

A Comparative Analysis of Job Satisfaction and Intent to Leave Among Rural and Urban Caseworkers in Pennsylvania's Child Welfare Agencies

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Abstract: In Pennsylvania, 67 county Child and Youth Services (CYS) agencies hold the legal authority for child protection, including investigating abuse or neglect, bringing cases before the court, removing children from unsafe homes, and determining custody or foster placements as ordered by the courts. Private child welfare agencies support and partner with public county agencies by providing services such as foster care placements, adoption, counseling, parenting education, and family reunification programs. Both public and private agencies across the state have been impacted by high staff vacancies and turnover. Pennsylvania's public child welfare system continues to face significant workforce challenges related to turnover and vacancies. This report summarizes findings from a statewide survey of Pennsylvania child welfare caseworkers, aimed at identifying factors influencing job satisfaction, performance, and intent to leave. The survey was conducted in collaboration with the Pennsylvania Children and Youth Administrators (PCYA) and the Pennsylvania Council of Children, Youth and Family Services (PCCYFS). Some potential differences emerged between rural and urban caseworkers, with the urban caseworkers who were surveyed reporting higher average caseloads. Also from the same survey, rural caseworkers noted that they had greater flexibility and higher satisfaction with court responsibilities. Both rural and urban respondents had moderately high intent-to-leave scores, based on a series of questions asking about job seeking or workplace withdrawal behaviors, with no statistically significant differences between regions. Salary and benefits were the most powerful and consistent indicators of whether a respondent was likely to consider leaving. Further analysis of the survey findings suggests intent to leave does decline as supervisor support improves, but even at what was perceived to be the best supervision among respondents, those who were dissatisfied with salary still showed elevated intent-to-leave scores compared with their satisfied peers. The report recommends some changes at the agency level, as well as state-level policy changes related to child welfare caseworker workload, salaries, and funding.

Keywords: child welfare caseworkers, turnover, urban, rural, intent to leave

This project was sponsored by a grant from the Center for Rural Pennsylvania, a legislative agency of the Pennsylvania General Assembly. The Center for Rural Pennsylvania is a bipartisan, bicameral legislative agency that serves as a resource for rural policy within the Pennsylvania General Assembly. It was created in 1987 under Act 16, the Rural Revitalization Act, to promote and sustain the vitality of Pennsylvania's rural and small communities. Information contained in this report does not necessarily reflect the views of individual board members or the Center for Rural Pennsylvania. For more information, contact the Center for Rural Pennsylvania, 625 Forster St., Room 902, Harrisburg, PA 17120, (717) 787-9555, www.rural.pa.gov.

Executive Summary

In Pennsylvania, 67 county Child and Youth Services (CYS) agencies hold the legal authority for child protection, including investigating abuse or neglect, bringing cases before the court, removing children from unsafe homes, and determining custody or foster placements as ordered by the courts. This study addresses the longstanding concern of high turnover rates within Pennsylvania's child welfare system, which disrupts service continuity, increases operational costs, and diminishes the quality of services for children and families. A review of secondary data shows that for the most recent year available, turnover and vacancy rates at agencies are over 25 percent, a notable increase from where they were in 2013 (12 percent). This research compares rural and urban agency work environments, to provide a comprehensive analysis of the factors influencing workforce stability.

The key source of findings in this report is a statewide survey of Pennsylvania child welfare caseworkers. The survey, developed in collaboration with the Pennsylvania Children and Youth Administrators (PCYA) and the Pennsylvania Council of Children, Youth and Family Services (PCCYFS), was distributed to public and private child welfare agencies across the state. We surveyed child welfare caseworkers across Pennsylvania to understand factors influencing their job satisfaction, performance, and intent to leave, with a focus on differences between public and private agencies and urban and rural settings. After data cleaning, 400 responses were deemed valid and served as the basis for analysis. Altogether, 257 caseworkers who work in public agencies and 143 caseworkers who work in private agencies completed the survey. Geographically, the sample was almost evenly split between rural and urban caseworkers.

Results

The urban caseworkers who were surveyed generally reported higher average caseloads than respondents in rural areas; they managed an average of 28 child cases compared to rural caseworkers' 24 child cases. Similarly, urban respondents reported serving about 16 families, on average, versus approximately 13 families for rural respondents. Survey results showed that some caseworkers managed caseloads far above the average; two reported handling 350 child cases, 10 other caseworkers reported managing over 100 child cases, and 16 caseworkers reported managing more than 100 family cases. While rural respondents generally reported having lower caseloads, it should be noted that broader service coverage areas, greater transportation demands, and fewer localized resources have the potential to make each rural case more complex and time-consuming. Further, research on two neighboring states shows that average caseloads are lower than those reported in both urban and rural Pennsylvania.

Factors Influencing Intent to Leave

Analyses of both rural and urban survey responses provide insights into what drives the intent to leave:

- Access to organizational resources appeared to show a stronger association with a lower intent to leave in rural areas compared to urban areas. This means that in rural agencies, caseworkers feel like they are adequately equipped with tools, and support may be even more critical for retention.
- Feeling recognized for one's work was also more strongly associated with reduced intent to leave in rural areas than in urban settings. Recognition may be particularly meaningful in smaller offices.
- Rural caseworkers reported significantly higher rates of satisfaction with court-related responsibilities and flexible work conditions. Speculatively, these findings could potentially align with the operational realities of smaller, more informal rural agencies. Moreover, urban respondents who reported higher satisfaction with their job flexibility had lower intent-to-leave scores. In cities with more intense scheduling demands, flexibility could be a more important buffer against burnout.
- Salary and benefits dissatisfaction were the clearest indicators of turnover risk among survey participants. Respondents who were not satisfied with their salary and benefits reported a much stronger intention to leave their jobs. These differences were statistically significant and remained clear even after accounting for other factors such as supervisor support and demographic characteristics.
- Supervisor support and adequate workplace resources appeared to provide some protection against the risk of employee separation but were not strong enough to offset compensation dissatisfaction. Across multiple areas of the survey, intent to leave showed a decline whenever there was higher satisfaction with supervision. Workers who reported that their supervisors offered consistent guidance, emotional support, and helped solve problems showed lower intent-to-leave scores, indicating that effective supervision can potentially help stabilize staff. However, the impact of effective supervision remained much smaller than the effects of salary and benefits. Even when supervision received high scores, respondents who were dissatisfied with salary still showed elevated intent-to-leave scores compared with their salary-satisfied peers.
- There appeared to be a somewhat different relationship between supervision and salary in rural versus urban counties. In general, if a respondent was satisfied with their salary, the incremental impact of good supervision was rather flat; satisfaction with compensation was more important. In contrast, for the surveyed caseworkers in urban counties, improved supervision appeared potentially more likely to retain caseworkers, even among those satisfied with salary, reflecting that improved supervision may have had a bigger impact on urban caseworkers than on rural.

Policy Considerations

Agency-Level Considerations

- **Institutionalizing Employee Recognition:** Feeling recognized for one's work was associated with reduced intent to leave among survey respondents, and the association was somewhat stronger in rural areas. Employee recognition should be an ingrained aspect of agency culture, fostering morale and a sense of belonging. By fostering a sense of community and offering an avenue for expression, this initiative could enhance workplace cohesion, validate employees' efforts, and may help them identify themselves more closely with the agency's mission.
- **Structured, Timely Supervisor Feedback:** Survey results showed that a favorable perception of supervision and support was correlated with a reduced intent to leave. To improve performance recognition and supervisor support, agencies could implement a streamlined, written feedback process. Given that performance evaluations may often be deprioritized in favor of more pressing daily tasks, this simplified feedback mechanism would enable supervisors to acknowledge employee contributions consistently.
- **Focus on Training Supervisors and Incentivizing Good Supervision:** Given that the survey results highlight the positive impact of supportive supervision in reducing caseworkers' intent to leave, increasing supervisor support through targeted training and the provision of adequate resources may help protect against caseworker resignations.
- **Keep Caseloads at a Manageable Level:** Average caseloads for child welfare workers are generally higher in Pennsylvania than in nearby states, and some caseloads were reported to be much higher (according to our survey). While high caseloads may occur temporarily, such as when a caseworker leaves their position and colleagues must absorb existing cases until a replacement is hired, heavy caseloads ultimately make it difficult to recruit new caseworkers within existing salary and benefit constraints. By improving retention and filling vacant positions, child welfare agencies can reduce excessive caseloads, ensuring that no single caseworker is responsible for more than 100 cases.

State-Level Considerations

- **Establishing Statewide Minimum Salaries for Public Child Welfare Staff:** According to the survey results, salary was strongly related to a caseworker's expressed intent to leave. To address workforce retention challenges related to salary, Pennsylvania could consider standardized minimum salaries for program service staff, including caseworkers, supervisors, and managers. To address disparities, minimum salary standards can be established through a legislatively directed workgroup that includes representatives from CCAP, PCYA, and OCYF. This group could collaboratively determine equitable pay scales.

- **Full Reimbursement Policy for Counties:** The Department of Aging uses a funding approach that the state could consider adopting for public child welfare agencies. We suggest a 100-percent reimbursement model, combined with year-end reconciliation to make counties whole. Ten county fiscal officers who were asked about their views on child welfare policy expressed support for this recommendation. This change could potentially allow counties to maintain staffing levels and financial stability without requiring new state funds. The proposed reconciliation mechanism might also improve equity among counties.
- **Classifying Public Child Protective Services Staff as First Responders:** Public child welfare staff, including caseworkers, supervisors, and administrators, often serve as the first line of intervention in high-risk child protection cases, frequently co-investigating with law enforcement in severe maltreatment situations. These professionals play a critical role in ensuring child safety. To acknowledge their essential contributions, Pennsylvania could formally classify CYS staff as “first responders,” elevating public perception and reinforcing the significance of their work. This recognition could enhance morale and professional respect, further supporting workforce retention and mission alignment.
- **Reassign Truancy Remediation for Older Youth to Juvenile Probation:** To improve system efficiency, the Juvenile Act could be amended to transfer responsibility for truancy cases involving youth aged 15 and older to Juvenile Probation. Reassigning truancy cases involving older youth to Juvenile Probation is suggested as one way to reduce the workload of public child welfare caseworkers. Under current mandates, CYS is responsible for truancy remediation, including cases involving older adolescents that often require labor-intensive interventions. Given that many of these cases ultimately require court involvement, probation offices may be better positioned to manage the necessary legal processes and interventions.

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Introduction

Turnover among child welfare caseworkers has remained a longstanding concern across Pennsylvania and nationally. High turnover rates disrupt service continuity, increase operational costs, and reduce the overall quality of services delivered to children and families. Pennsylvania could realize substantial savings by reducing caseworker turnover and freeing up funds to enhance services for children. The cost of replacing a caseworker, including training, ranges from approximately \$27,500 (Westbrook et al., 2012) to \$54,000 (National Child Welfare Workforce Institute, 2015). While the mandated 120-hour Charting the Course Training costs roughly \$4,500 per caseworker (DePasquale, 2017; Marsh, 2020), this cost excludes significant expenses such as salaries, travel, and lodging. Furthermore, the lengthy pre-service training period exacerbates existing caseload burdens for remaining caseworkers. These challenges are particularly pressing in rural counties, where limited staffing pools and geographic barriers often exacerbate caseworker strain.

