

**Charles D. Baker**  
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Lieutenant Governor



**Marylou Sudders**  
Secretary

**Linda S. Spears**  
Commissioner

# **Annual Report on Foster Care Review**

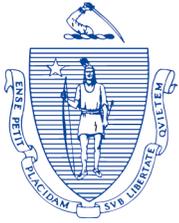
**As Required by M.G.L. 18B § 6A**

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Massachusetts Department of Children & Families



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LEGISLATIVE REPORT ON FOSTER CARE REVIEW

This document serves as the annual report regarding foster care reviews during the previous fiscal year of July 1, 2015 through June 31, 2016 as required by MGL Chapter 18B Section 6a which in that reads in part:

“..., The director of the unit shall submit an annual report to the governor, the child advocate and the joint committee on children, families and persons with disabilities on the performance of the unit. The report shall contain: an analysis and evaluation of the foster care review system and recommendations, if any, for its improvement; the total number of children in the care of the department or its agents during the previous fiscal year; the number of children who were in its care for more than 6 months; the number of reviews conducted; the number of children returned to their parents or guardian; the number of children for whom guardians, other than the department or its agent, were appointed; the number of children released for adoption; and the number of children adopted.”

This language asks for the Department to particularly comment on three areas: to provide an analysis and evaluation of the current foster care review system, to provide recommendations, if any, for its improvement, and to provide several data elements.

**I. An analysis and evaluation of the foster care review system**

The Foster Care Review Unit (FCRU) is an independent unit within the Department of Children and Families. The FCRU conducts case reviews for families within six months after a child is placed out of the home and every six months thereafter when a child, up to age 22, remains out of the home and in the care of the Department. A Foster Care Review (FCR) is conducted by a three member panel consisting of a case reviewer from the FCRU who convenes the meeting, a manager or supervisor from the DCF area office who is not directly responsible for the case under review, and a volunteer case reviewer from the community who is trained by the FCRU.

The FCR focuses on the extent to which the child's needs for safety, permanency, and well-being are being met. The panel makes determinations and recommendations that inform the next period of action planning with families in order to achieve a child's permanency plan by a projected date. The structure of the FCR allows parents and children 14 and

older to attend and actively participate in the review process for their family; these parties, in addition to substitute care providers and children’s attorneys, have the right to grieve determinations and request a Fair Hearing when a panel determines that an alternative permanency plan is most appropriate for a child. Parents are allowed to bring a person of support with them. Interpreters are secured for reviews, when needed, by the DCF area office working with the family.

The statewide FCR unit is currently staffed with 38 case reviewers, who are configured into seven teams, and four volunteer coordinators, who supervise the FCR volunteer case reviewers. These numbers reflects an increase of one case review team which occurred over FY2016 to meet the workload needs. Recruitment of FCR volunteer case reviewers is active and efforts are being made to establish a volunteer pool that represents the families being served by the panel.

**II. Recommendations, if any, for its improvement**

The FCRU is currently updating policy and procedures as it prepares to transition to iFamilynet; it is anticipated that these updates will better inform DCF practice and have a greater impact on achieving the safety, permanency, and well-being of children. The FCRU has obtained the FCR invitation translated into three alternate languages and is working to secure additional languages.

**III. Data elements**

the total number of children in the care of the department or its agents during the previous fiscal year;	18,253
the number of children who were in its care for more than 6 months;	13,584
the number of reviews conducted <sup>1</sup> ;	11,770
the number of children returned to their parents or guardian;	14,576
the number of children for whom guardians, other than the department or its agent, were appointed;	386
the number of children released for adoption; and	829
the number of children adopted.	583

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<sup>1</sup> A "review" may cover one or more children in a family/sibling group.