



Collaborative Quality Improvement

Division of Child Protection & Permanency

2026 Child & Family Services Review (CFSR) Round 4 Brief

The Child & Family Services Review

The Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) examines how well New Jersey's state-administered child welfare system supports children and families — including the Department of Children and Families (DCF), the courts, community partners, sister state agencies, and service providers. Together, these organizations work to ensure children are safe, families are supported, and services across the system promote long-term stability and well-being.

In Summer and Fall 2025, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Children and Families' (ACF) Children's Bureau (CB) administered Round 4 of the Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) in New Jersey. This periodic federal review assesses how well states meet federal child welfare requirements and examines the experiences of children and families receiving child welfare services. DCF submitted a Statewide Assessment based on administrative data, surveys, stakeholder focus groups and other sources. DCF then participated in a CB-led onsite review, consisting of 65 case record reviews and interviews with children, parents, DCF staff, and other child welfare partners.

In March 2026, CB transmitted its final report to DCF, summarizing CB's findings on the strengths and areas needing improvement within New Jersey's child welfare system. The report detailed New Jersey's performance on seven outcomes related to child safety, permanency, and well-being, as well as seven systemic factors that assess the effectiveness of New Jersey's child welfare infrastructure.

KEY FINDINGS

New Jersey **excels** in...

- Protecting children from abuse and neglect (**96%** of the time).
- Deploying standardized staff training in basic skills and knowledge.
- Responding to the community through authentic partnership, especially with people with lived experience.
- Applying standards equally across resource homes and recruiting resource parents to reflect New Jersey's diverse population.
- Implementing robust information management and quality assurance systems to ensure services provided to children and families meet the highest standards.

New Jersey is **making progress** in...

- Maintaining children safely in their homes (**80%**) when possible.
- Linking children with the services to meet relational (**73%**), educational (**87%**), and physical and mental health (**75%**) needs.

New Jersey is **making efforts to improve** in...

- Achieving permanency and stability for children in out-of-home placement - **one quarter** of children met the CFSR standard.
- Enhancing caregiver capacity to provide for their children's needs – **42%** of families met this CFSR standard.

A HOME FOR EVERY CHILD

DCF is partnering with ACF on the A Home for Every Child initiative, a national initiative focused on ensuring every child has a safe, stable and permanent home. As part of this work, DCF used findings from the CFSR to develop strategies to increase the ratio of licensed resource homes to children in out-of-home placement to at least 1:1 – meaning at least one licensed resource home for every child in out-of-home placement. This approach includes recruiting and supporting appropriate resource parents, and on safely reducing the number of children in out-of-home placement through expanded prevention and timely permanency.

This ratio compares the total number of licensed resource homes to the total number of children in out-of-home placement on the last day of each month. It reflects the availability of resource homes, not bed capacity.

As of May 2026...
New Jersey’s ratio is **0.89** — meaning there are fewer licensed resource homes than children in out-of-home placement.

Numerator: 2,498 licensed resource homes (with 5,124 resource beds statewide)

Denominator: 2,822 children in out-of-home placement

Increasing the number of resource homes by...



Developing an electronic system to monitor **resource home availability**



Using **targeted recruitment** for additional resource homes



Streamlining the **licensing process** for kin care



Improving **available supports** for resource parents

Decreasing the number of children in out-of-home placement by...



Expanding prevention programming



Increasing availability of best practice resources to enhance family engagement



Implementing **National Training and Development curriculum** for resource parents



Partnering with the **Administrative Office of the Courts** to reduce permanency time





Areas of Strength

Several areas of strength emerged during the CFSR process, reflecting sustained investment in the people and systems that keep New Jersey's children and families safe, healthy, and connected. The Children's Bureau found that New Jersey does an excellent job of protecting children from abuse and neglect, supported by strong statewide systems for investigation, staff training, information management, and quality assurance.

Safety: Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect

DCF places the highest priority on keeping children safe from abuse and neglect and maintains timely, high-quality investigative practice. Dedicated infrastructure, specialized staff, and comprehensive policy all contribute to strong safety practice. When threats to safety arise on open cases, DCF immediately acts to address the concerns. CB found that **96%** of investigations were initiated in a timely manner and that New Jersey protects children from abuse and neglect **96%** of the time. New Jersey achieved substantial conformity on this CFSR outcome.

