

# House Way and Means Committee

Healthcare Subcommittee  
FY26 Budget Hearing



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



# Key Officials/ Attendees

- **Amanda F. Whittle, J.D., C.G.S. – Psychiatric Rehab., CWLS**  
Director, Department of Children's Advocacy
  
- **Kayla Capps, J.D.**  
Deputy Director
  
- **LaDara Depugh, M.A.**  
Chief of Staff
  
- **Rob Schaller**  
Communications Director
  
- **Thomas Kaminer, CGFO, CPM**  
Budget Director, Office of Administrative Services  
Department of Administration Shared Services

# Agency Overview

## The Department of Children's Advocacy:

- **Supports** approximately 200 employees and 1200 volunteers/board members with offices throughout the state and a central state office.
- **Examines** system-wide services provided to children by nine state agencies
- **Ensures** timely, safe, and effective services
- **Develops and promotes** a broad vision of reform
- **Recommends** quality improvements for children's services
- **Educates** the public regarding the role of Children's Advocacy's and other agencies' services
- **Serves** as a member of the State Child Fatality Advisory Committee (Chair, October 2022-2024), Joint Citizens and Legislative Committee on Children, and other committees
- **Maintains** the Child Abuse Coordination Protocol and facilitates meetings

# Agency Overview

## The Department of Children's Advocacy has four divisions:

- **Continuum of Care** provides High Fidelity Wraparound care coordination to youth with challenging emotional and behavioral issues to help safely maintain them in their homes, schools and communities and out of state care.
- **Cass Elias McCarter Guardian ad Litem Program** provides Guardians ad Litem to serve as court-appointed special advocates for all abused and neglected children who are involved in DSS court cases.
- **Foster Care Review Division** supports the local and state Foster Care Review Boards in reviewing the cases of children who are in foster care to advocate for permanence. It also administers the **S.C. Heart Gallery**, which creates photo exhibits of children in foster care who are legally free for adoption.
- **System Improvement** includes the **Investigations** and **Critical Investigations units**:
  - **Investigations** receives, refers, monitors, and investigates complaints regarding services to children by nine child-serving agencies.
  - **Critical Investigations** receives and responds to critical incident notifications including fatalities, near-fatalities, and sexual assaults reported by nine child-serving agencies.

# FY26 Budget Request

<b>Recurring Funding:</b>	\$ 3,251,706
<b>Non-Recurring Funding:</b>	\$ 416,000
<b>Total:</b>	\$ 3,667,706

This request aligns with the goals and targets of the agency's Annual Accountability Report and with the agency's mission, vision, and statutory mandates.

