

2024 Case Closure Audit



**CHILDREN'S
JUSTICE PROJECT**
A Project of the Wyoming Supreme Court

**2024 Case Closure Audit
Completed in 2025**

INTRODUCTION

As a recipient of the federal Court Improvement Program (CIP) grant, the Wyoming Children’s Justice Project (CJP) is tasked with analyzing statewide child welfare case data and continuously improving the methods used to collect and evaluate that information. This effort supports data-informed policymaking and ensures that CJP initiatives are guided by accurate, meaningful findings.

In prior years, CJP’s data analysis focused exclusively on cases that ended in termination of parental rights. In 2021, CJP revised its approach to implement a “case closure audit” that reviews all closed abuse and neglect cases, allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of outcomes across the system.

This updated method has been applied to cases closed from 2020 through 2024. Since 2022, the process has been enhanced through increased technological support, and by 2023, was fully integrated with the Judicial Branch’s data team—ensuring greater consistency, reliability, and institutional alignment. That collaboration continues to strengthen Wyoming’s capacity to use data as a tool for evaluating and improving child welfare practices.

The findings of the 2024 audit are presented in the following report.

Methodology

The case closure audit involves a comprehensive review of every abuse and neglect case in Wyoming that closed during the previous calendar year. For instance, in 2021, the audit focused on cases closed in 2020, and this pattern continued until 2024 with the review of 2023 case closures. Technology improvements now provide the ability to begin reviewing cases as they close throughout the year. While full data collection and analysis cannot be completed until the calendar year concludes and all cases data has been finalized, this advancement allows earlier publication of data in the next calendar year.

The first step in the process is obtaining a list of every case closed during the previous calendar year, utilizing the Full Court Enterprise case management system maintained by the Wyoming Judicial Branch. Both case status and ROAs (register of actions) are used to identify closed cases. Cases with a dispositional status (e.g. closed, dismissed, entry of judgement, etc.) or cases with a closing ROA (e.g. 'ORD-CLOSE-CASE-SEAL', 'ORD-DISMISSING', 'ORD-DISCHARGE', 'ORD-CLOSING', etc.) are included in the list for review. Each of these cases is examined to verify the presence of a dismissal order signed by the judge to confirm eligibility for the review. Cases which were not closed in the calendar year under review are removed from the list. Additional cases removed from the list include cases that are transferred from one county to another due to the difficult procedural posture, and cases with consent decrees.

Once the final list is prepared, documents associated with cases closed during the audit period are processed using optical character recognition (OCR) software. The documents are loaded into the CJP module of the Wyoming Judicial Branch's user interface to allow for search optimization. Staff from the Administrative Office of the Courts, including CJP staff and members of the data team review the documents for each case and submit an electronic form with the required audit data. The audit data statistics are then processed and analyzed:

Data Point	What Is Collected	Reason for Collecting
Case Identifiers	The judge, county, children's initials, and case #	Identification and tracking purposes
Removal Date	The date the child was taken into temporary protective custody.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Statutory timelines for certain hearings run from the date of removal; - To calculate days to permanency change; and - To calculate days to permanency achieved.
Petition Date	The date the prosecutor filed the petition with the Clerk of District Court.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Statutory timelines for certain hearings run from the date of the petition; and - To calculate average case length.

Shelter Care Hearing Date	The date the court held the shelter care hearing.	By statute, the shelter care hearing must be held within 48 business hours of removal.
Initial Hearing Date	The date of the initial appearance.	Statutory timelines for certain hearings run from the date of the initial appearance.
Adjudication Date	The date the case was adjudicated at trial or through a plea.	Adjudication must be held within 60 days of the initial appearance, or for good cause, within 90 days of the filing of the petition.
Disposition Date	The date the final disposition hearing was held.	Disposition must occur within 60 days of the adjudication, but for good cause, may be continued for an additional 60 days
First Review Hearing Date	The date of the first review hearing.	The first review hearing must be held within 6 months of the date of removal.
First Permanency Hearing Date	The date of the first permanency hearing.	The first permanency hearing must be held within 1 year of the date of removal.
Date Permanency Plan Changed	The date when the court ordered the permanency plan as something other than reunification.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To calculate time to achieve a permanency plan change; and - To calculate time from permanency change to permanency achieved.
Permanency Type	The final permanency achieved in the case. Permanency types include: Preservation, Reunification, Guardianship, Adoption, APPLA, and Other.	The type of permanency achieved is used to sort cases and break down data by case type.
Date Permanency Was Achieved	The date final permanency was achieved.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To calculate time from permanency change to permanency achieved; and - To calculate total time in custody.

