

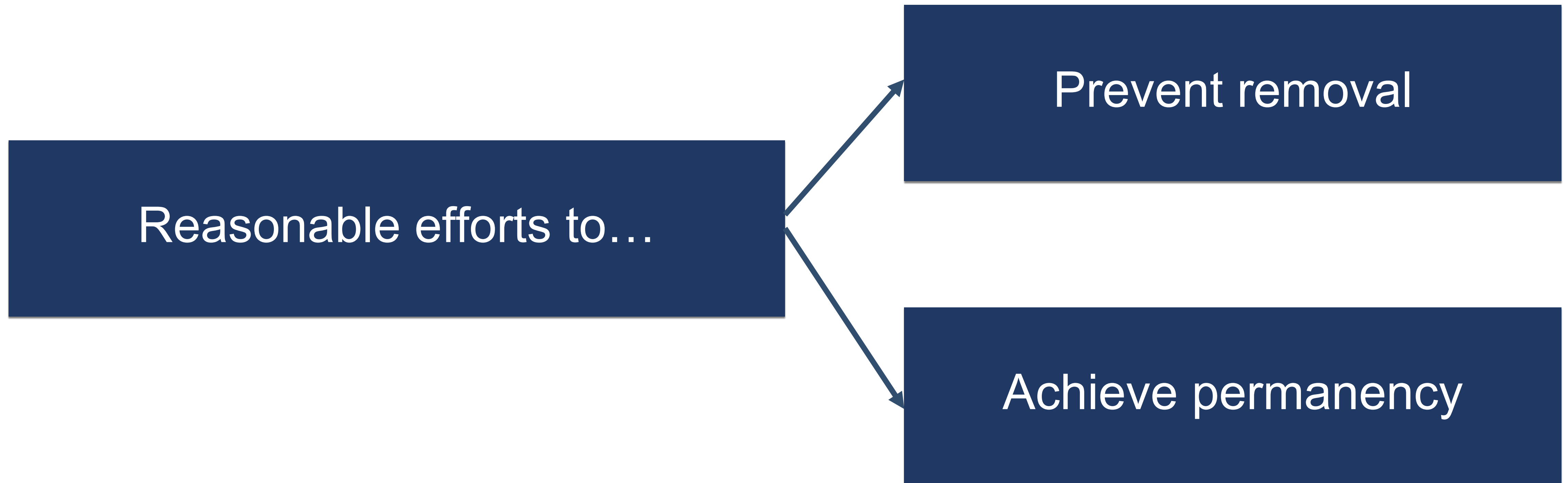
# Understanding Judges' Reasonable Efforts Decisions: Findings from the Reasonable Efforts Findings Study (REFS)

American Bar Association Webinar

November 13, 2024



# Reasonable Efforts Findings Overview



## **Notes: Reasonable Efforts Findings Overview Slide**

Our study examines two types of reasonable efforts findings.

### **1. Reasonable efforts to prevent removal**

When a child is removed from home, judges have 60 days to decide if the child welfare agency made reasonable efforts to prevent removal.

### **2. Reasonable efforts to achieve permanency.**

After removal, judges must decide within 12 months of entry into foster care if the child welfare agency has made reasonable efforts to achieve permanency (i.e., reunification with the parents or alternative permanency options).

# Primary Research Questions



## **Notes: Primary Research Questions Slide**

The primary research questions for this study seek to understand:

- what factors influence judges' reasonable efforts decisions?
- what reasonable efforts decisions are made and how are they documented in the court record?
- how those reasonable efforts decisions relate to case outcomes?





# Study Design

## Notes: Study Design Slide

More details on the REFS study design can be found in a 2-page overview we've prepared. *Introducing the Reasonable Efforts Findings Study* highlights the REFS Study and what it seeks to learn about judicial decision-making, the data the study will collect, the study sample, and the importance of the study to the legal community. Please download it at the OPRE website link (<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/report/introducing-reasonable-efforts-findings-study> provided in the chat).



# Study Sample was a Convenience Sample



**348** closed cases selected randomly from 5 sites

Findings are not generalizable, however they describe practice and judicial decision-making among a sample of child welfare courts.



## **Notes: Study Sample Was a Convenience Sample Slide**

- Our sample for the study is a random sample of 348 closed child welfare cases from 5 sites drawn from 3 states (3 counties in 1 state, 1 county each in 2 states).
- These were primarily urban cities (1 rural city).
- We had a minimum of 50 cases from each site because it allowed enough cases (across sites) for statistical comparison and it was enough cases per site to see some different outcomes (e.g., less common outcomes like aging out, guardianship, etc.).
- We used a random sample of cases from each site to ensure that practice we reviewed was representative of typical practice in that site.
- It is a convenience sample of sites that were willing to participate and were able to meet our data security requirements for accessing data.
- Goal with the sample was to get some diversity of practices among judges and states.

