

# Child Welfare Outcomes 2021: Report to Congress



ADMINISTRATION FOR  
**CHILDREN & FAMILIES**  
Administration on Children, Youth and Families

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## Executive Summary

The Child Welfare Outcomes Report is created by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to meet requirements of section 203(a) of the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 (ASFA).<sup>1</sup> ASFA created section 479A of the Social Security Act (the Act), which requires HHS to issue an annual report that assesses state performance in operating child protection and child welfare programs under Titles IV-B and IV-E of the Act.<sup>2</sup> The Child Welfare Outcomes series of Reports to Congress began with the 1998 Report and continues to be produced annually.

The Child Welfare Outcomes Reports provide information on national performance as well as the performance of individual states in seven outcome categories.<sup>3</sup> Prior to the first Report, the Children’s Bureau (CB) within HHS’s Administration for Children and Families (ACF) identified these outcomes in close consultation with state and local child welfare agency administrators, child advocacy organizations, child welfare researchers, state legislators, and other experts in the child welfare field. Beginning with the 2020 Report, Outcome 1 (reduce recurrence of child abuse and/or neglect) was modified to report recurrence of maltreatment within 12 months of a prior incident. The original outcome measure reported recurrence of maltreatment within a 6-month period. This adjustment was made to align with the current measure used in the Child and Family Services Reviews. The following are the national outcomes established by HHS through the consultation process mentioned above:

- **Outcome 1:** Reduce recurrence of child abuse and/or neglect
- **Outcome 2:** Reduce the incidence of child abuse and/or neglect in foster care
- **Outcome 3:** Increase permanency for children in foster care
- **Outcome 4:** Reduce time in foster care to reunification without increasing reentry
- **Outcome 5:** Reduce time in foster care to adoption
- **Outcome 6:** Increase placement stability
- **Outcome 7:** Reduce placements of young children in group homes or institutions

These outcomes reflect the importance of performance objectives in child welfare practice in and around the time of ASFA’s passage. In recent years, CB, Congress, and the child welfare field

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<sup>1</sup> See appendix A for the current specifications of section 479A of the Social Security Act, as created by ASFA and amended by Pub. L. 109–288, Pub. L. 112–34, Pub. L. 113–183, and Pub. L. 115–123.

<sup>2</sup> Title IV-E has been amended on several occasions. Its funds support foster care; adoption assistance; kinship guardianship assistance; and, at the option of a state, kinship navigator programs and/or time-limited prevention services for candidates of foster care, pregnant or parenting foster youth, and the parents or kin caregivers of those children and youth. Title IV-B funds support preventative and protective services for children. For more information on policies and guidance provided to states, see the [Policy/Program Issuances page](#) on the CB website.

<sup>3</sup> For the purposes of this Report, the designation of “state” includes the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. Therefore, the Report provides information on a total of 52 states, depending on the number of states that submitted adequate data for a particular measure. Tribal Title IV-E agencies are not included in this Report. It is important to note, however, that states report information on all children for whom the state has responsibility for placement, care, and supervision, and in some cases these children may be tribal children. Currently, the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System does not have an indicator to distinguish which states are reporting tribal information or an identifier for tribal children.

have begun to recognize and emphasize the critical importance of a full continuum of prevention services and approaches as essential to child welfare practice.

In addition to detailing state performance in the current outcome categories, this Report also includes findings of analyses conducted across states and over time. Data for most of the measures in this Report come from two national child welfare reporting systems—the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS) and the 1993 (or original) Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS).

In 2023, states have begun collecting and reporting updated AFCARS 2020 data. In addition to adding a number of new data elements, AFCARS 2020 also updates element definitions and descriptions to reflect more socially acceptable terminology.<sup>4</sup> As states transition to the new collection system and data begin to stabilize, CB may consider convening a group of child welfare experts to revisit the design and content of this Report. This potential revision would not only reflect newer data, but also reflect the state of the field, indicate advances in data collection and processing, and inform current principles around community research.

## Contextual Factors

The Child Welfare Outcomes Report presents data on child welfare-related contextual factors relevant to understanding and interpreting state performance on the measures. The following is a summary of the 2021 data for these contextual factors.<sup>5</sup>

### *Foster care information overview*

- Nationally, there were approximately 391,000 children in foster care on the last day of federal fiscal 2021. During that year, an estimated 207,000 children entered foster care, and approximately 215,000 children exited foster care.<sup>6</sup> Among the states, the foster care entry rate ranged from 0.8 children per 1,000 in a state's child population to 13.1 children per 1,000 in a state's population.<sup>7</sup>
- Each year since 2019, the number of children in foster care on the last day of the year decreased from the prior year. From 2019 to 2020, there was an approximately 4.5-percent decrease, and from 2020 to 2021, there was a 3.9-percent decrease.<sup>8</sup>
- Of the children who entered foster care in 2021, the majority had a reason for removal that included neglect (either alone—24.9 percent—or in combination with another reason other than physical or sexual abuse—29.8 percent). Physical or sexual abuse (alone)

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<sup>4</sup> For more information on the AFCARS 2020 rule, see [AFCARS Technical Bulletin #20: Data Elements for Out-of-Home Care and Adoption and Guardianship Assistance Data Files](#).

<sup>5</sup> Unless otherwise specified, the data used in this Report are for federal fiscal years (October 1–September 30). Additionally, unless otherwise specified, the data used in this Report are for federal fiscal year 2021.

<sup>6</sup> The foster care data for children in care on the last day of the year, entries, and exits were obtained from [Trends in Foster Care and Adoption: FY 2012–2021](#). These data may differ from data presented in later sections of this Report because of differences in data-quality thresholds.

<sup>7</sup> The foster care entry rate was calculated by dividing the total number of children entering foster care in a state by the total child population in that state and multiplying the resulting number by 1,000.

<sup>8</sup> For more information, see [Trends in Foster Care and Adoption: FY 2012–2021](#). The data used in that report were current as of June 28, 2022.

accounted for 15.9 percent of the removals, and drug abuse (alone) accounted for 9.2 percent. Removal reasons involving child behavior problems and a caretaker’s inability to cope accounted for approximately 4.0 percent each.

### *Child victims’ information overview*

- During 2021, approximately 588,000 children were confirmed to be victims of maltreatment.<sup>9</sup><sup>10</sup> The overall national child victim rate was 8.1 child victims per 1,000 children in the population.<sup>11</sup> State child victim rates varied dramatically, ranging from 1.6 child victims per 1,000 children to 17.0 child victims per 1,000 children.<sup>12</sup>

### **State Performance on Outcome Measures**

This Report includes a synopsis of key findings on the 12 measures established to assess performance on the seven national outcomes previously identified. These measures are described in detail in appendix B. For all measures, national performance was determined by the medians across states that meet data-quality thresholds. Table 1, at the end of the Executive Summary, displays these measures and their medians for 2017–2021.<sup>13</sup> Change in state performance over time was assessed by calculating a percentage change in performance on the measures.<sup>14</sup> Consistent with HHS’s historical approach to the analyses in these Reports, a percentage change of 5.0 or greater in either direction (i.e., positive or negative) was used as a general indicator that meaningful change in performance on the measures occurred. Therefore, for the purposes of the analyses presented in this Report, if the percentage change in performance from 2017 to 2021 was less than 5.0 percent in either direction, the determination was that there was no change in performance. Additionally, please note that lower values in this Report indicate better performance for the following measures: 1.1 (recurrence of maltreatment), 2.1

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<sup>9</sup> This Report uses a unique count for child victims, which tallies a child only once regardless of the number of times the child was found to be a victim during the reporting year.

<sup>10</sup> For the purposes of this Report, a “victim of child maltreatment” is defined as a child for whom an incident of abuse or neglect has been substantiated or indicated by an investigation or assessment. This includes a child who died as a result of child abuse or neglect. Prior to 2015, children with dispositions of “alternative response victim” were also included as victims. It is important to note that the Child Welfare Outcomes Reports use the total reported number of child victims as opposed to a national estimate of child victims, which often is reported in the Child Maltreatment reports. The total number of child victims in this Report were rounded to the nearest 1,000.

<sup>11</sup> The national child victim rate was calculated by dividing the total number of child victims (588,229) by the child population for all states that submitted NCANDS data (72,498,235) and multiplying the resulting number by 1,000. This calculation includes children under the age of 18.

<sup>12</sup> A state’s rate of child victims is defined as the number of child victims reported to NCANDS per 1,000 children in the state’s population.

<sup>13</sup> In this Report, two separate national medians were computed for each measure. In the 2021 Range of State Performance tables, national medians were calculated using data from all states that met the relevant data-quality thresholds in 2021 only. However, in the Median State Performance and Change in Performance Over Time tables, national medians were calculated using only data from the states that met the relevant data-quality thresholds for all the relevant fiscal years (2017–2021). This was done to provide a more accurate calculation of change over time. Unless stated otherwise, comparisons of medians between years used the latter calculation. Therefore, the number of states (N) included in each of these calculations may vary, and these two medians may vary slightly.

<sup>14</sup> Percentage change was calculated by subtracting the “old” data from the “new” data, dividing that result by the old data, and multiplying it by 100. For example, the national median on measure 3.1 was 90.3 percent in 2017 and 89.6 percent in 2021, and so the resulting decrease is 0.8 percent  $\{[(89.6-90.3)/90.3] \times 100 = -0.8\}$ .

(maltreatment in foster care), 3.4 (exits to emancipation for children who entered care before age 12), 4.2 (reentry into foster care), and 7.1 (placement of young children in group homes and institutions). Consequently, when referring to changes in performance in these measures over time, negative values indicate a measurement decrease but an improvement in performance; conversely, positive values indicate a measurement increase but a decline in performance. For all remaining measures, positive values indicate improvements in performance, and negative values indicate declines in performance. Table 2, at the end of the Executive Summary, is a summary snapshot to assist the reader in easily and quickly identifying where changes in performance for each state improved (darker cell shade), declined (lighter cell shade), or experienced no change (no cell shading) for each measure.

### ***Outcome 1: Reduce recurrence of child abuse and/or neglect***

- In 2020, state performance with regard to the percentage of child victims experiencing a recurrence of child maltreatment within a 12-month period (measure 1.1) was 7.5 percent.
- States with higher child victim rates tended to have higher maltreatment recurrence rates within a 12-month period (Pearson's  $r=0.74$ ).<sup>15</sup> Similarly, the percentage of children who were victims of neglect was moderately correlated with the percentage of maltreatment recurrence within a 12-month period (Pearson's  $r=0.52$ ).
- National performance over time on the recurrence of child maltreatment improved between 2017 (median=8.2 percent) and 2020 (median=7.4 percent), with approximately half of states (49 percent) demonstrating an improvement in performance.

### ***Outcome 2: Reduce the incidence of child abuse and/or neglect in foster care***

- In 2021, the national median with regard to the maltreatment of children in foster care (measure 2.1) was 0.31 percent, and state medians ranged from 0.00 percent to 1.42 percent of children in care.<sup>16</sup>
- The national median regarding the percentage of children who experienced maltreatment while in foster care increased from 0.27 percent in 2017 to 0.30 percent in 2021, with 48 percent of states reporting a decline in performance.

### ***Outcome 3: Increase permanency for children in foster care***

- In 2021, states were mostly successful in achieving permanency (i.e., discharge to reunification, adoption, or legal guardianship) for all children exiting foster care (measure 3.1), with a national median of 89.6 percent.

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<sup>15</sup> The strength of relationships in the Child Welfare Outcomes Reports is assessed using correlation coefficients, specifically Pearson's  $r$ , which can range in value from  $-1$  to  $+1$ .

<sup>16</sup> Due to the relatively few cases of child maltreatment in foster care, performance on this measure is presented using two decimal places to improve comparability.

- States were less successful in achieving permanent homes for children exiting foster care who had a diagnosed disability (measure 3.2, median=81.5 percent) and for children who had entered care when they were older than age 12 (measure 3.3, median=63.0 percent).<sup>17</sup>
- The median percentage of children who emancipated from foster care and who also were age 12 or younger when they entered care (measure 3.4) declined 8.4 percent since 2017 (from 16.6 percent in 2017 to 15.2 percent in 2021), with slightly more than half (52 percent) of states demonstrating improved performance on this measure.
- From 2017 to 2021, state performance declined for placing American Indian or Alaska Native (0.6 percent), Hispanic or Latino (1.5 percent), Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander (7.7), White (0.2 percent), and children of two or more races (2.6 percent) into permanent homes (measure 3.5). There was a slight increase in the median percentage of Asian children (from 87.3 percent to 91.7 percent) and for Black or African American children (from 86.5 percent to 87.1 percent) exiting care to permanent placements.

***Outcome 4: Reduce time in foster care to reunification without increasing reentry***

- In 32 states (63 percent), at least half of reunifications occurred within 12 months from the time of entry into foster care (measure 4.1). The national median for this outcome was 56.1 percent in 2021 and 64.5 percent in 2017, which represents a median decline of 13.0 percent since 2017.
- Of all children who entered foster care during 2021, a median of 7.2 percent had reentered foster care within 12 months of a prior foster care episode (measure 4.2). The national median had a 1.4-percent increase from 2017 to 2021, with 26 states showing increases during this period.

***Outcome 5: Reduce time in foster care to adoption***

- In 2021, the national median for children discharged to a finalized adoption within 12 months of the latest removal (measure 5.1a) was 2.0 percent, and more than half of states saw a decrease between 2017 and 2021.
- For adoptions occurring at least 12 months but less than 24 months from entry into foster care (measure 5.1b), national performance had a meaningful decline of 23.5 percent between 2017 and 2021, with almost three-fourths (74 percent) of states demonstrating a decline.

***Outcome 6: Increase placement stability***

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<sup>17</sup> For the purpose of AFCARS, a diagnosed disability includes intellectual disability, visual or hearing impairment, physical disability, emotional disturbance, or other medically diagnosed conditions requiring special care. For more information on the definitions and requirements for a disability, see [AFCARS Technical Bulletin #2: Disability Information](#), which was last revised February 2012. Note that the term “mental retardation” and not “intellectual disability” is the term in AFCARS 1993 legislative requirements that are in effect for the data collection reporting years used here. This and other socially unacceptable terms will be replaced in the future in order to comply with the updated AFCARS legislation (AFCARS 2020), and therefore we have removed the term from this report preemptively.

- In 2021, the majority of children in foster care for less than 12 months remained in a stable placement (i.e., having two or fewer placement settings in a single foster care episode) (measure 6.1a), with a national median of 83.8 percent.
- States were less successful in achieving placement stability the longer a child was in foster care. The median across states for children who were in care between 12 and 24 months (measure 6.1b) was 66.1 percent, and for children in care at least 24 months (measure 6.1c), it was 41.1 percent.
- Between 2017 and 2021, 41 states showed no change in performance in placement stability for children in care for less than 12 months. However, the national median increased slightly for children in care between 12 and 24 months (0.8 percent) and for children in care at least 24 months (0.5 percent)—with 43 percent and more than half (54 percent) of states, respectively, demonstrating an improvement in performance in these measures.

### *Outcome 7: Reduce placements of young children in group homes or institutions*

- For half of states (50 percent), 2.2 percent or less of children entering foster care under the age of 12 were placed in group homes or institutions in 2021 (measure 7.1).
- Overall, states continued to demonstrate improvement on this measure. The median decreased from 3.0 percent in 2017 to 2.2 percent in 2021 (a 26.7-percent decline), and 32 states (64 percent) demonstrated an improvement in performance.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations for Further Investigation**

In reviewing the key findings in all seven outcome areas, it is clear there are both areas of strength and areas in need of improvement with regard to achieving positive outcomes for children who come into contact with state child welfare systems. While AFCARS and NCANDS data provide some limited initial insight into many of these issues, all of these areas deserve additional investigation in order for the child welfare field to gain further understanding and move forward. In addition to the collaborative activities that ACF and state child welfare agencies undertake as part of the ongoing Child and Family Services Reviews, the following are examples of specific areas that may benefit from additional state monitoring and research actions

- The number of children in foster care on the last day of the year decreased during the last 3 years (2019, 2020, and 2021). As states use optional prevention funding and begin implementing prevention efforts, it will be important to monitor these numbers in future Reports to see if this will become a sustained decrease.<sup>18</sup>
- From 2017 to 2021, there was a decline in the national performance regarding maltreatment in foster care, with 48 percent of states showing decreased performance during that time. Although the maltreatment in foster care measure is very sensitive to slight changes because of the small number of children who are maltreated in care, it is important to monitor if this finding becomes a continuing trend. To address this,

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<sup>18</sup> The Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) (Pub. L. 115–123), which was enacted in 2018 and amended Titles IV-B and IV-E of the Act, provides optional Title IV-E prevention funding for states. For more information on FFPSA, see the [What’s New in Laws & Policies page](#) on the CB website. See the [Title IV-E Prevention Program page](#) on the CB website for more information about that program.



agencies should continue to monitor their practices and periodically review and update current trainings, enhance screening for foster parents, and ensure staff have the resources and capabilities needed to adequately care for children in their caseloads who are in out-of-home care.

- While the national median in achieving permanency for children with a diagnosed disability remained high, state performance on finding permanent homes for older children continues to be a challenge. Agencies should review their data to consider what additional barriers may prevent older youth from achieving permanency.
- Despite reunifications constituting more than half of all exits from foster care, the national performance on the percentage of children exiting to reunification who reunified within 12 months of entry into foster care has declined over the last 5 years, with over seven times as many states demonstrating a decline in performance than showing an improvement. When reunification is not in the best interest of the child, adoption often is pursued. However, data indicate that finalizing adoption in less than 2 years from entry is unlikely in most states. Agencies should continue to monitor these outcomes and to identify and review specific barriers to achieving timely reunifications and adoptions.
- From 2017 to 2021, the median performance regarding children in foster care for less than 12 months who were in a stable placement remained at over 80 percent across all 5 years. Consistent with previous Reports, states were less successful in achieving placement stability the longer a child was in foster care. The median performance across states for children in care between 12 and 24 months and for at least 24 months did not have a meaningful change in performance during the 5-year period. States should want to closely examine these populations of children in care to identify possible barriers to improved performance specific to these populations.
- Although the national median of young children placed in group homes or institutions in 2021 has improved since 2017, it is important to note that in 2021, 16 states declined in performance (i.e., more children were placed in congregate care). Therefore, it would be useful to determine what strategies may assist states that continue to struggle in this area.
- Table 2 displays the changes in performance for each state between 2017 and 2021 across the measures and select subcategories of measures. Seven states showed improvement in at least half (seven or more) of the measures, with states ranging from improving on one to seven measures. While many states are making progress on these permanency and safety outcomes, it is important for states to continue to monitor ongoing practice efforts and identify which strategies may be associated with improved outcomes. Then, they may be able to determine which of those strategies can be replicated to stem or reverse declining performance in any remaining outcomes.

Data and analyses presented throughout this Report offer additional details regarding the foster care population and overall national performance on the seven primary outcomes. Outcomes-based visuals in the Report display both single-year performance and state performance over time from 2017 to 2021.

Although the COVID-19 health crisis began in early 2020, this Report does not evaluate the specific circumstances that could account for changes in performance at the state level, including any potential impact the COVID-19 pandemic may have had on child welfare operating systems. However, four states did provide comments that cited the COVID-19 pandemic as a contributing

factor in performance (see chapter VI). Of the nine states that opted to submit data commentaries, three states mentioned the pandemic as a contributing factor, but not the sole factor, affecting their performance in certain areas. One state reported that the data collection deficiency the state experienced at the onset of the pandemic has been corrected, and results are reflected in the state's 2021 data submission. The following are highlights from the states' comments:

- Connecticut reported that the Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System did not have the capability at the onset of the pandemic to capture if a child was in their placement setting at the time of a caseworker visit. This has since been corrected and is reflected in the state's 2021 performance for caseworker visits occurring in the child's placement.
- Delaware continued to report a decrease in the number of children in foster care and the recurrence of maltreatment within 12 months, which has consistently been above the national standard. Despite the impact of the pandemic, the state attributes its performance to the Safety Organized Practice approach, family search and engagement strengths-based strategies, and its expansion of differential response for low-risk cases.
- New Jersey reported that the state's child welfare system has been significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The number of maltreatment reports received in 2020 represents a 13-percent decrease from 2019 reports, and the 2021 reports received represent an 8-percent decrease from reports received in 2020. The state reported that the decrease has been attributed to school closures, since school staff are the largest source of maltreatment reports.
- Wisconsin reported that Youth Justice referrals continue to remain below the 2019 levels, with the 2021 numbers showing a 21-percent decrease. Although this decrease can be partially attributed to the impact of the pandemic, the state's Bureau of Youth Services has been supporting Youth Justice professionals since 2016 with trainings and coaching for best practices. In addition, the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families continues to refine the Youth Justice infrastructure to support alignment with best practices.

Although only a few states mentioned challenges faced during the COVID-19 pandemic in their CWO Report comments, *Child Maltreatment 2021* includes a more robust commentary section in which states report challenges they faced pertaining to the NCANDS data collection.<sup>19</sup> This Report only uses NCANDS data for safety measures 1 and 2; therefore, NCANDS data commentaries in *Child Maltreatment 2021* regarding COVID-19 and other issues should not be generalized to the collection of AFCARS data if they are not mentioned specifically by the state providing the comment.

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<sup>19</sup> For more information, see Appendix D: State Commentary of [Child Maltreatment 2021](#).

**Table 1. Median State Performance on Outcome Measures, 2017–2021**

<b>Outcome measures</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>Change in median, 2017–2021</b>
Measure 1.1: Of all children who were victims of substantiated or indicated child abuse and/or neglect during a 12-month period, what percentage had another substantiated or indicated report within 12 months of the initial victimization? (N=49) <sup>c</sup>	8.2%	7.4%	7.5%	7.4%	-- <sup>a</sup>	-9.8% <sup>b</sup>
Measure 2.1: Of all children who were in foster care during the year, what percentage were the subject of substantiated or indicated maltreatment by a foster parent or facility staff? (N=48) <sup>c</sup>	0.27%	0.24%	0.27%	0.29%	0.30%	11.11%
Measure 3.1: Of all children who exited foster care during the year, what percentage left to either reunification, adoption, or legal guardianship (i.e., were discharged to a permanent home)? (N=50)	90.3%	90.5%	90.5%	90.3%	89.6%	-0.8%
Measure 3.2: Of all children who exited foster care during the year and were identified as having a diagnosed disability, what percentage left to either reunification, adoption, or legal guardianship (i.e., were discharged to a permanent home)? (N=43)	81.2%	82.4%	83.3%	83.8%	81.9%	0.9%
Measure 3.3: Of all children who exited foster care during the year and were older than age 12 at the time of their most recent entry into care, what percentage left either to reunification, adoption, or legal guardianship (i.e., were discharged to a permanent home)? (N=50)	64.5%	62.9%	64.3%	62.7%	63.0%	-2.3%
Measure 3.4: Of all children exiting foster care during the year to emancipation, what percentage were age 12 or younger at the time of entry into care? (N=50) <sup>c</sup>	16.6%	15.5%	15.0%	14.6%	15.2%	-8.4%
Measure 4.1: Of all children reunified with their parents or caretakers at the time of discharge from foster care during the year, what percentage were reunified in less than 12 months from the time of entry into foster care? (N=50)	64.5%	64.7%	63.1%	61.1%	56.1%	-13.0%
Measure 4.2: Of all children who entered foster care during the year, what percentage reentered care within 12 months of a prior foster care episode? (N=50) <sup>c</sup>	7.1%	6.8%	7.3%	7.2%	7.2%	1.4%
Measure 5.1a: Of all children discharged from foster care during the year to a finalized adoption, what percentage exited care in less than 12 months from the date of the latest removal from home? (N=50)	3.5%	2.7%	3.1%	2.5%	2.0%	-42.9%
Measure 5.1b: Of all children discharged from care during the year to a finalized adoption, what percentage exited care at least 12 months but less than 24 months from the date of the latest removal from home? (N=50)	29.4%	29.0%	27.1%	26.3%	22.5%	-23.5%
Measure 6.1a: Of all children served in foster care during the year who were in care for less than 12 months, what percentage had no more than two placement settings? (N=50)	84.2%	83.5%	83.0%	84.6%	84.2%	0.0%

Measure 6.1b: Of all children served in foster care during the year who were in care for at least 12 months but less than 24 months, what percentage had no more than two placement settings? (N=50)	65.6%	65.5%	64.9%	65.8%	66.1%	0.8%
Measure 6.1c: Of all children served in foster care during the year who were in care for at least 24 months, what percentage had no more than two placement settings? (N=50)	41.0%	41.0%	41.0%	40.2%	41.2%	0.5%
Measure 7.1: Of all children who entered foster care during the year and were age 12 or younger at the time of their most recent placement, what percentage were placed in a group home or an institution? (N=50) <sup>c</sup>	3.0%	3.1%	2.9%	2.5%	2.2%	-26.7%

<sup>a</sup> At the time of this analysis, data were not available to calculate the recurrence of maltreatment for children who were victims of maltreatment in 2021.

<sup>b</sup> For measure 1.1, the percentage change is 2017–2020 rather than 2017–2021.

<sup>c</sup> For these measures, a lower number indicates better performance.

Notes.

— A change of +/-5.0 percent is considered a change in performance. Values shaded in dark magenta indicate an improvement in performance, values shaded in light magenta indicate a decline in performance, and values with no shading indicate no change in performance.

— Data for this table include all states that met the relevant data-quality criteria for all years. Data for measure 3.5 is presented separately in table III–5 in this Report.

**Table 2. State Percentage Change in Performance by Outcome Measure, 2017–2021**

State	1.1	2.1	3.1	3.2	3.3	3.4	4.1	4.2	5.1a	5.1b	6.1a	6.1b	6.1c	7.1
Alabama	13.2%	-15.6%	1.9%	9.9%	4.5%	-29.7%	-11.0%	-16.4%	-23.9%	-18.5%	-0.1%	12.0%	9.0%	-51.8%
Alaska	-20.2%	26.9%	-2.6%	-13.5%	-1.9%	17.0%	-19.1%	-15.5%	334.6%	31.2%	-3.8%	5.8%	-0.8%	-22.8%
Arizona	DQ	DQ	2.1%	4.9%	9.6%	-6.2%	5.2%	-31.6%	4.8%	0.4%	-2.5%	-0.1%	-44.5%	33.1%
Arkansas	20.1%	27.7%	-1.7%	-2.3%	-5.9%	10.8%	-13.3%	-37.6%	-6.6%	-7.5%	2.8%	19.3%	4.3%	-74.6%
California	-10.5%	34.1%	1.0%	2.1%	-7.4%	-12.6%	-13.5%	-3.3%	-36.0%	-16.5%	-0.3%	6.3%	11.9%	-40.0%
Colorado	7.9%	-34.9%	-0.4%	DQ	-8.1%	-19.8%	-6.6%	-8.5%	-60.7%	-45.8%	1.7%	13.2%	22.7%	-64.0%
Connecticut	-21.9%	-89.1%	1.1%	7.8%	7.6%	33.3%	-33.7%	16.3%	-38.3%	-60.6%	4.8%	3.8%	20.4%	-3.0%
Delaware	-50.3%	NA	-4.9%	-7.0%	-6.4%	-38.8%	11.0%	-62.9%	90.1%	17.5%	-1.7%	12.6%	-20.9%	126.1%
District of Columbia	9.1%	-8.6%	1.6%	250.0%	-7.8%	-50.0%	-20.2%	4.8%	0.0%	105.2%	-19.8%	-19.6%	-21.2%	88.9%
Florida	-12.7%	-79.3%	0.1%	-6.3%	-4.7%	-28.3%	-15.3%	-0.3%	-45.2%	-27.2%	0.9%	4.2%	-0.8%	-46.8%
Georgia	0.5%	14.0%	-2.6%	3.6%	-16.9%	55.6%	-26.0%	-22.7%	-74.9%	-49.2%	4.3%	9.3%	18.9%	-22.8%
Hawaii	180.3%	469.1%	3.0%	2.5%	7.1%	67.4%	-2.3%	-15.1%	-51.1%	-0.6%	-1.9%	7.7%	7.8%	-26.7%
Idaho	-12.8%	457.0%	-3.5%	-10.9%	2.2%	-42.9%	6.2%	-29.5%	88.7%	9.6%	-3.1%	-4.7%	-12.0%	-62.2%
Illinois	12.7%	2.7%	-7.8%	-23.0%	-27.0%	-28.5%	38.0%	62.5%	160.9%	-14.7%	9.7%	13.3%	42.9%	-65.3%
Indiana	-6.5%	-29.9%	-0.4%	1.0%	-2.8%	32.5%	-10.9%	-5.0%	15.6%	-40.6%	-0.3%	-1.5%	-3.0%	-31.5%
Iowa	15.0%	335.4%	1.8%	7.3%	5.1%	-36.8%	-5.9%	13.1%	-36.4%	-16.7%	-0.1%	4.6%	11.2%	-11.5%
Kansas	-18.0%	-62.6%	-0.4%	2.6%	-11.8%	14.1%	-33.5%	-8.2%	-6.3%	-36.4%	9.6%	4.2%	-3.2%	11.7%
Kentucky	-28.7%	-39.7%	0.5%	-1.9%	-1.8%	13.1%	-17.7%	-23.9%	8.4%	-19.6%	-0.4%	3.4%	7.6%	-19.2%
Louisiana	-46.9%	DQ	-1.1%	1.2%	-7.3%	-17.7%	-11.1%	-43.3%	47.0%	2.0%	-0.8%	3.4%	-9.6%	-20.9%
Maine	44.3%	10.3%	-0.7%	3.3%	-9.6%	-12.5%	-12.0%	84.0%	-83.5%	-68.6%	-6.8%	-5.2%	13.3%	-76.9%
Maryland	-28.3%	113.1%	DQ	DQ	DQ	DQ	DQ	DQ	DQ	DQ	DQ	DQ	DQ	DQ
Massachusetts	-5.7%	12.6%	0.4%	DQ	-5.9%	30.1%	-18.2%	-18.2%	-67.6%	-52.9%	13.3%	22.6%	-7.7%	-20.0%
Michigan	-8.2%	-44.3%	-0.9%	-11.4%	-8.1%	-25.7%	-43.1%	-14.6%	-41.0%	-29.7%	2.6%	6.7%	13.4%	-69.0%
Minnesota	-32.4%	-31.5%	0.4%	DQ*	-4.9%	-13.2%	-7.4%	1.3%	-49.7%	-31.2%	1.0%	9.2%	8.1%	14.2%
Mississippi	10.5%	24.4%	1.7%	2.5%	-0.4%	11.9%	-18.0%	-18.6%	-62.2%	-19.3%	-1.7%	-3.0%	5.9%	-45.5%
Missouri	-8.6%	3.4%	-1.1%	-4.6%	-3.1%	4.0%	-22.7%	-21.3%	-45.9%	5.1%	0.3%	7.4%	10.4%	-21.5%
Montana	1.5%	-38.9%	0.3%	DQ*	0.0%	32.0%	7.9%	-3.0%	-80.5%	-40.4%	2.7%	5.1%	-1.9%	-38.6%
Nebraska	-6.5%	34.1%	-2.8%	-0.8%	-8.8%	5.1%	-11.6%	23.3%	-47.2%	18.0%	-1.7%	-0.1%	5.4%	11.5%
Nevada	1.7%	153.3%	-0.4%	6.4%	-4.2%	-28.7%	-8.7%	-30.4%	-60.5%	-21.2%	0.7%	21.4%	21.0%	-6.8%
New Hampshire	-36.9%	-100.0%	7.8%	-9.1%	-1.0%	-13.1%	-3.3%	15.8%	-56.0%	-45.8%	-4.1%	-3.7%	-10.9%	16.4%
New Jersey	-29.8%	10.3%	-2.1%	-1.2%	-16.9%	19.2%	-24.2%	-22.1%	-42.7%	-21.9%	4.1%	8.0%	3.1%	36.9%
New Mexico	-2.2%	50.2%	-0.4%	3.5%	-3.8%	41.2%	-14.6%	-26.3%	-42.4%	-43.5%	-3.3%	19.9%	-4.8%	-32.7%
New York	-9.2%	-57.8%	-5.3%	-14.0%	-28.9%	-15.9%	-20.7%	-13.3%	-64.3%	-25.8%	-0.6%	1.1%	7.0%	7.1%
North Carolina	DQ	DQ	1.1%	0.8%	6.7%	92.2%	-19.9%	273.6%	-36.2%	-22.3%	-11.8%	-24.5%	-33.8%	21.7%
North Dakota	-28.4%	0.0%	6.9%	16.1%	10.4%	-39.4%	-5.0%	11.2%	-68.1%	-13.2%	-4.0%	0.3%	22.4%	-86.8%
Ohio	5.4%	-15.9%	-1.5%	-0.5%	-13.3%	-57.1%	-19.1%	65.3%	-48.2%	-32.4%	-0.2%	1.4%	5.5%	17.8%
Oklahoma	-4.0%	-15.1%	-1.7%	-8.6%	-0.3%	-3.9%	-12.9%	-18.1%	7.6%	-0.4%	1.3%	13.9%	36.4%	23.0%
Oregon	-0.6%	-100.0%	0.0%	2.4%	-3.9%	-19.4%	-12.7%	33.1%	-49.0%	35.4%	0.3%	3.0%	0.1%	-35.8%
Pennsylvania	23.1%	-2.2%	-1.1%	DQ	-13.7%	16.2%	-14.8%	-1.1%	-35.9%	-28.8%	2.7%	11.0%	25.6%	-27.8%
Puerto Rico	DQ	DQ	DQ	DQ	DQ	DQ	DQ	DQ	DQ	DQ	DQ	DQ	DQ	DQ
Rhode Island	-23.2%	-30.9%	5.0%	10.1%	2.8%	15.1%	-54.9%	-34.7%	-64.2%	-49.9%	3.7%	6.1%	15.3%	-43.9%
South Carolina	9.9%	99.9%	-2.7%	DQ	-2.2%	4.1%	-16.5%	10.6%	-57.3%	-36.6%	-11.0%	-9.2%	-14.7%	-78.3%
South Dakota	4.7%	-76.2%	3.8%	DQ	-7.7%	-44.3%	0.9%	73.7%	-18.2%	-33.5%	0.2%	-9.2%	-1.3%	-51.2%
Tennessee	0.8%	111.0%	5.1%	17.2%	6.0%	8.1%	-15.8%	4.7%	-55.3%	-20.5%	15.0%	17.0%	22.0%	24.0%
Texas	7.3%	211.6%	-0.5%	1.7%	-2.9%	-15.7%	-20.6%	5.3%	-53.2%	-11.3%	-2.9%	-0.8%	-1.7%	-20.4%
Utah	-10.3%	188.4%	2.9%	80.1%	5.6%	40.4%	-15.1%	2.9%	-49.2%	-12.8%	5.9%	4.6%	59.1%	-23.1%
Vermont	-8.1%	83.6%	-0.8%	3.2%	-4.1%	-28.6%	-3.7%	-17.5%	-38.2%	-36.3%	1.4%	-6.3%	13.2%	6.9%
Virginia	-3.8%	5.7%	2.7%	3.1%	-2.2%	-24.5%	-9.9%	57.1%	3.9%	9.5%	1.4%	-0.4%	-6.6%	-50.4%
Washington	3.9%	-6.4%	1.4%	1.2%	1.0%	-45.4%	-13.5%	13.6%	-60.3%	-33.9%	4.3%	9.3%	1.7%	23.3%

**Table 2. State Percentage Change in Performance by Outcome Measure, 2017–2021**

<b>State</b>	<b>1.1</b>	<b>2.1</b>	<b>3.1</b>	<b>3.2</b>	<b>3.3</b>	<b>3.4</b>	<b>4.1</b>	<b>4.2</b>	<b>5.1a</b>	<b>5.1b</b>	<b>6.1a</b>	<b>6.1b</b>	<b>6.1c</b>	<b>7.1</b>
<b>West Virginia</b>	-38.6%	-0.1%	1.0%	-0.4%	0.6%	108.5%	-16.8%	-14.6%	38.6%	-4.1%	-0.3%	3.1%	16.4%	-40.9%
<b>Wisconsin</b>	-28.6%	57.4%	-1.0%	3.4%	-9.4%	-27.8%	-16.0%	1.3%	-2.8%	-21.1%	-0.5%	2.0%	10.5%	7.6%
<b>Wyoming</b>	52.3%	82.2%	0.5%	1.0%	3.8%	NA	3.4%	-17.4%	75.7%	-25.0%	-1.8%	-11.0%	-13.9%	-3.5%

<sup>a</sup>For measure 1.1, the percentage change is 2017–2020 rather than 2017–2021.

Notes.

—This table excludes measure 3.5. State-level information on this measure can be found on the [Child Welfare Outcomes data site](#), and national performance is included in chapter III of this Report.

—A change of +/-5.0 percent is considered a change in performance. Values shaded in dark magenta indicate an improvement in performance, values shaded in light magenta indicate a decline in performance, and values with no shading indicate no change in performance.

—Lower values in this Report indicate better performance for the following measures: 1.1, 2.1, 3.4, 4.2, and 7.1. Consequently, when referring to percentage changes in performance in these measures over time, negative values indicate a measurement decrease but an improvement in performance; conversely, positive values indicate a measurement increase but a decline in performance.

For all remaining measures, positive values indicate improvements in performance, and negative values indicate declines in performance.

—Percentage-change calculations were done without rounding.

—Cells marked with “DQ” were excluded from analyses due to incomplete data or data-quality issues.

—Cells marked with “NA” indicate a percentage change could not be calculated because the percentage for the first year (2017) was 0.00 percent.

