



REGION 6 COMMUNITY PROFILE

DECEMBER 2021

 **COALITION OF
CHILD SERVING SECTORS**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Region 6 is comprised of Harris and 12 surrounding counties. With 7.5 million residents, including 1.9 million children, the region comprises 25 percent of the Texas population. Using data made available by the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) and the University of Texas System, this 2021 community profile provides insights about the children and families within the region that are involved with, or at risk of involvement with, the child welfare system. This profile is a point-in-time snapshot reflecting data available at the time of publication¹, and it is intended to serve as an information source for individuals, organizations, and collaboratives interested in understanding the region and responding to its needs.



Key Trends and Insights

- Region 6 is one of the lowest maltreatment risk areas of the state. Most counties in Region 6 have below average or lower maltreatment risk levels across all age groupings. Matagorda County is the outlier, with above average risk levels in four out of five age categories.
 - There are zip codes within counties that have risk levels among the highest in the state, including north and northeast Houston (77032, 77078, 77028, and 77026), south Houston (77021, 77051, and 77033) and part of Galveston (77550)
- Statewide, there were 157,519 completed Child Protective Services investigations in FY 2021. Of those, 34,335 (22%) were in Region 6.
- Statewide and in Region 6, the number of completed investigations being closed without Family Based Safety Services (FBSS) or conservatorship (CVS) services has been rising for several years. The investigation closure rate without services is higher in Region 6 than statewide.
 - In fiscal year 2022 to date, 96 percent of all completed investigations in Region 6 and 92 percent of all completed investigations statewide have been closed without services.
 - More than 80 percent of substantiated Region 6 cases (those with a Reason to Believe disposition indicating that maltreatment was found to have occurred) have been closed without services, somewhat higher than the 73 percent statewide average for fiscal year 2022 to date.
- Compared to the state, Region 6 opens a smaller proportion of completed investigations to FBSS. The percentage of completed investigations opened for Family Based Safety Services (FBSS) services dropped considerably statewide, including Region 6, beginning in fiscal year 2021.
- At 6-month, 1-year, and 5-year measurement points, the Region 6 rate of children being re-reported as alleged victims of maltreatment after a closed FBSS case is lower than the state rate.
- Removals in the state and region have been in a downward trajectory over the past several years.

¹ Data in this report reflects the most recent publicly available information as of October 2021. The most recent data available varies by source.



In Region 6, 47 percent fewer children were removed in fiscal year 2021 than a decade prior. Since fiscal year 2018, there has been a somewhat sharp downward trajectory. Based on the first two months of fiscal year 2022, removals are on track to drop even further. This trend is seen across all age groups, including infants.

- Neglectful Supervision is the most prevalent removal reason for every age group except youth ages 14 to 17, for whom Refusal to Accept Parental Responsibility is most prevalent.
- Of all children in care in September 2021, children ages zero to 5 represent the largest age grouping; 42 percent of children in care in Region 6 and 46 percent of children in care statewide are under age 6.
- Of children in substitute care in Region 6 in September 2021, 89 percent were placed within the region, and 48 percent were placed within their legal county. Further, 85 percent were placed in a family-like setting, either in a foster family home (52%) or a kinship home (33%).
- Tracking with the trends of declining removals, the number of children exiting care in Region 6 has also decreased substantially since 2012.
- In recent years, children and youth are staying in care longer, and in Region 6 the average length of stay is several months longer than at the state level. In fiscal year 2021, the average length of stay in Region 6 was 26.3 months, compared to the state average of 20.6 months.
- Youth who age out spend more than twice as long in care than children with other exit types. In fiscal year 2021, Region 6 youth who aged out spent an average of four and a half years in care (53.7 months).

The child welfare system is heavily influenced by contextual factors both internal and external to the system. As of this report, the Covid-19 pandemic is prominent among those factors. Covid-19 disrupted every aspect of child welfare system functioning, as well as community needs and resources. Families were put under unprecedented strain due to unemployment, school closures, and social isolation. At the same time, community agencies struggled to maintain services due to financial hardship and burdensome Covid-related expenses. Providers and DFPS experienced staffing shortages. Children did not come into routine contact with mandated reporters of maltreatment at schools, daycares, or medical visits.

These circumstances likely explain some of the findings of the Region 6 community profile over the past year and a half. For example, reports, investigations, removals, and exits all dropped substantially, even compared to the declines that were already happening pre-Covid. Other findings may not be so readily explainable by the pandemic, such as decreased rates of case openings to family preservation services. It may take years to realize the full impact that Covid has had, and continues to have, on system operations.

In the meantime, other contextual factors were still at work, even amidst the pandemic. DFPS experienced leadership changes at state and regional levels. New state and federal laws and policies went into effect². Natural disasters affected our state's entire population. Substance use continued to harm individuals and families. Racial inequalities were brought into the forefront of public attention. These factors and others create a landscape in which the child welfare system operates, and all may play roles in the state of the system as seen in the numbers in this report.

² <https://tacfs.org/policy/key-issues>



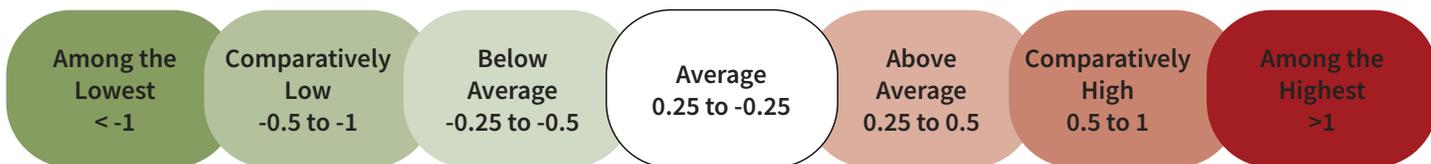
REGION 6 COMMUNITY PROFILE

The following sections examine regional trends across the continuum of child welfare involvement, from investigation through exits from conservatorship. Statewide trends are also reported where relevant.

Community-Level Maltreatment Risk

The DFPS Prevention and Early Intervention (PEI) division has collaborated with the University of Texas at Tyler Health Science Center to create an interactive community maltreatment [risk map tool](#). This interactive tool provides robust community-level data that can be used to support strategic planning, needs assessment, program development, and service delivery to support families.

The researchers who developed the tool used statistical modeling of comprehensive community-level risk indicators to quantify maltreatment risk at the zip code and county levels throughout the state. Risk scores are broken out by age group, as risk factors for maltreatment vary by age. Some of the metrics used to calculate risk scores include, among others, health and disability indicators, low income, family poverty, community safety, employment rate, percent of children enrolled in childcare/school, and hospital visits for substance abuse and assaults. For each zip code and county in the state, a risk score is assigned in each age group. Negative risk scores indicate maltreatment risk lower than the state average; positive risk scores indicate maltreatment risk higher than the state average. The scores are grouped into descriptive risk levels as follows:



Region 6 is comprised of thirteen counties in southeast Texas: Austin, Brazoria, Chambers, Colorado, Fort Bend, Galveston, Harris, Liberty, Matagorda, Montgomery, Walker, Waller, and Wharton. The total child population of the region is 1,926,346³, and 69 percent of these children reside in Harris County. Further, Region 6 as a whole has the largest child population in the state: 1 in 4 children in Texas resides in Region 6.

At the county level, Region 6 is one of the lowest maltreatment risk areas of the state. As shown in Table 1 below, only two counties in the entire region have any age groupings at above average risk: Matagorda County is above average in all age groups except 10-14, and Liberty County is above average in the 10-14 grouping only. Most counties are below average or lower across all age groupings. No counties in the region have high or very high risk levels in any age grouping. This indicates that underlying metrics that predict maltreatment risk are low throughout most of the region.

There are, however, zip codes within counties that have risk levels among the highest in the state, including north and northeast Houston (77032, 77078, 77028, and 77026), south Houston (77021, 77051, and 77033) and part of Galveston (77550).

