



Annual Report

Court Year 2020 - 2021



“New Jersey’s child welfare system bears almost no resemblance to the Division of Youth and Family Services of the past.”

*Christine Norbut Beyer
Department of Children and Families
Commissioner, 2020*



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In memory of Gail L. Houlihan

This annual report is dedicated to the memory of our friend and colleague Gail L. Houlihan (1936 – 2022), whose commitment to the children of New Jersey and actions helped to establish New Jersey’s Child Placement Review (CPR) program in 1978. She was a founding member of the New Jersey Child Placement Advisory Council (NJ CPAC) and the Advocates for Children of New Jersey (ACNJ).



New Jersey Child Placement Advisory Council Executive Board

Executive Board

Chair Lorene S. Wilkerson	Middlesex County
Vice Chair Eunice I. Salton	Middlesex County
Secretary Adele Polomski	Ocean County
Treasurer Mary “Twinkie” Polizzi	Bergen County

Voting Members

Francesca Amato	Hudson County
Lila Bernstein	Morris County
Ummil-Khair Sameerah Lewis-Diaab	Middlesex County
Michael Krasner	Union County
Susan B. Lubalin	Essex County
Sandra Wilson Moss	Passaic County
Mary Parham	Middlesex County
Frank E. Petrucci	Essex County
Colleen McKenna Tucker	Hudson County

Non-Voting Members

Emeritus

Connie D. Jenkins-Buwa	Middlesex County
Keith England	Essex County
Gail L. Houlihan	Burlington County
William T. Noll	Monmouth County
Susan Rodgers (Nominating Chair)	Mercer County

Honorary

Darrell L. Armstrong	Mercer County
Greg Rapport	Mercer County



Letter from the Chair

To the Esteemed Members of the New Jersey Supreme Court, Governor and Legislators:

Court Year 2021 was a pivotal year in New Jersey's journey towards realizing an improved welfare and protection system that delivers equitable services and programs to all children, youth, families and communities. The New Jersey Child Placement Advisory Council (NJ CPAC) is honored to be part of the ongoing transformation.

A critical piece to becoming a better system is the use and analysis of data. Facts and figures like those presented here can contribute to informed decisions that drive solutions-based improvements. Another critical aspect of improvement involves listening to and incorporating the voices of those with lived experiences. In these two areas, the Department of Children and Families (DCF) and the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) made substantial progress.

It was impossible to ignore a racial and human reckoning not seen since the civil rights movements of the 1960s. Graphic imagery reminded us of the fragility of our systems and magnified the racism, discrimination and microaggressions experienced by colleagues and the people we serve. We are more committed than ever to promoting social justice, diversity, equity and inclusion within NJ CPAC and Child Placement Review (CPR) boards.

Through our training programs, we stress that it is essential that caseworkers, teachers, police, health care and other professionals who interact with children be mindful of their own biases when making decisions and are aware of culturally sensitive services and supports within their communities.

No data can fully capture how well families processed the continuing uncertainty and disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The toll was especially harsh on children and youth who lost their parents, grandparents and other primary caretakers to the virus. We believe that the marked increase in placing children with relatives or family friends has been beneficial to children adjusting to the shock and pain of loss.

Behind the data presented here are compelling narratives of transformation and teamwork. The achievements highlighted could not have happened without the expertise and work of many dedicated individuals.

No stories are as inspiring as the ones shared by those who, in 2021, overcame extreme poverty, violence, addiction, the pandemic and other adversities to keep their families healthy and intact. It is to their courage, resilience and voices that we dedicate this report.

Lorene S. Wilkerson

Chair

New Jersey Child Placement Advisory Council (NJ CPAC)



NJ CPAC Training Webinars for Court Year 2021

NJ CPAC provides training on various topics to enhance the knowledge of all child welfare stakeholders and provide CPR board volunteers with required learning credits. We thank all co-hosts, presenters and panelists who graciously donated their time.

On Oct. 21, 2020, NJ CPAC presented *Transforming Trauma for Children, Youth and Families: Newark as a Healing-Centered City*. This webinar opened with a private screening of the documentary, *Resilience: The Biology of Stress and the Science of Hope* and showcased efforts by New Jersey's largest city to reduce street violence and lay the groundwork for trauma-informed programs and services. Co-host Lakeesha Eure, the first director of Newark's Office of Violence Prevention, discussed how the city of Newark reallocated funding from the public safety department to invest in a collaborative, community-based hub of social services' programs. She shared her four-step action plan for stopping city violence. Juan A. Rios, director of the Master of Social Work program at Seton Hall University, spoke to the innovative techniques he uses to help first responders heal from trauma. Waffiyah Saleem, founder and CEO of SHE MATTERS, LLC, shared how women can transform the pain of trauma into purpose by using the power of community to introduce healing, inspire self-discovery and engage support.

On May 20, 2021, NJ CPAC co-hosted *Families and Youth: We Have a Voice* with embrella, a member of the NJ CPAC Partners Moving Forward Committee. Embrella was formerly known as Foster and Adoptive Family Services (FAFS). Blake Connor, executive director of the DCF Office of Family Voice (OFV), led the first panel. *Every Voice Matters* highlighted how the DCF engages individuals with lived experiences to ensure policy and practice are infused with authentic voices. OFV's Kaysie Getty and Kareem Lovelace-Crump provided examples of how youth and fathers transform the system with their ideas, innovation and feedback. A father and a youth with lived experience shared their stories and perspectives and what it means to contribute their voices to improving the system.

The second panel, *Racial Disparities in Child Welfare Matter*, was facilitated by NJ CPAC Chair Lorene S. Wilkerson. It was an overview of how the DCF and the Family Practice Division of the AOC apply a racial equity lens and other strategies to better understand disparate results for Black families, youth and children. Florence Racine represented the DCF Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion and the AOC Family Practice Division was represented by Kathy Haggerty. Licensed clinical psychologist Dr. Denise Williams Johnson spoke to the issues of trauma and distrust in Black communities and how an inadequate understanding of the impact of racism can affect the quality of evaluations and mental health treatment.

Corissa Kazar, embrella's director of family support, moderated the third and last panel. Kazar discussed how the nonprofit focuses its training programs on kinship caregivers. She also emphasized that while the need for foster parents in New Jersey is diminishing, embrella continues to provide educational supports to traditional resource parents. Embrella works closely with the DCF to ensure material aligns with current DCF objectives and practice. The panel featured Dawn Marlow, DCF's Office of Resource Families administrator, and Darlene Fusco, deputy director of Adoption, Resource Families and Resource Licensing. All NJ CPAC webinars are recorded, edited and posted on the NJ CPAC website.

NJ CPAC Collaborative Partnerships and Memberships

NJ CPAC executive board members are required to volunteer on county CPR boards. As a result, NJ CPAC had representatives on 13 CPR boards in 2021.

In addition to CPR and NJ CPAC, members of the board also volunteer on state and community-based boards and groups including:

New Jersey Task Force on Child Abuse and Neglect (NJTFCAN)

Wilkerson sits on the protection subcommittee and is chair of the digital realm of child abuse working group. The workgroup, in collaboration with the New Jersey Department of Education (DOE), has developed an online safety flyer for parents and caregivers. The guideline provides parents and caregivers with tips on helping children stay safe online. It is anticipated that once the final draft is completed, the DOE will distribute it to New Jersey school districts.

