Agency Name:	Department of Children's Advocacy		
Agency Code:	L080	Section:	41

Fiscal Year FY 2025-2026
Agency Budget Plan

FORM A - BUDGET PLAN SUMMARY

OPERATING REQUESTS *(FORM B1)*	**For FY 2025-2026, my agency is (mark "X"):**
X	Requesting General Fund Appropriations.
	Requesting Federal/Other Authorization.
	Not requesting any changes.

NON-RECURRING REQUESTS *(FORM B2)*	**For FY 2025-2026, my agency is (mark "X"):**
X	Requesting Non-Recurring Appropriations.
	Requesting Non-Recurring Federal/Other Authorization.
	Not requesting any changes.

CAPITAL REQUESTS *(FORM C)*	**For FY 2025-2026, my agency is (mark "X"):**
	Requesting funding for Capital Projects.
X	Not requesting any changes.

PROVISOS *(FORM D)*	**For FY 2025-2026, my agency is (mark "X"):**
X	Requesting a new proviso and/or substantive changes to existing provisos.
	Only requesting technical proviso changes (such as date references).
	Not requesting any proviso changes.

Please identify your agency's preferred contacts for this year's budget process.

	Name	***Phone***	***Email***
PRIMARY CONTACT:	Amanda F. Whittle	(803) 734-3176	amanda.whittle@childadvocate.sc.gov
SECONDARY CONTACT:	Thomas Kaminer		thomas.kaminer@admin.sc.gov

I have reviewed and approved the enclosed FY 2025-2026 Agency Budget Plan, which is complete and accurate to the extent of my knowledge.

	Agency Director	***Board or Commission Chair***
SIGN/DATE:	Amanda F. Whittle 9/27/2024	
TYPE/PRINT NAME:	Amanda F. Whittle	

This form must be signed by the agency head – not a delegate.

Agency Name:	Department of Children's Advocacy
Agency Code:	L080
Section:	41

BUDGET REQUESTS			FUNDING					FTES				
Priority	Request Type	Request Title	State	Federal	Earmarked	Restricted	Total	State	Federal	Earmarked	Restricted	Total
1	B1 - Recurring	Advocating for System Improvement	1,003,498	0	0	0	1,003,498	9.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	9.00
2	B1 - Recurring	Advocating for the Best Interests of Abused and Neglected Children	1,123,601	0	0	0	1,123,601	14.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	14.00
3	B1 - Recurring	S.C. Continuum of Care Transfer Alignment Request (Related to Proviso 35.1)	400,000	0	0	0	400,000	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
4	B1 - Recurring	IT Operations including Microsoft Office 365/IT Licensing	115,700	0	0	0	115,700	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
5	B2 - Non-Recurring	IT Operations (Cisco Switch End-of-Life Replacement)	77,000	0	0	0	77,000	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
6	B1 - Recurring	Guardian ad Litem Program Operational Expenses	121,193	0	0	0	121,193	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
7	B2 - Non-Recurring	Recruiting and Retaining Child Advocates (non-recurring)	339,000	0	0	0	339,000	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
8	B1 - Recurring	Recruiting and Retaining Child Advocates (recurring)	440,564	0	0	0	440,564	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
9	B2 - Non-Recurring	Equipment for New Hires	47,150	0	0	0	47,150	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
TOTALS			3,667,706	0	0	0	3,667,706	23.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	23.00

Agency Name:	Department of Children's Advocacy		
Agency Code:	L080	Section:	41

FORM B1 – RECURRING OPERATING REQUEST

AGENCY PRIORITY	**1**

Provide the Agency Priority Ranking from the Executive Summary.

TITLE	**Advocating for System Improvement**

Provide a brief, descriptive title for this request.

AMOUNT	**General: $1,003,498** **Federal: $0** **Other: $0** **Total: $1,003,498**

What is the net change in requested appropriations for FY 2025-2026? This amount should correspond to the total for all funding sources on the Executive Summary.

NEW POSITIONS	**9.00**

Please provide the total number of new positions needed for this request.

FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH THE REQUEST

Mark "X" for all that apply:	
	Change in cost of providing current services to existing program audience
X	Change in case load/enrollment under existing program guidelines
	Non-mandated change in eligibility/enrollment for existing program
	Non-mandated program change in service levels or areas
X	Proposed establishment of a new program or initiative
	Loss of federal or other external financial support for existing program
	Exhaustion of fund balances previously used to support program
	IT Technology/Security related
X	HR/Personnel Related
	Consulted DTO during development
X	Related to a Non-Recurring request – If so, Priority # 9

STATEWIDE ENTERPRISE STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

Mark "X" for primary applicable Statewide Enterprise Strategic Objective:	
	Education, Training, and Human Development
X	Healthy and Safe Families
	Maintaining Safety, Integrity, and Security
	Public Infrastructure and Economic Development
	Government and Citizens

ACCOUNTABILITY OF FUNDS

1.2.3. - Augment existing policies and procedures for the Investigations Unit and Critical Investigations Unit to ensure clear expectations for staff and alignment with the agency's mission and duties

2.1.1. - Review and update the agency's online resource directory of state services and resources for children

2.1.2. - Develop and deliver or attend and participate in at least 4 public or community meetings or events to share information about accessing and/or navigating services provided by state agencies for children

2.2.5. - Initial response to complaints occurs within one business day of the Agency's receipt of telephone, website-submitted, or emailed complaints for FY25.

3.1.1. - Review and improve the agency's tracking system for reviewing and evaluating services for children.

3.1.2. - Review and report on services that state agencies provide to children to the General Assembly and Governor

3.1.3. - Evaluate services of state agencies within the scope of the Dept of Children's

	Advocacy with target of completing evaluations of all 9 agencies by FY24 3.2.2. - Encourage a culture of collaboration and coordination among state agencies which serve children by developing relationships and communicating regularly in a professional and respectful manner. Regular meetings should occur, with a minimum of one virtual or in-person meeting occurring with each of the nine state agencies each fiscal year. The advancement of these strategies is dependent upon a well-trained, appropriately resourced workforce within the Investigations Unit and Critical Investigations Unit. These nine (9) FTES and accompanying resources will allow staff to have responsible workloads to not only respond to complaints and notifications but also to capture, track, and analyze quantitative and qualitative data that will inform system improvement recommendations and initiatives. Each strategy has measurable goals in the agency's most recent Annual Accountability Report.

What specific strategy, as outlined in the most recent Strategic Planning and Performance Measurement template of agency's accountability report, does this funding request support? How would this request advance that strategy? How would the use of these funds be evaluated?

RECIPIENTS OF FUNDS

These funds would be used for salaries within the System Improvement Division and for equipment and resources to support new staff. Salary and fringe are estimated at $935,025.25, and operational costs are estimated at $68,472.00

Salary costs were estimated as follows:

AH40 Program Coordinator II

(Midpoint: $64,885 plus fringe .45 $29,198.25= $94,083.25 X 5 =$470,416.25)

AH45 Program Manager I

(Midpoint: $80,105 plus fringe .45 $36,047.25 X 1 = $116,152.25)

AE30 Attorney III

(Midpoint: $80,105 plus fringe .45 $36,047.25 = $116,152.25 X 3 = $348,456.75)

Operational costs were estimated as follows:

Rent: $27,072

Based on rent at the Edgar Brown building ($147,390.85 /49 offices = $3008/year per office

Cell phone: $5,400

Estimated at $50/month per employee or $600/year

Travel and training: $36,000

Estimated at $4000/year for 9 FTEs

Recurring operational costs: $68,472

Non-Recurring operational costs: $18,450.00 – included separately as Priority #9

Recurring salary and fringe: $935,025.25

Total recurring costs: $1,003,497.25

What individuals or entities would receive these funds (contractors, vendors, grantees, individual beneficiaries, etc.)? How would these funds be allocated – using an existing formula, through a competitive process, based upon predetermined eligibility criteria?

JUSTIFICATION OF REQUEST

Complaint submissions to the Investigations Unit increased by 38.9% during FY23, and by an additional 18% during FY24. Phone calls increased 25%. The Unit assisted callers with 3099 referrals, and Investigators completed 288 investigations.

What? The Investigations Unit receives complaints from parents, foster parents, other agencies, and providers regarding services provided to children by child-serving agencies. This Unit provides an independent resource for the public. With reasonable workloads, the Investigators are able to thoroughly review and/or investigate complaints and work on solutions to the complex matters that are presented.

How? As a result of the new positions received for FY25, the Investigations Unit has capacity to handle the current workload, and additional positions are not requested for that unit for FY26.

Critical incident notifications increased by 90% in FY24 after a 250% increase in FY23 and a 542% increase in FY22.

What? The Critical Investigations Unit receives notifications of fatalities and near fatalities from nine (9) child-serving agencies. During FY23, the existing staff struggled to keep pace with the rising number of notifications which included making site visits, meeting with youth at DJJ, PRTFs, and group homes, and communicating with agency leadership. This is an impactful resource for South Carolina, and this request supports having a staff that is capable of meeting the increased notifications. Critical Incident notifications have increased from a yearly receipt of 32 in FY20 to a yearly receipt of 2,894 in FY24. That is a 90% increase since FY23. Of the 2,894 notifications received, 1161 were investigated.

How? In FY25, the agency requested six (6) Program Coordinator IIs (AH40) and received one (1). The agency requests the remaining five (5) positions for FY26. These employees would serve as Critical Investigations Unit investigators to respond to critical incident notifications. This unit received 32 notifications in FY20, 77 in FY21, 417 in FY22, 1519 in FY23, and 2894 in FY24. It is anticipated that notifications will continue to increase in FY25. Additional FTEs are necessary to provide quality review and response to the critical incident notifications the agency receives from nine other child-serving agencies.

(Midpoint: $64,885 plus fringe .45 $29,198.25= $94,083.25 X 5 =$470,416.25)

Legal advocacy and counsel are essential to improve outcomes for children and to achieve system improvement.

