

Superior Court of the District of Columbia



2025 Family Court Annual Report



The Honorable Milton C. Lee Jr.
Chief Judge

March 31, 2026

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Executive Summary

Since the enactment of the District of Columbia Family Court Act of 2001,¹ 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 to be submitted to Congress. The following summarizes some of the measures taken by the Family Court in 2025 in its continued efforts to improve the lives of children and families in the District of Columbia. This Act mandates that the Annual Report address the following areas:

- 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 2025, 45 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 18 families (40%).
 - Almost all (98%) 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 2025, 88 child abuse and neglect cases (representing 139 children) participated in the mediation process, with 17 cases (19%, representing 23 children) resulting in a full agreement and 66 cases (75%, representing 111 children) resulting in a partial agreement.
 - The Multi-Door Dispute Resolution Division of Superior Court also works to resolve domestic relations cases through ADR. In 2025, 693 cases were mediated, of which 213 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. In 2025, 689 cases were referred, and 480 (70%) cases were negotiated. Of those 480 cases negotiated, 395 (81%) were resolved in whole or in part.
- 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, 73% had a factfinding hearing and 54% 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 37% for the trial or stipulation hearing and 18% 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 largely met these standards in 2025; eighty-one percent (81%) of the cases were disposed or otherwise resolved within six months of service of process and 89% within 12 months of service of process.
 - Sixty-eight percent (68%) of child abuse and neglect cases closed to adoption in 2025 were finalized within one year, with a median time of 278 days between the filing and finalization of the adoption petition. Of the 366 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.
 - Thirty-four percent (34%) 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 40 days. Of the cases adjudicated, 40% were disposed within the 45-day timeframe; the median time from initial hearing to disposition was 56 days.
 - Twenty-six percent (26%) 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 72 days. Of the cases that were adjudicated, 30% were disposed within the 60-day timeframe; the median time from initial hearing to disposition was 93 days.
 - All youth referred to the Court Social Services Division (CSSD) must be screened following their arrest and prior to their initial hearing. In 2025, CSSD screened 1,928 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 throughout 2025.
- 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: 1) the need to identify and obtain services or programs for the youth prior to disposition, 2) delays related to the ability of the Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services (DYRS) to obtain placement, 3) delays in receipt of required psychological and/or psychiatric reports, 4) non-compliance with court orders by youth under court supervision, and 5) youth being involved in other proceedings before the court.
- ASFA compliance rates were negatively impacted by competing priorities for Magistrate Judge resources which limited the availability to schedule hearings.
- Time to disposition for child abuse and neglect cases where children were removed from their home was adversely impacted by scheduling issues involving key witnesses, outstanding issues requiring resolution at trial, and limited calendar availability due to ongoing judicial vacancies.
- Information on: (a) the number of judges serving on the Family Court as of December 31, 2025; (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, 2025, the Family Court comprised 24 judges, consisting of 12 Associate Judges and 12 Magistrate Judges.
 - Five of the twelve Family Court Associate Judges have served on the Family Court for at least two consecutive years. Eight of the twelve Magistrate Judges have served on the Family Court for at least two consecutive years.
 - Seven domestic relations cases were retained outside the Family Court.
 - As of January 1, 2026, three Associate Judges and one Magistrate Judge were reassigned from the Family Court; three Associate Judges and one Magistrate Judge were reassigned to the Family Court. One additional Associate Judge, appointed to the bench in January 2026, was assigned to the Family Court later that month.
 - The Associate Judges serving on the Family Court have the education and training experience required by the Family Court Act; however, due to persistent judicial vacancies, the number of Associate Judges available to serve is limited.
 - Competing priorities for Magistrate Judge resources limit the number of Magistrate Judges available to serve on the Family Court.
- 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 2025 was 101%.
- In neglect matters, the median length of time from removal to achievement of the permanency goal of reunification was 13.3 months; the median length of time from removal to achievement of the permanency goal of adoption was 33.0 months; the median length of time from removal to achievement of the permanency goal of guardianship was 39.9 months; the median length of time from removal to achievement of the permanency goal of legal custody was 13.5 months.
- In mental health cases, the average time to disposition was 22 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 202 days from the file date, and 148 days from the date of service of process.
- In domestic relations cases, the average time to disposition in uncontested cases was 84 days for divorce cases, 100 days for third-party custody cases, and 88 days for custody cases; in contested cases, the average time to disposition was 139 days in divorce cases, 100 days in third-party custody cases, and 182 days in custody cases.
- For youth released at the initial hearing in juvenile delinquency cases, the median time to adjudication was 58 days, and the median time to disposition was 75 days.
- The Court’s established time standard is that 98% of juvenile delinquency cases in which youth are released at the initial hearing are disposed within 270 days. In 2025, 73% of cases were disposed within the time standard.
- In alignment with best practices regarding diversion programs, the Family Court has two specialty courts/programs designed to address risk factors adversely impacting the lives of the District’s youth.
 - In 2025, 158 cases were certified to the Juvenile Behavioral Diversion Program (JBDP), with 52 cases (33%) resulting in program completion.
 - In 2025, 85 cases were certified to HOPE “Here Opportunities Prepare you for Excellence” Court, with 24 cases (28%) resulting in program completion.
- 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 creating a data dashboard for neglect judges that will track case event timelines and

statutory benchmarks, affording judges greater visibility into compliance with federal and D.C. requirements.

- The CIP developed the Quality Court Hearings Project (QCH) to enhance the quality of legal proceedings and determine how quality hearings lead to better outcomes for children and families. The focus of the current hearing review project is to measure the level of judicial engagement of parents during court hearings. The CIP is finalizing two tools for reviewers to gather data by listening to audio recordings of court hearings and examining hearing orders.
- The CIP is in the pilot phase of its Quality Legal Representation project. The Family Preservation Program (FPP) creates a defense team by providing independent defense social workers to attorneys who represent parents. The program seeks to improve the quality of legal representation by creating a multidisciplinary team to assist parents in achieving the goals set forth in their case plans, aiming to decrease time to permanency. Multidisciplinary teams, supervised by the FPP Supervisory Social Worker, consist of the FPP's licensed clinical social worker, parent attorney, and parent. The FPP currently has one case carrying social worker and six parents enrolled. The CIP collects data at various stages of a case and encourages feedback from all parties via meetings, surveys, and focus groups.

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),³ requires the Chief Judge of the Superior Court to submit an annual report on the activities of the Family Court to Congress. The report, summarizing activities of the Family Court during 2025, must include the following:

- The Chief Judge’s assessment of the productivity and success of the use of alternative dispute resolution (see pages 25-31).
- Goals and timetables as required by the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 to improve the Family Court’s performance (see pages 42-44).
- 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 31-57, 62-70, 80-84).
- 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 20, 40-42, 66-70, 82).
- Information on: (a) the number of judges serving on the Family Court as of December 31, 2025; (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 11-25).
- 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 31-57, 62-70, 80-84).
- A proposed remedial plan of action if the Family Court failed to meet the deadlines, standards, and outcome measures prescribed by such laws or

³ See *supra* note 1.

practices (see pages 40-62, 66-70, 80-84).

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, 2026, the Family Court consisted of 24 judges, including 12 Associate Judges and 12 Magistrate Judges. Additionally, two magistrate judges assisted with the uncontested divorce calendar. Five of the 12 Magistrate Judges were assigned to hear child abuse and neglect cases. One additional associate judge was sworn in and joined Family Court in late January 2026.

Length of Term on Family Court

In 2012, the D.C. Courts and Public Defender Service Act (D.C. Courts and PDS Act) became effective.⁴ 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 Higashi	January	2022
Judge Wellner	January	2023
Judge Crane	August	2023

⁴ Pub. L. No. 112-229, 126 Stat. 1611 (2012).

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
Judge Ross	January	2026
Judge Scott	January	2026
Judge Tunnage	January	2026
Judge Suttenger	January	2026

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 Mulkey	January	2024
Magistrate Judge Vila	January	2024
Magistrate Judge Acuña	July	2024
Magistrate Judge Abebe	August	2024
Magistrate Judge Nolan	January	2025
Magistrate Judge Glover	January	2026

Reassignments to and from Family Court

In October 2025, the Chief Judge of the Superior Court of the District of Columbia issued judicial assignments for calendar year 2026. Those assignments became effective on January 1, 2026. Judge Higashi is now the Family Court Presiding Judge, and Judge Wellner is the Deputy Presiding Judge. As part of the reassignment, Judges Soltys,

Crowell, and Sanchez along with Magistrate Judge Jones left Family Court; Judge Soltys retained one domestic relations case and Judge Sanchez retained six domestic relations cases. Judge Suttenger was appointed to the bench in January 2026; Judges Ross, Scott, Suttenger, and Tunnage along with Magistrate Judge Glover joined Family Court in January 2026 for the first time.

The judges newly serving in the Family Court are assigned to various calendars to increase judicial efficiency. Judges Scott, Suttenger, and Tunnage are assigned to the Domestic Relations calendar. Judge Ross is assigned to the Juvenile and Adoptions calendar. Magistrate Judge Glover is assigned to the Juvenile Intake and New Referrals Calendar.

Below is a brief description of the education and training experience of the judges joining Family Court after January 2026.

Judge Glover

Eric Sebastian Glover was appointed by Chief Judge Anita Josey-Herring on July 20, 2023.

Prior to his appointment to the bench, Judge Glover held the position of General Counsel for the District of Columbia Department of Corrections (DOC), serving as the agency's chief legal officer. During his tenure, he offered expert legal counsel to DOC staff and leadership, playing a crucial role in the formulation and execution of the agency's policies and programs.

Before joining DOC, Judge Glover served as Chief of the Civil Enforcement Section at the Office of the Attorney General for the District of Columbia (OAG). There, he managed affirmative litigation and led a team of lawyers in the successful

prosecution of one of the largest wage theft recovery actions ever brought by the agency. Additionally, he worked as a trial attorney in the OAG's Civil Litigation Division, defending the District, its employees, and agencies in various civil lawsuits, including cases related to civil rights matters under 42 U.S.C. § 1983. Judge Glover also gained experience in criminal and civil law while employed with the New York City Law Department.

Judge Glover is a member of the Council for Court Excellence and the Washington Bar Association. He is also a mentor with the Abrahamson Scholarship Foundation. Additionally, he is a former member of the D.C. Bar's Litigation Section's Steering Committee and the District of Columbia Sentencing Commission.

A native Bostonian, Judge Glover grew up in the city's Dorchester neighborhood and attended high school at Boston Latin Academy. He received his bachelor's degree in Political Science from Morgan State University and his J.D. from Howard University School of Law, where he was a member of the Charles Hamilton Houston National Moot Court Team and the Howard Scroll: Social Justice Law Review.

Judge Ross

Carl Ezekiel Ross was nominated by President Joseph R. Biden to be an Associate Judge of the Superior Court of the District of Columbia on December 15, 2021. His nomination was confirmed by the United States Senate on December 15, 2022.

Judge Ross was born in Washington, D.C. He received his Bachelor of Arts degree from Oral Roberts University and his Juris Doctor degree from William and Mary School of Law.

After law school, Judge Ross served as a judicial law clerk to the Honorable James R. Spencer of the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia.

In 2004, Judge Ross joined Arnold & Porter LLP as a litigation associate. At Arnold & Porter, Judge Ross worked on a variety of federal appellate and district court matters. Judge Ross also handled a variety of pro bono cases, including landlord-tenant cases in the Superior Court of the District of Columbia in conjunction with the Legal Aid Society of D.C.

In 2009, Judge Ross was sworn in as an Assistant United States Attorney (“AUSA”) in the District of Columbia U.S. Attorney’s Office’s Civil Division. During his tenure as a civil AUSA, Judge Ross handled federal appellate and district court matters involving employment litigation, the Federal Tort Claims Act, the Administrative Procedures Act, Bivens, the Freedom of Information Act, the False Claims Act, patent term adjustments, and other matters.

In 2017, Judge Ross began serving as investigative counsel to the United States House of Representatives Committee on Ethics. As investigative counsel, Judge Ross led investigations into matters involving criminal and civil allegations of fraud, sexual harassment, impermissible financial transactions, disclosure of classified information, illegal campaign activity, improper use of congressional resources, and other matters.

Judge Scott

Judge Ebony M. Scott was nominated by President Joseph R. Biden Jr. to be an associate judge of the Superior Court of the District of Columbia in September 2021 and confirmed by the Senate on February 7, 2022. Previously, Judge Scott was appointed magistrate judge by Chief Judge Robert E. Morin in January 2020.

Judge Scott graduated from the University of Rochester with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science and earned her law degree from American University's Washington College of Law (WCL) in 2006. Following graduation from law school, Judge Scott served as a judicial law clerk to the Honorable Anna Blackburne-Rigsby on the District of Columbia Court of Appeals.

Following her clerkship, she joined the law firm of Chaikin, Sherman, Cammarata & Siegel, P.C., where she litigated personal injury cases on behalf of plaintiffs in the District of Columbia and Maryland. She later joined the Office of the Attorney General for the District of Columbia in 2012 as an assistant attorney general, where she prosecuted a variety of cases involving drug, firearm, and prostitution related nuisances, and later served as acting chief of her Section.

In 2016, Judge Scott joined the District of Columbia Office of Human Rights as general counsel. In her role, she oversaw the day-to-day operations of the Legal Division and managed the resolution of discrimination complaints arising under the D.C. Human Rights Act and other federal and District laws. In 2018, Judge Scott joined the Mayor's Office of Legal Counsel as deputy director. In this role, she assisted the Director in supervising all agency counsel reporting to the mayor, and provided legal advice to the mayor, agency directors, and deputy mayors.

Judge Scott has always been committed to public service. She previously served as an Abramson Scholarship Foundation (ASF) mentor, played an active role on its mentoring committee, and currently serves on ASF's Inaugural Advisory Council. She is a former member of the Trial Lawyers' Association of Metropolitan Washington, D.C. and previously served as a governor on the Board of Governors, and as chair of the

Education Committee. She has also been an active member of the American Association for Justice and served for two years as one of the regional coordinators for the Washington, D.C. regional tournament for the National Student Trial Advocacy Competition.

Judge Scott is also an adjunct assistant professor at WCL. In 2023, Judge Scott received the Joseph H. Hairston Award from WCL for her distinguished public service.

Judge Suttenger

Elana S. Suttenger was nominated by President Donald Trump to be an Associate Judge of the Superior Court of the District of Columbia on September 2, 2025. Her nomination was confirmed by the United States Senate on December 18, 2025.

Judge Suttenger graduated from Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology in Alexandria, Virginia. She earned her Bachelor of Arts, magna cum laude, from the University of Pennsylvania, where she had dual majors in Religious Studies and French. She earned her Juris Doctor from the Georgetown University Law Center, where she served as Managing Editor on The Georgetown Law Journal and represented domestic violence victims in the Superior Court as part of the Domestic Violence Clinic. After law school, she clerked for the Honorable Chief Judge Royce C. Lamberth on the United States District Court for the District of Columbia.

