

THE 2025 NCCPR RATE-OF-REMOVAL INDEX

With rate-of-placement supplement. Released May 5, 2026, Updated May 23, 2026

The *NCCPR Rate-of-Removal Index* compares the propensity of states to adopt a “take-the-child-and-run” approach to child welfare. The index compares the number of times children in each state are taken from their families by family policing agencies (a more accurate term than child protective services (CPS) agencies) during Federal Fiscal Year 2025, 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.

THIS IS NOT THE “SNAPSHOT NUMBER”

The measure of a state’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 state 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 state’s propensity to remove children.

A state 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 state’s propensity to take away children in the first place.) Conversely, a state can have a low snapshot number and still take away many children, but take them for only a short time. Thus, a state that takes away many children in January, but returns most of them by August, will have a low number when the “snapshot” is taken in September.

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

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

But because the snapshot number also is important, we’ve included an *NCCPR Rate-of-Placement Index* immediately after the rate-of-removal data. It uses the same sources and the same methodology as the *Rate-of-Removal Index*.

HOW THE INDEX IS COMPILED

The source for foster care data for all but one state is the Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families (ACF) Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS). Data for 2023 through 2025 are available on [a new, interactive dashboard from ACF](#). Data from 2013 through 2022 are available by [going to this link](#) and clicking on “state data set.” Data for earlier years are available from NCCPR. The exception this year is Kansas, for reasons discussed below.

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 state’s total child population. But then all the states 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 (not to mention the factor [most often confused with “neglect”](#)) – poverty.

In addition, **since family policing agencies almost never take children from affluent families, using the total child population would allow affluent states that still take large numbers of children from impoverished neighborhoods to camouflage this fact.** So, for our main index, in order to come closer to an apples-to-apples comparison, we use the Census Bureau's Current Population Survey to determine the number of people under age 18 living in poverty in each state.

This is a statistical sample, as opposed to the headcount used every ten years in the census. This has led to fluctuations from year to year, probably as a result of sampling issues. To minimize these errors, we've adopted a method used by the National Center for Children in Poverty at Columbia University. They use the *average* from the most recent three Current Population Surveys to estimate the number of impoverished children in each state. The estimates in these tables, therefore, are a three-year average for 2022, 2023 and 2024. The data tables are [available from the Census Bureau here](#).

We then compare the number of children removed from their homes in each state to this three-year average estimate of the number of people under age 18 in that state who are living in poverty.

But for those interested in a comparison to total child population, ACF's new database provides those data. Change the default from “graph” to “table view” in the upper right, and click on “rate” under “count or rate” toward the top of the column on the left.

HIDDEN FOSTER CARE

This index measures only entries reported by states to the federal government. But there is also a system of what Prof. Josh Gupta-Kagan of Columbia University Law School calls [“hidden foster care.”](#) in which parents are coerced into letting CPS agencies place their children informally, usually in kinship foster care with relatives. Prof. Gupta-Kagan estimates that there may be as many of these hidden placements as there are officially-recorded placements.

In some cases, the proportion is even higher. In Texas, [nearly two-thirds of placements](#) are never reported to the federal government. There are indications that [the rate in Virginia](#) may be nearly as high.

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 at the insistence of a child welfare agency, *it is still foster care* and should be counted as such. Any “child welfare” agency official who says “We are keeping children out of foster care by placing them with relatives” or using kinship care as a means of “diversion” from foster care is being, at best, disingenuous.

NCCPR believes that federal regulations actually require states to report entries into hidden foster care, but ACF is not enforcing those regulations.

THE KANSAS CONUNDRUM

Kansas may be even worse. That state has its own special way of hiding the true number of placements, as is explained in detail in [NCCPR's report on Kansas child welfare](#). At best, Kansas is

exploiting a technicality in regulations to allow it to hide the true extent to which it takes away children. We believe that the true number of Kansas children torn from their families is [at least 31% higher](#) than the figure reported by the state to the federal government. The number of children Kansas admits to taking makes the rate of removal in Kansas more than double the national average. And their rate of placement is among the very worst. Add in Kansas' own special form of hidden foster care, and that state may well be sixth in the nation for child removal and third in the nation for children trapped in foster care on any given day. All this is why there's an asterisk next to the listing for Kansas in the tables.

