



Child Protective Investigator and Child Protective Investigator Supervisor

ANNUAL REPORT

Florida Department of Children and Families

Office of Child & Family Well-Being

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Purpose

This report, pursuant to section 402.402(5), Florida Statutes (F.S.), requires the Florida Department of Children and Families (Department) to provide a status report to the Governor, President of the Senate, and Speaker of the House of Representatives as to the educational qualifications, turnover, professional advancement, and working conditions of the Department's Child Protective Investigators (CPI), Senior Child Protective Investigators (Senior CPI), Child Protective Investigator Supervisors (CPI Supervisor), and other child protective investigative staff.

Educational Qualifications

Section 402.402(1), F.S., requires the Department to recruit and hire persons qualified by their education and experience to perform social work functions and provide guidance for preference to individuals having a social work degree. A second level preference is given to individuals with a human service-related degree including: psychology, sociology, counseling, special education, education, human development, child development, family development, marriage and family therapy, and nursing.

Additionally, a third level preference is to hire persons with baccalaureate degrees who have a combination of direct relevant work or volunteer experience, preferably in a public service field related to children's services, demonstrating critical thinking skills, formal assessment processes, communication skills, problem solving, and empathy with a commitment to helping children and families.

As of July 7, 2026, a People First data extract indicated a total of 1,869 employees were serving in either CPI, Senior CPI, CPI Supervisor, or Field Support Consultant (FSC) roles. Of that number, 1,266 staff were identified as having a bachelor's degree; 185 were identified as having a master's degree; three were identified as having a doctorate degree; 60 were identified as educational data unavailable; and 355 were identified as high school graduates, having an associate degree, or some years of college with associated work experience.

The total active child protective investigative staff currently holding a degree in Social Work is 104 (5.56 percent).

Table 1 - Educational Qualifications for Department Child Protective Investigation Positions							
Fiscal Year	Position	Some College and/or Work Experience	Bachelor's Degree	Master's Degree	Doctorate Degree	Unavailable	Social Work Degree
2025-26	CPI, Senior CPI, FSC, CPI Supervisor	355	1,266	185	3	60	104
Fiscal Year	Position	Some College and/or Work Experience	Bachelor's Degree	Master's degree	Doctorate Degree	Unavailable	Social Work Degree
2024-25	CPI, Senior CPI, FSC, CPI Supervisor	328	1,261	165	3	72	112

Turnover

The CPI role is a demanding position that requires strong critical thinking and problem-solving skills. The high-stress nature of the job involves unpredictable hours, tight timeframes, fluctuating caseloads, and exposure to trauma. These demands contribute to burnout and emotional and psychological strain, making long-term retention more challenging. Turnover can further increase caseloads for remaining investigators and impact the Department's ability to maintain an experienced and specialized workforce.

The Department's Turnover rate for Child Protective Investigator positions decreased by 2.32 percentage points from the previous fiscal year, with the greatest improvement occurring among CPI Supervisors.

Table 2 - Turnover Rate of Department Child Protective Investigation Positions						
	FY 2025-26			FY 2024-25		
Position (FTE)	FTE	# separated	% Turnover	FTE	# separated	% Turnover
CPI	1,151.5	723	62.79%	1,180.5	753	63.79%
Senior CPI	282	49	17.38%	261	45	17.24%
FSC	116	13	11.21%	104	9	8.65%
CPI Supervisor	300.5	35	11.65%	292	50	17.12%
Total	1,850	820	44.32%	1,837.5	857	46.64%

**For Table 2, FTE represents the average number of employees in each position during the fiscal year.

Vacancy Rates

Table 3 - Vacancy Rate of Department Child Protective Investigation Positions			
Position (FTE)	FY 2025-26	FY 2024-25	Change from FY 2024-25
CPI	11.57%	12.72%	- 1.15%
Senior CPI	4.84%	11.30%	- 6.46%
FSC	5.84%	28.97%	- 23.13%
CPI Supervisor	8.66%	10.54%	- 1.88%

Vacancy rates declined across all CPI positions, demonstrating continued progress in workforce stabilization and retention.

