

FY27 Budget

Ways and Means Healthcare Subcommittee Hearing



South Carolina Department of
**CHILDREN'S
ADVOCACY**
Advocacy. Accountability. Service.

Agency Attendees

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Margaret Fent Bodman, J.D. Interim Director

LaDara Depugh, MA, Chief of Staff

Tena Hardee, JD, General Counsel

Jasmine DuBose, MBA, Accounting/Fiscal Manager

Tom Kaminer, CFGO, CPM, Budget Director
Department of Administration

Agency Overview

- **Ensure** timely, safe, and effective services for children
- **Develop** and **promote** a broad vision of reform
- **Recommend** quality improvements for children's services
- **Educate** the public regarding the role of the Department of Children's Advocacy and services of other agencies
- **Maintain** the SC Child Abuse Response Protocol and facilitates meetings to update the protocol
- **Serves** on State Child Fatality Advisory Committee, Joint Citizens and Legislative Committee on Children, and other child serving committees
- **Support** approximately 240 employees and 1200 GAL volunteers & Foster Care Review Board members with offices throughout the state and a central office on the Statehouse grounds

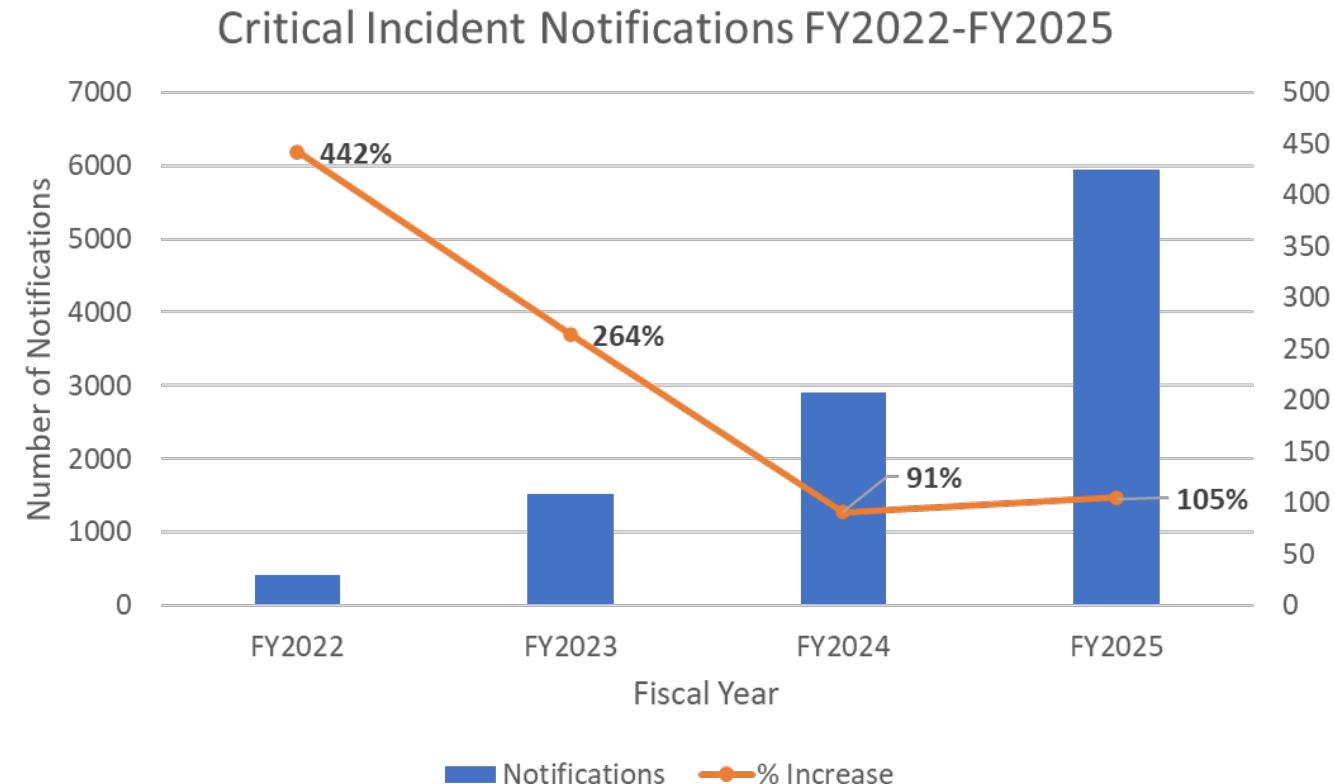
Agency Divisions

- **The System Improvement Division** receives, responds to, and/or investigates complaints and critical incidents regarding services for children by nine specific child-serving agencies.
- **Cass Elias McCarter Guardian ad Litem Program** provides a best-interest advocate for abused and neglected children in DSS court proceedings in 45 counties; the advocate may be a volunteer or a staff member.
- **S.C. Continuum of Care** provides care coordination services for youth with challenging emotional and behavioral issues.
- **Foster Care Review Division** provides support to the State and local Foster Care Review Boards and the Heart Gallery to promote permanency for children who are in foster care.

