



# Measuring Transformation &

Elevating Youth Voice  
in Child Welfare

APRIL 2022



children's  
defense fund  
ohio



THE ANNIE E. CASEY  
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# Measuring Transformation

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in Ohio**

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# Letter from CDF-Ohio

Raising a child is hard work and caregiving goes beyond providing the basic needs of nutrition, health, economic well-being, and safe housing. Children must also have positive, supportive relationships, be free from violence and trauma-inducing circumstances, and benefit from asset-rich neighborhoods and communities. Children don't come in pieces and a holistic approach to childhood is needed to support all children as they transition to successful adulthood.

Across the U.S. and Ohio, many families struggle with a variety of challenges. Unfortunately, these challenges may make it necessary for children to be placed in care away from their parents, which can save lives and positively change the trajectory of a child's future but can also be traumatic for children who struggle to cope with circumstances beyond their control. Oftentimes, youth feel powerless and voiceless during this painful process. In more positive stories, the outcomes are family reunification; however, this is not always the case. When children are placed in foster care, real-time measures of their well-being are critical. Local children services agencies have the immense responsibility of ensuring that each and every child placed in their care has their basic needs met—both physically and emotionally—and indicators allow us to keep tabs on how children are doing.

This new report from Children's Defense Fund-Ohio (CDF-Ohio), *Measuring Transformation and Elevating Youth Voice in Child Welfare*, reflects on the systems we have put in place to answer the question, "how are the children doing?" This question is essential; it is the only question that truly matters when addressing the needs of our children. However, too often when seeking the answer to this question, we fail to ask the youth themselves. The perspectives of youth who have experienced foster care or those who are currently in care are the missing piece in the design and improvement of systems and structures intended to serve children and their interests. This report urges us to recognize youth lived experience as a valued community asset and calls for more institutionalized practices that are inclusive of youth input in decisions that impact their lives.

In Ohio, as in many other states, our children can and should be doing better than they are. Though we are encouraged by investments in children services in the past four years by the Ohio Legislature and the Governor, more is needed to realize the goals of all children thriving and flourishing into adulthood.

This report provides a county-by-county snapshot of the challenges and opportunities facing our children and child welfare systems across the state of Ohio. The data snapshots are tools to use during community conversations among local advocates, program administrators, and policymakers to inform continuous quality improvement efforts.

Given these challenges and opportunities, CDF-Ohio presents our policymakers, community leaders, social service community, and non-profit partners with this report to further our shared goal of ensuring all children are ready for school, the world of work, civic participation, and lifelong happiness and well-being. This data and policy report highlights perspectives from youth, shares data that shows where we are as a state, and provides recommendations for how we navigate toward a better future for children.

Together, we can make Ohio a place where all children and families can thrive.



Dr. Tracy Nájera, PhD, MPA  
Executive Director

# Table of Contents

## Acknowledgments

## Executive Summary

### **01 Introduction**

A Vision for Youth . . . . .	8
Elevating Youth Voice . . . . .	9
The Challenge . . . . .	11
Reason to hope . . . . .	13
Measuring Transformation . . . . .	14

### **02 The Story of Measures So Far**

Child Welfare Outcomes Report . . . . .	15
Continuous Quality Improvement in Child Welfare . . . . .	18
Federal Performance Measures . . . . .	19
State-level Performance Measures . . . . .	21
How is Ohio Doing? . . . . .	22
How are Counties Doing? . . . . .	31

### **03 Perspectives of Youth With Lived Experience**

Current Measures Evaluated . . . . .	35
Proposed Measures . . . . .	37

### **04 Looking Ahead**

Youth Experience Surveys . . . . .	38
Youth Voice in Children Services Operations . . . . .	39
Other Proposed Measures . . . . .	42



## 05 Summary

Summary of Recommendations . . . . .	46
List of Figures . . . . .	49
References . . . . .	50
Appendix A: Information on Youth Focus Groups . . . . .	52
Appendix B: Building the Path Forward . . . . .	55
Appendix C: Data Landscape . . . . .	59
Appendix D: 2022 Child Welfare Outcomes County Profiles . . . . .	60



# Executive Summary

## Measuring Transformation and Elevating Youth Voice

Each of the 25,000 children who spent time in foster care in Ohio foster care needs positive, supportive relationships to improve the child welfare system. This system must be designed to incorporate the voices of those with lived experience in meaningful ways, ranging from individual cases to system-wide decisions.

This new report by the Children's Defense Fund-Ohio captures insights from youth with lived experience on how to measure the impact of improvement efforts in the child welfare system.

Ohio trails the nation in outcomes for youth who were in foster care in their late teens. Data from 2018 indicate that, at age 21, Ohio's youth were much more likely to be unemployed and to have experienced incarceration than their peers in other states. Ohio ranks in the bottom 10% of the U.S. on four indicators highlighted in the National Youth in Transition survey:

- Graduating high school or getting a GED;
- Being employed;
- Being enrolled in school; and
- Experiencing incarceration.

Leaders in Ohio recognized the need for reform and have since undertaken major initiatives to improve these outcomes, such as the Children Services Transformation Advisory Council recommendations, the establishment of a Youth Ombudsman office, implementation of the Family First Prevention Services Act, and efforts to address racial equity and improve outcomes for infants through the Safe Babies™ approach. Measuring progress will be essential to understanding the effectiveness of these reforms. The purpose of this report is to put forward specific measures that can be used by practitioners and policymakers as key indicators of change.

## Key Findings

The current measures do not fully capture the experiences of children while they are in care. Youth experience surveys should be an integral part of an agency's practices. The data from these surveys can be used as part of a continuous quality improvement framework that makes data accessible, identifies standards, measures progress, and innovates with new practices.

\*Focus group participant with experience in foster care

“My hope for youth in care is that their voices can be heard in a meaningful way.”



Ohio ranks in the bottom 10% of the U.S. in child welfare outcomes		
	OH	US
Those who attained a High School Diploma/GED	60%	70%
Those who were employed	46%	57%
Those who were enrolled in school	12%	28%
Those who experienced incarceration	37%	19%
Bottom 20%		
Those who experienced homelessness	37%	29%
Those who have a connection to an adult	81%	87%

“We also need to be taking qualitative, anonymous, if need be, surveys of our kids in care frequently, and asking them if they are being maltreated.\*”



Though incomplete, existing measures are an important part of the system, and this report describes them in detail and evaluates Ohio's performance on them.

## Does Ohio meet the National Standard?


### Safety

-  More Ohio children experience multiple instances of abuse and neglect than nationally.
-  More Ohio children experience maltreatment while in care than nationally.

### Permanency

-  Ohio performs better than average on measures of permanency.
-  Of children who are reunified, more return to foster care within 12 months than the national average.

### Stability

-  Placement stability is an area of strength for Ohio, with children moving less frequently than in other states.

These measures are part of the process that the federal Children's Bureau uses to review state performance. At the state level, the Office of Families and Children has also identified performance measures. Measures include the number of children who are placed in group homes and institutions, known as congregate care, the number of youth who age out of care, and the number of children who have multiple reports of maltreatment, among others.

### Race Equity

Rates of racial disparity are not prescribed performance measures at the federal or state level; however leaders in child welfare recognize that disparities exist, and Black and brown children are affected disproportionately.<sup>5</sup> Racial disparity measures may indicate there is an opportunity to address racial biases through reflective consultation or other innovative practices. All reforms must address racial equity and be evaluated for their impact on different demographics.

\*Focus group participant with experience in foster care

### Key Statistics

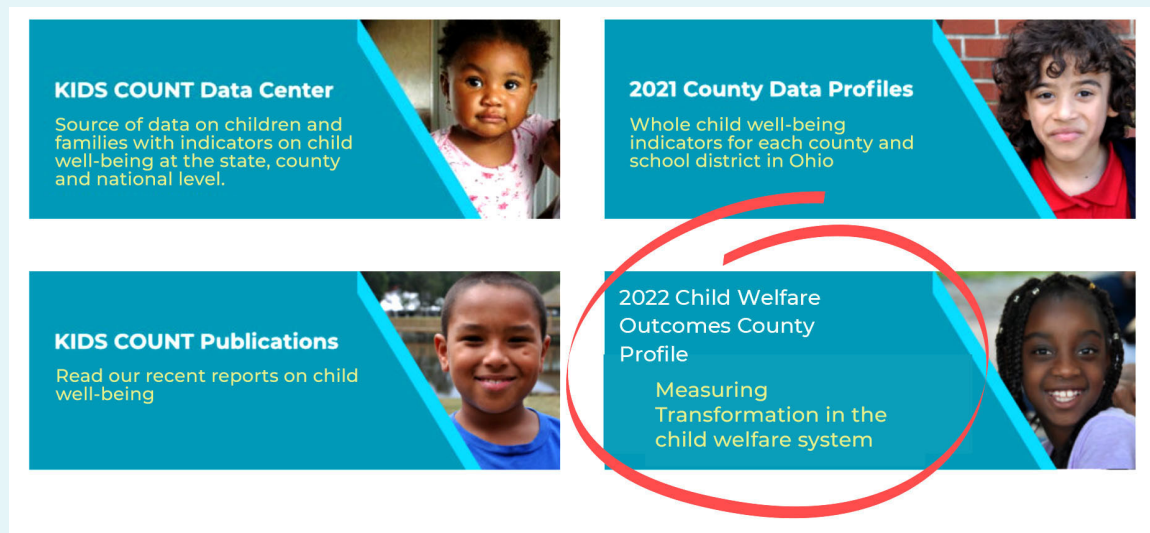
- The percentage of children placed in congregate care among counties ranges from as high as 63% to as low as 5%.
- Over 1,000 youth aged out of care in 2019 and 2020, but in 2021, the number decreased to 952.
- Participation in Bridges, which offers independent living services to youth who age out of care, increased by more than 20% in each of the last two years.
- Roughly one in four children have more than one screened-in report of maltreatment in one year.
- Children in Ohio who are Black are three times more likely to be placed in out-of-home care as children who are white.

## County Profiles

Because Ohio's child protection and children's services system is county administered, it is important to measure the impact of reforms at the county level. This report includes a "Child Welfare Outcomes County Profile." These county profiles serve as a model of information that the state should be providing so that county-level data is easily accessible. Individual counties will have their own profile available online at the Children's Defense Fund-Ohio website as part of the KIDS COUNT Data page.

### Link to Dashboard

<https://cdfohio.org/policy/resources/kids-count/>



## Leverage what is already working

Several models already exist for improving the way Ohio measures transformation. Existing practices, such as Ohio's exit interviews and case reviews, provide the groundwork for gathering meaningful data about youth experiences while in care. Other states serve as models as well. For example, New York has been surveying youth annually since 2018. Florida's performance dashboard includes targets, trends over time, and details about sibling groups, for example. OhioRISE, a new initiative for youth in the Ohio Department of Medicaid, has identified performance measures that include graduation rates and other educational benchmarks. An Ohio Youth Ombudsman office, which is in the planning stages to be established in 2022, can review data about children who run away from placements or who are housed in office buildings to support efforts to protect youth rights while in care.

## Key Recommendations

### Elevate youth voice

- Focus on performance measures that matter to youth.
- Measure youth experiences in care by directly asking them.

### Re-imagine existing processes to ensure that children are safe in their placements

- Change the name of the current process of asking children in foster care questions about their placement from "Exit Interviews" to "Youth Experience Surveys" and conduct them on a quarterly basis.
- Make Youth Experience Surveys a priority by including them as a part of the annual review for an agency.



At a minimum, the measures that should be included in a review are:

- ♦ The percentage of "Yes" responses to the existing questions: "Were you comfortable in that foster home?", "Did you feel safe in that home?", "Do you think that is a good foster home for other children?"
- ♦ The percentage of interviews that were completed out of the total that should have been completed.
- ♦ Add at least the following questions to the survey: "Did you receive a copy of the Foster Youth Bill of Rights?" and "Do you believe your rights have been violated while you have been in care?"

**Use data to identify areas where further investigation is necessary**

- Track the number of youth who run away from placements as a flag to investigate whether the placement is safe.
- Track whether children who run away have had a counseling session in compliance with the Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act.
- If placement concerns involve rights violations, refer the child to the Youth Ombudsman office after other attempts at resolution have been exhausted.



## A Vision for Youth

Meet Marcus (name changed), a funny and intelligent freshman in high school. Marcus was originally in foster care and later placed with his aunt. After being moved to this placement, his grades dropped, he discontinued involvement in extra-curricular activities, and began exhibiting symptoms of depression and anxiety. His sister, a college student, checked in on him regularly and he told her that he was being physically and emotionally abused in this placement, and that his aunt did not feed him on a regular basis.

Marcus' aunt became more and more vocal about not wanting him in her home. She decided to move out of the state, but did not take him with her. For two months, he had no place to call home and was couch surfing.

His sister assisted him in reaching out to the local children services agency to report these concerns and to ask that Marcus be placed into protective custody. They have identified a foster parent who would be happy to take him. This foster parent has cared for Marcus before, and is currently providing care for one of his brothers. She would gladly welcome him into her home.

The agency filed a report and said they would send someone to another aunt's house to check on him. Marcus did not feel safe returning to this aunt's house, so his sister took him to a shelter for homeless teens. However, he was turned away because they were unable to obtain permission from his legal guardian.

Sadly, though his name has been changed, Marcus' story is true. His sister was persistent and was able to advocate for him to find stability after months of homelessness, but his story demonstrates the need to transform the child welfare system.

Marcus, like all young people, needs positive, supportive relationships to thrive. Our communities and systems have critical roles to play in nurturing these supportive relationships which are the roots that provide youth with stability. Sustaining the healthy development of young people should be the orienting force for efforts to improve the child welfare system.

Developmental psychologist, Urie Bronfenbrenner, states that the foundation for child development is a relationship with "one or more adults who have an irrational emotional relationship with the child."<sup>1</sup> Relationships are a key protective factor that lower the risk of negative outcomes.

If a child experiences abuse or neglect, we must strive to not only protect them but to also ensure that they have positive, supportive relationships with their family, caregivers, siblings, and other caring adults and have access to trauma-informed care.

The voices of youth are essential to shaping the child welfare system. The system must be designed to incorporate the voices of those with lived experience in meaningful ways ranging from individual case decisions to system-wide decisions. Capturing their perspective on their wishes and the relationships they find supportive throughout their case and permanency planning is an important piece. Capturing their perspective on ways that system needs to change is another.

Imagine if Marcus had been able to voice his concerns with his placement and create a new plan within a system that prioritized his development and the relationships that are most important to him. Imagine him growing into a thriving adult and becoming a part of the community supporting other young people. This is the vision that motivates efforts to transform the system.

# Elevating Youth Voice

To realize this vision for youth, the voices of young people with lived experience must influence policy and practice. Specifically, youth must be a part of the process of identifying the outcomes and measures that are used throughout the child welfare system. This report captures youth perspectives on the existing measures adopted by the state to assess performance. It also captures their ideas of Ohio for new ways to measure outcomes that are more effective. It also captures the feedback and ideas of youth about new approaches and indicators to measure outcomes that may be better indicators of wellbeing and successful outcomes.

Fortunately, in Ohio, there is an active community of young people who have been in foster care who are committed to being a part of transformation efforts. These young advocates survived maltreatment and are working to prevent it from happening to others. With their insights about ways to measure transformation, leaders in Ohio can evaluate whether efforts to transform the system are responsive to the needs of youth. They can develop a performance management framework that reflects the realities of children in care.

This report serves as a guide for leaders who want to invest in key reform efforts, by establishing clear and measurable outcomes to determine whether investments are making a positive impact for youth and their potential for future success.

When an independent and neutral party is able to access performance data, it is able to identify and investigate patterns of system failures. In 2022, Governor DeWine will appoint two new roles to serve as neutral leaders: A Youth Ombudsman and a Family Ombudsman. Their immediate purpose is to investigate individual cases of rights violations and system failures. The Youth Ombudsman will focus on issues that are submitted by youth like Marcus, while the Family Ombudsman will focus on adult-submitted reports. Because of their independence, these appointees have an important role as neutral parties who can collect data, identify patterns of system failures, measure performance at the local level, and make recommendations for improvements. The Youth Ombudsman and the Family Ombudsman should review the recommendations in this report and use their annual report to highlight key measures of performance.

## A Vision for youth: *In their Words*

Throughout this report, there are direct quotes from youth with lived experience in foster care. They shared their insights on their vision for transformation and ways to measure it.

