



CSA TODAY

A NEWSLETTER OF THE OFFICE OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES

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Director's Blog: Leadership Perspectives Keeping Us Connected



Together, We Power Virginia's System of Care

Preetha Agrawal, Chief Information Officer; Anna Antell, Lead Program Consultant
Stephanie Bacote, Program Audit Manager; and Kristi Schabo, Policy & Operations Officer

In this edition, the OCS Leadership Team is stepping into the Director's Blog to share updates, insights, and stories from across the CSA community. Stay tuned for future contributions from our amazing leadership!

Systems of Care (SOC) provides the guiding framework, philosophy, and core values that shape the Children's Services Act (CSA). At the heart of Virginia's SOC is a shared vision, mission, and set of goals that keep partners aligned. In this model, there is *No Wrong Door* for families to access help; care is *coordinated* across agencies; funds are *braided* and *blended* to maximize impact; and planning happens through *multi-disciplinary teams* that bring diverse expertise to the table. The CSA builds on this framework by envisioning a child-serving system that is truly child-centered, family-focused, and community-based. Its values—cultural humility, trauma-informed practice, data-driven decision making, evidence-based strategies, and outcome-focused action—guide every aspect of the work. These principles show up in the operating structures of both state and local CSA teams, in the CSA's mission, and in the daily efforts of the Office of Children's Services (OCS), ensuring that the SOC is not just a philosophy but a lived practice across the Commonwealth.

Virginia's child serving system and the CSA thrive because state and local policy operate in true partnership to support a unified system of care. At the state level, policies established by the State Executive Council for Children's Services (SEC) and carried forward by the OCS set clear programmatic and fiscal standards that promote collaboration, accountability, and consistent implementation across the Commonwealth. These policies, in conjunction with the Code of Virginia, create guardrails that ensure services remain child-centered, family-focused, and community-based; however, the real momentum behind the CSA happens locally. CPMTs and FAPTs take the SOC vision and bring it to life, using the CSA's built-in

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DIRECTOR'S BLOG (CONT'D)

flexibility to craft relevant local policies, tailor innovative supports, and invest resources where they make the biggest impact for the youth and families in their communities.

Together, state guidance and local creativity form a powerful engine that drives Virginia's child-serving system forward with energy, enthusiasm, and purpose. Foundational to a SOC is collaboration amongst the formal child-serving system, across the levels of planning, and with youth and families. This central tenant to a SOC is seen through the timely, cross agency consulted, and reliable Technical Assistance provided by the Program Team at OCS, and through the planning of the annual CSA conference, an event that brings together over 500 individuals serving Virginia's System of Care. Evidenced in training topics intended to enhance local CSA team functioning and planning and improve outcomes for youth and families (CPMT & FAPT Roles and Responsibilities, High Functioning FAPT, Strategic Planning, Family Engagement, Systems of Care, and CANS and Service Planning), the Program Team promotes the System of Care.

Local CSA programs and external partners rely on strong systems of care, and CSA program audits play a key role in maintaining and improving those systems. Working with local CSA programs and external partners, audits provide an objective look at how local processes are functioning—examining service plans, funding decisions, documentation practices, and cross-agency collaboration. This helps programs confirm where their work is aligned with state requirements and where adjustments may be needed. By identifying strengths and improvement opportunities, audits support consistent, high-quality practices across communities. They promote transparency, reinforce accountability, and help partners better coordinate services for children and families. Ultimately, CSA program audits strengthen trust among agencies and ensure that resources are used effectively to support positive outcomes for the youth and families served.

Information Technology (IT) systems managed by OCS function as the digital backbone of a unified system of care. By delivering secure, reliable data-management infrastructure, these systems streamline data collection, storage, and analysis across the entire care network. This creates a consistent and efficient flow of information between programs and providers. With centralized data integration, IT solutions make it easier to capture, aggregate, and analyze outcomes from multiple service areas. Leadership teams can quickly identify system-wide gaps, monitor patient and client progress, and track emerging trends. This visibility supports more accurate resource allocation, especially for high-risk populations or areas with increasing demand. Ultimately, the technology enables data-driven decision-making that enhances coordination, improves service delivery, and strengthens overall system performance.

At its core, CSA is not a single person or a single agency; it is shared work powered by many hands across the Commonwealth. Every youth, every family member, every CPMT representative, every FAPT participant, every case manager, and every partner in the child-serving system contributes to the System of Care at the local level; and the SEC and OCS and other state entities are right alongside, providing statewide leadership, clear policy, reliable guidance, technical assistance, audits, training, and the IT infrastructure that keeps everyone connected and aligned. Together, this intentional effort makes Virginia's SOC strong – a network of people and agencies bringing expertise and resources in commitment to the mission of CSA. When woven together, CSA and the SOC become more than a framework. What results is a collaborative multi-level system that empowers communities and helps children and families thrive across the Commonwealth.

Let's keep striving, growing, and leading—one step at a time!





Join us for an inspiring experience at the **15th Annual Commonwealth of Virginia CSA Conference**, hosted at the scenic Hotel Roanoke & Conference Center. This year's theme underscores a key message: ***meaningful progress in children's services happens when we work together.*** By bringing together agencies, communities, and partners, we spark new ideas and create innovative solutions that improve outcomes for children, youth, and families. Visit the [conference website](#) for registration details, lodging options, and full conference information.

A joint pre-conference session for CSA Coordinators, CPMT members, and FAPT members will be held on October 13th from 2 PM to 5 PM. This interactive session, led by **Ellen Kagen** of the Kagen Leadership Group, will offer insight on how we can provide the kind of leadership that will create change for the children and families we serve as well as for our systems and organizations. There is no cost for the preconference, but registration is required. Select the preconference add-on during your conference sign-up.

