National Coalition for Child Protection Reform / 53 Skyhill Road (Suite 202) / Alexandria, Va. 22314
(703) 212-2006 / info@nccpr.org / www.nccpr.org

THE NCCPR *GEORGIA* RATE-OF-REMOVAL INDEX

UPDATED AND EXPANDED, March, 2008

For the past several years, NCCPR has published a rate-of-removal index comparing the propensity of *states* to adopt a "take-the-child-and-run" approach to child welfare. The index compares the number of children taken from their parents in each state during the most recent year for which data are available to a Census Bureau estimate of the number of children living in poverty in that state. The result is the number of removals of children from their homes for every 1,000 impoverished children in that state.

We have applied the same methodology to two states, California and Ohio, where individual counties run child welfare, and to Florida, where the state is divided into regions which have a great deal of autonomy.

The inspiration for doing a similar analysis in Georgia, even though the Georgia system is, theoretically, state-run, came from the state's former Child Advocate, Dee Simms. When Simms ran the Office of Child Advocate that office was known for embracing a take-the-child-and-run approach to child welfare, and for issuing blistering audits of county child welfare offices. So when we saw OCA lavish praise on one county, Cobb, we figured Cobb County must take children at an unusually high rate. (It does.) That led us to the comparison below.

We say Georgia child welfare is *theoretically* state run, because we found that there actually is a wider variation in the propensity of county child welfare offices to take children in Georgia than in any of the other states we've examined. Among the ranked counties, the county that takes children at the highest rate, takes those children at a rate *16 times* higher than the county that takes children most sparingly.

THE UPDATE

This edition of the *NCCPR Georgia Rate-of-Removal Index* updates the original in several important ways.

● *More recent entry-into-care data*. We now have entry into care data for the year ending September 30, 2007.

● *Much more recent data on the impoverished child population in each county*. We now have data from a 2005 Census Bureau estimate, instead of relying on the 2000 census.

● *Complete safety data*. We now have data for every county on the two key outcomes used to measure safety. And these data show, once again, that *it is not necessary to take away large numbers of children in order to keep children safe.* Just as we found in Ohio, California and Florida, counties in Georgia which took proportionately fewer children often did better on key safety outcomes.

THIS IS NOT THE "SNAPSHOT NUMBER"…

The measure of a county's foster care population usually seen in news accounts is the so-called "snapshot number" indicating the number of children in foster care in a county on one

particular day each year. That is a very important number, but it is a less accurate measure of a county's propensity to remove children.

A county may have a high snapshot number even if it takes away very few children, if it hangs on to those it takes for a very long time. (That is, in itself, a serious problem, but not a measure of the county's propensity to take away children in the first place.) Conversely, a county may have a low snapshot number and still take away many children, but take them for only a very short time. Thus, a county which takes away many children in January, but returns most of them by August, will have a low number if the "snapshot" is taken in September. Also, a county which took away a great many children a decade or more ago and let them languish in foster care may have a low snapshot number now simply because those children are "aging out" of the system at 18 – hardly a testament to a system's success.

…RATHER, THIS INDEX USES REMOVALS OVER THE COURSE OF A YEAR

So instead of measuring the foster care population on any given day, the *NCCPR Georgia Rate-of-Removal Index* relies on Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS) data listing the total number of children removed over the course of a year.

HOW THE INDEX IS COMPILED

We could have simply compared the number of children removed to a county's total child population. But then all the counties with high rates-of-removal and high child poverty rates would complain that this was unfair because we didn't consider the single largest risk factor for actual abuse, not to mention the factor most often confused with "neglect:" poverty. So, in order to factor that out, and come closer to an apples-to-apples comparison, we compare removals to the number of *impoverished* children in each county, according to a 2005 Census Bureau estimate, the most recent such data available.

RANKINGS

NCCPR's national *Rate-of-Removal Index* includes a ranking for each state. We did not try to do this for every Georgia county. That's because many of Georgia's 159 counties are so small that even very small changes in the number of children removed, which could be the result of factors beyond the county's control, could significantly change their rankings. Safety data also can fluctuate greatly based on a small change in raw numbers in these counties.

