

Position Statement

For 2025 Session

MACSSA has an organizational priority of “Strategic Position Development” with the goal of addressing challenges and leading innovation through thoughtful analysis that incorporates fiscal implications, systemic policy concerns, and legislative strategies in the development of policy and legislative positions.

Position Title: **Child Protection Workforce and State Investment in Staff**

Proposal

Issue: Challenges Facing Minnesota’s CPS Workforce:

High Turnover Rates and Burnout: CPS caseworkers frequently experience secondary trauma, leading to high turnover. The Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS) found that the average tenure for CPS workers was only 2.5 years (DHS, 2023)ⁱ. This attrition disrupts relationships with children and families and increases agency costs for recruitment and training. Child protection staffing faces significant challenges due to the intense public and administrative scrutiny inherent in this critical work. While oversight is essential, the sheer volume and intensity of scrutiny often discourage individuals from entering or remaining in the field. This constant pressure can be deeply disheartening and demotivating. Currently, child welfare programs are held accountable to a wide array of entities, including federal and state statutes, County Boards, Court Appointed attorneys, internal complaint processes, DHS, DCYF, ICWA audits, TCM audits, CFSR, Judges, GALs, county residents, the Ombudsman’s office, the Office of Civil Rights, and more. Additional layers of oversight continue to be added, such as those from the Supreme Court Advisory Committee and multiple advisory teams associated with MAAFPCWDA. Balancing the expectations of these varied stakeholders while ensuring compliance is extraordinarily difficult, as it is nearly impossible to meet everyone's standards simultaneously. Staff members often endure verbal abuse, threats, and frequent complaints as part of their daily work. These challenges, coupled with secondary trauma, can lead to burnout, and necessitate leave time to recover. This, in turn, diverts critical time and resources from directly supporting families, further compounding the demands of an already taxing profession.

1. **Recruitment Difficulties:** The workforce shortage is further compounded by the difficulty in recruiting qualified applicants. Factors such as demanding job expectations, counties are competing with one another, the state and private employers for a limited number for eligible staff. As a result, many counties report that vacancies remain unfilled for extended periods, with rural areas facing additional recruitment challenges.
3. **Challenges with long-term professional development:** Once a new worker completes Foundations Training, there is limited specialized training to meet job duties. This is especially true for longer-term staff to find affordable and meaningful training opportunities within the state. This is despite information from the National Workforce Institute, that consistent and positive training in supports workforce retention (2020).ⁱⁱ
4. **Outdated Technology in the Social Services Information System (SSIS):** SSIS, the system used by CPS workers across Minnesota, has not kept pace with modern technology standards and requires urgent modernization to increase efficiency and reduce administrative burdens on staff. Current limitations in the SSIS system, including a non-intuitive interface and time-consuming data entry requirements, divert CPS workers' time away from direct interactions with families. According to research, more streamlined, user-friendly systems allow caseworkers to

spend up to 25% more time with clients, which can improve outcomes in child welfare cases (National Child Welfare Workforce Institute, 2020).ⁱⁱⁱ The financial cost to the counties and state is significant without a complete overhaul or replacement of the SSIS system. Counties need immediate improvement in reporting abilities for data, which could be accomplished through a through state developed Power BI program. There is substantial inequity between counties that can afford the cost of training, computer programs and staff time to figure out how to access the state system data and to build the reports. SSIS is not easily used in the field to help workers be more efficient so many counties are paying for secondary systems like Case Works or Traverse, to try and find an electronic filing system that works in the field. Moreover, this technology does not push work into SSIS which results in duplication of documentation.

For example:

- \$16,350,900 is the estimated county cost because a time entry takes 90 seconds instead of 30 seconds.
- \$16,350,900 is the estimated county cost because it takes 8 minutes to log into SSIS each day.

