

Superior Court of the District of Columbia



2024 Family Court Annual Report



Honorable Milton C. Lee Jr.
Chief Judge

March 31, 2025

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	v
Introduction	10
Mission Statement	11
Judicial Resources in Family Court.....	11
Length of Term on Family Court	11
Reassignments to and from Family Court.....	12
Ability to Recruit Qualified Sitting Judges to Serve on Family Court	22
Training and Education	23
Alternative Dispute Resolution in Family Court.....	26
ADR Performance Measures.....	26
Child Protection Mediation Under the Adoption and Safe Families Act.....	27
Domestic Relations Mediation	29
Family Court/Multi-Door ADR Initiatives	30
District of Columbia Bar, Family Law Community/Family Court ADR Program.....	31
Family Court Operations Case Activity	32
Family Court Case Activity.....	34
Abuse and Neglect Cases	36
Children Referred to Family Court	37
Transfer of Abuse and Neglect Cases Outside of Family Court.....	39
Compliance with D.C. ASFA Requirements	40
Trial/Stipulation of Abuse and Neglect Cases	40
Disposition Hearings in Abuse and Neglect Cases	42
Compliance with ASFA Permanency Hearing Requirements	43
Goal Setting and Achievement Date	44
Barriers to Permanency	45
Family Treatment Court Program	48
Permanency Outcomes for Children	49
Performance Measure 1: Permanency	51
Performance Measure 2: Timeliness	54
Performance Measure 3: Due Process	57
New Initiatives in Child Abuse and Neglect	58
Court Improvement Program	58
Courtwide Forms Workgroup	60
Juvenile Cases.....	60

Timeliness of Juvenile Delinquency Case Processing	61
Securely Detained Juveniles	63
Non-Securely Detained Juveniles	65
Released Juveniles	66
Family Court Social Services Division (CSSD).....	68
CSSD Organization	69
Juvenile Intake and Delinquency Prevention Branch.....	69
Child Guidance Clinic	71
CSSD Region I and Region II Pre- and Post-Disposition Supervision	73
Information, Contracts and Community Outreach (ICCO)	75
Mental Health and Habilitation Branch.....	76
Parentage and Support Branch	77
Domestic Relations Branch	79
Conclusion	80
Notes	80

Executive Summary

Since the enactment of the District of Columbia Family Court Act of 2001¹, the Family Court has achieved many of the goals set forth in its Family Court Transition Plan submitted to the President and Congress on April 5, 2002. The Family Court Act requires an annual report on the activities of the Family Court be submitted to Congress. The following summarizes some of the measures taken by the Family Court in 2024 in its continued efforts to improve the lives of children and families in the District of Columbia.

- The Chief Judge’s assessment of the productivity and success of the use of alternative dispute resolution.
 - The Court partnered with the Family Law Community of the District of Columbia Bar—a group of experienced family law attorneys—to conduct alternative dispute resolution (ADR) in domestic relations cases. In 2024, 53 families were ordered to participate in the ADR program. The program includes a case evaluation component along with mediation. The program successfully settled, either in full or in part, the cases of 30 families (56%).
 - Almost all (95%) of new child abuse and neglect cases filed were referred to mediation, which is consistent with the mandate in the Family Court Act to resolve cases and proceedings through ADR to the greatest extent practicable while prioritizing child safety. Of the cases referred for mediation in 2024, 112 child abuse and neglect cases (representing 194 children) participated in the mediation process, with 28 cases (25%, representing 54 children) resulting in a full agreement.
 - The Multi-Door Dispute Resolution Division of Superior Court also works to resolve domestic relations cases through ADR. In 2024, 565 cases were mediated, of which 176 cases (31%) were settled through mediation, either in full or in part.
 - Family Court attorney negotiators assist litigants in reaching amicable solutions to domestic relations matters presented to the court. Attorney negotiators fully negotiated 547 (78%) of the 703 referred cases, resolving 438 of those cases.
- Goals and timetables as required by the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 to improve the Family Court’s performance.
 - The Family Court monitored key performance measures, including compliance with the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA)² and the performance measures in the *Toolkit for Court Performance Measures in Child Abuse and Neglect Cases*.

¹ Pub. L. No. 107-114, 115 Stat. 2100 (2002).

² “ASFA” refers to the federal statute, Pub. L. No. 105-89, 107 Stat. 649 (1997), unless otherwise specified.

- In child abuse and neglect cases where children were removed from the home, 81% had a factfinding hearing and 64% had a disposition hearing held in compliance with the 105-day ASFA timeline; compliance with the 45-day timeline for children not removed from home was 54% for the trial or stipulation hearing and 34% for the disposition hearing.
- Information on the extent to which the Family Court met deadlines and standards applicable under Federal and District of Columbia law to review and dispose of actions and proceedings under the Family Court’s jurisdiction during the year.
 - In parentage and support cases, federal regulations mandate that orders to establish support be completed in 75% of the cases within six months of the date of service of process and 90% of the cases within 12 months of the date of service of process. The Family Court met these standards in 2024; seventy-eight percent of the cases were disposed or otherwise resolved within six months of service of process and 92% within 12 months of service of process.
 - Seventy-three percent (48) of child abuse and neglect cases disposed to adoption in 2024 were finalized within one year, with a median time of 280 days between the filing and finalization of the adoption petition. Of the 403 children in foster care whose adoption was finalized in the past five years, no children reentered foster care.
 - For juvenile delinquency cases, there are established timeframes in which a juvenile must be adjudicated and disposed.
 - Forty-three percent of securely detained juveniles charged with the most serious crimes were adjudicated within 45 days of their initial hearing in compliance with D.C. law³; the median time from initial hearing to adjudication was 50 days. Of the cases adjudicated, 54% were disposed within the 60-day timeframe; the median time from initial hearing to disposition was 87 days.
 - Thirty-nine percent of securely detained juveniles charged with serious crimes were adjudicated within 30 days of their initial hearing in compliance with D.C. law; the median time from initial hearing to adjudication was 42 days. Of the cases adjudicated, 71% were disposed within the 45-day timeframe; the median time from initial hearing to disposition was 54 days.
 - Thirty-three percent of non-securely detained juveniles were adjudicated within 45 days of their initial hearing in compliance with D.C. law; the median time from initial hearing to adjudication was 61 days. Of the cases that were adjudicated, 72% were disposed within the 60-day timeframe; the median time from initial hearing to disposition was 99 days.

³ D.C. Code § 16-2301(e) establishes timeframes for the trial or factfinding hearing for youth detained prior to trial in secure detention facilities and non-secure detention facilities or shelter houses.

- All youth referred to the Court Social Services Division (CSSD) must be screened following their arrest and prior to their initial hearing. In 2024, CSSD screened 1,692 newly referred youth, including youth arrested for delinquency matters and status offenses.

- Information on any factors which are not under the control of the Family Court which interfere with or prevent the Family Court from carrying out its responsibilities in the most effective manner possible.
 - The Family Court continues to manage its judicial resources while dealing with ongoing judicial vacancies. The Family Court had between four to six judicial vacancies throughout 2024.
 - Factors impacting time to adjudication for juvenile delinquency cases include the absence of an essential witness, unavailability of evidence, unavailability of an attorney, incomplete psychological, psychiatric and/or neurological tests, and difficulties in scheduling.
 - Factors impacting time to disposition for juvenile delinquency cases include the need to identify and obtain services or programs for the youth prior to disposition, delays in receipt of required psychological and/or psychiatric reports, non-compliance with court orders, and youth being involved in other proceedings before the court.
 - ASFA compliance rates were negatively impacted by persistent judicial vacancies which limit the calendar time available to schedule hearings, with vacancies in three of the eight Neglect calendars through all of 2024.
 - Time to disposition hearing for child abuse and neglect cases where children were removed from their home were adversely impacted by scheduling issues involving key witnesses and legal complexities.

- Information on: (a) the number of judges serving on the Family Court as of December 31, 2024; (b) how long each such judge has served on the Family Court; (c) the number of cases retained outside the Family Court; (d) the number of reassignments to and from the Family Court; and (e) the ability to recruit qualified sitting judges to serve on the Family Court.
 - On December 31, 2024, the Family Court comprised 24 judges, consisting of 12 Associate Judges and 12 Magistrate Judges.
 - Four newly appointed judges joined the Family Court in 2024, two Associate Judges and two Magistrate Judges.
 - Associate Judges interested in serving on the Family Court may volunteer or participate in an internal training program to gain the educational and training experience required by the Family Court Act.
 - While the Family Court has been successful in recruiting Associate Judge volunteers and recruiting Magistrate Judges through vacancy announcements, Associate Judges require Senate confirmation after being nominated by the President of the United States.

- An analysis of the Family Court’s efficiency and effectiveness in managing its caseload during the year, including an analysis of the time required to dispose of actions and proceedings among the various categories of the Family Court jurisdiction, as prescribed by applicable law and best practices.
 - The overall clearance rate for the Family Court in 2024 was 103%.
 - In neglect matters, the median length of time from removal to achievement of the permanency goal of reunification was 21.7 months; the median length of time from removal to achievement of the permanency goal of adoption was 30.3 months; the median length of time from removal to achievement of the permanency goal of guardianship was 23.1 months; the median length of time from removal to achievement of the permanency goal of legal custody was 17.7 months.
 - In mental health cases, the average time to disposition was 25 days.
 - In parentage and support cases, time to disposition is calculated from either the file date or date of service of process. Cases were disposed with an average time to disposition of 217 days from the file date, and 167 days from the date of service of process.
 - In domestic relations cases, the average time to disposition in uncontested cases was 50 days for divorce cases, 84 days for third-party custody cases, and 120 days for custody cases; in contested cases, the average time to disposition was 163 days in divorce cases, 161 days in third-party custody cases, and 206 days in custody cases.
 - For youth released in juvenile delinquency cases, the median time to adjudication was 59 days, and the median time to disposition was 71 days.
 - The Court’s established time standard is that 98% of juvenile delinquency cases in which youth are released are disposed within 270 days. In 2024, 74% of cases were disposed within the time standard.
 - In alignment with best practices regarding diversionary programs, the Family Court has two specialty courts/programs designed to address risk factors adversely impacting the lives of the District’s youth.
 - The Juvenile Behavioral Diversion Program (JBDP) continued to operate as a voluntary intensive graduated response program, designed to engage juveniles and status offenders in appropriate mental health services and other community supports. The goal is to reduce behavioral symptoms that result in the youth’s involvement with the juvenile justice system and to improve the youth’s functioning in the home, school, and community. Many youth who successfully complete the program are eligible to have their case dismissed. In 2024, 131 youth participated in JBDP, with 31 (24%) successfully completing the program.
 - HOPE “Here Opportunities Prepare You for Excellence” Court continues to serve as a treatment court established to address the multiple needs of court-involved youth whose home life is unstable, who are at risk of being sexually pressured or exploited, or who have

had challenges in the community (e.g. leaving home, truancy, substance abuse, etc.). For youth in the delinquency system, HOPE Court offers a path to case closure for those who succeed and graduate. For youth in the neglect system, HOPE Court offers specialized services to assist youth and families to achieve their permanency goals. In 2024, 69 youth participated in HOPE Court, with 14 (20%) successfully completing the program.

- In alignment with best practices, the Family Treatment Court Program (FTC) is a 12- to 15-month voluntary program which takes a holistic approach to helping participants break the cycle of addiction, shorten the out-of-home placement of children, and expedite permanency.
- A proposed remedial plan of action if the Family Court failed to meet the deadlines, standards, and outcome measures prescribed by such laws or practices.
 - The Court Improvement Program (CIP) continued its collaboration with the Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA) and the Office of the Attorney General for the District of Columbia to identify and evaluate systemic barriers and delays to achieving permanency in neglect cases. The CIP is working with CFSA using its permanency tracker to examine how CFSA and Court processes can better manage case events before they result in delay. Additionally, the CIP is working to incorporate case event timelines and statutory benchmarks into a judicial dashboard to afford judges greater visibility on whether a case is compliant with federal and D.C. requirements.
 - To identify barriers to quality court hearings, the CIP developed the Quality Court Hearings Project (QCH) which aims to enhance the quality of legal proceedings and determine how quality hearings lead to better outcomes for children and families. The CIP is currently working to finalize the review tool, after which reviewers will gather data by listening to recorded court hearings and conducting case file reviews.

We continue to implement new initiatives and sustain past initiatives to better serve children and families in our court system.

Introduction

The District of Columbia Family Court Act of 2001 (Family Court Act)⁴, requires that the Chief Judge of the Superior Court submit to Congress an annual report on the activities of the Family Court. The report, summarizing activities of the Family Court during 2024, must include the following:

- The Chief Judge’s assessment of the productivity and success of the use of alternative dispute resolution (see pages 26-32).
- Goals and timetables as required by the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 to improve the Family Court’s performance (see pages 40-45).
- Information on the extent to which the Family Court met deadlines and standards applicable under Federal and District of Columbia law to review and dispose of actions and proceedings under the Family Court’s jurisdiction during the year (see pages 32-57, 60-68, 76-80).
- Information on the progress made in establishing locations and appropriate space for the Family Court that are consistent with the mission of the Family Court until such time as the locations and space are established.
- Information on any factors which are not under the control of the Family Court which interfere with or prevent the Family Court from carrying out its responsibilities in the most effective manner possible (see pages 11, 41-43, 65-67).
- Information on: (a) the number of judges serving on the Family Court as of December 31, 2024; (b) how long each such judge has served on the Family Court; (c) the number of cases retained outside the Family Court; (d) the number of reassignments to and from the Family Court; and (e) the ability to recruit qualified sitting judges to serve on the Family Court (see pages 11-26).
- An analysis of the Family Court’s efficiency and effectiveness in managing its caseload during the year, including an analysis of the time required to dispose of actions and proceedings among the various categories of the Family Court jurisdiction, as prescribed by applicable law and best practices (see pages 32-57, 60-68, 76-80).
- A proposed remedial plan of action if the Family Court failed to meet the

⁴ See *supra* note 1.

deadlines, standards, and outcome measures prescribed by such laws or practices (see pages 41-47, 51-60, 65-67, 76-80).

Mission Statement

The mission of the Family Court of the Superior Court of the District of Columbia is to protect and support children brought before it, strengthen families in trouble, provide permanency for children and decide disputes involving families fairly and expeditiously, while treating all parties with dignity and respect.

Judicial Resources in Family Court

On January 1, 2025, the Family Court consisted of 24 judges, consisting of 12 Associate Judges and 12 Magistrate Judges; five of the Magistrate Judges were assigned to hear child abuse and neglect cases. The Family Court continues to manage its judicial resources while dealing with ongoing judicial vacancies; a full complement would be 28 Family Court judges.

Length of Term on Family Court

In 2012, the D.C. Courts and Public Defender Service Act (D.C. Courts and PDS Act) became effective⁵. Section 4 of the law amended D.C. Code § 11-908A to reduce the term of current and future Family Court Associate Judges from five years to three years. The following are the commencement dates of Associate Judges currently assigned to the Family Court.

<u>Associate Judges</u>	<u>Commencement Date</u>
Judge Soltys	January 2019
Judge Higashi	January 2022

⁵ Pub. L. No. 112-229, 126 Stat. 1611 (2012).

Judge Crowell	January	2023
Judge Wellner	January	2023
Judge Sanchez	January	2023
Judge Crane	August	2023
Judge Briggs	January	2024
Judge Seoane López	January	2024
Judge Noti	March	2024
Judge Nguyen	July	2024
Judge Willoughby	July	2024
Judge Demeo	January	2025

The following are the commencement dates of Magistrate Judges currently assigned to the Family Court:

<u>Magistrate Judges</u>	<u>Commencement Date</u>	
Magistrate Judge Breslow	October	2002
Magistrate Judge Albert	January	2006
Magistrate Judge Wiedmann	January	2020
Magistrate Judge Beatty-Arthur	July	2020
Magistrate Judge Marblestein-Deare	August	2022
Magistrate Judge Chandler	July	2023
Magistrate Judge Jones	January	2024
Magistrate Judge Mulkey	January	2024
Magistrate Judge Vila	January	2024
Magistrate Judge Acuña	July	2024
Magistrate Judge Abebe	August	2024
Magistrate Judge Nolan	January	2025

Reassignments to and from Family Court

In October 2024, the Chief Judge of the Superior Court of the District of Columbia issued judicial assignments for calendar year 2025. Those assignments became effective on January 1, 2025. Judge Soltys continues as the Family Court Presiding Judge, and Judge Higashi continues as the Deputy Presiding Judge. As part of the reassignment, Judge

Becker left Family Court; Judge Becker retained two domestic relations cases. Judge Ranga left Family Court in April 2024. Judge Noti was sworn in as an Associate Judge in March 2024 and, in April 2024, was permanently reassigned to Judge Ranga's domestic relations calendar.⁶ Magistrate Judge Fentress retired on May 31, 2024. Magistrate Judge Johnson retired on August 30, 2024,⁷ and Presiding Magistrate Judge Nolan, who previously served in the Family Court, was temporarily assigned to Magistrate Judge Johnson's Family Court calendar; that assignment became permanent in January 2025. Judge Hertzfeld, who previously served in the Family Court, was temporarily assigned to Judge Crowell's Juvenile and Adoptions calendar from October 2023 through March 2024 while Judge Crowell was on military leave.

Four newly appointed judges joined the Family Court in 2024. Judges Nguyen and Willoughby and Magistrate Judges Abebe and Acuña were appointed to the bench in 2024. Judges Nguyen and Willoughby and Magistrate Judge Acuña joined the Family Court in July 2024; Magistrate Judge Abebe joined the Family Court in August 2024. Judge Demeo, who was previously serving in the Superior Court's Criminal Division, joined the Family Court in January 2025.

The judges newly serving in the Family Court are assigned to various calendars to increase judicial efficiency. Judges Demeo and Nguyen are assigned to the Domestic Relations calendar. Judge Willoughby is assigned to the Juvenile and Adoptions calendar.

⁶ At the time Judge Noti was sworn in as an Associate Judge, she was a Magistrate Judge assigned to an Abuse and Neglect calendar in the Family Court.

⁷ Between April and August 2024, three of the five Family Court Magistrate Judges assigned to Abuse and Neglect calendars retired or were promoted, leaving those positions vacant, and resulting in the two remaining Abuse and Neglect Magistrate Judges temporarily handling a caseload formerly handled by five Magistrate Judges.

Magistrate Judge Abebe is assigned to the Neglect and Abuse calendar. Magistrate Judge Acuña is assigned to the Neglect and Adoptions calendar and Special Immigration Juvenile Status calendar. Presiding Magistrate Judge Nolan is assigned to the Neglect and Adoptions calendar and Fathering Court calendar.

Below is a brief description of the education and training experience of the judges joining Family Court after January 2024.

Judge Abebe

The Honorable Meti Abebe was appointed a magistrate judge by Former Chief Judge Anita Josey-Herring on August 12, 2024, making her the first Ethiopian-American judge on the Superior Court of the District of Columbia.

Born and raised in Addis Ababa, Judge Abebe completed high school at the International Community School. She then moved to the U.S. and earned a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology from George Washington University, where she was active in the International Students and African Students Associations.

Judge Abebe received her law degree from Howard University School of Law, earning honors in Administrative Law and Problems of World Order. She also participated in the International Law Society.

Judge Abebe's commitment to public service is evident from her work in South Africa on land reform issues resulting from the Group Areas Act and the segregation of land ownership during Apartheid. This work reinforced her passion for advocacy while working closely with the community.

