



THE SUPREME COURT OF MINNESOTA
MINNESOTA JUDICIAL CENTER
25 REV. DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. BLVD.
SAINT PAUL, MINNESOTA 55155

CHAMBERS OF
JUSTICE ANNE K. McKEIG

(651) 297-7676

DATE: July 10, 2025

TO: Hon. Natalie E. Hudson, Chief Justice, Minnesota Supreme Court
Hon. Tim H. Walz, Governor, Minnesota
Rep. Carlie Kotya-Witthuhn, Co-Chair, Children and Families Finance and Policy Comm.
Rep. Nolan West, Co-Chair, Children and Families Finance and Policy Comm.
Rep. Nathan Nelson, Co-Vice Chair, Children and Families Finance and Policy Comm.
Rep. Jessica Hanson, Co-Vice Chair, Children and Families Finance and Policy Comm.
Rep. Mohamud Noor, Co-Chair, Human Services Finance and Policy Comm.
Rep. Joe Schomacker, Co-Chair, Human Services Finance and Policy Comm.
Rep. Dawn Gillman, Co-Vice Chair, Human Services Finance and Policy Comm.
Rep. Heather Keeler, Co-Vice Chair, Human Services Finance and Policy Comm.
Sen. Melissa H. Wicklund, Chair, Health and Human Services Comm.
Sen. Paul J. Utke, Ranking Minority Member, Health and Human Services Comm.
Sen. Alice Mann, Vice Chair, Health and Human Services Comm.
Sen. Ron Latz, Chair, Judiciary and Public Safety Comm.
Sen. Warren Limmer, Ranking Minority Member, Judiciary and Public Safety Comm.
Sen. Clare Oumou Verbeten, Vice Chair, Judiciary and Public Safety Comm.

RE: Progress Report, MN Supreme Court Council on Child Protection and Maltreatment Prevention
Order In Re Establishment of and Appointments to the Supreme Court Council on Child Protection
and Maltreatment Prevention, ADM24-8001
[Minn. Laws Chapter 115, Article 12, Section 30](#)

Greetings –

In April 2024, the Minnesota legislature passed a bill inviting the Chief Justice of the Minnesota Supreme Court to establish a Supreme Court Council on Child Protection and Maltreatment Prevention (“Council”) as part of Minnesota’s Court Improvement Program known as the Children’s Justice Initiative. The bill was enacted into law by Governor Walz in May 2024.

In response to the Legislature’s invitation, in August 2024 Chief Justice Natalie E. Hudson of the Minnesota Supreme Court issued an order establishing the Council and appointing Council members and advisors. The purpose of the Council is to “*develop a comprehensive blueprint to improve Minnesota’s child protection system and prevent unnecessary entry of children and families into the system.*”

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Both the legislation and the Supreme Court Order require the Council to submit a Progress Report by July 15, 2025, to the Chief Justice, Governor, and chairs and ranking minority members of the legislative committees with jurisdiction over child protection. A Final Report and recommendations must be submitted by January 15, 2026.

In compliance with the legislation and Supreme Court order, attached please find the Progress Report filed on behalf of the Minnesota Supreme Court Council on Child Protection and Maltreatment Prevention.

As you will see from a review of the report, the Council is focusing its attention on the safety of children.

I welcome any questions you may have.

Sincerely,



Anne K. McKeig, Associate Justice
Minnesota Supreme Court

CC: Timothy Droske, Commissioner, Minnesota Supreme Court
Jeff Shorba, State Court Administrator
Callie Lehman, Judicial Intergovernmental Relations Liaison, State Court Administrator's Office
Jake Smith, Deputy General Counsel, Office of Governor Tim Walz
Adam Miller, Deputy General Counsel and Dir. of Judicial Appointments, Office of Gov. Tim Walz
Colie Colburn, Co-Committee Admin., House Children and Families Finance and Policy Comm.
Lauren Hayward, Co-Committee Admin., House Children and Families Finance and Policy Comm.
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Anna Burke, Committee Administrator, Health and Human Services Comm.
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Jacquelyn Clinton, Committee Administrator, Judiciary and Public Safety Comm.
Nicole Kaplan, Committee Administrator, Judiciary and Public Safety Comm.
Linnea Michaelson, Committee Administrator, Judiciary and Public Safety Comm.
Legislative Reference Library
State Law Library
Members, Supreme Court Council on Child Protection and Maltreatment Prevention
Judith Nord, Sr. Staff Attorney, Supreme Court Council on Child Protection and Maltreatment Prevention



**MINNESOTA
JUDICIAL BRANCH**

Progress Report

**Supreme Court Council on
Child Protection and Maltreatment Prevention**

July 10, 2025

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1. Establishment of Council

1.1. Legislation Authorizing Council

In April 2024, the Minnesota legislature passed a bill inviting the Chief Justice of the Minnesota Supreme Court to establish a Supreme Court Council on Child Protection and Maltreatment Prevention (“Council”) as part of Minnesota’s Court Improvement Program known as the Children’s Justice Initiative.¹ The bill was enacted into law by Governor Walz in May 2024.²

1.2. Supreme Court Order Establishing Council

In response to the Legislature’s invitation, in August 2024 Chief Justice Natalie Hudson of the Minnesota Supreme Court issued an order establishing the Council and appointing members and advisors.³ The Council was created for the purpose of *“develop[ing] a comprehensive blueprint to improve Minnesota’s child protection system and prevent unnecessary entry of children and families into the system.”*⁴

The Council’s charge reflects a commitment to keeping children safe, investing in their well-being, supporting their families, and strengthening communities to create environments where children can thrive. The Council was tasked with the following:

- “reviewing policies, laws, practices, latest research, and data related to children in the child protection system;
- gathering information through surveys or focus groups, including consultation with individuals who have lived experience with the child protection system, and reviews of evidence supporting federal guidance and research on the child protection system and maltreatment prevention;
- reviewing research that evaluates the effects of child foster care placement and out-of-home placement on the safety, permanency, and well-being of children and that identifies and evaluates factors designed to ensure emotional and physical safety of children in the context of child placement and permanency dispositions, family preservation, and reunification;
- making recommendations for changes in policies and law that are designed to improve outcomes for children and families in the child protection system or at risk of maltreatment; and
- recognizing the inherent sovereignty of Tribal Nations and the unique political status of their children and families.”⁵

¹ Minnesota Laws [Chapter 15, Article 12, Section 30, subdivision 1 \(“Legislation”\)](#).

² See Act of May 18, 2024, ch. 115, art. 12, § 30 (“Act”).

³ Order In Re Establishment of and Appointments to the Supreme Court Council on Child Protection and Maltreatment Prevention (“Order”) at paragraph 3. ADM24-8001. [Minnesota Judicial Branch - News and Announcements \(mncourts.gov\)](#). See also Legislation, *supra* note 1, at subd. 5.

⁴ Id. at para. 2.

⁵ Id. at para. 3.

