

# The State of Child Welfare



How well are Pennsylvania and county governments doing to assure safe, stable and permanent families for all children? This inaugural review of the performance of our child welfare systems provides a data overview to help examine the facts and gauge our efforts to meet the needs of our most vulnerable children.

Are counties keeping children safe in their homes so fewer children ever have to enter foster care? Are they placing children in the foster care settings that increase the likelihood of a permanent family for every child? Are they taking the necessary steps to assure children who won't be reunified with their birth families are adopted as soon as possible? Are they preventing children from repeat abuse or re-entry into foster care placement? "The State of Child Welfare" will help measure progress over time as well as shine a light on areas that need improvement so that Pennsylvania's commitment to a "forever family for every child" will one day become reality.

The families of more than 120,000 children in Pennsylvania received in-home services last year designed to address the underlying causes of child abuse and neglect such as substance abuse or inadequate housing. No Pennsylvania community is immune — children from urban, rural and suburban communities alike face these hardships.

More than 31,500 children lived in Pennsylvania's foster care system in 2008. Foster care is meant to be a temporary intervention, yet the typical Pennsylvania child spends 16 months in care. One-third of children who stay in foster care this long in our state will live in three or more settings. Further complicating this challenge is the reality that Pennsylvania children are more likely to live in group homes and institutions than children in other states.

Nearly half of all Pennsylvania children and youth are reunited with their birth families within one year of entering foster care but 28 percent re-enter the foster care system within the next 12 months. Another 22 percent of Pennsylvania children left foster care last year to live with a legal guardian or because they were adopted. But for many children, this process took more than two years — a near eternity in the life of a child.

For some children, the reality of a permanent family remains elusive — about one in six children left the system last year without a permanent family because they aged out of the system, ran away or were transferred to another agency such as juvenile justice or mental health.

What do we know about these children and what impact will foster care placement have on their futures?

While foster care is a critical safety net necessary in many cases to protect children from harm, children who spend long periods of time in foster care are more likely to drop out of school, have mental health challenges, become involved in crime, experience unemployment and even homelessness as adults.

## A Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children Initiative

**Our primary goal must be to ensure that every child can live safely with their family. If this cannot be achieved, we must find another permanent family for every child as soon as possible. And if children must be placed in foster care, there is more we can do to achieve better outcomes for these children and their families by changing public policies as recommended in this report.**

## SIGNIFICANCE

## INDICATOR

Child maltreatment is a serious problem that has grave and costly consequences for the child, his or her family and the community at-large.

A child who has experienced abuse and neglect is more likely to have social, emotional and physical health problems and perform poorly in school.

### Child Abuse Reports

Reported incidents of suspected child abuse through the ChildLine and Abuse Registry. Does not include General Protective Service reports which include less severe general neglect reports. (Number and rate per 1,000 children)

STATE	RURAL	RURAL MIX	URBAN MIX	URBAN
25,655	3,673	2,915	6,109	12,958
8.3/1000	10.0/1000	8.2/1000	8.5/1000	7.9/1000

### Child Abuse Substantiations

Founded or indicated reports of child abuse. Does not include the number of children determined to need General Protective Services.

STATE	RURAL	RURAL MIX	URBAN MIX	URBAN
16.4%	19.8%	17.4%	15.5%	15.6%

### Repeated Child Abuse

Children with another substantiated incident of abuse following the first reported incident. (data may be overstated)

STATE	RURAL	RURAL MIX	URBAN MIX	URBAN
1 in 11	1 in 10	1 in 11	1 in 16	1 in 11

In-home services are designed to strengthen families by addressing the root causes of abuse and neglect. The provision of in-home services helps a child to remain safely in his or her home.

### In-home Services

Children whose families received services in their homes to address concerns related to child safety and well-being on any given day. (data may be understated)

STATE	RURAL	RURAL MIX	URBAN MIX	URBAN
31,517	4,337	3,946	5,631	17,603

Foster care is meant to be a temporary intervention to assure the safety and well-being of a child. A child who spends long periods of time in foster care is more likely than other children to drop out of school, have mental health challenges, experience unemployment and be homeless as an adult.