In 2008, after years of work in D.C., she established her private practice with a focus on immigration law and business contract review. In 2016, Judge Abebe expanded

her practice to adoption, guardianship, and child neglect law after joining the Counsel for Child Abuse and Neglect attorney panel. She represented individuals and corporations in immigration matters and served as Guardian ad Litem and counsel for parents and foster parents in Family Court.

By organizing workshops and providing *pro bono* legal services, Judge Abebe has worked to enhance legal literacy and access to justice for immigrant communities. Additionally, she has contributed to the local Ethiopian community by offering language interpretation services, which reflects her commitment to advocacy and support for all those who may encounter barriers to justice.

Judge Acuña

The Honorable Melanie A. Acuña was appointed a magistrate judge by Former Chief Judge Anita Josey-Herring on July 1, 2024.

Prior to her appointment, Judge Acuña served as a Senior Attorney at Legal Counsel for the Elderly, where she specialized in advocating for low-income elderly residents of Washington D.C. facing eviction on the Superior Court's Landlord Tenant calendar.

Previously, Judge Acuña worked as a contract attorney for Mil Mujeres, a local nonprofit providing immigration services to low-income Latinos. Prior to Mil Mujeres, she served as an Assistant Public Defender at the Office of the Public Defender for Montgomery County, Maryland for six years. In this capacity, Judge Acuña represented indigent clients in the state's District and Circuit Courts, handling a wide range of cases including serious traffic offenses, misdemeanors, felonies, probation violations, and

advocating for clients in Adult Drug Court. She served as lead counsel in dozens of bench trials and jury trials.

Judge Acuña graduated from Regis College in Massachusetts with a Bachelor of Arts in Communications and Political Science. She earned her law degree from the University of the District of Columbia – David A. Clarke School of Law (UDC-DCSL). During her time at UDC-DCSL, Judge Acuña was a Dean’s Fellow, recipient of the David Niblack Criminal Defense Scholarship, President of the Student Bar Association, and an active member in Law Review, the Latino Law Student Association, and the Black Law Student Association. After law school she served as a judicial law clerk for the Honorable Sean D. Wallace in the Prince George’s County Circuit Court.

Judge Acuña is fluent in Spanish. She was born and raised in New Jersey and has been a resident of the District of Columbia for over 20 years.

Judge Demeo

In 2009, President Obama nominated Marisa J. Demeo to become an Associate Judge of the Superior Court of the District of Columbia. The Senate confirmed her nomination in 2010. She currently serves as a trial judge in the Family Court. She has served as the Presiding Judge of the Criminal Division and the Deputy Presiding Judge of the Probate and Tax Divisions. She also has served as a trial judge in the Civil Division and the Domestic Violence Division. Judge Demeo currently serves on the Joint Committee on Judicial Administration. She also served as the Vice Chairperson and Chairperson of the Hispanic Bar Association of the District of Columbia Judicial Council.

Judge Demeo graduated from Princeton University, where she received her Bachelor of Arts degree in Politics with a concentration in Latin American Studies. She

currently serves on the Princeton University Board of Trustees. She received her Juris Doctor from New York University School of Law (NYU), where she served on the *Law Review*. At NYU, Judge Demeo was selected as a Root-Tilden Scholar for her academic achievement and commitment to public interest.

After graduating from law school, Judge Demeo served as an Honors Program trial attorney in the Department of Justice's Civil Rights Division. Subsequently, she headed the D.C. national policy office of the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF), a national Latino civil rights organization. Judge Demeo later joined the United States Attorney's Office for the District of Columbia as an Assistant United States Attorney where she served as a criminal prosecutor. In 2007, Judge Demeo was appointed as a Magistrate Judge, where she served until her confirmation as an Associate Judge.

Judge Demeo has taught criminal procedure and a course on problem solving courts at Georgetown University School of Law. She also taught criminal procedure and immigration law at Howard University School of Law.

Judge Nguyen

Danny Lam Nguyen was nominated to be an Associate Judge of the Superior Court of the District of Columbia by President Donald J. Trump in 2020, and again by President Joseph R. Biden Jr. in 2023. Judge Nguyen's nomination was confirmed by the United States Senate on July 10, 2024.

Before his judicial appointment, Judge Nguyen was an Associate General Counsel on the Business Investigations team at Booz Allen Hamilton. Prior to that role, Judge Nguyen was a federal prosecutor for over eight years, prosecuting complex

financial fraud cases across the country as a Trial Attorney in the United States Department of Justice's Criminal Division, and violent crimes as an Assistant United States Attorney in the Superior Court Division of the United States Attorney's Office for the District of Columbia.

Earlier in his career, Judge Nguyen was an attorney at Wilmer Cutler Pickering Hale and Dorr LLP, where he conducted internal investigations and litigated various matters for the firm's clients. Judge Nguyen also served as a law clerk to the Honorable Reggie B. Walton of the United States District Court for the District of Columbia.

Judge Nguyen is a proud alumnus of the University of California, Los Angeles, where he received both his Bachelor of Arts and Master of Education. Judge Nguyen then completed his first year of legal studies at Santa Clara University School of Law, before transferring to Georgetown University Law Center, where he received his Juris Doctor, *magna cum laude*.

Judge Nolan

The Honorable Lloyd U. Nolan, Jr. was appointed as a magistrate judge by Former Chief Judge Lee Satterfield in 2010.

Judge Nolan is currently serving as the Presiding Magistrate Judge of the Superior Court of the District of Columbia. Judge Nolan was born and raised in Pittsfield, Massachusetts. Judge Nolan received his Bachelor of Arts degree from American International College in Springfield, Massachusetts in 1988. After graduation, he worked in sales and marketing at the Nabisco and Kraft General Foods companies.

In 1998, Judge Nolan received his Juris Doctor from the George Washington University School of Law. After law school, Judge Nolan served as a judicial law clerk for

the Honorable Russell F. Canan of the Superior Court of the District of Columbia. Judge Nolan then joined the Public Defender Service for the District of Columbia, where he spent 11 years doing trial work at all levels, from juvenile matters to the most serious adult felony cases. During his tenure at the Public Defender Service, Judge Nolan also worked in the Appellate Division.

Since joining the bench as a Magistrate Judge in 2010, Judge Nolan has served in every court division except the Probate Division. As the Presiding Magistrate Judge, he has direct responsibility for the magistrate judges, as well as a Neglect and Abuse calendar. In addition, Judge Nolan serves on multiple committees within the Courthouse.

Judge Noti

Judge Adrienne Jennings Noti was nominated by President Joseph R. Biden Jr. to be an Associate Judge of the Superior Court of the District of Columbia on September 20, 2021. Her nomination was confirmed by the United States Senate on March 7, 2024. Prior to this appointment, Judge Noti served as a Magistrate Judge of the Superior Court of the District of Columbia since October 6, 2014.

Judge Noti was born and raised in Washington, DC, and is a graduate of D.C. public schools. Judge Noti received her B.A. from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and her law degree *magna cum laude* from the Georgetown University Law Center.

After graduating from Georgetown, Judge Noti clerked for the Honorable Carol Bagley Amon in the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of New York. Judge Noti then began her career in public interest law and family law. Following a fellowship at the Center for Reproductive Rights, she worked as a Staff Attorney at the Safe Horizon

Domestic Violence Law Project, representing clients in protection order, child custody, visitation, and neglect proceedings in New York Family Courts.

From 2002 to 2010, Judge Noti was a clinical law professor, first at Rutgers School of Law – Newark, where she led the Women’s Rights Litigation Clinic and coordinated a *pro bono* project program that provided legal information to *pro se* litigants. Then, Judge Noti served as a Practitioner-in-Residence at American University’s Washington College of Law in the Women and the Law Clinic. She supervised student attorneys representing clients in child custody, child support, divorce, domestic violence, disability, and immigration matters, including in DC Superior Court.

Judge Noti specialized in improving access to justice for parents and *pro se* litigants. In 2010, Judge Noti joined the DC Bar Pro Bono Program where she was the lead Managing Attorney for family law and coordinated the Advocacy and Justice Clinic. Prior to her appointment as a Magistrate Judge, Judge Noti worked at the Office of Child Support Enforcement, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, where she developed and implemented federal child support policy, advised senior policymakers on child support enforcement, and conducted trainings for judges, attorneys and child support professionals nationwide.

In her nearly 10 years of service as a Magistrate Judge, Judge Noti has presided over matters in the Family Court and Domestic Violence, Criminal, Civil, and Probate Divisions. Additionally, she served as the Presiding Judge of the Family Treatment Court, an intensive drug treatment court for select parents involved in the child abuse and neglect system. During her tenure, Judge Noti led judicial training sessions and served on various committees, including the Criminal Justice Act Panel Committee, Committee on Strategic

Planning Leadership Council, Judicial Education Committee, and Family Court Training Committee.

Judge Noti has taught at American University's Washington College of Law, Georgetown University Law Center, and in the Women's Studies Department at Rutgers University and at the New York University School of Social Work.

Judge Willoughby

Charles J. Willoughby Jr. was nominated by President Joseph R. Biden Jr. to be an Associate Judge of the Superior Court of the District of Columbia on June 28, 2023. His nomination was confirmed by the United States Senate on July 10, 2024.

Judge Willoughby, a native Washingtonian, attended and graduated from Sidwell Friends School and subsequently obtained two Bachelor of Arts degrees – first from Morehouse College and then from Belmont University. Judge Willoughby received his Juris Doctor from the Howard University School of Law in 2007.

Following his graduation from law school, Judge Willoughby was employed as an Assistant Attorney General at the Virgin Islands Department of Justice, handling firearms, narcotics, domestic violence and homicide cases. Judge Willoughby then worked as an associate at a law firm in St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands, with a concentration on general civil litigation and premises liability matters, while also serving on the Criminal Justice Act Panel, representing indigent defendants in criminal cases.

In 2014, Judge Willoughby was sworn in as an Assistant United States Attorney at the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Columbia. At the time he was appointed to the bench, Judge Willoughby was serving as a Deputy Chief in the Major Crimes Section

of the Superior Court Division. In this role, he supervised numerous prosecutors during the investigation and prosecution of violent crime cases.

Prior to becoming a supervisor, Judge Willoughby prosecuted violent crime matters in Superior Court and cybercrime matters in District Court. During his tenure as an Assistant United States Attorney, Judge Willoughby was awarded multiple United States Attorney's Special Achievement Awards. In 2021, he was an inaugural recipient of the Assistant United States Attorney's Association Patricia J. Smoot Award, recognizing his leadership, commitment to inclusion, and passion for the ethical pursuit of justice.

Ability to Recruit Qualified Sitting Judges to Serve on Family Court

Since its inception, the Family Court has successfully recruited qualified judges to serve on the Family Court. Recruitment efforts were aided by enactment of the D.C. Courts and PDS Act⁸, in 2012, which reduced the term of current and future Family Court Associate Judges from five years to three years. As required by law, all Associate Judges currently serving in the Family Court volunteered to serve. A two-fold process has been implemented to replace those judges who choose to transfer out after completion of their term. First, there is an ongoing process to identify and recruit Associate Judges interested in serving on the Family Court, who have the requisite educational and training experience required by law. Second, Superior Court Associate Judges who are interested in serving but do not have the requisite experience or training required by the Family Court Act are provided the opportunity to participate in a quarterly training program, developed by the Presiding Family Court Judge. The training

⁸ *Id.*

is designed to ensure that these judges have the knowledge and skills required to serve in the Family Court.

Given the overwhelming response from the Bar for the Magistrate Judge positions previously advertised, no recruitment difficulties are envisioned for future Magistrate Judge vacancies.

Training and Education

The Chief Judge of the Superior Court and the Presiding and Deputy Presiding Judges of the Family Court collaborate with the Superior Court's Judicial Education Committee and the Family Court Planning Committee to develop and provide training for Family Court judicial staff. This interdisciplinary committee consists of judicial officers, court staff, attorneys, social workers, psychologists, and other experts in child welfare. Family Court judicial staff consistently strive to enhance their skills and gain a deeper understanding of the issues facing the families and children navigating the complexities of the legal system.

Family Court judicial officers took advantage of several training opportunities in 2024:

In April 2024, the Family Court hosted a quarterly training entitled *Abuse to Prison Pipeline*. There were 70 virtual attendees. Additionally, they hosted a training in June 2024 entitled, *Girl Interrupted – The Erasure of Black Girls Childhood*.

On October 25, 2024, the Family Court, in conjunction with the D.C. Courts' Center for Education and Training (CET), held its 22nd Annual Interdisciplinary Conference – *Stewards of Children*. With 215 virtual attendees, the conference depicted

child abuse experiences and aimed to provide techniques for parents and caregivers to protect children along with enumerating the rights of survivors and ensuring they are treated with dignity and respect. Michelle Booth Cole, of Safe Shores – The DC Children’s Advocacy Center, shared her expertise about how to recognize and react responsibly to child sexual abuse, including discussions on critical issues in sexual abuse prevention. In addition, Kathryn Rifenkark and Tiffany Henderson of the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children shared their expertise about the intersection of online enticement, sextortion, and child sex trafficking. Participants were provided resources to enhance service delivery within the communities served by the Family Court. The sessions were both educational and a reflection of the Court’s dedication to understanding the multifaceted challenges families and children face.

Judges and court staff are consistently trained on current family law. During the year, Family Court law clerks and other employees also received training on topics to help them better assist the judges in the division. Some of the topics included evidence, motions training, and research tools. Family Court judges are continually apprised of recent developments and changes in family law along with enacted legislation affecting the Family Court. The judges also participated in the Spring Judicial and Senior Managers Conference, entitled *Navigating the AI Revolution: The Intersection of Artificial Intelligence and Judicial Integrity*.

Additionally, four new judicial officers joined the Family Court in 2024 and were trained in family law particular to their calendars as well as general family law. Judicial officers who were changing calendars participated in mandatory in-service training on their respective new calendar assignments.

Beyond formal training, the Presiding Judge fostered a spirit of collaboration through weekly lunch meetings and mandatory monthly discussions for Family Court judicial officers to confer about issues involving Family Court cases and to hear from guest speakers on a variety of relevant topics. These gatherings provided a platform for sharing knowledge and discussing complex cases, further uniting the judicial officers in their common goals.

The Counsel for Child Abuse and Neglect Branch (CCAN) of the Family Court, which oversees the assignment of attorneys in child welfare cases, conducts trainings for new child abuse and neglect attorneys, and coordinates additional trainings for current panel members, including a brown bag lunch series on important topics in child abuse and neglect practice. The trainings and brown bag lunches strive to be interdisciplinary and employ the skills of many stakeholders involved in the child welfare system. Sessions in 2023 included initial CCAN, Guardian ad Litem and Special Education Panel Attorney Training; Updates to Education Judicial Bench Cards for Neglect and Delinquency cases; Making Your Record presented by the Children's Law Center; Harm to Parents and Harm of Removal in Neglect cases presented by Assistant Professor of Law Shanta Trivedi; Best Practices in Providing Special Education Representation in Adult Criminal Court; Ethics Training in Neglect cases presented by the DC Bar and SOUL: A New Permanency Option for Older Youth in the District.

Family Court non-judicial staff also participated in a variety of training programs in 2024. Topics included: conflict resolution; active listening; time management; critical thinking; writing skills; best practices in customer service; building trust; emotional intelligence, adult and child CPR; elevating teamwork and collaboration; leading teams;

and self-care in dealing with stress, trauma and healing. While these educational opportunities focused on a variety of topics, they all had the goal of moving the Court toward improved outcomes for children and families.

Alternative Dispute Resolution in Family Court

Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) in Family Court is provided through the Superior Court's Multi-Door Dispute Resolution Division (Multi-Door). Both the Child Protection Mediation and Family Mediation programs facilitated by Multi-Door have proven to be highly successful in resolving child abuse and neglect cases and domestic relations cases. The programs had an equally positive effect on court processing timeframes and costs. These results provide compelling support for the continuation of these valuable public service programs.

ADR Performance Measures

The Multi-Door Division relies on outcome measures to assess the quantity and quality of ADR performance. Three performance indicators measure the quality of ADR:

- a) ADR Outcome – measures clients' satisfaction with the outcome of the mediation process (including whether a full agreement on the case was reached or if specific contested issues were resolved), fairness of the outcome, level of understanding of the opposing party's concerns, impact upon communications with the other party, and impact upon time spent pursuing the case.
- b) ADR Process – measures clients' satisfaction with the overall mediation process, including their ability to discuss issues openly, fairness of the process, length of the session, and whether the participants perceived coercion by the other party or

mediators.

- c) Mediator Performance – measures clients’ satisfaction with the mediators’ performance in conducting the process, including explaining the process and the mediators’ role, providing parties the opportunity to fully explain issues, the mediators’ understanding of the issues, whether the mediators gained the parties’ trust, and any perceived bias on the part of the mediators.

These quality performance indicators are measured through participant surveys distributed to all participants in ADR processes at Multi-Door. Statistical measures include the satisfaction level of respondents with the overall ADR process, ADR outcome, and mediator performance. Multi-Door staff hold periodic meetings to review these statistical measures and determine initiatives to improve overall program performance. Performance indicators provide a measure of the extent to which ADR is meeting the objectives of settlement, quality, and responsiveness.

Child Protection Mediation Under the Adoption and Safe Families Act

In 2024, 275 new abuse and neglect cases were filed in the Family Court. Each case represents one child in Family Court. In mediation, however, each case represents a family, often with multiple children. Ninety-five percent of the new abuse and neglect cases filed (165 families with 261 children) were referred to mediation, which is consistent with the mandate in the Family Court Act to resolve cases and proceedings through ADR to the greatest extent practicable while prioritizing child safety.⁹ Of those

⁹ These multi-party mediations are structured to enhance safety in the following ways: pre-mediation information is provided to participants; parents are included in the sessions; appropriate training is provided;

165 families, 10 families (6%, representing 11 children) whose cases were filed in 2024 were offered mediation in 2025. Overall, mediation was offered to 155 families with 250 children in 2024. Of the 155 families offered mediation in 2024, 72% of the families (112 cases, representing 194 children) participated in the mediation process; 28% of the families (43 cases, representing 56 children) did not participate and their cases were not mediated.¹⁰

A substantial number of cases offered mediation were successfully settled via mediation, either in full or in part.¹¹ In 2024, nearly all of the 112 cases which went to mediation reached an agreement on jurisdiction, family services, or a plan to resolve the case. Of the mediated cases, 28 cases (25%, representing 54 children) resulted in a full agreement. In these cases, the issue of legal jurisdiction was resolved, and the mediation resulted in a stipulation (an admission of neglect by a parent or guardian). In 71 cases (63%, representing 120 children) the mediation was partially successful, resolving significant family concerns. There were 13 cases (12%, representing 20 children) in which mediation resulted in no agreement.