**“What does it mean to thrive? That I have a stable roof over my head and a stable life where the bills are paid and there is always healthy food in the pantry/fridge. I’m not worried about being homeless or ‘couch hopping’ anymore.”**

**“My degrees, my used SUV, a stable roof over my head, and my forever expanding family and support system that I have gotten to choose, I feel pretty successful.”**

**“Thriving usually means unlearning many of the skills once needed to survive. When you’ve experienced trauma, it means learning to trust both yourself and others more fully.”**

**“My hope for youth in care is that their voices can be heard in a meaningful way.”**





“  
My hope is that youth currently in care are in homes that truly care about their welfare, regardless of their situation.  
”

“  
My hope for youth in care, from the bottom of my heart, is that they do not have an experience like mine.  
”

“  
I want to help create a world where youth rights are widely respected and recognized.  
”

“  
My hope is that youth will finally have a reliable place to call when no one else is listening to their cries for help a fully funded, staffed and functional Youth Ombudsman Office.  
”

“  
I want to help create a world where youth voices ring louder than the adults.  
”

# The Challenge

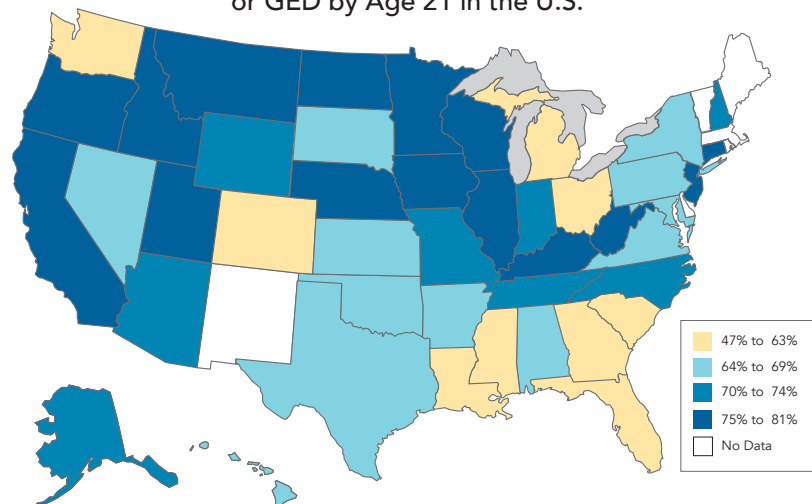
## Ohio Trails the Nation in Positive Outcomes for Youth in Foster Care

Ohio youth who experience foster care face many challenges in their ability to thrive and flourish as they transition to adulthood. 2018 data indicate that they are much more likely to be unemployed and to experience incarceration than their peers in other states.<sup>2</sup>

Ohio ranks in the bottom 10% of the U.S. on four indicators highlighted in the National Youth in Transition survey:

1. Graduating high school or getting a GED,
2. Being employed,
3. Being enrolled in school, and
4. Experiencing incarceration.

**Figure 1.** Percentage of Youth Transitioning Out of Foster Care Who Attained a High-School Diploma or GED by Age 21 in the U.S.



**Figure 2.** List of Measures in which Ohio Ranks in the Bottom 10% and 20% of the U.S. in Child Welfare Outcomes

Ohio ranks in the bottom 10% of the U.S. in child welfare outcomes		
	OH	US
Those who attained a High School Diploma/GED	60%	70%
Those who were employed	46%	57%
Those who were enrolled in school	12%	28%
Those who experienced incarceration	37%	19%
Bottom 20%		
Those who experienced homelessness	37%	29%
Those who have a connection to an adult	81%	87%

This survey follows a cohort of youth, with the first phase conducted at 17 years-old and follow-up at 19 and 21 years-old. Of those responding at 21 years-old, 60% reported having a high-school diploma or GED. This corresponds to data from the Ohio Department of Education that shows that only 63% of youth who were in foster care graduate from high school compared to 87% of the general class of 2020.<sup>3</sup>

Moreover, Ohio ranked in the bottom 10% of states in terms of participation in the survey. In the first phase, when they were 17 years old, only 44% responded, compared to 100% in Pennsylvania. Only 16% responded when they were 21. A survey response rate may represent the degree to which a state is able to reach and meet the needs of youth before their 21st birthday, the age of eligibility for independent living services offered through the Bridges program.<sup>4</sup>



## Black Youth Disproportionately Represented and Have Worse Outcomes

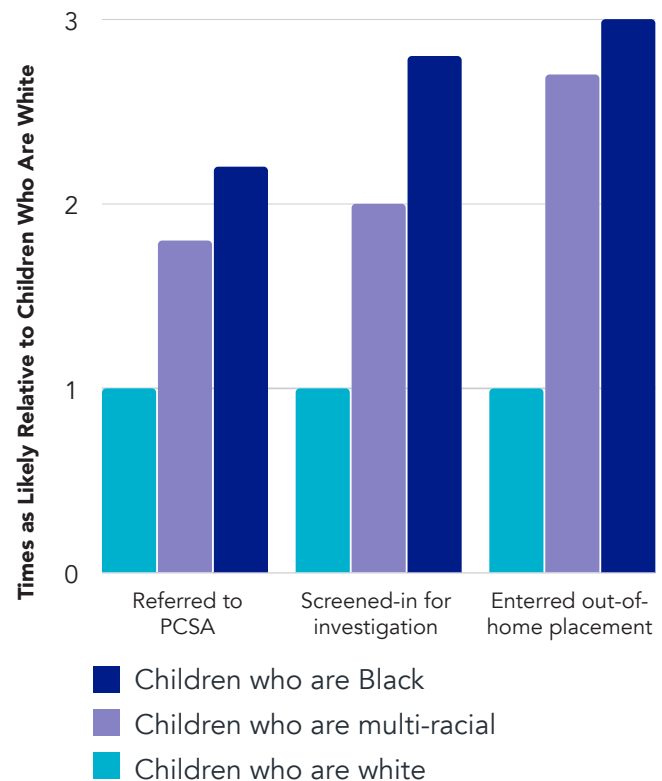
These outcomes disproportionately impact young people of color, who are overrepresented in the system. Young people who are Black are 2.2 times more likely to be referred to children services, 2.8 times more likely to have a report screened in for investigation, and 3 times more likely to enter out-of-home placement compared to those who are white. Likewise, young people who identify as multi-racial are 1.8 times more likely to be referred to children services, 2 times more likely to have a report screened in for investigation, and 2.7 times more likely to enter out-of-home care.<sup>5</sup>

Older youth (14+) who are Black are more likely to have two or more episodes of foster care, 46% of youth compared to 35% of youth who are white. Nationally, only 35% of youth who are Black have multiple episodes.<sup>6</sup>

These disparities have been perpetuated through systems for decades and are exacerbated by policies that disproportionately impact home ownership, educational attainment, incarceration and community safety. Redlining and disparities in criminal sentencing affect wealth and contribute to poverty, which increases the likelihood of being involved with child welfare. In addition, practices in the medical field have disparate impacts. Despite similar instances of substance use during pregnancy, Black women are more likely to be screened for it and have it reported, which leads to higher levels of child welfare involvement.<sup>7</sup>



**Figure 3.** Racial Disparities in Ohio's Child Welfare System



Because children who are Black and multi-racial are disproportionately impacted, equity must be central to all reform efforts. Centering equity means being intentional beginning with the earliest stages of reforms to consider ways that communities of color have historically been impacted and ways that legacies of racism continue to impact policies, practices, behaviors, and attitudes. Deciding on measures is one key aspect of developing reform efforts, and centering equity in this process is essential. Disaggregating measures by race and ethnicity will reveal more about how reforms are impacting different groups. For example, some reforms are designed to reduce the number of children and youth who are placed in residential facilities. By showing how the placements are changing over time for youth who are Black, white or multi-racial separately, the data will reveal whether the reforms are having the intended impact on each population.

# Reason to Hope

Many young people, leaders, and practitioners in Ohio are working to address the challenges listed above, which is reason to hope. The following list of initiatives is not comprehensive but represents highlights of the current efforts to reform the system.

## 1 Children's Services Transformation

In 2019, Governor DeWine appointed the Children Services Transformation (CST) Advisory Council to convene listening sessions across the state and offer recommendations to reform the system. The 37 recommendations coming out of that report span seven domains:

- prevention
- workforce
- practice
- kinship
- foster care
- adoption
- courts<sup>5</sup>

## 2 Youth Ombudsman Office

Many young advocates who have been in foster care recommend that Ohio create a Youth Ombudsman office, exclusively focused on enforcing youth rights.<sup>9</sup> Ohio is in the process of establishing this office. House Bill 4 passed in early 2022 which states that the governor shall appoint a Youth Ombudsman with input by the Ohio Youth Advisory Board.

## 3 Addressing Racism

The Ohio Department of Job and Family Services is studying ways to address racial bias in the child welfare system. In the first stage of the study, young people with lived experiences were interviewed to bring awareness to ways that racism impacts the system. The interviews found clear inconsistencies

in the implementation of policies and procedures that lead to racial disparities for Black and multi-racial young people.<sup>8</sup> The 2020 report provides a foundation for next steps. Equipped with this information, systems can be thoughtfully and effectively re-designed.

## 4 Safe Babies Court Teams

On a smaller scale, three local communities adopted a new practice called the Safe Babies™ approach, a nationally recognized evidenced-based model that seeks to promote healthy child development and reduce the length of time to permanency through interdisciplinary and proactive teamwork among the family, the court, and children services professionals. Children's Defense Fund-Ohio has been supporting implementation at these sites since 2020.<sup>10</sup> At one local site, the team is working to address racial equity through the practice of "reflective consultation." Practitioners work with an expert to evaluate how their practice can be more centered on race equity.

## 5 Family First Prevention Services

Leaders in Ohio are also working to implement the Family First Prevention Services Act, a significant change in federal legislation that will have a major impact on the child welfare landscape.<sup>1</sup> The legislation has two primary impacts: one, the way behavioral healthcare is accessed and funded; and two, the way youth are placed in residential treatment facilities and how those facilities are qualified to offer services.

# Measuring Transformation

As leaders in Ohio undertake each of these initiatives, measuring progress will be essential to understanding their effectiveness.

The purpose of this report is to put forward specific measures that can be used by practitioners and policy makers as key indicators of change.

The first part of this study examines the existing measures and performance management framework of the Child and Family Service Reviews. The second part demonstrates how Ohio is performing according to this framework. The third section captures input from youth with lived experience on existing measures and works toward identifying new ones. Youth perspectives lay the groundwork for a series of recommendations to improve current practices to better measure performance.



## Measures Guide Practice

Data is like a GPS system that guides the way to the desired destination. Insights from young people are like on-the-ground input that might warn of flooding or obstacle on the road that ought to be avoided.

Young people with lived experience in foster care or who have been impacted by the child welfare system are important contributors to this conversation, and this report urges those with the power to make decisions for their well-being to listen and learn from their expertise.

This report builds on ongoing efforts to transform the child welfare system by offering a detailed review of the way data can be used to determine what is working.

In many cases, data is not readily available. Throughout this report there are recommendations for collecting data in new ways and leveraging existing processes to capture the experiences of youth in a systematic way.

**This report is designed to engage youth, practitioners, leaders, and policymakers in an ongoing conversation about the best ways to measure the effectiveness of efforts to improve the child welfare system.**



# 02 The Story of Measures So Far

At the federal level, outcomes have been tied to measures in two ways. The Child Welfare Outcomes Report is made public and reported to Congress, and the Child and Family Services Reviews use measures to assess performance and create improvement plans in a collaborative process between the Children's Bureau and states.

## Child Welfare Outcomes Report

Measuring transformation in child welfare has been a focus at the national level for decades. The Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 charged the U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services to "develop a set of outcome measures...that can be used to assess the performance of States in operating child protection and child welfare programs," which came to be known as the Child Welfare Outcomes (CWO) Report.<sup>12</sup>

This section will describe the CWO report in detail and discuss ways that it is still relevant, ways it needs to change, and how it fits into an overall performance management framework.



### Report Outcomes

**Reduce repeated maltreatment**

**Reduce maltreatment in foster care**

**Increase permanency**

**Reduce time in foster care to reunification without increasing reentry**

**Reduce time to adoption**

**Increase placement stability**

**Reduce placements of young children in group homes or institutions**

“

The first step is to have accurate data so that you have a full picture.

”

# Child Welfare Outcomes Report: Drilling Into the Measures

## Outcome 1

### **Reduce Recurrence of Child Abuse And/or Neglect:**

Measures whether a child has multiple substantiated or indicated reports of maltreatment in a given time period.

The measure uses case-level data for each report in the statewide automated child welfare information system (SACWIS). In isolation, this measure may steer practices that over-emphasize separation to avoid recurrence. It may also create longer separations to avoid multiple reports within a given time period. It must be balanced with measures of prevention and services that reduce recurrence without unnecessary or lengthy separation.

## Outcome 2

### **Reduce the Incidence of Child Abuse And/or Neglect in Foster Care:**

Measures whether a child was maltreated while they were placed out of home.

The measure relies on case-level data about reports. If a substantiated report occurred while the child was in care, it would appear in this measure. Official data likely undercounts these cases. There is an inherent conflict when investigations are completed by the agency responsible for licensing substitute caregivers.

If maltreatment is not properly investigated and substantiated, it will not be reflected in this data.

This represents the lowest possible standard of quality: do no harm. The standard of quality should be much higher.

## Outcome 3

### **Increase Permanency for Children in Foster Care:**

Measures whether a child left foster care with a permanent family (with their biological family, an adopted family or a new guardian) compared to staying in care until they became an adult.

In isolation, this measure could steer practices to focus on permanency on paper only, preventing a young person from accessing education and housing resources. It must be balanced with measures of access to opportunities to thrive as adults.

## Outcome 4

### **Reduce Time in Foster Care to Reunification Without Increasing Reentry:**

Measures whether a child was reunified with their parents within certain timeframes (one, two, three or four years). It balances this against a measure of whether a child enters care again either within the year or after.

Re-entry refers to a child who has been in care multiple times, which is different from recurrence, an indicator signifying whether a child has multiple substantiated reports.



## Outcome 5

### **Reduce Time in Foster Care to Adoption:**

Measures timeframes, similar to Outcome 4 (one, two three or four years) and whether a child was adopted within those.

In this report, Outcome 4 and 5 place equal value on two types of permanency: reunification and adoption. The measures steer practices toward timeliness rather than a preference for one option or the other.

## Outcome 6

### **Increase Placement Stability:**

Measures whether a child lived in two or fewer different placements depending on how long they were in care.

The measure doesn't effectively steer practices. A better measure has been developed showing the number of placement moves per 1,000 days in care, which provides a single measure capturing the total number of placements.

## Outcome 7

### **Reduce Placements of Young Children in Group Homes or Institutions:**

Measures whether a child was 12 years old or younger when they were placed in a residential facility or group home

This measure focuses on younger children, at the exclusion of older youth. New laws around placements in residential facilities in the Family First Prevention Services Act require a more nuanced approach to measuring whether children would benefit from a family-based placement or a residential treatment facility, regardless of age.

## Summary

### **A 1997-era Report is a Helpful Guide to Build a 2022 Tool That More Effectively Steers Practice**

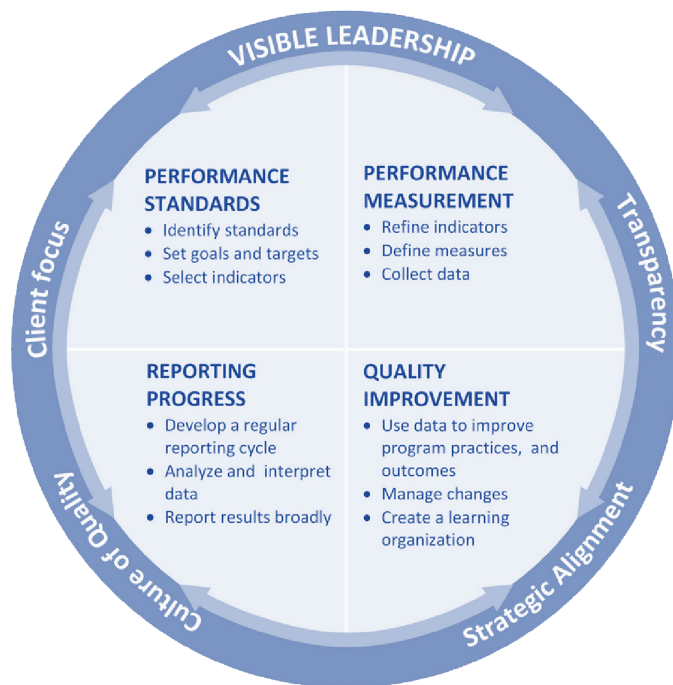
The CWO Report laid the foundation for measuring performance. The measures were used for assessments until 2014. The report continues to provide an easy way to compare Ohio to other states and across years. However, the Child and Family Services Reviews represent the most recent agreed-upon measures at the federal level.<sup>13</sup>

# Continuous Quality Improvement in Child Welfare

Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) is the framework that encompasses these processes. A clear performance management framework is necessary for any organization that seeks to maintain high quality services. There are several key components to an effective performance management system.

## To steer practice, measures must be embedded into an overall performance management framework.

By itself, measuring transformation is limited in its ability to affect change. Measures must be part of an organization's process for evaluating and improving its practices.



