

CHILD WELFARE STAFFING AND CASELOAD

DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY
SERVICES

PERFORMANCE AUDIT SERVICES

Informational Brief
June 4, 2025

**LOUISIANA LEGISLATIVE AUDITOR
1600 NORTH THIRD STREET
POST OFFICE BOX 94397
BATON ROUGE, LOUISIANA 70804-9397**

LEGISLATIVE AUDITOR
MICHAEL J. "MIKE" WAGUESPACK, CPA

FIRST ASSISTANT LEGISLATIVE AUDITOR
BETH Q. DAVIS, CPA

DIRECTOR OF PERFORMANCE AUDIT SERVICES
EMILY DIXON, CIA, CGAP, CRMA, MBA

AUDIT TEAM
JULIE FLOYD, CIA, CGAP, MPA
MEGHAN RICH, MA, PHD

Under the provisions of state law, this report is a public document. A copy of this report has been submitted to the Governor, to the Attorney General, and to other public officials as required by state law. A copy of this report is available for public inspection at the Baton Rouge office of the Louisiana Legislative Auditor and online at www.la.la.gov. When contacting the office, you may refer to Agency ID No. 9726 or Report ID No. 40250008 for additional information.

This document is produced by the Louisiana Legislative Auditor, State of Louisiana, Post Office Box 94397, Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70804-9397 in accordance with Louisiana Revised Statute 24:513. Four copies of this public document was produced at an approximate cost of \$2.60. This material was produced in accordance with the standards for state agencies established pursuant to R.S. 43:31.

In compliance with the Americans With Disabilities Act, if you need special assistance relative to this document, or any documents of the Legislative Auditor, please contact Jenifer Schaye, General Counsel, at 225-339-3800.

June 4, 2025

The Honorable J. Cameron Henry, Jr.
President of the Senate
The Honorable Phillip R. DeVillier,
Speaker of the House of Representatives

Dear Senator Henry and Representative DeVillier:

This informational brief provides the results of our analysis of the Department of Children and Family Services' Child Welfare staffing levels, expenditures for personnel services, turnover rates, caseloads and case backlogs, and supplemental contract staff in the Baton Rouge and Orleans Regions. This brief is intended to provide timely information related to an area of interest to the legislature or based on a legislative request. I hope this brief will benefit you in your legislative decision-making process.

We would like to express our appreciation to the Department of Children and Family Services for their assistance during this review.

Respectfully submitted,



Michael J. "Mike" Waguespack, CPA
Legislative Auditor

MJW/aa

CWSTAFFING





Informational Brief

Child Welfare Staffing and Caseload

Department of Children and Family Services

MICHAEL J. "MIKE"
WAGUESPACK, CPA

Audit Control# 40250008

Performance Audit Services -- June 2025

Background

The mission of the Department of Children and Family Services' (DCFS) Division of Child Welfare is to work to protect children against abuse and/or neglect and find permanent homes for Louisiana's foster children. To accomplish its mission and goals, Child Welfare operates offices in nine regions across the state serving children and families in a range of programs including child protective services, family services, foster care, and adoption. See Exhibit B.1 in Appendix B for a description of Child Welfare programs.

During fiscal year 2024, Child Welfare had 1,541 filled positions,¹ served approximately 4,400 children in foster care per month, conducted 21,901 child protection investigations, and had total expenditures of approximately \$327.5 million. According to DCFS, it has struggled to recruit and retain qualified Child Welfare staff due to the nature and difficulty of the job, along with a low salary. Child Welfare staffing is a common challenge across all states.

We compiled this information brief in response to a legislative request. This report provides information about Child Welfare staffing levels, expenditures for personnel services, turnover rates, caseloads and case backlogs, and supplemental contract staff in the Baton Rouge and Orleans Regions. See Exhibit 1 for a map of DCFS Regions.

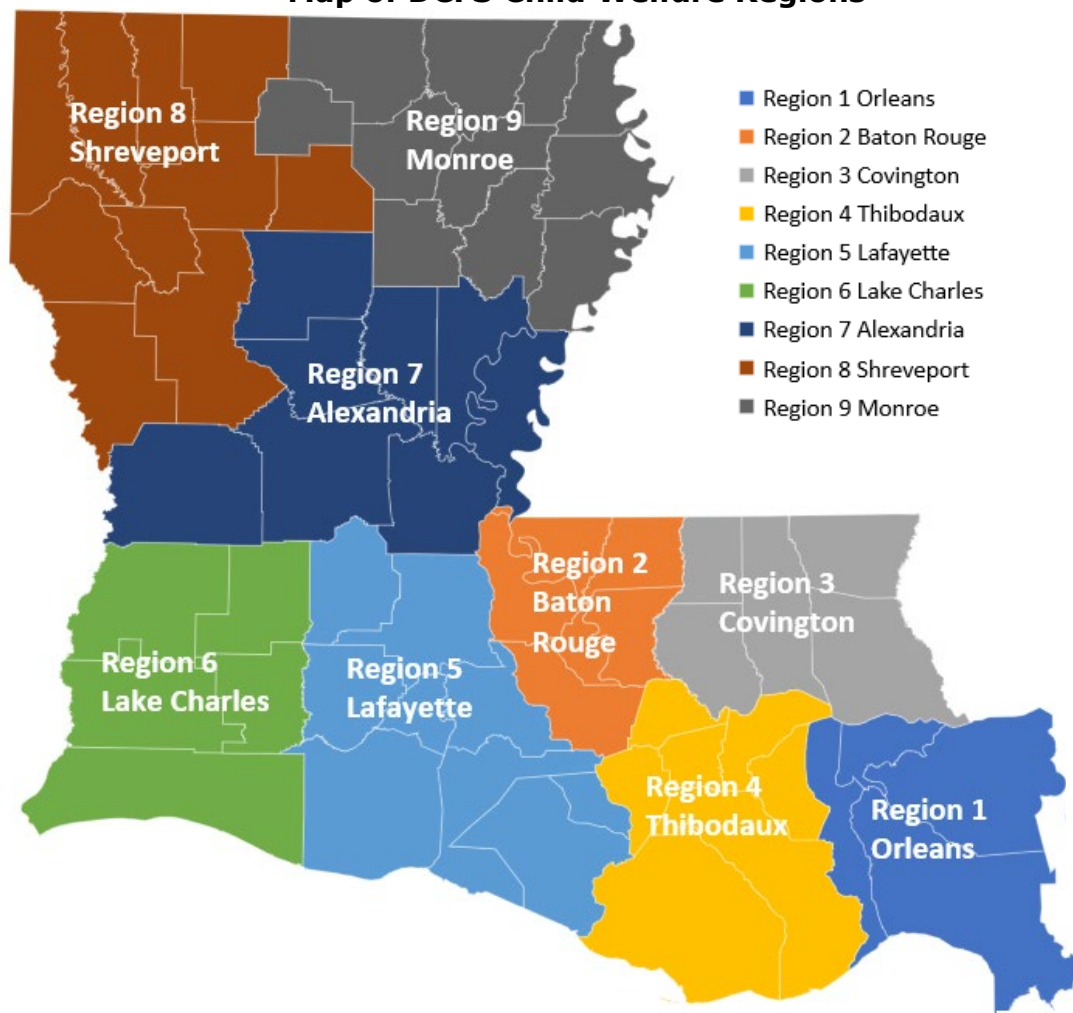
Why We Compiled This Informational Brief