This year, it gets even more complicated. If the AFCARS data are correct, officially-reported entries into foster care in Kansas in 2025 skyrocketed by 74% over 2024. The number of children in care on Sept. 30, 2025, would be 70% higher than in 2024. Kansas officials say the feds may have double-counted, the feds say the data come from what Kansas reported, and they even asked Kansas about it before releasing their latest update to the AFCARS database.

While a giant single-year increase in children taken from their homes is entirely possible, in past years, data Kansas publishes on its own website track closely with the federal numbers. And there's been no high-profile reason for a foster-care panic in Kansas in 2025. We're inclined to think the federal number is a data glitch. [So, for now, we're using what Kansas released on its own website here](#), because we think it is closer to the mark. (That also means that, unlike the other states, the data for Kansas are for the year ending June 30, not Sept. 30.) But, to be clear, even using Kansas' own numbers, their rate of removal is awful, and their rate of placement is among the worst in the nation.

WASHINGTON STATE DATA

Washington State has had a great deal of difficulty providing basic data to the federal government. It failed completely in 2023 and 2024. Then, for 2025, it provided the federal government with an entry figure almost identical to what the state itself published online – for 2024. [The state's own 2025 figure is higher](#). So we are using the state's own figure in this index.

OTHER CAUTIONS AND CAVEATS

- As a group that believes strongly in family preservation, we feel that a high rate of removal is a sign of a bad system. But a low rate of removal is not always a sign of a good system. It is, however, always an essential *prerequisite* for a good system. And, because foster care is [inherently so harmful](#), the burden of proof should be on those opposed to reducing foster care to prove that this compromises safety rather than on those who have successfully curbed foster care to prove that it does not. (Despite this unfair burden, many states have provided such proof in the form of assessments by independent court monitors and/or reductions in re-abuse of children left in their own homes.)

- Even when the number of children taken away is relatively low, systems still may be doing enormous harm to children. New York's relatively low rate of removal is driven largely by New York City – but the city still engages in [massive, traumatic surveillance of families](#), even when children are not removed.

- The data don't reveal trends over time. A state 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 state that removed relatively few children in 2025 but now is in the midst of a [foster-care panic](#). Trend data are available by following the link to AFCARS data noted above; trend data all the way back to 1999 are available from NCCPR.

- There is an extra reason for caution about trends when looking at 2020 and 2021 – COVID. The pandemic had such a dramatic effect on everything that in some states 2020 and/or 2021 data may always be an outlier that shouldn't be considered in examining trends. (Note, though, that the fearmongering about COVID supposedly causing a [“pandemic of child abuse”](#) was wrong.)

- In 11 states, most or all children are in individual counties that run their own family policing systems.¹ Statewide data may obscure success stories or extreme failures in individual counties. Even in some systems that are nominally state-run, there are wide variations among counties or regions. Some states make available the raw data needed to do county-by-county or region-by-region comparisons; most do not.

- One cannot say, based on these data, that state X “took Y percent of its poor children from their parents in 2024.” 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 *almost* entirely poor, to a general population that is entirely poor.

BEWARE OF THE TYPICAL EXCUSES

- Some states may claim they don't really take away as many children as the federal data show. In fact, they're probably wrong and the feds probably are right (though, as noted above, this year Kansas may be an exception). The federal government doesn't make these numbers up; it relies for its data on state family policing agencies – the same agencies that, in some states, may offer up lower numbers for public consumption.

The difference probably has to do with definitions. The federal government uses a standard definition: If a child has been taken away for more than 24 hours, it “counts” as an entry into foster care. And that makes sense – you can be sure it “counts” for a child who endures it. So the numbers states give the federal government are supposed to include all such children.