Priority 1 - \$506,745.96 (recurring)	(5) FTE positions for System Improvement Division
Priority 2 - \$278,724.12 (recurring)	(3) FTE positions for GAL Division
Priority 3 - \$84,104.84 (recurring)	(1) FTE for Foster Care Review Division
Priority 4 – \$1,500,000 (non-recurring)	Stabilize operations, maintain staff <i>(request reduced to cover salary increases)</i>
Priority 5 – \$1,500,000 (recurring) \$3,428,597 (recurring)	General Fund due to reliance on carry forward Increase in Spend Authority to Match Revenue
Priority 6 - \$50,840.56 (recurring)	IT Operations Request
Priority 7 - \$13,000 (non-recurring)	New Hire Equipment Request <i>(\$1,500 per new FTE approved)</i>
Priority 8 - \$400,000 (recurring)	Continuum of Care Transfer Alignment Request <i>(no funding requested if there is no proviso change)</i>
Priority 9 - \$377,554.07 (recurring)	GAL & FCRD Pay Disparity Alignment
Priority 10 – \$750,000 (non-recurring)	Children's Trust of South Carolina
Priority 11 - 1,500,000 (non-recurring)	South Carolina Network of Children's Advocacy Centers

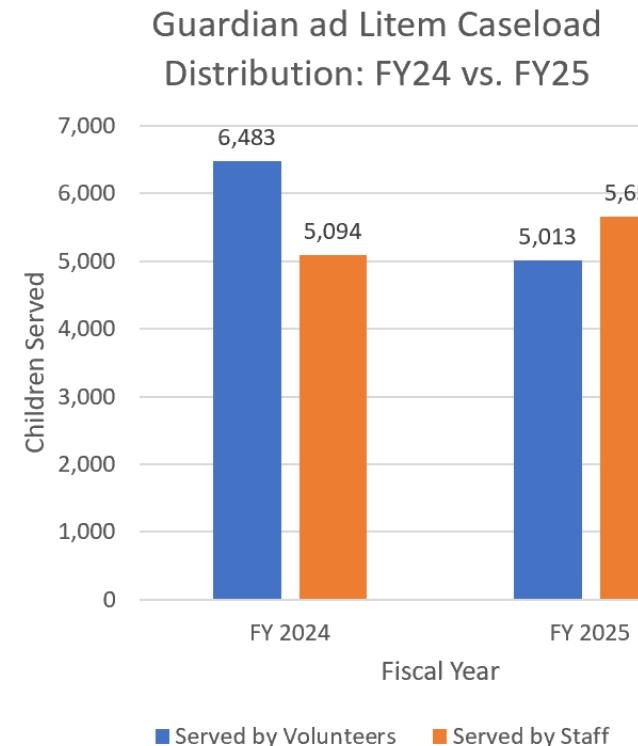
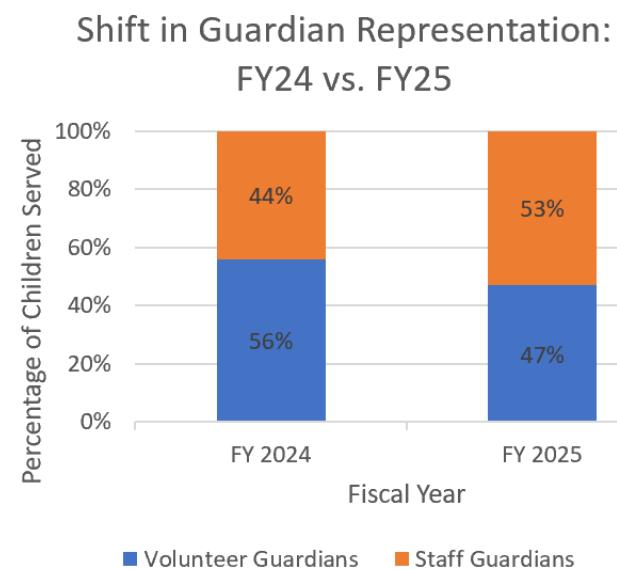
Priority 1: System Improvement FTE (5) Request Recurring Funds \$506,745.96

- The Critical Investigations Unit receives notifications of fatalities and near fatalities from 9 child-serving agencies.
- Investigators conduct site visits, meet with youth at DJJ, PRTF, and group facilities.
- Child advocates and investigators coordinate and attend multi-disciplinary staffings and court hearings.
- The goal is to have sufficient staff for Investigator caseloads to be between 24 and 30 cases per Investigator.



