

Legislative Interactions with Child Welfare

Janée Harvey, Family Well-Being and Protection Division Director



Health and
Human Services

Structure of Child Protective Services (CPS)

All States have....

- ▶ Child Abuse Reporting
- ▶ Laws
 - Mandatory Reporters
 - Categories of abuse
 - Confidentiality
 - Allegation responses
 - Legal timelines
- ▶ Services tied to Reasonable Efforts
- ▶ Court interaction

Iowa has the Three Cs

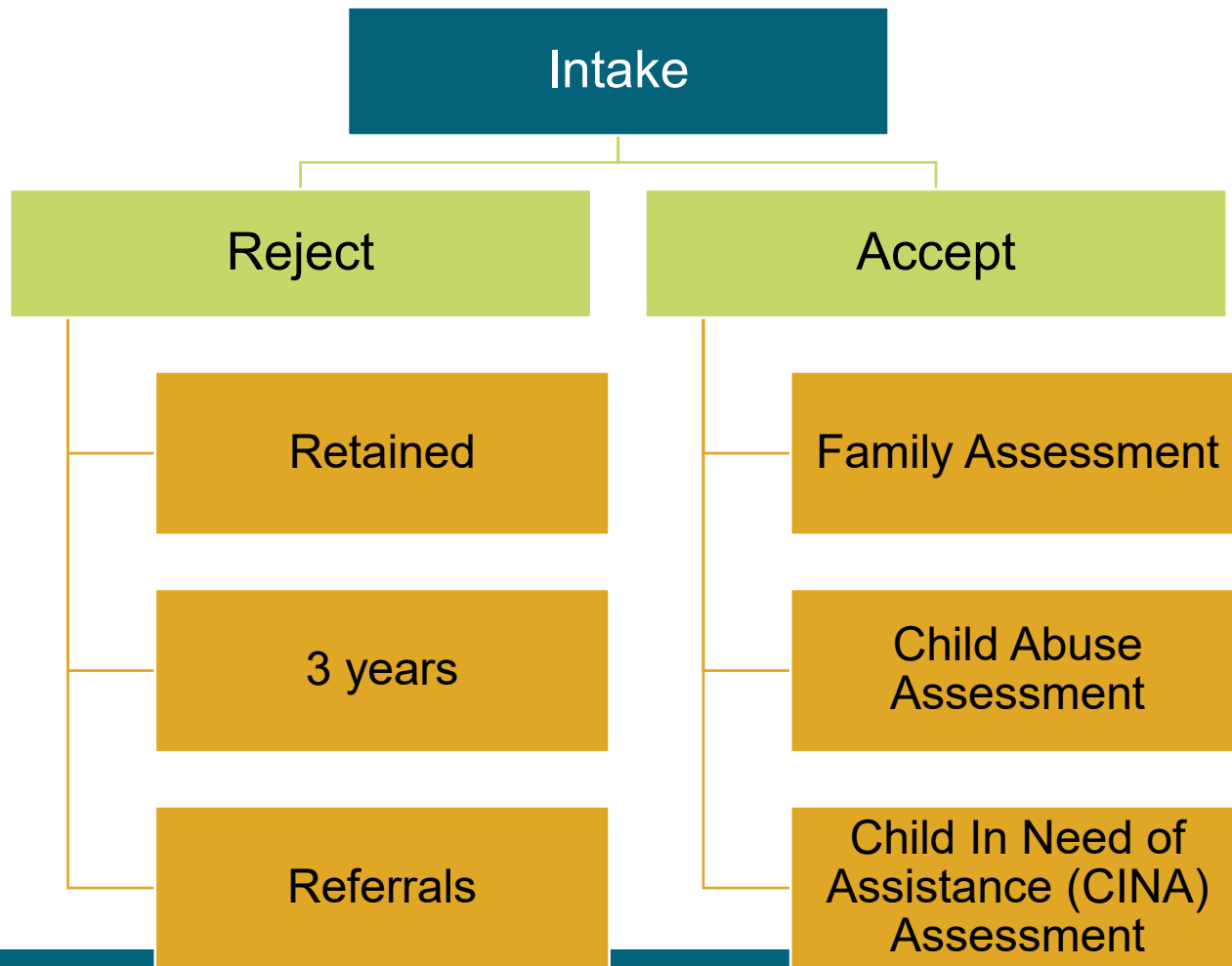
The victim is a
child

The person
alleged
responsible is a
caretaker

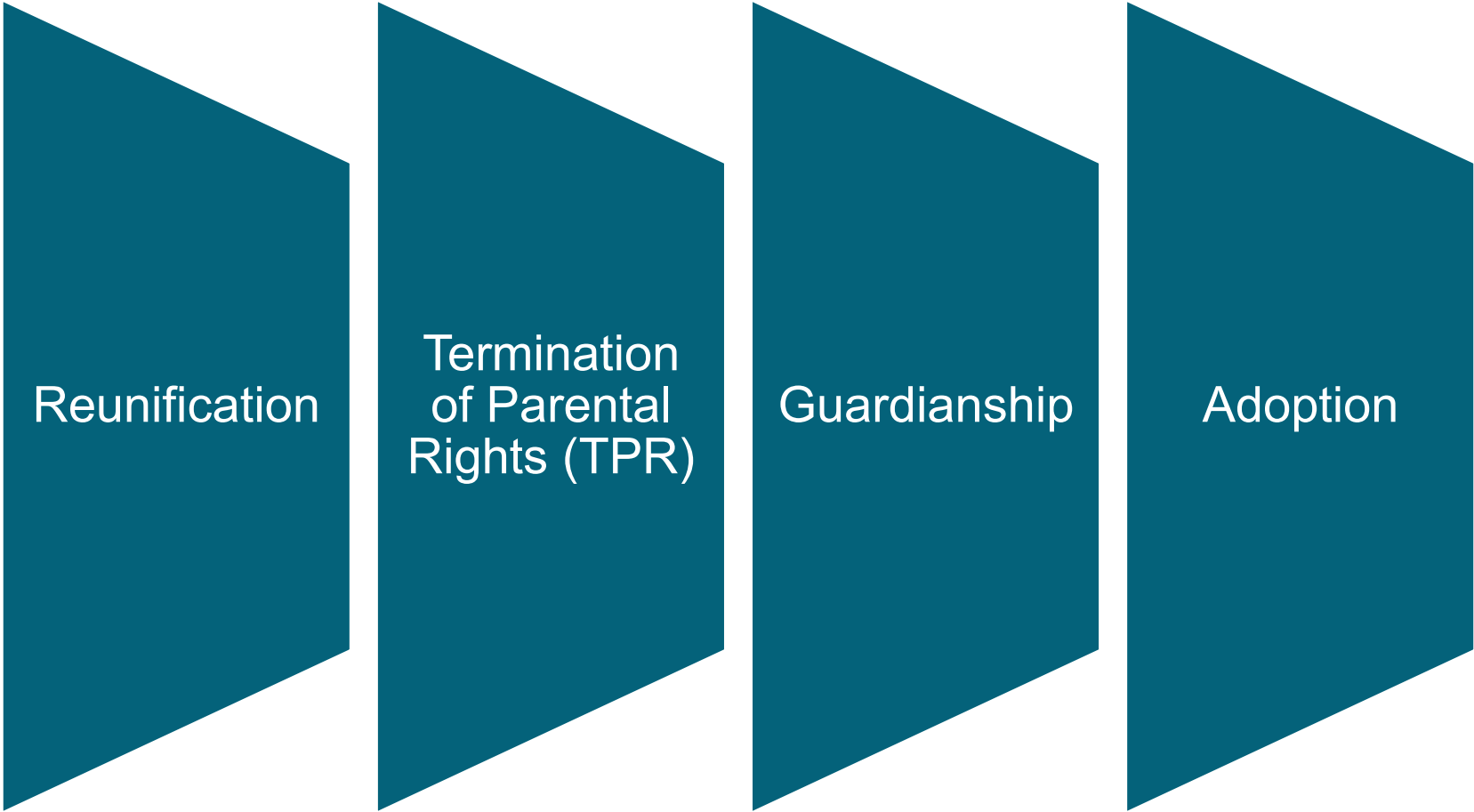
The child is
subjected to
one or more of
the 11
**categories of
abuse** defined
in Iowa Code §
232.68

Iowa's Abuse Hotline

1-800-362-2178



Case Closure Outcomes



Reunification

Termination
of Parental
Rights (TPR)

