In December 2018, the Strengthen Families Rebuild Hope coalition (SFRH) released a report: “Addressing the Foster Care Crisis in Kansas.”

Over the last year, agencies, legislators, and advocates have worked to implement changes and fix the system, but there are still many children and families in our state who need help. Outcomes for Kansas’s foster care system have not yet shown substantial improvement as of November 2019. The number of kids entering care has leveled off since reaching a peak in April 2018, but there are still too many kids in the system. The racial disparities for children entering the system are worse. Children are still staying in foster care too long and experiencing dangerously high placement instability. The system is setting up too many children to fail by not doing enough to help them find permanency and success when they leave foster care.

SFRH is made up of organizations and individuals dedicated to helping reform Kansas’s foster care system. The 2018 report identified three key problems and three primary recommendation areas. SFRH recognizes issues in Kansas’s foster care system have been building for years and cannot be “resolved over night.” But reform must still be approached with both intention and urgency. This report evaluates the changes that have taken place with respect to the identified problems and follows up on what has (or has not) been done with regards to the recommendations.

Problems:

1. **Too many Kansas children are in the foster care system, and they are entering at racially disproportionate rates.** The number of kids entering foster care is no longer rapidly increasing, but there are still too many kids in out-of-home care. The racial disparities have gotten worse. Families still lack access to supports needed to keep children safely in their home.

2. **Kansas children are staying in foster care for too long, and they often experience dangerously high instability in their placements.** The average length of time spent in foster care increased every year between 2013 and 2019. Children in care are even more likely to live in group residential homes than family-like settings than in previous years. Placement instability is still more than twice the national standard, and educational instability has led to low high school graduation rates among foster youth.

3. **It is too difficult for Kansas children in foster care to find permanency.** Permanency and re-entry remain serious problems. Kansas continues to fail to meet numerous federal performance standards in finding permanent solutions.

Recommendations and progress:

1. **Support Kansas families by ensuring they have the resources necessary to take care of their children and avoid contact with the foster care system.** The Kansas legislature failed to pass any legislation to repair cuts to the safety net. The Department for Children and Families (DCF) and other state agencies have begun to reform administrative policy and practices to increase access to eligible Kansans, but these fixes are constrained by state statute.

2. **Once children become known to the Kansas Department for Children and Families through reports and investigations, Kansas needs to focus on more targeted prevention and early interventions.** DCF awarded $13 million in prevention grants to 18 agencies across the state in October 2019. These funds were made available through the federal Family First Prevention Services Act and secured with matching funds allocated by the legislature. Additionally, the DCF has made progress by adopting new models like “Family Finding” to connect children to adults in their lives, reduce trauma, and prevent placement/removal and “Team Decision Making” to actively involve parents, family, community members, and others to problem solving and decisions about where children can safely live.

3. **Finally, Kansas needs to improve conditions for youth in foster care.** Progress on this goal is mixed. For example, the legislature passed a budget that included 42 new social worker positions but removed additional funding proposed for psychiatric residential treatment facilities. Legislation to establish an Office of the Child Advocate stalled from the beginning of the session. Systemic change will require years of hard work, and all stakeholders should commit to increased transparency and accountability in Kansas’s child welfare system.

The problems in Kansas foster care have existed for a long time, but not enough has been done to fix the system, especially by the Kansas Legislature. While all Kansans have a part to play, the Executive and Legislative branches must act now to adequately address the trauma faced by thousands of kids going through a broken foster care system.
Strengthen Families Rebuild Hope (SFRH) is an independent coalition of organizations and individuals who are dedicated to helping reform Kansas’s foster care system.

**Steering Committee Members:**

**Sister Therese Bangart**, Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth

**Zachary Brown**, young leader and former foster care youth

**Lori Burns-Bucklew**, child welfare law specialist

**Carl Burris**, young leader and former foster care youth

**Traci Dotson**, young leader and former foster care youth

**Grey Endres**, LSCSW, LCSW

**FosterAdopt Connect**

**Don Jordan**, retired social services administrator

**Kansas African American Foster Care/Adoption Coalition**

**Kansas Appleseed**

**Kansas Association of Community Action Programs**

**Kansas Chapter - National Association of Social Workers**

**Stormy Lukasavage**, young leader and former foster care youth

**Natalie Zarate**, young leader and former foster care youth

---

Table of Contents

Executive Summary ........................................................................................................ Pg. 1
About the Strengthen Families Rebuild Hope Coalition .............................................. Pg. 2
Table of Contents .......................................................................................................... Pg. 3
Problems ......................................................................................................................... Pg. 4-11
Update: Problem 1. Too many Kansas children are in the foster care system, and they are entering at racially disproportionate rates. ........................................ Pg. 4-6
   The Number of Kansas Children in Foster Care ...................................................... Pg. 4
   National Comparisons .............................................................................................. Pg. 5
   Racial Disparities ........................................................................................................ Pg. 5
   Entries vs. Exits ......................................................................................................... Pg. 6
Update: Problem 2. Kansas children are staying in foster care for too long, and they often experience dangerously high instability in their placements. .......... Pg. 6-10
   Placement Instability ............................................................................................... Pg. 6
   Educational Stability ................................................................................................. Pg. 7
   Placement Setting ..................................................................................................... Pg. 8
   Sibling Placement ...................................................................................................... Pg. 9
   Safety ........................................................................................................................ Pg. 9
   Average Length of Stay ............................................................................................ Pg. 10
Update: Problem 3. It is too difficult for Kansas children in foster care to find permanence. ........................................................................................................ Pg. 10-11
   Progress Towards Adoption ..................................................................................... Pg. 10
   Achieving Permanency before Age 18 ...................................................................... Pg. 11
   Re-entry into Foster Care .......................................................................................... Pg. 11
   Safety and Well-being Performance Standards ........................................................ Pg. 11
Recommendations ........................................................................................................... Pg. 12-16
Update: Recommendation Area 1. Support Kansas Families ...................................... Pg. 12-15
   Strengthen Safety Net Programs ............................................................................. Pg. 12
      Independent TANF / Foster Care Research .......................................................... Pg. 13
      Primary Removal Reason ..................................................................................... Pg. 14
   Expand Medicaid ...................................................................................................... Pg. 15
Update: Recommendation Area 2. Targeted Prevention and Early Intervention ......... Pg. 15
   Pass the Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) .......................................... Pg. 15
   Address Racial Disparities ....................................................................................... Pg. 15
Update: Recommendation Area 3. In-care Reforms ..................................................... Pg. 16
   Strengthen Workforce .............................................................................................. Pg. 16
   Create an Office of the Child Advocate .................................................................... Pg. 16
   Bolster Child Welfare Oversight ............................................................................. Pg. 16
Conclusion ....................................................................................................................... Pg. 16
Works Cited ..................................................................................................................... Pg. 17-18
Appendix A - FFPSA Summary ..................................................................................... Pg. 19
Appendix B - Newspaper Articles ................................................................................ Pg. 20-22
Problems