1.3. Council Members, Advisors, Consultants, and Staff

Chief Justice Natalie Hudson of the Minnesota Supreme Court appointed Associate Justice Anne McKeig as the Chief Justice's designee and as Chair of the Council. In accordance with the authorizing legislation,⁶ the Chief Justice also appointed representatives of a broad range of groups, including: child protection and maltreatment prevention professionals, guardians ad litem who advocate for the best interests of children, attorneys representing parents and children in alignment with their clients' expressed interests, education professionals, representatives of state and local governments, leaders of nonprofit organizations, law enforcement officers, and state court judges. In addition, persons with lived child protection system experience as parents and children or youth were appointed to ensure inclusion of lived perspectives.⁷

Consistent with the authorizing legislation, the Executive Board of the Minnesota Indian Affairs Council appointed a tribal representative to serve on the Council, and the Commissioner of the Department of Children, Youth, and Families appointed a designee to serve on the Council.⁸

1.3.1. Council Members

The Council is composed of individuals specified in the authorizing legislation,⁹ along with others who bring deep knowledge of the strengths and challenges within Minnesota's child protection system as well as ideas for improving the system. Council members include subject matter experts in child welfare and child protection who reflect a diversity of race, gender, experience, and geographic representation across the state.

- **Hon. Anne McKeig** (Council Chair), Associate Justice, Minnesota Supreme Court
- **Ann Ahlstrom**, Chair, Minnesota Guardian Ad Litem Program Board
- **Elizabeth "Libby" Bergman**, Clinical Supervisor and Psychotherapist, Psychotherapy Partners
- **Lynn Brave Heart**, ICWA Division Program Manager, Minnesota Guardian Ad Litem Program
- **Ethel Chitseko**, Lead Peer Recovery Specialist, Recovery is Happening, and person with lived child protection system experience as a parent
- **Misty Coonce**, Ombudsman for Foster Youth, Minnesota Office of the Foster Youth Ombudsperson
- **Nikki Farago**, Deputy Commissioner, Agency Culture and Relations, Minnesota Department of Human Services
- **Leonard Fineday**, Secretary/Treasurer, Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe
- **Matt Freeman**, Executive Director, Minnesota Association of County Social Services Administrators

⁶ Legislation, *supra* note 1, at subd. 2.

⁷ Order, *supra* note 3, at para. 5.

⁸ Id.

⁹ Legislation, *supra* note 1, at subd. 2(a).



- **Neal Gaalswyk**, Cass County Commissioner; President, Association of Minnesota Counties
- **Anne Tyler Gueinzus**, Managing Attorney, Children's Law Center of Minnesota
- **Mark Hudson**, M.D., Pediatrician; Medical Director, Midwest Children's Resource Center; Executive Director, Midwest Regional Child Advocacy Center
- **Erin Johnson**, Assistant County Attorney, Washington County Attorney's Office
- **Anthony Kotschevar**, Investigator, Stearns County Sheriff's Office
- **Traci LaLiberte**, Executive Director, Multidisciplinary Institute for Child Welfare
- **Susan McPherson**, Minnesota Dept. of Human Services
- **Marcia Milliken**, Executive Director, Minnesota Children's Alliance
- **Jennifer L. Nelson**, Managing Attorney, State of Minnesota Ninth Judicial District Public Defender
- **Erika Randall**, Guardian ad Litem Manager, Sixth and Ninth Judicial Districts, Minnesota Guardian ad Litem Program
- **Sondra Samuels**, President and CEO, Northside Achievement Zone
- **Veronica Sanchez**, Program Coordinator, Live it! Program, Division of Indian Work; person with lived child protection system experience as a child or youth
- **Rebecca St. George**, Assistant Commissioner, Child Safety & Permanency, Minnesota Department of Children, Youth & Families (DCYF)
- **Mallory Stoll**, Family and Juvenile Attorney and Partner, Blahnik, Prchal & Stoll, PLLC
- **Hon. Shan Wang**, Assistant Chief Judge, Seventh Judicial District, Stearns County
- **Catherine Wright**, Psy.D., National Register Health Psychologist; Early Childhood, Youth and Family Mental Health Systems Coordinator, Behavioral Health Administration, Minnesota Department of Human Services
- **Timothy Zuel**, MSSW, Ph.D., LICSW; Adjunct Professor of Social Work, University of Minnesota; Be@School Manager (retired), Hennepin County Attorney's Office

1.3.2. Council Advisors and Consultants

The Council's expertise is being supplemented by the expertise of Council advisors and consultants:

- **Nathan Chomilo**, M.D., Medical Director - Medicaid & MinnesotaCare, Minnesota Department of Human Services
- **Karen Brindisi**, Program Attorney, National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, under contract with the Minnesota Judicial Branch as Council Advisor
- **Melissa Palay**, Senior Director, Strategic Consultant, Casey Family Programs
- **Mike Scholl**, Senior Director, Strategic Consulting, Casey Family Programs
- **Victor Vieth**, Chief Program Officer, Education and Research, Zero Abuse Project
- **Hon. Korey Wahwassuck (Ret.)**, under contract with the Minnesota Judicial Branch as Focus Group Facilitator and Council Consultant

1.3.3. Council Staff

The work of the council is supported by staff members:

- **Ellen Bendewald**, Research Analyst, State Court Administrator's Office



- **Aaron Lauer**, Policy and Planning Consultant, State Court Administrator's Office
- **Judith Nord**, Sr. Staff Attorney, State Court Administrator's Office
- **Theo Perzichilli**, Resident to Justice Anne McKeig, Minnesota Supreme Court
- **Ava Shannon**, Administrative Assistant, State Court Administrator's Office

2. Council Activities

2.1. Full Council Work

2.1.1. Presentations

The Council held its first meeting in August 2024 and thereafter generally convened twice monthly for three-hour sessions. In total, the Council met seventeen times through June 2025, when this report was submitted.

In alignment with the tasks identified in the Supreme Court Order,¹⁰ the Council began its work by receiving presentations from subject matter experts on the key topics listed below. These sessions were designed to ensure all Council members had a shared understanding of the child welfare system, the social services process, and the court process, and to initiate discussion of the issues and challenges within the child protection system.

- Children have the right to be safe (Aug. 2024)
- Public health crisis: Community responsibility for well-being of Minnesota's children (Aug. 2024)
- High-level orientation to scope of project: A roadmap for the Council's work (Sept. 2024)
- Principles for productive Council meetings (Sept. 2024)
- Primary focus of the Council: ensuring child safety, permanency, and well-being (Sept. 2024)
- Overview of the child protection system from maltreatment report to permanency for the child (Sept. 2024)
- Overview of the final report and recommendations of the 2015 Governor's Task Force on the Protection of Children (Sept. 2024)
- Overview of child protection processes and procedures for social services agencies (Oct. 2024)
- Overview of juvenile court processes and procedures for child protection proceedings (Oct. 2024)
- Family assessment – Intended purpose and application – National research on intended purpose of "family assessment" (Oct. 2024)
- Family Assessment in Minnesota – intended purpose and application (Oct. 2024)
- The Council's destination: Ensuring child safety, permanency, and well-being (Nov. 2024)
- Overview of Child Advocacy Studies (CAST) – an evidence-based academic major, minor, or certificate program that focuses on child maltreatment (Nov. 2024)

¹⁰ Order, *supra* note 3, at para. 3(1) – (5).



