



January 29th, 2024

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

Richard Champagne
Acting Senate Chief Clerk
B20 – Southeast, State Capitol
Madison, WI 53703

Dear Assembly Chief Clerk Blazel and Acting Senate Chief Clerk Champagne:

In compliance with 2009 Wisconsin Act 78, the Child Welfare Public Disclosure Act, please accept the Department of Children and Families' (DCF) 2023 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, 2023, and fulfills the DCF reporting requirements under Section 48.981(9)(b) of the Wisconsin Statutes. The data has been updated to reflect new information learned during the preparation of the 2023 annual report relating to incidents that were pending at the time of the release of the quarterly reports for the 2023 calendar year. For example, updating the number of incidents initially reported.

We appreciate the Legislature's interest in Wisconsin's child welfare system and their commitment to supporting 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 very challenging situations with children and families 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: 209

Wisconsin child protective services agencies screened in and investigated 209 reported incidents of suspected sexual abuse to 175 children residing in out-of-home care.

Dates of the Incidents:

The 209 reported incidents are estimated to have occurred between March 29, 2013 and December 20, 2023. 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 209 reported incidents, maltreatment determinations were made for 177 (85%) of the reported incidents, while 32 (15%) maltreatment determinations are pending because the investigations are not complete.

Of the 177 reported incidents where the maltreatment determination was made, 135 (76%) were unsubstantiated (i.e., preponderance of the evidence indicating that sexual abuse occurred was not found), 36 (20%) were substantiated, four (2%) were unable to be located, and two (1%) were deemed services not needed.

Nature of Maltreater Relationship:

Of the 36 substantiated incidents, the relationships of the maltreaters to the children were as follows:

- A non-caregiver in eight incidents
- A stranger in eight incidents
- A minor in the placement setting in eight incidents
- A non-relative foster parent in three incidents
- Other minor maltreater in two incident
- A biological parent in one incident
- A family friend in one incident
- A partner/friend sharing dwelling in one incident
- A relative non-care provider in one incident
- A step parent in one incident
- A teacher or other school employee in one incident
- An unknown maltreater in one incident

Fourteen (14) of the 36 substantiated incidents included allegations of sex trafficking.

Types of Placement:

Of the 36 substantiated incidents, the placement types of the children were as follows:

- Missing from out-of-home care in 10 incidents
- A non-relative foster family home in six incidents
- A detention facility in three incidents
- A court-ordered kinship home in three incidents
- An unlicensed relative home in three incidents
- A non-relative treatment foster home in three incidents
- A group home in two incidents
- A residential care center in two incidents
- A relative foster family home in one incident
- An unlicensed non-relative in one incident
- A shelter care facility in one incident
- A juvenile correctional facility in one incident

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Location of Substantiated Incidents:

Of the 36 substantiated incidents of sexual abuse to children residing in out-of-home care, incidents took place in the following 11 counties:

- Twenty incidents took place in Milwaukee County
- Six incidents took place in Racine County
- Two incidents took place in Marathon County
- One incident took place in Barron County
- One incident took place in Dane County
- One incident took place in Fond du Lac County
- One incident took place in Grant County
- One incident took place in Kenosha County
- One incident took place in Price County
- One incident took place in Vernon County
- One incident took place in Washington County

Ages or Age Group of Children:

Alleged sexual abuse was reported and investigated for children ages two to 17 years. Of the 36 substantiated incidents of sexual abuse, there were five substantiated incidents for children seven years and younger and 31 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

cc: Governor Tony Evers