

**JOINT LEGISLATIVE OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE
ON HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES**

NC Department of Health and Human Services

Child Welfare Update

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County DSS's Provide North Carolinians with a Broad Scope of Services

- **Medicaid Eligibility Determinations**
- **Child Welfare Services**
- **Adult Protective Services and Guardianship**
- **Child Support Services**
- **Food and Nutrition Services**
- **Work First Family Assistance**
- **Child Care Subsidy**
- **Energy Assistance**
- **Special Assistance**

State Supervised, County Administered System

- **North Carolina's social services system is state-supervised, county-administered — one of nine in the country. Most states have a centralized administrative system.**
- **The NC DHHS Division of Social Services is the supervising and oversight agency for the administration of social services in North Carolina.**
- **Per G.S. §108A-74, NC DHHS has the responsibility and authority to evaluate a county department of social services' provision of child welfare services; the delivery of services must be in accordance with applicable state laws, rules, and policies.**

Regional Support Model: Helping to Improve Quality and Effectiveness of DSS programs

- **NC DHHS continues to implement the regional support model for social services agencies outlined in Rylan's Law (S.L. 2017-14)**
- **The model will allow NC DHHS to deploy continuous quality improvement and technical assistance more proactively, effectively and efficiently across the state**
- **With support from the General Assembly included in last year's approved budget, NC DHHS has made progress in filling the newly funded positions:**
 - **Lead Regional Director began on January 8**
 - **4 Regional Director positions are in the final stages of hiring**
 - **3 positions remain in active recruiting**

Counties are Facing a Workforce Crisis

- **Local DSS positions are mostly funded through county and federal resources**
- **Each county has different levels of resources that drive staffing levels and salaries for social services employees**
- **Counties are facing a severe workforce crisis driven by a variety of factors**
 - **Low salaries in many counties**
 - **Wide variance in salaries across the state**
 - **Competition from other industries for workers**
 - **Difficult jobs**
 - **Retirements**

Local Workforce Challenges Impact Child Welfare Services

- **High rates of Turnover**
 - Children’s safety through timely assessment is impacted by staff turnover:
 - ~1 in 4 frontline child welfare workers are replaced and retrained in a year
 - Roughly a fifth of counties had 50% or higher turnover in their child welfare workers (NC DHHS Child Welfare Staffing 2020)
- **Staffing/Caseloads**
 - Over half of NC counties did not have enough staff to meet caseload levels

Additional State Funding Will Help Counties Address Workforce Challenges

- **Local DSS's have continued to advocate for state aid to counties**
- **Flexible funding would allow counties to address the specific challenges facing their local workforce including:**
 - **Increasing pay**
 - **Offering hiring and retention bonuses**
 - **Creating new positions to ease workload burden on existing staff**
- **State aid to county DSS's has not been funded since FY 2009**

