



2018 REPORT ON

Child Protection in Vermont



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If you have any questions or comments about this report, please contact Melissa Burt at 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 <http://dcf.vermont.gov/protection/reporting>.

Online Mandated Reporter Training

Our two-hour training for mandated reporters will teach you about the:

- ➔ Dynamics of child abuse and neglect
- ➔ Responsibilities of mandated reporters in Vermont
- ➔ 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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MESSAGE FROM THE DCF COMMISSIONER

I would like to welcome the new Family Services Deputy Commissioner Christine Johnson who joined us on June 10. Christine has worked in Human Services for the last 28 years, most recently as the Executive Director of the Chittenden County Opioid Alliance. In that role, she implemented a collective impact model to address the opioid epidemic, understanding that solving this issue requires a community approach. We are excited that she has joined our team!



For the first time, this report also includes Vermont juvenile court data. This was done to show the life of child protection cases — from the initial intake calls taken by Family Services staff to the conclusion of cases in court. While our caseload continues to rise, we are beginning to see a decrease in the calls to our child protection hotline and in the court filings related to child abuse and neglect. We are hopeful this trend will continue.

We continue looking for opportunities to prevent and address abuse in Vermont, and I would like to highlight a few initiatives:

- We are working with the judiciary, States' Attorneys, Office of the Defender General and legislature on *Children In Need of Supervision (CHINS)* reform.
- A new approach using Judicial Masters is being piloted to help improve the flow of cases through the juvenile court.
- We are hopeful that a *Family Treatment Court Pilot* will be implemented to address instances where substance use is the predominant factor in a CHINS case.
- We are engaged in a legislatively-appointed study through the University of Vermont to look at the factors contributing to the high rate of children coming into State's custody.

Through all of this, we hope to decrease the number of children in DCF custody and safely keep more children in their homes or with relatives. We will continue our efforts to support parents who are struggling with substance use, housing instability and mental health concerns by connecting them with services to help them stabilize.

Our challenge to protect children and support families is ongoing. I am deeply appreciative of our committed Family Services staff, foster parents and community partners who engage with children and families on a daily basis. Thank you.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, which appears to read "Ken Schatz".

Ken Schatz, DCF Commissioner

MESSAGE FROM THE FSD DEPUTY COMMISSIONER

I am honored to be the new Deputy Commissioner of the Family Services Division (FSD) of the Department for Children and Families. FSD plays a pivotal role in both child protection and youth justice in Vermont. We work closely with our current partners and build pathways with new ones to ensure our child welfare system is robust and equipped to support families in their times of greatest need.



We value the role data plays in understanding how we are doing and where to focus our attention to make improvements. This report is an example of how we use data to understand the capacity needed in our child welfare system and to dovetail our responses and programs.

I would like to highlight a few recent initiatives:

- ➔ In 2018, we embarked on a year-long strategic planning process that will guide our division for the next three years. We will use the plan to focus on the priorities identified through this process and look forward to sharing the results in the coming year.
- ➔ We are working with the Capacity Building Center for States on continuous quality improvement in an effort to track our outcomes and evaluate our progress.

A strong system is vital to making sure children grow up in safe and healthy homes, schools and communities. A strong system is one in which everyone plays a role.

I witness the dedication of our staff, foster and kinship foster parents and community partners every day as they work to meet the needs of children, young people and families.

We look forward to working with you to support children and families living lives full of love and hope.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Christine Johnson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Christine Johnson, FSD Deputy Commissioner

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides child protection data for calendar year 2018 in Vermont.

Here are the highlights:

- ➡ 20,779 reports were made to the Child Protection Line in 2018 — 422 fewer than in 2017.
- ➡ At least 77% of the reports made were from mandated reporters; at least 17% were from non-mandated reporters.
- ➡ Of the 20,779 reports received , we opened 5,326 child safety interventions:
 - ⇒ 3,173 investigations
 - ⇒ 2,153 assessments
- ➡ At the conclusion of the 5,326 child safety interventions, 1,281 cases were opened for ongoing services.
- ➡ At the conclusion of the 3,173 investigations, we substantiated 999 reports.
- ➡ Based on these substantiated reports, there were:
 - ⇒ 1,182 unique child victims
 - ⇒ 1,036 incidents of abuse
 - 162 of physical abuse
 - 382 of sexual abuse
 - 65 of risk of sexual abuse
 - 392 of risk of harm
 - 35 of emotional maltreatment/neglect
- ➡ During the last quarter of 2018, there were:
 - ⇒ 1,283 children in DCF custody
 - ⇒ 743 children in the conditional custody of a parent, relative or other person known to the child and family
 - ⇒ 512 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

