regularly sharing CFSR performance data and trends with the judges, attorneys, and legislators in attendance. CIP supported the training and preparedness of court partners by offering a Child Welfare Law Specialist (CWLS) annual retreat in March 2024 in conjunction with the University of Georgia Child Endangerment and Sexual Exploitation (CEASE) Conference. Georgia now has 87 CWLS, including 13 judges. CIP also co-hosted the Child Welfare Summit in December 2024 with over 500 attendees. Summit co-hosts included the Office of the Child Advocate, Georgia

CASA, and the CEASE Clinic at the University of Georgia School of Law. The Summit offered 12 CLE hours including 3 Trial Hours, 1 Ethics Hour, and 1 Professionalism Hour.

Georgia Tribes

While Georgia has no federally recognized tribes, Georgia makes efforts to comply with the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) for children in Georgia who are subject to ICWA. This occurs through direct communication with tribal representatives by individual counties after identification and notification has occurred regarding a specific child. Additionally, Georgia's efforts to comply with ICWA includes having a dedicated ICWA/Tribe Liaison (housed in the Policy and Regulations Unit), annual training, data reporting, and evaluation of service provisions.

DFCS continues to collaborate with the Georgia Tribes. The ICWA Liaison continues to partner with the Georgia Tribes, led by Marian McCormick (Lower Muscogee Creek), Frances Crews (Cherokee of Georgia Tribal Council), and Rhonda Bennet and Glen Jones (Georgia Tribe of Eastern Cherokee). This includes participating regularly in meetings of the Georgia Council of American Indian Concerns. The meetings allow discussion of child welfare policies or practices that may involve their tribal members and families. The CFSP and APSR are shared with Georgia Tribes.

Item 32: Coordinating Services and Benefits

The Division regularly coordinates with other federally funded agencies and organizations serving the same populations of children and families.

Housing

The Foster Youth to Independence (FYI) Voucher Program is an innovative initiative aimed at fostering independence for youth aging out of foster care. The FYI Voucher Program is a part of a broader, systemic effort to support youth in their transition from the foster care system to adulthood, ensuring they have access to the financial resources necessary for housing, education, and employment. The Family Unification Program (FUP) Voucher Program supports families involved in the child welfare system, where a lack of stable housing is a primary factor in the separation of children from their family. The program provides housing assistance to help stabilize families, prevent homelessness, and facilitate reunification. The DFCS Well-Being team estimates 476 FUP vouchers supported families over the past several years (data are managed by the individual housing authority). FUP vouchers are currently used at maximum capacity.

Each housing jurisdiction is eligible for 25 FYI vouchers per fiscal year, and the voucher can only be used in the jurisdiction served by the housing authority. Staff are expected to consult with the Youth Support Services team via email for the requirements of each housing authority. Each housing authority may have a different protocol for submission. If the youth is still in foster care at the time of the application, the case manager must verify that their exit date is within the next 90 days and accurately documented in their transition plan in Georgia SHINES. Youth vouchers are available for up to 36 months. The DFCS Youth Support Services will establish and identify a system of prioritization, to ensure eligible youth are referred based on their level of need. The DFCS Well-Being team reports 33 FYI vouchers supported youth in CY2024 and estimates capacity to serve 85 youth in CY2025.

The GPAC/Youth CAPTA Panel developed recommendations for the child welfare agency, the Legislature, and other stakeholders to improve access to housing for youth who are exiting foster care, and to increase supports and resources to ensure youth can be successful with living independently. Additional details can be found in the CAPTA Citizen Review Panel Annual Report.

The Division has a partnership with Project Community Connections, Inc., a non-profit that provides housing assessments, counseling, and advocacy for families in metro Atlanta. For every family placed into housing, PCCI also provides case management and follow-up services. The PCCI/Rapid Re-Housing program is only available to families with an open family preservation and/or foster care case with Fulton County DFCS. Families must be homeless or at risk of eviction. The Housing and Urban Development's definition of homelessness/at risk is utilized to define homelessness for this initiative. In FY2025, the program received 89 referrals, accepted 50 referrals, and 18 families have successfully completed the program. The PCCI contract was extended in October 2024 and will conclude in September 2025.

Education

The Early Childhood Collaboration Unit (ECCU) was created to provide comprehensive monitoring, consultation, support, and advocacy for children in care, ages birth – 5 years old, who qualify for early childhood educational programming and/or childcare (Head Start, Child and Parent Services (CAPS), and Georgia Pre-K). Quarterly training is provided for DFCS staff, foster caregivers, and placement providers to provide information on the resources available from the Early Childhood Collaboration Unit (ECCU). With an emphasis on building and fostering relationships that support educational stability at an early age, the

ECCU works collaboratively with partners to ensure the educational needs of this population are met. Partners include the county DFCS offices, other state agencies, and external stakeholders, such as the [Georgia Head Start State Collaboration Office](#), whose mission is to foster partnerships between federally funded Head Start programs and other entities in the state that serve low-income children (birth to school entry) and their families.

Georgia has 32 agencies that offer Head Start and Early Head Start services through a variety of models based on the needs of the local community. These models may include center-based care, home visiting, childcare partnership locations, and family childcare homes. These services are provided to over 28,000 low-income preschool children birth through five-years-old and their families. Georgia SHINES data for early childhood education enrollments are tracked monthly. Data show that at least 80% of children aged 0-5 in foster care are enrolled in an early education setting. Nearly all of these children are enrolled in a Quality Rated Childcare Center, and 3-5% are enrolled in Pre-Kindergarten. Less than 2% of young children in foster care are enrolled in Head Start or Early Start.

Referrals Submitted to the Early Childhood Collaboration Unit (CY 2024)

As of CY 2024, DFCS staff are no longer required to route Head Start referrals through the Early Childhood Collaboration Unit and are now encouraged to connect directly with local programs to facilitate more immediate communication and timely enrollment. This shift has strengthened coordination, improved responsiveness, and increased enrollment by fostering stronger working relationships between DFCS case managers and Head Start staff. The Early Childhood Collaboration Unit continues to track and monitor referral data in GA SHINES and in partnership with the State Head Start Collaboration Office, Georgia Head Start Association, and Head Start grantees statewide, remains a key resource for training, technical assistance, and consultation. The Unit will remain the agency's primary point of contact for all early childhood and childcare services.

Key Highlights and Outcomes

- DFCS Social Services Case Managers worked directly with the Head Start Grantee's family services staff to enroll children into Head Start programs.
- DFCS Early Childhood Coordinators provided targeted training and technical assistance to DFCS staff and Head Start Grantees statewide.
- Approximately 200 families were connected to a Head Start Grantee during the reporting period. A significant increase from the 20 families reported during CY 2022–CY 2023.

Health

The Medicaid and PeachCare for Kids programs provide a safety net for people who may not otherwise have access to health care. In SFY2023 (the most recent available data), the average monthly number of children who received Medicaid was 1,371,040, and the average monthly number of children who received PeachCare for Kids was 208,066.

The Department of Public Health (DPH) is a partner to provide screening and support to birth mothers and families with substance use issues, and to provide health assessments for infants and young children through Children First, the single point of entry for all DPH Child Health programs and services for children from birth to five years old. Children First links eligible children to early intervention services, as well as other public health programs and community-based resources.

The Division collaborated with the Department of Public Health and other stakeholders for priority setting and strategic planning of the title V Maternal and Child Health Block Grant. DPH requested multiple partners across the state to convene in March 2025 to provide input and help determine DPH's priority needs for the next five years and the strategies to address those needs.

Financial Independence

The Division utilizes [Georgia Gateway](#) as a streamlined, one-stop-shop resource for individuals in the community to apply for, check, or renew benefits, as well as report household or income changes and upload required documents. Georgia Gateway served as a critical tool throughout the Covid pandemic to ensure users were able to remotely request medical assistance, childcare benefits, SNAP, or TANF, and explore eligibility for other cash and food assistance programs. Participating agencies on the Gateway platform include DFCS, Department of Community Health, Department of Early Care and Learning, and Department of Public Health. Gateway continues to be updated for a more user-friendly experience and to provide additional resources.

According to the SFY2023 annual report, an average of 1,530,412 individuals received Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits each month, and 871,271 children benefited from the SNAP program. Also during SFY2023, an average of 12,404 children were supported by Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF)

Child Support

The Division of Child Support Services (DCSS) within the Department of Human Services serves as a resource for DFCS case managers and communities to support non-custodial parents in caring for their children. The DCSS Fatherhood Program is well-regarded within the counties and holds monthly “fatherhood conversations” to provide individualized support and resources to interested parents, including emotional wellness training and accountability coaching. In the SFY2023 annual report, the Fatherhood Program enrolled 4,414 parents, referred 927 noncustodial parents to GED programs, increased support for 9,026 children, and collected \$5,536,704 from participants. During SFY2023, DCSS received a five-year Safe Access for Victims’ Economic Security (SAVES) grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Child Support Services (OCSS). SAVES is a new national demonstration model designed to develop, evaluate, and implement best practices to provide safe access to child support and parenting time services. As a SAVES grantee, Georgia DCSS becomes one of 13 state child support programs to execute comprehensive domestic violence services to survivors who need assistance accessing child support.

Safety Net Services

DFCS is leading State agency collaboration to meet critical mental/behavioral health needs through leveraging Unite Us solutions with a growing list of state agencies, including DBHDD, Georgia Department of Veteran Services, and Technical College System of Georgia. Additional information on safety net services is located in [Section D: Update to the Plan for Enacting the State’s Vision](#).

Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention (Items 33-36)

Item 33: Application of State Standards

DFCS continues to be successful in ensuring that state standards and child welfare policies are applied consistently to all approved foster homes statewide, for both CPA foster homes and DFCS foster homes. Resource Developers (RDs) complete comprehensive written evaluations of the overall quality and functioning of each approved caregiver on an annual basis that includes a recommendation for reapproval or disapproval. RDs also review the

initial and re-evaluations completed by the Room, Board, Watchful Oversight (RBWO) private providers. In reviewing the initial and re-evaluations, RDs confirm that the foster parent received the required training, medical, number of home visits and safety screenings completed timely. A home cannot be approved without pre-service training or a medical and safety screening.

GA+SCORECARDS are issued for Child Caring Institutions (CCIs), Child Placing Agencies (CPAs), and Independent Living/Transitional Living Programs (ILP/TLP) on a quarterly basis. The GA+SCORECARD summarizes a provider's quarterly performance. Data for the GA+SCORECARD is drawn from three sources: reviews conducted by OPM, self-reported data reported by RBWO providers to GA+SCORE and/or GA SHINES, and DFCS data gathered from GA SHINES. This document indicates the source of data for each measurement.

Providers are required to meet performance standards in several measures that fall under the categories of Safety, Permanency and Well-Being. Providers will receive an overall score and corresponding grade as well as a complete scorecard that details performance in each of the required measurements. Each GA+SCORECARD includes:

1. The most recent Comprehensive (Annual or Biennial) Review score, the averages for all Safety Reviews conducted in the most recent four quarters, and a subtotal for OPM Monitoring
2. Quarterly scores for each measure and a quarterly subtotal for the measures
3. Quarterly scores for each Incentive Credit and a quarterly subtotal for the credits (capped at 10 points); note that providers are not eligible for incentive credits if their most recent Comprehensive score is below 70
4. Any penalty debit imposed because of non-verifiable self-reporting in a previous quarter
5. A total quarterly score that is the sum of #1, #2, and #3, minus any penalty debit imposed in #4

Scores and sub-scores are calculated by multiplying the provider's measurement performance (as a decimal) by the weight of the measure.

Any score below 70% is a failing grade and will require a Program Improvement Plan (PIP). A PIP is required whenever a provider fails to achieve at least a score of 70% in any of the overall review categories which are Safety, Permanency and Well-Being, and/or if scores within those categories are below the 70% threshold.

In SFY24, 31 providers (out of 264) received a failing score. Half of the failing scores were noted with ILP providers:

Failing CCI	6
Failing CPA	7
Failing ILP	16
Failing TLP	2

Most of the failing scores are related to providers failing to provide self-reported data correctly, providers failing to provide self-reported data by the reporting deadline, providers failing to maintain documentation to support the work they have completed, or providers failing to complete the work associated with the self-reported data. A lot of these issues are related to staff changes (either due to staff shortages or new staff coming aboard that have not been properly trained by the provider).

On average, most providers make the needed improvements in their score cards within one month. OPM offers Technical Assistance to providers, as needed, to ensure that they are aware of the reporting guidelines. OPM also provides instructional videos and other written materials for providers to use as a guide to reporting requirements. This has proven to be helpful to new provider staff.

The Monitoring Specialists with OPM conducts Safety Checks twice each year of all providers. Safety Checks review all RBWO staff and CPA caregivers for five required safety check items:

1. Criminal Background Check
2. Pardons/parole history
3. Sex offender history
4. CPS history
5. Department of Corrections

In CY2024, OPM staff completed 100% of the required Safety Checks. Each Safety Check review looks at all five required safety check items and a Corrective Action Plan (CAP) is requested if there are any safety checks out of compliance. CAPs were requested due to non-compliance with at least one of the safety check items. OPM does not collect data to show which safety checks were non-compliant for each Safety Check Review.

Item 34: Criminal Background Clearances

DFCS continues to be successful in ensuring that the State complies with Federal requirements related to approving foster care and adoptive placements.

DFCS Child Welfare Policy and RBWO Minimum Standards uniformly outline the requirements for criminal background checks. Staff must conduct a check of the Georgia crime information databases on adult household members as needed when providing Child Protective Services (CPS), including when assessing Safety Resources and Temporary Alternatives to Foster Care, as well as a check of national and state crime information databases utilizing electronic fingerprinting (Live Scan) on any prospective foster and adoptive parent before the applicant may be finally approved for placement of a child, regardless of whether foster care maintenance payments or adoption assistance payments are to be made on behalf of the child. This includes all adults (age 18 and over) residing in the home (permanently or temporarily) who have access to children placed in the home. The Office of the Inspector General (OIG) within the Department of Human Services is responsible for reviewing criminal background information and providing clearances on CPA families, CCI direct care staff, and CPA/CCI case support workers. OIG also provides criminal background checks for DFCS foster family homes determination if they may be approved to provide foster care.

CPA providers are required to update the criminal background check during the annual re-evaluation period. In the instance that a re-evaluation is not completed timely and the home goes into unapproved status in SHINES, the CPA is required to have the criminal background check completed on the caregiver and submitted to OPM so that the home can be placed back into approval status. OPM has developed a process by which CPA providers will be sent alerts at multiple time intervals when there is a criminal background check coming due. This is in place to aid CPA providers in tracking upcoming criminal background checks that are due to be repeated.

Item 35: Diligent Recruitment

Data on the demographics of children in care can be found at dhs.georgia.gov/division-family-children-services-child-welfare.

The below table shows the demographics of children in care on December 31, 2024. The Division’s Office of Provider Management (OPM) shares data with CPA providers on the current placement needs for children in care and reminds providers of the importance of recruiting homes to support these needs.

CY 2024	CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE
Male	5270

Female	5007
Age 0-6	4441
Age 7-12	2955
Age 13-17	2881
Black/African-American	4778
White	4590
Native American or Native Alaskan	1
Asian	13
Multiracial	884
Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	11
Undetermined	0
Hispanic or Latino * <i>includes same children as race data</i>	742

Source: DFCS Data Unit, Georgia SHINES

OPM also posts the current placement needs on the GA+SCORE website. Interested providers are directed to the site when they have interest in obtaining a contract with the Division as a placement resource. This is an ongoing effort. OPM expanded the state needs list to include placements for youth with developmental delays and Autism. In 2024, OPM facilitated eleven monthly meetings with CPA providers. In 2024, one new CSEC placement provider was contracted with the division. OPM maintains contracts with two CPA providers to develop foster homes specifically for sibling groups.

Item 36: Cross Jurisdictional Resources

The Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC) regulates the placement of all child welfare-involved and domestic private adoption placements of all children across state lines. ICPC applies to foster care, kinship care, parental care, residential care, and adoption (private and public).

The Division’s ICPC Unit works with all 50 states, District of Columbia, and the Virgin Islands, to facilitate timely placements for children. Cases are monitored weekly by ICPC staff to ensure timeliness. ICPC staff maintain a database of all cases and send monthly updates to regional CRRU staff that identify any home study requests that are approaching the 60-day overdue mark. CRRU teams are required to respond to ICPC with the requested progress updates on the overdue cases within five days of receiving the information. In many regions, CRRU staff have developed a Standard Operating Procedure manual to define the processes

and timelines required to complete interjurisdictional home studies within the prescribed time frames. Regions with active SOPs in place and dedicated staff can adhere to the required timelines. ICPC also sends monthly updates to other states when overdue home studies are identified; however, responses are not always received within the requested five-day period.