**Figure 4:** ECC Performance Management Framework, as Adopted from the Updated Turning Point Performance Management System Framework.<sup>14</sup>

When viewing measures in the context of performance management, it is important to understand the ways an evaluation system may impact the behavior of practitioners.<sup>15</sup> Professionals must have clear data, awareness of evidence-based practices that drive better outcomes for children, the support of agency leadership to make necessary changes in practice, and ultimately held accountable for their practice and outcomes. As such, measures, standards, evaluations, and incentives must be carefully considered so that there won't be unintended consequences.

## Measures

Easily accessible, timely and reliable measures are the foundation

## Standards

Leaders and practitioners identify and understand the target measures to steer toward

## Progress

Leaders and practitioners consistently review measures compared to standards

## Improvement

Continually learn and innovate to find best practices which will be reflected in measures

“The numbers show if the qualitative efforts are failing. It's supposed to drive the practice. Let's see what the outcomes were.”

# Federal Performance Measures

The Child and Family Services Reviews (CFSR) represent the performance management framework for states by the federal Children's Bureau.<sup>16</sup> Data Profiles is the term used to describe a set of key performance indicators, which correspond to the Child Welfare Outcomes Report. The table below shows the measures that are a part of the Data Profile with the national performance standards established for the CFSR review process for each indicator. In the next section, Ohio's data for each of these measures will be shared and compared to the national performance.

**Figure 5:** Outcomes and Measures in the CFSR Data Profiles Showing the National Standard

OUTCOME	MEASURE	DETAIL	NATIONAL STANDARD
<b>Safety in care</b>	Maltreatment per 100,000 days in care	Of all children in foster care during a 12-month period, what is the rate of victimization, per day of care?	9.67 A lower value is desirable.
<b>Safety at home</b>	Percent of recurrence within 12 mos.	Of all children who were victims of a substantiated or indicated maltreatment report during a 12-month period, what percent were victims of another substantiated or indicated maltreatment report within 12 months?	9.5% A lower value is desirable.
<b>Permanency</b>	Permanence within 12 months	Permanency in 12 months for children entering care	42.7% A lower value is desirable.
		Permanency in 12 months for children in care 12-23 months	45.9% A lower value is desirable.
		Permanency in 12 months for children in care 24 months or more	31.8% A higher value is desirable.
	Re-entry within 12 months	Of all children who enter foster care in a 12-month period who were discharged within 12 months to reunification, living with a relative, or guardianship, what percentage reentered foster care within 12 months of their discharge?	8.1% A lower value is desirable.
<b>Stability</b>	Moves per 1,000 days	Of all children who enter care in a 12-month period, what is the rate of placement moves, per 1,000 days of foster care?	4.44 A lower value is desirable.

Other outcomes that are a part of the CFSR are evaluated by qualitative assessments to determine whether or not they are strengths. The reviews also evaluate systemic factors related to the data system, case review system, training, licensing, etc. Since Ohio is one of nine states that is state-supervised and county administered, the review process has two layers. The Office of and Children uses a parallel process, the Child Protection Oversight and Evaluation process (CPOE), to evaluate counties.

**Figure 6:** Outcomes that Require Qualitative Evaluation During the CFSR Process

OUTCOMES	CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES REVIEW PROCESS
Relationships while in care	Qualitative evaluation around sibling connections, visitation, preserving connections, relative placement, relationship between child and parent
Family capacity to meet child’s needs	Qualitative evaluation around needs and services of caregivers and children; as well as caseworker involvement
Child’s health and educational needs are met	Qualitative evaluation around physical and mental health needs as well education



# State-level Performance Measures

In addition to the federal measures required by the CFSR process, the Office of Families and Children established a framework it would use to measure the short and long term transformation efforts. The measures are categorized in three levels that correspond with goals in different timeframes.<sup>17</sup>

System measures include caseworker caseloads and counts, percentage of cases that are screened in and the number of cases that have a status of “ongoing.”

Practice measures show the timeliness of assessments, case plans and visits with adults and children each month, to name a few.

Two of the outcome measures correspond to the CFSR Data Profiles, including Recurrence of Maltreatment and Re-Entry Into Care. Three other measures show different aspects: Children in Care by Placement Type, Child Abuse/Neglect Report Recurrence, and Children Aging Out of Care.

## System Measures

### Near-term Goal:

Addressing system-wide workforce, caseload and capacity trends.

## Practice Measures

### Mid-term Goal:

Striving for overall improved foundational children services practices that are key to family engagement and child outcomes.

## Outcome Measures

### Long-term Goal:

Striving for overall improved child safety, well-being and permanency outcomes that can be achieved to transform our system and implement the Family First Prevention Services Act.

## The Measures Are Missing a Key Component: How Are Children and Youth Doing From Their Own Perspective?

This framework offers multiple levels of performance measures, which allows agencies to target more immediate practices that lead to longer-term outcomes. In theory, improving practice and system measures such as caseloads and timeliness will have a longer-term impact on outcome measures of safety, permanency, and stability.

This framework and the data that is available to users is a robust element to continuous quality improvement. However, the measures are missing a key component: how are children and youth doing from their own perspective? The most straightforward way to collect this data is to interview the youth themselves. Later, this report explores options for getting more direct input from youth. The next section explores how Ohio is doing on the performance measures described above. This report will focus only on the child outcomes rather than the system and practice measures.



# How is Ohio Doing?

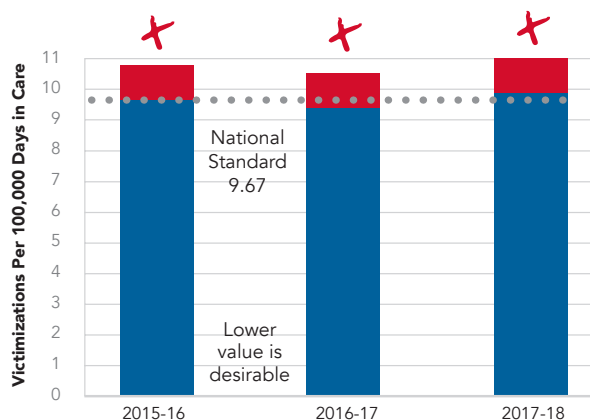
## How is ohio doing on reducing maltreatment?

The first set of measures focuses on safety. Unfortunately, in recent years, Ohio has missed the mark in this area on both of the key performance indicators. Ohio performed worse than the national standard for children who experienced multiple instances of maltreatment.<sup>18</sup> In 2019, there was a significant increase in the recurrence of maltreatment to 10.1%. The graph presents data over three periods. The red area in the chart shows the level above the national standard. The green area reflects the level below the standard.

This measure reinforces the need for transformation in the child welfare system. Efforts to improve the system must address the need to reduce the number of children who have repeated experiences of maltreatment.

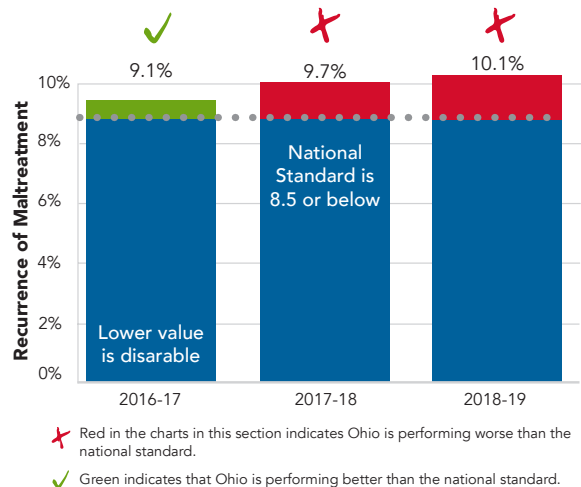
## Ohio misses the national standard For maltreatment while in care.

**Figure 8:** Rate of Children Who Experience Maltreatment While in Care Per 100,000 Days



## Ohio misses the national standard For maltreatment while in care

**Figure 7:** Percentage of Children Who Have Multiple Substantiated Reports of Maltreatment in 12 Months



Ohio also missed the mark on the other safety indicator: maltreatment while in care. Youth with experience in foster care have questioned whether this measure captures all maltreatment in care, but even if it only captures a subset, Ohio is doing worse than the national standard. Children in Ohio were more likely to experience maltreatment in care than in other states. Moreover, disparities exist in this measure based on race. Children who are Black were victimized at a rate 13.1 out of 100,000 days, compared to a rate of 10.4 among children who are white. Transformation efforts must address safety both in care and at home. While the accuracy of this measure has been called into question by youth with experience in care, it remains a part of the state's performance system and is part of the story of whether transformation efforts are having an impact.

## How is ohio doing on increasing permanency?

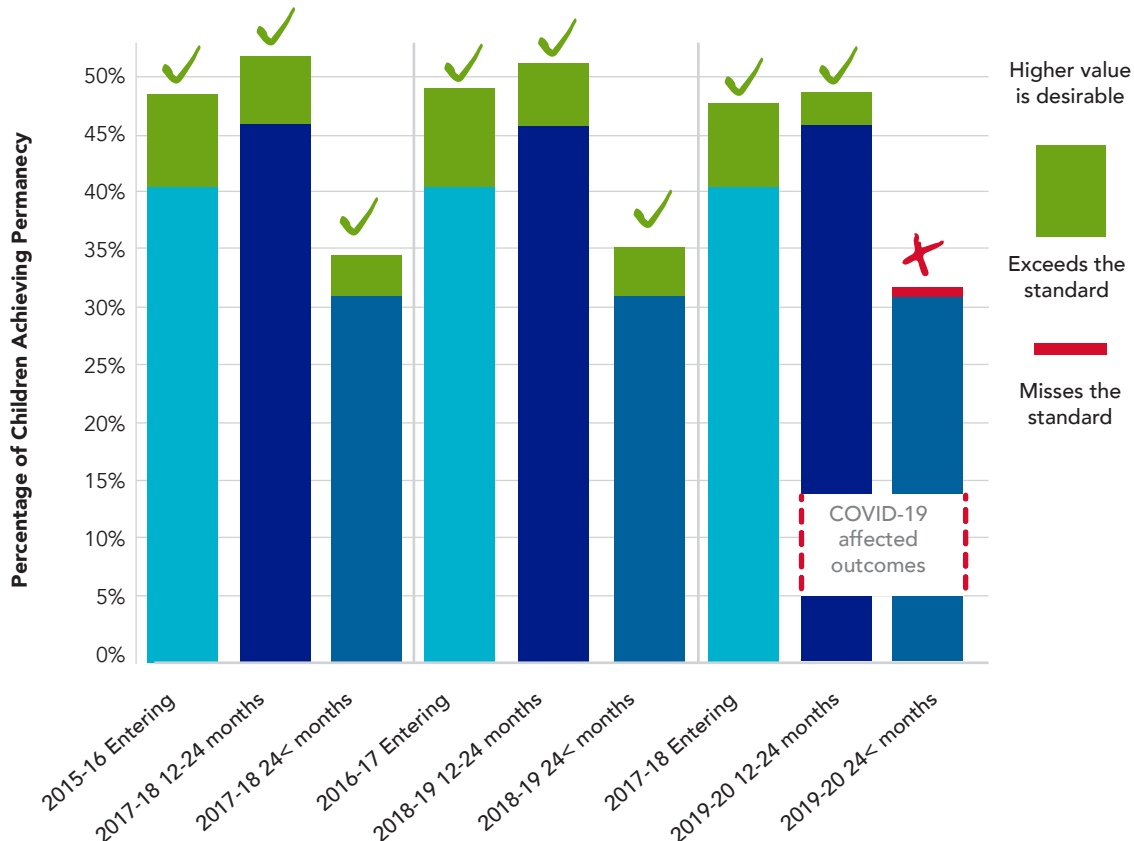
While Ohio misses the mark on reducing maltreatment, it does better on permanency outcomes. Children in Ohio are more likely to experience reunification, legal guardianship and adoption than their peers in other states. There are three different national standards depending on how long a child has been in care. For those entering care recently, the percentage of children in Ohio that have achieved permanency within 12 months was 47.3% in FY18. Because this measure requires time to elapse, FY18 is the most recent data. Ohio has been above the national standard of 42.7% for the last three years and has remained consistent over this time. However, disparities do exist for children who are Black, who achieve permanency less often than children who are white.

Of the children that had been in care for more than a year, 46.8% achieved permanency within 12 months in FY20. The rate declined in recent years, from 51%. However, these are still higher than the national standard of 45.9%. Of children who are white, 48% achieved permanency, compared to 44.3% of children who are Black. In this group, there were differences based on age, with older children having a lower rate.

Ohio missed the mark in the most recent year among children who have been in care for more than two years. Of these children, only 31% achieved permanency in 12 months in FY20, which is below the national standard of 31.8%. The disruptions of COVID-19 are reflected in measures of children who had been in care at least 12 months. Measures of permanency for children who entered care during COVID-19 are not yet reported. The disparities between children who are Black (25%) and those who are white (34%) widen even more in the group of children who have been in care over 24 months.

### Until recently, Ohio has exceeded the standards for permanency.

**Figure 9: Rate of Children Who Achieved Permanency in 12 Months for Children Entering Care, Those in Care 12-23 Months and Those in Care 24 Months or More**



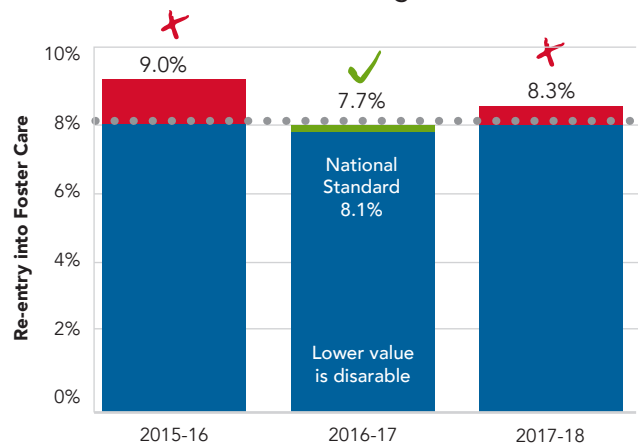
## How is ohio doing on reducing time in foster care to reunification without increasing reentry?

The measure of permanency above highlights a group of children, those who recently entered care. Of this group, 47.3% achieved permanency in 12 months. Now, looking more closely at this group of children, this chart shows whether they reentered care within 12 months of leaving. In this case, a lower value is desirable, because the goal is that no children would return again so soon.

In FY18, the most recent data available, 8.3% reentered foster care within 12 months of their discharge, which misses the national standard of 8.1%. Over the course of three years, Ohio has fluctuated above and below the standard.

Transformation efforts which focus on reunification must rely on this measure because it captures both the safety and permanency outcomes.

**Figure 10: Percent of Children Who Were Reunified, Living With a Relative, or Guardianship, Who Reentered Foster Care Within 12 Months of Their Discharge**



**Ohio has missed the mark two of the last three years on this measure.**



## How is ohio doing to increase placement stability?

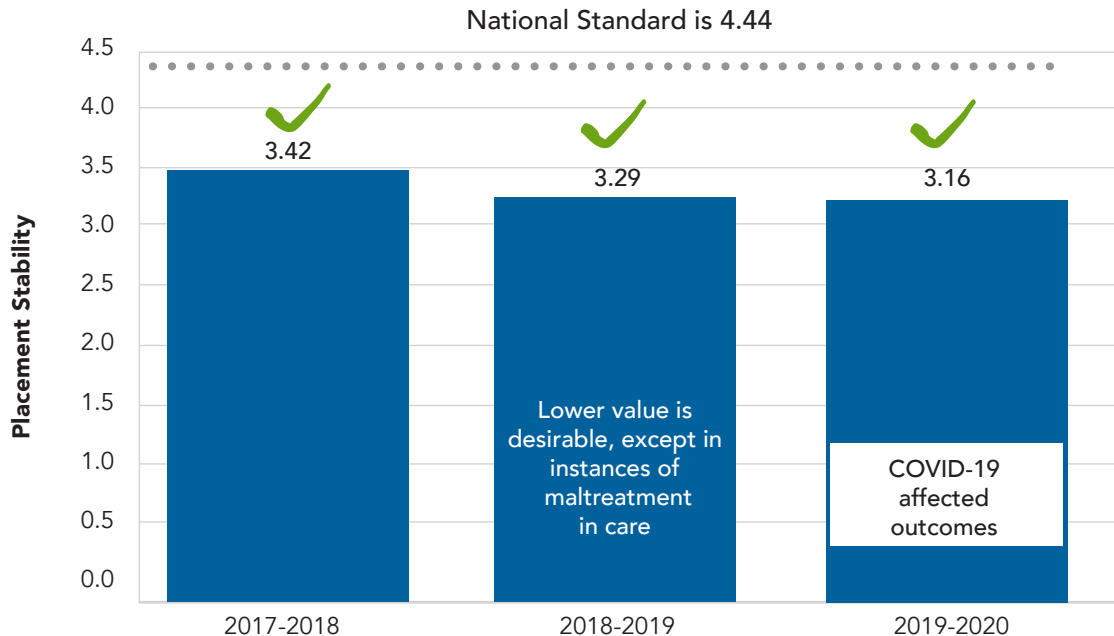
Disruptions in placements can have a negative impact on supportive relationships as well as behavior and education outcomes. Placement instability is associated with increased school absences and school discipline (suspensions and expulsions), increased grade retention, and decreased graduation rates.<sup>19</sup>

Ohio performs better than the national standard on placement stability. Placement stability is measured by the number of "Placement Moves," so a lower rate indicates fewer disruptions. This measure does not reflect the average number of times a child moves. Rather, it reflects the system as a whole using the number of moves per 1,000 days. In FY19, which included a period of time impacted by COVID-19, the rate at which children changed placements was 3.16. This was lower than the national target of 4.44 or below. Ohio declined in this measure over the three reporting periods. There was no significant difference among children who are Black and white. However, children in older age groups did experience more frequent transitions than younger children in the same period of time.