The conference kicks off on October 14th with **Noah Scalin**, a high-energy artist and author whose stunning artwork proves that creativity is everywhere you are. Get ready—Noah is bringing the spark as this year's keynote speaker!

Conference activities will also feature a dynamic lineup of breakout sessions designed to support learning, collaboration, and practical skill-building across the CSA community. Each session offers participants the opportunity to explore timely topics, engage with subject matter experts, and share innovative approaches with peers from across the Commonwealth across various training tracks. These focused discussions, with some specifically designed for new CSA Coordinators, CPMT members, and FAPT members, allow participants to dive deeper into key areas of practice, exchange insights, and return to their local programs with new tools and strategies to enhance outcomes for children and families.

Enhance your conference experience with our *Guidebook* mobile app, where you'll find the agenda, breakout sessions, exhibitors, sponsors, and evaluations all in one place.

Online registration closes **October 12, 2026**. Secure your spot today and join us in shaping bold ideas and stronger futures for the communities we serve. For questions, please email [Mary Bell](#).





Supporting Educational Stability. Empowering Futures.

The Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS) and the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) have partnered to offer training focused on promoting educational stability for youth in foster care. These sessions are available both in-person and virtually, covering key topics such as the educational stability process, best interest determinations, general education, unique situations in special education, dispute resolution, and support for older youth involved in Fostering Futures.

While the in-person sessions have concluded, virtual training opportunities remain available. All trainings are free and open to anyone interested, including:

- DSS workers and supervisors
- School staff – Foster care liaisons, Guidance Counselors, Principals, Teachers, Superintendents
- CASA
- Guardian ad Litem (GAL)
- Others working with youth in foster care

For full details and registration information, please check out the [Fusion broadcast](#), or you may contact [Jessie Forman](#), State Educational Stability Liaison.



CSA Annual Service Gap Survey Report *Now Available!*

The Office of Children's Services (OCS) has released the results of the FY2026 Children's Services Act Annual Service Gap Survey, providing updated insight into service availability and emerging needs across Virginia's child-serving systems. Localities reviewed their previously reported gaps and indicated which needs had improved, worsened, or newly appeared over the past year.

The report highlights continued shortages in community-based behavioral health services, foster care placements, and crisis response supports, along with growing concerns in evidence-based treatment availability and transportation barriers. Many localities noted persistent difficulties in securing specialized behavioral health interventions and sufficient family-based foster care options.

The FY 2026 update is intended to guide Community Policy and Management Teams (CPMTs) in planning, resource development, and interagency collaboration to address priority gaps and improve service access for children and families. The full report is available on the [CSA website](#).

If you have questions regarding the survey or need assistance, please contact the [Office of Children's Services](#).





