

Reforming Mandated Reporting in New Jersey

Moving from Reporting to Supporting Families

JANUARY 2026



New Jersey Task Force on Child Abuse and Neglect

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Executive Summary

Introduction

Across the country, there is an ongoing crisis that disrupts families, strains public resources, and sows distrust within communities. This crisis is born of good intentions colliding with misaligned incentives, leaving families and communities to pick up the pieces.

Before they reach adulthood, more than one in three children in America will be the subject of a report to a child abuse hotline.¹ Across the country, child protection hotlines receive an extraordinary number of calls each year, and New Jersey is no exception. In 2024, New Jersey's child protection services investigated 94,844 cases of potential abuse or neglect. Yet only a small fraction of these cases—just 2.4% of all reports and 2.1% of neglect reports—were ultimately substantiated or established as meeting the legal definition of abuse or neglect. Well over two-thirds of these reports were for neglect, a broad category that often reflects the hardships of poverty rather than true maltreatment.

This misalignment has profound consequences. Families facing housing instability, food insecurity, or limited access to healthcare are too often reported for neglect instead of connected to government or community resources that would better support them. As a result, parents and children are subjected to unnecessary investigations that can be intrusive and traumatizing, while the

child protection system itself is strained by an overwhelming number of cases that do not require its involvement. At the same time, child welfare systems need to be informed when genuine risk to children is present.

In response, many states, including New Jersey, are examining how neglect investigations are initiated and how best to ensure that families experiencing economic hardship are connected to supportive resources without unnecessary child protection services involvement—while maintaining a strong commitment to child safety. The New Jersey Task Force on Child Abuse and Neglect (NJTFCAN) was founded in 1983 to bring a coordinated, statewide effort to address child abuse and neglect. Over the years, the Task Force has worked with stakeholders from across the child serving system, along with impacted families to better understand and improve our efforts to prevent and address child maltreatment. This work led NJTFCAN to convene the Subcommittee on Poverty, Neglect, and Community Outcomes (Subcommittee) in 2023 to examine ways in which the current operation of child protection services, particularly mandated reporting, conflates poverty and neglect, and to explore reforms to better support families.

¹ Edwards, F., Wakefield, S., Healy, K., & Wildeman, C. (2021). Contact with Child Protective Services is pervasive but unequally distributed by race and ethnicity in large US counties. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, 118(30). <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2106272118>

Guiding Beliefs & Vision

The Subcommittee seeks to safely shift from fear-based reporting toward supporting families within their own communities, by increasing the precision and accuracy of mandated reporting.

Reporters must be able to distinguish true safety concerns from challenges rooted in poverty, reflect on how their perceptions shape decisions, and integrate consistent training and decision-making tools. At the same time, professionals and community members need clear pathways to connect families with community-based resources outside the child protection system. This approach reduces unnecessary investigations, builds trust, and ensures the child

protection system can focus on children who truly need immediate intervention to remain safe.

In service of this goal, the Subcommittee set out to ensure that New Jersey families can access the right help at the right time—before challenges escalate into crises. As part of broader efforts to strengthen the state’s approach to supporting families and protecting children, the Subcommittee examined the policies, practices, and statutes that currently govern the reporting of neglect. This included a close review of mandated reporting laws, available training and tools for professionals, and the systems and resources that currently respond to families.



“Being part of the NJTFCAN workgroup was both challenging and deeply rewarding. This collaborative process encouraged us to actively listen, engage in thoughtful discussions, and ultimately develop recommendations that genuinely reflect the authentic experiences of children and families. For me, this work is crucial because it ensures that decisions are not made in isolation but are grounded in voices with system exposure, community insights, and a vision for a child welfare system that prioritizes protection and upliftment rather than harm. These recommendations hold significant importance because they possess the potential to transform our approach to families, ensuring that compassion and fairness remain at the forefront of our interactions.”

DASHAAN JENNINGS

Founder | Consultant | Youth and Family Mentor
STR8UP Employment Services

HUNDREDS OF REPORTS ARE MADE EVERY DAY

In 2024, New Jersey's child protection services investigated

94,844

cases of potential abuse or neglect.*

NEGLECT REPORTS DOMINATE

70%

of all reports were for neglect, often linked to circumstances of hardship rather than intentional harm.

NEW JERSEY IS PART OF A NATIONAL TREND†

Low substantiation is a national issue; the national average substantiation rate is 16%. However, New Jersey's substantiation rate is merely

2.4%

A FEW PROFESSIONS MAKE MOST OF THE CALLS

Healthcare providers, educators, and law enforcement officers made over

64%

 of reports.

VERY FEW NEGLECT CASES ARE SUBSTANTIATED

Of the **65,985** cases of potential neglect investigated by child protection services, only

2 out of every **100** reports were confirmed as meeting the legal definition of neglect.

ANONYMOUS REPORTS ARE COMMON, BUT RARELY CONFIRMED

About **1** in **10**

neglect reports came from anonymous sources, with very low confirmation rates—only 0.8%.

* More than 158,000 calls came into the hotline during 2024; the difference between calls and investigations is due to the calls being either evaluated by the hotline as needing no further action, referred to other services or agencies, or being incomplete.

† Williams, S. C., Rosenberg, R., & Martinez, V. (2025). *State-level Data for Understanding Child Welfare in the United States*. Child Trends. <https://www.childtrends.org/publications/state-level-data-for-understanding-child-welfare-in-the-united-states>

The Case for Reform

New Jersey’s child protection system faces a fundamental imbalance that leaves hotline workers overburdened with calls that do not meet the legal threshold for investigation, and results in fewer resources available for children who are truly unsafe. Anecdotally, response times for urgent cases are frequently delayed.

For families, the impact is deeply personal. Parents struggling with economic hardship often undergo intrusive investigations that bring additional stress, stigma, and fear, instead of the support they need. These experiences diminish trust in schools, and healthcare providers, police, and community organizations that could otherwise be reliable partners. At the same time, mandated reporters describe working in a climate of fear, compelled to report even marginal concerns to avoid liability, even when they believe families would be better served by community-based assistance.

By mistaking poverty for neglect, the system not only diverts attention from children who truly need protection but also undermines the connections that help families remain stable while families facing hardships are directed to appropriate supports.

Reform Efforts & Process

In 2022, following on work of the Four Branch Institute that brought together the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of the New Jersey government, along with families impacted by the child welfare system, the NJTFCAN saw a clear need to sharpen its focus on how neglect and poverty are often conflated. This work laid the groundwork for the formation of the Subcommittee on Poverty, Neglect, and Community Outcomes in 2023.

Over the course of 2024, the Subcommittee commissioned surveys and focus groups to delve into the ways in which New Jersey’s mandated reporting system conflated poverty and neglect. As a result of that work, the Subcommittee noted two prevailing themes - the need for far more clarity in training of mandated reporters, and the need to understand and potentially reform the institutional and professional liability concerns that mandated reporters encounter. As a result, in 2025, the Subcommittee established three Workgroups—Training, Liability, and Pilots & Innovation—made up of 46 members, to develop specific, actionable recommendations to reform mandated reporting.



These groups included parents with lived expertise alongside professionals in education, healthcare, law enforcement, advocacy, and state and county agencies. This broad mix of perspectives allowed the Workgroups to balance practical insights from the field with policy expertise.

The timeline was accelerated, but supported with a structured and thorough participatory process. In just four months, members moved from orientation to the development of formal recommendations. This required long hours, additional meetings, and a shared commitment to seeing this work through. New Jersey's efforts are part of a larger national conversation. States such as California, Colorado, Connecticut, Massachusetts, New York, and Texas have all launched similar initiatives, from clarifying definitions of neglect to piloting alternative hotlines and expanding mandated reporter trainings. The Subcommittee's work builds on these experiences while tailoring solutions to New Jersey's unique challenges.



"The reform of Mandated Reporting demonstrates a willingness for the Department of Children and Families to improve the way the State supports children in need of resources. As the safety net for children and families continues to erode, it is imperative that we reduce unnecessary investigations and focus on helping families in need. Pediatricians need now to understand the changes, and their role in supporting families."

STEVEN KAIRYS MD, MPH

Professor of Pediatrics, Hackensack Meridian School of Medicine



A Unified Path Forward: Transforming Mandated Reporting in New Jersey

New Jersey's current mandated reporting framework operates in a way that often results in a conflation of poverty with neglect. Families struggling to make ends meet are too often pulled into a system of surveillance, while true cases of abuse and danger risk being lost in the noise. Children deserve better. Families deserve better. And New Jersey deserves a system that protects children while also supporting families in ways that build trust, not fear.

The nine recommendations below offer exactly that: a unified reform strategy that aims to recalibrate mandated reporting so that it tightly focuses on children who are at risk of harm and moves to provide support to families who are struggling with poverty. Collectively, these recommendations reflect swift and dedicated deliberation, informed by national best practices, state data, and the lived expertise of families and individuals with proximity to mandated reporting. Taken together, these recommendations increase both accuracy and precision of child neglect reports in New Jersey.

Laying a Common Foundation

Every mandated reporter needs the same clear understanding of what constitutes maltreatment and what does not.

- ▶ **RECOMMENDATION 1** establishes a Gold Standard mandated reporter training curriculum in statute,
- ▶ **RECOMMENDATION 2** requires its regular completion by top reporting professions, and
- ▶ **RECOMMENDATION 4** adds supplemental, profession-specific modules.

Together, these steps ensure that educators, healthcare providers, police officers, and other groups that work closely with children and families, such as child care providers, share a common foundation while still receiving guidance tailored to their professional context.

This is more than education, it's about fairness. New Jersey's children need all mandated reporters to clearly understand signs of abuse and neglect, and no family should be treated differently simply because one reporter sees poverty while another sees neglect.



Building Accountability and Trust

Training only matters if it is real, trackable, and enforced.

- ▶ **RECOMMENDATION 3** creates the infrastructure: a learning management system, certified trainers, and a dedicated website.
- ▶ **RECOMMENDATION 5** puts enforcement and compliance monitoring in the hands of oversight bodies across education, healthcare, law enforcement, and child care.

This makes training a continuous cycle of learning and accountability, not just a “check the box” exercise. Reporters know they are supported while the staff at CPS can trust the higher quality of submitted reports.

Recalibrating Reporting Practices

The heart of reform is changing how reporting itself works.

- ▶ **RECOMMENDATION 6** shifts New Jersey from universal mandated reporting to categorical reporting, focusing the reporting responsibility on trained reporters instead of the general public.
- ▶ **RECOMMENDATION 7** charts a path to end anonymous reports that too often lead to misuse and retaliation, and
- ▶ **RECOMMENDATION 8** correspondingly raises penalties for false reports to help address anonymous reporting.
- ▶ **RECOMMENDATION 9** introduces a decision-making tool with liability protections, so reporters can pause, reflect, and safely support families when a report isn't warranted.

These changes give reporters both the clarity and protection they need to make thoughtful, informed

calls—reducing misuse and bias while safeguarding child safety. This is about respect. Respect for children's safety, respect for families' dignity, and respect for the professionals making difficult calls.

A Culture Shift: From Reporting to Supporting

Reform is not just technical; it is cultural. That's why the package includes two key implementation considerations:

- ▶ Creation of Implementation Teams to guide and coordinate the work of reform, and
- ▶ A Narrative Shift Campaign to change how we perceive and talk about families—from suspicion to support, from punishment to partnership.

When New Jersey stops treating hardship as neglect, and starts asking how it can help, it changes the story for thousands of families and children across the state.

Why This Set of Recommendations Matters as a Whole

Each recommendation fills a gap, but the true strength lies in how they fit together. Training without enforcement is weak. Enforcement without liability protections is unfair. Liability protections without a decision-making tool are unsafe. Only together do these reforms form a balanced, interlocking system that protects children while giving families and reporters the clarity, trust, and support they need.

This is not about tinkering at the edges. It is about transformation—about building a system that sees families as human, not as case numbers, and creating a system that focuses its resources where children truly need protection, while helping struggling families find the support they deserve.

Next Steps

The recommendations and implementation considerations are a beginning, not an end. Their impact will depend on thoughtful and sustained implementation. Several themes emerged across all Workgroups that will guide this process: reforms should be phased in gradually, beginning with the largest reporter groups; training must be practical, consistent, and accessible; approaches should be aligned across education, healthcare, child care, and law enforcement while recognizing the unique structures of each sector; oversight and accountability should be grounded in professional licensing and regulatory bodies; and communication with the public and professionals must be clear, consistent, and ongoing.

Carrying this work forward will require collaboration across multiple systems, legislative action to update laws and penalties, and a continued commitment to centering the experiences of families and professionals who interact most closely with reporting. Workgroup members have expressed a strong desire to remain engaged, helping to translate recommendations into practice and sustain momentum. Ultimately, these steps represent part of a broader shift in how New Jersey

responds to families. Reforming mandated reporting is an important milestone, but lasting change will also require investment in community supports and pathways that allow families to receive help before challenges escalate.

By moving forward with clarity and shared purpose, New Jersey can build a system that protects children while strengthening families, and anchor itself as a leader in this national movement.

