

TRENDS Child DATA SNAPSHOT

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FOSTER CARE DATA SNAPSHOT

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Foster care is intended to provide a temporary safe haven for children who have been abused or neglected, or whose parents for some other reason cannot provide adequate care. It is not intended to be a permanent living arrangement. The goal of U.S. child welfare is to find safe, permanent homes for children, either by reunification with their families of origin or through adoption or placement with a permanent legal guardian.

Unfortunately, many children in foster care never end up in a safe, permanent family. Some spend years in multiple foster families and group homes, an experience that heightens their risk of emotional, behavioral, and academic challenges. For this reason, policy makers, administrators, and advocates have focused their efforts on safely reducing the foster care rolls. Their efforts to date have yielded mixed results. While the numbers of children in foster care and entering care each year have decreased nationwide, there is wide variation among the states, and the decline has not been continuous over the past decade.

To coincide with National Foster Care Month in May, this Data Snapshot explores state and national trends in the number of children in foster care, as well as the number entering foster care, each year from 2000 to 2009, using data from the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS). On September 30, 2009, 424,000 children were in foster care in the United States, a decrease nationally of 23 percent from the 544,000 children in foster care on September 30, 2000.

ABOUT THE DATA SOURCE

This Data Snapshot uses data from the foster care file of the Adoption and Foster Care Reporting System (AFCARS). The AFCARS foster care file includes child-specific information provided by states from their child welfare administrative data systems on all children in foster care for whom the state child welfare agency has responsibility for placement, care, or supervision, regardless of eligibility for Title IV-E funds. Data are included for a federal fiscal year.

Children are categorized as being in foster care if they entered foster care prior to the end of the current fiscal year and were not discharged from their latest foster care spell by the end of the current fiscal year.

Children are categorized as entering foster care if the most recent date of their removal from parental custody was after the beginning of the current fiscal year and before the end of the fiscal year.

FIGURE 1

Number of children in foster care at the end of the fiscal year, and entering in the fiscal year, by year (in thousands)

