



# ***Citizen Foster Care Review Board***

## **2025 Annual Report**

Kentucky Citizen Foster Care Review Board





# Honoring a new chapter in service to Kentucky's children

This year marks an important moment for the Citizen Foster Care Review Board as it introduces a new visual expression of its mission. The image featured on the cover and carried throughout this report reflects the heart of this work: guiding children toward safety, stability and hope. The figures reaching toward a star speak to resilience in the face of adversity and to the steady support Kentuckians provide when a child needs it most.

This updated presentation also represents the continued growth of a program that has served families for more than four decades. It underscores CFCRB's commitment to listening, learning and adapting as the needs of children evolve.

Most of all, it stands as a tribute to the volunteers, judges, caregivers and community partners whose efforts light the way forward. Their service strengthens our courts and brings us closer to a future where every child has the chance to thrive.



**Debra Hembree Lambert**  
Chief Justice of the  
Commonwealth

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**Citizen  
Foster Care  
Review Board**

# Progress report on Kentucky children in foster care

It is with great pride and excitement that I present the **FY 2025 Kentucky Citizen Foster Care Review Board (CFCRB) Annual Report**. This report highlights the children served by the CFCRB program and the unwavering dedication of our volunteer review boards across the Commonwealth.

Every day, our CFCRB volunteers step up with passion and purpose—working tirelessly to ensure that children in out-of-home care receive the support they need and the stability they deserve. In compliance with state and federal law, volunteers conduct thorough reviews of every child placed in the custody of the Cabinet for Health and Family Services. Their thoughtful findings and recommendations directly support judges in making informed, child-focused decisions that move families closer to permanency.

This year marked an exciting milestone: **the successful statewide rollout of the Interactive Interested Party Review (IPR) process!** This innovative virtual meeting format brings together all key voices—caseworkers, caregivers, legal representatives and more—to collaborate in real-time, break down barriers and find local, practical solutions. The findings and recommendations developed from these reviews assist judges in driving stronger outcomes and swifter permanency decisions for children across Kentucky.

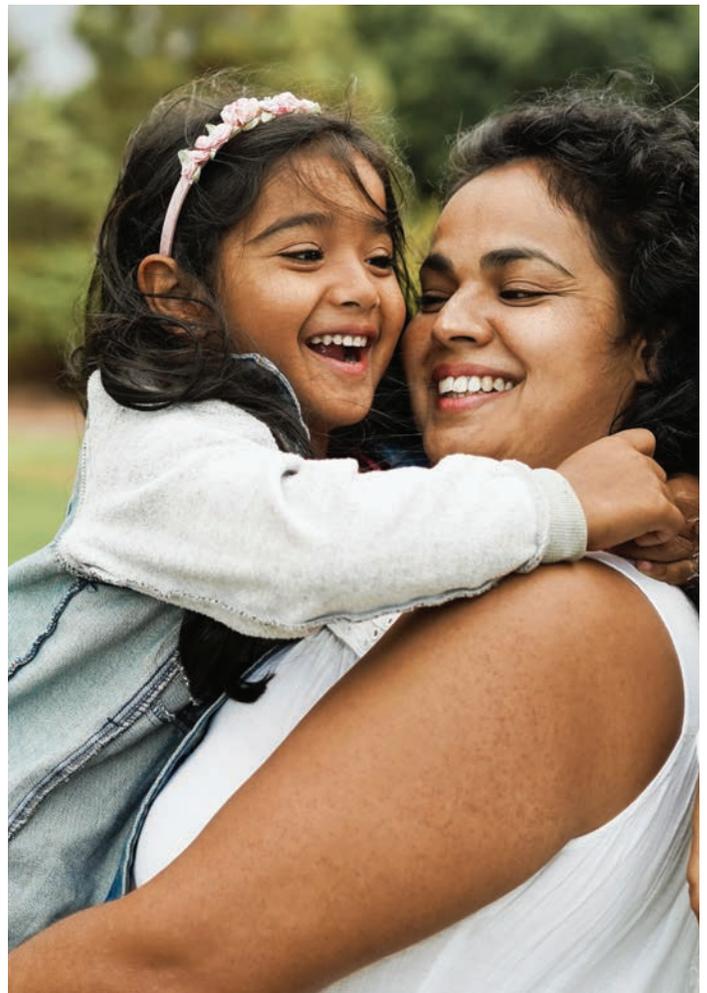
Beyond individual case reviews, the CFCRB remains a powerful advocate for **systemic change**. We proudly

continue to share data-driven recommendations with the **Kentucky Supreme Court, the Governor and the Legislature**. Our regional community forums, held twice a year, are a vital part of this process. In Fall 2024, we emphasized the need to elevate lived experience voices in child welfare reform. In Summer 2025, we focused on advancing normalcy for children in care—ensuring every child has the opportunity to experience joy, connection and belonging.

Serving as State Chair is an extraordinary honor. I am continually inspired by our volunteers' compassion, professionalism, and relentless commitment to Kentucky's children and families. Together, we are creating a system that listens more, supports better and acts faster—for every child, every time.



**Rosalyn Patton-Pelt**  
State Chair  
Citizen Foster Care Review Board



# Snapshot of Kentucky's foster care system

**CFCRB Reviews.** In FY 2025, 716 CFCRB volunteers conducted 1,698 paper reviews and 18,048 interested party reviews for a total of 19,746 reviews of 11,435 children. In FY 2024, there were 720 volunteers who conducted 19,565 reviews of 11,301 children.

**Length of Stay.** The average length of stay for children in care was 24.34 months, a slight decrease from the 24.61 months reported in FY 2024.

**Reunification.** Of the children reviewed by the CFCRB, 40% were released through reunification to parents or primary caregivers in FY 2025. Another 20% were released through placement with relatives or fictive kin.

**Exiting Care.** In FY 2025, 12% of youth aged out of care, which is a slight increase from FY 2024 which saw 11% of youth aging out of care.

**Ages of Children Served.** Of the children reviewed by the CFCRB, those aged 5 and younger remain the largest age group at 31%, with ages 16 to 20 at 24% and ages 11 to 15 at 22%.

**Finalized Adoption.** In FY 2025, 26% of children achieved adoption, which is a slight increase from FY 2024. Children with a finalized adoption spent 38.5 months in care, which was a slight decrease from the 38.8 months reported in FY 2024.

**Number of Placements.** Children experienced an average of 3.87 placements per commitment. Kentucky's children fare better than children nationally who experienced on average 4.48 moves during a twelve-month period.

**Barriers to Permanency.** In FY 2025, the CFCRB reported that the top four barriers to permanency were chronic mental health issues, substance use disorder, systemic delays and incarceration.

**Local Solutions Identified to Address Barriers.** In FY 2025, CFCRB boards reported that the top four identified solutions to address barriers as mental health treatment, substance use disorder treatment, trauma-centered treatment and housing/support.



# 2025 – 2026 recommendations for legislative & policy reform

The Kentucky Citizen Foster Care Review Board is required by Kentucky Revised Statute 620.320(5) to evaluate and make annual recommendations to the Supreme Court of Kentucky, the Governor and the Legislative Research Commission regarding the laws, practices, policies and procedures that affect permanence for children in out-of-home placement. The CFCRB State Board approved the following legislative recommendations for 2025 and the 2026 legislative session:

## **Update Board Membership Statute**

Amend KRS 620.190(2)(e) regarding membership on local boards to allow non-DCBS employees of the Cabinet for Health and Family Services (CHFS) to serve on local boards.

Suggested language would read as follows:

“Employees of the *Department for Community Based Services* shall be prohibited from serving on the local citizen foster care review board.”

The original wording was in place before the merger of the Cabinet for Health Services and the Cabinet for Families and Children, and it prohibits participation by potential volunteers from CHFS departments that are not directly involved with dependency, abuse and neglect cases.

## **Support the Statewide Expansion of Family Court**

The Kentucky Citizen Foster Care Review Boards (CFCRB) has historically regarded the statewide expansion of Family Court as a high priority due to improved outcomes for families and children who have access to expanded services provided by Family Court. To further this cause, the CFCRB would support a future judicial redistricting plan that increases the presence of Family Court, with the ultimate goal of expanding Family Court to every county in the Commonwealth.

## **Support Continued Efforts for Statewide Broadband Equity**

The Kentucky Citizen Foster Care Review Board recommends the continued development and ongoing maintenance of infrastructure and services that will provide affordable broadband access statewide.

## **Allow Judicial Discretion Whether to Order Child Support at Removal**

Amend KRS 620.090 to provide discretion to judges

regarding whether to order child support at a child’s temporary removal hearing. Currently, the statute requires that judges order child support at the temporary removal hearing. Many parents, who are required to pay child support to the state to offset the cost of their child being placed in foster care, are already living in poverty. This can negatively impact a family that is trying to develop and maintain familial and economic stability to reunify with their child. Reducing a parent’s income impedes their ability to engage in reunification efforts, consequently extending the time the child spends in foster care. By allowing the judge to have discretion in these matters, this could improve permanency outcomes for Kentucky’s children.

## **Support Review and Improvement of the Court Appointed Counsel Process**

Support the review and improvement of the system for providing court appointed counsel for children and parents in family law cases. Court-appointed counsel perform a vital function by providing high quality legal representation to children and families in court on child welfare matters, thereby ensuring procedural fairness and access to justice for all families and children.

## **Establish Paid Lived Expert Advisory Councils Across Child Welfare Systems**

Require that child welfare organizations establish continuous, paid advisory councils composed of individuals with lived experience in the child welfare system, including birth parents, foster parents, kinship caregivers and youth.

These councils should have clearly defined roles, responsibilities, and direct avenues for influencing policy and practice. The goal is to ensure that those most impacted by the child welfare system have a consistent, supported, and compensated voice in shaping the very systems that serve families across Kentucky.

Lived experts offer critical insight that helps humanize policy and bridge gaps between agencies and the communities they serve. However, many are still expected to contribute without compensation, despite the time, emotional labor and personal costs involved.

By formalizing and compensating these advisory roles, Kentucky can strengthen its commitment to meaningful system reform.

# CFCRB volunteers met with legislators during Children's Advocacy Week



(Left to right)  
Nathan Goins,  
Eboni  
Thompson,  
Rosalyn Patton-  
Pelt, Steven Farr,  
Dudley Adle and  
Ashley Clark

Several CFCRB volunteers met virtually with legislators during the Children's Advocacy Week held March 3-7, 2025. The event continued an annual tradition that began in 2004 to allow advocates across the state to join forces on behalf of the safety, health, education, and economic well-being of children and families. An in-person rally was held on March 5, 2025.

The CFCRB was one of the Blueprint Partners of this event. The Blueprint for Kentucky's Children is a coalition of non-profit, public and private organizations that stands on three pillars: thriving communities launch strong families, strong families launch successful kids and successful kids launch a prosperous future for Kentucky.

## **CFCRB Mission**

To ensure safe, permanent, timely placement of Kentucky's children in out-of-home care.

## **CFCRB Vision**

### *With respect to children in care:*

To ensure adequate and necessary services are provided to families and children with the utmost importance given to safety, well-being and permanency.