Guardianship

Adoption

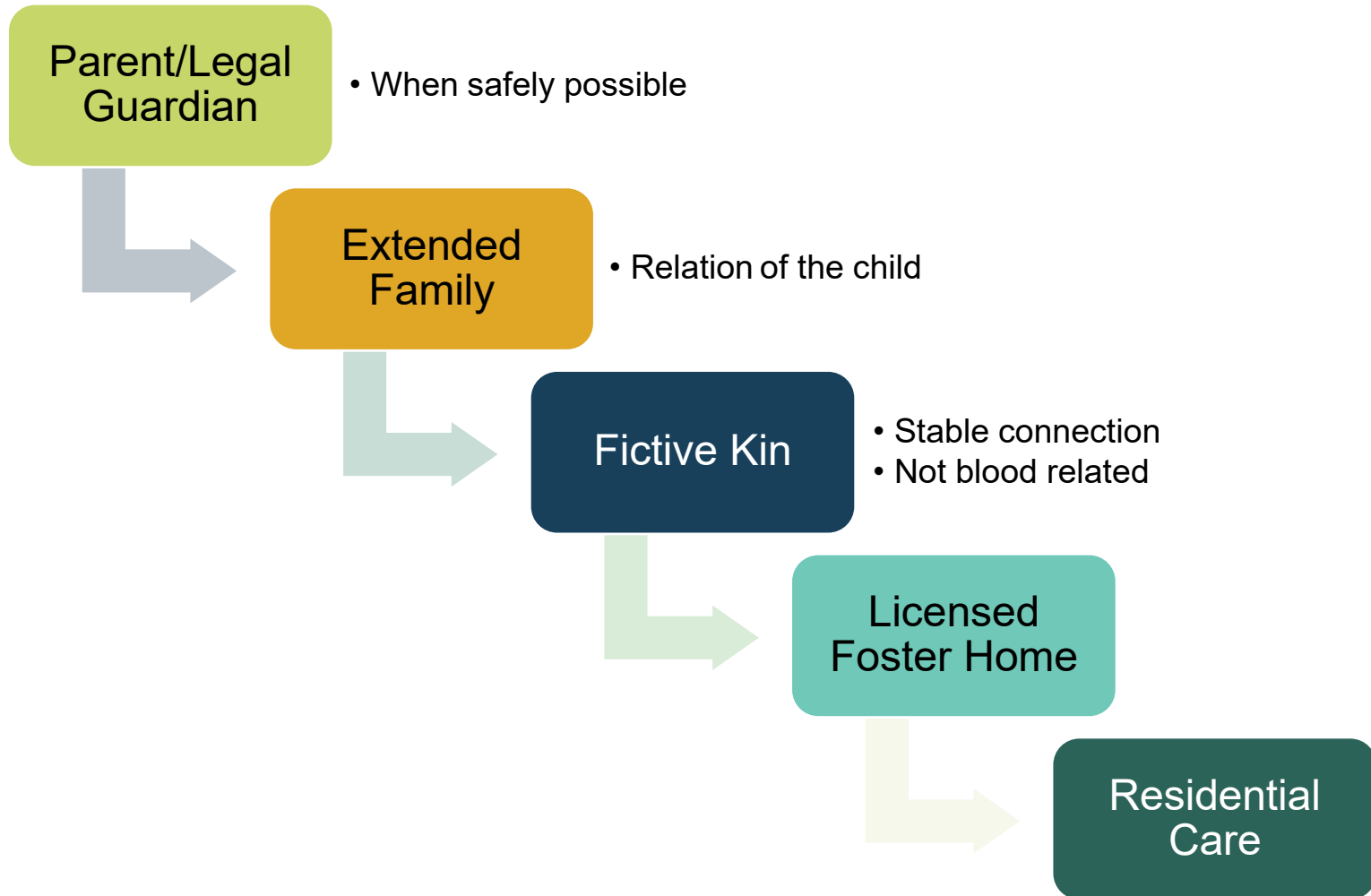
Key Legislation Examples in Iowa

Family First Prevention Services Act “Family First”

- Federal legislation in 2018 to restructure how the federal government spends money on child welfare
- Improve outcomes for children
- Utilize evidence-based practice
- Foster care prevention services
 - Mental health & substance abuse treatment
 - In home family services
 - Parent skill-based program



Placement Options



Kinship Caregiver Support (2025)

Kinship Care Payment

- Implemented April 1, 2025
- Daily rate equivalent to base foster care maintenance payment

Expedited licensing for Relative/Fictive Kin

- Implemented July 1, 2025
- 674 referrals

