



## Department of Children, Youth, and Families Implementation Office Frequently Asked Questions

### Why create a new agency?

While Minnesota frequently ranks as a top state to live and work, far too often, children and families across the state face disparities along the lines of race, ZIP code, and income. State leaders working to improve the lives of children and families consistently heard feedback from external partners and families themselves that there was a need for structural change to improve these outcomes. Based on this feedback, analysis of state governance structures across the country, and aligned leadership, Governor Walz and Lieutenant Governor Flanagan put forward a proposal to do things differently.

In the historic 2023 legislative session, the Governor's Office, Minnesota legislature, and leaders for children and families worked in partnership to pass legislation establishing the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) to create a sustainable, public face for children's issues in state government, along with a thoughtful transition process to launch the new agency. The goals of this new agency are to:

- Align outcomes and policy for children, youth, and families across state government.
- Elevate the priorities and funding needs of children, youth, and families.
- Focus local partners on improving the front door for services, with a goal to ease access and navigation for families and improve service.
- Sharpen the focus of state agencies to best address issues central to the people they serve.

### What is the timeline for setting up the new agency and transferring programs?

The Department of Children, Youth, and Families will launch on July 1, 2024, with a commissioner appointed by the governor. Programs identified to transfer from the Departments of Human Services (DHS), Public Safety (DPS), Education (MDE), and Health (MDH) will transition between July 1, 2024, and July 1, 2025.

To enable a successful transfer under this timeline, the Department of Children, Youth, and Families Implementation Office was established on July 1, 2023, to research, analyze, and engage impacted state agencies in planning successful program transfers, including the specific timeline of the transfer.

## **What is the purpose and structure of the Implementation Office?**

The Department of Children, Youth, and Families Implementation Office, housed at Minnesota Management and Budget (MMB), provides administrative and project management, coordination, and capacity for the budget, policy, and administrative planning necessary to transfer programs centered on children and families and associated finances to the new agency. The office includes functions for engagement, human resources, legal analysis, coordination, and project management. Coordination across the affected state agencies is a core function of the office to build an agency with a mission to elevate and center the work done on behalf of children within state government.

## **Why is the state making these changes now?**

Through years of family and partner engagement across state systems and structures, including through the Preschool Development Grant, Title V, Early Childhood Systems Reform, Child Care and Development Fund Plan, and the Children's Cabinet Advisory Councils, families and partners indicated they wanted increased service and program coordination and simpler service navigation. And in recent years, legislative champions have called for structural change in state government to better serve children and families.

Executive and legislative leaders are aligned behind the mission to put children and families at the center of state government. In 2023, Governor Walz and Lieutenant Governor Flanagan put forward a proposal for the Department of Children, Youth, and Families informed by these years of discussion and engagement with families, advocates, service providers, Tribes, local partners, legislators, national organizations, and other states, related to the needs of children, youth, and families and the systems that serve them. The proposal was also built on the foundation created by the State-Level Governance for Early Childhood Programs in Minnesota report issued in January 2022, a 2018 Office of the Legislative Auditor report on Early Childhood Programs, and restructuring efforts centered on children, youth, and families in other states, among other engagement and reports.

## **What does the new agency mean for local service delivery?**

One goal of this transition process is to prevent and minimize disruption in services. Other states have demonstrated that consolidation of key state programs for children, youth, and families helps to center children in state government and creates a clear focus on improving outcomes for children. The new law and funding provide the authority, resources, capacity, and time necessary to ensure a successful launch of the new Minnesota Department of Children, Youth, and Families. As a state with county- and Tribe-administered services and strong local control in our education system, careful consideration for local level service delivery in the transition and implementation is important. Specific focus on engagement, partnership, and consultation is being created in the Implementation Office structure.

## **What will happen to the Minnesota Children's Cabinet?**

The Children's Cabinet will continue its work. Coordination of people, data, and policy across state government is essential, as emphasized in the 2022 State-Level Governance for Early Childhood Programs in Minnesota report and other national reports highlighting the importance of inter-agency collaboration regardless of a state's government structure. The Children's Cabinet's role in aligning and convening people, data, money, and policy around priorities like children's mental health, economic security, public health, and other areas across state agencies continues to be important, and as such, will continue to be housed at Minnesota Management and Budget.

## How will equity be considered and prioritized in this transition?

Equity is a core component of the creation of the new agency. Although Minnesota is ranked as a top state to live and work, this is not yet true for every Minnesotan. Our systems have not led to equitable outcomes for children, and today, race, ZIP code, and income are too often determinants of opportunity.

This reimagining of state government structures provides an opportunity to drive equitable outcomes for all families by coordinating programs centered on children under one agency and providing a clear front door for families to access. The change also elevates the priorities and funding needs of children, youth, and families by providing focused leadership in the state executive branch and with the Minnesota Legislature.

Specific to the transition, state leaders are leveraging equity tools from state agencies for decision-making throughout the transition process and will include an equity and inclusion framework and practices in hiring, employee relations, and other important organizational planning. This work will build off current and past state efforts to address inequities.