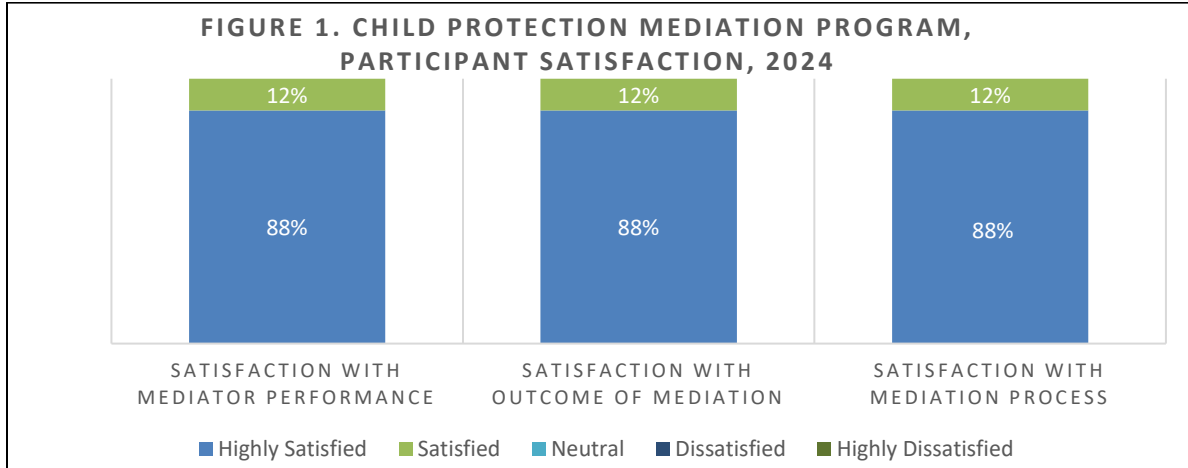
Qualitative measures, shown in Figure 1, illustrate satisfaction measures (highly satisfied and satisfied) of 100% for performance of the mediator(s), 100% for the ADR

and a layered domestic violence screening protocol is implemented by Multi-Door staff and mediators for cases with a history of domestic violence.

¹⁰ Scheduled cases may not be held for the following reasons: (a) case was dismissed by the court; (b) case was settled prior to mediation; (c) case was rescheduled by the parties; (d) case was cancelled (e.g., domestic violence); or (e) case was scheduled in 2024 for mediation in 2025. Family Court and Multi-Door have implemented measures to reduce the number of rescheduled cases to expedite case resolution.

¹¹ In addition to the new abuse and neglect referrals, less than 10 post-adjudication cases were referred with issues of permanency, custody, visitation and/or post-adoption communication. Of those cases referred in 2024, all were offered mediation in 2024. Of these cases (representing 14 children), 75% were mediated and 25% did not participate. Of the cases that were mediated, a partial settlement was reached in 50% of the cases. The remaining cases either reached full settlement on custody or post-adoption contact or no agreement was reached.

outcome, and 100% for the ADR process.¹²



Domestic Relations Mediation

Mediation in domestic relations matters typically addresses issues of child custody, visitation, child support, alimony, and distribution of property. Domestic relations matters are often characterized by high levels of discord and poor communication, both factors which contribute to increasing the level of conflict.

A total of 832 domestic relations cases completed the mediation intake interview process and were referred to mediation in 2024.¹³ Of those 832 cases, 267 cases (32%) referred to mediation did not participate because they were found to be either inappropriate or ineligible for mediation or the parties voluntarily withdrew from the process.¹⁴

Of the 565 cases mediated, 176 cases (31%) settled in mediation and 389 cases

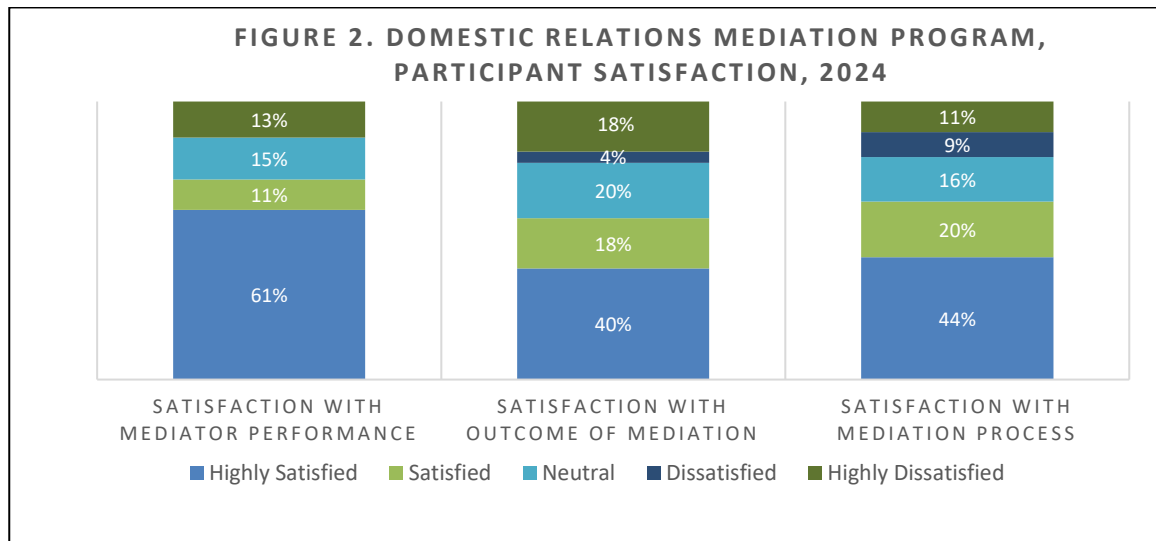
¹² These statistics are based on data provided by the Multi-Door Dispute Resolution Division.

¹³ There were 1,308 cases opened at intake. Prior to reaching mediation, 476 of those cases were closed at intake because at least one essential party did not complete the intake interview process or neither party responded to intake scheduling requests.

¹⁴ Cases that did not participate in mediation include: 17 cases deemed inappropriate for mediation and 216 cases where at least one party failed to report to mediation or refused to mediate.

(69%) did not reach an agreement. Of the 176 settled cases, a full agreement was reached in 128 cases (73%); a partial agreement was reached in 48 cases (27%), resolving significant family concerns.

Qualitative outcome measures (Figure 2) show satisfaction rates (highly satisfied and satisfied) of 72% for the performance of the mediator(s), 58% for the ADR outcome, and 64% for the ADR process.



Family Court/Multi-Door ADR Initiatives

The Family Court and Multi-Door have coordinated efforts to implement initiatives to support ADR consistent with the Family Court Act. In 2024, the Program for Agreement and Cooperation in Contested Custody Cases (PAC) was conducted remotely via Zoom for the first six months of the year (January through June). PAC was placed on a temporary hiatus in July so the adult and children’s seminars could be redesigned and relaunched in 2025. The objective of the program is to help participants improve working relationships and develop effective communication skills while prioritizing their children’s needs.

Five education seminars were conducted in 2024, which helped 135 parents understand the impact of custody disputes on co-parenting and how these disputes affect their children.

Additionally, the Family Court has two staff attorneys who serve as on-site mediators for parties who are referred by judges for same-day mediation. These lawyers, called “attorney negotiators,” are highly effective because they are experienced family law attorneys who can give parties a realistic sense of what the outcome of their dispute might be if their case went to trial. Attorney negotiators work with litigants to reach solutions on matters including, but not limited to, custody, divorce, visitation, child support, property distribution, and alimony. Frequently, the attorney negotiators are successful in helping parties reach an agreement on the day of their court hearing. If the parties are able to come to an agreement on all the issues before the court, a permanent court order will be issued. In 2024, 703 cases were referred to attorney negotiators; of those, 547 cases were fully negotiated. Of those 547 cases, 438 were resolved (80%) and 109 (20%) were unresolved. Family Court collaborated with the Catholic University Law School to expand the program, supervising law school students who served as volunteer student attorney negotiators.

District of Columbia Bar, Family Law Community/Family Court ADR Program

In addition to domestic relations cases mediated through Multi-Door, the Court also has a partnership with the Family Law Community of the District of Columbia Bar. This group of experienced family law attorneys conducted ADR in domestic relations cases. Judges decide on a case-by-case basis, in consultation with the parties and the lawyers, whether it is appropriate to refer a case to an ADR lawyer for mediation. The

parties, either pro se or with their counsel, agree to attend and participate in ADR for up to three hours, if marital property is at issue, and up to four hours, if issues of custody are involved. The parties agree to pay the ADR Facilitator at a reduced hourly rate. As part of their participation in the program, ADR Facilitators agree to accept one *pro bono* case per year, making their high-quality and comprehensive mediation services available to lower-income parties.

The ADR Facilitators are family lawyers with at least five years of experience in domestic relations practice and mediation training or experience. The program includes a case evaluation component, along with mediation, in which parties and counsel are provided with an assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of their respective positions. In 2024, parties in 53 cases participated in this ADR program. Thirty-eight percent (20) of the cases were fully settled and 19% (10) were partially settled through the program.

Family Court Operations Case Activity

There were 3,453 pending pre-disposition cases in the Family Court on January 1, 2024. In 2024, there were 9,617 new cases filed¹⁵ and 272 cases reopened in the Family Court. During the same period, 10,215 cases were disposed. As a result, there were 3,127 cases pending in the Family Court on December 31, 2024 (Table 1).

TABLE 1. FAMILY COURT OPERATIONS CASE ACTIVITY, 2024

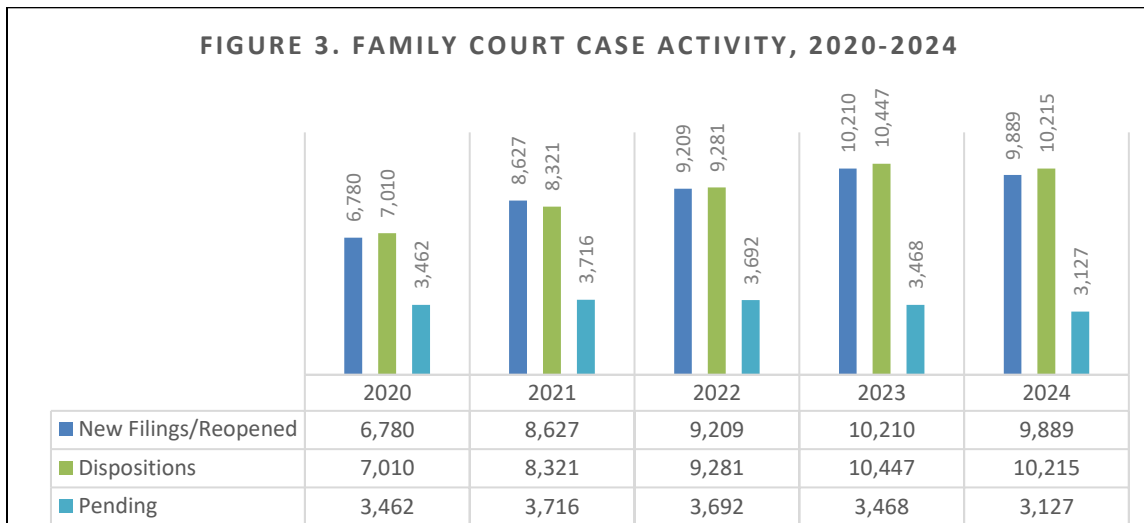
	Abuse & Neglect	Adoption	Divorce & Custody	Juvenile ^a	Mental Health	Parentage & Support ^b	Total
Pending Jan. 1 ^c	51	85	1,625	733	190	769	3,453
New Filings & Reopened ^d	275 ^e	162	4,364	1,196 ^e	2,668	1,224	9,889

¹⁵ New filings in Abuse and Neglect (10) and Juvenile (71) initiated with a pre-petition custody order were excluded from the new cases filed unless a subsequent petition was filed in 2024. The exclusion of these cases more accurately reflects the cases available to be processed. Prior to 2018, those cases were included in the new filings category.

Total Available for Disposition	326	247	5,989	1,929	2,858	1,993	13,342
Dispositions	269 ^f	161	4,302	1,248 ^f	2,691	1,544	10,215
Pending Dec. 31	57	86	1,687	681	167	449	3,127
Percent Change in Pending	11.8%	1.2%	3.8%	-7.1%	-12.1%	-41.6%	-9.4%
Clearance Rate^g	98%	99%	99%	104%	101%	126%	103%

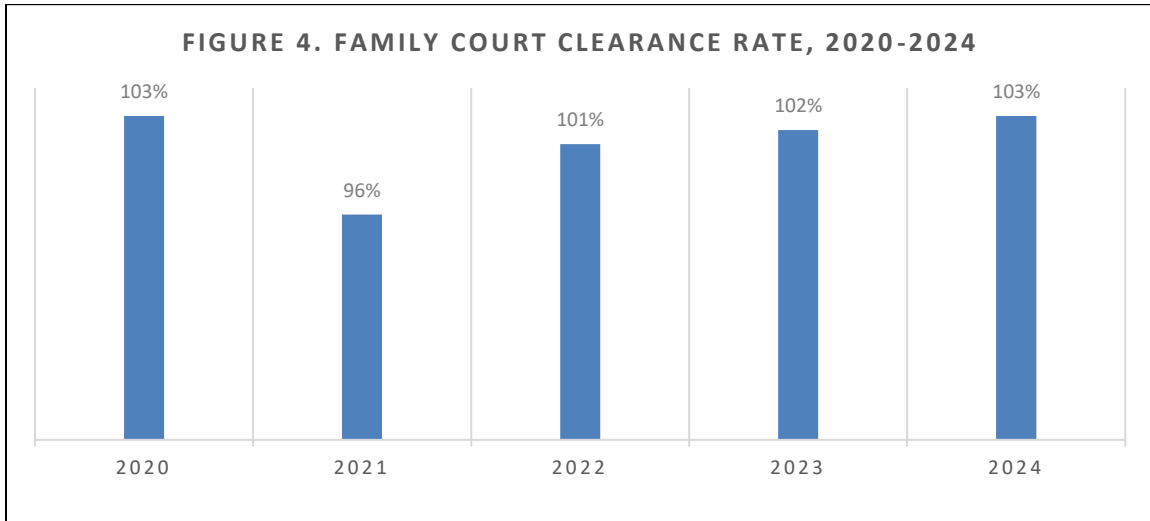
- a. Includes cases involving Delinquency, PINS (persons in need of supervision), and Interstate Compact.
- b. Two types of order-related dispositions occur in Parentage and Support (P&S) cases: temporary and permanent support order dispositions.
- c. Pending figures for all case types were adjusted after an audit of caseloads.
- d. New filings and reopened case counts are combined, by case type, due to cell suppression guidelines. In 2024, there were 9,617 new cases filed and 272 cases reopened in the Family Court.
- e. New filings do not reflect cases in pre-petition custody order status.
- f. Dispositions in Abuse & Neglect and Juvenile reporting do not include cases that were not petitioned.
- g. The clearance rate, a measure of court efficiency, is the total number of cases disposed divided by the total number of cases added (new filings and reopened cases) during a given period. Rates over 100% indicate the court disposed of more cases than were added, thereby reducing the pending caseload.

Over the past five years, the number of filings (including reopened cases) and the number of dispositions increased overall (Figure 3). Both new filings/reopened cases and dispositions increased by 46% from 2020 to 2024. New filings/reopened cases rose from 6,780 to 9,889 cases while dispositions grew from 7,010 to 10,215 cases.



An effective measure of whether a court is managing its caseload efficiently is its clearance rate. The clearance rate is the number of outgoing cases as a percentage of the number of incoming cases. To maintain a clearance rate of 100%, the court must dispose of one case for every new case filed or reopened. Disposing of cases in a timely manner helps ensure that the number of cases awaiting disposition, or the pending caseload, does

not increase. The overall clearance rate for the Family Court in 2024 was 103% (Figure 4).



Family Court Case Activity

New case filings in Family Court decreased 4% from 2023 to 2024 (9,973 in 2023; 9,617 in 2024). New case filings increased for abuse and neglect, divorce and custody, and parentage and support cases; new case filings decreased for adoption, juvenile, and mental health cases. In 2024, the Family Court resolved 10,215 cases, a 2% decrease in the number of dispositions from 2023 (10,447). While dispositions increased in abuse and neglect, juvenile, and parentage and support cases, dispositions decreased in adoption, divorce and custody, and mental health cases.

A disposition does not always end court oversight and judicial involvement. In many Family Court cases, even after an order is entered, there is a significant amount of post-disposition activity. For example, dispositions in parentage and support cases include cases resolved through the issuance of either a temporary or permanent support order. Cases resolved through issuance of a temporary support order often have financial review hearings scheduled after disposition until a permanent support order is

established. In addition, all support cases are subject to contempt and modification hearings that require judicial oversight. Child support orders entered in D.C. are valid until the child attains the age of 21 or is emancipated. In 2024, 1,200 post-disposition parentage and support motions were filed.

Domestic relations cases are also subject to post-disposition activity such as motions for contempt and motions to modify or enforce custody or visitation; these motions can require significant judicial, administrative and courtroom management; often, the post-judgment litigation is just as extensive and involved as a case that is initiated with a newly-filed complaint for custody. In 2024, 3,458 post-disposition motions were filed in domestic relations cases.

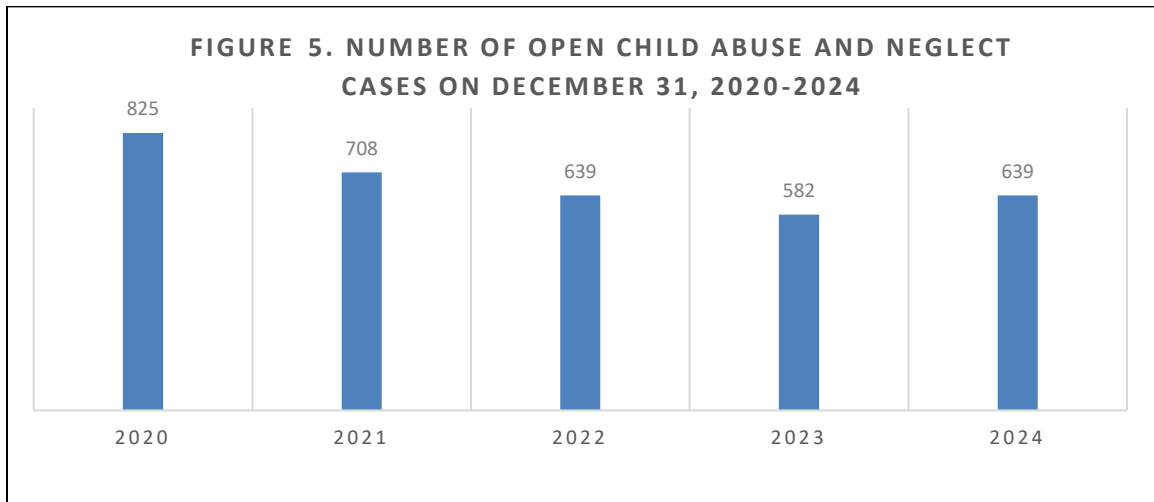
Mental habilitation cases are considered disposed once an order of commitment or an order of voluntary admission is entered. In 2024, 479 post-disposition mental habilitation cases remained open, requiring annual judicial review to evaluate the need for continued commitment.

Juvenile cases are disposed at sentencing and stay open until the sentence expires or the Family Court no longer has jurisdiction over the juvenile. In 2024, there were 793 post-disposition juvenile cases.

