



The Title IV-E Guardianship Assistance Program (GAP): Use of Guardianship is Growing, but Lags Adoption Assistance and is Unevenly Used Across States

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KEY POINTS

- The geographic reach of the [Title IV-E Guardianship Assistance Program \(GAP\)](#), first authorized in 2008, continues to expand. As of March 2026, 43 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, and 12 Indian tribes had approved GAP plans, accounting for about 87 percent of jurisdictions.
- Guardianship caseloads have steadily increased, but lag far behind adoption assistance. By Fiscal Year 2023 (FY23), jurisdictions supported a combined average monthly caseload of 45,153 children in Title IV-E subsidized guardianships, up from 24,689 in FY16 (an 83 percent increase). In comparison, in FY23 the Title IV-E adoption assistance program reported a caseload more than 12 times as high. Another 35,883 children received state funded guardianships outside the Title IV-E program, likely because the children did not meet Title IV-E eligibility requirements.
- Nearly half of the GAP caseloads were in just three states – California, Missouri, and Texas – in FY23, though those states contained just 24 percent of the U.S. population of children under age 18. Nearly three-quarters of GAP placements nationally were in 10 states.
- The size of states' GAP caseloads in relation to their Title IV-E foster care caseloads varies widely. While some states do not participate in GAP or use the program infrequently, in 14 states, there were at least half as many children in Title IV-E guardianships as in Title IV-E foster care. In three states (Missouri, Hawaii, and Connecticut), the number of children receiving federal guardianship assistance in FY23 *exceeded* the number of children in Title IV-E supported foster care.
- By FY23, exits from foster care to guardianship had nearly doubled from FY10, when the Title IV-E GAP rolled out.
- The Title IV-E GAP has one of the lowest monthly costs per child, compared to other Title IV-E programs. In FY23, GAP and Adoption Assistance cost on average about half as much as Foster Homes and one-fourth as much as Child Care Institutions. Monthly costs per child for GAP and adoption assistance were very similar.
- Eligibility rules, including income requirements, challenge GAP implementation. Supports, such as innovative state resources (e.g., in Texas), can assist kin caregivers.

BACKGROUND

The federal Guardianship Assistance Program (GAP), authorized in Title IV-E of the Social Security Act by the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008, provides federal matching funds to states and Tribes that choose to operate kin guardianship assistance programs alongside their Title IV-E foster care and adoption assistance programs. Under Title IV-E guardianships, relatives or others with close personal relationships with a child in foster care may assume long-term custody of the child without the court oversight involved with foster care, while receiving ongoing financial assistance toward the child’s care. The first states that opted into the Title IV-E GAP received approval of their plans and began implementing the program as soon as 2010.

This brief summarizes facts about the program’s implementation as of March 2026, using the most recent publicly available caseload data through FY23. It updates [a similar brief](#) published in 2017. Methods for this brief are discussed in Appendix 1.

Program and Policy Context

To be eligible for federal guardianship assistance, a child must have been eligible for Title IV-E foster care payments for at least six months while living with the relative as a licensed or approved foster family home. The child welfare agency must also first rule out both reunification and adoption as viable permanency plans. In addition, the state agency must determine that the child demonstrates a strong attachment to the prospective guardian, the prospective guardian has a strong commitment to caring for the child permanently, and (for children ages 14 and older) that the child has been consulted regarding the arrangement.

Under GAP arrangements, guardians assume full legal responsibility for the child’s care and become the primary decision-maker for the child’s upbringing, health, and education, typically with no ongoing agency oversight. However, unlike adoptions, guardianships do not require that parental rights be terminated. This may confer some benefits, including access to inheritance and staying on parents’ health insurance longer. Guardianships can be dissolved or modified more easily than adoptions if the family’s circumstances change. The legal definition of guardianship and the terms of guardianship orders vary by jurisdiction. Some specific differences between Title IV-E Guardianship Assistance Program and Title IV-E Adoption Assistance are included in Table 1.

Table 1. Guardianships and Adoption Assistance Both Offer Permanency for Children but Differ in Terms of Legal Relationship, Eligibility, and Program Status

	Adoption Assistance	Guardianship
Legal Relationship	Permanent Birth parents’ rights are terminated	Permanent Does not require termination of parental rights
Eligibility – for more information see the links below	Most children must be in foster care and deemed to have “special needs,” though children in independent adoption arrangements may access the program through other eligibility pathways (no time constraints)	Child must be eligible for foster care payments while placed with a licensed relative for at least six consecutive months

	No income requirement	Income requirement: Each state is required to look back at income eligibility provisions of the 1996 Aid to Families with Dependent Children program
		See additional eligibility requirements in Program Instruction ACYF-CB-PI-10-01
Program Status	Mandatory for all states receiving Title IV-E funding	Optional program that agencies may choose to offer

Note. See more information about [Adoption Assistance](#) and the [Guardianship Assistance Program](#).

In 2018, Congress passed the Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) as part of Division E of the Bipartisan Budget Act (P.L.115-123),¹ which expanded federal support for services to prevent the need for children to enter foster care. While FFPSA did not change the statutory eligibility or payment structure of Title IV-E GAP, it allowed federal reimbursement for prevention services to kin caregivers to prevent foster care entry. FFPSA also placed new limitations on Title IV-E reimbursement for non-family placements, indirectly incentivizing family-based permanency options like guardianship.

Following FFPSA’s passage, HHS issued guidance² to help jurisdictions implement the mandatory and optional requirements of the law. As recently as January 2026, an HHS funding announcement provided information to Tribes on the integration of guardianship assistance and other optional programs during the development of their Title IV-E plans.³

Some states operate their own subsidized guardianship programs (sometimes referred to as non-IV-E Guardianship Subsidies), either in addition to or instead of the federal program, largely for families who do not meet Title IV-E eligibility requirements. Many of these programs predate GAP, while others have been established parallel to states’ Title IV-E GAP implementation. For the purposes of this brief, the phrases “federal” or “Title IV-E” GAP/guardianships refer to guardianships subsidized by the federal government. The descriptor “non-Title IV-E” GAP/guardianships refers to guardianships funded exclusively by state or local funds.