³ Estimate as of December 2020: https://www.dfps.state.tx.us/About_DFPS/Data_Book/Child_Protective_Investigations/Populations_at_Risk.asp





Table 1: Region 6 child population and comparative risk level by county

County	Child Population	Risk Level: Infants	Risk Level: Age 1-4	Risk Level: Age 5-9	Risk Level: Age 10-14	Risk Level: Age 15-17
Harris	1,330,726	Low	Below average	Low	Low	Low
Fort Bend	210,803	Among the lowest	Among the lowest	Among the lowest	Among the lowest	Among the lowest
Montgomery	152,679	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low
Brazoria	94,183	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low
Galveston	85,826	Average	Average	Below average	Below average	Below average
Liberty	21,053	Below average	Average	Average	Above average	Low
Walker	13,097	Below average	Below average	Low	Average	Average
Waller	11,528	Low	Among the lowest	Among the lowest	Average	Low
Chambers	10,887	Low	Below average	Low	Among the lowest	Among the lowest
Wharton	10,603	Average	Average	Average	Average	Average
Matagorda	9,067	Above average	Above average	Above average	Average	Above average
Austin	6,938	Below average	Below average	Low	Below average	Below average
Colorado	4,956	Low	Below average	Low	Low	Among the lowest

Intake and Investigations

In fiscal year 2021, there were 57,179 reports of abuse and/or neglect in Region 6, 89 percent of which were assigned for investigation. Among cases that were assigned, about one-third were assigned as a Priority 1.

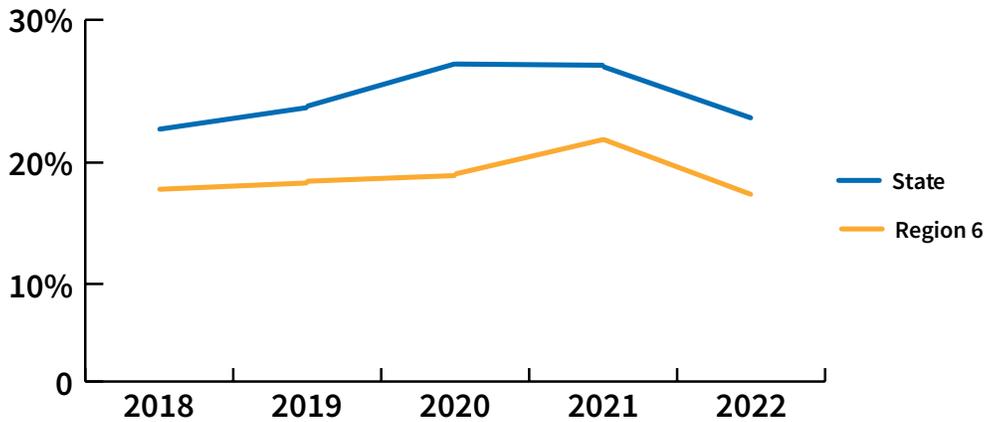
The percentage of completed investigations that were substantiated with a reason to believe disposition has been lower in Region 6 than statewide for the past 5 years⁴, as shown in Figure 1. Regional variance ranges from 18 percent in Fort Bend County to 31 percent in Colorado County. The lower substantiation rate in Region 6 compared to the rest of the state may reflect some combination of comparatively lower underlying maltreatment risk and differences in regional policies and practices.

⁴ The percentages for FY 2022 are year-to-date (September and October 2021).





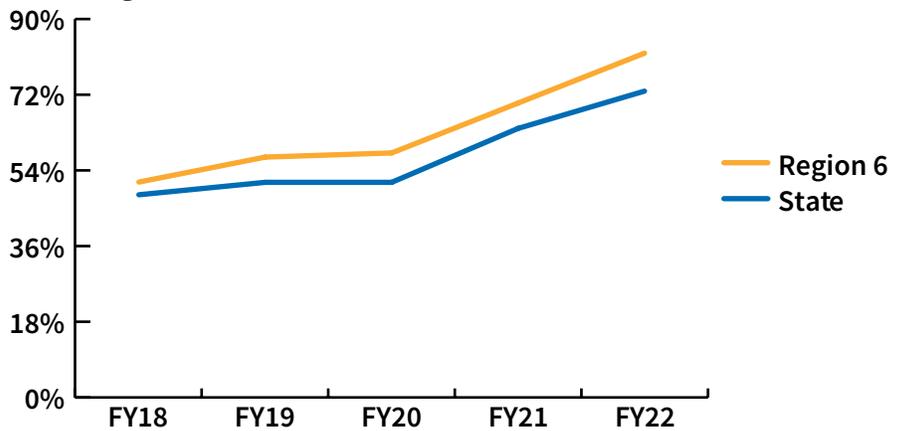
Figure 1: Percent of completed investigations with substantiated (RTB) dispositions



Source: DFPS Data Book FY 2018 to FY 2021; DFPS Monthly Reports FY 2022

There is a concurrent trend of higher proportions of substantiated cases being closed with no further services, especially since fiscal year 2020, which includes the first six months of the Covid-19 pandemic (Figure 2). This trend is continuing in the first two months of fiscal year 2022. More than 80 percent of substantiated Region 6 cases in FY 2022 to date have been closed without services, slightly higher than the 73 percent statewide average.

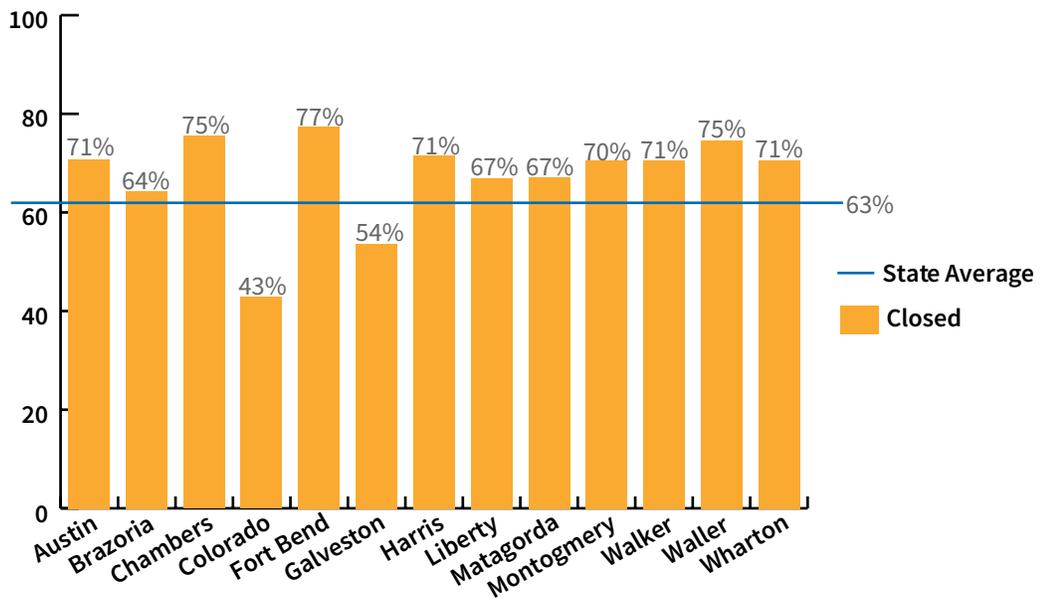
Figure 2: Substantiated cases closed without services



Source: DFPS Monthly Data Report FY 2018 – FY 2022

In fiscal year 2021, all counties in Region 6 except Colorado and Galveston had higher rates of RTB cases being closed without services compared to the state average, as shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Percent of substantiated cases closed without services, by county (FY 2021)



Source: DFPS Monthly Data Report FY 2021



CPS SERVICES: FAMILY BASED SAFETY SERVICES AND CONSERVATORSHIP

Families may be referred to Family Based Safety Services (FBSS) after a completed maltreatment investigation when there are ongoing risk factors that need services but do not rise to the level of removal. FBSS provides family preservation services that focus on keeping children with their families by increasing safety and reducing risk factors for future maltreatment. Compared to the state, Region 6 opens a lower proportion of completed investigations to FBSS, as shown in Figure 4. This is potentially related to the lower level of community-level maltreatment risk in Region 6 compared to the rest of the state. Less, or less severe, maltreatment in the population could predict less need for family preservation services. In both the region and the state, there has been a substantial drop in the percentage of completed investigations referred to FBSS beginning in fiscal year 2021 and continuing in the first two months fiscal year 2022.

