Child Welfare

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This is not a comprehensive collection of all work on the state level. If there are resources you'd like to see featured here, please send them to us!

Committees

- Illinois General Assembly House Adoption & Child Welfare Committee
- Illinois General Assembly Senate Child Welfare Committee
- Kansas Interim Committee on Child Welfare System Oversight
- Kentucky House and Senate Standing Committees on Families & Children
- Michigan House Oversight Committee – Subcommittee on the Child Welfare System
- New York State Assembly Standing Committee on Children and Families

Oversight Partners

- Office of Inspector General of Nebraska Child Welfare

Interactive Resources

- Maine Department of Health and Human Services: Child Welfare Data Dashboard
  - Dashboards, reports, interactive maps, and metrics on child welfare, foster care, and more.
- South Carolina Department of Social Services: Data and Resources

- Visual maps and interactive data regarding child welfare open cases, including investigations, family preservation, reunification, child fatalities, etc., as well as adult protective services information. Data can be downloaded in .docx, .xlsx, .pptx, .pdf, .tiff, .html, .csv, and .xml formats.

Audits, Agency and Legislative Office Reports

- Arizona, Auditor General: Arizona Department of Child Safety—Caseworker Caseload Standards, July 2020
- Arizona, Auditor General: Arizona Department of Child Safety -- Investigations of Noncriminal Child Abuse and Neglect Reports, Sept. 2025
- California, State Auditor: The Child Abuse Central Index: The Unreliability of This Database Puts Children at Risk and May Violate Individuals' Rights, May 2022
- Idaho, Legislative Services Office: Department of Health and Welfare – Child Care and Development Fund, Aug. 2023
- Idaho, Office of Performance Evaluations: Evaluation and Retention of Child Neglect Referrals, Aug. 2021
- Idaho, Office of Performance Evaluations: State Oversight of Children's Residential Care, Aug. 2026
- Iowa, Office of Ombudsman: Misplaced Trust: An Investigation of the Death of Sabrina Ray, Sept. 2020
- Iowa, Office of Ombudsman: A Tragedy of Errors: An Investigation of the Death of Natalie Finn, Feb. 2020
- Florida, Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability: Annual Report on the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in Florida, July 2025
- Kentucky, Legislative Research Commission: Kentucky Child Fatality and Near Fatality External Review Panel 2022 Update, Nov. 2022
- Maine, Office of Program Evaluation & Government Accountability: Child Protective Services Investigations, March 2022
- Michigan, Department of Health and Human Services' Children's Services Agency: Child Welfare Improvement Taskforce Report, 2021

- Michigan, Office of the Auditor General: Michigan Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (MiSACWIS), June 2017
- Michigan, Office of the Auditor General: Children's Protective Services Investigations, Michigan Department of Health and Human Services, Sept. 2018
  - Follow-Up Audit, July 2024
- Minnesota, Inspector General of the Department of Human Services, Children and Family Services: Status of Child Care in Minnesota, 2019; Feb. 2020
- Nebraska, Office of Inspector General of Nebraska Child Welfare: Juvenile Room Confinement in Nebraska Annual Report 2020-2021; Dec. 2021
- Nevada, Legislative Counsel Bureau (Audit Division): Governmental and Private Facilities for Children – Inspections, Dec. 2022

Committee Reports

- Maine Government Oversight Committee: Frontline Perspectives in Child Protection as Catalysts for Reform, Feb. 2024

Other Resources of Interest

- Bipartisan Policy Center: Oversight and Accountability in Child Welfare Systems, March 2026

In the News

- **Florida** foster kids are given powerful medications, but Feds find state oversight lacking (KFF Health News, 9/27/2023)
  - A federal audit has revealed significant issues in Florida's child welfare system regarding the prescription and monitoring of psychotropic and opioid medications for foster children. The audit found lax record-keeping, missing authorization paperwork, and incomplete case files in a random selection of 115 children. Over 2,200 foster children, including 73 aged 5 or younger, in Florida are prescribed mental health medications, but in nearly half the cases, there were no records of the prescribed medications in the state's primary case management system. The lack of oversight raises concerns about potential health and safety risks for these vulnerable children.