## Child Welfare Outcomes Data Site

Additional child welfare-related context data and state data regarding the seven national measures are available on the [Child Welfare Outcomes data site](#). The Child Welfare Outcomes data site allows for a significantly faster release of these data than is possible via the publication of the full Report. The data site features AFCARS and NCANDS data that have been reviewed and approved by the states for inclusion in the Report and that are updated annually.

With the data site, users have the ability to conduct the following activities:

- View one state's data or simultaneously compare data for multiple states, including by ACF region
- Compare data for a single state across multiple years
- View state context, demographic, and outcome data in tables grouped by type of data
- View additional context and demographic data for states not included in the Report, including two distinct breakdowns of race and ethnicity data
- Choose to view data in a table or graph
- Export the data into a variety of formats, including copying or printing customized data directly from the site, exporting data into Excel, and saving data as a PDF or CSV file
- Search for data by topic of interest
- View static state data pages previously included in the full Reports

For questions or more information about the Child Welfare Outcomes data site, please contact CB at [CBDataTeam@acf.hhs.gov](mailto:CBDataTeam@acf.hhs.gov).

## **Introduction to the Child Welfare Outcomes: Data and Analysis**

The Child Welfare Outcomes Report is created by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to meet the requirements of section 203(a) of the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 (ASFA). ASFA added section 479A of the Social Security Act (the Act), which requires HHS to issue an annual report that assesses state performance in operating child protection and child welfare programs under Titles IV-B and IV-E of the Act.<sup>20 21</sup> The Act has been amended several times to expand child welfare data collection:

- The Child and Family Services Improvement Act of 2006 (Pub. L. 109–288) required states to report data on monthly caseworker visits.<sup>22</sup>
- The Child and Family Services Improvement and Innovation Act (Pub. L. 112–34) amended the requirements on monthly caseworker visit data.<sup>23</sup>
- The Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act (Pub. L. 113–183) required data to be reported on children in foster care who are pregnant or parenting or who were placed in a child care institution or other non-foster family home settings.<sup>24</sup>
- The Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) (Pub. L. 115–123) amended the data requirements regarding children placed in a child care institution or other non-foster family home settings.<sup>25</sup>

The Child Welfare Outcomes series of Reports to Congress began with the 1998 Report and continues to be produced annually.

### **Outcome Measures**

The Child Welfare Outcomes Reports provide information on national performance, as well as the performance of individual states, in seven outcome categories.<sup>26</sup> Prior to the first Report, the Children’s Bureau (CB) within HHS’s Administration for Children and Families (ACF) identified these outcomes in close consultation with state and local child welfare agency administrators, child advocacy organizations, child welfare researchers, state legislators, and other experts in the child welfare field. The outcomes reflect a consensus of these groups

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<sup>20</sup> See appendix A for the current specifications of Section 479A of the Act, as created by ASFA and amended by Pub. L. 109–288, Pub. L. 112–34, Pub. L. 113–183, and Pub. L. 115–123.

<sup>21</sup> Title IV-B funds support preventative and protective services for children. Title IV-E funds support foster care; adoption assistance; kinship guardianship assistance; and, at the option of a state, kinship navigator programs and/or time-limited prevention services for candidates of foster care, pregnant or parenting foster youth, and the parents or kin caregivers of those children and youth. For more information on policies and guidance provided to states, see the [Policy/Program Issuances page](#) on the CB website.

<sup>22</sup> More information can be found in [ACYF-CB-IM-06-05](#).

<sup>23</sup> More information can be found in [ACYF-CB-IM-11-06](#).

<sup>24</sup> More information can be found in [ACYF-CB-IM-14-03](#).

<sup>25</sup> More information can be found in [ACYF-CB-IM-18-02](#).

<sup>26</sup> For the purposes of this Report, the designation of “state” includes the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. Therefore, the Report provides information on up to a total of 52 states, depending on the number of states that submitted adequate data for a particular measure.



regarding important performance objectives for child welfare practice. The following are the seven national outcomes established by HHS through this consultation process:

- **Outcome 1:** Reduce recurrence of child abuse and/or neglect
- **Outcome 2:** Reduce the incidence of child abuse and/or neglect in foster care
- **Outcome 3:** Increase permanency for children in foster care
- **Outcome 4:** Reduce time in foster care to reunification without increasing reentry
- **Outcome 5:** Reduce time in foster care to adoption
- **Outcome 6:** Increase placement stability
- **Outcome 7:** Reduce placements of young children in group homes or institutions

These outcomes reflect the importance of performance objectives in child welfare practice in and around the time of ASFA’s passage. In recent years, CB, Congress, and the child welfare field have begun to recognize and emphasize the critical importance of a full continuum of prevention services and approaches as essential to child welfare practice. This may lead to HHS considering the creation and addition of prevention-oriented performance objectives in the future. Also, in 2023, states have begun collecting and reporting updated Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) 2020 data. As states transition to the new collection system and data begin to stabilize, CB also may consider convening a group of child welfare experts to revisit the design and content of this Report. This potential revision would not only reflect newer data, but also reflect the state of the field, indicate advances in data collection and processing, and inform current principles around community research. Additionally, there has been increasing interest in better understanding the significant variations in outcomes that specific subpopulations experience in foster care. Therefore, performance objectives that show why and where these variations occur may also be adopted as part of a larger effort to understand and address disparities that may lead to inequities in child welfare outcomes.

## **Relationship to the Child and Family Services Review**

While measures used in this Report share some similarities with the data indicators used as part of HHS’s Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) process, the measures are not the same as the CFSR data indicators, except for measure 1.1 (the recurrence of maltreatment), which is the same as the CFSR measure.<sup>27</sup> The CFSRs were authorized through the 1994 amendments to the Act, which require HHS to review state child and family service programs to ensure conformity with federal child welfare requirements in Titles IV-B and IV-E of the Act. The reviews are also used to determine the experiences of children and families as they are engaged in child welfare services and to assist states in enhancing their capacity to help children and families achieve positive outcomes. The reviews focus on outcomes for children and families in the areas of safety, permanency, and well-being, and one aspect of this review process uses a defined set of data indicators to assess performance. Additional information about the CFSRs, including information on the data indicators used, can be found on the [CFSRs page](#) of the CB website. Readers should exercise caution when comparing performance on the Child Welfare Outcomes Report measures and CFSR performance because the measures differ in a number of respects, including data-quality inclusion and exclusion criteria and calculations.

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<sup>27</sup> See appendix B for the full list of outcomes and measures.

## Context Data

This Report presents data pertaining to state performance on the measures as well as on certain child welfare-related contextual factors. These context data are relevant to understanding and interpreting performance on the measures featured in these Reports. The contextual factors include the following:

- Estimated child population statistics by state, including the number of children under the age of 18 and child poverty data<sup>28</sup>
- Caseworker visits data for children in foster care, including the percentage of children in foster care visited monthly by their caseworker and the percentage of monthly visits occurring in the home of the child<sup>29</sup>
- The numbers of children in foster care at the end of the fiscal year (FY) and who entered and exited foster care during the FY
- The number of children waiting for adoption, the number of waiting children who were adopted, and the number of children for whom an adoption was finalized during the FY

## Data Sources

Data for the original Child Welfare Outcomes measures and the majority of the context data in this Report come from the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS) and AFCARS.<sup>30</sup> States submit NCANDS data voluntarily, but they are required by regulation to submit AFCARS data. The specific NCANDS and AFCARS data elements used to calculate each outcome measure are outlined in appendix D.

Pursuant to section 479A of the Act, caseworker visit data are included in this Report. Data for the caseworker visits requirements are not part of NCANDS and AFCARS, but states are required to submit them separately each December. Some states elected to use a sampling procedure approved by CB rather than reporting information on all children in foster care. Beginning in FY 2023, data for caseworker visits will be collected under the AFCARS 2020 data collection rule.

This Report also uses child population data, which are provided by the U.S. Census Bureau on an annual basis. Total child population estimates are derived by calculating expected population change from the most recent decennial census data. Child poverty data are from the 1-year estimates of the Census Bureau's American Community Survey, an ongoing survey that annually

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<sup>28</sup> These data come from the U.S. Census Bureau and reflect estimates rather than actual numbers. These data are based on the calendar year and not the fiscal year.

<sup>29</sup> Section 479A(a)(6) of the Act requires HHS to report data on caseworker visits in this Report. Requirements for caseworker visits data were revised in Pub. L. 112–34 and are currently defined under sections 424(f)(1) and (2) of the Act. Beginning in 2012, states began using a revised methodology for reporting caseworker visits data as outlined in Program Instruction [ACYF-CB-PI-12-01](#), which was issued on January 6, 2012. For more information, see appendix C.

<sup>30</sup> Unless otherwise specified, the data used in this Report are for federal FYs (October 1–September 30). Additionally, unless otherwise specified, the data used in this Report are for federal FY 2021.

samples a small percentage of the population to provide communities with information relevant to their service provision and investments.<sup>31</sup>

The data used in this Report may vary slightly from other sources if a state resubmitted data after HHS prepared the data for this Report.<sup>32</sup>

### *National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System*

NCANDS is a federally sponsored effort that encourages states to collect and analyze data pertaining to children who come to the attention of public child protective services (CPS) agencies as alleged victims of abuse or neglect. NCANDS was a result of a directive in the 1988 amendments to the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) to establish a national data-collection and analysis program on child abuse and neglect.<sup>33</sup> The data are submitted voluntarily by the states, as well as the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. NCANDS data are published annually in the Child Maltreatment report series.<sup>34</sup> A summary of the most recent report, *Child Maltreatment 2021*, is presented in appendix E.

The NCANDS Child File is a data file that states submit annually that contains detailed case information about each child who is the subject of an investigation or assessment in response to a maltreatment allegation. Any child who is associated with a report and who has received a disposition during the year is included in the Child File. Although a disposition usually refers to a finding regarding the allegation, it also can include reports that were closed without a finding.

The Child File is the primary data source for the safety-related data included in this Report. While alternate safety-data sources sometimes are allowed for the purposes of the CFSRs, they are not used here.

### *Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System*

Most data included in this Report come from AFCARS.<sup>35</sup> Title IV-E agencies are required to submit case-level information to AFCARS twice a year on all children who are under their care and responsibility for placement, children who are covered by an interagency agreement with another public agency that receives Title IV-E funds, and children who have been adopted with Title IV-E agency involvement. The requirements for the AFCARS 1993 rule are codified in federal regulation at 45 CFR 1355.40.

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<sup>31</sup> Additional information on the methodology used to calculate child population estimates can be found on the [Methodology page](#) of the Census Bureau’s website. For additional information on the methodology used to collect and calculate child poverty data, visit the [American Community Survey page](#) of the Census Bureau website.

<sup>32</sup> For this Report, AFCARS data were prepared on June 28, 2022; NCANDS data were prepared on April 1, 2022; census data were prepared on September 12, 2022, (except 2020 experimental poverty data were prepared on December 6, 2021); and caseworker visits data were prepared on March 21, 2022.

<sup>33</sup> More information about CAPTA can be found on the [About CAPTA: A Legislative History section](#) of the CB website.

<sup>34</sup> Some results presented in this Report may not be the same as those presented in the Child Maltreatment reports due to differences in data inclusion and exclusion criteria.

<sup>35</sup> See appendix F for AFCARS Report No. 29.

## Data Analyses in the Report

Chapters II through V of this Report present key findings of analyses conducted across states. These findings pertain to national performance on measures in 2021 (2020 for measure 1.1), variations across states in performance, changes in performance over time, and the relationships between contextual factors and state performance.

### *Calculation of national medians*

In this Report, two separate national medians were computed for each measure. In the 2021 Range of State Performance tables, national medians were calculated using data from all states that met the relevant data-quality thresholds in 2021 only.<sup>36</sup> (In the 2021 Range of State Performance tables, national medians for measure 1.1 were calculated using data from all states that met the relevant data-quality thresholds in 2020.) However, in the Median State Performance and Change in Performance Over Time tables, national medians were calculated only using data from the states that met the relevant data-quality thresholds for all the relevant FYs (2017–2021). Similarly, in the Median State Performance and Change in Performance Over Time tables, national medians for measure 1.1 were calculated only using data from the states that met the relevant data-quality thresholds for all the relevant FYs (2017–2020). This was done to provide a more accurate calculation of change over time. Unless stated otherwise, comparisons of medians between years use the data-inclusion criteria of the latter calculation. Therefore, the number of states (N) included in each of these calculations may vary, and these two medians may vary slightly.

### *Percentage change calculations*

Change in state performance over time was determined by calculating a percentage change in performance on the measures.<sup>37</sup> Consistent with HHS’s historical approach to the analyses in these Reports, a percentage change of 5.0 or greater in either direction (i.e., positive or negative) is used as a general indicator that a meaningful change in performance on the measures occurred. Therefore, for purposes of the analyses presented in the Child Welfare Outcomes Reports, if the percentage change in performance from 2017 to 2021 was less than 5.0 in either direction, the determination was that there was “no change” in performance.

Since some changes in data over time may appear small in absolute terms, the Report presents percentage change data to highlight the fact that they may still represent large proportional changes.

### *Correlations*

The strength of relationships between measures and context variables was assessed using correlation coefficients, specifically Pearson’s *r*. This coefficient can range from –1 to +1. In

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<sup>36</sup> See appendix G for more information on methodology and data-quality thresholds, including reasons state data were excluded from analyses.

<sup>37</sup> Percentage change was calculated by subtracting the “old” data from the “new” data, dividing that result by the old data, and multiplying it by 100. For example, the national median on measure 3.1 was 90.3 percent in 2017 and 89.6 percent in 2021, and so the resulting decrease is –0.8 percent  $\{[(89.6-90.3)/90.3] \times 100 = -0.8\}$ .

the Child Welfare Outcomes Reports, these coefficients are interpreted in accordance with J.P. Guilford's suggested interpretations for correlation coefficient values<sup>38</sup>:

- A coefficient of 0.0 to plus or minus 0.20 indicates a very low or negligible correlation.
- A coefficient of plus or minus 0.20–0.40 indicates a low correlation.
- A coefficient of plus or minus 0.40–0.70 indicates a moderate correlation.
- A coefficient of plus or minus 0.70–0.90 indicates a high correlation.
- A coefficient of plus or minus 0.90–1.00 indicates a very high correlation.

### **Child Welfare Outcomes Report Data Site**

The [Child Welfare Outcomes Report data site](#) is a web-based tool that allows users to view Child Welfare Outcomes Report data and create customized outputs according to individual needs. Users can isolate and view the variables in which they are most interested, compare data across states and years, choose from a variety of different data-output displays, and export data reports into Excel and printer-friendly formats. The website also enables users to access data not currently available in the full Report, including the following:

- Estimated general child-population statistics with regard to the race and ethnicity of children
- Characteristics (i.e., age, race and ethnicity, and maltreatment type) of child maltreatment victims
- Mean and median response times of CPS to allegations of maltreatment
- Characteristics (i.e., age, race and ethnicity, and median length of stay) of children in foster care at the start of the FY, children in care at the end of the FY, and children who entered and exited foster care during the FY
- Characteristics (i.e., age, race, and ethnicity) of children waiting for adoption and of children with finalized adoptions
- Alternate categorical breakdowns for all race and ethnicity data<sup>39</sup>

The website allows for the release of Report data in a timelier manner than is possible through the full Report publication process. Data updates to the site occur annually after the data have been reviewed by the states and prior to the release of the full Report. Site functionality is updated on a regular basis to provide users with new and increased capabilities for data use and reporting.

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<sup>38</sup> Guilford, J.P. (1956). *Fundamental statistics in psychology and education* (3rd ed.). McGraw-Hill.

<sup>39</sup> The traditional race and ethnicity breakdown displays non-Hispanic or Latino race categories and a category of Hispanic or Latino children of any race. The alternate breakdown treats race and ethnicity as two separate categories that are not mutually exclusive and displays race categories that are combined with a Hispanic or Latino or non-Hispanic or Latino designation.

## Chapter I: Child Welfare Outcomes Demographic and Contextual Data

In addition to reporting on specific child welfare measures, this Report also includes data and information on a range of child populations, including the overall national child population, state child populations, and subgroups within states. To provide context for the child welfare outcomes information contained in subsequent chapters, this chapter provides an overview of the child population under age 18, including those living in poverty, in foster care, waiting for adoption, and who have been adopted.

### National Child Population

In 2021, the national population of children under the age of 18 was estimated to be 74,112,223. The three states with the largest populations under the age of 18 were California (8,772,631), Texas (7,475,433), and Florida (4,289,280). The three states with the smallest populations under the age of 18 were Vermont (116,976), the District of Columbia (125,835), and Wyoming (132,424).

Nationally, 16.9 percent of children under the age of 18 were estimated to be living in poverty in 2021. Poverty rates for children varied widely across states, ranging from 8.1 percent to 54.9 percent, and 21 states (40 percent) had poverty rates above the national average. Although there is some evidence that children in low-income or impoverished areas may be more likely to be reported as victims of maltreatment, it is not clear that this translates to children in poverty more likely being removed from their homes and placed in foster care.<sup>40</sup> In 2021, there was a negligible correlation between states' foster care entry rates and their estimated proportion of the child population living in poverty (Pearson's  $r=-0.12$ ).

### Children in Foster Care

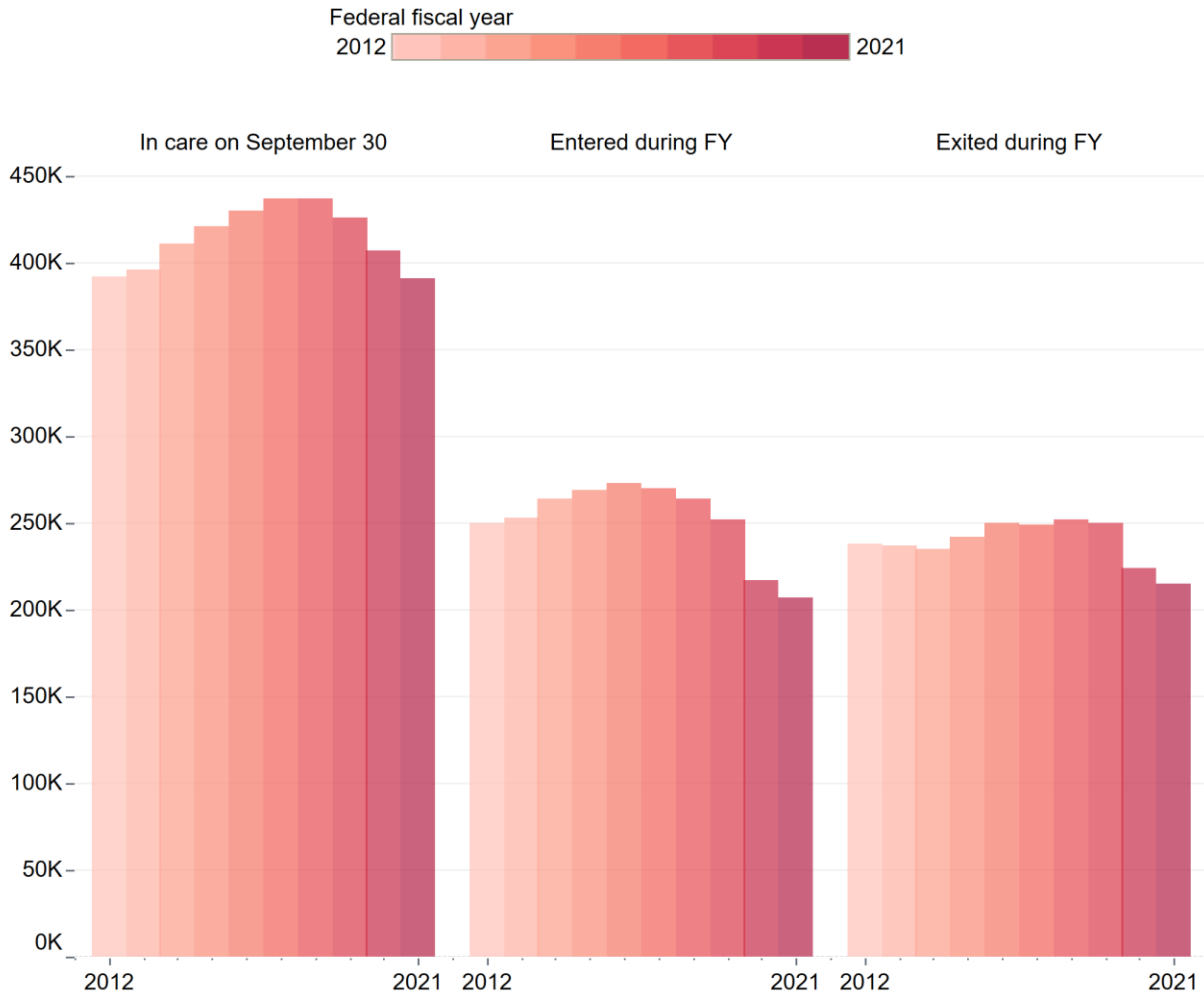
Nationwide, approximately 391,000 children were in foster care on the last day of FY 2021.<sup>41</sup> Figure I-1 shows that from 2012 until 2018, the number of children in care on the last day of the FY has steadily increased or remained flat. However, beginning in 2019, the number of children in care on the last day of the FY has been decreasing, with respect to the previous year. The decrease from 2018 to 2019 was less than 3 percent (2.6 percent), the decrease observed from 2019 to 2020 was 4.7 percent, and the decrease from 2020 to 2021 was 4.1 percent, for an overall decrease of 10.5 percent since 2018. The 2020 and 2021 decrease may be partially attributed to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

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<sup>40</sup> For example, see "[Income Inequality and Child Maltreatment in the United States](#)" or "[Addressing the Underlying Issue of Poverty in Child-Neglect Cases](#)."

<sup>41</sup> Data from [Trends in Foster Care and Adoption: FY 2012–2021](#) were used for this section of the Report, including figure I-1. Those data are current as of June 28, 2022. Due to differences in sources and/or data quality decisions, these data may not be consistent with other data displayed throughout the Report.

**Figure I-1. Number of Children in Care, 2012–2021 (N=51)**



Note.—Due to data quality concerns, many of which are associated with the lingering effects of Hurricane Maria, Puerto Rico’s data are only included for the years 2018 through 2021 for both foster care and adoption. Puerto Rico is in the process of addressing the quality of its data.

Of the children in foster care on the last day of FY 2021, about half (51.1 percent) were age 7 or younger, 34.7 percent were between the ages of 8 and 15, and 14.1 percent were age 16 or older. Nationally, the breakdown of the races and ethnicities of children in care on the last day of FY 2021 was 43.0 percent White, 22.2 percent Black or African American, 21.8 percent Hispanic or Latino, 7.8 percent two or more races, 2.4 percent American Indian or Alaska Native, 0.5 percent Asian, and 0.3 percent Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander. Additional data regarding the age, race, and ethnicity of children in care on the first and last days of the FY, and those who entered and exited care during the FY, are available on the [Child Welfare Outcomes data site](#).

AFCARS data show that the number of children in care on the last day of the FY has decreased for the last 3 years (2019, 2020, and 2021).

## Entry into Foster Care

In 2021, an estimated 207,000 children entered foster care nationally. This section provides additional data about these children.

### *Race/ethnicity and age distribution*

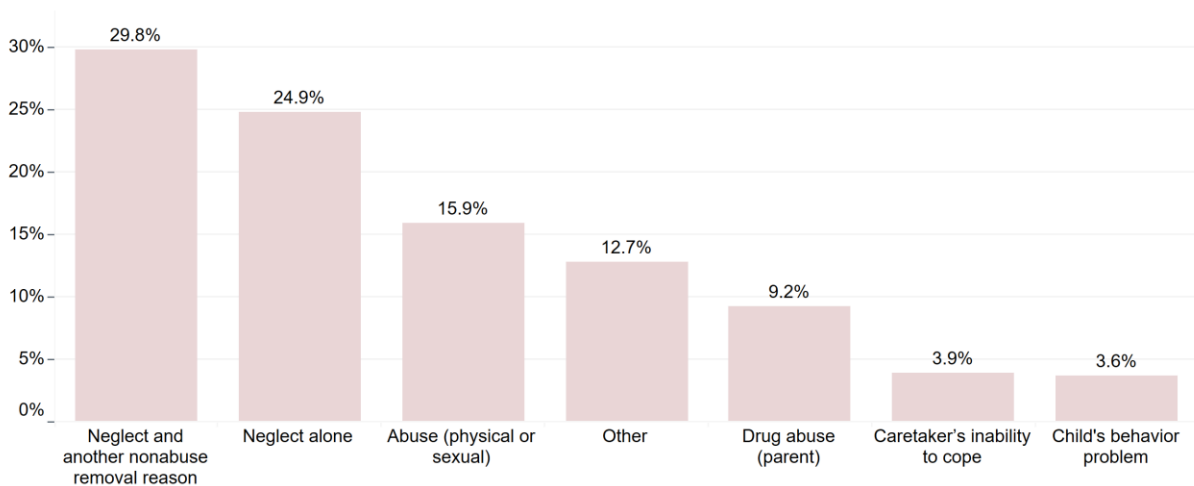
The demographic distribution of those children entering care is similar to that of the in-care population. The race and ethnicity of the children who entered care during FY 2021 was 45.4 percent White, 19.8 percent Black or African American, 20.9 percent Hispanic or Latino, 7.7 percent two or more races, 2.2 percent American Indian or Alaska Native, 0.6 percent Asian, and 0.3 percent Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander.

Nationally, more than half (58.5 percent) were age 7 or younger, 32.4 percent were between the ages of 8 and 15, and 9.1 percent were age 16 or older.

### *Circumstances associated with removal*

The majority of children who entered foster care in 2021 had a reason for removal that included neglect (either alone—24.9 percent— or in combination with another reason other than physical or sexual abuse—29.8 percent) (see figure I-2). Nearly one-tenth (9.2 percent) of children entering care were reported with parental drug abuse as the only reason associated with removal. Sexual or physical abuse accounted for 15.9 percent of removals, and child behavior problems (alone) and caretaker’s inability to cope (alone) each accounted for approximately 4.0 percent of removals. For a more complete analysis of all removal reasons, see appendix F.

**Figure I-2. Circumstances Associated With Removal, 2021 (N=52), 2021 (N=52)**



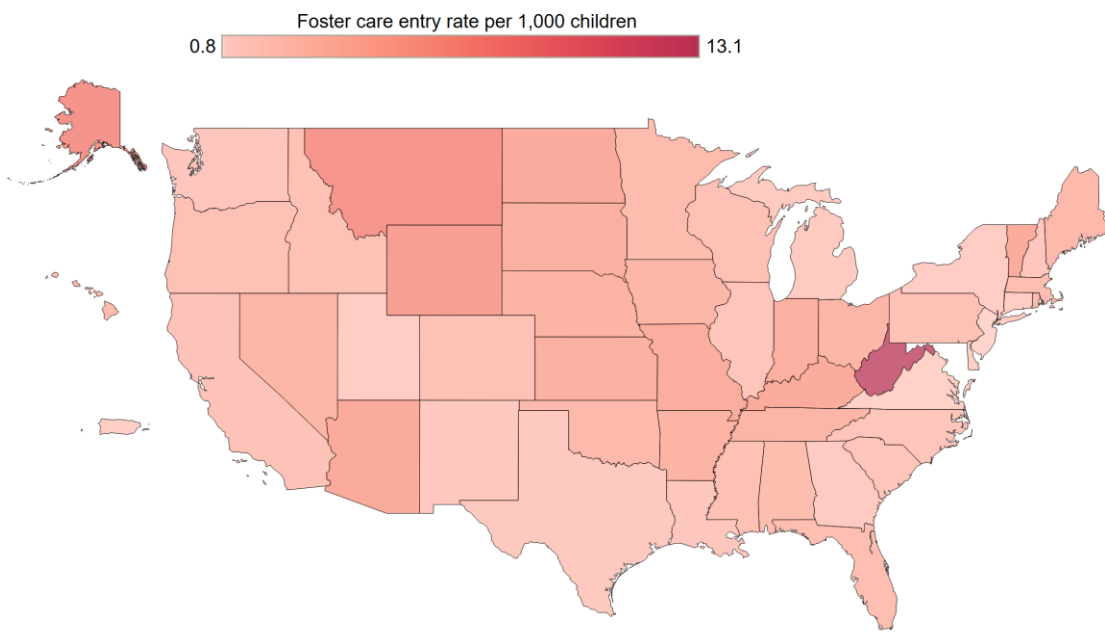


### Entry rates

States differed considerably with respect to the rate of foster care entry, defined as the number of children entering foster care in a year per 1,000 children in the state population (see figure I-3).<sup>42</sup> The foster care entry rate in 2021 ranged from 0.8 children (New Jersey) to 13.1 children (West Virginia) per 1,000 in the population. The 5-year analysis shows that the median entry rate has been decreasing steadily—4.1 in 2017, 3.9 in 2018, 3.7 in 2019, 3.1 in 2020, and 3.0 in 2021—for an overall decrease of 26.8 percent since 2017.

The reasons for variations in the rates of foster care entry are difficult to determine using federal administrative data. They may be due to differences across states in policies regarding under what circumstances children are removed from the home and placed in foster care. The existence and availability of services designed to support families and enable children to remain in the home also may affect the number of children who enter foster care within a state. As noted in prior Child Welfare Outcomes Reports, this variation is unlikely to be attributed to differences in the rate of child victims in a state. There was a low correlation between foster care entry rates and child victim rates in 2021 (Pearson’s  $r=0.33$ ).

**Figure I-3. Map of Foster Care Entry Rates per 1,000 Children by State, 2021 (N=52)**



<sup>42</sup> The foster care entry rate was calculated by dividing the total number of children entering foster care in a state by the total child population in that state and multiplying the resulting number by 1,000.

### *Entry rates by race and ethnicity*

The national foster care entry rate by race and ethnicity in 2021 ranged from a high of 7.8 (American Indian or Alaska Native) to a low of 0.3 (Asian) per 1,000 children in the child population of that race. The entry rates per 1,000 children of that race or category for the remaining categories were 4.6 for children of two or more races, 4.0 for Black or African American children, 3.8 for Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander children, 2.6 for White children, and 2.3 for Hispanic or Latino children. Compared to White children, American Indian or Alaska Native children were 3.0 times more likely to be placed in foster care, and Black or African American children were 1.6 times more likely than White children to be placed in care. Asian and Hispanic or Latino children entered care at lower rates than White children; they were 0.1 and 0.9 times as likely to enter care, respectively.<sup>43</sup>

### **Children Waiting for Adoption and Children Adopted**

At the start of 2021, approximately 116,000 children and youth were identified as waiting for adoption.<sup>44 45</sup> Of that group, roughly 54,000, or 46.2 percent, had been placed in an adoptive home by the end of the year. The range in performance across the states varied widely, with a high of 72.3 percent (Iowa) to a low of 16.4 percent (Puerto Rico). Table I–1 (at the end of the chapter) shows the number of children waiting for adoption and the number of children adopted within 6 months and within 1 year for 2021.

Additionally, because the data for the “waiting” population do not differentiate between children and youth who have been waiting for long periods of time and children who may have recently received a goal of adoption or had their parents’ parental rights terminated, it is useful to examine the length of time from the date of the termination of parental rights to adoption in order to gain a more complete understanding of when children are adopted from foster care. There were slightly over 51,000 children and youth for whom the legal process of terminating parental rights occurred during 2020. By the end of 2021, 67.0 percent of those children were discharged to adoption within 1 year of the date of the termination of parental rights. State percentages ranged from 41.7 percent (New York) to 96.7 percent (District of Columbia). (See figure I–11 at the end of the chapter for more details.)

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<sup>43</sup> The rate of disproportionality was calculated by dividing the rate of the race/ethnicity of interest by the rate of the base race (in this analysis, White). For more information on entry rates and rates of disproportionality in entries for 2021—including state-level data, medians across states, and information about the analyses—visit the [State-Specific Foster Care Data 2021 page](#) on the CB website. For county-level information on entries into foster care by race/ethnicity, visit the [Foster Care Entries FY 2020 page](#).

<sup>44</sup> Please note that the number of children reported as waiting for adoption in the first paragraph of this section refers to children waiting at the start of the FY and not at the end of the FY (as reported in other sections in this Report). In addition, the number of children reported as adopted in the first paragraph also might differ from the number of children reported as adopted in the third paragraph of this section, which uses children who were identified as waiting as the base population and evaluates how many children were adopted at the end of the 12-month period. Percentages were calculated without rounding.

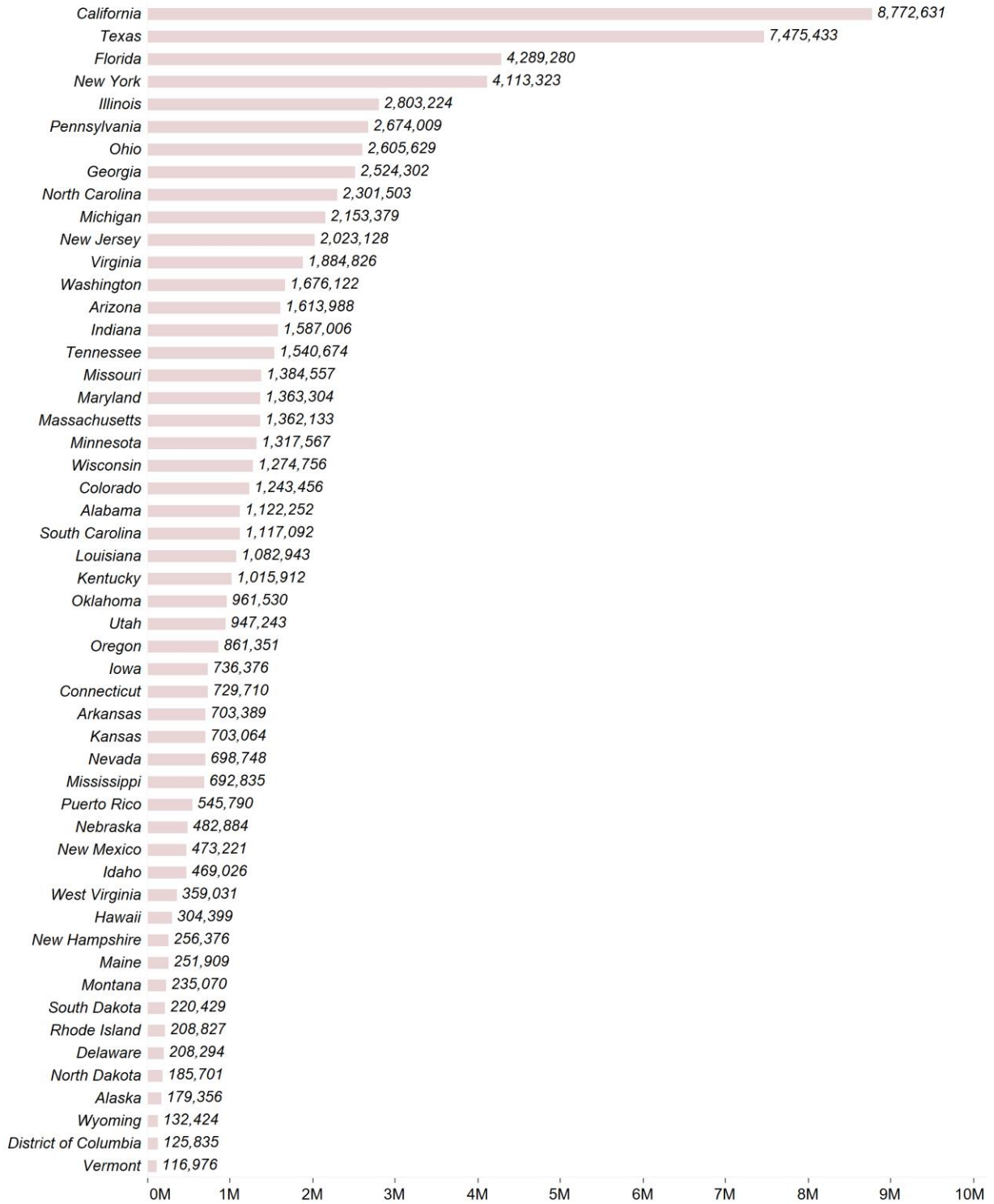
<sup>45</sup> There is no federal definition for a child “waiting for adoption.” The definition used in the Child Welfare Outcomes Reports includes children through age 17 who have a goal (as indicated in AFCARS) of adoption and/or whose parents’ parental rights have been terminated. It excludes children 16 years old and older whose parents’ parental rights have been terminated and who have a goal of emancipation. A state’s own definition may differ from that used here. For the most current data, see the [Data and Statistics: AFCARS page](#) on the CB website.

Lastly, as in prior Child Welfare Outcomes Reports, the number of children adopted from foster care in a given year is provided as context. In 2021, about 54,000 children and youth were adopted from foster care, a 6.3-percent decrease over the approximate 58,000 children adopted from foster care in 2020.

