

CHEZ HOPE

REVIEW OF OPERATIONS FOR DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES

LOCAL GOVERNMENT SERVICES

Informational Brief
June 17, 2026

**LOUISIANA LEGISLATIVE AUDITOR
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June 17, 2026

Secretary Rebecca Harris
Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS)

Dear Secretary Harris:

In the fall of 2025, DCFS contacted the Louisiana Legislative Auditor (LLA) to express concerns related to Chez Hope, a contracted provider of services to domestic violence survivors.

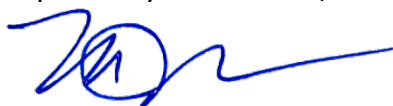
LLA staff visited and met with Chez Hope officials in October 2025 and, over the following months, obtained and analyzed documentation to address the concerns presented. The information brief is based on a limited review of documentation and related discussions. This work does not constitute an audit, review, investigation, or examination. Accordingly, we do not express an opinion, conclusion, or any form of assurance on the entity's financial statements; internal control over financial reporting; or compliance with laws, regulations, contracts, or grant requirements. Had we performed additional procedures or conducted an audit or other assurance engagement, other matters may have come to our attention that would have been reported.

The informational brief presents the matters identified during our work, along with recommendations to assist DCFS and Chez Hope in strengthening operations and communications. We are available to discuss the matters presented with you and your staff at your convenience.

We hope this information is helpful in supporting the effective management of services provided to the taxpayers of Louisiana and domestic abuse survivors.

We would like to express our appreciation to DCFS and Chez Hope for their assistance during our review.

Respectfully submitted,



Michael J. "Mike" Waguespack, CPA
Louisiana Legislative Auditor

MJW/ch

CHEZ HOPE 2026



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INTRODUCTION

Areas of Concern Presented to LLA

The following areas of concern were communicated to LLA by DCFS regarding Chez Hope's operations:

- Organization, staffing levels, and compensation of staff
- Reasonableness of rent paid for facilities
- Purchase and operation of vehicles used to provide services
- Coordination of food assistance, including SNAP application support and providing food directly using other federal funds
- Lack of controls over purchases from vendors
- Accuracy of performance data related to services provided to survivors
- Requests for increased funding and the relationship between funding levels and service expansion

Background:

Chez Hope serves four parishes (St. Mary, St. Martin, Iberia, and Assumption) in south Louisiana. It operates two emergency shelters (one in Iberia Parish and the other in St. Mary Parish), the Iberia KKIDS (Keeping Kids in Domestic Situations Safe) Center, and the TEAR (Technology Education Advocacy and Resource) Center. Chez Hope provides residential (e.g., overnight stays in shelters, hotels, or other locations) and non-residential (e.g., court escorts, transportation, or groceries) services in these parishes. According to Chez Hope, it is the only domestic violence program in the state operating two non-congregant emergency shelters. The organization also utilizes mobile offices across the four parishes to allow meetings off-site.

DCFS provides funds to Chez Hope through the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Family Violence Prevention and Intervention Initiative. This funding is available to help operate the shelters and perform outreach. DCFS contracts with a total of 18 domestic violence shelters in the state.

According to Chez Hope's 2025 audit, the organization received total revenues, gains, and other support of \$2,507,042. Of that amount, \$2,128,632 is Federal and State Financial Assistance, \$17,655 is Local Assistance, and the remaining amount, \$360,755, is from non-governmental sources. The original contract between DCFS and Chez Hope, for the period July 1, 2024, through June 30, 2027, was signed in December 2024 and set Chez Hope's funding at

\$900,000 per year. In October 2025, the parties signed an amended contract with updated annual funding amounts through DCFS of \$900,000 for fiscal year (FY) 2025, and \$1,090,000 for FY 2026 and FY 2027. The increase was intended to support the continued provision of domestic violence and family violence services.

IDENTIFIED MANAGEMENT ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on our high-level analysis of the documentation we obtained from Chez Hope and conversations with DCFS and Chez Hope officials, we identified certain management and communication issues that should be addressed, and we developed recommendations intended to help improve the operations of DCFS and Chez Hope. This informational brief is intended to support DCFS officials in working with Chez Hope to address the issues and recommendations as determined by DCFS.

Management Issue #1: DCFS and Chez Hope officials should improve communication to ensure mutual understanding. Both DCFS and Chez Hope confirmed that domestic violence programs statewide vary significantly in their service delivery models. These differences include how shelter, food, transportation, and furniture are provided to survivors. There is also uncertainty about how beds should be defined within the shelter provided to survivors. Per discussions with DCFS, there does not appear to be a uniform method by which these services are required to be offered. Furthermore, it should be noted that Chez Hope receives funding from other Federal and State grants, as well as local funding, private grants, and donations. Therefore, restrictions on managing funds may vary depending on the source of the revenue used to make certain purchases.

Recommendations: Chez Hope and DCFS should develop processes to ensure required services, actual deliverables, and associated survivor service costs are clearly understood by both parties. In addition, DCFS should develop clearer statewide guidance outlining minimum expectations for how services such as shelter, food, transportation, and assistance with furniture should be provided. Such guidance should include prohibited purchases and/or funding for survivors. While programs may continue to operate differently based on local needs, establishing baseline standards could promote greater consistency and comparability across providers. To accomplish such a working relationship, Chez Hope and DCFS should conduct regularly-scheduled team meetings to discuss deliverables, costs, and any concerns from either party.

Management Issue #2: Chez Hope should more clearly present data to support the structure, staffing level, and compensation of staff. DCFS expressed concern that staff size and compensation levels of Chez Hope staff may not correspond to program demand. According to the 2025 audit, Chez Hope had salary expenses of \$980,263. Currently, Chez Hope employs 33 staff members, 19 of whom are funded by DCFS grants. The other employees are supported by a mix of other state and local funding. Furthermore, in Chez Hope's grant application to DCFS, we noted that the agency outlines the duties of grant-funded positions and how these roles support program needs. During 2025, Chez Hope provided services to 1,347 people.