Conclusion

The work of the Subcommittee has demonstrated that meaningful change is both possible and urgently needed. Parents, professionals, and system leaders came together to address a long-standing challenge of oversurveillance and overreporting based on poverty being mistaken for neglect. Their collective efforts produced a clear set of recommendations that, if implemented, can sharpen the focus of child protection services on true safety risks and reduce the thousands of unsubstantiated reports. The momentum generated through this process should serve as a foundation for continued action, ensuring that New Jersey moves toward a future where children are protected, parents are supported, and communities are strengthened.



Together, these reforms make a simple but profound promise: New Jersey will no longer confuse poverty with neglect. We will protect children, respect families, and build a child protection system worthy of our values.

STATEMENTS FROM THE CO-CHAIRS OF THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON POVERTY, NEGLECT, AND COMMUNITY OUTCOMES

I was at a national conference when I first heard that 1 in 3 American children (and 1 in 2 Black children) will be reported to a child protection hotline before turning 18. I thought it must be a mistake. But it was not – I read the research that drew this conclusion – and that cold reality continues to shape the way that I view the important work of keeping children safe.

Child abuse and neglect are very real, and those of us who have worked in this field know the deep and lasting harm children can suffer. At the same time, stereotypes about families in poverty are also real. The overuse and misuse of the child protection hotline causes its own kind of lasting harm to families and communities, particularly those with fewer resources.

As a professional in this field, I believe it is in everyone's interest to preserve the hotline for true concerns of abuse and neglect, while building out connections to community supports and social service systems to help when families struggle with poverty. That is why I was so grateful when the New Jersey Task Force on Child Abuse and Neglect established this Subcommittee in 2023, and why I am so proud of the careful, committed work reflected in these recommendations.

KATIE STOEHR

FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER
DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

For me, this work is also deeply personal. I know what it feels like to be on the receiving end of a system that too often is confused by the murky space between poverty and neglect. That is why being part of this Subcommittee has been both healing and empowering. What stands out most to me is the openness of professionals from the highest-reporting fields to acknowledge the harm this culture of reporting can cause.

To sit with parents, educators, health care providers, law enforcement, and advocates, and still move forward after difficult conversations, is extraordinary. It shows that change is possible. We are in a pivotal moment where honesty and commitment can finally turn the tide on a culture of fear, and we can create a system that keeps children safe while treating families with dignity.

KAYANN FOSTER

COMMUNITY HEALTH WORKER
PASSAIC COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

Together, we are proud to share the recommendations that follow. We also want to thank the members of the Subcommittee, the Workgroups, and the Recommendation teams. Their hard work of wrestling with contentious issues, of finding ways to disagree respectfully, and occasionally, to change their mind, represents the best of New Jersey. We believe this is how transformation begins: when data, lived experience, and courage come together in common purpose.

With gratitude and hope,

Kayann Foster

KAYANN FOSTER

Co-Chair (Elected 2025),
Subcommittee on Poverty, Neglect, and
Community Outcomes, of the NJ Task Force
on Child Abuse and Neglect

Katie Stoehr

KATIE STOEHR

Co-Chair (2023–25),
Subcommittee on Poverty, Neglect, and
Community Outcomes, of the NJ Task Force
on Child Abuse and Neglect

I am honored to step into the role of co-chair for the Subcommittee on Poverty, Neglect, and Community Outcomes as my colleague, Katie Stoehr, transitions out of this position. We owe deep gratitude for her leadership and vision, which have paved the way for this important and complex reform work. This is a pivotal moment in our shared effort—one that calls for courage, collaboration, and deep commitment. After developing thoughtful, evidence-informed recommendations to reform New Jersey’s mandated reporting approach, we now face both the challenge and the opportunity of turning those recommendations into action.

Implementation is where real transformation begins, and it will take all of us—state partners, practitioners, families, and communities—to make this change a reality.

Throughout my career, I have been privileged to serve children and families in many roles: as a clinician, educator, advocate, and collaborator across systems. Those experiences have taught me that keeping children safe begins with keeping families supported and connected to their communities. As we enter this next phase, I look forward to working alongside each of you to ensure our reforms are guided by compassion, informed by data, and rooted in the belief that every child deserves to grow up safe, supported, and surrounded by care.

With gratitude and commitment,

Nydia Y. Monagas

NYDIA Y. MONAGAS

Co-Chair (Elected 2025),
Subcommittee on Poverty, Neglect, and
Community Outcomes, of the NJ Task Force
on Child Abuse and Neglect

STATEMENT FROM THE CO-CHAIRS OF NEW JERSEY TASK FORCE ON CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT

Revaluating and reforming the way we respond to families in challenging circumstances is not easy, but it is essential. As Co-Chairs of the New Jersey Task Force on Child Abuse and Neglect, we are proud of the work that the Task Force’s Subcommittee on Poverty, Neglect, and Community Outcomes has undertaken to further our mission of supporting families and children. The Subcommittee’s charge was clear: to examine how our current mandated reporting system can better distinguish poverty from neglect in order to decrease the trauma from unnecessary, deep-end child protective services interventions, and to recommend reforms that keep children safe while treating families with dignity.

Too often, families struggling to make ends meet have been caught in a system designed to address harm. Teachers, doctors, police officers, and other mandated reporters are frequently placed in the impossible position of choosing between doing what feels supportive and what they believe the law requires. The recommendations in this report offer a path forward—one that brings clarity to mandated reporting, precision to decision-making, and fairness to how our intersecting systems respond to families.

The Subcommittee’s work was rooted in partnership and proximity. Parents with lived expertise worked

alongside educators, healthcare providers, advocates, attorneys, and public officials to shape solutions that are both pragmatic and deeply humane. Members gave generously of their time, insight, and lived experience to produce nine actionable recommendations. These reforms represent not just technical improvements, but a shift from reporting to supporting.

We are grateful to the many individuals and organizations who contributed to this work, and to the families whose courage in sharing their stories guided our direction. We also extend appreciation to our colleagues in the Department of Children and Families, the Legislature, and community-based partners across New Jersey who continue to advance prevention strategies, strengthen families and communities, and align systems toward shared positive outcomes for the people we all serve.

This report is more than a set of recommendations; it is a commitment to do better by New Jersey’s children and families. The work ahead will require persistence and collaboration across every level of our child- and family-serving systems. But as this process has already shown, meaningful change is possible when we lead with clarity, humility, and purpose. Together, we can build a system that protects children, respects families, and strengthens the trust between communities and those who serve them.

CHRISTINE NORBUT BEYER, MSW

Commissioner, New Jersey Department of Children and Families; Co-Chair, New Jersey Task Force on Child Abuse and Neglect

MARY E. COOGAN, ESQ.

President & CEO, Advocates for Children of New Jersey; Co-Chair, New Jersey Task Force on Child Abuse and Neglect

Introduction

Mandated reporting reform is urgently needed across the United States and in New Jersey. Each year thousands of calls to the state’s child abuse hotline are investigated, yet only a small fraction meet the legal definition of abuse or neglect. The overwhelming majority are allegations of neglect, a category that is often a “catch-all” for poverty rather than maltreatment. This pattern places unnecessary strain on the child protection system, diverts attention from children in real danger, and exposes parents and caregivers to investigations that are stressful and disruptive instead of supportive.

In response, New Jersey has joined a national movement by undertaking a deliberate process to examine how mandated reporting laws and practices can be refined to keep children and families safely together and supported in their communities.

The New Jersey Task Force on Child Abuse and Neglect (NJTFCAN) is a statutorily established, multi-disciplinary advisory body to New Jersey’s child welfare system, charged to study and develop recommendations regarding the most effective means of improving the quality and scope of child protective and preventative services provided or supported by the state government.

NJTFCAN convened the Subcommittee on Poverty, Neglect, and Community Outcomes (the Subcommittee) in 2023 to examine ways in which the current operation of the child protection services, particularly mandated reporting—operated under the Department of Children and Families’ (DCF) Division of Child Protection and Permanency (DCP&P) in New Jersey—conflates poverty and neglect, and to explore ways to reform the system to better support families.

Among the goals that the Subcommittee set for itself were two that are key to this work: first, to identify what situations, policies, regulations and/or laws prompt someone to report a neglect allegation; and second, to look at how mandated reporters are being trained—with the focus on fidelity to a new Gold Standard curriculum and training process. These goals are in furtherance of the Subcommittee’s overall aim of safely shifting towards supporting families within their own communities by increasing the precision and accuracy of mandated reporting.

In practice, this means:

- ▶ **ENSURING** mandated reporters can distinguish genuine maltreatment concerns from issues related to poverty.
- ▶ **ENCOURAGING** reporters to examine how a family’s economic and social differences, along with their personal feelings about the families they report, may shape their reporting behavior.
- ▶ **PROVIDING** all mandated reporters with a Gold Standard set of materials to guide decision-making on when a report to child protection services (CPS) is truly warranted.
- ▶ **RAISING** awareness among professionals and community members about effective pathways to support families outside of the CPS system.

By making these changes, we can reduce the trauma families experience when systems intervene unnecessarily, and instead strengthen connections to community supports and services. Safely reducing the number of CPS reports will also allow hotline workers to focus on the children and families who genuinely need system intervention.

Efforts to Complete the Work

To advance this work, in March 2025, the Subcommittee brought together community members and professionals familiar with mandated reporting of child abuse and neglect to identify practical recommendations for strengthening New Jersey’s child protection system. To focus the efforts of these committed individuals, the Subcommittee organized three Workgroups: Training, Liability, and Pilots & Innovation. Each Workgroup was tasked with examining specific aspects of the system, with Training and Liability Workgroups developing recommendations, and the Pilots & Innovation Workgroup bringing lessons from across the country to help shape what might work best in New Jersey.

THE TRAINING WORKGROUP aimed to provide feedback on the development of a new mandated reporter training and develop recommendations for the delivery and oversight of the training with an emphasis on reaching high-reporting groups, including law enforcement, education, and healthcare.

THE LIABILITY WORKGROUP aimed to examine the current liability and penalties placed on individuals, organizations, and corporations for failure to

report abuse and neglect. Based on findings, the Workgroup was tasked with recommending legislative, practice, and/or policy changes that safely shift the emphasis from reporting families to supporting families, especially for cases in which poverty may be conflated with neglect.

The Workgroups began their tasks in late April 2025 and, by the second week of August, were voting on a set of thoughtful and strategic recommendations. Over this period, members moved from orientation to in-depth discussion, drawing on their broad and varied expertise and proximity to mandated reporting to shape practical, well-informed solutions.

Members exceeded the time commitment initially requested, dedicating additional hours to reviewing materials, participating in sub-discussions, and refining language to ensure the recommendations were both achievable and responsive to the Subcommittee’s objectives. From the start, the Workgroups identified priority issues, organized their discussions around clear objectives, and approached the task with focus and collaboration. This disciplined effort ensured that the final set of recommendations reflected both careful consideration and the diverse perspectives of the group.



Guiding Principles

In 2024, the Subcommittee proposed a framework and workplan to achieve its overarching aspiration: to ensure that New Jersey families can access the right help at the right time. Themes in this framework ranged from ensuring families in New Jersey have effective pathways to support outside the child protection system, to equipping mandated reporters with tools to distinguish poverty from maltreatment in reporting decisions, to improving statewide access to clear guidance and

investing in the most effective strategies to reduce child poverty. As part of this broader effort to strengthen the state’s approach to supporting families and protecting children, the Subcommittee set out to examine the policies, practices, and statutes that currently govern the reporting of neglect. This included a close review of mandated reporting laws, available training and tools for professionals, and the systems and resources that currently respond to families.

ACKNOWLEDGING THE PROBLEM: Overreporting of Neglect

Across the country, and here in New Jersey, the overuse and misuse of child protection services hotlines has become pervasive. These hotlines are vital tools in protecting children from harm, where abuse or genuine neglect are suspected. Yet, the majority of reports in New Jersey allege neglect, often rooted not in parental disregard but in poverty-related concerns such as housing instability, food insecurity, or unmet healthcare needs.

This misapplication has significant consequences. It diverts limited resources away from urgent cases of abuse and neglect. More critically, it inflicts unnecessary harm on families who endure intrusive investigations, fear of child removal, and long-lasting erosion of trust in the very institutions meant to help. Families who should be met with support are instead subjected to surveillance, leaving deep scars and compounding existing inequities.

FINDING A NEW APPROACH: From Mandated Reporting to Community Supporting

New Jersey is embracing a new paradigm. One that ensures suspected cases of abuse and neglect reach the child protection system, while families experiencing poverty or struggling with access to housing, healthcare, or other social needs are connected to community-based support. This shift—from fear-based reporting to trust-based supporting—recognizes that strengthening families requires meeting needs outside the child protective services system.

Through this approach, the state can more effectively protect children while also building a foundation of dignity and trust for families.

The Necessity for Mandated Reporting Reform

AT-A-GLANCE DATA SNAPSHOT

HUNDREDS OF REPORTS ARE MADE EVERY DAY.

In 2024, 94,844 investigations were opened for child abuse or neglect in New Jersey based on calls to New Jersey's child abuse hotline.

NEGLECT REPORTS DOMINATE.

Approximately 70% of these calls, representing 65,985 investigations, allege neglect rather than abuse.

