



Agency of Human Services, Department for Children and Families **Child Protection In Vermont Report For 2025**

Submitted To:

General Assembly
House Committee on Human Services
Senate Committee on Health and Welfare

Submitted By:

Sandi Hoffman, Commissioner

Prepared By:

Aryka Radke, Deputy Commissioner, Family Services
Lindsay Barron, Director of Policy & Planning, Family Services Division
Carlie Thibault, Quality Assurance Administrator, Family Services Division
Shannon Halnon, Quality Assurance Coordinator, Family Services Division
Hannah Marble, Director of Communications & Legislative Affairs

Published:

6.11.2026

Contact Information

From:

Hannah Marble, Director of Communications & Legislative Affairs
Department for Children and Families, Family Services Division
Hannah.Marble@vermont.gov

To receive this information in an alternative format or for other accessibility requests, please contact:

Hannah Marble, Director of Communications & Legislative Affairs
Department for Children and Families, Family Services Division
Hannah.Marble@vermont.gov

Table of Contents

Agency of Human Services, Department for Children and Families Child Protection In Vermont Report For 2025	1
Contact Information	2
Introduction	4
Message From the Department for Children and Families	5
System Improvements and Initiatives	5
Act 154	5
Safe Systems Learning Reviews	6
Structured Decision-Making Risk Assessment Customization and Stakeholder Engagement	7
Conclusion	8
2025 Summary and Data	9
Reports to the Child Protection Hotline	10
Reports Alleging Child Abuse & Neglect, by Reporter Type	10
Reports Accepted for Intervention & Outcomes	11
Victims of Child Abuse and Neglect	12
Ongoing Family Services Worker Caseloads	13
Additional Child Protection Data	14
Vermont Juvenile Court Data	14

Table of Figures

Figure 1: Reports to the Child Protection Hotline.	10
Figure 2: Reports Alleging Child Abuse and Neglect, by Reporter Type	11
Figure 3: Reports to Vermont's Child Protection Hotline and Outcomes	12
Figure 4: Victims of Child Abuse & Neglect	12
Figure 5: Ongoing Family Services Worker Caseloads	13

Introduction

The report has been prepared in accordance with 33 V.S.A. § 4923.

§ 4923. Reporting

The Commissioner shall publish an annual report regarding reports of child abuse and neglect no later than June 30, for the previous year. The report shall include:

- (1) The number of reports accepted as valid allegations of child abuse or neglect.
- (2) The number of reports that resulted in an investigative response; particularly:
 - (A) the number of investigations that resulted in a substantiation;
 - (B) the types of maltreatment substantiated;
 - (C) the relationship of the perpetrator to the victim, by category; and
 - (D) the gender and age group of the substantiated victims.
- (3) The number of reports that resulted in an assessment response; particularly:
 - (A) the general types of maltreatment alleged in cases that received an assessment response; and
 - (B) the number of assessments that resulted in the recommendation of services.
- (4) Trend information over a five-year period. Beginning with the adoption of the assessment response and continuing over the next five years, the report shall explain the impact of the assessment response on statistical reporting. (Added 2007, No. 168 (Adj. Sess.), § 19.)

Message From the Department for Children and Families

The Department for Children and Families (DCF), Family Services Division (FSD), submits the Annual Child Protection Report in accordance with 33 V.S.A. § 4923. This report provides information regarding reports of child abuse and neglect received during the reporting period, including investigative and assessment responses, substantiations, maltreatment trends, and demographic data. It also reflects broader efforts underway to strengthen Vermont's child protection system and improve outcomes for children, youth, and families.

Protecting children while supporting families is the Division's primary responsibility. That responsibility requires clear decision-making, strong practice, accountability, and compassion for the children, families, staff, and community partners involved in this work. FSD continues to advance a child welfare system in Vermont that is trauma-informed, equitable, family-centered, and focused on safety, permanency, and the well-being of children and youth. The data contained in this report represents more than statistics; it reflects the lived experiences of children and families across Vermont, the concerns brought forward by mandated reporters and community members, and the work of dedicated professionals who respond every day to concerns regarding child safety.