System and Transformation

Iowa's Focus

"Family connections are strengthened and preserved"

Safely reducing the number of children in care

Implementation of evidence-based services

Reduce reliance on group care

Subsidized Guardianship Program

Saving money doing what's right for the family and for the budget

How We Will Improve Outcomes



Safe Kids Strategies

Transforming Child Protective Services in Iowa

Support a well-trained workforce equipped to spend more time with families

- Workforce recruitment and retention payments
- Comprehensive Child Welfare Information System (CCWIS) development

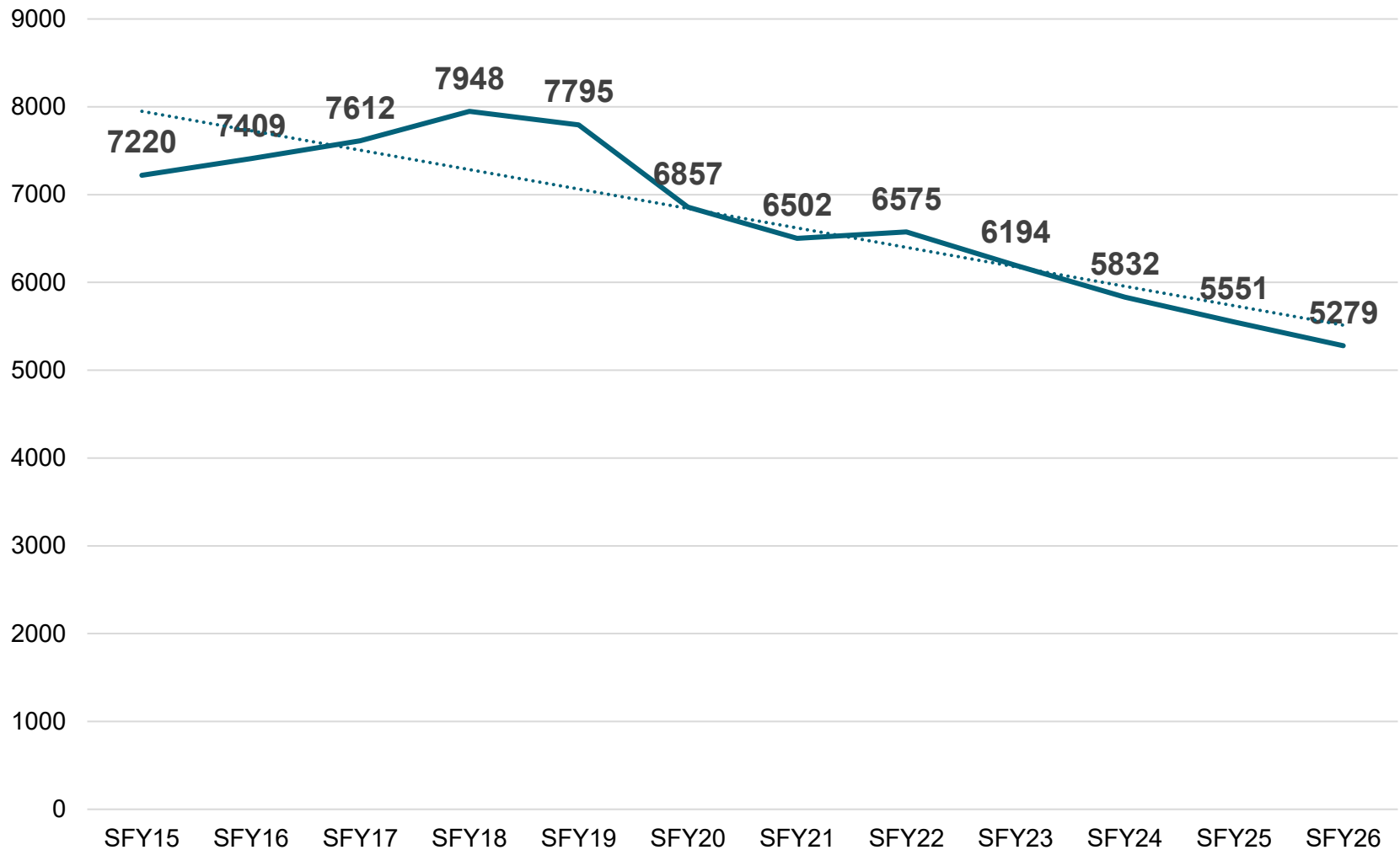
Elevate quality specialty care to meet unique needs