When completed investigations are opened for further services, they can be opened to FBSS or conservatorship (removal). Of cases that are opened, Region 6 opens a higher proportion to FBSS than the state as a whole (Figure 5). Many of the individual counties within the region (nearly all of them smaller counties), however, open a lower proportion of cases to FBSS compared to the state average.



Figure 4: Percent of all completed investigations opened to FBSS

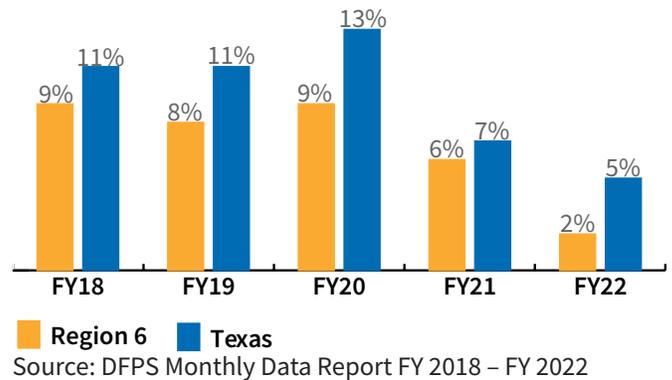
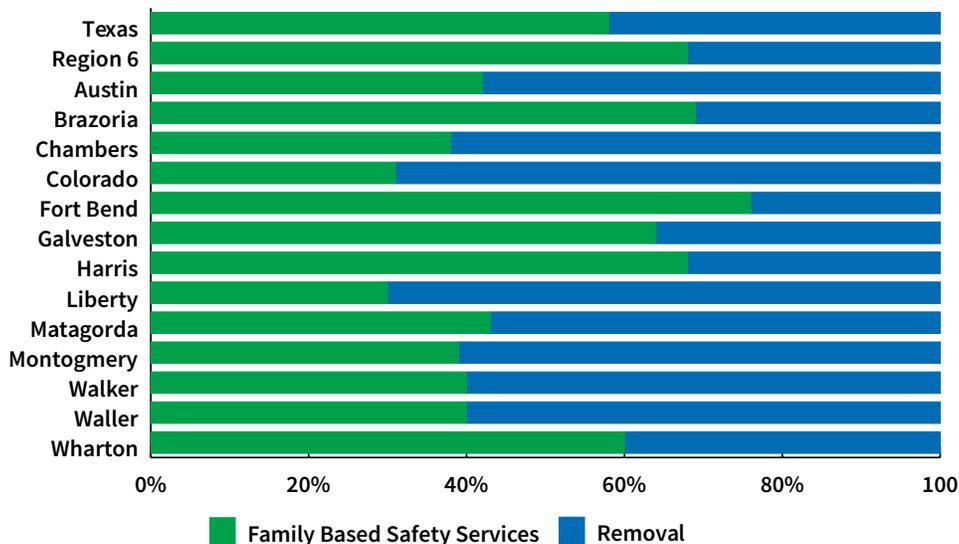


Figure 5: Case actions following investigation, fiscal year 2021





The state tracks the number of cases where children are re-reported as alleged victims of maltreatment after an FBSS case is closed. At all measurement points, the Region 6 recidivism⁵ rate is lower than the state rate, as shown in Table 2.

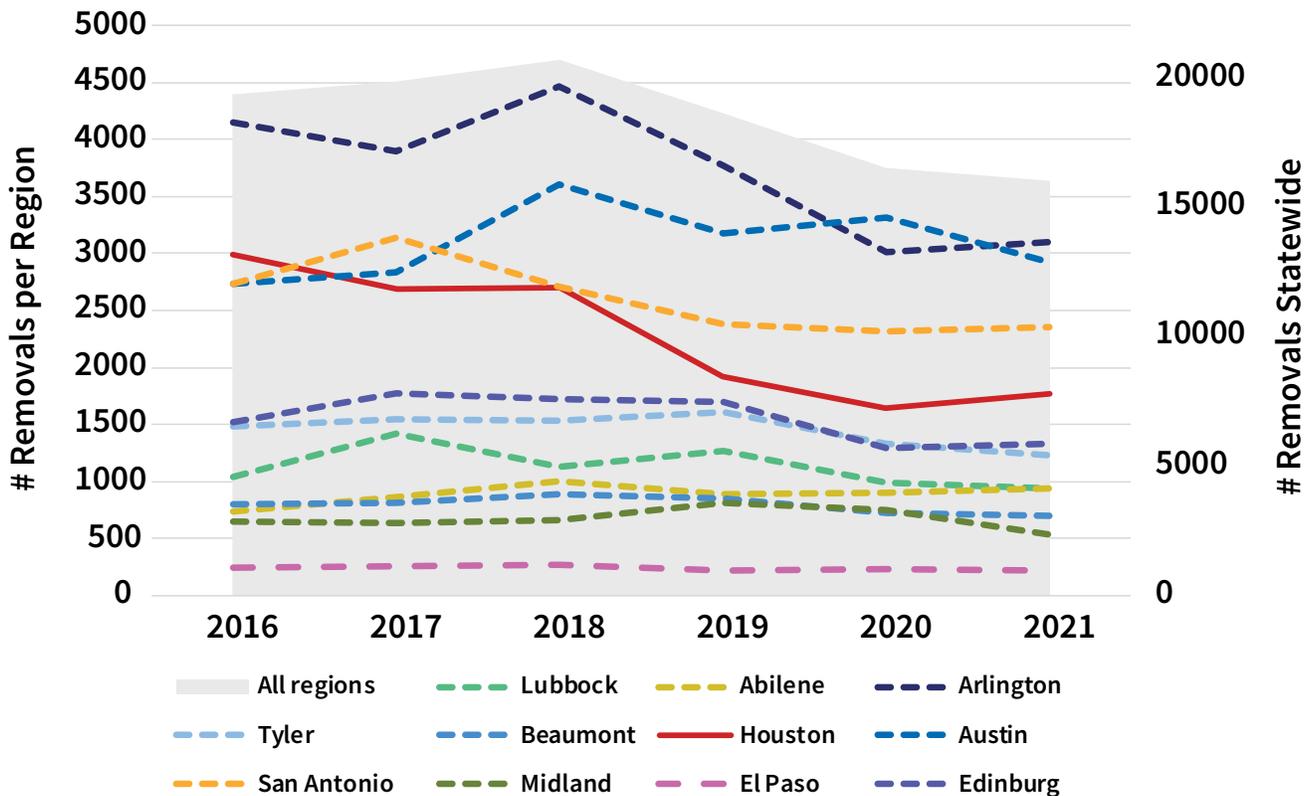
Table 2: Recidivism following FBSS case closure (FY 2020)			
	6-month recidivism	1-year recidivism	5-year recidivism
Region 6	8%	14%	35%
State	10%	18%	41%

Source: DFPS Data Book FY 2020

Removals

Consistent with the rest of the state, removals in Region 6 have been trending down over the past several years, with a 19 percent decrease from 2011 to 2018 and then a more substantial 35 percent drop between 2018 and 2021 (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Number of removals, FY 2016 to FY 2021