Recommendations: In addition to documentation currently maintained, Chez Hope should also document its justification for staffing levels (i.e., number of staff needed) and compensation levels (i.e., salaries and benefits). This may include maintaining written explanations of how current staffing levels align with program demands and demonstrating how salaries correspond to comparable positions in similar programs and agencies. Strengthening this documentation will enhance transparency and provide DCFS with a clearer understanding of how staffing costs support service delivery.

Management Issue #3: Chez Hope should study its current leases and rental agreements to determine if it is obtaining the best rates possible. According to the 2025 audit report, Chez Hope had an annual rent expense of \$214,160 for space in three different buildings. Our review of contracts identified annual rent payments to three separate vendors: \$116,400 for the Iberia Parish shelter space, \$10,800 for the KKIDSS program, and \$54,000 for the Tech Center (TEAR).

Recommendations: Chez Hope should document the necessity and reasonableness of its rental arrangements, including explanations of why leased space is required; how rental rates compare to market rates; and whether alternative, lower-cost options were evaluated. Providing this information will help demonstrate that rental costs are justified and aligned with program needs.

Management Issue #4: Chez Hope should study whether it maintains an optimal number of vehicles. DCFS expressed concern that Chez Hope may have too many vehicles. The organization has eight vehicles. Chez Hope staff indicated that all vehicles are fully paid for and are necessary to provide transportation to their residential and non-residential clients due to the lack of public transportation in the rural area in which they operate. Furthermore, per Chez Hope, survivors frequently arrive at the shelter without their belongings and require transportation for themselves and their families.

Based on documentation provided by Chez Hope supporting the purchase of two vehicles, one in 2024 and one in 2025, the funding used for these purchases consisted of a mix of private and public dollars. The 2024 purchase of a 2023 Ford Transit, totaling \$47,933.50, was paid in full using supplemental state general fund dollars allocated in Act 397 of the 2023 Regular Session. The 2025 purchase of a 2025 Ford Explorer, totaling \$50,934.80, was funded primarily with \$48,000 from the United Way of Acadiana, with the remaining \$2,934.80 covered by unspecified state funds. The remaining vehicles were purchased between 2016 and 2022, prior to the period under review.

Recommendations: Chez Hope should maintain clear documentation supporting the need for each vehicle, including how the vehicles are used to deliver services; associated operating costs; and internal controls over mileage, fuel usage, and maintenance. In addition, Chez Hope should ensure that policies address personal use of program-funded vehicles and include procedures to monitor and document compliance (e.g., details related to employee take-home

usage). Strengthening these controls will help demonstrate that vehicle-related expenses are necessary, reasonable, and appropriately used for program purposes. Finally, Chez Hope and its auditor should evaluate whether the purchase of any vehicles funded specifically by the supplemental appropriations in Act 397 of the 2023 Regular Session is an allowable expenditure, as the Act limits the use of those funds to “facility repairs and improvements.”

Management Issue #5: Chez Hope assists Survivors with SNAP applications while continuing to provide food to them directly using TANF funds. DCFS has concerns that this may be a possible duplication of federal funding being used for the provision of food. According to DCFS, food delivery methods vary by provider. DCFS indicated that Chez Hope staff assists survivors with SNAP applications while providing TANF-funded food to help them save their SNAP benefits for post-shelter use. Conversely, Chez Hope staff stated that they cannot ask if survivors are receiving SNAP benefits due to certain laws. Based on a review of the contract between DCFS and Chez Hope, it is unclear if any rules have been violated.

Chez Hope cited 42 U.S.C. § 10408 as its justification for not requiring survivors to disclose their SNAP benefit status. 42 U.S.C. § 10408 states that shelters cannot require survivors to meet any conditions in order to access emergency shelter, and that funds are to be used for, among other purposes, assistance in accessing related federal and state financial assistance programs. In addition, La. R.S. 46:460.9 provides that public assistance program requirements that create obstacles for a victim of domestic violence must be waived, including time limits on receipt of assistance, work or training requirements, TANF limitations, and residency requirements, so long as a victim develops a plan outlining actions and services to become free from the domestic violence situation.

Recommendations: DCFS and Chez Hope should work together to determine what activities are allowable under applicable laws and program regulations. They should clarify and agree on allowable methods of providing services, and, if necessary, consult legal counsel to ensure proper interpretation of the laws and regulations governing program operations. This alignment will help prevent misunderstandings and ensure that services are provided in compliance with funding requirements.

Management Issue #6: Internal Controls should be strengthened to better manage purchasing. Based on discussions with Chez Hope and DCFS staff, and our high-level review of information provided by both organizations, it was noted that internal controls over purchasing could be improved, as purchases were made across multiple vendors with minimal documentation clearly supporting the business purpose.

After reviewing 33 bank statements for Chez Hope (January 2023 through September 2025) containing more than 6,000 transactions, we observed extensive purchases from Amazon and Walmart, primarily for food, household items, and materials classified as therapeutic supplies, such as journals, coloring books, and

phone chargers. We also noted numerous purchases at other grocery and furniture stores. The business purposes for these purchases were not always clearly documented, though we recognize this may be partially attributable to survivor confidentiality concerns.

During our review, we identified at least 33 additional expenses for which the business purpose was also unclear. Included among these questioned transactions were 21 checks made payable to "cash," with no or limited business purpose indicated in the memo line. These 21 checks totaled \$2,822.78, with the largest individual transaction totaling \$200.00. See Appendix A for presentation of these 33 expenditures, including Chez Hopes explanations of the transactions and the attributable funding source for each expenditure.

