



An Overview of the North Dakota Child Welfare System

Interim Juvenile Justice Committee | Representative Michelle Strinden, Chair

Presenter: Kelsey Bless, Foster Care Licensing Administrator

August 24, 2023

NORTH
Dakota
Be Legendary.

Health & Human Services

Roadmap to an Overview of Child Welfare

1. Child Welfare in ND

2. Key Ideas

- a. Safety Framework
- b. CQI

3. Key Elements

- a. Safety
- b. Permanency
- c. Wellbeing

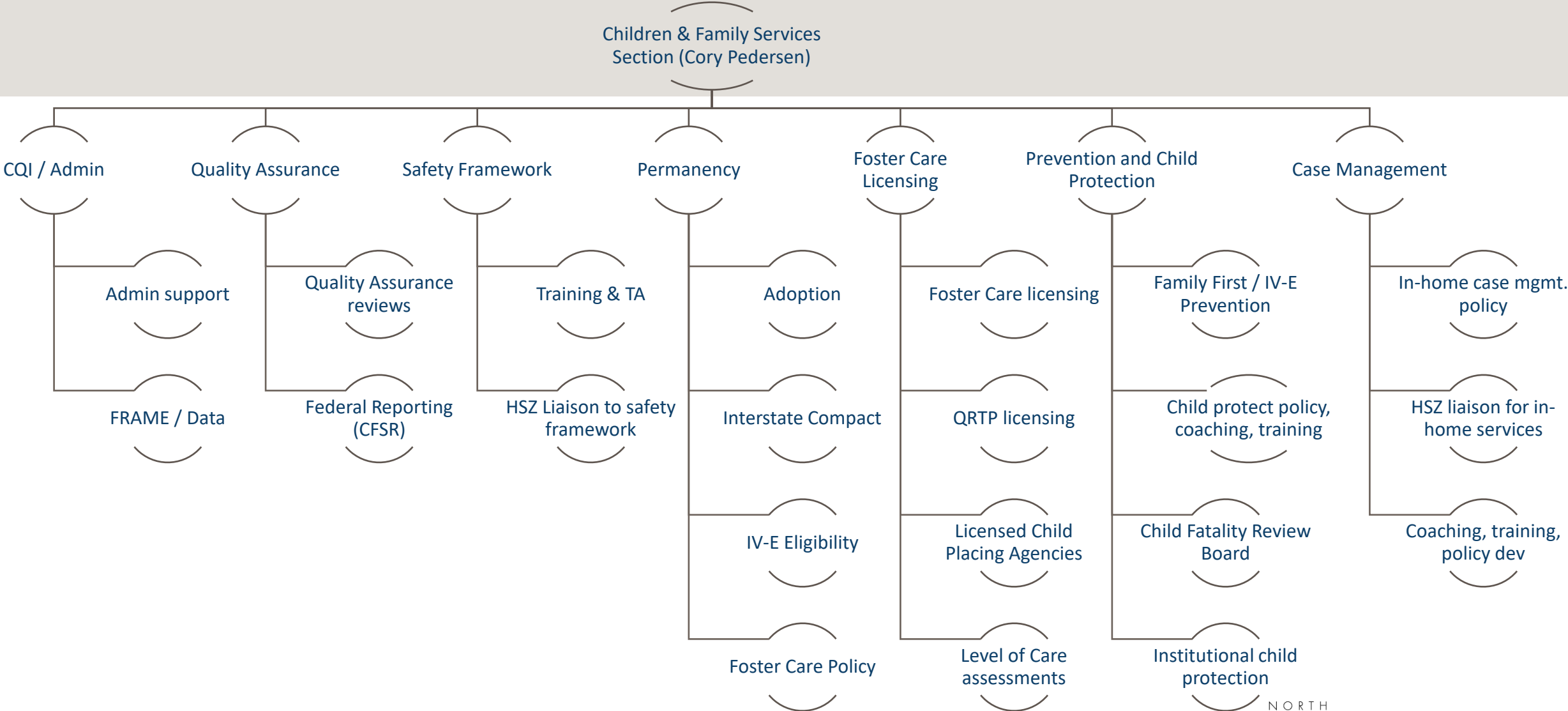
4. On the Horizon





HHS and Child Welfare in ND

Children & Family Services: Team Structure





ND Child Welfare System Mission: Safe Children and Strong Families

Safety (Protection/Prevention)

Prevention

- Home Visiting
- Behavioral Health & Substance Abuse Services
- Kinship ND

Protection

- Child protection services
- Foster Care
- Child fatality review panel
- Parent Resource Centers

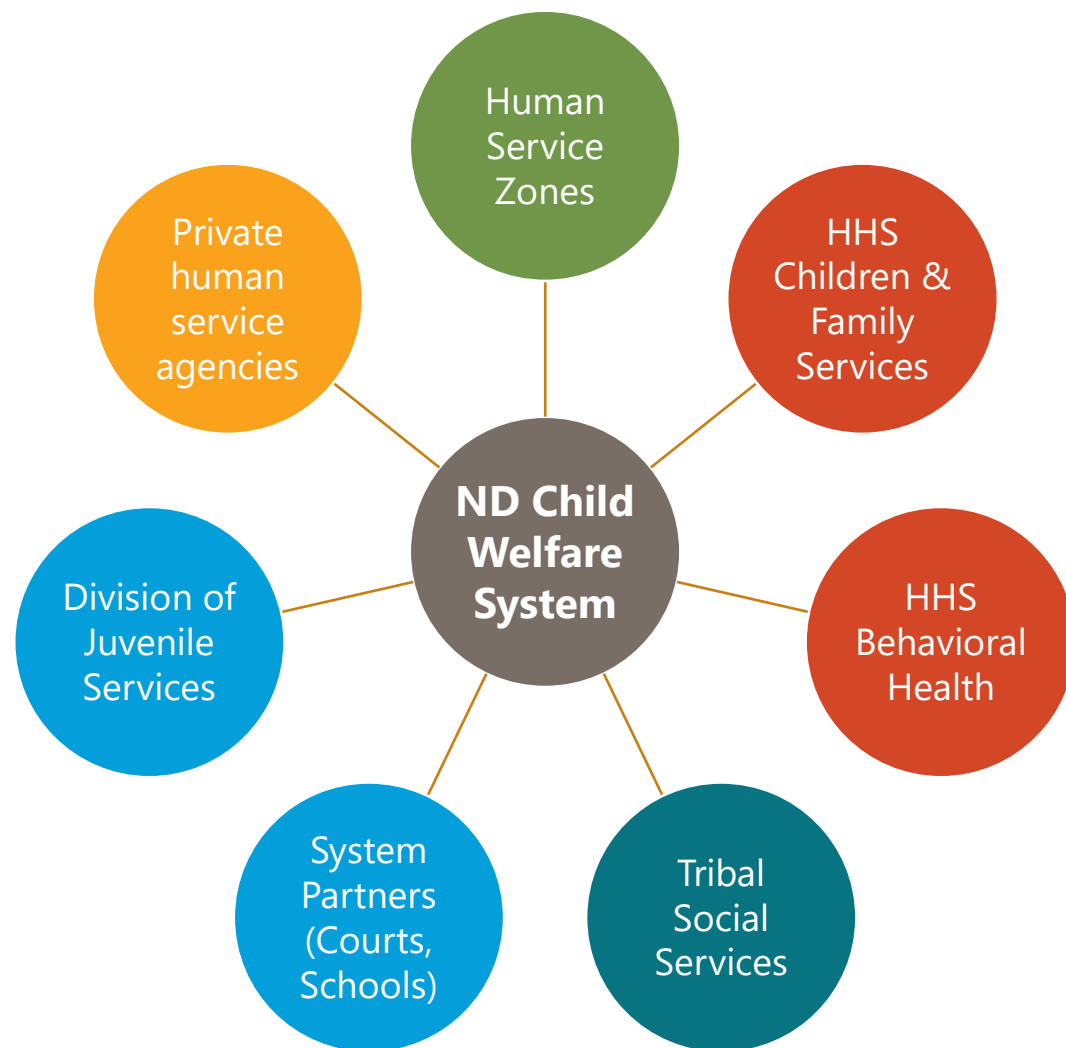
Permanency

- Family Reunification
- Adoption
- Guardianships
- Interstate compacts for the placement of children
- Independent living services

Well-being

- Family preservation services
- In-home case management
- Children in Need of Services
- Respite care
- Nurturing Parent programs
- Parent aides
- Family centered engagement

The Child Welfare System in North Dakota includes both public and private sector partners



The mission of the child welfare system in North Dakota

**Safe Children
Strong Families**



North Dakota Child Welfare System

Dept of Health & Human Services

Human Service Centers

- Crisis teams
- Intensive In-home services (therapy & treatment, skills training, behavior mod)
- Targeted case management

Children & Family Services

- Training/coaching of field staff
- Oversee quality service delivery
- Administration of policy
- License foster homes
- IV-E and Adoption Eligibility

Private Providers

- Foster homes, including therapeutic foster care
- Safe shelter for crisis
- Human trafficking supports and safe beds
- Unaccompanied minor services
- Targeted case management
- Adoption services for children in foster care and the families adopting them
- Title IV-E Prevention Services

Tribal Social Services

- FRAME entry and foster eligibility determinations
- Joint practice model and ICWA training
- Native American Training Institute supports (training, billing, IEP (IWCA Family Preservation))
- FMAP service contracting
- IV-E agreements boost access to funding

Human Service Zones

- Assess present and impending danger
- Safety planning
- Case management
- Assess and build parent capacities
- Provide safe supports for children and families
- In home supports
- Parent aides
- License foster homes
- Intake for child abuse and neglect reports
- CHINS (Children in Need of Services)

Division of Juvenile Services (DJS)

CFS works closely with DJS specific to children in need of out of home treatment, which results in a foster care placement.

ND Child Welfare Redesign Projects

- Child Protection
- Eligibility Determination for Foster Care and Subsidized Adoption
- Safety Framework Practice Model
- Licensing for Foster Care Settings
- Data Management System
- Adoption for children in the custody of a Human Service Zone

Safety Framework Practice Model

- December 2020
- Consistent child welfare practice
- Intervene with families whose children are unsafe based on the presence of uncontrolled danger threats.



Safety Framework Practice Model

Why Implementation in ND?

↑ Children in foster care

↓ Services and supports closer to home

↑ Parental substance use



Safety Framework Practice Model

What is the overall goal?

↑ Children safe at home

↓ Foster care numbers

↑ Kinship placements



Safety Framework Practice Model

What does it look like when a child is **SAFE**?

- ✓ No threats of danger exist within the family, **or**
- ✓ Parents/caregivers possess sufficient protective capacities to control any threat, **or**
- ✓ The child is not vulnerable to the existing danger.



Safety Framework Practice Model

What does it look like when a child is **UNSAFE**?

- ✓ Threats of danger exist within the family, **and**
- ✓ Children are vulnerable to such threats, **and**
- ✓ Parents/caregivers have insufficient protective capacities to manage or control the threats.



Safety Framework Practice Model

Child Removal Criteria



ALL QUESTIONS ARE "YES"
Child can remain in the home with necessary supports in place



ANY QUESTION IS "NO"
Child safety not assured, so removal is necessary

Safety Framework Fidelity Review

- **36% Improvement** assuring children remain safely at home
- **13% Improvement** assuring children remain connected to people, places and culture that are important to them
- **21% Improvement** in enhanced parental capacities to provide for child's needs
- **26% Improvement** in addressing impending dangers and diminished parental capacities
- **28% Decrease** in number of children in foster care
- **18% Increase** in number of unlicensed kinship placements, so children do not have to enter foster care



Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI)

Key Idea:
Continuous Quality Improvement

A philosophy of systemic improvement

1. Identify and Understand the Problem
2. Research Solutions
3. Develop a Theory of Change
4. Adapt/Develop a Solution
5. Implement the Solution
6. Monitor and Assess

CQI will help North Dakota child welfare be data-informed, systematic, and proactive, while including stakeholders to incorporate information about multiple aspects of the system. ND has four Cross Zonal CQI Teams geographically organized in accordance with North Dakota's court units.