The range of problems affecting kids in Kansas's foster care system is diverse. Most, however, can be grouped into three categories:

1. Too many Kansas children are in the foster care system, and they are entering at racially disproportionate rates.

2. Kansas children are staying in foster care for too long, and they often experience dangerously high instability in their placements.

3. It is too difficult for Kansas children in foster care to find permanency.

Update: Problem 1

Too many Kansas children are in the foster care system, and they are entering at racially disproportionate rates.

The number of Kansas children in foster care is no longer on the same upwards trajectory but remains dangerously high.

The number of kids reported by DCF in out-of-home care peaked in April 2018 at 7,687 kids after having increased fairly steadily since the beginning of 2012. Since the April 2018 peak, the number of kids in out-o-home care has bounced around 7,500, ending October 2019 at 7,557. While it is positive that the number of kids in the system is no longer rising at the rate it was before, there are still too many kids in care.

Kansas Out-of-Home Care Population at End of Month

Source: DCF data (http://www.dcf.ks.gov/services/PPS/Pages/FosterCareDemographicReports.aspx) summarized by SFRH
National Comparisons

With the addition of more recent data, the national comparisons have worsened since our last report. In September of 2018 (the end of the most recent federal fiscal year for which there is data), the national rate of children under 18 in out-of-home foster care per 1,000 was 5.8. This is up slightly from 5.7 in 2016. The number in Kansas in 2018 was 11.4, nearly double the national rate. This is a significant increase from the 10.1 rate last reported for 2016.

Note: The number of 2018 Kansas kids under 18 in care has not yet been updated by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. This number is conservatively estimated by using the low-bound ratio (99.4%) between the numbers reported by the Annie E. Casey Foundation and the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) state data tables for total kids in care between fiscal years 2009 and 2017. This ratio has remained between 99.4% and 99.9% for the past nine years.

Racial Disparities

Significant racial disparities continue in the Kansas foster care system, and they are getting worse. In 2019, the disparity ratio for black children was 2.24, meaning black children were more than twice as likely than white children to be in foster care in Kansas. Updated demographic population estimates from the US Census Bureau show us that the disparities for black children are even worse than what SFRH reported in 2018. While the rate at which kids enter foster care has leveled out, the racial disparities are getting worse. The increase in the disparity for black kids in the last year was the largest in the last decade.

Number in foster care per 1,000 children

Kansas: 11.4
United States: 5.8


Ratio of Children Under 18 in Out-of-Home Care per 1,000 Kids

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>US</th>
<th>Kansas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: DCF data (http://www.dcf.ks.gov/services/PPS/Pages/FosterCareDemographicReports.aspx) and U.S. Census Bureau Population Estimate data (https://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/popest/tables/2010-2018/state/asrh/sc-est2018-alldata5.csv) summarized by SFRH.
A comprehensive review of studies in 2011 identified four main explanations for racial disparities in child welfare systems: 1) inequity and disparate outcomes as a result of systemic oppression of black children and families (e.g. redlining); 2) racial bias and discrimination; 3) processes and resources; and 4) geographic variance. The review found the evidence regarding the first category of disproportionate needs was mixed. A direct link between the poverty risks black families experience and their disproportionate child welfare involvement is not clear. The evidence does suggest that racial bias and discrimination plays a significant role, particularly on the front end of a family's contact with the foster care system. Community reporters are more likely to report families of color, and families of color are more likely to be investigated. The evidence also suggests resources and geography are important parts of the explanation. There is a broad pattern of inequitable service and resource availability for families of color, and there is a high degree of variance in disparity based on location.

Entries vs. Exits:

Part of why the increase in the number of kids in foster care has leveled off is that the number of kids exiting the system during a year is much closer to the number entering. The number of kids entering, though, is still too high. Each one of the 4,125 removals that happened in 2019 represents a traumatic experience for that child.

Update: Problem 2

Kansas children are staying in foster care for too long, and they often experience dangerously high instability in their placements.

Placement instability

The national standard for placement stability set by the most recent Child and Family Service Review* was 4.12 moves per 1,000 total days in foster care for children who entered foster care in the previous 12 months. To meet this standard the rate needed to be at 4.12 or lower. The rate in Kansas is 9.2 as of October 2019 (the most recent available data). The instability indicator hit a record high of 10.5 in August of 2019.

*Note: The Children’s Bureau, part of the Administration for Children and Families (ACF), conducts periodic reviews of statewide data indicators to determine conformity with the requirements of Title IV-B and IV-E of the Social Security Act. These periodic reviews are known as Child and Family Service Reviews (CFSRs). The most recent federal CFSR was known as CFSR 3 and the review set national performance standards that each state should be meeting.
Many children experience excessive numbers of moves, oftentimes being moved to a new placement every night. At the forums SFRH held across the state in 2018, some participants talked about children “couch surfing” through the foster care system. It is impossible for children to thrive when they face such dangerous instability.

Numerous studies link placement instability with an increased likelihood of attachment disorders, behavioral problems, mental health issues, increased substance abuse, and risky sexual behaviors.