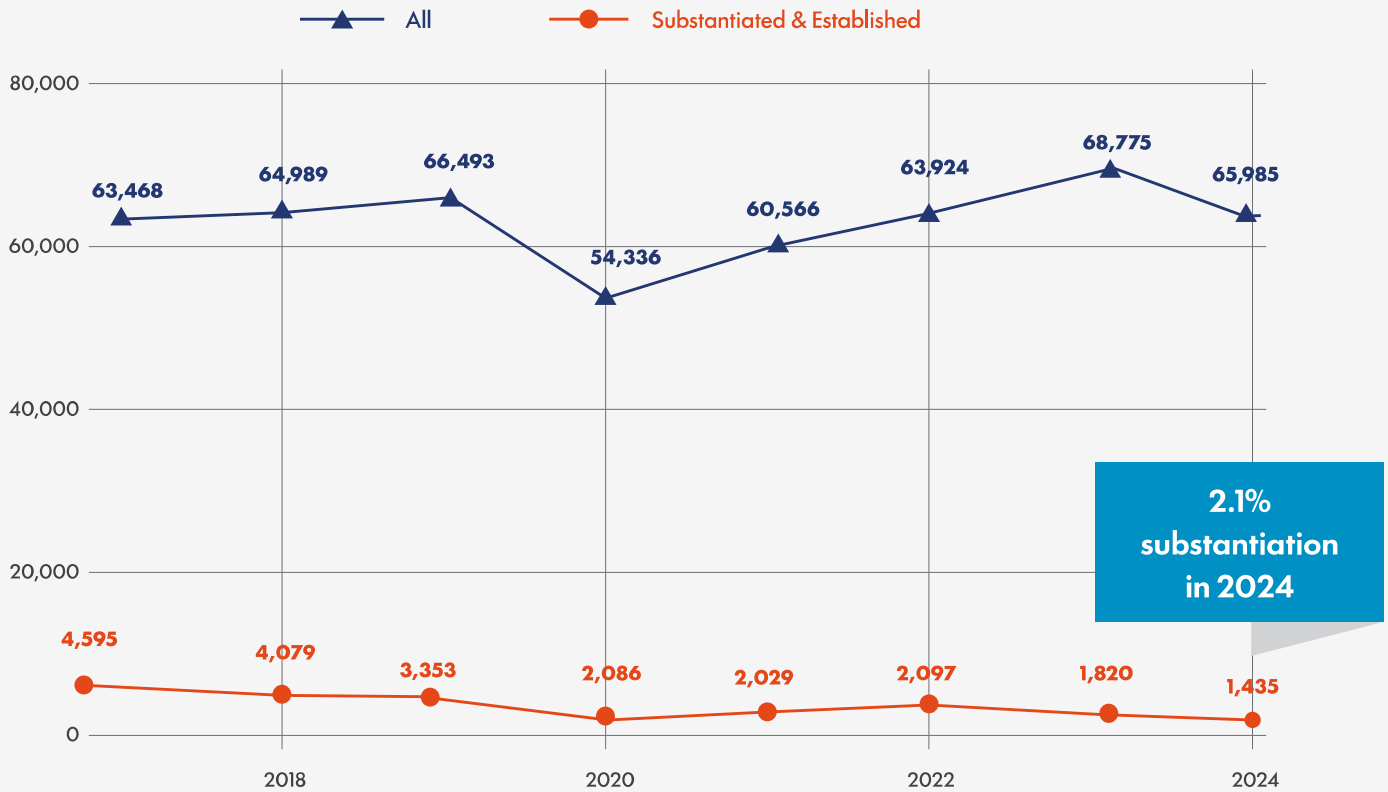
MOST ARE NEVER CONFIRMED.

Only a small fraction of these neglect reports—just 2 out of every 100—were confirmed as meeting the legal definitions of abuse or neglect.

These numbers illustrate that the majority of reports coming into New Jersey's child abuse hotlines do not result in substantiated or established findings. Yet, families still undergo the stress and disruption of an investigation. The prevalence of neglect as the dominant category—often used as a stand-in for concerns rooted in poverty—highlights how broad and imprecise the reporting framework has become. At the same time, the structure of Universal Mandated Reporting, combined with the potential for legal penalties if professionals fail to act, reinforces a culture of both oversurveillance and overreporting. These factors together shape a system in which child serving professionals are incentivized to report, rather than offer support, even when the concern is not about imminent danger to a child.



NEGLECT REPORTS AND SUBSTANTIATION RATES OVER TIME



New Jersey Child Welfare Data Hub. (2024). Child Protection and Permanency Data Portal (Child Abuse/Neglect). Retrieved September 5, 2025, from <https://njchilddata.rutgers.edu/portal>

New Jersey’s substantiation rate for neglect in 2024 was 2.1%. That means that for every 100 calls into the child abuse hotline that allege neglect, around 98 are deemed as unwarranted of further action by CP&P. Low substantiation rates are not unique to New Jersey. Research shows that substantiation rates around the country vary widely but often fail to reach double digits. This is unfair to families who are unnecessarily brought into contact with the system, as well as to systems themselves, who must spend time and resources on far too many cases where there is no need for intervention.

New Jersey’s low substantiation rate is not limited to neglect. When calls alleging abuse are included, the substantiation rate rises to just 2.4%. And while many states have implemented systems that require only a subset of professionals to report potential abuse or neglect to their local or state agencies, New Jersey’s Universal Mandated Reporting requirements mean that everyone in the state is required to report.

And while many states have implemented systems that require only a subset of professionals to report potential abuse or neglect to their local or state agencies, New Jersey’s Universal Mandated Reporting requirements mean that everyone in the state is required to report.

Universal Mandated Reporting Requirements in New Jersey

New Jersey is one of seventeen states, plus Puerto Rico, that requires all people who suspect child abuse or neglect to file a report.² Essentially, every person in the state is a mandated reporter. Some professions, such as those covering people working in schools, have further requirements that overlap the state’s Universal Mandated Reporting requirements.³

Universal Mandated Reporting (UMR) laws have become deeply entrenched in those states that use them. Once enacted, no state has ever reversed such a statute, reflecting both the stronghold these laws have in our society and the difficulty of shifting away from deep-seated legal frameworks, despite data that shows states with UMR laws do not have improved child safety. In states with Universal Mandated Reporting laws, only 1 in 15 reports made by nonprofessionals are substantiated or established, compared to 1 in 8 reports leading to substantiation in states without Universal Mandated Reporting.⁴ This means states with Universal Mandated Reporting laws have nearly double the number of unsubstantiated reports.

This persistence underscores the impact of fear and entrenched institutional structures on reporting, even as evidence continues to show the unintended harms of over-reporting and the need for alternative, community-based approaches to supporting families.

New Jersey Statutes⁵

9:6-8.10. REPORTS OF CHILD ABUSE

Any person having reasonable cause to believe that a child has been subjected to child abuse, including sexual abuse, or acts of child abuse shall report the same immediately to the Division of Child Protection and Permanency by telephone or otherwise. Such reports, where possible, shall contain the names and addresses of the child and his parent, guardian, or other person having custody and control of the child and, if known, the child’s age, the nature and possible extent of the child’s injuries, abuse or maltreatment, including any evidence of previous injuries, abuse or maltreatment, and any other information that the person believes may be helpful with respect to the child abuse and the identity of the perpetrator.

9:6-8.14. VIOLATIONS, DEGREE OF CRIME

- a. Except as provided in subsection b. of this section any person knowingly violating the provisions of this act including the failure to report an act of child abuse having reasonable cause to believe that an act of child abuse has been committed, is a disorderly person.
- b. Any person who knowingly fails to report an act of sexual abuse against a child and who has reasonable cause to believe that an act of sexual abuse has been committed is guilty of a crime of the fourth degree.

² Child Welfare Information Gateway. (2023). *Mandatory Reporting of Child Abuse and Neglect*. <https://www.childwelfare.gov/resources/mandatory-reporting-child-abuse-and-neglect/>

³ N.J. Admin. Code Tit. 6A, § 6A:16-11.1 (2015)

⁴ Carter, E., & Brown, A. (2022). It’s Time to Reform CPS Reporting Laws. *Texas Public Policy Foundation*. <https://www.texas-policy.com/its-time-to-reform-cps-reporting-laws/>

⁵ NJ Code § 9:6-8.10

Understanding Key Terminology

The New Jersey child protection system uses four possible findings when an allegation of abuse or neglect is investigated:*

- ▶ **Substantiated** – Issued when the preponderance of evidence shows a child has been abused or neglected, and aggravating and mitigating factors weigh in favor of substantiation. This finding is disclosed in a Child Abuse Record Information (CARI) check.
- ▶ **Established** – Issued when the preponderance of evidence shows a child has been abused or neglected, but the act(s) do not warrant a “substantiated” finding. This finding is not disclosed in a CARI check, but the record remains in Department of Children and Families (DCF) files.
- ▶ **Not Established** – Issued when there is not a preponderance of evidence that a child was abused or neglected, but evidence shows the child was harmed or at risk of harm. This finding is not disclosed in a CARI check, but the record remains in DCF files.
- ▶ **Unfounded** – Issued when there is not a preponderance of evidence that a child was abused or neglected, and there is no evidence of harm or risk of harm. This finding is not disclosed in a CARI check and may be eligible for expungement under certain conditions.

* NJ Rev Stat § 9:6-8.21 (2024); NJ Admin Code 3A:10-7.3



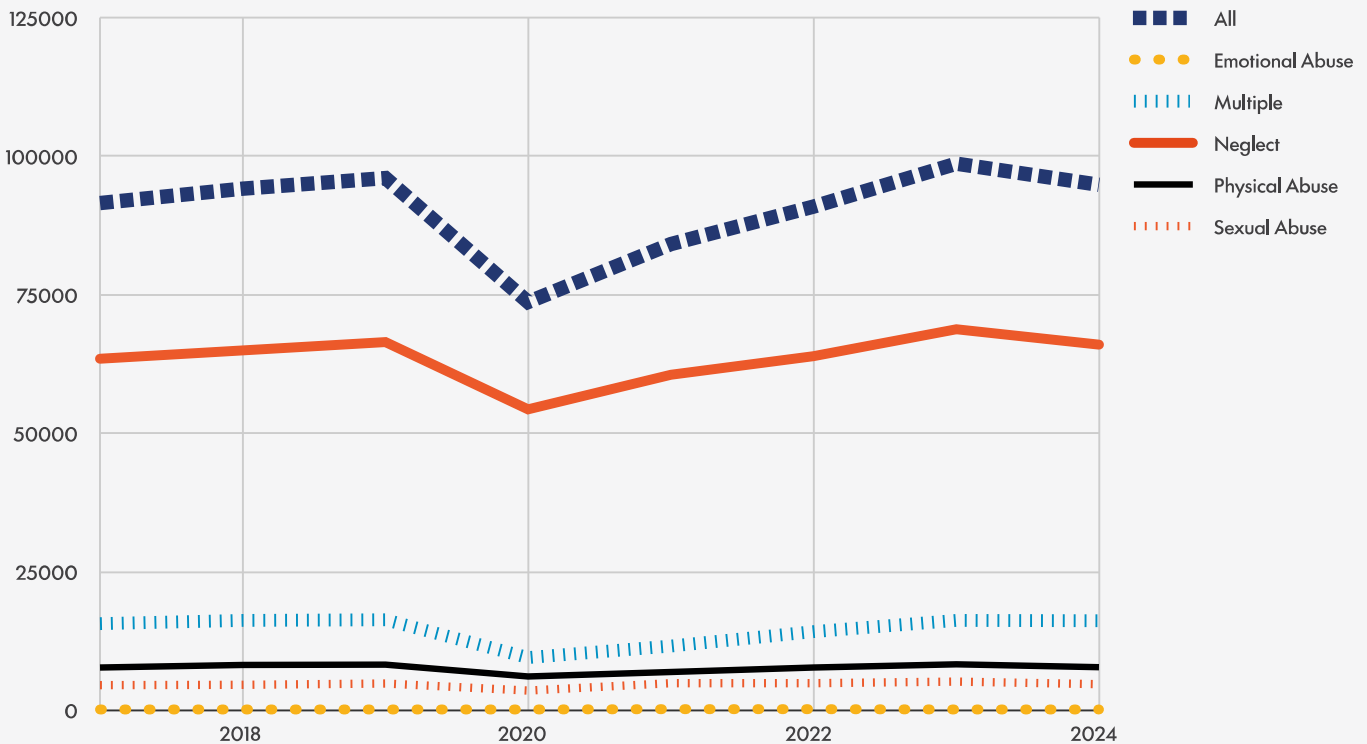
Current Challenges with “Neglect” Reports

In New Jersey, as in many states around the country, neglect functions as a broad “catch-all” category that drives the majority of reports to child abuse hotlines. In 2024, there were 65,985 allegations of neglect, representing roughly 70% of all reports made.⁶

This category often reflects concerns tied to family circumstances such as inadequate childcare, unsta-

ble housing, lack of basic utilities, or limited access to food, healthcare, or legal support.⁷ While these conditions can create significant challenges for families, they often do not constitute imminent safety risks to children. In some cases, neglect reports do stem from valid concerns about a caregiver’s mental health, substance use, or exposure to domestic violence.⁸ Nevertheless, the conflation of poverty and neglect represents a lost opportunity for families to receive the support they need, while at the same time subjecting them to unnecessary intrusion into their lives.

