

The purpose of the 2020 Data Brief is to highlight and track the long-term trends associated with progress towards 2020 and to educate internal and external stakeholders about how to analyze these key trends with respect to the 2020 goals.

Top 10 jurisdictions for number of children in out-of-home care:

- California (78,373)
- Texas (30,848)
- New York (29,973)
- Florida (29,229)
- Pennsylvania (21,135)
- Michigan (20,142)
- Illinois (18,367)
- Ohio (16,631)
- Georgia (13,175)
- Oklahoma (11,816)

Top 10 jurisdictions for rate of children in out-of-home care:

- DC (20.7)
- Nebraska (13.9)
- Oklahoma (13.2)
- Iowa (12.7)
- Oregon (12.5)
- Rhode Island (12.0)
- Alaska (11.0)
- Wyoming (10.7)
- Vermont (10.3)
- West Virginia (10.3)

## RATE AND NUMBER

### 2020 Data Brief

Why do both the rate and number of children in out-of-home care give a complete understanding of which states have the greatest potential for reduction?

#### What's the issue and how is it relevant to 2020?

Both the number of children in out-of-home care and the rate of children in out-of-home care are important measurements to evaluate a child welfare system. The number is the prevalence of children in care, generally at a given point in time. The rate is the incidence of children in out-of-home care while controlling for the child population. While the number reflects which jurisdictions are working with the most children in out-of-home care, the rate determines which jurisdictions may have the greatest potential for reduction.

#### What do the numbers tell us?<sup>i</sup>

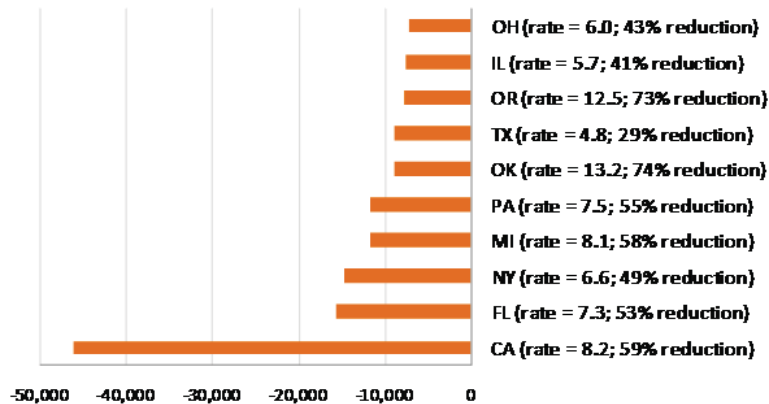
Nationally, about 508,000 children live in out-of-home care. That translates to a rate of 6.8 children for every 1,000 children in the general population.<sup>ii</sup> Both the number (508,000) and rate (6.8) of children in out-of-home care are decreasing, each following a fairly parallel trend over the past several years. A reduction in both shows that child welfare systems are maintaining a slow decrease in the out-of-home care population, in spite of fluctuations in the general population of children. This is a very good thing.

Ranking states by number of children in out-of-home care is very different from ranking states by the rate of children in out-of-home care. In fact, only Oklahoma is in the top 10 for both rate and number. (See sidebar for list.)

The District of Columbia provides an example of a jurisdiction with a high rate of children in care.<sup>iii</sup> D.C. has a relatively small total number of children in out-of-home care (2,378 / ranking: 40th) although they have the highest rate of children in out-of-home care (20.7 per 1,000 children in the population). The national rate is 6.8. Looking at the numbers in this way allows additional questions to be asked: what is a reasonable rate of children in out-of-home care? How would a change in the rate of placement influence the overall number of children in care? And based on either of these factors, how can we best distribute resources to achieve Casey's 2020 Strategy? Theoretically, D.C. has great potential for improvement, as illustrated by their high rate of children in care. Although improvements in this jurisdiction are undoubtedly important, even major reductions in D.C. will not contribute significantly to our 2020 goal of reducing the number of children in care by 50 percent nationally.

Consider another example. Texas has the second largest population of children in out-of-home care, comprising approximately 6.1 percent of the national population of children in care. However, Texas has one of the lowest rates of children in out-of-home care at 4.8. While a decrease in the number of children in out-of-home care may contribute significantly to an overall reduction in the numbers nationwide, what is a realistic rate for Texas? How will that impact a reduction in the number of children in out of home care? How should resources be invested to maintain the lower than average placement rate in spite of a growing population to avoid an increase in the number of children in care?

**States with the Greatest Potential for Reduction Based on Lowering  
the Rate of Children in Out-of-Home Care**



Taking a national look at the numbers, some interesting conclusions can be drawn. To make significant progress on a 50 percent reduction of the number of children in care by 2020, jurisdictions must have the right combination of both a high number and a high rate of children in out-of-home care. For example, the rate of children in out-of-home care nationally is 6.8. If the rate were cut in half there would be a reduction of about 253,901 children in out-of-home care nationally, or 50 percent overall.<sup>iv</sup> States with the greatest potential for reduction in this scenario include all the states in the top 10 for out-of-home care population, except for Georgia. (See graph above.)

**What's next?**

To measure progress towards the 2020 goal of reducing the children in out-of-home care by 50 percent, it is critical to monitor the number of children in out-of-home care over time. Understanding trends in the rate of children in care is also significant because it helps to identify states where there may be potential for reduction, relative to the number of children in the general population. It is clear that the rate of children in care nationally must be reduced to achieve 2020 and the contributions that individual states can make must be carefully assessed. A state's rate relative to the national average is merely a starting point for conversations about reduction. A state with a very low rate may still have great potential for reduction, and vice versa. Although this is an admittedly simple way of identifying jurisdictions with reduction potential, the rate provides a foundation for additional data analysis and assessment of how to promote reductions in some jurisdictions and how to maintain successful efforts in others.

i. All data shared in this 2020 Data Brief is from the Administration of Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services: Foster Care FY2002 – FY2006 Entries, Exits and Numbers of Children in Care on the Last Day of Each Fiscal Year. Accessed August 28, 2008 via [http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/stats\\_research/afcars/statistics/entryexit2006.htm](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/stats_research/afcars/statistics/entryexit2006.htm).

ii. According to the Adoption and Foster Care Reporting and Analysis System (AFCARS), there were 508,446 children in out-of-home care on September 30, 2006.

iii. Note that the District of Columbia is not a state and caution should be taken when comparing it to states.

iv. The average rate of children in out-of-home care per 1,000 children in the population is 6.8. These numbers were calculated using a rate of half the national average, or 3.4.