- Educational needs of children impacted by the child welfare system, including those in foster care or at risk of foster care (Nov. 2024)
- Federal reimbursement of Title IV-E funds for costs associated with eligible children who are in foster care or at risk of placement, including administrative costs for case management, costs to pay for legal representation for children and parents, and child welfare training (Nov. 2024)
- Overview of Child Advocacy Centers (CACs) (Dec. 2024)
- Overview of National Center for State Courts' "Upstream" initiative – a court-led, community-based child maltreatment prevention initiative (Dec. 2024)
- Rep. Jim Nash's child protection experience and discussion of suggested process revisions (Jan. 2025)
- When faith hurts: Developing effective multidisciplinary team (MDT) responses to spiritual impact of maltreatment (Jan. 2025)
- Overview of the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) 2025 Child Safety and Permanency legislative priorities (Jan. 2025)
- Overview of child maltreatment prevention options and child sexual abuse program evaluation (Jan. 2025)
- Minnesota child welfare funding sources, purposes, and unused funds (Mar. 2025)
- Overview of Council Roadmap: Getting to the July Progress Report and Beyond (Mar. 2025)
- Review of system challenges identified by subcommittees (Mar. 2025)
- Legislative update: Overview of pending child protection-related bills (May 2025)
- Focus groups and surveys – Review of and revisions to proposed questions for participants (May 2025)
- A panel of persons with lived foster care experience as children or youth (May 2025)

2.1.2. Identification of Key Themes

Drawing on the presentations received through March 2025, the Council identified six overarching themes to guide the development of its blueprint recommendations:

- Maltreatment prevention and early intervention
- Child safety, permanency, and well-being, including youth beyond age 18 in extended foster care
- Juvenile court rules, practices, and procedures
- Social services statutes, practices, and procedures
- Workforce development and retention
- Federal, state, and local funding streams

2.2. Establishment of Subcommittees

The Council established a subcommittee for each of the six key overarching themes. In February 2025, these subcommittees convened to identify issues or challenges related to their respective focus areas, including whether each issue or challenge had a regional or statewide impact. Subcommittees also identified relevant data or research that could support their findings, and compiled lists of national, state,

and local subject matter experts or organizations that could be consulted to further explore or validate the identified issues and challenges.

During the Council's March 2025 meetings, each subcommittee presented its identified issues and challenges to the full Council. The Council then reviewed and discussed each subcommittee's findings, offering input on issues to be added or removed to ensure each focus area was accurate and as comprehensive as possible. The Council recognized that additional research on each topic would need to be accomplished by Council staff.

2.3. Community Input

To inform development of its blueprint recommendations, in April 2025 the Council began gathering community input on challenges within the child protection system, as well as promising practices and potential solutions. This input is being collected through broad outreach efforts and multiple engagement methods, including online surveys and facilitated focus group discussions. These activities will continue into December 2025.

2.3.1. Participant Groups

By December 2025, the Council intends to seek input from the following key groups:

- Persons with lived child protection system experience as parents and children,
- Professionals working in the child protection system, including mandated reporters, and
- Persons and organizations in the broader community, including tribal communities, faith communities, and communities of color.

To encourage participation in focus groups and surveys, the Supreme Court issued an order prohibiting access to identifying information about participants:

"To ensure the anonymity of the individuals who respond to the Council surveys and who participate in focus groups, and to increase the likelihood of candid and honest responses, anything in the Council focus group discussions and survey responses that could be used to identify the survey respondents and focus group participants shall be confidential. Similarly, because the purpose of the surveys and focus groups is to assess Minnesota's child protection system and identify ways it could be improved, not to focus on individuals or specific cases, records from the Council surveys and focus groups that identify specific court cases, parties and participants, court personnel, judges, litigants, attorneys, or other individuals participating in court cases shall be confidential."¹¹

Surveys and discussions will engage respondents in the following topic areas:

- the strengths of the existing child protection system,
- the participants' experiences with barriers and challenges in the child protection system,

¹¹ Order Regarding Access to Confidential Information ("Order") at paragraph 3. ADM24-8001. March 2025.

- ways to ensure that children are safe whether they remain in the home or are in foster care,
- promising practices and solutions to prevent child maltreatment and improve the child protection system, and
- the participants' vision for community engagement in preventing child maltreatment.

The Council members engaged in planning sessions to identify the key questions they wanted to explore and to identify the various groups whose input would inform their work. The Council also discussed outreach strategies for both the surveys and focus groups.

2.3.2. Surveys

An online survey is being developed to gather community input from a broad range of groups, including all groups represented in the focus groups.

The survey will include questions designed to directly address the Council's charge of developing a blueprint to improve Minnesota's child protection system and prevent maltreatment and the unnecessary entry of children and families into the system:

- What can be done to prevent child maltreatment in your community?
- What is working well in the current child protection system?
- What about the current child protection system needs to be improved?

The survey will be conducted anonymously and, in accordance with the Supreme Court Order referenced above, narrative responses that could directly or indirectly identify individuals will be treated as confidential.

To minimize the concerns and potential risks associated with participation, the survey and focus group questions concentrate on perceptions of how the child protection system functions and opportunities for improvement, rather than on individual or personal impacts. The survey introduction will clearly state that participation in the survey is voluntary and may evoke difficult emotions, ensuring that potential respondents are fully informed of any risks associated with participation. The survey will be limited to individuals over the age of 18 who do not have an open child protection case.

Survey results will be compiled and analyzed to identify key themes. The Council will review the survey results and themes in Fall 2025 to inform development of its blueprint. Survey results will be included with the Council's Final Report, scheduled for submission in January 2026.

2.3.3. Focus Groups

As of the date of this report, virtual, two-hour, facilitated focus group sessions have been held with guardians ad litem, law enforcement officers, mandated reporters, Asian Pacific community leaders, and county child protection workers.



Additional focus group sessions are being planned with persons with lived child protection system experience either as parents or as children or youth, Black and African American community leaders, Latino community leaders, tribal community leaders, members of the Coalition on Child Welfare, religious and spiritual community leaders, tribal service organization leaders, county social services agency directors, juvenile court judges, county attorneys, attorneys for parents, attorneys for children, formerly incarcerated parents who had a child in the child protection system, youth-serving organizations, and foster parents and providers.

Focus groups with persons with lived experience as children or youth will be limited to those over age 18. All persons with lived experience as parents, children, or youth will be receive a small honorarium in recognition of their time and contributions.

Summaries of all focus group discussions will be prepared, and key themes will be identified. The Council will review these summaries and emerging themes in Fall 2025 to inform development of its blueprint. Focus group summaries will be included as appendices to the Council's Final Report, scheduled for submission in January 2026.

3. Key Child Protection System Challenges

This section outlines the key challenges within Minnesota's child protection system identified through the work of the Council's subcommittees detailed in Section 2 and through subsequent Council discussions. These challenges reflect the collective experience and expertise of Council members and confirm longstanding issues that continue to persist and remain deeply entrenched in Minnesota's child protection system. Additional challenges with the child protection system may emerge through surveys scheduled for launch in July 2025, and through focus groups, which will continue into September 2025.

The key challenges identified by the Council are organized into three overarching themes:

- (1) Minnesota must do more to prevent child maltreatment,
- (2) Some parts of Minnesota's child protection system require improvement, and
- (3) Minnesota can make more effective use of its limited resources.

In the outline below, each theme includes related concepts identified by the Council and many are supported by relevant research. As focus groups and surveys progress, the responses and results will help to further refine and expand upon these key themes. As the Council continues its work, additional research will be collected and added in support of the key challenges.

