



General Federation of Women's Clubs Winter Board Meeting

January 11, 2025



South Carolina Department of
**CHILDREN'S
ADVOCACY**
Advocacy. Accountability. Service.



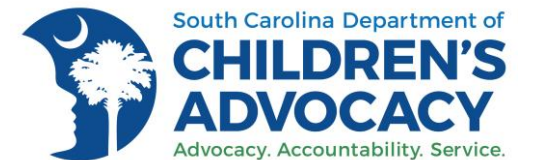
Mission:

The S.C. Department of Children's Advocacy champions advocacy, accountability, and service to improve outcomes for children served by state agencies in South Carolina.

Vision:

Growing a Community Where Children Thrive

Advocacy | Accountability | Service





South Carolina Department of
**CHILDREN'S
ADVOCACY**
Advocacy. Accountability. Service.



Amanda Whittle, J.D., CWLS
**State Child Advocate &
Agency Director**

Agency was created by legislation in 2018 and launched July 1, 2019.

Responsible for administering:

- Cass Elias McCarter Guardian ad Litem Program
- Foster Care Review Division
- S.C. Continuum of Care

Also responsible for:

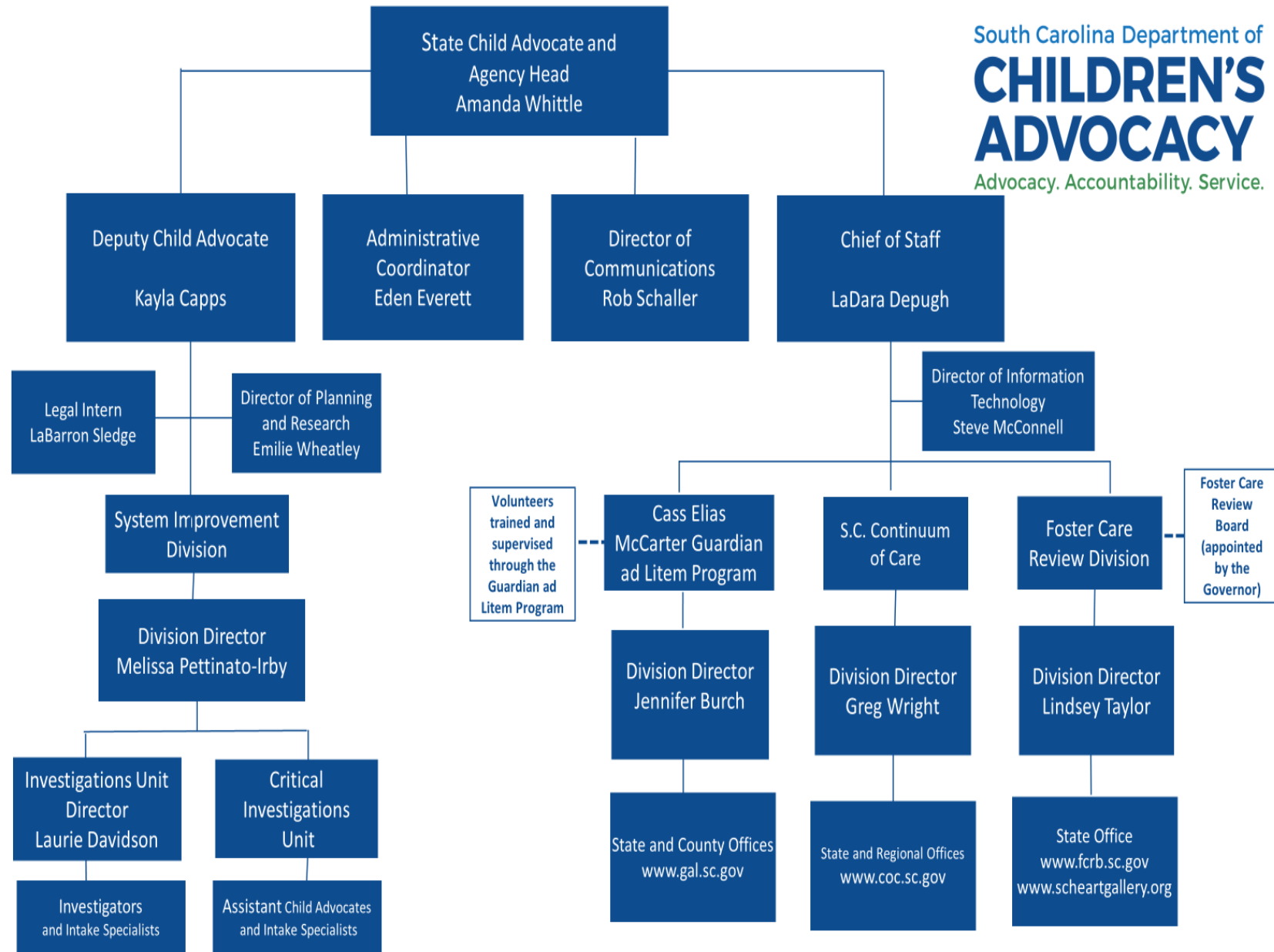
- Receiving and responding to complaints and critical incidents regarding nine child-serving agencies
- Examining system-wide services
- Ensuring timely, safe, and effective services
- Developing and promoting a broad vision of reform
- Making recommendations for quality improvements
- Educating the public regarding its role and the services of other child-serving agencies



