



5-Year Strategic Plan

MISSISSIPPI DEPARTMENT OF CHILD PROTECTION SERVICES

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651-09



Mississippi Department of Child Protection Services

5-Year Strategic Plan 2020–2024

Our Relevant Statewide Goal: Human Services

“To ensure that Mississippians are able to develop to their full potential by having their basic needs met, including the need for adequate food and shelter and a healthy, stable, and nurturing family environment or a competent and caring system of social support.”

Our Vision

Mississippi’s children will grow up in strong families, safe from harm and supported through partnerships that promote family stability and permanency.

Our Mission

To lead Mississippi’s efforts in keeping children and youth safe and thriving by:

- strengthening families;
- preventing child abuse, neglect, and exploitation; and,
- promoting child and family well-being and permanent family connections.

Our Core Values

Ultimately, the mission, vision, philosophy, and outcomes of the Mississippi Department of Child Protection Services turn on the abilities of staff. Caseworkers, supervisors, and a variety of support staff fulfill the

MDCPS mission through their tireless efforts in all of Mississippi's 82 counties each and every day. Given the agency's reliance on frontline staff, MDCPS has developed its Core Values as a guide to staff regarding conduct in and out of the workplace.

Competence

We possess technical skills and professional knowledge. We work with common sense and use critical thinking skills. We make informed decisions and we follow through to achieve successful outcomes.

Integrity

We are honest in our interactions. We are accountable for our actions. We do the right things.

Responsibility

We do what we say we are going to do. We take initiative.

Respect

We treat others with kindness, compassion, and dignity. We honor difference of our clients and each other.

Personal Courage

We are loyal to the mission of MDCPS. We advocate for our clients. We lead by example even when doing so carries risk.

Collaboration

We make decisions for the common good. We share resources based on need. We work together effectively in teams and we work with a collective knowledge of all programs and services.

Family-centered

We believe that families are not defined just one way. We value all families and respect the family voice in decision-making. We support a family's ability to grow and change.

Our Philosophy

MDCPS believes neither government nor other social institutions can ever fully replace a child's family. Conversely, Mississippi's children and families will thrive when parents are supported, prepared, and equipped to raise their own children in a safe, loving and protective environment without life-long government involvement. The MDCPS Safe at Home approach is founded in the belief that the first and greatest investment of time and resources should be made in the care and protection of children in their own homes. With the appropriate investment of short-term services and intensive supports designed to strengthen families, even those who experience temporary family disruption can reach sustainable, long-term familial safety and

stability. Through these supports, MDCPS can prevent unnecessary family separation and out-of-home placement, reducing additional trauma to children and families while also achieving safety and maintaining permanency.

However, when a child cannot safely remain in his or her own home because of eminent or actual danger or neglect, MDCPS recognizes immediate steps must be taken to protect and care for that child while simultaneously working toward timely reunification with the child's family whenever safely possible. When this is not an option, MDCPS works to assure timely completion of other permanent plans—adoption, durable legal custody, guardianship or a successful transition to independence. Overall, MDCPS works to empower the family and encourage self-sufficiency while meeting the child's needs for safety and wellbeing, and achieving timely permanency.

MDCPS's philosophy recognizes that Mississippi cannot achieve sustainable, long-term child and family well-being and permanent family connections simply by operating a foster care system in which government raises children in lieu of their families. Rather, MDCPS believes long-term wellbeing for children and families only can be achieved by ensuring foster care is one tool in a much broader child welfare system which seeks to preserve the family whenever possible. Key to this is establishment of a statewide partnership with community connections essential to the safety, well-being and permanency of all Mississippi families. This safety net is particularly critical when a child is removed and placed into state custody. Immediate and diligent efforts must be made to place the child and/or sibling group with other relatives, if possible, or with a licensed foster family which can maintain the child and/or sibling group in their own schools and communities. The goal is to minimize trauma to the child and birth family as much as possible. In these situations, families can best be supported by a strong safety network, extended family and community. Frontline staff and other partnerships supporting them are, cooperatively, leading agents of positive change in the lives of these children, youth, and families -- working in tandem toward sustainable, long-term child and family well-being and permanent family connections.

MDCPS believes success must be judged by four targeted outcomes for Mississippi's children and families: safety, well-being, permanency and organizational stability.

