



TEXAS CENTER  
FOR THE JUDICIARY

Improving Permanency Outcomes: AFCARS & The Courts  
Christopher E. Church, JD, MS  
Children's Law Center, USC School of Law  
2016 Child Welfare Judicial Conference  
November 14-16, Austin

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### Agenda

- ❖ Introduction & Foundational Matters (2-3 Min)
- ❖ Overview of AFCARS Data (5 Min)
- ❖ The National Child Welfare Landscape (2-3 Min)
- ❖ Texas Child Welfare Dynamics (10 Min)
- ❖ Case Study: AFCARS Data & the Courts (20 Min)
- ❖ Q&A



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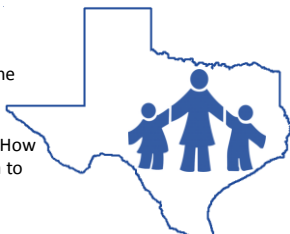
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### My Goals

- ❖ Explore Some Data I Find Meaningful as it Relates to the Work of Juvenile Courts
- ❖ Help You Better Understand How Courts Can Use AFCARS Data to Drive Court Improvement



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## About Me

- ❖ Judicial Consultant w/ Fostering Court Improvement
- ❖ Formerly a Bureaucrat (GA CIP), Currently an Academic (USC Law),
- ❖ MS in Mathematics (Go Mean Green!) and JD (Go Zags!)
- ❖ Live in Columbia, SC with my wife and our two dogs




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## Acknowledgement

“The spread of data-driven decision making is just the kind of thing they thought they could avoid by majoring in the humanities and then studying something nice and verbal, like law.” Ian Ayers, [Super Crunchers](#)

Gorgias, a first generation Sophist, promised to give his students “such absolute readiness for speaking, that they should be able to convince their audience independent of any knowledge of the subject.”




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## Overview of AFCARS

- ❖ Federal Requirement for ~20 Years
- ❖ Dataset of Record for Children in Foster Care
- ❖ Always Counting Children – Never “Cases”
- ❖ Linked Longitudinally, Duplicated Dataset
- ❖ AFCARS is a Gold Mine

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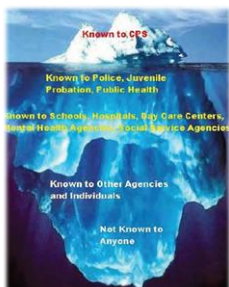
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## Acknowledgement

“Although CPS investigates a substantial number of maltreated children, these children represent only the *tip of the iceberg.*”

