

The State of Child Welfare



The high-profile events of the past year understandably have put child abuse at the forefront of public policy discussions. This has led to an unprecedented — and long overdue — look at how we can better protect our children from harm and help those who already have suffered abuse or neglect.

Clearly, keeping children safe is every Pennsylvanian's responsibility. Whenever child abuse or neglect is suspected, Pennsylvania's child welfare system has a critical role to respond appropriately. But we must be careful not to mistakenly think a higher volume of abuse reports means we are doing a better job of protecting children. Protecting children should not be simplified to a numbers game that leads to a false sense of accomplishment.

Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children believes any changes meant to better address child abuse reports should not undermine aspects of the child welfare system that already are working to help kids and families. In particular, the commonwealth needs to preserve its "General Protective Services" (GPS) approach, which allows the child welfare system to provide services to families in need, including a broad range of family preservation and prevention services. GPS is, in effect, a "floor" in the child welfare system that must

remain so we can effectively address situations that pose harm to children but do not rise to the level of child abuse.

In GPS, the primary goal is identifying family issues that might be impacting child safety and well-being and providing services to address those issues. A counterpart of this approach, "Child Protective Services" (CPS), uses a more urgent timeframe for response — similar to that of a law enforcement investigation — and focuses on whether abuse has occurred and who might have perpetrated it.

Simply put, GPS helps identify and address issues before child abuse might occur — so it's important that we preserve it. While collection of detailed, annual GPS data is only in the early stages, available information from a recent quarter of 2012 indicates nearly four times as many families were served through GPS than CPS. This means the child welfare system is providing extensive services to children and families through GPS to address issues that don't rise to the level of our child abuse definition, all in an effort to keep kids safe in their homes.

If done thoughtfully, Pennsylvania can improve its child protection system without eroding critical elements that we know are working to help keep kids safe.

We also must ensure the increased focus on identifying and helping children who suffer from abuse or neglect does not compromise our efforts to improve other facets of the child welfare system, particularly for children living in foster care. Foster care is sometimes necessary to keep children safe, but how children are served when they enter and exit foster care is critical. Pennsylvania must reduce its overreliance on "congregate care" settings (group homes and institutions) and do more to lessen the risk of children re-entering foster care once reunited with their families.

Pennsylvania's family-focused approach to foster care has been reaping beneficial results in recent years:

- *The foster care population continues to decline as almost 1,800 fewer children are in out-of-home placement compared to last year.*
- *The use of family settings for children in foster care — a preferred form of placement — has been on the rise.*

Close examination of the data suggests that Pennsylvania's efforts to safely reduce foster care placement may have plateaued. But our work is far from done.

We are at a critical point in our efforts to improve the child welfare system, and we have the means to continue making progress. State and county leaders are focused on improving child outcomes and strengthening families. Pennsylvania has received permission from the federal government to be more flexible in spending its child welfare funding — enabling greater investments in prevention and strategies that better serve children in their homes so they remain connected to their families and communities.

This newfound funding flexibility, coupled with changes to the child welfare system being considered by state policymakers, can keep Pennsylvania's child welfare achievements moving in the right direction.



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 age 0-17)

STATE		STATUS	RURAL		RURAL MIX		URBAN MIX		URBAN	
2011 REPORT	CURRENT REPORT		2011 REPORT	CURRENT REPORT	2011 REPORT	CURRENT REPORT	2011 REPORT	CURRENT REPORT	2011 REPORT	CURRENT REPORT
24,615	24,378	—	2,198	2,246	3,733	3,700	5,171	5,265	13,513	13,167
9.0	8.7		7.2	10.6	12.5	9.1	7.9	9.4	9.1	8.2