Date of Closure	The date the judge orders the case to be closed.	To calculate case length.
Consent Decree	Whether or not the case contained a consent decree.	To eliminate cases with consent decrees from the data set.

Methodology, cont.

The data points are entered into the case closure database. Because children within the same case may be returned home at different times or leave the case under different permanency options, a “case” within the case closure audit refers to a child, not a court case. For example, a juvenile court case with five children will be entered into the database as five different cases, one for each of the children with the information pertaining to that child.

Once these data points are entered into the database, the following calculations are made for each case:

Calculation	What Is Calculated
Number of Closed Cases	Total number of cases closed within the reporting period.
Number of Consent Decrees	Number of cases that contained a consent decree.
Number of Cases Analyzed	Number of cases in the dataset, once cases with consent decrees have been removed
Number of [Permanency Type]	Breaks down the number of cases analyzed by permanency type.
Percent Returned	Percentage of cases in which the child was returned home (reunified).
Average Days to First Permanency Hearing	The days from the time of removal to the time of the first permanency hearing.
Average Days to Permanency Change (by Permanency Type)	The days from time of removal to the time the court changes the permanency plan to another permanency type besides reunification; in the case of multiple permanency changes the initial permanency change is used in the calculation.
Average Days to Permanency (by Permanency Type)	The days from time of removal to the time final permanency is achieved.
Average Days to Permanency from Permanency Change (by Permanency Type)	The days from the time the court changes the permanency plan to the time final permanency is achieved; in the case of multiple permanency changes the initial permanency change is used in the calculation.
Average Case Length (by Permanency Type)	The days from when the petition is filed to when the judge orders the case to be closed.

Methodology, cont.

After these numbers are collected, the database is then reviewed for errors. The following results trigger an automatic re-review for accuracy.

Data Point	Trigger Point for Second Review
Days to Adjudication	Anything over 100 days
Days to Disposition	Anything over 120 days
Days to Review Hearing	Anything over 200 days
Days to Permanency Hearing	Anything over 370 days

Any other data point that indicates possible error (such as a negative number, a failure to calculate, or a final number that is glaringly wrong) also triggers a second review of the case data. Second reviews are designed to eliminate errors in data collection as well as typographical errors.

Once error checking is complete, district averages are obtained, and data is prepared for dissemination to the CJP Council. Upon review of the final report, the CJP Council will approve publication of the case closure audit data.

Federal Timelines

Permanency Type	Federal Timeline Requirement
Reunification	12 months
Guardianship	18 months
Adoption	24 months

Case Closure Audit	First Judicial District	Second Judicial District	Third Judicial District	Fourth Judicial District	Fifth Judicial District	Sixth Judicial District	Seventh Judicial District	Eighth Judicial District	Ninth Judicial District	Statewide
# of Closed Cases	93	78	61	29	42	191	138	43	41	716
# of Consent Decrees	14	17	8	4	12	32	34	6	16	143
# of Cases Analyzed	79	61	53	25	30	159	104	37	25	573
# Reunification	40	34	43	12	12	51	57	21	13	283
# Preservation	14	3	4	1	14	79	2	7	0	124
# Adoption	10	8	5	8	1	18	28	7	7	92
# Guardianship	8	13	0	3	1	6	15	2	5	53
# APPLA	6	3	1	1	2	5	2	0	0	20
# Other	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
% Returned	50.6%	55.7%	81.1%	48.0%	40.0%	32.1%	54.8%	56.8%	52.0%	52.3%
Average Days To First Permanency Hearing	352	358	364	366	358	421	375	391	390	375
Average Days To Permanency Change - Adoption	337	443	450	409	428	440	476	417	469	430
Average Days To Permanency Change - Guardianship	450	326	N/A	253	369	392	392	272	393	356
Average Days To Permanency Change - APPLA	244	321	864	680	342	563	233	N/A	N/A	464

Case Closure Audit	First Judicial District	Second Judicial District	Third Judicial District	Fourth Judicial District	Fifth Judicial District	Sixth Judicial District	Seventh Judicial District	Eighth Judicial District	Ninth Judicial District	Statewide
Average Days To Permanency - Adoption	795	998	1,514	650	749	1,130	863	1,478	685	985
Average Days To Permanency - Guardianship	1,068	493	N/A	449	740	506	489	419	670	604
Average Days To Permanency - APPLA	657	933	1,040	2,337	362	2,604	1,568	N/A	N/A	1,357
Average Days To Permanency - Reunification	186	253	359	342	389	161	256	356	241	283
Average Days To Permanency From Permanency Change - Adoption	457	555	1,064	241	321	690	387	1,061	216	555
Average Days To Permanency From Permanency Change - Guardianship	618	166	N/A	196	371	113	106	146	277	249
Average Days To Permanency From Permanency Change - APPLA	412	612	176	1,657	19	2,041	1,334	N/A	N/A	893
Average Case Length - Preservation	47	153	303	361	167	274	139	324	N/A	221
Average Case Length - Reunification	195	360	410	439	478	374	262	373	278	352
Average Case Length - Adoption	796	1,016	1,529	691	790	1,171	873	1,491	661	1,002
Average Case Length - Guardianship	1,170	510	N/A	447	738	645	498	430	694	642
Average Case Length - APPLA	671	935	1,059	2,356	642	2,611	1,567	N/A	N/A	1,406

