



Annual Report

Court Year 2021-2022





“After 20 years of hard work, we have reformed our system from one lacking basic structure, statewide coordination, and adequate resources to a national leader among child- and family-serving systems.”

*DCF Commissioner
Beyer Budget Testimony
May 2022*

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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
William T. Noll	Monmouth County
Susan Rodgers (Nominating Chair)	Mercer County

Honorary

Darrell L. Armstrong	Mercer County
Greg Rapport	Mercer County



“True progress demands a collaborative partnership that takes advantage of the best resources our community has to offer.”

*AOC Director, Glenn A. Grant
Budget Testimony
April 2022*



Letter from the Chair

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

On behalf of the New Jersey Child Placement Advisory Council (NJ CPAC) I am honored to present this annual report.

NJ CPAC's report must, by state statute, focus on the Division of Child Protection and Permanency (CP&P) child welfare practices and policies as they relate to the care and placement of abused and neglected children. This report highlights the progress the CP&P has made and challenges met during Court Year 2022 (July 1, 2021 - June 30, 2022) in attaining safe, healthy and permanent homes for children and youth and NJ CPAC's recommendations for improvement summarized on page 10. Data on a range of social, health and economic issues associated with placement are also included in addition to data on CPR board activities.

NJ CPAC is pleased to report that New Jersey continues to make improvements in meeting the needs of children and families despite the obstacles presented by the pandemic. However, the historic and continuing shortage of judges has resulted in unacceptable delays in divorce proceedings and consequently placed families' lives in limbo. NJ CPAC fully backs calls by Chief Justice Stuart Rabner, and Glenn A. Grant, J.A.D., Acting Administrative Director of the Courts, and others to quickly nominate and confirm qualified candidates.

NJ CPAC would like to acknowledge the stressful and often heartbreaking work performed by child welfare workers in our state, every day. Their role is part of a wider system that protects and supports New Jersey's most vulnerable. Police, agencies, therapists, providers, physicians, nurses, law guardians, advocates, teachers, judges and more also make important contributions. It is imperative that they, and all parts of the system, continue to build alliances, work collaboratively, stay informed of developments and listen to the people and communities they serve to build public trust in our institutions.

Lorene S. Wilkerson

Chair

New Jersey Child Placement Advisory Council (NJ CPAC)



NJ CPAC Collaborative Partnerships and Memberships

All NJ CPAC executive board members are required to volunteer on their county CPR boards. Board members also volunteer in other capacities for the children and families of New Jersey.

NJ CPAC Chair **Lorene S. Wilkerson**, represents NJ CPAC on the New Jersey Task Force on Child Abuse and Neglect (NJTFCAN) and its protection subcommittee. She also represents NJ CPAC on the Children in Court Improvement Committee (CICIC), where she is a member of the CICIC Race Equity Subcommittee and Three Plus Years Working Group, addressing children in placement for more than three years. Wilkerson is the co-chair of the newly incorporated Anti-Racist Mental Health Alliance of New Jersey (ARMHA-NJ), whose mission is to address the racial inequities in the mental health field and society at large in New Jersey.

NJ CPAC Vice Chair **Eunice I. Salton** is a dispute resolution specialist who serves as a mediator, arbitrator and conflict coach in the New Jersey and New York State courts. In New York, she arbitrates in the New York State Part 137 Attorney-Client Fee Resolution Program and mediates in the New York Federal Executive Board Shared Neutrals Program and in the Dispute the Community Dispute Resolutions Centers (CDRC) in Brooklyn, Queens, Long Island and Manhattan. In New Jersey, she mediates in the municipal courts in Middlesex County and serves on the District Ethics Committee (VII) for Middlesex County. Additionally, she is a liaison to the United Nations representing Mediators Beyond Borders International (MBBI), where she is a member of the United Nations Multilateral Working Group (UNMWG) which plans programs for the annual meetings of the Commission on the Status of Women and the High-Level Political Forum.

Lila Bernstein retired in 2022 from NJ CPAC, which she chaired in 2004 and 2005, and the Morris County CPR board, where she was a long-time member. In addition to leading various NJ CPAC committees and initiatives, she also volunteered with fellow NJ CPAC member Frank Petrucci on Essex Model Courts and for numerous organizations and causes in Morris and Essex counties.

Susan Lubalin is a rotarian with the Rotary Club of the Caldwells where she was awarded the Spirit of Service Award of Excellence for 2021-2022. As the lead chair for the sponsorship committee, she helped raise more than \$111,000 in 2022 and more than \$106,000 in 2021 for the Rotary/Kiwanis Caldwell Street Fair. She is on the board of trustees for the Essex Valley School in West Caldwell and the chair of its Strategic Task Force Committee.

Frank Petrucci has been actively involved in the CPR program and NJ CPAC since the late 1970s. Through his volunteer work on Essex Model Courts and with Special Olympics he inspires others to create inclusive and accepting communities.

Colleen McKenna Tucker has been a member of the Hudson County CPR Board since 2004 and served as chair from 2008 through 2017. She has been a member of NJ CPAC since 2021. She works full-time in New York City as the executive director of the International Insurance Society.

Greg Rapport is an honorary member of NJ CPAC and the founder and executive director of the Age-Out Foundation. He hosts the live Age-Out Radio program which reaches thousands of listeners across the nation weekly on issues related to foster care with a focus on youth aging out of the system. Prior to the pandemic, he volunteered on the Mercer County organizations Capitol Cities Youth Violence Coalition, Trenton Youth Investment Council and Trenton Area Stakeholders.



Summary of NJ CPAC Recommendations

This report fulfills the mandate of the New Jersey Child Placement Advisory Council (NJ CPAC) under the 1978 NJ Child Placement Review Act to provide an annual report to the Supreme Court, governor and legislature. It measures New Jersey's performance pertaining to children in out-of-home placement, commonly known as foster care, during court year (CY) July 1, 2021 – June 30, 2022.

This report contains the following key recommendations:

1. Disassociate family poverty and associated economic circumstances from child neglect.
2. Consider mandatory training for resource parents on how to recognize early warning signs that a child or adolescent under their care might need mental health services.
3. Investigate why children return home 30 days or less after removal from the family home.



Trends in New Jersey Foster Care Facts, Figures and Analyses

NJ CPAC, along with CPR boards, are conduits for informed public input and provide an objective perspective on the efficacy of New Jersey state's child protection and welfare policies, programs, practices and programs.

NJ CPAC relies on data from the Judiciary, the Department of Children and Families (DCF) and other government sources to identify issues and trends and form its recommendations. Data provided by the Judiciary is presented by court year, July 1, 2021 – June 30, 2022, unless otherwise indicated. All other sources are presented by calendar year, Jan. 1, 2021 – Dec. 31, 2022, unless otherwise indicated.

Increase in number of calls to the abuse and neglect hotline.

Most child abuse and neglect cases enter New Jersey’s child welfare system with a call to the state hotline. According to the CP&P data portal of the NJ Child Welfare Data Hub – Rutgers, in 2022 New Jersey’s centralized child abuse hotline (also known as the State Central Registry, or SCR) received 90,950 calls related to child abuse and neglect. That was compared to 84,162 in 2021 and 73,726 in 2020.

All New Jersey residents, having reasonable cause to believe that a child is abused or in danger of abuse, are legally required to report this to the SCR. Therefore, the SCR has an essential role in ensuring that caseworkers who know how to respond to an abuse/neglect allegation are alerted. NJ CPAC recommends that the DCF regularly analyze call center metrics and keep current with new and emerging technologies for further improvements in call center screening efficiencies and performance.

