

South Carolina Department of Social Services

Fiscal Year 2022-2023 Overview

The South Carolina Department of Social Services (DSS or Agency), one of the largest state government agencies in South Carolina, provides a vast array of critical services to a wide range of constituent groups who may find themselves in difficult and challenging situations across the state. The agency operates through an integrated service delivery model of county-level offices and regional operations that are guided by a state office which provides centralized management, support, and accountability functions. The Agency works closely with and relies on other state agencies, non-profit organizations, and other strategic partners to perform its work.

Beyond the high-profile work done in the areas of Child Welfare and Adult Protective Services, the Agency also serves as the state's administrator of safety net programs that provide financial and employment assistance to families in need, including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program. The Agency also provides the infrastructure for the licensure and oversight of childcare providers across the state, as well as the ongoing implementation of a quality-based ratings system. The Agency also manages the statewide collection and disbursement of Child Support. Finally, Agency employees staff emergency shelters statewide during hurricanes, floods, and other disasters.

Division Highlights

Adult Advocacy

The Adult Advocacy Division consists of the Adult Protective Services (APS) and Domestic Violence programs. APS is mandated to investigate non-criminal reports of caregiver abuse, neglect, and exploitation of vulnerable adults. If the results of an investigation meet the criteria outlined in SC law and APS policy, temporary protective services are provided to adults (18 years or older) who have been determined to be vulnerable and have a physical or mental condition which prevents them from providing for their own care or protection.

The Domestic Violence program funds, monitors, and assists domestic violence programs statewide, as mandated by state law. Crisis intervention and prevention services support victims of family violence and their children through a network of community based/non-profit service providers. This program also manages the federal Family Violence Prevention and Services Act (FVPSA) grant that supports emergency shelters and related activities. This program also manages the state's Domestic Violence Fund, which awards grants to domestic violence centers and programs statewide.

Together, these programs funded, organized, and hosted the state's third annual World Elder Abuse Awareness Walk (WEAAD) on June 15, 2023, with over 200 participants. Speakers included Kelly Cordell, SCDSS Adult Advocacy Director, Connie Munn, Department of Aging Director, and State Senator Katrina Shealy of Lexington County. Multiple media outlets covered the event.

Adult Protective Services

APS continues to refine its infrastructure to improve program outcomes. Collaboration with the Agency's Information Technology team has led to modifications to better track services for adult clients. Evaluating and updating procedures and policies remains a focus, including efforts to rewrite the investigations policy and building a practice model to guide case work. The policy and program oversight team continues to focus on practice improvement tools and strategies and has begun practice reviews regionally. After a thorough review of the intake process, a draft intake tool was developed to be implemented during the next fiscal year. This new tool will bridge gaps in the intake process and allow some of our state's most vulnerable adults to receive services. APS continues to collaborate with the Agency's Staff Development and Training team to review, update, and enhance training opportunities for staff. APS finalized a new assessment tool, South Carolina Adult Needs and Vulnerability Assessment (SCANVA), that will look at adult's needs and vulnerability as well as strengths and well-being.

For the sixth consecutive year, the Agency has received grant funding from the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) program that funded the Family Group Conferencing Program. Next grant year, this program will be brought in-house. APS is currently hiring positions and developing a new model, Adult Centered Planning (ACP). The ACP program is focused on the adult and their supporting family or friends.

APS received ARPA stimulus funds through the Administration of Community Living (ACL), which has allowed funding for projects and services the program otherwise would not have been able to implement. One of these projects, the Home Stabilization Project, provide funds to make minor repairs or modifications that will allow the adult to remain in their home.

Domestic Violence Program

Content on domestic violence continues to be integrated into all related APS curriculum offerings. Staff from the domestic violence program attended numerous APS regional meetings to provide updates and resources related to domestic violence. In addition, the program continues to work with SCCADVASA to develop and conduct a specialized training for DSS staff regarding domestic violence and also participates in the Domestic Violence Advisory Committee, which meets quarterly.

The Agency continues to provide funding through grants to local shelters and domestic violence programs. The domestic violence liaison program in each DSS county office continues to collaborate and support DSS county offices to better serve shared clients. The creation of a DSS domestic violence liaison toolkit allows liaisons to share best practices, documents, and data.

