

**Maryland Department of Human Services
Social Services Administration**

Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI)

**Child and Family Services Review (CFSR)
Results Report**

Baltimore City Department of Social Services

**April & May 2024
October & November 2024**



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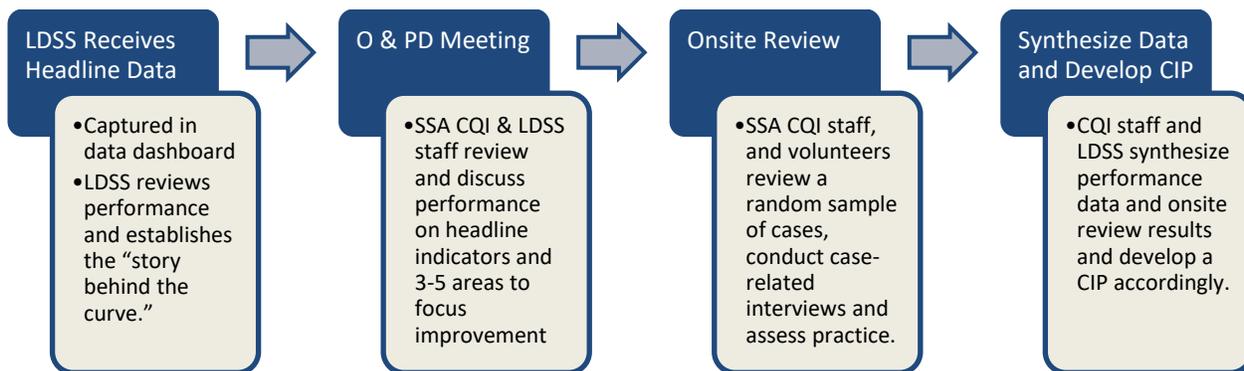
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I. Overview of Maryland’s Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI)

Maryland’s CQI process is designed to align with SSA’s strategic vision and support our enhanced Integrated Practice Model (IPM), effective utilization of comprehensive assessments, and expanded/aligned service array. Quality CQI efforts are dependent upon the **active inclusion and participation of staff at all levels of the agency, children, youth, families, and other key stakeholders** throughout the process. CQI is a **partnership between LDSSs, DHS/SSA, and others** to jointly assess practice and work towards better outcomes for children, youth, families, and vulnerable adults.

As part of Maryland’s CQI process, each local department, in partnership with SSA, will undergo a Maryland Child and Family Services Review (CFSR). This review, which aligns with the federal review process, focuses on child and family safety, permanency, and well-being outcomes. The review is designed to combine evidence from various sources to highlight the strengths and areas of challenge in the local system of care which are impacting child and family outcomes.

The Maryland CFSR currently involves three interrelated components: 1) an **Orientation and Practical Data (O & PD) Meeting** with focused discussion on the local department’s performance on the headline data indicators and the story that provides context for that performance, 2) an **onsite review**, which examines child welfare practices to achieve positive outcomes for children by reviewing a random sample of cases, and, 3) the development of a **Continuous Improvement Plan (CIP)** to guide the LDSS’s improvement efforts based on the findings of the data meeting and onsite review. Please review the MD CQI Manual for more detail on the overall CFSR process. A high-level diagram of the CFSR process is below.



This report focuses on the findings of the O&PD Meeting and the onsite review. During the onsite review, a review team uses a review instrument to assess the quality of practice and the functioning of processes that support the achievement of child and family outcomes related to safety, permanency, and well-being. Reviewers combine information from interviews with key case participants and the record in CJAMS to complete the review using the online review instrument. More detailed information on the case review instrument and the process for assessing cases can be found in Appendix A. This report also provides SSA’s feedback on local department strengths and areas needing improvement as well as recommendations for continued exploration and improvement for consideration in the local department’s continuous improvement plan.

SSA would like to thank and commend Local Department of Social Services Director, Brandi Stocksdale and Assistant Director for Adult, Family & Children Services, Corrine Mullings the Child Welfare program administrators, supervisors, caseworkers, families, youth, and the entire DSS child welfare staff for their efforts in making the CFSR onsite review a successful endeavor.

II. Orientation & Practical Data Meeting

Prior to the onsite review, SSA and the LDSS held an Orientation and Practical Data Meeting on February 28, 2024, and August 29, 2024, to discuss the LDSS's performance on SSA's headline indicators. The headline indicators are aggregate measures of performance related to safety, permanency and well-being. Based on a review of the data, Baltimore City highlighted the following indicators as areas of performance to explore further:

- Permanency
 - Permanency in 12 months (new entries)
 - Permanency in 12 months (12-23 months)
 - Permanency in 12 months (24+ months)

During this meeting, the LDSS also shared “the story behind the curve” which highlighted their assessment of the practice and systemic factors impacting performance, including specific examples. Key findings included:

- The agency has been focused on using considered removal FTDMs prior to and the day of shelter care to divert children from entering into foster care when possible. As a result, the families whose children enter into foster care tend to have higher needs and less familial or natural supports which require more time to achieve permanency.
- Permanency unit has been focused more on using trial home visits to support the reunification process and ensure adequate supports are in place for families prior to reunifying.
- A pilot program focusing on kinship families has launched, and the agency is hoping to see an increase in their permanency performance over time from these focused efforts with kinship caregivers.

This discussion provided context for the onsite review and the practice that may be demonstrated through the case review.