**Rate of Moves per 1,000 Days in Foster Care**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Actual</th>
<th>Performance Standard (4.12)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jan-15</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb-15</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mar-15</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apr-15</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May-15</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jun-15</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jul-15</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aug-15</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sep-15</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct-15</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov-15</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec-15</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan-16</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb-16</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mar-16</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apr-16</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May-16</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jun-16</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jul-16</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aug-16</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sep-16</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct-16</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov-16</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec-16</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan-17</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb-17</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mar-17</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apr-17</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May-17</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jun-17</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jul-17</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aug-17</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sep-17</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct-17</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov-17</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec-17</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan-18</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb-18</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mar-18</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apr-18</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May-18</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jun-18</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jul-18</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aug-18</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sep-18</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct-18</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov-18</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec-18</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan-19</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb-19</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mar-19</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apr-19</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May-19</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jun-19</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jul-19</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aug-19</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sep-19</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct-19</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov-19</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec-19</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan-20</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb-20</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mar-20</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apr-20</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May-20</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jun-20</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jul-20</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aug-20</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sep-20</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct-20</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov-20</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec-20</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Educational Stability**

The national performance standard for school stability is that at least 25% of children in foster care should attend the same school they attended before entering state care. This recognizes there will be a significant upheaval for most kids, but placements should result in at least a quarter of children staying in the same school. The 17.9% rate for Kansas so far through the first three months of fiscal year 2020 marks a steady improvement in this metric since 2016 but is still well below the 25% baseline threshold.

**School Stability**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>% of Children age 6 and older in out-of-home placement who are attending same school as before removal</th>
<th>Performance Standard (25%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>19.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>15.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>14.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019</td>
<td>17.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2020*</td>
<td>17.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*SFY 2020 only includes four months of data (July - September 2019).
Educational stability is important to educational outcomes. A 2018 study found that "both school moves and placement changes have a negative effect on academic growth." Graduation rates in 2019 for students aging out of foster care fell to only 38.6%, dropping significantly from the 68.3% rate in the previous year.

Placement Setting

The stability of a child’s placement in the foster care system is also connected to the type of setting the child is placed in. Research shows that children placed in group residential care have consistently worse experiences, more behavioral problems, and worse perceptions of care than children placed in a family foster care setting.

Kansas has continued the troubling trend of placing fewer kids in a family-like setting and more kids in group home settings. The percentage of foster care kids in a group residential facility has risen to 8.7% through the first three months of fiscal year 2020, the highest rate in at least the last decade and nearly double what the rate was in 2013. There has been a slight improvement in the percentage of kinship placements, though it still trails the percentage of foster family homes by a significant amount. Kansas has continually exceeded the national performance standard for the percentage of children in family-like settings (90%).

Kinship Placement

Kinship placement remains a distant second to non-relative family foster home placement for children in the Kansas foster care system. A growing body of research shows that children in kinship care have better health outcomes than those in non-kinship care, greater permanency and placement stability, and fewer behavioral problems and mental health disorders.

Kinship placement in Kansas does not receive adequate support. According to information presented to the Kansas Child Welfare System Task Force in fall 2017, standard foster family homes received on average $21 per day, while relative, non-licensed families received only $3 per day in state fiscal year 2017.
Sibling Placement

Research indicates that keeping siblings together is “beneficial to the placement stability, permanency, and well-being” of children in foster care. DCF tracks the percentage of children with siblings who have been placed with at least one of their siblings.

The percentage of children being placed with at least one of their siblings has continued to decrease further below the performance standard of 78%. Only 73.1% of children with siblings are in a placement with at least one sibling through the first three months of fiscal year 2020. This continues to add to the trauma experienced by kids taken from their home.

Sibling Placement

![Sibling Placement Chart]

Safety

The safety of a child while in foster care is extremely important. DCF began reporting the victimization rate for Kansas children in foster care beginning in July 2015. This rate is calculated by taking the number of substantiated and affirmed reports of maltreatment of children in foster care over the last 12 months and then dividing that number by the number of days children have been in foster care. This number is divided by 100,000 to determine a victimization rate per 100,000 days in care.

There has been a continuation of the downward trend that started in mid-2017 with respect to the number of substantiated and affirmed reports of maltreatment during foster care. The rate of victimization per 100,000 days spent in care by all children is at 3.5 for the 12-month period ending in September 2019, down from the peak of 7.6 that occurred in the 12-month period ending in July 2017. It is important to keep in mind that this reflects only incidents of maltreatment that were both substantiated and affirmed during the 12-month period. Even at the rate of 3.5 for the most recent 12-month period, it still represents 100 substantiated and affirmed victimizations.

Maltreatment in Kansas Foster Care

![Maltreatment in Kansas Foster Care Chart]
**Average Length of Stay**

In 2013, a child spent an average 16.0 months in foster care before leaving the system. There’s been a dip in the average length of stay for kids exiting care so far in fiscal year 2020, in which the average length of stay for those exiting foster care has been 19.9 months.

![Average Length of Stay for Children Exiting Care](image)

*Source: DCF data [here](http://www.dcf.ks.gov/services/PPS/Pages/FosterCareDemographicReports.aspx) summarized by SFRH
Note: The State Fiscal Year (SFY) in Kansas runs from July 1 - June 30. E.g. SFY 2020 is July 1, 2019 through June 30, 2020
*SFY 2020 only includes five months of data (July - October 2019).

---

**Update: Problem 3**

It is too difficult for kids in foster care to find permanency

Permanency is an important component to a child’s wellbeing. Research shows that the failure to provide a child a stable environment in a timely manner during development compounds the adverse consequences of prior maltreatment, contributes to escalating behavior problems, and reduces a child’s long-term chances for well-being.18

**Progress Towards Adoption**

Children adopted within a year of their parents’ rights being terminated has risen since 2018 from 28.8% to 41.9% so far in fiscal year 2020. This percentage remains below the national performance standard of 45.8%.

![Adoption Within 12 Months](image)

*Source: DCF data [here](http://www.dcf.ks.gov/services/PPS/Pages/CareManagementContractOutcomes.aspx) summarized by SFRH
Note: The State Fiscal Year (SFY) in Kansas runs from July 1 - June 30. E.g. SFY 2019 is July 1, 2018 through June 30, 2019
*SFY 2020 only includes four months of data (July - September 2019).
Achieving Permanency before Age 18

The percentage of kids who left foster care who found a permanent home before they turned 18 has risen slightly from 87.8% in fiscal year 2018 to 92.3% in fiscal year 2020. This measure remains below the national performance standard of 96.8%.