Our Targeted Outcomes

Safety— Mississippi's children will be free from abuse and neglect.

MDCPS works to protect Mississippi's children from abuse and neglect, assuring their safety and wellbeing by partnering with families, communities, and other government entities in an ethically, culturally, and socially responsible manner. MDCPS has the statutory authority and responsibility to investigate reports of child abuse and neglect. The timely and accurate investigation of these reports represents the forefront of MDCPS's efforts to assure child safety in Mississippi. MDCPS also fosters child safety through the implementation and enforcement of appropriate licensure standards for the relatives, foster parents, and facilities that provide placement options to house children in the State's custody; the implementation intensive in-home services to

assure the safety of children who remain in their homes; and through public education to reduce the occurrence of child abuse and neglect in the first place.

Well-being – Mississippi will operate a safe and supportive foster care system.

Mississippi law also tasks MDCPS with the responsibility of strengthening Mississippi families to enable them to care and protect their children in their own homes. This involves building on the strengths and identifying the needs of each at-risk child and family through diligent efforts to connect children and families to providers linked through a statewide safety net of services.

Permanency – Mississippi children will be safe and protected through permanent family connections.

MDCPS succeeds when Mississippi children are secure and protected in sustainable and supported permanent family environments. Whenever possible, our first priority is for children to be safely maintained in their own home if they can do so with assistance provided through intensive in-home services. If removal is necessary for the child's protection, permanency may also be achieved through short-term foster care while families receive help needed to raise their children without the continued involvement of government. In other situations, permanency may be achieved through timely and accurate identification of relatives willing and able to raise a child while maintaining the child's connection to birth parent(s). When birth parents or other kinship are not viable options, permanency may involve connecting a child to a new, loving adoptive family or establishing another relative as a legal guardian.

In addition to protecting children in care, MDCPS also works to strengthen Mississippi families to enable them to care and protect their children. This involves building on the strengths and addressing the needs of each at-risk child's family through diligent efforts to connect children and families to providers linked through a statewide safety net of services. Partnerships with other government agencies and community partners, also facilitate the intervention to meet systemic challenges to family stability beyond abuse and neglect itself.

Stability - Mississippi will create, equip, support and sustain an effective and efficient Department of Child Protection Services.

The Mississippi Legislature established the Mississippi Department of Child Protection Services in 2016 to protect at-risk children and strengthen their families' abilities to care for them. Our services range from prevention efforts, case management, intervention in-home services to avoid child removal, foster care, adoption and reunification with parents whenever safely possible.

Since our creation, we have begun organization of a new state agency with a clear mission, purpose and set of programmatic goals. Work continues to develop a workable infrastructure, to evaluate and realign work priorities as needed, to staff fully and to train and equip caseworkers, supervisors and support staff to provide for the protection and safety of Mississippi's children and families in an effective and efficient manner. Simultaneously, MDCPS is required by federal court order to comply with hundreds of specific performance standards for the care and protection of the thousands of foster children in Mississippi state custody.

EXTERNAL & INTERNAL ASSESSMENT

INTERNAL

Strengths:

- New Administration/Leadership team
- Engaged staff
- Administration's willingness to try new approaches/solutions
- Alignment in "plan of work" philosophy
- Focus on upgrading staff training and professional development
- Infusion of trauma-informed care
- Data-informed decision-making

Weaknesses:

- Insufficient resources – both people and funding
- Frontline staff turnover/retention issues
- Public image – child welfare's troubled history
- Field operations – inexperienced supervisors/middle-management; deficit in institutional knowledge

EXTERNAL

Opportunities:

- Renewed and vocal support from Governor's office
- Family First Act – shifting federal priorities away from state custody toward in-home care
- Faith-based partnerships/Community stakeholders
- Engaged court system/AOC leadership
- Performance Improvement Plans – federal performance reviews informing practice
- Identifying opportunities to maximize funding streams.