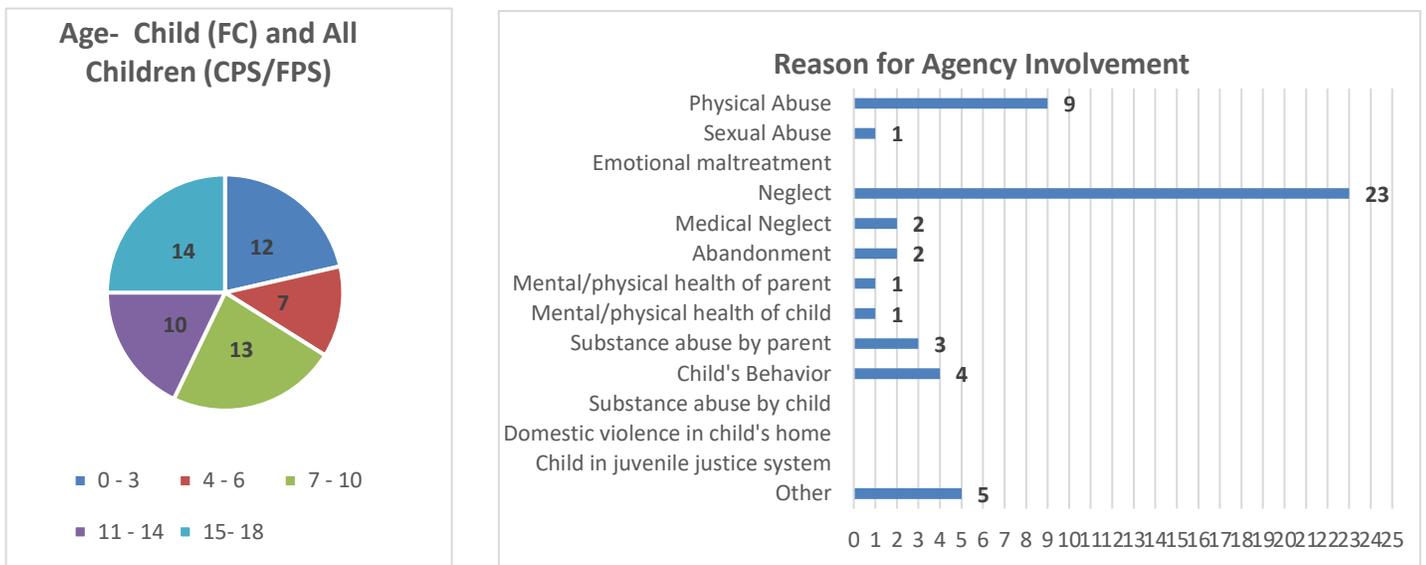
III. Baltimore City Onsite Review Methodology and Case Characteristics

The spring phase of the Baltimore City onsite review was conducted from April 8, 2024, through April 15, 2024, and May 13, 2024, through May 20, 2024. The review assessed performance during a period under review (PUR) from April 1, 2023, until the date each specific case was first reviewed onsite. The review team assessed 20 cases, including 13 foster care cases and 7 cases of

children who have received in-home services, all of which were Family Preservation services cases.

The fall Baltimore City onsite review was conducted from October 15, 2024, through October 21, 2024, and November 12, 2024, through November 18, 2024. The fall onsite review assessed performance during a PUR from October 1, 2023, until the date each specific case was first reviewed onsite. The review team assessed 20 cases, including 13 foster care cases and 7 cases of children who have received in-home services, four (4) investigative response (IR), two (2) alternative response (AR), and one (1) Family Preservation services case.

The following graphs display the age distribution and reasons for agency involvement for the cases reviewed.



Although these cases were randomly selected using a stratified methodology, this sample of cases may or may not be representative of the county’s child welfare population. However, SSA considers the case review findings and observations to be reflective of practice that exists in the local department and a basis for further exploring strengths and areas needing improvement.

IV. Baltimore City Onsite Review Findings

In this section, narrative descriptions are provided for each of the three areas of focus (safety, permanency, and well-being) that discuss the strengths and areas for growth based on the practice observed in the reviewed cases. It is important to note that depending upon case circumstances, not all cases are applicable to be rated for each item. Each case can be rated as a Strength, Area Needing Improvement (ANI), or not applicable for each of the 18 CFSR items. Appendix B provides the total number of applicable cases for each item and the percentage of cases receiving a strength rating for each item. Additionally, Appendix C provides the percentage of cases rated as a strength for each item for the county compared to Maryland’s

overall data extracted from the Online Monitoring System. Appendix D provides a breakdown of jurisdiction-specific demographic and child welfare data.

A. Safety Items

The CFSR evaluates two (2) safety outcomes across three (3) items.

Safety Outcome 1: Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect.

Item 1: Timeliness of Initiating Investigations of Reports of Child Maltreatment

Of the cases reviewed, five (5) cases were applicable to be rated for Item 1. Four (4) cases were rated a Strength, which is the majority (80%) of cases applicable for this item. All four (4) cases were foster care cases. The review demonstrated the agency initiated investigations or assessments of maltreatment reports and completed face-to-face contact with the victim children within the State mandated time frames of twenty-four (24) hours for abuse, forty-eight (48) hours for risk of harm assessments, and five (5) days for neglect cases.

The one (1) remaining applicable case was an in-home case rated as an Area Needing Improvement (ANI) because the agency did not make timely face-to-face contact with the victim child following a risk of harm assessment.

Safety Outcome 2: Children are safely maintained in their homes whenever possible and appropriate.

Item 2: Services to Family to Protect Child(ren) in the Home and Prevent Removal or Re-Entry into Foster Care

Of the cases reviewed, eleven (11) cases were applicable to be rated for Item 2. Ten (10) cases were rated a Strength, which is the majority (91%) of cases applicable for this item. Of the Strength cases, six (6) were foster care cases. In four (4) of the foster care cases, the review demonstrated the agency provided services to families in efforts to prevent children's entry into foster care or determined that no additional services could be provided to prevent the children from entering into care. In the two (2) remaining foster care cases, the agency provided services to ensure that children were not at risk of re-entering foster care during the review period. The remaining four (4) cases rated as a Strength were in-home services cases where the agency provided appropriate services to families to successfully prevent the children from entering into foster care.

The one (1) remaining case was a foster care case that was rated an Area Needing Improvement because the agency did not provide services in efforts to prevent the child from re-entering foster care during the review period.