We conducted this analysis in response to a legislative request asking us to conduct a staffing needs assessment and analysis of the existing case backlog in each DCFS region. To conduct this analysis, we reviewed DCFS' staffing needs assessment, case and caseload data, and efforts to address recruitment and retention of Child Welfare workers and to address child protective services cases, and we analyzed staffing levels and expenditures for personnel services. We relied on information provided by DCFS and did not independently verify all underlying data.

Informational briefs are intended to provide more timely information than standards-based performance audits. While these informational briefs do not follow all *Government Auditing Standards*, we conduct quality assurance activities to ensure the information presented is accurate. In addition, we incorporated feedback we received from DCFS throughout this informational brief. See Appendix A for DCFS' response.

¹ As of June 30, 2024

Exhibit 1
Map of DCFS Child Welfare Regions



Source: Prepared by legislative auditor's staff using data provided by DCFS.

What We Found

Based on DCFS' internal staffing needs assessment, regional Child Welfare offices had unmet staffing needs of at least 129 workers in fiscal year 2024. To determine appropriate, or adequate, staffing levels, DCFS conducts a staffing needs assessment.² To calculate staffing needs, DCFS uses the monthly average of new cases and applies a standard/goal staff-to-case ratio that is unique to each program/type of case.³ Exhibit 2 shows the staff-to-case ratios for each program.

² According to DCFS, in the past this assessment was completed every six months. Going forward, an assessment will be completed every three years unless there are significant changes in the workforce which would require a re-evaluation earlier than three years.

³ Staff-to-case ratios and the staff-to-supervisor ratios are based on recommendations of child welfare organizations such as the Child Welfare League of America (www.cwla.org) and the Council on Accreditation (www.frfsa.org).

For example, the standard/goal ratio of staff-to-cases for Child Protective Services (CPS) cases is one staff for every 10 cases. During fiscal years 2023 through 2024, the Baton Rouge Region had an average of 232 new CPS cases each month, which results in a need for 23 full-time experienced workers to handle those CPS cases. DCFS does additional calculations to account for newly hired workers who are not able to carry a full caseload, and employees on extended leave.

Exhibit 2 Child Welfare Standard/Goal Staff-to-Case Ratios, by Program	
Program	Ratio
Adoption and Guardianship Subsidy	1:600
Home Development	1:55
Adoption and Adoption Petition	1:15
Family Support Services	1:15
Child Protective Services	1:10
Foster Care/Eligibility	1:10/1:355
Extended Foster Care	1:8 to 1:12
Source: Prepared by the legislative auditor's staff using data provided by DCFS	

DCFS also uses ratios to calculate the appropriate number of support and supervisory staff; however, these ratios are based on the number of staff needed rather than the average number of cases. For example, the standard/goal ratio for supervisors is one supervisor for every five caseworkers, and for managers the ratio is one manager for every four supervisors. Exhibit 3 shows DCFS' calculation of minimum Child Welfare staffing levels needed in each region, actual filled positions, and unmet needs for fiscal year 2024 based on average caseloads during fiscal year 2023 through fiscal year 2024 and includes the programs listed in Exhibit 2 except for extended foster care because that program is staffed at the state-wide level, not at the regions.

Exhibit 3 Child Welfare Staffing Needs Based on DCFS Assessment, by Region* Fiscal Year 2024			
Region	Need	Filled FY24	Unmet Need
Orleans	146	149	0
Baton Rouge	161	145	16
Covington	206	179	27
Thibodaux	143	123	20
Lafayette	195	183	12
Lake Charles	96	88	8
Alexandria	150	119	31
Shreveport	153	149	4
Monroe	131	120	11
*Based on monthly average of new cases during fiscal year 2023 through fiscal year 2024, and excludes extended foster care and state office staff. Source: Prepared by legislative auditor's staff using data provided by DCFS.			

According to DCFS, the numbers in Exhibit 3 do not represent the true staffing need because they do not account for new hires who are not able to carry a full caseload, or for staff who are on extended leave.

From July 1, 2022, through February 10, 2025, total Child Welfare filled positions have decreased by 108 (6.9%), from 1,554 on July 1, 2022, to 1,446 on February 10, 2025. Filled positions consist of Authorized Table of Organization (TO) full-time positions and full-time non-TO positions.⁴ These are the positions that are authorized and funded via the annual budget bill (House Bill 1). TO positions are permanent, while non-TO positions are temporary job appointments. Exhibit 4 shows the total Child Welfare filled positions from July 1, 2022, through February 10, 2025.

Exhibit 5 shows the same information broken out by DCFS regions and includes the percent change in staffing levels From July 1, 2022 through February 10, 2025. See Exhibit B.2 in Appendix B for Child Welfare filled positions by job title from July 1, 2022, through February 10, 2025, and also the percent change in filled positions during the same period.