In CY2024, the Georgia Legislature passed SB 483, to codify the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children.

ICPC Foster and Adoptive Home Study Requests

		CY2023	CY2024
Georgia as Sending State	Number of ICPC home study requests sent to other states	316 -112 Adoption -204 Foster	297 - 136 Adoption -161 foster
	Number of ICPC placements	- 74 for Adoption -130 for Foster	- 89 Adoption - 116 Foster
	Timely home study completed by other states	102/316 (32%)	103/297 (35%)
Georgia as Receiving State	Number of ICPC home study requests received from other states	607 -184 for Adoption -423 for Foster	609 -167 Adoption -442 Foster
	Timely home study requests completed for other states	197/607 (32%)	193/609 (32%)
	Number of ICPC placements	-128 for Adoption - 294 for Foster	-112 Adoptions -296 Foster

Source: National Electronic Interstate Compact Enterprise (NEICE)

Section D: Update to the Plan for Enacting the State’s Vision and Progress Made to Improve Outcomes

Georgia submitted its 2025-2029 Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP) in June 2024. The CFSP included several goals and strategies that reflected the state’s vision for improving the child welfare system and were aligned with the CFSR Program Improvement Plan (PIP).

Goal 1 – Build Workforce and Staff Competencies

The state’s goal is to create a competent, satisfied, effective, and ever-developing workforce. The Georgia Department of Administrative Services (DOAS) research on employee engagement levers shows that personnel pressure points include skilled labor shortages, shifts in economic activity, career reshuffling, and rising wages in recent years still evident in today’s job market. [DOAS’ FY25 Plan](#) encourages state agencies to continue revamping their workforce composition with retiring Baby Boomer generation and additional job entry of Generation Z. The Division continues to explore opportunities to recruit and retain top talent, and to build staff competencies.

Objective 1.1: Increase number of new DFCS case managers hired annually	The DHS Office of Human Resources (OHR) reported hiring 637 case managers (Social Service Specialist 1, 2, or 3) in CY2024.
Performance Improvement Targets	OHR recognizes that competition for talent exists (e.g., Amazon, Target, Walmart, Chik Fil-A) and is recruiting regularly. OHR held 32 career fairs in the fall of 2024 and 14 in spring 2025 at Georgia colleges and universities, technical colleges, military services, and through community outreach.
Baseline CY2023: 883	The Division is partnering with the Department of Administrative Services (DOAS) to reduce barriers to state government employment. Senate Bill 3
CY2024: 900	(2023) modifies the minimum job requirements for jobs that require college
CY2025: 925	degrees in order to include more experience-based requirements. The state
CY2026: 925	can develop strategies to better leverage experience and skills-based hiring
CY2027: 950	opportunities and tap into non-traditional talent pools.
CY2028: 950	
<i>Source: DHS Office of Human Resources</i>	

<p>Objective 1.2: Decrease number of DFCS case managers leaving the agency annually</p>	<p>OHR reported 615 case managers left DFCS employment in CY2024.</p>
<p>Performance Improvement Targets</p>	<p>The “Great Resignation” period following the COVID-19 pandemic affected all employment sectors in all states. OHR is evaluating turnover data to better understand current trends in employment and identify patterns in attrition decisions. The Division is also partnering with DOAS to examine manager-supervisor development and support that could improve critical soft skills and create a better management experience for employees. This work is ongoing.</p>
<p>Baseline CY2023: 623</p>	
<p>CY2024: 600</p>	
<p>CY2025: 575</p>	
<p>CY2026: 550</p>	
<p>CY2027: 525</p>	
<p>CY2028: 500</p>	<p><i>Source: DHS Office of Human Resources</i></p>

<p>Objective 1.3: Increase the percentage of DFCS case managers with at least 12 consecutive months of employment</p>	<p>OHR data show that 49% of active case managers (787 out of 1,601) had at least 12 months of consecutive service as of December 2024.</p> <p>To calculate this measure, OHR selected all case manager positions (SSS 1, 2, and 3) that were active as of 12/21/2024, and then determined if they had 12 consecutive months of employment.</p>
<p>Performance Improvement Targets</p>	<p>OHR is reviewing entry level salaries for case managers and supervisors. In FY2025, the Division provided a cost-of-living adjustment of 4% to all staff and increased the base salary for case managers and supervisors by \$3,000. The Division’s career pathway allows case managers who complete all required trainings and have a positive performance review during their first two years of employment to be promoted into the next tier. Staff were offered two opportunities in CY2024 to convert 40 hours of accrued annual leave into a cash payout</p>
<p>Baseline 2023: 56% (701/1,254)</p>	
<p>CY2024: 76%</p>	
<p>CY2025: 77%</p>	
<p>CY2026: 78%</p>	
<p>CY2027: 79%</p>	
<p>CY2028: 80%</p>	<p><i>Source: DHS Office of Human Resources</i></p>

<p>Objective 1.4: Increase the percentage of case managers/supervisors reporting “feeling prepared for the work” after completing New Worker Training by 2.5% annually</p>	<p>The Quality Assurance Unit interviewed 494 stakeholders during the case review process in CY2024, including 348 DFCS staff.</p>
<p>Performance Improvement Targets</p>	<p>Data from the CY2024 respondents:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. (Case Managers) Rate the effectiveness of initial training received and preparedness for your job responsibilities Excellent/Good – 54% Fair/Poor – 46% 2. (Case Managers) Rate the effectiveness of ongoing training for your continued job responsibilities Excellent/Good – 68% Fair/Poor – 32% 3. (Supervisors) Rate the effectiveness of initial training provided to new case managers Excellent/Good – 50% Fair/Poor – 50% 4. (Supervisors) Rate the effectiveness of ongoing training for case managers Excellent/Good – 57% Fair/Poor – 43%
<p>Baseline CY2023: 70%*</p>	
<p>CY2024: 72.5%</p>	
<p>CY2025: 75%</p>	
<p>CY2026: 77.5%</p>	
<p>CY2027: 80%</p>	
<p>CY2028: 82.5%</p>	
	<p>The Training and Professional Development Unit requests feedback from new case managers on their training experiences. Over 60% of respondents reported that the new worker training prepared them for their job duties. The FFY24 response rate is less than 20% of new workers; the TPD Unit is coordinating with district and regional leadership to increase responses and obtain data that reflects a larger proportion of new staff.</p> <p>Data from the FFY24 respondents (n=87):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Were you provided with an overview of the requirements and expectations of the new worker training sequence for Social Services Specialist? YES - 83/87 (95%) 2. Were you assigned a Field Practice Coach? YES - 39/87 (45%) 3. Did the training on Georgia SHINES prepare you to perform required data entry functions? YES - 46/87 (53%) 4. The Training was realistic to the reality of the work? Either Strongly Agree/Agree - 53/84 (63%) Either Disagree/Strongly Disagree - 28/84 (33%) 5. The training provided sufficient practice opportunities in the curriculum. Strongly Agree/Agree - 57/84 (68%) Disagree/Strongly Disagree - 28/84 (32%) 6. Did the new worker training prepare you with the knowledge and skills needed to perform your job duties? YES - 53/83 (64%)

	<p>NO -30/83 (36%)</p> <p>7. Please share the job duties or responsibilities that were not adequately covered in the new worker training sequence.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Self-Care ○ SHINES ○ Kinship Placements ○ Payment of Care ○ Adoptions Tasks ○ More Foster Care Focus ○ More Shadowing ○ Case Planning <p>The Training and Professional Development Unit established a volunteer Field Practice Coach (FPC) position to support new case managers. Feedback from case managers who have a FPC mentor report being better prepared for their role and have greater understanding of the required child welfare policies and procedures.</p> <p>As of January 2025, there are 164 active FPCs. Out of the 14 DFCS regions, 13 regions have at least two FPCs, and seven regions have at least 10 FPCs. Case managers who volunteer as a FPC are limited to two new mentees, as they are also managing their own caseload. In August 2024, the Division approved a reimbursement increase so that a FPC can receive a \$500 stipend for each mentee. Prior to this increase, FPCs received \$500 for the first CM mentee and \$250 for the second. The Division is marketing this opportunity regularly to county staff and leadership. This work is ongoing.</p> <p><i>Source: DFCS Quality Assurance Unit and Training and Professional Development Unit</i></p>
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Implementation and Program Supports

- HB 1010 (2024) increased the number of hours of paid parental leave for state employees and employees of local education agencies from 120 to 240 hours. Leave can be used for the birth of a child or the foster and adoption placement of a child.
- The Employees’ Retirement System of Georgia (ERS) provides retirement benefits to state employees. The Georgia State Employees’ Pension and Savings Plan is a hybrid pension and 401(k) retirement plan established for state employees who began working for the state on or after January 1, 2009. To incentivize employee retention, HB 911 (2023) increased the 401(k) employer match up to 9% for employees with 13 years or more of service.

Goal 2 – Increase Front-End Supports for Families

Georgia is working to identify specific prevention and early intervention strategies that will prevent child maltreatment and reduce the need for foster care entries. Recommendations for front-end supports were provided by staff and stakeholders, including the youth advisory board (Georgia Peers Advocating for Change), the Parent Advisory Council, and the CAPTA citizen review panels.

<p>Objective 2.1: Partner with Unite Us to develop a proactive outreach and referral system for families to access needed supports.</p>	<p>By the end of 2024, all 58 pilot counties launched on Unite Us, activating a multi-pronged, preventative strategy to support Georgia’s families. This includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishing multiple new pathways for families, DFCS staff and CHINS courts to easily access Unite Us’ care coordination team, including an online self-referral, 400+ licenses to best-in-class referral technology, and an online Public Resource Directory, ensuring services are available to Georgian families. • Providing care coordination to Georgians referred to DFCS that are not eligible for DFCS services, ensuring their social needs are met and preventing future DFCS referrals. • Building and maintaining a robust and engaged Network of community partners to respond to and close the loop on the needs of Georgian families. • Providing real-time data dashboards tracking needs, outcomes, demographics, and more. <p>Within the first two months of launch, DFCS has helped 1,095 Georgians address social needs, projecting to serve over 6,500 Georgians in the first year of service. Statewide, 635 Georgians accessed the Public Resource Directory completing 1,159 resource searches.</p>
<p>Performance Improvement Target</p>	
<p>100 families served monthly</p>	
<p><i>Source: DHS Office of Information Technology</i></p>	

<p>Objective 2.2: Leverage the State of Hope initiative to address basic safety net services including education, trauma awareness, quality care</p>	<p>In CY2024, the Division received 177 applications for State of Hope grant support and awarded 34 applicants for funding.</p> <p>The total requested funding from the 177 applicants was \$7,360,249. Funding of \$510,000 was approved for the 34 awarded programs. Of the 34 approved applicants, 18 were first-time recipients of the SoH award, with five being new/start-up programs. While funding may be limited, Hope is not.</p> <p>Awarded applicants include food banks offering food staples that are culturally appropriate for the community’s food-insecure families, autism awareness training for first responders, peer recovery support services, kinship caregiver support programs, a fatherhood support project, mentors</p>
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giving, and economic self-sufficiency for vulnerable youth and families with a human-centered approach.	for justice-involved teens, parenting support for incarcerated mothers and their infants, a youth mental health wellness program through sports, and an early childhood play program for children with disabilities and their families.
	Funding support is provided by the state’s CAPTA and PSSF grants. Applicants that do not receive SoH funding are eligible to participate in the SoH ecosystem that provides access to resources and workshops
Performance Improvement Target	
25 organizations funded annually	

Source: DHS Office of External Partnerships

Objective 2.3:	During FY2024, 165 children were referred to the Health Connect America (HCA) program, and 104 children in 27 families were served. Successful discharge (i.e., meeting goals) was reported for 12 families; unsuccessful discharge was reported for 15 families, due to children being removed within 30 days of intake or families needing a higher level of care. The program noted that 18 families (with 45 children) were not served due to lack of appropriate diagnosis or refusing services.														
Monitor performance of Community Action Treatment (CAT) teams to determine success at preventing entry into foster care for youth with complex needs.	From Sept 2023 - April 2024 (most recent data available), 44 children and their families were served by the local CAT team. The program noted that caregivers of five youth were not served due to lack of appropriate diagnosis or refusing services. The program reported the following utilization data during the 8-month period:														
	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Service Type</th> <th>Number of Hours</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Assessment</td> <td>96.60</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Individual Therapy</td> <td>106.38</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Family Therapy</td> <td>106.45</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Case Management</td> <td>216.80</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Individual Skill Building</td> <td>56.35</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Family Skill Building</td> <td>15.5</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Service Type	Number of Hours	Assessment	96.60	Individual Therapy	106.38	Family Therapy	106.45	Case Management	216.80	Individual Skill Building	56.35	Family Skill Building	15.5
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Performance Improvement Targets															
60 individuals annually	The programs noted several strengths and needs for continued success. The CAT team would like to build resource libraries within each count to assist the families in obtaining assistance programs, and to expand the services to include children over the age of three. The CAT team also noted difficulties in coordinating schedules for all parties to participate. Satisfaction surveys are														

	being planned for families and stakeholders to identify areas of success, challenges, and improvements.
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Source: DFCS Care Coordination Treatment Unit

<p>Objective 2.4:</p> <p>Monitor performance of the Family First evidence-based programs to determine success at preventing entry into foster care for youth with complex needs.</p>	<p>Phase 1 of Family First implementation officially launched on November 1, 2023. Grace Harbour provides Multisystemic Therapy services to youth in Chatham and Richmond Counties. Family Ties provides Function Family Therapy services to youth in DeKalb and Cherokee counties.</p> <p>Of the families who are receiving services or have successfully completed, there are no reports of those youth entering care.</p> <p>Referral Totals—Since Family First launched services, a combined total of 79 referrals have been received. 35 were referred for MST services (Richmond County—20 youth; Chatham County—15 youth) and 44 were referred for FFT services (Cherokee County—23 youth; DeKalb—21 youth).</p>
<p>Performance Improvement Target</p>	<p>Successful Completions—Of the total number of youth referred for MST/FFT services (79), a total of 26 youth have successfully completed MST/FFT services. Of those 26 youth, 14 youth successfully completed FFT services (Cherokee—13 youth; DeKalb—1 youth) and 12 youth successfully completed MST services (Richmond—7 youth; Chatham—5 youth).</p>
<p>50 youth served in each program site annually.</p> <p>2025 update: <i>DHS/DFCS staff are coordinating with the Family First program providers to establish appropriate service goals for each individual program site, as referrals may be lower in some counties/regions. This benchmark may be updated in the 2026 APSR submission as more information is obtained.</i></p>	<p>Discharged—Of the total number of youth referred (79), 16 youth were discharged after services started and as a result did not successfully complete services. Of those 16 youth who were discharged prior to successfully completing, 8 were discharged from FFT services (Cherokee—4 youth; DeKalb—4 youth) and 8 were discharged from MST services (Richmond—5 youth; Chatham—3 youth).</p> <p>Reasons youth were discharged from services include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lack of engagement from the youth/family • youth entered a mental health or child welfare placement • youth entered a CSEC placement due to prior incident • family expressed desire to discontinue services • youth/family moved out of service area • youth experienced suicidal ideations • DFCS closed (or did not open) Family Preservation case <p>Active Referrals—Currently, 23 youth are classified as active. This means that they are either actively receiving MST/FFT services or they have been referred and are currently being assessed for service delivery. Of those 23 active youth, 15 are active in FFT services (Cherokee County-1 youth; DeKalb—14 youth) and 7 are active in MST services (Richmond County—2 youth; Chatham County—5 youth).</p>

	<p>The Phase 2 plan is to implement Healthy Families America and Parents as teachers to families of younger children ages 0-5 in Clarke, Oconee, and Dougherty counties. HFA will be provided in Clarke and Oconee while PAT will be provided in Dougherty. DHS anticipates that the HFA and PAT programs will serve at least 15 families per county during FY2026.</p> <p>The Division is adding the Intercept program as a Family First service and will continue to serve all counties in regions 13 and 14. FFT is also expanding to Pickens and Fulton counties. DHS anticipates that the Intercept, FFT, and MST programs will serve at least 30 youth in each county during FY2026.</p> <p>This work is ongoing.</p>
<p><i>Source: DHS Office of External Partnerships</i></p>	

Implementation and Program Supports

- **Community Action Teams** – Building networks of community professionals to strengthen families without removal to foster care.
- **Intercept** – A program through Youth Villages that was added to the state’s Family First Title IV-E Prevention Services as a well-supported in-home parenting program.
- The [Prevention and Community Support Section](#) leads the Community Based Child Abuse Prevention (CBCAP) work for Georgia. PCS has been the overseeing body for the CBCAP grant since 2014. PCS works in partnership with community-based public and nonprofit organizations committed to improving child and family wellbeing by supporting primary and secondary prevention programs, services, and systems through funding or staff leadership. Most of the grant-funded programs are in three-year cohort cycles allowing time for awardees to develop a sustainability plan. PCS issues annual contract awards, researches and tracks current trends in child abuse and neglect prevention and family support and strengthening, raises awareness for children's issues, and enlists expert guidance, feedback, and evaluation to help community programs thrive. PCS's presence on the local, state, and national levels brings much needed attention and resources to communities to improve outcomes for children and their families. The goal of PCS’s approach is to engage communities in planning, implementing, and evaluating a continuum of prevention services. Engaging communities in this way encourages self-sufficiency after the grant funding is removed.
- The [Promoting Safe and Stable Families \(PSSF\)](#) program provides a multitude of primary prevention services within the community. The PSSF team begins with an annual statewide needs assessment to identify family and community service needs. The needs assessment includes: consultation with Division leadership, unit, and program managers; an online survey for regional and county directors,

administrators, supervisors, and case managers; and input from service providers and community stakeholders representing all PSSF program areas and service models. The annual Statement of Need (SoN) incorporates feedback from all sources in response to changing family needs, community resources, and state and federal priorities. In FFY2024, PSSF in Georgia supported 148 programs and 106 agencies. Over 10,000 families were served with 17,471 dependents.