Recruitment Efforts

The Department continues to deploy several strategies to address recruitment challenges for CPI and CPI Supervisor positions, which have effectively resulted in a reduction in the vacancy rate. Additionally, there are several support positions in place to assist investigators and supervisors, ensuring a holistic approach to serving our families. These include FSCs, Analysts, Family Finders, Multi-Disciplinary Team Specialists, Family Navigators, Behavioral Health Consultants, and staff from HOPE Florida. Subject Matter Experts specializing in substance abuse, mental health, and domestic violence also provide guidance during investigations. This collaborative approach helps ensure families receive the best

possible support while strengthening the work of investigators. Enhanced, modernized technology with the Comprehensive Child Welfare Information System (CCWIS) is currently being implemented to improve efficiency. In addition, streamlined processes for cases involving less immediate safety concerns help investigators focus their time and expertise based on each family's circumstances and needs.

Recruitment activity for Child Protective Investigators during FY 2025-26 resulted in more than 13,600 applications statewide. Of the 1,015 candidates who received an offer, 94.5 percent accepted (959 candidates).

Family Navigation

Family Navigation is a voluntary, family centered program launched in 2022 to provide rapid support to families involved with Child Protective Investigations who are contending with co-occurring conditions including domestic violence, substance misuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse, or other complex needs. Family Navigators use their behavioral health expertise and knowledge of community resources to quickly engage families, coordinate services, and address barriers. This partnership allows CPIs to focus on child safety while Family Navigators help families work toward long term safety, stability, and well-being. The statewide program includes 51 positions: 10 leadership positions and 41 front-line Family Navigator positions. For FY2025-26, the program served 3,547 families.

Strategic Recruitment and Outreach

By leveraging technology platforms such as Indeed and LinkedIn, the Department has continued to expand our reach for educating the public about available job opportunities and attracting qualified candidates. These platforms allow the Department to access extensive talent databases and strategically target hiring event advertisements to relevant audiences. This has also allowed the Department to enhance their social, digital, print, and partner facing materials to reach candidates with public safety, military, education, and service-related experience.

The Department continues to implement its targeted recruitment strategy through hiring fairs which provide opportunities to directly engage prospective candidates, answer questions about careers with the Department, and, when appropriate, conduct pre-screening or other preliminary hiring activities.

Continue the Mission

First Lady Casey DeSantis spearheaded the Department's "Continue the Mission" initiative beginning in 2022. This is a collaborative effort involving the Department and Florida's Department of Veteran's Affairs to recruit veterans, military spouses, and former law enforcement officers to serve in CPI positions. This initiative was designed to leverage the skills and experiences of these individuals to protect Florida's most vulnerable children and support strong, resilient families. Senate Bill 7012 (2025) expanded this recruitment strategy for CPI and Case Manager positions and broadened the target population to individuals with backgrounds in law enforcement, first responders, military service, education, health care, emergency management, and other public service fields.

To support implementation, DCF has partnered with Accenture to strengthen recruitment and retention strategies. Accenture conducted focus groups with current CPIs and Case Managers, including those

recently hired as well as more seasoned staff, to better understand what attracts candidates to these roles, the realities of the work, and the factors that influence retention. Analysis from the focus groups was used to inform the marketing campaign materials to attract the right candidates and ultimately improve retention within the roles of CPI and Case Manager.

The initiative has seen significant success, resulting in numerous targeted hiring fairs and 564 candidates being hired to work in these critical roles, beginning from inception of Continue the Mission in July 2022 through June 2026. Of the candidates that have been hired through Continue the Mission, an average of 26 percent remain active employees while an average of six percent have been promoted into higher level positions. The Department has conducted 320 job fairs and recruitment events in support of the Continue the Mission initiative.

In FY 2025–2026, the Department participated in 11 Indeed virtual events, 23 in-person veteran recruitment events, 11 college job fairs, and 22 other community events. Building on these efforts, the Department will conduct a targeted recruitment campaign for Case Managers and Child Protective Investigators from July through September 2026.