System Improvements and Initiatives

Act 154

Vermont is undertaking significant work to modernize and improve the child protection system. In 2024, the Vermont Legislature passed Act 154 (H.661), representing one of the most significant reforms to Vermont's child protection framework in decades. In collaboration with key stakeholders, FSD engaged in an extensive analysis and review process to develop reform recommendations that were incorporated into the legislation. These reforms include the creation of "internal findings" as an alternative to substantiation that results in placement on the Child Protection Registry; the establishment of a centralized substantiation review process to promote consistency and reduce bias in decision-making; and expanded timeframes for the Commissioner's Registry Review process, among many others. The efforts undertaken in 2024 have continued into 2025 and will continue into the future as we implement the multi-phased approach to this systematic reform.

For more information about FSD's work on Act 154, including meeting minutes, legislative reports, and slide decks, please visit the [Child Protection Registry Reform](#) website.

Safe Systems Learning Reviews

FSD also continued development of the Safe System Learning Review (SSLR) process during the reporting period. The SSLR is a system-focused critical incident review approach designed to identify opportunities for learning and systems improvement through supportive and non-punitive review practices. Vermont's approach is informed by the work of the [National Partnership for Child Safety](#) (NPCS), a collaborative network of public child welfare agencies dedicated to advancing safety science and improving outcomes for children and families through shared learning, data analysis, and systems improvement methodologies.

The SSLR process applies principles of safety science to child welfare practice. Rather than focusing on individual blame or hindsight judgment, SSLRs examine the broader system conditions, decision-making environments, policies, communication practices, resource constraints, and organizational factors that influence outcomes. This approach is especially important in child welfare, where staff are often required to make difficult decisions in complex circumstances and with the information available at the time. By examining how system conditions shape practice, SSLRs promote a deeper understanding of both strengths and vulnerabilities within the child protection system.

A central goal of the SSLR process is to foster a culture of continuous learning, transparency, and psychological safety. The process is intentionally supportive and non-punitive, encouraging candid discussion among staff, system partners, and leadership regarding practice challenges and opportunities for improvement. At the same time, SSLRs are grounded in accountability: accountability to children and families, to sound practice, and to improving the systems that support frontline decision-making. This approach helps identify patterns and systemic issues that may not otherwise emerge through traditional compliance-focused reviews. SSLRs are designed not to determine fault, but to generate actionable learning that can strengthen policies, supervision, training, communication, cross-system collaboration, and service delivery.

The SSLR process also supports workforce development and organizational resilience. By creating structured opportunities for reflection and shared learning, the process helps staff better understand complex case dynamics while reinforcing a culture of professional support and accountability. Lessons learned through SSLRs contribute to improvements in practice standards, resource allocation, and system coordination - ultimately strengthening the State's capacity to protect children and support families effectively.

FSD remains committed to integrating evidence-informed safety science approaches into Vermont's child welfare system and to using the SSLR process as an important tool

for organizational learning and system improvement. Through this work, the Department seeks to enhance child safety outcomes while building a more responsive, collaborative, and continuously improving child protection system.

Structured Decision-Making Risk Assessment Customization and Stakeholder Engagement

FSD has continued to support ongoing improvement of Vermont's Structured Decision Making (SDM) system. For over fifteen years, Vermont has utilized SDM, an evidence-based suite of assessment tools designed to support consistent, accurate, and equitable decision-making at key points within the child protection system. These tools assist practitioners in assessing safety and risk, informing service decisions, and promoting effective allocation of agency resources.

As part of Vermont's commitment to continuous quality improvement, DCF contracted with Evident Change to update the SDM safety assessment and conduct a validation study of the current SDM risk assessment. This work is intended to ensure that the tools continue to reflect Vermont's practice model, policy framework, and values while strengthening accuracy, equity, transparency, and practical utility for staff and families.

