



June 1, 2020

# Agency Strategic Plan

## Fiscal Years 2021-2025

*DRAFT*



Texas Department of Family and Protective Services



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## Agency Mission, Vision, and Values

### **DFPS Mission**

We promote safe and healthy families and protect children and vulnerable adults from abuse, neglect, and exploitation.

### **DFPS Vision**

Improving the lives of those we serve.

### **DFPS Values**

- **Accountable:** We act with a sense of urgency to deliver results in an accountable, ethical, and transparent manner.
- **Respectful:** We recognize the value of each person and act timely, value privacy, and treat all with respect.
- **Diverse:** We promote diversity, inclusion, and equality by honoring individual differences.
- **Collaborative:** Whether through our staff or contractors, we work in partnership with clients, families, and communities to ensure our mutual success.
- **Professional:** We value our staff and strive for excellence while being professional, passionate, and innovative.

## Goal 1: Client Services

### Improve direct delivery services to meet client, family, and community needs.

*Our agency exists to protect vulnerable Texans from abuse, neglect, and exploitation.*

*Continuous improvement to client services is central to our mission and should be proactive, data-driven, and constantly evolving.*

## Action Items

Action Item 1: Improve practices for better client outcomes to maximize the safety, permanency, and well-being of clients, families, and communities served through August 31, 2025.

Action Item 2: Build placement capacity to help ensure clients can stay in their local communities and achieve permanency through August 31, 2025.

Action Item 3: Promote evidence-informed practices in service delivery through August 31, 2025.

Action Item 4: Reduce the average time to achieve permanency for children in CPS conservatorship to 15.4 months by August 31, 2022.

Action Item 5: Improve placement resources and services through staged implementation of Community-Based Care and targeted capacity-building efforts across the state through August 31, 2025.

Action Item 6: Improve the quality of services to clients by implementing performance-based contracting and testing and evaluating the use of contracting services through August 31, 2025.

Action Item 7: Develop and implement the second-generation five-year strategic plan for the administration of Prevention and Early Intervention (PEI) programs to enhance positive outcomes for children and families through August 31, 2025.

Action Item 8: Fully engage families through funding, caseworker training, tools, and conferences as the agency and its community-based prevention partners work with children and families through August 31, 2025.

Action Item 9: Maintain reduction of Statewide Intake (SWI) call hold times and rate of abandoned calls through August 31, 2025.

Action Item 10: Establish an agency-wide strategy for soliciting customer satisfaction through surveys and use those results to improve service delivery through August 31, 2025.

Action Item 11: Use the Special Investigator positions statewide to provide consistent training on proper forensic investigation techniques through August 31, 2025.

## How Goal 1 Action Items Support Statewide Objectives

### Accountability

DFPS works to ensure that the DFPS mission, vision, and values are reflected in the work of staff and that the agency remains accountable to the community. DFPS promotes accountability to the public by working to build capacity, learning from the community and other state child welfare agencies, incorporating evidence-informed best practices, and continuously evaluating agency work and the work of contractors through data-driven analysis and client feedback.

### Efficiency

DFPS practices good stewardship of state resources by promoting efficient processes while maintaining or improving the quality of services provided to clients. Single Source Continuum Contractors in DFPS's Community-Based Care initiative oversee placement and services to children in DFPS conservatorship. Additional placement capacity closer to local communities serves a dual role of improving client outcomes while minimizing inefficiencies.

### Effectiveness

DFPS prioritizes effectiveness in client services by proactively seeking to maximize client safety, permanency, and satisfaction with our work. DFPS uses multiple family-centered approaches to serve clients and their families. Community-Based Care allows CPS to access the flexibility, innovation and opportunities available to a non-profit or governmental entity to serve the children and families of Texas in the best way possible. By continuously improving services and promoting evidence-informed practices in service delivery, the agency can more directly and effectively serve client needs.

