



PENNSYLVANIA
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2021 State of Child Welfare

NAVIGATING THE UNCERTAINTY OF THE PANDEMIC TO STRENGTHEN THE SYSTEM





To improve Pennsylvania’s child welfare system, our 12th annual State of Child Welfare report provides a 5-year analysis of how Pennsylvania fares with practices around child safety, placement, and permanency and includes county-level data and statewide and geographic trends. Additionally, from a state perspective, we continue to analyze racial disparity and disproportionality across the child population (age 0-20) in the child welfare system.

New Data Suppression Rules Required by DHS:

This year’s report will include suppressing some raw numbers based on new rules outlined by the Department of Human Services (DHS). To ensure privacy and protect against identifying individuals, counts of less than 11 are suppressed. This is also true for any percentage or rate that relates to a count of less than 11. When possible, a range is provided. In some instances, a percentage or rate related to a count greater than 10 must also be suppressed (or changed to a range) so that another rate cannot be determined through calculation. Additionally, due to how data was provided (or not at all) from DHS to PPC, some indicators could not be calculated or are noted as “not provided.” This is true for in-home services total, foster care stability, timely reunification, and failed reunification. Entities interested in these data points should contact DHS directly.

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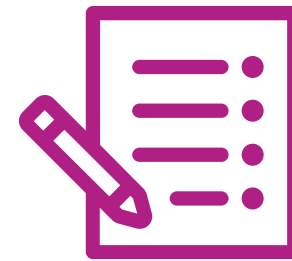
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POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS



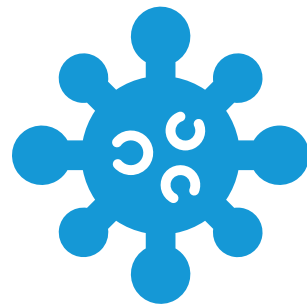
Data analyzed in the annual State of Child Welfare report correlates to several significant policy changes. The following areas need the attention and legislative

action from policymakers in Harrisburg and Washington, D.C., and officials in the executive branch at the Department of Human Services.

- ✓ Continue to invest in and build a robust prevention services system that aims to mitigate non-abuse factors, keep families and communities together, and reduce the amount of time formal child welfare intervention is necessary. The Family First Prevention Services Act allows Pennsylvania to capitalize on expanding an evidence-based services continuum. However, this is only one step in the process, and we should continue to analyze where gaps in services exist. This would include increased state funding for prevention services that may not be eligible for federal Title IV-E funding, such as programs that show promising outcomes but may not meet the rigor needed to achieve an evidence-based rating. Additionally, the service array should address non-abuse factors that often lead to child welfare involvement, such as homelessness and poverty. This includes coordination and collaboration between the offices within DHS, especially where there is the ability to look at braided funding.

- ✓ Act on PPC’s kinship care report recommendations to increase opportunities for children to be placed with kin. This includes eliminating arbitrary barriers to licensure, having a seamless waiver process, a fair appeal process, and addressing policies that create subjectivity and bias in decision-making.
- ✓ Increase supports for transition age youth to ensure they are prepared to successfully exit the system to adulthood by consistently offering permanency services and appropriate transition plans, so they are connected to community-based supports and do not exit to homelessness.
- ✓ As DHS builds a new state information system, increase data sets required from county agencies. All data should be disaggregated by age, gender, race, ethnicity, and county and should be available to the public. Advocates, researchers, and families should be engaged in the development process.
- ✓ Develop forums – both within the state and with external advocates – to obtain the lived experiences of children and youth who have been involved with the child welfare system to help shape practice and enact policy change.
- ✓ Invest in our child welfare workforce at the state and county levels, in addition to meeting the needs of private providers, by analyzing recruitment and retention trends and developing an understanding of the federal and state funding options to support it.

Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Child Welfare System



The COVID-19 pandemic has caused shifts in all child-serving systems, with child welfare being no exception. Stay-at-home orders, moving to virtual learning, and

less contact with medical professionals created a significant decrease in mandated reporting trends. While reports of abuse and neglect decreased, the medical community sounded the alarm that abuse was still occurring, and more severe cases were occurring. There also was an increase in rates of child fatalities and near fatalities, with an uptick in cases of children ingesting substances.

“WE ARE JUST BEGINNING TO GRAPPLE WITH THE IMPACT COVID-19 HAS HAD ON FAMILIES AND THEIR MOST VULNERABLE MEMBERS. THE DATA IS ALARMING, WITH CHILD ABUSE-RELATED FATALITIES REACHING AN UNPRECEDENTED HIGH AND NEAR FATALITIES CONTINUING TO SHOW A CONCERNING NUMBER OF CHILDREN WHO ARE RECEIVING INADEQUATE CARE AND BEING NEGLECTED. THE TIME IS NOW FOR US TO INVEST AN UNPRECEDENTED LEVEL OF RESOURCES INTO PREVENTION PROGRAMS THAT HELP FAMILIES. WE MUST MOVE FROM MANAGING CONSEQUENCES TO IDENTIFYING AND PROVIDING A SOLUTION TO THE CONTRIBUTING FACTORS.”

- Angela Liddle, President and CEO, Pennsylvania Family Support Alliance

Further, county agencies decreased in-person contact with children, youth, and families in certain situations. Courts also moved to virtual hearings that provided fewer interactions with vital advocates, such as court-appointed attorneys, and delayed permanency hearings. While service providers continued to deliver essential services, some have been forced to close due to a lack of referrals.

Life is anything but typical for children living through the pandemic, especially those experiencing abuse and neglect. It is essential that we analyze critical data, hear directly from impacted individuals on their experiences, and build off lessons learned to prevent abuse and neglect better, keep families together, and expedite permanency. Unfortunately, DHS does not produce real-time data, and outcomes from 2021 on reporting, investigations, and foster care will not be available until 2022 to understand the impact of the pandemic - before, during, and after.

Despite the pandemic, there have been several initiatives for the Office of Children, Youth and Families (OCYF) within DHS, as well as for county child welfare agencies, that were planned or implemented over the course of the past year. These initiatives aim to improve practices within the system, but they are complex – meaning it may take several years for some of them to be realized fully.

Implementation of the Family First Prevention Services Act

As part of the omnibus, sweeping Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018, language enacting the Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) passed



Congress. It became one of the most significant child welfare legislative reforms in recent history. The law aims to create new federal funding for evidence-based prevention services and further limit back-end placement services that are not family-based, including congregate care programs. Congregate care placements are permitted when time-limited to meet specialized needs, and programs must demonstrate high-quality programming.

