



FFY 2025 Court Improvement Program Annual Report

Indiana Court Office of Court Services, Children & Families Division

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The data presented in this report pertains to the Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2025, encompassing Child in Need of Services (CHINS) cases that closed between October 1, 2024, and September 30, 2025. Cases opened prior to October 1, 2019, have been excluded from this analysis, as they may not accurately reflect current practices. Comprehensive, multi-year data, filtered by county, Department of Child Services (DCS) region, and Judicial District, is available on the publicly accessible [Child Welfare Court Performance Measures Dashboard](#).

Indiana FFY 2025 Child Welfare Performance Measures reflect significant improvement in the median time it takes for children to achieve permanency. This achievement is particularly noteworthy given the starting point of these efforts. Following an initial call to action from Chief Justice Loretta Rush in September 2020, emergency joint meetings of the Juvenile Justice Improvement Committee (now the Juvenile Advisory Committee) and the Child Welfare Improvement Committee were convened where stakeholders initiated a series of projects aimed at improving time to permanency outcomes. In FFY 2021, the median time to overall permanency was 593 days; by FFY 2025, this measure had decreased by 21% to 470 days. Similarly, the FFY 2021 median time to permanency for adoption was 1,112 days, which has been reduced to 863 days. The improvements directly reflect the sustained, focused, and collaborative efforts of all stakeholders involved.

The FFY 2025 data confirms positive trends across nearly all tracked areas, with 14 out of 19 measures showing improvement. Reunification, the process of returning children in temporary out-of-home care to their families of origin, is the most common outcome for children, at 61% (3,746 out of 6,180). Reunification is widely regarded as the preferred permanency goal in child welfare when safe and appropriate, as emphasized in a systematic review published in the *Child & Youth Care Forum*, 2025. Multiple studies indicate reunification is associated with better long-term outcomes for children's emotional well-being, family stability, and developmental health.¹

With limited exceptions, federal law requires DCS to make reasonable efforts to reunify families². Beginning with the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980, federal policy has mandated that reunification be prioritized as the preferred outcome for children

¹ Child Trends (2015): Reunification from Foster Care: Challenges and Successes

Wulczyn et al. (2011): Beyond Common Sense: Child Welfare, Child Well Being, and the Evidence for Policy Reform

² 42 U.S.C. § 671(a)(15)

who enter foster care due to abuse or neglect (May 15, 2017). Indiana also prioritizes family reunification for children removed from their homes due to abuse or neglect, requiring DCS to make “reasonable efforts” to preserve and reunify families.³ In Indiana, these cases reached permanency more quickly than all other outcomes and fell below the national standard of 365 days for the first time since 2016, at 359 median days to reunification.

Federal Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) data is collected through periodically mandated reviews of child welfare systems to ensure they meet requirements and achieve positive outcomes for children, focusing on safety, permanency and well-being. The Children’s Bureau recently began publishing CFSR Data Profile information online, increasing transparency and public access to these measures. The latest CFSR data profile⁴ demonstrates that Indiana is outperforming the national average in achieving permanency for children within twelve months. Specifically, 41% of children who entered foster care in 2023 attained legal permanency within this period, compared to the national average of 35%. The 2023/2024 data represent the most recent available for these metrics.

Reentry to foster care measures the percentage of children who reenter foster care within 12 months of discharge when permanency (excluding adoptions) was achieved within 12 months. This indicator assesses how effective programs and practices are in supporting reunification and other permanency outcomes and preventing children from reentering foster care. In 2023, Indiana’s reentry rate was 4.9%, which is better than the national rate of 5.6%.

Overall, the FFY 2025 findings demonstrate that Indiana’s child welfare system is making clear, measurable progress in a positive direction. Sustained reductions in time to permanency, improvements across the majority of performance measures, reunification outcomes that exceed national benchmarks, and lower than average reentry rates collectively reflect meaningful progress in timeliness, stability and permanency outcomes for children and families. These results underscore the impact of coordinated leadership, data informed decision making, and cross-system collaboration initiated over the past several years. While continued attention and refinement remain necessary, the progress documented in this report affirms that focused efforts are producing measurable improvements and provides a strong foundation for continued advancement in Indiana’s child welfare system.

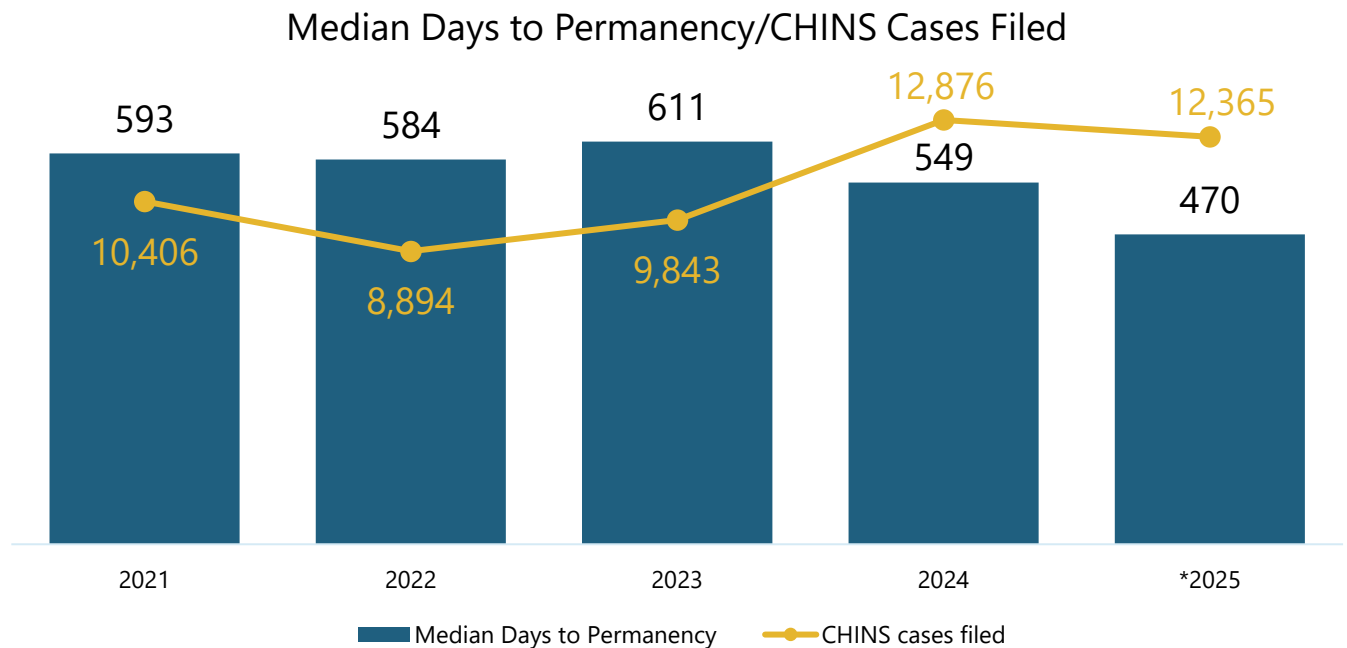
³ Ind. Code § 31-34-21-5.5 (2024)

⁴ [Child and Family Services Review \(CFSR 4\) Data Profile Context Data](#)

COURT PERFORMANCE MEASURES

CHINS cases filed

To understand the data associated with these cases, it is important to understand the underlying process. A child abuse and neglect case typically begins with a report of suspected abuse or neglect to DCS. DCS then conducts an investigation, and if the allegations are substantiated, a CHINS petition may be filed. Provisional data from the 2025 Indiana Trial Court Statistics by County report⁵ indicates an decrease in the number of CHINS cases filed in 2025. Figure 1 illustrates the median time to permanency in FFY 2024 was 549 days, with 12,876 CHINS cases filed. In contrast, FFY 2025 saw a decrease in the time to permanency to 470 days; the number of CHINS cases filed decreased to 12,365 (see figure 1).



*CHINS cases filed is provisional data and subject to change
Figure 1

⁵ 2025 Indiana Trial Court Statistics by County is provisional and subject to change.