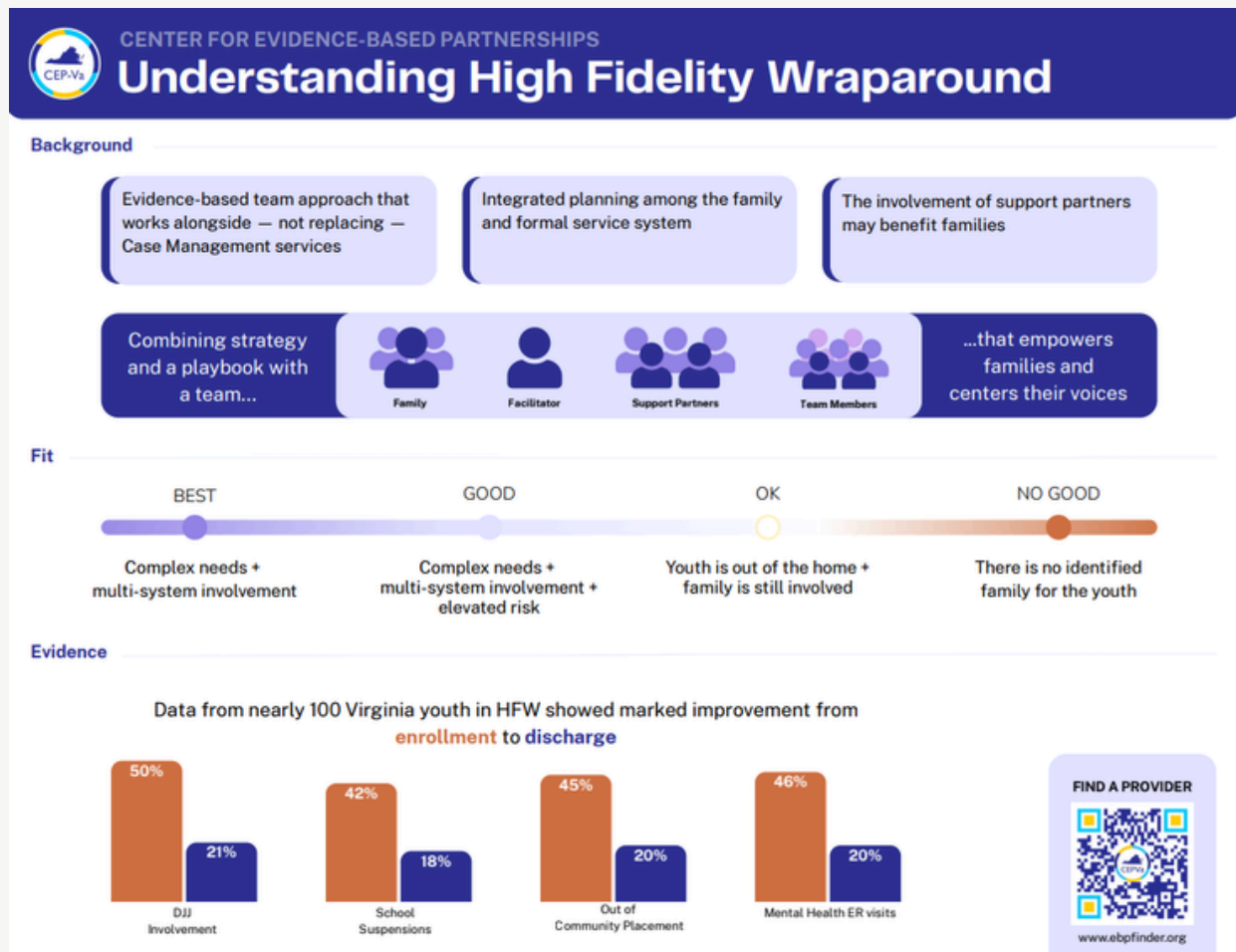
Resource Spotlight



High Fidelity Wraparound in Virginia

High Fidelity Wraparound (HFW) has played an important role in supporting children and families across Virginia. In recent years, however, the way practitioners, case managers, and local teams think about HFW has evolved. With renewed expectations for coordination, accountability, and family-driven planning, HFW is becoming an even more valuable tool for improving outcomes.

In collaboration with state and local partners, the [Center for Evidence-based Partnerships](#) (CEP-Va) has developed a resource to help Virginia agencies and practitioners better understand how HFW can strengthen service planning and delivery. This tool offers a streamlined way to explore key concepts, identify points for action, and connect practice to current statewide data.



Source: *Understanding High Fidelity Wraparound*. Center for Evidence-based Partnerships, June 2026.

This [resource](#) supports implementation in three important ways:

- It helps case managers and families understand how HFW can assist them.
- It guides workers on when to make a referral.
- It presents Virginia-specific HFW data to support informed decision-making.

As service needs grow more complex, this tool offers a clear way to connect HFW practice with your team's goals – ensuring children and families receive individualized, community-based support.



Choosing the **Red Pill**: Seeing CSA Clearly

Submitted by Annette Larkin, Program Auditor

"You take the blue pill... the story ends, you wake up in your bed and believe whatever you want to believe. You take the red pill... you stay in Wonderland, and I show you how deep the rabbit hole goes.... Remember all I'm offering is the truth, nothing more."

~ The Matrix (1999) Morpheus quote

In the movie, *The Matrix*, Neo, the character portrayed by Keanu Reeves, had to choose between two pills: the **"Blue"** pill, which keeps him blissfully unaware and safely insulated from reality, or the **"Red"** pill, which reveals the truth – intricate, and occasionally unsettling yet ultimately discovering the reality of the Matrix.

For local Children's Services Act (CSA) programs, strong governance, risk management, and internal control functions are much like that **"Red"** pill. They

empower CPMTs to see the "code" behind their operations: the patterns, vulnerabilities, and decision pathways that shape outcomes for children and families.

Just as Morpheus, portrayed by Laurence Fishburne, guided Neo to see the Matrix clearly, these tools guide CPMTs beyond assumptions and into clarity, accountability, and informed decision-making.

Are you intrigued? – Take the **"Red"** pill and follow me into the Matrix....



Effective Governance: The Architect of CSA Stability

In *The Matrix*, the Architect serves as the system's creator and chief administrator—designing, maintaining, and updating the simulated world to preserve its stability. In the world of CSA, effective governance through the CPMT plays that same role. Strong governance provides the structure that keeps the system functioning as a cohesive program. It ensures:

- Clear and defined decision-making authority,
- Consistent and uniform application of policies and procedures,
- Transparent and accurate documentation,
- Collaboration across all child-serving agencies, and
- Responsible stewardship and accountability for taxpayer funds.

In practice, this means each agency representative at the CPMT table arrives as the subject-matter expert for their organization—fully informed about their agency's policies, mandates, funding responsibilities, and prepared to contribute that expertise to the collective decision-making process.

When governance is weak, systems begin to operate on assumptions—much like navigating the Matrix without understanding its underlying rules. But when governance is strong, CPMTs have the blueprint they need to make defensible, well-reasoned, and child-centered decisions, grounded in both state requirements and sound agency practice.

Risk Management: Anticipating the Unexpected

Just as Neo stayed two steps ahead of danger in *The Matrix*, effective CSA risk management requires the CPMT to anticipate challenges before they materialize. Being proactive—not reactive—is the key to system stability.

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In the CSA environment, strong risk management means:

- Identifying vulnerabilities in programmatic, fiscal, and administrative processes,
- Assessing the likelihood and potential impact of those risks,
- Implementing preventive mitigation strategies to reduce exposure, and
- Ensuring continuous monitoring so small issues do not evolve into crises.

Common risks include noncompliance with statutory requirements, service disruption, unauthorized funding or inappropriate services to address needs, and fragmented communication between agencies. When CPMTs proactively examine these areas, they safeguard both the integrity of the CSA system and the youth and families it serves. In other words, when CSA programs take the time to understand the “rules of the system,” they prevent major disruptions—much like navigating the Matrix with full awareness of its architecture.

Internal Controls: The “Code” That Is the Anchor

In The Matrix, the “code” determined the boundaries of reality—what was possible, what was permitted, and what could be revealed. In the world of CSA, internal controls serve a similar purpose. They define the structures that make information trustworthy, decision-making consistent, and fiscal practices defensible.

Internal controls are the safeguards that ensure:

- Funds are used appropriately and legally,
- Decisions are well-documented and traceable,
- Data is accurate, secure, and complete,
- Services provided align with statutory and policy requirements, and
- Oversight bodies can verify the integrity of decisions and expenditures.