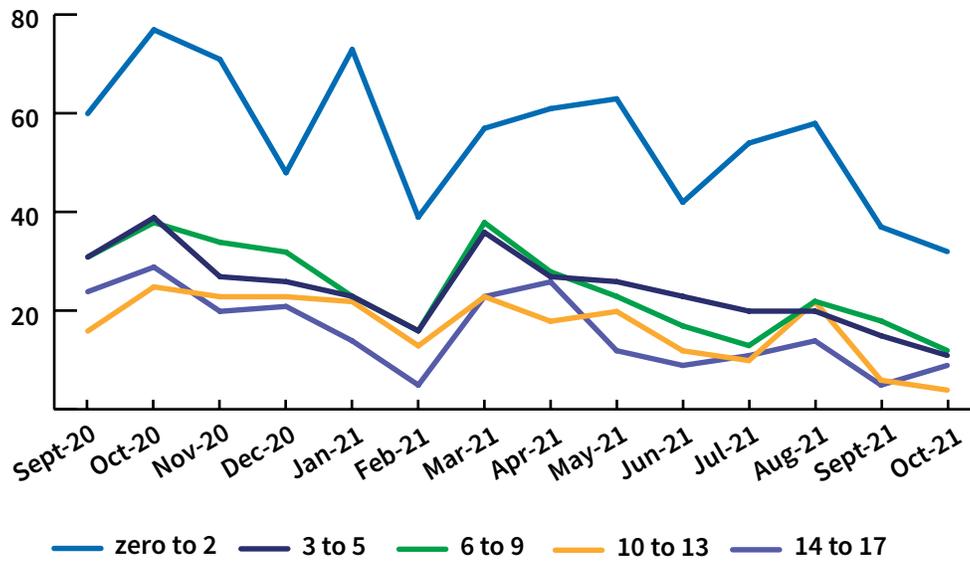
Source: DFPS Monthly Data Report FY 2016 -2021

⁵ In this context “recidivism” refers to being alleged as a victim in a new report, regardless of the disposition of that report.





Figure 7: Region 6 monthly removals by age, FY 2021 and 2022

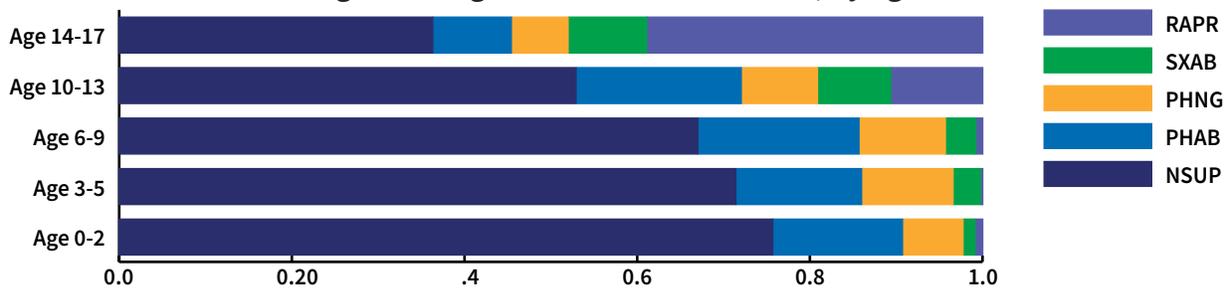


Source: DFPS Monthly Data Report FY 2021 - 2022

Drilling down to look monthly over the past 14 months in Region 6, removals have dropped even further in the first two months of fiscal year 2022 (Figure 7). There is a steep proportional decline in the youngest age group (age 0-2).

In Region 6 and statewide, Neglectful Supervision (NSUP) is the most common removal reason in all age groups except 14-17, as shown in Figure 8.^{6, 7} Among infants, NSUP represents more than three-quarters of substantiated allegations among children in care. As age progresses, NSUP is a smaller proportion of all substantiated allegations in removals, and in the age 14-17 grouping, Refusal to Accept Parental Responsibility (RAPR) becomes the most common removal reason (39% of substantiated allegations among children in care).

Figure 8: Region 6 reason for removal, by age



Source: CCSS RSI presentation, FY 2021

6 Children can have more than one reason for removal.

7 PHAB=physical abuse; PHNG=physical neglect; SXAB=sexual abuse





Demographics

As shown in Table 3, children and youth in care in Region 6 trend slightly older than the entire state. Region 6 has a higher proportion of African American children, and lower proportions of White and Hispanic/Latino children compared to the state as a whole. In the region and the state, there are slightly more boys than girls in care.

Table 3: Demographics of children in substitute care as of September 2021		
	Region 6 Percent	Statewide Percent
Female	46	48
Male	54	52
Total	100%	100%
Age: 0 -2	23	28
Age: 3-5	19	18
Age: 6-9	18	17
Age: 10-13	18	17
Age: 14-17	22	21
Total	100%	100%
African American	36	22
Hispanic/Latino	30	41
White	27	30
Native American	<1	<1
Asian	1	1
Multi-racial/ethnic	<1	<1
Undetermined	1	1
Not recorded	<1	<1
Total	100%	100%

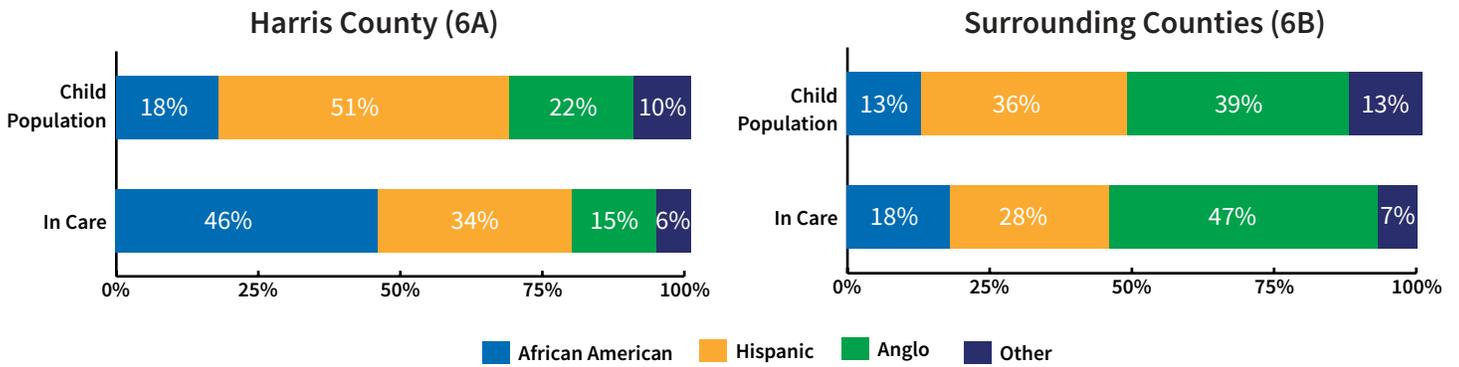
Within the region, there are also substantial differences in the racial demographics of children in care compared to the child population. As shown on Figure 9, African American children are overrepresented in substitute care across the region, with the disparity most pronounced in Harris County⁸. Latino/Hispanic children are slightly underrepresented in care compared to the child population in both 6A and 6B. White children are underrepresented in 6A but overrepresented in 6B. Children of other races (including Asian and Native American) are underrepresented in all of Region 6.

⁸ See Appendix A for graph representing the racial demographics of children for each county in Region 6.