### Excellence in Customer Service

As a client-focused, public-facing agency, DFPS strives for optimal customer service. This includes increasing community visibility and outreach, encouraging client and community feedback, and using this information to make meaningful improvements to customer service delivery.

### Transparency

Transparency is central to maximizing client satisfaction with services provided. DFPS strives to keep Texans informed of the impacts to services and operations through the public website and by partnering with trusted local organizations. DFPS continuously seeks input from stakeholders to improve operations and address community needs.

### Other Considerations

DFPS has no other considerations to report for this goal.

## Goal 2: Workforce Stability and Development

**Increase workforce stability and retention of institutional knowledge by focusing on attracting, retaining, and developing highly qualified staff.**

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*Staff carry out the agency's mission, provide continuity of services, and are the face of the agency to clients, families, and communities. Staff turnover threatens client outcomes as well as agency effectiveness and efficiency. It is in the best interest of both the agency and our clients to attract and retain the most qualified employees possible.*

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### Action Items

- Action Item 1: Build the agency's mission, vision, and values into agency culture so that it guides employee actions and directs policy decisions through August 31, 2025.
- Action Item 2: Continuously examine the drivers of turnover and identify feasible reduction and possible retention solutions for both field staff and support staff through August 31, 2025.
- Action Item 3: Strengthen the process for transitioning workforce to Single-Source Continuum Contractors under the Community-Based Care model through August 31, 2025.
- Action Item 4: Continuously evaluate staff development programs agency-wide, including staff orientation, mentoring and cross-training of established staff through August 31, 2025.
- Action Item 5: Establish a strategy to identify and develop potential leaders and provide professional development for current leaders to support succession planning efforts through August 31, 2025.
- Action Item 6: Explore opportunities to provide support for worker safety, including responding to the effects of secondary trauma, through August 31, 2025.
- Action Item 7: Ensure collaboration between the Center for Learning and Organizational Excellence and agency programs to identify potential training needs for field and non-field staff through August 31, 2025.

## How Goal 2 Action Items Support Statewide Objectives

### Accountability

DFPS's compelling mission attracts responsible and civic-minded staff. It is incumbent upon DFPS leadership to provide a welcoming and supportive work environment, fostering commitment and longevity for all DFPS employees. A solid knowledge base and set of skills takes time to develop. Supported, tenured staff are more effective at their jobs and better prepared to serve vulnerable Texans. Accountability to both clients and the public requires a commitment to staff support and workforce stability and development.

### Efficiency

High staff turnover and low employee morale are an enormous cost to any organization. DFPS requires large numbers of competent, detailed, and determined workers. Considerable time and resources are lost between the time that an employee leaves their position and their replacement reaches their level of competence and institutional knowledge. Improving workforce stability allows DFPS to dedicate more resources to serving clients and developing existing staff and less to recruitment and onboarding.

### Effectiveness

Tenured staff not only are more efficient, due to the complex nature of the work performed by DFPS, they are also more effective. Developing confident, highly productive employees is a time intensive process – particularly in the field. Staff turnover across all levels is disruptive to this process and affects continuity of services for our clients. Ongoing and engaging staff training opportunities, leadership development, and mentorship programs increase staff satisfaction and empower staff to excel in both their current positions and in future positions with the agency.

### Excellence in Customer Service

Better employees result in better customer service. Staff with more training and experience provide faster and more effective services, resulting in better client outcomes and reduced hold times at intake. DFPS has an opportunity to provide superior services by attracting, developing, and retaining the highest quality staff possible.

### Transparency

Fulfilling the agency's mission involves targeted and tactful public engagement, whether at intake, while assessing client safety, or when providing services. By optimizing the quality and morale of experienced, well-supported staff, DFPS can better fulfill its promise of transparent, effective service delivery to the public.

### Other Considerations

DFPS has no other considerations to report for this goal.