There are several other vital components of the law, such as extending supports to transition age foster youth and improving kinship care policies, which are optional for states. PPC recently released a [fact sheet](#) outlining the state's [5-year prevention plan](#) and noting other provisions that Pennsylvania has selected to implement.

While the FFPSA ignited important conversations surrounding upstream prevention and family support, there are several challenges that have been recognized through its implementation. With a limited number of evidence-based services approved by the Title IV-E clearinghouse, the narrow categories the programs fall into, and the required rigor of evidence-based status, a limited number of programs exist where a state can claim reimbursement. Further, programs selected by the clearinghouse to date have particular criteria and are not always tailored to a family's needs. We have an opportunity to look at the FFPSA as a piece of the prevention puzzle. The state's annual Needs-Based Budget process must also be a lever for supporting primary prevention and differential response programs.

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Streamlining State Safety & Risk Assessment Tools

County child welfare agencies currently utilize two tools to assess children and families for imminent safety concerns and ongoing risk factors. The safety and risk assessment tools are cumbersome, often duplicative, and highly subjective. Pennsylvania has been considering options to revise and potentially merge these documents to evaluate children and families' needs better. With the support of Casey Family Programs, a safety subcommittee convened by OCYF has been holding meetings with other states to consider multiple options, like the Functional Assessment Screening Tool (FAST) or the Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANS) assessment. Both tools are types of assessments that assist with decision-making and with ongoing case planning. While no formal decision has been made, changes hopefully will support caseworkers in identifying safety and risk factors more appropriately, leading to better identification of services to mitigate concerns, and ultimately, provide stability within home communities.

Creating a New Statewide Case Management System

Each county child welfare agency currently has a case management system that collects required data elements and then feeds that information into the state's Child Welfare Information System (CWIS). However, each county system continues to house important case documents. Currently, there is no standard case management system, with each county having an option to select or craft one that meets their needs. This creates vast variances across counties on what data is or is

not collected. Additionally, county systems do not connect, making it difficult to share information readily or easily.

Having a standardized system will allow better data analysis and policy reform at the state level. OCYF has been engaged in implementing a statewide case management system for several years, looking to create an enterprise system to shed light on a child or family's story more effectively. This system is not anticipated to be operationalized until at least 2024. Recently, several pieces of legislation have been introduced to understand the process better and potentially require the system to be expedited. House Resolution 119, introduced by Representative Karen Boback, would require a Joint State Government Commission study of the DHS's implementation process, the needs to effectively do so, and provide better public transparency. The resolution was passed, and a report is due to the legislature within six months.

Implementing an Agency-Wide Race Equity Plan

Necessary and much-needed conversations around race equity and inclusion are happening, along with the need for administrative, legislative, and fiscal reform, especially when its evaluating disaggregated data. DHS released [Racial Equity Report 2021](#) focused on preliminary analysis to reduce, and hopefully eliminate, racial disparities and disproportionality within child and family-serving systems. Child welfare was included in the report, and significant challenges within the system for children and families of color. Broad strategies were outlined, but the report leaves much for discussion, and critical conversations on the next steps have yet to be released.



“THE FAMILY FIRST PREVENTION AND SERVICES ACT IS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR COUNTIES, PROVIDERS AND COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS TO BUILD A STRONG NETWORK OF SUSTAINABLE PARTNERSHIPS THAT HELP KEEP CHILDREN IN THEIR COMMUNITIES AND WITH THEIR FAMILIES WHEN POSSIBLE. HOWEVER, FAMILY FIRST ALSO RECOGNIZES THAT SOME CHILDREN MAY REQUIRE HIGH-QUALITY RESIDENTIAL TREATMENT SO THAT THEY CAN BE PRODUCTIVE MEMBERS OF THEIR COMMUNITIES. PROVIDERS ARE EXCITED TO BE VALUED PARTNERS IN PENNSYLVANIA'S EFFORTS.”

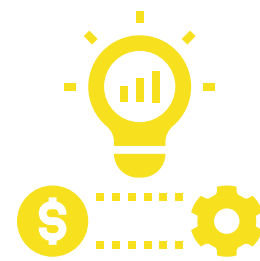
- Terry Clark, President and CEO, Pennsylvania Council of Children, Youth and Families

Ongoing Regulatory Revisions

Several essential and outdated regulations have been under revision at OCYF for at least the past year, if not several years. These include Title 55, Chapter 3130 regulations governing the operation of child welfare agencies and the Chapter 3800 regulations that govern the operations of child residential and treatment centers.

Specific to the Chapter 3130 regulations, revisions can improve casework practice by reducing caseload sizes and supervisor-to-caseworker ratios. While some counties have expanded staffing to meet the needs of a reduced staff-to-supervisor ratio, building in the expansion of staff relative to lowering caseload sizes will be difficult

to ascertain without final recommendations on the number. The modifications to the 3800 regulations aim to solidify some of the provisions included in the specialized settings within the implementation of the FFPSA and more broadly focus on ensuring that congregate care settings are high-quality and meet the time-limited treatment of children and youth. The proposed regulations have been circulating for several years, and OCYF indicated it would be ready for release in October 2021. However, the regulations have yet to be released for public review or comment.



Several stimulus packages have passed Congress since the onset of the pandemic in the spring of 2020, some of which included increases in specific child welfare streams

that are integral in supporting children, youth, and families. The increases in funding aimed to stabilize those in the child welfare system during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, not all funding has been spent to date, and planning at the state and county levels is underway to determine the best use of funds. PPC urges the state to move forward in disbursing these much-needed financial supports.

Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021

The “Supporting Foster Youth and Families through the Pandemic Act,” contained in Division X of the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021 (P.L. 116-260), became law on December 27, 2020, and provided additional, supplemental, or enhanced funding for several programs authorized under Titles IV-B and IV-E of the Social Security Act. Significant increases were included through the Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood (the Chafee Program) and the Education and Training Voucher Program, totaling approximately \$15 million. OCYF issued guidance and allocations to county child welfare agencies in April 2021. These provisions included a moratorium on youth aging out of the foster care system solely due to age, the suspension of Title IV-E requirements, and increased transitional and after-care supports, among others.

Effective September 30, 2021, several codified provisions expired, including the moratorium on aging out of care. Unfortunately, some older



youth did not have adequate support to live independently without federal legislation to extend provisions and were ultimately discharged to homelessness. H.R. 5176 was introduced on September 3, 2021, but failed to gain momentum and did not pass before the provisions expired. Nationally, advocacy organizations continue to push a legislative agenda to extend supports to older youth to prepare them for a successful transition to adulthood.