But when states give figures to news organizations or post them on their websites, or even when they give them to a different federal database, they can use any definition they want. Some states may count a child as “removed” only if s/he is still in foster care at the time of the first court hearing, which can be anywhere from 24 hours to two weeks after removal. All the children family police agencies take, then change their minds about and return before that hearing -- much the worse for the experience -- are not counted under this definition. (This is similar to the method Kansas uses to avoid even reporting these removals to the federal government, in violation of the spirit, if not the letter, of the federal definition.) See also the discussion of “hidden foster care” above.

- Some states also claim that they are the only state, or among the very few states, in which the data include children placed in foster care through their juvenile justice systems as well as their “child welfare” systems. But when staff from the Nebraska Legislature checked on this excuse, they found that, in fact, at least 31 states include such placements.²

(Tables begin on the following page)

¹ This figure includes Wisconsin, where the state runs the system in Milwaukee County, but all other counties run their own and Nevada, where the two largest counties run their own systems.

² Performance Audit Committee, Nebraska Legislature [DHHS Privatization of Child Welfare and Juvenile Services](#), November, 2011, pp. 31,32.

*-See the narrative for a discussion of sources for data from these states.

2025 NCCPR RATE-OF-REMOVAL INDEX

State	Average number of children living in poverty, 2022-2024	Entries into foster care, FFY 2025	Rate of removal	Rank
Alabama	222,000	3,208	14.5	34
Alaska	21,667	1,080	49.8	4
Arizona	261,333	4,908	18.8	28
Arkansas	140,667	1,983	14.1	37
California	1,199,000	17,388	14.5	34
Colorado	111,667	2,998	26.8	16
Connecticut	95,000	1,549	16.3	31
Delaware	27,000	234	8.7	48
District of Columbia	22,000	171	7.8	49
Florida	720,333	7,855	10.9	43
Georgia	410,667	4,950	12.1	40
Hawaii	41,000	666	16.2	32
Idaho	40,667	922	22.7	22
Illinois	369,333	4,874	13.2	38
Indiana	175,333	7,579	43.2	7
Iowa	83,667	2,466	29.5	13
Kansas*	74,333	4,416	59.4	2
Kentucky	222,667	5,483	24.6	20
Louisiana	291,000	3,335	11.5	41
Maine	28,333	721	25.4	19
Maryland	140,333	1,480	10.5	45
Massachusetts	141,333	3,068	21.7	23
Michigan	376,000	3,684	9.8	46
Minnesota	116,667	3,529	30.2	12
Mississippi	153,667	2,354	15.3	33
Missouri	205,333	5,428	26.4	18
Montana	24,667	1,142	46.3	6
Nebraska	40,333	1,939	48.1	5
Nevada	110,333	2,639	23.9	21
New Hampshire	20,000	608	30.4	11
New Jersey	255,000	1,542	6.0	51
New Mexico	110,000	1,161	10.6	44
New York	641,667	6,248	9.7	47
North Carolina	451,333	5,206	11.5	41
North Dakota	23,667	751	31.7	10
Ohio	367,333	9,801	26.7	17
Oklahoma	176,667	3,568	20.2	27
Oregon	110,333	2,391	21.7	23
Pennsylvania	346,333	6,460	18.7	29
Rhode Island	23,000	653	28.4	14
South Carolina	186,667	2,685	14.4	36
South Dakota	23,667	971	41.0	8
Tennessee	186,667	5,236	28.0	15
Texas	1,284,333	9,750	7.6	50
Utah	53,667	1,124	20.9	25
Vermont	11,667	475	40.7	9
Virginia	207,333	2,678	12.9	39
Washington*	173,000	3,200	18.5	30
West Virginia	56,667	4,131	72.9	1
Wisconsin	141,667	2,910	20.5	26
Wyoming	10,667	580	54.4	3
National Average	10,727,668	173,805	16.2	

