

Government Results and Opportunity Hearing Brief



During the 2024 session, the Legislature appropriated funding for four Government Results and Opportunity (GRO) fund pilot projects at the Children, Youth and Families Department (CYFD). The funding provided targeted support for pilot projects to address persistent child welfare challenges in New Mexico: development and retention of a professionalized workforce, prevention and early intervention services for families to reduce the number of children removed from homes, and recruitment and retention of resource (foster) homes. CYFD has struggled to implement the pilot programs strategically and consistently, failing to expend funding in some programs and changing plans for expenditure. Consequently, outcomes are limited and evaluation of the success of the programs is challenging. However, the state continues to face challenges in recruiting and retaining a qualified workforce, delivering programs to prevent child maltreatment, and ensuring appropriate placements for children in custody.

AGENCY: Children, Youth and Families Department

DATE: July 22, 2026

PURPOSE OF HEARING:
Review of 2024 GRO pilot projects

WITNESS: Valerie Sandoval,
Acting Secretary, CYFD

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EXPECTED OUTCOME:
Informational

Masters-Level Social Work Licensure

Amount: \$1.7 million **Purpose:** To implement and evaluate outcomes of a pilot program to incentivize attainment of masters-level social work licensure to develop and retain caseworkers in the child protective services program. The children, youth and families department shall report quarterly on the number of caseworkers with a masters-level social work license in a child protective services caseworker position and of masters-level social workers retained more than twelve months in protective services caseworker roles.

New Mexico struggles to recruit and retain a professionalized child welfare workforce. At the end of 2025, CYFD had only 264 employees with social work degrees and only about half of these employees were licensed social workers. Within protective services, the agency maintained a total of 128 employees with social work degrees, half of which had master's degrees and only 26 of which were licensed. During calendar year 2025, CYFD increased the total number of licensed social workers at the agency from 122 to 134.

In the first year of the pilot program (FY25), CYFD used the GRO funding to implement a temporary 10 percent raise for employees with a master's degree in social work, resulting in raises for 48 employees. The agency did not demonstrate any increased attainment of masters-level social work licensure or retention of employees with such licensure resulting from the salary increases.

Appropriation Progress At-A-Glance	
Evaluation Plan Submitted	Yes
Percent Expended	
Year 1	99%
Year 2	61%
Outcomes Tracked and Reported	No

In the second year of the pilot program (FY26), CYFD redesigned the program to include: (1) a needs assessment survey to identify barriers to, readiness for, and staff interest in licensure; (2) tiered salary differentials aligned to licensure level; and (3) recognition and celebration activities for licensure and graduation milestones. The agency is tracking licensure attainment, twelve-month retention, and workforce competitiveness to evaluate the program’s effectiveness. Notably, due to the changes made to the pilot program, CYFD expended only about 60 percent of appropriated funds in FY26 and will have less data to report when final GRO evaluations are due in September 2026.

Questions for Consideration:

- Under the revised pilot program, how many additional employees are licensed social workers?
- Under the revised pilot program, how has retention of licensed social workers changed?
- Under the revised pilot program, how many existing employees have newly pursued licensure?

Multi-Level Response for CPS

Amount: \$4.2 million **Purpose:** For a pilot to expand evidence-based implementation of multilevel response statewide in the child protective services program, pursuant to Section 32-4-4.1 NMSA 1978. The children, youth and families department shall report quarterly on the number of families receiving a multilevel response, the percentage of multilevel response eligible families who engage in services, the percentage of participating families in multilevel response who have a traditional child protective services investigation within a twelve-month period and the percentage of participating families in multilevel response with a substantiated case of child maltreatment.

Appropriation Progress At-A-Glance	
Evaluation Plan Submitted	Yes
Percent Expended	
Year 1	1%
Year 2	49%
Outcomes Tracked and Reported	No

In 2019, New Mexico enacted legislation to create a multilevel response model in which lower risk reports of child maltreatment that would otherwise be screened-in for investigation may be diverted for connection to resources or in-home services if appropriate. Rather than implement multilevel response to fidelity with this model, CYFD created a family outreach program for reports of maltreatment that are screened-out. The Legislature provided GRO funding to support implementation of multilevel response to fidelity in an evidence-based manner and as required by statute.

CYFD failed to expend the appropriated funding and implement multilevel response in the first year of the pilot program (FY25). In the second year of the pilot program (FY26), the agency launched a pilot in San Juan and McKinley counties beginning in early 2026. As of May 31, 2026, the program had received 132 referrals, primarily for educational neglect and lack of supervision, and served 360 children. The program connected families to educational supports, behavioral

health services, housing resources, legal assistance, medical services, and other community-based supports. Of the 132 families served, 83 percent have not had a subsequent report to CYFD and no substantiated findings of abuse or neglect have resulted for those families with a subsequent report. Beginning in FY27, the pilot will expand services to Bernalillo county.

