

Maryland Department of Human Services
Social Services Administration
Continuous Quality Improvement
CFSR Results Report

Baltimore City Department of Social Services
April & May 2022
October & November 2022



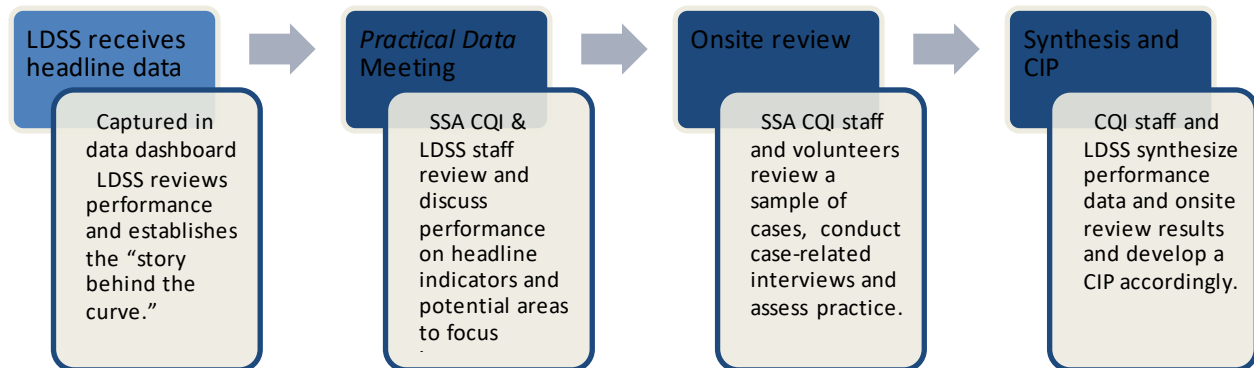
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I. Maryland’s Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) Overview

Maryland’s CQI process is designed to align with SSA’s strategic vision, and support our enhanced integrated practice model, 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 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 components¹: 1) a **Practical Data 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 the agency, local court and provider child welfare practices to achieve positive outcomes for children; by reviewing a 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 review process is below.



This report focuses on the findings of the onsite review and the Practical Data Meeting. 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 instrument. More

¹ *Practical Data* meetings are currently in place but may not have been conducted in every jurisdiction. As a result, information from this meeting is not in every local jurisdiction’s report. Additionally, at a later date, SSA intends to add focus groups with local staff, managers, and community stakeholders to elicit information on local systemic drivers and other aspects of practice not included in the OSRI.

detailed information on the case review instrument and the process for assessing cases is in appendix A. This report also provides SSA's feedback on local department strengths, areas needing attention, and then provides recommendations for continued exploration and improvement for consideration in the local department's continuous improvement plan.

SSA would like to thank and commend Baltimore City Department of Social Services Director Brandi Stockdale, Assistant Director for Adult, Family & Children's Services Corine Mullings and 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. Practical Data Meeting

Prior to the onsite review, SSA and the LDSS held Orientation and Practical Data Meetings on March 7, 2022, and on August 8, 2022, 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 DSS highlighted the following indicators as areas of performance to explore further:

- Permanency
 - Permanency in 12 months for children in care 24+ months
- Well-Being
 - Placement stability

The LDSS shared some key examples/their assessment of the practice and systemic factors impacting performance. Key findings include:

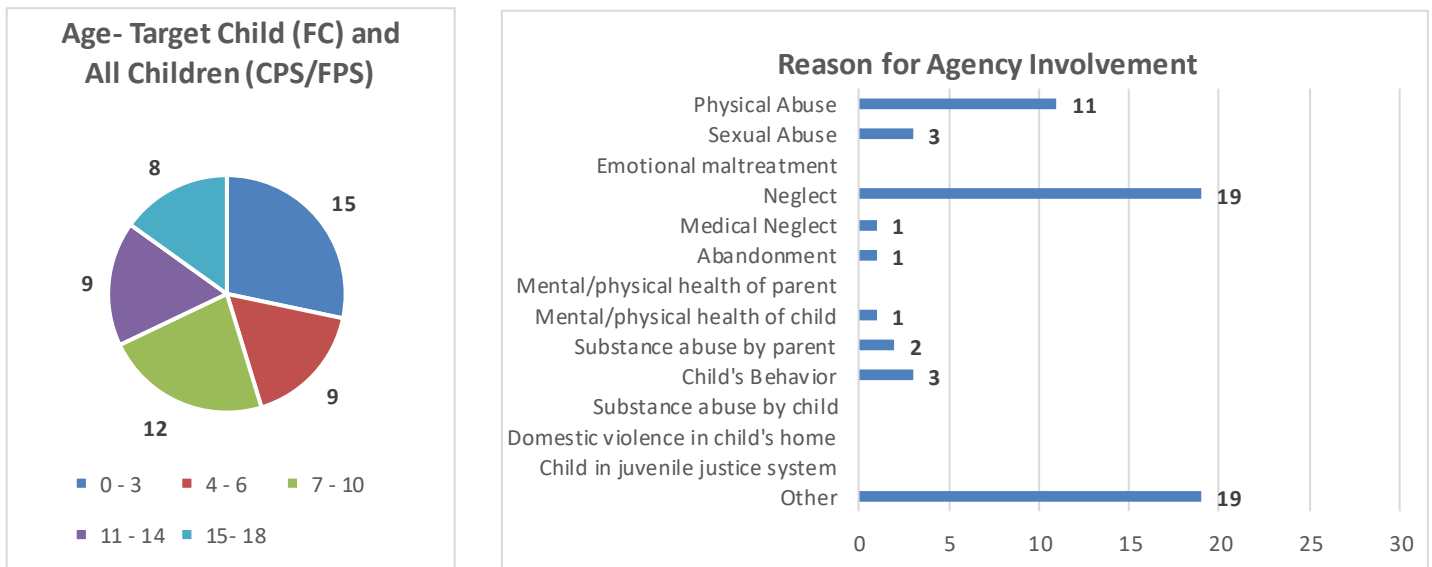
- Permanency
 - The agency reported that they experienced delays in custody and guardianship due to delays in processing the paperwork, scheduling fingerprinting, and delays in court hearings. It was noted that staffing vacancies played a major factor in delays with permanency. Housing has also posed a challenge to achieving reunification in the past year since COVID-19.
- Well-Being
 - The agency reported that many placement changes that took place were not negative changes. It was noted that many placement changes occurred due to mental health concerns, behavior, and stepping down from a residential treatment facility to a family setting. Furthermore, the agency reported that they have developed a web-based kinship resource center to increase support to kinship providers in an effort to increase performance in placement stability. The agency also utilizes a Kinship Navigator who reaches out to kinship providers within 48-72 hours of a child's entry into foster care to assess, check-in, and identify needs.