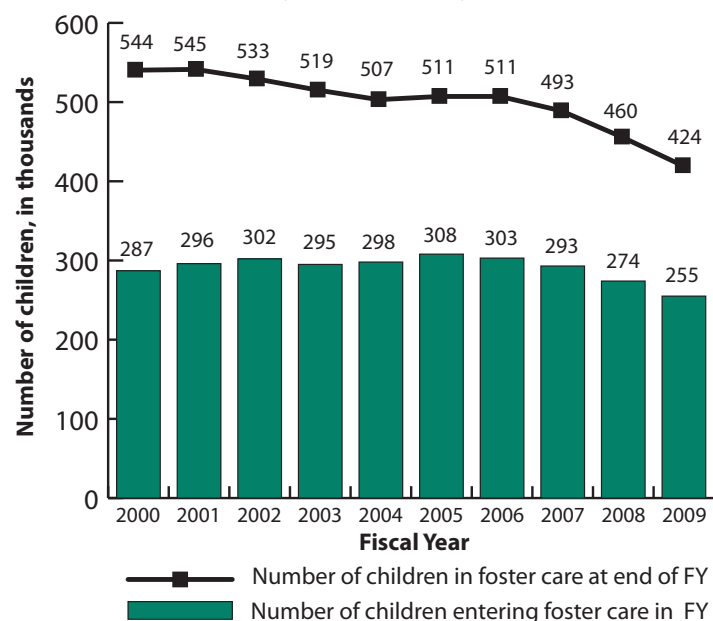
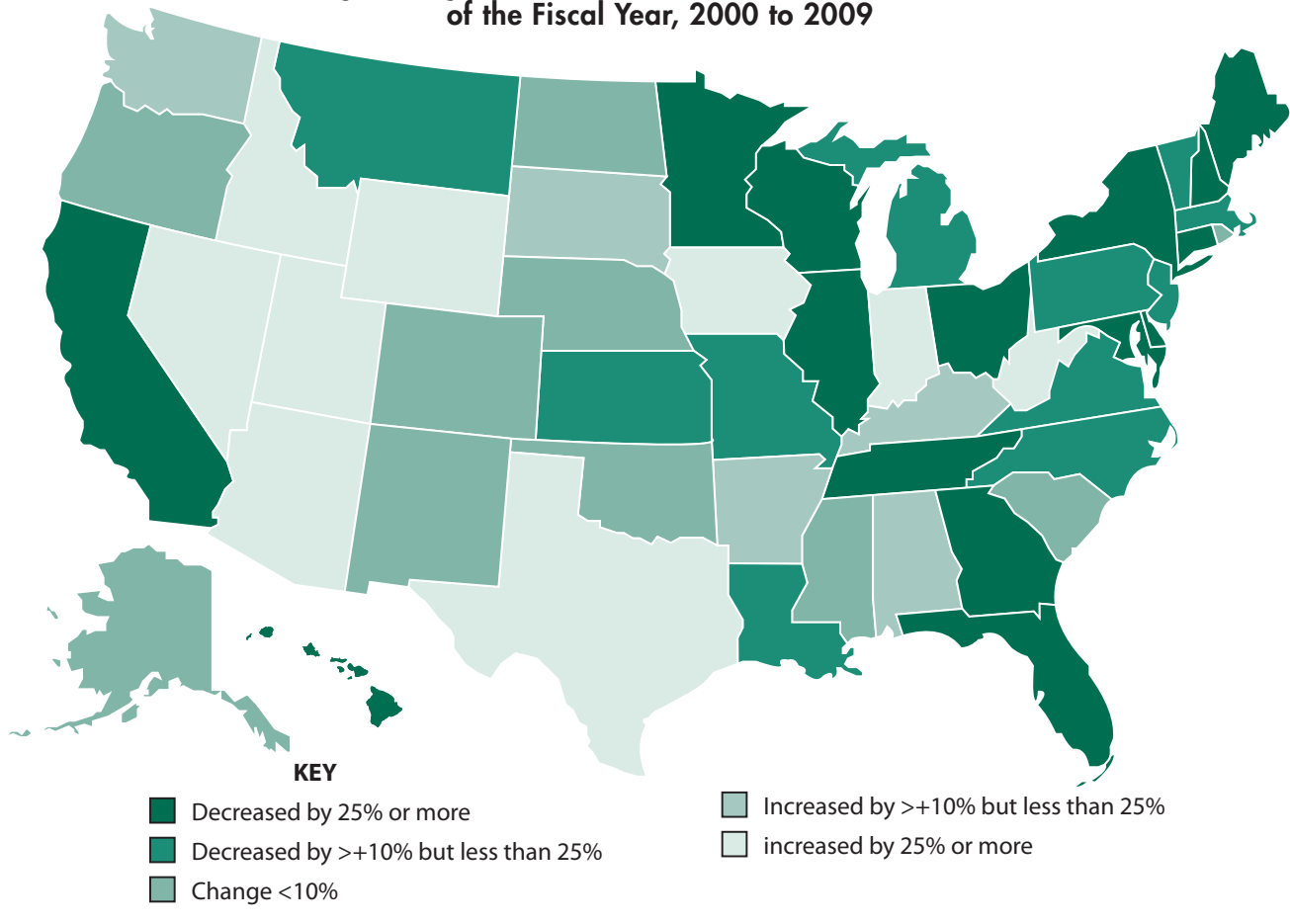


FIGURE 2

Percentage change in number of children in foster care at the end of the Fiscal Year, 2000 to 2009



The number of children in foster care at the end of each fiscal year decreased from 2001 to 2004, increased slightly to 511,000 in 2005 and 2006, and then continued to decline steadily to 424,000 at the end of FY 2009. (See Figure 1.)

Similarly, the number of children entering foster care each year has decreased overall, from 287,000 children in 2000, to 255,000 children in 2009. However, the number of children entering care has fluctuated over the course of the decade, reaching a high of 308,000 children entering care in 2005 before starting to decline.

For more information on the importance of foster care, visit the [Child Trends DataBank](#).

NATIONAL AND STATE-LEVEL CHANGES IN THE NUMBER OF CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE BETWEEN 2000 AND 2009.

Nationally, the number of children in foster care at the end of the fiscal year decreased by 23%

between 2000 and 2009. The map in Figure 2 illustrates the percentage change in the number of children in foster care at the end of the year between 2000 and 2009, by state. States in darker shades experienced decreases in their foster care population, while states with the lightest two shades had increases. Table 1 ranks the states by the percentage change in their foster care populations between 2000 and 2009.

