



# Transforming New York's Child Welfare System by Investing in Families

## The Promise

Families and young people can easily access the economic, food, child care, and other concrete supports they need to thrive in every neighborhood and community around the state.

## The Challenge

New York State has taken significant steps to reorient child welfare to direct more resources toward supporting families and preventing family separation. It remains the case, however, that child welfare Preventive Services are generally not available to families until after an investigation has already begun. When services are available, they often don't address the core challenges facing most families, including persistent food, financial, or housing insecurity.<sup>1</sup> Further, too many families are caught up in Child Protective Services (CPS) investigations—acutely stressful experiences even if ultimately dismissed as unfounded, as is the case 75% of the time.

## What We Know

Over 143,000 New York families were subject to CPS investigations in 2024, at a statewide rate of 30 investigations per 1,000 children (compared to a national average of 42 per 1,000).<sup>2</sup>

The chance a family will face an investigation varies significantly by their county of residence: 66% of counties investigate at a rate greater than the national average, and nearly 30% of New York counties investigate families at a rate of 60 per 1,000, 43% greater than the national average.

Among the contributing reasons for these high investigation rates may be that New York's mandated reporters—who make the majority of reports to the State Central Registry—are criminally liable by state law if they fail to report a case of substantiated maltreatment.<sup>3,4</sup> Race is also a factor: Black families are 2.6 times more likely to be investigated and 4.7 times more likely to be subject to separation.<sup>5</sup> Notably, in some communities, investigation rate variations likely occur at the neighborhood level, which may not be reflected in the county-level investigation rate.

Ultimately, over three-quarters of reports to the State Central Register are unfounded.

For most families, being subject to a CPS investigation—even one that is unfounded—is disruptive and traumatic. Investigations can entail months-long processes of invasive procedures, such as searching the home and children, and interviewing family members, neighbors, and teachers. Many families are not informed of their rights during CPS investigations, including their right to legal counsel. Legal representation empowers families to access more services, faster reunification and visitation in cases of separation, and

### Most New York counties investigate families at a higher rate than the national average

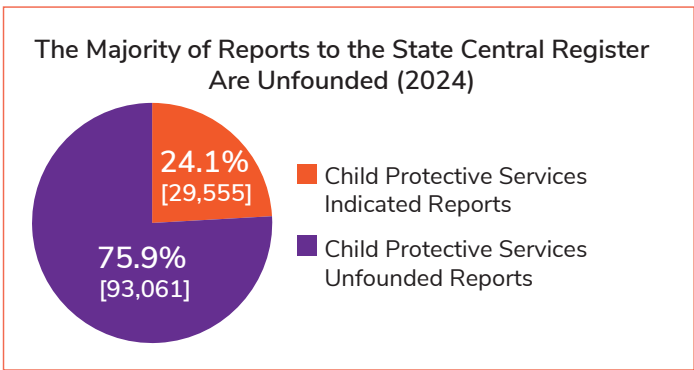
Location	2024 - Investigations per 1000
USA	41.7
New York State	30.4
New York City	22.7
Chemung	84.0
Clinton	82.6
Chautauqua	81.2
Greene	74.6
Warren	74.5
Seneca	73.6
Cortland	70.2
Madison	67.7
Essex	67.6
Cattaraugus	67.3
Bronx	41.3

Source: Schuyler Center calculations based on NYS OCFS. (2025); U.S. Census 5-Year ACS. (2024); New York City Administration for Children's Services. (n.d); and Child Trends. (2025).

better outcomes in court, among other benefits.<sup>6</sup> Unnecessary investigations carry costs in addition to child and family wellbeing: a recent study focused on Monroe County estimates that each unfounded report costs the county \$2,243.<sup>7</sup>

**New York has historically and to date placed more children in institutional settings at a high rate.**

While most children removed from their families as a result of CPS investigations are placed in kinship or foster families, 13% are placed in institutional settings, a higher percentage than 25 other states.<sup>8</sup> Institutional settings (or “group homes” or “congregate care”) are meant to be used rarely and as a last resort because children in these settings almost always experience poorer outcomes, including in the form of poorer physical and mental development, ability to bond with caregivers, and behavioral health. Further, children in these settings are less likely to end up in a permanent home with lifelong family ties.<sup>9</sup>



Source: Office of Research, Evaluation and Performance Analytics. (2025). 2024 Monitoring and Analysis Profiles With Selected Trend Data: 2020-2024. New York State Office of Children and Family Services.

**State Policy Solutions**

- ▶ Prevent unnecessary family separation by investing in trusted, community-based programs that contribute to child and family wellbeing.
- ▶ Ensure children and families know their rights when they first come into contact with the child welfare system, and have timely access to quality legal representation to enable them to advocate for the supports they need to thrive.
- ▶ Prevent unnecessary CPS investigations by reducing the number of mandated reporters and limiting penalties for failing to report, and ensuring new mothers and pregnant people or their babies are drug tested only after providing informed consent, among other strategies. **Notably, at the end of 2025, the Governor signed a bill ending anonymous reporting to the State Central Register, one important action to reduce unnecessary investigations.**
- ▶ Ensure that congregate care is only used as a last resort, and each child in foster care is placed in a setting that will best facilitate their health, wellbeing, and success.

“A caregiver’s ability to overcome significant hardship is seldom enhanced by being investigated and supervised.  
—NYS OCFS, New York State Family First Prevention Service Act Prevention Plan, 2022”

<sup>1</sup> New York State Office of Children and Family Services. (2022). [New York State Family First Prevention Services Act Prevention Plan](#).  
<sup>2</sup> Child Trends. (2025). [State-level Data for Understanding Child Welfare in the United States](#).  
<sup>3</sup> New York State Office of Children and Family Services. (2025). [2024 Monitoring and Analysis Profiles With Selected Trend Data: 2020-2024](#).  
<sup>4</sup> New York State Office of Children and Family Services. (n.d.). [Legal Protections for Mandated Reporters](#).  
<sup>5</sup> New York State Office of Children and Family Services. (2025). [Disproportionate Minority Representation \(DMR\) in Child Welfare Services Dashboard: 2024 & Five Year Trends](#).  
<sup>6</sup> Casey Family Programs. (2019). [Strong Families: How does high-quality legal representation for parents support better outcome?](#).  
<sup>7</sup> HOPE585. (2025). [Cost of a False Alarm: Analysis of the socioeconomic impact of unfounded Child Protective Services Investigations in Monroe County \(2024\)](#).  
<sup>8</sup> Kids Count Data Center. (2025). [Children in foster care by placement type \(group home or institution only\) in United States](#).  
<sup>9</sup> Casey Family Programs. (2022). [What are the outcomes for youth placed in group and institutional settings?](#).  
\*For all sources and computations go to: <https://scaany.org/sonyc-sources-2026/>