Goal 3 – Improve Information Sharing and Data Tools

Georgia is working to modernize its technology systems for child welfare, health care, and education to improve efficiencies and ensure staff can use their time serving children and families, not navigating cumbersome systems. The state is also modernizing its data-sharing tools to support cross-agency partnerships and improve access to information, including academic performance data and court hearing dates.

<p>Objective 3.1:</p> <p>Modularization of case record management system – Georgia SHINES</p>	<p>The Department of Human Services Office of Information Technology is currently working to modularize the Georgia SHINES system. The modularization project will streamline and simplify the case record management system, moving away from the inadequate modularization and high code complexity of the current system. The functionality of Georgia SHINES is currently tied to one complex monolithic application structure.</p>
<p>Performance Improvement Targets</p>	<p>The goal is to develop microservice application and scalability to all functions. The technology changes will not change the business areas, services, or interface, but will make the user experience simpler and lead to better synchronization with the program areas (i.e., Intake, Persons, Contacts, Attachments, Assessments). The case management application will also have offline capabilities through a user’s laptop and/or mobile device when a case manager is in the field or an area that does not have access to the internet. Daily tasks that can be completed offline will include uploading files and photos, completing case plans and assessments, and entering case data. The offline data will sync directly to the system when the user is online.</p>
<p>2024: Design and Development</p>	
<p>2025: Testing, Training, and Launch</p>	
<p>2026 - 2029: User Experience Feedback, Enhancements as Needed</p>	
	<p>Current / Planned Activities: The project started in August 2024 and is approximately 39% complete. Activities completed include project initiation (project planning, stakeholder governance, risk / issue governance),</p>

	<p>discovery (identify opportunities for improving existing interfaces and partner system, align with technology) and design for several key components. Activities in progress include discovery, Design (identify opportunities for improving user experience and existing interfaces with partner systems, align with technology), Develop and Test (build application, data migration, support comprehensive functional testing and security / performance testing).</p> <p>2025 activities will include continued development, testing, training, and launch efforts: Readiness and Deploy (train the trainer, early and frequent communication), mobile app development, and data migration. 2026-29 efforts will include user experience feedback enhancements as needed: Support (monitor and resolve issue), assess training effectiveness.</p> <p>Implementation Supports: Subject matter experts in SHINES, design architects and designers (Tech team), DHS project management office team, DHS business team, Elixir project team, Georgia Technology Authority (GTA), Comms, Training. Daily and weekly cadence with stakeholders to review and discuss progress.</p>
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Source: DHS Office of Information Technology

<p>Objective 3.2:</p> <p>Increase the percentage of children in foster care that graduate from high school (Well-Being Outcome 2)</p>	<p>Georgia’s Department of Education (DOE) reported a 45.9% graduation rate for youth in foster care for the 2023-2024 school year.</p> <p>EPAC provides direct consultation to foster parents and case managers regarding specific academic situations regarding youth in foster care. Education Support Monitors participate in school meetings to determine best practices to increase poor academic performance. Participation documentation is now in contact logs within Georgia SHINES. School meetings include: Trauma informed meetings (HB855), IEP meetings, school discipline meetings and tribunals.</p>
<p>Performance Improvement Targets</p> <p>Baseline 2023: 45.3%</p> <p>2024: 46%</p> <p>2025: 47%</p> <p>2026: 48%</p> <p>2027: 49%</p> <p>2028: 50%</p>	<p>EPAC reviews Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), averaging 80 per month, to ensure they are current and appropriately meeting the needs of the youth. EPAC data shows that 85% of reviewed IEPs are appropriate. If the incomplete or inappropriate accommodations are affecting the youth’s ability to learn or attend school, the Education Support Monitor will initiate a meeting with the case manager and/or school and schedule an IEP meeting to address the situation.</p> <p>EPAC established a contract in 2024 with Tutor.com so that all children and youth in foster care have access to individualized tutoring. Tutors can assist</p>

with homework, improve writing skills, help students study for tests, and review difficult concepts. Tutor.com also offers The Princeton Review SAT and ACT self-paced test preparation that includes at least 3 full-length SAT and ACT practice tests, personalized study plans based on test performance results, video lessons and practice drills.

Tutor.com is available on a mobile device through a mobile browser as well as have mobile apps for the Android and IOS devices. All features on the platform such as test prep and drop off review services should be accessible through the mobile device. This service will be monitored to determine how free access to tutoring is supporting youth.

Source: DFCS Education, Programming, Assessment and Consultation (EPAC) Unit, Georgia Department of Education

<p>Objective 3.3:</p> <p>Leverage Caregiver Data and Technology to improve parent engagement and caregiver connections</p>	<p>The QA Unit reports 49% strength rating on Permanency Outcome 2 (cases reviewed Feb-April 2025). Permanency Outcome 2 data can be found in Section C: Assessment of Current Performance</p>																						
<p>Performance Improvement Target</p>	<p>In CY2024, there were 3,076 unique users to CommuniCare. The system was still new in 2024; the Division expects the number of users to increase in the coming years.</p>																						
<p>Permanency Outcome 2 baseline in 2024: 38%</p>	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Role</th> <th>Unique User Count</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>CASA Administrator</td> <td>4</td> </tr> <tr> <td>CASA Staff</td> <td>218</td> </tr> <tr> <td>CASA Volunteer</td> <td>419</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Case Manager</td> <td>588</td> </tr> <tr> <td>DFCS Foster Parent</td> <td>1257</td> </tr> <tr> <td>DHS Administrator</td> <td>19</td> </tr> <tr> <td>DHS Staff</td> <td>123</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Parent</td> <td>247</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Supervisor</td> <td>201</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Total</td> <td>3076</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Role	Unique User Count	CASA Administrator	4	CASA Staff	218	CASA Volunteer	419	Case Manager	588	DFCS Foster Parent	1257	DHS Administrator	19	DHS Staff	123	Parent	247	Supervisor	201	Total	3076
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<p>2025: 40%</p>	<p>The Division partnered with the University of Georgia School of Social Work to evaluate the usage patterns and future needs of the CommuniCare platform. UGA developed a theory of change for CommuniCare to positively impact the desired outcome of “decreased time to permanency”.</p>																						
<p>2026: 42%</p>	<p>In CY2024, the Training and Professional Development Unit recorded 1,457 completed CommuniCare trainings on the LMS portal. Regional leaders continue to encourage staff to participate in the training, utilize the system</p>																						
<p>2027: 44%</p>																							
<p>2028: 46%</p>																							
<p>2029: 48%</p>																							

	to increase information exchange with caregivers, and encourage ongoing child/family connections.
<i>Source: DFCS Quality Assurance Unit; DHS Office of Communications</i>	

Another example of information-sharing and data tools is the Special Victims Unit (SVU); a partnership developed in 2024 between the Division and law enforcement to locate missing foster children. Other duties of SVU are to respond to maltreatment in care involving CSEC-suspected, CSEC-confirmed, or CSAM-suspected foster children, unlawful adoptions, unlawful, unlicensed or unsafe non-foster-care placements, FBI-involved and GBI-involved cases, and non-resident missing children reported as possibly present in Georgia. Staff are required to update Georgia SHINES as soon as a child is reported as missing or runaway, which sends an immediate notification to the SVU team. Case managers must also send an email to the SVU email box to send pertinent information to assist with locating the child. Case managers are asked to provide SVU with current photos of the child, the child’s social media accounts and digital payments, cell phone, close contacts, and any tattoos. The case should also be staffed with the SAAG to ensure SVU can seek runaway warrants which engages local law enforcement to assist in locating the child, and SVU works to obtain secure transports for children which ensures the child is safe during transport to and from the health care provider and placement. The SVU team has experienced law enforcement on staff and collaborates regularly with local law enforcement agencies to provide training and guidance.

Implementation and Program Supports

In February 2025, the Child Welfare Policy Manual was successfully transitioned from the Online Directives Information System (ODIS) to the new Policy and Manuals Management System (PAMMS) platform. This transition is part of the Division’s ongoing efforts to enhance accessibility, efficiency, and overall user experience for all child welfare staff. PAMMS offers a modern and intuitive interface, making it easier to locate and review policies quickly. Unlike ODIS, PAMMS is a fully web-based platform, eliminating the need to download policies for review.

Section E: Update to Service Descriptions

Title IV-B, subpart 1: Stephanie Tubbs Jones Child Welfare Services Program

Georgia's title IV-B (1) funding is used for child welfare services statewide, including:

1. **Child Protective Services:** CPS utilizes an Investigation when an Initial Safety Assessment (ISA) indicates a present danger situation, an impending danger safety threat, or the reported maltreatment allegations fall into specific categories requiring the assignment of the report to investigation. During the investigation, families are engaged using DFCS' Practice Model as informed by Solution-Based Casework (SBC). SBC is best thought of as the architecture that holds practice to a consistent focus on safety outcomes. At the heart of SBC is the belief that by building a partnership with the family, a true focus on developing pragmatic solutions to the family's everyday problems can be achieved. Documenting and celebrating the successes of the family are also acknowledged and provide a framework for the family to sustain positive change moving forward. By using the SBC model, the case manager is able to follow a conceptual map for family-centered practice from assessment through case closure.
2. **CPS Intake Communication Center (CICC):** DHS developed a centralized system for receiving reports of abuse and neglect in 2013. The Statewide Child Protective Services Intake Communications Center (CICC) is responsible for receiving reports of abuse for children residing in Georgia. CICC receives reports 24 hours a day, seven days a week, of known or suspected instances of child abuse and neglect, including reports of physical or mental injury, sexual abuse or exploitation or negligent treatment or maltreatment of a child under circumstances that indicate that the child's health or welfare is threatened. For the purposes of child abuse and neglect reports, the term "child" shall mean an individual who has not yet attained 18 years of age, who is not an emancipated minor.
3. **Family Preservation Services:** Family Preservation Services (FPS) is described by the Family Preservation and Support Services Act of 1993 (PL 103-66) as a continuum of family-focused services for at-risk children and families. Services include activities designed to assist families in crisis, often where a child is at risk of being placed in out-of-home care because of abuse and/or neglect. Support services include preventive activities, typically provided by community-based organizations designed to improve the nurturing of children and to strengthen and enhance the stability of families.

4. **Prevention and Community Support (PCS):** The Prevention and Community Support Section (PCS) works within the Division and in partnership with community-based organizations to reduce child abuse and neglect. Using state and federal funding streams, PCS supports the use of evidence-based and evidence-informed practices and programs to improve outcomes for children and families. PCS also functions as the Children's Trust Fund entity for the state of Georgia.
5. **Family Support Services:** DFCS has a two-track differential response system to address reports of known or suspected child abuse and neglect, Investigations and Family Support Services (FSS). FSS is an alternative child protective services (CPS) response for providing protection to children by engaging the family to build consensus around the everyday life situations which may interfere with the family's ability to nurture and protect their child(ren). The family's participation in FSS is not voluntary as there are allegations of maltreatment. FSS are designed to ensure child safety and prevent future involvement in the child welfare system using formal and informal services to strengthen and support families. The FSS track is utilized when the Initial Safety Assessment (ISA) does not indicate a present danger situation or impending danger safety threat. An assessment of child safety and family functioning is required just as it is during an Investigation. However, there is no formal finding of substantiated or unsubstantiated concerning the allegations of abuse or neglect.
6. **Caregiver Recruitment and Retention:** The Caregiver Recruitment and Retention Unit (CRRU) diligently recruits and retains foster and adoptive parents through ongoing recruitment and retention efforts which include: the development of a statewide coordinated recruitment and retention plan; the development and implementation of regional foster and adoptive parent recruitment and retention plans; the use of child-specific recruitment efforts to assist in the recruitment of foster and adoptive parents; the use of targeted efforts to recruit caregivers who are able to meet the needs of a specific group/category of children (e.g., medically fragile, teens, siblings); the use of targeted efforts to recruit sufficient placement resources in each local school district so children entering care are able to remain in the same school they were attending prior to removal; and the use of regional and state data to communicate the recruitment needs and the results of recruitment and retention efforts.
7. **Adoptions:** Adoption is a specialized field that focuses on finding safe and permanent families for children when permanent, legal separation from their family is necessary. Adoption is a social and legal process designed to establish a new legal family giving children the same rights and benefits of those who are born into a family. Adoption

practice provides sound planning for children who have a permanency goal of adoption and children who are in the permanent custody of DFCS. An integral part of adoption services is working with birth parents as they decide whether adoption is in the best interest of the parent and child through a voluntary or non-voluntary Termination of Parental Rights (TPR).

Supporting information on the numbers of children and/or families served can be found on the **CFS-101** form.

Services for Children Adopted from Other Countries

The [Georgia Center for Resources and Support \(GCRS\)](#) continues to be available to all adoptive families residing in Georgia, including those who have adopted internationally. The center offers a number of resources and supports, including live and on-demand classes for adoptive and foster parents, therapeutic adoption clinicians, and a lending library of books, articles, and DVD resources for adoptive and foster families. Regional Resource Advisors are available throughout Georgia to assist adoptive families by providing advice, support, and training. The center is also staffed with families who have adopted and are able to provide support as a family with lived experience.

There are no current tracking mechanisms or data to identify the number of Georgia families who have adopted internationally. Families who have adopted internationally are eligible for other contract post-adoption services provided by the Division with a waiver.

There were zero children who were adopted from other countries and entered into state custody in FY2024 as a result of disruption or dissolution.

Services for Children Under the Age of Five

Georgia SHINES data for early childhood education enrollments are tracked monthly. CY2024 data show that 84% of children aged 0-5 in foster care are enrolled in an early education setting. More than 80% of these children are enrolled in a Quality Rated Childcare Center, and 3-5% are enrolled in Pre-Kindergarten. Less than 2% are enrolled in Head Start or Early Head Start.

