

Fiscal Year 2023 Budget Priorities Overview

ENHANCING PLACEMENT STABILITY & FOSTER PARENT RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

DCF: Services for Children and Families Line Item #4800-0038

Supports for children in foster care are funded through a line item that supports a wide range of services for DCF involved children.

	FY2023 MAFF request	FY2023 Governor
#4800-0038: Providing for the Daily and Special Needs of Foster Children	\$13.8M	\$13.4M

Providing for the daily and special needs of foster children

❖ **Daily Needs of Foster Children: \$7.4M**

Foster parents are volunteers who are reimbursed for the cost of caring for foster children through a Daily Rate of Support (DRS). The current DRS lags well behind the actual cost of caring for a child, especially when accounting for the increased need common among foster children. The economic impact of COVID-19 pandemic further widened this gap, with most foster families reporting increased costs for everything from gasoline to food in addition to reduced wages. Foster parents who are financially able to do so willingly dip into personal resources to cover the gap in daily needs and to provide the “extras” for children in their care. While this generosity is laudable, placing this financial burden on foster parents creates an inequitable system with implications for the wellbeing of children and for recruitment and retention of qualified foster parents including kinship caregivers. This 10% proposed increase is equal to the Governor’s proposal for FY23 and constitutes a critical step to closing the gap between reimbursement and the actual cost of raising a foster child in 2022.

❖ **Parent and Children Together (PACT): \$5.8M**

PACT services are specialized to support families with foster child needs, tasks, or unique circumstances that require additional service hours beyond routine care. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, foster families are relying on PACT services more than ever to support the children in their care. This request constitutes a 33% increase to the hourly Parents and Children Together (PACT) rate, the first increase in rate in over a decade. This increase, which is included in the Governor’s proposal, is necessary to keep up with continuously growing inflation in cost of services for families, and to respond to the increased needs of foster families as a result of the pandemic.

❖ **Kid’s Net Behavioral Health Partners: \$400k**

In response to increased demand for behavioral health supports for kids in foster care, MSPCC’s

Kids' Net Program utilized one time federal grant funding to develop a team of Behavioral Health (BH) Partners. BH Partners are foster/adoptive parents with specific lived experience supporting children with behavioral health challenges. They receive extensive training on trauma, behavioral health, and navigating the service delivery systems. With the goal of preserving placement stability, the BH Partners provide coaching, consultation, and facilitate access to resources to assist foster parents in meeting the behavioral health needs of the children in their homes and avert emerging behavioral health crises. This request ensures the Kid's Net Program has appropriate resources to continue meeting the increased behavioral health needs of foster families that arose as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

❖ **Recruitment and Retention of Foster Homes: \$150k**

Recruitment and retention of qualified foster and kinship homes is CENTRAL to the Commonwealth's ability to find appropriate homes for children coming into care. The COVID-19 pandemic has made it increasingly more difficult to recruit new foster homes thus action must be taken to better attract and support prospective foster parents. This request (also included in the Governor's FY23 budget proposal) funds \$500 bonuses to support the recruitment of new foster families, including for existing foster parents who refer new foster families and for DCF employees who become foster parents.

DHE: Tuition and Fees Waivers for Foster and Adopted Youth- Line Item #7066-0021

Level Funding Request: \$7,294,911

National data shows that the college graduation rate for children who spent time in the child welfare system is **less than 5%**. In comparison, the graduation rate for all youth is 34%. Every year, a number of youth who aged out of foster care or were adopted from foster care defy the odds and are accepted to a state college or university. For those youth, this program is absolutely critical to removing what would otherwise be an insurmountable financial barrier to attending and completing a college or university degree. Since 2008, this program has enabled hundreds of young people access education and the resulting employment opportunities that they would not otherwise have had.

FY2022 GAA	FY2022 Spending	FY2023 MAFF request	FY2023 Governor
\$7,294,911	\$7,294,911	\$7,294,911	\$7,294,911