



**Palmetto Association
for Children and Families**
Helping Children. Serving Families.

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January 23, 2024

Chairman, Healthcare Subcommittee
House Ways and Means Committee
108 Blatt Building
Columbia, SC 29201

FY 24 – 25 – Department of Social Services Budget Request

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee

The Palmetto Association for Children and Families (PAFCAF) is an Association representing the interest of over 50 Member agencies who are private sector, predominantly non-profit organizations that offer a wide continuum of services to over eighty-five percent of children, teens, and families in foster care across South Carolina. Services range from community-based prevention services, Rehabilitative Behavioral Health Services or RBHS services, emergency shelter care, foster care, therapeutic foster care, group care/residential treatment and supervised independent living. The cost of providing care has significantly increased over the last three to four years due to the pandemic, a national workforce crisis, and record inflation. The cost for placement service options for regular foster care, therapeutic foster care, and group (or congregate) care have truly hit an unsurpassed high. Our member agencies serving our most vulnerable young citizens compete against fast food chains and other retail-based businesses that can offer a higher wage.

Our young people are struggling in ways that we have never seen before. The increased incidences of complex mental health needs among our children, particularly those in the South Carolina child welfare system, are resulting in significant challenges with providing stable placement and treatment options for them. Most unfortunately, our great state of South Carolina currently ranks last in the nation in placement stability for children and youth in foster care. We must right this ship!

PAFCAF has been intentional and focused on our efforts to create stronger more outcome-oriented partnerships with South Carolina Department of Social Services, and to work collaboratively with them in the co-creation of a more diversified and better funded service delivery system. We must work together to diversify, transform, and provide increased support to our service and placement continuum. South Carolina Department of Social Services has taken steps in their FY 24-25 budget to improve reimbursement for both foster care and for short term group care treatment placements, acknowledging that we must invest in these important and needed services if we want better outcomes for the children and teens who need them.

As you and your colleagues already know, Michelle H is a civil rights class action lawsuit in our state, which specifically addresses how children and youth in the South Carolina foster care system are served. There are numerous benchmarks contained in the Michelle H Federal Settlement Agreement (FSA). Eradication of overnight stays in the DSS offices, night to night stays in multiple foster care settings, and improved stability and permanency are all necessary components of the Federal Settlement Agreement to improve outcomes for Class Members. Unfortunately, this past year we trended in the wrong direction in all three areas. The South Carolina Department of Social Services and providers are committed to correcting this for our children. Addressing insufficient rates for placement services is a foundational piece of this work.

Our member agencies continue to stand ready to work with the South Carolina Department of Social Services to ensure children, teens and young adults have access to high quality service and placement options that can and will provide for better long-term outcomes related to stability and permanency. We humbly yet boldly ask for the support of you as Chairman and the full House Ways and Means Committee for the FY24-25 South Carolina Department of Social Services Budget Request. We know in partnership; we can continue to ensure our youngest citizens have the opportunity for better tomorrows!

Thank you for your longstanding commitment and service to the state of South Carolina!

With deepest gratitude and respect,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Kimberly Crowley". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name and title.

Kimberly Crowley, MA
Chief Executive Officer
Palmetto Association for Children and Families (PAFCAF)