

Overview: Georgia's 2015 Fiscal Year Human Services Budget Strategic Additions Made to DHS Budget; Service Cuts Since Recession Retained

By Melissa Johnson, Policy Analyst

The governor's \$516.1 million budget proposal for the 2015 fiscal year makes strategic additions to help protect Georgia's children and adults, but falls far short of restoring funds to pre-recession levels. The state's spending plan makes it somewhat easier for the Department of Human Services (DHS) to fulfill its mission to protect and support children and older Georgians, but the proposal does not represent a full commitment to meet the growing needs of the state's most vulnerable people.

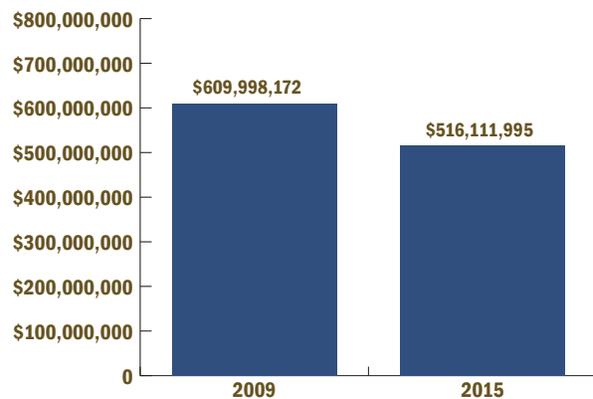
If the governor's budget for the 2015 fiscal year is adopted, it will represent a 15.4 percent drop in funding for the department since the 2009 fiscal year. Meanwhile, during that time, the demand for social services increased. The budget could be enough to not only restore some service cuts that date to the recession, but also provide some additional funding for growth in social services.

In the governor's proposed 2015 budget, state money is distributed among services for the most vulnerable children and adults as shown.

Notable provisions of the 2015 Department of Human Services Budget include:

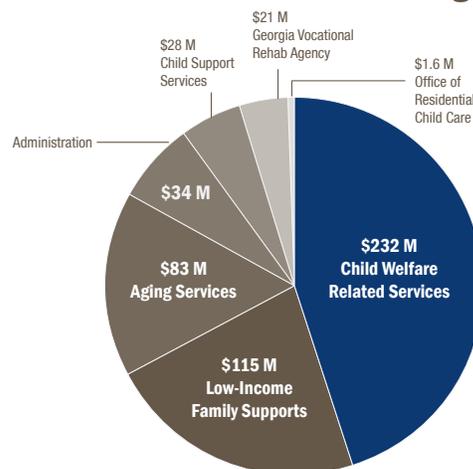
- \$7.4 million more than 2014 to hire 175 more Child Protective Services workers
- \$3.3 million more than 2014 to keep 235 agents to enforce child support payments
- \$920,000 more than 2014 to hire 11 more Adult Protective Services workers and for emergency placement of abused, neglected or exploited at-risk adults

Department of Human Services Funding Cut 15.4 Percent Since 2009



Source: FY 2009 House Bill 990 (excludes programs transferred out of DHS due to the reorganization and includes all agencies currently administratively attached to DHS) and Governor Budget Report – Fiscal Year 2015

Department of Human Services \$516 Million 2015 Budget



Source: Governor's Budget Report - 2015 Fiscal Year

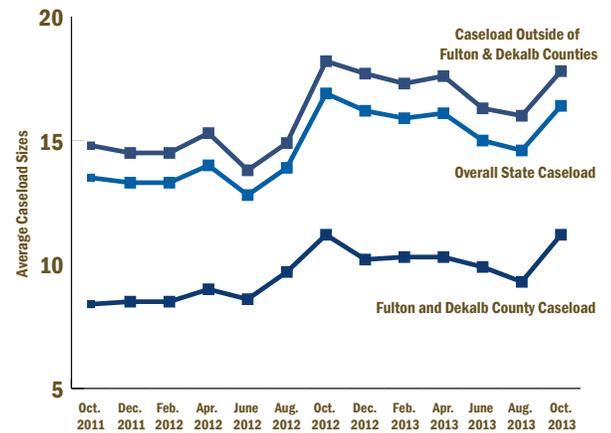
Child Welfare Budget Receives Needed Boost

Child welfare-related services are the largest part of the human services budget and are set to increase by 9 percent over the previous year in the proposed budget. A large part of this increase is due to the \$7.4 million infusion that the Division of Family and Children Services would use to hire 175 additional Child Protective Services workers. Child welfare caseworkers are often a child's first line of defense against abuse, abandonment and neglect.

Child welfare caseworkers are saddled with the cumulative effects of budget cuts since 2009, while the demand for their services increased. The average caseload for child welfare workers has escalated by 21 percent over the past two years, from 13.5 cases per caseworker to 16.4. A child welfare caseworker can effectively handle about 10 active cases and four active investigations, according to the Child Welfare League of America.

