



**CHILD  
PROTECTION  
IN VERMONT  
REPORT FOR 2020**

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

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If you have any questions or comments about this report, please contact Melissa Burt at [Melissa.Burt@vermont.gov](mailto:Melissa.Burt@vermont.gov).

## Report Suspected Child Abuse & Neglect

**1-800-649-5285**

If you suspect a child is being abused or neglected, call Vermont's Child Protection Line to report it — 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. If the child is in immediate danger, dial 911 or the local police first. Then, call to make a report.

All Vermonters are encouraged to report their concerns about children's safety. Mandated reporters are legally required to report suspected child abuse and neglect within 24 hours.

To learn more, go to <https://dcf.vermont.gov/protection/reporting>.

### ONLINE MANDATED REPORTER TRAINING

This training will teach you about the:

- ➔ Dynamics of child abuse and neglect,
- ➔ Responsibilities of mandated reporters in Vermont, and
- ➔ Role we all play in keeping children safe.

Visit our website at the address below to access the training. Once you've successfully completed the final exam, you'll get a Certificate of Completion.

<https://dcf.vermont.gov/protection/reporting/mandated>

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## A note about child protection during COVID

Mandated reporters, family, friends, neighbors and community members all play an important role in helping to keep children and youth safe. Their reports to Vermont’s Children Protection Line make it possible for us to intervene when abuse or neglect is suspected and there are concerns about children’s safety and well-being. They are truly children’s first line of defense.

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, many organizations were shut down and families were isolated at home. Most mandated reporters — including child care providers, teachers, doctors, nurses, clergy and social workers — who regularly see children and youth lost contact with them for awhile.

As a result, reports to the Child Protection Line dropped significantly. At the same time, the risk of abuse and neglect increased considerably because of heightened stress due to factors such as job loss, economic uncertainty, social isolation and fear — of the virus, the situation around the world and the future.

It took a minute for everyone to figure out new ways for checking in with children and helping families access needed supports. Our Family Services Division provided guidance to mandated reporters around ways to evaluate children’s safety during the pandemic.

Last year’s report definitely reflects the changes wrought by the pandemic. But as more organizations have reopened and resumed services, either in person or remotely, the number of reports received has increased to more expected levels.

**Sean Brown took on the role of DCF Commissioner in June of 2020. Aryka Radke joined as Family Services Deputy Commissioner in early 2021.**

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

Vermont's only secure residential treatment program for delinquent youth, the Woodside Juvenile Rehabilitation Center, was closed in fall of 2020. Work was needed to make sure the state's high-end system of care was meeting the needs of children and youth struggling with mental health, substance use and behavioral issues.

Below are a few of the initiatives we are currently working on to enhance our system of care and ensure these needs are met:

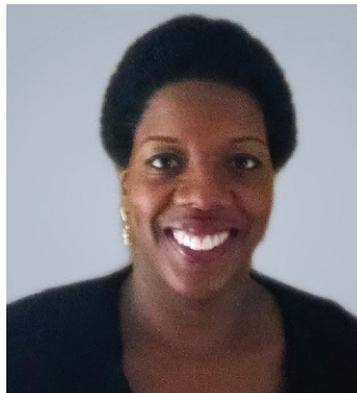
1. Developing short-term crisis beds to stabilize youth who are struggling with significant mental health concerns.
2. Transforming a building in Newbury to a six-bed, secure treatment program for delinquent youth.
3. Recruiting, training and supporting specialized foster homes that are able to provide care for high-needs youth in a family environment.

We look forward to these new system-of-care options being available to struggling youth in Vermont. And we will continue working to improve services, supports and connections so we can better serve children and youth in their own communities.



Sean Brown, DCF Commissioner

Aryka Radke, FSD Deputy Commissioner



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**This report provides child protection data for calendar year 2020 in Vermont.**

Here are the highlights:

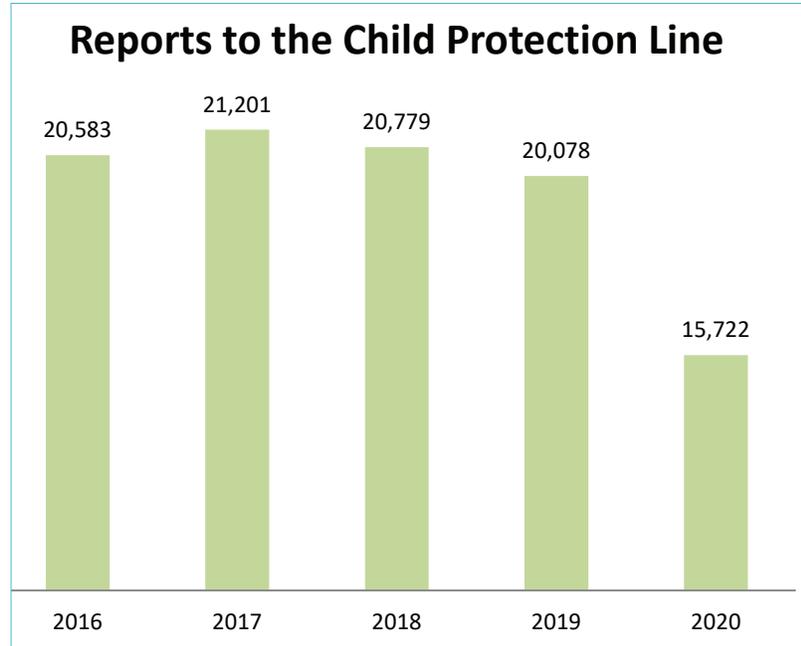
- 15,722 reports were made to the Child Protection Line in 2020 — 4,356 fewer than in 2019.
  - ⇒ This 21.69% decrease in reports is almost certainly an anomaly due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Stay-at-home orders and school closures kept children away from the watchful eyes of mandated reporters — especially educators who typically make about a third of all child abuse and neglect reports in Vermont.
- At least 73% of the reports made were from mandated reporters and 20% from non-mandated reporters.
  - ⇒ Reports from educators decreased in 2020 — from an average of 32% of all reports in both 2018 and 2019 to only 24% of reports in 2020.
- Based on the 15,722 reports received, we opened 3,620 child safety interventions:
  - ⇒ 1,604 investigations
  - ⇒ 2,016 assessments
    - 1,167 child abuse assessments
    - 849 family assessments
- At the conclusion of the 3,620 child safety interventions, 794 cases were opened for ongoing services.
- At the conclusion of the 1,604 investigations, 527 reports were substantiated.
- Based on the 527 substantiated reports, there were 649 unique child victims.
- During the last quarter of 2020, there were:
  - ⇒ 1,093 children in DCF custody
  - ⇒ 435 children in the conditional custody of a parent, relative or other person known to the child and family
  - ⇒ 348 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)**

## 15,722 in 2020

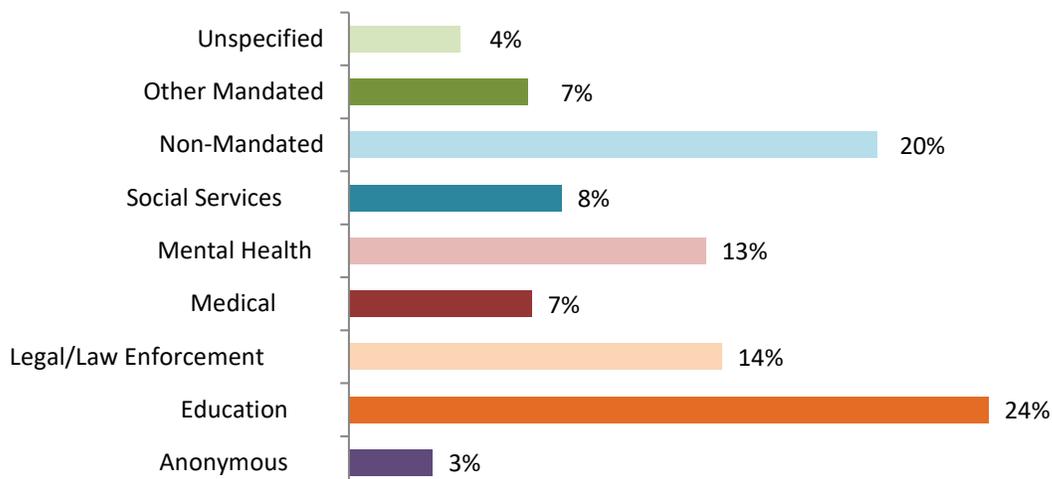
There were 4,356 fewer calls made to Vermont's Child Protection Line in 2020. This decrease of almost 22% is almost certainly an anomaly due to the Covid-19 pandemic.