Child Welfare Overview

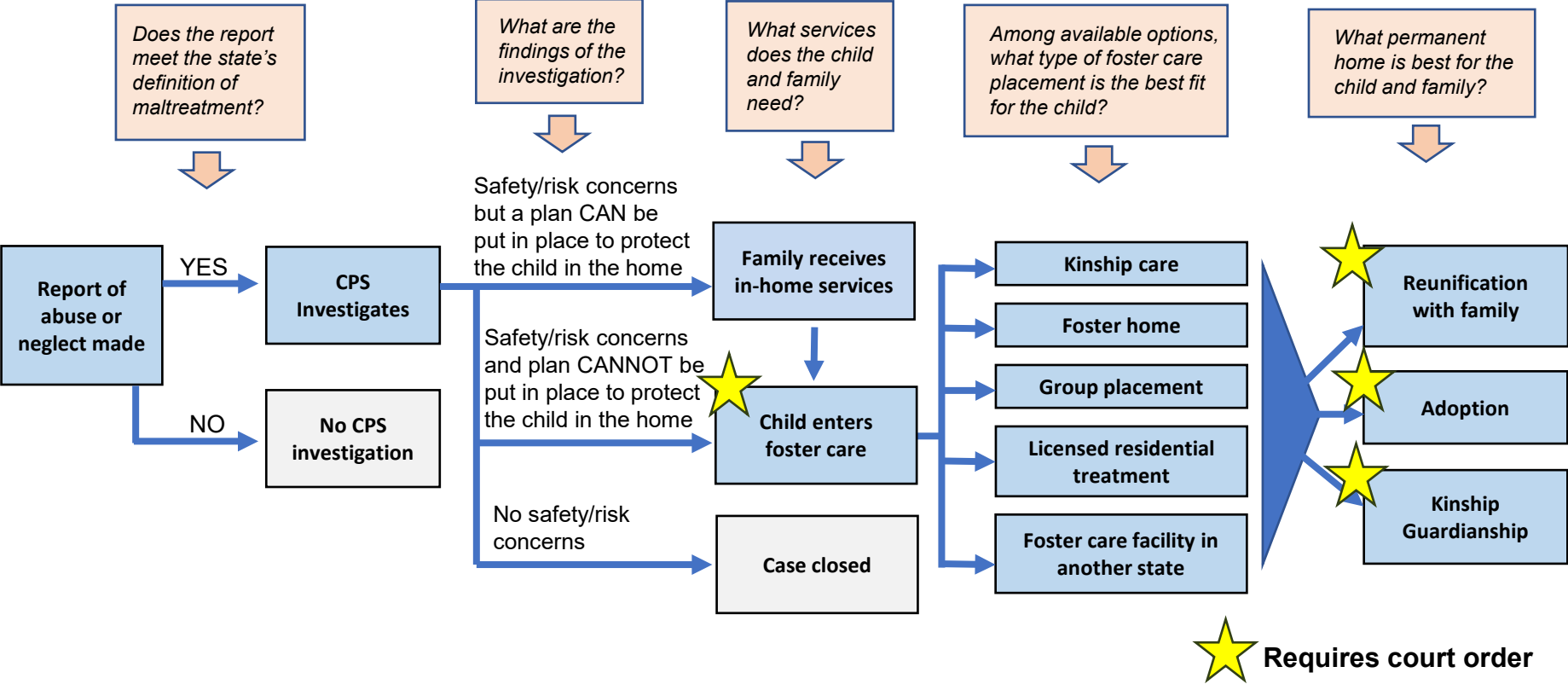
Report

Intake

Assessment

Placement

Permanency



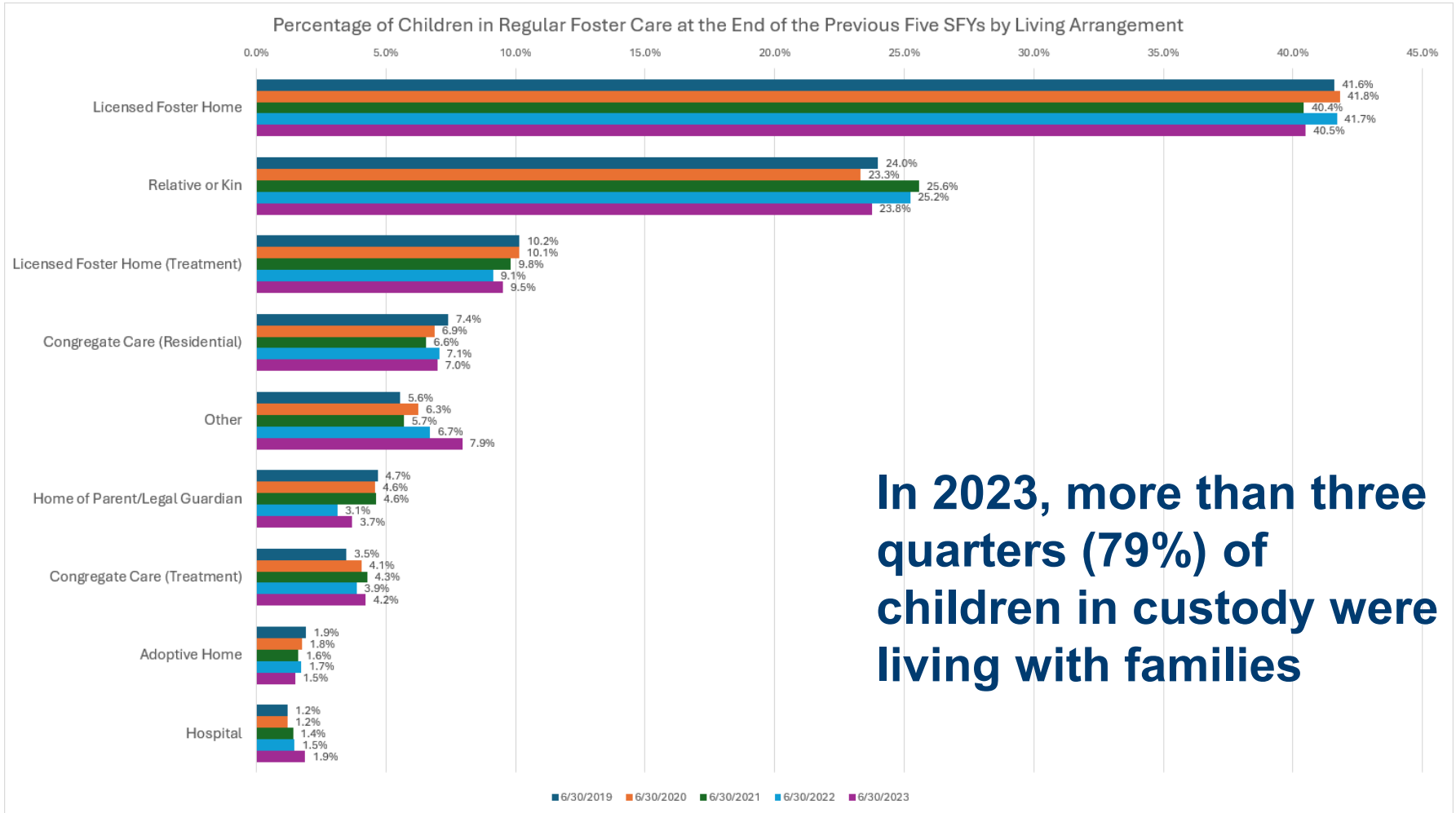
Key Decision Points for a Child and Family