Beyond finances and agency management, workforce stability in child welfare directly impacts child safety. Caseworkers are essential for family engagement, safety monitoring, and care coordination. Premature departures lead to disrupted relationships and service gaps, hindering child well-being. National survey data showed that prioritizing caseworker competence, youth-centered approaches, and reduced turnover correlates with improved outcomes (Williams and Glisson, 2013). A two-year qualitative study showed that frequent, abrupt turnover among child welfare professionals caused significant emotional and relational harm to youth in care (Curry, 2019).

This report presents findings from a statewide survey to examine the determinants of job satisfaction, job performance, and intent to leave among Pennsylvania child welfare caseworkers, comparing rural and urban environments, and public versus private agency contexts. By identifying patterns in job satisfaction and performance and highlighting key drivers of intent to leave, this study offers timely, data-driven insights to inform workforce development strategies across Pennsylvania's child welfare system. The findings are intended to support policy discussions and workforce interventions at the county, regional, and state levels.

Background

Public Caseworkers at County Children, Youth, and Family Agencies

Across Pennsylvania's 67 counties, more than 3,000 county-employed caseworkers (public caseworkers) and case supervisors dedicate themselves to ensuring the safety and well-being of the Commonwealth's children, youth, and families (Commonwealth of Pennsylvania's Office of Children, Youth, and Families, 2024). The Pennsylvania child welfare system is state-supervised and county-administered. In Pennsylvania, all reports of child abuse or neglect are either investigated or assessed by Child Protective Services (CPS) or General Protective Services (GPS) depending on the nature of the referral. CPS conducts investigations of cases identified as abuse, such as bodily injury, mental injury,

sexual exploitation, serious neglect, human trafficking, or death of a child (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2024).

In the U.S., more than 3 million children—roughly equivalent to the population of Arkansas—experience abuse or neglect each year (Children’s Bureau and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2022). In Pennsylvania alone, over 40,000 children are the subjects of reports, with approximately 1 in 1,000 children affected (Rizvi et al., 2022).

In addition to public staff in Pennsylvania, CYS also partners and contracts with private agencies, which provide services such as foster care placements, adoption, counseling, parenting education, and family reunification programs. According to an estimate from the Pennsylvania Council of Children, Youth, and Family Services (PCCYFS) (Personal Communication, 2025), there are approximately 750 private providers.

Current state regulations require that county caseworkers be assigned to no more than 30 families (Pennsylvania’s Children and Youth System, 1999), which is significantly higher than current best practices for caseload volume in child welfare. In contrast, the Child Welfare League of America (1999), recommended a caseload ratio of 12 to 15 children per caseworker.

Although work groups have been convened to study and recommend appropriate caseworker-to-client ratios, this remains a “moving target.” For example, there has been an ongoing discussion about whether to count the number of children, particularly those in out-of-home (foster) care, as some counties do, or to include the number of adults in the household. Or, in cases where parents live separately, there is a question about whether both households be counted, given that both are often recipients of remedial services. A more rational and equitable approach may be to implement a case-weighting system that more accurately reflects the complexity, and service demands of each case.

Furthermore, despite some legislative updates over the years, specific regulations regarding caseload limits have remained largely unchanged, leading to persistent strain on agency capacity. Since 1980, the most significant federal legislative changes in child welfare have been the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act (P.L. 96-272) and the Adoption and Safe Families Act (P.L. 105-89). Federal laws and regulations govern nearly every aspect of state child welfare systems. These laws define the scope and responsibilities of child protective services for any jurisdiction that receives federal funding under this legislation. They also authorize the courts and establish child protective services as the largest social service entitlement in the country. No state can effectively operate a public child welfare system without federal financial support. When new federal legislation—such as the Family First Prevention Services Act—is enacted, states are given two years to pass conforming legislation to maintain eligibility for federal funding. State laws, in turn, provide jurisdiction and authority to state courts and county child welfare agencies.

The Office of Children, Youth, and Families of The Pennsylvania Department of Human Services (OCYF) has issued Bulletins and Special Transmittals recommending caseworker-to-family ratios that are lower than the regulatory minimums. These ratios directly influence staffing costs—more clients require more staff. Still, during periods of fiscal constraint, some county budget officials may opt to fund only the staffing levels that meet, but do not exceed, the regulatory requirements.

In response to the Penn State child sex abuse scandal involving a famous football coach in 2012, substantial changes were made to the Pennsylvania Child Protective Services Law (CPSL) (Pennsylvania Department of Human Services, 2022). The resulting legislative changes, which took place in 2014, re-clarified and expanded the definitions of child abuse, perpetrators, and mandated reporters, which increased referrals and workload. By 2015, in terms of initial workload impact, state officials estimated that 4 in 10 callers were on hold with ChildLine so long they gave up before they could connect with a caseworker (Pennsylvania Family Support Alliance, 2021). Assad (2017) reported that in Northampton County, referrals increased by 78 percent in 2015 and by nearly 140 percent in 2017, relative to 2014.

Prior to the scandal, public child welfare agencies were operating with staff levels that were at or near their allocated complements; however, caseloads were already high before legislative changes led to increased referrals.

Over time, it seems that workload has been a contributing factor to higher turnover rates. In a 2013 exit survey implemented by the Pennsylvania Children and Youth Administrators Association (PCYA) across all 67 County Children and Youth Services (CYS) Agencies reported a turnover rate of 12 percent. Such rates would be consistent with goals in the PCYA Strategic Plan (2007–2009) which set goals of keeping turnover below 15 percent for Caseworker II positions and below 25 percent for Caseworker I positions.

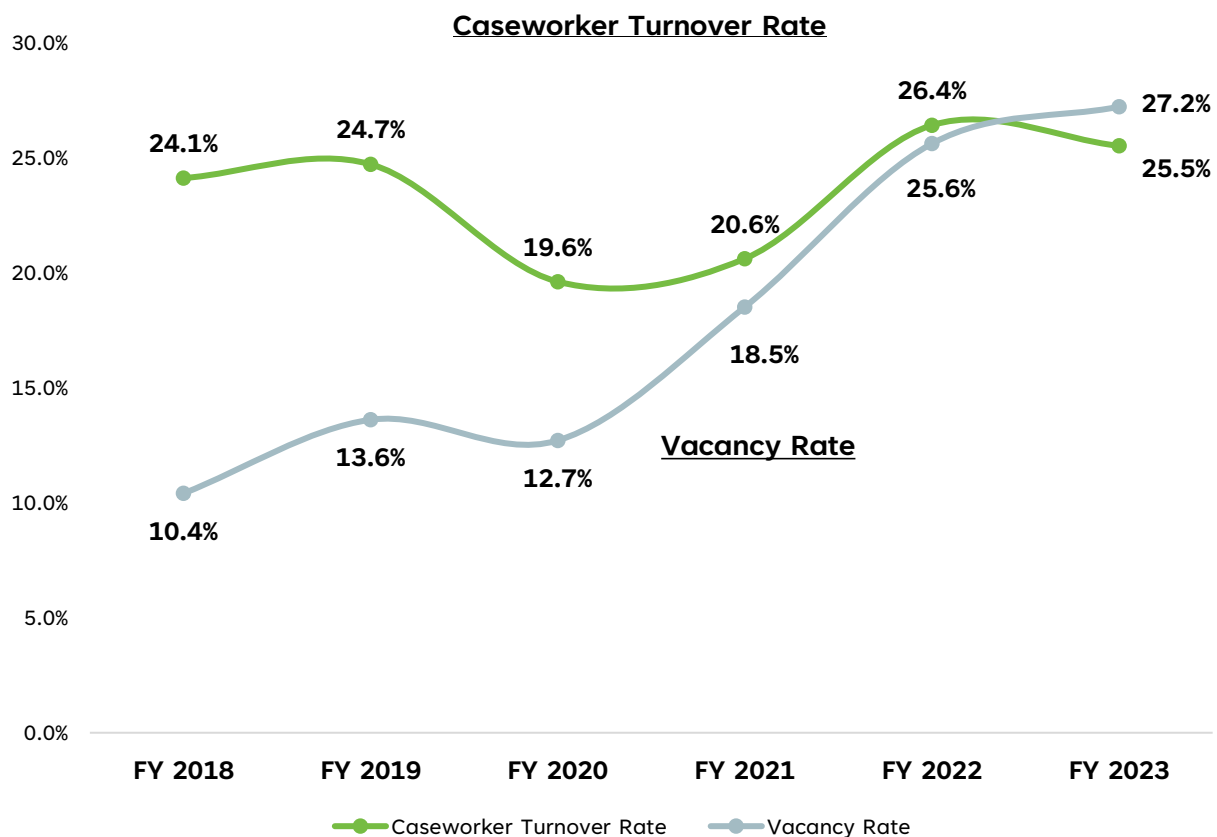
After 2014, when legislative changes led to increased referrals, turnover rates escalated significantly, reaching an estimated average of 30 to 60 percent, and in some counties, the loss of caseworkers even reached 90 percent (Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children, 2017). This represents a significantly higher turnover rate compared to other industries; for example, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2023) reported an annual turnover rate of 13.4 percent in the professional services sector (Buck, 2023; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023). A report by the Pennsylvania Child Welfare Resource Center, which published a report to support the state's review of county Needs-Based Plans and Budgets, stated that the *median* turnover rate (not average rate) jumped to 23 percent in FY 2021-22 after consistently ranging from 16 percent to 18 percent between FY 2017-18 and FY 2020-21.

Turnover rates continue to be a concern in county-operated public agencies. While some counties have seen post-COVID improvements in vacancies, staffing shortages remain a critical issue. As Brian Bornman, Director of the Pennsylvania Children and Youth Administrators (PCYA), Inc., noted, “Things are actually improving, but it’s

nowhere near pre-COVID levels. Some counties feel that things are ‘better’ because they went from 80 percent vacancy to 50 percent. 30 percent vacancy seems to be very common.” (March 27, 2025)

More than one in four public caseworkers (25.5 percent) left their jobs in fiscal year (FY) 2023, and nearly one in five public caseworkers (17 percent) hired in FY 2023 quit before the end of the fiscal year (Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Office of Children, Youth, and Families, 2024). With persistent turnover, vacancy rates for caseworker positions have nearly tripled between FY 2018 and FY 2023—with more than a quarter (27 percent) of public caseworker positions vacant as of FY 2023. Figure 1 shows turnover and vacancy rates in Pennsylvania over time.