The American Rescue Plan (ARP)

The American Rescue Plan was signed into law on March 11, 2021, and included significant increases in prevention funding, supplementing the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA). This also included the supplemental funding for the Community Based Child Abuse Prevention (CBCAP) state grant program. In total, the state received more than \$12 million in stimulus funding through the ARP. While the use of these funds has not yet occurred as of the fall of 2021, it is anticipated that CBCAP funding will be utilized to support evidence-based home visiting programs and add programming in mandated reporter training. Plans for the use of CAPTA funds have not been publicly released to date. These funds must be expended by 2024.



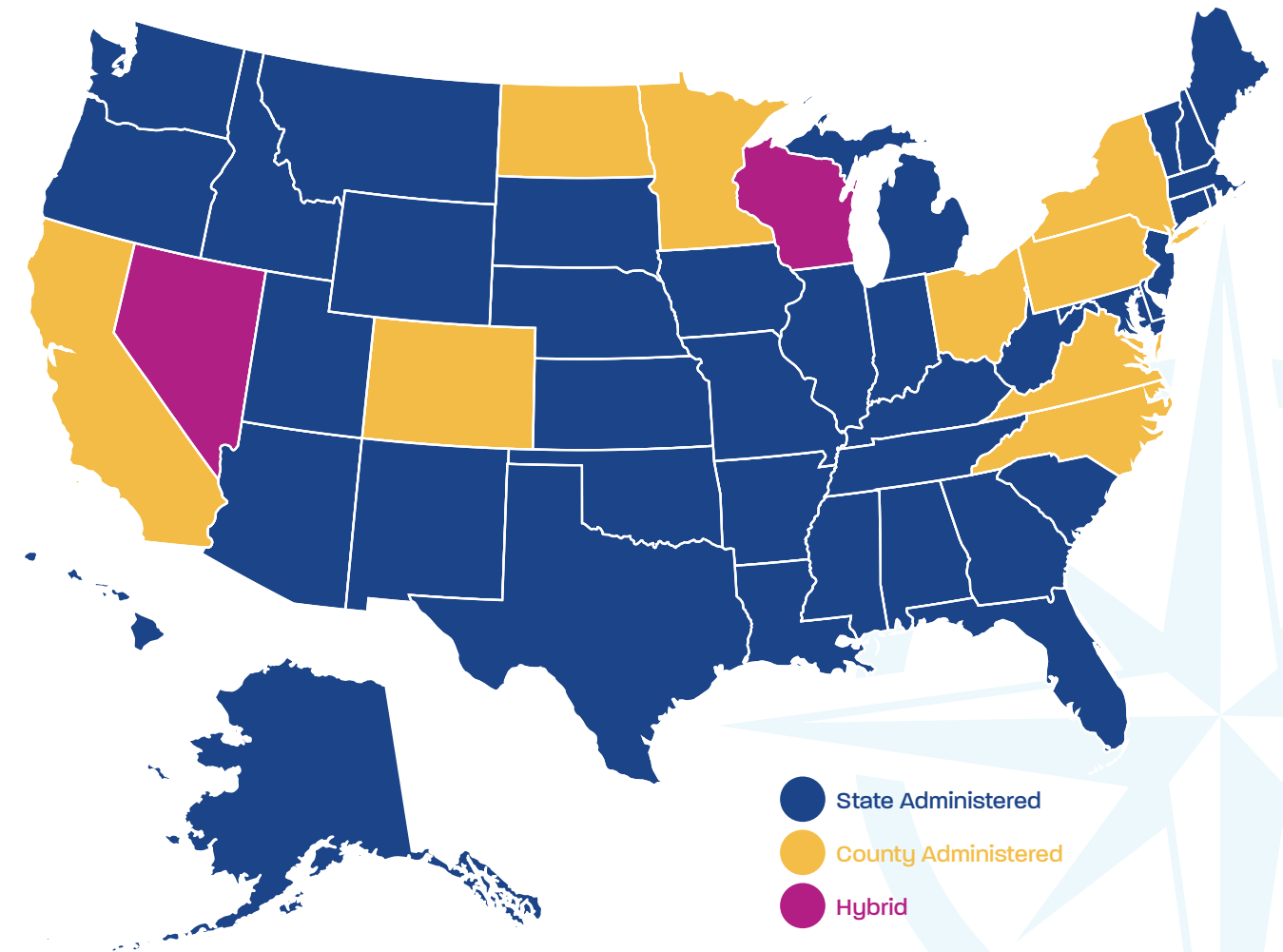
The purpose of the child welfare system is to investigate allegations of child abuse and neglect, make determinations on the validity of reports, and provide in-

home and community-based services to stabilize families and keep them intact. However, if a placement is necessary, the system should ensure children and youth are placed in a family-based setting or in a treatment program in a time-limited capacity to meet specialized needs.