NEGLECT – MAKES UP 70% OF ALL CHILD PROTECTION SERVICES ALLEGATIONS



New Jersey Child Welfare Data Hub. (2024). Child Protection and Permanency Data Portal (Child Abuse/Neglect). Retrieved November 10, 2025, from <https://njchilddata.rutgers.edu/portal>

6 New Jersey Child Welfare Data Hub. (2024). Child Protection and Permanency Data Portal (Child Abuse/Neglect). Retrieved August 23, 2025, from <https://njchilddata.rutgers.edu/portal>

7 National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges. (n.d.). *Distinguishing Poverty Experienced by Families from Child Neglect*. <https://www.ncjfcj.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Distinguishing-Poverty.pdf>

8 Palmer, L., Font, S., Eastman, A. L., Guo, L., & Putnam-Hornstein, E. (2024). What does child protective services investigate as neglect? A population-based study. *Child Maltreatment*, 29(1), 96–105. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10775595221114144>

Impact of Conflation Between Poverty and Neglect

The conflation of poverty with neglect is one of the most significant and harmful challenges facing child welfare systems across the United States, including New Jersey's. In 2024, 70.9% of reports in New Jersey were for neglect, yet only 2.1% of those allegations were substantiated or established. This demonstrates that the vast majority of calls do not meet the legal threshold for substantiation.⁹

Misallocation of Resources and System Strain

The consequence of this dynamic is that child protection resources are diverted away from children in urgent need of intervention. Response times for genuine cases of maltreatment are delayed, and children who are truly unsafe may be left without timely protection. This overburdening of the front door of the system means that the focus of hotline staff and at times investigators is pulled away from children whose families are genuinely unable to safely care for them, potentially making truly vulnerable children less safe.¹⁰

Trauma and Erosion of Family Trust

For families, unnecessary investigations create fear, stress, and lasting trauma. Parents report experiencing stigma and mistrust, and children often describe confusion and anxiety when subject to home visits or interviews prompted by unfounded allegations. Over time, this erodes trust in public systems and can lead to what has been called a multigenerational fear of public agencies, pushing families further from natural supports.¹¹



"My passion for child safety is deeply rooted in my upbringing—my parents served as foster parents, and I witnessed firsthand the impact that compassionate, community-centered support can have on a child's life. Recommendations by the subcommittee are driven by a shared commitment to reforming Mandated Reporting in ways that better reflect the realities of neglect, poverty, and community outcomes. The recommendations developed represent a thoughtful, forward-looking and realistic approach to supporting families while strengthening accountability and care. I'm proud to be part of a team that's advancing meaningful, equity-centered change."

POLICE CHIEF MICHAEL KOROSKI,
Borough of Morris Plains

9 New Jersey Child Welfare Data Hub. (2024). Child Protection and Permanency Data Portal (Child Abuse/Neglect). Retrieved August 23, 2025, from <https://njchilddata.rutgers.edu/portal>

10 California's Mandated Reporting to Community Supporting Task Force. (2024). *Shifting from Reporting Families to Supporting Families*. <https://www.caltrn.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/MRCS-Task-Force-Report-for-09-04-24.pdf>

11 Ibid.

Challenges for Mandated Reporters

While every resident in New Jersey is required to report, nearly two-thirds of reports come from a few professions including law enforcement, education, healthcare, and government agencies. Many of these professionals, particularly in education and healthcare, consistently expressed concern about the current system. Many noted surprise at how few reports are ultimately substantiated, underscoring a gap between the training they received and the legal underpinning of the system itself. Professionals described feeling trapped between a legal obligation to report and an ethical responsibility to preserve trust with families. In New Jersey, any person who fails to make a report can be held liable as a “disorderly person”—a criminal charge that can lead to time in prison, financial penalties, and the revocation of professional licenses.¹²

Without clear guidance on when reporting is truly necessary, many err on the side of over-reporting to avoid liability. This uncertainty contributes to strained relationships between providers and families and reduces the effectiveness of preventive supports.¹³



12 NJ Rev Stat § 9:6-8.14 (2024)

13 Action Research. (2025). *Mandated Reporting in New Jersey: Using reporter insights to highlight areas for policy and training improvements*. June Simon, Gabrielle Steinwachs, Emily Rodriguez, and Grace Carter. <https://www.actionresearch.io/publications-full/mandated-reporting-in-new-jersey-reporter-insights-to-strengthen-policy-and-training>

Poverty as a Driver of Reports

Research confirms that poverty is strongly and consistently associated with child welfare involvement, particularly with reports of neglect. Parents struggling with limited income face direct barriers to meeting children’s basic needs—adequate food, safe housing, healthcare, and child-care—which can lead to reports classified as neglect under current law. In addition, families living in poverty are often under closer scrutiny due to greater interaction with public systems, creating heightened risk of being reported regardless of actual maltreatment.¹⁴

Various research efforts demonstrate the potential of poverty-reduction strategies to substantially reduce child welfare involvement.

Analysis by the American Academy of Pediatrics¹⁵ found that when states invested an additional \$1,000 per person living in poverty into benefit programs, child maltreatment indicators declined across the board. Reports of maltreatment fell by 4.3%, substantiations decreased by 4.0%, foster care placements dropped by 2.1%, and child fatalities were reduced by 7.7%.

Research from Chapin Hall¹⁶ demonstrates that even modest income boosts for low-income families lead to measurable decreases in maltreatment reports and foster care placements. Similarly, when families receive child care subsidies or housing supports, the likelihood of a neglect report or removal declines significantly. These combined findings reinforce that policies which stabilize family resources, through cash assistance, food supports, child care, or housing, directly strengthen child safety and reduce calls to the CPS hotline.

When families can reliably access economic assistance and community-based supports, the circumstances that often trigger neglect reports can be addressed before they escalate to allegations of neglect. Government programs that provide income stability, housing support, food security, and childcare assistance, combined with local resources such as Family Success Centers or Family Support Organizations (FSOs), create a foundation for children’s safety and well-being. By helping families meet their basic needs in trusted community settings, New Jersey can reduce unnecessary hotline calls and ensure that families are supported rather than reported.



"Understanding how poverty, and neglect intersect challenged us to look beyond compliance toward meaningful change. Working alongside colleagues from law enforcement, education, healthcare, and individuals with lived experience created a rare and powerful dialogue—one rooted in shared commitment to reimagining mandated reporting as a pathway to family support rather than surveillance."

MEERA WELLS, MD, FAPA

14 Pac, J., Collyer, S., Berger, L., O'Brien, K., Parker, E., Pecora, P., Rostad, W., Waldfogel, J., & Wimer, C. (2023). The effects of child poverty reductions on child protective services involvement. *The Social Service Review*, 97(1), 43–91. <https://doi.org/10.1086/723219>

15 Puls, H. T., Hall, M., Anderst, J. D., Gurley, T., Perrin, J., & Chung, P. J. (2021). State spending on public benefit programs and child maltreatment. *Pediatrics*, 148(5), e2021050685. <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2021-050685>

16 Grewal-Kök, Y. (2024). *Flexible funds for concrete supports to families as a child welfare prevention strategy* (Meeting Family Needs series). Chapin Hall.

Evidence of Harm and Ineffectiveness

A 2022 report by Human Rights Watch and the ACLU captures the human toll of this dynamic, documenting how families across the country are penalized for being poor rather than provided with the support they need.¹⁷ In the United States today, 1 in 3 children—and over half of Black/African American children—will be the subject of a CPS investigation before turning 18, the majority of which do not result in substantiation. Importantly, referrals to child protection services have not demonstrably increased child safety; 97.9% of neglect allegations in New Jersey remain unsubstantiated.¹⁸ This failure rate places an extraordinary burden on families and on child protection agencies themselves.

Data-Driven Rationale from New Jersey Reports

In addition to the consistently low rates of substantiated or established cases, the data reveals that reports are not evenly distributed across professions. Instead, they are heavily concentrated among a small number of fields, with law enforcement, healthcare, and education together accounting for nearly two-thirds of all reports. Within this, law enforcement emerged as the single largest driver of neglect reports, while anonymous reports—though making up a notable share—were rarely substantiated.

Key findings from 2024 include:

- ▶ **REPORTER CONCENTRATION** – Over 64% of all reports came from just three categories: law enforcement, healthcare, education.
- ▶ **LAW ENFORCEMENT AS A DRIVER** – Law enforcement alone accounted for 38% of neglect reports, significantly higher than any other avenue.
- ▶ **ANONYMOUS REPORTING** – Anonymous sources made up roughly 10% of neglect reports and 8% of abuse reports, yet these reports had low substantiation rates—often just 1% or lower.
- ▶ **LOW SUBSTANTIATION RATES OVERALL** – Even among the reporter categories with the highest substantiation rates (government agencies, health, police), rates ranged only from 2.9% to 3.9%.

1 in 3 Children

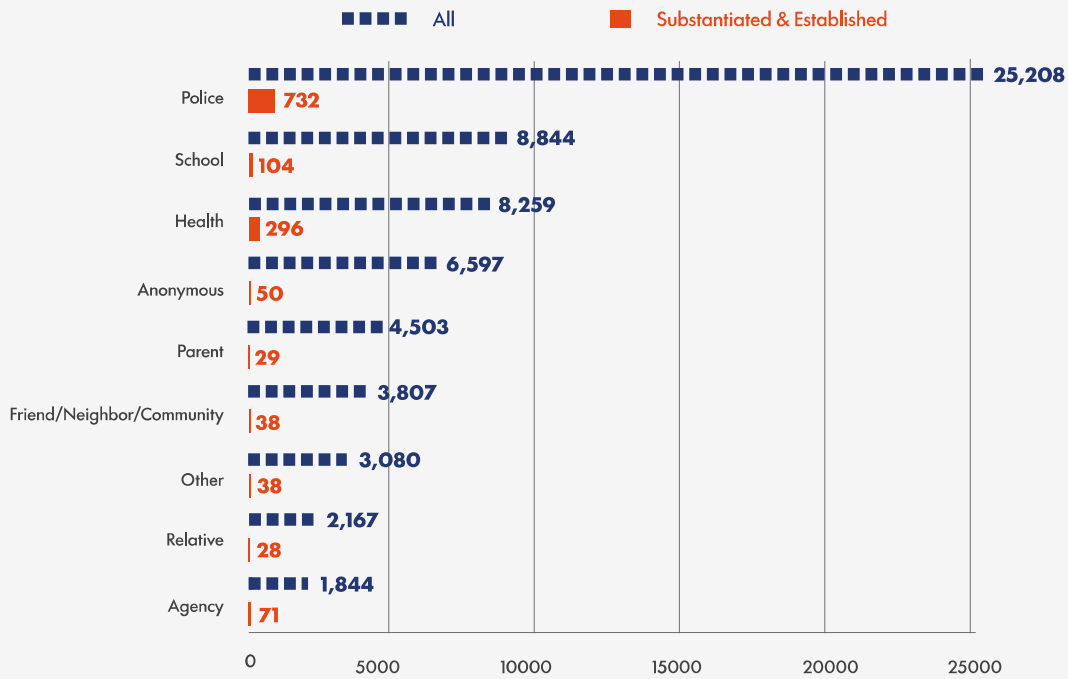
in the United States today will be the subject of a CPS investigation before turning 18.



¹⁷ Human Rights Watch. (2022). *If I Wasn't Poor, I Wouldn't Be Unfit: The Family Separation Crisis in the US Child Welfare System*. <https://www.hrw.org/report/2022/11/17/if-i-wasnt-poor-i-wouldnt-be-unfit/family-separation-crisis-us-child-welfare>.

¹⁸ New Jersey Child Welfare Data Hub. (2024). Child Protection and Permanency Data Portal (Child Abuse/Neglect). Retrieved August 23, 2025, from <https://njchilddata.rutgers.edu/portal>.

NEGLECT REPORTS BY PROFESSION POLICE (38% OF ALL REPORTS); SCHOOL (13%), HEALTH (13%)



New Jersey Child Welfare Data Hub. (2024). Child Protection and Permanency Data Portal (Child Abuse/Neglect). Retrieved May 7, 2025, from <https://njchilddata.rutgers.edu/portal>

Since 2017, only 2-7% of neglect reports resulted in a substantiated or established finding.¹⁹ These determinations indicate confirmed instances of abuse or neglect, representing the cases in which a report was warranted under New Jersey law.

The data indicate that a significant number, well over 90%, of neglect reports do not meet the legal threshold for abuse or neglect under state law. They also reveal consistent patterns in reporting sources, the nature of concerns reported, and the small proportion of cases resulting in substantiated findings. These findings highlight the importance of ensuring that mandated reporting processes are clearly defined, applied consistently, and supported by alternative, community pathways that connect families to appropriate resources when child safety is not at risk.

¹⁹ New Jersey Child Welfare Data Hub. (2024). Child Protection and Permanency Data Portal (Child Abuse/Neglect). Retrieved August 23, 2025, from <https://njchilddata.rutgers.edu/portal>

Reform Efforts in New Jersey & Around the Country

The New Jersey Task Force on Child Abuse and Neglect

NJTFCAN is a statutorily established, multidisciplinary advisory body charged with studying and developing recommendations to improve the quality and scope of child protective and preventive services in the state. Over the past several years, NJTFCAN has undertaken a series of initiatives to explore how the child protection services system can better meet the needs of children and families while reducing unnecessary system involvement.