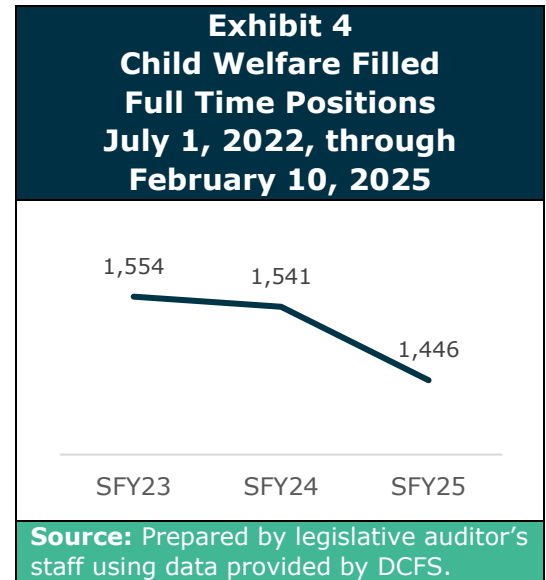


Exhibit 5 Child Welfare Filled Full-Time Positions, by Region July 1, 2022 through February 10, 2025					
Region	FY23	FY24	FY25	FY 23-25 Change	FY 23-25 % Change
Orleans	159	149	141	-18	-11.3%
Baton Rouge	136	145	117	-19	-14.0%
Covington	184	179	169	-15	-8.2%
Thibodaux	111	123	119	8	7.2%
Lafayette	184	183	173	-11	-6.0%
Lake Charles	103	88	84	-19	-18.4%
Alexandria	121	119	109	-12	-9.9%
Shreveport	162	149	137	-25	-15.4%
Monroe	127	120	118	-9	-7.1%
State-wide*	267	286	279	12	4.5%
Total	1,554	1,541	1,446	-108	-6.9%
*Statewide includes Child Welfare employees who are not assigned to a region including Centralized Intake and Extended Foster Care workers, direct case work staff, and program staff. Source: Prepared by legislative auditor's staff using data provided by DCFS.					

⁴ In addition to TO and non-TO positions, DCFS also uses employees that work on an as-needed basis called WAEs (when actually employed). From July 1, 2022, through February 10, 2025, DCFS employed an average of 47 WAEs. These employees are not included in the count of filled positions.

During fiscal years 2023 through 2024, Child Welfare expenditures for personnel services increased \$6.2 million (or 4.3%), from \$143.6 million in fiscal year 2023 to \$149.8 million in fiscal year 2024.⁵

Personnel services includes expenditures for salaries, related benefits, and other compensation. Related benefits includes required payments for insurance and retirement. Other compensation includes salaries for non-permanent employees including job appointments. Exhibit 6 shows the change in expenditures for Child Welfare personnel services during fiscal years 2023 through 2024.

Exhibit 6 Child Welfare Expenditures for Personnel Services (in millions) Fiscal Years 2023 through 2024				
Category	FY23	FY24	FY23-24 Change	FY23-24 % Change
Salaries	\$93.0	\$98.9	\$5.9	6.3%*
Related Benefits	42.2	45.5	3.3	7.8%
Other Compensation	8.4	5.4	-3.0	-35.7%
Total Personnel Services	\$143.6	\$149.8	\$6.2	4.3%
*Excluding a coding error would result in an overall 0.5% increase in salary expenditures from fiscal year 2023 to fiscal year 2024. Source: Prepared by legislative auditor's staff using data from LaGov.				

According to DCFS, salary expenditures for Child Welfare increased, in part, because House Bill 1 of the 2023 regular legislative session authorized Child Welfare to increase TO by 71 positions; the positions were primarily used to convert job appointments utilized to meet caseload needs in field offices. In addition, a coding error that reflects a salary expenditure of \$5.5 million in fiscal year 2024 contributes to the overall increase in salary expenditures. According to DCFS, that expenditure was erroneously posted to the overtime account and should not reflect a salary cost. Excluding that error would result in an overall 0.5% increase in salary expenditures from fiscal year 2023 to fiscal year 2024.

Expenditures for other compensation declined by \$3.0 million (35.7%) during the same timeframe. According to DCFS, this decline is the result of converting job appointments, which are temporary positions, to permanent TO positions starting in fiscal year 2024.

Child Welfare vacant positions increased by 22 (18.6%), from 118 in fiscal year 2023 to 140 on February 10, 2025. Positions with high vacancies include frontline Child Welfare workers. Vacant positions is the count of authorized TO positions that are not filled as of the last day of the fiscal year (does not include non-TO job appointments). The Alexandria Region had the greatest increase in vacant positions with an increase of 200% between July 1, 2022, and February 10, 2025. Exhibit 7 shows Child Welfare vacancies from July 1,

⁵ Excluding a coding error would result in an overall 0.5% increase in salary expenditures from fiscal year 2023 to fiscal year 2024.

2022, through February 10, 2025, by regions, and includes the percent change in vacancies during the same time.

Exhibit 7 Child Welfare Vacant TO Positions, by Region July 1, 2022 through February 10, 2025					
Region	FY23	FY24	FY25	FY 23-25 Change	FY 23-25 % Change
Orleans	9	12	10	1	11.1%
Baton Rouge	10	12	18	8	80.0%
Covington	12	10	13	1	8.3%
Thibodaux	10	9	7	-3	-30.0%
Lafayette	15	13	10	-5	-33.3%
Lake Charles	6	2	7	1	16.7%
Alexandria	9	9	27	18	200.0%
Shreveport	5	8	14	9	180.0%
Monroe	16	6	8	-8	-50.0%
State-wide*	26	22	26	0	0.0%
All Regions	118	103	140	22	18.6%
*Statewide includes Child Welfare employees who are not assigned to a region including Centralized Intake and Extended Foster Care workers, direct case work staff, and program staff. Source: Prepared by legislative auditor's staff using data provided by DCFS.					

From July 1, 2022, through February 10, 2025, positions with the largest vacancies were frontline Child Welfare workers including Child Welfare Specialist Trainee and Child Welfare Specialist 1, 2, and 3. A Child Welfare Specialist Trainee is the entry level position for a caseworker; and the Child Welfare Specialist 1, 2, and 3 represent the promotions track for caseworkers, with a Specialist 3 being the most senior and experienced caseworker. From July 1, 2022, through February 10, 2025, vacancies in the Child Welfare Specialist 1 position increased by 240%. Exhibit 8 shows Child Welfare vacant positions by job title from July 1, 2022, through February 10, 2025.

Exhibit 8 Child Welfare Vacant Positions, by Job Title Child Welfare Specialist Trainee and Specialists July 1, 2022 through February 10, 2025					
Job Title	FY23	FY24	FY25	FY23-25 Change	FY23-25 % Change
Child Welfare Specialist Trainee	8	6	6	-2	-25.0%
Child Welfare Specialist 1	5	11	17	12	240.0%
Child Welfare Specialist 2	5	6	11	6	120.0%
Child Welfare Specialist 3	38	31	56	18	47.4%
Source: Prepared by legislative auditor's staff using data provided by DCFS.					