New Jersey also demonstrated strong performance related to keeping children safe in out-of-home placement. The rate of maltreatment in out-of-home placement was **3.96** victimizations per 100,000 care-days, significantly better than the national rate of **9.07**. Recurrence of maltreatment, measured as the percentage of children who experienced maltreatment more than once within 12 months, was **5.2%**, which was also statistically better than the national performance of **9.7%**. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services reported that only two of the first 20 states reviewed in CFSR Round 4 achieved substantial conformity on this safety outcome, underscoring New Jersey's exceptional performance.*

**In the past 25 years, [no state](#) has met all seven outcomes and all seven systemic factors.*



Systemic Strengths

CB found several systemic strengths in New Jersey's child welfare system, determining that five of the seven systemic factors were in substantial conformity. New Jersey's **information management system**, NJ SPIRIT, enables DCF to accurately track each child's identity, status, location, and permanency goals. DCF also maintains a strong **quality assurance system** that evaluates the quality of services, identifies strengths and needs, and assesses the effectiveness of ongoing improvement efforts.

CB found that **staff and provider training** in New Jersey is strong. DCF standardized both initial and ongoing staff training and maintains tracking and evaluation systems that monitor training completion and effectiveness. While resource and adoptive parent training was identified as an area needing improvement, DCF has already started to strengthen this work by improving initial training compliance, updating curricula, and enhancing feedback mechanisms.

CB also identified DCF's commitment to **community responsiveness** as a strength. New Jersey engages stakeholders effectively and coordinates services with other federal programs. DCF gathers input from stakeholders through listening sessions, focus groups, and ongoing consultation with courts, youth, parents, service providers, resource parents, and other child- and family-serving agencies when developing its five-year Child and Family Services Plan and Annual Progress and Services Reports. DCF consults with stakeholders continuously through various councils, committees, and advisory boards, and collaborates widely with federal programs to ensure coordinated services for shared populations.

Resource and adoptive parent licensing, recruitment, and retention were also identified as strengths. CB found that New Jersey applies state standards consistently across all resource homes and residential care centers, maintains strict safety requirements through background checks and case planning, and recruits resource parents to reflect the diversity of new Jersey's population.



Areas of Progress

New Jersey's child welfare system is constantly improving. While New Jersey did not achieve substantial conformity with federal requirements in several areas reviewed during the CFSR, it still demonstrated substantive progress, including in preserving the relational, educational, physical and mental well-being of children.

Safety: Children are safely maintained in their homes whenever possible and appropriate

When DCF intervenes to protect a child's safety, it strives to keep children safely in their homes whenever possible to reduce the trauma of family separation. In 2024, New Jersey had one of the lowest out-of-home placement rates in the country at **0.8** placements per 1,000 children.¹

Using statewide administrative data, the majority of children (**90%**) with active CP&P involvement remain in their own homes with their families. Supported by a robust safety and risk assessment infrastructure, CP&P caseworkers assess safety and risk of all children involved with the agency, with **95%** of investigations having a completed safety assessment and **98%** of investigations having a completed risk assessment in FFY 2024.

During the onsite case review, CB found that New Jersey maintained children safely in their homes **80%** of the time, provided adequate in-home services to prevent removal or re-entry **63%** of the time, and demonstrated strong risk and safety assessment and management **80%** of the time.

1. Administration for Children & Families. (2026 January). *Child Maltreatment*. Children's Bureau. <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/data-research/child-maltreatment>.

Identify and enhance support for children at risk of delayed permanency

DCF will develop a predictive analytics model to support decision making related to children in out-of-home placement that are most at risk for delayed permanency.

Family Engagement

DCF will identify national best practices, trainings and other resources on family engagement. DCF has already made significant changes to emphasize and guide case practice with parents, specifically with fathers. These include training guidance for caseworkers on the importance of working with fathers and the creation of the Office of Family Voice, the Parents Council, and D.A.D.S. Council. Furthermore, DCF made changes to the statewide information system to track visitation with mothers and fathers separately. DCF recognizes that family involvement increases the rate of successful goal achievement and results in reduced risk of future maltreatment and expects caseworkers to authentically engage parents, children, youth, and resource parents throughout the life of the case.

Areas of Progress (cont'd)

Permanency & Well-Being: Family relationships are preserved, and children receive services to meet their educational needs, physical health needs, and mental health needs

DCF prioritizes maintaining the highest levels of relational, educational, and physical and mental well-being of children in out-of-home placement. Whenever possible, DCF prioritizes placing children entering out-of-home placement with kin. In 2024, **57%** of children were placed with kin at the time of entry into out-of-home placement, compared to less than **30%** of children who were initially placed with kin in 2010. New Jersey also prioritizes placement of siblings together and ensures sibling visitation. In 2024, **82%** of children in sibling groups of two or three were placed with all their siblings. CB found that **73%** of the time, the continuity of family relationships and connections was preserved for children in out-of-home placement in New Jersey.