North Dakota Child Welfare System

CONTINUOUS QUALITY
IMPROVEMENT

Strengthening Families by Improving Quality



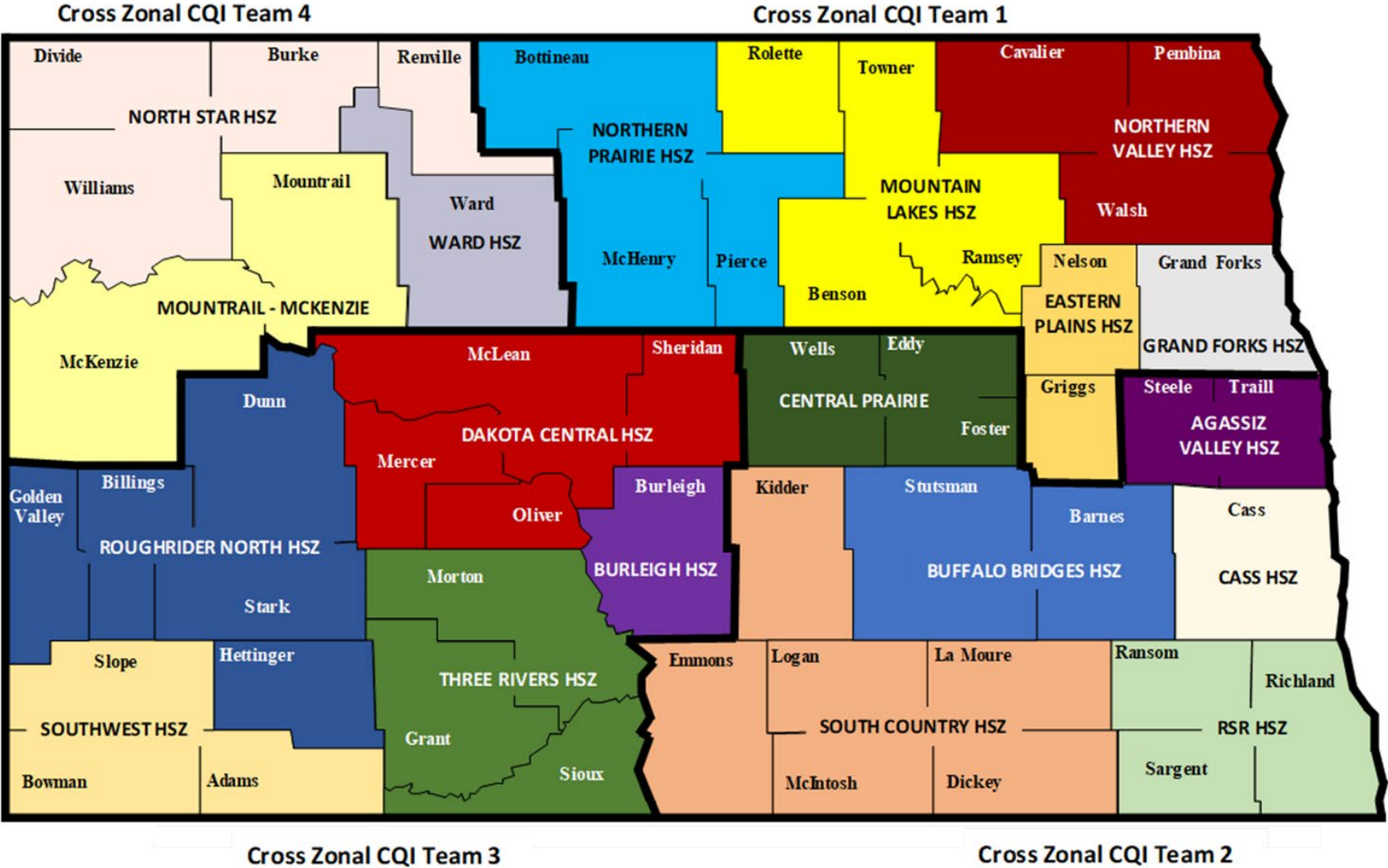
Why
CQI?

Child safety and wellbeing is complex and dynamic. We are constantly looking for ways to improve systems of care for children.

Cross-Zonal Teams

Continuous Quality Improvement

Key Idea:
Continuous Quality
Improvement



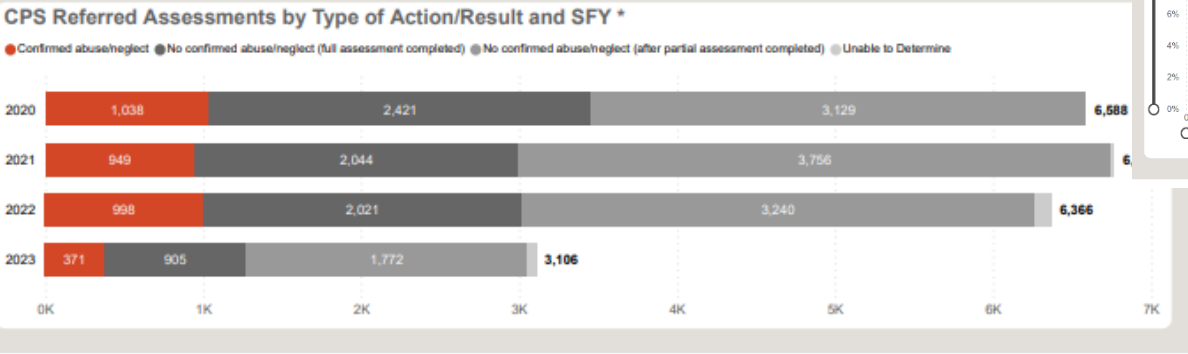
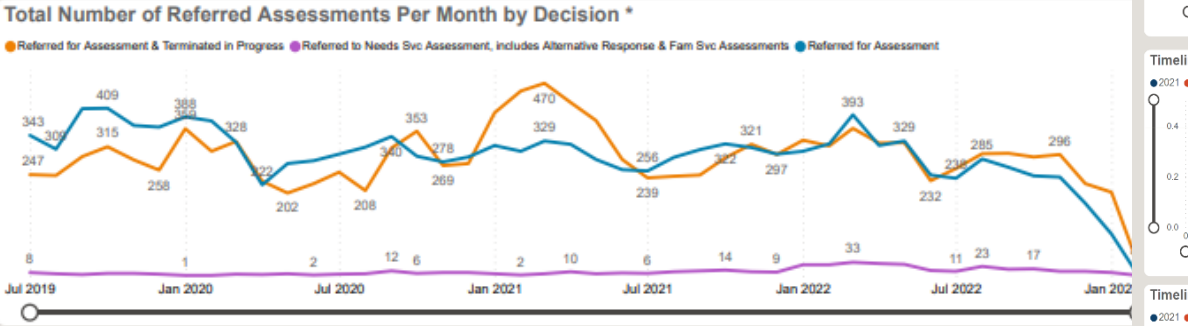
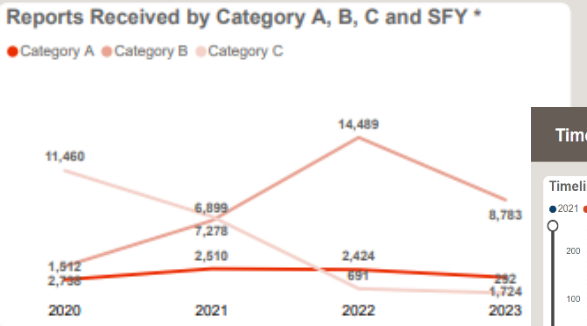
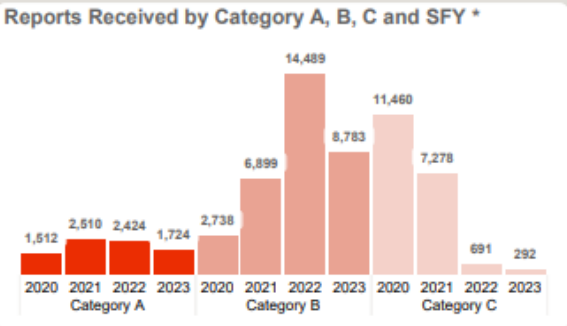
Quality Assurance (QA)

- Statewide Quality Assurance Reviews
- Compare ND results to national standards
- Evaluate safety, permanency, and well-being outcomes
- 7 outcomes of Safety, Permanency and Well-Being are measured and monitored
- Embedded into our ND CQI efforts



Sharing data to improve services

Assessments Zone: All County: All State Fiscal Year (SFY): All Date: All



Permanency Zone: All County: All

Foster Care Case Open Date to Close Date 11/2/2011 to 8/28/2022

In Home Case Open Date to Close Date 11/2/2009 to 2/23/2023

Number of Children in Foster Care *

HSZ	Count
Agassiz Valley HSZ	10
Buffalo Bridges HSZ	28
Burleigh County HSZ	139
Cass County HSZ	192
Central Plains HSZ	3
Delaware Central HSZ	14
Eastern Plains HSZ	1
Grand Forks County HSZ	150
Mountain Lakes HSZ	68
Mountain Mankato HSZ	13
North Star HSZ	51
Northern Plains HSZ	4
Northern Valley HSZ	14
Rough Rider North HSZ	19
RSR HSZ	12
South County HSZ	8
Southwest Dakota HSZ	14
Three Rivers HSZ	34
Unknown HSZ	371
Ward County HSZ	95

Number of In Home Open Cases*

HSZ	Count
Agassiz Valley HSZ	14
Buffalo Bridges HSZ	158
Burleigh County HSZ	391
Cass County HSZ	172
Central Plains HSZ	24
Delaware Central HSZ	67
Eastern Plains HSZ	10
Grand Forks County HSZ	223
Mountain Lakes HSZ	136
Mountain Mankato HSZ	77
North Star HSZ	210
Northern Plains HSZ	45
Northern Valley HSZ	52
Rough Rider North HSZ	192
RSR HSZ	72
South County HSZ	69
Southwest Dakota HSZ	37
Three Rivers HSZ	147
Unknown HSZ	2
Ward County HSZ	256

Timeliness Zone: All County: All State Fiscal Year (SFY): All

Timeliness of Face to Face Visits for A Cases (Number of Reports) *

Timeliness of Face to Face Visits for A Cases (Average Cases Per Filled FTE) *

Timeliness of Face to Face Visits for A Cases (% of Face to Face) *

Newly established internal facing dashboard to provide insight to Human Service Zone and HHS staff related to delivery of child protection and permanency services across the state.

of Open HSZ Foster Care Cases on Point in Time (One Day)

Human Service Zone	6/1/2020	6/1/2021	6/1/2022	6/1/2023	2020 to 2023 Difference
Northern Valley HSZ	63	49	25	17	-46
Mountain Lakes HSZ	107	96	96	66	-41
Roughrider North HSZ	77	50	45	39	-38
Grand Forks County HSZ	219	223	201	184	-35
Buffalo Bridges HSZ	62	42	36	36	-26
Mountrail-McKenzie HSZ	38	23	19	12	-26
RSR HSZ	33	21	14	11	-22
Northern Prairie HSZ	31	25	16	13	-18
North Star HSZ	87	71	63	78	-9
South Country HSZ	23	27	11	15	-8
Central Prairie HSZ	8	3	2	3	-5
Three Rivers HSZ	53	65	68	49	-4
Eastern Plains HSZ	5	2	2	2	-3
Agassiz Valley HSZ	20	17	33	17	-3
Southwest Dakota HSZ	12	5	8	16	4
Dakota Central HSZ	10	5	11	15	5
Ward County HSZ	128	137	127	140	12
Cass County HSZ	192	217	230	230	38
Burleigh County HSZ	139	146	169	192	53
Totals	1307	1224	1176	1135	-172

