



COST OF A FALSE ALARM

(REVISED VERSION)

**Analysis of the socioeconomic impact of unfounded
CPS investigations in Monroe County (2024)**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Organizational Statement

At HOPE585, we believe the child welfare system is entangled in a crisis of over-surveillance and over-reporting—particularly for families who are already vulnerable due to poverty, racial inequity, or systemic bias. Far too many calls to the Statewide Central Register (SCR) are accepted for investigation without sufficient basis, triggering unnecessary scrutiny and trauma. As you review the data presented in this report, it's important to understand that while resources may appear to be concentrated on unsubstantiated cases, the root issue is deeper: if these investigations had never been initiated, there would be no need to allocate time, personnel, or funding to determine their validity. The true cost of a false alarm is not just measured in dollars—it is measured in disrupted families, eroded trust, and communities made to feel disposable. This report seeks to illuminate the financial and human consequences of a system that too often mistakes need for neglect.

Due to limited access to Monroe County-specific data, this report relies on a peer comparison model from a neighboring county; therefore, the figures presented should be understood as informed estimates rather than exact figures.

Key Findings

- In 2024, Monroe County conducted **6,768 Child Protective Services (CPS) investigations**; approximately **76% (5,140 cases)** were ultimately **unfounded** (New York State Office of Children and Family Services, 2024).
- Investigations trigger lasting psychological trauma, stigmatization, and distrust in community institutions, disproportionately harming marginalized groups.

Cost Implications

- Unfounded investigations generate substantial direct government and family-incurred costs, averaging an estimated **\$2,244 per case**.
- Monroe County incurs an estimated **\$11.54 million annually** in government expenditures for unfounded investigations, including staffing, overhead, legal services, and operational costs.

Policy Direction

- Enact the Supporting Families Together Act (A2135/Hevesi) to remove certain civil and criminal penalties for mandated reporters, curb overreporting, and rebuild trust between families and providers.
- Pass the Maternal Health, Dignity and Consent Act (A860/S845) to require documented informed consent for perinatal drug testing and screening and disclose potential CPS consequences.
- Establish and seed a community-governed Child and Family Well-Being Fund that invests in small, neighborhood nonprofits to prevent CPS involvement.

OFFICE OF CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES (OCFS) DATA (OCFS, 2024)

Reports by Source

Overall Numbers

In 2024, Monroe County recorded a total of **6,768 registered CPS reports**. This number reflects the volume of concerns about child safety that were formally reported to Child Protective Services.

Key Sources of Reports

The majority of reports came from mandated reporters. Social Services personnel accounted for (26.8%) of all reports, making them the largest source. Education personnel followed at (15.4%), showing the critical role schools play in identifying concerns. Reports from parents (10.9%), friends and neighbors (9.5%), and law enforcement personnel (8.9%) also made up a meaningful portion of the total. Additionally, mental health professionals contributed (7.9%), while medical personnel reported (5.4%) of cases. Together, these groups highlight how both formal systems and families contribute to the reporting process.

Minimal Contributors

Smaller portions of reports came from child day care personnel (1.0%), substitute care providers (1.1%), and masked or other reporters (1.4%). Anonymous or unknown reporters accounted for (4.1%) of cases. These relatively low percentages suggest that some groups with consistent access to children, such as child care providers, may be underreporting or face barriers to filing reports.

Insights

The data shows that CPS intake is primarily driven by formal systems such as social services, schools, law enforcement, and health professionals. At the same time, reports from parents and community members remain significant, reflecting both awareness and possible strain within families and neighborhoods.

Allegations and Substantiations by Category

Alleged Allegations

Nearly all reports (96.6%) included allegations of **neglect or deprivation of necessities**, highlighting that unmet basic needs dominate CPS involvement. Other frequent allegations included physical abuse (24.2%), medical neglect (11.4%), and sexual abuse (6.4%). Less common allegations were psychological or emotional maltreatment (2.9%), sex trafficking (0.1%), and masked/other (6.5%).

Substantiated Allegations

Once investigations were completed, the picture changed dramatically. Only **(21.9%) of cases were substantiated as neglect**, compared to the (96.6%) originally alleged. Physical abuse was substantiated in (3.6%) of reports, while medical neglect (1.5%), sexual abuse (1.0%), and psychological maltreatment (0.2%) made up very small shares. Masked/other categories were substantiated in just (0.5%) of cases.

