

MEMORANDUM REPORT

April 17, 1998

TO: Health and Human Services Committee

FROM: Jennifer Kimball, Research Assistant *JK*
Office of Legislative Oversight

SUBJECT: ***OLO Budget Project: Child Welfare Workload Analysis***

In March, the Council amended the Office of Legislative Oversight FY 98 Work Program to add projects related to the Council's review of agency FY 99 budget requests. This budget project analyzes workload and staffing trends in Child Welfare Services from FY 96 to December FY 98.

This memorandum is organized into five parts:

- Part I describes the organization of Child Welfare Services;
- Part II describes the staffing and caseloads in the Screening Unit, Assessment Unit, and Continuing/Treatment Unit;
- Part III compares the Child Welfare Services caseloads to standards established by the Maryland Department of Human Resources and the Child Welfare League of America;
- Part IV reviews two issues related to caseloads: supervisor workload and support staff needs; and
- Part V (page 18) summarizes OLO's findings.

At the April 16th HHS Committee meeting, the Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) presented findings and recommendations from its study of Montgomery County's front-end child protective services. The study evaluates the effectiveness of Child Welfare Services' screening and investigation functions, identifies needed changes, and defines steps to implement those changes.

Some of the Child Welfare League's findings relate to workload, including:

- Growth in the number of reports of alleged abuse and neglect has increased the screening and investigation workload.
- The County's Screening Team supervisor to worker ratio is higher than CWLA and State standards.

The Child Welfare League recommends adding 2.0 FTE social workers and 1.0 FTE supervisor to the screening function, and 5.0 FTE to investigations.

OLO's budget project complements the Child Welfare League's findings and recommendations on workload. Specifically, this memorandum report reviews data on social worker caseloads in screening, investigation, and foster care/continuing services in FY 96, FY 97, and FY 98. The CWLA's summary report to the Committee did not include these workload data, which the Committee may find useful when considering the Child Welfare League's staffing recommendations.

Part I. Organization of Child Welfare Services

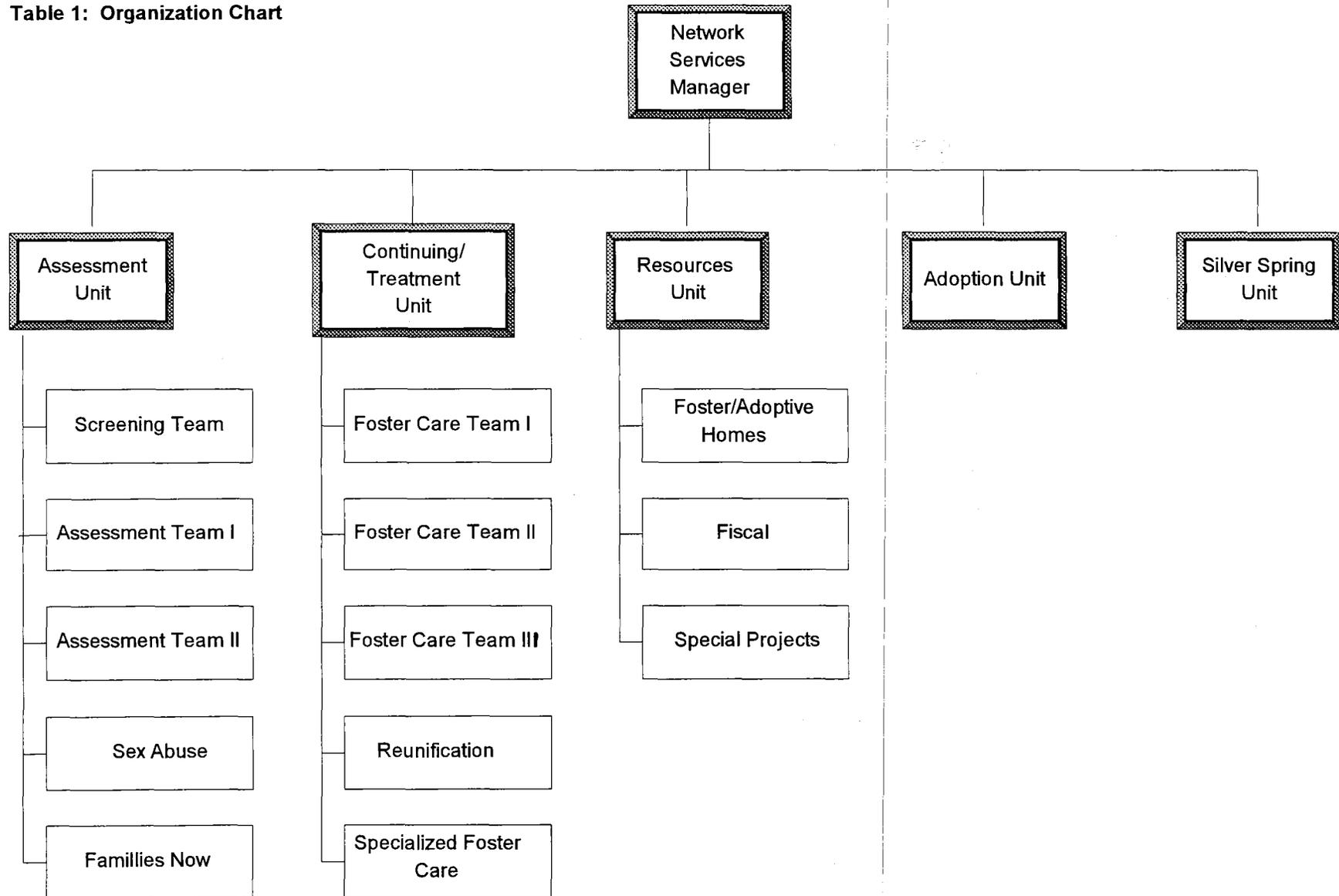
Child Welfare Services is a program area within the Department of Health and Human Services' Children, Youth and Family Services. The Child Welfare Services program staff identify and address cases of child abuse and neglect, provide services to prevent child abuse and neglect, assist parents to provide proper care, and provide an alternate plan of care for children when necessary.