Child Support Services

The Child Support Services Division (CSSD) establishes and enforces orders for child support, establishes paternity for children when paternity is an issue, locates absent parents when whereabouts are unknown, and manages the collection and distribution of child support payments. In addition to services provided to custodial parents, noncustodial parents may apply for genetic testing to determine if they are the father of a child. CSSD also provides enhanced fatherhood initiatives to improve the capability of both custodial and noncustodial parents to provide their children with the financial, physical, and emotional support they deserve and need to be safe and to thrive. CSSD strengthened its partnership with the South Carolina Center for Fathers and Families by coordinating four (4) regional conferences which also included the Economic Services Division, Child Welfare Division, and the Early Care

Scholarship Program. Through the Access and Visitation grant, better known as the Visitation Involvement Parenting (VIP) program, services are provided to assist noncustodial parents with obtaining court ordered visitation with their children. The VIP program currently provides services in the Midlands and Lowcountry regions. The Lowcountry region welcomed a new program coordinator in the past year who successfully completed the South Carolina Bar Association's Family Court Mediator training. CSSD continues to reinforce that the division serves the needs of all parents regardless of whether they are the custodial or noncustodial parent.

Over the course of the federal fiscal year, the division focused on increasing staff knowledge through opportunities to cross-train and shadow in other areas within CSSD. As a result, CSSD has seen an increase in existing staff accepting new positions within the division as opposed to seeking opportunities elsewhere. The retention of staff and migration within the division has set a precedent for other employees to follow and several staff members have informed their team leaders that their goals are to gain experience in their current position and pursue other positions at CSSD in the future. The division focused on creating a core curriculum for new employees as well as specialized seminars and continuing education for existing staff. CSSD completed and implemented a two-week training curriculum for Regional Case Managers. New employees attend this training at the State Office which provides a firm foundation before they begin individualized training in the Regional Offices. The division held several seminars covering topics such as case closure and intergovernmental case processing. CSSD also held a Continuing Legal Education (CLE) seminar for staff attorneys which was approved by the South Carolina Supreme Court's Commission on CLE to provide the attorneys with credit for their participation.

CSSD continues to collect money for clients efficiently, with collections increasing year over year. In fact, CSSD was the 14th most cost-effective child support program in the United States for the most recent federal fiscal year. Streamlining processes by expanding virtual services, decreasing the backlog of cases awaiting scheduling, and improving performance on established measures including timely case closure and successful establishment of paternity orders remains a focus for CSSD.

In order to provide clients with access to all of their case information in a convenient way, CSSD redesigned its Customer Service Portal in February of 2023 to a platform that is more user friendly for mobile devices. CSSD identified the vast majority of customers accessing the portal were doing so from either a cell phone, tablet or other mobile device. Custodial parents and noncustodial parents are able to obtain payment and disbursement histories, update address and employment information, and monitor for court dates and upcoming hearings. The Customer Service Portal went "live" in March of 2021 and the reception has been incredible. As of August 1, 2023, the portal website has been visited almost 2 million times and 49,000 custodial and noncustodial parents have created user accounts.

CSSD launched an Online Application Portal in June of 2022 which provides parents with the option to apply for services, in English or Spanish, using their computer or smartphone. The division is now receiving over 1,000 online applications per month. Online applications represent more than 75% of all applications received.

The South Carolina Child Support Guidelines are the responsibility of CSSD and the South Carolina Department of Social Services. All orders issued by the Family Courts of South Carolina utilize the guidelines to determine the appropriate amount of child support that a noncustodial parent should contribute. The guidelines are regularly reviewed to make necessary changes and adjustments to ensure compliance with federal and state laws. CSSD completed the guidelines review and submitted the

proposed guidelines to the South Carolina Legislature in January of 2023. The proposed guidelines remain on the Legislature's agenda for the 2024 legislative session.

Providing all of South Carolina's residents with access to its services and physical locations remains a priority for CSSD. In the past year, twenty-seven (27) of the most frequently generated documents have been modified to include a Spanish phrase providing the recipient with information on how to request a translated version of the document. Additional documents have been identified and are in the process of being modified as well. CSSD released an enhancement to the Palmetto Automated Child Support System (PACSS) to clearly identify clients who may require the service of an interpreter. This enhancement has reduced the frequency of administrative and judicial hearings being rescheduled to obtain an interpreter and ensures that custodial and noncustodial parents receive information in their preferred language. In addition, the inspections of CSSD's four physical offices have been completed and are currently being reviewed to prioritize any necessary improvements.

Child Welfare Services

Programs and activities in the Child Welfare Services division (CWS) are targeted to improve safety, permanency, and well-being outcomes for affected children and families across the state. CWS operations include Intake services, Investigative services, Family Preservation services, Foster Care services, Foster Home Licensing services, and Adoption services.

