



MISSOURI CFSR ROUND 4 AH4EC PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT PLAN

Missouri CFSR Round 4 AH4EC Program
Improvement Plan (Technical Bulletin #14)

Missouri Department of Social Services

**Minor formatting adjustments may have been made to this document for 508 compliance.
Content is unaffected.**

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Introduction

Missouri opted into the “A Home for Every Child” initiative on February 12, 2026. To develop strategies that would both increase the number of relative homes and licensed foster homes available for placement of foster children and to safely decrease the overall number of children in foster care, Missouri Children’s Division (CD) established three workgroups:

- Safety and Prevention of Foster Care Entries
- Expedited Safe Permanency and Sustained Care and
- Foster Home Recruitment and Retention.

The workgroups consisted of members of Children’s Division leadership and field staff, the Missouri Legislature, the Department of Social Services Division of Legal Services, members of the Office of State Courts Administrator, juvenile officers, community stakeholders, and foster parents.

As of February 1, 2026, Missouri had 12,045 children in foster care. Of the 12,045 children in foster care, approximately 6,700 children were placed in a foster or relative home. It should be noted that 965 (8%) children were residing with their parent/caregiver on trial home placement. Currently in Missouri, for every 100 children in foster care, homes are available for around 55 of those children.

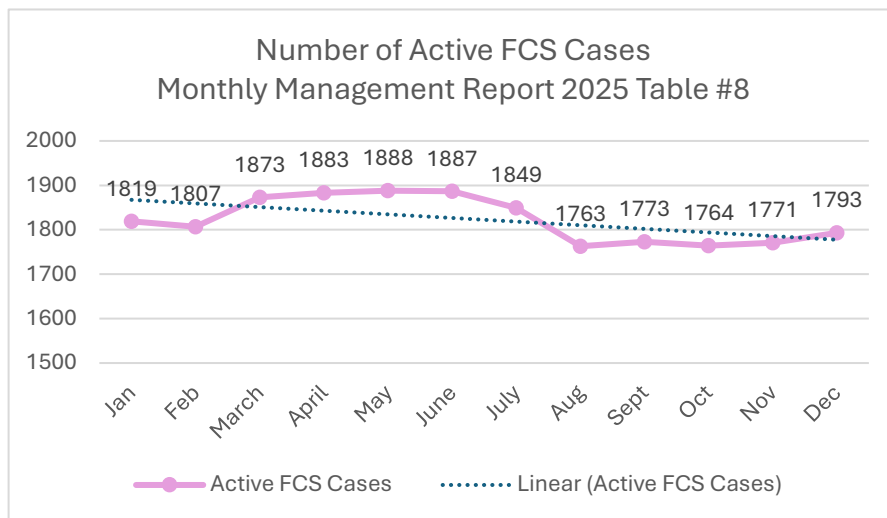
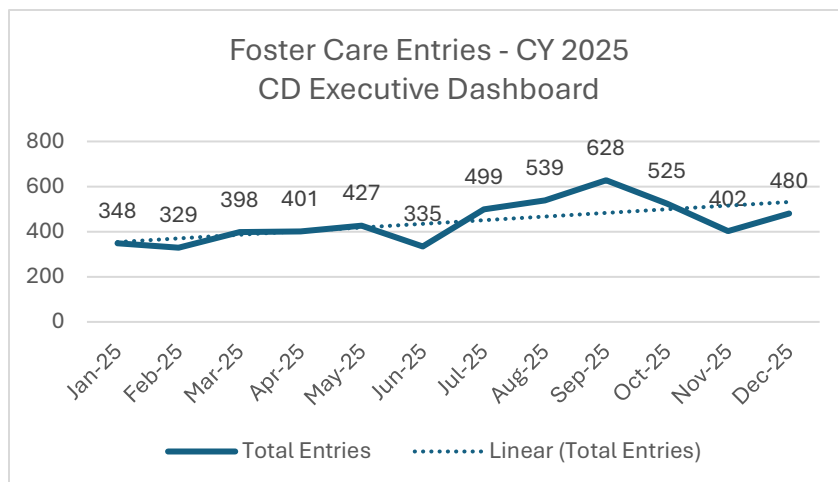
The established goal of this Program Improvement Plan (PIP) is to shrink the gap between the number of foster/relative homes available to take placement of children and the number of children in foster care. The following pages will outline Missouri’s focus over the upcoming twelve (12) months to move toward that objective.