In April 2012, Judge Suttenger was sworn in as an Assistant United States Attorney at the United States Attorney's Office for the District of Columbia. At the time of her appointment to the bench, she served as Special Counsel for Policy and Legislative Affairs in the Front Office. In that role, she developed and led the legislative

efforts of the United States Attorney's Office, represented the office before the Council of the District of Columbia, and coordinated with external stakeholders, including governmental and community partners. She served as the U.S. Attorney's designee to the District of Columbia Sentencing Commission, the Criminal Code Reform Commission Advisory Group, the District of Columbia Clemency Board, the Council for Court Excellence's Criminal Justice Committee, the District Jails and Justice Task Force, and the Redbook criminal jury instruction committee. She has also served as her office's advisor on ethics and professional responsibility.

Prior to becoming Special Counsel for Policy and Legislative Affairs, she served as a Senior Assistant U.S. Attorney, investigating and prosecuting complex and sensitive cases involving domestic violence and sexual offenses committed against children and adults. During her tenure in the office, she prosecuted numerous cases ranging from misdemeanors to violent felonies, and she briefed and argued cases on appeal. She received numerous Special Act Awards during her time at the U.S. Attorney's Office and received the U.S. Attorney's Award for Community Outreach in 2022.

Judge Tunnage

Judge Donald Walker Tunnage was nominated to be an associate judge of D.C. Superior Court by President Joseph R. Biden Jr. in September 2021 and confirmed by the Senate in February 2022.

Before becoming a judicial officer, Judge Tunnage was a career attorney in the Civil Rights Division of the United States Department of Justice, where he has spent the past two decades enforcing federal civil rights statutes through both criminal and civil courtroom litigation across the nation.

During his early tenure in the Civil Rights Division as a civil trial attorney, Judge Tunnage litigated lawsuits in federal district courts to enforce the Fair Housing Act, the Public Accommodations Act, and Title VII of the Civil Rights Act. Judge Tunnage then served as a criminal prosecutor in the Civil Rights Division, where he investigates and prosecutes cases that involve interference with liberties and deprivation of Constitutional and federal rights. Judge Tunnage has been recognized consistently by the Department of Justice with Special Achievement awards and has thrice been awarded Special Commendation for outstanding performance.

Prior to joining the Department of Justice, Judge Tunnage was an assistant state public defender in Miami, Florida, where he litigated criminal appeals on behalf of indigent persons and made appearances in all three levels of state appellate courts in Florida, including a case of first impression before the Supreme Court of Florida.

Judge Tunnage received his Bachelor of Arts in Sociology from Morehouse College, where he was inducted into Phi Beta Kappa, and his Juris Doctor from Duke University Law School. Judge Tunnage also holds a Master's in Public Policy from the Harvard Kennedy School of Government.

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 Act⁵ 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

⁵ *Id.*

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 with the opportunity to participate in a quarterly training program, developed by the Presiding Judge of the Family Court. The training is designed to ensure that these judges have the knowledge and skills required to serve in the Family Court. Despite adequate training and experience, the number of Associate Judges available to serve on the Family Court is limited due to persistent judicial vacancies.

Given the overwhelming response from the Bar to the Magistrate Judge positions previously advertised, no recruitment difficulties are envisioned for future Magistrate Judge vacancies. Competing priorities for Magistrate Judge resources limit the number of Magistrate Judges available to serve on the Family Court.

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 and staff took advantage of several training opportunities in 2025:

In March 2025, the Mental Health and Habilitation Branch held a virtual American Sign Language training which was attended by 40 people. On April 1, 2025, the Mental Health and Habilitation Branch held a training session featuring the Department of Disability Services explaining their specialized services. Forty-five (45) virtual attendees participated.

On May 29, 2025, the Family Court Domestic Relations Branch and the DC Bar Association held the Annual Domestic Relations Bench-Bar Dialogue which 50 people attended. This event brings together domestic relations practitioners and the judges of the D.C. Superior Court for an off-the-record discussion on various aspects of family law practice in the District of Columbia. Noted speakers represented the DC Bar, Judges from the Family Court of the District of Columbia, and the Tucker Family Law group.

The Family Court hosted its first quarterly training, entitled *Common Education Barriers and Opportunities for Students in the District of Columbia*, on March 28, 2025. There were 140 virtual attendees. Speakers included the School Justice Project, the Public Defender Service, Members of the Courts Education Panel, Office of the Superintendent of Education, Child and Family Services Agency, Department of Disability Services, Luke Moore Opportunity Academy and Ballou STAY opportunity Academy. This was followed by another Family Court quarterly training on June 13, 2025, entitled *Utilizing Mental Health Evaluations for Youth in Court Advocacy*. There was lively and engaged discussion between the speakers and 140 participants. The speakers

included Dr. Katara Watkins-Laws of the Superior Court of the District of Columbia's Court Social Services Division Child Guidance Clinic, Coury Mascagni of Lawyers for the People, Jonathan Krell of the Children's Law Center, Attorney Robyn Thorpe and Dr. Susan Theut.

On September 11, 2025, the Family Court, in conjunction with the Center for Education and Training (CET), held its 23rd Annual Interdisciplinary Conference – Dual System Youth: Conversations for Collaboration. With 206 virtual attendees, the conference discussed youth who have been part of both the juvenile delinquency system and child abuse and neglect system and how to adequately assist them in healing and embracing their next chapter. The speakers included the Honorable Everett Mitchell of Wisconsin, the Honorable Kristin Hileman-Adams of Prince George's County, Maryland, Walter Jackson of the Maryland Department of Human Services, and members of the Georgetown Center for Youth Justice. Participants were provided with resources to enhance service delivery within the communities served by Family Court. The conference was informative and a reflection of the Court's dedication to understanding the multifaceted challenges families and children face on a continual basis.

Family Court judges attended an annual in-service training on December 4 and 5, 2025 that covered recent developments in family law and recently enacted legislation affecting the Family Court. The judges also participated in the Spring Judicial and Senior Managers Conference (May 8 and 9, 2025), entitled *Stronger Together: Leadership, Technology, and the Future of Courts*. Additionally, judicial officers changing calendars or moving into Family Court participated in mandatory in-service training for their respective calendars.

Judges and court staff are consistently trained in current family law. During the year, Family Court law clerks and non-judicial court employees received training to aid them in assisting Family Court judges. Topics included: Evidence; Impeachment; Motions; Post-Conviction Motions, Effective Interpersonal Communication in the 21st Century, Emotional and Social Intelligence, the Essentials of Creative Communication, and Critical Thinking Skills for the Court Professional, among others.

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 receives attorney applications for appointment to Family Court panels and conducts initial and continuing education trainings for child abuse and neglect attorneys. These trainings included 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 and knowledge of many stakeholders involved in the child welfare system. Sessions in 2025 included:

- Child and Family Services Agency's (CFSA) presentation on its new Warmline initiative
- The Howard University School of Law Child Welfare/Family Justice Clinic's Brown Bag presentation on Intimate Partner Violence
- D.C. Safe Shores' presentation on Memory, Suggestibility and Forensic Interviews
- Family Law Assistance Network's presentation on Family Law and Public Benefits

- CFSA’s presentation on its new case management system and updated complaints and court reports
- Children’s Law Center’s (CLC) presentation on The Road To ASFA: The History and Legacy of The American Child Welfare System
- Advocates for Justice and Education’s presentation on Accessing and Enrolling in Health Services for Children with Special Needs (HSCSN) for Professionals
- Advocates for Justice and Education’s presentation on School Discipline Refresher with Focus on Strategies and Practice Issues
- Advocates for Justice and Education’s presentation on 504 and Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Eligibility
- School Justice Project’s presentation on Special Education Representation in Adult Court
- Advocates for Justice and Education’s presentation on Quick Constitutional Law Refresher for Education Attorneys and Professionals
- Office of the State Superintendent of Education’s presentation on Out of State Educational Placements for Children Committed to CFSA
- D.C. Kincare Alliance’s presentation on Third Party Custody
- Advocates for Justice and Education’s presentation on Compulsory Education in Neglect and Child Welfare – What Professionals Need to Know
- CLC and CCAN Panel Attorneys’ Training on Filing Adoptions on Behalf of Caregivers
- CLC’s presentation on Trial Skills Training on Objections
- CLC and CCAN Panel Attorneys’ Training on Filing Guardianship Motions on Behalf of Caregivers
- CCAN Panel Attorneys’ Training on Updated Form Education Orders and the Best Interests Determination in School Placement
- School Justice Project’s presentation on Special Ed. 101: Nuts and Bolts
- CLC’s presentation on Behavior Intervention Planning
- School Justice Project’s presentation on Providing Special Education Representation in Adult Criminal Court
- Court Appointed Special Advocates’ (CASA) presentation on CASA Programs and Services
- DC Strong Start/Early Intervention’s presentation on Family Serving Professionals
- Office of the Attorney General of the District of Columbia and CLC’s presentation on Preserving Our Kids’ Equity Through Trusts (POKETT) and Fostering Stable Housing Opportunities Act of 2022
- Children’s Hospital Child and Adolescent Protection Clinic’s presentation on Racial and Ethnic Disproportionality in the Child Welfare System: Causes, Consequences, and Solutions
- CLC’s presentation on Appellate Practice

- CLC’s presentation on Understanding the Neuroscience of Addiction in Child Welfare Practice
- Catholic Charities’ presentation on Immigration 101 for Neglect Practitioners
- CLC’s presentation on Ethical Use of AI in Legal Practice
- CLC’s presentation on Beyond Disposition: Proactive Advocacy for Achieving Reunification
- Form Order workgroup’s presentation on New Neglect Form Hearing Orders
- DC Bar’s presentation on Ethics for CCAN Attorneys
- National Association of Counsel for Children presentation on Trials Skills

Additionally, CCAN hosted and facilitated quarterly case rounds sessions where attorneys were able to discuss current practice-related issues with their peers, including solutions and practice tips.

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 have had an equally positive effect on court processing time standards.

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 identify 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 2025, 207 abuse and neglect cases were filed or reopened in the Family Court. Each case represents one child in Family Court. In mediation, however, each case represents a family, often with multiple children. Of the 207 abuse and neglect cases filed

or reopened, 203 cases 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.⁶ The 203 cases represent 135 families. Of those 135 families, 13 families (10%, representing 17 children) whose cases were filed in 2025 were offered mediation in 2026. In 2025, mediation was offered to 122 families with 186 children. Of the 122 families offered mediation in 2025, 72% of the families (88 cases, representing 139 children) participated in the mediation process; 28% of the families (34 cases, representing 47 children) did not participate and their cases were not mediated.⁷

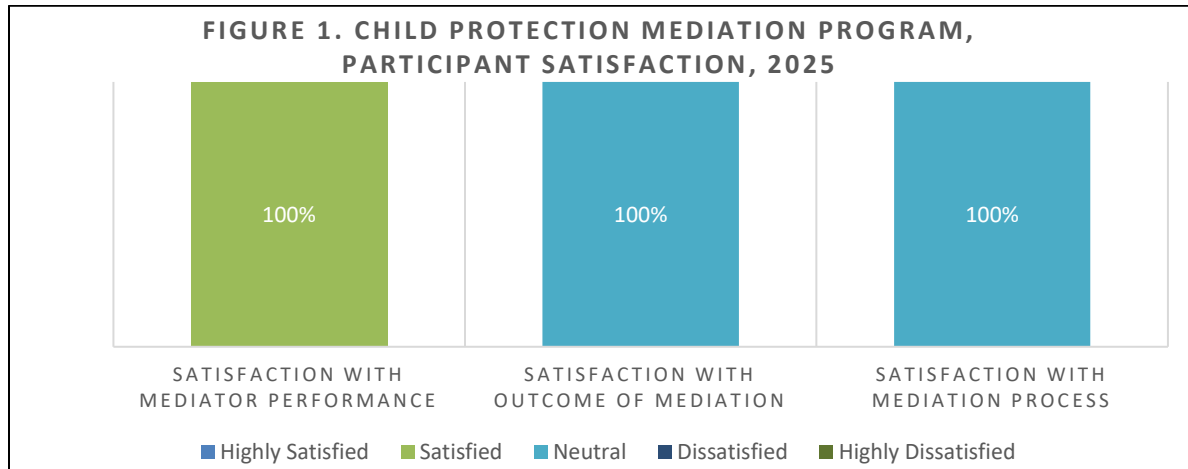
A substantial number of cases offered mediation were successfully settled via mediation, either in full or in part.⁸ In 2025, nearly all of the 88 cases which went to mediation reached an agreement on jurisdiction, family services, or a plan to resolve the case. Of the 88 mediated cases, 17 cases (19%, representing 23 children) resulted in 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 66 cases (75%, representing 111 children) the mediation was partially successful, resolving significant family concerns.

⁶ 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; and a layered domestic violence screening protocol is implemented by Multi-Door staff and mediators for cases with a history of domestic violence.

⁷ 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.

⁸ In addition to the new abuse and neglect referrals, less than 15 post-adjudication cases were referred with issues of permanency, custody, visitation and/or post-adoption communication. Of those cases referred in 2025, all were offered mediation in 2025. Of these cases (representing 21 children), 90% were mediated and 10% did not participate. Of the cases that were mediated, a full settlement was reached in 30% of the cases, a partial settlement was reached in 40% of the cases, and no settlement was reached in 20% of the cases.

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



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.

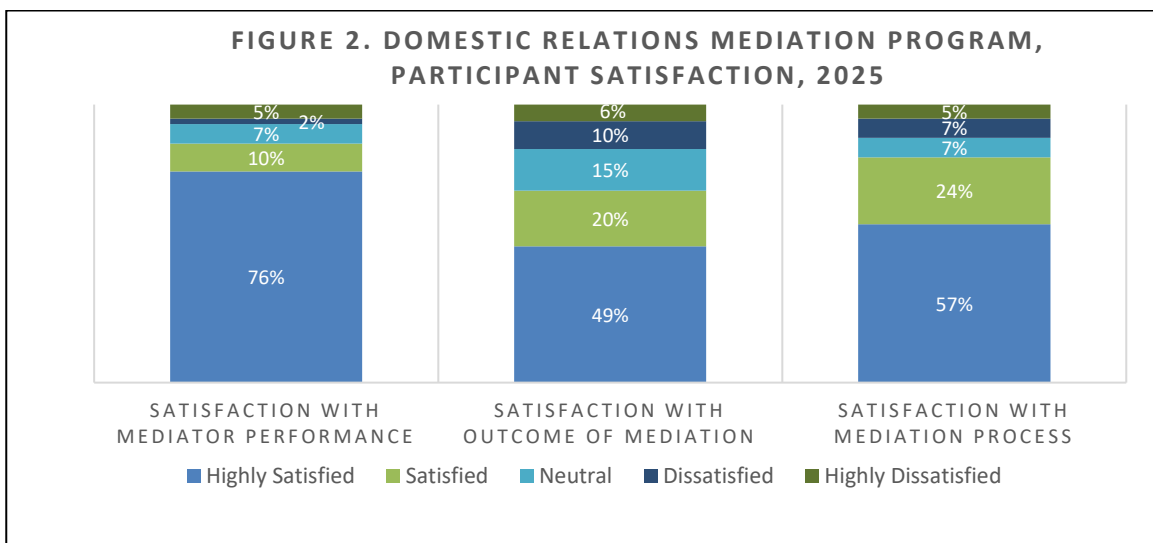
A total of 982 domestic relations cases completed the mediation intake interview process and were referred to mediation in 2025.⁹ Of those 982 cases, 289 cases (29%) referred to mediation did not participate because they were found to be either inappropriate or ineligible for mediation or the parties voluntarily withdrew from the process.¹⁰

⁹ There were 1,469 cases opened at intake. Prior to reaching mediation, 487 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.