### *With respect to the judges we serve:*

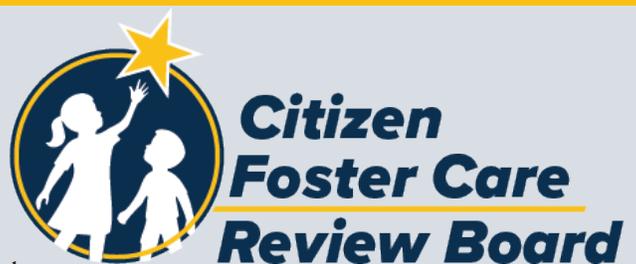
To provide timely, accurate and sufficiently detailed information about children in care so as to promote knowledgeable permanency decisions.

### *With respect to the CFCRB volunteers:*

To promote awareness and understanding regarding children's issues through educational opportunities at local, regional and state levels.

### *With respect to the Cabinet for Health and Family Services:*

To provide meaningful, respectful feedback regarding paths to permanency.



# CFCRB hosts regional community forums: Tell us what you think

## *Public weighs in on foster care systems at regional forums*

The Kentucky General Assembly passed House Bill 1 in 2018 to reform Kentucky's foster care system by removing barriers to children being placed in permanent homes.

HB 1 amended KRS 620.270 to require the Citizen Foster Care Review Board to participate in regional community forums at least twice a year and present the findings to the Supreme Court, Governor and Legislative Research Commission. These forums allow the public to discuss their concerns and identify barriers to the safety, well-being and timely permanency of children in care.

The following summary of findings from Fall 2024 and Summer 2025 CFCRB Regional Community Forums is



based on the public's concerns. Recommendations have been categorized by party, stakeholder group, or topic. The FY 2025 forums were conducted virtually, leading to increased participation by community partners.

*Note: These comments do not necessarily reflect the opinions of Kentucky Court of Justice elected officials and employees.*

## FALL 2024 REGIONAL COMMUNITY FORUMS: ISSUES & CONCERNS

The Fall 2024 forums focused on elevating the voice of lived experts who have experience in the child welfare system and encouraging authentic engagement with community partners and stakeholders to promote child and family well-being and positive outcomes for children and families.

### **Elevating and cultivating the voice of lived experience in the child welfare system**

- Lived experts are those who have been directly impacted by and have experience with the child welfare system. System improvement should be informed by their insight and perspective. Lived experts can also help people learn how to advocate for their rights.
- Some youth in out-of-home care participate in the Voices of the Commonwealth. This group surveys the youth regarding their experiences and helps them hone their skills by talking with DCBS leadership. Some former foster youths have been hired to work with the Cabinet. They offer a different perspective when discussing case consults.
- The Voices of the Commonwealth was very instrumental in advocating for many of the new policies/rights that foster youth have such as driver's licenses, increasing the age for extended commitment, creation of the youth Bill of Rights.
- Kentucky Partnership for Families and Children (KPFC) Peer Mentor Program offers mentors with lived experience. The mentors have lived experience and are quite responsive and extremely helpful.

- The voices of lived experts tell us so much more than our best attempts at evaluating the system. We cannot know the world they grew up in better than they do, and we do not feel what they feel and have felt while being in foster care. Hearing their stories, their past struggles and what helped--or hindered--their growth is the most valuable tool we have available to improve plans and policies.
- Case planning conferences for youth, transition meetings for older youth (age 17+), case planning conferences with biological parents/caregivers and court advocacy are all ways to allow individuals to have a voice in their own life and future within the foster care system.
- Aetna has peer support available. This helps teach youth how to advocate for themselves and how to be informed in case planning.
- It benefits everyone to offer lived experts a seat at the table to help design a new way of helping families and children in the future.
- Bring lived experts in at the beginning and work with them throughout the entirety of the case. Let them know what their role is in the process.
- Lived experts can be engaged through calls to action, for example: public speaking/testimony, written advocacy through blogs and op-eds, providing feedback and insight through meetings.
- Hire lived experts as advisors, peer mentors, trainers, educators, case consultants and program developers.
- DCBS Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) has a

youth initiative that looks for youth with lived experiences on panels and through surveys.

- Lived experts can be involved through participation in CFCRB interested party reviews. Hearing from parents, youth and foster parents makes all the difference for the local CFCRBs.
- Lived experts volunteering with groups such as Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA), Community Programs and focus groups and Kentucky Partnerships for Families and Children are a great resource.
- DCBS is including lived experts in their Prevention Branch – looking at focus groups to keep families from having to interact with DCBS; what could have prevented involvement in the child welfare system.
- Partner with advocacy organizations to inform policy reform efforts, ensuring that lived experience perspectives shape systemic changes.
- Develop and deliver training programs for child welfare professionals, focusing on trauma-informed care, cultural competence and family-centered practice.
- Offer peer-to-peer support, guidance and mentorship to families and youth navigating the child welfare system.
- Collaborate with agencies, policymakers and service providers to inform decision-making and ensure lived experience perspectives are considered.

### **Barriers lived experts encounter when engaging for system improvement**

- Many lived experts may not know about the opportunities to become engaged.
- Some feel their feelings are not validated and are dismissed.
- They may feel stigmatized.
- Many feel hopeless about improving the system.
- Sometimes barriers, such as lack of communication, keep those that serve operating in silos instead of collaborating to make sure families don't fall through the cracks.
- Some lived experts worry that speaking up can get them in trouble. They also need to be supported financially, emotionally, and with information gaps to show up as fully as possible among professionals.
- Travel expenses, compensation, language access and childcare can be a barrier to engaging lived experts.
- Lack of cultural competency leads to barriers for lived experts.
- Coercion, lack of knowledge on individual rights and misinformation run rampant.
- Encountering resistance or skepticism from professionals who may not value lived experience or may feel threatened by their involvement.
- Facing stigma or shame related to their experiences, making it difficult to speak out or engage in improvement efforts.
- Communication between parents and the Cabinet is very poor. There is a dismissive and sometimes adversarial relationship that develops. Parent's concerns are often ignored.
- Reliving traumatic experiences or emotions when sharing

their stories or advocating for change.

- Being invited to participate in a superficial or symbolic capacity, without meaningful influence or decision-making power.
- The handling of emotional labor before and after the meetings. These subjects can be hard to talk about and triggering.

### **Possible solutions to better develop the inclusion and validation of lived experts in system improvement**

- Ensure that participants use language that is birth-parent friendly.
- Case workers engage their youth to have a voice in placement.
- Equal decision-making power for lived experts.
- Youth empowerment conferences to build skills for the youth.
- Organizations like KY SEAT (System Experience at the Table) and Voices of the Commonwealth provide peer groups and coordination support, so people do not need to advocate on their own.
- Assigning mentors to both parents and youths involved in the child welfare system can build self-esteem and increase self-advocacy.
- KYThrivingfamilies.org is a website that offers families and children access to information to navigate the child welfare system and how to find support. The information is divided into four categories Foster Youth, Foster Parent, Birth Parent and Kinship/Fictive Kin Caregiver. This site explains what the individuals' rights are, how they can advocate as well as where to obtain peer support. This helps with awareness of how to ask questions and provide feedback. It is a living website and open to others providing input.
- Participating in CFCRB meetings allows interested parties to share their view on the progress being made toward permanency.

### **Open Discussion**

#### **Children/Youth**

- Give the youth a voice. This allows youth to have their voices heard and to participate in their future planning.
- Increased stability and family engagements can lead to stable placements and reduce the likelihood of moves.
- By engaging youth in their future planning, this can help them find a purpose in their pain and lead to empowerment.
- There is limited support for youth with complex needs.
- Some youth have experienced an inadequate response to allegations of maltreatment.

#### **Parents**

- Parents need to be informed about resources and supports. In some parts of the state, there is a lack of resources.

- Parents' inability to afford attorney fees is a barrier.
- Peer Support can be a beneficial asset in getting oneself together and providing resources.
- A barrier for parents is not having transportation to attend required services.
- It is important that parents can communicate with their children while in care; it helps their children feel safe.
- Building relationships between caregivers and biological parents creates successes for parents and children.
- Parents sometimes face dismissive attitudes when important information is being brought up. Also, information is not always documented in the case. Information is sometimes withheld from parents.
- Parent complaints filed about social workers seem to go nowhere.
- Parents have found it difficult to get inaccurate information corrected in their cases. There is no accountability in the system to prevent or change false information presented to the record.
- Advocacy groups and parenting classes/groups can be supportive. Having a safe place to vent and share experiences without fear of retaliation is helpful. More parent-peer relationships in the community would be beneficial, as well as providing emotional support for parents. It impacts every part of your life. Having someone to turn to is invaluable.
- Parents often encounter inadequate mental health services, limited access to healthcare and dental care, as well as poor communication and coordination among providers.
- Some parents encounter inconsistent or inadequate visitation with their children.
- Parents also suffer from trauma and attachment issues.



## Foster Parents

- The adoption process can be very difficult to navigate. Some foster parents have formed support groups to help each other through their journey. Some feel it is very difficult, and the system is not set up for everyone to know what to do and how to navigate the process.
- Some foster parents feel the courts do not give them a proper voice when it comes to their foster children, even though they feel they know the child the best, due to daily involvement in their life.
- There needs to be foster parent training on diverse hair care, religious trauma and LGBTQ+ youth. These three areas can traumatize youth in a different way than the original concerns that brought the child into care.
- Inadequate screening and training for foster parents.
- Foster parents with multiple children in their home notice differences in how cases are handled and feel there needs to be consistency across the board with cases.
- Improved communication with foster and biological parents regarding legal and court processes would be helpful.
- Foster parents do not fully understand the system and how it works and sometimes they feel that even the workers get confused.

## Relatives/Kinship Care/Fictive Kin

- Inadequate family search and engagement.
- Insufficient support for kinship care.
- When children are placed with relatives and/or fictive kin, family dynamics shift which can lead to trauma. This kind of involvement with DCBS can have a profound effect on the caregivers and the biological parent's relationship.

## Overall System Comments and Concerns

- Many case workers still have high caseloads which continues to lead to turnover. Many of these cases have a high degree of complexity, for example, multiple placements and large sibling groups.
- There is a lack of available permanent families.
- In some areas, there are still delays in court proceedings.
- There is a need for more specific trauma training as trauma can show very differently for each child.
- Transition services are needed to prepare youth to transition to adulthood, specifically awareness of housing and education programs.
- Focus is needed on maintaining sibling attachment as children work together to process their trauma and attachment concerns.
- Training is needed for educators on the importance of not delaying educational plans and interventions for foster children despite concerns that the child/youth might be moved quickly.

# SUMMER 2025 REGIONAL COMMUNITY FORUMS: ISSUES & CONCERNS

The Summer 2025 forums focused on the availability and access to normalcy activities for Kentucky's children in foster care.