# Data Collection Methods

1

Use structured forms to gather information about practices and processes at initial hearings



2

Use structured forms to gather information from closed court case files



## **Notes: Data Collection Methods Slide**

- We used two primary data collection methods.
- First, we observed recordings of initial hearings in child welfare cases (the first hearing to consider the child's removal) –using a structured court observation form.
- Second, we reviewed the court case files that were associated with the hearings that we observed.



# Findings





# 1

## What Factors are Associated with Judges' Findings of Reasonable Efforts to Prevent Removal?

### Factors Explored:



#### Hearing quality components

Discussion during the hearing  
How judges engage parents



#### Information in documents provided to the court before the hearing

Agency efforts to work with  
the family  
Safety considerations



#### Case characteristics

Age  
Gender  
Petition allegations  
Presenting problems

## **Notes: What Factors are Associated with Judge's Findings of Reasonable Efforts to Prevent Removal? Factors Explored Slide**

We explored how the following factors are related to judges' findings of reasonable efforts to prevent removal during the initial hearing after a child is placed outside the home:

- Hearing quality components (e.g., discussion during the hearing, how judges engage parents)
- Information in documents provided to the court before the hearing (e.g., reasonable efforts topics/issues addressed in petitions, affidavits, caseworker reports, etc.)
- Case characteristics (e.g., age, gender, petition allegations, presenting problems)

# 1

## What Factors are Associated with Judges' Findings of Reasonable Efforts to Prevent Removal?

### Types of Reasonable Efforts to Prevent Removal Findings at the Initial Hearing

	Cases	Percent
Reasonable efforts were made to prevent removal	294	86
Reasonable efforts were not possible (emergency situation)	32	9
Reasonable efforts were not required (aggravated circumstances)	1	<1
Agency did not make reasonable efforts to prevent removal	0	0
No finding about reasonable efforts to prevent removal	13	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>340</b>	<b>100</b>

## **Notes: What Factors Are Associated with Judges Findings of Reasonable Efforts to Prevent Removal, Types of Reasonable Efforts to Prevent Removal Finding at the Initial Hearing Slide**

This table shows the types of reasonable efforts to prevent removal findings made at the initial hearing.

- Prevent removal (86%)
- Not possible (emergency situation)(9%)
- Not required (aggravated circumstances)(>1%)
- Agency did not make reasonable efforts to prevent removal (0%)
- No finding (4%)

The finding RE to prevent removal was made for the first time at the initial hearing on the case (94%) of cases

The reasonable efforts to prevent removal finding was made in most cases at the initial hearing (94%). But 96% of cases made the finding somewhere in the life of the case.

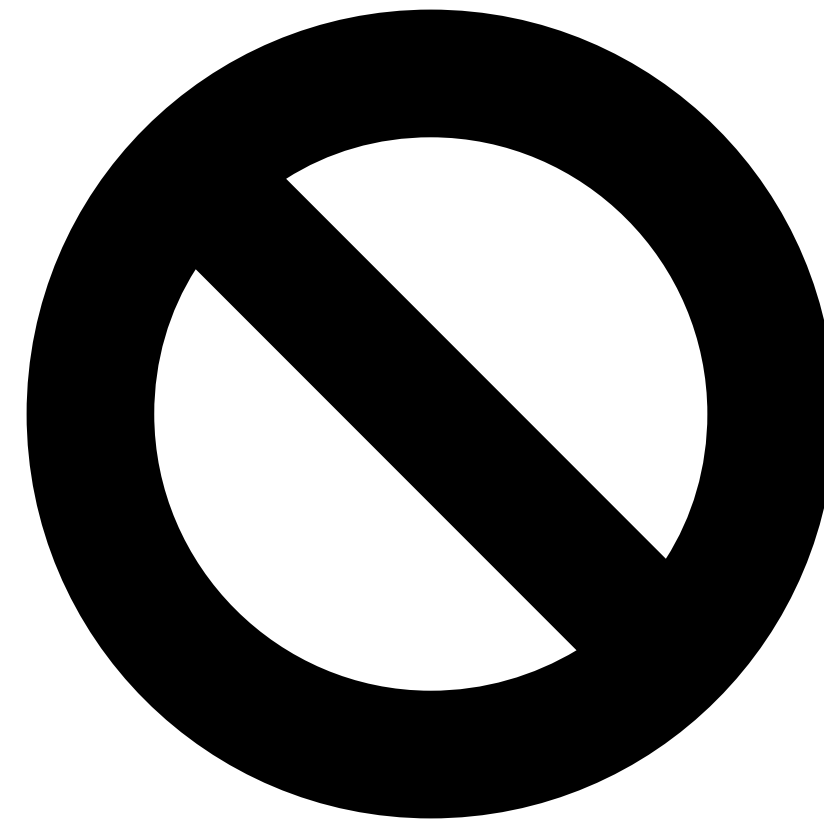
We never observed a case that made the finding that the agency did not make reasonable efforts to prevent removal.

