

Child Welfare - Involved

Critical Incidents

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Judicial Community of Practice



WASHINGTON
COURTS
ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE OF THE COURTS

Critical Incidents

- **Child Fatalities:** When the family was involved in the child protection/welfare system within the preceding 12 months of the child's death, including "information only" referrals, or, when the fatality occurred in a DCYF licensed, certified, or state operated facility.
- **Child Near Fatalities:** When the family was involved in the child protection/welfare system within the preceding 12 months, including "information only" referrals, or the near fatality occurred in a DCYF licensed, certified, or state-operated facility.

A near fatality is defined as an act that, as certified by a physician, places the child in serious or critical condition

Critical Incidents Reviews

DCYF is required by statute (RCW 74.13.640) to review **child fatalities and near fatalities** that are maltreatment-related and where DCYF provided services to the child or youth within 12 months prior to the incident.

Typically conducted two to three months following a critical incident.

Fatality reports are published on DCYF website:
<https://dcyf.wa.gov/practice/oiaa/reports/child-fatality/child-welfare>

CHILD FATALITY REVIEW



Washington State Department of
CHILDREN, YOUTH & FAMILIES

Number of Critical Incidents

January – September 2025

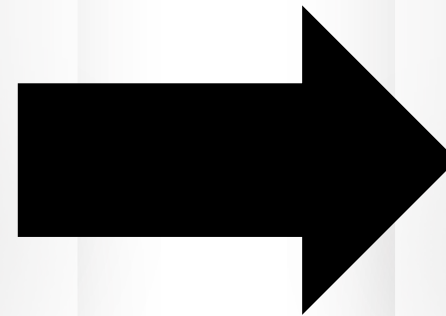
DCYF is limited by statute (RCW 74.13.640) to reviewing only those child fatalities and near fatalities that are maltreatment-related and where there was prior DCYF involvement within the 12 months preceding the incident.

Total number of DCYF-reviewable critical incidents

Q1: 22 critical incidents
Q2: 14 critical incidents
Q3: 9 critical incidents*

Total: 45

*Q3 data is still preliminary pending medical examiner reports and maltreatment investigations.



