

January 28, 2021

Ms. Kay Inabnet
Assistant Assembly Chief Clerk
17 West Main Street, Suite 401
Madison, WI 53703

Mr. Mike Queensland
Senate Chief Clerk
B20 – Southeast, State Capitol
Madison, WI 53703

Dear Assistant Assembly Chief Clerk Inabnet and Senate Chief Clerk Queensland:

In compliance with 2009 Wisconsin Act 78, the Child Welfare Public Disclosure Act, attached is the Department of Children and Families' 2020 annual report, which details alleged sexual abuse of children residing in out-of-home care. The data provided in this report addresses incidents of alleged sexual abuse for the period January 1 through December 31, 2020 and fulfills the Department of Children and Families' reporting requirements under Section 48.981(9)(b) of the Wisconsin Statutes.

We appreciate the legislature's interest in Wisconsin's child welfare system and their commitment to supporting the Department of Children and Families (DCF), county and tribal child welfare agencies, and the hundreds of non-profit organizations who work to protect Wisconsin children every day. Like you, we are saddened by all cases of child maltreatment and are committed to strengthening families so that child maltreatment does not occur. Wisconsin is fortunate to have dedicated and passionate child welfare workers and we want to recognize and express our appreciation for their commitment and compassion as they engage in these cases on a daily basis.

We encourage legislators and stakeholders to reinforce awareness that prevention of child maltreatment is a community-wide responsibility involving all individuals and organizations in the community, and to continue to support efforts at the local and state levels to develop a more robust and consistent array of child maltreatment prevention services. Through collaborative and data-driven analyses and discussions, we all can support efforts to strengthen the families in our state to provide safe, stable and nurturing homes for their children and help our families and children succeed and thrive.

The following is a summary of the findings in the [report](#):

Number of Reported Incidents: 188

Wisconsin child protective services agencies screened in and investigated 188 reported incidents of suspected sexual abuse to 168 children residing in out-of-home care during 2020.

Dates of the Incidents:

The reported incidents are estimated to have occurred between May 6, 2008, and December 27, 2020. Children disclose abuse in different stages; therefore, it is common for abuse to be reported months or even years after the incident occurred. In cases of alleged abuse involving non-verbal children, dates of alleged maltreatment are often difficult or impossible to determine.

Maltreatment Determinations:

For reported incidents, maltreatment determinations were made for 167 (89%) of the reported incidents. Of the incidents for which maltreatment determinations were made, 132 (68%) were unsubstantiated (i.e., preponderance of the evidence indicating that sexual abuse occurred was not found) while 26 (13%) of the reported incidents were substantiated. In addition, maltreatment determinations in seven incidents (4%) could not be made because the agencies were not able to locate the family. In two additional incidents (1%), services determinations were made in lieu of maltreatment determinations. Maltreatment determinations for the remaining 21 incidents (11%) are pending because the investigations are not complete.

Nature of Maltreater Relationship:

Of the 26 substantiated incidents, the relationship of the maltreater to the child was:

- A non-caregiver in 12 incidents
- A stranger in seven incidents
- An unknown maltreater in two incidents
- A sibling in one incident
- Another child in the foster home in one incident
- Another child in shelter care in one incident
- A biological parent in one incident
- A non-relative foster parent in one incident

Of the 26 substantiated incidents listed above, sex trafficking was identified as the type of sexual abuse in 12 incidents.

Types of Placement:

Of the 26 substantiated incidents, the child's placement type was:

- A group home in seven incidents
- A non-relative treatment foster home in five incidents
- Missing from out-of-home care in four incidents
- A shelter in three incidents
- A non-relative foster home in two incidents
- A relative foster home in one incident
- Court ordered kinship care in one incident
- A residential care center in one incident

- An unlicensed non-relative in one incident
- An unlicensed relative in one incident
- The alleged sexual abuse did not necessarily occur within the placement setting or by a maltreater who resided in the setting.

Location of Substantiated Incidents:

Forty-two counties have investigated, or are investigating, incidents of sexual abuse to children residing in out-of-home care. Ten counties substantiated one or more incidents of sexual abuse as follows:

- Milwaukee County substantiated 14 incidents
- Dane County substantiated two incidents
- Wood County substantiated two incidents
- Grant County substantiated two incidents
- Kenosha County substantiated one incident
- Dodge County substantiated one incident
- Ozaukee County substantiated one incident
- Vernon County substantiated one incident
- Vilas County substantiated one incident
- Walworth County substantiated one incident

Ages or Age Group of Children:

Alleged sexual abuse was reported for children ages 1 to 17 years. Of the 26 substantiated incidents of sexual abuse, there were four substantiated incidents for children seven years and younger and 22 substantiated incidents for children eight years and older.

In closing, thank you for the opportunity to provide the attached information and for your continued partnership in ensuring all Wisconsin children are safe and loved members of thriving families and communities. Feel free to contact the department with questions or clarification requests.

Sincerely,



Emilie Amundson
Secretary

Attachment

cc: Governor Tony Evers