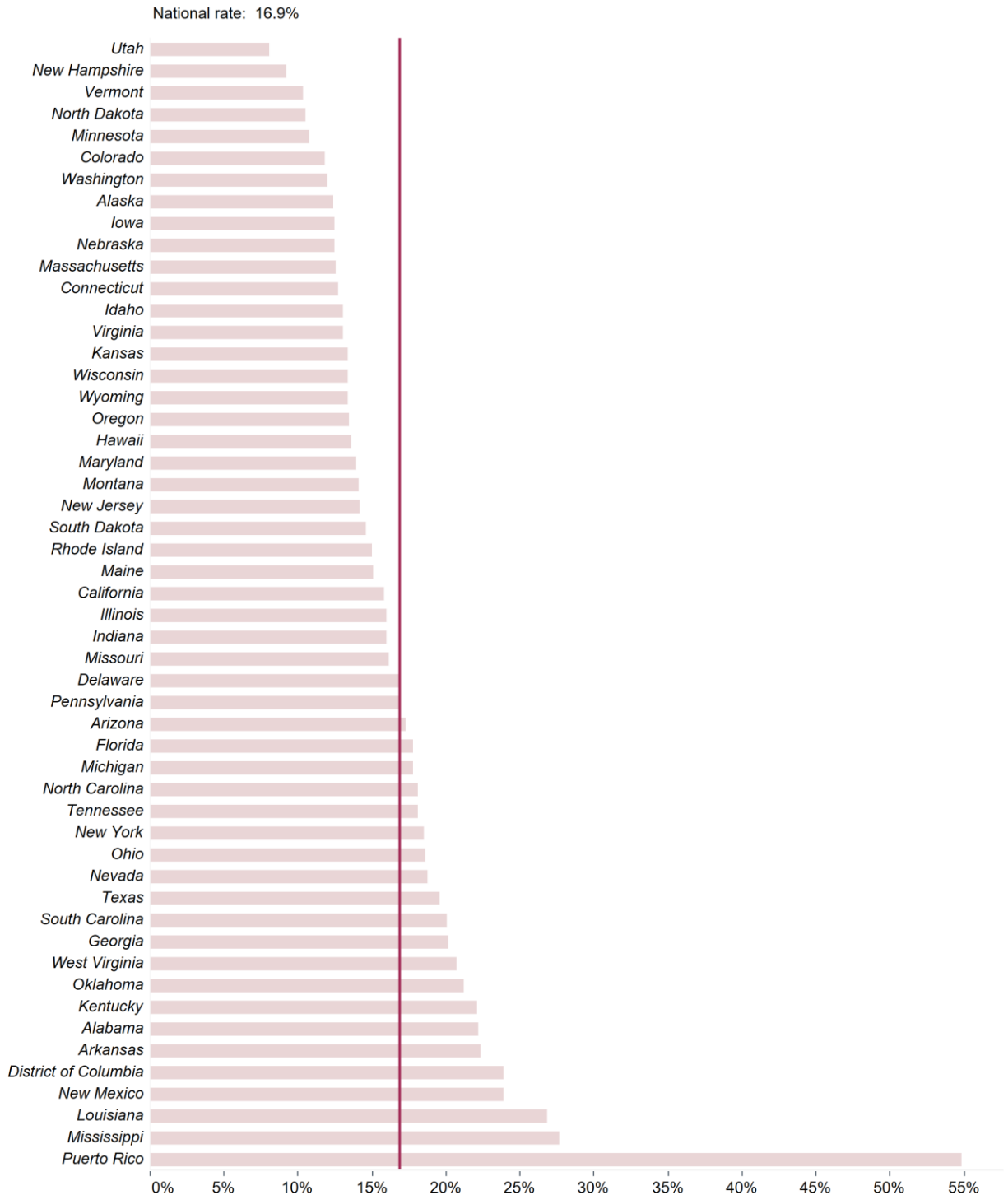
## **Summary**

The child populations described in this chapter provide context for understanding and interpreting information on child welfare outcomes contained in subsequent chapters. Additional visualizations of select demographics described in this chapter are displayed at the end of the chapter. Further demographic information on child populations—such as state data on race, ethnicity, and age (including those states excluded from analyses and counts in this Report due to data-quality problems)—is available on the [Child Welfare Outcomes data site](#).

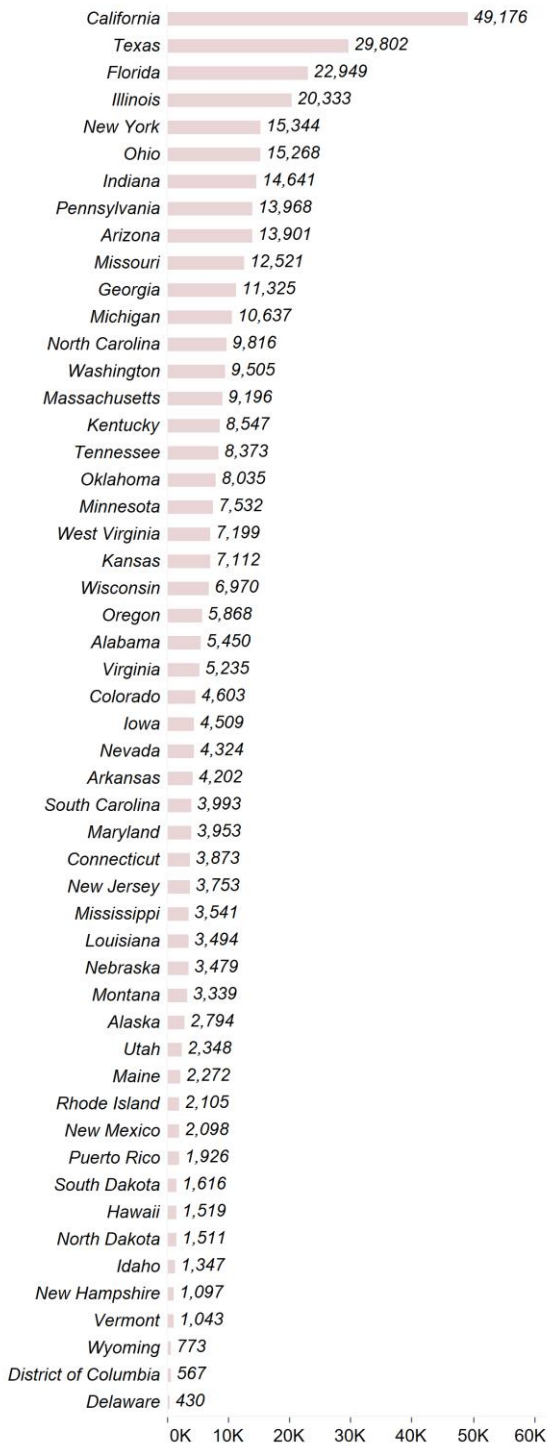
**Figure I-4. Estimated Child Population Under Age 18, 2021 (N=52)**



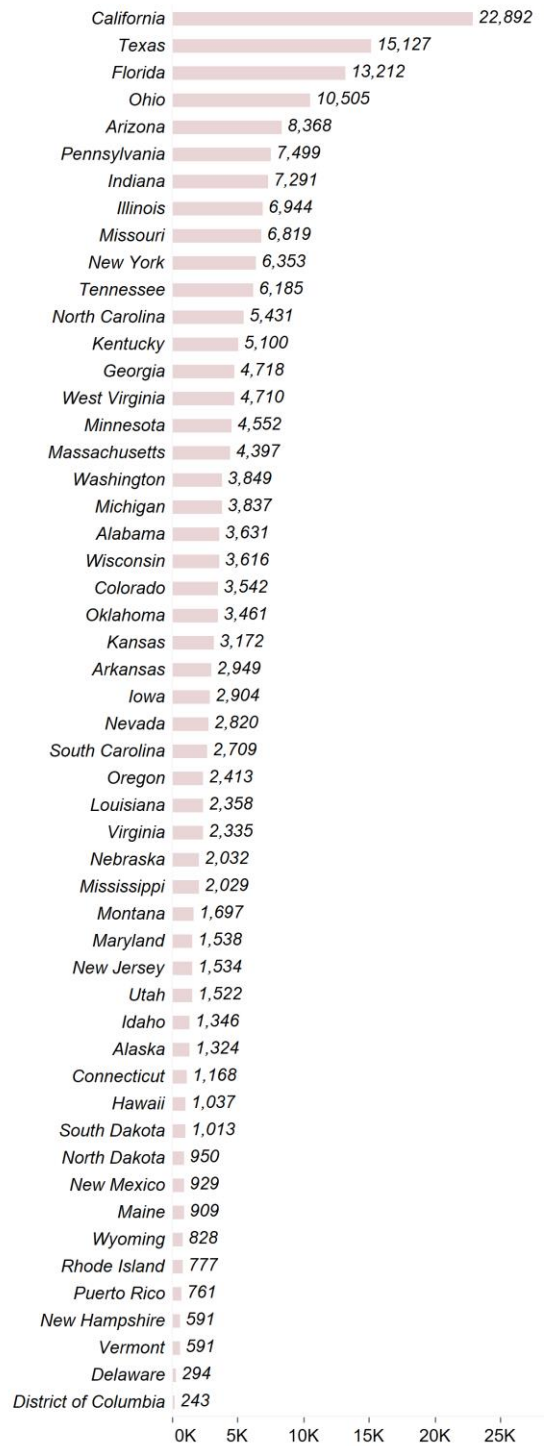
**Figure I-5. Estimated Proportion of the Child Population Living in Poverty, 2021 (N=52)**



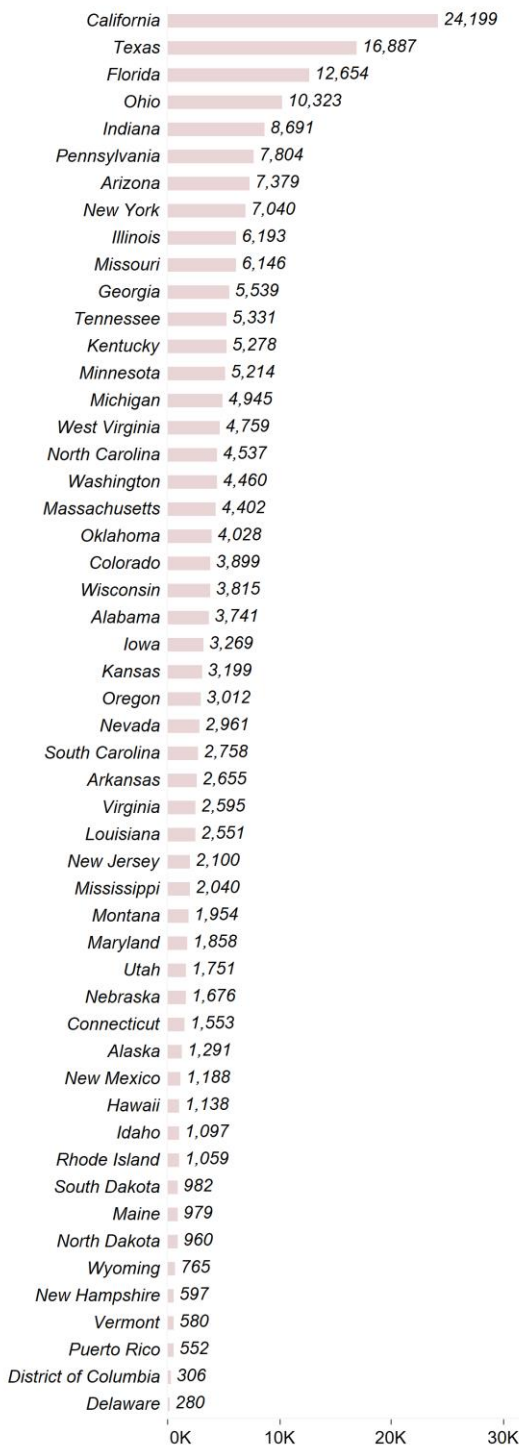
**Figure I-6. Number of Children in Foster Care on the First Day of the FY, 2021 (N=52)**



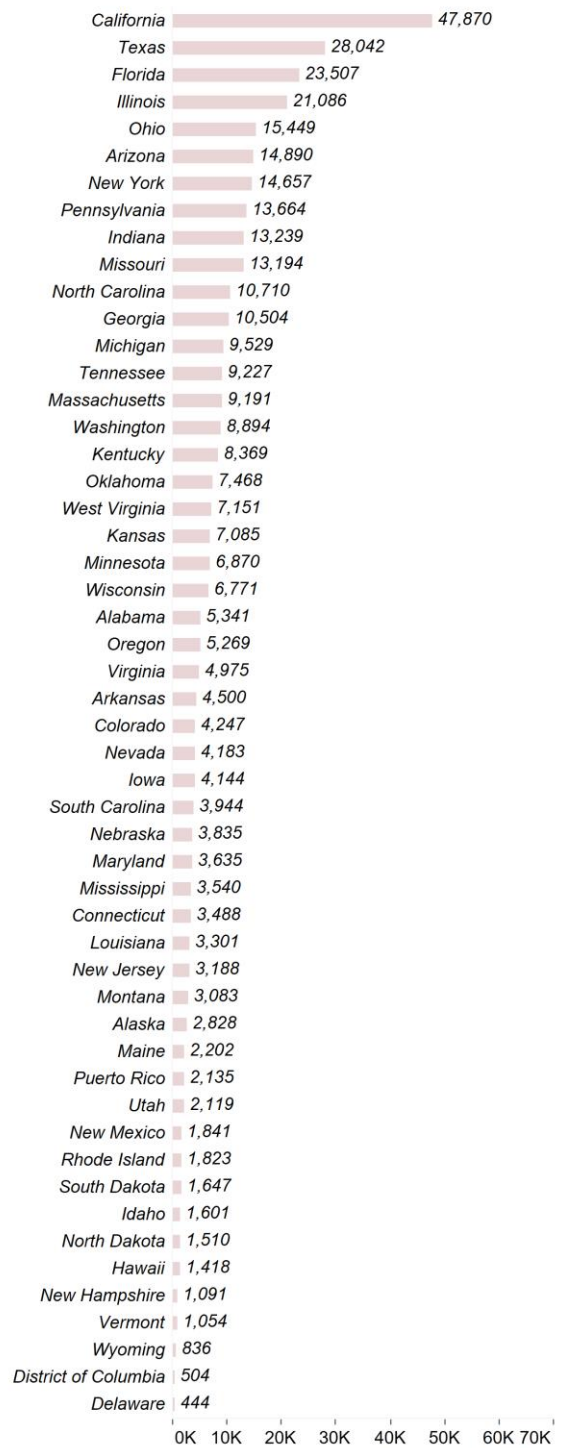
**Figure I-7. Number of Children Entering Foster Care in the FY, 2021 (N=52)**



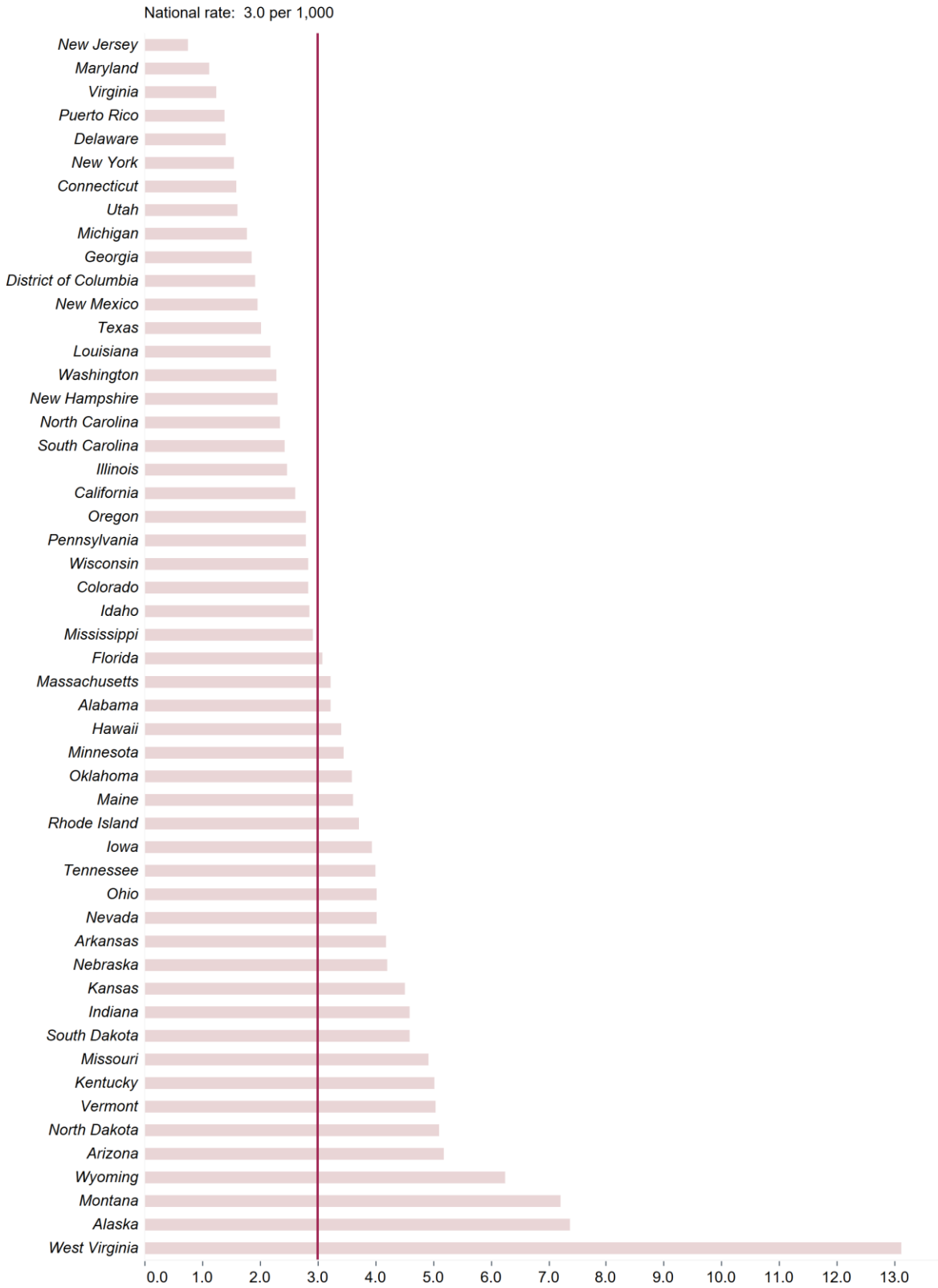
**Figure I-8. Number of Children Exiting Foster Care in the FY, 2021 (N=52)**



**Figure I-9. Number of Children in Foster Care on the Last Day of the FY, 2021 (N=52)**

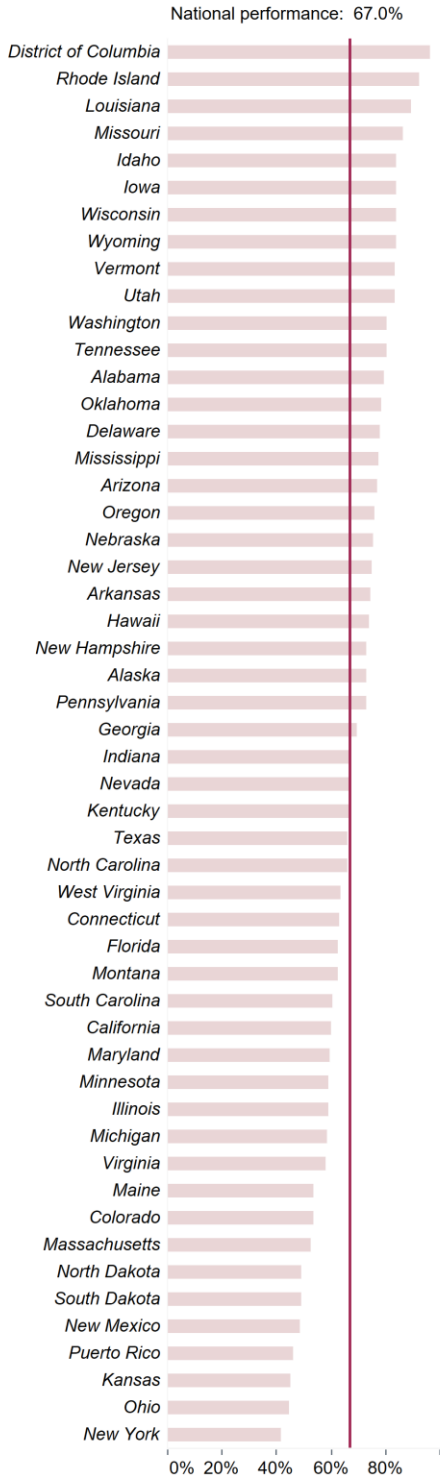


**Figure I–10. Foster Care Entry Rate per 1,000 Children, 2021 (N=52)**

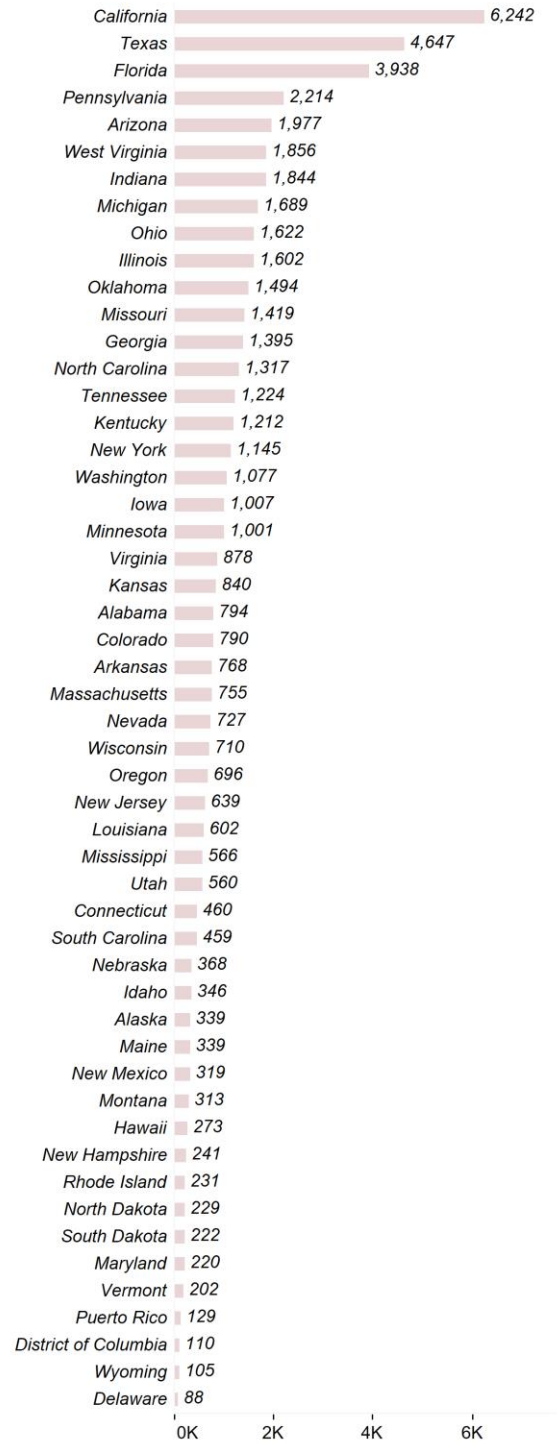




**Figure I–11. Percentage of Children Adopted Within 12 Months of Legal Termination of Parental Rights in 2020 (N=52)**



**Figure I–12. Number of Children Adopted, 2021 (N=52)**



**Table I-1. Number of Waiting Children Adopted, 2021 (N=52)**

State	Total waiting on first day of 2021 (Oct. 1, 2020)	Within 6 months (by Mar. 31, 2021)	Within 12 months (by Sept. 30, 2021)	Within 6 months (by Mar. 31, 2021)	Within 12 months (by Sept. 30, 2021)
Alabama	1,741	375	784	21.5%	45.0%
Alaska	1,005	217	407	21.6%	40.5%
Arizona	3,587	1,202	2,015	33.5%	56.2%
Arkansas	1,132	339	565	29.9%	49.9%
California	14,682	3,382	6,307	23.0%	43.0%
Colorado	844	288	447	34.1%	53.0%
Connecticut	1,366	163	449	11.9%	32.9%
Delaware	156	52	82	33.3%	52.6%
District of Columbia	161	68	92	42.2%	57.1%
Florida	9,004	2,257	4,210	25.1%	46.8%
Georgia	3,008	747	1,322	24.8%	43.9%
Hawaii	262	116	188	44.3%	71.8%
Idaho	452	158	279	35.0%	61.7%
Illinois	2,632	769	1,304	29.2%	49.5%
Indiana	3,559	973	1,812	27.3%	50.9%
Iowa	1,103	542	797	49.1%	72.3%
Kansas	2,291	412	856	18.0%	37.4%
Kentucky	3,293	736	1,496	22.4%	45.4%
Louisiana	1,161	398	674	34.3%	58.1%
Maine	609	198	333	32.5%	54.7%
Maryland	293	68	131	23.2%	44.7%
Massachusetts	3,539	442	976	12.5%	27.6%
Michigan	3,647	1,020	1,847	28.0%	50.6%
Minnesota	1,862	588	987	31.6%	53.0%
Mississippi	1,315	321	614	24.4%	46.7%
Missouri	2,537	648	1,164	25.5%	45.9%
Montana	814	196	351	24.1%	43.1%
Nebraska	655	184	322	28.1%	49.2%
Nevada	1,696	384	798	22.6%	47.1%
New Hampshire	207	50	105	24.2%	50.7%
New Jersey	1,580	399	725	25.3%	45.9%
New Mexico	1,040	233	437	22.4%	42.0%
New York	3,580	641	1,192	17.9%	33.3%
North Carolina	2,725	590	1,091	21.7%	40.0%
North Dakota	438	102	188	23.3%	42.9%
Ohio	3,412	863	1,559	25.3%	45.7%
Oklahoma	3,593	727	1,541	20.2%	42.9%
Oregon	1,036	451	653	43.5%	63.0%
Pennsylvania	3,152	939	1,624	29.8%	51.5%
Puerto Rico	444	49	73	11.0%	16.4%
Rhode Island	364	101	187	27.7%	51.4%
South Carolina	1,619	294	603	18.2%	37.2%
South Dakota	435	106	196	24.4%	45.1%
Tennessee	1,760	550	897	31.3%	51.0%
Texas	12,249	3,118	5,931	25.5%	48.4%
Utah	682	240	418	35.2%	61.3%
Vermont	307	108	175	35.2%	57.0%
Virginia	1,951	446	850	22.9%	43.6%
Washington	2,793	577	1,119	20.7%	40.1%
West Virginia	2,665	938	1,701	35.2%	63.8%
Wisconsin	1,408	349	651	24.8%	46.2%
Wyoming	122	28	61	23.0%	50.0%

**Table I–2. Number of Children Adopted, 2017–2021 (N=50)**

State	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Alabama	504	714	738	816	794
Alaska	366	353	396	354	339
Arizona	4,298	3,926	3,373	2,905	1,977
Arkansas	971	1,001	984	777	768
California	6,524	6,966	6,981	5,562	6,242
Colorado	948	910	919	832	790
Connecticut	488	497	661	450	460
Delaware	108	116	129	116	88
District of Columbia	91	100	98	98	110
Florida	3,831	4,455	4,714	4,534	3,938
Georgia	1,401	1,469	1,668	1,585	1,395
Hawaii	152	189	206	206	273
Idaho	258	245	328	353	346
Illinois	1,777	1,754	1,747	1,522	1,602
Indiana	1,964	2,016	2,489	2,149	1,844
Iowa	1,006	1,074	1,228	1,266	1,007
Kansas	674	936	1,227	985	840
Kentucky	1,128	1,124	1,368	1,365	1,212
Louisiana	766	905	895	749	602
Maine	456	395	294	247	339
Massachusetts	657	826	998	762	755
Michigan	1,970	1,991	2,161	1,851	1,689
Minnesota	946	1,284	1,347	1,043	1,001
Mississippi	358	431	719	597	566
Missouri	1,541	1,798	1,820	1,652	1,419
Montana	274	396	482	432	313
Nebraska	546	564	560	433	368
Nevada	740	760	805	796	727
New Hampshire	108	211	278	183	241
New Jersey	1,106	1,054	1,162	788	639
New Mexico	311	297	336	281	319
New York	1,789	1,697	1,648	974	1,145
North Carolina	1,528	1,522	1,546	1,521	1,317
North Dakota	162	172	197	197	229
Ohio	1,538	1,566	1,665	1,466	1,622
Oklahoma	2,593	2,238	2,086	1,820	1,494
Oregon	707	679	792	877	696
Pennsylvania	2,077	2,628	2,849	2,087	2,214
Rhode Island	250	254	184	152	231
South Carolina	487	435	529	551	459
South Dakota	181	183	211	209	222
Tennessee	1,260	1,248	1,166	1,186	1,224
Texas	5,361	5,748	6,105	5,249	4,647
Utah	665	818	639	518	560
Vermont	287	262	260	263	202
Virginia	801	879	769	844	878
Washington	1,345	1,331	1,509	1,425	1,077
West Virginia	1,070	1,410	1,699	1,683	1,856
Wisconsin	692	755	711	748	710
Wyoming	82	75	120	98	105

Note.—Data include all states that met the relevant data-quality thresholds.

## Chapter II: Keeping Children Safe

Public child welfare agencies are responsible for ensuring children who have been found to be victims of abuse or neglect are protected from further harm. Whether children are placed in foster care or maintained in their homes, the child welfare agency's first concern must be to ensure their safety. Outcome 1 (reduce recurrence of child abuse and/or neglect) and outcome 2 (reduce the incidence of child abuse and/or neglect in foster care) encompass these safety goals for children and youth.

This chapter provides information on contextual factors related to child safety as well as on the following two safety measures:

- Measure 1.1: The percentage of child victims who experienced a recurrence of maltreatment within a 12-month period
- Measure 2.1: The percentage of all children in foster care who were maltreated by a foster parent or facility staff member

### Child Victims and Child Fatalities

HHS collects and analyzes data from NCANDS on children who come into contact with public CPS agencies as alleged victims of abuse or neglect. Although submission of data to NCANDS is voluntary for states, HHS strongly encourages participation and provides technical assistance to help with data collection and reporting. All states have been reporting data to NCANDS since 1991. Fifty-one states reported NCANDS data in 2021.

Although the NCANDS submission is voluntary, it is strongly encouraged. All states have been reporting data to NCANDS since 1991.

### *Child victims*

During 2021, approximately 588,000 children were confirmed to be victims of maltreatment.<sup>46 47</sup> The most common maltreatment type reported was neglect,

Additional data about child victims—including age, race, and ethnicity—and CPS response time are available on the [Child Welfare Outcomes data site](#).

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<sup>46</sup> This Report uses a unique count for child victims, which tallies a child only once regardless of the number of times they were found to be a victim during the reporting year.

<sup>47</sup> For the purposes of this Report, a “victim of child maltreatment” is defined as a child for whom an incident of abuse or neglect has been substantiated or indicated by an investigation or assessment. This includes a child who died of child abuse or neglect. Prior to 2015, children with dispositions of “alternative response victim” were also included as victims. It is important to note that the Child Welfare Outcomes Reports use the total reported number of child victims as opposed to a national estimate of child victims, which often is reported in the Child Maltreatment reports. The total number of child victims in this Report were rounded to the nearest 1,000. For county-level information on child victimizations by race/ethnicity, visit the [Victimization and Child Abuse and Neglect FY 2020 page](#).

which was included in 82.1 percent of substantiated allegations.<sup>48</sup> It is important to note that maltreatment categories reported to NCANDS are established by data collection rules. States collect more specific allegation types in their information systems and then assign allegation types to the specific categories identified in NCANDS. As a result, there is substantial variation in what states report as neglect. Physical abuse and sexual abuse were the next most common maltreatment types—included in 16.4 percent and 10.3 percent of reported incidents of maltreatment, respectively. Psychological maltreatment accounted for 6.6 percent, and medical neglect accounted for 2.0 percent. In 2018, states began reporting sex trafficking as a separate maltreatment type. Thirty-five states reported at least one child who had been a victim of sex trafficking in 2021. This maltreatment type was reported for less than 1 percent (0.2) of all child victims nationally. Table II–1 shows the total numbers of child victims and the national child victim rates for 2017 through 2021.

<b>Measures</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2021<sup>a</sup></b>
<b>Total child victims</b>	673,630	677,464	656,251	618,399	588,229
<b>National child victim rate<sup>b</sup></b>	9.1	9.2	8.9	8.3	8.1

<sup>a</sup> All 52 states reported 2017–2020 data to NCANDS, but 51 states reported 2021 data.

<sup>b</sup> The national child victim rate was calculated by dividing the number of child victims from reporting states by the child population for reporting states and multiplying by 1,000.

Note.—The data in this table represent unique counts of child victims (i.e., a child only may be reported as a victim once per reporting year). The national estimate was calculated by multiplying the national child victim rate by the national child population and dividing by 1,000.

The national child victim rate decreased from 9.1 child victims per 1,000 children in 2017 to 8.1 child victims per 1,000 children in 2021—a decrease of 11.0 percent (see table II–1). There are many factors that could be related to the decrease in the rate of child victims, such as changes to screening procedures or policies. Additionally, the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic in the first months of 2020 may have affected that rate.<sup>49</sup> The rate of neglect decreased from 7.3 instances per 1,000 children in 2017 to 6.5 instances per 1,000 children in 2021. Similarly, the national rate (per 1,000 children in the population) of physical abuse dropped from 1.7 in 2017 to 1.3 in 2021. The national rates for psychological, medical, and sexual abuse remained unchanged for the same period.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>48</sup> Any form of child maltreatment can occur separately but can also occur in combination, and a child can be identified as the victim of more than one type of maltreatment. For more information, see the [National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System \(NCANDS\) Child File Codebook](#), which was last revised in November 2019.

<sup>49</sup> See appendix D of [Child Maltreatment 2021](#) for information on states’ data commentaries about how child welfare agencies managed operations during the pandemic. For additional information, see “[Calculating the Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Child Abuse and Neglect in the U.S.](#)” in *Child Abuse & Neglect*.

<sup>50</sup> The rate for sexual abuse in each of 2017 and 2021 was 0.8 child victims per 1,000 children. Similarly, the rate for medical neglect in each of 2017 and 2021 was 0.2 child victims per 1,000 children. The rate for psychological maltreatment was 0.5 child victims per 1,000 children for both 2017 and 2021.

Similar to previous Child Welfare Outcomes Reports, child victim rates varied widely across states. In 2021, they ranged from 1.6 child victims per 1,000 children in the state’s population to 17.0 child victims per 1,000 children in the state’s population (see figures II–1 and II–2, the latter of which is located at the end of the chapter). There are several possible explanations for this variation. One explanation is that state definitions of “child maltreatment” vary.<sup>51</sup> States with broader definitions of what constitutes child maltreatment may have higher victim rates than states with narrower definitions. Variations in the level of evidence required for substantiation also may contribute to different child victim rates among states.<sup>52</sup>

Consistent with findings in previous Child Welfare Outcomes Reports, child victim rates varied dramatically across states in 2021, ranging from 1.6 victims per 1,000 children to 17.0 victims per 1,000 children.

Another factor that limits the comparability of child victim rates across states is the use of alternative response approaches.<sup>53</sup> In alternative response approaches, child welfare agencies respond to reports of maltreatment with a referral for a family assessment rather than with a formal investigation. This typically occurs when a decision is made that there are no immediate safety concerns for the child and that the maltreatment allegation involves low or moderate risk. When a referral is made for a family assessment instead of an investigation, there is often no determination made regarding the allegations of maltreatment; therefore, the child is not classified as a victim.<sup>54</sup> Even within states that have implemented alternative response systems, comparing outcomes for children across local jurisdictions is challenging due to the varying degrees of implementation across the state. Although some states are implementing their systems statewide, others are gradually adding alternative response approaches to select jurisdictions. These methodological challenges mean that caution is warranted when comparing states that use alternative response approaches to those that do not. Similarly, when a state begins using this type of approach, examining changes in performance over time within the state may prove difficult due to the shifting responses to allegations of maltreatment.

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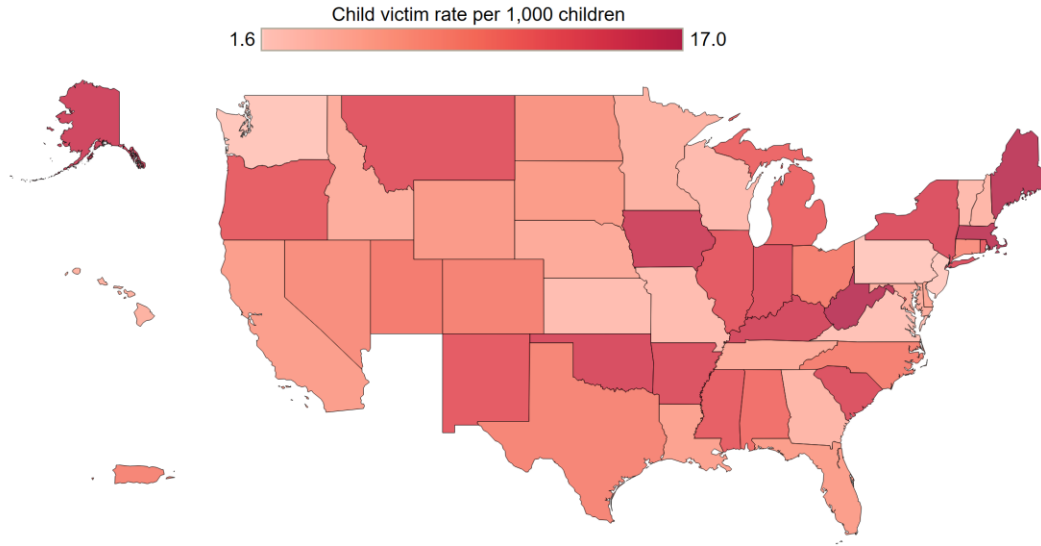
<sup>51</sup> More information about variations in state definitions of child abuse and neglect can be found in [Definitions of Child Abuse and Neglect](#) by Child Welfare Information Gateway.

