

Overview and Update Child Welfare

Senate Human Services Committee

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www.dcyf.wa.gov



Washington State Department of
CHILDREN, YOUTH & FAMILIES

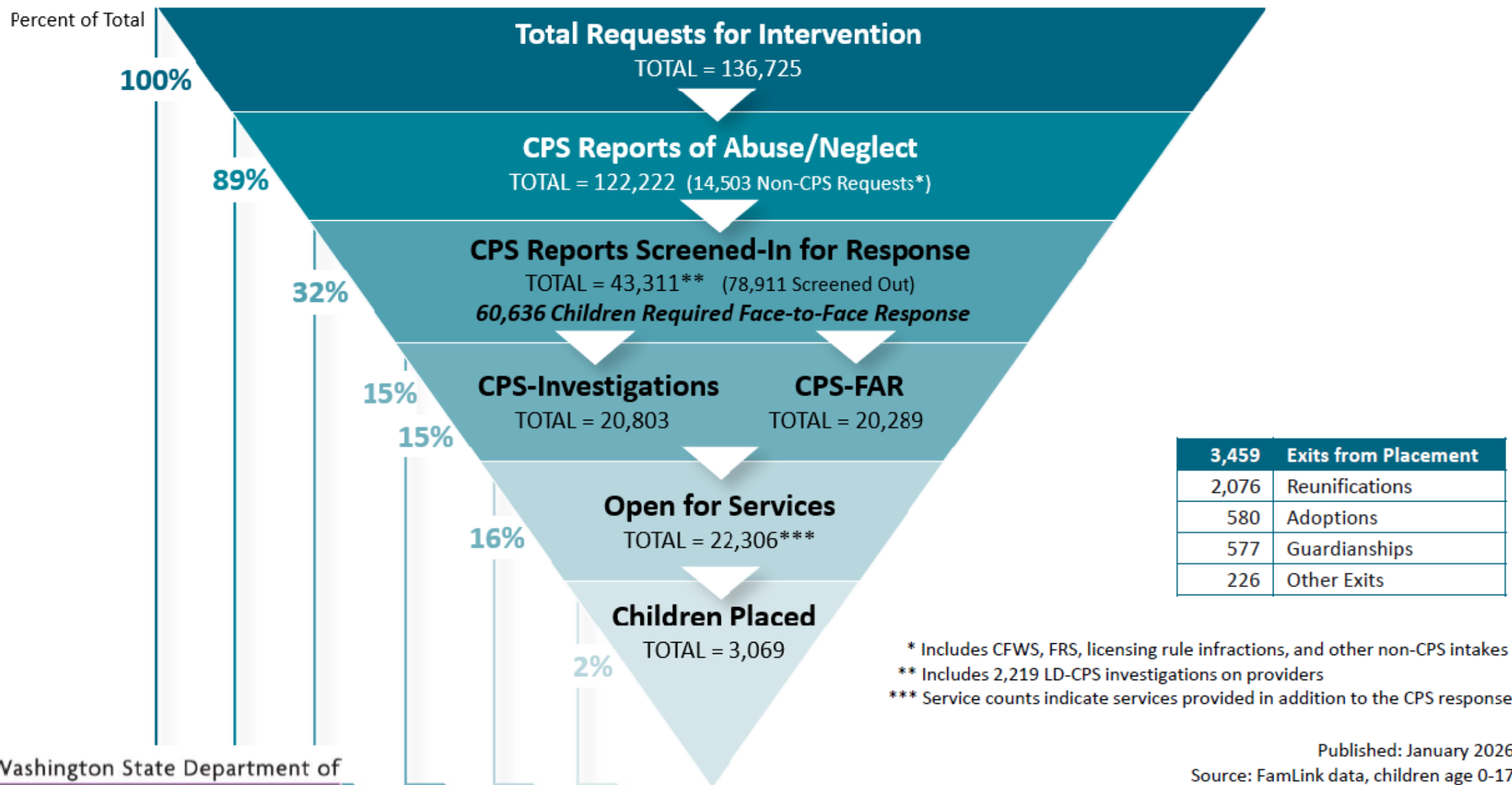
What is Child Welfare?