### Children Entering Foster Care

**All entries** into foster care during the year  
**First time** entries during the year

STATE	RURAL	RURAL MIX	URBAN MIX	URBAN
12,307	1,462	1,515	2,403	6,927
67.4%	71.3%	72.7%	75.9%	62.4%

### Children in Foster Care

All Children in Foster Care		STATE	RURAL	RURAL MIX	URBAN MIX	URBAN
<b>Age</b>	0-1	14.5%	13.9%	14.8%	16.4%	13.9%
	2-5	17.6%	17.1%	16.2%	18.4%	17.7%
	6-12	22.5%	23.8%	21.4%	22.6%	22.4%
	13+	45.4%	45.2%	47.6%	42.5%	46.0%
<b>Race and ethnicity</b>	White	48.6%	89.6%	81.6%	70.0%	30.0%
	African American	45.8%	9.7%	18.2%	27.8%	61.7%
	Other	6.3%	1.2%	1.4%	2.2%	9.1%
	Latino	9.7%	5.3%	3.8%	18.7%	8.6%
<b>Placement setting</b>	Pre-Adoptive Home	4.0%	3.3%	2.6%	6.3%	3.5%
	Foster Family Home - Relative	20.9%	12.9%	10.0%	17.1%	25.1%
	Foster Family Home - Non-Relative	42.8%	52.4%	47.7%	45.6%	39.6%
	Group Home	13.3%	14.5%	23.7%	13.3%	11.4%
	Institution	14.0%	9.4%	7.4%	12.1%	16.3%
	Supervised Independent Living	1.8%	0.3%	1.1%	1.2%	2.4%
	Runaway	0.6%	0.3%	0.5%	1.0%	0.5%
Trial Home Visit	2.6%	6.8%	7.0%	3.3%	1.1%	

## SIGNIFICANCE

## INDICATOR

A child's separation from his or her parents or relatives is traumatic for all involved. Minimizing the time a child spends in foster care without compromising safety is key to healthy child development.

### Timely Reunification with Parents or Relatives

Children who entered foster care for the first time who were reunified with their parents or discharged to relatives within the next 12 months.

STATE	RURAL	RURAL MIX	URBAN MIX	URBAN
48.2%	54.8%	62.0%	49.0%	44.2%

A child re-entering foster care following a return to his or her family signals a breakdown in the family and a potential failure on the part of the child welfare system to appropriately address family needs.

### Re-entry into Foster Care

Children who re-entered foster care in fewer than 12 months following reunification with parents or relatives. (data may be overstated)

STATE	RURAL	RURAL MIX	URBAN MIX	URBAN
27.8%	21.8%	22.8%	22.7%	31.7%

A child relies on his or her family for an array of supports from early childhood through adulthood. Without a permanent family, a child fails to have a sense of security and suffers from a lack of belonging.

### Children Leaving Foster Care

Children who exited foster care by discharge reason and how long they were in foster care. Also includes the median length of stay for children remaining in foster care.

Total Children Leaving Foster Care		STATE	RURAL	RURAL MIX	URBAN MIX	URBAN
[number of months until leaving]		14,027	1,550	1,570	2,806	8,101
<b>Reunification</b>		10.7	7.4	5.6	12.1	12.3
[number of months until reunification]		57.8%	64.6%	70.5%	56.4%	54.5%
<b>Adoption</b>		5.9	3.7	3.0	5.4	7.6
[number of months until adoption]		15.7%	13.3%	10.0%	24.1%	14.4%
<b>Guardianship</b>		31.7	33.5	26.9	28.8	33.8
[number of months until guardianship]		5.9%	4.8%	4.7%	3.7%	7.1%
<b>Live with Other Relatives</b>		24.1	17.8	18.6	23.6	24.7
[number of months until living with relatives]		6.1%	6.5%	5.9%	6.0%	6.0%
<b>Emancipation</b>		2.8	1.9	1.9	4.3	2.5
[number of months until emancipation]		6.6%	8.8%	6.2%	6.9%	6.1%
<b>Transfer to Another Agency</b>		37.7	26.8	32.4	38.5	41.2
[number of months until transfer]		4.0%	1.7%	2.4%	2.1%	5.4%
<b>Runaway</b>		4.9	0.9	3.9	5.0	5.6
[number of months until running away]		3.8%	0.2%	0.3%	0.6%	6.3%
<b>Death of Child</b>		7.5	21.2	14.7	17.8	6.9
[number of months until death of a child]		0.1%	0.1%	0.0%	0.2%	0.1%
<b>Total Children Remaining In Foster Care</b>		9.6	8.3	—	6.8	13.5
[number of months children have been in care]		18,380	1,731	1,577	3,367	11,705
		15.7	13	13.3	14.5	16.7

