

ONONDAGA COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES

2027 EXECUTIVE BUDGET WRITTEN STATEMENT

SECTION 1:

2026 INITIATIVES & ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- In 2026, with the leadership of the County Executive's Office, DCFS engaged in a cross-departmental collaboration to support complex case planning for vulnerable individuals experiencing homelessness, substance use, mental health challenges, and other barriers to stability. This collaborative works to identify and connect individuals to appropriate mental health, substance use, and housing resources, services, and community-based supports. By bringing together multidisciplinary partners to develop strategies, the collaborative is able to improve coordination of services and address complex, overlapping needs.
- Onondaga County DCFS School-Based Initiatives funding continues to support ALL school districts within the County by providing funding that ultimately allows for approximately \$17 million in programming for mental health services that include ACCESS Liaisons, Promise Zone Specialists, and Family Support Specialists. These services within schools assist students and their families with challenges they may be experiencing.
- DCFS and E911 have continued to work closely with community partners to strengthen and expand the 911/988 Persons in Crisis (PIC) program, which is designed to divert appropriate 911 calls from traditional law enforcement responses to mobile crisis responses. In partnership with Law Enforcement, the City of Syracuse, Contact Community Services, St. Joseph's Hospital and Liberty Resources, Onondaga County has made significant progress in establishing a coordinated, 24/7 response model that connects individuals experiencing a behavioral health crisis with trained mental health professionals and individuals with lived experience.
- The Child Welfare Division implemented the Home and School Collaborative (HSC) in 2026 to work exclusively with Syracuse City School District (SCSD). The HSC established a collaboration among families, SCSD, and Child Welfare. This unit investigates all reports of abuse or neglect that are called in by SCSD. This approach has increased child safety and well-being as well as improved school attendance and performance. The implementation of this specialized unit has also reduced the number of child abuse/neglect reports that SCSD has made.
- In collaboration with the Department of Social Services – Economic Security (DSS-ES) and their Childhood Poverty Reduction initiatives, DCFS continues to support the Attendance Project delivered by ACCESS. Since its launch in April 2025, the program has expanded from an initial four SCSD schools to thirteen school buildings, with ACCESS Attendance Liaisons working directly with students and families to address barriers to consistent school attendance. At the close of the 2026-2026 school year, ACCESS liaisons were working with 505 students. 70% of program participants have improved attendance.
- While at Hillbrook, seventeen youth have obtained regents diplomas over the past five years.
- The Syracuse/Onondaga County Youth Bureau continues to expand Youth Sports services with increased funding to community partners to support non-traditional sports programming and team sports programming.
- DCFS has continued to collaborate with the Onondaga County Sheriff's Office and the Onondaga County Probation Department to build and implement the Central New York Threat Assessment, Management, and Strategy (CNY TAMS) team. In 2026, a CNY TAMS Advisory Board was created to facilitate this important work. The Advisory Board meets weekly while the full TAMS team meets monthly to assess school and community threats and brings together stakeholders to strategize and manage threat assessment cases on an ongoing basis.
- DCFS facilitated a second County-wide School-Based Threat Assessment training for all school districts in November 2025. Approximately 250 school personnel attended the in-person training at the Oncenter.

2026 BUDGET REVIEW

As a department, DCFS is projected to be within budget for 2026, outside of increased costs of Mandated Services.

SECTION 2:

2027 BUDGET OVERVIEW

The 2027 Children and Family Services budget includes two additional funded Caseworker positions to expand Child Protective Services investigators assigned to schools through the Child Welfare Home-and-School Collaborative Program. Assigning investigators to schools will improve communication, support more timely responses, and strengthen coordination of services for children and families.

The 2027 Budget also includes increased costs in Maintenance & Utilities and All Other due primarily to inflation and contractual escalators.

The 2027 Travel and Training appropriation remains relatively flat and primarily supports required employee mileage, child transportation, home visits, and parking. The account also supports required State training and professional development in areas such as youth services and development, life skills, CPR and first aid, crisis management certification, juvenile and family court practices, and results-based accountability.

The 2027 Professional Services appropriation increases by \$619,517, primarily due to increased costs for foster care aftercare services. These services support children and families following placement and seek to prevent unnecessary foster care re-entry by helping stabilize families in the community. The account also continues to support Qualified Individual assessments, laboratory services, evaluations and treatment, investigations, psychological testing and assessments, court testimony, special prosecutors and expert services, foster care preventive services, interpreter services, transportation for foster parents, and Family Court attorneys.

The 2027 Contractual Services appropriation increases by approximately \$1.2 million, primarily related to State-funded mental health contracts and the transition of the Adolescent Day Treatment Program to an outside service-delivery model. Both changes have no additional local-dollar impact, as the State-funded contracts are fully offset by revenue and the Adolescent Day Treatment transition is offset by reductions in other appropriations, including salaries. Contractual Services continues to support a broad range of programs, including child welfare, child welfare preventive services, youth services, child mental health services including school-based mental health, adult mental health, and juvenile detention services.

The 2027 Juvenile Delinquent appropriation increases by \$898,923. These costs are largely driven by court-ordered placements and the level of services required for youth involved in the juvenile justice system. Because placement decisions are made by the courts, the County has limited control over these expenditures, and even modest changes in the number or type of placements can have a significant budgetary impact.

The 2027 Foster Care appropriation increases by approximately \$6.4 million. Costs remain elevated due to higher case counts over the past several years, increased placement costs based on the level of care required for children entering the system, and State-approved provider rate increases, including a 6% increase effective July 2026.

The 2027 Local Direct Support for Grants appropriation decreases by \$675,000, as existing balances and prior County investments are available to support a portion of the 2027 costs associated with the OnCare Local and Early Childhood Enhancement Programs.

The 2027 Transfer to Grant Projects appropriation decreases by \$532,000, as existing balances and prior County investments are available to support a portion of the 2027 costs associated with School-Based Mental Health

programs. The account continues to support local matching requirements for Youth Programs, Child Abuse Prevention and Child Advocacy programs, and the Supervision and Treatment Services for Juveniles Program.

Cumulative increases in State and Federal Aid revenues are primarily driven by reimbursements associated with Foster Care, Juvenile Delinquent Services, Juvenile Detention, including Raise the Age, Mental Health Services, Child Welfare Services, and eligible administrative costs.

SECTION 3:

2027 STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

- Expand the Home and School Collaborative within Child Welfare to support families with Child Welfare involvement in Syracuse City School District and additional districts throughout the County.
- Strengthen the 911/988 PIC Crisis Services through the provision of 24/7 coverage of a PIC Crisis Counselor and 24/7 Crisis Services Dispatch from 911.
- Continued and ongoing engagement with school districts throughout the County to implement School Based Mental Health Services in all districts
- Provide ongoing training and coordination with schools to build out the school threat assessment system
- Continue to recruit and retain staff who are committed to serving children and families so that all are successful in the home, school, and community
- Begin construction on an educational wing at Hillbrook Juvenile Detention Center in collaboration with Onondaga County Facilities Management
- Continue collaborations with other Human Services Departments within the County to develop strategies to better serve children and families