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 Baltimore City onsite review was conducted in the spring from April 11, 2022, through April 18, 2022, and May 9, 2022, through May 16, 2022. The onsite review was conducted in the fall from October 11, 2022, through October 18, 2022, and November 7, 2022 through November 16, 2022. The spring review assessed performance during a period under review (PUR) from April 1, 2021, until the date each specific case was first reviewed onsite. The fall review assessed performance during a period under review (PUR) from October 1, 2021, until the date each specific case was first reviewed onsite. The review team assessed 40 cases, including 26 foster care cases and 14 cases of children who have received in-home services: seven (7) Investigative Responses (IR), three (3) Alternative Responses (AR) and four (4) Family Preservation services cases.

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



These cases were randomly selected using a stratified methodology. However, this sample of cases may or may not be representative of Baltimore City’s entire 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

Appendix B provides a summary of case ratings by item and outcome for the review. Below we provide a narrative description of the item, number of applicable cases and the practice observed in the cases. Note that not all cases are applicable for each item. The item performance for a particular case can be rated as a strength, area needing improvement or not applicable. The tables present the percentage of applicable cases that received a strength rating.

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

Safety Outcome 1	Applicable Cases	Strength Rating (%)
Item 1	20	95.0%

Item 1: Timeliness of Initiating Investigations of Reports of Child Maltreatment. *Assesses whether responses to all accepted child maltreatment reports received during the period under review were initiated, and face-to-face contact with the child(ren) made, within the time frames established by agency policies or state statutes.*

The majority of cases, nineteen (19) of the twenty (20) applicable cases for this item, were rated as a Strength. 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.

In the one (1) case rated an ANI, the review showed the agency did not make face-to-face contact with the children identified as the victim child's siblings in a Substance Exposed Newborn (SENs) case from fifteen (15) days to twenty-six (26) days after the required time frames, and the review did not show any valid reasons for the delays.

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

Safety Outcome 2	Applicable Cases	Strength Rating (%)
Item 2	17	88.2%
Item 3	40	90.0%

Item 2: Services to Family to Protect Children in the Home and Prevent Removal or Re-Entry into Foster Care. *Assesses whether, during the period under review, the agency made concerted efforts to provide services to the family to prevent children's entry into foster care or re-entry after a reunification.*

The majority, fifteen (15) out of seventeen (17) applicable cases for this item were rated a Strength. Eleven (11) of the cases were rated a Strength because the agency ensured safety-related services were in place such as substance use and mental health treatment in an attempt to prevent the children's entry into foster care. In the remaining four (4) cases that were rated a Strength, the children's removal was necessary to ensure their safety, therefore, no safety related services could have been provided to prevent the children's entry into foster care.

The remaining two (2) cases were rated an ANI because the agency did not provide safety-related services to the families that would have prevented the children from entering foster care, and there were no barriers to the agency doing so.

Item 3: Risk and Safety Assessment Management. *Assesses whether, during the period under review, the agency made concerted efforts to assess and address the risk and safety concerns relating to the child(ren) in their own homes or while in foster care.*

The majority, thirty-six (36) of the forty (40) applicable cases for this item were rated as a Strength. The agency assessed 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 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). In fifteen (15) cases, the agency developed an appropriate safety plan and monitored the safety plan 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.

The remaining four (4) cases were rated an ANI. In two (2) cases rated an ANI, the agency did not complete ongoing risk or safety assessments of children. In one (1) of the cases rated an ANI, the agency did not complete accurate initial assessments of the children's safety. The final case was rated an ANI because the agency closed the case with safety concerns that were not adequately addressed.

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

Permanency Outcome 1	Applicable Cases	Strength Rating (%)
Item 4	26	80.8%
Item 5	26	57.7%
Item 6	26	30.8%

Item 4: Stability of Foster Care Placement. *Assesses whether the child in foster care is in a stable placement at the time of the onsite review and that any changes in placement that occurred during the period under review were in the best interests of the child and consistent with achieving the child's permanency goal(s).*

The majority of applicable cases, twenty-one (21) out of (26), were rated as a Strength. In four (4) of these cases rated a Strength, children did experience a placement change but it was determined to be in the child's best interest. For the remaining seventeen (17) cases rated a Strength, there were no indications that the children were at risk of disruption and the placement resources did not need assistance in maintaining the children in their placements. The review revealed that the agency assessed the stability of these placements by having conversations with foster parents and children, when age appropriate, on a regular basis.

In three (3) out of the five (5) cases rated an ANI, the children experienced 2-3 placement changes during the period under review and these changes were not planned by the agency or in an effort to achieve the children's case goals. Furthermore, the agency did not make any efforts to provide services in order to stabilize the placements prior to the change in placement. In the remaining two (2) cases rated ANI, the agency did not accurately assess placement stability as the children were placed in inappropriate placements. Furthermore, the agency did not provide foster parents with appropriate services to address runaway and behavior issues to stabilize the children's placements.

