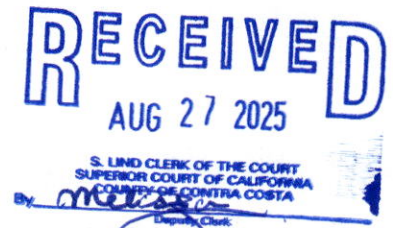


2024-2025 CONTRA COSTA COUNTY CIVIL GRAND JURY REPORT NO. 2506
"Children & Family Services: Challenges in Recruitment"
May 16, 2025

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS' RESPONSE
August 12, 2025



FINDINGS

F1: The Children and Family Services staff is dedicated to the important work they do.

Response: The Employment & Human Services Department (EHSD) agrees with and appreciates this finding.

F2: The social worker job is challenging and stressful, contributing to the difficulty in recruiting and retaining of staff.

Response: EHSD agrees with this finding.

F3: Children and Family Services faces challenges in both hiring and retaining social worker staff.

Response: EHSD agrees that this is a long-standing county, state, and national situation.

F4: Social workers have resigned and taken positions with competing agencies offering higher pay.

Response: EHSD partially disagrees. Social workers do resign but EHSD does not have the data to support that a preponderance take positions with better pay. Employees who give notice of resignation are referred for exit interviews, which are optional. Of the 13 most recent exit interviews, most respondents checked multiple boxes for the reasons for resignation. Four indicated the reason for resignation was better pay, eight noted personal reasons, four noted relocation or better commute, and 6 noted they were going to another government organization.

F5: As of January 2025, Children and Family Services has a current social worker vacancy rate of 19%, with 31 of 167 authorized positions unfilled.

Response: EHSD agrees that the vacancy rate was 19% in January 2025. The rate is declining. On June 30, 2025 Children and Family Services has 165 authorized Social Worker II/III positions and a total of 24 vacancies which equates to a vacancy rate of 16%

F6: Understaffing increases the workload for existing staff.

Response: EHSD agrees with this finding. To mitigate workload impacts for permanent social workers, EHSD utilizes staff reassignments to balance caseloads, paid over-time, and temporary and retiree social workers.

F7: The absence of a full staff of social workers can result in a negative impact on services provided to children and families, including delays in service, requirements for re-interviews, and the related stress on children and families.

Response: Budgeted and filled positions are not the best indicators of sufficient staffing. SB2030 helped provide guidance on caseload standards, but standards and resource levels vary across California counties. Risk is always present, and varies case by case. Overall, Contra Costa performs well related to mandatory national standards.

Performance Measure (mandated level)	EHSD April 2025	EHSD 12 month average (May 2024-April 2025)
1. Immediate referrals with timely response (=>90%)	96%	97%
2. 10 day referrals with timely response (=>90%)	93%	95%
3. Timely monthly social worker visits (=>95%)	95%	96%
4. Children achieving permanency in 12 months (=>35%)	42%	37%
5. Recurrence of maltreatment within 1 year (<10%)	7%	7%

F8: The hiring process is lengthy, with 27 steps and taking on average 113 days, which can potentially discourage applicants from completing the process and receiving an offer of employment.

Response: Human Resources partially disagrees. The 113 days to hire is a countywide average and is consistent with other public sector agencies. This average is not specific to CFS or the Social Worker classifications, which are run as continuous recruitments throughout the year. In FY 24/25 we received 417 applications for the CFS Social Worker classifications which indicates a high level of interest. The average time to hire continues to decrease year over year and remains a high priority for ongoing improvement. The 27 steps to hire document outlines internal HR and departmental personnel staff tasks with many happening simultaneously. Not all of the steps are applicable to all recruitments. The document was designed to highlight the shared responsibilities between Human Resources and the hiring department. These steps do not impact the applicant and would not discourage participation in the recruitment. The applicant is

only required to complete 2-3 steps during the recruitment process: submit an application, complete an exam (if applicable) and participate in the interview.

F9: Fewer college students in the western United States are enrolling in social work majors, reducing the pool of potential applicants.

Response: EHSD agrees with this interpretation of the data cited by the Grand Jury.

F10: Children and Family Services does not recruit for social workers at universities and colleges outside of the Bay Area or participate at recruiting/hiring fairs nationally.

Response: EHSD agrees with this finding.