3.1. Minnesota Must Do More to Prevent Child Maltreatment

3.1.1. Minnesota needs broader public awareness about the scope of child maltreatment in Minnesota, child maltreatment risk factors, and the need for more community involvement in helping to prevent maltreatment

Child maltreatment in Minnesota has risen to the level of a public health crisis

- In 2022 (the most recent year for which maltreatment information is available), county “social services agencies screened 76,203 intakes, representing no significant change from the prior year.”¹² “There were 32,047 alleged victims involved in 24,489 completed assessments or investigations.”¹³ “The number and proportion of reports assigned to Family Assessment (Minnesota’s alternative response path) remained relatively consistent for a fifth year, with 65% of the total 24,489 cases. The rest received either a Family or Facility Investigation.”¹⁴ “Children ages 8 and younger represented the majority of children involved in completed maltreatment assessments/investigations (56.7%).”¹⁵ One in five children involved in completed child maltreatment assessments and investigations were under the age of three.¹⁶

Impact of public awareness campaigns designed to prevent child maltreatment is encouraging

- Public awareness campaigns aimed at preventing child maltreatment have been implemented in many jurisdictions with encouraging outcomes.¹⁷
 - In 1995, a public awareness campaign was developed “because of the need to promote public understanding of the link between addictions and child maltreatment. A multimedia campaign helped to increase by 62% the average monthly number of people who called a telephone service for information about

¹² [Minnesota’s Child Maltreatment Report, 2022](#), Minnesota Department of Human Services (August 1, 2024), p. 5 (Following a relatively large decline in the number of child maltreatment reports received during the first year of the pandemic, there was a small increase in the number of reports that were received by Child Protective Services across the state in 2022”).

¹³ *Id.* at p. 5.

¹⁴ *Id.* at p. 6.

¹⁵ *Id.* at p. 5.

¹⁶ *Id.*

¹⁷ [A Systematic Review of Universal Campaigns Targeting Child Physical Abuse Prevention, PubMed Central](#). Poole, MK, Seal, DW., Taylor, CA. National Library of Medicine Health Educ Res. 2014 Jun;29(3):388-432. doi: 10.1093/her/cyu012. Epub 2014 Apr 7. PMID: 24711483; PMCID: PMC4021196. See Table 1 for a list of researched campaigns.



how to aid abused and neglected children. The campaign was supported by market research and professional experience that indicated the campaign should focus on easy action a citizen could take, avoid inducing fear or blame, and target third party helpers and younger families-at-risk. Campaign exposure was promoted through the support of corporate partners. A random household survey found that 61% of the general population had seen or heard the campaign slogan. The average monthly calls to the child maltreatment information service regarding alcohol and other drug abuse tripled and the requests regarding at-risk children almost doubled.”¹⁸

Evidence supports community-led prevention initiatives

- Some community prevention efforts exist wholly outside of the state/county child protection system, while others are implemented in the community and may be funded or managed by state or county agencies. Community-led maltreatment prevention efforts that exist outside of the state/county agency system are supported by years of research and have shown promising results.¹⁹
- “Key aspects of these efforts include focusing on primary prevention, often through Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention (CBCAP) programs that empower families and provide resources. These initiatives emphasize comprehensive support for parents, parent leadership, interagency collaborations, and the use of evidence-based practices tailored to community needs. Community efforts also aim to address underlying issues like economic hardship by promoting stability and providing support. Engaging the community is seen as vital for expanding resources, fostering collective responsibility, and addressing risk factors.”²⁰
- Communities can contribute to child abuse prevention by educating parents, strengthening families with support services, encouraging community involvement, and raising awareness. Challenges in these efforts include the need for significant resources and long-term investment, generating support from various stakeholders, and demonstrating the effectiveness of universal initiatives. There are also challenges in ensuring programs effectively reinforce positive parenting practices.²¹

¹⁸ [The impact of a media campaign on public action to help maltreated children in addictive families](#). Andrews AB, McLeese DG, Curran S. Child Abuse Negl. 1995 Aug;19(8):921-32. doi: 10.1016/0145-2134(95)00054-c. PMID: 7583751 (abstract).

¹⁹ See for example: [Community-Level Prevention of Childhood Maltreatment: Next Steps in a World with COVID-19](#), PubMed Central – National Library of Medicine, Int. J. Child Maltreat. 2021 Jan 6; 3(4) : 467–481; [Creating Community Responsibility for Child Protection: Possibilities and Challenges](#), PubMed – National Library of Medicine, Future Child, 2009 Fall;19(2) : 67-93,

²⁰ [What is CBCAP](#): Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention, Family Resource Information, Education, and Network Development Service (FRIENDS), [website](#) (2025).

²¹ [Four Strategies to Prevent Child Abuse](#), Child Abuse Prevention Council, [website](#) (June 2025).



National efforts to promote public awareness can be replicated in states

- The importance of raising broad public awareness regarding prevention of child maltreatment has been exemplified through initiatives such as the Children’s Bureau’s National Child Abuse Prevention Month.²²

3.1.2. Multimedia campaigns can help to prevent child maltreatment

Leveraging multimedia campaigns to strengthen families

- Multimedia campaigns aimed at preventing child maltreatment could harness various media platforms to raise awareness and connect families with essential resources. These campaigns could focus on educating the public about the importance of strengthening families and expanding access to support systems.

Shifting the narrative: Prevention through support, not judgment

- To be most effective, “prevention strategies should focus on reducing risk factors that are highly prevalent and modifiable. The Social Ecological Model (SEM) posits that such factors exist at multiple levels, ranging from the individual and interpersonal to broader community and societal levels.”²³

3.1.3. Placing greater emphasis on victims and enhancing the provision of support services would strengthen Minnesota’s child protection system

Gaps in prevention exist across rural and urban communities

- In both rural and urban communities there is a lack of services and supports that are known to prevent child maltreatment. Existing resources and services often focus on the perpetrators of child maltreatment, while providing comparatively less support for victims.

State investment in Community Resource Centers to strengthen families

- In 2023, the Minnesota Legislature allocated \$7.1 million in grant funding to the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) to develop and implement a statewide network of Community Resource Centers. As of April 2025, five counties are receiving state funding through the Community Resource Centers grant and 41 other counties are exploring the model of Family Resource Centers through assistance of philanthropic or local county dollars. In consultation with state agencies, community

²² [National Child Abuse Prevention Month, Child Welfare Information Gateway.](#)

²³ [A systematic review of universal campaigns targeting child physical abuse prevention, Mary Kathryn Poole, David W Seal, Catherine A Taylor](#); National Library of Medicine, PMCID: PMC4021196 PMID: [24711483](#).



partners, and the Community Resource Center Advisory Council, DCYF awarded grants to support the planning, implementation, and evaluation of these programs. The grants aim to:

- "Increase access to resources that improve economic stability for families and kinship caregivers.
- Promote family and child well-being to prevent maltreatment and neglect.
- Encourage families and communities to collaborate on changes that make families feel safe asking for help.
- Ensure staff at community resource centers and foster kinship navigator programs are well-trained and equipped to assist families effectively."

"Community resource center and kinship navigator staff will be trained to use innovative tools, including Help Me Connect and Minnesota's Bridge to Benefits, to help families identify eligible services and find the support available in their areas."²⁴

Specialized support needed for pregnant and parenting youth in foster care

- Pregnant and parenting youth in foster care require specialized resources and support to prevent intergenerational family separation and promote long-term family stability.²⁵

Affordable housing is a protective factor against child maltreatment

- Population studies have shown that access to affordable housing is associated with reduced rates of violence, including lower incidences of child maltreatment.²⁶

Basic needs and economic supports are critical to family stability

- As noted by the U.S. Administration for Children and Families, a growing body of research demonstrates that high-quality early care and education serves as an effective strategy for preventing child maltreatment.²⁷

Economic supports are foundational to preventing maltreatment and strengthening families

- "Access to the basic necessities of life is fundamental to the safety, well-being, and success of every family. Tangible resources — such as housing, food, and health care —

²⁴ [New Initiative Connects Families to Support and Resources](#), Minn. Dept. of Children, Families, and Youth, March 4, 2025.