Figure 9: Racial disproportionality among children in care

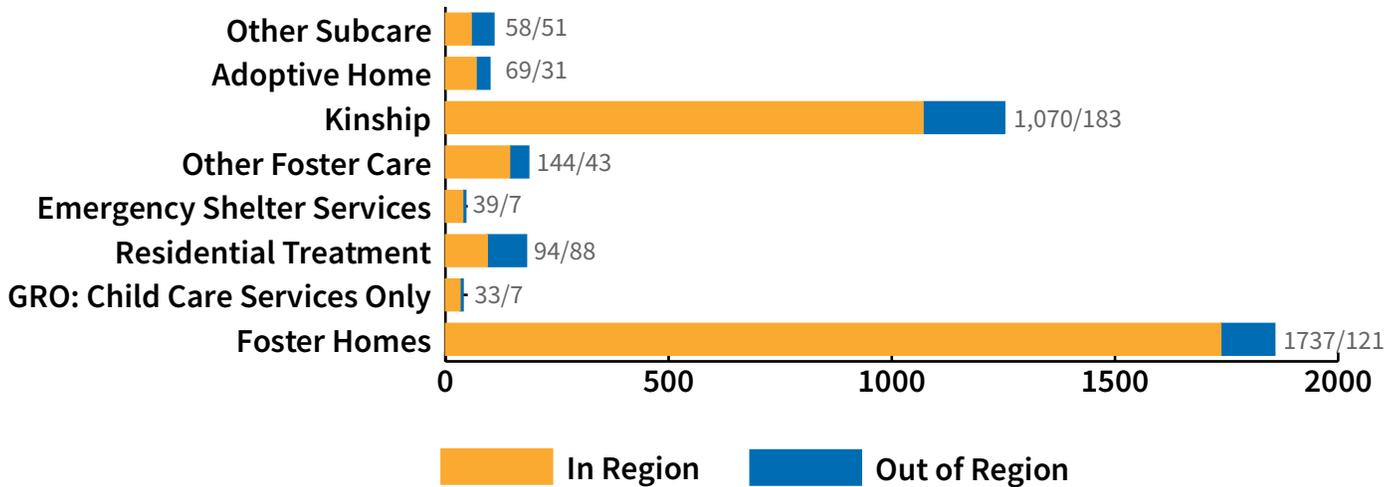


Source: DFPS Monthly Data Report FY 2021; DFPS Data Book FY 2020

Placements

The large majority of children in care on the last day of the fiscal year (August 31, 2021) were residing in a family-like setting; 52 percent were placed in foster homes and another 33 percent were placed with kinship families⁹ (Figure 10). Children in kinship placements were the most likely to be placed outside their legal region.

Figure 10: Child placement settings, end of FY 2021



Source: DFPS Monthly Data Report FY 2021

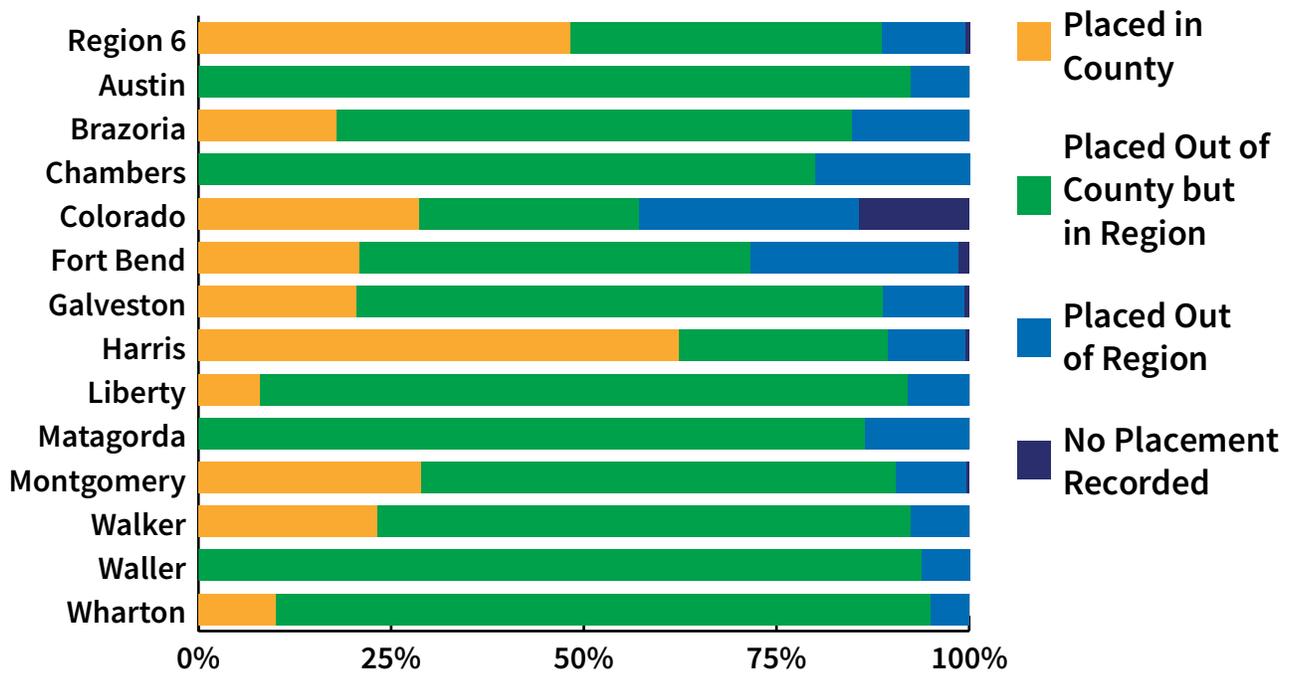
Over 80 percent of all children whose legal jurisdiction is in Region 6 were placed within the region during September 2021. Harris County has a significantly higher percentage of children (62%) who are placed within their home county compared to other counties in the region (Figure 11).

⁹ Kinship families that are licensed as foster families are included in the foster homes count.





Figure 11: Placement proximity of Region 6 children by county (September 2021)



Source: DFPS Monthly Data Report FY 2021

Capacity to place children close to home is related to the number of beds in the region, the services that are available to support children with complex needs, and the “borrowing” of Region 6 beds by other regions. Data from September 2021 shows that Region 6 provides more beds to other regions than it gains. While a total of 528 Region 6 children were placed in other regions, 1,706 children from other regions were placed in Region 6.

Table 4: Substitute care beds “borrowed” from and by Region 6

Type of placement	Out-of-region children placed in Region 6	Region 6 children placed out-of-region
DFPS foster homes	1	38
Private CPA and independent foster homes	727	86
GRO	96	7
Residential treatment center	356	84
Emergency shelter	64	9
Other foster care	154	46
Kinship home	288	175
Adoptive home	11	28
Independent living	0	0
Other subcare	10	55
Total	1,706	528

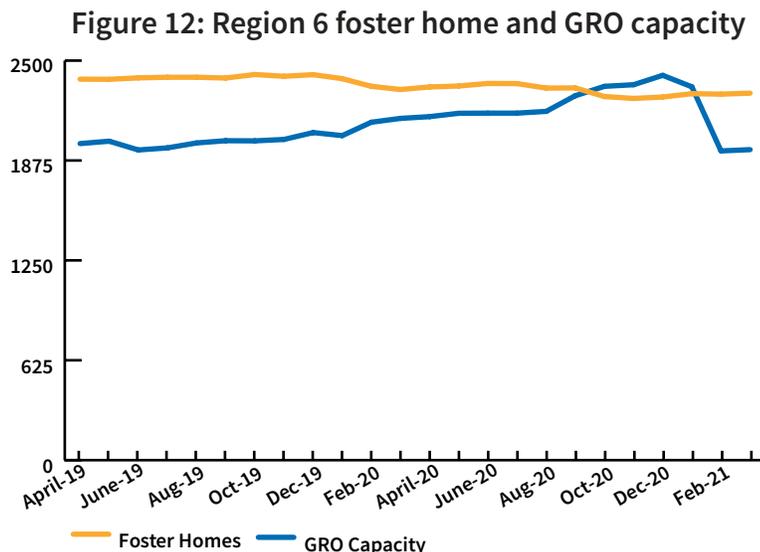
Source: DFPS Monthly Data Report September 2021

The region has lost a modest amount of placement capacity in recent years. Over the 24-month period beginning in April 2019, the number of foster homes in Region 6 decreased 4 percent while capacity at residential facilities (GROs) decreased 2 percent (Figure 12).