On one level, decreasing placement moves is an important indicator of success but it must never take precedence over moving children who are experiencing maltreatment while in care. A focus on this measure should never result in a reluctance to move children who are unsafe in a placement.

### Ohio has consistently met the standard for placement stability, and has improved each of the last two years.

**Figure 11:** Rate of Placement Moves per 1,000 Days of Foster Care



## How is ohio doing on the percentage of children who are placed in group homes and institutions?

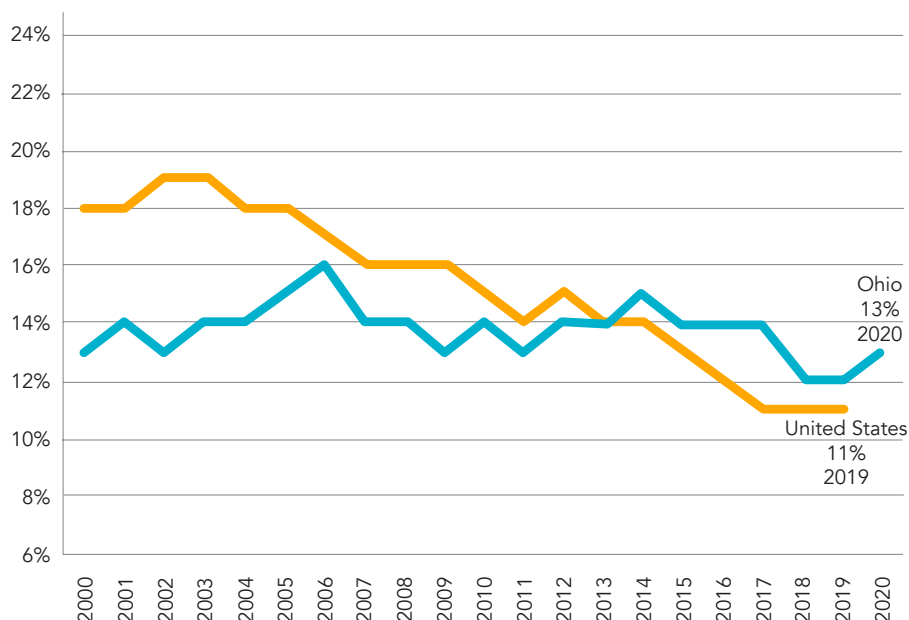
The previous section described the federal measures on which states are evaluated. This section shows how Ohio is doing on the performance measures identified at the state-level by the Office of Families and Children. These measures do not have standards prescribed in the same way that the federal measures do. The federal measures have a clear norm applied to each measure, stating that a lower or higher value is preferred. Ohio's performance measures do not clearly state this preference.

The research is clear that children should be placed in the least restrictive and most family-like environment possible. Placements in group homes, residential facilities, or other restrictive environments beyond what is necessary for treatment have been shown to increase the likelihood of behavior problems and maltreatment in care.<sup>20</sup> These types of placements are collectively known as congregate care. Since 2000, the percentage of children in congregate care has remained relatively stable in Ohio. The state's rate started out lower than the national average, but during the past two decades, the national average has declined from 18% to 11% while Ohio's has seen little change. In both 2000 and 2020, the percentage of children in congregate care was 13%.<sup>21, 22</sup>

After implementation of the Family First Prevention Services Act, if the percentage of children placed in group homes or institutions decreases, it will offer supporting evidence of the initiative's success. It may take several years for the impacts to be visible, because the causes of an overreliance on congregate care are complex and include a system-wide shortage of foster and kinship placements for older youth. In the short-term, other measures may show more immediate evidence of its impact, for example "Length of Stay for Behavioral Health (BH) Inpatient Hospitals and Psychiatric Residential Treatment Facility (PRTF)," "Awaiting Discharge: Rate of children in BH Inpatient or PRTF who could be discharged," and "Length of Time Awaiting Discharge."

### Ohio has seen little change in the use of groups homes or institutions over the last two decades.

**Figure 12: Percentage of Children Placed in Group Homes or Institutions**





## How is ohio doing on the percentage of children who are placed in kinship care?

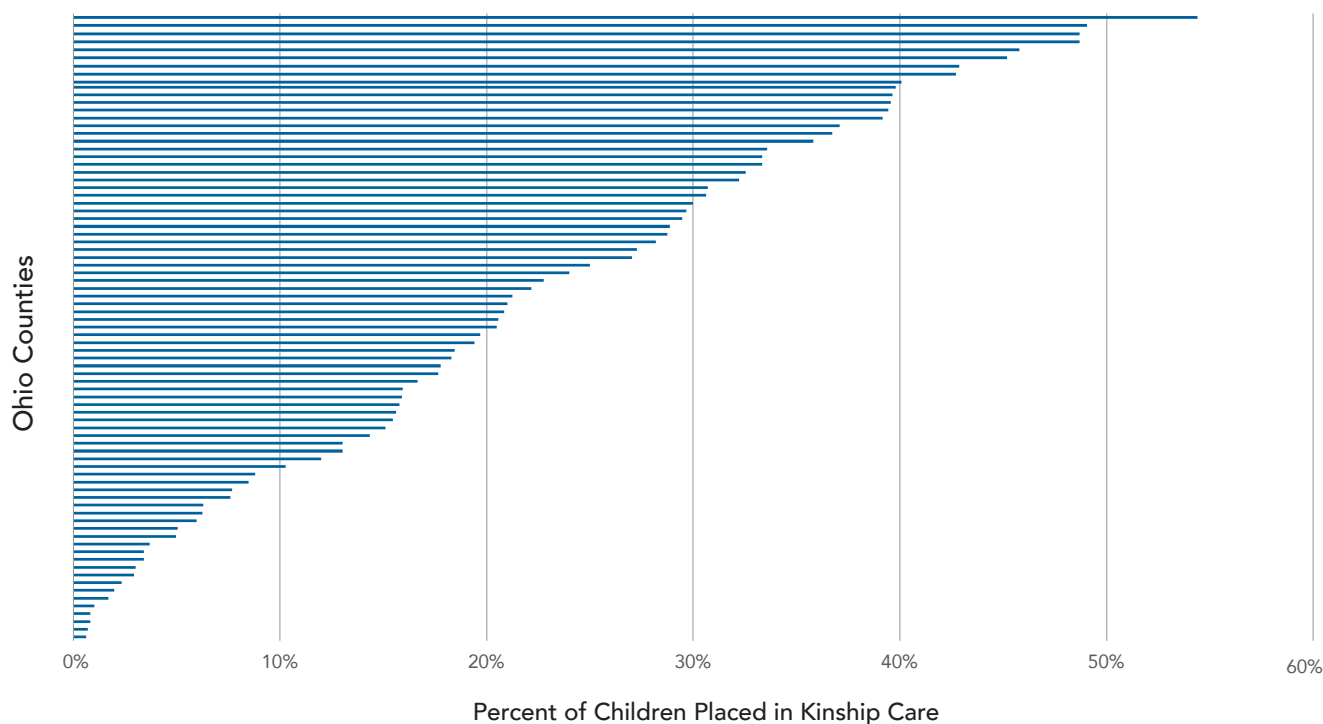
Placements in family settings can be categorized as family foster homes and kinship homes. When children are placed in homes where they already have an existing relationship, it is referred to as “Kinship Care” both when the relationships are biological (Relative Home) or otherwise (Non-relative Home). Ohio tracks each of these placement types separately. Research suggests that kinship placements increase positive outcomes, including fewer behavior problems, better wellbeing and fewer placement disruptions.<sup>23</sup> An increase in the percentage of children in kinship placement could be considered a positive outcome, though it can’t be looked at in isolation.

As Marcus’ story demonstrates, kinship must be understood as having an existing relationship that is positive and supportive, which was the case with his former foster caregiver though not with his biological relative. Prioritizing kinship placement requires that youth have a voice in determining which relationships in their lives are positive and supportive. In the section, “Perspectives from those with Lived Experience,” youth describe the need to be directly asked about their experiences in care. Measures of youth experience should be looked at alongside placement type to ensure that the emphasis remains on positive and supportive relationships.

Figure 13 shows that different counties emphasize kinship care to a different extent, ranging from 1% to 54%.<sup>24</sup> Because there is not a national standard for this measure, county-level comparisons should steer conversations about how practices differ across jurisdictions. The data should be reviewed carefully to uncover nuances in each counties’ practices. For example, if a county emphasizes prevention practices so that fewer children are placed in custody, kinship care may occur informally rather than being captured as a formal kinship placement. This measure is important but only if it is reviewed in the context of youth experiences and county practices. To view county-specific data, see page 31: 2022 Child Welfare Outcomes County Profiles.

### Counties in Ohio vary in how frequently they place children with kin.

**Figure 13.** Percentage of Children Place in Kinship Care by County in Ohio in 2021

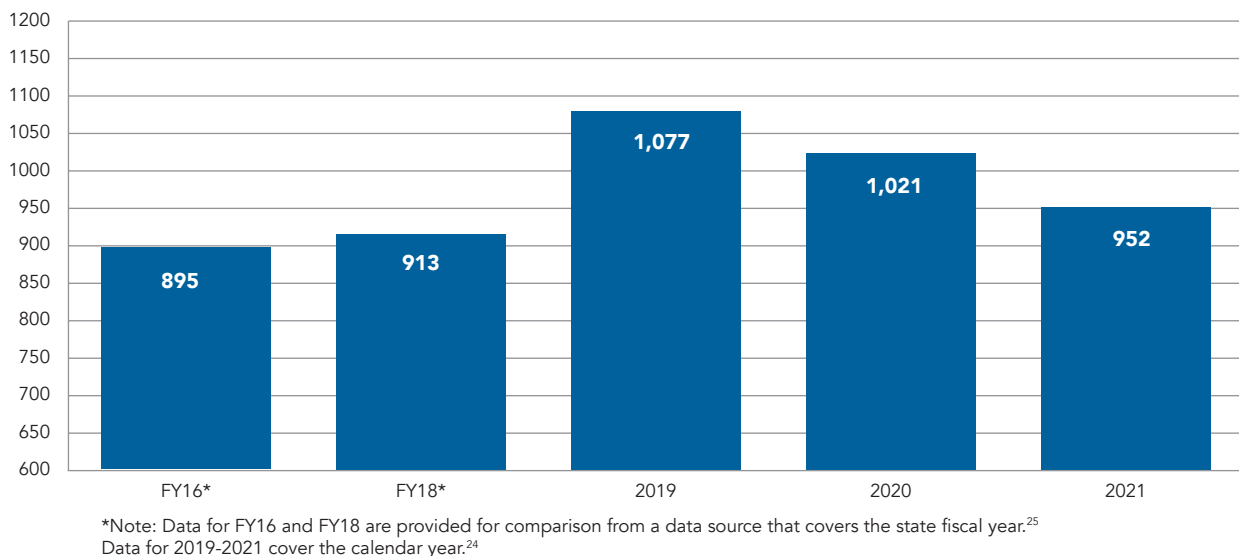


## How is ohio doing on the number of youth who age out of care?

Every child deserves to have positive and supportive relationships that last a lifetime, but in Ohio roughly 1,000 youth age out of foster care each year without achieving permanency. Recent data shows that youth who age out of care have an increased likelihood of experiencing homelessness and unemployment, as well as being involved with the criminal justice system.<sup>2</sup> There are different ways to approach improving these outcomes. Some efforts focus on attaining permanency and emphasize intensive recruitment, extended family-finding, and collaborative meetings that include youth in permanency planning. Other efforts focus on training young people to live independently. One result of these efforts is a requirement that, beginning at age 14, every youth in care receives independent living services. Efforts have also created options to extend foster care beyond age 18 to allow youth more time to mature, which Ohio has opted to provide through its Bridges program. This program offers housing assistance and employment supports. On one hand, reducing the number of youth who age out of care is associated with positive outcomes. However, because of the additional supports that extended foster care provides, outcomes may actually be better than an alternative in which legal permanency occurs but doesn't provide a positive, supportive relationship into adulthood. The chart below shows that in 2019 there was an increase in the number of youth who aged out of care, but it has declined each year since.<sup>24, 25</sup>

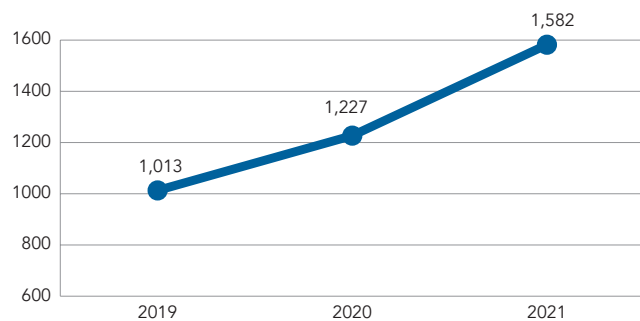
### The number of youth aging out has fluctuated, but more are participating in independent living services until age 21.

**Figure 14.** Total Number of Youth Who Aged Out of Care



An alternative measure that reflects improved outcomes is the number of youth who participated in Bridges. Youth who participate in the program maintain employment or school enrollment, so in effect, participation reflects other measures of wellbeing. The number of youth participating has increased by more than 20% for the past two years, which is a bright spot in Ohio's outcome measures.<sup>24</sup>

**Figure 15.** Total Number of Youth Participating in Bridges Extended Foster Care



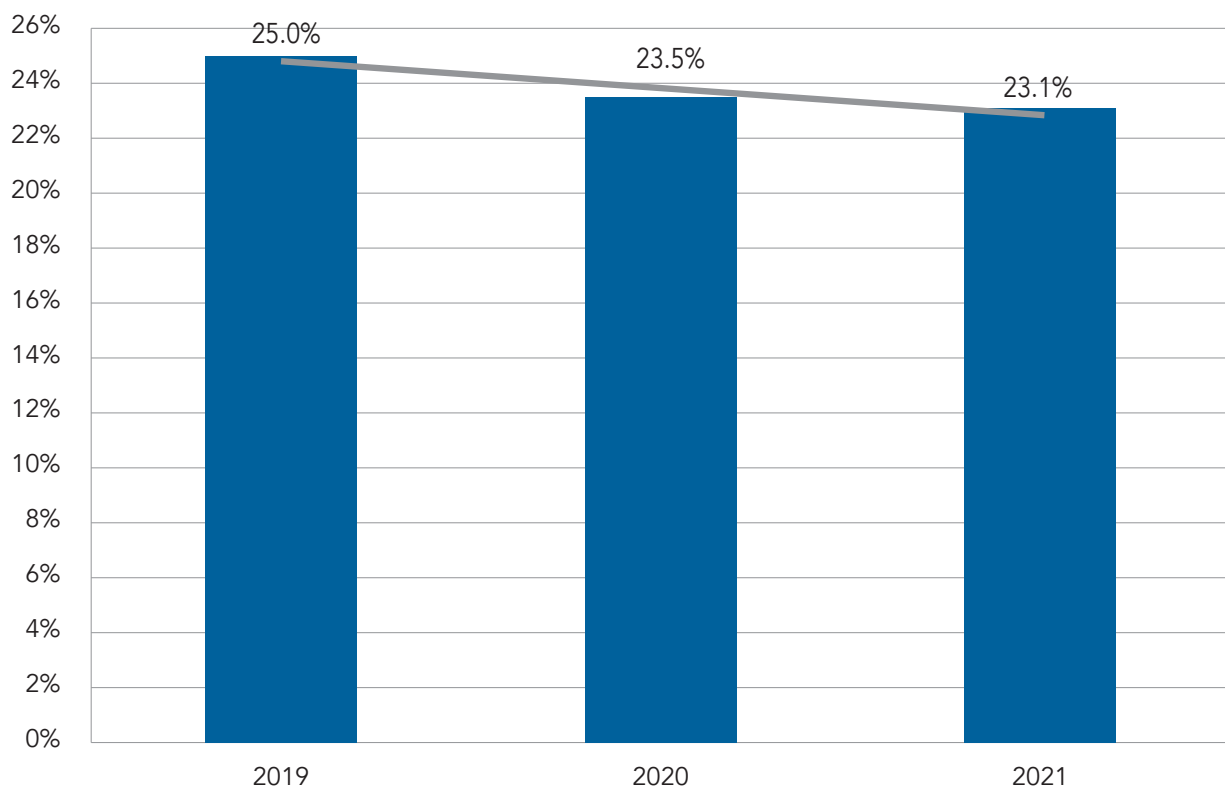
## How is ohio doing on the percentage of children who have multiple screened-in reports of maltreatment in one year?