Insights

The data highlights a major gap between allegations and substantiation. While nearly all reports flagged neglect, only about one in five ultimately confirmed it. Similarly, categories like physical and sexual abuse were alleged at higher rates but substantiated at much lower levels. This suggests two realities: first, mandated reporters and community members are highly cautious, often reporting any concern tied to unmet needs or potential harm; second, CPS investigations often reveal that many initial allegations do not meet the threshold for confirmation.

The disproportionality between reported neglect (96.6%) and substantiated neglect (21.9%) is especially telling. It suggests that systemic conditions like poverty, housing instability, or lack of resources are frequently reported as neglect, even when they may not meet legal or investigative standards for substantiation. This raises important questions about whether CPS is being used as a default response to family hardship rather than a targeted system for child maltreatment.



DIRECT COSTS

Each year, Monroe County's Child Protective Services (CPS) investigates thousands of reports alleging abuse or neglect. **Approximately 76%** of these reports—**totaling 5,140 cases in 2024**—are ultimately deemed unfounded (New York State Office of Children and Family Services, 2024). Despite this outcome, each unfounded report triggers a comprehensive investigative process, consuming significant county resources over an estimated average of 65 days per case (Office of Children and Family Services, 2006). On any given day, Monroe County actively manages approximately 915 unfounded investigations (New York State Office of Children and Family Services, 2024).

The financial impact on county resources is substantial. Utilizing local salary data, staffing benchmarks from comparable counties, and Monroe County's actual overhead rates, our analysis estimates **direct governmental expenditures of approximately \$11.54 million annually**—about **\$2,244 per unfounded investigation**. Payroll and fringe benefits account for the majority of these expenses, compounded by costs associated with travel, central administrative overhead, legal services, and vendor-contracted support activities. These necessary operational expenses, though often overlooked in budget summaries, significantly elevate the county's total financial obligation.

A. Government Expenditures
(Detailed calculations -> Appendix A-E)

Cost Component	2024 Total \$	Per Case \$
Salaries & fringe	\$6.89 M	\$1,340
Travel	\$0.11 M	\$20
Central overhead (IDC)	\$2.2 M	\$432
Turnover (30% rate)	\$1.4 M	\$273
Legal / court time	\$0.70 M	\$137
Vendor-contracted services	\$0.21 M	\$41
Total - Direct Govt. Cost	\$11.54 M	\$2,244



INDIRECT COSTS

The indirect costs described in this section reflect documented human and social impacts identified in statewide and national research on unfounded CPS investigations. Due to limited Monroe County–specific data on psychological, relational, and long-term trust outcomes, this analysis applies established research findings to the local investigation volume in 2024. These impacts should therefore be understood as evidence-informed projections of likely human cost rather than Monroe County–exclusive empirical measurements.

Emotional & Psychological Costs

Child protective investigations, even when allegations are unfounded, often inflict substantial emotional and psychological harm on children and parents. Research and expert analyses have documented a range of negative impacts:

Trauma to Children: Investigative practices can be intrusive and terrifying for children. In extreme cases, strip searches conducted during investigations are described as “demeaning” and “dehumanizing,” causing trauma with potential life-long consequences (American Bar Association, n.d.). Even absent such invasive measures, the intrusion of an investigation itself is traumatic – families commonly report intense stress, fear, and feelings of powerlessness due to the ordeal (Schmidt et al., 2021). The mere threat of removal creates ongoing anxiety in children. One analysis notes that during an investigation, “the very foundation of a child’s ability to trust can be shaken, as the greatest authority in their young lives – their parents – prove powerless to protect them from the intrusion” (Parental Rights Foundation, n.d.). This erosion of the parent–child trust bond is a distinct psychological cost, leaving children feeling less secure. Notably, federal data indicate that as many as 83% of investigations find no abuse or neglect, meaning in the vast majority of cases “children were traumatized only by the investigation itself” (Parental Rights Foundation, n.d.).

Parental Distress and Mental Health: Parents subjected to unfounded CPS investigations often experience trauma-like symptoms themselves, including heightened stress, anxiety, shame, and even PTSD. They may feel criminalized and helpless in the face of state scrutiny. Studies have found significant adverse mental health outcomes associated with child welfare investigations – one study observed that families who underwent a CPS investigation reported elevated rates of depression, anxiety, and self-doubt (Schmidt et al., 2021; Evangelist et al., 2023). Parents frequently describe feelings of stigma and guilt, as if they were deemed “bad” parents in their communities, which can lead to social isolation. These psychological costs can persist long after the case is closed, as parents cope with the lingering stigma of being investigated.