Without the anchor—a strong internal-control framework—CPMTs may feel like they are operating effectively while unseen errors, compliance issues, or fiscal risks quietly accumulate—much like living within a simulation that appears stable on the surface but is not grounded in truth underneath.

Mastering the Matrix

Ultimately, the goal of local CSA programs is not to escape “the Matrix,” but to master it. By setting the governance structure, identifying risk, strengthening internal controls, and cultivating a culture of continuous improvement, CPMTs ensure that every decision—financial, operational, and clinical—advances the heart of their mission: helping children and families navigate their own complex worlds with greater safety, stability, and hope.

Now that you’re fully inside the Matrix, stay open to what it brings into focus—truths, structures, and insights that empower us to fortify our System of Care for every child and family. I challenge CPMTs to step forward with clarity: embrace transparency, strengthen oversight, and confront risk head-on. Build an internal control system where the “code” is visible to all—and can be used to drive stronger, smarter, and more impactful outcomes.

I leave this charge:



**Master the Matrix. Strengthen the system.
Transform the future for the children and families we serve.**

Reference: *The Matrix* (1999).

IF YOU FIND THIS ARTICLE HELPFUL AND WOULD LIKE MORE INFORMATION ON THIS TOPIC, PLEASE CONTACT ANY MEMBER OF THE PROGRAM AUDIT TEAM. CONTACT INFORMATION IS AVAILABLE ON THE [CSA WEBSITE](#). ALSO, CHECK THE OCS NEWSLETTER, “CSA TODAY,” FOR FUTURE ARTICLES.



Turning Assessment into Action: Improving FAPT Operations

Submitted by Courtney Sexton, Program Consultant

Last quarter, we encouraged teams to reflect on how their FAPT is functioning. Reflection is most valuable when it leads to action and sustainable improvement. Continuous improvement doesn't happen all at once - it happens through collaborative planning, gradual changes, and regular evaluation. The following are strategies that you may implement as you seek to improve FAPT operations:

Identify Your Priorities

Not every opportunity needs to be tackled all at once. Using the observations from your self-assessment, identify one or two areas that would have the greatest impact on your team's effectiveness.

Questions to Consider

- Where do we struggle most consistently?
- What concerns do members raise repeatedly?
- What feedback do we get from families?
- Which improvements are achievable over the next 3 to 6 months?

Set SMART Goals

Once priorities are identified, develop specific goals. Improvement goals are **Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound**.



Example:

Increase family attendance at FAPT meetings from 50% to 75% over the next 6 months by improving communication and meeting preparation.

Develop an Action Plan

Determine:

- Who will lead the effort?
- What steps will be taken?
- What resources are needed?
- How often will progress be reviewed?
- How will success be measured?

Monitor Progress Regularly

Sustainable improvement requires regular check-ins. Set aside a few minutes at each FAPT meeting to review improvement goals.

Ask:

- What progress have we made?
- What is the next action item?
- What barriers have we encountered?
- Do we need to adjust our approach?

Review, Refine, and Repeat

Recognizing and celebrating success is just as important as identifying new opportunities for improvement.

- Continuous improvement is an ongoing process. If your team achieves their goal, celebrate and identify the next area for improvement.
- If a strategy isn't producing the desired results, use what you have learned to refine your action plan rather than abandoning the effort. Adjust your approach, implement the changes, and continue to monitor your progress.

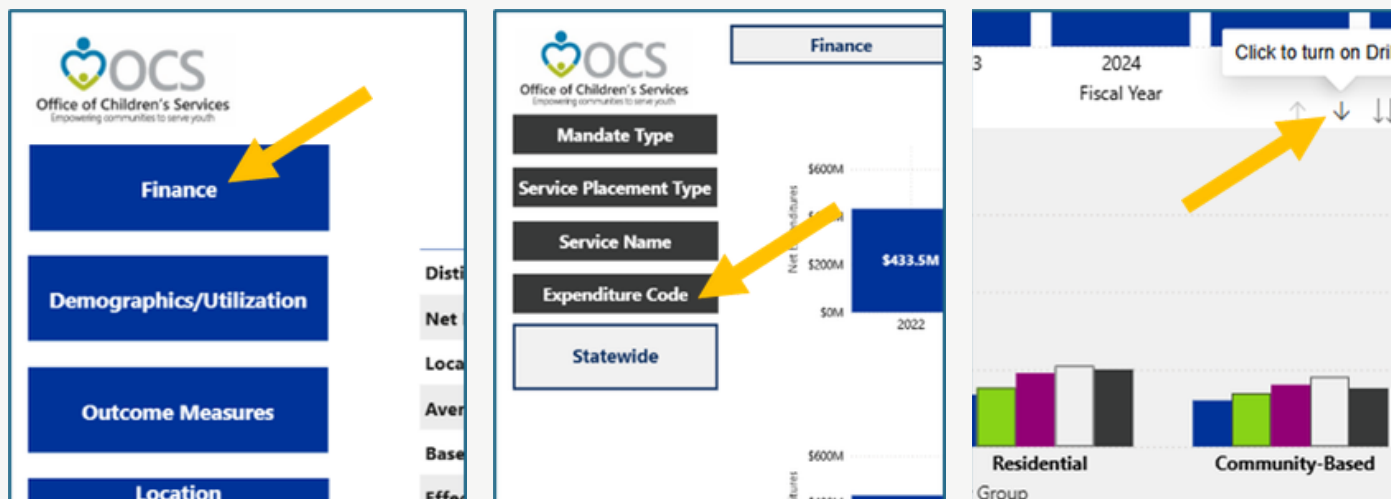
Over time, these small, intentional improvements can strengthen your FAPT's effectiveness and better support children and families.