In addition to the federal measures of recurrence of maltreatment described previously, the Office of Families and Children also measures recurrence of reports. This measure captures situations when a child was allowed remain at home following an initial report, but the agency receives another report about their safety within a year. This measure does not require either the first report or subsequent reports to be substantiated, however, it does have to be "screened-in." Because this is not a federal measure, there is no national standard. On average, nearly 1 in 4 children experience two or more reports within a year. There is a downward trend reflected in the years 2020 and 2021. However, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of total reports fell by as much as 50% in 2020.<sup>26</sup> It is possible that this measure of multiple reports may also have been effected in 2020 and 2021 due to the year look-back period. It is too early to say whether this reflects a positive trend in Ohio, but this measure has great potential as a tool to evaluate the impact of reform efforts.

As is noted in the section on Perspectives of those with Lived Experiences (see page 31), this measure is an important indicator of safety and should be emphasized.

### Children had a lower likelihood of having multiple screened-in reports in 2021.

**Figure 16.** Percentage\* of Children With Multiple Reports of Maltreatment in One Year



\*of those with at least one report

## How is ohio doing on race equity?

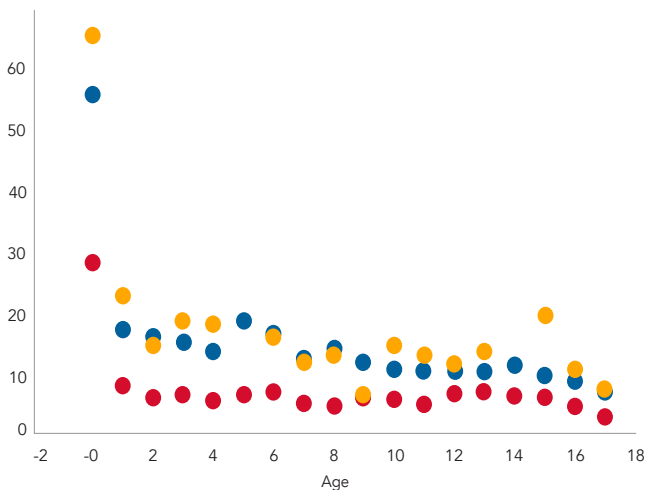
Rates of racial disparity are not prescribed performance measures at the federal or state level, though leaders in child welfare recognize that disparities exist and children are affected disproportionately.<sup>5</sup> These disparities persist across all ages and are pronounced among infants. The maltreatment and placement rates for infants of every race are high, which makes the disparities more noticeable, though the rate of disparity for infants is lower than for other ages.

Figure 17 compares the rates of maltreatment by age and race for FY2020. The rate of maltreatment refers to reports of abuse or neglect that were substantiated or indicated. Figure 18 compares the placement rates by age and race for calendar year 2021. Placement rates refers to children who entered an out-of-home placement during the year. The charts below show data for the seven counties with the largest percentage of children who are Black: Cuyahoga, Franklin, Hamilton, Lucas, Mahoning, Montgomery and Summit.\*<sup>39</sup> Across all age groups, children who are Black show higher maltreatment and placement rates than those who are white. Children who are multi-racial face even higher rates. Because the populations of other demographic groups are small, these numbers are not reported. Smaller counties show disparities as well, which are shown in the County Profiles described in the next section.

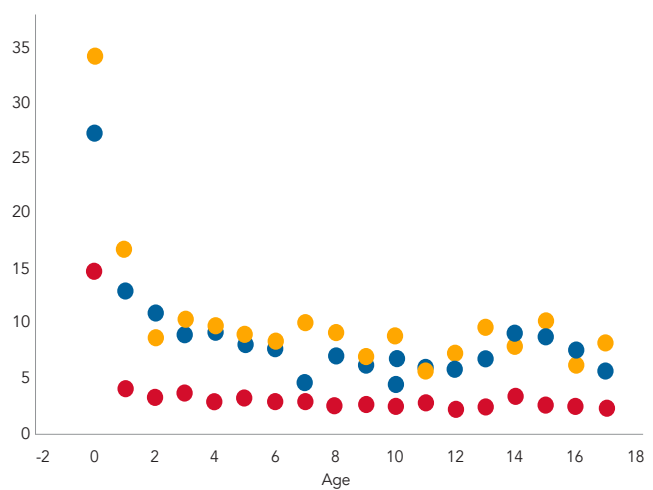
Reforms must address racial equity and be evaluated for different demographics. Racial disparity measures may indicate there is an opportunity to address racial biases through reflective consultation. The Safe Babies Court Team™ model in Cuyahoga County is one example of reforms that are using this practice to address disparities specifically for infants and toddlers. Measures at a county level may not reveal the impact of this program at its current scale, but as reform efforts are brought to scale, county-level measures offer a key way to navigate toward improved outcomes for children.

### Disparities exist across all ages, and are pronounced for infants.

**Figure 17.** Rate of Children Confirmed by Child Protective Services as Victims of Maltreatment in FY2020 per 1,000 in the Population



**Figure 18.** Rate of Children Who Entered Out-of-Home Placement in 2021 per 1,000 in the Population



\*The population size when disaggregated at this level is small for some counties. Due to small population size of some counties, the number of children was not provided in the data request, but rather the final calculation of the rate. Best practice would be to aggregate the number of children but for this analysis, rates were aggregated, which may skew the data.



# How Are Counties Doing?

Because Ohio's child protection and children services system is county administered, it is important to measure the impact of reforms at the county level. While state mandates direct many aspects of the way counties operate, each county has different practices. A common refrain in Ohio is that there are 88 different counties and 88 different ways of doing things. As such, the implementation of various reform efforts will vary.

The Office of Families and Children offers a public dashboard that shows county-level data for a number of measures, including the number of children in care by placement type across a variety of characteristics, though unfortunately not by race and ethnicity. However, many of the measures that are clearly tied to performance outcomes are not easily accessible to practitioners and those who are interested in evaluating the impact of reforms. Reports are available to internal users, but they don't show all of the county's outcome measures compiled in one place. This report serves as a model of a "Child Welfare Outcomes County Profile" that should be easily accessible in the state of Ohio as it invests in key transformation efforts. The following pages provide a version of this dashboard for a benchmark county. It does not reflect an actual county but various counties are included because their performance serves as a benchmark for others. Individual counties will have their own profile available online at the Children's Defense Fund-Ohio website, on its KIDS COUNT Data page. These profiles have also been printed as PDFs from the website and are available in Appendix D of this report.

**Discover how counties are doing by linking to "2022 Child Welfare Outcomes County Profile: Measuring Transformation."**

**Link to Dashboard**

<https://cdfohio.org/policy/resources/kids-count/>

**Figure 19.** Image of the KIDS COUNT Data Webpage on CDF-Ohio's Website where the "Child Welfare Outcomes County Profiles: Measuring Transformation" are Located



# Measuring Transformation & Elevating Youth Voice

## IN CHILD WELFARE

### Benchmark County Profile

This is a sample profile that displays data for a hypothetical county that performs better than average on specific measures. Population and other rates listed in the header show the state averages. To view a specific county, visit <https://cdfohio.org/policy/resources/kids-count/>.

Child Population: **2,568,641**

Black: **15%**

Hispanic: **7%**

Multi-racial: **5%**

Other: **4%**

White: **70%**

Children in Care (2021): **25,104**

Rate of Maltreatment: **6.8**

Placement Rate: **9.7**

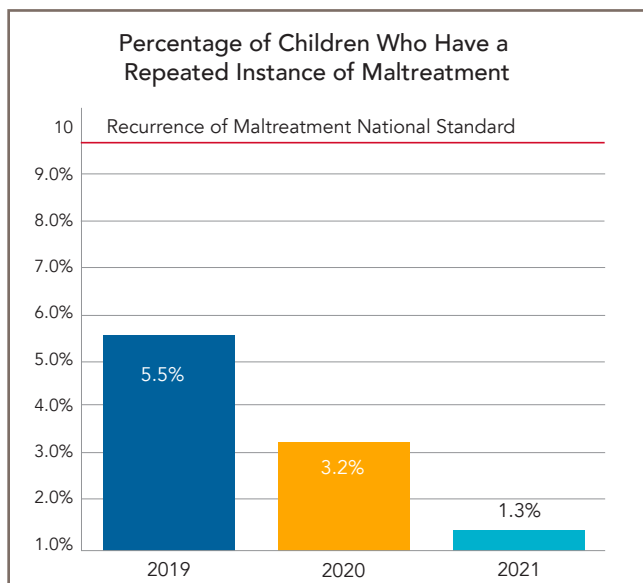
Maltreatment Recurrence Rate: **10.1%**

Re-entry Rate: **10.4%**

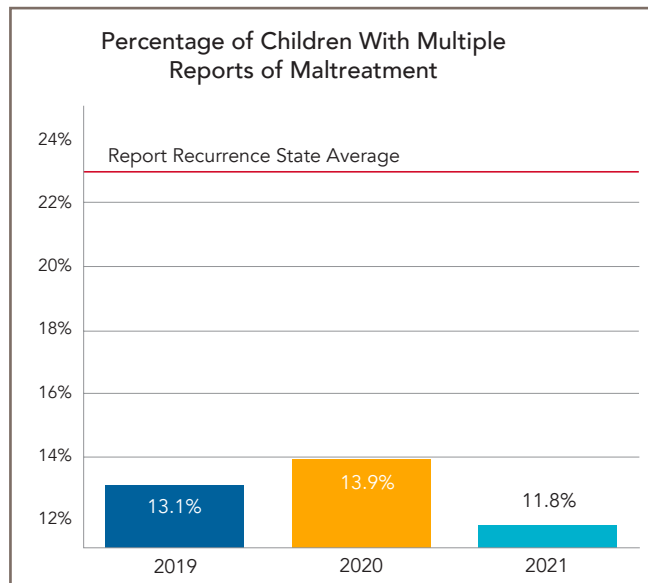
Report Recurrence Rate: **23.1%**

## First and Foremost, Keep Children Safe.

This profile includes key indicators that measure how well our community is doing in ensuring the safety, permanency, stability and equity of children and youth who experience maltreatment. The measures are important but they don't tell the whole story. Youth with lived experience have spoken: Ohio must systematically capture youth experiences from their own perspective to measure performance.



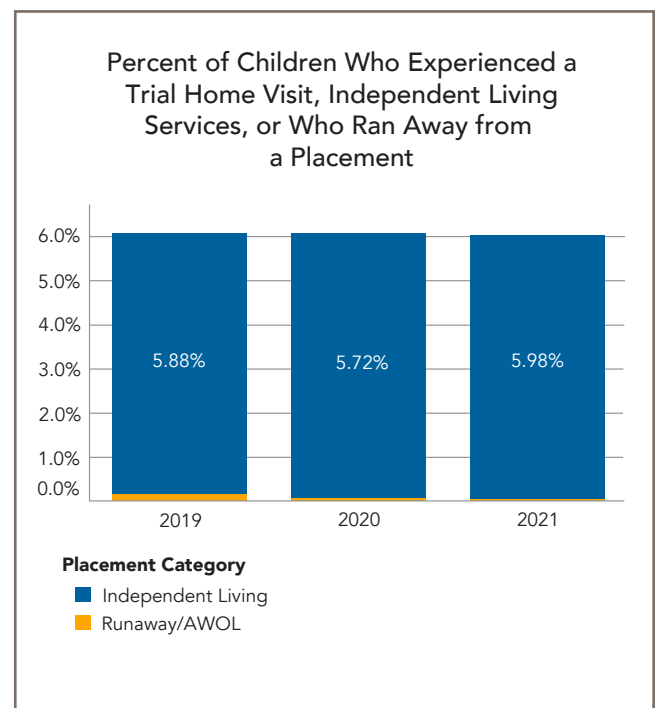
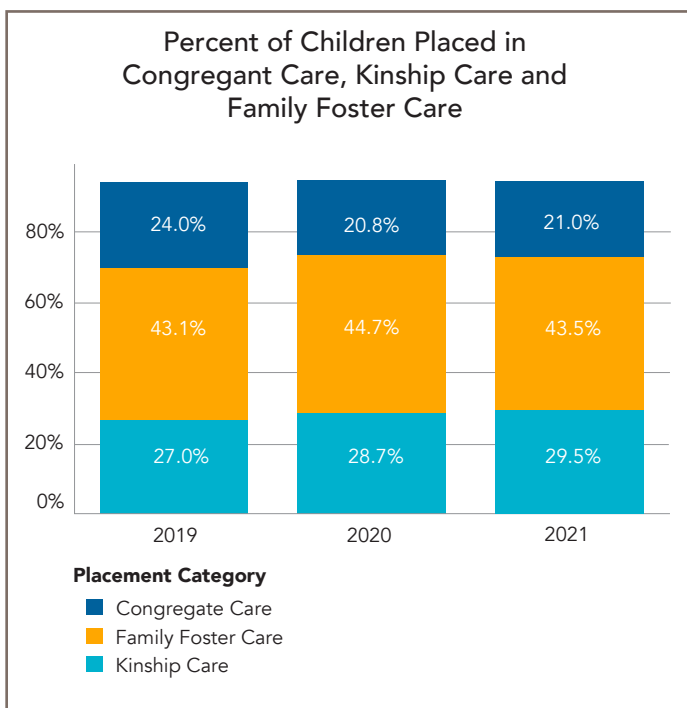
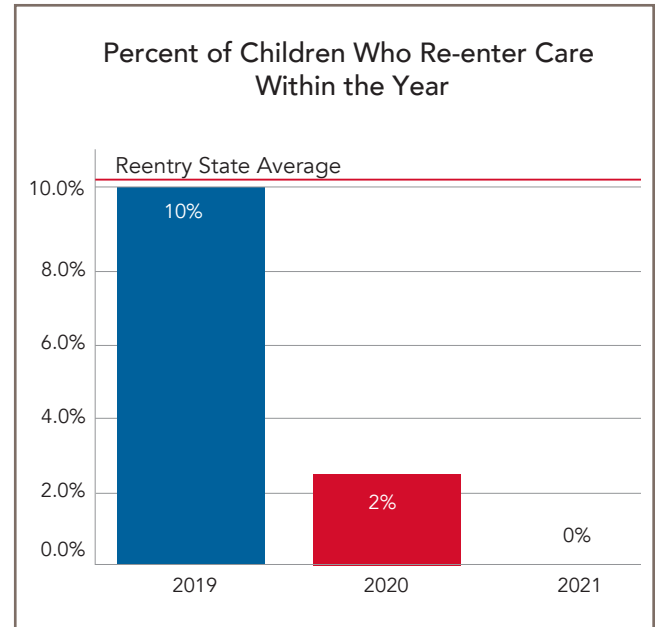
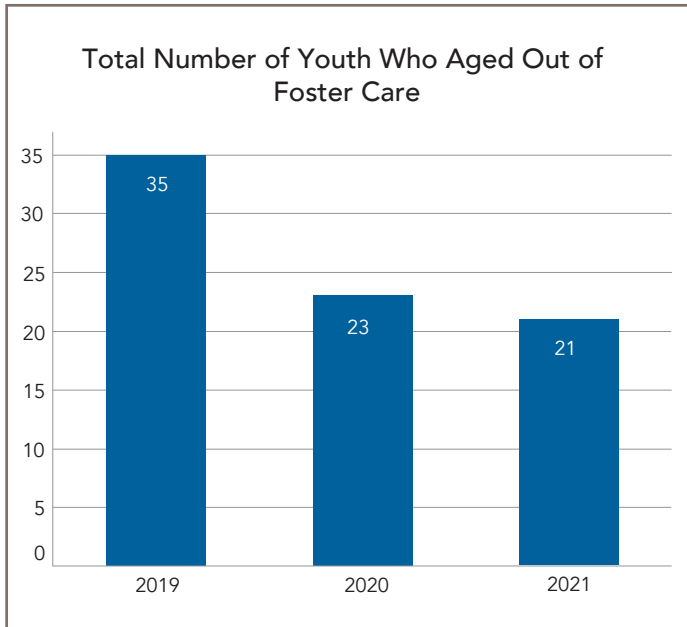
\*National Standard\* and \*State Average\* are not included.