THE GEOGRAPHIC REACH OF THE GUARDIANSHIP PROGRAM CONTINUES TO EXPAND

Figure 1 shows which states were participating in the Title IV-E guardianship program as of FY23. In that year, 54 jurisdictions – 42 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, and nine Indian tribes – had approved Title IV-E GAP plans, accounting for 80 percent of jurisdictions.ⁱ As of March 2026, one additional state (Kentucky) and three Indian tribes had approved Title IV-E GAP plans,ⁱⁱ accounting for about 87 percent of jurisdictions.ⁱⁱⁱ For this brief, however, we rely on FY23 data because it is the most recent year with complete claims and caseload information.

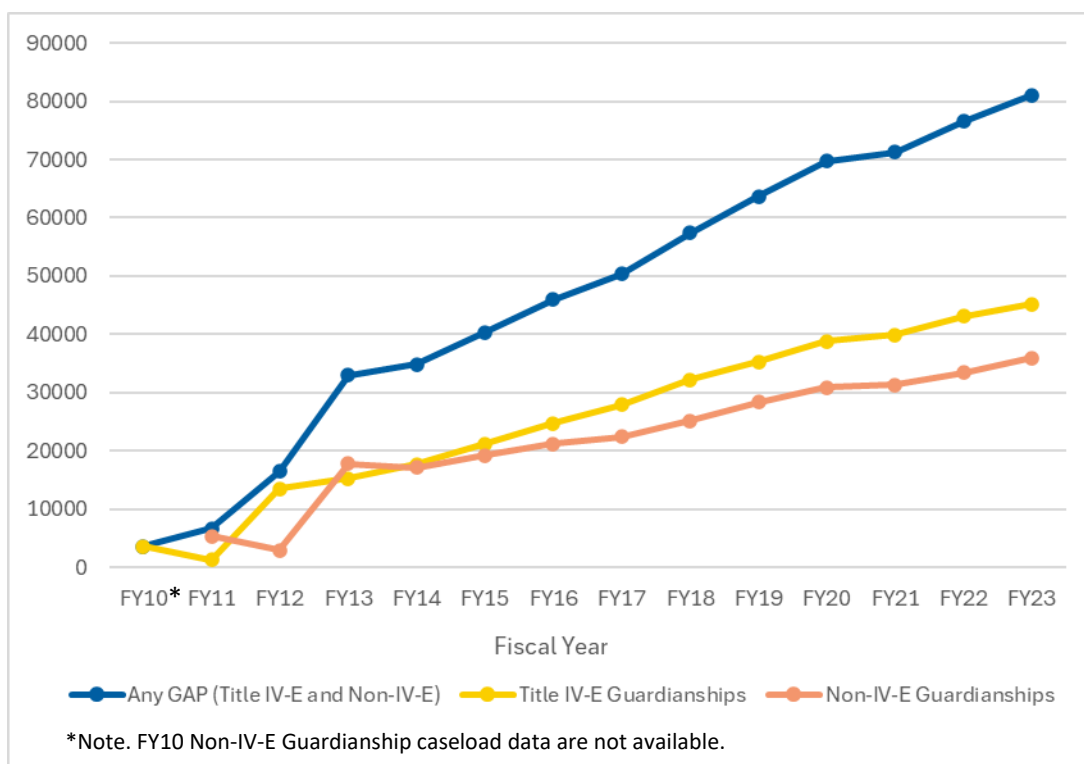
ⁱ The FY23 percent of jurisdictions with a GAP was calculated by dividing the 54 jurisdictions (including 42 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, and nine Indian tribes) with approved Title IV-E GAP plans, by the total number of jurisdictions that are *actively implementing* Title IV-E programming (67 jurisdictions - 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, and 14 Indian tribes). If all tribes eligible for Title IV-E – including those not actively implementing Title IV-E programming (which includes 7 additional tribes) – are included in the denominator, then 73 percent of eligible jurisdictions have approved Title IV-E GAP plan (54 jurisdictions/74 jurisdictions).

ⁱⁱ <https://acf.gov/cb/grant-funding/title-iv-e-guardianship-assistance>

ⁱⁱⁱ The current (as of March 2026) percent of jurisdictions with a plan was calculated by dividing 58 jurisdictions (including 43 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, and 12 Indian tribes) with approved Title IV-E GAP plans, by the total number

The Title IV-E guardianship program is much smaller than the Title IV-E adoption assistance program. In FY23, the Title IV-E adoption assistance program reported a caseload of 560,210 children – over 12 times more children than the Title IV-E guardianship caseload (45,153). As mentioned above, from FY16 to FY23 the Title IV-E guardianship program saw an 83 percent increase in caseload volume, whereas the Title IV-E adoption assistance program experienced a 23 percent increase in caseload during the same time period. Another difference between Title IV-E guardianship and adoption assistance programs is the age at which children tend to exit foster care into either GAP or adoption assistance. For adoption assistance programs, children entering from foster care were generally younger, with those between the ages of one and five years old representing more than half (54%), followed by six- to 10-year-olds (25%). Conversely, GAP entry was relatively even across age groups, with one- to five-year-olds making up 30 percent, six- to 10-year-olds making up 26 percent, and 11- to 16-year-olds making up 36 percent of those that exited foster care into guardianships.

Figure 2. Both IV-E and Non-IV-E National Guardianship Assistance Caseloads Have Increased from FY10 to FY23



Source: ACF, Children’s Bureau, Title IV-E Programs Expenditure and Caseload Data

With the increasing number of guardianships, it is important to note that GAP caseloads are cumulative. Once a family begins receiving GAP payments, those payments typically continue until the child reaches 18 years of age. Thus, particularly in the early years of program implementation, caseloads grew quickly as more children were added and few exited. This growth is part of the program’s design and is similar to growth seen in the adoption assistance caseload, when those supports were first introduced.