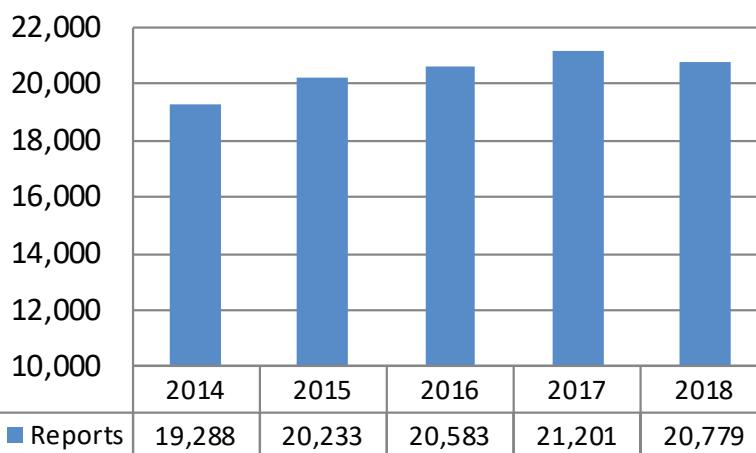
We encourage all Vermonters to call our Child Protection Line if they are concerned about a child's safety and well-being— whether or not they are mandated by law to do so. **1-800-649-5285**

20,779 in 2018

The number of reports made to Vermont's Child Protection Line decreased slightly – from a high of 21,201 in 2017 down to 20,779 in 2018. That's 422 fewer reports.



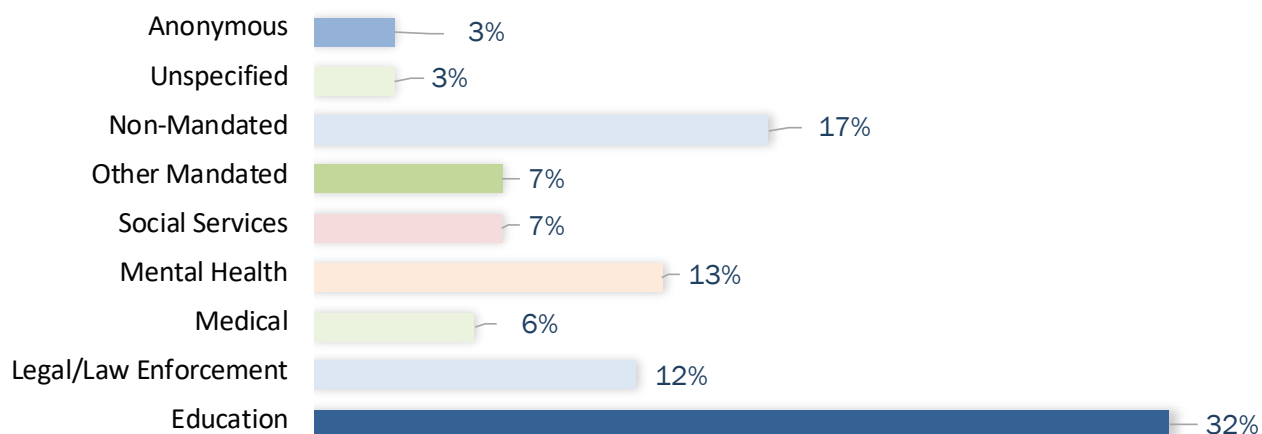
Reports to the Child Protection Line from 2014 to 2018



At least 77% of reports came from mandated reporters.