¹⁰ Cases that did not participate in mediation include: 20 cases deemed inappropriate for mediation and 269 cases where at least one party failed to report to mediation or refused to mediate.

Of the 693 cases mediated, 213 cases (31%) settled in mediation and 480 cases (69%) did not reach an agreement. Of the 213 settled cases, a full agreement was reached in 160 cases (75%); a partial agreement was reached in 53 cases (25%), resolving significant family concerns.

Qualitative outcome measures (Figure 2) show satisfaction rates (highly satisfied and satisfied) of 86% for the performance of the mediator(s), 69% for the ADR outcome, and 81% 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 2025, both the adult and children’s components of the Program for Agreement and Cooperation in Contested Custody Cases (PAC) were relaunched. The objective of the program is to help participants improve working relationships and develop effective communication skills while prioritizing their children’s needs.

Twenty adult education seminars were conducted both in person and remotely via Zoom in 2025, which helped 271 parents understand the impact of custody disputes on co-

parenting and how these disputes affect their children. In addition, four children's education seminars were conducted in person in 2025, which supported 32 children involved in court-filed contested custody cases.

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 2025, 689 cases were referred to attorney negotiators; of those, 480 cases were fully negotiated. Of those 480 cases, 395 were resolved (82%) and 85 (18%) were unresolved. Family Court collaborated with the Catholic University Law School and George Washington Law School to find volunteer students to serve as attorney negotiators supervised by law school clinic professors.

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

In addition to domestic relations cases mediated through Multi-Door, the Court 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 2025, parties in 45 cases participated in this ADR program. Twenty-seven percent (27%, representing 12 cases) of the cases were fully settled and 13% (6) were partially settled through the program.

Family Court Operations Case Activity

There were 3,136 pending pre-disposition cases in the Family Court on January 1, 2025. In 2025, there were 9,881 new cases filed or reopened in the Family Court.¹¹ During the same period, 9,937 cases were disposed. As a result, there were 3,080 cases pending in the Family Court on December 31, 2025 (Table 1).

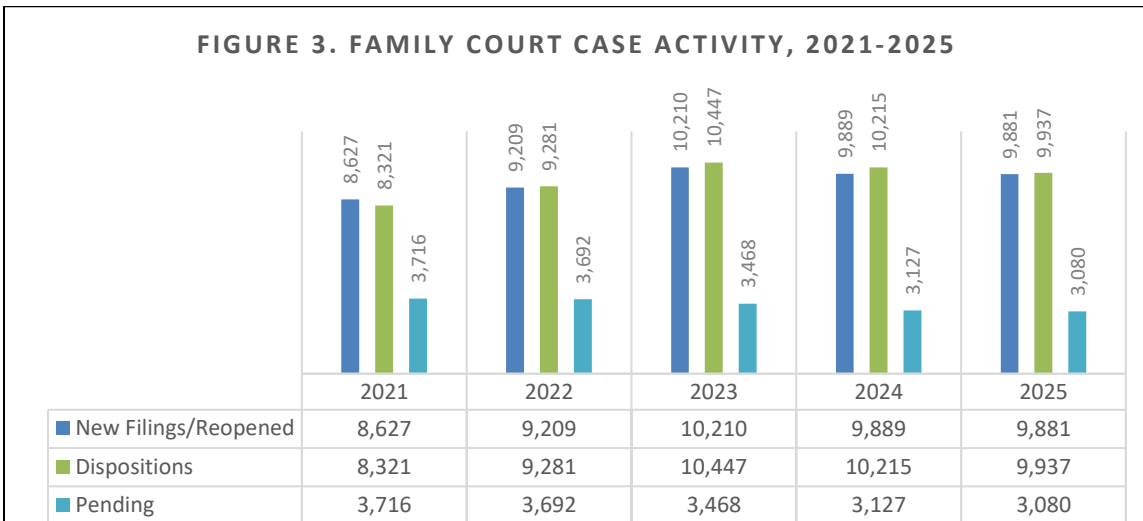
¹¹ New filings in Abuse and Neglect (7) and Juvenile (53) initiated with a pre-petition custody order were excluded from the new cases filed unless a subsequent petition was filed in 2025. The exclusion of these cases more accurately reflects the cases available to be processed. Prior to 2018, those cases were included in the new filings category.

TABLE 1. FAMILY COURT OPERATIONS CASE ACTIVITY, 2025

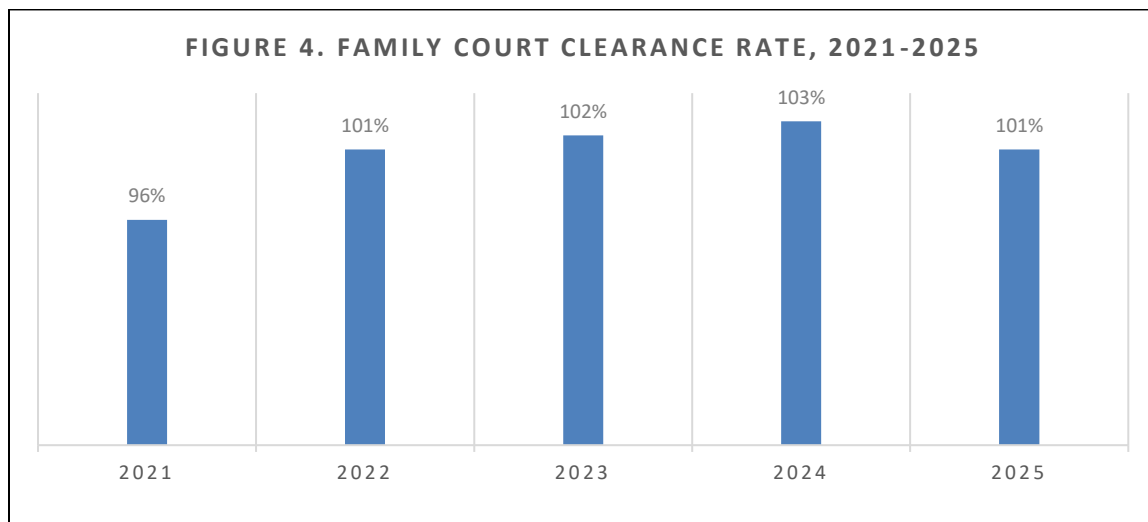
	Abuse & Neglect	Adoption	Divorce & Custody	Juvenile ^a	Mental Health	Parentage & Support ^b	Total
Pending Jan. 1 ^c	57	86	1,679	689	156	469	3,136
New Filings & Reopened ^d	207 ^e	187	4,243	1,287 ^e	2,502	1,455	9,881
Total Available for Disposition	264	273	5,922	1,976	2,658	1,924	13,017
Dispositions	203 ^f	186	4,386	1,238 ^f	2,518	1,406	9,937
Pending Dec. 31	61	87	1,536	738	140	518	3,080
Percent Change in Pending	7.0%	1.2%	-8.5%	7.1%	-10.3%	10.4%	-1.8%
Clearance Rate ^g	98%	99%	103%	96%	101%	97%	101%

- 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 Divorce & Custody, Juvenile, Mental Health, and Parentage & Support 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 2025, there were 9,633 new cases filed, and 248 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 dispositions increased (Figure 3). New filings/reopened cases increased by 15% and dispositions increased by 19%. New filings/reopened cases rose from 8,627 (2021) to 9,881 (2025) cases while dispositions grew from 8,321 (2021) to 9,937 (2025) 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. Timely case disposition ensures that the number of cases awaiting disposition, or the pending caseload, does not increase. The overall clearance rate for the Family Court in 2025 was 101% (Figure 4).



Family Court Case Activity

New case filings in Family Court remained steady from 2024 to 2025 (9,889 in 2024; 9,881 in 2025). New case filings increased for adoption, juvenile, and parentage and support cases; new case filings decreased for abuse and neglect, divorce and custody, and mental health cases. In 2025, the Family Court resolved 9,937 cases, a 3% decrease in the number of dispositions from 2024 (10,215). While dispositions increased in adoption, divorce and custody, dispositions decreased in abuse and neglect, juvenile, parentage and support, 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 2025, 1,427 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 may require significant judicial, administrative and courtroom management; the post-judgment litigation is often just as extensive and involved as a new custody case. In 2025, 5,966 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 2025, 449 post-disposition mental habilitation cases remained open, requiring annual judicial review to evaluate the need for continued commitment.

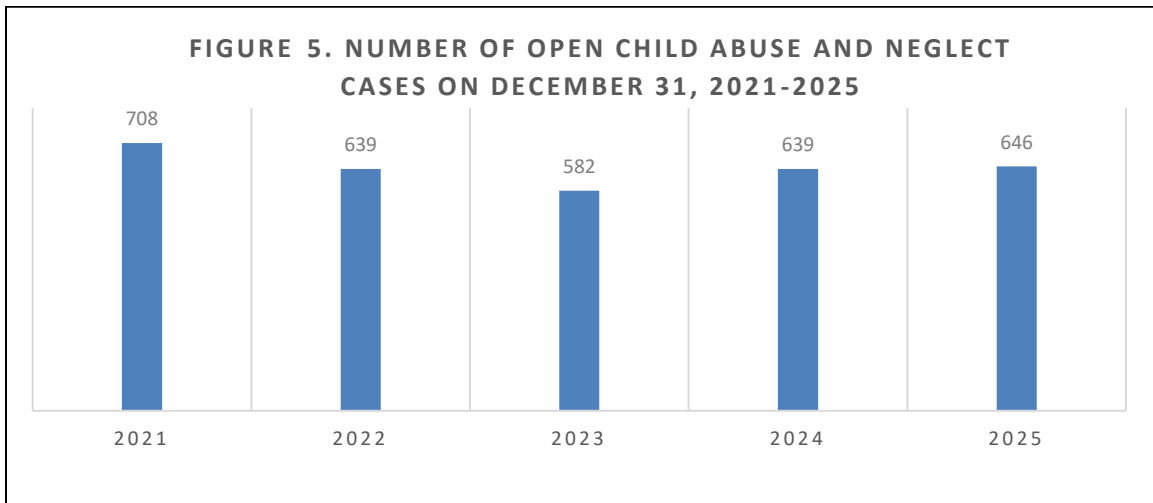
Juvenile cases are disposed at sentencing and remain open until the sentence expires or the Family Court no longer has jurisdiction over the juvenile. In 2025, there were 803 post-disposition juvenile cases.

Abuse and neglect cases remain open after disposition until either a permanency outcome or the Family Court no longer has jurisdiction over the respondent due to age. In 2025, 585 post-disposition abuse and neglect cases remained open and required regular judicial review until the child reached permanency either through placement in a

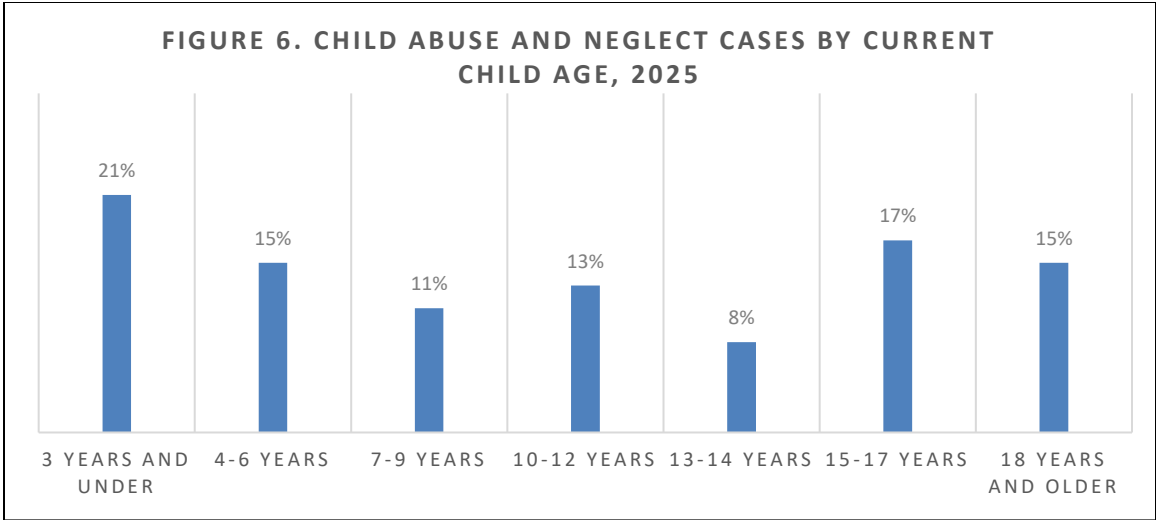
permanent living situation or aged out of the foster care system.

Child Abuse and Neglect Cases

In 2025, there were 646 children with an open abuse and neglect case under Family Court jurisdiction (Figure 5). This includes children with petitioned cases that are either undisposed (61) or in which a disposition hearing was held and then followed by regularly scheduled permanency hearings (585). Twenty-six of the 585 post-disposition cases involved children with a disrupted guardianship.



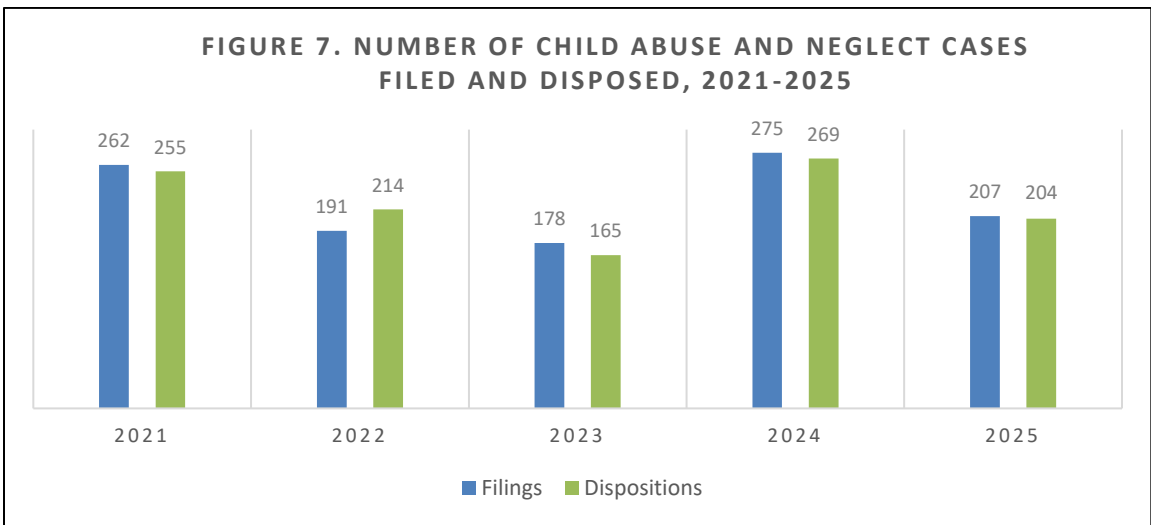
Youth aged 15 and older accounted for 32% of all open abuse and neglect cases under Family Court jurisdiction (Figure 6). Twenty-one percent of children were aged three years and under.