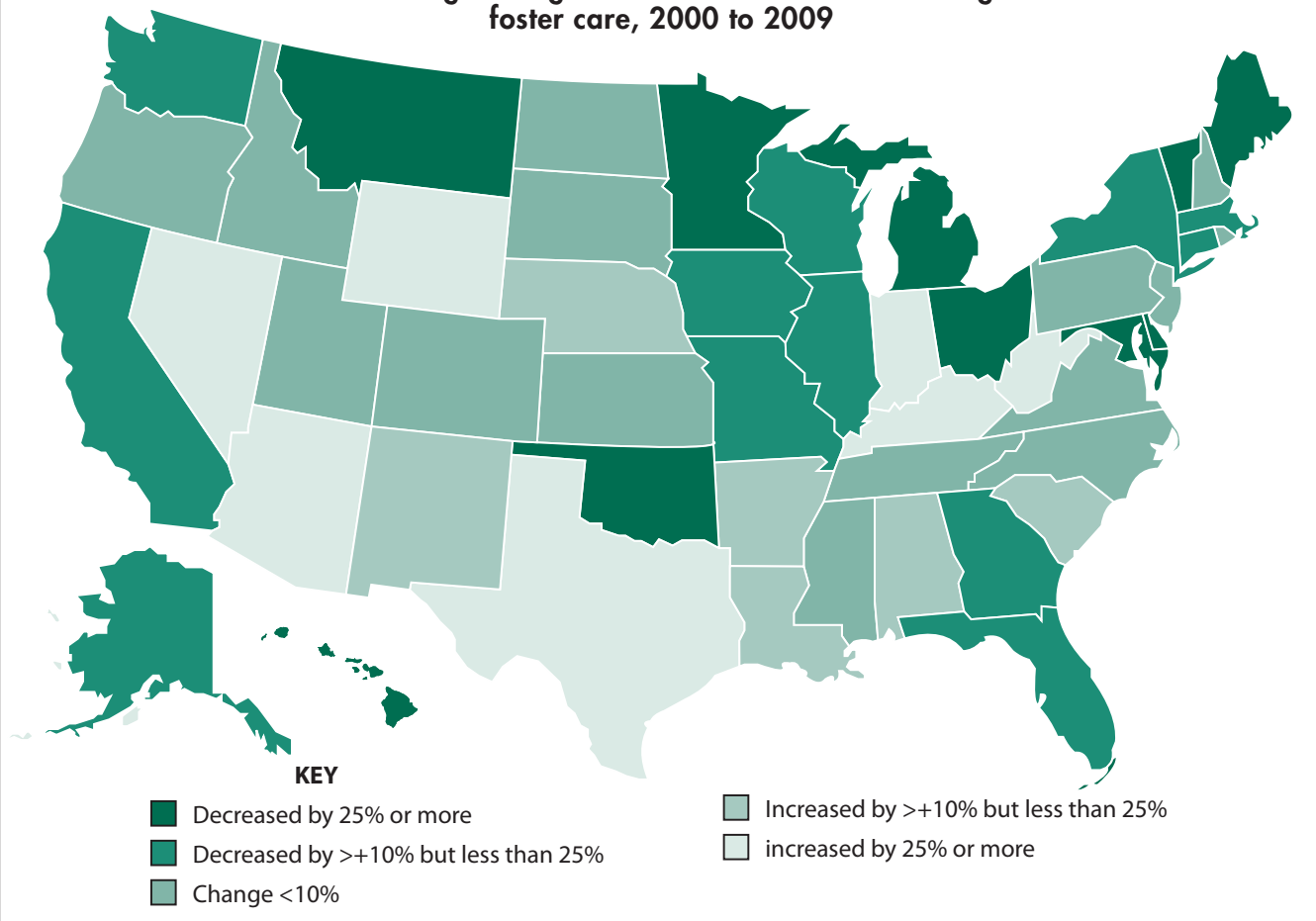
- Maine had the largest decline, with its foster care population dropping by nearly half (48.4%).
- Nevada had the largest increase, with its foster care population nearly doubling (195%).

NUMBER OF CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE BY STATE IN 2009.

