



**CHILD  
PROTECTION  
IN VERMONT  
REPORT FOR 2023**

**Child Protection Hotline:  
1-800-649-5285**

# MESSAGE FROM DCF COMMISSIONER & FAMILY SERVICES DIVISION (FSD) DEPUTY COMMISSIONER

---

This year has been a time of slow but steady progress for the Family Services Division (FSD). We are making some headway in efforts to stabilize our high-end system of care (HESOC), deepening our commitment to prevention through our Families Come First Plan, and continuing our focus on workforce development.

## **HESOC Initiatives**

DCF's HESOC consists of the treatment programs dedicated to serving our youth with the most intense needs. It continues to operate at a significantly reduced capacity in terms of residential placement, as compared to prior years. Several projects are underway to restore capacity within the system; two are highlighted below.

DCF collaborated closely with the Department of Buildings and General Services (BGS) to retrofit the former Middlesex Therapeutic Community Residence as a temporary secure stabilization facility for appropriate justice-involved youth. DCF has contracted with a local trusted provider to run this program. It will be a four-bed program and is intended to serve all genders. The purpose of the short-term placement is to give the youth the opportunity, time and space to de-escalate and to provide a clinical assessment and understanding of their needs moving forward. This will better serve the youth with an appropriate placement and provide a measure of relief for our family services workers, as it should reduce the need to staff youth in alternative settings. The provider anticipates the program will be operational by the end of summer 2024.

Likewise, there has been significant momentum in creating a permanent secure treatment and stabilization program. We propose to develop a state-of-the-art campus in Vergennes. Officially named the Green Mountain Youth Campus, the facility will contain an 8-bed stabilization and 6-bed treatment program. A central, common area for education, recreation, wellness, and administration will serve both. This program will be evidence-based, trauma-responsive, and incorporate the healing aspects of the site's natural environment.

DCF, in partnership with project builder ReArch Company, Inc., and BGS, has begun community engagement activities in earnest. Leaders within the departments have developed written and video marketing materials with the builders. There will be community forums where the team will speak to city residents about the intended program and address community concerns. This project is off to a solid start, with a focused and deliberate effort towards thorough, thoughtful community engagement. We intend to be good neighbors to the City of Vergennes. The permitting process for the project is upcoming. We have established an ambitious timeline for development and construction and anticipate opening the campus in the Summer of 2026.

We recognize that the instability in the HESOC is larger than simply FSD. Accordingly, in consultation with the VSEA, we have convened a HESOC Taskforce comprised of stakeholders, advocates, community partners, those with lived experience, and fellow departments to develop comprehensive and lasting solutions to the problem. We have also established a workgroup dedicated strictly to

# MESSAGE FROM DCF COMMISSIONER & FAMILY SERVICES DIVISION (FSD) DEPUTY COMMISSIONER

---

facility planning for justice involved youth with a similar constituency.

## **Prevention Efforts – Families Come First**

Our efforts are not limited to developing facilities. We are committed to focusing on prevention to best serve the children and youth in the state. In February 2022, Vermont's 5-year Prevention Plan was approved. From there, we began to prepare for the delivery of Evidenced-Based Programs (EBP), supported by the Prevention Clearinghouse, to leverage state funds. Our initial efforts aim at providing services to prevent children and families from becoming further embedded in the child welfare system. This past year, we have been working with contracted partners to train and support the delivery of EBP services. We recently chose an instrument to measure the delivery and model fidelity. All of these steps bring Vermont that much closer to being able to draw down Title IV-E prevention dollars.

We have also been working on child welfare rebranding over the past year, highlighting and supporting better communication both internally and externally. This is an intentional effort on our part to support family-centered practice at all levels, and better engage families' voices in the process. Workforce Retention & Recruitment Endeavors

FSD has focused on enhancing retention and recruitment while supporting the revision of workforce practices toward racial justice and inclusivity. Central to these efforts is cultivating new relationships with staff at various levels/roles through committees, workgroups, and individual connections fostered by a new position within the Division - the Workforce Development Director. By engaging stakeholders at various levels, FSD seeks to leverage diverse perspectives to inform strategic decisions and initiatives that bolster employee satisfaction, meaningful engagement, and support creative recruitment at the district and division levels. As part of this work, new partnerships with other agencies, such as HireAbility, have been built to widen the applicant pool.