Children in Court Improvement Committee (CICIC) and Race Equity Subcommittee

As a member of the race equity subcommittee of the CICIC, Wilkerson participates in addressing the policies and practices that adversely impact families of color receiving services related to a child welfare matter. During CY 2021, the subcommittee continued to review and analyze race data worksheets of the county CIC advisory committees. Work also progressed on developing a race equity tool that addresses how policies and practices can be developed to eliminate institutional racism.

New Jersey courts

Salton volunteers as a court-appointed mediator in the Middlesex Vicinage and was approved by the New Jersey Supreme Court to volunteer on the District VIII Ethics Committee in Middlesex County. Bernstein and Petrucci volunteer on Essex County Model Court as program committee co-chairs.

New Jersey community-based programs

Current board members volunteer for various community-based groups serving families and children, including the Special Olympics (Petrucci); National Council of Jewish Women Essex Board, Impact 100, Jewish Women's Foundation of New Jersey, Youth Services Advisory Committee Morris and the Rachel Coalition (Bernstein); Capitol Cities Youth Violence Coalition, Trenton Youth Investment Council and Trenton Area Stakeholders (Rapport). Rodgers is a domestic violence responder for Providence House of Catholic Charities of Trenton.

New York municipal court and international organization

The NJ CPAC executive board relationships also extend beyond New Jersey, with Salton volunteering as a court mediator for New York (southern district) and as liaison for the United Nations for Mediators Beyond Borders International (MBBI), where she is a member of the United Nations Multilateral Working Group (UNMWG).



“What can be more important than ensuring that children are safe and hopefully living with their family?”

*- Sallyanne Floria
Chair, CICIC
Retired Assignment Judge, Essex Vicinage*

Trends in New Jersey Foster Care

Facts, Figures and Analyses

This report measures the performance of the child welfare and protection system pertaining to children in out-of-home placement during the court year (CY) July 1, 2020 – June 30, 2021. It provides accountability through public transparency and makes recommendations for improvements as per NJ CPAC's mandates under the CPR Act.

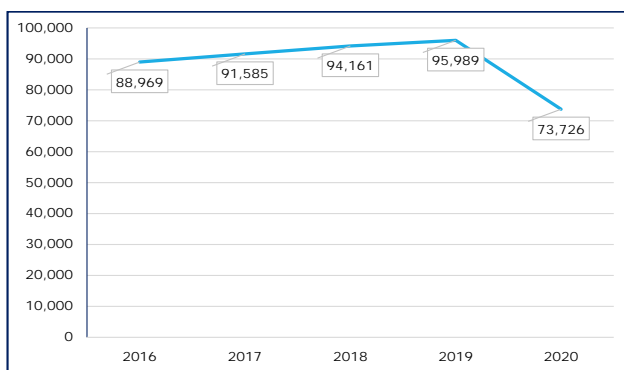
NJ CPAC relies on data from the Judiciary, the DCF and other government sources to identify issues and trends and form recommendations. Data provided by the Judiciary is presented by court year, July 1, 2020 – June 30, 2021, unless otherwise indicated. All other sources are presented by calendar year, Jan. 1, 2020 – Dec. 31, 2021.

Decrease in number of reports to the abuse and neglect hotline

The New Jersey Division of Child Protection and Permanency (CP&P) is New Jersey's child protection and child welfare agency within the Department of Children and Families (DCF). The CP&P is responsible for investigating allegations of child abuse and neglect. Chart 1 tracks the total number of abuse and neglect reports received by the Child Abuse Hotline (State Central Registry, or SCR) during calendar years 2016 through 2020.

Chart 1:

Number of children and youth reported to the CP&P for an abuse/neglect allegation 2016 – 2020



Source: New Jersey Child Welfare Data Hub. Total Hotline Referrals.



Decline in calls from usual reporters

In New Jersey, anyone with a reasonable suspicion that a child has been abused or neglected is legally required to immediately report it. New Jersey relies on law enforcement, education, health care and other professionals to report on children suspected of being abused and neglected. Table 1 compares the total number of children referred to the CP&P in calendar year 2020 with 2019. The total number of incidence reports received by the CP&P declined from 95,989 in 2019 to 55,836 in 2020 in all categories with one exception. The number of reports generated by individuals with a relational connection to the child or family (relatives, friends and neighbors) showed an uptick.

Table 1:
Sources of child abuse/neglect calls to the State Central Registry (Child Abuse Hotline) 2020 vs. 2019

Reporter	Number of Reported Incidences	
	2019	2020
Government Agency	4,339	3,168
Anonymous	10,988	5,094
Facility (includes correctional facility)	964	694
Community Group/Individual	7,275	2,183
Daycare/Babysitter	N/A	113
Health care Provider	13,401	9,548
Court/Legal	2,443	846
Parent	6,798	4,427
Law Enforcement	20,553	14,612
Relative/Friend/Neighbor	3,548	4,019
School Staff	20,076	8,682
Self (child)	331	294
Other	5,273	2,156
Total From All Sources	95,989	55,836

Source: New Jersey Child Welfare Data Hub. All CPS & CRS referrals.



2020 census results established new framework for analyzing, interpreting and understanding data

The results of the 2020 U.S. census, released in 2021, determined how much federal funding would be available in the next 10 years for New Jersey family and child-serving programs. NJ CPAC stakeholders use census data pertaining to race, ethnicity, housing, income, family size and other demographics to apply for federal grant funds and to allocate resources.

According to the census bureau, the 2020 census provided a more accurate snapshot of race and ethnic origins than did the 2010 census. For example, individuals could self-identify their race and ethnicity. Some categories were deleted, merged or added. “White” was defined as a person having origins in Europe, the Middle East or North Africa. “Some other race alone” included individuals who identified as Latino or of Spanish origin.

The following table shows that New Jersey has become more racially and ethnically diverse in the last decade, with the number of people identified as “White alone” declining by more than 15 percent. NJ CPAC encourages stakeholders to use the 2020 census as a reference tool to assess whether household demographics, racial compositions and other characteristics have changed, and to question if their service and program offerings align with current local needs.

***Table 2:
Race and Ethnicity Characteristics of New Jersey
Residents vs. 2010***

Race/Ethnicity	2020	Percent Change from 2010
White Alone	61.6%	-15.2%
Black Alone	12.4%	+1.2%
Hispanic Alone	18.7%	N/A
Asian Alone	6%	+30.9%
American Indian or Alaska Native Alone	1.1%	+76.3%
Some Other Race Alone	8.4%	+87.4%
Two or More Races	10.2%	+276%

Source: www.census.gov.

Note: Percentages are based on a 2020 total New Jersey population of 9,288,994.

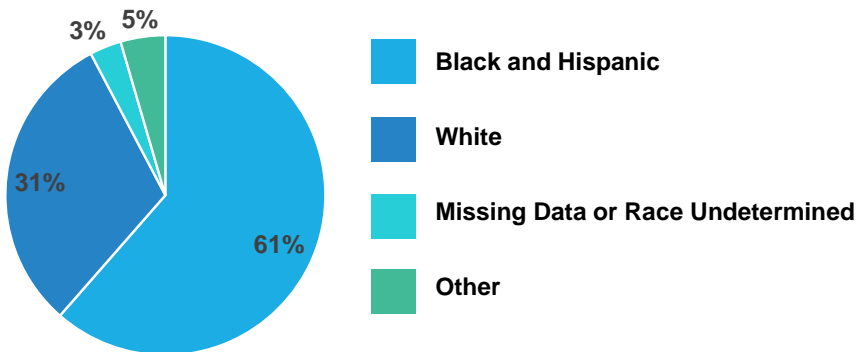


Most reports alleging abuse and neglect involved children of color

The National Council of State Legislatures, the New Jersey Bar Association and other stakeholder groups have acknowledged that racial and economic disproportionalities and disparities are present at every stage in the child welfare and protection process. To end racial injustice and produce lasting change in New Jersey, the DCF and the AOC are systematically using data collection, research and analysis to identify exactly where in the current system inequities occur at the local level. The goal is a transformative system that considers and integrates outside perspectives, empowers the voices of individuals with lived experience, continuously challenges racial and economic systemic discrimination, and prioritizes strengthening, rather than separating, families.