Table 1 also presents the total number of children in foster care on September 30, 2009 by state.

FIGURE 3

Percentage change in number of children entering foster care, 2000 to 2009



- California had the largest number of children in foster care (60,198 children) on this date, primarily because it has the largest child population in the nation.

YEAR-TO-YEAR CHANGES IN THE NUMBER OF CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE.

While Figure 2 and Table 1 demonstrate the overall percentage change between 2000 and 2009, Table 2 highlights the percentage change in the foster care population by year in each state.

- Almost every state, like the United States as a whole, has experienced fluctuations in both positive and negative directions from year to year.
- Only California and Illinois have decreased their foster care totals each year since 2000.

NATIONAL AND STATE-LEVEL CHANGES IN THE NUMBER OF CHILDREN ENTERING FOSTER CARE BETWEEN 2000 AND 2009.

Figure 3 illustrates the percentage change in the

number of children entering foster care in each state between 2000 and 2009. While the number of children entering foster care nationally decreased by 12% between 2000 and 2009, not all states experienced similar declines. As shown in the map, states highlighted in the darkest three shades experienced decreases between 2000 and 2009 in the number of children entering foster care, and states highlighted in the lightest two shades experienced increases. (See Table 3 for state rankings.)

- Delaware had the largest decrease, with the number of children entering foster care declining by more than one half (53%).
- Nevada had the largest increase, with the number of children entering in 2009 more than triple what it was in 2000 (332%).

NUMBER OF CHILDREN ENTERING FOSTER CARE BY STATE IN 2009.

In addition to presenting the percentage change in the number of children entering foster care

from 2000 to 2009, Table 3 includes the number of children entering foster care in 2009 and the rate of children entering foster care per 1,000 children ages 0 to 17 in each state.

- Again, California had the largest number of children entering foster care in 2009.
- Wyoming had the highest rate of foster care entry, with 8.18 of every 1,000 children entering foster care in 2009.

YEAR-TO-YEAR CHANGES IN THE NUMBER OF CHILDREN ENTERING FOSTER CARE.

The overall percentage change between 2000 and 2009 in the number children entering foster care, as shown in Figure 3 and Table 3, is broken down in Table 4 to show year-to-year changes. As is the case with the number of children in care, there is year-to-year fluctuation in the direction and rate of change, and neither the nation nor any single state experienced continuous decreases or increases in these numbers over this period.

CONCLUSION

Foster care is an important safety net for some children who cannot remain safely at home because of abuse or neglect. Although one might expect that the numbers of children needing foster care might be approximately uniform (after controlling for population) across states, the data presented in this snapshot document wide variation in terms of entries and placements from state to state. The reasons for these differences are complex, but can partially be explained by the wide variation in state foster care systems with respect to their funding structures, policies and practices. For more information about specific state policies and funding, visit the Child Welfare Policy Database and the Fostering Connections website.

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TABLE 1

Percentage change in number of children in foster care at the end of Fiscal Year (2000 to 2009), and number of children in foster care at end of FY2009, by state

State	Overall percent change from 2000 to 2009	Number of children in care at end of FY2009
Maine	-48.40%	1,646
Florida	-47.70%	19,156
California	-46.60%	60,198
Maryland	-46.20%	7,052
Illinois	-42.20%	17,080
New York	-40.60%	27,992
Ohio	-40.10%	12,197
Hawaii	-39.40%	1,455
Minnesota	-36.60%	5,410
Wisconsin	-35.40%	6,785
Tennessee	-33.70%	6,723
Connecticut	-32.00%	4,761
District of Columbia	-30.90%	2,111
New Hampshire	-29.10%	930
Georgia	-28.40%	8,020
Delaware	-25.90%	814
Missouri	-24.80%	9,912
Montana	-24.80%	1,639
Vermont	-23.50%	1,062
United States¹	-23.10%	423,773
Pennsylvania	-22.00%	16,878
New Jersey	-20.30%	7,809
Massachusetts	-17.00%	9,650
Kansas	-13.40%	5,691
Virginia	-12.70%	5,927
North Carolina	-12.00%	9,547
Louisiana	-11.50%	4,786
Michigan	-11.50%	17,723
Rhode Island	-8.30%	2,112
Oregon	-5.90%	8,650
Nebraska	-5.80%	5,343
Alaska	-1.20%	2,166
Mississippi	0.90%	3,320
Oklahoma	3.60%	8,712
New Mexico	5.10%	2,009
Colorado	5.20%	7,927
North Dakota	8.40%	1,224
South Carolina	9.10%	4,938
Washington	10.90%	9,922
Kentucky	14.20%	6,872
Arkansas	20.10%	3,657
South Dakota	22.10%	1,484
Alabama	22.70%	6,894
West Virginia	25.10%	4,237
Iowa	29.50%	6,564
Wyoming	41.70%	1,155
Idaho	42.50%	1,446
Texas	46.70%	26,686
Utah	52.90%	2,759
Arizona	57.10%	10,175
Indiana	66.20%	12,437
Nevada	195.90%	4,779
Puerto Rico ¹	---	5,351