## Goal 3: Process Improvement

**Strengthen internal processes by better analyzing agency operations and identifying and correcting areas for more efficient and effective operations.**

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*The agency strives to continuously evolve and provide the best services possible with maximum efficiency. This requires a constant focus on reviewing processes, correcting inefficiencies, and adapting to change.*

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### Action Items

Action Item 1: Establish an on-going method to identify processes, policies, and information technology project management practices that can be improved to allow for more efficient and productive work through August 31, 2025.

Action Item 2: Incorporate staff feedback to agency processes and policies and monitor for effectiveness. Include planning on how to insulate productivity from short-term adjustments and emergencies through August 31, 2025.

Action Item 3: Identify and evaluate the potential for innovative service delivery options through August 31, 2025.

Action Item 4: Maximize the use of data in agency processes and continue data-driven improvements through August 31, 2025.

Action Item 5: Improve service delivery to clients by exploring innovative provider contracting and procurement with simplified and consistent processes through August 31, 2025.

Action Item 6: Maximize SWI service availability by fully staffing Texarkana call center by August 31, 2025.

Action Item 7: Encourage all director-level staff to develop contacts with counterparts in other states to exchange best practices, especially in areas of IT, telework, and facilities utilization through August 31, 2025.

Action Item 8: Explore options to improve or replace SWI telephone system for more efficient operations by August 31, 2025.

Action Item 9: Report annually the progress of all program services and related plans for improvements through August 31, 2025.

## How Goal 3 Action Items Support Statewide Objectives

### Accountability

Accountability requires a commitment to improvement and innovation. DFPS continuously analyzes internal processes and agency operations for areas of improvement and solicits feedback from clients and community partners to ensure that it is meeting client and community needs. DFPS's status as a stand-alone agency provides new opportunities for the agency to get even closer to the community it serves and to take greater responsibility for internal processes that affect case outcomes.

### Efficiency

Efficiency is central to DFPS's commitment to process improvement. A formalized, proactive process to review operations and make improvements ensures optimal effectiveness at a minimal cost. Reviewing agency-wide responses to current and past emergencies helps DFPS prepare for continuity of operations during future emergencies so that services are uninterrupted. Additionally, DFPS continues to examine opportunities for innovation and improvement in contract services and other support programs.

### Effectiveness

DFPS strives to constantly improve client outcomes and delivery of services by continuously seeking out areas of inefficiency and potential for improvement and innovation. DFPS identifies and reinforces existing policies that encourage productive work, uses staff feedback to review changes to agency processes, seeks innovative service delivery options, and makes data-driven decisions to increase agency effectiveness.

### Excellence in Customer Service

Providing the best customer service possible is central to the agency's goals. DFPS seeks to provide excellence in customer service through its commitment to evolve and improve at every opportunity. DFPS solicits feedback from clients and community partners to improve internal processes and service delivery options. Additionally, innovative provider contracts maximize the effectiveness and efficiency of client-facing resources.

### Transparency

DFPS incorporates outcome data along with staff and client feedback into decision-making. Publishing annual progress of services and plans for improvement invites informed feedback from the community. DFPS exists to protect Texas' most vulnerable populations and welcomes outside and inside perspectives as it reviews and improves its operations.

## **Other Considerations**

DFPS IRM has published its existing methodology for information technology project management practices as the DFPS-wide approach for information technology projects in accordance with Texas Administrative Code Section 216.10.

## Goal 4: Teamwork

### Enhance internal communications to ensure cohesion among divisions.

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*The Texas Department of Family and Protective Services serves a large, diverse, and populous state through a wide array of functions and services. Optimize communication and relations across divisions and functional areas.*

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#### Action Items

Action Item 1: Actively promote a more cohesive culture and collaboration between divisions in the agency to close communication gaps through August 31, 2025.

Action Item 2: Strengthen executive communication to administrative divisions and program areas to foster better support and understanding of the legal, financial, and operational context for decisions through August 31, 2025.

Action Item 3: Ensure all internal stakeholders are represented when establishing new programs and processes to build staff buy-in and to make sure all perspectives are considered through August 31, 2025.

