

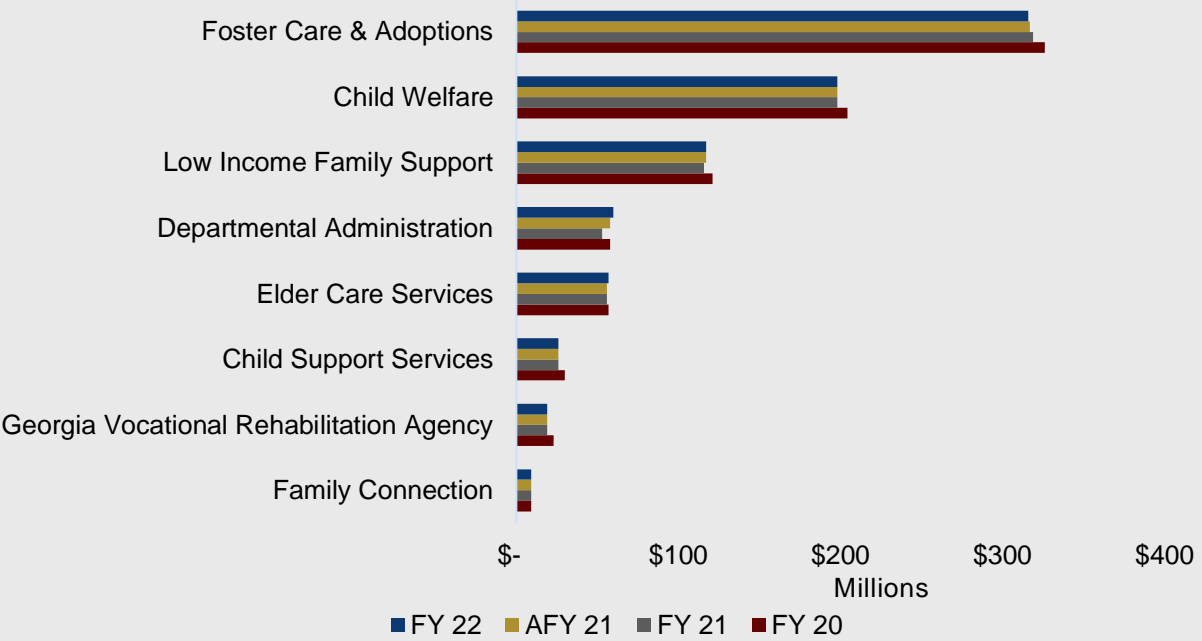
Overview: Georgia’s 2022 Fiscal Year Budget for Human Services

By: Alex Camardelle, Senior Policy Analyst, Economic Mobility

The Governor is requesting very small increases in select programs administered by the Department of Human Services (DHS). The request amends the current fiscal year (FY 2021) spending plan by providing a .5 percent bump in spending, and for the next fiscal year (FY 2022) increases funds one percent.

The amended budget request brings the FY 2021 budget for the agency to \$800 million, up from \$796 million. If approved, the governor’s budget request would raise it slightly more to \$803 million in the new fiscal year. Despite the small increase, the governor’s budget request would maintain about \$29 million in harsh cuts to the department enacted after COVID-19 in the amended budget, and \$26 million in the new fiscal year.

Proposed Human Services Funding for AFY 21 and FY 2022 Would Still Fall Below FY 2020 Levels in Most Program Areas



Source: The Governor’s Budget Report Amended Fiscal Year 2021 and Fiscal Year 2022; House Bill 31 (2020).

By the Numbers

Proposed Amended FY 2021 Highlights

- \$700,000 added to federal eligibility benefit services for the implementation of the Patients First Act
- About \$5 million added for the implementation of the Patients First Act, the state's new health-care-related laws under Georgia's 1115 Medicaid waiver plan, in departmental administration¹
- \$413,000 transferred from foster care to departmental administration to cover an increase in Conduent's volume-based contract. Conduent is the company responsible for managing Georgia's electronic benefits transfer (EBT) programs
- About \$2 million in state funds replaced with enhanced Federal Medical Assistance Percentages (FMAP) dollars in foster care