Measured Impact on Children’s Wellbeing: Beyond qualitative reports, researchers have attempted to quantify the emotional/behavioral impact of CPS contact on children. For example, a 2023 longitudinal study using a birth cohort found that children who experienced a CPS investigation had significantly worse behavioral and mental health outcomes compared to similar peers who had no CPS contact (Evangelist et al., 2023). The investigation was associated with a 29% increase in externalizing behavior problems and a 27% increase in internalizing behaviors (like anxiety/ depression), as well as higher rates of smoking, impulsivity, and school troubles in adolescence (Evangelist et al., 2023). These findings suggest that the stress of an investigation can tangibly harm a child’s development, even when no actual

abuse occurred. In short, unfounded investigations can create new emotional trauma: children may require counseling or other supports to heal from the frightening experience of a CPS probe, and parents' mental health may deteriorate under the weight of fear and uncertainty. While difficult to put a dollar value on these psychological costs, they are very real. Public officials themselves acknowledge this harm – as New York City's child welfare commissioner recently stated, "investigations are often disruptive, stressful and can be traumatic" for families (New York City Administration for Children's Services, 2023). Importantly, broader research on childhood trauma indicates long-term societal costs: for instance, the CDC estimates that preventing adverse childhood experiences could make the U.S. economy \$14 trillion larger, reflecting the enormous burden of trauma-related health problems in adulthood (Connecticut Public, 2023). Unwarranted CPS investigations likely contribute to this burden by introducing trauma into children's lives unnecessarily.

Loss of Institutional Trust

Another indirect cost of unfounded CPS investigations is the erosion of trust in public institutions and support systems. When families are subjected to an intrusive investigation that turns out to be baseless, they often become fearful and distrustful of the very institutions meant to help them (schools, hospitals, social services). This has several ripple effects:

“System Avoidance” and Underutilization of Services: Research shows that families who have been investigated (or fear being reported) tend to avoid contact with mandatory reporters or social services, even when they need help. In one study of low-income mothers, 57% admitted concealing hardships (like housing instability or stress at home) from doctors, teachers, or social workers to avoid triggering a CPS report, and 1 in 6 mothers said they outright declined services or assistance for fear of CPS involvement (Casey Family Programs, n.d.). For example, some parents avoided using homeless shelters or stopped confiding in home visiting programs once they realized those providers might report them (Casey Family Programs, n.d.). This kind of deliberate non-use of beneficial services is a direct consequence of lost trust. Parents have reported that they only feel safe seeking help from providers who explicitly promise not to call CPS (Casey Family Programs, n.d.). Unsubstantiated investigations thus seed distrust not only of the child protection system but of broader social programs. Parents, anxious about “surveillance,” may shy away from hospitals, counseling, food assistance, or parenting classes – any setting involving officials who could report them (Schmidt et al., 2021). The cost here is that families forgo vital support and early interventions. As the Casey Family Programs analysis notes, by withholding information or avoiding providers, parents “deprived themselves and their families of much-needed services” that could improve their situation (Casey Family Programs, n.d.). In economic terms, this can translate to higher long-run costs: problems like untreated health issues, unaddressed housing needs, or unreported domestic stresses can worsen without help, potentially leading to crises that are far more costly to society than the original preventive services.

Diminished Trust in Authorities: Widespread surveillance of families (especially in marginalized communities) perpetuates a cycle of distrust in public institutions. After an unfounded CPS investigation, families often come to view child welfare agents, and by extension other government authorities, with skepticism and fear. One public health letter observes that when an investigation does not lead to any finding of abuse, it nonetheless creates “distrust of the child welfare system and other social service programs”, such that parents begin avoiding contact and strategically concealing information from service providers and healthcare professionals (Schmidt et al., 2021). In communities with high rates of unfounded investigations, this can fray the relationship between residents and

agencies like schools or public health clinics. Families may feel “once burned, twice shy” – less likely to cooperate with school social workers or police in the future, suspecting any interaction could result in another traumatic inquiry. This loss of trust is difficult to quantify but has real implications: public systems function best when people believe they will be treated fairly and seek assistance without fear. When that trust is broken, it undermines the effectiveness of child protective services themselves (as truly at-risk children might not be brought to the system’s attention) and weakens the social safety net in the community. In sum, the opportunity cost of unfounded investigations is that they alienate families from institutions that exist to support them, making those institutions less able to do their job and potentially imposing higher costs down the line as problems go unaddressed until they reach emergency levels.