These operations are tied to the administration of federal Title IV-B and IV-E funded programs and their related child welfare plans and services, as overseen by the US Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families' Children's Bureau (Children's Bureau). These programs are operated in accordance with federal and state requirements, as well as the 2020-2024 state Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP), a five-year strategic plan that includes goals, objectives, strategies, and planned services. Each year, the Agency is required to file an Annual Progress and Services Report (APSR) with the Children's Bureau. In submitting its APSR for 2022-2023, DSS continues to engage internal and external partners to discuss progress and challenges.

The Agency has completed the third round of the federal Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) process. The CFSR process measures compliance with safety, permanency, and well-being outcomes for children and families under the care of DSS. The two components of this statewide review are quality assurance (QA) case reviews and an assessment of systemic factors. The systemic factors include: statewide information system; case review system; quality assurance (QA) system; staff and provider training; ongoing staff training; foster and adoptive training; service array and resource development; agency responsiveness to the community; foster home licensing; adoptive parent licensing; and recruitment and retention.

In early 2023 the SCDSS Child Welfare Strategic Plan was released. This effort is a product of focus groups and listening session to engage DSS staff at all levels, including frontline staff, county and state office leadership, and multiple sessions with youth, birth parents, and kinship caregivers. The Strategic Plan is influenced by the Better Together philosophy and informed by the GPS practice model. The plan includes three areas of focus for 2023 to include assessment, teaming, and service array. Over the first quarter of 2023, SCDSS child welfare is using these areas to focus to construct goals, action steps, and data metrics to improve practices in each of these three areas.

DSS continues the campaign called Better Together: Enhancing Practice, Transforming Lives to advance a well-being system that partners with children, youth, and families to prevent further harm to communities of color. This campaign highlights the Agency's efforts to transform the state's child welfare system within three strategic domains: cross-cutting strategies; strategies to preserve families; and strategies to achieve permanency.

The Agency has completed the implementation of two new assessment tools: The Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANS) tool and the Family Advocacy and Support (FAST) tool. These tools provide support for frontline staff to guide the assessment of safety and risk, strengths, needs, and the identification of appropriate services. Statewide training and implementation were completed in October of 2021. With implementation complete, SCDSS focuses on improving the timeliness and quality of these assessments. Analysis of data reveals significant improvements, with FAST submission rates increasing 35% and timeliness rates improving 148% since January 2022.

Recognizing that defining, implementing, and operating within a Safety Culture is integral to supporting frontline staff, the Agency has partnered with the University of Kentucky to establish a Safety Culture within the agency. In October of 2021, the Safety Culture survey was completed, and results were analyzed. The Agency continues to work towards a Safety Culture, identifying ways in which leadership can implement staff supports and promote psychological safety. The agency is in the process of hiring a new position that will focus on the infusion of Safety Culture across the agency. As of August 2023 SCDSS, is in the final stages of the hiring process for this position.

As of January 2021, Child and Family Team Meetings (CFTM) are now held statewide in foster care and family preservation cases. The CFTM process engages family, youth, and other supports in planning and decision making throughout the life of a case and at critical decision-making points. SCDSS has been strengthening family engagement through the CFTM and is seeing significant improvements in family participation. Reviewing data from one year apart shows significant increases in fictive kin, foster family, GAL, relatives, professional, and youth attendance during CFTMs. In particular, youth participation rates have increased significantly. SCDSS strongly believes in the power of family and youth voice, meaningful partnership with stakeholders throughout the life of the case, and that through development of a child and family team that we can improve safety, well-being, and permanency outcomes. SCDSS has

put a focus on the development and improvement of the CFTM and family permanency planning (FPP) processes to collaboratively develop case plans with families the agency is involved with. The FPP is a collaboratively developed plan through the CFTM process that is family-centered, individualized, and strengths-based.

Michelle H. Settlement Agreement

In 2016, the US District Court approved a settlement agreement ("Settlement Agreement" or "Agreement") to resolve a class action lawsuit (commonly known as the "Michelle H." lawsuit) filed against the State of South Carolina in 2015 on behalf of children in foster care. Entering into the Agreement avoided prolonged litigation and allowed DSS to focus on improving the quality of foster care for children in the state. The settlement appoints two national child welfare experts as independent co-monitors. They file periodic public progress reports with the US District Court. The last report was filed in October of 2023.