## Normalcy Activities for Children/Youth in Foster Care

- Youth in foster care are going to prom, participating in age-appropriate sports, learning to drive, getting their licenses, working and saving money.
- Extracurricular activities include sports; dances; programs at the YMCA, churches; camps; waterparks; school clubs; activities at local libraries; children in Out-of-Home Care (OOHC) have access to activities that all children in the community have access to.
- DCBS provides approval so OOHC children can experience normal activities, such as going to a mall in the next state, going to concerts, or even going on vacation with their foster families. This could be throughout the US or out of the country.
- Foster children/independent living youths are able and are getting their driver's licenses.
- Times have changed. Foster families and the Cabinet are more accepting of OOHC youth meeting those age-appropriate milestones and activities, helping to remove the stigma of foster care.
- There are no differences between children in Private Child Care (PCC) and DCBS placement. Foster children are being brought into the family fold and are equal family members within the family.
- The shift is largely due to an increase in family and fictive kin placements.
- Seeing a shift in out of home care placements to relative and fictive kin ensures a child participates in activities that they are familiar with and are typical family activities.
- Children in foster care are participating in age-appropriate activities with coordination between DCBS, foster parents, bio-parents, etc.
- Children's participation in activities depends on each individual situation and the child's specific needs. The situation changes however, when a child recommits at 18.
- DCBS provides Life Skills Reimagined by LYFT Learning, through Kentucky RISE (Resources for Independence, Success, and Empowerment) to residential facilities to help youth prepare for adulthood. The PCC is responsible for helping the child complete the program. They're not all ready at the same time, and they all have different needs. Readiness is a determination that needs to be made on the part of the caregiver.
- Some residential facilities let kids go to school off campus, cook, or live in their own cottage.

## Barriers to Normalcy Activities

- Biological parents may not allow a trip or experience, due to fear. Fear of the unknown, fear of child bonding with foster parents, fear of not being able to provide equal experiences once the youth returns home.
- Communication between foster parents and biological parents can be a barrier if there is miscommunication, no communication or attitudes between individuals.
- The cost of extracurricular activities.
- Intellectual capacity of the child.
- Transportation barriers.
- Child's behaviors (may have restrictions on who they may be around, or locations they may visit).
- Availability of resources relative to the placement location.
- Stability of placement for the child (frequent moves within system)
- The need for a different level of supervision depending on the foster child's needs; the cost if a foster family has multiple children; transportation to activities.
- Children in residential placements are not able to access as many activities as foster homes due to shortage of staff or youth's behaviors.
- Some residential placements do a great job of providing normalcy activities, while some residential placements do not provide opportunities for youth to leave campus.





- The need for DCBS and system partners to listen to children/youth in foster care, especially when the children/youth have questions about what is going on in their case.
- More trauma informed care for children/youth in out-of-home care; the therapy needs to match the child's needs.

### Parents

- Parents need trauma-informed care therapy, the same as their children.
- Biological parents and foster parents need to have a good relationship, so they can parent the youth together. Acknowledge the youth's likes, dislikes, health, education celebrations, struggles, etc. This will help the youth, foster parents and parents trust each other.
- There is an app, AppClose, that divorced parents typically use to communicate schedules and basic information, and it can be monitored. Daviess County is going to start using this app so foster parents and biological parents can communicate, and it will also be monitored by DCBS. It helps everyone stay involved and do what is in the best interest of the child.

### Foster Parents

- Improved communication between foster parents and DCBS. Foster parents feel they need a better vision of what is going on with the child. This is a balancing act as DCBS cannot provide confidential information regarding the child's parents to the foster parents.

### Overall System Comments and Concerns

- DCBS stresses that it is not an adoption agency. DCBS helps and supports families and children to rebuild their relationships. Everyone is to be a team player to support the parent(s).
- There is a push to allow DCBS youth to talk about their experiences, and DCBS can learn from those joys and struggles. This information is practical, and it educates staffs of what it is like to live in the system.
- DCBS needs to continue to include the youth's fathers, and involve them not only in the case, but also their lives. By including fathers and their families, the youth's support system grows.
- Foster children can get a driver's license now. They were not able to do so in the past. Youth development funds can be used to pay for driver's education.
- DCBS will pay for a child's car insurance until they are 19 years old.

### Local Solutions

- DCBS Youth Development Funds help youth participate in extracurricular/youth development activities starting at age 14. This fund can be accessed twice a year, up to \$1,000. Youth in college can sometimes use it for Greek life dues.
- Wednesday's Child funding is available for youth of any age to assist with activities. There is currently no limit for this fund.
- Increase availability to resources.
- Involve different community organizations to help with specific child needs (e.g. providing sports materials or participation fees for a child or scholarships for art camps, etc.).
- Increase age range for youth development funds.
- Subsidizing training to support staff to meet the needs of our youth.
- Transportation supports by faith-based organizations or even foster parent's carpooling to activities.
- Increased supports to maintain stable placements, mentorship, life skill training assistance.

### Open Discussion

#### Children

- There is a push to allow DCBS youth to talk about their experiences, and DCBS can learn from those joys and struggles. This information is practical, and it educates staffs of what it is like to live in the system.

# CFCRB overview by the numbers

## Out-of-home care demographics

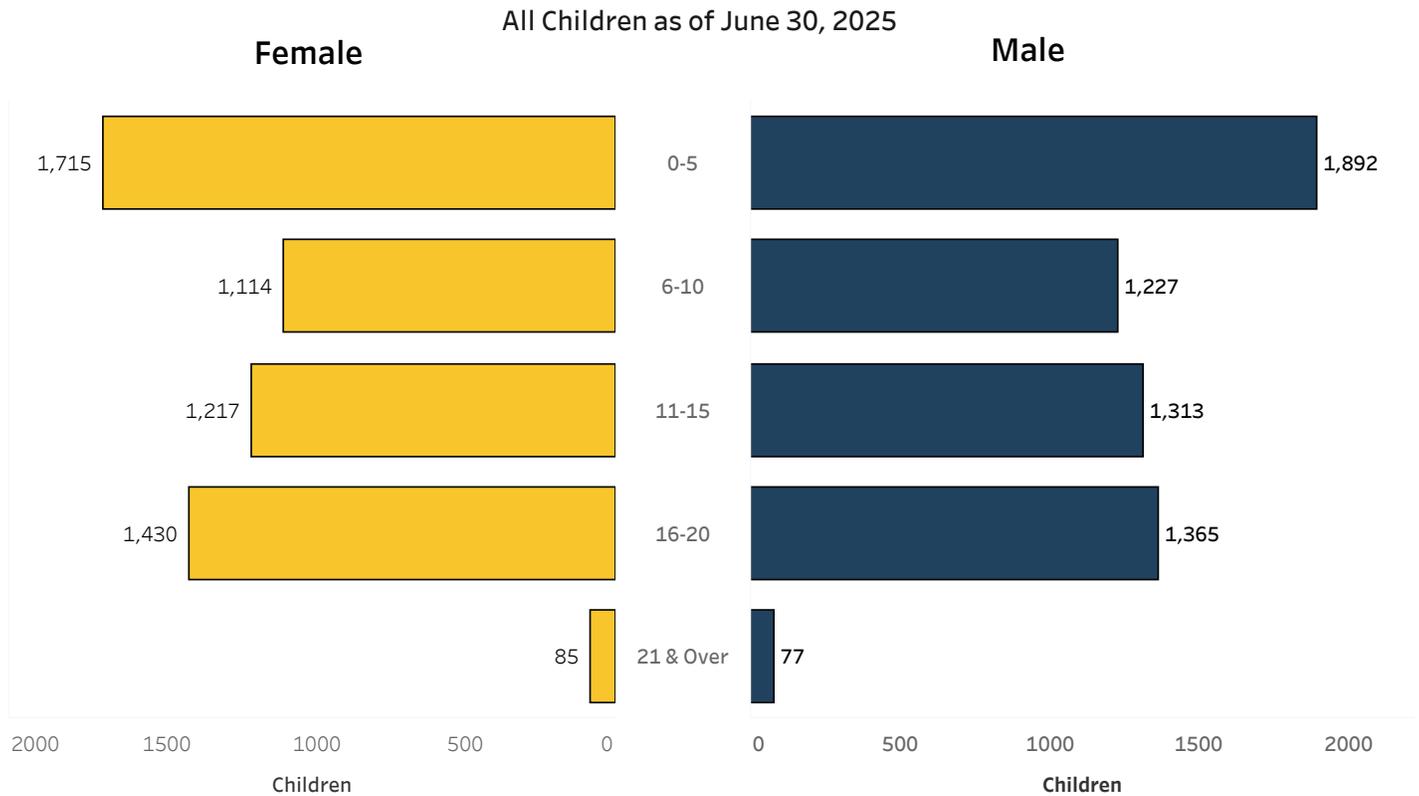
### What gender are children in out-of-home care?

The gender of children in out-of-home care is almost evenly split, with 51% male and 49% female.

### What are the ages of children in foster care?

In FY 2025, the youngest child reviewed by CFCRB volunteers was one month old and the oldest was 22 years old (due to extended commitment). The average age remained constant at 11 years. Of the children reviewed by the CFCRB, those aged 5 and younger remain the largest age group at 31%, with ages 16 to 20 at 24% and ages 11 to 15 at 22%. The age analysis is based on children who were in out-of-home care on June 30, 2025, and includes children who were released from the custody of the Cabinet for Health and Family Services anytime during the fiscal year.