While this section pertained to all children with open abuse and neglect cases in 2025, the next section focuses on new child abuse and neglect filings.

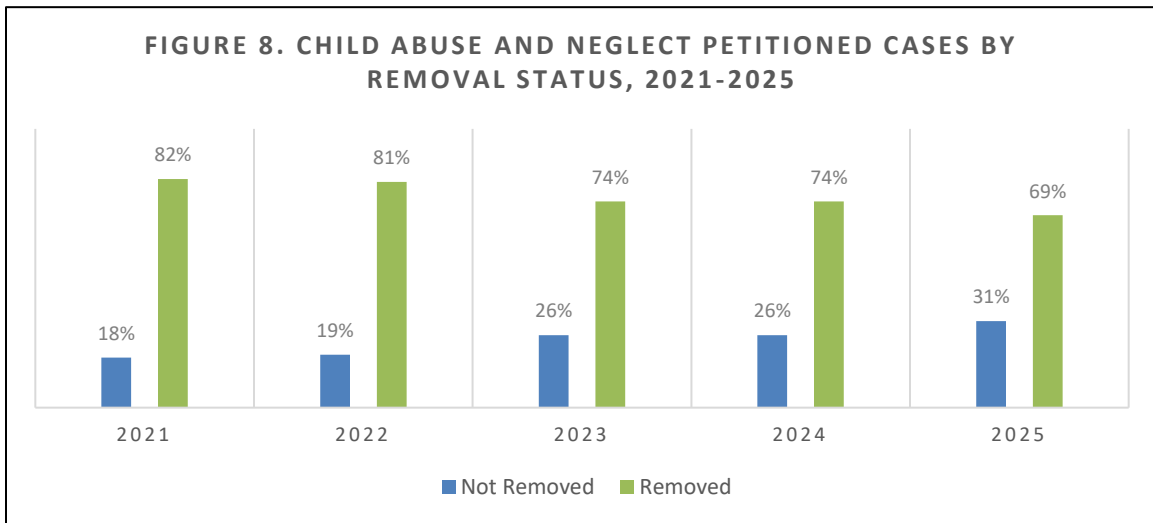
Children Referred to Family Court

In 2025, there were 207 new child abuse and neglect filings, and 204 child abuse and neglect cases disposed (Figure 7). Of the 207 filings, 64% (132) had a completed disposition hearing, 29% (61) remained undisposed, and 7% (14) were dismissed as of December 31, 2025.



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.¹²

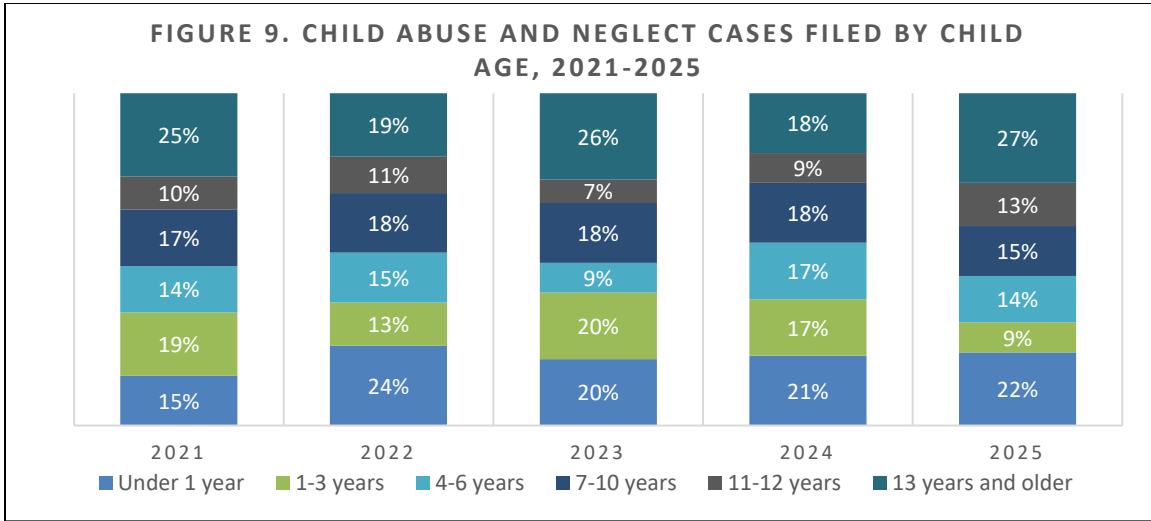


In 2025, children were removed from the home in 69% of petitioned cases while children remained in the home under protective supervision in 31% of petitioned cases (Figure 8). The lowest percentage of removed petitioned cases in the last five years occurred in 2025.

At the time of referral, 45% of new filings were for children aged six and younger, with 31% for children aged three or younger (Figure 9). 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 2025, 27% of new filings to Family Court involved children aged 13 and older at the time of referral. The Family Court,

¹² Child and Family Services Agency, “Four Pillars.” CFSA.DC.GOV. <https://www.cfsa.dc.gov/page/four-pillars/>. Accessed March 19, 2024.

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 of Columbia, 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 2025, no judges leaving the Family Court retained any abuse and neglect cases.

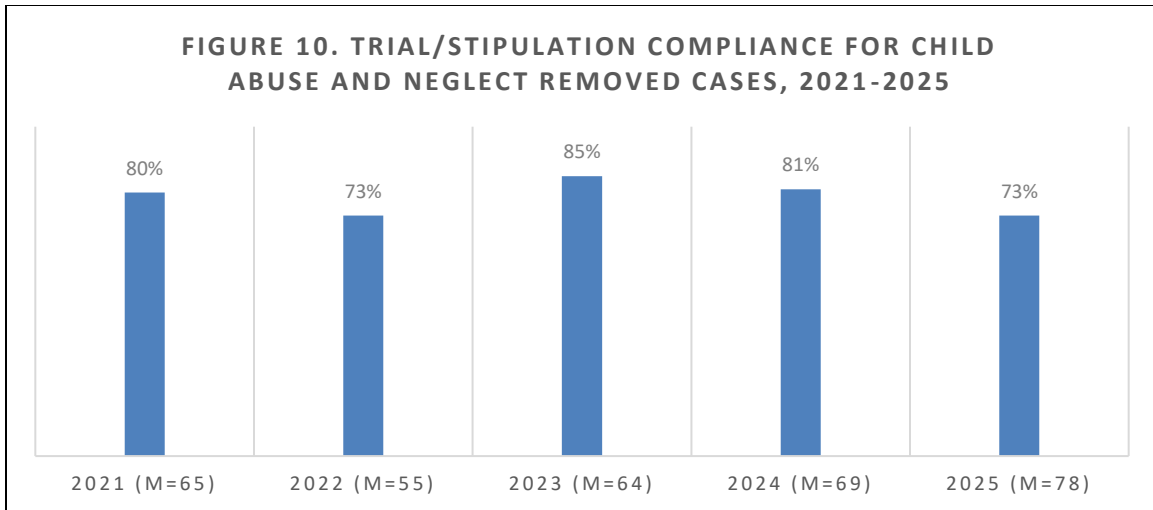
Compliance with D.C. ASFA Requirements

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.¹³ 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.

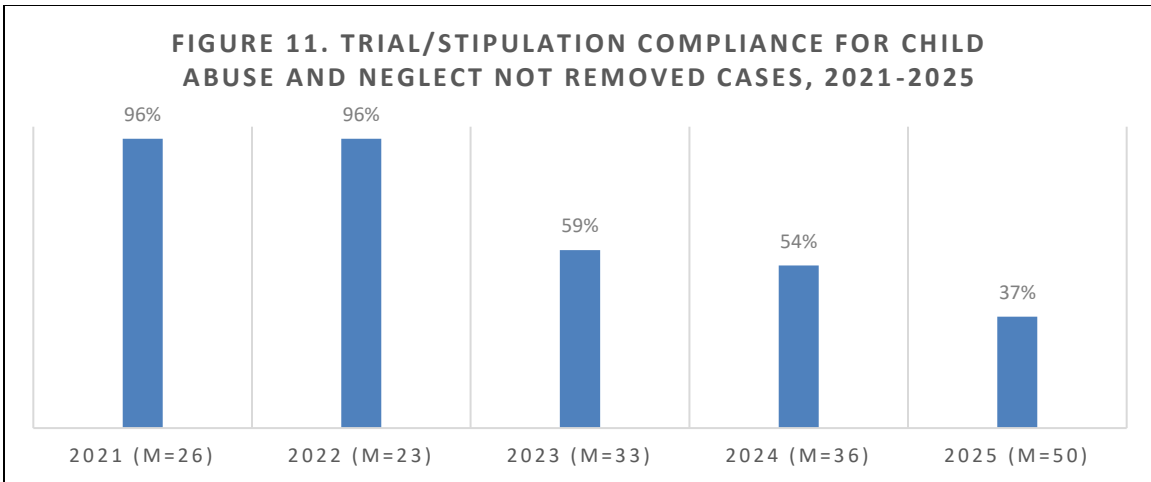
Trial/Stipulation of Child Abuse and Neglect Cases

In 2025, 69% of children referred to the court were removed from their home (Figure 8). Seventy-three percent (73%) of cases filed either had a factfinding hearing or closed within the 105-day ASFA timeline for trials in removal cases (Figure 10). The compliance rate may increase as pending cases filed later in 2025 have trial and stipulation hearings in 2026. The median time for a case to reach trial or stipulation was 78 days.

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

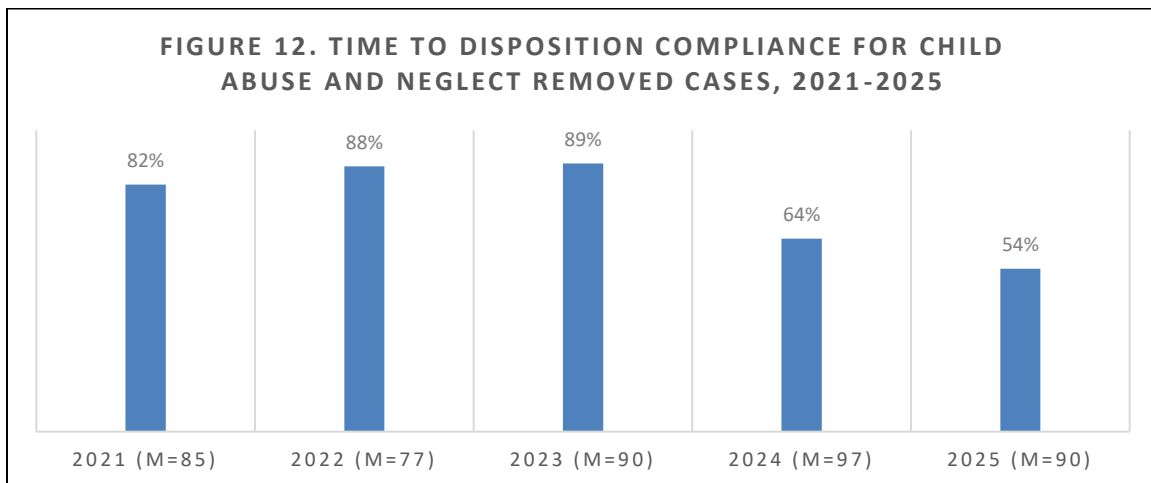


Thirty-one percent (31%) of children referred to the court were not removed from their home (Figure 8). For children not removed from home, compliance with either the timeline to trial or stipulation or closure (45 days) was 37% in 2025 (Figure 11). The median time for a case to reach trial or stipulation was 50 days. Compliance rates are also impacted by persistent judicial vacancies which limit the calendar time available to schedule hearings. A number of cases involved sibling groups with several parents and stepparents as parties, thereby increasing the complexity of the trial or stipulation events. In 2025, there were 34 sibling groups – three groups with six siblings, two groups with five siblings, four groups with four siblings, five groups with three siblings and 20 groups with two siblings. The Family Court will continue to monitor and track compliance in this area throughout 2026.



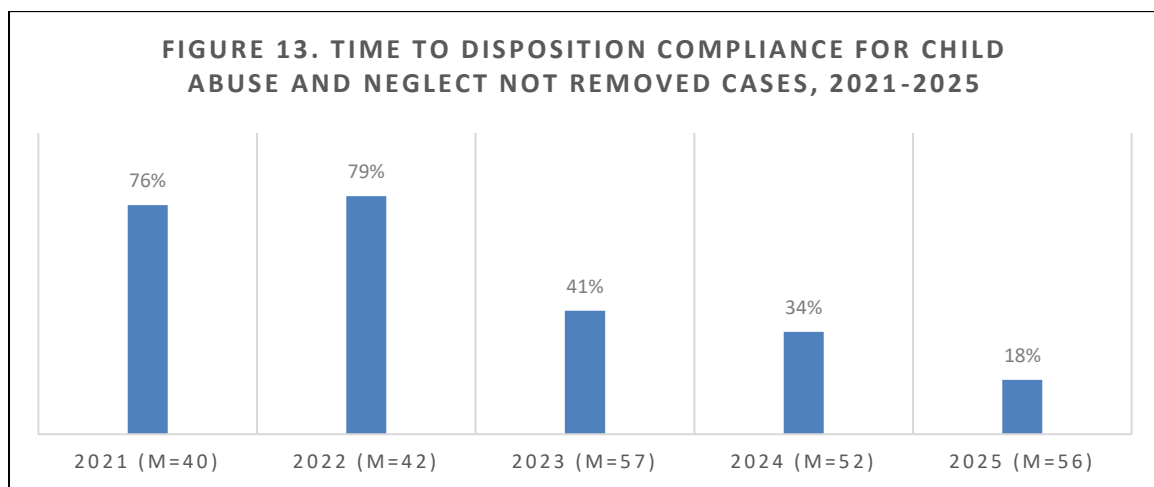
Disposition Hearings in Child Abuse and Neglect Cases

In 2025, among cases where the child was removed, 54% held a disposition hearing within the 105-day timeline (Figure 12). This number may increase as pending cases filed later in 2025 have disposition hearings in 2026. In 2025, the median time to disposition was 90 days. Two factors adversely impacting time to disposition are scheduling issues involving key witnesses and outstanding issues requiring resolution at trial. Additionally, compliance rates are impacted by continuing judicial vacancies which limit the calendar time available to schedule hearings.