Spending Trends: Tracking Residential Expenditures Over Time

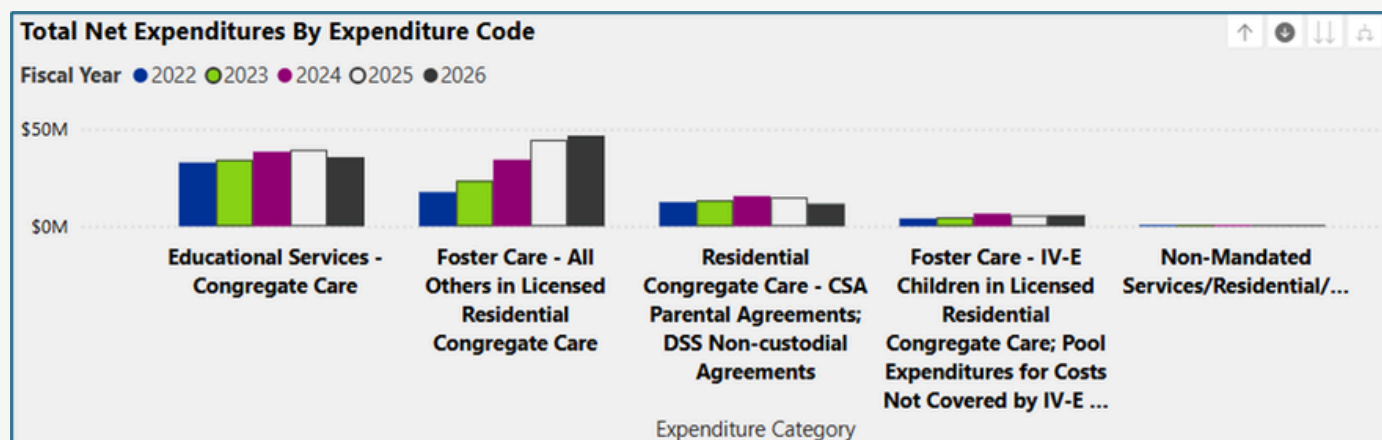
Carrie Thompson, OCS Research Associate Senior

This article will highlight a statewide data trend, using the CSA Data and Outcomes Dashboard (CQI), provide instructions on how localities can find their data on the topic, and offer applications for local Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI).

Residential total net expenditures (Expenditure code 1: Congregate care/Mandated and Non-mandated residential services) have been generally increasing since FY2023. To view this trend, we access the Finance menu on the home screen of the dashboard (left image), followed by the Expenditure Code menu on the finance page (middle image).



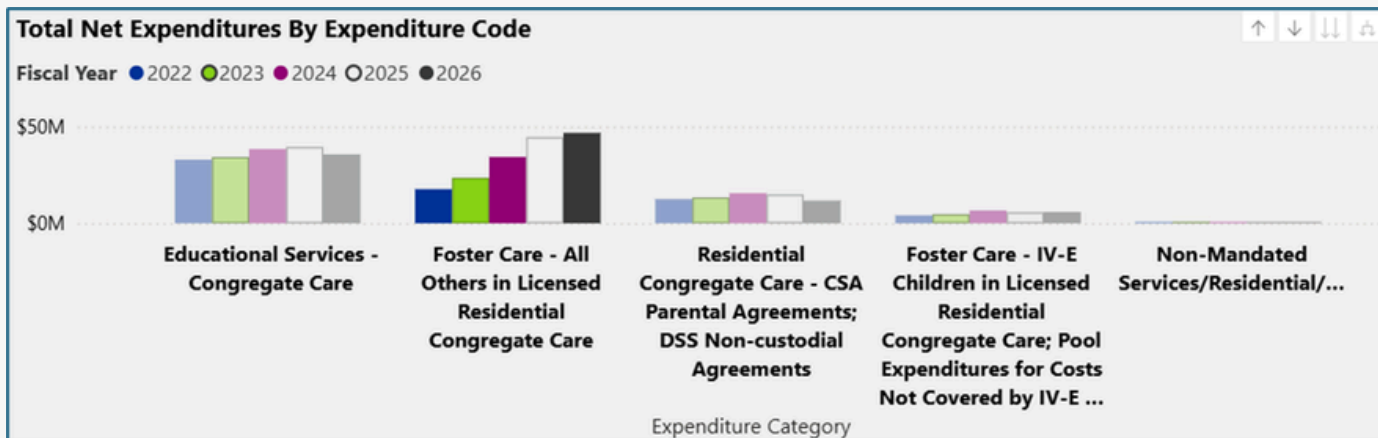
Clicking the Drill down icon in the chart (image above on the right), and then clicking the Residential heading on the x-axis, will display all the expenditure codes within the Residential category (image below, note the dark highlight of the drill down icon).



Looking at the chart above, Expenditure 1b (Foster Care – All Others in Licensed Residential Congregate Care) seems to be increasing over time more than the other expenditure codes. Expenditure 1b has a taller (more total net expenditures) column each year compared to the year before. What is driving this increase? Is it more children, increasing costs, or a combination? To answer these questions, click the Drill down icon again to unhighlight the icon. Then click on the expenditure category of interest (here, Foster Care – All Others in Licensed Residential Congregate Care). The selected expenditure category

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will stay in full color while the categories will be slightly grayed out (see image below).