\*Out of the total children with at least one substantiated report and within one year of the first report

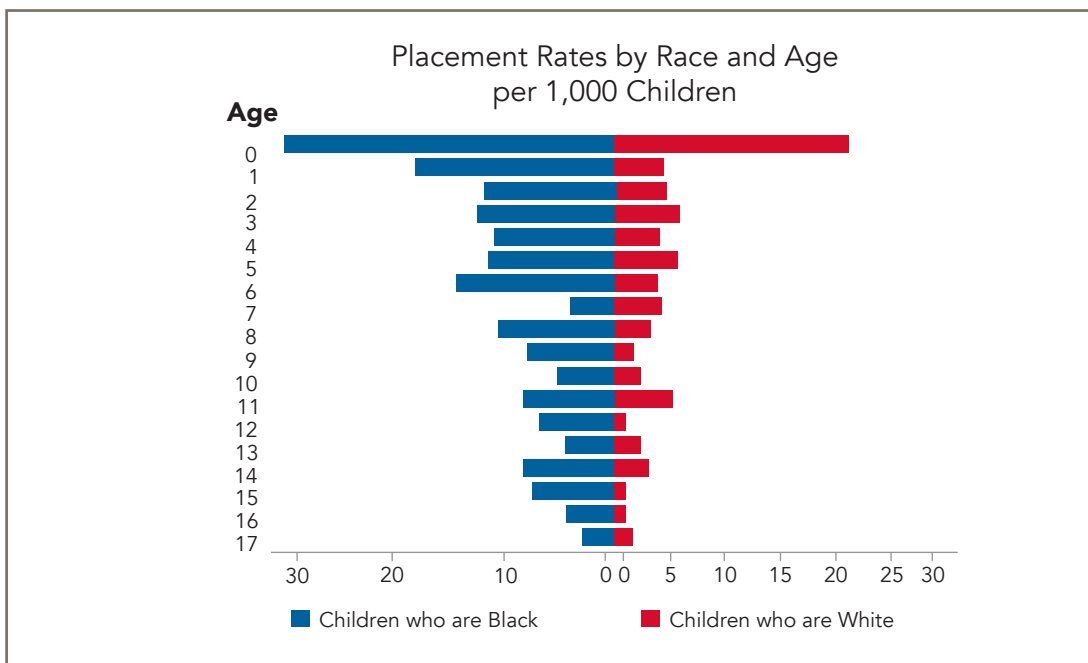
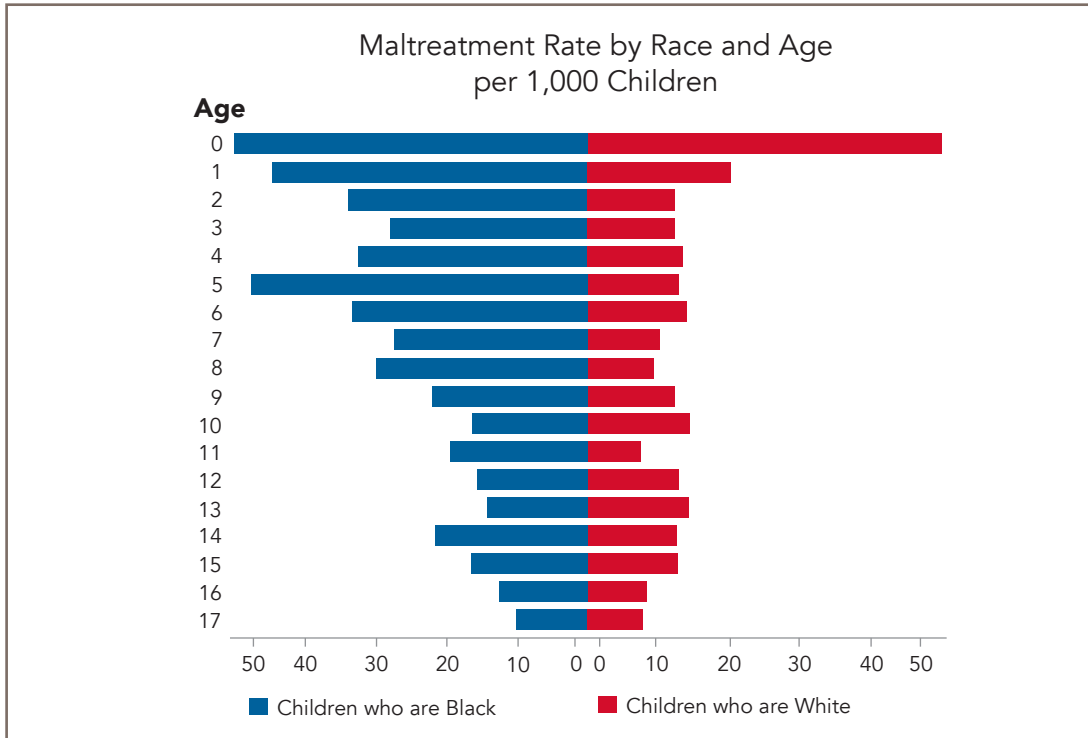
## Every Child Deserves to be Listened to.

Youth who have been in foster care said the most effective performance measures should be captured from youth themselves. Ask them: Do you feel safe and comfortable in your placement? How would you rate your relationship with your caseworker? Are you aware of the Foster Youth Bill of Rights? Responses to these questions should be measured at the county level and included alongside other measures when evaluating the impact of reforms.



## Racial Equity Must Remain Central.

Rates of maltreatment and placement by age and race show disparities among children who are Black and white. Reforms must address racial equity and be evaluated for different demographics. Not only race and ethnicity, but age, sexuality, gender, disabilities are all characteristics that are important to recognize and drill into. Racial disparity measures indicate there is an opportunity to address racial biases through initiatives like reflective consultation.





# 03

## Perspectives of Youth with Lived Experience

The perspectives of people who have been in foster care as youth were captured during focus groups. The groups reviewed current measures and offered suggestions for new ways to measure progress of reforms to the child welfare system. See Appendix A for more details on the focus group protocol.

The conversations included advocates who have participated in a campaign to establish a Youth Ombudsman to investigate reports of abuse made by youth. It was framed as a discussion of ways that this new office could be involved with measuring performance through its annual report. If the Youth Ombudsman annual report included performance measures, what would be included?

### Current Measures Evaluated: Maltreatment in Care

The current measures around safety were found to be lacking in a number of ways that made them unreliable and ineffective in measuring transformation.

One focus group participant, Laila-Rose Hudson published the study: "Our Forgotten Youth: Those left behind by foster care maltreatment reporting," as part of the Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute's 2021 Foster Youth Internship Program® federal policy report, "Building the Path Forward for Change in the Child Welfare System."<sup>27</sup>

In her report, she lists a number of factors that lead to maltreatment being underreported and concludes, "all these factors combined leave a skewed data system for maltreatment in foster care, and it is nearly impossible to take appropriate remedial measures when the scope of the problem is largely unknown." The full report can be found in Appendix B.

### Key Trends in Youth Responses

**Current measures do not accurately capture maltreatment**

**Maltreatment is only measured if it is investigated and substantiated**

**Reports made by youth are often not investigated**

“According to the NCANDs, Ohio is less than a percent and we all know that is wrong. You can't run into a kid with any amount of lived experience who has not been maltreated in some way.”

Others echoed her statements, debating the best way to respond to the question "How effective is this measure?" On one hand, one participant said, "it is an extremely effective data point if we have all the right information." On the other hand, if the data is not capturing the reality, it is ineffective.

Because this measure is perceived as inaccurate by participants in the focus groups, more needs to be done to capture the experience of youth in care. In the next section, other ways of capturing this data will be discussed.

“They claim that only a small percent ever are mistreated in foster care. No.”

## Current Measures Evaluated: Recurrence of Maltreatment

The perspectives of those with lived experience in foster care are important because they shed light on the measures in nuanced ways that are significant yet often overlooked due to the absence of youth input and lived expertise in systems design. It is also important to note that the focus groups were comprised of individuals who are advocating for change in many cases because they experienced abuse and want to ensure it does not happen to someone else. Their experiences give them a heightened focus on issues of safety. One participant said that measuring recurrence of maltreatment is ineffective because it does not capture the situation when a victim had previously unsubstantiated reports. Rather, the current measure only counts if the child had two substantiated reports within 12 months.

**“When you focus on victims you may miss some youth by definition. I was not a ‘victim’. I was a parentified child upon my last entrance in care.”**

## Current Measures Evaluated: Permanency and Stability

Participants did not have objections to the current measures of permanency and stability. They expressed the need to track children whose permanency plan was a Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (PPLA), which they said should not fall into the permanency category.

The percentage of total reports that were unsubstantiated is different than the measure that the participant suggests, which is the number of children who are victims who had previously had an unsubstantiated report.

**“When we are talking about transformation, my main concern with the recurrence rate is that it doesn’t capture the number of cases that have been reported to CPS and that have been found throughout the investigation to be unsubstantiated and there is no intervention that takes place. It aligns with my personal story. There isn’t an intervention until there is some serious adverse event.”**

The measure that most closely resembles this participant’s suggestion shows the percentage of children who have had multiple reports on page 29. This is currently available in SACWIS, called “CPS Report Recurrence.” In Ohio, almost one in four children have multiple screened-in reports in a year. In her case it took many years for the abuse to finally be substantiated. Children whose cases appear in this report should be identified and tracked over time to understand patterns that may prevent abuse from being substantiated until it becomes extreme.

## Key Trends in Youth Responses

**Abuse was not substantiated until it was severe**

**The pressing need is to ensure investigations accurately substantiate abuse**

**Permanency is a subjective experience that may not be reflected in measures**

**All measures should be disaggregated by age and race**

**There is a delicate balance between permanency and safety**

# Proposed Measures: Capture Youth Experiences in a Systematic Way

**“We also need to be taking qualitative, anonymous, if need be, surveys of our kids in care, frequently, and asking them if they are being maltreated.”**

As Hudson recommends in her report (Appendix B), Ohio and other states must “anonymously survey the youth in their care annually about maltreatment to analyze the gaps between self-reported and state reported NCANDS data and create a system of accountability and transparency.” The focus group participants emphasized the need to capture the experiences of youth in a systematic way to measure performance. It is common practice in the service industry to survey customers, but examples of asking about the experiences of children and youth in children services is limited.

New York City has been a leader in this space since 2018. The Administration for Children Services (ACS) surveys youth in foster care aged 13 and older.<sup>28</sup> About half of the eligible youth participated in the online survey, which covers a variety of topics. The survey provides an example of a system-wide practice of asking youth about their experiences. Individual agencies also use this tool to measure performance. A private agency in Florida surveys every child aged 9 and over on an annual basis, as well as parents, caregivers, and professionals.<sup>29</sup>

Typically, customer service surveys are completed by people who voluntarily receive a service, which is not the case with children and families involved with children services. Nevertheless, it is generally accepted that surveys are worthwhile.<sup>30</sup>

## Recommendations

- Measure youth experiences in care by directly asking them.
- Design surveys alongside people with lived experience.
- Offer the survey frequently to allow youth to reflect updated circumstances based on new placements and other changes.
- Directly ask about safety and treatment in care using both qualitative and quantitative questions.
- Provide ways to address issues raised during the survey.

### NYC Youth Experience Survey Topics

Access to food and clothing  
Relationships with foster and bio families  
Relationships with friends  
Money/allowance from caregiver  
Access to internet and phone  
Education  
Extracurricular activities  
Religious practices

**“My concern is that a lot of these things are not actually static. I am not sure how useful it would be if its only reflecting that period, because a situation can change overnight.”**

**“We are only doing this annually? (The abuse in my foster home) was the whole year of my life. Every six months. We should be constantly asking them questions.”**

# 04 Looking Ahead

## Youth Experience Surveys

**“We need to know where our starting point is. Then, you can know where you started, where you ended, and what you have accomplished.”**

Collecting accurate assessments of youth experience while in care will serve as the starting point for all reform efforts. Understanding the current measurable state of the experiences of young people in care is the first step. Focus group participants emphasized the need for accurate baseline measures. If the federally-mandated measure of maltreatment while in care is ineffective, the first step is establishing a new measure that can serve as a baseline indicator.

Participants also emphasized the need for consistency so that measures can be compared before and after reform efforts take place.

The questions that are asked should capture the areas that young people have identified as in need of reform. In 2020, youth advocates organized a demonstration in Cleveland in response to a media report that youth were living in the social service office there for weeks.<sup>31</sup> Focus group participants remarked that many youth stay in emergency shelters or office buildings, yet those experiences are not viewed as “placements” and the experiences of youth in these settings are not evaluated.

Other questions on the survey could address ongoing interactions with the system. One young man noted the instrumental role that the relationship with a caseworker has on all aspects of case planning and outcomes. By measuring how well this relationship is going, one can predict how well the child will do in other areas, like successful transition to adulthood.

Participants offered suggestions for questions that could be asked, listed here. They also reflected on considerations such as frequency, age appropriateness, and collection methods.

**“How many kids who are in the system get discriminated against while in custody?”**

### Questions that Can Serve as Baseline Measures

Have you experienced maltreatment in care?

Do you feel safe in your placement?

Are you aware of the Foster Youth Bill of Rights?

How would you rate the quality of your relationship with your caseworker?

How many caseworkers have you had during your time in care?

Are you aware of independent living resources and supports?

How prepared are you for adulthood?

### Considerations

How frequently should the survey occur?

What questions are asked at different ages?

How can we ease the burden on caseworkers but ensure accuracy and timeliness?

How do we ensure confidentiality so youth can be honest?



# Youth Voice in Children Services Operations:

## Exit Interviews as a Way to Capture Youth Experiences

Surveys should be integrated into the practices of agencies without adding new burdens on caseworkers. Finding ways to leverage and reimagine existing evaluation tools allows new measures to be captured without creating more paperwork. Ohio law currently requires agencies to complete exit interviews for children who leave a placement.<sup>32</sup> This practice shows promise as a tool to capture youth experiences while in care. The first step is to track the percentage of placements that have an interview completed. Aggregating exit interview responses at the county level would create new measures of the percentage of children who respond about their experiences that they felt safe and comfortable in their placement. However, exit interviews in their current form are not sufficient and changes are recommended in the design and frequency.

Focus group participants thought the interviews should occur more frequently. Currently, they occur after a child leaves a placement. They also said that youth should be able to complete the questions themselves, rather than having the caseworker enter the information on their behalf. This will allow the young person to directly express any concerns. Finally, completing the interviews should be a high priority and tied to annual reviews. Some participants in the group said they never had an interview, and the one participant who was also a former caseworker said conducting exit interviews and reviewing the information was a low priority for county agencies.

## Recommendations

- Change the name from “Exit Interviews” to “Youth Experience Surveys” and conduct them on a quarterly basis for every child under supervision.
- Make Youth Experience Surveys a priority by including them as a part of the annual review for an agency. At a minimum, the measures that should be included in a review are:
  - ♦ The percentage of Yes responses to the existing questions: “Were you comfortable in that foster home? Did you feel safe in that home? Do you think that is a good foster home for other children?”
  - ♦ The percentage of interviews that were completed out of the total that should have been
- Add at least the following questions to the survey: “Did you receive a copy of the Foster Youth Bill of Rights?” and “Do you believe your rights have been violated while you have been in care?”
- Review the current questions with current and former foster youth to ensure they are designed to capture their experiences.
- Create an online format and allow children over a certain age to fill them out themselves if they prefer.

**Compare the amount exit interviews with the number of children in care. That part could be impactful.**

**A kid needs time to make a report (about their placement) like a 24-72 hour window so they can digest what they went through.**

**(An exit interview) needs to be completed by the actual youth in care in a setting where they don't feel intimidated.**

# Youth Voice in Children Services Operations:

## Case Reviews and Semi-annual Administrative Reviews (SAR) as Ways to Capture Youth Experiences

Exit interviews do not occur frequently enough to capture youth experience systematically, but there are other standard processes that occur more regularly. Case reviews are completed by the caseworker every 90 days, along with semi-annual reviews (SARs).<sup>32</sup> While the frequency of these reviews is desirable, they are not designed to capture youth experiences directly. These are completed by the caseworker to assess safety and case progress in terms of services, strengths, needs, and risks. Ultimately, these reviews are used to determine whether or not to continue services. The tools capture the perspectives of the caseworker, but not the youth or the family who is the recipient of the services. The current case review form is designed as a decision-making tool rather than a measurement tool in a performance evaluation framework. However, the information collected through this process could be a valuable resource for measuring transformation, if the reviews were designed with that purpose in mind. Reimagining case reviews to incorporate the perspectives of youth in care would provide a systematic way to measure their experiences at 90-day intervals.

## Recommendations

- Reimagine 90-day case reviews and semi-annual reviews to incorporate perspectives of youth in care.
- Establish youth focus groups for input on how to incorporate the perspectives of youth in case reviews.
- Allow youth to participate in case reviews anonymously so they can be honest about their experiences with their case team without repercussion.
- Institute data collection methods that allow youth experience data to be tied to their case but accessible only by third-party evaluators to protect youth from repercussions.
- Create data systems that allow case review data to be aggregated and analyzed as a tool to measure performance.



“[Exit interviews are] the child’s story thru the lens of someone else.”

“I remember this and my caseworker just typing the whole time. The responses should come from the individual. What is being reflected is summarized in the personality of the caseworker and doesn’t reflect the actual thoughts of the child.”