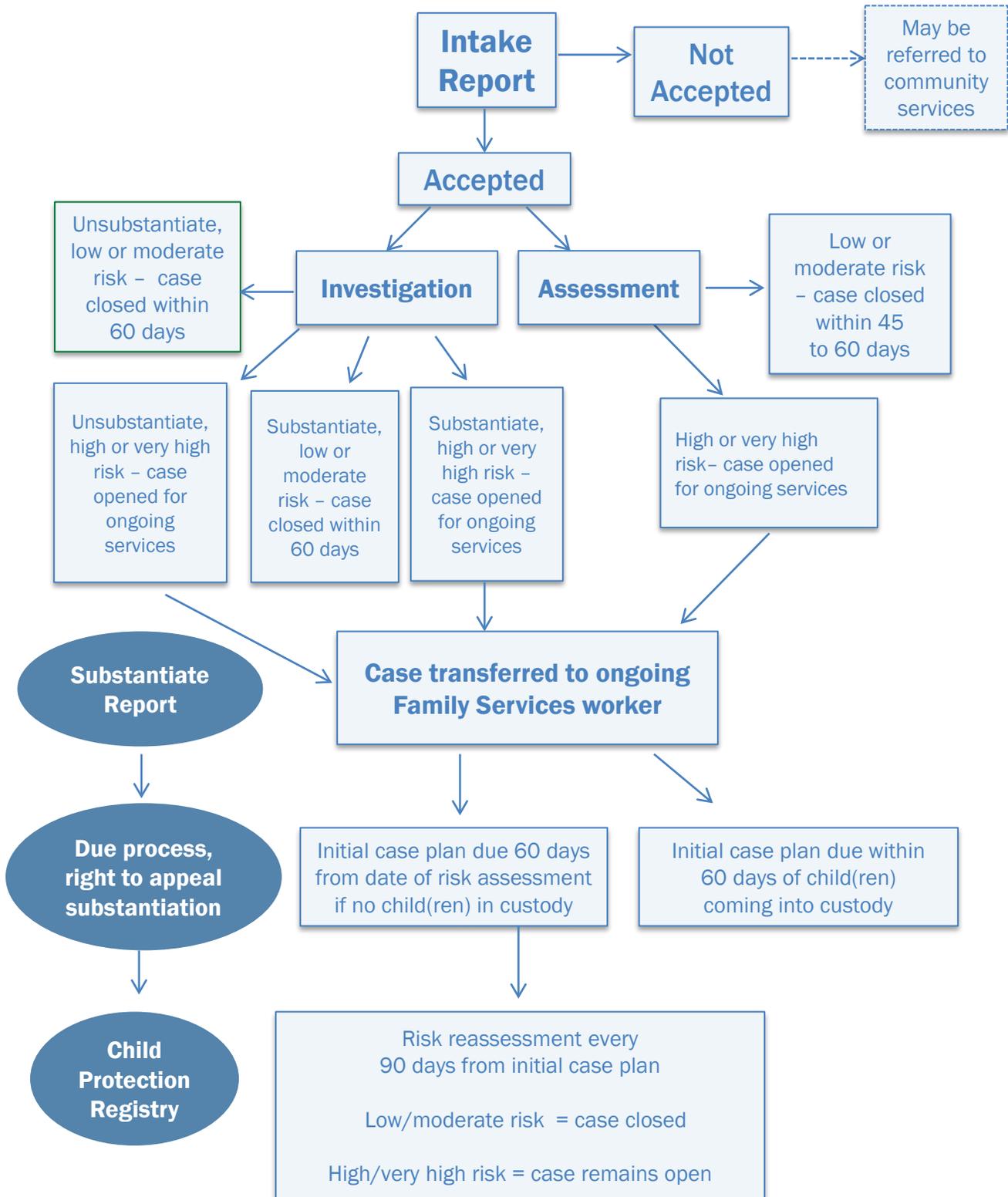
**At least 73%** of reports came from mandated reporters.

**At least 20%** of reports came from non-mandated reporters.

### Reports Alleging Child Abuse and Neglect, by Reporter Type (2020)



# FLOWCHART SHOWING WHAT HAPPENS TO REPORTS



To learn more about what happens to the reports we receive, visit our website at <https://dcf.vermont.gov/protection/reporting/mandated/what-happens>.

# REPORTS ACCEPTED FOR INTERVENTION

## 3,620 Child Safety Interventions in 2020

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>.