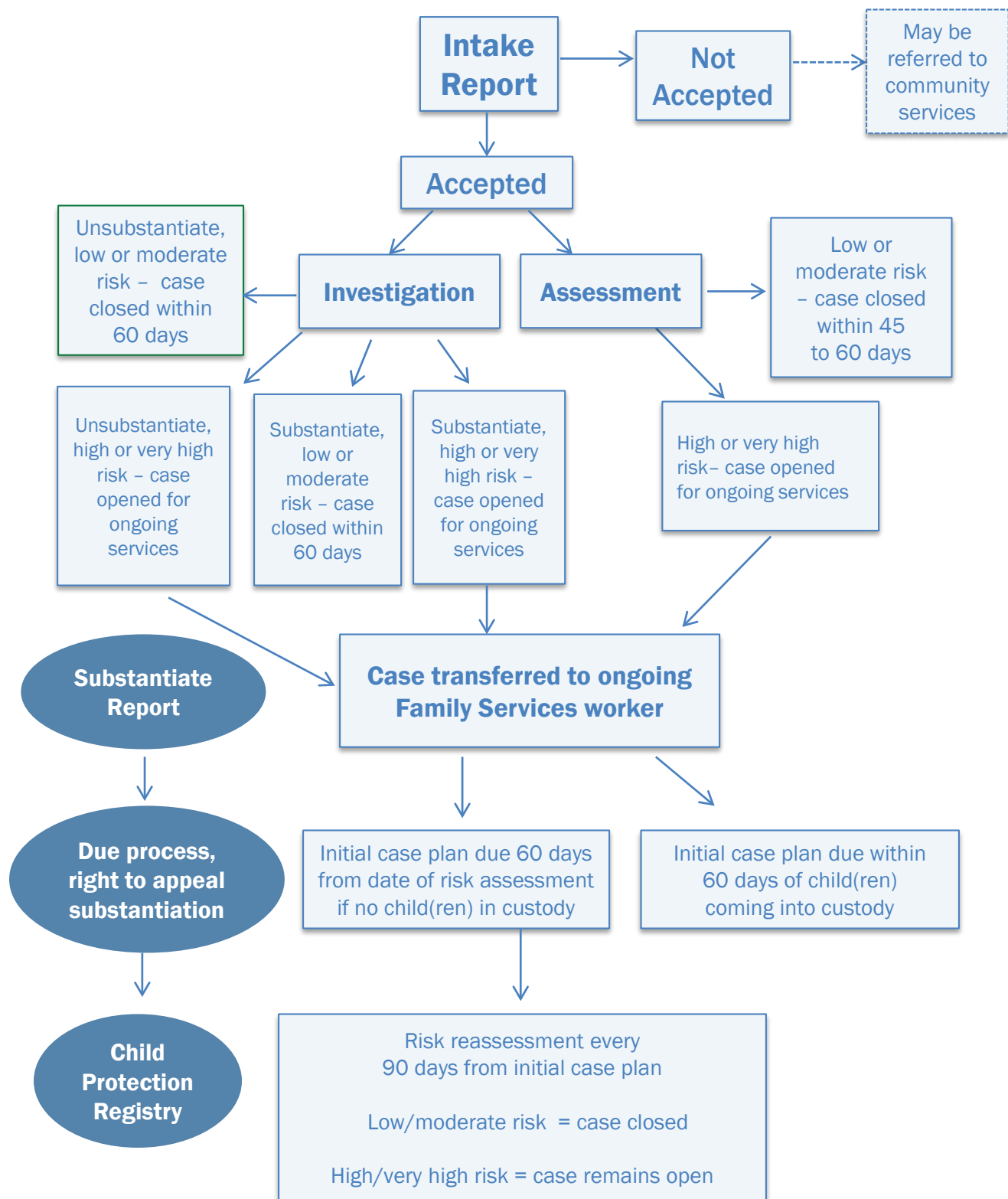
At least 17% of reports came from non-mandated reporters.

Reports Alleging Child Abuse and Neglect by reporter type (2018)



Learn more about mandated reporters at <https://dcf.vermont.gov/protection/reporting/mandated>.