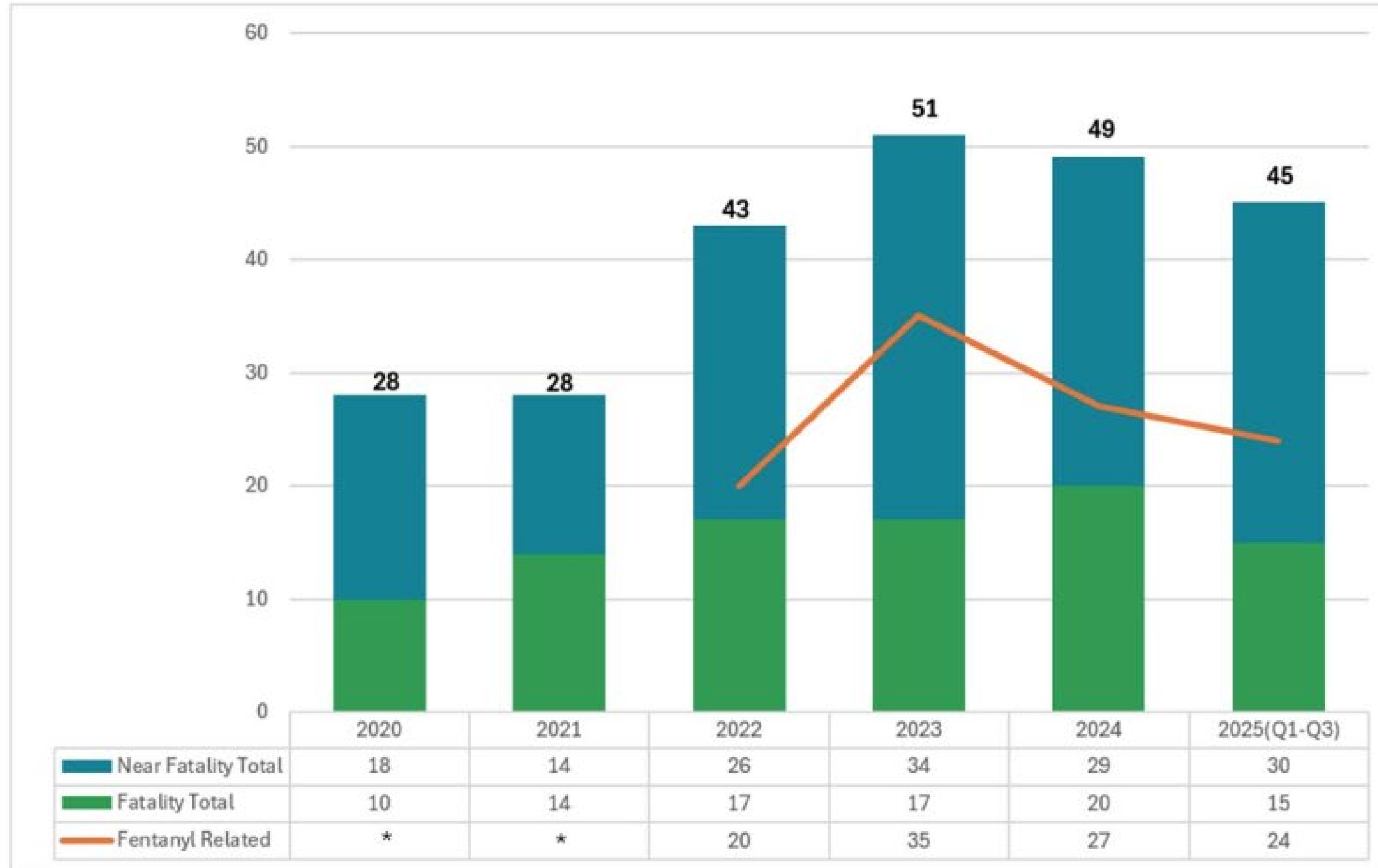
Opioid related critical incidents

24 (53%) critical incidents were related to opioids.

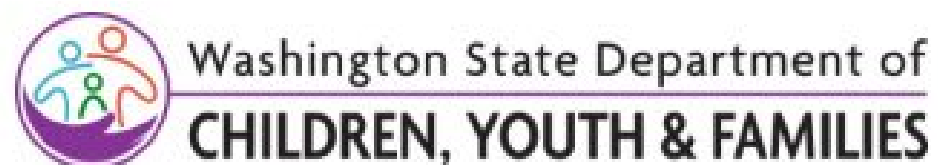
Includes:
3 fatalities
21 near fatalities

NUMBER OF CRITICAL INCIDENTS

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



Year	Fatality Count	Near Fatality Count
2020	10	18
2021	14	14
2022	17	26
2023	17	34
2024	20	29
2025 (Q1-Q3)	15	30



DCYF PPS (October 2025),
Administrative Incident Reporting and Fatality Reviews (Jan 2019- Sept 2025)
Q3 data is still preliminary pending medical examiner reports and maltreatment investigations

DCYF has a standard to mask numbers from 1-9 in public reports to prevent any possibility of identifying individuals to protect confidentiality. In the interest of providing as much transparency as possible to support the purpose of this report, we have included numbers from 1-9 regarding fatalities, as fatality reviews are already made public.

Observations and Takeaways

Numbers are high but are not double or triple previous years.

About 53% of critical incidents in 2025 have been opioid related

Possible Reasons for Moderation

1. Seeing the full effects of SB 6109
2. Changes in DCYF practice in Q1
3. Opioid overdoses trend down during the summer

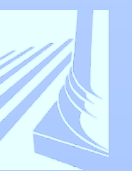
Children ages 0-3 are most likely age group to experience a critical incident.