- Therapeutic Foster Care
- Sobriety, Treatment and Recovery Teams (START)

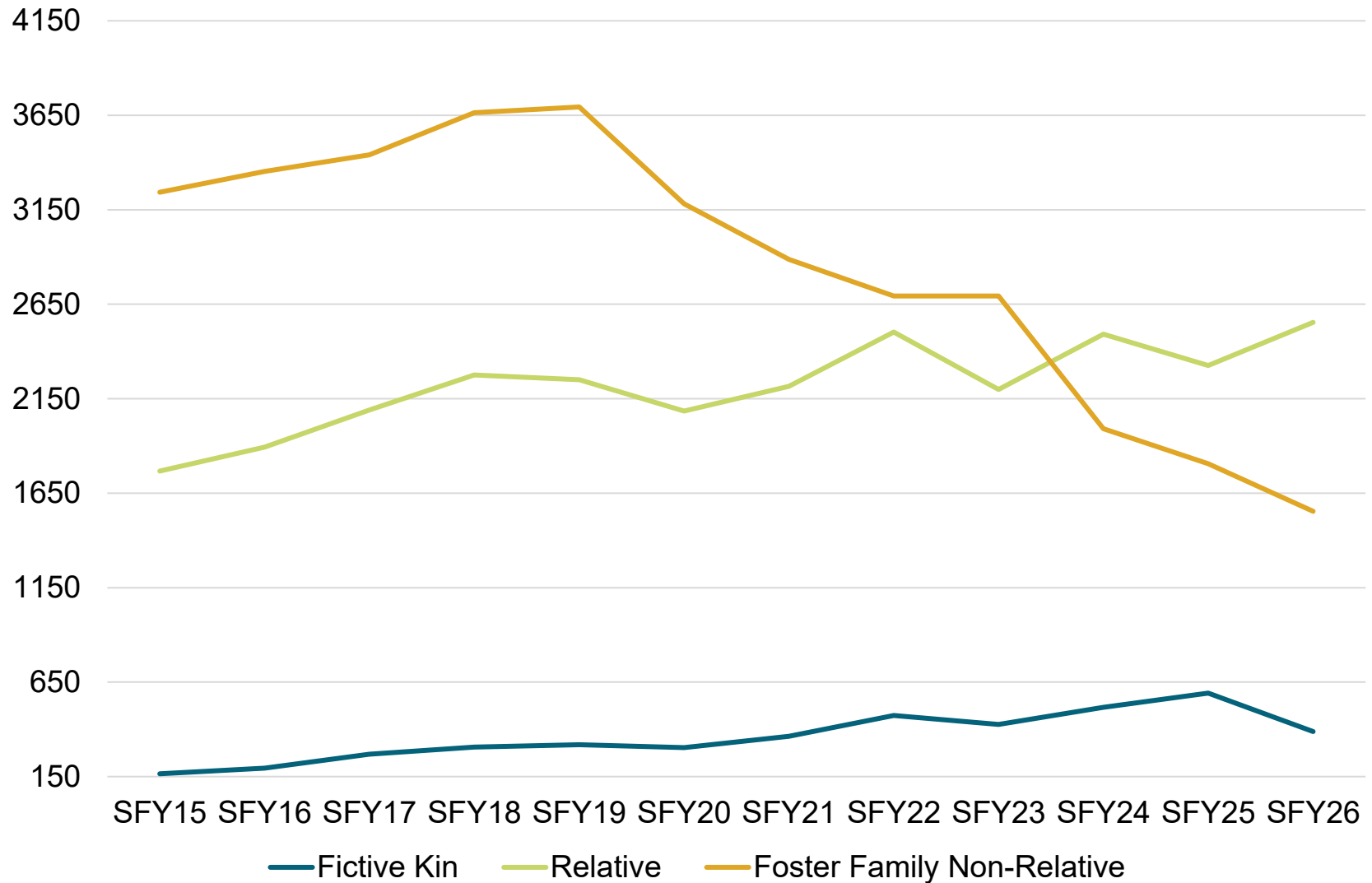
Build strong relationships so kids spend more time in family settings

- Central Consult Unit (CCU)