DCYF is the lead agency in Washington State responsible for investigating allegations of Child Abuse or Neglect:

- Screens allegations
- Conducts Child Protective Services (CPS) Investigations
- Provides CPS-Family Assessment Response (CPS-FAR)



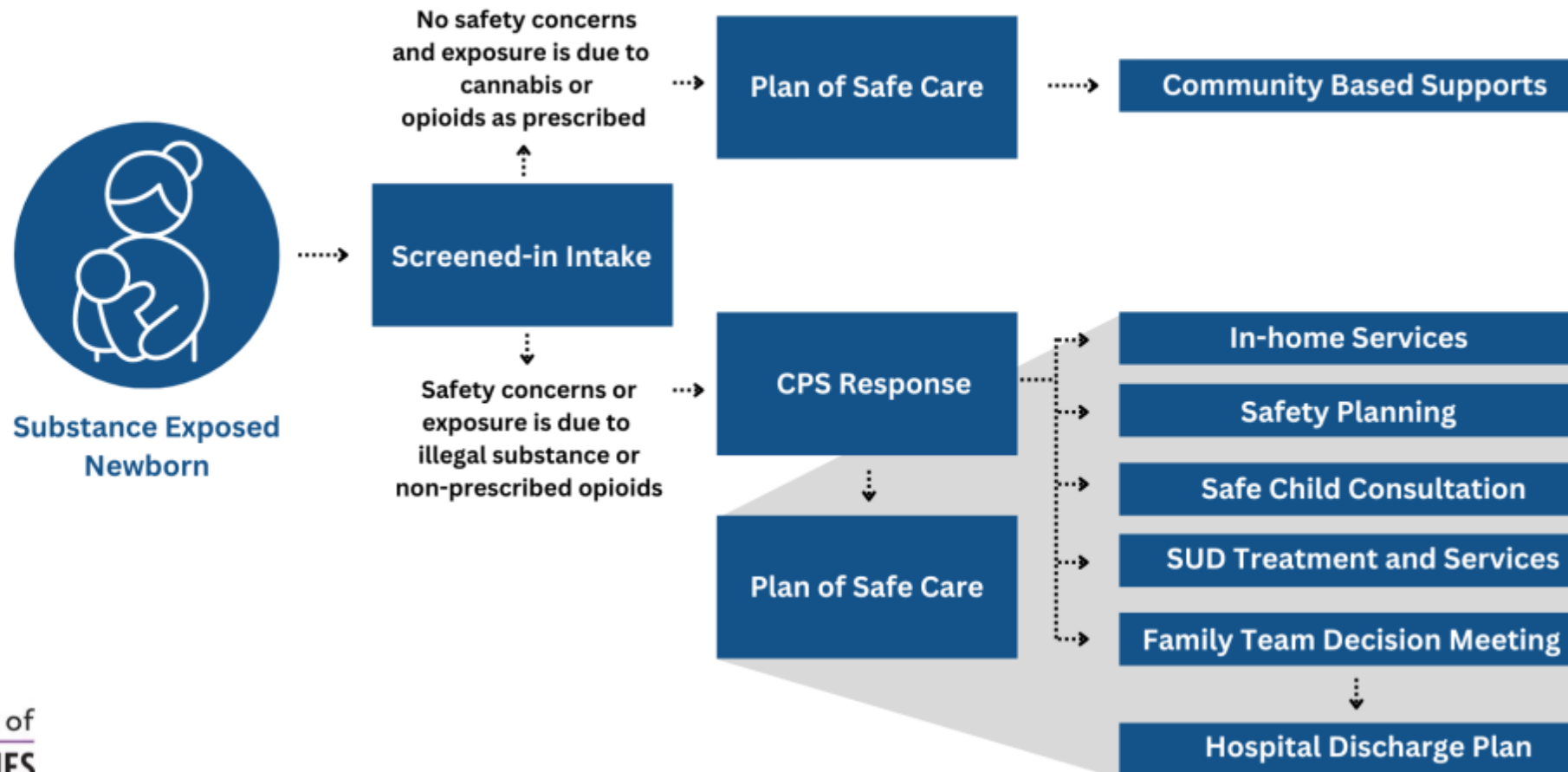
Child Welfare Overview SFY 2025



Alternate Pathway for Substance Exposed Newborns: Plan of Safe Care

Infants with specific substance exposure and no safety concerns are referred to Help Me Grow