Threats:

- Motion for receivership; ongoing Olivia Y lawsuit compliance issues; court oversight; legal costs
- Insufficient state funding; inadequate federal resources
- Oppositional agendas among key stakeholders
- 2020 statewide elections – unknown level of support for MDCPS and mission

MDCPS

5-YEAR “Safe at Home” STRATEGIC PLAN

OUTCOME #1: SAFETY

- OBJECTIVE: Mississippi’s children will be protected from abuse, neglect and exploitation.
 - STRATEGY 1: We will inform mandated reporters and public about Mississippi Centralized Intake process and reporting responsibilities
 - Output measure: *Provide training and educational opportunities to mandated reporters via seminar presentations, online training, printed materials and other outreach efforts to increase awareness and use of the 24-hour 1-800-222-8000 hotline, MDCPS online abuse reporting tool and smartphone app.*
 - Efficiency measure: *Number of educational and training opportunities provided. Number of reports made using available reporting tools.*
 - STRATEGY 2: We will timely initiate and complete abuse, neglect and exploitation investigations.
 - Output measure 1: *Abuse, neglect and exploitation investigations will be timely initiated and completed after being screened by MCI and referred to appropriate county office.*
 - Efficiency measure 1: *Number and percentage of investigations timely initiated and completed.*
 - STRATEGY 3: We will target safety and prevention education to at-risk populations.
 - Output measure: *Develop and deliver safety information campaigns to families with an ongoing or previous relationship with MDCPS through in-home, prevention or foster care services.*
 - Efficiency measure: *Number of repeat instances of recurrence of safety/ neglect/ abuse problems.*
 - Explanatory measure: *This is a preventive strategy to reduce recidivism in the state’s child welfare system as well as to reduce any occurrence of avoidable harm to children. MDCPS also provides child abuse prevention programs to families with no previous involvement with the agency.*
 - STRATEGY 4: We will promote ongoing safety of at-risk children.

- Output measure 1: *Strengthen family parenting skills and promote self-sufficiency to reduce recurrence rate of child abuse and/or neglect after being discharged from state custody into permanency (reunification or adoption).*
- Efficiency measure 1: *Recidivism rates of children coming back into MDCPS involvement after closure of in-home services or after reunification, adoption or other non-state custody arrangement.*

OUTCOME #2: WELL-BEING

- OBJECTIVE: Mississippi will operate a safe and supportive foster care system.
 - STRATEGY 1: Strengthen safety assessment, child placement and case planning/management processes.
 - Output measure 1: *Implement practice model expectations for safety assessments, child placement determination and case management.*
 - Efficiency measure 1: *The number of assessments conducted and family service plans implemented with fidelity.*
 - Explanatory measure: *MDCPS operates a foster care review process to monitor caseworker and supervisory handling of cases in accordance with practice model expectations.*
 - STRATEGY 2: We will recruit, license and monitor foster homes statewide to meet in-custody children's needs.
 - Output measure 1: *Expand Rescue 100 efforts to partner with faith-based community to recruit, license and support new foster homes.*
 - Efficiency measure 1: *Number and geographic distribution of new licensed foster homes.*
 - Output measure 2: *Expand county office licensure staff efforts to recruit, train and license additional foster homes as well as inspect, retain and renew licensure of existing foster homes.*
 - Efficiency measure 2: *Number and geographic distribution of licensed foster homes.*
 - Output measure 3: *Expand support network for existing/renewed foster homes through licensure caseworker visits and connection to community foster support groups.*
 - Efficiency measure 3: *Number and frequency of licensure caseworker visits with foster parents.*
 - Efficiency measure 3B: *Number and geographic distribution of community foster parent support groups networked with MDCPS foster families.*

- STRATEGY 3: We will meet physical, educational, emotional/behavioral and medical needs of foster children and families throughout custody/placement.
 - Output measure 1: *Foster children will receive timely physical and psychological exams upon entering foster care system.*
 - Efficiency measure 1: *Number and percentage of foster children receiving timely medical and psychological exams.*
 - Output measure 2: *Foster children will receive appropriate medical, dental and psychological care throughout foster care placement.*
 - Efficiency measure 2: *Number and percentage of foster children receiving appropriate medical care during placement.*
 - Output measure 3: *Foster children will receive IEP evaluation/updates and be provided special educational assistance as needed throughout foster care placement.*
 - Efficiency measure 3: *Number of foster children receiving special educational assistance during placement.*
- STRATEGY 4: We will maintain child/family connections throughout foster care.
 - Output measure 1: *Foster children will receive regular visits with birth parent(s), siblings and other family members throughout foster care period.*
 - Efficiency measure 1: *Number of family visits for each child in foster care and percentage of foster children receiving recommended number of family visits.*
 - Output measure 2: *Birth parent(s), extended family and siblings (when appropriate) will be involved with foster child, foster parents and MDCPS caseworkers in developing and updating family service plan and child's permanency plan throughout foster care period.*
 - Efficiency measure 2: *The percentage of family team meetings with documented participation.*