According to the 2020 U.S. census data, New Jersey is among the most racially diverse states in the nation. Chart 2 reveals that in 2020, of the 73,726 reports completed by the SCR, about 61 percent involved Black or Hispanic children. White children accounted for 31 percent. To understand how these percentages contrast to race/ethnicity of total population, refer to Table 2.

***Chart 2:
Race/ethnicity of children and youth
referred to the CP&P in 2020***



Source: New Jersey Child Welfare Data Hub. All CPS & CRS referrals.

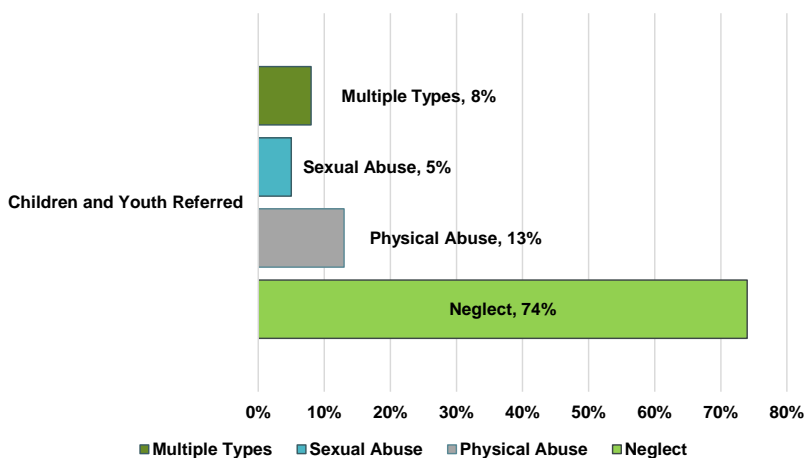


Most allegations involved neglect, not abuse

After the initial screening, reports are referred to a local CP&P office for further assessment and/or investigation. The greatest percentage of allegations referred to local CP&P offices in calendar year 2020 involved child neglect, not child abuse, as defined by New Jersey law. This finding has remained consistent for at least a decade.

When viewing Chart 3, it is necessary to understand that a report of suspected abuse and/or neglect could involve more than one child, or a single child could be counted multiple times due to reports received by the SCR on separate occasions.

***Chart 3:
Percentage of referrals received by CP&P
local offices in 2019***



Source: New Jersey Child Welfare Data Hub. All CPS & CRS referrals.



The odds of being investigated following an abuse/neglect referral were about equal for all races and ethnicities

Racial disproportionality in child welfare practice can be measured at many stages and by a variety of metrics. Based on limited data available to NJ CPAC, families in all race categories had a similar likelihood of being referred to a local CP&P office for further assessment and/or investigation in calendar year 2020.

NJ CPAC is committed to all efforts to seek and eliminate barriers to equality wherever they exist. It is vital that individuals facilitating and promoting the emotional, social and behavioral well-being of children be aware of the history of child welfare and understand that the current system was designed by predominately White leaders and institutions. This historical context contributed to the interpersonal, institutional and cultural biases that exist today towards some racial and ethnic groups and families living in poverty. NJ CPAC believes that efforts by the DCF and the AOC to invite and embrace feedback from the people directly impacted by and who experienced the system are crucial for complete system transformation.

The DCF has trained caseworkers and other staff to avoid assumptions about race and ethnicity, make case decisions based on incomplete information, and become more vigilant about obtaining accurate information directly from their clients. The AOC plans to train all employees in 2022 in understanding systemic institutional racism and to recognize implicit biases in themselves. NJ CPAC is working with the AOC and CASA to provide race equity training to CPR volunteers. As part of their training in the initial CPR review, volunteers also are encouraged to question caseworkers to further ensure that all documents that include race and ethnicity are accurate, complete and consistent throughout the life of a case.

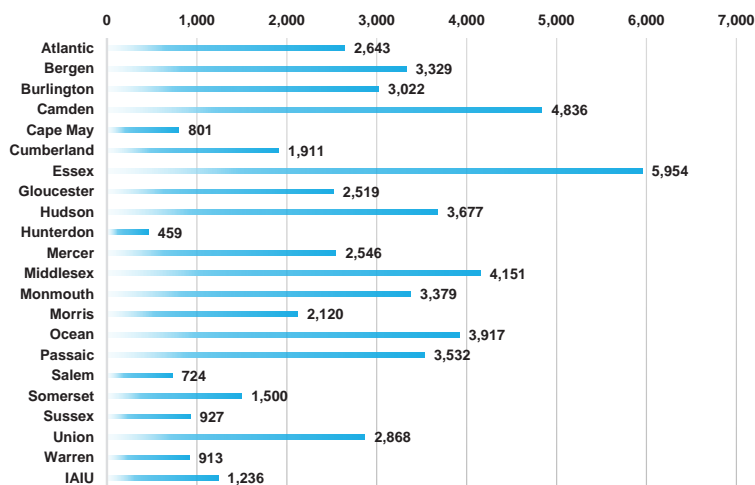


Essex, Camden and Middlesex counties received the most reports requiring further investigation

The following chart captures the total number of child abuse and neglect reports assigned to each county in calendar year 2020. All 21 counties have at least one local CP&P office responsible for investigating if a child or youth has been harmed or is at risk of harm, and/or if a family could benefit from support services.

Allegations involving out-of-home settings are assigned to one of four regional DCF Institutional Abuse Investigation Units (IAIU). These referrals are included below. Examples of out-of-home settings include resource (foster) homes, schools and residential centers.

Chart 4:
Number of referrals received by CP&P local offices by county 2020



Source: New Jersey Child Welfare Data Hub. Total hotline referrals report.

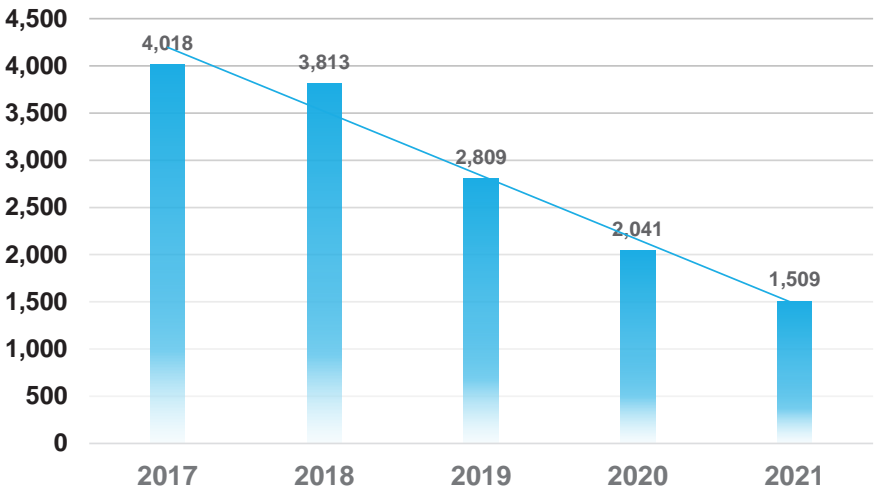


Fewer children entered out-of-home placement in 2021

In 2020 and 2021, the DCF continued to focus on reducing the number of children served out of their home by investing in its extensive network of social services programs and supports, community partnerships and provider contracts.

