

January 28, 2022

Edward A. Blazel
Assembly Chief Clerk
Risser Justice Center
17 West Main Street, Suite 401
Madison, WI 53703

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

Dear Assembly Chief Clerk Blazel and Senate Chief Clerk Queensland:

In compliance with 2009 Wisconsin Act 78, the Child Welfare Public Disclosure Act, please accept the Department of Children and Families' 2021 annual report on alleged sexual abuse of children residing in out-of-home care. The data presented below addresses incidents of alleged sexual abuse for the period January 1 through December 31, 2021 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, 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:

Wisconsin child protective services agencies screened in and investigated 208 reported incidents of suspected sexual abuse to 173 children residing in out-of-home care.

Dates of the Incidents:

The 208 reported incidents are estimated to have occurred between April 2009 and December 23, 2021. Because children disclose abuse in different stages, it is common for children to report incidents months or even years after the incident occurred. Furthermore, in cases of alleged abuse involving non-verbal children, dates of alleged maltreatment are often difficult or impossible to determine.

Maltreatment Determinations:

Of the 208 reported incidents, maltreatment determinations were made for 191 (92%) of the reported incidents, while 17 (8%) maltreatment determinations are pending because the investigations are not complete.

Of the 191 reported incidents where the maltreatment determination was made, 143 (75%) were unsubstantiated (i.e., preponderance of the evidence indicating that sexual abuse occurred was not found), 39 (20%) were substantiated, 6 (3%) were unable to locate source, 2 (1%) was deemed services not needed, and 1 (0.5%) was deemed services needed.

Nature of Maltreater Relationship:

Of the 39 substantiated incidents, the relationships of the maltreaters to the children were as follows:

- A non-caregiver in 10 cases
- A stranger in five cases
- An unnamed minor in four cases
- A relative non-care provider in three cases
- Another child in a licensed care facility (not foster care) in two cases
- A non-relative foster parent in two cases
- A relative care provider in two cases
- An unknown maltreater in two cases
- An individual who shared a foster home in one case
- Another child in one case
- Another child in a foster home in one case
- A family friend in one case
- A peer maltreater in one case
- A relative primary care provider in one case
- A sibling or step sibling in one case
- A staff member in a congregate care facility in one case
- A stepparent in one case

19 of the substantiated incidents included allegations of sex trafficking.

Types of Placement:

Of the 39 substantiated incidents, the placement types of the children were as follows:

- A group home in 15 incidents
- A non-relative foster family home in six incidents
- A court-ordered kinship home in five incidents
- A relative foster family home in four incidents
- A non-relative treatment foster care family home in three incidents
- Missing from out-of-home care in two incidents
- A residential care center in two incidents
- An unlicensed relative in one incident
- A shelter care facility in one incident

Location of Substantiated Incidents:

Of the 39 substantiated incidents of sexual abuse to children residing in out-of-home care, incidents took place in the following 14 counties:

- Milwaukee County substantiated 20 incidents
- Wood County substantiated three incidents
- Brown County substantiated two incidents
- Eau Claire County substantiated two incidents
- Kenosha County substantiated two incidents
- Portage County substantiated two incidents
- Waushara County substantiated two incidents
- Chippewa County substantiated one incident
- Jackson County substantiated one incident
- Manitowoc County substantiated one incident
- Sheboygan County substantiated one incident
- Vernon County substantiated one incident
- Waukesha County substantiated one incident

Ages or Age Group of Children:

Alleged sexual abuse was reported for children ages 0 to 17 years. Of the 39 substantiated incidents of sexual abuse, there were eight substantiated incidents for children seven years and younger and 32 substantiated incidents for children eight years and older.

In closing, thank you 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