In 2025, among cases where the child was not removed, 18% held a disposition

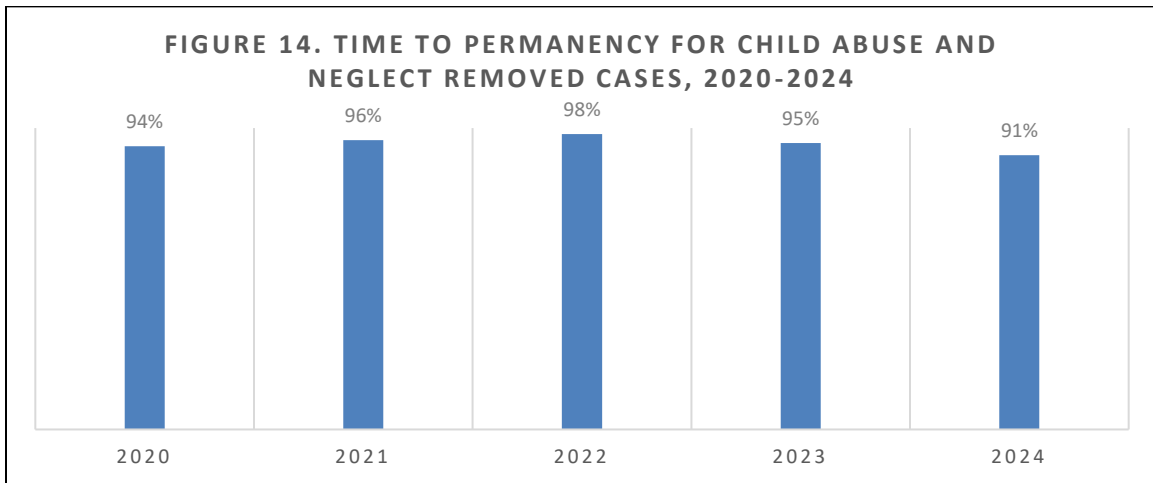
hearing within the 45-day timeline (Figure 14). This number may increase as pending cases filed later in 2025 have disposition hearings in 2026. The median time to reach disposition was 56 days. Due to the small number of abuse and neglect cases with children not removed from the home, compliance rates 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. The Family Court will continue to monitor and track compliance in this area throughout 2026.



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 the past five years, at least 91% of removed cases had a permanency hearing or closed within the required timeline. Some cases filed in 2025 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*

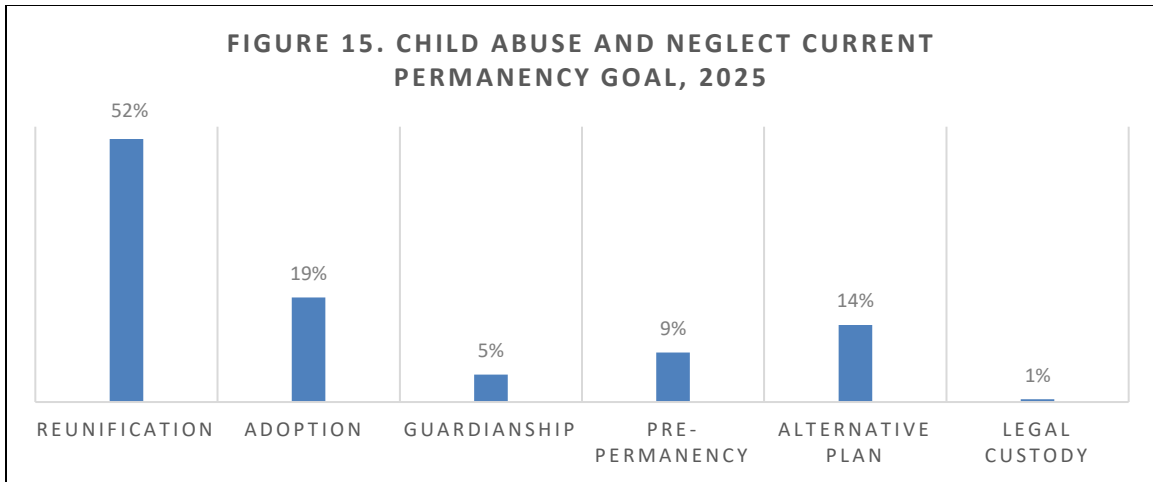
Child Abuse and Neglect Cases, NCJFCJ recommends that permanency hearings be set for 60 minutes.¹⁴ Family Court judges continue to report that the length of their permanency hearings meets or exceeds this standard.

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 15 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.

¹⁴ 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 (52%), 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. Additionally, the lack of adoption resources and issues related to the adoption subsidy were frequently cited barriers. For the 5% 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 best interest of the youth to set a goal of APPLA (14%). 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),¹⁵ only youth aged 16 and older are eligible for an APPLA goal.

A partnership between Court Appointed Special Advocates of D.C. (CASA) and the Family Court of the D.C. Superior Court, the Preparing Youth for Adulthood (PYA) program provides targeted advocacy and specialized services to court-involved youth aged 14 and older who are in foster care with a permanency goal of Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (APPLA). The program, which supports CASA's regular advocacy with PYA-trained volunteers who offer targeted transition planning, life skills development, resource navigation, and mentorship, is intended to prepare kids who are at risk of aging out of care. In order to empower kids to improve their self-advocacy, professional communication, leadership, and career planning, services center on education, employment, housing, health, and establishing enduring relationships. Within 30 to 60 days of being assigned, CASA volunteers get specialized training. They then collaborate with CFSA and other organizations to link adolescents to workforce programs, post-secondary education, and extended foster care benefits. The PYA program, which is funded by the Court Improvement Program (CIP), focuses on quantifiable results such as enhancing youth performance and development, and participant demographics and information. In addition, PYA provides bi-annual qualitative information in the form of narrative impact stories from participants. PYA

¹⁵ Pub. L. 113-183, 128 Stat. 1919 (2014).

updated its training module for volunteers assigned to this special population that includes individual transition planning, life skills development, resource navigation and advocacy, and youth voice and engagement. This training module was reviewed by CFSA, the CIP, and OAG.

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.

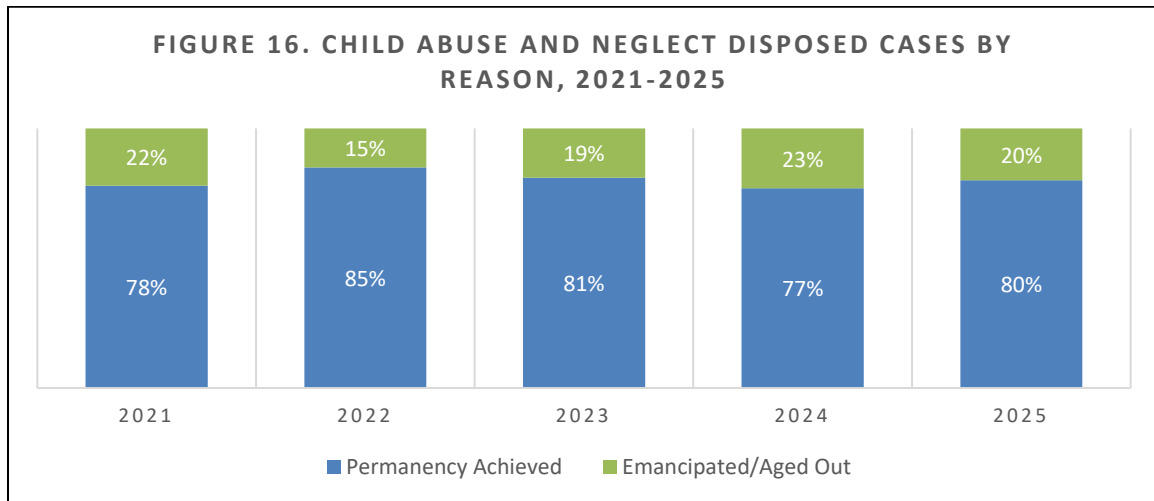
FTC, utilizing a grant from the Office of Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), hosted over 100 client-centered workshops and trainings on topics including Trauma, Domestic Violence, Parenting, Opioids, and Fentanyl. In addition to providing training to program participants, FTC facilitated staff trainings on 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 multiple open houses to familiarize the community with the program.

This year, FTC made an indelible impact on the lives of children and families in the District of Columbia impacted by substance use disorders, resulting in more than 15 families receiving resources and referrals to wrap around services. This evidence-based

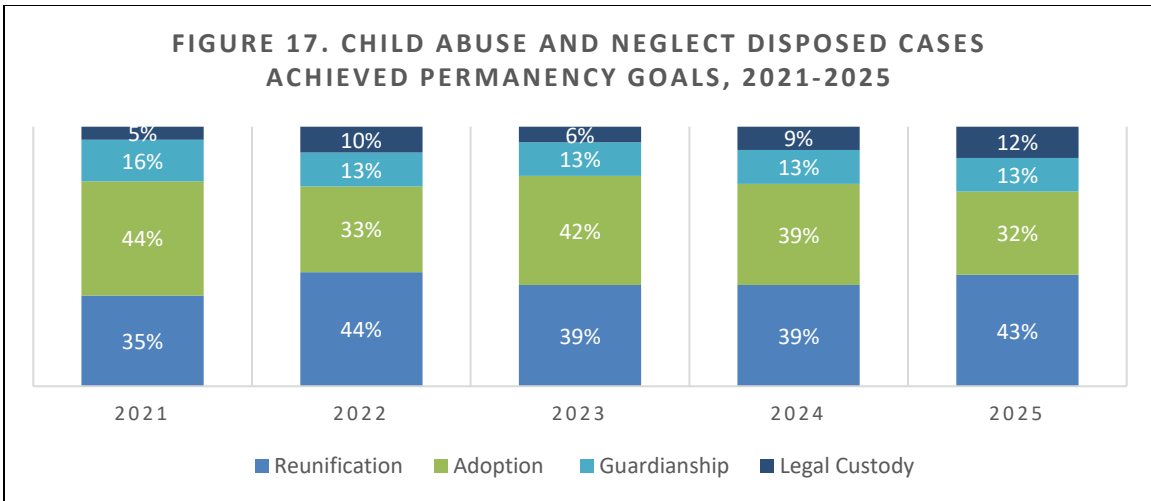
program continues to be an effective and viable treatment component for court-involved families.

Permanency Outcomes for Children

This section focuses on permanency outcomes for children following a disposition hearing. In 2025, Family Court judicial officers closed 188 post-disposition abuse and neglect cases. Eighty percent (80%) were closed due to an achieved permanency outcome (Figure 16). Twenty percent (20%) of the cases were closed without reaching permanency, either because the child aged out of the system or was emancipated.



In 2025, 43% of cases with permanency outcomes closed to reunification (Figure 17). Thirty-two percent (32%) of cases closed to adoption, 13% closed to guardianship, and 12% closed to legal custody.



Twenty percent (20%) 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 participate 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*¹⁶ 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.¹⁷

¹⁶ 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>.

¹⁷ D.C. Code § 16-2304 (2016); Superior Court Neglect Rule 42.

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.

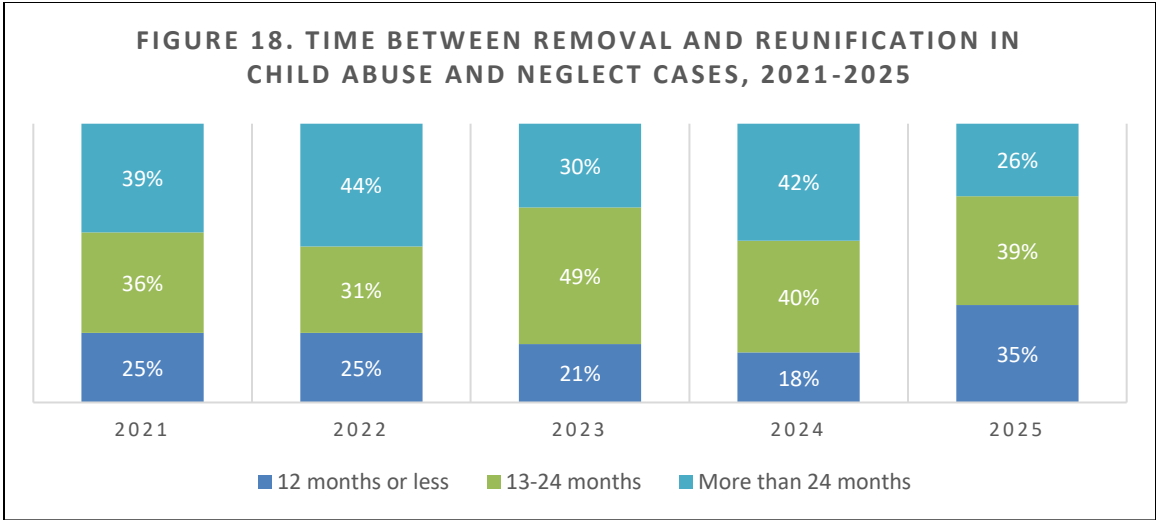
Measure 1a: Percentage of children who reach legal permanency (by reunification, adoption, guardianship, legal custody, or another planned permanent living arrangement) within 6, 12, 18, and 24 months from removal.

TABLE 2. MEDIAN TIME (IN MONTHS) FROM REMOVAL TO ACHIEVED PERMANENCY OUTCOME IN CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT CASES, 2021-2025

Year	Reunification	Adoption	Guardianship	Legal Custody
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
2025	13.3	33.0	39.9	13.5

Table 2 reflects median time (in months) from removal to case closure. In 2025, the median time required to achieve permanency from time of removal decreased in reunification and legal custody while increasing in adoption and guardianship.

In 2025, 35% of children were reunified with their parents within 12 months of removal, the highest percentage in the past five years (Figure 18). Thirty-nine percent (39%) of children reunified with their parents within 24 months and 26% of children reunified beyond 24 months from removal.

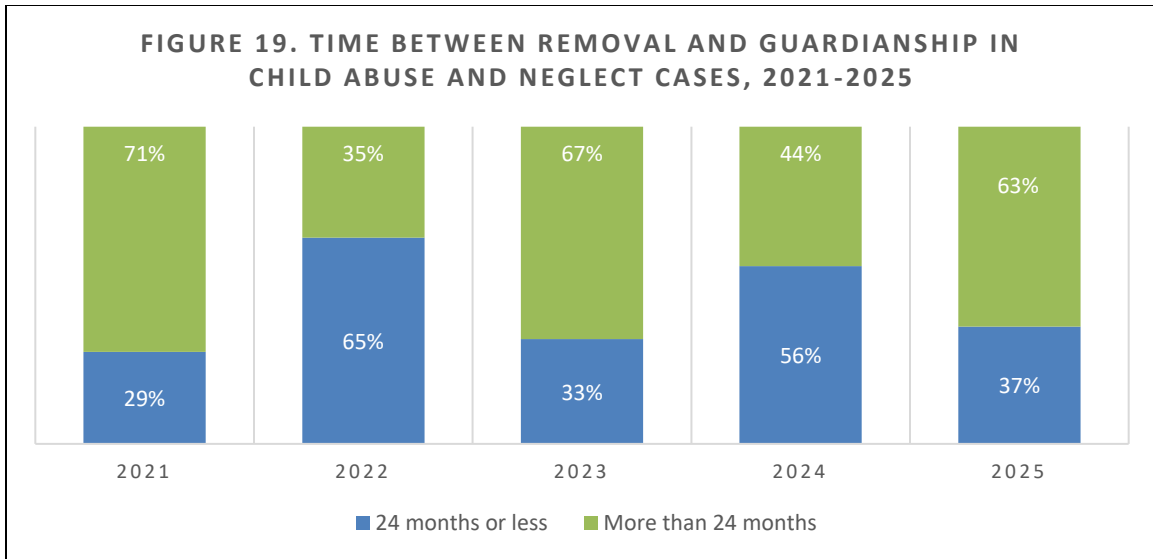


In 2025, 20% of children whose cases closed to adoption spent two years or less in care waiting for adoption finalization. The percentage of children who spent more than 24 months in care waiting for the adoption finalization was 80% (Table 3).