### Children in Foster Care by Age and Gender



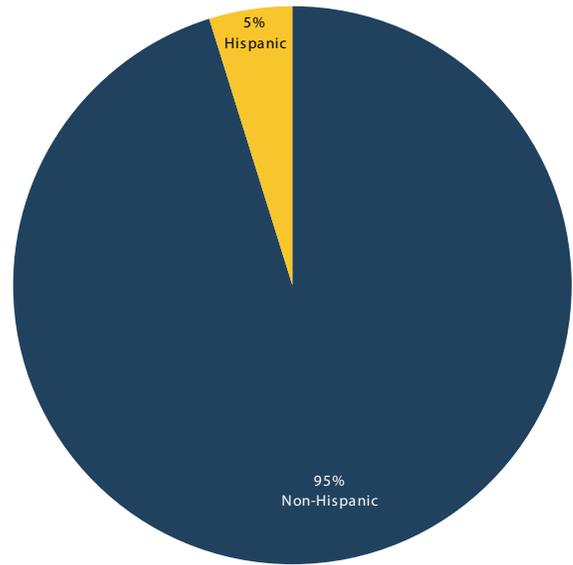
# CFCRB overview by the numbers

## What race are children in foster care?

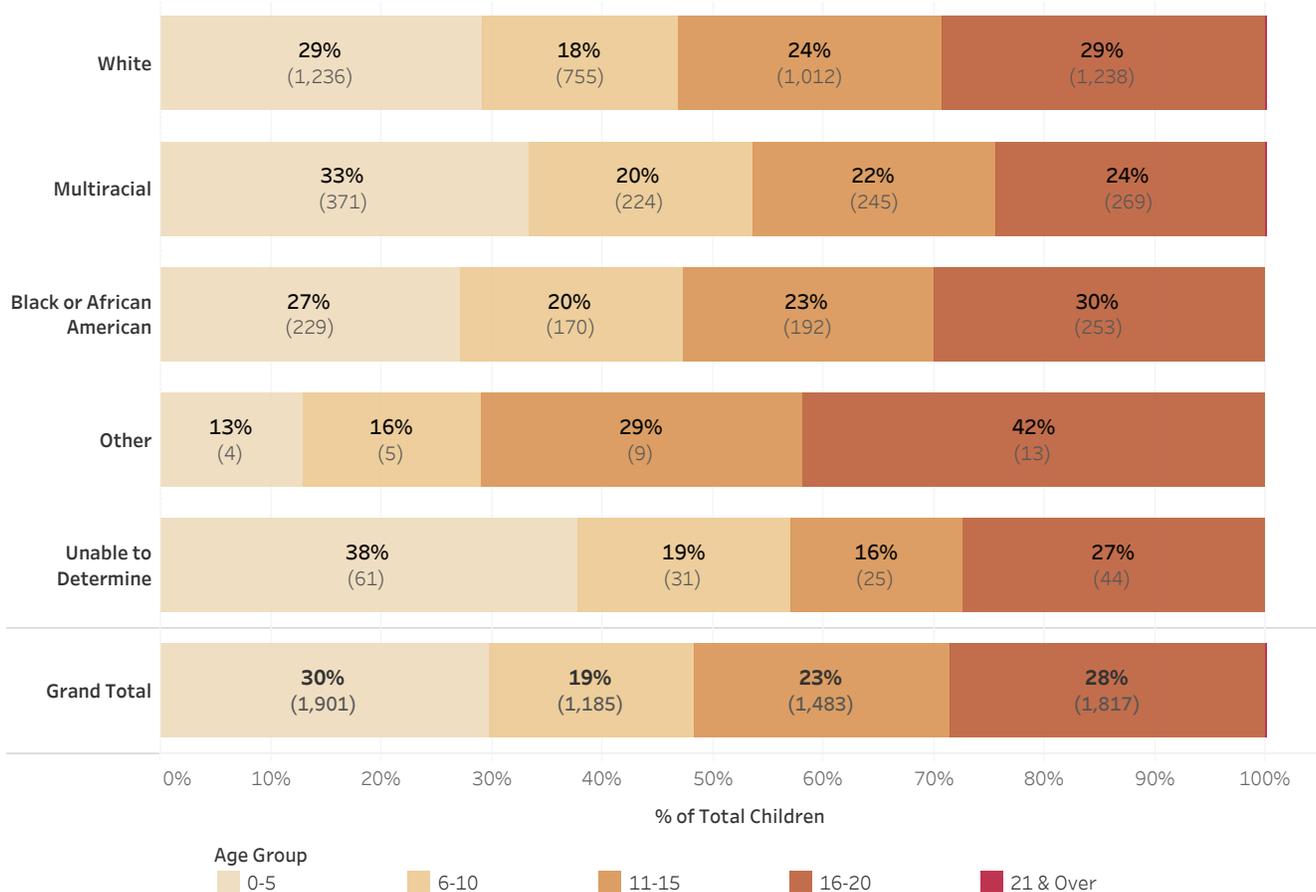
Of the children in foster care in FY 2025, 68% are Caucasian, 12% are Black/African American, 2.6% are unable to be determined, 17% are Multiracial, and less than 1% are other. The other races include American Indian/Alaskan Native, Asian and Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander. In addition, 5% of the children in foster care have Hispanic ethnicity.

*Note: In March 2018, the CATS system updated its race codes to allow the selection of multiple race types. However, this only affects children who have entered care from March 2018 to the present.*

## Foster Care Children by Ethnicity



## Active Children in Foster Care as of June 30, 2025 by Race and Age



# Time in out-of-home care

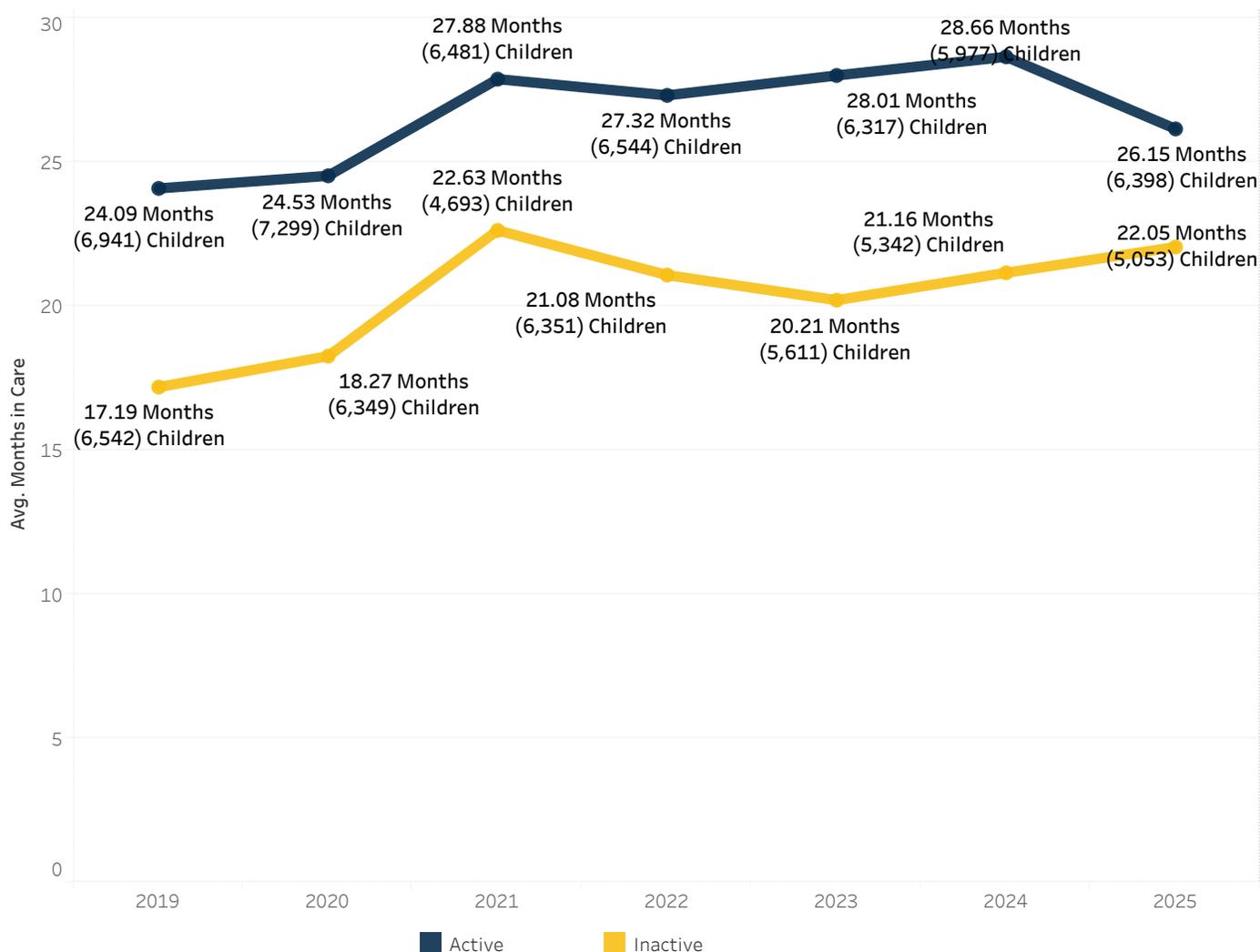
## What is the average length of stay by age group for children in out-of-home care?

Active children – children who were still in care at the end of FY 2025 – experienced an average length of stay of 26.15 months. Inactive children – children released at any time during the fiscal year – experienced an average length of stay of 22.05 months. The overall average length of stay for FY 2025 was 24.34 months, which is a slight decrease from the average length of stay of 24.6 months in FY 2024.

The charts show the average number of months children were in care as of June 30, 2025. The chart illustrates the average length of stay in out-of-home care from FY 2019 and 2025.

It should be noted that in calculating the average length of stay, children who were in care less than 24 hours are counted as “zero” for the length of time in care. These are children who may have been in the process of being removed from the home when a suitable relative assumed custody of the child. When taking into account these zeros, it may actually skew the average to the lower end of the spectrum.

**Children in Foster Care by Average Number of Months  
FY 2019 - FY 2025**



# CFCRB overview by the numbers

## Exiting out-of-home care

### Why are children released from out-of-home care?

In FY 2025, 4,552 children were released from out-of-home care. Of the children released, 40% were reunified with parents or primary guardians, a slight increase from FY 2024. 20% of children released were placed with relatives or fictive kin.

Children aging out of care account for 12% of the releases compared to 11% in 2024. This is significant as children aging out of care do not obtain permanency.

The chart shows children exiting out-of-home care by release type.

**Children in Foster Care By Race & Release Type**  
FY 2025



\*Other Race not included (see table below)

- Reunification - Parent / Primary Careta..
- Aged Out
- Fictive Kin
- Adoption
- Successor Guardian
- Death
- Placed with relatives
- Transfer to Another Agency
- Kinship Care Placement

# Permanency through adoption

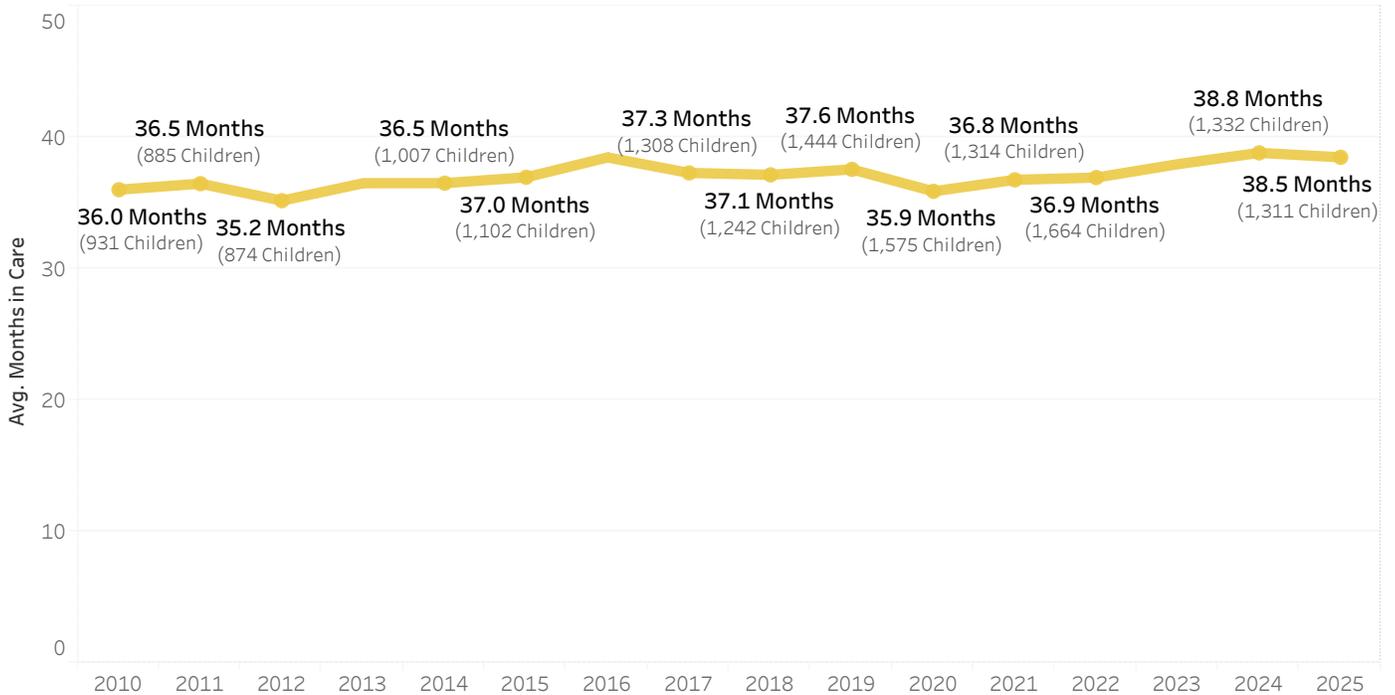
## What percentage of children in out-of-home care were adopted?