STATE	RURAL	RURAL MIX	URBAN MIX	URBAN
14,027	1,550	1,570	2,806	8,101
10.7	7.4	5.6	12.1	12.3
57.8%	64.6%	70.5%	56.4%	54.5%
5.9	3.7	3.0	5.4	7.6
15.7%	13.3%	10.0%	24.1%	14.4%
31.7	33.5	26.9	28.8	33.8
5.9%	4.8%	4.7%	3.7%	7.1%
24.1	17.8	18.6	23.6	24.7
6.1%	6.5%	5.9%	6.0%	6.0%
2.8	1.9	1.9	4.3	2.5
6.6%	8.8%	6.2%	6.9%	6.1%
37.7	26.8	32.4	38.5	41.2
4.0%	1.7%	2.4%	2.1%	5.4%
4.9	0.9	3.9	5.0	5.6
3.8%	0.2%	0.3%	0.6%	6.3%
7.5	21.2	14.7	17.8	6.9
0.1%	0.1%	0.0%	0.2%	0.1%
9.6	8.3	—	6.8	13.5
18,380	1,731	1,577	3,367	11,705
15.7	13	13.3	14.5	16.7

Every time a child moves the traumatic experience of separation and lack of continuity in his/her life grows. A child who experiences multiple placements while in foster care struggles to build and maintain healthy relationships and is disadvantaged academically due to repeated school changes.

### Foster Care Placement Stability

Children who were in foster care for 12 to 23 months and had three or more placement settings.

STATE	RURAL	RURAL MIX	URBAN MIX	URBAN
33.3%	37.7%	33.0%	35.5%	32.0%

The frequency and quality of visitation between the caseworker and a child is a key component to assuring safety, permanency planning and related service delivery.

### Caseworker Visits

Children who were in foster care and visited on a monthly basis by a county or private agency child welfare worker.

STATE	RURAL	RURAL MIX	URBAN MIX	URBAN
81%	NOT AVAILABLE			

# PUBLIC POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Pennsylvania can do more to safely reduce the number of children in Pennsylvania's foster care system by assuring a legal and permanent family for every child. Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children calls on policymakers to take steps to implement the following recommendations to achieve this goal:

- Require county children and youth agencies to engage in family finding efforts - the diligent search and recruitment of relatives and extended kin including both maternal and paternal family members in order to keep children safely in their family networks.
- Assure that all families involved in the child welfare system have the opportunity to engage in family conferencing — a process that helps families identify resources, identify challenges, and develop action plans to address the underlying reasons the family has become known to the child welfare system or reasons the child is not safe.
- Enact child welfare financing that increases funding for in-home and community-based services and provides financial incentives to improve child and family safety, permanency and well-being outcomes.
- Create a legal means to establish formal and enforceable post-adoption contact agreements between birth and adoptive families in cases deemed appropriate by the courts.
- Allow the courts to reverse the termination of parental rights for a child who remains in foster care without another permanent family for three or more years when deemed appropriate and when will aid in successful reunification with the birth family.
- Assure that children in foster care and their birth parents receive appropriate legal representation.
- Require a minimum of three-month permanency review hearings by the courts for all children in foster care.
- Establish a foster care bill of rights for children.
- Increase the use of reunification, adoption and legal guardianship as permanency goals for children in foster care and create criteria which limit and decrease reliance on the permanency goals of emancipation and long-term foster care (Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement).
- Require county children and youth agencies to collect and annually report information on the race and ethnicity of children and families at the point of referral, investigation and acceptance for child welfare services.

For more information on data reporting periods, citations and sources, visit [www.porchlightproject.org/reports/socw09/data/citations.pdf](http://www.porchlightproject.org/reports/socw09/data/citations.pdf)

For more information on these public policy recommendations please visit: [http://www.porchlightproject.org/pdfs/policy\\_recommendations\\_detailed.pdf](http://www.porchlightproject.org/pdfs/policy_recommendations_detailed.pdf).

This report was made possible in collaboration with Casey Family Programs, whose mission is to provide and improve – and ultimately prevent the need for – foster care. To learn more, visit [www.casey.org](http://www.casey.org). The findings and conclusions presented in this report are those of Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children and do not necessarily reflect the views of Casey Family Programs.

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The Porch Light Project  
Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children  
116 Pine Street, Suite 430 • Harrisburg, PA • 17101-1244  
[www.porchlightproject.org](http://www.porchlightproject.org) • 717.236.5680 • 800.257.2030