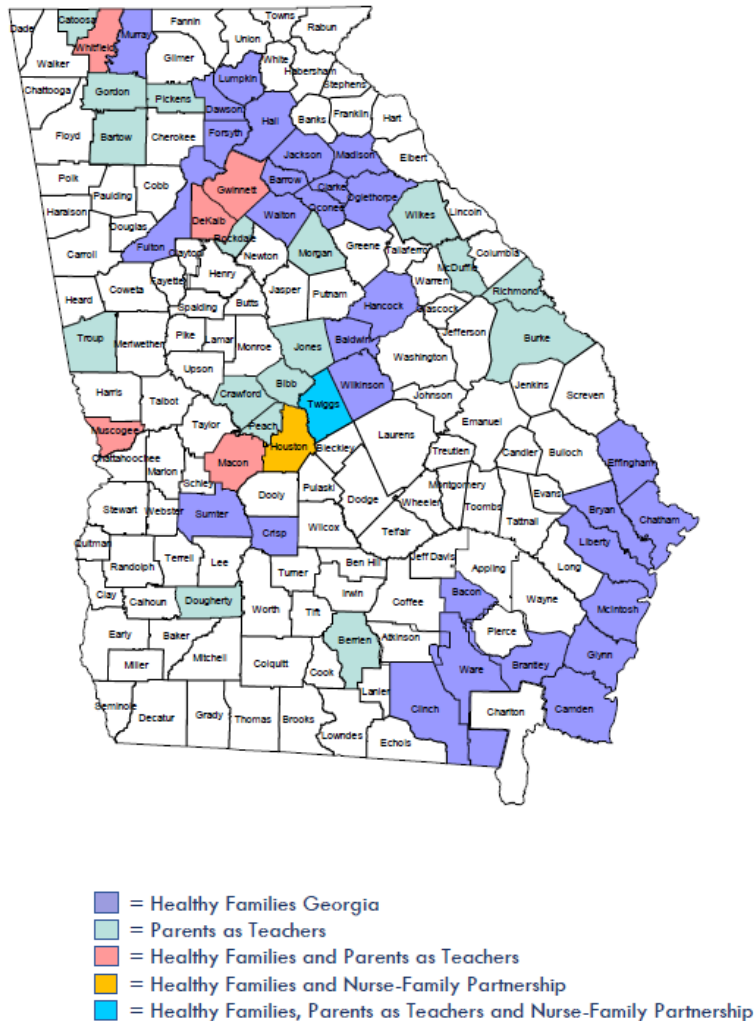
The Division provides funding support through CAPTA, CBCAP, and PSSF to provide evidence-based home visiting programs which serve families with children birth to five years

of age. These programs also collaborate with the Department of Public Health (DPH) Home Visiting programs that provides Healthy Families and Parents as Teachers with funding support from the federal Maternal Infant Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) grant. The curricula provide families who are pregnant and/or parenting with children under the age of five with services and supports that focus on linking pregnant women with prenatal care, promoting strong child/parent attachment, and coaching parents on learning activities that foster the child's development and support the parents' role as their child's first and most important teacher. Home visitors for these programs conduct regular screenings to help parents identify possible health and developmental issues. Each of the home visiting programs is required to conduct Ages and Stages Questionnaires (ASQ) and monitor the child's development, making referrals to Babies Can't Wait when appropriate. To address their developmental needs, children under the age of four in CPS cases are required to be referred to the Department of Public Health (DPH), Babies Can't Wait program.

In January 2025, the responsibility of overseeing developmental screening (Children 1st referrals) transitioned from WPAC to the Early Childhood Collaboration Unit (ECCU) under the Well-Being Services Section. This unit is responsible for ensuring that the developmental, educational, and health needs of children in care ages birth to five, are effectively addressed.

The Early Intervention Coordinator provides training, technical assistance, consultation, and comprehensive monitoring of the mental health needs of children (birth to five) in foster care. The coordinator reviews weekly, monthly, and quarterly reports from GA SHINES, Children 1st, and the DFCS data unit to initiate developmental referrals, confirm the receipt of submitted referrals, track assessment results, monitor service eligibility, and reconcile data discrepancies. To ensure compliance the early intervention coordinator utilizes an established tracking system to monitor referrals from initiation to completion. The coordinator provides quarterly reports to regional and county staff that highlight trends, strengths, and opportunities. These reports serve as a tool to support the development of strategies aimed at addressing the identified needs and gaps in service provision supporting continuous improvement in the delivery of services to children in care.

Evidenced Based Home Visiting Programs
 Counties Served
 As of October 1, 2024



Source: DFCS Prevention and Community Support Section. Sites include Healthy Families America, Nurse Family Partnership, and Parents as Teachers

Babies Can't Wait (BCW) is Georgia's early intervention program through DPH that offers an array of services and support for infants and toddlers (birth to age three) with special needs. BCW serves a crucial role in completing assessments of infants and young children and offers recommendations and services to ensure the child is on target in the best way that is appropriate for their age and current medical condition. The Division works closely with DPH to ensure that the proper assessments and referrals are completed timely for children. The Division also collaborates with Georgia's **Children's Medical Services (CMS)** program to support children with special health care needs.

The Division also funds a screening and referral program called First Steps Georgia. This program, funded with support from CAPTA and CBCAP, offers screenings to pregnant mothers or parents with children birth to five years and links families to appropriate programs/services/resources. The screening tool asks about the family to establish any risk factors, such as history of domestic violence or child welfare involvement, lack of healthcare or insurance, substance misuse or mental health issues. The screener will offer referrals, as appropriate. In the case of parents who need no referrals, they are offered the Find Help Georgia online resource and some information about child development, safe sleep, and other pertinent universal parenting information.

A Plan of Safe Care (POSC) is completed for all infants affected by prenatal substance exposure or fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, even where there is not a specific allegation of maltreatment. The POSC may be completed by the DFCS case manager when there is an allegation of maltreatment that requires an investigation. The POSC may also be completed by the mother's health care provider during the prenatal period or immediately after birth. The Division is expanding funding for providers to accept referrals of substance-affected infants with no maltreatment alleged, for the development and monitoring of the POSC for the infant and family. Descriptions of these providers and their services can be found in the [CAPTA State Grant](#) section of this report.

The DFCS Office of Provider Management (OPM) ensures that placement providers that provide care for foster children under the age of five are meeting the safety, permanency and well-being needs of the children served. Providers are required to report and document the services that are being provided to children; this information is used to calculate performance measures for each provider. OPM also conducts safety reviews, annual comprehensive reviews, and performance-based placement reviews to ensure that providers are meeting their contractual obligations and providing quality services to the children. OPM has also identified the need for more caregivers to support sibling groups, which often includes children under the age of five. OPM is working with CPA providers on their recruitment and retention plans to ensure that they are recruiting caregivers who can meet the needs of this population.

[Efforts to Track and Prevent Child Maltreatment Deaths](#)

Georgia's Child Fatality Review (CFR) program was established by statute in 1990; CFR is an independent program administered out of the Georgia Bureau of Investigation (GBI). Local CFR committees are encouraged to meet regularly to review the causes and circumstances of child deaths within their counties, and to develop and review prevention efforts. CFR

annual reports describing the state's child fatality data, which includes child maltreatment deaths, can be found at the [GBI-CFR website](#).

The Division was previously engaged with the [National Partnership for Child Safety \(NPCS\)](#), a member-owned quality improvement collaborative aimed to reduce child maltreatment fatalities. The Division separated from NPCS in June 2024. As part of the Division's fatality review process, and in collaboration with a team from Georgia's Office of the Child Advocate, the Child Death, and Serious Injury (CDSI) Review Team completed 36 critical incident/child fatality reviews in CY2024.

This process involved completing thorough case record reviews and individually debriefing over 130 DFCS staff members plus relevant external stakeholders. Reviewers identify improvement opportunities, or key learnings. Improvement opportunities are defined as case-level actions or inactions relevant to the outcome, case, or an industry standard. In essence, they highlight the gap between what families needed and what families received from various community partners during the Division's involvement. As improvement opportunities are identified, systemic factors contributing to the improvement opportunities are evaluated and described through the Safe Systems Improvement Tool (SSIT). Findings are scored according to their proximity and relation to the outcome. Data elements are aggregated for the purposes of identifying program and practice improvements for all community partners involved at a systems level. The SSIT is a nationally recognized tool used to structure critical incident reviews and standardize their findings.

In advocacy of Georgia's families and DFCS' direct service professionals, these reviews provide a candid glimpse of the work and how system improvements could foster better supports and help DFCS' professionals and the community at large serve families. The Division is partnering with external child welfare system stakeholders, other state agencies, and the CAPTA Panel members to explore next steps in the development and implementation of a statewide plan to prevent maltreatment-related fatalities.

The Division also supports the statewide plan to prevent child maltreatment fatalities through the [Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Plan \(CANPP\)](#), which continues to improve access to evidence-based or research-informed programs for families, caregivers, youth, and community members. More information on the CANPP resources and focus areas can be found at: <https://abuse.publichealth.gsu.edu/canpp/>. The effort is part of the larger [Georgia Essentials for Childhood](#), a comprehensive effort for child abuse and neglect prevention.

The CANPP effort was initiated in 2019 with a convening of child-serving agencies and organizations. Entities were tasked with identifying a representative champion to participate

in strategic planning. Over the course of the next year, over 30 meetings were held across the state which included more than 635 individuals representing state and local government leaders, providers of human services, educators, civic and business leaders, parents, caregivers and members of faith-based organizations. Additionally, two surveys soliciting input from providers and parents/caregivers were distributed and completed by nearly 800 Georgians. The surveys and planning sessions yielded six strategic objectives and 50 strategies for preventing child maltreatment and maltreatment-related fatalities in Georgia. A state plan incorporating the input from this diverse group was developed and in mid- 2020 was approved by state leadership. The Georgia Essentials for Childhood Steering Committee has been charged with overseeing the implementation of the CANPP, monitoring progress toward the plan’s goals, assisting in the development of regional plans, and reviewing progress toward the plan on an annual basis.

In FY24, the regional conveners became *ambassadors*, helping identify opportunities for state-level support within their communities and help spread the word about state-level resources and developments of interest and use to local communities. This effort furthered 2023’s overt shift to an emphasis on a theory of change for normalizing primary prevention across Georgia. As part of this evolution, the CANPP was reframed as a sort of strategic plan for Georgia Essentials for Childhood initiative. The primary focus became the plan’s six objectives as the core areas to facilitate progress in, rather than the 50 strategies identified originally.

In FY24, Region 1 successfully achieved the goals outlined in its original 2020 plan. Few regions received the same level of support and follow-through from their partners, making Region 1’s success particularly noteworthy. As a result, the region has maintained strong collaboration with its partners. Regional ambassadors strove to amplify the voices of lived experience and their own wisdom gained through direct-service practice in these ways:

- Participating in quarterly Ambassador meetings that operate like a community of practice — talking about successes and challenges, offering peer support, sharing resources, collectively addressing barriers.
- Providing feedback on the work of Georgia Essentials for Childhood’s five working groups and offering suggestions for their ongoing projects. One example is data literacy: Ambassadors met with a co-chair of the Data Working Group to discuss the needs and barriers to data literacy across the state and among partners. This feedback loop is essential for supporting the ecosystem of child and family well-being at all levels.
- Regional ambassadors also led the shift in framing from “child abuse and neglect prevention” to “supporting child and family well-being” through their regional work.

At the state level, we were able to articulate the State Prevention Plan’s six objectives more clearly as “aspirations,” supported by the five working groups of Georgia Essentials for Childhood and a broader ecosystem of well-being for children and families.

Populations at Greatest Risk for Maltreatment

Data from Georgia SHINES regularly finds that younger children, particularly those less than 12 months of age, have the highest risk of substantiated maltreatment, and that females are slightly more likely than males to be substantiated victims of maltreatment.

In FFY2024, there were 104 child deaths from maltreatment, and 83% of victim children (n=86) were age five or younger.

To ensure programs and services are appropriately targeted to those at risk of maltreatment related deaths, the Division shares these data with the CAPTA Panel members, DFCS field leadership, program directors, and regional C3 Coordinators (who in turn provide data-related trainings and supports as needed to frontline staff). The data sharing effort is to assist in targeting programs and services to those populations. The Prevention and Community Support Section (PCS) and the Well-Being Section (which includes the Educational Programming, Assessment and Consultation (EPAC) Unit, the Wellness Programming, Assessment and Consultation (WPAC) Unit, and the Early Childhood Collaboration Unit (ECCU) also utilize these data to develop targeted programs and services.

As an example, DFCS’ Safety Bridge program partners with the children’s hospital liaisons to identify young children referred by physicians for abuse injuries where no maltreater is identified. The Safety Bridge facilitates ongoing consultations with staff and service providers to ensure young children at greatest risk are protected. Cases are monitored weekly for up to six months and aggregate data trends are used to improve local safety planning efforts. PSSF also uses the data to develop the annual needs assessment and better target local services to children at risk of maltreatment-related fatalities. The CANPP was developed using multiple data sources, including DFCS and Kids Count, and continues to be updated locally to reflect observed trends in abuse, neglect, and maltreatment-related fatalities.

Title IV-B, subpart 2: MaryLee Allen Promoting Safe and Stable Families (PSSF)

The strength of PSSF in Georgia is that all PSSF providers are community-based and are acutely aware of the challenges, needs, and strengths of their communities and families. All service providers wishing to obtain PSSF funding must meet the following criteria:

1. Eligibility: State, County or City Governments; other Public Entities, including institutions of higher education;
2. Non-profits: must have a 501I(3) status with the IRS and be registered and in active compliance status for the year in which grant funds are sought with the Georgia Secretary of State's Office.
3. Faith-based and community organizations that meet eligibility requirements are eligible to receive awards. Individuals, sole proprietors, foreign entities and for-profit organizations are not eligible to compete for, or receive, awards made under this announcement.

The funding opportunity announcement solicits proposals for services to improve the safety, permanency and wellbeing of children, youth, and their families through coordinated, community-based service delivery. These services must be designed to build service capacity between state and local child welfare agencies and community-based family service agencies to ensure that children who are at risk for child welfare intervention have access to comprehensive, high-quality prevention and early intervention, preservation, reunification or adoption promotion and post-permanency services. Additional information on the PSSF funding and supported programs can be found at pssfnet.com.

PSSF services are determined by an annual community needs assessment and Departmental priorities. The annual Statement of Need solicitation for community-based services in Georgia is designed to reinforce ongoing service and population priorities, support the state's five-year Child & Family Services Plan, and address needs identified in the state's quality assurance reviews and other, annual and ongoing input from staff and stakeholders as solicited through:

- Consultation with Division leadership, unit and program managers
- Consultation with community stakeholders
- DFCS Survey

Feedback from these multiple stakeholder sources on special or under-served populations, under-served communities, specific service needs, and service delivery approaches will be incorporated in the annual Statement of Need, and reflected across 14 different service

models (program models), and will be a factor in the decision process regarding funding of programs annually.

PSSF is committed to building capacity in its community-based network through opportunities to support personal and professional development by sponsoring specialized training that promotes family engagement and enhances the effectiveness of program services and service delivery, to improve outcomes.

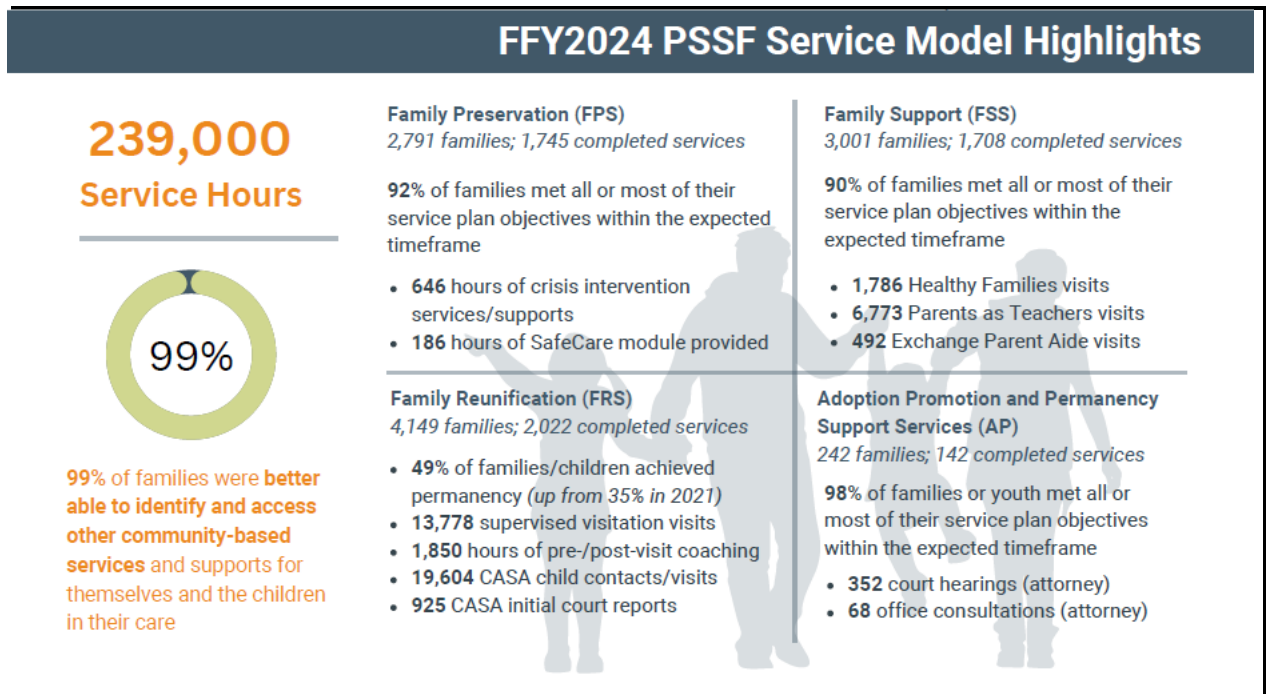
- **Family support services** address prevention and risk reduction of child maltreatment by promoting well-being of the entire family. Families are identified as eligible if they are not currently known to DFCS, are screened out, referred for services, or have an unsubstantiated investigation. PSSF grantees address home visiting, healthy relationships and co-parenting, prevention and early intervention, and services for homeless youth. PSSF also provides funding assistance to safety net programs awarded for a State of Hope grant.
- **Family preservation services** address the prevention of repeated maltreatment and preserving families. Families are identified by a previous DFCS involvement – family preservation or foster care – or relatives who are caring for children who are not their own. PSSF grantees address placement prevention, crisis intervention, post-placement aftercare to support reintegration of children into their communities, and substance abuse treatment/recovery support to prevent relapse.
- **Family reunification services** promote and sustain permanency for children and their families to prevent repeated maltreatment. Eligible families have children who are removed from their care and are in foster care or another temporary placement. PSSF grantees provide supervised family visitation and parent reunification services to assist caregivers in addressing the behaviors that resulted in the placement of their children into foster care and help prepare for the children’s return to the home.
- **Adoption promotion and post-permanency support services** promote and sustain permanency and community connections for children and families. Eligible families have children exiting foster or relative care to adoption or guardianship, and youth who are transitioning to adulthood and will not achieve adoption by age 18. PSSF grantees provide adoption promotion services to prevent disruption/dissolution and emancipation services to help youth establish meaningful adult connections.