Recommendations: Chez Hope should maintain detailed documentation supporting all purchases from Amazon, Walmart, and similar vendors, including the business purpose, funding source, and how each purchase supports program activities. This detailed supporting documentation (including receipts and invoices), should also be clearly linked to purchase files, bank statements, and corresponding funding sources (e.g., local governmental grants, non-governmental grants, and direct donations). It is important that Chez Hope enhance its controls over checks written to "cash" by ensuring all memo lines are fully completed to justify the expenditure. To the extent practicable, purchases should be preapproved by authorized personnel, and approval should be documented. Chez Hope should also conduct a regular periodic review of purchases, reconcile noted problems, and document this review. Implementing these policies and procedures will help ensure that expenditures are reasonable, allowable, and properly tracked. DCFS and Chez Hope should review questionable spending identified by LLA and take corrective actions to resolve, if necessary.

Management Issue #7: There is some concern as to whether Chez Hope is reporting accurate performance information and whether it is meeting expected targets of performance that warrant its increased funding requests. Due to the varying circumstances each survivor may face, including factors such as the number of children in their custody and the length of their stay, we were not able to draw a conclusion regarding the accuracy, completeness, and reasonableness of the performance data reported by Chez Hope to DCFS. However, we do recommend that DCFS and Chez Hope officials work together to develop clear lines of performance reporting that will promote transparency, understanding, and cooperation. Also, we recommend the development of regular meetings to discuss expectations and actual performance.

According to information we obtained for years 2020 through 2025:

- The total number of people served each year ranged from 1,347 to 1,679 (lowest in 2025 to highest in 2023).
- The number of people who stayed in a shelter ranged from 48 to 185 (lowest in 2021 to highest in 2023).

- The number of shelter nights ranged from 1,890 to 6,047 (lowest in 2021 to highest in 2025).
- The St. Mary shelter has a total capacity of 39 occupants (3 family apartments x 8 occupants each, and 3 single apartments x 5 occupants each).
- The New Iberia shelter has a total capacity of 47 occupants (4 family apartments x 8 occupants each, and 3 single apartments x 5 occupants each).

Recommendations: Chez Hope must ensure that all service data is accurately and sufficiently recorded, particularly regarding overnight stays at both the St. Mary and New Iberia emergency shelters, as well as any shelter provided via hotels or apartments. DCFS has raised concerns about how shelter occupancy is being reported and how many clients are being served with available space, highlighting a need for clarity. If current systems do not adequately capture information regarding the number of available apartments and beds and the number of clients served, Chez Hope should implement or revise mandatory procedures to document the number of occupants served, the type of shelter provided, and the maximum number of people occupying any living quarters at one time to fully support report data and justify funding requests (this should also include the number of available apartments and beds in total, as well as the number available for use at any specific time). As mentioned above, DCFS and Chez Hope should schedule regular performance meetings to discuss expectations and deliverables, which will foster cooperation between the two agencies.

APPENDIX A: QUESTIONABLE EXPENDITURES

We reviewed bank statements from January 2023 through September 2025 and noted some questionable charges. As noted previously within the report, there were numerous large charges to Walmart, supermarkets, Amazon Marketplace, and furniture stores throughout the bank statements; these are not listed below but may warrant additional scrutiny by DCFS, Chez Hope, and its auditor. Also, numerous checks were written that had no description of the purchase(s) in the "memo" line. The table below provides individual purchases that we found to be more questionable than others and may warrant further discussion between DCFS and Chez Hope staff. This table is meant to foster discussion, transparency, coordination, and cooperation between the two agencies and to ensure effective use of funds.

Review of 2023 - 2025 Bank Statement Purchases (Debits)		Explanation of Purchases by Chez Hope Staff
Monthly Bank Statement Observations		
Date	Items in Question	
2/3/2023	Golden Nugget Hotel ATM Deposit of \$.02 and POS charge of \$46.06	Reason: LCADV meeting held at The Golden Nugget. Booking receipt shows total charge \$339.52 with \$39.98 required to be paid at the property (we are assuming this is resort fee and taxes). Paid \$46.06 at the property and was not given a receipt. We attempted to obtain a receipt copy from the Golden Nugget, but it no longer has these records. Grant: St. Mary Gov.
2/13/2023	Royalton White Sands Resort in Jamaica charge for \$394.80.	Reason: This was a fraudulent charge on our account and disputed with the bank. Note: Chez Hope did not provide LLA with supporting documentation to verify the charge as an external fraudulent transaction.
6/14/2023	Celebrity Theatre charge 1 \$75.00	Reason: Summer Camp Field Trip. Grant: Non-Grant
6/14/2023	Celebrity Theatre charge 2 \$80.00	Reason: Summer Camp Field Trip. Grant: Non-Grant
7/3/2023	SIR Speedy Printing and Banners charges for \$20,796.84	Reason: Program handbooks and manuals. Grant: DCFS
11/1/2023	Check # 4542 for cash = \$175.75	Reason: Shelter petty cash reimb. For survivor apt. fee, gas, and program vehicle detail. Grant: Non-Grant