Item 3: Risk and Safety Assessment and Management

Of the cases reviewed, all forty (40) cases were applicable to be rated for Item 3. The majority (90%) of cases were rated a Strength; twenty-two (22) cases were foster care cases and fourteen (14) were in-home services cases. The agency accurately assessed the children's risk and safety initially, when applicable, and on an ongoing basis. The review showed that the agency engaged families in conversations around safety and risk and utilized formal assessments such as the Safety Assessments for Every-Child (SAFE-C), the Safety Assessments for Every-Child Out of Home

Placement (SAFE-C OHP), the Maryland Initial Family Risk Assessment (MFIRA), and the Maryland Family Risk Reassessment (MFRRA). Furthermore, the review demonstrated that, when appropriate, the agency developed safety plans with families and monitored them as needed to ensure the children's safety. Additionally, the review determined there were no safety concerns related to visitation between children and their parents or family members that were not adequately addressed by the agency during the review period.

Of the remaining four (4) foster care cases that were rated an Area Needing Improvement, it was because the agency either did not accurately assess the children's risk or safety throughout the entire review period or did not assess the safety and risk of the children remaining in the family home.

B. Permanency Items

The CFSR evaluates two (2) permanency outcomes which are measured through eight (8) items.

Permanency Outcome 1: Children have permanency and stability in their living situations.

Item 4: Stability of Foster Care Placement

Of the cases reviewed, twenty-six (26) foster care cases were applicable to be rated for Item 4. Seventeen (17) cases were rated a Strength which was the majority (65%) of applicable cases for this item. The review demonstrated that, in most cases, children in foster care remained in one, stable placement throughout the PUR. Additionally, the agency assessed the stability of children's placements by having ongoing conversations with foster parents, relative caregivers, and/or children about the placement during regular visits. In two (2) of the cases rated a Strength, the review revealed, although the children experienced a change in placement, these changes were planned by the agency in order to meet the children's needs.

Nine (9) cases were rated an Area Needing Improvement for this item. Some were rated as such because the review revealed that the placements were not stable due to the children frequently being Absent Without Official Leave (AWOL) from their placement during the review period. The remaining cases were rated an Area Needing Improvement because the children experienced placement changes during the PUR that were not planned by the agency in order to meet children's needs or achieve case goals.

Item 5: Permanency Goal for Child

Of the cases reviewed, twenty-six foster care (26) cases were applicable to be rated for Item 5. Fourteen (14) cases were rated an Area Needing Improvement which was the majority (54%) of cases applicable for this item. The review demonstrated the agency did not file for termination of parental rights (TPR) or an exception once children had been in foster care for at least 15 out of the most recent 22 months. Additionally, in the majority of cases rated an Area Needing Improvement, the review revealed concurrent permanency goals were established, but the goals of guardianship and/or adoption were not established in a timely manner. The remaining ANI cases were rated as such because the permanency goal of reunification was not appropriate to the case circumstances during the period under review.

The remaining twelve (12) applicable cases were rated a Strength because the review demonstrated the agency established permanency goals in a timely manner that were appropriate to case circumstances.

Item 6: Achieving Reunification, Guardianship, Adoption, or Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement

Of the cases reviewed, twenty-six (26) foster care cases were applicable to be rated for Item 6. Twenty (20) cases were rated an Area Needing Improvement which was the majority (77%) of cases applicable for this item. The review determined the agency and/or court did not make concerted efforts to achieve permanency for children in foster care within the federally mandated timeframes of 12 months for reunification, 18 months for guardianship, and 24 months for adoption. Furthermore, children in the cases that were rated an Area Needing Improvement for this item were in foster care from thirteen (13) months to eighty-four (84) months at the time of the review. In the majority of cases rated an ANI, the agency either did not identify an adoptive or guardianship resource during the PUR or did not make concerted efforts to complete the required paperwork once a resource was identified. In some of the cases, the agency did not consistently demonstrate efforts to engage the biological parents, legal guardians, and/or youth in discussions related to permanency to ensure they were participating in the agreed upon services needed for reunification to occur and that the services were adequately meeting their needs. Furthermore, the review demonstrated the agency did not consistently engage biological fathers who were incarcerated in case planning or services to support in their reunification efforts during the PUR. Additionally, in some of the cases, the agency did not secure and formalize a living arrangement that would be considered permanent until discharged from foster care for children with a goal of Another Planned Living Arrangement (APPLA). Additionally, in at least three (3) of the cases rated an ANI, the review revealed the court was a barrier to achieving reunification within the mandated timeframes due to court hearings repeatedly being postponed at the request of the biological parents' attorney or the court allowing parents more time to complete the services necessary for reunification to occur (i.e. completing substance use treatment or obtaining housing).

In the remaining six (6) cases that were rated as a Strength, the review demonstrated the agency and court made concerted efforts to achieve permanency for children in foster care in a timely manner. The review determined children had been in foster care from four (4) days to eighteen (18) months, and permanency was achieved or it was likely to be achieved within the mandated timeframes of 12-months for reunification, 18-months for guardianship, and 24-months for adoption, respectively.

Permanency Outcome 2: The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children.

Item 7: Placement with Siblings

Of the cases reviewed, thirteen (13) foster care cases were applicable to be rated for Item 7. Ten (10) cases were rated a Strength which was the majority (77%) of cases applicable for this item. The review demonstrated the agency placed children in foster care with their siblings when appropriate. The review showed the agency typically made placement decisions for sibling groups by assessing the children's individual needs. In cases where children could not be placed with their siblings, the review showed the separation was because at least one of the siblings required a higher

level of care to meet their specific needs. Additionally, some of the cases were rated a Strength because children were placed with the majority of their siblings in foster care but could not all be placed together due to the large size of the sibling group.

The remaining three (3) cases were rated an Area Needing Improvement because the review revealed the children were not placed with their siblings in foster care and there was no valid reason for their separation.

Item 8: Visiting with Parents and Siblings in Foster Care

Of the cases reviewed, twenty-one (21) foster care cases were applicable to be rated for Item 8. Fifteen (15) cases were rated a Strength which is the majority (71%) of cases applicable for this item. The agency made concerted efforts to ensure frequent and quality visitation occurred between the child, biological parents or legal guardians, and their siblings in foster care when applicable. The review showed that the average frequency of parent-child visits ranged from more than weekly to monthly and varied from 30 minutes to 8 hours, which was sufficient to maintain children's relationships with their applicable caregivers. Additionally, in the cases that were applicable for visitation with siblings in foster care, the agency ensured the children had visits with their siblings that were sufficient to promote the continuity of their relationships. The frequency of sibling visits varied from more than weekly to monthly and ranged from 30 minutes to 8 hours, which was determined to be sufficient in maintaining the siblings' relationships with one another during the review period.