Figure 1: Caseworker Turnover and Vacancy Trends (FY 2018 – FY 2023)

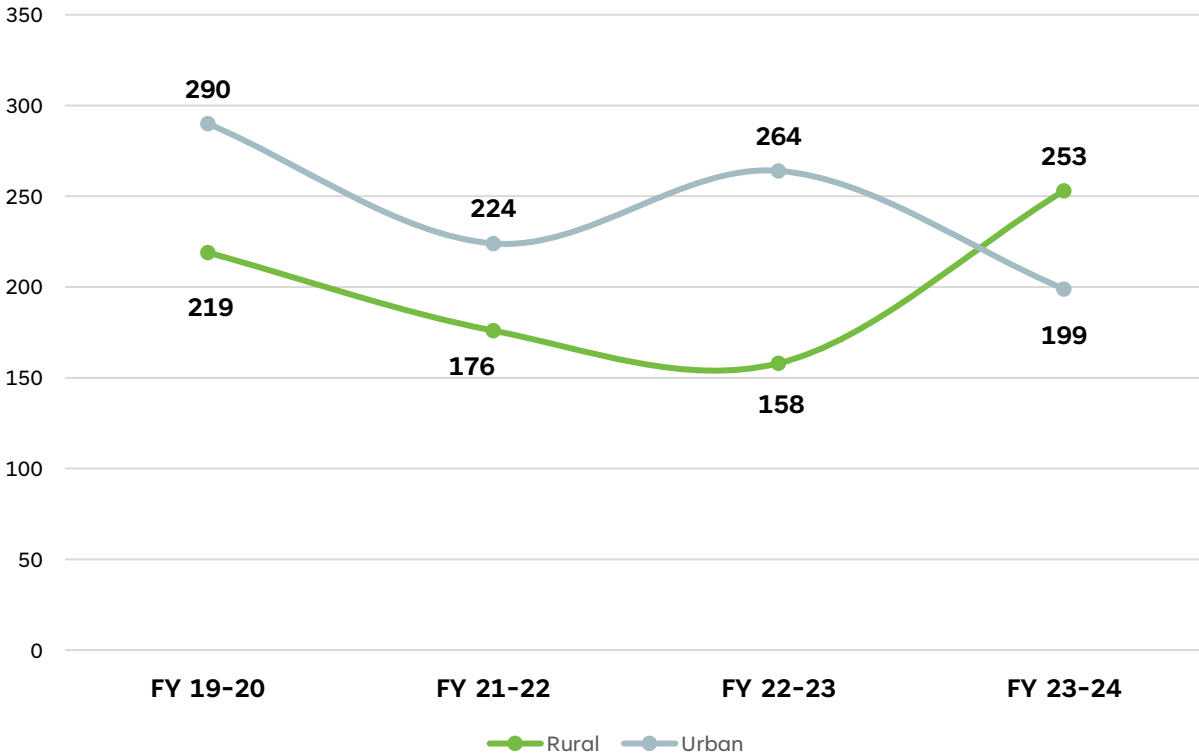


Data Source: Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Office of Children, Youth, and Families (2024)
https://papproviders.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/OCYF-CCYA-Recruitment-and-Retention-Study-2024_FINAL.pdf.

Our research team obtained personnel and solicitor data from the Pennsylvania Children and Youth Administrators (PCYA) to analyze turnover patterns over the past five years to get another measure of the numbers of caseworkers leaving. The statewide survey of personnel and solicitor data was initiated in 2019. The personnel and solicitor data collected from each agency do not separate data for caseworkers and supervisors

between 2019 and 2021. The personnel and solicitor data show that while overall turnover declined during the pandemic, reported turnover numbers increased in urban areas temporarily, but increased notably in FY 2023-24 for rural county agencies (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Total Case-Carrying Staff/Reported Turnover by Rural and Urban Counties



Data Source: PCYA Personnel and Solicitor Data.

Similar challenges are facing private agencies. In the fall of 2021, the Pennsylvania Council of Children, Youth and Family Services (PCCYFS) distributed a survey to its members. Of the 62 provider members at the time, 51 responded. The survey results highlighted several areas of concern related to the private child welfare workforce. Notably, more than 25 percent of responding providers reported having over 30 vacant full-time equivalent (FTE) positions for staff working directly with children and families. To place this number in context, counties of the third class typically have over 100 caseworkers, while the total number of caseworker positions in smaller counties (fifth class and below) would be below 30.

In 2023, PCCYFS conducted another statewide survey to document salary levels and turnover rates among private sector workers. According to the 2023 PCCYFS Survey, 88 percent of private agencies reported increased staff turnover since March 2020, when COVID-19 began significantly impacting organizational operations. Additionally, 55 percent of agencies indicated that staff leave of absences related to COVID-19 affected

their ability to serve children and families. The PCCYFS survey also captured a range of service areas represented by PCCYFS member agencies. Among the 39 agencies reporting at least one open position in Pennsylvania, a total of 1,261 vacancies were identified. The majority of these openings (81 percent) were in direct care, mental health, or behavioral health roles. More than half of agencies reported involvement in foster family care (64 percent) and/or adoption services (60 percent). Of those reporting turnover in direct care staff, 79 percent cited wages as a contributing factor to staff turnover. According to base salary data for private workers collected from the survey, referral coordinators and social services staff earn between \$36,400 and \$41,870. The current average salary among public workers (caseworker I) is \$34,888.

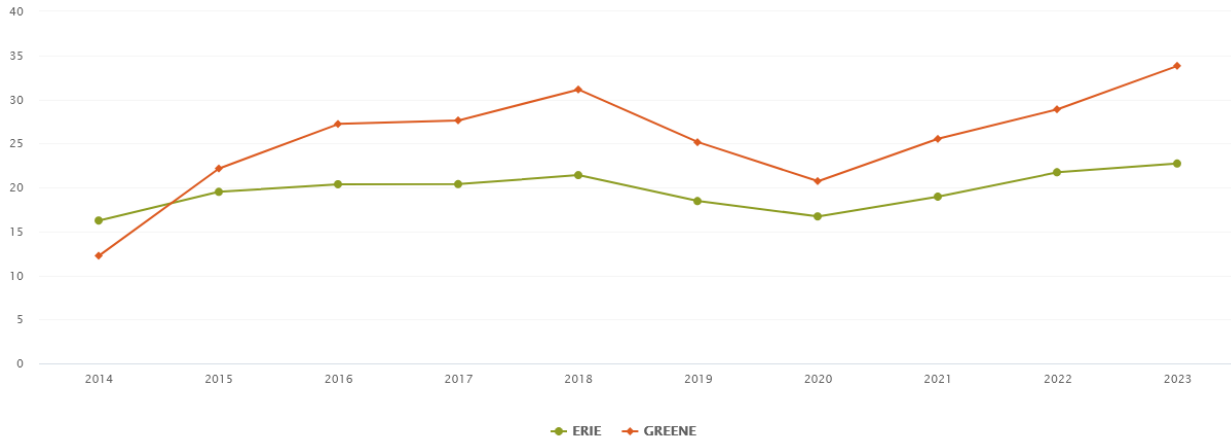
Child Safety in Pennsylvania

The rate of reported and substantiated child abuse cases per 1,000 children in Pennsylvania rose after 2014, with the notable exception of the pandemic period, during which reporting and substantiation declined in urban and rural counties. We report on the rate (per 1,000 children) of the substantiated cases by county for 2023 (Table 1), as well as the total reported cases by county (Table 2). The average raw number of reported cases for urban counties was higher (1,448) than for rural counties (267), which is not surprising given the higher population in urban counties. The average rate of substantiated cases in rural counties was higher (20) than for urban counties (15).

To look at trends over time, we first look at the number of reported child abuse cases for urban and rural counties since 2014 (see Appendix 4). These numbers increased through 2017, then began a decline which bottomed out in 2020 during the COVID pandemic. Since 2020, reported cases have slowly increased in number in urban counties every year, but volume has remained fairly stagnant in rural counties since 2021. Second, Figure 3 charts the rates of substantiated cases for two counties: the urban and rural county with the highest rates of substantiated child abuse rates, Erie County (urban) and Greene County (rural). Over time, the graph shows increasing rates of substantiated child abuse. Levels temporarily declined in 2019 and 2020, but have steadily increased since then.

Figure 3: Examples of Erie (Urban County) versus Greene (Rural County): Number of Reported Cases of Child Abuse per 1,000 Children

CHILD ABUSE AND REABUSE - NUMBER OF REPORTED AND SUBSTANTIATED CASES: REPORTS PER 1,000 CHILDREN (NUMBER) - 2014-2023



Note: The rate per 1,000 children was calculated by dividing the suspected cases by the child population from birth through age 17. Data Source: Annie E. Casey Foundation and Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children (2024).

Table 1: Reported and Substantiated Cases in Pennsylvania (2023)

Location	Number Reported and Substantiated Cases per 1,000 Children*
Pennsylvania	15
Greene	34
Venango	30
Northumberland	30
McKean	28
Crawford	28
Bradford	27
Mercer	27
Forest	26
Fayette	25
Tioga	25
Clinton	25
Blair	24
Juniata	24
Clearfield	23
Erie	23

Clarion	23
Lycoming	21
Armstrong	21
Sullivan	20
Warren	20
Cambria	20
York	19
Beaver	19
Dauphin	19
Carbon	19
Mifflin	19
Schuylkill	19
Lawrence	19
Lackawanna	19
Elk	18
Huntingdon	18
Washington	18
Indiana	18
Somerset	18
Luzerne	18
Wayne	18
Pike	17
Columbia	17
Fulton	17
Bedford	17
Westmoreland	17
Perry	17
Franklin	17
Lehigh	17
Potter	17
Cameron	16
Adams	16
Wyoming	16
Susquehanna	16
Jefferson	16
Philadelphia	15
Montour	15
Lebanon	14
Cumberland	14
Monroe	14
Allegheny	14

Snyder	14
Northampton	14
Lancaster	13
Berks	13
Butler	12
Union	11
Delaware	11
Centre	10
Montgomery	9
Chester	8
Bucks	8

*The rate per 1,000 children was calculated by the child population from birth through age 17.
 Data Source: Annie E. Casey Foundation and Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children (2024).

Table 2: Statewide Reported Cases of Child Abuse, 2023

Location	Reported Cases of Child Abuse
Pennsylvania	40,301
Philadelphia	4,927
Allegheny	3,182
York	1,941
Lancaster	1,645
Montgomery	1,574
Delaware	1,443
Lehigh	1,373
Erie	1,284
Berks	1,219
Dauphin	1,191
Luzerne	1,117
Westmoreland	1,103
Bucks	1,039
Chester	1,002

Northampton	831
Lackawanna	786
Cumberland	764
Washington	716
Beaver	619
Fayette	600
Blair	595
Franklin	586
Mercer	577
Northumberland	543
Schuylkill	507
Lycoming	501
Cambria	492
Monroe	484
Crawford	479
Lebanon	463
Butler	451
Bradford	358
Adams	339
Clearfield	333
Lawrence	317
Venango	301
Indiana	276
Armstrong	255
Centre	243

Carbon	239
Somerset	238
McKean	226
Greene	226
Tioga	206
Columbia	203
Pike	194
Clinton	193
Mifflin	192
Perry	168
Clarion	165
Bedford	158
Wayne	151
Warren	150
Jefferson	145
Huntingdon	144
Juniata	122
Susquehanna	118
Snyder	118
Elk	104
Union	91
Wyoming	81
Montour	56
Potter	54
Fulton	53

Sullivan	20
Forest	17
Cameron	13

Note. Substantiated Cases of Child Abuse include founded or indicated reports of child abuse and neglect. It does not include the number of children determined to need general protective services.
Data Source: Annie E. Casey Foundation and Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children (2024).

