



TEXAS
Department of Family
and Protective Services

Children and Youth Missing from
DFPS Conservatorship
&
Human Trafficking
Data

Fiscal Year 2023 Report

May 2024

REPORT OUTLINE

There are three distinct sections of this report which provide data for Fiscal Year 2023 and the preceding two fiscal years, when available. Each section should be reviewed independently of one another to understand the trends, per area, where identification occurs.

1. [Background](#)
2. [Children and Youth Missing While in DFPS Conservatorship and Recovery Information](#)
3. [Children and Youth who are Victims of Trafficking in DFPS Conservatorship](#)

BACKGROUND

Pursuant to [Texas Family Code § 264.017\(b\)\(12\)](#) and (13) the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) is required to report annually:

- The number of children who are missing from the children's substitute care provider while in the managing conservatorship of DFPS;
- The number of children who were victims of trafficking under Chapter 20A, Penal Code, while in the managing conservatorship DFPS;

Pursuant to [Texas Family Code § 264.123 \(g\)](#), DFPS is also required to report annually:

- Whether a child who went missing was a victim of the offense under [Chapter 20A, Penal Code](#) Trafficking of Persons;
- Whether the managing conservatorship of DFPS is temporary or permanent;
- The type of substitute care in which the child is placed; and
- The child's county of residence, sex, age, race, and ethnicity.

Children are marked with missing events from care in the following circumstances:

- If child or youth runs away from care
- Is abducted by known or unknown person
- Or otherwise absent from care with no known location.

In April 2019, the DFPS IMPACT system was enhanced with the ability to capture data known about human trafficking victimization incidents for any child or youth involved in any DFPS child welfare stage of service.

Incidents are reported by Fiscal Year, but victimization may not have occurred at the time of victim identification. The Fiscal Year refers to the year in which an incident was recorded in the data system. Incidents are categorized as either Suspected-Unconfirmed or Confirmed.

A trafficking event is Suspected-Unconfirmed when specific information regarding the child or youth and the surrounding circumstances creates a reasonable belief that the child or youth has been trafficked. Note: A missing/runaway episode, in and of itself, is not equal to Suspected-Unconfirmed.

A trafficking event is Confirmed when evidence supports the conclusion that the child or youth has been trafficked. Note: The supporting evidence must be more than just an allegation or suspicion and does not have to be a direct outcry from the child or youth.

For children who have more than one trafficking incident in a fiscal year, the highest level of confirmation status (Confirmed over Suspected-Unconfirmed) is reported. A child can only be in one cohort per fiscal year.

CHILDREN AND YOUTH MISSING WHILE IN DFPS CONSERVATORSHIP AND RECOVERY INFORMATION

Overview

In Fiscal Year 2023, 31,475 children and youth were in DFPS Conservatorship at some point in time. Of these, 1,081 unique children and youth had missing events that started during Fiscal Year 2023. There were 83 additional children and youth who were already missing at the start of the fiscal year and did not have new missing events in the fiscal year.¹ Therefore, a total of 1,164 (3.7%) unique children and youth were missing at some point during Fiscal Year 2023.

Of the 1,164 children and youth who were missing at some point during Fiscal Year 2023:

- 1,016 (87%) had been located as of August 31, 2023.
- 109 (9%) were missing and in DFPS conservatorship on August 31, 2023. Of which, 35 (32%) had gone missing during the month of August 2023.
- 39 (3%) children and youth exited conservatorship while missing.² Of these:
 - 15 (38%) youth turned 18 while on missing status;
 - 23 (59%) had legal responsibility terminated by the court of jurisdiction while on missing status and before they turned 18; and
 - 1 (3%) passed away while missing.

From Fiscal Year 2022 to Fiscal Year 2023, there was a slight increase in the percentage of children and youth in DFPS Conservatorship who had at least one or more missing event during the fiscal year (see **Table 1**).

Table 1
Total Number of Children and Youth in DFPS Conservatorship who were Missing FY 2021-2023

	FY 2021	FY 2022	FY 2023
Number of children and youth in conservatorship at some point during fiscal year.	45,870	38,294	31,475
Number of children and youth in conservatorship who were reported missing during fiscal year.	1,695	1,220	1,081
Percent of children and youth in conservatorship who were reported missing during fiscal year.	3.7%	3.2%	3.4%

Demographics of Children and Youth Missing from DFPS Conservatorship³

Of the children and youth who were newly reported as missing in Fiscal Year 2023, 67% were age 15-17 at the time of their first missing event in the fiscal year (see **Table 2**).

Table 2
Ages of Children and Youth at the Time of the First Missing Event
FY 2021-2023

Age	FY 2021 Number of Children	%	FY 2022 Number of Children	%	FY 2023 Number of Children	%
17	401	24%	307	25%	246	23%
16	403	24%	280	23%	301	28%
15	325	19%	256	21%	181	17%
14	220	13%	150	12%	126	12%
13	118	7%	92	8%	77	7%
12	60	4%	33	3%	26	2%
Less than 12 ⁴	168	10%	102	8%	124	11%
Total	1,695	100%	1,220	100%	1,081	100%

The gender breakdown of those missing from care has remained consistent, in Fiscal Year 2023 (see **Table 3**).

Table 3
Gender of Missing Children and Youth
FY 2021-2023

Gender	FY 2021 Number of Children	%	FY 2022 Number of Children	%	FY 2023 Number of Children	%
Female	966	57%	710	58%	603	56%
Male	729	43%	510	42%	478	44%
Total	1,695	100%	1,220	100%	1,081	100%

Race/Ethnicity for children and youth missing have remained consistent across fiscal years (see **Table 4**).

Table 4
Race/Ethnicity of Children and Youth with Missing Episodes
FY 2021-2023

Race/ Ethnicity	FY 2021 Number of Children	%	FY 2022 Number of Children	%	FY 2023 Number of Children	%	FY 2023 % of All Children in Care
African American	414	24%	306	25%	281	26%	22%
Anglo	450	27%	297	24%	280	26%	28%
Asian/Pacific Islander	8	< 1%	10	< 1%	13	1%	<1%
Hispanic	737	43%	535	44%	448	41%	43%
Native American	5	< 1%	2	< 1%	1	< 1%	< 1%
Other ⁵	81	5%	70	6%	58	5%	6%
Total	1,695	100%	1,220	100%	1,081	100%	100%

As in prior fiscal years, the living arrangement from which children and youth are missing from DFPS Conservatorship most frequently in Fiscal Year 2023 is Residential Treatment Centers (see **Table 5**).

Table 5
Living Arrangements for Children and Youth at the Time of the Missing Event
FY 2021-2023

Living Arrangement	FY 2021 Number of Children	%	FY 2022 Number of Children	%	FY 2023 Number of Children	%
Licensed Settings ⁶	1013	59%	667	54%	592	55%
Unlicensed Settings ⁷	504	30%	473	39%	361	34%
Missing at Time of Removal	150	9%	70	6%	116	11%
Other Setting ⁸	26	2%	10	1%	12	1%
Unknown	2	< 1%	0	0%	0	0%
Total	1,695	100%	1,220	100%	1,081	100%

Most children and youth who were missing were under Permanent Managing Conservatorship (PMC) with Termination of Parental Rights, followed by Temporary Managing Conservatorship (TMC), then PMC without Termination of Parental Rights (see **Table 6**). Note: Most children and youth in DFPS conservatorship are under TMC.

Table 6
Legal Status of Missing Children and Youth
FY 2021-2023

Legal Status	FY 2021 Number of Children	%	FY 2022 Number of Children	%	FY 2023 Number of Children	%
Permanent Managing Conservatorship with Termination	526	31%	464	38%	456	42%
Temporary Managing Conservatorship	852	50%	494	40%	365	34%
Permanent Managing Conservatorship Without Termination	307	18%	244	20%	230	21%
None – Missing prior to obtaining Conservatorship	8	< 1%	15	1%	23	2%
Care, Custody, and Control	1	< 1%	3	< 1%	7	1%
Not Recorded	1	< 1%	0	0%	0	0%
Total	1,695	100%	1,220	100%	1,081	100%

Table 7
Placement Counties of Children and Youth at the First FY 2023 Missing Event⁹
(Highest to Lowest)

County	Number of Children Missing	County	Number of Children Missing	County	Number of Children Missing
Harris	244	Ellis	< 5	Bastrop	< 5
Bexar	88	Hall	< 5	Bee	< 5
Tarrant	85	Potter	< 5	Bowie	< 5
Dallas	84	Burnet	< 5	Brown	< 5
Fort Bend	63	Hale	< 5	Cherokee	< 5
Travis	38	Henderson	< 5	Coryell	< 5
Taylor	35	Hunt	< 5	Falls	< 5
Bell	32	Hutchinson	< 5	Freestone	< 5
Comal	25	Kerr	< 5	Frio	< 5
Lubbock	24	Lamar	< 5	Grayson	< 5
Denton	21	Llano	< 5	Guadalupe	< 5
Smith	21	Rusk	< 5	Jim Wells	< 5
El Paso	18	Tom Green	< 5	Jones	< 5
McLennan	18	Val Verde	< 5	Liberty	< 5
Montgomery	18	Washington	< 5	Matagorda	< 5
Nueces	16	Angelina	< 5	Nacogdoches	< 5
Randall	16	Aransas	< 5	Orange	< 5
Brazoria	15	Donley	< 5	Palo Pinto	< 5
Williamson	15	Galveston	< 5	San Augustine	< 5
Ector	14	Gregg	< 5	San Patricio	< 5
Cameron	12	Hardin	< 5	Shelby	< 5
Collin	10	Harrison	< 5	Tyler	< 5
Hays	9	Kendall	< 5	Waller	< 5
Hidalgo	9	Medina	< 5	Webb	< 5
Midland	8	Polk	< 5	Wharton	< 5
Brazos	7	Scurry	< 5		
Kaufman	7	Victoria	< 5		
Jefferson	6	Walker	< 5		
Wichita	6	Anderson	< 5	Out of State	11
Van Zandt	5	Andrews	< 5	Total	1,081

Total Number of Missing Events

In Fiscal Year 2023, while there was a total of 1,081 unique children and youth who were reported missing, the total number of missing events was 2,714. (see **Table 8**).

Table 8
Number of Missing Events of Children and Youth
FY 2021-2023

	FY 2021 Number	FY 2022 Number	FY 2023 Number
Total Number of Missing Events	3,528	2,832	2,714

Children with Multiple Missing Events

In Fiscal Year 2023, of the 1,081 unique children and youth who were reported as missing, 59% had only one missing event, while 41% had more than one missing event. The median number of missing events was 1, while the average number of missing events was 2.5.

Recovery Information

Reasons Given for Missing Event

When children and youth are recovered, a recovery interview is conducted to determine reasons for a missing event, however not all children and youth recovered provided this information. A total of 2,698 recoveries were documented and for 1,457 of these recoveries, the children and youth reported why they were missing from care in Fiscal Year 2023.¹⁰ The top seven reasons children and youth gave include:

- Desire to be on one's own (16%)
- Anger at CPS or the system (13%)
- Dislike of rules of placement (13%)
- Other (11%)
- Desire to be with boyfriend/girlfriend (8%)
- Frustration/anger with caregivers (8%)
- Desire for new placement (7%)

CHILDREN AND YOUTH WHO ARE VICTIMS OF TRAFFICKING IN DFPS CONSERVATORSHIP

During Fiscal Year 2023, 31,475 children and youth were in DFPS Conservatorship at any point in the fiscal year. Of these, 386 (1%) unique children and youth were identified as either Suspected-Unconfirmed or Confirmed for human trafficking (sex or labor) trafficking victimization while in substitute care.

Of the 386 children and youth in DFPS Conservatorship at some point during Fiscal Year 2023 who were identified as either Suspected-Unconfirmed or Confirmed for human trafficking (sex or labor) trafficking victimization:

- 369 were identified as experiencing only sex trafficking victimization. Of these,
 - 270 were listed as Confirmed victimization, and
 - 99 were listed as Suspected-Unconfirmed victimization.
- 8 were identified as experiencing only labor trafficking victimization. Of these,
 - 6 were listed as Confirmed victimization, and
 - 2 were listed as Suspected-Unconfirmed victimization.
- 9 were identified as experiencing both sex trafficking and labor trafficking victimization.

Demographics for Children and Youth who are Victims of Trafficking in DFPS Conservatorship³

Of the children and youth in DFPS Conservatorship who were identified as experiencing human trafficking victimization, the majority were 14-16 years of age. (see **Table 9**).

Table 9
Ages of Children and Youth in DFPS Conservatorship
Identified as Experiencing Human Trafficking Victimization
FY 2022-2023

Age	FY 2022 Number of Children and Youth	%	FY 2023 Number of Children and Youth	%
17	21	5%	24	6%
16	96	25%	79	20%
15	92	24%	80	21%
14	51	13%	54	14%
13	39	10%	49	13%
12	21	5%	31	8%
Less than 12	62	16%	69	18%
Total	382	100%	386	100%

The gender breakdown of those children and youth in DFPS Conservatorship who were identified as experiencing human trafficking victimization are as follows. (see **Table 10**).

Table 10
Gender of Children and Youth in DFPS Conservatorship
Identified as Experiencing Human Trafficking Victimization
FY 2022-2023

Gender	FY 2022 Number of Children and Youth	%	FY 2023 Number of Children and Youth	%
Female	347	91%	348	90%
Male	35	9%	38	10%
Total	382	100%	386	100%

The race breakdown of those children and youth in DFPS Conservatorship who were identified as experiencing human trafficking victimization are as follows. (see **Table 11**).