When a caller alleges a child has been neglected/abused and/or could be at risk, the SCR prepares an abuse/neglect report. The report could include information on one or more allegation types: emotional abuse, neglect, physical abuse and/or sexual abuse. It could also include information about prior calls to the SCR involving the child and/or family and if the family has multiple children living in the home. The SCR’s report is transmitted to a local CP&P county office.

The CP&P is New Jersey’s multi-faceted child protection and welfare agency. It is a division within the DCF. Ensuring safety for children and families is its core mission, though in recent years it has moved away from traditional child protection services to proactive family strengthening efforts.

In An Average Week in New Jersey

1,883 babies are born.	179 babies are born preterm. (less than 36 weeks of pregnancy)
150 babies are born with low birthweight.	1,417 women receive adequate prenatal care.

Source: March of Dimes Report Card, Nov. 2022



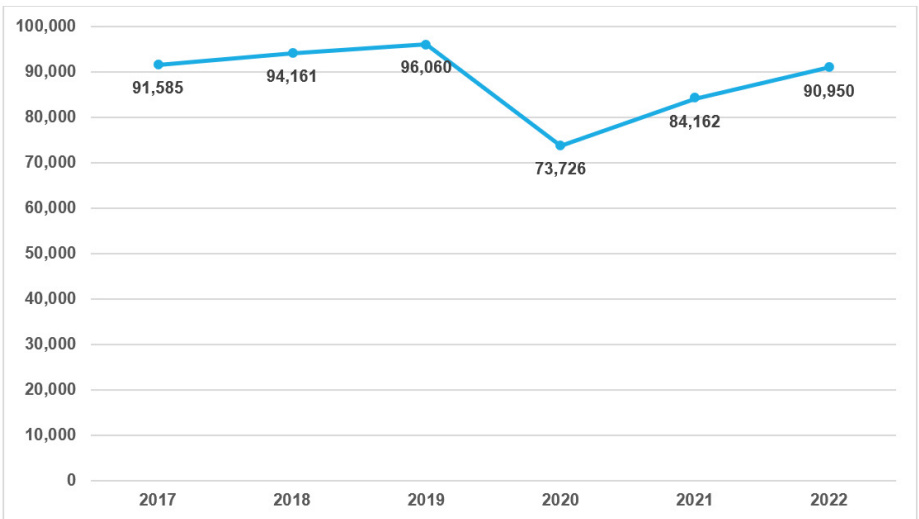
Increase in number of children referred to CP&P for an abuse/neglect investigation.

When a CP&P local office receives an abuse/neglect referral from the SCR alleging the child is in imminent harm, it opens a case and initiates an investigation (www.nj.gov/dcf).

All 21 counties have at least one local CP&P office responsible for investigating if abuse/neglect has occurred, if there is imminent risk of abuse/neglect, and whether the child and/or the child’s family can be served with in-home services.

Chart 1 shows that the total number of referrals to a CP&P local office reversed course in calendar 2019 and began to decline. The total reached the lowest point in 2020, the first year of the pandemic, before resuming its upward trend in 2021. In 2022 the number of referrals had not reached pre-pandemic levels. Totals are for the total number of child abuse/neglect reports assigned to CP&P offices statewide and do not include reports/referrals assigned to other entities within the DCF.

Chart 1:
Number of abuse/neglect referrals received by CP&P



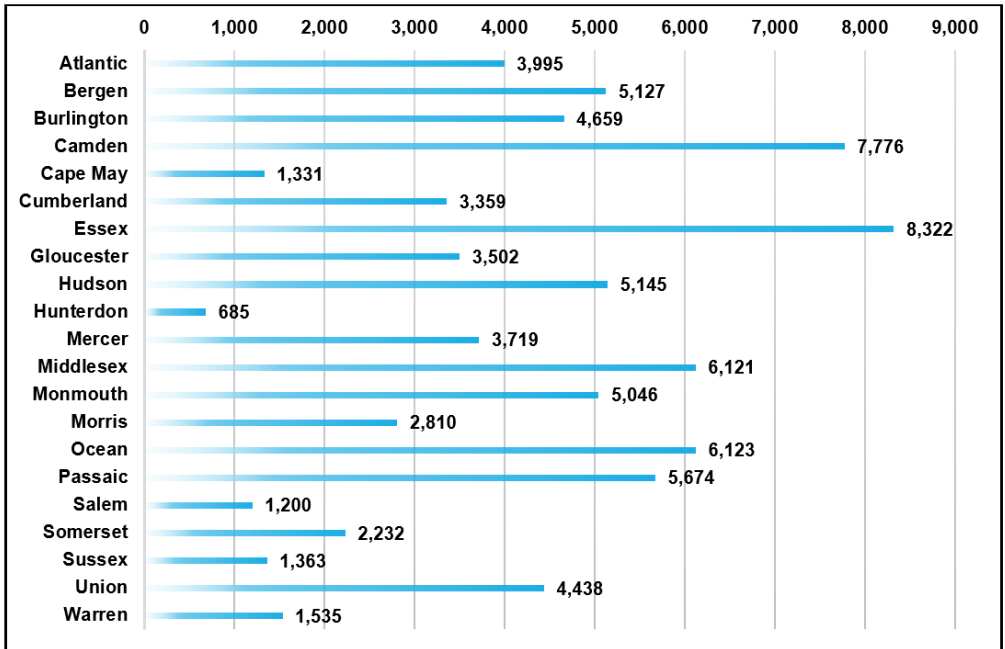
Source: New Jersey Child Welfare Data Hub. All CPS & CWS referrals.



Essex county received the most referrals requiring further investigation.

The chart below captures the total number of abuse and neglect referrals from the SCR to each county in calendar year 2021. Essex County, followed by Camden and Ocean counties, received the most referrals.

***Chart 2:
Number of abuse/neglect referrals
received by CP&P offices in 2021***



Source: NJ Child Welfare Data Hub. Total-hotline-referrals data.



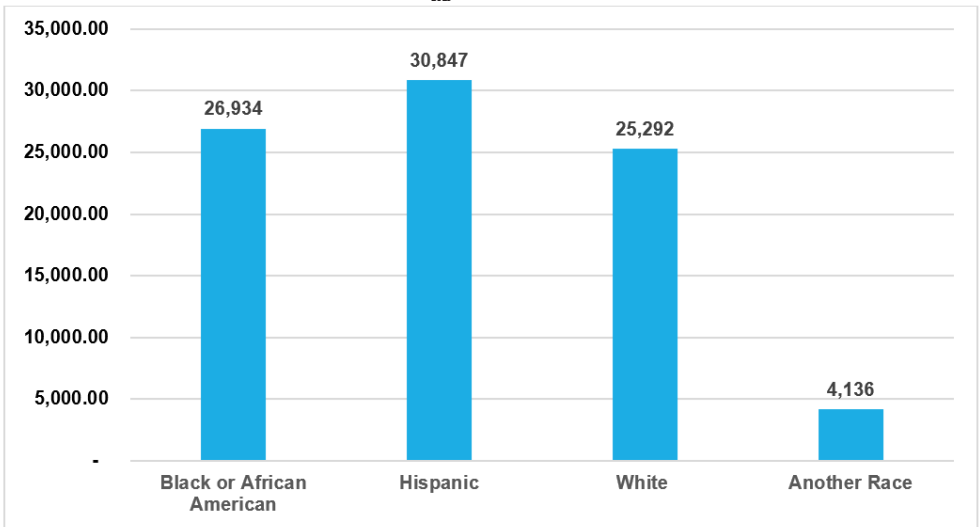
Children of color disproportionately represented in abuse/neglect investigations.