Priority 2: Guardian ad Litem FTE (3) Request Recurring Funds \$278,724.12

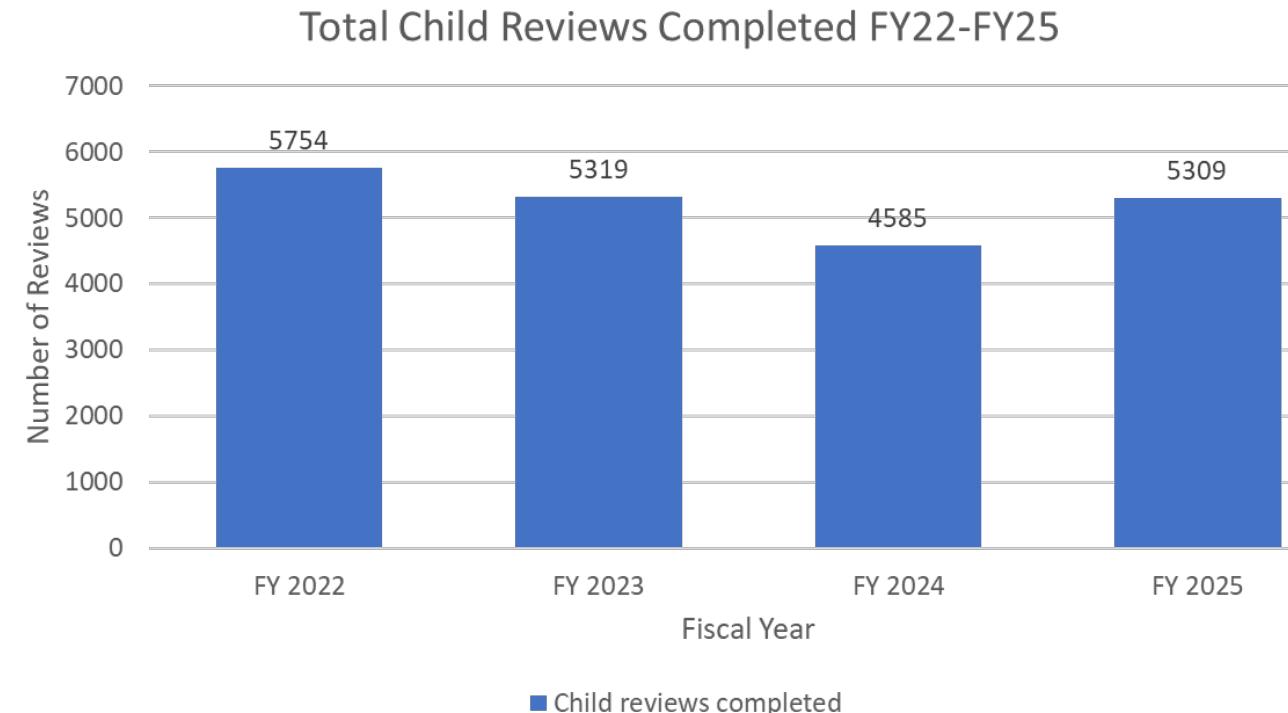
- The GAL Division continues to face rising caseloads that threaten its ability to meet statutory obligations and ensure that children have their best interests represented in court.
- In FY25, we served 10,666 children: an average of 6,000 children per month with only 146 staff available statewide.
- Of these children,
 - 47% were appointed a volunteer guardian ad litem
 - 53% required a trained Department of Children's Advocacy staff member to serve as their guardian, reflecting a growing reliance on agency personnel
- Caseloads exceed 30 per staff member, far above the goal of maintaining caseloads below 20.
- These positions will:
 - help reduce caseloads,
 - stabilize staffing,
 - improve outcomes for children.



Priority 3: Foster Care Review Board FTE Request

Recurring Funds \$84,104.84

- FCRB has significantly grown in its legal and regulatory responsibilities due to increased statutory oversight requirements.
- FCRB attorney position has become a General Counsel
- Bottlenecks in legal document preparation, policy review, and case management support delay timely reviews and place additional strain on the General Counsel and program staff.
- Legal assistant will provide essential support by drafting, editing, and organizing legal documents, managing records, assisting with policy updates, and supporting oversight hearings.
- Goal: meet statutory requirement of reviewing each child's case every 6 months, streamline adoption referrals, and ensure consistent compliance across the state.



