



## Agency Recommendation Summary

The Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) requests \$14,949,000 (\$12,025,000 General Fund- State) and 40 full time equivalents (FTE) in the 2025-27 Biennial Budget to provide additional practice and professional development supports, and address workload associated with increased tort filings. Claims filed against DCYF more than doubled between SFY 2023 and SFY 2024. DCYF is proposing additional staff to complete required tasks associated with these claims. Additionally, DCYF is proposing several interventions designed to improve practice and reduce tort claims in the future.

## Program Recommendation Summary

### 010 - Children and Families Services

DCYF requests 4,339,000 (\$3,160,000 General Fund State) and 16.0 FTEs the 2025-27 Biennial Budget to provide additional Family Practice Model, Critical Incident, and De-escalation training support to improve practice and reduce tort claims in the future.

### 090 - Program Support

DCYF requests \$10,610,000 (\$8,865,000 General Fund State) and 24.0 FTEs in the 2025-27 Biennial Budget to provide additional practice and professional development supports, and address workload associated with increased tort filings. Claims filed against DCYF more than doubled between SFY 2023 and SFY 2024. DCYF is proposing additional staff to complete required tasks associated with these claims. Additionally, DCYF is proposing several interventions designed to improve practice and reduce tort claims in the future.

## Fiscal Summary

Fiscal Summary <i>Dollars in Thousands</i>	Fiscal Years		Biennial	Fiscal Years		Biennial
	2026	2027	2025-27	2028	2029	2027-29
<b>Staffing</b>						
FTEs	40.0	40.0	40.0	39.0	39.0	39.0
<b>Operating Expenditures</b>						
Fund 001 - 1	\$1,621,000	\$1,539,000	\$3,160,000	\$1,539,000	\$1,539,000	\$3,078,000
Fund 001 - A	\$533,000	\$506,000	\$1,039,000	\$506,000	\$506,000	\$1,012,000
Fund 001 - C	\$42,000	\$31,000	\$73,000	\$29,000	\$28,000	\$57,000
Fund 001 - 1	\$4,484,000	\$4,381,000	\$8,865,000	\$4,658,000	\$4,570,000	\$9,228,000
Fund 001 - A	\$830,000	\$842,000	\$1,672,000	\$929,000	\$914,000	\$1,843,000
Fund 001 - C	\$72,000	\$68,000	\$140,000	\$68,000	\$68,000	\$136,000
Total Expenditures	\$7,582,000	\$7,367,000	\$14,949,000	\$7,729,000	\$7,625,000	\$15,354,000
<b>Revenue</b>						
001 - 0393	\$605,000	\$574,000	\$1,179,000	\$574,000	\$574,000	\$1,148,000
001 - 0393	\$872,000	\$873,000	\$1,745,000	\$958,000	\$942,000	\$1,900,000
Total Revenue	\$1,477,000	\$1,447,000	\$2,924,000	\$1,532,000	\$1,516,000	\$3,048,000

## Decision Package Description

DCYF is subject to a significant number of TORT claims due to the highly sensitive nature of the agency's work. These claims can arise from almost any time-period and include allegations of negligence or wrongdoing on the part of DCYF. In SFY 2020, DCYF had fewer than 200 claims and the vast majority were associated with child welfare. In SFY 2024, DCYF had over 500 claims, which were evenly split between juvenile rehabilitation and child welfare.

Each tort claim requires between 5 to 13 days of research and discovery work which requires our public disclosure staff to review and prepare documents including necessary redaction.

To respond to the rise in tort claims, DCYF is requesting 20 FTE in SFY 26 and ongoing. These positions include staff to gather and process records, as well as management support and witness coordination. DCYF has never requested additional staff to respond to tort claims and can no longer keep pace with the workload given the significant increase in claims.

Along with a rise in tort claims, DCYF is also experiencing an increase in critical incidents. A critical incident occurs with there is a fatality or near-fatality for a family known to the child welfare system. These reviews are required by statute and are largely due to an increase in fentanyl

or other drug related incidents. DCYF reviewed 51 cases in 2023, compared to 23 cases in 2019.

Regardless of the tort liability, DCYF has a responsibility to continue improving practice and mitigate harm to the children, youth and families that we serve. This decision package, therefore, also includes multiple investments in practice improvement.

Practice improvements investments include:

- Positions to support implementation of a unified family practice model.

The family practice model was co-designed with staff and families to give practical examples of high-quality practice. As an example, the practice model for intake describes ways to be aware of bias and assumptions that might influence screening decisions. It encourages staff to access other perspectives when making decisions, being careful with word choices and communicating objectively.

- Additional staff to assist in reviewing critical incidents.

Critical Incident reviews bring together diverse perspectives from stakeholders, tribes and communities to offer insights into practice or system changes that could avoid child fatalities and near fatalities in the future.