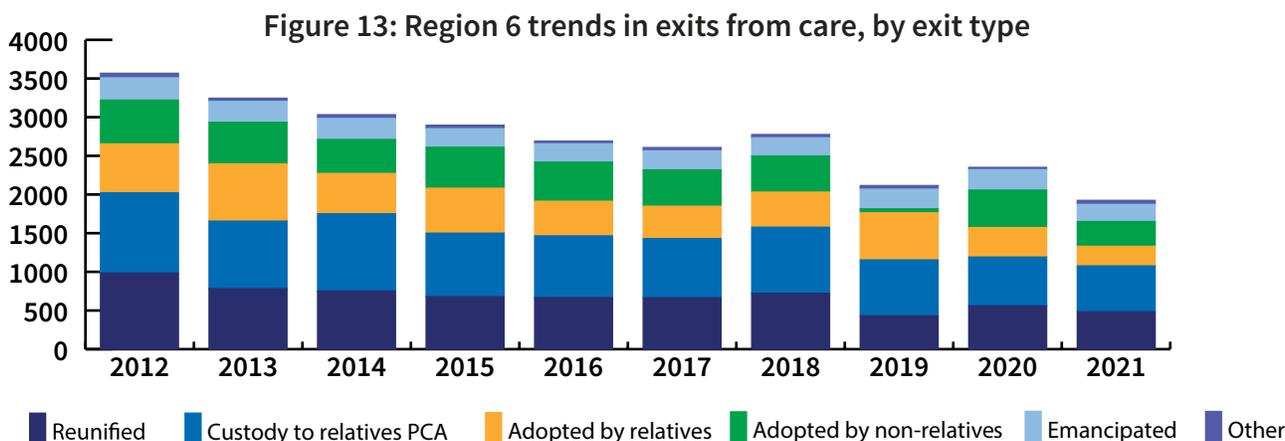
Exits

Tracking with the trends of declining removals, the number of children exiting care in Region 6 has also decreased substantially since 2012.

During fiscal year 2021, 25 percent of children in Region 6 who exited care were reunified, which is lower than the statewide average of 33 percent. Another 44 percent exited to a permanent placement with other family members, either through permanent custody to a relative (31%) or adoption by a relative (13%).



Source: DFPS Response to Kolkhorst/Frank letter



Source: DFPS Monthly Data Report Fiscal Years 2012 - 2021

Aging out is relatively rare compared to other exit types; 11.5 percent of all youth who exited care in fiscal year 2021 aged out, which is higher than the statewide average of 7 percent. Though aging out is a small proportion of all exits, it is a large proportion of exits among older youth; almost half of youth who exited care at age 14 or older aged out. Rates of different exit types have fluctuated over the past decade, but on balance, the proportion of children exiting to reunification has trended downward, and the proportion of young adults aging out of care has increased.¹⁰

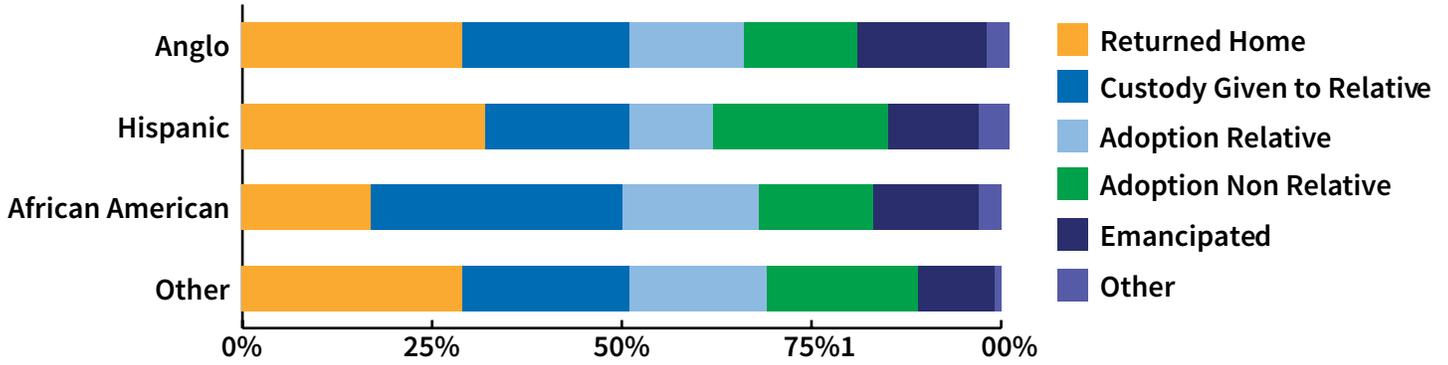
Exits from care vary by race, although these variations look different in Harris County than in the surrounding counties of the region (Figures 14 and 15). In fiscal year 2021, in both 6A and 6B, African American children are substantially less likely to reunify than their peers, and in 6B, they are more likely to age out than any other group. In 6A, Latino/Hispanic children are more likely to reunify and to be adopted by a nonrelative than their peers, but this does not hold true in 6B. White/non-Hispanic youth have a higher proportion of emancipation exits than any other group in 6A, while in 6B they have a lower proportion of emancipations than Latino/Hispanic and African American children.

¹⁰ See Appendix A for graphs that show exit types by county in Region 6 during fiscal year 2021.



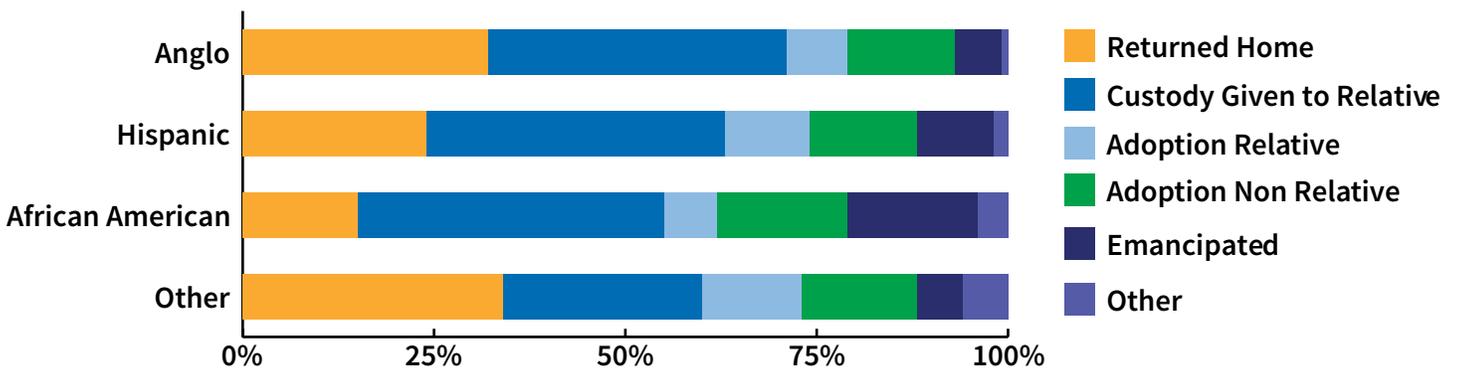


Figure 14: Harris County (6A) exits from care by race FY 2021



Source: DFPS Monthly Data Report Fiscal Year 2021

Figure 15: Surrounding counties (6B) exits from care by race FY 2021



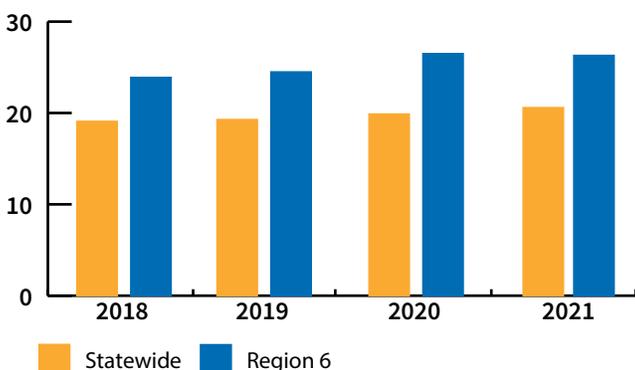
Source: DFPS Monthly Data Report Fiscal Year 2021

For children and young adults who leave care, the time to exit has been increasing in Region 6 and throughout the state over the past several years. The average length of stay for children exiting care in Region 6 is consistently higher than the average length of stay statewide (Figure 16). The average length of stay for all children who exited care from Region 6 in fiscal year 2021 was just over 26 months, though there is substantial variation by county (Figure 17) and by exit type (Table 5). Youth who age out of care spend more than four years in care on average; in 2021 the average time in care for emancipated youth was 53.7 months.

