

FY26-27 Budget Recommendations

1. Fully Fund Florida's 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline

Request: Close the \$9.6 million funding gap to ensure Florida's 988 Lifeline remains accessible, responsive, and effective statewide.

For FY 2026–27, the Department of Children & Families (DCF) projects a total need of **\$22,048,062** to operate Florida's 988 Lifeline. The state has secured **\$12,438,781** in recurring funds, leaving a **\$9,609,281 shortfall**.

Why 988 Matters

- Florida's **13 accredited call centers** provide a universal entry point to the crisis care continuum, connecting people in emotional distress, suicidal crisis, mental health, or substance-related concerns to **free, confidential support 24/7**.
- Trained specialists assess safety, provide de-escalation and follow-up, and connect callers to local community-based services.
- 988 significantly reduces pressure on **law enforcement, emergency rooms, and hospitals**.

Proven Impact and Cost Savings

- **96% of callers** are diverted from higher, more costly levels of care such as Mobile Response Teams (MRTs) or Crisis Stabilization Units (CSUs).
- **Cost per person, per day:**
 - 988 Lifeline: **< \$0.50**
 - Mobile Response Teams: **\$3.10**
 - Crisis Stabilization Units: **\$458**
- Fewer than **1.5% of calls** require an emergency response.

Growing Demand, Insufficient Capacity

- Since 988 launched in July 2022, Florida's call volume has grown **20–22% annually**.
- In FY 2024–25 and FY 2023–24, requested recurring funding was reduced by half in final budgets.
- As a result, local call centers currently answer only **~74% of calls** (December 2025), well below the **90% target**.

The Commission on Mental Health and Substance Use Disorder has formally recommended securing annual funding to ensure a **90% answer rate**.

Outcomes to Date (as of March 2025)

- **321,960 calls answered**
- **125,000+ referrals** to non-acute community behavioral health services
- **10,500+ referrals** to Mobile Response Teams
- **3,235 active suicide attempts managed**, with every individual successfully connected to the next level of care

Funding Reality: Current funding relies heavily on **temporary federal sources**, including a grant set to expire in September 2026. Without full recurring funding, Florida risks reduced access, longer wait times, and preventable loss of life.

2. Fund Forensic Florida Assertive Community Treatment (FACT) Teams

Request: \$4.5 million in recurring funds to implement **three Forensic FACT teams** in high-need communities, including rural areas.

Forensic FACT teams build on Florida's evidence-based Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) model and provide intensive, community-based services for individuals with serious mental illness (SMI) involved in the criminal justice system. These teams directly support the goals of the **Tristin Murphy Act** by expanding treatment-based diversion options and reducing reliance on incarceration and state hospitals.

Why Forensic FACT Teams Are Needed

- Approximately **2 in 5 incarcerated individuals** have a history of mental illness.
- More than **50%** of individuals receiving mental health medication while incarcerated discontinue treatment after release.
- Many communities, particularly **rural counties**, lack access to specialized behavioral health services for justice-involved individuals with SMI.

As of June 2025: 856 individuals were on the Department of Children & Families' forensic waitlist. An average of **235 individuals per month** were on the Seeking Placement List awaiting housing and outpatient services after discharge from state mental health facilities.

Rural counties often experience higher commitment rates and greater reliance on state hospitals due to limited local services. Expanding Forensic FACT teams supports the Legislature's broader **Rural Renaissance** goals by strengthening access to health care and community-based services in underserved areas.

Cost-Effective, Evidence-Based Care

- Traditional FACT teams save Florida **over \$500 million annually** by serving ~3,900 individuals in the community rather than in state hospitals.
- Proven outcomes include:
 - **98%** maintaining or gaining stable housing
 - **90%** avoiding repeated crisis stabilization services
 - **99%** avoiding readmission to state mental health treatment facilities

How Forensic FACT Teams Work

- Teams include **clinical staff, a criminal justice liaison, and a forensic peer specialist**.
- Services focus on medication adherence, housing stability, daily functioning, court compliance, and recovery supports.
- Teams may serve as:
 - A **diversion option** for individuals committed under Chapter 916, F.S.
 - A **step-down service** following discharge from state mental health or residential treatment programs

DCF will prioritize counties with the highest commitment rates, including rural areas with limited behavioral health infrastructure.

3. Expand Community Residential Treatment Beds to Divert from Jail to Treatment

Request: \$17.1 million in recurring funds to add **144 community residential treatment beds** for individuals committed under Chapter 916, F.S.

The Problem: Florida's courts and jails face a growing population of individuals with mental illness who require treatment, not incarceration.

- Florida is projected to grow by **3.5 million residents** by 2030.
- The number of individuals with mental illness is expected to rise **133%** by 2028.
- Despite recent investments, **waitlists persist** at state mental health treatment facilities (SMHTFs).

The Behavioral Health Gap Analysis (January 2025) projects the need by 2029 for:

- **770–934 new civil beds**
- **1,074–1,429 new forensic beds**

“Divert to What?”

The Legislature's intent under the **Tristin Murphy Act** is clear: divert non-violent individuals with mental illness from jail into treatment. That goal cannot be met without sufficient treatment capacity.

Florida's four existing Community Residential Treatment Programs provide a proven alternative by:

- Reducing commitments to SMHTFs
- Restoring competency in a community setting
- Lowering jail recidivism
- Connecting individuals to appropriate care after discharge

Judges and courts across multiple circuits already rely on these programs when beds are available.

Strong Return on Investment

- Comparing the cost of community residential treatment programs to SMHTFs shows **\$179.8 million in avoided costs**.
- After program expenses, Florida realizes **\$55.8 million in net savings**, representing a **45% return on investment**.

***Together, these proven solutions advance public safety, improve health outcomes,
and make efficient use of state resources.***