Of the children released from care in FY 2025, 26% achieved permanency through adoption, which is a slight increase from FY 2024 which saw 24% of released children achieve permanency through adoption. Nationwide, the number of children released from care by adoption has continuously declined since 2019.

Data reflects children who exited care because of a finalized adoption spent 38.5 months in care prior to adoption finalization.

The chart illustrates the average number of months to finalized adoption for children in foster care from FY 2010 to 2025.

**Average Number of Months to Final Adoption**  
FY 2010 - FY 2025



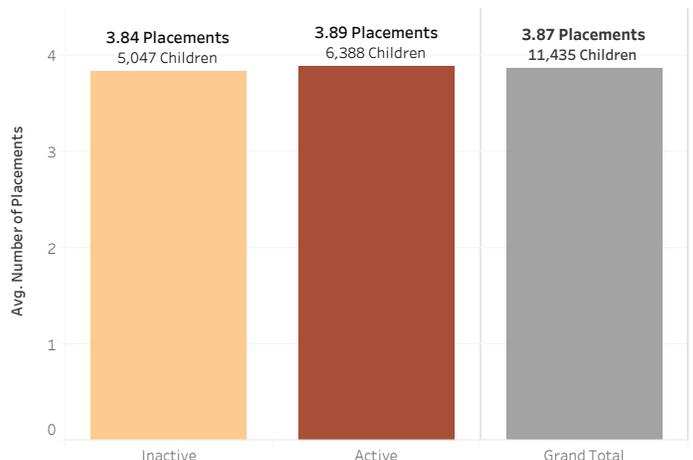
\* Statistics captured in this chart represent all children whose cases were reviewed between July 1, 2009 and June 30, 2025.  
 \* The term "active children" describes those children who were still in care at the end of each FY (June 30).  
 \* The term "inactive children" describes those whose cases were reviewed during fiscal year but were released from care prior to end of FY (June 30).

# Placement stability

## What do fewer out-of-home placements mean for children in foster care?

Fewer placements create stability and lessen the trauma for children in care. Kentucky's children experienced an average of 3.87 placements per commitment during FY 2025 compared to the national average of 4.48. In FY 2025, a total of 177 children experienced more than three moves in a 6-month time frame. This is an increase from the 104 children who experienced more than 3 moves in 6-months in FY 2024.

**Average Placements FY 2025**



# Elevating the voice of lived experience

## Nicole Powers, Lived Expert and Parent Advocate

**M**y name is Nicole. I am a Kentucky parent of six children who has been impacted by child welfare involvement. My children and I were separated for three years. We have been reunited and custody of my children has been restored.

As a parent with lived experience, I know that advocacy is quite limited for parents facing the system. I often felt unheard, dismissed and powerless. At every stage of the process to bring my children home, I was met with silence from advocates. No one would speak up. I was repeatedly given the excuse that the “system is broken.”

Then I learned about the CFCRB. I reached out to them. They were immediately responsive, and I was invited to attend my first IPR. This was close to two and a half years into my family’s separation. Prior to this time, the CFCRB had not been provided my contact information. At the IPR, I was finally given a voice. The volunteers who attended were respectful, asked common sense questions and considered what I had to say. At the next IPR, I experienced the same level of respect, questions and consideration. The reports from my first and second IPR reflected that I had been listened to and heard. I experienced open advocacy for my children and myself for the first time since my children were removed from my care. For the first time in our case, no excuses were made, and no roadblocks were encountered.

The honest, open conversations we had at the reviews were reflected in plain language on the reports sent to the judge, and I know our judge read the reports because she referenced them during our court hearings.



**Nicole Powers**

This organization is a valuable resource for families. The CFCRB is under-utilized. Attending reviews is not promoted to families or attorneys. Many parents, like me, don’t know about these meetings, so they aren’t able to attend. My own attorney had never attended and had never seen a report from an IPR despite many years of practice in family law.

I am grateful for the volunteers who give their time to listen to parents and consider our input to improve outcomes for children in our child welfare system.

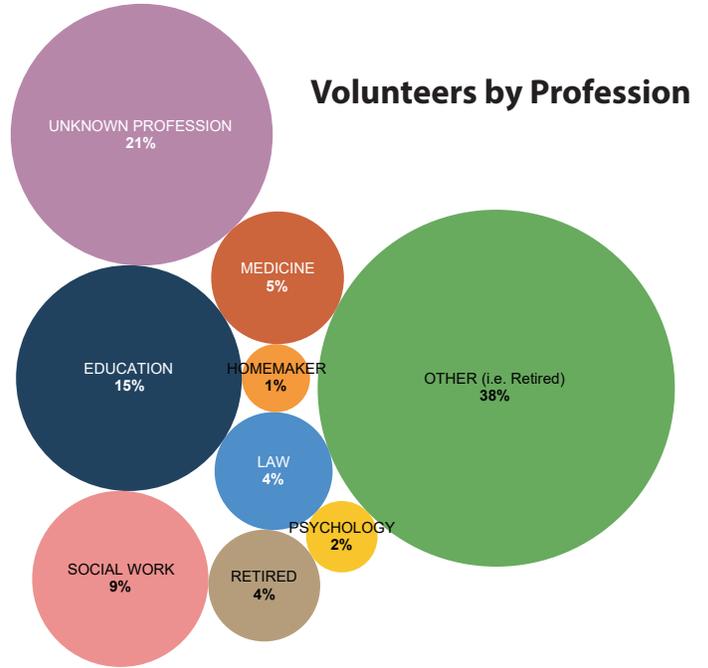
# Profile of CFCRB volunteers

## Who are the CFCRB Volunteers?

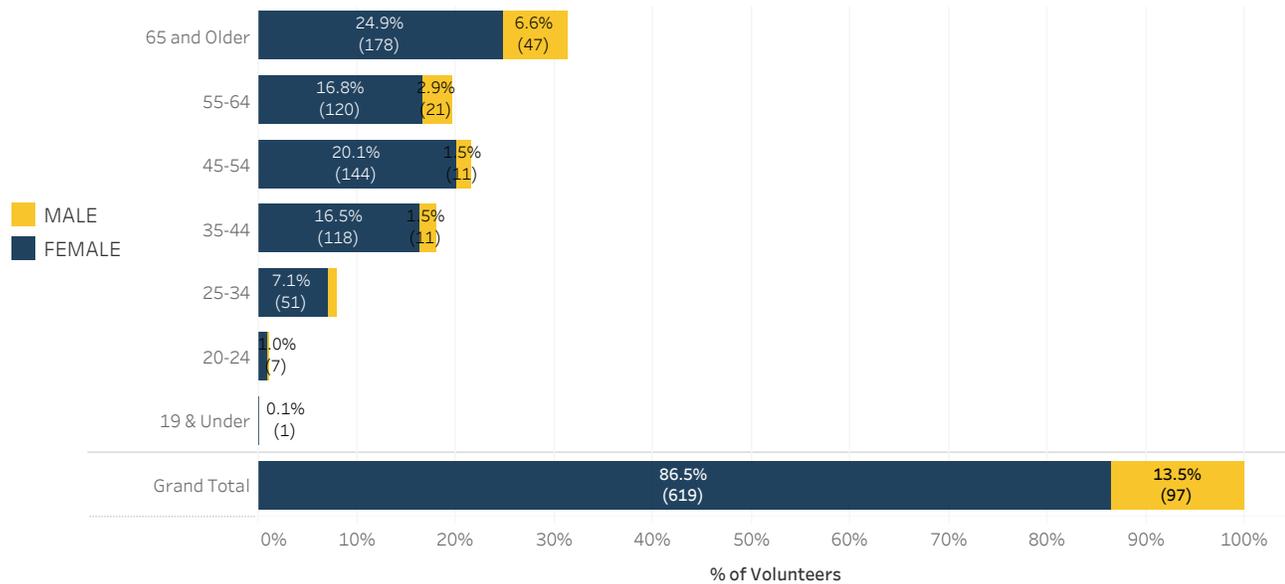
CFCRB volunteers come from a variety of educational and professional backgrounds, but all share a genuine concern for children and their welfare.

Of the 716 volunteers, 86.5% are female, and 36% have backgrounds in education, medicine, law, social work and psychology. They range in age from 19 to 90, with an average age of 56. The average length of service is six years, which demonstrates their commitment to the children they serve.

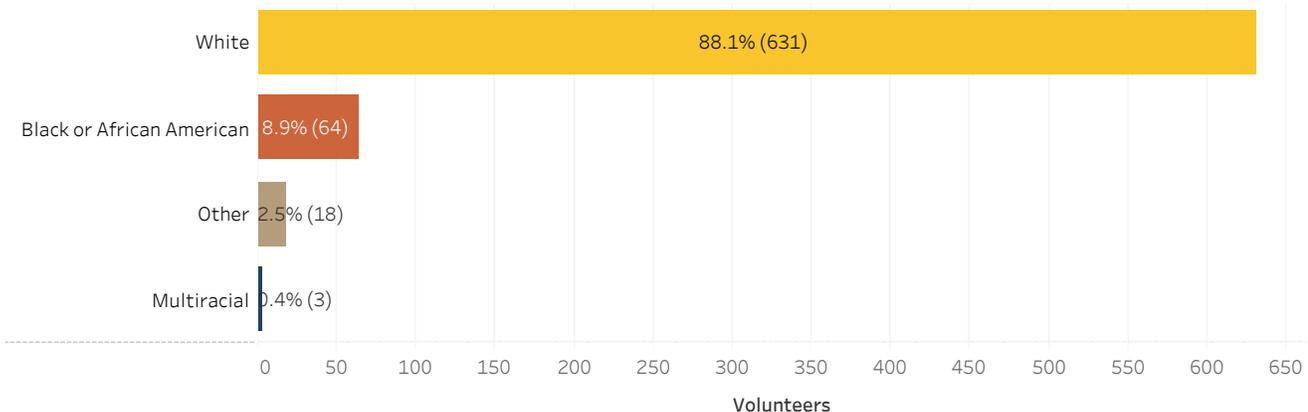
Of the volunteers, 88% are Caucasian, 9% are African American, and 2.5% are considered other.



## Volunteers by Age Group & Gender



## Volunteers by Race



# Working together, CFCRB volunteers make a difference

I would like to take this opportunity to recognize and commend the Citizen Foster Care Review Board (CFCRB) volunteers for their steadfast commitment to Kentucky’s children in out-of-home care. Their dedication, compassion and unwavering service continue to make a profound difference in the lives of the Commonwealth’s most vulnerable youth.

Over the past year, CFCRB volunteers have engaged in comprehensive training initiatives aimed at strengthening their knowledge and enhancing the impact of their reviews. These trainings have focused on key topics such as advancing a trauma-informed approach, identifying and addressing barriers to permanency, and crafting clear, actionable recommendations. Each of these efforts plays a critical role in improving the quality of reviews provided to the courts and ultimately, the outcomes for children and families.

In addition to strengthening their practice, CFCRB volunteer leadership partnered this year with the Communications Department at the Administrative Office of the Courts to design a new logo for the Kentucky Citizen Foster Care Review Board. Proudly featured throughout this annual report, the new logo is more than a visual update—it is a powerful symbol of the advocacy, collaboration and commitment our volunteers bring to their work every day.