When safety concerns are present and DCYF initiates a CPS response, a Plan of Safe Care is still created to inform services and supports for the family



For more information visit:
www.dcyf.wa.gov/safety/plan-safe-care

What is a CPS response?

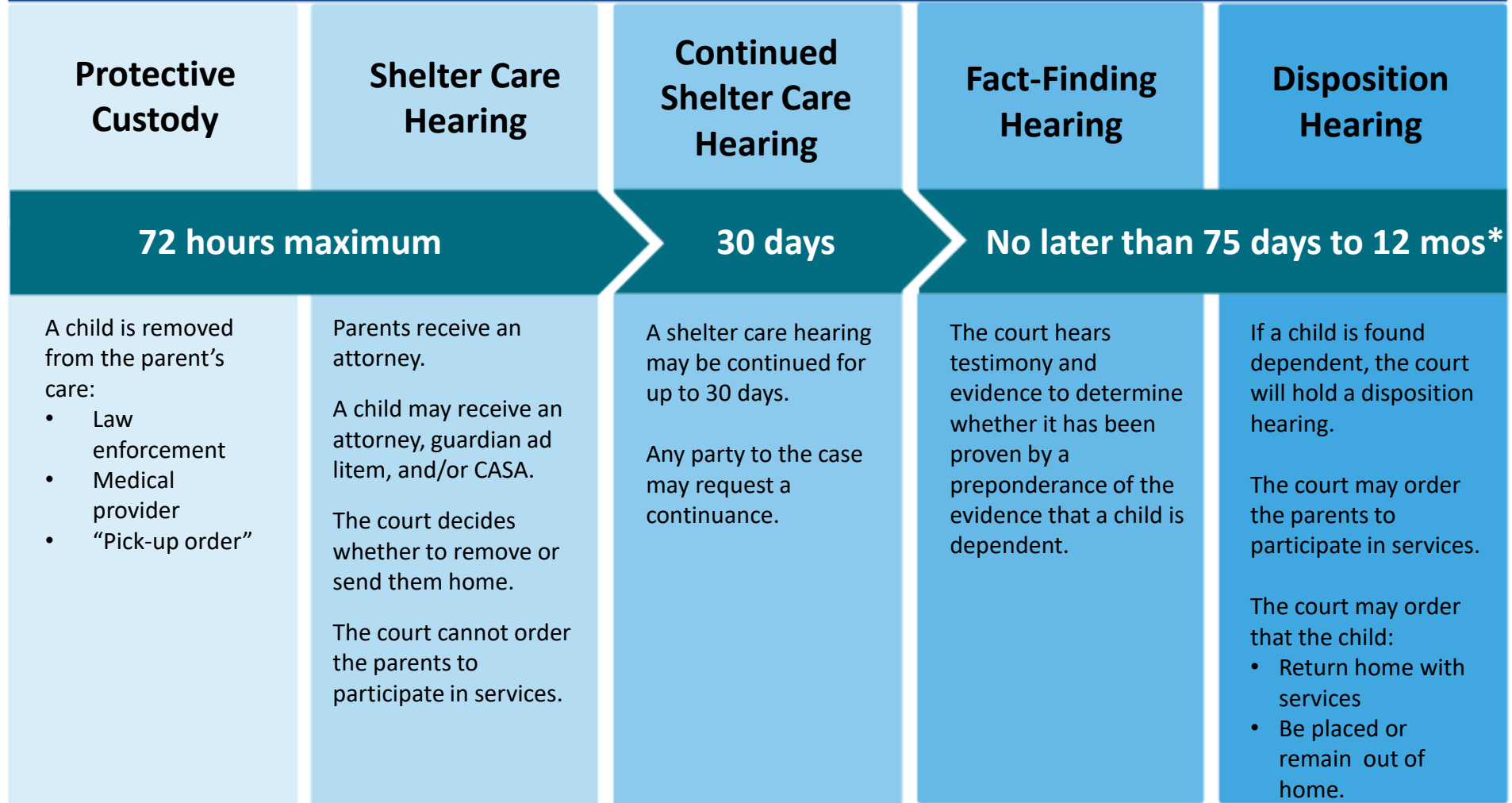


DCYF investigates allegations of child abuse or neglect and provides a Child Protective Services (CPS) investigation or Family Assessment Response (FAR) within 24-72 hours of receiving an allegation of abuse or neglect that meets screening criteria.

- **Screen** allegations
- **Response** in person within 24-72 hours
- **Assessment** of the child's safety as well as the family's strengths and needs
- **Referral** for services and supports