Re-entry into Foster Care

Many Kansas children re-enter foster care after exiting the system. After peaking in May 2019 at 10.35%, the re-entry to foster care rate dipped to 9.06% for the 12-month period ending in September 2019. From October 2018 to September 2019, 1,281 kids entered foster care and were then discharged to live with a relative, guardian, or custodian. Of those 1,281 kids, 116 ended up back in the foster care system before September 2019 was over. While this 9.06% September 2019 re-entry rate is an improvement from the peak in May 2019, it still remains above the national performance standard of 8.3%.

Safety and Well-being Performance Standards

Kansas failed to meet 14 standards for child safety and well-being over the state fiscal year ending June 2019. This is a slight improvement over the previous fiscal year, when it failed to meet 16 standards.19

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performance Measure</th>
<th>Standard</th>
<th>Actual</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Progress Towards Adoption (Adopted &lt;12 months)</td>
<td>45.8%</td>
<td>39.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timely Adoption (Adopted &lt;24 months)</td>
<td>26.8%</td>
<td>17.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achieving Permanency</td>
<td>96.8%</td>
<td>91.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permanency in 12 months</td>
<td>40.5%</td>
<td>36.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permanency for children in foster care 12-23 months</td>
<td>43.6%</td>
<td>39.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community-based Family Services: Engaged Timely</td>
<td>80.0%</td>
<td>46.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Re-entry to Foster Care</td>
<td>8.3% (lower is better)</td>
<td>9.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Placement Stability Rate</td>
<td>4.12 (lower is better)</td>
<td>9.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sibling Placement</td>
<td>78.0%</td>
<td>73.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Same School</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
<td>17.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Preservation: Families are Engaged Timely</td>
<td>95.0%</td>
<td>93.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Preservation: Babies Born Substance Free</td>
<td>90.0%</td>
<td>86.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Preservation: Children Maintained at Home</td>
<td>90.0%</td>
<td>83.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Preservation: Safety Over 365 Days</td>
<td>95.0%</td>
<td>94.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: DCF data (http://www.dcf.ks.gov/services/PPS/Pages/CaseManagementContractOutcomes.aspx) summarized by SFRH

Note: The State Fiscal Year (SFY) in Kansas runs from July 1 - June 30. E.g. SFY 2019 is July 1, 2018 through June 30, 2019
*SFY 2020 only includes four months of data (July - September 2019)
Effectively reforming the foster care system will require a multi-pronged approach that reaches children before they come in contact with the state, after the state is made aware of potential maltreatment, and while they are in foster care. In the 2018 report, SFRH grouped recommendations into three categories. Here, we have outlined progress made over the last year in these recommendation areas.

1. Support Kansas Families

2. Targeted Prevention and Early Intervention

3. In-Care Reforms

---

**Update: Recommendation Area 1**

Support Kansas Families

**Strengthen Safety Net Programs**

- Legislative level: Unmet
- Administrative level: Ongoing

To reduce instances of child maltreatment, Kansas must address the large gaps in the social safety net. In recent years, Kansas drastically cut support for children by creating barriers to programs like Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and Child Care Assistance. The so-called HOPE Act, passed by the Kansas legislature in 2015 and 2016, severely reduced the number of months a family is eligible to receive TANF support, increased bureaucratic hurdles for work requirements, and allowed for cross-program sanctions that can revoke an entire family’s eligibility for multiple programs based on one family member’s failure to follow difficult-to-understand regulations and requirements.

**Table: TANF**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State fiscal year</th>
<th>Avg. children served/month</th>
<th>Percent change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SFY 2011</td>
<td>25,981</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SFY 2019</td>
<td>6,752</td>
<td>-74%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table: Child Care Assistance**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State fiscal year</th>
<th>Avg. children served/month</th>
<th>Percent change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SFY 2011</td>
<td>19,734</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SFY 2019</td>
<td>8,823</td>
<td>-55.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table: SNAP/Food Assistance**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State fiscal Year</th>
<th>Avg. children served/month</th>
<th>Percent change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SFY 2011</td>
<td>136,295</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SFY 2019</td>
<td>96,653</td>
<td>-29.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table: Out-of-Home Care**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State fiscal year</th>
<th>Avg. children served/month</th>
<th>Percent Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SFY 2011</td>
<td>5,214</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SFY 2019</td>
<td>7,484</td>
<td>+43.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Kansas Legislature failed to pass any legislation to repair cuts to the safety net. Research strongly suggests that improving access to supports like TANF, SNAP (food assistance), Child Care Assistance, and Medicaid would reduce the number of children being removed from their homes.\(^{21}\)

While no legislation was passed, there were several bills brought forward that attempted to address the shredded safety net programs. Senate Bill 12 would have eliminated some HOPE Act restrictions on TANF, SNAP, and Child Care assistance, including the TANF lifetime limits and work requirements, the prohibition on promoting the Food Assistance Program with SNAP funds, and Food Assistance waiver restrictions.\(^{22}\) This bill was referred to the Senate Committee on Public Health and Welfare. House Bill 2157 was also introduced, and would have rolled back fewer HOPE Act restrictions, particularly on TANF.\(^{23}\) This bill was referred to the House Committee on Health and Human Services. Both bills were denied hearings.

More Kansans experiencing poverty or hardship will fall through the cracks, and children will continue to be removed from their homes at dramatically heightened rates. This failure remains an enormous burden on the system. DCF and other state agencies have begun to reform administrative policy and practices to increase access to eligible Kansans, but these fixes are limited to flexibility constrained by state statute.

In May 2019, DCF began using the 15% ABAWD (Able Bodied Adults Without Dependents) exemptions to maintain eligible Kansans’ food assistance.\(^{24}\) Less than three months later, under political pressure, DCF withdrew the policy. The Kansas Attorney General said such a policy went against the “spirit of the law.”\(^{25}\) Importantly, the 2015 and 2016 HOPE Acts restrict neither this exemption, nor many other aspects of SNAP. At the national level, SNAP is a highly flexible, responsive anti-hunger policy with a complex system of waivers and exemptions to allow state administrators to address food insecurity in a way that reflects the reality on the ground.\(^{26}\) DCF should reconsider implementing the 15% ABAWD exemption within a certain framework. For example, DCF could use the exemptions to reduce barriers to food assistance for a fixed amount of time for eligible foster youth who have recently aged out of the system.