Retention Efforts

Efforts to reduce turnover and improve workforce stability in CPI positions include a variety of strategies:

Regional Retention Efforts

Supervisory support plays a vital role in ensuring frontline worker stability and long-term retention. To enable supervisors and management to concentrate on direct casework and provide guidance to CPI staff, the Department established Retention Specialist positions. The Retention Specialists support employee engagement, strengthen the new hire experience, identify workforce concerns, and promote long-term retention of front-line staff. Their efforts are tailored to regional needs and include:

- New employee onboarding and early-career support, including participation in new employee orientation, preparation of onboarding materials and welcome resources, coordination of equipment and other job-related resources, early new-hire check-ins, regional 30-, 60-, and 90-day touchpoints, and coordination of pre-service graduation ceremonies, including opportunities for family members to participate.
- Employee feedback and retention monitoring through quarterly climate and pulse surveys, new-hire touchpoint surveys, employee roundtables, suggestion channels, stay interviews, exit interviews, and focus groups. Retention Specialists review feedback, identify recurring concerns or barriers, and provide findings and recommended action items to regional leadership. During FY 2025-26, more than 90 roundtables were conducted statewide, reaching over 450 team members across various roles including pre-service CPIs, Senior CPIs and CPI Supervisors.
- Employee recognition and engagement, including service, team, and unit awards; certificates of appreciation; employee and operational success spotlights; recognition of professional milestones; staff appreciation events; and team-building activities such as luncheons, graduation celebrations, holiday events, friendly competitions, and other circuit- or region-specific activities.
- Ongoing communication and connection through weekly or monthly newsletters, staff broadcasts, training flyers, policy and practice updates, promotional opportunity announcements, town halls, all-staff meetings, and other communications that highlight

employee accomplishments, share available resources, and keep frontline staff connected to regional and Department updates.

Through these localized efforts, Retention Specialists provide an ongoing connection between frontline employees and leadership, allowing the Department to identify emerging workforce needs, respond to employee feedback, recognize staff contributions, and strengthen employee engagement and retention.

Additional Workforce Retention and Working Conditions Strategies

In addition to direct retention and engagement initiatives, the Department continues to implement operational strategies intended to improve working conditions and provide greater support to frontline investigative staff. These efforts include:

- Utilization of night and weekend units to reduce the frequency and burden of weekend and overnight on-call shifts and promote improved work-life balance.
- The implementation and utilization of the Investigative Analyst Units to support investigative staff by reviewing hotline intakes for case assignment, completing pre-commencement activities, identifying appropriate alternate closures, and completing referrals and records requests.
- The continued use and development of mobile technology allowing CPIs to complete additional work while in the field and providing supervisors with greater ability to review investigations and performance in real time. This reduces the time CPI staff must spend on administrative requirements, enhancing their time spent with families and in the field.
- In 2022, the Department created Family Finder positions to conduct concerted efforts to identify and locate relatives and fictive kin, complete home studies for potential caregivers, and help identify safe family placement options for children. As of July 7, 2026, the Department has 62 Family Finder positions statewide.

Fleet Vehicles

The Department has allocated 938 fleet vehicles to CPIs statewide, providing vehicle access for approximately 65 percent of investigators. This investment reduces the need for CPIs to use personal vehicles while conducting field work, while also supporting employee morale and strengthening the Department's competitive recruitment efforts.

Professional Development

The Department's voluntary Career Ladder program helps Child Protective Investigators (CPIs), Senior CPIs, and CPI Supervisors strengthen their skills, demonstrate competency, and advance professionally. Participants receive specialized training in areas such as domestic violence, behavioral health, human trafficking, and sexual abuse, while supervisors also receive training in mentoring and coaching. To earn Career Ladder certification, participants must complete the required training and demonstrate proficiency by achieving a score of at least 80 percent on a recent case quality review. Employees receive financial incentives as they progress through the program. During FY 2025–2026, 19 CPI, Senior CPIs and Supervisors earned Career Ladder certifications.

The Department continues to evaluate opportunities to strengthen the program through competency-based training focused on complex maltreatment cases, instruction from subject-matter experts, and ongoing reviews to confirm that participants consistently apply their specialized knowledge in their work.