- **CPS Report – Anyone can make a CPS report in NC. Reports that meet the definition for abuse, neglect, or dependency are investigated by local DSS.**
- **Assessment – During assessment, social workers investigate the level of safety and risk concerns for a child within their family and living situation.**
- **Foster Care Placement – The first choice is for a relative to provide foster care to keep children with their families. If kinship care isn't an option, children should be placed in the most family-like setting appropriate to their needs.**
- **Permanency – Placements that provide consistent, stable, nurturing living situations are critical to positive outcomes for children and families.**
- **Exiting Foster Care – Reunification with parents is the primary goal for children in foster care, but it's not always an option. Adoption is another path to lasting permanency.**

Snapshot of Children in Foster Care

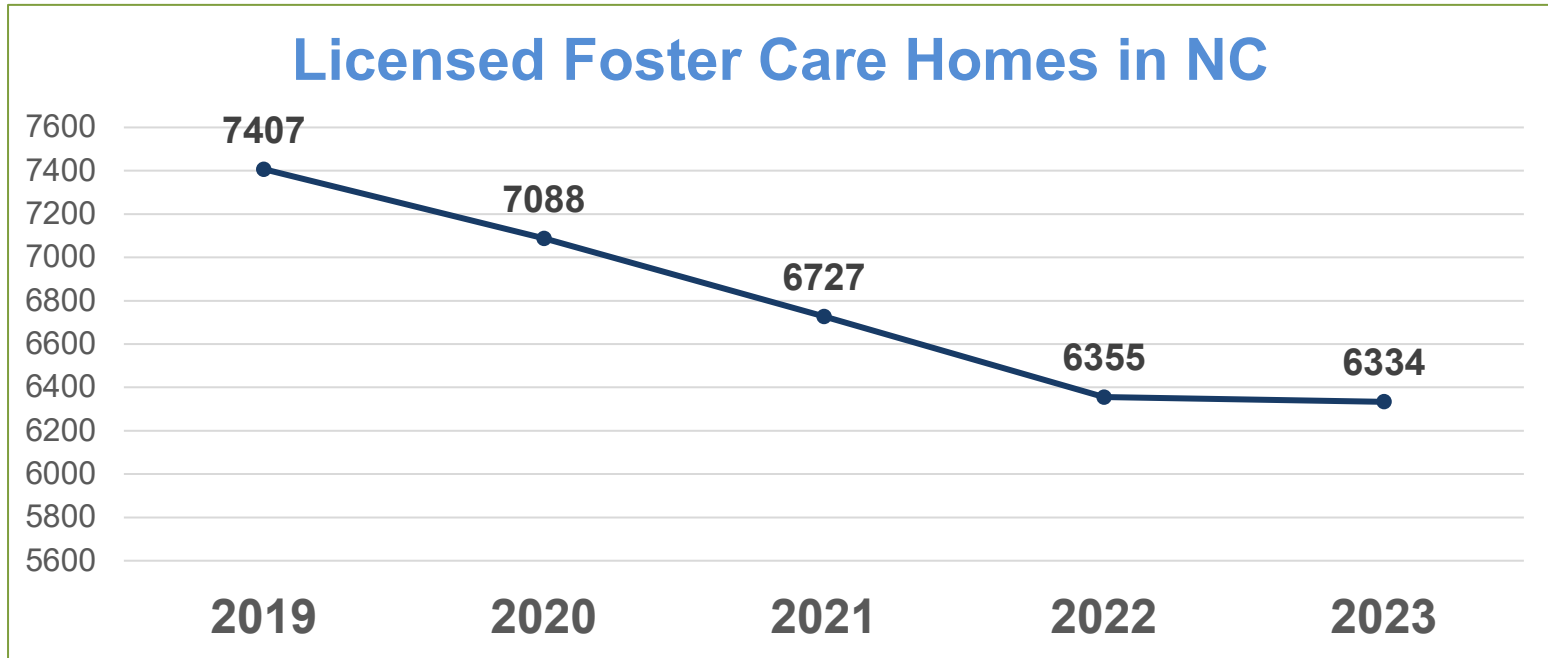
- **In SFY 2022-23, 15,047 children spent at least one day in foster care in NC.**
- **Children in rural counties enter foster care at twice the rate of children in urban counties.**
- **40% of children in foster care are 5 years old or younger.**
- **NC has fewer placement moves (2.35 per 1000 days) in comparison to the national average of 4.48 per 1000 days.**