Kayla Capps, J.D.
Deputy State
Child Advocate



LaDara Depugh, M.A.
Chief of Staff



State Child Advocate's Broad Vision of Reform (2019)

- **Access and awareness of an array of services** that allow **children to safely remain in their homes and communities or in the least restrictive, most family-like setting based upon their needs**
- **Coordination of services and efforts for a system of care grounded in urgency, empathy and sustainability**
- Continued **collaboration** with child welfare **partners regarding communication, service coordination and planning strategies** to improve the **timeliness of court hearings and outcomes for children**





Cass Elias McCarter

GUARDIAN AD LITEM

SC Dept. of Children's Advocacy



Jennifer Burch

Director, Cass Elias McCarter
Guardian ad Litem Program

- The Cass Elias McCarter Guardian ad Litem Program began in 1984 and is in 45 counties.
- Guardians ad Litem (GALs) are court-appointed special advocates for children in DSS abuse and neglect actions (not private custody actions).
- The program served 14,425 children in the last fiscal year with an average of 8,468 children served each month.



Cass Elias McCarter
**GUARDIAN
AD LITEM**
SC Dept. of Children's Advocacy

Guardian ad Litem Program



Children/families currently
being served

In FY24, the Guardian ad Litem
Program served 11,577 children
with an average of 6,600 children
served per month.



Active volunteers
1000



Total children/families
served by staff

**Guardian ad Litem Program staff
served as GALs for 44% of the
6,600 children in FY24**



South Carolina Division of

FOSTER CARE REVIEW

Dept. of Children's Advocacy



Lindsey Taylor

Director, Foster Care Review Division

- The Foster Care Review Division (FCRD) supports the Foster Care Review Board (FCRB), which was created in 1974 pursuant to S. C. Code of Laws Ann. Section 63-11-700, et.seq. to review the cases of children who are in foster care and to advocate for permanence so children do not linger in foster care.
- The Foster Care Review Boards review the cases of children in foster care once every six months (after a child has been in foster care four months) and submits their recommendations to the Court on yellow paper.
- S.C. Heart Gallery is a program within the FCRD that works to recruit adoptive homes for legally free children by featuring them in photo exhibits around the state. ❤️



South Carolina Division of
**FOSTER CARE
REVIEW**
Dept. of Children's Advocacy

Foster Care Review Division

- The Foster Care Review Division (FCRD) and the Foster Care Review Board (FCRB) celebrated their 50th Anniversary this month.



Photo credit: Kinard Lisbon, Governor's Office

- Current Board Vacancies can be found on the Department of Children's Advocacy's website.



South Carolina

CONTINUUM OF CARE

Dept. of Children's Advocacy



Greg Wright, LPCS

Director, S.C. Continuum of Care

- The S.C. Continuum of Care was created in 1983 pursuant to S. C. Code of Laws Ann. Section 63-11-1310, et.seq. to “develop and enhance the delivery of services to children and youth with severe emotional and behavioral needs and to ensure that the special needs of this population are met appropriately to the extent possible within South Carolina.”
- Continuum of Care uses High Fidelity Wraparound which is an evidence-based to provide intensive care coordination to children and youth who are experiencing serious behavioral or emotional challenges.