**Ashley Clark**, Executive Officer  
Family and Juvenile Services  
Administrative Office of the Courts

**“You must be the change you wish to see in the world.”**

**— Mahatma Gandhi**

The importance of these contributions has been underscored at the national level. The federal Child and Family Services Reviews have recognized the periodic reviews conducted by the Kentucky CFCRB as a strength within our child welfare system. This recognition reflects the professionalism and care our volunteers bring to this critical role—and the trust they have earned across agencies and communities.

As we look ahead, I remain confident in our shared ability to build on this momentum. Together, we will continue to advance best practices, strengthen outcomes and center the voices of children and families in all we do.

With sincere appreciation,

Ashley Clark



# Training programs help volunteers stay current



Through training programs offered by the Administrative Office of the Courts, volunteers received 3,072 hours of initial training and continued education. Trainings are conducted via Zoom and Microsoft Teams. These trainings include:

- CFCRB annual trainings
- Initial trainings
- Chair/Vice Chair trainings
- Technical trainings, which include Secure Documents, Forms, Conducting IPRs, Microsoft Teams and Zoom Tips
- Virtual trainings focused on children's issues and approved by local chairs

The CFCRB volunteers attended annual trainings in April and May of 2025, which provided their yearly six hours of required continued education. One hundred eighty-four volunteers were trained in April, and 157 volunteers were trained in May.

The April annual training focused on the importance of working towards a trauma-informed approach to care.

Trauma-informed care recognizes the potential presence of trauma symptoms and acknowledges the role that trauma may play in an individual's life. Being aware of the role trauma plays in the lives of the children reviewed by the CFCRB heightens the quality of the reviews the boards provide to the courts.

The May trainings sought to strengthen the effectiveness of CFCRB reviews by offering interactive sessions where volunteers practiced incorporating child welfare statutes and guidelines into their findings and recommendations. These trainings focused on identifying barriers to permanency and local solutions to overcome these barriers, as well as writing impactful recommendations for the court.

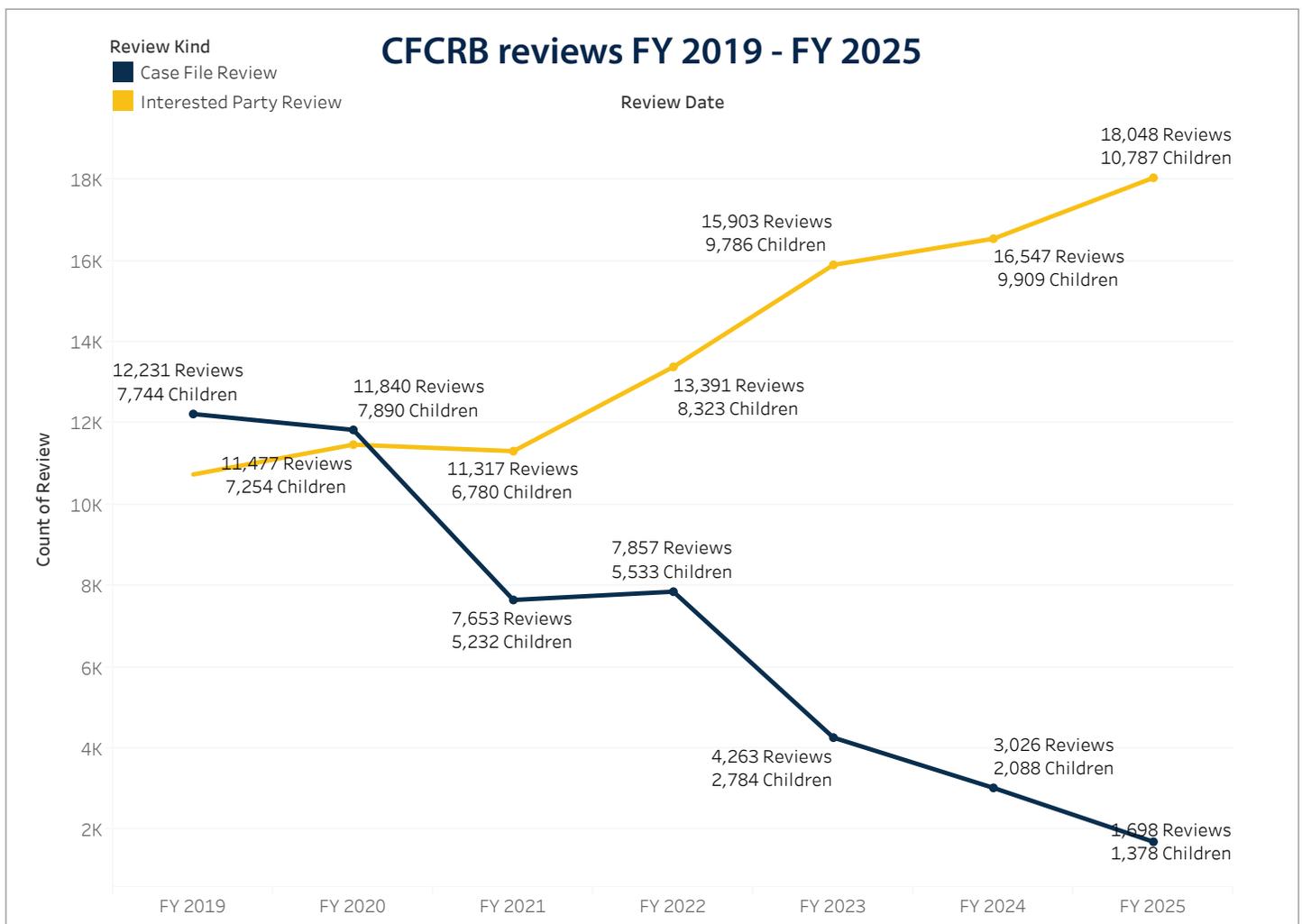
# More children benefit from an interested party review

The Interested Party Review (IPR) is an interactive review process that involves Citizen Foster Care Review Board volunteers, parents, care providers, service providers, Department for Community Based Services personnel, Court Appointed Special Advocate volunteers and attorneys for children and parents.

IPRs focus on case plans for the parents and their child, and the progress being made to secure permanency for the child. After completing the mandatory review, the Family Services program coordinator compiles a comprehensive report of findings and recommendations and submits it to the judge responsible for the case.

In FY 2025, CFCRB volunteers conducted 18,048 intensive reviews for 10,787 children. In FY 2024, the CFCRB conducted 16,539 IPRs.

The use of IPR as the standard for reviewing cases has grown exponentially since its implementation in 2007. In its first year, only 16% of the CFCRB boards used IPR, compared with 100% in FY 2025. That means that 169 boards now utilize the IPR process across all 120 Kentucky counties.



## CFCRB reviews by county/local board FY 2025

Review Board Name	Case File Review		Interested Party Review		Grand Total	
	Reviews	Children	Reviews	Children	Reviews	Children
ADAIR			58	27	58	27
ADAIR B IPR			25	7	25	7
ALLEN			127	71	127	71
ANDERSON IPR	4	4	88	49	92	49
BALLARD/CARLISLE			92	55	92	55
BARREN	30	29			30	29
Barren B IPR	3	3	109	84	112	84
BARREN IPR			172	106	172	106
BATH/MENIFEE IPR	15	15	92	53	107	56
BELL IPR	5	5	55	37	60	37
BOONE/GALLATIN	125	80			125	80
BOONE/GALLATIN 2 IPR			83	61	83	61
BOONE/GALLATIN 3 IPR			20	20	20	20
BOONE/GALLATIN IPR			196	119	196	119
BOURBON IPR	1	1	43	26	44	26
BOYD 2 IPR			15	15	15	15
BOYD A IPR			2	2	2	2
BOYD IPR	124	110	168	125	292	183
BOYLE IPR			137	75	137	75
BREATHITT	4	3	125	71	129	71
BRECKINRIDGE			91	49	91	49
BULLITT			141	91	141	91
BULLITT B			155	100	155	100
BUTLER			113	67	113	67
CALDWELL/LYON			53	35	53	35
CALLOWAY			185	97	185	97
CAMPBELL 1	140	102	1	1	141	103
CAMPBELL 2	23	22			23	22
CAMPBELL 3 IPR			125	85	125	85
CAMPBELL 4 IPR			184	109	184	109
CAMPBELL 5 IPR			24	24	24	24
CARROLL IPR	6	6	124	84	130	84
CARTER IPR	35	35	107	70	142	99
CASEY			45	23	45	23
CHRISTIAN			148	95	148	95
CHRISTIAN B IPR			133	83	133	83
CLARK B			6	6	6	6
CLARK B IPR	1	1	98	60	99	60
CLARK IPR	2	2	155	98	157	99
CLAY IPR			86	47	86	47
CLINTON IPR	5	5	36	23	41	23
CRITTENDEN			86	57	86	57
DAVISS A			160	99	160	99
DAVISS B			148	94	148	94
DAVISS C	3	3	148	89	151	89
EDMONSON			70	42	70	42
ELLIOTT/MORGAN IPR	36	32	79	45	115	64
ESTILL IPR			89	48	89	48
FAYETTE 1 IPR	4	4	186	116	190	116
FAYETTE 2 IPR			99	63	99	63
FAYETTE 3 IPR			17	17	17	17
FAYETTE 4 IPR			122	65	122	65
FAYETTE A IPR	3	3	93	55	96	55
FAYETTE B IPR			107	55	107	55
FAYETTE C			86	48	86	48
FAYETTE E IPR			135	74	135	74
FAYETTE F IPR			122	75	122	75
FAYETTE G IPR			106	52	106	52
FAYETTE I IPR			108	58	108	58
FAYETTE J IPR			137	73	137	73
FLEMING/ROBERTSON	3	3	50	32	53	34

