

MEMORANDUM

To: Senate Judiciary Committee

From: Chris Winters, Commissioner, DCF
Aryka Radke, JD, Deputy Commissioner, DCF-FSD

Date: Friday, March 28, 2025

Re: H.2 Follow-Up Regarding Workforce and High End System of Care (HESOC)

Summary:

- DCF looks forward to painting the full picture on the FSD Workforce and High-End System of Care (HESOC) and the improvements we've made in recent months
- While DCF doesn't question the veracity of the testimony provided to the SJ by the VSEA on 3/21, it appears to DCF that much of it is more reflective of a workforce perspective from over a year ago. Further, some of the shared workforce statistics are no longer accurate.
- The most accurate accounting of DCF's readiness to implement the final stage of RTA has been provided in the bimonthly RTA reports we've been filing over the last year. The final of these reports is due for submission on 3/31/2025.
- Several HESOC and workforce projects have been successfully implemented in the past year and others are underway.
- DCF is trending positively to fewer staffings, more supportive services for youth, and less staff turnover and vacancies.
- Despite these modest yet important improvements, we are still not prepared to serve 19-year-olds, and appreciate that the Committee has supported the House's decision to delay for two more years while we continue to improve our systems and workforce.

Workforce:

- Vacancies: This fiscal year, we have continued trending toward lower vacancies. At the beginning of FY25 we had 28 vacancies and as of 3/12 we had 17.
- Turnover: Our last available annual turnover rate was 16%, but our current point in time (not annual rate) is 6%. Due to reclassifications this is our most up to date number, which does not account for new hires turnover.



- Job satisfaction: Our last Employee Engagement Survey was conducted before the implementation of Child and Adolescent Transitional Staffing Team (CATS) and other HESOC resource increases. It showed that 61% of our staff who participated felt job satisfaction, and 61 % of staff had an intent to remain in child welfare per our 2024 staff safety culture survey. We do not have 2025 scores yet.
- Anecdotal evidence from central office district visits shows increased job satisfaction and confidence in HESOC resources.
- Supportive Initiatives: In the last year, we have implemented 22 new strategies to support workforce satisfaction and retention including starting a mentoring program, wellness culture conversations, training needs assessments and district visits to hear first-hand from staff.

High End System of Care (HESOC):

- New programming developed to support youth with high acuity needs, populations who'd previously been staffed in alternative settings:
 - Red Clover Treatment Center now offers the first in-state secure stabilization beds since the closure of Woodside in 2020
 - DCF has partnered with DAIL to develop the first ever youth-specific crisis programming for high-risk youth with developmental needs
 - Existing residential and crisis stabilization programs have very gradually expanded capacity
- New resources were developed by DCF to reduce the pressure on FSD workforce to manage crisis response
 - High End System of Care Director and High-End System of Care Coordinator positions have been created to shift organizational burden from front line staff
 - New and expanded contracts with traveling nursing staff now accommodate the bulk of staffing needs
 - The interagency Child and Adolescent Transitional Staffing Team (CATS) has been developed and trained to manage staffing emergencies. The CATS team operates an independent standby schedule to relieve pressure on frontline standby workers.
- Alternative Setting staffing pressures peaked in 2023 when 126 distinct staffings occurring that year. In 2024, instances of alternative setting staffings dropped by over 30%
- High-end staffings still occur at a much higher rate than pre-pandemic rates; however, concerted efforts have greatly reduced the immediate hourly impact on FSD workforce.
 - Currently, high end staffings are supported almost entirely by contract staffers, respite foster providers, and voluntary workforce.
 - At one point in 2023, every FSD standby worker in the state was called out at least once to support coverage of 5 concurrent staffings in one weekend.
 - Comparatively, the standby workforce has only been used twice in the past six months for high-end staffings, and only for a few hours while alternatives were identified.
- Though these efforts have been successful to reduce immediate FSD pressures, the practice of Alternative setting staffings is not supported as a long-term solution. Further treatment and placement options still must be in place before DCF can be prepared to serve a further expanded juvenile jurisdiction.