Table 1 (page 2a) shows the current Child Welfare Services organization. Child Welfare Services is divided into five units: Assessment, Continuing/Treatment, Resources, Adoption, and Silver Spring. Each Unit is divided into teams.

The Assessment Unit includes five teams with the following responsibilities:

- one Screening Team - receives and processes all referrals of suspected abuse and neglect;
- two Assessment Teams - investigate reports of alleged abuse and neglect;
- one Sexual Abuse Team - investigates and provides ongoing services in cases of sexual abuse; and
- one Families Now/Family Preservation Team - provides time-limited, intensive, home-based services to families in crisis when children are at risk of out-of-home placement.

Table 1: Organization Chart



The Continuing/Treatment Unit also includes five teams:

- three Foster Care/Continuing Services Teams - provide ongoing social services to children and families, including children remaining with their parents, children placed in foster care, and children in residential facilities;
- one Specialized Foster Care Team - provides intensive foster care services to children with serious medical or emotional needs; and
- one Permanency Planning Reunification Team - provides time-limited, intensive social services in an effort to reunify families.

The Resources Unit coordinates recruitment, training, and supervision of foster and adoptive parents and processes requests for funds for children and families served by Child Welfare Services. The Adoption Unit handles the social services component of adoption proceedings.

Child Welfare Services will open the Silver Spring Unit in May 1998. The Department plans to open a unit in Germantown this summer. These units will bring child welfare services into the community, making it easier for clients and social workers to become familiar with resources in the local community and facilitating relationships between social workers and community members.

Part II. Caseloads in the Screening, Assessment, and Foster Care/Continuing Services Teams

Social workers on the Screening Team (Assessment Unit), the two Assessment Teams (Assessment Unit), and the three Foster Care/Continuing Services Teams (Continuing/Treatment Unit) manage cases referred for child abuse and neglect. This section describes the work of these teams and presents data on staff workyears, numbers of cases, and average number of cases per social worker for FY 96 through FY 98.

Child Welfare Services collects monthly data on the number of calls to report abuse and neglect, the number of cases investigated, the number of active foster care and continuing services cases, and the number of cases per social worker (caseload.)

Caseload data represent an average and do not reflect the caseload variances among the social workers. For example, the data average the cases handled by part-time and full-time social workers, but part-time workers handle fewer cases at any one time than full-time workers. Newly hired social workers also handle fewer cases when initially hired. In addition, when social workers on the Screening Team or the Assessment Teams are on leave, other staff members on the Team must handle more cases.

A. Screening

1. Overview

The Screening Unit is the single point of entry into Child Welfare Services. This Unit receives and processes all referrals of suspected child abuse and neglect, as well as other requests for child welfare services, such as foster care, adoption, and family services.

Department of Health and Human Services staff receive reports 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The social workers on the Screening Team handle most of the telephone calls Monday to Friday, between 8:30 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. Staff from DHHS' child and adult protective services handle emergency calls after regular business hours, on weekends, and on holidays.

A receptionist answers initial telephone calls. Callers include school staff, police, doctors, relatives, neighbors, and others reporting suspected child abuse and neglect. If possible, the receptionist immediately transfers the caller to a social worker (particularly calls from the police or hospitals). If a social worker is not available, the receptionist takes a message and a social worker returns the call. Staff triage messages according to the urgency of the situation. Social workers give priority to potential sexual abuse and serious physical abuse or neglect situations.

When social workers receive a report of suspected abuse or neglect, they evaluate the report to determine if it meets the statutory and Department guidelines to require an investigation and to determine the urgency with which the Department must respond. Social workers screening telephone calls make the following decisions:

- Is the reported information sufficient to initiate a formal investigation/assessment?
- Is the source of the information credible?
- What is the response time required to respond to this case?

The social worker screening a telephone call must gather comprehensive information from the person making the report to determine:

- Demographic information about the child/family;
- Information about the alleged maltreatment, including nature, severity and frequency;
- Information about the child's physical and emotional condition and behavior; and
- Information about the parent/caretakers' emotional and physical condition, behavior, history, view of the child, child rearing practices, and relationships outside the family.

This in-depth information helps the Screening social worker determine how quickly an investigation should begin. It also helps the Assessment social worker to locate the child and parent(s)/caretaker(s) and begin the investigation. The information collected by the screening social worker also identifies other possible sources of information about the family, and potential abuse or neglect.

Child Welfare Services staff enter information about the source of calls in Quest, a computer system that tracks child welfare cases. At this time, the system does not generate reports based on the origin of the call. The Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) collected data on the origin of a sample of calls investigated between July 1996 and June 1997. CWLA found that 31% of calls came from educational personnel; 33% from legal/justice personnel; 15% from relatives, friends, and neighbors; and 7% from medical personnel.

The Screening social workers also educate the community about identifying and reporting suspected child maltreatment. This includes explaining confidentiality issues, identifying which professionals are mandated to report, describing which types of situations to report to Child Welfare Services and what information Child Welfare Services needs reported.

2. Staff

Table 2 (page 6) shows Screening Team workyears in FY 96, FY 97, and FY 98. The workyears on a team may change throughout any fiscal year. The workyears in the table represent the general staffing during the fiscal year. All of the positions are permanent merit system positions. There is currently one full-time and one part-time vacancy due to recent resignations. When Screening is particularly busy, other social workers in Child Welfare Services assist with screening calls.