NEARLY THREE-QUARTERS OF TITLE IV-E GAP CASES IN FY23 WERE IN JUST 10 STATES

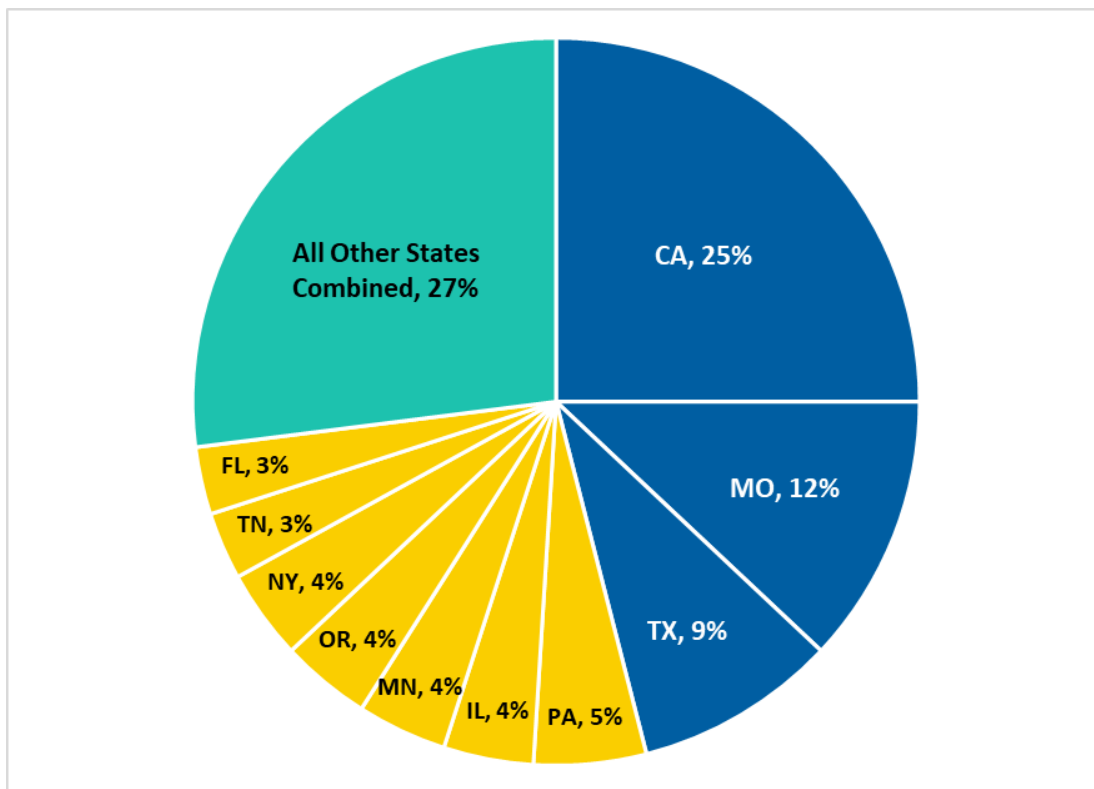
Figure 3 highlights the states with the largest FY23 GAP caseloads. Florida, Minnesota, New York, and Tennessee are new to the top 10 jurisdictions serving the most children since the 2017 analysis; the others have long been some of the largest users of the program. From FY16 to FY23, California, Missouri, and Texas have

remained the states with the highest Title IV-E GAP caseloads, making up around 50 percent. In comparison, those three states contain approximately 24 percent of the U.S. population of children under 18.⁴

The remaining states and the District of Columbia with approved Title IV-E GAP plans in FY23 operated smaller programs, each serving less than three percent of the national Title IV-E guardianship caseload. Nine states, plus Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands, each averaged fewer than 50 children per month. Appendix 2 (Table 3) lists FY23 Title IV-E and non-Title IV-E guardianship caseloads for all jurisdictions.

Caseload size is often related to a jurisdiction’s general child population and their foster care populations, but not always. Some large states have few or no Title IV-E GAP cases, while some smaller states have comparatively high participation. For example, in FY23, Michigan served fewer children than West Virginia, New Jersey’s caseload was similar to Montana’s, and Virginia’s was close to South Dakota’s. Additionally, the number of years a jurisdiction has been implementing the Title IV-E guardianship program also influences their caseload, since children remain eligible until age 18 – or 21 if they meet certain criteria^{iv} – so caseloads grow over time.

Figure 3. Snapshot of FY23 Title IV-E Guardianship Assistance Caseloads: Three States Account for Almost Half of Caseloads



Source: ACF, Children’s Bureau, [FY23 Title IV-E Guardianship Assistance Claims and Caseload Data](#)

^{iv} Based on the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act, only youth who enter a guardianship agreement after age 16 and meet the education or employment criteria qualify until age 21, for those states that have already extended foster care to age 21. See PI-10-11 for more details: <https://acf.gov/sites/default/files/documents/cb/pi1011.pdf>.