The majority of cases (86%) made a finding that the agency did make reasonable efforts, 9% indicated that reasonable efforts were not possible due to an emergent situation, <1% said reasonable efforts were not required due to aggravated circumstances.



# 1

## What Factors are Associated with Judges' Findings of Reasonable Efforts to Prevent Removal?



Lack of variation in reasonable efforts  
to prevent removal findings

## **Notes: What Factors Are Associated with Judges Findings of Reasonable Efforts to Prevent Removal, Lack of variation slide**

We were unable to fully explore this question due to a lack of variability in our outcome of interest.

This lack of variability in the outcome, as well as a small sample size of only 13 cases where the judge declined to make a finding regarding RE to prevent removal, may indicate a potential bias in the sampling of cases (i.e., that the random sample of cases we drew may mis-represent cases in the population). To take potential bias into consideration in analysis, we explored statistical bias reduction methods. The model produced wide confidence intervals and the statistical software we used (SAS) issued warnings that the model produced by our analysis was not an accurate representation of the contribution that different variables make to the reasonable effort to prevent removal findings.

As a result, we concluded that there was not enough variability in the outcome of reasonable efforts to prevent removal finding made versus not made for us to pursue a logistic regression model for this research question.

Therefore, we are only reporting descriptive information about we have covered so far about the reasonable efforts to prevent removal finding.

# Discussion

How often do you see variation in  
reasonable efforts findings in your  
jurisdiction?

## 2

# What Factors are Associated with Judges' Findings of Reasonable Efforts to Achieve Permanency?

## Factors Explored:



### **Breadth & depth of information in documents provided to the court before review hearings**

Agency efforts to work with the family  
Safety



### **Timing of review hearings**

When in the case process they occur



### **Case characteristics**

Child's age and gender  
Petition allegations  
Presenting problems in the case



## Notes: What Factors Influence Judges' Findings of Reasonable Efforts to Achieve Permanency? Factors Explored Slide

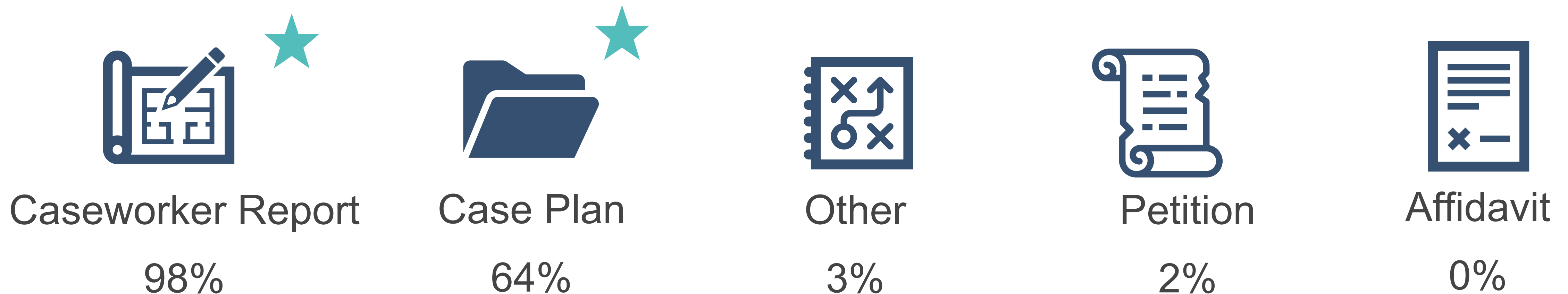
We explored how the following factors are related to judges' findings of reasonable efforts to achieve permanency at the first review hearing:

- Breadth and depth of information in documents provided to the court before review hearings (e.g., number of reasonable efforts topics/issues addressed in caseworker reports)
- Timing of review hearings (e.g., when in the case process they occur)
- Case characteristics (e.g., child's age, petition allegations, and presenting problems in the case)

# 2

## What Factors are Associated with Judges' Findings of Reasonable Efforts to Achieve Permanency?

### Information Available to Judges When Making Reasonable Efforts to Achieve Permanency



## **Notes: What Factors Influence Judges' Findings of Reasonable Efforts to Achieve Permanency? Information Available Slides**