What? Like the Cass Elias McCarter Guardian ad Litem Program and the Foster Care Review Division, the System Improvement Division needs an attorney to provide legal guidance and advocacy for staff in advocating for children. There is also an opportunity to improve children's outcomes through piloting a direct representation model by hiring two attorneys who would provide direct representation to children in a pilot county

How? A staff attorney is essential for the System Improvement Division, particularly considering the legal issues that arise in interpreting laws, working with other state agencies, and advocating for children. In addition, two Attorney III FTEs would be trained, supervised, and supported by the agency to implement a pilot project with the Children's Law Center, Department of Social Services and other stakeholders. In this pilot project, two attorneys would provide direct representation for children and adolescents based on certain criteria to reduce placement instability and improve permanency for children in foster care.

(Midpoint: $80,105 plus fringe .45 $36,047.25 X 3 = $348,456.75)

It is essential to create capacity to fulfill the agency's statutory duties regarding receipt and response of complaints and critical incident notifications from nine child-serving agencies.

What? The Department of Children's Advocacy is comprised of three divisions which have existed since the 1980s, and, by statute, each division has a division director and regional or program managers within their organizational structure. The enabling legislation for the Department of Children's Advocacy required the receipt, review, monitoring and/or investigation of complaints regarding nine child-serving agencies and critical incident notifications regarding nine child-serving agencies. Since 2019, the agency has built capacity to fulfill these duties – from the creation of a toll-free number and the agency's initial investigators to this year's budget request which seeks to fully staff a System Improvement Division, similar to the other divisions within the agency.

How? Along with the aforementioned requests, one Program Manager I position (AH45) would support the System Improvement Director to supervise the Critical Investigations Unit. This position aligns with the existing division structure within the agency for the Continuum of Care, Foster Care Review Division, and Guardian ad Litem Program.

(Midpoint: $80,105 plus fringe .45 $36,047.25 X 1 = $116,152.25)

There is no additional capacity within the agency to meet the needs of the System Improvement Division. The Investigations Unit and Critical Investigations Unit did not have any vacancies as of June 30, 2024. The agency's overall vacancy rate is 11%, down from 19.91% at the end of FY23. Positions within the agency have been reclassified to create capacity for these units, and the new FTE positions are essential for creating capacity and sustainability, for recruiting and retaining staff with reasonable workloads, and for ensuring quality work product to improve outcomes for children and families in South Carolina.

Please thoroughly explain the request to include the justification for funds, potential offsets, matching funds, and method of calculation. Please include any explanation of impact if funds are not received. If new positions have been requested, explain why existing vacancies are not sufficient.

Agency Name:	Department of Children's Advocacy		
Agency Code:	L080	Section:	41

FORM B1 – RECURRING OPERATING REQUEST

AGENCY PRIORITY	**2**

Provide the Agency Priority Ranking from the Executive Summary.

TITLE	**Advocating for the Best Interests of Abused and Neglected Children**

Provide a brief, descriptive title for this request.

AMOUNT	**General: $1,123,601** **Federal: $0** **Other: $0** **Total: $1,123,601**

What is the net change in requested appropriations for FY 2025-2026? This amount should correspond to the total for all funding sources on the Executive Summary.

NEW POSITIONS	**14.00**

Please provide the total number of new positions needed for this request.

FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH THE REQUEST

Mark "X" for all that apply:

	Change in cost of providing current services to existing program audience
X	Change in case load/enrollment under existing program guidelines
	Non-mandated change in eligibility/enrollment for existing program
	Non-mandated program change in service levels or areas
	Proposed establishment of a new program or initiative
	Loss of federal or other external financial support for existing program
	Exhaustion of fund balances previously used to support program
	IT Technology/Security related
	HR/Personnel Related
	Consulted DTO during development
X	Related to a Non-Recurring request – If so, Priority # 9

STATEWIDE ENTERPRISE STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

Mark "X" for primary applicable Statewide Enterprise Strategic Objective:

	Education, Training, and Human Development
X	Healthy and Safe Families
	Maintaining Safety, Integrity, and Security
	Public Infrastructure and Economic Development
	Government and Citizens

ACCOUNTABILITY OF FUNDS

1.1.1. - Increase the number of active volunteers

1.2.1. - Foster innovation in retention methods for staff. Survey Guardian ad Litem staff regarding their satisfaction with their relationship with leadership

1.3.1. - Increase the completion rate of potential volunteers from the 30-hour Pre-service Training.

3.1.4 - Monitor and report audits scores for local county offices to ensure quality standards are met.

The advancement of these strategies is dependent upon a well-trained, appropriately resourced workforce within the Cass Elias McCarter Guardian ad Litem Program. These fourteen (14) FTES and accompanying resources will allow staff to have responsible workloads to advocate for abused and neglected children who have pending legal actions with the Department of Social Services in Family Courts throughout the state. Each strategy has measurable goals in the agency's most recent Annual Accountability Report.

What specific strategy, as outlined in the most recent Strategic Planning and Performance Measurement template of agency's accountability report, does this funding request support? How would this request advance that strategy? How would the use of these funds be evaluated?

RECIPIENTS OF FUNDS	These funds would be used for salaries and resources primarily for the Cass Elias McCarter Guardian ad Litem Program and for equipment and resources to support new staff. Salary and fringe are estimated at $1,059,088.70, and operational costs are estimated at $64,512.00 **<u>Salary costs were estimated as follows:</u>** AH30 Program Assistants (Midpoint $44,977 plus fringe .45 $20,239.65 = $65,216.65 X 4 = $260,866.60) AH35 Program Coordinator Is (Midpoint: $53,957 plus fringe .45 $24,280.65=$78,237.65 X 9 = $704,138.85) AH40 Program Coordinator IIs (Midpoint: $64,885 plus fringe .45 $29,198.25 X 1 = $94,083.25) **<u>Operational costs for new FTEs were estimated as follows:</u>** *Rent for new FTEs: $42,112* Based on rent for the Edgar Brown building ($147,390.85 / 49 offices = $3008/year per office x 14 *Cell phones for new FTEs: $8,400* Estimated at $50/month per employee or $600/year *Travel and training for new FTEs: $14,000* Estimated at $1000/year Recurring salary and fringe for new FTEs: $1,059,089 Recurring operational costs for new FTEs: $64,512

What individuals or entities would receive these funds (contractors, vendors, grantees, individual beneficiaries, etc.)? How would these funds be allocated – using an existing formula, through a competitive process, based upon predetermined eligibility criteria?

	The Cass Elias McCarter Guardian ad Litem Program's model is to have volunteers to serve as best-interest advocates for abused and neglected children. At the end of FY2023, 52% of children had a volunteer appointed for them. At the end of FY2022, 56% of children had a volunteer Guardian ad Litem appointed for them. What? Guardian ad Litem Program staff recruit and train volunteers. In an effort to recruit volunteers, the Guardian ad Litem Program established a goal of sharing 100 volunteer highlights to raise awareness about the impact of Guardians ad Litem and to recruit volunteers. The Program surpassed the goal by 600% with 647 in FY23. In assessing the strategy, the Program identified a barrier with volunteer recruitment at the pre-service training point, and 1.3.2. goal was replaced by a new FY24 goal (1.3.3.) related to recruitment. Nevertheless, the number of children served by volunteers has not significantly increased. How? Among other job duties, four (4) Guardian ad Litem Program Assistants (AH30) would work directly with identified counties to assist with ensuring continuing education trainings for volunteers, facilitating volunteer appreciation/recruitment events, and performing direct child advocacy as court-appointed Guardians ad Litem when appropriate staff or volunteers are not available. The Program Assistants would be assigned and responsible for casework, court preparation and court attendance for up to five (5) cases. (Midpoint $44,977 plus fringe .45 $20,239.65 = $65,216.65 X 4 = $260,866.60)

JUSTIFICATION OF REQUEST	**The Cass Elias McCarter Guardian ad Litem Program served 14,425 children with 8,468 served per month. Staff are court-appointed to provide best-interest advocacy for all children for whom a volunteer cannot be appointed which was 48% in FY23 and 44% in FY22.** How? Nine (9) new Program Coordinator I (AH35) positions for the Guardian ad Litem Program would provide staff in identified counties to ensure children have quality best-interest representation, and timely reports are submitted for the Court's consideration in making decisions regarding children's placement and services. These FTEs would provide approximately 12,000 hours of direct child advocacy services for children in abuse and neglect cases when a volunteer Guardian ad Litem is not available. (Midpoint: $53,957 plus fringe .45 $24,280.65=$78,237.65 X 9 = $704,138.85) How? Among other job duties, one (1) Program Coordinator II (AH40) would serve as an additional Regional Quality Assurance Coordinator who would work with the Statewide QA Coordinator to develop and implement a plan for process improvements based on quality results; oversee regional continuous improvement projects and data integrity for the program; conduct regional auditing of the case management system/statistical data; and review case management system reports and statistical data for accuracy for monthly reporting to senior management. (Midpoint: $64,885 plus fringe .45 $29,198.25 X 1 = $94,083.25) **There is no additional capacity within the agency to meet the needs of the Guardian ad Litem Program.** The agency's overall vacancy rate was 11% at the end of FY24 compared with 19.91% at the end of FY23. The vacancy rates for Guardian ad Litem was 8% at the end of FY24. At the beginning of FY24, approximately twenty (20) time-limited positions were reclassified from Continuum of Care to the Guardian ad Litem Program in an effort to support the Guardian ad Litem Program. The agency requested 21 FTEs for the GAL Program for FY25 and received 8. The agency is now requesting 14 for FY26. The new FTE positions are essential to support the agency in fulfilling its statutory duties to meet with children, to conduct an independent investigation, to attend meetings and hearings about children, and to issue reports and recommendations to the Court.

Please thoroughly explain the request to include the justification for funds, potential offsets, matching funds, and method of calculation. Please include any explanation of impact if funds are not received. If new positions have been requested, explain why existing vacancies are not sufficient.

Agency Name:	Department of Children's Advocacy		
Agency Code:	L080	Section:	41

FORM B1 – RECURRING OPERATING REQUEST

AGENCY PRIORITY	3

Provide the Agency Priority Ranking from the Executive Summary.