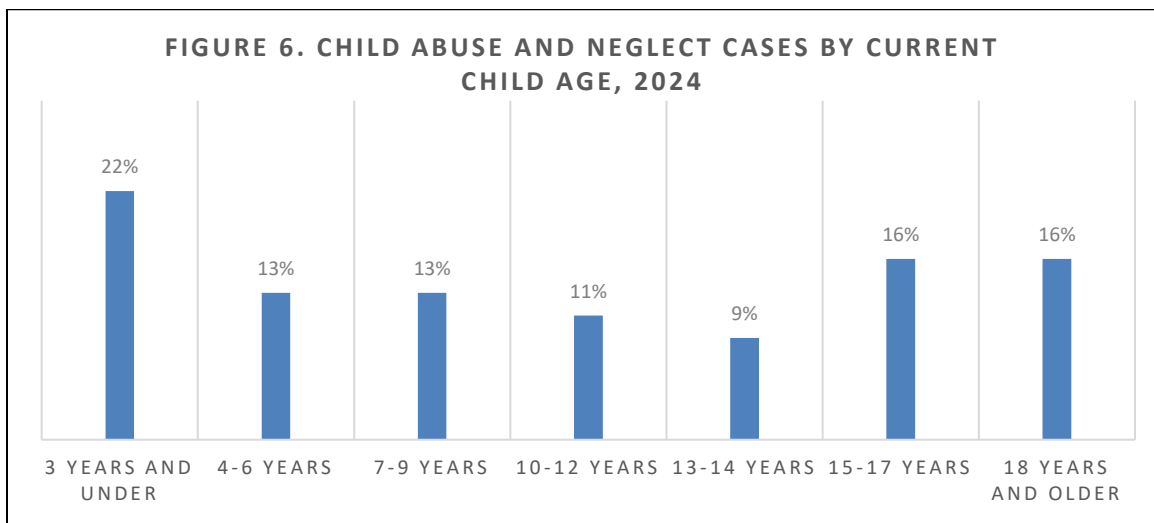
Abuse and neglect cases remain open after disposition until either the permanency goal is achieved or the Family Court no longer has jurisdiction over the respondent due to age. In 2024, 582 post-disposition abuse and neglect cases remained open and required regular judicial review until the child reached permanency either through placement in a permanent living situation or aged out of the foster care system.

Child Abuse and Neglect Cases

In 2024, there were 639 children with an open abuse and neglect case under Family Court jurisdiction (Figure 5). This includes children with open petitioned cases that are either undisposed (57) or in which a disposition hearing was held and then followed by regularly scheduled permanency hearings (582). Thirty-four of the 582 post-disposition cases involved children with a disrupted guardianship.



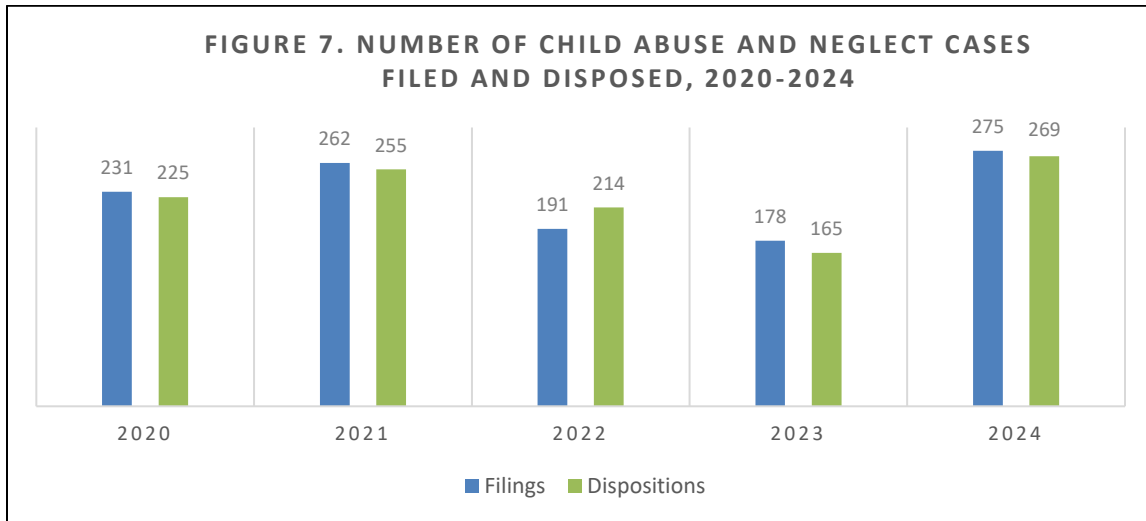
Youth aged 15 and older accounted for 32% of all open abuse and neglect cases under Family Court jurisdiction (Figure 6). Twenty-two percent of children were aged three years and under.



While this section pertained to all children with open abuse and neglect cases in 2024, the next section focuses on child abuse and neglect new referrals.

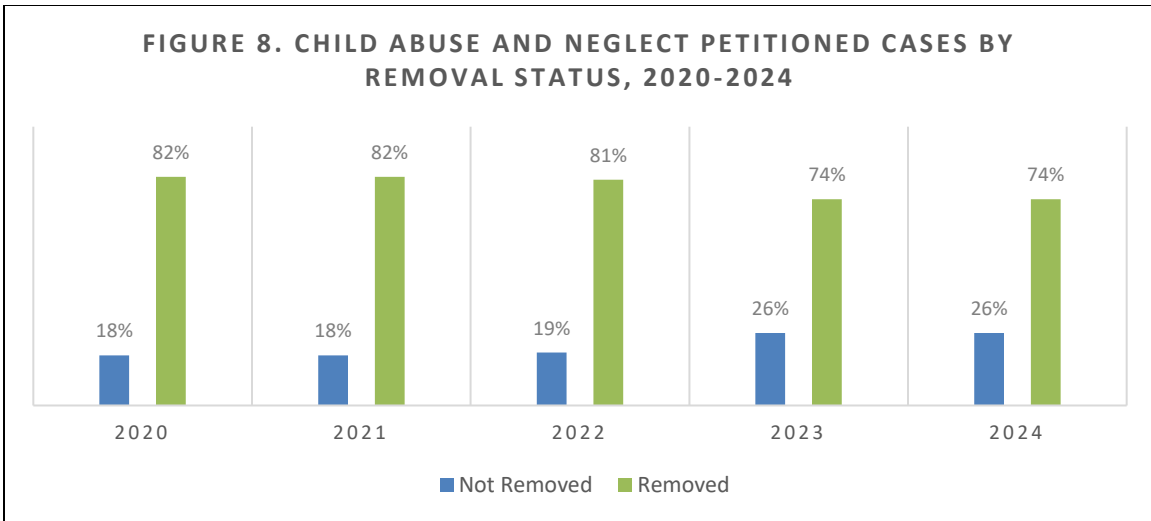
Children Referred to Family Court

In 2024, there were 275 new child abuse and neglect referrals filed and 269 child abuse and neglect cases disposed (Figure 7). Of the 275 new referrals, 74% (204) had a completed disposition hearing, 21% (58) remained undisposed, and 5% (13) were dismissed as of December 31, 2024.

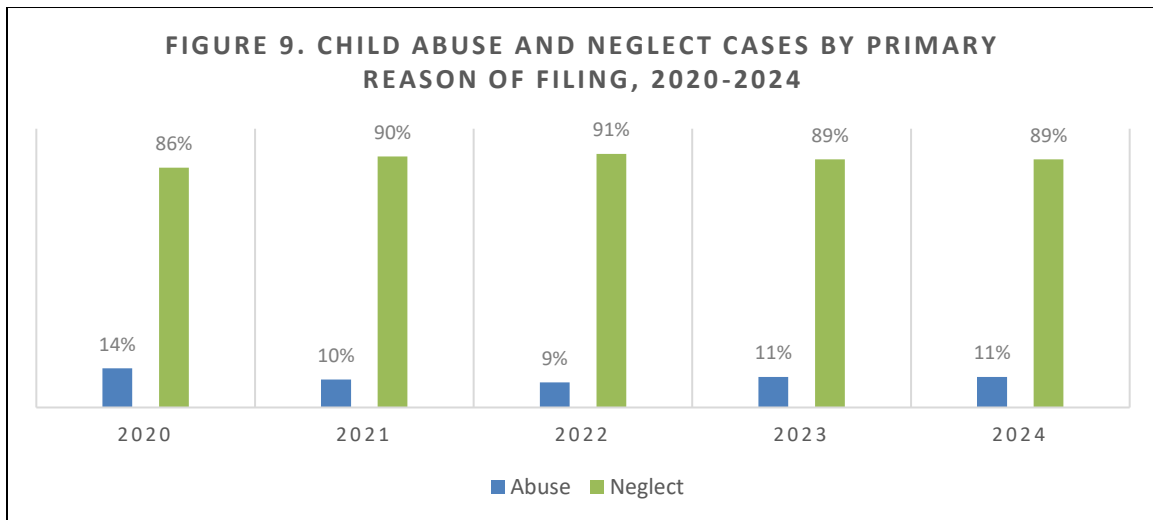


In-home supervision of cases by CFSA provides the family and the agency with an opportunity to address the family’s needs without court supervision. CFSA’s strategic agenda known as the “Four Pillars” strives to improve outcomes for children and families by reducing the number of children coming under Family Court jurisdiction through application of “Pillar One: Narrowing the Front Door.” This pillar was designed to decrease the number of entries into foster care through differential response and placement with kin.¹⁶

¹⁶ Child and Family Services Agency, “Four Pillars.” CFSA.DC.GOV. <https://www.cfsa.dc.gov/page/four-pillars/>. Accessed March 19, 2024.

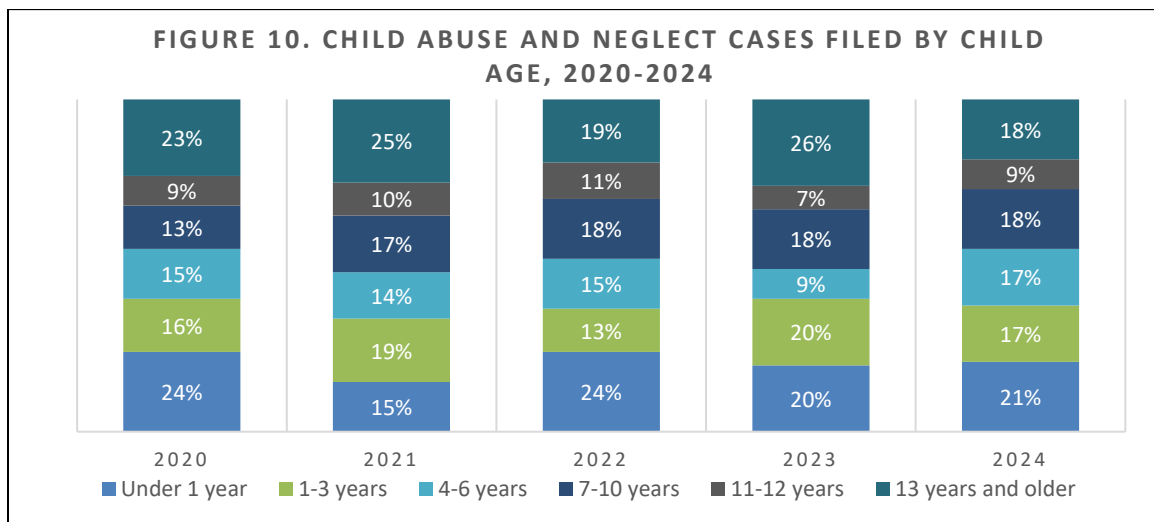


In 2024, children were removed from the home in 74% of petitioned cases while children remained in the home under protective supervision in 26% of petitioned cases (Figure 8). The lowest percentage of removed petitioned cases in the last five years occurred in 2023 and 2024. In 2024, an allegation of neglect (89%) was the most likely reason for a youth to be referred to the Family Court (Figure 9).



At the time of referral, over half (55%) of new petitions were for children aged six and younger, with 38% for children aged three or younger (Figure 10). Given the vulnerability of children in these age groups, the Family Court and CFSA are continuing to review the needs of this population, especially as it relates to educational and

developmental services and access to other early intervention programs. In 2024, 18% of new petitions to Family Court involved children aged 13 and older at the time of referral. The Family Court, CFSA, and other child welfare stakeholders continue to examine the implications of a larger population of older youth coming into care. The examination includes an assessment of resources available in the District, assisting parents and caregivers in addressing this population’s needs before they come into care, as well as identifying and developing appropriate placement options once they are in care.



Transfer of Child Abuse and Neglect Cases Outside of Family Court

Under the Family Court Act, if the term of a Family Court judge expires before the judge disposes of the case, the Presiding Judge must reassign the case to another Family Court judge. A non-Family Court judge can retain a case, with the approval of the Chief Judge, provided that: (1) the judge retaining the case has the required experience in family law; (2) the case is in compliance with the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA); and (3) it is likely that permanency would not be achieved more quickly by reassigning the case within the Family Court. In 2024, no judges leaving the Family

Court retained any abuse and neglect cases.

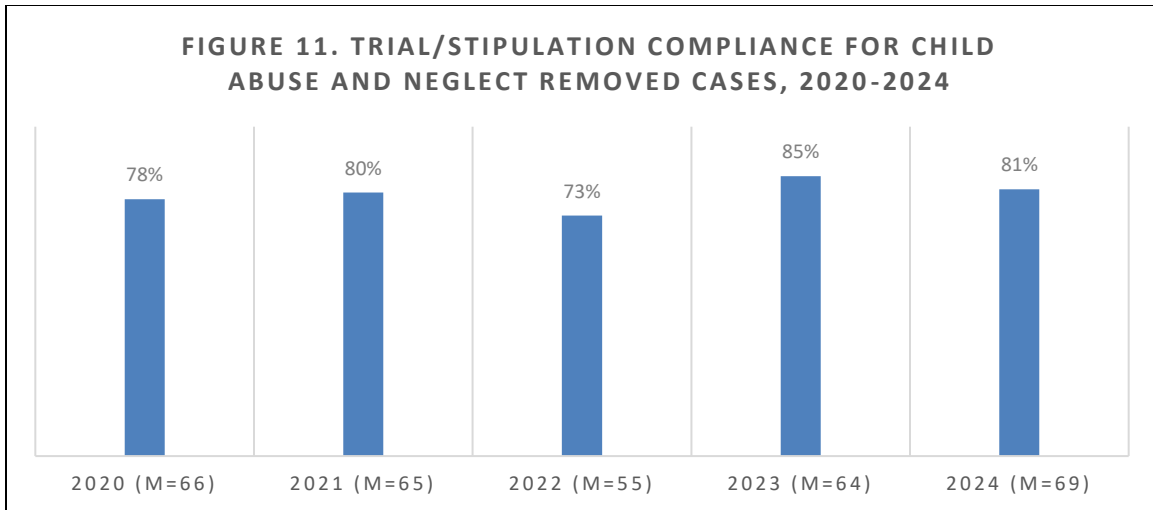
Compliance with D.C. ASFA Requirements

The District of Columbia Adoption and Safe Families Act (D.C. ASFA) establishes timelines for the completion of trials and disposition hearings in abuse and neglect cases.¹⁷ The timelines vary depending on whether the child was removed from the home. For a child removed from the home, the statutory timeframe within which the trial or stipulation must be held is 105 days from the date of removal. For a child not removed from the home, the statutory timeframe within which the trial or stipulation must be held is 45 days from the petition filing date. The statute requires that trial and disposition occur on the same day, regardless of whether the child has been removed, but permits the court 15 additional days to hold a disposition hearing for good cause shown, if the continuance does not result in the hearing exceeding the overall deadline.

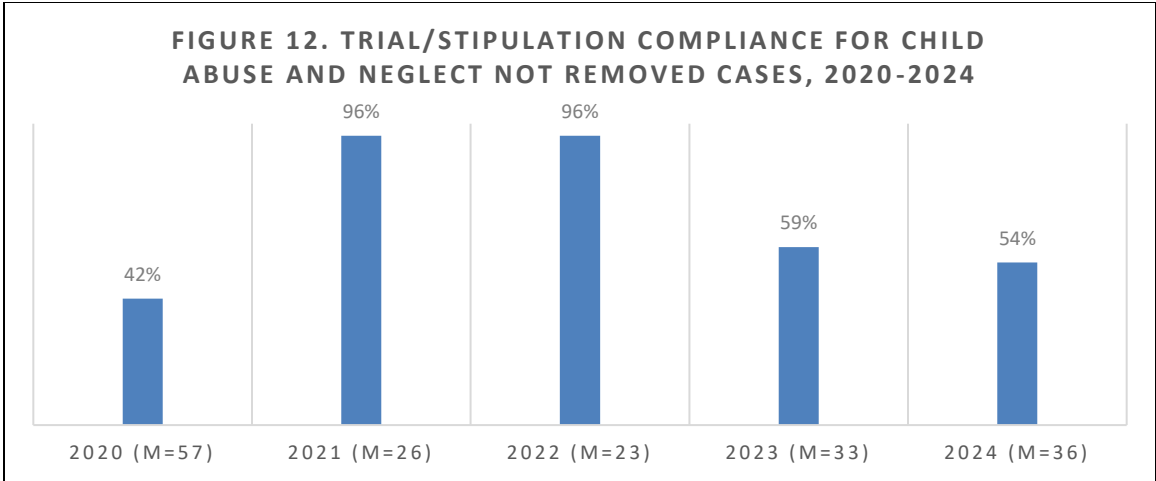
Trial/Stipulation of Child Abuse and Neglect Cases

In 2024, 74% of children referred to the court were removed from their home (Figure 8). Eighty-one percent of cases filed had a factfinding hearing in compliance with the 105-day ASFA timeline for trials in removal cases (Figure 11). The median time for a case to reach trial or stipulation was 69 days.

¹⁷ D.C. Law 13-136, 47 D.C. Reg. 2850 (2000), codified at D.C. Code § 16-2301 *et seq.*, (2000 Ed.).

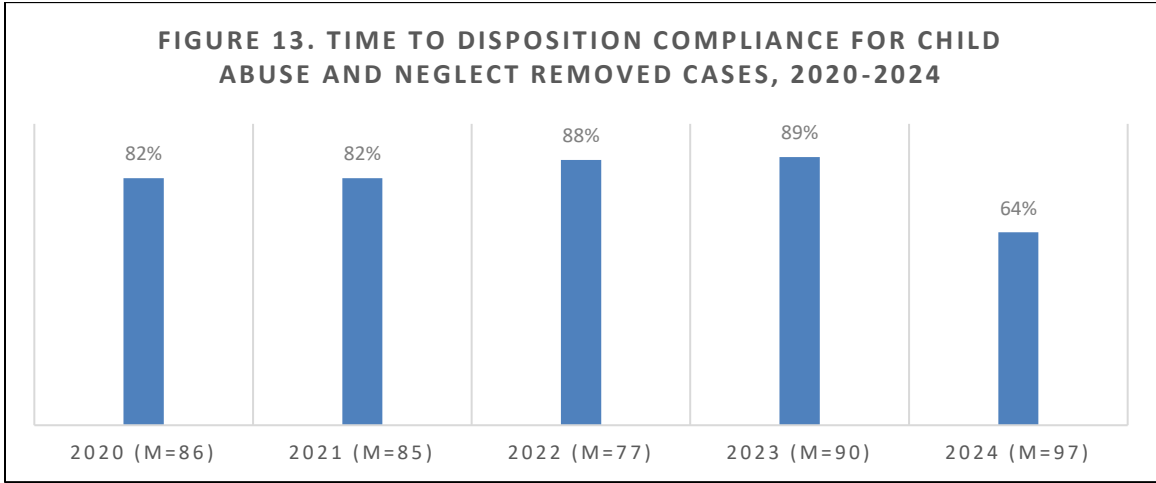


Twenty-six percent of children referred to the court were not removed from their home (Figure 8). For children not removed from home, compliance with the timeline to trial or stipulation (45 days) was 54% in 2024 (Figure 12). The median time for a case to reach trial or stipulation was 36 days. Due to the small number of abuse and neglect cases with children not removed from the home, compliance rates are increasingly impacted by a small number of non-compliant cases. Compliance rates are also impacted by persistent judicial vacancies which limit the calendar time available to schedule hearings, with vacancies in three of the eight Neglect calendars through all of 2024, and vacancies in three additional Neglect calendars for several months of 2024 (two due to retirements and one resulting from a Magistrate Judge who was appointed and confirmed as an Associate Judge and switched to a different calendar). For a period of months, there were only two Magistrate Judges handling all the cases that had previously been handled by five Magistrate Judges. The Family Court will continue to monitor and track compliance in this area throughout 2025.