Chart 5 summarizes the downward trend in the total number of children and youth removed from their homes and placed into New Jersey’s child welfare and protection system. This type of placement is referred to as an “out-of-home placement.”

***Chart 5:
Number of new out-of-home placement cases
2016-2021 (court year)***



Source: NJ Administrative Office of Courts. New Filings Dashboard. webfocusprod.courts.judiciary.state.nj.us.

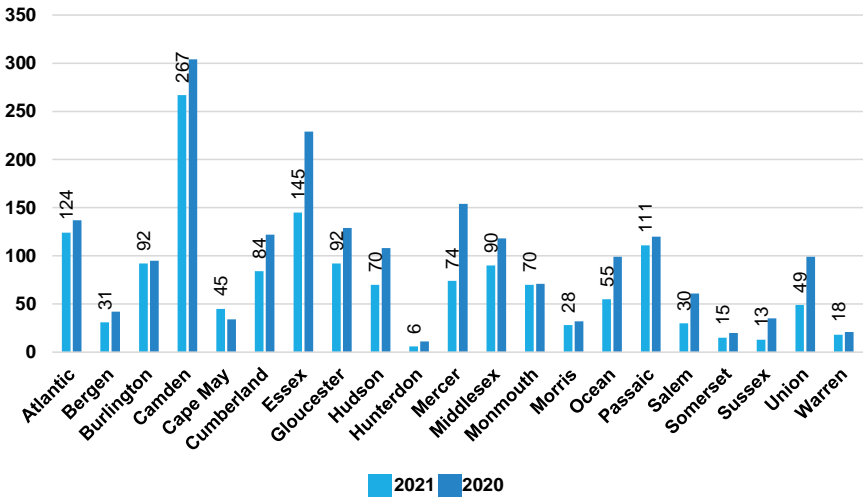


Cape May was the only county to show an increase in the total number of new out-of-home placement cases in 2021

The following chart provides a county view of the number of children and youth entering out-of-home placement for the first time.

Chart 6:

Number of new out-of-home placement cases (FC docket) by county in 2021 (court year) vs 2020.



Source: NJ Administrative Office of Courts, New Filings Dashboard, webfocusprod.courts.judiciary.state.nj.us.



A parent's substance use was the primary reason for children entering placement in 2021

New Jersey's efforts to reduce a child's need for out-of-home placement involves identifying the individual risk factors and circumstances that contributed to the child's initial placement and/or reentry into the system and determining what services and/or supports are needed to attain permanency. The CP&P will then work with its network of state and community agencies to deploy an appropriate multi-service response.

During the CPR initial review, CPR boards review the form used by the CP&P to notify the courts that a child has been placed out of their home. According to information documented by the CP&P on the Notice of Placement (NOP) form, in CY 2021, most children entering placement did so for reasons associated with the parent. Of these, 23 percent entered out-of-home placement because of a parent's substance use.

The National Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported in 2021 that New Jersey was one of four states where drug-related deaths did not increase during lock down. It seems that this finding could be due to any number of influences, including a parent's involvement in the recovery court program, previously known as drug court, New Jersey's efforts to make Narcan more widely available to those vulnerable to opiate overdose, and expansion of community mental health and recovery services.





Fewer domestic abuse complaints filed in 2020

The total number of domestic violence complaints filed in New Jersey declined from 32,458 in calendar 2019 to 29,895 in 2020, as reported by the New Jersey Courts' *2018 – 2020 Report on the Prevention of Domestic Violence Act*.

Of the complaints issued Jan. 1 through Dec. 31, 2020, slightly more than 50 percent involved homes with children living in the home at the time of the filing.



Increased number of New Jersey children were living in concentrated poverty neighborhoods and “true” poverty homes

Each year the Advocates for Children of New Jersey (ACNJ) releases its Kids Count Report measuring the well-being of New Jersey children at state and county levels. The 2020 report, compiled through Casey Family Programs, showed that while New Jersey families fared better than most states, 13 percent of New Jersey’s children under the age of five lived in high-poverty, low-opportunity neighborhoods, which are defined as neighborhoods where 30 percent or more of the population lives in poverty.

In July 2021, the Legal Services of New Jersey (LSNJ) Poverty Institute published True Poverty – What it Takes to Avoid Poverty and Deprivation in the Garden State. Using 2019 and 2020 data sources, the report defined “true poverty level” or TPL as “the minimum income families need in order to afford basic necessities without any public or private support and without making trade-offs.” Table 3 compares the statewide weighted average of TPL in New Jersey as a percentage of the federal government’s definition of poverty in 2019. The TPL varies by county and across family compositions.

LSNJ also reported that in 2019 nearly one-third of people living in New Jersey did not have sufficient resources to afford basic necessities. An infant on average added \$26,206 to a family’s basic budget for a total of \$58,409. Housing and childcare were the largest cost items for most families.

While poverty is a risk factor of child abuse and neglect, it does not equate to child neglect, according to the U.S. Children’s Bureau and others. NJ CPAC supports the position that a child should not be removed from the home due to poverty alone. A family’s struggles to meet a child’s basic needs can be alleviated with the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Programs (SNAP) and other state and community support programs.



Table 3:
True Poverty Level (TPL) in New Jersey as a Percentage of the Federal Poverty (FPL)

Family Composition	FPL 2019	TPL 2019	TPL as % of FPL
1 adult, 1 pre-school age child and 1 school-age child	\$20,598	\$70,372	342%
2 adults, 1 pre-school age child	\$20,578	\$65,977	321%
2 adults, 1 pre-school age child and 1 school-age child	\$25,926	\$78,365	325%

Source: LSNJ Poverty Institute 2021.



Top “Pain Points” for Children and Families Caused by the Pandemic¹

FOOD SECURITY

Nine percent of New Jersey’s adults living in households with children said they sometimes or often did not have enough to eat



HOUSING STABILITY

Nineteen percent of New Jersey’s adults living in households with children had slight or no confidence they would make the next rent or mortgage payment on time



AFFORDABLE HEALTH CARE

Ten percent of New Jersey’s adults living in households with children reported that they did not have health insurance



MENTAL HEALTH

Fourteen percent of New Jersey’s adults living in households with children felt down, depressed or hopeless



¹ACNJ and Annie E. Casey Foundation



More children and youth experienced mental health struggles and emergencies

Multiple reports and evidence support that the pandemic has taken its toll on the mental and behavioral health of children. In March 2022, the Journal of the American Medical Association’s (JAMA) Pediatrics published the findings of a four-year investigative study. “Five-Year Trends in US Children’s Health and Well-being, 2016-2020” was designed to measure children’s current health conditions, positive health behaviors, access to health care and utilization, as well as family well-being and stressors. Parents and caretakers of more than 174,000 children from birth to the age of 17 participated. The study found that between 2016 and 2020 there were significant:

- Increases in children’s diagnosed anxiety and depression
- Decreases in children’s physical activity
- Decreases in caregiver mental and emotional well-being and coping with parenting demands.

The study also noted that from 2019 to 2020 the following findings occurred and were attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic:

- Significant increases in children’s diagnosed behavioral or conduct problems
- Decreases in preventive medical care visits
- Increases in unmet health care needs
- Increases in the proportion of young children whose parents quit, declined, or changed jobs because of childcare problems.