STATES VARY IN THE PROPORTION OF TITLE IV-E ELIGIBLE CHILDREN IN GUARDIANSHIP

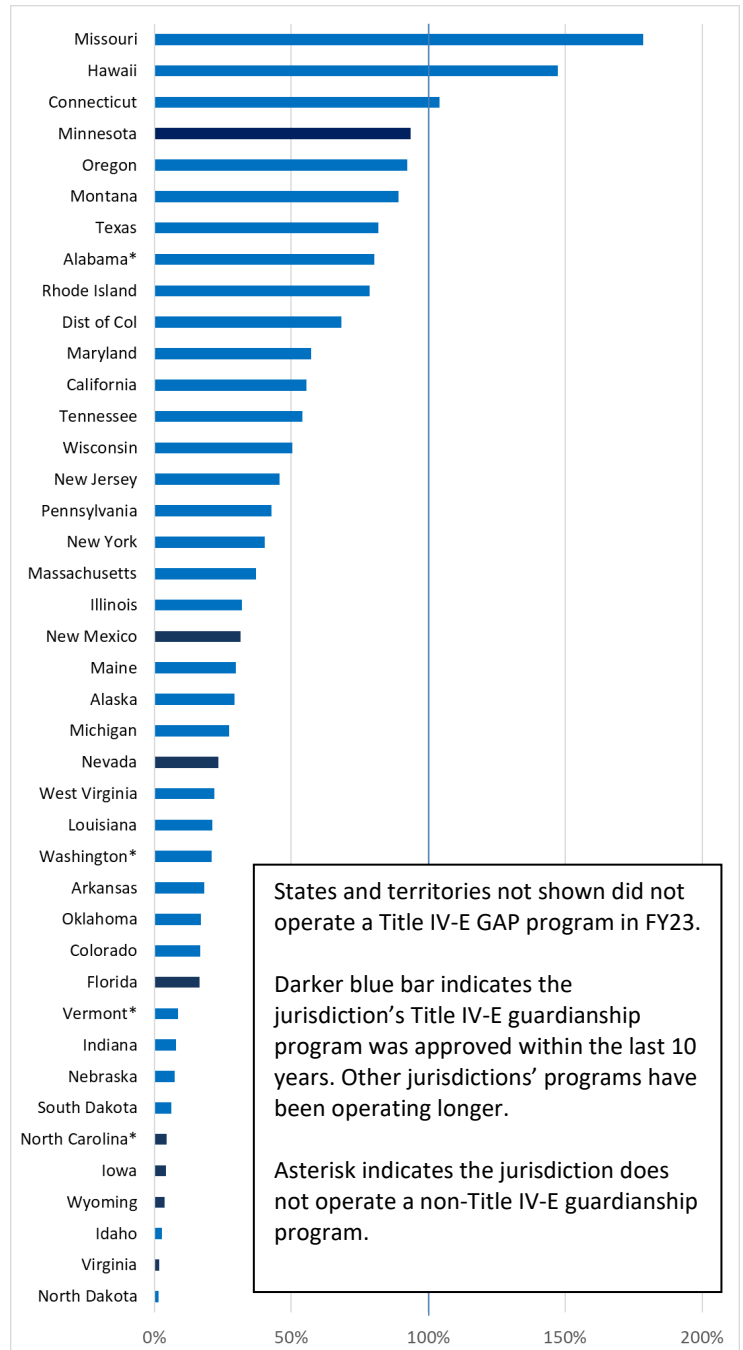
Jurisdictions differ widely in how often they use guardianship as a permanency option – that is, children exiting foster care to guardianship. As a measure of how jurisdictions use the federal guardianship program, Figure 4 displays how each jurisdiction’s Title IV-E guardianship caseload compares to its Title IV-E foster care caseload. In Missouri, Hawaii, and Connecticut, the FY23 Title IV-E guardianship caseload was actually larger than the foster care caseload. In 11 other states, Title IV-E guardianship caseloads were at least half the size of Title IV-E foster care caseloads. However, in many jurisdictions, the Title IV-E guardianship caseload was much smaller – or nearly zero.

Some of the variation in how often jurisdictions use guardianship comes from their child welfare practices. Some jurisdictions may have kin-first policies or licensure waivers that encourage kin guardianship. Another factor driving variation is how long ago the jurisdiction began operating its GAP (particularly since caseloads are cumulative over time, typically until a child reaches age 18). Additional variation may be due to interactions between those factors and underlying Title IV-E eligibility rates (since only children in Title IV-E supported foster care are eligible for Title IV-E GAP), as well as whether jurisdictions operate their own non-Title IV-E guardianship programs separate from the federal Title IV-E program.

MOST STATES OPERATING TITLE IV-E GUARDIANSHIP PROGRAMS ALSO HAVE A NON-TITLE IV-E GUARDIANSHIP PROGRAM

Nearly all jurisdictions (38 of 42) that reported Title IV-E GAP caseloads in FY23 reported they also fund guardianships using non-Title IV-E funds. In nine states – Iowa, Maine, Maryland, Nebraska, North Dakota, Rhode Island, South Dakota, West Virginia, and Wyoming – more than two-thirds of guardianships were funded by the states themselves using non-Title IV-E funds (Figure 5).

Figure 4. Title IV-E Guardianship Caseload as a Proportion of Its Title IV-E Foster Care Caseload, FY23