For decades, the federal agency overseeing and reporting on child welfare, the U.S. Children’s Bureau, has regularly reported that Black/African American children are far more likely than their White peers to be investigated as victims of abuse and neglect, removed from their homes, and permanently separated from their biological parents (www.acf.hhs.gov).

Chart 3 depicts by total number the race and ethnicity of New Jersey children and youth to the age of 17 investigated by the CP&P in 2022. According to 2022 New Jersey population estimates, persons under the age of 18 represented 21.5 percent of the total New Jersey population. (www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/NJ).

As previously reported by NJ CPAC, New Jersey is working to identify and eradicate racism through education and other means throughout the child abuse/neglect case continuum. Chart 3 is evidence that, despite efforts and intentions, disparities and disproportionalities remain.

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



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



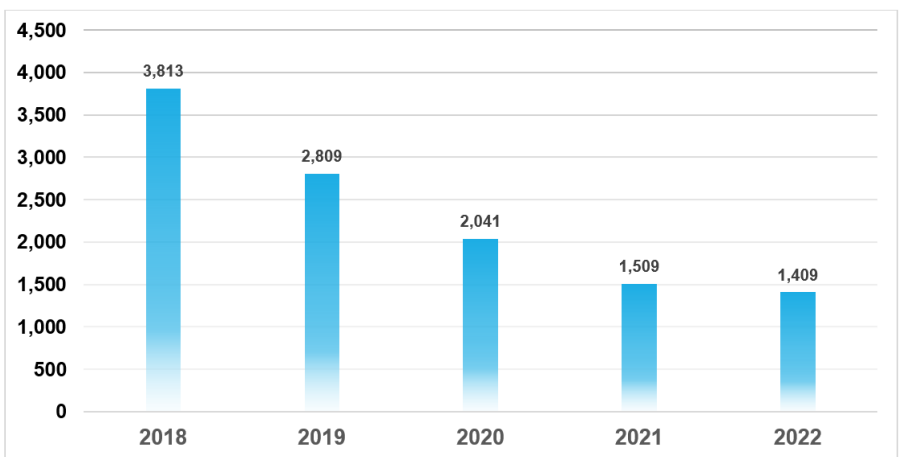
Further decline in number of children entering out-of-home (OOH) child welfare placement.

Extensive research supports separating a child from parents leads to detrimental, long-term psychological and behavioral consequences that could be worse than leaving the child at home. (Trivedi, S. University of Baltimore School of Law, *The Harm of Child Removal*, 2019)

Julio Mendez, retired assignment judge for the Atlantic/Cape May Vicinage, commented in a 2023 editorial published in the *Star Ledger* that “New Jersey’s child welfare system has made impressive progress and is becoming a national model.” He noted that the CP&P favors maintaining children safely in their own home, when possible. Chart 4 aligns with the DCF’s strategy. According to the DCF, New Jersey has the lowest removal rate in the country and in 2021, 50 percent fewer children entered foster care than in 2018. The number of new cases continued to decline in 2022.

In the New Jersey court system, a FC case is a CP&P case where the child is removed from their home and put in an OOH placement for assorted reasons, including allegations of abuse and neglect. A FC case is also referred to as a child placement review. Chart 4 totals are for initial OOH placements only and does not include children and youth who entered placement two or more times.

Chart 4: Number of new OOH placement (FC) cases



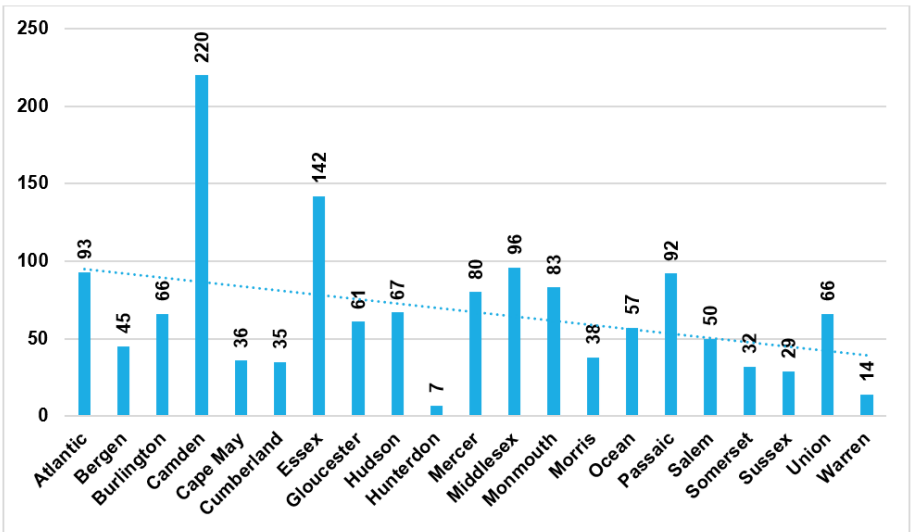
Source: AOC. New Filings Dashboard



Camden county experienced the most children entering OOH placement

Chart 5 provides a county breakdown of the total number of children and youth entering OOH placement in 2022. Camden County, followed by Essex and Middlesex counties, experienced the highest number of new OOH placement cases.

Chart 5:
Number of new OOH placement cases (FC docket) by county in 2022 (court year)



Source: AOC. New Filings Dashboard.



Most children entered OOH placement due to neglect

The CP&P's continuing efforts to provide in-home services and reduce OOH placements involves identifying, tracking and analyzing risk factors and circumstances contributing to a child's initial placement and/or reentry into the system.

There are multiple reasons why a child enters placement. Sixty days after a child is placed in OOH, CPR boards conduct reviews in order to provide a range of information to family court regarding the child's placement and barriers to finding the child a permanent home. The information is provided so that the courts can address each child's needs early in the case.

During the CPR initial review, CPR boards review assorted confidential records and documents, including the form used by the CP&P to notify the courts that a child has been placed out of their home (Directive 19-17: Child Placement Review (CPR) Program Revised Standards). Known as the Notice of Placement (NOP), the NOP contains complete, case-specific documentation regarding reasonable efforts to prevent the child's placement and why it is contrary to the welfare of the child to remain in the home. According to information documented by the CP&P on the NOP and captured by reports maintained by the AOC, most children entered OOH placement in 2022 because of neglect. A parent's substance use was the second most common reason.

Numerous theories and research show that poverty contributes to higher incidences of neglect, according to Children's Bureau; Annie E. Casey Foundation; Fong, Harvard University, 2016). Families experiencing economic hardships might struggle to meet a child's basic needs such as shelter, food, and medical care. New Jersey's child welfare community is working towards disentangling poverty from neglect. For example, the NJTFCAN studies how New Jersey can more effectively identify and respond to the needs of families and children presenting as neglect and works with its members to make and coordinate statewide improvements. The NJTFCAN also is revisiting the state's statutory definition of child neglect. The current definition (N.J.S.A. 9:6-8.21) encompasses a broad range of socio-economic circumstances that can increase a child's risk of being removed from the home, including inadequate food, housing and clothing.

