

**Department of Human Services
Fiscal Year 2023 Operating Budget
Response to Department of Legislative Services Budget Analysis**

**Senate Budget and Taxation Committee
Health and Human Services Subcommittee
Senator Melony Griffith
Thursday, February 18, 2022**

**House Appropriations Committee
Health and Social Services Subcommittee
Delegate Kirill Reznik
Wednesday, February 21, 2022**

Testimony of Secretary Lourdes R. Padilla

Good afternoon, Chair and members of the Committee. It is a pleasure to be here today. With me today are: Gregory James, Deputy Secretary for Operations; Subramanian Muniyasamy, Chief Technology Officer and Stafford Chipungu, our Chief Financial Officer. Daniel Wait, Director, Human Resources Development and Training; Denise Conway, Executive Director, Social Services Administration and La Sherra Ayala, Executive Director, Family Investment Administration are also available to address any questions.

The Department of Human Services (DHS) is responsible for three primary areas: we administer the State's social services programs including foster care, adoption, and adult services; we provide economic assistance to those in need; and we facilitate the collection and distribution of child support. During the last fiscal year, we estimate that at least one million Marylanders were touched by one or more of our services.



DHS Administration units provide support services and directions to both the central and local offices through the offices of the Secretary, Operations, Technology for Human Services (OTHS) and Local General Administration. DHS Administration units support the programs so that they can execute the services and benefits to the citizens of Maryland. DHS Administration FY 2023 Allowance totals \$254 million, a decrease of \$12 million or 5% compared to the FY 2022 Appropriation.

The Office of the Secretary comprises the Citizen's Review Board for Children (CRBC); the Maryland Commission for Women; and the Maryland Legal Services Program and provides overall direction and coordination for all DHS programs and activities. The Operations Office consists of two divisions: Division of Budget, Finance, and Personnel; and the Division of Administrative Services. OTHS is responsible for the overall management and direction of DHS information systems. DHS is also the operator of the Maryland Total Human-services Integrated Network (MD THINK), a shared human services platform which supports program applications for DHS and other state agencies.

Thank you for the opportunity to be here today. We are now ready to answer any questions you may have.



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Response to Issues

Issue#1: - DHS should comment on the reason for the decline in timely reporting and the steps it is taking to resume pre-fiscal 2021 reporting timelines and to increase the proportion of cases receiving appropriate educational, physical, and mental health services. (Page 7)

Response to Issue: The Department agrees with the importance of returning to pre-fiscal 2021 reporting timelines of ensuring youth in foster care receive timely education, physical, and mental health services. The Department has continued to see the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on providers of physical and mental health services. The pandemic limited the availability of scheduling and in-person visits with health care providers within the mandated timeframes. Furthermore, the Department recognizes the documentation of kept medical appointments as a barrier to timely completion. Child welfare staff experience delays in receiving medical documentation from providers and this delay in the documentation being within CJAMS causes noncompliance.

The Department with the assistance of the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), was able to ensure children in foster care were enrolled in an education setting timely. Virtual learning supported children who entered foster care during the reporting period to remain in their school of origin. However, it was difficult to ensure children and youth who received or were in need of Individual Education Plan (IEP) received services timely. These children experienced delays as these services were more difficult to administer virtually or initiate the IEP process. With the return to in-person learning the Department continued to see most children were enrolled in school within one week of entry, administer IEP related services, and initiation of IEP evaluations.



The Department is taking the following steps to see a return to pre-fiscal 2021 reporting:

- We have a new Child Welfare Medical Director who joined in January this year.
- We have established a new SSA Audit and Compliance Quality Implementation (ACQI) Unit.
- We constantly reiterate to caseworkers the importance of maintaining up-to-date medical educational and physical services to children in our care.
- Additionally, the Department will continue to enhance CJAMS reports and the ability to share information with MDH and MSDE.

Issue #2: The Department should comment on its efforts to prioritize the well-being of social workers during the pandemic, including any efforts to facilitate supervisor -subordinate communications, the creation of peer support groups, the availability of scheduling flexibilities, access to mental health services, and any other available supports. (Page 17)

Response to Issue: The Department agrees that prioritizing the well-being of social workers during the pandemic, and at all times, is critical to maintaining staff morale. Support begins with building communication between supervisors and subordinates. To ensure the flow of communication, the Department has ensured that all staff have the tools necessary to succeed. This has included dispersing laptop computers, iPads, and cellular telephones to supervisors and staff. Further, the staff trainings developed by the Department's Learning Office have focused on helping supervisory staff understand their role as a coach and mentor.

