

Department of Children and Families



SIBLING VISITATION

C.G.S. 17A-10A



Background:

The CT General Statute effective October 1, 2014 (Section 17a-10a amended by Public Act 12-71) established a requirement that visitation with siblings for children placed in the care and custody of the Commissioner of the Department of Children and Families (DCF) should occur no less than once per week unless not in the best interest of the child according to the assigned area office staff.

The statute also requires DCF to report on compliance with these requirements on an annual basis. DCF was not able to develop an automated report that calculates compliance with the statute because documentation of visitation plans, and best interest decisions concerning those plans, are done in qualitative text fields in our LINK case management system. Since case reviews are a labor-intensive process, a review process utilizing a random sample was selected, rather than reviewing all applicable cases. Random samples allow for a cautious generalization of results for the population (total children in DCF care). The number of target children included in this review process has yielded results that are accurate with a 95% confidence interval (CI) and margins of error less than 9%. This means since the current study yielded 51% compliance rate and margin of error = 7% (refer to table below), if it was conducted another 100 times, the compliance rate would range between 44 and 58 percent almost all (95 percent) of the time.

Results:

The DCF Data Reporting and Evaluation unit conducted a study of 173 target children. The children were under the care and custody of the Commissioner of DCF for at least one month during SFY24 (7/1/23 - 6/30/24). Each child’s visitation with their siblings (including adult siblings) was evaluated. Compliance with the statute was operationalized at the target child and sibling level, resulting in a sample size of 311 sibling pairs.

The following table displays the results for this review process since the third year it was conducted in 2018. Please note that evaluation of some of the sibling pairs was not possible/applicable because it was later determined that the sibling did not meet the criteria set forth by the statute, or they were found to be in the population due to data entry errors. The sibling pairs in which the expectation was not able to be determined were excluded from the measurement. For these reasons, the denominator for calculating compliance is in the column labeled "Evaluated Sibling Pairs." Also, please note CI for all samples is 95%, while margins of error vary from year to year based on changes in Total Children in DCF Care during SFY and Total Target Children in Sample.

SFY	Total Children in DCF Care During SFY	Total Target Children in Sample	Margin of Error	Total Sibling Pairs	Evaluated Sibling Pairs	Sibling Pairs Meeting Visitation Expectation	Sibling Pairs with Documentation in Case Plan
2018	5,668	150	7.9%	332	320	126 (39.4%)	177 (53.3%)
2019	5,862	128	8.6%	269	252	120 (46.7%)	164 (62.1%)
2020	5,472	147	8.0%	286	286	112 (39.2%)	136 (47.6%)
2021	4,992	138	8.2%	270	146	82 (56.1%)	73 (50%)
2022	4,415	149	7.9%	286	210	136 (64.7%)	133 (63.3%)
2023	4,110	152	6.8%	267	250	175 (70.0%)	206 (82.4%)
2024	4,122	173	6.8%	311	177	91 (51.4%)	142 (80.2%)

Barriers to Meeting Visitation Expectation:

The most common barrier throughout the years has been the siblings refusing to visit with one another. In many cases siblings may not have positive relationships; therefore, they refuse to visit. Additional barriers include parents/guardians refusing to allow visitation or canceling/not attending visits. Many sibling visits occur during supervised visitation with parents, and if those visits are canceled, the siblings do not visit. It should be noted that some visits occur in more natural ways by allowing the older youth and/or relatives/foster parents to facilitate the visitation. The documentation for these visits may not be entered into the electronic record since they do not have access to our case management system.

Conclusion:

Identified barriers in meeting the visitation expectations continue to exist. Additional training and guidance on documentation would assist in presenting an accurate representation of the work that is being done. It is imperative for the Department to continue to ensure that children in care maintain a relationship with their siblings, which is essential to their development and wellbeing. Thus, we continue to evaluate the visitation of children in care and examine strategies to increase visitation.