FLOWCHART SHOWING WHAT HAPPENS TO REPORTS



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

REPORTS ACCEPTED FOR INTERVENTION

5,326 Child Safety Interventions in 2018

Vermont law authorizes two types of intervention:

1. Assessments
2. Investigations

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



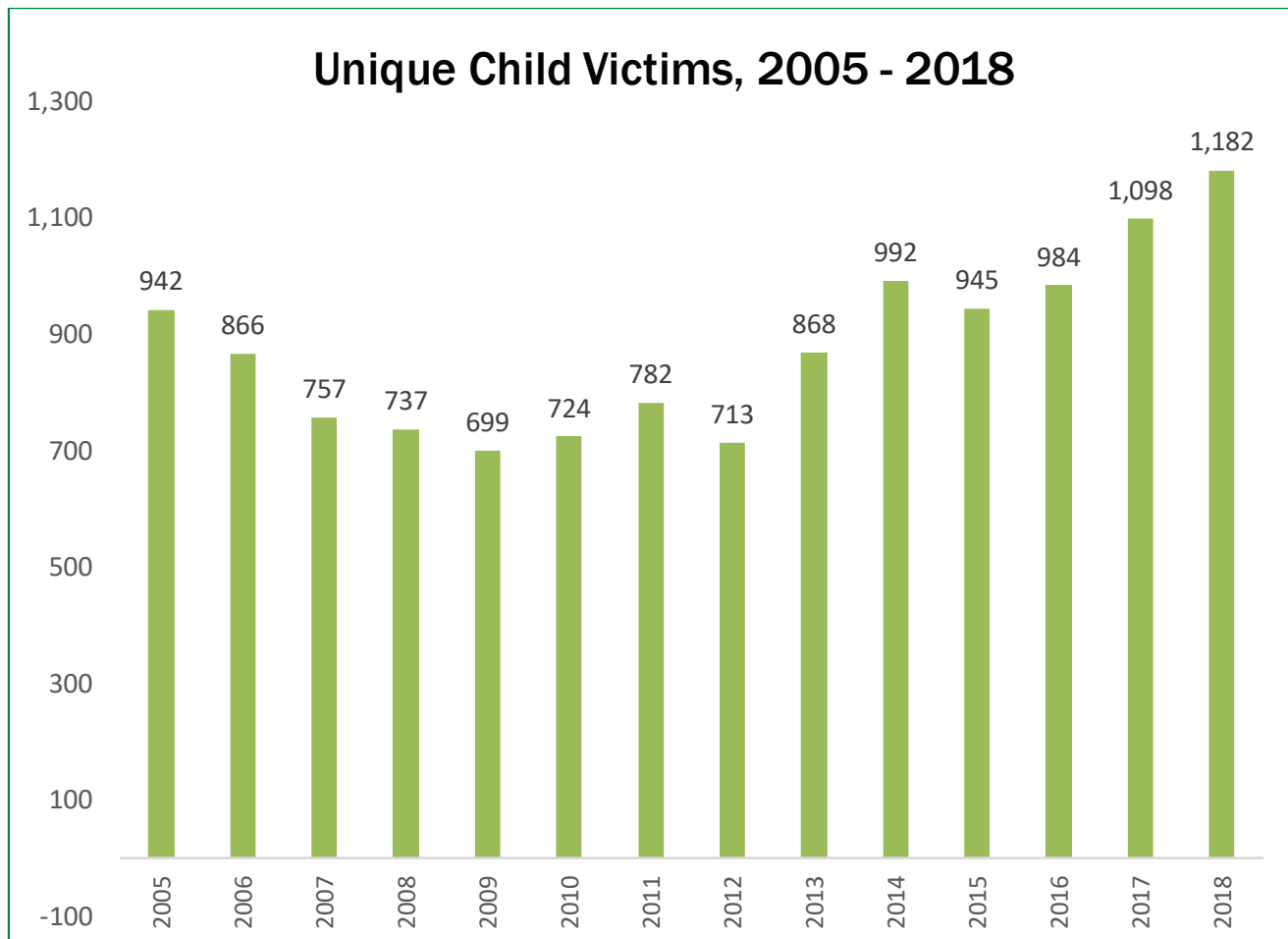
CALENDAR YEAR	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Calls to Vermont's Child Protection Line	19,288	20,233	20,583	21,201	20,779
Total reports accepted for intervention	5,846 (30%)	5,630 (28%)	5,509 (27%)	5,527 (26%)	5,326 (25%)
- Investigations	2,877	2,634	2,835	3,054	3,173
- Assessments	2,969	2,996	2,674	2,473	2,153
• Child abuse assessments	1,688	1,618	1,421	1,351	1,130
• Family assessments	1,281	1,378	1,253	1,122	1,023
Outcomes of interventions:					
- Investigations substantiated ¹	652	773	737	876	999
- Cases opened for services ²	916	1,050	1,068	1,230	1,281