Table 5: Region 6 average length of stay by exit type (FY 2021)

Exit Type	Months
Returned home	14.7
Custody to relatives PCA	24.1
Custody to relatives no PCA	16.5
Adoption relatives	32.9
Adoption non-relatives	35.4
Emancipated	53.7
Average across all types	26.3

Figure 16: Average time to exit in months

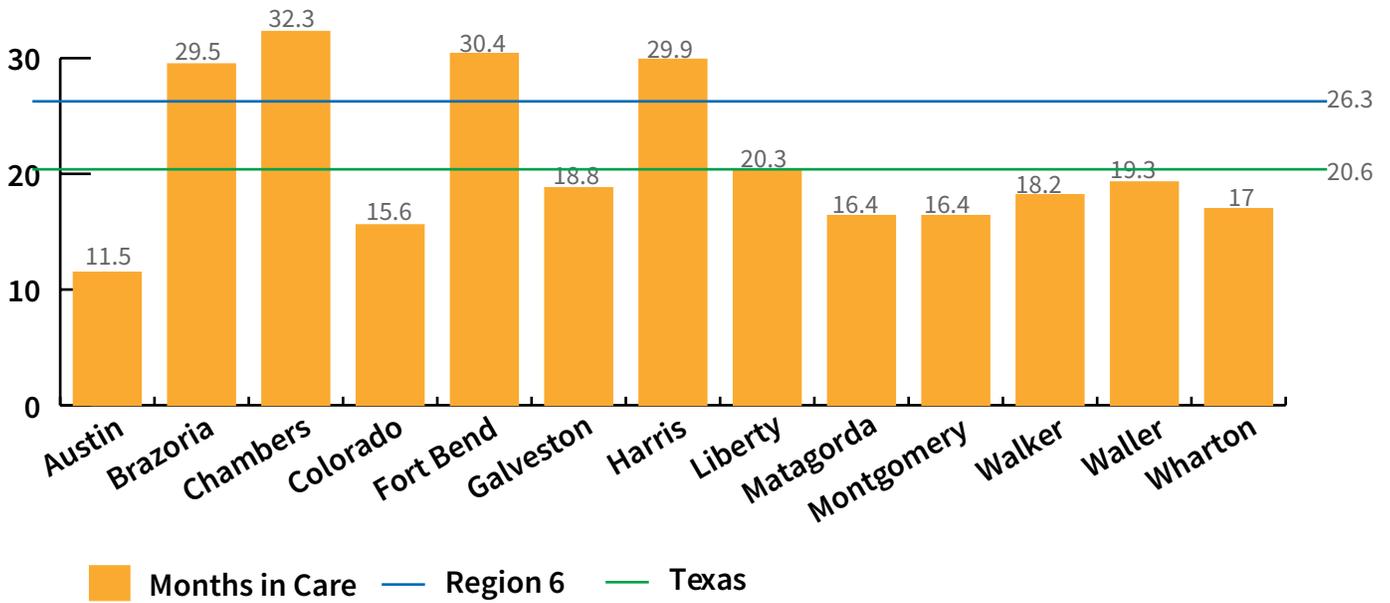


Source: DFPS Monthly Data Report Fiscal Years 2018 - 2021





Figure 17: Average time in care, by Region 6 county



Source: DFPS Monthly Data Report FY 2021

CONCLUSION

This community profile is intended to provide information about the children and families within the region that can be used by individuals, organizations, and collaboratives interested in understanding the region and responding to its needs. Based on the data available at the time of the publication, Region 6 is one of the lowest maltreatment risk areas. However, reduced investigations, and removals, and a dramatic reduction in families referred to Family Based Safety Services in 2021 suggest that special attention should be paid to ensuring families are receiving the services and supports they need. Further, with more than 80 percent of substantiated Region 6 cases closed without services, it is imperative that there are systems and services in place to ensure that this does not translate to increased risk of abuse and neglect.



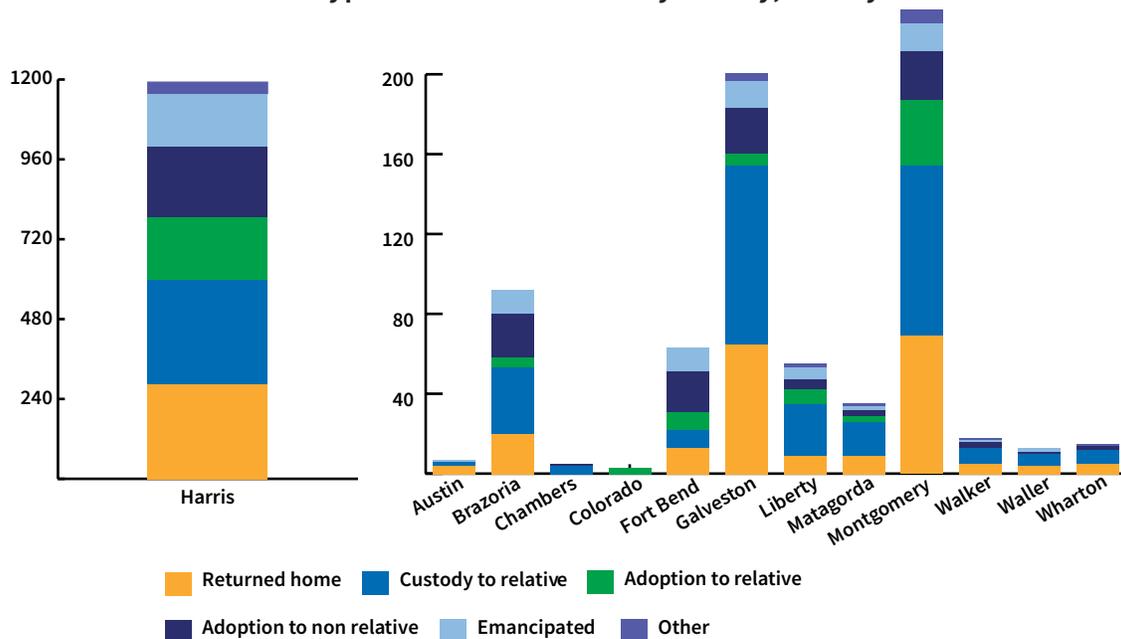


APPENDIX A: SUPPLEMENTAL TABLES AND GRAPHS

Region 6 completed investigations and substantiations by county			
Region 6 county	Completed investigations FY 2021	% Substantiated (RTB)	% Substantiated (RTB) closed with no services
Austin	143	29%	71%
Brazoria	1,336	25%	64%
Chambers	222	24%	75%
Colorado	91	31%	43%
Fort Bend	2,121	18%	77%
Galveston	1,635	28%	54%
Harris	24,494	20%	71%
Liberty	706	24%	67%
Matagorda	259	27%	67%
Montgomery	2,639	24%	70%
Walker	273	25%	71%
Waller	229	26%	75%
Wharton	187	27%	71%

