

THE COST OF CHILD MALTREATMENT TO THE ALABAMA ECONOMY 2023

Prepared for The Alabama Department of Child
Abuse and Neglect Prevention
The Children's Trust Fund

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1. Executive Summary

CBER estimates that child maltreatment (child abuse and neglect) exceeded \$8.0 billion in tangible economic costs on Alabama’s economy in 2023, with the breakdown by cost category presented below. This estimate reflects only the cohort of first-time child maltreatment victims in 2023 and does not capture the broader, harder-to-measure economic and social costs that affect families, extended family members, and communities across the state.

The Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA, P.L. 100-294) defines child abuse and neglect as “any recent act or failure to act on the part of a parent or caretaker which results in death, serious physical or emotional harm, sexual abuse or exploitation, or an act or failure to act that presents an imminent risk of serious harm.” According to the National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect (NDACAN), six primary forms of maltreatment are reported: medical neglect, neglect, physical abuse, psychological maltreatment, sexual abuse, and emotional abuse. In 2015, the Justice for Victims of Trafficking Act (P.L. 114-22) expanded this definition to include sex trafficking. The incidence of each form of maltreatment is examined in detail in Chapter 2 of this report.

Child Maltreatment Cost to Alabama, 2023

Category	Cost (2023 dollars)
Low Birth Weight	252,577,618
Chronic Illness (Childhood Asthma) ^a	29,614,793
Childhood Mental Health Care ^b	20,829,823
Child Welfare System	331,976,713
Law Enforcement for Intervention	646,505
Other Medical Costs of Children	1,835,595
Special Education	90,054,127
Juvenile Delinquency	43,954,675
Adult Criminality	128,542,714
Adult Mental Health and Health Care ^c	744,530,947
Adult Homelessness	7,246,325
Lost Worker Productivity of Victims	6,309,196,322
Lost Worker Productivity due to Mortality	55,966,237
Total Annual Costs due to Child Maltreatment	8,016,972,393

^a Midpoint of \$10,917,879 - \$48,314,097 cost range.

^b Midpoint of \$13,887,687 - \$27,775,373 cost range.

^c Midpoint of \$443,139,449 - \$1,045,992,508 cost range.

Rounding errors may be present.

Source: Center for Business and Economic Research, The University of Alabama.

In 2023, Alabama recorded 9,194 first-time child maltreatment victims, resulting in an estimated per-victim cost of \$871,979. These costs accrue over the life course, influencing long-term health, earnings potential, and labor force participation. The economic burden associated with worker productivity is especially significant: lost productivity accounts for \$6.4 billion, or 79.4 percent of all estimated costs. This

underscores the vital role that combating child maltreatment can play in strengthening Alabama’s workforce and supporting sustained economic growth.

To achieve these gains, Alabama must continue to strengthen investment in protecting children. The *2023 Annual Report of the Alabama Department of Child Abuse and Neglect – The Children’s Trust Fund* (ADCANP/CTF 2023) reports a Fiscal Year 2023 (FY2023) budget of approximately \$20.6 million, with slightly less than \$7.6 million appropriated from the Education Trust Fund and General Fund. By comparison, the \$8.0 billion economic cost of child maltreatment represents about 3.2 percent of Alabama’s \$248.3 billion gross domestic product (GDP) in 2023. Applying this same 3.2 percent ratio to the state’s \$16.6 billion in FY2023 net tax collections yields \$535.9 million—an amount 26.0 times larger than the CTF budget. This comparison illustrates the substantial return on investment that could be realized through increased funding for child maltreatment prevention.

Expanding the state’s commitment to prevention is a strategic economic decision. Strengthening the safety and well-being of Alabama’s children is not only vital to families and communities—it is also a direct investment in the future availability, stability, and productivity of the state’s workforce.

2. Introduction and Review

The Center for Business and Economic Research (CBER) compiled data from the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System’s (NCANDS) *Child Maltreatment Reports* and *Child Welfare Outcomes Reports*, with an emphasis on data from 2013, 2018, and 2023—the five-year increments aligning with the Children’s Defense Fund reporting cycle—to examine trends in Alabama’s children who are victims of maltreatment.