NIS-4




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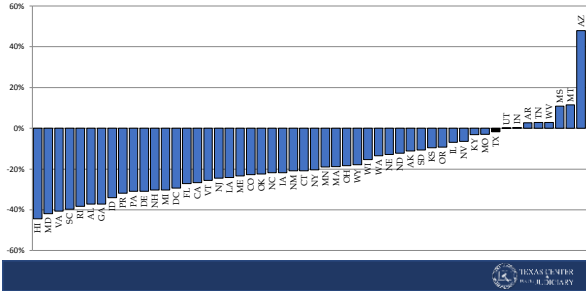
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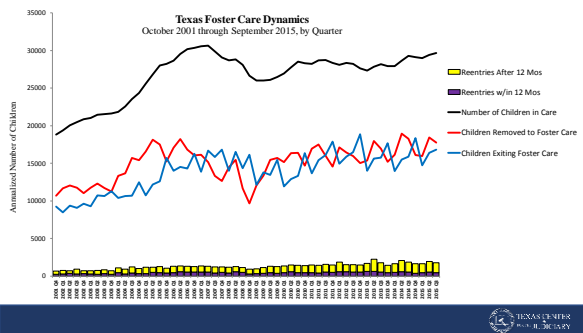
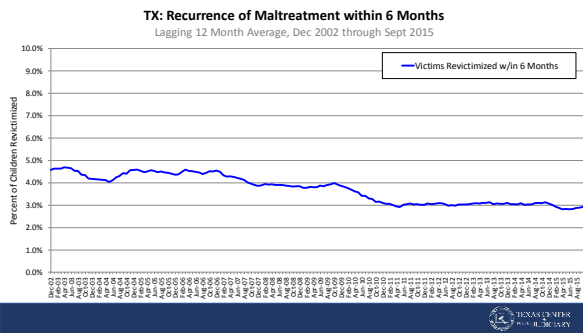
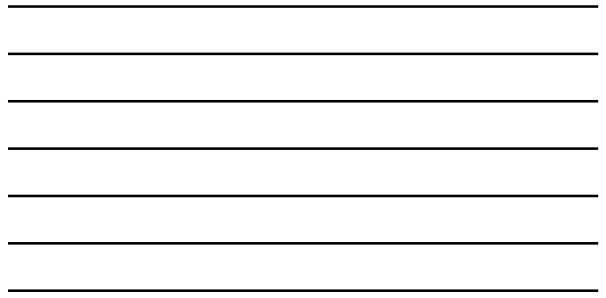
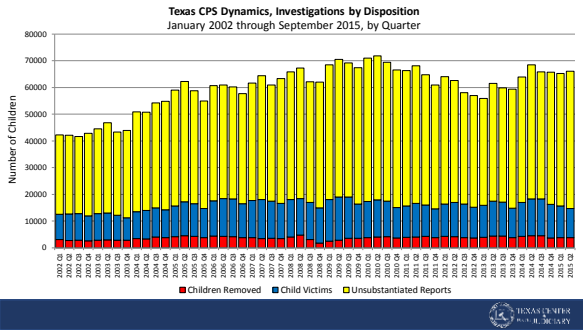
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Percent Change of Foster Care Population from 2007 to 2012 FFY  
Number of Children in Care on Last Day of FFY, ACF Child Welfare Outcomes





### Removal Dynamics

	Average Monthly Removals	Entering w/in 12 Months of a Previous Discharge	Permanency w/in 12 Months
Bexar	2.5 per 10K	3.4%	28%
Dallas	2.1 per 10K	2.5%	48%
El Paso	0.6 per 10K	Zero	38%
Harris	1.1 per 10K	1%	26%
Lubbock	4.1 per 10K	6.7%	26%
Tarrant	0.9 per 10K	2.4%	29%
Travis	2.2 per 10K	4.1%	32%
<b>Statewide</b>	<b>1.9 per 10K</b>	<b>2.7%</b>	<b>36%</b>




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<b>Statewide</b>	<b>1.9 per 10K</b>	<b>2.7%</b>	<b>36%</b>

A child living in Lubbock County is nearly 7 times as likely to be removed to foster care as a child living in El Paso County.




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Interesting to consider the intersection of the removal rate and reentry rate.




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Neighboring Urban Counties – twice as likely to be removed in Dallas.




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Neighboring Urban Counties – 1.7 times as likely to achieve permanency w/in a year




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Dallas	2.1 per 10K	2.5%	48%
<i>Dallas &amp; San Antonio removing similar amount of children (per capita), but achieving very different permanency rates. Austin, too.</i>			
Travis	2.2 per 10K	6.1%	32%
<b>Statewide</b>	<b>1.9 per 10K</b>	<b>2.7%</b>	<b>36%</b>




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## Exploring the Context of Removals

- ❖ Removal rate varies by a factor of 7 across TX' 11 DFPS regions.
  - ❖ What contributes to this variance?
  - ❖ Should community standards play into the decision to remove?
- ❖ Try and articulate a standard for removal. How do your professional perspectives differ? How are they alike?




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## Timeliness of Reunification

Why Do We Care?

- ❖ Children deserve to be with their *families* as quickly as that can be safely achieved.
- ❖ Foster Care is a *limited* intervention.




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## Timeliness of Reunification

If we care, we measure.

- ❖ **Our Value:** "Children in foster care should stay as long as they need to, but not a day longer."
- ❖ **Our Measure:** Of all children reunified during the most recent 12 months, what percent were reunified within 12 months of their removal?