Time to Adjudication

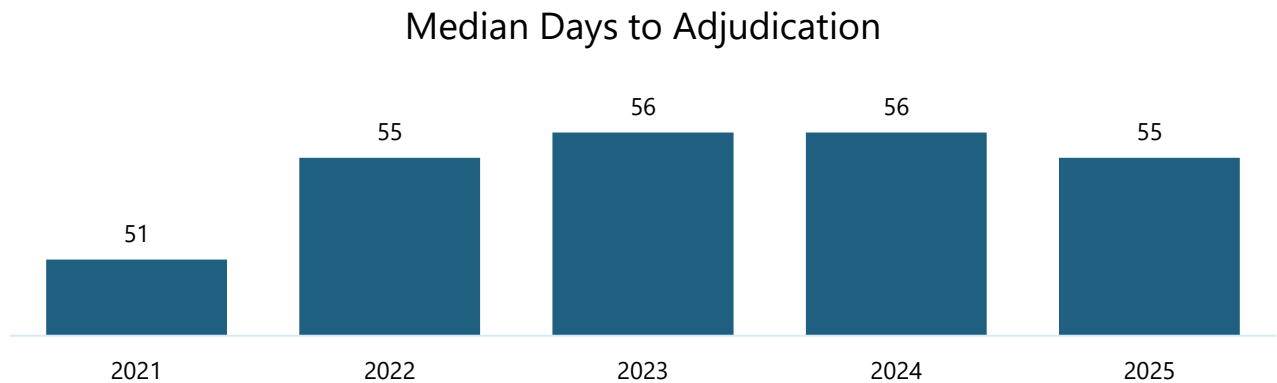


Figure 2

The next step in the process may either be consolidated into one hearing or distributed across multiple hearings, with the final outcome being a determination by the court of whether the allegations in the CHINS petition are true or not. Time to adjudication measures the median number of days from when the initial CHINS petition is filed and the date of the final court determination.

The median days to adjudication in Indiana for FFY 2025 was 55 days. [Indiana Code 31-34-11-1](#) requires the juvenile court to complete a fact-finding hearing not more than 60 days after a petition alleging that a child is a CHINS is filed. Indiana counties continue to meet this statutory requirement, as evidenced by the data (see figure 2).

Time to Disposition

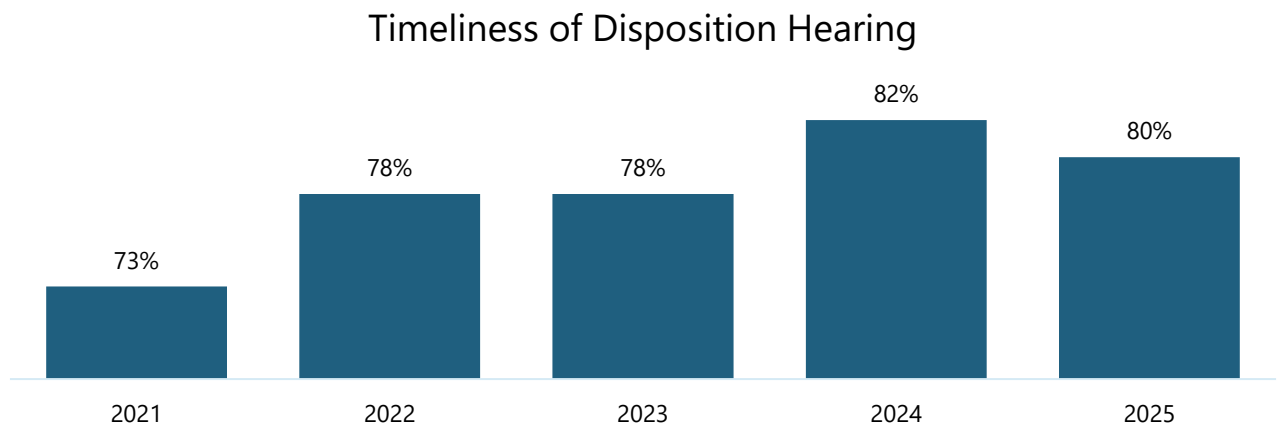


Figure 3

Once the court has made a determination that some or all of the allegations in the CHINS petition are true, the court must consider appropriate services and conditions to be required of the family to keep the child safe, which may include placement of the child in another home or shelter care. Time to disposition measures the median number of days from the date

the original CHINS petition was filed to the date of the final dispositional hearing. FFY 2025 data indicates 80% (5,948 of 7,425) of the dispositional hearings were held within 30 days of the date the court made the finding the child was a CHINS (adjudication) in compliance with [Indiana Code 31-34-19-1](#). This shows a slight decrease from FFY 2024 data (see figure 3).

Review and Permanency Hearings

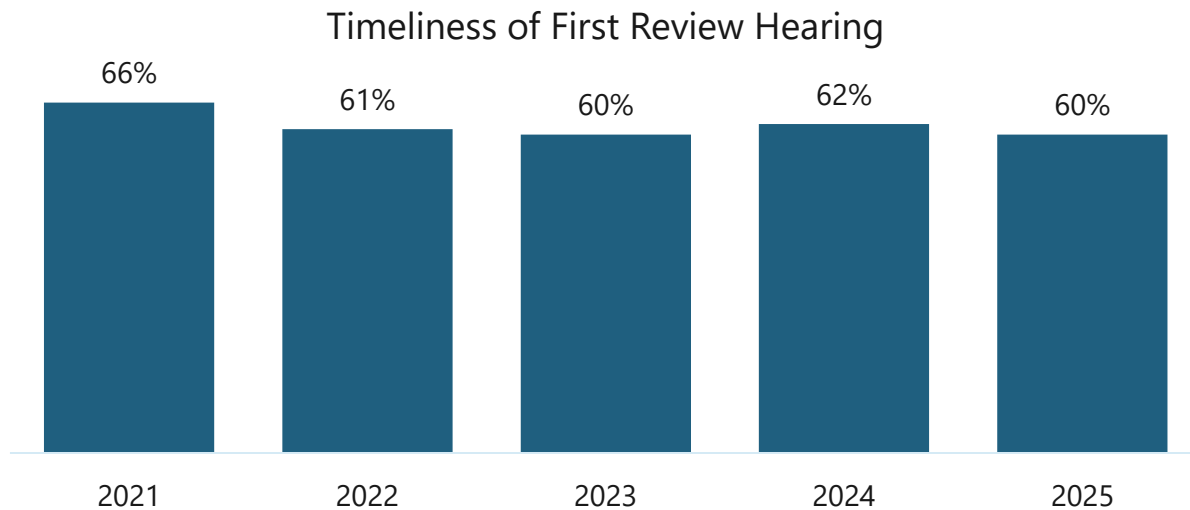


Figure 4

In response to the round 4 CFSR, stakeholders identified the delay in timely first review and permanency hearings as a potential area for improvement. Timeliness is measured by whether the first review hearing was held within six months of the date the child was removed from the home or the date of disposition, whichever comes first. Consistent and ongoing review and permanency hearings are instrumental in helping courts monitor progress and ensure that the child and family are receiving the necessary care and treatment to move the case toward reunification or another permanency goal. As part of the Program Improvement Plan (PIP) agreed to by stakeholders, DCS and CIP identified several counties with a strong commitment to improving child welfare outcomes and capacity to participate in a pilot project. Lawrence, Marion and St. Joseph Counties agreed that, beginning April 1, 2025, they would set future hearing dates on the record before concluding the initial hearing and include those dates in the written court order. The primary objective of this practice is to achieve the following goals:

- Reduce delays due to crowded dockets
- Increase awareness of permanency timelines
- Improve the timely holding of 1st review and 1st permanency hearings
- Improve court performance metrics

- Reduce the number of Failures to Appear (FTA) and emphasize importance of timely permanency

The methodology for measuring the timeliness of first review hearing was recently updated. Under the revised approach, cases are classified as untimely if the first review hearing occurs more than six months after the date of removal or disposition, whichever comes first, or if no first review hearing was held within that timeframe. As a result of this change, prior year results have been revised. For FFY 2025, the first review hearing was held within six months in 60% (4,041 out of 6,705) of the cases (see figure 4).