OUTCOME #3: PERMANENCY

- OBJECTIVE: Mississippi children will be safe and protected through permanent family connections.
 - STRATEGY 1: We will strengthen families through in-home services and prevention efforts to avoid trauma of child removal.
 - Output measure 1: *Maximize in-home services available through in-Circle program to prevent avoidable removal of children whenever safely possible.*

- Efficiency measure 1: *The number of participants receiving in-home services and their self-assessment of skills obtained by participating.*
 - Efficiency measure 1B: *The number of children who were not brought into state custody because of in-home intervention with family services provided through in-Circle.*
 - Explanatory measure: *The in-Circle Family Support Services program provides intensive in-home services to families at-risk of having their children removed and placed into state custody unless safety and neglect problems can be addressed and resolved. It is a comprehensive home and community-based family preservation, reunification and support services program in which families receive up to 10 hours a week for two to three months of customized support services. Children, families and youth are actively involved in identifying their strengths, needs and service requests – and in developing family service plans to address those areas.*
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- Output measure 2: *Utilize services offered statewide through Families First to provide in-home family services to avoid child removal whenever safely possible.*
 - Efficiency measure 2: *The number of participants referred to Family First and their self-assessment of skills and services received from participation.*
 - Explanatory measure: Families First for Mississippi is a non-profit organization that supports MDCPS and MDHS to address “whole family” needs including services for children, adolescents, adults and the elderly. Their partnership with state and community agencies fills in service gaps and ensure that quality services are not being unnecessarily replicated. The program seeks to strengthen families of all backgrounds and life circumstances through seminars, workshops, classes and presentations in locales such as schools, community centers, churches and state agency offices.
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- STRATEGY 2: We will reunify children with birth families whenever safely possible.
 - Output measure 1: *Ensure children remain in state custody no longer than is necessary to ensure their safe and secure return to their birth family, whenever safety possible.*
 - Efficiency measure 1: *The length of time children stay in MDCPS custody before reunification.*
 - Output measure 2: *Work with courts/judges to ensure all reasonable efforts are made and recorded timely to facilitate reunification as soon as safely possible.*
 - Efficiency measure 2: *The length of time between approval of reunification as a child’s permanent plan and when reunification occurs.*
 - Efficiency measure 2B: *The number of family reunifications.*

 - STRATEGY 3: We will facilitate timely adoptions or legal guardianships for foster children when reunification is not safely possible or recommended.

- Output measure 1: *Monitor TPR/adoption packet progress before, during and after Termination of Parent Rights has been ordered to address issues and avoid adoption delays.*
- Efficiency measure 1: *The average length of time from when adoptions are approved as permanent plan and adoptions are finalized.*

- Output measure 2: *Reduce/eliminate backlog of court hearing dates on adoption/TPR hearings.*
- Efficiency measure 2: *The number of adoptions finalized.*

- Output measure 3: *Reasonable Efforts are properly documented in adoption case files.*
- Efficiency measure 3: *Percentage of case files reflecting proper reasonable effort documentation.*

- Explanatory measure: *MDCPS and the courts are required to document what “reasonable efforts” have been made to prevent removal of at-risk children from their homes and strengthen the family as well as reasonable efforts to reunify children with their birth parents and to achieve swiftly other permanency alternatives such as adoption. Court records and case files should include a factual description of efforts, not just conclusory statements.*

- STRATEGY 4: We will provide independent living skills and appropriate support for older foster children.
 - Output measure 1: *Seek legislative approval of college tuition credits for eligible foster children involved in Independent Living Program.*
 - Efficiency measure 1: *Track number of students impacted by tuition credits..*
 - Output measure 2: *Expand participation and services provided to Independent Living students aged 14+.*
 - Efficiency measure 2: *The number of students participating in the Independent Living Program.*

 - Explanatory measure: *The MDCPS Independent Living program assists older foster care youth with housing, education, employment and transportation as they prepare to “age out” of the foster care system. Beginning at age 14, foster youth can receive services and skills training until they exit custody through adoption, permanent placement, reunification, emancipation or age. Aftercare Services are available to youth who exit custody at age 18 until their 21st birthday.*

OUTCOME #4: STABILITY

- OBJECTIVE: Mississippi will create, equip, support and sustain an effective and efficient Department of Child Protection Services.