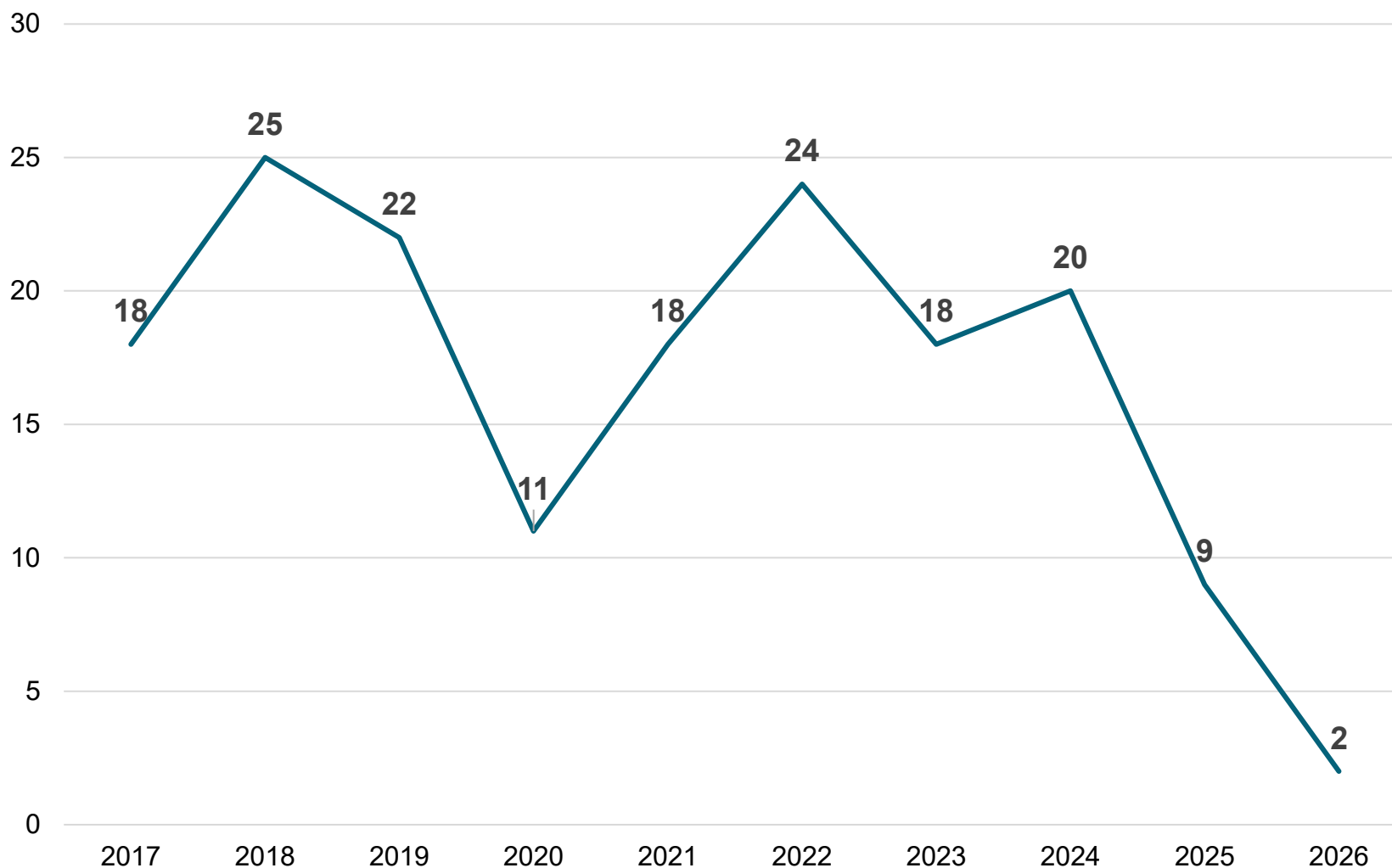
Number of Children in Foster Care



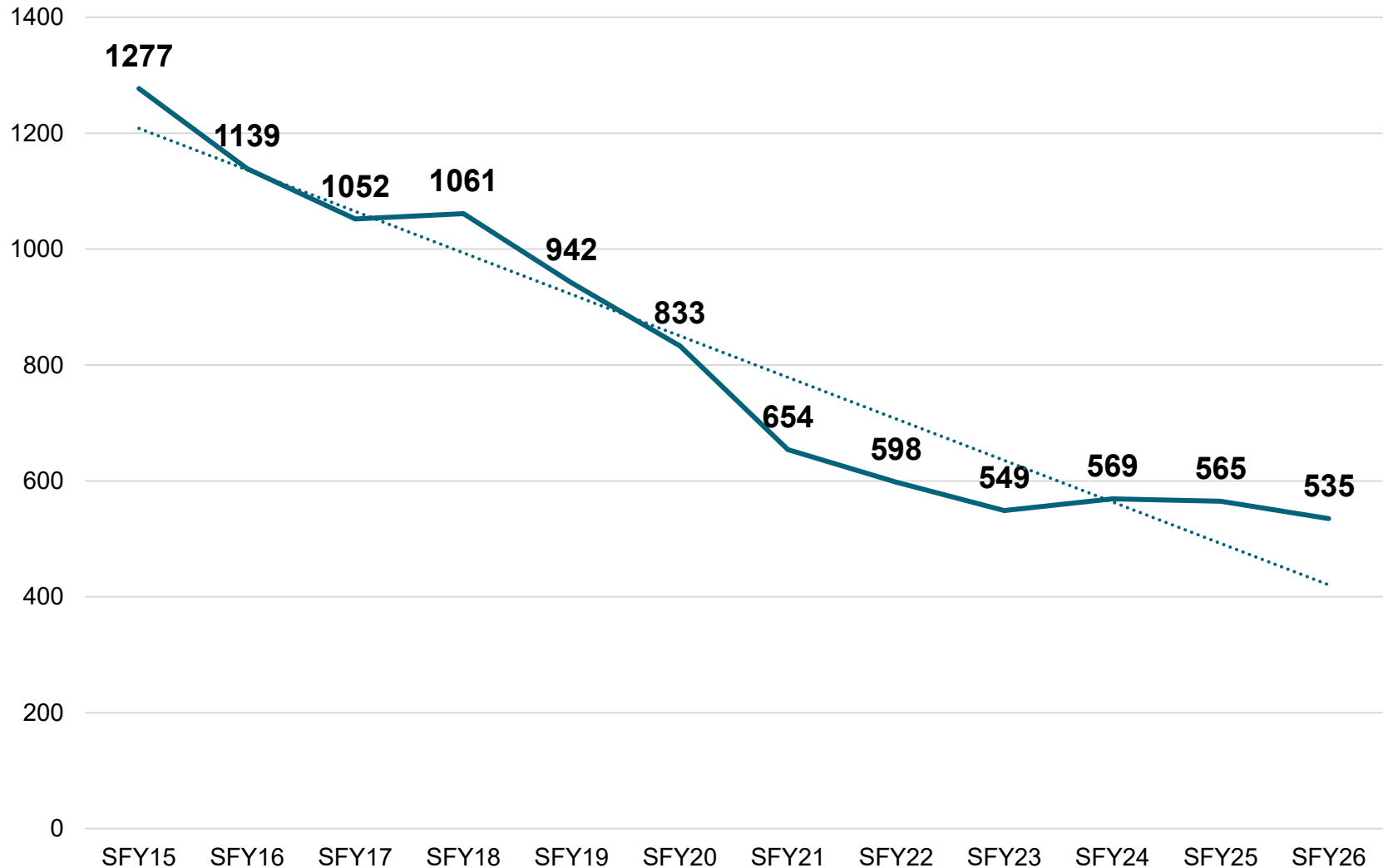
Foster Care Placements



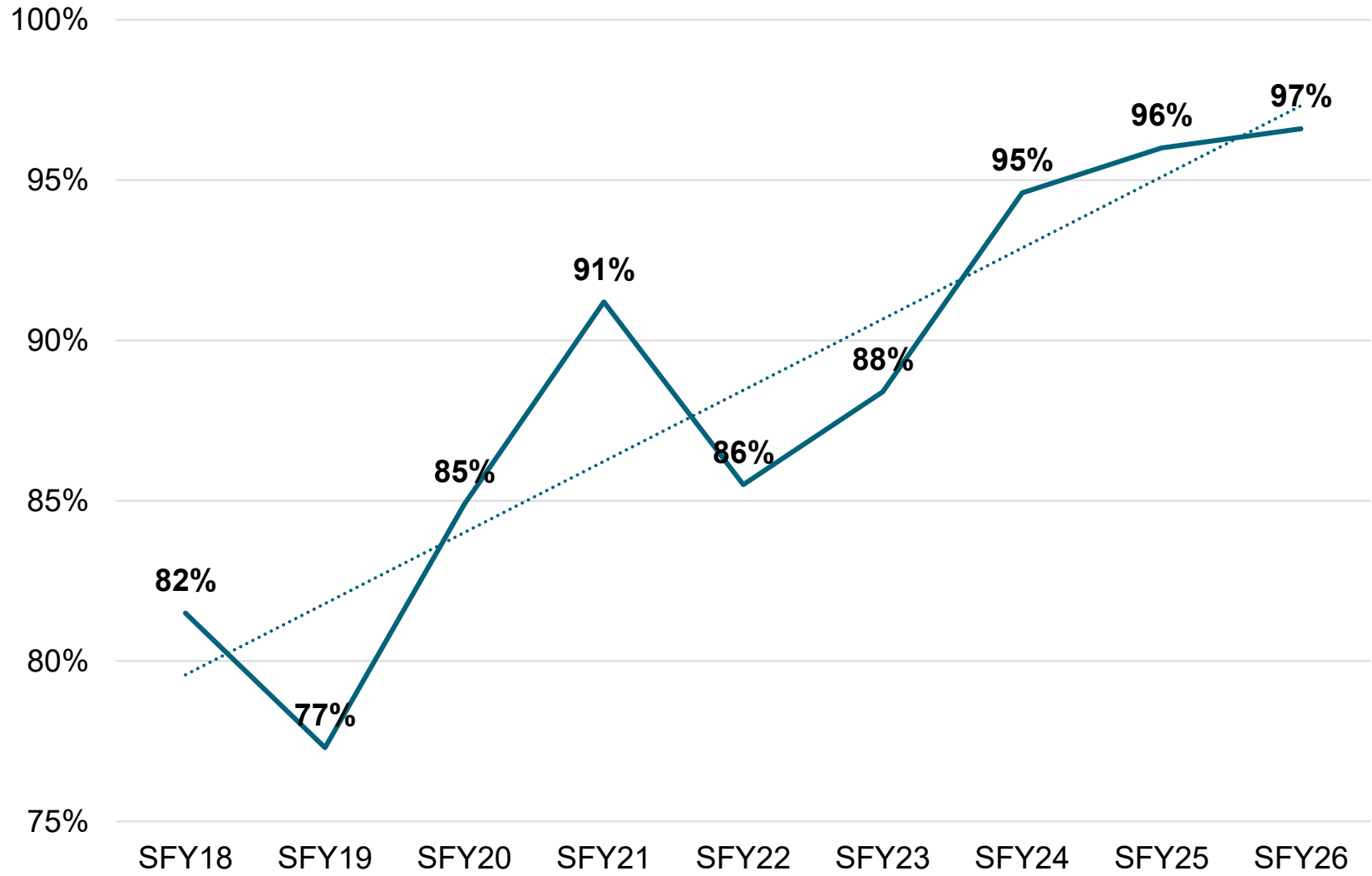
Child Fatalities as a Result of Abuse



Number of Children in Group Care



Monthly Casework Visits





Health and
Human Services

Questions

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SAFE STRONG SUPPORTIVE

casey family programs

Peter J. Pecora, Ph.D.
Managing Director,
Research Services
Presentation for the CSG
Midwestern Legislative
Conference

August 31, 2026

safe children | strong families | supportive communities

safe children | **strong** families | **supportive** communities



Who we are

Casey Family Programs is the nation's largest operating foundation focused on safely reducing the need for foster care and Building Communities of Hope for children and families in the United States.