The Agreement includes an expansive range of provisions mapped out within five implementations plans. DSS continues to make progress in the completion of activities outlined in the five court-approved implementation plans. The provisions within these plans consider case manager caseloads, foster child visits with their case managers and family members, investigations of allegations of abuse and neglect of children in foster care, appropriate and timely foster care placements, and access to physical and mental health care for children in DSS custody. Through intentional efforts and sustained improvement over the past several years, SCDSS was granted approval of Maintenance of effort status for four of the Agreement measures during August 2023. This marks the first time since the lawsuit began that this status has been reached, marking a moment of celebration of immense progress happening across the system.

Economic Services

The Economic Services division (ES) seeks to effectively and efficiently serve the citizens of South Carolina by helping individuals and families achieve stability through financial and other temporary benefits while transitioning into employment. This encompasses multiple programs and divisions, including the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP), the Employment Services Division, and the Division of Early Care and Education.

Public Assistance/Benefit Programs

Economic Services processed more than 437,000 applications for SNAP and TANF assistance in SFY 2023. The average number of applications received per week during this time was 7,677, which represents a 60% increase over 2019 levels. On a typical day prior to COVID-19, the agency received about 4,800 applications per week.

In addition to addressing the increase in SNAP applications, South Carolina continues to issue Pandemic EBT (P-EBT), a federal program created in 2020 to help mitigate the financial impact created by prolonged school closures and kids consuming meals at home that they otherwise would have received through the national free or reduced-price meals program. In 2020 and 2021, more than \$700 million in P-EBT benefits were issued to South Carolina families. In July and August 2022, three additional rounds of P-EBT were issued, providing benefits for qualifying children ages 0-5 covering the 2021-22 school year and the 2022 summer period, as well as a summer 2022 benefit for K-12 students. Approximately \$280 million in benefits were issued to 555,000 children statewide.

Employment Services

Over the course of the fiscal year, Employment Services staff collaborated with ES County Operations staff to improve the referral process between SNAP eligibility and SNAP E&T programs, increased SNAP Employment & Training enrollments, and assisted 1,387 South Carolina TANF and SNAP Employment & Training program participants obtain employment.

Early Care and Education

South Carolina received four supplemental federal child care grants related to COVID-19, totaling nearly \$955 million. This unprecedented infusion of one-time child care funding for states is not likely to occur ever again. The Agency has utilized this stimulus funding to provide numerous supports to child care

providers throughout the pandemic and will continue to do so through 2024. As of June 30, 2023, we have spent or obligated more than \$693 million.

On July 7, 2022, DSS launched a one-time Technology Grant for child care providers to purchase equipment or services needed to help support child care business operations and classroom functionality. \$54 million in Technology Grants were issued to 1,728 child care providers.

In December 2021, the Agency launched the initial round of American Rescue Plan Child Care Stabilization Grants to qualified child care providers. These grants are designed to help stabilize child care operations, and funds may be used to cover expenses such as rent/mortgage payments, utility bills, payroll benefits, and facility maintenance or improvements. A second round of Stabilization Grants was launched in June 2022, and \$224.4 million in Round 2 grants were approved during the fiscal year. Between Round 1 and Round 2, DSS staff approved more than \$448 million in Stabilization Grants to child care providers.

DSS began offering child care assistance (scholarships) for working parents in October 2020. In order to qualify, parent income must be at or below 300% FPL, and be working at least 15 hours a week or in school or training program. As of June 30, 2023, 66,460 children have been approved for SC Child Care COVID-300 Scholarships and placed in a slot. 38,000 children were approved during SFY 2023.

South Carolina Department of Social Services
Summary of Carryforwards from 6/30/2023

Year Into Which Carried Forward		FY24
General Fund Carryforward		Amount
DHHS Funds	\$	9,338,456
Other	\$	12,960,252
General Fund Total	\$	22,298,708
Special Line Items Carryforward		Amount
Child Support	\$	11,771,281
Phone System Upgrade	\$	-
Summer Reading Program	\$	13,881
Teen Pregnancy Program	\$	456,382
Special Line Items Total	\$	12,241,543
Grand Total Carryforward	\$	34,540,251

SC Department of Social Services - Plan for Carryforward Funding

Special Line-Item Carryforward Funding:

Overall, as reported in prior years, a significant portion (\$12.2 million) of recurring budget carryforward represents declining balances of what are captured as 'special line items' that were intended to be spent over multiple fiscal years when appropriated. This includes the amounts remaining for the child support system implementation, as well as nominal amounts for two smaller programs – teen pregnancy and summer reading.