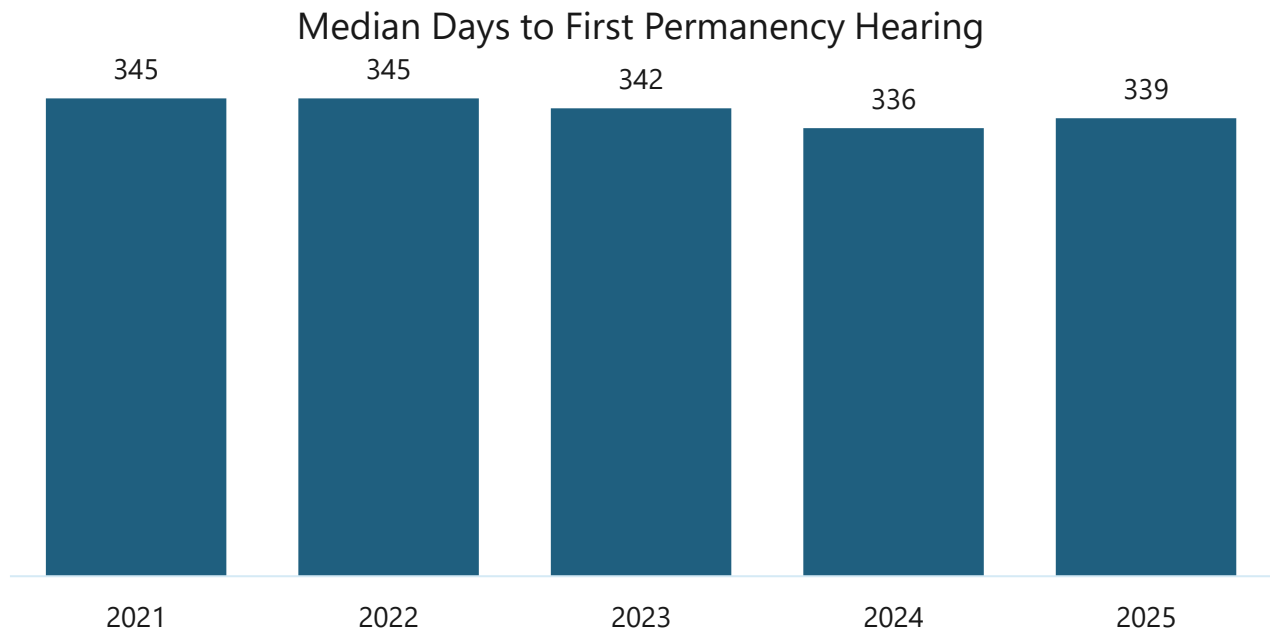


Figure 5

The median time to first permanency hearing increased slightly from 336 median days in FFY 2024 to 339 median days in FFY 2025 (see figure 5). This measure has remained consistently below the statutory one-year requirement.

Termination of Parental Rights

If a child cannot be maintained safely in their home and the parent has demonstrated an inability or unwillingness to provide for the child's basic needs, a Termination of Parental Rights (TPR) petition may be filed in accordance with [Indiana Code 31-35-2-4](#). The data for TPR measures are calculated only in those cases in which TPR data was provided by counties; it is not a required field. Mandatory petitions filed in accordance with [Indiana Code 31-35-2-4\(b\)\(2\)iii](#), that are subsequently dismissed, are not included in the is data. FFY 2025 includes data for 1,720 TPR petitions with a median time from the date the CHINS petition was filed to the date the TPR petition was filed of 477 days.

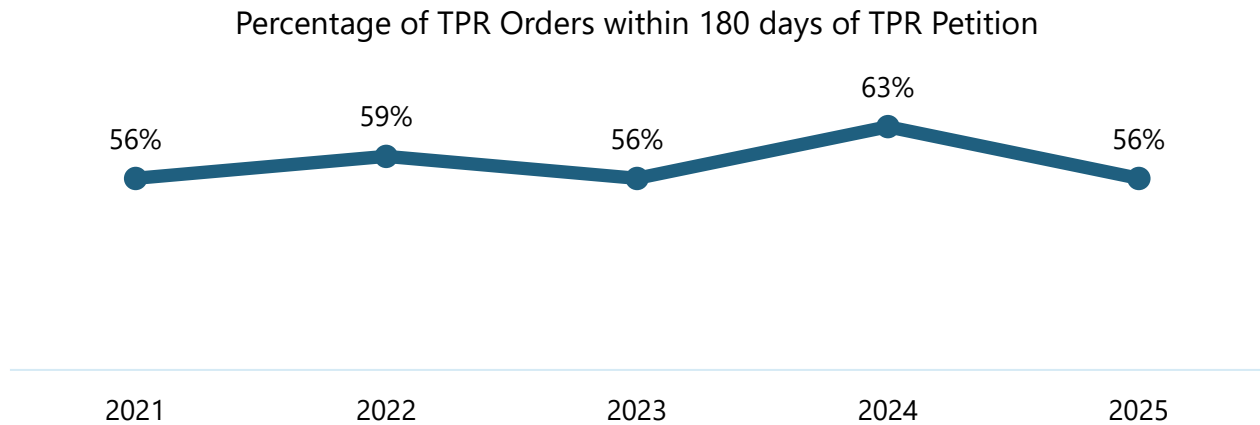


Figure 6

The median time from the CHINS petition being filed until the trial court issues an order terminating parental rights was 661 days for FFY 2025, down from 683 days for FFY 2024. The percentage of TPR orders completed within 180 days of the petition decreased from 63% (440 out of 698 cases reported) to 56% (470 out of 842 cases reported) in FFY 2025.

Permanency

The final stage of a CHINS case is the achievement of permanency: the goal is to provide a stable, secure, and permanent living situation for children. Permanency is defined in Indiana as children in foster care who reach legal permanency by reunification, adoption, guardianship, or relative placement. Those cases which have a wardship termination of Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (APPLA) and Other (cases that reach disposition but close for other reasons such as "aging out", case transfer, death of the child, runaway, emancipation, or other such reasons unrelated to the child's permanency) are defined as not having reached permanency. For cases in FFY 2025, 98% (6,037 out of 6,180) of children achieved permanency.

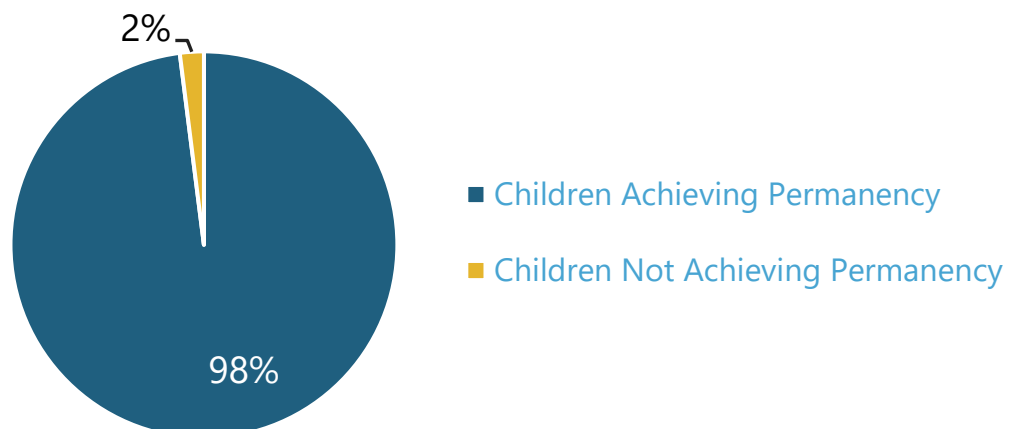


Figure 7

Time to permanency is only calculated in cases in which the child has been removed from the home of their parent, guardian or custodian and placed in foster care, residential treatment, placed with a non-custodial parent, or a relative placement at some point during the life of their case. In FFY 2025 6,180 cases were closed involving children who were removed from their homes. The median time to permanency dropped by a remarkable 14% from 549 median days in FFY 2024 to 470 median days in FFY 2025.