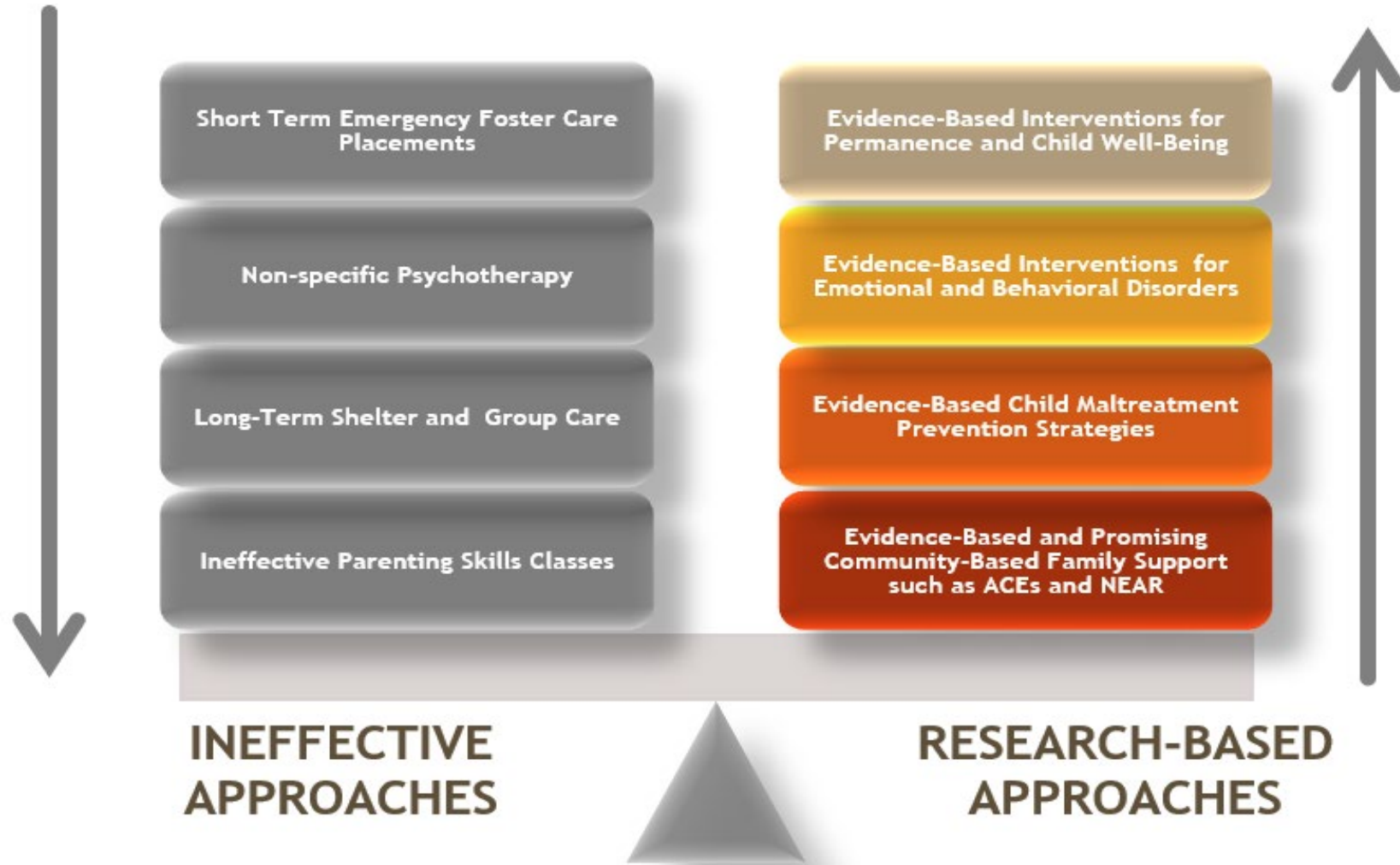
Data to Improve Services

Key Idea:
Continuous Quality Improvement



Family First Prevention Services Act

Shifting Resources to Support What Works (PL 115-183)



Title IV-E Prevention Services

- Investing in prevention to keep children safely in their home
- Creating funding opportunities for service providers
- Highlighting evidence-based treatment models
- Assisting children and families



Title IV-E Prevention Services

Service	Description	Service Locations in ND
Healthy Families	Home visitation program to strengthen family functioning, reduce risk and build protective factors (birth-5 yrs old)	Adams, Barnes, Billings, Bowman, Burleigh, Cass, Dunn, Emmons, Grand Forks, Grant, Hettinger, McKenzie, Morton, Pembina, Nelson, Slope, Stark, Stutsman, Walsh, Williams
Brief Strategic Family Therapy	Intensive family intervention for youth with behavioral substance or delinquency concerns (ages 6-17)	Bismarck, Dickinson, Ellendale, Fargo, Grand Forks, Jamestown, Mandan, Minot, Watford City, Williston
Parent-Child Interaction Therapy	Coaches parents with children experiencing emotional, behavioral concerns (ages 2-7)	Bismarck, Fargo, Grand Forks, Jamestown, West Fargo
Family Check-Up/Everyday Parenting	Intervention for families of child with emotional, behavioral, and academic concerns which supports positive parenting (ages 2-17)	Bismarck, Fargo, Grand Forks, Mandan, Minot, Valley City, West Fargo
Multisystemic Therapy	Intensive treatment and intervention for high-risk youth (ages 12-17)	Southeast Region: Cass, Richland, Ransom, Traill, Sargent
Functional Family Therapy, Homebuilders, Nurse Family Partnership, Parents as Teachers -No IV-E enrolled providers		

Title IV-E Prevention Services

- **410 applications** seeking services
- **306 children** approved to receive services
- **156 children** currently open and receiving services
- **7 children** identified as later entering foster care



98%

Of children avoided foster care / out of home placement

Universe of children includes those who were determined "at risk" for foster care

Kinship ND - Navigator

Support for caregivers who:

- ✓ Are a North Dakota resident
- ✓ Have full-time care of a child who is not their own
- ✓ Have a preexisting relationship with the child

Kinship ND can assist caregivers who have a:

- ✓ Private arrangement,
- ✓ Power of attorney or Guardianship,
- ✓ CPS, in-home services, or placement under public custody in foster care (Tribal, Zone, DJS).

Caregiver will receive:

- ✓ 1:1 support
- ✓ Resources and referral
- ✓ Limited financial assistance (Cannot be licensed provider)



Kinship ND

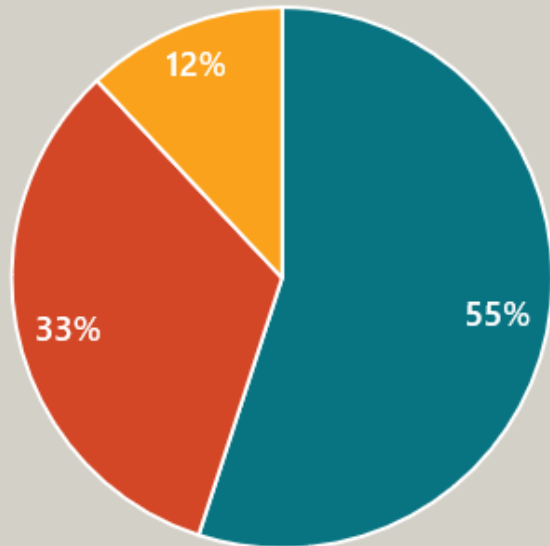
From 3/17/21 – 8/1/23 we have served:

648 ND Caregiver Homes

1,215 Children

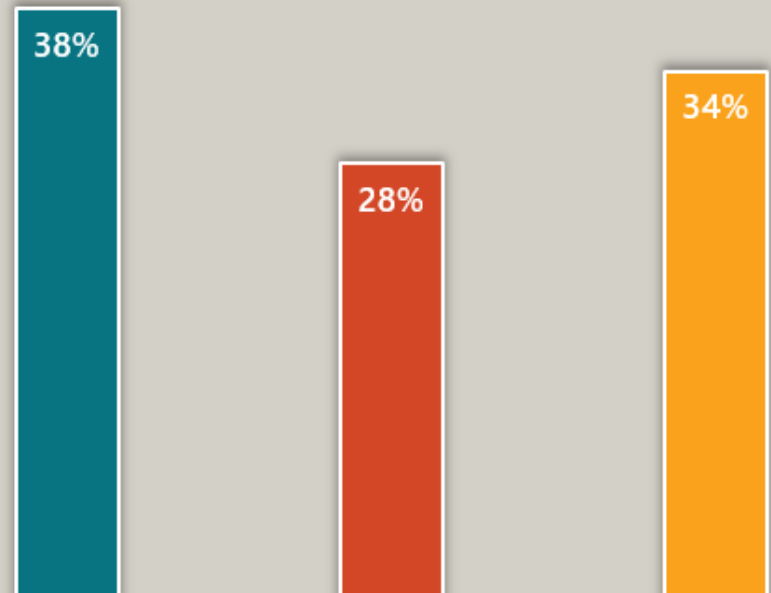
Reimbursed **\$360,817** to support children's needs

Caregiver Relationship to the Child



- Grandparents & Great Grandparents
- Other Family (Sibling, Cousin, Aunt/Uncle, etc.)
- Fictive Kin

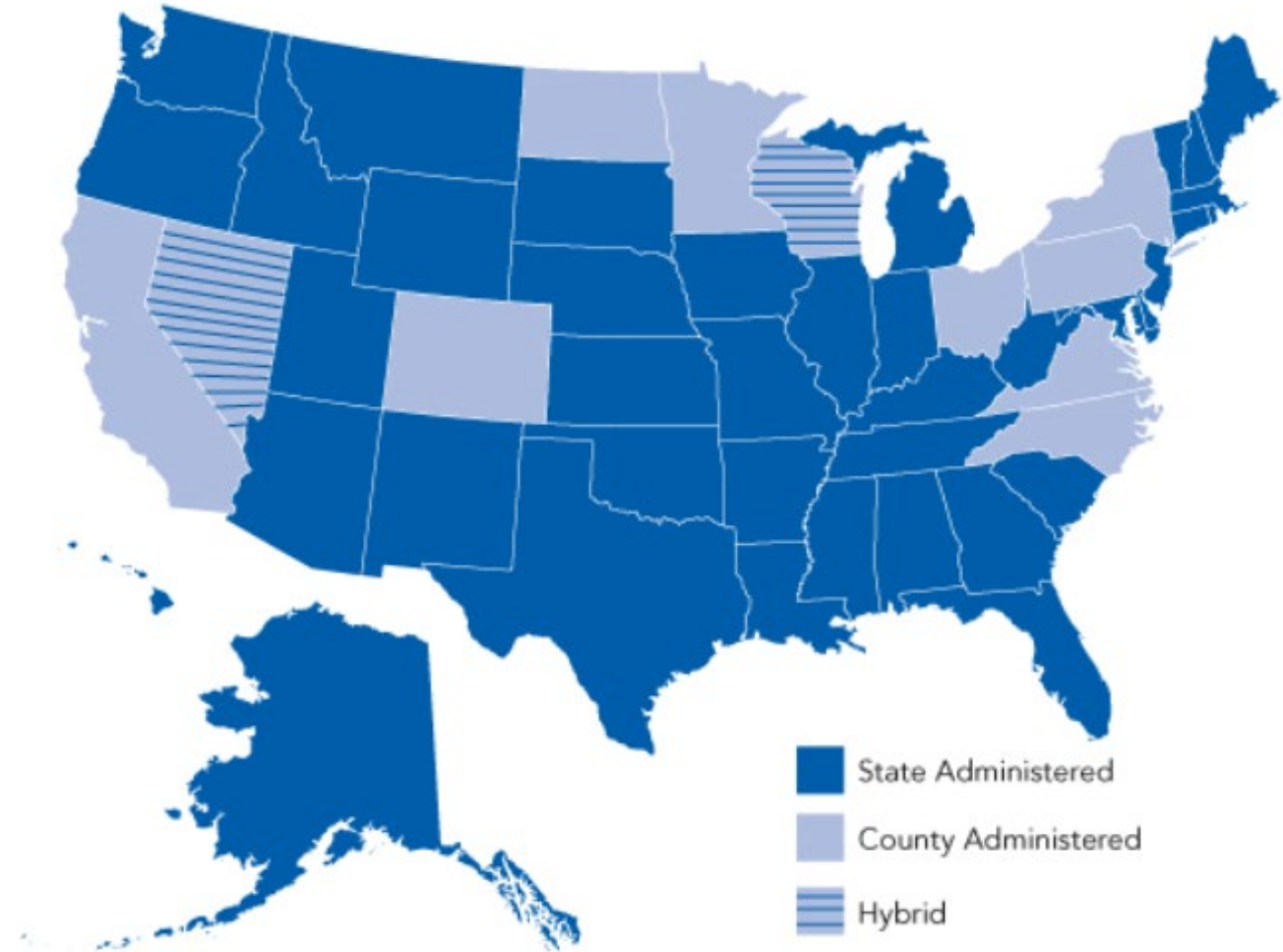
Ages of the Children in Kinship ND



0-5 Years Old 6-10 Years Old 11-17 Years Old

Administrative Structure for Child Protection Services (CPS)

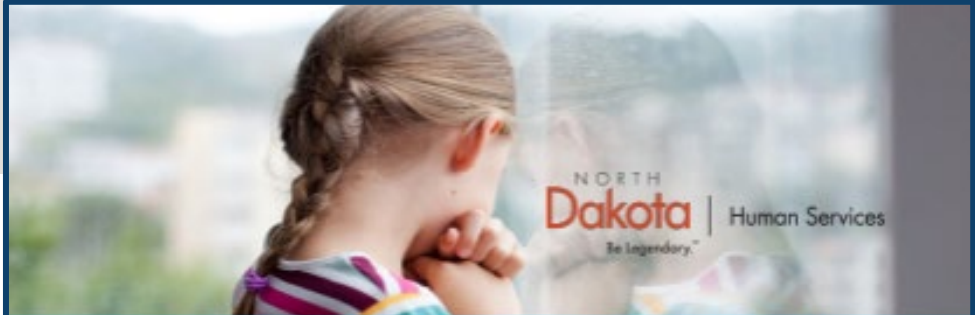
- All States are responsible for compliance with Federal and State requirements; however, they may differ in the way child welfare services are operated and delivered.
- Major CPS Functions in ND are delivered by Human Service Zones
 - Hotline to report suspected abuse or neglect
 - Screening and determining need for response
 - Conducting assessments
 - Safety/risk and family functioning assessments
 - Assigning cases to response track



Source: "State vs. County Administration of Child Welfare Services", Fact Sheet from Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2018.