We currently have an annual maintenance contract for our child support enforcement system (PACSS) of approximately \$5.6M, of which 34% is paid for with state general funds. There are also staffing costs, hosting and communication costs, and state disbursement unit costs that need to be paid each year, for a total of approximately \$4.7M in state general funds.

The remaining funds for the Summer Reading Program, which are to be used for a variety of academic enrichment programs that serve low-income school age children and will be used on our Family Connections contract which provides educational and support services for children with IEP's. These funds will be fully spent in FY24.

The annual teen pregnancy prevention program was awarded on a federal fiscal year basis until this past year, so this is simply a timing difference until we get the contract payments caught up and on track with the change-over to the state fiscal year basis.

DHHS One-Time Carryforward Funding:

In addition, also mentioned in prior year budget materials, over \$9 million of the carryforward represents a declining balance of one-time state funds transferred in FY21 from DHHS to fund multi-year investments in Family Preservation/Service Array, QRTP, and IT/Systems costs. As of June 30, 2023, slightly over \$7.6 million of these funds have been spent, with the remaining planned expenditures for Family Preservation Services, Service Array, and QRTP over the next few years.

These funds would have been expended sooner if not for the influx of significant, one-time COVID stimulus funding, along with the Family First Transition Act (FFTA) grant, which expires on 9/30/25, that was prioritized and allowable for some of the same purposes over the last three fiscal years. The agency was able to divert nearly \$9.7 million of total funding to stimulus funds and FFTA funding for allowable purposes, but as most of these recurring items come up for renewal, we will need to utilize available state or federal funding.

Programmatic Carryforward Funding:

Approximately \$7 million of the \$13 million in general carryforward funding relates to programs that were funded beginning in FY23, where rolling out such programs and efforts was contingent on the general assembly's approval of the funding and certain statutory changes, which obviously wasn't final until the FY23 budget was passed on June 16, 2022.

Approximately \$4.7 million of the \$7 million represents funding for the Extension of Foster Care (EFC) program and Kinship Navigator programs. EFC just received approval from the Federal Government in December, and we will begin rolling out the program in February 2024. We will be rolling out grants for the Kinship Navigator program this month in each of the four regions.

Staffing Related Carryforward Funding:

Approximately \$6 million of the \$13 million represents funding for new FTEs in Child Welfare (including the final caseload-carrying positions ordered to be allocated/funded under the Michelle H. Final Settlement Agreement) as well as funding for 14 additional county attorneys required to achieve and maintain timely legal case progression and resolution, to positively impact timely permanency for children.

Given that these positions were just allocated this prior year, and especially given the difficulties in navigating the labor market during this time, it's not surprising that we have a portion of these positions and associated dollars that we carried forward into FY24, but out of 286 positions appropriated for these purposes, as of December, 226 of them have been filled at least once since being allocated.

We have a 14.06% vacancy rate as an agency, which is an improvement of 5.59% over the rate this time last year, and we've seen a net gain of 298 filled positions.

DSS recently engaged the Department of Administration, Division of State Human Resources to do a close review of our processes that impact our 'time to fill' positions. Their review noted that our time to hire (50 days for non-continuous, and 121 days for continuous postings) was "significantly lower than the average time-to-hire for all South Carolina agencies and institutions of higher education" (77 and 141 days, respectively). We're doing a good job there, but we are implementing additional process changes/tools to get those numbers closer to the 30-45 day mark to continue being more competitive with private sector.

Out of the total current 735 vacancies, 463, or 62.99% have been vacant for less than six months, which for us represents the effect of 'normal' turnover. We are a large agency, with nearly 4,500 filled FTEs currently. Our current vacancy rate is at 14.06%, which is probably lower than many other agencies. The majority of our positions - nearly 600, or just over 80%, are less than 12 months old, and all of those are being actively worked to be backfilled.

We sent all vacant positions that have been vacant for more than one year to the respective director and asked for a detailed explanation of why the position has been vacant for so long, if they were going to fill it, or what the status was. The majority of these positions were in the recruitment life cycle, the new hire life cycle, or were being interviewed for. There were many that have been posted repeatedly and consistently with no viable candidate identified, but the position is still needed, and those areas continue to work with HR to improve ways to recruit for these positions. We were able to "give up" at least 5 positions from this pool in order to utilize them for the requests that came in from the FY25 budget requests.

South Carolina Department of Social Services
Summary of FTE's
As of 12/31/2023

FTE Type	State	Federal	Other	Total
Filled	1,706	2,607	179	4,493
Vacant	279	427	29	735
Totals	1,986	3,034	209	5,228

SC DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

EOM: 12/2023