Table 1:
***Fourteen Percent of NJ Children Under
the Age of Five Living in Poverty in 2020***

County	Total NJ Children Under the Age of Five	Total NJ Children Under Five Living in Poverty	Percentage of NJ Children Under Five Living in Poverty
Atlantic	14,124	3,335	23.6%
Bergen	48,651	3,098	6.4%
Burlington	22,124	2,418	10.9%
Camden	30,306	5,571	18.4%
Cape May	4,175	565	13.5%
Cumberland	9,485	1,820	19.2%
Essex	52,081	11,495	22.1%
Gloucester	15,072	1,287	8.5%
Hudson	46,174	1,697	16.7%
Hunterdon	5,049	190	3.8%
Mercer	20,595	3,802	18.5%
Middlesex	47,136	5,307	11.3%
Monmouth	30,447	2,333	7.7%
Morris	24,483	1,130	4.6%
Ocean	42,281	8,055	19.1%
Passaic	33,342	8,508	25.4%
Salem	3,325	842	25.3%
Somerset	16,891	1,018	6.0%
Sussex	6,529	383	6.1%
Union	34,760	4,321	12.4%
Warren	4,790	447	9.3%
Statewide Total	511,820	76,622	14.2%

Sources: NJ State Health Assessment Data (NJSHAD) - Children Under Five Years of Age Living in Poverty American Community Survey, U.S. Census 2020





“The data is clear – in order to give children the opportunity to thrive, we need to start with babies.”

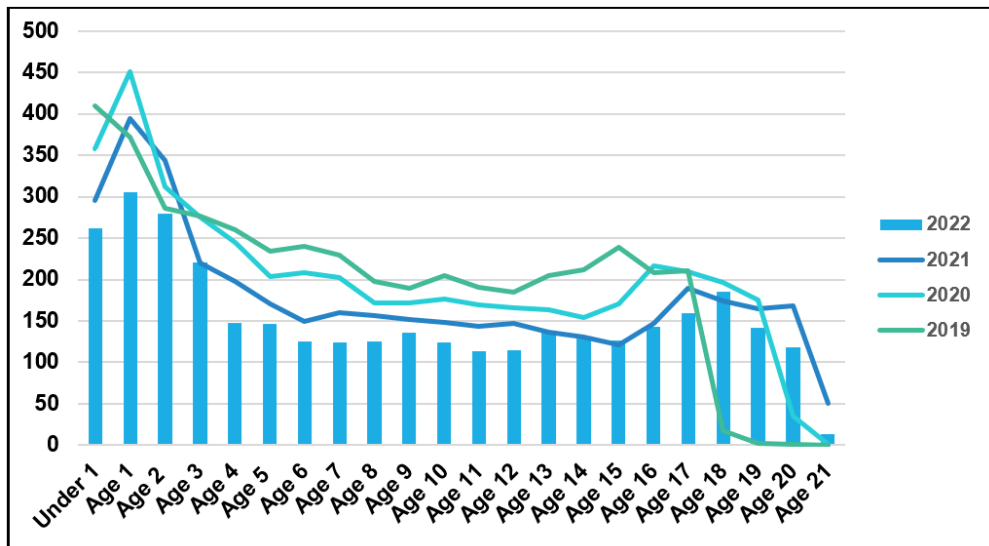
Cecilia Zalkind
Retired ACNJ President and CEO
May 2022

One-year old children accounted for most OOH placements

Court data shows that 1-year old children had more active cases pending before the court in 2022 than all other ages.

Chart 6:

Ages of children and youth with court involvement entering OOH placement in 2022 vs. 2021, 2020 and 2019 (court years)



Source: AOC. CPR Reports. Age at time of placement for minors with active cases, court years 2019 through 2022.

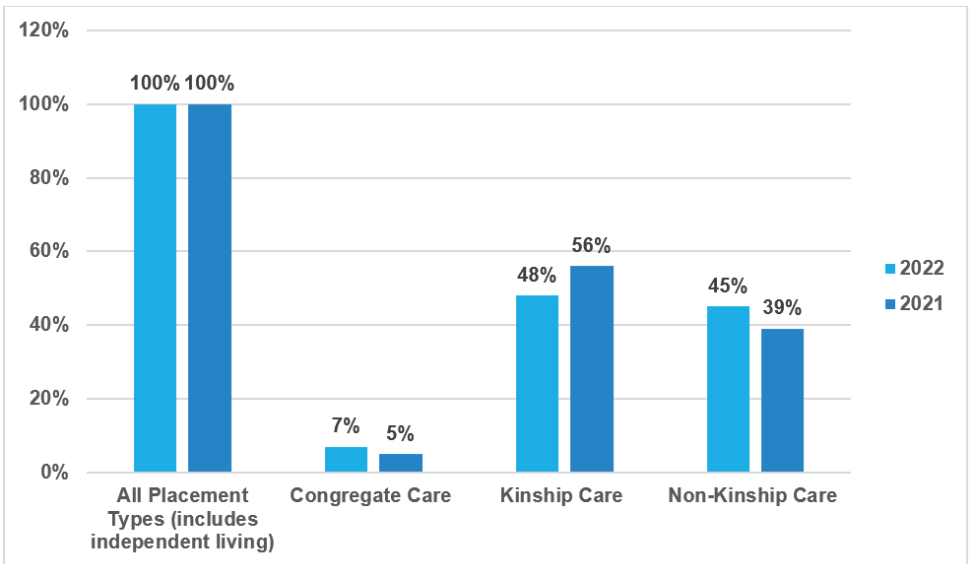
More than half of all children entering OOH placement for the first time placed with family members

Once the CP&P and the courts agree that OOH placement is necessary for the welfare of the child, efforts to identify a caregiver with a biological or legal relationship to the child, or who is psychologically connected to the child or the child’s parent, also known as kin, are made. This type of arrangement is known as a kinship placement (www.nj.gov/njfofosteradopt/kinship).

When the CP&P is unable to identify a kinship caregiver willing or able to take care of the child, CP&P will rely on licensed resource, or non-kinship parents (N.J.S.A.30:4C-26.4). Resource parents are commonly known as foster parents.

Chart 7 shows that in 2021 and 2022, most New Jersey children entering OOH placement for the first time were placed with kin or resource parents. Smaller percentages of children entering OOH placement for the first time were placed in congregate care or in an independent living arrangement. Congregate care, which includes supportive residential treatment facilities, accounted for less than 10 percent of total placements. Independent living arrangements for adolescents accounted for less than 1 percent of all placement types.

Chart 7:
Children entering OOH by placement type in 2022 vs. 2021 (first-time entries only).



Source: NJ Child Welfare Data Hub. Children entering out of home placement (first-time entry).



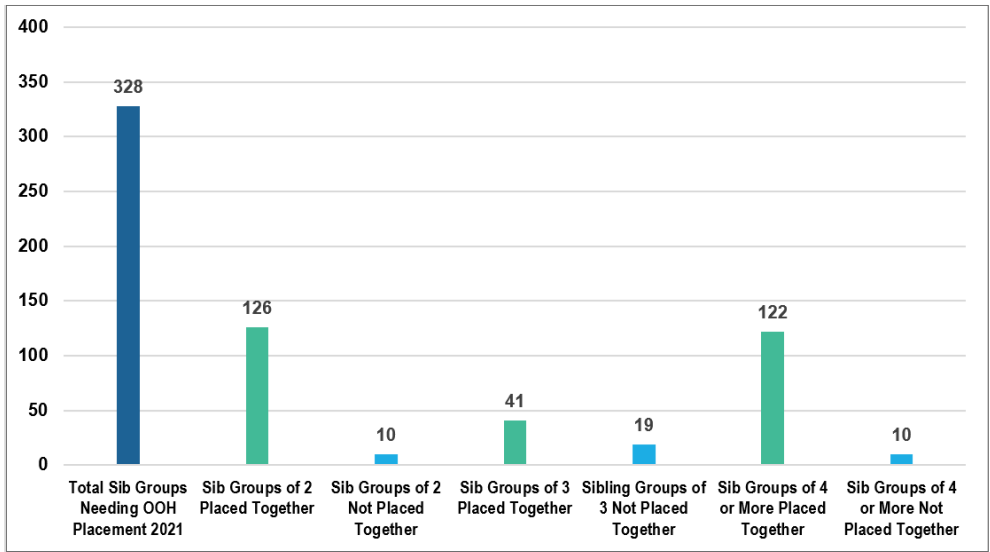
Most large sibling groups placed in resource homes

Chart 8 shows that the CP&P successfully placed 289 of 328 sibling groups, or children from the same family, with the same non-kin resource family. The DCF defines a successful sibling placement as placing a group of two or three siblings with the same provider. For a group of four or more siblings the DCF defines a successful placement when at least one sibling is placed with another.