TITLE	**S.C. Continuum of Care Transfer Alignment Request (Related to Proviso 35.1)**

Provide a brief, descriptive title for this request.

AMOUNT	**General: $400,000** **Federal: $0** **Other: $0** **Total: $400,000**

What is the net change in requested appropriations for FY 2025-2026? This amount should correspond to the total for all funding sources on the Executive Summary.

NEW POSITIONS	0.00

Please provide the total number of new positions needed for this request.

FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH THE REQUEST

Mark "X" for all that apply:

	Change in cost of providing current services to existing program audience
	Change in case load/enrollment under existing program guidelines
	Non-mandated change in eligibility/enrollment for existing program
	Non-mandated program change in service levels or areas
	Proposed establishment of a new program or initiative
X	Loss of federal or other external financial support for existing program
X	Exhaustion of fund balances previously used to support program
	IT Technology/Security related
	HR/Personnel Related
	Consulted DTO during development
	Related to a Non-Recurring request – If so, Priority #

STATEWIDE ENTERPRISE STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

Mark "X" for primary applicable Statewide Enterprise Strategic Objective:

	Education, Training, and Human Development
X	Healthy and Safe Families
	Maintaining Safety, Integrity, and Security
	Public Infrastructure and Economic Development
	Government and Citizens

ACCOUNTABILITY OF FUNDS

1.1.3 - Reduce the existing staff vacancies within Continuum of Care

2.1.3. – Increase the number of 1915(c) Waiver Youth enrollment to 250 by June 2025

2.2.2. – Ensure 87% of Continuum of Care parents interviewed will feel satisfied with the services they receive overall each fiscal year

2.2.3. – Maintain or improve efficacy of Continuum of Care's services for children and youth as measured through dashboard data

3.1.5 -Maintain youth in their homes, schools, and communities through High Fidelity Wraparound intensive care coordination

The request supports the FY25 Strategic Planning and Performance Measurements of the Department of Children's Advocacy (DCA)'s Annual Accountability Report. The S.C. Continuum of Care provides intensive care coordination for children and youth with serious emotional and behavioral challenges to help them remain in their homes, schools and communities. The use of these funds will be evaluated through measurable targets as outlined in the Annual Accountability Report, assessments to determine the efficacy of the Continuum of Care's services, and program review by the University of Maryland to ensure program integrity.

What specific strategy, as outlined in the most recent Strategic Planning and Performance Measurement template of agency's accountability report, does this funding request support? How would this request advance that strategy? How would the use of these funds be evaluated?

RECIPIENTS OF FUNDS	If Proviso 35.1 is modified to discontinue the Department of Mental Health (DMH)'s transfer of funds to Continuum of Care, then these funds should be allocated to S.C. Continuum of Care's existing budget which primarily consists of salaries, operational expenses, and goods and services. If Proviso 35.1 is not modified, then the Department of Children's Advocacy would rescind this request. The purpose of this request is to ensure the transfer of $400,000 to Continuum of Care, either through the existing language of Proviso 35.1 or through a direct state allocation.

What individuals or entities would receive these funds (contractors, vendors, grantees, individual beneficiaries, etc.)? How would these funds be allocated – using an existing formula, through a competitive process, based upon predetermined eligibility criteria?

JUSTIFICATION OF REQUEST	The S.C. Continuum of Care has been receiving $400,000 per year from the Department of Mental Health (DMH) for approximately twenty years pursuant to Proviso 35.1. If DMH seeks modification of Proviso 35.1 to delete the portion of the proviso which requires DMH to forward $400,000 to S.C. Continuum of Care, then this request is that the funding be directed by the General Assembly to Continuum of Care. The $400,000 recurring funding is built into Department of Children's Advocacy/S.C. Continuum of Care's recurring budget, and a budget alignment is sought in the event of a modification of Proviso 35.1. When the Department of Children's Advocacy became effective on July 1, 2019, Continuum of Care's expenditures exceeded its appropriations and reimbursement by almost $1 million annually. Based on spending at that time and based on Continuum of Care's carryforward funds, it was anticipated that Continuum of Care would not be soluble by July of 2021. Director Whittle worked with agency leadership and DHHS to obtain a 1915C Medicaid Waiver in July of 2020 which allowed Continuum of Care to move away from sole reliance on Targeted Case Management (TCM), its unit billing structure, to instead have a sustainable reimbursement rate for providing High Fidelity Wraparound services. The program's financial projections are based on a continuation of existing funding streams, including the $400,000 transfer from the Department of Mental Health. Ongoing budget projections include the $400,000 DMH transfer. Department of Children's Advocacy requests the $400,000 be allocated by the General Assembly directly to the S.C. Continuum of Care's budget if Proviso 35.1 is modified to no longer require DMH to transfer funds to S.C. Continuum of Care.

Please thoroughly explain the request to include the justification for funds, potential offsets, matching funds, and method of calculation. Please include any explanation of impact if funds are not received. If new positions have been requested, explain why existing vacancies are not sufficient.

Agency Name:	Department of Children's Advocacy		
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FORM B1 – RECURRING OPERATING REQUEST

AGENCY PRIORITY	**4**

Provide the Agency Priority Ranking from the Executive Summary.

TITLE	**IT Operations including Microsoft Office 365/IT Licensing**

Provide a brief, descriptive title for this request.

AMOUNT	**General: $115,700** **Federal: $0** **Other: $0** **Total: $115,700**

What is the net change in requested appropriations for FY 2025-2026? This amount should correspond to the total for all funding sources on the Executive Summary.

NEW POSITIONS	**0.00**

Please provide the total number of new positions needed for this request.

FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH THE REQUEST

Mark "X" for all that apply:

X	Change in cost of providing current services to existing program audience
	Change in case load/enrollment under existing program guidelines
	Non-mandated change in eligibility/enrollment for existing program
	Non-mandated program change in service levels or areas
	Proposed establishment of a new program or initiative
	Loss of federal or other external financial support for existing program
	Exhaustion of fund balances previously used to support program
X	IT Technology/Security related
	HR/Personnel Related
X	Consulted DTO during development
	Related to a Non-Recurring request – If so, Priority #

STATEWIDE ENTERPRISE STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

Mark "X" for primary applicable Statewide Enterprise Strategic Objective:

	Education, Training, and Human Development
X	Healthy and Safe Families
	Maintaining Safety, Integrity, and Security
	Public Infrastructure and Economic Development
	Government and Citizens

1.2.3. - Augment existing policies and procedures for the Investigations Unit and Critical Investigations Unit to ensure clear expectations for staff and alignment with the agency's mission and duties

2.1.1. - Review and update the agency's online resource directory of state services and resources for children

2.1.2. - Develop and deliver or attend and participate in at least 4 public or community meetings or events to share information about accessing and/or navigating services provided by state agencies for children

3.1.1. - Review and improve the agency's tracking system for reviewing and evaluating services for children.

3.1.2. - Review and report on services that state agencies provide to children to the General Assembly and Governor

3.1.3. - Evaluate services of state agencies within the scope of the Dept of Children's Advocacy

3.2.2. - Encourage a culture of collaboration and coordination among state agencies which serve children by developing relationships and communicating regularly in a

ACCOUNTABILITY OF FUNDS	professional and respectful manner. Regular meetings should occur, with a minimum of one virtual or in-person meeting occurring with each of the nine state agencies each fiscal year. The advancement of these strategies is dependent upon the ability to communicate and collaborate effectively, both internally and externally. **Re-Request for Funding**: Many state agencies began using the Microsoft Teams virtual platform. Children's Advocacy was not able to have Teams disseminated to staff in 2020 and subscribed to Webex. In 2022, the Department of Administration notified Children's Advocacy (as a shared services agency) that Admin DTO would be providing Teams access to all Children's Advocacy staff, and Children's Advocacy would be responsible for the costs. Having Teams and the Microsoft Suite benefits Children's Advocacy, and Children's Advocacy needs state allocations to pay for the services. This is a duplicate request that has not yet been allocated. The July 1, 2023 bill was $84,669.36, and the agency was billed again in July of 2024. The agency does not have designated funding for this expense. This funding is coming from operational funding for the agency's programs and other expenses. **New Request for Funding**: The annual cost for Cisco/Meraki AP SmartNet Licenses was $16,587.90 in May of 2023 and $16,808.06 in June of 2024. The projected cost for May or June of 2025 is $17,000. State allocations are needed for these recurring expenses. **New Request for Funding:** State allocations are needed to support the agency's operational needs related to the role of the IT Director. This includes $600 per month for a car lease, $500 per month for equipment and supplies for cabling and other expenses related to county IT moves and maintenance, and $500 per year for training for the IT Director. This totals $13,700 per year Having access to efficient and reliable information technology including Teams, One Drive, and SharePoint are related to strategies with measurable goals in the agency's most recent Annual Accountability Report.

What specific strategy, as outlined in the most recent Strategic Planning and Performance Measurement template of agency's accountability report, does this funding request support? How would this request advance that strategy? How would the use of these funds be evaluated?

RECIPIENTS OF FUNDS	Staff with the Department of Children's Advocacy will use Teams and the Microsoft Suite, Miraki licenses, and Cisco switches, and staff benefits from the agency's IT Director. Access to these tools also benefit children, families, and other agencies. Technology, licensing access, and IT support significantly improve the agency's ability to coordinate and communicate. Children's Advocacy also communicates with individuals and organizations which benefit from having an assessable platform for virtual meetings.

What individuals or entities would receive these funds (contractors, vendors, grantees, individual beneficiaries, etc.)? How would these funds be allocated – using an existing formula, through a competitive process, based upon predetermined eligibility criteria?