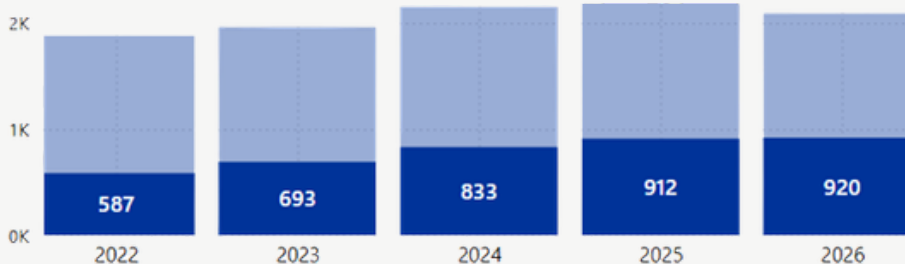


After selecting the expenditure category, use the chart above the total net expenditures visual to display Distinct Child Count or Average Net Expenditures Per Child (images below of statewide examples). By hovering over the blue bars with your mouse, a pop-up window will display the values. Remember that when a specific LEDRS code is highlighted in the total net expenditures chart, you will want to use the "highlighted" values provided in the chart and in the pop-up.

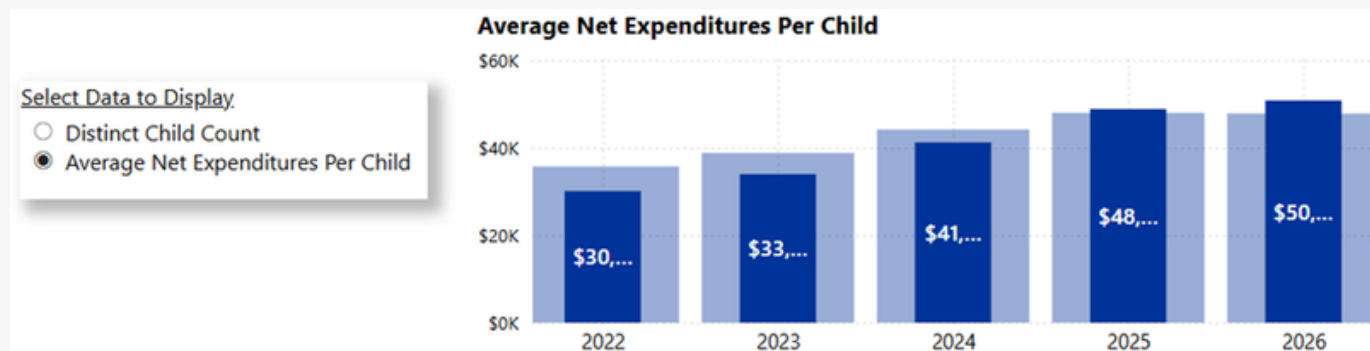
Distinct Child Count

Select Data to Display:

- ☒ Distinct Child Count
- ☐ Average Net Expenditures Per Child



How has the count of local youth served under expenditure code 1b changed over time?

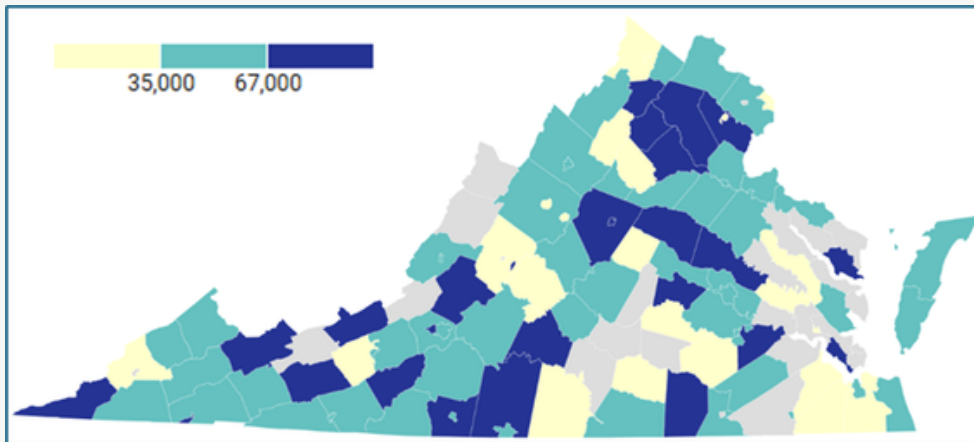


How has the average net expenditure changed since FY2022 for your locality?

Below are maps that summarize average spending and change in youth counts across the state, for this specific expenditure code.



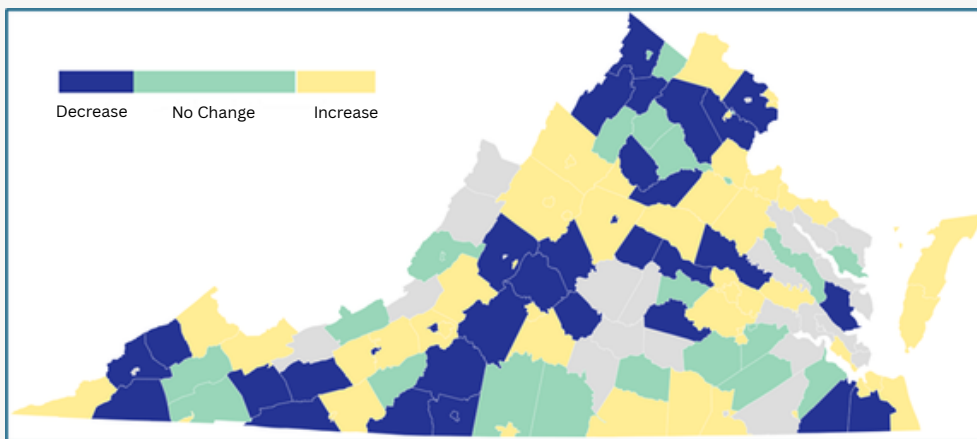
FY2026 (as of July 2026) Average Net Expenditure per Child for Expenditure Code 1b



The average net expenditure for FY2026 ranged from a minimum \$2,960 to a maximum of \$211,801 per child. Per diem rates and lengths of stay can affect this number.