Disproportionate Impact (Intangible Costs on Marginalized Communities)

The burdens of unfounded CPS investigations fall unequally across different socioeconomic and demographic groups – an intangible cost in terms of fairness and social cohesion. Data reveal stark racial and economic disparities in who is most likely to be subjected to child welfare investigations, meaning the harms described above disproportionately affect low-income families and families of color:

Racial Disparities: Black, Indigenous, and Latino communities experience child-protection investigations at much higher rates than White families. For example, in New York City an estimated 44% of Black children and 43% of Latino children will undergo an ACS (Administration for Children’s Services) investigation by the time they turn 18, compared to only about 19% of White children (The Imprint, 2024). The agency’s own data show that in recent years a Black child in NYC has been seven times more likely than a White child to be the subject of a CPS investigation (New York City Administration for Children’s Services, 2023). These figures are echoed nationally. One study found that more than half of Black children in America (around 53%) will be investigated by child welfare services before adulthood (Roberts, 2022). By contrast, roughly one-quarter of White children nationally face investigations. Indigenous (Native American) families are similarly over-surveilled – in some jurisdictions, over 50% of Native American children are investigated by CPS during childhood (Schmidt et al., 2021). Such disproportionate contact means the trauma and stress of unfounded investigations are concentrated in communities of color. These families already contend with structural inequalities, and the added ordeal of invasive state scrutiny can compound intergenerational trauma. Researchers note that families of color often experience investigations as racially biased and disrespectful; many parents of color report feeling singled out, judged, and shamed due to racial stereotypes (New York City Administration for Children’s Services, 2023). This can lead to a deep sense of injustice and alienation from public institutions – a social cost that is hard to monetize but deeply consequential.

Poverty and Over-Surveillance: Low-income families (who are disproportionately Black and Latino in many areas) are at the greatest risk of unfounded CPS reports. Poverty itself is a key predictor: studies consistently find that economic hardship correlates with higher CPS involvement, not necessarily because poor parents mistreat their children more, but often because poverty-related circumstances (lack of adequate housing, childcare, or medical care) get misinterpreted as “neglect” (Casey Family Programs, n.d.; The Imprint, 2024). In New York State, for instance, about 75% of all child welfare cases are neglect allegations (often tied to conditions of poverty) rather than physical or sexual abuse (The Imprint, 2024). This means many loving parents are investigated essentially for being poor. The cost here is intangible but significant: family members in these investigations feel humiliated and

criminalized for their poverty. It also diverts public resources to surveilling and “correcting” conditions of need (through investigations) instead of directly alleviating the poverty itself. One outcome is that marginalized families come to view child welfare not as help but as a punitive system. Advocates in New York have characterized current mandatory reporting practices as a form of “surveillance, criminalization, and punishment of disproportionately Black, Latine, Indigenous, and low-income families” (The Imprint, 2024). This disproportionate impact can deepen societal inequalities – for example, parents in these communities might face greater difficulty gaining employment (due to time missed for CPS meetings or the stigma of a record in the State Central Register), and children may carry the emotional scars into their education, affecting performance and future opportunities.

Immigrant and Mixed-Status Families: Although data are less readily available, immigrant families (especially those with uncertain legal status) are another group likely to experience outsized fear and impact from CPS investigations. These families may be less likely to seek assistance (for housing, medical care, etc.) because of dual fears of child welfare and immigration enforcement. Language barriers and cultural differences can also lead to misunderstandings that trigger unwarranted reports. The result is that immigrant parents often live with a heightened baseline of stress regarding any interaction with authorities, and an unfounded CPS inquiry can be particularly destabilizing – potentially causing mistrust not only in child protection but in government institutions overall. The intangible cost is the further marginalization of immigrant communities, who may retreat from available services (school programs, clinics, aid organizations) after seeing an investigation upend a family unjustly.