Child Abuse Substantiations

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

STATE		STATUS	RURAL		RURAL MIX		URBAN MIX		URBAN	
2011 REPORT	CURRENT REPORT		2011 REPORT	CURRENT REPORT	2011 REPORT	CURRENT REPORT	2011 REPORT	CURRENT REPORT	2011 REPORT	CURRENT REPORT
14.9%	14.0%	—	18.1%	19.2%	17.0%	16.6%	13.6%	13.8%	14.2%	12.4%

Repeated Child Abuse

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

STATE		STATUS	RURAL		RURAL MIX		URBAN MIX		URBAN	
2011 REPORT	CURRENT REPORT		2011 REPORT	CURRENT REPORT	2011 REPORT	CURRENT REPORT	2011 REPORT	CURRENT REPORT	2011 REPORT	CURRENT REPORT
9.0%	7.9%	—	9.0%	11.6%	8.8%	6.8%	7.1%	6.7%	9.8%	7.9%
1 in 11	1 in 13		1 in 11	1 in 9	1 in 11	1 in 15	1 in 14	1 in 15	1 in 10	1 in 13

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 during the year.

STATE		STATUS	RURAL		RURAL MIX		URBAN MIX		URBAN	
2011 REPORT	CURRENT REPORT		2011 REPORT	CURRENT REPORT	2011 REPORT	CURRENT REPORT	2011 REPORT	CURRENT REPORT	2011 REPORT	CURRENT REPORT
168,821	164,842	NO SIGNIFICANT CHANGE	22,325	21,306	32,494	30,712	30,804	29,162	83,198	83,662

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		STATUS	RURAL		RURAL MIX		URBAN MIX		URBAN	
2011 REPORT	CURRENT REPORT		2011 REPORT	CURRENT REPORT	2011 REPORT	CURRENT REPORT	2011 REPORT	CURRENT REPORT	2011 REPORT	CURRENT REPORT
11,131	10,038	MADE PROGRESS	847	855	1,651	1,538	1,624	1,754	7,009	5,891
68.6%	71.5%		73.1%	75.3%	74.7%	73.1%	74.8%	78.6%	65.1%	68.4%

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 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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For more information on data reporting periods, citations and sources, visit: porchlightproject.org/socw12.shtml



SIGNIFICANCE

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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 in Foster Care

All Children in Foster Care
(Rate per 1,000 children age 0-20)

Age	0-1	2-5	6-12	13-17	18-20
	11.6%	21.6%	22.8%	33.6%	10.4%
	12.0%	21.9%	22.5%	33.2%	10.5%

Race and Ethnicity	White	Black or African-American	Other	Hispanic or Latino
	52.0%	46.3%	3.8%	11.8%
	54.6%	44.8%	3.2%	11.7%

Placement Setting	Family Setting	Congregate Care	Supervised Independent Living
	71.1%	20.1%	2.5%
	72.5%	21.0%	2.0%
	5.8%	10.9%	2.3%
	3.1%	12.7%	1.2%
	23.5%	9.2%	4.1%
	24.2%	8.4%	3.3%
	41.8%	2.5%	4.1%
	45.2%	2.0%	3.3%
	4.1%	10.9%	4.1%
	12.7%	9.2%	4.1%
	2.5%	2.5%	4.1%
	2.0%	2.5%	4.1%
	4.1%	2.5%	4.1%
	3.3%	2.5%	4.1%

