

THE NCCPR 2025 BIG CITY RATE-OF-REMOVAL INDEX

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For many years, NCCPR has released 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 in each state taken from their families by family police agencies (a more accurate term than “child welfare agencies”) to a Census Bureau estimate of the number of children living in poverty. The result is the number of removals of children from their homes for every 1,000 impoverished children. **This index applies the same methodology to America’s ten biggest cities and their surrounding counties.**

THIS IS NOT THE “SNAPSHOT NUMBER”

The measure of a city’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 city on one particular day – usually September 30 of each year. That is a very important number, but it is a less accurate measure of a city’s propensity to remove children.

A city 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 city’s propensity to take away children in the first place.) Conversely, a city can have a low snapshot number and still take away many children if it takes them for a relatively short time. Thus, a city that 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.

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

So instead of measuring the foster care population on any given day, the *NCCPR Big City Rate-of-Removal Index* relies on data listing the number of children removed at some point over the course of a given year.

COMPARISON DATA: WHY WE THINK IT’S MORE VALID TO COMPARE ENTRIES TO CHILDREN LIVING IN POVERTY

We could have simply compared the number of children removed to a city’s total child population. (And, for those interested only in that measure, we have included such a comparison in the tables that follow.) But then all the cities with high rates of removal and high child poverty rates would complain that this was unfair because we didn’t consider a risk factor for actual abuse (and even more, though agencies rarely admit it, the factor [most often confused with “neglect”](#)) – poverty.

In addition, since family police agencies almost never take children from affluent families, using the total child population would allow affluent communities that still take large numbers of children from impoverished neighborhoods to camouflage this fact. This can be seen when one compares the data from Santa Clara County, California, with and without factoring in poverty. So, to come closer to an apples-to-apples comparison, we recommend using the rates of removal that factor in Census Bureau estimates for the number of people under age 18 living in poverty in each city.

THE SANTA CLARA ANOMALY

For the sake of consistency, and the fact that “top ten” is a convention when making lists while top nine is not, these data include San Jose, California and surrounding Santa Clara County. But, as the center of Silicon Valley, San Jose is far wealthier than the other cities. Note the low child poverty rate and

correspondingly low raw number of entries into care. But that low raw number still represents a skyrocketing proportion of impoverished children torn from their homes because of a [foster-care panic](#) underway there. Indeed, the panic is so bad that, among America's ten largest cities and their surrounding counties, Santa Clara County now has the second highest rate of tearing apart families.

OTHER CAUTIONS AND CAVEATS

- 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 curbing the confusion of poverty with neglect and embracing safe, proven programs to keep families together or by ignoring children in real danger. (What typically happens, however, is that any system that dares to curb wrongful removal is *falsely accused* of ignoring children in real danger – as has happened in Santa Clara County.)

- Conversely, curbing wrongful removal is not enough. Though New York City does relatively well compared to other cities when it comes to curbing the actual removal of children, the reduction in foster care has been accompanied by an increase in onerous, oppressive, constant surveillance of families, while forcing parents to jump through all sorts of hoops. This adds enormous stress. That stress itself ultimately can destroy families. Even when it doesn't, it can do enormous harm to children's emotional well-being.

- Although placing a child with a relative is less traumatic than placing a child with a stranger, when such a "kinship care" placement is done by order of a court *or* a family police agency, *it is still foster care*. Any family police agency official who says "We are keeping children out of foster care by placing them with relatives" is being, at best, disingenuous.

This also applies to "hidden foster care" – coerced so-called "voluntary" placements with relatives that bypass even the minimal due process requirements of the formal system. Cities and states don't report these foster care placements in their official figures. As a result, some places may be making their entry-into-care figures look lower than they should be by failing to report all such placements. The problem is [particularly severe in Texas](#), where more than 60% of entries into foster care are "off the books." So the numbers from Texas cities, particularly the low numbers from Dallas and Houston, should be viewed with some suspicion. Because any form of "kinship care," when demanded by a family police agency, whether official or hidden, *is foster care*.

- The data don't reveal trends over time. A community that still has a relatively high number of removals but has been steadily and safely reducing them may be a better "role model" than a community that removed relatively few children in past years but now is in the midst of a [foster-care panic](#).

- One cannot say, based on these data, that city x "took y percent of its poor children from their parents in 2025." 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, for example, in 2025, authorities in metropolitan Phoenix appeared far more prone to resort to foster care than their counterparts in any other big city, since this index shows that metropolitan Phoenix has the highest rate of removal.

(Tables on following page.)

The NCCPR Big City Rate-of-Removal Index

Updated March, 2026

RATES OF REMOVAL IN AMERICA'S TEN LARGEST CITIES* FACTORING IN CHILD POVERTY

County	Impoverished child population, 2024	Entries into foster care	Rate-of-removal per thousand impoverished children	Time period
Maricopa County (Phoenix)	130362	3,334	25.6	SFY2025
Santa Clara County (San Jose, CA)	24627	421	17.1	SFY 2025
Los Angeles County	315526	5,032	15.9	SFY 2025
Bexar County (San Antonio, TX)	90900	1,143	12.6	SFY 2025
Philadelphia County	89018	1,044	11.8	FFY 2025
New York City	393248	3,097	7.9	CFY 2025
San Diego County	73859	570	7.7	SFY 2025
Dallas County	110386	835	7.6	SFY 2025
Cook County (Chicago)	182324	787	4.3	SFY 2025
Harris County (Houston)	292108	971	3.3	SFY 2025
TOTAL / AVERAGE	1,702,358	17,481	10.3	

RATES OF REMOVAL IN AMERICA'S TEN LARGEST CITIES* WITHOUT FACTORING IN CHILD POVERTY

County	Child population, 2024	Entries into foster care	Rate-of-removal per thousand children	Time period
Maricopa County (Phoenix)	994838	3,334	3.4	SFY2025
Philadelphia County	320179	1,044	3.3	FFY 2025
Los Angeles County	1907754	5,032	2.6	SFY 2025
Bexar County (San Antonio, TX)	505622	1,143	2.3	SFY 2025
New York City	1621246	3,097	1.9	CFY 2025
Dallas County	642098	835	1.3	SFY 2025
Santa Clara County (San Jose, CA)	367631	421	1.1	SFY 2025
San Diego County	660024	570	0.9	SFY 2025
Harris County (Houston)	1253961	971	0.8	SFY 2025
Cook County (Chicago)	1035937	787	0.8	SFY 2025
TOTAL / AVERAGE	9,309,290	17,481	1.9	

*-Where the city is part of a county, figures are for the county.

Data sources on following page

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SOURCES: POPULATION AND IMPOVERISHED CHILD POPULATION

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<https://dcs.az.gov/content/semi-annual-child-welfare-report-sep-2025> (Arizona data are released in six-month increments. To get the data for the first half of the year, change "sep" to "mar" in the link.)