To address recruitment, DCFS implemented a special entrance rate in 2018 for frontline Child Welfare positions, including Child Welfare Specialist Trainee and Child Welfare Specialist 1, 2, and 3. A special entrance rate is starting salary above the normal minimum used when the pre-approved salary is not adequate to attract or retain employees, and must be approved by the Department of State Civil Service. These special entrance rates were expanded to other positions in 2021, including Child Welfare Services Assistant and Child Welfare Supervisor. Another recruitment mechanism DCFS employed to expand the applicant pool is to allow for years of work experience to substitute for the minimum requirement that applicants possess a bachelor's degree. According to DCFS, as of May 5, 2025, DCFS reported approximately \$13.5 million in funding (\$10.1 state general funds and \$3.4 federal funds) for 132 vacant TO positions in Child Welfare.

Appendix B, Exhibit B.3 describes the job functions and average salaries for Child Welfare workers from July 1, 2022, through January 29, 2025. Appendix B, Exhibit B.4 describes the special pay mechanisms implemented to improve recruitment and retention.

Child Welfare turnover rates declined slightly, from 15.9% in fiscal year 2023 to 15.3% in fiscal year 2024. During fiscal years 2023 through 2024, an average of 214 Child Welfare employees separated employment annually from DCFS. From July 1, 2024, through March 26, 2025, 151 Child Welfare employees have separated.⁶ To address retention, DCFS implemented special pay mechanisms including premium pay and incentive awards. Since December 2021, Child Welfare staff in the positions of Child Welfare Specialist Trainee; Child Welfare Specialist 1, 2, and 3; and Child Welfare Supervisors are eligible for up to \$4 per hour in premium pay, separate from their base salary.

In addition, Child Welfare staff who work in the Baton Rouge (effective August 2022) or Orleans (effective September 2022) Regions are eligible for up to \$5 per hour in premium pay.⁷ Child Welfare staff who move their work location to the Baton Rouge Region are also eligible for an incentive award of up to \$2,500 a month.⁸ Special pay mechanisms were implemented for the Baton Rouge and Orleans Regions to address high caseloads and case backlogs in those regions. Appendix B, Exhibit B.4 shows the special pay mechanisms currently in effect.

⁶ Based on the End of Month (EOM) file for 2/28/25 and Transaction Data for 7/1/24-3/26/25.

⁷ Child Welfare Social Services Analysts, Social Services Supervisor, and support staff are eligible for a maximum of \$2.50 per hour premium pay for the Baton Rouge and Orleans Regions.

⁸ This incentive and some other special pay mechanisms are set to expire in June 2025.

In fiscal year 2023, DCFS paid approximately \$5.7 million in premium pay for Child Welfare employees. DCFS conducted a Child Welfare staffing and salary analysis in summer 2024 but concluded that there was not enough data to determine if premium pay measures have proved effective in retaining employees at the lowest entry levels of the job series (Child Welfare Specialist Trainee, Child Welfare Specialist 1, and Child Welfare Specialist 2).

Special Pay Example

A Child Welfare Specialist 3 can earn an additional \$4 per hour, totaling an additional \$8,320 per year (\$4/hour x 80 hours/pay period x 26) for a total salary of \$58,968 for the year. This worker may also be eligible for the region-specific \$5 per hour in premium pay, which would add \$10,400 to their salary for a total of \$69,368.

From July 1, 2022, through January 31, 2025, monthly average CPS cases declined statewide by 349.1 (-16.2%), from 2,152.9 cases in fiscal year 2023 to 1,803.8 cases as of January 31, 2025. Child Welfare programs include CPS, family support services, foster care, adoptions, extended foster care, foster care home development, and the adoption and guardianship subsidy program. According to DCFS, CPS cases are affected the most by staffing shortages and high caseloads. From July 1, 2022, through January 31, 2025, the monthly average number of CPS cases declined by 349.1 cases (-16.2%).

Adoption cases also declined, from 577.4 cases in fiscal year 2023 to 529 cases in fiscal year 2025, a decline of 8.4%. The largest increase in cases over the same time period is foster care cases, which went up by 437.1 cases (12.6%). Exhibit 9 shows the monthly average of cases for each program from July 1, 2022, through January 31, 2025. Appendix C shows the monthly average of cases for each program by region for the same time period.

Exhibit 9 Child Welfare Cases, by Program July 1, 2022 through January 31, 2025					
Program	FY23 Monthly Average	FY24 Monthly Average	FY25 Monthly Average	FY23-25 Change	FY23-25 % Change
Foster Care	3,474.6	3,816.4	3,911.7	437.1	12.6%
Home Development	1,707.8	1,784.6	1,908.3	200.5	11.7%
Extended Foster Care	181.6	188.7	198.8	17.2	9.5%
Family Support Services	1,131.5	1,228.0	1,159.2	27.7	2.4%
Adoption and Guardianship Subsidy	8,903.9	8,997.5	9,081.0	177.1	2.0%
Adoptions	577.4	594.4	529.0	-48.4	-8.4%
Child Protective Services	2,152.9	1,891.3	1,803.8	-349.1	-16.2%
Source: Prepared by legislative auditor's staff using data provided by DCFS.					

The percentage of Child Welfare staff who received more than the standard caseload of 10 new CPS investigations in a month was 25.8% from July 1, 2024, through January 31, 2025. However, this was an improvement from 30.6% of staff in fiscal year 2024. According to DCFS, the

CPS caseload standard is 10 new investigations assigned to caseworkers each month and no more than seven new investigations each month for new staff. In addition, other staff such as Child Welfare supervisors and managers will occasionally be assigned a CPS investigation.

In fiscal year 2024, 211 (30.6%) of 689 Child Welfare workers⁹ received more than 10 new CPS investigations in any given month. In fiscal year 2025 (through January 31, 2025), 144 (25.8%) of 558 Child Welfare workers statewide received more than 10 new CPS investigations in any given month, with the Lake Charles Region having the highest percentage of staff above the caseload standard (35.3%). According to DCFS, the Lake Charles Region has less turnover, and therefore, more experienced investigation staff. This means those staff are more frequently assigned higher than the 10 new CPS cases per month. Exhibit 10 shows the count and percent of Child Welfare staff who received more than 10 new CPS investigations in any given month during July 1, 2023, through January 31, 2025, broken out by region.

