

January 29, 2025

Richard Champagne
Senate Chief Clerk
State Capitol, B20 SE
P.O. Box 7882
Madison, WI 53703

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

Dear Senate Chief Clerk Champagne and Assembly Chief Clerk Blazel:

In compliance with 2009 Wisconsin Act 78, the Child Welfare Public Disclosure Act, please accept the Department of Children and Families' (DCF's) 2024 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, 2024, 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 2024 annual report relating to incidents that were pending at the time of the release of the quarterly reports for the 2024 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 professionals, 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: 145

Wisconsin child protective services agencies screened in and investigated 145 reported incidents of suspected sexual abuse to 113 children residing in out-of-home care.

Dates of the Incidents:

The 145 reported incidents are estimated to have occurred between May 2018 and December 2024. 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 145 reported incidents, maltreatment determinations were made for 128 (88%) of the reported incidents, while 17 (12%) maltreatment determinations are pending because the investigations are not complete.

Of the 128 reported incidents where the maltreatment determination was made, 96 (75%) were unsubstantiated (i.e., preponderance of the evidence indicating that sexual abuse occurred was not found), 22 (17%) were substantiated, five (4%) were unable to locate source, and five (4%) were deemed services not needed.

Nature of Maltreater Relationship:

Of the 22 substantiated incidents, the relationships of the maltreaters to the children were as follows:

- A court-ordered relative care provider in four incidents
- A non-caregiver in four incidents
- A stranger in four incidents
- A minor maltreater not in the placement setting in four incidents
- A biological parent in three incidents
- A relative non-care provider in one incident
- A minor in the placement setting in one incident
- An unknown maltreater in one incident

Nine (9) of the 22 substantiated incidents included allegations of sex trafficking.

Types of Placement Settings:

Of the 22 substantiated incidents, the placement types of the children were as follows:

- A court-ordered kinship home in six incidents
- A non-relative foster family home in three incidents
- Missing from out-of-home care in three incidents
- A group home in three incidents
- A shelter care facility in three incidents
- An unlicensed relative in two incidents
- An unlicensed non-relative in one incident
- A pre-adoptive home in one incident

Location of Substantiated Incidents:

Of the 22 substantiated incidents of sexual abuse to children residing in out-of-home care, incidents took place in the following 8 counties:

- Twelve incidents took place in Milwaukee County
- Three incidents took place in Washburn County
- Two incidents took place in Outagamie County
- One incident took place in Door County
- One incident took place in La Crosse County
- One incident took place in Manitowoc County
- One incident took place in Racine County
- One incident took place in Winnebago County

Ages or Age Group of Children:

Alleged sexual abuse was reported and investigated for children less than one year to 17 years of age. Of the 22 substantiated incidents of sexual abuse, there were six substantiated incidents for children seven years and younger and 16 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,



Jeff Pertl
Secretary

cc: Governor Tony Evers