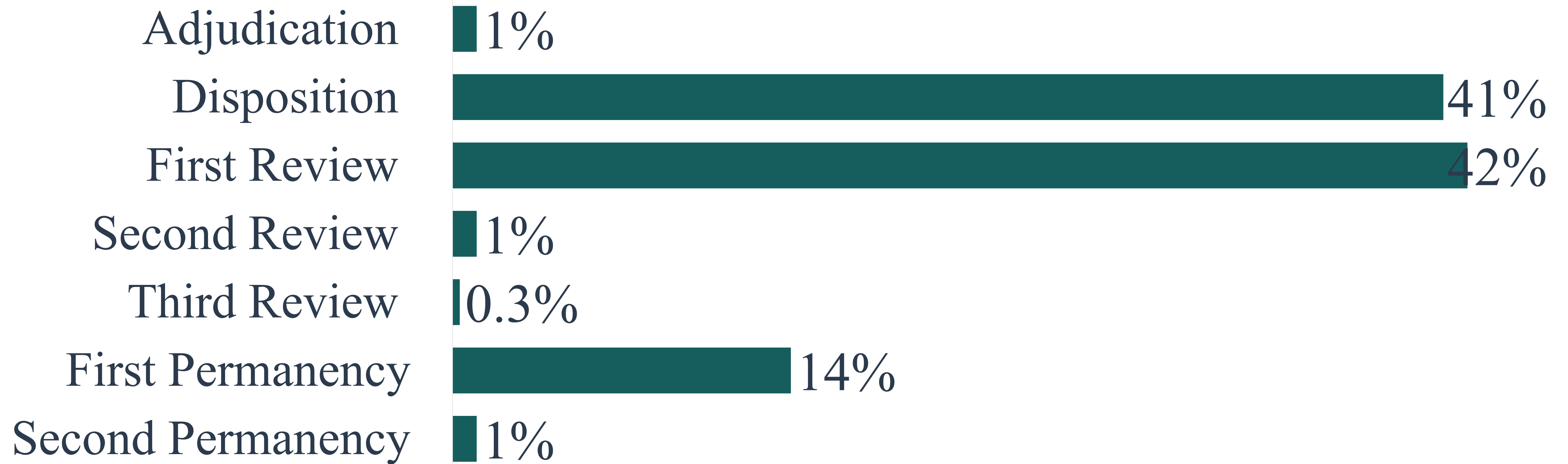
We examined the types of documents provided to the judge immediately before the first hearing where they made a reasonable efforts to achieve permanency finding. In most cases, this was a caseworker report and a case plan.

- Caseworker report (98%)
- Case plan (64%)
- Affidavit (0%)
- Petition (2%)
- Other (3%)

## 2

# What Factors are Associated with Judges' Findings of Reasonable Efforts to Achieve Permanency?

## Percent of Hearings Where First Reasonable Efforts to Achieve Permanency Finding Made





## Notes: What Factors Influence Judges' Findings of Reasonable Efforts to Achieve Permanency?

### Percent of Hearings Where First Reasonable Efforts to Achieve Permanency Slide

This chart shows the percent of hearings where the first reasonable efforts to achieve permanency finding was made.

- Adjudication (1%)
- Disposition (41%)
- First Review (42%)
- Second Review (1%)
- Third Review (.3%)
- First Permanency (14%)
- Second Permanency (1%)

We chose to explore this at the first review because we had more cases that went to a first review hearing (than cases that made it to a permanency hearing). 77% of cases made a reasonable efforts to achieve permanency finding and 23% did not make a finding.



## 2

# What Factors are Associated with Judges' Findings of Reasonable Efforts to Achieve Permanency?

When all factors are considered together in a model...

**More reasonable efforts topics** addressed in documents submitted to the court before the first review hearing



More likely to have a finding about reasonable efforts to achieve permanency at the first review hearing





## **Notes: What Factors Influence Judges' Findings of Reasonable Efforts to Achieve Permanency?**

### **More reasonable efforts topics slide**

When considering the appropriate variables together in a model...

We found that the more reasonable efforts topics addressed in documents submitted to the court before the first review hearing, the more likely the judge was to make a finding about reasonable efforts to achieve permanency.

It is unclear why this happened and we were not able to explore this in our study. Perhaps it is because judges routinely make the finding at the first review hearing so the child welfare agency prepares reports containing information about more topics or issues to inform the judge's decision-making. Or it may be that in more severe or complex cases (e.g., cases involving sexual abuse) more information is provided in reports, including information related to reasonable efforts, with judges subsequently being more likely to make a reasonable efforts finding. More research is needed.