Table 2: Screening Staff Workyears - FY 96, FY 97, and FY 98

	FY 96	FY 97	FY 98^a
Supervisor	1.0	1.0 ^b	1.0 ^b
Receptionist	1.0	1.0	1.0
Full-time Social Workers	1.0	2.0	3.0
Part-time Social Workers	2.0	2.0	2.5
Total	5.0	6.0	7.5

^a In FY 98, 1.5 workyears were re-deployed from elsewhere in Child Welfare Services.

^b In FY 97 and FY 98, the supervisor of the Screening staff also supervises one of the two Assessment teams.

3. Workload

Screening Team staff collect data on the number of telephone calls to report suspected abuse and neglect and the number of calls screened by each social worker. Table 3 (page 6a) shows the number of calls received by the Screening Team for six month periods in FY 96, FY 97, and FY 98 and the average number of calls per month during those periods.

The data indicate that the number of calls fluctuated between June of FY 96 and December of FY 98. The data also evidence an upward trend during the time period. The number of calls received between July and December 1998 were 3,101, which is 9% higher than the number of calls received during the same six month time period in FY 96. The data also indicate that the social workers receive more calls during the second half of the fiscal year (January to June). If this trend continues, then the Screening Unit will receive more than 3,500 calls in the second half of the current fiscal year.

OLO's review of monthly data indicate that the Team receives a higher volume of phone calls in the months of March, April, May, and October. They receive fewer calls during July, August, December, and January. The months that Child Welfare Services receiver fewer calls correlate with periods when school is not in session.

Table 4 (page 6a) shows the average number of calls screened per social worker for six month periods in FY 96, FY 97, and FY 98. (To account for the mix of part-time and full-time employees, OLO calculated the number of calls per staff workyear.) Table 4 also shows the average number of calls each social worker screened per month. The numbers represent an average and do not reflect the variations of workload among the staff members.

Table 3: Number of Calls to the Screening Staff - FY 96, FY 97, and FY 98

	FY 96		FY97		FY98
	July-Dec.	Jan.-June	July-Dec.	Jan.-June	July-Dec.
Number of Calls	2,822	3,206	2,600	3,509	3,101
Average per Month	470	534	433	585	517

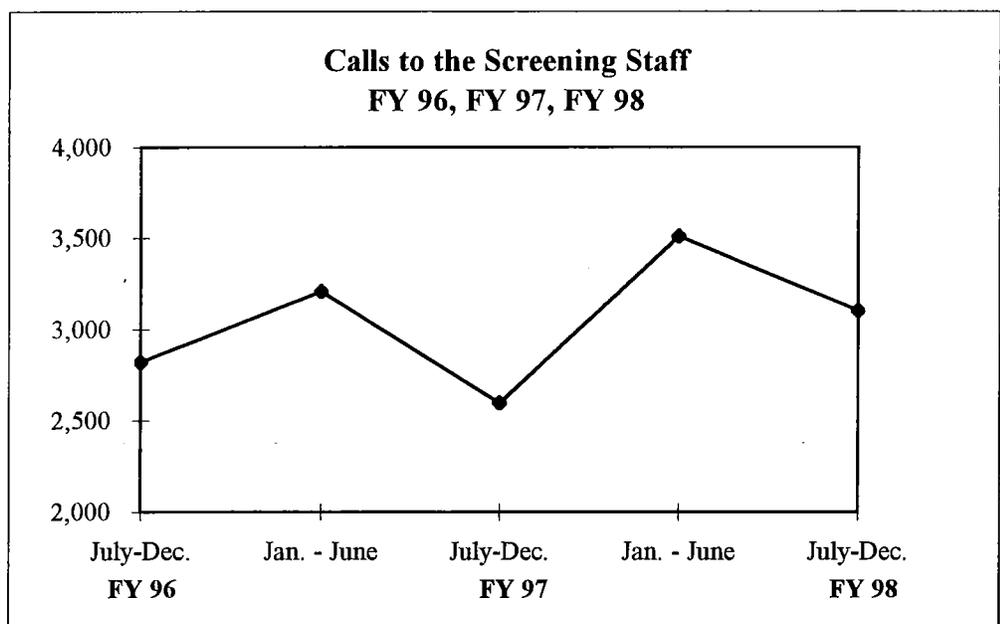


Table 4: Average Calls Screened per Social Worker¹ - FY 96, FY 97, FY 98

	FY 96		FY 97		FY 98
	July-Dec.	Jan.-June	July-Dec.	Jan.-June	July-Dec.
Average calls screened per social worker	940	1,068	650	877	564
Average calls per social worker per month	157	178	108	146	94

¹ OLO calculated the number of calls per staff workyear.

Every Screening call is different. Some calls only require a 15 minute conversation, while others take over an hour. A social worker's background and experience may also influence the length of screening calls. As a result, each social worker screens a different number of calls and that number varies from one month to the next. The data in Table 4 provide a sense of the Screening social workers' workload, on average, during six month time periods and monthly.

4. Observations

Based on interviews and site visits, OLO observed stresses on the Screening Team due to the high volume of calls reporting abuse and neglect. For example:

- Calls come into the Unit so frequently that while the receptionist takes a message on one call, there are sometimes multiple other callers placed on hold.
- Social workers are often called upon to respond to emergency calls and find it difficult to respond to the lower priority calls in a timely manner.
- Asked how the screening function would change if each social worker had fewer telephone calls to return, staff responded that they would spend more time with each caller to thoroughly assess the risk involved, and could return all calls within a shorter time period.

B. Assessment

1. Overview

There are two Assessment Teams in Child Welfare Services, each staffed by a supervisor and social workers. After a Screening Unit social worker decides that a report of child maltreatment meets the criteria for an investigation, an Assessment Unit social worker investigates the report. State law mandates that a social worker investigating a case see a child within: 24 hours for suspected physical and sexual abuse; five days for suspected neglect; and five days for mental injury.