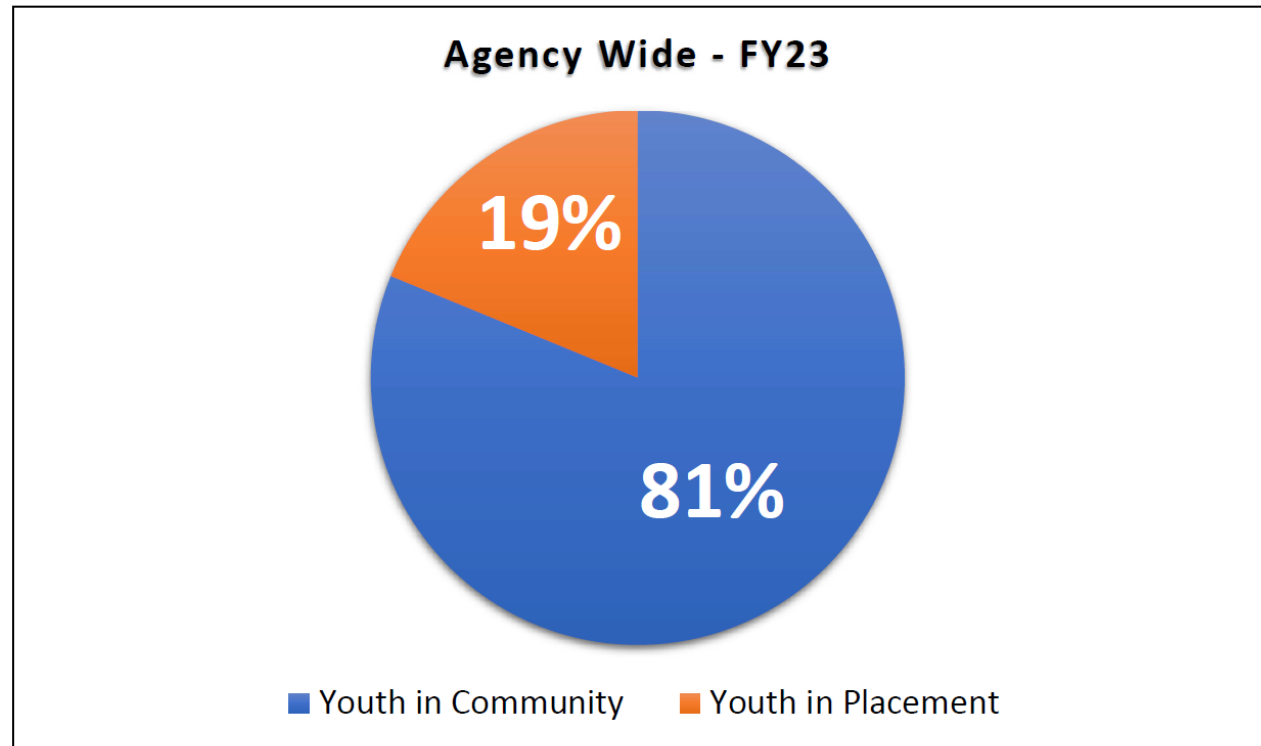
South Carolina

CONTINUUM OF CARE

Dept. of Children's Advocacy

Continuum of Care's goal is to maintain children and youth in their homes, schools, and communities to avoid higher levels of care such as DSS, DJJ or emergency departments. However, sometimes those higher levels of care are necessary. During FY23, 81% of youth who partnered with COC remained in the community while 19% had out-of-home placement.

Continuum of Care





South Carolina Division of

**SYSTEM
IMPROVEMENT**

Dept. of Children's Advocacy

Investigations Unit and Critical Investigations Unit

Receives, refers, monitors and/or investigates complaints and critical incidents regarding services provided to children by nine state agencies:

- Department of Disabilities and Special Needs
- Department of Health and Environmental Control (now Department of Public Health)
- Department of Health and Human Services
- Department of Juvenile Justice
- Department of Mental Health
- Department of Social Services
- Governor's School for Agriculture at John de la Howe School
- School for the Deaf and the Blind
- Wil Lou Gray Opportunity School

