

E. Rural Classification: Lowndes County, as a whole, does not meet the definition of rural classification, as defined by the State of Georgia (e.g., a county population of 35,000 people or less) and adopted by the General Assembly in 1999 as part of the Rural Hospital Authorities Act (SB195). The US Census Bureau reports a 2020 Lowndes County population of 118,251. Source: <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/lowndescountygeorgia>

II. Needs statement:

A. Statement of the specific problem(s)/gap(s) the project will address: Lowndes County aspires to achieve excellence by providing quality services for the positive development of children, the safety of the community, and the preservation of the family unit. Given clear research evidence that evidence-based practices can prevent youth from entering the juvenile justice system, reduce recidivism and improve positive youth and family outcomes, it is a clear extension of the Court’s mission to implement these alternatives to prevent further escalation of youth into the County’s juvenile justice system. There are vast differences in needs between youth who commit delinquent acts, youth who commit first-time nonviolent acts, and youth who commit status offenses also known as Children in Need of Services (CHINS). In certain circumstances, such as first-time nonviolent and CHINS youth, further intervention may not be necessary. Consequently, when services are appropriate for this population, effective interventions that target specific circumstances or criminogenic needs for these youth should be provided. In order to prevent further involvement with the justice system, evidence-based programming can be a great prevention tool for first-time nonviolent status offenders and CHINS youth at the front end. The SFP program is a wonderful opportunity to prevent at-risk youth, ages 7-17, from entering the juvenile justice system.

For the year between July 1, 2022 and June 30, 2023, Lowndes County had 185 total juvenile CHINS cases, and of those 39 were adjudicated in juvenile court. Additionally, during the same period, Lowndes County had 275 total juveniles commit first-time nonviolent acts, with 75 of those eventually being adjudicated. There is a significant need for evidence-based services that are geared towards low risk youth and families in Lowndes County. The evidenced based programs that Lowndes County does have access to at this time are for moderate to high risk youth; therefore, leaving a gap for services. Strengthening Families Program would be a great opportunity for at-risk youth and their families.