Methods

This report utilized a cross-sectional survey designed to assess job satisfaction, job performance, and intent to leave among child welfare caseworkers across Pennsylvania. The survey was developed collaboratively by the research team in partnership with the Pennsylvania Children and Youth Administrators (PCYA) and the Pennsylvania Council of Children, Youth and Family Services (PCCYFS) and distributed to public and private child welfare agencies throughout the state. Respondents elected to participate on a voluntary basis.

The survey instrument included a range of items measuring job satisfaction across multiple dimensions, including court-related work, caseload and workload demands, recognition and compensation, organizational mission alignment, benefits, and work flexibility. Intent to leave was assessed using a set of eight items ranging from thoughts about leaving the agency to active job-seeking behaviors. Each item was rated on a 4-point Likert scale. Respondents were asked to rate their agreement with a set of statements using a 4-point Likert Scale, ranging from “completely disagree” to “completely agree.” Another intent-to-leave question asked respondents to indicate, with a categorical Yes or No response, whether they had ever considered leaving the agency. Work performance was assessed using six proxy items that reflected essential aspects of casework. These included whether workers felt they had enough time to investigate harm, provide a broad range of services, deliver services in a timely manner, form interagency partnerships, plan and deliver services effectively, and protect children from maltreatment.

Respondents were also asked to report on their demographic background and agency characteristics. Caseworkers were classified based on whether their primary work agency was located in a rural or urban county, using definitions established by the Center for Rural Pennsylvania. This rural and urban distinction was applied to respondents based on their agency location, enabling a comparative analysis of job satisfaction, job performance, and intent to leave between caseworkers serving in different geographic contexts.

To better understand what factors may influence caseworkers’ thoughts about leaving their agencies, correlation analyses were conducted separately for rural and urban respondents. These analyses examined the relationship between different aspects of work satisfaction and intent to leave. By calculating Pearson correlation coefficients

for each group, the analysis assessed how strongly each factor was connected to caseworkers' intent to leave their roles.

Intent to leave was measured in two ways: 1) a single-item psychological indicator (i.e., "ever thought about leaving"), and 2) a composite mean score of all eight turnover-related items representing a continuum from contemplation to active job search behavior (e.g., "I search for other employment in a newspaper"; "I send out resumes for other employment."). A composite score aggregates multiple survey items together into a single metric, capturing different stages of job-separation intentions. While both measures were used for analysis, prior literature supports the use of a single-item indicator of turnover intention as a reliable and parsimonious outcome (Hom et al., 2012; Rubenstein et al., 2018). Accordingly, a correlation of the single-item indicator was prioritized involving the single-item indicator while including the composite score as a sensitivity check.

To identify whether any factors mattered more in one setting than the other, the strength of each correlation was statistically compared between rural and urban samples using Fisher's *r*-to-*z* transformation. This helps determine whether a particular job satisfaction factor is more strongly associated with intent to leave in one context over the other. All analyses were conducted using STATA 18 and SPSS 29. Missing responses were handled through pairwise deletion during correlation analysis to maximize use of available data.

In October 2025, we conducted a second brief survey to gather the perspectives of 10 county fiscal officers on two key policy reform proposals. The survey sought to assess general county-level support for (1) full reimbursement of CYS staff salaries and benefits, and (2) the establishment of statewide minimum salaries for all CYS staff positions. The two-question survey was administered in person at the Pennsylvania Children and Youth Administrators (PCYA) quarterly meeting (October 2025). An independent third party conducted the anonymous survey on behalf of our research team. Ten CYS fiscal officers from 10 counties, both urban and rural, participated. Because the fiscal officer survey involved a small convenience sample, findings should be interpreted as exploratory stakeholder input rather than representative statewide consensus.

The questions posed to the fiscal officers were as follows:

- **Question 1:** "Do you favor 100-percent reimbursement of all CYS staff (salary and benefits), with no new money added, but allowing funds to be drawn from other cost centers as needed to cover these expenses, with the provision that counties will be made whole at year's end if they are in overmatch?" (Note: "Overmatch" refers to counties spending beyond their allocated funding.)
- **Question 2:** "Do you favor establishing statewide minimum salaries for all CYS staff positions?"

A two-year implementation timeframe was proposed, with a financial disincentive for noncompliance (e.g., 100-percent reimbursement for 100-percent compliance, 90-percent reimbursement for 90-percent compliance, and current matching requirements for under 90-percent compliance).

Results

A total of 712 child welfare caseworkers across Pennsylvania initiated the survey. As mentioned in the Methods section, participation in the survey was voluntary and results should be interpreted as descriptive indicators rather than representative estimates of the statewide workforce. After data cleaning and the removal of incomplete responses, valid responses were received from 300 to 400 respondents (numbers vary on particular questions, depending on item-level completeness). Respondents provided valid data on key variables, including agency type, geographic setting, job satisfaction, work performance, and intent to leave. These participants formed the analytic sample for this report.

Among respondents who provided valid agency information, 257 caseworkers (64 percent) were employed in public agencies, while 143 (36 percent) worked in private agencies. In terms of geographic classification, equal proportions of the sample were from rural and urban counties.

While 712 individuals began the survey, not all completed every section. As a result, the response numbers vary across specific analyses. Throughout this report, valid percentages are used for each variable to ensure interpretive accuracy. Table 4 and Figure 4 present county-level responses to the multiple-response question regarding the ZIP codes in which caseworkers are currently working. Figure 4 was generated using GIS software based on the data presented in Table 4. Note that response counts vary significantly across counties and that the survey does not weigh counties proportionally. In addition, no responses were received from caseworkers in three rural counties (Elk, Forest, and Mifflin).

Table 3: Number of Responses by County

County	Multiple Responses*
Schuylkill	50
Berks	44
Northampton	42
Westmoreland	39
Luzerne	37
Lehigh	35
Fayette	23
Cambria	22
Tioga	17
Bradford	16
Cumberland	15
Indiana	13
Chester	12

Lycoming	12
Somerset	12
Warren	12
Montgomery	11
Carbon	11
Wyoming	11
Columbia	11
Philadelphia	10
Northumberland	10
McKean	10
Perry	10
Potter	9
Monroe	9
Lancaster	9
Washington	9
Allegheny	9
Bedford	9
Bucks	8
Sullivan	7
Mercer	7
Adams	7
Greene	7
Blair	7
Venango	6
Huntingdon	6
Clearfield	6
Delaware	5
Lackawanna	5
Pike	5
Armstrong	5
Centre	5
Dauphin	4
York	4
Cameron	4
Butler	4
Franklin	4
Jefferson	3
Erie	3

Latino, and smaller proportions identified as Multiracial/Multiethnic or Other, American Indian/Alaska Native, or Asian/Pacific Islander (Table 5).

Educational attainment among respondents was relatively high, with nearly 60 percent having completed an associate or bachelor's degree and over a quarter holding a graduate degree. Only a small proportion (less than 2 percent) reported a high school diploma or GED as their highest level of education. Overall, the demographic data suggest a workforce that is predominantly female, highly educated, and racially homogenous, with some regional differences in educational background and race/ethnicity distribution.

Table 4: Demographic Information

Measure	Mean (SD)	N	%
Age (Years)	40.85 (11.91)		
Gender			
Male		63	15.91
Female		327	82.58
NA		6	1.52
Race/Ethnicity			
Multiple Race or Ethnicity/Other		12	3.02
American Indian or Alaskan Native		3	0.76
Asian/Pacific Islander		2	0.50
Black/African American		22	5.54
Hispanic		16	4.03
White		342	86.15
Education			
High school diploma or GED		7	1.73
Associate or bachelor's degree		237	58.66
Some graduate school		45	11.14
Graduate degree		115	28.47

Note: Valid percentages are reported.

Caseworker Experience by Role and Region

To better understand the daily realities of child welfare work in Pennsylvania, the survey included a series of items assessing job performance, satisfaction, and perceived support. These items captured key aspects of the caseworker role, including their ability to investigate potential risks to child and family safety, deliver necessary services, collaborate with community partners, feel supported by their supervisors, and manage their workload effectively. The following section presents visual comparisons and brief interpretations of these indicators, highlighting patterns by both geographic regions (rural vs. urban). Each figure uses valid percentages, which reflect the proportion of responses among those who answered the question. Each figure is also accompanied by

the original survey item text and a concise narrative to contextualize differences in worker experiences across settings.

Caseload Volume and Service Volume

As a foundational indicator of caseworker burden, participants were asked to report both the number of families and children on their current caseloads. These variables provide context for interpreting worker stress, service demands, and downstream outcomes like burnout and leaving intention. This is critical to understanding how caseworker responsibilities vary by geographic setting. The charts below display the average number of family and child cases reported by caseworkers in rural and urban counties (Figure 5 and 6).

Figure 5: Average Survey Respondent's Current Family Caseload by Rural and Urban Counties

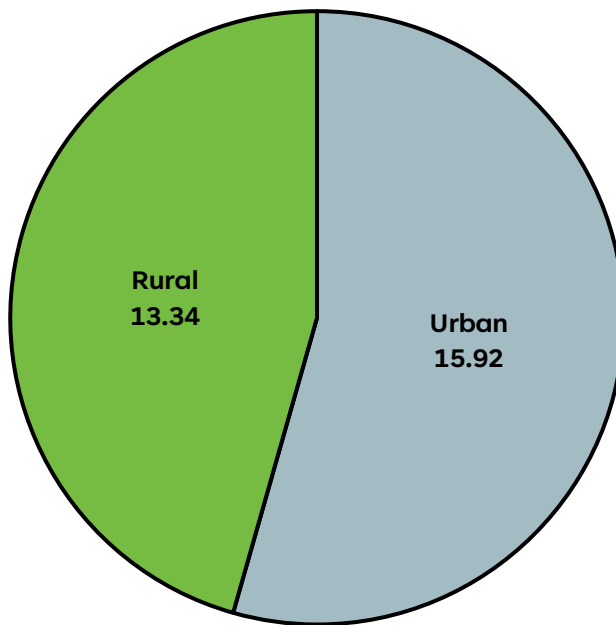
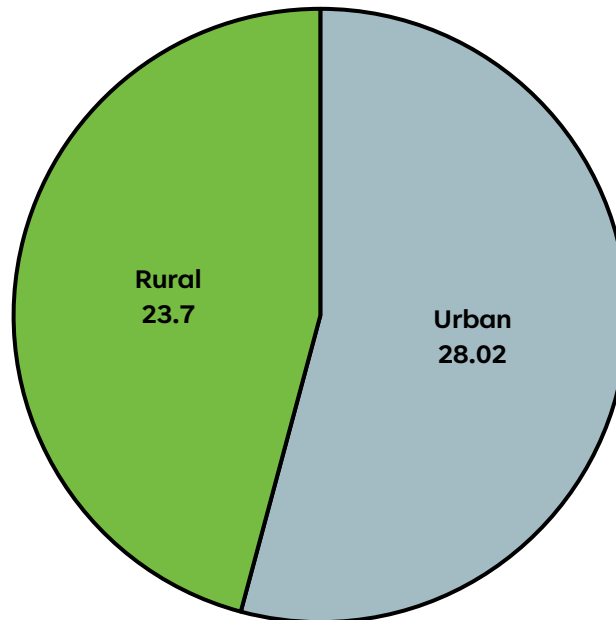


Figure 6: Average Survey Respondent's Current Child Caseload by Rural and Urban Counties



Urban caseworkers reported higher average child caseload (mean/average (M) = 28.03, standard deviation (SD) = 43.80) compared to rural caseworkers (M = 23.70, SD = 20.20). A similar trend emerged for family caseloads, with urban workers reporting more families served (M = 15.92, SD = 30.34) than rural workers (M = 13.34, SD = 16.02). Although rural caseworkers generally appear to manage fewer cases overall, this does not necessarily indicate an easier workload. Rural workers are more likely to face broader service coverage areas, greater transportation demands, and fewer localized resources, which have the potential to make each case more logistically complex and time-consuming. In addition, the standard deviation for urban and rural caseworkers is large and varies considerably from the mean. The large standard deviations indicate substantial variation in caseloads across agencies, including several extreme outliers.