A central component of this work is meaningful stakeholder engagement. DCF recognizes that effective and sustainable system improvement depend on incorporating the perspectives of those who use, are impacted by, and interact with the child welfare system. Consistent with best practices identified by Evident Change and other states' child welfare jurisdictions nationwide, Vermont's approach emphasizes collaboration among field staff, supervisors, managers, policy and quality assurance staff, legal and court partners, community organizations, family advocates, and individuals with lived experience.

Stakeholder engagement activities are designed to support transparency, shared ownership, and informed decision-making throughout the SDM update process. In this context, "customization" refers to adapting the SDM tools, so they align with Vermont's statutes, policies, and practice expectations, while "validation" refers to evaluating whether the tools accurately and reliably support decision-making in Vermont's child protection system. These activities ensure the tools reflect both evidence-based practice and the realities of day-to-day work.

During this process, stakeholders participated in several engagement activities, including workgroups, risk validation surveys, discovery meetings, and customization sessions. These activities focused on reviewing assessment items and definitions, evaluating how current tools function in practice examining alignment with policy and procedures, and identifying opportunities to improve consistency and usability.

The stakeholder engagement process also supports broader system goals beyond tool refinement. By involving diverse voices and perspectives, the process strengthens trust, promotes transparency, and increases organizational readiness for implementation of revised assessment tools. It also supports workforce development by creating opportunities for shared learning and collaborative problem-solving among staff and system partners.

Through this work, FSD aims to strengthen the consistency and effectiveness of child protection decision-making while ensuring that assessment practices remain grounded in evidence, responsive to Vermont's communities, and aligned with the Department's commitment to equity, child safety, and family well-being.

Conclusion

In closing, the Department for Children and Families remains committed to strengthening Vermont's child protection system through continuous learning, collaboration, and evidence-informed practice. The work highlighted in this report reflects the dedication of staff, community partners, and families working together to promote the safety, permanency, and well-being of Vermont's children.

While the data presented provides important insight into child protection trends and outcomes, it also represents the real experiences of children and families across our state. As we continue implementing key reforms and system improvements, FSD remains focused on building a more equitable, transparent, and responsive child welfare system that supports both child safety and family well-being.

This work is challenging, deeply human and essential. We are grateful to the caregivers, staff, mandated reporters, community partners, courts, service providers, and families who contribute to the safety and wellbeing of Vermont's children and youth. The Department remains committed to doing this work with integrity, compassion, and accountability.

2025 Summary and Data

This report provides child protection data for calendar year 2025 in Vermont. Key data points include:

- 18,399 reports were made to the child protection hotline in 2025. 1,011 less than in 2024, representing a 5.21% decrease.
- At least 78% of the reports made to the child protection hotline were from mandated reporters and 16% from (known) non-mandated reporters.
- Of the 18,399 reports received in 2025, 3,757 were accepted (a 4% increase from 2024). The percentage of reports accepted was 20%. Of these reports accepted, 54% were accepted as investigations, 28% were accepted as child abuse assessments, and 18% were accepted as family assessments.
 - 2,031 investigations
 - 1,726 assessments
 - 1,057 child abuse assessments
 - 669 family assessments
- Out of the 3,757¹ reports accepted, 504 cases (13%) were opened for ongoing services.
- Out of the 2,031 investigations accepted, 494 (24%) of these investigations were substantiated.
- Based on the 494 substantiated reports, there were 567 child victims².
- During the last quarter of 2025, there were:
 - 768 children in DCF custody
 - 271 children in the conditional custody of a parent, relative, or other person known to the child and family
 - 127 families receiving ongoing services after an investigation or assessment determined there was a high, to very high-risk of future maltreatment.

¹ As of May 11, 2026, there were 169 pending interventions from 2025

² Reports may involve multiple children. Substantiations are determined individually and may include more than one type of maltreatment. As a result of this, the number of child victims may exceed the number of reports substantiated.