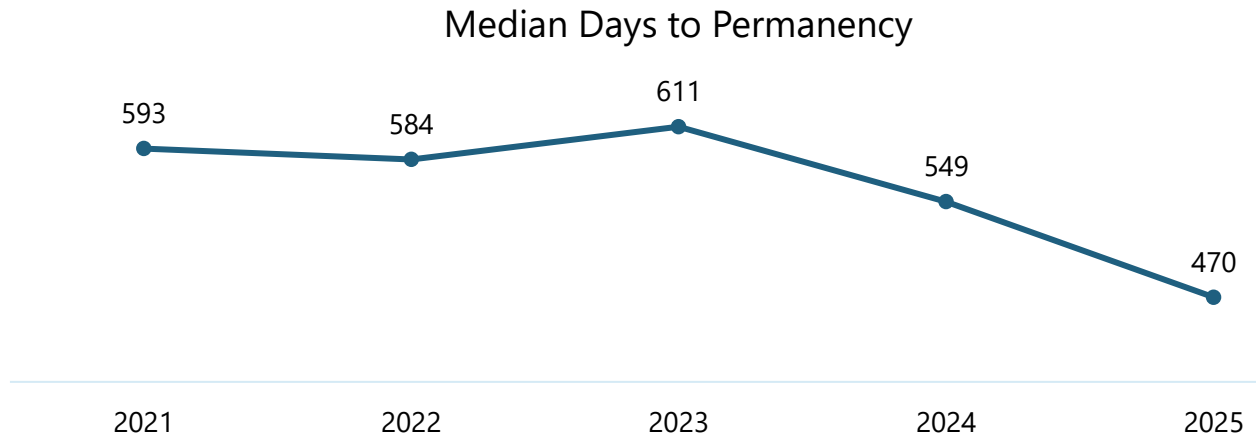


Figure 8

Permanency by Permanency Type

Time to permanency is also broken down by permanency type: reunification, adoption, guardianship, relative placement, and another planned permanent living arrangement (APPLA) (see figure 9). Reunification represents 61% (3,746 out of 6,180 cases) of all cases closed in FFY 2025 and is associated with the shortest time to permanency, with a median time of 359 days (see figure 10).

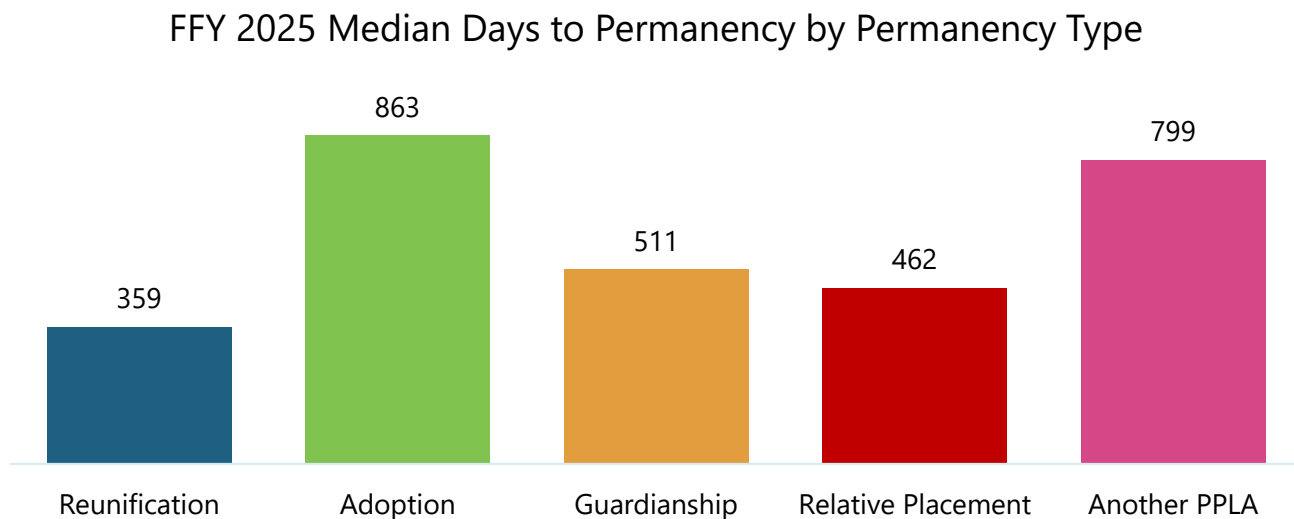


Figure 9

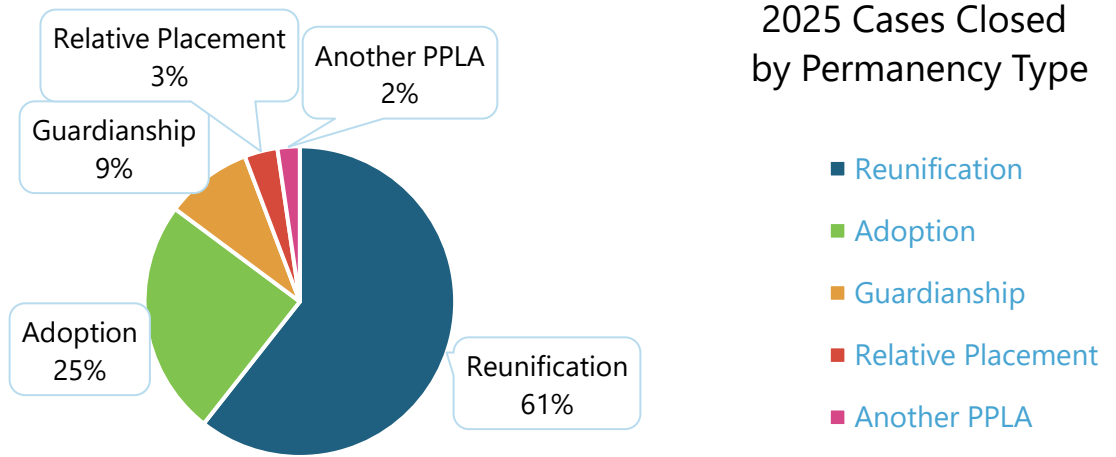


Figure 10

The CFSR national standards⁶ for timely achievement of permanency provide a focus on the state’s responsibility to reunify or place children in safe and permanent homes as soon as possible after removal. The following graphs illustrate the median time to permanency for FFY 2025 in Indiana compared to the national standards. This year’s data highlights a significant success: Indiana is outperforming the national standard by returning children to their homes or placing them in legal guardianships in less time, underscoring the state’s effectiveness in achieving timely permanency.

Reunification

Reunification, the process of returning children in temporary out-of-home care to their families of origin, is the most common outcome for children, at 61% (3,746 out of 6,180 cases). In Indiana, these cases reached permanency more quickly than all other outcomes and fell below the national standard of 365 days for the first time since 2016, at 359 days.

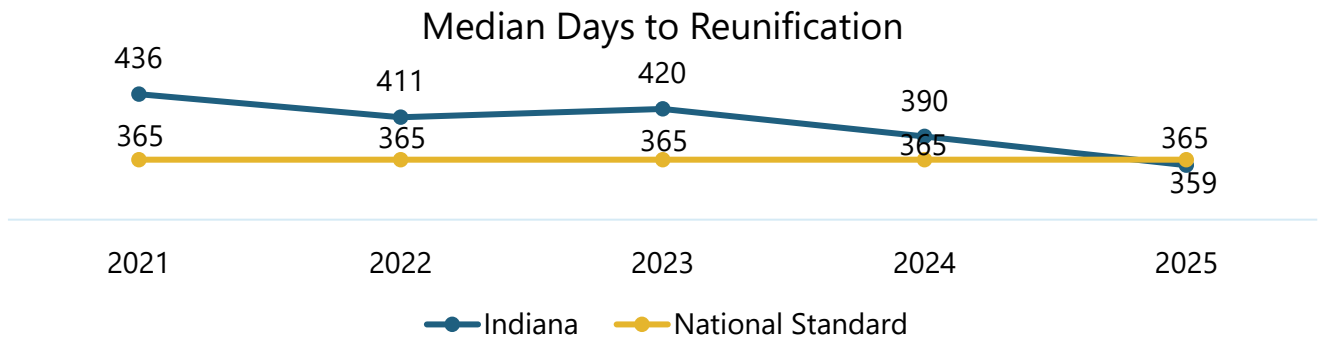


Figure 11

⁶ Title IV-E Foster Care Eligibility Reviews and Child and Family Services State Plan Reviews (issued January 25, 2000, page 4020)

Adoption

The second most frequent outcome for children in out-of-home care is adoption, In FFY 2025 25% of cases (1,518 out of 6,180) reached permanency with an outcome of adoption. Adoption, which has the longest national standard of two years (730 days), had a median time to permanency of 863 days, representing a 9% reduction from FFY 2024, when the median time was 952 days.