- Additional investments in the newly created Office of Practice and Professional Learning. In 2023, DCYF created an enterprise-wide office tasked with supporting practice and professional learning across all agency systems. The office coordinates these activities and engages in quality assurance of training and other professional development investments. DCYF is proposing additional investments in de-escalation training for child welfare staff. This training is critical as child welfare staff are often placed in tense situations with families and de-escalate young people that may be in the office or a state-run facility while long-term placement is found. The D.S. Settlement increased mandates for DCYF to provide training to service providers in child welfare. The agency intends to continue expansion of trainings and professional development to both DCYF staff and contracted providers.

DCYF believes that investing just a fraction of the funding that currently goes to tort claims, including payments to individuals and legal response, would go a long way towards improving the quality and intention of practice to not only lower our legal liability but ensure that children, youth and families receive the high-quality services and support they need to thrive.

## Assumptions and Calculations

### ***Expansion, Reduction, Elimination or Alteration of a current program or service:***

This decision package will expand on DCYF's existing infrastructure to support tort claim and critical incident responses, support practice and learning across all DCYF systems, and create additional support for a more robust unified family practice model.

### ***Detailed Assumptions and Calculations:***

**Tort Claim Response** - \$950,000 (\$794,000 General Fund-State)

- \$330,000 in FY2026 to contract 120 hours per month at a rate of \$229 per hour for business analyst services to scope for Information Technology solutions to improve document management and workflow. ( $\$229 \text{ hour} \times 120 \text{ hours} \times 12 = \$330,000$ )
- \$413,000 (FY26), \$207,000 (FY27) and \$103,000 (FY28) for contracted attorneys who will assist with aggregating settlements, discovery and document review and witness/hearings preparation. DCYF assumes the contracted attorney service cost is \$51,667 per month and scaled down each FY.

### **Professional Development**

\$3,166,000 (\$2,533,000 General Fund-State) for contracted services for observing trainers, statewide convenings for engagement and strategic planning, and actual trainings including de-escalation techniques for case workers.

### ***Workforce Assumptions:***

#### **Tort Claim Response**

20 FTEs that will assist in the response to tort claims filed against the department. These FTEs include:

- A litigation witness coordination administrator who will, in coordination with the Attorney's General Office, manage the scheduling, preparation and communication with witnesses involved in litigation to ensure their timely and effective participation in legal proceedings. This position is critical in ensuring that staff, who may not typically have to act as a witness in court proceedings, are comfortable and prepared.
- A litigation administrator who will be responsible for the implementation and oversight of all administrative processes and case management for DCYF's tort and program litigation. The position involves setting litigation strategy and ensuring seamless coordination between DCYF and our legal partners and representing DCYF at mediations and other proceedings.
- Victim services coordinator who will provide notice to victims and victims immediate families of a juvenile's transition to the community or authorized leave as required by RCW 13.40.205. This position will also facilitate community-based support for victims and witnesses.
- Two litigation and information governance operations managers who will oversee the operations of DCYF's litigation-related information governance program, ensuring the secure handling of litigation-related information and maintaining the Legal Office's compliance with applicable legal and regulatory information governance requirements.
- 11 forms and records positions to conduct discovery and information governance, and 2 supervisors

A project manager and position to assist in gathering needed data and reporting and to conduct quality assurance for risk mitigation and litigation processes

### **Family Practice Model**

4.0 Management Analyst FTEs which will assist in adoption of the family practice model, training, and quality assurance. Three of the positions will join three positions funded by DCYF to ensure that each region has a position responsible for assisting staff with adherence to the practice model. These positions will also assist in updating the practice model and implementation of new initiatives in response to changes in the law, court cases, or other changes to practice. In addition, one of the four positions would be responsible for maintaining and improving the family practice model website, which staff will use to find relative policy, practice profiles and other guidance.

### **Critical Incident Team**

3.0 Management Analyst 5 FTEs which includes:

- One additional fatality reviewer to cover the increase in workload over the last five years
- One additional data analyst to analyze data gathered, conduct root cause analysis, identify trends in the data, and make recommendations for upstream interventions and practice/process improvements.
- One additional systems' mapping coordinator who will map relevant DCYF systems related to critical incidents and coordinate continued fidelity to the National Partnership for Child Safety model, which DCYF is currently implementing using contracted resources.

### **Professional Development**

4 FTEs that will add needed capacity for professional development and practice supports. These positions include:

- A professional learning quality assurance manager (management analyst 5) who will develop and implement training and trainer recognition process and monitoring, including oversight of quality monitoring and training observations.
- Alliance Manager (management analyst 5) who will provide oversight and act as a liaison with The Alliance for Professional Development, Training, and Caregiver Excellence, which is DCYF's training partner seated in the University of Washington's School of Social Work. This position will track deliverables for the training contract, provide quality assurance monitoring, and coordinate logistics related to training and professional development provided under the Alliance contract.
- Instructional Design Program Administrator (WMS Band 1) who would oversee instructional design for all DCYF provided trainings. DCYF has a desire to expand training and professional development opportunities for staff and to leverage needs across the different divisions.