F11: Children and Family Services has reduced the educational requirements from Master of Social Work to Bachelor of Science plus relevant experience, to increase the pool of potential applicants.

Response: EHSD partially agrees with this finding. EHSD reduced the educational requirement from Master of Social Work to Bachelor of Science plus relevant experience prior to the year 2000, though the actual date is unknown. EHSD does not have records indicating the reason for this change.

F12: Adding dedicated Human Resources staff to Employment and Human Services Department has aided hiring efforts.

Response: EHSD agrees with this finding.

F13: Children and Family Services does not reimburse new employees for relocation expenses.

Response: EHSD agrees with this finding. The County does not reimburse new employees for relocation expenses.

F14: Children and Family Services does not reimburse interviewees for travel expenses.

Response: EHSD agrees with this finding. The County does not reimburse interviewees for travel expenses. EHSD does offer video interviews for all social work applicants for CFS positions, including out-of-town applicants.

F15: Children and Family Services provides limited motivational, recognition, and wellness programs for social workers.

Response: EHSD disagrees with this finding. The Board of Supervisors, EHSD, and CFS celebrate and acknowledge social work staff annually during Social Work appreciation month. The various CFS Divisions coordinate and plan celebrations throughout the year. These include annual years of service recognition events, opportunities for social workers to be spotlighted for their work in the EHSD newsletter and during Board proclamation months. Employee Assistance Program services are available to all staff and CFS holds a critical incident debriefing to support staff involved in critical incidents. CFS offers opportunities for social workers to participate in supervision groups to obtain the necessary hours to become licensed practitioners. EHSD extends the opportunity to staff to obtain advanced degrees and participate in employee internships during which they are able to maintain their full-time employment. Finally, CFS has trained and supports all supervisors in trauma-informed supervision given the child and family trauma that CFS social workers encounter in the course of their duties.

F16: Children and Family Services does not have an employee referral program for social workers.

Response: EHSD agrees with this finding. The County does not have an employee referral program.

F17: Children and Family Services does not have a hiring or retention bonus program for social workers.

Response: EHSD agrees with this finding. The County does not have a hiring or retention bonus program for social workers.

F18: Children and Family Services has university and employee internship programs. Since 2019, CFS hired eight of 28 university interns and promoted five of 23 employee interns into permanent social worker positions.

Response: EHSD essentially agrees with this finding with a small correction to the exact numbers. Since 2019 CFS has hired 10 university interns promoted 6 employee interns into permanent social worker positions.

F19: Several of the challenges identified by the Grand Jury in 2019 (including a number of vacancies among social workers, a lengthy hiring process, heavy workloads, and a stressful work environment) still exist today.

Response: EHSD partially agrees. Contra Costa County along with other child welfare agencies statewide have continued to grapple with social work vacancies since 2019. The nature of public child welfare work is stressful due to the child trauma witnessed, legal responsibilities, complex mandated case work activities, and complex family situations for which social workers are expected to provide interventions using a trauma informed approach. Social Workers require extensive training and experience, which has been

offered through the Title IV-E Child Welfare Training Program and state mandated Core training. Both programs are intended to train, educate and prepare social workers for the demands experienced in the field of public child welfare.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- R1:** By January 1, 2026, the Board of Supervisors should consider directing the Human Resources Department and the Employment and Human Services Department to recruit for social workers at universities and colleges outside of Contra Costa County, participate at recruiting/hiring fairs nationally, and host virtual job fairs, potentially using Measure X funds as a source of funding.

Response: EHSD and Human Resources will work together to implement this recommendation by January 1, 2026 using existing funding.

- R2:** By January 1, 2026, the Board of Supervisors should consider directing the Human Resources Department and the Employment and Human Services Department to develop an employee referral program, potentially using Measure X funds as a source of funding.

Response: EHSD, Human Resources, and the County Administrator's Office do not recommend an employee referral program at this time. An employee referral program would need to be assessed in light of the County workforce as a whole and by taking into consideration the market for similar referral incentives. Additionally, logistical hurdles include accurate validation of employee referrals.

- R3:** By July 1, 2026, the Board of Supervisors should consider directing the Human Resources Department and the Employment and Human Services Department to implement a hiring and retention bonuses program, potentially using Measure X funds as a source of funding.