Exhibit 10 Child Welfare Staff with More Than 10 New CPS Investigations in a Month, by Region* July 1, 2023 through January 31, 2025					
Region	Fiscal Year 2024		Fiscal Year 2025		FY24-25
	# Staff	% Staff	# Staff	% Staff	% Change
Orleans	37	35.6%	25	28.7%	-6.84%
Baton Rouge	30	21.0%	17	17.9%	-3.08%
Covington	27	37.5%	21	32.8%	-4.69%
Thibodaux	20	30.3%	14	25.9%	-4.38%
Lafayette	29	35.4%	20	26.7%	-8.70%
Lake Charles	14	42.4%	12	35.3%	-7.13%
Alexandria	18	24.0%	12	24.0%	0.00%
Shreveport	24	38.7%	16	29.1%	-9.62%
Monroe	12	23.1%	7	15.9%	-7.17%
All Regions	211	30.6%	144	25.8%	-4.82%
*Excludes cases assigned to DCFS workers in the state office. Source: Prepared by legislative auditor's staff using data provided by DCFS.					

⁹ This count of Child Welfare workers is less than the total number of filled Child Welfare positions in fiscal year 2024 (shown in Exhibit 5) because this count only includes regional workers who conducted CPS investigations.

The CPS workload changed from an average of 9.3 active cases each month per Child Welfare staff in fiscal year 2023 to 15.9 from July 1, 2024, through January 31, 2025. According to DCFS, the Child Welfare League of

America's 2012 caseload standards state that workers conducting initial CPS assessments and providing ongoing CPS service should have no more than 10 active ongoing families. Caseload standards have not been updated since 2012.

However, from July 1, 2024, through January 31, 2025, CPS workers had an average of 15.9 active/ongoing cases, and some case workers carry much larger caseloads. From July 1, 2024, through January 31, 2025, some child welfare workers had more than 100 active CPS cases in a month, as shown in Exhibit 11. For example, 39 workers had more than 100 cases in a given month during the same time frame. Exhibit 11 shows the maximum number of active cases for a single child welfare worker in a month from July 1, 2024, through January 31, 2025.

Exhibit 11	
Maximum Active CPS Cases for a Single Child Welfare Staff, by Region*	
July 1, 2024 through January 31, 2025	
Region	FY25 Maximum
Orleans	144
Baton Rouge	162
Covington	146
Thibodaux	132
Lafayette	110
Lake Charles	78
Alexandria	344
Shreveport	140
Monroe	132
*Excludes cases assigned to DCFS workers in the state office.	
Source: Prepared by legislative auditor's staff using data provided by DCFS.	

Exhibit 12 shows the average number of active CPS cases for Child Welfare staff each month during July 1, 2022, through January 31, 2025, broken out by region. According to DCFS, these averages include instances where a CPS case is assigned to a worker that does not normally carry a CPS caseload, such as a supervisor or manager, resulting in a lower average.

Exhibit 12 Average Active/Ongoing CPS Cases per Child Welfare Staff, by Region* July 1, 2022 through January 31, 2025					
Region	FY23 Monthly Average	FY24 Monthly Average	FY25 Monthly Average	FY23-25 Change	FY23-25 % Change
Orleans	11.0	10.2	16.8	5.8	52.2%
Baton Rouge	6.5	7.1	13.0	6.6	101.2%
Covington	9.5	10.1	15.8	6.3	66.3%
Thibodaux	11.0	9.3	15.8	4.8	43.2%
Lafayette	7.0	6.1	12.7	5.7	82.4%
Lake Charles	9.1	6.6	10.1	1.0	11.0%
Alexandria	9.6	7.7	23.7	14.1	147.8%
Shreveport	10.3	12.7	18.7	8.3	80.7%
Monroe	12.1	11.5	17.7	5.6	46.7%
All Regions	9.3	9.0	15.9	6.6	70.9%
*Excludes cases assigned to DCFS workers in the state office. Source: Prepared by legislative auditor's staff using data provided by DCFS.					

From July 1, 2022, through February 3, 2025, the statewide backlog of CPS cases declined by 607.6 (-19.8%), from 3,070.6 in fiscal year 2023 to 2,463.0 on February 3, 2025. However, the backlog in the Alexandria Region increased by 196.5 (65.9%), from 298.3 cases in fiscal year 2023 to 494.8 cases on February 3, 2025. According to DCFS policy, CPS investigations should be closed within 60 days. If a CPS case is open longer than 60 days, it is considered to be in backlog status. When Centralized Intake staff receive a report of alleged child abuse/neglect, the case is assigned a priority based on the circumstances of the allegation and forwarded to the appropriate Child Welfare local office. Based on the priority assigned, the Child Welfare caseworker must initiate contact within 24 hours or up to five calendar days, and the caseworker must complete the investigation within 60 days.

- *Priority 1* - child fatalities, substance exposed newborns, etc.; contact must be made within 24 hours.
- *Priority 2* - threatening harm, lack of adequate supervision, etc.; contact must be made within 48 hours.
- *Priority 3* - inadequate shelter, bruises, etc.; contact must be made within three calendar days.
- *Priority 4* - emotional maltreatment, inadequate food, etc.; contact must be made within five calendar days.

Statewide, CPS backlogs have declined by 607.6 cases (19.8%). Specifically, two regions saw major declines in backlog cases: Orleans (379.4 cases, a decline of 61.8%) and Lake Charles (116.2 cases, a decline of 77.1%). However, in the

Alexandria Region, the CPS backlogs increased from 298.3 cases in fiscal year 2023 to 494.8 cases in fiscal year 2025 (through February 3, 2025), a 65.9% increase.

To address the increase in backlog cases in the Alexandria Region, DCFS stated that it has formed a specialized interview team to expedite staff hiring, added new CPS staff positions, added temporary staff to work CPS cases, and accelerated case closures through changes in the case review process. Exhibit 13 shows the weekly average of backlog cases for each region and statewide from July 1, 2022 through February 3, 2025.

Exhibit 13 Child Protective Services Case Backlog, by Region July 1, 2022 through February 3, 2025					
Region	FY23 Weekly Average	FY24 Weekly Average	FY25 Weekly Average	FY23-25 Change	FY23-25 % Change
Orleans	614.2	305.7	234.8	-379.4	-61.8%
Baton Rouge	578.4	801.4	500.6	-77.8	-13.5%
Covington	341.0	486.1	341.5	0.5	0.1%
Thibodaux	221.1	164.1	139.8	-81.3	-36.8%
Lafayette	96.5	83.6	108.1	11.6	12.0%
Lake Charles	150.7	29.5	34.5	-116.2	-77.1%
Alexandria	298.3	188.2	494.8	196.5	65.9%
Shreveport	337.4	417.9	273.9	-63.5	-18.8%
Monroe	433.0	408.7	335.0	-98.0	-22.6%
All Regions	3,070.6	2,885.2	2,463.0	-607.6	-19.8%
Source: Prepared by legislative auditor's staff using data provided by DCFS.					