- **Develop a safety plan** (if necessary) and a **case plan** for the family
- DCYF must close the case within 90 days unless the parent agrees to keep the case open for services



Process to establishing dependency



*Fact-finding and disposition hearings may be continued and shelter care status may continue for many months in the case.

What happens at a Shelter Care Hearing?

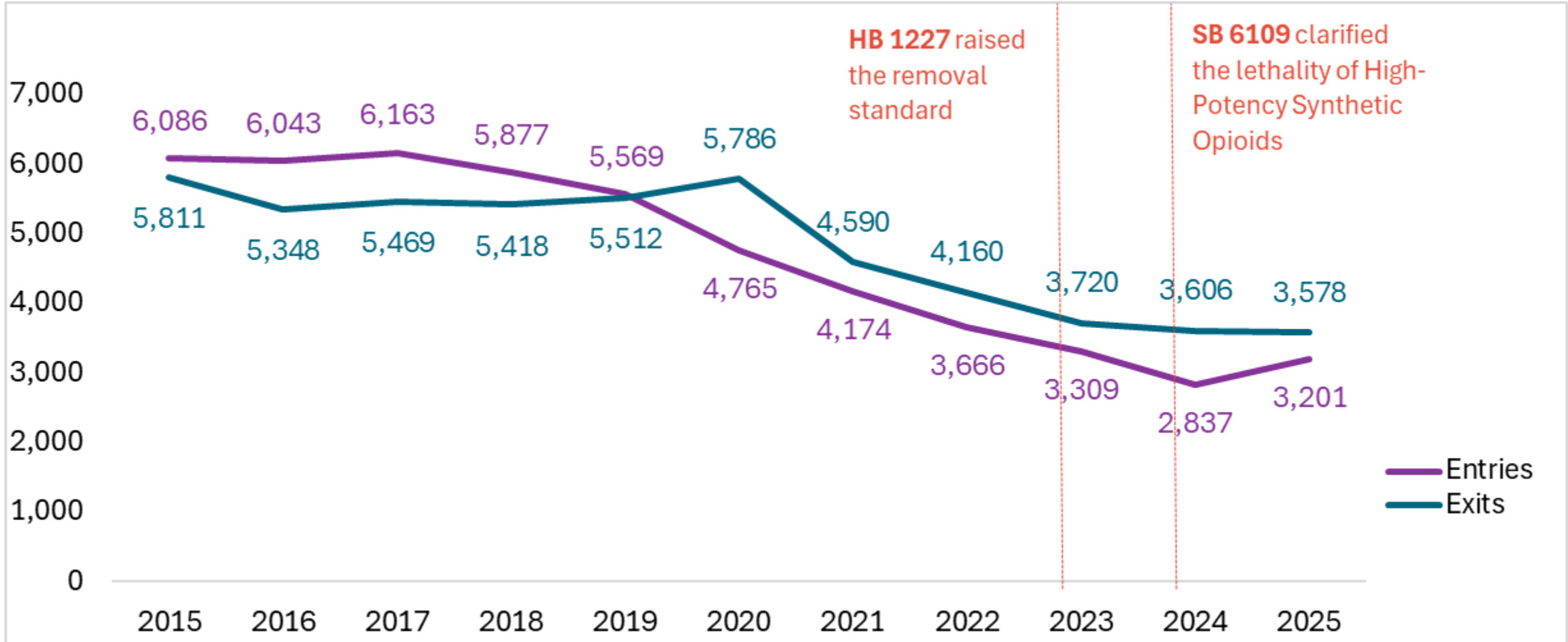
If DCYF files a dependency petition seeking removal of the child, a Shelter Care Hearing is held within 72-hours. The hearing is held to determine if an unsafe situation exists requiring the child to remain out of the home or can safely return while waiting for a full fact-finding hearing.

