



Putting Families First in Wisconsin's Child Welfare System

Making critical investments in Wisconsin's child welfare system to support more families in-home, set youth up for success, and strengthen family-focused, collaborative programs.

Governor Evers' 2025–2027 biennial budget proposal is the most pro-kid budget in state history and includes crucial investments in the child welfare system. Decisions about what will be included in the final budget, which is typically announced in June, will be made by the Legislature as well as the Governor.

Getting Key Investments Directly to Families and Counties

The Governor's budget eliminates unnecessary financial barriers to family reunification while guaranteeing that child welfare agencies across the state have the funding to support families. This includes protecting the property rights of children in out-of-home care (OHC) by making sure a child's Social Security income is available for their use following their exit from OHC. It also recommends removing the requirement that agencies collect child support from families with children who enter certain OHC placements; instead, these financial resources remain with the family, better supporting efforts towards reunification. An increase of more than **\$8.5 million** over the biennium to Children and Family Aids and an **\$8.4 million** increase over the biennium to Community Youth and Family Aids provides additional flexible resources so that local agencies can support children and families in-home or in their community.

Supporting Families in Their Homes

Keeping families together and reducing the use of out-of-home care is critical to strengthening Wisconsin's communities. The Governor's Budget includes investing **\$5 million** over the biennium to expand home visiting to additional counties and Tribal Nations and a **\$3 million** investment in online parenting programs to support families in rural communities. The Governor's budget includes a **\$66 million** investment over the biennium to support services for crime victims statewide and help critical victim service providers stay afloat after significant recent federal funding cuts. The Governor's investment will help ensure that domestic violence agencies across the state have the resources they need to serve families in crisis.



Keeping Children in Family Settings

Prioritizing the placement of children with those who know and love them is critical to minimizing the trauma of family separation, increasing stability, and maintaining a child's connections to family and community. This budget invests over **\$7 million** across the biennium to support Tribal family services, as well as **\$2 million** to increase the foster care age-based rates by 5 percent. This increase provides for foster care Level 1 caregivers and kinship caregivers to also receive these increased age-based rates and qualifies them for sibling exceptional payments and one-time clothing allowances.



Setting Youth Up for Success

Supporting young people on their journeys to becoming successful adults is fundamental to DCF's vision. Expanding eligibility and funding for independent living services by **\$10.5 million** allows DCF to better support young people for an extended period after they leave out-of-home care. Investing **\$7.5 million** for programs that support runaway and homeless youth helps ensure that the state's most vulnerable young people stay safe. Extending kinship care and subsidized guardianship to include youth involved with the youth justice system lets more young people achieve permanency by keeping them with people who know and love them – including relatives and like-kin.

Supporting Children with Complex Needs

When children with high acuity needs cannot receive appropriate services in their homes, serving them safely in their communities is critical. To support this, the budget seeks **\$5 million** over the next two years to continue an existing residential pilot program to provide specialized, therapeutic care that promotes stable reunification of children in OHC. In addition, to reduce child welfare and youth justice involvement for children and families in crisis, DCF supports the Department of Health Services (DHS) budget items that propose the development of a Medicaid waiver to create a specialty managed care program for children's behavioral health. DCF continues to support state investment in a psychiatric residential treatment facility to serve children and youth under 21 years old to ensure that children receive the right level of intervention at the right time.

Implementing Evidence-Based Youth Justice System Changes

Reshaping the youth justice system to align with best practice and research on adolescent brain development and serving youth safely within their communities are critical undertakings. Providing **\$10 million** over the biennium to return 17-year-olds to the youth justice system and creating a **Juvenile Justice Reform Review Committee** to make recommendations to DCF and the Department of Corrections regarding certain areas of reform to the juvenile justice system are foundational to achieving this goal.