Estimated FY2026 PSSF (Title IV-B, subpart 2) Service Populations

Crisis Intervention (Family Preservation)	84,243	\$2,856,706	25%
Prevention and Support Services (Family Support)	87,585	\$3,048,900	27%

Family Reunification Services	81,641	\$3,174,048	28%
Adoption Promotion and Post-Permanency Support Services	33,614 (families)	\$2,323,683	20%
TOTAL		\$11,403,337	100%

Additional information on the impact of PSSF in Georgia can be found at pssfnet.com.



SOURCE: FFY2024 PSSF Statewide Summary Profile (pssfnet.com/pssfga)

Kinship Navigator Grant

Kinship care represents a vital support system for children who cannot live with their biological parents. Georgia’s [Kinship Navigator Program](#) is implemented directly through the Division of Family and Children Services as a comprehensive resource hub, offering:

- Individualized support and guidance for kinship caregivers
- Information and referral services
- Financial assistance resources
- Legal support and consultation
- Emotional and mental health support
- Access to Educational and training programs

FY 2024 title IV-B, subpart 2 funds were used to evaluate and implement FY 2024 Key Achievements

Service Expansion

- Increased service reach by 400 compared to the previous year
- Expanded support group network to 4 additional counties
- Developed new partnership with local community partners
- Caregiver Support Metrics
 - Total families served: Child welfare involved referrals 1,087 and community/informal referrals 909
 - New kinship families supported: 1902
 - Average support duration: 6 months
 - Satisfaction rate: 81% positive feedback
- Financial Assistance
 - Total financial aid distributed: \$ 349,000
 - Average aid per family: \$ 350.00

Support categories:

- Basic necessities support
- Housing support
- Healthcare-related costs
- Emergency assistance

Training and Education Initiatives

- Conducted 15 virtual and 21 in-person workshops
- Total participants in educational programs: 426

Topics covered:

- Legal Matters and Support: Panel Discussion
- Keeping children safe in a Digital World
- Positive Discipline
- Having difficult conversations with children
- Program Evaluation

The Kinship Navigator Program remains committed to supporting kinship families, recognizing their crucial role in providing stable, loving environments for children facing challenging family circumstances. Georgia's ongoing efforts aim to strengthen these families, provide comprehensive support, and create positive pathways for kinship families' growth and development. Kinship families can contact the program via <https://dhs.georgia.gov/kinship-care-portal> and by calling 1-877-210-Kids and selecting the second option. The Division uses social media, community stakeholders, and community events to create awareness and promote kinship services. Currently, the state's program

evaluators are considering incorporating aspects of an approved Kinship Navigator Model’s to enhance Georgia’s ability to access title IV-E funding for navigator services.

Monthly Caseworker Visit Formula Grant

Monthly caseworker visit (MCV) grants are provided to states to improve the quality of caseworker visits with an emphasis on improving caseworker decision-making on the safety, permanency, and well-being of foster children and caseworker recruitment, retention, and training (section 436(b)(4)(B)(i) of the Act). Georgia’s FFY2024 funds of \$766,264 supported telecommunication services (cell phones and smart phones) for foster care caseworkers. Having access to high-speed internet-capable telecommunication devices supports the quality of visits by ensuring caseworkers can take and upload photos of injuries or environments in real time and can access assessment tools or policy guidance from the field to assist them in case preparation and planning. Caseworkers can also use the “panic button” app on the phone in the event of an emergency to discreetly summon law enforcement to their location.

Monthly caseworker visits are required under DFCS [Policy 10.18: Purposeful Contacts in Foster Care](#). The policy includes a requirement for staff to make at least one purposeful face-to-face contact each calendar month with every child under the state’s care and/or custody to assess child safety, well-being and permanency, with the majority (over 50%) of the contacts occurring in the residence of the child. The policy also requires staff to make purposeful face-to-face contact with any child in foster care within seven calendar days of an initial placement and any subsequent placement change.

Georgia has demonstrated proficiency since 2011 in meeting the federal requirement for monthly caseworker visits to children in care. Since FFY 2015, Georgia has exceeded the requirement that 95% of children in care receive at least one monthly caseworker visit. Georgia has also exceeded the requirement that at least 50% of the total number of monthly visits made by caseworkers to children in foster care must occur in the child’s residence.

Adoption and Legal Guardianship Incentive Payments and Savings

In CY2024, Adoption and Guardianship Incentive Payments were used for the following programs to promote placement stability for youth who continue to experience disruptions.

1. \$333,000 to staff the Post-Adoption and Guardianship unit, which works with staff, adoptive, and guardianship families who may be in crisis. The goals of the Unit are to enhance the stability and support of post-adoptive/guardianship families; to reduce the likelihood of discontinuity; and to build well-being and resilience.

2. \$70,000 to provide recruitment and retention training and support to caregivers and ensure children sustain in their homes and communities. Funds were utilized to highlight and celebrate caregivers who went above and beyond to achieve permanency for the youth in our care.
3. \$180,000 for the Butler Institute Foster and Adoptive Survey to understand the needs and experiences of existing foster caregivers and to explore resource utilization
4. \$608,181 for the Project Community Connection to provide housing support for families transitioning out of foster care
5. \$425,000 to Faith Bridge for child life histories
6. \$50,000 for staff training, as requested

The Division plans to continue providing funding support in CY2026 for the Post-Adoption and Guardianship unit, recruitment and training, child life histories, and staff training.

Adoption Savings Expenditures

Adoption savings funds are reinvested back into Georgia's Adoption budget. Georgia used the Adoption savings in CY2024 to support the following Pre and Post Adoption services agreements:

Georgia Center for Resources & Support (GCRS)- To maintain operation of the Georgia Center for Foster and Adoption Resources by developing and delivering a comprehensive program for accessing and developing post placement services for foster and adoptive families. Services are available on a statewide basis.

Reunion Registry- To enhance and maintain operation of Georgia's Adoption Reunion Registry as required by state law to offer services to birth parents, adopted persons, adoptive parents and siblings who are affected by adoptions finalized in Georgia.

Adoption Services- To recruit, assess, prepare, and train families who will be able to parent children with special needs and to provide the family support services that will assist them in maintaining the placement of these children to the point of finalization and even beyond.

ADOPTS (Addressing the Distress of Post-Traumatic Stress)- ADOPTS is a trauma-focused, adoption-specific therapy program serving children ages 8-17 years old and their parents. ADOPTS places its primary emphasis on treatment of past traumatic experiences for pre and post adopted children.

ATEAM- To provide adopted teens in grades 6-12 opportunities for mutual support and self-awareness/development through group interactions with other adopted teens in 12 ATEAM sites across the state. Parent support meetings also provided.

Crisis Intervention- Provide crisis intervention to families with a potential for disruption or dissolution of an adoptive placement. A statewide team of skilled individuals work with families to assess and connect them to needed resources.

Child Life History- Completion of child life histories, which is a critical element in the adoption process. This must be completed in order to secure permanent homes for children in the custody of DHS.

Statewide Child Recruitment Adoption Services- For children waiting for permanent custody, youth waiting in foster care without an identified placement who: are age 9 and older with a goal of adoption, and at the discretion of the state, children who are under age 9 with mental or physical special needs or who are part of a sibling group.

Family Match- Provides To match children in need of an adoptive family with licensed, approved, and waiting families through a database driven system for hopeful adoptive parents that works with Child placement agencies and recruitment organizations.

Photo-listing- To maintain a photo listing website for children waiting for adoption and a toll-free inquiry line.

Wednesday's Child Program- The Wednesday's Child program is a child specific recruitment program. It is a collaboration among the Georgia Department of Human Services, Department of Family and Children Services and WAGA Fox 5 television station. Each week, children free for adoption who are in the custody of the State are profiled on Fox 5 TV – Atlanta.

If future Adoption Incentive funds are earned, Georgia anticipates using these funds. Georgia expends Adoption Incentive grants in the order they are received to ensure timely expenditure prior to the grant's expiration date. States have 36 months to expend the funds (P.L. 113-183), and there are no anticipated challenges in accessing and spending these payments.

Georgia will continue to use the same methodology (CB Method) that was submitted via the CB 496 during the previous reporting period.

Family First Prevention Services Transition Grant

Details of referrals and completions of the FFPSA programs can be found in [Section D: Update to the Plan for Enacting the State’s Vision](#).

Phase 1 of Family First implementation officially launched on November 1, 2023. Grace Harbour provides Multisystemic Therapy (MST) services to youth in Chatham and Richmond Counties. Family Ties provides Functional Family Therapy (FFT) services to youth in DeKalb and Cherokee counties.

Of the families who are receiving services or have successfully completed, there are no reports of those youth entering care.

In FY2026, the Phase 2 plan is to implement Healthy Families America (HFA) and Parents as Teachers (PAT) to families of children ages 0-5 in Clarke, Oconee, and Dougherty counties. HFA will be provided in Clarke and Oconee; PAT will be provided in Dougherty. DHS anticipates that the HFA and PAT programs will serve at least 15 families per county during FY2026.

The Division is adding the Intercept program as a Family First service and will continue to serve all counties in regions 13 and 14. FFT is also expanding to Pickens and Fulton counties. DHS anticipates that the Intercept, FFT, and MST programs will serve at least 30 youth in each county during FY2026.

This work is ongoing.

Georgia was awarded \$18,555,327 in FFPSA grants. The below table describes the expenditures for each year of effort (FY2023-2025) and plans for FY2026.

	FY2023	FY2024	FY2025	FY2026
Chapin Hall- Technical Assistance	\$418,973.49	\$214,343	\$382,033	\$100,000
Sam Wolfe Strategies- RFP Development and Support	\$6109.38	n/a	n/a	n/a
Lexicon- Communication Support	\$945,313.22	n/a	n/a	n/a
Carl Vinson- CQI, Fidelity	\$217,790.34	\$432,000	\$432,000	\$150,000

Monitoring, and Data Support				
DFCS Family First Team	\$657,327.75	\$138,801	\$138,826	\$34,750
Family Ties Enterprises Inc.	n/a	\$895,237.20	\$895,237.20	\$350,000
Grace Harbour Inc.	n/a	\$1,497,243.	\$937,981	\$450,000
Computer Aid Inc.	n/a	n/a	\$1,492,000	\$500,000
Murphy Harpst Children's Center	n/a	n/a	\$165,148	\$100,000
Youth Villages	n/a			\$500,000
Healthy Families America (Clarke & Oconee counties)	n/a	n/a	n/a	\$500,000
Parents As Teachers (Dougherty County)	n/a	n/a	n/a	\$500,000
DFCS Statewide Family First Conference	n/a	n/a	n/a	\$75,000
TOTAL	\$2,245,514.18	\$3,177,624.20	\$4,443,225.20	\$3,259,750

During the current APSR reporting period, DFCS continues to use FFPSA Transition Grant funds for operational costs to support the implementation of the Family First Act by funding salaries for the DFCS Family First Team and the following contracts:

- Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago for technical assistance, project management, and support related to implementing the state's five-year prevention plan and continuous quality improvement processes to assure successful implementation of the Family First Act
- Carl Vinson Institute of Government at the University of Georgia for ongoing support with fidelity monitoring, data collection and analysis, and continuous quality improvement of the evidenced-based programs

- Family Ties Enterprises Inc. for providing Functional Family Therapy, an FFPSA approved prevention service, to youth and families In Cherokee and DeKalb counties
- Grace Harbour Inc. for providing Multisystemic Therapy, an FFPSA approved prevention service, to youth and families in Chatham and Richmond counties
- Computer Inc. for providing IT assistance and enhancements to the Georgia SHINES system to operationalize family first requirements
- Murphy-Harpst Children’s Centers to provide startup costs for implementing a QRTP pilot program

In FY2026, DFCS plans to utilize \$3,225,000 of the remaining FFPSA Transition Grant funds to cover operational costs that support the planning and preparation for the expansion and statewide implementation of the Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA). Funding will support salaries for the DFCS Family First Team, workforce development opportunities, and both continued and new initiatives, including:

- Continued contracts and services with the following providers: Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago, Carl Vinson Institute of Government at the University of Georgia, Family Ties Enterprises Inc., Grace Harbour Inc., and Murphy-Harpst Children’s Centers
- Youth Villages for delivery of the Intercept program—an approved FFPSA prevention service—for children, youth, and families in Clayton, Cobb, DeKalb, Fulton, and Gwinnett counties
- Start-up costs and first-quarter SFY 2026 contracts for service providers awarded the RFPs for Healthy Families America in Clarke and Oconee counties and Parents as Teachers in Dougherty County; this includes a three-month contract for service implementation technical assistance
- Computer Inc. for SHINES system enhancements necessary for the statewide implementation of FFPSA
- The DFCS Statewide Family First Conference

The FFPSA Transition Grants were awarded to all states and territories in FY 2020. An estimated \$5,400,000 of Georgia’s allotment will be unencumbered by September 30, 2025, and unliquidated by January 28, 2026.

Collaborating with Youth and Young Adults

Georgia Peers Advocating for Change (GPAC) serves as a CAPTA citizen review panel, offering critical feedback on a range of child welfare issues, with a focused emphasis on housing for youth transitioning out of foster care. To date, GPAC has made impactful recommendations to the Division of Family & Children Services (DFCS), advocating for expanded housing services and supports. These recommendations have included the development of partnerships with government and community organizations, as well as the intentional incorporation of youth voice at every level of these collaborations.

In response, the Division has initiated regular meetings with key community housing partners, including Partnership for Home, to explore available resources and identify effective strategies to support young people at risk of or experiencing homelessness. Additionally, DFCS has engaged in ongoing discussions with the Department of Community Affairs and local housing authorities to strengthen relationships and facilitate youth access to Foster Youth to Independence (FYI) housing vouchers and pathways to stable housing. These efforts reflect a growing commitment to aligning services and partnerships in ways that directly address the needs and priorities voiced by youth themselves.

DFCS continues to incorporate youth and young adults with lived experience in decision making, data collection, and dissemination. The youth advisory board Georgia Peers Advocating for Change continues to be a part of the UBUNTU collaborative along with Georgia Empowerment, the Amerigroup Youth Advisory Board, and representatives from the Georgia Health Department and Georgia CARES. These youth and young adults participate in conferences and meetings across the state including the State CASA conference and the Georgia Conference on Children and Families.

Division staff and young leaders from the UBUNTU collaborative participate in a number of internal and external trainings and conferences to share information about Georgia Youth NYTD Outcomes and needs. Conferences, trainings, and presentations include The Georgia DOE McKinney-Vento Conference, Georgia Conference on Children and Families, and Statewide Field Placement Specialist meetings.

Serving Youth and Young Adults Statewide

There have been no changes to the process of determining eligibility for Chafee benefits and services in Georgia.

Georgia continues to serve youth throughout the state via regional Independent Living Specialist (ILS). The ILS works in partnership with regional and county staff to ensure that eligible youth and young adults are connected to Chafee Support services, engaged in Transitional Roundtable meetings, are developing their Written Transitional Living Plans (WTLPs), and are provided with appropriate resources to support the transition to adulthood. In areas with a higher concentration of youth placed, the ILS can leverage connections with placements to encourage youth participation in available programming such as ILP workshops. Group home partners such as A Friend's House and Rainbow Children's Home regularly ensure that youth placed with them participate in ILP workshops each month. ILS also work with the counties or regions they serve to meet specific training needs (NYTD, WTLP, or Scattered Site Assessment) or question and answer sessions to ensure they are knowledgeable of the needs in their specific areas. This is especially beneficial to service youth and families in the rural areas of Georgia where resources may not be as accessible. ILS and their supervisors often travel throughout their regions to make themselves available to provide support and help address any barriers they may be experiencing.