Reports to the Child Protection Hotline

In 2025, 18,399 reports were made to the child protection hotline. Since 2023, the number of reports has gradually and consistently decreased. The lowest number of reports in the past five years was recorded in 2020, with 15,722 reports.

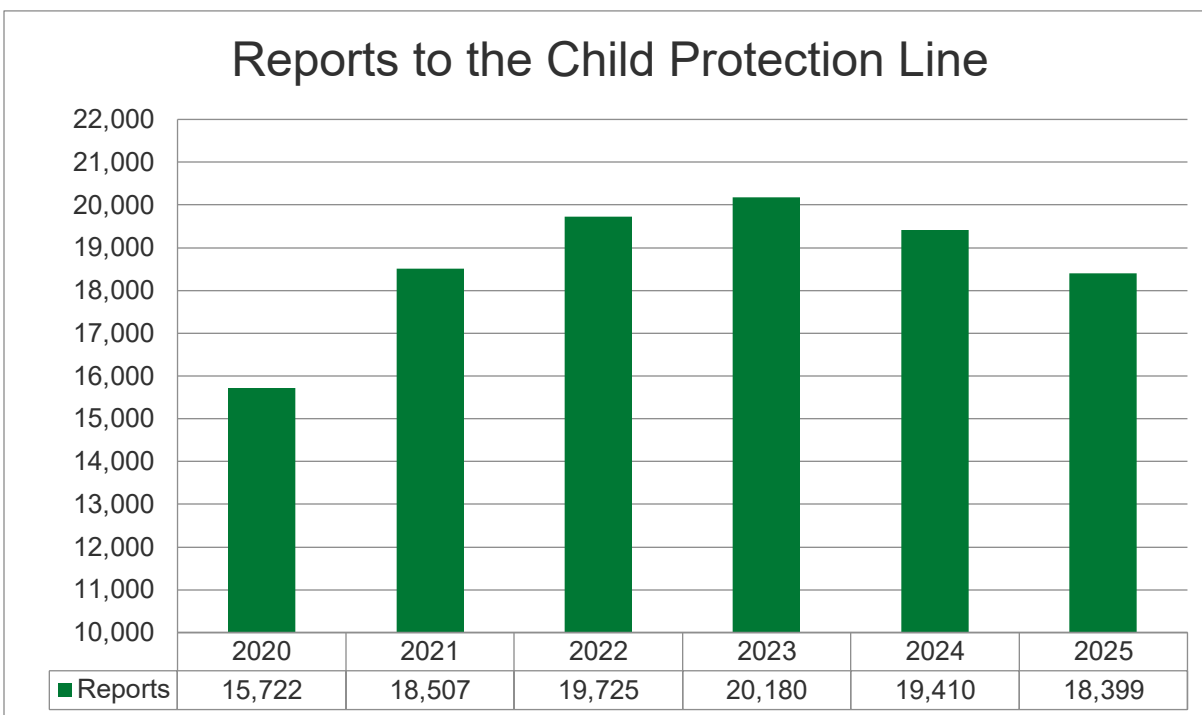


Figure 1: Reports to the Child Protection Hotline.

Reports Alleging Child Abuse & Neglect, by Reporter Type

In 2025, educational entities were the leading source of child protection reports. From 2024 to 2025, the top three reporting sources remained consistent, in the following order: educational entities, non-mandated reporters, and legal/law enforcement entities.