The DCF updated its Foster and Adoptive Parent Diligent Recruitment Plan in 2021. The plan reaffirmed the DCF's commitment to recruit and retain resource and adoptive families reflecting the multi-cultural, racial, and ethnic diversity of the children and youth placed in their home. NJ CPAC does not have access to data showing that this is happening and to what extent. NJ CPAC endorses improved transparency.

NJ CPAC commends the DCF Office of Family Voice (OFV), the Youth Council and legislative sponsors Senate Majority Leader Teresa Ruiz, Senator Joseph Vitale, and Assemblywomen Gabriela Mosquera, Carol Murphy and, Lisa Swain for recognizing the importance of sibling relationships when crafting the Siblings' Rights Bill. NJ CPAC especially applauds the Youth Council, which brought this issue to the legislative forefront in 2020 and worked to ensure the bill included language related to siblings having a voice in each other's permanency planning and placement.

Chart 8:
Placement of siblings (sib) groups in 2021



Source: NJ Child Welfare Data Hub. Siblings Placed Together



Most children spent two years in OOH placement before attaining permanency

Once children enter OOH placement, the permanency goal is to safely reunify them with their parents or secure another permanent arrangement. Timely permanency refers to the period a child enters and exits OOH placement and into a permanent placement setting.

Table 2 shows that most New Jersey children and youth spent two years or less in OOH placement Court Year 2022. Essex County had the greater number of children remaining in placement for five years or longer, followed by Mercer County.

***Table 2:
Time spent in OOH placement by county in 2022***

County	0-180 Days (6 Months)	181-360 Days (1 Year)	361-720 Days (2 Years)	721-1080 Days (3 Years)	1081-1440 Days (4 Years)	1441-1800 Days (5 Years)	Over 1800 Days Over 5 Yrs	Total
Atlantic	59	30	56	31	20	8	27	231
Bergen	33	9	15	10	6	4	14	91
Burlington	19	22	48	21	14	6	9	139
Camden	74	99	104	73	44	12	24	430
Cape May	24	14	26	13	4	3	6	90
Cumberland	24	11	19	17	10	11	12	104
Essex	71	55	86	80	62	52	74	480
Gloucester	29	24	56	39	17	13	19	197
Hudson	37	21	45	39	25	10	24	201
Hunterdon	5	3	3	3	0	2	1	17
Mercer	33	27	50	43	38	23	40	254
Middlesex	47	31	52	43	25	12	14	224
Monmouth	34	26	44	27	15	9	17	172
Morris	20	17	14	4	3	10	6	74
Ocean	32	20	31	21	27	11	13	155
Passaic	34	36	72	29	15	12	18	216
Salem	22	15	12	7	4	3	7	70
Somerset	11	13	9	6	5	0	6	50
Sussex	3	7	2	1	0	2	3	18
Union	21	29	26	36	20	12	24	168
Warren	3	2	10	3	2	1	1	22
TOTAL	635	511	780	546	356	216	359	3,403

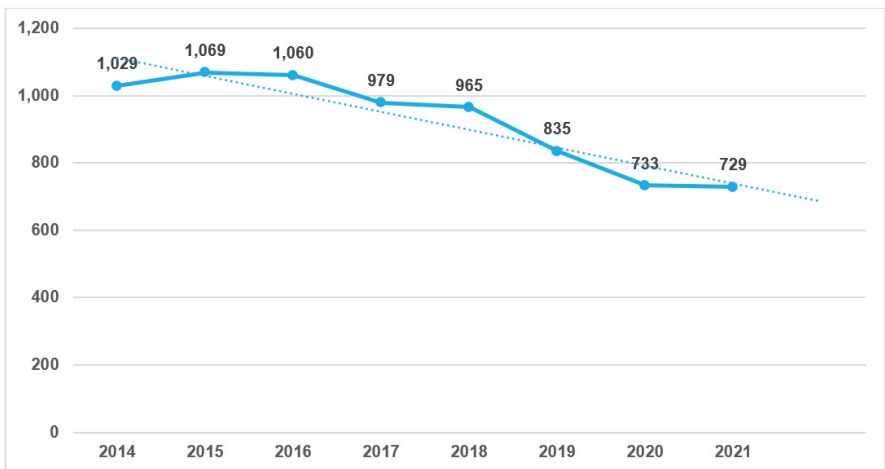
Source: AOC. CPR Reports. Length of Time in Placement.



Fewer children spent time in OOH placement longer than three years

Chart 9 is a historical view of the total number of children and youth in the system for longer than 36 months on the last day of calendar years 2014 through 2021. Totals are for all ages, genders, races/ethnicities, type of placements, such as kinship, non-kinship and congregate goals, such as reunification, adoption and independent living.

***Chart 9:
Total number of children in placement longer than three years***



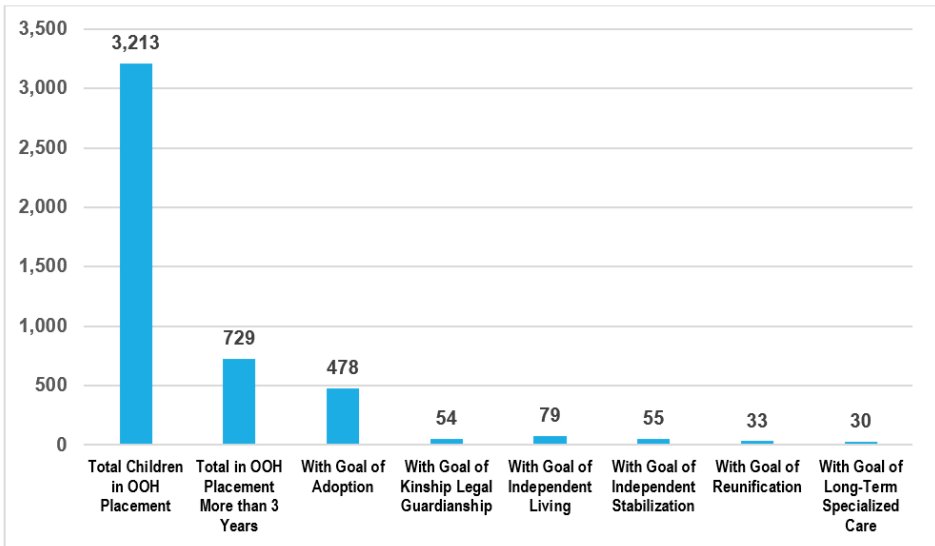
Source: NJ Child Welfare Data Hub. Children in placement longer than 36 months – point in time



Children waiting for adoption accounted for most extended OOH placements

Chart 10 reveals that of the 729 New Jersey children and youth in OOH placement in 2021 longer than three years, 478, or 66 percent, had parents whose rights were terminated. Adoption became the placement goal, replacing reunification with the parent. Adoption could involve adoption by a family member but is a permanency goal separate from kinship legal guardianship (KLG). Unlike adoption, KLG does not sever all parental rights.

***Chart 10:
Total number of children and youth in OOH placement more than three years in 2021 and a breakdown of their placement goals***



Source: NJ Child Welfare Hub. Children in Placement Longer than 36 Months.