Child Protection Services (CPS)

- Child Abuse and Neglect Index (NDCC 50-25.1-05.5)
- CPS Intake 1-833-958-3500
- Assessments



N.D. Child Protection Services (CPS) Reporting Line

IMPORTANT
If it's an **EMERGENCY** and a child is in imminent DANGER
CALL 9-1-1 NOW.



To report suspected child abuse or neglect, call North Dakota's toll-free

Child Abuse & Neglect Reporting Line
1-833-958-3500

Statewide toll-free
Child Abuse & Neglect Reporting Line
1-833-958-3500
*Available 8 a.m. - 5 p.m. Central Time
(7 a.m. - 4 p.m. Mountain Time), Monday - Friday.*

Key Benefits:

- A dedicated team of specialized CPS intake professionals gather all needed facts so CPS workers can act more quickly to protect children.
- Ensures consistent quality service.
- Reduces phone tag because intake workers are available to take your call.
- Uses an enhanced intake process with focused questions to better target actions.
- Allows local child welfare professionals to devote more quality time to strengthening and supporting families to keep more children safely at home.

Law Enforcement or Medical Personnel:

- If you need a Child Protection Worker to respond to your location immediately, contact your local Human Service Zone office directly.
- You can provide supporting documents to the CPS Intake Unit by fax: (701) 328-0361.

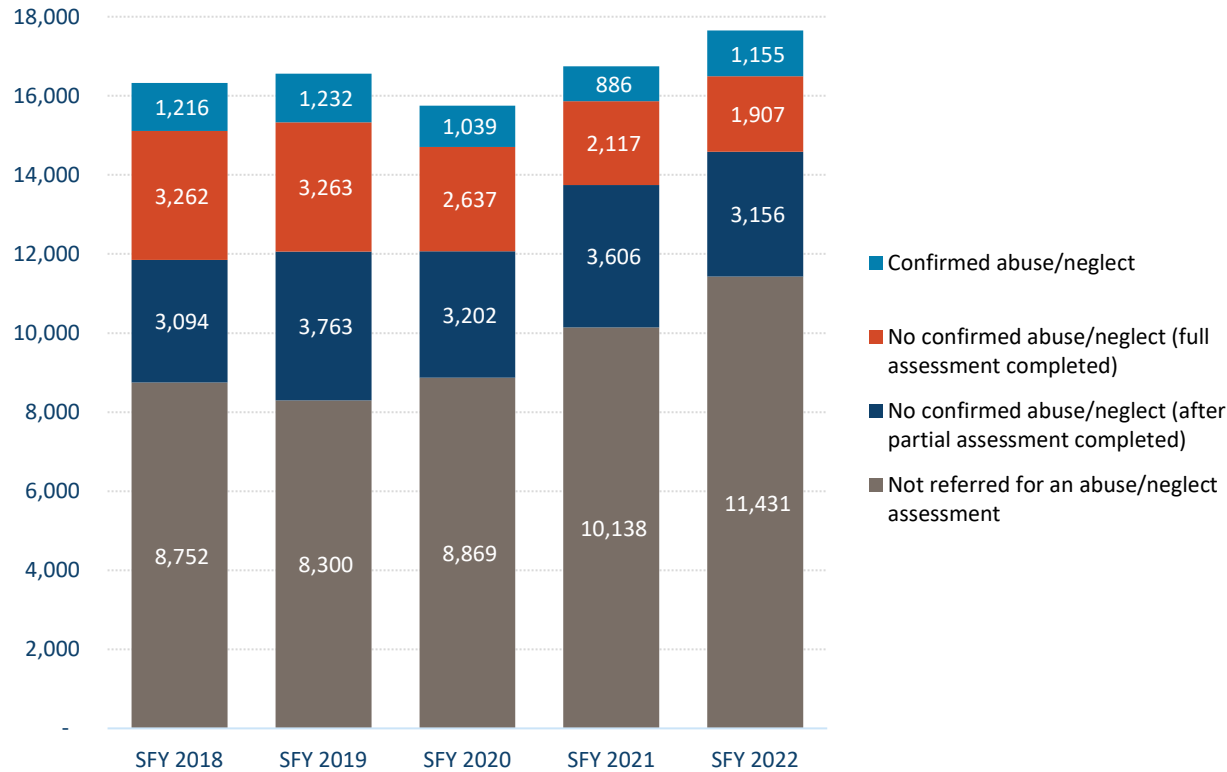
Child Protection Services (CPS)

- Institutional Child Abuse and Neglect (ICPS)
 - ✓ Public or Private School
 - ✓ Residential Facility licensed, certified or approved by the Department
 - Psychiatric Residential Treatment Facility (PRTF)
 - Qualified Residential Treatment Program (QRTP)
 - Intermediate Care Facility for youth with I/DD (ICF)
- Mandated Reporter Training
 - ✓ <https://mandatedreporter.pcand.org/>
- Child Fatality Review Board (NDCC 50-25.1-04)

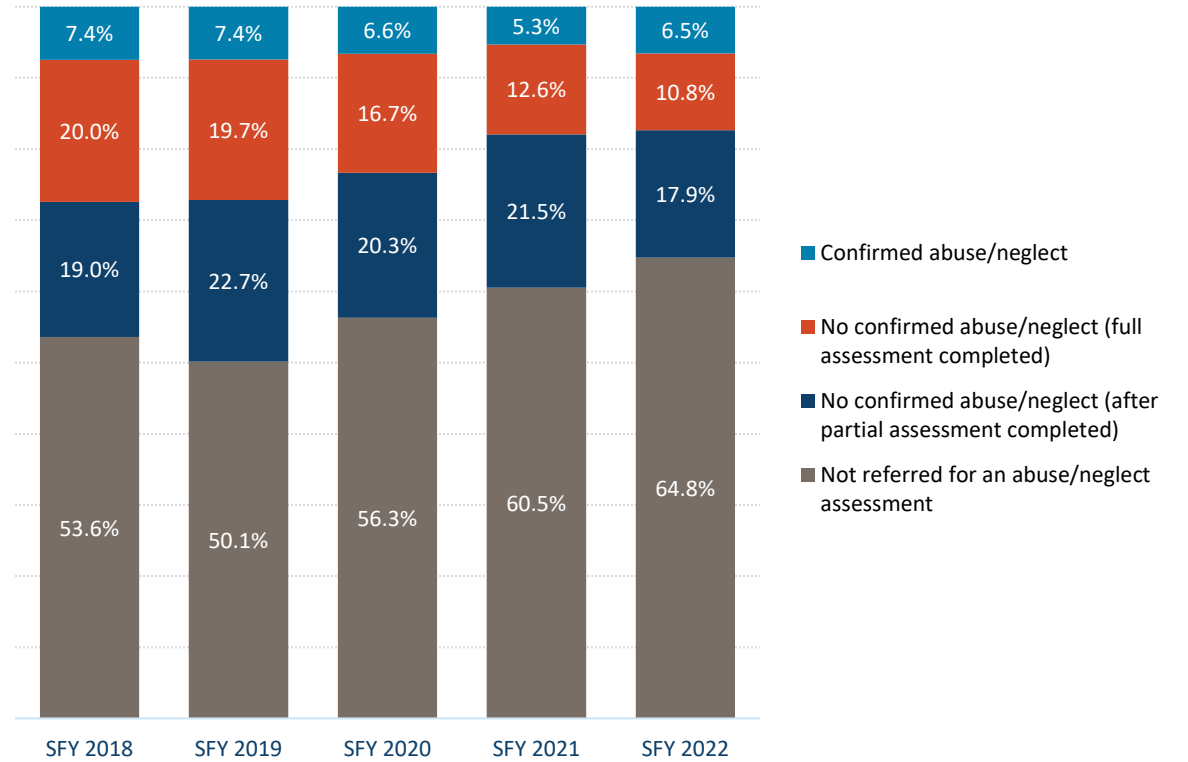


ND sees roughly **1,100** confirmed cases of child abuse or neglect each year

ND sees approximately 1,000-1,200 confirmed cases of child abuse and/or neglect each year



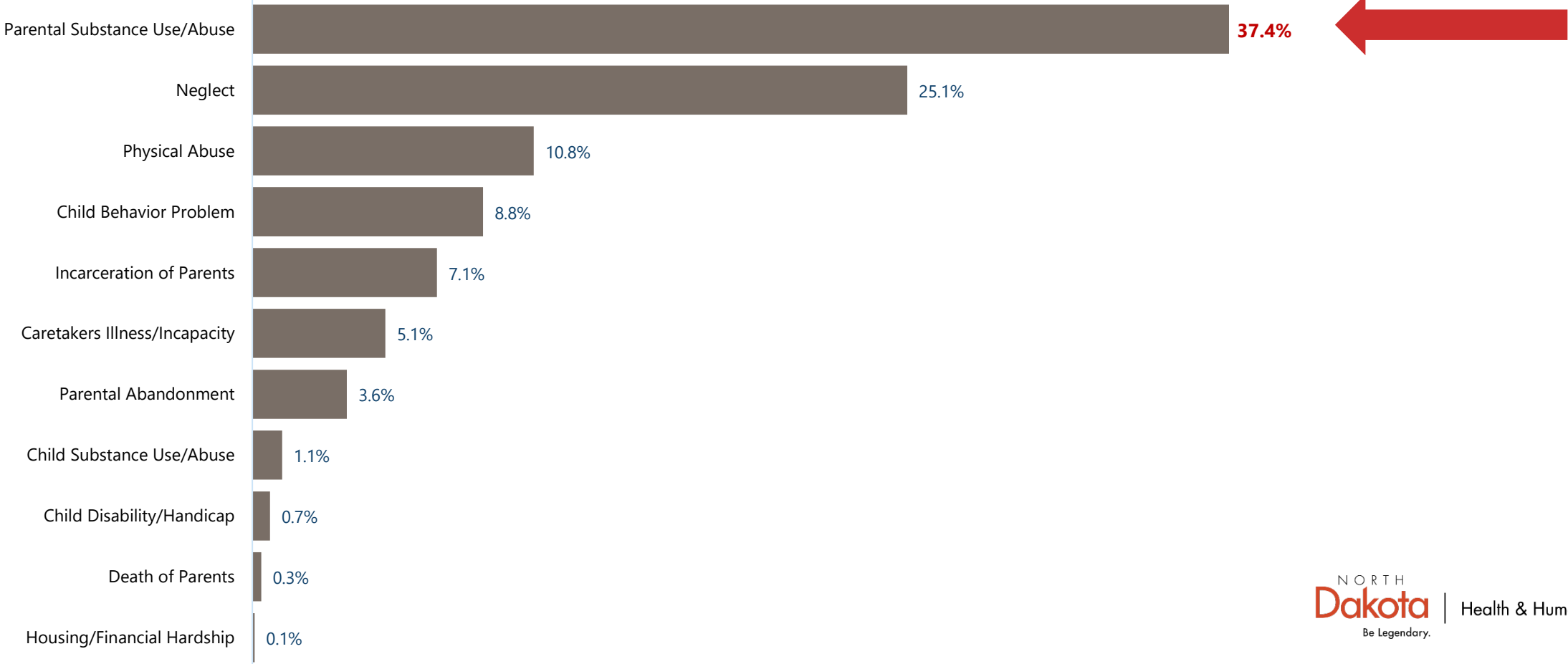
Approximately 7% of reports of suspected child abuse/neglect are ultimately confirmed