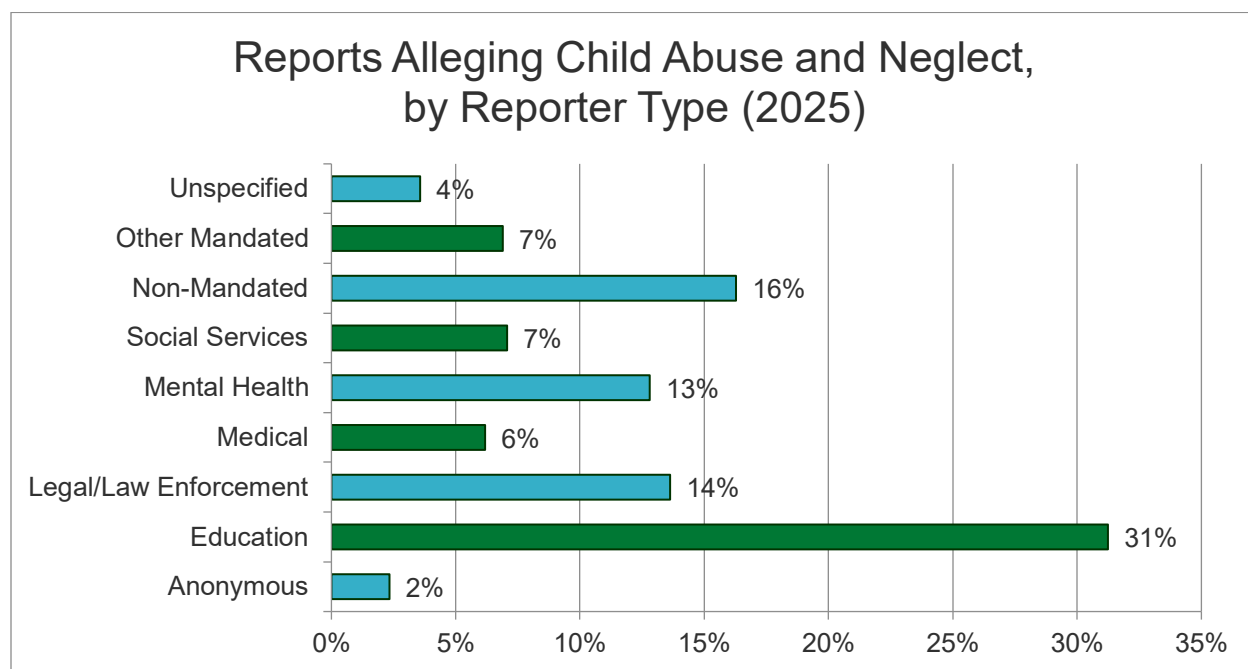


Figure 2: Reports Alleging Child Abuse and Neglect, by Reporter Type

Reports Accepted for Intervention & Outcomes

There were 3,757³ child safety interventions in calendar year 2025.

Vermont law authorizes two types of interventions, assessments, and investigations. Investigations are legally required in certain circumstances. To learn more about the distinctions between assessments and investigations, and how they occur, please reference [Family Services Policy #52](#).

Type	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Total Calls to Vermont's Child Protection Hotline	18,507	19,725	20,180	19,410	18,399
Total Reports Accepted for Intervention	4,423 (24%)	4,526 (23%)	4,040 (20%)	3,617 (19%)	3,757 (20%)
Total Investigations	1,966	2,386	2,272	2,037	2,031
Total Assessments	2,457	2,140	1,768	1,580	1,726
Child Abuse Assessments	1,515	1,307	1,103	993	1,057

Type	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Family Assessments	942	833	665	587	669
Outcomes of Interventions: Investigations Substantiated	609	593	547	483	494
Outcome of Interventions: Cases Opened for Services	875	623	499	493	504

Figure 3: Reports to Vermont's Child Protection Hotline and Outcomes

³ As of 05/11/2026, there were 169 pending interventions from 2025

⁴ The years in the table are calendar years

⁵ Substantiated Investigations: An investigation is substantiated if the evidence found during the investigation is based upon accurate and reliable information where there is a preponderance of the evidence necessary to support the allegation that the child has been abused or neglected.

⁶Cases Opened for Services: A voluntary case is offered to a family for ongoing services if, during any type of intervention, the assessed risk of future maltreatment is determined to be high or very high.