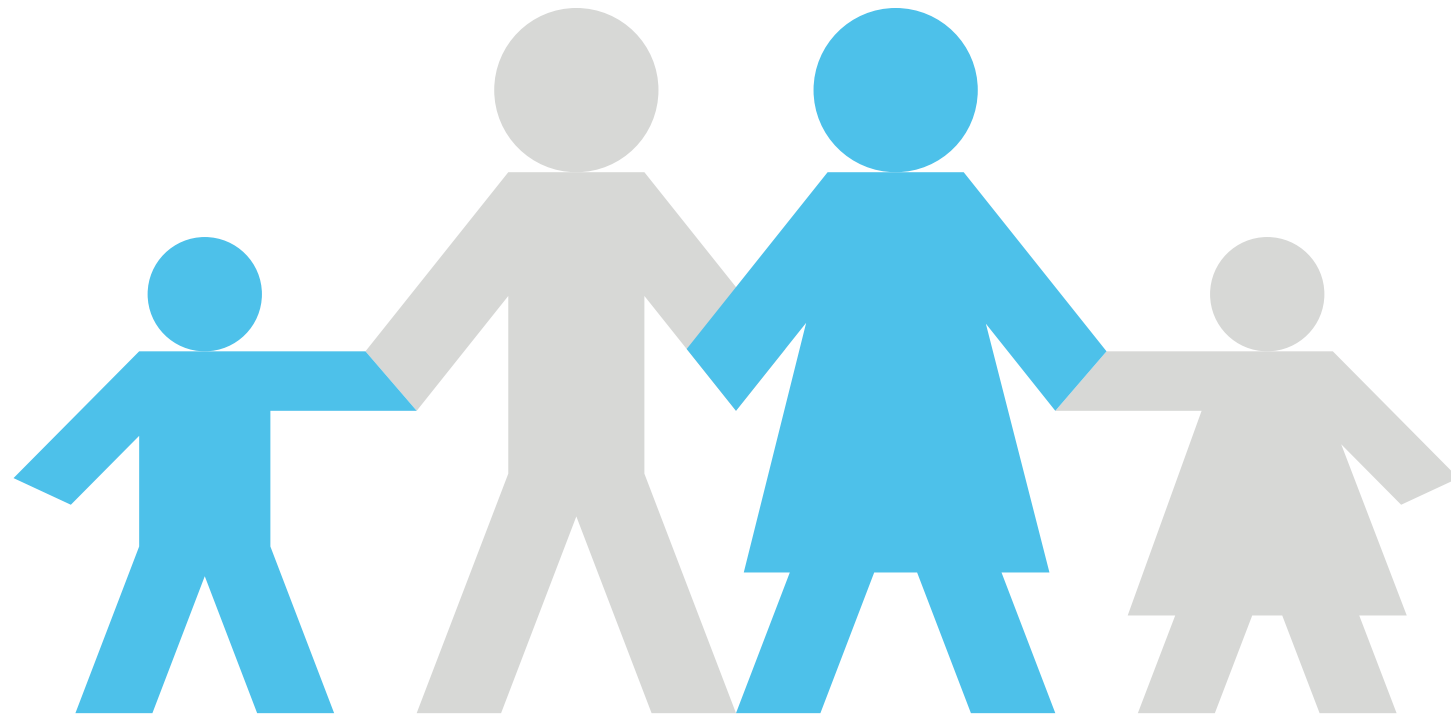
All states are required to have a child welfare system, but they operate differently to serve children, youth, and families. There are three types of child welfare systems:

- State-administered – a centralized, state-provided system.
- County-administered – each county operates independently but is supervised by a state entity.
- Hybrid – a system administered partially by the state and by the counties.

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- State Administered
- County Administered
- Hybrid



Pennsylvania is a county-administered, state-supervised child welfare system. OCYF supervises each of the 67 county child welfare agencies that operate independently. Mandated and permissive reporters disclose child abuse and neglect allegations by verbally or electronically providing information to ChildLine, the state's toll-free reporting hotline. ChildLine then determines the category of investigation and transmits the information to the appropriate county child welfare agency for investigation. These are defined by either a Child Protective Services (CPS) report or a General Protective Services (GPS) report. Pennsylvania is somewhat unique in having differentiation in reports, whereas other states have only one designation of reports.

CPS reports are defined by the Child Protective Services Law and include reports of abuse such as physical, sexual, and serious physical neglect, among others. Outcomes for CPS reports can

either be substantiated as "indicated" or "founded" or unsubstantiated as "unfounded."

GPS reports are reports with less-severe findings, often focused on indications of neglect, and can include parental substance use disorders, truancy, and homelessness, among others. Outcomes for GPS reports can either be substantiated as "validated" or unsubstantiated as "invalidated."

A case can be "screened out" – meaning no formal investigatory action is taken – or accepted for ongoing services. Services provided to families are intended to stabilize the family, decrease risk factors for ongoing abuse or neglect, meet specific treatment needs, or support placements in out-of-home care. Services can be community-based, in which there is no formal oversight or contracting by the county child welfare agency, and can be either preventative or on an intervention basis. Similarly, and more often, county agencies contract with providers to offer comprehensive services.

Whichever service is provided, community or in-home supports is an important piece of practice that child welfare agencies offer.

If a child cannot safely remain in their biological home, placement outside of the home into a foster care setting is the next option. Preferably, children should stay in their own home and communities with supportive services to ensure their safety and mitigate ongoing risk. However, when this cannot occur, children and youth should have the first option of being placed with kin, or someone they know, trust, or with whom they have a significant supportive relationship. Kin does not have to be blood-related and can be a teacher, counselor, family friend, or someone the child or family identifies as support. Only once kin has been ruled out as an option should a child be placed in a higher level of care, such as foster care. Congregate care settings, such as group homes or residential placements, must be the option of last resort and should only be utilized to meet specialized, time-limited treatment needs.

Once a child is in out-of-home placement, in most cases, all efforts should be made to reunify them safely and quickly with biological parents. A concurrent plan should always be defined to determine the next permanency option should reunification not be successful. The goal

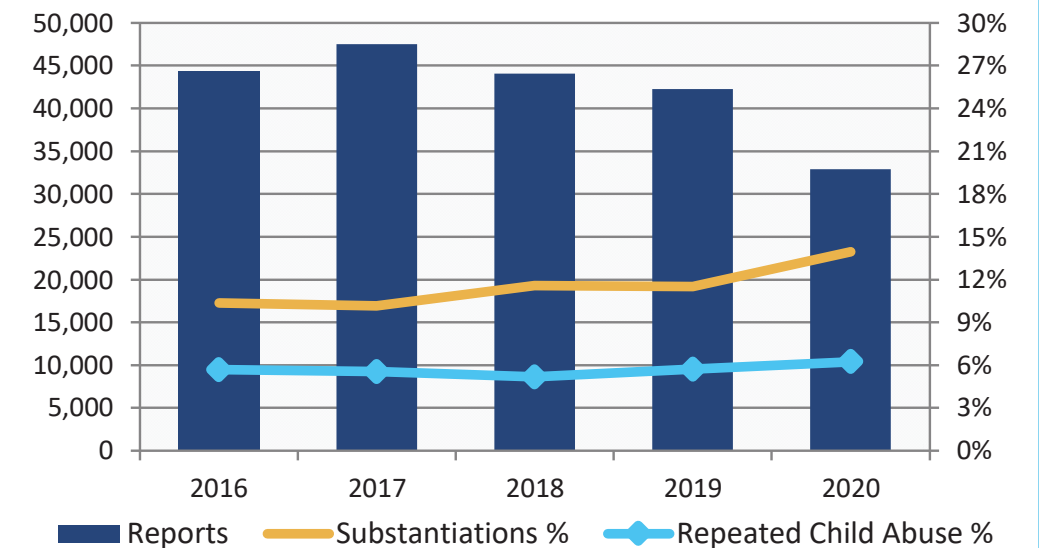
should account for what is in the child's best interests and with their input if age-appropriate. Other permanency options include adoption or permanent legal custodianship.