²⁵ ["What Strategies Support Pregnant and Parenting Teens in Foster Care?" Pregnant and Parenting Teens – Casey Family Programs website \(July 9, 2024\).](#)

²⁶ Shanahan M, Austin A, Durrance C, *et al.* [The association of the availability of affordable housing and rates of child maltreatment and intimate partner violence related homicide.](#) *Injury Prevention* 2022; 28:A31.

²⁷ [High Quality Early Care and Education is Child Maltreatment Prevention | The Administration for Children and Families.](#)



strengthen families and communities by avoiding and de-escalating crises, reducing parental stress, and ensuring children have the material items they need to thrive. Research on the use and effects of providing economic supports — and how they can prevent families from coming to the attention of a child protection agency — continues to grow. [Studies show](#) that supporting families to access and receive adequate and effective economic supports can prevent family separation, decrease time to permanency for children who have been removed from their parents, decrease the risk of subsequent abuse or neglect, and enhance child and family well-being.”²⁸

3.1.4. Child protection services operate within a complex, multi-systemic framework that includes law enforcement, education, and healthcare, each with unique roles and responsibilities

Child protection operates within a broader system of interconnected services

- Child protection does not function in isolation; rather, it is embedded in a network of interconnected systems. This complexity underscores the critical need for collaboration and coordination among agencies to ensure child safety and well-being. Addressing child protection challenges requires a comprehensive, cross-system approach that acknowledges the interdependencies between public systems and the broader community.²⁹

Formal partnerships are essential for effective cross-system collaboration

- To effectively protect children, child protection agencies must work in partnership with law enforcement, healthcare providers, educators, and other professionals to support families and reduce unnecessary family separation. This includes formalizing partnerships through mechanisms such as Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs), which can help sustain cross-system collaboration even amid leadership transitions.³⁰

Sustained commitment and innovation drive system transformation

- A broad, cross-system commitment to work together and be amenable to change is critical for system transformation. Promising strategies include system partners creating cross-sector committees, establishing joint multi-system trainings such as for law

²⁸ How do economic supports benefit families and communities? Casey Family Programs (February 4, 2025).

²⁹ [Understanding the Role of CPS in Investigating Child Abuse Allegations](#), National Crimes Against Children Investigators Association, Michael Lee (Oct. 28.2024).

³⁰ [How are some jurisdictions transforming mandated reporting?](#) Casey Family Programs (March 27, 2025).



enforcement officers and social workers, developing new trainings for mandated reporters, and engaging trusted community leaders in the work.³¹

3.1.5. Parents and children face stigma when seeking help

Stigma around seeking parenting support can be a barrier to accessing services

- Research has documented measurable stigma experienced by parents who seek out parenting supports, which can act as a barrier to accessing needed services.³²

Fear of judgment or blaming can prevent children from seeking help

- Stigma and fear of judgment can prevent children who have experienced maltreatment from reaching out for help from schools, places of worship, or other organizations. These fears may stem from concerns about being blamed, judged or misunderstood by peers, teachers, or faith leaders.³³
- The feeling of stigma can be lessened when parents and children seek help from Community Resource Centers and Family Resource Centers before seeking help from counties where they may feel surveilled.

3.1.6. Increasing social isolation contributes to a higher risk of maltreatment and makes prevention more difficult

Lack of targeted services for youth in school and transitioning to adulthood

- There is a shortage of agencies and services specifically designed to support youth during their school years and as they transition to adulthood.

Social isolation increases family stress and highlights need for support networks

- Social isolation heightens stress for both families and parents, underscoring the need for stronger connections, supportive networks, and accessible resources.

³¹ Id.

³² [Measuring Stigma for Seeking Parenting Help Among Head Start Fathers | Journal of the Society for Social Work and Research: Vol 8, No 2.](#)

³³ [Stigma as a Barrier to Addressing Childhood Trauma in Conversation with Trauma Survivors: A Study in the General Population](#) | National Library of Medicine, Oct. 18, 2021.



3.1.7. There are significant unmet resource needs for both parents and children — before, during, and after involvement in the child protection system

Critical shortages in services for children with complex needs

- Unmet resource needs include critical shortages in services such as mental and chemical health treatment, and appropriate placement options for children with complex behavioral needs.
- A 2017 report by the Minnesota National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) shows that “a dramatic rise in mental health hospital visits signaled the need for expanded options for families with children facing mental health crises. Over the last decade, The Minnesota Hospital Association (MHA) has tracked emergency department visits for this population and found a significant increase: Nearly 20,000 children/youth visits to the emergency room for mental health reasons in 2016, up from under 10,000 such visits in 2007.”³⁴
- “Minnesota will need to address this issue in multiple ways; increasing hospital and residential treatment capacity are important components, but current models don’t provide urgent access or the appropriate level of care for many families. Hospital stays can be both costly and ineffective in providing care to those experiencing a mental health crisis, with hospitalizations costing an average of \$15,540 per stay and studies showing patients often experience an escalation of symptoms in the emergency department and a lack of transition support and coordination with community providers. Likewise, the state’s current residential treatment models don’t meet the needs of this population, as there are often long wait lists to access care, and the programs are designed as a much lengthier treatment, varying from 100 days to over a year.”³⁵

Workforce shortages impede access to behavioral health in rural areas

- “The need for behavioral health treatment in rural communities nationwide has been exacerbated by the ongoing flood of fentanyl into rural areas. Providers say the surge in need combined with rural workforce shortages have impeded the rollout of Minnesota’s new direct access system for lower income people because it hinges on the availability of licensed alcohol and drug counselors, who are in short supply in rural Minnesota.”³⁶
- In addition, “across many states, rural areas are riddled with behavioral health provider shortages. Those deficits persist even though, compared with more densely populated

³⁴ [Children’s Crisis Residential Services Study](#): Report to the Minnesota Department of Human Services, National Alliance on Mental Illness Minnesota (2017), p. 3.

³⁵ *Id.*

³⁶ [Minnesota Overhauled Substance Use Treatment. Rural Residents Still Face Barriers](#), KFF Health News, April 3, 2023.

places, rural areas have more people living in poverty and more people likely to be uninsured or underinsured — both risk factors for substance use disorders.”³⁷

3.1.8. Maltreatment can occur in foster care settings

Maltreatment can occur in foster care, but most alleged offenders are parents

- In its 2022 Child Maltreatment Report, the Minnesota Department of Children, Youth, and Families reported the position of authority held by alleged offenders. Of 26,409 alleged maltreatment offenders, 0.6% were relative foster parents, 0.5% were non-relative foster parents and 0.15% were group home/residential facility staff, compared to 80.1% who were biological parents.³⁸

3.2. Some Parts of Minnesota’s Child Protection System Require Improvement

3.2.1. There is a need for the child protection system to work better for children, families, and their communities

Legal barriers prevent effective data sharing across systems

- Existing statutes create significant barriers to the sharing of critical child-specific data among schools, child protection agencies, and other justice and community partners.

Foster youth need targeted, holistic support

- There is a pressing need for improved support for children and youth in foster care. Key areas include ensuring educational stability, expanding placement options for children and youth with behavioral needs, enhancing extended foster care services, providing direct financial assistance, supporting kinship care arrangements, and addressing the intergenerational cycle of involvement in the system.