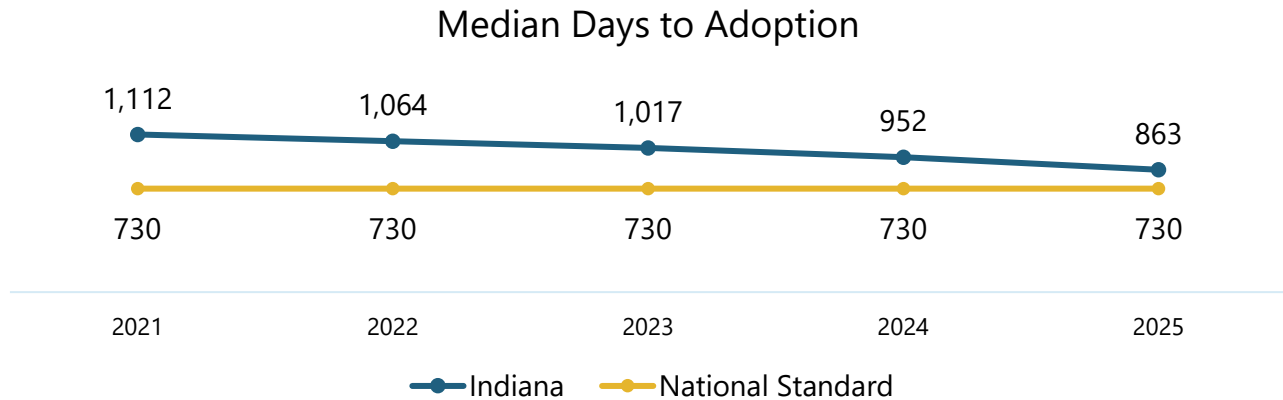


Figure 12

Guardianship

Legal guardianship is a court ordered arrangement in which a responsible adult (guardian) is authorized to make major decisions, such as those related to medical care, education, and living arrangements while providing a stable home for a child without necessarily ending the biological parents' rights. In some cases, however, guardianship may be established after parental rights have been terminated. In FFY 2025, guardianships accounted for 9% (560 out of 6,180) of all cases that closed with a median time to permanency of 511 days, although this represents an increase in time to permanency compared to FFY 2024 data, it remains below the national standard of 18 months (547.5 days).

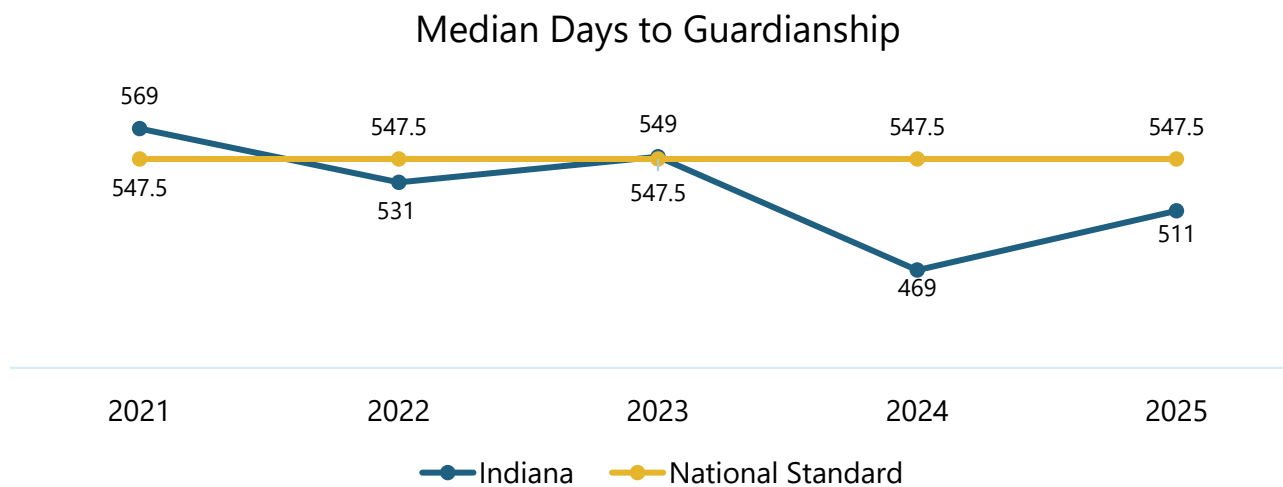


Figure 13

Relative Placement and Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (APPLA)

Relative placement refers to cases in which the child is placed with a responsible adult sibling, grandparent, aunt, uncle, custodial parent of the child's sibling or another relative who will act as the child's custodian. FFY 2025 indicates a slight improvement for cases with this outcome, going from 470 median days to 462. Case with an outcome of relative placement account for 3% (213 out of 6,180) of all wardships terminated in FFY 2025.

When other permanency options have been exhausted and/or determined not to be in the child's best interest, a youth age 16 or older may have a case closure of APPLA, which allows the child to stay in out-of-home care with a non-relative while continuing to receive service to prepare the youth for independent living. These particular cases had a median time to permanency of 799 days for FFY 2025, an 8% decrease from 864 days in FFY 2024.

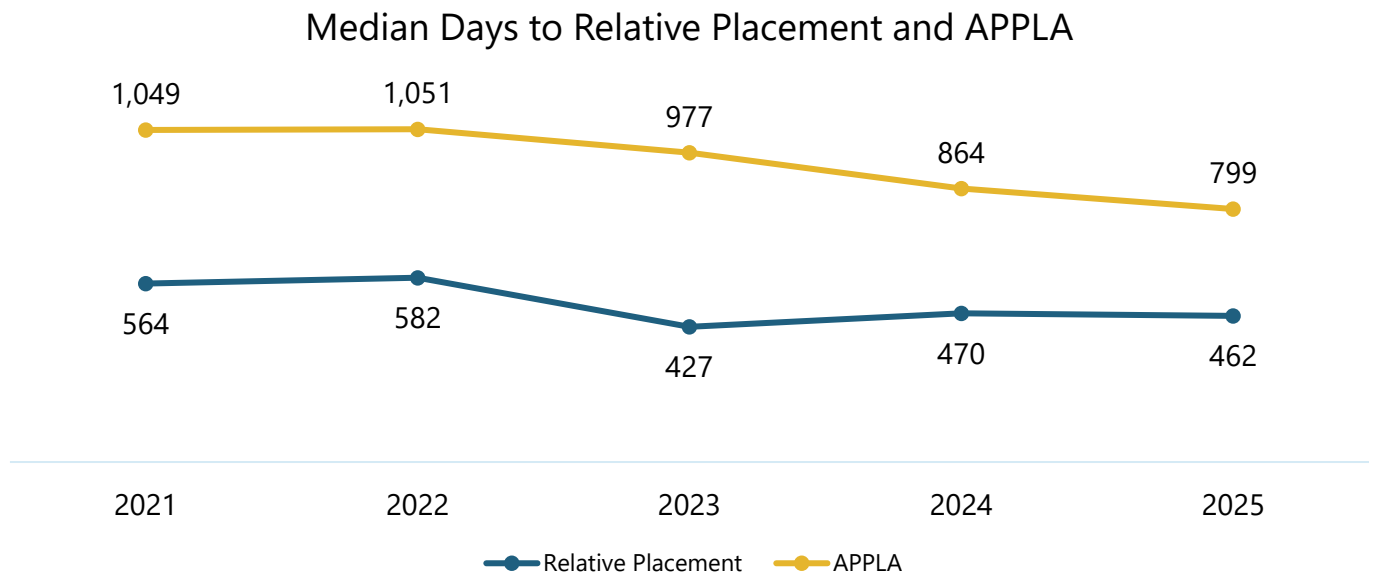


Figure 14

HOW WE COMPARE

The U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Administration for Children & Families (ACF) and Children’s Bureau (CB) oversee the federal funding provided to state CIPs. Indiana is part of ACF Region 5 which includes Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio and Wisconsin. 2023 data is the most recent Child Welfare Outcomes Report Data available⁷ and reports the number of children in care on the first day of the fiscal year (October 1). The chart below shows this data for Indiana in comparison with the other states in region 5. The majority of states in the region showed a reduction in the number of children in care from FY 2022 to FY 2023, with Ohio and Michigan being the only states with a slight increase in the number of children in care.