When defining equity, the Department of Children, Youth, and Families Implementation Office uses the definition from the Early Childhood Systems Reform final report: “When every person, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, age, socioeconomic status, or geographic location has the opportunity to realize their full potential of physical, social, emotional, and cognitive well-being, without limits imposed by structural inequities. Equity is ensuring everyone has what they need to be successful. This is different from equality which involves treating everyone the same.”

The Great Start for All Minnesota Children Task Force final report included this list of historically disenfranchised groups to prioritize in decision-making, which the Implementation Office will also use:

- Racial and ethnic minorities, including people of color and Indigenous people
- Members of the LGBTQIA+ community
- Those experiencing multi-generational or ongoing trauma
- Those at risk of or with developmental delays or disabilities
- Those from homes where English is not the primary language

## Many programs important to children and families aren't included in the new agency. How were decisions made about which programs to transfer? How will programs in different agencies coordinate with each other?

Programs that will transfer to the Department of Children, Youth, and Families were identified and named in the statute during a robust legislative process and based on feedback and engagement from Minnesota families, local service providers, state leaders, and legislators.

Programs that serve children and youth may not have been identified to move at this time based on factors including, but not limited to, feedback from community leaders and partners, existing agency structures, service standards and alignment, and federal requirements.

Each identified program will be reviewed to determine the timeline for transfer. There is flexibility to delay or defer a transfer as needed. Programs not already identified to transfer to the Department of Children, Youth, and Families can be considered for inclusion and transfer as the implementation process goes forward. Once the transition period concludes, programs can still be considered for transfer as identified by the administration, legislature, and advocates.

Ultimately, no single agency can encompass all the services that benefit children, youth, and families, and cross-agency coordination will be a continued need to put children and family at the center of government.

## **How will this new agency address needs in the child care and early education sector?**

This type of change has been recommended by advocates and child care and early education experts, including through the recent legislatively directed Great Start for All Minnesota Children Task Force. There has been progress in recent years to address the needs of families and providers, including through ongoing Child Care Regulation Modernization projects where the Department of Human Services engages directly with providers around modernizing and improving regulations. The child care stabilization grants and Great Start Compensation Support Program, which was funded in the 2023 legislative session, will continue to provide ongoing funding to this critical sector. Providers have shared the importance of streamlining access and service navigation for families. Moving early care and education programs from the Departments of Human Services and Education into one consolidated agency will help achieve that goal.

## **Why are programs for older youth, such as youth justice programs, included?**

Based on feedback from families, leaders identified a need to invest in youth success and protection with a whole family focus. For example, youth and families served by the Office of Youth Justice, currently housed at the Department of Public Safety, have asked why the program is at a public safety agency when the goal is prevention and opportunity. By including programs for the full spectrum of ages, the Department of Children, Youth and Families can focus resources upstream on prevention and support, serve families with multiple children, and support children as they grow up.

The new Office of Restorative Practices and a youth restorative justice grant program, both established by the 2023 Legislature, have also been identified to move to the Department of Children, Youth, and Families. These will start at the Department of Public Safety and transfer to the new agency on the same timeline as the other programs.

## **Will the creation of this new agency move Part C services away from school districts?**

No. School districts will continue to locally administer Part C services. At the state level, Part C will move from the Department of Education to the Department of Children, Youth, and Families. The legislation specifically includes safeguards and input processes to address concerns and feedback heard related to Part C moving away from school districts.

Part C was created by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) to “develop and implement a statewide, comprehensive, coordinated, multidisciplinary, interagency system that provides early intervention services for infants and toddlers with disabilities and their families.” For more information, visit the Minnesota Department of Education’s Part C FAQ.

## **What will happen to state employee positions?**

No positions will be eliminated due to creation of the Department of Children, Youth, and Families. Statute states that “no transferred employee shall have their employment status and job classification altered as a result of the transfer.”

We anticipate that staff who work on programs that are moving to the new agency will also transition to the new agency, but at this stage it is too early to predetermine the final organizational structure. The legislation requires employees be given 30 days’ notice of a transfer. The exact timing of program transfer may vary by program, based on operational needs, federal considerations, and other factors as we move through the transition process.

## **Will state employee union contracts remain in place with the new agency?**

Yes, all collective bargaining agreements that cover any employee of the Departments of Human Services, Education, Public Safety, or Health who is transferred to the Department of Children, Youth, and Families remain in effect. The legislation states that any employee who is transferred to the department remain in the same employment status, bargaining unit, and civil service protection as the employees had before the transfer.

## **How will local governments, partners, and families continue to engage in the development and implementation of the new department?**

As a state with county- and Tribally-administered services, careful consideration of local level service delivery during the transition and implementation is important. The Department of Children, Youth, and Families Implementation Office will work closely with local governments and partners throughout the transition process to understand and address their concerns. Continuity of services at the point of community access is critical. The legislation establishing the new agency and transition process also requires a transition report, which must include recommendations, developed through engagement with county and Tribal governments, for how the Department of Children, Youth, and Families will coordinate and partner with county and Tribal governments, including through a governing authority such as an intergovernmental advisory committee.

And finally, feedback from families informed and continues to shape the process of building a new children and family-centered state agency. Throughout the transition, the Implementation Office will work in partnership with agencies and advisory councils and lead its own engagement efforts to keep feedback from families at the center of the work. Once created, the Department of Children, Youth, and Families will have a public engagement function to continue hearing directly from families.