- **Illinois** DCFS report card for past two years shows more failures than last review (CBS News, 9/26/2023)
    - The Illinois Department of Child and Family Services (DCFS) received a critical review of its performance over the past two years, with 33 major failures identified by the state Auditor General, up from the previous count of 30. The report highlighted significant delays in notifying authorities in cases of child death, injury, torture, malnutrition, and sex abuse, with DCFS failing to notify local authorities within the required 24 hours in 20% of cases. Despite acknowledging the issues and accepting recommendations for improvement, concerns persist about the agency's lack of urgency and accountability, even as it is set to receive an 11% budget boost, surpassing $2 billion in Illinois taxpayer money for the first time.
        - Read the State Auditor's report

- Frustrated lawmakers grill **Maine**'s child protection chief (**PAYWALL:** Portland Press Herald, 10/18/2023)
    - Lawmakers in Maine expressed frustration during a Government Oversight Committee meeting over the state agency's failure to prevent high-profile deaths of children previously known to child protective services. The Office of Family and Child Services director, Todd Landry, faced criticism for his leadership amid reports revealing an increase in Maine's rate of repeated child maltreatment from 15.4% in 2018 to 19.6% in 2021, double the national average. Lawmakers are considering more frequent meetings and broader powers, including the use of subpoenas, to investigate the child welfare system and address its shortcomings, citing a lack of progress and inadequate training and staffing as key issues.

- **Maine**: State agency, legislative committee clash in supreme court hearing over records (**PAYWALL:** Portland Press Herald, 12/6/2023)
    - Lawyers representing Maine's Government Oversight Committee and the Department of Health and Human Services clashed in the Maine Supreme Judicial Court over access to confidential case records involving children who died after contact with the state office. The committee sued the Mills administration for denying it access, citing the Legislature's authority to subpoena confidential records absent explicit exemptions. The state argued that there is an established framework for reviewing the child deaths, limiting information release to the committee's investigative staff.

- **West Virginia**: Health committee advances bills meant to enhance oversight (Metro News, 1/11/2024)
    - The House Committee on Health and Human Resources has advanced two bills to improve oversight. One bill, HB 4595, allows a legislative oversight committee to meet privately for sensitive matters, such as child protective services investigations, to provide lawmakers with access to information for timely policy adjustments without compromising transparency. Another bill, HB 4593, requires open meetings for the nonprofit West Virginia First Foundation, responsible for distributing opioid lawsuit proceeds, ensuring transparent decision-making for the significant funds involved in addressing the opioid crisis.

- **Maine**: New child welfare chief aims to prioritize input from caseworkers, front-line workers (**PAYWALL:** Portland Press Herald, 1/27/2024)
    - The new director of the Office of Child and Family Services, Bobbi Johnson, outlined her priorities to the Government Oversight Committee, focusing on engaging with caseworkers and stakeholders to address concerns within the child protective system. Johnson plans to visit district offices to gather feedback and aims to learn from individuals with firsthand experience, including foster parents and service providers. The oversight committee is preparing policy recommendations to improve child protection for the legislature's consideration.

- **Nebraska** child welfare, prison watchdogs have temporarily restored access for oversight roles (Nebraska Examiner, 2/14/2024)
    - The six-month dispute between Nebraska's legislative and executive branches over inspector general access saw a temporary resolution as the Legislature signed a memorandum of understanding with Governor Jim Pillen. The agreement outlines the information the executive branch will provide to state inspectors general for corrections and child welfare, temporarily halting the conflict and avoiding potential lawsuits. The memorandum, set to expire at the end of the 2025 session, aims to provide a broader assessment of legislative oversight, with ongoing proposals including the creation of a special committee and amendments to statutes addressing concerns.

- **Idaho** Legislature commissions investigation of youth treatment homes, passes bills to increase oversight and regulations (Investigate West, 3/19/2024)

- The Idaho Legislature has initiated an investigation into youth treatment homes following reports of child abuse and neglect, with a focus on enhancing oversight and regulations. Lawmakers responded to a series of investigative reports revealing concerning incidents at state-licensed facilities, prompting a state watchdog investigation. Additionally, the Legislature passed bills to increase regulation and oversight of youth treatment homes, including establishing an ombudsman for child welfare monitoring and formulating policies for placing children in congregate care.

- Oversight panel suggests more than two dozen reforms for **Maine** child welfare system (Maine Morning Star, 5/10/2024)
  - The Government Oversight Committee in Maine recommended over two dozen reforms to the state's child welfare system, aimed at addressing issues such as working conditions and child safety. The bipartisan recommendations seek to enhance resources, mental health support, and legal access within the system. Despite ongoing challenges, efforts are being made to implement these changes and improve the current state of child welfare in Maine.