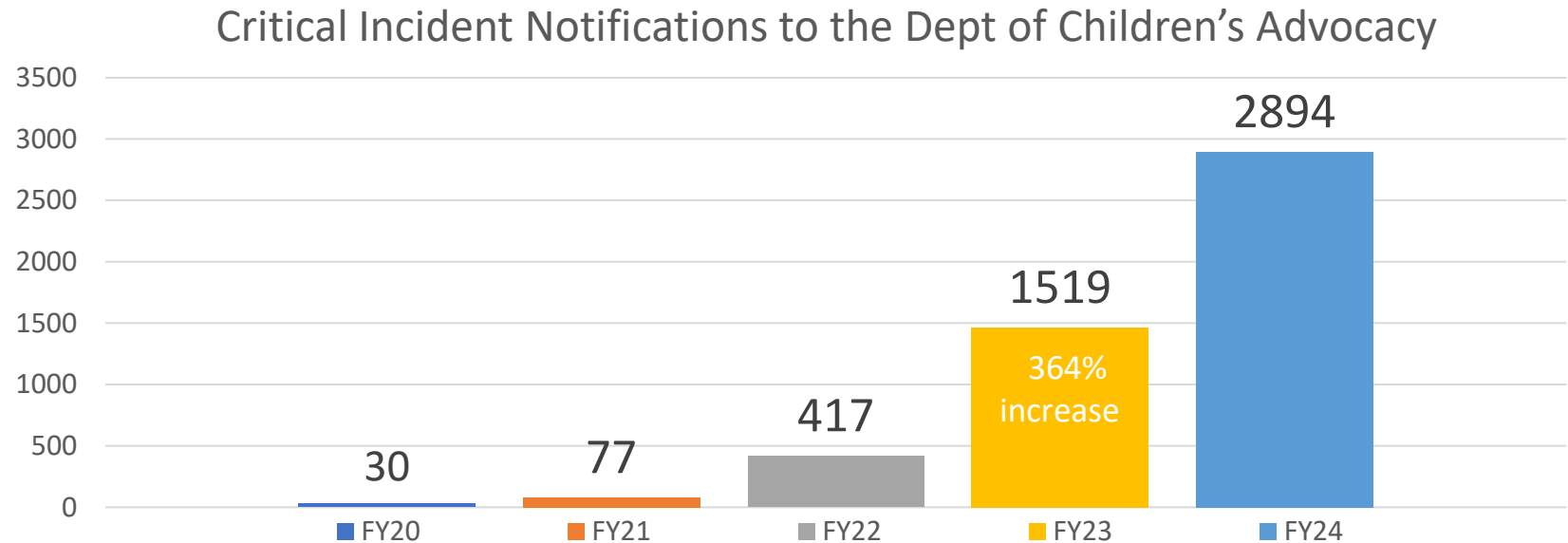
**FY26  
Budget  
Requests**

***Priority 1***

Agency Priority 1 – Recurring Funds  
System Improvement  
\$1,003,498

2,894 critical incident notifications received in FY24  
by the Critical Investigations Unit.

1,161 investigations completed  
by the Critical Investigations Unit.





# FY26 Budget Requests

## *Priority 1*

Agency Priority 1 – Recurring Funds  
System Improvement  
\$1,003,498

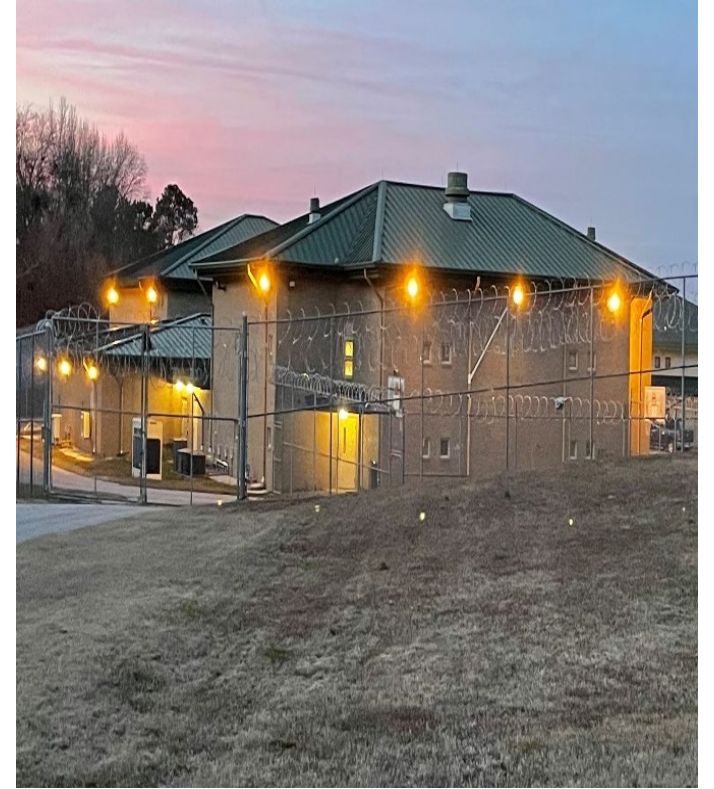
For FY25, the Agency requested 10 FTEs for the System Improvement Division and received 5 FTEs.