Safety and Prevention of Foster Care Entries

Missouri offers Family-Centered Services (FCS) as an intervention to help families address identified safety threats being managed through a safety plan and risk factors with the goal of children remaining safely with their families while mitigating the likelihood of future child welfare system involvement. The FCS case offers home-based, preventative services by providing both direct services and connection to support and help available within the community. FCS focuses on strengthening families, addressing crisis management, increasing child and family well-being, and developing sustainable safety networks and supports aimed at lowering the risk of future concerns of child abuse or neglect.

Throughout calendar year 2025, there has been a gradual increase in the number of children entering foster care in Missouri.

Also, during that time, there has been a slight decrease in the number of active Family-Centered Services cases across the state.



A case review of open FCS cases is currently being completed by CD program staff and field leadership. Preliminary results indicate concerning practice trends during the initial thirty (30) days of FCS case activity. With less than half of cases reviewed, 67% indicate

that previous child abuse/neglect (CAN) history of the family was not reviewed; 58% indicate that safety and risk concerns were not reviewed with the family during the initial family assessment; and 91% of reviews lacked quality case goals that include addressing the safety and risk concerns that precipitated the opening of the FCS case.

Missouri has observed an ineffective pattern in FCS case work practice, resulting in inconsistencies across the state. Work with families lacks a thorough assessment at case opening to identify all needs of the family and the identification of the root cause of those needs and is often not followed by robust interventions to address the concerns. With case reviews showing that previous child abuse and neglect history is not being reviewed at FCS case opening and there not being a clear definition of the safety threats and risk factors during the initial family assessment, the communication between the CD staff members completing the hotline and the CD staff members engaging the family in FCS services needs to be strengthened. Without a significant hand-off between the two disciplines, who

may have different perspectives and objectives, the safety and risk concerns for the child may be lost.

Missouri has developed a universal referral tool to be used by CAN staff when requesting a Family-Centered Services case be opened for a family with whom they have been working. In addition, a structured hand-off procedure has been established to help identify, articulate, and address the safety threats/risk factors in the family to ensure a common understanding and agreement of the FCS case goals for the family. The hand-off procedure includes a staffing between the CAN worker/supervisor and the FCS worker/supervisor. At this meeting, there will be agreement regarding the family's level of risk and the initial home visit response timeframe.

The transition procedure also includes a collaborative initial home visit with the family. The CAN worker and the FCS worker will both meet with the family to discuss the FCS program, review any safety plans currently in place, and begin the comprehensive family assessment.

These new procedures will be piloted in eight non-metro circuits throughout the state. Missouri anticipates an increase in timely FCS case openings and more timely initial home visits that are consistent with the family's risk level. Missouri also expects to see fewer families declining FCS services at the onset and a decrease in subsequent hotlines and foster care entries.

STRATEGY 1: Introduce the FCS referral pilot in implementation circuits to increase the engagement of families in the FCS program, thereby addressing safety threats and risk factors and decreasing subsequent child welfare system involvement.

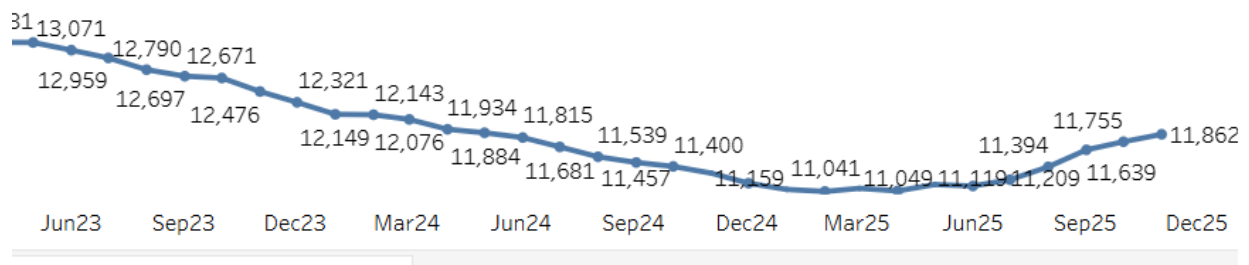
Steps to be completed during PIP pilot implementation are as follows:

- Implement the FCS Referral Pilot in Circuits 3 and 7 (Northwest Region), 32 and 35 (Southeast Region), 29 and 40 (Southwest Region) and 2 and 20 (Northeast Region). Implementation will extend for ninety (90) days.
- Provide monthly touchpoints with all pilot sites during implementation to determine if any adjustments to procedures are needed. Touchpoints will include a listening session with pilot participants and a survey of their observations and experiences.
- Analyze the FCS referral pilot following 90-day completion and provide recommendations to Children's Division leadership.
 - Conduct a case review of sampled pilot cases to determine practice differences from initial case review completed prior to pilot implementation (data referenced above).

- Determine if families received additional hotline calls during pilot and/or if children entered foster care. Analyze trends for service gaps and/or reason(s) for entering care.
- Review of data to include reasons why families declined FCS services, frequency of screening meetings, and the presence of both CAN and FCS workers during initial home visits.
- Children’s Division leadership will review recommendations to determine if the FCS referral pilot will be expanded/implemented statewide.
 - Determine CAN/FCS capacity to expand.
 - Explore use of Qualtrics for statewide expansion.
- Write enhanced FCS referral policy to be issued through temporary guidance.
- Update training for new workers to include FCS referral pilot adaptations.
- Explore training efforts for existing CAN and FCS staff to introduce new expectations.

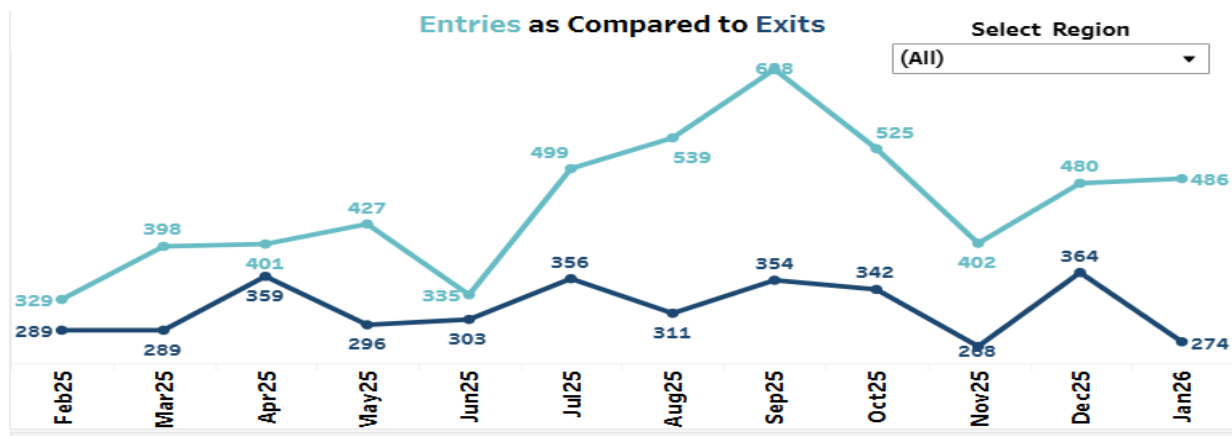
Expedited Safe Permanency and Sustainable Care

The overall number of children in foster care in Missouri had seen a steady decline in recent years until May 2025 at which time the pattern has changed to a slight increase in the number of children in foster care, as represented in the chart below.