Site, the control variable, was also significant in the multivariate model.

## 2

# What Factors are Associated with Judges' Findings of Reasonable Efforts to Achieve Permanency?

When considered together...

Level of detail in documents  
submitted to court before the first  
review hearing



Finding about reasonable  
efforts to achieve  
permanency



## **Notes: What Factors Influence Judges' Findings of Reasonable Efforts to Achieve Permanency? Level of detail Slide**

We also found that the level of detail in documents provided to the court prior to the first review hearing was not associated with reasonable efforts to achieve permanency findings.

Our data suggest that that number of topics included in documents was more informative to judges' decision-making than the level of detail provided for each topic. More qualitative studies (studies that ask for narrative) of why and how judges make reasonable efforts to achieve permanency findings would help us understand this difference.



# 2

## What Factors are Associated with Judges' Findings of Reasonable Efforts to Achieve Permanency?

When considered together...

Timing of the first review  
hearing



Finding about reasonable  
efforts to achieve  
permanency



## **Notes: What Factors Influence Judges' Findings of Reasonable Efforts to Achieve Permanency? Timing of the First Review Slide**

Finally, we found the timing of the first review hearing was not associated with judges' reasonable efforts to achieve permanency findings.

# Discussion

Why do you think we are seeing  
these results?

# 3

## How are Reasonable Efforts Findings Related to the Likelihood of Reunification?

### Factors Explored:



#### Judicial reasonable efforts findings

Prevent removal

Achieve permanency



#### Level of detail of reasonable efforts

0 to 3 scale



#### Case characteristics

Child's age

Petition allegations

Presenting problems in case



## **Notes: How are Reasonable Efforts Findings Related to the Likelihood of Reunification?” Factors Explored Slide**

We explored how the following factors are related to the likelihood of reunification:

- Judicial reasonable efforts to: Prevent removal finding, and to Achieve permanency finding
- Level of detail of the reasonable efforts to: Prevent removal finding, and Achieve permanency finding
- Case characteristics (e.g., child’s age, petition allegations and presenting problems in the case)



3

## How are Reasonable Efforts Findings Related to the Likelihood of Reunification?

59%

Cases resulted in  
reunification





## **Notes: How are Reasonable Efforts Findings Related to the Likelihood of Reunification? 59% Slide**

In response to Research Question 3, we found the following key findings:

- 59 percent of cases resulted in reunification.

This is higher than the national average of 48% (as reported in the most recent Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System report)

# 3

## How are Reasonable Efforts Findings Related to the Likelihood of Reunification?

**When all factors are considered together in a model...**

Two models with different predictors were explored:

1. Whether a finding of reasonable efforts to achieve permanency was made at the first review hearing
2. Level of detail of the finding

## **Notes: How are Reasonable Efforts Findings Related to the Likelihood of Reunification? Two Models with different predictors were explored slide**

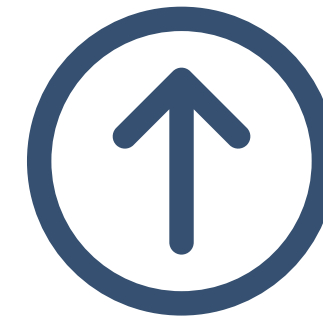
To test the model with the appropriate variables together, we wanted to explore two different models. One model included the outcome of whether a finding was made, yes or no, and a second model included with the level of detail of the finding when one was made. All other variables that we wanted to explore were the same across both models. We wanted to explore this because we thought it was important to look at the nuance of the reasonable efforts finding (is there a difference between making a finding yes/no and making a detailed finding).

# 3

## How are Reasonable Efforts Findings Related to the Likelihood of Reunification?

**Model 1: When all factors are considered together...**

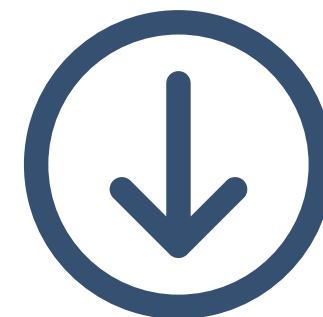
Physical abuse



More likely to reunify

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Homelessness



Less Likely to Reunify



## **Notes: Notes: How are Reasonable Efforts Findings Related to the Likelihood of Reunification? Model 1 Slide**

**In model 1, while exploring whether a finding was made, as well as case characteristics, we found two allegations or presenting problems that were associated with the likelihood of reunification. Making of the reasonable efforts finding was not related.**