The social worker must complete the investigation within 60 days. The social worker's assessment determines: 1) the child's safety and well being; 2) if maltreatment has occurred; and 3) the risk of further maltreatment.

The social worker attempts to make initial contact with the child in a neutral location, such as a school or day care center. The social worker contacts parents/caregivers during the investigation to inform them of the allegations, gather information, and assess the parents' ability to care for and protect the child. Child Welfare Services conducts all sexual abuse and serious physical abuse investigations in conjunction with the Police Department.

The social worker talks with other relevant individuals, such as a school counselor, relatives, and medical professionals, to gather additional information to assess the situation and devise a plan of action. During the course of an investigation, the social worker maintains contact with the child and family, helps them obtain identified services and attempts to resolve problems. After completing an investigation, the Assessment social worker either:

- closes the case;
- refers the family to other community resources and then closes the case; or
- transfers the case to the Family Preservation Unit or the Continuing/Treatment Unit for additional services.

In cases where the level of danger to a child is high, it may be necessary to remove the child from their home immediately and place him/her with relatives or in foster care. When Child Welfare Services removes a child from his/her home without parental consent, they must immediately bring the matter to Juvenile Court to review the placement. When the Court approves the placement, the Assessment social worker transfers the case to the Continuing/Treatment Unit.

There is also a Sexual Abuse Team comprised of a supervisor, seven social workers, and one part-time aide. Four social workers conduct investigations of reports of sexual abuse, working in conjunction with the police and the Shady Grove Sexual Abuse and Assault Center (which provides medical evaluations of sexually abused children.)

The Sexual Abuse Unit staff maintain close contact with the State's Attorney's office to support the prosecution of criminal charges. Community mental health service providers are also important partners in treating sexually abused children, their families, and the offenders.

Sexual abuse social workers conduct investigations in the same way as the Assessment social workers. Three social workers on the Sexual Abuse Team provide ongoing specialized child protective services and foster care services to sexually abused children and their families.

2. Staff

Table 5 (page 9) shows the number of workyears in the Assessment Unit in FY 96, FY 97, and FY 98. Throughout any fiscal year, the workyears on a team may change. The workyears in the table represent the general staffing levels during the fiscal year.

In FY 96, one supervisor supervised each Assessment Team. Since FY 97, one of the Assessment supervisors also oversees the Screening staff (see Table 2). In FY 97, Child Welfare Services shifted staff from other teams to create the Sexual Abuse Team. That team also has a supervisor.

Table 5: Assessment Staff Workyears - FY 96, FY 97, and FY 98

	FY 96	FY 97	FY 98
Supervisors ¹	2.0	2.0	2.0
Full-time Social Workers ²	16.0	14.0	18.0
Total	18.0	16.0	20.0

¹ In FY 96, each Assessment Team had a supervisor. Since FY 97, one Assessment supervisor also supervises the Screening Team (see Table 2). The FY 97 and FY 98 supervisor workyears include the supervisor of the Sexual Abuse Team.

² The table does not include the contractual staff assigned to the Assessment Team.

3. Workload

Table 6 (page 9a) shows the number of new cases investigated during six month periods in FY 96, FY 97, and FY 98, and the average number of new cases investigated per month during those periods. The data indicate an increasing trend in the number of new cases entering Child Welfare Services for investigation. The Assessment Teams received 748 new cases for investigation during the first half of FY 96. They received 36% more (1,174 new cases), during the first half of FY 1998.

OLO's review of monthly data showed that the social workers on the Assessment Teams received the highest volume of new cases for investigation during the months of March, April, May, and October. The data also indicate that they received fewer new cases for investigation during the months of July, August, December, and January.

The data in Table 6 count only the new cases entering the child welfare system for investigation. The data do not count the total active cases during the month, which include cases received in a previous month that are not yet completed. Each month, each social worker's caseload includes new cases on top of cases received in previous months that are in the process of investigating.

The number of new cases investigated per social worker varies. Table 7 (page 9a) shows the average number of new cases investigated by each social worker during six month periods and every month in FY 96, FY 97, and FY 98. This average caseload does not reflect variances in individual social worker caseloads. As indicated earlier, it also does not include the cases received in a prior month that the social worker is still investigating.

OLO does not have data on the number of active investigations over time. However, Child Welfare Services staff indicate that the total caseloads during January, February, and March of 1998 totaled more than 40 cases per social worker, for those

Table 6: Number of New Cases For Investigation - FY 96, FY 97, and FY 98

	FY 96		FY97		FY98
	July-Dec.	Jan.-June	July-Dec.	Jan.-June	July-Dec.
Number of New Investigation Cases	748	987	834	1,148	1,174
Average per Month	125	165	139	191	196

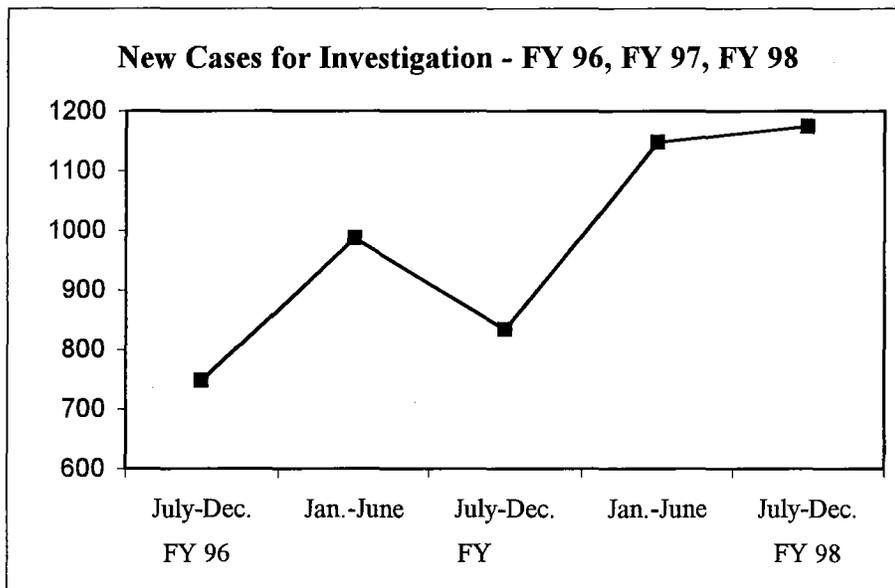


Table 7: Average Number of New Investigations per Social Worker¹ - FY 96, FY 97, and FY 98