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

Year	24 months or less	More than 24 months
2021	29%	71%
2022	33%	67%
2023	26%	74%
2024	29%	71%
2025	20%	80%

Thirty-seven percent (37%) of children spent 24 months or less in care before reaching permanency with a permanent guardian (Figure 19). At the same time, 63% 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 20% (37) of the 188 cases that closed in 2025, the children did not achieve permanency because they aged out of the system or emancipated (Figure 16).

Reentry to Foster Care¹⁸

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 2021, one percent (1%) of children with cases that closed to reunification returned to foster care within 12 months; an additional one percent (1%) 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 366 children in foster care whose adoption was finalized since 2021, no children reentered foster care.

¹⁸ 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.

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 2021, fourteen percent (14%) of children with cases that closed to guardianship returned to foster care within 12 months; an additional five percent (5%) returned to foster care within 24 months. Six percent (6%) of the children returned to foster care were part of sibling groups. In many instances, guardianship placements were disrupted 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.¹⁹

Performance Measure 2: Timeliness

Goal: To enhance expedition to permanency by minimizing the time from the filing 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.²⁰ To comply with this

¹⁹ Administrative Order 16-02 enacts guardianship procedures which formalize the process and requirements for naming a successor guardian.

²⁰ See 42 USC § 675(5)(E) and (F); D.C. Code § 16-2354(b).

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.²¹

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 2025, less than 10 TPR motions were filed.²² In 2025, the median time from filing of the original petition to filing of a TPR motion was 454 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.

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

Less than ten TPR motions were disposed in 2025.²³ In 2025, the median time from filing to disposition of a TPR motion was 842 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

²¹ 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 for the District of Columbia to ensure timely action, rather than a deadline set by statute.

²² D.C. Code § 16-2333.03(a)(2) requires any data points less than 10 observations be suppressed.

²³ *Id.*

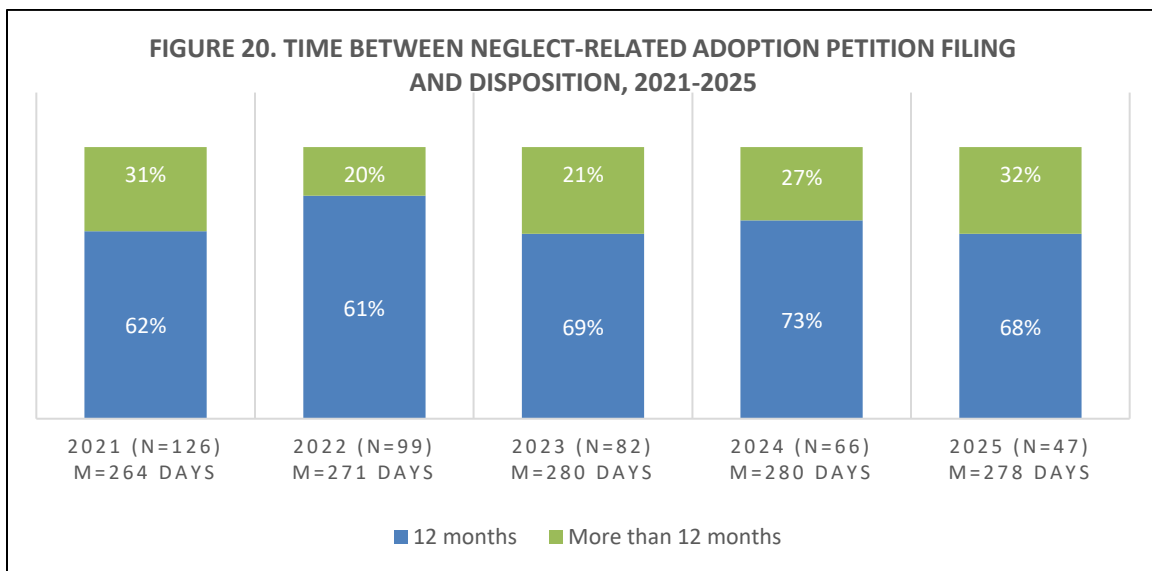
adoption statute.²⁴

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 2025.

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

Figure 20 illustrates the time to disposition (by disposition year) for adoption petitions filed both in and prior to 2025. Sixty-eight percent (68%, representing 32 cases) of the disposed adoption petitions (47) in 2025 were finalized within one year. The median time between the filing and finalization of the adoption petition was 278 days in 2025.



²⁴ 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 2025, 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) is a federally-funded initiative aimed at improving the handling of child abuse and neglect cases in state courts. The CIP is monitored by the Children’s Bureau, a federal agency organized under the Department of Health and Human Services’ Administration for Children and Family. The CIP has two purposes: 1) to promote continuous quality improvement of court processes and legal representation in child welfare proceedings through ongoing data analysis, assessments, and training, and 2) to enhance and expand collaboration between the judicial branch of the local governments and the child welfare agencies, specifically between the Court and

Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA). The CIP grant requires the CIP to maintain projects in three main areas: 1) quality legal representation, 2) timeliness to permanency, and 3) hearing quality.

The CIP is overseen by the CIP Advisory Committee. The 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, CFSA, the Office of the Attorney General for the District of Columbia (OAG), foster parents, former foster youth, the Department of Behavioral Health, and other stakeholder organizations. In June 2025, the Court submitted its annual CIP grant request for 2026, which was subsequently approved.

The Agency-Court Data Sharing workgroup conducts in-depth case reviews to identify systemic barriers to permanency and quality court hearings. This workgroup developed the Quality Court Hearings project (QCH). This project is a collaboration between the Court, CFSA, OAG, Children's Law Center (CLC), and other external stakeholders. As a part of this project, 100 cases will be reviewed to measure the level of engagement of parents and children by the judge at court hearings. The premise is if parents and children have a voice and feel free to speak and ask questions, they will better understand the proceedings, increasing their interest in attending hearings and engagement in the reunification process. Given their critical nature, the project will commence with analyzing initial hearings, reviewing two separate aspects: written court orders and audio recordings. Separate tools were developed for both reviews based on stakeholder feedback and are being finalized. Court staff, OAG and CLC will serve as hearing reviewers. The

CIP will aggregate and analyze the data gathered from the collection tools and distribute the results to stakeholders for review. Stakeholders will use the results to develop and implement solutions to improve the quality of court hearings.

The CIP is also developing data dashboards to assist the Court and CFSA in identifying barriers to permanency in child abuse and neglect cases. These dashboards will permit real-time review of cases not meeting required benchmarks. The dashboards will provide the workgroup with the necessary information to implement the second phase of its timeliness project, which identifies areas of delay and brainstorm actions and projects aimed at reducing those delays. The dashboard's data points will be developed based on input from CFSA, OAG, judges and attorneys representing parents and children. While the dashboards will only be accessible to the Court, this collaboration ensures various perspectives are heard.

The CIP Superior Court Family Preservation Program (FPP) seeks to better address the needs of parents in child abuse and neglect cases while allowing their attorneys to focus on legal issues. To meet this end, FPP provides a social worker to parents' attorneys whose role is to work with parents on meeting the goals identified in CFSA's case plan. The social worker is part of the legal defense team, adhering to the Rules of Professional Conduct regarding attorney-client privilege and confidentiality. The social worker assists attorneys but does not testify or attend court hearings. The social worker's tasks are informed by the attorney to effectively support the parent in achieving his or her reunification plan. The Family Preservation Program social worker is managed by the FPP Supervisory Social Worker.

The CIP FPP pilot program currently has six active FPP cases and four cases are in the intake stage. In 2025, the processes for intake and assignment of social workers were modified and memorialized, and program data collection tools were updated to reflect changes. In the next year, CIP will continue to gather feedback about the program via focus groups with attorneys, social workers, and parents. Qualitative information gathered from these discussions, along with quantitative data gathered from program forms, will assist the CIP in determining the effectiveness of the program, specifically whether additional support helped the attorney focus on legal strategies and assisted the parent in completing tasks in their case plan.

The CIP created a project to review and update the form hearing orders used in neglect matters. The orders were reviewed to ensure they continue to meet statutory requirements, and any updates were informed by the annual review of ASFA compliance, Children's Bureau's review of the neglect system in the District, and feedback from stakeholders. A workgroup consisting of a neglect judge, a judicial law clerk, attorneys from the Court, OAG, panel attorneys, and the Children's Law Center met periodically to review and revise the form hearing orders. This process afforded a structured conversation about how the various organizations collect and analyze data from court orders to support improvements in safety and permanency.

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 Court's Multi-Door Division to discuss how to revamp the Permanency Mediation Program, with ongoing discussions about new guidelines continuing into 2026.

CIP used grant funds to cover expenses for a CCAN panel attorney, a neglect judge and a CIP staff member to attend the 48th National Child Welfare Law Conference hosted by the Association of Counsel for Children. The theme of the conference was *Catalysts for Change: Innovating Advocacy through Power Sharing and Transformational Leadership*. The theme underscores the need to rethink traditional advocacy models, actively share power, and harness the creativity and resourcefulness of all involved in child welfare systems to drive lasting, meaningful practice and policy reform. Funds were used for a CIP staff member to attend the Court Technology Conference sponsored by the National Center for State Courts. The conference was designed to educate court professionals on the latest breakthroughs and best practices in court technology. A CCAN attorney who represents parents, children and caregivers was sponsored to attend the 50th Annual Families Rising Conference. This conference focused on the impact of trauma and loss, core issues in adoption, kinship care and birth family connections, supporting children and families in adoption and foster care and many other relevant topics. The CIP team, HOPE Court judge, and attorneys from OAG, CLC, and CCAN attended the 2025 American Youth Policy Forum sponsored by the Children's Defense Fund. The forum explored the impact of policy and politics on children, youth, and families.

In addition, the CIP hosted its first Neglect Symposium, *Rethinking Neglect: Communication, Collaboration, and Poverty Bias in the Child Welfare System*. The innovative training addressed best practices for communicating effectively, strategies for improving collaboration, and tools for identifying and addressing poverty. A number of judges and court personnel were in attendance, including those currently or previously assigned to the neglect calendar. Attorneys from OAG, CLC, and CCAN along with social workers from the D.C. CFSA and The National Center for Children and Families also attended to learn and share their knowledge.

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 provides CCAN attorneys with access to interpretation services on the phone within minutes.

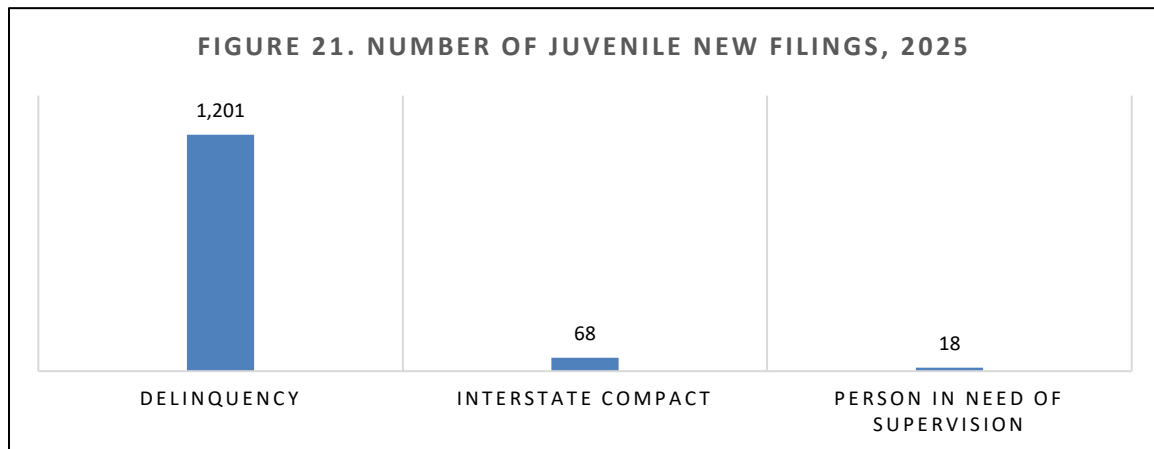
Courtwide Forms Workgroup

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 2025, the group created and modified Family Court forms related to sealing of juvenile cases, expiration of custody orders, and detention and hospitalization orders in mental health cases.

Juvenile Cases

In 2025, there were 1,287 new juvenile filings and reopens in the Family Court. Ninety-three percent (93%, representing 1,201 cases) of the filings were based on a

delinquency petition, 5% (68) pursuant to an Interstate Compact Agreement (ISC),²⁵ and 2% (18) on a person in need of supervision (PINS) allegation.



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.²⁶

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

²⁵ 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.

²⁶ 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.

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 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.

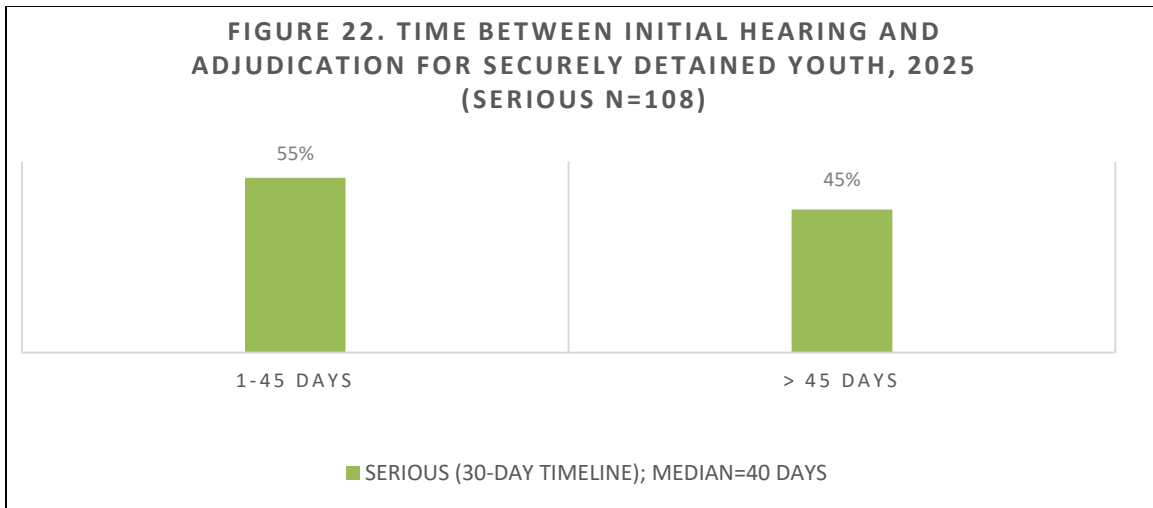
Data on time to adjudication is based on the detention status of the respondent at the time of the initial hearing. In contrast, data on time to disposition is calculated based on the detention status of the respondent at the time of the disposition hearing. In addition, court performance on time to 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 2025, 172 (14%) juveniles were detained in secure facilities prior to adjudication. Twenty (12%) of the 172 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*. Due to cell suppression policy, the number of most serious adjudication cases and affiliated compliance rate is not reported.²⁷ The median time from initial hearing to adjudication was 70 days. Due to the small number of most serious cases, compliance rates are increasingly impacted by the number cases out of compliance.