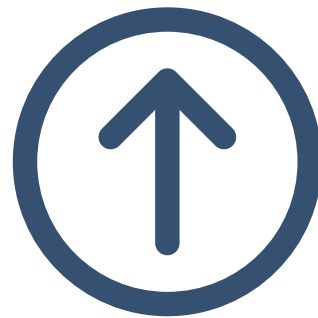
**Homelessness was related to a decreased likelihood of reunification.** This aligns with often raised concerns of the child welfare system regarding the issue of families entering care and remaining involved in the system due to poverty. It is often challenging to disentangle poverty and neglect. From the data we have, it is impossible to determine whether the issue of homelessness was an initial issue at intake or a reflection of a more pervasive issue with that family, including ongoing challenges with finding safe housing. It is important to consider further evidence around the issue of homelessness as it relates to poverty and the agency's ability to help the family resolve the issue. Complexity of homelessness cases should also be considered (e.g., how are homelessness and domestic violence or homelessness and mental health concerns related) to really understand this issue.

# 3

## How are Reasonable Efforts Findings Related to the Likelihood of Reunification?

### Model 2: When all the factors are considered together...

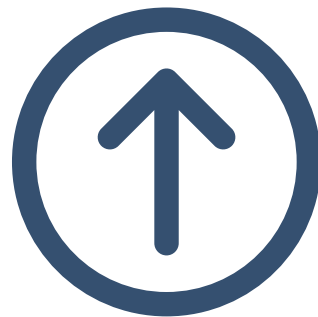
Cases with **less** detailed reasonable efforts to achieve permanency findings



More likely to reunify

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Physical abuse



More likely to reunify

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Abandonment



Less Likely to Reunify

## **Notes: How are Reasonable Efforts Findings Related to the Likelihood of Reunification? Model 2 Slide**

**In model 2, we found that...(refer to slide).**

**Level of detail of the reasonable efforts to achieve permanency finding seemed to have a stronger association with reunification than whether a finding was made.** \*Again – level of detail is how much detail there was in the written order.\* This may be because judges felt more explanation or detail should be included in their findings in complex cases or cases where the parents are not making good progress. The level of detail is one way judges may be building a record of the agency's noted efforts, which may be useful in cases when reunification is not the safe permanency option. This could be important if anyone appeals the case on the grounds that reasonable efforts were not made. The judge may also be reflecting the information provided.

Cases with physical abuse allegations were more likely to be associated with reunification while cases with abandonment allegations were less likely to be associated with reunification. Physical abuse allegations are more likely to have concrete solutions for parents to address through a case plan, while abandonment cases often involve parents who have chosen not to be involved in the child's life. Of course, additional information could be helpful in learning more nuanced information about the allegation of abandonment and whether the parent left the child or is recently uninvolved.



# Discussion

What stands out to you  
from these findings?

# 4

## How are Reasonable Efforts Findings Related to Time to Permanency?

### Factors Explored:



#### **Judicial reasonable efforts findings**

Prevent removal

Achieve permanency



#### **Level of detail of reasonable efforts**

Prevent removal

Achieve permanency



#### **Case characteristics**

Child's age

Petition allegations

Presenting problems in case

## **Notes: How are Reasonable Efforts Findings Related to Time to Permanency? Factors Explored Slide**

We explored how the following factors are related to time to permanency:

- Judicial reasonable efforts to prevent removal finding
- Level of detail of the reasonable efforts to prevent removal finding
- Judicial reasonable efforts to achieve permanency findings
- Level of detail of the reasonable efforts to achieve permanency finding
- Case characteristics (e.g., child's age, petition allegations and presenting problems in the case)



4

## How are Reasonable Efforts Findings Related to Time to Permanency?

*657 days*

Average number of days for  
cases to achieve  
permanency



## **Notes: How are Reasonable Efforts Findings Related to Time to Permanency? 657 days Slide**

Our findings in response to research question 4 showed that the average number of days for cases to achieve permanency was **657 days**.

**This is similar to the national average of length of stay (22.6 months or 689 days) from the FY 2022 AFCARS report)**

# 4

## How are Reasonable Efforts Findings Related to Time to Permanency?

When considered together...

Cases with **less** detailed reasonable efforts to achieve permanency findings



Faster time to permanency

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Physical abuse



Faster time to permanency



## **Notes: How are Reasonable Efforts Findings Related to Time to Permanency? When Considered Together Slide**

Findings about what case characteristics or findings are related to the time for cases to achieve permanency aligned with the findings about the likelihood of reunification.

**Cases with lower levels of detail in the reasonable efforts to achieve permanency finding at the first review hearing achieved permanency at a faster rate compared to cases with higher levels of detail.** This aligns with our finding from research question 3 about the likelihood of reunification where lower levels of detail in the reasonable efforts to achieve permanency finding were associated with reunification.