STATE	STATUS	RURAL		RURAL MIX		URBAN MIX		URBAN	
		2011 REPORT	CURRENT REPORT	2011 REPORT	CURRENT REPORT	2011 REPORT	CURRENT REPORT	2011 REPORT	CURRENT REPORT
24,229	MADE PROGRESS	1,636	1,690	3,184	2,958	3,561	3,568	15,848	14,227
7.2	MADE PROGRESS	6.2	6.4	6.6	6.1	5.2	5.2	8.2	7.3
	NO SIGNIFICANT CHANGE	10.6%	10.4%	10.6%	12.7%	13.4%	14.8%	11.5%	11.3%
	NO SIGNIFICANT CHANGE	21.1%	22.8%	21.0%	21.3%	21.5%	22.2%	21.8%	21.8%
	NO SIGNIFICANT CHANGE	25.4%	23.2%	23.6%	21.7%	20.8%	21.3%	22.9%	22.8%
	NO SIGNIFICANT CHANGE	36.4%	37.0%	37.7%	37.1%	35.2%	32.8%	32.0%	32.1%
	NO SIGNIFICANT CHANGE	6.5%	6.5%	7.1%	7.3%	9.0%	8.9%	11.8%	12.0%
	LOST GROUND	92.8%	92.4%	82.1%	82.2%	76.0%	78.3%	36.4%	38.4%
	LOST GROUND	7.4%	6.8%	18.5%	18.6%	27.0%	25.3%	60.2%	59.6%
	LOST GROUND	1.3%	2.0%	0.8%	0.9%	0.9%	1.1%	5.3%	4.4%
	LOST GROUND	3.1%	3.3%	7.2%	5.8%	18.5%	18.5%	12.1%	12.2%
	LOST GROUND	74.8%	74.6%	66.4%	69.6%	71.3%	74.3%	71.5%	72.4%
	LOST GROUND	5.2%	2.4%	6.7%	2.6%	5.4%	2.6%	5.7%	3.3%
	LOST GROUND	20.8%	21.5%	13.9%	15.4%	22.2%	23.7%	26.0%	26.5%
	LOST GROUND	48.7%	50.7%	45.9%	51.6%	43.7%	48.1%	39.8%	42.6%
	LOST GROUND	20.8%	21.2%	20.7%	22.0%	20.7%	19.4%	19.8%	21.2%
	LOST GROUND	14.4%	16.2%	14.3%	15.8%	12.2%	12.1%	9.5%	11.8%
	LOST GROUND	6.4%	5.0%	6.4%	6.2%	8.5%	7.3%	10.3%	9.5%
	LOST GROUND	0.8%	0.7%	0.9%	0.5%	1.4%	1.0%	3.2%	2.7%
	LOST GROUND	0.2%	0.2%	1.3%	0.9%	1.3%	1.0%	2.9%	1.4%
	LOST GROUND	3.5%	3.3%	10.7%	7.0%	5.3%	4.3%	2.5%	2.2%

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	STATUS	RURAL		RURAL MIX		URBAN MIX		URBAN	
2011 REPORT	CURRENT REPORT	2011 REPORT	CURRENT REPORT	2011 REPORT	CURRENT REPORT	2011 REPORT	CURRENT REPORT	2011 REPORT	CURRENT REPORT
53.8%	52.4%	59.0%	62.6%	64.5%	61.9%	53.8%	47.9%	50.7%	49.6%

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	STATUS	RURAL		RURAL MIX		URBAN MIX		URBAN	
2011 REPORT	CURRENT REPORT	2011 REPORT	CURRENT REPORT	2011 REPORT	CURRENT REPORT	2011 REPORT	CURRENT REPORT	2011 REPORT	CURRENT REPORT
26.9%	29.0%	22.4%	20.6%	19.3%	21.7%	20.3%	20.6%	31.6%	34.1%



SIGNIFICANCE

INDICATOR

Note: Values in the 2011 Report column were updated from those included in the 2011 — The State of Child Welfare Report.

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.