JUSTIFICATION OF REQUEST	**The South Carolina Department of Administration (Admin) conducted an audit of its Division of Technology Operations (DTO)-provided Microsoft Office 365 licensing. While in the past Admin assumed Office 365 licensing costs for its customers, DTO has been working with agencies to pass on this fee as it engages with customers in other activities.** What? Agencies which had not been previously charged for Office 365 licensing costs became responsible for their Office 365 licensing costs effective July 1 of each year. These charges will be invoiced on a yearly basis each July. How? Licensing costs are determined by multiplying the number of accounts by the current license cost as summarized below. The cost for the Department of Children's Advocacy was estimated to be $77,711.40 based on 195 users with licensing costs at $398.52 each. The agency has been billed for 2023 and 2025 without state allocations. **The budget request for Microsoft Office 365 licensing is $85,000 based on the invoice of $84,669.36. This billing change results in additional functionality such as Teams, One Drive and SharePoint licensing will be available for all staff. Our agency has not had Teams, One Drive or SharePoint.**

Additional expenses for which state allocations are needed:

The annual cost for Cisco/Meraki AP SmartNet Licenses was $16,587.90 in May of 2023 and $16,808.06 in June of 2024. The projected cost for May or June of 2025 is $17,000. State allocations are needed for these recurring expenses. State allocations are needed to support the agency's operational needs related to the role of the IT Director. This includes $600 per month for a car lease, $500 per month for equipment and

supplies for cabling and other expenses related to county IT moves and maintenance, and $500 per year for training for the IT Director. This totals $13,700 per year

Please thoroughly explain the request to include the justification for funds, potential offsets, matching funds, and method of calculation. Please include any explanation of impact if funds are not received. If new positions have been requested, explain why existing vacancies are not sufficient.

Agency Name:	Department of Children's Advocacy		
Agency Code:	L080	Section:	41

FORM B1 – RECURRING OPERATING REQUEST

AGENCY PRIORITY	**6**

Provide the Agency Priority Ranking from the Executive Summary.

TITLE	**Guardian ad Litem Program Operational Expenses**

Provide a brief, descriptive title for this request.

AMOUNT	**General: $121,193** **Federal: $0** **Other: $0** **Total: $121,193**

What is the net change in requested appropriations for FY 2025-2026? This amount should correspond to the total for all funding sources on the Executive Summary.

NEW POSITIONS	**0.00**

Please provide the total number of new positions needed for this request.

FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH THE REQUEST

Mark "X" for all that apply:

X	Change in cost of providing current services to existing program audience
X	Change in case load/enrollment under existing program guidelines
	Non-mandated change in eligibility/enrollment for existing program
	Non-mandated program change in service levels or areas
X	Proposed establishment of a new program or initiative
	Loss of federal or other external financial support for existing program
	Exhaustion of fund balances previously used to support program
	IT Technology/Security related
	HR/Personnel Related
	Consulted DTO during development
	Related to a Non-Recurring request – If so, Priority #

STATEWIDE ENTERPRISE STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

Mark "X" for primary applicable Statewide Enterprise Strategic Objective:

	Education, Training, and Human Development
X	Healthy and Safe Families
	Maintaining Safety, Integrity, and Security
	Public Infrastructure and Economic Development
	Government and Citizens

ACCOUNTABILITY OF FUNDS

1.1.3- Review (and revise/implement as appropriate) onboarding and ongoing training to improve staff retention

1.2.1. - Reduce existing vacancies by recruiting and retaining staff in an effort to reduce existing workloads for staff; improve staff's ability to actively recruit volunteers; and to provide additional support for volunteers and the court system

1.3.1. - Survey volunteer Guardians ad Litem regarding their satisfaction with their relationship with the Guardian ad Litem Program

1.3.3. - Increase the completion rate of potential volunteers from the 30-hour Pre-Service Training

3.1.5 - Complete annual audits for local county offices to ensure quality standards are met

3.3.1 - Monitor and report progress quarterly and annually in achieving permanent plans for children in foster care through an external system of accountability and advocacy each fiscal year.

The advancement of these strategies is dependent upon a well-trained, appropriately resourced workforce within the Cass Elias McCarter Guardian ad Litem Program. This funding will provide resources for the program's operations. Each strategy has measurable goals in the agency's most recent Annual Accountability Report.

What specific strategy, as outlined in the most recent Strategic Planning and Performance Measurement template of agency's accountability report, does this funding request support? How would this request advance that strategy? How would the use of these funds be evaluated?

RECIPIENTS OF FUNDS

Increased operational Costs for Guardian ad Litem Program operations are as follows:

Lease Increases for County Office Space: $57,780

Increased costs for legal representation for volunteer Guardians ad Litem: $47,743

What individuals or entities would receive these funds (contractors, vendors, grantees, individual beneficiaries, etc.)? How would these funds be allocated – using an existing formula, through a competitive process, based upon predetermined eligibility criteria?

JUSTIFICATION OF REQUEST

The Cass Elias McCarter Guardian ad Litem Program has experienced increased costs related to office space, moving expenses, and legal representation.

Lease Increases for County Office Space: $57,780

Leases have increased in several locations and some offices have been relocated.

There will be a **$57,780** annual increase in leases for the Guardian ad Litem Program. Net changes will occur as follows:

Horry +$275

Anderson +2,072

Sumter +620

Berkley +2,000 (current location is free)

Aiken +1,275

Kershaw +1,075

Spartanburg -2,502 (rent will be free at new location)

Moving and IT Expenses: $16,400

Four additional offices will need to be relocated with additional costs of $6,000 for moving expenses and $10,400 for IT expenses for a total of **$16,400** (Horry, Berkley, Florence and Hampton/Allendale).The Program anticipates similar recurring costs each year.

Increased costs for legal representation for volunteer Guardians ad Litem:$47,743

The Department of Children's Advocacy has a contract with the Department of Social Services whereby Title IV-B funding is drawn down for the payment of contract attorneys who represent Guardians ad Litem in Family Court abuse and neglect matters. This is a 75/25 match with IV-B funding and state dollars.

The current contract with DSS is $1,034,243.41. The Guardian ad Litem Program's budget expense for that is $295,793.41, and the IV-B match is $738,450.00. The Guardian ad Litem Program is working with DSS to renegotiate the contract, but there may be implications for DSS which preclude DSS from agreeing to an increase in this contract. In the meantime, additional funding had to be added to attorney contracts in the amount of **$47,743** to retain quality legal representation for Guardians ad Litem. The Department of Children's Advocacy requests recurring funding for the additional costs to secure attorneys for Guardians ad Litem.

Please thoroughly explain the request to include the justification for funds, potential offsets, matching funds, and method of calculation. Please include any explanation of impact if funds are not received. If new positions have been requested, explain why existing vacancies are not sufficient.

Agency Name:	Department of Children's Advocacy		
Agency Code:	L080	Section:	41

FORM B1 – RECURRING OPERATING REQUEST

AGENCY PRIORITY	**8**
	Provide the Agency Priority Ranking from the Executive Summary.
TITLE	**Recruiting and Retaining Child Advocates (recurring)**
	Provide a brief, descriptive title for this request.
AMOUNT	**General: $440,564** **Federal: $0** **Other: $0** **Total: $440,564**
	What is the net change in requested appropriations for FY 2025-2026? This amount should correspond to the total for all funding sources on the Executive Summary.
NEW POSITIONS	**0.00**
	Please provide the total number of new positions needed for this request.

FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH THE REQUEST

Mark "X" for all that apply:

	Change in cost of providing current services to existing program audience
X	Change in case load/enrollment under existing program guidelines
	Non-mandated change in eligibility/enrollment for existing program
	Non-mandated program change in service levels or areas
	Proposed establishment of a new program or initiative
	Loss of federal or other external financial support for existing program
	Exhaustion of fund balances previously used to support program
	IT Technology/Security related
X	HR/Personnel Related
	Consulted DTO during development
	Related to a Non-Recurring request – If so, Priority #

STATEWIDE ENTERPRISE STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

Mark "X" for primary applicable Statewide Enterprise Strategic Objective:

	Education, Training, and Human Development
X	Healthy and Safe Families
	Maintaining Safety, Integrity, and Security
	Public Infrastructure and Economic Development
	Government and Citizens

ACCOUNTABILITY OF FUNDS

1.1.2- Improve or maintain agency turnover rate through effective recruitment and retention

1.2.1. - Foster innovation in retention methods for staff. Survey Guardian ad Litem staff regarding their satisfaction with their relationship with leadership

1.3.1. - Increase the completion rate of potential volunteers from the 30-hour Pre-Service Training

2.1.5. - Provide information to the public through social media about children awaiting adoption in South Carolina

2.2.5. - Review and update 100% of FCRD/FCRB policies and procedures to streamline and improve consistency across the state.

3.1.4 – Monitor and report audit scores for local county offices to ensure quality standards are met

3.1.6. - Increase the number of adoption referrals received by Heart Gallery by 10%

3.3.1 - Monitor and report progress quarterly and annually in achieving permanent plans for children in foster care through an external system of accountability and advocacy each fiscal year.

The advancement of these strategies is dependent upon a well-trained, appropriately resourced workforce within the Department of Children's Advocacy. Each strategy has measurable goals in the agency's most recent Annual Accountability Report.

What specific strategy, as outlined in the most recent Strategic Planning and Performance Measurement template of agency's accountability report, does this funding request support? How would this request advance that strategy? How would the use of these funds be evaluated?

RECIPIENTS OF FUNDS

This request is for recurring salary increases for full-time Department of Children's Advocacy staff (FTE, Temporary Grant and Time-Limited) based on their performance for the 2025-2026 evaluation period.

Eligible Staff who receive a performance evaluation for 2025-2026 of 1.50 (Successful) or higher would be considered.

- Exceptional 2.50 – 3.00
- Successful 1.50 – 2.49

Certain staff would not be eligible, including:

1. Staff who have submitted a resignation letter to end employment.
2. Staff who have not been with the agency or in their position for 12 months and/or who have not completed their probationary period. Staff will be eligible for consideration for an increase at the completion of their successful probation period.
3. Staff who received a non-recurring performance-based bonus for the same evaluation period.
4. Staff who received a promotion within the past 12 months. Staff will be eligible for consideration of an increase at the completion of their successful 6-month probation period.

What individuals or entities would receive these funds (contractors, vendors, grantees, individual beneficiaries, etc.)? How would these funds be allocated – using an existing formula, through a competitive process, based upon predetermined eligibility criteria?