²⁷ See *supra* note 24.

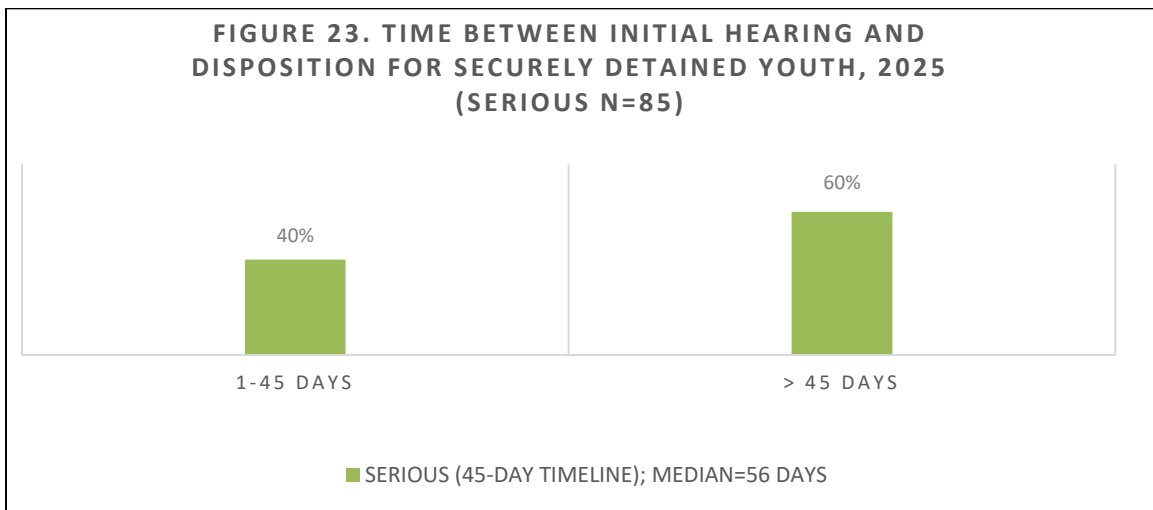
In 2025, there were 152 (88%) securely detained juveniles charged with serious offenses (other than the most serious cases) requiring case adjudication within 30 days. These cases are subsequently referred to as *serious*. In 2025, 108 juveniles had an adjudication hearing in their case while the remaining 44 cases were pending adjudication or closed prior to adjudication. Thirty-four percent (34%, representing 37 cases) of the 108 serious securely detained adjudicated juveniles had timely hearings held within the 30-day timeframe with an additional 21% (23) having hearings in the 31- to 45-day timeframe. The median time from initial hearing to adjudication was 40 days (Figure 22). The compliance rate may increase as juveniles with pending cases, filed later in 2025, are adjudicated in 2026.



Several factors contributed to the inability to adjudicate all cases of securely detained juveniles 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. Due to cell suppression policy, the number of most serious detained cases (60-day timeframe) and the affiliated compliance rate is not reported.²⁸ The median time from initial hearing to disposition was 119 days.

In 2025, eighty-five (79%) of the 108 adjudicated serious cases in which juveniles were securely detained reached disposition while the remaining 23 cases were pending disposition. Thirty-four (40%) of the 85 adjudicated cases were disposed within the 45-day timeframe (Figure 23), The median time from initial hearing to disposition hearing was 56 days.

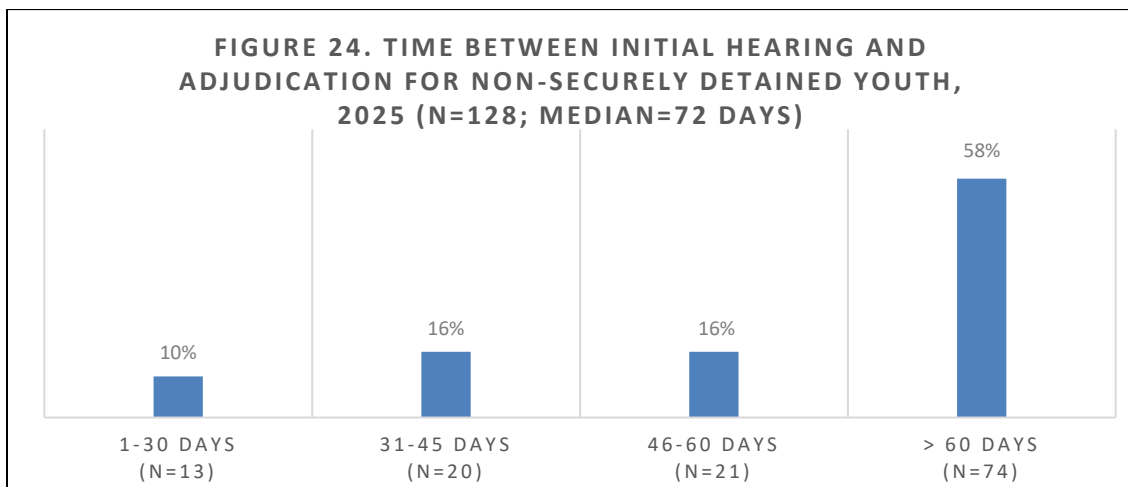


A major factor contributing to delays in disposition was the need to identify and obtain services or programs for the juveniles prior to disposition. Other factors included delays related to the ability of DYRS to obtain placement, delays in receipt of required psychological and/or psychiatric reports,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

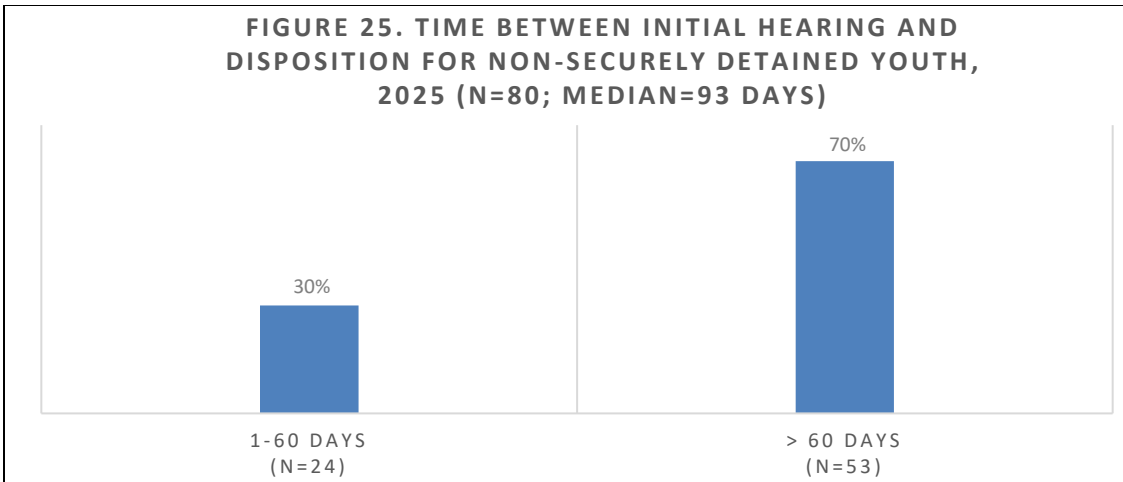
²⁸ *Id.*

Non-Securely Detained Juveniles

In 2025, 213 (18%) juveniles were detained in non-secure facilities or shelter houses prior to adjudication. Sixty percent (60%, representing 128 cases) of the 213 non-securely detained juveniles cases reached adjudication while the remaining 85 cases were pending adjudication or closed prior to adjudication. Twenty-six percent (36%, representing 33 cases) of 128 non-securely detained adjudicated juveniles had timely hearings held within the 45-day timeframe (Figure 24). The median time from initial hearing to adjudication was 72 days.

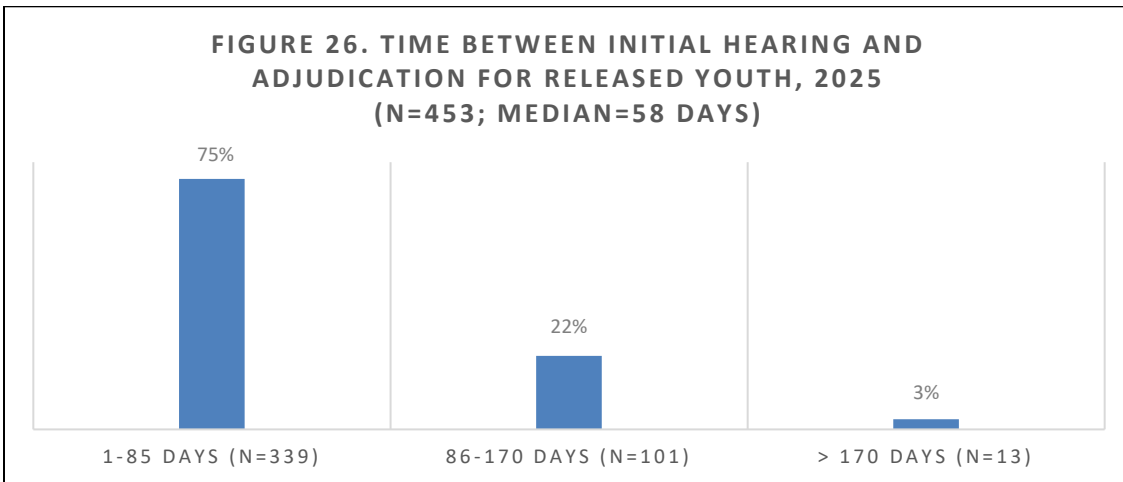


In 2025, 80 (63%) of the 128 adjudicated non-secure detention cases reached disposition while the remaining 48 cases were pending disposition. Twenty-four (30%) cases were compliant with the 60-day timeframe (Figure 25). The median time to disposition was 93 days.



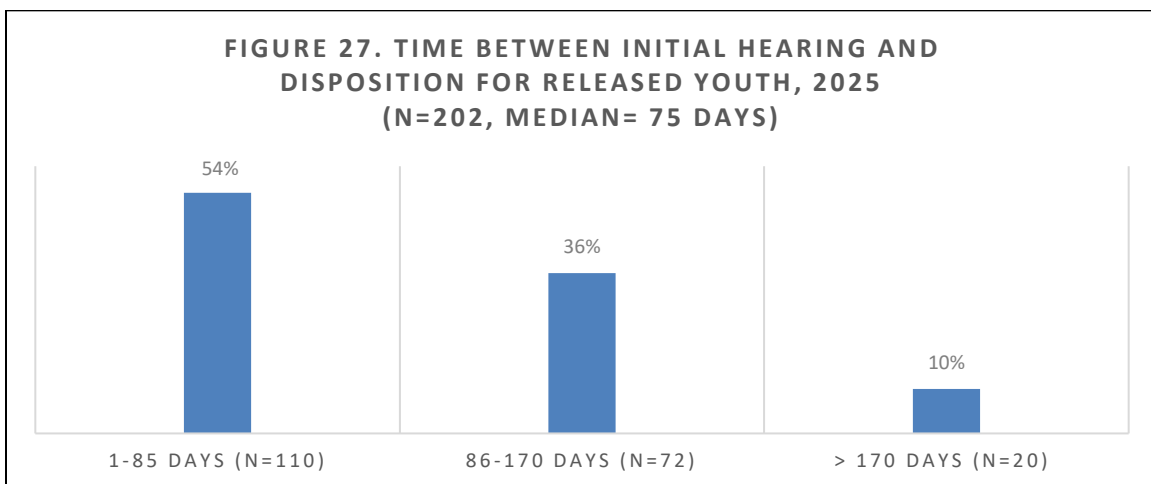
Released Juveniles

In 2025, 816 juveniles (68%) were released prior to adjudication. Fifty-six percent (56%, representing 453 cases) of cases, in which youth were released, reached adjudication while the remaining 363 cases were pending adjudication or closed prior to adjudication. In 2025, 75% (339) of released adjudicated juveniles had timely hearings. Of the 453 cases that had an adjudication hearing, 75% (339) were adjudicated within 85 days, 22% (101) in 86 to 170 days, and 3% (13) in greater than 170 days (Figure 26). In adjudicated cases, the median time from initial hearing to adjudication was 58 days.



In 2025, 202 (45%) of the 453 adjudicated juveniles were released at the time of

their disposition hearing while the remaining 251 cases were pending disposition. Fifty-four percent (110) of 202 adjudicated released cases were disposed within 85 days, 36% (72) in 86 to 170 days, and 10% (20) in greater than 170 days (Figure 27). The median time to disposition was 75 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 juveniles 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)

The Family Court’s Social Services Division (CSSD) is committed to supporting court-involved youth and families by assessing risks, evaluating individual needs, and providing recommendations and reports to Family Court judges. CSSD supervises youth involved in delinquent acts and status offenses, such as truancy or running away. Through accountability measures, evidence-based interventions, and programs that build positive skills and behaviors, CSSD works to improve youth outcomes, reduce future court

involvement, and enhance public safety. Additionally, CSSD supervises newly arrested committed youth who are under the jurisdiction of the Department of Youth Rehabilitative Services (DYRS) prior to disposition. In alignment with the Family Court’s “One Family, One Judge” policy, CSSD strives to maintain continuity of supervision and aims to keep the same probation officer assigned to the youth throughout the case, where practicable.

CSSD Organization

In 2025, a total of 1,582 youths were under CSSD supervision. As the juvenile probation agency for the nation’s capital, CSSD is responsible for all youth involved in the District of Columbia’s juvenile justice system who are not committed to the District of Columbia’s Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services (DYRS). CSSD provides pre-trial services, diversion and supervision, as well as post-adjudicated probation. The Division’s responsibilities primarily include: 1) screening and assessing each newly referred youth’s social service needs and risk to public safety following arrest for delinquency or referral as a status offender (e.g., truant or habitual runaways); 2) making initial detention and release decisions when court is not in session; 3) assessing each youth’s eligibility for formal specialized diversion programs; 4) conducting youth and family psychological assessments; 5) making petition and detention recommendations to the Office of the Attorney General for the District of Columbia (OAG); 6) advising and making recommendations to the Court throughout all phases of the adjudication process; 7) conducting home, school, and community assessments for comprehensive pre-trial and post-disposition probation services/supervision plans and alternatives to detention; 8) facilitating Family Group Conferences; 9) facilitating youth commitments to DYRS; and 10) coordinating services and supervision for all court-involved youth. The Division is

comprised of the Director's Office (which includes two operational units), the Child Guidance Clinic, and three branches—each containing multiple specialized units. Each branch will be discussed further below.

Director's Office

The Director's Office provides leadership, oversight, and strategic guidance for all divisional goals, programs, and activities within the Court Social Services Division (CSSD), in alignment with the District of Columbia Code and Annotated Rules. This office ensures operational integrity and service delivery across the Division. Within the Director's Office, there are two units:

- The Contract Monitoring, Data and Financial Analysis (COMDAF) unit is responsible for coordinating court-ordered referrals, overseeing the procurement and reimbursement processes for contractual service providers, and compiling and analyzing CSSD's operational data. COMDAF develops statements of work, organizes source selection evaluation boards, and ensures that solicitations are conducted efficiently to meet the service needs of youths and families.
- The Juvenile Information Control Center (JICC) unit supports day intake operations at the Moultrie Courthouse public counter. JICC is also responsible for managing incoming and outgoing mail at CSSD's five satellite offices, the closed file business process, overseeing the division's fleet vehicles and maintenance, and providing frontline customer service support to staff and the public.