STATE		STATUS	RURAL		RURAL MIX		URBAN MIX		URBAN			
2011 REPORT	CURRENT REPORT		2011 REPORT	CURRENT REPORT	2011 REPORT	CURRENT REPORT	2011 REPORT	CURRENT REPORT	2011 REPORT	CURRENT REPORT		
Total Children Leaving Foster Care		LOST GROUND	14,002	10,578	899	874	1,984	1,502	1,958	1,524	9,161	6,678
Percent of Children Leaving Foster Care			57.8%	47.1%	55.0%	51.7%	62.3%	50.8%	55.0%	42.7%	57.8%	46.9%
[number of months until leaving]			11.2	11.3	8.6	9.4	7.6	7.0	12.4	11.7	13.1	13.7
Exit to Permanent Arrangements		NO SIGNIFICANT CHANGE	88.7%	87.4%	91.3%	91.2%	92.4%	90.9%	85.6%	86.2%	88.3%	86.4%
Reunification			61.7%	59.3%	64.8%	64.1%	66.6%	63.1%	51.1%	53.7%	62.6%	59.0%
[number of months until reunification]			6.5	5.8	3.7	3.9	3.5	3.3	6.3	4.4	7.4	7.7
Adoption			16.3%	17.9%	14.5%	16.2%	14.7%	14.2%	23.4%	23.0%	15.2%	17.9%
[number of months until adoption]			30.1	28.6	37.0	32.1	33.7	33.7	25.2	25.4	32.0	31.4
Guardianship			6.1%	5.6%	5.9%	6.8%	5.2%	5.5%	5.0%	4.1%	6.5%	5.8%
[number of months until guardianship]			22.3	21.4	20.3	19.5	21.1	20.8	21.4	25.6	27.0	31.0
Live with Other Relatives		4.7%	4.6%	6.1%	4.1%	5.8%	8.2%	6.1%	5.4%	4.0%	3.7%	
[number of months until living with relatives]		2.9	3.1	8.4	8.3	8.9	4.9	4.4	8.7	5.8	4.6	
Exit to Non-permanent Arrangements		LOST GROUND	11.2%	12.5%	8.7%	8.7%	7.5%	8.7%	14.2%	13.8%	11.6%	13.5%
Emancipation			6.3%	7.8%	7.0%	7.3%	5.5%	7.1%	7.3%	10.1%	6.1%	7.5%
[number of months until emancipation]			34.3	38.5	27.9	29.4	37.8	42.5	34.2	41.0	40.7	40.0
Transfer to Another Agency			4.2%	1.9%	1.7%	1.4%	1.7%	1.2%	6.2%	3.3%	4.6%	1.8%
[number of months until transfer]			5.4	7.1	2.6	9.6	4.2	6.3	10.2	9.5	13.9	21.5
Runaway		0.7%	2.7%	0.0%	0.0%	0.3%	0.4%	0.7%	0.3%	0.9%	4.1%	
[number of months until running away]		13.1	5.0	0.0	0.0	27.1	28.6	25.9	30.7	11.9	46.5	
Death of Child		---	0.1%	0.1%	0.0%	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%
[number of months until death of a child]			12.7	4.7	0.0	19.9	79.1	7.0	76.7	1.7	9.2	14.4
Total Children Remaining in Foster Care		LOST GROUND	13,146	13,611	896	912	1,530	1,650	1,896	2,203	8,824	8,846
[number of months children have been in care]			14.0	12.8	14.5	12.5	15.1	11.8	13.8	11.5	15.6	15.8

Every time a child moves, the trauma caused by separation and lack of continuity grows. A child who faces multiple placements struggles to build and maintain healthy relationships and faces academic challenges due to 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		STATUS	RURAL		RURAL MIX		URBAN MIX		URBAN	
2011 REPORT	CURRENT REPORT		2011 REPORT	CURRENT REPORT	2011 REPORT	CURRENT REPORT	2011 REPORT	CURRENT REPORT	2011 REPORT	CURRENT REPORT
33.8%	35.2%	LOST GROUND	32.3%	33.5%	37.0%	36.0%	34.9%	37.8%	33.1%	34.7%

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		STATUS	RURAL		RURAL MIX		URBAN MIX		URBA	
2011 REPORT	CURRENT REPORT		2011 REPORT	CURRENT REPORT	2011 REPORT	CURRENT REPORT	2011 REPORT	CURRENT REPORT	2011 REPORT	CURRENT REPORT
92%	96%	MADE PROGRESS	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---