Calculations:

- $6,830,172 \text{ Hours} / 8 \text{ hours per day} \times \$143.67 \text{ State-Wide Average Staff Cost/Hour} \times 8 \text{ minutes} / 60 = \$16,354,900$
 - $6,830,172 \text{ Hours} / 8 \text{ hours per day} \times 8\text{-time entries/day} \times \$143.67 \text{ State-Wide Average Staff Cost/Hour} \times 1 \text{ minute} / 60 = \$ 8,177,500$
5. **Commitment to Quality Work:** It's essential to acknowledge that child protection workers do not come to work each day with the intention of performing poorly. On the contrary, CPS staff are deeply committed to upholding the highest standards in their work, often under challenging circumstances and with limited resources. Our workforce strives to make a positive difference in the lives of children and families, motivated by a genuine desire to protect vulnerable individuals and contribute meaningfully to our communities. This dedication underpins our call for greater support, fair compensation, and adequate resources to enable CPS professionals to maintain the quality of service that Minnesota's children and families deserve.

Legislative Recommendations To address these challenges and build a resilient CPS workforce capable of meeting Minnesota's needs through 2030, we recommend the following actions:

1. **Increase Funding for CPS Positions and Compensation Adjustments:**
 - Increase funding to support competitive salaries for CPS workers across the state, including adjustments for inflation and cost-of-living disparities between rural and urban areas. According to the American Public Human Services Association (APHSA), higher salaries directly correlate with improved retention (APHSA, 2021).^{iv}
 - Provide loan forgiveness or other financial incentives for new graduates entering CPS positions, with a focus on rural recruitment.
2. **Implement Statewide CPS Training Standards and Resources:**
 - Align current social work undergraduate education with the Foundations Curriculum to ensure that those specific knowledge and skills are taught in their program of study, making them job ready at graduation.
 - Increase investment in continuous professional development programs, including mentorship and peer support, to enhance skills and reduce burnout among tenured CPS workers.
3. **Reduce, and fund at a Statewide Level, Caseloads and Staff to Supervisor Ratios to Improve Quality Work, Worker Retention and Child Safety:**
 - Establish caseload standards that are in line with national best practices, and Minnesota current laws related to the Minnesota African American Family Preservation and Child Welfare Disproportionally Act (MAAFPCWDA) (Caseload reductions will enable CPS workers to provide higher-quality services to families while reducing burnout).^{v vi}

- Newly hired child protection workers should carry no more than three-quarters of a caseload until they are released from probation.^{vii}
- Establish a supervisor-worker ratio based on current system laws/rules as appropriate.^{viii}
- Allocate additional funding to counties for hiring new CPS staff and resources to meet these caseload numbers. However, it is critical to note that as local county levies pay the largest cost of child protection services in Minnesota, most counties are currently unable to afford to meet these targets.

4. Modernize the Social Services Information System (SSIS):

- Allocate funding to update SSIS with a modern, intuitive interface and streamlined workflow processes. An updated system will reduce the administrative burden on CPS workers, enabling them to spend more time engaging with families and providing critical services.
- Ensure that SSIS modernization efforts include mobile access, integration with other state systems, and robust data analytics capabilities, which will improve the quality and timeliness of data-driven decision-making in child welfare.
- Provide ongoing training and support for CPS staff in using the updated system, ensuring the new platform enhances rather than hinders case management efficiency.

5. Support Worker Well-being Through Mental Health Resources:

- Fund Reflective Supervision in local county agencies. (cite some research)
- Fund mental health support services specifically for CPS workers, including access to counseling and debriefing services following traumatic cases.
- Implement wellness programs that promote a supportive work environment, including flexible scheduling, peer support groups, and supervisor training in recognizing and mitigating worker burnout.

Minnesota's child protective services are at a crossroads. Without immediate legislative action to address staffing shortages, training deficiencies, and workplace stressors, the state's CPS system will continue to struggle, putting vulnerable children and families at risk. By investing in workforce support measures, the Legislature can help build a sustainable CPS system that ensures safety, stability, and well-being for Minnesota's children. We urge the Legislature to adopt these recommendations to strengthen the CPS workforce for 2025-2030 and beyond.

