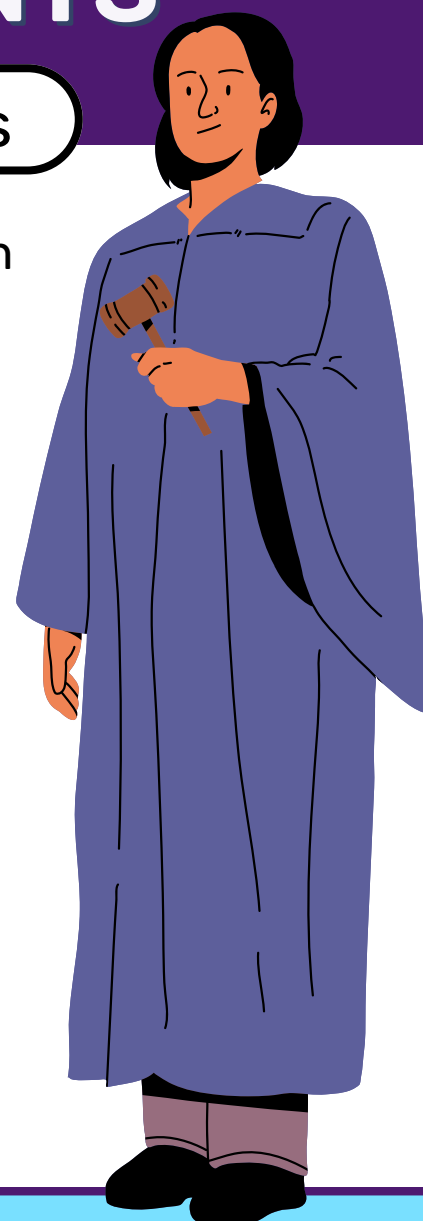


Child Dependency Courts

Critical incidents are the most tragic outcomes in child welfare cases. By understanding the factors behind them, judicial officers can make informed decisions that strengthen safety planning, reinforce high-quality practice, and promote better outcomes for families.



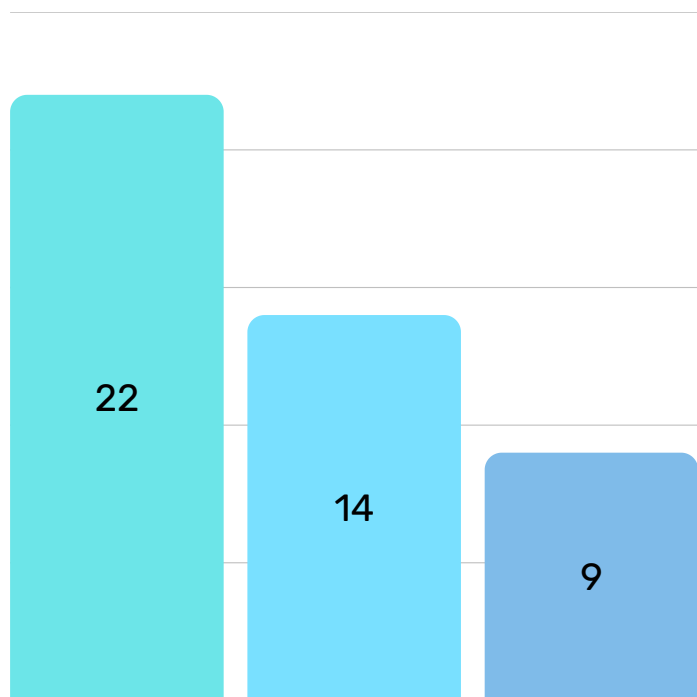
“Critical Incident” Defined

- Child fatality or near-fatality
- Family was involved with DCYF within past 12 months, or
- Occurred in DCYF-licensed, certified, or state-operated facility

Most critical incidents occur in families who were never involved in dependency court

2025 Critical Incidents (Jan-Sep)

● Q1 ● Q2 ● Q3*



Department of Children, Youth, & Families
Critical Incident Briefing, November 3, 2025

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

Key Takeaways

- About 50% of incidents were opioid-related
- Infants and toddlers are most impacted
- Most cases occurred in CPS-involved families deemed medium-high and high risk
 - Many of these families cycled in and out of CPS
- Incidents occur on average 5 months after case closure

JUDICIAL PRACTICE TIPS

- Apply legal standards accurately
- Ensure strong safety assessments
- Use in-home pre-fact-finding cases when appropriate
- Increase oversight in substance-use cases
- Address parental stressors and resource gaps
- Strengthen father engagement
- Expect consistent, high-quality casework
- Know you community’s resources and gaps
- Utilize an Active Community Team