- A parent is assigned an attorney (if unable to afford one)
- Judicial officer decides:
 - If DCYF has made “reasonable” or “active efforts” to prevent removal
 - If removal is “necessary to prevent imminent physical harm”
 - If prevention services would prevent the need for removal. If the parent agrees to services, the judge must place the child in the home. The judge may not order services over the parent’s objection.
 - Whether to place the child out of home or place the child with the parent while awaiting a fact-finding hearing.



FEWER CHILDREN ARE ENTERING OUT-OF-HOME PLACEMENT

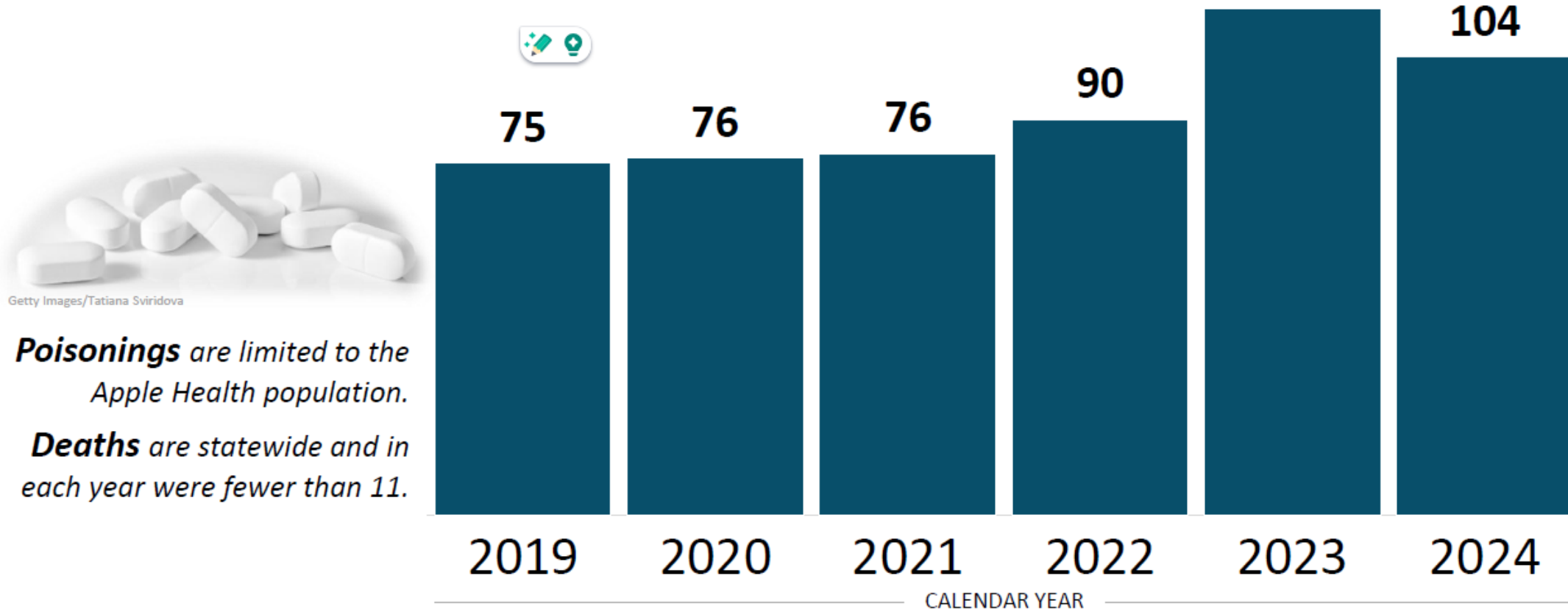
STATE FISCAL YEARS 2015-2025



Opioid-Related Poisonings or Deaths

among Infants and Toddlers age Birth to Age Three

CY 2019 to 2024



Getty Images/Tatiana Sviridova

Poisonings are limited to the Apple Health population.

Deaths are statewide and in each year were fewer than 11.

