



Vermont's FFY 2027 Annual Progress and Services Report (APSR)

Statement of Incorporation by Reference

In accordance with this Program Instruction and its definition of “critical updates,” the state/territory/insular area incorporates by reference the information and data contained in its prior year APSR as if fully set forth herein. Accordingly, this submission provides only critical updates since the prior year APSR, consistent with the reporting requirements of **45 C.F.R. §1357.16**.

Opening Remarks

In accordance with Children's Bureau guidance, this APSR highlights critical updates since Vermont's previous submission. While the Family Services Division has advanced numerous initiatives over the past year, a consistent theme has emerged across our work.

Much of the Division's work and efforts have centered on strengthening the heart of child welfare and juvenile justice practice — building and sustaining meaningful relationships with children, youth, parents, caregivers, community partners, providers, and the many systems with which we collaborate. We have intentionally advanced relational and restorative approaches that emphasize partnership, repairing harm, shared decision-making, and family voice. This work represents a natural evolution of the Division's ongoing investment in safety culture and reflects our belief that families are experts in their own lives and should remain at the center of decisions that affect them.

Critical Updates

Monthly Caseworker Visit Standards

- Aligned with relational practices and quality engagement with families, the Division has maintained its commitment to achieving the 95% contact requirement for children and youth in care. We have

observed steady improvements over the last several years through targeted practice improvements, workforce stabilization, and the safe reduction of children in foster care, among other factors. At the six-month point of this reporting period, Vermont completed 95.78% of the required caseworker visits, a notable accomplishment.

Child and Family Services Review (CFSR)

In spring 2026, Vermont opted into the A Home for Every Child (AH4EC) Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) Program Improvement Plan (PIP) Pilot. Vermont recently submitted its initial PIP draft and looks forward to partnering with the Children's Bureau as we continue refining the plan. The following PIP goals have been identified:

- **Goal A:** Vermont will reduce the number of children in foster care by preventing unnecessary custody entries and supporting timely, safe exits from foster care.
- **Goal B:** Vermont will strengthen family type placement availability by recruiting and retaining the homes needed for Vermont children.

Advancing a Kin-First Culture

- Vermont is committed to advancing a kin-first culture across policy, practice, and service delivery. Key updates include:
 - Developing separate licensing and approval standards for relative and kin foster family homes to reduce barriers while maintaining child safety.
 - Exploring sustainable statewide implementation of Family Group Conferencing (FGC).
 - Focusing on strategies to strengthen relative/kin search and engagement.
 - Transitioning to a new evidence-based Kinship Navigation Model. With formula funding for Kinship Navigation Programs concluding on September 30, 2026, Vermont will issue a Request for Grant Application (RFGA) to implement the Washington State evidence-based Kinship Navigation Model, with implementation anticipated to begin during winter 2026–2027.

Continuous Quality Improvement & Quality Assurance System

- Vermont FSD has continued to take the necessary steps to improve our quality assurance processes through the procurement of a Comprehensive Child Welfare Information System (CCWIS). Vermont recently identified a vendor, and contract negotiations are anticipated to begin in summer 2026.

Safety Organized Practice

- Through data analysis, validation, and ongoing evaluation of Vermont's practices related to identifying imminent risks associated with child abuse and neglect, Vermont has continued to safely reduce the number of children in foster care while maintaining a focus on child safety. As part of this work, Vermont is updating its Structured Decision-Making (SDM) tools related to safety and risk assessment. These efforts directly support the goals outlined in Vermont's 2025–2029 Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP) and CFSR Pilot PIP.

Services for Children Under the Age of Five

- The Child Development Division (CDD) previously held individual grant agreements with the Parent Child Center's in Vermont but now holds one consolidated grant agreement with the Vermont Parent Child Center Network (VPCCN), an intermediary nonprofit organization that

awards the PCCs sub-subrecipient grants. This shift has significantly improved the administration of PCC grant funding.

