

## Background:

The CT General Statutes 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 annually. DCF could not develop an automated report that calculates compliance with the statutory requirements because documentation of visitation plans and best interest decisions concerning those plans are in qualitative text fields within its LINK case management system necessitating case reviews.

## Case Review Process:

Since case reviews are labor-intensive, a review process utilizing a random sample was selected rather than reviewing all applicable cases. Random samples allow for a cautious generalization of its results to the population (total children in DCF care). Thus, the number of target children included in review samples yield results that are accurate with a 95% confidence interval (CI) and margins of error less than 9%. 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 the State Fiscal Year (SFY) and Total Target Children in Sample. (Refer to these columns in table below.)

DCF Data Reporting and Evaluation Unit conducted a study of 201 target children who were under the care and custody of the Commissioner of DCF for at least one month during SFY25 (7/1/24 - 6/30/25). 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 361 sibling pairs. Evaluation of some sibling pairs was not possible/applicable because the sibling did not meet the statutory criteria, inclusion in the population was due to data entry error, or visitation expectations were unable to be determined. In many cases, siblings were placed together in accordance with best practice; as a result, they were excluded from the sample.

## Results:

The current case review results yielded a 51% (119 of 233) compliance rate (see column labeled "Evaluated Sibling Pairs" in below table) and margin of error of 6.8%. If case reviews were conducted another 100 times, the compliance rate would range between 44% and 58% ( $\pm 7\%$  of 51%) almost all (95%) of the time. This rate remains constant with last SFY24 (51%; 91 of 177). The table below also displays case review results since SFY19. Compliance ranges from the highest rate of 70% (175 of 250 sibling pairs) in 2023 to the lowest rate of 39% (112 of 286 sibling pairs) in 2020, during COVID pandemic.

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
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%)
2025	4,224	201	6.8%	361	233	119 (51.1%)	206 (88.4%)

## Barriers to Meeting Visitation Expectation:

The most common barrier continues to be refusal to visit. Primarily, siblings refuse to visit one another. In many cases, siblings may not have positive relationships; therefore, they refuse to visit. Next, parents/guardians refuse to allow visitation or cancel/do not attend visits. Many sibling visits occur during supervised visits with parents, which if canceled, siblings do not visit. Noteworthy, some visits occur in more natural ways by allowing older youth and/or relatives/foster parents to facilitate sibling visits.

## Conclusion:

Identified barriers in meeting the visitation expectations continue to exist. Periodic training and guidance on documentation would assist staff presenting an accurate representation of the work being done consistent with statutory requirements to ensure a true assessment of compliance. Despite this challenge, documentation of visitation expectation in the case plan increased by 8.2% from last SFY with this current SFY having the highest percentage. (Refer to the above table.) It is imperative for the Department to continue to ensure children in its care and custody maintain a relationship with their siblings, which is essential to their well-being and development. Thus, we continue to evaluate visitation of siblings and examine strategies to increase such visitation.