SOURCES: Data comes from the DSHS Integrated Client Databases. Opioid-related poisonings are identified through Apple Health claims and encounter data in ProviderOne where there is a diagnosis of opioid-related poisoning on the claim, irrespective of the intent (accidental, self-harm, assault, or undetermined). Opioid-related deaths are identified through Department of Health death records where the underlying cause of death was opioids or where opioids were a contributing factor to the death. Children were included if they were 3 years old or younger at the date of diagnosis or death. Children who were diagnosed with a poisoning who later died are only counted once, as an opioid-related death.

*Counts of subcategories are not shown according to department suppression standards that protect confidentiality (death counts in all years were 10 or fewer).



Number of DCYF-Reviewable Critical Incidents for 2025

- **Total number of 2025 DCYF-reviewable critical incidents**

- Q1 2025: 22 critical incidents
- Q2 2025: 14 critical incidents
- Q3 2025: 9 critical incidents*
- Q4 2025: 11 critical incidents

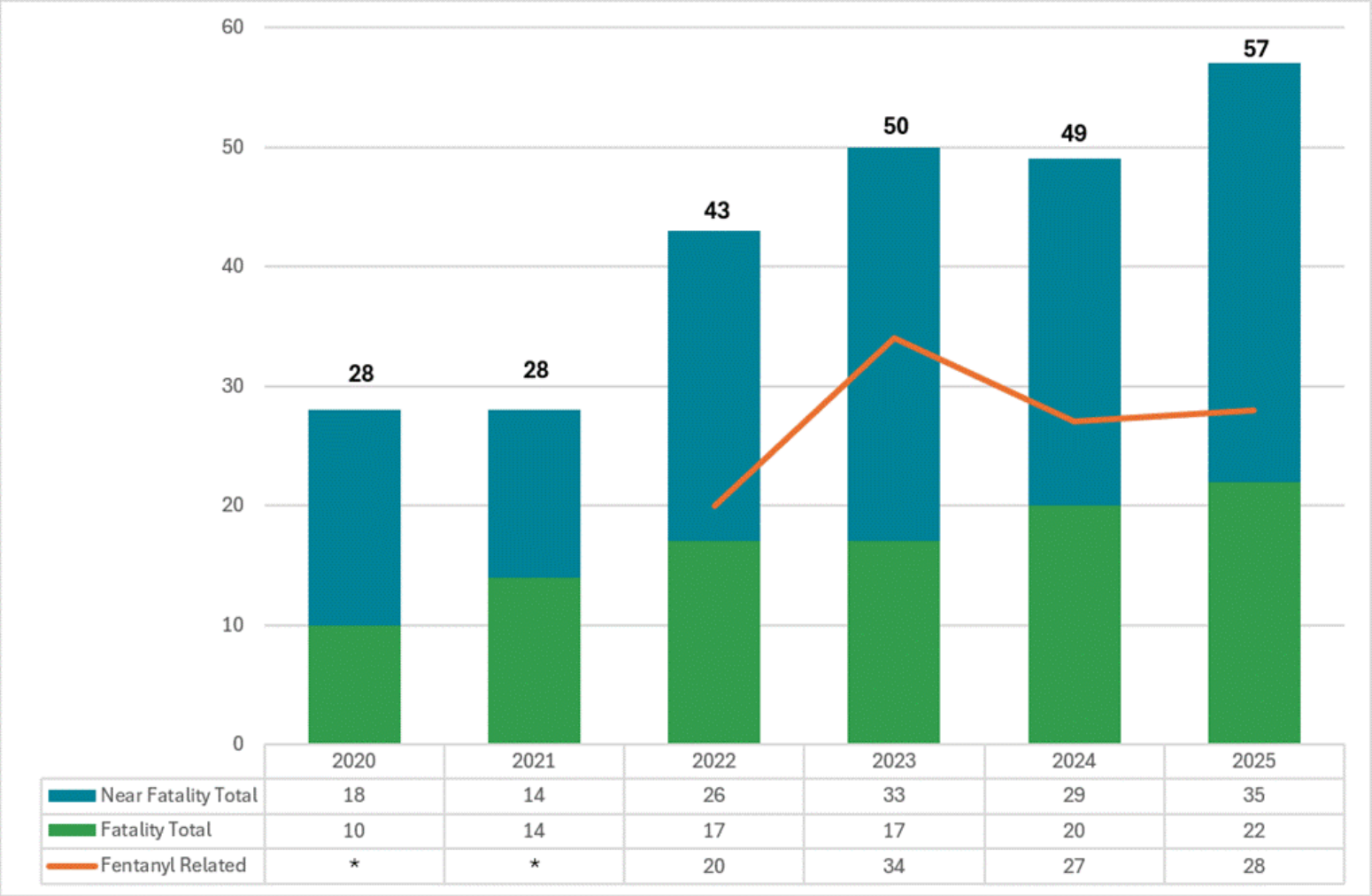
- **In 2025, 28 opioid related critical incidents**

