STATE OF ARKANSAS
House of Representatives

Arkansas House Newsletter

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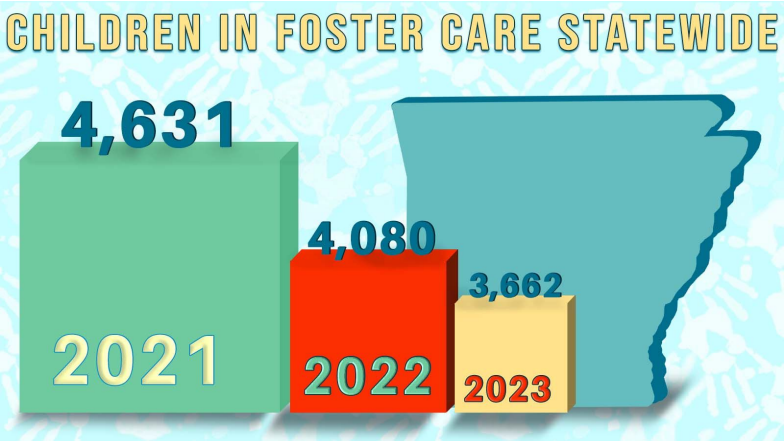
Committee Reviews Progress in Family Preservation Services



This week, the House Committee for Aging, Children and Youth, Legislative and Military Affairs reviewed a vital report from the Division of Children and Family Services (DCFS) regarding family preservation services. The data presented painted a hopeful picture of progress in our efforts to support Arkansas families and protect our children.

At the close of 2023, there were 3,662 children in foster care, marking a significant 10% decrease from the previous year. This reduction is noteworthy, especially when considering that it is approximately 30% lower than the all-time high of 5,234 children in foster care recorded in 2016.

Research indicates that children placed with relatives experience better outcomes compared to those placed with non-relatives. As of the end of 2023, 36% of children in foster care were residing with relatives. While this is a slight decrease from the previous two years, it remains nearly double the rate observed seven years

ago, when only 20% of children were placed with relatives. This shift reflects our growing recognition of the importance of family ties in achieving placement stability.

Additionally, DCFS has successfully prevented reentry into foster care for most children who reunify with their families, consistently meeting the national standard of 8.3% or less for six consecutive years.

The agency’s performance in facilitating adoptions has also been commendable. In 2023, Arkansas finalized 783 adoptions, with an average time from termination of parental rights to finalization of just 12.3 months—closely aligned with the national average of 12.4 months. This consistency in achieving permanency metrics is a testament to the hard work and dedication of everyone involved in our child welfare system.

A significant factor contributing to this positive trajectory has been the DCFS’s implementation and expansion of evidence-based prevention services. These programs provide families with the support they need to prevent the immediate need for foster care placement. As of 2023, these services are available statewide, ensuring that more families can access the help they need.

In conclusion, the progress made in 2023 not only reflects our commitment to improving the welfare of children in Arkansas but also highlights the importance of family preservation services. By continuing to focus on keeping families together and providing evidence-based support, we are paving the way for a brighter future for our children and our communities.