¹ Data for Puerto Rico not available for 2000, therefore percentage change from 2000 to 2009 could not be calculated. Percentage change in the national number of children in foster care from 2000 to 2009 excludes Puerto Rico.

TABLE 2

**Percentage change in number of children in foster care at the end of Fiscal Year,
by state (2000 to 2009)**

	2000 to 2001	2001 to 2002	2002 to 2003	2003 to 2004	2004 to 2005	2005 to 2006	2006 to 2007	2007 to 2008	2008 to 2009
Alabama	4.23	0.41	3.33	-2.39	16.50	3.53	1.48	-5.33	0.26
Alaska	-9.12	3.96	-1.54	-10.29	-2.19	12.68	8.63	-1.05	-0.09
Arizona	-6.56	2.03	20.99	23.10	5.34	0.47	-1.66	8.95	-2.40
Arkansas	-2.82	0.41	1.45	3.65	3.65	6.05	5.30	-2.60	3.83
California	-5.00	-6.27	-3.18	-15.03	-2.90	-2.34	-5.51	-9.09	-10.58
Colorado	-5.24	29.01	-4.94	-6.37	0.21	-0.90	-4.45	1.85	0.08
Connecticut	6.35	-19.26	12.24	0.90	3.37	5.92	-22.34	-7.11	-11.39
Delaware	-6.83	-13.39	-8.13	4.30	13.31	11.64	7.73	-18.93	-13.22
District of Columbia	9.33	-0.54	-6.90	-15.65	-3.41	-5.99	-7.22	0.91	-4.78
Florida	-11.28	-1.58	-4.02	-5.91	1.55	-0.28	-9.81	-15.84	-13.66
Georgia	17.59	-0.20	3.26	4.70	-1.77	-5.66	-7.13	-18.40	-19.67
Hawaii	7.62	6.89	4.49	2.15	-6.89	-14.21	-17.62	-16.39	-10.30
Idaho	9.75	11.85	12.44	11.71	16.17	1.76	1.08	-7.86	-16.08
Illinois	-4.61	-13.68	-11.24	-7.76	-2.51	-5.46	-2.71	-0.17	-4.28
Indiana	12.04	1.13	3.97	10.92	14.98	1.25	-0.11	8.92	0.41
Iowa	2.64	0.69	-4.33	7.44	26.19	33.06	-8.85	-18.17	-2.65
Kansas	-2.44	-3.42	-6.61	4.83	-3.71	9.56	3.72	-4.90	-9.75
Kentucky	2.46	10.53	1.19	1.49	3.17	5.35	-0.67	-4.94	-4.32
Louisiana	-7.07	-3.88	-5.96	-3.17	9.92	7.86	2.30	-5.03	-5.51
Maine	1.10	-4.40	-10.51	-6.38	-10.64	-10.09	-5.11	-5.38	-11.70
Maryland	-4.19	-4.28	-4.20	-3.56	-2.20	5.87	-13.52	-22.11	-8.99
Massachusetts	-0.44	8.14	0.78	-0.36	-2.91	-5.72	-8.71	-0.67	-7.45
Michigan	4.30	1.70	0.59	-0.95	-3.19	-1.74	3.42	-3.16	-12.14
Minnesota	-4.26	-1.41	-15.92	-3.40	6.70	2.55	-5.59	-10.78	-10.25
