

News for Immediate Release

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New Court Website Feature Provides Detailed Look at Child Dependency Cases Case Data to Aid in Improving Care for Abused, Neglected Children

HARRISBURG—The Supreme Court of Pennsylvania today unveiled an interactive website feature that, for the first time, will give the public as well as judges and child care professionals a comprehensive look at the demographics of the state’s abused and neglected children under court supervision.

The child dependency data display feature, believed to be the only one of its kind in the country, is located on the Unified Judicial System’s new website on the [research and statistics page](http://www.pacourts.us) at www.pacourts.us. It presents statewide and county-specific data, and includes items such as age, gender, race, length of court supervision and adjudication, current child placement, and permanent child placement plans.

“The data establishes a baseline to measure performance and will help us identify counties and courts which are excelling in certain areas, so those practices can be applied elsewhere to further improve care for abused and neglected children,” said state Supreme Court Justice Max Baer. Justice Baer is a former administrative judge of family court in Allegheny County who is guiding these efforts on behalf of the Supreme Court.

“The data will also enhance our ongoing efforts to reduce the amount of time children spend in foster care and to either safely return them to their homes or place them in an alternative permanent, loving family setting,” said Justice Baer.

Court-led efforts over the last six years have reduced the number of children in foster care or other temporary living arrangements by 34 percent and reduced by 2.2 million the annual number of days the state’s dependent children spent out of their homes, according to statistics provided by the Department of Public Welfare. Statewide, the number of abused and neglected children in the state dependency system has dropped from more than 21,000 in 2006 to 14,000 in 2012.

“Safely keeping these children at home or with relatives or quickly placing them into a permanent alternative family setting not only greatly improves their chances to succeed, it significantly reduces costs, saving an estimated \$200 million in federal, state and local tax dollars over the last two years,” Justice Baer added.

The interactive website data displays, commonly referred to as the “dependency dashboards,” present complex data in easy-to-understand formats that allow users, including the public and media, to make quick, visual comparisons of related data. The dashboards do not include the names or specific information regarding individual children or families.

There are three separate dependency data dashboards that include statewide data comparisons, county data details and county demographic details. They reveal that at the end of 2011, more

than 16,000 children were under the supervision of Pennsylvania's courts. This total includes children under the court's supervision, both within their own homes and those placed outside of their homes.

Twenty-one percent of these dependent children were between birth and age three, 17 percent between the ages of four and seven; 13 percent between the ages of eight and 11, 19 percent between the ages 12 and 15, 18 percent age 16 and 17, and 12 percent 18 years or older.

Of the children under the court's supervision at the end of 2011, 40 percent were in foster care; 20 remained in home; 18 percent were in kinship care; 14 percent were in congregate or institutional care; and the remaining were either in a detention center, hospital or no placement was assigned, according to case records.

"The ability to cite these numbers from the dependency dashboards highlights its significance," Justice Baer said. "An understanding of Pennsylvania's demographics, statewide and county-by-county, will allow us to sharpen our reform efforts to focus our greatest resources upon our greatest problems."

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EDITORS NOTE: Pennsylvania's Common Pleas Courts have jurisdiction of child dependency cases. The information compiled in the dependency data dashboards is obtained from details contained in each dependency case as recorded by county officials in the Unified Judicial System's Common Pleas Case Management System. Some of the dependency case data may be incomplete. The APOC intends to update the data dashboards periodically.

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