What the Data Reveals

Abuse and Neglect

Child abuse referrals include allegations of suspected abuse, such as physical abuse, sexual abuse, or serious physical neglect, among others. **In 2020, there were 32,919 CPS reports, which was a 22% decline in reports from 2019. However, the substantiation of reports was the highest in the last five years, with 14% of reports being investigated and found to be true.** The COVID-19 pandemic is a significant contributor to the reduction in reports, as mandated reporters, such as teachers and physicians, had little to no contact with children to spot and report abuse. However, it is critical to note this does not mean child abuse decreased. As well-reported

Child Abuse Reports, Percent Substantiated



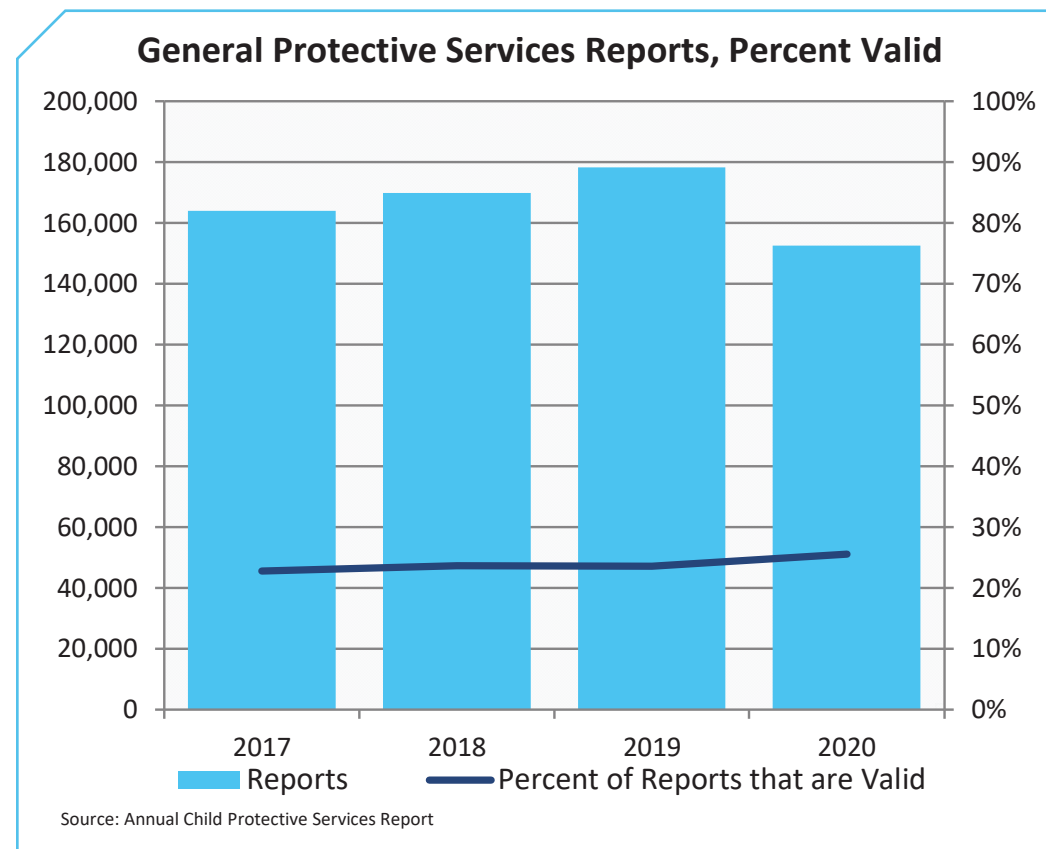
Source: Annual Child Protective Services Report

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by pediatricians, during this period, more severe cases were being seen in their practices.

General protective services referrals are non-abuse allegations that include general neglect such as truancy, homelessness, or parental substance use disorders, among others. In 2020, there were 152,478 GPS referrals, which was a 14% decrease from 2019. Like CPS reports, substantiation rates of GPS reports were the highest in the past five years at 25.6%.

In-home services often refer to prevention and intervention-based programs that seek to mitigate safety or risk factors and help to keep families intact. However, if an out-of-home placement is necessary, services can help to reunify families or support permanency. **Last year, more than 181,000 children and families were served through child welfare-funded services.**



Unfortunately, the total number of children and families served through in-home services was not complete due to the missing data from Fayette County. While the total number is helpful, it would be more advantageous to break down the types of services being offered to note which categories those services fall in and what stage of the case they are provided. These data points would assist in identifying where gaps in services exist.

The Foster Care System

While county agencies are tasked with trying to mitigate safety and risk of future harm in offering services, unfortunately, not all children can remain in their biological homes. Placement out of the home should preferably be in a family-based setting, such as in kinship care or foster care. Congregate care, such as group homes and residential programs, should be the option of last

resort and aimed at meeting the time-limited specialized treatment needs of a child or youth.

