



STATE STATUTES
CURRENT THROUGH JANUARY 2024

Establishment and Maintenance of Central Registries for Child Abuse or Neglect Reports

To find statute information for a particular State or Territory, go to the [State Statutes Search](#).

Every State has procedures for maintaining records related to reports and investigations of child abuse and neglect. The term "central registry" is used by many States to refer to a centralized database for the statewide collection and maintenance of child abuse and neglect investigation records. For this publication, Child Welfare Information Gateway reviewed State laws regarding requirements for managing reports of suspected child abuse or neglect. An analysis of the information shows that approximately 37 States,¹ the District of Columbia, American Samoa, Guam, and Puerto Rico have statutes

or regulations requiring the utilization of some form of a central registry for managing records of reports.

WHAT'S INSIDE

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¹ The word "approximately" is used to stress the fact that States frequently amend their laws and applies to all data in this publication. The information in this publication is current only through January 2024. The States that have central registries include Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Mississippi, Nebraska, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, North Dakota, Oregon, Rhode Island, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Vermont, Virginia, Washington, West Virginia, and Wyoming.

In seven States,² reports of child abuse or neglect and records related to those reports are maintained in that State's statewide automated child welfare data system. In four States,³ the county agencies that receive the reports of suspected abuse or neglect are required to maintain these records and submit the reports to State departments of social services. Florida maintains all records of child abuse reports in its hotline reporting system. Georgia is working to implement a statewide system for sharing data among several agencies, including, among others, the Department of Human Services, the Department of Public Health, the Department of Juvenile Justice, the Department of Education, and the Georgia Crime Information Center.

In most States, the registries are maintained by social services departments. In California and West Virginia, however, the central registries are maintained by the State police. The Northern Mariana Islands and the U.S. Virgin Islands do not address the issue of central registries or records management in their statutes.

PURPOSE OF CENTRAL REGISTRIES

Central registries and the systematic record keeping of child abuse and neglect reports assist child protective services in the identification and protection of abused

and neglected children. Central registry reports are typically used to aid agencies in the investigation, treatment, and prevention of child maltreatment cases and to maintain statistical information for staffing and funding purposes.

Central registry records are used to screen new reports of child abuse or neglect to determine if the family had prior involvement with child protective services. Information from substantiated or founded reports is also made available to employers in child care, education, and health care or other entities in which employees or volunteers will have direct contact with children. All States, the District of Columbia, Guam, and Puerto Rico also require a check of central registry records as part of the background check for foster and adoptive parent applicants.⁴ Only the information from substantiated reports may be released for background checks.

CONTENTS OF RECORDS

In addition to the name of the person alleged to have harmed a child, the types of information contained in central registries vary from State to State but may include the child's name and address,⁵ the name of the child's parent or guardian,⁶ the nature of the harm to the child,⁷ and the results of any investigations.⁸ Some States retain all information related to reports of abuse and neglect in their central registries. In 26

² Missouri, Montana, New Mexico, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, and Utah

³ Colorado, Maine, Minnesota, and Wisconsin

⁴ For more information on requirements to obtain central registry clearances for prospective foster and adoptive parents, see Child Welfare Information Gateway's [Background Checks for Prospective Foster, Adoptive, and Kinship Caregivers](#).

⁵ In 10 States (California, Indiana, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, and Virginia), the District of Columbia, and Guam

⁶ In six States (California, Indiana, Mississippi, Missouri, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and South Dakota) and the District of Columbia

⁷ In eight States (Mississippi, Missouri, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, Vermont, Virginia, and West Virginia), the District of Columbia, and Guam

⁸ In six States: Alaska, Indiana, New Mexico, Ohio, Washington, and Wisconsin

States,⁹ American Samoa, and Guam, only substantiated reports are maintained in the central registry.

MAINTENANCE OF RECORDS

States maintain substantiated central registry records to enable them to conduct the needed background checks for prospective foster or adoptive homes or employees or volunteers for jobs working with children. In eight States,¹⁰ retention of substantiated records is limited to a set number of years unless another report concerning the same child or person found to have harmed a child is received during the retention period. In four States,¹¹ substantiated records will be held permanently when the person has been found to have committed severe abuse, including sexual abuse or bodily injury. Statutes in seven States¹² require agencies to retain unsubstantiated reports for a designated number of years to inform future risk and safety assessments, while Arkansas and Indiana maintain unsubstantiated reports indefinitely.

The information maintained in central registries and other agency records is

confidential, and access to these records is limited to individuals with a direct interest in the case. Which individuals have access to this information and under what circumstances also varies from State to State.¹³

This publication is a product of the State Statutes Series prepared by Child Welfare Information Gateway. While every attempt has been made to be as complete as possible, additional information on these topics may be in other sections of a State's code as well as agency regulations, case law, and informal practices and procedures.

SUGGESTED CITATION:

Child Welfare Information Gateway. (2024). *Establishment and maintenance of central registries for child abuse or neglect reports*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Children's Bureau. <https://www.childwelfare.gov/resources/establishment-and-maintenance-central-registries-child-abuse-or-neglect-reports/>

⁹ Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Nebraska, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, North Carolina, North Dakota, South Carolina, Texas, Vermont, Virginia, West Virginia, and Wyoming

¹⁰ Arizona (25 years), Kentucky (7 years), Louisiana (10 years), Minnesota (10 years), North Dakota (25 years), Virginia (3 to 25 years, depending on the severity of the abuse), Washington (as defined by rule), and West Virginia (10 years)

¹¹ Arkansas, Louisiana (after a second report of sexual abuse), Michigan (until the perpetrator has died), and South Dakota

¹² Illinois (5 years), Maine (5 years), Minnesota (5 years), Missouri (5 to 10 years, depending on the severity of the abuse), New Hampshire (10 years), Virginia (3 years), and Washington (3 years)

¹³ For more information, see Information Gateway's [Disclosure of Confidential Child Abuse and Neglect Records](#).



U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Administration for Children and Families
Administration on Children, Youth and Families
Children's Bureau



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