2022 – Four Branch Series

In 2022, [Casey Family Programs](#) partnered with the New Jersey Department of Children and Families (DCF) to host a “Four Branch Institute” convening, bringing together representatives from the executive, judicial, and legislative branches of government, along with parents and community members. This convening met with the underlying goal to identify a common understanding of the current child protection services system and a shared commitment to a future that best meets the needs of children and their families without unnecessary investigations and placements into foster care.

Through a series of meetings, participants examined the history of child protection services, current understanding of child development, and the experiences of parents within the system. These sessions facilitated cross-sector dialogue and generated a set of recommended areas for action.

Participants explored the science of childhood development, including how trauma affects the developing brain. Discussions examined the effects not only of abuse and neglect, but also of family separation, and the potential long-term consequences for children.

The group reflected on how child welfare systems, largely built in the 1960s and 1970s, have evolved through a series of legislative changes. With current research offering new insights into child development and family well-being, participants considered what changes might be needed to better serve children and families today. Key themes emerged, including the need to:

- ▶ **DEVELOP** core principles for a family well-being system.
- ▶ **EXAMINE** relevant federal and state laws, such as the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA).
- ▶ **EXPAND** pre-litigation legal representation for families.
- ▶ **CONSIDER** how foster care placement can affect a parent’s benefits, including health insurance and housing.
- ▶ **IMPROVE** coordination of family support services outside of the child protection system.
- ▶ **ENSURE** families receive timely and clear notice when the Division of Child Protection and Permanency (DCP&P) becomes involved.

Participants recognized that these issues were also being discussed at the federal level, and that New Jersey had an opportunity to take a proactive role. They noted the value of aligning discussions already taking place in multiple state forums, including within the NJTFCAN, to create a more coordinated and effective approach.



“It’s really important to be able to design this in a way that is fair to each individual...I think that everything should be looked at more personally.”

NJ PARENT WORKING WITH DCF

From these conversations came the proposal to establish a new NJTFCAN subcommittee dedicated to examining poverty and neglect. In 2023, the Task Force voted to approve the creation of this Subcommittee, with the New Jersey Department of Children and Families committing staff to co-chair the new body. Membership would include both Task Force members and individuals from outside the Task Force, including participants from the Four Branch Institute, ensuring that the work would be informed by a wide range of perspectives and experiences.

2023 – Subcommittee Formation

In April 2023, NJTFCAN voted to establish the Poverty, Neglect, and Community Outcomes. Over the next year, the Subcommittee identified its membership and began examining state and national data, publications on mandated

reporting reform, and the efforts of other states. Members also reviewed the National Academies of Science, Engineering and Medicine’s 2019 A Roadmap to Reducing Child Poverty.²⁰ That fall, NJTFCAN hosted a statewide conference focused on the intersection of poverty and neglect, providing a platform for sharing research, lived experiences, and emerging strategies.

2024 – Research and Stakeholder Engagement

In 2024, the Subcommittee commissioned qualitative research to better understand the experiences of mandated reporters, including how they are trained, what topics are covered, and what employer-imposed reporting requirements exist. The findings provided important insight into variations in training and practice across sectors. This initiative involved conducting 15 online focus groups and interviews with 48 professionals from law enforcement, education, and health-care across the state, with the objective of creating a baseline understanding of their training experiences, workplace reporting requirements, and the common scenarios and influences that prompt a report of child neglect. The findings, presented to the Subcommittee in a February 2025 report, provided crucial insights into variations in training and practice across sectors and were organized into five key areas: 1) mandated reporting awareness and expectations; 2) training; 3) reporting triggers and preventive measures; 4) reporting practices and protocols; and 5) communication with CPS (New Jersey’s Division of Child Protection & Permanency).

Two areas in particular rose to the top as priorities. First, the research highlighted significant gaps and inconsistencies in training. While 77% of participants had undergone some training, many

²⁰ "Front Matter." National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. 2019. *A Roadmap to Reducing Child Poverty*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/25246>.

in education and healthcare viewed it as insufficient, often consisting of brief online modules that lacked opportunities for discussion. These professionals expressed a clear need for more comprehensive training on the definition of neglect, substantiation criteria, reporting processes, and alternative community-based resources.²¹

Second, while all reporters understood their legal obligation and the liability consequences of failing to report, their understanding of DCP&P's investigative processes and case outcomes varied significantly. For example, healthcare and education professionals were often surprised by low substantiation rates and concerned that reporting could permanently damage their relationships with families, who might then disengage from essential services.²²

Later that year, the NJTFCAN convened professionals from across the state's healthcare, education, and law enforcement communities for its annual conference. Attendees heard from child welfare experts on mandatory reporting and explored strategies to better support families in ways that prevent abuse and neglect. Importantly, many of the voices represented at this convening—and in other stakeholder discussions—later informed and participated in the Subcommittee's work, helping to ensure both continuity and expansion of perspectives.

At the conclusion of the conference, participants were invited to complete a survey on mandated reporting practices and behaviors. A total of 129 professionals from 20 counties responded, with the majority representing education, healthcare, and law enforcement. Their feedback covered training, workplace protocols, reporting triggers,



and decision-making influences. The results revealed wide variation in reporter experiences, and qualitative responses underscored liability concerns as a recurring theme. Results also highlighted that fear of liability can be a powerful driver of reporting behavior, justifying why it was a key area for the Subcommittee's focus.²³

21 Action Research. (2025). *Mandated Reporting in New Jersey: Using reporter insights to highlight areas for policy and training improvements*. June Simon, Gabrielle Steinwachs, Emily Rodriguez, and Grace Carter. <https://www.actionresearch.io/publications-full/mandated-reporting-in-new-jersey-reporter-insights-to-strengthen-policy-and-training>

22 Ibid.

23 [2024 NJTFCAN Conference Survey Results](#)

In December 2024, [Casey Family Programs](#) convened a group of states at the forefront of reexamining mandated reporting practices, including New Jersey.²⁴ Thirteen jurisdictional teams—comprising child protection agencies, mandated reporters, individuals with lived experience, community partners, and other stakeholders—came together to share approaches to transforming mandated reporting. The convening highlighted key issues, challenges, strategies, and early lessons emerging from these efforts across the country.

2025 – Further Examination of Child Poverty, and Development of Workgroups and Recommendations

To build on the insights from the focus groups and survey, the Subcommittee convened three Workgroups in 2025 to translate these findings into actionable recommendations. As detailed in this report, the Workgroups focused on developing strategies to reduce the conflation of poverty with neglect in mandated reporting, while ensuring children remain safe from harm. The Workgroups were tasked with identifying practical, policy-focused strategies that could be implemented in New Jersey’s child protection framework, as well as recommended best-practices for implementing the new Gold Standard mandated reporter training with broad reach and fidelity. The Workgroups drew on the momentum created through prior engagement, while broadening the circle of participation to include new members and varied viewpoints.



“Participating on the NJTFCAN Recommendations subcommittee provided me with a unique opportunity to mesh my experiences as a CASA worker, special education teacher, and former foster care parent to collaborate with stakeholders from other invested agencies. Our rich, engaging discussions emphasized family-focused support. I am proud of the robust, insightful, and thoughtful reflections which resulted in a tangible training program that will benefit all mandated reporters in the state of New Jersey.”

ELIZABETH PICCINNINI, MS

Special Education, MA Curriculum & Instruction,
Evesham Township School District

²⁴ Casey Family Programs. (2025, March). How are some jurisdictions transforming mandated reporting?
<https://www.casey.org/mandated-reporting-convening/>

New Jersey's 2025 Examination of Poverty

In parallel with the development of Workgroups and recommendations, the Subcommittee also launched a complementary effort in 2025 to deepen its understanding of child poverty in New Jersey. Building on its 2024 review of the [National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine's 2019 A Roadmap to Reducing Child Poverty](#), the Subcommittee recognized the importance of examining both immediate and long-term strategies for reducing child poverty. The Roadmap demonstrated how particular combinations of policies and benefits could cut child poverty rates by as much as 50%.²⁵ Subcommittee members observed, however, that these recommendations primarily focused on alleviating the effects of poverty through cash transfers and other supports, rather than addressing poverty's root causes. This broader inquiry reflects the Subcommittee's aspiration to ensure that all families can access the right help at the right time, whether through mandated reporting reform or through more effective strategies to prevent and reduce child poverty.

Accordingly, in 2025, the Subcommittee identified interest in learning more about the following domains as contributors to child poverty:

- ▶ Income, wages, and labor force participation
- ▶ Children's education and the education system
- ▶ Child care
- ▶ Housing, residential mobility, and neighborhood conditions
- ▶ Child health and the healthcare system
- ▶ Neighborhood safety and the criminal justice system
- ▶ Transportation access
- ▶ Involvement with the child welfare system

The Subcommittee prioritized two of these (housing, residential mobility, and neighborhood conditions; and income, wages, and labor force participation) for examination in 2025. DCF's post-doctoral research fellow conducted research into each domain, sharing information about the relationship between that domain and child poverty, promising policy approaches in New Jersey and nationally, and barriers/drivers of success for those policy options.

This examination of child poverty remains ongoing, and the findings are expected to inform future work at DCF. While distinct from the Workgroups, this effort complements their recommendations by broadening the state's understanding of how best to support families and reduce the conditions that often lead to child welfare involvement.

²⁵ "Front Matter." National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. 2019. *A Roadmap to Reducing Child Poverty*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/25246>.

Comparative State Analysis

New Jersey's work to reform the role of mandated reporting is part of a broader national trend.²⁶ This snapshot of reforms underway in other states shows New Jersey's work in context of that national effort. Together, these initiatives reflect a growing recognition that families are best served when concerns about unmet needs can be addressed through timely support, rather than through unnecessary child protective investigations.

CALIFORNIA

- ▶ In 2022, Assembly Bill 2085 and Senate Bill 1085 were signed to clarify that poverty and economic hardship alone do not constitute neglect, and cannot be the sole reason for a family to enter the child welfare system.^{27,28}
- ▶ In March 2023, the state established a statewide **Mandated Reporting to Community Supporting Task Force** with the goal of providing guidance and actionable recommendations to reform mandated reporting.
- ▶ The Task Force's final report in September 2024 listed 14 recommendations, with one being the removal of the general neglect reporting requirement and adoption of decision-support tools statewide.
- ▶ Legislation enacted in July 2025 established the **Mandated Reporting Advisory Committee** as an ongoing body to oversee the implementation of the Task Force recommendations, as well as to continue to make additional recommendations as needed, and to evaluate the impact and of the Task Force recommendations.
- ▶ In 2025, two additional Task Force recommendations were codified in legislation, calling on counties to outline mandated reporting changes in their Comprehensive Prevention Plans, and directing the development and required content of standardized mandated reporter training.

26 Center for the Study of Social Policy. (2024). What Parents Say About...Supporting Families Rather Than Reporting Them: Changing Mandated Reporting Policies and Practices. <https://ctfalliance.org/partnering-with-parents/bpnn/#mandated-reporting-brief>

27 A.B. 2085, 2021–22 Reg. Sess. (CA 2022)

28 A.B. 1085, 2021–22 Reg. Sess. (CA 2022)

COLORADO

- ▶ In 2022, the legislature established a **Mandatory Reporting Task Force** to review policies and their impact on families, particularly ones under economic strain or with disabilities.
- ▶ The Task Force’s final report, in January 2025, recommended narrowing the definition of neglect, creating a decision-support tool for reporters, monitoring disproportionality, and aligning the definition of “Severe Neglect” with the state’s Structured Decision-Making Tool.
- ▶ An additional recommendation to establish a warmline is currently being piloted in 3 counties.
- ▶ Following recommendations from the Mandatory Reporting Taskforce, House Bill 25-1188, enacted September 2025, clarifies the responsibilities for mandated reporters and prohibits reporting based on families’ socio-economic status.²⁹

CONNECTICUT

- ▶ With nearly 40% of reports originating from schools, the legislature passed a 2024 law allowing schools to **conduct a preliminary inquiry** before reporting, designed to determine if “reasonable suspicion” exists.
- ▶ This provision creates a “good faith effort” clause intended to minimize unnecessary reports and allow schools to resolve concerns with community supports.
- ▶ In 2025, Connecticut created and launched a new online mandated reporting training, offered in English, Spanish, and American Sign Language.

MASSACHUSETTS

- ▶ A **Mandated Reporting Commission** released its final report in 2021 after extensive deliberations and public input.
- ▶ While no consensus was reached on final recommendations, the report documented critical concerns and highlighted the complexity of reform.

²⁹ *New Colorado child abuse reporting.* (2025). Colorado Office of School Safety. <https://oss.colorado.gov/news-article/new-colorado-child-abuse-reporting>

NEW YORK

- ▶ In 2023, the state revised mandated reporter training, explicitly incorporating content on bias in reporting.
- ▶ In New York City, 1,800 school liaisons received new training and began using a decision tree tool to help determine when a report is warranted.
- ▶ Alternative hotlines have also been developed to connect families directly to resources and referrals.
- ▶ In June 2025, the Legislature passed a bill to eliminate anonymous reporting, and require a caller to leave contact information when filing a report. This bill is awaiting the governor's signature.