**Cases that had allegations of physical abuse were more likely to achieve permanency faster than cases that did not have this allegation.** This also aligns with our likelihood of reunification findings. Reunification is one of the faster permanency outcomes (Children's Bureau, 2022), so it makes sense that if physical abuse cases are more likely to reunify, then they would also be more likely to achieve faster permanency.

# Discussion

How do you think these findings  
could be helpful to you in your work  
or to the field?

# Key Takeaways



As an exploratory study with a small number of sites, REFS should not be used on its own to inform recommendations for all child welfare courts.



## **Notes: Key Takeaways Slide**

Before we share key takeaways and possible considerations for practice, as a reminder this study was completely exploratory and not meant to inform changes in practice or to evaluate court-based findings. Rather, we wanted to better understand the reasonable efforts findings and how they could be related to outcomes.

It is also important to recognize that we have very little research on this topic.

# Key Takeaways From All Research Findings and Considerations for Future Research



Judges in the study never made a finding that the agency did not make reasonable efforts. It is important to consider **why** this might not be occurring.



When there were more reasonable efforts topics (e.g., efforts provided, how working with family) in reports, judges were more likely to make a reasonable efforts to achieve permanency finding. All professionals can raise this information in court hearings to ensure the judge has it.



When judges made more detailed reasonable efforts findings, the case was less likely to end in reunification. This may be related to making a legal case for the agency's efforts, when reunification seems less likely. Future research should explore **why** this is occurring.

## Notes: Key Takeaways From All Research Findings and Considerations for Future Research Slide

These are some considerations across the findings from the study, including all four research questions.

Some takeaways that practitioners can consider include:

- No judges in the sample found that the child welfare agency had not made reasonable efforts to prevent removal or to achieve permanency (at the first review hearing). Judges could reflect on why this might be and the implications it has for judges' responsibility to hold the child welfare agency accountable in doing enough of the right things to keep children safely with their families.
- More topics included in the report prior to the first review was related to the judges making a finding that reasonable efforts were made to achieve permanency. If the finding is made because information is provided (which we cannot say conclusively from our study), then all professionals can play a role in ensuring this information is provided to the judge.
- This may be because judges felt more explanation or detail should be included in their findings in cases where the parents are not making good progress and not on track for reunification.



# Further Reading



## Child Welfare Hearing Quality Research: What Legal Professionals Should Know

As legal professionals practicing in child welfare courts, you can better prepare for and participate in court hearings if you understand how hearing quality affects the case process and outcomes. Research is starting to explore what activities and behaviors are associated with child welfare hearing quality. This document highlights both what is currently known and gaps in understanding.

Hearing Quality Components*
Judicial inquiry and engagement of hearing participants
Breadth, depth, and relevance of discussion
Parent attendance and engagement
Child attendance and engagement
Child welfare agency attendance and engagement
Quality of representation for the parent, child, and child welfare agency
Attention to and application of legal standards

\*For more information about these components, see Richards, T., Samuels, A., Gatewisk, S., Frommkecht, A., & Ruben, J. (2021). *Conceptual model of judicial decision-making and hearing quality in child welfare* (OPRE Brief No. 2021-86). Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

- What activities and behaviors are associated with hearing quality?**
- Research shows the following activities and behaviors are related to child welfare court hearing quality:
- ✓ **The judge and court participants discuss key topics in a meaningful way.** How the judge gets information during the hearing and the number and kinds of questions judges ask can affect hearing quality. Discussion is high-quality when judges ask direct questions, ask follow-up questions,<sup>1</sup> ask about different topics,<sup>2</sup> expand discussion on topics,<sup>3</sup> and ask relevant questions.<sup>4</sup> The number of topics discussed at a hearing may play a role in reducing how long children spend in temporary care and whether they reunify with their parents.<sup>5</sup>
  - ✓ **Parents attend and engage meaningfully in hearings.** Research shows when parents attend court hearings their children's permanency outcomes, such as family reunification, improve.<sup>6</sup> When judges seek parent input during hearings, the child may be more likely to be placed temporarily with family members,<sup>7</sup> and the child may achieve permanency faster.<sup>8</sup> Parents are more likely to keep attending their hearings when they are represented by an attorney and engaged in early hearings.<sup>9</sup> Some research finds the number of topics discussed increases when parents attend their hearings.<sup>10</sup>

## How Court Practices and Resources Relate to Judicial Decision-Making and Hearing Quality in Child Welfare Cases

- As a legal professional involved in child welfare cases, does your court:
- Keep the same judge throughout the life of the case?
  - Devote more time and resources early in the case?
  - Avoid postponing hearings?
  - Schedule hearings at set times?
  - Dedicate enough judicial staff time for each case?
  - Create a supportive setting for families?