Review of 2023 - 2025 Bank Statement Purchases (Debits)		Explanation of Purchases by Chez Hope Staff
<i>Monthly Bank Statement Observations</i>		
Date	Items in Question	
1/5/2024	Check #4567 for cash = \$177.25	Reason: Franklin petty cash reimb. For tree of hope plates, survivor birth cert., employee fingerprints, and employee reimbursement for using wrong card. <i>Grant: Non-Grant</i>
1/25/2024	Check #4575 for cash = \$185.05	Reason: Iberia petty cash reimb. For survivor birth cert., survivor meds, survivor apt. fee, and survivor work apparel. <i>Grant: Non-Grant</i>
2/27/2024	Check #4591 for cash = \$82	Reason: Petty cash reimbursement for St. Martin PO Box. <i>Grant: Non-Grant</i>
3/11/2024	Check #4595 for cash = \$134.76	Reason: Franklin petty cash reimb. For survivor birth certificate, printer cable, and car wash for program vehicle. <i>Grant: Non-Grant</i>
4/1/2024	Check # 4603 for cash = \$120.00	Reason: Survivor repl. Birth certificates (paid in cash to avoid card fee) and application fees. <i>Grant: Non-Grant</i>
7/1/2024	Check #4661 for cash = \$170.95 (memo: New Iberia Shelter)	Reason: New Iberia petty cash reimb. Survivor repl. ID fee, uniforms, hotel stay, and plumbing piece for shelter. <i>Grant: Non-Grant</i>
8/1/2024	Check #4685 for cash = \$139.63 (memo: New Iberia Shelter)	Note: Memo of check was printed incorrectly (Error by staff) Reason: Franklin petty cash reimb. for survivor birth cert., employee fingerprints, envelope charge and Summer program field trip to Palmetto State Park. <i>Grant: Non-Grant</i>
10/9/2024	Check #4710 for cash = \$114 (memo: birth certificate and tow)	Reason: Survivor birth certificate and tow for survivor's vehicle. <i>Grant: DV Flex</i>
10/10/2024	Check #4711 for cash = \$136	Reason: Survivor repl. Birth certificates (paid in cash to avoid card fee) <i>Grant: DV Flex</i>
10/21/2024	Check #4717 for cash = \$73	Reason: St. Martin petty cash reimb. For PO Box renewal. <i>Grant: Non-Grant</i>
10/25/2024	Check # 4719 for cash = \$51	Reason: Survivor birth cert. and DL replacement. <i>Grant: DV Flex</i>
11/26/2024	Check #4736 for cash = \$37.35	Reason: Survivor rental application fee (\$10 + \$2.35 MO fee from USPS; \$25 rental application fee paid in Cash). <i>Grant: DV Flex</i>
11/26/2024	Check #4737 for cash = \$132.38	Reason: Franklin petty cash reimb. (vehicle inspection sticker and decorations; Survivor repl. Birth certificate). <i>Grant: \$34 to St. Mary Gov., \$98.38 to Non-Grant</i>

Review of 2023 - 2025 Bank Statement Purchases (Debits)		Explanation of Purchases by Chez Hope Staff
<i>Monthly Bank Statement Observations</i>		
Date	Items in Question	
1/7/2025	Check #4753 for cash= \$84.00	Reason: Reimb. St. Martin petty cash for PO Box renewal. Grant: Non-Grant
1/10/2025	Lamp Station Ice for \$235.50	Reason: Staff training and meeting. Grant: Non-Grant
1/10/2025	Two charges to Donut Palace for \$ 62.65 and \$36.49 Charge 1 \$62.65	Reason: Staff training and meeting. Grant: Non-Grant
1/10/2025	Two charges to Donut Palace for \$ 62.65 and \$36.49 Charge 2 \$36.49	Reason: Staff training and meeting. Grant: Non-Grant
1/10/2025	Lamp Lighter Coffee for \$10.07	Reason: Staff training and meeting. Grant: Non-Grant
1/15/2025	Check #4756 for cash = \$136.00	Reason: Survivor repl. Birth certificates (paid in cash to avoid card fee) Grant: DV Flex
2/20/2025	JP Lapeyrouse (car dealership) for \$827.11	Reason: Battery replacement for Durango (program vehicle) Grant: United Way
2/21/2025	Dannys Fried Chicken for \$9.63	Reason: Survivors lunch. Grant: DV Flex
2/21/2025	Lowes for \$1,683.68	Reason: Essential furnishings for survivor. Grant: DV Flex
4/29/2025	Check #4779 for cash = \$165.03	Reason: Petty cash reimb. For New Iberia Shelter (Survivor assistance & tire iron for program vehicle). Grant: Non-Grant
5/1/2025	Check #4781 for cash= \$200.00	Reason: Initial \$200 cash for Morgan City petty cash. Grant: Non-Grant
6/12/2025	Check #4784 for cash = \$188.63	Reason: Petty cash reimbursement for Franklin Shelter (car detail for van, birth cert. for survivor, Disposable table clothes for Coffee & Conversation event). Grant: Non-Grant
8/1/2025	Check #4805 for cash = \$150.00	Reason: Petty cash reimbursement for Franklin Shelter (car detail for Jeep). Grant: Non-Grant
9/25/2025	Check #4816 for cash = \$170	Reason: Petty cash reimbursement for New Iberia Shelter repl. Birth certificates for survivor. Grant: Non-Grant

APPENDIX B: DCFS'S RESPONSE

Jeff Landry
GOVERNOR



Rebecca Harris
SECRETARY

State of Louisiana

Department of Children and Family Services

June 5, 2026

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

RE: Chez Hope, Review of Operations for Department of Children and Family Services

Dear Mr. Waguespack:

The Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) has received the informational brief titled "Chez Hope, Review of Operations for Department of Children and Family Services" issued by Local Government Services. DCFS appreciates the review and remains committed to services to domestic violence survivors. DCFS remains committed to continuously evaluation ways to improve and streamline the processes with the department.

In response to the recommendations outlined in the report, DCFS provides the following responses:

Recommendations 1: Chez Hope and DCFS should develop processes to ensure required services, actual deliverables, and associated survivor service costs are clearly understood by both parties. In addition, DCFS should develop clearer statewide guidance outlining minimum expectations for how services such as shelter, food, transportation, and assistance with furniture should be provided. Such guidance should include prohibited purchases and/or funding for survivors. While programs may continue to operate differently based on local needs, establishing baseline standards could promote greater consistency and comparability across providers. To accomplish such a working relationship, Chez Hope and DCFS should conduct regularly-scheduled team meetings to discuss deliverables, costs, and any concerns from either party.