So the first two charts on the following pages provide data and rakings for all Georgia counties in which at least 2,000 impoverished children resided according to the 2005 Census Bureau estimate. Though that is only 54 of 159 counties, those counties include about 78 percent of the children taken away statewide over the course of a year. We also provide a chart with data for all 159 counties, but without rankings.

THE EXCEPTIONAL CASE OF FAYETTE COUNTY

Using this standard, Fayette County, with an estimated 1,363 impoverished children, is not officially ranked. But Fayette County's propensity for child removal is so extreme that it deserves special notice. While no longer a contender for "child removal capital of America" Fayette County is clearly the child removal capital of Georgia, taking children at a rate nearly four times the state average, and four-and-a-half to seven-and-a-half times the average rates in

states widely regarded as, relatively speaking, models. Indeed, while not the very worst, Fayette County still takes away children at a rate higher than all but a handful of other jurisdictions we have encountered anywhere else in the country.

In order for Fayette to take children at a rate no higher than the Georgia average it would have to take away about 26 children per year. Instead, it takes nearly 100. The other way Fayette would be no worse than average would be if the real number of impoverished children living in the county is nearly four times higher than estimated by the census bureau. So clearly, Fayette's dismal standing is not due to circumstances beyond the control of the county DFCS office.

SAFETY DATA

As a group that believes strongly in family preservation, we feel that a high rate-of-removal almost always is a sign of a bad system. But a low rate-of-removal is not necessarily a sign of a good system. A low rate-of-removal can be accomplished either by embracing safe, proven programs to keep families together, or by ignoring children in real danger.

There are two primary means for measuring how a child welfare system does in keeping children safe.

One is to track how often, when maltreatment is substantiated, the child is maltreated again. The other measure is foster-care "recidivism." That is, what percentage of children entering foster care are entering again, after having been discharged from foster care within 12 months.

Although we have provided the data for foster-care recidivism, we believe it cannot be used reliably for the overwhelming majority of individual counties in Georgia because in most cases the raw numbers are so small that a fair comparison is impossible.

Even in the case of reabuse, we recommend using these data with caution because so many counties are so small. In addition, the Georgia data cannot be compared with the measure used in many other states. Most states, and the federal government, measure reabuse by looking at the percentage of substantiated allegations in which there is a second substantiated allegation within six months. The measure available on the Georgia DFCS website is different. It measures the proportion of children who were investigated for maltreatment who were investigated again, regardless of whether either report was substantiated. And it uses a 12-month time period instead of six months. Nevertheless, we believe this is a reasonable measure for a rough, general comparison among the ranked counties within Georgia, and for spotting extreme outliers.

The data clearly show that a take-the-child-and-run approach not only is not necessary to keep children safe, it may place children in more danger by overwhelming workers, leaving them less time to make good decisions. For example, the ranked county with the highest rate of removal, Cherokee, also has one of the worst rates of re-abuse. And the ranked county that takes proportionately the fewest children, Burke, has a safety record as good or better than most other ranked counties.

OTHER CAVEATS

One cannot say, based on these data, that county X "took Y percent of its poor children from their parents." That would be inaccurate because, while the overwhelming majority of children taken from their parents are poor, not all of them are. Thus, we are comparing a pool of children – those removed from their parents – which is mostly poor, to a general population that is entirely poor. One can say only that authorities in Cherokee County appear more prone to resort to foster care than their counterparts in any of the other ranked counties.

THE TABLES

The first two tables on the following pages are the *NCCPR Georgia Rate-of-Removal Index.* They compare rates of child removal for 54 counties for the 12 months ending September 30, 2007. The first table lists the counties alphabetically, the second in the order in which they took away children. The tables also include the rate of foster care recidivism for the same time period, and the rate of reabuse for State Fiscal Year 2007, the most recent period for which these data are available.

That is followed by a table providing the data for every Georgia county, without rankings.

