

## **Improving Maine's Child Welfare Telephone Intake System**

**June 28, 2019**

The Intake Unit within the Office of Child and Family Services (OCFS) manages Maine's child protection hotline. Intake is the first point of contact between the public and the child welfare system. The Intake Unit is staffed 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Currently, the Intake Unit receives approximately 6,000-7,000 phone calls per month, while also making approximately 3,500 outgoing calls each month. The Intake Unit serves as a critical piece of the response system when mandated reporters and other individuals report alleged child abuse and/or neglect concerns. Intake staff gather information from those making the reports and decide whether the information in the report rises to the level of requiring a child welfare response.

From 2017 to 2018, the number of calls received by the Intake telephone system increased from 61,200 to 71,700. For calendar year 2019, the Intake telephone system is projected to receive 11% (or nearly 7,900) more calls. The overall increase in child abuse and neglect call volume has resulted in increased wait times for callers wanting to speak with Intake staff and there is potential for missed opportunities to protect children and support families. OCFS determined that the phone system design was negatively impacting the Intake Unit's ability to respond to calls in a timely manner.

Over the past five months, OCFS has worked closely with the Office of Information Technology (OIT) and the state's telephone vendors to improve the capabilities of the Intake Unit's telephone system. On June 18th, the Department rolled out an improved and modernized telephone solution.

The Department, working with its partners, established the modernization project with the goals of increasing the number of calls answered live, decreasing the rate of abandoned calls, decreasing caller wait times, and improving the ability of supervisors in the Intake Unit to actively manage call flow.

Some of the enhancements included: redesigned call flows to give child abuse- and neglect-related calls priority handling, "normal" work hour and "after hour" call flows to better align with the services offered during each timeframe, improved treatment of callers in-queue by offering an opt-out-to-voicemail option every 30 seconds, and a First-in-Line capability.

First-in-Line monitors incoming call wait time, and when it exceeds a threshold set by the Department, the system will inform the caller of the estimated wait time and ask the caller if they prefer to continue to wait or to have the system call them back when their call can be answered. These changes reflect the Department's commitment to respond to all calls while also respecting the valuable time of those making reports.

The upgraded telephone system is just one of many improvements being made within the Intake Unit. The Department understands that proper staffing levels are critical to a timely response. Over the last six months, all existing Intake vacancies have been or are in the process of being filled,

including a nurse consultant position, which will enhance the Department's ability to assist families with substance-exposed newborns. The Governor and Legislature have also shown their commitment to improving the Intake Unit, by providing 11 new caseworker and 2 new supervisor positions in the state's budget. Additionally, the Department reviewed established Intake Policy and Structured Decision Making (SDM) tools to ensure they align with practice expectations to enhance child safety and opportunities for family support.

Responding promptly to allegations of child abuse and neglect is a core responsibility of Maine's child welfare system. The Department remains committed to systemic changes to improve child and family safety and wellbeing.