Averages also cannot capture what is potentially happening in the most challenging agencies. Survey results showed that two caseworkers reported managing 350 child cases, and 10 other caseworkers reported managing more than 100 child cases. Sixteen caseworkers reported managing more than 100 family cases.

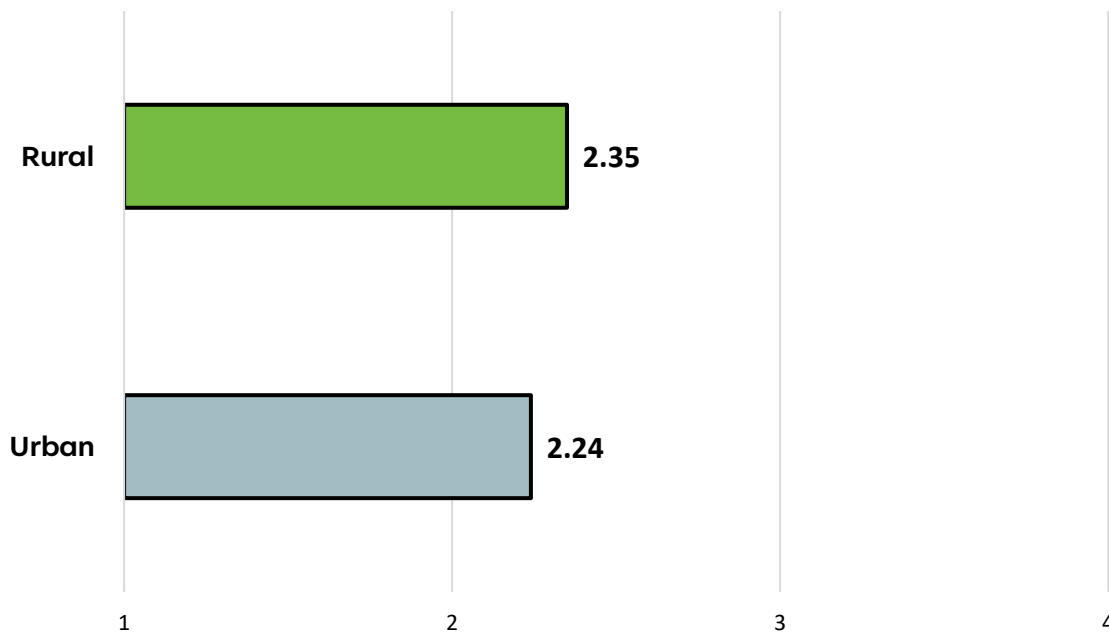
Public agency workers reported somewhat higher average caseloads and less variability compared to those in private agencies ($p < .05$). For public agencies, the mean caseload was 30.85 (SD = 23.97), ranging from 1 to 179 (the median was 27). For private agencies, the mean caseload was 24.02 (SD = 26.61), with a range from 1 to 167, but the median for private agencies was higher, at 31.50). As previously mentioned, the high standard deviations indicate high variance within the data, rather than data that are clustered around the mean or median.

Perceived Workload Demands

To complement raw caseloads numbers, the survey asked caseworkers to rate their perceived workload, including time pressure, manageability, and general burden across daily responsibilities (e.g., paperwork, computer work). As figure 7 shows across all these measures, rural perceptions are somewhat more favorable than urban.

One additional measure that showed differences between rural and urban areas is that rural caseworkers were more likely to agree with the statement that they have adequate time to investigate (39 percent) compared to their urban counterparts (25 percent). Caseworkers reporting higher satisfaction with their workload were significantly less likely to report serious thoughts of leaving. The odds of intent to leave decreased by 58 percent for each unit increase (one point on a four-point scale) in workload satisfaction ($OR = 0.43, p = .006$). This underscores the impact of manageable work demands in reducing caseworker attrition risk.

Figure 7: Average Rating for Perceived Workload Demands by Rural and Urban



Intent to Leave and Related Factors

Because turnover is a central concern of this study, the survey measured captured responses related to intent to leave across multiple indicators. The full set of intent-to-leave items captures behaviors ranging from casual contemplation to active job seeking. It also included a single, straightforward question: "Have you ever thought about leaving?" with categorical response options (Yes or No). Together, these measures provide a comprehensive perspective on worker intent to leave. Of course, a key question is whether any factors are associated with a lower intent to leave. To statistically assess how workplace conditions or other factors may influence intent to leave, correlation analyses were conducted. The following results were all shown to be statistically significant, unless otherwise specified.

The results of these analyses showed that access to organizational resources was associated with lower intent to leave in rural areas ($r = -.58$) compared to urban areas ($r = -.47$), $z = 2.74$, $p < .01$. This means that in rural agencies, caseworkers who felt they had the tools, staffing, and support needed were especially less likely to consider leaving. This finding suggests that when there is strain caused by limited resources, there may be a notable impact on rural caseworker retention.

Feeling recognized for one's work was also somewhat more strongly associated with reduced intent to leave in rural areas ($r = -.43$) than in urban settings ($r = -.37$). Recognition may be particularly meaningful in smaller, more isolated offices.

Rural caseworkers reported significantly higher satisfaction with court-related responsibilities ($p < .001$) and flexible work conditions ($p = .01$). Speculatively, these findings could potentially align with the operational realities of smaller, more informal rural agencies. Job flexibility, including control over work hours and scheduling, was more strongly tied to lower intent to leave in urban areas ($r = -.42$) than in rural areas ($r = -.33$), $z = 2.56$, $p = .01$. In cities, where scheduling demands and traffic or inter-agency coordination are more intense, flexibility may be a more prominent buffer against burnout.

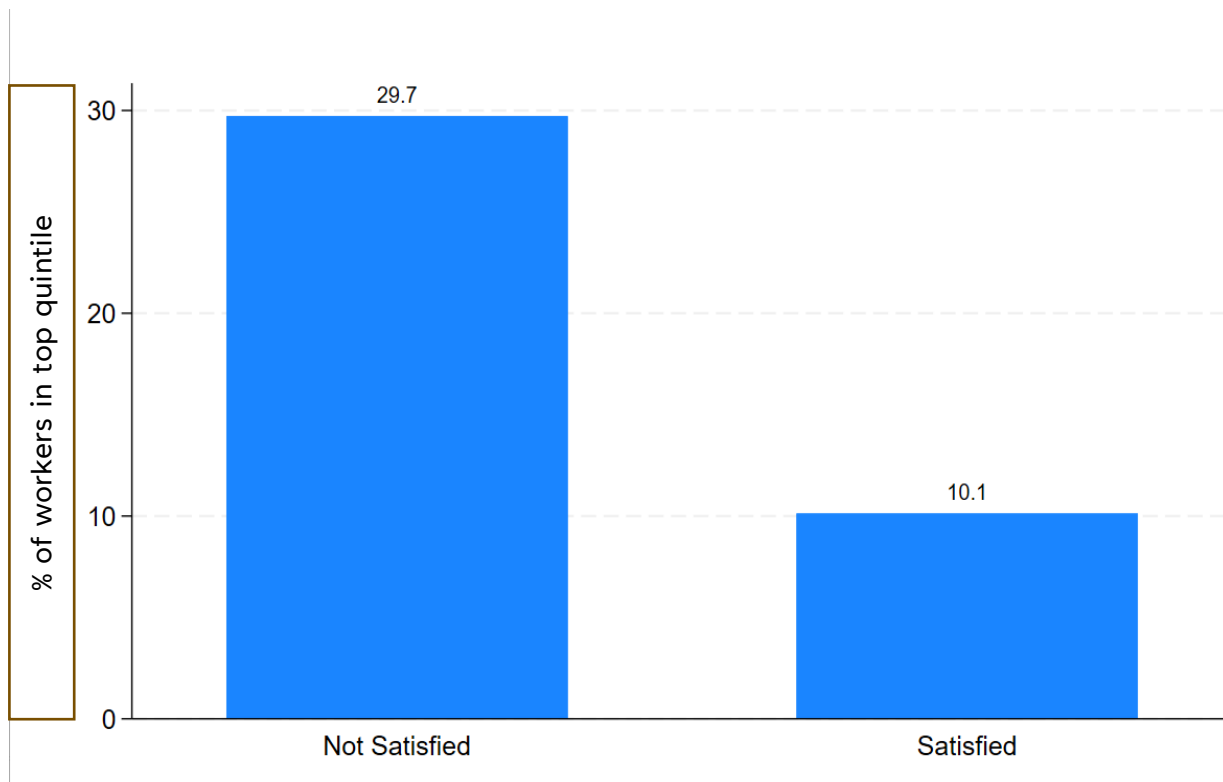
Other domains such as paperwork, salary, and benefits also followed the pattern where higher satisfaction in these areas was linked to a lower intent to leave. However, the difference between rural and urban workers in these cases was not statistically significant.

Salary and benefits dissatisfaction are the clearest indicators of intent to leave among all caseworkers regardless of geographic location. Caseworkers who were not satisfied with their salary or benefits reported a much stronger intention to leave their jobs. On a 1-to-5 scale measuring how often workers think about or take steps toward leaving, those dissatisfied with their salary averaged 4.41, compared to 3.90 among those who were satisfied ($p < .05$). A similar pattern appeared for benefits, with dissatisfied workers averaging 4.12 compared with 3.70 among those who were satisfied. These differences are statistically significant and remain clear even after accounting for factors such as supervisor support and demographic characteristics. This

means that salary and benefits remain the most powerful and consistent indicators of whether a worker is likely to consider leaving, regardless of other circumstances.