In October 2021, *The Journal of Pediatrics* published another study estimating that from March 2020 through June 2021, 140,000 children under the age of 18 in the U.S. lost a parent or a grandparent caregiver due to COVID-19 or for another reason related to the virus.

All newly single parents and kinship caregivers should have immediate access to, and benefit from, supportive services to provide healthy, stable environments for children traumatized by the loss of a parent or primary caregiver. Yet, despite best efforts of the CP&P and agencies, there are barriers preventing this goal. For example, as in other states, New Jersey faces a shortage of mental health clinicians, counselors, psychologists and pediatric and adolescent psychiatrists. The lack of diversity in the mental health care field is an added impediment for individuals of color needing and seeking services and treatment. Statistics from the American Psychiatric Association (APA) showed that, in 2020, two percent of psychiatrists and four percent of psychologists in the United States were Black. This scarcity makes it more difficult for someone of color to find a professional with whom they feel comfortable enough to share race-related trauma and attain an accurate diagnosis.

NJ CPAC recognizes that there are no easy and short-term solutions for this issue. To create a career pipeline, NJ CPAC recommends stakeholders convene and explore measures and incentives that will encourage school and college-age students from marginalized communities to pursue health care careers.

Meanwhile, NJ CPAC applauds efforts by the New Jersey Department of Education (NJ DOE) and the New Jersey School Boards Association to help districts address the mental health needs of all students. Schools are in a distinct position to recognize early signs of mental, behavioral, and developmental disorders in school-age children and develop individualized education plans (IEPs) to ensure such children receive coordinated, specialized services.

With what is now known about the generational impact of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and considering the enormous mental health toll the pandemic continues to place on children and youth, NJ CPAC recommends that mobile mental health outreach services and such interventions as telehealth for one-on-one counseling and therapy for children and youth be expanded.

NJ CPAC recognizes that agencies and non-profits who rely on state contracts have been challenged with hiring and retaining staff for essential positions that are emotionally draining and risk their personal safety because direct contact with clients is required. New Jersey needs to regularly review funding of state contracts that pay a fixed reimbursement rate for mental-health positions and, if necessary, free up funding so that agencies without additional sources of steady revenue can retain staff and compete for new talent.

NJ CPAC thanks legislators who have responded to requests by the DCF, ACNJ and others, including NJ CPAC, to support additional funding services that provide for the well-being of the most vulnerable.



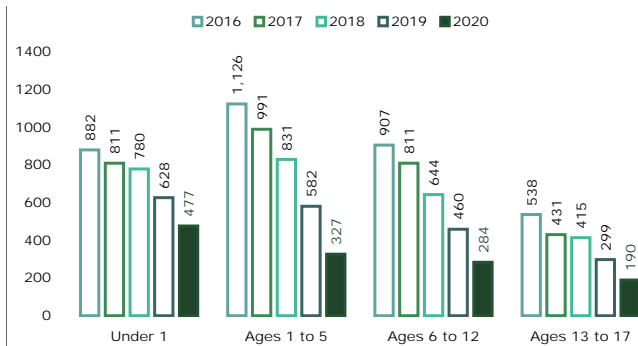
Of children who entered foster care for the first time, most were less than one year old

Using data from the DCF, Chart 7 shows the total number of children across all age groups entering out-of-home placement over a five-year period. It reveals that infants under the age of one accounted for most of the children entering foster care in calendar year 2020.

Chart 8, which uses data provided from the AOC, shows that in 2020 and 2021 children at the age of one accounted for most out-of-home placements.

NJ CPAC has no data to explain why the number of adolescents entering the system dropped off at age 15 but increased at age 16. This age group could be taking advantage of prevention services or were reluctant to leave the family home because of the pandemic.

Chart 7:
Ages of children entering out-of-home placement for the first time 2015 – 2020 (calendar year)

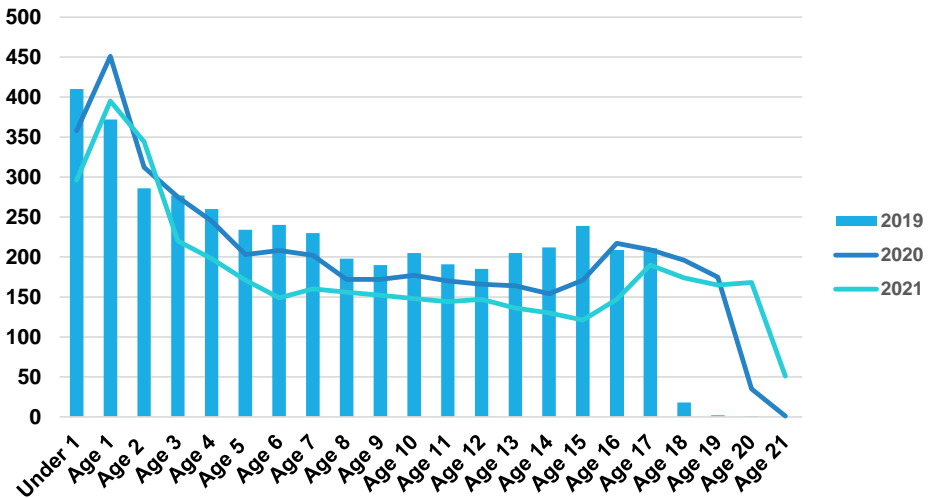


Source: New Jersey Child Welfare Data Hub. Entering placement reports.



Chart 8:

Ages of children and youth with court involvement entering out-of-home placement in 2021 vs. 2020 and 2019 (court year)



Source: New Jersey Child Welfare Data Hub. Entering placement reports.



Maltreatment occurred to less than one percent of children who remained in the home six months after a substantiated abuse or neglect finding

Maltreatment is a broad term that can include physical, sexual, psychological abuse and neglect. The next table and chart provide information about the number of children over a five-year period statewide with a substantiated report who remained in their homes and who were then subjected to maltreatment again after the initial abuse and neglect finding. The DCF defines a “substantiated” investigative finding as “a preponderance of the evidence establishes that a child is an abused or neglected child as defined by statute; and either the investigation indicates the existence of any of the absolute conditions; or substantiation is warranted based on consideration of the aggravating and mitigating factors.”

Table 4 compares the total number of children served by the CP&P with an in-home living arrangement on the last day of the calendar year with the children who were subsequently maltreated at six month and 12-month intervals.

Chart 9 shows that the number of children maltreated at six and at 12 months has steadily declined since 2015 before plateauing in 2019. The decline resumed during the first six months of 2021 when New Jersey began easing up COVID-19-related restrictions. The plateau could be a consequence of fewer in-person visits by caseworkers due to COVID-19 and the drop in reporting from formal sources.