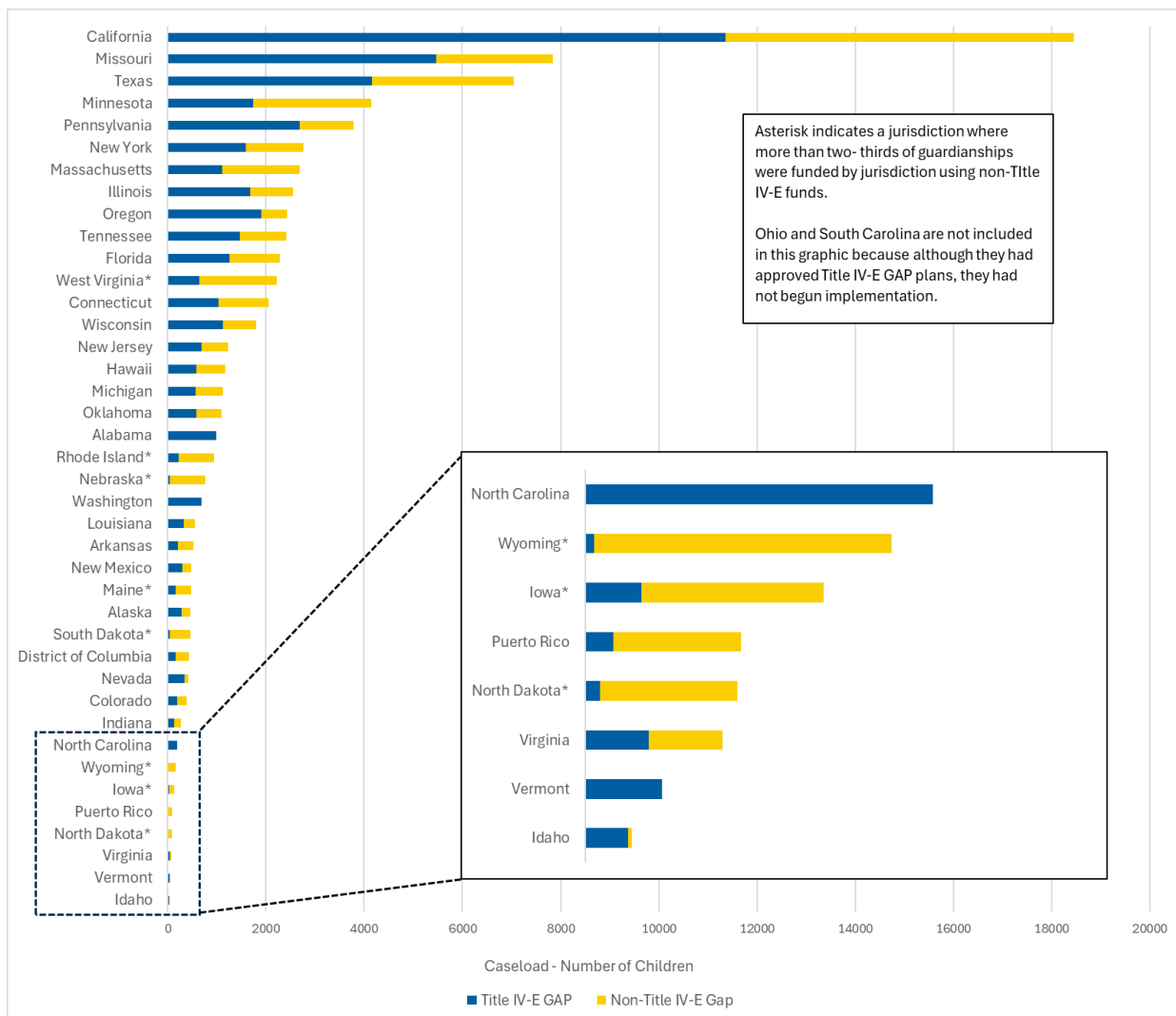


Source: ACF, Children’s Bureau: FY23 Title IV-E Foster Care and Guardianship Assistance Claims and Caseload Data

Nationally, 56 percent of subsidized guardianships reported by states and territories in their financial claims and caseload data included federal funding under GAP. In comparison, 36 percent of children in foster care are served under Title IV-E.^v The higher eligibility rates for children in guardianships compared to foster care likely reflect the optional nature of the GAP program. That is, jurisdictions may elect not to provide non-federally funded guardianships,^{vi} making the proportion of federally eligible guardianship recipients higher. All states' foster care programs include both Title IV-E eligible and non-Title-IV-E eligible children.

For children receiving adoption assistance, 87 percent of them are Title IV-E eligible.^{vii} The higher eligibility rate for children in the adoption assistance program compared to guardianships is likely due to the population served, as Title IV-E adoption assistance is designed to facilitate timely placements for children with special needs that may otherwise experience difficulty with adoption placement.⁵

Figure 5. Among States and Territories, 56 Percent of Subsidized Guardianships Included Federal Funding, FY23



Source: ACF, Children’s Bureau: FY23 Title IV-E Guardianship Assistance Claims and Caseload Data

^v Depending on eligibility. States receive federal funding for services provided through federal financial participation reimbursements.
^{vi} In 2023, four states – Alabama, North Carolina, Vermont, and Washington – only provided Title IV-E GAP information.
^{vii} Depending on eligibility. States receive federal funding for services provided through federal financial participation reimbursements.

FOURTEEN YEARS INTO THE GAP PROGRAM, TITLE IV-E GUARDIANSHIPS MADE UP 11 PERCENT OF FOSTER CARE EXITS

In FY23, 11 percent of children leaving foster care – roughly one in ten – exited to guardianships with relatives or other close adults (Table 2). Another seven percent exited to live with relatives without a formal guardianship agreement. Table 2 includes guardianships supported by the federal government through the Title IV-E program, guardianships subsidized by programs that states fund without federal financial participation (non-Title IV-E guardianships), and unsubsidized guardianships.

Since FY10, the share of children exiting to live with kin – either guardianship or living with relatives – has increased from 14 percent to 18 percent in FY23. Guardianship exits nearly doubled, rising from six to 11 percent, while exits to relatives without guardianship declined slightly from eight to seven percent. Over the same period, reunification and non-permanency exits decreased and adoption exits increased.

Table 2. Exits to Guardianships Nearly Doubled and Exits to Adoption Increased, While Non-Permanency and Reunification Exits Declined, FY10-FY23

Fiscal Year	Reunification	Adoption	Guardianship	Live with Relatives	Non-permanency Exits
2010	51%	21%	6%	8%	14%
2011	52%	20%	6%	8%	14%
2012	51%	22%	7%	8%	12%
2013	51%	21%	7%	8%	13%
2014	51%	21%	9%	7%	12%
2015	51%	22%	9%	6%	12%
2016	51%	23%	10%	7%	9%
2017	49%	24%	10%	7%	10%
2018	49%	25%	11%	7%	8%
2019	47%	26%	11%	6%	10%
2020	48%	25%	10%	6%	11%
2021	47%	25%	12%	6%	10%
2022	46%	27%	11%	6%	10%
2023	44%	27%	11%	7%	10%
State Ranges for 2023	27-63%	16-42%	2-24%	0-26%	<1-20%
Tribe & Territory Ranges for 2023	<1-70%	<1-52%	<1-42%	<1%	0-16%