Substance use and mental health needs left unaddressed are leading reasons for removal from ND parental homes

Removal Reasons

Percent of children entering care for each removal reason: SFY2022



Family foster homes provide care for 68% of children affected by an out-of-home placement

Continuum of Care – Jan 2023

Safety:
Protection



**Relative
Kinship Care**

18%



**Family Foster
Home**

68%
(20% are licensed relatives)



**Treatment
Foster Home**

8%



**Qualified
Residential
Treatment (QRTP)**

2%



Non-Foster
(PRTF, DD, Job Corp,
Detention, Hospital)

2%



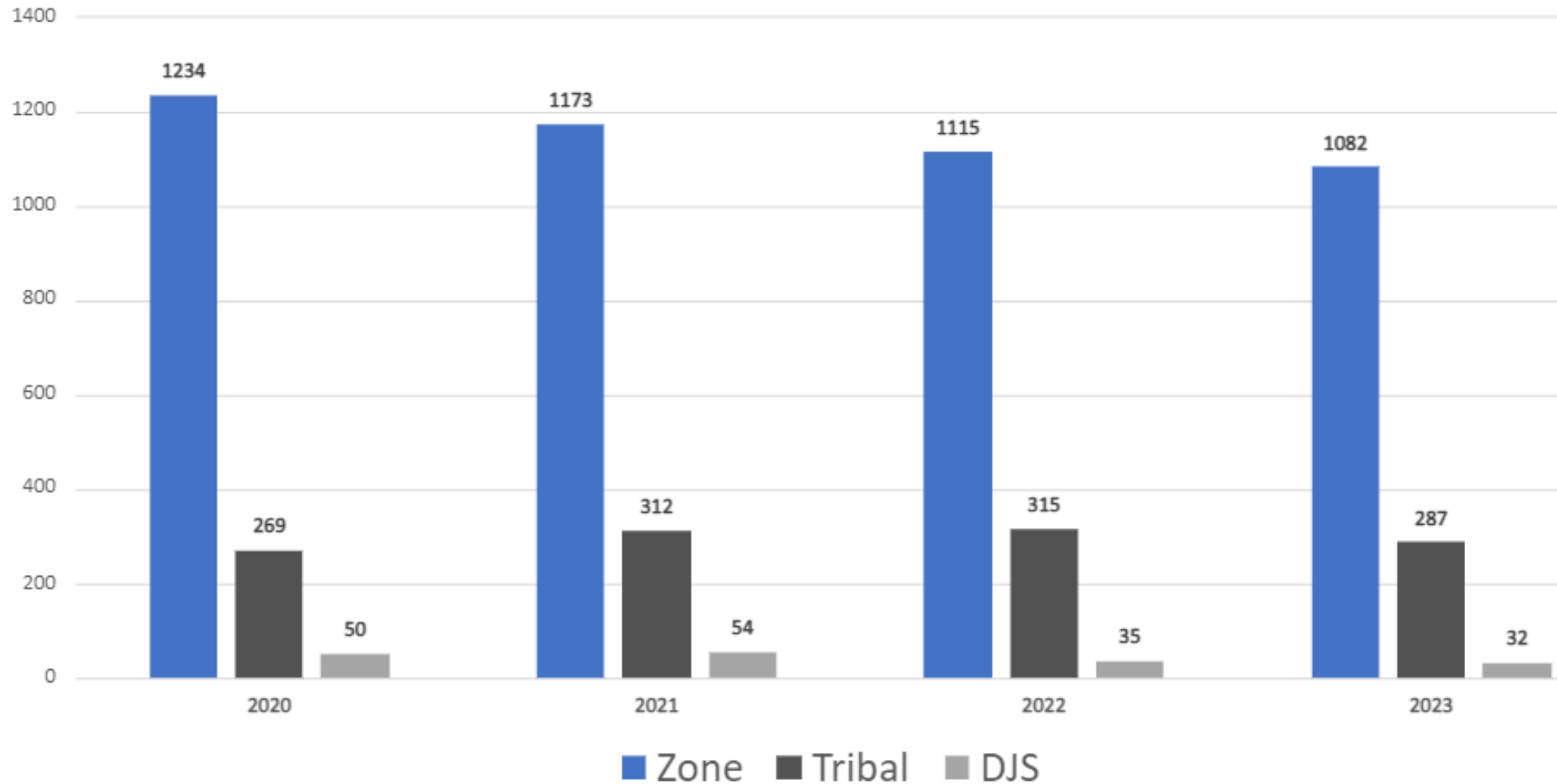
**18+ Continued
Foster Care**

2%



ND Foster Care Data Trend

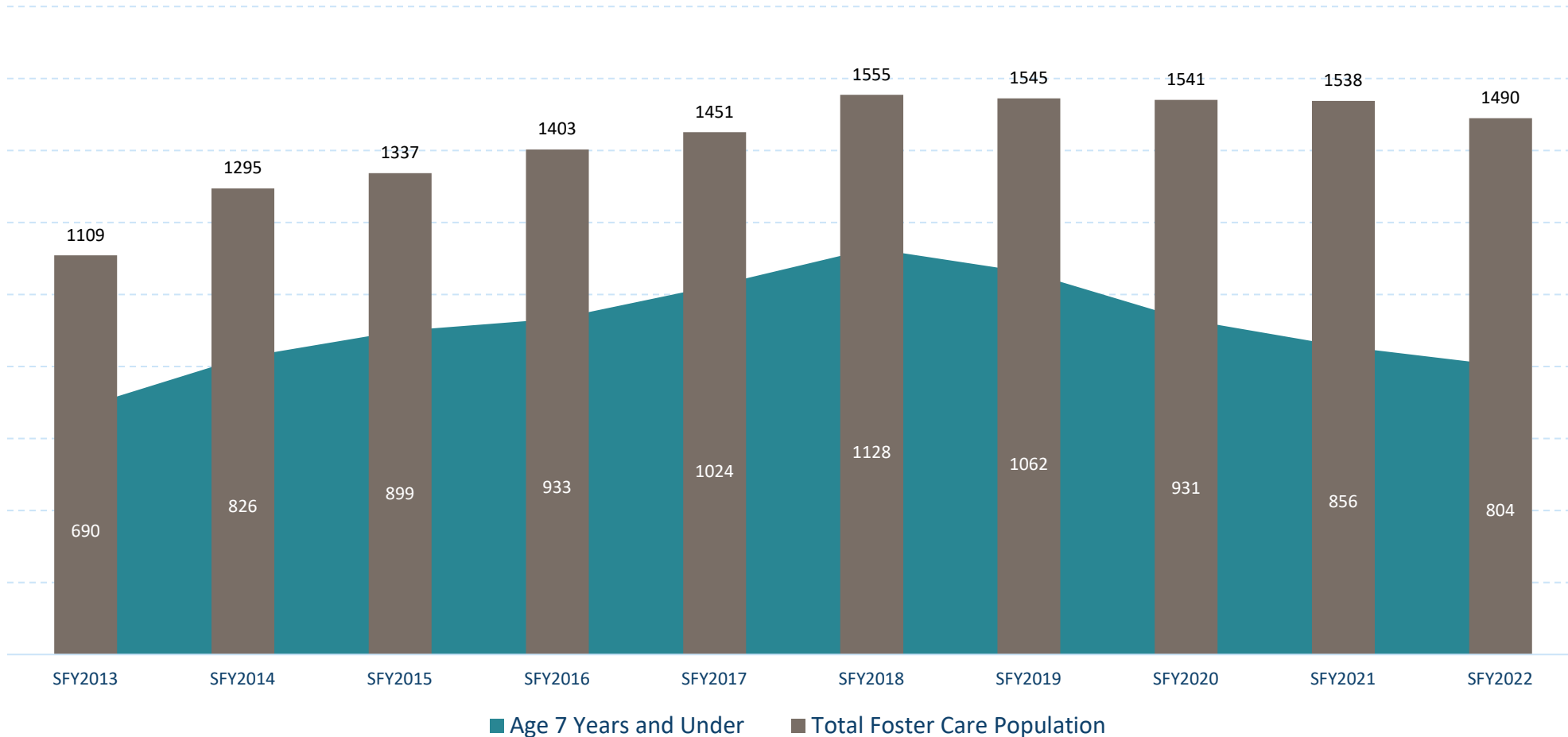
In the past 4 years by custodian – Moment in Time on June 1st of each year



The percentage of children in foster care under age 7 has declined from 62% to 54% since 2013

The number of children in foster care in ND has risen by 34% over the last 10 years

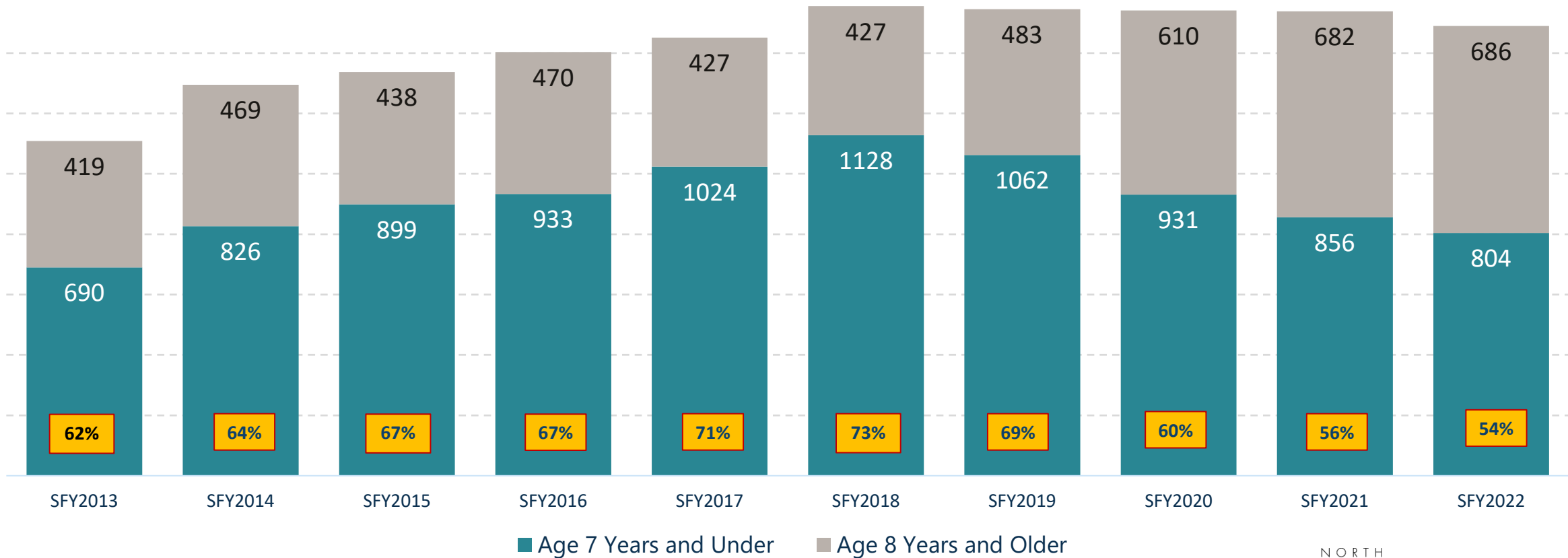
Point-in-Time Average of ND Foster Care census and those age 7 years and under, FFY 2013-2022