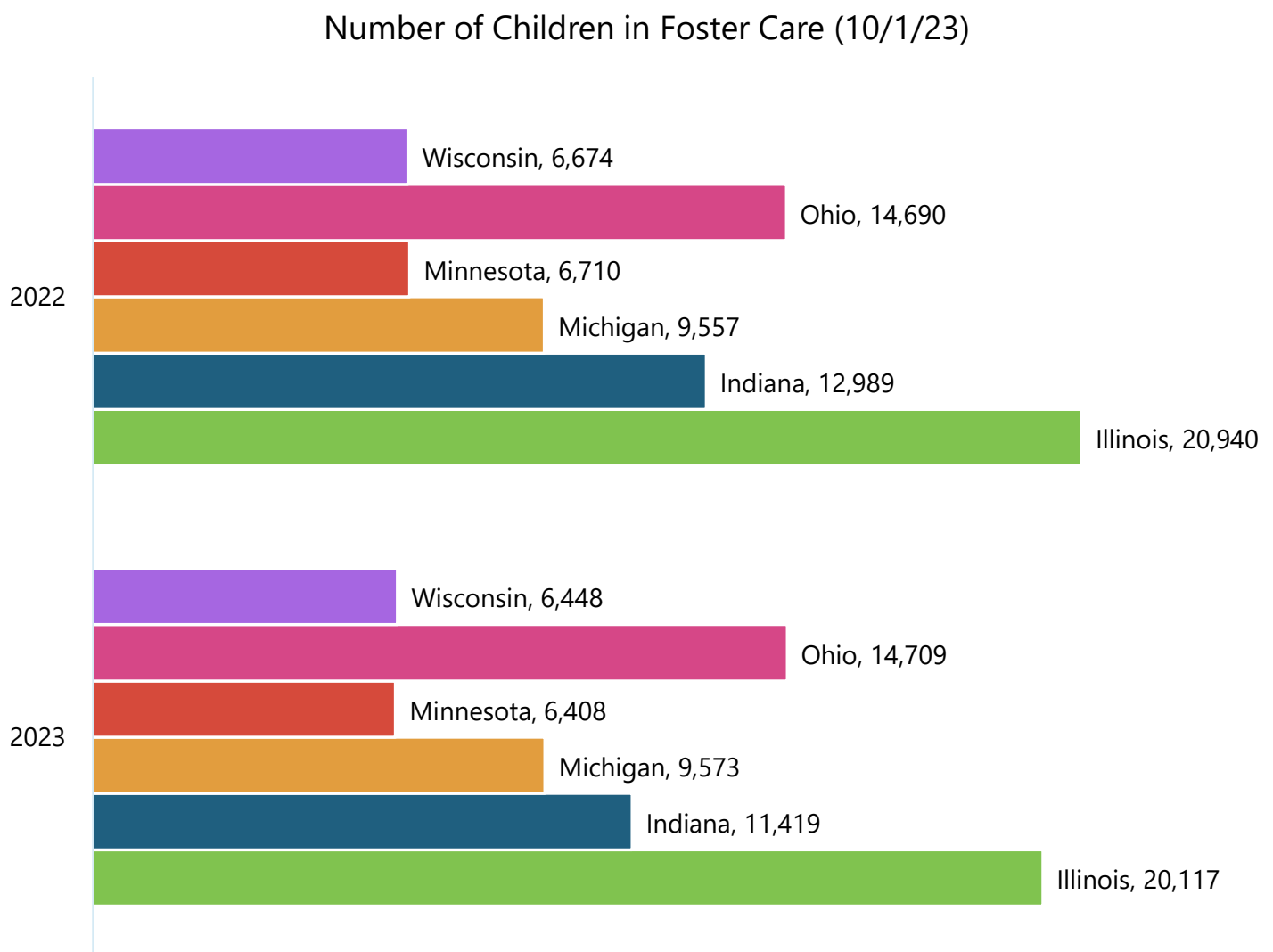
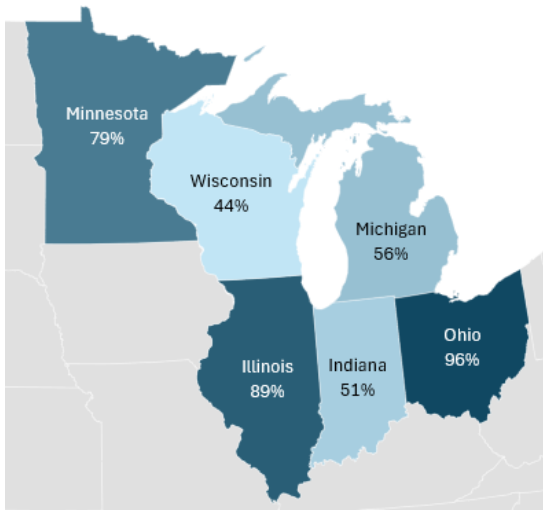


Figure 15

⁷ [Children’s Bureau – Children in Care – Child Welfare Outcomes](#)



The CB collects data on children in care who are awaiting adoption. As shown in figure 16, as of October 1, 2023, 51% of children awaiting adoption in Indiana (1,097 out of 2,139) had parents whose rights had been terminated.

CB data going back to 2019⁸ shows that Indiana has historically led the Region 5 states in the number of youth exiting care to adoption. However, in 2023, Illinois led the six states with 1,991 adoptions, slightly surpassing Indiana's 1,914 (see figure 17).

Figure 16

Number of Children Exiting Care to Adoption

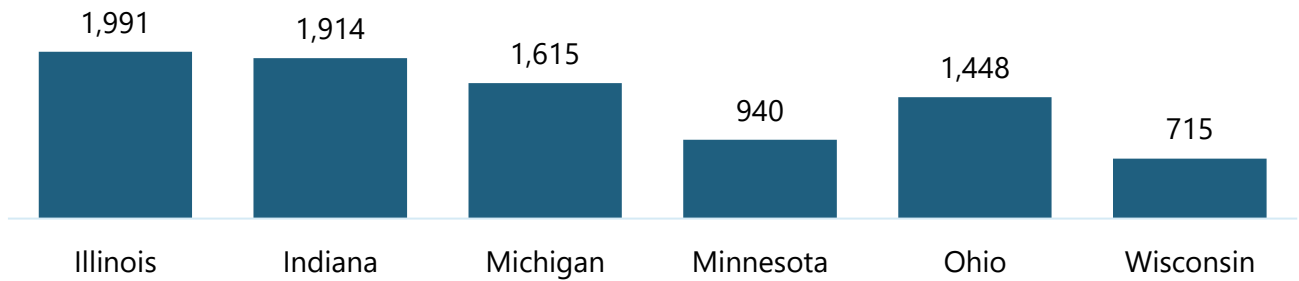


Figure 17

Minnesota continues to lead the region in the percentage of adoption cases completed within 24 months at 42.5% in 2023. Indiana data shows 14.6% of cases reached permanency within the same time period.⁹ The majority, 52.7% of adoption cases in Indiana, reached permanency within 36 months.

% of Adoption Cases Completed w/in 24 Months

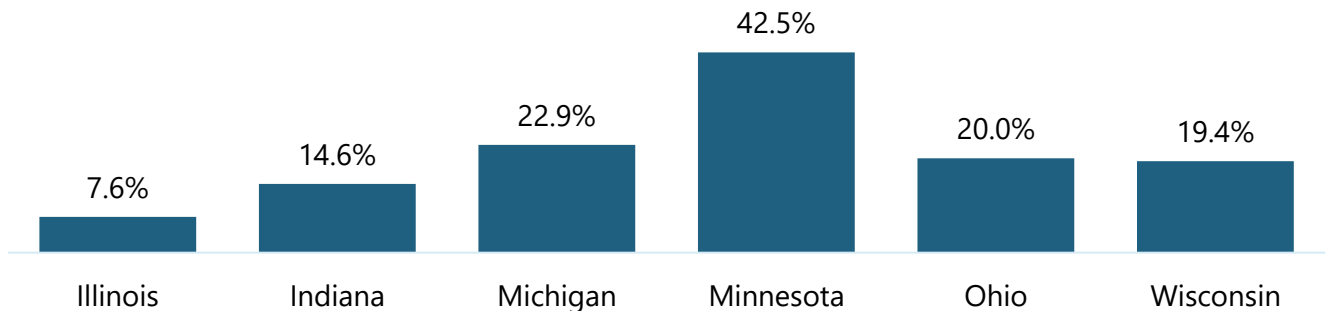


Figure 18

⁸ [Children's Bureau – Children Adopted](#)

⁹ [Children's Bureau – Time to Adoption](#) Minnesota law includes expedited timelines for permanency and termination proceedings. The state has since implemented reforms to address disproportionality in the child welfare system, which may influence outcomes reflected in this data over time.