In 2023, the Children’s Trust Fund (CTF) of Alabama reported revenue of \$20,649,726, which reflects substantial growth since 2018, when CTF revenue totaled \$7,751,378.¹ As illustrated in Figure 1, CTF revenue increased by \$13,078,348 (172.7 percent) in nominal dollars; after adjusting for inflation, revenue increased by \$9,264,776 (125.3 percent) in real dollars.² State appropriations to the Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Board—derived from the General Fund³ and the Education Trust Fund⁴—also rose from \$1,156,075 in 2018 to \$7,630,524 in 2023, an increase of \$6,474,449 in nominal dollars and \$5,026,419 in real dollars. After accounting for inflation, state appropriations represented 14.9 percent of CTF’s total revenue in 2018 and increased to 29.8 percent in 2023. The State of Alabama spent \$281,380,539 on child welfare for fiscal year 2020 (FY2020), including \$143,928,938 from federal sources, the total cost for 2023 is estimated at \$331,976,713 after accounting for inflation.⁵ Alabama also received \$88,354,695 in federal reimbursements, plus an additional \$3,274,362.17 in retroactive claiming

¹ Alabama Department of Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention. (2017–2023). *Annual reports*. Alabama Children’s Trust Fund. <https://ctf.alabama.gov/about-us/annual-reports/>

² U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (n.d.). *CPI inflation calculator*. https://www.bls.gov/data/inflation_calculator.htm

³ Alabama Department of Finance. (Fiscal Years 2003–2023). *State general fund appropriations reports*. Alabama Department of Finance, Executive Budget Office. https://budget.alabama.gov/state_general_fund_appropriations/

⁴ Alabama Department of Finance. (Fiscal Years 2003–2023). *State general fund appropriations reports*. Alabama Department of Finance, Executive Budget Office. https://budget.alabama.gov/education_trust_fund_appropriations/

⁵ Child Trends. (2023, May). *Alabama: State fiscal year 2020 child welfare financing survey*. https://cms.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Alabama_SF2020CWFS_ChildTrends_May2023.pdf

from the Title IV-E program in FY2023, which provides financial assistance for the maintenance and care of eligible children in foster care or adoptive placements.⁶ The Department of Human Resources', which administers child welfare programs in the state, budget grew from \$1.84 billion in FY2018⁷ to \$3.82 billion in FY2023.⁸

NCANDS reported that 1,130,840 children were residents of Alabama in 2023. Figure 2 shows that the state's child population has increased by only 7,418 since 2000, reflecting a growth rate of just 0.7 percent. In contrast, Alabama's total population grew by 623,895 people, or 14.0 percent, during the same period. Thus, growth in the child population accounted for slightly more than one percent of overall statewide population growth. Children as a share of the total population have declined steadily—from 25.3 percent in 2000 to 22.3 percent in 2023—as Alabama continues to experience a rapidly aging population.

In 2023, there were 26,738 reports referred to Child Protective Services (CPS) for allegations of abuse or neglect, involving 36,326 children who received either an investigation or an alternative response to determine whether they were maltreated or at risk of maltreatment (see Figure 4).⁹ The number of referrals and investigations declined by approximately 7.0 percent and 6.0 percent, respectively, since 2018. However, compared to 2013, there were 6,777 more referrals and 8,465 more investigations conducted in 2023—an increase of 34.0 percent and 30.4 percent over ten years.

Despite this overall increase in child maltreatment referrals and investigations, Alabama's child protective services workforce has not kept pace. Table 1 shows that since 2013, the state has had a net gain of only two intake and screening workers, while the total CPS workforce has declined by 58 positions—a 10.0 percent overall reduction. Consequently, the number of reports per investigator increased by 55.0 percent, rising from 40 cases to 62 cases per investigator.

This reduction in workforce capacity corresponds with longer response times. Figure 4 shows that average CPS response times increased from 48 hours (2 days) in 2013 to 73 hours (3.04 days) in 2023. The most recent child maltreatment report indicates that Alabama's average response time remains faster than the national average of 102 hours (4.3 days) but slower than the national median response time of 69 hours (2.9 days).¹⁰

Figure 5 shows that the number of child maltreatment victims was 8,809 in 2013, peaked at 12,158 in 2018, and declined slightly to 11,636 in 2023. The number of first-time victims followed a similar trend;

⁶ Alabama Department of Human Resources. (2024, July). *2023 Annual Report*. <https://dhr.alabama.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/2023-Annual-Report-RGB-WEB.pdf>. See page 8.

⁷ Alabama Department of Human Resources. (n.d.). *2018 Annual Report*. <https://dhr.alabama.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/018AnnRpt.pdf>. See page 24.

