

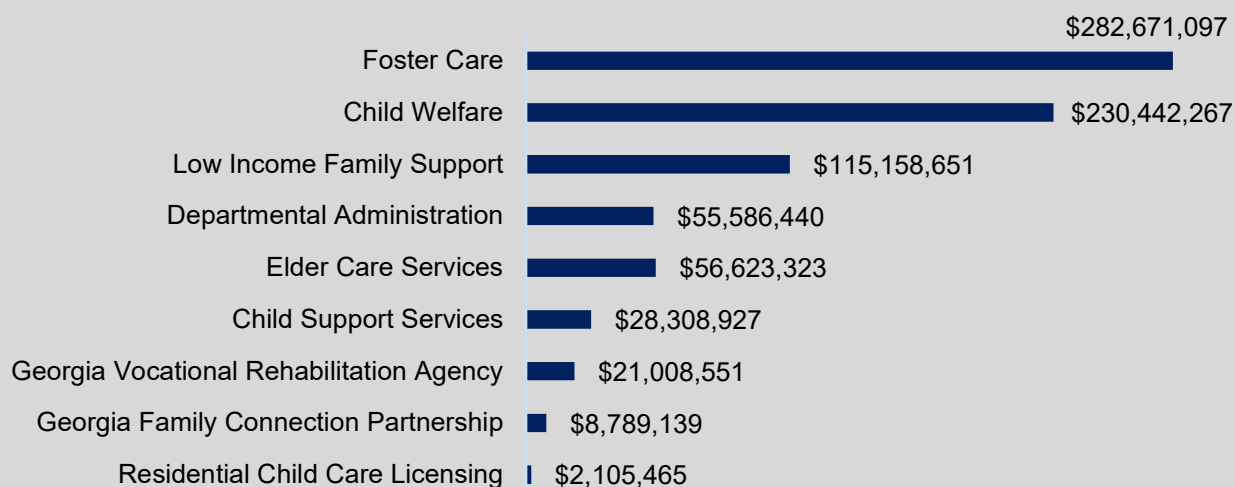
Overview: Georgia's 2021 Fiscal Year Budget for Human Services

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Gov. Brian Kemp's proposed \$800 million Department of Human Services budget for the 2021 fiscal year includes cuts to critical programs that support Georgia's foster care system and help ensure the safety and protection of Georgia's most vulnerable children. The 2021 proposal reduces investment in the agency by \$28.8 million less than the budget lawmakers approved last year. While the agency is tasked with making significant enhancements to service delivery to reduce the number of youths in foster care and the number of reports of child abuse, the budget proposal nearly eliminates the ability of the agency to grow the staff capacity needed to reach more children and families.

The largest share of state funding for the agency is for child welfare- and foster care-related services. The Georgia Division of Family and Children Services' (DFCS) efforts to protect vulnerable children account for about 64 percent of the agency's overall budget. Following closely are state investments to pay the salaries of eligibility staff for federal low-income assistance programs such as Medicaid, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). Smaller yet vital programs such as vocational training for adults with disabilities and elder protection services account for the remaining funds.

FY 2021 Budget Proposal Sends \$800 Million to the Department of Human Services



Source: [Governor's Budget Report Fiscal Year 2021](#), pages 206-221.

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By the Numbers

Amended 2020 Fiscal Year highlights

- \$25.4 million decrease in agency funding in this current fiscal year
- \$5 million reduction in spending for the Georgia Gateway online eligibility system used to access public benefits
- \$3.8 million reduction due to the elimination of 42 foster care and child welfare positions
- \$1.2 million reduction due to the elimination of 67 child support services agent positions
- \$250,000 reduction in spending for foster parent outreach and recruitment

2021 Fiscal Year highlights

- \$28.8 million decrease in agency funding for fiscal year 2021
- \$6.2 million reduction due to the elimination of more than 130 vacant child protection and foster care caseworkers
- \$2.2 million reduction due to the elimination of more than 100 vacant caseworker positions that help children and families with low incomes access public assistance
- \$5 million reduction in funding for the Georgia Gateway online eligibility system for accessing public benefits
- \$1.7 million reduction due to the elimination of 101 child support services agent positions
- \$250,000 reduction in spending for foster parent outreach and recruitment
- \$3.9 million transfer of federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) funds to fill budget holes in child welfare services
- \$4.5 million in \$1,000 pay raises to full-time agency staff who earn less than \$40,000 annually

Budget Includes Cuts to Key Priorities

While addressing the needs of Georgia's foster care system remains a core mission for the agency, the proposed spending cuts may limit future progress. In the 2018 and 2019 budgets, former Governor Deal helped ease the financial costs associated with caring for foster youth by raising the per diem rates for families. In 2020, Governor Kemp continued that promise by adding about \$10 million to cover the costs for additional foster families.

In contrast, the FY 2021 budget includes deep cuts to child welfare and foster care spending by \$16 million, with no additional funds to assist foster families in meeting the basic needs of their children. Currently, nearly 13,000 children are in Georgia's foster care system. In the governor's State of the State address, he mentioned major reforms to the foster care system, most notably tripling the state's adoption tax credit and lowering the age threshold for an adult to adopt to 21. However, special attention must be given to the case load for DFCS caseworkers, because the agency is already understaffed.

The 2021 budget also reduces state spending on caseworkers who help low-income Georgians access public assistance. By eliminating 100 vacant caseworker positions, frontline staff in local DFCS offices may continue to face large caseloads. As a result, processing times for applications for programs like SNAP and Medicaid may become longer.

For example, DFCS caseworkers are required to approve applications for eligible individuals seeking SNAP within 30 days, according to federal law. Georgia has not always met this “*standard of promptness*” and has experienced significant delays in processing times. In joint budget hearings with legislators, the director of the DFCS offices ensured the audience that standard of promptness will be met due to improvements to Georgia’s online portal for accessing benefits, Gateway. However, the Gateway system is also seeing a reduction of \$5 million in 2021.

Moreover, under this budget, nearly \$3.9 million in additional TANF funds are being transferred to fill holes in child welfare-related services that were created by this year’s state spending cuts. TANF is meant to fund cash assistance and programs related to work and education, but in FY 2021, Georgia will spend just 3 percent of its annual TANF award (\$330 million) on programs directly related to work and education, with more than 50 percent of its annual TANF award now going toward child welfare-related programs.