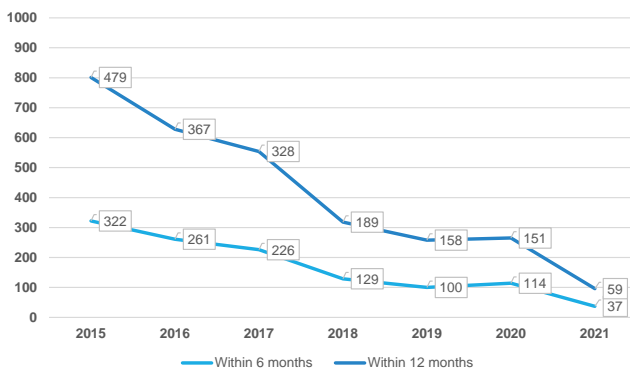


Table 4:
Maltreatment in the home (point in time)
following a substantiated finding

Last Day of Calendar Year	Total Number of Children Served by the CP&P Living in the Home	Percentage Maltreated at 6 Months	Percentage Maltreated at 12 Months
2015	41,712	.6%	.9%
2016	41,386	.5%	.8%
2017	42,180	.3%	.4%
2018	42,918	.2%	.4%
2019	40,174	.3%	.4%
2020	27,332	.1%	.2%

Source: New Jersey Child Welfare Data Hub. All children served by CP&P (in-home/out-of-home) and maltreatment in home.

Chart 9:
Total number of children maltreated after beginning in-home services



Source: New Jersey Child Welfare Data Hub. All children served by CP&P (in-home/out-of-home) and maltreatment in home. Children Exiting Out of Home Placement.



Youth with lived experience empowered to improve foster care for themselves and peers

The term “youth voice” describes a strategy in which young people are authentically engaged in working toward changing the systems that directly affect their lives. Youth with lived experience offer a unique perspective that can improve the effectiveness of services (Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, 2012).

In December 2018, in a marked culture shift from traditional policy development where policy decisions are made by agency leadership, the DCF announced the creation of the Office of Family Voice (OFV), the first of its kind among public child welfare agencies nationwide. The office would serve as liaison to program participants and facilitate opportunities for those with lived experience to participate in policy transformation. The OFV has since recruited current and former foster youth and fathers to share their experiences and perspectives, provide feedback on policies and practices, and suggest new approaches for meeting the needs of those involved in the system. It also created a Youth Council and, in 2020, the Wisdom Council, comprised of families with lived experience receiving services from the CP&P and the DCF Children’s System of Care (CSOC).

OFV’s progress was featured in NJ CPAC’s May 2021 webinar *Families and Youth: We Have a Voice!*



Strategic alliances formed to better serve the needs of the most vulnerable

In 2018, NJ CPAC sponsored an all-day conference to explore how stakeholders can develop and strengthen partnerships to eliminate barriers and gaps in services and better serve the needs of children and families. A key takeaway was the need for improved coordination and the elimination of county borders as barriers to providing services to children in foster care, unhoused caregivers and aging-out youth. NJ CPAC is pleased that the DCF is actively forming alliances to reform, improve and expand its service offerings and delivery.

For example, the DCF, through CSOC, in 2019 began working with PerformCare, a national, full-service behavioral health managed care company, to coordinate and provide behavioral health, intellectual/developmental disability services and substance use treatment for New Jersey parents, caregivers and youth.

In September 2020, the DCF announced its participation in LifeSet™, a nationally recognized, evidenced-informed social services intervention program of Youth Villages providing older youth in foster care between the ages of 17 through 22 with comprehensive, individualized support as they transition from the state system to adult independence.



Fewer young adults with court involvement received DCF services

Prior to the pandemic, older youth who did not attain permanency were offered opportunities to continue to receive services past the age of 18. Some did so because of severe emotional and/or complex physical needs. Others were enrolled in college or vocational training. Some found adulthood without financial and other supports too difficult. Table 5 shows that the number of youth over the age of 18 receiving services has decreased since 2019.

Table 5:

Number of young adults over the age of 18 involved in the courts receiving DCF support and/or services (court year)

Age	2019	2020	2021
18	249	207	174
19	208	193	165
20	211	175	168
21	18	33	51
22	2	1	8
23	0	0	0
24	1	0	0
Total	689	609	566

Source: AOC. CPR Reports. Age at Time of Placement for Minors with Active Cases, Court Years 2019, 2020 and 2021.



Of children and youth with active and pending FC cases in 2021, most were Black

The CICIC compares the share of children and youth in different race and ethnicity categories to the state's total population to better understand why Black children are four times as likely as White children to enter out-of-home placement in New Jersey and conversely, why some races and ethnicities are rarely reported to the SCR for abuse and neglect allegations.

According to the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS), using data available from the National Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect, in 2020 Black children comprised about 42 percent of the total number of New Jersey children in out-of-home placement, despite Black residents occupying about 15 percent of the state's total population. In 2020, White children accounted for approximately 27 percent in out-of-home placement in New Jersey while a much higher percentage (72 percent) comprised the total population.



Most children in foster care experienced no prior out-of-home placements as of June 30, 2021 (point in time)

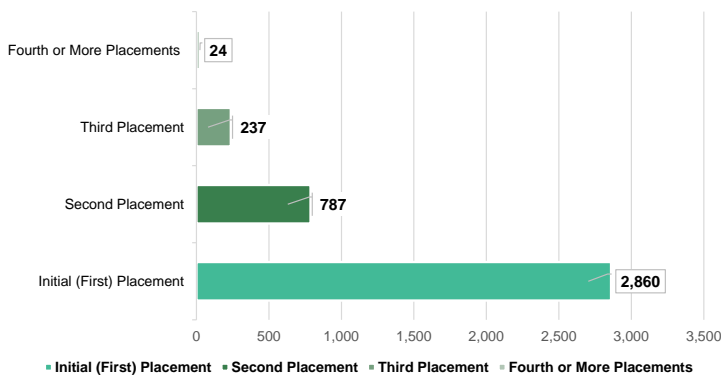
The first placement with a family member (kin placement) or a resource family (stranger placement) is considered the initial placement. State law* defines “repeated” placement as occurring when a child placed by the CP&P with a resource parent/family is returned to the biological parent, or reunified, and then is again removed from the home into placement. Each time a child is returned into resource family care, the CP&P must count the placement as a new placement.

Chart 10 provides a snapshot of the number of placements experienced by New Jersey children and youth in out-of-home placement with active and pending cases on Dec. 30, 2021. For instance, on that date, 2,860 children were experiencing their first placement and 787 were experiencing their second placement. For the first time in at least six years, no child or youth was experiencing their fifth placement.

According to a 2018 brief by Casey Family Programs, a national foundation focused on foster care and child welfare, placement instability has a negative impact on safety, permanency and well-being. There are various explanations as to why a child could have repeated placements. A parent or family member might need more time to address the issues that lead to the initial placement. A child might be older, part of a large sibling group, experiencing difficulties forming meaningful relations and other emotional challenges related to the trauma of removal, or have complex mental and physical needs requiring intensive services.

Caseworker turnover during critical junctures also has been linked to placement instability, according to 2016 research by the Journal of Public Welfare cited by Case. The impact of COVID-19 on staff turnover and the ability of agencies to hire qualified employees to backfill vacancies, especially for positions requiring person-to-person contact, is a concern of NJ CPAC. However, there is no known solution amid a national pandemic.

Chart 10:
Number of placements experienced by children as of June 30, 2020 (point in time)



Source: AOC. CPR Reports. Minors repeating in placement. Webfocusprod.courts.judiciary.state.nj.us.

* N.J.S.A.30:4C-53.2 - Definition of "repeated placement in resource family care", "placed again into resource family care." For purposes of P.L. 1991, c. 448 (C. 30:4C-53.1 et seq.), the terms "repeated placement into resource family care" and "placed again into resource family care" shall apply to a child who has been placed in the custody of the Division of Child Protection and Permanency for placement in resource family care by the Family Part of the Chancery Division of the Superior Court or as a result of a voluntary placement agreement pursuant to P.L.1974, c.119 (C.9:6-8.21 et seq.), released into the custody of the child's parents or legally responsible guardian at the conclusion of the placement and is once again temporarily removed from the child's place of residence and placed under the division's care and supervision.