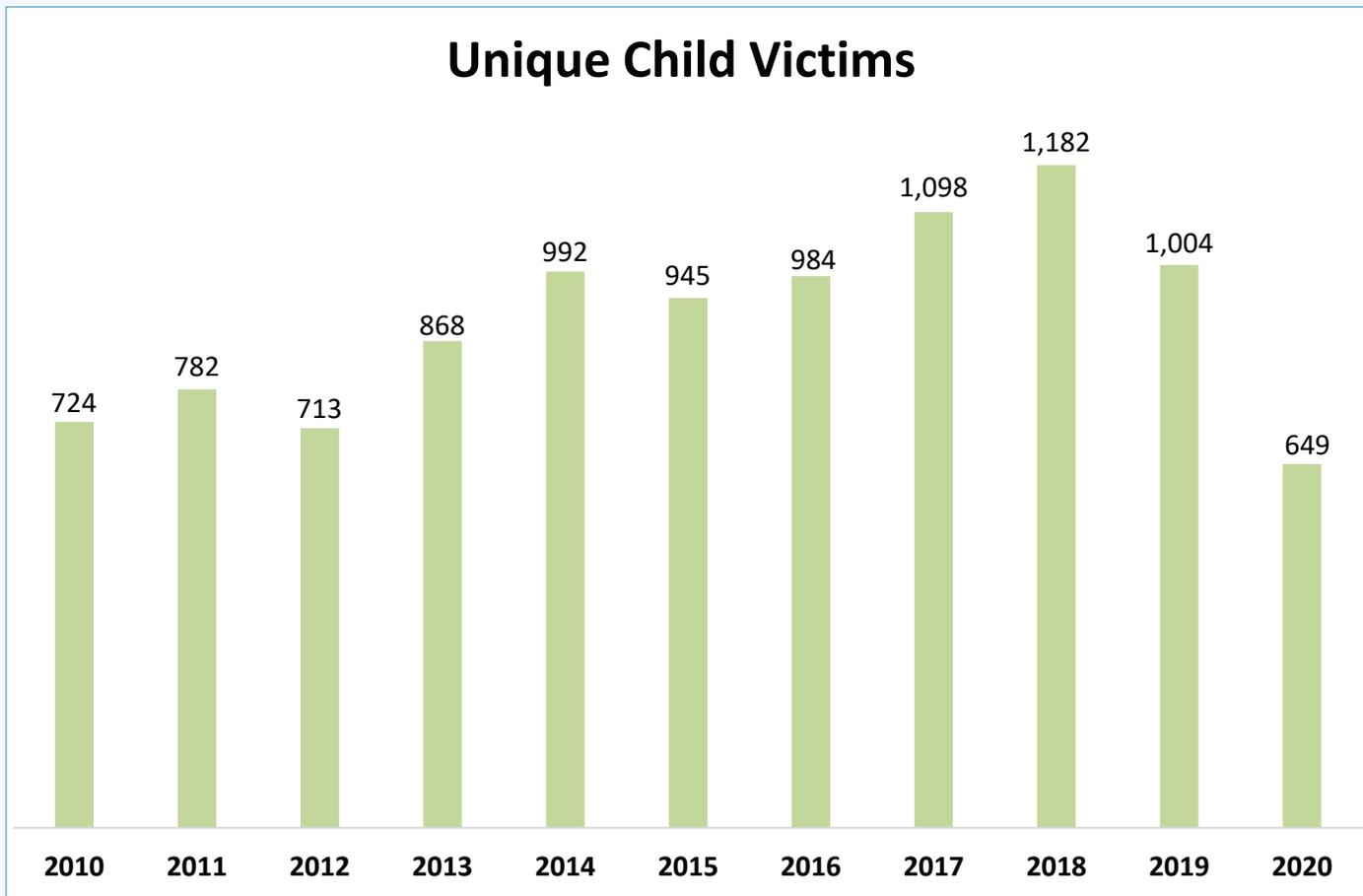
CALENDAR YEAR	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
<b>Calls to Vermont's Child Protection Line</b>	20,583	21,201	20,779	20,078	15,722
<b>Total reports accepted for intervention</b>	5,509 (27%)	5,527 (26%)	5,326 (25%)	4,606 (22%)	3,620 (23%)
- Investigations	2,835	3,054	3,173	2,640	1,604
- Assessments	2,674	2,473	2,153	1,966	2,016
• Child abuse assessments	1,421	1,351	1,130	1,117	1,167
• Family assessments	1,253	1,122	1,023	849	849
<b>Outcomes of interventions:</b>					
- Investigations substantiated <sup>1</sup>	737	876	999	822	527
- Cases opened for services <sup>2</sup>	1,068	1,230	1,281	1,047	794

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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.