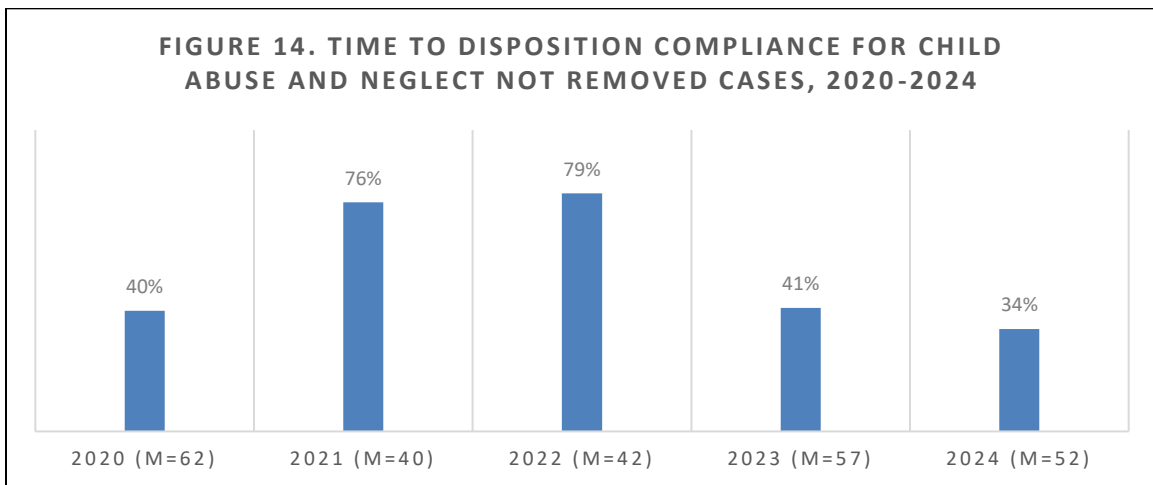


Disposition Hearings in Child Abuse and Neglect Cases

In 2024, among petitioned cases where the child was removed, 64% held a disposition hearing within the 105-day timeline (Figure 13). This number may increase as pending cases filed later in 2024 have disposition hearings in 2025. In 2024, the median time to disposition was 97 days. Two factors adversely impacting time to disposition are scheduling issues involving key witnesses, and legal complexities, which can cause delays as the parties work toward resolution prior to trial. Additionally, compliance rates are impacted by continuing judicial vacancies which limit the calendar time available to schedule hearings.



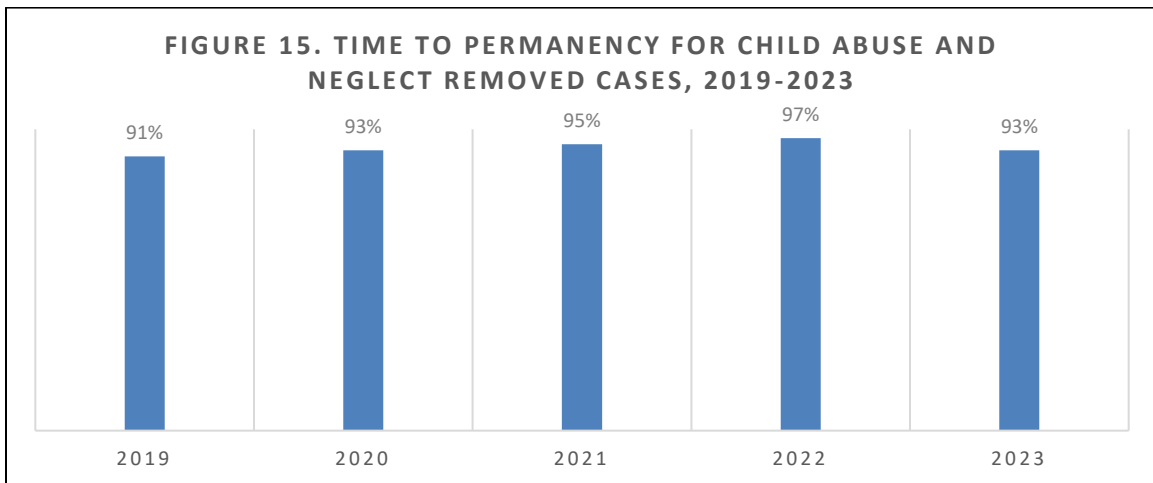
In 2024, among petitioned cases where the child was not removed, 34% held a disposition hearing within the 45-day timeline (Figure 14). This number may increase as pending cases filed later in 2024 have disposition hearings in 2025. The median time to reach disposition was 52 days. Due to the small number of abuse and neglect cases with children not removed from the home, compliance rates are increasingly impacted by a small number of non-compliant cases. Compliance rates are also impacted by persistent judicial vacancies which limit the calendar time available to schedule hearings, with vacancies in three of the eight Neglect calendars through all of 2024. The Family Court will continue to monitor and track compliance in this area throughout 2025.



Compliance with ASFA Permanency Hearing Requirements

Both the D.C. and Federal ASFA require the court to hold a permanency hearing for each child who has been removed from home within 12 months of the child’s entry into foster care. Entry into foster care is defined in D.C. Code § 16-2301(28) as the earlier of 60 days after the date on which the child is removed from the home, or the date of the first judicial finding that the child has been neglected. The purpose of the permanency hearing, ASFA’s most important requirement, is to decide the child’s permanency goal

and to set a timetable for achieving it. Figure 15 shows the court’s compliance with holding permanency hearings within the ASFA timeline. The level of compliance with this requirement has consistently remained high. In every year since 2019, at least 91% of removed cases had a permanency hearing within the required timeline. Some cases filed in 2024 are pending a permanency hearing, and, if held timely, will increase the compliance rate.



Goal Setting and Achievement Date

ASFA requires that the Family Court set a specific goal (reunification, adoption, guardianship, custody, or another planned permanent living arrangement (APPLA)) and an achievement date for that goal at each permanency hearing. Judges are also required to raise the issue of barriers in achieving the permanency goal in the court hearings. Early identification of barriers leads to expedited resolution of issues and improved permanency success.

The National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (NCJFCJ) and the American Bar Association’s Center on Children and the Law have established best practices for the content and structure of permanency hearings mandated by ASFA,

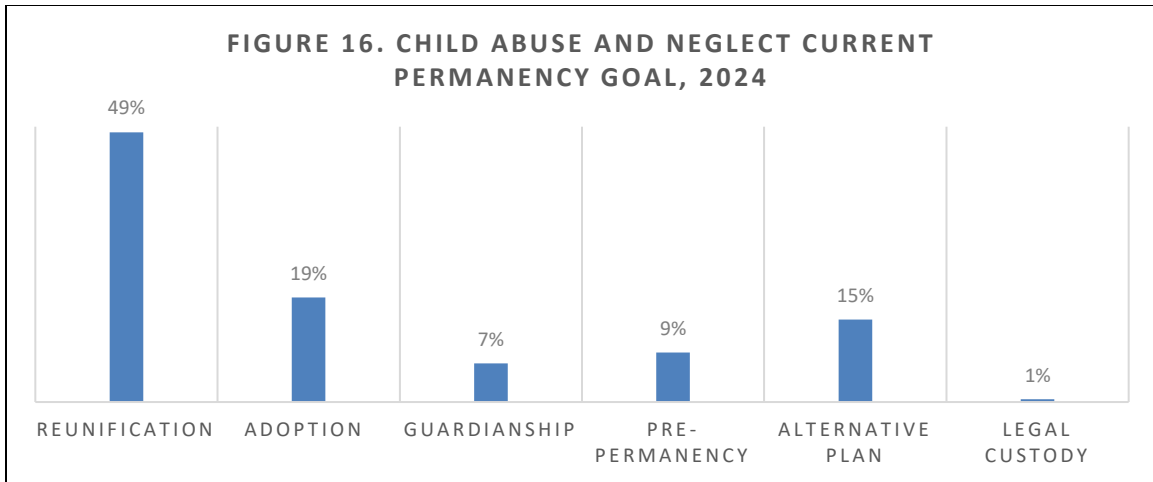
including what decisions should be made and how much time should be set aside for each hearing. In its publication, *Enhanced Resource Guidelines: Improving Court Practice in Child Abuse and Neglect Cases*, NCJFCJ recommends that permanency hearings be set for 60 minutes.¹⁸ Family Court judges continue to report that the length of their permanency hearings meets or exceeds this standard.

Judicial officers are required to use a standardized court order for all permanency hearings. In 2012, the Family Court Strategic Planning Committee, through the Abuse and Neglect Subcommittee's court orders workgroup, reviewed, revised, and piloted the official court order forms for proceedings in these cases. The revised orders became effective on January 1, 2013, and are used in every courtroom. The orders not only meet the requirements of ASFA but also the requirements of the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 (P.L. 110-351), the Safe and Timely Interstate Placement of Foster Children Act of 2006 (P.L. 109-239), and the Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978 (P.L. 95-608).

Barriers to Permanency

Figure 16 illustrates permanency goals for children including reunification, adoption, guardianship, legal custody, or another planned permanent living arrangement (APPLA). Pre-permanency cases (9%) have yet to hold a disposition hearing, the earliest point at which a permanency goal would be set. Although the court has successfully established goals for children, each goal presents a unique set of challenges.

¹⁸ National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges. (2016). *Enhanced Resources Guideline: Improving Court Practice in Child Abuse and Neglect Cases*. <https://www.ncjfcj.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/NCJFCJ-Enhanced-Resource-Guidelines-05-2016.pdf>



For children with the goal of reunification (49%), the primary barriers to reunification were related to the disability of a parent, the parent’s mental health issues, the need for the parent to receive substance abuse treatment, the need for the parent to obtain life skills training, and/or the lack of adequate housing. For children with the goal of adoption (19%), obtaining appropriate housing and procedural impediments such as the completion of adoption proceedings were the most frequently identified barriers to permanency. The lack of adoption resources and issues related to the adoption subsidy were additional frequently cited barriers. For the 7% of children with the goal of guardianship, impediments such as completion of the guardianship proceedings, disability of the parent/caretaker, the need to receive substance abuse and other treatment, and issues related to the guardianship subsidy were barriers to achieving permanency.

Youth aged 15 and older comprised 32% of all children in foster care. Many of these children cannot return to their parents and do not wish to be adopted or considered for any other permanency option, making permanency difficult to achieve. In such cases, the court found it was in the youths’ best interests to set a goal of APPLA (15%).

Pursuant to federal requirements, CFSA and the Family Court continue to work to review

permanency options and services available for older youth, including working to reduce the number of youth with a goal of APPLA and the number of youth aging out of the child welfare system. Under the Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act of 2014 (Preventing Sex Trafficking Act),¹⁹ only youth aged 16 and older are eligible for an APPLA goal.

The *Preparing Youth for Adulthood Program (PYA)*, created by the Family Court in conjunction with Court Appointed Special Advocates for Children of D.C. (CASA), has been an effective tool in helping older youth who remain in foster care through age 21 receive the support necessary to achieve independence. The program focuses on life skills development through positivity, empowerment and opportunity. Special advocates work with each youth on goal setting and achievement, building financial literacy and budgeting skills, and working on long-term housing, employment and education. The program emphasizes connection, as each older youth is paired with one adult special advocate who has committed to remaining in the youth's life after emancipation and will continue to mentor that youth as needed to create a more seamless transition out of care. The program works in tandem with CFSA's Office of Youth Empowerment on youth transitional planning, independent living services, educational and vocational training, and improved life skills training. The PYA is funded through the Court Improvement Program (CIP) grant, which was reauthorized and funded for 2024-2025.

¹⁹ Pub. L. 113-183, 128 Stat. 1919 (2014).

Family Treatment Court Program

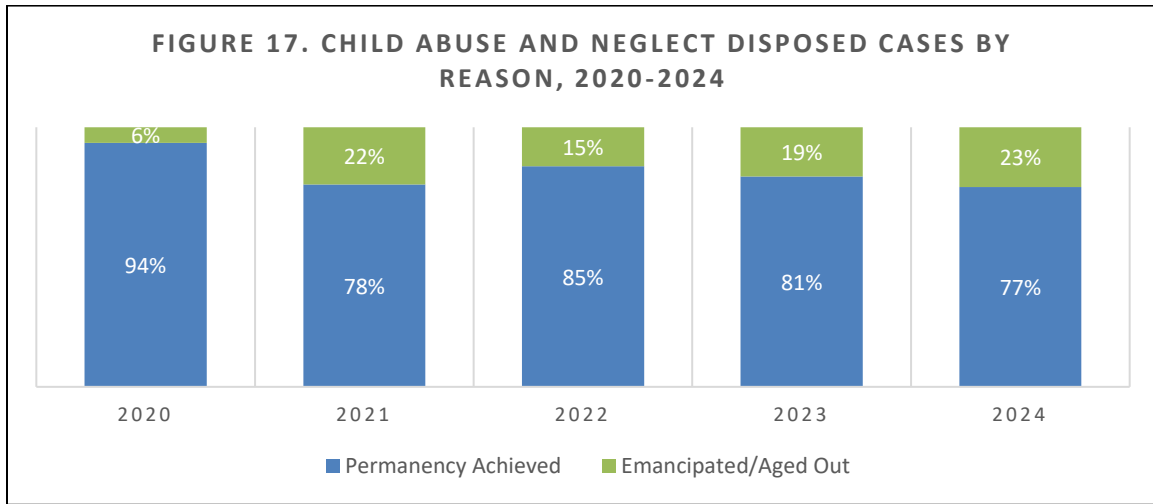
The Family Court Treatment Program (FTC) is a 12 to 15-month voluntary program which takes a holistic approach to helping participants break the cycle of addiction, shorten the out-of-home placement of children, and expedite permanency.

FTC, utilizing a grant from the Office of Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), hosted over 100 client-centered workshops and trainings on topics including Trauma, Domestic Violence, Parenting, Opioids, and Fentanyl. In addition to providing training to program participants, FTC facilitated more than 25 staff trainings which included Trauma-Informed Care, Motivational Interviewing, Dual Diagnosis, HIPAA regulations, and NARCAN. The three-year OJJDP grant offered program participants metro cards to assist with transportation related to attending mandatory court hearings, drug testing, visiting their children, as well as offering gift card incentives to participants for reaching program milestones. FTC offered each participant a Recovery Mentor who worked directly with parents to support their recovery process. FTC worked with its partners and outside agencies to host at least four open houses and produced a three-minute promotional video designed to familiarize the community with the program.

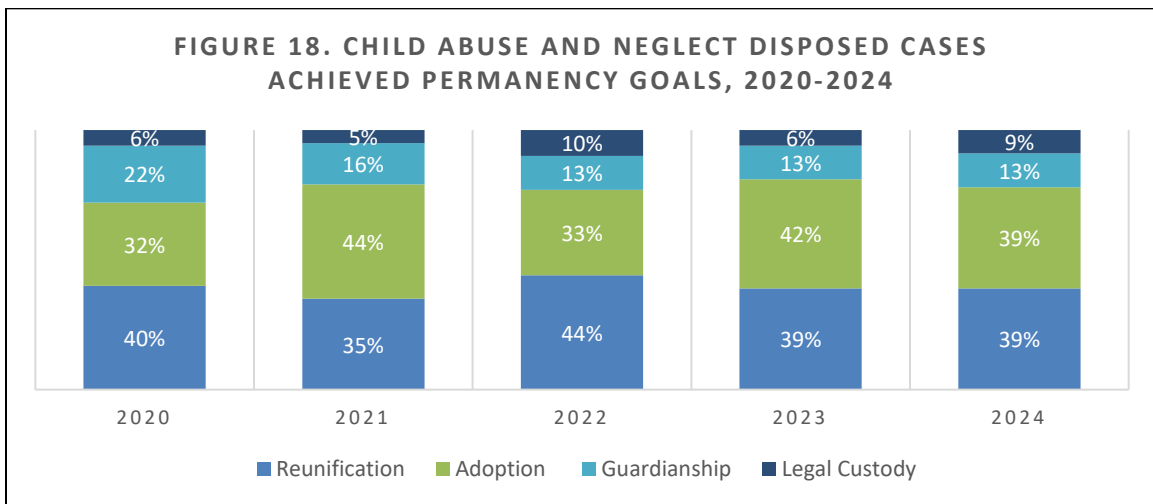
This year, FTC made an indelible impact in the lives of children and families in the District of Columbia impacted by substance use disorders, resulting in more than 30 families receiving resources and referrals to wrap around services. This evidenced based program continues to be an effective and viable treatment component for court-involved families. The success of the program is evidenced by the more than 400 families who have achieved reunification since its inception in 2003.

Permanency Outcomes for Children

This section focuses on permanency outcomes for children following a disposition hearing. In 2024, Family Court judicial officers closed 182 post-disposition abuse and neglect cases. Seventy-seven percent were closed because permanency was achieved (Figure 17). Twenty-three percent of the cases were closed without reaching permanency, either because the child aged out of the system or was emancipated.



In 2024, 39% of cases closed due to reunification and adoption, respectively (Figure 18). Thirteen percent closed due to guardianship, and nine percent of cases closed due to legal custody.



Twenty-two percent of post-disposition cases were closed without the child achieving permanency. This was due to the child reaching the age of majority or the child refusing further services from CFSA. CFSA established enhanced guidelines and procedures for social workers considering a goal of APPLA to ensure that the maximum number of children reach permanency. The court agreed to work with the agency to help monitor compliance with the requirements for recommending a permanency goal change to APPLA. CFSA's policy and the court's monitoring are designed to ensure that only those children for whom no other permanency option is appropriate will receive a goal of APPLA.

The court is required, under the Preventing Sex Trafficking Act, to ensure that the youth participates in case planning. At each permanency hearing, CFSA must outline their intensive and ongoing efforts for family placement in addition to the success of those efforts, including attempting to locate biological family members using search engines and databases (including social media). Additionally, the court is required to ask the youth about the youth's desired permanency outcome and make a judicial determination as to why APPLA remains the best permanency goal and preferable to the child being returned home, adopted, placed with a legal guardian, or placed with a fit and willing relative. At each permanency hearing, the agency is also required to specify the steps it is taking to ensure that the reasonable and prudent parent standard is being followed, and that the child has regular, ongoing opportunities to engage in age or developmentally appropriate activities.

As required by the Preventing Sex Trafficking Act, the court measures its performance and monitors the outcomes of children under court supervision. Using the

performance measures developed by the American Bar Association, the National Center for State Courts and the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, the court established routine data collection for aspects relevant to outcomes for children. The *Toolkit for Court Performance Measures in Child Abuse and Neglect Cases*²⁰ identifies four performance measures--safety, permanency, timeliness, and due process--which courts can use to assess their performance. Each measure has a goal, outcomes, and a list of performance elements that courts should consider when developing performance plans to assess their success in meeting the identified goals.

The Family Court performance measures of permanency and timeliness are discussed below. Performance information is also tracked for due process. Due process is thoroughly addressed in the District of Columbia, as counsel is appointed for all parents, guardians, and custodians who meet the financial eligibility requirements, and a guardian ad litem is appointed for all children.²¹

Data for each performance area is measured and restricted to cases filed and/or disposed of within a specific timeframe. A cohort analysis approach, based on when a case was filed, allows the court to examine its performance over time in achieving permanency for children, as well as allowing an assessment of the impact of legislative and/or administrative changes over time.