The department will develop an official guidebook in collaboration with contracted providers to increase clarity and set expectations. This manual will clearly outline the minimum funding rules for food, shelter, transportation, and assistance with furniture by funding stream. It will also feature a strict list of banned purchases or prohibitions by funding stream.

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Recommendations 2: In addition to documentation currently maintained, Chez Hope should also document its justification for staffing levels (i.e., number of staff needed) and compensation levels (i.e., salaries and benefits). This may include maintaining written explanations of how current staffing levels align with program demands and demonstrating how salaries correspond to comparable positions in similar programs and agencies. Strengthening this documentation will enhance transparency and provide DCFS with a clearer understanding of how staffing costs support service delivery.

The department will update its procurement process at the next funding announcement requiring respondents to include a staffing report, which shall include a listing of staff positions, local salary data to verify pay rates match similar jobs in the area, staff-to-client ratio for each direct-service position, supervisor-to-staff ratio for each supervisory position, including details related to unfilled positions and the organization's intention of expanding the number of existing positions or developing new positions during the funding period.

Recommendations 3: Chez Hope should document the necessity and reasonableness of its rental arrangements, including explanations of why leased space is required; how rental rates compare to market rates; and whether alternative, lower-cost options were evaluated. Providing this information will help demonstrate that rental costs are justified and aligned with program needs.

The department will update its procurement process at the next funding announcement to require respondents to include a local real estate assessment to verify that lease costs match current market rates for each leased space, and justification statement from the respondent including a clear business case detailing why the specific space is needed, and a summary of cheaper alternative options reviewed and the specific reasons why those lower-cost alternatives were declined.

Recommendations 4: Chez Hope should maintain clear documentation supporting the need for each vehicle, including how the vehicles are used to deliver services; associated operating costs; and internal controls over mileage, fuel usage, and maintenance. In addition, Chez Hope should ensure that policies address personal use of program-funded vehicles and include procedures to monitor and document compliance (e.g., details related to employee take-home usage). Strengthening these controls will help demonstrate that vehicle-related expenses are necessary, reasonable, and appropriately used for program purposes. Finally, Chez Hope and its auditor should evaluate whether the purchase of any vehicles funded specifically by the supplemental appropriations in Act 397 of the 2023 Regular Session is an allowable expenditure, as the Act limits the use of those funds to “facility repairs and improvements.”

The department will update its procurement process at the next funding announcement to require each respondent's board to sign a formal policy banning personal use of program vehicles.

The department is amending the Statement of Work (SOW) to include language requiring contractors to provide a semi-annual vehicle compliance report including the following data elements per survivor and their dependent: distinct client identification number, first name (first two letters), last name (first two letters), date of service, specific service type as categorized: relocation to an emergency shelter/safe house/hotel, airport/bus terminal, legal consult/court hearing, police station, family justice center, hospital/medical care/pharmacy, social service office, employment, adult education/continuing education, permanent housing, and childcare/school. The report shall also include supporting documentation for each vehicle used to serve survivors including mileage logs by client ID and purpose for vehicle usage, and fuel costs purchased with each trip, if applicable.

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Recommendations 5: DCFS and Chez Hope should work together to determine what activities are allowable under applicable laws and program regulations. They should clarify and agree on allowable methods of providing services, and, if necessary, consult legal counsel to ensure proper interpretation of the laws and regulations governing program operations. This alignment will help prevent misunderstandings and ensure that services are provided in compliance with funding requirements.

The department will allow a courtesy review period of the draft official guidebook jointly developed with providers from Recommendation 1 so that providers, including their boards and legal teams, have an opportunity to review what activities will be allowed and provide final questions for clarification prior to finalization.

Recommendations 6: Chez Hope should maintain detailed documentation supporting all purchases from Amazon, Walmart, and similar vendors, including the business purpose, funding source, and how each purchase supports program activities. This detailed supporting documentation (including receipts and invoices), should also be clearly linked to purchase files, bank statements, and corresponding funding sources (e.g., local governmental grants, non-governmental grants, and direct donations). It is important that Chez Hope enhances its controls over checks written to "cash" by ensuring all memo lines are fully completed to justify the expenditure. To the extent practicable, purchases should be preapproved by authorized personnel, and approval should be documented. Chez Hope should also conduct a regular periodic review of purchases, reconcile noted problems, and document this review. Implementing these policies and procedures will help ensure that expenditures are reasonable, allowable, and properly tracked. DCFS and Chez Hope should review questionable spending identified by LLA and take corrective actions to resolve, if necessary.

The department will perform routine, random unannounced monitoring visits to conduct a financial review of store receipts, bank statements, and checks written to "cash" to ensure total transparency of program expenditures.

Recommendations 7: Chez Hope must ensure that all service data is accurately and sufficiently recorded, particularly regarding overnight stays at both the St. Mary and New Iberia emergency shelters, as well as any shelter provided via hotels or apartments. DCFS has raised concerns about how shelter occupancy is being reported and how many clients are being served with available space, highlighting a need for clarity. If current systems do not adequately capture information regarding the number of available apartments and beds and the number of clients served, Chez Hope should implement or revise mandatory procedures to document the number of occupants served, the type of shelter provided, and the maximum number of people occupying any living quarters at one time to fully support report data and justify funding requests (this should also include the number of available apartments and beds in total, as well as the number available for use at any specific time). As mentioned above, DCFS and Chez Hope should schedule regular performance meetings to discuss expectations and deliverables, which will foster cooperation between the two agencies.