Map created using Datawrapper; gray localities did not have data

Change in Youth Counts, Served Under Expenditure Code 1b, from FY2025 to FY2026



Localities ranged from a decrease of 60% in number of youth in FY2026, compared to FY2025, to an increase of 200%.

Map created using Datawrapper; gray localities did not have data

Some CQI questions to consider when reviewing this, or other, local data points:

- How well are we utilizing resources?
- Are there options available to shift any trends seen?
- How might our practice change to decrease spending or volume of residential placements?

Resources:

[CSA Data and Outcomes Dashboard \(CQI\)](#)

[LEDRS Coding Cheat Sheet](#) – provides the number and name of all Service Placement Types (SPT), Primary Mandate Types (PMT), Expenditure Categories, and Service Names

Got a Question about CQI and CSA Data?



Contact [Carrie Thompson](#)





Let's Talk Funding Magic!

In the world of CSA, braided and blended funding are where strategy meets creativity. Think of them as the “power-combo move” of financing – different funding streams teaming up to stretch resources, close service gaps, and boost support for Virginia’s children and families. Whether funds are woven together (braided) or combined into a single pool (blended), the goal is always the same: smarter dollars, stronger outcomes, and a system that works better for everyone.

Spotlight on PSSF: Powering Strong Families Across Virginia

Now that we’ve unlocked the magic behind these funding strategies, it’s time to spotlight one of the true MVPs in the mix: **Promoting Safe and Stable Families (PSSF)** program.

PSSF brings essential federal funding to Virginia to help keep families safely together, strengthen parent-child relationships, and support reunification when separation occurs. It provides communities with the tools to step in early, stabilize families in crisis, and promote safe, permanent homes for children.

What makes PSSF especially impactful is its flexibility. These funds can be braided with CSA dollars to expand family preservation services, boost reunification supports, enhance parent education, strengthen adoption stability, and invest in community-based resources that meet families where they are. It’s the kind of support that fills gaps, fuels innovation, and empowers families to thrive – not just get by.

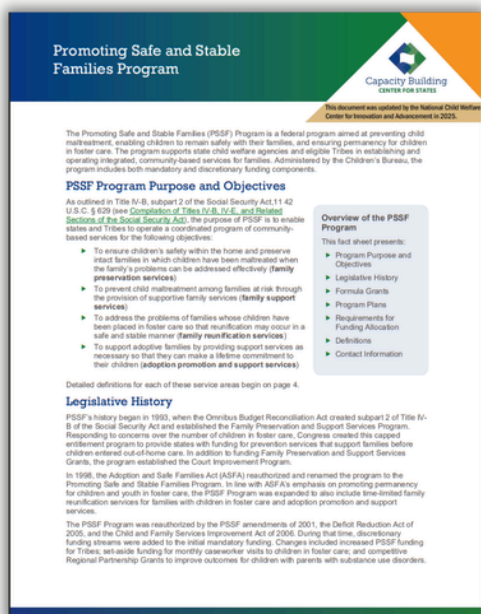
Together, braided and blended funding – powered by programs like PSSF – help Virginia’s child-serving systems build responsive, resilient services that truly make a difference.

Funding Boost in Action

Braided + Blended Funding: These creative financing strategies help CSA partners stretch resources, reduce service gaps, and support families more effectively.

PSSF at a Glance: The PSSF program brings essential federal dollars to Virginia to strengthen families, support reunification, and expand community-based services.

Why It Matters: When PSSF is paired with CSA funds, communities gain flexible, responsive tools that help families stay safe, stable, and connected.



Want Some Inspiring Reading?

Check out the latest Child Welfare Gateway [issue!](#) Dive into a feature on the PSSF program, explore real-world case studies that show how family group decision-making and strong primary prevention ecosystems support children, and browse practical frameworks designed to strengthen the systems that keep kids and families safe. It’s a quick read with big insights you can use!

Which funding source should we tackle next?
Let us know by emailing [Mary Bell](#).



Registration Now Open! **CSA Connections Mentor Training:** **Building Skills for Effective Mentorship**



Registration is now open for the CSA Connections Mentor Training! This interactive workshop is designed for current CSA Connections mentors and CSA Coordinators who are seriously considering serving as peer mentors. Mentors will build practical mentoring skills through active listening, effective questioning, and strategies for strengthening mentor-mentee relationships.

Monday, September 28, 2026
10:00 AM – 2:00 PM
Virginia Tech Center – Richmond
2810 N. Parham Road, Suite 300
Richmond, VA 23294

Lunch will be provided.

Current CSA Connections mentors may register by emailing [Courtney Sexton](#) and including any dietary restrictions.

If interested in becoming a CSA Connections mentor, please join us! Email Courtney Sexton and cc [Rudy Zavala](#) to register and learn more about the program.



The Office of Children's Services (OCS) is excited to announce the return of our **Virtual Office Hours** in September 2026. These sessions continue to be one a valuable way to connect with local CSA teams across the Commonwealth, offering real-time guidance, clarification, and collaboration.



Designed as an open, drop-in space, Virtual Office Hours give participants the opportunity to ask questions, explore challenging scenarios, and stay updated on important policy or program changes. Whether you're new to CSA or a seasoned practitioner, each session offers practical insights and a supportive environment to exchange ideas with OCS staff and colleagues statewide. Sessions are held on select Fridays from September through May, typically from 9:00 a.m. to 10:00 or 10:30 a.m., depending on the topic and level of discussion.

To help us tailor each session to your needs, questions can be submitted in advance to [Mary Bell](#).

As we resume in September 2026, we look forward to re-engaging with our partners, hearing your questions, and working together to strengthen services for children, youth, and families. Keep an eye out for session dates and the *GoToMeeting* link.

We can't wait to see you online again!