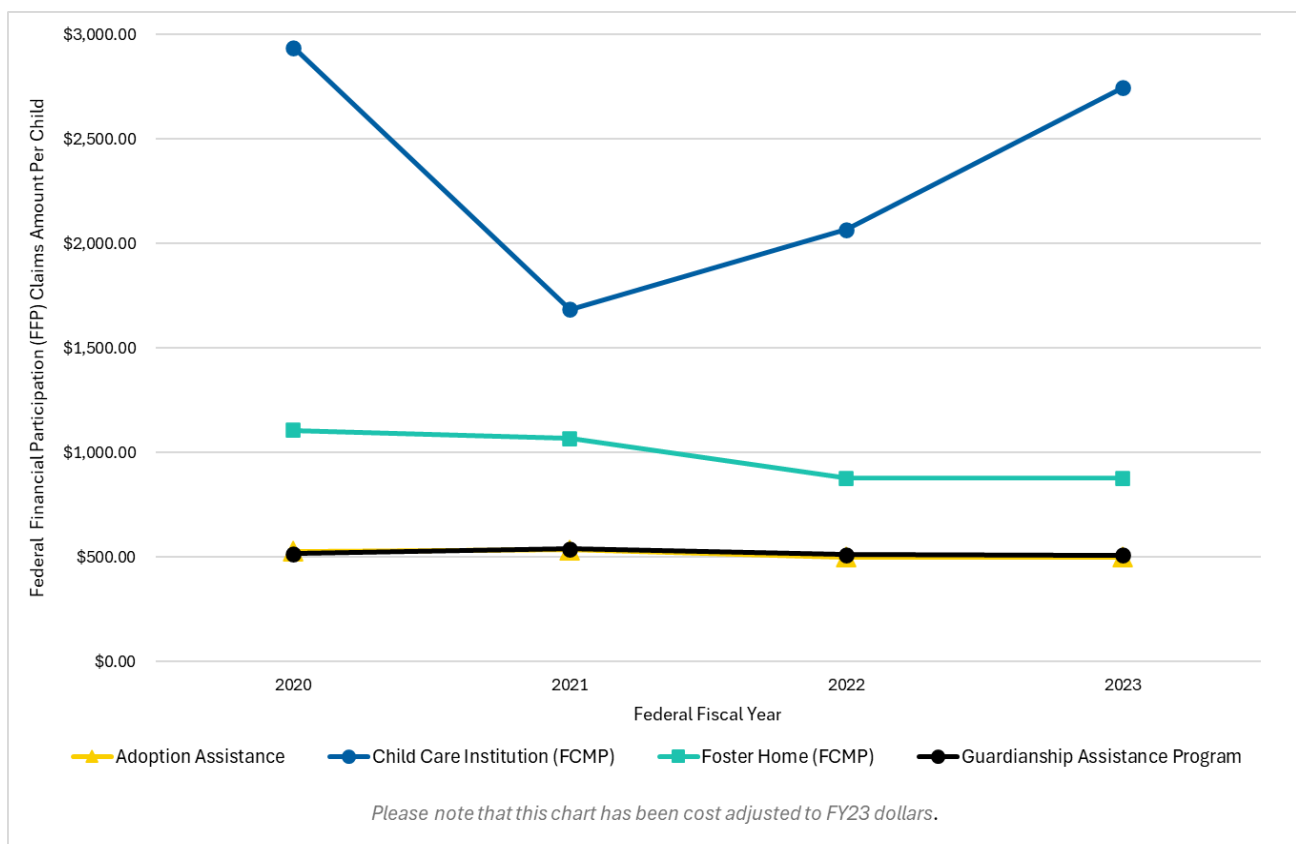
Source: ACF, Children’s Bureau, The [AFCARS Report and Dashboard](#) for each of the specified years

These trends may reflect changes in who enters foster care and shifts in state policies. States tend to emphasize different pathways out of foster care. With fewer children entering care overall, those who do may have more complex needs, making reunification less likely. At the same time, states’ focus on kinship care may have encouraged both guardianships and relative adoptions. In states with higher exits to guardianship, fewer children are exiting care to the permanency option “live with relatives” ($r=-0.50$, $p<.01$, see Appendix 2, Table 4).

GAP COSTS REMAIN LOW AND STABLE, AVERAGING ABOUT HALF THE COST OF FOSTER CARE PER CHILD PER MONTH

Figure 6 compares average monthly cost per child (cost adjusted to 2023 dollars) across four Title IV-E funding categories: GAP, Adoption Assistance, Child Care Institutions (CCI),^{viii} and Foster Homes. Among these programs, Title IV-E GAP and Adoption Assistance have the lowest average monthly costs per child, each a little over \$500 per child per month for all fiscal years analyzed. Title IV-E Foster Homes and CCI were substantially more expensive, with GAP and Adoption Assistance costing on average about half as much as Foster Homes and one-fourth as much as CCI. The CCI costs per child were not only higher but also considerably more volatile, exhibiting large year-to-year spikes and declines that complicate budgeting and forecasting.

Figure 6. GAP Has One of the Lowest Monthly Costs Per Child Compared to Other Title IV-E Programs, FY20 to FY23



Source: ACF, Children’s Bureau: FY20 to FY23 Title IV-E Foster Care, Adoption Assistance, and Guardianship Assistance Claims and Caseload Data

From FY20 to FY23, inflation increased by approximately 18 percent. Over the same period, average monthly per child costs for GAP decreased slightly from \$515 to \$509, and Adoption Assistance declined from \$527 to \$498 (–5.5%), after accounting for inflation. Because both programs grew far more slowly than inflation – or declined in nominal terms – the data indicate real cost decreases for these programs between FY20 and FY23. The much lower average monthly cost per child in GAP and Adoption Assistance relative to Foster Homes and CCIs – combined with the cost stability of GAP and Adoption Assistance costs over time – could suggest that

^{viii} Child Care Institutions include congregate care group-based residential settings and, for youth aged 18 and older, supervised independent living placements.

family-based permanency options may provide meaningful fiscal advantages in a given year in addition to their stability benefits for children over higher-cost non-permanency care settings. It is not surprising that foster homes and CCI's, both more service-intensive, short-term settings, are more expensive than guardianships, per child per month. For example, CCI's have restrictions on claiming (14 days unless one of the excepted settings), federal requirements for placements in a qualified residential treatment program (QRTP), and new requirements for criminal records checks for all adults working in a CCI, all of which impact allowability of payments. Additionally, children placed in CCI's might have a higher level of care with some of the costs being covered by other sources, such as Medicaid.