Furthermore, FSD has approved the recruitment of a Wellness Navigator position, underscoring FSD's commitment to employee wellness. This role is currently open for bid and involves engaging district directors to develop tailored programming for each district and providing regular reports on the effects of workplace stress and outcomes.

We are working hard to create a workplace worthy of our staff, and support and services worthy of the children and youth in DCF care and custody.

**Chris Winters, DCF Commissioner**

**Aryka Radke, JD, FSD Deputy Commissioner**

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

---

**This report provides child protection data for calendar year 2023 in Vermont.**

Here are the highlights:

- ➔ 20,180 reports were made to the Child Protection Line in 2023 — 455 more than in 2022.
- ➔ At least 76% of the reports made were from mandated reporters and 17% from non-mandated reporters.
- ➔ In 2022, there were 4,526 reports accepted. In 2023, there was a 12% decrease with the number of reports accepted being 4,040.
- ➔ Of the 20,180 reports received in 2023, 4,040 were accepted. The percentage of reports accepted was 20%. Of these reports accepted, 56% were accepted as investigations, and 44% were accepted as assessments.
  - ⇒ 2,272 investigations
  - ⇒ 1,768 assessments:
    - 1,103 child abuse assessments
    - 665 family assessments
- ➔ Out of the 4,040 reports accepted, 499 cases or 12.6% were opened for ongoing services.
- ➔ Out of the 2,272 investigations accepted, 547 or 24% of these investigations were substantiated.
- ➔ Based on the 547 substantiated reports, there were 639 unique child victims.
- ➔ During the last quarter of 2023, there were:
  - ⇒ 921 children in DCF custody
  - ⇒ 438 children in the conditional custody of a parent, relative or other person known to the child and family
  - ⇒ 158 families getting ongoing services after an investigation or assessment determined there was a high to very high-risk of future maltreatment

# REPORTS OF SUSPECTED CHILD ABUSE & NEGLECT

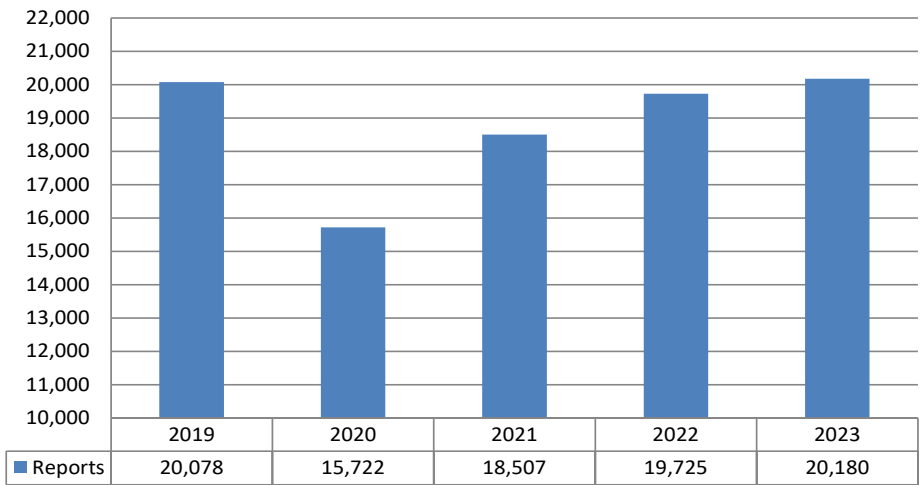
We encourage all Vermonters to call our Child Protection Line when they have concerns about a child’s safety and well-being— whether or not they are mandated by law to do so. [1-800-649-5285 \(24/7\)](tel:1-800-649-5285)

**20,180** in 2023

There were 455 more calls made to Vermont’s Child Protection Line in 2023. This increase likely reflects the return to “normal” operations since the pandemic began.