Children and youth who remained in OOH placement less than 30 days need further study

New Jersey permits the immediate removal of a child from a parent’s home without a pending court order if the CP&P considers the child is in imminent risk of harm. This emergency removal is known as a “Dodd removal.” A child removed under Dodd will either be placed with a family member or a resource family. Within two days after the removal, the CP&P caseworker appears before a judge and presents evidence as to why the emergency removal was necessary. The Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 (ASFA) requires that the CP&P provide evidence that it made “reasonable” efforts to prevent a child from being removed from their home.

NJ CPAC concurs that a child’s safety is paramount and there are circumstances where emergency removals of children are unavoidable. However, NJ CPAC is also concerned about the unintended consequences of well-intentioned but unnecessary removals.

The Marshall Project, the non-profit criminal justice news organization (www.themarshallproject.org), reported that short stays are more likely to occur in high-poverty areas. In 2018, the Marshall Project ranked Camden County 10th of the top counties in the U.S. with the highest percentage of children returned to parents within 10 days of initial placement. That same year, the DCF brief, Building a 21st Century Child Welfare System, reported that 16 percent of New Jersey children exited OOH placement less than 30 days after placement in 2018. This begs the question, Are all emergency removals necessary or are other factors, such as implicit bias, at play?

As part of their race equity data collection and analysis, the DCF and the courts are looking into the population of children and youth who are removed from the home only to be returned shortly thereafter. Given what is known about the trauma of separation on children and youth and the socioeconomic factors that increase the likelihood of family separation, NJ CPAC recommends that Dodd removal data be made available to the public. Specifically, NJ CPAC would like to see the DCF and the courts provide greater public transparency on the number, race/ethnicity and residence of children and youth removed under Dodd and then returned to the home within 30 days of the removal. As case-specific information is confidential and protected, and the race/ethnicity of a child might not be known or available, sharing state totals over a five-year period vs. county totals would be adequate for public transparency purposes.

Consequences of parental incarceration on OOH placement rates and permanency need further study

According to the National Resource Center on Children and Families of the Incarcerated associated with Rutgers University-Camden (nrcf.camden.rutgers.edu), the oldest and largest organization of its kind, “the growing number of children with an incarcerated parent represents one of the most significant collateral consequences of the record prison population in the U.S.”

All children have a right to a relationship with their parents when safe and possible. In 2016, the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) conducted the Survey of Prison Inmates (SPI) and estimated that of incarcerated mothers, 58% are mothers of minor children. According to the same survey, women were more likely to have served as the child’s primary caretaker prior to their imprisonment. Of incarcerated parents who lived with their minor children at the time of their arrest, most reported that their child (or children) was in the care of the other parent or stepparent (71 percent, a grandmother (13 percent) and/or grandfather (4 percent), or other relatives (5 percent).

NJ CPAC was unable to locate data on New Jersey children of incarcerated parents. If current intersectionality research by DCF and the AOC does not consider parental incarceration, NJ CPAC recommends that this be addressed. Research should consider such things as the number of New Jersey children in OOH placement with an incarcerated parent and/or sibling, the impact of the incarcerated parent on time spent in OOH placement, and, if reunification was the permanency goal, whether this was attained after the parent’s release. Capturing such data can also help the CP&P improve behavioral health and other service offerings for affected families and children during the incarceration period.

NJ CPAC also recommends that the DCF disaggregate and track jail/prison visits when a primary caretaker is involved. Parental incarceration is an Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) with negative health and social consequences, according to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (www.cdc.gov). Depending on the nature of the parent’s/sibling’s offense, a facility’s visitation policy and geographic location, in-person visitation might not be possible and/or practical. But if it is in the child’s best interests to maintain a relationship with their parent, caseworkers can arrange for phone calls, virtual visits or written correspondence in lieu of in-person visits.

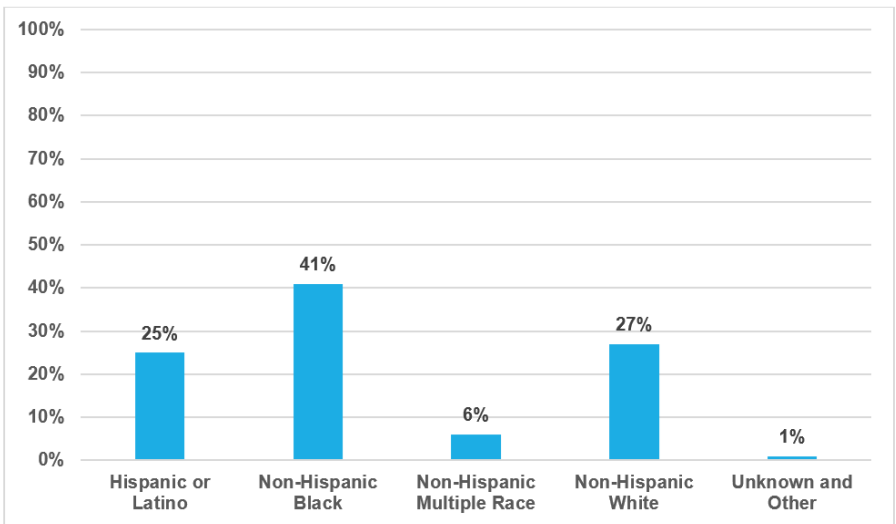
Individuals with lived experience are giving their voices to various court and DCF initiatives and having a direct impact on identifying priorities. Thought should be given to elevating and infusing the voices of youth of incarcerated parents, caregivers and formerly incarcerated parents.



Most children waiting for adoption were Black

The chart below shows the percentage of New Jersey children and youth by race and ethnicity waiting for adoption. Percent estimates in each origin category are based on the total number in OOH placement. The Annie E. Casey Foundation sourced its data from the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System ([AFCARS](#)) 2021 #274. ([Children in foster care waiting for adoption by race and Hispanic origin | KIDS COUNT Data Center \(aecf.org\)](#)).

***Chart 11:
Children and youth waiting for adoption
by race and ethnicity as of 2021***



Source: Annie E. Casey Foundation, KIDS COUNT data center.



Intersectionality improved understanding of how multiple systems and factors contribute to racial inequities in child welfare

The 2020 U.S. census painted a detailed picture of how racially and ethnically varied New Jersey's population has grown over the last decade. A 2022 student research paper published by the Hughes Center for Public Policy at Stockton University used census data to observe that while New Jersey has grown more racially/ethnically diverse over the previous decade, diversity was not spread evenly among its 21 counties. The paper assigned a "diversity index" for Hispanic/Latino and the non-Hispanic White, Black and Asian populations. According to the paper's diversity index:

- The most diverse counties in New Jersey are Cumberland, Essex, Hudson, Middlesex, Passaic, Somerset and Union.
- Counties rated moderate in diversity are Atlantic, Bergen, Burlington, Camden, Mercer and Morris.
- The least diverse counties in New Jersey are Cape May, Gloucester, Hunterdon, Monmouth, Ocean, Salem, Sussex and Warren.

The DCF and the AOC recently began applying the framework of intersectionality to improve understanding the ways race, ethnicity and other social categories such as gender, education, language and income influence the trajectory and outcomes of a child abuse and neglect case.

NJ CPAC believes that applying intersectional perspectives will help policymakers and individuals working with multi-cultural children and families make informed decisions leading to improved equity and inclusion in policy and practice. The DCF and the AOC provide their staff with implicit bias training opportunities. These trainings reinforce staff engagement in continuous self-appraisal and assessment of how their attitudes and behaviors reflect their views of clients. Similarly, NJ CPAC has offered implicit bias training to CPR board volunteers.