## CFCRB reviews by county/local board FY 2025

Review Board Name	Case File Review		Interested Party Review		Grand Total	
	Reviews	Children	Reviews	Children	Reviews	Children
FLOYD IPR	39	32	207	133	246	140
FRANKLIN	123	89	6	6	129	94
FRANKLIN B IPR	13	13	2	2	15	15
FRANKLIN IPR			135	86	135	86
FULTON/HICKMAN			54	33	54	33
GARRARD IPR			105	58	105	58
GRANT IPR			90	50	90	50
GRAVES	2	2	134	80	136	80
GRAVES B			53	33	53	33
GRAYSON			166	105	166	105
GREEN			26	15	26	15
GREENUP/LEWIS IPR	51	44	147	118	198	124
HANCOCK			35	21	35	21
HARDIN A			214	159	214	159
HARDIN B			204	139	204	139
HARDIN C			208	140	208	140
HARDIN D			125	104	125	104
HARLAN IPR	2	2	46	28	48	28
HARRISON/NICHOLAS IPR	39	33	157	98	196	108
HART			85	51	85	51
HENDERSON			147	84	147	84
HENRY IPR	1	1	45	25	46	25
HOPKINS			136	80	136	80
JACKSON IPR	1	1	68	42	69	42
JEFFERSON 1	7	7			7	7
JEFFERSON 1 IPR			203	119	203	119
JEFFERSON 2 IPR	2	2	235	156	237	156
JEFFERSON 3	5	5			5	5
JEFFERSON 3 IPR	3	3	224	130	227	133
JEFFERSON 4	60	59			60	59
JEFFERSON 4 IPR	2	2	173	132	175	132
JEFFERSON 5A			208	126	208	126
JEFFERSON 6 IPR			258	152	258	152
JEFFERSON 7			115	69	115	69
JEFFERSON 7A			108	60	108	60
JEFFERSON 8	2	2	110	65	112	67
JEFFERSON 8A			101	61	101	61
JEFFERSON 9 IPR	8	7	263	158	271	161
JEFFERSON 10 IPR			134	91	134	91
JEFFERSON 10B IPR			76	51	76	51
JESSAMINE IPR			120	68	120	68
JOHNSON IPR	16	15	85	47	101	58
KENTON 1 IPR	18	18	98	67	116	77
KENTON 2 IPR	19	18	108	60	127	68
KENTON 3 IPR	3	3	15	15	18	18
KENTON 3-Campbell	82	60	1	1	83	61
KENTON 4 IPR	24	24	119	72	143	79
KENTON 5 IPR	13	13	118	78	131	83
KENTON 6	87	70	2	2	89	72
KENTON 6 IPR	4	4	10	10	14	13
KENTON 7 IPR	22	22	96	62	118	73
KENTON 8 IPR	10	10	112	64	122	64
KENTON STATUS IPR	17	17	69	53	86	64
KNOTT/PERRY IPR			76	45	76	45
KNOX IPR			125	76	125	76
LARUE			23	16	23	16
LAUREL 2			173	93	173	93
LAUREL IPR	2	1	173	94	175	95
LAWRENCE IPR	30	27	77	46	107	60
LEE/OWSLEY IPR	7	7	90	62	97	64
LESLIE	6	5	55	41	61	41

## CFCRB reviews by county/local board FY 2025

Review Board Name	Case File Review		Interested Party Review		Grand Total	
	Reviews	Children	Reviews	Children	Reviews	Children
LETCHER	2	2	60	32	62	32
LINCOLN IPR			117	67	117	67
LIVINGSTON			34	22	34	22
LOGAN			84	51	84	51
MADISON A IPR	1	1	171	105	172	105
MADISON B	3	3	166	93	169	95
MADISON C	1	1	16	12	17	13
MADISON C IPR	1	1	136	88	137	88
MAGOFFIN IPR	11	11	69	40	80	49
MARION/WASHINGTON IPR			64	45	64	45
MARSHALL			76	52	76	52
Marshall B			94	59	94	59
MARTIN IPR	48	45	85	55	133	85
MASON/BRACKEN IPR	2	2	131	90	133	90
MCCRACKEN A IPR			156	95	156	95
MCCRACKEN B			162	89	162	89
MCCREARY	1	1	62	28	63	28
MCLEAN			41	24	41	24
MEADE			143	82	143	82
MERCER IPR			96	57	96	57
METCALFE			37	21	37	21
MONROE/CUMBERLAND			36	18	36	18
MONTGOMERY IPR	31	31	90	66	121	70
MUHLENBERG			106	62	106	62
NELSON			67	40	67	40
OHIO			156	94	156	94
OLDHAM IPR			60	42	60	42
OWEN			37	23	37	23
PENDLETON IPR	21	21	91	62	112	63
Perry 2	13	12	174	116	187	116
PIKE IPR A	56	44	247	181	303	192
POWELL IPR	24	22	64	38	88	54
PULASKI B IPR			90	54	90	54
PULASKI IPR			169	101	169	101
ROCKCASTLE IPR			108	56	108	56
ROWAN A IPR	16	15	123	65	139	77
RUSSELL			166	97	166	97
SCOTT	48	41	1	1	49	41
SCOTT B IPR	19	18	48	46	67	61
SHELBY B IPR	17	17	48	47	65	57
SHELBY IPR	10	10	123	80	133	82
SIMPSON			114	68	114	68
SPENCER IPR	1	1	55	34	56	34
TAYLOR			47	32	47	32
TODD			69	51	69	51
TRIGG			40	24	40	24
TRIMBLE IPR			40	20	40	20
UNION			76	49	76	49
WARREN A IPR			125	71	125	71
WARREN B			121	70	121	70
WARREN C IPR			125	74	125	74
WARREN D IPR			137	77	137	77
WARREN E IPR			132	71	132	71
WARREN G IPR			123	61	123	61
WAYNE	7	7	74	43	81	47
WEBSTER	1	1	21	12	22	12
WHITLEY IPR	19	18	233	130	252	130
WOLFE	13	12	48	25	61	37
WOODFORD			41	24	41	24
Grand Total	1,698	1,378	18,048	10,787	19,746	11,435

# ***Celebrating positive outcomes for children***

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It truly takes a village to help a child grow and thrive. This section highlights the success, however big or small, of children and families who have experienced positive impacts despite their involvement in the child welfare system. We appreciate the CFCRB volunteers and staff, judges and Cabinet for Health and Family Services staff for creating the village that makes this good news possible.





## Success Stories

### Fayette County IPR

The Fayette F Interested Party Review (IPR) board reviewed a sibling group of five children who had been in out-of-home care since 2021. Throughout the duration of the case, the mother remained fully compliant with her case plan and successfully completed all required tasks. Despite her progress, the goal was later changed to adoption, and a petition for termination of parental rights (TPR) was filed. Upon learning about the Citizen Foster Care Review Board (CFCRB), the mother reached out requesting to attend the Interested Party Review. After her participation in several IPRs, the board determined that she had demonstrated consistent compliance and questioned the justification for proceeding with the TPR. Following consideration of the board's findings and recommendations, the Judge denied the TPR and directed the Cabinet to work toward reunification. Within a few months, the children successfully transitioned back home, and custody was rescinded. The mother's perseverance, unwavering hope, and determination to reunite with her children are truly commendable.

### Madison County IPR

The Madison B IPR board reviewed an 18-year-old recommitted youth who came into care because of sexual abuse in the home by a family member. She bonded well with her foster family; however, they decided not to pursue adoption due to her age. Instead, the family will be a lifelong support for her. She visits them over school breaks and holidays. She maintains a relationship with her younger brother, who is still in the mother's care, though she chooses not to have a relationship with her mother. She is currently attending Eastern Kentucky University (EKU) with a goal of becoming a pharmacist. She is doing well in her own apartment. She has obtained her driver's license and has saved enough money to purchase a car. In addition to attending EKU, she works part-time.

### Hardin County IPR

The Hardin D IPR board reviewed two siblings who entered care due to parental substance misuse. The parents worked diligently to complete their case plan. Through their dedicated efforts and compliance with the local Family Recovery Court, the parents were able to maintain sobriety. The family was reunified within eight months of the children being placed in out-of-home care.





The Citizen Foster Care Review Board owes its success to the 716 volunteers who advocate for Kentucky’s children. We pay tribute to several of these longtime child welfare champions.

## **Veteran Volunteers** – focusing on volunteers’ history with CFCRB.

These long-time CFCRB volunteers have spent years—some, even decades—helping create better outcomes for Kentucky’s children. Their dedication, experience, and insight have made a lasting difference in the foster care system and in the communities they serve.

As of May 2025, all CFCRB boards now review cases as Interested Party Review boards—meaning they work more closely with everyone involved in a child’s case to better understand each situation.



### **KIM CRAIG – Clinton IPR (20 years of service)**

**Meet Kim Craig.** For over 20 years, Kim has volunteered with the Citizen Foster Care Review Board, combining her deep commitment to youth with her 30-year career as a Family Resource and Youth Services Center coordinator in her local school system. That connection has kept her involved ever since. For the past 15 years, Kim has served as chair of the Clinton County Interested Party Review Board, helping guide meaningful conversations and decisions for children in care. One case that still stands out to her involved a baby boy placed for adoption. He entered foster care shortly after birth and was later adopted. Kim wants future volunteers to know one thing: “You will never regret it.”



### **CINDY PAYNE – Warren B (20 years of service)**

**Meet Cindy Payne,** a veteran Citizen Foster Care Review Board volunteer whose years of service have been filled with both challenges and hope. One moment that left a lasting impression on her was when a foster child bravely shared her story at a board meeting, describing how much she loved her foster family. Though she didn’t want to be adopted, the child told the board she just wanted to stay with people who made her feel safe and loved. “It brought us all to tears,” Cindy recalled. With deep compassion, Cindy has reviewed countless cases, some difficult, others uplifting. “Your emotions will be all over the place,” she said, “but as a volunteer, you have the power to influence a child’s future.” Her advice for new volunteers? Be prepared for anything but know that what you do matters.

### **KATHIE HARRIS – Harlan (39 years of service)**

**Meet Kathie Harris.** She first joined the Citizen Foster Care Review Board while in graduate school, encouraged by a colleague who recognized her passion for supporting children and families in southeastern Kentucky.

With a background in school psychology, the mission of CFCRB felt like a natural fit. In the early years, reviews meant handwritten notes, triplicate forms and mailed recommendations. Today, the process is more streamlined and digital, but one thing hasn't changed: Kathie's focus.

She ensures every decision centers on the best interest of the child. To her, CFCRB represents a commitment to creating meaningful, lasting change in the community she calls home, something made possible by the dedication her fellow volunteers demonstrate through their presence and hard work.



### **KATHY PECK – Butler, Edmonson, Grayson, Warren B, Warren C IPR (10 years of service)**

**Meet Kathy Peck.** When Kathy heard a radio commercial about the Citizen Foster Care Review Board, it sparked something in her. With a long history of giving back through various organizations, she saw CFCRB as a meaningful way to continue volunteering, especially in a space that was deeply personal. “My mom was in foster care and I remember visiting her foster parents when I was a child,” Kathy shared. “I also have a cousin who was placed in foster care when we were children.”

Since joining CFCRB, Kathy has worked on a lot of cases. The most meaningful moments for her are when children are safely reunited with their families. “When parents use the resources available, make changes and are reunited with their children—those cases stay with me.” When asked what keeps her going, Kathy doesn't hesitate. “The children. Someone has to fight for them.”



### **SHELIA NUCKOLS – Adair, Barren IPR, Barren B IPR, Hart, Laure, Lincoln IPR, McCreary, Taylor (19 years)**

**Meet Shelia Nuckols.** When she first signed up to be a Citizen Foster Care Review Board volunteer nearly 20 years ago, she already had a heart for children in care. Whether through fostering or volunteering, she knew she wanted to be part of the solution for kids stuck in limbo. “It was a learning curve,” she admitted. “But I saw early on how many cases were stuck because there wasn't a clear direction. I wanted to help change that—not just for the kids in my care, but for others too.” She believes that every volunteer plays an important role in helping the system work. “Sometimes, you're just one piece of the pie and that piece matters,” she said. Over the years, she's seen those small pieces add up to real progress. What once took five years can now happen in two. “That stability makes a big difference in a child's life.” Reflecting on her years of service, she added, “It's not for everyone, but if you try it, you might find that you're exactly the piece that helps a child find stability and a home.” For Shelia, the most meaningful moments aren't tied to one case, but to seeing children find permanency, whether through adoption, reunification, or kinship placement.



# A heart for children



Giving a voice to our youngest citizens takes compassion and concern for the welfare of others. CFCRB volunteers explain their devotion to this cause.