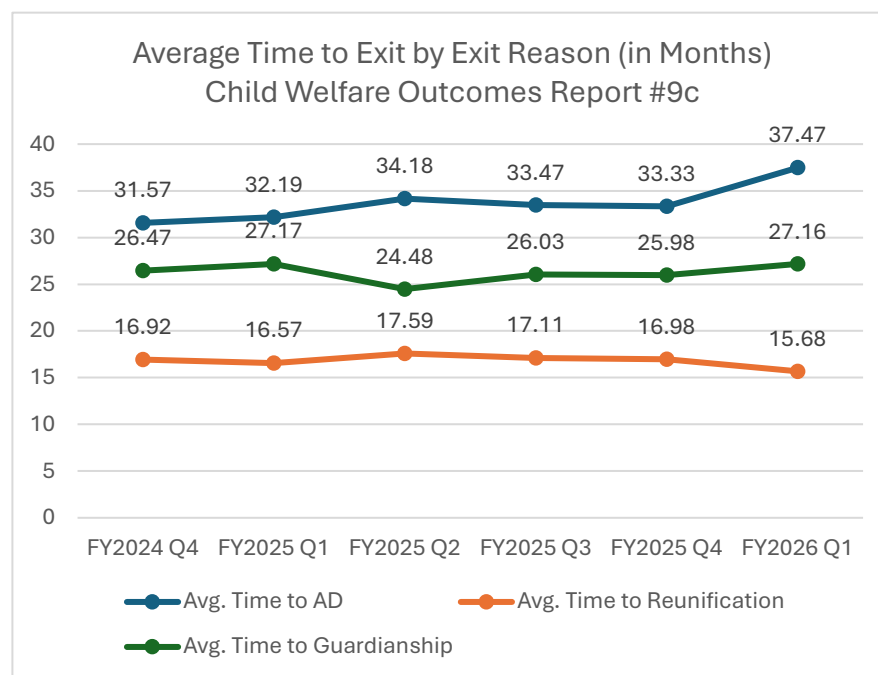
Information from CD Executive Dashboard as of January 2026.

As noted in the Safety and Prevention of Foster Care Entries section, the number of children entering foster care is increasing. However, the number of foster care exits has remained relatively steady throughout calendar year 2025, leading to an increase in the overall population.



Information from CD Executive Dashboard as of January 2026.

The average time to exit for children who have exited foster care has exceeded the federal standards of twelve (12) months for reunification, eighteen (18) months for guardianship,



and twenty-four (24) months for adoption.

The average time to adoption has increased by six months over the past six quarters of available data. While the average months to reunification has decreased, it remains over the twelve (12) month expectation.

Barriers in the path to permanency for children are not quickly identified

and there lacks a sense of urgency to address the reasons for custody across all components of the child welfare system.

To become aware of both case-level issues and system concerns, Missouri will create a case review process to identify permanency bottlenecks and remove barriers for three specific groups of children:

- Children with a goal of guardianship who have been living in a relative home for 12 months or longer.

- Children with a goal of adoption who are living in a relative home (regardless of time) and TPR is complete.
- Children on trial home visit for 9 months or longer (phase one) and 4-8 months (phase two).

Goals upon strategy implementation include children achieving permanency in a timelier manner as a result of focused attention and accountability, trends in system barriers will be identified for resolution, and the deployment of limited legal resources in a more effective way to reduce the amount of time children spend in foster care.

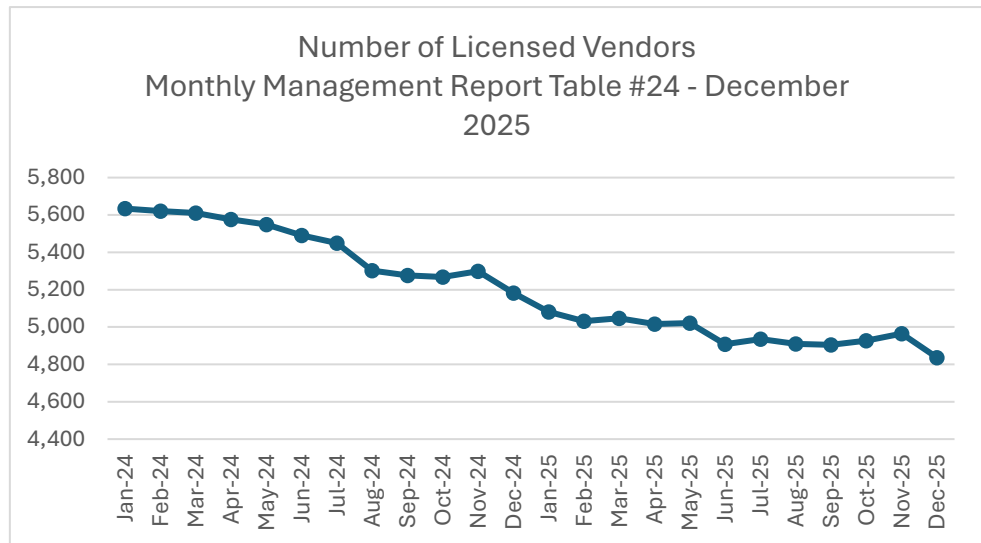
STRATEGY 2: Develop and implement a statewide case review process to identify barriers to permanency for children meeting specified criteria and monitor progress towards removing those bottlenecks until permanency is achieved.