Rethink
child
welfare 

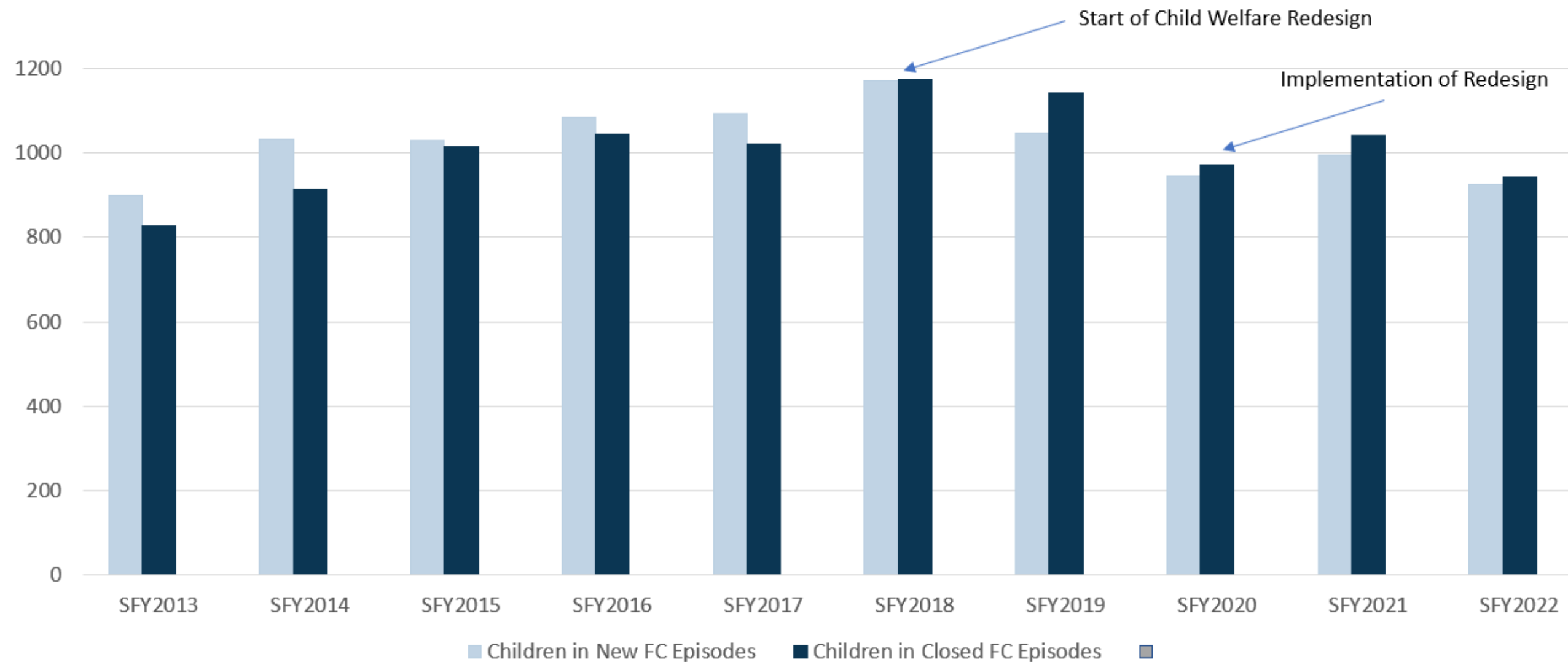
Early interventions with young families are key to reducing foster care placement for the youngest children.

In FY 2022, 54% of the 1,421 children in foster care are younger than age 7 – this is the lowest proportion in at least 10 years



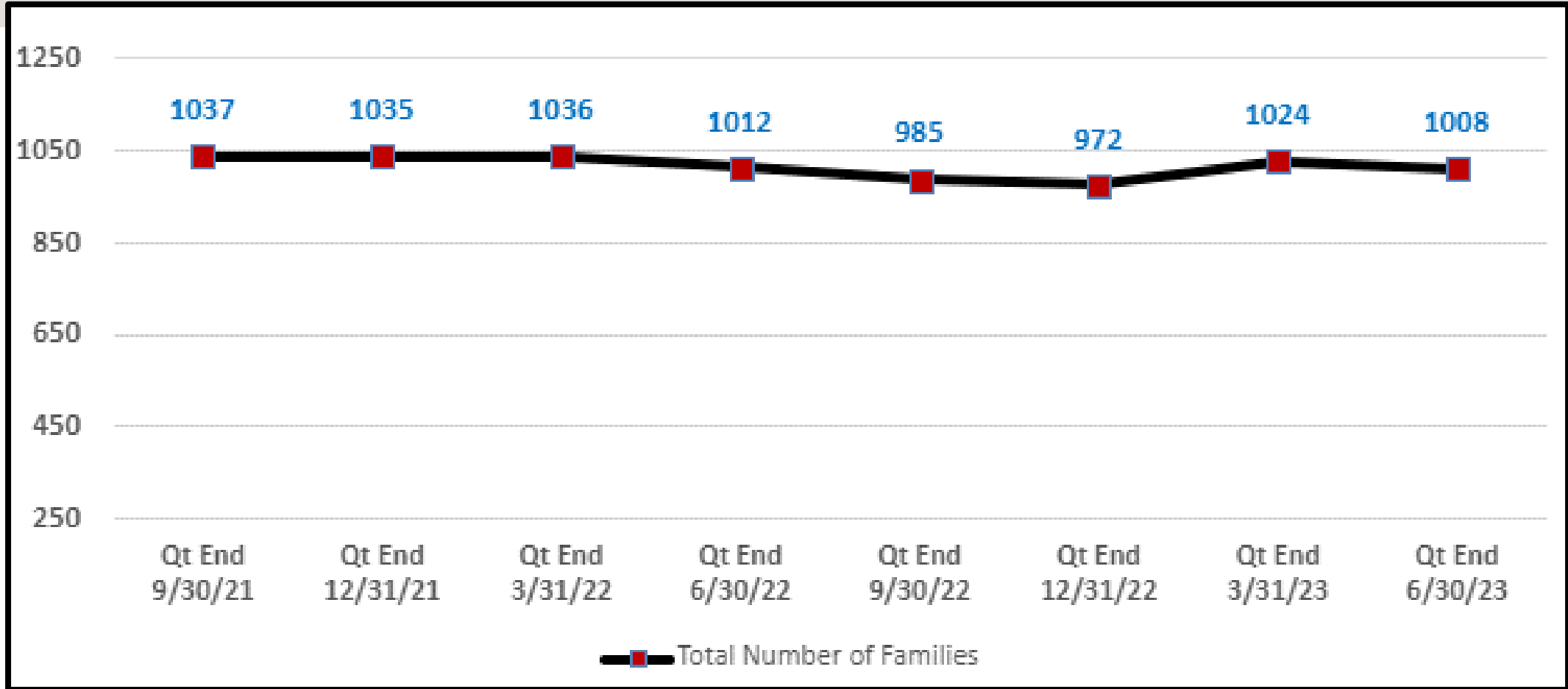
Point-in-Time Average of ND Foster Care census and those age 7 years and under, SFY 2013-2023

How many children enter and exit ND foster care?