However, based on the survey data, satisfaction with salary is not entirely determinative in eliminating all indicators of a possible intent to leave, but it helps. We created a measure that ranks the answers of survey respondents on the questions measuring intent to leave, such that respondents were then ranked by quintiles. Responses to the intent-to-leave scale were aggregated into a continuous summary score reflecting the frequency with which caseworkers' responses to multiple questions indicated they think about leaving, search for other jobs, or take concrete steps toward departure, including interviewing. Those scores were then ordered from lowest to highest across all respondents. Responses to the intent-to-leave scale were aggregated into a composite score reflecting the frequency with which caseworkers reported thoughts about leaving, job-search behaviors, or other indicators of turnover intention. These scores were then divided into quintiles representing increasing levels of intent to leave.

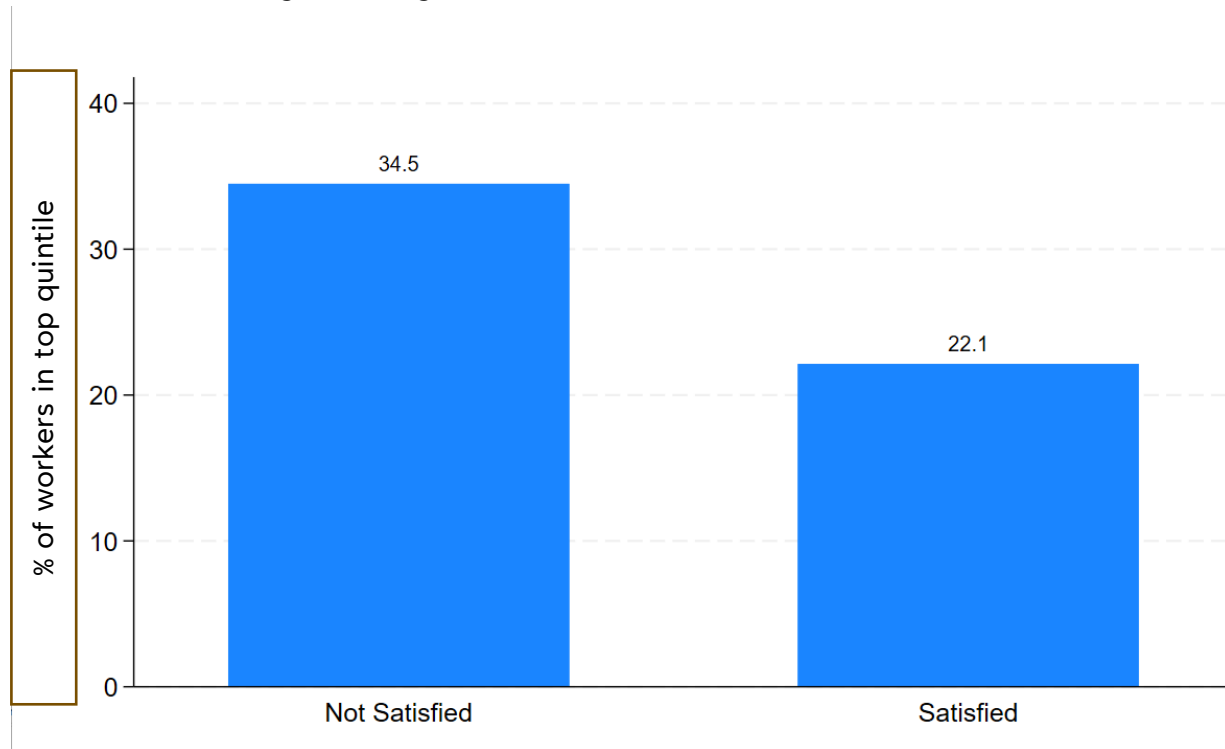
Caseworkers who were unsatisfied with their salary were far more likely to be in the group with the highest intent to leave as shown in Figure 8 below. Of those reporting dissatisfaction with salary, nearly 30 percent fell within the top quintile of leaving-intent scores, compared with only 10 percent of those who were satisfied. This means that while salary satisfaction clearly lowers the risk of turnover intention, a share of satisfied workers still reported frequent thoughts or actions related to leaving. Compensation helps retain staff, but it cannot, on its own, overcome other job-related stressors that continue to drive turnover intent.

Figure 8: Highest Intent to Leave Quintile and Salary

Benefits appear somewhat related to caseworkers' intent to leave. Workers who were not satisfied with their benefits appeared somewhat more likely to fall within the top 20 percent of leaving-intent scores, compared to those who were satisfied (Figure 9). This means while benefit satisfaction helps reduce intent to leave, more than one in five benefit-satisfied workers were still in the group most likely to leave. Like salary satisfaction, benefit satisfaction lowers but does not eliminate intent to leave.

F

Figure 9: Highest Intent to Leave Quintile and Benefits



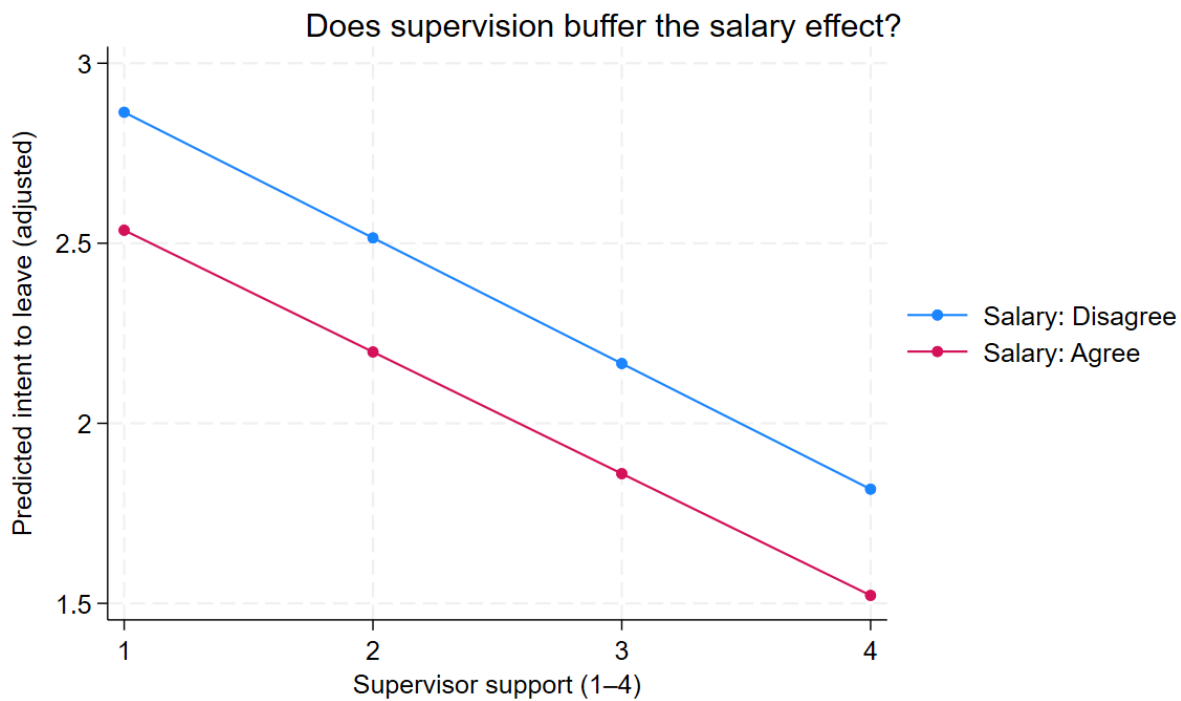
Caseworkers' perceptions of their supervisor's role in supporting them, both practically and emotionally, may have an impact on job satisfaction. Items measured on the survey included whether supervisors were accessible, provide guidance, offer feedback, and support workers' decision-making and emotional well-being.

Supervisor support and adequate workplace resources were generally associated with a lower intent to leave among those surveyed but were not strong enough to offset compensation dissatisfaction. Workers who reported that their supervisors offered consistent guidance, emotional support, and helped solve problems showed slightly lower intent-to-leave scores, confirming that effective supervision can help stabilize staff. However, the impact of supervision remains much smaller than the effects of salary and benefits. Likewise, caseworkers who felt they had the tools and resources needed to do their jobs or -reported somewhat lower intent to leave, but these improvements were not large enough to substantially change overall intention to leave when compensation remained low.

Figure 10 illustrates how supervisory support interacts with salary satisfaction in predicting intent to leave. The y-axis represents the average predicted intent-to-leave score (composite of eight items; higher values indicate more frequent leaving-related behaviors). Across the chart, intent to leave declines steadily as supervision improves, confirming that strong supervision does help lower turnover intent. However, the salary-satisfaction lines remain separated, showing that supervision benefits everyone but does not erase the effects of compensation. In other words, even at what is perceived to be

the highest level of satisfaction with supervision, caseworkers who are dissatisfied with salary still show elevated intent-to-leave scores compared with their salary satisfied peers.

Figure 10: Supervisory Support versus Salary Satisfaction



Note: Lines show predicted composite intent-to-leave scores by level of supervisory support. The blue line represents workers who are not satisfied with salary and the red line represents those who are satisfied. The y-axis reflects the predicted average intent-to-leave score, calculated from eight items measuring both thoughts and actions related to leaving (e.g., thinking about leaving, searching for other jobs, participating in job interviews).

When the same analysis is done for rural and urban caseworkers separately, higher supervisory support corresponds with lower leaving intent across the Commonwealth. In rural counties, however, if a child welfare worker is satisfied with their salary (red line) the incremental impact of good supervision is rather flat; satisfaction with compensation is more important (Figure 11). In urban counties, caseworkers satisfied with salary express greater intent to leave than their rural counterparts under poor supervision (in other words, a satisfactory salary is not enough to keep them), yet the slope of the line is steep, reflecting that improved supervision has a bigger impact on urban caseworkers than on rural.

Rural workers dissatisfied with their salaries are more likely to leave across the chart. Good supervision lessens intent to leave but does not close the wide gap with those satisfied with salary. Improved supervisor support affects workers' expressed intent to leave when they are dissatisfied with salary in the same way, whether rural or urban.