Mississippi	4.59	-21.99	1.30	9.85	9.37	-2.02	3.90	-1.08	0.85
Missouri	1.62	-2.73	-8.67	-1.03	-2.93	-10.95	-3.29	2.86	-2.13
Montana	-7.89	-4.78	-2.41	8.79	9.46	-11.70	-11.47	-7.89	2.44
Nebraska	10.22	-8.47	-10.06	22.22	-0.97	-0.71	-5.04	-4.83	-4.44
Nevada	83.22	11.22	7.11	14.18	14.86	9.17	0.40	-0.87	-4.86
New Hampshire	-1.75	0.23	-5.73	1.56	-4.69	-2.72	-5.41	-5.07	-9.62
New Jersey	8.90	7.28	12.03	-4.13	-8.77	-5.50	-14.94	-5.56	-8.24
New Mexico	-8.11	7.29	12.57	1.65	7.37	1.77	2.80	-8.34	-9.55
New York	-7.97	-6.02	-9.04	-9.77	-8.93	-1.59	0.33	-1.93	-5.09
North Carolina	-6.61	-5.95	0.07	5.70	6.16	3.90	-2.59	-9.11	-2.99
North Dakota	3.37	2.57	3.43	6.14	4.26	-2.85	-5.11	-1.82	-1.29
Ohio	5.99	-2.53	-8.15	-6.83	-3.10	-4.67	2.31	-19.47	-10.99
Oklahoma	3.19	1.59	4.99	22.41	0.60	3.71	-0.28	-10.08	-17.77
Oregon	-2.47	1.51	0.18	10.21	9.67	-3.26	-10.31	-6.00	-3.76
Pennsylvania	-1.44	0.43	-2.64	5.27	-1.15	-2.56	-1.31	-7.86	-12.18
Rhode Island	4.87	-1.28	-1.09	2.42	3.94	13.27	-4.22	-11.57	-12.26
South Carolina	5.50	0.92	-0.35	-3.46	2.63	3.43	4.61	-2.88	-1.22
South Dakota	12.51	2.12	10.10	2.93	7.71	-3.29	-4.98	-5.36	0.13
Tennessee	-4.58	-3.31	1.37	1.09	-5.97	-4.42	-10.06	-6.86	-6.87
Texas	8.52	8.18	2.47	12.11	17.75	6.80	-2.30	-6.60	-5.19
Utah	8.42	3.47	0.40	3.69	8.40	6.21	12.86	-0.91	1.66
Vermont	-0.50	10.42	-7.67	1.63	0.28	-3.97	-5.08	-8.33	-11.50
Virginia	1.13	3.54	-0.89	-2.51	2.23	11.69	-0.99	-13.16	-12.10
Washington	1.74	6.24	-4.72	1.68	7.47	3.86	6.22	1.26	-11.78
West Virginia	-2.66	-2.37	26.37	-1.94	7.64	-1.61	4.35	0.05	-3.97
Wisconsin	-9.59	-7.93	-10.52	-0.15	3.80	-5.77	-2.55	-0.58	-8.35
Wyoming	18.40	-3.73	13.56	12.23	5.07	4.58	-5.38	-6.26	0.09
United States¹	-1.50	-2.16	-2.41	-2.37	0.96	-0.06	-3.59	-6.68	-7.76

¹ National estimate excludes Puerto Rico.

TABLE 3

Percentage change in number of children entering foster care in FY2009, by state and number and rate of children entering foster care in 2009, by state