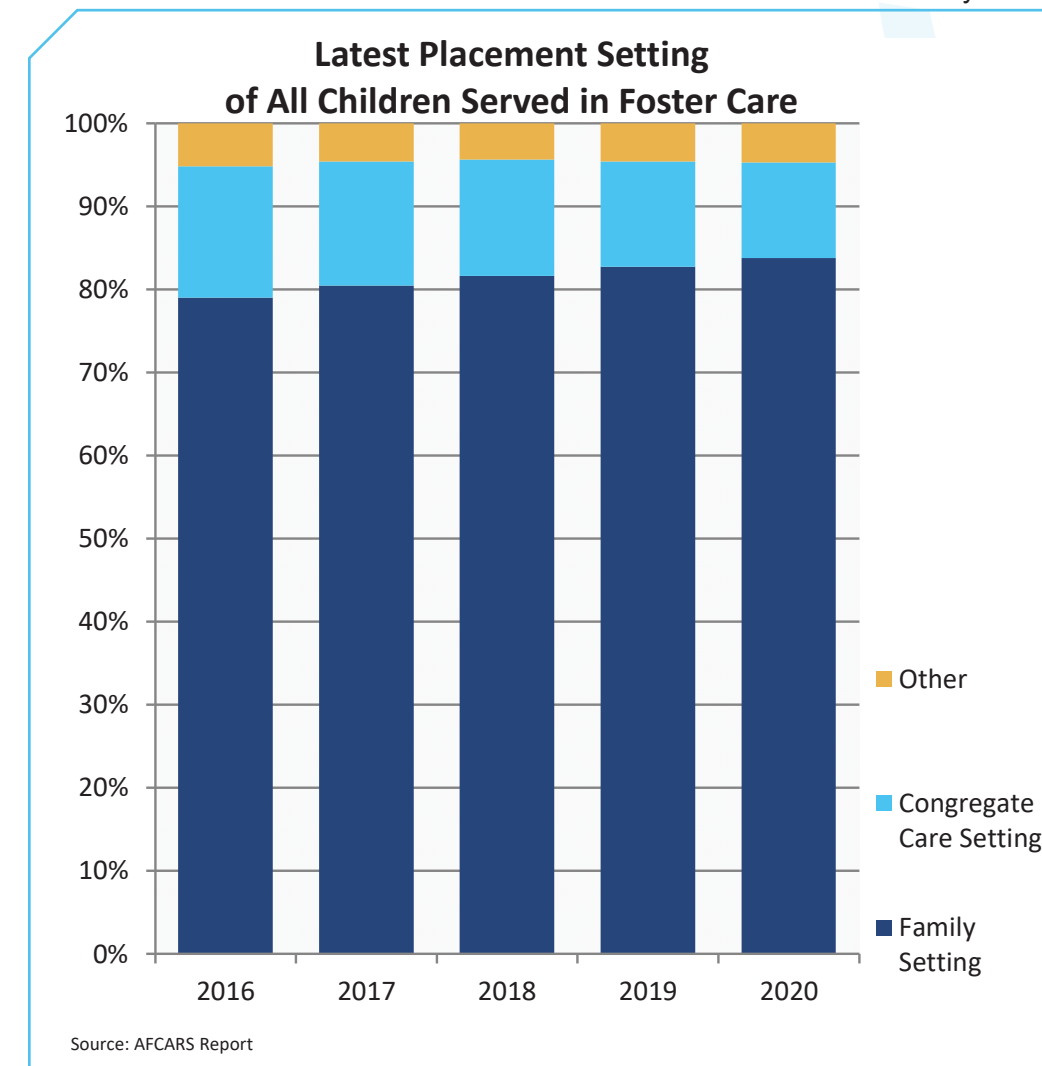
In 2020, 21,689 children were served in the Pennsylvania foster care system, a 12% decrease in the total population from the prior year.

A 5-year review shows that there have been continued increases in children being served in a family-based setting, with increases in placement in kinship care. The rate of children being placed in congregate care is the

lowest since 2016, at 11.5%. Similarly, there was a decrease in the number of first-time entries into the system, with a reduction of 23%, accounting for over 1,700 children and youth. Increases also were demonstrated in first-time entries being in a family-based setting, with 44% of children and youth being placed with kin. **The most vulnerable population – children under the age of six – make up over half of all first-time entries.**

occurs, the child or youth is less likely to be placed in a family-based setting and more frequently will enter a congregate care setting. More than 1 in 4 re-entries in 2020 were placed in a congregate care setting, such as a group home, residential setting, or an institution. More than half of the population re-entering the foster care system are older youth.

While Pennsylvania has made consistent strides



in increasing placement with kin, we have more work to do. PPC released its first-ever brief [Kinship Care in Pennsylvania: Creating an Equitable System for Families](#), which highlighted the deficiencies in practice and offered tangible solutions. When speaking with kin who have been denied the ability to be considered or licensed, there were themes of subjectivity and bias in decision making, outdated practices, and inconsistencies in policies across counties. Placing children with kin or someone they have a significant connection to increases permanency, leads to better overall

Some children experience multiple entries into the system, meaning they reunify or achieve permanency but are then placed in the system again due to new allegations or changes in circumstance. Unfortunately, when this situation

occurs, the child or youth is less likely to be placed in a family-based setting and more frequently will enter a congregate care setting. More than 1 in 4 re-entries in 2020 were placed in a congregate care setting, such as a group home, residential setting, or an institution. More than half of the population re-entering the foster care system are older youth.

With overall reductions in placement, one could assume this translates to better interventions on the front-end of an investigation and correspondingly stabilizes families. However, when we look at the totality of the data from the start of an investigation through placement, the overall reduction correlates to the challenges we know were present due to the pandemic. With fewer referrals being made by mandated reporters, there were fewer occasions to identify abuse leading to placement. Data from 2021 will be significant to see how trends shift as schools resumed in-person instruction. There was subsequently more interaction between mandated reporters, such as teachers, with children and families.

Transition Age Youth

Transition age youth are ages 14 and older who have been served in the foster care system and are a population that continues to need targeted and specialized support. **Older youth make up nearly one-third of the overall foster care system and account for over 50% of all re-entries.** Typically, this population has poorer outcomes than their peers in the general population across several indicators, including education, employment, and homelessness. County agencies are required to transition plan with older youth by helping them to create a roadmap for how they will be successful once they exit the system. Additionally, permanency and transition services should be offered through the course of a youth's involvement to assist them with identifying their permanency plan, who are identified as supportive adults that can and are willing to help, and what ongoing services will be needed to ensure these youth are successful.

While Pennsylvania has several laws aiming to ensure these practices happen, far too often, youth are not provided with adequate transition services or planning. Further, youth are not always engaged in their permanency planning and exit the system without having achieved legal permanency. The goal of "Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement" (APPLA) is subsequently assigned to a youth's case, meaning that they will age out of the system without having achieved another legal goal, such as adoption or guardianship.

The way to better understand the gaps and challenges in serving older youth is to increase the data being collected on outcomes and listen to the youth's lived experiences. OCYF currently offers no publicly available data on indicators and

"PARENT-CHILD SEPARATION IMPACTS THE ENTIRE FAMILY SYSTEM. IT MAY BE HARD TO IMAGINE A CHILD YOU LOVE BEING TAKEN BY A FORCE OUTSIDE OF YOUR FAMILY (THE GOVERNMENT), BUT YOU LIKELY KNOW YOU WOULDN'T WANT YOUR GRANDCHILD, NIECE, BROTHER, COUSIN PLACED IN A STRANGER'S FOSTER HOME. NOT ONLY DOES KINSHIP CARE REDUCE TRAUMA AND CREATE STABILITY FOR CHILDREN SEPARATED FROM THEIR PARENTS, BUT IT VALIDATES THE REALITY OF FAMILY INTERCONNECTEDNESS AND THE NATURAL RESOURCES AND SUPPORT KIN EAGERLY AND INSTINCTUALLY OFFER THEIR LOVED ONES IN CRISIS."