Proposed Fiscal Year 2022 Highlights

- \$4.5 million added to address a growth in adoptions
- \$14.3 million reduction in foster care funds to reflect savings from a decline in monthly foster care placements
- \$6.5 million added to reflect the anticipated loss of foster care and permanency funds provided by enhanced federal funding
- \$944,000 added to Federal Benefit Eligibility Services to support the implementation of the Patients First Act
- \$7.2 million added to Departmental Administration to support the implementation of the Patients First Act
- \$1.3 million added to the Division of Aging Services to hire 13 adult protective services caseworkers and three public guardianship caseworkers

Child Welfare

The agency is the state's child protection arm, providing child welfare services. The agency investigates and provides case management services for reports of child abuse and neglect. The budget request makes no changes to the current or new fiscal year budget for child welfare services.

Foster Care and Adoptions

Through the Division of Family and Child Services (DFCS) housed at DHS, the agency manages the state's foster care and adoption system. DFCS staff and partners throughout the state assist with the placement of children who become involved in the foster care system. The agency also issues payments to families who foster in the form of a per diem. Some children are also fostered in group homes, and the agency monitors and provides

licensing to these homes. Due to a one-time increase in FMAP approved in COVID-relief legislation, the agency is able to replace about \$2 million in state funds with increased federal dollars to pay for Foster Care Maintenance payments. If approved, the request for the new fiscal year (FY 2022) anticipates a loss in the enhanced FMAP and adds about \$6.5 million to continue foster care maintenance payments.

Additional funds are included to address an increase in adoptions as well. The current fiscal year budget for adoptions will remain unchanged, but if approved, the new fiscal year budget will include about \$4.5 million for adoption assistance.

Division of Aging Services

The Division of Aging Services provides support to Georgia's elderly population, adults with disabilities and their caregivers. The Division employs staff that investigate reports of elder abuse and administers services that support the economic and health needs of the elderly. The budget request makes no changes for the current fiscal year but does propose additional funding for the new fiscal year. The request would provide about \$974,000 to add 13 adult protective services caseworkers to investigate reports of abuse, neglect and/or exploitation of seniors and adults with disabilities.

The budget would also add \$231,000 to add three public guardianship caseworkers to coordinate and monitor all services needed for the health and wellbeing of guardianship clients. Public guardianship case managers act as surrogate decision-makers and advocate for persons under guardianship, and also coordinate and monitor all services needed for the support, care, education, health and welfare of guardianship clients.

Low Income Assistance

The department was responsible for delivering an unprecedented amount of income support and other forms of assistance to Georgians with very little or no income during the COVID-19 crisis. Many of these programs are federally funded, including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Medicaid, Nutrition Assistance for Women, Infants and Children (WIC), Low Income Home Energy Assistance Programs (LIHEAP) and several others.

The request amends this current fiscal year budget to transfer about \$413,000 from foster care to cover contracts for Conduent, the private corporation responsible for electronic benefits transfer (EBT) in the state. EBT is used to issue payments to individuals and families enrolled in WIC, SNAP and TANF.

The agency assists Georgians with very low incomes with work support. Last year, the agency had to eliminate 13 contracts for TANF-funded services that helped TANF-eligible

families find employment, access cash benefits and other critical safety net services. The governor's budget request continues a harmful tradition of using TANF funding for purposes other than direct cash aid. Budget writers have become dependent on using TANF to continue Georgia's cuts-only approach to balancing the state budget instead of raising new revenues and deploying TANF funding for its intended purpose—direct cash aid for people at or near the poverty line. Despite the unprecedented rise in unemployment and financial hardship, this budget does not restore those contracts for TANF-funded services, appropriate additional funds for cash assistance or add additional funds to support rising caseload numbers in SNAP or other safety net programs.

Funds are being added to support the implementation of the Patients First Act passed in the 2018 Legislative Session. This funding will be used in part to upgrade technology to allow for the screening of applicants, as well as hire staff to assist with eligibility determination and the monitoring of work requirements.

End Notes

¹ Harker, L. (2019, November 25). GBPI presents 1115 waiver public *comments*. Georgia Budget and Policy Institute. <https://gbpi.org/1115-waiver-public-comments/>