JUSTIFICATION OF REQUEST

Foster Care Review Division: $130,541

Salary increases for the South Carolina Division of Foster Care would be based on employees' performance for the 2025-2026 evaluation period. FCRD staff has only received one across the board pay increase, which was position specific and did not impact all positions. This occurred in 2022 and was designed to increase salaries that fell significantly below the state average for state employees in the same job classification and with comparable years of service.

The proposal for salary increases for full-time staff is based on the state average for the job classification along with employee performance for the 2025-2026 evaluation period. All FCRD staff fall below the state average salary regardless of agency or state tenure, and the Division has never provided performance increases to reward employees for strong performance for their valuable service on behalf of some of South Carolina's most vulnerable citizens. The proposed increase will make pay within the FCRD more competitive and will reward staff for strong performance. It is the division's hope that this will reduce staff turnover and improve employee morale.

FCRD experienced extremely high turnover in calendar year 2022 with many of the employees who have vacated their positions accepting higher paying positions elsewhere. To avoid a recurrence of a high turnover rate, the Division proposes performance-based increases that are tied to EPMS ratings with a 5% increase being earned by those with ratings of Successful and an 8% increase being earned by those with ratings of Exceptional.

Guardian ad Litem Program: $310,023

Salary increases for the Cass Elias McCarter Guardian ad Litem Program would be based on employees' performance for the 2025-2026 evaluation period. The Guardian ad Litem Program's vacancy rate has been reduced from almost 40% in July of 2019 to 8% in July of 2024. This has been due to concerted efforts to track and fill

	vacancies and to assess and modify salaries to ensure equity. A performance pay increase program was approved for the division in the past, but due to budget constraints, employees were not able to receive another increase. A series of efforts tied to filling vacancies, improving salaries, and providing a more flexible work schedule have contributed to lowering the attrition rate, and rewarding staff for their performance is also morale-boosting. This results in improved outcomes for children as staff are able to have the sufficient resources they need to do their jobs and as staff are incentivized through appropriate compensation. This request is for a performance-based increase tied to EPMS ratings with a 5% increase for Successful scores and 7% increase for Exceptional scores. This amount does not include the fringe benefits.

Please thoroughly explain the request to include the justification for funds, potential offsets, matching funds, and method of calculation. Please include any explanation of impact if funds are not received. If new positions have been requested, explain why existing vacancies are not sufficient.

Agency Name:	Department of Children's Advocacy		
Agency Code:	L080	Section:	41

FORM B2 – NON-RECURRING OPERATING REQUEST

AGENCY PRIORITY	5

Provide the Agency Priority Ranking from the Executive Summary.

TITLE	IT Operations (Cisco Switch End-of-Life Replacement)

Provide a brief, descriptive title for this request.

AMOUNT	$77,000

What is the net change in requested appropriations for FY 2025-2026? This amount should correspond to the total for all funding sources on the Executive Summary.

FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH THE REQUEST

Mark "X" for all that apply:	
X	Change in cost of providing current services to existing program audience
	Change in case load/enrollment under existing program guidelines
	Non-mandated change in eligibility/enrollment for existing program
	Non-mandated program change in service levels or areas
	Proposed establishment of a new program or initiative
	Loss of federal or other external financial support for existing program
	Exhaustion of fund balances previously used to support program
X	IT Technology/Security related
X	Consulted DTO during development
	HR/Personnel Related
X	Request for Non-Recurring Appropriations
	Request for Federal/Other Authorization to spend existing funding
	Related to a Recurring request – If so, Priority #

STATEWIDE ENTERPRISE STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

Mark "X" for primary applicable Statewide Enterprise Strategic Objective:	
	Education, Training, and Human Development
X	Healthy and Safe Families
	Maintaining Safety, Integrity, and Security
	Public Infrastructure and Economic Development
	Government and Citizens

ACCOUNTABILITY OF FUNDS

1.2.3. - Augment existing policies and procedures for the Investigations Unit and Critical Investigations Unit to ensure clear expectations for staff and alignment with the agency's mission and duties

2.1.1. - Review and update the agency's online resource directory of state services and resources for children

2.1.2. - Develop and deliver or attend and participate in at least 4 public or community meetings or events to share information about accessing and/or navigating services provided by state agencies for children

3.1.1. - Review and improve the agency's tracking system for reviewing and evaluating services for children.

3.1.2. - Review and report on services that state agencies provide to children to the General Assembly and Governor

3.1.3. - Evaluate services of state agencies within the scope of the Dept of Children's Advocacy

3.2.2. - Encourage a culture of collaboration and coordination among state agencies which serve children by developing relationships and communicating regularly in a professional and respectful manner. Regular meetings should occur, with a minimum of one virtual or in-person meeting occurring with each of the nine state agencies each fiscal year.

The advancement of these strategies is dependent upon the ability to communicate and collaborate effectively, both internally and externally.

What specific strategy, as outlined in the most recent Strategic Planning and Performance Measurement template of *agency's accountability report, does this funding request support? How would this request advance that strategy? How would the use of these funds be evaluated?*

RECIPIENTS OF FUNDS	Staff with the Department of Children's Advocacy need access to quality, efficient, reliable technology to perform their job duties. These tools will also benefit children, families, and other agencies, because they improve Children's Advocacy's ability to coordinate and communicate.

What individuals or entities would receive these funds (contractors, vendors, grantees, individual beneficiaries, etc.)? How would these funds be allocated – using an existing formula, through a competitive process, based upon predetermined eligibility criteria?

JUSTIFICATION OF REQUEST	In June of 2024, the Department of Children's Advocacy was notified by the South Carolina Department of Administration's (Admin) Office of Technology and Information Services (OTIS) that the Cisco 2960, 3650 and 3850 switches currently operating in the agency's environment are approaching their end-of-life. The agency was advised that these switches will need to be replaced to help ensure alignment with state security requirements. Admin has incurred this cost for its shared services customers in the past, but communicated the expectation that such expenses will be the responsibility of agencies moving forward. As such, agencies were advised to add the replacement costs for these switches to their FY 2024-25 budgets. At that time, the FY2024-25 budget process had come to a close, so the agency is requesting the allocations for the FY25-26 budget. Admin has worked to secure the lowest possible replacement cost for agencies through vendor negotiations and bulk purchasing. These efforts are expected to result in an estimated $400,000 in cost savings for the state. Admin will purchase the replacement hardware (Cisco 9200 and 9300 switches) and rebill those costs to the agency once installed. The Department of Children's Advocacy does not have the fiscal surplus to absorb these costs without additional state allocations, and, if unfunded, these costs will come from program operations.

Please thoroughly explain the request to include the justification for funds, potential offsets, matching funds, and method of calculation. Please include any explanation of impact if funds are not received. If new positions have been requested, explain why existing vacancies are not sufficient.

Agency Name:	Department of Children's Advocacy		
Agency Code:	L080	Section:	41

FORM B2 – NON-RECURRING OPERATING REQUEST

AGENCY PRIORITY	7

Provide the Agency Priority Ranking from the Executive Summary.

TITLE	Recruiting and Retaining Child Advocates (non-recurring)

Provide a brief, descriptive title for this request.

AMOUNT	$339,000

What is the net change in requested appropriations for FY 2025-2026? This amount should correspond to the total for all funding sources on the Executive Summary.

FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH THE REQUEST

Mark "X" for all that apply:	
	Change in cost of providing current services to existing program audience
X	Change in case load/enrollment under existing program guidelines
	Non-mandated change in eligibility/enrollment for existing program
	Non-mandated program change in service levels or areas
	Proposed establishment of a new program or initiative
	Loss of federal or other external financial support for existing program
	Exhaustion of fund balances previously used to support program
	IT Technology/Security related
	Consulted DTO during development
	HR/Personnel Related
	Request for Non-Recurring Appropriations
	Request for Federal/Other Authorization to spend existing funding
	Related to a Recurring request – If so, Priority #

STATEWIDE ENTERPRISE STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

Mark "X" for primary applicable Statewide Enterprise Strategic Objective:	
	Education, Training, and Human Development
X	Healthy and Safe Families
	Maintaining Safety, Integrity, and Security
	Public Infrastructure and Economic Development
	Government and Citizens

ACCOUNTABILITY OF FUNDS

1.1.1- Increase the number of active volunteers

1.1.2- Improve or maintain agency turnover rate through effective recruitment and retention

1.1.3-Reduce the existing staff vacancies within Continuum of Care

1.1.4-Increase the diversity of GALs who serve as best interest advocates for children

1.2.1. - Foster innovation in retention methods for staff. Survey Guardian ad Litem staff regarding their satisfaction with their relationship with leadership

1.3.4. - Reduce the existing staff vacancies within Continuum of Care

2.1.4-Increae the number of 1915(C) Waiver Youth enrollment

2.1.5. - Provide information to the public through social media about children awaiting adoption in South Carolina

2.2.2. - Create and disseminate effective and engaging training material for all Department of Children's Advocacy programs

2.2.4-Initial response to complaints occurs within one business day of the Agency's receipt of telephone, website-submitted, or emailed complaints for FY25.

2.2.5. - Review and update 100% of FCRD/FCRB policies and procedures to streamline and improve consistency across the state.

3.1.1. - Review and improve the agency's tracking system for reviewing and evaluating services for children

3.1.2. - Review and report on services that state agencies provide to children to the General Assembly and Governor

3.1.3-Evaluate services of state agencies within the scope of the Dept of Children's Advocacy

3.1.4 – Monitor and report audit scores for local county offices to ensure quality standards are met

3.1.6. - Increase the number of adoption referrals received by Heart Gallery by 10%

3.2.1. -Provide data and analysis regarding complaint dispositions in an effort to inform recommendations for improvement

3.3.1 - Monitor and report progress quarterly and annually in achieving permanent plans for children in foster care through an external system of accountability and advocacy each fiscal year.

3.3.2-Monitor and report total number and typology trends of critical incident notifications received by the DCA within a fiscal year

The advancement of all of Children's Advocacy's strategies is dependent upon a well-trained, appropriately resourced workforce. Each strategy has measurable goals in the agency's most recent Annual Accountability Report.

What specific strategy, as outlined in the most recent Strategic Planning and Performance Measurement template of agency's accountability report, does this funding request support? How would this request advance that strategy? How would the use of these funds be evaluated?