Sources:

- All child welfare data in the charts on the following pages, except reabuse rates are from data supplied by the Georgia Division of Family and Children Services to the Fostering Court Improvement website. To its credit, DFCS is one of only three participating states that make these data readily available to the general public via this website. Georgia data are available here: http://fosteringcourtimprovement.org/ga/County/removals_summary.html
- Reabuse rate: Georgia Division of Family and Children Services, *Child Welfare in Georgia, State Fiscal Year 2007*, available online at: http://dfcs.dhr.georgia.gov/DHR-DFCS/DHR-DFCS-publication/HB14062007_12_13.pdf
- Impoverished children: U.S. Census Bureau, *Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates: Estimates for Florida Counties, 2005*, available online at: http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/saipe/county.html

Funding for this publication, and NCCPR's other national advocacy activities, comes from the Annie E. Casey Foundation. We thank the Foundation for its support, but acknowledge that the views expressed in this publication are those of NCCPR alone and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of our funders.

RATE-OF-REMOVAL AND SAFETY DATA FOR COUNTIES WITH AT LEAST 2,000 IMPOVERISHED CHILDREN, 12 MONTHS ENDING SEPTEMBER 30, 2007

County	Children Removed from their homes, Year ending Sept. 30, 2007	Impoverished Children, 2005	Rate-of-removal	Rank	% of children investigated for second allegation of maltreatment, SFY 2007	% of children returned to foster care w/in 12 months, year ending Sept. 30, 2007
Baldwin	18	2,180	8.3	47	4.4	-
Barrow	85	2,303	36.9	4	3.3	5
Bartow	128	4,567	28.0	11	6.3	4
Bibb	107	14,692	7.3	49	5.9	5
Bulloch	24	3,133	7.7	48	2.9	-
Burke	10	2,657	3.8	54	5.1	-
Camden	20	2,104	9.5	45	7.5	15
Carroll	56	4,861	11.5	42	5.2	9
Catoosa	87	2,439	35.7	5	9.0	17
Chatham	291	13,323	21.8	25	5.5	6
Cherokee	235	3,870	60.7	1	10.1	10
Clarke	71	4,892	14.5	39	5.1	8
Clayton	300	15,914	18.9	30	3.5	6
Cobb	577	19,031	30.3	10	3.9	11
Coffee	61	3,173	19.2	29	6.9	2
Colquitt	39	3,828	10.2	44	4.3	5
Columbia	56	2,330	24.0	18	3.5	4
Coweta	118	3,538	33.4	6	5.1	11
Crisp	69	2,601	26.5	15	8.1	16
Decatur	60	2,584	23.2	21	10.5	7
Dekalb	697	37,763	18.5	31	4.7	9
Dougherty	46	8,459	5.4	51	10.3	2
Douglas	137	4,115	33.3	7	5.1	2
Emanuel	26	2,154	12.1	40	2.5	19
Floyd	165	6,045	27.3	12	10.7	19
Forsyth	51	2,321	22.0	23	9.3	4
Fulton	876	55,035	15.9	35	6.6	9
Glynn	71	4,179	17.0	33	5.8	3
Gordon	105	2,325	45.2	3	4.5	16
Gwinnett	448	19,801	22.6	22	4.6	11
Hall	60	6,752	8.9	46	10.0	8
Henry	107	4,226	25.3	16	4.3	9
Houston	123	6,062	20.3	28	3.6	2
Jackson	70	2,222	31.5	8	7.4	14
Laurens	67	3,187	21.0	26	9.4	6
Liberty	71	4,786	14.8	38	7.6	8
Lowndes	109	5,903	18.5	31	5.6	2
Mitchell	32	2,140	15.0	36	12.4	9
Murray	58	2,137	27.1	14	8.2	2
Muscogee	100	14,223	7.0	50	4.6	3
Newton	42	4,017	10.5	43	6.6	10
Paulding	59	2,897	20.4	27	7.1	10
Polk	137	2,447	56.0	2	6.9	12

Richmond	269	17,932	15.0	36	5.6	9
Spalding	113	4,140	27.3	12	10.7	12
Sumter	16	3,694	4.3	53	6.0	19
Thomas	14	2,864	4.9	52	6.8	-
Tift	84	3,515	23.9	19	8.0	21
Toombs	65	2,767	23.5	20	9.4	15
Troup	62	3,766	16.5	34	4.3	5
Walker	72	2,990	24.1	17	7.4	6
Walton	64	3,175	20.2	24	7.2	-
Ware	29	2,587	11.2	41	10.0	7
Whitfield	132	4,227	31.2	9	10.2	5
Larger County total	**6,989**	**368,873**	**18.9**			
Statewide total	**8,916**	**470,425**	**19.0**			