## How Goal 4 Action Items Support Statewide Objectives

### Accountability

Teamwork and collaboration between agency divisions and individual staff are integral to meeting the needs of vulnerable Texans. Collaboration and increased transparency between programs allow staff to hold each other accountable, to check each other's work, and to welcome fresh perspectives.

### Efficiency

Teamwork is a necessary part of efficient operations. Collaboration and teamwork across divisions allows for shared knowledge and resources, breaking down silos, and limiting duplicated efforts.

### Effectiveness

DFPS is a large agency and its divisions must simultaneously have the flexibility to face challenges as they arise while providing continuity of operations to ensure a solid network of assistance. If divisions are too autonomous, services lack consistency and vulnerable Texans can inadvertently fail to receive needed services. Effectiveness of operations requires communication and teamwork across divisions to best meet client needs. This includes effective internal communication about legal, financial, and operational decisions and making sure that all internal stakeholders are consulted when beginning new programs.

### Excellence in Customer Service

DFPS strives to provide optimal customer service by ensuring access and continuity among services to all Texans. Effective teamwork encourages information sharing among staff, and provides coherent division of services between programs, avoiding duplication or overlap of services.

### Transparency

Active collaboration between agency divisions assists in the ability to communicate with clients and community stakeholders in a clear, consistent, and accurate manner. Likewise, internal transparency is essential to effective teamwork. Transparency between programs and between executive and non-executive level staff improves cohesion, efficiency, internal relations and employee satisfaction.

### Other Considerations

DFPS has no other considerations to report for this goal.

## Goal 5: Community Relations

**Improve external communications and outreach to better inform the public and assist with protecting clients, families, and communities.**

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*Achieving the agency's mission is aided by communication and collaboration with a variety of external entities. These include community groups, media organizations, local law enforcement, and the state Legislature.*

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### Action Items

- Action Item 1: Continue to strive to reflect the mission, vision, and values of the agency and the positive impact DFPS has on clients, families, and communities in Texas through August 31, 2025.
- Action Item 2: Use agency data and positive engagement to accurately portray the agency's strengths and needs through August 31, 2025.
- Action Item 3: Continue agency presence at key public events to sustain existing and build additional relationships with external partners with assistance from the Faith-Based and Community Engagement Division through August 31, 2025.
- Action Item 4: Continue to strengthen relationships with law enforcement agencies through August 31, 2025.
- Action Item 5: Expand technical assistance and support to communities to help them plan, assess, choose appropriate evidence-based programs to support families, collaborate in the community, leverage private dollars, and sustain their efforts through August 31, 2025.
- Action Item 6: Promote public awareness of protective factors for children, including topics such as safe sleep for infants, supervision to prevent drowning and hyperthermia deaths in cars, effective ways to nurture children, safe ways to manage the stress of parenting, and the need for early childhood immunizations through August 31, 2025.

## How Goal 5 Action Items Support Statewide Objectives

### Accountability

Promoting public awareness of DFPS services through a robust community relations campaign opens a dialogue with communities and stakeholders across Texas. By improving partnerships with the public and by increasing the visibility of agency services, DFPS has an opportunity to work more collaboratively with clients, families, and communities.

### Efficiency

DFPS responds more efficiently and effectively when communities are informed of the ways in which DFPS may assist. DFPS strives to work collaboratively with its client communities and promote its mission.

### Effectiveness

The mission of DFPS is to promote safe and healthy families and protect children and vulnerable adults from abuse, neglect, and exploitation. It would be impossible for DFPS to effectively carry out its mission without working directly and collaboratively with local communities. DFPS relies on the community to report abuse and neglect. Local communities rely on DFPS to keep them informed of safe and healthy family practices. Analyzing ways in which DFPS may improve and expand community relations and putting our conclusions into action directly impacts how effective we are in carrying out the mission of our agency.