OUTLIERS

To ensure a more accurate and representative analysis of case closure audit data, the CJP Advisory Council, in collaboration with the Administrative Office of the Courts Data and Quality Assurance Analyst, utilized a median-based approach for looking at this next set of data.

Recognizing that the dataset included significant outliers—cases that were either resolved unusually quickly or remained open for extended periods—a median calculation was selected to mitigate their impact. In this method, the values in each category were sorted from smallest to largest, and the middle value was used to determine the typical case length. For categories with an even number of values, the average of the two central figures was used.

This approach provides a more reliable measure of central tendency, offering a clearer picture of typical case timelines without distortion from extreme values.

The following table contains the 2024 Case Closure Audit Data medians.

Case Closure Audit	First Judicial District	Second Judicial District	Third Judicial District	Fourth Judicial District	Fifth Judicial District	Sixth Judicial District	Seventh Judicial District	Eighth Judicial District	Ninth Judicial District	Statewide
# of Cases Closed	93	78	61	29	42	191	138	43	41	716
# of Consent Decrees	14	17	8	4	12	32	34	6	16	143
# of Cases Analyzed	79	61	53	25	30	159	104	37	25	573
# of Reunification	40	34	43	12	12	51	57	21	13	283
# of Preservation	14	3	4	1	14	79	2	7	0	124
# of Adoption	10	8	5	8	1	18	28	7	7	92
# of Guardianship	8	13	0	3	1	6	15	2	5	53
# of APPLA	6	3	1	1	2	5	2	0	0	20
# of Other	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
% Returned	51%	56%	81%	48%	40%	32%	55%	57%	52%	52%
Days to First Permanency Hearing	353	327	361	352	360	360	361	365	383	358
Days to Permanency Change - Adoption	320	454	385	416	428	470	430	365	436	412
Days to Permanency Change - Guardianship	460	320		348	369	375	368	272	430	368
Days to Permanency Change - APPLA	226	352	864	680	342	708	234			487
Days to Permanency - Adoption	796	1214	997	646	749	1162	725	1703	494	943
Days to Permanency - Guardianship	897	435		619	740	450	497	419	687	593
Days to Permanency - APPLA	661	542	1040	2337	362	1834	1568			1192
Days to Permanency - Reunification	35	98	345	348	352	113	265	318	305	242
Days to Permanency from Change - Adoption	492	760	612	228	321	651	320	1338	58	531
Days to Permanency from Change - Guardianship	522	134		271	371	89	76	146	257	233

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Case Closure Audit	First Judicial District	Second Judicial District	Third Judicial District	Fourth Judicial District	Fifth Judicial District	Sixth Judicial District	Seventh Judicial District	Eighth Judicial District	Ninth Judicial District	Statewide
Days to Permanency from Change - APPLA	434	12	176	1657	20	1126	1334			680
Case Length - Preservation	34	199	224	361	87	240	139	152		180
Case Length - Reunification	58	231	406	402	464	374	263	328	356	320
Case Length - Adoption	795	1224	1018	687	790	1222	736	1719	495	965
Case Length - Guardianship	1050	469		617	738	482	510	430	720	627
Case Length - APPLA	696	543	1059	2356	642	1832	1567			1242
Case Length	90	321	416	459	294	364	374	359	445	347

Appendix A

Permanency Type Definitions

Permanency Type	Definition
Preservation	When a child does not enter custody and remains with a parent/guardian.
Reunification	When a child enters custody and then returns home to a parent/guardian.
Guardianship	When a child enters custody and then achieves permanency through legal guardianship with someone other than the parent/guardian from whom they were removed (i.e., relative, foster parent).
Adoption	When a child enters custody and then achieves permanency through legal adoption with someone other than the parent/guardian from whom they were removed (i.e., relative, foster parent).
APPLA (Alternative Planned Permanent Living Arrangement)	When a child enters custody and then achieves permanency through transitioning to a self-sufficiency while connecting them to an adult permanency resource.
Other	This data point was added in the 2021 Case Closure Audit to account for cases that were closed before permanency was achieved, such as a case where a child passed away or custody was transitioned to a delinquency case.