This snapshot highlights some research that is beginning to show that these court practices and court system resources relate to judicial decision-making and hearing quality in child welfare court cases. Gaps in the current research are also discussed.

**Court practices**  
Child welfare courts around the country use different practices to support judges' decision-making and improve hearing quality. Some research suggests the following four court practices relate to judicial decision-making and hearing quality in child welfare cases.

**Judicial continuity**  
Assigning one judge to handle a case may allow the judge to get to know the family and their case better. Studies report having the same judge handle a case may improve how quickly the case is processed. For example, when fewer judges are assigned to a case, there may be fewer requests to postpone hearings.<sup>1</sup> Assigning fewer judges may reduce the time it takes for a child to be placed in a permanent home.<sup>2</sup> It may

counsel early, holding early court hearings, holding a precourt meeting to prepare for the hearing, and ensuring parents attend and participate in early hearings.<sup>3</sup> Providing parents legal representation and involving them in court hearings early in the case process are believed to help them engage in services and address underlying issues so their children can return home faster.<sup>4</sup> Research suggests that holding early hearings can help reduce the time it takes for a case to close.<sup>1</sup> One study of a state court reform effort, which included elements of frontloading, reported more timely court hearings, less time to close cases, and increased reunification rates.<sup>5</sup> Changes other than frontloading the case process, such as improving quality of hearings and policy reforms, may also have contributed to these results.

**Continuances**  
A continuance stops a hearing and reschedules it to another day and time. Judges may continue a hearing for many reasons, such as when parents have not been located and notified of a hearing, or if parties are absent in court. Continuances may increase the overall hearing time, disrupt the hearing and court process, influence parties' attitudes and experiences with the hearing process, and delay case resolution and outcomes. Studies show that issuing fewer continuances is associated with reducing the time children spend in foster care.<sup>6</sup>

**Calendar/scheduling**  
Court calendaring and scheduling practices vary by court. Scheduling hearings at set times is a best practice to streamline cases, allow parties and court staff to

## How Legal Professionals Can Use the *Compendium of Measures and Data Sources: Understanding Judicial Decision-Making and Hearing Quality in Child Welfare*

**Understanding Research Terms**

**Measure:** A research tool that is used to gather information on a topic of interest.

- Examples:**
- **Judicial Expertise and Decision-Making Survey.**<sup>1</sup> A web-based survey asking attorneys to rate how much they agree with statements about judges' expertise and decisions in child welfare cases.
  - **Parent Engagement Measure.**<sup>2</sup> A paper-and-pencil survey asking parents to rank how engaged they were in their case.

**Measurement Strategy:** How the measure was administered or used in practice for the specific study for which it was designed, as well as how it could be used in practice (when known). This includes data collection method.

- Examples:**
- court observation
  - case file review
  - survey
  - interview
  - focus group

**Data Source:** A publicly available dataset(s) of state or national child welfare court data.

As a legal professional who focuses on child welfare cases, research and data can be a crucial guide for improving hearing practice.

- Consider these examples:
- Your county child welfare working group is developing a plan to evaluate the impact of a new court project. You want to explore what administrative data may be used to assess key components of the plan including case outcomes. You also want to know what measures, including surveys and interview protocols, could be used to examine other topics such as how judges make decisions and hearing quality that may not be available in existing administrative data.
  - A judge is using a new court order template. She needs a measure to evaluate whether the new template helps judges tailor their findings to the specific facts of each case.
  - An attorney thinks engaging parents in court hearings will improve parents' case outcomes and experiences with the legal system. She wants to find a measure to use when observing court hearings to see how judges and attorneys engage parents.

A new resource—the *Compendium of Measures and Data Sources: Understanding Judicial Decision-Making and Hearing Quality in Child Welfare*—can help in these situations. Available here, the *Compendium* can help identify research measures and strategies to use in your court improvement work.

- What is the *Compendium*?**  
The *Compendium* summarizes information on research measures and data sources used in child welfare court hearing research (see sidebar for definitions). It presents this information in several ways:
- **Table of Measures.** A table summarizing child welfare court

## Notes: Further Reading Slide

- The full final report will be available later this year.
- In the meantime, we encourage you to read the conceptual model brief and the compendium of measures and data sources we discussed. Links to the documents are in the chat.
- Additionally, we have 3, short 2-page briefs available. One summarizes what is known from research on hearing quality and where gaps remain. Another summarizes what research tells us about court practices and resources and where gaps remain. And the third is an overview of how court professionals can use the Compendium of Measures and Data Sources in their work.



# Questions?