SAFE STRONG SUPPORTIVE

OUR MISSION

To provide and improve —
and ultimately prevent the
need for — foster care.

Outline

- What research and data indicate about keeping children safe at home
- Considerations for state legislature oversight
- What is a well-functioning child protection agency?

Child safety is paramount

Child protection agencies are entrusted with the authority to uphold safety through identification, assessment, and the provision of appropriate services.

What is best for children and families?

- Intervene as early as possible
- Some vulnerable children can remain safely at home while parents receive community services and support
- Removing children from their families and homes creates emotional distress and trauma that should be avoided, whenever possible

Indicators can inform state legislature oversight

Monitor key indicators over time to see patterns in the performance and outcomes:

- Who is the child protection agency serving?
- Is the system meeting safety and permanency expectations?
- What are opportunities for improvement?

What are key national shifts?

Between 2005 and 2025:

- There has been a 38% decrease in the **number of children in foster care**
- **Placement with relatives** has increased to 46%
- Children placed in **group placement settings** has decreased by 52%

Where do children live after being in foster care?

45% Reunited with birthparents, relatives, or kin

27% Adopted

11% Placed in legal guardianship

9% Aged out without permanent legal connection

8% Other

How long do children spend living in foster care?

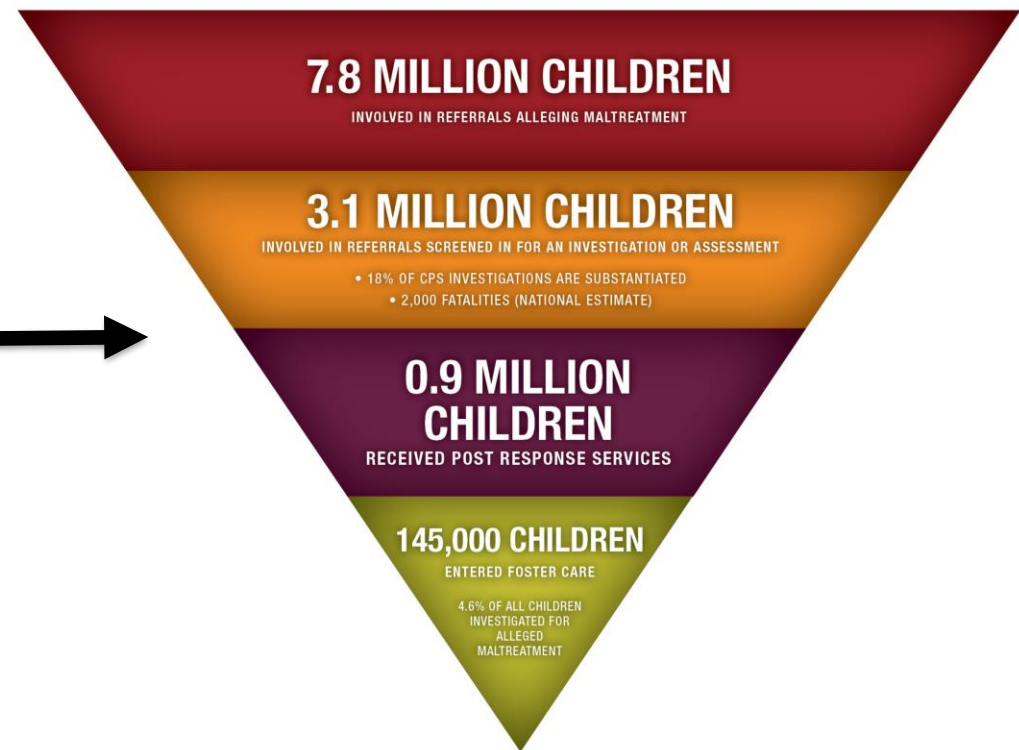


- 35% of children exit foster care with 12 months or less.
- However, 17% of children have been there for three years or more.