	FY 96		FY 97		FY 98
	July-Dec.	Jan.-June	July-Dec.	Jan.-June	July-Dec.
Average New Investigations per Social Worker	47	62	60	82	65
Average per Month	8	10	10	14	11

¹ OLO calculated the number of calls per staff workyear.

investigating physical abuse and neglect allegations. Total workload includes new cases plus on-going investigation cases received during previous months.

4. Observations

Based on interviews and site visits, OLO observed stresses in the Assessment Teams due to the abundance of high priority cases and the complex nature of the cases. For example:

- The total number of cases requiring investigation is increasing. Social workers are even performing a higher volume of investigations during traditionally “slow” times of the year, e.g., winter and summer school breaks.
- Social workers express difficulty handling all of their assigned cases at once. They find themselves constantly handling crisis situations, and unable to devote time to less critical but necessary tasks.
- While a child and family enter the system in response to one incident, the investigation usually reveals an array of other problems and issues that need attention.
- State mandates requiring a visit within 24 hours of an alleged abuse report and five days within an alleged neglect report put additional pressure on the social workers’ time.
- Asked how the investigation function would change given smaller caseloads, staff commented that it would be easier to meet State mandates, allow more time for non-crisis tasks, and enable staff to conduct more thorough investigations.

C. Foster Care/Continuing Services

1. Overview

If an investigation indicates that a child or family needs additional assistance with abuse or neglect issues, the Assessment Unit social worker transfers the case to either the Family Preservation or Continuing/Treatment Unit:

- The Family Preservation Unit - provides intense services to families for up to nine months, in order to avoid removing the child from the home.
- The Continuing/Treatment Unit - provides foster care and continuing protective services to keep existing families together and reunite separated families.

The Continuing/Treatment Unit consists of five teams: three Foster Care/Continuing Services Teams; a Specialized Foster Care Team; and a Permanency Planning Reunification Team.

Each social worker on the Foster Care/Continuing Services Teams handles a combination of foster care and continuing services cases. At present, each social worker handles an average of 27 cases at a time. Newly employed social workers have smaller caseloads.

Every child placed in an agency licensed foster home or a relative's home is counted as one case. Each family in a protective services category is counted as one case. Therefore, a family with one child or a family with eight children both count as one case in the social worker's caseload. Families with multiple children tend to have more problems and require more intervention by the social worker.

A supervisor assigns each case to a social worker based on the social worker's existing caseload and experience. The social worker assesses each case and develops a plan to assist the family. For each child placed in a foster or kinship home, the State mandates that the social worker develop a service plan within 60 days of the initial placement. The social worker reassesses this plan at 240 days, or earlier, and then at a minimum of every six months until the case is closed. For protective services cases, the social worker must complete a service plan within 45 days after the case is transferred from the Assessment Unit. After that, service plans are reviewed every six months or more frequently, if indicated.

Continuing Protective Services - Continuing protective services cases involve children and families with problems that require assistance in order to maximize the safety of the child and prevent out-of-home placement. For continuing services cases, social workers must develop a service plan to lower the risk of child abuse or neglect, or to ameliorate the effect caused by child maltreatment. For continuing services cases, social workers:

- conduct home visits to assess the child's safety (minimum of once a month);
- help the family access needed services, e.g., food stamps, parent aide services, housing, day care;
- make referrals for health-related services including mental health and substance abuse treatment;
- track progress on individual behavior changes, and achievement of objectives/tasks;
- attend school meetings and clinic appointments with the family;
- teach parenting and other skills;
- appear before the court if the child is under a court order of protective supervision; and
- act as liaison between the school and the parents on behalf of the child.

Child Welfare Services usually provides continuing services for up to 12 months. The social worker continually reassesses each case until he/she determines that the risk of maltreatment has been reduced. If there is no court involvement and the period exceeds 12 months, then the director or the director's designee reviews the service plan and decides whether to continue or close the case.

Foster Care - Foster care cases involve reuniting parents with children who were removed from their home and placed in a licensed agency foster home or relative's home. For foster care cases, social workers:

- prepare and monitor the case plan to reunite the children and parents;
- visit the foster family;
- arrange visits between the child and the parents;
- attend meetings and conferences with professionals who are not part of DHHS;
- arrange and advocate for services on behalf of the children and parents (e.g., mental health or substance abuse counseling, housing, in-home aide services);
- refer parents to parenting classes;
- prepare court reports, attend all court reviews, Foster Care Review Board meetings, and case consultations; and
- work with the Office of the County Attorney to determine whether there is legal sufficiency to file petition for guardianship with right to consent to adoption.

Social workers continually assess the family's progress in reaching its goals and work toward reducing the length of time children remain in foster care. As of December 1997, the Maryland Department of Human Resources reported that in Montgomery County, the median length of stay in foster care was 26 months. (45% were in foster care less than 12 months; 18% less than 18 months and 16% less than 24 months. The remaining 21% ranged from 30 to 48 months.)