The department will continue to monitor each provider's monthly Family Violence Prevention and Services Act (FVPSA) Performance Progress Report (PPR) for accuracy, which is a mandatory collection of information FVPSA requires related to the provision of family violence and domestic violence services, and discuss inaccuracies as needed. The department will utilize shelter nights as opposed to bed counts in funding allocation methodologies.

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Should you require additional information, please contact Charles Watkins, Assistant Secretary of Family Support at Charles.Watkins.DCFS@LA.GOV.

Sincerely,



Rebecca Harris
Secretary

cc: Haley Williams	Deputy Secretary
Christopher Bahm	Undersecretary
Charles Watkins	Assistant Secretary
Mona Chapman	Deputy Assistant Secretary
Sarah Tirrell	General Counsel
Julie Starns	TANF Director
Babur Rehman	Audit Director

APPENDIX C: CHEZ HOPE'S RESPONSE

Chez Hope, Inc.
Family Violence Crisis Center



In 2022, Chez Hope was awarded an additional \$541,053.00 in funding at the request of the Louisiana Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) to establish and operate an emergency shelter in New Iberia. DCFS was fully aware that the shelter would operate under a non-communal living model, which inherently limits the number of individuals that can be served at any given time due to the apartment-style structure designed to provide safety, privacy, and trauma-informed accommodations for survivors of domestic violence and their children. Despite this understanding, DCFS specifically requested that Chez Hope move forward with opening the shelter utilizing this model.

Based on that request and the commitment of state support, Chez Hope entered into a five-year lease agreement with the landlord and invested substantial organizational resources to open the shelter quickly and efficiently in order to meet the urgent needs of survivors in Iberia and St. Martin Parishes. The shelter ultimately provided seven apartment-style, non-communal living units specifically designed to serve survivors in rural communities where there are no alternative domestic violence shelter options available.

In 2025, however, Chez Hope's funding was reduced by \$240,411.00, creating a financial deficit that makes continued operation of the New Iberia shelter unsustainable. As a direct result of this reduction, Chez Hope faces the likelihood of being forced to close the shelter that DCFS specifically requested the organization open only three years earlier. Closure of the shelter would eliminate all seven non-communal living units and result in the layoff of seven employees. Most importantly, survivors of domestic violence and their children in Iberia and St. Martin Parishes would lose access to critical, lifesaving services and emergency housing in communities that already have extremely limited resources for safety and support.

Chez Hope believes the organization was placed in an untenable position by being encouraged to make a long-term operational and contractual commitment based on the expectation of continued support, only to have that support significantly reduced after the shelter was established and functioning successfully.

On May 9, 2025, DCFS Secretary Matlock personally visited the New Iberia shelter. Following extensive discussions regarding shelter operations, service delivery, and the needs of survivors in the region, Secretary Matlock agreed that the previously reduced funding should be restored in order to maintain shelter operations. Following that visit, paperwork was prepared and an amendment was initiated to increase Chez Hope's FY26 funding from \$900,000.00 to \$1,090,000.00. Chez Hope subsequently received adjusted monthly payments for July and August consistent with the proposed amendment.

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Franklin, LA 70538
(337)828-4200 Phone
(337)828-4202 Fax

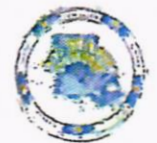
New Iberia, LA
(337)560-0090

St. Martinville, LA
(337)242-6100

Napoleonville, LA
(985)513-277

State Crisis
Hotline
1-888-411-1333

chezhope.org



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However, in August 2025, Secretary Matlock was replaced by Secretary Harris. On September 16, Chez Hope received notification via email that the amendment had been rejected by the current administration.

At no point did Chez Hope request new or additional funding beyond what had already been approved through the amendment process initiated under Secretary Matlock's administration. Chez Hope simply requested that the previously promised amendment be honored so that the New Iberia shelter could remain operational and continue providing critical services to survivors of domestic violence and their children.

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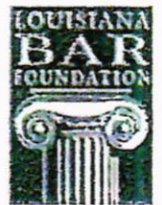
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CHEZ HOPE RESPONSES TO MANAGEMENT ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Management Issue #1: DCFS and Chez Hope officials should improve communication to ensure mutual understanding.

Recommendations: Chez Hope and DCFS should develop processes to ensure required services, deliverables and associated survivor service costs are clearly understood by both parties. In addition, DCFS should develop clearer statewide guidance outlining minimum expectations for how services should be provided.

Response:

Contract terms and conditions number 18 states “No claim for services furnished or requested for reimbursement by Contractor, not provided for in this Contract, shall be allowed by the Department (i.e. if services provided, DCFS is responsible and required to disallow the submitted reimbursement).

Attachment A 2. Deliverables lay out requirements for services provided by Chez Hope employees (i.e. 2.1.4. and 2.1.16. Specifically states transportation is required as a provided service by Chez Hope.

Management Issue #2: Chez Hope should more clearly present data to support the structure, staffing level, and compensation of staff. DCFS expressed concern that staff size and compensation levels of Chez Hope staff may not correspond to program demand. According to the 2025 audit, Chez Hope had salary expenses of \$980,263. Currently, Chez Hope employs 33 staff members, 19 of whom are funded by DCFS grants. The other employees are supported by a mix of other state and local funding. Furthermore, in Chez Hope’s grant application to DCFS, we noted that the agency outlines the duties of grant-funded positions and how these roles support program needs. During 2025, Chez Hope provided services to 1,347 people.

Recommendations: In addition to the documentation currently maintained, Chez Hope should also document its justification for staffing levels (i.e., number of staff needed) and compensation levels (i.e., salaries and benefits). This may include maintaining written explanations of how current staffing levels align with program demands and demonstrating how salaries correspond to comparable positions in similar programs and agencies. Strengthening this documentation will enhance transparency and provide DCFS with a clearer understanding of how staffing costs support service delivery.