Performance Measure 1: Permanency

Goal: Children should have permanency and stability in their living situations.

Measure 1a: Percentage of children who reach legal permanency (by reunification,

²⁰ Department of Justice Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. (2019). *Toolkit for Court Performance Measures in Child Abuse and Neglect Cases*. <https://ojjdp.ojp.gov/library/toolkit-for-court-performance-measures-in-child-abuse-and-neglect-cases>.

²¹ D.C. Code § 16-2304 (2016); Superior Court Neglect Rule 42.

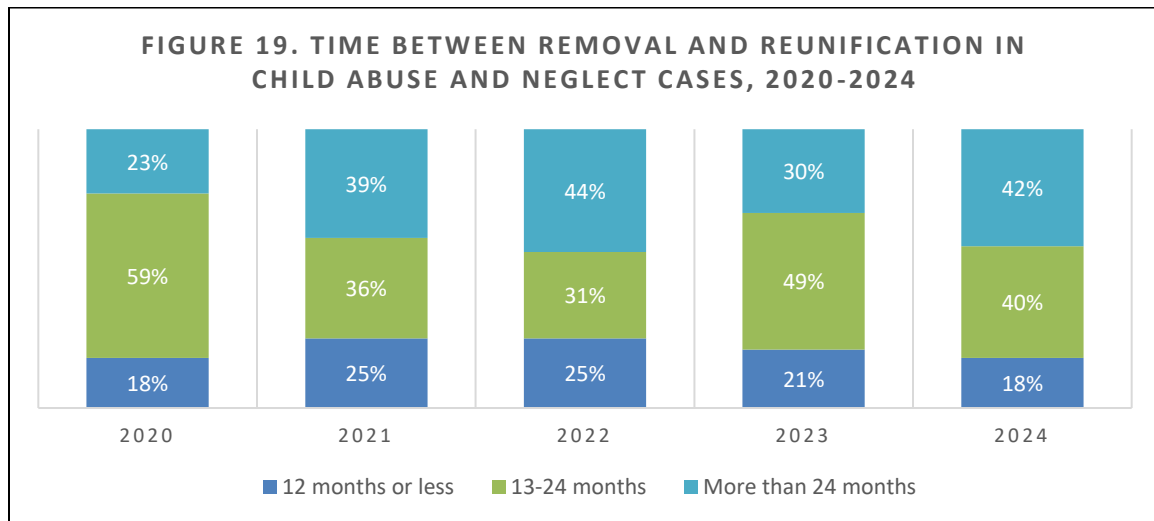
adoption, guardianship, legal custody, or another planned permanent living arrangement) within 6, 12, 18, and 24 months from removal.

TABLE 2. MEDIAN TIME (IN MONTHS) FROM REMOVAL TO ACHIEVED PERMANENCY GOAL IN CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT CASES, 2020-2024

Year	Reunification	Adoption	Guardianship	Legal Custody
2020	20.4	37.0	24.0	21.6
2021	22.8	30.2	32.9	20.7
2022	20.7	33.8	18.4	22.7
2023	17.9	32.9	28.6	25.6
2024	21.7	30.3	23.1	17.7

Table 2 reflects median time (in months) to case closure. In 2024, the median time required to achieve permanency from time of removal decreased in adoption, guardianship, and legal custody while increasing in reunification.

In 2024, 18% of children were reunified with their parents within 12 months of removal and 40% within 24 months (Figure 19). Forty-two percent of children were reunified in more than 24 months from removal in 2024.



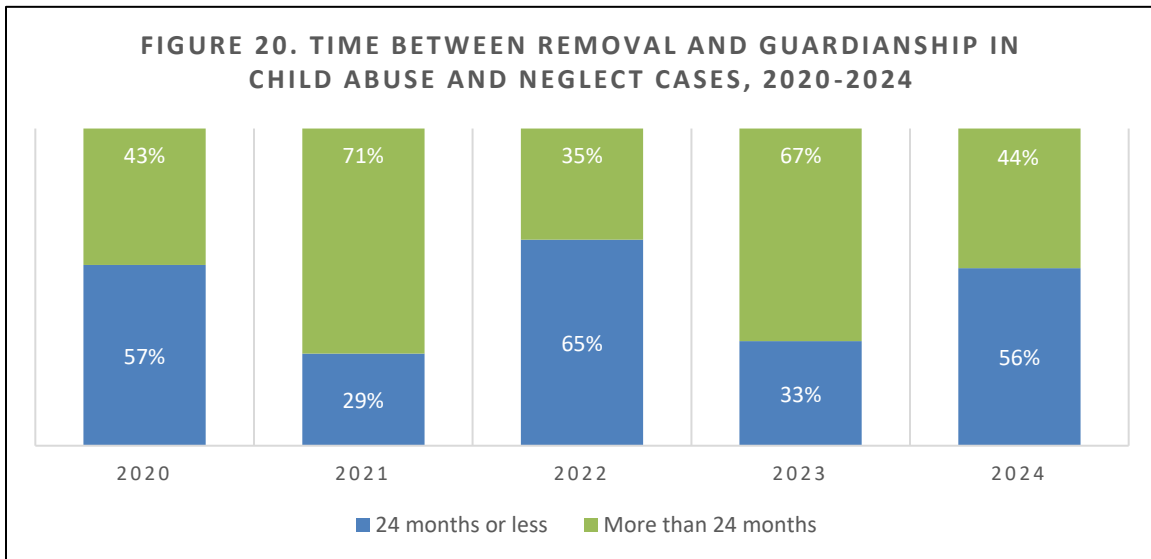
In 2024, 29% of children whose cases closed to adoption spent two years or less in care waiting for adoption finalization. The percentage of children who spent more than 24 months in

care waiting for adoption finalization was 71% (Table 3).

TABLE 3. TIME BETWEEN REMOVAL AND ADOPTION IN CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT CASES, 2020-2024

Year	24 months or less	More than 24 months
2020	25%	75%
2021	29%	71%
2022	33%	67%
2023	26%	74%
2024	29%	71%

As illustrated in Figure 20, 56% of children spent 24 months or less in care before reaching permanency with a permanent guardian. At the same time, 44% of youth spent more than 24 months in care before reaching permanency with a permanent guardian.



Measure 1b. *Percentage of children who do not achieve permanency in the foster care system.*

In 23% of the 182 cases that closed in 2024, the children did not achieve permanency because they aged out of the system or emancipated (Figure 17).

Reentry to Foster Care²²

***Measure 1c.** Percentage of children who reenter foster care pursuant to a court order within 12 and 24 months of being returned to their families.*

Since 2020, two percent of children with cases that closed to reunification returned to foster care within 12 months; an additional two percent returned to foster care within 24 months.

***Measure 1d(i).** Percentage of children who reenter foster care pursuant to a court order within 12 and 24 months of being adopted.*

Of the 403 children in foster care whose adoption was finalized since 2020, no children reentered foster care.

***Measure 1d(ii).** Percentage of children who reenter foster care pursuant to a court order within 12 and 24 months of being placed with a permanent guardian.*

Since 2020, five percent of children with cases that closed to guardianship returned to foster care within 12 months; an additional five percent returned to foster care within 24 months. In many instances, guardianship placements disrupt due to the death or incapacity of the caregiver. Consistent with statutory requirements, successor guardians are named, and those placements are reviewed by the court. The cases are reopened to conduct home studies and background checks to ensure child safety prior to placement with the successor guardian.²³

Performance Measure 2: Timeliness

Goal: To enhance expedition to permanency by minimizing the time from the filing

²² All reentry rates are based on the number of children returned to care in the District of Columbia. Children returned to care in other jurisdictions are excluded.

²³ Administrative Order 16-02 enacts guardianship procedures which formalize the process and requirements for naming a successor guardian.

of the petition/removal to permanency.

Measures 2a-2e. Time to adjudication, disposition hearing and permanency hearing for children removed from home and children that are not removed.

See discussion under ASFA compliance, pages 40-45.

Termination of Parental Rights

Federal and local laws require that when a child has been placed outside of the home for 15 of the most recent 22 months from the date of entry into foster care, a motion for termination of parental rights (TPR) must be filed or a compelling reason to exempt the case from the TPR requirement must be documented.²⁴ To comply with this requirement, the Office of the Attorney General (OAG) is mandated to take legal action or file a TPR motion when children have been removed from the home in two instances – either, as stated above, when the child has been removed from the home for 15 of the most recent 22 months or within 45 days of a goal of adoption being set.²⁵

Measure 2f(i). Time between filing of the original neglect petition in an abuse and neglect case and filing of the TPR motion.

The following section provides information on the court’s performance as it relates to the handling of TPR motions. In 2024, less than 10 TPR motions were filed.²⁶ In 2024, the median time from filing of the original petition to filing of a TPR motion was 453 days. The status of TPR cases is reviewed by both the court and OAG on a quarterly basis to ensure that whenever a goal changes to adoption, a timely TPR motion is filed.

²⁴ See 42 USC § 675(5)(E) and (F); D.C. Code § 16-2354(b).

²⁵ D.C. Code § 16-2354(b) sets forth the criteria dictating under what circumstances a TPR can be filed, including the 15 out of 22 months’ timeline. The 45-day filing deadline is a policy set by the Office of the Attorney General to ensure timely action, rather than a deadline set by statute.

²⁶ D.C. Code § 16-2333.03(a)(2) requires any data points less than 10 observations be suppressed.

Measure 2f(ii). *Time between filing and disposition of TPR motions in abuse and neglect cases.*

Less than ten TPR motions were disposed in 2024.²⁷ In 2024, the median time from filing to disposition of a TPR motion was 472 days.

The government is under a statutory requirement to file a TPR, yet there is no statutory timeline requirement for the resolution of the TPR once it is filed. As a practical matter, the TPR continues simultaneously with the adoption case and is dismissed at the time the adoption is granted, if it is not withdrawn for some other reason. The practice of terminating parental rights within the adoption case is based upon the District of Columbia adoption statute.²⁸

Measure 2g. *Time between granting of the TPR motion and filing of the adoption petition in abuse and neglect cases.*

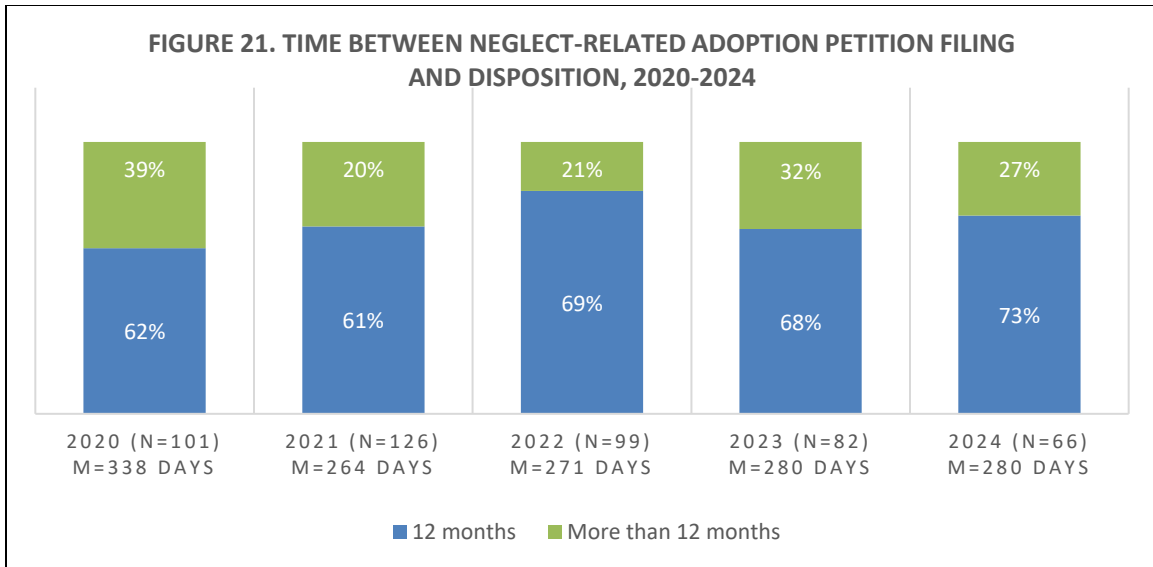
There were no TPR motions granted in 2024.

Measure 2h. *Time between filing of adoption petition and finalization of adoption in abuse and neglect cases.*

Figure 21 illustrates the time to disposition (by disposition year) for adoption petitions filed both in and prior to 2024. Seventy-three percent (48) of the disposed adoption petitions (66) in 2024 were finalized within one year. The median time between the filing and finalization of the adoption petition was 280 days in 2024.

²⁷ *Id.*

²⁸ A determination as to whether the natural parents are withholding their consent to adoption contrary to a child's best interest requires the weighing of the factors considered in termination of parental rights proceedings, pursuant to D.C. Code § 16-2353(b). *See In re Petition of P.S.*, 797 A.2d 1219, 1223 (D.C. 2001).



Performance Measure 3: Due Process

Goal: To deal with cases impartially and thoroughly based on the evidence brought before the court.

Measure 3d. Percentage of children receiving legal counsel, guardians ad litem or CASA volunteers in advance of the initial hearing.

D.C. Code § 16-2304 requires the appointment of a guardian ad litem for all children involved in neglect proceedings. In 2024, a guardian ad litem was appointed for all children in advance of the initial hearing.

Measure 3e. Percentage of cases where counsel for parents is appointed in advance of the initial hearing.

D.C. Code §16-2304 also entitles parents to be represented by counsel at all critical stages of neglect proceedings and, if financially unable to obtain adequate representation, to have counsel appointed for them. In all cases where the parent met the financial eligibility criteria, counsel was appointed for the parent before or on the day of the initial hearing.

New Initiatives in Child Abuse and Neglect

Court Improvement Program

The Court Improvement Program (CIP) Advisory Committee held quarterly meetings to discuss programs funded by the current five-year grant. Co-chaired by the Presiding Judge and the Abuse & Neglect Program Manager, the committee is comprised of stakeholders in the child welfare community, including the court, Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA), the Office of the Attorney General (OAG), foster parents, former foster youth, the Department of Behavioral Health, and others. In June 2024, the Court submitted its annual CIP grant request and received approval.

CIP reconvened the Agency-Court Data Sharing workgroup in August 2024. This workgroup conducts in-depth case reviews to identify systemic barriers to permanency and quality court hearings. To address barriers to permanency, CIP identified timelines and statutory benchmarks to employ in a judicial dashboard. The completion of this endeavor is aligned with the Court's implementation of its new case management system in Family Court. The Agency-Court Data Sharing workgroup also plans to incorporate the Agency's permanency tracker benchmarks to help improve case management and reduce delays in permanency.

To identify barriers to quality court hearings, the CIP developed the Quality Court Hearings project (QCH). The QCH project is to enhance the quality of legal proceedings and determine how quality hearings lead to better outcomes for children and families. The QCH project will examine the quality of court hearings from initial hearings to permanency. CIP utilized the Judicial, Court, and Attorney Measures of Performance (JCAMP) to create its review tool. The measures in the tool were determined by a

distributed survey to various stakeholders including judges, CFSA and OAG. CIP plans to review cases from October 1, 2021 through September 30, 2023. Court reviewers will evaluate recorded hearings and conduct case file reviews to assess court hearings. The next step in the project is to finalize the tool and select and train the court reviewers.

CIP created a multidisciplinary representation project, called the Family Preservation Program (FPP), that adds a social worker to a parent's legal defense team. CIP formed a workgroup consisting of representatives from CFSA, OAG, the Court, and the CCAN bar to help develop the FPP. CIP also consulted with the ABA, other state CIPs, and the heads of multidisciplinary programs in other jurisdictions. In 2023, CIP hired a social worker consultant to help design and implement the project. CIP launched the FPP as a two-year pilot project at the end of 2024, with a limited pool of attorneys. The plan is to refine the program throughout the pilot phase, then offer it to a larger number of CCAN attorneys.

CIP remains committed to the Permanency Mediation Program, which enhances existing mediation options by affording parents the option to mediate a permanency goal change from reunification to adoption and waive a sometimes lengthy and unpleasant evidentiary proceeding. The Permanency Mediation Program allows any participant in a neglect case to refer the case for permanency mediation prior to the first permanency hearing or any time CFSA recommends a goal change to adoption. Permanency mediation can be a first step in empowering parents to participate in permanency planning in cases where reunification appears to be unlikely. After noticing a decline in participation, CIP collaborated with the Branch Chief at Multi-Door to devise a plan of how to revamp the

Permanency Mediation Program and will meet in the Spring of 2025 to create new guidelines for the program.

CIP used grant funds to cover expenses for CCAN panel attorneys to attend the National Association of Counsel for Children virtual conference. CIP grant funds were also used to provide CCAN attorneys access to the Language Line which affords the opportunity to effectively communicate with non-English speaking clients. Language Line allows CCAN attorneys to access an interpreter on the phone within minutes to provide interpretation services.

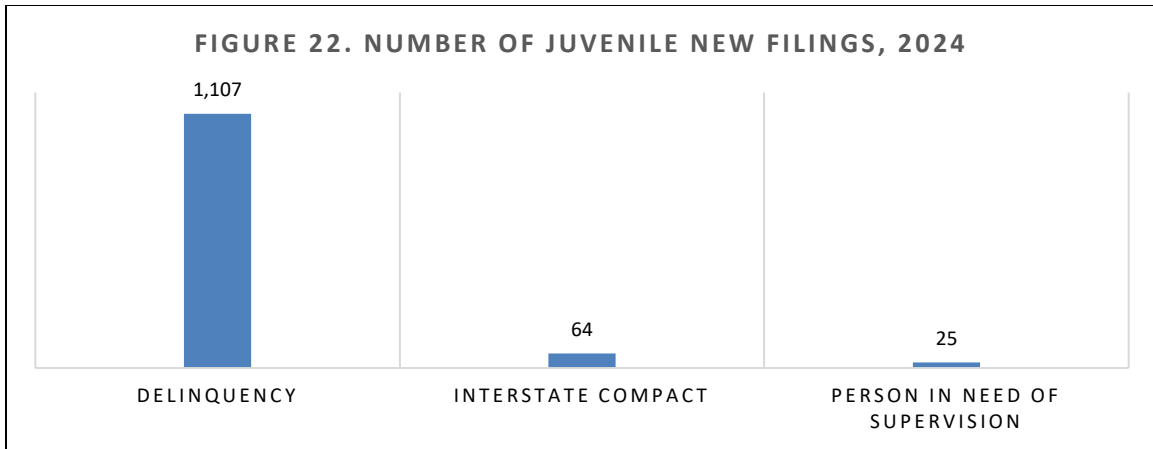
Courtwide Forms Workgroup

This group's mission is to standardize, consolidate, create, and maintain Superior Court's Family Court forms, to ensure they are accessible and in plain language. In 2024, the group created and modified Family Court forms related to motions, custody orders in neglect cases, subpoenas in juvenile and neglect cases, and summons in domestic relations cases. The group also updated forms associated with paternity and a Writ of Attachment.

Juvenile Cases

In 2024, there were 1,196 new juvenile filings and reopens in the Family Court. Ninety-three percent (1,107) of the filings were based on a delinquency petition, 5% (64) pursuant to an Interstate Compact Agreement (ISC),²⁹ and 2% (25) on a person in need of supervision (PINS) allegation.