- 4 fatalities
- 24 near fatalities
- 24 age 3 or younger



2025 IS ON PACE TO SURPASS 2024 LEVELS BEFORE END OF YEAR

NUMBER OF CRITICAL INCIDENTS



Year	Fatality Count	Near Fatality Count
2020	10	18
2021	14	14
2022	17	26
2023	17	34
2024	20	29
2025	22	35

Observations and Takeaways

- 2025 was still a record year and very concerning, but numbers are not double or triple previous years.
- Possible reasons for moderation since Q1: Seeing the full effects of SB 6109 and that opioid overdoses trend down during the summer.
- About 53% of critical incidents in 2025 have been opioid related.
- Children ages 0-3 are most likely age group to experience a critical incident.
- The number of children ages 0-3 with chronic CPS involvement (high-need families) has steadily increased since 2018. When CPS chronicity is not effectively interrupted, it may result in more complex family situations, child removals, and critical incidents.



DCYF Responses To Date

- Safe Child Consults for every case involving opioid use and a child under 3
- Mining expertise of front-line staff: HPSO info-gathering sessions
- Geographical hot spots: Highlighting services for local staff and providers
- Increasing caseworker trainings for neglect and medically complex cases
- New training supports for some contracted service providers on working with families involved with substance abuse.

Need for Services for Families

- Families need support in their communities to mitigate risk factors.
- The Governor's budget includes **a set of investments that will help prevent critical incidents while supporting families who are struggling.**
- Investing in increased community-based supports will:
 - Better engage parents in substance use disorder treatment
 - Create safe home environments for young children
 - Connect families to services after a case closed



Governor's Budget – Critical Incidents Investments

Modernize Child Welfare Safety Framework

- DCYF will update the Safety Framework utilizing the SAFE Model developed by Action 4 Child Protection

Prevention services in high needs communities:

- Parent-Child Assistance Program (PCAP) – 32 additional slots
- Community pathways referrals prior to closing a Child Protective Services, CPS-Family Assessment Response or Family Voluntary Services case. Families with children 0-3 years will be referred to Help Me Grow



Thank you!

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