Because many of the focus group participants have been involved with advocacy for a Youth Ombudsman office, one question was posed in a way that connected with this effort: “If the Youth Ombudsman office analyzed and reported data, what measures would be included?” This way of asking the question elicited responses that were different from current measures. One person highlighted the need to track instances of maltreatment based on whether the services were outsourced to a private for-profit agency to identify trends. She referenced her experience of maltreatment in a placement provided by this type of agency. Another participant, who had experience both as a young person in care and as a caseworker, commented that in her experience, contracted agencies operate under a different set of rules. Theoretically, perpetrators will gravitate to the institutions that have the least oversight. Tracking in this way provides an additional layer of oversight. They also suggested tracking the number of youth whose cases are closed after they are missing for a certain period of time and the number of youth who stay overnight in offices due to a lack of placement options.

## Recommendations

- Disaggregate measures by race, ethnicity and age.
- Disaggregate measures by whether services are outsourced to private for-profit agencies to identify trends.
- Track the number of youth who run away from placements as a flag to investigate for maltreatment in care.
- Measure the number of missing children whose cases are closed each year without being located.
- Monitor the number of children who stay in office buildings and other spaces that are inappropriate for children overnight because of placement shortages.

“**How heavily are (counties) relying on outsourcing?**”

“**We need to go to the people with lived experience, not as many people are motivated to reach out. They are just trying to get out and leave it behind.**”



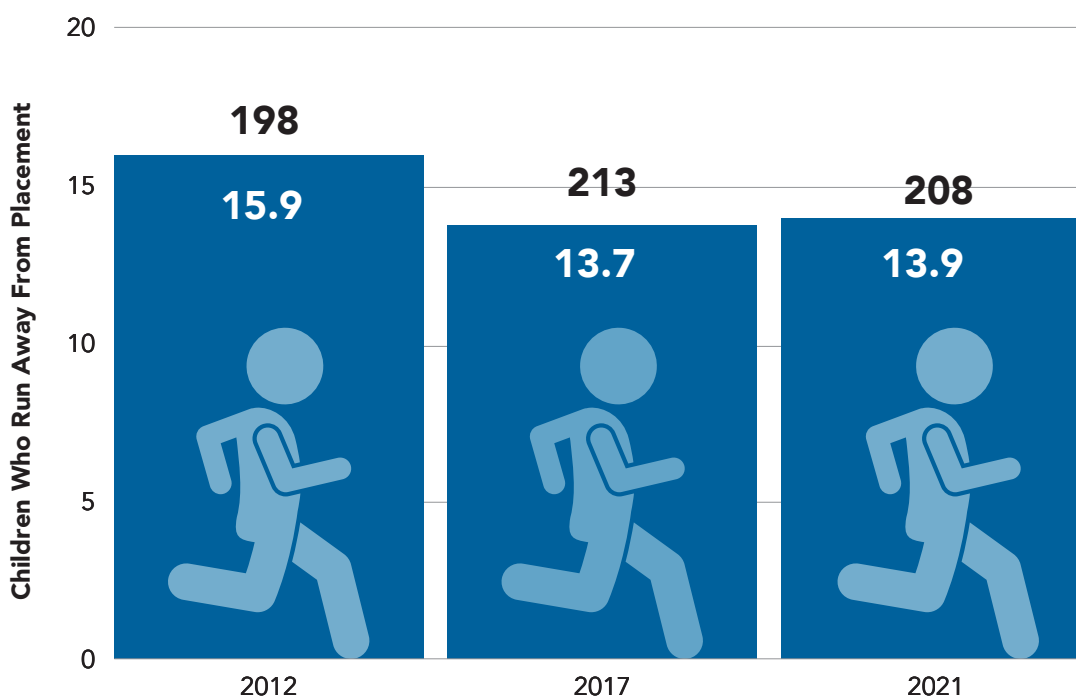
“**One of the things we need to look at is the increased instances of abuse because (outsourced services) don’t have the same oversight or level of qualification than they would have under the government.**”

## Other Proposed Measures: Children Who Run Away From Placements

Another measure discussed was the number of youth who run away, or are absent without leave (AWOL). When a child leaves their placement without permission, children services updates their case file as AWOL until they return. When asked about including this as a measure, young people with lived experience in care responded that it must be viewed through a lens of exploring the underlying causes and destigmatizing it. They explained that this behavior may reflect an attempt to resolve an issue with the placement when the adults around them are not responding effectively. The measure by itself does not include information about the underlying reason, but reporting it highlights the need to respond to these situations appropriately. It was considered to be a flag to investigate for youth who may be experiencing maltreatment in care.

The Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act<sup>33</sup> is a federal law that requires agencies to provide a counseling session after a youth runs away to find out why. In the future, data around compliance with this law, as well as findings from the counseling session could accompany this measure in order to develop practices that prevent children from running away and being at risk of trafficking.

**Figure 20. Point-in-time Count of Children in Care for Placement Type "AWOL" in October of each Year <sup>22</sup>**



This measure underestimates the total number of children who run away, as it reflects only those who were on runaway status in October of each year, not youth who ran from a placement at some other point during the report period. The numbers in the Office and Families and Children dashboard are subject to change and were last pulled on March 21, 2021.



The 2019 Report to Congress on The Child Welfare System Response to Sex Trafficking of Children outlines reasons children run away from placements, as well as risk factors.<sup>34</sup> The report cites academic studies but does not rely on systematic data provided by states through their reporting process. The reasons were generally categorized as “pull” factors that cause youth to run to something (e.g., friends, family, excitement) or “push” factors that cause youth to run from something (e.g., caregivers, placement setting).

Before and after an episode, youth should be made aware of their rights and provided clear mechanisms to report rights violations. This will help them to address issues before they resort to running away, as well as prevent other children from being placed in an unsafe environment.

## Recommendations

- Include the number of children who run away in conversations about performance measurement among staff teams.
- Use the number of youth who run away from placements as a flag to investigate maltreatment in care.
- Track whether children have had a counseling session in compliance with the Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act.
- If placement concerns involve rights violations, refer the child to the Youth Ombudsman office after other attempts at resolution have been exhausted. If concerns involve issues of abuse or neglect, practitioners should comply with all mandated reporting rules.

**“If you are maltreated and no one is going to listen to you, you might run away. It could correlate with the number of children who are maltreated in care.”**

**“Being labeled AWOL tends to be a stigmatizing thing. It has to be viewed differently. What is going on that might be causing this behavior? It not necessarily a behavioral problem. We must look deeper than the surface level.”**



# Other Proposed Measures: Sibling Connections

Young people with lived experience have voiced the importance of maintaining sibling connections when a child is placed out-of-home. Along with their voices, research shows that remaining connected with siblings is a protective factor against the grief and anxiety associated with entering care.<sup>35</sup>

Sibling connections are a priority policy area for advocates in Ohio with lived experience, who testified in support of HB448, Fostering Sibling Connections in 2018.

In order to track sibling connections, the state data system should capture and report on this measure. Until recently, this data has not been required by the federal reporting system, AFCARS, but starting in 2023, this data will be part of the annual reporting. By October 2022, the state must demonstrate that it has modified its information system (SACWIS) to be able to collect and report this data.

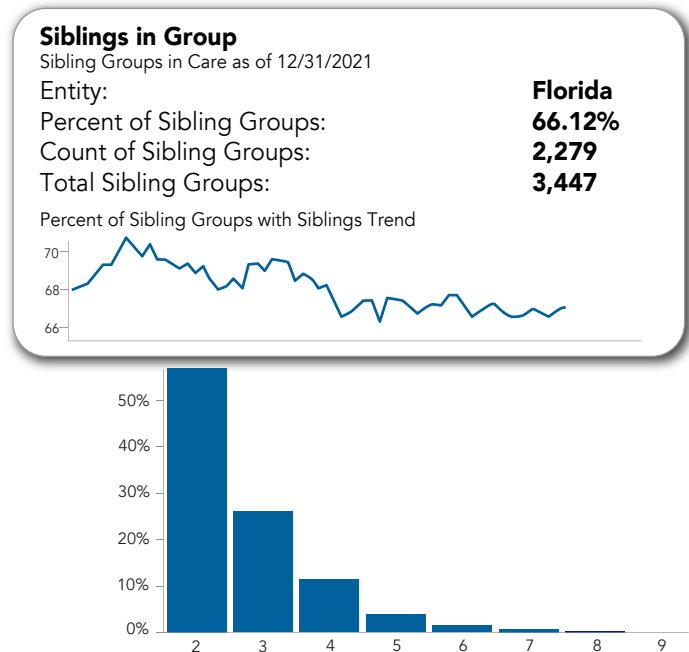
Sibling connections data must be a part of continuous quality improvement efforts, going beyond minimum compliance with federal reporting requirements. One state does this exceptionally well. The Florida Department of Families and Children provides a public dashboard that shows sibling connection data, including the percentage of sibling groups that are placed together over time, on a quarterly basis. It also includes a standard 65% so that the user can easily compare the actual to the target. Since 2006, the earliest period reported, the percentage increased from 60% to a high of 67%, showing marked improvement. Florida has been within a percentage point of the target since 2014, offering some evidence that highlighting this measure had the intended impact.<sup>36</sup>

## Recommendations

- Use sibling connection data as a performance measure and identify targets for the state.
- Follow Florida's lead by creating a public dashboard that highlights performance measures.

### State Highlight: Florida Sibling Connections Dashboard

**Figure 21.** Florida Sibling Connection Dashboard Percentage of Sibling Groups Placed Together in Out-of-Home Care by Number in Group



Florida's dashboard also shows the size of the sibling group and the number and percentage placed together. It is more challenging to find a placement for larger groups. Showing the detail by size will allow practitioners to focus on more specific solutions for different size of groups.

“Losing contact with my oldest brother left me feeling completely lost. He was the living example that encouraged me to make myself better.”

# Other Proposed Measures: Wellbeing and Educational Outcomes

As Ohio seeks to reform other systems that affect children, leaders can look to their methods of measuring performance as a guide. OhioRISE is an initiative to improve and coordinate physical and behavioral health care for children and youth with complex health needs who are involved with multiple systems.<sup>37</sup>

OhioRISE will track the performance of its programs using a clear set of measures. The measures of child well-being serve as an important model of using external data sources to evaluate how children are doing. Kindergarten readiness, 3rd grade reading proficiency and graduation rates are key developmental benchmarks. Agencies should be able to see the relationship between their work and these outcomes. It is estimated that as many as 60,000 young people will be eligible for this specialized health plan. Not all children involved with children services will be a part of OhioRISE. And not all the youth served by OhioRISE will be a part of children services. But in situations where there is overlap, the data that is collected would be valuable to both systems.

Figure 22.  
**OhioRISE Performance Measures**

## **General**

Rate of suspensions (in-school and out of school)  
Rate of expulsions  
Satisfaction Surveys  
Tobacco Use: Screening and Cessation (Ages 12 – 17)  
Kindergarten Readiness  
Chronic Absenteeism  
3rd Grade Reading  
Graduation Rates

## **Behavioral Health**

Rate of Out-of-Home Placement  
Rate of Out-of-State Residential Placements  
Length of Stay for Behavioral Health (BH) Inpatient Hospitals and Psychiatric Residential Treatment Facility (PRTF)  
Awaiting Discharge: Rate of children in BH Inpatient or PRTF who could be discharged  
Length of Time Awaiting Discharge  
Emergency Department Use  
Rate of children on any antipsychotic medication  
Rate of children on 4 or more antipsychotics  
Timely Access to Services  
Rate of children with any charged offense  
Foster Care Placement Disruptions Due to Behavioral Health

“

**A child can be labeled as problematic. They are acting in a specific way and they are doing it to relay a message.**

”

Ohio will use a standardized instrument called the Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANS) to determine eligibility for OhioRISE. CANS, like other instruments, has the benefit of offering standardized scores that can be aggregated to analyze child well-being in the community as a whole.<sup>38</sup>

Participants in youth focus groups warned that the data should be used with caution. They emphasized that standardized scores are by definition point-in-time observations that should never be used to label children. They wanted to be clear that these scores can and do change over time. They were also concerned that the evaluator had all the power over the scores, and it didn't necessarily reflect the young person's perspective.

## **Recommendations**

- Use external data sources, especially from the education system to measure child wellbeing.
- Develop data sharing agreements between public children's services agencies, OhioRISE and local school districts to better track the well-being of children.
- Use standardized instruments that measure child well-being with caution, and use them periodically to measure change as children grow and develop.

# 05 Summary

Measuring transformation provides the navigation to a destination where all young people who have been in foster care thrive as adults. Ohio has a robust community of thriving young adults who have achieved stability and are giving back to their community through advocacy, service, and peer mentorship. Yet the data shows that far too many of Ohio's youth have not found their footing and are facing serious challenges as they transition to adulthood. Ohio ranks in the bottom 10% of the nation on several outcomes of young people who were in foster care in their late teens. Ohio performed below the national standard on the federal safety outcomes. Yet, even if Ohio improved on these measures, young people with lived experience say that they fail to accurately capture the experiences of youth while in care, and new measures are needed.

We envision a future where every young person has positive and supportive relationships with caring adults and access to the resources they need to achieve stability and pursue their dreams. To get there, we must start by collecting accurate data that reflects the realities of young people's lived experiences so that we will be better equipped to address the challenges they face. A youth experience survey, built into the regular rhythms of case reviews and placement interviews, will allow real-time data on youth experience to drive practice. We need accessible dashboards that combine youth experience data with existing federal measures and innovative measures identified by those with lived experience. We need to incorporate these measures into a performance management framework that creates continuous improvement in practice.

## Summary of Recommendations

### Focus on Performance Measures That Matter to Youth

- Measure youth experiences in care by directly asking them.
- Disaggregate measures by race, ethnicity, and age.
- Disaggregate measures by whether services are outsourced to private for-profit agencies.
- Use sibling connection data as a performance measure and identify targets for the state.
- Use the number of youth who run away from placements as a flag to investigate maltreatment in care.
- Measure the number of missing children whose cases are closed each year without being located.
- Monitor the number of children who stay in office buildings and other spaces that are inappropriate for children overnight because of placement shortages.
- Track whether children have had a counseling session in compliance with the Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act.
- If placement concerns involve rights violations, refer the child to the Youth Ombudsman office after other attempts at resolution have been exhausted. If concerns involve issues of abuse or neglect, practitioners should comply with all mandated reporting rules.

### Include Youth Interviews in Performance Measures

- Design surveys alongside people with lived experience.
- Offer the survey frequently to allow youth to reflect updated circumstances based on new placements and other changes.
- Directly ask about safety and treatment in care using both qualitative and quantitative questions.
- Provide ways to address issues raised during the survey.



## Reimagine Existing Processes as Performance Measures

- Change the name from “Exit Interviews” to “Youth Experience Surveys” and conduct them on a quarterly basis.
- Make Youth Experience Surveys a priority by including them as a part of the annual review for an agency. At a minimum, the measures that should be included in a review are:
  - ♦ The percentage of “Yes” responses to the existing questions: “Were you comfortable in that foster home? Did you feel safe in that home? Do you think that is a good foster home for other children?”
  - ♦ The percentage of interviews that were completed out of the total that should have been
  - ♦ Add at least the following questions to the survey: “Did you receive a copy of the Foster Youth Bill of Rights?” and “Do you believe your rights have been violated while you have been in care?”
- Review the current questions with current and former foster youth to ensure they are designed to capture their experiences.
- Create an online format and allow children over a certain age to fill them out themselves if they prefer.
- Reimagine 90-day case reviews and semi-annual reviews to incorporate perspectives of youth in care.
- Establish youth focus groups for input on how to incorporate the perspectives of youth in case reviews.
- Allow youth to participate in case reviews anonymously so they can be honest about their experiences with their case team without repercussion.
- Institute data collection methods that allow youth experience data to be tied to their case but accessible only by third-party evaluators to protect youth from repercussions.
- Create data systems that allow case review data to be aggregated and analyzed as a tool to measure performance.
- Follow Florida’s lead by creating a public dashboard that highlights performance measures.

## Include Measures of Well-being From Other Systems

- Use external data sources, especially from the education system to measure child wellbeing.
- Develop data sharing agreements between public children’s services agencies, OhioRISE and local school districts to better track the well-being of children.
- Use standardized instruments that measure child well-being with caution, and use them periodically to measure change as children grow and develop.