²⁹ Interstate Compact cases are comprised of juvenile residents of the District of Columbia who were adjudicated in other jurisdictions, but who are referred to the Court to serve their probation under the supervision of the Court Social Services Division, as a courtesy to the referring jurisdiction.



Timeliness of Juvenile Delinquency Case Processing

Many jurisdictions, including the District of Columbia, have established case processing time standards for youth detained prior to trial. In addition to individual jurisdictions’ time standards, several national organizations, including the American Bar Association, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (NCJFCJ), and the National District Attorneys Association have issued guidelines for case processing in juvenile cases.³⁰

The guidelines, both at the state and national level, address the time between key events in a juvenile delinquency case. In general, these guidelines suggest that, for youth detained prior to trial, the maximum time between court filing and adjudication should be no more than 30 days, and the maximum time from filing to disposition should be no more than 60 days.

District of Columbia Code §16-2310(e) establishes timeframes for the trial or

³⁰ See “Delays in Juvenile Court Processing of Delinquency Cases” by Jeffrey A. Butts conducted under the sponsorship of the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (1997), and “Waiting for Justice: Moving Young Offenders Through the Juvenile Court Process” by Jeffrey Butts and Gregory Halima conducted under the sponsorship of the National Center for Juvenile Justice (1996). Also see “Enhanced Juvenile Justice Guidelines: Improving Court Practice in Juvenile Justice Cases” (NCJFCJ) (2018) which establishes national best practices in the handling of juvenile delinquency cases.

factfinding hearing for youth detained prior to trial in secure detention facilities and non-secure detention facilities or shelter houses. In certain instances, the court may extend the time limit for the factfinding hearing. *See* D.C. Code § 16-2310(e)(2)(A). Additionally, with good cause, the Attorney General may move for further continuances in 30-day increments.

As for the timeframe for disposition of juvenile cases, Superior Court Juvenile Rule 32 requires that the disposition hearing in cases of securely and non-securely detained youth is held within 15 days of adjudication. The D.C. Court of Appeals has held that the 15-day time requirement of Rule 32 is advisory rather than mandatory and that the trial court may extend the 15-day period for a reasonable length of time in order to obtain the predisposition report. *See, In re J.B.*, 906 A.2d 866 (D.C. 2006).

This report examines case processing standards for youth in four categories:

(1) Securely detained juveniles charged with murder, assault with intent to kill, armed robbery, first degree sexual abuse, and first-degree burglary: D.C. Code § 16-2310(e) allows 45 days from initial hearing to adjudication and Rule 32 allows an additional 15 days from adjudication to disposition, for a total of 60 days from initial hearing to disposition.

(2) Securely detained juveniles charged with any offense other than those identified in (1) above: D.C. Code § 16-2310(e) allows 30 days from initial hearing to adjudication and Rule 32 allows an additional 15 days from adjudication to disposition, for a total of 45 days from initial hearing to disposition.

(3) Non-securely detained juveniles charged with any offense: D.C. Code § 16-2310(e) allows 45 days from initial hearing to adjudication and Rule 32 allows an additional 15 days from adjudication to disposition, for a total of 60 days from initial

hearing to disposition.

(4) Released youth: Administrative Order 08-13 allows 270 days for disposition.

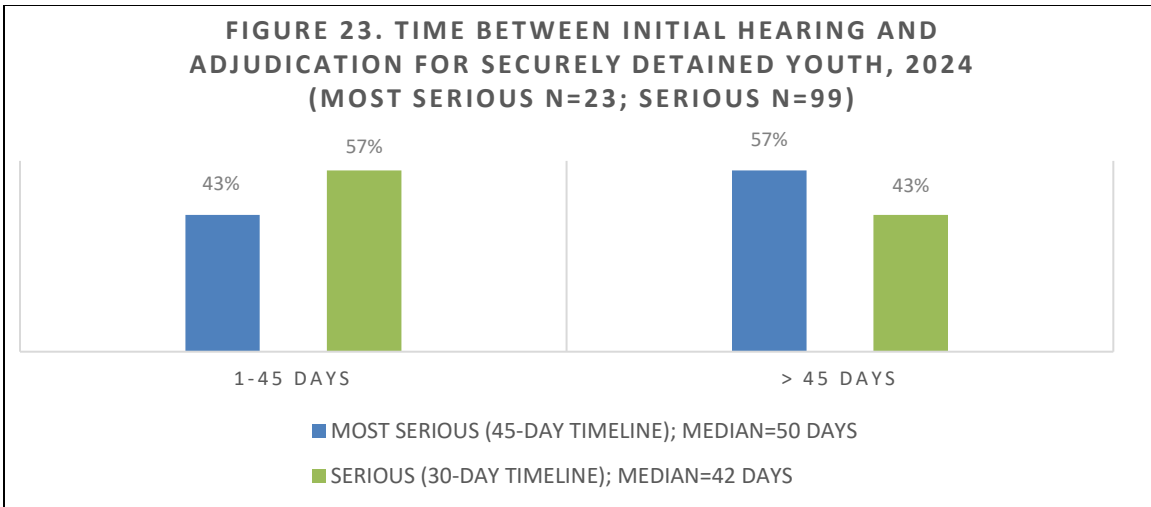
There is no Family Court statute or rule that dictates time standards for either adjudication or disposition for cases of youth released prior to adjudication.

Data on time to adjudication is based on the detention status of the respondent at the time of the initial hearing.³¹ In contrast, data on time to disposition is calculated based on the detention status of the respondent at the time of the disposition hearing. In addition, court performance on time to disposition accounts for excludable delay stemming from the absence or unavailability of the child (custody orders) and the period of delay stemming from various examinations and assessments.

Securely Detained Juveniles

In 2024, 35 (21%) of the 169 securely detained juveniles were charged with murder, assault with intent to kill, armed robbery, first degree sexual abuse, or first-degree burglary as their most serious offense. As stated above, these cases require adjudication within 45 days and are subsequently referred to as “Most Serious.” Forty-three percent (10) of the 23 “most serious” securely detained adjudicated juveniles had timely hearings held within the 45-day timeframe (Figure 23). The median time from initial hearing to adjudication was 50 days.

³¹ The initial hearing was not held in five juvenile cases. The remainder of the juvenile analysis concerns the 1,102 delinquency cases in which an initial hearing was held.

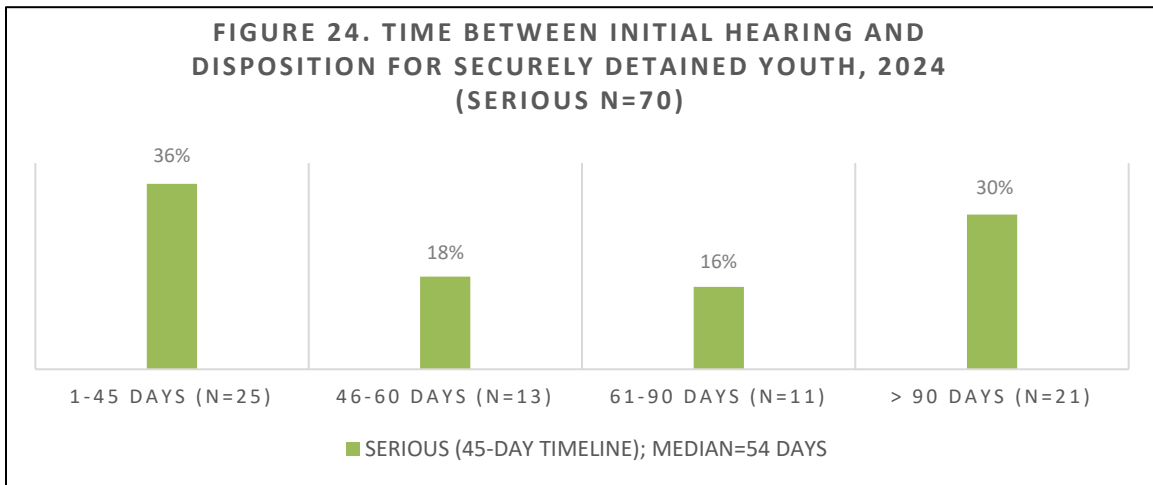


In 2024, there were 134 (79%) securely detained juveniles who were charged with serious offenses (other than the most serious cases) and required to have their cases adjudicated within 30 days. These cases are subsequently referred to as “Serious.” Thirty-nine percent (39) of the 99 “serious” securely detained adjudicated juveniles had timely hearings held within the 30-day timeframe with an additional 18% (18) having hearings in the 31- to 45-day timeframe. The median time from initial hearing to adjudication was 42 days.

Several factors contributed to the inability to adjudicate all cases of securely detained youth in a timely manner. These factors include, but are not limited to, the absence of an essential witness, unavailability of evidence, unavailability of an attorney, incomplete psychological, psychiatric and/or neurological tests, and difficulties in scheduling. The court will monitor and track how requests for continuances are addressed with the goal of reducing the number of continuances requested and granted.

The calculation of time to disposition includes case processing from initial hearing to disposition. Eighteen (78%) of the 23 adjudicated most serious cases in which

youth were securely detained reached disposition in 2024.³² The median time from initial hearing to disposition was 87 days.



Seventy (71%) of the 99 adjudicated serious cases in which youth were securely detained reached disposition in 2024. Thirty-six percent (25) of the 70 adjudicated cases were disposed within the 45-day timeframe (Figure 24). The median time from initial hearing to disposition hearing was 54 days.

A major factor contributing to delays in disposition was the need to identify and obtain services or programs for the youth prior to disposition. Other factors included delays related to DYRS’s ability to obtain placement, delays in receipt of required psychological and/or psychiatric reports, non-compliance with court orders, and youth being involved in other proceedings before the court.

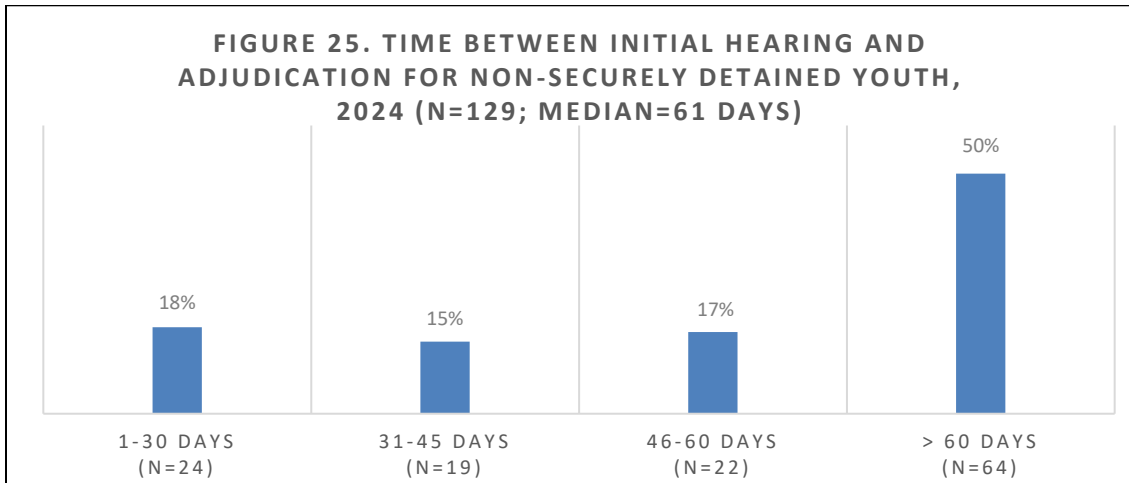
Non-Securely Detained Juveniles

In 2024, 227 juveniles were detained in non-secure facilities or shelter houses

³² Detailed information on the numbers cases reaching disposition within the required timeframe is not reported due to D.C. Code § 16-2333.03(a)(2), which requires any data points less than 10 observations be suppressed.

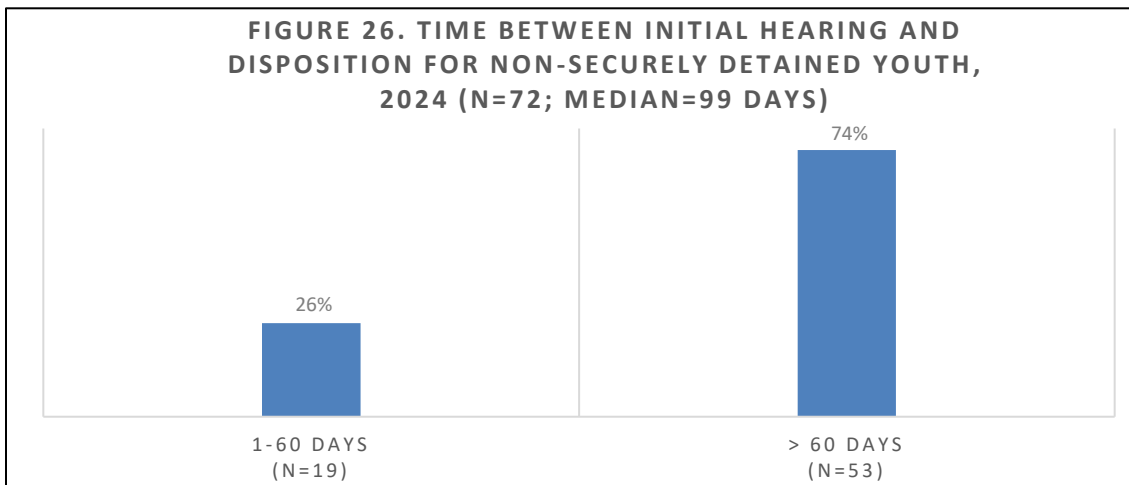
prior to adjudication. Thirty-three percent (43) of 129 non-securely detained adjudicated juveniles had timely hearings held within the 45-day timeframe (Figure 25). This 33% of cases break down as follows: 18% (24) in 1 to 30 days, and 15% (19) in 31 to 45 days.

The median number of days to adjudication was 61 days.



In 2024, 72 (56%) of the 129 adjudicated non-secure detention cases reached disposition. Nineteen (26%) cases were compliant with the 60-day timeframe (Figure 26).

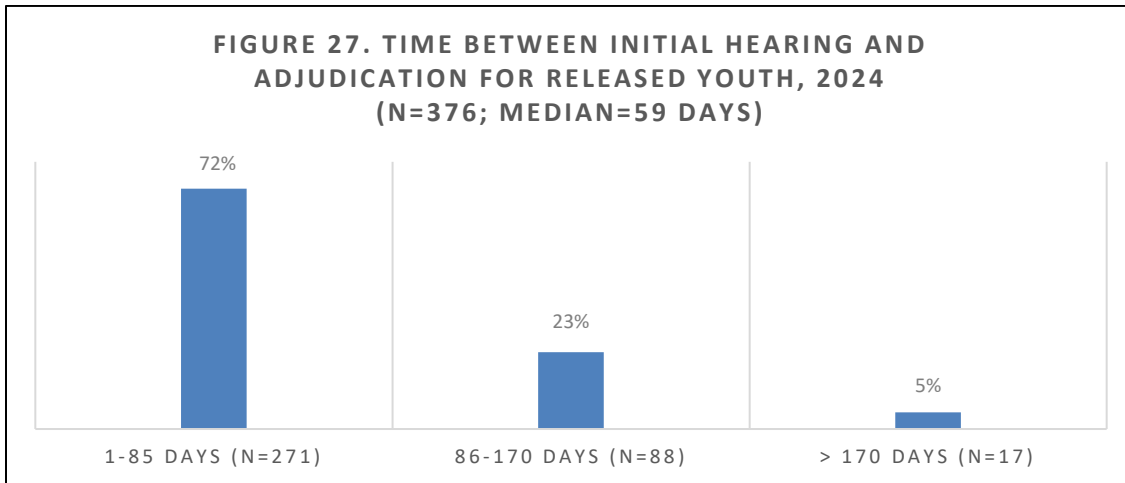
The median time to disposition was 99 days.



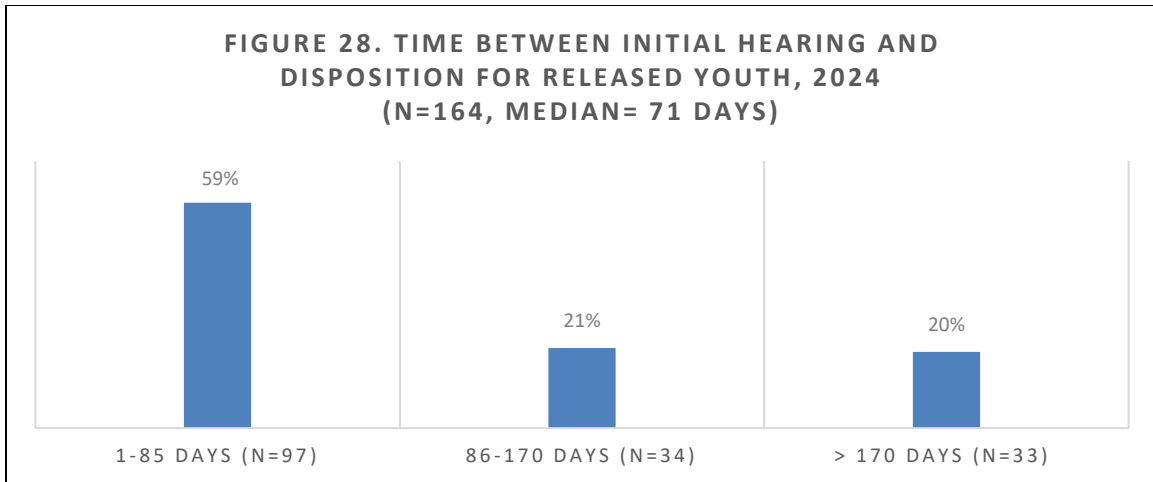
Released Juveniles

In 2024, 706 juveniles (64%) were released prior to adjudication. In 2024, 100%

(376) of released adjudicated juveniles had timely hearings. Of the 376 cases that had an adjudication hearing, 72% (271) were adjudicated within 85 days, 23% (88) in 86 to 170 days, and 5% (17) in greater than 170 days (Figure 27). In adjudicated cases, the median time to adjudication was 59 days.



In 2024, 164 adjudicated youth were released at the time of their disposition hearing (Figure 28). Fifty-nine percent (97) of adjudicated released cases were disposed within 85 days, 21% (34) in 86 to 170 days, and 20% (33) in greater than 170 days. The median time to disposition was 71 days. As with securely detained youth, a major factor contributing to delays in disposition was the need to identify and obtain services or programs for the youth prior to disposition. Other factors included examinations concerning mental competency, failure to appear, and non-compliance with a court order. The court will monitor and track how requests for continuances are addressed with the goal of reducing the number of continuances requested and granted.



Family Court Social Services Division (CSSD)

In accordance with Public Law 91-358, the Family Court’s Social Services Division (CSSD) is responsible for screening, assessing, and presenting juvenile delinquency and status offender (persons in need of supervision (PINS), truants, runaways, and youth referred for ungovernable behavior) cases in Family Court. CSSD is further charged with managing both juvenile delinquency and status offender cases, including supervising all newly arrested youth, pre-disposition juveniles, juveniles sentenced post- disposition to probation, and youth who entered into diversion agreements (e.g., consent decrees, Diversion Tracks I, II, and III, Deferred Prosecution Agreements (DPA) and Deferred Disposition Agreements (DDA)). Additionally, CSSD supervises newly arrested committed youth who are under the jurisdiction of the Department of Youth Rehabilitative Services (DYRS) prior to disposition. Following the Family Court Act’s ‘One Judge, One Family’ guidelines, there is one probation officer assigned to the juvenile throughout the entirety of his or her case.