Source: DFPS Monthly Data Report Fiscal Year 2021

Number and types of exits from care by county, fiscal year 2021

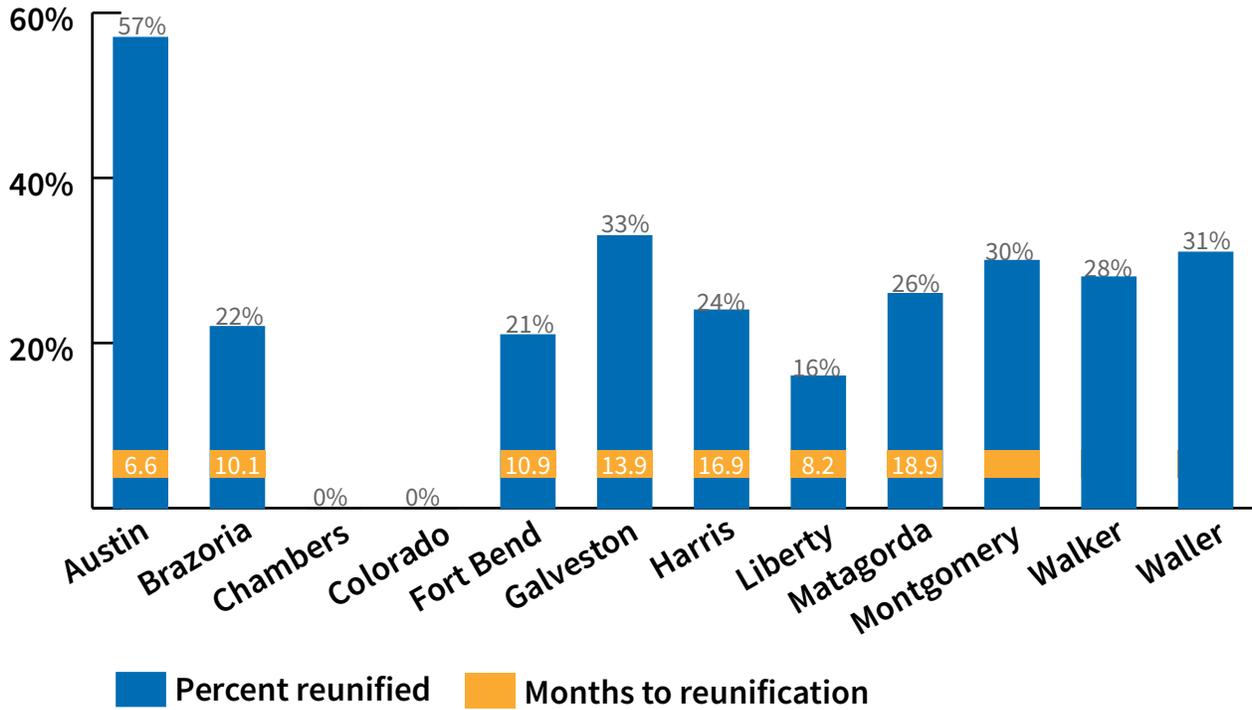


Source: DFPS Monthly Data Report Fiscal Year 2021



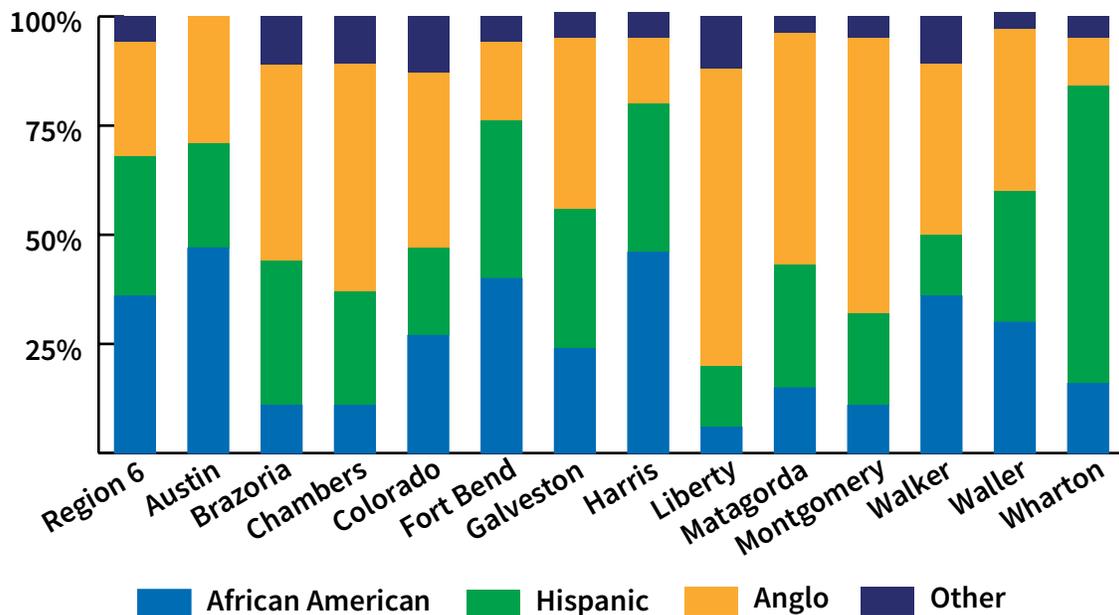


Region 6 children reunified by county, FY 2021



Source: DFPS Monthly Data Report Fiscal Year 2021. The numbers inside the columns indicate the average length of stay prior to reunification. Chambers and Colorado Counties had small numbers of exiting children in 2021 (5 and 3 respectively) and none of these children were reunified.

Race/ethnicity of children in substitute care, September 2021



Data Source: DFPS Monthly Data Report Fiscal Year 2021

APPENDIX B: DATA AND INFORMATION RESOURCES

There are multiple sources of data and information that can inform states, communities, and organizations on the current dynamics of the child welfare system. These resources provide a more complete backdrop of system functioning beyond what information stakeholders might have internally.

- In November 2020, the Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) published a [Foster Care Needs Assessment](#) report, which identified the continued need for placement capacity across the state for, with particular focus on:
 - Youth 14 and older with basic and moderate service levels,
 - All higher needs children and youth, and
 - All ages and service levels in rural areas.
- In November 2020, DFPS also released an updated [Community Based Care \(CBC\) Implementation Plan](#) which includes relevant information such as implementation goals, expectations, and rollout timelines. As catchment areas in the state continue to implement various stages of the plan, understanding the CBC process is critical for community planning. Understanding the experiences in the early-adopting catchment areas may provide important lessons for planning in other areas of the state.
- The DFPS Prevention and Early Intervention (PEI) division worked with the University of Texas at Tyler Health Science Center to create an interactive community maltreatment [risk map tool](#). The UT Tyler researchers who developed the tool used statistical analysis of comprehensive risk indicators quantify maltreatment risk at the zip code and county levels throughout the state. This interactive tool provides robust community-level data that can be used to support strategic planning, needs assessment, program development, and service delivery to support families.
- DFPS continues to maintain and update the interactive online [Data Book](#). Users can access statistics on a variety of critical indicators through the full pipeline of child welfare system involvement, including prevention, intake, investigation, family preservation, and substitute care. Most indicators go back 10 years and can be sliced on various elements, including region and county. The most recently available data is from fiscal year 2020; new data is expected soon reflecting fiscal year 2021.
- In addition to the Data Book, DFPS publishes a [Key Metrics Monthly Dashboard](#) with many of the same metrics, but with more detail and more frequent updates.
- The Texas Alliance of Child and Family Services' [website](#) has information on key issues, including changes to state and federal laws and policies





APPENDIX C: LIST OF ACRONYMS

- Community Based Care: **CBC**
- Conservatorship: **CVS**
- Department of Family and Protective Services: **DFPS**
- Family Based Safety Services: **FBSS**
- General Residential Operations: **GRO**
- Neglectful Supervision: **NSUP**
- Prevention and Early Intervention: **PEI**
- Reason to Believe: **RTB**
- Refusal to Accept Parental Responsibility: **RAPR**