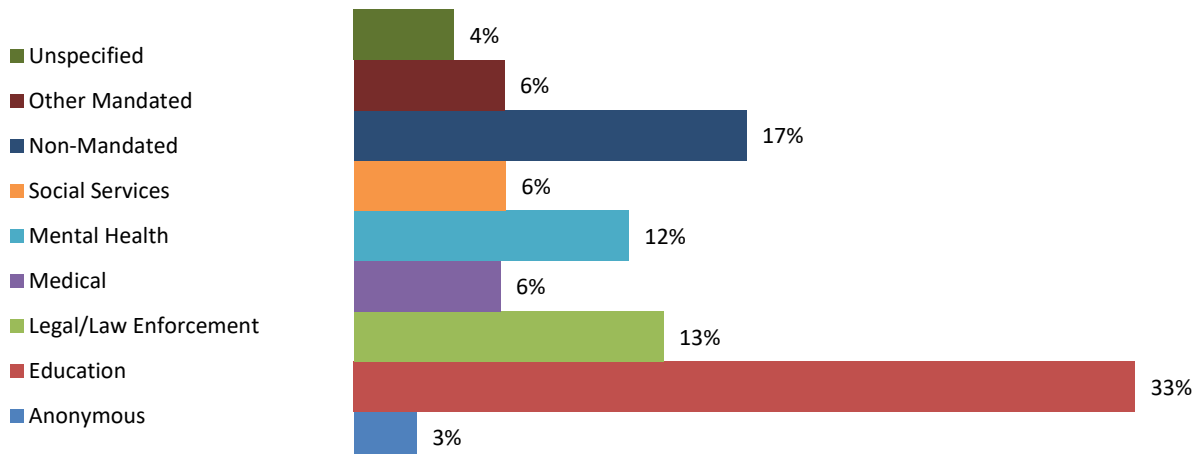


**Reports to the Child Protection Line From 2019 to 2023**



**At least 76%** of reports came from mandated reporters.  
**At least 17%** of reports came from non-mandated reporters.

**Reports Alleging Child Abuse and Neglect, by Reporter Type (2023)**



# REPORTS ACCEPTED FOR INTERVENTION

## 4,040 Child Safety Interventions in 2023

Vermont law authorizes two types of intervention:

1. Assessments
2. Investigations

While the preferred intervention is usually an assessment, an investigation is legally required in certain situations. To learn more, read FSD Policy 52 - Child Safety Interventions: Investigations & Assessments on our website at <https://dcf.vermont.gov/fsd/policies>.



CALENDAR YEAR	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
<b>Calls to Vermont's Child Protection Line</b>	20,078	15,722	18,507	19,725	20,180
<b>Total reports accepted for intervention</b>	4,606 (22%)	3,620 (23%)	4,423 (24%)	4,526 (23%)	4,040 (20%)
- Investigations	2,640	1,604	1,966	2,386	2,272
- Assessments	1,966	2,016	2,457	2,140	1,768
• Child abuse assessments	1,117	1,167	1,515	1,307	1,103
• Family assessments	849	849	942	833	665
<b>Outcomes of interventions:</b>					
- Investigations substantiated <sup>1</sup>	822	527	609	593	547
- Cases opened for services <sup>2</sup>	1,047	794	876	623	499