CSSD Organization

CSSD is comprised of five branches operating under the Office of the Director, two of which have probation teams housed in satellite offices/Balanced and Restorative Justice (BARJ) Drop-In Centers. These branches are strategically located in each quadrant of the city to provide access to youth touching the juvenile justice system. The five branches include the Juvenile Intake and Delinquency Prevention, Child Guidance Clinic (CGC), Region I Pre- and Post-Disposition Supervision, Region II Pre- and Post-Disposition Supervision, and Information Contracts and Community Outreach. Each of the five branches will be discussed further below.

Juvenile Intake and Delinquency Prevention Branch

The Intake Branch is comprised of two Intake Units, Unit I - Day Intake, Unit II - Night Intake, and the Delinquency Prevention Unit (DPU). DPU is responsible for managing electronic monitoring services and transporting eligible youth, following an arrest, to their home, an approved alternative adult if the parent/guardian is unavailable, or to the Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA); youth are transported to CFSA upon notification that a parent/guardian refuses to retrieve their child from court, or if that youth is a ward of the District of Columbia and is committed to CFSA custody. DPU also represents CSSD at local meetings to address concerns about youth crime and public safety, as well as raise awareness about CSSD's function within the juvenile justice system in the District.

The Intake Branch is responsible for screening, investigating, making recommendations, and presenting cases in Family Court for all newly arrested youth referred in delinquency cases by the Metropolitan Police Department (MPD). The Branch

is also responsible for screening and determining the status of all truancy referrals. A critical function of the Intake Branch is managing Global Position System (GPS) electronic monitoring services for CSSD youth. This includes installing, monitoring, and uninstalling GPS electronic monitoring units along with calibrating inclusion and exclusion zones and retrieving data.

All youth referred to CSSD must be screened following their arrest and prior to their initial hearing, providing a preliminary hold or release recommendation. In 2024, the Intake Branch screened 1,692 newly referred youth, including youth arrested for delinquency matters and status offenses. Youth arrested for delinquency matters were screened using the following instruments: CSSD's validated Risk Assessment Instrument, a pre-trial social assessment, the Conners Behavioral Rating Scale, and the Sex Trafficking Review (STAR) assessment. Of the youth screened following arrest, 475 (28%) were female, and 1,217 (72%) were male. The Intake Branch also ensured 480 GPS electronic monitoring units were installed timely in accordance with each court order.

In 2024, DPU began distributing a daily notification list to CSSD staff of youth whose GPS electronic monitoring units were noncompliant. The list is sent to probation officers, supervisory probation officers, and senior managers overseeing pre- and post-disposition supervision teams, detailing youth whose GPS monitors are below the acceptable battery charging level or showing signs of tampering/attempted removal. This list assists CSSD supervision units in quickly addressing violations and other areas of noncompliance. It also facilitates discussions regarding the appropriateness of device removal when a youth has successfully maintained compliance for the prescribed period.

Child Guidance Clinic

The Child Guidance Clinic (CGC), the mental health branch of CSSD, is responsible for facilitating court-ordered psychological, neuro-psychological, psycho-educational, and comprehensive clinical risk (e.g., violence risk, psychosexual) evaluations. Additionally, the CGC facilitates competency restoration and juvenile sex offender interventions, provides individual and family counseling to CSSD-involved uninsured or underinsured youth, and is credentialed and equipped to conduct evaluations on waiver of juvenile jurisdiction, competency to waive trial, and *Miranda* right. CGC supports CSSD's validation of screening and assessment tools such as the Risk Assessment Instrument³³ and monitors use of the Sex Trafficking Assessment Review (STAR) screening tool (previously developed by the CGC). CGC psychologists also consult with Intake juvenile probation officers following use of the Conners Behavioral Rating Scale (CBRS), a baseline mental health screening tool which helps ascertain behavioral health needs for youth at intake.

In 2024, the CGC provided evaluations in-person and virtually across three location types: Secure Detention (i.e., Youth Services Center (YSC) or DC Jail); CSSD BARJ Drop-In Centers; and the H. Carl Moultrie Courthouse. The CGC received 369 referrals for clinical forensic evaluations. Court-ordered evaluations encompassed psychological, psychoeducational, neuropsychological, sex offender risk, violence risk, competency, and emergency forensic evaluations in addition to the Sex Trafficking

³³ CSSD is currently revalidating the current Risk Assessment Instrument. The revalidation process involves reviewing data and processes, discussions with senior management, and receiving recommendations from internal and external stakeholders. The revalidation process will enable the development of a companion risk and needs instrument to ensure levels of supervision and services are aligned with risk range classifications (low-, medium-, or high-risk).

Assessment Review (STAR). Of the 369 referrals received, 267 (72%) were completed in 2024; sixty-six of the 125 pending referrals received in 2023 were also completed, resulting in a total of 333 evaluations completed in 2024. A total of 75 referrals were not completed due to court case closure or vacated orders.³⁴ A total of 86 referrals were carried over to 2025.

CGC maintained its nationally recognized, pre-doctoral psychology internship training program accredited by the American Psychological Association (APA). Three new interns joined CGC in 2024, selected from Howard University, Northwest University, and The Chicago School of Professional Psychology. The interns were chosen from a pool of roughly 89 applicants, underscoring continued increase of interest among candidates in the CGC Doctoral internship program.

CGC psychologists assisted with the facilitation of emergency forensic/psychiatric evaluations, which are primarily conducted by psychiatrists contracted through the Department of Behavioral Health (DBH). Additionally, CGC continued facilitation of its juvenile sex offense prevention program, Sex Abuse Violates Everyone (SAVE), and competency restoration program, Competency Attainment Training (CAT), via in-person sessions for youth in the community and utilized a hybrid format for youth in secure detention settings. Additional highlights include:

- a) Maintained frequent and regular contact with youth. Provided individual therapy and crisis support to court-involved youth onsite in CSSD-supported locations.
- b) Attendance of CGC staff psychologists and interns at the American Psychology Law Society (AP-LS) annual conference and received trainings on topics such as “Mitigating Racial/Cultural Unfairness and Bias in Violence Risk Assessments,” “Enhancing the Efficacy of Competency Restoration Treatments with Recovery-

³⁴ This includes referrals pending from 2023 and referrals received in 2024.

- Oriented Cognitive Therapy (CT-R)”, “Assessing Risk in Justice-Involved Youth,” and “Understanding Firearm-Related Violence.”
- c) Hosted a mock trial collaborative event between the Superior Court, the Office of the Attorney General, and Georgetown Law’s Juvenile Justice Clinic which provided training on expert witness testimony regarding competency to stand trial.
 - d) Continued clinic staff representation on various committees that support the mental health of the District’s youth, including the Psychiatric Residential Treatment Facility (PRTF) committee, the Juvenile Behavioral Diversion Program (JBDP) Suitability Committee, CSEC Multidisciplinary Team, and stakeholder groups for JBDP and Here Opportunities Prepare You for Excellence (HOPE) Court.

CSSD Region I and Region II Pre- and Post-Disposition Supervision

Region I Pre- and Post-Disposition Supervision (Region I) is comprised of four teams: (1) Southeast Satellite Office (SESO)/Balanced and Restorative Justice (BARJ) Drop-In Center; (2) Southwest Satellite Office (SWSO)/Balanced and Restorative Justice (BARJ) Drop-In Center; (3) Leaders Of Today in Solidarity (LOTS)/Balanced and Restorative Justice (BARJ) Drop-In Center; and (4) the High-Intensive Supervision - Ultimate Transition Ultimate Responsibility Now (UTURN) Team.

Region II Pre- and Post-Disposition Supervision (Region II) is also comprised of four teams: (1) Northwest Satellite Office (NWSO)/Balanced and Restorative Justice (BARJ) Drop-In Center; (2) Northeast Satellite Office (NESO)/Balanced and Restorative Justice (BARJ) Drop-In Center; (3) Status Offender, Behavioral Health Diversion and HOPE Court Office (SOBHDHC) Balanced and Restorative Justice (BARJ) Drop-In Center; and (4) Interstate Probation Supervision Team.

Youth participated in a variety of activities (e.g. tutoring, mentoring, vocational, educational, and structured recreation) available Monday through Saturdays in the division’s Balanced and Restorative Justice (BARJ) Drop-In Centers, where programming centers around CSSD’s pro-social rehabilitative programmatic approach to juvenile justice. In line with this approach, all pre-disposition youth were required to attend BARJ

Drop-In Centers' afterschool programming for a period of 30 days; youth court ordered to attend had mandated attendance of 60 days. To improve and streamline recordkeeping, an e-sign check-in process for BARJ attendees was piloted at the Northeast and JBDP BARJ Drop-In Centers. CSSD is evaluating and refining the e-sign initiative in preparation for full-scale utilization and data capturing at all BARJ locations.

In 2024, a total of 1,394 youths were under CSSD supervision. To address the needs of court-involved youth, CSSD relies on an array of activities, services, interventions, and resources to help youth better understand and process their thoughts and feelings, which, in turn, improves their interactions with others. BARJ programs utilize a graduated response system, balancing incentives to promote and sustain compliance and accountability. This approach ensures youth are encouraged and afforded a variety of opportunities for successful engagement.

Supervision in Solution/Diversion Specialty Courts

The specialty courts under the Family Court (JBDP and HOPE Court) address the needs of youth struggling with behavioral health issues, and youth at the highest risk for commercial sex exploitation and human trafficking, respectively. Through a multifaceted continuum of services, including agencies responsible for the provision of mental health services, CSSD has continued to identify youth eligible for diversion. The practice of diverting suitable youth to a specialty court allows the opportunity to address risk factors adversely impacting the lives of the District's youth.

JBDP continued to operate as a voluntary intensive graduated response program, designed to engage juveniles and status offenders in appropriate mental health services and other community supports. Following a determination of legal eligibility for JBDP by

the OAG, CSSD, in partnership with the Department of Behavioral Health (DBH), considers factors such as amenability to treatment and community support to further assess each youth's clinical eligibility. Youth eligible for JBDP must be under 18 years of age and diagnosed with at least one behavioral or substance use disorder, according to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Health Disorders (DSM-5-TR). Each youth's participation in the program typically ranges from six to twelve months; however, shorter or longer durations of time are permitted, depending on the level of engagement with services and achievement of benchmark therapeutic goals and objectives. In 2024, 131 youth participated in JBDP, with 31 (24%) successfully completing the program.

HOPE Court is a strength-based, youth-driven court where the youth plays an active role in selecting and monitoring his or her services. Any youth with a delinquency, person in need of supervision, or child abuse and neglect case is eligible to be considered for participation in HOPE Court, with a focus on those whose home life is unstable, who are at risk of being sexually pressured or exploited, or who have had challenges in the community (e.g. leaving home, truancy, substance abuse, etc.). Youth are screened for eligibility by CFSA or CSSD, depending on the case. The goal is that successful completion of HOPE Court will end the youth's involvement in the juvenile justice system and start them on a successful path to adulthood. In 2024, 69 youth participated in HOPE Court, with 14 (20%) successfully completing the program.

Programs and Services for Court Involved Youth

The CSSD Information Contracts and Community Outreach (ICCO) team facilitated mentoring and tutoring services in BARJ Drop-In Centers for 879 youth. An additional 172 youth referrals to external community-based services were processed. The

referrals link CSSD youth to essential services, including mentoring, life skills, and tutoring sessions.

In 2024, vendors expanded available services to advance CSSD’s continued efforts to provide targeted tutoring to youth beyond those attending BARJ programming, Succeeding in Our Academic Responsibilities (SOAR) provided targeted and comprehensive tutoring services to two cohorts of youth at the Southwest Vocational Center and the Northeast BARJ Drop-In Center.

CSSD continues to work with internal and external juvenile justice stakeholders – including, but not limited to, the Presiding and Deputy Presiding Judges of the Family Court, the Office of the Attorney General (OAG), the Department of Behavioral Health (DBH), the Metropolitan Police Department (MPD), the Department of Youth Rehabilitative Services (DYRS), and the Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA) – to ensure access and timely delivery of services and supports to system-involved youth and families.

Mental Health and Habilitation Branch

The Mental Health and Habilitation Branch is responsible for the adjudication of cases related to the hospitalization and continued treatment of persons in need of mental health services and persons with intellectual disabilities, along with the accurate and secure maintenance of records resulting from these activities.

The Mental Health and Habilitation Branch recruits and provides volunteer advocates for persons with intellectual disabilities through the Mental Habilitation Advocate Program. In 2024, 20 advocates supported respondents in 40 cases. Five new advocates joined the program in 2024. Virtual quarterly trainings were conducted,

including one with the Presiding Judge, and one to recognize advocates who reached service milestones of five, eight, twenty, and thirty years. The Disability Services Reform Amendment Act of 2018, which took effect on May 5, 2018,³⁵ comprehensively repealed and amended the Citizens with Intellectual Disabilities Constitutional Rights and Dignity Act of 1978, ending new admissions and commitments of persons with intellectual disabilities and providing that, for current commitments, the court will terminate commitment unless there is informed consent for continued commitment. No mental habilitation cases were filed in 2024.

In 2024, 2,557 mental health cases were filed, and 111 cases were reopened. Court performance measures, established by Administrative Order 09-12, require that 99% of cases filed are disposed within 60 days. The court disposed of 93% of the cases within that standard. Cases were disposed with an average time to disposition of 25 days.

Parentage and Support Branch

The Parentage and Support Branch is responsible for the adjudication of cases involving the establishment of parentage and support and the accurate and secure maintenance of records resulting from these activities. In 2024, 1,154 new parentage and support actions were filed in the Family Court and 70 cases were reopened. In 2024, the Office of the Attorney General initiated 79% (970) of parentage and support filings. The remaining 21% (254) were filed privately.

Federal regulations mandate that orders to establish support be completed in 75% of the cases within six months of the date of service of process and 90% of the cases

³⁵ D.C. Code §§ 7-1304.01-1304.13.

within 12 months of the date of service of process (*see* 45 CFR § 303.101). The court met these standards in 2024; seventy-eight percent of the cases were disposed or otherwise resolved within six months (180 days) of service of process and 92% within 12 months of service of process.

In parentage and support cases, time to disposition is calculated from either the file date or date of service of process. Cases were disposed with an average time to disposition of 217 days from the file date, and 167 days from the date of service of process.

The court and D.C. Child Support Services Division continue to collaborate to ensure that cases are processed and resolved more efficiently and timely. In 2024, three Magistrate Judges continued to address cases using a hybrid schedule. Two Parentage and Support judges continued to schedule 72 cases per week and the third Magistrate Judge scheduled 56 cases per week. In April 2024, in collaboration with the Office of the Attorney General, the Family Court entered 61 adjudications of paternity and 45 child support orders, also known as Administrative Child Support Orders, through the Child Support Conciliation Program. This collaboration also led to less than 10 dismissal orders based on exclusion of genetic testing results.

In collaboration with the three Magistrate Judges and CSSD, the Parentage and Support Branch has begun working on a Bench Warrant Project. This project, a significant step towards improving the time to disposition, aims to schedule bench warrant hearings for respondents where a bench warrant was issued over ten years ago and remains outstanding. Addressing unresolved bench warrants and, subsequently, disposing of these cases will positively impact the overall time to disposition of the Parentage and Support caseload.

The Family Court, in collaboration with legal service providers Legal Aid D.C. and Bread for the City, maintains a Child Support Resource Center located in the anteroom of Courtroom JM-13. The attorneys staffing the Child Support Resource Center assist litigants, mostly respondents, by providing information and brief advice.

Domestic Relations Branch

The Domestic Relations Branch is responsible for the adjudication of divorce and custody proceedings, along with the accurate and secure maintenance of records resulting from these activities. In 2024, 4,289 new divorce and custody cases were filed in the Family Court and 75 cases were reopened.

The majority of divorce and custody cases met the established time to disposition standards in 2024, including 83% of uncontested divorce cases, 45% of uncontested third-party custody cases, and 35% of uncontested custody cases. Additionally, 79% of contested divorce cases, 84% of contested custody third-party cases, and 79% of contested custody cases reached disposition within the nine-month standard. The average time to disposition in uncontested cases was 50 days for uncontested divorce cases, 84 days for uncontested third-party custody cases, and 120 days for uncontested custody cases; in contested cases, the average time to disposition was 163 days in contested divorce cases, 161 days in contested custody third-party cases, and 206 days in contested custody cases. The Family Court will continue to monitor and track performance in this area and implement appropriate measures to improve compliance rates, particularly in uncontested custody cases.

In 2024, Magistrate Judges continued to oversee initial hearings which improves judicial efficiency by allowing the assigned Associate Judges to focus on the later stages

of litigation and cases which are ready to be resolved or scheduled for trial. In July 2024, an additional Magistrate Judge was added to assist with managing the Special Immigrant Juvenile Status calendar. In July 2024, an additional Associate Judge was added to the Domestic Relations calendar. The assignment of two additional judges to divorce and custody cases should improve time to disposition outcomes for these cases in 2025.

The Domestic Relations Branch provided additional services to litigants via an online portal through which litigants can request and receive certified copies electronically. In 2024, 777 requests for certified copies were successfully processed.

Conclusion

In 2024, the District of Columbia Family Court made significant progress in enhancing the efficiency, accessibility, and effectiveness of its services to children and families. The Court successfully maintained an overall clearance rate of 103%, ensuring that more cases were resolved than received, despite ongoing judicial vacancies and other challenges beyond the court's control. This accomplishment underscores the dedication and resilience of the Family Court's judges and staff in managing caseloads effectively.

The use of alternative dispute resolution (ADR) in domestic relations and child abuse and neglect cases remained a critical tool in facilitating agreements and reducing litigation burdens. Of the 275 child abuse and neglect cases filed in 2024, 99 cases were successfully mediated (28 resulting in a full agreement), contributing to more collaborative solutions and reducing the emotional toll on families. Additionally, attorney negotiators fully negotiated and resolved 438 domestic relations cases, reducing the need for prolonged litigation.

Moreover, the Family Court remained steadfast in its mission to improve outcomes for children in the child welfare system. In 2024, 77% of disposed child abuse and neglect cases resulted in children achieving permanency through reunification, adoption, guardianship, or legal custody. Importantly, no children whose adoptions were finalized in the past five years reentered foster care, highlighting the Court's careful oversight in securing stable futures for these children. The Family Treatment Court Program, JBDP, and HOPE Court also continued to demonstrate their effectiveness in supporting court-involved families, helping to break cycles of dependency and delinquency.

In addition to these achievements, the Family Court prioritized professional development and judicial education. Judges and court personnel participated in extensive training programs on topics such as trauma-informed care, domestic violence, and artificial intelligence in judicial processes. The Court also worked to ensure that its legal and administrative practices remain aligned with best practices in family law.

While challenges remain, including judicial vacancies and systemic barriers to timely case resolution, the Family Court remains committed to continuous improvement. The Court Improvement Program (CIP) is actively working to identify and address delays in achieving permanency, and new initiatives such as the Quality Court Hearings Project are being implemented to enhance judicial decision-making and service delivery. Moving forward, the Family Court remains committed to addressing these challenges by reevaluating and refining its processes in line with best practices.

Looking ahead, the Family Court will continue to build on its successes and adopt innovative approaches to better serve the children and families of the District of Columbia. Through dedication, collaboration, and a steadfast commitment to justice, the

Family Court reaffirms its mission to provide fair, timely, and compassionate resolutions, ensuring that every child and family receives the highest standard of care, fairness, and legal protection.

Notes

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