Complaints are submitted online or by phone at 1-800-206-1957

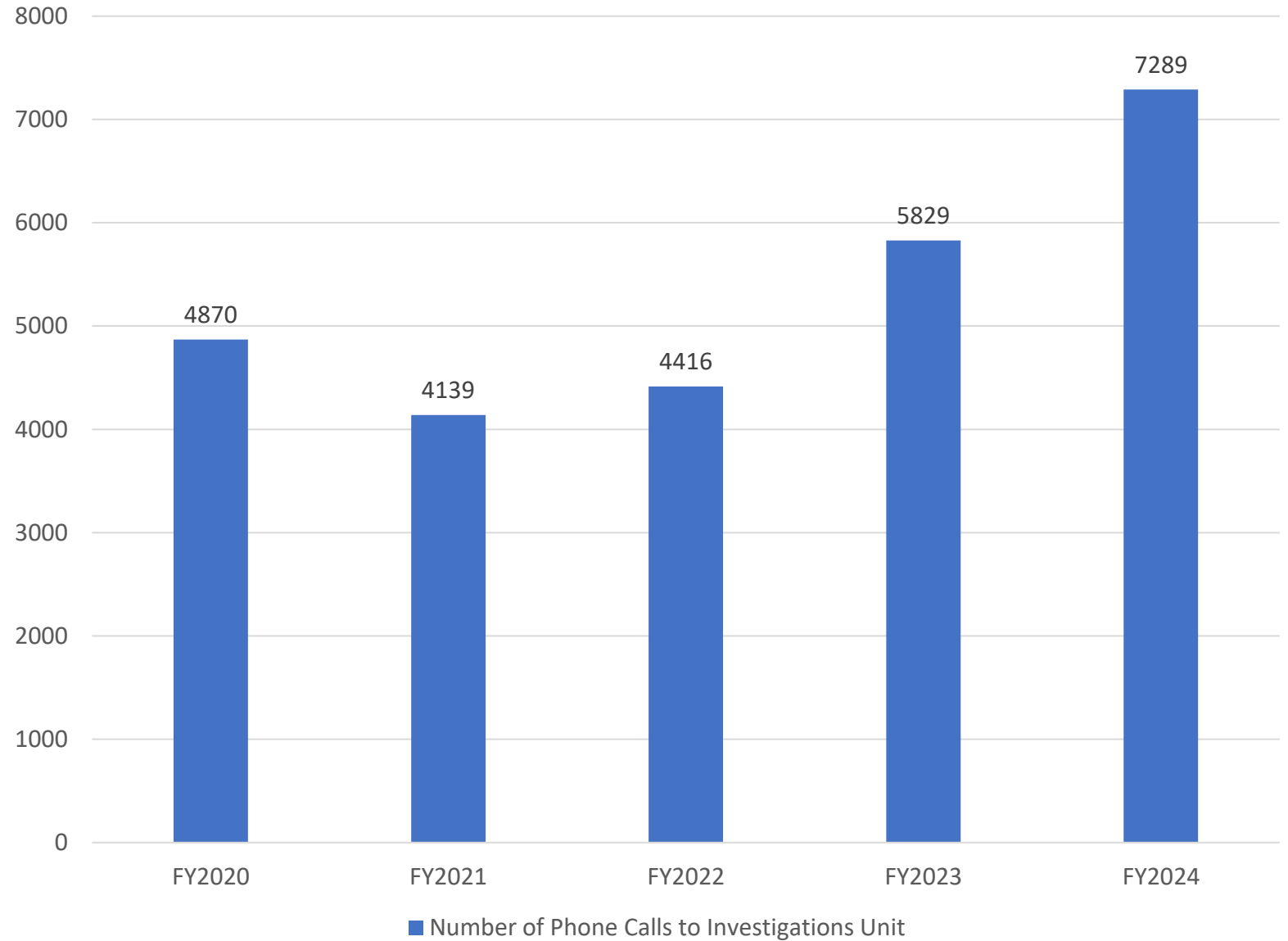
Melissa Pettinato-Irby, MSW
**Director, System Improvement
Division**