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 reports¹ 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.



¹ 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.

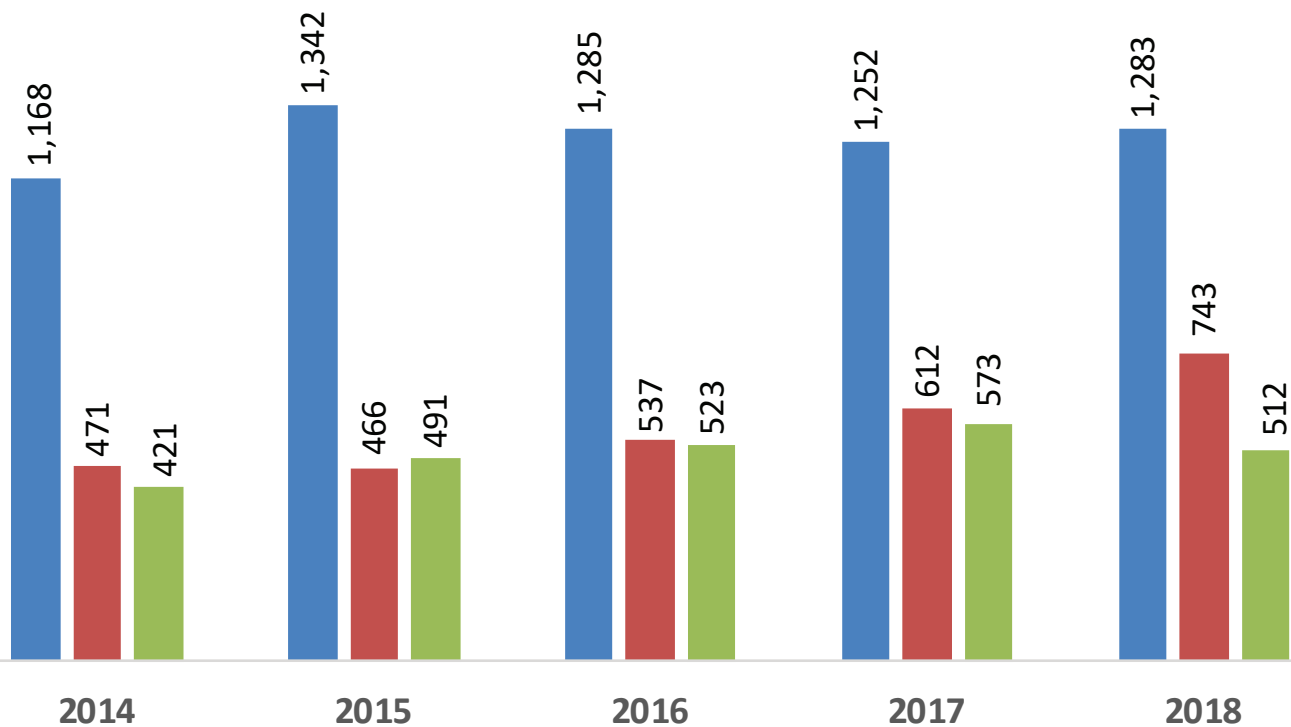


➔ **Families getting ongoing support:**

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 full reports, go to <http://www.vermontjudiciary.org/about-vermont-judiciary/court-statistics-and-reports>.

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

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 2018
- ➡ 2018 data on:
 - ⇒ Reports substantiated by abuser-child relationship
 - ⇒ Reports substantiated by age of abuser
 - ⇒ Reports substantiated by gender of abuser
 - ⇒ 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,
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