Poor education outcomes are tied to school instability

- A review of the literature shows that over 40% of foster youth aged 15–17 have repeated a grade, and they receive individualized education services at rates 2.5 to 3.5 higher than their peers in the general population.³⁹

³⁷ Id.

³⁸ Relationship of alleged offenders to alleged victims in completed assessments/investigations by determination of maltreatment, [Minnesota’s Child Maltreatment Report, 2022](#), Minnesota Department of Children, Youth, and Families, p. 51, Aug. 1, 2024.

³⁹ [Developing strategies for positive change: Transitioning foster youth to adulthood](#). Graham, K. Children and Youth Services Review (2015, May 5).



- Poor educational outcomes are linked to frequent school changes often required of children and youth in foster care.⁴⁰

Intergenerational cycle of maltreatment results in elevated maltreatment and foster care risk for children of parents who have experienced maltreatment

- A recent review of literature also found disproportionate foster care involvement among the children whose parents had previously experienced abuse or neglect, removal from their homes, and placement in foster care — highlighting the intergenerational nature of child protection system involvement.⁴¹
- Research has begun to identify a risk for children of parents who themselves were placed in foster care when they were children. Approximately 1.1% of children in the U.S. enter foster care each year. A study by Casey Family Programs found that 9% of parents who themselves were once in foster care report having a child in foster care.⁴²
- Parents who have experienced childhood maltreatment — whether neglect or physical, sexual, or emotional abuse — are at an increased risk of perpetuating the cycle with their own children. Several pathways may explain this intergenerational pattern, including learned behavior, impaired emotional regulation, disorganized attachment, and transmission of psychopathology. Additionally, factors such as social isolation, young parental age, stress, poverty, and substance abuse increase the risk of intergenerational transmission of maltreatment.⁴³ While breaking this cycle of maltreatment can be difficult, it is possible through targeted interventions such as therapy, support groups, and trauma-informed parenting strategies.⁴⁴

Trauma-informed parenting programs support healthier families

- Interventions like Positive Parenting and Parent-Child Interaction Therapy have been shown to help address underlying trauma. They promote positive parent-child relationships to disrupt cycles of maltreatment and foster safer, more supportive environments for children.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ [What is the “Every Student Succeeds Act”?](#) Casey Family Programs website (July 2022).

⁴¹ [Child welfare involvement and adjustment among care alumni and their children: A systematic review of risk and protective factors - ScienceDirect.](#)

⁴² [Intergenerational Pathways Leading to Foster Care Placement of Foster Care Alumni’s Children](#), National Institute of Health, NIH Public Access Manuscript, Child Fam Soc Work, 2015 February; 20(1): 72–82 [nihms423980.pdf](#).

⁴³ [The Intergenerational Transmission of Child Maltreatment: A Three-Level Meta-Analysis, Child Abuse & Neglect](#), vol. 84, Oct. 2018, section 4.3, pp. 131–145.

⁴⁴ Id. at section 4.3.

⁴⁵ Id.



Rethinking racial disparities in foster care – the need to understand “why” there is disproportionality

- Historically, discussions about racial disparities in foster care have focused on comparing the number of white children and children of color who enter the child protection system. However, the conversation must shift toward understanding *why* children of color are disproportionately represented. This includes examining the multigenerational impacts of trauma, systemic inequities, and other structural factors that contribute to increased involvement of children of color in the child protection system. A more meaningful dialogue centers on the root causes and what is happening in families and communities that lead to this involvement — rather than simply quantifying it.

Data gaps and disparities facing LGBTQ+ youth in foster care

- There is a significant lack of comprehensive data collected about LGBTQ youth in foster care. This gap limits the ability to understand their experiences, assess disparities, and tailor services to meet their unique needs.
 - In June-July 2020, Foster Advocates conducted a study of former foster youth (ages 14 – 26) across Minnesota. With respect to sexual orientation, 27% of fosters identified as LGBTQIA+, 71% identified as heterosexual, and 2% were unsure.⁴⁶
 - Sexual orientation and gender identity are not currently included as demographic categories in the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS), limiting the ability to fully understand and address the needs of LGBTQ+ youth in care.⁴⁷
 - A telephone survey of 786 randomly sampled youth in foster care living in Los Angeles found that “19% of youth in foster care in Los Angeles identify as LGBTQ.” Notably, the survey also reported that “there are between 1.5 to 2 times as many LGBTQ youth living in foster care as LGBTQ youth estimated to be living outside of foster care.”⁴⁸

Reevaluating the role of non-custodial parents in child protection cases

- A review is needed of how non-custodial parents are treated within Minnesota’s child protection system, particularly in cases where they may serve as a safe and viable placement options. Questions to consider include:
 - **Should Minnesota’s paternity statutes be revised** to allow for easier and timelier establishment of paternity in child protection cases?

⁴⁶[Foster Youth COVID-19 Impact Report Minnesota](#), Foster Advocates, p. 4 (June-July 2020).

⁴⁷ [Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System \(AFCARS\) | The Administration for Children and Families](#).

⁴⁸ [Sexual and Gender Minority Youth in Foster Care, Williams Institute, Wilson, B., Khush, C., Kastanis, A., Nezhad, S. August 2014.](#)



- **Are there legal mechanisms to transfer a case from juvenile court to family court** if the non-custodial parent is fit and able to assume custody of the children, and the protection concerns set forth in the CHIPS petition involve only the custodial parent?
- **When a child is placed with a non-custodial parent through a juvenile court matter**, should the same permanency timelines and requirements — such as providing reasonable efforts to reunite with the custodial parent — still apply?

3.2.2. The professionals in the system need better support

Social services agencies face significant workforce challenges

- Social services agencies face significant workforce challenges, particularly related to recruitment, retention, and qualifications. Variations in hiring standards across counties may contribute to inconsistencies in staffing, retention, and workforce stability. As some counties adjust qualification requirements to reduce barriers to entry into child protection roles, gaps may emerge in experience traditionally gained through advanced educational degrees, internships, or lived experience.
 - **To address these gaps**, enhancements in job qualifications should be paired with robust training and mentorship programs to build the necessary skills and support professional development.

Retention remains a critical concern

- The average tenure for child protection services (CPS) workers is just 2.5 years⁴⁹ — substantially lower than the median tenure of 6.2 years for public sector employees — highlighting the urgency of addressing retention challenges.⁵⁰
- Secondary traumatic stress may adversely impact individual workers, increase the risk of burnout, and contribute to high turnover of the workforce. This can impact all levels of the workforce, including case managers, supervisors, managers, and directors. Access to mental health resources, peer support networks, and organizational strategies may promote the resilience necessary to maintaining a stable, effective workforce.

Adapting workforce training to regional and role-based needs

- Supporting and training the child protection workforce is complicated by the variation in roles across the state, particularly between generalists and specialists. In rural communities where caseloads are broad and specialized expertise is limited, agencies often rely on generalists who must develop a wide range of skills to manage diverse and complex cases. While specialization offers important benefits, the realities of staffing in rural areas require flexibility. To meet the varied needs of child protection workers across

⁴⁹ MACSSA 2025 Legislative Session Position Statement, [MACSSA website](#).

⁵⁰ [Employee Tenure in 2024](#). U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.



Minnesota, a consistent yet adaptable system of workforce training and support is essential — one that acknowledges regional differences while maintaining statewide standards of quality and competence.