2025 NCCPR RATE-OF-REMOVAL INDEX, BY RANK

State	Average number of children living in poverty, 2022-2024	Entries into foster care, FFY 2025	Rate of removal	Rank
West Virginia	56,667	4,131	72.9	1
Kansas*	74,333	4,416	59.4	2
Wyoming	10,667	580	54.4	3
Alaska	21,667	1,080	49.8	4
Nebraska	40,333	1,939	48.1	5
Montana	24,667	1,142	46.3	6
Indiana	175,333	7,579	43.2	7
South Dakota	23,667	971	41.0	8
Vermont	11,667	475	40.7	9
North Dakota	23,667	751	31.7	10
New Hampshire	20,000	608	30.4	11
Minnesota	116,667	3,529	30.2	12
Iowa	83,667	2,466	29.5	13
Rhode Island	23,000	653	28.4	14
Tennessee	186,667	5,236	28.0	15
Colorado	111,667	2,998	26.8	16
Ohio	367,333	9,801	26.7	17
Missouri	205,333	5,428	26.4	18
Maine	28,333	721	25.4	19
Kentucky	222,667	5,483	24.6	20
Nevada	110,333	2,639	23.9	21
Idaho	40,667	922	22.7	22
Massachusetts	141,333	3,068	21.7	23
Oregon	110,333	2,391	21.7	23
Utah	53,667	1,124	20.9	25
Wisconsin	141,667	2,910	20.5	26
Oklahoma	176,667	3,568	20.2	27
Arizona	261,333	4,908	18.8	28
Pennsylvania	346,333	6,460	18.7	29
Washington*	173,000	3,200	18.5	30
Connecticut	95,000	1,549	16.3	31
Hawaii	41,000	666	16.2	32
Mississippi	153,667	2,354	15.3	33
California	1,199,000	17,388	14.5	34
Alabama	222,000	3,208	14.5	34
South Carolina	186,667	2,685	14.4	36
Arkansas	140,667	1,983	14.1	37
Illinois	369,333	4,874	13.2	38
Virginia	207,333	2,678	12.9	39
Georgia	410,667	4,950	12.1	40
North Carolina	451,333	5,206	11.5	41
Louisiana	291,000	3,335	11.5	41
Florida	720,333	7,855	10.9	43
New Mexico	110,000	1,161	10.6	44
Maryland	140,333	1,480	10.5	45
Michigan	376,000	3,684	9.8	46
New York	641,667	6,248	9.7	47
Delaware	27,000	234	8.7	48
District of Columbia	22,000	171	7.8	49
Texas	1,284,333	9,750	7.6	50
New Jersey	255,000	1,542	6.0	51
National Average	10,727,668	173,805	16.2	

2025 NCCPR RATE-OF-PLACEMENT INDEX

State	Average number of children living in poverty, 2022-2024	In foster care, Sept. 30, 2025	Rate of Placement	Rank
Alabama	222,000	5,616	25.3	38
Alaska	21,667	2,460	113.5	2
Arizona	261,333	8,306	31.8	28
Arkansas	140,667	3,264	23.2	42
California	1,199,000	36,212	30.2	32
Colorado	111,667	4,194	37.6	24
Connecticut	95,000	3,440	36.2	26
Delaware	27,000	469	17.4	48
District of Columbia	22,000	523	23.8	41
Florida	720,333	15,346	21.3	45
Georgia	410,667	10,877	26.5	35
Hawaii	41,000	913	22.3	44
Idaho	40,667	1,258	30.9	31
Illinois	369,333	16,610	45.0	18
Indiana	175,333	11,843	67.5	10
Iowa	83,667	3,365	40.2	21
Kansas*	74,333	7,022	94.5	3
Kentucky	222,667	8,569	38.5	23
Louisiana	291,000	4,619	15.9	49
Maine	28,333	2,133	75.3	6
Maryland	140,333	3,703	26.4	36
Massachusetts	141,333	8,323	58.9	12
Michigan	376,000	9,558	25.4	37
Minnesota	116,667	5,434	46.6	16
Mississippi	153,667	3,787	24.6	39
Missouri	205,333	11,727	57.1	13
Montana	24,667	1,965	79.7	5
Nebraska	40,333	3,599	89.2	4
Nevada	110,333	4,048	36.7	25
New Hampshire	20,000	1,062	53.1	14
New Jersey	255,000	2,846	11.2	51
New Mexico	110,000	2,282	20.7	46
New York	641,667	14,455	22.5	43
North Carolina	451,333	11,056	24.5	40
North Dakota	23,667	1,102	46.6	17
Ohio	367,333	15,268	41.6	19
Oklahoma	176,667	6,171	34.9	27
Oregon	110,333	4,526	41.0	20
Pennsylvania	346,333	10,865	31.4	30
Rhode Island	23,000	1,574	68.4	9
South Carolina	186,667	3,322	17.8	47
South Dakota	23,667	1,698	71.7	7
Tennessee	186,667	8,990	48.2	15
Texas	1,284,333	17,520	13.6	50
Utah	53,667	1,593	29.7	33
Vermont	11,667	828	71.0	8
Virginia	207,333	5,576	26.9	34
Washington	173,000	5,480	31.7	29
West Virginia	56,667	6,616	116.8	1
Wisconsin	141,667	5,687	40.1	22
Wyoming	10,667	688	64.5	11
National Average	10,727,668	328,388	30.6	