From May 2023 to January 2025, supplemental contract staff for the Orleans and Baton Rouge Regions added an average of 42 supplemental staff who worked a total of 3,076 Child Welfare cases in both regions combined.

To address the backlog of CPS cases in the Orleans and Baton Rouge Regions, and to provide relief to DCFS caseworkers in those regions, DCFS contracted with Safety Management Systems (SMS) to provide additional staff. Some SMS contract staff work after-hours shifts to allow DCFS staff to have more work-life balance.

These SMS contract staff initiate investigations and then transfer the case back to DCFS workers. In addition, SMS contract staff provide a specialized unit known as the Strike Team which is available at any time deemed necessary by DCFS. The Strike Team can be called on to clear backlogs, work special projects, and work frontline to relieve DCFS agency staff when the region is short staffed. The SMS Strike Team staff work to close cases which is different from the after-hours SMS workers who only initiate cases.

According to the SMS contract, the minimum rate for a contracted worker is \$66.70 per hour which results in an annual salary of \$138,736. In comparison, the annual salary for a Child Welfare Specialist 3 employed by DCFS who is eligible for premium pay can be \$69,368, not including benefits.

From May 2023 to January 2025, SMS provided an average of 17 workers in the Orleans Region and 25 workers in the Baton Rouge Region. A majority of these workers were Licensed Clinical Social Workers. SMS after-hours workers initiated 805 CPS cases in the Orleans Region and 776 cases in the Baton Rouge Region. SMS Strike Team workers handled 310 CPS cases in the Orleans Region and 1,185 CPS cases in the Baton Rouge Region. The total contract costs were \$9.5 million between November 2022 and February 2025. This contract expires on June 20, 2025. Exhibit 14 shows the number of SMS contract workers, the number of cases, and the contract cost per year.

Exhibit 14 SMS Contract Staff and Cost (in millions) May 2023 through February 2025*				
	FY23	FY24	FY25	Total
SMS Contract Staff	40	51	36	42 (Average)
After-hours CPS Cases Initiated	177	968	436	1,581
Strike Team Cases Closed	168	847	480	1,495
Total Cost for SMS Contract (in millions)	\$2.1	\$5.1	\$2.3	\$9.5
*For staff and cases, the period includes May 2023-January 2025. For contract costs, the period includes November 2022-February 2025. Source: Prepared by legislative auditor's staff using data provided by DCFS.				

APPENDIX A: MANAGEMENT’S RESPONSE



Executive Division
627 North 4th Street
Baton Rouge, LA 70802

(O) 225.342.9538
(F) 225.342.8636
www.dcfsl.a.gov

Jeff Landry, Governor
David N. Matlock, Secretary

May 29, 2025

Mr. Michael J. "Mike" Waguespack, CPA
Legislative Auditor
P.O. Box 94397
Baton Rouge, LA 70804-9397

Dear Mr. Waguespack:

The Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) has reviewed the informational brief on Child Welfare (CW) staffing and caseloads, developed by the Louisiana Legislative Auditor (LLA) in response to a legislative request.

The informational brief provided an analysis of Child Welfare staffing levels, expenditures for personnel services, turnover rates, caseloads and case backlogs, and supplemental contract staff in the Baton Rouge and Orleans Regions.

While DCFS concurs with the analysis presented by the LLA, we would like to reiterate that the numbers in Exhibit 3 do not represent the true staffing need because they do not account for new hires who are not able to carry a full caseload, or for staff who are on extended leave resulting in cases being transferred between workers, which ultimately slows completion of duties. In addition, caseloads vary in complexity including the severity of the allegations, family size and dynamics, and geographic location, impacting the time required for each case.

Despite ongoing challenges, DCFS remains committed to strengthening its frontline workforce. The Department continues to explore strategies for effectively managing child welfare caseloads and workloads, with the goal of improving staff retention and increasing positive outcomes for children and families.

Sincerely,

David N. Matlock
Secretary



APPENDIX B

This appendix includes a description of Child Welfare programs, Child Welfare staff job functions, salary changes, special pay mechanisms, and Child Welfare filled positions by job title.

Exhibit B.1 Child Welfare Programs and Standard/Goal Staff-to-Case Ratios, by Program July 1, 2022 through January 31, 2025	
Program Description	Ratio
Child Protective Services: CPS includes the investigation of child abuse and neglect, as well as the provision of short-term services to children and families. These services are legally mandated, specialized investigations and social services for children who are alleged to be neglected, abused, exploited or without proper custody or guardianship.	1:10
Family Support Services: Prevents the unnecessary separation of children from their families by identifying family problems, assisting families in resolving their problems, and preventing the breakup of families when a child can be cared for safely at home.	1:15
Foster Care: Foster care is a goal-directed program of services for children and their parents who are separated due to child abuse, neglect, or specific family circumstances requiring out-of-home care. Foster care services are intended to be an interim process to provide care for children until they are reunited with their family or another permanent living arrangement is provided.	Foster Care 1:10 Eligibility 1:355
Adoptions and Adoption Petitions: Children placed for adoption by DCFS are those children who have come into the department's custody and have been made available for adoption through the legal processes of a judgment of termination of parental rights or an act of voluntary surrender by their parents. Adoption petition services provide for staff to conduct investigations of all independent adoptions including stepparent, grandparent, one parent, and non-relative adoptions to determine the availability of the child and the suitability of the adoptive home, reporting to the courts the findings of these investigations and assisting the families in obtaining revised birth certificates.	1:15
Extended Foster Care: Louisiana extends the age of foster care to 21 for all youth in care on their 18th birthday. The voluntary program allows DCFS to provide intensive services to aid in youths' transition to adulthood.	1:8 to 1:12
Home Development: The Home Development Program within DCFS is charged with the responsibility of developing foster/adoptive family homes that: can meet the placement needs of and are willing to care for the types of children in the custody of DCFS; meet the Department's minimum standards; and can participate as team members in permanency planning for those children.	1:55
Adoption and Guardianship Subsidy: The Adoption Subsidy allows DCFS to continue financial involvement and other support in relation to the child's needs beyond the point of the legal finalization of an adoption. The Guardianship Subsidy makes payments to certified caregivers who accept guardianship of a child from Foster Care. Both subsidy programs benefit the child who otherwise might not be able to achieve permanency outside of Department custody because of special needs or other circumstances, and the family who might not be able to care for the child without the subsidy.	Subsidy 1:600
Source: Prepared by legislative auditor's staff using data provided by DCFS.	