Response: *Chez Hope currently maintains detailed job descriptions for each position, including defined duties, responsibilities, and established salary ranges. To determine appropriate compensation levels, Chez Hope utilizes the Texas Domestic Violence Compensation Report as a benchmarking resource, as Louisiana does not currently maintain a comparable compensation study specific to domestic violence service providers. Compensation decisions also consider employee experience, education, specialized training, certifications, and the operational demands associated with providing trauma-informed domestic violence services.*

Chez Hope aligns staffing levels with program demands by evaluating multiple operational factors, including service volume, grant deliverables, shelter coverage requirements, 24-hour crisis response needs, case management responsibilities, prevention programming, outreach activities, court advocacy, transportation assistance, and other direct client support services. Staffing levels are also influenced by the need to maintain survivor safety, confidentiality, compliance with funding requirements, and continuity of care across the rural communities served by the organization.

During 2025, Chez Hope provided services to 1,347 individuals while maintaining staffing necessary to ensure uninterrupted emergency shelter operations and crisis intervention services. In addition to direct service delivery, staff responsibilities include hotline response, safety planning, housing coordination, assistance with public benefits, legal and medical advocacy, community education, prevention initiatives, documentation and reporting requirements, and grant compliance activities.

Chez Hope believes its staffing structure is necessary to effectively meet the needs of survivors and fulfill contractual and programmatic obligations. However, the organization acknowledges the importance of maintaining additional documentation demonstrating the relationship between staffing levels, compensation, and program demands.

Going forward, Chez Hope will strengthen documentation practices by maintaining written analyses supporting staffing needs, workload distribution, and compensation determinations, including comparisons to similar positions within domestic violence and nonprofit service organizations when feasible. These measures will further enhance transparency and provide additional support demonstrating that staffing expenditures are reasonable, necessary, and directly connected to program operations and service delivery.

Management Issue #3: Chez Hope should study its current leases and rental agreements to determine if it is obtaining the best rates possible. According to the 2025 audit report, Chez Hope had an annual rent expense of \$214,160 for space in three different buildings. Our review of contracts identified annual rent payments to three separate vendors: \$116,400 for the Iberia Parish shelter space, \$10,800 for the KKIDSS program, and \$54,000 for the Tech Center (TEAR).

Recommendations: Chez Hope should document the necessity and reasonableness of its rental arrangements, including explanations of why leased space is required; how rental rates compare to market rates; and whether alternative, lower-cost options were evaluated. Providing this information will help demonstrate that rental costs are justified and aligned with program needs.

Response: *Chez Hope operates within rural communities where available housing, shelter facilities, and commercial rental properties are limited. The organization leases multiple facilities to support emergency shelter operations, client services, prevention programming, outreach activities, and administrative functions necessary to meet contractual obligations and program requirements.*

The leased facilities are necessary to ensure survivor safety, client confidentiality, accessibility, and continuity of services across the parishes served by the organization. Chez Hope continually

evaluates available rental options within its service areas to identify facilities that are safe, functional, accessible, and cost-effective while meeting the specialized needs associated with domestic violence services. Due to the limited availability of appropriate properties in these rural communities, alternative options are often scarce or unsuitable for confidential shelter and service delivery operations.

Chez Hope believes the current leased spaces are necessary to support ongoing program operations and service delivery. However, the organization acknowledges the importance of maintaining sufficient documentation demonstrating the necessity and reasonableness of rental expenditures.

Going forward, Chez Hope will strengthen its documentation practices by maintaining records that support:

- the operational necessity of each leased facility;*
- the basis for determining rental costs to be reasonable;*
- comparisons to available market rates when feasible; and*
- consideration of alternative or lower-cost options, when available and appropriate.*

These measures will further enhance transparency, accountability, and compliance with applicable grant and funding requirements while ensuring uninterrupted services to survivors and their families.

Management Issue #4: *Chez Hope should study whether it maintains an optimal number of vehicles. DCFS expressed concerns that Chez Hope may have too many vehicles.*

Recommendation: *Chez Hope should maintain clear documentation supporting the need for each vehicle. Chez Hope and its auditor should evaluate whether the purchase of any vehicles funded by ACT 397 is an allowable expenditure, as the Act limits the use of those funds to “facility repairs and improvements”.*

Response: *Chez Hope currently owns 8 vehicles – 7 full passenger vehicles and 1 pickup truck and provides services in 4 parishes with an average of 2 vehicles per parish. Chez Hope owned vehicles are used for survivor transportation for the following purposes: legal counsel and court appointments, health appointments, services related to children of survivors along with relocating survivors. As stated in sections 2.1.4 and 2.1.16 in the contract provided by DCFS, ownership of these vehicles are required to meet the contract requirements.*

Act 397 Page 3 under Article II – Scope of Services 2.1 of the executed Cooperative Endeavor Agreement between Chez Hope and the Department of the Treasury, State of Louisiana specifically states “We will also purchase a vehicle for use in our Mobile Advocacy Project”.

Management Issue #5: Chez Hope assists Survivors with SNAP applications while continuing to provide food to them directly using TANF funds. *DCFS has concerns that this may be a possible duplication of federal funding being used for the provision of food. According to DCFS, food delivery methods vary by provider. DCFS indicated that Chez Hope staff assists survivors with SNAP*

applications while providing TANF-funded food to help them save their SNAP benefits for post-shelter use. Conversely, Chez Hope staff stated that they cannot ask if survivors are receiving SNAP benefits due to certain laws. Based on a review of the contract between DCFS and Chez Hope, it is unclear if any rules have been violated.