RATE-OF-REMOVAL AND SAFETY DATA FOR COUNTIES WITH AT LEAST 2,000 IMPOVERISHED CHILDREN, BY RANK, 12 MONTHS ENDING SEPTEMBER 30, 2007

County	Children Removed from their homes, Year ending Sept. 30, 2007	Impoverished Children, 2005	Rate-of-removal	Rank	% of children investigated for second allegation of maltreatment, SFY 2007	% of children returned to foster care w/in 12 months, year ending Sept. 30, 2007
Cherokee	235	3,870	60.7	1	10.1	10
Polk	137	2,447	56.0	2	6.9	12
Gordon	105	2,325	45.2	3	4.5	16
Barrow	85	2,303	36.9	4	3.3	5
Catoosa	87	2,439	35.7	5	9.0	17
Coweta	118	3,538	33.4	6	5.1	11
Douglas	137	4,115	33.3	7	5.1	2
Jackson	70	2,222	31.5	8	7.4	14
Whitfield	132	4,227	31.2	9	10.2	5
Cobb	577	19,031	30.3	10	3.9	11
Bartow	128	4,567	28.0	11	6.3	4
Floyd	165	6,045	27.3	12	10.7	19
Spalding	113	4,140	27.3	12	10.7	12
Murray	58	2,137	27.1	14	8.2	2
Crisp	69	2,601	26.5	15	8.1	16
Henry	107	4,226	25.3	16	4.3	9
Walker	72	2,990	24.1	17	7.4	6
Columbia	56	2,330	24.0	18	3.5	4
Tift	84	3,515	23.9	19	8.0	21
Toombs	65	2,767	23.5	20	9.4	15
Decatur	60	2,584	23.2	21	10.5	7
Gwinnett	448	19,801	22.6	22	4.6	11
Forsyth	51	2,321	22.0	23	9.3	4
Walton	64	3,175	20.2	24	7.2	0
Chatham	291	13,323	21.8	25	5.5	6
Laurens	67	3,187	21.0	26	9.4	6
Paulding	59	2,897	20.4	27	7.1	10
Houston	123	6,062	20.3	28	3.6	2
Coffee	61	3,173	19.2	29	6.9	2
Clayton	300	15,914	18.9	30	3.5	6
Dekalb	697	37,763	18.5	31	4.7	9
Lowndes	109	5,903	18.5	31	5.6	2
Glynn	71	4,179	17.0	33	5.8	3
Troup	62	3,766	16.5	34	4.3	5
Fulton	876	55,035	15.9	35	6.6	9
Mitchell	32	2,140	15.0	36	12.4	9
Richmond	269	17,932	15.0	36	5.6	9

Liberty	71	4,786	14.8	38	7.6	8
Clarke	71	4,892	14.5	39	5.1	8
Emanuel	26	2,154	12.1	40	2.5	19
Ware	29	2,587	11.2	41	10.0	7
Carroll	56	4,861	11.5	42	5.2	9
Newton	42	4,017	10.5	43	6.6	10
Colquitt	39	3,828	10.2	44	4.3	5
Camden	20	2,104	9.5	45	7.5	15
Hall	60	6,752	8.9	46	10.0	8
Baldwin	18	2,180	8.3	47	4.4	0
Bulloch	24	3,133	7.7	48	2.9	0
Bibb	107	14,692	7.3	49	5.9	5
Muscogee	100	14,223	7.0	50	4.6	3
Dougherty	46	8,459	5.4	51	10.3	2
Thomas	14	2,864	4.9	52	6.8	0
Sumter	16	3,694	4.3	53	6.0	19
Burke	10	2,657	3.8	54	5.1	0
Larger County total	**6,989**	**368873**	**18.9**			
Statewide total	**8,916**	**470,425**	**19.0**			