Systemic Priority/Paradigm Trend Alignment (highlight all that apply and explain why)

- **Equity:** Promote racial equity and eliminate racial disparities in the human services system for all people across the state. (*systemic priority*)
- **Workforce:** Advocate for strategies to sustain and equip the workforce, and simplify work given the forecasted labor shortages. (*systemic priority/paradigm trend*)
- **Technology:** Collaboratively seek state investment in systems transformation and modernization which must include appropriate county collaboration, oversight, and guidance. (*systemic priority/paradigm trend*)
- **Governance/Partnerships:** Co-create state/county governance that results in clear accountability, appropriate allocation of resources, stabilized service delivery, and improved outcomes for people served. (*systemic priority/paradigm trend*)
- **Resident Service:** Adapt to individual needs to support real choices (*paradigm trend*)

1. Focus on User-Centric Design and Efficiency

- **Why it Aligns:** There's a growing priority in social services to reduce administrative burdens so that caseworkers can spend more time directly supporting children and families. User-friendly, efficient systems that reduce time on documentation and increase access to critical data support this priority.
- **How it Shows in Systems:** Both Ohio and Colorado's systems emphasize user-centered design, making systems intuitive and accessible, which supports the paradigm shift towards efficient service delivery over complex, time-consuming data entry.

2. Modularity and Agile Development for Adaptability

- **Why it Aligns:** Modularity and agile development reflect the trend toward systems that can evolve with emerging needs, policy changes, and technological advancements without requiring a complete overhaul each time. This paradigm shift values flexibility and long-term adaptability.
- **How it Shows in Systems:** Colorado’s phased, modular approach and agile methodology for TRAILS reflect this by allowing incremental, responsive updates, so the system can evolve with changes in child welfare practices and legislation, providing a sustainable, long-term solution.

3. Improving Data Accessibility and Integration

- **Why it Aligns:** A systemic priority in child welfare is to ensure caseworkers, supervisors, and policy makers have timely access to accurate data across agencies, supporting a holistic view of child welfare cases and services. Integration with other state systems helps create an ecosystem where relevant information is readily accessible.
- **How it Shows in Systems:** Colorado’s and Ohio’s enhanced data integration capabilities align with this trend, as they allow better data sharing and information flow across related systems, contributing to informed decision-making and a more cohesive support network for children.

4. Field Accessibility and Mobile Solutions

- **Why it Aligns:** The trend towards mobility and real-time data access in the field aligns with the systemic priority of enhancing the work environment for caseworkers. Systems that provide real-time access empower workers to deliver timely services and reduce the lag between field observations and system updates.
- **How it Shows in Systems:** Colorado’s TRAILS system is specifically designed to be mobile-friendly, allowing caseworkers to access and update case information while in the field. This not only increases efficiency but also improves data accuracy by reducing the time between service delivery and documentation.

5. Enhanced Accuracy and Consistency for Compliance and Reporting

- **Why it Aligns:** With increased accountability standards and oversight in child welfare, there is a systemic priority to have consistent, accurate data for compliance reporting, federal reimbursement, and strategic decision-making. Systems that ensure real-time updates and consistent data collection practices align with this trend.
- **How it Shows in Systems:** Ohio’s SACWIS and Colorado’s TRAILS provide improved documentation and automated updates, which support accurate, standardized reporting, reducing the risks of compliance issues and enhancing data quality for program assessments.

Together, these areas help fulfill a vision of child welfare systems that are not only efficient and responsive to caseworkers' needs but also robust in their support for long-term systemic priorities, including adaptability, data integration, and compliance. These alignments support a future-focused approach to child welfare where technology serves as an enabler of more effective, compassionate, and data-informed service delivery.

Operational Priority (Committee) Alignment (highlight all that apply and explain why)

Adult Services	Children’s Services	Equity	Modernization
Behavioral Health	Economic Supports	Healthcare	Policy
1. Equity			

Rationale: The statement emphasizes the need to address disparities within the child protection workforce, especially in rural areas where recruitment is challenging. It highlights how these disparities can lead to unequal service access across counties, with some counties able to afford training and reporting enhancements while others cannot. By promoting equitable access to resources and support, this position aims to provide all children with consistent protection regardless of their location.