Green Mountain Youth Center

- In June of 2026, Vermont announced the site selection for the Green Mountain Youth Center (GMYC). The GMYC will serve youth ages 12 to 18, providing 24-hour support in a highly structured, clinically intensive setting in South Burlington, Vermont. The facility will provide trauma-informed, therapeutic care for justice-involved youth who cannot be safely served in less restrictive settings. It will include two related programs, an 8-bed crisis stabilization unit for youth awaiting a court decision and a 6-bed residential treatment program for post-adjudicated youth, offering services including therapy, education, family engagement, and life-skills development. Vermont has been working towards an in-state option for justice-involved youth with complex mental health and behavioral needs for many years, and construction is tentatively set to begin in Spring of 2027, with the center becoming operational as early as mid to late summer of 2028.

Supporting America's Children and Families Act Highlights

Informing Families about Legal Representation

- Through the Office of the Defender General (ODG), Vermont has a longstanding structure in place to ensure that children, youth, and parents have access to independent legal representation and are informed of their rights.

Enhancing ICWA Compliance & Collaboration

- Vermont does not have federally recognized tribes within its borders but continues to maintain diligent inquiry and notification practices whenever tribal affiliation is identified or suggested. The Division asks about tribal affiliation at multiple points in the case process and follows up on family-reported information. Vermont's ICWA Coordinator supports notice, documentation, and follow-up, including written notice, phone outreach, and efforts to reduce barriers to tribal response.

Strengthening Health Oversight for Youth

- In November 2025, Vermont convened its first Foster Care Health Summit, bringing together cross-system partners from child welfare, health care, Medicaid, mental health, public health, education, community organizations, and foster families. The summit focused on strengthening care coordination, youth mental health, informed consent for psychotropic medications, timely access to care, information sharing, and supports for children with complex medical needs. Lessons learned are informing updates to Vermont's Health Care Oversight and Coordination Plan and ongoing cross-system improvement efforts.

Modernizing Caseworker Visits for Older Youth

- It has been an ongoing practice that our aftercare (Chafee) contractors meet with youth in settings of their preference, including remotely. We intend to continue offering flexibility in this area through this APSR and beyond.

Preventing Separation Due to Poverty

- The Division amended its screening policy to reinforce that poverty alone does not constitute neglect. The updated policy clarifies that a family's financial inability to provide for a child, by itself, is not neglect. Unless a child is in immediate danger, staff are expected to gather additional information regarding the family's efforts and willingness to access public benefits, community resources, and other supports to meet the child's needs.
- This policy update aligns with long-standing Vermont law. Since 2007, 33 V.S.A. § 4915b(f) has provided that: "The Department shall not substantiate cases in which neglect is caused solely by the lack of financial resources of the parent or guardian."

Centering Youth & Family Voice in Planning

- The Division sponsored a consulting project through the Vermont Certified Public Manager (VCPM) Program, a statewide leadership development initiative, to examine national and state approaches for integrating family voice into child welfare policy, practice, and continuous quality improvement. The resulting report provides recommendations for developing a formal Family Voices Program, and the Division is exploring opportunities to implement those recommendations.
- On April 10, 2026, the Division and our contracted Chafee administrator, Elevate Youth Services (EYS), hosted our annual Youth Empowerment Summit with an express purpose of youth engagement with DCF and FSD leadership. Young people shared their experiences of the child welfare system and their recommendations for change. The Division and EYS prioritized highlighting youth voice, elevating lived experience, and strengthening community connections.
- The Division established a Lived Experience Workgroup that considers key feedback themes from youth with foster care experience, identifies action steps, implementation ideas, and opportunities for engaging individuals with experience interacting with the Division.
- The CCWIS Core Team has committed to ensuring that the design, development, and implementation of the new system is centered around the children, youth, and families it serves.

Conclusion

Vermont continues to build upon its commitment to strengthening child welfare and juvenile justice practice through relationships, continuous quality improvement, and meaningful engagement with children, youth, families, caregivers, and community partners. The critical updates highlighted in this APSR reflect a continued focus on safely reducing unnecessary family separation, strengthening kinship and family-centered practice, modernizing systems, and ensuring that the voices of those with lived experience help shape policy and practice.

The Division also continues to strengthen its safety culture, with strong staff engagement (59% response rate; 255 staff) and continued increases in employees reporting that they feel supported, connected, and psychologically safe. Statewide, shared language and intentional strategies around mindful organizing continue to expand practices such as huddles, checklists, debriefs, and goodbye circles. Vermont remains committed to continuous learning, continuous improvement, and working alongside families and communities to improve safety, permanency, and well-being for children and youth.