RECIPIENTS OF FUNDS

This request is for non-recurring bonuses for full-time Department of Children's Advocacy staff (FTE, Temporary Grant and Time-Limited) based on their performance for the 2025-2026 evaluation period.

Eligible Staff who receive a performance evaluation for 2025-2026 of 1.50 (Successful) or higher would be considered.

• Exceptional 2.50 – 3.00 ($1,500)

• Successful 1.50 – 2.49 ($1,200)

Certain staff would not be eligible, including:

1. Staff who have submitted a resignation letter to end employment.

2. Staff who have not completed their probationary period.

3. Staff who received a recurring pay for performance increase for the same evaluation period.

What individuals or entities would receive these funds (contractors, vendors, grantees, individual beneficiaries, etc.)? How would these funds be allocated – using an existing formula, through a competitive process, based upon predetermined eligibility criteria?

Continuum of Care: $60,000 (high-end projection)

Continuum of Care had a 35% vacancy rate as of June 30, 2024, reduced from 40% as of June 30, 2023. A performance-based bonus could be a significant investment for recruiting and retaining staff, and it will serve as an additional incentive for staff to improve outcomes for children by serving more youth, maintaining children in their homes, schools and communities when appropriate, and improving youth's functionality as demonstrated by reduced Child and Adolescent Functional Assessment Score (CAFAS) results. Based on 40 filled positions, Continuum of Care's high-end projection is $60,000 to provide one-time performance-based bonuses for staff if all staff demonstrated exceptional performance of their success criteria during the evaluation period. The criteria for determining whether performance-based increases should be outlined in employees' 2025-2026 EPMSs which are prepared in January of 2025. The criteria should be established based on each employee's performance toward serving more youth, maintaining children in their homes, schools and communities when appropriate, and improving youth's functionality as demonstrated by reduced Child and Adolescent Functional Assessment Score (CAFAS) results.

Foster Care Review Division: $34,500 (high-end projection)

Performance-based bonuses for FCRD staff would reward staff based on their performance while also decreasing turnover and improving employee morale. All FCRD

JUSTIFICATION OF REQUEST	staff fall below the state average salary regardless of agency or state tenure, and the Division has never provided performance increases to reward employees for strong performance. Since the Division does not produce any revenue outside of a contract with the South Carolina Department of Social Services and only provides services to citizens that do not require any fees, budget increases are primarily dependent on state allocations. **Guardian ad Litem Program: $214,500 (high-end projection)** The Guardian ad Litem Program's vacancy rate has been reduced from almost 40% in July of 2019 to 8% in July of 2024. This has been due to concerted efforts to track and fill vacancies and to assess and modify salaries to ensure equity. A performance pay increase program was approved for the division in the past, but due to budget constraints, employees were not able to receive another increase. A series of efforts tied to filling vacancies, improving salaries, and providing a more flexible work schedule have contributed to lowering the attrition rate, and rewarding staff for their performance is also morale-boosting. **System Improvement Division: $25,500 (high-end projection)** The Critical Investigations Unit Investigators, Investigations Unit Investigators, Intake Specialists, Investigations Unit Director, and Deputy Child Advocate experienced high caseloads regarding a broad range of complaints and/or serious critical incidents over the last fiscal year, and they consistently performed at a high level. Across System Improvement, workflow has increased 54%. This growth is significant, and this proposal provides financial recognition for their performance amidst increasing caseloads. If funded, these bonuses will have a profound impact on retention, production, and office morale. Staff will feel more valued and seen, which ultimately allows for greater impact for the children in South Carolina. A non-recurring bonus will ensure highly trained staff remain committed to System Improvement. The Agency has already invested great deal of time, money, and resources into the current System Improvement staff. If this request is not granted, System Improvement may lose these valuable staff that are well-versed, highly trained, and competent in their work. This loss will cost the agency time and money, since workflow will drastically decrease, significant time will be needed to identify, hire, and train a new employee, who will not be ready to immediately alleviate the high caseloads, and the cases and investigations will become stagnant. If the Agency's workflow decreases, the Agency may miss vital information or be unable to timely advocate for appropriate services for children and youth. The ability to offer a non-recurring bonus to System Improvement staff is impactful. **Administration: $4500 (high-end projection)** The Department of Children's Advocacy's Administration staff included with this request are the IT Director, Communications Director, Fiscal Analyst and Administrative Coordinator, provided they meet the established criteria outlined herein. When these staff go above and beyond their required duties, the benefit is felt throughout the agency. This plan would incentivize and reward staff who meet and/or exceed their goals annually while incentivizing staff to continue to demonstrate high performance in their job duties.

Please thoroughly explain the request to include the justification for funds, potential offsets, matching funds, and method of calculation. Please include any explanation of impact if funds are not received. If new positions have been requested, explain why existing vacancies are not sufficient.

Agency Name:	Department of Children's Advocacy		
Agency Code:	L080	Section:	41

FORM B2 – NON-RECURRING OPERATING REQUEST

AGENCY PRIORITY	9

Provide the Agency Priority Ranking from the Executive Summary.

TITLE	Equipment for New Hires

Provide a brief, descriptive title for this request.

AMOUNT	$47,150

What is the net change in requested appropriations for FY 2025-2026? This amount should correspond to the total for all funding sources on the Executive Summary.

FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH THE REQUEST

Mark "X" for all that apply:	
X	Change in cost of providing current services to existing program audience
	Change in case load/enrollment under existing program guidelines
	Non-mandated change in eligibility/enrollment for existing program
	Non-mandated program change in service levels or areas
	Proposed establishment of a new program or initiative
	Loss of federal or other external financial support for existing program
	Exhaustion of fund balances previously used to support program
X	IT Technology/Security related
X	Consulted DTO during development
	HR/Personnel Related
X	Request for Non-Recurring Appropriations
	Request for Federal/Other Authorization to spend existing funding
X	Related to a Recurring request – If so, Priority # Advocating for System Improvement

STATEWIDE ENTERPRISE STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

Mark "X" for primary applicable Statewide Enterprise Strategic Objective:	
	Education, Training, and Human Development
X	Healthy and Safe Families
	Maintaining Safety, Integrity, and Security
	Public Infrastructure and Economic Development
	Government and Citizens

ACCOUNTABILITY OF FUNDS

1.1.1. - Increase the number of active volunteers

1.2.1. - Foster innovation in retention methods for staff. Survey Guardian ad Litem staff regarding their satisfaction with their relationship with leadership

1.3.1. - Increase the completion rate of potential volunteers from the 30-hour Pre-service Training.

3.1.4 - Monitor and report audits scores for local county offices to ensure quality standards are met.

1.2.3. - Augment existing policies and procedures for the Investigations Unit and Critical Investigations Unit to ensure clear expectations for staff and alignment with the agency's mission and duties

2.1.1. - Review and update the agency's online resource directory of state services and resources for children

2.1.2. - Develop and deliver or attend and participate in at least 4 public or community meetings or events to share information about accessing and/or navigating services provided by state agencies for children

2.2.5. - Initial response to complaints occurs within one business day of the Agency's receipt of telephone, website-submitted, or emailed complaints for FY25.

3.1.1. - Review and improve the agency's tracking system for reviewing and evaluating services for children.

3.1.2. - Review and report on services that state agencies provide to children to the General Assembly and Governor

	3.1.3. - Evaluate services of state agencies within the scope of the Dept of Children's Advocacy with target of completing evaluations of all 9 agencies by FY24 3.2.2. - Encourage a culture of collaboration and coordination among state agencies which serve children by developing relationships and communicating regularly in a professional and respectful manner. Regular meetings should occur, with a minimum of one virtual or in-person meeting occurring with each of the nine state agencies each fiscal year. The advancement of these strategies is dependent upon the ability to communicate and collaborate effectively, both internally and externally.

What specific strategy, as outlined in the most recent Strategic Planning and Performance Measurement template of agency's accountability report, does this funding request support? How would this request advance that strategy? How would the use of these funds be evaluated?

RECIPIENTS OF FUNDS	Staff with the Department of Children's Advocacy need reliable equipment to perform their job duties. These tools will also benefit children, families, and other agencies, because they improve Children's Advocacy's ability to coordinate and communicate.

What individuals or entities would receive these funds (contractors, vendors, grantees, individual beneficiaries, etc.)? How would these funds be allocated – using an existing formula, through a competitive process, based upon predetermined eligibility criteria?

JUSTIFICATION OF REQUEST	**Related to Priority #1:** IT Equipment: $4,500 Non-recurring Estimated cost of $500 per employee for desks and other non-IT equipment Non-IT Equipment: $13,950 Non-recurring Estimated cost of $1550 per employee for laptops, monitors and other IT equipment **Related to Priority #2:** Non-IT Equipment: $7,000 Non-recurring Estimated cost of $500 per employee for desks and other non-IT equipment IT Equipment: $21,700 Non-recurring Estimated cost of $1550 per employee for laptops, monitors and other IT equipment TOTAL: $47,150.00 **See Recurring Priority #1 and Recurring Priority #2 for additional justification.**

Please thoroughly explain the request to include the justification for funds, potential offsets, matching funds, and method of calculation. Please include any explanation of impact if funds are not received. If new positions have been requested, explain why existing vacancies are not sufficient.

Agency Name:	Department of Children's Advocacy		
Agency Code:	L080	Section:	41

FORM D – PROVISO REVISION REQUEST

NUMBER	NEW
	Cite the proviso according to the renumbered list (or mark "NEW").
TITLE	Per Diem and Tax Credit for Volunteer Guardians ad Litem
	Provide the title from the renumbered list or suggest a short title for any new request.
BUDGET PROGRAM	Guardian ad Litem Program
	Identify the associated budget program(s) by name and budget section.
RELATED BUDGET REQUEST	
	Is this request associated with a budget request you have submitted for FY 2025-2026? If so, cite it here.
REQUESTED ACTION	Add
	Choose from: Add, Delete, Amend, or Codify.
OTHER AGENCIES AFFECTED	The Comptroller General would be affected, because this would create per diem payments (with a cap) for volunteer Guardians ad Litem in abuse and neglect proceedings with the Cass Elias McCarter Guardian ad Litem Program as individuals eligible for (modified) per diem. The Department of Revenue would be affected if a state tax credit of up to $250 was approved.
	Which other agencies would be affected by the recommended action? How?