**For FY26, 9 FTEs are requested:**

- **5 Investigators**
- **3 Attorneys**
- **1 Supervisor**



# Impact







# FY26 Budget Requests

## *Priority 2*

Agency Priority 2 – Recurring Funds  
Best-Interest Advocacy for Abused and Neglected Children  
\$1,123,601

**11,577 children served in FY24**

The Guardian ad Litem Program assigned best interest advocates for 11,577 children.

**8,468 children per month**

The Guardian ad Litem Program served an average of 8,468 children per month.

**128 Guardian ad Litem staff**

**56%** of children were appointed a volunteer Guardian ad Litem.

**44%** of children were appointed a trained staff person as their Guardian ad Litem.

# **FY26 Budget Requests**

## ***Priority 2***

Agency Priority 2 – Recurring Funds  
**Best-Interest Advocacy for Abused and Neglected Children**  
**\$1,123,601**

For FY25, the Agency requested 21 FTEs for the GAL Program and received 8 FTEs.

**For FY26, 14 FTEs are requested:**

- **9 Program Coordinator I positions**
- **4 Program Assistants**
- **1 Program Coordinator II position**

# Impact





# FY26 Budget Requests

## *Priority 3*

### Agency Priority 3 – Recurring Funds Continuum of Care Transfer Alignment \$400,000

- DCA seeks a budget alignment in the event DMH is no longer required to transfer \$400,000 to Continuum of Care pursuant to Proviso 35.1
- Proviso 35.1 has been in effect for approximately 20 years.
- **This request is not necessary if Proviso 35.1 is not changed.**

# Impact



The journey  
is long.

The first step  
just got easier.



South Carolina  
**CONTINUUM  
OF CARE**  
Dept. of Children's Advocacy



# FY26 Budget Requests

## *Priority 4 and Priority 5*

### Agency Priority 4 – Recurring Funds IT Operations including Microsoft Office 365/IT Licensing \$115,700

- In 2022, the Department of Administration notified DCA (as a shared services agency) that Admin DTO would provide Teams access to all DCA staff, and DCA would be responsible for the costs.
- The annual cost for Microsoft Office is \$85,000. Cisco/Meraki AP SmartNet License costs were \$16,808.06 in June of 2024 and projected at \$17,000 for June of 2025.
- Costs associated with IT training and travel to support offices are \$13,700.

### Agency Priority 5 – Non-Recurring Cisco Switch End-of-Life Replacements (non-recurring) \$77,000

- In June 2024, DCA was notified by the Department of Administration's Office of Technology and Information Services (OTIS) that the Cisco switches currently operating in the agency's environment were approaching end-of-life.
- The agency was advised that these switches needed to be replaced to help ensure alignment with state security requirements, and expenses will be the responsibility of agencies moving forward.
- Admin has secured the lowest possible replacement cost through vendor negotiations and bulk purchasing.

# Impact





# FY26 Budget Requests

## *Priority 6*

### Agency Priority 6 – Recurring Funds Guardian ad Litem Program Operational Expenses \$121,193

#### **Lease Increases for County Office Space: \$57,780**

Leases have increased in several locations and some offices have been relocated. There will be a **\$57,780** annual increase in leases for the Guardian ad Litem Program.

#### **Moving and IT Expenses: \$16,400**

Four additional offices will need to be relocated with additional costs of \$6,000 for moving expenses and \$10,400 for IT expenses for a total of **\$16,400**. The Program anticipates similar recurring costs each year.

#### **Increased costs for legal representation for volunteer Guardians ad Litem: \$47,743**

Title IV-B funding is drawn down for the payment of contract attorneys who represent Guardians ad Litem in Family Court abuse and neglect matters. This is a 75/25 match with IV-B funding and state dollars. The current contract is \$1,034,243.41.