“Though all babies are born with unlimited potential, opportunities for New Jersey’s babies to grow and flourish are not shared equally... As advocates for babies, we must push for policies that we know will address the barriers our children face.”

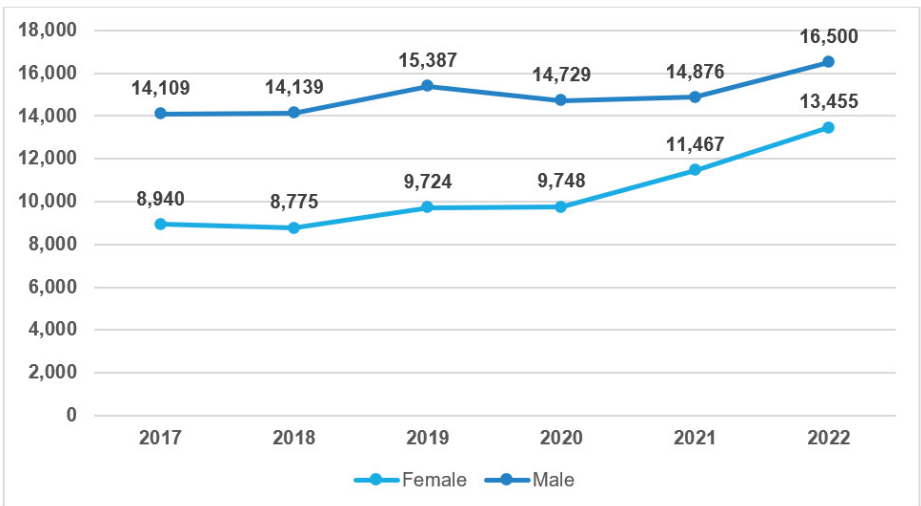
*Miriam Calderón
Zero to Three Chief Policy Officer
May 2022*

More children received behavioral health services

In 2019, the DCF contracted with PerformCare to serve as the single point of access to the statewide Children’s System of Care (CSOC), administered by the DCF. As the behavioral health contract system administrator to the DCF, CSOC provides community-based behavioral, substance use and intellectual /developmental disability services for children and youth up to the age of 21 (www.performcare.org/solutions/system-of-care).

Chart 12 depicts the total number of New Jersey children and youth by gender in both in-home and OOH placements receiving community services from a DCF contracted care management organization. CSOC provided services in calendar years 2017 through 2022. Chart 12 excludes CSOC involvement for reasons related to intellectual and developmental disabilities.

***Chart 12:
Children and youth receiving behavioral health services from care management organizations***



Source: NJ Child Welfare Data Hub. CSOC/youth served care management organizations.

The DCF is responsible for ensuring children and youth who enter OOH placement receive a full medical and behavioral assessment. All children entering receive a pre-placement assessment within 24 hours of removal from their home. The purpose is to evaluate the health status of the child at the time of removal, identify, document and develop a plan to address the child’s immediate (urgent and non-urgent) health care needs, document injury if present, and ensure each child is free from contagion.

Within 30 days of entering out-of-home care for the first time, every child must have a comprehensive medical examination (CME) to ensure that they receive appropriate services and access to care. If a child is placed with a resource parent, a nurse will visit three weeks after the child lives with the resource parent (www.embrella.org).

Children and youth who enter OOH placement have already experienced the trauma of separation and other traumatic circumstances. Given the vulnerability of these children to mental health issues, NJ CPAC recommends that as soon as a child is placed in the home of a resource parent, that the parent be trained in recognizing the warning signs of serious mental health disorders. Training should be customized to the age and gender of the child.

Another consideration for this recommendation is the possibility that severe mood disorders are not apparent during initial assessments. According to multiple studies, missed or misdiagnosed depression in children and youth is common for any number of reasons. For example, a 2019 study (Rinke, Bunde) found that adolescents rarely present to physicians with a mood complaint and depression can be misdiagnosed in 60 percent of cases. In a 2021 article in *Preventative Health*, Itai Danovitch, a physician at Cedars-Sinai Hospital in Los Angeles, was quoted stating misdiagnosis is “incredibly common” for many different health conditions. In the same 2021 article, National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) noted that some symptoms evolve over time.





Mobilization Response and Stabilization Teams responded to more calls for females experiencing mental health emergencies than for males

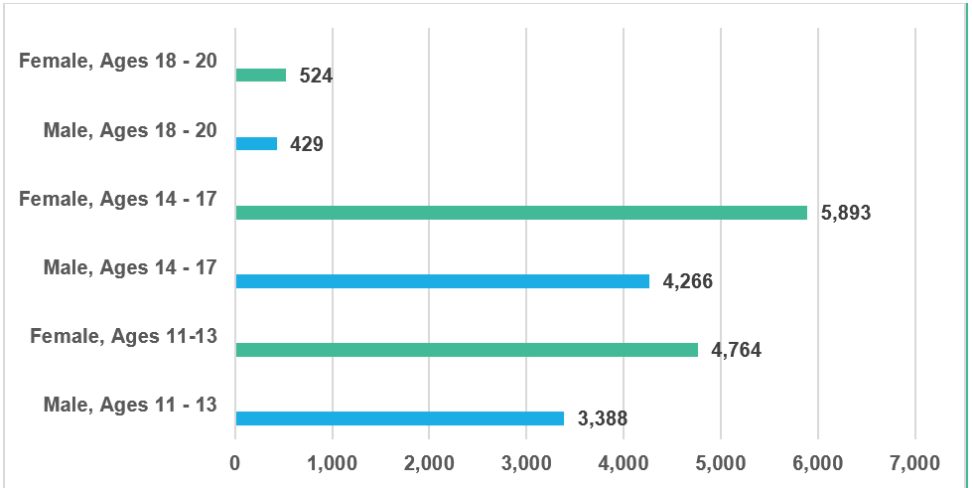
Chart 13 shows that behaviors exhibited by females ages 14 through 17 in homes and schools resulted in the most dispatches by CSOC Mobile Response and Stabilization (MRSS) teams. These teams respond to calls for help when a child is involved in an emotional or behavioral health crisis that causes a disruption. There are several hotlines for youth that provide counseling and support over the phone. For life-threatening services, 911 always should be called (www.performcarenj.org/families/emergency-services).

The CDC found that as the pandemic progressed, emergency department visits for suicide attempts increased among adolescents, primarily driven by females. While the CDC concluded that there is no definitive consensus on the cause of the disparities between female and male students, researchers have speculated that social media use, higher rates of bullying and sexual pressures and exploitation could have contributed to the gender disparities (www.cdc.gov/healthy-youth).

NJ CPAC has previously reported about the shortage of child psychiatrists and therapists, particularly in rural areas and communities with lower levels of income and education. This is a national issue. NJ CPAC has also emphasized the importance of multicultural counseling and therapy. Requiring telehealth counseling in schools is one possible solution that should be considered by legislators.

Chart 13:

Total number of times a Mobile Response and Stabilization Team was dispatched to a youth's home by gender in 2021



Source: NJ Child Welfare Data Hub. Mobile Responses in the Year.