**Independent TANF / Foster Care Research**

Preliminary findings from a University of Kansas study provide evidence of a causal link between additional restrictions on welfare benefits and an increase in foster care cases. Donna Ginther, one of the researchers on that study, says, “It’s remarkable. There is a mirror image. As the Kansas TANF caseloads drop, the number of reports of abuse and neglect go up. And you see a similar relationship for foster care placements.”\(^{27}\)

![Figure 12. TANF Caseloads and Reports of Child Maltreatment in Kansas, 2000-2015](http://www.kslegislature.org/li_2018/b2017_18/committees/ctte_tf_child_welfare_system_1/documents/testimony/20180527-49.pdf)

The number of children benefiting from safety net programs has decreased dramatically after HOPE Act restrictions were put in place. Between SFY 2011 and SFY 2019, the number of children served by TANF decreased by 74%, the number of children served by SNAP decreased by 29.1%, and the number of children served by child care assistance decreased by 55.3%.

There has been a change in the trends for the primary removal reason for kids entering foster care. Neglect remains the largest reason for removal, highlighting the necessity of economic supports for Kansas families, but it did drop off a bit as a primary reason cited for removal in fiscal year 2019.

It is important to note that the categories of primary removal reasons tracked by DCF changed in 2019. There was a significant uptick in cases citing emotional abuse (up to 436 from 294) as the primary removal reason, while cases citing physical neglect as the primary removal reason fell from 738 in 2018 to 591 in 2019. These two changes explain the decrease in neglect cases and the rise in parent/child relationship cases. The troubling rise in physical and sexual abuse cases also continued. Cases citing substance abuse and child behavior as a primary reason continued their decline, significantly undercutting any notion that changes to the juvenile justice system have put added stress on the foster care system.

The five categories as tracked by Strengthen Families Rebuild Hope include the following groupings of the 29 designations tracked statewide by DCF:

- **Child Behavior**: Child’s Behavior Problem
- **Neglect**: Abandonment, Death of Parent, Educational Neglect, Inadequate Housing, Incarceration of Parent, Lack of Supervision, Medical Neglect, Neglect, Physical Neglect
- **Physical or sexual abuse**: Human Trafficking-Labor, Human Trafficking-Sex, Physical Abuse, Sexual Abuse
- **Substance Use**: Alcohol Abuse Child, Alcohol Abuse Parent, Drug Abuse Child, Drug Abuse Parent, Infant Positive for Substances, Methamphetamine use, Parent Opioid Use, Substance Affected Infant
- **Parent / Child Relationship**: Caretaker Inability to Cope, Child Disability, Emotional Abuse, Parent Child Conflict, Relinquishment, Runaway, Truancy
Expand Medicaid: Unmet

Kansas can support families and improve children’s health by expanding Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act, as 37 other states (including DC) have done.28 A comprehensive review of 202 studies by the Kaiser Family Foundation that compared Medicaid expansion states with non-expansion states showed expansion states had “huge reductions in uncompensated care delivered by safety net providers, dramatic increases in coverage and access, substantial increases in family financial security, and multiple other areas.”29 The review found uninsured children are more likely to get health coverage when states expand Medicaid: “States that expanded Medicaid coverage saw nearly double the rate of decline in uninsured children as compared to states that didn’t accept the ACA’s Medicaid option.” The review also found that when Medicaid was expanded to parents, regular preventative care for children increased as families became more familiar with the healthcare system and coverage for regular preventative visits. Additionally, the review found that Medicaid expansion also reduced financial and psychological distress for families experiencing poverty, a potential cause of child maltreatment.30

Medicaid expansion was a hotly debated topic in the 2019 legislative session. By overruling the chair and forcing a vote, the Kansas House of Representatives passed an imperfect bill that would have expanded Medicaid but included barriers to access (i.e. premiums and lockouts). The Kansas Senate fell one vote short of its own effort to overrule leadership and force a vote.31

Since the conclusion of the 2019 session, Senate leadership convened a select committee to produce recommendations for its own Medicaid expansion bill.32 Proposed legislation in the Senate chamber will likely include work requirements, co-pays, high premiums, lockouts, and a license for providers to discriminate. Ultimately, the proposal could intentionally delay Medicaid expansion by up to three years due to the complex federal waiver system.

Update: Recommendation Area 2
Targeted Prevention and Early Intervention

Pass the Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA): Met

The FFPSA assists states in expanding child welfare services before, during, and after foster care. The main provisions are designed to keep children at home, reduce placements in group or residential settings, and facilitate permanency sooner.

DCF awarded $13 million in prevention grants to 18 agencies across the state.33 These funds were secured with matching funds allocated by the legislature. The grants were awarded to organizations addressing substance use disorder, mental health, kinship navigation, parent skill building, and evaluation. The legislature passed House Bill 2103, which amended the Revised Kansas Code for Care of Children to meet the requirements of the FFPSA.34 These requirements included defining qualified residential treatment programs (QRTPs), and established notice and hearing requirements for when a child is placed in a QRTP.

Address Racial Disparities: Unmet

A significant amount of research has documented the over-representation of black kids in child welfare systems nationally.35 Unfortunately, this holds true in Kansas as well. As described in this report, black children in Kansas are significantly more likely than white children to be in foster care, but no significant efforts have been made to address this issue.

Kansas needs to engage external expertise and set standards and policies to confront and resolve racial disparities. There should be a focus on the racial biases that lead to higher reporting and investigation levels for families of color and on ensuring black families have equal access to preventative services and resources. Oversight by an independent Office of the Child Advocate—that includes addressing racial disparities—would be an important step.
Strengthen Workforce: **Ongoing**

The state budget passed in 2019 included funding for 42 new social worker positions, 80 paid practicums, and dedicated money for recruitment and retention funds. It is unclear if these and additional fixes in the near future, will be enough to address unsustainably high caseloads and burnout among social workers.