Family Foster Care Homes

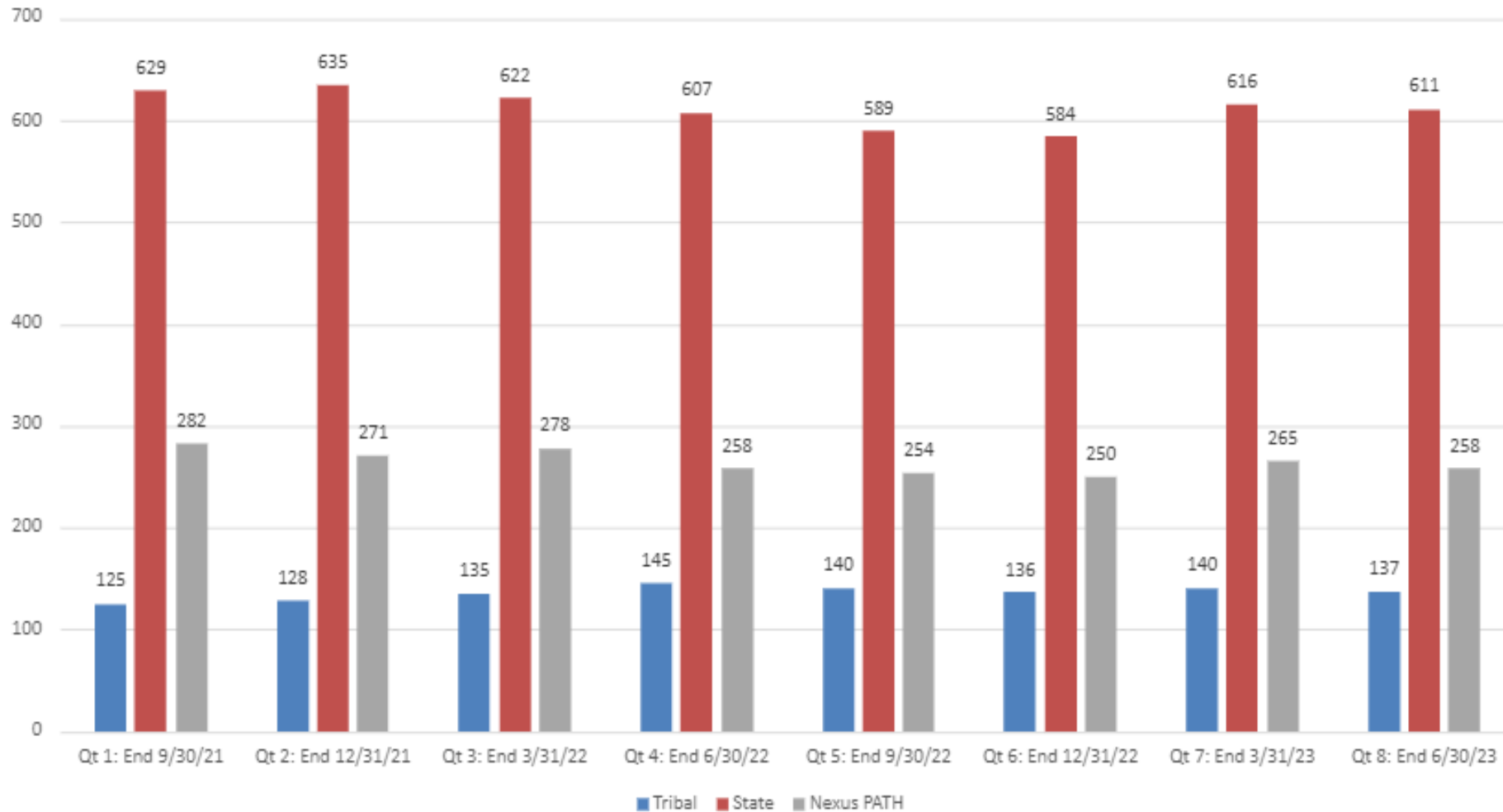
Licensing Data



Family Foster Care Homes

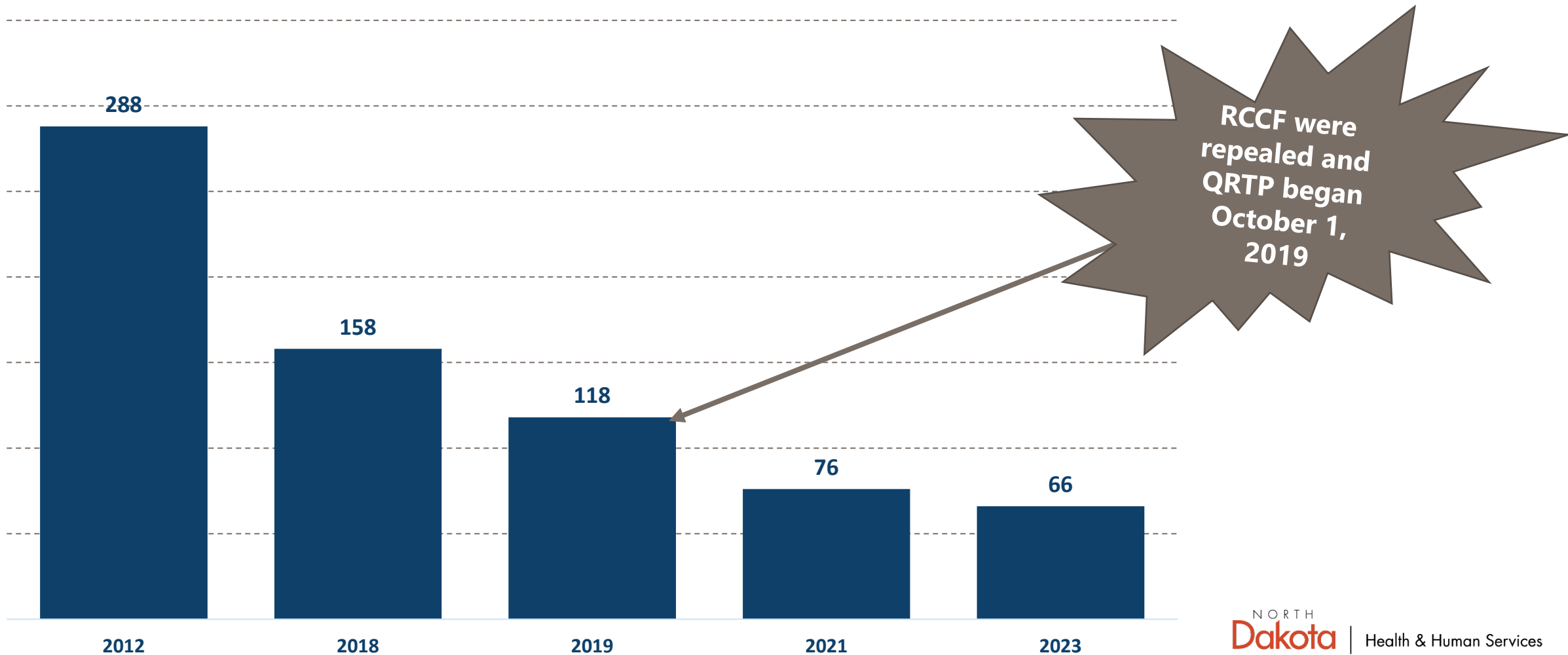
Licensing Data – Provider Type

Safety:
Protection



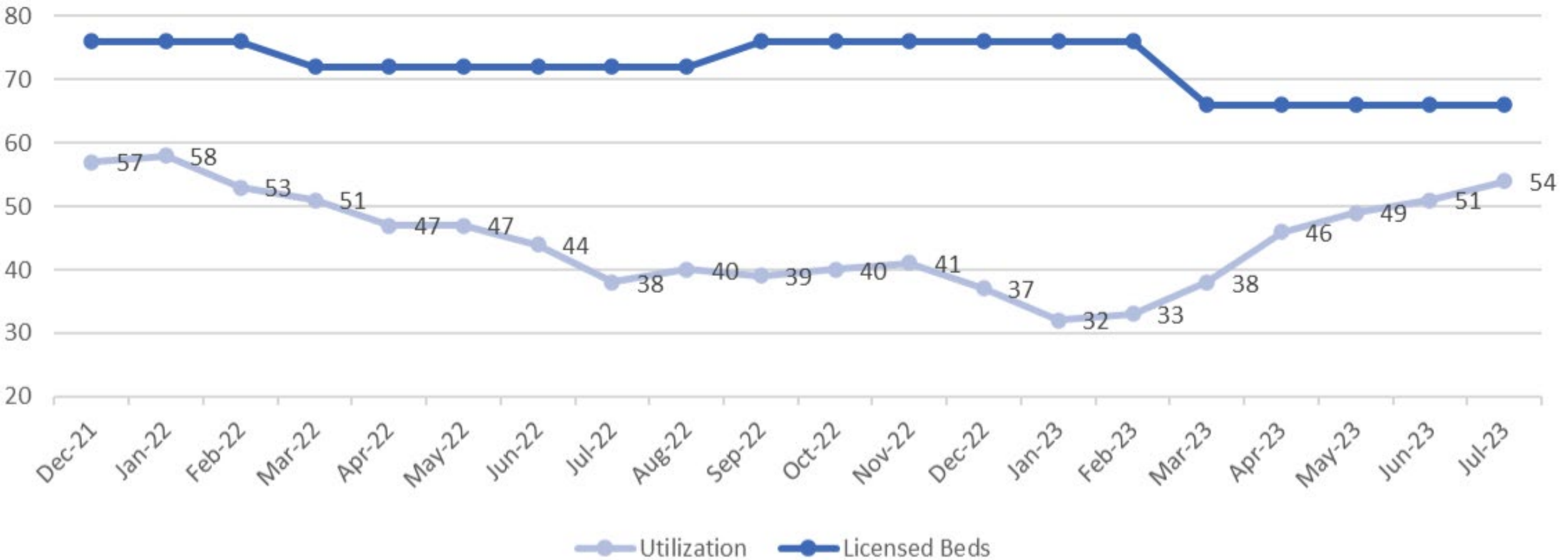
In-State Residential Placement

Residential Child Care Facility (RCCF) to Qualified Residential Treatment Program (QRTP) Beds



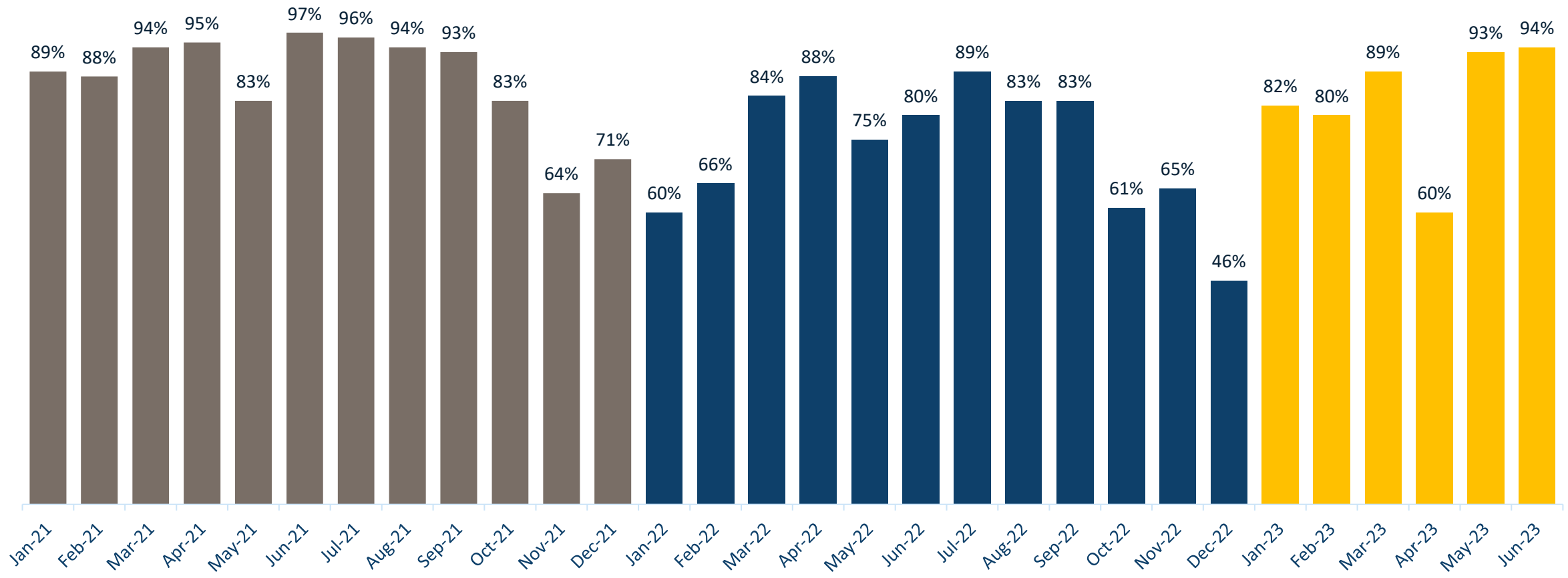
In-State Residential Placement

Q RTP Utilization



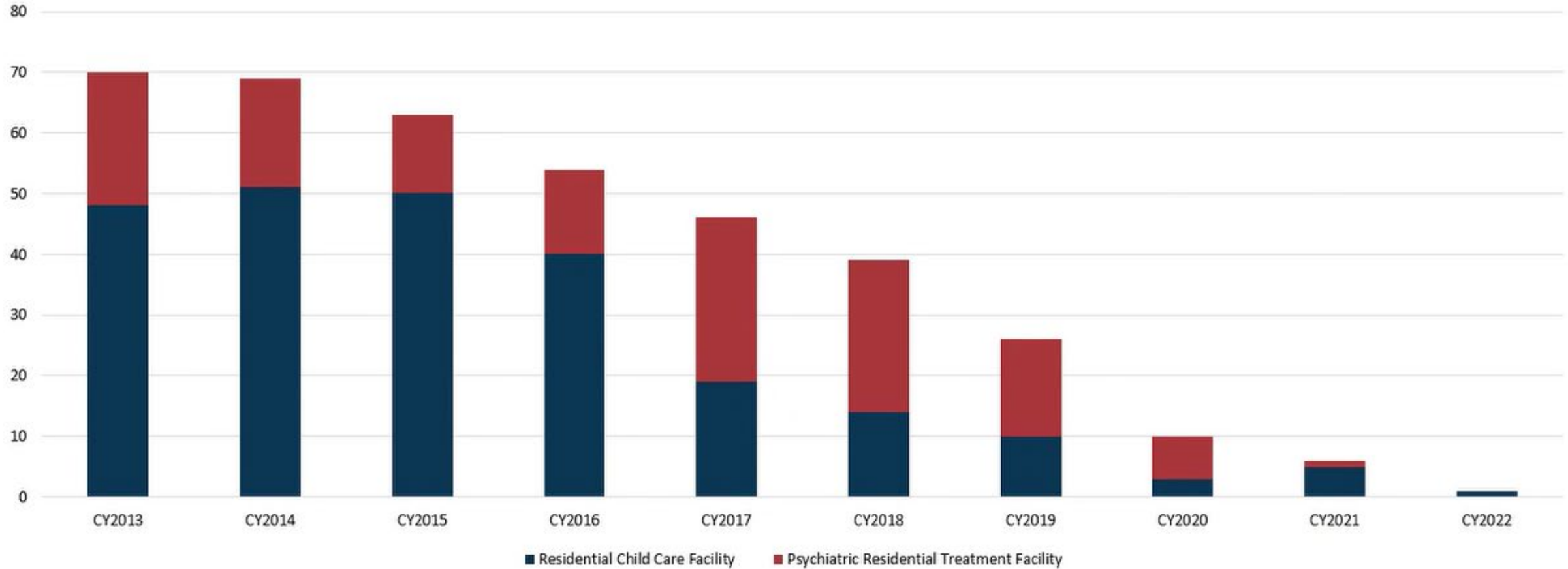
In-State Residential Placement

QRTP Third Party Assessment - Approvals



Out of State – ICPC Residential Placement

98% Reduction since CY 2013



Licensing & Level of Care

SAFETY – PROTECTION

- Family Foster Homes
- Treatment Foster Homes
- Certified Shelter Care Programs
- Qualified Residential Treatment Programs (QRTP)

PERMANENCY

- Licensed Child Placing Agencies (LCPA)
- Supervised Independent Living (SIL)



(833)-FST-HOME

Shelter Care

Emergency Care in a Family Setting

- ✓ Licensed foster homes on call for emergency
- ✓ Diversion
- ✓ Prevention
- ✓ Various options across the state

Certified Shelter Care Program Settings

- ✓ Temporary stay (7 days)
- ✓ Pending next placement option
- ✓ 4 options across the state (Williston, Minot, Grand Forks and Dickinson)



Support for Case Management Field Service Specialists (FSS)

- Foster Care and In-Home cases
- Child and Family Team Meeting
- Technical Assistance
- Resource and Support
- Safety Framework Practice Model Training and Support



Human Service Zones act as the “authorized agent” of the State of North Dakota in the delivery of child protective services.