Of the remaining six (6) cases rated an Area Needing Improvement, the review demonstrated the agency did not ensure frequent visitation occurred between siblings in foster care who were placed separately, or the agency did not make concerted efforts to engage the applicable caregivers in order to support visitation between them and the children during the PUR.

Item 9: Preserving Connections

Of the cases reviewed, twenty-five (25) foster care cases were applicable to be rated for Item 9. Twenty (20) cases were rated a Strength which is the majority (80%) of cases applicable for this item. The review demonstrated the agency was able to maintain children's prior connections to caregivers with whom the agency was not working towards reunification, siblings who were not in foster care, extended family members, school, community and friends while the children were in foster care. The agency supported children in maintaining their connections through visitation, telephone contact, and/or virtual visits. Additionally, the review revealed that when children had to switch schools, the agency held collaborative meetings to assess whether the change in school settings was determined to be in the best interest to meet the child's needs. Furthermore, the review revealed the agency and court inquired about Native American heritage and tribal affiliation with families, and there was no Native American membership identified for any of the children in the cases reviewed.

Of the five (5) remaining cases that were rated an Area Needing Improvement, the agency did not ensure children were able to maintain their important connections with siblings who were not in foster care or inquire about important connections for a child who entered foster care shortly after birth.

Item 10: Relative Placement

Of the cases reviewed, twenty-five (25) foster care cases were applicable to be rated for Item 10. Twenty-three (23) cases were rated a Strength which is the majority (92%) of cases applicable for this item. The review demonstrated the agency made concerted efforts to place children with their relatives. The review indicated most children in the cases reviewed were placed in stable homes with a relative throughout the period under review. Additionally, the agency engaged the biological parents and children, when age-appropriate, in efforts to identify potential maternal and paternal relative placement resources. The review also revealed the agency utilized locator services, such as Family Find, to assist in identifying and locating maternal and paternal relatives.

Of the two (2) remaining cases rated an Area Needing Improvement, the agency did not make any efforts to identify paternal relatives during the PUR and did not follow-up to evaluate paternal relatives as a potential placement resource who had been previously identified.

Item 11: Relationship of Child in Care with Parents

Of the cases reviewed, eighteen (18) foster care cases were applicable to be rated for Item 11. Thirteen (13) cases were rated a Strength which is the majority (72%) of cases applicable for this item. The review demonstrated the agency promoted positive relationships between children and their applicable biological parents or legal guardians outside of parent-child visits. The agency informed biological parents and/or legal guardians of children's medical, dental, and school appointments and encouraged caregivers to attend, when possible. The agency also offered transportation assistance to attend these appointments in some cases and, in some of the cases reviewed, promoted a positive relationship between the child and applicable caregiver by referring them to family therapy during the period under review.

For the remaining five (5) cases rated an Area Needing Improvement, the agency did not make any efforts to keep the caregivers informed of the child's medical/dental appointments and school meetings in order to support a positive relationship between the child in foster care and their caregiver during the review period.

C. Well-Being Items

The CFSR measures seven (7) items that are used to evaluate three (3) well-being outcomes.

Well-Being Outcome 1: Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children's needs.

Item 12A: Needs Assessment and Services to Children

Of the cases reviewed, forty (40) cases were applicable to be rated for Item 11. Of those cases, the majority (93%) were rated a Strength, twenty-three (23) were foster care cases and fourteen (14) were in-home services cases. The review demonstrated the agency was able to assess the children's social/emotional needs and provide the appropriate services to meet their social/emotional needs when needs were identified. The agency primarily assessed children's social/emotional needs through observations or conversations, when age-appropriate, with the children during visits or through conversations with biological parents, legal guardians, foster parents, relative caregivers, or service providers. In twenty-four (24) cases rated as a Strength, there was evidence that the agency also utilized formal assessments such as the Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths

Assessment (CANS) or the Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths Assessments for Families (CANS-F). Additionally, in at least six (6) of the foster care cases rated as a Strength, the agency also informally assessed the older youth's independent living skills through ongoing conversations with them. The review revealed, in the majority of cases reviewed, there were no social/emotional or independent living needs identified for children. In the seven (7) remaining Strength cases where needs were identified, the agency made concerted efforts to provide appropriate services to meet children's social/emotional or independent living needs by providing referrals for services to support children's capacity to improve peer or familial relationships, assist with finding employment, and develop life skills.

Of the remaining three (3) cases that were rated as an Area Needing Improvement, all were foster care cases. For these cases, the agency either did not assess the independent living needs of the older youth or the agency did not provide appropriate services to meet the child's identified need related to poor peer relationships.

Item 12B: Needs Assessment and Services to Parents

Of the cases reviewed, forty (40) cases were applicable to be rated for Item 12B. Of those cases, the majority (55%) were rated an Area Needing Improvement, nineteen (19) were foster care cases and three (3) were in-home services cases. The review demonstrated the agency was not consistent in its practice of engaging biological parents and/or legal guardians to assess their needs and provide services during the review period. The agency did not consistently assess applicable caregivers' needs on an ongoing basis to determine if services were necessary or if the services they were engaged in were appropriate to meet their identified needs. Furthermore, the review revealed there was no significant difference in the lack of engagement between biological mothers and biological fathers, but the lack of ongoing assessment was more prevalent in the foster care cases reviewed than in-home cases.

The remaining (45%) of cases were rated a Strength for this item, seven (7) were foster care cases and eleven (11) were in-home services cases. The review demonstrated the agency accurately and comprehensively assessed all applicable caregivers' needs and provided appropriate services to meet their identified needs, when necessary. Additionally, the agency made concerted efforts to provide appropriate services to meet parents' identified needs, such as referrals to substance use evaluations and treatment, mental health services, parenting, and housing assistance. The agency also monitored caregivers' participation and progress in these services through ongoing engagement with parents and service providers to determine if the services were adequately meeting the biological parents' needs.