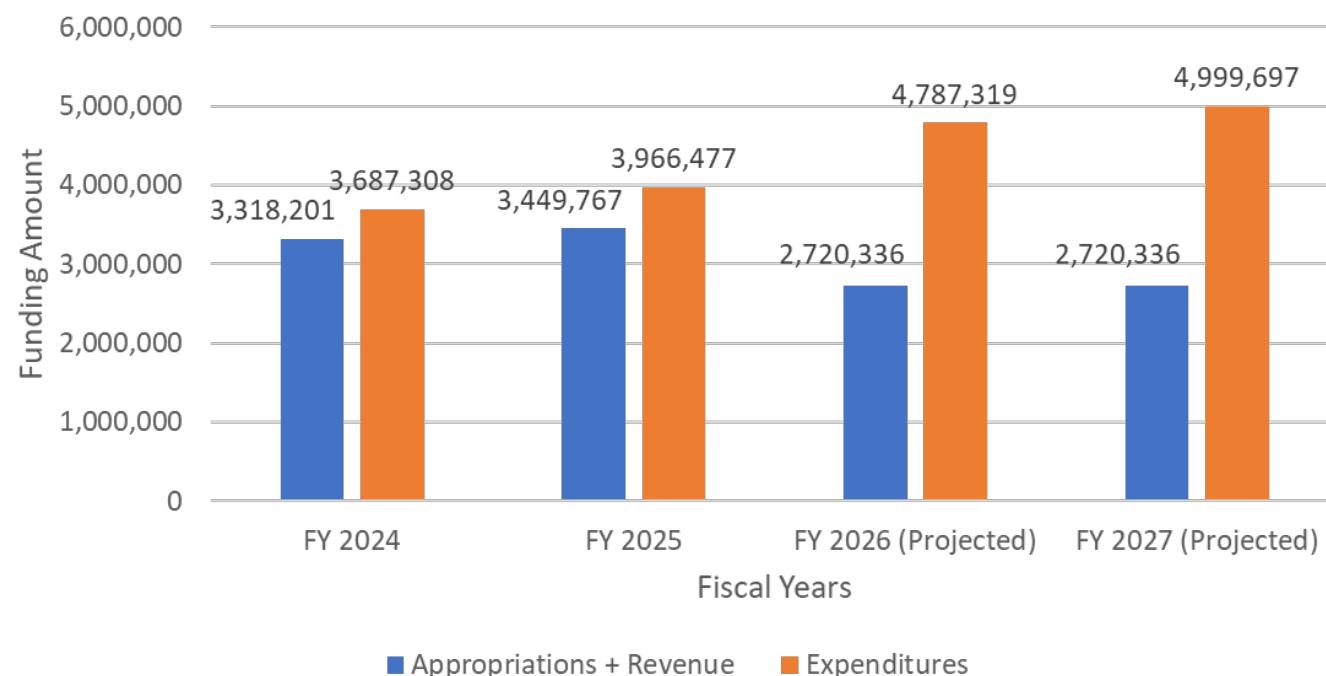
Note: FY25 increase reflects higher completion rates as fewer cases are being continued, resulting in more documented legal actions and greater workload for legal staff.