Exhibit B.2 Child Welfare Filled Positions, by Job Title* July 1, 2022 through February 10, 2025					
Job Title	FY23	FY24	FY25	FY23-25 Change	FY23-25 % Change
Child Welfare Service Assistant	45	39	34	-11	-24.4%
Child Welfare Spec Trainee	103	32	29	-74	-71.8%
Child Welfare Specialist 1	97	128	99	2	2.1%
Child Welfare Specialist 2	82	92	94	12	14.6%
Child Welfare Specialist 3	514	510	486	-28	-5.4%
Child Welfare Support Specialist	3	1	3	0	0.0%
Child Welfare Supervisor	183	191	186	3	1.6%
Child Welfare Consultant	116	129	130	14	12.1%
Child Welfare Manager 1	68	70	69	1	1.5%
Child Welfare Manager 2	7	8	6	-1	-14.3%
Total	1,218	1,200	1,136	-82	-6.7%
*Does not include all job titles within the Division of Child Welfare. Source: Prepared by legislative auditor's staff using data provided by DCFS.					

Exhibit B.3 Child Welfare Average Salary, by Job Title* July 1, 2021 through January 29, 2025						
Job Title	Job Function	FY22	FY23	FY24	FY25	FY22-25 Change
CW Service Assistant	To provide basic Child Welfare services to clients and potential clients of the agency by assisting them in gaining access to agency services.	\$26,734	\$28,204	\$28,545	\$30,033	\$3,299
CW Spec Trainee	To train in performing professional Child Welfare services for the safety, permanency, and well-being of children and families as mandated by state and federal laws.	\$30,834	\$39,036	\$37,844	\$37,361	\$6,527
CW Specialist 1	To provide Child Welfare services for the safety, permanency, and well-being of children and families as mandated by state and federal laws.	\$35,633	\$45,739	\$43,194	\$42,060	\$6,427
CW Specialist 2		\$39,918	\$49,319	\$49,614	\$48,472	\$8,554
CW Specialist 3		\$49,952	\$57,875	\$56,894	\$58,473	\$8,521
CW Support Specialist	To provide professional support services for Child Welfare activities.	\$49,894	\$56,743	\$54,313	\$49,783	-\$111

CW Supervisor	Provides services in Child Welfare program areas administered by DCFS by supervising a unit of professional Child Welfare staff.	\$60,286	\$70,115	\$68,711	\$70,627	\$10,341
CW Consultant	To provide consultation and program guidance to managers and other Child Welfare staff.	\$67,678	\$69,710	\$69,039	\$76,453	\$8,775
CW Manager 1	To manage a state office unit responsible for the administration of Child Welfare programs, or several special programmatic support functions, or the contracts and federal eligibility function for the agency, or to manage the operations of a DCFS Child Welfare program within a geographic region or other defined area within DCFS.	\$79,091	\$83,553	\$81,707	\$85,177	\$6,086
CW Manager 2	To administer complex Child Welfare statewide program(s) and/or direct statewide functions and practices.	\$91,523	\$95,137	\$98,088	\$99,587	\$8,064
*Does not include all job titles within the Division of Child Welfare. Source: Prepared by legislative auditor's staff using data provided by DCFS.						

Exhibit B.4 Child Welfare Current Pay Mechanisms

Permanent Pay Mechanisms

Current Effective Date	Pay Mechanism	Job Titles	Approved Rates
12/27/2021	Special Entrance Rate (All CW Programs)	Child Welfare Specialist Trainee	\$17.56
		Child Welfare Specialist 1	\$19.88
		Child Welfare Specialist 2	\$22.76
		Child Welfare Specialist 3	\$24.35
		Child Welfare Supervisor	\$26.91
12/27/2021	Premium Pay (All CW Programs)	Child Welfare Specialist Trainee	Up to \$4.00 per hour (based on longevity)
		Child Welfare Specialist 1	
		Child Welfare Specialist 2	
		Child Welfare Specialist 3	
		Child Welfare Supervisor	
12/27/2021	Premium Pay	Social Services Analyst 1 (Child Welfare Team Specialist)	Up to \$2.00 per hour

Temporary Pay Mechanisms*

8/8/2022 (Baton Rouge Region) 9/7/2022 (New Orleans Region)	Premium Pay	Child Welfare Specialist Trainee	Up to \$5.00 per hour (Baton Rouge Region and New Orleans Region only)
		Child Welfare Specialist 1	
		Child Welfare Specialist 2	
		Child Welfare Specialist 3	
		Child Welfare Supervisor	
		Child Welfare Manager 1	
		Child Welfare Manager 2	
		Child Welfare Asst Area Director (Program Consultant – Social Services)	
		Child Welfare Area Director	
8/8/2022	Incentive Award	Applies to employees who are assigned duties within the Baton Rouge Child Welfare Region from other regions, State Office, or Baton Rouge Region in non-Child Welfare program	Up to \$2,500 per month

*Temporary pay mechanisms are set to expire on June 20, 2025.

Source: Prepared by legislative auditor's staff using data provided by Louisiana State Civil Service.

APPENDIX C

This appendix shows the monthly average caseloads for fiscal years 2023 to 2025 (through January 31, 2025) by region for Child Welfare programs including child protective services, family support services, foster care, adoptions, extended foster care, foster care home development, and the adoption and guardianship subsidy program.

Exhibit C.1
New Child Protective Services Cases, by Region
From July 1, 2022 through January 31, 2025

Region	2023 Monthly Average	2024 Monthly Average	2025 Monthly Average	Fiscal Years 23-25 Change	Fiscal Years 23-25 % Change
Orleans	389.7	338.3	316.1	-73.6	-18.9%
Baton Rouge	234.8	227.0	228.0	-6.8	-2.9%
Covington	304.4	255.0	226.3	-78.1	-25.7%
Thibodaux	185.8	163.8	161.3	-24.5	-13.2%
Lafayette	290.0	234.9	236.4	-53.6	-18.5%
Lake Charles	157.7	140.4	131.6	-26.1	-16.6%
Alexandria	163.9	159.4	153.7	-10.2	-6.2%
Shreveport	257.8	223.3	213.1	-44.7	-17.3%
Monroe	168.8	149.2	137.3	-31.5	-18.7%
All Regions	2,152.9	1,891.3	1,803.8	-349.1	-16.2%
Source: Prepared by legislative auditor's staff using data provided by DCFS.					