Response: EHSD, Human Resources, and the County Administrator's Office will work together to consider a time-limited hiring and retention bonus program for Children & Family Services Social Workers for BOS consideration and approval, and implementation by July 1, 2026. This aligns with the recent Board approved time-limited hiring and retention bonuses for Community Services Bureau teachers. It also aligns with child welfare social worker hiring and retention bonus program in San Mateo County. Should they be implemented, these bonuses will be funded by EHSD allocations for CFS programs as salary and benefits expenditures. Should they be implemented, EHSD will evaluate the effectiveness of the program for hiring and retention and report to the Family & Human Services Committee.

- R4:** By January 1, 2026, the Board of Supervisors should consider directing the Human Resources Department and the Employment and Human Services Department to

create other incentive programs for new and existing staff, such as student loan forgiveness programs and housing assistance, potentially using Measure X funds as a source of funding.

Response: EHSD, Human Resources, and the County Administrator's Office do not recommend implementing this recommendation. All county employees are already eligible for the federal Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program (PSLF) in which, per current rules, remaining student loan balances are forgiven after 120 qualifying payments and full-time employment in a qualifying government. President Donald Trump affirmed this program in a Presidential Action on March 7, 2025. Given that the cost of housing in the Bay Area impacts all county employees, a classification-specific housing assistance program would not be equitable.

R5: By January 1, 2026, the Board of Supervisors should consider directing the Human Resources Department and the Employment and Human Services Department to expand internship programs to generate increased interest in working with CFS in Contra Costa.

Response: EHSD does have the capacity to expand the number of hosted participants in the federally funded California Title IV-E Education Program for child welfare social workers. EHSD employs a part-time retiree who administers this program including recruitment of students and interactions with local participating universities (CSU East Bay, Sacramento State University, San Francisco State University, San Jose State University, University of California Berkeley). EHSD acknowledges the Grand Jury Finding 9 that fewer college students in the western United States are enrolling in social work majors, reducing the pool of potential applicants. UC Berkeley paused their internship program for school year 25-26 due to lack of sufficient enrollment.

R6: By July 1, 2026, the Board of Supervisors should consider directing the Human Resources Department and the Employment and Human Services Department to streamline the hiring process to reduce the time it takes to hire a social worker.

Response: The child welfare social work classifications (SW II and SW III) are already continuous recruitments. The factor limiting hiring is the necessity of an intensive, three-month orientation and training for all new social workers, including those with experience in other counties as county practices differ. EHSD currently conducts three trainings per year, a schedule necessitated by the fact that much of the training is delivered by the Bay Area Academy (dedicated to child welfare training) concurrently for all Bay area counties. The number of new employees in each training is not limited but some candidates are unable to wait until the start of the next training and may choose employment elsewhere. Moreover, it is not clear that Contra Costa county hiring timelines differ from surrounding counties.

R7: By January 1, 2026, the Board of Supervisors should consider directing the Human Resources Department and the Employment and Human Services Department to develop and implement a program to pay for moving expenses for newly hired social workers, potentially using Measure X funds as a source of funding.

Response: EHSD, Human Resources, and the County Administrator's Office do not recommend reimbursement for moving expenses for social workers as it would need to be implemented for all of EHSD classifications at a minimum, and likely for all the County classifications to be accepted by labor groups as a fair practice.

R8: By January 1, 2026, the Board of Supervisors should consider directing the Human Resources Department and the Employment and Human Services Department to develop and implement a program to pay for travel expenses of employees when recruiting social workers, potentially using Measure X funds as a source of funding.

Response: EHSD, Human Resources, and the County Administrator's Office do not recommend implementing this recommendation as it would be inequitable if not applied to all county positions, and would be cost prohibitive if applied to all county positions. EHSD offers remote activities for all application, interview and hiring activities.

R9: By July 1, 2026, the Board of Supervisors should consider directing the Human Resources Department and the Employment and Human Services Department to provide additional motivational, recognition, and wellness programs for social workers as an incentive in recruitment and retention, potentially using Measure X funds as a source of funding.

Response: In addition to the motivational, recognition, and wellness programs for social workers already implemented by EHSD and listed in F15 above, CFS has retained two consultants for additional supports. In 2025, one consultant is delivering a series of Emotional Intelligence trainings to strengthen the leadership team so that they can better support staff through high stress situations. And in 2026, another consultant will train supervisors in Reflective Supervision to help staff process and manage burnout and secondary trauma which is common in child welfare work.