Figure 11: Rural: Salary versus Supervision

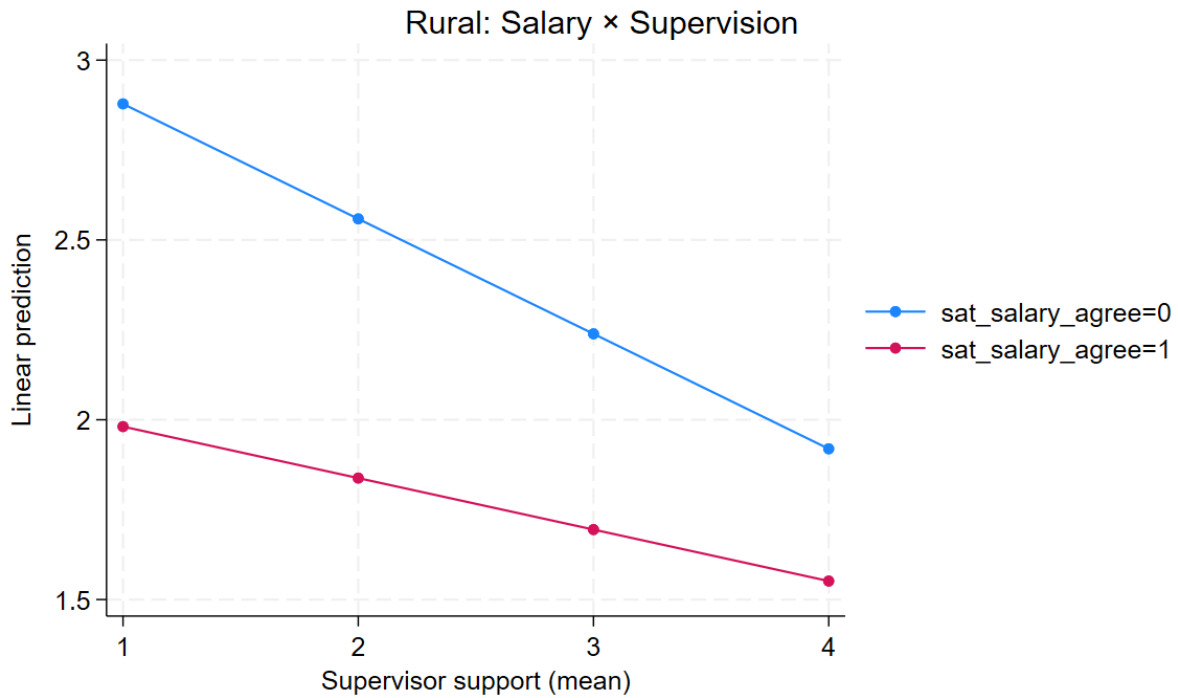
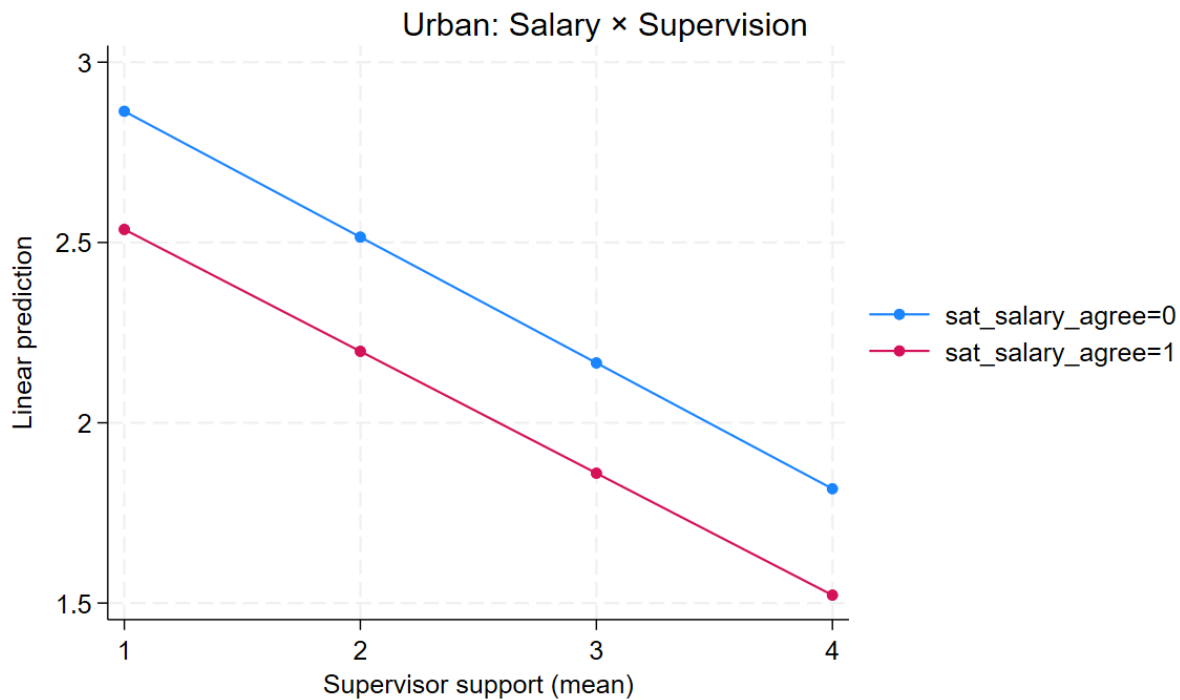


Figure 12: Urban: Salary versus Supervision

County Fiscal Officers

In October 2025, we conducted a second brief survey to gather the perspectives of 10 county fiscal officers on two key policy reform proposals. Currently, to receive state and federal funding, counties are required to provide matching county funds, which generally constitute approximately 15 percent of total costs. As a result, because child welfare and protection services are constrained by a county’s capacity to supply the required matching funds, poorer counties naturally end up with less state funding than wealthier ones. In addition, because personnel costs represent the largest or second-largest expenditure for most counties—alongside placement costs—counties facing fiscal constraints are potentially more likely to limit staff hiring.

The survey was distributed to 10 county fiscal officers in 10 counties (both rural and urban) and assessed general county-level support for (1) full reimbursement of CYs staff salaries and benefits, and (2) the establishment of statewide minimum salaries for all CYs staff positions in the form of two binary (yes or no) questions.¹

The 10 fiscal officers who were asked the questions stated “yes” in support of the full reimbursement of staff salaries and benefits under a county framework that allows

¹ The two questions were as follows: (1) Do you favor 100% reimbursement of all CYs staff (salary and benefits), with no new money added, but allowing funds to be drawn from other cost centers as needed to cover these expenses, with the provision that counties will be made whole at year’s end if they are in overmatch? (2) Do you favor establishing statewide minimum salaries for all CYs staff positions?

funds to be drawn from other cost centers. Eight out of the 10 county fiscal officers surveyed stated “yes” in support of the establishment of statewide minimum salaries. The two dissenting county fiscal officers expressed concern that adopting such a policy might lead staff in other human service agencies—such as the Departments of Aging and Drug and Alcohol Programs—to expect similar salary adjustments, which raised concerns with their county commissioners.

The findings indicate at least some potential support among fiscal officers for systemic funding reform through full reimbursement and for workforce stabilization via standardized salary minimums. Salaries vary widely across counties, ranging from the low \$30,000s to the low \$60,000s. Legislators are encouraged to consult their county’s CYS Director for specific details.

Comparison with Other States

Pennsylvania is one of only 11 states in the nation that operates under a state-supervised, county-operated model for child protective services (CPS). In contrast, the majority of states administer their CPS programs through state employees who work from regional state offices. While some have criticized the Pennsylvania system and believe that a state-administered CPS system would be more effective, the current fiscal and political landscape makes such a transition unlikely in the foreseeable future. Nevertheless, this section is therefore included for the purpose of comparison.

Compared to neighboring states, Pennsylvania also faces more significant workforce challenges due to lower starting salaries, higher caseloads, and elevated turnover rates. For example, starting salaries range from as low as \$29,250 in Clearfield County to a high of \$60,000 in Cumberland County. As analyses above show, dissatisfaction with salary increases the risk of caseworkers leaving their jobs.

New York and New Jersey are presented for a simple comparison. Public salary data for these states was retrieved directly from their official .gov websites (third-party sources like ZipRecruiter and Salary.com do not isolate state-employed CPS workers and often lack standardized job descriptions). Even within a state, reconciling specific job titles and responsibilities within state civil service systems remains a challenge. However, based on an analysis of job duties, salary ranges, and workload expectations, the following salary and caseloads were determined:

New York (County-Operated CPS System)

- **Starting Salary:** \$57,127
- **Average Salary:** \$62,043
- **Maximum Salary:** \$91,071
- **Average Caseload:** 9 cases (2017)
- **Turnover Rate:** 23%–60%, with a most recent reported rate of 48.2%

New Jersey (State-Operated CPS System)

- **Starting Salary (Trainee Level):** \$59,430
- **Average Salary:** \$88,539

- **Maximum Salary:** \$116,013
- **Average Caseload:** 15 cases (2022)
- **Turnover Rate:** 25% (2023)

Most notable are the lower average caseloads in other states compared to Pennsylvania averages; and despite the lower caseload, starting salaries in other states are higher.

Policy Considerations

Considering the significant correlations among court-related work and flexible working conditions, which is representing public caseworkers. We have formulated recommendations at both the agency and state levels. One of the most significant challenges of Pennsylvania's county-operated model is the salary disparity between counties, particularly in rural areas where wages tend to be lower.

Agency-Level Recommendations

Institutionalizing Employee Recognition

Feeling recognized for one's work is associated with reduced intent to leave, and the association is somewhat stronger in rural areas. Employee recognition should be an ingrained aspect of agency culture, fostering morale and a sense of belonging. One way to achieve this is by creating a regularly published internal newsletter that acknowledges various achievements, from personal milestones such as birthdays to professional accomplishments, including training completions and case-specific successes. Ideally, contributions to this publication should come from staff members across all levels, covering both personal updates (e.g., selling Girl Scout cookies) and professional developments. Additionally, providing broader agency updates, such as client statistics, licensing details, and budget status, helps maintain transparency and keeps employees informed. This also creates a durable record of the workplace environment. By fostering a sense of community and offering an avenue for expression, this initiative enhances workplace cohesion, recognizes employees' efforts, and aligns them more closely with the agency's mission.

Structured, Timely Supervisor Feedback

Survey results showed that a favorable perception of supervision and support was correlated with a reduced intent to leave. To improve performance recognition and supervisor support, agencies could implement a streamlined, written feedback process. A monthly, structured evaluation form—ideally a single-page, check-the-box format with room for optional comments—could be completed by supervisors for each supervisee. This approach provides cumulative documentation that can be referenced during annual evaluations, ensuring timely recognition of employee performance. Given that performance evaluations may often be deprioritized in favor of more pressing daily

tasks, this simplified feedback mechanism would enable supervisors to acknowledge employee contributions consistently. Furthermore, employees should have input in designing the form to ensure its effectiveness and fairness.

Focus on Training Supervisors and Incentivizing Good Supervision

Given that the survey results highlight the positive impact of supportive supervision in reducing caseworkers' intent to leave, increasing supervisor support through targeted training and the provision of adequate resources may help protect against caseworker resignations.

Keep Caseloads at a Manageable Level

This study found that 16 of the caseworkers who were surveyed reported managing more than 100 family cases. While there are cases where high caseloads occur temporarily, such as when a caseworker leaves their position and colleagues must absorb existing cases until a replacement is hired, heavy caseloads ultimately make it difficult to recruit new caseworkers within existing salary and benefit constraints. By improving retention and filling vacant positions, child welfare agencies can reduce excessive caseloads, ensuring that no single caseworker is responsible for more than 100 cases.

State-Level Recommendations

Establishing Statewide Minimum Salaries for Public Child Welfare Staff

According to the survey results, salary was strongly related to a caseworker's expressed intent to leave. To address workforce retention challenges which are related to salary, Pennsylvania should consider standardized minimum salaries for program service staff, including caseworkers, supervisors, and managers. To address disparities, minimum salary standards can be established through a legislatively directed workgroup that includes representatives from CCAP, PCYA, and OCYF. This group could collaboratively determine equitable pay scales during a two-year implementation period. Retention challenges persist even in higher-paying counties, as workers often leave due to the demanding nature of the job. This underscores the importance of implementing retention strategies. Low salaries fail to attract qualified candidates, and counties are unable to retain workers when better opportunities exist elsewhere.