In summary, the indirect costs of unfounded CPS investigations are far-reaching. They include profound emotional and psychological tolls on children and parents, an erosion of trust that reduces engagement with supportive institutions, and a disproportionate burden on marginalized groups, exacerbating existing inequalities. These costs may not show up on a budget sheet, but they manifest in long-term human and socioeconomic consequences – from the mental health struggles of a traumatized child (and the associated healthcare needs or lost future productivity) to the frayed relationship between vulnerable communities and the systems designed to serve them. Each unfounded investigation carries these hidden costs, which advocates argue should be factored into policy decisions. Reducing unnecessary investigations and adopting more supportive, preventative approaches could avoid these harms and yield broad social benefits by saving families from trauma, preserving trust in institutions, and promoting more equitable outcomes (New York City Administration for Children’s Services, 2023; The Imprint, 2024).

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Supporting Families Together Act (Bill A9283/S.8602)

Passage of **Supporting Families Together Act (A9283/S.8602)** is strongly recommended. The Supporting Families Together Act would remove the legal penalties. This bill keeps the legal requirements for professional to report suspected child abuse and neglect to CPS. By advancing this bill, New York can reduce harmful overreporting, strengthen trust between families and service providers, and allow professionals to focus on connecting families with meaningful support rather than defaulting to CPS investigations.

Rationale

- Reduces unnecessary CPS involvement**
 Current vague reporting standards and fear of penalties have resulted in excessive reporting of poverty-related concerns, not abuse. Nearly 80% of calls are unsubstantiated, draining resources and harming families unnecessarily.
- Strengthens family access to community services**
 Families often avoid schools, hospitals, and social services out of fear of being reported. Removing penalties encourages families to seek help earlier, reducing isolation and increasing access to preventative supports.
- Strengthens professional practice and trust**
 Removing penalties allows helping professionals to exercise their judgment, build trust with families, and focus on solutions rather than compliance-driven reporting. This shift not only reduces fear-driven decisions but also creates healthier relationships between providers and the communities they serve.
- Aligns with evidence**
 Decades of research confirm that mandated reporting has not reduced child abuse rates. However, it has caused significant collateral harm to children and families. Redirecting attention toward supportive interventions offers a more effective path to child safety.

Supporting Families Together Act (A9283/S.8602) takes a necessary step toward transforming New York's child protection system into one that addresses real needs instead of punishing poverty. It reduces unnecessary trauma, restores trust, and allows professionals to prioritize family well-being.

Maternal, Health and Dignity Act

The Maternal Health, Dignity and Consent Act (A860/S845) addresses critical gaps in informed consent practices in New York State’s maternal health system. This legislation requires healthcare providers to obtain both written and verbal informed consent before conducting drug tests or verbal drug screenings on perinatal people or their newborns.

Key Provisions

- **Dual Consent Requirement:** Both verbal and written consent are required in hospital settings for drug tests and verbal screenings. In non-hospital clinical settings, drug tests require both verbal and written consent, while verbal screenings require verbal consent.
- **Transparency of Purpose:** Providers must explain the *medical reason* for testing or screening.
- **Disclosure of Risks:** Providers must inform patients about potential consequences of a positive test or screening, including risks of family separation and involvement with the family policing system.

Rationale

This bill is rooted in racial and reproductive justice, responding to long-standing inequities in maternal healthcare. Black, Latine, Indigenous, and low-income families are disproportionately subjected to non-consensual testing, surveillance, and punitive interventions. By requiring true informed consent, the Act seeks to restore dignity, reduce coercion, and protect families from unnecessary harm.

Voices from Impacted Communities

- **Lived Experience:** Testimonies highlight coercive consent practices, such as women unknowingly signing drug test consents while in vulnerable medical states, or newborns being tested without parental knowledge, resulting in family separation.
- **Medical Support:** Maternal health professionals recognize this legislation as an essential first step toward undoing systemic harm and ensuring respectful, patient-centered care.

Adopting this legislation would:

- Protect perinatal people from coercive and discriminatory medical practices.
- Safeguard families against unjust surveillance and separation.
- Advance racial and reproductive justice in New York State’s healthcare system.

Child and Family Well-Being Fund

The **Child & Family Wellbeing Fund**, proposed as part of the Child and Family Reinvestment Act, represents a transformational shift in how New York supports children and families. Instead of relying on punitive interventions through the child protective services (CPS) system, the fund invests directly in communities, addressing the root causes of family stress and promoting environments where children can thrive.