TEXAS

- ▶ A coalition of stakeholders advanced several reforms, beginning in 2021.
- ▶ House Bill 567 narrowed the definition of neglect to cases involving “immediate danger” and required that caregivers act with “blatant disregard” for child safety. This bill passed the Legislature and was filed without the governor's signature in 2021.
- ▶ Additional reforms included prohibiting removal of children based solely on parental marijuana use (unless harm is demonstrated) and eliminating anonymous reporting.
- ▶ In 2023, House Bill 63 stated that the child abuse hotline is not authorized to take an anonymous report of abuse or neglect.
- ▶ Since 2022, the number of children in the Texas child welfare system has decreased by approximately 40%, with no reported increase in child fatalities.

OTHER STATE EFFORTS

- ▶ In **Illinois**, recent legislation requires the Child Protective Service Unit to share final reports with the child's school, intended to improve transparency and cross-system coordination.
- ▶ In **Wisconsin**, staff on alternative response hotlines provide feedback, referrals, and resources while assessing whether concerns meet the legal threshold for maltreatment.
- ▶ In **New Hampshire**, reporters can use decision tree tools that include statutory guidance, bias reflection prompts, and pathways to community-based alternatives.

While approaches vary, several common strategies are emerging across the country, including revisiting definitions and legal standards, creating statewide commissions and task forces, developing training and practice change, building community pathways, establishing data and feedback loops, and piloting and scaling innovative supports.

New Jersey's efforts align closely with leading states in the movement to refine mandated reporting practices, while reflecting the state's own structure and priorities. Like California, Colorado, and Massachusetts, New Jersey has established a formal, multidisciplinary body to guide reform—the New Jersey Task Force on Child Abuse and Neglect's Subcommittee on Poverty, Neglect, and Community Outcomes—ensuring cross-system participation and input from those with direct experience in the child protection services system. Similar to New York City and Ohio, New Jersey has invested in gathering data and feedback from mandated reporters to inform clearer guidance and strengthen pathways to community-based supports. By pairing this information with targeted Workgroups focused on training and liability, the state positioned itself to develop recommendations that address both the decision-making

process and the policy environment. In doing so, New Jersey is not only participating in the national shift toward more balanced and supportive reporting systems but also building a model that is tailored to its specific legal framework, service landscape, and community needs.

Across the country, state laws and regulations differ widely in both whether mandated reporters are trained, and how much training they receive. Data gathered by Colorado's Mandated Reporting Task Force in 2023³⁰ showed that in 21 states and Washington, D.C., mandated reporter training is referenced in statute. However, the scope of mandates differs significantly, and focusing on top-level statutory requirements often paints an incomplete picture. For example, New Jersey currently does not have general or sector specific statutory requirements for mandated reporter training, but N.J. Administrative Code³¹ requires all employees, volunteers, and interns working in a school district to receive training on the school district's policies and procedures for reporting allegations of abuse or neglect. This nuance in requirements is not unique to New Jersey but is addressable, and was a key factor in establishing the Training Workgroup to make recommendations on how to implement a statewide gold standard training with fidelity.



30 Office of the Colorado Child Protection Ombudsman. (2023). 50-State Comparison of Mandatory Reporting Laws. [Coloradocpo.org](https://coloradocpo.org). Retrieved August 22, 2025, from <https://coloradocpo.org/mandatory-reporting-resource/>

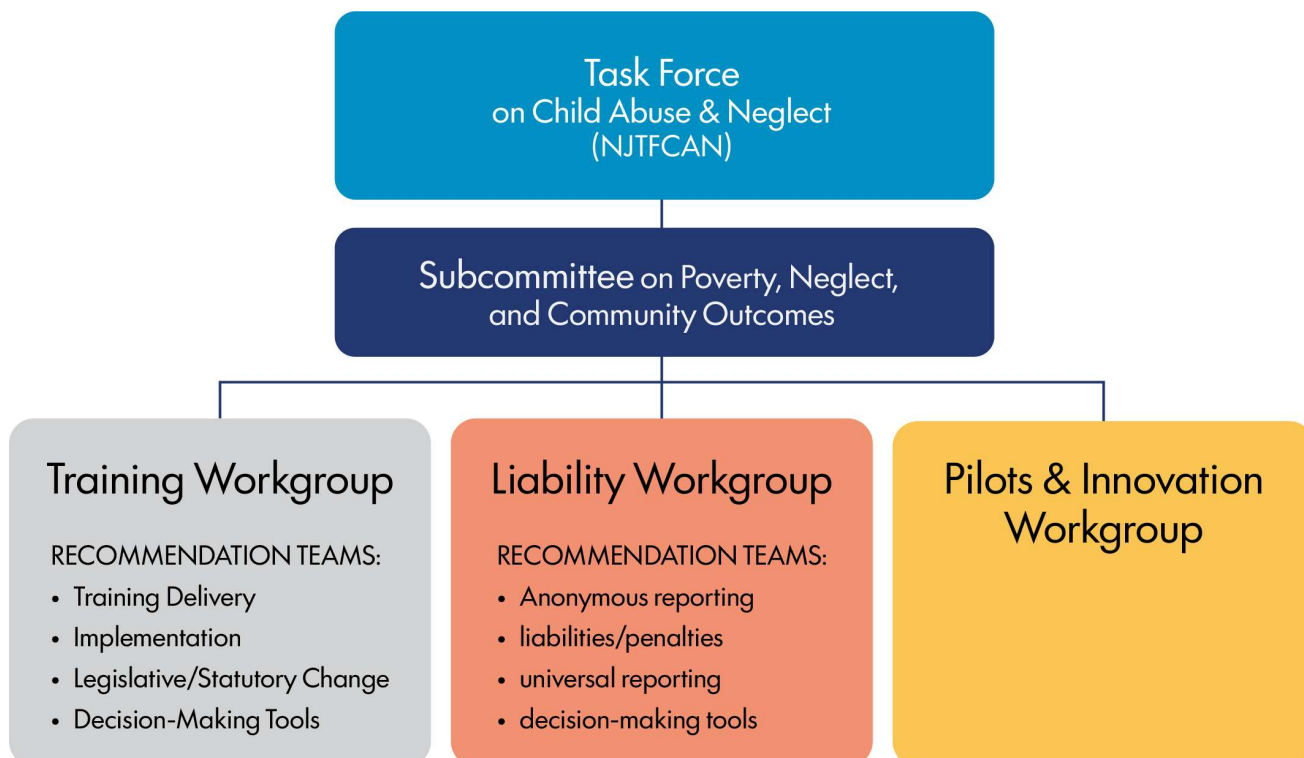
31 N.J. Admin Code 6A:16-11.1(a)

Subcommittee & Workgroup Structure

The Subcommittee on Poverty, Neglect, and Community Outcomes

In 2023, the Subcommittee on Poverty, Neglect, and Community Outcomes (the Subcommittee) was convened under the oversight of the NJTFCAN, with administrative support provided by the Department of Children and Families. The Subcommittee set out to develop recommendations to reform New Jersey’s mandated reporting laws so they more effectively distinguish between true maltreatment and the conditions of poverty, and to review penalties associated with reporting requirements.

The Subcommittee is made up of fourteen members, of which two are parents with lived expertise. The Subcommittee brings together a broad cross-section of New Jersey’s child and family support network. Members include state agencies (Departments of Children and Families, Human Services, Education), county-level social services (Warren County), healthcare providers (Cooper Health, pediatric expertise), and child advocacy and prevention organizations (Advocates for Children of NJ, NJ Children’s Alliance, Prevent Child Abuse NJ). Importantly, the group also includes parents and lived experience experts, ensuring that family and community perspectives are incorporated alongside institutional voices.



Training, Liability, and Pilots & Innovation Workgroups

In March 2025, the Subcommittee issued a call for applications to join specialized Workgroups that examine the current mandated reporting system in New Jersey and identify recommendations for reform. The goal was to bring together individuals who could provide practical insight into the challenges and opportunities for improving New Jersey’s approach to child protection.

The Workgroups met from April through August 2025 to develop recommendations for updating New Jersey’s mandated reporting practices, with a goal of increasing precision and accuracy in mandated reporting so that families are supported in their communities and poverty is not confused with neglect. To carry out this work, the Subcommittee established three dedicated Workgroups: the Training Workgroup and Liability Workgroup to identify recommendations to reform New Jersey’s mandated reporting system, and the Pilots & Innovation Workgroup to research and analyze promising pilots and practice innovations from around the country to support those recommendations.

Beyond the Workgroup structure, the Subcommittee itself also examined issues related to child poverty more broadly (see page XX), recognizing that the conflation of poverty with neglect is at the root of many challenges within child protection services.

Standing Up the Workgroups

To ensure that the Workgroups reflected a broad range of perspectives, roles, and proximity to mandated reporting, the Subcommittee reached out to attendees of the NJTFCAN Fall 2024 Conference, participants in the Subcommittee focus groups, as well as partner organizations such as the NJ State Association of Chiefs of Police and the NJ Principals and Supervisors Association. A robust set of applications was received, with interest exceeding the number of available seats. All applicants were asked a set of questions designed to assess their familiarity with New Jersey’s child protection services, knowledge of mandated reporting laws and practices, understanding of challenges within the current system, and underlying interest in contributing to this work.

Each application was reviewed using a standardized rubric, with multiple reviewers scoring each applicant. Priority was given to individuals demonstrating a high level of familiarity with current laws and policies, while an intentional weight was placed on lived expertise—recognizing the importance of including the voices of those who have personally navigated the child welfare system.

The goal was to bring together members whose professional expertise, community roles, and lived experience could collectively inform thoughtful, equitable recommendations for reform. Ultimately, 46 members were selected to serve on the Workgroups. Final decisions in the selection process rested with the Subcommittee, which also designated certain seats for appointed members from New Jersey government agencies to ensure alignment with state-level systems and policy considerations.

Identifying Recommendation Areas & Starter Questions

Based on its review of the 2024 survey and focus group research conducted with NJ mandated reporters, the Subcommittee identified priority areas for focused exploration—Training and Liability, further supported by a Pilots & Innovation Workgroup—to ultimately improve precision and accuracy of mandated reporting; ensuring that families are supported, and poverty is no longer conflated with neglect. These areas represented areas that the focus group and survey findings, as well as conference proceedings, elevated as appropriate places to begin to address the legal and practice framework within which NJ’s mandated reporters operate. Each Workgroup builds on lessons from national practice, state-level reform efforts, and the lived expertise of families and reporters to ensure that recommendations are both actionable and transformative.

Training

Data consistently shows that the majority of hotline calls come from child serving professionals such as healthcare providers, law enforcement officers, and educators, rather than from members of the public. The Subcommittee’s focus group and survey research showed that these reporters often face unclear guidance and a lack of alternatives when confronted with concerns related to poverty, family stress, or unmet needs. Accordingly, the Subcommittee established the Training Workgroup to: (a) create recommendations on the ownership, accountability, and certification of New Jersey’s mandated reporter training; (b) create recommendations on additional tools that would be helpful to mandated reporters to support sound decisions on whether to make a report (e.g., website, decision tree, etc.); and (c) to provide feedback to Rutgers University on their ongoing work to create a new Gold Standard Mandated Reporter training.

Building Shared Understanding

BY APPLYING LIVED EXPERIENCE, professional expertise, and their roles in the community, the Workgroup members were able to bring the broadest possible set of views to this work. Below is a representative sample of the seats occupied by members of the three Workgroups:

- ▶ Advocacy & Community-Based Organizations
- ▶ Court Administration
- ▶ Doctors, Pediatricians, and Clinical Providers
- ▶ Education and Child Care
- ▶ Hospital Administration
- ▶ Law Enforcement
- ▶ Mental Health Providers
- ▶ New Jersey Department of Children and Families
- ▶ New Jersey Department of Education
- ▶ New Jersey Department of Health
- ▶ New Jersey Office of the Attorney General
- ▶ New Jersey Office of the Public Defender
- ▶ Parent with Lived Experience
- ▶ Prosecutor’s Office

Liability

Fear of liability has long been one of the driving forces behind over-reporting. Across the country, mandated reporters describe erring “on the side of caution” not because they believe a child is unsafe, but because they fear repercussions if they fail to report. In reviewing the findings from focus group and survey research, and reflecting on the NJTFCAN 2024 Fall Conference proceedings, the Subcommittee noted that New Jersey is no exception. This creates a culture in which poverty is mistaken for neglect and families are subjected to invasive investigations with no findings of abuse. The Liability Workgroup studied how New Jersey’s statutes, policies, and practices could be refined to reduce this fear-based, over-reporting, while maintaining strong protections for children.

Accordingly, the Subcommittee established the Liability Workgroup to (a) conduct a thorough and conclusive analysis of state and national data that can support actionable recommendations, (b) create recommendations on specific statute revisions related to mandated reporter liability that can safely reduce over-reporting; and (c) create recommendations on tools, practices, and/or policies that address fear-based reporting by safely minimizing the liability of mandated reporters.

Pilots & Innovation

Finally, while training and liability reforms provide immediate and necessary tools, lasting change requires innovation. Across the country, communities are testing new models—such as alternative response pathways, community-based navigator programs, and cross-system collaborations—that reduce unnecessary child protection involvement and address racial inequities in reporting. New Jersey has the opportunity to learn from these models and adapt them to its unique context. The Pilots & Innovation Workgroup worked to support the recommendations from the other Workgroups, and ensured the Subcommittee’s recommendations are grounded not only in what is, but in what could be—bringing forward promising practices that can be tested, evaluated, and scaled in New Jersey.