Priority 4: Continuum of Care Request

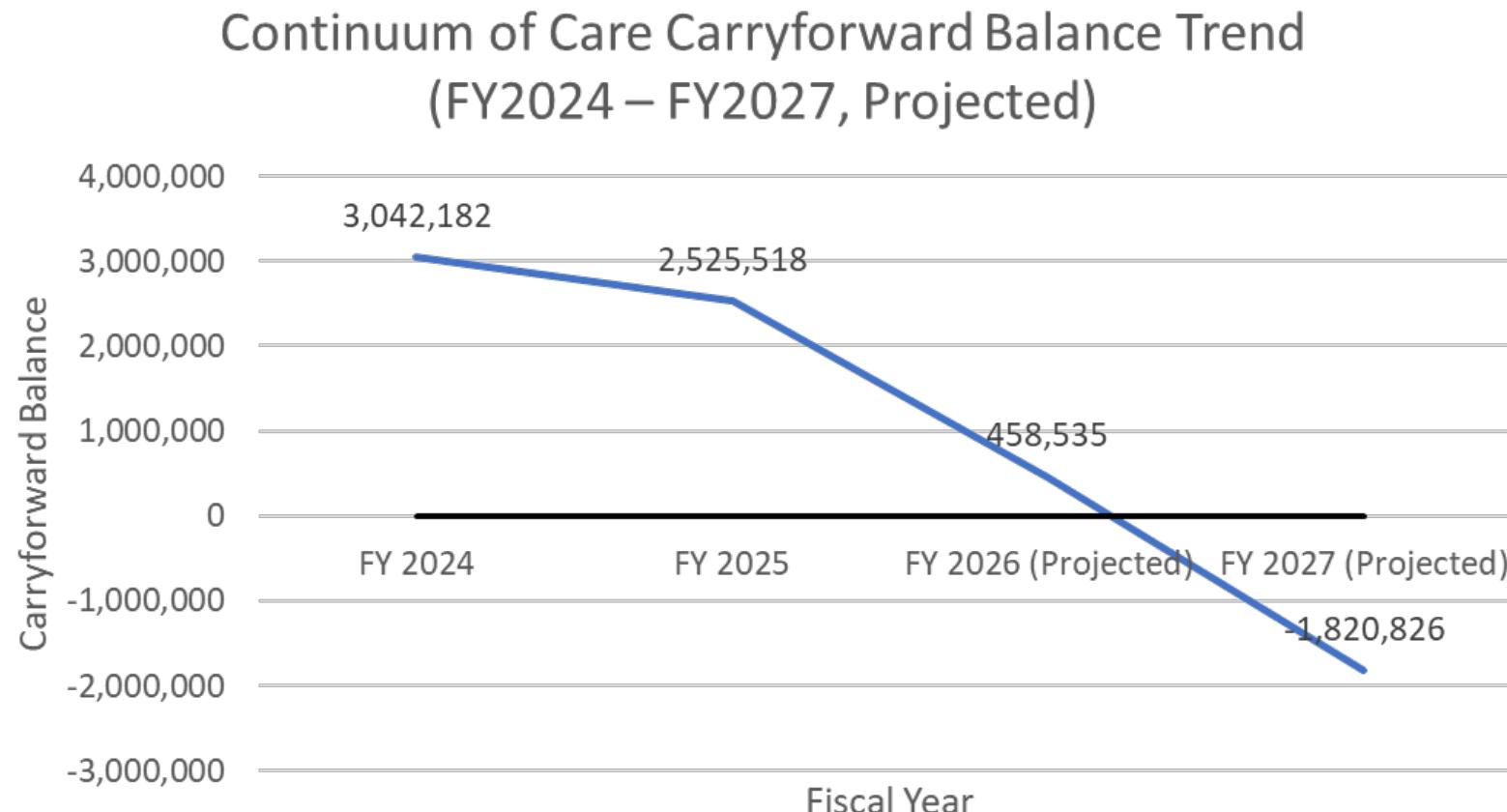
Non-Recurring Funds \$1,500,000

- To stabilize operations and maintain staffing to continue services for youth with severe emotional and behavioral health needs.
 - Medicaid waiver program that previously provided program revenue has expired.
 - Division expenditures total \$3.97M, exceeding appropriations and revenues of \$3.45M.
 - Carryforward balances will be fully depleted by FY2027, resulting in a projected negative balance of \$1.82M.
- Cover unavoidable cost increases in:
 - Lease costs for office space and vehicles
 - Utilities, IT, and communications
 - Supplies and copier leases
- Provide a fiscal bridge while the Division secures new contracts and long-term funding sources.

Continuum of Care Revenue vs. Expenditures
(FY2024 – FY2027)



Priority 4: Continuum of Care Request Non-Recurring Funds \$1,500,000



Priority 5: Guardian ad Litem “Best Interest” Request Recurring Funds \$4,928,597 (total)

Purpose:

To sustain mandated child advocacy operations by addressing recurring cost pressures and aligning spending authority with actual revenues.

Funding Breakdown:

\$1.5M General Fund: Covers inflationary costs and increased operational expenses with increased staff. .

\$3.43M Other Funds: Restores authority restricted by prior reductions.

Impact:

Supports: 147 employees statewide

Carryforward balances:

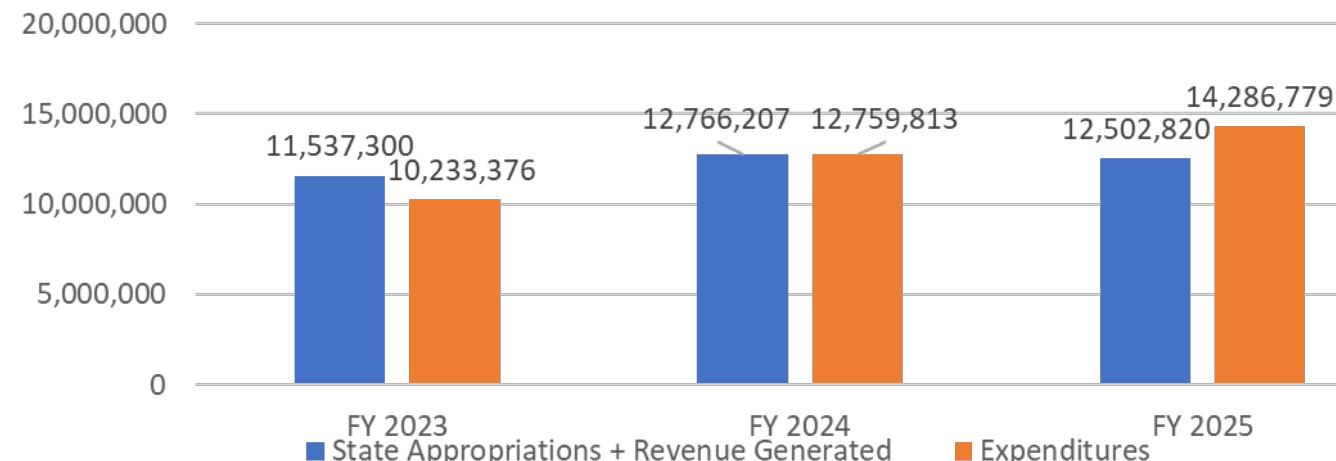
FY2024 - \$12.6M

FY2025 - \$10.8M

FY2026 - \$7.4M (projected)