These enhancements are intended to strengthen professional development and improve the quality of child protective investigations.

Supervisor Leadership Academy

The Department's Supervisor Leadership Academy is offered to current supervisory staff in any program who demonstrate leadership potential. The enterprise-wide program supports participants in strengthening and expanding their leadership abilities, with a focus on refining coaching, teambuilding, and problem-solving skills that enhance team productivity and operational efficiency. The curriculum was updated based on feedback from previous cohorts and redeployed in January 2026.

Due to high demand, the Department offered eight Supervisor Leadership Academy cohorts during FY 2025-26, with 29 CPI Supervisors completing the program. Based on participant survey feedback, the Academy continues to receive strong satisfaction ratings across all measured areas, with 100 percent positive responses.

Emerging Leaders Academy

The Department's Emerging Leaders Academy is offered enterprise-wide to non-supervisory staff across all programs who are seeking professional growth and preparing for future leadership roles. The Academy's curriculum is structured around the "Hero's Journey" framework, guiding participants in discovering their authentic leadership voice and leading with purpose. Over the four-month program, staff explore their personal journey, challenges, and accomplishments, fostering self-discovery and enhancing their ability to relate to others, communicate effectively, and lead with empathy and resilience.

Due to strong demand, the Department offered six cohorts during FY 2025-26. Among those completing the Emerging Leaders Academy were seven Senior CPIs and six CPIs. Participant survey feedback continues to be highly positive, with 100 percent of respondents reporting satisfaction with their overall experience.

The Florida Academy Pre-service Program CPI Specialty Track

The Florida Academy for Child Protection and Family Resilience ("the Florida Academy") is the Department's approved pre-service curriculum. "Foundations" replaced the former "Core" training and provides standardized required child welfare content for all CPIs, case managers, and licensing specialists. After Foundations is complete, child welfare staff complete a specialty curriculum specific to their role. CPI Specialty track launched in January 2024 and continued with a statewide staggered rollout which completed in June 2025. All new CPIs are trained using the Florida Academy curriculum by certified trainers who are monitored monthly to ensure the program is delivered to fidelity. This ensures all new CPIs receive consistent messaging and shared language. In FY 2025-26, approximately 850 new CPIs were trained through the Florida Academy.

The Florida Academy curriculum was updated in 2023 to reflect policy and practice changes implemented since the previous training was introduced in 2013. It was also updated to include virtual reality, live actor simulation, problem-based scenarios to enhance critical thinking skills, and a skills competency assessment prior to provisional certification.

Beginning in May 2025, the Department partnered with the Florida Certification Board to revise the Child Protective Investigator (CPI) competency assessment based on feedback from trainers and CPI supervisors. In April 2026, the Board updated the competencies to focus more directly on the skills required for the role. In FY 2026–27, the Department will prepare trainers, supervisors, and evaluators to implement the updated assessment statewide.

The Department continues to partner with the Florida Institute for Child Welfare (FICW) who assists with funding support for implementation, purchase, and maintenance of virtual reality headsets, scenarios, and evaluation. The FICW supported evaluation of the Florida Academy will help identify where to enhance or revise pre-service training and address barriers to consistent statewide delivery. Feedback from trainees, supervisors, trainers, implementation partners, and people with lived experience, together with follow up of Florida Academy trained staff, will inform how training is supported and applied on the job. Findings on implementation strategies, engagement, and retention will also help guide resource and sustainability decisions as well as implementation of future programs.

Additional Training Programs for Child Welfare Staff

Ongoing in-service training is essential to maintaining a skilled, adaptable, and engaged workforce. In a rapidly evolving work environment, continuous learning helps ensure that employees remain proficient in their roles and are prepared to meet emerging challenges. Consistent training not only enhances individual performance but also contributes to overall organizational success by aligning employee capabilities with strategic objectives. Moreover, investing in employee development fosters a culture of growth, leading to increased job satisfaction and retention.

