



Establish a Department of Children's Services public dashboard, with metrics and timelines set by statute, to support transparency and accountability.

Quick Facts

Current Status

The Department of Children's Services currently has an online dashboard titled the "Commissioner's Dashboard". This dashboard is updated regularly, in some instances monthly or daily. The Dashboard covers custodial trends, hotline reports, foster care trends, trial home visits, juvenile justice placements, probation, adoptions and more. But, the dashboard is not publicly available.

Given the existing infrastructure of the Commissioner's Dashboard, a small investment to add codified metrics and ensure privacy protections are in place for public use would buy a significant amount of public trust.

Metrics for Consideration (Not currently reported in Commissioner's Dashboard)

- Percent of caseworkers with fewer than 20 cases during the last month by division (Foster Care, Child Protective Services, Special Investigation Unit, etc)
- Supervisor worker ratio
- On-time case plans and Child and Family Team Meetings.
- Substantiated abuse cases by type of abuse
- Child placement moves (including offices and transition homes)
- Medical visits
- CPS response times

The Problem

Tennesseans including policy makers, parents, foster parents, social services workers, and the general public are rightfully invested in how our Department of Children's Services is performing. Currently, there is not a single, simple location for Tennesseans to access up-to-date key metrics. The Department publishes annual reports, but data in those reports typically lag as expected and do not reflect the current status of the department. While information is available, it requires knowledge of federal databases or reports, public records requests, or observing legislative hearings. All of these are things that many Tennesseans, even those deeply invested in the care of our children, simply don't have the time or capacity to do.

Why this Matters

Department of Children's Services is tasked with some of the most consequential and fraught work conducted by the State. The decisions to remove a child from their parents, the investigation and evaluation of abuse, finding a child a safe home for what may be the first time in their life. All of these are monumental decisions being made by the state. Ensuring transparency and accountability into the key metrics that can factor into the success of this system is a simple step toward a more trusted and supported Department.

How we can fix it

Creating an online and publicly accessible dashboard with metrics and reporting timelines set in statute will allow Tennesseans to understand where progress is being made within the Department, where pressure points still exist and follow trends. By codifying the metrics and timelines, it will allow Tennesseans to know what to expect and when to expect it. It will allow grant recipients, social services non-profits, and private philanthropy to have consistent reliable data that does not change with commissioners or administration change. A successful child welfare system is not just one Department, it requires the investment of non-profits, private providers, philanthropy, faith communities and Tennesseans all across the state. If we are asking for their investment, clear and easily accessible data is the foundation of that partnership.

Example: New Jersey Child Welfare Data Dashboard:

<https://www.nj.gov/dcf/insights/reports/child-welfare-data-dashboard/>