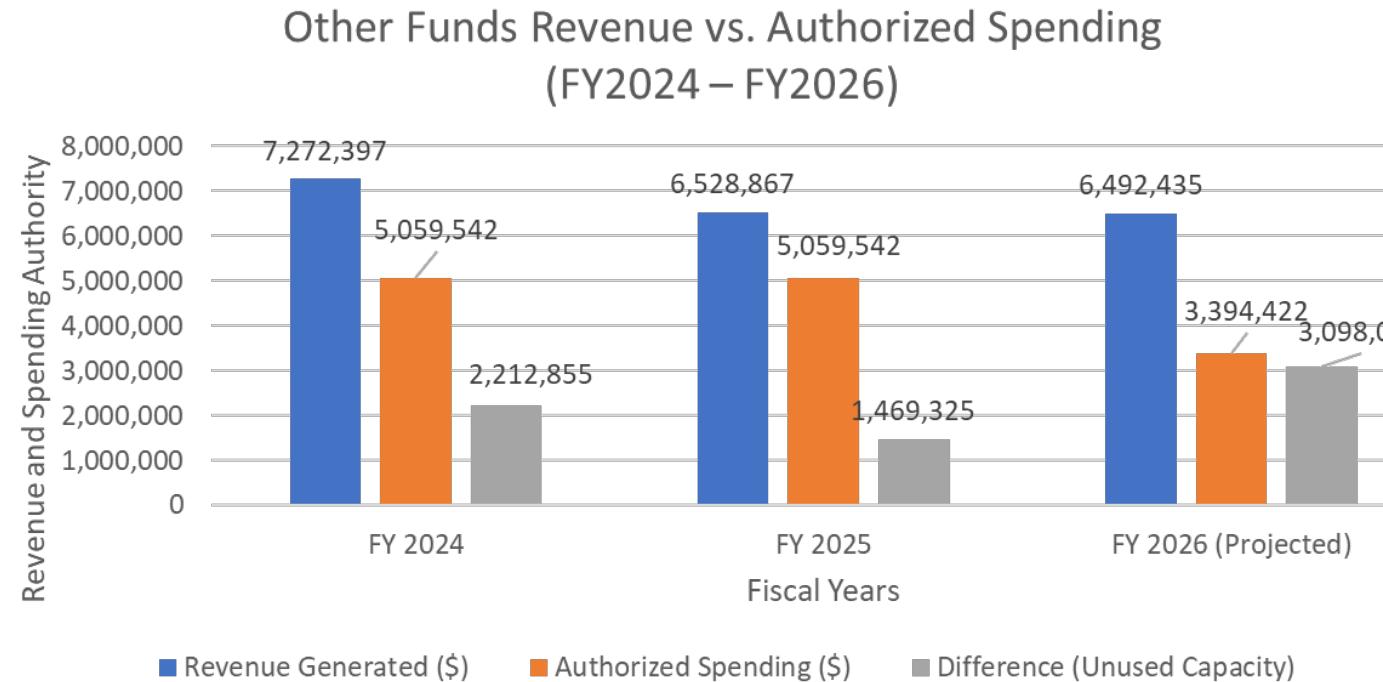
FY2027 - \$3.1M (projected)

Expenditures Exceed Appropriations & Revenue (FY2023 - FY2025)