GARYSE works closely with the state of origin for a young adult to ensure that the young adult is connected to any applicable Chafee resources from that state. GARYSE also ensures that the young adult is connected to Georgia Medicaid and appropriate community resources. The Unit also serves as a liaison when necessary to ensure that these young adults are appropriately connected to education resources such as ETV which generally travels from the state of origin.

Well-Being State Office Teams, in collaboration with Rev Max, assisted former foster youth that aged out of care with re-instating Medicaid that lapsed per the request of the youth through the healthmatters@dhs.ga.gov email box. A significant number of the youth missed notification of Medicaid renewal due to lack of updated contact information in Gateway.

Serving Youth at Various Ages and Stages

GARYSE engages with youth beginning at age 14 to support their access to age-appropriate extracurricular activities via Chafee supports. GARYSE also participates with community partners MAAC, NsoroWORKS, Orange Duffle Bag and others to attend Roadshows around the state. These Roadshows took place in June 2024 (South Georgia), August 2024 (Metro Atlanta) and March 2025 (North Georgia). During these events youth in and exiting foster care received resources around continuing education, financial management, and real time connections to employment opportunities in fields such as aviation, technology, and healthcare.

Collaboration with Community Agencies

DFCS works with community partners and other appropriate agencies to support youth working towards independence. Our Youth Support Services and GARYSE teams work collaboratively with Georgia Driver Services to support youth and young adults in obtaining a state ID. This partnership was offered to youth at the 2025 Teens R 4 Me youth conference. The 2025 Teens R 4 Me Conference offered youth 14-17 opportunities to network with peers in an environment that also supports life skills development. Additionally, these youth are invited to attend monthly virtual and in person life skills education via partnerships. The life skills workshops offered via partnership with Carrie Steele-Pitts Home were able to show an increase of over 100 youth attendees each month when comparing the months of June to September from 2023 to 2024. This continues an overall positive trend since 2021. The Teens R 4 Me conference also offers an “Adult Day” which invites DFCS Staff, placement providers, and other partners opportunities to attend education workshops supporting best practices for working with youth currently experiencing foster care. The FY2025 conference also included a presentation on the most recent CFSR and PIP. This presentation informed child welfare partners about the CFSR Final Report findings, noted areas needing improvement, and the plans to improve outcomes for youth in the state of Georgia.

In CY2024, the Division continued collaboration with agencies and stakeholders to support youth in their transition to adulthood, including:

1. Georgia Department of Community Affairs to ensure young adults in need of housing and housing supports who had experienced foster care and who were in foster care have access to the federal Foster Youth to Independence (FYI) Vouchers. DCA uses local housing authority to make the vouchers available to eligible youth age 18 or older.
2. Atlanta Covenant House Homeless shelter to support employment readiness programs, life skills training, clothing and toiletry items, electronic and technology

Region 9

In CY2024, the region’s C3 Coordinator became the new facilitator for Transitional Roundtables (TRT) and there have been new assignments in both EPAC and WPAC.

The region’s ILS has designated the youth as co-host of the TRT and we are making sure that subsequent meetings are not repetition but a continuum. We obtain the youth’s email address during TRTs and if they do not have one, we plan for someone to help them create one so that partners can share information with the youth directly which makes them feel more in charge of the meetings and their own well-being.

At the TRT, EPAC shares information about tuition waivers, scholarship opportunities, non-traditional education options such as Option B, dual achievement, HiSet and GED.

Through the TRT process each partner gets to review options available to our youth starting at age 16 so we can try and help them understand their options before they turn 18 and must make some spontaneous decision.

The TRT includes discussion on all academic or health needs and engages other partners as needed for guidance on alternative options. Other issues are discussed during TRTs so we can make plans to address the needs of the youth based on what the youth would like to see happen, if possible.

items, transportation costs, and assistance with acquiring vital documents and cell phones/calling cards.

3. The [Hilton Foundation](#) along with the [United Way of Greater Atlanta](#) are investing over five years to support career development with [CareerReady ATL](#) effort to scale and sustain youth apprenticeship opportunities. Former foster youth are engaged regularly to advise the project and ensure high-demand career pathways are tailored to the specific needs of youth in Georgia. The Division's Cultivating the Rising Experienced Worker (CREW) team works to create placements for summer paid work with some of the partners.

[National Youth in Transition Database \(NYTD\)](#)

In CY2024, the Division's Chafee Program staff continues to provide technical assistance to counties and regions not meeting the pacing efforts within the specified timeframes. Since implementation of the pacing plan, most regions continue to exceed the NYTD entry expectation by the 4th month of the review period.

NYTD outcomes data are distributed to the annual Teens R 4 Me conference attendees for their review and awareness. The information is also displayed on large posters throughout the conference for youth and stakeholders to view during the youth portions of the conference. NYTD outcomes data reports are shared with the GPAC youth advisory council and Ubuntu Youth Engagement Collaborative during the annual retreats.

The Division's Chafee Program staff are exploring efforts to expand the scope of NYTD data dissemination in CY2025.

[Education and Training Vouchers \(ETV\)](#)

ETV Services are provided in partnership with contractors at J.W. Fanning Institute at the University of Georgia. Through their Embark program they process ETV requests and payments. The Embark network also provides supports for students who need assistance navigating campus systems and resources. The program has already served more students that were served in the previous year (FY24 saw 233 students; FY25 served 236 students with projections anticipating 240 by the end of the fiscal year). Community organizations like MAAC or Fostering Success Act (named after legislation) aid students needing support with obtaining/maintaining stable housing or managing unexpected expenses.

The J.W. Fanning Institute has continued to cultivate relationships with other organizations serving young adults in need. They have begun hosting meetings with community partners including Fostering Success Act and MAAC to discuss ways they can ensure that students are supported without services being duplicated.

The Division has participated in a variety of training and workshops to support improvements in youth outcomes and resource access. The Educational Programming, Assessment, and Consultation (EPAC) program presented at the AFPAG conferencing to an audience of foster parents, service providers and DFCS staff sharing how the program assesses the educational needs for youth in care and advocates for them in the education setting. GARYSE also presented at the 2024 Georgia DOE McKinney-Vento Conference sharing supports the division provides for youth and young adults to provide normalcy and preparation for post-secondary education.

Georgia's ETV program design and delivery remains largely unchanged from prior years, and include:

1. Technology that allows students to determine eligibility and manage their ETV independently.
2. Payments made more efficient through direct deposit to schools.
3. Increase in delivered trainings via MS Teams and Zoom, along with more individualized trainings to students and stakeholders.
4. Designated Point of Contact (DPOC) for youth experiencing foster care as well as youth experiencing homelessness at every institution within the 53 campuses of the University System of Georgia and the Technical College System of Georgia.
5. The [Embark Georgia Leadership conference](#) is held every 18 months to build relationships and share information among the key stakeholders who support students who have experienced foster care

7/1/2023-6/30/2024: 233 students received ETV support. This includes 97 first time voucher recipients.

7/1/2024-6/30/2025: Estimated 239 students receiving ETV support. This includes 121 first time voucher recipients.

[Consultation and Coordination with Tribes](#)

While Georgia has no federally recognized tribes, Georgia makes efforts to comply with the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) for children in Georgia who are subject to ICWA. This occurs through direct communication with tribal representatives by individual counties after identification and notification has occurred regarding a specific child. Additionally,

Georgia's efforts to comply with ICWA includes having a dedicated ICWA/Tribe Liaison (housed in the Policy and Regulations Unit), annual training, data reporting, and evaluation of service provisions.

DFCS requires annual ICWA training for all child welfare staff. The training addresses topics including but not limited to, identifying children subject to ICWA, notification requirements, active efforts to prevent breakup of the Indian family, and expert witnesses. Knowledge checks are included throughout and require a passing score on a final to ensure comprehension. The ICWA Liaison meets with the Training and Professional Development (TPD) Unit annually to review the training and recommend any needed updates. For example, the training will undergo some minor updates in CY2025 to highlight information related to the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) Final Rule. The Final Rule was also shared with the Georgia SHINES team so that they can begin planning for system enhancements.

In CY2024, the ICWA Liaison continued to monitor the state's compliance through semi-annual regional reports and data reports from Georgia SHINES. Meetings with the Georgia SHINES team are ongoing to continue efforts to develop a report to simplify tracking of ICWA cases, as well as improving the quality of the semi-annual data reports. The CY2024 technology enhancement within Georgia SHINES (addition of the case notes feature) should also allow for tracking using key words to determine cases where it might not yet be realized that ICWA policy must be followed.

Meetings with the Court Improvement Program resumed in the Spring of 2025 to discuss ways that DFCS and CIP can partner to improve ICWA compliance. In addition, the DHS Office of the General Counsel (OGC) is developing a Special Assistant Attorney General (SAAG) Manual that will include ICWA information for more uniform practice guidance. The ICWA Liaison will assist in providing material for the ICWA section of the Manual.

The ICWA Liaison continues to provide technical assistance on a case-by-case basis to DFCS staff. This includes assisting with at least six requests in CY2024, providing contact information for several cases and more detailed assistance on a case in Region 7. Additionally, guidance was provided on a request that also involved a necessary ICPC referral from Nebraska for a case in Region 11.

The ICWA Liaison also participates in monthly meetings for state ICWA managers held by the National Indian Child Welfare Association and facilitated by the Child Welfare League of America. The ICWA Liaison also attends training to enhance knowledge of ICWA. CY2024 trainings include: The Role of Attorneys representing parents and Osage Reign of Terror.

In 2023, the Court Improvement Program identified a Child Welfare Law Specialist (CWLS) attorney to serve as an ICWA Liaison for the courts, and to partner with the DFCS ICWA Liaison to improve awareness of ICWA among case managers, judges, and attorneys. The Liaisons attend state and national meetings that advance tribal interests and increase awareness of ICWA, including the National Indian Child Welfare Association meeting for state ICWA representatives. In 2024, the ICWA Liaison for courts consulted on one case and participated in constituency meetings and communities of practice. Plans for 2025 include reviewing a random sample of court orders to determine if ICWA regulations were met, and to present at upcoming attorney trainings.

Eligibility for Chafee and ETV Benefits

Georgia Tribes do not provide Chafee/ETV Services. DFCS is responsible for child welfare services for children in Georgia. All Chafee-eligible youth receive services through the program.

Georgia Tribes

DFCS continues to collaborate with the Georgia Tribes. The ICWA Liaison continues to serve as the DFCS State Office Liaison to the Georgia Tribes, led by Marian McCormick (Lower Muscogee Creek), Frances Crews (Cherokee of Georgia Tribal Council), and Rhonda Bennet and Glen Jones (Georgia Tribe of Eastern Cherokee). This includes participating regularly in meetings of the Georgia Council of American Indian Concerns. The meetings allow discussion of child welfare policies or practices that may involve their tribal members and families. The Annual Progress and Services Report (APSR) is shared with Georgia Tribes.

ICWA Liaison met with the Caregiver Recruitment and Retention Unit (CRRU) to explore expanding foster parent recruitment of tribal members. Plans were made to attend Georgia tribes localized gatherings by regional CRRU staff. During the 2024 bi-annual ICWA survey, it was reported that Grady County staff had previously engaged the Lower Muscogee Creek tribe regarding recruitment efforts, but they did not have interest due to their small size. Region 2 reported some difficulties in contacting the Georgia Tribe of Eastern Cherokee. Region 6 reported prior years efforts at the Ocmulgee Mounds National Historic Park during their September Ocmulgee Indigenous Celebration. This is an area that will need a focus and continued engagement is planned. For example, the ICWA Liaison is coordinating with Region 6 to begin planning for possible recruitment during the Ocmulgee Mounds Celebration. The ICWA Liaison has engaged the Georgia tribes to provide more information about this event. In addition, the ICWA Liaison reconnected the Lower Muscogee Creek Tribe with Region 10 staff related to a tribal celebration event planned for October 2025.

Data

Of the 14 regions, 10 regions report early inquiries regarding tribal affiliations with families including asking about tribal affiliations during family team meetings and court proceedings. Per the regional reports, Regional Field Program Specialists are utilized for additional support and monitoring of cases that may require tribal notification. Once a case is identified, the SAAGs staff court cases and regular reviews to ensure adherence to ICWA. In addition, SAAGs have been used to engage tribes, request verification of a child or parent's membership in a tribe, and tribe's participation in court hearings.

In CY2024, across the state, there were thirteen children in eight cases who were verified as members of a tribe or eligible for membership. Of the eight cases, seven were foster care cases and one was family preservation. Notification to tribes occurred in all seven foster care cases. Notification did not occur in the family preservation case.

Two of eight cases reported active participation by tribal representatives. One of the cases in Region 1 had involvement with Renee Gann from the Cherokee Nation in Oklahoma as an expert witness. Staff for this case had ongoing involvement with the tribe and participation during court hearings. Another case in region 2 has court involvement with the ICWA Case Manager Celeste Apkwaw and Tribal representative, Emmanuel Antelo from the Gila River Indian Community. One case received a denial of tribal eligibility from the Nez Perce tribe.

Regional staff reported difficulty contacting tribal representatives in some cases. Region 1 reported difficulty finding an expert witness for the Rosebud Sioux which delayed TPR and permanency for the child. Region 11 reported that regular contact occurred with the Eastern Band of Cherokee until June 2024. There have been some changes in staff within the county and contact has been re-established recently. The last contact with the tribe indicated that they would like to be updated but had no intention of intervening in the case.

Several tribes and tribal representatives were in contact with Georgia DFCS staff this year including Cherokee Nation Representative Renee Gann, Indigenous Alaska Tribe (Gwichyaa Zzhee Gwich'in) f/k/a The Native of Ft. Yukon, Rosebud Sioux from South Dakota, Gila River Indian Community was represented by ICWA Case Manager Celeste Apkwaw and Emmanuel Antelo, Mescalero Apache, and the Nez Perce. Counties reported positive working relationships once notification was successful to the tribe. Region 1 and 2 have reported working with several families who are members of the Eastern Band of Cherokee, and the regions work well with representative Jenny Bean, making it possible to make the most appropriate decisions for the children.

CFSP/APSR Exchange

All tribal leaders are invited to present or attend Georgia's annual APSR Joint Planning meetings. Tribal leaders are invited and encouraged to participate in monitoring of the CFSP

and the development of the APSR each year. The ICWA liaison provides information to tribes on how to access both the CFSP and the APSR and presents a summary of those reports to the Georgia Council on American Indian Concerns. The ICWA Liaison will continue efforts to ensure the tribal leaders are engaged in CFSP-APSR Joint Collaboration meetings, encouraged to provide feedback on goals and strategies, and invited to participate in agency planning activities.

Jurisdiction

Georgia Tribes do not provide child welfare services. DFCS is responsible for child welfare services for children in Georgia.

Section F: CAPTA State Plan Requirements and Updates

The contact information for Georgia’s CAPTA Coordinator is:

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In CY2024, there were no changes in Georgia statutes that adversely affected the State’s eligibility for the CAPTA State Grant. There were no changes to the current CAPTA Plan.

Citizen Review Panels

Georgia currently has four citizen review panels. Three district-level panels were established in 2024: North District (DFCS Regions 1-5), South District (DFCS Regions 6-12), and Metro District (DFCS Regions 13-14). A panel comprised of youth with lived experience (Georgia Peers Advocating for Change (GPAC)) includes youth from the entire state. Each of Georgia’s panels has 10-14 active volunteer members who live and/or work within their panel’s district. Panel member volunteers were recruited and onboarded in 2024 and have agreed to serve a three-year term. Panel member recruitment can continue to occur within the three-year term if a panel determines there is a need to add additional members of an identified professional discipline based on the interest of the panel. The next panel member recruitment and selection process will begin in the fall of 2026. Discussions are underway to develop a “roll-off plan” that staggers the timing of incoming and outgoing panel members and maintains institutional knowledge within the panels during transitional years.