Victims of Child Abuse and Neglect

The data in Figure 4 is based on substantiated reports of child abuse and neglect. The number of unique child victims is listed as an unduplicated count. This means that each child victimization is counted only once, regardless of the number of times they were found to be victimized during the reporting year.

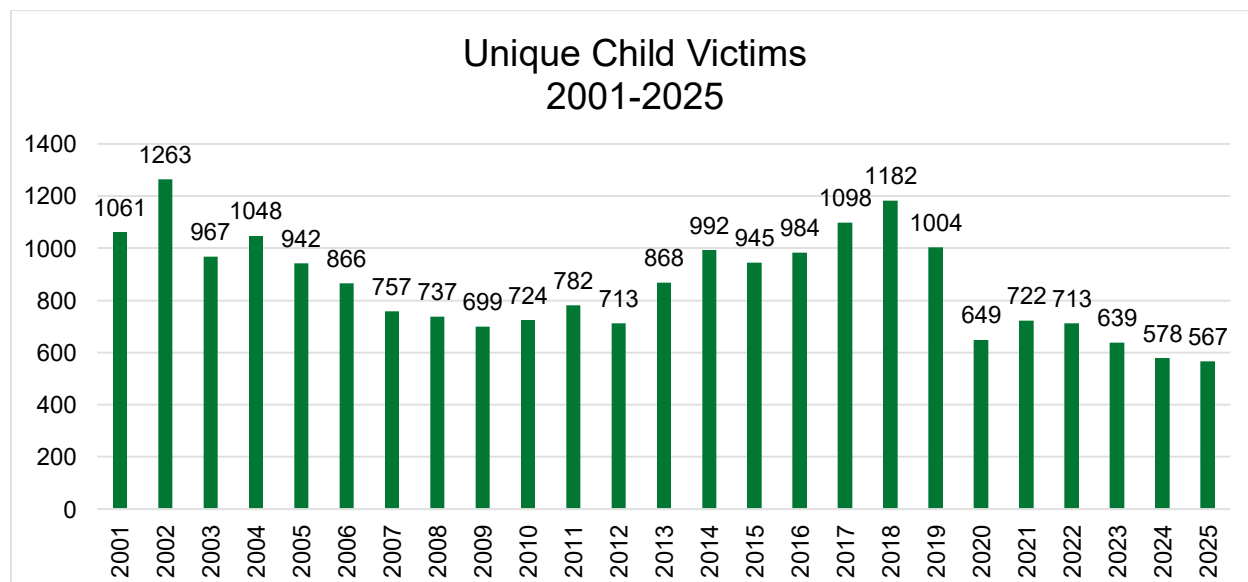


Figure 4: Victims of Child Abuse & Neglect

Ongoing Family Services Worker Caseloads

The ongoing caseloads for Family Services Workers (FSWs) exhibited in this data include three different case types:

1. **Children and youth in DCF custody**
These are cases where a family court judge has placed a child in the temporary custody of the Department for Children and Families (DCF) due to concerns about the child's safety or well-being.
2. **Children and youth under Conditional Custody Orders (CCOs)**
These occur when a court places a child in the custody of a parent, relative, or another person known to the family, but with specific conditions attached. DCF remains involved to ensure those conditions are met.
3. **Families receiving non-court-involved ongoing support**
These are voluntary cases where, after an investigation or assessment finds a high or very high risk of future maltreatment, the family agrees to continue working with DCF for ongoing support services.