Create an Office of the Child Advocate: **Unmet**

House Bill 2187 was introduced in the 2019 legislative session. It would create the Office of the Child Advocate for Children’s Protection and Services within the Department of Administration. A hearing for the bill was scheduled but canceled a day before it was set to take place. The bill calls for the office to be administered by the Child Advocate, who would be appointed jointly by the Governor and the Chief Justice of the Kansas Supreme Court, with the advice and consent of the Kansas Senate. The Child Advocate would hold office for six years, act independently of DCF and Kansas Department of Corrections, and have its own budget.

An independent Office of the Child Advocate is important to provide oversight. This office could serve not only to address problems that exist for kids already in care but could shine a light on practices that lead to racial disparities for kids coming into the system.

Bolster Child Welfare System Oversight: **Unmet**

Legislators on the House Committee on Children and Seniors passed House Bill 2403 out of committee to establish a joint committee on child welfare system oversight. The bill did not progress further in the legislative process. As proposed, the oversight committee would review data and trends in the child welfare system; the duties, responsibilities, and contributions of system stakeholders; programs, services, and benefits offered to children and families involved in the system or at risk of involvement; implementation of the 2019 Child Welfare System Task Force Report recommendations; additional opportunities to strengthen foster care through evidence-based interventions; and more.

Conclusion

One year after releasing our first report, "Addressing the Foster Care Crisis in Kansas," in December 2018, most foster care outcomes have not yet shown improvement. There are still too many kids in foster care, and they continue to enter in a racially disproportionate manner. There have been some improvements in the average length of stay, but kids still experience dangerously high levels of placement instability. Finding permanency for kids remains a significant problem.

There are steps we can take to fix Kansas foster care’s ongoing problems:

- Strengthen the safety net. Restoring access to TANF, SNAP, and Child Care Assistance and expanding Medicaid help alleviate the conditions that lead to children being removed from their homes.

- Continue to use FFPSA funding to support targeted prevention and early intervention, while also taking active efforts to address the racial disparities that exist in the foster care system.

- Improve in-care conditions by implementing independent oversight in the form of an Office of the Child Advocate.

It is clear that fixing the system will require sustained efforts, but Kansas children deserve no less.


9. Id.


19. Shorman, J. “Kansas DCF failed to meet 16 standards for child safety, well-being over past year.” The Wichita Eagle, August 30, 2018


Appendix A - Family First Prevention Services Act Summary

The following summary was written by:
Angelica Cardenas-Chaisson, M.S.W., Policy Associate
Child and Family Policy Center, www.cfpciowa.org

High-Level Summary: Family First Prevention Services Act
Provisions related to prevention:

- Beginning October 1, 2019 (or later for states that choose to delay implementation of the group care provisions) Title IV-E will reimburse states for certain evidence-based prevention services
- Eligible services are mental health and substance abuse prevention and treatment services and/or in-home parent skill-based services
- Services may be provided for not more than 12 months
- Services may be provided for “candidates” for foster care (i.e., children who are at imminent risk of entering foster care), their parents and relatives, and pregnant and parenting young people in foster care
- Services must meet evidentiary standards: “promising,” “supported,” and “well-supported”
- At least 50% of expenditures must be on “well-supported” practices

Provisions related to group care:

- Limits federal funding to children in family foster homes, qualified residential treatment programs (QRTPs), and special treatment settings for pregnant or parenting teens, youth 18 and over preparing to transition from foster care to adulthood, and sex trafficking victims (including those at risk)
- The act requires timely assessments and periodic review of children with special needs who are placed in QRTPs to ensure their continued need for such care:
  - Assessment by qualified individual within 30 days of placement in QRTP
  - Court must review assessment within 60 days of placement in QRTP, and agency must continue to justify placement at every permanency hearing
- After FY2020 (unless the state opts to delay until 2022), Title IV-E reimbursement will be provided only for administrative costs for children in other group care settings, and not for room and board
- Requires states to include in their state plan an assurance that they will not advance policies that will result in a significant increase in the number of youth in the juvenile justice system because of the new group home restrictions.

Provisions related to older youth:

- Extends eligibility for Chafee independent living services to youth up to age 23
- Only applies to states that have extended foster care to age 21 (or states HHS determines are providing comparable services and assistance to youth who have aged out)
- Extends eligibility for education and training vouchers for youth up to age 26

Other selected provisions:

- Beginning October 1, 2018, allows Title IV-E to support the placement of a child in foster care with his/her parent in a family-based residential treatment facility. Reimbursement is available without regard to AFDC income eligibility.
- Reauthorizes and updates the Regional Partnership Grant program
- Beginning October 1, 2018 allows IV-E to support evidence-based kinship navigator programs
- Requires HHS to release model licensing standards for family foster homes, and requires states to submit to HHS how their licensing standards compare to the model standards
- Allows Promoting Safe and Stable Families (PSSF) funds to be used for unlimited reunification services for children in foster care and an additional 15 months of family reunification services for children once they return home
- Requires states to have statewide plans to track and prevent child fatalities
- Establishes new grant program to support recruitment and retention of high-quality foster families
- Establishes an electronic interstate case-processing system to help states expedite the interstate placement of children
- Extends Adoption and Legal Guardianship Incentive Payment for five years
- Extends the Stephanie Tubbs Jones Child Welfare Services Program and the Promoting Safe and Stable Families Program, including the Court Improvement Program
Appendix B - Newspaper Articles

Hundreds of articles have tracked the Kansas foster care system’s failings. Here are a few examples:

2013

April 29, 2013. “Truancy policies can catch parents by surprise.” Peter Hancock, Lawrence Journal World. “From July 1, 2012, through March 31, 2013, the agency reported 68 children in Kansas were removed from their homes because of truancy.”

May 10, 2013. “We must step up if we think a child is at risk.” Joco Opinion, The Kansas City Star. “Falling through the cracks. It’s a trite, over-used cliche. But sometimes it’s the best and most descriptive way to portray what happens to a child like L.P., the little girl who was rescued from a closet-dungeon last year.”

August 19, 2013. “Kansas Child Support Contracts Questioned.” The Kansas City Star. “Private contractors are preparing to take over operations of the Kansas child support system in the coming weeks even as questions remain about how the contracts were awarded.”