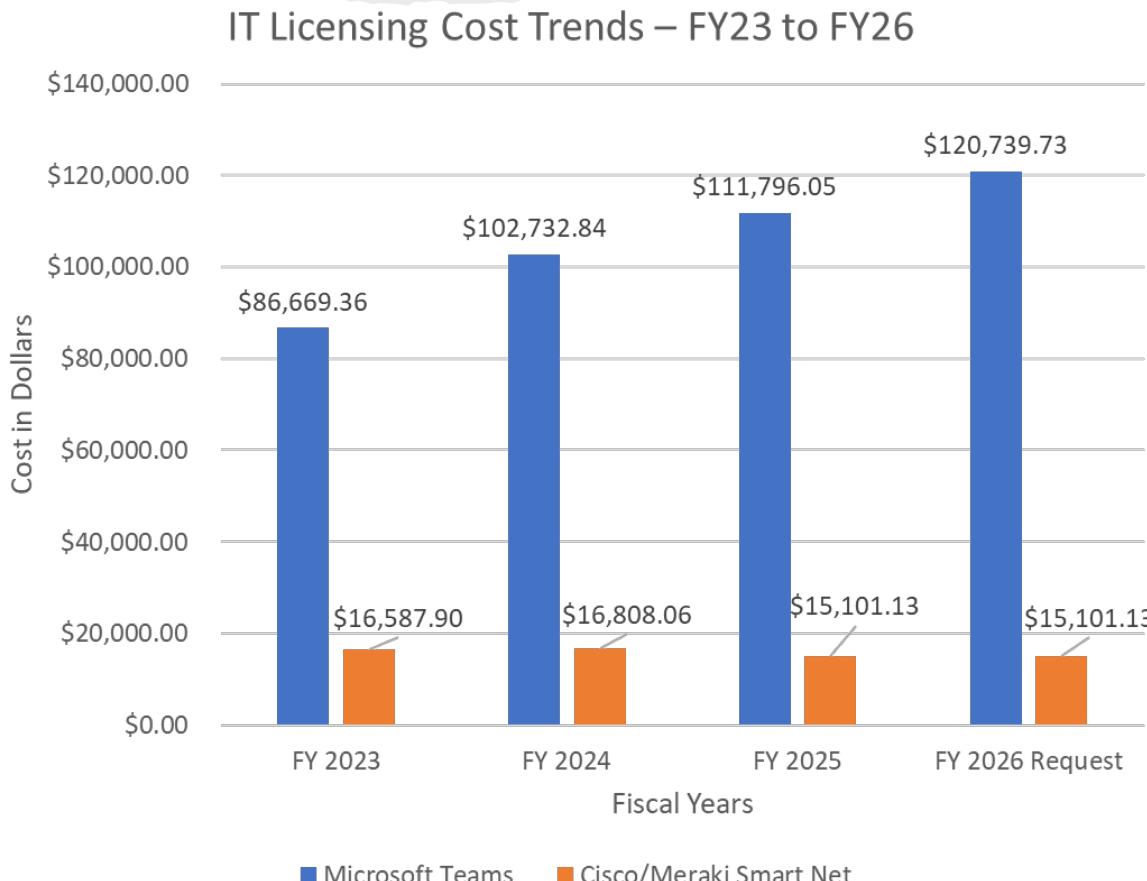
Priority 5: Guardian ad Litem “Best Interest” Request Recurring Funds \$3,428,597

- The Division consistently generates more *other funds* revenue than it is authorized to spend.
- Current authorization restricts access to approximately \$3.4M annually in available revenues.
- Restoring spending authority will allow full utilization of generated funds, reduce reliance on carryforwards balances, and improve fiscal transparency.



Priority 6: IT Operations Request

Recurring Funds \$50,840.86



Ensure uninterrupted agency operations by maintaining required Microsoft 365 and Cisto/Meraki Smart Net licensing for staff connectivity, communication, and IT security.

Annual Price

Subtotal: \$135,840.86

\$85,000 current recurring funding (FY25)

Total request: \$50,840.86

Note: Funding increase addresses software cost growth from inflation and staff expansion.

Priority 7: New Hire Equipment Request

Non-Recurring Funds \$13,000

- **This request is related to Recurring Priorities #1, #2, #3:**
- Laptop: \$1000
- Docking station, wireless mouse, monitors, laptop bag: \$500
- $1,500 * 9 = \$13,500$

Priority 8: Continuum of Care Transfer Alignment Request

Recurring Funds \$400,000

Purpose

To ensure funding continuity for the Continuum of Care (COC) program in the event the long-standing **Proviso 35.1** transfer from the Office of Mental Health is discontinued or amended.

Background

Proviso 35.1 has required the Office of Mental Health to transfer \$400,000 annually to the Continuum of Care for nearly 20 years.

If this proviso is removed or altered, COC would lose that recurring support needed to sustain intensive case management and coordination services for children with severe emotional or behavioral needs.

This request provides a budget realignment within the Department of Children's Advocacy to maintain current operations should the transfer end.

If Proviso 35.1 remains in effect, the Department of Children's Advocacy does not request this funding.

Priority 9: Guardian ad Litem & Foster Care Review Board Pay Disparity Alignment Request Recurring Funds \$377,554.07

Purpose

To correct pay inequities resulting from the updated statewide pay matrix and prior 2% salary increase, which caused new hires to enter at higher salaries than tenured staff with advanced credentials.

