

Child Protection Removals and Reunifications

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State of Minnesota
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Outline

- Background
- Decentralized System
- Law Enforcement Holds
- Efforts to Prevent Removals
- Placements and Reunifications

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Minnesota's Child Protection Goals

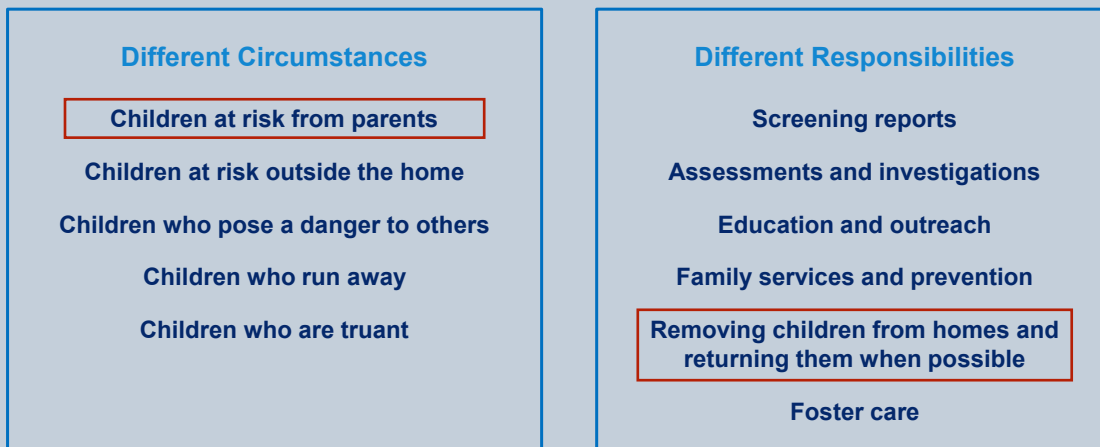
- Protect children's safety

"The paramount consideration in all juvenile protection proceedings is the health, safety, and best interests of the child."
Minn. Stat. 2022, 260C.001, subd. 2(a).
- Keep families together

"The purpose of the laws...is...to preserve and strengthen the child's family ties whenever possible and in the child's best interests."
Minn. Stat. 2022, 260C.001, subd. 2(b).
- Balancing these priorities can be difficult

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Child Protection has Many Components



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Authority to Remove a Child

- Child protection agencies do not have independent authority to remove a child from the home
- Child removal can only be authorized by:
 - Law enforcement (72-hour emergency hold)
 - Courts
 - Parents
- Courts must authorize any long-term placement of a child out of the parents' custody

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Three Paths After an Emergency Hold

**Local authorities
return child to
parents**

**Court holds
hearing**



Court orders the child
remain out of the
home

or

Court returns child
to parents

**Parents agree
to voluntary
out-of-home
placement**

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Placements

- Once a court has ordered an out-of-home placement, the child enters long-term foster care
- Only the court can determine how the placement ends

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Decentralization

- Minnesota provides child protection services at the county level
- Local officials and individual courts have substantial discretion
- Some services—particularly law enforcement activities—are provided at the city level

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Many Entities Have Child Protection Roles

- Attorneys for parents and children
- County attorneys and tribal attorneys
- County child protection agencies
- District courts and tribal courts
- Guardians ad litem
- Law enforcement agencies
- Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS)
- Tribal representatives

Fragmented Oversight

- DHS and the federal Children's Bureau primarily review system-level outcomes, not individual cases
- Courts review individual cases, but only those that advance to a court hearing
- No outside agency reviews or assesses law enforcement actions related to child protection

Recent Trends

- Just over 6,000 children removed from homes in 2019
- Most common reasons: caretaker drug abuse (26%) and alleged neglect (23%)
- American Indian and African American children more likely than other children to be removed from home
- Law enforcement emergency holds are the most frequent form of removal

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Law Enforcement Emergency Holds

- Local practices regarding law enforcement holds vary widely
- No data available on the use of holds by specific law enforcement agencies
- No ongoing training requirements for law enforcement

Percent of removals beginning with holds	Child protection agencies
More than 80%	12
60 - 80%	31
40 - 60%	24
Less than 40%	11

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Outcomes Following Holds Vary

County	Percent of emergency holds with no further out-of-home placement
Beltrami	<1%
Clay	12
Ramsey	21
Washington	38
Minnesota	13%

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Recommendations

- DHS should track which law enforcement agencies place emergency holds
- DHS should convene a working group to make recommendations to the Legislature on law enforcement training

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Required Efforts to Prevent Removals

- Under state and federal law, agencies must make “reasonable efforts” to avoid removals
- Statutes do not clearly define how child protection agencies should demonstrate reasonable efforts
- A higher, more well-defined standard, “active efforts,” applies for American Indian children

Prevention Efforts Vary

- The prevention services provided to families before a child’s removal from the home varied widely
- Courts accepted many different actions and levels of activity as “reasonable efforts”
- Some court orders found that reasonable efforts occurred without explaining what they were

Federal Initiative

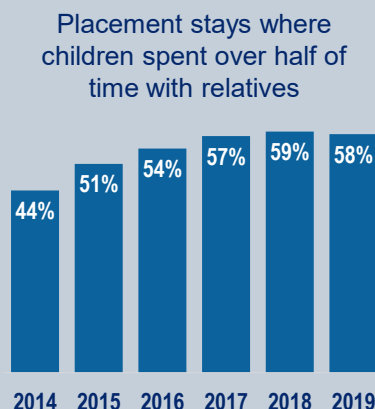
- The 2018 Family First Prevention Services Act mandates states meet new requirements regarding prevention services
- In response, both DHS and the Judicial Branch have taken additional steps to address prevention efforts
- We encourage both DHS and the Judicial Branch to continue addressing prevention

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Placement Data

- Within two years of most removals, children were reunified with a parent or placed long-term with relatives
- Out-of-home placements with relatives increased between 2014 and 2019
- Increase in relative placements was largest for African American and Hispanic children



Court Performance Measures

- Judicial branch performance measures related to child protection all involve time deadlines
- However, courts have responsibilities other than timely processing of cases

Recommendation: The Judicial Branch should consider adding other performance measures

Parent Information

- Our review of cases suggested out-of-home-placement plans are lengthy and complex
- Parents may have difficulty understanding what is required to pursue reunification

Recommendation: The Legislature should require child protection agencies to provide parents with short, easy-to-understand summary documents

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