COURT IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM (CIP)

About CIP

The Court Improvement Program (CIP) is administered by the Indiana Office of Court Services to enhance the safety, timely permanency, and well-being outcomes for children and families involved in child welfare proceedings. This report and the statewide collection of metrics are supported by CIP funding granted to the Indiana Supreme Court by the United States Department of Health and Human Services, Administration of Children and Families.

Activities

Tracking Timeliness in Child Welfare Proceedings

The Court Performance Measures were established in 2013 under Indiana Administrative Rule 1(F) to track and measure court performance in CHINS and TPR cases. These measures allow courts to assess compliance with national and state case processing timeliness standards, recognize strengths and areas for improvement, enhance the quality and timeliness of hearings, and improve outcomes for children and families involved in child welfare proceedings. Reports are generated on a quarterly basis, and all data undergoes thorough validation to identify and correct any errors. Corrections are provided to counties prior to the final submission of data to an online, public-facing data dashboard maintained by the CIP data analyst and publicly available on the Indiana Supreme Court's website:

(<https://www.in.gov/courts/iocs/cip/welfare/>).

The dashboard serves as a centralized, interactive tool to help judges and stakeholders use data to guide decisions and strengthen court processes. The dashboard includes historical data spanning the past five years and offers functionality to sort information by county, DCS region, or judicial district, with the ability to compare local data to state-level data. Where applicable, national standards are also included.

The dashboard format has evolved over time to enhance usability. It now features both median and average measures of central tendency and includes a permanency-focused page, as well as a county snapshot that presents key measures in a single, printable format.

Indiana's Child Welfare Improvement Committee

Each state that receives federal Court Improvement Program funding must form a statewide task force to support its work. Indiana's task force, the [Child Welfare Improvement Committee](#) (CWIC), is a multidisciplinary group composed of members appointed by the Chief Justice of the Indiana Supreme Court. CWIC examines ways to improve safety, timely permanency, and

well-being outcomes for children and families involved in the child welfare system. In 2025, CWIC engaged in strategic planning to redefine its purpose statement, identify actionable goals, and created workgroups to focus on developing and implementing child welfare system improvement projects related to stakeholder collaboration and communication.

Judicial Education and Training

CIP works in partnership with the Indiana Office of Court Services (IOCS) Education Division to support and provide funding for statewide training for judicial officers with juvenile and family court jurisdiction. CIP provided support for the March 2025 New Juvenile Judicial Officers Orientation, the June 2025 Juvenile Judges Annual Meeting, and the September 2025 Judicial Conference of Indiana. The conferences were attended by a total of 748 judicial officers. At the Juvenile Judges Annual Meeting, CIP participated in a panel discussion on strategies to convene local collaborative child welfare stakeholder meetings and distributed the one-page handout developed by CWIC containing information on strategies for improving time to permanency. CIP also provided funding for and presented at the GAL/CASA annual conference held in September 2025, which had 523 attendees.

CIP Collaborative Projects

In FFY 2024-2025, CIP collaborated with child welfare stakeholders statewide on a variety of projects designed to reduce time to permanency and improve safety and well-being for children and families.

Child and Family Services Review

CIP continued ongoing collaboration with the Indiana Department of Child Services (DCS) to complete the Child and Family Services Reviews Program Improvement Plan (PIP) for Indiana. The PIP focuses on areas needing improvement under the following domains:

- Workforce Development
- Service Array and Resource Development
- Foster Parent Recruitment and Retention
- Cross Collaboration with Courts

Each domain is broken down into specific key activities designed to achieve goals related to improving safety, permanency, and well-being outcomes. CIP staff regularly attended meetings to provide insight on implementation strategies and identify opportunities for partnership between DCS, Indiana's courts, and other child welfare stakeholders. CIP will continue participating in multiple PIP workgroups throughout the 2-year PIP cycle.

Quality Hearing Project

The quality hearing project is a collaboration between CIP, DCS, and the National Legal and Judicial Child Welfare Center for Innovation and Advancement to analyze current practice, work with pilot counties to identify actionable insights that can improve the efficacy of hearings and ultimately enhance the well-being of children involved in child welfare proceedings. Trained observers conducted approximately 50 hearing observations in each of the three pilot counties. The observers reviewed CHINS initial hearings, dispositional hearings, review hearings, and permanency hearings. The observers attended hearings in person and/or reviewed recordings of previously conducted hearings. The initial observations took place in October and November 2024. The data was analyzed and reports were provided to the individual pilot counties. The aggregate data from all pilot counties was anonymous and key takeaways were subsequently provided to stakeholders.

Listening Sessions

CIP collaborated with the Commission on Improving the Status of Children in Indiana to host a series of listening sessions between judicial officers with expertise in juvenile law and lived experts. The judicial officers held separate sessions with foster parents, parents, and youth. The sessions gave the lived experts the opportunity to engage in an open dialogue with the judges, identify areas of concern with Indiana's child welfare system, and discuss recommendations for improvement. The judicial officers shared what they learned at committee meetings and trainings attended by a variety of child welfare stakeholders. In conjunction with IOCS' Legal Support Division, CIP created a one-page summary for judicial officers with statutory authority and practical guidance on how to more effectively include foster parents and relative caregivers in child welfare hearings.

Proactive Hearings Pilot

CIP and DCS collaborated to select three pilot counties with strong leadership and proactive stakeholders to pilot a new scheduling structure: the court schedules the first CHINS review hearing and the first CHINS permanency hearing at the time of the initial hearing. The objectives of the pilot include reducing delays due to crowded dockets; increasing awareness of permanency timeliness; improving the timely holding of first review and first permanency hearings; improving court performance metrics; reducing the number of "failures to appear"; and emphasizing the importance of timely permanency.

Judges in the pilot counties scheduled the first review and first permanency hearing on the record before concluding the initial hearing and included the future hearing dates in the written court order provided to all parties. Other court stakeholders were educated on the purposes of the pilot and were encouraged to request that the court set timely hearings.

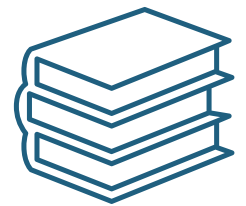
Collaborative Stakeholder Meetings Pilot

CIP and DCS selected three pilot counties to convene local stakeholder meetings to improve collaboration and permanency outcomes by establishing local relationships, reviewing local data from DCS and the CIP Data Dashboard, identifying opportunities for improvement, reducing unnecessary delays, and proposing new initiatives. Pilot counties were expected to hold quarterly stakeholder meetings and report on their activities. CIP staff attended the first meeting in each pilot county to provide technical assistance. The Director of DCS and the Chief Administrative Officer for the Office of Judicial Administration each wrote a letter to communicate expectations to DCS staff and the judiciary on the importance of local collaboration, including encouraging the use of dual status facilitations.

Grants & Scholarship Opportunities

CIP offers grant funding to Indiana courts that exercise jurisdiction over CHINS and TPR cases (including Dual Status cases), as well as legal aid and nonprofit organizations that provide legal assistance to clients involved in the child welfare system. CIP grants prioritize applications for projects designed to improve safety, timely permanency, and well-being outcomes for children and families involved in the child welfare system. For Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2025, CIP provided grants to seven counties totaling \$91,026.00.

CIP also supports ongoing professional development for judicial officers with juvenile court jurisdiction by providing scholarships for attendance at child-welfare related seminars, conferences, and meetings, and membership in child-welfare related professional organizations, such as the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (NCJFCJ). CIP scholarships will reimburse eligible expenses up to \$3,000 and require a 25% in-kind or cash match. For FFY 2025, CIP awarded \$12,677.61 in scholarship funds to five recipients to attend NCJFCJ conferences.