- **West Virginia**: Special Session On Homeschool Oversight Possible After Death Of Boone County Teen (WV Public Broadcasting, 6/7/2024)
  - In the wake of the death of a Boone County teenager who was being homeschooled, state lawmakers are considering a special session to address oversight of homeschooling, aiming to ensure educational standards and child welfare protections are adequately met, amid concerns about the current lack of regulation and monitoring in the state's homeschooling practices.

- **Michigan** CPS not doing enough to protect kids, state audit finds. HHS objects (The Detroit News, 7/9/2024)
  - A state audit released Tuesday by the Office of the Auditor General found that Michigan's Child Protective Services (CPS) still has significant issues in protecting potentially abused or neglected children, particularly in not conducting face-to-face assessments within 24 hours and allowing investigators to close certain cases without proper monitoring. The audit is a follow-up to a critical 2018 report that identified serious problems during Gov. Rick Snyder's administration. Despite progress noted by the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) and its director, Elizabeth Hertel, the audit identified non-compliance with the 2018 improvement plan in key areas. The MDHHS criticized the audit process as "unethical

and biased," arguing that the focus on process and documentation does not equate to child safety. However, the audit revealed that in about 5% of cases, face-to-face contact was not made within the required time frame, and in 21% of cases, investigators did not document an immediate safety plan or explain why one wasn't necessary.
    - Read the audit
    - Read the 2018 audit

- **Kentucky** auditor sues governor over access to child abuse database (WDRB, 8/30/2024)
    - Kentucky State Auditor Allison Ball filed a lawsuit against Gov. Andy Beshear and the Cabinet for Health and Family Services to gain access to a database of child and adult neglect and abuse cases. The lawsuit argues that without full access to this information, the ombudsman's office cannot effectively oversee the cabinet's handling of these cases, which are crucial for protecting the state's most vulnerable citizens. The dispute stems from a legislative change that transferred the ombudsman's office from the cabinet to the auditor's office, affecting their ability to review sensitive case data.

- **Utah**: Child and Family Services speaks to lawmakers after 12-year-old's death (KSL-TV, 9/16/2024)
    - After the death of 12-year-old Gavin Peterson, Utah's Division of Child and Family Services (DCFS) spoke to the Rule Review and General Oversight Committee about potential gaps in their resources and legislative support. DCFS shared insights into how they handle abuse cases and addressed concerns about a rise in false reports. Lawmakers are exploring new legislation to penalize false claims and enhance support for child welfare services, with the Child Welfare Legislative Panel planning to further review the Peterson case in October.

- **Kentucky**: Agreement reached in lawsuit between Beshear, auditor over access to abuse database (Courier Journal, 9/18/2024)
    - An agreement has been reached in the legal dispute between Kentucky Auditor Allison Ball and Governor Andy Beshear's administration regarding access to the iTWIST database, which tracks abuse and neglect cases. The conflict arose after the Cabinet for Health and Family Services (CHFS) blocked the Commonwealth Office of the Ombudsman from accessing the system following its move under the Auditor's office. A court-ordered settlement now requires CHFS to

restore access to the ombudsman, resolving the lawsuit filed by Ball, who argued that this access is critical for protecting vulnerable children and adults in Kentucky.

- **New Mexico**: CYFD leader pushes back on lawmakers suggesting more state oversight of agency (Santa Fe New Mexican, 9/18/2024)
  - Lawmakers on the Legislative Finance Committee expressed frustration with the Children, Youth and Families Department (CYFD) over ongoing workforce issues and inadequate child placement efforts. Some suggested external oversight for CYFD, an idea that failed in past legislative sessions, but CYFD Secretary Teresa Casados resisted, citing existing federal and state oversight. Despite millions of dollars in appropriations for workforce development, the department continues to struggle with high turnover and vacancies, while also facing difficulties in recruiting foster families and accessing federal funds for prevention programs.

- New federal data shows **Maine**'s child welfare agency is moving against national trends (The Maine Monitor, 1/19/2025)
  - A Government Oversight Committee hearing in Maine reviewed the Department of Health and Human Services' (DHHS) decision to reduce access to children's residential treatment facilities, opting for community-based care instead. Lawmakers raised concerns about the adequacy of these community services, workforce shortages, and the impact on children with severe mental health needs. DHHS defended the policy shift as aligned with federal guidelines, emphasizing efforts to improve service availability and quality in home-based settings.

- **Kentucky**: State auditor asks for deeper investigation of foster children housing (West Kentucky Star, 1/29/2025)
  - Kentucky State Auditor Allison Ball has called for a deeper investigation into the housing of foster children in state office buildings after receiving concerning data from the Commonwealth Office of the Ombudsman. A preliminary review found that 49 children, some as young as one year old, spent a total of 198 days in Cabinet for Health and Family Services (CHFS) offices over a four-month period, with stays averaging 4.04 days and one child staying as long as 35 days. Ball emphasized the need for urgent action to address systemic failures and expand the investigation to include children housed in hotels and state parks.

