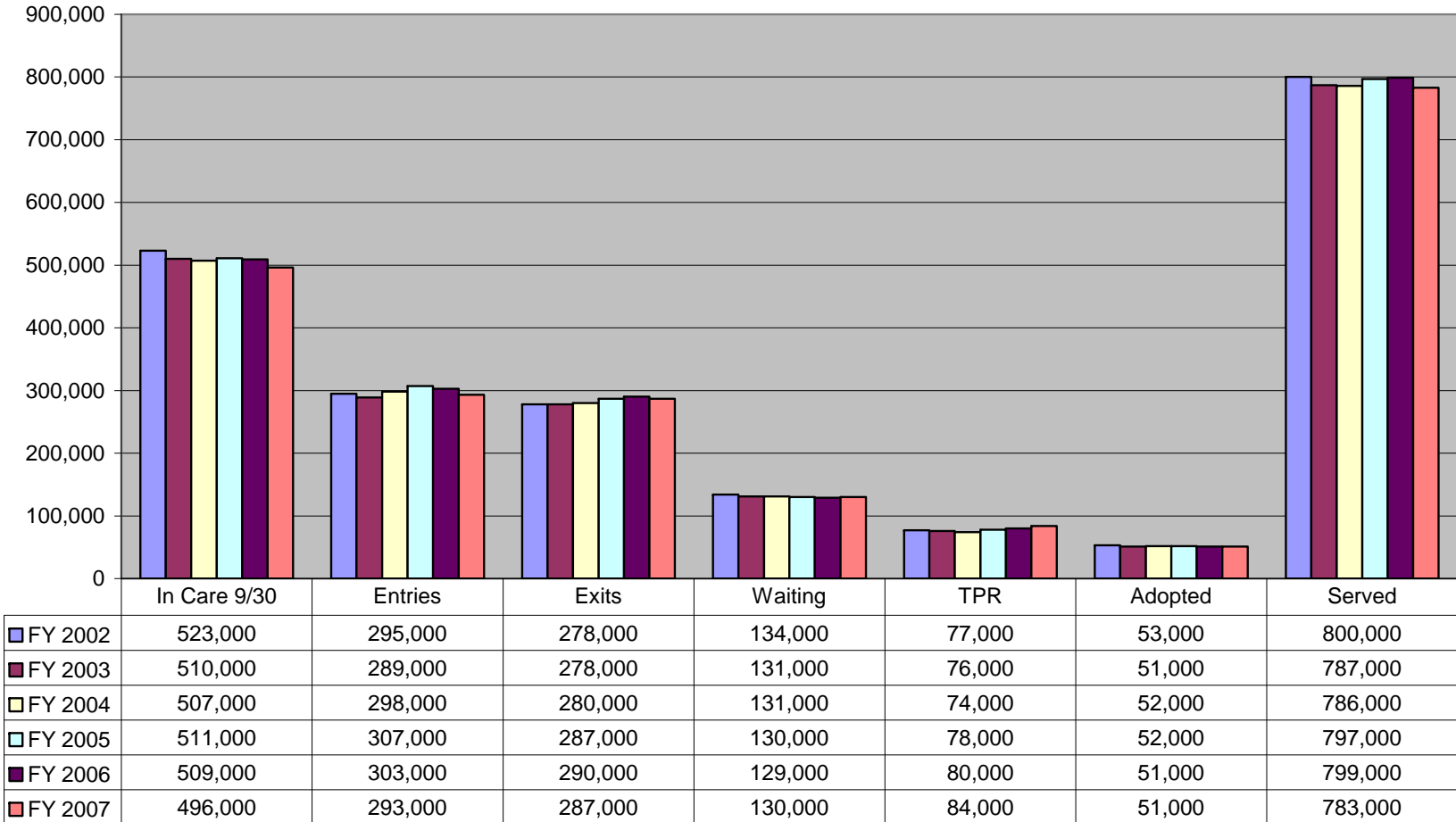


Trends in Foster Care and Adoption--FY 2002-FY 2007

(Based on data submitted by states as of September 1, 2008)

Source: AFCARS data, U.S. Children's Bureau, Administration for Children, Youth and Families



Discussion of "Trends" Chart

The data in the chart were submitted to the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) by States, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico by September 1, 2008.

Sub-population Definitions

1. **In foster care on the last day of the federal fiscal year (September 30):** This is an estimated count of all the children in foster care **on the last day** of the year. An individual child is included in the count for each year for which he or she is in foster care on the last day.
2. **Entering care during the federal fiscal year:** This is an estimated count of all children who enter foster care **during** the year. An individual child is counted only once for each year, even if the child entered, exited and re-entered care during the year. If an individual child entered in one year and then exits and re-enters in a subsequent year, he or she is included in the count of entries for both years.
3. **Exiting care during the federal fiscal year:** This is an estimated count of all children who exited foster care during the fiscal year **at the end of their most recent foster care episode**. An individual child is counted only once for each year, even if the child exited, re-entered and exited again during the year. If an individual child exits care in one year and then re-enters and exits again in a subsequent year, he or she is included in the count of exits for both years.