Community Service Aides - Child Welfare Services assigns in-home parent aides to the foster care and continuing services cases to help parents who need additional support. The aides often develop a trusting relationship with the family. They visit the parent at least once a week at home; maintain telephone contact between visits; provide transportation and/or accompany the parent to and from appointments; teach basic living skills; act as a role model; and help families deal with community service systems. The aides keep the social workers updated on the family's progress.

In January 1998, DHHS assigned four in-home parent aides from the Aging and Disability Services to the Child Welfare Services' Continuing/Treatment Unit. Before January, social workers had to submit a request for a parent aide to Aging and Disability Services.

2. Staff

Table 8 (page 13) summarizes the foster care/continuing services staff workyears in FY 96, FY 97, and FY 98. The data in Table 8 include supervisors, social workers, and community service aides; the data exclude the transportation aide, social work assistant, caseworker, human services worker, client assistant, and counseling specialist assigned to the Foster Care/Continuing Services Teams.

Similar to the Screening and Assessment staff, the workyears on the Foster Care/Continuing Services Teams change throughout the year. The data represent Child Welfare Services' best estimate of the workyears during the majority of the fiscal year.

Table 8: Foster Care/Continuing Services Staff Workyears - FY 96, FY 97, and FY 98¹

	FY 96	FY 97	FY 98
Supervisors	3.0	4.0	4.0
Full-time Social Workers	25.0	29.0	25.0 ²
Part-time Social Workers ³	1.0	2.0	2.0
Community Service Aides	1.0	7.0	7.0
Total	30	42	38

¹ Table 8 excludes the following staff: transportation aide, social work assistant, caseworker, human services worker, client assistant, and counseling specialist

² Two social worker positions are temporary, with contracts ending 6/30/98.

³ Includes contractual employees

3. Workload

At any one time, the social workers on the three Foster Care/Continuing Services Teams handle a combination of foster care and continuing services cases. The proportion of each type of case depends on the types of cases entering the system and the social worker's experience and skills.

The Screening social workers spend limited time determining if a report of maltreatment meets the criteria for investigation. According to the Child Welfare League, Assessment social workers spend, on average, 11 hours total on an investigation. In contrast, a foster care/continuing services social worker can maintain the same case in their caseload for multiple years. At the same time, they continually add new cases to their caseload. In addition, like the Screening and Assessment Teams, staff assume extra work when co-workers are on extended leave, increasing their workload for periods of time.

The Foster Care/Continuing Services teams keep data on the number of open cases every month. Cases that remain open over multiple months are counted every month that the case is open. Table 9 (page 14a) presents data on the average number of foster care and continuing services cases active per month during six month periods. The foster care and continuing services data do not include children living with relatives, or families in the Family Preservation/Families Now program or Permanency Planning Reunification program, or sexual abuse cases (Sexual Abuse Team created in FY 97).

The average number of active foster care cases per month fluctuated between 710 cases/month (July-Dec. FY 97) to 803 cases/month (Jan.-June FY 96). The average number of active foster care cases per month has been increasing steadily since the first half of FY 97. There were, on average, 710 active cases during the first half of FY 97, 725 cases/month during the second half of FY 97, and 774 active cases/month during the first half of FY 98.

The average number of active continuing services cases per month also fluctuated and has been steadily increasing since the first half of FY 97. The data indicate that the average number of active continuing services cases per month increased from 61 in the first half of FY 97, to 66 in the second half of FY 97, to 91 cases/month in the first half of FY 98.

Table 10 (page 14a) presents the average number of cases per social worker per month during six month periods in FY 96, FY 97, and FY 98. The data represent averages and do not reflect all of the variations throughout the months or in the number of cases from social worker to social worker. However, the data do provide a sense of the staff workload over time.

4. Observations

Based on interviews, OLO observed stresses on the Continuing/Treatment Unit staff due to large caseloads and the level of work required for each case. For example:

- Social workers report that they must constantly juggle cases and tasks. They spend much of their time handling emergencies, leaving little time for lower priority activities.
- Social workers find that there is not enough time with the current caseload to invest any extra effort, beyond minimal requirements, in each case.
- Each case involves a lot of paperwork.
- Asked how smaller caseloads would affect the function, staff responded that they would increase visits, better track families' progress and needs, and provide more education and counseling rather than sending the family to another service provider.

Table 9: Number of Foster Care and Continuing Services Cases - FY 96, FY 97, and FY 98

	FY 96		FY 97		FY 98
	July-Dec.	Jan.-June	July-Dec.	Jan.-June	July-Dec.
Average Foster Care Cases per Month	798	803	710	725	774
Average Continuing Services Cases per Month	95	87	61	66	91