2025 NCCPR RATE-OF-PLACEMENT INDEX, BY RANK

State	Average number of children living in poverty, 2022-2024	In foster care, Sept. 30, 2025	Rate of Placement	Rank
West Virginia	56,667	6,616	116.8	1
Alaska	21,667	2,460	113.5	2
Kansas*	74,333	7,022	94.5	3
Nebraska	40,333	3,599	89.2	4
Montana	24,667	1,965	79.7	5
Maine	28,333	2,133	75.3	6
South Dakota	23,667	1,698	71.7	7
Vermont	11,667	828	71.0	8
Rhode Island	23,000	1,574	68.4	9
Indiana	175,333	11,843	67.5	10
Wyoming	10,667	688	64.5	11
Massachusetts	141,333	8,323	58.9	12
Missouri	205,333	11,727	57.1	13
New Hampshire	20,000	1,062	53.1	14
Tennessee	186,667	8,990	48.2	15
Minnesota	116,667	5,434	46.6	16
North Dakota	23,667	1,102	46.6	17
Illinois	369,333	16,610	45.0	18
Ohio	367,333	15,268	41.6	19
Oregon	110,333	4,526	41.0	20
Iowa	83,667	3,365	40.2	21
Wisconsin	141,667	5,687	40.1	22
Kentucky	222,667	8,569	38.5	23
Colorado	111,667	4,194	37.6	24
Nevada	110,333	4,048	36.7	25
Connecticut	95,000	3,440	36.2	26
Oklahoma	176,667	6,171	34.9	27
Arizona	261,333	8,306	31.8	28
Washington	173,000	5,480	31.7	29
Pennsylvania	346,333	10,865	31.4	30
Idaho	40,667	1,258	30.9	31
California	1,199,000	36,212	30.2	32
Utah	53,667	1,593	29.7	33
Virginia	207,333	5,576	26.9	34
Georgia	410,667	10,877	26.5	35
Maryland	140,333	3,703	26.4	36
Michigan	376,000	9,558	25.4	37
Alabama	222,000	5,616	25.3	38
Mississippi	153,667	3,787	24.6	39
North Carolina	451,333	11,056	24.5	40
District of Columbia	22,000	523	23.8	41
Arkansas	140,667	3,264	23.2	42
New York	641,667	14,455	22.5	43
Hawaii	41,000	913	22.3	44
Florida	720,333	15,346	21.3	45
New Mexico	110,000	2,282	20.7	46
South Carolina	186,667	3,322	17.8	47
Delaware	27,000	469	17.4	48
Louisiana	291,000	4,619	15.9	49
Texas	1,284,333	17,520	13.6	50
New Jersey	255,000	2,846	11.2	51
National Average	10,727,668	328,388	30.6	