Full Reimbursement Policy for Counties

The Department of Aging uses a funding approach that the state could consider for public child welfare. We suggest a 100-percent reimbursement model, combined with year-end reconciliation to make counties whole, which was supported by the 10 county fiscal officers we surveyed. This change could potentially allow counties to maintain staffing levels and financial stability without requiring new state funds. The proposed

reconciliation mechanism might also improve equity among counties by making overmatched counties whole at year's end.

Classifying Public Child Protective Services Staff as First Responders

Public child welfare staff, including caseworkers, supervisors, and administrators, often serve as the first line of intervention in high-risk child protection cases, frequently co-investigating with law enforcement in severe maltreatment situations. These professionals play a critical role in ensuring child safety. To acknowledge their essential contributions, Pennsylvania could formally classify CYS staff as “first responders,” elevating public perception and reinforcing the significance of their work. This recognition would enhance morale and professional respect, further supporting workforce retention and mission alignment.

Reassign Truancy Remediation for Older Youth to Juvenile Probation

To improve system efficiency, the Juvenile Act could be amended to transfer responsibility for truancy cases involving youth aged 15 and older to Juvenile Probation. Reassigning truancy cases involving older youth to Juvenile Probation is suggested as one way to reduce the workload of public child welfare caseworkers. Under current mandates, CYS is responsible for truancy remediation, including cases involving older adolescents that often require labor-intensive interventions. Given that many of these cases ultimately require court involvement, probation offices are better positioned to manage the necessary legal processes and interventions. Reassigning these cases would allow CYS to refocus resources on core child protection functions, reduce excessive documentation demands, and alleviate overall workload pressures.

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Appendix 1

Caseloads by Agency Type

Caseload	Private vs. Public	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>
Number of Children	Private	129	29.68
	Public	160	23.34
Number of Family	Private	132	14.94
	Public	162	12.22

Note: Valid percentages are reported here.

Appendix 2

Sample Characteristics of Rural and Urban Caseworkers

Demographics	Rural	Urban	Total
Age (<i>M, SD</i>)	39.91 (11.11)	41.88 (12.76)	
Gender (%)			
Male	28 (13.46)	32 (17.49)	60
Female	176 (86.62)	149 (81.42)	225
Other	4 (13.46)	2 (1.09)	6
Race/Ethnicity (%)			
Multiple ethnicity/Other	3 (1.44)	9 (4.92)	12
American Indian or Alaskan Native	3 (1.44)	0	3
Asian/Pacific Islander	0	2 (1.09)	2
Black/African American	9 (4.31)	13 (7.10)	22
Hispanic	1 (0.48)	15 (8.20)	16
White	193 (92.34)	144 (78.69)	337
Education (%)			
Completed high school or GED	5 (2.36)	2 (1.07)	7
Graduated from college	139 (65.57)	94 (50.27)	233
Some graduate school	22 (10.38)	22 (11.76)	44
Completed graduate school	46 (21.70)	69 (36.90)	115

Note: Valid percentages are reported here.

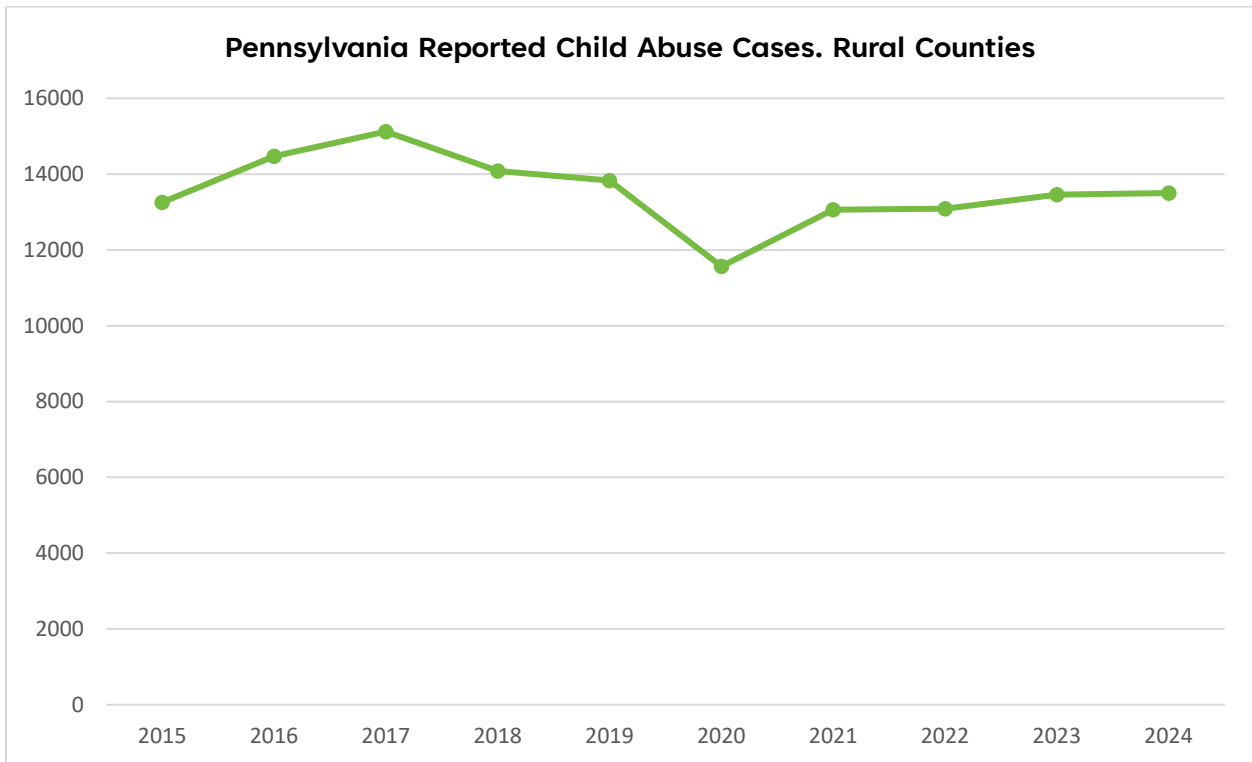
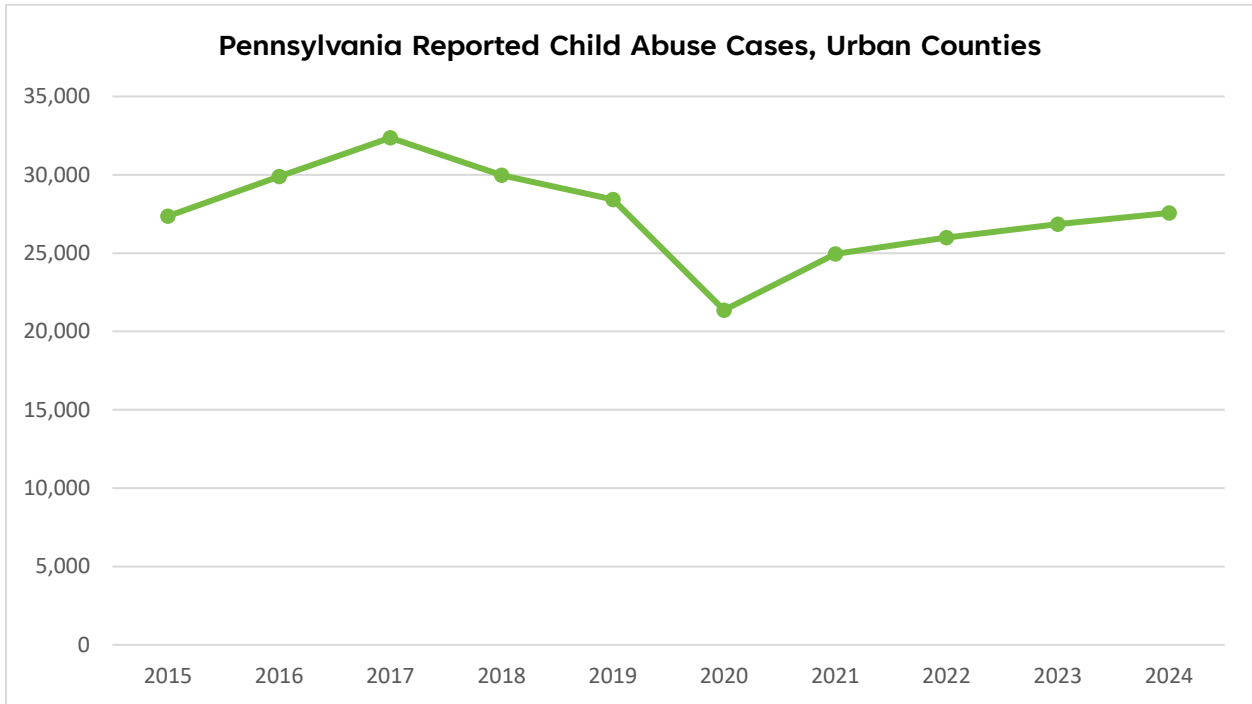
Appendix 3

Child Abuse Rates (Percent of substantiated cases in Pennsylvania, 2023)

County	Percent	County	Percent
Pennsylvania	11.7%	Juniata	13.90%
Adams	16.20%	Lackawanna	10.90%
Allegheny	7.90%	Lancaster	12.90%
Armstrong	19.60%	Lawrence	18.30%
Beaver	23.60%	Lebanon	15.10%
Bedford	8.90%	Lehigh	7.10%
Berks	12.00%	Luzerne	10.00%
Blair	7.70%	Lycoming	14.20%
Bradford	24.00%	McKean	14.60%
Bucks	8.60%	Mercer	18.90%
Butler	10.00%	Mifflin	8.30%
Cambria	5.10%	Monroe	17.40%
Cameron	7.70%	Montgomery	7.30%
Carbon	10.50%	Montour	12.50%
Centre	7.80%	Northampton	12.90%
Chester	10.00%	Northumberland	17.50%
Clarion	14.50%	Perry	13.70%
Clearfield	8.70%	Philadelphia	10.70%
Clinton	14.00%	Pike	29.90%
Columbia	13.30%	Potter	9.30%
Crawford	11.90%	Schuylkill	11.40%
Cumberland	13.10%	Snyder	10.20%
Dauphin	20.60%	Somerset	17.20%
Delaware	6.60%	Sullivan	15.00%
Elk	27.90%	Susquehanna	10.20%
Erie	9.70%	Tioga	15.50%
Fayette	10.70%	Union	14.30%
Forest	17.60%	Venango	21.30%
Franklin	7.50%	Warren	4.70%
Fulton	17.00%	Washington	8.50%
Greene	19.50%	Wayne	7.90%
Huntingdon	8.30%	Westmoreland	13.10%
Indiana	9.80%	Wyoming	9.90%
Jefferson	13.80%	York	14.10%

Data Source: Annie E. Casey Foundation and Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children (2024).

Appendix 4



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