Table 6:
Active and pending FC cases by race/ethnicity

County	Black	White	Hispanic	Asian/ Pacific Islander	Not Stated	Other
Atlantic	178	197	2	7	0	1
Bergen	50	76	51	5	1	0
Burlington	106	174	3	2	0	0
Camden	453	366	8	6	0	0
Cape May	44	88	4	0	0	0
Cumberland	95	174	38	0	0	2
Essex	725	81	98	3	0	4
Gloucester	115	237	12	2	0	5
Hudson	164	74	111	5	0	1
Hunterdon	3	11	3	1	0	1
Mercer	265	88	51	0	0	1
Middlesex	100	186	18	13	0	7
Monmouth	91	138	28	1	0	0
Morris	21	72	14	2	0	2
Ocean	71	234	6	1	0	9
Passaic	130	177	30	1	0	0
Salem	38	68	0	1	0	0
Somerset	26	31	4	0	0	2
Sussex	5	58	2	0	0	0
Union	196	99	32	0	0	3
Warren	10	61	0	0	0	0
Total	2,886	2,690	515	50	1	38

Source: AOC. CPR Reports. By Race. webfocusprod.courts.judiciary.state.nj.us.



More children spent less than two years in out-of-home placement in 2021

**Table 7:
Time spent in out-of-home placement by county
as of June 30, 2021**

County	0 – Six Months	1 Year or Less	2 Years or Less	3 Years or Less	4 Years or Less	5 Years or Less	6 Years or Less
Atlantic	47	59	68	32	15	15	28
Bergen	17	5	23	21	11	7	18
Burlington	34	38	42	28	14	5	15
Camden	133	88	146	95	26	8	36
Cape May	16	18	21	12	7	6	3
Cumberland	24	22	43	27	19	10	8
Essex	65	53	130	124	88	34	90
Gloucester	35	34	59	43	23	19	24
Hudson	32	27	72	40	23	14	31
Hunterdon	2	2	7	3	2	0	2
Mercer	29	30	63	55	35	20	47
Middlesex	48	39	66	45	21	3	22
Monmouth	35	30	37	21	20	6	23
Morris	5	17	13	7	14	2	11
Ocean	32	14	49	60	24	6	26
Passaic	51	40	59	26	23	10	20
Salem	15	7	11	15	7	3	5
Somerset	5	4	10	12	0	4	7
Sussex	6	3	11	1	2	2	3
Union	30	17	54	38	33	6	37
Warren	7	10	6	6	2	1	0
Total	668	557	990	711	409	181	456

Source: AOC. CPR Reports. Length of Time in Placement. webfocusprod.courts.judiciary.state.nj.us.



Most children exiting out-of-home placement were reunited with their parent or adopted

The table below provides the reasons all children and youth were “discharged” and exited out-of-home placement in calendar year 2020, regardless of the time spent in placement or number of placements. Unification with the parent, formerly referred to as “reunification,” is the primary goal in most cases. Most children were either reunited with families or placed with a family member or someone who has a relationship with the family and/or child on discharge.

To protect the privacy of children and families represented, data on the number of children who died while under DCF supervision is stated as 10 or less. The New Jersey Child Fatality and Near Fatality Review Board, established by the New Jersey Comprehensive Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CCAPTA), reviews child fatalities and near fatalities to identify causes, relationships to governmental support systems, and to better understand how to prevent them.

Table 8:

Reasons why children and youth left out-of-home placement

Reason for discharge	Number
Reunification	1,123
Living with relatives	166
Kinship Legal Guardianship	165
Adoption	711
Reach age of majority	146
Custody transferred to another agency	27
Runaway	13
Child death	10 or less
Other	10 or less

Source: New Jersey Child Welfare Data Hub. Children Exiting Out of Home Placement.



Backlog of cases persisted

Court backlog refers to cases which are pending before the court. For FC (child placement review) cases, the Judiciary uses the case-processing goal of 12 months from the initial placement to the child’s permanency hearing. At the permanency hearing, the CP&P will present a plan for the child’s permanent placement.

The plan could involve returning the child to the parent, terminating the parent’s parental rights or placement with kin. Table 9 (on page 42) shows the total number of FC cases by county failing to meet the 12-month standard. Mercer, Passaic and Union counties had the largest numbers of cases in backlog.

While no child should wait longer than necessary to live in a safe and permanent home, NJ CPAC recognizes that judges and staff have been operating under challenging and dynamic circumstances posed by COVID-19. We commend family court judges for their ongoing commitment to adapt new approaches, make personal sacrifices and take action to continue the work of the courts.

Without their dedication and efforts, coupled with the decision to keep the courts open, backlog totals would be higher.

Table 9:
Backlog of CPR Cases (FC Cases) by county 2020 vs. 2021

County	Number of Backlog Cases 2020	Number of Backlog Cases 2021
Atlantic	0	0
Bergen	0	2
Burlington	0	0
Camden	0	0
Cape May	0	0
Cumberland	4	0
Essex	0	0
Gloucester	1	0
Hudson	0	0
Hunterdon	0	0
Mercer	8	26
Middlesex	5	0
Monmouth	2	2
Morris	0	0
Ocean	1	0
Passaic	20	30
Salem	0	0
Somerset	0	0
Sussex	0	0
Union	1	13
Warren	0	0
Total	45	76

Source: AOC. webfocusprod.courts.judiciary.state.nj.us.



More Children placed with Kin

More than a decade ago, the DCF shifted its practice and decision making, favoring maintaining children safely in their own homes when possible. When children are deemed safe in the home, the CP&P will create a safety protection plan and work with the family to stabilize and maintain the child in their home.

When situations arise and a child can no longer safely reside with their birth parent/legal guardian, the CP&P will first look for relatives and family friends who may be familiar to the child to provide care. Relatives and family friends are usually known to a child and, according to the Annie Casey Foundation, can often help ease the trauma of separating from a birth parent by providing a safe, nurturing environment. The next diagram provides insight into the extent New Jersey grandparents, relatives and family friends are providing care to children unable live with their birth parents.

There will always be a need for resource parents able to take in large sibling groups, children exposed to communicable diseases, and children with severe behavioral, mental and developmental needs above what a family member is able or willing to provide.





Kinship Care in New Jersey on Sept. 30, 2019 (point in time)

1,834

Number of children in foster care whose most recent placement was relative foster parent

12.6 months

Average length of time living with current relative foster family

45%

Of children adopted from foster care, percent adopted by relatives (includes stepparents)

33%

Percent of children in foster care whose most recent placement was relative foster family

4%

Households with a grandparent living with a grandchild¹

Sources: www.datatrends.org obtained with permission from the National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect reporting period (October 1, 2018 – September 30, 2019) and 1 US Census Community Survey.



CPR Board Activities for Court Year 2021 Facts and Figures

CPR board initial reviews

When a court finds that a child should be placed outside the home, the child's case is subject to a review by the CPR board 60 days after the child is placed, which is known as a CPR initial review. CPR boards can conduct additional reviews for children who have been voluntarily placed, but data related to such reviews are not included in this report because they are rare.

CPR is a statewide program. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, CPR board volunteers met at local courthouses in every vicinage at least once a month to review cases and prepare recommendations for family court judges.

Prior to a scheduled initial review, the CP&P determines if the child's family home is safe and whether in-home services are appropriate. As more children receive in-home services to avoid the psychological and emotional consequences and possible developmental delays associated with the trauma of family separation, the number of children entering out-of-home placement and the number of 60-day initial reviews conducted statewide have proportionately declined.