Table 11
Race of Children and Youth in DFPS Conservatorship
Identified as Experiencing Human Trafficking Victimization
FY 2022-2023

Race/Ethnicity	FY 2022 Number of Children and Youth	%	FY 2023 Number of Children and Youth	%	FY 2023 % of All Children in Care
African American	85	22%	90	23%	22%
Anglo	104	27%	107	28%	28%
Asian/Pacific Islander	2	1%	3	1%	<1%
Hispanic	172	45%	171	44%	43%
Native American	0	0%	0	0%	<1%
Other ⁵	19	5%	15	4%	6%
Total	382	100%	386	100%	100%

Children and Youth Trafficked while Missing

There were 1,095 unique children recovered from missing status in Fiscal Year 2023.¹¹ Of the 1,095 children and youth who were recovered in Fiscal Year 2023, 106 (10%) were identified as experiencing some form of victimization while missing, 53 (5%) of whom were identified as a victim of sex trafficking and 1 (< 1%) of whom was identified as a victim of labor trafficking (see **Table 12**).

Table 12
Overview of Texas Children and Youth in DFPS Conservatorship
FY 2022-2023

	FY 2022	FY 2023
Total number in DFPS Conservatorship at some point in fiscal year	38,294	31,475
Total number of unique children and youth missing from DFPS Conservatorship at some point in fiscal year	1,334	1,164
Total number of unique children recovered during fiscal year ⁹	1,219	1,095
Number of unique children who were identified as being victimized during missing episode	131	106
Number of unique victims identified as sex trafficking victims during missing episode	56	53
Number of unique victims identified as labor trafficking victims during missing episode	0	1

Tables 13-15 provide the age, gender, and race/ethnicity of the 53 children and youth who were identified as being sex trafficked during a missing event in Fiscal Year 2023, as well as the children and youth who were identified being sex trafficked during a missing event in previous Fiscal Years.

Table 13
Ages of Children and Youth Sex Trafficked During a Missing Event
FY 2022-2023

Age	FY 2022 Number of Children	%	FY 2023 Number of Children	%
17	10	23%	15	28%
16	22	39%	21	40%
15	17	32%	12	23%
14	2	4%	4	8%
13	4	7%	1	2%
12	1	2%	0	0%
11	0	0%	0	0%
Total	56	100%	53	100%

Table 14
Gender of Children and Youth Sex Trafficked During a Missing Event
FY 2022-2023

Gender	FY 2022 Number of Children	%	FY 2023 Number of Children	%
Female	54	96%	51	96%
Male	2	4%	2	4%
Total	56	100%	53	100%

Table 15
Race/Ethnicity of Children and Youth Sex Trafficked During a Missing Event
FY 2022-2023

Ethnicity	FY 2022 Number of Children	%	FY 2023 Number of Children	%	FY 2023 % of All Children and Youth in Care
African American	19	34%	14	26%	22%
Anglo	12	21%	16	30%	28%
Asian/Pacific Islander	1	2%	0	0%	< 1%
Hispanic	20	36%	20	38%	43%
Native American	0	0%	0	0%	< 1%
Other ⁵	4	7%	3	6%	6%
Total	56	100%	53	100%	100%

¹ To avoid duplicative counting, demographic data for youth already missing at the start of Fiscal Year 2023 is not included in the demographic data of this report, unless the youth had a new missing event within Fiscal Year 2023.

² DFPS continues to search for any youth missing from DFPS Conservatorship until DFPS no longer has legal authority.

³ Demographic information is based on the child's first missing event or trafficking incident of the fiscal year.

⁴ The majority of these children were either missing because parent(s) absconded with the children before DFPS could take possession or abducted after DFPS took possession.

⁵ This category includes Multiple Race (non-Hispanic), Declined to Indicate (non-Hispanic), and Unable to Determine (non-Hispanic).

⁶ Licensed Settings includes Residential Treatment, Therapeutic Foster Care, Emergency Shelter, Basic Child Care, Basic Foster Family Home, and Other Foster Care settings.

⁷ Unlicensed Settings includes DFPS Supervision, Kinship Home, Unauthorized Placement, and Own Home settings.

⁸ This category includes Independent Living and Adoptive Homes, in addition to cases in which the child or youth was recovered but was missing again before placement could occur in the same day.

⁹ For children and youth who were missing at the time of removal, or whose first Fiscal Year 2023 missing event was preceded by a different missing event, the county of legal jurisdiction was used as the placement county from which the child or youth went missing.

¹⁰ The number of recoveries is greater than the number of unique children and youth who were missing, as well as the number of unique children and youth who were recovered, because youth may have multiple missing events and recovery events within the fiscal year.

¹¹ In Fiscal Year 2023, there were a total of 1,095 recoveries throughout the fiscal year. This number differs from the 1,016 recoveries (page 3) which is reporting the number of children or youth whose status on August 31, 2023 was recovered.