RATES OF REMOVAL AND SAFETY DATA, ALL COUNTIES, YEAR ENDING SEPTEMBER 30, 2007

County	Children Removed from their homes, Year ending Sept. 30, 2007	Impoverished Children, 2005	Rate-of-removal	% of children investigated for second allegation of maltreatment, SFY 2007	% of children returned to foster care w/in 12 months, year ending Sept. 30, 2007
Appling	14	1,329	10.5	4.5	0
Atkinson	8	858	9.3	8.0	0
Bacon	23	782	29.4	7.1	0
Baker	5	381	13.1	13.0	0
Baldwin	18	2,180	8.3	4.4	0
Banks	7	766	9.1	6.4	0
Barrow	85	2,303	36.9	3.3	5
Bartow	128	4,567	28.0	6.3	4
Ben Hill	20	1,635	12.2	9.1	25
Berrien	44	1,195	36.8	11.6	0
Bibb	107	14,692	7.3	5.9	5
Bleckley	0	694	-	5.9	0
Brantley	23	959	24.0	8.9	0
Brooks	13	1,454	8.9	1.6	8
Bryan	9	1,073	8.4	5.7	0
Bulloch	24	3,133	7.7	2.9	0
Burke	10	2,657	3.8	5.1	0
Butts	50	959	52.1	13.7	10
Calhoun	0	486	-	2.0	0
Camden	20	2,104	9.5	7.5	15
Candler	12	936	12.8	2.1	42
Carroll	56	4,861	11.5	5.2	9
Catoosa	87	2,439	35.7	9.0	17
Charlton	31	797	38.9	17.7	13
Chatham	291	13,323	21.8	5.5	6
Chattahoochee	5	800	6.3	0.0	0
Chattooga	52	1,359	38.3	5.3	29
Cherokee	235	3,870	60.7	10.1	10
Clarke	71	4,892	14.5	5.1	8
Clay	0	392	-	0.0	0
Clayton	300	15,914	18.9	3.5	6
Clinch	2	666	3.0	12.7	0
Cobb	577	19,031	30.3	3.9	11
Coffee	61	3,173	19.2	6.9	2
Colquitt	39	3,828	10.2	4.3	5

NCCPR GEORGIA RATE-OF-REMOVAL INDEX/8

Columbia	56	2,330	24.0	3.5	4
Cook	10	1,257	8.0	6.9	0
Coweta	118	3,538	33.4	5.1	11
Crawford	27	711	38.0	10.1	4
Crisp	69	2,601	26.5	8.1	16
Dade	12	569	21.1	5.2	0
Dawson	10	699	14.3	1.8	30
Decatur	60	2,584	23.2	10.5	7
Dekalb	697	37,763	18.5	4.7	9
Dodge	21	1,413	14.9	6.3	10
Dooly	10	852	11.7	1.3	0
Dougherty	46	8,459	5.4	10.3	2
Douglas	137	4,115	33.3	5.1	2
Early	12	1,381	8.7	5.5	0
Echols	8	395	20.3	3.4	0
Effingham	48	1,668	28.8	2.6	0
Elbert	4	1,257	3.2	8.4	0
Emanuel	26	2,154	12.1	2.5	19
Evans	14	994	14.1	11.5	0
Fannin	48	970	49.5	2.8	10
Fayette	98	1,363	71.9	5.1	2
Floyd	165	6,045	27.3	10.7	19
Forsyth	51	2,321	22.0	9.3	4
Franklin	22	1,007	21.8	5.1	5
Fulton	876	55,035	15.9	6.6	9
Gilmer	12	1,317	9.1	8.6	8
Glascock	1	116	8.6	5.8	0
Glynn	71	4,179	17.0	5.8	3
Gordon	105	2,325	45.2	4.5	16
Grady	42	1,857	22.6	9.5	7
Greene	20	1,187	16.8	8.0	0
Gwinnett	448	19,801	22.6	4.6	11
Habersham	21	1,420	14.8	10.0	5
Hall	60	6,752	8.9	10.3	8
Hancock	1	746	1.3	2.8	0
Haralson	43	1,607	26.8	8.5	5
Harris	15	788	19.0	5.3	7
Hart	27	1,254	21.5	5.9	7
Heard	22	701	31.4	11.0	9
Henry	107	4,226	25.3	4.3	9
Houston	123	6,062	20.3	3.6	2
Irwin	27	718	37.6	11.2	11
Jackson	70	2,222	31.5	7.4	14
Jasper	8	760	10.5	10.6	0
Jeff Davis	33	937	35.2	4.5	21
Jefferson	11	1,773	6.2	6.5	9
Jenkins	2	903	2.2	17.7	0
Johnson	17	821	20.7	3.8	0
Jones	36	1,007	35.7	6.1	0
Lamar	27	915	29.5	6.3	0
Lanier	9	589	15.3	9.3	0
Laurens	67	3,187	21.0	9.4	6
Lee	24	1,005	23.9	14.6	0
Liberty	71	4,786	14.8	7.6	8
Lincoln	3	443	6.8	3.4	0
Long	14	1,042	13.4	14.7	0
Lowndes	109	5,903	18.5	5.6	2
Lumpkin	71	1,020	69.6	7.1	21
Macon	17	1,423	11.9	11.3	0
Madison	17	1,254	13.6	6.2	0
Marion	2	685	2.9	8.0	0
Mcduffie	20	1,729	11.6	6.1	10
Mcintosh	9	867	10.4	12.9	0
Meriwether	57	1,712	33.3	6.7	0
Miller	10	475	21.1	9.2	0