### Excellence in Customer Service

Community engagement is a crucial component of customer service. By partnering with the public, DFPS can better promote its value to the community while simultaneously improving the way it interacts with clients and meets their needs. The commitment to excellence in customer service allows for a dialogue to happen across the state to ensure that the agency and the community better understand each other. DFPS's new Faith-Based and Community Engagement Division is dedicated to community relations and will enhance DFPS's ability to provide excellent customer service.

### Transparency

DFPS cannot be transparent in its operations without expansive community relations. DFPS strives to work collaboratively with community groups, increasing its visibility and earning buy-in from clients, families, and communities. This effort includes use of agency data and social media to accurately portray the agency's strengths and needs, attending public events to help build collaborative relationships, and providing opportunities for community feedback.

### Other Considerations

DFPS has no other considerations to report for this goal.

## Redundancies and Impediments

### Human Resources Code, Section 48.1521. INVESTIGATION OF COMPLEX CASES

Description: This section requires counties with populations of 250,000 or more to create Adult Protective Services (APS) special task units (STUs) to review cases of abuse, neglect, and exploitation of older adults. These STUs are to be made up of community members, and the intent is to provide a multidisciplinary group to advise APS on difficult cases. In some parts of the state, STUs are effective. However, in many parts of the state, Community Resource Coordination Groups for Adults are more effective than STUs. Maintaining the STU with enough members with expertise in banking, law enforcement, mental health services, forensic accounting and legal is difficult.

Recommendation: Change language from “shall” to “may,” and remove the population requirement.

Benefit: The recommended change would create efficiencies by redirecting APS resources to counties that would benefit from a STU and divert staff resources in counties where STUs are inactive.

### Human Resources Code, Section 48.1523. MANAGEMENT REVIEW FOLLOWING CERTAIN INVESTIGATIONS

Description: This section requires APS supervisors to review investigations of APS clients with two or more previous APS investigations. APS has other mechanisms in place to indicate if a client has two or more prior investigations. APS implemented a structured decision-making model that assists caseworkers in identifying individuals at risk of experiencing abuse, neglect, or exploitation within six to twelve months of a closed investigation. Additionally, the Information Management Protecting Adults and Children in Texas (IMPACT) software places indicators on investigations of clients who have an open APS case, or for clients who have had two or more cases in the last 12 months. Lastly, SWI includes prior cases involving the same client in intake reports.

Recommendation: Remove this section from statute.

Benefit: The recommended change would create efficiencies by reducing duplicative efforts.

### Government Code, Section 2155.089. REPORTING VENDOR PERFORMANCE

Description: This section requires vendor performance reporting requirements that, for emergency child placements through child-specific contracts (CSCs), impose a burdensome and

redundant administration duty on contract management staff, as well as contract oversight staff reporting to the Comptroller. The reporting of CSC placements does not benefit the State of Texas, as DFPS is the single state agency that enters into these types of client service emergency placements.

Recommendation: Add child specific contracts to the exemptions listed in subsection (c) of this section.

Benefit: The recommended change would allow contract management staff and contract oversight staff to expend more time on critical tasks such as focusing on more meaningful performance and compliance activities.

#### **Government Code, Section 2155.144. PROCUREMENTS BY HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES AGENCIES**

Description: DFPS maintains client service contracts that follow HHSC purchasing authority and rules. Most DFPS client services are obtained via open enrollment, a solicitation method unique to HHSC and client services and not used by the Comptroller and its general purchasing authority. Not having access to the enrollment process would adversely impact DFPS client service contracts. In addition, enrollment contracts under HHSC are exempt from certain reporting requirements, such as the Vendor Performance Tracking System, which would overwhelm DFPS administratively if it had to comply with these requirements.

Recommendation: Add DFPS as an agency to which this section applies.

Benefit: The recommended change would create efficiencies in acquiring goods and services for the benefit or on behalf of clients of programs operated by the agency.