Chez Hope cited 42 U.S.C. § 10408 as its justification for not requiring survivors to disclose their SNAP benefit status. 42 U.S.C. § 10408 states that shelters cannot require survivors to meet any conditions in order to access emergency shelter, and that funds are to be used for, among other purposes, assistance in accessing related federal and state financial assistance programs. In addition, La. R.S. 46:460.9 provides that public assistance program requirements that create obstacles for a victim of domestic violence must be waived, including time limits on receipt of assistance, work or training requirements, TANF limitations, and residency requirements, so long as a victim develops a plan outlining actions and services to become free from the domestic violence situation.

Recommendations: DCFS and Chez Hope should work together to determine what activities are allowable under applicable laws and program regulations. They should clarify and agree on allowable methods of providing services, and, if necessary, consult legal counsel to ensure proper interpretation of the laws and regulations governing program operations. This alignment will help prevent misunderstandings and ensure that services are provided in compliance with funding requirements.

Response: *Chez Hope acknowledges DCFS's concern regarding the potential duplication of federal funding related to the provision of food assistance while survivors are simultaneously being assisted with SNAP applications. However, based on applicable federal and state law, Chez Hope believes its practices are consistent with the intent and requirements of domestic violence survivor protections and emergency assistance programs.*

Chez Hope provides emergency food assistance using TANF funds as part of its crisis response services to survivors of domestic violence. These services are intended to address immediate health and safety needs during periods of instability and transition. Assistance with SNAP applications is provided separately as a supportive service designed to help survivors access longer-term public benefits for future self-sufficiency after leaving shelter or crisis services.

*Chez Hope does not require survivors to disclose whether they are currently receiving SNAP benefits as a condition of receiving emergency shelter or related supportive services. This practice is grounded in federal protections under **42 U.S.C. § 10408**, which prohibits shelters and service providers from imposing conditions that would create barriers to emergency shelter access and expressly allows the use of funds to assist survivors in accessing other federal and state assistance programs.*

*Additionally, **La. R.S. 46:460.9** recognizes that victims of domestic violence may require flexibility and accommodations within public assistance programs in order to escape abusive situations safely. The statute specifically authorizes waivers and modifications of public assistance requirements that could otherwise create barriers for survivors.*

Management Issue #6: Internal Controls for purchasing – review of bank statements, classification of purchases and expenses. 33 expenses for business purpose was unclear. 21 checks made payable to cash with no or limited business purposes indicated in the memo line.

Recommendation: Chez Hope should maintain detailed documentation for supporting all purchases which should include business purpose and funding source. Checks made to cash should be pre-approved by authorized personnel and include approval documentation.

Response: *Electronic documentation provided via thumb drive during our visit, all purchases include a “Debit Voucher” along with the bill or invoice and receipt for payment. The Debit Voucher specifically states the company paid, reason for the purchase, grant funding the purchase and the executive director’s approval for purchase (see Debit Voucher Example in supporting documentation response).*

Checks made to “Cash” are reimbursements to each corresponding locations petty cash kept on premises. Due to limited text space, debit vouchers specify which location the petty cash reimbursement is for (Franklin, Iberia, etc.). Included with the Invoice Voucher is a Petty Cash Form which details the date, purpose for the expense and amount for each purchase along with the receipt from the purchase. All documentation associated to checks made to cash were provided electronically through the above-mentioned thumb drive as requested.

Management Issue #7: There are some concerns as to whether Chez Hope is reporting accurate performance information and whether it meets expected targets of performance that warrant its increased funding request.

Recommendation: Chez Hope must ensure that all service data is accurately and sufficiently recorded, particularly regarding overnight stays at both the St. Mary and New Iberia emergency shelters, as well as any shelter provided via hotels or apartments. DCFS has raised concerns about how shelter occupancy is being reported and how many clients are being served with available space, highlighting a need for clarity. If current systems do not adequately capture information regarding the number of available apartments and beds and the number of clients served, Chez Hope should implement or revise mandatory procedures to document the number of occupants served, the type of shelter provided, and the maximum number of people occupying any living quarters at one time to fully support report data and justify funding requests (this should also include the number of available apartments and beds in total, as well as the number available for use at any specific time). As mentioned above, DCFS and Chez Hope should schedule regular performance meetings to discuss expectations and deliverables, which will foster cooperation between the two agencies.

Response: *The performance guidelines are given by DCFS. We report monthly by utilizing the Performance Progress report that states the number of new domestic violence victims (clients) seen for the first time during this reporting period who received non shelter (legal advocacy, housing assistance, court accompaniment.) and shelter services (including a shelter facility managed by the program, safe home or hotel). Clients should be counted once regardless of the number of times served during the fiscal year. The current reporting methodology focuses primarily on “new clients” rather than shelter utilization or service frequency. This can create challenges when evaluating*

shelter occupancy, bed utilization, staffing demands, and operational capacity. For example, a new client in April is still living in the shelter in May, yet their services are not counted for the month of May. Because the reporting guidance prioritizes unduplicated client counts, the data may not fully demonstrate the actual operational workload, housing demand, crisis response activity, or level of ongoing trauma-informed support being provided by the agency. This can create misunderstandings regarding shelter occupancy rates, utilization of available space, and justification for increased funding requests.

Appendix A: Questionable Expenditures:

Responses to each referenced charge was submitted to Mr. Battle via email on 03/17/26 with a shared folder labeled "Final Requests" that included each referenced transaction. Each transaction included the reason for purchase, receipt and/or invoice, amount paid, funding grant(s) and approval as laid out on the corresponding vouchers. I was later notified by Mr. Kelly that he had not received the corresponding documentation. Presumably this folder was not shared between Mr. Battle and Mr. Kelly. The file was electronically shared with Mr. Kelly on 04/01/26.

First National Bank of Jeanerette stated that the charge was pending and needed to be a cleared charge before the bank could dispute it. In the meantime, the card was cancelled and reissued card ending in 7574 in February 2023.

Sincerely,



Cherrise Picard, Executive Director
Chez Hope, Inc.