The Challenge

- **Poverty misclassified as neglect:** The majority of CPS reports in New York are linked to unmet basic needs—housing instability, food insecurity, lack of medical access, or transportation barriers—not abuse.
- **Disproportionate surveillance:** Low-income families and communities of color are more likely to be reported to CPS, despite issues like domestic violence and substance use occurring across socioeconomic lines.
- **Lack of trusted supports:** Many services in disenfranchised neighborhoods are staffed by mandated reporters, making families fearful of seeking help due to the threat of CPS involvement.
- **Historic disinvestment:** Decades of redlining and systemic racism have stripped many neighborhoods of the very resources—safe spaces, childcare, healthcare access, community programming—that support child and family wellbeing.

The Policy Solution: Child & Family Wellbeing Fund

The Fund directly invests in local communities with the following priorities:

- **Support for small, community-rooted nonprofits:** Only open to organizations with budgets under \$2M, nominated by community members, and without CPS ties.
- **Community-driven governance:** Advisory boards include parents and youth impacted by the CPS system.
- **Strengthening the social fabric:** Guided by the Asset-Based Community Development model to build social capital, leadership, and collective action.
- **Building capacity:** Technical assistance is built in to help small nonprofits grow sustainably.
- **Preventing CPS involvement:** Investments focus on reducing family stress, addressing poverty-related needs, and fostering joy through family activities and neighborhood gatherings.

Expected Outcomes

- **Equity:** Corrects decades of structural racism and economic disinvestment by channeling resources into historically marginalized communities.
- **Prevention:** Reduces the likelihood of unnecessary CPS investigations and involvement by stabilizing families before crisis points.
- **Cost savings:** Decreases health disparities, improves educational outcomes, and lowers costs associated with over-policing and system involvement.
- **Community power:** Elevates the voices and leadership of those most impacted, ensuring sustainable change that reflects local expertise.

Conclusion

The Child & Family Wellbeing Fund redefines child welfare for New York State. By investing in neighborhoods rather than punishing families for poverty, it creates safer, healthier, and more equitable communities. This approach aligns with New York's family policy guidelines, fulfills the promise of government support for nurturing environments, and positions the state as a national leader in child and family wellbeing.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Workload Snapshot

OCFS reports *days to report determination* in four time-based categories: 0 to 30 days, 31 to 60 days, 61 to 90 days, and more than 90 days. These timelines are tracked separately for indicated and unfounded cases. For this analysis, we focus exclusively on *unfounded* investigations.

Days open	0-30	31-60	61-90	> 90
% of cases	17.5%	23%	15.6%	21.2%

Timeline to determination for unfounded cases:

To estimate the average duration, we assigned midpoints to each category:

- 15 days for 0 to 30
- 45 days for 31 to 60
- 75 days for 61 to 90
- 120 days for more than 90

Although the final category is open-ended, we use 120 days as a conservative midpoint. This assumes that the number of cases steadily declines after 90 days rather than continuing at the same rate. It provides a balanced way to account for longer cases without overestimating the average.

Weighting these midpoints by the percentage of unfounded cases in each category yields an estimated average of **65 days**, or just over two months, that an unfounded investigation remains open (New York State Office of Children and Family Services, 2024).

Appendix B: Estimated Daily Caseload

Because investigations remain open for varying lengths of time and often overlap, the county is not actively working on all 5,140 unfounded cases simultaneously. To estimate how many cases are open on a typical day, we multiply the annual number of unfounded investigations by the average number of days each case remains open (65) and divide by the number of days in a year (365):

$$\text{Average Open Cases} = \frac{N \times D}{365} = \frac{5,140 \times 65}{365} \approx 915$$

Where:

N = number of unfounded investigations per year (5,140)

D = average days each investigation remains open (65)

This yields an estimated 915 unfounded cases open on any given day (New York State Office of Children and Family Services, 2024).

Appendix C: Estimated Staffing Need Based on Caseload Benchmark

A 2023 WHEC News article reported that Monroe County legislators had previously considered capping CPS caseloads at 15 investigations per worker, although that limit was never formally adopted (WHEC-TV, 2023). We use this proposed threshold as a reasonable benchmark to model staffing needs under a more sustainable workload standard.

Applying the 15-case benchmark to the estimated 915 open unfounded investigations suggests the county would need approximately 61 investigators actively assigned to unfounded cases alone in order to maintain manageable caseloads.