Item 5: Permanency Goal for Child. *Assesses whether appropriate permanency goals were established for the child in a timely manner.*

Fifteen (15) of the twenty-six (26) applicable cases for this item were rated a Strength. The review showed the agency and court established the permanency goals in a timely manner and those goals were appropriate based on case circumstances. The review revealed that the establishment of permanency goals ranged from the same day or up to 6 months after entry into foster care. Furthermore, in three (3) of the cases where TPR was applicable, the agency filed for an exception to termination of parental rights (TPR) within the timeframe.

The remaining eleven (11) applicable cases for this item were rated an ANI. The agency did not make concerted efforts to establish the permanency goals timely or they were not appropriate during the period under review. In seven (7) cases, the review revealed the goal of reunification was not appropriate to case circumstances during the PUR. There were two (2) cases where the review revealed the goal of guardianship was not appropriate to case circumstances. Additionally, the review showed that the agency did not consistently establish concurrent permanency goals in a timely manner. Four (4) cases received a rating of ANI because the agency did not establish concurrent goals of guardianship or adoption in a timely manner. Furthermore, in the majority of cases with an ANI rating, the review revealed the agency did not file for Termination of Parental Rights (TPR) or an exception, when applicable, in a timely manner when children had been in foster care for at least 15 out of the most recent 22 months.

Item 6: Achieving Reunification, Guardianship, Adoption, or Other Planned Permanency Living Arrangement. *Assesses whether concerted efforts were made, or are being made, during the period under review to achieve reunification, guardianship, adoption, or other planned permanent living arrangement.*

The majority, eighteen (18) of the twenty-six (26) cases applicable for this item were rated an ANI because the agency and courts did not consistently support families in achieving permanency for the children in a timely manner. There were sixteen (16) cases that had a permanency plan of reunification, and the agency and courts did not make concerted efforts to achieve the goal within the 12-month time frame. The agency did not consistently demonstrate efforts to engage biological parents 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 meeting their needs. Additionally, the agency and courts did not always provide the services necessary for families to achieve reunification timely, such as therapeutic services and substance use treatment, or provide assistance in obtaining the necessary documentation for parents to access these services. In addition, in at least one (1) case, the review showed no barriers to achieving reunification, but the agency and courts did not make efforts to reunify the biological parent and children although the parent completed all necessary services to reunify. Furthermore, in the cases with an ANI rating that had a permanency goal of guardianship, the agency did not consistently make concerted efforts towards achieving this goal by completing the necessary paperwork. In the three (3) cases rated an ANI that had a goal of Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (APPLA), the agency did not secure a formalized living arrangement for the children that would be considered permanent until they were discharged from foster care.

The remaining eight (8) applicable cases were rated a Strength because the agency and courts made concerted efforts to achieve permanency for the children in foster care in a timely manner. In two

(2) cases permanency was achieved within the mandated time frame, in one (1) case reunification was achieved within 12 months and in the other (1) case guardianship was achieved within 18 months. In one (1) case, in which the youth had a goal of APPLA, the agency identified and formalized a permanent living arrangement for the youth. In five (5) cases, the review determined it was likely that permanency would be achieved within the mandated time frames of 12-months for reunification, 18-months for guardianship and 24-months for adoption.

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

Permanency Outcome 1	Applicable Cases	Strength Rating (%)
Item 7	14	85.7%
Item 8	23	73.9%
Item 9	26	80.8%
Item 10	24	83.3%
Item 11	23	47.8%

Item 7: Placement with Siblings. *Assesses whether, during the period under review, concerted efforts were made to ensure that siblings in foster care are placed together unless a separation was necessary to meet the needs of one of the siblings.*

The majority, twelve (12) out of the fourteen (14) cases applicable for this item were rated a Strength as the agency placed children 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 or it was therapeutically determined to not be in the children's best interest to place them together during the PUR.

For the two (2) cases rated an ANI, children were not placed with all their siblings in foster care and the review showed no valid reason for their separation.

Item 8: Visiting with Parents and Siblings in Foster Care. *Assesses whether, during the period under review, concerted efforts were made to ensure that visitation between a child in foster care and his or her mother, father, and siblings is of sufficient frequency and quality to promote continuity in the child's relationship with these close family members.*

The majority, seventeen (17) out of the twenty-three (23) cases applicable for this item were rated a Strength because the agency made concerted efforts to ensure frequent and quality visitation occurred between the child, biological parents, and their siblings in foster care when applicable. The review showed that the frequency of visits varied from weekly to monthly and ranged from 1 hour to overnight visits, which was sufficient to maintain the children's relationships with their applicable biological parents based on case circumstances. The agency also provided transportation assistance for biological parents and children to attend these visits when necessary. In the six (6) 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 review indicated that the frequency of sibling visits

varied from weekly to monthly and ranged from 15 minutes to 8 hours, which was determined to be sufficient in maintaining their relationships with one another based on case circumstances.

The six (6) remaining cases applicable for this item were rated as an ANI because the agency did not ensure the children had frequent and quality visitation with their applicable biological parents or siblings in foster care. The review showed that in most cases rated an ANI visits between children and their families occurred less than once a month or never. Additionally, the agency did not always ensure that the visits that occurred were of sufficient quality to support the continuity in the family relationships. The majority of the cases rated an ANI revealed that the agency did not engage the biological parent/legal guardian in discussions around visitation to determine if there were any barriers or if any assistance was needed in coordinating or facilitating visits. Additionally, in three (3) cases rated an ANI there was no evidence of a visitation plan. The review did not show a significant difference for biological mothers or biological fathers in these cases.

Item 9: Preserving Connections. *Assesses whether, during the period under review, concerted efforts were made to maintain the child's connections to his or her neighborhood, community, faith, extended family, Tribe, school, and friends.*

The majority, twenty-one (21) of twenty-six (26) applicable cases for this item were rated as a Strength. The agency was able to maintain children's important connections to extended family and school when they entered foster care. The review showed that the agency supported children maintaining their connections with family members through telephone contact or visitation and ensured no additional assistance was needed to support visitation. Additionally, in five (5) cases, children were able to remain in their schools of origin upon entry into foster care. In two (2) cases where the children experienced a change in schools, it was determined to be in the child's best interest as the change in schools was due to the child attending school at the placement facility. In three (3) cases the review showed children's change in school was due to a natural academic progression. Furthermore, in all twenty-one (21) cases the agency inquired about Native American heritage and tribal affiliation with families or through the courts and determined none of the children had any Native American heritage.

The remaining five (5) cases were rated as an ANI because the agency did not make efforts to maintain the children's connections with their biological fathers whom the agency was not working towards reunification, siblings not in foster care, and/or extended family members when the child entered foster care and the review did not reveal any barriers.

Item 10: Relative Placement. *Assesses whether, during the period under review, concerted efforts were made to place the child with relatives when appropriate.*

A majority, twenty (20), out of the twenty-four (24) cases applicable for this item were rated as a Strength because the agency made concerted efforts to place children with relatives during the PUR. The review showed that the agency engaged the biological parents and children, when age-appropriate, in an effort to identify potential maternal and paternal relative placement resources. In some of the Strength cases the review also showed evidence that the agency utilized parent locator services, such as Family Find, to assist in identifying and locating maternal and paternal relatives. In twelve (12) out of twenty-four (24) applicable cases, children were placed with a

relative and remained in their relative placements throughout the PUR, unless it was determined the child required a higher level of care.

The remaining four (4) applicable cases were rated an ANI because the agency either did not make efforts during the period under review to identify maternal or paternal relatives or did not re-evaluate identified relatives who were not permanently ruled out.

Item 11: Relationship of Child in Care with Parents. *Assesses whether, during the period under review, concerted efforts were made to promote, support, and/or maintain positive relationships between the child in foster care and his or her mother and father or other primary caregiver(s) from whom the child had been removed through activities other than just arranging for visitation.*

Slightly over half, twelve (12) out of the twenty-three (23) cases applicable for this item were rated an ANI. The agency did not make concerted efforts to promote, support, or otherwise maintain positive relationships between children and their biological parents whom they were removed from. While the findings in Item 8 suggest the agency has strong practice in engaging biological parents to ensure frequent and quality visitation between the children and their biological parents, the review also showed the agency did not consistently encourage or facilitate other means of contact between children and their biological parents outside of visitation. For the majority of cases rated an ANI for this item, the agency did not keep the biological parents informed of children's medical/dental appointments and school meetings or encourage the biological parents to attend these meetings, either virtually or in-person, during the PUR.

The remaining eleven (11) cases applicable for this item were rated a Strength because the agency promoted positive relationships between children and their applicable biological parents or legal guardians outside of the scheduled parent-child visits. In these cases the agency informed biological parents and/or legal guardians of the children's medical, dental, and school appointments and encouraged them to attend, when possible. In two (2) cases the agency provided transportation to the biological parent to attend medical appointments.

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

Well-Being Outcome 1	Applicable Cases	Strength Rating (%)
Item 12	40	32.5%
Item 12A	40	92.5%
Item 12B	38	36.8%
Item 12C	24	79.2%
Item 13	40	42.5%
Item 14	40	95.0%
Item 15	37	32.4%

Item 12: Needs and Services of Child, Parents, and Foster Parents. *Assesses whether, during the period under review, the agency (1) made concerted efforts to assess the needs of children, parents, and foster parents (both initially, if the child entered foster care or the case was opened during the period under review, and on an ongoing basis) to identify the services necessary to achieve*

case goals and 9 adequately address the issues relevant to the agency's involvement with the family, and (2) provided the appropriate services.

Item 12 provides a rating for three sub-items (12A related to children, 12B related to parents and 12C related to foster parents) and an overall rating based on the ratings from the sub-items combined.

Item 12A: Needs and Services of Child

The majority, thirty-seven (37) of the forty (40) cases applicable for this item were rated as a Strength because 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 review showed 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 eleven (11) 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). In four (4) of the foster care cases rated as a Strength, the agency also informally assessed the older youth's independent living skills through conversations with them, and in two (2) cases, the review showed evidence that the agency utilized the Ansell Casey Life Skills Assessment to formally assess older youth's independent living needs. In the majority of cases, there were no social or emotional needs identified for children. In the three (3) 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 to support children's peer relationships, financial literacy, and life skill classes.

For the remaining three (3) cases rated an ANI, the agency did not comprehensively assess the children's needs on an ongoing basis and, thus, did not provide appropriate services for the children's social/emotional needs, or if the agency did assess the children's needs, services were not provided to address the needs identified. In two (2) out of the three (3) cases rated an ANI, the review showed that needs were identified for the children, but the agency did not provide the necessary services to meet the children's needs.

Item 12B: Needs and Services to Parents

The majority, twenty-four (24) of the thirty-eight (38) cases applicable for this item were rated an ANI because the agency did not engage with the applicable biological parents to assess their needs, or the agency did not consistently provide appropriate services to meet their needs when needs were identified. The review showed there was a lack of engagement to assess both biological parents to determine what services would assist them in ensuring their children's safety and well-being and to achieve their case goals. Thirteen (13) out of the twenty-four (24) cases rated an ANI were applicable for biological fathers and twenty (20) of the twenty-four (24) cases rated an ANI were applicable for biological mothers. In the majority of cases rated an ANI for this item, the agency did not complete any needs assessments of the biological mothers' or biological fathers' needs, did not consistently assess their needs on an ongoing basis to determine if services were necessary, or, if parents were already engaged in services, did not assess to determine if the services were appropriately meeting the parents' identified needs. Furthermore,

some of the cases were rated an ANI because the agency did not provide services to meet the biological parents' needs once needs were identified. Additionally, in some cases, the review showed evidence that the biological parents' whereabouts were unknown to the agency, but the agency did not make concerted efforts to locate them during the PUR. The review revealed that the lack of consistent engagement with biological parents was evident in both foster care and in-home cases.

The remaining fourteen (14) applicable cases for this item were rated a Strength because the agency was able to accurately and comprehensively assess the biological parents' needs and provide appropriate services to meet their identified needs. Ten (10) out of the fourteen (14) cases rated a Strength were not applicable for biological fathers. A biological parent is not applicable for this item if one of the following is true: their identity is unknown, if their whereabouts were not known during the entire PUR despite agency efforts to locate them, if the biological parent does not have a relationship with the child and has not been involved with the family, or if the biological parent was deceased prior to the PUR. Additionally, the review showed when needs were identified the agency ensured these needs were met and monitored the biological parents progress in services. Examples of needs provided by the agency include substance abuse, parenting classes, mental health treatment, and housing.

Item 12C: Needs and Services to Foster Parents

The majority, nineteen (19) out of the twenty-four (24) applicable cases for this item were rated as a Strength because 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 all cases rated a Strength, 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.

The five (5) remaining cases applicable for this item were rated an ANI because the agency did not provide supportive services to foster parents, such as therapy, daycare, financial assistance, and crisis intervention services, to meet their needs and stabilize the placement during the PUR.

Item 13: Child and Family Involvement in Case Planning. *Assesses whether, during the period under review, concerted efforts were made (or are being made) to involve parents and children (if developmentally appropriate) in the case planning process on an ongoing basis.*

Twenty-three (23) out of the forty (40) cases applicable for this item were rated an ANI. The agency did not consistently include all applicable biological parents in case planning during the PUR. The review showed the agency often did not contact the biological parents to include them in regular discussions around developing case goals or progress towards achieving case goals. While the agency engaged biological mothers more often than biological fathers, biological mothers' involvement in case planning was still limited.

The remaining seventeen (17) applicable cases were rated a Strength because the agency made concerted efforts to involve the children and their applicable parents and/or legal guardians in the development of case goals and ongoing case planning during the period under review. In the cases

rated a Strength, the review found that the agency encouraged and supported the applicable parents, legal guardians, and children in sharing their thoughts and opinions in decision-making. The agency also utilized developmentally appropriate dialogue in the case planning process with children, adjusted case goals when necessary, and met regularly with families to have ongoing case planning discussions.

Item 14: Caseworker Visits with Child. *Assesses whether the frequency and quality of visits between caseworkers and the child(ren) in the case are sufficient to ensure the safety, permanency, and well-being of the child and promote achievement of case goals.*

The majority, thirty-eight (38) out of forty (40) applicable cases, were rated as a Strength because the agency conducted frequent and quality visits with children to ensure their safety, permanency, and well-being and promote the achievement of their case goals. The review showed in all applicable cases the agency visits with children were noted to be sufficient frequency based on the case circumstances. For most cases rated a Strength, the agency visited with children 1-2 times a month for 30 minutes to an hour. In all applicable cases rated a Strength, the agency's visits with children 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, 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 their case goals.

The remaining two (2) applicable cases were rated an ANI because the agency's visits with the child were not of sufficient frequency to assess the child's safety, address permanency and well-being, and promote the achievement of case goals. In one (1) ANI case, the review showed that after the child was reunified the agency only had one visit with the child and did not have any visits for the remaining 8 months of the PUR. In the other ANI case, the agency did not have sufficient quality visits with the child to address safety and promote the achievement of case goals. The agency did not effectively engage the child in conversations about safety in the home prior to closing.

Item 15: Caseworker Visits with Parents. *Assesses whether, during the period under review, the frequency and quality of visits between caseworkers and the mothers and fathers of the child(ren) are sufficient to ensure the safety, permanency, and well-being of the child(ren) and promote achievement of case goals.*

The majority, twenty-five (25) out of the thirty-seven (37) applicable cases were rated an ANI because the agency did not engage biological parents in frequent and quality visits to discuss the safety, permanency, and/or well-being of their children or to promote the achievement of case goals. The review showed that in twenty (20) out of the twenty-five (25) cases rated an ANI, the agency never met with one or both biological parents or legal guardians. The agency met with biological fathers less often than biological mothers. The typical pattern of visitation with biological mothers was less than once a month, while the typical pattern of visitation with biological fathers was never. In five (5) out of the twenty-five (25) cases rated an ANI, the agency did not conduct quality visits with the biological parents, as the agency did not engage the

biological parents in discussions around their children's safety, permanency, or well-being nor the achievement of case goals.

The remaining twelve (12) applicable cases were rated a Strength because the review revealed the agency conducted frequent and quality visits with all applicable biological parents. The frequency of the visits with the biological parents were weekly, bi-weekly, or at least monthly and varied between 15 minutes to an hour which was noted to be sufficient frequency based on the case circumstances. These visits would occur in the biological parents' home, at the agency, or in the community. The review also revealed during these visits the agency would discuss safety, permanency, well-being, and the progress in case plan goals for individual family members, as well as inquire about if there were any additional needs.

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

Well-Being Outcome 2	Applicable Cases	Strength Rating (%)
Item 16	18	100.0%

Item 16: Educational Needs of the Child. *Assesses whether, during the period under review, the agency made concerted efforts to assess children's educational needs at the initial contact with the child (if the case was opened during the period under review) or on an ongoing basis (if the case was opened before the period under review), and whether identified needs were appropriately addressed in case planning and case management activities.*

All eighteen (18) applicable cases for this item were rated as a Strength. The review showed the agency continually assessed the children's educational needs and provided appropriate support and/or services when necessary. All cases rated a Strength were foster care cases. 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/legal guardians. In ten (10) out of the eighteen (18) cases rated a Strength, the agency's assessments accurately determined that the children did not have any educational needs. In the remaining eight (8) cases rated a Strength, 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.

Well-Being Outcome 3: Children receive adequate services to meet their physical and mental health needs

Well-Being Outcome 3	Applicable Cases	Strength Rating (%)
Item 17	37	91.9%
Item 18	16	87.5%

Item 17: Physical Health of the Child. *Assesses whether, during the period under review, the agency addressed the physical health needs of the children, including dental health needs.*

The majority, thirty-four (34) of the thirty-seven (37) applicable cases for this item were rated a Strength because the agency consistently assessed the children's physical and dental health needs

and ensured appropriate services were provided when necessary. The review showed the agency comprehensively assessed the children's physical and dental health needs through conversations with the children, biological parents, foster parents, placement providers and medical providers. The assessments revealed the children needed routine medical, dental care, and vision care. The agency ensured children received their routine physical, dental, and vision 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.

In the three (3) remaining applicable foster care cases rated an ANI, the agency did not accurately assess the children's dental health needs and/or did not provide appropriate dental health services to meet the identified needs.

Item 18: Mental/Behavioral Health of the Child. *Assesses whether, during the period under review, the agency addressed the mental/behavioral health needs of the children.*

The majority, fourteen (14) of the sixteen (16) applicable cases were rated as a Strength because the agency consistently assessed the children's mental/behavioral health needs and provided appropriate services when necessary. The review showed that the agency was able to comprehensively assess children's mental/behavioral health needs through observations of the children and conversations with the biological parents, foster parents, placement provider staff, 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 therapeutic service 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 to 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 two (2) applicable cases were rated an ANI because the agency did not provide appropriate mental/behavioral services to meet the children's identified needs.

V. Summary of Strengths and Areas Needing Improvement from the Onsite Review and the 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 in foster care as well as children receiving Family Preservation Services and children 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*, *Children without maltreatment after Family Preservation (FP)*, and *Children without maltreatment after Assessment*.

Additionally, the review revealed that the agency demonstrated strong practice around providing safety-related services to prevent children's removal, when possible, specifically when substance use, and the child's mental/behavioral health needs were the identified safety concern (Item 2). The agency also appropriately removed children when necessary, during the PUR to ensure their safety. While the agency is not yet meeting the target for **Permanency** headline indicator, *Entry rate per 1,000 children*, the agency's performance is trending in the right direction. Lastly, the agency demonstrated strong skills in assessing the children's well-being (Items 12A, 16, 17, 18). In the majority of cases, the agency also did well in providing 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). The agency's accurate assessment of the children's educational needs, specifically, and the subsequent provision of educational services aligns with the **Well-Being** headline indicator, *enrolled in school w/in 5 days of entry*.

Areas Needing Improvement

The Practical Data meeting and onsite review also highlighted areas that Baltimore City Department of Social Services could improve upon to strengthen its practice. Partnership with families, especially biological parents, is a significant area of improvement for the agency based upon the results of the onsite review. The review revealed that the agency often did not meet with biological parents involved in foster care cases, and even when visits did occur, they were not frequent enough or of good quality (Item 15) for the agency to assess the biological parents' needs accurately or comprehensively (Item 12B). Additionally, the review showed that the agency did not consistently involve biological parents in case planning for foster care cases (Item 13).

The onsite review showed that the agency also needs to improve practice around establishing appropriate permanency goals (Item 5) and achieving permanency for children in a timely manner (Item 6). The agency is not meeting the State target for the following **Permanency**

headline indicators: *exiting to permanency within 12 months (12-23 months)*, *exiting to permanency within 12 months (24+ months)*. During the Practical Data Meeting, the agency expressed interest in working towards improving their timeliness to permanency. Furthermore, the review showed that the agency and courts did not always consider the children's best interest when establishing or adjusting permanency goals (Item 5), which may be contributing to the challenge of achieving permanency for these children. These findings confirm the agency's identification of standardized permanency plans mentioned in the Practical Data Meeting and suggest that the agency can improve practice around individualized permanency planning with families to promote the successful achievement of permanency for every child.

VI. SSA Recommendations for Further Analysis and Improvement

Baltimore City DSS 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/Permanency

- Focusing on improving practice around family partnership could be a key strategy in enhancing the agency's performance rate in many areas that are interconnected. Encourage agency staff and supervisors to review the Integrated Practice Model (IPM) Practice Profile for Engage found on DHS Knowledge Base. This resource can begin empowering agency staff and supervisors, through reflective prompts, to ensure they are utilizing the necessary engagement skills to build authentic partnerships with biological parents. Engagement begins at the first encounter but should be assessed and maintained throughout the life of the working relationship.
Link to Practice Profile:
http://kb.dhs.maryland.gov/directory/SSA/Integrated%20Practice%20Model/IPM%20-%20Updated/09_IPM-PS_Engage.pdf
- Utilize supervision with staff to identify any barriers or challenges to engaging biological parents in order to assess their needs and identify individualized services. It may also be beneficial to conduct group case consultations around engagement with biological parents so that staff can collectively share 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, conversations should be initiated around their individualized goals and challenges. When we encourage biological parents to think about past experiences and how they've been successful, they are more likely to take ownership of the plans we collaboratively develop, which supports sustainable outcomes. If agency staff are having difficulties locating biological parents, they should utilize the Absent Parent Locator, Family Finding services, or E & E to obtain a last known address. It is also recommended to document these efforts in CJAMS.

VII. Next steps

Baltimore City DSS 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 DSS 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.

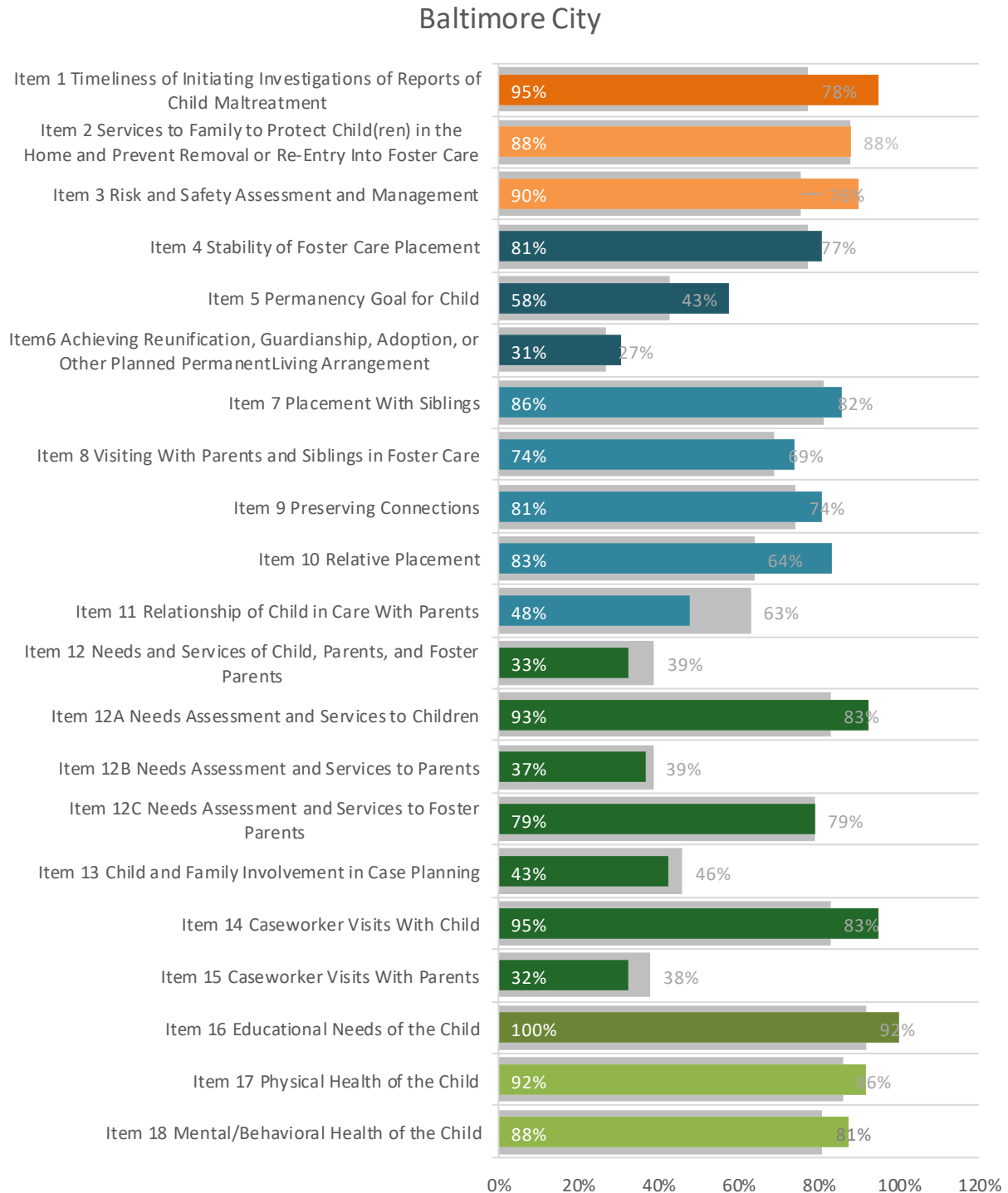
The reviewers are guided to assess practice during a defined period under review, typically a 12 to 15-month period that extends back from the date of the onsite review. The actual assessment period for any particular case depends on the length that a case is open for services, or for placement during 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 assure 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 - Ratings for Safety, Permanency, and Well-Being Outcomes and Items

The below chart represents percent of cases rated as a strength for each item for the county compared to the Maryland data (behind in gray) from the Online Monitoring System.



Appendix C – Demographic/Context Data

Baltimore City, Demographic Data (*U.S Census Bureau, 2021*)