- STRATEGY 1: We will comply with requirements the Modified Settlement Agreement of Olivia Y lawsuit by sustained agency performance.
 - Output measure 1: *MDCPS will meet specific performance measure requirements set forth in the Modified Settlement Agreement, as permitted by funding and other resources.*
 - Efficiency measure – *Court monitor’s assessment of MDCPS compliance with all required performance standards in the Olivia Y consent agreement by the specified dates using measurements established and/ or approved by the court-appointed monitor.*
 - Explanatory measure – *The Key Performance Indicators in the Second Modified Settlement Agreement include specific performance requirements for specific time periods in the targeted areas of:*
 1. *Child Protection* – *Timely investigation screenings, assignments, initiatives and approvals*
 2. *Licensure* – *Unlicensed placement rates, homes exceeding licensed placement rates, timely screenings, safety assessments*
 3. *Caseload Standards* – *Formula and percentage of compliance*
 4. *Caseworker Visits* – *With children in foster care, children in in-home care, with parents, with foster/ adoptive parents*
 5. *Child Placements* – *Emergency shelter rates, sibling placements, relative placements trial home visits, therapeutic Services/ Placements*
 6. *Connections* – *Family Visits (siblings and Parent/ child)*
 7. *Permanency* – *Timely case plans, Independent Living Planning, TPR Progress, Court Hearings*
 8. *Services* – *Independent Living Services, Medical Screenings, Medical Services, Therapeutic Services, Educational Services*
- STRATEGY 2: We will develop new comprehensive Child Welfare Information System for use by agency caseworkers and staff to collect and maintain accurate case data of all child cases and investigations.
 - Output measure 1: *Design, produce and implement CCWIS case management information system by June 30, 2021, (dependent on funding.)*
 - Efficiency measure 1: *Increased user (caseworkers and supervisors) satisfaction and increased productivity, once the system is fully operational.*
 - Explanatory measure: *The Modified Settlement Agreement in the Olivia Y lawsuit requires MDCPS to develop a new Comprehensive Child Welfare Information System which meets federal requirements by June 30, 2021. The system must permit timely access by authorized MDCPS staff to information, including current and historical case documents, to support child safety and continuity of care across placement settings and services; capture, track and report application financial information and performance requirements; and include prompts for workers and supervisors regarding required actions in a child’s case.*
- STRATEGY 3: We will maximize use of federal and explore use of private funds to supplement state resources

- Output measure 1: *Improve caseworker understanding and response accuracy to Random Moment Sample surveys through education, training and supervisory oversight.*
 - Efficiency measure 1: *Increased response rates affecting activities eligible for federal funding.*

 - Output measure 2: *Implement process changes and make corrections to eligibility process and practice as outlined in Title IV-E Program Improvement Plan.*
 - Efficiency measure 2: *Increased rate of eligible IV-E children as allowed by federal guidelines and regulations.*

 - Explanatory measure: *Federal IV-E regulations and guidelines affect eligibility determinations. MDCPS will work to increase the number of eligible children to receive federally funded board payments/ services (in lieu of state-funded payments) while complying with these federal requirements.*
- STRATEGY 4: We will hire, train, equip and retain adequate child welfare frontline, supervisory and support staff to meet caseloads standards and provide appropriate services.
- Output measure: *Hire and train caseworkers and supervisors to meet caseload/ work needs within fiscal year.*
 - Efficiency measure: *Retention and turnover rates specific to caseworkers and supervisors.*

 - Explanatory measure: *Olivia Y lawsuit settlement agreement requires MDCPS to maintain at least 90 percent of its caseworkers in compliance with maximum workload standards. (Caseworkers will have caseloads which do not exceed the caseload standards computed in a weighted matrix approved by the court; i.e. 14 child protection investigations, or 14 ongoing foster care cases with placement responsibility and service or 17 in-home cases or 15 adoption service cases, and other similar assignments or combinations.)*