The governor's budget proposes new spending designed to reduce caseloads to about 15 per caseworker. Outside of Fulton and DeKalb counties, where DHS is bound to a federal consent decree mandating lower caseloads among other reforms, child welfare staffers have carried an average workload of at least 15 cases since August 2012.

Caseloads for Child Welfare Workers Increase by 21% Over Two Years



Source: Department of Human Services, Governor's Presentation, December 4, 2013

Child Support Positions Preserved in 2015 Budget

Child Support Services will get more money than in the 2014 budget if the governor's 2015 spending plan is adopted. The new money is needed to stabilize the division and fill a projected \$9.8 million budget hole in 2015. Child Support Services encourages and enforces parental financial support responsibility. The division will get money to preserve 235 positions under the governor's plan.

Cuts to state funding for Child Support Services in recent years created a negative ripple effect. Budget cuts in both the 2013 and 2014 budgets caused the division to miss out on about \$2.5 million in federal matching funds over both years. The governor's 2015 budget proposes adding \$3.3 million to leverage \$6.5 million in federal funding.

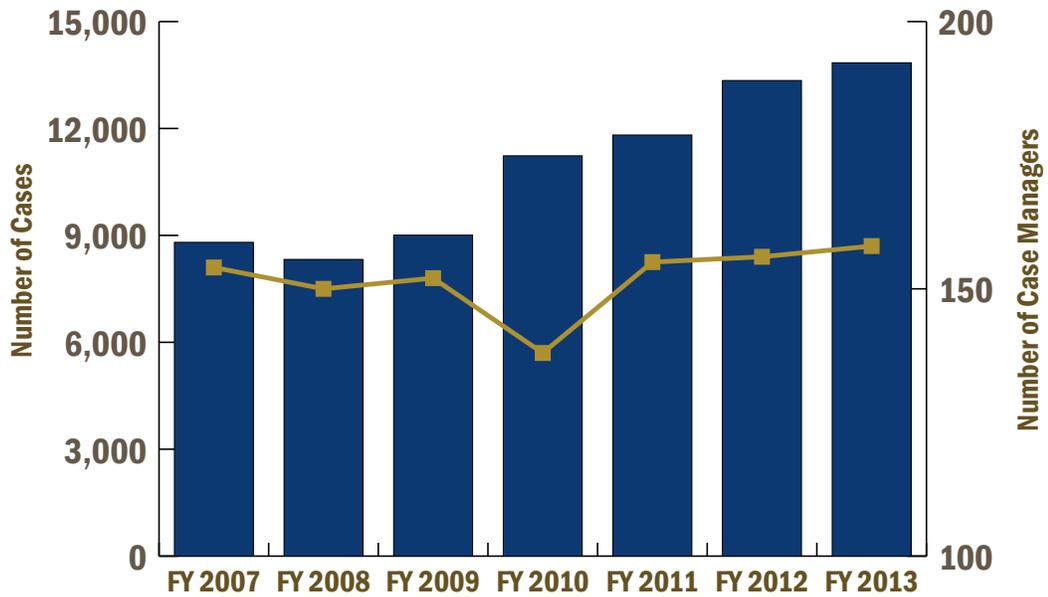
Money for Services for Older Georgians Still Short of Need

Georgia's is home to the fourth-fastest growing population age 65 and older in the United States. The growing number of older Georgians is causing increased demand for support services. The governor's 2015 budget proposal adds money to address this growth, but it is not enough to meet the needs identified by experts on Georgia's aging trends.

The 2015 spending plan adds \$1.3 million for Elder Abuse Investigations and Prevention. About \$230,000 is for temporary emergency placement of abused, neglected or exploited adults. About \$690,000 would be used to hire 11 additional Adult Protective Services workers. Aging experts say the need is much greater. The state should spend more than \$450,000 for adult emergency care and \$2 million to hire 33 new Adult Protective Services workers in 2015, the experts say.

A spike in crime targeting the state's senior and disabled citizens for financial gain creates the need for more workers protecting their interests. Adult Protective Services cases grew about 54 percent between 2009 and 2013.

Staff Levels Constant as Adult Protective Services Cases Rise



Source: Department of Human Services

Cuts in recent years are set to continue limiting services in 2015. Next year's budget for Aging Services maintains a reduction of \$9 million, or about 10 percent, since 2009. Alzheimer's respite, wellness and nutrition education programs and other aging services have been slashed in recent years. The proposed 2015 budget does not include enough money to restore services provided by the Division of Aging to pre-recession levels.

The ongoing budget shortfall is particularly tough on people who rely on the state's Elder Community Living Services. This initiative allows older Georgians to live independent lives in their own communities instead of nursing homes, which are more expensive for individuals and the state. The proposed 2015 budget provides no additional money for these services. Aging experts requested \$6 million for 2015 to help shrink the waiting list of requests for assistance. That includes about 12,000 people asking for assistance with home-delivered meals, transportation, minor home repairs and other services.