Mitchell	32	2,140	15.0	12.4	9
Monroe	30	909	33.0	9.6	27
Montgomery	12	632	19.0	13.9	17
Morgan	12	792	15.2	7.1	0
Murray	58	2,137	27.1	8.2	2
Muscogee	100	14,223	7.0	4.6	3
Newton	42	4,017	10.5	6.6	10
Oconee	18	645	27.9	6.6	0
Oglethorpe	5	649	7.7	6.0	0
Paulding	59	2,897	20.4	7.1	10
Peach	35	1,639	21.4	2.3	11
Pickens	56	1,171	47.8	4.5	11
Pierce	5	1,254	4.0	7.4	0
Pike	15	574	26.1	6.3	0
Polk	137	2,447	56.0	6.9	12
Pulaski	10	517	19.3	10.1	0
Putnam	9	1,099	8.2	5.4	0
Quitman	0	206	-	0.0	0
Rabun	17	644	26.4	12.3	12
Randolph	12	739	16.2	1.2	8
Richmond	269	17,932	15.0	5.6	9
Rockdale	51	3,256	15.7	9.6	16
Schley	3	278	10.8	14.7	0
Screven	16	1,124	14.2	5.6	0
Seminole	13	843	15.4	7.4	0
Spalding	113	4,140	27.3	10.7	12
Stephens	41	1,336	30.7	12.8	10
Stewart	5	456	11.0	3.0	60
Sumter	16	3,694	4.3	6.0	19
Talbot	11	481	22.9	0.0	9
Taliaferro	0	157	-	0.0	0
Tattnall	9	1,710	5.3	7.6	0
Taylor	4	810	4.9	5.1	0
Telfair	15	814	18.4	6.7	20
Terrell	16	1,092	14.7	4.0	0
Thomas	14	2,864	4.9	6.8	0
Tift	84	3,515	23.9	8.0	21
Toombs	65	2,767	23.5	9.4	15
Towns	21	344	61.0	3.6	14
Treutlen	2	621	3.2	2.6	0
Troup	62	3,766	16.5	4.3	5
Turner	6	1,081	5.6	9.2	0
Twiggs	5	713	7.0	12.1	0
Union	20	778	25.7	5.4	5
Upson	68	1,768	38.5	12.2	10
Walker	72	2,990	24.1	7.4	6
Walton	64	3,175	20.2	7.2	0
Ware	29	2,587	11.2	10.0	7
Warren	4	505	7.9	3.8	0
Washington	10	1,513	6.6	7.1	0
Wayne	19	1,943	9.8	5.0	0
Webster	0	155	-	5.9	0
Wheeler	5	445	11.2	6.8	0
White	24	1,074	22.3	6.2	29
Whitfield	132	4,227	31.2	10.2	5
Wilcox	7	687	10.2	18.7	0
Wilkes	1	640	1.6	12.3	0
Wilkinson	20	733	27.3	3.2	10
Worth	15	1,595	9.4	12.3	13
Statewide	**8916**	**470,425**	**19.0**		9