



Board Summary Report

File #: 24-122

Agenda Date: 3/12/2024

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To: Board of County Commissioners

Through: Cheryl Ternes, Director, Human Services

Prepared By:

Michelle Dossey, Child & Adult Protection Services (CAPS) Division Manager, Human Services

Presenter:

Cheryl Ternes, Director, Human Services; Michelle Dossey, Child/Adult Protection Services Division Manager, Human Services; Suzanna Dobbins, Finance Division Manager, Human Services

Subject:

2:00 PM *Approval of Assessment/Case Cap Stipend for Child Welfare Caseworkers

Purpose and Request:

Colorado County Departments of Human Services are statutorily required to respond and intervene on child protection assessments and cases, regardless of the available number of caseworkers to manage these caseloads. As a result of significant vacancies within the CAPS Division, an Assessment/Case Cap Stipend policy has been drafted to mitigate these concerns. Approval by the Board of County Commissioners is being sought to implement the proposed Assessment/Case Cap Stipend policy.

Background and Discussion: To ensure that children and families receive the highest quality of service in safety, permanency and wellbeing, the National Child Welfare best practice standards recommend that each Intake and Permanency Caseworker carry no more than 10-12 assessments or cases. Child welfare agencies are required to ensure that each assessment or case has an assigned caseworker to conduct case work, despite the number of caseworkers available to take those assessments or cases. Since early 2023, the CAPS Division has struggled to hire and retain, as well as certify caseworkers. As a result, our Intake Caseworkers have been carrying on average 20-30 assessments each, and Permanency Caseworkers have been carrying on average 16-21 cases each.

We have implemented a number of strategies to increase retention in order to stabilize our workforce. We have also consulted with the other large 11 counties to consider other ideas that might help Arapahoe County be successful. Two of those counties, El Paso and Adams Counties, have implemented a similar policy and have seen success in retaining caseworkers. After careful consideration, this policy has been drafted to address the workload challenges, by providing a stipend to Intake and Permanency caseworkers who exceed the recommended best practice standards, as well as compensate certified, non-intake or non-permanency caseworkers who volunteer to take assessments or cases to support the Child and Adult Protection Services (CAPS) Division during these difficult times.

This policy will only be implemented at times that our vacancy rate reaches the threshold of at or above 15%. The vacancy rate is determined by the number of fully certified caseworkers taking assessments or cases in full

rotation. Colorado Statute and Regulations require all newly hired caseworkers attend the Colorado Child Welfare Training Academy and receive certification prior to taking assessments or cases. Therefore, just simply a filled position does not count in the vacancy rate calculations for the purposes of this policy. Once stability has been achieved, this policy will be inoperative. When an Intake Caseworker reaches the cap of 12 assessments or a Permanency Caseworker reaches the cap of 12 cases, they will be compensated for any additional assessments/cases worked in excess of the 12-case cap. This stipend will range from \$200-\$300 per pay period based on a tiered system and the number of assessments/cases they are over the cap. Additionally, non-Intake/non-Permanency certified caseworkers who are willing to take on extra job duties by taking 4 assessments per month or carrying 2 permanency cases, will also be compensated. The policy as drafted, provides strict guidelines and will require significant upper-level management oversight and approval to ensure the proper use of this funding. This policy has been reviewed and approved by Human Resources Compensation and the County Attorney's Office.

Fiscal Impact: The financial impact of the stipends for the Child and Adult Program Services Division caseworkers will be an estimated \$422,500 for nine months (if approved, March 17 start date), and \$549,250 for twelve months, including tax and retirement costs. The number of FTE is estimated to be 66. The County share is estimated at \$84,500 for nine months and \$109,850 for twelve months (see attachment).

The Child Welfare Block Allocation increased \$2,147,509 from SFY22-23 to SFY23-24 and will most likely increase again for SFY24-25. The current allocation is more than sufficient to cover the increased costs associated with the stipends (see attachment). Should the need for the stipends continue, the allocation is estimated to be sufficient to allow for the costs. This will not impact our fund balance as the amounts are already included in the County budget, therefore, there will be no need for a budget supplemental for these expenditures.

Alternatives: The BOCC could choose to not approve the policy. The Department would continue to seek alternatives aimed to increase caseworker retention.

Alignment with Strategic Plan:

- Be fiscally sustainable
- Provide essential and mandated service
- Be community focused

Staff Recommendation: The Department of Human Services requests that the BOCC approves the Assessment/Case Cap Stipend policy.

Concurrence: Human Resources, Adriane Hackett; Human Resources Compensation, Dusty Sash and Jennifer Cooley; County Attorney's Office Daniel Perkins and Michael Valentine.