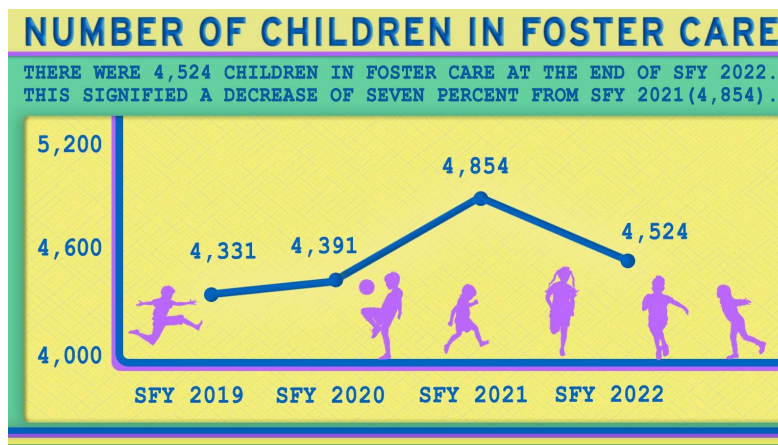




Arkansas House Newsletter

December 21, 2022

Reducing the Number of Foster Care Cases



Earlier this month, many of us gathered in the Old Supreme Court Chamber at our Capitol to celebrate Christmas with some of the children currently in our state's foster care system. This is an annual event that distributes thousands of gifts and brings countless smiles.

Our goal as a state is to make sure these children have the best care available year-round. At the end of the State Fiscal Year 2022, there were 4,524 Arkansas children in foster care. That is a decrease of 7% from the previous year.

In 2021, the General Assembly passed [Act 574](#) which directed the House Committee on Aging, Children and Youth, Legislative and Military Affairs and the Senate Committee on Children and Youth to conduct a study of the best practices for reducing the number of children in foster care. That study was conducted and [the final report](#) was submitted to the [Arkansas Legislative Council](#) this month.

The study included an assessment of the number of children in foster care, an examination of the state's current practices and policies aimed at reducing the number of children in foster care, an examination of the

methods other states use, and the formulation of a plan for the state to implement to reduce or eliminate the number of children in foster care.

The [reports](#) details staffing challenges in the most recent years presented by the health emergency. But despite those challenges, the [DHS Division of Children and Family Services](#) has continued to implement a variety of strategies to reduce the number of children in foster care. Those strategies include incentive programs to recruit and retain quality staff and prevention programs focused on in-home services.

The [reports](#) also note that DCFS staff have worked hard over the last several years to ensure children are placed with relatives and fictive kin when safe and appropriate. Close to 41% of children were placed with relatives statewide as of September 30, 2021, as compared to the 28.1% of children who were placed with relatives statewide as of March 30, 2019. Children whose first placement was with a relative or fictive kin have consistently shown to have more placement stability, fewer instances of maltreatment while in foster care, and have achieved permanency more quickly than their counterparts.

[This report will help guide members when considering legislation in the 2023 Regular Session.](#)