South Carolina Division of
**SYSTEM
IMPROVEMENT**
Dept. of Children's Advocacy

System Improvement Division's Investigations Unit

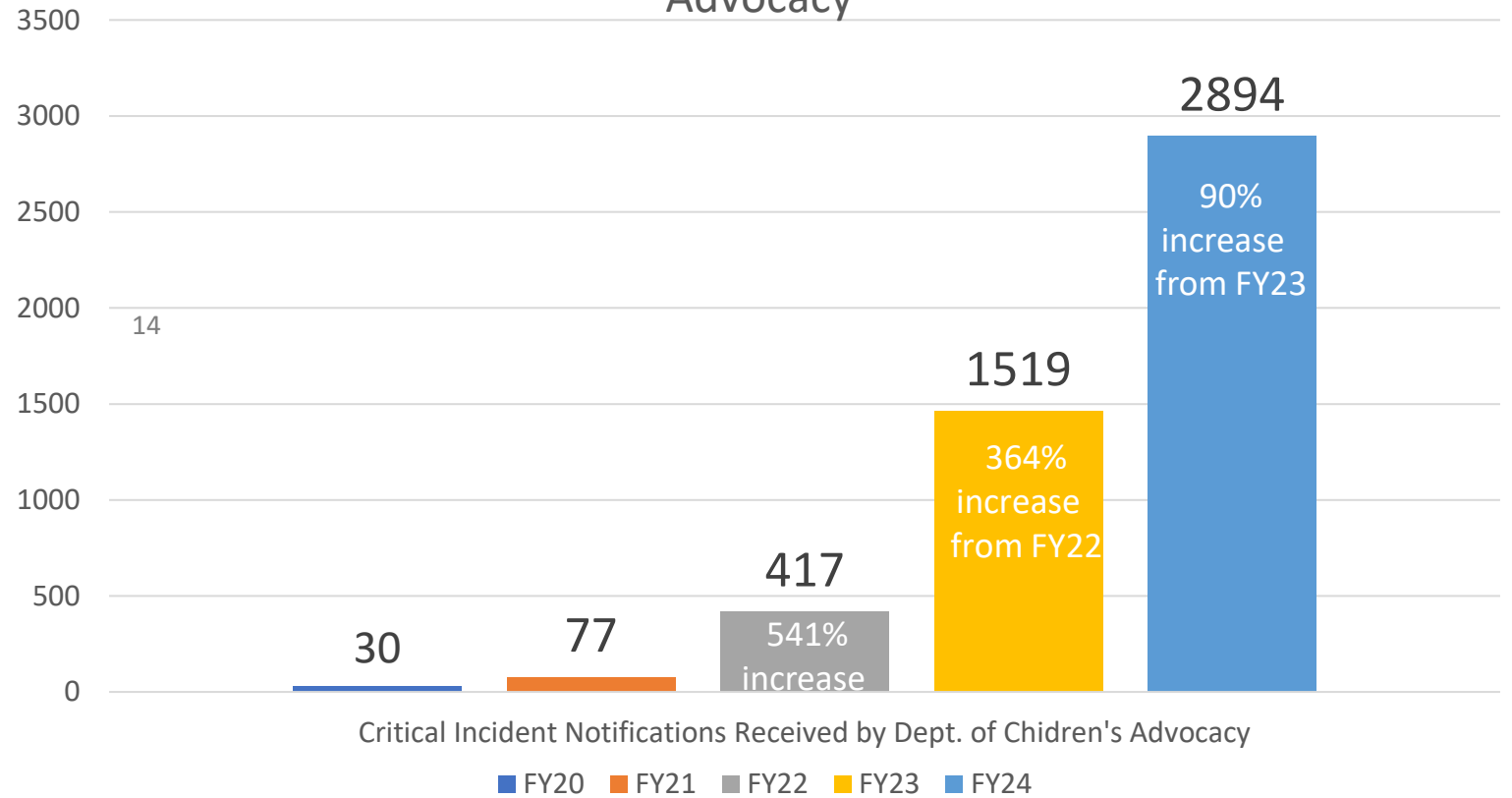
Number of Phone Calls to Investigations Unit



System Improvement Division's Critical Investigations Unit

Critical Investigations Unit

Critical Incident Notifications to the Dept of Children's Advocacy



Communication
Collaboration
Coordination
*for
real-time
advocacy*



Communication Collaboration Coordination *for improved outcomes for children*

CLICK
Go to hope.connectsSCkids.org to get started.

CONNECT
Take a Questionnaire on behalf of your child and receive feedback and support from a program counselor.