#### **Family Code, Section 102.0091(d). WAIVER OF CITATION**

Description: Unless a parent is incarcerated, this provision requires that a waiver of service must be signed before a notary public. Particularly with the significant volume of CPS cases involving a parent(s) in Mexico or Central America, this can create a barrier to permanency. A parent may be willing to sign a waiver of service, but understandably unwilling to seek out and pay for a notary. Although the fees are nominal, the logistics of a state agency paying a notary in a foreign country makes make getting a waiver impractical. While U.S. embassies and consulate typically provide notary services for a fee, requests for a fee waiver for state agency child protective services have not been successful.

Recommendation: Amend the last sentence of the statute as follows: “This subsection does not apply if the party executing the waiver is incarcerated or resides outside the United States.”

**Benefit:** The recommended change would substantially simplify service of process in cases involving parents willing to waive service but living abroad. For the many CPS cases involving a parent in Mexico, this could eliminate a huge delay. Mexico has objected to service by international mail under the Hague Convention, which means service in Mexico must go through the formal Hague process, which takes a minimum of five months, often much longer. While that is unavoidable in many cases, at least where a parent is willing to sign a waiver, we could avoid this type of delay, which would otherwise prolong a child's stay in foster care.

### **Family Code, Section 261.201. CONFIDENTIALITY AND DISCLOSURE OF INFORMATION**

**Description:** Statutory changes made during the 85th Regular Session and organizational restructuring of CPS/CPI and child care investigations (CCI)/child care licensing (CCL) have created confusion regarding this section. Further updates to it and other statutes in chapter 261 are necessary to clarify which statutes do and do not apply to CCI. Specifically, subsection (h) contains a provision that excludes CCI from the confidentiality provisions in that section as CCI was previously (and to some extent, still is) governed by Human Resources Code chapter 42; however, subsection (h) predates these recent legislative changes. This creates confusion for the public and staff, including records management staff, when redacting and releasing investigation reports for the different programs.

**Recommendation:** Delete subsection (h) of this section.

**Benefit:** The recommended change would eliminate redundancies in confidentiality statutes and possible conflicts in release of information to entitled persons and would create a more efficient process for the DFPS Records Management Group when redacting documents if they were able to apply the same confidentiality statute for all child abuse and neglect investigations.

### **Family Code, Section 261.303. INTERFERENCE WITH INVESTIGATION; COURT ORDER**

**Description:** Subsection (b)(3) of this section allows DFPS to transport a child for the purpose of interviewing them, but the 4th Amendment of the United States Constitution requires consent, court order or exigent circumstances before transport can occur. Subsection (b) does not specifically authorize transport of a child to a Child Advocacy Center (CAC) for a forensic interview. In practice, CPI investigators screen for sexual abuse, but cease questioning and refer children to a forensic interview at a CAC if the child makes an outcry. This practice lessens the chances of re-traumatizing a child victim of sexual abuse by limiting the number of times the child is asked to disclose the abuse. In investigations in which a child is referred to a CAC forensic interview, but the parent or parents refuse, DFPS is not able to obtain a court order for

the transport of the child to a CAC for a forensic interview. This results in inefficient or ineffective agency operations because it leads to more complicated legal staff meetings, and possible removal of a child (with accompanying requirements for documentation and staff hours) when a simple court order to transport the child for forensic interview could have been sought instead. Some counties already interpret 261.303 to allow transport for interview, but it only specifically authorizes transport for medical, psychological, or psychiatric examination.

**Recommendation:** Amend subsection (b) of the statute to read: “If admission to the home, school, or any place where the child may be cannot be obtained, then for good cause shown the court having family law jurisdiction shall order the parent, the person responsible for the care of the children, or the person in charge of any place where the child may be to allow entrance or transport of the child to a Child Advocacy Center for the interview, examination, and investigation.”

**Benefit:** This change would allow caseworkers to expend more time on critical tasks while avoiding unnecessary legal meetings and proceedings such as removal. Preventing unnecessary removal has the added benefit of avoiding the trauma to a child that surrounds removal.