Addressing the impact of remote work on professional development

- The shift toward remote work among child protection system professionals has created challenges for workforce development. The hands-on training, mentorship, and day-to-day collaboration that were once integral to onboarding and professional growth have been significantly reduced or, in some cases, eliminated. This loss impacts both the quality of training and the sense of connection among staff.

Strengthening the workforce through qualifications, collaboration, and equity

- Regarding child protection workers, several key areas require attention to strengthen the workforce:
 - Qualifications should extend beyond minimum educational requirements to ensure that workers are truly prepared and competent for the complexity of the role.
 - Greater emphasis must be placed on cross-disciplinary collaboration and efforts to break down organizational silos, enabling more integrated and effective service delivery.
 - Targeted strategies are needed to recruit and retain child protection workers in rural and underserved communities, where workforce shortages are often most acute.

Prioritizing experiential learning and mentorship in workforce development

- Child protection work is best learned through hands-on experience and mentorship. However, fewer workers today have access to colleagues with this firsthand knowledge. While technology offers opportunities to support experiential learning, its effectiveness depends on access to reliable internet — something not guaranteed in all parts of the state. Structured experiential training, strong mentorship programs, and effective integration of technology are essential components of skill development for today's child protection workforce.

Mandated reporter training – historical gaps and legislative reforms to standardize

- Prior to enactment of legislation during the 2025 legislative session, there was a lack of consistent training for mandated reporters, resulting in lack of clarity regarding who must make a report of maltreatment, what must be reported, and under what circumstances must a report be made.⁵¹

⁵¹ [Improved training for identifying signs of child maltreatment, abuse goal of House bill](#). Abelin, T. (Feb. 26, 2025)



- During the 2025 legislative session, [Minn. Stat. § 260E.065](#) was amended to provide that the “local welfare agency must offer training to a person required to make a report of maltreatment.” The statute further provides that the training “must provide an explanation of the legal obligations of a reporter, consequences for failure to report, and instruction on how to detect and report suspected maltreatment.” Local agencies “may fulfill the requirement by directing reporters to trainings offered by [the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF)].” The amendment also provides that “at least half of the training time must be spent on how to identify signs of suspected maltreatment or abuse” and “must cover the definition of each maltreatment type.” The Commissioner of DCYF is required to “create trainings with input from professionals with specialized knowledge related to maltreatment, including but not limited to medical professionals, attorneys, mental health professionals, and social workers.”⁵²
- While the 2025 legislation — [Minn. Stat. § 260E.065](#) — requires local child welfare agencies to provide mandated reporter training, the mandated reporter statutes Minn. Stat § 260E.01 - § 260E.39 do require mandated reporters to attend such training.

3.2.3. The court process needs improvement

Several challenges exist within the court process for juvenile protection proceedings, impacting the ability to serve children and families effectively.

Insufficient hearing time limits amount of attention courts can give children and families

- There is not enough time allocated for child protection hearings to allow the court to adequately address the progress on the case plan and the needs of the parties and participants or to comply fully with all statutory and rule-based requirements. The Children’s Justice Initiative promotes best practices for the appropriate amount of time for each type of child protection hearing. The hearing time best practices are not achieved statewide primarily because of an insufficient number of judges across the entire judicial system to cover all of the required work. A second reason is the limited availability of calendar time for justice partners. The lack of sufficient hearing time can cause delays in safely returning children home and in achieving timely alternative permanency for children.

Judicial rotation can cause lack of continuity

- In urban counties, the process of judicial rotation into and out of CHIPS calendars may present challenges for the parties and participants. The length of these rotations varies from county to county. In some jurisdictions, judicial CHIPS assignments last less than three years — often too brief to allow a judge to see a case through from removal to

⁵² Minn. Stat. § 260E.065 (2025).



permanency. This lack of judicial continuity can impact case outcomes and participant trust in the process.

Inconsistent court oversight and lack of uniform practices

- There is a need for stronger and more consistent court oversight to ensure adherence to best practices in CHIPS cases. Without a uniform framework, practices and outcomes can vary widely across counties.

Need for standardized training for all child protection system professionals

A standardized training curriculum for all child protection system professionals — including judges, attorneys, social workers, guardians ad litem, law enforcement officers, tribal representatives, and others — is essential. This curriculum should provide consistent, accurate information on court procedures, statutory and rules requirements, and best practices. Its implementation would promote fairness, efficiency, and consistent informed decision-making statewide.

Pre-appointment and regular “refresher” CHIPS training needed by judges, attorneys, and other child protection system professionals

- Concerns have been raised that judges may not receive sufficient, or appropriate training on the law and procedures governing child protection matters prior to beginning their CHIPS rotation. This lack of training can contribute to delays in case progression, which is particularly problematic given the strict timelines for reunification or alternative permanency. Because child protection proceedings involve complex legal standards, procedural requirements, and critical trauma-responsive decisions, judges should receive specialized child protection training before presiding over child protection proceedings.
- To promote effective and informed advocacy, attorneys should receive standardized training on the law and procedures governing child protection matters prior to before being appointed to represent the child protection agency, parents, or children. The issue of standardized training for attorneys for parents is intended to be addressed by the upcoming implementation of the Office of Appellate Counsel and Training.
- Requiring all mandated reporters to successfully complete the standardized curriculum, as evidenced by a certificate of completion, is also essential. The first part of the curriculum should be completed prior to engaging with children and families in the child protection system. The second part of the curriculum should be completed collaboratively with other child protection system stakeholders within the individual’s county to ensure a shared understanding of local practices.
- Regular refresher training should be made available to all child protection system stakeholders, with completion required to maintain alignment with current laws, policies, and best practices.



Clarifying the purpose of hearings for participants

- A designated “neutral” person should be present in the courtroom to clearly explain the purpose, procedures, and expectations of each hearing. This is especially important for individuals who either don’t have attorneys or who may not have been fully briefed by their attorneys beforehand. Even those with legal representation can struggle to understand court proceedings, and the quality and consistency of explanations currently vary from case to case. Attorneys may not always have time to meet with or brief their clients before a hearing — especially when hearings are held virtually.

Local policies are inconsistent regarding who is or is not permitted to speak during hearings

- Courts have varying policies about who will be called upon and who may speak during CHIPS hearings. [Juvenile Protection Rule 27.01](#) allows social services court reports to be “supplemented at or before the hearing either orally or in writing.”

Court-appointed attorneys for parents and children often face delays in initiating contact with their clients

- Attorneys are not consistently provided with client contact information at the time of appointment. These delays can prevent meaningful attorney-client communication prior to the hearing, potentially impacting the quality of the hearing, the quality of representation, and the client’s understanding of their case. Some attorneys for parents do not meet with their clients between hearings to learn what progress is or is not being made on the case plan or any concerns the parent may have. Instead, this important discussion sometimes occurs immediately prior to a hearing, which often is not enough time to fully discuss what is included in the social worker’s report to court and the parent’s concerns and progress on the case plan.

There is a lack of consistent appointment of counsel for children across the state

- There are inconsistent procedures for appointment of counsel for children. This is particularly true for children who turn age 10 during the pendency of their case. In some instances, children are not informed of their statutory right to counsel upon reaching age 10, and, even when they are timely informed, legal representation is not always appointed promptly.

There is a lack of consistent appointment of counsel for parents across the state.