Table 10:
Summary of CPR board activities 2016 through 2020

Court Year	CPR Board Meetings	Initial CPR Board Reviews
2017	342	2,831
2018	368	3,159
2019	353	2,327
2020	351	1,172
2021	308	926

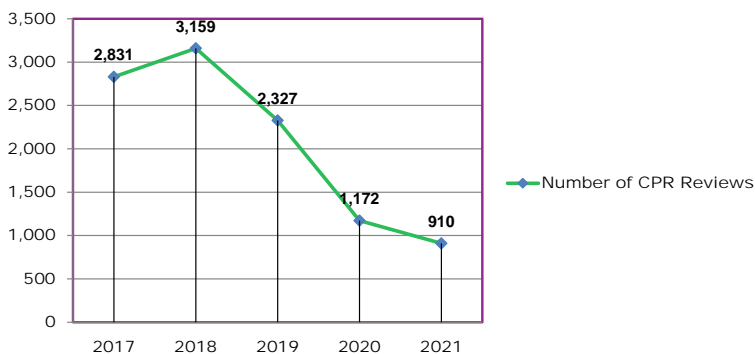
Source: AOC. CPR Reports. webfocusprod.courts.judiciary.state.nj.us.



Total number of initial reviews

The following chart captures the decrease in the number of cases reviewed statewide by CPR boards.

Chart 11:
Number of CPR board reviews 2017 through 2021



Source: AOC. CPR Reports. webfocusprod.courts.judiciary.state.nj.us.

Impact of the pandemic on CPR Board Activities

The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic during the first quarter of 2020 resulted in a virtual shutdown of the state and a rapid shift in court operations as New Jersey undertook action to mitigate its spread. CPR boards stopped meeting in-person to conduct CPR initial reviews. Some vicinages turned to conducting reviews remotely using the approved checklist and recommendation forms. For vicinages unable to conduct virtual reviews, judges reviewed cases of children, likely folding the review into hearings and other court proceedings, though NJ CPAC has no data to support this.

Throughout CY 2021, CPR reviews were held using an amalgam of arrangements to avoid delays in permanency and disruptions of services. NJ CPAC has no data on how many meetings and/or reviews were held by CPR boards versus judges.



The table on the next page shows that the total number of CPR board meetings increased in CY 2021. This is likely the result of board meetings being held throughout the year in a virtual format. The number of CPR board reviews decreased significantly from 2020 to 2021.

All counties except for Middlesex County held fewer reviews. The low number of meetings and reviews in Essex County is worrisome, as Essex typically has among the highest number of out-of-home placement cases. Warren County, which typically has among the fewest cases, also is suspect, as it held six meetings but conducted no reviews.

Such disparities could be due to how vicinages are inputting reviews by judges. There could be other factors involved. The AOC is working with the counties to eliminate future discrepancies.



Table 10:
***Number of CPR board cases reviewed by county
in 2021 vs. 2020***

County	2020 CPR Board Reviews	2021 CPR Board Reviews	+/-
Atlantic	108	68	-40
Bergen	51	26	-25
Burlington	83	77	-6
Camden	269	262	-7
Cape May	34	22	-12
Cumberland	114	35	-79
Essex	181	5	-176
Gloucester	117	81	-36
Hudson	95	12	-83
Hunterdon	7	3	-4
Mercer	101	31	-70
Middlesex	68	73	+5
Monmouth	94	59	-35
Morris	27	26	-1
Ocean	116	45	-71
Passaic	81	55	-26
Salem	38	7	-31
Somerset	6	1	-5
Sussex	36	12	-24
Union	70	10	-60
Warren	16	0	-16
Total	1,712	910	-802

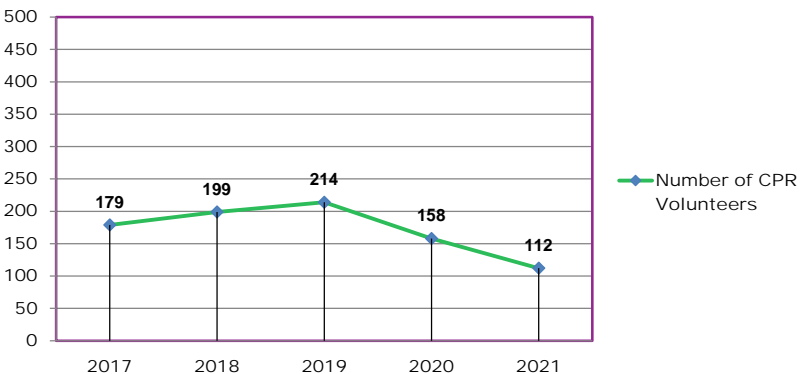
Source: AOC. CPR Reports. webfocusprod.courts.judiciary.state.nj.us.



Total number of CPR board volunteers

The total number of CPR board volunteers dropped from 2019 levels by nearly 50 percent. Of the 111 volunteers, 72 reported as White, 15 reported as Black and 2 as Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander; the remaining volunteers did not provide race/ethnicity.

Chart 12:
Number of CPR board volunteers 2015 through 2021



Source: AOC. Volunteer Information Processing System (VIPS) Reports Count of Active Volunteers by Program and County.

Mandated Requirements for CPR Boards

To meet the mandated requirements of the CPR Act, a county must have at least one CPR board for approximately every 200 reviews held during the previous year and at least five court-appointed volunteers on a board.

These requirements were established in the late 1970's when no one foresaw a once-in-a-century global pandemic that greatly disrupted numerous aspects of conducting reviews. CPR volunteers are subject to criminal background checks and fingerprinting every three years to be reappointed, which made it difficult for court staff in some vicinages to ensure the accuracy of volunteer data, while courthouses remained closed to visitors in accordance with state health and safety guidelines.

Table 12:
Statutory Requirements v. 2021 performance

County	Reviews by CPR Boards 2020	Minimum CPR Boards Required 2021	Actual CPR Boards 2021	Met Mandated Minimum Number of CPR Boards 2021	Minimum CPR Volunteers Required 2021	Actual CPR Volunteers 2021	Met Mandated Minimum Number of CPR Volunteers 2021
Atlantic	68	1	1	✓	5	1	
Bergen	26	1	1	✓	5	11	✓
Burlington	77	1	1	✓	5	6	✓
Camden	262	2	2	✓	10	1	
Cape May	22	1	1	✓	5	4	
Cumberland	35	1	1	✓	5	9	✓
Essex	5	1	2	✓	5	8	✓
Gloucester	81	1	1	✓	5	17	✓
Hudson	12	1	1	✓	5	1	
Hunterdon	3	1	1	✓	5	2	
Mercer	31	1	1	✓	5	7	✓
Middlesex	73	1	1	✓	5	5	✓
Monmouth	59	1	1	✓	5	6	✓
Morris	26	1	1	✓	5	5	✓
Ocean	45	1	1	✓	5	5	✓
Passaic	55	1	1	✓	5	4	
Salem	7	1	1	✓	5	8	✓
Somerset	1	1	1	✓	5	2	
Sussex	12	1	1	✓	5	4	
Union	10	1	1	✓	5	4	
Warren	0	1	1	✓	5	2	
Total	910	22	23		110	112	

Source: AOC. CPR Activity and Volunteer Information Processing System (VIPS) Reports Run 8.14.20 and information provided by the counties in FACTs 10.22.21.



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JANUARY 2023