CHAT
Exchange messages and learn about available resources and services.

hope.connectsSCkids.org

South Carolina Department of Mental Health
DMH
Office of Suicide Prevention

South Carolina Department of
CHILDREN'S ADVOCACY
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American Foundation for Suicide Prevention

A small but enthusiastic division, the System Improvement Division partnered with the Department of Mental Health and American Foundation for Suicide Prevention to launch and support the Hope Connects SC Kids screener, an online, interactive kids' screener, the first of its kind in the nation.

Communication Collaboration Coordination for evaluating and prioritizing children's needs



Multi-Agency Cooperation and Coordination to Strengthen S.C.'s Placement and Service Array

As of September, 2024:

South Carolina's
PLACEMENT AND SERVICE ARRAY
for children

1

Highest Level of Care

- Current Array:*
- Private hospitals
 - William S. Hall (DMH's Acute Care)
 - Private Psychiatric Residential

- Needs:*
- State-operated Psychiatric Residential
 - Children's Crisis Stabilization Units

\$20 million allocated to DJJ by the General Assembly to 7/2022; RFP issued in Fall of 2022 and reissued in 6/2023; Bid award was issued on 10/13/2023; PRTF ground-breaking on 9/16/2024

Law changed 7/2023 to include CSUs for children/youth

Transition/Step-Down Placements

\$45.5 million in grants awarded for crisis stabilization services in EDs in 2023

- Current Array:*
- Therapeutic Community
 - Short-Term Residential
 - Alcohol/substance Abuse Treatment
 - Treatment for youth who are detained*

Funding requested by DMH in 9/22 budget submission and allocated for FY24 for residential intensive services

- Needs:*
- High Management Group Homes

DDSN hired 8 state-level case managers in FY24 to assist with placement and support

DSS's QRTPs and DJJ's Gateways

Advocacy for DDSN to stand up Residential Habilitation capacity; DDSN solicited for high management beds; approximately 12 new beds became available in 2024

2

Communicating with DHHS and private providers regarding out of home respite

Increased funding in FY24 for Children's Trust Home-Visiting

DSS RFP/MMO for additional capacity

Beginning in FY24, DDSN is incentivizing individuals to become ABA providers

3

Intensive Community Services

Current Array:

- DMH mobile crisis
- DAODAS addiction and mental health counseling hotline
- Intensive Outpatient Programs (IOP)
- BSFT
- 988 IOP

Needs:

- 988 implementation resources
- Additional Access/Availability
- Respite; Peer Support

Intentional Services

988 went live 7/16/2022; additional funding allocated in FY23 and FY24; new Charleston call center in addition to

Current Array:

- DMH: School-based mental health services to private services through DHHS activities
- Children's Trust: Community Support for young parents; home visiting, Strengthening Families; Triple P: Positive Parenting Program
- DHHS's ongoing Behavioral Health Services

Increased school-based mental health access; decrease in counselor:student ratio

Needs:

- 988 implementation resources
- Additional Access/Availability
- Respite; Peer Support

Medicaid created the Master Plan Advisory Committee (MPAC)

Drafted 3/25/2022; updated 8/16/2022 Amanda Whittle



Medicaid work underway regarding increased RBHS and placement array; State Plan amended to add MST, Homebuilders, and other intensive in-home services⁸

* STAPs are alternatives to detention and not "transition or step-down placements."

Multi-Agency
Cooperation
and
Coordination
to Advocate
for a State-
Operated
Psychiatric
Residential
Treatment
Facility



A ground-breaking ceremony was held on September 16, 2024 for the William R. Byars, Jr. Treatment Center which will be built on the South Carolina Department of Mental Health's Crafts Farrow Road Campus in Columbia, South Carolina. This will be a PRTF for seriously mentally ill, justice-involved youth.



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In Summary:

- We are working hard at the Department of Children's Advocacy to improve outcomes for children.
- If you are looking for a meaningful way to volunteer, consider the Cass Elias McCarter Guardian ad Litem Program and Foster Care Review Board.
- If you know someone who is experiencing serious emotional or behavioral challenges due to mental illness, consider a referral to S.C. Continuum of Care.
- If you or someone you know has complaints or concerns about a child-serving agency, call us at 1-800-206-1957 or submit an online complaint.
- Learn more at www.childadvocate.sc.gov



Advocacy | Accountability | Service

South Carolina Department of Children's Advocacy



*Amanda F. Whittle, J.D., CWLS, C.G.S. – Psychiatric Rehabilitation
State Child Advocate and Agency Director*

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