COMDAF established contracts for mentoring and tutoring services in Balanced and Restorative Justice (BARJ) Drop-In Centers for 814 youth. An additional 308 youth

referrals to external community-based services were processed. The referrals link CSSD youth to essential services, including mentoring, life skills, and tutoring sessions. The targeted and comprehensive tutoring and mentoring services are aimed at improving youth's executive functioning skills, academic skills, and ability to engage in pro-social activities.

In 2025, 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 focused on literacy, mathematics, critical thinking, typing, and life skills. Although 25 youth were identified as eligible and appropriate for participation, only eight youth consistently engaged in the eight-week program. At the conclusion of the program, probation officers received a comprehensive summary of each participating youth's academic progress, skill development, and areas of continued need, along with individualized recommendations to support future educational success. These recommendations are intended to be shared with the youth's school for the upcoming academic year to promote continuity of support and informed educational planning. In addition to BARJ programming, CSSD fostered a partnership with the D.C. Central Kitchen to provide structured community service opportunities for court-involved youth, reinforcing pro-social skill development, accountability, and workforce readiness.

Juvenile Intake and Delinquency Prevention Branch

The Intake Services and Delinquency Prevention Branch is comprised of three teams: two teams provide intake services during the day, evening, and overnight hours,

while the third team is responsible for managing Global Positioning System (GPS) electronic monitoring.

- Intake Units I and II are responsible for screening newly referred youth to assess risk to public safety and determine appropriate case processing. This includes conducting social assessments for law enforcement-referred youth and administering standardized assessments such as the Conners assessment (to identify potential behavioral health concerns) and the Sex Trafficking Assessment Review (STAR) to screen for indicators of commercial sexual exploitation. Intake staff also evaluate truancy referrals and make recommendations to the Office of the Attorney General for the District of Columbia based on the youth's needs and legal circumstances. As part of their duties, intake probation officers write court reports and deliver oral presentations to judicial officers in accordance with the D.C. Code to recommend conditions of release, identify appropriate services or supervision levels, and ensure decisions are informed by structured risk assessments and related social factors.
- The Delinquency Prevention Unit (DPU) is responsible for administering and supervising the Court's electronic monitoring program, which includes GPS tracking for youth placed under court-ordered supervision in the community. DPU staff are trained to install and actively monitor the devices, review system-generated alerts, and utilize advanced features—such as real-time voice commands—to communicate directly with the youth when needed. The unit also contacts parents or guardians to address technical concerns, including low or depleted battery levels, to ensure continuous and reliable tracking. By maintaining

close coordination with probation officers, judicial officers, and law enforcement, DPU plays a vital role in reinforcing accountability, promoting public safety, and ensuring youth remain in compliance with court-imposed conditions.

After a youth is arrested, CSSD must conduct a screening prior to the youth's initial hearing. This screening informs recommendations regarding whether the youth should be detained or released pending court proceedings. In 2025, the Intake Branch screened 1,928 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 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, 544 (28%) were female, and 1,384 (72%) were male. The DPU also installed 393 GPS electronic monitoring units in accordance with court orders.

Child Guidance Clinic

The Child Guidance Clinic (CGC) – provides court-ordered mental health evaluations and services to youth under CSSD supervision, including psychological and forensic evaluations, therapy, and competency attainment training. CGC staff conduct psychoeducational, psychological, and specialized assessments such as Competency to Stand Trial, Psychosexual Evaluations, Violence Risk Assessments, Neuropsychological and Adaptive Functioning Assessments, Juvenile Waiver Evaluations, and other mental health or exploitation vulnerability screenings. . Evaluations are typically conducted in-

person and completed in one session, with reports submitted to the Court, defense counsel, and the prosecutor within 14 days after the evaluation is conducted.

CGC also provides court-ordered Competency Attainment Training (CAT) for youth found not competent to stand trial, delivered via individual or group sessions. CGC also facilitates Sex Abuse Violates Everyone (SAVE), a 12- to 16-week, evidence-informed treatment group for youth adjudicated for sex-related offenses. SAVE is conducted twice annually and ordered following a psychosexual evaluation. A treatment summary is submitted at program completion. CGC also offers a voluntary parent group alongside SAVE to support family involvement and community safety. CGC provides time-limited, individual counseling and oversees Structured Psychotherapy for Adolescents Responding to Chronic Stress (SPARCS), an evidenced-based group therapy, for youth either court-ordered or referred by their probation officer to participate.

In 2025, CGC received 481 referrals for clinical forensic evaluations. Of the 481 referrals received, 307 were completed in 2025; 86 of the pending referrals received in 2024 were also completed, resulting in a total of 393 evaluations completed in 2025. Twenty-five referrals were not completed due to court case closures or vacated orders, and 149 referrals were carried over to 2026.

CGC continued its nationally recognized, pre-doctoral psychology internship program, which was recertified by the American Psychological Association (APA) in 2025. Three new interns joined CGC that year, enabling the clinic to expand mental health support services. These interns were selected from a pool of approximately 103 applicants, highlighting the sustained and growing interest in the CGC Doctoral Internship Program.

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

The Pre-/Post-Probation Supervision Branch - Region I provides comprehensive case management and community supervision throughout a youth's involvement with the Court Social Services Division. Region I consists of the following site-based units: 1) Southeast Satellite Office (SESO), housed in the Southeast BARJ Drop-In Center and serving youth residing in the southeast quadrant; 2) Southwest Satellite Office (SWSO), housed in the Southwest BARJ Drop-In Center and serving youth in the southwest and lower northwest quadrants; 3) Leaders of Today in Solidarity (LOTS) Office, the District's first gender-responsive probation program which provides trauma-informed supervision and support specifically for female youth.

The Pre-/Post-Probation Supervision Branch - Region II provides comprehensive case management and community supervision throughout a youth's involvement with the Court Social Services Division. Region II serves youth with a range of supervision needs and includes targeted programming for youth with significant mental health challenges, status offenses, and those identified as at risk for or victims of exploitation. Region II consists of the following site-based units: 1) Northeast Satellite Office (NESO), serving male youth residing in the northeast quadrant of the District; 2) Northwest Satellite Office (NWSO), serving youth in the northwest quadrant of the District. Region II also includes the Status Offense and Specialty Courts Office, which handles 1) supervision and service coordination for youth referred for habitual truancy and runaway behavior—cases designated as Persons in Need of Supervision (PINS); 2) the Juvenile Behavioral Diversion Program (JBDP), which serves youth with primary mental health diagnoses; 3) HOPE Court (Here Opportunities Prepare you for Excellence), a specialty court which

supports youth who have been identified as being at-risk or confirmed victims of sexual exploitation.

In addition to these site-based offices, Regions I and II include two decentralized units that maintain representation across all BARJ Drop-In Centers. The Ultimate Transitions Ultimate Responsibilities Now (UTURN) Intensive Supervision Program provides high-intensity supervision and serves as an alternative to secure commitment for high-risk youth. The Interstate Compact Unit is responsible for the supervision and coordination of youth returning from or placed in other jurisdictions under the Interstate Compact for Juveniles.

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 sexual 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 provides the opportunity to address risk factors adversely impacting the District's youth.

JBDP is 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 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). A youth's program participation 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 2025, 158 cases were certified to JBDP, with 52 (33%) cases resulting in program completion.²⁹

HOPE Court is a strength-based, youth-driven court where youth play an active role in selecting their 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.). Successful completion of HOPE Court aims to end the youth's involvement in the juvenile justice system and start them on a successful path to adulthood. In 2025, 85 cases were certified to HOPE Court, with 24 (28%) cases resulting in program completion.

Programs and Services for Court Involved Youth

CSSD continues to collaborate with internal and external juvenile justice stakeholders—including the Office of the Attorney General for the District of Columbia (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 that system-involved youth have timely

²⁹ Data are reported by case as an individual youth may have multiple cases in different postures.

access to needed services. In 2025, CSSD strengthened these efforts through targeted operational improvements. These included the launch of a specialized unit dedicated to closely monitoring and recovering absconded youth, as well as the implementation of an electronic sign-in system to track wait times and improve workflow efficiency at the Clerk's Office and Night Intake Services Branch. To support these data-driven improvements, a Senior Program Analyst position was also established to oversee reporting, data quality, and analysis of key performance metrics. Additionally, CSSD completed a comprehensive review and update of business processes and standard operating procedures, and formalized the establishment of an internal committee to manage Psychiatric Residential Treatment Facility (PRTF) referrals. This committee is designed to improve coordination within the division and with relevant stakeholders to support the placement of youth.

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 2025, 22 advocates supported respondents in 41 cases. One new advocate joined the program, and one current advocate took on additional cases in 2025. Virtual quarterly trainings were conducted, as well as an in-person training with the Presiding Judge. The Disability Services Reform Amendment Act of 2018, which took

effect on May 5, 2018,³⁰ 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 2025.

In 2025, 2,378 mental health cases were filed, and 124 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 94% of the cases within that standard. Cases were disposed with an average time to disposition of 22 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 2025, 1,400 new parentage and support actions were filed in the Family Court, and 55 cases were reopened. In 2025, the OAG initiated 81% (1,185) of parentage and support filings. The remaining 19% (270) 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 within 12 months of the date of service of process (*see* 45 CFR § 303.101). The court partially met these standards in 2025; eighty-one percent of the cases were disposed or otherwise resolved within six months (180 days) of service of process. However, the court

³⁰ D.C. Code §§ 7-1304.01-1304.13.

disposed of 89% of cases within 12 months of service of process, falling short of the 90% standard.

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 202 days from the file date, and 148 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 efficiently and timely. Remote proceedings continued to be used when they served the interests of efficiency or public justice. Two Parentage and Support judges continued to schedule 72 cases per week, and the third Magistrate Judge scheduled 56 cases per week. In 2025, in collaboration with the OAG, the Family Court entered 58 adjudications of paternity and 97 child support orders, also known as Administrative Child Support Orders, through the Child Support Conciliation Program. This collaboration also led to 5 dismissal orders based on exclusion of genetic testing results, along with under 21 other case dismissals for various reasons. There was a significant increase, validating the success of the Child Support Conciliation Program.

In collaboration with the three Magistrate Judges and D.C. Child Support Services Division, the Parentage and Support Branch launched a bench warrant project that delivered measurable improvement in case resolution. This initiative was impactful towards improving the time to disposition, clearing longstanding and unresolved bench warrants, and disposing of active bench warrant cases in the parentage and support caseload. In 2025, this collaboration resulted in the cancellation of 522 bench warrants and the same-day closure of 122 cases following the quashing or execution of the warrant.

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 free legal information, advice, and/or representation regarding parentage and child support matters.

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 2025, 4,175 new divorce and custody cases were filed in the Family Court, and 68 cases were reopened.

The majority of divorce and custody cases met the established time to disposition standards in 2025. In uncontested cases, including 47% of uncontested divorce cases, 52% of uncontested third-party custody cases, and 43% of uncontested custody cases reached disposed within the 60-day standard. In contested cases, 88% of contested divorce cases, 85% of contested custody third-party cases, and 82% of contested custody cases reached disposition within the 270-day standard. The average time to disposition in uncontested cases was 84 days for uncontested divorce cases, 100 days for uncontested third-party custody cases, and 88 days for uncontested custody cases; in contested cases, the average time to disposition was 139 days in contested divorce cases, 152 days in contested custody third-party cases, and 182 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 2025, Magistrate Judges continued to oversee initial hearings and manage the Special Immigrant Juvenile Status calendar which improved 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.

The Domestic Relations Branch provided additional services to litigants both in person and via an online portal through which litigants can request and receive certified copies electronically. In 2025, 3,649 requests for certified copies were successfully processed.

Conclusion

In 2025, the District of Columbia Family Court attempted to sustain the efficiency, accessibility, and effectiveness of its services to children and families. The overall clearance rate decreased from 103% in 2024 to 101% in 2025, while navigating ongoing judicial vacancies, budgetary constraints, and other challenges beyond the court's control. In 2025, the Family Court resolved 9,937 cases, a 3% decrease in the number of dispositions from 2024 (10,215). Dispositions decreased in abuse and neglect, juvenile, parentage and support, and mental health cases. Family Court continues to serve the children and families of the District of Columbia while facing numerous challenges.

Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) remained a critical tool in facilitating agreements and reducing litigation burdens in domestic relations and child abuse and neglect cases. The Multi-Door Dispute Resolution Division referred 98% of child abuse and neglect cases filed or reopened in 2025 to mediation, and nearly all mediated cases reached full or partial agreements on critical issues affecting children and families. In domestic relations matters, 693 cases were mediated, with 213 cases reaching settlement;

of those, 160 reached full agreement. These outcomes demonstrate that mediation not only reduces litigation time and expense but also promotes more durable, family-centered resolutions.

The attorney negotiator program further strengthened the Court's dispute resolution capacity. In 2025, 395 (82%) of the 480 fully negotiated cases were successfully resolved. By providing negotiation services staffed by experienced family law attorneys, the Court significantly increased the number of cases resolved without protracted litigation. The collaboration with local law schools to provide supervised student attorney negotiators expanded capacity while supporting the development of future practitioners committed to family law and public service.

Moreover, the Family Court remained steadfast in its mission to improve outcomes for children in the child welfare system. In 2025, 80% 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. Family Court judges and staff completed a wide range of interdisciplinary trainings in 2025 focused on mental health, disability services, education barriers, youth advocacy, dual-system youth, and recent developments in family law and legislation. They also participated in skill-building sessions on evidence, motions

practice, communication, emotional intelligence, ethics, and trial skills to strengthen courtroom effectiveness and professional development. In addition, CCAN provided attorneys with specialized training on child welfare topics such as abuse and neglect practice, special education, public benefits, immigration, housing stability, neuroscience of addiction, and racial disproportionality. The Court also worked to ensure that its legal and administrative practices remain aligned with best practices in family law.

While challenges remain, including persistent judicial vacancies and systemic barriers to timely case resolution, the Family Court remains committed to continuous improvement. The Court Improvement Program (CIP) continues to work on strengthening court processes and outcomes in child abuse and neglect cases through targeted innovation, collaboration, and data-driven reform. By expanding cross-agency partnerships among the Court, CFSA, OAG, and Children’s Law Center, CIP advanced continuous quality improvement in legal representation, hearing quality, and timeliness to permanency. New initiatives such as the Quality Court Hearings and child abuse and neglect data dashboards were developed to drive meaningful improvements and reduce delays in case resolution. The CIP also revitalized the Permanency Mediation Program to expand family-centered resolution options and invested in innovative training and technology to promote improved communication, cultural responsiveness, and equitable access to services, including interpretation support for non-English-speaking families. It is actively working to identify and address delays in achieving permanency and launching new initiatives such as the Quality Court Hearings Project 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 in the face of ongoing judicial vacancies, budgetary constraints, and other challenges beyond the court's control. 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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