Explore the numbers

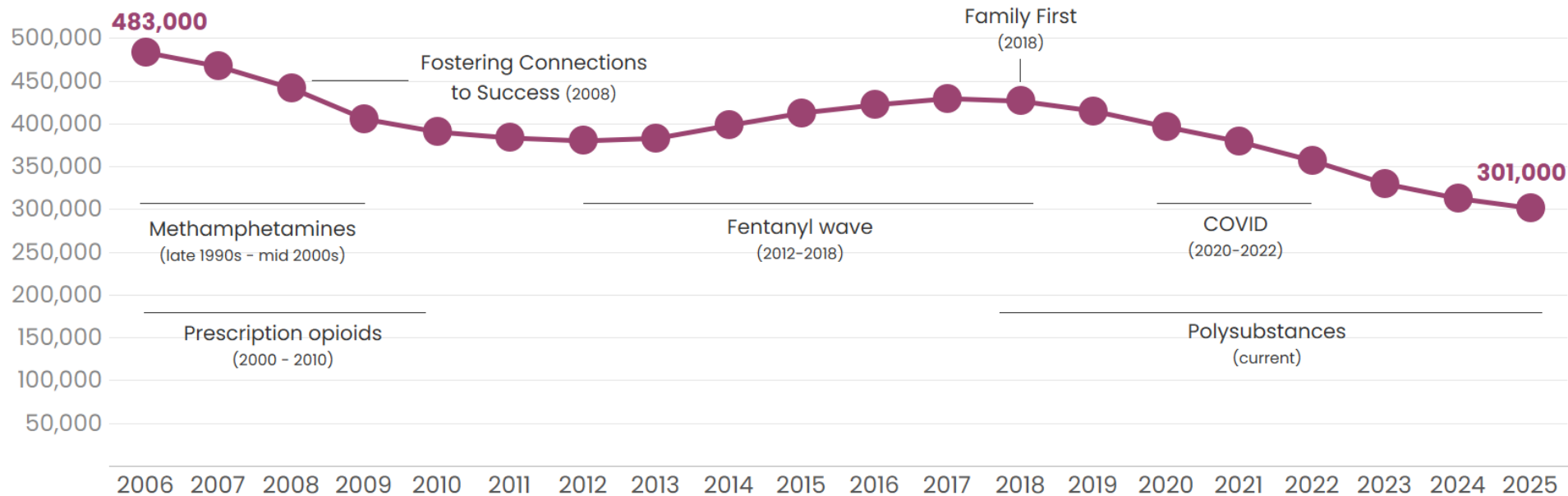
Calls, investigations, substantiations and entries

Nationally, only 18% of CPS investigations result in substantiated findings.



Explore the numbers

Number of children in out-of-home care, 2006-2025

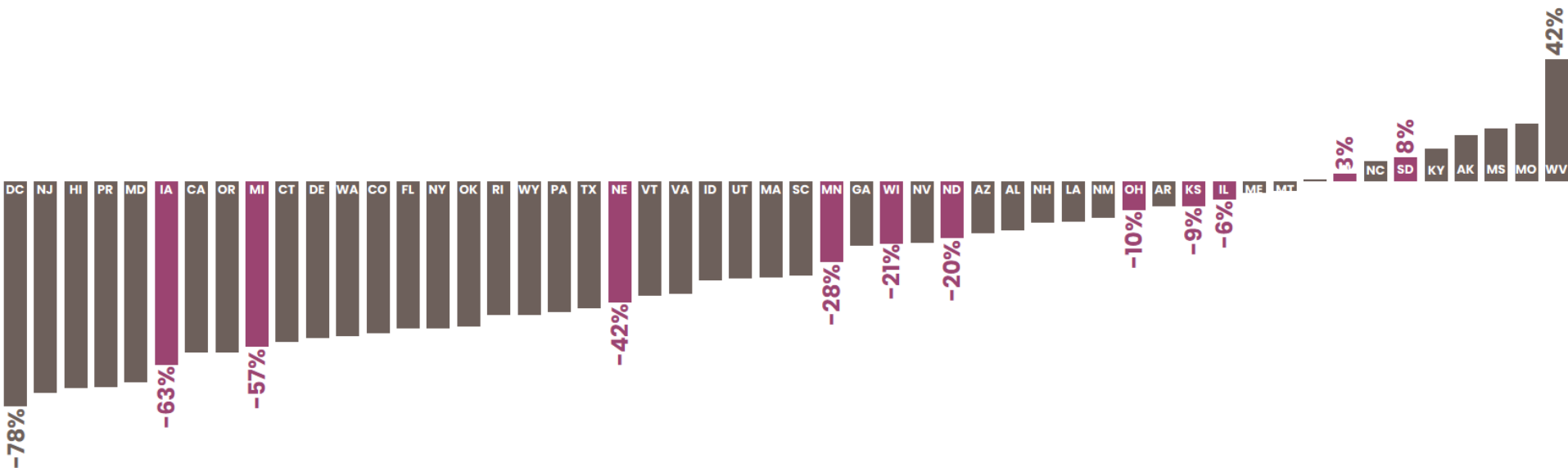


Finding: 282,000 (38%) Fewer children in care

Source: Publicly available Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System obtained through National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System
Children < age 18; counts rounded to nearest 1,000

Explore the numbers

Percent change of **children in out-of-home care**, 2006-2025



Finding: 83% of states have experienced reductions

Source: Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System obtained through National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System
Children < age 18

How would a well-functioning child protection agency target resources?

- Utilize evidence-based tools and practices to assess and address child and family needs
- Identify children at imminent risk of harm
- Make timely, trauma-informed determinations as to whether and how best to intervene
- Provide best and appropriate services to families

Questions to consider

- Why are children coming to the attention of child protection system?
- How do you support families and provide needed resources for services that keep children safely with their families?
- How do families access interventions, services and supports when they are in crisis?
- How do you engage all partners, agencies and the community who can, and should, play a role in ensuring child safety?



Thank you!

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Resources:

