THE NCCPR 2023 BIG CITY RATE-OF-REMOVAL INDEX
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For many years, NCCPR has released a *Rate-of-Removal Index* comparing the propensity of states to adopt a "take-the-child-and-run" approach to child welfare. The index compares the number of children in each state taken from their families by family police agencies (a more accurate term than "child welfare agencies") to a Census Bureau estimate of the number of children living in poverty. The result is the number of removals of children from their homes for every 1,000 impoverished children. **This index applies the same methodology to America's ten biggest cities and their surrounding counties.**

THIS IS NOT THE "SNAPSHOT NUMBER"

The measure of a city's foster care population usually seen in news accounts is the so-called "snapshot number" indicating the number of children in foster care in a city on one particular day – usually September 30 of each year. That is a very important number, but it is a less accurate measure of a city's propensity to remove children.

A city may have a high snapshot number even if it takes away very few children, if it hangs on to those it takes for a very long time. (That is, in itself, a serious problem, but not a measure of the city's propensity to take away children in the first place.) Conversely, a city can have a low snapshot number and still take away many children if it takes them for a relatively short time. Thus, a city which takes away many children in January, but returns most of them by August will have a low number if the "snapshot" is taken in September.

RATHER, THE INDEX USES REMOVALS OVER THE COURSE OF A YEAR

So instead of measuring the foster care population on any given day, the *NCCPR Big City Rate-of-Removal Index* relies on data listing the number of children removed at some point over the course of a given year.

HOW THE INDEX IS COMPILED

The sources for foster care data are listed at the end of the table. It should be noted that agencies vary in when they make data available, so this year we're offering two versions. In the version with the most up-to-date data, the time periods used are fairly close – all are within one year of each other - they are not identical. That's because Texas and Pennsylvania lag behind all the others in the top-ten in making current data available. Rates of removal usually do not change radically from year to year. But this also means the index is not a precise measure. Rather, it gives a sense of which cities are outliers. So the rate of removal in Phoenix is extreme compared to all the others, and the rates in Philadelphia and Los Angeles also are significantly worse than the others.

This year we've added an additional table. In this one, we've "turned back the clock" on the six cities that provided the most up-to-date data, so they cover the same time period as the laggards in Texas and Pennsylvania.

THE SAN JOSE ANOMALY

For the sake of consistency, and the fact that "top ten" is a convention when making lists while top nine is not, these data include San Jose, California and surrounding Santa Clara County. But, as the center of Silicon Valley, San Jose is far wealthier than the other cities. Note the low child poverty rate and correspondingly low raw number of entries into care. This makes the San Jose figures more susceptible to year-to-year fluctuations than the others. (And next year's San Jose figure almost certainly will be much higher because, as this index is published, a foster-care panic is underway there.)

COMPARISON DATA: WHY WE THINK IT'S MORE VALID TO COMPARE ENTRIES TO CHILDREN LIVING IN POVERTY

We could have simply compared the number of children removed to a city's total child population. (And, for those interested only in that measure, we have included such a comparison in the tables that follow.) But then all the cities with high rates of removal and high child poverty rates would complain that this was unfair because we didn't consider a risk factor for actual abuse (and even more, though the agencies won't admit it, the factor most often confused with "neglect") – poverty.

In addition, since family police agencies almost never take children from affluent families, using the total child population would allow affluent communities that still take large numbers of children from impoverished neighborhoods to camouflage this fact. This can be seen when one compares the data from San Jose with and without factoring in poverty. So, to come closer to an apples-to-apples comparison, we recommend using the rates of removal that factor in Census Bureau estimates for the number of people under age 18 living in poverty in each city.

OTHER CAUTIONS AND CAVEATS

• As a group that believes strongly in family preservation, we feel that a high rate-of-removal almost always is a sign of a bad system. But a low rate-of-removal is not necessarily a sign of a good system. A low rate-of-removal can be accomplished either by curbing the confusion of poverty with neglect and embracing safe, proven programs to keep families together, or by ignoring children in real danger. (What typically happens, however, is that any system that dares to curb wrongful removal is *falsely accused* of ignoring children in real danger.)

● Conversely, curbing wrongful removal is not enough. Though New York City does relatively well compared to other cities when it comes to curbing the actual removal of children, the reduction in foster care has been accompanied by an increase in onerous, oppressive, constant surveillance of families, while forcing parents to jump through all sorts of hoops. This adds enormous stress. That stress itself ultimately can destroy families and, even when it doesn't, it can do enormous harm to children's emotional well-being.