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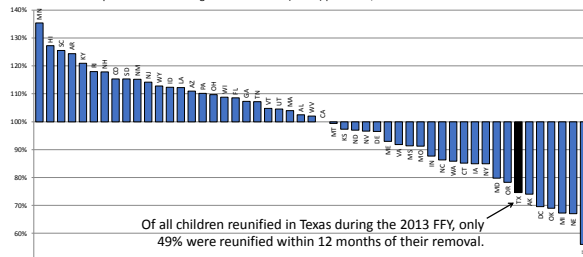
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**Percent of Children Reunified within 12 Months**  
Expressed as a Percentage of the Nat'l Rate (65.6%) | 2013 FFY, Child Welfare Outcomes Data




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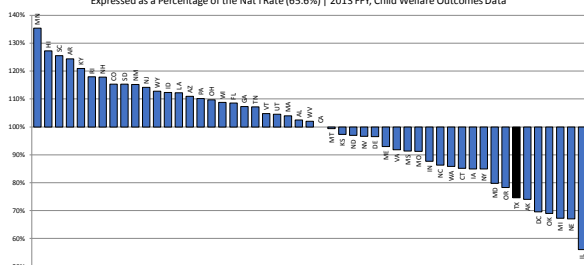
## Improving Timeliness of Reunification

Among children reunified in TX during the 2013 FFY, 49% were discharged within 12 months of their removal.

- ❖ Nationally, about 66% of children reunified were discharged within 12 months of their removal.
- ❖ Across TX DFPS regions, these rates range from 31% to 55%.



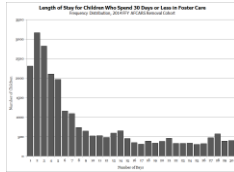
**Percent of Children Reunified within 12 Months**  
Expressed as a Percentage of the Nat'l Rate (65.6%) | 2013 FFY, Child Welfare Outcomes Data



### Improving Timeliness of Reunification

Of the ~25K Children Discharged within 30 Days of Their Removal:

- ❖ Most (75%) Spend Less Than 2 Weeks in Foster Care
- ❖ Most (73%) in an Unfamiliar Environment, with Unfamiliar People
- ❖ Before Nearly All (91.5%) are Returned to their Family




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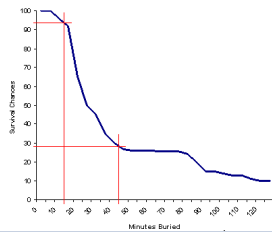
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### Improving Timeliness of Reunification

- ❖ All about measuring *'time to'* some event, like death
- ❖ Shows *full story* (as compared to summary stats)
- ❖ Trying to identify our own *interference*




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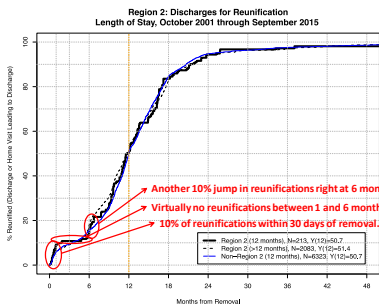
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### Improving Timeliness of Reunification

**Our Value:** "Children in foster care should stay in care as long as they need it, but not a day longer."

**Our Problem:** Children's reunification date may be driven less by their readiness to go there and more by the court's hearing date.

**Our Solution:** ?

**Our Hope:** Children will be reunited with their families as soon as possible, *but not a day longer*.



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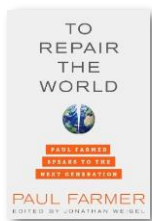
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"He confessed how tired he was working in such a shabby facility... Even though he himself was not poor, working in that clinic had lowered his expectations about what was possible ...

And who could blame him? The same verdict was being drawn by most 'experts' ... the magnitude of our challenges was difficult for even me to comprehend. But the assumption that the only health care possible in rural Haiti was poor-quality health care – *that was a failure of imagination.*"



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### Q&A

Christopher E. Church  
Law & Policy Director  
Children's Law Center  
USC School of Law  
cchurch@law.sc.edu  
803-777-1249



"We'd now like to open the floor to shorter speeches disguised as questions."



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