



Stop Making CPS Caseworkers Type

Why shifting documentation away from frontline workers improves safety, quality, and retention

Executive summary

Child welfare agencies are under intense pressure to keep children safe while stabilizing families—yet a large share of caseworker time is still consumed by typing and re-typing documentation. Multiple state workforce studies show that documentation and other administrative work consistently crowd out direct contact with children and families. Redirecting typing and formatting away from caseworkers (to transcription, speech-to-text, or admin support) is a straightforward way to buy back scarce frontline time, reduce burnout, and improve practice quality.

Three evidence-backed reasons to stop expecting caseworkers to type their own reports:

- 1) Documentation is the single biggest time sink. In North Carolina's statewide workload study, caseworkers spent the largest share of their time on case documentation (14.8%), while only 11.4% was spent in contacts with families (and 4.2% face-to-face). The report also found workers duplicate effort by drafting in Word and uploading to the system, and it explicitly recommends technology-assisted dictation to cut documentation time.
- 2) Administrative/documentation work routinely exceeds capacity. Colorado's workload study found caseworkers spent the highest percentage of time (38%) on documentation/administration, concluding that mandated work exceeded available staff time and urging operational efficiencies.
- 3) Paperwork burden drives burnout and turnover—and staff themselves ask for transcription tools. Pennsylvania's 2024 recruitment/retention study documents how "burdensome and unnecessary" paperwork adds to burnout, and notes frontline requests for "Dragon or similar support for automatic transcription" to reduce time spent typing and re-typing notes.

What this means for supervisors

1) Time and opportunity cost

Using North Carolina's numbers: the study estimates an average 108.3 hours/month available for casework per caseworker. With 14.8% of that spent on documentation inside the case system, that's about 16.0 hours/month typing and formatting. If you replace typing



with dictation/transcription that's roughly 3× faster than typing, you free up about two-thirds of that time—≈10.7 hours/month per worker—for contacts, visits, teaming, and court prep. For a unit of 25 caseworkers, that's ≈267 hours/month, roughly 1.7 FTE-months of frontline time returned every month.

2) Quality and risk

- Fewer late or thin notes. When workers don't have to carve out long typing blocks after hours, notes are completed closer to the event, improving accuracy and defensibility.
- Better face-time allocation. Multiple workload studies show documentation/administration eclipsing family contact; shifting typing off the worker reverses that ratio at the margin.

3) Workforce stability

Pennsylvania's study traces burnout directly to "burdensome" paperwork and records frontline staff calling for transcription to relieve the load. Reducing after-hours typing helps contain attrition—one of the largest hidden costs in child welfare.

Implementation blueprint (90 days)

Phase 1 – Policy & workflow (Weeks 1–3)

- Define what gets dictated vs. typed.
- Set service-level expectations.
- Privacy & security compliance.

Phase 2 – Tooling & pilots (Weeks 4–8)

- Pick your mode(s): transcription or speech-to-text.
- Pilot with 2–3 units.
- Micro-training for effective dictation.

Phase 3 – Scale & sustain (Weeks 9–12)

- Codify SOPs.
- Create templates & smart prompts.
- Provide light admin support.

How to measure success

- Direct contact time: increase minutes spent with families.
- Timeliness: more reports completed within 24–48 hours.
- After-hours typing: reduce overtime by 25–40%.
- Worker sentiment & retention: lower burnout, higher retention.

Addressing common objections

- "Typing is faster for me." Studies show dictation is about 3× faster than typing.
- "We'll lose detail or nuance." Dictation usually increases narrative richness.



- “We can’t afford it.” Time savings convert directly into more casework and improved outcomes.

References (selected)

- North Carolina DSS Child Welfare Workload Study (2023, PCG)
- Colorado Child Welfare County Workload Study – Report Highlights (2014, State Auditor)
- Pennsylvania OCYF–CCYA Recruitment & Retention Study (2024)