Item 12C: Needs Assessment and Services to Foster Parents

Of the cases reviewed, twenty-five (25) foster care cases were applicable to be rated for Item 12C. Seventeen (17) cases were rated a Strength which was the majority (68%) of cases applicable for this item. The review demonstrated the agency consistently assessed the foster parents' needs on an ongoing basis to ensure there was no need for services to improve their capacity to provide appropriate care and supervision to children in their homes. The review showed the agency would typically complete comprehensive assessments of the foster parents' needs through weekly to monthly home visits and telephone calls. In some of the Strength cases, the agency's assessments

accurately determined that the foster parents did not have identified needs; therefore, no services were provided to them during the PUR. In the remaining cases rated a Strength, needs related to financial assistance were identified for the foster parents, and the agency ensured they were provided with adequate services to meet their needs.

Of the eight (8) remaining cases that were rated an Area Needing Improvement, it was because the agency did not comprehensively assess the foster parent's needs or did not provide appropriate services to address the foster parents' needs related to assistance managing the children's delinquent and/or runaway behaviors.

Item 13: Child and Family Involvement in Case Planning

Of the cases reviewed, thirty-nine (39) cases were applicable to be rated for Item 13. Of those cases, the majority (56%) were rated a Strength, eleven (11) were foster care cases and eleven (11) were in-home services cases. The review demonstrated the agency actively involved biological parents and, when developmentally appropriate, children in the initial case plan development and ongoing case planning conversations. Additionally, the review indicated evidence of the agency utilizing Family Team Decision Meetings (FTDMs) to facilitate case planning discussions with children and families. Furthermore, the agency did well in engaging children in ongoing age-appropriate case planning conversations about their needs and goals.

The remaining (44%) cases were rated an Area Needing Improvement, fourteen (14) were foster care cases and three (3) were in-home services cases. The agency did not include all applicable biological parents or legal guardians in case planning during the PUR. The review showed the agency was not consistent in its practice of engaging biological parents to include them in regular discussions around developing case goals or monitoring progress towards achieving case goals. The review revealed there was no significant difference in the lack of involvement in case planning between biological mothers and biological fathers. However, as the majority of ANI cases were foster care cases, there may be meaningful differences in the agency's case planning practice across in-home and foster care programs.

Item 14: Caseworker Visits with Child

Of the cases reviewed, forty (40) cases were applicable to be rated for Item 14. All (100%) of the cases rated for this item were rated a Strength, twenty-six (26) were foster care cases and fourteen (14) were in-home services cases. The review demonstrated the agency conducted frequent and quality visits with children to ensure their safety, permanency, well-being, and promote the achievement of case goals. The agency's visits with children ranged from weekly to biweekly to monthly which were noted to be of sufficient frequency based on the case circumstances. The visits with children lasted anywhere from 20 minutes to an hour and were noted to be of sufficient quality as the agency conducted visits in an environment comfortable to the children such as at their home, placement, school, or in the community. The agency had age-appropriate interactions with the children and typically met with them individually to allow for open and honest conversations to ensure their safety, permanency, and well-being and to have discussions around the progress towards case goals.

Item 15: Caseworker Visits with Parents

Of the cases reviewed, thirty-eight (38) cases were applicable to be rated for Item 15. Of those cases, the majority (55%) were rated an ANI, eighteen (18) were foster care cases and three (3)

were in-home services cases. The review revealed the agency did not consistently engage biological parents in frequent, quality face-to-face visits to discuss the safety, permanency, or well-being of their children or to promote the achievement of case goals. One of the primary reasons for the ANI ratings was the quality of the agency's visits with the parents as the review demonstrated contact with the biological parents was only occurring for approximately 5 to 10 minutes following parent-child visits which was found to not be sufficient to assess needs and promote achievement of case goals. In half of the foster care cases rated an ANI, the agency did not have any face-to-face visits with the biological parents and/or legal guardian during the period under review. Furthermore, in the three (3) in-home services cases rated an ANI, the agency did not conduct visits with all of the biological parents who were applicable for assessment in this item or only had a single visit with the biological parents during the review period.

The remaining cases were rated as a Strength, six (6) were foster care cases and eleven (11) were in-home services case. The review demonstrated the agency had frequent and quality visits with all applicable biological parents. The agency's visits with parents ranged from weekly to biweekly to monthly for 15 minutes to 1.5 hours which was noted to be of sufficient frequency based on the case circumstances.

Well-Being Outcome 2: Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs.

Item 16: Educational Needs of the Child

Of the cases reviewed, twenty-seven (27) cases were applicable to be rated for Item 16. Of those cases, the majority (93%) were rated a Strength, twenty-three (23) were foster care cases and two (2) were in-home services cases. The review demonstrated the agency continually assessed the children's educational needs and provided appropriate support and/or services when necessary. The review showed that the agency was able to comprehensively assess the children's educational needs through conversations with foster parents, the children, school personnel, placement provider staff, and biological parents. In the majority of cases, the agency's assessments accurately determined that the children did not have any educational needs. In the remaining Strength cases, the agency was able to accurately identify the children's educational needs and provide appropriate referrals for services to support the children's educational success. Additionally, the agency monitored children's academic progress and the educational services in place to ensure their needs were continuously being met

The remaining two (2) cases were foster care cases that were rated an Area Needing Improvement because the agency did not ensure the children received educational services to address their identified needs.

Well-Being Outcome 2: Children receive adequate services to meet their physical and mental health needs.

Item 17: Physical/Dental Health of the Child

Of the cases reviewed, thirty-one (31) cases were applicable to be rated for Item 17. Of those cases, the majority (71%) were rated a Strength, seventeen (17) were foster care cases and five (5) were in-home services cases. The agency consistently assessed children's physical and dental health needs and ensured appropriate services were provided when necessary. The review showed that the agency was able to assess comprehensively children's physical health needs through

observations of the children, reviews of the children's medical records, and conversations with biological parents, foster parents, placement provider staff, the children, and medical providers. Through these assessments, the agency was able to determine what appropriate health services should be in place to ensure the children's physical and dental health needs were met. The agency ensured children received their routine physical and dental health services as well as any specialized health services, when necessary, by providing referrals and following up with biological parents, foster parents, and medical providers. Additionally, the agency monitored prescription medication when applicable.