Local CSA Spotlight

Lee County CSA: Excellence in Action

Lee County's CSA program is celebrating major strides in strengthening accountability, collaboration, and family-centered practice. Under the leadership of their CSA Coordinator, Emily Ashley, the team aligned its work with OCS expectations through updated policies, clearer documentation, improved facilitation, and streamlined processes. Engagement across CPMT and FAPT grew noticeably, resulting in more structured meetings, stronger communication, and a more unified approach to decision-making.

A standout achievement is the program's renewed commitment to family voice. By redesigning meeting environments and communication practices, Lee County created more welcoming, respectful spaces that encourage meaningful participation and build trust with families. Partnerships with service providers also strengthened, expanding service options and improving coordination.

OCS recognized Lee County's early and substantial progress through the Enhanced Technical Assistance (ETA) Program, highlighting improvements in policy updates, leadership clarity, documentation, training participation, goal setting, and fiscal oversight. The development of a formal strategic plan further demonstrates the locality's dedication to continued growth.

Lee County's efforts reflect a highly engaged team committed to delivering consistent, compassionate, and high-quality support to children and families.

Please join us in congratulating the Lee County CSA Program for earning the **SEC's Excellence in CSA Award** – an outstanding and well-deserved achievement!



CELEBRATE INNOVATION IN CSA - NOMINATE A STANDOUT PROGRAM!

We encourage communities across the Commonwealth to help spotlight excellence in CSA practice. While local CSA programs cannot nominate themselves, they can recognize and uplift the outstanding work of their peers. If you know a CSA program demonstrating exceptional collaboration, innovation, or impact for children and families, we invite you to submit a nomination for the SEC's Excellence in CSA Award.

Nominations may be submitted to csa.office@csa.virginia.gov.



RESOURCE ROUND-UP



Parent and Youth Empowerment Summit



Advancing Kinship Care Together

Join the VDSS Resource Family team in celebrating Kinship Awareness Month. National experts and Virginia partners will explore best practices, identify gaps, and strengthen how we support and approve kinship resource families.

Registration is now open!



SUPPORT FOR FOSTER YOUTH WITH ELEVATE

Local departments of social services (LDSS) now have access to a new trauma-informed, self-paced learning program designed to support teenagers in foster care called **ELEVATE**. This program offers 4 flexible courses for youth, caregivers, and professionals covering various topics such as life skills, education and career planning, wellness, digital literacy, and more. The platform includes interactive tools and a supportive online community built for real-world use.

Questions about the program's release and accessibility can be sent to Chanda Yarbrough at chanda.yarbrough9@dss.virginia.gov.



5th annual Training and
Resource Day!

Save the Date:

April 14, 2027

Hotel Madison, Harrisonburg

coming soon...

- *Sponsorship opportunities
- *Vendor and participant registration
- *Brainstorming breakout session topics

Hotel block now open: click [here](#) for booking!

**QUESTION
& ANSWER**

TA QUESTIONS OF THE QUARTER

Can CSA pay for pre-placement visits for a youth in foster care to a potential foster or pre-adoptive home?

Yes, however, the visit is considered a service which must be on the child's Individual Family Services Plan (IFSP), recommended by the Family Assessment and Planning Team (FAPT), and meet all CSA expectations regarding approval of services.

Pre-placement visits are not supported by maintenance payments. Providers, typically licensed child placing agencies that provide treatment foster care, should establish a fee negotiated with the locality for pre-placement visits which is inclusive of their costs as well as the stipend they provide to the foster parent offering the visit. The amount paid to the pre-placement visit home cannot duplicate or exceed the amount of the child's foster care maintenance payment.

The child's current foster parents continue to be paid maintenance during the visit for no longer than 14 days. If the decision is made during the visit that the foster child cannot return to the foster home, maintenance payments cease at that time.

Can CSA pay for services when parents have filed for Relief of Custody?

The 2025 General Assembly amended COV [§16.1-277.02](#), effective in 2026, outlining new procedures when a parent seeks relief of custody. Under the revised statute, local court service units (CSUs) must refer petitioning parents or custodians to the local department of social services (LDSS) for assessment and service provision, including referral to the local Family Assessment and Planning Team (FAPT).

The LDSS will open an In-Home Foster Care Prevention case, establishing the child's eligibility for CSA services. While a child may also qualify as a Child in Need of Services (CHINS), no additional eligibility category is required beyond the opening of the DSS case. Updated CSA policy regarding CHINS clarifies that families are not required to express willingness for the child to remain in or return home to access CSA-funded services.

FAPT should identify and arrange services aimed at supporting family stability. This may include community-based interventions or placement through a CSA Parental Agreement to address behavioral or emotional needs. Filing a Relief of Custody petition does not preclude consideration of a CSA Parental Agreement when treatment needs are the primary concern, and this agreement may be an appropriate option for an overwhelmed family that otherwise feels their only successful outcome is to be granted relief of custody. However, these agreements should not serve as long-term alternatives, as they may result in unnecessarily restrictive and prolonged placements without resolving underlying issues.

Parents or custodians seeking custody relief due to significant developmental disabilities should also be referred to the local community services board (CSB), which may offer supports including Medicaid community living waiver placements.

The statute emphasizes that the FAPT referral must not delay services unless directed by the court.

The happiest people I know are those who lose themselves in the service of others.

-Gordon B. Hinkley-



Got Questions?

Use the OCS Technical Assistance Help Desk to get answers to your questions. OCS staff receive all inquiries and aim to respond the same day.

The OCS Technical Assistance Help Desk is found on the CSA Website under the "About" section → [Request Technical Assistance](#).



Would you like to contribute to CSA Today?

If you have information you would like to share with CSA colleagues across the state, please follow the [guidelines for submission](#).



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