SUMMARY & EXPLANATION

The Department of Children's Advocacy proposes a proviso to establish authority for a state tax deduction or credit up to $250 and/or payment of per diem with a cap of $250 per court appointment for volunteer Guardians ad Litem who are appointed through the Cass Elias McCarter Guardian ad Litem Program to provide best-interest advocacy in abuse and neglect proceedings.

The Guardian ad Litem Program continues to make significant efforts to increase the number of trained volunteers to serve as best interest advocates for abused and neglected children. These efforts include hiring state and regional recruiters and trainers, creating an engaging social media presence, and participating in community events to raise awareness of the need and impact of volunteer Guardians ad Litem. At the end of FY24, 56% of children were appointed a volunteer Guardian ad Litem, and 44% of children were appointed a trained Guardian ad Litem Program staff person. FY2019 data indicated 2000 volunteers served 15,603 children. At the beginning of FY20, it was determined that 1754 volunteer Guardians ad Litem had completed training and were available for appointment.

The caseloads at that time were determined based on the total number of children and total number of trained, available volunteers. Further data analysis revealed that not all trained volunteers were actively taking willing to accept appointments.

The ongoing data scrubbing and quality assurance indicate there were 999 active volunteers who were assigned as best interest advocates as of June 30, 2024.

In FY24, the Guardian ad Litem Program served 11,577 children with an average of 6,600 children served per month. If 999 volunteers served 56% of 6,600 children, then the average volunteer caseload was 3 or 4 children. By contrast, Guardian ad Litem Program staff of approximately 135 FTEs served 44% of 6,600 children.

In some areas, staff caseloads are between 30 and 35, and the goal is that, if staff must have caseloads, the caseloads should be below 20 throughout the state.

The Department of Children's Advocacy recognizes that additional efforts are needed to recruit volunteer Guardians ad Litem to serve as best interest advocates for children.

The agency proposes the creation of a Proviso that authorizes a state tax credit or deduction for volunteer expenses up to $250 per child per appointment such as the mileage or other expenses incurred by volunteer Guardians ad Litem as well payment of per diem as calculated by South Carolina's per diem rate, with a cap of $250 per child per appointment.

South Carolina Code of Laws Ann. Section 63-7-1620 requires that a Guardian ad Litem be appointed for all children in abuse and neglect proceedings. The Cass Elias McCarter Guardian ad Litem Program is responsible for identifying a Guardian ad Litem for appointment in all counties, except Richland which has a county-based (not state-supported) program.

South Carolina Code of Laws Ann. Section 63-11-740 concerns Foster Care Review Boards and provides, in pertinent part: Members of the local boards and former members substituting for an absent member may not receive compensation for their services but must be allowed mileage, per diem, and subsistence as provided by law for state boards, committees, and commissions for attendance at board meetings.

The Department of Children's Advocacy administers the Cass Elias McCarter Guardian ad Litem (GAL) Program and the Foster Care Review Division (FCRD) which supports Foster Care Review Boards. Both the GAL Program and the FCRD have volunteer models. The GAL Program relies on volunteer Guardians ad Litem, and the FCRD relies on volunteer Foster Care Review Board members.

Summarize the existing proviso. If requesting a new proviso, describe the current state of affairs without it. Explain the need for your requested action. For deletion requests due to recent codification, please identify SC Code section where language now appears.

FISCAL IMPACT

If sufficient numbers of volunteers are recruited and retained, then there would be a cost benefit even if volunteers are provided a tax credit or deduction or payment of per diem as outlined herein.

The proposed cost of implementing the volunteer recruitment and retention measures should be considered alongside the estimated costs associated with FTEs serving as Guardians ad Litem. Estimations are as follows: Salary of $40,000, fringe of 45%, office space of $3008, cell phone of $600, travel and training of $4000, the recurring cost for a Program Coordinator I is $65,608 recurring with an additional non-recurring cost of $2000 for IT and non-IT equipment.

Staff responsibilities include more than serving as a Guardian ad Litem when volunteers are not available. Approximately 50% of the job duties of a Program Coordinator I are devoted to best-interest advocacy with caseloads of 20 or more. Based on this information, $65,608 salary, fringe, and expenses x 50% of job duties (equals $32,804) divided by a caseload of 20 children equals a cost of $1640.20 per child.

Every volunteer who is appointed for a child saves the state $1640.20 without the requests outlined herein, and, even with the costs outlined herein, volunteer Guardians ad Litem would save $1390.20.

The cost for implementation of the proviso would vary based on the provisions, including the cap.

If volunteer Guardians ad Litem serve 56% of 11,577 per year and if there was modified per diem cap of $250, then the cost could be as high as $1,620,780. That is still a savings of $9,012,833.42 for the state when considering 56% of 11,577 x the cost of $1640.20 for a total of $10,633.713.40 to hire FTEs to serve as Guardians ad Litem for 56% of children.

If the number of volunteers increased to volunteers serving 65% of children, then, based on the number of children served in FY24 with a cap of $250, the cost could be as high as $1,881,263 with a net benefit to the state of $10,461,324.

If the cap was reduced to $100, then the cost could be $648,312 and the net benefit would be $9,985,301.42 based on 56% and $742,505 with a net benefit of $11,600,082 based on 65% of volunteers serving 11,577 children.

The following projections are also outlined in the Department of Children's Advocacy's FY26 Budget B.1., Priority 2 wherein the Department of Children's Advocacy is requesting additional FTEs to reduce staff caseloads to a level that allows staff to engage in quality best-interest advocacy for abused and neglected children.

Provide estimates of any fiscal impacts associated with this proviso, whether for state, federal, or other funds. Explain the method of calculation.

NEW PROVISO (Department of Children's Advocacy; Comptroller General; Department of Revenue; Volunteer Guardians ad Litem Per Diem) Volunteers who are trained by and appointed through the Cass Elias McCarter Guardian ad Litem Program shall receive per diem up to $250 per child and up to $250 in tax deductions for travel and subsistence reimbursement per child for whom they are appointed regarding their volunteerism through court-appointment to serve as Guardian ad Litem. The Comptroller General is authorized to provide modified per diem to volunteer Guardians ad Litem up to $250 as

PROPOSED PROVISO TEXT	submitted by the Department of Children's Advocacy for volunteer Guardians ad Litem who are appointed to provide best-interest advocacy for abused and neglected children; provided, payment is limited to $250 per volunteer Guardian ad Litem per child. Children's Advocacy is required to maintain records of submissions and to provide data to the General Assembly through the end of the fiscal year to indicate the amount of per diem paid and the number of children served by volunteer Guardians ad Litem to analyze the impact of this proviso. The State Department of Revenue is authorized to allow volunteer Guardians ad Litem to deduct up to $250 from their taxes based on the expenditures they incur in their volunteerism through appointment as best interest advocates for abused and neglected children with deductions limited to $250 per appointment per child. This proviso does not apply to state employees or to anyone who receives compensation for their services as a Guardian ad Litem.

Paste existing text above, then bold and underline insertions and strikethrough deletions. For new proviso requests, enter requested text above.

Agency Name:	Department of Children's Advocacy		
Agency Code:	L080	Section:	41

FORM D – PROVISO REVISION REQUEST

NUMBER	NEW
	Cite the proviso according to the renumbered list (or mark "NEW").
TITLE	Counsel for Children Pilot
	Provide the title from the renumbered list or suggest a short title for any new request.
BUDGET PROGRAM	System Improvement Division
	Identify the associated budget program(s) by name and budget section.
RELATED BUDGET REQUEST	B.1. Recurring Priority #1
	Is this request associated with a budget request you have submitted for FY 2025-2026? If so, cite it here.
REQUESTED ACTION	Add
	Choose from: Add, Delete, Amend, or Codify.
OTHER AGENCIES AFFECTED	Court Administration and Department of Social Services would be affected, because this would modify the current statutory appointments for Guardians ad Litem for children in certain abuse and neglect actions.
	Which other agencies would be affected by the recommended action? How?

The Department of Children's Advocacy proposes a proviso to establish a pilot program concerning appointment of counsel for children in Family Court proceedings for youth who are in foster care. A proviso is necessary to address three issues: (1) The criteria for appointment of counsel for children in the identified pilot counties; (2) the non-appointment of a Guardian ad Litem; and (3) funding for the pilot program. The current law concerning legal representation for children in child abuse and neglect proceedings is as follows:

SECTION 63-7-1620. Legal representation of children.

In all child abuse and neglect proceedings:

(1) Children must be appointed a guardian ad litem by the family court. A guardian ad litem serving on behalf of the South Carolina Guardian ad Litem Program or Richland County CASA must be represented by legal counsel in any judicial proceeding pursuant to Section 63-11-530(C).

(2) The family court may appoint legal counsel for the child. Counsel for the child may not be the same as counsel for:

(a) the parent, legal guardian, or other person subject to the proceeding;

(b) any governmental or social agency involved in the proceeding;

(c) the child's guardian ad litem.

(3) Parents, legal guardians, or other persons subject to any judicial proceeding are entitled to legal counsel. Those persons unable to afford legal representation must be appointed counsel by the family court.

(4) The interests of the State and the Department of Social Services must be represented by the legal representatives of the Department of Social Services in any judicial proceeding.

Mental and behavioral health challenges, education issues, juvenile justice involvement, and long-term negative impacts can be exacerbated for youth who spend extended time in foster care and/or who have multiple placement changes while in foster care.

