*Welcome to LLA Reports, a podcast produced by the Louisiana Legislative Auditor’s office. This podcast is intended to be an oral representation of the written report it highlights and is primarily for the use of the Louisiana Legislature.*

This is Emily Dixon. I’m a manager for LLA’s Performance Audit Services. This episode of LLA Reports focuses on our new report titled “Child Welfare Centralized Intake.”

This report provides the results of our audit of the Department of Children and Family Services – or DCFS. The purpose of the audit was to evaluate DCFS’ Centralized Intake processes for receiving and processing reports of potential child abuse and neglect during fiscal years 2018 through 2022.

Overall, we found the majority of child abuse and neglect reports received by Centralized Intake – or CI – during fiscal years 2018 through 2022 came from mandatory reporters such as school personnel and medical professionals.

Since the online Mandated Reporter Portal – or MRP – was established in August 2018, about 29 percent of the more than 197,000 reports received by CI have come through the portal. In addition, emergency reports submitted through the portal have increased 47.3 percent, from 239 reports in fiscal year 2019 to 352 reports in fiscal year 2022, even though mandatory reporters have been instructed to make emergency reports through the CI hotline.

State lawallows mandatory reporters to file potential child abuse and neglect reports through the portal, but DCFS’ mandatory reporter training and the MRP advise them to use the portal for non-emergency reports and to call the hotline for emergency reports.

We also found DCFS has not developed performance targets for the hotline – including wait time, callbacks, and the number of calls abandoned – that would help it evaluate CI performance.

Our analysis of fiscal year 2022 call data found the average time to answer calls was 6.9 minutes, the average number of abandoned calls each month was 1,183, and the average number of reporters requesting callbacks each month was 1,111.

Without performance targets or goals, it is difficult for management to determine if CI is answering calls and processing abuse and neglect reports in a timely manner.

In addition, we found DCFS should use hotline data on call volume and other measures to determine appropriate CI staffing levels. Since 2011, CI has used nine overlapping shifts, but these shifts are not based on an analysis of call volume. Our analysis ofcall volume data from calendar year 2022 found CI may be overstaffed from approximately 5 p.m. to 2 a.m. on any given weekday, while the peak call period is between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. In addition, our analysis showed that Thursdays and Fridays had the highest daily average wait time to answer calls and the most calls abandoned.

We found as well that DCFS has reduced the risk of incorrectly accepting or not accepting reports of child abuse and neglect by requiring two levels of review for each intake decision. DCFS also has strengthened its quality assurance processes to evaluate the work of CI staff.

As a result of our report, we developed eight recommendations and one matter for legislative consideration.

We suggestedthe legislature consider amending state law to require that all mandated reporters complete DCFS’ mandatory reporter training annually, and that this annual training be monitored by the oversight/licensing entities of the various mandatory reporters.

We recommended DCFS communicate how important it is for all mandatory reporters to complete the training on a regular basis and use the portal only for non-emergency reports.

We also recommended DCFS develop a strategy to manage the increasing number of emergency reports submitted through the portal.

We recommended as well that DCFSdevelop and monitor additional performance targets for the hotline, such as average speed to answer, callbacks, and the number of calls abandoned, so it can fully evaluate CI staff performance.

We recommended, too, thatDCFS ensure its contractor continues to retain child abuse and neglect hotline call data as required in the contract and work with the contractor to adjust the report formats to include more relevant and useful monthly call volume data.

In addition, we recommendedDCFS analyze the hotline call data to determine if simplifying its schedule to minimize shift changes during peak call times would result in fewer abandoned calls and shorter wait times and analyze trends in monthly and daily hotline call volume to adjust staffing and reduce the average time to answer calls during peak times.

Finally, we recommendedDCFS management establish a continuous quality improvement process to analyze intake and investigations data and recommend improvements.

As part of its response, which is included in the report as Appendix A, DCFS agreed with all eight of our recommendations.

*We hope you found this podcast informative, and that you’ll follow future episodes of LLA Reports.*

*This podcast was created as part of the audit report just discussed and is intended primarily for the use of the Louisiana Legislature. Both the full report and the podcast can be found on the LLA’s website at* [*www.lla.la.gov*](http://www.lla.la.gov)*.*

*Thank you for listening.*