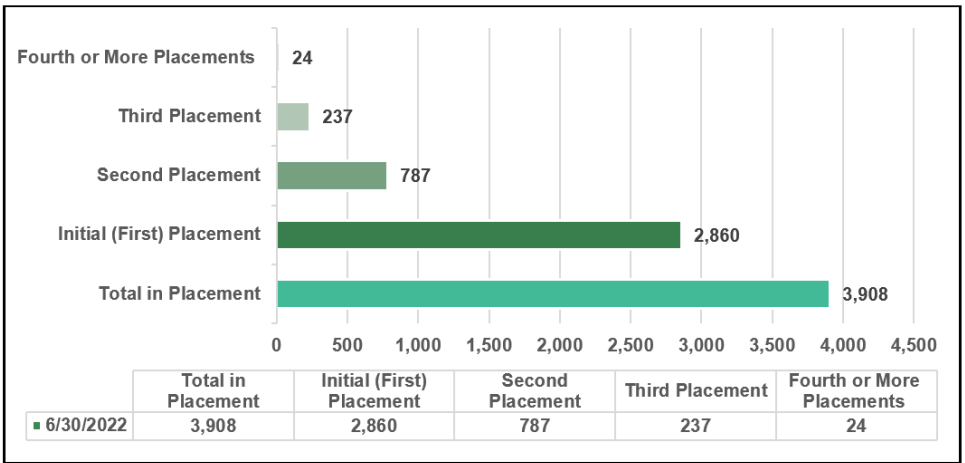
Thirty percent of children and youth were experiencing their second placement as of June 30, 2022

Chart 14 shows the number of placements experienced by all New Jersey children and youth in OOH placement with active and pending cases on the last day of court year 2022 (June 30, 2022).

New Jersey 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 returns to resource family care, the CP&P must count the placement as a new placement.

*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.

***Chart 14:
Number of children and youth experiencing multiple placements as of June 30, 2022***



Source: AOC. CPR Reports. Minors repeating in placement.



Most children exiting OOH placement were reunited with a family member or adopted

The table below provides the reasons why all children and youth exited OOH placement in calendar years 2020 and 2021, regardless of the time spent in placement or number of placements. Both years show similar findings. On exiting placement, most children were returned to a family member – a classification group that includes parents, primary caregivers, guardians and relatives. Unification with the parent, formerly referred to as “reunification,” is the primary goal in most cases.

***Table 3:
Number of placements experienced by children
as of June 30, 2021 (point in time)***

Reason for discharge	Number in 2021	Number in 2020
Reunification	1,000	1,123
Living with relatives	132	166
Kinship Legal Guardianship	154	165
Adoption	592	711
Reach age of majority	122	146
Custody transferred to another agency	39	27
Runaway	13	13
Child death	10 or less	10 or less
Other	10 or less	10 or less

Source: AOC. CPR Reports. Minors repeating in placement.

In 2022, the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), Office Of Inspector General, released the report, *National Snapshot of State Agency Approaches to Reporting and Locating Children Missing from Foster Care*. The report noted that children who go missing are vulnerable to crime and exploitation. In accordance with N.J.A.C. 6A:11.1(a), any individual having a reason to believe that a child might be missing must immediately notify designated child welfare authorities. Should a child go missing while under DCF's supervision, the DCF is required to file a missing person's report with local police and with the National Crime Information Center (NCIC) database of the Federal Bureau of Investigation and to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) no later than 24 hours after receiving the information.

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. This information is available to the public on the DCF website.

Number of NJ Children in OOH Placement Missing

12,151

Number of Children in Foster Care

350

Number of Missing Episodes

2%

Percentage of Missing Children

39

Average Days Child Missing

2

Number of Times Missing

Source: DHHS, 2020 data



NJ CPAC Training Webinars for Court Year 2022

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

A two-hour virtual workshop was customized by NJ CPAC for CPR board volunteers and the CPR board initial review. *Tools for Advancing Equity: A Virtual Workshop on Advancing the Elimination of Bias in Child Welfare-Related Decision Making.* Was presented with the AOC Family Practice Division, the workshop was developed to augment volunteer understanding of implicit bias, associations, assumptions, thought processes and decision-making, and incorporated interactive experiences and breakout session discussions. The workshop was presented and facilitated by Lisa R. Burke, Diversity, Inclusion, and Community Engagement Program Manager for the New Jersey Judiciary. NJ CPAC looks forward to working with the AOC on developing more learning opportunities customized for CPR volunteers.





CPR Board Activities

Facts and Figures

The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic and its rapid shift in court operations altered the way counties conducted business and disrupted the regular recording and collection of raw data. The pandemic continued to test court operations in unprecedented ways after the courts began returning to in-person events in 2021.

Number of CPR reviews underreported in 2022

CPR is a statewide program. When a child enters OOH placement, the child's case is reviewed by the county CPR board 60 days after the initial placement for its completeness, to identify the barriers that need to be addressed to attain a permanent home for the child, and to ensure that a concurrent plan exists. This review of CIC cases is referred to as a CPR initial review and includes case-specific recommendations to the judge. CPR boards can also conduct additional reviews for children who have been voluntarily placed (www.njcourts.gov/public/overview-volunteer-services-cpr).

Counties responded differently to the COVID-19 pandemic to ensure that the best interests of children, youth and families continued to be served without disruption when New Jersey placed health restrictions on in-person gatherings. Several counties switched from in-person volunteer reviews at courthouses to virtual reviews by CPR boards. Other counties switched to reviews by judges who absorbed the CPR review in their hearings and proceedings.

As a result of data errors relating to judges conducting CPR initial reviews, several counties underreported the total number of CPR initial reviews. When the CPR data entry issues are resolved, the affected reports will be updated.

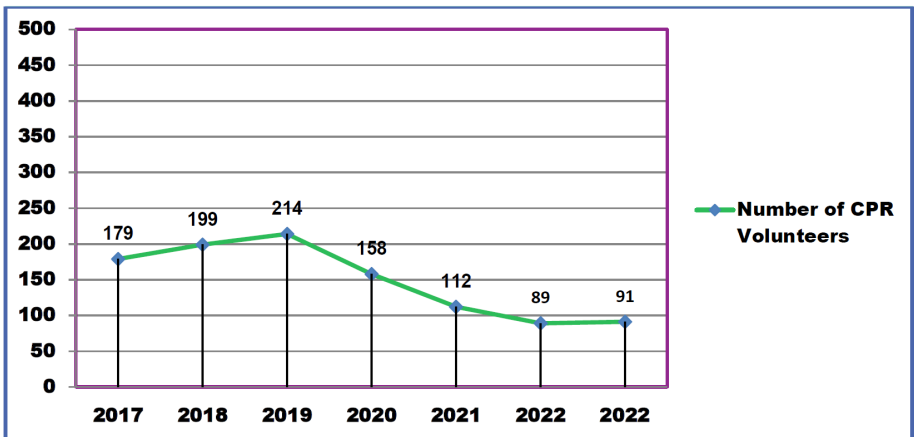


Decline in total number of CPR board volunteers

Totals of active volunteers in court years 2020 through 2022 reflect the difficulties experienced by counties in retaining and recruiting volunteers during and after the pandemic. A national survey on volunteerism conducted by AmeriCorps with the U.S. Census Bureau found that between 2019 and 2021, volunteer participation dropped seven percent, the largest decrease since 2002. AmeriCorps attributed this decline to people taking on second jobs in response to inflation increases, childcare challenges and fear of illness.

Moving forward, the Judiciary is taking concrete steps to recruit more volunteers into its volunteer court programs, including CPR. For example, counties are holding recruiting events and issuing press releases on court volunteer vacancies. NJ CPAC contributes by bringing potential CPR board volunteers together at webinars and conferences.

***Chart 15:
Number of CPR board volunteers 2017 through 2022***



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





STUART RABNER

CHIEF JUSTICE

GLENN A. GRANT, J.A.D.

ACTING ADMINISTRATIVE DIRECTOR OF THE COURTS

JENNIFER M. PEREZ

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JOANNE M. DIETRICH

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MAY 2024