The Department understands that our social workers are impacted by the trauma of the work they do and need flexibility to manage that impact. Throughout the pandemic and moving forward, the Department has worked to allow staff flexibility in scheduling. This flexibility also includes the extensive use of telework, providing another tool for managing the work-life balance.

During the pandemic, DHS partnered with Maryland Institute for Emergency Medical Services Systems (MIEMSS) to host a series of nine (9) mental health forums designed to build peer support. Over 755 DHS employees attended these sessions. The Department intends to continue these opportunities.

Staff have access to mental health resources which were enhanced by the MyMD Cares program which provides state employees access to counselors on call 24 hours a day / 7 days a week. In addition, many Local Departments of Social Services have developed quiet spaces within their offices to allow workers time to decompress and process the stresses of the job. The Department continues to explore additional options to provide support.



Issue #3 DHS should discuss any impact that these changes are expected to have on service provision or supervisory needs. (Page 17)

Response to Issue: The Department recognizes that there was an increase in vacancies within the Family Investment Specialist job classification series. The Department took a number of actions to increase efficiency which minimized the impact of vacancies on FIA clients.

In order to broaden our pool of talent, the Department is seeking to leverage our ability to offer entry level opportunities to a broader group of potential candidates. Our strategy includes working with the Department of Budget and Management to remove the requirement that candidates for entry level Family Investment Specialist positions have a bachelor's degree, and to allow a wide range of experience as qualifying criteria. The Department is confident that we can recruit, develop, and better retain staff from this deeper pool of candidates while also allowing greater equity in access to opportunities within the Department. In addition, consistent with the mission of the Department, these changes will allow for greater equity in access to opportunity and give greater flexibility in meeting the needs of our clients. These changes will support retaining staff that will contribute to fulfilling the service delivery needs as available flexibilities cease. We do not anticipate changes in supervisory needs.

Issue #4 The Department of Legislative Services (DLS) recommends a report on DHS' recruitment plan and the impact of departmentwide vacancy rates on service delivery. (Page 17)

Response to Issue: The Department agrees with this recommendation and will provide a report on our recruitment plan and the impact of departmentwide vacancy rates on services delivery.

Issue #5 DHS should comment on any data reporting issues that have occurred during the transition for E&E and the CJAMS and how it has addressed any issues that have arisen. In addition, as the project prepares to conclude in fiscal 2022, DLS recommends committee narrative requesting information on the services delivery and data reporting advantages available with the new system. (Page 18)

Response to Issue: The Department takes data reporting very seriously. MD THINK has encountered some challenges typical of a major technology transition. These do not represent systemic issues with actual capabilities of the new system. Overall, the new applications offer case workers several benefits, including greater and more flexibility access to data. Issues are being addressed and resolved as they arise, and the Department has an aggressive plan to complete data reporting issues in this fiscal year. Below are the issues that have occurred during the transition for E & E and CJAMS, and how we are addressing them:



Eligibility and Enrollment E&E:

Challenges: There were some challenges related to conversion of data from the legacy CARES to E&E for the TANF and SNAP Data Report. The issue arose from the fact that the reports needed to be generated from legacy CARES and E&E followed by reconciliation. As a result, for the quarter of October - December 2021, there were few discrepancies identified for the case data related to TANF, SNAP, and other assistance programs.

Resolution: Since all statewide caseloads from CARES were migrated to E&E on November 15, 2021, currently, all the reports are generated from only one system (E & E), and all the identified discrepancies in assistance and caseload reports are in the final stage of being resolved and are targeted to be completed by the end of this fiscal year.

Child, Juvenile, and Adult Management System:

Challenges: There have been challenges with enhancement of existing reports to reflect the new features and take advantage of the enhanced data and reporting capabilities. MD THINK is currently engaged in enhancing all reports related to CJAMS, which is targeted to be completed by the end of SFY 2022.

Resolution: In the CJAMS, all these reports are being automated and target to complete by the end of SFY 2022.



Response to Recommended Action

Recommended Action #1

Add language restricting the general fund appropriation for the Maryland Legal Services Program to that purpose. **(Pages 2 and 21)**

Response: The Department concurs with this recommendation.

Recommended Action #2

Adopt committee narrative requesting a department wide recruitment plan Report Due December 15, 2022. **(Pages 2 and 21)**

Response: The Department concurs with this recommendation.

Recommended Action #3

Adopt committee narrative requesting a catalog of available data reports Report Due October 1, 2022. **(Pages 2 and 22)**

Response: The Department concurs with this recommendation.