Questions for Consideration:

- How do repeat referrals compare between the counties served by multilevel response and those not currently served?
- Has multilevel response delivery begun in Bernalillo county? What is the timeline for full implementation?

Prevention and Intervention Services

Amount: \$9 million **Purpose:** For a pilot to expand evidence-based prevention and intervention programs, including safe care home visiting, ~~published in the federal Title IV-E prevention services clearinghouse or that may be reimbursed by medicaid.~~ The children, youth and families department shall report quarterly on the number of families participating in evidence-based community based prevention and intervention programs ~~that are in the Title IV-E clearinghouse or eligible for medicaid reimbursement,~~ the percentage of participating families subject to a child protective services investigation and the percentage of participating families with a substantiated case of child maltreatment.

New Mexico faces persistently high rates of repeat maltreatment; as of May 2026, the state’s repeat maltreatment rate was 16.1 percent, well above the national benchmark of 9 percent. Research consistently suggests that evidence-based prevention and early intervention programs can prevent child maltreatment. However, CYFD has struggled to implement evidence-based prevention and early intervention programs. The Legislature provided additional GRO funding to provide the agency with the opportunity to expand evidence-based programs and evaluate their outcomes, particularly as CYFD continued to seek approval of its plan which would allow federal reimbursement for such programs (after many years and several failed attempts, the agency’s Family First Prevention Services Act plan was approved in October 2025).

In the first year of the pilot program (FY25), CYFD spent only 10 percent of the \$3 million appropriated for prevention and early intervention programs. In the second year of the pilot (FY26), the agency planned to direct funds to SafeCare—an evidence-based home visiting program for children ages 0-5 at risk of child maltreatment—and expanding family resource centers to San Juan and Lea counties. Near the end of FY26, CYFD had enrolled 25 families in SafeCare and only a single family had completed the program. The agency expanded family resource center service areas to provide resources and referrals.

Appropriation Progress At-A-Glance	
Evaluation Plan Submitted	Yes
Percent Expended	
Year 1	10%
Year 2	49%
Outcomes Tracked and Reported	No

Questions for Consideration:

- What outcomes is CYFD tracking for those served at family resource centers? What do the early results demonstrate? What is the agency's rigorous evaluation plan for the effectiveness of resource centers?
- How many families does CYFD seek to enroll in SafeCare in FY27? Does the agency intend to serve CARA families with the home-visiting program? What is the agency's rigorous evaluation plan for the program?

Foster Care Support

Amount: \$3.8 million **Purpose: For recruitment, training and support of treatment foster care and foster care providers to support hard-to-place children. The children, youth and families department shall report quarterly on the number of treatment foster and foster care families recruited, trained and have a child in custody of child protective services in their care, number of treatment foster and foster care families recruited and trained that maintain their provider status and the number of youth in child protective services care placed in an office, out-of-state, congregate care or shelter setting.**

Appropriation Progress At-A-Glance	
Evaluation Plan Submitted	Yes
Percent Expended	
Year 1	95%
Year 2	50%
Outcomes Tracked and Reported	No

New Mexico consistently faces insufficient numbers of resource (foster) homes or foster placements. The *Kevin S.* settlement agreement committed the state to efforts to expand community-based family placements for youth in custody, increase the number of foster families, and increase the use of treatment foster care. The Legislature appropriated GRO funding to support CYFD's efforts in this area.

In the first year of the pilot program (FY25), CYFD created five dedicated positions to focus on foster care family recruitment and retention. Despite the dedication of resources, the agency lacked a unified recruitment strategy and did not see sustained increases in foster family inquiries or new foster family licensure throughout 2025. In the second year of the pilot program (FY26), CYFD focused on implementing an enhanced foster care program, Foster Care Plus, which provides additional training, support, and funding for foster families with higher needs placements. Since the start of FY25, the agency has demonstrated some improvement and the number of foster families has increased from 1,013 (576 relative, 437 non-relative) to 1,214 (732 relative, 482 non-relative), with most of the increase occurring in FY26. Notably, increases are concentrated within relative foster families, and additional non-relative foster placement options are needed.

Questions for Consideration:

- How many children have been served through Foster Care Plus? What is the agency's plan for rigorous evaluation of the program?
- What is the agency's plan to recruit additional non-relative foster homes in FY27?
- How many foster families have been recruited through recruitment events?