



DEKALB COUNTY CHILD ADVOCACY CENTER
GREGORY A. ADAMS JUVENILE JUSTICE CENTER
4309 Memorial Drive
Decatur, GA 30032
(404) 294-2646 office **(404) 294-2658 fax**

The Honorable Michael Thurmond
CEO

Trenny Stovall
Director

TO: The DeKalb County Board of Commissioners; CEO Michael Thurmond; COO Zachary Williams

FR: Trenny Stovall

CC: Budget Department

RE: Request for Additional Positions for Fifth Juvenile Courtroom – Child Advocacy Center (Cost Center 4010)

DA: November 1, 2018

DeKalb County Child Advocacy Center Department Request for Mid-Year Budget Adjustment

The Child Advocacy Center department is requesting three (3) positions to support the legal representation to child-victims in dependency (abuse and neglect) cases that will be assigned to the newly created Juvenile Court judge's position and courtroom. Two (2) additional attorneys and one (1) social worker are needed to manage the estimated 200-300 dependency cases and 850-1,000 additional dependency hearings that will be handled annually by the additional courtroom. The total cost associated with this program modification for department's 2018 budget will be \$55,045.80.

HOW DOES REQUEST ALIGN WITH DEKALB COUNTY ORGANIZATIONAL GOALS?

This request for additional positions aligns with DeKalb County's organizational goals to Improve Public Safety and to Prevent Juvenile Delinquency and Crime. The department's legal representation of child abuse victims improves public safety by ensuring that child-victims' rights are protected, and that they receive rehabilitation resources and are kept safe from future victimization. Additionally, the department's specialized representation of youth abuse victims in foster care helps to ensure that they receive the education, job training, and independent living skills to prepare for independence thereby reducing their engagement in delinquent and antisocial behaviors.

LEGAL MANDATE & JUSTIFICATION

Currently, there are four (4) full-time DeKalb County Juvenile Court judges managing dependency and delinquency cases in four (4) courtrooms. In the 2018 Budget, a fifth judge's position was approved for the DeKalb County Juvenile Court.

The fifth courtroom will hear an estimated 200 - 300 dependency (abuse and neglect) cases annually. The addition of a fifth courtroom will help to alleviate some of the existing procedural delays, so that legal timelines are met and cases are disposed of more expeditiously. The fifth courtroom is not expected to reduce the number of

hearings. In order to improve timeliness and legal compliance 850-1,000 additional dependency hearings are expected annually. The Child Advocacy Center will need additional staff in order to provide competent legal representation for child-victim clients in dependency cases

DeKalb County is mandated by O.C.G.A. sec. 15-11-103 to provide legal counsel for all children alleged to be abused and neglect before the juvenile court. Additionally, DeKalb County's settlement of the federal class action lawsuit Kenny A. et. al. vs. Perdue et. al., 547 F.3d 1319 required that the county provide legal representation for all dependent children. These mandated legal services are delivered through the Child Advocacy Center department. The Child Advocacy Center represents 1,300-1,500 abused children in nearly 3,500 dependency hearings, and logs 75,000-90,000 miles annually conducting more than 5,000 field investigations. *It should be noted that this significant field work requirement for child advocate attorneys is distinguishable from all other attorney positions within DeKalb County.* Currently Child advocate litigation teams consist of 3 attorneys and a paralegal assigned to each courtroom. Three investigators and a social worker work across teams supporting the entire caseload of 1,300 – 1,500 children. If approved the two (2) new child advocate attorneys and (1) social worker are expected to manage approximately 850 - 1,000 additional dependency hearings and to conduct 400-600 additional field investigations annually.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN IF REQUEST IS NOT GRANTED?

If the positions are not granted, the department will not have adequate staff or resources to provide competent legal representation nor to protect the best interests and wellbeing of 200-300 abused and neglected children.

Because the court calendars of each courtroom overlap and are held simultaneously, it is not possible to utilize existing staff to manage cases in another courtroom. If additional positions are not authorized the department would have to reassign attorneys from other courtrooms thereby significantly increasing the caseload of the remaining team members. Under the current child advocate litigation team model (3 attorneys and 1 paralegal) for each courtroom, workloads are as follows:

- Child advocate attorneys - 2-4 days / week in court in addition to logging and average of 330 miles conducting 15-30 field investigations monthly.
- Investigators /social workers work across litigation teams and log 500- 800 miles conducting 25-50 field investigations monthly.

If new positions are not authorized, the reassignment of current staff would result in department's inability to comply with legal requirements to conduct investigations and to consult with clients prior to all hearings. Therefore, reassigning current staff members would severely strain human resources and diminish the department's ability to comply with legal and best practice requirements.