Foster Care Trends by Placement



In 2023, more than three quarters (79%) of children in custody were living with families

Licensed Foster Care Trends in NC



- **From November to December 2023, we have seen an increase of more than 300 licensed foster families**

Licensed Foster Care Trends in Other States

	Percent decrease from 2019 - 2023
North Carolina	15%
South Carolina	66%
Tennessee	13%
Georgia	40%
Kentucky	10%

Source: The Imprint

Key Challenges Facing Children and Families

- **Children remain in the system for far too long**
 - Workforce challenges
 - Insufficient court resources and variation in practices
- **Children experience too many placements**
 - Workforce turnover creates disruption in placement plans
 - Without access to adequate mental health services, we have seen sharp increases in child behavior that causes disruption in placements
- **Too many children are in inappropriate settings**
 - Children are in more restrictive settings than needed
 - Children are escalating to higher levels of need because they have not received appropriate behavioral health treatment

The longer children stay in the system, the more likely they are to have multiple placements and increased trauma

Addressing Challenges

- **Kinship provider support**

- **Newly launched program to provide financial supports to kinship providers to increase the number of foster-care involved youth who are placed in kinship care**
- **Over 1,100 kinship homes have been enrolled with more than 2,000 children in kinship placements**
- **Process for state reimbursement is complete for all counties**

Addressing Challenges

- **Legislative increase in foster care rates**

Foster Care Board Rates by Age Group			
	0-5	6-12	13+
July 2022 – June 2023	\$514	\$654	\$698
July 2023 - present	\$702	\$742	\$810

Note: Rates are per child, per month

Addressing Challenges

- **Supporting County Innovation**
- **Emergency Placement Funds**
 - **\$7.79 million from the behavioral health funding allocated by the General Assembly to address complex behavioral health or other special needs**
 - **Funds will assist county DSS in addressing identified placement needs for children in custody of the agencies**
 - **100% of funds are allocated to the counties and are available for use beginning February 1**

Key Focus Areas Moving Forward

- **Implementing NCGA funded behavioral health investments to strengthen services in the community**
- **Legislative action to alleviate staffing crisis and better serve children and families:**
 - Provide state aid to counties
 - Increase capacity of courts to expedite permanency

Appendix

Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) Update

- **Positions added with federal transition act dollars to build capacity to implement within the seven social services:**
 - FFPSA Services Manager and 7 Regionally Deployed Prevention Specialists
 - Child Welfare Finance Manager and 3 reporting Budget Analyst
- **Federally approved plan includes the following evidence-based services to prevent children from entering foster care:**
 - Homebuilders: launching February 2024
 - Parents as Teachers
 - Triple P
 - Multi-Systemic Therapy

Foster Care Trauma-Informed Assessment

- **Meeting convened with Benchmarks and NC DHHS leaders**
- **Identified additional stakeholders to join**
- **Reviewed timeline deliverables to build a plan for implementation**
- **Ongoing meeting schedule developed**