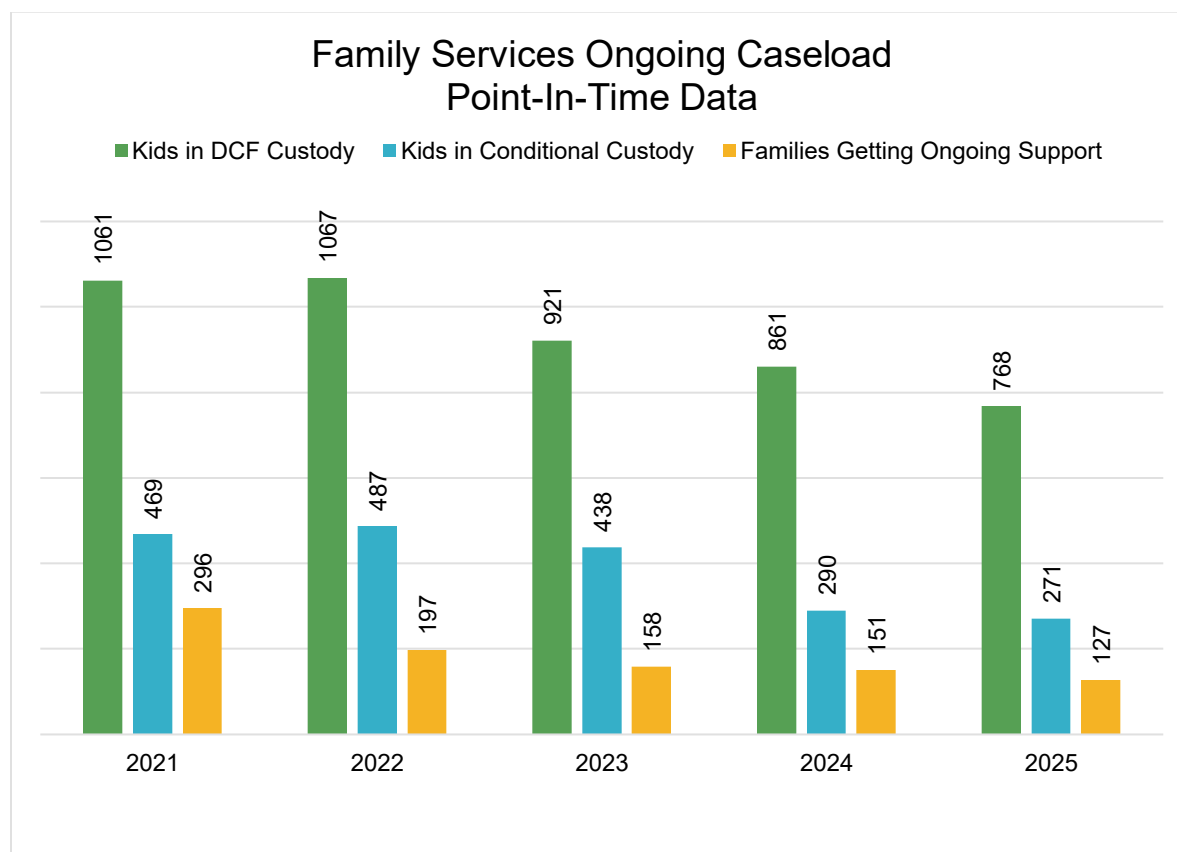


Figure 5: Ongoing Family Services Worker Caseloads

Additional Child Protection Data

For more information, including additional child protection data, please visit the [Family Services Division Data](#) website. This website includes:

- Annual child protection reports dating back to 2006
- Profiles of interventions and outcomes by district, for 2019–2023

2025 data on:

- Reports substantiated by abuser-child relationship
- Reports substantiated by age of abuser
- Reports substantiated by gender of abuser and type of abuse
- Reports substantiated by gender of victim and type of abuse
- Reports substantiated by type of abuse
- Reports substantiated by victim age and type of abuse

Vermont Juvenile Court Data

For information regarding juvenile court data in Vermont, including annual statistical reporting, please visit the [Vermont Judiciary's](#) website. The annual reports provide detailed statewide data and trends from Fiscal Year 2025, including key categories such as:

- Children in Need of Care and Supervision (CHINS) cases
- Termination of Parental Rights (TPR) cases
- Delinquency cases
- Youthful Offender cases

These reports offer a comprehensive overview of juvenile court activity and help illustrate how case volumes and outcomes are tracked across Vermont's court system.