2014

January 13, 2014. “Investigation finds DCF’s Wichita Staff Improperly Shared Confidential Data with FaithBuilders.” The Wichita Eagle. “A three-month investigation spurred by complaints concluded that a state agency overseeing the welfare of children allowed personal relationships with the head of FaithBuilders to result in improper sharing of confidential information.”

June 9, 2014. “Number of Children in Kansas Foster Care Hits Record High.” Dave Ranney, KCUR. “In April, there were 6,156 children in the system. That’s 356 more children than in April 2013 and 872 more than two years earlier.”

July 26, 2014. “Grandmother of Slain El Dorado Girl Disagrees with Ruling that DCF can’t be held liable.” Tim Potter, The Wichita Eagle. “In a ruling filed last week, Sedgwick County District Judge William Woolley wrote that “the court holds that Kansas law does not impose on child welfare agencies an independent duty” in the investigation of child abuse.”

August 2, 2014. “Baby’s Death in Wichita Puts Focus on Foster System.” Tim Potter, The Wichita Eagle. “... a 10-month-old girl remained up to 2 1/2 hours in a closed-up car outside her foster home July 24. By the time her foster parents realized she had been left strapped into the hot car and rushed out to get her, she had died, police said.”

November 9, 2014. “With Kansas DCF privatization, some child support measures fall.” Jonathan Shorman, The Topeka Capital-Journal. “...data obtained by The Topeka Capital-Journal through an open records request shows Kansas now does a worse job collecting current child support than before privatization — and the percentage of current support collected stands at a 14-year low.”

2015

March 27, 2015. “Former employee of the KSDCF Files Whistleblower Lawsuit.” Dave Ranney, KCUR. “A former child protection supervisor with the Kansas Department for Children and Families office in Winfield has filed a “whistleblower” lawsuit, accusing the agency of firing her for calling her supervisor’s attention to false reports filed by a social worker.”


November 24, 2015. “Kansas Legislators Call for Scrutiny of Foster Care Contractors.” Andy Marso, KCUR. “The Kansas Department for Children and Families announced major changes to its standards for substantiating child abuse Tuesday. But lawmakers want more reform of a privatized foster care system they say is failing to protect children.”


2016

January 20, 2016. “Nearly a Quarter of DCF Social Workers Left in 2015.” Megan Hart, KPR. “Nearly a quarter of social workers with the Kansas Department for Children and Families left the job in the yearlong period ending Dec. 1, and job vacancies increased by more than two-thirds at the same time.”

July 27, 2016. “State Audit: DCF Fails to Ensure Safety of Children in Foster Care.” Brian Lowry, The Wichita Eagle. “A state audit has concluded that the Kansas Department for Children and Families has failed to ensure the safety of kids in the state’s foster care system. DCF failed to investigate allegations of abuse or neglect called in to the Kansas Protection Report Center in a timely manner.”

September 22, 2016. “Kansas Foster Care System Not Meeting Requirements.” Joe Denoyer, KSCB. “Auditors say the Kansas foster care system isn’t meeting many federal requirements, including ones aimed at providing stability for children.”
November 18, 2016. “Legislative Committee Recommends more Oversight of Kansas Foster Care.” Stephen Koranda, KPR. “The recommendations come after a state audit earlier this year, which said the Kansas Department for Children and Families wasn’t doing enough to ensure the safety of kids in foster care. One of the recommendations says lawmakers should create a panel that will more closely monitor and review foster care in Kansas.”


May 15, 2017. “As Kansas Foster Care System Sets Records, Advocates Call for More Family Services.” Meg Wingerter, Kansas News Service. “In the 2013 fiscal year, for example, 394 fewer families were referred for preservation services than in 2010 and 530 more children entered the foster care system. The association appears to work both ways, because fewer children entered the system in the 2014 and 2015 fiscal years, when the number of families receiving preservation services increased.”

September 19, 2017. “Lack of Space in Kansas Leads to some Foster Kids Sleeping in Offices.” Stephen Koranda, KPR. “Over the last year, more than 100 Kansas kids placed in the foster care system had to spend the night in offices instead of homes. Kids slept on couches or makeshift beds in the offices of the private organizations that handle foster care placement.”

October 11, 2017. “More than 70 Kids Missing from Kansas’ Foster Care System.” Madeline Fox, Kansas News Service. “Seventy-four children are missing from Kansas’ privatized foster care system. Thirty-eight of the missing children were under the supervision of KVC Kansas, the contractor managing cases in eastern Kansas. Thirty-six more are missing from among Saint Francis Community Service’s caseload in the western part of the state.”

November 12, 2017. “Secrecy Inside Child Welfare System Can Kill: ‘God help the children of Kansas’.” Laura Bauer, The Kansas City Star. “What Caleb’s father faced that day in December 2014 is what other parents and Kansas legislators say they’ve battled for years: An agency charged with protecting kids instead focused on protecting itself. An agency where a former high-level DCF supervisor told The Star she was instructed not to document anything after a child’s death and to shred notes after meetings so attorneys and reporters couldn’t get them through open records requests. An agency where even lawmakers insist DCF officials are intentionally misleading them and providing information the Legislature can’t trust.”

February 21, 2018. “Kansas Foster Care System Overwhelmed as Even More Kids Flood In.” Madeline Fox, Kansas News Service. “The trend in overnight stays began for KVC Kansas in September of 2016. St. Francis Community Services, the western contractor, saw its first child sleep overnight in an office in February 2017. From there, it grew — and it’s still growing. Last fiscal year, 108 kids slept in contractor offices. This fiscal year, with four months left to go, that number is already up to 167. Most stayed one night, though a handful stayed two or three, or, this month, five. So far, 20 children have stayed in an office overnight in February.”

April 21, 2018. “Some Kansas Foster Children are Still Missing as Others Sleep in Offices.” Laura Bauer and Hunter Woodall, The Kansas City Star. “When Gina Meier-Hummel took over the troubled state agency Dec. 1, she assured lawmakers and the public that she and her administration would work with the state’s two private contractors to correct these problems. Yet lawmakers and child advocates say that while the new administration is making things better, some kids are still in dire straits across Kansas.”