Steps to be completed during PIP pilot implementation are as follows.

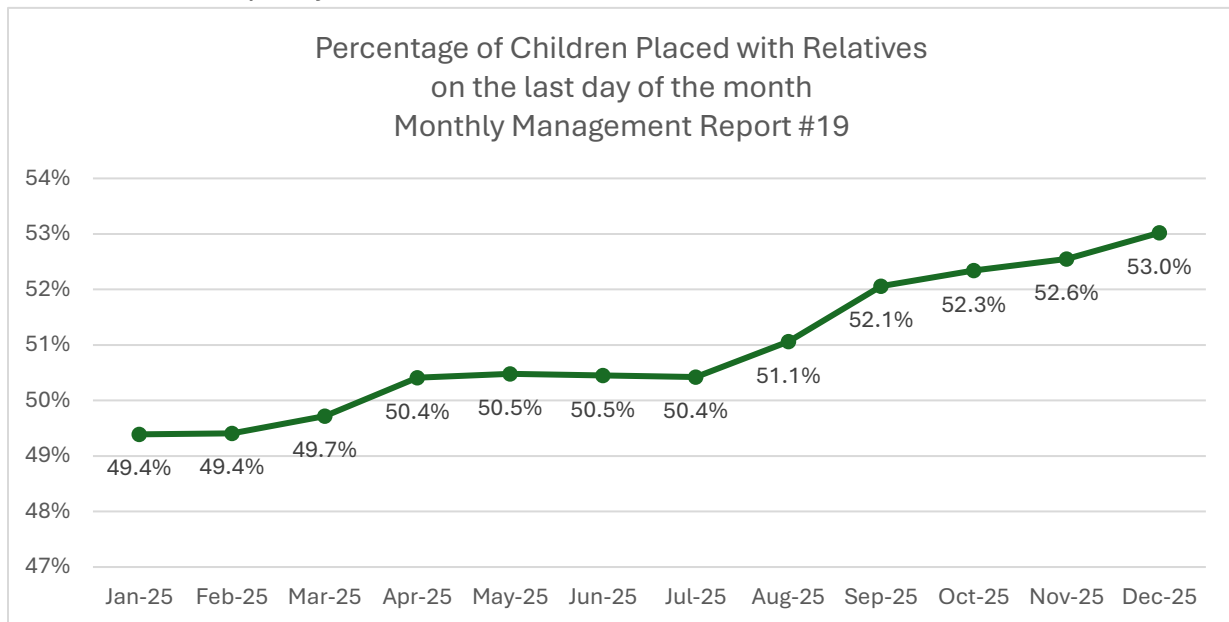
- Establish process and procedures for case review to include:
 - identification of project leads and review teams
 - development of case review tool and data collection methods
 - communication plan for CD staff, Foster Care Case Management (FCCM) agency staff, and legal and judicial partners; and
 - case assignment process
- Develop and provide case review training for review teams to ensure consistency in application of the review tool
- Review the selected cases in partnership with Division of Legal Services to determine barriers to permanency. Each review will conclude with an action plan for next steps to remove identified barriers.
- At the conclusion of the case reviews, project leads, and review teams will identify systemic concerns and develop action steps toward their resolution with the assistance and support of CD leadership.
- Collect monthly status updates and monitor progress to achieve permanency goals for children within each specified criteria throughout PIP implementation period.

Foster Home Recruitment and Retention

In the past two years, the number of licensed vendors has seen an overall decline, as outlined in the chart to the right. One potential impact to this downward trend is that the number of children in foster care had also been declining in recent years. In May 2025, the number of foster children began a slight incline, and the number of licensed homes began to plateau.



Also of note, the percentage of children placed with relatives, both in licensed and unlicensed homes, has increased over the past year.



Presented with the opportunity through the PIP pilot to increase the number of family homes available for placement of foster children, Missouri will prioritize locating and evaluating relative homes as placement options. It should be noted that Missouri statute considers non-related kin as relative placements. The case management system includes

the degree of relation to further identify the relationship between child and placement provider.