<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:**

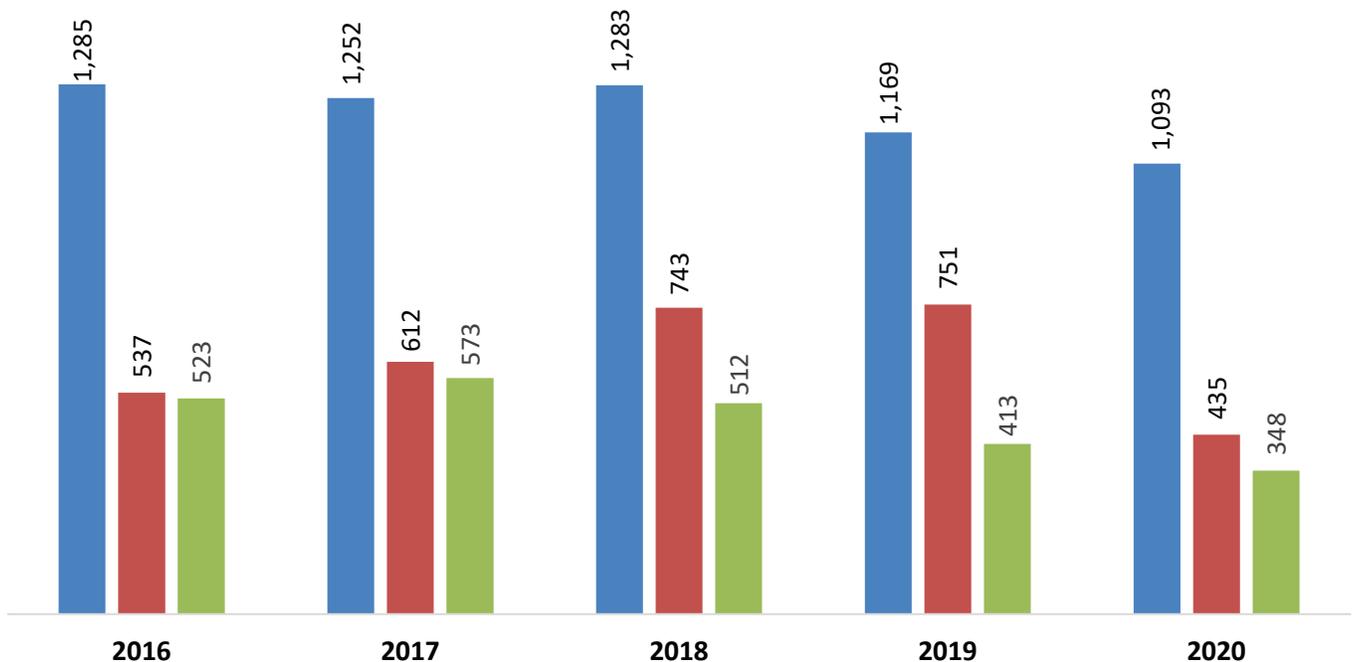
When an investigation or assessment determines there's a high to very high risk of future maltreatment and a case is opened for ongoing services.



## Family Services Ongoing Caseload

*point-in-time, Q4 annually*

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



# VERMONT JUVENILE COURT DATA

Vermont court cases include two main categories of juvenile cases:

1. **Children In Need of care and Supervision (CHINS)**, which includes children who may have been abandoned, abused or neglected; beyond their parent’s control; and truant.
2. Youth who committed a delinquent act.

The data in the table below comes from the Vermont Judiciary’s Annual Statistical Report. To see the latest data, go to <https://www.vermontjudiciary.org/about-vermont-judiciary/court-statistics-and-reports>.

STATE FISCAL YEAR	FY2014	FY2015	FY2016	FY2017	FY2018	FY2019	FY2020
CHINS—abused or neglected	809	1,065	1,066	921	1,100	897	710
CHINS—truant	123	112	137	165	183	130	92
CHINS—beyond parent’s control	93	84	85	65	75	68	55
Delinquency	668	704	738	705	884	708	626
Youthful offender	54	44	43	33	33	504 <sup>1</sup>	390
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1,747</b>	<b>2,009</b>	<b>2,069</b>	<b>1,889</b>	<b>2,275</b>	<b>2,307</b>	<b>1,873</b>

1. In 2016, the Vermont legislature changed the law to make youth 21 years of age or younger eligible for youthful offender status when charged with a crime in Vermont.

This was done to:

- ➡ Bring the law more in line with science that shows youth in that age group don’t have fully developed brains and are more amenable to treatment and rehabilitation.
- ➡ Avoid treating juveniles as adults, with the exception of the most serious offenses.
- ➡ Mitigate major consequences for youth charged in adult court (e.g., a public record, exclusion from the military and ineligibility for student loans).

This change expanded the population eligible for youthful offender status, resulting in a significant increase in the number of youthful offender cases starting July 1, 2018.

## **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 2014 to 2020
- ➔ 2020 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/child-protection-data>**

## **HELP PREVENT CHILD ABUSE IN VERMONT**

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being abused or neglected,  
call Vermont's Child Protection Line  
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