When CP&P determines that a school-aged child must be removed from their living situation to ensure the child's safety, the Division prioritizes maintaining the child in their school and ensuring that appropriate educational supports are established to facilitate academic success. Through an internal quality assurance process, DCF found that educational stability of children was an area of strength, scoring **91%** in alignment with best practice and policy. However, learning and development was an area needing improvement, with only **66-75%** alignment with best practice and policy. CB found that **87%** of the time, children received appropriate services to meet their educational needs. During Round 4, only **5%** of states reviewed were in conformity with this factor.

Ensuring children receive services to meet their physical and mental health needs has been and continues to be a high priority for DCF.

Over **90%** of children received a pre-placement exam, initial mental health screening, and ongoing mental health screening. **86%** of children in out-of-home placement received semi-annual dental exams and **65%** received a timely, comprehensive medical exam when entering placement. CB found that **75%** of the time, children receive adequate services to meet their physical and mental health needs, and **85%** of children have their physical health needs met.



Implement the National Training and Development Curriculum (NTDC) for Resource Parents

DCF will also improve the quality of out-of-home placement by providing training for resource parents through the national training and development curriculum (NTDC). This training includes updated trauma-informed content and is more receptive to child/family connections. Research shows that children placed with NTDC caregivers were **2.9 times** more likely to achieve permanency through adoption and kinship legal guardianship. By ensuring resource parents have what they need through enhanced engagement (e.g., maintaining the Resource Parent Council, undertaking periodic resource parent surveys, bi-annual resource parent town halls, and facilitating resource parent symposiums), children are more likely to receive the care that they need, including educational supports as well as physical and mental health services.

Systemic Areas of Progress

DCF works alongside the courts to ensure youth and families are successful in case planning and throughout all necessary legal proceedings. The case review system functions to ensure each child has a written case plan that is developed jointly with the child's parents. The system also depends on New Jersey's judicial system to ensure that, for each child, periodic reviews happen every six months, permanency hearings occur every 12 months, and that filings for termination of parental rights (TPR) proceedings occur in a timely manner when they are appropriate. Resource parents and caregivers are expected to receive notification of any review or hearing held with respect to children in their care and that they have a right to be heard in any review or hearing held with respect to the child.

While not fully meeting CFSR substantial conformity standards, New Jersey's practice around periodic reviews and timely permanency hearings is strong, with **98%** of children receiving timely periodic reviews. **88%** of children receive timely permanency hearings, including **95%** of children receiving their initial hearing and **84%** of children receiving subsequent hearings. Written case plans, TPR, and notice of hearing and reviews to caregivers were considered areas needing improvement during the latest CFSR.

Because so many of these activities are done in conjunction with the courts, DCF will continue to engage with the New Jersey Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) and identify areas where support can be provided.



Areas of Improvement

Permanency: Children achieving timely permanency and stability were areas needing improvement

DCF's policy and practice emphasize permanency and stability and ensuring that children in out-of-home placement maintain continuity of family relationships, especially through kin placements and ensuring sibling connections. As the number of children in placement continues to decline statewide, DCF continues to examine factors that can delay permanency so children can achieve reunification, guardianship or adoption as quickly and safely as possible.

Placement stability, defined by CB as the number of placement moves per 1,000 days spent in out-of-home placement, was a bright spot for New Jersey. DCF's performance of **4.08** is statistically better than the national performance of **4.48**, although this measure has been creeping up steadily. In 2024, **79%** of children entering out-of-home placement experienced fewer than three placements in the first 12 months, compared to **83%** in 2022.

Permanency within 12 months for children entering out-of-home placement was achieved **35%** of the time, compared to the national performance of 35.2%, which was not statistically different. For children who had been in out-of-home placement for 12 to 23 months, the rate of achieving permanency in 12 months was **40%**, compared to the national performance of 43.8%, which was statistically worse. For children who had been in out-of-home placement for 24 months or more, **37.5%** achieved permanency in 12 months, compared to the national performance of 37.3%, which was not statistically different. Permanency remains an area needing improvement for NJ.

The reentry rate, defined as the percent of children who reenter out-of-home placement within 12 months of being discharged to permanency, was **5.8%** compared to the national performance of 5.6%, which was not statistically different. Reentry among children younger than 1 and children aged 6 to 10 years has doubled over the last three reporting years, with decreases for all other age groups. Similarly, reentry has increased by **46%** among Black children, decreased by **49%** among Hispanic children, and decreased by **24%** among White children in the same period.