Starter Questions: Defining Direction

At the outset, each Workgroup aligned on a clear objective: to examine and improve New Jersey’s system of mandated reporting. Members recognized the important parameter for these workgroups, the scope of which was tightly focused on the “front door” of child protective services (e.g, the decision to make a report), and not to the services and processes that occur once a report is accepted for investigation. Within this frame, the Workgroups focused on how mandated reporting could be improved to more accurately identify true maltreatment while preventing the misidentification of poverty as neglect.



Recommendation Teams

The Workgroups began with a series of framing questions to guide their discussions. Based on early discussions shaped by these starter questions, the Training and Liability Workgroups were further subdivided into smaller Recommendation Teams to carry the work forward in a focused and efficient manner. Each team was assigned a starter question and charged with reviewing relevant data and research, drafting preliminary recommendations, and presenting their findings back to the larger Workgroup. From there, recommendations were refined and elevated to the full Subcommittee for deliberation and final approval.

For the Training Workgroup, this meant providing feedback on the development of the new, Gold Standard statewide training, as well as examining best practices for ensuring expedient and consistent implementation of the training, especially with the top mandated reporter professions. For the Liability Workgroup, this meant examining how statute and policy changes could reduce fear-based reporting without compromising child safety, with attention to how liability concerns drive reporters' behavior and contribute to unnecessary child welfare involvement.

The Pilots & Innovation Workgroup was tasked with bringing in lessons from other states that could inform the Liability & Training Workgroups' investigations, as well as researching best practices both within New Jersey and across the country to ensure that the recommendations were grounded in the practical realities of systems change.



Recommendations to Reform New Jersey's Mandated Reporting System

Building on the charge of the Subcommittee and the focused efforts of the Workgroups, a total of nine recommendations were developed to guide New Jersey's path forward. These include five recommendations from the Training Workgroup, and four recommendations from the Liability Workgroup. Two additional implementation considerations were put forth by the Workgroups to help support moving the recommendations into sustainable change: to establish an Implementation Team, and to invest in a Narrative Shift project to ensure lasting change.

Collectively, these recommendations reflect months of deliberation, informed by national best practices, state data, and the lived expertise of families and reporters. But the strength of the recommendation lies in the way in which they are mutually reinforcing.

Robust training with no enforcement mechanism means that the current patchwork training system is likely to persist. Enforcement without providing liability protections is not fair for reporters or for families. Liability protections without a standardized decision-making tool has the potential to put families at risk. Only together do these reforms form a balanced, interlocking system that protects children while giving reporters the tools they need to move away from confusing poverty with neglect.

To ensure clarity and consistency, each recommendation is presented in a common format, starting by outlining the data and rationale that support the proposed change, followed by key implementation considerations to guide practical application, reflecting the Subcommittee's commitment to grounding recommendations in evidence while also anticipating the real-world needs of policymakers, practitioners, and communities.



“The Workgroup struggled most with the recommendation to remove Universal Mandated Reporting in New Jersey, which requires EVERY person to report if there is “reasonable cause to believe” child neglect and/or abuse has occurred, or face criminal prosecution. The possibility of criminal prosecution incentivizes over-reporting by licensed professionals and the institutions they work for, subjecting children and families to unnecessary government intrusion and squandering limited resources on ultimately many unsubstantiated reports. Facing the reality that no other state with Universal Mandated Reporting has opted to remove it, we recognize that in the social laboratory of our democracy, inevitably someone must go first. If not us then who? If not now, then when? The Workgroup decided that we were in a position to propose an alternative to better serve New Jersey families and communities.”

KEITH L. HOVEY, JD, BSN

In-house counsel for an academic healthcare system

Unified Recommendations

The unified recommendations below were developed and endorsed by the Training Workgroup (recommendations 1-5) and the Liability Workgroup (recommendations 6-9,) and unanimously approved by the full Subcommittee on Poverty, Neglect, and Community Outcomes.

RECOMMENDATION 1:

Establish New Jersey Gold Standard Mandated Reporter Training in Statute

Establish the New Jersey Gold Standard Mandated Reporter Training (**Recognizing and Reporting Child Maltreatment in New Jersey**) in statute as the one training on recognizing and reporting maltreatment that meets basic training requirements for all mandated reporters.

RECOMMENDATION 2:

Require Mandated Reporter Training for all Top Mandated Reporting Groups

Amend New Jersey's current mandated reporting statute [NJSA 9:6-8.10](#) to require all top mandated reporting groups (Education, Healthcare, Law Enforcement, and Child Care) to complete the New Jersey Gold Standard Mandated Reporter Training (Recognizing and Reporting Child Maltreatment in New Jersey) at least once every three years.

RECOMMENDATION 3:

Mandated Reporting Training Implementation Supports

Recommend the New Jersey Department of Children and Families develop and implement the following MR Training implementation supports:

- ▶ **Synchronous Training Format Advisory Group** to assess the cost of providing synchronous training to all mandated reporters at a frequency determined by the training requirements for each profession.
- ▶ **Mandated Reporter Training Website** to contain at a minimum: (1) Information on how to access the Mandated Reporter Training; (2) New Jersey Decision Tool link and instruction for use; and (3) information on access to community services and supports.
- ▶ **Certification and Support for Mandated Reporter Trainers** Designate an entity to receive applications from, select, train, certify and support qualified mandated reporter trainers.

RECOMMENDATION 4:

Supplemental Training for all Top Mandated Reporter Groups

Require top Mandated Reporter Oversight Bodies (Education, Healthcare, Law Enforcement, and Child Care) to co-develop, with the NJ Department of Children and Families, and implement a supplemental MR training specific to their members. The MR-specific supplemental modules plus the basic New Jersey Gold Standard Mandated Reporter Training (Recognizing and Reporting Child Maltreatment in New Jersey) fulfill the MR training requirement and both must be taken at least once every three years.

RECOMMENDATION 5:

Mandated Reporter Training Enforcement

Establish in legislation the requirement for top Mandated Reporter Oversight Bodies (Education, Healthcare, Law Enforcement, and Child Care) to (1) Establish internal policy, procedures and timeline (minimum once per 3 years) for taking the basic training; (2) Establish an internal system for monitoring accountability; and (3) Provide an annual report to the New Jersey Task Force on Child Abuse and Neglect on compliance rates, resulting community outcomes, and barriers.

RECOMMENDATION 6:

Universal Mandated Reporting

Legislatively revise NJSA 9:6-8.10 from “Any person having reasonable cause...” which established Universal Mandated Reporting, to Categorical Reporting that names specific professions as Mandated Reporters, with a focus on the top reporting groups—law enforcement, education, and healthcare—making up nearly 70% of all reports of child neglect in New Jersey.

RECOMMENDATION 7:

Anonymous Reporting

Safely eliminate Anonymous Reporting through a multi-level approach that includes amending the operating procedures of the child abuse hotline as follows:

- ▶ Provide all callers to the child abuse hotline with a detailed description of: a) how confidentiality of their identity will be maintained, and b) how detailed information from them, including their identity, is necessary in order to ensure adequate investigation of the allegation, thereby helping to achieve the caller's intent of keeping a child safe.
- ▶ **IF THE CALLER WANTS TO REMAIN ANONYMOUS:** Escalate the call to the manager of the Division of Child Protection & Permanency (DCP&P) hotline to reiterate and emphasize the information in #1.
- ▶ **IF THE CALLER WANTS TO REMAIN ANONYMOUS:** State that a minimum amount of information is required to make a report, which includes:
 - ▶ an operating phone number for the caller (tested during the call)
 - ▶ for the individual involved (adult):
 - ▶ the first name, or other identifying information, and
 - ▶ the address or location
 - ▶ for the alleged subject (child)
 - ▶ the first name, or other identifying information, and
 - ▶ the address or location

If any of this information is missing, the caller will be informed that without these critical details, DCP&P may be unable to confirm the child's identity, location, or circumstances—possibly making it impossible to proceed in taking action on the caller's intent to help keep the child safe.

- ▶ **IF THE CALLER WANTS TO REMAIN ANONYMOUS:** Callers who have the information required in #3, and who still want to remain anonymous, will have the opportunity to provide their report. They will be informed that in addition to the standard investigation of the allegation, their report will be further studied to understand why anonymous reports are made. If in that process it is determined that they have reported falsely, they could be subject to criminal penalties (per a separate recommendation by the Liability Workgroup).

RECOMMENDATION 8:

False Reporting

Legislatively increase the penalty for False Reporting from civil to criminal—through the revision of N.J.S.A 9:6-8.15, or by amending an existing related statute.

RECOMMENDATION 9:

Decision-Making Tool to Remove Liability

With the ultimate goal of safely removing liability from mandated reporters when there is a demonstrated use that a reporter has used a decision-making process that indicates a child's safety is not at risk and a report is not required, pursue a multi-pronged approach as follows:

1. **Monitor use of the Decision-Making Tool**—Once a decision-making tool is released and included in the new training on recognizing and reporting neglect, study its uptake, operational challenges, behavior changes, and impact on child abuse hotline calls.
2. **Conduct a study with at least one of the top reporting groups**—law enforcement, education, healthcare—in which the liability for failure to report (as identified under N.J.S.A. 9:6-8.10) would be temporarily suspended for study participants, when there is a demonstrated use of a child abuse and neglect decision-making process that indicates a child's safety is not at risk and a report is not required. The purpose of the study is to: 1) examine if the removal of liability reduces calls to the child abuse hotline, and 2) assess whether the use of the Decision-Making Tool negatively impacts child safety.
3. Depending on the results from #1 and #2, **recommend legislation that provides immunity from liability—the same level of immunity as when a report is made—for mandated reporters when a Decision-Making Tool is used** to make an informed decision regarding the need for a child abuse and/or neglect report to be made. For licensed professionals, full immunity

The Vote on the Recommendations

Voting Process for Recommendations

The development of recommendations followed a structured and transparent voting process. Votes were taken on the full package of recommendations rather than on individual items, ensuring that the proposals advanced as a cohesive set. At each stage of the process, participants were able to record comments to accompany their “yes” or “no” vote; these comments were compiled and documented to preserve the full range of perspectives.

Votes originated within recommendation teams, which were responsible for drafting proposals within each Workgroup, taking into consideration the data, rationale, and implementation considerations for each recommendation. From there, recommendations advanced to the Workgroup as a whole, then to the Subcommittee, and finally to the Task Force for a final decision. At every level, a simple majority (51% or higher) was required to move the recommendations forward. This multi-tiered process allowed for careful vetting, broad input, and accountability at each step.



Summary of Votes

RECOMMENDATION TEAMS

- Across 7 distinct Recommendation Teams, 9 individual recommendations were advanced to the Workgroups via majority vote

TRAINING WORKGROUP

- 92% of Workgroup vote to approve the recommendations to advance to the Subcommittee on Poverty, Neglect, and Community Outcomes
- 12 Workgroup members participated in the vote, with 11 voting yes and 1 abstaining

LIABILITY WORKGROUP

- 84% of Workgroup vote to approve the recommendations to advance to the Subcommittee
- 19 Workgroup members participated in the vote, with 16 voting yes, 2 voting no, and 1 abstaining

SUBCOMMITTEE ON POVERTY, NEGLECT, AND COMMUNITY OUTCOMES

- Following the Workgroups' deliberations, the full Subcommittee convened on August 25, 2025 to review and vote on the proposed recommendations. All nine recommendations were unanimously approved.

NJ TASK FORCE CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT

- Following the Subcommittee's vote, the New Jersey Task Force on Child Abuse and Neglect (NJTFCAN) voted unanimously on September 26, 2025 to approve all nine recommendations.
- 20 Task Force members participated in the vote, with 18 voting yes, and 2 abstaining.

Alternative Perspectives

The Subcommittee recognized that while the full package of recommendations was advanced to the Task Force for consideration, not all members were in complete agreement on every element. Throughout the process, participants expressed a range of views, reflecting the complexity of mandated reporting reform and its impact on families, professionals, and systems. Documenting these differing perspectives is an important part of maintaining transparency and honoring the input of all members. Full statements outlining alternative viewpoints are included in the Appendix.

What's Next

While not tasked with creating or voting on recommendations, the Pilots & Innovation Workgroup supported the work of the Training and Liability Workgroups by thinking long-term about the feasibility of their recommendations. Because the gap between recommendation and practice is wide and the challenges of implementation are well known, the Pilots & Innovations Workgroup identified two key areas for the consideration of the Workgroups. These were not voted on by the Subcommittee or Task Force;

rather, they were intended to be a guide for those seeking to implement the Subcommittee's nine recommendations.

These considerations—establishing dedicated Implementation Teams and launching a broader Narrative Shift campaign—provide a structure and public engagement strategy to move from planning to action and to build long-term support for transforming New Jersey's approach to mandated reporting.

Creation of Implementation Team(s)

To ensure the recommendations move beyond theory into practice, the Pilots & Innovation Workgroup proposes the creation of one or more Implementation Teams. These teams will be charged with reviewing the implementation considerations attached to each recommendation and advising on concrete steps for operationalizing them. Their role will be to translate the Subcommittee's work into clear, actionable strategies that can be carried forward by the state and its partners. Members from the Training, Liability, and Pilots & Innovation Workgroups could be given priority consideration to join, ensuring continuity of expertise and perspective from those who shaped the initial recommendations.

