

Summary of Legislation

2026



Human Services

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Introduction

The Colorado General Assembly passed a number of bills related to human services, children, and families. Due to budgetary constraints, the General Assembly focused less on expanding and creating new programs, and focused more on refining existing programs and systems. Major legislation primarily focused on updating child welfare court processes, making changes to how social services operate, and improving the relationship between federal and state programs.

Updates to Child Welfare Courts

This legislative session, the General Assembly passed three major bills designed to protect children and youth during abuse and neglect court proceedings.

[House Bill 26-1227](#) clarifies that children and youth involved in dependency and neglect proceedings possess formal legal standing on all matters affecting their interests, and establishes their statutory right to full representation by a guardian or counsel for youth, and to active participation in all proceedings. Furthermore, the bill establishes a mandatory judicial review process in the event a county moves to

dismiss a dependency and neglect petition prior to an official ruling. The court must conduct a hearing to evaluate whether the county possesses a reasonable basis for dismissal; the court shall dismiss the petition if a reasonable basis is established, but must allow the matter to proceed if unable to establish a reasonable basis.

In order to ensure children and youth are going to safe homes, the legislature passed [House Bill 26-1298](#), which amends the statutory background check requirements and certification process for individuals providing out-of-home care within the child welfare system. Under the revised framework, fingerprint-based criminal history record checks must be submitted to the Colorado Bureau of Investigation (CBI) for state-level review, followed by national verification via the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). The CBI is authorized to transmit FBI fingerprint-based criminal history data exclusively to state or county departments, and private child placement entities are excluded from directly receiving federal criminal history information.

Additionally, the bill expands the scope of mandated background checks for kinship foster care home certification. Existing licensing and disqualifying conviction standards are also applied to residential or

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day-treatment child care facilities and traditional foster homes. This fingerprinting requirement is further expanded to encompass all adults residing within a foster or kinship foster care home, as well as any individuals who maintain direct contact with a child or youth or who are otherwise associated with the facility license.

Over the last decade, states across the United States have been shifting their child welfare systems to encourage children to be placed with their family when possible. To further facilitate that, the Colorado General Assembly passed [House Bill 26-1314](#), which, clarifies the definitions of "grandparent" and "great-grandparent" for purposes of family time by including individuals whose child or grandchild is deceased. The bill also establishes a presumption that the placement of a child or youth with a relative or kin is in the child or youth's best interest. This presumption can be rebutted by a preponderance of the evidence, giving primary consideration to the child or youth's mental, physical, or emotional needs.

Administrative Changes to Social Services Programs

Navigating social services programs can be as challenging for program administrators as it is for those who need the services. To help with this, the General Assembly passed a variety of bills that streamline collaboration between departments and simplify regulations.

Child welfare cases can involve law enforcement, social workers, medical professionals, and legal experts. Difficulties with coordinating these groups can lead to delays and impact outcomes. [House Bill 26-1142](#) makes it easier for the various groups to coordinate by amending the statutory definition of a "child advocacy center" and establishing the parameters for a child advocacy center multidisciplinary team. At a minimum, this multidisciplinary team must include representatives from a law enforcement agency, the district attorney's office, the county child protective services unit, local mental health and health care providers, a victim advocate, and child advocacy center personnel. The bill also authorizes reciprocal information sharing between county departments of human services and multidisciplinary team members, provided the disclosures are related to child protection efforts in maltreatment cases, and it grants comprehensive civil and criminal immunity for authorized disclosures made between multidisciplinary teams and county departments.

[House Bill 26-1147](#) seeks to help individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities by providing their families with access to a consistent set of rules for host homes. The bill specifically mandates that the Department of Health Care Policy and Financing (HCPF) establish a centralized database of host home providers delivering individual residential services and supports through Program-Approved Service Agencies (PASAs), to be utilized collectively

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by HCPF, the Department of Public Health and Environment, and PASAs for data tracking. Effective July 1, 2026, PASAs are required to submit quarterly provider disclosures to the database, which HCPF must update within 30-days of receipt. Furthermore, the bill changes municipal oversight, clarifying that host homes must be classified as residential properties under local law, and expressly prohibiting local governments from imposing regulatory burdens or restrictions on host homes that do not uniformly apply to standard residential properties.

Changes Related to Federal Policy

As a result of changes at the federal level and events in Colorado, the General Assembly has made changes to social services programs to meet federal mandates and ensure resources are properly allocated.

[House Bill 26-1260](#) defers the implementation date of specified federally mandated Colorado Child Care Assistance Program (CCCAP) provisions by two years, extending the statutory deadline from August 1, 2026, to August 1, 2028. This extension applies to the monthly income cap on family copayments, the requirement that counties issue advance provider payments based on child enrollment rather than attendance. It also applies to the mandate directing the Colorado Department of Early Childhood (CDEC) and individual counties to utilize strategic grants and contracts to

improve access for underserved populations. Additionally, the bill requires the department incorporate comprehensive disclosures regarding the specific volume of CCCAP allocations made by both CDEC and counties for administrative functions, including all direct and indirect expenses.

To ensure that children and youth involved in Colorado's child welfare program receive the resources they are entitled to, [House Bill 26-1347](#) mandates that county departments of human services pursue federal Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits on behalf of eligible foster children and youth, and establish screening timelines based on the minor's age. Effective July 1, 2028, counties must refer any child under six years old placed in out-of-home care for a developmental screening within 45 days of assuming custody; for children aged six and older, an evaluation of disability-related needs must be integrated into the initial medical intake. If an evaluation indicates potential SSI eligibility and the Social Security Administration is actively accepting applications, the county must initiate the application process within 45 days of acquiring the necessary documentation. The same is true for any child enrolled in the Children's Habilitation Residential Program Waiver. If a county determines a child is unlikely to qualify for SSI despite an identified disability, it must formally document its reasoning and reassess eligibility annually during the youth's routine

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medical examination or upon receipt of new material information.

HB26-1347 also enacts oversight, asset management, and regulatory compliance standards for youth receiving SSI benefits. Counties must reassess the designated representative payee or fiduciary immediately upon any change in a youth's legal custody. To ensure fiscal transparency, county departments are required to log all SSI expenditures within the state's case management system, and deliver an annual accounting to both the minor and their legal representative. Prior to utilizing SSI funds to offset the cost of care, counties must comply with all applicable federal regulations and convene with the youth and interested parties to evaluate the minor's reasonable and foreseeable needs. To govern this framework, the Colorado Department of Human Services is directed to create rules addressing screening, application, account management, and notice protocols by January 1, 2028, while providing technical assistance to county departments.