CPI training needs are continuously assessed through the review of performance data, quality review findings, interviews, focus groups, feedback from regional leadership and stakeholders, trainer observations, and changes to law, administrative code, and policy or practice expectations. Training priorities are established based on performance gaps, operational needs, and legislative updates. Courses are developed with feedback from subject matter experts and feedback from trainers, stakeholders, and regional CPI leadership.

Major programs that were developed and implemented in FY 2025-26 include:

Compass

Compass was designed as to enhance foundational investigative skills program for CPIs and CPI Supervisors. However, as it was developed in partnership with CPI leadership, expectations were expanded to require Compass for all CPIs, CPI Supervisors, Program Administrators, and Operations Managers. The region Child Protection Directors were engaged in the development and delivery of Compass to all Program Administrators and Operations Managers statewide and continue to support the rollout to CPI Supervisors as the first day of the NorthStar program and as a stand-alone program for CPIs. The program provides “back to basics” content regarding pre-commencement activities, commencement, information collection, interviewing techniques, identification and evaluation of evidence, findings, safety decision making, and documentation.

As of September 14, 2026, 74 Program Administrators, 219 CPI Supervisors, and 941 CPIs and Senior CPIs have completed Compass.

Project NorthStar (now referred to as NorthStar)

NorthStar is a statewide professional development program that helps Child Protective Investigation (CPI) leaders apply Florida's child welfare practice model consistently throughout an investigation. Developed with child welfare experts and regional leaders, the program serves CPI Supervisors, Operations Managers, and Program Administrators. Training focuses on critical supervisory decisions, including assessing danger, developing safety plans, reviewing investigative findings, and determining when a case can safely close.

Participants complete classroom training, practice with realistic case examples, receive five weeks of individualized coaching, and apply what they have learned through independent work. Their proficiency is then measured through a standardized competency assessment. NorthStar uses a "pass or develop" approach, meaning participants who need additional development receive targeted coaching and another opportunity to demonstrate proficiency. Participants may also request a review if they believe an assessment was scored inconsistently with Department policy.

Program Administrators and Operations Managers began participating in early 2026, followed by CPI Supervisors in June. Eighty-five percent of Program Administrators passed the assessment on their first attempt, and the remaining participants passed after receiving additional support and completing a second assessment. CPI Supervisor training was delivered in every region, with competency assessments planned for FY 2026–27.

The program is supported by 22 experienced Practice Model Coaches across the state. Coaches work with regional leaders, trainers, and Quality Assurance staff to provide consistent guidance, identify emerging needs, and strengthen practice. The Department will continue evaluating NorthStar and providing ongoing training, coaching, and assessment to support consistent, high-quality child protective investigations statewide.

Medically Complex/Medical Neglect

Section 39.608, Florida Statutes, established specialized training and certification requirements for child protective investigations involving medical neglect. Child Protective Investigators (CPIs) and supervisors must complete eight hours of preservice training and two hours of ongoing training to maintain certification. Medical neglect investigations are assigned to a certified CPI whenever possible. If one is unavailable, the assigned investigator must consult with a certified specialist who can provide guidance throughout the investigation.

During FY 2025–26, the Department began updating its medical neglect training in preparation for statutory changes enacted through House Bill (HB) 47. The updated training will incorporate the new requirements while strengthening practical skills in family engagement, assessing medical needs, developing meaningful case plans, and identifying the behavioral changes necessary to protect a child. The training will be delivered regionally in partnership with the Department of Health's Child Protection Team.

Effective July 2026, section 39.303, Florida Statutes, was amended to strengthen requirements for investigations involving children with complex or pre-existing medical conditions. In collaboration with the Department of Health, the Department developed a Medically Complex Investigation Process Map and supporting training to guide staff in assessing safety, coordinating medical expertise, and addressing each child's unique needs. Statewide training and implementation will continue during FY 2026–27.

The Department also established a Medically Complex Review Team to review all investigations meeting the established criteria. The team provides timely consultation and guidance, promotes thorough and consistent investigative practices, and supports coordination when a case transitions from investigation to ongoing case management. This includes ensuring that important information is shared and that pending medical testing or other necessary actions are appropriately addressed.