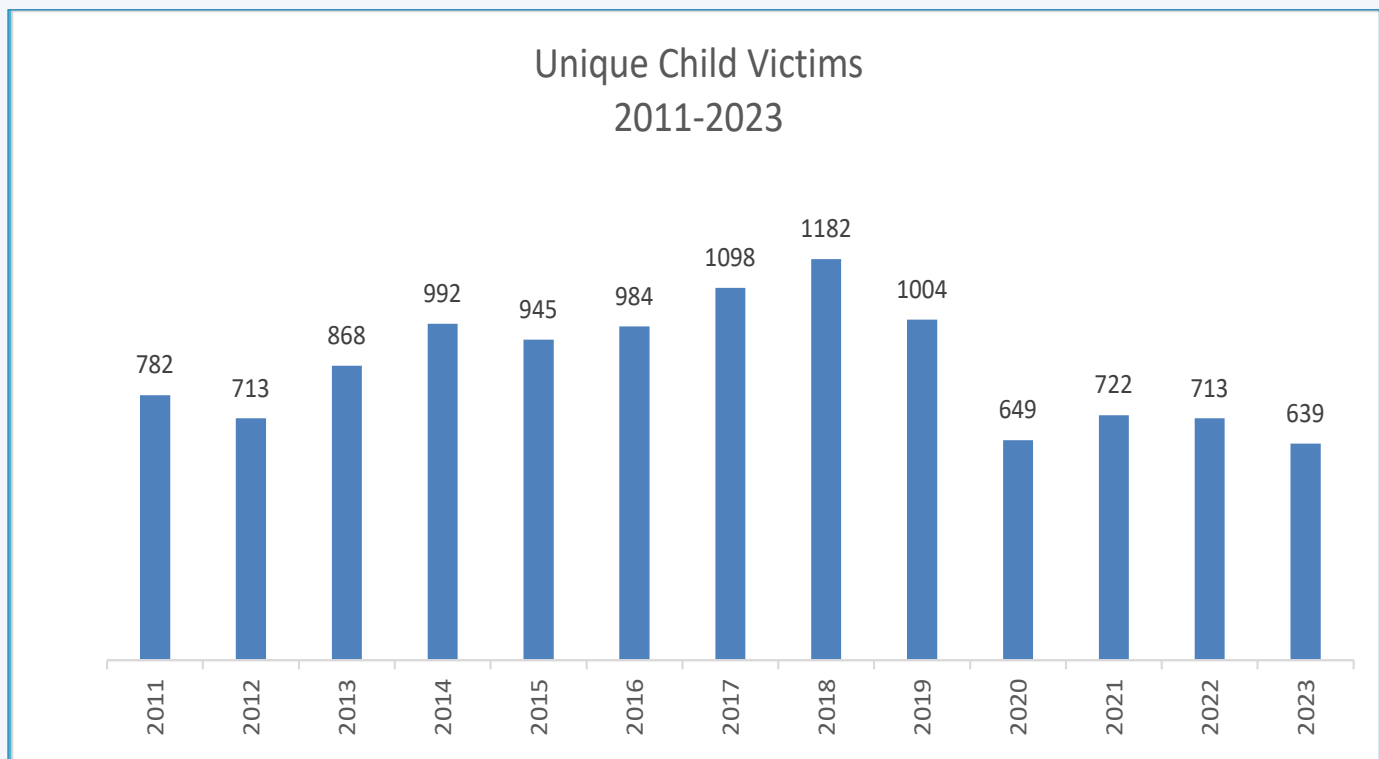
1 INVESTIGATIONS SUBSTANTIATED: A report is substantiated if the evidence found during the investigation would lead a reasonable person to believe the child was abused or neglected.

2 CASES OPENED FOR SERVICES: A case is opened 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 & NEGLECT

The data in the table below is based on substantiated reports<sup>1</sup> of child abuse and neglect. The number of unique child victims listed is an unduplicated count. This means that each child victim is counted only once, regardless of the number of times they were found to be victimized during the reporting year.

The sharp decrease in unique child victims in 2020 correlates to a decrease in reports received due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The slight increase in 2021 reflects a return to “normal” operations since the pandemic began.



<sup>1</sup> When DCF investigates a report of child abuse or neglect, we must decide whether a reasonable person would believe that it happened. If the answer is YES, the report is substantiated and the person’s name is added to the Child Protection Registry - a database of all substantiated reports of child abuse and neglect dating back to January 1, 1992.



# ONGOING FAMILY SERVICES CASELOAD

Our ongoing caseload includes the following types of cases:

➔ **Kids in DCF custody:**

When a family court judge places a child in the temporary custody of the Department for Children and Families because of concerns about a child’s safety and well-being.



➔ **Kids in conditional custody:**

When a family court judge places a child in the conditional custody of a parent, relative or other person known to the family and orders DCF to stay involved – to supervise, provide services and ensure the child’s safety.