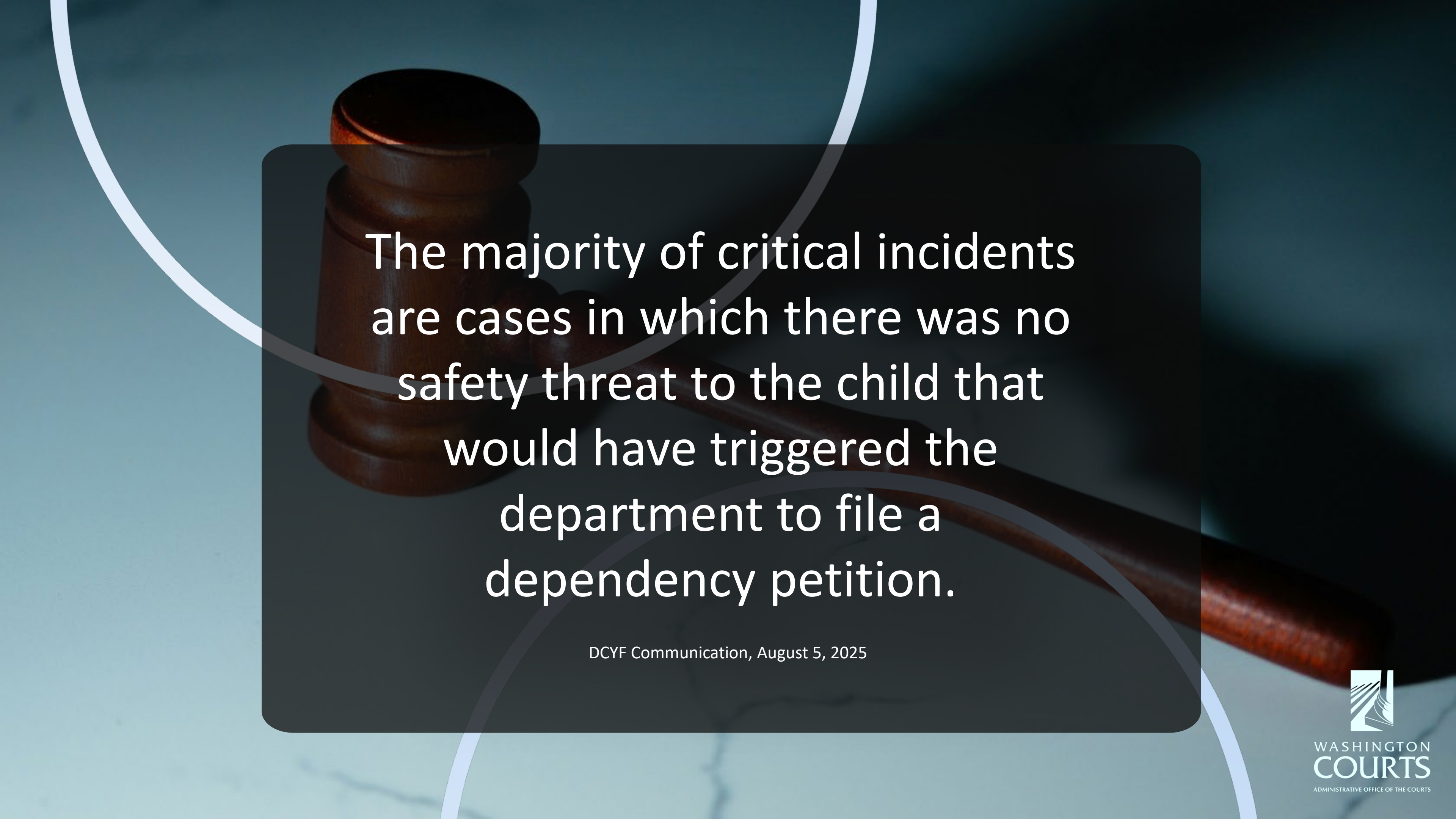
The number of families with chronic CPS involvement (high-need families) has steadily increased since 2018.