A project Curriculum Inventory Specialist (MA5) who will inventory and analyze current curriculum developed by DCYF and contractors. This position will create a repository for existing curricula, which can accommodate future training curriculum. This position will be a 2-year project position

### **De-escalation Training Unit**

6.0 FTEs to create a unit to deliver de-escalation training for case workers. This team of eight social service training specialists and one supervisor will provide de-escalation trainings three to four times a month across the state. The training requires the use of two primary trainers and two additional trainers for days three and four of each training. This training is physically challenging and having eight trainers would allow for rotation of staff. This unit will also provide refresher training and possibly other safety training such as CPR.

### **Historical Funding:**

#### **FY2026**

- FTE = 13.0 FTEs
- Total Funds = \$1,305,000
- Near General Fund = \$1,044,000
- Other Funds = \$835,000

#### **FY2027**

- FTE = 13.0 FTEs
- Total Funds = \$1,305,000
- Near General Fund = \$1,044,000
- Other Funds = \$835,000

## **Strategic and Performance Outcomes**

### **Strategic Framework:**

This package supports the agency's strategic plan goal of improving the quality and intention of our practice.

### **Performance Outcomes:**

DCYF assumes the ability to complete response and preparation for tort claims timely and accurately if this package is funded. In addition, the agency hopes to see a reduction in the number and size of claims as our practice investments result in practice change. It is important to note that DCYF's legal liability may not be related to quality of practice so reductions in these two items may not be possible even as practice improves.

## Equity Impacts

### **Community Outreach and Engagement:**

DCYF engages in extensive outreach to communities through a variety of means including webinars and in person meetings. For the family practice model development, DCYF worked with both staff and those with lived experience to co-design these practice profiles. For critical incident reviews, DCYF works with stakeholders and tribes to review critical incidents and make recommendations.

### **Disproportional Impact Considerations:**

Investing in the quality of our practices through support of a practice model, learning from critical incidents and improving the training and professional development supports for our staff will positively impact disproportionality and outcomes for children, youth and families.

### **Target Communities and Populations:**

Given the disproportionate representation of black, brown and tribal children and families in child welfare and juvenile justice any investments in the quality of the practice and experience of those involved in these systems supports more equitable outcomes.

### **Community Inputs and Incorporation:**

Not Applicable

## Other Collateral Connections

### **HEAL Act Agencies Supplemental Questions**

Not applicable

### **Puget Sound Recovery:**

Not applicable

### **State Workforce Impacts:**

Not applicable

### **Intergovernmental:**

There are no intergovernmental impacts.

### **Stakeholder Impacts:**

Clients for the child welfare and juvenile rehabilitation systems can expect improvements in service quality from this request.

### **State Facilities Impacts:**

Not applicable

### **Changes from Current Law:**

Not applicable

### **Legal or Administrative Mandates:**

Not applicable

### **Governor's Salmon Strategy:**

Not applicable

## IT Addendum

**Does this Decision Package include funding for any IT-related costs, including hardware, software, (including cloud-based services), contracts or IT staff?**

No

## Objects of Expenditure

Objects of Expenditure <i>Dollars in Thousands</i>	Fiscal Years		Biennial	Fiscal Years		Biennial
	2026	2027	2025-27	2028	2029	2027-29
Obj. A	\$1,542,000	\$1,543,000	<b>\$3,085,000</b>	\$1,543,000	\$1,543,000	<b>\$3,086,000</b>
Obj. B	\$502,000	\$503,000	<b>\$1,005,000</b>	\$503,000	\$503,000	<b>\$1,006,000</b>
Obj. C	\$0	\$0	<b>\$0</b>	\$0	\$0	<b>\$0</b>
Obj. E	\$29,000	\$29,000	<b>\$58,000</b>	\$29,000	\$29,000	<b>\$58,000</b>
Obj. G	\$38,000	\$38,000	<b>\$76,000</b>	\$38,000	\$38,000	<b>\$76,000</b>
Obj. J	\$115,000	\$0	<b>\$115,000</b>	\$0	\$0	<b>\$0</b>
Obj. A	\$1,983,000	\$1,989,000	<b>\$3,972,000</b>	\$1,891,000	\$1,891,000	<b>\$3,782,000</b>
Obj. B	\$696,000	\$697,000	<b>\$1,393,000</b>	\$665,000	\$665,000	<b>\$1,330,000</b>
Obj. C	\$1,283,000	\$1,883,000	<b>\$3,166,000</b>	\$2,483,000	\$2,483,000	<b>\$4,966,000</b>
Obj. E	\$786,000	\$250,000	<b>\$1,036,000</b>	\$145,000	\$41,000	<b>\$186,000</b>
Obj. G	\$58,000	\$58,000	<b>\$116,000</b>	\$55,000	\$55,000	<b>\$110,000</b>
Obj. J	\$173,000	\$0	<b>\$173,000</b>	\$0	\$0	<b>\$0</b>
Obj. T	\$377,000	\$377,000	<b>\$754,000</b>	\$377,000	\$377,000	<b>\$754,000</b>

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