All panels meet independently at least quarterly; the youth panel meets monthly. Panels meet together semi-annually to collaborate on inquiries and share information. An all-panel orientation was held in June 2024 to introduce new members and review panel procedures and expectations. An all-panel retreat occurred over 1.5 days in August 2024. At the All-Panel Annual Retreat, the members were given a brief history of Citizen Review Panels in Georgia and heard a presentation from the CRP Chair of New York (the New York panel structure is similar to the Georgia panel structure). Members also received presentations on Georgia’s most recent Panel Annual Report, current statewide data and information from several prevention programs – the Family First Prevention Services, State of Hope, and Prevent Child Abuse Georgia – and Georgia’s Court Improvement Program. The next all-

panel meeting was held in April 2025 to develop the panel's annual report and recommendations. Discussion also addressed how the panels will structure their FY2026 inquiries to ensure the panels' work continues to focus on the state child protection system.

At the conclusion of the All-panel Annual Retreat in August 2024, each district panel selected its chairperson and focus area for the year. The South District expressed interest in the Timely Relative Subsidy Support and Approval Process based on shared experiences while partnering to serve families and children in various counties of South Georgia. The Metro District expressed interest in two areas: Workforce Turnover/Retention Efforts/ Training and Improving Relationship Between DFCS and Housing Authorities in Georgia. Similarly, the North District began its inquiries with interest in two areas: Workforce Retention for DFCS Case Managers, Providers, and Foster Parents and Collaboration and Information sharing among agencies (courts, education, CASA, providers, etc.). Each of the district panels took into consideration the results of the CFSR Round 4 Final Report, discussions during CFSR PIP focus groups on safety, permanency, and well-being, and Georgia's current Child and Family Services Plan to align the efforts of each panel with current state performance and efforts.

Staff assistance for the panels is provided by DHS/DFCS. In FY2024, the Panel Coordinator provided the panels with support that included obtaining guest presenters on topics of interest to the panels, coordination of meeting location, coordination of the annual All-Panel Retreat in August 2024, submitting requests for data and information to DFCS leadership and other community agencies and stakeholders to obtain information on behalf of the panels. The Panel Coordinator supports each of the panels by attending all meetings in-person unless the meeting is designated to be held virtually. In addition to convening and facilitating quarterly meetings with each district panel, the Panel Coordinator serves as a liaison between DFCS and the panels and assists the panels with researching information, stakeholder engagement, soliciting public comment, and facilitating preparation of the annual reports of CRP recommendations with assistance from the DFCS Federal Plans Unit and the University of Georgia.

DHS contracted with the J.W. Fanning Institute at the University of Georgia to serve as an independent third-party support for the panels. In CY2024, staff at the Fanning Institute collaborated with the Panel Coordinator to engage community stakeholders and previous panel members to develop and define the regional panels, develop a recruitment plan and orientation process for new panel members, and provide technical assistance to ensure that the new panels remain independent and unbiased. In CY2025, the Fanning Institute is supporting the panels by assisting with identification and recruitment of new members for each panel, as needed, to ensure variety of professional disciplines on each panel. The Fanning Institute led the coordination of the All-Panel Meeting in April 2025 and will also coordinate the All-Panel Retreat in fall 2025. The Fanning Institute is assisting the panels

with the development of their annual report, the Policy and Procedure Manual, and updating the CAPTA State Plan to reflect the current child welfare performance data and priority areas of the panels. The annual citizens review panel report, as well as the Division's written responses to the panel recommendations, are attached in the Appendix.

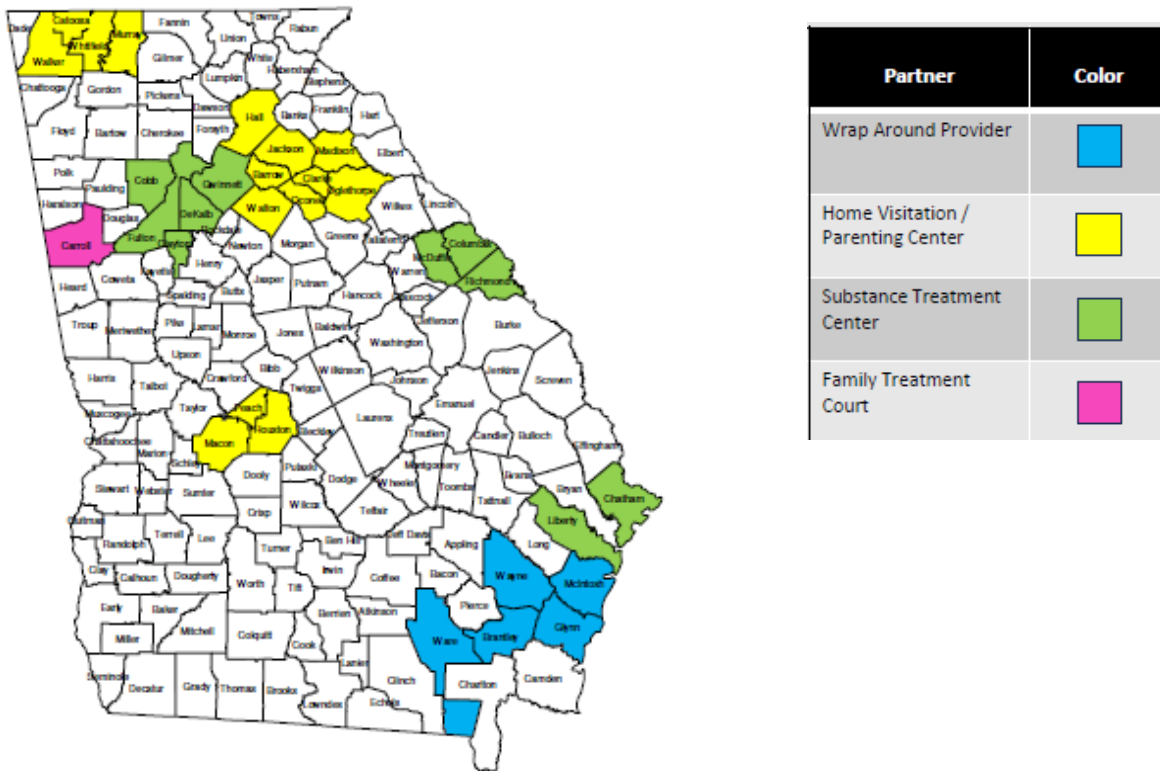
Infants Affected by Substance Use/Abuse

Georgia's CAPTA State Grant supports the development, implementation, and monitoring of plans of safe care (POSC) for substance-affected infants by providing funding and technical support to community providers. In FY2024, the CAPTA State Grant supported the development, implementation, and monitoring of plans of safe care (POSC) for substance-affected infants by providing funding and technical support to the Department of Public Health, Mary Hall Freedom Village in DFCS regions Resource13 and 14, Community In Schools of Catoosa, Rainbow House/Children's Center-Houston County, Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities, Recovery Place Community Services, Hope House, Carroll County Juvenile Court, Foster Love Ministries, Georgia Family Connection Partnership, Prevent Child Abuse Athens/BrightPaths, Wellroot/UMCH, Family Support Council, United Way of Central Georgia and several other community providers, including approximately 17 First Steps sites across the state. These partnerships aim to expand community-based support, substance abuse recovery and treatment, and home visiting services that provide ongoing monitoring of POSC for infants and their families referred from DFCS. These programs are encouraged to connect with their local First Steps, Community Service Boards, substance abuse treatment providers, and other resources for supports and collaboration. In March 2024, the first annual POSC Meet and Greet was held at the John C. Maxwell Leadership Center in Duluth, GA. The event was attended by over 30 community stakeholders and partners. The day included interactive activities and presentations focused on prenatal substance abuse. The agenda also offered providers the chance to network, share successes and challenges related to family engagement. Participant feedback highlighted the value of open discussions and networking with grantees from across the state, providing an opportunity to exchange best practices, lived experiences, resources, and explore potential avenues for expanding POSC services.

The notification pathway for POSC referrals with No Maltreatment of abuse allegations cases (referred to as Special Circumstances - Infants Prenatally Exposed to Substances (No Maltreatment)) involving a contracted provider requires the DFCS Recovery Specialist to route the intake information directly to the provider within three business days of receiving the intake report. The provider must confirm receipt of the referral within 24 hours, make initial contact with the family within three business days, and develop the POSC with the

family within 60 days. Many contracted providers have established collaborative relationships with their local DFCS teams, so the local DFCS office will send the referral directly to the provider. In jurisdictions without a contracted provider, county DFCS staff will continue to manage these referrals by developing POSCs, making service referrals, and monitoring progress. Additionally, CAPTA-funded POSC partners must adhere to [Child Welfare Policy 19.27: Plans of Safe Care for Infants Prenatally Exposed to Substances](#).

Georgia Division of Family & Children Services 2024-2025 Plan of Safe Care Partnerships



Source: DFCS Recovery Specialist; Data as of February 2025

In February 2025, the Division released a funding opportunity announcement requesting applications from community providers to support POSC development and monitoring in FY2026. Fourteen applications were received, and eight were recommended for funding.

CAPTA State Grant

The Division supported the following projects in FY25 with CAPTA State Grant funds.

Activity	Program Partner(s)	CAPTA Priority	CAPTA Amount
Multi-Disciplinary Child Abuse and Neglect Institute (MDCANI) Training	Georgia Office of the Child Advocate	Workforce Development (Area 7)	\$75,000
Mandated Reporter Training	DFCS Prevention and Community Support	Workforce Development (Area 7)	\$47,386
POSC Awardees	Mary Hall Freedom Village R13	Plans of Safe Care (Area 7, 10, 13)	\$200,000
	Mary Hall Freedom Village R14		\$250,000
	Carroll County Juvenile Court		\$169,491
	Communities in Schools of Catoosa		\$52,589
	Rainbow House / Children's Resource Center Houston County		\$200,000
	Recovery Place Community Services		\$199,993
	Hope House		\$199,606
	Foster Love Ministries		\$200,000
	Prevent Child Abuse Athens		\$200,000
	Advocates for Bartow		\$80,000
	Wellroot/UMHC		\$205,977
POSC Tracking Database	DHS/DFCS Office of Information Technology	Plans of Safe Care (Area 7, 10, 13)	\$39,510
CAPTA/CJA Grantee Administrative Support	Care Solutions, Inc.	CAPTA Administrative Support	\$51,000
CAPTA Panel Support (meetings and technical assistance)	University of Georgia Angels in Paradise	CAPTA Administrative Support	\$197,664
Accenture AVENues virtual reality renewal	DHS/DFCS Training and Professional Development	Workforce Development (Area 7)	\$168,000
First Steps Georgia / Home Visiting Programs	DFCS Prevention and Community Support	Plans of Safe Care (Area 7, 10, 13)	\$501,372
Click Safe mobile emergency response tool	DHS/DFCS Office of Information Technology	Workforce Development (Area 7)	\$383,940

State of Hope Community Partnerships	DHS/DFCS Office of External Affairs	Enhancing Community Capacity and Interagency Collaboration (Area 11, 12, 13)	\$200,000
Youth Villages	DFCS Permanency Unit	Enhancing Community Capacity and Interagency Collaboration (Area 11, 12, 13)	\$250,000

The CAPTA State Grant supported the following partner programs:

- Office of the Child Advocate – to deliver ten MDCANI trainings. MDCANI is an intensive, two-day training covering every aspect of a dependency case, including reasonable efforts to prevent removal. MDCANI training materials further promote the utilization of trauma-informed therapies for children, collaborations with domestic violence and substance abuse treatment services, inter-agency services to prevent re-entry to foster care, high quality legal education (related to pre-removal needs) and other topics the faculty deem appropriate for the specific jurisdiction receiving training. Attendees to MDCANI include DFCS staff, law enforcement, legal and judicial partners, CASA, and attorneys. In 2024, ten trainings were delivered drawing 470 attendees for MDCANI Part 1 (The First 75 Days) and Part 2 (Focus on Permanency).
- [Mandated Reporter training](#) developed by Care Solutions. In CY2024, 55,452 participants enrolled in the mandated reporter training and 47,734 certificates of completion were earned. Most trained participants were educators, but other child-serving professional disciplines were also represented.
- Accenture’s [AVenues](#) virtual reality experience which is used for recruitment and new case manager training. The virtual reality (VR) training experience supports caseworkers in their decision making during a scenario of an initial virtual home visit. Wearing VR goggles, the user takes up the caseworker role, hears a report that a child is being mistreated and visits her at home. In that virtual home, the user practices observing, asking questions of each family member, and then interpreting their behavior. At the end of the experience, the user makes a critical decision to find if the home is safe enough for the child, or the child should be removed from his/her family.
- Youth Villages to provide the Intercept family preservation and in-home support services to 36 families in regions 13 and 14. Their Intercept program aims to prevent foster care placement and provide post-reunification stabilization services.
- First Steps – coordinated by the Prevention and Community Support Section (PCS) and Georgia’s Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) grantee (the Department of Public Health). [First Steps Georgia](#) provides universal, free, and voluntary support services for all expectant parents and children birth to five and their families, including screenings of and referrals to appropriate services for

pregnant women for substance use disorders, and infants and children for effects of prenatal exposure to substance. Four sites were recommended for funding in FY24, to serve 1,050 families with the First Steps program and 175 families with Home Visiting. The program staff develop and monitor Plans of Safe Care for prenatally exposed infants who are referred from the local DFCS office. Caregivers are also encouraged to voluntarily enroll with the home visiting program to receive ongoing services and supports for their family. Training and technical assistance is provided by the University of Georgia.

- Ongoing funding for the mobile emergency response tool “Click Safe”, formally known as Safe Harbor System, which was included in Georgia Senate Bill 138 (2015). DFCS partnered with the Georgia Tech Research Institute (GTRI) to develop an emergency response tool to aid case managers as a last line of defense if they find themselves in a dangerous situation during a site visit where calling 911 is not an option. The [Click Safe System](#) is a unique safety app that consists of a mobile application, web application, and a Panic Button. It is a discreet alert system that enables law enforcement to pinpoint a case manager’s location. The case manager can activate a help request when needed using the “Panic Button” to alert and dispatch 911 emergency authorities to the case manager’s GPS-identified location.

FY26 Plans

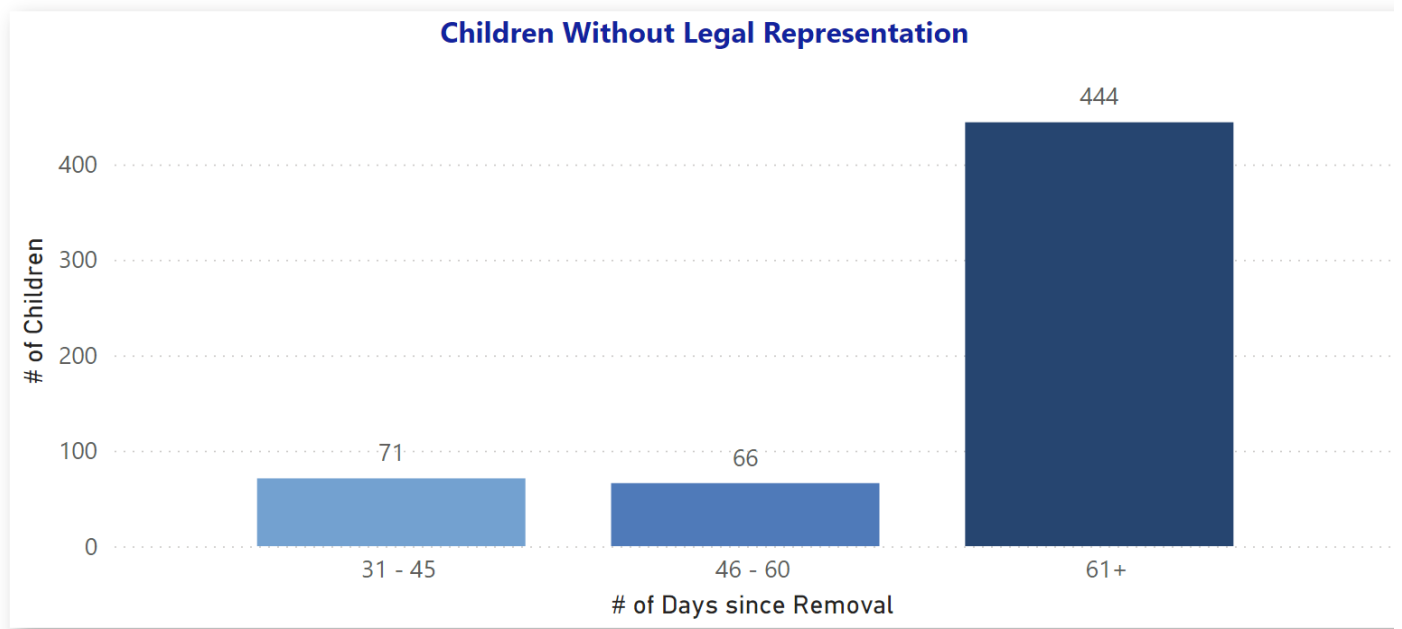
The Division is working with the state’s CAPTA Panels and other stakeholders to explore additional opportunities in FY26 that leverage the CAPTA State Grant and expand community collaborations. In 2025, the CAPTA Panels are working to update the CAPTA State Plan to align with the 2025-2029 CFSP and the CFSR PIP, and which will be used to help identify funding priorities for the CAPTA state grant in FY2026.