State	Overall percent change from 2000 to 2009	Number of children entering foster care in 2009¹	Rate of children entering foster care in 2009, per 1,000 children²
Delaware	-53.16%	445	2.14
Minnesota	-44.47%	5,999	4.74
Ohio	-43.23%	8,741	3.22
Montana	-38.54%	976	4.43
Hawaii	-30.95%	1,332	4.58
Maryland	-29.43%	2,772	2.05
Maine	-28.42%	753	2.78
Oklahoma	-27.81%	4,734	5.15
Michigan	-26.56%	7,863	3.34
Vermont	-25.17%	550	4.35
Wisconsin	-24.01%	4,560	3.48
California	-23.77%	34,826	3.68
Florida	-23.73%	14,313	3.53
New York	-22.46%	12,876	2.90
Missouri	-21.90%	5,636	3.93
Illinois	-21.66%	5,176	1.62
Washington	-19.74%	6,092	3.88
District of Columbia	-19.48%	624	5.42
Georgia	-16.66%	5,857	2.27
Massachusetts	-16.39%	6,171	4.30
Iowa	-15.87%	4,728	6.61
Alaska	-15.42%	927	5.05
United States²	-11.51%	255,418	3.40
Connecticut	-10.75%	2,466	3.04
North Carolina	-8.92%	4,971	2.15
Colorado	-8.48%	6,353	5.08
Pennsylvania	-8.25%	11,226	3.99
North Dakota	-6.56%	940	6.52
Virginia	-5.70%	2,582	1.40
Utah	-4.10%	2,060	2.36
Oregon	-1.58%	4,601	5.26
Kansas	-0.88%	3,163	4.49
South Dakota	0.49%	1,448	7.25
Rhode Island	2.70%	1,447	6.27
New Jersey	3.14%	4,800	2.34
New Hampshire	4.34%	505	1.65
Mississippi	5.09%	2,107	2.74
Idaho	7.81%	1,215	2.90
Tennessee	8.61%	5,952	3.97
New Mexico	11.85%	1,991	3.90
Nebraska	13.69%	3,563	7.74
Louisiana	15.01%	3,631	3.23
South Carolina	17.24%	3,719	3.44
Alabama	17.40%	3,124	2.75
Arkansas	17.48%	4,161	5.86
West Virginia	25.42%	3,000	7.68
Texas	29.38%	12,769	1.85
Kentucky	30.50%	5,387	5.30
Wyoming	44.91%	1,139	8.59
Arizona	63.39%	7,588	4.36
Indiana	69.73%	9,464	5.95
Nevada	331.65%	2,905	4.26
Puerto Rico ³	---	1,190	1.17

¹ Number calculated for children ages 0-20.

² Rates calculated for children ages 0-17.

³ Data for Puerto Rico not available for 2000, therefore percent-change from 2000 to 2009 could not be calculated. Percent-change in the national number of children in foster care from 2000 to 2009 excludes Puerto Rico.