- **Alaska** House votes to increase oversight and limit time for foster youth in psychiatric facilities (Alaska Beacon, 3/27/2025)

- The Alaska House approved a bill to increase legislative oversight of the state's Office of Children's Services and limit how long foster youth can be held in psychiatric institutions. The legislation would require more frequent reporting to lawmakers and establish stricter time limits for inpatient psychiatric stays. Supporters said the bill aims to protect vulnerable children and improve transparency in the child welfare system.

- **Oregon** child welfare agency has 'undone' part of rule requiring public inquiry into child deaths, senator says (Oregon Live, 5/27/2025)
  - According to Oregon State Sen. Sara Gelser Blouin, the Oregon Department of Human Services has modified a rule that previously required public inquiries into child deaths linked to state care, potentially reducing oversight. The senator stated that the change allows the agency to withhold convening reviews in certain cases, which could limit transparency and accountability. Gelser Blouin has called for the rule to be reinstated and plans to pursue legislative action to ensure consistent oversight of child welfare-related fatalities.

- In care facilities, **Idaho** kids are under less abuse oversight, watchdog government report finds (Idaho Capital Sun, 6/6/2025)
  - A recent report by the Office of Performance Evaluations found that children in Idaho's residential care facilities face reduced oversight, with OPE noting that abuse allegations are not consistently investigated or tracked. According to the report, Idaho lacks a centralized system to monitor incidents and ensure accountability across agencies responsible for child welfare. Lawmakers have begun discussing potential reforms to improve interagency coordination and strengthen protections for children in care.

- Lawmakers demand greater oversight of **Arizona**'s Department of Child Safety (Arizona Capitol Times, 8/8/2025)
  - Lawmakers on Arizona's Joint Legislative Audit Committee questioned Department of Child Safety officials over case backlogs, staffing shortages, and child fatalities, citing concerns raised in a recent state audit. According to auditors, the agency has struggled to meet investigation timelines and has experienced high turnover. Committee members indicated they may pursue legislation to strengthen oversight and require more frequent performance reporting.

- **Maryland**: State may have put children in homes where registered sex offenders lived (Maryland Matters, 9/17/2025)
  - A legislative audit by the Maryland Department of Legislative Services found that the Social Services Administration (SSA) failed to conduct proper background checks on employees and vendors, allowing registered sex offenders and individuals with serious criminal histories to interact with children in state care. From 2020 to 2024, SSA also placed hundreds of foster children in hotels under unlicensed supervision, often for extended periods, and could not document efforts to secure proper placements or ensure required health and education services were provided. The audit, which rated SSA's compliance as unsatisfactory for the third consecutive time, led lawmakers to plan oversight hearings, while the agency stated it has taken corrective actions since 2023.

- **Oregon**: Senate Committee to Review State Oversight of Foster Care and Long-Term Care Services (Grants Pass Tribune, 11/15/2025)
  - An Oregon Senate committee announced plans to review state oversight of foster care and long-term care services, citing recent reports of systemic issues and failures in both sectors. Lawmakers referenced findings from state audits and constituent complaints regarding inadequate monitoring and care standards. The committee aims to evaluate current oversight structures and consider potential reforms to improve accountability.

- '**Alaska** must follow the law': State lawmaker says audit shows OCS not doing enough to help children (2KTUU, 11/19/2025)
  - A recent audit of Alaska's Office of Children's Services (OCS) found the agency is not meeting legal requirements to support children and families, prompting concern from state lawmakers. The audit cited issues including high staff turnover, delayed case processing, and failure to meet federal and state child welfare standards. In response, members of the legislative oversight committee called for stronger compliance measures and increased accountability within OCS.

- 'A change for the worse' — Lawmakers troubled by DoHS treatment of **WV** foster care providers (West Virginia Watch, 12/10/2025)
  - West Virginia lawmakers expressed concern during a recent interim oversight committee meeting about the Department of Health's handling of foster care provider contracts following

the split of the Department of Human Services. According to testimony, delays and changes in contract management have disrupted services and created uncertainty among foster care providers. Legislators indicated they may seek further review or action to ensure the continuity of care for children in the system.