Working Conditions

The Department is focused on supporting the growth and stability of its workforce, which is fundamental to the success of the state's child protection efforts. In 2022, the Department established the Workforce Wellness Unit (WWU), dedicated to enhancing the overall well-being of Department staff, with a specific focus on preventing secondary traumatic stress and burnout among CPI staff.

The initiatives implemented by the Department are comprehensive and proactive, aimed at not only addressing the immediate needs of staff in crisis situations but also promoting ongoing wellness and resilience across the organization. By integrating peer support, structured wellness programs, and local advocacy, the WWU seeks to create a supportive environment that enhances the overall well-being and retention of Investigation staff.

During FY 2025-26, the WWU reached 6,340 participants enterprise wide through a range of wellness and workforce-support offerings designed to strengthen employee well-being, resilience, engagement, and team effectiveness. Offerings included the 360 Wellness Series, Balance, Blend, Boundaries, Compassion Fatigue, Launch Restored, Retention Intelligence, Team Building, and True Colors. Participation totals reflect attendance across all WWU offerings. Employees who participated in multiple WWU programs may be presented more than once, as attendance is captured by each individual event.

Teambuilding and Engagement Initiatives

WWU facilitates team building events focusing on strengthening workplace relationships, improving communication, and fostering psychological safety. These activities integrate principles of emotional intelligence and holistic wellness, providing opportunities for employees to recharge, strengthen connections, and build healthier team dynamics. Team-building events are offered enterprise-wide, with a particular focus on the Office of Child and Family Well-Being, given the challenging nature of the work performed by its staff. During FY 2025-26, the WWU reached 1,080 employees enterprise-wide through team-building activities.

360 YOU Training

The 360 YOU workshop is a foundational training designed to build self-awareness and resilience. The training focuses on the eight dimensions of wellness, guiding participants through self-assessments to

identify strengths and areas for growth. Each participant creates a personalized wellness plan aimed at enhancing well-being in identified areas of challenge. A total of 1,452 individuals participated in the 360 YOU workshop for FY 2025-26.

Welcome Wednesday

Welcome Wednesday is a monthly statewide virtual onboarding event hosted by WWU to welcome new employees and build early engagement with the Department's mission, leadership, and programs. Executive leaders provide an overview of the Department and their respective program areas, helping new employees understand how their roles contribute to the Department's broader mission and the opportunities available across the agency. Employees who are unable to attend their initial session are

invited to participate in a subsequent event. During FY 2025-26, Welcome Wednesday reached 1,389 new Department employees statewide.

Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM)

The Department's internal Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) Team includes more than 60 trained staff across the state. CISM is a confidential, peer-led crisis intervention model designed to support employees following high-impact or traumatic events, which are frequently encountered within the Office of Child and Family Well-Being. The Department's CISM model is accredited through the International Critical Incident Stress Foundation and includes a master's-level clinician who serves as the Department's Clinical Director. The Clinical Director provides mental health expertise and serves as a resource to the CISM Team both during and following critical incidents.

During FY 2025-26, the CISM Team provided support to 280 employees, offering immediate emotional support and helping mitigate the potential long-term psychological effects of critical incidents. Support was provided in response to circumstances including fatalities involving clients, coworkers, or family members; burnout and compassion fatigue associated with sustained exposure to traumatic case content or high-intensity workloads; disaster-related incidents; and vicarious trauma resulting from prolonged exposure to emotionally distressing casework.

The Department continues to invest in leadership development through coaching and mentoring provided by experienced staff, the Office of Quality and Innovation, and designated trainers.

Conclusion

The Department remains focused on building and sustaining a skilled, supported, and stable child protective investigative workforce. Declining vacancy rates, strong candidate acceptance, expanded training, leadership development, improved field resources, and targeted wellness supports demonstrate progress across the employee experience; from recruitment and onboarding through professional advancement and retention. While turnover remains a continued area of focus, the Department will use workforce data, employee feedback, and performance outcomes to strengthen these efforts and ensure investigators and supervisors have the preparation, tools, and support necessary to serve Florida's children and families effectively.