- Karissa Phelps, Stoneleigh Fellow, Temple Legal Aid

"ALL CHILDREN BENEFIT FROM THE UNCONDITIONAL LOVING SUPPORT OF A FOREVER FAMILY. OLDER YOUTH IN CARE WANT AND NEED THE SUPPORT OF RELATIONAL PERMANENCY. TOO OFTEN, WE AS A SYSTEM FOCUS ON INDEPENDENCE INSTEAD OF INTERDEPENDENCE FOR THIS COLLECTIVE OF YOUTH AGING OUT OF THE FOSTER CARE SYSTEM. I RECALL A QUOTE FROM AN OLDER YOUTH ENTERING COLLEGE WITHOUT FAMILY SUPPORT, "WHO WILL I CALL WHEN I GET AN A?". WE CAN DO BETTER."

- Rick Azzaro, Executive Director, VOCE

Advisory Board (YAB) provides valuable feedback on system reform, more comprehensive consumer feedback forums need to be actualized with more intentionality in elevating experiences in policy recommendations.

Racial Disparity and Disproportionality in the Child Welfare System

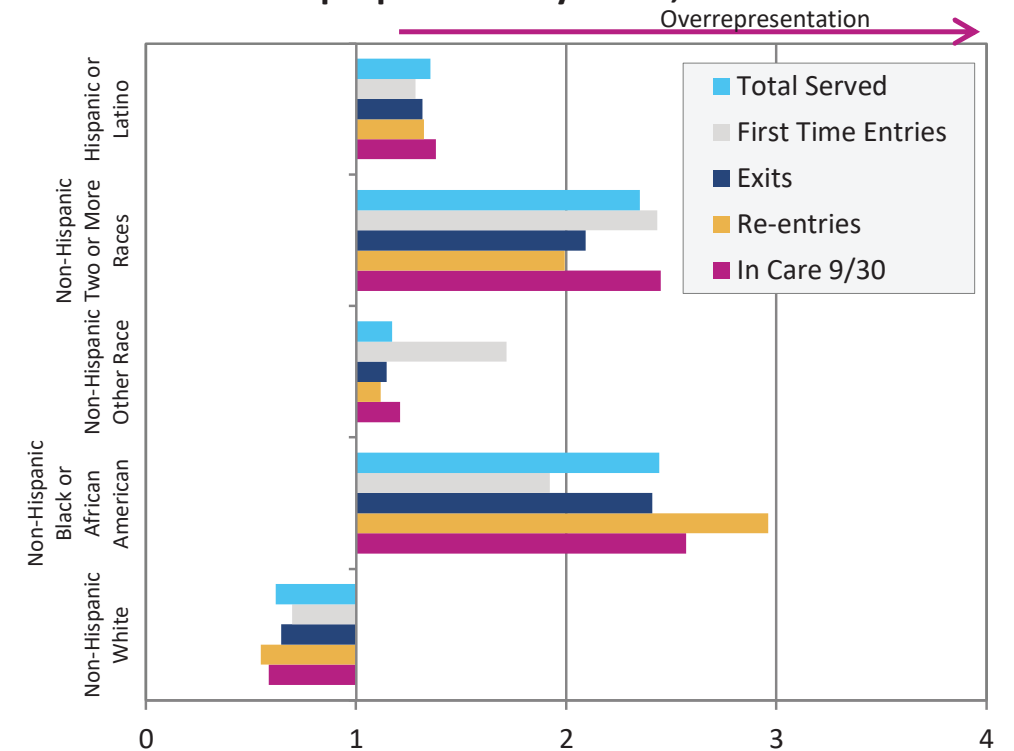
PPC continues to elevate the need for more equity and equality within the child welfare system. Far too often, Black, Hispanic, and children and families of multiple races are over surveilled, investigated, and represented in all aspects of the system. PPC has continued to focus on gathering data disaggregated by race and ethnicity to better understand potential disparities and disproportionality in CPS and GPS investigations

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outcomes for any of the foster care population.

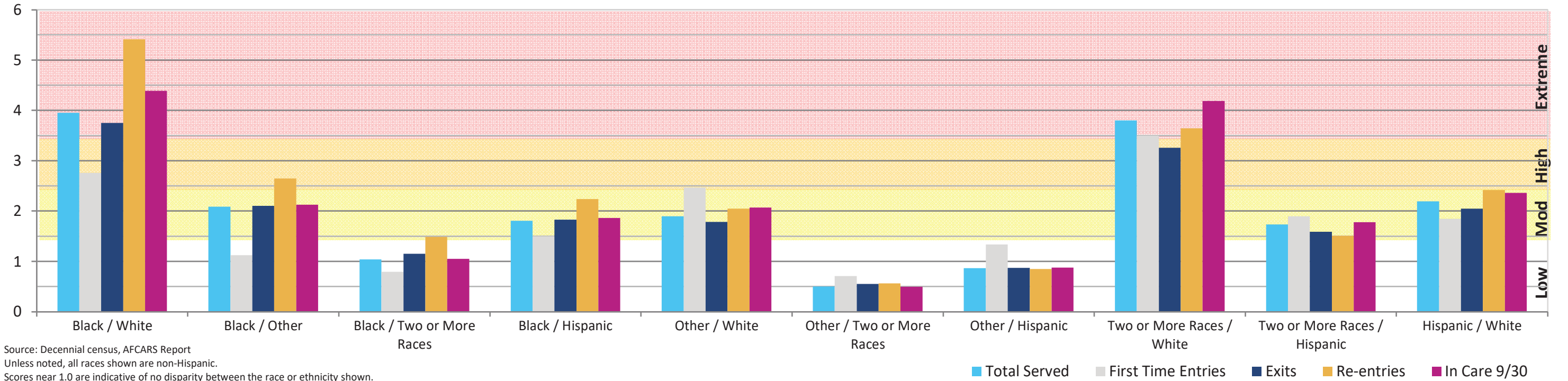
This State of Child Welfare report is the only mechanism, and even in the datasets available, there are limitations due to the amount and type of data that the state collects. Increased data collection specific to outcomes for this population will help to identify policy solutions. However, youth have been stepping forward to share their stories and identify policy solutions even without the data. We need to infuse lived experiences into policy planning at every stage and start allowing consumers to help shape solutions. While the Youth

Racial Disproportionality Index, 2020



Source: Decennial census, AFCARS Report
Scores less than 1.0 are indicative of underrepresentation, scores of 1.0 indicate no disproportionality and scores of 1.1 and greater indicate overrepresentation.