Counsel for Kids is a national campaign to ensure the right to counsel for children and youth involved in abuse and neglect proceedings and reports, "Compared to youth who do not have attorney representation, children appointed client-directed attorneys experience better results, less time in foster care or group settings, shorter time to adoption or guardianship, and more successful reunifications. They are also 45% more likely to reunify with their parents, 30% less likely to change placements, and 65% less likely to change schools. A client-directed attorney can shorten the time a child is in the foster care system, meaning cost-savings for state and federal taxpayers." (Source: Counselforkids.org)

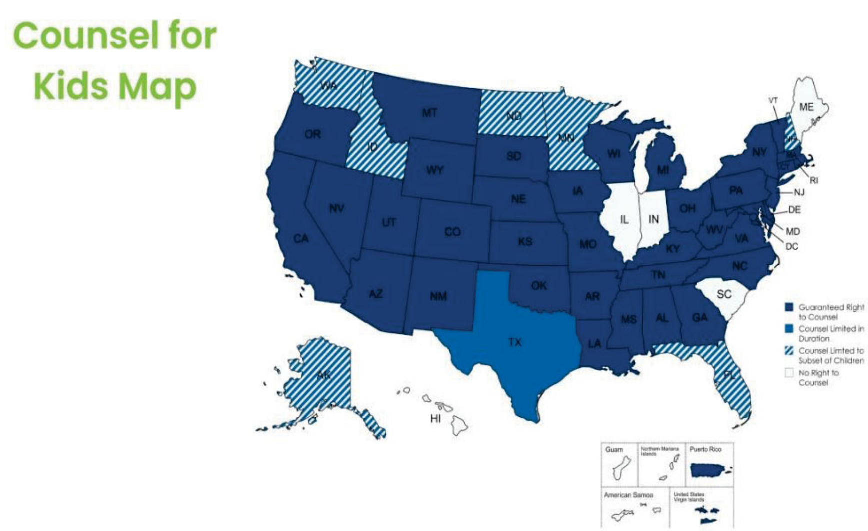
SUMMARY & EXPLANATION

The Department of Children's Advocacy (including the Cass Elias McCarter Guardian ad Litem Program), Court Administration, Department of Social Services, Commission on Indigent Defense, Children's Law Center, and attorney and judicial members of the Bench Bar Committee have been collaborating to pilot or test this practice in South Carolina. The National Association of Counsel for Children has met with the Bench Bar Committee and with the Direct Representation subcommittee to provide additional information and to offer free technical assistance to support South Carolina having counsel for children. Children are required to have an attorney to represent them in juvenile justice proceedings but not for child welfare proceedings. Currently, state law allows, but does not require, the appointment of counsel for children in abuse and neglect court proceedings, and state law requires the appointment of a Guardian ad Litem in all abuse and neglect court proceedings.

A 2018 change in Title IV-E of the Social Security Act underscores the impact of direct representation for children by allowing states to pursue matching dollars for direct representation of children. This is for attorneys who provide direct representation of children as compared with Guardians ad Litem who provide best-interest advocacy. (Source: Title IV-E – Federal Payments for Foster Care and Adoption Assistance - SJI Funding Toolkit) After this change in federal law, American Bar Association President wrote, "This action will produce better outcomes for countless children, courts, and child welfare agencies throughout the country." (Source: https://www.americanbar.org/co...)

At public hearings, the Joint Citizens and Legislative Committee on Children have heard from supporters of counsel for children including a young lady who shared her experiences and recommendations based on the time she spent in foster care. (Source: JCLCC public hearing, September 24, 2024)

Other states have enacted laws to provide direct representation for children in abuse and neglect proceedings:



Source: counselforkids.org

In an effort to analyze the effectiveness of appointment of counsel for children in South Carolina, it is necessary to modify these statutes for piloting purposes.

Summarize the existing proviso. If requesting a new proviso, describe the current state of affairs without it. Explain the need for your requested action. For deletion requests due to recent codification, please identify SC Code section where language now appears.

The fiscal impact would be $247,520 (recurring) and $4,000 (non-recurring) annually for two years for a total fiscal impact of $499,040. It is anticipated that these costs would be offset by the benefit provided by direct representation of children including permanency and placement stability for youth who are in foster care. Federal matching funds may be available based on a 2019 Title IV-E amendment which allows states to seek matching dollars for direct representation of children in abuse and neglect proceedings.

The following projections are also outlined in the Department of Children's Advocacy's FY26 Budget B.1., Priority 1 for hiring and onboarding two Attorney IIIs to serve as

FISCAL IMPACT	counsel for youth and provide direct representation for certain youth in foster care for a two year pilot period: Midpoint: $80,105 plus fringe .45 $36,047.25 x 2 = $232,304 *Rent: $6,016* Based on rent at the Edgar Brown building ($147,390.85 /49 offices = $3008/year per office Cell phone: $1,200 Estimated at $50/month per employee or $600/year *IT Equipment: $1,000 Non-recurring* Estimated cost of $500 per employee for desks and other non-IT equipment *Non-IT Equipment: $3,000 Non-recurring* Estimated cost of $1,550 per employee for laptops, monitors and other IT equipment *Travel and training: $8,000* Estimated at $4000/year Recurring: $247,520 Non-Recurring: $4,000

Provide estimates of any fiscal impacts associated with this proviso, whether for state, federal, or other funds. Explain the method of calculation.

PROPOSED PROVISO TEXT	**NEW PROVISO** (Department of Children's Advocacy; Court Administration; Department of Social Services: Counsel for Children Pilot) The Department of Children's Advocacy, Court Administration, and Department of Social Services are hereby authorized to pilot in two counties the appointment of counsel for youth who are in foster care. Children's Advocacy and the Court are hereby authorized to substitute the appointment of counsel for youth for the appointment of a Guardian ad Litem in the pilot counties such that, when counsel is appointed, a Guardian ad Litem shall not be appointed as outlined in S.C. Code of Laws Ann. Section 63-7-1620. Children's Advocacy shall confer with Court Administration, Social Services, and the Children's Law Center to develop criteria for appointment of counsel. Children's Advocacy shall be allocated a recurring $247,520 and non-recurring $4,000 for two years during which time Children's Advocacy shall capture and report data concerning the use and effectiveness of the pilot program specifically concerning placement stability and permanency for youth in foster care who are represented by counsel.

Paste existing text above, then bold and underline insertions and strikethrough deletions. For new proviso requests, enter requested text above.

Agency Name:	Department of Children's Advocacy		
Agency Code:	L080	Section:	41

FORM E – AGENCY COST SAVINGS AND GENERAL FUND REDUCTION CONTINGENCY PLAN

TITLE

Agency Cost Savings and General Fund Reduction Contingency Plan

AMOUNT

$0

What is the General Fund 3% reduction amount? This amount should correspond to the reduction spreadsheet prepared by EBO.

ASSOCIATED FTE REDUCTIONS

6 FTEs

How many FTEs would be reduced in association with this General Fund reduction?

PROGRAM / ACTIVITY IMPACT

These FTEs are needed to provide High Fidelity Wraparound to children and youth with serious emotional and behavioral challenges. The core mission of the Continuum of Care is to help maintain children and youth in their homes, schools, and communities to avoid higher levels of care and to reduce children's functional impairment related to mental and behavioral challenges. Continuum of Care is also able to request a reimbursement rate for the intensive care coordination provided to families by Continuum of Care staff. Not filling these positions would impact the number of children, youth and families with whom Continuum of Care partners and could result in the child or youth needing to enter a higher level of care such as an emergency department, psychiatric rehabilitation treatment facility or acute care setting without in-home intensive care coordination that Continuum of Care provides.

A general fund reduction would be achieved by maintaining six (6) vacancies within the Continuum of Care (COC) Program. The vacancy rate was at 38% as of June 30, 2023, and, based on Continuum of Care's budget and youth's needs, Continuum of Care has committed to reduce the vacancy rate to 15% as outlined in the agency's FY25 Annual Accountability Report goals.

What programs or activities are supported by the General Funds identified?

SUMMARY

6 GA15 FTEs @ $43,000 = $258,000

Employer Contributions (@ 41.2%) = $106,296

Total Savings = $364,296

Continuum of Care employees in the GA15 classification are Wrap Facilitators who provide High Fidelity Wraparound to children, youth and families in an effort to maintain children in their homes, schools, and communities. For the work performed by employees in this job classification, the agency is able to submit reimbursement requests to Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) through the 1915(C) Medicaid waiver for children who qualify for the Palmetto Coordinated System of Care (PCSC) waiver. This funding provides fiscal sustainability for Continuum of Care. Thus, not filling these positions inhibits the division's ability to maximize federal funding.

Not providing this evidence-based practice places children at greater risk of entering higher levels of care such as emergency departments, juvenile justice, foster care, and acute care settings.

Filling vacancies within the Continuum of Care division aligns with the goals, strategies and measures of 1.3.4, 2.1.3, 2.2.3, and 2.2.4 of the agency's Annual Accountability Report which was submitted on September 10, 2024. FTEs within this program are identified for the agency cost savings plan based on the total number of existing FTE vacancies for this division as compared with other divisions within the agency as well as this program's ability to offset the impact of a General Fund decrease through use of its carryforward funds for a limited period of time.

Please provide a detailed summary of service delivery impact caused by a reduction in General Fund Appropriations and provide the method of calculation for anticipated reductions. Agencies should prioritize reduction in expenditures that have the least significant impact on service delivery.

AGENCY COST SAVINGS PLANS	The Department of Children's Advocacy recognizes the need to maintain all of the Continuum of Care's FTE positions and continues to assess and explore ways to use state allocations more efficiently. One such way is through the development of a new telework policy and business case plan. The telework policy and business case plan were developed to reduce recruitment and training costs associated with high turnover by incentivizing recruitment and retention through more flexible work schedules. These plans are projected to reduce costs and operating expenses by more than $50,000. Those savings will then be used to support staff development, training, and retention through performance pay increases and increased training opportunities as the budget permits. The agency's overall turnover rate has already been reduced from 34% at the end of FY22 to 15% at the end of FY24. Department of Children's Advocacy contemplates that South Carolina's financial forecast is such that this cost savings plan will not need to be implemented; however, in the event it is necessary, eliminating 6 FTE positions would reduce operating expenses by at least 3%.

What measures does the agency plan to implement to reduce its costs and operating expenses by more than $50,000? Provide a summary of the measures taken and the estimated amount of savings. How does the agency plan to repurpose the savings?