GAP IMPLEMENTATION IS CHALLENGED BY RESTRICTIVE ELIGIBILITY RULES

At one time, policymakers believed guardianship was more likely to fail than either reunification or adoption. This led to specific program requirements that other permanency options be ruled out before guardianship could be considered. But the federal guardianship program's restrictive eligibility rules likely also limit its use. One challenge is the requirement that children have been eligible to receive a Title IV-E foster care maintenance payment while placed with the guardian for at least six months before becoming eligible for GAP. Jurisdictions may quickly identify relatives willing to assume permanent guardianship for children who are unable to return home but for whom adoption is not a preferred option. But then they must either delay permanency until a child meets the time-in-care requirement or do without guardianship payments for the duration of the subsidy eligibility period, typically until the child reaches 18 years of age (or 21 if specific eligibility criteria are met).

A related challenge is the income eligibility requirements for Title IV-E foster care (and thus for Title IV-E GAP) based on Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program income eligibility standards that have not been updated for inflation since 1996.^{ix} This is particularly limiting for jurisdictions that had more restrictive standards at the time. In seven states, families' income cannot exceed \$5,000 per year to be eligible for Title IV-E (Delaware, Indiana, Kansas, Mississippi, Nebraska, New Mexico, and Virginia).⁶ For children who are not eligible for federally-funded Title IV-E foster care, in addition to paying for foster care itself with state funds, jurisdictions must either take on the entire cost of guardianship subsidies, urge families to take guardianship without financial assistance (or with the much lower assistance available through child-only payments from the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Program, if eligible), or lose this permanency option. Kinship families are more likely to be poor than other families.⁷ Relatives who take in children from foster care may not be able to afford to pay for the child (or children, in the case of siblings) without a subsidy.⁸ In contrast, the AFDC eligibility criteria have been phased out for federal reimbursements under the Title IV-E Adoption Assistance Program.

Additionally, implementing GAP for older youth presents several challenges, particularly because it can be restrictive in terms of supports offered compared to remaining in foster care. If a youth exits to guardianship before age 16, they could lose access to many services they may otherwise receive through Chafee programs (including education and training vouchers). Even for youth transitioning to GAP after age 16, available supports can differ and may be more limited. While GAP can extend financial assistance to age 21 if the youth is in school, working, or has a medical condition, this support often looks very different from the comprehensive services provided through extended foster care. Importantly, certain benefits are tied specifically to being in foster care at age 18 or older, such as room and board assistance and Medicaid coverage up to age 26, meaning youth who move to GAP earlier may forfeit these opportunities. Although tools like [Kansas's comparison chart](#) help families understand these trade-offs, the complexity of eligibility

^{ix} The link with AFDC eligibility criteria was phased out between 2010 and 2024 for the Title IV-E Adoption Assistance Program. It still applies to Title IV-E Foster Care subsidies, which has led to declines in Title IV-E eligibility in that program.

rules and the potential loss of key supports make GAP implementation challenging and, in some cases, restrictive for older youth.

SUPPORTS EXIST TO FACILITATE IMPLEMENTATION

Recent [changes to foster care licensure requirements](#) implemented in 2023 may make it easier for families to meet GAP eligibility requirements. The 2023 final rule⁹ allows jurisdictions to create separate licensing or approval standards for relative kinship foster families. As of February 2026, the Children’s Bureau has approved Title IV-E plans that adopt separate licensing standards for 19 states and 5 tribes.¹⁰ For example, the final rule requires that approved kinship foster family homes receive the same payment amounts that would have been made if the child was placed in a non-kinship foster family home.¹¹ Some jurisdictions also offer provisional licensing to support the placement of children with kin (including into guardianship arrangements) while licensure applications are being processed.¹² This has the potential to allow children continuity in important supports in their lives, like staying in the same school. In addition, a Title IV-E agency may waive non-safety-related licensing or approval standards for relative foster family homes on a case-by-case basis (section 471(a)(10)(D) of the Act). Therefore, some states allow waivers^x for certain foster care home licensing requirements that do not directly affect a child’s safety (for example, home square footage requirements). These waivers make it easier for guardianship and other arrangements to proceed.¹³ To support kin caregiving even more, the Administration for Children and Families could consider providing updated policy guidance differentiating expectations for kin versus non-kin.^{xi}

Title IV-E agencies can also receive federal funding for evidence-based kinship navigator programs that help kin caregivers learn about and access programs and services (including GAP) to meet their own needs and the needs of the children they are raising. As of January 2026, 11 states and one territory have been approved to operate [evidence-based kinship navigator programs](#): Colorado, Delaware, Iowa, Minnesota, Nebraska, Nevada, Ohio, Puerto Rico, South Carolina, Utah, Virginia, and Washington.¹⁴

Training is also available to support guardianship in kinship families. Resources exist for staff to understand the benefits of kinship placements and work toward successful implementation.¹⁵ For example, Texas has developed a best practices guide that discusses specialized training for caseworker staff to explore the nuances of working with kin caregivers and to orient the workforce toward kinship care.¹⁶ Kin caregivers often face complicated family relationships due to their dual status as both a caregiver and a relative – particularly compared to other non-kin foster caregivers. Caseworkers can also support caregivers in accessing services for themselves to help them navigate these transitions, for example, receiving information related to parenting education and child development. Illinois’ Post Adoption and Subsidized Guardianship Services Guide¹⁷ is designed to present families with an overview of available trauma-focused services to meet children’s ongoing needs.

CONCLUSION

Fourteen years into the implementation of Title IV-E GAP, its caseload continues to increase (though is still a fraction of the adoption assistance caseload), and guardianship has become a more frequently used arrangement in the permanency continuum for children in foster care. Jurisdictions still vary in how frequently GAP is used to support exits from foster care, and perhaps federal technical assistance could help identify and

^x Title IV-E expenditures can only be claimed if a foster family home is fully licensed and, in most cases, a provisional license does not equate to full licensure.