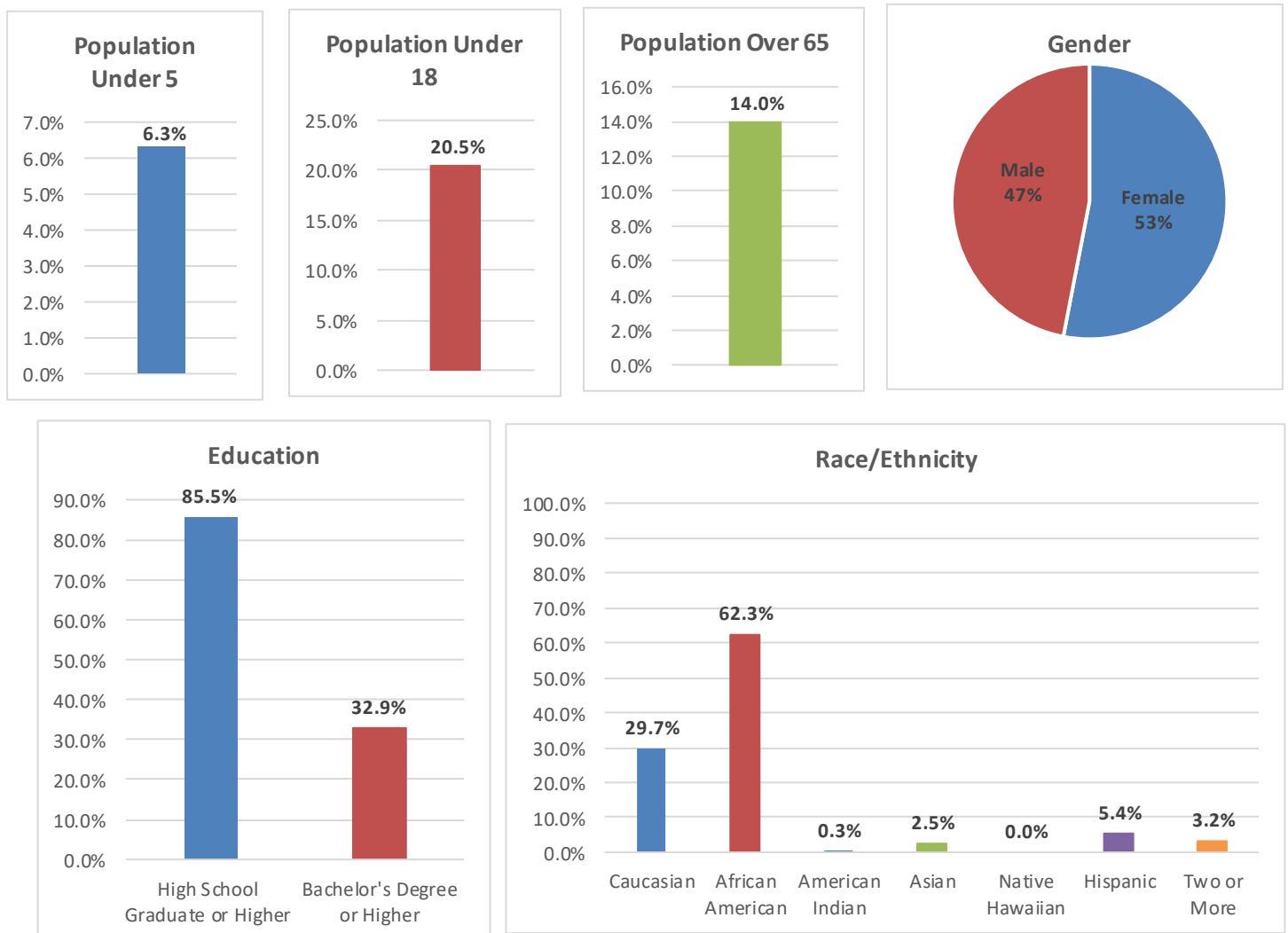
Total population (*July 1, 2021*): 576,498

Household Indicators:

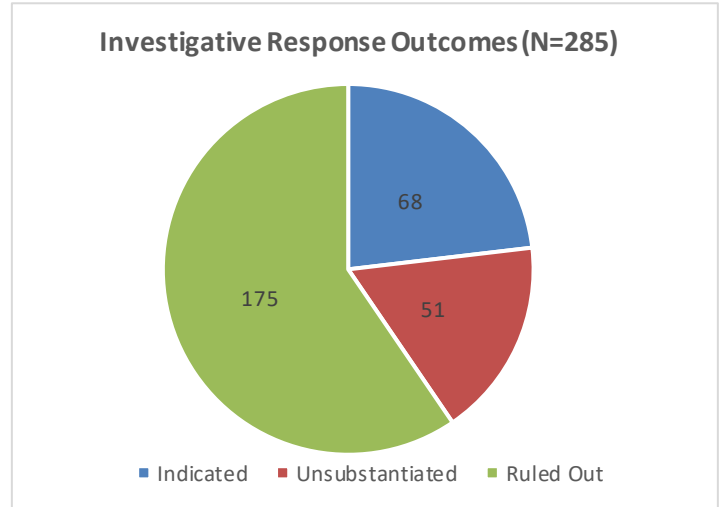
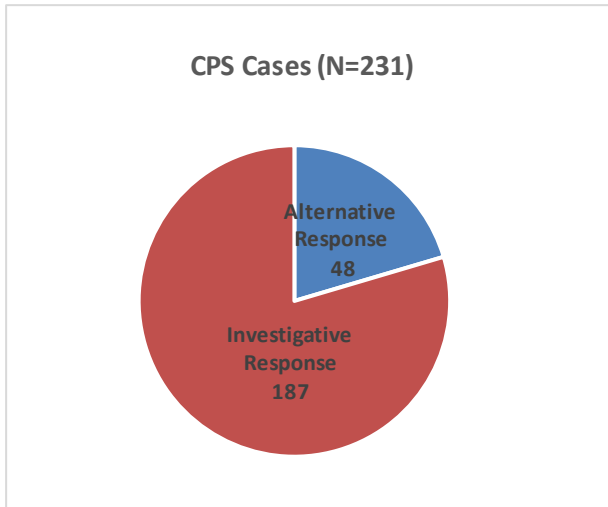
Median Income (2020 dollars) - \$52,164

Average persons per household (2016-2020) – 2.39

Poverty Rate: 20.0%



Baltimore City, Child Welfare Data (*Child Welfare Trends Report – July 2022, 12-month median end of month counts*)



Baltimore City Child Welfare Context *12-month median end of month counts	
CPS Maltreatment Reports	781
Total CPS Findings	285
In-Home Services	332
OOH Placements	1,667
Family Foster Homes	0
Formal Kinship Providers	0