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Governor Tony Evers
Secretary Emilie Amundson

Secretary's Office

January 31, 2020

Jeffrey Renk
Senate Chief Clerk
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P.O. Box 7882
Madison, WI 53707

Patrick E. Fuller
Assembly Chief Clerk
Risser Justice Center
17 West Main Street, Suite 401
P.O. Box 8952
Madison, WI 53708

Dear Chief Clerk Renk and Chief Clerk Fuller:

In compliance with 2009 Wisconsin Act 78, the Child Welfare Public Disclosure Act, attached is the Department of Children and Families' 2019 annual report, which details alleged sexual abuse of children residing in out-of-home care. The attached data details reports of alleged sexual abuse for the period January 1 through December 31, 2019, and fulfills the Department of Children and Families' reporting requirements under Section 48.981(9)(b), Wis. Stats.

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 attached report:

Number of Reported Incidents: 197

Wisconsin child protective services agencies screened in and investigated 197 reported incidents of suspected sexual abuse to 176 children residing in out-of-home care during 2019.

Dates of the Incidents:

The reported incidents are estimated to have occurred between March 2015 and December 2019. 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 166 (84%) of the reported incidents. Of the incidents for which maltreatment determinations were made, 139 (84%) were unsubstantiated (i.e., preponderance of the evidence indicating that sexual abuse occurred was not found) while 27 (16%) of the reported incidents were substantiated. In addition, maltreatment determinations in two incidents (1%) could not be made because the agencies were not able to locate the family. In three additional incidents (2%), services determinations were made in lieu of maltreatment determinations. Maltreatment determinations for the remaining 26 incidents (13%) are pending because the investigations are not complete.

Nature of Maltreater Relationship:

Of the 27 substantiated incidents, the relationship of the maltreater to the child was:

- A non-caregiver in six incidents
- A stranger in five incidents
- A sibling in four incidents
- Another child in the foster home in four incidents
- Another child in licensed care in two incidents (one in shelter care, and one in a residential care center)
- A partner sharing the child's dwelling in two incidents
- An unnamed minor in two incidents
- A minor child in one incident
- A non-relative informal caregiver in one incident

Of the 27 substantiated incidents listed above, sex trafficking was identified as the type of sexual abuse in 11 incidents.

Types of Placement:

Of the 27 substantiated incidents, the child's placement type was:

- A residential care center in seven
- A group home in six
- A non-relative treatment foster home in six
- A non-relative foster home in four
- Court ordered kinship care in two
- A shelter in two

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:

Thirty-three 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:

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- Milwaukee County substantiated 11 incidents
- Dane County substantiated four incidents
- Eau Claire County substantiated two incidents
- Outagamie County substantiated two incidents
- Racine County substantiated two incidents
- Wood County substantiated two incidents
- Brown County substantiated one incident
- Burnett County substantiated one incident
- Chippewa County substantiated one incident
- Grant County substantiated one incident

Ages or Age Group of Children:

Alleged sexual abuse was reported for children ages 0 to 17 years. Of the 27 substantiated incidents of sexual abuse, there were three substantiated incidents for children seven years and younger and 24 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