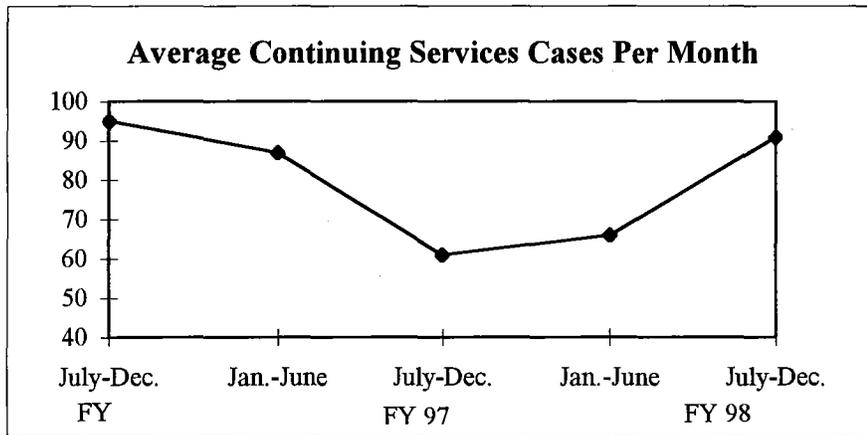
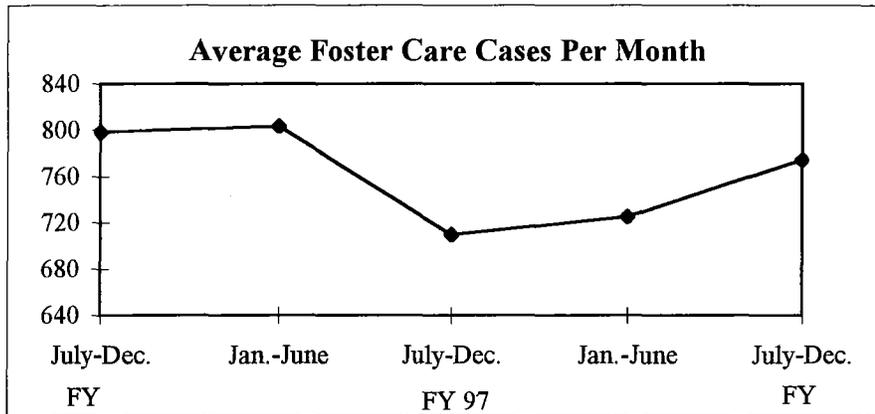


Table 10: Average Number of Foster Care/Continuing Services Cases per Social Worker - FY 96, FY 97, and FY 98

	FY 96		FY 97		FY 98
	July-Dec.	Jan.-June	July-Dec.	Jan.-June	July-Dec.
Average Cases per Social Worker per Month	27	27	25	28	27

Part III. Comparison of County's Caseloads to State and Child Welfare League Standards

The State of Maryland and the Child Welfare League of America establish caseload standards for social workers investigating alleged cases of child abuse and neglect and for social workers handling foster care and continuing services cases. Table 11 (page 15a) lists the State of Maryland and Child Welfare League standards. The assessment standards refer to the optimal number of **new investigation cases** a social worker handles at a time. The foster care and continuing protective services standards refer to the number of **active** cases that a social worker handles at a time.

The State of Maryland bases its caseload standards on compliance with State mandates regarding child abuse and neglect. State regulations require that a social worker investigating a physical or sex abuse case visit the child who allegedly has been abused within 24 hours of the report. State regulations also require that a social worker investigating a neglect case visit the child who has allegedly been neglected within five calendar days of the report. That State also requires that a social worker complete an investigation within sixty days.

Social workers on the Foster Care/Continuing Services Teams also follow State mandates. For example, the State requires social workers to reconsider or formally evaluate each family's service plan at least every six months.

The Child Welfare League bases standards on an examination of current practices, a survey of professional literature, a review of standards developed by other organizations, and scientific findings from social work and related fields. The Child Welfare League recommends slightly smaller caseloads than the State Department of Human Resources.

For comparison purposes, the table shows average caseloads in Montgomery County's Child Welfare Services for six month periods from FY 96 to December of FY 98. These data identify:

- the average number of new investigation cases each Assessment social worker receives per month; and
- the average number of foster care and continuing services cases each Foster Care/Continuing Services social worker handles per month.

Each social worker on the Foster Care/Continuing Services Teams handles a combination of foster care and continuing services cases. Child Welfare Services does not track foster care caseloads and continuing services caseloads separately.

The data indicate that the County's Child Welfare Service caseloads exceed the standards. The State recommends that each social worker handle no more than seven new investigation cases each month. Since FY 96, the County's social workers averaged between 8 and 14 new investigation cases each month.

Table 11: Comparison of County's Child Welfare Services Caseload to Standards

	Caseload Standards		County's Child Welfare Services Caseload				
	State of Maryland	Child Welfare League of America	FY 96 July-Dec.	FY 96 Jan.-June	FY 97 July-Dec.	FY 97 Jan.-June	FY 98 July-Dec.
New Investigation Cases	7:1	N/A	8:1	10:1	10:1	14:1	11:1
Active Continuing Protective Service Cases	20:1	17:1	27:1	27:1	25:1	28:1	27:1
Active Foster Care Cases	20:1	12-15:1					

The State recommends that each social worker handle no more than 20 continuing protective services or foster care cases each month; the Child Welfare League recommends even smaller caseloads (17 for continuing protective services and 12-15 for foster care). Since FY 96, the County's social workers averaged between 25 and 28 active foster care/continuing protective services cases per month. Since one continuing protective service case could involve assisting multiple children, 25 - 28 cases per month under-represents actual workload.

Table 11 (page 15a) shows the Child Welfare Services' average caseload over time to illustrate the volatility from one six month period to the next. Caseloads vary with changes in reporting and staffing. First, the number of reports of suspected abuse and neglect vary from one period to the next. Second, Child Welfare Services may shift social workers from one unit to another during the fiscal year. Removing or adding staff to a unit affects caseloads in the unit.

Staff on maternity leave and long-term sick leave also affect caseloads by shifting additional cases to other social workers on the team. Despite these caveats, the data in Table 11 still provide a useful comparison of caseloads in Montgomery County to State and Child Welfare League standards.

Part IV. Related Issues: Supervisor Workload and Support Staff

Supervisors in Child Welfare Services oversee the employees on the team. Responsibilities include:

- meeting with the social workers on a regular basis to review each case,
- providing clinical direction and interpreting policies/procedures for social workers,
- consulting with other supervisors in Child Welfare Services,
- meeting with service providers from outside DHHS, and
- discussing court cases with attorneys.

The supervisors also perform administrative tasks such as record reviews, monthly report writing, and data collection. They interview, hire, and train new staff. Supervisors may also appear in court.