The remaining nine (9) cases were foster care cases that were rated as an ANI. The majority was because the agency did not ensure children received routine dental exams that were overdue during the review period. Additionally, the agency did not ensure that any evidence of the children attending their required medical examinations during the period under review was documented in the case record.

Item 18: Mental/Behavioral Health of the Child

Of the cases reviewed, twenty-three (23) cases were applicable to be rated for Item 18. Of those cases, the majority (78%) were rated a Strength, thirteen (13) were foster care cases and five (5) were in-home services cases. The review demonstrated the agency consistently assessed the children's mental/behavioral health needs and provided appropriate services when necessary. The agency comprehensively assessed children's mental/behavioral health needs through observations of the children and conversations with biological parents, foster parents, placement provider staff, the children, and service providers. Through these assessments, the agency was able to determine how to best support the children's mental/behavioral health by referring them to appropriate services to meet their identified mental/behavioral health needs. The agency followed up with biological parents, foster parents, the children, and service providers on an ongoing basis to monitor the children's participation in these services and evaluate their appropriateness based on whether or not the service was addressing the children's mental/behavioral health needs. Additionally, the agency provided appropriate oversight of prescribed psychotropic medication when applicable.

The remaining five (5) cases were foster care cases rated as an Area Needing Improvement because the agency did not ensure the children received appropriate therapeutic services to meet their identified needs.

V. Summary of Strengths and Areas Needing Improvement from the Onsite Review and the Orientation & Practical Data Meeting

Strengths

The *Practical Data* meeting and onsite review highlighted several strengths that Baltimore City Department of Social Services can continue to build upon to serve children and families. The agency has continued to demonstrate strong skills in assessing risk and safety for children receiving Family Preservation Services and when involved in an open CPS investigation (Item 3). Additionally, the agency is strong in consistently responding to investigations and assessments in a timely manner (Item 1) as shown in the majority of the cases reviewed. The agency's strong practices related to risk and safety assessment and timely responses to investigations and

assessments is evidenced by the positive performance in **Safety** headline indicators: *Children without maltreatment recurrence* and *Children without maltreatment after Family Preservation (FP)*. Additionally, the review revealed that the agency demonstrated strong practice around providing services to address safety and risk concerns to prevent children's entry into foster care, when possible, specifically when substance use and mental/behavioral health needs were the identified (Item 2). The agency's strong assessment practice is further evidenced by the agency demonstrating accurate and comprehensive assessment of children's risk and safety across in-home services and foster care cases. Furthermore, the agency demonstrated strong skills in assessing the children's social/emotional needs and educational needs (Items 12A, 16). In cases where needs were identified in these areas, the agency provided the appropriate services to support the children's well-being. The agency's consistent and successful assessments of children's well-being is likely supported by the frequent and quality visits the agency is having with children for both in-home and foster care cases (Item 14). Lastly, the agency's effective engagement practice with children is likely further evidenced by the strong performance in preserving children's connections from prior to entering foster care (Item 9) and assessing for relative placements (Item 10).

Areas Needing Improvement

The *Practical Data* meeting and review also highlighted areas that Baltimore City Department of Social Services could improve upon to strengthen its practice. There was evidence during the onsite review and in the headline indicators that timely achievement of permanency is a significant area for growth. The onsite review revealed that the agency and court did not consistently make concerted efforts towards achieving the established goals of reunification, guardianship, adoption, or APPLA. The review showed that the agency did not consistently partner with biological parents towards achieving case goals and did not consistently provide or monitor services necessary for reunification to occur (Item 6). The review also showed that the agency often did not make efforts to identify guardianship resources when there was a concurrent goal of guardianship. Furthermore, the review demonstrated the agency and court did not formalize a permanent living arrangement for older youth with goals of APPLA. Additionally, the agency did not consistently file for TPR or an exception once children had been in foster care for 15 months (Item 5). The review also indicated delays in court hearings and/or challenges with parents' attorneys created barriers to achieving timely in some of the cases reviewed. The agency's engagement practice with biological parents can be strengthened by identifying individualized service needs for caregivers (Item 12B), including them in ongoing case planning conversations to monitor progress in services provided (Item 13), and conducting regular visits with biological parents and legal guardians (Item 15). Deficits in the agency's practice of engaging biological parents and legal guardians around permanency in foster care cases is further supported by the agency not meeting the State target for the following **Permanency** headline indicators: *Permanency in 12 mos (entries)*, *Permanency in 12 mos (12-23 months)*, and *Permanency in 12 mos (24mos +)*.

VI. SSA Recommendations for Further Analysis and Improvement

Baltimore City can utilize its strengths to drive the changes needed to improve services to children and families. We recommend the LDSS consider the following to help improve its systems and practice with children and families.

Engagement

- Utilize supervision with staff to identify any barriers or challenges to engaging biological parents in order to assess their needs to identify individualized services and involve them in case planning. Provide staff with targeted supervision and training that addresses deficits in engagement practice and highlights the importance of authentic engagement and partnership with biological parents and families. It may also be beneficial to conduct group case consultations around engagement with biological parents so staff can collectively share among their peers what engagement practices have been successful with biological parents and identify common trends in barriers or challenges to engagement.
- Agency staff should increase their attempts to locate and engage both biological parents to involve them in decision-making for their children. When agency staff have current contact information for the biological parents, ongoing conversations should be initiated around their individualized goals and challenges. As biological parents are encouraged to think about past experiences and how they've been successful, they are more likely to take ownership to collaboratively develop plan, which supports sustainable outcomes. If agency staff are having difficulties locating biological parents, they should make ongoing efforts to engage parents on an at least monthly basis using various means (i.e. phone calls, home visits, utilizing Absent Parent Locator, Family Finding services, or CARES to obtain a last known address, exploring social media, mailing certified letters, etc.). It is also recommended to document these efforts in CJAMS

Permanency

- While the review demonstrated strong practice in assessing for relative placements and preserving children's important connections while in foster care, to increase permanency outcomes, it is suggested the agency continue to engage caregivers to explore guardianship with identified paternal or maternal relatives and fictive kin. When children are placed in kinship settings, having ongoing conversations with the caregivers to assess their willingness and ability to become a guardianship resource can help to increase the timely achievement of permanency.
- Baltimore City should partner with their local permanency planning liaison to facilitate conversations with their court system around identifying barriers and developing strategies to resolve delays in achieving permanency for children within the federally mandated timeframes. Involving court partners in the development and monitoring of the continuous improvement plan (CIP) allows the agency and court to take ownership and share

responsibility for achieving positive permanency outcomes for children and youth in foster care.