- [Minn. Stat. § 260C.163, subd. 3\(c\)](#), mandates that, prior to the first hearing in any child in need of protection or services (CHIPS), termination of parental rights (TPR), or transfer of permanent legal and physical custody (TPLPC) proceeding the court must appoint counsel for each parent, guardian, or custodian who desires counsel and who qualifies financially under [Minn. Stat. § 611.17](#).



Procedures for appointing appellate counsel vary from county to county

- There is no consistent statewide process for appointing appellate counsel. There is no centralized list of qualified appellate attorneys from which appellate appointments are made, leading to gaps in representation on appeal. These issues are intended to be addressed by the upcoming implementation of the Office of Appellate Counsel and Training, which will help standardize appellate representation practices statewide.

Simultaneous criminal and CHIPS cases

- Parents who simultaneously face criminal charges and allegations in a child protection petition can cause delays in the child protection process by not accepting services in their CHIPS case. By statute, in termination of parental rights cases the county attorney determines whether the criminal or child protection case goes to trial first. Each county attorney's office has procedures to determine that order. If the criminal case goes first, it can impact the timing of admissions and denials in the termination of parental rights proceeding and delay establishment of permanency for the child.
 - Pursuant to [Minn. Stat. § 260C.178, subd. 1\(j\)](#), "If the county attorney has filed a [termination of parental rights] petition, the court shall schedule a trial within 90 days of the filing of the petition except when the county attorney determines that the criminal case shall proceed to trial first under section 260C.503, subdivision 2, paragraph (c)."
 - Pursuant to [Minn. Stat. § 260C.503, subd. 2\(c\)](#), "if criminal charges have been filed against a parent arising out of the conduct alleged to constitute egregious harm, the county attorney shall determine [whether the termination of parental rights or criminal] matter should proceed to trial first, consistent with the best interests of the child and subject to the defendant's right to a speedy trial."

Permanency timelines

- Resolving cases within the statutorily required timeline can be difficult due to insufficient access to chemical dependency treatment, mental health services, and other critical resources that parents need to address the underlying causes of the child's maltreatment.

Children as parties to proceedings

- Children are not automatically considered as parties in their own child protection cases. Under [Juvenile Protection Rule 34.01](#), children are designated as participants and may become a party as a matter of right. [Juvenile Protection Rule 34.03](#) provides that to become a party the child must file a notice of intervention — a potentially difficult process if the child lacks legal representation. The court must schedule a hearing if any party files an objection to the child's notice of intervention.

Limitations of the court setting for mental health issues

- Courts may not be the most appropriate setting for resolving issues rooted primarily in parental mental health challenges.



Inadequacy of court for certain child behavioral issues

- Court proceedings may not be the most effective forum for addressing truancy, runaway behavior, and other child behavioral concerns, especially when those behaviors are linked to a child's mental health needs.

Lack of uniform process for updating the court

- There is no uniform process in the statutes, rules, or statewide court practices for case managers to provide new information or updates to the court at hearings for anything that occurs or becomes known between the time their report is filed and the hearing.

3.2.4. The social services process needs improvement

Limited procedural flexibility

- In an effort to ensure system accountability, social services procedures can lack flexibility. Requirements such as 24-hour timelines for screening decisions, track assignment, permanency petition deadliness, and other statutory timelines may not allow for case-by-case discretion.

Effectiveness of the two-track system is unclear

- It is unclear whether Minnesota's two-track response system (Family Assessment and Family Investigation) is fulfilling its original intent, maintaining fidelity to alternative response models, or effectively addressing systemic issues within child protection.

Inconsistent track assignment across counties

- Counties have varying interpretations of State guidance on track assignment (i.e., Family Assessment or Family Investigation), resulting in inconsistencies. The same family circumstance may lead to different responses depending on the county, raising concerns about equity and fairness.

Unclear safety assessment tools

- There is a lack of clarity around the safety assessment tool used by child protection workers to make safety plans, which may lead to inconsistent application or confusion among practitioners.

Administrative burden on frontline staff

- The administrative process, particularly the use of the Department of Children, Youth, and Families' case management system (SSIS), is overly burdensome and time consuming, significantly impacting the capacity of frontline staff to engage directly with families.



- A staff survey in Pine County revealed that, on average, only 17.6% of a child protection worker's time—based on SSIS documentation—is spent directly interacting with families, underscoring the impact of administrative demands.⁵³

Overly complex case plans

- The out-of-home placement case plan template is excessively long, complex, and often difficult for parents and attorneys to understand. It is unclear which components of the template are mandated by federal or state law, contributing to confusion and potential non-compliance.

Decrease adversarial atmosphere

- While attorneys and child protection workers are expected to advocate zealously for their clients, greater collaboration among justice system partners is needed to reduce the adversarial nature of the child protection process .

Multidisciplinary teams

- Judicially led, multidisciplinary teams — such as the Children's Justice Initiative — that meet regularly at the county level play a critical role in fostering collaboration among justice partners and ensuring a shared understanding of the county's child protection processes and procedures. There is a need to ensure each county has a multi-disciplinary team that meets regularly to maintain consistent county-wide alignment with current laws, policies, and best practices

Collaborative relationships

- A stronger, more collaborative relationship is needed between the county child welfare agencies and the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) to support consistent and effective service delivery.

Statutory barriers to data sharing between systems hinder services for children

- Statutory barriers to data sharing between systems — including child protection, healthcare, education, and service providers — hinder the coordination of essential services to children .

Siloed operations

- Services and agencies often operate in silos. For example, service providers may be unable to coordinate care for a family because confidentiality rules prevent them from knowing that other providers are involved with the family.

⁵³ MACSSA Position Statement on SSIS Modernization. [MO5 - SSIS Modernization - 2025 Statement.pdf](#).



Cross-system data sharing

- Effective cross-system data sharing requires collaboration not only between agencies, but also across community partnerships and service systems to ensure coordinated and responsive support for children and families.⁵⁴

3.3. Minnesota Can Make More Effective Use of its Limited Resources

Disconnect between state and counties in funding oversight

- There is a disconnect between the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) and the counties in understanding and implementing the child welfare funding system. Because the system is county administered, DCYF lacks the oversight, clarity, and technical expertise needed to fully understand the sources, amounts, and uses of federal and state funding. As a result, counties are left to serve as funding experts — even though they do not control the mechanisms for federal drawdown and reimbursement.

Untapped federal funding opportunities for prevention and support services

- Significant untapped federal resources are available to support and expand child welfare services. These include Title IV-E reimbursement dollars for prevention services, legal representation of parents and children, parent mentors, social workers, and training programs.
 - Although Minnesota's Family First Prevention Plan was approved by the federal Children's Bureau in September 2022, few counties are currently drawing down reimbursement funds for prevention services that could strengthen their local service arrays. For example, only one county is seeking reimbursement for attorney time spent representing parents.

Unequal county resources create service disparities

- The availability of child welfare resources varies significantly from county to county, due in part to reliance on county-level funding based on property taxes. Counties with limited tax capacity often struggle to provide the same level of services as those with greater financial resources, leading to disparities in child welfare system access and outcomes. State and federal funding is inadequate and generally narrowly targeted.

⁵⁴ How can data sharing across child- and family-serving systems be implemented effectively. Casey Family Programs. (2024, November 2).



Lack of public-private partnerships limits innovation and support

- There is a lack of strong public/private partnerships in the areas of child protection and maltreatment prevention, limiting innovation, resource expansion, and coordinated community-based support.