TABLE 4

**Percentage change in number of children entering foster care in Fiscal Year,
by state (2000 to 2009)**

	2000 to 2001	2001 to 2002	2002 to 2003	2003 to 2004	2004 to 2005	2005 to 2006	2006 to 2007	2007 to 2008	2008 to 2009
Alabama	0.41	16.95	3.87	10.84	6.84	-1.38	3.98	-8.95	12.96
Alaska	-8.85	6.91	-11.70	-29.48	41.35	-1.91	-2.71	3.23	0.11
Arizona	-2.78	11.83	22.96	15.54	5.20	-2.09	0.97	10.01	-7.54
Arkansas	-5.51	0.09	6.30	-2.11	3.70	8.55	4.13	-7.68	10.31
California	-1.11	3.06	-1.63	-14.04	4.34	0.02	0.75	-12.63	-3.69
Colorado	0.94	10.43	-1.62	2.22	-1.68	-7.74	-8.90	2.46	-3.58
Connecticut	-1.81	1.84	13.28	-6.65	-2.26	9.45	-14.24	-0.30	-7.74
Delaware	-1.16	-2.24	-6.21	2.21	5.11	10.38	8.72	-43.51	-29.03
District of Columbia	6.06	-1.22	-11.45	1.39	26.06	-27.09	-12.54	21.50	-12.36
Florida	-0.49	11.39	-1.21	-3.00	11.11	-0.67	-13.86	-16.42	-9.63
Georgia	28.98	7.73	8.21	10.70	-6.94	-10.32	-7.24	-25.78	-12.87
Hawaii	13.69	7.16	-0.98	-0.95	-17.96	-11.53	-13.51	-4.56	-3.55
Idaho	7.28	0.33	6.51	20.51	10.60	-9.87	0.52	-13.40	-10.07
Illinois	-3.89	-5.94	-3.00	-2.16	0.86	-12.49	0.00	16.77	-11.42
Indiana	-3.17	5.13	7.19	15.48	7.33	-2.48	4.87	21.56	0.95
Iowa	3.72	-0.14	-1.46	3.94	13.74	-17.55	-7.91	-11.81	4.12
Kansas	-11.19	-2.40	-3.22	13.49	2.67	12.41	16.23	-13.79	-9.96
Kentucky	11.19	14.38	4.48	1.39	7.00	6.13	-8.23	-0.55	-6.52
Louisiana	-4.53	-1.33	-5.55	-1.96	22.40	17.62	-8.37	-6.33	6.70
Maine	-0.48	-18.82	6.35	-10.62	-10.02	1.38	14.38	6.41	-16.05
Maryland	-6.77	-2.70	-2.61	2.71	-5.92	-5.34	-10.52	-8.70	6.90
Massachusetts	-2.80	-8.63	-0.73	1.68	-5.50	2.00	0.56	4.29	-7.73
Michigan	14.72	-18.43	-3.68	0.94	-4.57	-3.13	1.21	-4.38	-9.78
Minnesota	-7.32	3.05	-21.68	-3.39	4.61	-1.82	-3.46	-7.11	-16.56
Mississippi	4.44	-24.45	-0.76	17.96	10.58	-4.69	16.96	-8.10	0.43
Missouri	2.44	-3.42	-11.16	4.35	-2.52	-12.31	-5.64	-3.82	9.78
Montana	-5.16	-13.28	-10.03	4.51	16.61	-17.67	-8.82	-4.93	-4.50
Nebraska	6.89	0.03	-13.25	42.93	-5.13	-3.63	-5.90	-6.55	6.64
Nevada	395.99	2.91	7.02	-5.11	4.07	8.82	-6.33	-9.62	-13.13
New Hampshire	10.33	5.43	2.66	-3.11	-2.14	1.64	5.03	-2.39	-11.56
New Jersey	16.74	11.39	15.57	-4.59	-12.68	8.08	-9.46	-8.51	-7.99
New Mexico	6.01	4.29	-1.37	15.56	-0.09	-5.35	6.93	-5.69	-6.92
New York	-8.85	1.96	-11.88	-6.57	-11.19	18.35	-0.96	2.12	-4.66
North Carolina	-2.88	5.92	-2.74	11.50	7.23	-1.78	-6.11	-15.36	-2.45
North Dakota	0.70	3.06	0.57	-0.19	4.77	-13.66	-4.96	4.22	0.11
Ohio	4.94	-7.27	-6.57	-6.04	-6.39	-2.40	-2.25	-13.43	-14.03
Oklahoma	-1.08	6.72	-3.03	-3.07	9.56	-2.83	-2.30	-12.93	-19.67
Oregon	-2.95	12.30	-2.34	11.41	11.78	-14.57	-13.03	-1.19	1.14
Pennsylvania	10.41	1.30	-4.71	11.77	0.58	-3.06	0.77	-8.99	-13.85
Rhode Island	5.96	5.96	-0.95	5.23	-5.34	29.66	-13.83	-14.68	-2.76
South Carolina	7.35	3.88	-3.42	-9.02	4.05	7.76	8.24	2.36	-3.68
South Dakota	-5.83	-0.66	2.00	-7.35	7.38	-0.88	2.65	-3.38	7.66
Tennessee	3.41	6.71	4.27	6.50	5.08	-6.29	-3.04	-4.16	-3.13
Texas	8.22	10.17	-2.15	18.24	24.39	-0.03	-10.08	-9.70	-7.11
Utah	-6.61	8.52	-11.44	1.35	13.36	-1.90	-2.85	-2.98	0.59
Vermont	-1.09	14.44	-12.86	15.86	-8.33	-8.96	-11.84	4.37	-14.73
Virginia	6.06	12.74	2.35	2.00	2.93	11.88	-8.41	-8.90	-21.38
Washington	-4.18	-7.82	-7.58	5.78	6.87	-3.80	3.86	-5.34	-8.03
West Virginia	-6.61	5.55	-0.47	2.34	27.06	-0.33	0.89	6.35	-8.09
Wisconsin	-14.05	-2.02	-0.87	12.63	8.08	-9.99	-4.70	-4.53	-8.71
Wyoming	13.99	-9.71	21.01	19.31	3.42	-1.99	-10.39	5.94	1.33
United States¹	1.99	2.03	-2.07	0.91	3.46	-1.40	-3.35	-6.72	-6.431

¹National estimate excludes Puerto Rico.