# List of Figures

<b>Figure 1.</b> Percentage of Youth Transitioning out of Foster Care who Attained a High-school Diploma or GED by 21 in the US. <sup>2</sup> . . . . .	Page 11
<b>Figure 2.</b> List of Measures in which Ohio Ranks in the Bottom 10% and 20% of the US in Child Welfare Outcomes. <sup>2</sup> . . . . .	Page 11
<b>Figure 3.</b> Racial Disparities in Ohio’s Child Welfare System. <sup>5</sup> . . . . .	Page 12
<b>Figure 4.</b> ECC Performance Management Framework, as Adopted from the Updated Turning Point Performance Management System Framework <sup>14</sup> . . . . .	Page 18
<b>Figure 5.</b> Outcomes and Measures in the CFSR Data Profiles with the National Standard. <sup>16</sup> . . . . .	Page 19
<b>Figure 6.</b> Outcomes that Require Qualitative Evaluation during the CFSR Process. <sup>16</sup> . . . . .	Page 20
<b>Figure 7.</b> Percentage of Children who have Multiple Substantiated Reports of Maltreatment in 12 months. <sup>18</sup> . . . . .	Page 22
<b>Figure 8.</b> Rate of Children who Experience Maltreatment while in Care per 100,000 Days. <sup>18</sup> . . . . .	Page 22
<b>Figure 9.</b> Rate of Children who Achieved Permanency in 12 Months for Children Entering Care, those in Care 12-23 Months and those in Care 24 Months or More. <sup>18</sup> . . . . .	Page 23
<b>Figure 10.</b> Percent of Children who were Reunified, Living with a Relative, or Guardianship, who Reentered Foster Care within 12 Months of their Discharge. <sup>18</sup> . . . . .	Page 24
<b>Figure 11.</b> Rate of Placement Moves per 1,000 Days of Foster Care <sup>18</sup> . . . . .	Page 25
<b>Figure 12.</b> Percentage of Children Placed in Group Homes or Institutions. <sup>21, 22</sup> . . . . .	Page 26
<b>Figure 13.</b> Percentage of Children Placed in Kinship Care by County in Ohio in 2021. <sup>24</sup> . . . . .	Page 27
<b>Figure 14.</b> Total Number of Youth who Aged Out of Care. <sup>24, 25</sup> . . . . .	Page 28
<b>Figure 15.</b> Total Number of Youth Participating in Bridges Extended Foster Care <sup>24</sup> . . . . .	Page 28
<b>Figure 16.</b> Percentage of Children with Multiple Reports of Maltreatment in One Year <sup>24</sup> . . . . .	Page 29
<b>Figure 17.</b> Rate of Children Confirmed by Child Protective Services as Victims of Maltreatment in FY2020 per 1,000 in the population <sup>39</sup> . . . . .	Page 30
<b>Figure 18.</b> Rate of Children who Entered Out-of-Home Placement in 2021 per 1,000 in the population <sup>39</sup> . . . . .	Page 30
<b>Figure 19.</b> Image of the KIDS COUNT Data Webpage on CDF-Ohio’s Website where the “Child Welfare Outcomes County Profiles: Measuring Transformation” are Located. . . . .	Page 31
<b>Figure 20.</b> Point-in-time Count of Children in Care for Placement Type “AWOL” in October of each Year <sup>22</sup> . . . . .	Page 42
<b>Figure 21.</b> Florida Sibling Connection Dashboard Percentage of Sibling Groups Placed Together in Out-of-Home Care by Number in Group <sup>36</sup> . . . . .	Page 44
<b>Figure 22.</b> OhioRise Performance Measures. <sup>37</sup> . . . . .	Page 45

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- 1  
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# Appendix A

## Information on Youth Focus Groups

### Demographic information on focus group participants

GROUP	NUMBER	PERCENT
Non-Hispanic Black	2	25%
Non-Hispanic White	6	75%
Hispanic/Latinx (any race)	0	0%
Asian/Pacific Islander	0	0%
Native American	0	0%
Female	5	62.5%
Male	3	37.5%
Other gender	0	0%
Ohio Youth Advisory Board	2	29%
Action Ohio	5	62.5%
Thanksgiving Together	1	1.25%

### Selection Process for Focus Group Participants

Participants were selected by the researcher based on their experience in the foster care system as youth and their knowledge of efforts to reform the child welfare system. They were known by the researcher from other contexts, including their participation in groups such as the OHIO Youth Advisory Board, ACTION Ohio, and Thanksgiving Together, an annual gathering of people with lived experience in foster care in Ohio. Many of the participants are actively involved with advocacy campaigns, including the Youth Ombudsman Campaign. The researcher attempted to balance the perspectives of people from different race and gender backgrounds.



## Protocol for Focus Groups

Prior to focus group, all participants received a participant consent form that included that permission to record the focus group conversation and a media release.

The focus groups took place on a video conference call on Sundays morning during the fall of 2021. After joining the call, participants were informed that they would be provided a \$25 gift card for their time and participation. The consent form was reviewed and participants were assured that receiving the gift card was not contingent on their participation. Participants were told they would have an opportunity review any comments or findings prior to publication to ensure it reflected their original intent. The meetings lasted between 75 and 120 minutes.

## Script and Questions for Focus Groups

### Welcome and Introductions

Share an image of the report introduction and describe the purpose of the report and focus group:

- To review current measures of the child welfare system
- Elevate youth's perspectives of existing and proposed measures
- Identify new measures to effectively measure transformation
- Explain that people, including an official like a Youth Ombudsman, could collect data and use these measures to evaluate progress on reform efforts and hold the system accountable
- Explain that the purpose of the focus

### Provide an Overview of the Current Measures

- Share a list of the measures including in the CFSR Data Profiles including a brief description
- Ask: What are your thoughts on using these to measure transformation?
- Ask: Please rate the current measures from not effective at all to very effective on a scale from 1 to 5 and under the Transition to talking header, after "Rate these suggested measures" add on a scale from 1 (not effective) to 5 (Very effective)

### Transition to Talking About What Other Measures Are Possible

- Ask: How should we measure transformation?
- Rate these suggested measures: percent of children placed with at least one sibling, rate of children who run away, percent of children who are placed in group homes or residential, rate of children who stay in offices overnight

### Transition to Talking About Ways to Capture Youth Experience

- Describe and display actual forms used for current exit interviews
- Ask: What are your thoughts on using exit interviews to measure transformation?
- Describe other state's use of annual surveys and display list of topics from the actual survey
- Ask: What are your thoughts on using an annual survey to measure transformation?
- Describe CANS assessment tool and display a version of the form used
- Ask: What are your thoughts on using a tool like CANS to measure transformation?
- Compare different ways to capture youth experience, ask: Rate these methods of capturing youth experience from Not Effective to Very Effective

### Closing

- Express gratitude for their time and remind them to check their email for a digital gift card in the next two days.
- Remind them that a copy of the report will be sent for their review prior to publication
- Express the need for self-care after talking about traumatic experiences
- Offer encouragement that the results will be used to affect change



# Appendix B:

## Building the Path Forward

### OUR FORGOTTEN YOUTH: THOSE LEFT BEHIND BY FOSTER CARE MALTREATMENT REPORTING

*Laila-Rose Hudson*

#### RECOMMENDATION SUMMARY

**Congress should allocate funds in the 2021 reauthorization of the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) to incentivize states with funding that will encourage implementation of an independent foster youth-specific ombudsman who collects and reports data and policy recommendations publicly, for maximum transparency. Congress should also require the Administration to add specific questions about maltreatment in foster care to both the NSCAW and NYTD surveys. Finally, Congress should require state child welfare agencies to anonymously survey the youth in their care annually about maltreatment to analyze the gaps between self-reported and state reported NCANDS data and create a system of accountability and transparency.**

#### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Instances of maltreatment in foster care such as physical, sexual, and emotional abuse, as well as neglect, are likely underreported; therefore, a better system for data collection is needed to fully assess the actual rates at which youth experience abuse while under the guardianship of the state and to implement improved preventative measures. This can be achieved by incentivizing states to create an independent, youth-specific ombudsman office, adding questions to existing surveys of foster youth, or creating new surveys to monitor discrepancies between maltreatment reported by states and maltreatment experienced by young people.

#### PERSONAL REFLECTION

*Trigger warning: child sexual abuse and suicide*

I experienced abuse and neglect in foster care on more than one occasion and in more than one placement. In one particularly egregious situation, my attempts to report sexual abuse perpetrated by a foster parent were largely ignored and explained away as a “projection” of my past trauma or a tendency for dishonesty, and so I stayed quiet.



## PERSONAL REFLECTION (CONTINUED)

There was no official mechanism for me to report outside of my social workers, who were unreceptive. On the eve of a trial, where I was set to testify against a member of my biological family for committing the same crime, my foster father took his own life and left a note implicating himself as a perpetrator of abuse. In the wake of his death, everyone involved questioned me, and I disclosed everything. However, no investigation was conducted, as it would unduly “upset the family” and my story was swept under the rug. Alarming, I have encountered several other foster youth whose abuse allegations were handled in a similar manner. I am only one of many whose experience fell between the cracks of the current reporting systems.

## THE PROBLEM & CURRENT LAW

Simply put, the available data on the rates of maltreatment in foster care do not match the voices of lived experience. According to available data, across all 50 states, roughly 0.4% of foster youth reported experiencing maltreatment in foster care in 2019 (Administration of Children & Families, n.d.). In stark contrast, in one study of 43 foster youth, 37% reported experiencing maltreatment while in a foster placement (Riebschleger et al., 2015). Further research supports that as many as one in three youth attests to suffering abuse while in foster or congregate care (Pecora et al., 2006).

The existing system that details reports of maltreatment in foster care is the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS). NCANDS only contains information voluntarily provided by states, which are instances of reported maltreatment. However, there are many instances of maltreatment that go unreported. The NCANDS report includes the percentage of children reported to have been maltreated in biological homes as well as while in out of home care. NCANDS collects case-level data that details each allegation of maltreatment that resulted in a CPS response, the types of maltreatment involved, investigative findings, services provided, whether a report was screened out, and the identity of the alleged perpetrators. NCANDS data is published in publicly available child welfare outcome reports and child maltreatment reports.

“*The available data on the rates of maltreatment in foster care do not match the voices of lived experience.*”



According to the data, roughly 0.4% of foster youth reported experiencing maltreatment.



However, in a study of foster youth, 37% reported experiencing maltreatment while in a foster placement.

## THE PROBLEM & CURRENT LAW (*CONTINUED*)

45 CFR 1355 requires state and tribal Title IV-E agencies to submit certain case-level data biannually as part of the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS). While this data set includes the general demographics on children in foster care and their families, as well as the number of removals and placements, AFCARS does not include information about maltreatment in foster care (AFCARS, n.d.).

The inconsistencies between reported and actual maltreatment in foster care are caused by multiple contributing factors. First, in many cases, youth in foster care do not have access to reporting mechanisms outside of their social workers. As a youth in care, I felt uncomfortable coming forward to my social workers because I perceived they had an interest in retaining foster parents and keeping incidence reports to a minimum to avoid public scrutiny and bad press. In addition, social workers generally have heavy caseloads and must manage conflicting priorities. Thus, youth may have trouble contacting their case workers at all. These points are noted by advocates who are pushing for greater independence for the California youth-specific ombudsman office. They argue that placing the office within the control of the children's services agency severely limits its potential for positive impact (Child & Sandefer, 2015).

Youth may also fear retribution from social workers or caretakers for making allegations. This fear is legitimate and not at all unfounded, particularly in congregate care settings where there have been numerous allegations of staff reporting youth to authorities with the intention of getting the youth removed and avoiding accusations of mistreatment (Goodkind & Miller, 2006). Even when abuse victims do come forward, there are cases like mine where allegations remain unofficial and uninvestigated.

All these factors combined leave a skewed data system for maltreatment in foster care, and it is near impossible to take appropriate remedial measures when the scope of the problem is largely unknown. The research supports that even one incidence of maltreatment in foster care can be severely detrimental to a youth's outcomes and the overall trajectory of their lives (Uliando & Mellor, 2012). To best protect foster youth, one of the most vulnerable populations in our society, there must be an accurate understanding of the struggles they face.

Some states are planning to create a mechanism for foster youth to report maltreatment, or already have, by instituting a statewide youth-specific ombudsman office to receive and investigate reports made by foster youth (Foster Action Ohio, n.d.). Establishing a youth-specific ombudsman has long been considered the best practice. The ombudsman needs to be youth-specific, because other ombudsman programs that service adults as well as youth end up primarily serving as a benefit to only the adults.



## THE PROBLEM & CURRENT LAW (CONTINUED)

Ideally, a youth-specific ombudsman should operate independently from state children's services agencies to avoid any conflict of interest and increase potential positive impact. If each state had an independent, youth-specific ombudsman, more youth would likely come forward without fear of reprisal, and those unheard by their social workers could have a viable alternative to report. In Texas, for example, the Ombudsman substantiated 250 reports of maltreatment (Texas Department of Health and Human Services, 2019). That is 250 children who were heard and received intervention who may not have otherwise had their allegations recorded and addressed. In the public ombudsman report, the Texas Department of Health and Human Services noted how vital independence and transparency is for an ombudsman to create the most systemic change in their role. Similarly, other state youth-specific ombudsmen could be required to submit data about the reports received in addition to the NCANDS data received from state agencies.

In addition to a youth-specific ombudsman, there are existing surveys such as the National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being (NSCAW) and the National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD) that solicit youth feedback about their experiences in foster care. NSCAW is a longitudinal study of children that have reported maltreatment and have had contact with the child welfare system but does not have a specific focus on maltreatment in foster care (Dolan et al., 2011). Notably, maltreatment in foster care is also excluded from the outcome variables in the NYTD database (National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect, 2019).

## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

To strengthen foster youth maltreatment reporting, Congress should:

- **Allocate funds in the 2021 reauthorization of the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) to incentivize states with funding that will encourage implementation of an independent foster youth-specific ombudsman** who collects and reports data and policy recommendations publicly, for maximum transparency. This will allow states to earn federal incentive payments if and when states implement an independent foster youth-specific Ombudsman.
- **Require the Administration to add specific questions about maltreatment in foster care** to both the NSCAW and NYTD surveys.
- **Require state child welfare agencies to anonymously survey the youth in their care annually about maltreatment** to analyze the gaps between self-reported and state reported NCANDS data and create a system of accountability and transparency.

# Appendix C:

## Data Landscape

### Federal Data Sources

- The Adoption and Foster Care Analysis Reporting System (AFCARS) is used to populate information on all children in foster care and those who have been adopted within Title IV-E agency involvement. **States are required to report data to AFCARS.**
- National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS) collects case-level data. **Data Submissions are voluntary but Ohio reports most measures.**

### National Reports on State data

- Child Welfare Outcomes Report uses both AFCARS and NCANDS data (see page 15)
- The annual Child Maltreatment report, is published by the Children's Bureau using NCANDS data. <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/dataresearch/child-maltreatment>

### State Data Sources

- Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (SACWIS) is used by every public children services agency across the nation. Each county enters case-level data into this system. No public access.

### State and County-level Reports

- Families and Children Dashboard publishes totals by county of various measures. <https://data.jfs.ohio.gov/FamChild/ChildWelfare.stm>
- Public Children's Services Association of Ohio publishes County Fact Sheets that use SACWIS data. Most recent year is 2018.

### Representative Samples

- National Survey on Child and Adolescent Well-being (NSCAW)
- National Youth in Transitions Database (NYTD)

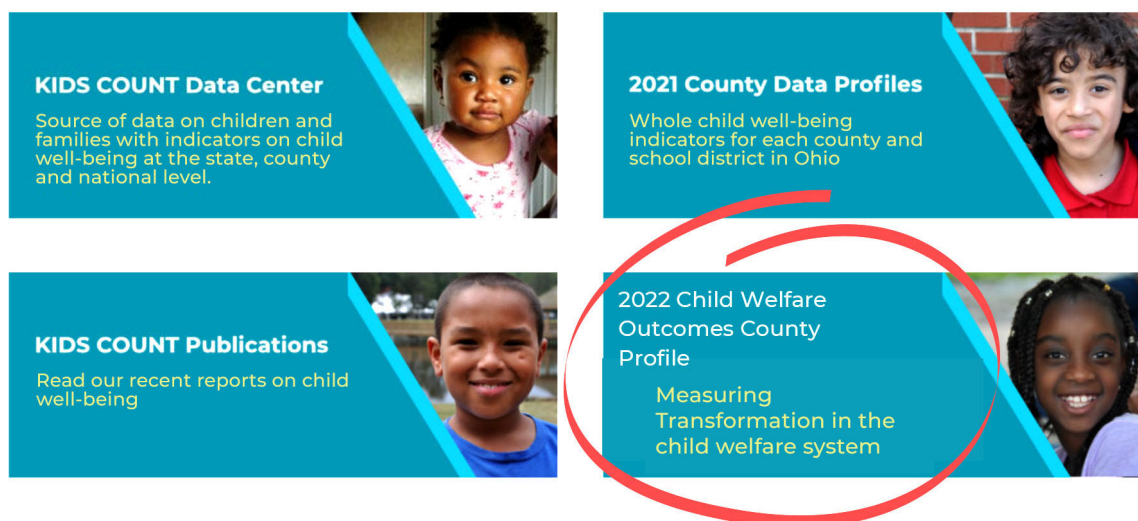
DATA SOURCES	LEVEL	PUBLICATIONS
SACWIS	Counties enter data. States use data for reporting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Families and Children Dashboard</li> <li>• PCSAO Factsheets</li> </ul>
AFCARS	National dataset on placements; mandated	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Child Welfare Outcomes Report</li> </ul>
NCANDS	National dataset on all cases; voluntarily	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Child Maltreatment Report</li> </ul>

## Appendix D:

# 2022 Child Welfare Outcomes County Profiles Printed from the KIDS COUNT Webpage

**Link to Dashboard**

<https://cdfohio.org/policy/resources/kids-count/>











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in Ohio  
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