



Senate Committee on Health and Human Services: Recurrence of Child Abuse and Neglect

Judge John Specia, DFPS Commissioner

April 20, 2016

The mission of the Department of Family and Protective Services is to protect children, the elderly, and people with disabilities from abuse, neglect, and exploitation by involving clients, families, and communities.

Examine the current process that Child Protective Services uses to track recurrence of child abuse and neglect, and make recommendations to improve data tracking and the use of that data to assist in preventing recurrence. The study should examine the differences in recurrence among families who received services, families who received no services and had their cases closed, and families who had their children removed from the home.

Defining Recurrence

When DFPS receives a report of abuse or neglect, we look at any prior DFPS involvement with the family. We then use that information to help inform our decision making throughout the course of our work.

After we close a case, we track recurrence by type of intervention:

Investigations

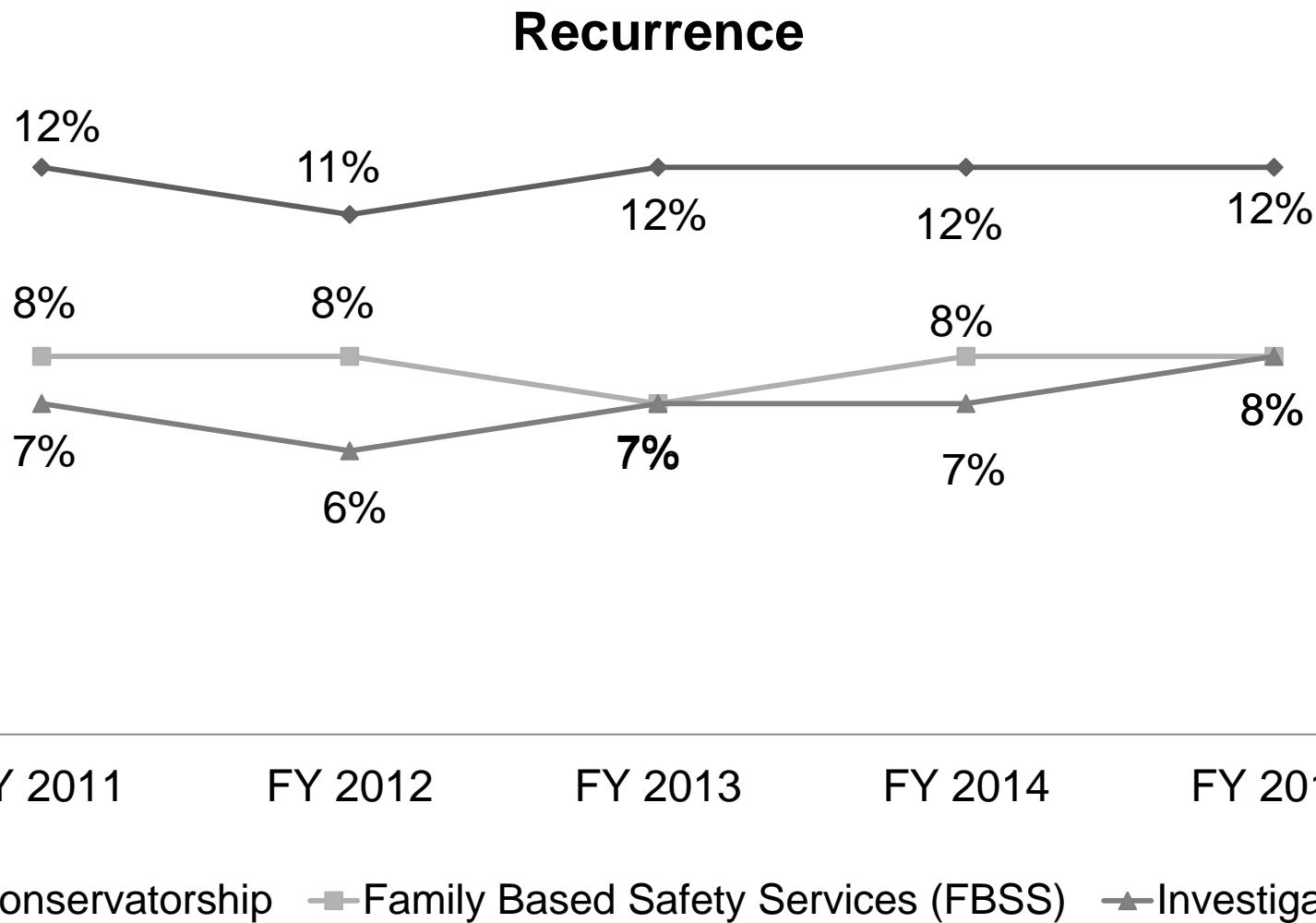
- Children reported to have been abused or neglected but did not receive services (regardless of disposition) and then had a subsequent confirmed allegation or case open for services within the next 12 months.