The Guardian ad Litem Program is working with DSS to renegotiate the contract, but there may be implications for DSS which preclude DSS from agreeing to an increase in this contract.

In the meantime, additional funding had to be added to attorney contracts in the amount of **\$47,743** to retain quality legal representation for Guardians ad Litem. The Department of Children's Advocacy requests recurring funding for the additional costs to secure attorneys for Guardians ad Litem as required by state law.





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# FY26 Budget Requests

## *Priority 7 and Priority 8*

### Agency Priority 7 – Non-Recurring Funds Recruiting and Retaining Child Advocates **\$339,000**

This request is for non-recurring bonuses for full-time Department of Children's Advocacy staff (FTE, Temporary Grant and Time-Limited) based on their performance for the 2025-2026 evaluation. Eligible staff who receive a performance evaluation for 2025-2026 of 1.50 (Successful) or higher would be considered.

- Exceptional 2.50 – 3.00 (\$1,500)
- Successful 1.50 – 2.49 (\$1,200)

### Agency Priority 8 – Recurring Recruiting and Retaining Child Advocates **\$440,564**

This request is specifically for Foster Care Review Division and Guardian ad Litem Program staff to make salaries comparable and/or competitive with other positions within state government based on the job expectations.

Recurring salary increases for full-time Department of Children's Advocacy staff (FTE, Temporary Grant and Time-Limited) would be based on their performance for the 2025-2026 evaluation period. Eligible Staff who receive a performance evaluation for 2025-2026 of 1.50 (Successful) or higher would be considered.

- Exceptional 2.50 – 3.00 (7% or 8%)
- Successful 1.50 – 2.49 (5%)

# Impact



# FY26 Budget Requests

## *Priority 9*

Agency Priority 9 – Non-Recurring Funds  
**Equipment for New Hires**  
**\$47,150**

### **Related to Priority #1:**

Non-IT Equipment: \$4,500

- Estimated cost of \$500 per employee for desks and other non-IT equipment

IT Equipment: \$13,950

- Estimated cost of \$1,550 per employee for laptops, monitors and other IT equipment

### **Related to Priority #2:**

Non-IT Equipment: \$7,000

- Estimated cost of \$500 per employee for desks and other non-IT equipment

IT Equipment: \$21,700

- Estimated cost of \$1550 per employee for laptops, monitors and other IT equipment

**TOTAL: \$47,150.00**

# Impact



Photo credit: Kinard Lisbon, Governor's Office



# FY26 Budget Request Summary

## Priority 1 – **\$1,004,497.25** | System Improvement and Investigations

A total of 9 FTEs are requested for FY26. This includes 5 positions requested in FY25, a Program Manager I position to lead the Critical Investigations Unit, and 3 attorneys for the System Improvement Division.

## Priority 2 – **\$1,123,600.70** | Best-Interest Advocacy for Abused and Neglected Children

A total of 14 FTEs are requested for FY26 including 13 positions requested in FY25. When there is not a volunteer Guardian ad Litem available, an agency employee is appointed to serve as a GAL, causing staff caseloads to reach as high as 30 per staff person. Caseloads need to be lowered to less than 20 to improve best interest advocacy for abused and neglected children.

## Priority 3 – **\$400,000** | Continuum of Care Transfer Alignment (no funding requested if there is no proviso change)

## Priority 4 – **\$115,700** | IT Operations (including Microsoft and Meraki Licensing) (\$85,000 of which was requested/not allocated in FY25)

## Priority 5 – **\$77,000** | Cisco Switch End-of-Life Replacements (NEW, non-recurring)

## Priority 6 – **\$121,193** | Guardian ad Litem Program Operations

## Priorities 7 & 8 – **\$339,000** (non-recurring); **\$440,564** (recurring) | Recruiting and Retaining Staff

## Priority 9 – **\$ 47,150** | Equipment for New Hires



South Carolina Department of

# CHILDREN'S ADVOCACY

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