Because Monroe County’s budget does not provide detail on CPS staffing or position classifications, we used Onondaga County’s 2025 adopted budget as a peer comparison (Onondaga County, 2024). Onondaga’s budget outlines specific staffing ratios and supervisory structures for its child welfare division. It indicates that frontline investigative roles are typically split between caseworkers and senior caseworkers at a ratio of 14 to 1, and that one supervisor oversees approximately 5.3 investigators.

Using these ratios, we estimate the staffing structure required to manage Monroe County’s daily caseload as follows:

Role	Formula	FTE
Investigators (total)	$915 \div 15$	61
• Caseworkers	$61 \times 14/15$	57
• Senior caseworkers	$61 \times 1/15$	4
Supervisors	$61 \div 5.3$	12

Appendix D: Estimated Payroll Cost

To estimate payroll costs for the staffing model described above, we used mid-point salaries based on the salary ranges listed on CaseWorkers.org, Monroe County’s official recruitment site for child welfare and protective services roles. While the site name may sound generic, it is operated by Monroe County and provides up-to-date compensation details for relevant positions (CaseWorkers.org, 2025).

We calculated the estimated annual payroll by multiplying each role’s mid-point salary by the number of full-time equivalent (FTE) positions needed to manage the unfounded caseload:

Position	Mid-point salary	Head-count	Annual cost
Caseworker	\$60,063	57	\$3,423,563
Senior caseworker	\$69,648	4	\$278,591
Supervisor	\$80,765	12	\$969,184
Total			\$4,671,338

Appendix E: Agency Cost Add-Ons

Payroll is only the starting point. A complete cost model includes fringe benefits, travel and mileage, central overhead, turnover-related expenses, legal involvement, and vendor-contracted services. The estimates below are grounded in actual spending patterns from Monroe and Onondaga Counties and are structured to reflect department-level operations.

Fringe Benefits

Fringe benefits were calculated using actual ratios from the Monroe County 2024 Adopted Budget. In the Department of Human Services – Child and Family Services, the county budgeted \$10,986,225 for employee benefits and \$23,104,088 for personnel services (Monroe County Department of Human Services, 2024).

Fringe Rate (based on Monroe 2024 DHS budget):

$$Fringe Rate = \frac{10,986,225}{23,104,088} \approx 0.475$$

Fringe cost applied to salary base:

$$Fringe Cost = 4,671,366 \times 0.475 = 2,219,900$$

Travel & Mileage

The Monroe budget does not specify travel costs for CPS staff, so we used Onondaga County’s 2025 budget for Child and Family Services as a proxy. Travel and training expenditures totaled \$405,804 and salaries were \$17,723,56 (Onondaga County, 2024):

Travel as a percentage of Onondaga salary base:

$$Travel Rate = \frac{405,804}{17,723,561} \approx 0.023$$

Travel cost applied to Monroe salary base:

$$Travel Cost = 4,671,366 \times 0.023 = 107,441$$

Central Overhead

To account for support services like IT, facilities, fleet, HR, and county finance, we used Monroe County’s actual inter-departmental chargeback (IDC) rate for Child and Family Services in 2024 (Monroe County Department of Human Services, 2024). The budget includes:

- Personnel services: \$24,511,716
- IDC charges: \$7,553,044

IDC (overhead) rate from Monroe’s 2024 budget:

$$\text{Overhead Rate} = \frac{7,553,044}{24,511,716} \approx 0.308$$

Overhead applied to salaries + fringe + travel:

$$\text{Overhead Cost} = (4,671,366 + 2,219,900 + 107,441) \times 0.308 = 2,224,229$$

Turnover Costs

To estimate the cost of turnover, we applied the methodology from the Casey Foundation’s Turnover Cost Calculator, a tool developed specifically for human service agencies. The calculator assigns a cost of 70 to 200 percent of annual salary per departure, depending on how comprehensively an agency values lost productivity, training, and recruitment costs. We use the conservative floor value of 100 percent of salary, which includes direct hiring and onboarding expenses but excludes longer-term impacts on service delivery (Casey Family Programs & Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2011).

Assuming a 30 percent annual turnover rate among the staff assigned to unfounded cases:

$$\text{Turnover Cost} = 0.30 \times 4,671,366 \times 1.00 = 1,401,410$$

Legal and Court-Related Costs

Using the New York State Child-Welfare Workload Study, we adopt the study’s observation that an average CPS investigation requires 2.4 hours of legal/court involvement (Office of Children and Family Services, 2006). Assuming this time is staffed two-thirds by a County Attorney and one-third by a Paralegal, and adding 0.25 hours of attorney file-closure work, we can translate the workload into dollar costs using Monroe County salary bands (plus a 30 % fringe for benefits and payroll taxes).