Family Based Safety Services (FBSS)

- Children with FBSS case closed without a removal who then had a subsequent confirmed allegation or case open for services within the next 12 months.

Conservatorship

- Children who return home from DFPS conservatorship and then have a subsequent confirmed allegation or case open for services within the next 12 months.



Recurrence Reporting: Conclusions

- The rate of recurrence has not changed significantly over the last 5 years.
- Using federal measures of recurrence, recurrence in Texas is lower than the national average.
- Recurrence is highest for children who return home from DFPS conservatorship as these children are generally in the highest risk families.
- Currently, DFPS only reports recurrence for children. DFPS will add perpetrators to recurrence reporting in the FY16 Databook.

Identification at Intake:

- When Statewide Intake (SWI) receives a report of alleged abuse or neglect, the SWI worker must consider risk factors based on the information available.
 - For example:
 - Are there drugs or a history of drug use?
 - Is there family violence or a history of family violence?
 - Is there mental illness or a history of mental illness?
 - For every report, the SWI worker looks to see if there is any case history.
 - The case history helps determine the priority level and appropriate routing for the report.
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CPS Investigations:

- CPS investigates reports of child abuse or neglect to determine if any child in the family has been abused or neglected. Prior history is reviewed to help inform safety and risk decisions
- In August 2015, CPS began using Structured Decision Making tools during the investigation. These tools incorporate prior history to help the caseworker make decisions in the case.
- CPS Investigators use prior history throughout the life of the case to evaluate child safety and to assess need for services.
 - For example, if there is a parent with a history of substance abuse issues, CPS may conduct a drug test in the new investigation.

Using Prior History to Inform Decision Making: Family Based Safety Services

Family Based Safety Services:

- Services may be offered at the conclusion of an investigation where risk or safety concerns remain in the home.
- CPS works directly with parents, extended family members, and community providers to:
 - Enhance parents' protective capacities;
 - Build a network of support around a family that will keep children safe in their own homes;
 - Help stabilize the family; and
 - Reduce the safety threats of future abuse or neglect.
- CPS Uses Prior history to:
 - Determine the best course of action for the family.
 - Help identify high risk cases needing additional support and case review.

Conservatorship:

- When children cannot live safely at home, the court can grant temporary conservatorship to CPS.
- Children may be placed in foster care or with relatives in a “kinship care” setting.
- CPS uses prior history to assess the biological family needs to help support reunification, including services for the child and family.
- Prior history is also used to ensure the foster or kinship setting is safe and appropriate for the child.

Prevention and Early Intervention

Prevention and Early Intervention (PEI) promotes positive outcomes for children, youth, families, and communities through family strengthening programs based on research and data. All of these programs focus on preventing child abuse and neglect.



Prevention and Early Intervention

While PEI primarily focuses on families who are not known to the CPS system, PEI has several initiatives specifically targeting the recurrence of child abuse or neglect :

- The Helping through Intervention and Prevention (HIP) program serves all families with a newborn who:
 - Previously had their parental rights terminated due to child abuse and neglect;
 - Previously had a child die with the cause identified as child abuse or neglect; or
 - Currently are foster youth in care.
 - The Community Based Family Services program serves the parents or caregivers of children whose CPS cases were determined low risk and are being closed with parenting classes and home-visitation in eleven counties.
 - PEI is opening its contracted programs to be able to serve families with open or previous CPS cases, including the new Military Families Program.
 - PEI has developed a public education campaign to help parents deal with the stress of parenting. This can be used by CPS staff with open cases and speaks to common vulnerabilities like infant crying and challenging teenage behavior.
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Recommendations

- To improve data tracking and use of data, continue modernizing the DFPS data system to make it easier for staff to quickly and effectively access prior history.
 - Allow better coordination and access to data systems.
 - Consider options for additional post-CPS involvement services, such as home visiting, for cases at a higher risk of recurrence.
 - Review the record retention schedule and consider improvements to record retention policy.
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