- Audit: Poor DCFS casework kept **Utah** kids in harm's way (Utah News Dispatch, 1/30/2026)
  - According to a recent audit highlighted before Utah lawmakers, the Division of Child and Family Services failed to consistently follow required casework protocols, which auditors said left some children in unsafe situations and delayed necessary interventions. The audit reportedly found gaps in risk assessments, documentation, and supervisory oversight, and recommended improvements in training, staffing, and accountability measures. Legislative oversight committees were briefed on the findings and are expected to monitor the agency's implementation of corrective actions.

- **Utah**: Misled by reports on children who died in state custody, lawmakers want more information (Utah News Dispatch, 2/4/2026)
  - Utah lawmakers on a legislative oversight committee said they want more detailed and timely information about children who died after contact with the Division of Child and Family Services, citing concerns about transparency and systemic issues. According to discussion during a recent hearing, members requested regular reports and clearer data to help them assess patterns and agency performance. Agency officials indicated they are reviewing reporting practices and working to improve communication with lawmakers.

- **Alaska**: Lawmakers probe OCS management following audit finding agency is failing to implement reforms (Alaska Beacon, 2/16/2026)
  - Alaska lawmakers questioned leaders of the Office of Children's Services during a recent legislative hearing after an audit found the agency had failed to fully implement previously recommended reforms. According to the audit, deficiencies persisted in areas including caseworker training, documentation, and oversight practices intended to protect vulnerable children. Committee members said they plan to continue oversight to monitor corrective actions and ensure compliance with audit recommendations.

- **New Mexico** state auditor: Child welfare agency misused millions (Searchlight New Mexico, 3/9/2026)

- According to a report from the New Mexico State Auditor, the state's child welfare agency was found to have misused millions of dollars, including expenditures that did not comply with procurement rules or contractual requirements. The audit identified weaknesses in financial oversight and internal controls, raising concerns about how funds were allocated and monitored. Officials indicated that corrective actions and further review could be pursued in response to the findings.

- A check list for state lawmakers who want to protect adopted children (News From the States, 3/24/2026)
  - A checklist outlined by child welfare advocates and policy experts suggests steps state lawmakers could consider to strengthen protections for adopted children, including improved screening of adoptive parents and post-adoption support services. According to the guidance, oversight mechanisms such as data tracking, mandatory reporting, and interagency coordination are emphasized to identify risks and ensure accountability. The recommendations also highlight, as advocates describe, the role of legislative oversight committees in reviewing adoption practices and ensuring that agencies follow established safeguards.

- Texas Speaker assigns panel to look into Uvalde shooting Roblox simulation (NBCDFW, 4/21/2026)
  - Texas House Speaker Dustin Burrows assigned lawmakers to examine Roblox and consider new regulations after a game on the platform allowed users to simulate the Robb Elementary shooting, playing as the gunman. According to Burrows and members of the House State Affairs Committee, lawmakers may pursue measures next session such as age verification, parental consent requirements, stronger content moderation, and potential civil or criminal penalties for companies that fail to prevent harmful content. Roblox said it removed the content, bans users who upload similar material, and is strengthening safety systems as it faces lawsuits and settlements related to child safety concerns.

- **North Carolina:** House unanimously passes Dominique Moody Safety Act (The Carolina Journal, 6/17/2026)
  - According to lawmakers, the North Carolina House unanimously passed Senate Bill 280, the "Dominique Moody Safety Act," to strengthen oversight of high-risk child welfare cases by creating a state-level escalation team within the Department of Health and Human Services, expanding training, requiring verifiable documentation of child protective services

assessments, and increasing accountability measures. The legislation follows the death of six-year-old Dominique Moody and recent House Oversight Committee scrutiny of Mecklenburg County's handling of repeated abuse reports, where state reviewers found multiple screening and case management failures. Lawmakers said the bill is intended to improve coordination among agencies, identify patterns of risk earlier, and help prevent future child fatalities.

- **Idaho** lawmakers hear updates on efforts to improve children's residential care, state 911 system (Idaho Capital Sun, 8/7/2026)
  - Idaho's Office of Performance Evaluations told the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee that 13 of 19 recommendations from its 2025 review of children's residential facilities have been completed, while four remaining proposals would require legislative action to strengthen treatment oversight, abuse investigations, public reporting, and protections against abusive staff moving between facilities. The committee also reviewed OPE findings on career and technical education, 911 modernization and death investigations, and directed OPE to investigate potential Medicaid "upcoding" by hospitals. JLOC Co-Chair Rep. Jordan Redman said the unresolved residential-facility recommendations should be a focus during the Legislature's next session.
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