<sup>52</sup> The State Child Abuse and Neglect (SCAN) database is a comprehensive resource that provides information on child maltreatment definitions across states as well as related policy practices. A data profile is available for each state, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. For more information, see the [State Profiles page](#) of the SCAN website.

<sup>53</sup> The term “alternative response” is sometimes used interchangeably with terms such as “differential response,” “dual track response,” and “multitrack response.” These terms tend to refer to the provision of a response other than an investigation when there is an allegation of maltreatment. Throughout this Report, the term “alternative response” is used. For more information on alternative response, see Information Gateway’s [Differential Response in Child Protective Services webpage](#).

<sup>54</sup> Some states make a distinction between those referrals for which services were required or mandated and those referrals for which services were not needed or were voluntary. In these cases, some states have chosen to report the referrals to NCANDS as either “alternative response victim” for those cases in which services were mandated or “alternative response non-victim” for those cases in which services were voluntary or not needed.

**Figure II–1. Map of Child Victim Rates per 1,000 Children by State, 2021 (N=51)**



***Child fatalities***

During 2021, 1,753 child fatalities were reported by states, and the national child fatality rate was 2.46 per 100,000 children in the population.<sup>55</sup> Like child victim rates, child fatality rates varied widely by state. In 2021, child fatality rates varied between 0.02 child fatalities per 100,000 children and 7.07 child fatalities per 100,000 children. Table II–2 shows the total number of child fatalities and the national child fatality rates for 2017–2021.

<b>Table II–2. Child Fatalities, 2017–2021</b>					
<b>Measures</b>	<b>2017 (N=51)</b>	<b>2018 (N=51)</b>	<b>2019 (N=52)</b>	<b>2020 (N=52)</b>	<b>2021 (N=50)</b>
<b>Total child fatalities</b>	1,691	1,751	1,825	1,742	1,753
<b>National child fatality rate<sup>a</sup></b>	2.28	2.41	2.48	2.37	2.46

<sup>a</sup> This rate is per 100,000 children.

As indicated in table II–2, the rate of child fatalities has fluctuated across the years. The national rate of child fatalities increased each year from 2017 to 2019—with the latter having the highest rate across all 5 years at 2.48—and the rate then dropped to 2.37 in 2020. However, the rate increased from 2020 (2.37) to 2021 (2.46). Given the relatively low number of child fatalities reported each year, the national rate is sensitive to multiple factors, including the number of

<sup>55</sup> The national child fatality rate was calculated by dividing the number of child fatalities reported by states (1,753) by the child population for all states that submitted NCANDS child fatality data (71,136,102) and multiplying that number by 100,000. Due to the relatively few cases of child fatalities, rates of child fatalities are presented using two decimal places to improve comparability.

states reporting data, changes in the national population estimates, and changes in state and federal policies that may affect reporting practices.<sup>56</sup>

### Range of State Performance on Safety-Related Outcome Measures

Child safety is addressed through outcome 1 (reduce recurrence of child abuse and/or neglect) and outcome 2 (reduce the incidence of child abuse and/or neglect in foster care). Table II–3 summarizes states’ performance in 2021 (for measure 2.1) and in 2020 (for measure 1.1) on the measures that reflect these outcomes. Cases identified as “alternative response victim” were not included in the calculation of these two safety measures; only substantiated and indicated cases were included.

<b>Outcome measures</b>	<b>25th percentile</b>	<b>National median (50th percentile)</b>	<b>75th percentile</b>	<b>Range</b>
Measure 1.1: Of all children who were victims of substantiated or indicated child abuse and/or neglect during a 12-month period, what percentage had another substantiated or indicated report within 12 months of the initial victimization? (N=51) <sup>a,b</sup>	5.0%	7.5%	10.3%	2.0%–17.4%
Measure 2.1: Of all children who were in foster care during the year, what percentage were the subject of substantiated or indicated maltreatment by a foster parent or facility staff? (N=49) <sup>a</sup>	0.20%	0.31%	0.77%	0.00%–1.42%

<sup>a</sup> For these measures, a lower number indicates better performance.

<sup>b</sup> This measure evaluates the recurrence of maltreatment in 2020.

Note.—Data for this table include all states for which adequate data were available.

### *Recurrence of maltreatment*

Recurrence of child maltreatment is associated with an increased risk of a number of significant negative outcomes for children, including developmental delay, cognitive and socioemotional problems, and entry into the juvenile justice system.<sup>57</sup> Additionally,

Consistent with findings in previous Child Welfare Outcomes Reports, states with higher child victim rates also tended to have higher recurrence rates.

recurrence adds additional burden to child welfare caseloads and available resources. The national median for maltreatment recurrence (measure 1.1) for children who were victims in 2020 was 7.5 percent. (Recurrence data for 2021 were not available for this Report.) Individual state performance ranged from 2.0 percent to 17.4 percent. A number of variables may have impacted this range in performance across states, including variations in child victim rates, the

<sup>56</sup> For additional information, refer to [Child Maltreatment 2021](#).

<sup>57</sup> Carnochan, S., Rizik-Baer, D., & Austin, M. (2013). Preventing the recurrence of maltreatment. *Journal of Evidence-Based Social Work*, 10(3), 161–178. <https://www.doi.org/10.1080/15433714.2013.788947>



variability in which the pandemic spread out within the United States, and state implementation of stay-at-home orders. From March 1 to May 31, 2020, 2,355 (73 percent) of the 3,233 U.S. counties had implemented stay-at-home orders.<sup>58</sup> With the closure of many institutions, children were less likely to be in contact with individuals that most frequently report child maltreatment, such as mandated reporters (e.g., school personnel, health-care providers).<sup>59</sup> As reported in previous Child Welfare Outcomes Reports, Pearson's correlation indicated a high correlation between a state's individual child victim rate and the rate of recurrence within a 12-month period (Pearson's  $r=0.74$ ).

The variation in state performance may also be related to differences across states regarding the types of child maltreatment reported. Most notably, states with high percentages of victims due to neglect tended to have a high percentage of maltreatment recurrence within a 12-month period (Pearson's  $r=0.52$ ). In contrast, there was a low, negative correlation between states' performance on measure 1.1 and the percentage of victims due to physical abuse (Pearson's  $r=-0.29$ ). There was a moderate, negative correlation between measure 1.1 and the percentage of victims of sexual abuse (Pearson's  $r=-0.45$ ). One possible explanation is that substantiated allegations of physical or sexual abuse are more likely to be followed by legal actions against the perpetrator, including actions designed to prevent additional unsupervised contact. In contrast, substantiated allegations of neglect may not result in similar actions unless the neglect is considered particularly severe.

### ***Maltreatment of children in foster care***

The 2021 data shown in table II-3 indicate a very low occurrence of maltreatment of children while in foster care (measure 2.1). The national median was 0.31 percent, but the range across states varied from 0.00 percent to 1.42 percent.<sup>60</sup> Three states (New Hampshire, North Dakota, and Oregon) reported zero cases of substantiated or indicated maltreatment by a foster parent or facility staff. Seven states (Alaska, Massachusetts, Mississippi, New York, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, and Utah) reported an occurrence of maltreatment while a child was in foster care of more than 1 percent. The variation among states may be influenced by several factors, including, but not limited to, the extent to which training and services are offered to support foster families and facility staff members; differences in casework practices; the levels of interaction caseworkers have with families, which may help caseworkers identify instances of maltreatment; the quality and consistency of caseworker visits; and the effective implementation of maltreatment prevention and treatment services.

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<sup>58</sup> Moreland, A., Herlihy, C., Tynan, M. A., Sunshine, G., McCord, R. F., Hilton, C., Poovey, J., Werner, A. K., Jones, C. D., Fulmer, E. B., Gundlapalli, A. V., Strosnider, H., Potvien, A., García, M. C., Honeycutt, S., Baldwin, G., Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Public Health Law Program, & CDC COVID-19 Response Team. (2020). Timing of state and territorial COVID-19 stay-at-home orders and changes in population movement — United States, March 1–May 31, 2020. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, 69, 1198–1203. <http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm6935a2external icon>

<sup>59</sup> Rapoport, E., Reiser, H., Schoeman, E., & Adesman, A. (2021). Reporting of child maltreatment during the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic in New York City from March to May 2020. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 116(part 2), 104719. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2020.104719>

<sup>60</sup> Due to the relatively few cases of child maltreatment in foster care, performance on this measure is presented using two decimal places to improve comparability.

## Changes Over Time in State Performance on Measures of Maltreatment Recurrence and Maltreatment of Children in Foster Care

Table II–4 presents the national medians across states for 2017–2020 for measure 1.1 and the national medians across states for 2017–2021 for measure 2.1, as well as the number of states that demonstrated an improvement or decline in performance, as determined by a percentage-change calculation.

Outcome measures <sup>a</sup>	Median by year					Improved in performance <sup>b</sup>	Declined in performance <sup>b</sup>
	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021		
Measure 1.1: Percentage of child victims who experienced a recurrence of maltreatment within a 12-month period of the initial victimization (N=49)	8.2%	7.4%	7.5%	7.4%	-- <sup>c</sup>	24 states (49%) <sup>c</sup>	14 states (29%) <sup>c</sup>
Measure 2.1: Percentage of all children in foster care who were maltreated by a foster parent or facility staff member (N=48) <sup>d</sup>	0.27%	0.24%	0.27%	0.29%	0.30%	19 states (40%)	23 states (48%)

<sup>a</sup> For these measures, a lower number indicates better performance. Full descriptions for the measures in this table can be found in table II–3 and appendix B.

<sup>b</sup> In accordance with standard procedure in conducting analyses for this Report, when there was a percentage change less than 5.0 percent in either direction (positive or negative), a determination was made that there was no change in performance.

<sup>c</sup> At the time of this analysis, data were not available to calculate the recurrence of maltreatment for children who were victims of maltreatment in 2021.

<sup>d</sup> For measure 1.1, the percentage change to determine an improvement or decline in performance is for 2017–2020 rather than for 2017–2021.

Note.—Data for this table include all states for which adequate data were available for all relevant years and may be different from the data included in table II–3 due to differences in the numbers of states included for each analysis.

As shown in table II–4, the median 4-year performance across states regarding the recurrence of child maltreatment (measure 1.1) decreased by 9.8 percent between 2017 and 2020, which showed a national improvement in performance—with almost half of the states (24) reporting an improvement in performance.

In contrast, the 5-year national median regarding the maltreatment of children in foster care (measure 2.1) showed a decline in performance. From 2017 to 2021, the national median increased from 0.27 percent to 0.30 percent—although close to half (23) of the states

The percentage of all children in foster care who experienced maltreatment while in care increased between 2017 and 2021.

reported a decline in performance for this measure. Individual state performance between 2017 and 2021 on measures of maltreatment recurrence (measure 1.1) and the maltreatment of children in foster care (measure 2.1) are displayed in tables II–5 and II–6 (presented at the end of the chapter).

## Summary of Findings Regarding Keeping Children Safe

National performance on the two safety-related measures (recurrence of maltreatment and maltreatment of children in foster care) was mixed between 2017 and 2021. The national median on measure 1.1 (maltreatment recurrence) decreased over the past 4 years, showing an improvement in performance, and the national median for measure 2.1 (maltreatment of children in care), despite fluctuations from year to year, showed an overall increase from 2017 to 2021, showing a decline in performance. It is difficult to compare states on their performance on these safety measures for the reasons previously discussed. Additionally, because of the relatively small number of child victims each year, individual state performance over time is highly sensitive to small changes in the number of victims.

For both of these safety measures, it is important to keep in mind that, while the percentages of maltreatment may be numerically small, these events have serious implications for the safety and well-being of children. Children who are maltreated, either at home or in foster care, can experience a wide variety of consequences, such as physical and mental health conditions and issues with cognitive development and academic achievement.<sup>61</sup> Furthermore, maltreatment recurrence is associated with an increase in trauma symptoms in children.<sup>62</sup> Conversely, because children who already have mental or physical conditions may be at higher risk for maltreatment,<sup>63</sup> it also is important to note that analyses in this Report do not imply causal relationships between physical and mental health conditions and maltreatment recurrence.

The end of this chapter displays outcomes-based visuals related to child safety, including child victim and fatality rates as well as state performance on outcomes 1 and 2. The [Child Welfare Outcomes data site](#) includes additional contextual data related to child maltreatment and child safety, including the following: age, race, ethnicity, and maltreatment type of child victims; mean and median CPS response times; and individual state data, including those states excluded from analyses and counts due to incomplete or inadequate data.

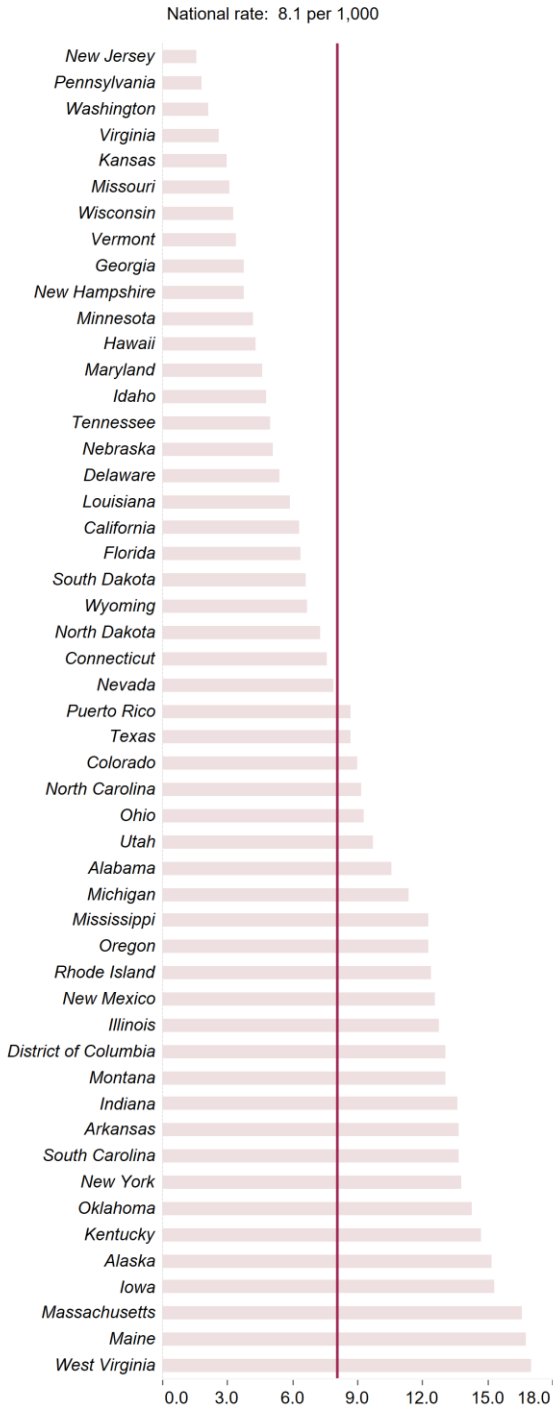
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<sup>61</sup> Child Welfare Information Gateway. (2019). *Long-term consequences of child abuse and neglect*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Children's Bureau. <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/factsheets/long-term-consequences/>

<sup>62</sup> Adams, Z. W., Moreland, A., Cohen, J. R., Lee, R. C., Hanson, R. F., Danielson, C. K., Self-Brown, S., & Briggs, E. C. (2016). Polyvictimization: Latent profiles and mental health outcomes in a clinical sample of adolescents. *Psychology of Violence*, 6(1), 145–155. <https://www.doi.org/10.1037/a0039713>

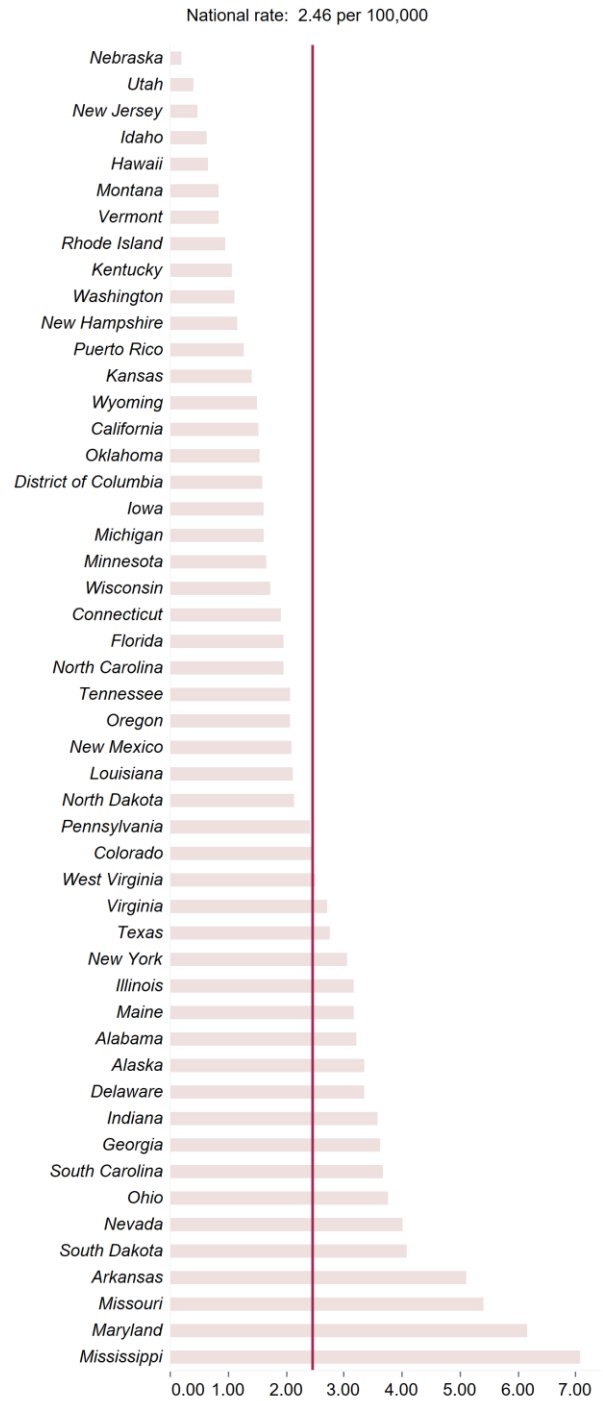
<sup>63</sup> For additional information, refer to Information Gateway's [The Risk and Prevention of Maltreatment of Children With Disabilities](#).

**Figure II–2. Child Victim Rate per 1,000 Children, 2021 (N=51)**



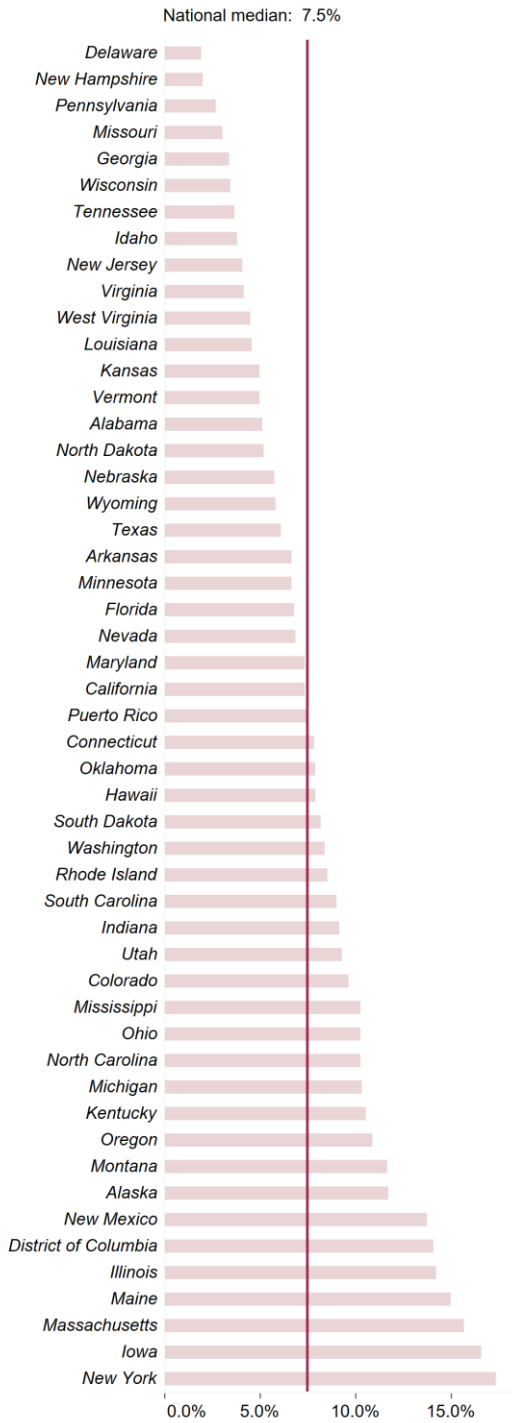
Note.—Data include all states that met the relevant data-quality thresholds.

**Figure II–3. Child Fatality Rate per 100,000 Children, 2021 (N=50)**



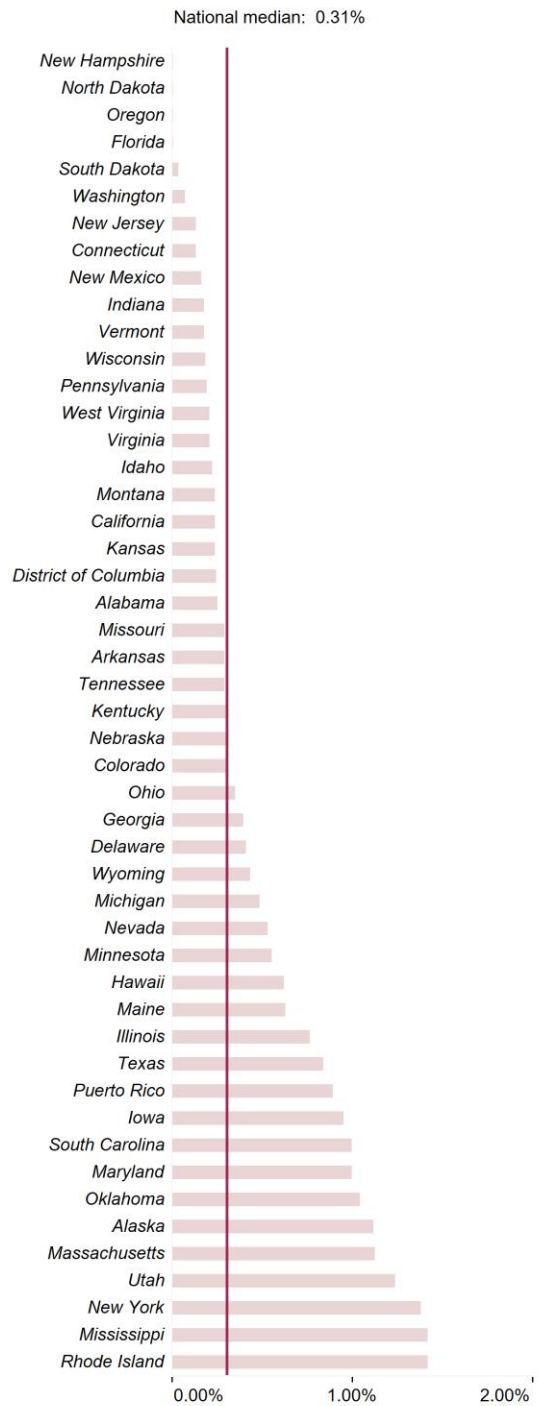
Note.—Data include all states that met the relevant data-quality thresholds.

**Figure II–4. Percentage of Children Experiencing a Recurrence of Maltreatment Within 12 Months, 2020 (N=51)**



Notes.  
 —Data include all states that met the relevant data-quality thresholds.  
 —A lower value indicates better performance.

**Figure II–5. Percentage of Children Experiencing Maltreatment in Foster Care, 2021 (N=49)**



Notes.  
 —Data include all states that met the relevant data-quality thresholds.  
 —A lower value indicates better performance.

**Table II–5. Percentage of Children Experiencing a Recurrence of Maltreatment Within 12 Months of the Initial Victimization, 2017–2021 (N=49)**

State	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021 <sup>a</sup>	Percentage change in performance, 2017–2020 <sup>b</sup>
Alabama	4.5%	4.8%	5.3%	5.2%	--	13.2%
Alaska	14.8%	17.4%	16.7%	11.8%	--	-20.2%
Arkansas	5.5%	6.8%	7.1%	6.6%	--	20.1%
California	8.2%	7.9%	7.5%	7.4%	--	-10.5%
Colorado	8.9%	8.3%	8.6%	9.7%	--	7.9%
Connecticut	10.1%	9.0%	8.6%	7.9%	--	-21.9%
Delaware	3.9%	3.6%	2.7%	2.0%	--	-50.3%
District of Columbia	12.9%	16.5%	13.1%	14.1%	--	9.1%
Florida	7.8%	7.1%	6.7%	6.8%	--	-12.7%
Georgia	3.4%	3.5%	3.1%	3.4%	--	0.5%
Hawaii	2.8%	4.2%	5.2%	7.9%	--	180.3%
Idaho	4.4%	4.7%	4.2%	3.8%	--	-12.8%
Illinois	12.6%	12.6%	13.4%	14.2%	--	12.7%
Indiana	9.8%	9.6%	9.9%	9.2%	--	-6.5%
Iowa	14.5%	15.2%	14.7%	16.6%	--	15.0%
Kansas	6.1%	6.8%	5.1%	5.0%	--	-18.0%
Kentucky	14.9%	13.8%	11.8%	10.6%	--	-28.7%
Louisiana	8.7%	6.6%	6.2%	4.6%	--	-46.9%
Maine	10.4%	11.8%	12.8%	15.0%	--	44.3%
Maryland	10.3%	9.9%	8.8%	7.4%	--	-28.3%
Massachusetts	16.7%	17.0%	16.9%	15.7%	--	-5.7%
Michigan	11.3%	10.8%	11.3%	10.4%	--	-8.2%
Minnesota	9.9%	7.2%	6.4%	6.7%	--	-32.4%
Mississippi	9.3%	10.5%	10.4%	10.3%	--	10.5%
Missouri	3.4%	3.8%	2.9%	3.1%	--	-8.6%
Montana	11.5%	11.7%	11.4%	11.7%	--	1.5%
Nebraska	6.2%	6.3%	5.1%	5.8%	--	-6.5%
Nevada	6.8%	7.4%	6.4%	6.9%	--	1.7%
New Hampshire	3.2%	3.6%	3.9%	2.0%	--	-36.9%
New Jersey	5.8%	4.9%	5.1%	4.1%	--	-29.8%
New Mexico	14.1%	14.5%	13.8%	13.8%	--	-2.2%
New York	19.1%	18.1%	18.1%	17.4%	--	-9.2%
North Dakota	7.3%	7.3%	6.7%	5.2%	--	-28.4%
Ohio	9.7%	10.1%	9.6%	10.3%	--	5.4%
Oklahoma	8.2%	8.6%	8.5%	7.9%	--	-4.0%
Oregon	11.0%	10.9%	11.4%	10.9%	--	-0.6%
Pennsylvania	2.2%	2.4%	2.5%	2.7%	--	23.1%
Rhode Island	11.1%	10.3%	10.4%	8.5%	--	-23.2%
South Carolina	8.2%	9.3%	8.0%	9.0%	--	9.9%
South Dakota	7.9%	7.3%	8.8%	8.2%	--	4.7%
Tennessee	3.7%	3.9%	4.2%	3.7%	--	0.8%
Texas	5.7%	5.5%	5.5%	6.1%	--	7.3%
Utah	10.4%	10.4%	9.4%	9.3%	--	-10.3%
Vermont	5.5%	5.4%	3.8%	5.0%	--	-8.1%
Virginia	4.3%	4.5%	4.4%	4.2%	--	-3.8%
Washington	8.1%	9.6%	8.2%	8.4%	--	3.9%
West Virginia	7.4%	7.0%	5.4%	4.5%	--	-38.6%
Wisconsin	4.9%	4.1%	4.1%	3.5%	--	-28.6%
Wyoming	3.9%	4.7%	5.3%	5.9%	--	52.3%

<sup>a</sup> Data were not available to calculate the recurrence of maltreatment of children who were victims of maltreatment in 2021.

<sup>b</sup> A change of +/-5.0 percent is considered a change in performance. Values shaded in dark magenta indicate an improvement in performance, values shaded in light magenta indicate a decline in performance, and values with no shading indicate no change in performance.

Note.— A lower value indicates better performance. Data include all states that met the relevant data-quality thresholds.

**Table II-6. Percentage of Children Experiencing Maltreatment in Foster Care, 2017–2021  
(N=48)**

State	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	Percentage change in performance, 2017–2021 <sup>a</sup>
Alabama	0.30%	0.17%	0.27%	0.32%	0.25%	-15.6%
Alaska	0.88%	1.51%	0.78%	1.43%	1.12%	26.9%
Arkansas	0.23%	0.13%	0.15%	0.21%	0.29%	27.7%
California	0.18%	0.19%	0.19%	0.25%	0.24%	34.1%
Colorado	0.49%	0.47%	0.46%	0.30%	0.32%	-34.9%
Connecticut	1.27%	0.03%	0.24%	0.15%	0.14%	-89.1%
Delaware	0.00%	0.00%	0.22%	0.00%	0.41%	NA
District of Columbia	0.27%	0.56%	0.28%	0.23%	0.25%	-8.6%
Florida	0.04%	0.01%	0.02%	0.01%	0.01%	-79.3%
Georgia	0.35%	0.18%	0.34%	0.30%	0.40%	14.0%
Hawaii	0.11%	0.11%	0.59%	0.26%	0.63%	469.1%
Idaho	0.04%	0.00%	0.07%	0.08%	0.22%	457.0%
Illinois	0.75%	0.60%	0.72%	0.84%	0.77%	2.7%
Indiana	0.26%	0.20%	0.25%	0.24%	0.18%	-29.9%
Iowa	0.22%	0.48%	0.38%	0.51%	0.96%	335.4%
Kansas	0.65%	0.16%	0.25%	0.15%	0.24%	-62.6%
Kentucky	0.51%	0.50%	0.20%	0.27%	0.31%	-39.7%
Maine	0.57%	0.75%	0.70%	0.85%	0.63%	10.3%
Maryland	0.47%	0.55%	0.54%	1.34%	1.00%	113.1%
Massachusetts	1.00%	1.22%	0.96%	1.15%	1.13%	12.6%
Michigan	0.88%	0.71%	0.88%	0.43%	0.49%	-44.3%
Minnesota	0.81%	0.70%	0.37%	0.53%	0.55%	-31.5%
Mississippi	1.14%	1.26%	1.55%	2.23%	1.42%	24.4%
Missouri	0.28%	0.27%	0.39%	0.28%	0.29%	3.4%
Montana	0.39%	0.84%	0.55%	0.35%	0.24%	-38.9%
Nebraska	0.23%	0.15%	0.21%	0.16%	0.31%	34.1%
Nevada	0.21%	0.24%	0.39%	0.33%	0.53%	153.3%
New Hampshire	0.20%	0.00%	0.05%	0.00%	0.00%	-100.0%
New Jersey	0.12%	0.32%	0.28%	0.13%	0.13%	10.3%
New Mexico	0.11%	0.19%	0.03%	0.26%	0.17%	50.2%
New York	3.28%	1.68%	1.50%	1.74%	1.38%	-57.8%
North Dakota	0.00%	0.15%	0.12%	0.08%	0.00%	0.0%
Ohio	0.42%	0.43%	0.49%	0.37%	0.35%	-15.9%
Oklahoma	1.23%	1.09%	0.69%	0.88%	1.04%	-15.1%
Oregon	0.95%	0.74%	0.86%	0.20%	0.00%	-100.0%
Pennsylvania	0.20%	0.11%	0.14%	0.18%	0.20%	-2.2%
Rhode Island	2.06%	1.80%	2.06%	2.19%	1.42%	-30.9%
South Carolina	0.50%	0.67%	0.41%	0.61%	1.00%	99.9%
South Dakota	0.16%	0.04%	0.26%	0.47%	0.04%	-76.2%
Tennessee	0.14%	0.19%	0.17%	0.29%	0.30%	111.0%
Texas	0.27%	0.23%	0.24%	0.44%	0.84%	211.6%
Utah	0.43%	0.43%	0.20%	0.42%	1.24%	188.4%
Vermont	0.10%	0.15%	0.15%	0.23%	0.18%	83.6%
Virginia	0.20%	0.13%	0.25%	0.19%	0.21%	5.7%
Washington	0.08%	0.07%	0.06%	0.09%	0.07%	-6.4%
West Virginia	0.21%	0.11%	0.14%	0.28%	0.21%	-0.1%
Wisconsin	0.12%	0.26%	0.11%	0.20%	0.19%	57.4%
Wyoming	0.24%	0.24%	0.00%	0.67%	0.44%	82.2%

<sup>a</sup> A change of +/-5.0 percent is considered a change in performance. Values shaded in dark magenta indicate an improvement in performance, values shaded in light magenta indicate a decline in performance, and values with no shading indicate no change in performance. Cells marked with “NA” indicate a percentage change could not be calculated because the percentage for the first year (2017) was 0.00 percent.

Note.— A lower value indicates better performance. Data include all states that met the relevant data-quality thresholds.

## Chapter III: Finding Permanent Homes for Children in Foster Care

When foster care is necessary to ensure a child’s safety and well-being, state child welfare agencies are tasked with the responsibility of working with families and the courts to return children to their homes or to find other permanent homes in a timely manner.<sup>64</sup> Outcome 3 (increase permanency for children in foster care) encompasses these permanency goals for children and youth. This chapter presents key findings on state performance toward this outcome by considering children who have exited foster care and assessing state data on the percentage who achieve permanency and the percentage who exit to emancipation. For the Child Welfare Outcomes Report data indicators, a child achieves permanency when they are reported as discharged from foster care to one of the following arrangements:

- Reunified with parents or primary caretakers
- Living with other relatives<sup>65</sup>
- Guardianship<sup>66</sup>
- Legally adopted

State and national performance on exits to permanency for children in foster care is assessed using the following measures:

- Measure 3.1: The percentage of all children exiting foster care who exited to a permanent home
- Measure 3.2: The percentage of all children exiting foster care with a diagnosed disability who were discharged to a permanent home
- Measure 3.3: The percentage of all children exiting foster care who entered foster care when they were older than age 12 and who were discharged to a permanent home
- Measure 3.4: The percentage of all children who emancipated from foster care and who entered foster care when they were age 12 or younger
- Measure 3.5: The percentage of children by racial or ethnic category who exited either to reunification, adoption, or legal guardianship<sup>67</sup>

### Children Exiting Foster Care

Nationally, approximately 215,000 children exited foster care in 2021. Across states, the median length of stay for children exiting care ranged from 7.9 months to 25.5 months. The majority of the states (48) reported a median length of stay less than 24 months for children exiting care, and

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<sup>64</sup> For the purposes of this Report, “foster care” refers to a variety of out-of-home placement settings in which children are placed away from their parents or guardians under the placement and care responsibility of the state child welfare agency for at least 24 hours. This includes foster family homes, group homes, shelters, residential treatment facilities, and similar placements. For more information, see [Guide to an AFCARS Assessment Review](#).

<sup>65</sup> For the Child Welfare Outcomes Reports, the discharge reasons of “reunification with parents or primary caretakers” and “living with other relatives” are combined into the category of “reunification.”

<sup>66</sup> Legal guardians include relatives and nonrelatives.

<sup>67</sup> Due to the structure of this measure, data regarding (1) the range of state performance in 2021 and (2) state medians and change in performance over time from 2017 to 2021 were included in separate tables. Additionally, in this Report, this measure is only reported at the national level. To view state-by-state data on this measure, please visit the [Child Welfare Outcomes data site](#).



three states reported a median length of stay less than 12 months for children exiting foster care. Chapter IV discusses outcomes designed to address the timeliness of these exits.

Table III–1 provides a breakdown of the foster care discharge reasons reported for these children. Nationally, 88.9 percent of all children exiting foster care during 2021 were discharged to a permanent home (i.e., were discharged to reunification, adoption, or legal guardianship).<sup>68</sup> Although that percentage is high, it is important to keep in mind that a central goal in child welfare is to find permanent, secure homes for 100 percent of children who must enter foster care.

In 2021, 88.9 percent of all children who exited foster care during the year were discharged to a permanent home.

<b>Discharge reason</b>	<b>Number of children</b>	<b>Percentage of total exits<sup>a</sup></b>
Adoption	53,546	24.9%
Emancipation	19,130	8.9%
Guardianship	25,023	11.6%
Reunification	112,535	52.3%
Other <sup>b</sup>	4,737	2.2%

<sup>a</sup> The percentage of total exits was calculated based on 214,971 children exiting care in 2021. The percentages may not total 100 percent due to rounding. In addition, the sum of adoption, guardianship, and reunification percentages also may not add up to the total percentage reported as discharged to permanency due to rounding.

<sup>b</sup> “Other” includes the discharge reasons of runaway, death, or transfer to another agency as well as missing data.

Nationally, slightly over 19,000 youth exited foster care in 2021 with a discharge reason of emancipation.<sup>69</sup>

These are youth for whom the state was unable to find a permanent home. Over the past 5 years, with the exception of 2018, the percentage of children exiting to emancipation has remained over 8 percent (8.4 percent in 2017, 7.6 percent in 2018, 8.2 percent in 2019, 8.8 percent in 2020, and 8.9 percent in 2021). The percentage change from 2017 to 2021 represented an overall increase of 6.4 percent.<sup>70</sup> The national median was 7.2 in 2017 and 7.0 in 2021.<sup>71</sup>

Since 2017, the percentage of all children emancipating from foster care has increased by 6.4 percent.

There was considerable variation between states in 2021 regarding the percentages of children exiting foster care with a discharge reason of emancipation. The states with the highest percentages of emancipation were Maryland (25.5 percent) New York (21.7 percent), Delaware (18.6 percent), and Virginia (16.3 percent). The states with the lowest percentages were Puerto Rico (0.4 percent), West Virginia (2.0 percent), and Wyoming and Washington (2.4 percent each).

<sup>68</sup> This percentage uses the total numbers reported across all states, as presented in table III–1. This should not be confused with the national median on measure 3.1, which is the median across states.

<sup>69</sup> For more information regarding the AFCARS definition of emancipation, see [Guide to an AFCARS Assessment Review](#).

<sup>70</sup> The percentage change calculation was done without rounding.

<sup>71</sup> These percentages refer to the median across states for *all* children exiting foster care to emancipation. This should not be confused with the median for outcome measure 3.4, which examines the subpopulation of children who were discharged to emancipation after entering care at age 12 or younger.

One possibility for this variation across states is the differences across states in the ages of children entering foster care (i.e., a state with proportionally more older youth entering foster care would have a higher percentage of the state’s foster youth exiting to emancipation). However, there was a low positive correlation between the percentage of youth in a state discharged from foster care who were emancipated and the percentage of children who entered foster care in the state who were age 12 or older (Pearson’s  $r=0.29$ ).

### Range of Performance in Achieving Permanency for Children in Foster Care

Table III–2 displays state performance in 2021 on measures regarding finding permanent homes for children in foster care. Table III–3 provides data about the racial and ethnic categories of children who left care to reunification, adoption, or legal guardianship (i.e., were discharged to a permanent home).

Table III–2. Range of State Performance, 2021				
Outcome 3: Increase Permanency for Children in Foster Care				
Outcome measures	25th percentile	National median (50th percentile)	75th percentile	Range
Measure 3.1: Of all children who exited foster care during the year, what percentage left to either reunification, adoption, or legal guardianship (i.e., were discharged to a permanent home)? (N=52)	86.5%	89.6%	92.2%	68.8%–98.6%
Measure 3.2: Of all children who exited foster care during the year and were identified as having a diagnosed disability, what percentage left to either reunification, adoption, or legal guardianship (i.e., were discharged to a permanent home)? (N=50)	75.2%	81.5%	87.3%	49.9%–97.8%
Measure 3.3: Of all children who exited foster care during the year and were older than age 12 at the time of their most recent entry into care, what percentage left either to reunification, adoption, or legal guardianship (i.e., were discharged to a permanent home)? (N=52)	55.1%	63.0%	69.8%	30.9%–96.9%
Measure 3.4: Of all children exiting foster care during the year to emancipation, what percentage were age 12 or younger at the time of entry into care? (N=52) <sup>a</sup>	10.9%	15.2%	20.0%	0.0%–57.1%

<sup>a</sup> For this measure, a lower number indicates better performance.

Note.—Data for this table include all states for which adequate data were available.

Table III–3. Range of State Performance, 2021				
Outcome 3: Increase Permanency for Children in Foster Care				
Measure 3.5: Of all children who exited foster care during the year, what percentage by racial/ethnic category left either to reunification, adoption, or legal guardianship (i.e., were discharged to a permanent home)? (N=52)	25th percentile	National median (50th percentile)	75th percentile	Range
American Indian or Alaska Native	77.6%	86.1%	94.5%	0.0%–100.0%
Asian	78.6%	91.1%	100.0%	33.3%–100.0%
Black or African American	82.6%	87.1%	90.6%	65.4%–100.0%
Hispanic or Latino (of any race)	86.0%	89.2%	92.2%	66.7%–98.5%
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander	50.0%	92.3%	100.0%	0.0%–100.0%
White	88.9%	90.9%	93.4%	77.4%–100.0%
Two or more races	87.6%	90.4%	95.5%	71.6%–100.0%

Note.—All races exclude children of Hispanic or Latino origin. Children of Hispanic or Latino ethnicity may be of any race.

Measures 3.1, 3.2, and 3.3 assess permanency for children at the time of discharge from foster care, and measure 3.5 assesses permanency by race and ethnicity categories. The national median across states for all children who exited foster care to permanency during 2021 (measure 3.1) was 89.6 percent. State medians ranged from 69.8 percent to 98.6 percent. Only the following three states reported permanency rates below 80.0 percent: Maryland (69.8 percent), New York (76.7 percent), and Virginia (77.2 percent).

### *Children with disabilities*

For the purpose of AFCARS and this Report, a child is determined to have a disability if a qualified professional has clinically diagnosed the child as having one of the following conditions: intellectual disability, visual or hearing impairment, physical disability, emotional disturbance, or other medically diagnosed conditions requiring special care.<sup>72</sup> As indicated in table III–2, states tended to be considerably more successful in 2021 in finding permanent homes for the general foster care population exiting foster care (national median: 89.6 percent) than for children with diagnosed disabilities who exited foster care (national median: 81.5 percent). State medians regarding permanent homes for children with disabilities varied considerably in 2021, ranging from 49.9 percent to 97.8 percent, with only one state (Washington) having a median on this measure being the same or higher than the state’s median for measure 3.1 (permanency for all children). The disparity between achieving permanency for all children exiting care and for children with disabilities has been a consistent finding in previous Child Welfare Outcomes Reports.<sup>73</sup> Because children with diagnosed disabilities may need higher levels of care, they may be more likely to be placed in residential treatment facilities, which may be better equipped to provide such care and are, therefore, less likely to achieve permanent homes with families. The findings presented in this Report suggest that agencies should continue to analyze their data and current practices to consider whether there are ways to increase placing these children in permanent homes.

### *Older youth in foster care*

Another long-standing pattern that continues in this Report is the difficulty states have in establishing permanency for children who entered foster care when they were older than age 12. The national median regarding exits to permanency by older youth, defined as children

Overall, states were less successful in establishing permanency for children with disabilities and children who entered foster care when they were older than age 12 than they were for the total population of children exiting care.

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<sup>72</sup> For more information on disabilities and AFCARS, including complete definitions and conditions that may be mapped to AFCARS, see [AFCARS Technical Bulletin #2: Disability Information](#), which was last revised in February 2012. Note that the term “mental retardation” and not “intellectual disability” is the term in AFCARS 1993 legislative requirements that are in effect for the data collection reporting years used here. This and other socially unacceptable terms will be replaced in the future in order to comply with the updated AFCARS legislation (AFCARS 2020), and therefore we have removed the term from this report pre-emptively.

<sup>73</sup> CB released two data briefs that explore foster care outcomes of children and youth with diagnosed conditions in foster care: [Analysis According to Special Health Care Needs Status](#) and [Analysis by the Type of Diagnosis or Diagnoses the Child Has](#).

who were older than age 12 at the time of their most recent entry into care, was only 63.0 percent.<sup>74</sup>

Older youth in foster care may face numerous age-specific barriers to permanency.<sup>75</sup> For example, there may be a shortage of families who are willing and able to provide permanent homes for older youth. This could be due to multiple factors, but one likely contributor is the higher rate of youth in foster care who report having experienced risky behaviors. Older youth transitioning from foster care have relatively higher rates of substance abuse assessment or counseling referrals, incarceration, and giving birth to or fathering a child.<sup>76</sup> In addition, youth with special health-care needs might require more resources, and there may be a lack of families willing and able to provide them with the support they need. For example, children with diagnoses of emotional disturbance and comorbid conditions are more likely to have removal reasons involving child behavior problems compared to children without those diagnoses,<sup>77</sup> which may mean these children and their foster families may require additional resources to secure placement stability.

Additionally, there may also be agency practices that act as barriers to permanency for older youth. Specifically, child welfare agencies may lack the commitment needed to establish permanency options for older youth in care, with staff perhaps believing these individuals to be unadoptable.<sup>78</sup> Furthermore, some agencies may focus on providing independent living services to these youth rather than finding permanency options. Although these types of services are an important component of preparing youth for adulthood, they are not sufficient for connecting them with permanent families.<sup>79</sup>

Finally, older youth might show some resistance to permanency planning. If permanency planning involves the termination of their birth parents' rights, older youth might be hesitant to form ties with new families. These youth also may fear some hesitancy to start a new family because of negative past experiences.<sup>80</sup>

### *Youth emancipating from foster care*

Measure 3.4 examines the amount of time children were in foster care before emancipation. The data in table III–2 show that, in half of the states, 15.2 percent or more of the children who were emancipated from foster care in 2021 were age 12 or younger at their entry into foster care (a

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<sup>74</sup> The number of older children in foster care may include youth who are involved in the juvenile justice system.

<sup>75</sup> Child Welfare Information Gateway. (2019). *Promoting permanency for older youth in out-of-home care*. HHS, ACF, CB. <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/bulletins-permanency>

<sup>76</sup> For more information, see the [National Youth in Transition Database Data Briefs page](#) on the CB website.

<sup>77</sup> Hernández Baullosa, T., White, T., & Haight, J. (2022). *Analysis by the type of diagnosis or diagnoses the child has*. HHS, ACF, CB, Data Analytic and Reporting Team.

<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/cb/data-brief2-analysis-by-diagnosis-type.pdf>

<sup>78</sup> Groh, A. (2009). *It's time to make older child adoption a reality: Because every child and youth deserves a family*. North American Council on Adoptable Children. <https://www.nacac.org/resource/its-time-to-make-older-child-adoption-a-reality-because-every-child-and-youth-deserves-a-family/>

<sup>79</sup> Child Welfare Information Gateway. (2019). *Promoting permanency for older youth in out-of-home care*. HHS, ACF, CB. <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/bulletins-permanency>

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

lower percentage is desirable for this measure). Individual state medians varied widely, from 0.0 percent to 57.1 percent.

It is important to keep in mind, however, that emancipations—regardless of age at entry—are a relatively small proportion of all exits from care for any given state, which can cause large fluctuations in state performance in a single year and over time. For example, 16 states had fewer than 100 children exiting care in 2021 with a discharge reason of emancipation, with Puerto Rico and Wyoming respectively reporting only 2 and 18 of such children. This effect will be especially important to keep in mind in future Reports if, as previously discussed, the total number of children emancipating from foster care for some states continues to decline.

### *Race and ethnicity of children exiting to permanency*

Measure 3.5 assesses the percentage of children exiting to a permanent home by race and ethnicity (see table III–3). The national median across states for children exiting to permanency during 2021 was 86.1 percent for American Indian or Alaska Native children, 91.1 percent for Asian children, 87.1 percent for Black or African American children, 89.2 percent for Hispanic or Latino children (of any race), 92.3 percent for Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander children, 90.9 percent for White children, and 90.4 percent for children of two or more races. For a breakout by state and exit reasons for this measure, visit the [Child Welfare Outcomes data site](#).

### **Changes Over Time in State Performance on Measures of Achieving Permanency**

Table III–4 presents the medians across states for 2017–2021 on the measures pertaining to achieving permanency for children in foster care. The table also presents a summary of the changes in state performance between 2017 and 2021 on these measures. These medians and changes in performance over time should be viewed together to gain a better understanding of trends over time.

**Table III–4. State Medians and Changes in Performance Over Time, 2017–2021**

**Outcome 3: Increase Permanency for Children in Foster Care**

Outcome measures <sup>a</sup>	Median by year					Improved in performance <sup>b</sup>	Declined in performance <sup>b</sup>
	2018	2017	2019	2020	2021		
Measure 3.1: Percentage of all children who exited foster care to a permanent home (N=50)	90.3%	90.5%	90.5%	90.3%	89.6%	3 states (6%)	2 states (4%)
Measure 3.2: Percentage of all children with a diagnosed disability exiting foster care who were discharged to a permanent home (N=43)	81.2%	82.4%	83.3%	83.8%	81.9%	9 states (21%)	7 states (16%)

Measure 3.3: Percentage of all children who entered foster care when they were older than age 12 who were discharged to a permanent home (N=50)	64.5%	62.9%	64.3%	62.7%	63.0%	8 states (16%)	19 states (38%)
Measure 3.4: Percentage of all children emancipated from foster care who entered foster care when they were age 12 or younger (N=50) <sup>c</sup>	16.6%	15.5%	15.0%	14.6%	15.2%	26 states (52%)	20 states (40%)

<sup>a</sup> Full descriptions for the measures in this table can be found in table III–2 and appendix B.

<sup>b</sup> In accordance with standard procedure for the analyses conducted for this Report, when there was a percentage change of less than 5.0 in either direction (positive or negative), a determination was made that there was no change in performance.

<sup>c</sup> For this measure, a lower number indicates better performance.

Note.—Data for this table include all states for which adequate data were available for all relevant years and may be different from the data included in table III–2 due to differences in the numbers of states included for each analysis.

Table III–5 presents data about the state medians regarding the percentages of children, by racial and ethnic categories, that left care to reunification, adoption, or legal guardianship.

Table III–5. State Medians and Changes in Performance Over Time, 2017–2021							
Outcome 3: Increase Permanency for Children in Foster Care							
Measure 3.5: Of all children who exited foster care during the year, what percentage by racial/ethnic category left either to reunification, adoption, or legal guardianship (i.e., were discharged to a permanent home)? (N=50) <sup>a</sup>	Median by year					Improved in performance <sup>b</sup>	Declined in performance <sup>b</sup>
	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021		
American Indian or Alaska Native	87.2%	83.3%	84.6%	86.6%	86.7%	13 states (26%)	11 states (22%)
Asian	87.3%	93.3%	85.7%	90.6%	91.7%	14 states (27%)	10 states (20%)
Black or African American	86.5%	86.8%	87.0%	85.9%	87.1%	8 states (16%)	7 states (14%)
Hispanic or Latino (of any race)	90.6%	90.5%	90.8%	89.3%	89.2%	5 states (10%)	9 states (18%)
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander	100.0%	93.3%	100.0%	100.0%	92.3%	8 states (16%)	9 states (18%)
White	91.1%	91.9%	91.6%	91.3%	90.9%	2 states (4%)	1 state (2%)
Two or more races	92.9%	94.4%	95.0%	95.1%	90.5%	11 states (22%)	14 states (28%)

<sup>a</sup> All races exclude children of Hispanic or Latino origin. Children of Hispanic or Latino ethnicity may be of any race. Full descriptions for this measure can be found in table III–2 and appendix B.

<sup>b</sup> In accordance with standard procedure for the analyses conducted for this Report, when there was a percentage change of less than 5.0 in either direction (positive or negative), a determination was made that there was no change in performance.

Note.—Data for this table include all states for which adequate data were available for all relevant years and may be different from the data included in table III–3 due to differences in the numbers of states included for each analysis.

As indicated in table III–4 and table III–6 (at the end of this chapter), states’ performance in finding permanent homes for children discharged from foster care (measure 3.1) declined slightly since 2017, though the overall 0.8-percent decrease over time does not meet the threshold of meaningful change utilized in this Report. Because of the generally high performance by states on this measure, meaningful change is less likely to occur over the relatively short 5-year timeframe under review for this Report. This is evidenced by 45 states

(90 percent) reporting no change in performance and 3 states (6 percent) demonstrating an improvement in performance.

As previously discussed, states have not been as successful in achieving permanency for children exiting with disabilities (measure 3.2) compared with their performance for all children. For example, the national median in 2021 for measure 3.1 was 89.6 percent while the national median for measure 3.2 was 81.9 percent. The national median showed less than 1-percent increase (0.9) between 2017 (81.2 percent) and 2021 (81.9 percent). Prior Child Welfare Outcomes Reports also noted a reliable, although not meaningful, yearly improvement on this measure, with slightly more states showing an improvement in performance than a decline.

In contrast, state performance on measure 3.3 (permanency for older children) continued to be a challenge for states. The national measure decreased slightly from 64.5 percent in 2017 to 63.0 percent in 2021—for an overall decrease of 2.3 percent. Furthermore, more states (38 percent) demonstrated a decline in performance than an improvement (16 percent) during that period.

One of the most notable changes in performance between 2017 and 2021 was in the percentage of children who emancipated from foster care who had entered care when they were age 12 or younger (measure 3.4). As presented in table III–4, over half of the states (52 percent) demonstrated improved performance between 2017 and 2021 on this measure. The national median improved from 16.6 percent to 15.2 percent—a meaningful improvement in performance of 8.4 percent. This finding reflects a continuing trend noted in previous Child Welfare Outcomes Reports, although the magnitude of change may be decreasing.<sup>81</sup>

Between 2017 and 2021, the median percentage of children emancipated from foster care who had entered care when they were age 12 or younger declined by 8.4 percent—with 26 states demonstrating an improvement in performance.

For measure 3.5 (see table III–5), which reports on the race and ethnicity of children exiting to permanency, a 5-year decrease in the national median was observed regarding American Indian or Alaska Native children (0.6 percent), Hispanic or Latino children (1.5 percent), children of two or more races (2.6 percent), and White children (0.2). Only two races showed a slight improvement in performance over the 5-year period evaluated: Asian children (5.0 percent) and Black or African American children (0.7 percent). The national median regarding Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander children decreased by 7.7 from 2017 to 2021, which is considered a meaningful change in performance, but the total number of Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander children experiencing an exit type was 629 in 2017 and 636 in 2021.

## Summary of Findings Regarding Achieving Permanency for Children in Foster Care

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<sup>81</sup> The following are the 5-year percentage decreases noted in prior Reports for the percentage of children who emancipated from foster care who had entered care when they were age 12 or younger (measure 3.4): 28.4 percent in *Child Welfare Outcomes Report 2016*, 24.9 percent in *Child Welfare Outcomes Report 2017*, 21.0 percent in *Child Welfare Outcomes Report 2018*, 19.4 percent in *Child Welfare Outcomes Report 2019*, and 12.6 percent in *Child Welfare Outcomes Report 2020*.

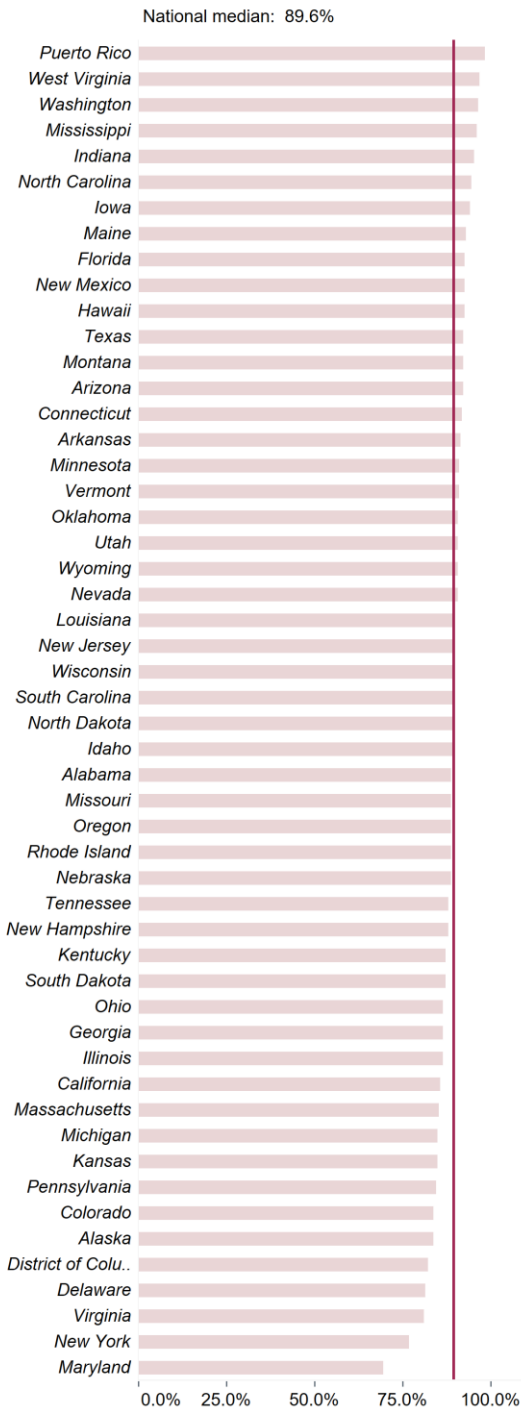
In 2021, 88.9 percent of all children exiting foster care were discharged to permanency. Similarly, the national medians for achieving permanency for children exiting foster care (measure 3.1) during the period of 2017–2021 remained consistently high, including 89.6 percent in 2021. Additionally, most states continued to show progress in reducing the percentage of children exiting foster care to emancipation. This includes 52 percent of states demonstrating a reduction in the percentage of children emancipating from foster care who entered foster care at age 12 or younger (measure 3.4).

Although not considered meaningful based on the standard procedure used in this Report, states continued to show some improvement in finding permanent homes for children with disabilities who exit care to permanency (measure 3.2). There was a decline in performance regarding older children achieving permanency (measure 3.3), though this is also not considered meaningful based on the standard used in this Report. Data for measure 3.5 indicate states have shown some improvement in finding permanent homes for Asian and Black or African American children. To the contrary, states' performance in achieving permanency for American Indian or Alaska Native children, Hispanic or Latino children, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander children, White children, and children of two or more races experienced a decline over the 5-year period. Overall, there remains room for improvement for outcome 3, and efforts are still needed to continue to reduce the disparities observed in permanency outcomes. State program administrators, policymakers, and child welfare researchers should heighten their efforts on detecting and addressing possible barriers to permanency for children in foster care who have disabilities, who entered care when they were older, or who are of a race or ethnicity for whom agencies have struggled to achieve permanency.

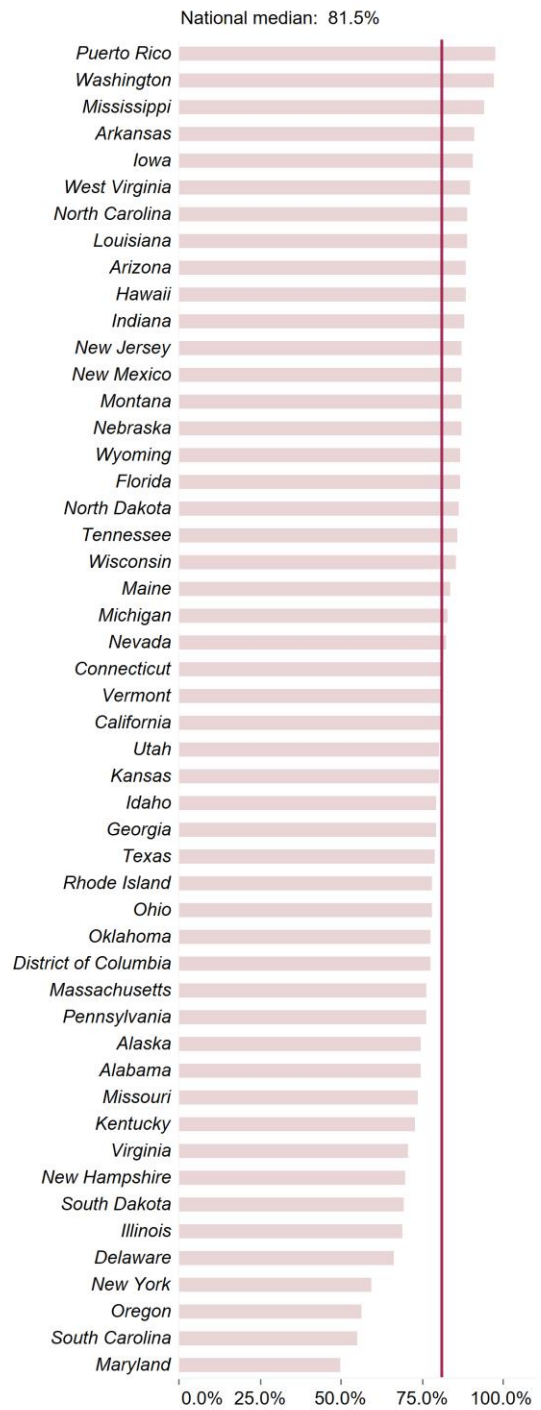
The end of this chapter displays outcomes-based visuals related to state data on outcome 3 (increase permanency for children in foster care). The [Child Welfare Outcomes data site](#) has additional contextual information regarding finding permanent homes for children in foster care, including child age; race and ethnicity; and the median length of stay of children in care, entering care, and exiting care. Individual state data, including those states excluded from analyses and counts in this Report due to incomplete or inadequate data, are also available.



**Figure III–1. Percentage of Exiting Children Who Exit to Permanency, 2021 (N=52)**

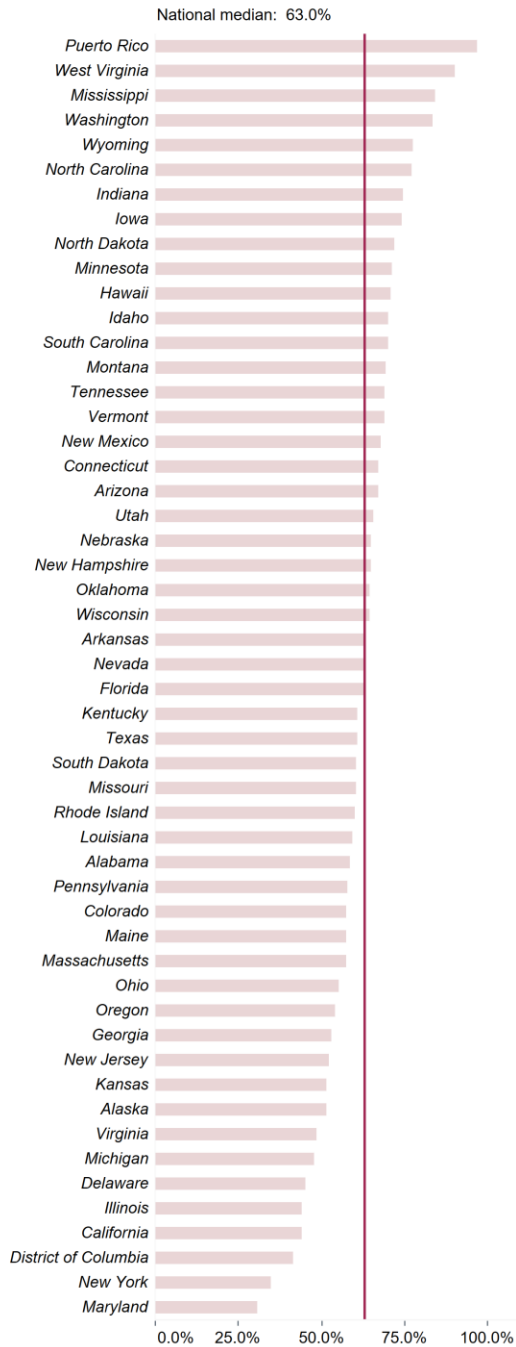


**Figure III–2. Percentage of Exiting Children With a Diagnosed Disability Who Exit to Permanency, 2021 (N=50)**

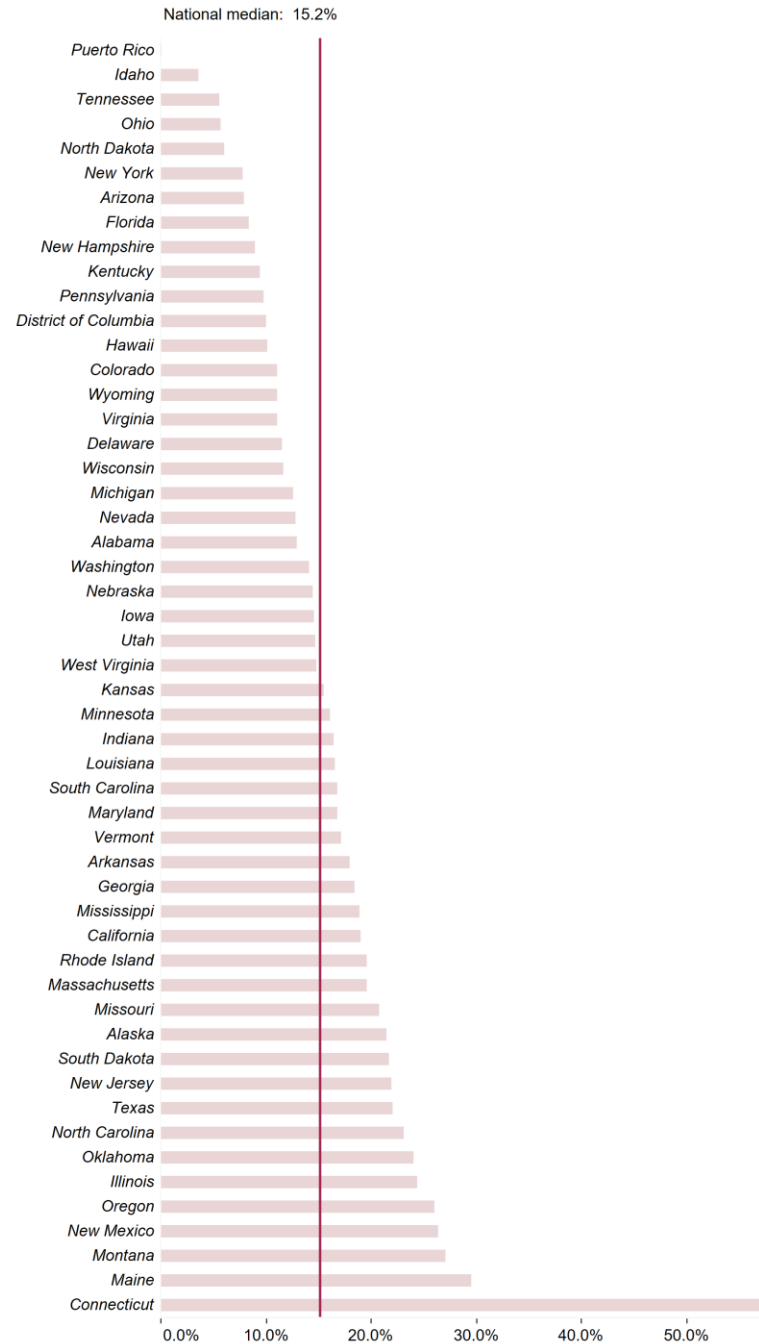


Note.—Data include all states that met the relevant data-quality thresholds.

**Figure III–3. Percentage of Exiting Children Age 12 and Older Who Exit to Permanency, 2021 (N=52)**



**Figure III–4. Percentage of Children Exiting to Emancipation Who Entered at Age 12 or Younger, 2021 (N=52)**



Note.—A lower value indicates better performance.

**Table III–6. Outcome 3.1: Percentage of Children Exiting to Permanency, 2017–2021  
(N=50)**

State	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	Percentage change in performance, 2017–2021 <sup>a</sup>
Alabama	87.3%	89.4%	89.0%	88.9%	89.0%	1.9%
Alaska	86.2%	88.6%	86.4%	83.0%	84.0%	-2.6%
Arizona	90.3%	89.7%	89.4%	92.1%	92.2%	2.1%
Arkansas	93.1%	92.5%	92.3%	91.4%	91.5%	-1.7%
California	84.8%	90.5%	85.9%	85.3%	85.6%	1.0%
Colorado	84.3%	83.8%	81.9%	81.6%	84.0%	-0.4%
Connecticut	90.8%	86.5%	90.2%	90.4%	91.8%	1.1%
Delaware	85.6%	84.0%	77.6%	76.8%	81.4%	-4.9%
District of Columbia	81.1%	85.9%	84.1%	84.6%	82.4%	1.6%
Florida	92.8%	92.6%	94.0%	93.3%	92.8%	0.1%
Georgia	88.9%	88.8%	88.8%	87.6%	86.6%	-2.6%
Hawaii	89.9%	89.9%	91.4%	90.9%	92.6%	3.0%
Idaho	92.7%	90.9%	91.5%	89.0%	89.4%	-3.5%
Illinois	93.6%	89.5%	87.3%	85.0%	86.4%	-7.8%
Indiana	95.7%	95.8%	96.1%	95.8%	95.2%	-0.4%
Iowa	92.7%	93.7%	93.9%	94.6%	94.4%	1.8%
Kansas	85.2%	87.1%	87.7%	86.9%	84.9%	-0.4%
Kentucky	87.0%	88.2%	88.8%	87.2%	87.5%	0.5%
Louisiana	91.0%	90.6%	91.2%	89.1%	90.0%	-1.1%
Maine	93.7%	92.4%	93.8%	94.8%	93.1%	-0.7%
Massachusetts	85.2%	85.7%	86.3%	84.8%	85.5%	0.4%
Michigan	85.8%	86.1%	87.4%	88.5%	85.1%	-0.9%
Minnesota	90.8%	91.5%	91.4%	90.8%	91.2%	0.4%
Mississippi	94.4%	95.9%	96.6%	95.9%	96.0%	1.7%
Missouri	90.0%	90.3%	90.2%	89.5%	89.0%	-1.1%
Montana	91.9%	91.5%	91.2%	91.3%	92.2%	0.3%
Nebraska	91.2%	92.4%	91.3%	90.2%	88.7%	-2.8%
Nevada	90.9%	93.0%	92.3%	90.8%	90.6%	-0.4%
New Hampshire	81.8%	91.1%	91.9%	91.5%	88.1%	7.8%
New Jersey	91.7%	92.0%	92.3%	90.3%	89.8%	-2.1%
New Mexico	93.3%	92.6%	93.9%	91.5%	92.8%	-0.4%
New York	81.1%	81.8%	81.7%	73.9%	76.7%	-5.3%
North Carolina	93.7%	93.0%	94.1%	93.9%	94.7%	1.1%
North Dakota	83.7%	82.8%	83.5%	90.3%	89.5%	6.9%
Ohio	87.9%	89.9%	87.6%	86.3%	86.6%	-1.5%
Oklahoma	92.5%	92.2%	93.9%	92.8%	90.9%	-1.7%
Oregon	88.8%	90.4%	90.5%	90.3%	88.8%	0.0%
Pennsylvania	85.5%	87.1%	84.8%	84.2%	84.6%	-1.1%
Rhode Island	84.6%	85.0%	79.1%	81.9%	88.8%	5.0%
South Carolina	92.2%	92.2%	92.7%	91.3%	89.7%	-2.7%
South Dakota	84.3%	83.0%	83.3%	83.8%	87.5%	3.8%
Tennessee	83.9%	83.9%	85.6%	84.7%	88.2%	5.1%
Texas	92.8%	93.5%	93.5%	92.4%	92.3%	-0.5%
Utah	88.2%	89.0%	91.1%	89.4%	90.7%	2.9%
Vermont	91.9%	92.4%	89.0%	89.8%	91.2%	-0.8%
Virginia	79.0%	72.0%	75.2%	77.2%	81.1%	2.7%
Washington	95.4%	95.3%	96.2%	96.1%	96.7%	1.4%
West Virginia	95.9%	97.3%	96.9%	96.9%	96.8%	1.0%
Wisconsin	90.7%	90.5%	90.4%	90.3%	89.8%	-1.0%
Wyoming	90.3%	92.3%	93.0%	93.1%	90.7%	0.5%

<sup>a</sup> A change of +/-5.0 percent is considered a change in performance. Values shaded in dark magenta indicate an improvement in performance, values shaded in light magenta indicate a decline in performance, and values with no shading indicate no change in performance.

Note.—Data include all states that met the relevant data-quality thresholds.

**Table III–7. Outcome 3.2: Percentage of Exiting Children With Diagnosed Disabilities Who Exit to Permanency, 2017–2021 (N=43)**

State	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	Percentage change in performance, 2017–2021 <sup>a</sup>
Alabama	68.1%	70.0%	70.6%	68.7%	74.8%	9.9%
Alaska	86.4%	90.2%	84.7%	75.9%	74.8%	–13.5%
Arizona	84.6%	80.9%	80.9%	83.8%	88.8%	4.9%
Arkansas	93.7%	93.3%	92.4%	91.4%	91.5%	–2.3%
California	79.5%	87.9%	81.7%	80.8%	81.2%	2.1%
Connecticut	75.9%	72.1%	77.9%	78.2%	81.9%	7.8%
Delaware	71.3%	66.4%	65.9%	64.6%	66.3%	–7.0%
District of Columbia	22.2%	72.7%	81.3%	85.7%	77.8%	250.0%
Florida	92.5%	91.1%	89.4%	89.0%	86.7%	–6.3%
Georgia	76.8%	76.7%	77.0%	77.6%	79.5%	3.6%
Hawaii	86.6%	87.4%	88.7%	86.1%	88.8%	2.5%
Idaho	89.4%	85.2%	88.8%	85.5%	79.7%	–10.9%
Illinois	90.0%	77.4%	67.1%	65.4%	69.3%	–23.0%
Indiana	87.3%	88.0%	90.0%	89.9%	88.2%	1.0%
Iowa	84.6%	88.0%	88.8%	90.4%	90.8%	7.3%
Kansas	78.2%	82.4%	83.6%	81.8%	80.3%	2.6%
Kentucky	74.3%	73.1%	76.9%	74.3%	72.9%	–1.9%
Louisiana	87.9%	88.8%	89.2%	88.7%	89.0%	1.2%
Maine	81.2%	79.9%	83.3%	86.6%	83.9%	3.3%
Michigan	93.9%	94.0%	91.3%	89.9%	83.1%	–11.4%
Mississippi	92.2%	92.5%	94.8%	95.2%	94.5%	2.5%
Missouri	77.6%	82.0%	73.0%	75.1%	74.0%	–4.6%
Nebraska	88.0%	91.0%	90.7%	86.6%	87.2%	–0.8%
Nevada	77.7%	72.8%	85.3%	84.7%	82.7%	6.4%
New Hampshire	76.8%	82.7%	81.3%	78.8%	69.8%	–9.1%
New Jersey	88.5%	88.3%	88.9%	86.6%	87.4%	–1.2%
New Mexico	84.3%	87.3%	86.9%	82.0%	87.3%	3.5%
New York	69.4%	69.3%	68.0%	55.8%	59.7%	–14.0%
North Carolina	88.6%	83.0%	89.1%	89.6%	89.3%	0.8%
North Dakota	74.5%	72.1%	77.0%	88.3%	86.5%	16.1%
Ohio	78.5%	81.8%	79.0%	75.0%	78.0%	–0.5%
Oklahoma	85.3%	85.4%	85.0%	84.7%	77.9%	–8.6%
Oregon	55.2%	62.2%	53.0%	59.0%	56.5%	2.4%
Rhode Island	71.3%	75.8%	59.5%	67.2%	78.4%	10.1%
Tennessee	73.6%	72.6%	81.2%	81.6%	86.3%	17.2%
Texas	77.7%	79.4%	80.7%	76.5%	79.1%	1.7%
Utah	44.6%	51.8%	83.1%	77.3%	80.3%	80.1%
Vermont	79.3%	68.0%	50.0%	71.4%	81.8%	3.2%
Virginia	68.5%	58.8%	61.1%	64.3%	70.7%	3.1%
Washington	96.3%	95.5%	96.9%	97.0%	97.5%	1.2%
West Virginia	90.2%	93.6%	89.9%	92.8%	89.9%	–0.4%
Wisconsin	82.9%	86.5%	84.8%	88.2%	85.7%	3.4%
Wyoming	86.3%	87.4%	84.1%	86.6%	87.1%	1.0%

<sup>a</sup> A change of +/-5.0 percent is considered a change in performance. Values shaded in dark magenta indicate an improvement in performance, values shaded in light magenta indicate a decline in performance, and values with no shading indicate no change in performance.

Note.—Data include all states that met the relevant data-quality thresholds.

**Table III–8. Outcome 3.3: Percentage of Children Exiting at Age 12 and Older Who Exit to Permanency, 2017–2021 (N=50)**

State	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	Percentage change in performance, 2017–2021 <sup>a</sup>
Alabama	56.0%	59.4%	58.8%	57.7%	58.5%	4.5%
Alaska	52.5%	52.3%	54.7%	46.2%	51.5%	-1.9%
Arizona	61.2%	60.1%	59.3%	67.6%	67.1%	9.6%
Arkansas	67.5%	68.9%	64.7%	62.5%	63.5%	-5.9%
California	47.7%	56.9%	44.5%	45.7%	44.2%	-7.4%
Colorado	62.7%	60.4%	56.3%	54.1%	57.7%	-8.1%
Connecticut	62.4%	50.7%	63.4%	71.1%	67.2%	7.6%
Delaware	48.4%	45.0%	36.8%	39.8%	45.2%	-6.4%
District of Columbia	45.3%	51.2%	51.9%	45.9%	41.8%	-7.8%
Florida	66.1%	63.2%	66.2%	64.2%	63.0%	-4.7%
Georgia	63.9%	61.3%	60.6%	57.4%	53.1%	-16.9%
Hawaii	66.2%	69.8%	70.0%	64.8%	70.9%	7.1%
Idaho	68.9%	62.4%	65.0%	67.6%	70.4%	2.2%
Illinois	60.7%	46.6%	45.4%	48.6%	44.3%	-27.0%
Indiana	76.9%	76.8%	77.4%	75.2%	74.7%	-2.8%
Iowa	70.8%	71.7%	71.5%	72.9%	74.4%	5.1%
Kansas	58.6%	63.4%	58.9%	56.9%	51.7%	-11.8%
Kentucky	62.2%	64.1%	64.7%	62.9%	61.1%	-1.8%
Louisiana	64.0%	59.4%	64.0%	54.2%	59.4%	-7.3%
Maine	63.7%	46.6%	63.0%	74.8%	57.6%	-9.6%
Massachusetts	61.1%	60.9%	61.4%	59.9%	57.5%	-5.9%
Michigan	52.1%	51.7%	54.6%	53.2%	47.8%	-8.1%
Minnesota	75.0%	74.1%	72.6%	72.2%	71.3%	-4.9%
Mississippi	84.6%	86.1%	85.7%	85.8%	84.3%	-0.4%
Missouri	62.5%	61.8%	60.3%	61.9%	60.6%	-3.1%
Montana	69.6%	67.1%	70.7%	68.6%	69.6%	0.0%
Nebraska	71.3%	75.4%	70.6%	67.2%	65.0%	-8.8%
Nevada	65.8%	69.1%	64.8%	61.6%	63.0%	-4.2%
New Hampshire	65.5%	79.7%	79.6%	77.4%	64.9%	-1.0%
New Jersey	63.3%	62.5%	63.1%	57.0%	52.6%	-16.9%
New Mexico	70.7%	73.0%	72.8%	70.1%	68.0%	-3.8%
New York	49.4%	47.9%	47.3%	36.6%	35.1%	-28.9%
North Carolina	72.6%	69.0%	72.9%	72.0%	77.4%	6.7%
North Dakota	65.2%	57.7%	59.4%	76.2%	72.0%	10.4%
Ohio	64.0%	66.8%	60.7%	57.4%	55.5%	-13.3%
Oklahoma	64.9%	62.5%	68.8%	63.3%	64.7%	-0.3%
Oregon	56.3%	59.3%	56.1%	53.8%	54.2%	-3.9%
Pennsylvania	67.1%	65.7%	59.5%	58.4%	57.9%	-13.7%
Rhode Island	58.6%	58.2%	43.1%	45.2%	60.2%	2.8%
South Carolina	71.8%	74.2%	74.4%	70.9%	70.2%	-2.2%
South Dakota	65.7%	60.9%	66.9%	57.2%	60.6%	-7.7%
Tennessee	65.3%	65.1%	67.1%	65.6%	69.2%	6.0%
Texas	62.6%	63.1%	63.0%	59.4%	60.8%	-2.9%
Utah	62.3%	62.7%	66.8%	61.9%	65.7%	5.6%
Vermont	72.1%	71.9%	68.5%	66.0%	69.2%	-4.1%
Virginia	49.8%	35.2%	37.2%	41.5%	48.6%	-2.2%
Washington	82.7%	82.1%	82.2%	80.2%	83.5%	1.0%
West Virginia	89.6%	92.5%	91.2%	90.2%	90.1%	0.6%
Wisconsin	71.4%	68.2%	68.3%	68.0%	64.7%	-9.4%
Wyoming	74.9%	80.4%	80.6%	80.9%	77.7%	3.8%

<sup>a</sup> A change of +/-5.0 percent is considered a change in performance. Values shaded in dark magenta indicate an improvement in performance, values shaded in light magenta indicate a decline in performance, and values with no shading indicate no change in performance.

Note.—Data include all states that met the relevant data-quality thresholds.

**Table III–9. Outcome 3.4: Percentage of Children Exiting to Emancipation Who Entered Care Under Age 12, 2017–2021 (N=50)**

State	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	Percentage change in performance, 2017–2021 <sup>a</sup>
Alabama	18.4%	17.9%	16.5%	10.6%	12.9%	-29.7%
Alaska	18.4%	15.2%	18.8%	14.7%	21.5%	17.0%
Arizona	8.5%	7.4%	9.6%	11.4%	7.9%	-6.2%
Arkansas	16.3%	17.4%	16.4%	19.3%	18.0%	10.8%
California	21.9%	19.6%	21.7%	20.4%	19.1%	-12.6%
Colorado	13.9%	14.2%	13.0%	8.4%	11.1%	-19.8%
Connecticut	42.9%	45.0%	48.6%	62.9%	57.1%	33.3%
Delaware	18.9%	11.8%	12.9%	24.4%	11.5%	-38.8%
District of Columbia	20.0%	18.4%	15.0%	13.0%	10.0%	-50.0%
Florida	11.7%	12.2%	7.2%	6.4%	8.4%	-28.3%
Georgia	11.9%	8.6%	14.9%	15.2%	18.5%	55.6%
Hawaii	6.1%	12.7%	6.8%	4.3%	10.1%	67.4%
Idaho	6.3%	6.0%	8.0%	7.7%	3.6%	-42.9%
Illinois	34.2%	27.6%	30.4%	31.9%	24.4%	-28.5%
Indiana	12.5%	12.8%	12.9%	11.5%	16.5%	32.5%
Iowa	23.1%	17.0%	21.8%	15.0%	14.6%	-36.8%
Kansas	13.6%	15.9%	12.5%	14.5%	15.5%	14.1%
Kentucky	8.4%	10.5%	10.2%	10.5%	9.5%	13.1%
Louisiana	20.1%	18.7%	23.7%	15.1%	16.6%	-17.7%
Maine	33.9%	28.6%	33.3%	40.0%	29.6%	-12.5%
Massachusetts	15.1%	17.8%	15.4%	17.5%	19.7%	30.1%
Michigan	17.0%	13.3%	16.0%	11.2%	12.6%	-25.7%
Minnesota	18.6%	14.3%	13.4%	14.8%	16.2%	-13.2%
Mississippi	16.9%	23.5%	19.4%	29.5%	19.0%	11.9%
Missouri	20.0%	20.8%	17.5%	22.9%	20.8%	4.0%
Montana	20.6%	19.1%	17.7%	22.5%	27.2%	32.0%
Nebraska	13.8%	12.2%	10.1%	6.9%	14.5%	5.1%
Nevada	18.1%	21.3%	15.4%	15.9%	12.9%	-28.7%
New Hampshire	10.3%	13.2%	8.7%	6.1%	9.0%	-13.1%
New Jersey	18.4%	15.8%	15.8%	17.9%	22.0%	19.2%
New Mexico	18.8%	21.4%	19.8%	33.0%	26.5%	41.2%
New York	9.3%	9.7%	10.1%	8.6%	7.8%	-15.9%
North Carolina	12.1%	15.2%	23.4%	19.0%	23.2%	92.2%
North Dakota	10.0%	16.2%	12.7%	12.5%	6.1%	-39.4%
Ohio	13.3%	12.7%	9.0%	8.3%	5.7%	-57.1%
Oklahoma	25.1%	22.7%	29.8%	24.8%	24.1%	-3.9%
Oregon	32.4%	27.5%	23.6%	21.0%	26.1%	-19.4%
Pennsylvania	8.5%	8.0%	7.2%	7.3%	9.8%	16.2%
Rhode Island	17.1%	12.7%	12.8%	8.1%	19.6%	15.1%
South Carolina	16.1%	17.1%	15.0%	12.1%	16.8%	4.1%
South Dakota	39.1%	15.8%	27.4%	15.6%	21.7%	-44.3%
Tennessee	5.2%	5.2%	7.1%	5.0%	5.7%	8.1%
Texas	26.3%	24.4%	24.6%	20.9%	22.2%	-15.7%
Utah	10.5%	12.4%	13.0%	9.4%	14.8%	40.4%
Vermont	24.0%	8.7%	13.0%	14.0%	17.1%	-28.6%
Virginia	14.8%	11.2%	10.0%	10.7%	11.1%	-24.5%
Washington	25.9%	23.6%	19.4%	14.7%	14.2%	-45.4%
West Virginia	7.1%	3.3%	15.0%	7.3%	14.9%	108.5%
Wisconsin	16.1%	12.2%	13.1%	10.5%	11.6%	-27.8%
Wyoming	0.0%	18.2%	9.1%	28.6%	11.1%	NA

<sup>a</sup> A change of +/-5.0 percent is considered a change in performance. Values shaded in dark magenta indicate an improvement in performance, values shaded in light magenta indicate a decline in performance, and values with no shading indicate no change in performance. Cells marked with “NA” indicate a percentage change could not be calculated because the percentage for the first year (2017) was 0.0 percent.

Note.—A lower value indicates better performance. Data include all states that met the relevant data-quality thresholds.

## Chapter IV: Achieving Timely Reunifications and Adoptions for Children in Foster Care

While chapter III broadly discusses the issue of permanency and notes special issues for the diverse population of children in foster care, this chapter focuses more specifically on the goal of achieving permanency through reunification and adoption. It also focuses on the timeliness of achieving permanency for children in foster care, as reinforced and supported by federal policies and laws. Outcome 4 (reduce time in foster care to reunification without increasing reentry) and outcome 5 (reduce time in foster care to adoption) encompass this goal for children and youth. Because the percentages of children who are discharged from foster care to guardianship are very small in almost all states, the timeliness of guardianships is not specifically addressed in this chapter.

This chapter provides information on contextual factors related to caseworker visits and presents national results for the following measures:

- Measure 4.1: The percentage of reunifications that occurred in less than 12 months from the time of entry into foster care
- Measure 4.2: The percentage of children entering foster care who reentered care within 12 months of a prior foster care episode
- Measure 5.1a: The percentage of children discharged to adoption in less than 12 months from the date of entry into foster care
- Measure 5.1b: The percentage of children discharged to adoption at least 12 months but less than 24 months from the date of entry into foster care

### Caseworker Visits

Achieving permanency in a timely manner for children in foster care can be linked in part to the frequency and quality of caseworker visits with children.<sup>82</sup> During the first and second rounds of the CFSRs, an association was found between measures involving caseworker visits and positive outcomes for children in foster care.<sup>83</sup> For example, frequent contact between the caseworker and the child (as indicated by positive ratings on item 19 in the round 2 CFSR onsite review instrument) was associated with substantial achievement on timely permanency.

Based in part on these findings, the Child and Family Services Improvement Act of 2006 (Pub. L. 109–288) amended Title IV-B of the Act to include requirements for states to collect data on monthly caseworker visits for children in foster care.<sup>84</sup> The Child and Family Services Improvement and Innovation Act of 2011 (Pub. L. 112–34) extended these requirements, which

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<sup>82</sup> Beginning with this Report and going forward, values for caseworker visits are rounded and may differ slightly from values reported in prior Reports.

<sup>83</sup> For more information related to this finding, refer to [Findings From the Initial Child and Family Service Reviews: 2001–2004](#) (slides 17, 18, and 40) and [Federal Child and Family Services Reviews, Aggregate Report, Round 2, Fiscal Years 2007–2010](#) (p. 57).

<sup>84</sup> More information on the Child and Family Services Improvement Act can be found on the CB website in [ACYF-CB-IM-06-05](#).

are now in section 424(f)(1)(A) and (2)(A) and section 479A(a)(6) of the Act.<sup>85</sup> Starting in 2012, states requirements were modified to begin meeting the following performance standards for caseworker visits:

- The total number of visits made by caseworkers on a monthly basis to children in foster care during a FY must be at least 90 percent of the total number of such visits that would occur if each child were visited once every month while in care. In 2015, this target increased to 95 percent.
- At least 50 percent of the total number of monthly visits made by caseworkers to children in foster care during a FY must occur in the child’s residence.

States submit an annual report to CB that includes data for monthly caseworker visits and visits in the home. Results for 2017–2021 are shown in table IV–1.<sup>86</sup> These data include the percentages of children in foster care visited each full month they were in care as well as the proportion of those visits that occurred in the homes where the children were then living. In general, to meet the requirements of section 422(b)(17) of the Act regarding monthly caseworker visits with children in foster care, visits must be conducted face to face. However, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, CB updated its guidance in March 2020 through a [letter to child welfare leaders](#) and a revision to the [Child Welfare Policy Manual](#) (7.3 Title IV-B, Programmatic Requirements, question 8) to allow the use of videoconferencing under limited circumstances. The policy now specifies that a visit conducted by means of videoconferencing with the child may be counted as a monthly caseworker visit during a public or individual health challenge or when a child’s or a caseworker’s severe health condition warrants limiting person-to-person contact. Caseworker visits conducted via videoconferences must still be conducted in accordance with the requirements listed in the Act and must include an evaluation of the child’s safety in each session.

CB also issued a [letter](#) in April 2020 notifying states and tribes of flexibility in light of the declaration of a public health emergency under section 319 of the Public Health Service Act (42 U.S.C. § 247d) in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The letter specified that during the major disaster period, the Title IV-E agency may include the monthly caseworker visits that occur by means of videoconferencing as “in the child’s residence” for meeting the requirement of section 424(f)(2)(A) of the Act. If multiple visits were made to a child during the month, either in person or via qualifying videoconferencing, and at least one of those visits occurred in the child’s residence, the state could count and report that one monthly visit occurred in the residence of the child.

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<sup>85</sup> More information on the Child and Family Services Improvement and Innovation Act can be found on the CB website in [ACYF-CB-IM-11-06](#). For detailed information on the collection and reporting of caseworker visits data prior to FY 2012, see [ACYF-CB-PI-08-03](#).

<sup>86</sup> More information on the caseworker visits measures can be found in appendix C of this Report. Additional guidance on the revised requirements for reporting the caseworker visits measures is outline in Program Instruction [ACYF-CB-PI-12-01](#), which was issued January 6, 2012.



Table IV–1. Monthly Caseworker Visits and Visits in the Home, 2017–2021					
Measures	National median				
	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Percentage of children receiving monthly caseworker visits (N=52)	95%	96%	96%	95%	96%
Percentage of monthly visits that occurred in the home of the child (N=52)	88%	87%	87%	88%	92%

As indicated in table IV–1, the national median regarding the percentage of children in foster care receiving a caseworker visit at least once each month while in care met or exceeded the national standard (95 percent) each year. Despite the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the median state performance was 96 percent in 2021, with 37 states meeting or exceeding the national standard (see figure IV–1 at the end of this chapter). Six of the 37 states that met or exceeded the standard in 2021 had not met it in 2020. Only 2 of the 15 states that did not meet the national standard in 2021 had met it in 2020. The stability of the national median for this measure in 2020 and 2021 could be partially attributed to the allowance of conducting caseworker visits through videoconferences.

The national median in 2021 for the percentage of monthly visits occurring in the child’s home was 92 percent—well above the national standard of 50 percent. This is an increase of 4 percent above the median in 2020. The median increase could be attributed to the COVID-19 lockdowns and the flexibilities allowing states to count videoconferencing visits as meeting the standard for caseworker visits when conducted in the child’s residence. No states fell below the 50-percent standard in any year from 2017 to 2021.

### Timeliness of Reunifications

Historically, the majority of children who exit from foster care are discharged to reunification. In 2021, reunifications represented 52.3 percent of all exits from foster care (see table III–1). Outcome 4 (reduce time in foster care to reunification without increasing reentry) addresses the need for timely reunifications.<sup>87</sup> The wording of this outcome is intended to ensure reunifications are not viewed as timely if they also are not permanent (i.e., if the child reenters foster care within 12 months of being reunified). For the Child Welfare Outcomes Reports, a reunification is considered to be timely if it occurs in less than 12 months from the date of entry into foster care (measure 4.1). A state’s timely reunification is better understood when considering how many children who enter foster care are reentering within a short period of time of their exit. Measure 4.2 assesses the percentage of children entering care within 12 months of a prior foster care episode. Table IV–2 presents summary data regarding state performance in 2021 on the timeliness of reunification without increasing reentries.

<sup>87</sup> For the Child Welfare Outcomes Reports, children are considered reunified if the discharge reason provided in AFCARS is either (1) reunified with parent or primary caretaker or (2) living with other relatives.

Table IV–2. Range of State Medians, 2021 Outcome 4: Achieving Timely Reunifications				
Outcome measures	25th percentile	National median (50th percentile)	75th percentile	Range
Measure 4.1: Of all children reunified with their parents or caretakers at the time of discharge from foster care during the year, what percentage were reunified in less than 12 months from the time of entry into foster care? (N=52)	43.7%	55.6%	65.0%	26%–77%
Measure 4.2: Of all children who entered foster care during the year, what percentage reentered care within 12 months of a prior foster care episode? (N=52) <sup>a</sup>	5.2%	7.2%	9.2%	2%–16%

<sup>a</sup> For this measure, a lower number indicates better performance.

The 2021 data shown in table IV–2 indicate that, in many states, a majority of children discharged to reunification were reunified in a timely manner. The national median was 55.6 percent, and state medians ranged from 26.0 percent to 77.0 percent. For 32 states, more than half of the reunifications that occurred were timely (see figure IV–3 at the end of this chapter).

Additionally, as shown in table IV–2, the national median for children who entered foster care in 2021 and who reentered care within 12 months of a prior foster care episode was 7.2 percent. There was a wide range in state medians—from 1.7 percent to 16.4 percent. Reentries—within any length of time of a prior foster care episode—accounted for 19.5 percent of all entries in 2021. Multiple changes in caregivers, especially for younger children, can affect healthy development and impair a child’s ability to form interpersonal relationships.<sup>88</sup> Thus, it is important for states to continue working to prevent reentries into foster care.

There was a moderate correlation between performance on measure 4.2 and the proportion of children in a state who entered care at age 12 or older (Pearson’s  $r=0.51$ ). As discussed in chapter III, older children in care achieve permanency at a lower rate compared to the general foster care population. Older youth may experience different challenges than younger children, and child welfare agencies may not be as equipped to meet their needs as well as they can for younger children. States may want to consider what strategies and services could be provided to older children in care and their families to reduce the likelihood of reentering care after exit.

### Changes Over Time in State Performance With Regard to Achieving Timely Reunifications

Table IV–3 shows the changes over time in the national median for achieving timely reunifications for children in foster care. This table also shows the number of states that

<sup>88</sup> Carnochan, S., Rizik-Baer, D., & Austin, M. (2013). Preventing re-entry into foster care. *Journal of Evidence-Based Social Work*, 10(3), 196–209. <https://www.doi.org/10.1080/15433714.2013.788949>

demonstrated an improvement or decline in performance, as determined by a percentage-change calculation.

Table IV–3. State Medians and Changes in Performance Over Time, 2017–2021							
Outcome 4: Achieving Timely Reunifications							
Outcome measures <sup>a</sup>	Median by year					Improved in performance <sup>b</sup>	Declined in performance <sup>b</sup>
	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021		
Measure 4.1: Percentage of reunifications that occurred in less than 12 months from the time of entry into foster care (N=50)	64.5%	64.7%	63.1%	61.1%	56.1%	5 states (10%)	39 states (78%)
Measure 4.2: Percentage of children entering foster care who reentered care within 12 months of a prior foster care episode (N=50) <sup>c</sup>	7.1%	6.8%	7.3%	7.2%	7.2%	26 states (52%)	15 states (30%)

<sup>a</sup> Full descriptions for the measures in this table can be found in table IV–2 and appendix B.

<sup>b</sup> In accordance with standard procedure for data analysis in this Report, when there was a percentage change of less than 5.0 in either direction (positive or negative), a determination was made that there was no change in performance.

<sup>c</sup> For this measure, a lower number indicates better performance.

Note.—Data for this table include all states for which adequate data were available for all relevant years and may be different from the data included in table IV–2 due to differences in the numbers of states included for each analysis.

As illustrated in table IV–3, the national median over time on achieving timely reunifications has declined throughout the past 5 years, with a 13-percent decline in performance over that period. From 2017 to 2021, 78 percent of states showed a decline in performance, and only 10 percent of states improved. Again, the COVID-19 pandemic may have been a factor in states’ declining performance, particularly with the notable drop in performance from 2020 to 2021. Possible barriers to reunification—such as decreased child-parent interactions, technical limitations in virtual sessions, and pandemic-related stress reported by child welfare workers—have been reported due to the pandemic.<sup>89</sup>

Similarly, there was a slight decline in state performance from 2017 to 2021 on the percentage of children reentering care within 12 months of a prior foster care episode, with the national median increasing from 7.1 percent in 2017 to 7.2 percent in 2021. It is worth highlighting that over half of the states (52 percent) showed improved performance from 2017 to 2021 on measure 4.2.

### Timeliness of Adoptions

While the majority of children exiting foster care are reunified with their families and not adopted, adoptions still account for approximately one-quarter of all exits from foster care (see table III–1). When a decision is made that adoption is in the best interests of the child (and

<sup>89</sup> Goldberg, A. E., Brodzinsky, D., Singer, J., & Crozier, P. (2021). The impact of COVID-19 on child welfare-involved families: Implications for parent–child reunification and child welfare professionals. *Developmental Child Welfare, 3*(3), 203–224. <https://doi.org/10.1177/25161032211045257>

agreed upon by the youth, if age appropriate), the adoption should proceed rapidly so the child can be placed quickly in a secure, caring, and safe environment.

As referenced in the beginning of this chapter, the timeliness of achieving permanency for children in foster care is critical to their well-being. ASFA amended section 475(5)(E) of the Act to require that a state file a petition to terminate the parents’ parental rights and concurrently pursue adoption as a permanency goal for any child who has been in foster care for 15 of the most recent 22 months unless the child is living with a relative, the agency has not provided services to address the circumstances associated with the child’s removal, or the agency documents a compelling reason why such action would not be in the best interests of the child. In accordance with section 475(5)(F) of the Act, a child is considered to have “entered foster care” (for purposes of starting the clock for the 15 of 22 months) upon the earlier of the following:

- The first judicial finding that the child has been subjected to abuse and/or neglect
- The date that is 60 days after the date on which the child is removed from the home

A 17-month timeframe was used for calculations associated with this Report’s related measures (i.e., those regarding timely adoptions and terminations of parental rights) because AFCARS does not collect information pertaining to the date of the first judicial finding. The timeframe was calculated by adding 60 days (to account for the second scenario for having “entered foster care”) and 15 months to the date of the child’s removal.

In 2021, approximately 54,000 children exited foster care to adoption, and approximately 114,000 children were categorized as waiting for adoption on the last day of the FY. Performance on outcome 5 (reduce time in foster care to adoption) is captured in measure 5.1, which addresses the timeliness of adoptions. Table IV–4 presents summary data showing the range of state performance in 2021 on this measure.

<b>Outcome measures<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>25th percentile</b>	<b>National median (50th percentile)</b>	<b>75th percentile</b>	<b>Range</b>
Measure 5.1a: Of all children discharged from foster care during the year to a finalized adoption, what percentage exited care in less than 12 months from the date of the latest removal from home? (N=52)	0.7%	2.0%	3.3%	0.0%–14.0%
Measure 5.1b: Of all children discharged from care during the year to a finalized adoption, what percentage exited care at least 12 months but less than 24 months from the date of the latest removal from home? (N=52)	14.7%	22.1%	30.9%	6.4%–51.0%

<sup>a</sup> Measure 5.1 was among the original Child Welfare Outcomes measures established in 1998. It is a calculation of discharges to adoption for a variety of time periods. Other time periods composing measure 5.1 are not shown in this table. State performance on each of the time periods is available on the [Child Welfare Outcomes data site](#). See appendix B for more information on how the measure is defined.

Note.—Data for this table include all states for which adequate data were available for all relevant years and may be different from the data included in table IV–2 due to differences in the numbers of states included for each analysis.

Outcome measure 5.1 focuses on the length of time in foster care for children who were discharged to adoption. Performance on this measure in 2021 suggests achieving timely adoptions was a challenge for all but a few states. As shown in table IV–4, it was rare in most states for adoptions to occur in less than 12 months from the child’s entry into foster care (measure 5.1a). The national median was only 2.0 percent and ranged from 0.0 percent to 14.0 percent. For adoptions occurring at least 12 months but less than 24 months from the child’s entry into foster care (measure 5.1b), the national median was 22.1 percent, with states’ performance ranging from 6.4 percent to 51.0 percent.

### Changes Over Time in State Performance With Regard to Timeliness of Adoptions

The medians across states from 2017 through 2021 for achieving timely adoptions for children in foster care are reported in table IV–5, which also presents the number of states that showed an improvement or decline in performance during the same timeframe. Change in state performance over time was computed by using a percentage-change calculation.

Table IV–5. State Medians and Changes in Performance Over Time, 2017–2021							
Outcome 5: Achieving Timely Adoptions							
Outcome measures <sup>a b</sup>	Median by year					Improved in performance <sup>c</sup>	Declined in performance <sup>c</sup>
	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021		
Measure 5.1a: Percentage of children discharged to adoption in less than 12 months from the date of entry into foster care (N=50)	3.5%	2.7%	3.1%	2.5%	2.0%	10 states (20%)	36 states (72%)
Measure 5.1b: Percentage of children discharged to adoption at least 12 months but less than 24 months from the date of entry into foster care (N=50)	29.4%	29.0%	27.1%	26.3%	22.5%	8 states (16%)	37 states (74%)

<sup>a</sup> Full descriptions for the measures in this table can be found in table IV–4 and appendix B.

<sup>b</sup> Measure 5.1 was among the original Child Welfare Outcomes measures established in 1998. It is a calculation of discharges to adoption for a variety of time periods. Other time periods composing measure 5.1 are not shown in this table. State performance on each of the time periods is available on the [Child Welfare Outcomes data site](#). See appendix B for more information on how the measure is defined.

<sup>c</sup> In accordance with standard procedure for data analysis in this Report, when there was a percentage change of less than 5.0 in either direction (positive or negative), a determination was made that there was no change in performance.

Note.—Data for this table include all states for which adequate data were available for all relevant years and may be different from the data included in table IV–4 due to differences in the numbers of states included for each analysis.

For measure 5.1a (the percentage of adoptions occurring in less than 12 months), the national median from 2017 to 2021 decreased from 3.5 percent to 2.0 percent—a meaningful 42.9-percent decrease. However, year-to-year performance was inconsistent. In addition, a greater proportion of

The 2021 data indicate that achieving timely adoptions within 12–24 months of entering foster care remained a challenge for all but a few states, with 74 percent of states demonstrating a decline in performance.

states reported decreases (72 percent) compared with the proportion that showed improved performance (20 percent). Recent declines are not unexpected and may reflect ACF initiatives to support timely reunifications, potentially delaying the decision that a child's situation warrants an adoption before reasonable efforts to stabilize families can be made.<sup>90</sup> These declining percentages also may be reflective of states' continuing adherence to the intent of ASFA to pursue termination of parental rights only for those children who have been in care for 15 of 22 months unless it is clearly in the child's best interests not to do so.

For measure 5.1b (the percentage of adoptions occurring at least 12 months but less than 24 months from a child's entry into care), there was a 23.5-percent decrease in the national median between 2017 and 2021, which is considered a meaningful change in performance based on the criteria used in this Report. Similarly, more states showed a decline in performance (74 percent) than an improvement (16 percent). Overall, achieving timely adoptions within 24 months of entering care remained a challenge for all but a few states. It will be important to see if these declines are sustained or whether they reflect a short-term impact of court closures and limitations on nonemergency court hearings that occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **Summary of Findings Regarding Achieving Reunifications and Adoptions in a Timely Manner**

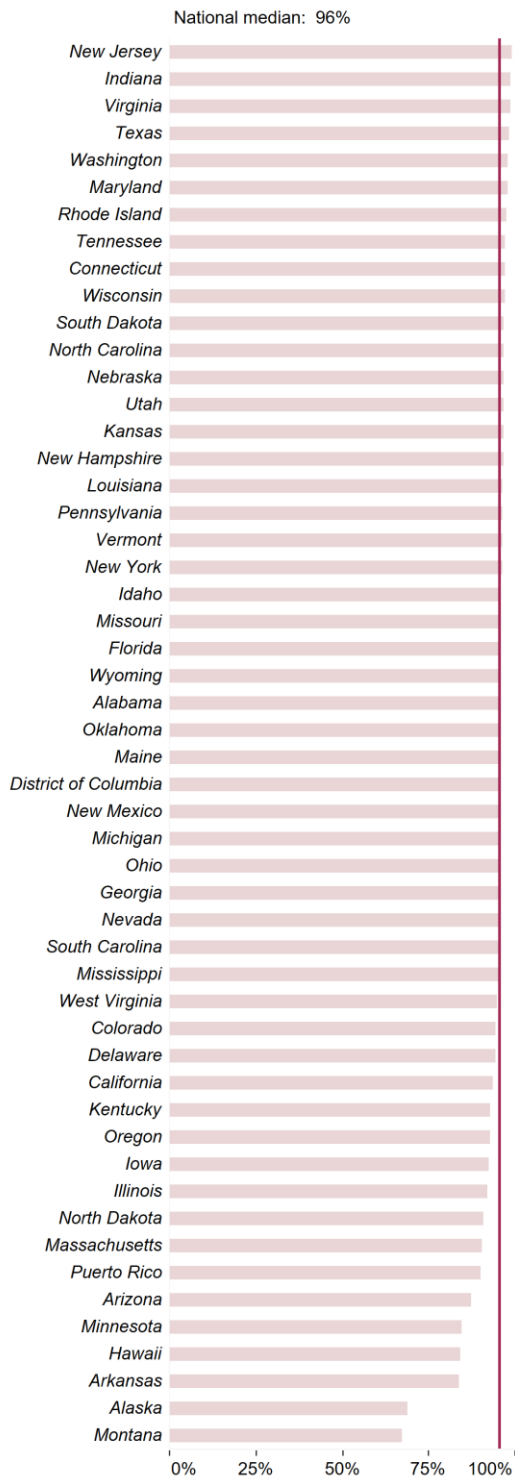
As noted in previous Child Welfare Outcomes Reports, states demonstrated declining performance over a 5-year period in achieving reunifications in a timely manner (measure 4.1). However, the national median on measure 4.2 (the percentage of children reentering foster care within 12 months of a prior episode) showed some improvement—1.4 percent, with 26 states showing improved performance. The national median for achieving adoptions within 12 months of entry (measure 5.1a) showed a meaningful, but not unexpected, decrease of 42.9 percent from 2017 to 2021. In addition, close to three-fourths of states also showed a decline in the percentage of children discharged to adoption in more than 12 months but less than 24 months from the date of entry (measure 5.1b). Although performance has mostly declined over time, it is worth noting that a few states have shown consistent improvements in measures 5.1a and 5.1b. Overall, results reveal that performance on both adoptions and reunifications is declining, and it will be important for states to monitor these outcomes as they strive to move children to timely permanency.

The end of this chapter displays outcomes-based visuals related to achieving reunifications and adoptions in a timely manner, including caseworker visits data and state performance on outcomes 4 and 5. More information on achieving reunification and adoption in a timely manner—data on reentries to care, breakdown by lengths of stay, and state data (including states excluded from analyses and counts due to incomplete or inadequate data)—is available on the [Child Welfare Outcomes data site](#).

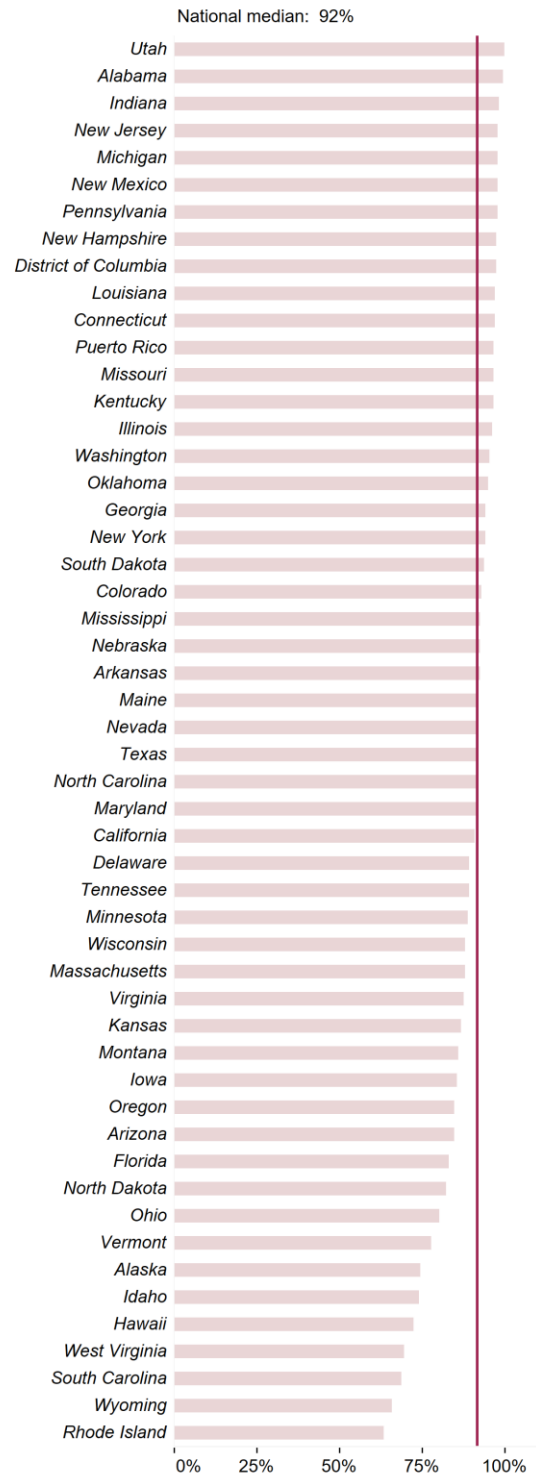
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<sup>90</sup> See, for example, the [Quality Improvement Center on Family-Centered Reunification grant program](#) and the [Regional Program Partnership grant program](#).

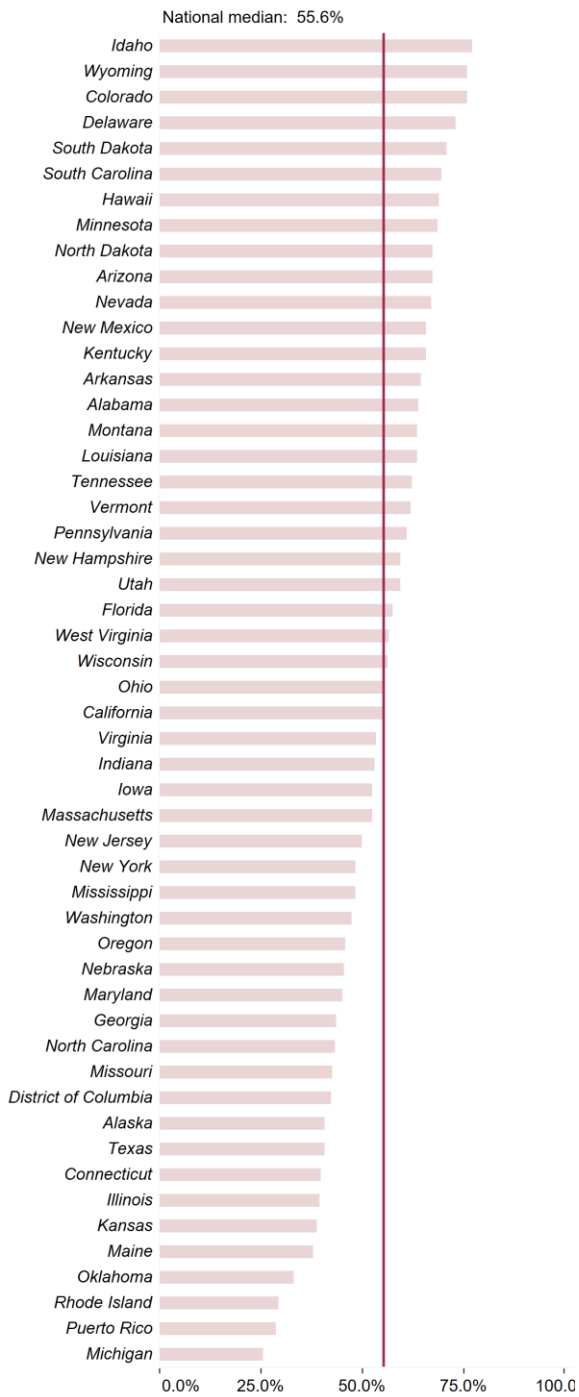
**Figure IV–1. Percentage of Children Receiving Monthly Caseworker Visits, 2021 (N=52)**



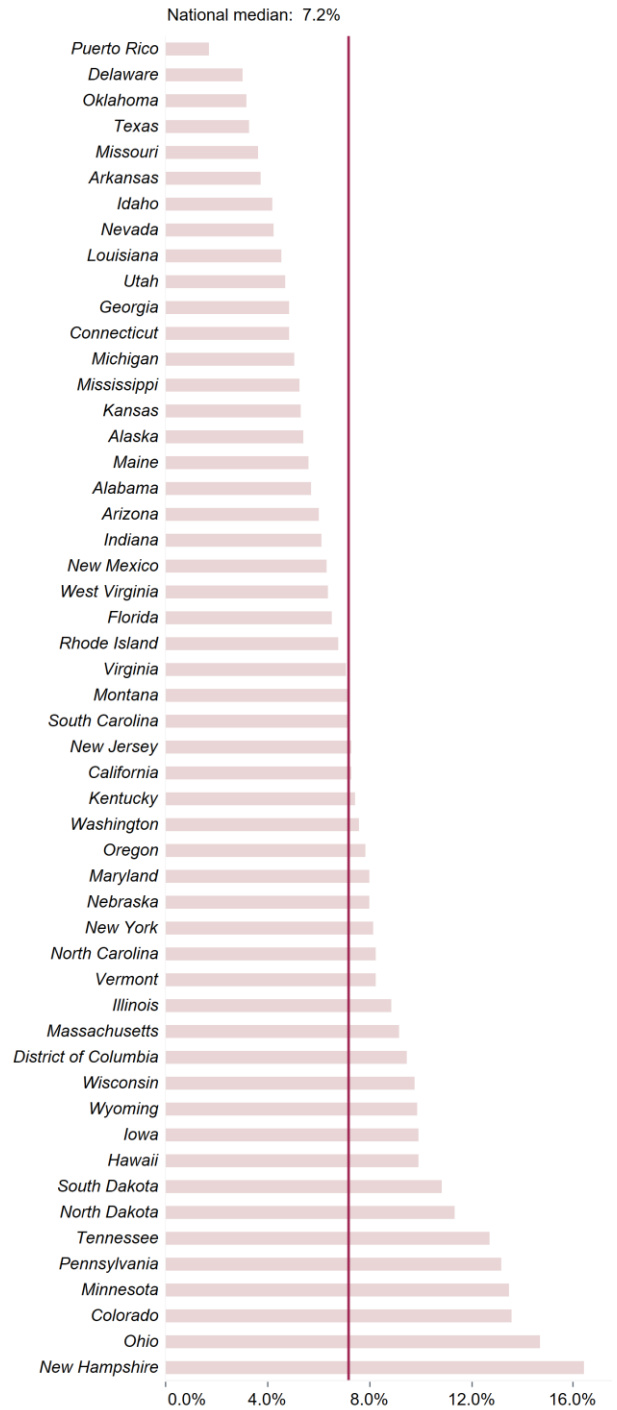
**Figure IV–2. Percentage of Monthly Caseworker Visits Occurring in the Home of the Child, 2021 (N=52)**



**Figure IV–3. Percentage of Children Reunified in Less Than 12 Months From Entering Care, 2021 (N=52)**



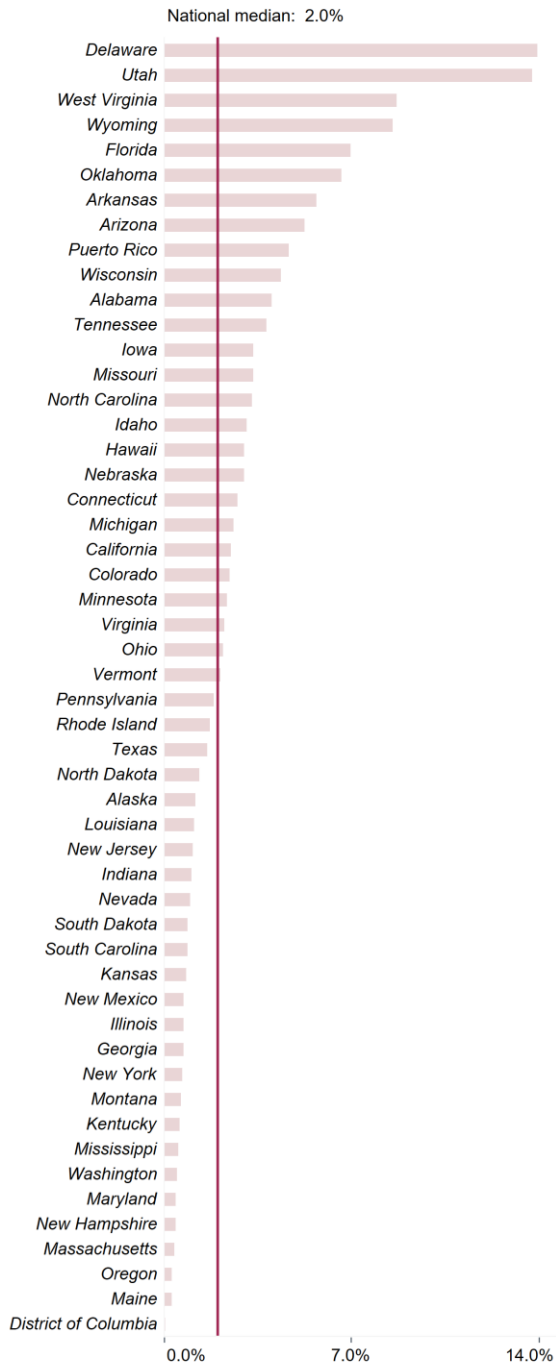
**Figure IV–4. Percentage of Children Reentering Care Within 12 Months of a Prior Foster Care Episode, 2021 (N=52)**



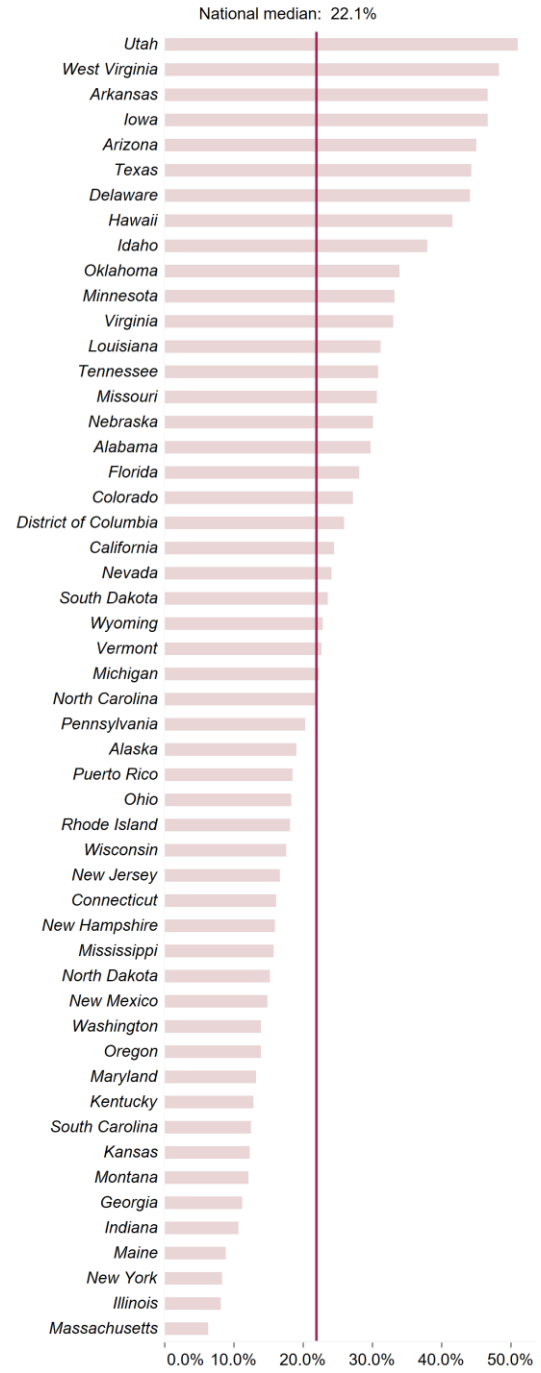
Note.—A lower value indicates better performance.



**Figure IV–5. Percentage of Children Exiting to Adoption Who Were in Care Less Than 12 Months, 2021 (N=52)**



**Figure IV–6. Percentage of Children Exiting to Adoption Who Were in Care More Than 12 Months but Less Than 24 Months, 2021 (N=52)**



**Table IV–6. Outcome 4.1: Percentage of Children Reunified in Less Than 12 Months From Entering Care, 2017–2021 (N=50)**

State	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	Percentage change in performance, 2017–2021 <sup>a</sup>
Alabama	72.0%	69.2%	68.6%	66.7%	64.1%	-11.0%
Alaska	50.6%	47.9%	47.3%	53.5%	40.9%	-19.1%
Arizona	64.1%	63.6%	66.5%	66.9%	67.4%	5.2%
Arkansas	74.8%	70.2%	71.3%	71.3%	64.8%	-13.3%
California	63.9%	63.2%	63.0%	61.9%	55.2%	-13.5%
Colorado	81.5%	82.5%	79.3%	75.6%	76.1%	-6.6%
Connecticut	60.3%	59.9%	56.9%	49.8%	40.0%	-33.7%
Delaware	65.8%	71.4%	71.6%	75.7%	73.1%	11.0%
District of Columbia	53.1%	48.8%	61.3%	50.4%	42.3%	-20.2%
Florida	68.2%	67.4%	63.4%	60.1%	57.8%	-15.3%
Georgia	59.1%	58.0%	53.0%	50.8%	43.8%	-26.0%
Hawaii	70.6%	76.4%	75.8%	67.2%	69.0%	-2.3%
Idaho	72.9%	74.0%	73.0%	73.8%	77.4%	6.2%
Illinois	28.7%	32.2%	36.0%	48.6%	39.6%	38.0%
Indiana	59.7%	57.1%	54.5%	51.7%	53.2%	-10.9%
Iowa	56.0%	53.3%	49.4%	44.4%	52.7%	-5.9%
Kansas	58.6%	55.2%	53.8%	48.3%	39.0%	-33.5%
Kentucky	79.9%	81.9%	78.4%	72.1%	65.8%	-17.7%
Louisiana	71.5%	75.5%	69.6%	67.5%	63.6%	-11.1%
Maine	43.1%	53.4%	61.8%	53.6%	38.0%	-12.0%
Massachusetts	64.4%	62.8%	60.3%	59.4%	52.6%	-18.2%
Michigan	44.9%	46.2%	40.3%	35.0%	25.6%	-43.1%
Minnesota	74.4%	74.3%	71.1%	68.6%	68.9%	-7.4%
Mississippi	59.2%	49.3%	55.2%	54.8%	48.5%	-18.0%
Missouri	55.3%	51.1%	51.8%	49.0%	42.7%	-22.7%
Montana	59.1%	56.3%	62.0%	61.4%	63.8%	7.9%
Nebraska	51.6%	46.7%	51.4%	52.0%	45.6%	-11.6%
Nevada	73.8%	72.7%	72.3%	68.7%	67.3%	-8.7%
New Hampshire	61.6%	71.7%	68.6%	71.1%	59.6%	-3.3%
New Jersey	66.1%	70.5%	63.9%	56.5%	50.1%	-24.2%
New Mexico	77.2%	75.1%	70.3%	65.9%	65.9%	-14.6%
New York	61.3%	61.1%	60.3%	54.3%	48.6%	-20.7%
North Carolina	54.2%	48.1%	48.0%	46.6%	43.4%	-19.9%
North Dakota	71.2%	74.6%	70.0%	66.2%	67.7%	-5.0%
Ohio	69.1%	67.9%	64.1%	61.5%	55.9%	-19.1%
Oklahoma	38.2%	39.9%	38.6%	39.2%	33.3%	-12.9%
Oregon	52.8%	52.6%	47.6%	49.6%	46.1%	-12.7%
Pennsylvania	71.8%	71.7%	68.8%	66.2%	61.2%	-14.8%
Rhode Island	65.1%	69.2%	53.6%	36.0%	29.4%	-54.9%
South Carolina	83.4%	81.4%	82.7%	78.8%	69.6%	-16.5%
South Dakota	70.3%	70.4%	75.0%	71.7%	71.0%	0.9%
Tennessee	74.4%	76.2%	69.6%	67.3%	62.6%	-15.8%
Texas	51.3%	52.3%	48.8%	45.7%	40.8%	-20.6%
Utah	70.2%	63.8%	63.8%	60.9%	59.6%	-15.1%
Vermont	64.6%	70.5%	63.3%	63.4%	62.3%	-3.7%
Virginia	59.5%	62.5%	60.4%	60.3%	53.6%	-9.9%
Washington	55.2%	54.5%	53.4%	49.9%	47.7%	-13.5%
West Virginia	68.1%	65.9%	62.3%	61.6%	56.7%	-16.8%
Wisconsin	67.1%	65.7%	64.3%	61.3%	56.4%	-16.0%
Wyoming	73.7%	74.4%	77.9%	76.9%	76.2%	3.4%

<sup>a</sup> A change of +/-5.0 percent is considered a change in performance. Values shaded in dark magenta indicate an improvement in performance, values shaded in light magenta indicate a decline in performance, and values with no shading indicate no change in performance.

Note.—Data include all states that met the relevant data-quality thresholds.

**Table IV–7. Outcome 4.2: Percentage of Children Reentering Foster Care Within 12 Months of a Prior Episode, 2017–2021 (N=50)**

State	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	Percentage change in performance, 2017–2021 <sup>a</sup>
Alabama	6.9%	6.7%	6.8%	7.0%	5.8%	-16.4%
Alaska	6.4%	6.7%	7.3%	6.0%	5.4%	-15.5%
Arizona	8.8%	8.7%	7.4%	7.1%	6.0%	-31.6%
Arkansas	6.0%	6.5%	5.6%	5.4%	3.7%	-37.6%
California	7.6%	8.0%	7.3%	7.2%	7.3%	-3.3%
Colorado	14.8%	15.5%	14.4%	12.4%	13.6%	-8.5%
Connecticut	4.2%	4.4%	4.7%	5.6%	4.9%	16.3%
Delaware	8.3%	2.7%	6.7%	4.8%	3.1%	-62.9%
District of Columbia	9.0%	6.3%	7.5%	8.0%	9.5%	4.8%
Florida	6.6%	7.1%	8.8%	7.4%	6.6%	-0.3%
Georgia	6.3%	6.2%	6.4%	6.2%	4.9%	-22.7%
Hawaii	11.7%	11.2%	8.9%	11.2%	9.9%	-15.1%
Idaho	6.0%	4.9%	4.3%	4.0%	4.2%	-29.5%
Illinois	5.5%	5.2%	5.5%	5.3%	8.9%	62.5%
Indiana	6.5%	6.8%	7.5%	6.5%	6.1%	-5.0%
Iowa	8.8%	6.5%	7.1%	8.0%	9.9%	13.1%
Kansas	5.8%	5.3%	6.5%	6.5%	5.3%	-8.2%
Kentucky	9.8%	7.9%	8.7%	8.0%	7.4%	-23.9%
Louisiana	8.1%	6.0%	6.6%	7.0%	4.6%	-43.3%
Maine	3.0%	5.5%	4.7%	8.4%	5.6%	84.0%
Massachusetts	11.2%	11.5%	11.6%	10.4%	9.2%	-18.2%
Michigan	5.9%	6.1%	6.0%	8.2%	5.1%	-14.6%
Minnesota	13.3%	13.7%	14.6%	13.0%	13.5%	1.3%
Mississippi	6.5%	6.3%	4.7%	4.8%	5.3%	-18.6%
Missouri	4.6%	4.1%	4.5%	3.4%	3.6%	-21.3%
Montana	7.4%	8.0%	9.4%	11.1%	7.2%	-3.0%
Nebraska	6.5%	5.8%	8.1%	7.4%	8.0%	23.3%
Nevada	6.1%	4.9%	4.1%	4.4%	4.3%	-30.4%
New Hampshire	14.2%	16.7%	15.5%	16.8%	16.4%	15.8%
New Jersey	9.4%	9.2%	9.6%	8.1%	7.3%	-22.1%
New Mexico	8.6%	8.7%	8.4%	6.8%	6.4%	-26.3%
New York	9.4%	6.9%	9.1%	8.9%	8.2%	-13.3%
North Carolina	2.2%	1.0%	5.6%	5.6%	8.3%	273.6%
North Dakota	10.2%	10.8%	11.3%	9.6%	11.4%	11.2%
Ohio	8.9%	10.9%	12.6%	13.6%	14.7%	65.3%
Oklahoma	3.9%	3.3%	4.5%	4.1%	3.2%	-18.1%
Oregon	5.9%	7.3%	7.1%	6.2%	7.9%	33.1%
Pennsylvania	13.3%	14.6%	13.6%	14.2%	13.2%	-1.1%
Rhode Island	10.5%	9.5%	8.4%	5.5%	6.8%	-34.7%
South Carolina	6.5%	6.9%	7.3%	6.8%	7.2%	10.6%
South Dakota	6.3%	7.7%	9.4%	9.1%	10.9%	73.7%
Tennessee	12.2%	11.6%	11.9%	12.4%	12.8%	4.7%
Texas	3.2%	3.4%	3.6%	3.9%	3.3%	5.3%
Utah	4.6%	6.3%	5.6%	6.2%	4.7%	2.9%
Vermont	10.1%	10.4%	10.9%	11.9%	8.3%	-17.5%
Virginia	4.5%	6.8%	7.0%	6.2%	7.1%	57.1%
Washington	6.7%	6.4%	6.6%	8.3%	7.6%	13.6%
West Virginia	7.5%	7.3%	8.2%	7.2%	6.4%	-14.6%
Wisconsin	9.7%	10.8%	11.1%	12.4%	9.8%	1.3%
Wyoming	12.0%	12.4%	13.7%	13.5%	9.9%	-17.4%

<sup>a</sup> A change of +/-5.0 percent is considered a change in performance. Values shaded in dark magenta indicate an improvement in performance, values shaded in light magenta indicate a decline in performance, and values with no shading indicate no change in performance.

Note.— A lower value indicates better performance. Data include all states that met the relevant data-quality thresholds.

**Table IV–8. Outcome 5.1a: Percentage of Children Exiting to Adoption in Less Than 12 Months, 2017–2021 (N=50)**

State	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	Percentage change in performance, 2017–2021 <sup>a</sup>
Alabama	5.3%	3.8%	3.3%	4.3%	4.1%	–23.9%
Alaska	0.3%	0.0%	1.0%	1.1%	1.2%	334.6%
Arizona	5.0%	6.2%	6.2%	6.0%	5.3%	4.8%
Arkansas	6.1%	5.9%	6.0%	6.0%	5.7%	–6.6%
California	3.9%	3.4%	4.0%	3.3%	2.5%	–36.0%
Colorado	6.3%	5.9%	6.3%	4.4%	2.5%	–60.7%
Connecticut	4.5%	4.8%	4.4%	1.3%	2.7%	–38.3%
Delaware	7.3%	7.5%	3.9%	3.5%	14.0%	90.1%
District of Columbia	0.0%	0.0%	3.1%	2.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Florida	12.7%	10.5%	10.3%	8.4%	7.0%	–45.2%
Georgia	2.8%	1.6%	1.4%	1.7%	0.7%	–74.9%
Hawaii	6.1%	6.7%	2.5%	4.4%	3.0%	–51.1%
Idaho	1.6%	2.1%	3.3%	2.8%	3.1%	88.7%
Illinois	0.3%	0.1%	0.3%	0.3%	0.7%	160.9%
Indiana	0.9%	1.5%	1.1%	1.3%	1.0%	15.6%
Iowa	5.3%	4.3%	3.7%	4.8%	3.3%	–36.4%
Kansas	0.9%	0.6%	1.0%	0.8%	0.8%	–6.3%
Kentucky	0.5%	0.7%	0.5%	0.5%	0.6%	8.4%
Louisiana	0.8%	1.2%	1.8%	1.2%	1.1%	47.0%
Maine	1.8%	2.0%	1.7%	0.8%	0.3%	–83.5%
Massachusetts	1.2%	0.7%	0.6%	0.4%	0.4%	–67.6%
Michigan	4.4%	3.5%	3.5%	2.9%	2.6%	–41.0%
Minnesota	4.7%	5.6%	6.1%	5.5%	2.4%	–49.7%
Mississippi	1.4%	1.4%	1.0%	0.8%	0.5%	–62.2%
Missouri	6.2%	5.3%	6.5%	5.6%	3.3%	–45.9%
Montana	3.3%	1.0%	1.9%	1.2%	0.6%	–80.5%
Nebraska	5.6%	4.3%	4.7%	5.3%	3.0%	–47.2%
Nevada	2.5%	1.8%	2.2%	1.0%	1.0%	–60.5%
New Hampshire	1.0%	0.5%	0.7%	1.1%	0.4%	–56.0%
New Jersey	1.9%	2.1%	2.5%	1.3%	1.1%	–42.7%
New Mexico	1.3%	0.7%	1.1%	0.0%	0.7%	–42.4%
New York	2.0%	1.6%	2.2%	1.7%	0.7%	–64.3%
North Carolina	5.2%	3.6%	3.2%	4.0%	3.3%	–36.2%
North Dakota	4.2%	0.6%	0.5%	1.6%	1.3%	–68.1%
Ohio	4.2%	4.5%	3.4%	3.0%	2.2%	–48.2%
Oklahoma	6.2%	7.1%	9.0%	6.7%	6.6%	7.6%
Oregon	0.6%	0.3%	0.3%	0.6%	0.3%	–49.0%
Pennsylvania	2.9%	2.6%	2.6%	2.5%	1.9%	–35.9%
Rhode Island	4.8%	3.5%	6.0%	2.7%	1.7%	–64.2%
South Carolina	2.1%	1.6%	2.1%	2.2%	0.9%	–57.3%
South Dakota	1.1%	2.2%	2.4%	1.0%	0.9%	–18.2%
Tennessee	8.6%	9.8%	8.3%	5.3%	3.8%	–55.3%
Texas	3.5%	2.8%	2.7%	2.5%	1.6%	–53.2%
Utah	27.0%	24.1%	23.1%	22.9%	13.7%	–49.2%
Vermont	3.4%	1.7%	4.8%	1.3%	2.1%	–38.2%
Virginia	2.2%	3.9%	3.6%	2.5%	2.2%	3.9%
Washington	1.2%	1.3%	1.0%	0.6%	0.5%	–60.3%
West Virginia	6.3%	7.1%	8.1%	6.2%	8.7%	38.6%
Wisconsin	4.5%	4.5%	3.2%	3.5%	4.4%	–2.8%
Wyoming	4.9%	2.7%	3.3%	3.1%	8.6%	75.7%

<sup>a</sup> A change of +/-5.0 percent is considered a change in performance. Values shaded in dark magenta indicate an improvement in performance, values shaded in light magenta indicate a decline in performance, and values with no shading indicate no change in performance.

Note.—Data include all states that met the relevant data-quality thresholds.

**Table IV–9. Outcome 5.1b: Percentage of Children Exiting to Adoption in More Than 12 Months but Less Than 24 Months, 2017–2021 (N=50)**

State	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	Percentage change in performance, 2017–2021 <sup>a</sup>
Alabama	36.5%	35.3%	36.2%	34.0%	29.7%	–18.5%
Alaska	14.6%	16.9%	18.2%	15.4%	19.1%	31.2%
Arizona	44.9%	43.3%	43.3%	45.2%	45.1%	0.4%
Arkansas	50.5%	47.3%	39.0%	42.1%	46.7%	–7.5%
California	29.4%	29.8%	29.7%	28.7%	24.5%	–16.5%
Colorado	50.3%	41.3%	38.8%	33.6%	27.2%	–45.8%
Connecticut	41.3%	35.8%	26.7%	30.2%	16.2%	–60.6%
Delaware	37.6%	38.3%	30.2%	37.7%	44.2%	17.5%
District of Columbia	12.6%	26.3%	19.6%	27.6%	25.9%	105.2%
Florida	38.6%	36.3%	34.4%	32.1%	28.1%	–27.2%
Georgia	22.3%	19.8%	15.6%	18.9%	11.3%	–49.2%
Hawaii	41.8%	41.7%	31.2%	43.9%	41.6%	–0.6%
Idaho	34.6%	38.0%	32.9%	37.6%	37.9%	9.6%
Illinois	9.7%	12.7%	12.5%	10.7%	8.2%	–14.7%
Indiana	18.1%	16.6%	13.8%	11.9%	10.8%	–40.6%
Iowa	56.0%	51.7%	51.8%	47.1%	46.7%	–16.7%
Kansas	19.3%	17.3%	16.3%	17.6%	12.3%	–36.4%
Kentucky	15.9%	14.5%	18.3%	20.6%	12.8%	–19.6%
Louisiana	30.6%	29.2%	35.3%	35.3%	31.2%	2.0%
Maine	28.6%	35.8%	32.5%	32.9%	9.0%	–68.6%
Massachusetts	13.5%	11.9%	13.3%	15.5%	6.4%	–52.9%
Michigan	31.7%	33.6%	30.0%	28.0%	22.3%	–29.7%
Minnesota	48.3%	40.1%	41.2%	37.8%	33.2%	–31.2%
Mississippi	19.5%	15.5%	16.0%	14.6%	15.7%	–19.3%
Missouri	29.3%	31.6%	32.9%	29.4%	30.8%	5.1%
Montana	20.4%	15.6%	19.6%	18.7%	12.1%	–40.4%
Nebraska	25.5%	32.9%	27.0%	24.0%	30.1%	18.0%
Nevada	30.6%	26.2%	25.0%	23.5%	24.1%	–21.2%
New Hampshire	29.4%	34.3%	29.4%	19.4%	15.9%	–45.8%
New Jersey	21.5%	21.5%	19.1%	23.8%	16.8%	–21.9%
New Mexico	26.4%	21.8%	18.0%	15.8%	14.9%	–43.5%
New York	11.2%	11.4%	14.2%	12.9%	8.3%	–25.8%
North Carolina	28.1%	28.0%	24.7%	25.8%	21.8%	–22.3%
North Dakota	17.5%	15.4%	21.4%	11.1%	15.2%	–13.2%
Ohio	27.2%	27.6%	27.3%	22.3%	18.4%	–32.4%
Oklahoma	34.1%	38.3%	37.8%	37.4%	33.9%	–0.4%
Oregon	10.3%	11.4%	11.9%	10.3%	13.9%	35.4%
Pennsylvania	28.7%	26.6%	23.8%	24.6%	20.4%	–28.8%
Rhode Island	36.3%	35.2%	35.0%	24.2%	18.2%	–49.9%
South Carolina	19.8%	20.4%	18.0%	17.8%	12.6%	–36.6%
South Dakota	35.6%	25.5%	19.6%	29.7%	23.6%	–33.5%
Tennessee	38.8%	38.5%	37.1%	36.8%	30.9%	–20.5%
Texas	50.0%	53.8%	52.6%	49.9%	44.4%	–11.3%
Utah	58.6%	56.2%	52.5%	47.6%	51.0%	–12.8%
Vermont	35.7%	28.7%	37.9%	24.2%	22.8%	–36.3%
Virginia	30.2%	29.9%	31.2%	33.3%	33.0%	9.5%
Washington	21.2%	21.2%	16.6%	15.9%	14.0%	–33.9%
West Virginia	50.3%	51.9%	54.4%	50.0%	48.3%	–4.1%
Wisconsin	22.3%	18.8%	21.5%	15.9%	17.6%	–21.1%
Wyoming	30.5%	20.0%	23.8%	26.8%	22.9%	–25.0%

<sup>a</sup> A change of +/-5.0 percent is considered a change in performance. Values shaded in dark magenta indicate an improvement in performance, values shaded in light magenta indicate a decline in performance, and values with no shading indicate no change in performance.

Note.—Data include all states that met the relevant data-quality thresholds.

## Chapter V: Achieving Stable and Appropriate Placement Settings for Children in Foster Care

The state child welfare agency is responsible for ensuring a child is in a stable placement setting while in foster care. The appropriateness of a placement setting also is important to the well-being of children in foster care. Placement setting stability is addressed in outcome 6 (increase placement stability for children in foster care). For the purposes of the Child Welfare Outcomes Reports, placement setting stability is defined as a child having had two or fewer placement settings in a single foster care episode.<sup>91</sup> Placement setting appropriateness is addressed in outcome 7 (reduce placements of young children in group homes or institutions). Outcome 7 is evaluated by examining the degree to which children age 12 or younger are placed in family foster homes rather than group homes or institutions.

This chapter presents national results for the following measures:

- Measure 6.1a: The percentage of children in foster care for less than 12 months who experienced two or fewer placement settings
- Measure 6.1b: The percentage of children in foster care for at least 12 months but less than 24 months who experienced two or fewer placement settings
- Measure 6.1c: The percentage of children in foster care for 24 months or longer who experienced two or fewer placement settings
- Measure 7.1: The percentage of children entering foster care at age 12 or younger who were placed in group homes or institutions

### Children in Group Homes and Institutions

FFPSA was enacted in 2018 and amended Titles IV-B and IV-E of the Act. Among other updates to child welfare policy, it provided more federal resources to help families stay together and established limits on federal foster care reimbursement for youth placed in non-

There are some children in foster care for whom a foster family setting will not meet their highly specialized needs. However, a family setting commonly will be the most appropriate, especially for young children.

foster family home settings (i.e., group homes and institutions).<sup>92</sup> According to the AFCARS definitions, group homes generally have between 7 and 12 children, and institutions are typically larger and may include residential treatment facilities or child care institutions. There are some instances in which a group home or institution is determined to be the most appropriate placement to meet the needs of a child. For example, young children may need a particular type

<sup>91</sup> A single foster care episode begins on the date when a child is removed from the home and ends when the child is discharged from foster care (i.e., is no longer under the care and placement responsibility of the state). For the purposes of this Report, the count of placement settings does not include temporary stays in hospitals, camps, respite care, or institutional placements. For additional information, please see the [Guide to an AFCARS Assessment Review](#).

<sup>92</sup> Currently, AFCARS does not have information regarding the placement setting provisions as amended by FFPSA regarding the details of prior placements and foster care episodes, services provided, and pregnancy or parenting status. For additional information on FFPSA data collection, see the [Title IV-E Prevention Program page](#) on the CB website.

of care to meet certain physical or mental health needs that a group home or institution is best equipped to provide.<sup>93</sup> However, the driving assumption behind outcome 7 is that, while group homes or institutions may be appropriate for some children in foster care, younger children are likely to have their needs better met in a family setting.

Approximately 35,000 children and youth had a current placement setting reported as being in congregate care (i.e., either a group home or institution) in 2021. Figure V–1 (at the end of this chapter) displays the percentage of children in congregate care by state on the last day of the FY. Overall, a median of 10.1 percent of children across states were in congregate care at the end of 2021.

Table V–1 displays the median state performance on a number of characteristics and indicators for children in either a group home or institution. For both group home and institution settings, most states had more males than females in those settings. The median age of entry was 13 years across states for group homes and 12 years for institutions. The national median length of stay for children in their current placement setting was higher for group homes (4.3 months) than for institutions (3.9 months). Nearly half of all children in congregate care had a diagnosed disability, with national medians of 45 percent for group homes and 44 percent for institutions. The proportions varied widely across states. Lastly, a relatively small percentage of children in either setting had a case goal of long-term foster care.<sup>94</sup> However, the range of states’ performance had a high of 42 percent for group homes and 20 percent for institutions. As states implement policies and strategies in response to updates in federal child welfare policy as a result of FFPSA, it will be important to monitor how the population of children in congregate care changes over time. Because of the high percentage of children with disabilities who are placed in congregate care settings, it is fundamental to examine the characteristics and diagnosis or diagnoses of these children to better meet their needs in congregate care or to reduce their placement in these types of settings.

<b>Characteristics</b>	<b>Group home</b>	<b>Institution</b>
<b>Male<sup>a</sup></b>	61% (0%–100%)	60% (38%–83%)
<b>Female<sup>a</sup></b>	39% (0%–76%)	40% (17%–62%)
<b>Age at entry (years)</b>	13	12
<b>Length of stay in care (months)</b>	17.8	18.2
<b>Length of stay in current setting (months)</b>	4.3	3.9
<b>Diagnosed disability<sup>a</sup></b>	45% (0%–100%)	44% (0%–98%)
<b>Case goal of long-term foster care<sup>a</sup></b>	1% (0%–42%)	1% (0%–20%)

<sup>a</sup> Data displayed are the medians across states, followed by the range of state performance in parentheses.

Note.—This table displays data for children in foster care on the last day of the FY.

<sup>94</sup> As discussed in chapter III, when foster care is necessary to ensure children’s safety and well-being, the goal of state child welfare agencies is to return children to their homes or to find other permanent homes in a timely manner. States report to AFCARS the most-recent case plan goal of long-term foster care when specific factors or conditions make it not appropriate or possible to return the child home or place the child for adoption, with a relative, or with a legal guardian. For more information on reporting case plan goals, see [AFCARS Technical Bulletin #1: Data Elements](#), which was last revised in February 2012.

## Achieving Stable and Appropriate Placement Settings for Children in Foster Care

Table V–2 presents the findings on state performance regarding placement stability (measure 6.1) and placements of young children in group homes or institutions (measure 7.1). For outcome measure 6.1, data are presented that measure placement stability for multiple timeframes regarding length of stay in foster care.

<b>Outcome measures</b>	<b>25th percentile</b>	<b>National median (50th percentile)</b>	<b>75th percentile</b>	<b>Range</b>
Measure 6.1a: Of all children served in foster care during the year who were in care for less than 12 months, what percentage had no more than two placement settings? (N=52)	80.4%	83.8%	87.6%	67.8%–92.1%
Measure 6.1b: Of all children served in foster care during the year who were in care for at least 12 months but less than 24 months, what percentage had no more than two placement settings? (N=52)	60.2%	66.1%	71.9%	48.9%–80.3%
Measure 6.1c: Of all children served in foster care during the year who were in care for at least 24 months, what percentage had no more than two placement settings? (N=52)	33.2%	41.1%	46.9%	21.3%–59.6%
Measure 7.1: Of all children who entered foster care during the year and were age 12 or younger at the time of their most recent placement, what percentage were placed in a group home or an institution? (N=52) <sup>a</sup>	1.5%	2.2%	3.5%	0.3%–26.3%

<sup>a</sup> For this measure, a lower number indicates better performance.

Note.—Data for this table include all states for which adequate data were available.

As shown in table V–2, the majority of children in foster care for less than 12 months across all states experienced no more than two placement settings in 2021, with a national median of 83.8 percent. It is encouraging that more than four out of five children remain in stable placements during their first year in foster care. While there may be times when a new placement setting will be in the best interest of the child, such as a move to a placement that better reflects the permanency goals and service needs of the child, it is generally important for states to continue to do as much as they can to keep placement setting counts to a minimum. Across the time periods composing measure 6.1, the median across states for children having no more than two placements decreased as the length of time in foster care increased: 83.8 percent for less than 12 months in care, 66.1 percent for between 12 months and 24 months in care, and 41.1 percent for 24 months or longer in care.

Direct comparisons between these measures are difficult to make. First, these measures count all of a child’s placement settings (regardless of in which years they occurred) up until discharge



from foster care or until the end of the reporting period rather than just those that occurred during the year of interest. In addition, the demographics of children included in each measure vary. For example, the population of children in care less than 12 months includes infants and very young children, whereas, by definition, the measure for children in care 24 months or longer limits the population to age 2 and older. Age is an important factor to consider when assessing placement stability.

Additionally, the relationship between time in care and placement setting stability is more nuanced than it may initially appear. Research has shown that many factors affect placement stability. For example, there is a link between placement stability and factors such as the age of the child; placement setting type; the presence of physical, mental, or behavioral needs; and foster care parent and agency characteristics.<sup>95</sup> Research also indicates a correlation between placement instability, deficits in executive functioning, and psychopathology.<sup>96</sup>

In about half of states in 2021, 2.2 percent or less of children entering foster care under the age of 12 were placed in group homes or institutions (measure 7.1), with states' performance ranging from 0.3 to 26.3. The low national median on this measure indicates positive national performance overall.

### **Changes Over Time in State Performance on Measures of Achieving Stable and Appropriate Placement Settings for Children in Foster Care**

Table V–3 displays the change in the national median over time on measures pertaining to achieving stable and appropriate placement settings for children in foster care. This table also shows the number of states that demonstrated an improvement or decline in performance on these measures.

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<sup>95</sup> Wedeles, J. (2016). *Placement stability in child welfare*. <https://www.oacas.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/PARTicle-Placement-Stability-in-Child-Welfare-FINAL.pdf>

<sup>96</sup> Fisher, P. A., Mannering, A. M., Van Scoyoc, A., & Graham, A. M. (2013). A translational neuroscience perspective on the importance of reducing placement instability among foster children. *Child Welfare*, 92(5), 9–36.

Table V–3. State Medians and Changes in Performance Over Time, 2017–2021							
Outcomes 6 and 7: Achieving Stable and Appropriate Placement Settings							
Outcome measures <sup>a</sup>	Median by year					Improved in performance <sup>b</sup>	Declined in performance <sup>b</sup>
	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021		
Measure 6.1a: Percentage of children in foster care for less than 12 months who experienced two or fewer placement settings (N=50) <sup>c</sup>	84.2%	83.5%	83.0%	84.6%	84.2%	5 states (10%)	4 states (8%)
Measure 6.1b: Percentage of children in foster care for at least 12 months but less than 24 months who experienced two or fewer placement settings (N=50) <sup>c</sup>	65.6%	65.5%	64.9%	65.8%	66.1%	22 states (43%)	7 states (14%)
Measure 6.1c: Percentage of children in foster care for 24 months or longer who experienced two or fewer placement settings (N=50) <sup>c</sup>	41.0%	41.0%	41.0%	40.2%	41.2%	27 states (54%)	11 states (22%)
Measure 7.1: Percentage of children entering foster care at age 12 or younger who were placed in group homes or institutions (N=50) <sup>d</sup>	3.0%	3.1%	2.9%	2.5%	2.2%	32 states (64%)	16 states (32%)

<sup>a</sup> Full descriptions for the measures in this table can be found in table V–2 and appendix B.

<sup>b</sup> In accordance with standard procedure for data analysis in this Report, when there was a percentage change of less than 5.0 in either direction (positive or negative), a determination was made that there was no change in performance.

<sup>c</sup> Other time periods composing measure 6.1 are not shown in this table. See appendix B for more information on how the measure is defined.

<sup>d</sup> For this measure, a lower number indicates better performance.

Note.—Data for this table include all states for which adequate data were available for all relevant years and may be different from the data included in table V–2 due to differences in the numbers of states included for each analysis.

As indicated in table V–3, there was little change in achieving placement stability for children in care less than 24 months between 2017 and 2021. For children in care less than 12 months (measure 6.1a), the national median remained unchanged, with about as many states reporting an improvement in performance (10 percent) as a decline (8 percent). The majority of states (82 percent) demonstrated no change in performance. Similarly, a small improvement was observed in the national median for children in care more than 12 months but less than 24 months (measure 6.1b), with an increase of 0.8 percent over the 5 years. Although 43 percent of states demonstrated no change in performance, more states demonstrated an improvement (43 percent) than a decrease (14 percent) in this measure.

The national median over time related to the percentage of children in foster care for 24 months or longer who experienced two or fewer placement settings (measure 6.1c) has remained relatively flat over time, with a change from 2017 to 2021 of 0.5 percent. While the percentage change from 2017 to 2021 was not a meaningful change and the national median remained at or slightly over 40 percent across the 5 years, it is worth highlighting that over half (54 percent) of

states demonstrated improvement on this measure, and only 11 states (22 percent) declined in performance. In addition, overall improvement of performance on this measure at the longer timeframes is encouraging.

While the overall change in performance at achieving placement-setting stability for children in care less than 12 months remained unchanged, the national median has remained over 80 percent across all 5 years.

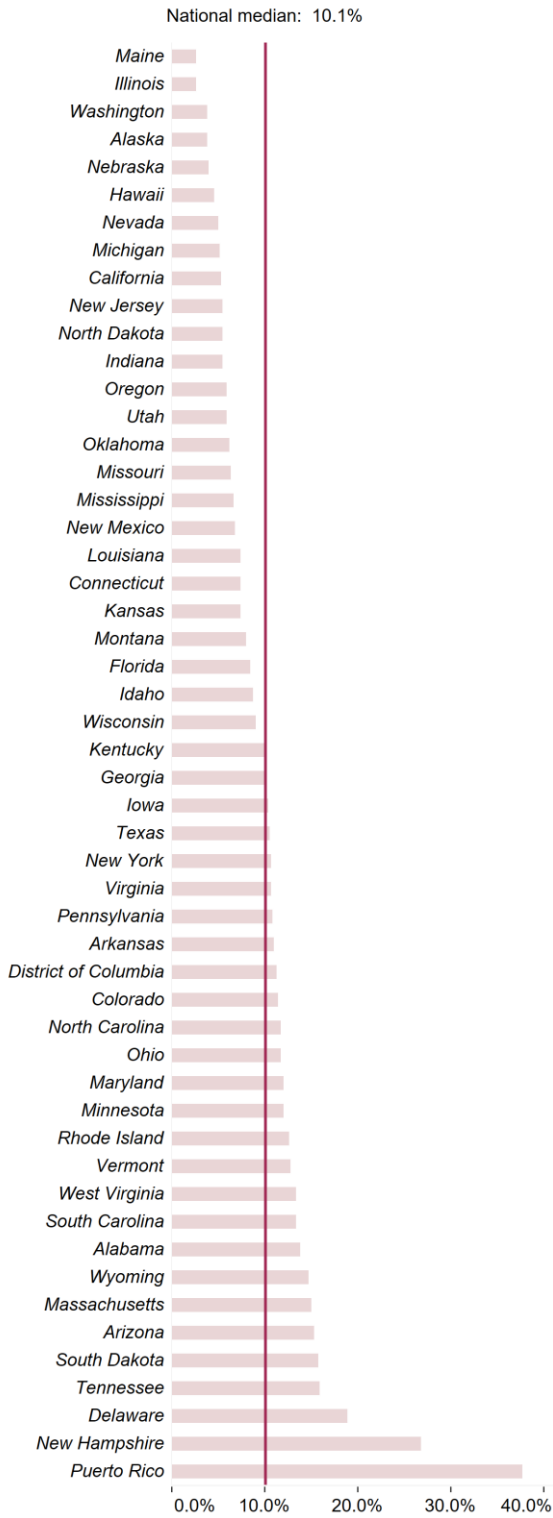
In 2021, there was an improvement in the percentage of children age 12 or younger who were placed in group homes or institutions (measure 7.1). The national median decreased from 3.0 percent in 2017 to 2.2 percent in 2021—a 26.7-percent decline over 5 years. Additionally, nearly two-thirds of the states (64 percent) reported an improvement in performance, and 32 percent of states reported a decline in performance. This continues a trend reported in previous Child Welfare Outcomes Reports.

### **Summary of Findings Regarding Achieving Stable and Appropriate Placements for Children in Foster Care**

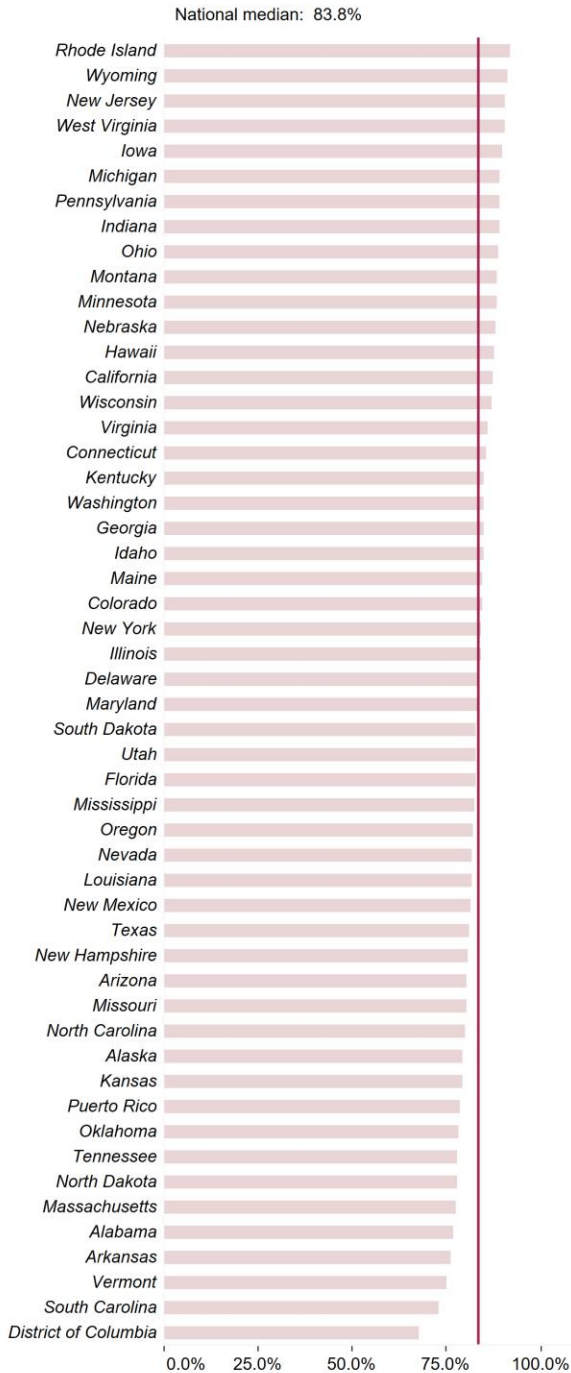
Although states have been fairly successful in achieving placement stability for children in foster care for less than 12 months, the percentage of children who have placement stability declines the longer they are in foster care. It is promising, however, that states have demonstrated some improvement in achieving placement setting stability for children in care longer than 12 months. It is also encouraging that the use of group homes and institutions for children age 12 years and younger continued to decline and that nearly two-thirds of states have shown meaningful improvement over the past 5 years on this measure. With the enactment of FFPSA, it will be important to develop a better understanding of the characteristics of children in various foster care placement settings. Information on children who are placed in congregate care settings will continue to be included in these Reports to monitor state progress on placing children in family settings and reducing the number of children who are placed in congregate care settings.

The end of this chapter displays outcomes-based visuals related to achieving stable and appropriate placements for children in foster care, including state performance on outcomes 6 and 7. The [Child Welfare Outcomes data site](#) includes additional information on achieving stable and appropriate placements for children as well as state data, including data on children in congregate care and for states excluded from analyses due to incomplete or inadequate data.

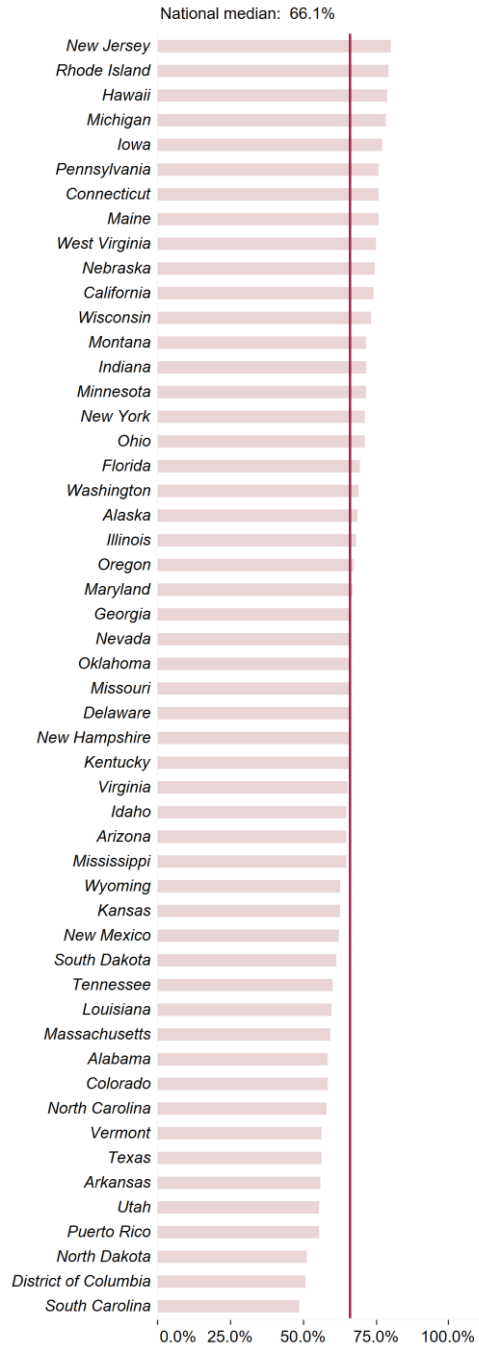
**Figure V–1. Percentage of Children in Care on the Last Day of the FY With a Placement in a Group Home or Institution, 2021 (N=52)**



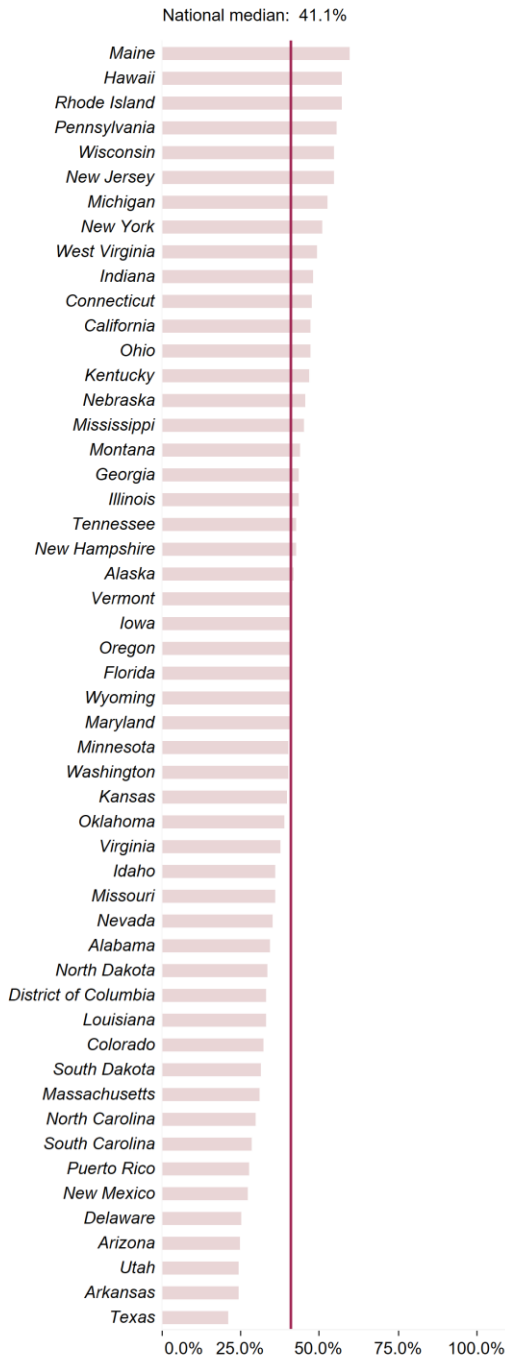
**Figure V–2. Percentage of Children in Care Less Than 12 Months With Two or Fewer Placement Settings, 2021 (N=52)**



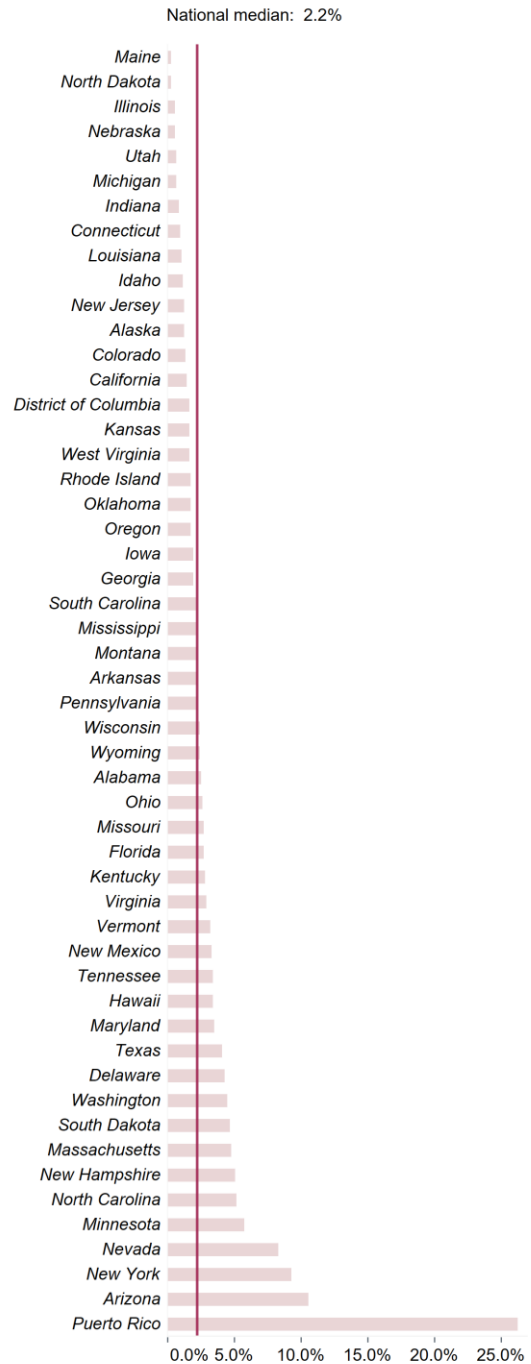
**Figure V–3. Percentage of Children in Care More Than 12 Months but Less Than 24 Months With Two or Fewer Placement Settings, 2021 (N=52)**



**Figure V-4. Percentage of Children in Care More Than 24 Months With Two or Fewer Placement Settings, 2021 (N=52)**



**Figure V-5. Percentage of Children Age 12 and Under Placed in Group Homes or Institutions, 2021 (N=52)**



Note.—A lower value indicates better performance.

**Table V–4. Outcome 6.1a: Percentage of Children in Care Less Than 12 Months With Two or Fewer Placement Settings, 2017–2021 (N=50)**

State	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	Percentage change in performance, 2017–2021 <sup>a</sup>
Alabama	76.9%	78.2%	78.1%	78.1%	76.8%	–0.1%
Alaska	82.6%	83.1%	78.2%	82.7%	79.5%	–3.8%
Arizona	82.5%	83.5%	83.6%	83.4%	80.5%	–2.5%
Arkansas	74.1%	77.3%	76.6%	75.6%	76.1%	2.8%
California	87.9%	87.8%	87.8%	88.9%	87.6%	–0.3%
Colorado	83.2%	82.1%	82.9%	82.2%	84.6%	1.7%
Connecticut	82.0%	81.8%	83.9%	84.8%	85.9%	4.8%
Delaware	85.3%	84.4%	84.1%	86.1%	83.9%	–1.7%
District of Columbia	84.6%	80.6%	70.7%	76.2%	67.8%	–19.8%
Florida	82.2%	81.3%	81.7%	84.5%	82.9%	0.9%
Georgia	81.5%	82.2%	83.2%	85.1%	85.0%	4.3%
Hawaii	89.4%	85.6%	87.6%	87.0%	87.7%	–1.9%
Idaho	87.6%	85.1%	83.0%	84.5%	84.9%	–3.1%
Illinois	76.9%	76.3%	81.6%	84.9%	84.4%	9.7%
Indiana	89.5%	89.0%	89.4%	89.4%	89.3%	–0.3%
Iowa	90.1%	89.3%	91.1%	90.6%	89.9%	–0.1%
Kansas	72.4%	69.9%	73.6%	79.0%	79.4%	9.6%
Kentucky	85.5%	85.6%	85.0%	84.8%	85.1%	–0.4%
Louisiana	82.6%	80.9%	80.4%	81.0%	81.9%	–0.8%
Maine	91.0%	87.3%	87.2%	87.8%	84.8%	–6.8%
Massachusetts	68.5%	69.7%	73.2%	79.1%	77.7%	13.3%
Michigan	87.2%	86.1%	87.7%	89.2%	89.4%	2.6%
Minnesota	87.7%	88.3%	88.2%	87.8%	88.6%	1.0%
Mississippi	84.1%	85.2%	84.0%	81.8%	82.7%	–1.7%
Missouri	80.2%	79.2%	78.6%	80.0%	80.4%	0.3%
Montana	86.2%	87.1%	87.1%	87.9%	88.6%	2.7%
Nebraska	89.8%	89.8%	90.2%	90.5%	88.3%	–1.7%
Nevada	81.5%	82.6%	81.9%	83.8%	82.0%	0.7%
New Hampshire	84.5%	83.9%	85.1%	81.6%	81.0%	–4.1%
New Jersey	87.3%	86.9%	87.4%	90.6%	90.8%	4.1%
New Mexico	84.4%	82.6%	81.3%	84.2%	81.6%	–3.3%
New York	85.0%	84.0%	83.0%	85.0%	84.5%	–0.6%
North Carolina	91.0%	90.5%	88.5%	88.4%	80.3%	–11.8%
North Dakota	81.3%	78.8%	80.7%	75.0%	78.1%	–4.0%
Ohio	89.2%	88.9%	89.3%	88.5%	89.0%	–0.2%
Oklahoma	77.4%	81.4%	80.2%	80.2%	78.4%	1.3%
Oregon	82.0%	80.6%	80.9%	82.9%	82.2%	0.3%
Pennsylvania	87.1%	87.9%	86.8%	89.1%	89.4%	2.7%
Rhode Island	88.9%	87.5%	89.8%	90.9%	92.1%	3.7%
South Carolina	82.4%	81.5%	77.1%	74.7%	73.3%	–11.0%
South Dakota	83.0%	85.6%	81.6%	82.8%	83.1%	0.2%
Tennessee	67.9%	67.8%	68.6%	66.0%	78.1%	15.0%
Texas	83.5%	83.1%	82.8%	84.2%	81.1%	–2.9%
Utah	78.3%	79.7%	79.6%	78.9%	82.9%	5.9%
Vermont	74.3%	78.9%	75.1%	76.0%	75.3%	1.4%
Virginia	84.9%	83.5%	82.3%	86.8%	86.1%	1.4%
Washington	81.5%	83.3%	81.1%	84.6%	85.0%	4.3%
West Virginia	91.0%	90.0%	90.7%	89.9%	90.7%	–0.3%
Wisconsin	87.8%	88.3%	86.4%	87.9%	87.3%	–0.5%
Wyoming	93.0%	90.6%	90.1%	90.1%	91.3%	–1.8%

<sup>a</sup> A change of +/-5.0 percent is considered a change in performance. Values shaded in dark magenta indicate an improvement in performance, values shaded in light magenta indicate a decline in performance, and values with no shading indicate no change in performance.

Note.—Data include all states that met the relevant data-quality thresholds.

**Table V–5. Outcome 6.1b: Percentage of Children in Care More Than 12 Months but Less Than 24 Months With Two or Fewer Placement Settings, 2017–2021 (N=50)**

State	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	Percentage change in performance, 2017–2021 <sup>a</sup>
Alabama	52.2%	55.4%	57.4%	58.6%	58.4%	12.0%
Alaska	65.1%	66.9%	65.4%	60.5%	68.8%	5.8%
Arizona	65.1%	68.3%	67.4%	69.2%	65.1%	–0.1%
Arkansas	47.1%	51.2%	53.3%	55.0%	56.2%	19.3%
California	70.1%	70.8%	71.4%	73.2%	74.5%	6.3%
Colorado	51.6%	51.3%	52.3%	58.7%	58.4%	13.2%
Connecticut	73.1%	67.7%	71.7%	74.0%	75.9%	3.8%
Delaware	58.5%	60.9%	59.0%	67.6%	65.9%	12.6%
District of Columbia	63.4%	65.0%	64.8%	55.6%	51.0%	–19.6%
Florida	66.8%	65.2%	64.8%	65.9%	69.7%	4.2%
Georgia	61.2%	63.5%	63.5%	65.7%	66.9%	9.3%
Hawaii	73.2%	78.8%	73.8%	77.7%	78.8%	7.7%
Idaho	68.4%	65.9%	63.0%	63.9%	65.2%	–4.7%
Illinois	60.3%	61.3%	63.4%	65.4%	68.3%	13.3%
Indiana	72.9%	73.4%	74.0%	72.9%	71.9%	–1.5%
Iowa	74.0%	74.3%	74.3%	76.7%	77.4%	4.6%
Kansas	60.2%	57.8%	55.4%	59.7%	62.8%	4.2%
Kentucky	63.5%	61.9%	63.4%	64.4%	65.6%	3.4%
Louisiana	58.1%	57.2%	56.1%	55.2%	60.1%	3.4%
Maine	80.0%	83.2%	77.3%	75.7%	75.9%	–5.2%
Massachusetts	48.5%	46.1%	48.8%	53.3%	59.4%	22.6%
Michigan	73.7%	71.8%	72.5%	75.5%	78.7%	6.7%
Minnesota	65.8%	67.6%	70.4%	69.5%	71.8%	9.2%
Mississippi	66.9%	65.8%	65.5%	66.0%	64.9%	–3.0%
Missouri	61.5%	63.4%	62.8%	61.5%	66.0%	7.4%
Montana	68.5%	69.0%	70.6%	70.5%	72.0%	5.1%
Nebraska	74.7%	74.3%	73.8%	73.7%	74.6%	–0.1%
Nevada	54.9%	57.8%	61.8%	61.2%	66.7%	21.4%
New Hampshire	68.2%	71.5%	67.3%	66.9%	65.7%	–3.7%
New Jersey	74.4%	73.9%	73.9%	75.8%	80.3%	8.0%
New Mexico	51.9%	54.4%	48.4%	52.5%	62.2%	19.9%
New York	70.8%	71.5%	68.7%	70.2%	71.5%	1.1%
North Carolina	77.2%	76.0%	72.5%	71.9%	58.3%	–24.5%
North Dakota	51.3%	52.5%	58.1%	53.7%	51.5%	0.3%
Ohio	70.3%	70.2%	70.7%	71.7%	71.2%	1.4%
Oklahoma	58.1%	59.1%	63.1%	63.5%	66.2%	13.9%
Oregon	65.6%	66.2%	66.0%	66.6%	67.6%	3.0%
Pennsylvania	68.5%	69.4%	70.4%	72.2%	76.0%	11.0%
Rhode Island	74.9%	73.3%	76.6%	76.5%	79.5%	6.1%
South Carolina	53.8%	53.8%	53.9%	50.4%	48.9%	–9.2%
South Dakota	67.8%	61.6%	59.5%	59.3%	61.5%	–9.2%
Tennessee	51.5%	50.3%	50.2%	50.2%	60.3%	17.0%
Texas	56.8%	56.0%	56.2%	55.6%	56.3%	–0.8%
Utah	53.3%	56.2%	55.4%	58.1%	55.8%	4.6%
Vermont	60.2%	57.0%	60.6%	59.3%	56.5%	–6.3%
Virginia	65.6%	64.7%	62.7%	65.2%	65.4%	–0.4%
Washington	63.1%	63.0%	65.1%	65.1%	69.0%	9.3%
West Virginia	72.9%	76.0%	75.7%	74.5%	75.2%	3.1%
Wisconsin	72.0%	72.7%	74.6%	72.2%	73.4%	2.0%
Wyoming	70.6%	73.5%	70.1%	66.4%	62.9%	–11.0%

<sup>a</sup> A change of +/-5.0 percent is considered a change in performance. Values shaded in dark magenta indicate an improvement in performance, values shaded in light magenta indicate a decline in performance, and values with no shading indicate no change in performance.

Note.—Data include all states that met the relevant data-quality thresholds.



**Table V–6. Outcome 6.1c: Percentage of Children in Care More Than 24 Months With Two or Fewer Placement Settings, 2017–2021 (N=50)**

State	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	Percentage change in performance, 2017–2021 <sup>a</sup>
Alabama	31.7%	32.0%	32.1%	32.7%	34.5%	9.0%
Alaska	42.3%	42.5%	41.6%	43.2%	41.9%	-0.8%
Arizona	44.7%	41.1%	40.3%	40.0%	24.8%	-44.5%
Arkansas	23.6%	19.7%	18.6%	18.1%	24.6%	4.3%
California	42.4%	42.5%	42.6%	44.5%	47.5%	11.9%
Colorado	26.5%	27.2%	27.6%	33.7%	32.5%	22.7%
Connecticut	39.5%	40.5%	43.3%	44.3%	47.6%	20.4%
Delaware	31.8%	28.5%	28.6%	24.0%	25.1%	-20.9%
District of Columbia	42.2%	38.3%	35.3%	41.6%	33.2%	-21.2%
Florida	41.5%	42.9%	43.3%	40.5%	41.1%	-0.8%
Georgia	36.8%	38.3%	39.0%	41.2%	43.7%	18.9%
Hawaii	53.3%	51.9%	57.9%	57.0%	57.4%	7.8%
Idaho	40.9%	43.9%	44.5%	38.8%	36.0%	-12.0%
Illinois	30.4%	30.7%	34.8%	38.2%	43.4%	42.9%
Indiana	49.7%	50.5%	50.3%	49.0%	48.3%	-3.0%
Iowa	37.2%	40.9%	40.8%	41.5%	41.4%	11.2%
Kansas	41.1%	43.0%	41.2%	39.0%	39.8%	-3.2%
Kentucky	43.5%	41.4%	42.7%	45.2%	46.8%	7.6%
Louisiana	36.5%	37.7%	34.0%	31.0%	33.0%	-9.6%
Maine	52.6%	49.3%	51.1%	53.8%	59.6%	13.3%
Massachusetts	33.9%	32.5%	30.0%	28.2%	31.3%	-7.7%
Michigan	46.6%	47.4%	48.2%	49.4%	52.8%	13.4%
Minnesota	37.3%	38.7%	38.2%	39.9%	40.3%	8.1%
Mississippi	42.6%	45.8%	45.5%	43.7%	45.1%	5.9%
Missouri	32.6%	33.9%	33.1%	34.3%	36.0%	10.4%
Montana	44.9%	46.7%	46.7%	45.1%	44.0%	-1.9%
Nebraska	43.1%	44.5%	44.3%	42.2%	45.5%	5.4%
Nevada	29.1%	29.3%	30.7%	33.9%	35.2%	21.0%
New Hampshire	47.8%	54.6%	50.8%	44.9%	42.6%	-10.9%
New Jersey	53.1%	52.2%	51.2%	52.1%	54.7%	3.1%
New Mexico	28.7%	29.6%	31.4%	29.6%	27.3%	-4.8%
New York	47.8%	46.9%	47.3%	48.4%	51.2%	7.0%
North Carolina	45.0%	42.4%	45.6%	38.5%	29.8%	-33.8%
North Dakota	27.4%	29.7%	32.6%	35.4%	33.5%	22.4%
Ohio	44.9%	44.8%	44.0%	46.2%	47.4%	5.5%
Oklahoma	28.7%	30.9%	33.1%	35.4%	39.1%	36.4%
Oregon	41.3%	41.5%	43.0%	43.1%	41.3%	0.1%
Pennsylvania	44.1%	46.3%	47.3%	50.2%	55.4%	25.6%
Rhode Island	49.6%	49.9%	48.5%	55.7%	57.2%	15.3%
South Carolina	33.5%	27.7%	28.7%	28.9%	28.6%	-14.7%
South Dakota	31.8%	34.1%	34.0%	34.9%	31.4%	-1.3%
Tennessee	35.0%	36.6%	35.2%	33.4%	42.7%	22.0%
Texas	21.7%	23.2%	21.7%	21.6%	21.3%	-1.7%
Utah	15.5%	16.7%	19.6%	18.8%	24.6%	59.1%
Vermont	36.6%	36.4%	33.0%	37.8%	41.4%	13.2%
Virginia	40.5%	39.8%	37.6%	37.5%	37.8%	-6.6%
Washington	39.6%	39.5%	39.7%	39.9%	40.3%	1.7%
West Virginia	42.2%	44.3%	46.1%	46.9%	49.2%	16.4%
Wisconsin	49.5%	50.0%	51.8%	54.6%	54.7%	10.5%
Wyoming	47.6%	48.0%	50.0%	45.4%	41.0%	-13.9%

<sup>a</sup> A change of +/-5.0 percent is considered a change in performance. Values shaded in dark magenta indicate an improvement in performance, values shaded in light magenta indicate a decline in performance, and values with no shading indicate no change in performance.

Note.—Data include all states that met the relevant data-quality thresholds.

**Table V–7. Outcome 7.1: Percentage of Children Age 12 or Younger in Group Homes or Institutions, 2017–2021 (N=50)**

State	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	Percentage change in performance, 2017–2021 <sup>a</sup>
Alabama	5.2%	4.4%	2.6%	2.7%	2.5%	–51.8%
Alaska	1.7%	1.8%	1.4%	2.0%	1.3%	–22.8%
Arizona	8.0%	6.2%	7.5%	7.8%	10.6%	33.1%
Arkansas	8.8%	8.0%	4.8%	2.9%	2.2%	–74.6%
California	2.5%	2.6%	1.9%	1.6%	1.5%	–40.0%
Colorado	3.7%	2.5%	1.9%	1.7%	1.3%	–64.0%
Connecticut	1.0%	0.9%	1.0%	0.5%	1.0%	–3.0%
Delaware	1.9%	4.7%	3.0%	3.3%	4.3%	126.1%
District of Columbia	0.9%	1.6%	3.5%	1.4%	1.6%	88.9%
Florida	5.2%	4.5%	3.8%	2.7%	2.8%	–46.8%
Georgia	2.6%	2.1%	2.0%	1.9%	2.0%	–22.8%
Hawaii	4.7%	5.7%	5.0%	3.2%	3.5%	–26.7%
Idaho	3.0%	3.1%	3.1%	2.5%	1.1%	–62.2%
Illinois	1.7%	1.5%	1.5%	1.0%	0.6%	–65.3%
Indiana	1.2%	1.2%	1.5%	1.2%	0.8%	–31.5%
Iowa	2.2%	2.2%	2.1%	2.3%	1.9%	–11.5%
Kansas	1.5%	2.0%	2.7%	2.1%	1.6%	11.7%
Kentucky	3.5%	4.0%	3.5%	2.9%	2.8%	–19.2%
Louisiana	1.4%	1.4%	0.9%	0.9%	1.1%	–20.9%
Maine	1.1%	0.8%	1.2%	0.8%	0.3%	–76.9%
Massachusetts	6.1%	5.3%	5.9%	5.9%	4.9%	–20.0%
Michigan	2.4%	2.4%	1.9%	0.8%	0.7%	–69.0%
Minnesota	5.1%	4.6%	5.3%	5.6%	5.8%	14.2%
Mississippi	3.9%	3.6%	2.8%	2.3%	2.1%	–45.5%
Missouri	3.5%	3.4%	2.9%	2.9%	2.7%	–21.5%
Montana	3.6%	3.1%	2.6%	2.3%	2.2%	–38.6%
Nebraska	0.5%	1.2%	0.7%	0.5%	0.6%	11.5%
Nevada	8.9%	8.5%	7.9%	5.6%	8.3%	–6.8%
New Hampshire	4.4%	7.8%	12.3%	8.0%	5.1%	16.4%
New Jersey	0.9%	1.3%	1.0%	1.0%	1.3%	36.9%
New Mexico	4.9%	3.6%	2.8%	4.5%	3.3%	–32.7%
New York	8.7%	8.3%	8.4%	7.8%	9.3%	7.1%
North Carolina	4.2%	3.6%	4.7%	4.7%	5.2%	21.7%
North Dakota	2.1%	1.9%	1.9%	1.2%	0.3%	–86.8%
Ohio	2.3%	2.5%	2.6%	2.8%	2.7%	17.8%
Oklahoma	1.4%	1.5%	1.5%	1.8%	1.8%	23.0%
Oregon	2.8%	2.1%	1.9%	1.8%	1.8%	–35.8%
Pennsylvania	3.1%	3.6%	3.1%	2.1%	2.3%	–27.8%
Rhode Island	3.1%	2.3%	2.8%	3.1%	1.7%	–43.9%
South Carolina	9.8%	9.7%	6.8%	5.6%	2.1%	–78.3%
South Dakota	9.7%	6.8%	7.8%	6.5%	4.7%	–51.2%
Tennessee	2.7%	2.8%	3.0%	2.8%	3.4%	24.0%
Texas	5.2%	4.9%	4.9%	4.6%	4.2%	–20.4%
Utah	0.9%	0.8%	0.5%	1.1%	0.7%	–23.1%
Vermont	3.0%	3.6%	4.2%	3.4%	3.2%	6.9%
Virginia	5.9%	4.2%	4.2%	3.3%	2.9%	–50.4%
Washington	3.7%	5.3%	6.1%	4.8%	4.5%	23.3%
West Virginia	2.8%	3.2%	2.9%	2.3%	1.7%	–40.9%
Wisconsin	2.3%	2.3%	2.6%	2.6%	2.4%	7.6%
Wyoming	2.6%	3.1%	3.2%	2.0%	2.5%	–3.5%

<sup>a</sup> A change of +/-5.0 percent is considered a change in performance. Values shaded in dark magenta indicate an improvement in performance, values shaded in light magenta indicate a decline in performance, and values with no shading indicate no change in performance.

Note.—A lower value indicates better performance. Data include all states that met the relevant data-quality thresholds.