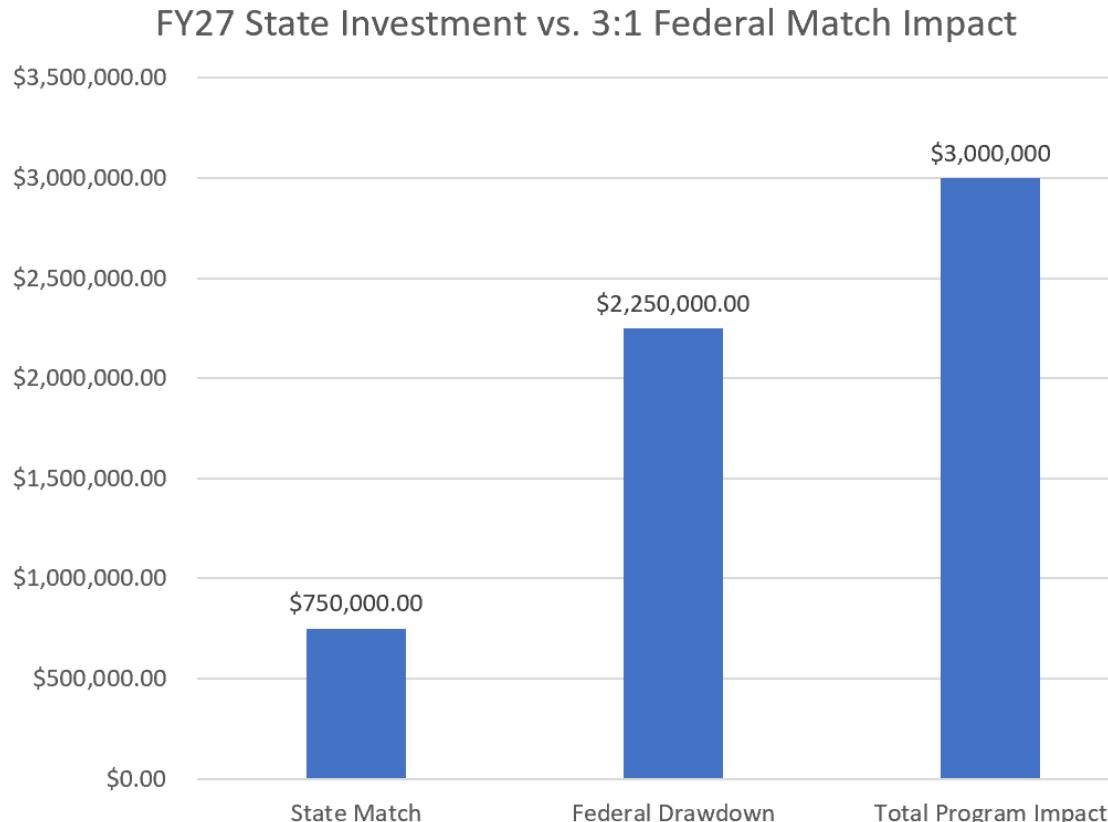
Background

Agency pay adjustments and statewide increases unintentionally created internal disparities. Addressing these disparities will restore equity, support, retention, and maintain program stability and quality outcomes.

Division	Employees Affected	Salary Difference	Fringe	Total
Guardian ad Litem	85	\$248,927.78	\$74,678.33	\$323,606.11
Foster Care Review Board	15	\$41,498.43	\$12,449.53	\$53,947.96
Grand Total	100	\$290,426.21	\$87,127.86	\$377,554.07

Priority 10: SC Children's Trust Request

Non-Recurring Funds \$750,000



- Mission is to find & fund innovative solutions to prevent child abuse and neglect.
- Received federal *Maternal Infant Early Childhood Homevisiting Grant*, which provides evidence-based homevisiting services to mothers and babies.
- Homevisiting:
 - improves maternal and infant health,
 - reduces dependency on government welfare programs,
 - increases child educational outcomes,
 - prevents abuse and neglect.
- Currently, less than 10% of eligible mothers and babies are receiving voluntary homevisiting services

Priority 11: SC Network of CACs Request Non-Recurring Funds \$1,500,000

- The South Carolina Network of Children's Advocacy Centers (SCNCAC) is a non-profit 501(c)(3) membership organization and statewide leader in the response to child abuse.
- Provide training, technical assistance, accreditation support and statewide services to 17 primary children's advocacy centers and 14 satellite children's advocacy centers (CAC) located throughout the state and serving all 46 counties in South Carolina.
- Funds will be used to provide:
 - Services to thousands of child abuse victims and their caregivers.
 - Statewide child abuse response protocol training and other assistance to multidisciplinary team partners, DSS and law enforcement agencies, to assist them in their investigative roles in response to child abuse.
 - Portion of the cost of the SCNCAC statewide forensic interview recording evidence management system and other statewide technology that is used by CACs, law enforcement, and DSS to protect the confidentiality of the disclosures made by children in the CAC.
 - Help with staff salaries and fringe benefits and equipment to support these services.



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