➔ **Families getting ongoing support:**

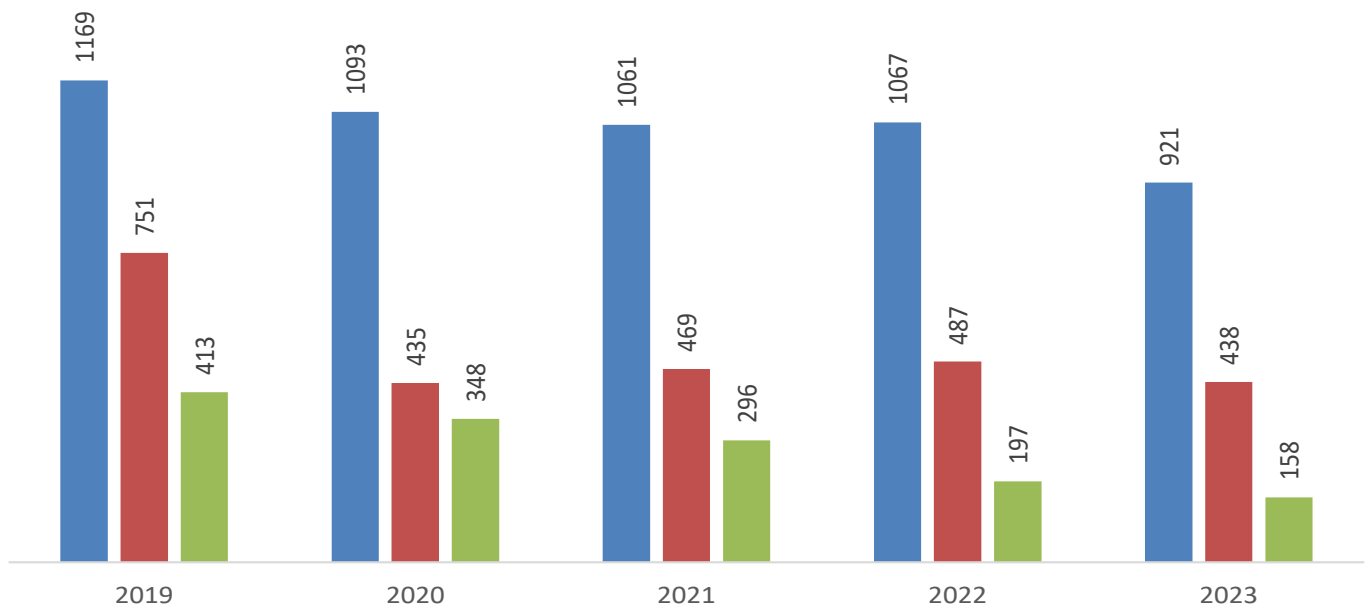
When an investigation or assessment determines there’s a high to very high risk of future maltreatment and a case is opened for ongoing services.



### Family Services Ongoing Caseload

*point-in-time, Q4 annually*

■ Kids in DCF Custody   ■ Kids in Conditional Custody   ■ Families Getting Ongoing Support





## ADDITIONAL CHILD PROTECTION DATA

Visit the DCF website for additional child protection data, including:

- ➔ Annual child protection reports dating back to 2006
- ➔ Profiles of interventions & outcomes by district, for 2019 to 2023
- ➔ 2023 data on:
  - ⇒ Reports substantiated by abuser-child relationship
  - ⇒ Reports substantiated by age of abuser
  - ⇒ Reports substantiated by gender of abuser & type of abuse
  - ⇒ Reports substantiated by gender of victim & type of abuse
  - ⇒ Reports substantiated by type of abuse
  - ⇒ Reports substantiated by victim's age and type of abuse

<https://dcf.vermont.gov/fsd/resources/data>

## VERMONT JUVENILE COURT DATA

Read the annual statistical reports on the Vermont Judiciary's website to get data on juvenile court cases. This includes FY2023 data on:

- ➔ CHINS cases
- ➔ Termination of Parental Rights (TPR)
- ➔ Delinquency
- ➔ Youthful Offenders

<https://www.vermontjudiciary.org/about-vermont-judiciary/court-statistics-and-reports>