VII. Next steps

Baltimore City and SSA will collaborate to review these findings in detail, reach an understanding of the local agency's strengths to sustain, and begin discussions on where to focus improvement efforts. In addition, the team will plan for how SSA technical assistance can support Baltimore City to reach mutually desired outcomes. The results of this meeting will initiate the development of a Continuous Improvement Plan. SSA and the LDSS will finalize the CIP separately and include measures that facilitate monitoring progress on an ongoing basis.

Appendix A – Onsite Review Assessment of Cases

The Onsite Review Instrument (OSRI) is a federal review instrument used to collect information during the review. Its structure is organized into a Face Sheet, which is used to document general case and family information, and three sections that correspond to the outcome domains of safety, permanency, and child and family well-being. Each outcome domain is further divided into individual outcomes, which are themselves divided into individual items that relate to the outcome. Maryland uses the Children’s Bureau’s Online Monitoring System (OMS) to document each OSRI and generate reports.

Each review pair completes one OSRI per case assigned, assessing and rating items based on information and standards provided in the instrument instructions. They draw equally from two information sources to complete the instrument: documentation from the case record and case-related interviews with children, parents (this could be a legal guardian or relative depending on case specifics), foster parents, and caseworkers. There may be occasions when service providers and other professionals knowledgeable about the case will be interviewed. As the reviewers complete the instrument, item and outcome ratings are assigned and rating documentation must be provided to support those ratings.

The reviewers are guided to assess practice during a defined period under review, typically a 12-to-15-month period that extends back from the date of the onsite review. The actual assessment period for any particular case depends on the length that a case is open for services, or for placement during that period under review. In general, when reviewing safety related outcomes, the reviewers assess practice relative to all children in the family whether the children are served in the home or in foster care. The permanency outcomes are only relevant for a target child in foster care. The assessment of well-being outcomes can vary depending on the circumstances of the case and case type.

Each case receives specific ratings for each item. Possible ratings include Strength, Area Needing Improvement (ANI) or Not Applicable (NA). For more information on what contributes to strength ratings, including what is considered a concerted effort to achieve the desired outcome for an item, please see the CB resource [*Understanding the Federal Expectations for Achieving an OSRI Strength Rating*](#). These item ratings for a case combine to yield one of four final outcome ratings: Substantially Achieved, Partially Achieved, Not Achieved, or Not Applicable as defined in the OSRI.

In order to ensure consistency and accuracy of ratings, all cases are subject to first and second level quality assurance reviews. Periodically, the Children’s Bureau conducts secondary oversight of the case before final approval.

Appendix B – State Rating Summary for Baltimore City

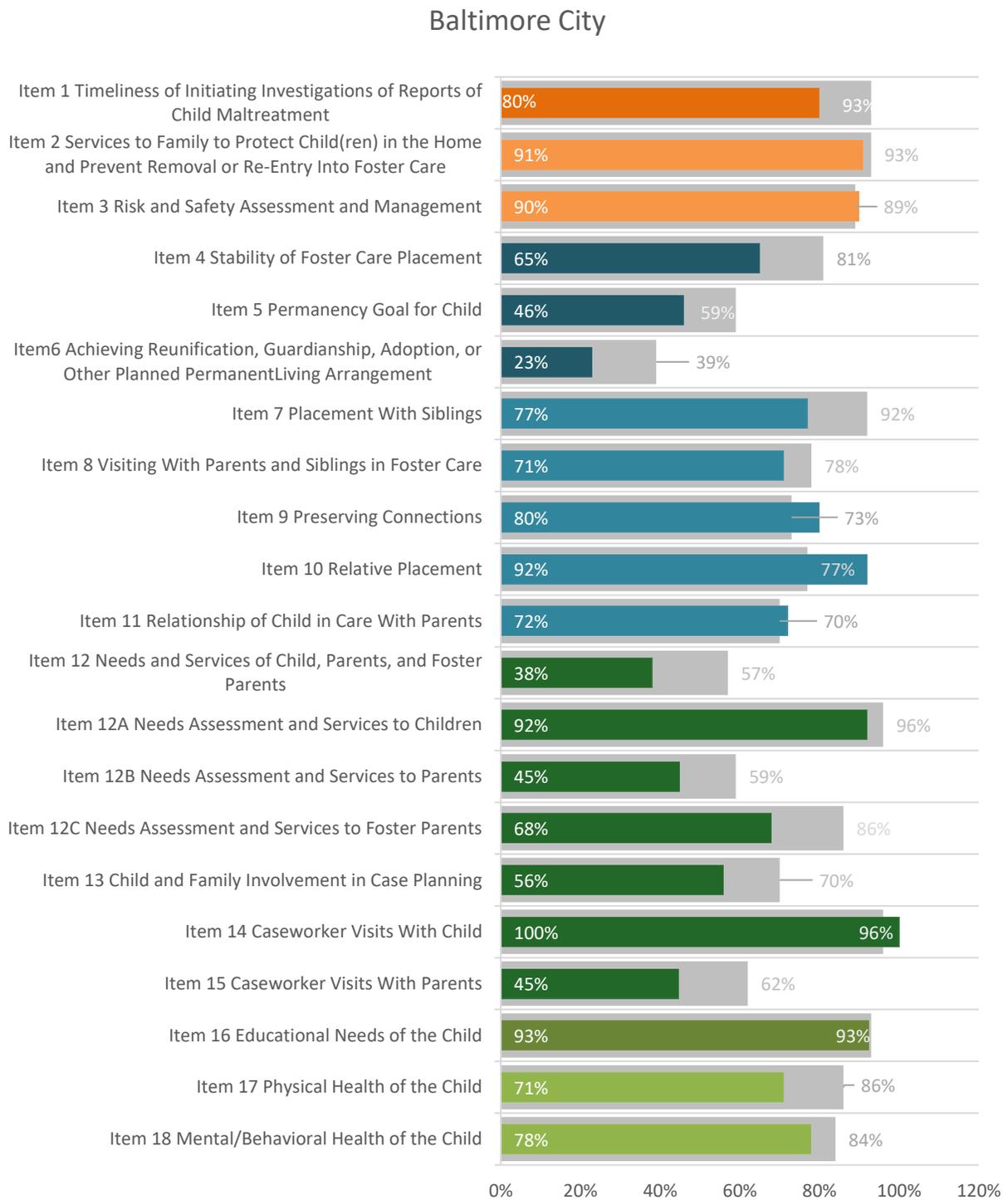
The below tables presents data collected from the Onsite Review Instrument (OSRI) State Rating Summary report. The table includes the total number of applicable cases along with the percentage of those cases rated a Strength for each of the 18 items.