In the onsite review, CB determined that children have permanency and stability in their living situations **25%** of the time. This was derived from a combination of factors: stability of out-of-home placement (**65%** of the time), having a permanency goal for the child (**50%** of the time), and achieving reunification, guardianship, adoption, or another planned permanent living arrangement (**33%** of the time).



Enhanced assessment and action planning of resource parent needs

DCF will enhance engagement with existing resource parents, e.g., maintain Resource Parent Council, undertake periodic resource parent surveys, host bi-annual resource parent town halls, and facilitate a resource parent symposium. DCF will use learnings from these processes to improve support for resource family caregivers.

Areas of Improvement (cont'd)

Well-Being: Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children's needs.

Outreach and engagement efforts are critical in assessing and understanding the needs of children, parents, and resource parents. DCF recognizes that family involvement in planning increases the rate of successful goal achievement and results in reduced risk of future maltreatment. As such, DCF expects that caseworkers authentically engage parents, children, and resource parents throughout the life of the case.

Round 4 of the CFSR showed that, while New Jersey had strengths in engaging and assessing the needs of children and resource parents, there were continued challenges in these practices for parents, especially fathers. In 2024, caseworkers met policy expectations around contact with children in **93%** of cases, although this was true only **68%** of the time for contacts with parents of children in out-of-home placement with a goal of reunification. And, through internal quality assurance processes, DCF found that the quality of assessment and engagement with children, fathers, mothers, resource parents, and families could also be improved.

CB determined that families had enhanced capacity to provide for their children's needs **42%** of the time. This was based on the scores of four underlying items: needs and services of child, parents, and resource parents (**46%** of the time), child and family involvement in case planning (**60%** of the time), caseworker visits with children (**86%** of the time), and caseworker visits with parents (**51%** of the time).



Resource Home Dashboard

DCF will develop and make available a dashboard for real-time resource home and recruitment data.

Geographic Information Systems mapping to support foster home recruitment

DCF will develop a Geographic Information Systems (GIS) model to more strategically recruit foster families through analysis of spatial data. The mapping will inform decisions throughout the Department's recruitment and licensing processes, e.g., targeted recruitment.

Kinship Licensing Regulations

DCF will continue efforts to increase kinship placements across the state by reducing the burden to license kin and decreasing the amount of time it takes to license kin. DCF will implement the recently published revised kin licensing regulations via policy and practice updates.

Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC)/DCF Joint Court Improvement Program (CIP) Efforts

DCF will collaborate with the AOC to develop the AOC/DCF Joint CIP Project aimed at reducing time to permanency. This continuous quality improvement project is required for the CIP grant.

Systemic Areas of Progress

DCF does provide a wide array of services in conjunction with the core set of child welfare and child protection services assessed in the CFSR. These include services for children with behavioral health disorders, substance use disorders, and intellectual/developmental disabilities, domestic violence services, child abuse and neglect prevention services, housing services, services for transition-age youth and young adults, school-linked services, and services to improve parenting, such as Family Connects NJ, New Jersey's recently launched universal home-visiting program.

Both items under the systemic factor of Service Array and Resource Development were areas needing improvement: DCF's array of services and individualizing services. The data provided suggested that service availability and accessibility varied statewide, and rural areas had greater barriers to accessing services due to challenges around fewer local providers, and limited evening and weekend hours. Other barriers to receiving services included lack of transportation and housing, and lack of availability and access to mental health services, therapeutic visitation, and specialized care for high-need children. While New Jersey seeks to meet all requirements, no other state reviewed during Round 4 of the CFSR were found to be in conformity with this systemic factor.



Other Strategic Initiatives

Delivering excellent services that lead to positive outcomes

Delivering high-quality services is a core priority for DCF. To strengthen service quality across New Jersey, DCF launched a systemwide monitoring approach to improve how contracted programs are reviewed and supported. This approach includes clear performance standards, consistent feedback loops, and monitoring methods and tools shaped by listening to participant needs and elevating the voices of people with lived experience. Guided by the Availability, Accessibility, Acceptability, and Quality (AAAQ) framework — selected through research, stakeholder input, and public feedback — DCF developed data collection tools and program-specific scorecards that help identify the aspects of services families value most and highlight barriers such as language access, transportation, and service hours. (NJ DCF, 2021).

Alongside this monitoring work, DCF updated its Collaborative Quality Improvement (CoQI) process to ensure child and family outcomes remain central to all improvement efforts. CoQI uses monitoring data, program evaluation findings, and research evidence to identify strengths and challenges, diagnose root causes, set priorities, develop strategies, and track progress over time. Together, these efforts help DCF understand whether families can access services when and how they need them — and ensure that family voices meaningfully shape service delivery statewide.

CFSR PERFORMANCE OUTCOMES