## Why I volunteer



**ANNE POLSTON** – Adair, Adair B IPR, Barren B IPR, Casey, Clinton IPR, Hardin A, Hardin B, Hardin D, Hart, Monroe/ Cumberland, Powell IPR, Russell, Russell B IPR, Wayne, Wolfe

**Meet Anne Polston.** When she and her husband were granted custody of their four grandchildren, she stepped into a role that changed her life. Grateful for the system that made it possible, Anne felt called to get involved. Now serving on a board that helps guide decisions for children in care, Anne understands how the Child Protective Services, Department for Community Based Services and the courts work together. It's made her realize how much stronger the work is when everyone brings something to the table. "Each of us brings something different and that's what makes our work strong," she said reflecting on her IPR Board. "We're a team."



**TERRI COKE** – Daviess B, McLean

**Meet Terri Coke,** a compassionate force within the non-profit and volunteer community. You may know Terri from her work as a Court-Appointed Special Advocate, where she advocates for the best interests of children involved in the court system. Her dedication to children and families continues in her volunteer role with the Citizen Foster Care Review Board, where she helps connect the dots. Drawing from her experience, she ensures that no detail slips through the cracks. "We're often the voice in the room," she said. Over time, Terri has developed new skills, listening deeply and making thoughtful, informed recommendations for families and children. But she's also found something just as rewarding: community and friendship. "I've had contact with most of the members of my board previously outside of CFCRB," she said. "It's interesting how our lives and activities overlap." "There is a non-profit/volunteer community and we just keep running into each other!" What began as a way to support

children on their journeys has also become a source of connection, a shared sense of purpose and a strong community of people working toward the same goal.

## LINDSEY GARRETT – Warren D IPR, Warren G IPR



**Meet Lindsey Garrett**, a foster mom whose heart for children in care led her to continue making a difference through the Citizen Foster Care Review Board. After years of opening her home to children in foster care, Lindsey and her family were nearing the end of their fostering journey, but her passion never faded. She still felt called to support children and families in a powerful way. She saw CFCRB as the perfect next step. Being a foster mom herself, she brings a strong voice to the table—advocating for youth in care, supporting foster families and uplifting biological parents working toward reunification. “My empathy has continued to grow with each review, each case,” she said. “To be privy to the worst moments of people’s lives is a daunting task but, it is a weight I am privileged to bear alongside our youth and their families.” For Lindsey, this work is personal, powerful and she’s committed to serving for as long as she can.

## LEE WHALEN – Boone/Gallatin IPR



**Meet Lee Whalen.** Before changing careers, she spent years on the front lines of child welfare as a social service clinician and supervisor for the Department for Community Based Services in Kenton County. That experience gave her a deep understanding of the child welfare system and a lasting commitment to Kentucky’s children. Today, she continues that commitment as a volunteer reviewing cases of children in out-of-home care. “I knew I could bring a unique experience and insight as well as understanding of the legal process,” she said. When she and her husband decided to start a family, she stepped away from full-time child welfare work, but it didn’t stop her from making a difference. “It’s something I can do from my desk without adding any more to my plate after work.” Lee finds the most inspiration in cases where older youth overcome difficult circumstances. “Some of the best cases are of our older youth, who a lot of the time are not adoptable, who come from some horrible situations but have fought through,” she said. Their stories aren’t easy – but they’re powerful. And for Lee, being able to witness, support and advocate for those resilient older youth is a reminder that hope can still thrive in even the hardest places.

## GWENDOLYN OCHOA – Hancock



**Meet Gwendolyn Ochoa**, a dedicated volunteer with the Citizen Foster Care Review Board, who first got involved after being encouraged from a former colleague. What began as a suggestion soon grew into a calling. “I began on a board knowing I was making a significant impact on a child’s life who cannot speak up for themselves,” she said. Gwendolyn brings a practical, compassionate perspective to each case, informed by her own experiences as a parent. She looks beyond the paperwork and focuses on what families really need. That might be support, understanding or simply asking the right questions. While the work can be challenging, it has also been deeply rewarding. For her, this work has never been about recognition; it’s about showing up, speaking up and making sure no child is overlooked. “I cannot emphasize enough how just asking a basic question like ‘Have we thought about this?’ or ‘What if we tried this?’ has produced a positive outcome.”

# In remembrance of: Melissa Goff

The Department of Family and Juvenile Services remembers with deep respect the contributions of Melissa Goff, who served as Program Coordinator for the Citizen Foster Care Review Board (CFCRB) program from December 16, 2013, until her passing on June 3, 2025.

Throughout her tenure, Melissa exemplified professionalism, knowledge and compassion. She was a steadfast advocate for children and families, and her dedication to the mission of the CFCRB strengthened the program and enriched the lives of those it serves.

Her absence is deeply felt, yet her legacy of commitment and care continues to guide and inspire the work of the CFCRB and the department.

## In memoriam

Sadly, members of the Citizen Foster Care Review Board passed away during this fiscal year. We honor and pay tribute to their memory and their dedication to the children they tirelessly advocated for throughout their services to the CFCRB. The voice they provided for the commonwealth's children in out-of-home care lives on through the CFCRB's continued commitment to children in foster care.

Brian Wajdyk	Madison A IPR	3 years of service
Joyce Sutton	McLean	12 years of service
Patricia Duncan	Hopkins	11 years of service
Donna Busic	Pike, Perry, Leslie, Lee, Owsley, Knott, Floyd Estill	21 years of service
Berlin Goins	Whitley, McCreary, Laurel, Knox, Clay, Bell, Adair	12 years of service
Melissa Goff	CFCRB Program Coordinator	12 years of service



# CFCRB Executive Committee

The CFCRB Executive Committee oversees the operation of the State Citizen Foster Care Review Board established in KRS 620.310 (1) and (2). The State Board consists of all local review board chairs and provides for a state CFCRB chair and vice chair.

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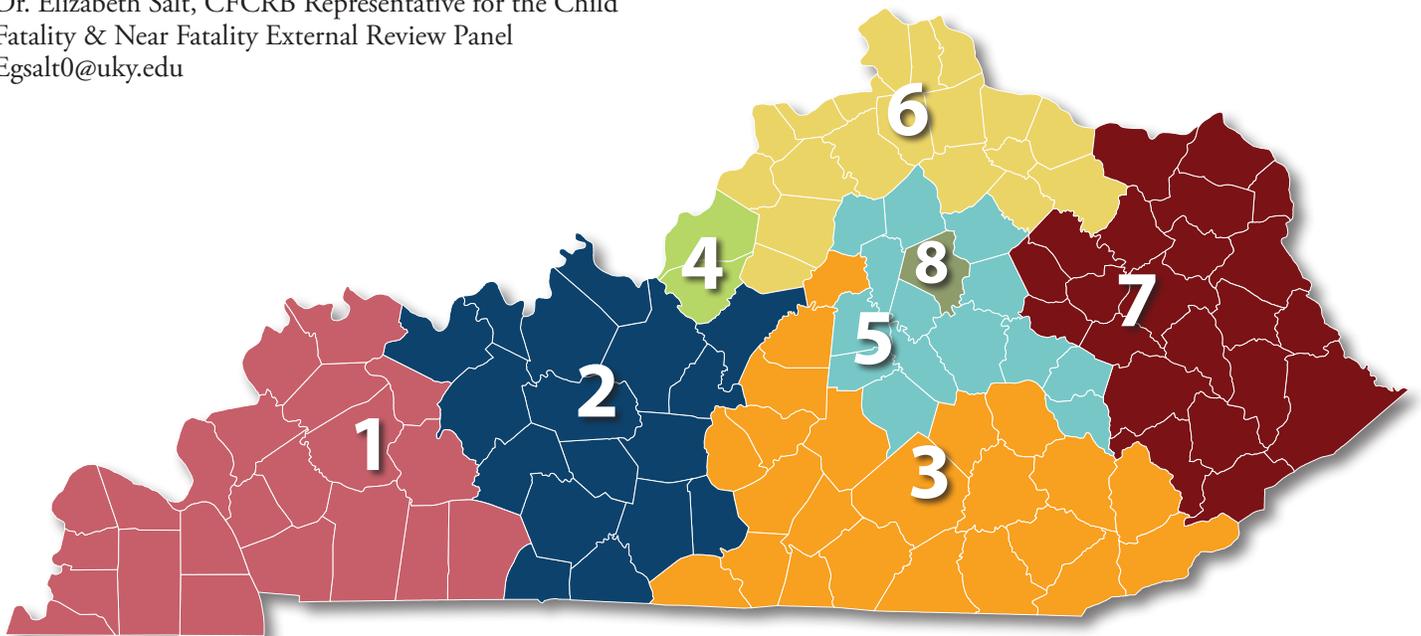
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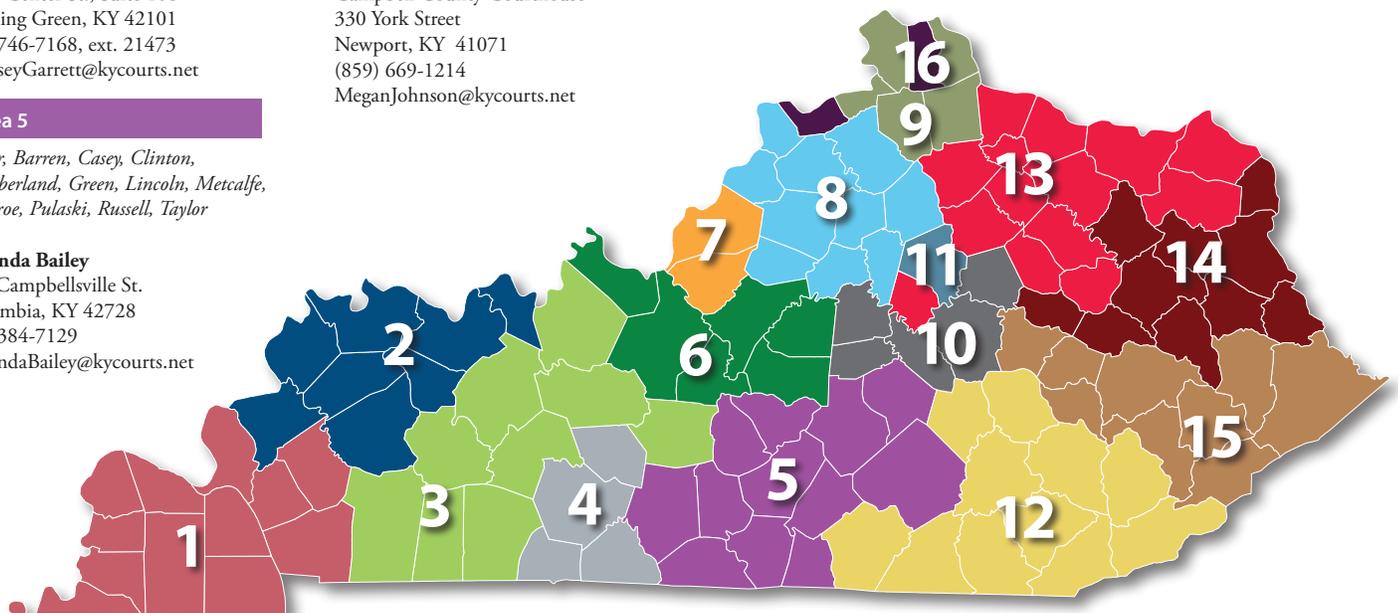
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## Acknowledgments

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