Exhibit C.2
Family Support Cases Served, by Region
From July 1, 2022 through January 31, 2025

Region	2023 Monthly Average	2024 Monthly Average	2025 Monthly Average	Fiscal Years 23-25 Change	Fiscal Years 23-25 % Change
Orleans	180.3	198.9	173.3	-7.0	-3.9%
Baton Rouge	175.8	176.8	166.4	-9.4	-5.3%
Covington	204.8	230.5	229.7	24.9	12.2%
Thibodaux	94.0	104.3	105.7	11.7	12.4%
Lafayette	138.9	155.2	148.4	9.5	6.8%
Lake Charles	54.1	60.8	64.7	10.6	19.6%
Alexandria	80.0	97.3	87.3	7.3	9.1%
Shreveport	109.0	113.8	107.0	-2.0	-1.8%
Monroe	94.6	90.4	76.7	-17.9	-18.9%
All Regions	1,131.5	1,228.0	1,159.2	27.7	2.4%
Source: Prepared by legislative auditor's staff using data provided by DCFS.					

Exhibit C.3
Foster Care Cases Served, by Region
From July 1, 2022 through January 31, 2025

Region	2023 Monthly Average	2024 Monthly Average	2025 Monthly Average	Fiscal Years 23-25 Change	Fiscal Years 23-25 % Change
Orleans	208.1	263.3	304.4	96.3	46.3%
Baton Rouge	436.2	452.4	439.7	3.5	0.8%
Covington	523.2	486.8	497.9	-25.3	-4.8%
Thibodaux	402.8	411.2	384.9	-17.9	-4.4%
Lafayette	526.5	548.7	598.9	72.4	13.8%
Lake Charles	259.0	229.3	193.0	-66.0	-25.5%
Alexandria	399.8	554.5	584.6	184.8	46.2%
Shreveport	373.4	479.4	498.4	125.0	33.5%
Monroe	345.6	390.8	409.9	64.3	18.6%
All Regions	3,474.6	3,816.4	3,911.7	437.1	12.6%

Source: Prepared by legislative auditor's staff using data provided by DCFS.

Exhibit C.4
Adoption Unit: Foster Care Cases Served, by Region
From July 1, 2022 through January 31, 2025

Region	2023 Monthly Average	2024 Monthly Average	2025 Monthly Average	Fiscal Years 23-25 Change	Fiscal Years 23-25 % Change
Orleans	37.2	45.9	34.1	-3.1	-8.3%
Baton Rouge	40.8	46.4	48.1	7.3	17.9%
Covington	108.5	101.8	93.6	-14.9	-13.7%
Thibodaux	86.0	89.8	66.0	-20.0	-23.3%
Lafayette	92.8	100.3	85.9	-6.9	-7.4%
Lake Charles	46.6	43.3	58.4	11.8	25.3%
Alexandria	57.8	56.1	51.0	-6.8	-11.8%
Shreveport	29.8	35.2	35.3	5.5	18.5%
Monroe	77.9	75.6	56.6	-21.3	-27.3%
All Regions	577.4	594.4	529.0	-48.4	-8.4%

Source: Prepared by legislative auditor's staff using data provided by DCFS.

Exhibit C.5
Extended Foster Care Cases Served, by Region
From July 1, 2022 through January 31, 2025

Region	2023 Monthly Average	2024 Monthly Average	2025 Monthly Average	Fiscal Years 23-25 Change	Fiscal Years 23-25 % Change
Orleans	24.2	22.3	19.4	-4.8	-19.8%
Baton Rouge	20.5	24.3	26.3	5.8	28.3%
Covington	42.1	45.6	38.9	-3.2	-7.6%
Thibodaux	14.1	17.8	27.0	12.9	91.5%
Lafayette	17.3	12.7	16.6	-0.7	-4.0%
Lake Charles	8.5	11.3	13.4	4.9	57.6%
Alexandria	16.0	15.1	14.0	-2.0	-12.5%
Shreveport	18.2	22.0	26.2	8.0	44.0%
Monroe	20.7	17.6	17.0	-3.7	-17.9%
All Regions	181.6	188.7	198.8	17.2	9.5%

Source: Prepared by legislative auditor's staff using data provided by DCFS.

Exhibit C.6
Home Development: Foster Care Homes Served, by Region
From July 1, 2022 through January 31, 2025

Region	2023 Monthly Average	2024 Monthly Average	2025 Monthly Average	Fiscal Years 23-25 Change	Fiscal Years 23-25 % Change
Orleans	122.3	112.3	137.3	15.0	12.3%
Baton Rouge	172.3	183.0	169.6	-2.7	-1.6%
Covington	285.9	274.0	275.9	-10.0	-3.5%
Thibodaux	164.9	155.8	173.9	9.0	5.5%
Lafayette	270.7	304.3	330.7	60.0	22.2%
Lake Charles	146.6	145.6	143.6	-3.0	-2.0%
Alexandria	173.8	231.7	271.0	97.2	55.9%
Shreveport	188.5	195.9	229.4	40.9	21.7%
Monroe	182.8	182.0	176.9	-5.9	-3.2%
All Regions	1,707.8	1,784.6	1,908.3	200.5	11.7%

Source: Prepared by legislative auditor's staff using data provided by DCFS.

Exhibit C.7
Adoption and Guardianship Subsidy Cases, by Region
From July 1, 2022 through January 31, 2025

Region	2023 Monthly Average	2024 Monthly Average	2025 Monthly Average	Fiscal Years 23-25 Change	Fiscal Years 23-25 % Change
Orleans	835.8	796.5	762.0	-73.8	-8.8%
Baton Rouge	430.3	482.1	512.0	81.7	19.0%
Covington	1909.7	1938.5	1948.0	38.3	2.0%
Thibodaux	800.6	826.8	845.4	44.8	5.6%
Lafayette	1339.2	1351.7	1354.3	15.1	1.1%
Lake Charles	841.6	827.8	832.0	-9.6	-1.1%
Alexandria	874.1	864.0	886.0	11.9	1.4%
Shreveport	912.1	899.3	903.4	-8.7	-1.0%
Monroe	960.5	1010.8	1037.9	77.4	8.1%
All Regions	8,903.9	8,997.5	9,081.0	177.1	2.0%

Source: Prepared by legislative auditor's staff using data provided by DCFS.