^{xi} This could build on the final ‘Separate Licensing or Approval Standards for Relative or Kinship Foster Family Homes’ rule, which states, “We encourage agencies to define relative and kin in a way that is inclusive of Tribal custom and adopt a broad definition of relative and kin for purposes of licensing and approval standards.”

address barriers to federal support for guardians. Consistently over time, a few states have claimed the highest Title IV-E GAP expenditures (California, Missouri, Texas, etc.). GAP costs remain low and stable over time.

Guardianship is an important permanency option. Given its success, more work is needed to understand whether eligibility restrictions serve their intended purposes or are arbitrary and not related to child or family well-being. This could include a comparison with any impacts to the Title IV-E Adoption Assistance Program, where AFDC eligibility criteria have already been phased out. Additional research is needed to explore how long guardianship arrangements endure, as well as the long-term well-being of children and families across various guardianship situations.

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APPENDIX 1.

Methods

This brief relies on two data sources. Information about GAP and foster care caseloads come from administrative data on states' claims to the program, which they report quarterly to the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) on Form CB-496. Annual spreadsheets that compile the data on expenditures and caseloads are compiled each year and [published](#) by ACF.^{xii} Children are counted in this caseload from the year they exit foster care until the guardianship is terminated or the child turns 18.^{xiii} Information about foster care exits is from the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) and is reported in annual [AFCARS Reports](#). This number only includes children who exited foster care in the fiscal year being reported. For this brief data from the [AFCARS Dashboard](#) for 2023 was used. AFCARS data is also available for independent analysis from the [National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect](#).

To maintain as much consistency as possible between the two reporting file types, Children's Bureau converted AFCARS 2020 data to a format compatible with AFCARS 1993 data, and data elements consistent with AFCARS 1993 were used for the current analyses. However, caution should be exercised when interpreting trends as data prior to FY23 were based exclusively on the AFCARS 1993 definitions and collection methods, and differences in approaches may affect comparability of earlier data to FY23.

The analyses presented in this brief use data that are currently available and depend on the quality of those data – both claims data related to guardianship as well as data presented in AFCARS. We note that there can be discrepancies between these two data sources not only due to the AFCARS data collection changes over time described above, but also because the reports are designed for different purposes and collect similar but different data. Data undergo periodic reviews for quality assurance and may be updated at a later time.

^{xii} Program caseload and expenditure data is available online for years 2019-2023 (as of the time of this brief's publication). Equivalent data for earlier years (for the guardianship program back to 2010 and for the foster care and adoption programs back to the late 1990s) is available internally within HHS and since its inception has been provided to researchers and policy analysts upon request.

^{xiii} Some states have policies that allow payments to continue until a later age, typically 19 to 21.

APPENDIX 2.

Table 3: Guardianship Caseloads, FY23

State	Year in which the State's GAP plan was Approved	Title IV-E Guardianship (average monthly number)	Non- Title IV-E Guardianship (average monthly number)	Total Guardianship (combined average monthly number)
Alabama	2010	991	—	991
Alaska	2010	282	182	464
Arizona	—	—	—	—
Arkansas	2011	208	313	521
California	2011	11,367	7,097	18,463
Colorado	2009	196	192	389
Connecticut	2009	1,038	1,011	2,049
Delaware	—	—	—	—
District of Columbia	2009	164	264	428
Florida	2019	1,258	1,019	2,277
Georgia	—	—	—	—
Hawaii	2011	580	583	1,162
Idaho	2010	23	2	25
Illinois	2009	1,671	883	2,554
Indiana	2012	130	128	258
Iowa	2019	30	97	127
Kansas	—	—	—	—
Kentucky	—	—	—	—
Louisiana	2010	330	227	557
Maine	2009	156	311	468
Maryland	2009	390	3,367	3,756
Massachusetts	2009	1,112	1,569	2,681
Michigan	2009	564	558	1,122
Minnesota	2015	1,737	2,403	4,140
Mississippi	—	—	—	—
Missouri	2009	5,467	2,371	7,838
Montana	2009	666	836	1,501
Nebraska	2009	42	714	756
Nevada	2017	346	63	409
New Hampshire	—	—	—	—
New Jersey	2009	690	544	1,233
New Mexico	2016	291	178	469
New York	2010	1,581	1,176	2,757
North Carolina	2017	185	N/A	185
North Dakota	2021	8	73	81
Ohio	2023	—	—	—
Oklahoma	2010	585	510	1,095
Oregon	2009	1,896	532	2,427
Pennsylvania	2009	2,691	1,097	3,788
Puerto Rico	2015	15	69	83

Rhode Island	2009	225	722	946
South Carolina	2023	—	—	—
South Dakota	2010	37	426	463
Tennessee	2009	1,466	951	2,418
Texas	2010	4,162	2,889	7,052
Utah	—	—	—	—
Vermont	2010	41	—	41
Virginia	2019	34	39	73
Washington	2009	681	—	681
West Virginia	2013	633	1,586	2,219
Wisconsin	2011	1,119	685	1,804
Wyoming	2021	5	158	163
Tribes	Varies	67	63	130
TOTAL		45,153	35,883	81,036

Source: ACF, Children’s Bureau, [FY2023 Title IV-E Guardianship Assistance Claims and Caseload Data](#). Dashes indicate the state reported no subsidized guardianships in FY23.

Table 4: States Using Guardianship as a Permanency Option have Fewer Children Exiting Care to Live with Relatives

	Non-Permanency Exits	Reunification	Adoption	Guardianship	Live with Relatives
Non-Permanency Exits	1.00				
Reunification	-0.38**	1.00			
Adoption	-0.11	-0.23	1.00		
Guardianship	0.04	-0.22	-0.14	1.00	
Live with Relatives	0.06	-0.48**	-0.35*	-0.50**	1.00

Note: Non-permanency exits include 1) Emancipation, 2) Runaway or Whereabouts Unknown, and 3) Transfer to Another Agency. Correlational analyses were conducted for state date only, given the small sample sizes for territories and Tribes. *p<.05; **p<.01

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