Permanency

- Family Reunification
- 18+ Continued Care
- Guardianship
- Adoption
- Identified Relatives / Kinship
- Interstate Compact on Placement of Children



Guardianship Subsidy

- **Federal Title IV-E = No maximum # of slots**
 - ✓ 7 active
 - ✓ 9 children pending/conditionally approved
 - ✓ July 1, 2023 = \$26/day
- **State General Fund = 100 maximum # of slots**
 - ✓ 65 active
 - ✓ 28 children pending/conditionally approved
 - ✓ July 1, 2023 = \$18/day

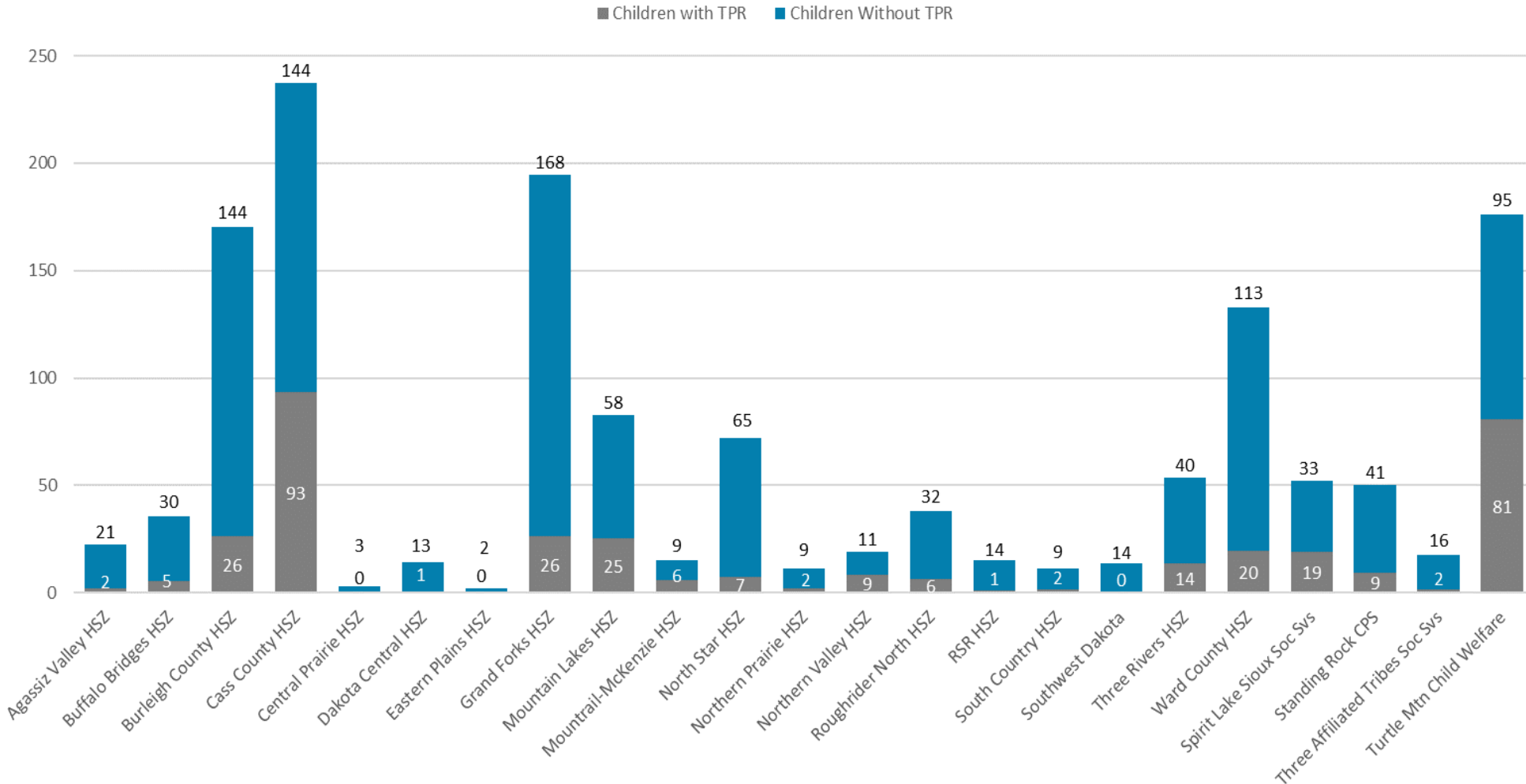


Adoption

- Termination of Parental Rights
- Contract with Catholic Charities, AASK
- Post Adopt Network
- Adoption Subsidy
- Legislative Session – Redesign



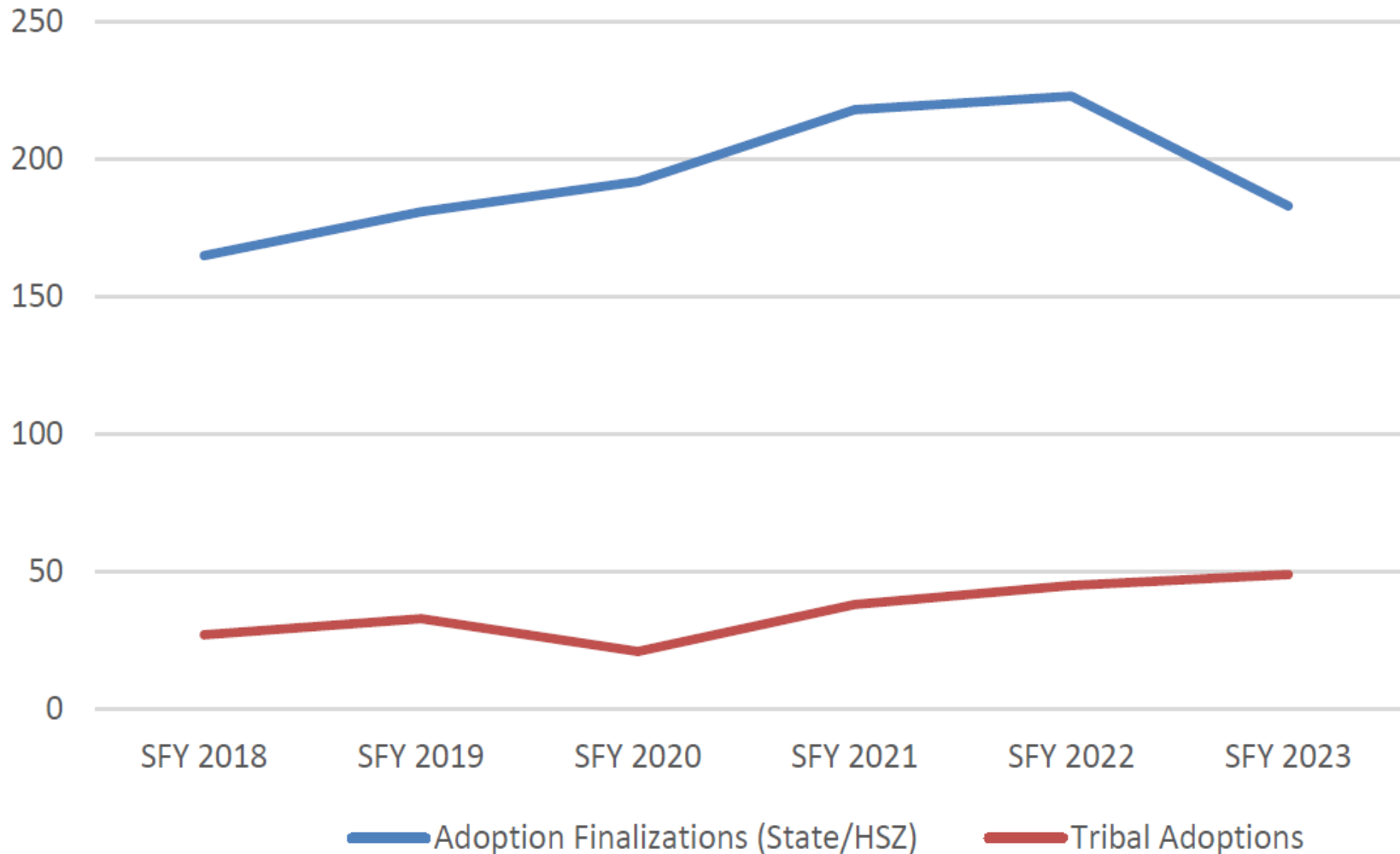
Termination of parental rights cases = 25% of children



Of the **1,421** kids in foster care in SFY2023, 356 (25%) had no legal connection to their biological parents due to Termination of Parental Rights (TPR).

ND Adoption Finalizations

State vs. Tribal Nations



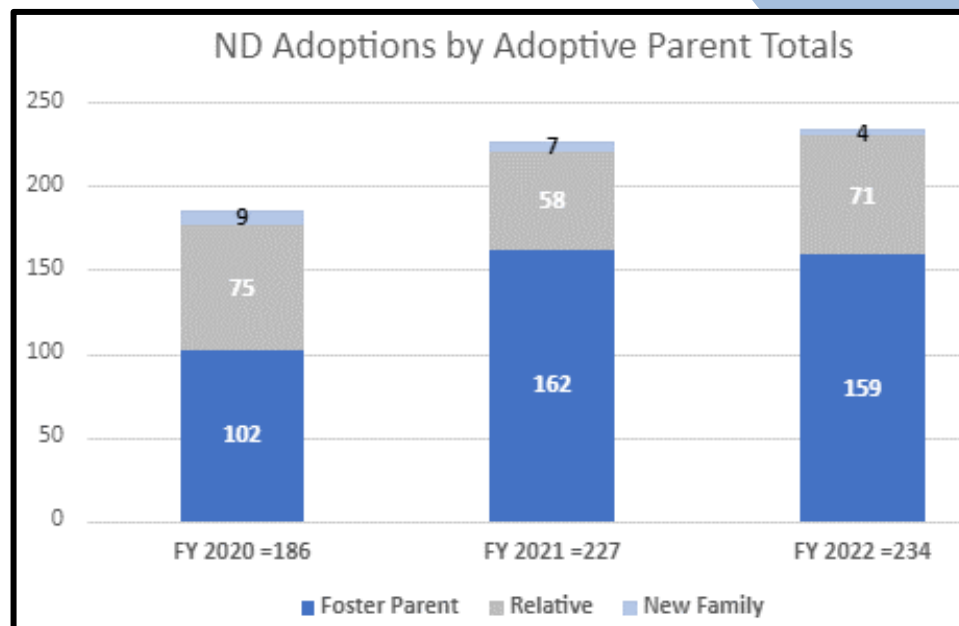
Adoptive Families and Foster Care Providers

- Assessment Process
- Assessing through two lenses' ~ Temporary vs. Lifetime
- Adoption would say roughly **65%** of adoptive families are current foster care providers.
- Foster care licensing would say **13%** of the licensed foster care providers will choose to adopt.

13%

Foster Care
serving 1500
children and
1000 family
providers

Adoption
finalizing
250 child
adoptions
per year



Post Adopt Network – Data

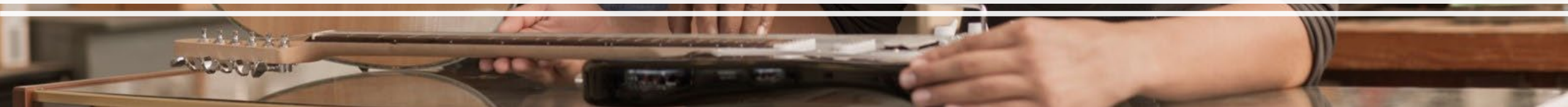
<https://ndpostadopt.org/>

- Served over 533 families
- Hosted 46 events with 1,317 participants
 - ✓ Camp Experiences (Camp Connect/Winter Retreat)
 - ✓ Mom's Retreat / Dad's Retreat
 - ✓ Monthly Events (Parents' Night Out, Kids' Night Out, and Family Night)
 - ✓ Recruitment/Awareness Events
- Held 49 parent support groups
- Hosted 9 parent education groups
- Facilitated 9 post adoption informational trainings to 284 partners and professionals





On the Horizon



Human Trafficking Study

- **SB 2341**

- ✓ FFPSA "Sex trafficking" level of care for treatment
- ✓ Group homes were repealed in 2019
- ✓ Goal of prevention and community services
- ✓ Current treatment in QRTP for those who qualify
- ✓ Placement maximums in residential settings

- **Next Steps**

- ✓ CFS is partnering with Human Trafficking Task Force (AG Office)
 - Review national evidence-based research
 - Establish definitions and common language (victim, suspected, at-risk, etc.)
 - Analyze ND need for children vs. adults
 - Analyze services available today vs. needed



Systemic Challenges



Long Stayers

18% (2023) of children in ND foster care have been in care for 3 years or more. Federal requirement is 12 month.



Complex Needs

3% (2023) of ND children in foster care are known to have several medical and behavioral health needs, and have experienced multiple placement settings with increased supervision, services and support.



Staff Turnover

ND child welfare staff are transitioning each month. This change in workforce interrupts timeliness, permanency achievement, placement stability, reunification, etc.



Request for Group Homes & Assessment Centers

Group homes have been repealed and are no longer federally supported. CFS created temporary certified shelters to assist in short stays. Assessment can happen from a child's home or community.



Disproportionality

Juvenile justice, courts and HHS are working collaboratively to review racial disproportionality of overrepresented racial groups in child welfare.

CFS: What's on the horizon?

- Safe Children and Healthy Families
- Improve timely response
- Engagement of stakeholders to improve practice
- Services closer to home
- Safely reduce foster care
 - ✓ IV-E Prevention services
 - ✓ Kinship ND





CFS Contact information

Cory Pedersen

Director, Children & Family Services

ctpedersen@nd.gov

Kelsey Bless

CFS Licensing Administrator, Children & Family Services

kmbless@nd.gov

www.hhs.nd.gov