Racial Disparity Indices, 2020



“OUR DATA REFLECTS A PERSISTENT AND ALARMING PATTERN OF OVER-RELIANCE ON FAMILY SEPARATION IN THE LIVES OF BLACK AND OTHER MINORITY FAMILIES. NOT ONLY ARE BLACK CHILDREN SIGNIFICANTLY MORE LIKELY TO BE SEPARATED FROM THEIR FAMILIES, BUT THEY ALSO EXPERIENCE SOME OF OUR WORST OUTCOMES, INCLUDING DELAYED REUNIFICATION, INSTITUTIONALIZATION IN CONGREGATE CARE, AND AGING OUT OF FOSTER CARE. THE INTERGENERATIONAL TRAUMA OF THESE INTERVENTIONS, AND THE EXTENT TO WHICH THEY DRIVE AND PERPETUATE RACIAL HARM, CANNOT BE OVERSTATED. WE MUST ACT URGENTLY AND COLLECTIVELY TO END THIS HARM BY DIVESTING FROM HARMFUL INTERVENTIONS, RE-CENTERING POWER IN COMMUNITIES, AND REIMAGINING SUPPORT FOR MARGINALIZED FAMILIES.”

- Kathleen Creamer, Managing Attorney, Community Legal Services

and foster care outcomes, including first-time entries, exits, and re-entries.

Disproportionality is apparent at the level at which groups of children are present in the child welfare system at higher or lower rates than in the general population. As exposed through the data, children who are Black, Hispanic, or of multiple races had higher than expected rates of CPS referrals, including those that were ultimately substantiated, as well as valid GPS allegations. **When we look at foster care rates, Black children and children of multiple races were represented in foster care at more than 2x the rate in the general population.**

Disparity demonstrates the lack of equality between two racial groups in the child welfare

system. Black children were nearly 4x more likely to exit foster care and more than 5x more likely to re-enter foster care than White children. Black children were also nearly 4.5x more likely to be in foster care than White children. Additionally, children of two or more races were 3.5x more likely to re-enter foster care than White children.

While there has been dialogue surrounding disparity and disproportionality within the child welfare system, there has been minimal movement in addressing outdated policies and practices. The indicators in 2020 are essentially the same as they were in 2019, demonstrating that there has been no shift in practices that impact the outcomes. There needs to be intentionality in acknowledging these issues, a commitment to addressing them, and a solid roadmap to make progress.



Hiring and retaining qualified staff is the first step in effectively serving children and youth in the child welfare system so they can be free of abuse and neglect. Even before the pandemic, the system suffered from high turnover rates as the work was traumatic, complex, and often thankless. Coupled with overwhelming workloads, low pay, and little ability for self-care, it is no surprise that there are high rates of child welfare staff leaving the field.

The pandemic has exacerbated turnover rates. The lack of staff to handle abuse and neglect cases in the child welfare system across the commonwealth is rising to a crisis level. Staff is leaving the workforce for less stressful positions such as retail, which often compensate individuals more than what they would make working in the child welfare field. Additionally, corporations are offering additional incentives, such as assisting with tuition for higher education. Earlier this year, PPC released [Unacknowledged Protectors: Consequences and Costs of Turnover in the Child Welfare Workforce](#) to offer solutions on stabilizing the field.

Policymakers can address workforce issues surrounding recruitment and retention, including:

- Making compensation packages, including salary and benefits packages consistent across counties of similar population, geography, cost of living, and other factors;
- Lowering caseload sizes to be more manageable by finally enacting revisions to the Chapter 3130 regulations, which also would address lowering supervisor-to-caseworker ratios;
- Implementing better onboarding practices such as increased mentorship for new caseworkers and supervisors;

- Improving efforts to diversify the child welfare workforce to represent better the communities they serve and reduce bias;
- Redesigning education and training requirements for caseworkers and examining practices around promotions to leadership positions in the field;
- Promoting legislation allowing for loan forgiveness for child welfare workers;
- Increasing support to expand, recruit for and invest in the Child Welfare Education for Baccalaureates (CWEB) and Child Welfare Education for Leadership (CWEL) programs;
- Investigating how further to maximize federal funding streams for workforce initiatives in Pennsylvania.

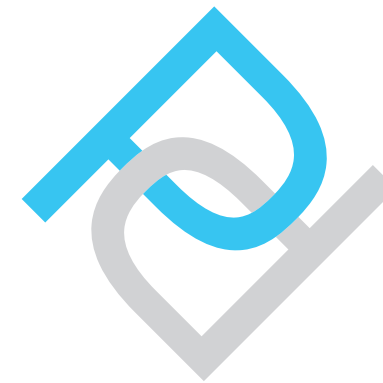
As the COVID-19 pandemic continues, we must work to restore the child welfare workforce, and more broadly, the human services workforce.

“THE ABILITY OF COUNTY CHILD WELFARE AGENCIES TO HIRE AND RETAIN QUALITY STAFF IS ONE OF THE MOST PRESSING ISSUES FACING THE SYSTEM TODAY. WITH SO MANY JOBS UNFILLED AT THIS TIME DUE TO THE PANDEMIC, IT IS EVEN MORE OF A CHALLENGE TO RECRUIT AND RETAIN QUALITY STAFF FOR THE FIELD. WE NEED TO ENSURE STAFF IS NOT OVERWHELMED WITH UNREALISTIC WORKLOADS, ARE FAIRLY COMPENSATED, AND ARE SUPPORTED IN THEIR WORK. FAILING TO MAINTAIN A PROFESSIONAL AND HIGHLY TRAINED WORKFORCE WILL ONLY RESULT IN POOR OUTCOMES FOR FAMILIES AND CHILDREN.”

- Brian Bornman, Executive Director, Pennsylvania Children and Youth Administrators



From reviewing the current data available on our child welfare system, the policy recommendations outlined at the beginning of this report can improve outcomes for children, youth, and families. There is an excellent opportunity to strategize legislative and administrative policy that focuses on better primary prevention, increasing opportunities for placement in a family-based setting, supporting our transition age youth, and adequately supporting the system and workforce. These recommendations will require a deep root cause analysis, including lifting the voices of consumers who have involvement with the system. Further, it is incumbent upon the Department of Human Services to increase data measures and produce them publicly and in real-time. Together, all stakeholders can be a part of advancing system change.



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CLICK [HERE](#) FOR STATEWIDE GEOGRAPHIC AND COUNTY-SPECIFIC DATA TABLES



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