4. **Whose parental rights have been terminated (TPR):** This is an estimated count of the children in care **on the last day** of the year who are both waiting for adoption and whose parental rights have been terminated. An individual child is counted only once for each year. An individual child is included in the count for each year that he or she has these characteristics on the last day of the year.

5. **Waiting to be adopted:** This is an estimated count of all children who are waiting to be adopted **on the last day** of the year. An individual child is included in the count for each year in which he or she is waiting to be adopted on the last day. There is no federal definition for children waiting to be adopted. For the purposes of this analysis, children waiting to be adopted include children with a goal of adoption and/or whose parental rights have been terminated. Children whose parental rights have been terminated, who are 16 years old and older, and who have a goal of emancipation are excluded from the “waiting” population. An individual child is included in the count for each year that he or she has these characteristics on the last day of the year.

6. **Adopted:** This is an estimated count of all children adopted **during the year** with public child welfare agency involvement. An individual child is counted only once for each year. In rare cases when a child is adopted multiple times, the child will be counted in each year he or she is adopted.

7. **Served:** This is an estimated count of all children who were in the public foster care system **during the year**. This number is the sum of two mutually exclusive groups of children: the children who are already in care on the first day of the fiscal year (as of October 1) and the children who enter foster care during the year. An individual child is counted only once for each year.

Technical Discussion

Ideally, the count in # 1 (in foster care on the last day of the year) plus the count in # 3 (exiting foster care during the fiscal year) should equal the count in # 7 (served). They are equal in FY 2006 and FY 2007, but they are not equal in FY 2002-FY 2005. The difference in those years is 1,000, or less than one tenth of one percent. Most of the difference can be attributed to estimation procedures and rounding.

Examination of the relationship between the number of exits and entries for each year gives the erroneous impression that the number of entries each year is greater than the number of exits even though the number of children in care on September 30 may be steady, be declining, or even be increasing but at a much slower pace than the exit numbers imply. This occurs because in the AFCARS database each child is counted only once and the information included on the child in the database is from their most recent foster care episode. However, there are some children who were in foster care on the first day of the year and exited and re-entered during the year one or more times prior to entering their most recent foster care episode. In addition, they remained in foster care through the last day of the fiscal year (September 30) in their most recent foster care episode. In these circumstances, the exit associated with their "in care" status on the first day of the year is not counted. We estimate that the number of these uncounted exits exceeds 10,000 annually.

There is also a data quality issue which has an impact on the number of exits. AFCARS data are submitted every six months covering a six month period. Sometimes a child who is reported during one six month period does not appear in the next period, and there is no record that the child exited. Reviews of these cases have shown that almost all of these are situations in which the child actually exited, but the exit was not reported to AFCARS. However, because the actual number of these "dropped" exits cannot be calculated, they have not been accounted for in the exit count. As this situation has been pointed out to states, the data quality has improved and the number of dropped exits has decreased. The number per year in FY 2002-FY 2006 is estimated to range between 8,000 and 10,000.

Data Discussion

The data show that the decline in the estimated number of children in foster care on the last day of each federal fiscal year (September 30) resumed in FY 2007 after pausing in FY 2005 and FY 2006. Between FY 2004 and FY 2005 the estimated number of children in care on the last day of the fiscal year increased from 507,000 in FY 2004 to 511,000 in FY 2005 and dropped slightly to 509,000 in FY 2006. For the first time since AFCARS data have been reported, in FY

2007 the estimated number of children in care on September 30 dropped below 500,000 to 496,000. A similar pattern is seen in the total estimated number of children served during these years. After declining since FY 1998, the estimated number of children served increased from 786,000 in FY 2004 to 797,000 in FY 2005 and 799,000 in FY 2006. The total number of children served in FY 2007 is estimated to be 783,000, the lowest number since AFCARS data have been reported.

After remaining under 300,000 until FY 2004, the estimated number of entries into foster care exceeded 300,000 in both FY 2005 and FY 2006 at 307,000 and 303,000, respectively. In FY 2007, the estimated number entries into foster care dropped to 293,000. The estimated number of exits which had increased between FY 2004 and FY 2006 from 280,000 to 290,000, declined slightly to 287,000 in FY 2007, excluding the exits identified in the second and third paragraphs of the technical discussion.

Since FY 2003, the estimated number of waiting children has been approximately 130,000 on the last day of each year. The estimated number of waiting children whose parental rights had been terminated as of the last day of the year has been increasing from 74,000 in FY 2004, to 78,000 in FY 2005, and to 80,000 in FY 2005. The estimated number reached 84,000 in FY 2007, the highest number since AFCARS data have been reported.