Loaded Hourly Rates

Role	Mid-Point Salary	Base \$/hr	+30 % Fringe	Loaded \$/hr
County Attorney	\$88,992	\$42.78	+\$12.84	\$55.62
Paralegal	\$69,000	\$33.17	+\$9.95	\$43.12

Per-Case Cost Calculation

- **Attorney time:** (1.6 h court + 0.25 h file closure) × \$55.62 ≈ \$102.80 (Monroe County Human Resources)
- **Paralegal time:** 0.8 h × \$43.12 ≈ \$34.50 (Salary.com, 2025)
- **Total per unfounded case:** ≈ \$137

Annual Cost (5,140 Unfounded Investigations)

Total annual spend: \$137 × 5,140 ≈ \$704,180

Vendor-Contracted Services

The Child & Family Services “Contractual Services” account includes interpreter services, laboratory testing, forensic medical exams, and other vendor-supported activities that may be used during CPS investigations. To estimate the portion of these costs attributable to investigative work, we used Monroe County’s 2024 amended budget figure for contractual services:

- Contractual Services (Child & Family Services, Monroe County 2024): \$4,208,875

To guide allocation, we calculated the share of division salaries associated with CPS investigations:

- Total personnel services (Child & Family Services, Monroe County 2024): \$24,511,716
- Estimated salaries for investigative staff assigned to unfounded cases: \$4,671,366

Share of salaries tied to investigations:

$$\frac{4,671,366}{24,511,716} \approx 0.19 \text{ or } 19\%$$

While investigative staff account for approximately 19 percent of division salaries, it is unclear how evenly contractual costs are distributed across program areas. As a result, we used a **5 percent allocation** as a lower-bound estimate for the share of vendor spending attributable to investigations.

Dollar value of 5 percent allocation:

$$\$4,208,875 \times 0.05 = \$210,444$$

Cost per unfounded investigation:

$$\frac{210,444}{5,140} \approx \$40.95$$

This results in an estimated \$210,000 annually, or about \$41 per unfounded investigation, for vendor-contracted services (Monroe County Department of Human Services, 2024).

Appendix F: Summary of Estimated CPS Investigation Costs

To understand the full cost of handling unfounded Child Protective Services (CPS) investigations in Monroe County, we modeled both direct and indirect expenses based on local budget data, public staffing benchmarks, and published operational cost studies. The estimate accounts for not just salaries, but also fringe benefits, travel, overhead, turnover, legal time, and contracted vendor services. Each cost component was tied to publicly reported figures or grounded in peer county comparisons where Monroe-specific data was unavailable.

All estimates are based on the 2024 volume of 5,140 unfounded investigations and reflect costs incurred across staffing, operations, and support systems (Monroe County Department of Human Services, 2024; Onondaga County, 2024; Casey Family Programs & Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2011; WHEC-TV, 2023).

Cost Breakdown Table

Component	Rate/Method	Annual Cost
Salaries	Investigator and supervisor roles assigned to unfounded investigations	\$4,671,366
Fringe benefits	47.5% of salaries (based on Monroe DHS budget)	\$2,219,900
Travel & mileage	2.3% of salaries (based on Onondaga DHS budget)	\$107,441
Central overhead	30.8% of salaries + fringe + travel (based on Monroe IDC allocations)	\$2,224,229
Turnover	30% annual turnover × 100% of salary replacement (Casey Foundation methodology)	\$1,401,410
Legal / court	2.65 hours per case @ blended \$51.7/hr (NYS workload study's 2.4 hr court time + 0.25 hr attorney closure)	\$704,180
Vendor services	5% of Child & Family Services contractual services account allocated to CPS investigations	\$210,000
Total Estimated Cost		\$11,538,526

Cost Per Case

$$\frac{\$11,538,526}{5,140} \approx \$2,244 \text{ per unfounded investigation}$$

The estimated total direct cost of unfounded CPS investigations on government spending and families under investigation for Monroe County in 2024 is approximately \$11.54 million, or about \$2,244 per case. This figure reflects the full operational footprint involved in screening, investigating, documenting, and administratively closing a report that is ultimately deemed unfounded.