Legal Representation

Data reported from Georgia SHINES shows that 94.2% of children in foster care over 30 days (10,045) as of May 23, 2025, had legal representation. This report excludes children with legal status as “temporary voluntary” or “Short term emergency care”.

Children in Care over 30 Days without Representation (5/23/2025)

# of Children Under 18 In Custody Over 30 Days:	10,045
# of Children In Care Over 30 Days Without Representation:	581
% of Children In Care Over 30 Days With Representation:	94.22%



Source: Georgia SHINES, LENSES report

To increase awareness and improve data quality, a Permanency Unit team member coordinates with each region and provides support for staff. The Georgia SHINES Job Aid is shared to remind staff on the procedures to input representation data into the case.

Section G: Statistical and Supporting Information

Update on Targeted Plans

Training and Professional Development Plan

No updates were made to the 2025-2029 Training Plan.

Diligent Recruitment and Retention Plan

There were no significant changes in the demographics of youth entering care, and so no changes in the Division's strategies to improve placement matching and decrease placement disruptions.

Georgia is enhancing a SHINES validation processes, standardizing collection methods, and ensuring that placement and foster home approval data are consistent across program areas. The identified system enhancement for the kinship assessment will limit incorrect policy assessments and foster home denials. The updated timeline for implementation of the kinship separate standards is October 2025.

Health Care Oversight Plan

The 2025-2029 Health Care Oversight and Coordination Plan was revised to reflect several important shifts in structure, roles, and oversight practices designed to enhance the quality and consistency of care provided to children and youth in foster care.

Outlined in the new plan are a few key state-level teams and shifts in responsibility. The newly created DFCS Health Services Coordinator (HSC) positions are highlighted as key roles within the State Office, tasked with guiding practice, monitoring service delivery, and providing technical assistance and training to field staff. The Early Childhood Collaboration Unit (ECCU) is now responsible for managing developmental screening referrals for children from birth to age five, a responsibility previously held by WPAC. This shift signals a more specialized focus on early childhood needs and interagency collaboration with the Georgia Department of Public Health. In addition, the DFCS Child Welfare Support Services (CWSS) team is introduced as the oversight body for ensuring the quality and fidelity of contracted services across the child welfare system.

The narrative and scope of quality assurance activities have also been expanded significantly in the revised plan. The plan outlines a more rigorous and proactive approach to monitoring health services and documentation, with quarterly reporting to leadership, monthly reviews of claims and data, and formal case staffing for any cases with screenings overdue by more than 120 days. There is also stronger alignment between quality oversight efforts and existing continuous quality improvement (CQI) systems, including collaboration with regional C3 coordinators.

The plan places greater emphasis on the responsibilities of DFCS case managers (CMs) for assessments and care coordination. It provides clearer guidance on documentation in Georgia SHINES, the use of the Georgia Health Information Network (GHIN), and communication with caregivers and providers. Additionally, the revised plan provides more specific timing around the development of a new trauma assessment template and accompanying training, targeting release in the fourth quarter of FFY 2025.

Early intervention practices for young children are more detailed in the plan. The referral process to the Children 1st program and Babies Can't Wait is outlined with step-by-step instructions, clearer time frames, documentation standards, and monitoring mechanisms. These additions reflect an increased priority on early identification and response to developmental concerns among children in care.

Lastly, the approach to transition planning has been strengthened. The updated plan assigns clearer responsibilities and expectations to case managers for ensuring continuity of care, including assisting youth with applying for Medicaid in or out of state, applying for Social Security benefits, and submitting developmental disability waivers when applicable. The plan underscores a more hands-on role for case managers and health coordinators in ensuring long-term care continuity and successful transitions into adulthood.

Overall, the plan reflects a more detailed, hands-on, and compliance-oriented approach to managing health care for children in foster care, with a clear emphasis on early childhood supports, interagency coordination, rigorous oversight, and stronger accountability for DFCS staff.

DHS/DFCS 'Continuity of Operations' Disaster Plan

Updates to the 2025-2029 Disaster Plan include:

- Updated state, district, and regional contacts
- Added language around D-SNAP EBT cards

- Added language to reference agency policies for alternative locations for operations during emergency events
- Language surrounding any threat
- Added link for the National Weather Service Forecast Office for southwest and south-central Georgia
- Added language to activate the State Shelter Plan for County-to-County Agreements

Georgia experienced three major hurricanes and a Biolab chemical plant fire during FY25.

- August 5, 2024, Hurricane Debby moved over southern Georgia as a Category 1 hurricane before quickly weakening to a tropical storm. Ten Red Cross managed shelters opened in seven counties – Bullock, Camden, Chatham (4), Coffee, Effingham, Glynn, and Lowndes.
- Hurricane Helene was a major category 4 hurricane with peak winds of 140 miles when it made landfall that decreased to a category 2 hurricane when it hit Georgia on September 27. The Governor executed a state of emergency for all 159 counties in Georgia. Damages were widespread from severe flooding, agricultural losses, and over 30 tornadoes and leaving over one million residents without electricity resulting in 29 Red Cross managed shelters opening in the following 24 counties:

Appling	Cook	Fulton	Laurens	Pierce	Telfair
Butts	Decatur	Henry	Lowndes - 2	Rabun	Thomas - 2
Camden	Dougherty	Jefferson	McDuffie	Richmond - 3	Tift
Colquitt	Echols	Lanier	Newton - 2	Sumter	Treutlen

- On October 8, less than two weeks after Hurricane Helene, Milton a category 5 Hurricane before downgrading as a category 3 hurricane spared Georgia; however, to accommodate evacuees from Florida and Georgia, ten Red Cross managed shelters opened in nine counties Bibb (2), Butts, Camden, Crisp, Dougherty, Glynn, Houston, Monroe, and Muscogee.

The Disaster Supplemental Nutrition Program (DSNAP) was activated for residents affected by Hurricane Helene in 55 disaster declared counties to include:

Appling	Bryan	Clinch	Effingham	Jefferson	Long	Screven	Treutlen
Atkinson	Bulloch	Coffee	Emanuel	Jenkins	Lowndes	Taliaferro	Ware
Bacon	Burke	Colquitt	Evans	Johnson	McDuffie	Tattnall	Warren
Ben Hill	Camden	Columbia	Glascocock	Lanier	McIntosh	Telfair	Washington
Berrien	Candler	Cook	Glynn	Laurens	Montgomery	Thomas	Wayne

Brantley Charlton Dodge Irwin Liberty Pierce Tift Wheeler
 Brooks Chatham Echols Jeff Davis Lincoln Richmond Toombs

Residents in the following 41 counties affected by Hurricane Helene were declared as Major Disaster Counties making them eligible to apply for disaster assistance through the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Individual and Public Assistance Programs. Those declared counties are:

Appling Bulloch Colquitt Glascock Johnson McDuffie Telfair
 Atkinson Burke Columbia Glynn Lanier Montgomery
 Bacon Candler Cook Laurens Pierce Toombs
 Chatham Irwin Liberty
 Ben Hill Echols Lincoln Richmond Treutlen
 Berrien Clinch Jeff Davis
 Brooks Emanuel Lowndes Screven Ware
 Coffee Jefferson
 Evans Tattnall Washington
 Jenkins
 Wheeler

During the 2024 historic hurricane season, the Department of Human Services also assisted with sheltering efforts due to the Rockdale County Biolab chemical fire October 1 - 5. Two shelters were opened in Newton and Henry Counties.

During Winter Weather January 2025, due to low temperatures and power outages, 22 warming centers opened in 18 counties between January 8 and January 29. No other shelters were opened during this event.

Appling Bibb - 2 Charlton Clarke Clayton Crisp DeKalb Douglas Fulton -
 3
 Jackson Lowndes -Meriwether Muscogee Polk Rabun Spalding Sumter Upson
 2

The DFCS Disaster Plan was not utilized for COVID-19 during FY25, however, counties continue to order COVID tests from the Department of Public Health stockpile warehouse. Lastly, Newton County had a sibling group of four children impacted by Hurricane Helene in October 2024. The foster home was destroyed. The foster parent and the children went to

her second home where a tree came through that roof as well, the children ended up having to move placements.

Juvenile Justice Transfer Data

Georgia SHINES data identified zero youth who transferred from DFCS to sole DJJ custody during FFY2024. Five children were transferred from DFCS to joint DFCS/DJJ custody during the period – four in the Metro district and one in North district.

Education and Training Voucher Data

7/1/2023-6/30/2024: 233 students received ETV support. This includes 97 first time voucher recipients.

7/1/2024-6/30/2025: Estimated 239 students receiving ETV support. This includes 121 first time voucher recipients.

Monthly Caseworker Visit Data

Georgia will report data on monthly caseworker visits with children in foster care by the required submission date of December 15, 2025.

Child Protective Services Workforce

Education, Qualifications and Training

The following table presents CY2024 demographic data on the State’s Social Services case management staff hierarchy (e.g., associate, case manager, supervisor).

Demographics on Social Services Case Management

Staff Characteristic		Total	Percent
Gender	Female	1619	92
	Male	151	8
Race/Ethnicity	Am. Indian	3	0
	Asian	11	1
	Black	1094	62

Staff Characteristic		Total	Percent
	Hawaii/PI	0	0
	Unknown	44	2
	Hispanic	60	3
	White	557	31
Age Group	<26	155	9
	26-30	262	15
	31-35	301	17
	36-40	233	13
	41-45	242	14
	46-50	243	14
	51-55	158	9
	56-60	111	6
	61+	64	3
A	Not Indicated	170	10
B	Less Than HS Graduate		0
C	HS Graduate or Equivalent	68	4
D	Some College	13	1
E	Technical School	2	0
F	2-Year College Degree	12	1
G	Bachelor's Level Degree	1145	65
H	Some Graduate School	2	0
I	Master's Level Degree	352	20
J	Doctorate (Academic)	0	0
K	Doctorate (Professional)	4	0
M	Specialist in Education	1	0

Staff Characteristic		Total	Percent
Pay Grade			
	G	747	42
	H	328	19
	I	224	13
	J	341	19
	K	1	0
	L	97	5
	M	16	1
	N	7	0
	O	0	0
	P	6	0
	Q	2	0

SOURCE: DFCS Data Unit and DHS Office of Human Resource Management

There were a total of 1,769 Intake and CPS workers who had at least one active case during the 12-month period ending December 31, 2024. These CPS and Intake workers were then matched with Employee Peoplesoft data to return their demographic characteristics. The resulting set was then filtered for the predefined job codes of SSP070, SSP071, SSP072, SSP073, SSM10, SSM011, SSM074, SSM070, SSM080, SSM085, SSM072, SSM071, SSM075, SSM010.

Highlighted Column Shows average load for a Foster Care Caseworker in CY 2024.

REGION	AVERAGE	MEDIAN
1	17	18
2	20	19
3	13	13
4	17	17
5	18	17
6	18	16
7	28	28
8	24	25
9	17	13
10	16	17
11	27	28

12	20	19
13	21	21
14	16	15
State	19	18

SOURCE: DFCS Data Unit, Georgia SHINES

Data based on any worker with greater than 5 cases at any point in time

DFCS CWS Field Operations - Special Entry Salaries

effective April 1, 2025

Job Code	Job Title	PG	Special Entry Salary	Comments
SST080	Child Welfare Svcs Tech 1	D	\$35,360.00	
SST081	Child Welfare Svcs Tech 2	E	\$38,480.00	
SST082	Child Welfare Svcs Tech 3	F	\$41,600.00	
SST083	Child Welfare Svcs Tech Spv	G	\$45,240.00	
SSP150	Child Welfare Svc Intake SPC 1	H	\$40,560.00	
SSP151	Child Welfare Svc Intake SPC 2	I	\$42,640.00	
SSP152	Child Welfare Svc Intake SPC 3	J	\$44,720.00	
SSP153	Child Welfare Svc Intake SPSPV	K	\$48,880.00	
SSP154	Child Welfare Svc Intake Admin	L	\$50,960.00	
SSP070	Child Welfare Svcs Case Mgr 1	I	\$47,083.51	
SSP071	Child Welfare Svcs Case Mgr 2	J	\$50,763.86	
SSP072	Child Welfare Svcs Case Mgr 3	K	\$54,812.25	
SSP073	Child Welfare Svcs CM Spv	L	\$59,265.47	
SSP164	Child Welfare Svcs Admin	M	\$73,000.00	

SSP165	Child Welfare Svc Field Pgm SP	M	\$70,000.00	Field Program Specialist
SSM080	Child Welfare Svcs Program Dir	N	\$80,000.00	Supervises CWS Admin and FPS
SSM070	Child Welfare Svcs Cnty Dir 1	M	\$73,000.00	
SSM071	Child Welfare Svcs Cnty Dir 2	M	\$77,000.00	
SSM072	Child Welfare Svcs Cnty Dir 3	N	\$84,000.00	
SSM073	Child Welfare Svcs Cnty Dir 4	O	\$93,000.00	
SSM074	Child Welfare Svcs Cnty Dir 5	P	\$103,000.00	
SSM075	Child Welfare Svcs Cnty Dir 6	Q	\$113,000.00	
SSM083	Child Welfare Svc Dpty Cnty D4	M	\$77,000.00	
SSM084	Child Welfare Svc Dpty Cnty D5	O	\$84,000.00	
SSM085	Child Welfare Svc Dpty Cnty D6	P	\$88,000.00	
SSM100	Child Welfare Svc Regional Dir	R	\$125,000.00	
A0117	Director	SE	\$138,000.00	District Director/Section Director



Division of Family & Children Services | Child Welfare Services (CWS) Career Path Model – Child Welfare Case Manager Series *Effective April 1, 2025*

Case Managers			Supervisor
Child Welfare Svcs CM 1 SSP070 - Grade I	Child Welfare Svcs CM 2 SSP071 - Grade J	Child Welfare Svcs CM 3 SSP072 - Grade K	Child Welfare Svcs CM Spv SSP073 - Grade L
Special Entry \$47,083.51	Special Entry \$50,763.86 or 10% promotional increase (whichever is higher)	Special Entry \$54,812.25 or 10% promotional increase (whichever is higher)	Special Entry \$59,265.47 or 10% promotional increase (whichever is higher)
<p>Minimum Qualifications:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Bachelor's degree from an accredited college or university. 	<p>Minimum Qualifications:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Bachelor's degree and two years of case management experience; or one year of experience at lower-level CWS CM 1 or position equivalent. 	<p>Minimum Qualifications:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Bachelor's degree and three years of case management experience; or one year of experience at lower-level CWS CM 2 or position equivalent. 	<p>Minimum Qualifications:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Bachelor's degree AND three years of job-related case management experience; OR one year of experience at a lower-level CWS CM 3 or position equivalent.
<p>Notes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All new hires come in as CWS CM 1. • New employees with public child welfare experience in another state are eligible for promotion to the appropriate Case Manager level after successful completion of new hire training and a minimum of three months successful performance. • Former GA DFCS employees may return to the agency at their former CWS CM job classification level. <i>Example: A former CWS CM 2 may be rehired as a CWS CM 2.</i> 	<p>DFCS Qualifications:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Master's degree and one year of experience with GA DFCS as CWS CM 1 or public child welfare experience from another state; OR Bachelor's degree and two years of case management experience with GA DFCS or public child welfare experience from another state. <input type="checkbox"/> Successful completion of new worker and all advanced skills trainings. <input type="checkbox"/> A three or higher on their last Performance Management Review and in good standing. <input type="checkbox"/> No disciplinary action within one year. 	<p>DFCS Qualifications:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Master's degree and two years of experience with GA DFCS as CWS CM 2 or public child welfare experience from another state; OR Bachelor's degree and three years of case management experience with GA DFCS or public child welfare experience from another state. <input type="checkbox"/> Successful completion of all Professional Excellence and/or professional development trainings offered by DFCS. <input type="checkbox"/> A three or higher on their last Performance Management Review and in good standing . <input type="checkbox"/> No disciplinary action within one year. 	<p>DFCS Qualifications:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Master's degree and two years of case management experience with GA DFCS or public child welfare experience from another state; OR Bachelor's degree AND three years of job-related case management experience; OR one year of experience at a lower-level CWS CM 3 or position equivalent.

Upd 04.28.25

DFCS Organizational Chart

