

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 fourth quarter report on alleged sexual abuse of children residing in out-of-home care. The data presented below addresses reports of alleged sexual abuse for the period October 1 through December 31, 2024 and fulfills the DCF reporting requirements under Section 48.981(9)(a), Wis. Stats.

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. 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: 36

Wisconsin child protective services agencies screened in and investigated 36 reported incidents of suspected sexual abuse to 30 children residing in out-of-home care.

Dates of the Incidents:

The 36 reported incidents are estimated to have occurred between August 2024 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 36 reported incidents, maltreatment determinations were made for 17 (47%) of the reported incidents, while 19 (53%) determinations are pending because the investigations are not complete.

Of the 17 reported incidents where the maltreatment determination was made, 10 (59%) were unsubstantiated (i.e., preponderance of the evidence indicating that sexual abuse occurred was not found), six (35%) were substantiated, and one (6%) was deemed services not needed.

Nature of Maltreater Relationship:

Of the six substantiated incidents, the relationship of the maltreater to the child was a biological parent in two incidents, a stranger in two incidents, other non-caregiver in one case, and a minor not in placement setting in one case. Four of the substantiated incidents included allegations of sex trafficking.

Types of Placement Settings:

Of the six substantiated incidents, three incidents occurred while the child was missing from out-of-home care, two incidents occurred while the child was placed in court-ordered kinship care, and one incident occurred while the child was placed in a group home.

Location of Substantiated Incidents:

Of the six substantiated incidents of sexual abuse to children residing in out-of-home care, four incidents occurred in Milwaukee County, one incident occurred in Door County, and one incident occurred in Washburn County.

Ages or Age Group of Children:

The alleged sexual abuse was reported and investigated for children 1-17 years of age. Incidents of sexual abuse were substantiated for five children. The six substantiated incidents of sexual abuse involved five children, ages 3, 12, 13, 15, and 17.

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.

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Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jeff Pertl". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Jeff Pertl
Secretary

cc: Governor Evers