● Although placing a child with a relative is less traumatic than placing a child with a stranger, when such a "kinship care" placement is done by order of a court *or* a family police agency, *it is still foster care.* Any family police agency official who says "we are keeping children out of foster care by placing them with relatives" is being, at best, disingenuous.

This also applies to "hidden foster care" – coerced so-called "voluntary" placements with relatives that bypass even the minimal due process requirements of the formal system. Cities and states don't report these foster care placements in their official figures. As a result, some places may be

making their entry-into-care figures lower than they should be by failing to report all such placements. The problem is particularly severe in Texas, where more than 60% of entries into foster care are "off the books." So the numbers from Texas cities, particularly the low numbers from Dallas and Houston, should be viewed with some suspicion. Because any form of "kinship care," when demanded by a family police agency, whether official or hidden *is foster care.*

• The data don't reveal trends over time. A community that still has a relatively high number of removals but has been steadily and safely reducing them may be a better "role model" than a community which removed relatively few children in past years, but now is in the midst of a foster-care panic.

• One cannot say, based on these data, that city x "took y percent of its poor children from their parents in 2023." That would be inaccurate because, while the overwhelming majority of children taken from their parents are poor, not all of them are. Thus, we are comparing a pool of children – those removed from their parents – which is mostly poor, to a general population that is entirely poor. One can say only that, for example, in 2023 authorities in metropolitan Phoenix appeared far more prone to resort to foster care than their counterparts in any other big city, since this index shows that metropolitan Phoenix has the highest rate-of-removal.

The NCCPR Big City Rate-of-Removal Index
Updated January, 2024

RATES OF REMOVAL IN AMERICA'S TEN LARGEST CITIES,*
FACTORING IN CHILD POVERTY

County	Impoverished Child population, 2022	Entries into foster care	Rate-of-Removal per thousand impoverished children	Time period
Maricopa County (Phoenix)	139,817	3,478	24.9	SFY 2023
Philadelphia County	91,746	1,508	16.4	SFY 2022
Los Angeles County	351,449	5,649	16.1	SFY 2023
Bexar County (San Antonio)	107,610	1,074	10.0	SFY 2022
San Diego County	84,001	767	9.1	SFY 2023
New York City	400,671	2,798	7.0	CFY 2023
Santa Clara County (San Jose)	25,899	149	5.8	SFY 2023
Dallas County	128,652	738	5.7	SFY 2022
Cook County (Chicago)	201,104	973	4.8	SFY 2023
Harris County (Houston)	298,813	566	1.9	SFY 2022
TOTAL/AVERAGE	**1,829,762**	**17,700**	**9.7**	

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RATES OF REMOVAL IN AMERICA'S TEN LARGEST CITIES,*
FACTORING IN CHILD POVERTY (ALL DATA FROM SFY 2022)

County	Impoverished Child population, 2022	Entries into foster care, SFY 2022	Rate-of-Removal per thousand impoverished children
Maricopa County (Phoenix)	139,817	3,768	26.9
Los Angeles County	351,449	6,363	18.1
Philadelphia County	91,746	1,508	16.4
San Diego County	84,001	979	11.7
Bexar County (San Antonio)	107,610	1,074	10.0
New York City	400,671	2,832	7.1
Santa Clara County (San Jose)	25,899	154	5.9
Dallas County	128,652	738	5.7
Cook County (Chicago)	201,104	1,077	5.4
Harris County (Houston)	298,813	566	1.9
TOTAL/AVERAGE	**1,829,762**	**19,059**	**10.4**

RATES OF REMOVAL IN AMERICA'S TEN LARGEST CITIES, *WITHOUT* FACTORING IN CHILD POVERTY

County	Child population, 2022	Entries into foster care	Rate-of-Removal per thousand children	Time period
Philadelphia County	324,578	1,508	4.6	SFY 2022
Maricopa County (Phoenix)	1,002,223	3,478	3.5	SFY 2023
Los Angeles County	1,945,950	5,649	2.9	SFY 2023
Bexar County (San Antonio)	500,082	1,074	2.1	SFY 2022
New York City	1,644,614	2,798	1.7	CFY 2023
Dallas County	641,244	738	1.2	SFY 2022
San Diego County	668,043	767	1.1	SFY 2023
Cook County (Chicago)	1,053,707	973	0.9	SFY 2023
Harris County (Houston)	1,216,462	566	0.5	SFY 2022
Santa Clara County (San Jose)	373,911	149	0.4	SFY 2023
TOTAL/AVERAGE	**9,370,814**	**17,700**	**1.9**	

*-Where the city is part of a county, figures are for the county.

SOURCES: POPULATION AND IMPOVERISHED CHILD POPULATION
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