Outcomes & Corresponding Items	Applicable Cases	Strength Rating
Safety Outcome 1: Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect.		
Item 1: Timeliness of Initiating Investigations of Reports of Child Maltreatment	5	80.0%
Safety Outcome 2: Children are safely maintained in their homes whenever possible and appropriate.		
Item 2: Services to Family to Protect Children in the Home and Prevent Removal or Re-Entry into Foster Care	11	90.9%
Item 3: Risk and Safety Assessment Management	40	90.0%
Permanency Outcome 1: Children have permanency and stability in their living situations.		
Item 4: Stability of Foster Care Placement	26	65.4%
Item 5: Permanency Goal for Child	26	46.2%
Item 6: Achieving Reunification, Guardianship, Adoption, or Other Planned Permanency Living Arrangement	26	23.1%
Permanency Outcome 2: The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children.		
Item 7: Placement with Siblings	13	76.9%
Item 8: Visiting with Parents and Siblings in Foster Care	21	71.4%
Item 9: Preserving Connections	25	80.0%
Item 10: Relative Placement	25	92.0%
Item 11: Relationship of Child in Care with Parents	18	72.2%
Well-Being Outcome 1: Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children's needs.		
Item 12A: Needs and Services to Child	40	92.5%
Item 12B: Needs and Services to Parents	40	45.0%
Item 12C: Needs and Services to Foster Parents	25	68.0%
Item 13: Child and Family Involvement in Case Planning	39	56.4%
Item 14: Caseworker Visits with Child	40	100%
Item 15: Caseworker Visits with Parents	38	44.7%
Well-Being Outcome 2: Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs.		
Item 16: Educational Needs of the Child	27	92.6%

Well-Being Outcome 2: Children receive adequate services to meet their physical and mental health needs.		
Item 17: Physical Health of the Child	31	71.0%
Item 18: Mental/Behavioral Health of the Child	23	78.3%

Appendix C – Comparison of Baltimore City Ratings to Maryland State Ratings

The below chart represents the percentage of cases rated as a Strength for each item for the county compared to the Maryland data (in gray).



Appendix D – Demographic/Context Data

Baltimore City, Demographic Data (U.S Census Bureau, 2024)

Total population (July 1, 2023): 565,239

Household Indicators:

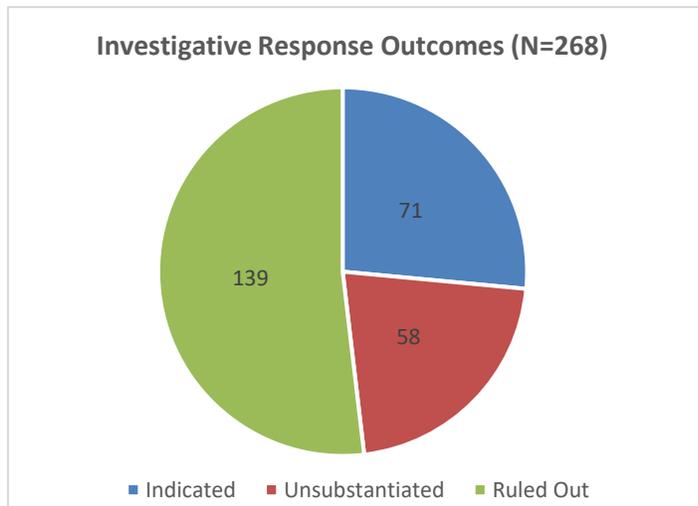
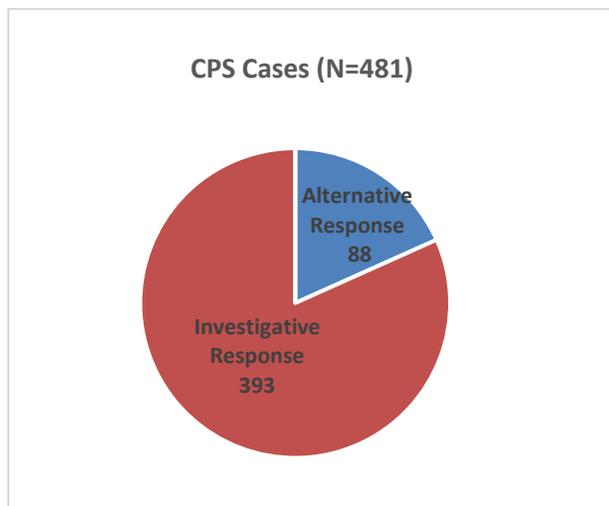
Median Income (2023 dollars) - \$59,623

Average persons per household (2019-2023) – 2.22

Poverty Rate: 20.1%



Baltimore City, Child Welfare Data (*Child Welfare Trends Report – December 2023, 12-month median end of month counts*)



Baltimore City Child Welfare Context	
*12-month median end of month counts	
CPS Maltreatment Reports	593
Total CPS Findings	267
In-Home Services	253
OOH Placements	1,450
Family Foster Homes	401
Formal Kinship Providers	430