Engage in a Narrative Shift Campaign

The Workgroup also emphasizes the importance of a deliberate narrative shift to reinforce and extend this work. Early efforts have already begun with connections made to professional associations that influence practice across New Jersey. Building on this foundational narrative shift strategy would help socialize the final recommendations, ensuring they are understood and embraced by the professionals and communities most affected. Over time, the narrative shift could broaden its reach, amplifying the central goal of moving from a culture of mandated reporting to one of community supporting—cementing this transformation not only in policy, but also in public understanding and professional practice.

The recommendations outlined in this report are only as effective as their implementation. They were informed by the robust work of the Recommendation Teams and the Workgroups to develop the data and rationale for their recommendations, as well as a set of implementation considerations. What follows is an overview of the overarching themes that emerged across all recommendations. Several cross-cutting considerations will shape the success of this work:

- ▶ **PHASED ROLLOUT:** Change should be introduced in stages, prioritizing the largest mandated reporter groups first. This allows costs, training demands, and administrative requirements to be managed effectively while incorporating lessons learned before scaling reforms statewide.
- ▶ **TRAINING QUALITY AND ACCESS:** Effective training requires curricula designed for adult learners, informed by lived expertise, and inclusive of practical tools such as the Mandated Reporting Decision Tool. Trainers must be qualified, regularly supported, and re-certified.
- ▶ **SECTOR ALIGNMENT:** Education, healthcare, childcare, and law enforcement each operate under different oversight and licensing structures. Tailoring approaches for these sectors, while promoting consistency across the system, is essential for effective adoption.

▶ **ACCOUNTABILITY AND OVERSIGHT:**

Responsibility for enforcing penalties and professional conduct should rest with licensing and regulatory boards, which are best equipped to evaluate cases in context and respond proportionately.

▶ **ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATION:**

Individuals with lived experience must be meaningfully engaged in shaping policy and practice, and a robust communication strategy is needed to build understanding, trust, and buy-in among professional groups and the broader public.

Implementing these recommendations will not be simple. It will require sustained collaboration across multiple professional sectors, careful coordination with regulatory and oversight bodies, and the active participation of people with lived experience, for a period of several years. Most critically, it will demand legislative change to align penalties, responsibilities, and protections with the new framework. This is difficult work—bringing together diverse stakeholders, balancing professional accountability with equity, and reshaping statutory requirements—but it is essential to build a child welfare system that moves beyond fear and compliance, and toward true support for families.



“This work improves outcomes for families by prioritizing connection to community-based support over default reporting. As a peer-to-peer support person, I lead with empathy and work with families the way I wish professionals had worked with me.”

STARLETTE MEDINA

Family Support Partner and Community Parent

Moving Forward

The recommendations in this report are an important step forward, and they also represent one part of a much larger conversation about how New Jersey supports children and families. Mandated reporting reform must be understood as a starting point, not an endpoint. Building a stronger system that is more accurate and precise will require investment, clear pathways for families to access help outside of the child protection system, and continued attention to dignity and respect. These priorities go beyond the scope of the Workgroups, but they remain integral to realizing the long-term vision that motivated this work. Workgroup members expressed a strong commitment to continuing to champion these broader reforms, and to ensuring the momentum built through this process extends to future efforts to reshape how New Jersey supports families. Please see the Additional Statement from Liability Workgroup Members in the Appendix for the Workgroup's full statement.

Conclusion

The work of the Subcommittee on Poverty, Neglect, and Community Outcomes reflects both the urgency of the moment, and the depth of challenges that have been entrenched in child welfare policy since the 1960s. The recommendations developed by the Workgroups represent an important step forward, while also fitting into a larger effort in New Jersey and nationally to reimagine mandated reporting and build systems that support, rather than penalize, families experiencing financial hardship.

This Subcommittee's work in 2024-25 brought together a broad group of people, including policy experts, service providers, parents with lived experience, and government representatives, who share a commitment to meaningful change. From the outset, the goal was not only to generate recommendations but also to create an environment where every voice could be heard and where participants left feeling inspired by what was possible. Many Workgroup members have affirmed that this goal was achieved, noting that the process was constructive, inclusive, and motivating, and that they are eager to continue advancing the reforms set out here.

Momentum for reform is building across the country, and New Jersey is stepping into a leadership role by advancing recommendations that shift the system from fear-based over-reporting to trust-based community support. These recommendations offer a roadmap toward a more accurate and effective approach—one that ensures child safety while also affirming the dignity and strength of families. The work ahead will not be easy, but the commitment expressed through this process clearly demonstrates that New Jersey is ready to lead.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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* Chairs or Tri-Chairs

GLOSSARY & DEFINITIONS

A / AB (ASSEMBLY BILL)

A bill introduced in the State Assembly.

CONCRETE SUPPORTS

Tangible resources that help families meet their basic needs during times of stress or crisis. These supports may include housing assistance, food, clothing, child care, transportation, or direct cash assistance.

CHILD ABUSE HOTLINE (STATE CENTRAL REGISTRY)

New Jersey's CPS hotline, which receives reports of child abuse and neglect. Reports requiring a field response are forwarded to the DCP&P Local Office who investigates.

CHILD ABUSE RECORD INFORMATION (CARI)

A government unit which performs the background checks for child abuse/neglect for the New Jersey Department of Children and Families.

CHILD PROTECTION/PROTECTIVE SERVICES (CPS)

A generic term for government agencies that investigate allegations of child abuse or neglect and provide services to ensure a child's safety. In New Jersey, this is called the Department of Child Protection and Permanency.

DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES (DCF)

A state government agency responsible for ensuring the safety and well-being of at-risk children, youth, and families.

DEPARTMENT OF CHILD PROTECTION AND PERMANENCY (DCP&P)

New Jersey's child protection and child welfare agency within the New Jersey Department of Children and Families.

ESTABLISHED

A categorical description of allegations of abuse and/or neglect findings during the investigation. Issued when the preponderance of evidence shows a child has been abused or neglected, but the act(s) do not warrant a "substantiated" finding upon consideration of aggravating and mitigating factors. This finding is not disclosed in a CARI check, but the record remains in DCF files.

NOT ESTABLISHED

A categorical description of allegations of abuse and/or neglect findings during the investigation. Issued when there is not a preponderance of evidence that a child was abused or neglected, but evidence shows the child was harmed or at risk of harm. This finding is not disclosed in a CARI check, but the record remains in DCF files.

S / SB (SENATE BILL)

A bill introduced in the State Senate.

SUBSTANTIATED

A categorical description of allegations of abuse and/or neglect findings during the investigation. Issued when the preponderance of evidence shows a child has been abused or neglected, and aggravating and mitigating factors weigh in favor of substantiation. This finding is disclosed in a Child Abuse Record Information (CARI) check.

UNFOUNDED

A categorical description of allegations of abuse and/or neglect findings during the investigation. Issued when there is not a preponderance of evidence that a child was abused or neglected, and there is no evidence of harm or risk of harm. This finding is not disclosed in a CARI check and may be eligible for expungement under certain conditions.

APPENDIX

- A. Alternative Perspectives Statement
- B. Liability Workgroup Additional Considerations Statement

Alternative Perspectives Statement

From:

Peter J. Boser, Esq. (ret.)
Assistant Monmouth County Prosecutor (ret.)

I oppose the removal of universal mandated reporting.

This change would likely lead to more cases of child abuse and neglect going unreported, putting children at risk.

I support many of the other recommendations, such as better training for reporters and responders, and the development of decision-making tools. However, removing the universal reporting requirement is misguided and does not actually address the problems it claims to solve.

If the hotline or investigative responses (by DCPD or law enforcement) are inappropriate, those systems should be improved. We shouldn't place the blame on good-faith reporters who are trying to protect children.

I. No other state has done this.

There is no precedent for a shift from universal to categorical mandated reporting. Comparing New Jersey to states that never had universal reporting is not helpful—they are fundamentally different systems.

II. This change does not address the real issue.

Concerns from poor and minority communities about surveillance are real, but this proposal doesn't solve that. Better training, more respectful responses, and public education would go much further. So would providing more resources to families struggling with poverty, rather than labeling their circumstances as neglect.

It is also argued that most people don't know about the universal reporting law. But if even one child is saved because someone did know, the law is worth having. And if most reports come from professionals (who would still be mandated reporters), then the problem of over-surveillance isn't caused by universal reporting in the first place.

III. The proposal lacks critical details.

We can't evaluate this change without knowing who would be included in the new categories of mandated reporters. Many of the roles mentioned aren't regulated by licensing authorities, making enforcement unrealistic. Suggesting this shift without considering how it would actually work is irresponsible.

IV. Penalties are meant to deter.

Some say criminal penalties don't matter because they're rarely used. But their purpose is to deter people from ignoring abuse. If someone is prosecuted, it means the system failed a child. The penalties exist to prevent that from happening in the first place.

V. Abuse is being overlooked in this process.

This proposal has focused almost entirely on the reporting and response to neglect, not abuse. Changing the law will also reduce responsibility for reporting abuse—an issue that hasn't been considered at all.

VI. The current law doesn't even mention neglect.

NJSA 9:6-8.10 refers only to abuse. It's unclear whether the inclusion of neglect in current practice was intentional or just something that evolved over time. Any proposed change should be informed by a thorough understanding of the law's original intent.¹

In summary:

There is no evidence that removing universal mandated reporting will help. It appears to be a symbolic change that won't meaningfully improve outcomes—and may make things worse by allowing more abuse and neglect to go unreported. Children will suffer as a result.

¹ Some workgroup members have argued that other statutes define "abuse" to include neglect. However, because this is a matter of criminal law, the specific wording must be examined carefully.

NJSA 9:6-1 provides separate definitions for "Abuse of a child" and "Neglect of a child." Meanwhile, NJSA 9:6-8.10, which governs mandatory reporting, refers only to "child abuse, including sexual abuse, or acts of child abuse" — without any mention of neglect.

Other related statutes, such as NJSA 9:6-8.9 and 9:6-8.21(c), use different terms. While they include descriptions of conduct that may amount to neglect, they do not clearly equate neglect with "abuse."

NJSA 9:6-8.21(c) defines "abused or neglected child" using language similar to NJSA 9:6-8.9, but neither leads to the conclusion that "child abuse" as used in NJSA 9:6-8.10, includes neglect.

The statute most similar in language to the mandatory reporting law, NJSA 9:6-1, clearly separates "abuse" and "neglect." Therefore, we cannot assume that "child abuse," as used in NJSA 9:6-8.10, automatically includes neglect.

These distinctions, while subtle, are legally significant. They would be highly relevant in any criminal prosecution for failure to report neglect. They should also be carefully considered if lawmakers intend to revise or replace the mandatory reporting statute.

Liability Workgroup Additional Considerations Statement

As members of the Liability Workgroup of the Subcommittee on Race, Poverty, and Neglect (the Subcommittee), we want to first express our appreciation for the opportunity to examine and provide recommendations on the reform of New Jersey’s mandated reporting legislation, policies, and practices. Our charge is focused specifically on the liability and penalties associated with reporting child abuse and neglect. In this context, our goal is to advance recommendations that can reduce the exceptionally high number of reports that are ultimately not substantiated or established, while ensuring child safety remains paramount.

We have diligently constructed a set of recommendations with that charge and goal in mind, and on August 15, 2025, the Workgroup voted to advance the set of recommendations to the Subcommittee for consideration and vote. While we understand the need to limit the scope of the Liability Workgroup to mandated reporting reform only—what happens before the “front door” of the Department of Child Protection & Permanency (DCP&P)—we feel compelled and obligated to express our perspective on the broader issues related to the safety and well-being of New Jersey’s children and families.

Specifically, we want to emphasize that the harm experienced by children and families extends beyond mandated reporting policies and practices. From the hotline assessment process to investigation protocols, and throughout the systems of the Department of Child Protection & Permanency, there are practices that fail to fully respect or reflect the strengths and rights of all New Jersey families. We urge that equal attention and commitment be directed toward reforming these practices as well. And that the language and procedures across all interactions with families be strength-based and reflect dignity and care.

Additionally, we want to stress that at the root of many of the issues this work seeks to address is the lack of accessible, culturally aligned resources and supports in the very communities most at risk of DCP&P involvement. While the Liability Workgroup has approached mandated reporting reform with thoughtfulness and care, these reforms alone cannot resolve the problem.

Until mandated reporters have clear, practical pathways to connect families directly to community-based resources, the challenges we are working to address will persist. Too many times individuals are reporting families—and sometimes families are even calling the hotline themselves—not because a child is being abused or neglected, but because they believe it is a way of securing the tangible goods and resources the family desperately needs.

Appendix

Building a robust network of community supports across the state is the most direct and respectful way to reduce unnecessary calls to the child abuse hotline—many of which stem from the conflation of poverty with neglect or from efforts to connect families with resources that should be readily available outside of the child protection system. We understand this responsibility goes beyond the New Jersey Department of Children and Families (DCF); family well-being must be shared across schools, hospitals, housing, and local systems, with progress measured through data and outcomes. Above all, reforms must be guided and shaped by the voices of those with lived experience.

We appreciate the platform to lift up these issues to the Subcommittee—a broad group of leaders who are committed to change.

Thank you for the opportunity to do this important work in partnership.

Signed,

From the Liability Workgroup:

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