In FY 98, one supervisor oversees the Screening staff and the staff on one of the two Assessment Teams. Another supervisor oversees the staff on the second Assessment Team. A third supervisor oversees the Sexual Abuse staff. Each Foster Care/Continuing Services Team has a supervisor. Table 12 (page 17) shows the number of social workers supervised (workyears). The table does not count administrative support staff. The number of social workers supervised changes as the number of social workers on each team changes during the year. The numbers in the table reflect the supervisor workload during the majority of the fiscal year.

Table 12: Number of Social Workers (Workyears) Supervised

Supervisor	FY 96	FY 97	FY 98
Screening ¹	6	N/A	N/A
Screening/Assessment Supervisor	N/A	13	17
Assessment Supervisor A	8	N/A	N/A
Assessment Supervisor B	8	7	9
Foster Care/Continuing Services			
Supervisor A	7.5	8.5	9.5
Supervisor B	8	8	10
Supervisor C	8	7.5	9
Supervisor D ²		12	11

¹ In FY 97 and 98, one supervisor oversees the Screening Team and one Assessment Team.

² In FY 97, Child Welfare Services established the Permanency Planning Reunification Team in the Continuing/Treatment Unit. That team includes a 1.0 workyear supervisor who supervises social workers and community services aides.

The Maryland Department of Human Resources and the Child Welfare League of America established workload standards for supervisors in the child abuse and neglect functions. The State recommends that six social workers report to each supervisor and the Child Welfare League recommends that five social workers report to each supervisor. As Table 12 above indicates, supervisors in Child Welfare Services currently supervise between 9 and 17 social workers each.

Based on staff interviews, OLO offers the following observations about Child Welfare Services supervisors:

- Given time limitations and the volume of the workload, supervisors must prioritize tasks. Each supervisor has a unique way of handling responsibilities and may spend his/her time in slightly different ways.
- In prioritizing tasks, supervisors often spend less time on administrative responsibilities (monthly reports, record reviews, statistics) than tasks related to clinical decisions.

Another observation about supervisor workload relates to the number of support staff in Child Welfare Services. OLO observed that the limited number of support staff increases the supervisors' workload and limits the capacity to collect data and maintain records.

As Child Welfare Services added social workers and handled more cases over time, the number of support staff remained the same. Currently, some supervisors and social workers share one support staff member with 15 other people. According to staff, this puts particular pressure on support staff's ability to maintain records and enter data required by the State.

Part V. Summary of Findings

The Child Welfare Services program staff identify and address cases of child abuse and neglect, provide services to prevent child abuse and neglect, assist parents to provide proper care, and provide an alternate plan of care for children when necessary. This memorandum report reviewed the Child Welfare Service program and presented data on social worker caseloads in the Screening, Investigation, and Foster Care/Continuing Services Teams.

OLO's findings are summarized below. They complement the Child Welfare League's conclusions and recommendations on the workload of the County's Child Welfare Services.

Part I. Organization of Child Welfare Services

1. Child Welfare Services is divided into five units: Assessment, Continuing/Treatment, Resources, Adoption, and Silver Spring. Each Unit is divided into teams.
2. Staff on the Screening Team determine which reports of suspected child abuse and neglect meet the criteria for investigation. Staff on the two Assessment Teams investigate cases of alleged child abuse and neglect, and develop a plan of action for each case. Staff on the three Foster Care/Continuing Services Teams provide continuing child welfare services for families that need further assistance.

Part II. Caseloads in the Screening, Assessment, and Foster Care/Continuing Services Teams

1. The number of calls screened, the number of cases investigated, and the number of foster care and continuing services cases handled fluctuates throughout the year. The data evidence an upward trend in the number of reports and cases of abuse and neglect between July of 1995 and December of 1998.
2. The Screening Team received 3,101 telephone calls between July and December 1998. This is 9% higher than the number of calls received during the same six month time period two years ago.
3. The Screening Unit transferred 1,174 new cases for investigation to the Assessment Teams between July and December 1998. This represents an increase of 36% from the number of new cases transferred two years ago.
4. Between July and December 1998, the average number of active continuing services cases (staffed by the Continuing Case/Foster Care Teams) was 91. This is compared to 61 cases during the same period in FY 97. (Sexual Abuse, Families Now, Permanency Planning, and kinship cases not included.)

Part III. Comparison of County's Caseloads to State and Child Welfare League Standards

1. The Child Welfare League of America and the State Department of Human Resources establish recommended ratios of social workers to child abuse and neglect cases.
2. Because of the fluctuation in caseloads over time, Child Welfare Services workload data must be examined over a number of years. In addition, it should be recognized that the County's caseload data represent averages and do not reflect the different caseloads from one social worker to another or the complexity of cases.
3. The County's caseloads in both Assessment and Foster Care/Continuing Services exceed the Child Welfare League and State Department of Human Resources standards. Specifically:
 - The State recommends that each social worker handle no more than seven new investigation cases each month. Since FY 96, the County's social workers averaged between 8 and 14 new investigation cases each month.
 - The State recommends that each social worker handle no more than 20 continuing protective services or foster care cases each month; the Child Welfare League recommends even smaller caseloads (17 for continuing protective services and 12-15 for foster care). Since FY 96, the County's social workers averaged between 25 and 28 active foster care/continuing protective services cases per month.

Part IV. Related Issues: Supervisor Workload and Support Staff

1. The Child Welfare League and the State also set standards for the number of social workers that a supervisor should oversee. The State recommends that six social workers report to each supervisor and the Child Welfare League recommends that five social workers report to each supervisor. Supervisors in Child Welfare Services currently supervise between 9 and 17 social workers each.
2. OLO observed that the limited number of support staff in Child Welfare Services increases the supervisors' workload and limits the support staff capacity to collect data and maintain records.