STAY INFORMED

Child Fatality Report Webpage

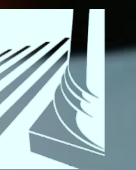
<https://dcyf.wa.gov/practice/oiaa/reports/child-fatality/child>





The majority of critical incidents are cases in which there was no safety threat to the child that would have triggered the department to file a dependency petition.

DCYF Communication, August 5, 2025



2025 OFCO Report

- **Recommendation 1:** Develop Guidelines on the Use of “In-Home Dependencies”
- **Recommendation 2:** Increase Treatment Resources for Pregnant and Parenting Women
- **Recommendation 3:** Increase Efforts to Engage Fathers and Paternal Relatives

Access the Report:

https://ofco.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2025-07/2025_OFCO_Critical_Incident_Report.pdf



2026 Legislative Budget Package

Addressing Critical Incidents

- Pre-filing representation model (F.I.R.S.T. Clinic)
- Parent Child Assistance Program (PCAP)
- Plan of Safe Care
- Public health nurses
- Family Resource Centers
- Community-based referral system
- Critical Incidents Workgroup (HCA, DCYF, DSHS, DOH)
- Maintain Family Impact Network (FIN)

Child Welfare

- Child Safety Framework updates
- Child welfare workload model updates
- Foster Care Assessment Program (FCAP)
- D.S. legal fees
- Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA)

Federal SSI Benefits (SSB 5911)

- Ends the state's practice of withholding federal Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits from children and youth in foster care who have a disability, or whose parent has died
- Young people in Extended Foster Care who have a disability will now receive approximately \$900 per month

The final operating budget invests **approximately \$2.5 million** towards interventions aimed at improving child safety.

Supporting Dependency Courts

Court Process for Cases Without Removal Workgroup

Goal is to develop a recommended model court process for procedurally handling dependency cases where a petition has been filed without a request for removal, or the child remains home or has been returned home prior to Fact-Finding by order of the court, referred to collectively as “in-home pre fact-finding cases”.

The formation of this workgroup was driven by multiple factors, including Washington’s historically higher rates of removal as compared to other states and recommendations from both DCYF’s fatality review process and the [2025 OFCO report](#).

Started February 2026

Online HUB: <https://fyjp.org/family-well-being-community-collaborative-fwcc/court-process-for-cases-without-removal-workgroup/>



Judicial Practice Tips

- Reinforce accurate application of legal standards for removal vs. dependency
- Promote appropriate use of in-home pre fact-finding cases.
- Insist on comprehensive safety assessments and quality safety practices.
- Require consistent, high-quality casework and follow-through from DCYF.
- Increase oversight in cases involving parental substance use, especially fentanyl.
- Address sources of parental stress—including poverty, domestic violence, housing instability, and lack of resources.
- Strengthen expectations around father engagement and diligent search inquiry.
- Learn your community resources and community gaps.
- Promote and support the use of Active Community Teams.

Dependency Judicial Resources

Family & Youth Justice Programs, at the Administrative Office of the Courts, provides training, technical assistance, and system improvement support to dependency courts.

Go to www.fyjp.org to view all opportunities available.

Upcoming Training

- [2026 Dependency Judicial Training Academy](#)
- [2026 Judicial Community of Practice Series](#)
- [Virtual Guardianship Training Series](#)

Online Training

- [Dependency 101 for Judicial Officers](#)
- [Dependency 201 for Judicial Officers](#)

Popular State Resources

- [2026 Dependency Judicial Rotation Support Guide](#)
- [Juvenile Non-Offender Benchbook](#)
- [iDecide](#)

Popular National Resources

- [NCJFCJ](#) (trainings, materials , grants and other supportive services)
- [Judicial Engagement Network \(JEN\)](#)

Thank you!

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