2. Modernization

Rationale: The statement addresses the outdated Social Services Information System (SSIS), advocating for modern, intuitive, and mobile-accessible technology. Modernization efforts would reduce administrative burdens, enabling caseworkers to focus more on direct services for families. The position also underscores the importance of data integration and real-time access, which would improve decision-making, compliance, and overall system efficiency. A streamlined system that minimizes time-consuming tasks aligns with current modernization trends.

3. Policy

Rationale: The statement calls for legislative support in funding, workforce retention strategies, and training initiatives to create a sustainable CPS system. By addressing issues like competitive salaries, caseload standards, and worker well-being, the position seeks policy interventions that will strengthen child protection services at a systemic level, ensuring that children’s safety and welfare remain a legislative priority.

This alignment with equity, modernization, and policy reflects a commitment to sustainable improvements in child protection, addressing both the immediate needs of the workforce and the long-term stability of services across Minnesota.

Rationale/Background:

Background The role of CPS is crucial to safeguarding the well-being of Minnesota’s children. However, CPS agencies face severe staffing shortages that limit their ability to carry out this mission effectively. Factors contributing to the crisis include high caseloads, burnout, comparatively low compensation, and insufficient support for the mental health challenges associated with the job. According to the National Association of Social Workers (NASW), turnover rates in CPS positions nationwide range from 20% to 40%, a trend that Minnesota mirrors (NASW, 2022).^{ix} Studies indicate that higher caseloads and burnout correlate with decreased child and family outcomes, underscoring the need for legislative intervention to address Minnesota’s CPS workforce challenges (Child Welfare League of America, 2021).^x

High-level, one paragraph description of the issue and its importance:

Executive Summary: Minnesota’s child protective services (CPS) system is facing a critical workforce crisis, characterized by high turnover, recruitment challenges, and barriers to effective training. These issues not only compromise service quality but also jeopardize child safety and intensify the pressures on remaining CPS staff. Currently, CPS workers experience high levels of burnout, secondary trauma, and insufficient compensation, with an average tenure of only 2.5 years. Additionally, outdated technology in the Social Services Information System (SSIS) further hampers efficiency, reducing the time workers can spend with families and increasing administrative burdens.

The Minnesota Association of County Social Service Administrators (MACSSA) recommends immediate legislative action to address these issues, with a focus on improving recruitment and retention, enhancing training, and modernizing the SSIS. Specific proposals include increasing funding for CPS staff positions and competitive salaries, establishing loan forgiveness programs for new CPS graduates, implementing statewide training standards, and modernizing SSIS with a user-friendly, mobile-accessible system. MACSSA also advocates for caseload reductions to align with national best practices, ensuring manageable workloads and higher-quality services for Minnesota families. Additional support for CPS worker well-being, including mental health resources and wellness programs, is essential for sustainable workforce resilience.

To ensure Minnesota’s CPS system can meet the needs of children and families in crisis, MACSSA urges the Legislature to adopt these comprehensive workforce support measures, fostering a stable, effective CPS system focused on safety, stability, and well-being for all Minnesota children.



MACSSA
Minnesota Association of County
Social Service Administrators

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ⁱ Minnesota Department of Human Services. (2023). *Annual Report on CPS Workforce and Case Outcomes*.

ⁱⁱ National Child Welfare Workforce Institute. (2020). *Training and Retention: Best Practices in CPS*.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid

^{iv} American Public Human Services Association. (2021). *Addressing Workforce Turnover in Public Human Services*.

^v Governor's Task Force on the Protection of Children Final Report and Recommendations March 2015

^{vi} Child Welfare League of America, 2021

^{vii} Governor's Task Force on the Protection of Children Final Report and Recommendations March 2015

^{viii} Ibid

^{ix} National Association of Social Workers. (2022). *Social Work and the Child Welfare Workforce: Challenges and Opportunities*.

^x Child Welfare League of America. (2021). *Caseload and Workload Management in Child Welfare Services*.