Over the past three years, the Missouri Legislature has placed emphasis on the importance of family in the lives of foster children by allocating a total of eighteen (18) Social Service Specialist positions as Diligent Search workers. These workers are located in each of the six regions of the state and are supervised by regional staff, with the support of a Program Development Specialist in central office. Their role is to provide Children's Division case management workers with a comprehensive list of relatives for potential placement and/or permanency options, mail notifications and make phone calls to relatives, assist in the completion of court notifications, and provide education and expertise. Due to capacity and the limited number of allocations, the Diligent Search workers currently do not accept referrals from Foster Care Case Management (FCCM) agencies, except on a case-by-case basis. As of the end of January 2026, 59% of children case managed by Children's Division were placed with relatives, compared to 49% of children case managed by FCCM agencies. FCCM agencies case manage approximately 40% of children in foster care.

Missouri is also looking forward to the release and introduction of the Foster Parent Portal. The portal will consist of an initial licensure and re-licensure process and workflow for families in Missouri that want to provide placement for children, whether as relative or foster care placements. The portal will enable both applicants and Children's Division staff to more easily and accurately track and take ownership of the licensing process by allowing information to be viewed, submitted, and approved in one central location. There are inefficiencies in the current licensure and re-licensure process that can be frustrating for foster and relative parents and for staff that the foster parent portal will minimize and, in some cases, eliminate.

The activities listed below represent a multi-pronged approach to elevate the importance of relative involvement when children enter foster care. By adding attention to the value of locating and evaluating relatives, Children's Division intends to see an increase in the number of children placed with family members, improved placement stability, and increased timely permanency.

STRATEGY 3: Increase the number of licensed and unlicensed relative homes available for the placement of foster children through enhanced diligent search efforts and the introduction of the Foster Parent Portal.

Steps to be completed during PIP pilot implementation are as follows.

- Explore development of a relative registry to allow family members who suspect they have relative children in foster care an avenue to make inquiry.

- All foster care entries assigned to FCCM agencies in the St. Louis Region, and in Jefferson, Franklin, and St. Charles counties will be referred to area Family Resource Centers' Diligent Search programs upon assignment, unless the assigned agency has internal mechanisms to complete thorough and timely diligent searches.
 - Explore feasibility of expansion to areas served by other Family Resource Centers.
- Ensure CD and FCCM staff are aware of relative placement expectations in policy and statute by developing a statewide communication campaign. Possible avenues include Practice Alerts, Director's weekly email, Monthly Stakeholder calls, and the Statewide Alternative Care Team meeting.
- Develop a mechanism to identify all foster care entries during the month through an operational dashboard or data listing to allow for monitoring of diligent search efforts and follow-up exploration of relatives for placement.
- Circuits with less than 45% of children in relative placements will receive targeted activities to identify circuit-specific barriers to the development of relative homes for placement. Targeted activities will include staff and stakeholder surveys. Actions to address barriers will occur as appropriate.
- Introduce the Foster Parent Portal which will assist relative placements and foster parents by streamlining the initial and re-licensure processes.
- Pilot revised tools and training to streamline the relative placement and licensing process in anticipation of promulgation of separate licensing regulations for relatives.

Conclusion

Missouri appreciates the opportunities afforded through the "A Home for Every Child" initiative set forth in Technical Bulletin #14. By participating in the PIP pilot, Missouri will focus attention on the safety, permanency, and well-being of children and families through enhanced prevention efforts, targeted permanency achievement, and an increased focus on locating and securing relative home placements.

Appendix A: Lead Measures

The following measures will be used to monitor implementation and determine the successful outcome of the PIP pilot strategies outlined above.

Safety and Prevention of Foster Care Entries:

- Reduce the number of entries to foster care from FCS intervention
- Decrease the median amount of time in days between hotline date and FCS case opening date

Expedited Safe Permanency and Sustained Care:

- Increase the number of exits from foster care through reunifications, guardianships, and adoptions
- Decrease the percentage of children who have been in foster care for 24 months or longer

Foster Home Recruitment and Retention:

- Increase the number of newly licensed relative homes
- Increase the number/percentage of children placed with relatives as initial placement