CIP Grant Recipients

Grant Funding for FFY 2025 Supported the Following Programs:

Allen County: The Allen County Superior Court-Family Relations Division utilized CIP grant funds to provide permanency mediations for CHINS cases that had been opened for over a year and would benefit from the program. The permanency mediation initiative aimed to

expedite permanency outcomes for children by supporting informed and timely decision making. The program served cases involving 55 children which resulted in 15 full agreements and 14 partial agreements.

Boone County: The Boone County Circuit Court utilized CIP grant funds to provide attorneys to CASAs representing the best interest of children in contested CHINS and TPR hearings. The attorneys were also available for legal consultation and to draft and file legal pleadings. The program provided legal assistance for cases involving 31 children.

Jennings County: Using local data from the CIP Court Performance Measures Dashboard, Jennings County Courts identified mediation as a potential opportunity to improve time to permanency. Jennings County Courts then utilized CIP grant funds to expand their mediation program to include cases in which timely permanency was an issue and explore whether those cases could be resolved with guardianship or relative placement. 100% of the county's CHINS cases participated in the mediation program, and 85% resulted in full agreements.

Kids' Voice of Indiana: Kids' Voice of Indiana used CIP grant funds to expand the distribution of the [2024 Indiana CHINS and Family Law Deskbook](#) to provide 100 additional copies to counties and legal aid organizations across the state. The Deskbook is a very useful resource for child welfare and family law judges, practitioners, and service providers that includes a summary of child welfare and family law cases and statutes. Prior to the 2024 edition, the Deskbook had not been updated since 2017. Deskbook recipients included the

"Thanks to the support of the CIP Grant, we have been able to broaden the reach of the updated Deskbook, making it accessible to more judges and courts throughout the state. We – and our project partners who are benefiting from the additional copies – are deeply appreciative."

-Lindsay Scott, President & CEO, Kids' Voice of Indiana

Indiana Supreme Court, Indiana Court of Appeals, State Office of GAL/CASA, and the judiciary and system stakeholders statewide.

Lawrence County: The Lawrence Circuit Court utilized CIP grant funds for CHINS and TPR mediations. The program focused on promoting faster resolutions of cases, decreasing conflict amongst parties, problem solving, negotiating post-adoption contract agreements, and enhancing informed decision-making focused on the best interests of the children. For FFY 2025, Lawrence County's mediation program served 72 children which resulted in 32 full agreements, 15 partial agreements, and 1 dismissal. The resolution of cases through mediation freed up valuable time on the Court's docket.

Tippecanoe County: Tippecanoe Superior Court III utilized CIP grant funds to provide monthly facilitations for child welfare cases, both pre- and post-adjudication. The goal of the

facilitations was to improve timely permanency for children and families. One hundred and twenty-two cases were referred to the mediation program, which resulted in 63 full agreements, 59 partial agreements, 12 dismissals, and 2 Informal Adjustments.

Looking ahead

In FFY 2026, CIP will continue its work to assist courts and stakeholders to improve safety, permanency, and well-being outcomes for children and families. CIP has several new projects on the horizon:

Direct Representation Pilot

CIP is in the initial stages of planning a small pilot to provide attorneys to certain youth in CHINS cases. CIP is currently gathering input from child welfare stakeholders across the state, including judicial officers, DCS staff, GAL/CASA, public defenders, and youth with lived experience. The pilot will take place in three counties and includes a focus on increasing youth engagement in permanency planning and at court hearings.

CWIC Workgroups

As part of its strategic planning efforts, CWIC identified the opportunity to leverage the expertise of its members to develop targeted system improvement efforts. CWIC convened workgroups to focus on projects related to child welfare stakeholder collaboration and communication. Each work group is composed of committee members representing different child welfare system stakeholders.

The collaboration workgroup will focus on the development of projects designed to foster engagement between child welfare system stakeholders. The communication workgroup will focus on the development of projects and resources designed to enhance the understanding of the child welfare system for children and families.

New CIP Strategic Plan in Development

With support from the ABA Center on Children and the Law National Legal and Judicial Child Welfare Center for Innovation and Advancement, CIP is engaged in five-year strategic plan development. CIP's new strategic plan will incorporate the change management cycle and continuous quality improvement concepts to identify priority areas of focus for system improvement efforts. Required initiatives will include a joint project with DCS, a hearing quality project, and a quality legal representation project.

Judicial Engagement Opportunity

CIP invites Certified Senior Judges with expertise in juvenile law to extend their judicial impact by serving as Jurists in Residence (JIRs). In addition to their work as Senior Judges, JIRs contract with CIP to provide targeted support to both CIP staff and judicial officers with juvenile jurisdiction across the state. Examples of JIR activities include:

- Serve as mentors to newly elected/appointed juvenile judicial officers
- Conduct court observation and feedback (upon request)
- Provide technical assistance and support in implementing best practices
- Enhance judicial decision making and court docket management
- Serve as consultants, trainers, and speakers, offering expert and experienced judicial advice on child welfare matters
- Assist CIP to design and implement child welfare improvement initiatives

This role allows Senior Judges to continue shaping high quality juvenile justice outcomes while mentoring the next generation of the judiciary.

Please contact jamie.devine@courts.in.gov for more information or to express interest in serving as a JIR.



HOW WE CAN HELP

CIP staff are available to provide technical assistance and support to courts, including:

- Providing courts with data and technical assistance in comparing and analyzing data
- Research and resources on best practices
- Jurists in Residence (Senior Judges with child welfare expertise) to:
 - Assist with projects
 - Coach/mentor Judicial Officers
 - Cover court allowing judicial officers time to implement projects
- Information on training and educational opportunities
- Grants to fund programs/projects intended to improve safety, well-being, and permanency outcomes for children involved in child welfare cases
- Professional development scholarships

Strategies to Improve Time to Permanency

- Establish local multidisciplinary teams to analyze permanency data, identify causes of delays, and implement steps to improve outcomes. County specific data is available on the [Child Welfare Court Performance Measures Dashboard](#)
- Consider mediation at different stages of a CHINS and TPR case
- Carefully review whether reasonable efforts are being made to achieve permanency
- Address child safety at each court hearing
- Require evidence that the child cannot safely return home before accepting other permanency plans
- Hold frequent review hearings following TPR and utilize post-TPR benchcards
- Utilize senior judges to hear non-contested guardianship and adoption cases
- Order DCS to refer children who are legally free for adoption without an identified adoptive family to the Indiana Adoption Program
- Expedite adoption hearings for children legally free for adoption and placed in pre-adoptive homes

Helpful Resources

- [Essential Questions to Ask at Each Hearing to Promote Permanency](#)
- National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (NCJFCJ) Enhanced Resource Guidelines: Improving Court Practice in Child Abuse and Neglect Cases (*available by emailing a request to cip@courts.in.gov*)
- NCJFCJ Enhanced Resource Guidelines: Child Welfare Caseworkers' Companion Guide (*available by emailing cip@courts.in.gov*)
- [NCJFCJ Bench Cards](#)
- [Spotlight Series for the Legal and Judicial Communities – CFSR Round 4](#)
- DCS Central Eligibility Unit (CEU) [Eligibility Binder](#) contains Desk Guides, Fact Sheets, Checklists, and other resources regarding: Adoption Assistance, Candidacy for Imminent Risk of Removal, Guardianship Assistance, Medicaid/Medicaid Enrollment, Title IV-A Emergency Assistance (EA), Title IV-E Collaborative Care Eligibility, Title IV-E Foster Care Eligibility (CHINS), and Social Security
- Capacity Building Center for Courts (CBCC) online learning experience, "Child Safety Training for Judges and Attorneys." The course covers the nuts-and-bolts of safety decision making in child welfare cases and is based on the ABA's [Child Safety: A Guide for Judges and Attorneys](#). Access the free course on [CapLEARN](#)
- [Post-TPR Benchcard](#) (child not in pre-adoptive home)
- [Post-TPR Benchcard](#) (child in pre-adoptive home)
- [Indiana Adoption Program](#) is a statewide initiative to help match adoptive families with waiting children
- Indicators of a Quality Court Hearing
https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/cb/pi1605_attachment
- [Child Welfare Court Performance Measures Dashboard](#) is an interactive webpage that provides the most recent statewide data with the ability to look at data at the state level, by individual county, DCS region or Judicial District
- The Quality Improvement Center on Engaging Youth in Finding Permanency ([QIC-EY](#)) has resources for courts and child welfare professionals to improve youth engagement in court and permanency planning.