August 20, 2018. “Kansas DCF Failed to Meet 16 Standards for Child Safety, Well-Being Over Past Year.” Jonathan Shorman, The Wichita Eagle. “Missing performance standards is not a new problem for the DCF. The agency has missed more than a dozen standards for at least the last three years. On the most recent report, the agency also fell short of standards related to placing children in permanent homes within a year and minimizing re-entry into foster care.”

October 7, 2018. “Kansas DCF Workers in KC area Face Caseloads up to Four Times the Norm, Review Shows.” Laura Bauer & Hunter Woodall, The Kansas City Star. “Child welfare workers investigating abuse and neglect are supposed to carry a maximum caseload of about 15. But in the Kansas City area, workers for the Kansas Department for Children and Families recently carried an average of 55 cases. Statewide, the number was 38. Plus, some abuse and neglect investigations across Kansas took several months, even up to a year or two, to close. And DCF has been crippled by an archaic computer system, a lack of timely training for employees and also has struggled to keep workers and fill positions.”

November 8, 2018. “New Data Shows Kansas Foster Care Load is Increasing.” Madeline Fox, Kansas News Service. “Numbers released by the federal government today (THUR) show the foster care load in Kansas is growing faster than the rest of the country. The state is also slower at getting them out of the system.”

November 16, 2018. “Kansas Is Sued Over Foster Care That’s Bounced Several Children Between 100 Homes.” Madeline Fox, Kansas News Service. “The class-action suit alleges the state violated foster kids’ rights by shifting them — some of them more than 100 times throughout their time in care — often from one single-night placement to the next. The suit says that renders kids in care effectively homeless.”
“Thousands of kids every day are being failed.’ Coalition demands change in Kansas” Laura Bauer, The Kansas City Star. “Kansas must fix a troubled, under-funded child welfare system now or more vulnerable children across the state will suffer. That’s the message from members of a coalition that released a report Thursday detailing woes inside the state’s child welfare system — from racial disparities in the children being removed from their homes to kids lingering in state custody too long. The coalition, Strengthen Families Rebuild Hope, spent the past year hosting town hall meetings and identifying what has gone wrong in Kansas and why. Now, the coalition hopes child welfare leaders and legislators — as well as average citizens across the state — take notice of the problems and solutions proposed in the report.”

December 23, 2018. “Advocates: Black kids are more likely to land in foster care, but just one thing needs to change.” Madeline Fox, Kansas News Service. “African-American children are much more likely to land in the Kansas foster care system than white children. A report from Strengthen Families Rebuild Hope, a coalition of organizations and people who have experience with the foster care system, concluded that Kansas falls in line with national trends. But the disparity in Kansas, with black children 75 percent more likely than white children to be pulled from their homes, has gotten worse in the past two years.”

February 15, 2019. “Letter to the editor: The Legislature must act.” Natalie Zarate, Topeka Capital-Journal. “I’m 22 years old. I spent seven years in foster care in Kansas. For the past 18 months, I’ve heard legislators promise to fix a system they said was broken, but first, they said they needed to hear the recommendations from the Child Welfare System Task Force. Many of those recommendations are now in Senate Bill 12, which would improve families’ access to critical safety net programs. The chairman of the Senate Public Health and Welfare Committee, Sen. Gene Suellentrop from Wichita, is refusing to hold a hearing on the bill, so it isn’t going anywhere.”

April 10, 2019. “‘Nothing being done’: Time running out for Kansas lawmakers on child welfare reforms.” Jonathan Shorman and Laura Bauer, The Kansas City Star. “Child advocates and legislators spent more than a year crafting ways to fix Kansas’ ailing foster care system, but they are growing frustrated that the Legislature has not approved most of their recommendations. [...] More than a dozen members of Kansas’ child welfare task force and its subcommittees have signed a letter urging lawmakers to do more.”

May 8, 2019. “A bitter pill to swallow: Kansas lawmakers drop child welfare oversight plan.” Laura Bauer and Jonathan Shorman, The Kansas City Star. “Despite the problems facing Kansas foster care, lawmakers, in the final hours of their annual session dropped a plan to hold the troubled system accountable. A provision creating a child welfare oversight committee was eliminated from the state budget, a last-minute casualty of the legislative battle over Medicaid expansion.”

September 3, 2019. “This is a crisis’: Attorneys for Kansas foster children insist kids are still harmed.” Laura Bauer, Judy Thomas, and Jonathan Shorman, The Kansas City Star. “Since the suit was filed in November [2018], children still bounce from placement to placement and are subjected to “night-to-night” stays, only compounding the instability they feel, according to court records filed late Friday. Children in state custody also continue to be deprived of the mental health treatment they need, attorneys said.”

October 24, 2019. “Protecting childhood in Kansas: What to consider when our juvenile justice system works, but our child welfare system does not.” Kansas Appleseed, Medium. “Juvenile justice and foster care are two systems that can significantly impact a child’s life and future. Kansas embraced research and national best practices to change its juvenile justice system and join the leading edge of reform. But the Kansas foster care system continues to struggle, putting children at risk.”

November 9, 2019. “Parents Say Kansas Foster Care System Is Chaotic, Deceptive And Traumatizing Children.” Peggy Lowe, KCUR. “People rallied on the steps of the statehouse in Topeka, calling on lawmakers to bring more accountability to the Kansas Department for Children and Families, an agency long under fire for losing kids and housing them in offices. Shelley Owens of Topeka came to the protest hoping to find help for her three grandchildren[,] ‘It’s been traumatic,’ Owens said. ‘They said they’d help us but they have lied to us from the beginning.’”

November 23, 2019. “Gov. Laura Kelly: State of Kansas will fix flawed foster-care system.” Governor Laura Kelly, Special to The Topeka Capital-Journal. “Children placed in foster care need to be in a safe place of comfort and caring, not one of neglect and abuse. The state of Kansas has a moral obligation to protect all children. [...] The system clearly was overwhelmed by children and families in need, yet resources were stripped from DCF — even as the number of children in foster care had risen 36 percent from 2012 to 2017. [...] Only significant action could bring an end to such a crisis.”