⁸ Alabama Department of Human Resources. (2024, July). *2023 Annual Report*. <https://dhr.alabama.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/2023-Annual-Report-RGB-WEB.pdf>. See page 23.

⁹ U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children's Bureau. (2025). *Child maltreatment 2023*. Available from <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/data-research/child-maltreatment>. See page 11.

¹⁰ U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children's Bureau. (2025). *Child maltreatment 2023*. Available from <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/data-research/child-maltreatment>. See page 9.

however, the number of children who experienced maltreatment more than once increased steadily by 54.9 percent between 2013 and 2023. Table 2 also indicates that infants (younger than one year old) remain the most likely to be victims of child maltreatment compared to any other single age group from birth to age 17. In 2023, 17.3 percent of all child maltreatment victims were infants, exceeding the national average of 14.2 percent.¹¹

Figure 6 shows that the number of children who died from abuse or neglect in Alabama has fluctuated since 2013 but increased overall by 34.4 percent, or 11 children, over the last ten years. In 2023, Alabama's child fatality rate was 3.80 per 100,000 children, higher than the national average of 2.73. Thus, more children in Alabama died from abuse and neglect compared to the national rate.

Table 2 highlights that victims of child maltreatment in 2023 were more likely to be female (54.1 percent) than male (45.8 percent). White children represented 58.5 percent of maltreatment victims, Black children 31.5 percent, and children of other racial and ethnic groups 10.0 percent. For comparison, White children represented 56.1 percent of Alabama's total child population, Black children represented 28.3 percent, and other racial and ethnic groups represented 15.6 percent. Therefore, both White and Black children were overrepresented among child maltreatment victims relative to their share of the child population.

In 2023, physical abuse (5,041 victims) was the most frequently reported type of maltreatment, followed by neglect (3,698 victims) and sexual abuse (1,613 victims)—a trend consistent across the three reporting years. Although sex trafficking remains a relatively rare form of maltreatment, the number of reported child sex trafficking victims increased from one in 2018 to six in 2023. Figure 7 shows that there were 8,275 perpetrators of child maltreatment in Alabama in 2023, and approximately 72.0 percent were parents of the victim—a trend consistent across reporting periods.

In Alabama's Fiscal Year 2023, 9,132 children were in the state's public foster care system, according to data from the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis System (AFCARS).¹² Of the 3,710 children who entered foster care in 2023, 85 percent were entering for the first time, 6 percent were reentering within 12 months of a prior episode, and 9 percent were reentering more than 12 months after a prior episode. Many entries into foster care are related to child maltreatment. Table 3 shows that in 2023, 26.2 percent of entries were due to neglect, 17.0 percent to physical abuse, and 4.8 percent to sexual abuse.

As shown in Figure 8, the number of children in foster care in Alabama increased by 33.0 percent from 7,322 in 2013 to a peak of 9,741 in 2019, declined for a few years, and then rose again to 9,132 in 2023. Between 2013 and 2018, more children entered the foster care system than exited the system, contributing to a rise in the number of children in care at the end of the fiscal year that peaked at 5,930 children in 2018. Beginning in 2019, entries and exits became more balanced, and in 2020 and 2021, more children

¹¹ U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children's Bureau. (2025). *Child maltreatment 2023*. Available from <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/data-research/child-maltreatment>. See Table 3-5, page 42.

¹² U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Children's Bureau. (n.d.). *AFCARS data dashboard*. <https://www.acf.gov/cb/research-data-technology/statistics-research/afcars>

exited the system than entered it, resulting in temporary declines in the number of children in care. However, from 2022 to 2023, entries increased while exits decreased, bringing the number of children in care at the end of FY2023 to 5,974.

Table 4 shows the age and race distribution of children served in Alabama’s foster care system in FY2023. Infants had a disproportionately high rate of entry (19.5 percent) and a low rate of exit (6.2 percent) yet represented only 7.8 percent of children in care on the last day of the fiscal year. Toddlers had a higher rate of exit than entry, accounting for 13.5 percent of entries and 17.6 percent of exits. Children in late childhood and early adolescence had relatively similar distributions across entries, exits, and year-end totals, with late childhood representing roughly 11–12 percent and early adolescence about 34 percent across these measures. Children in late adolescence accounted for 21.2 percent of entries, 19.9 percent of exits, and 24.7 percent of children in care at year-end.

As noted earlier, Alabama’s child population is 56.1 percent White, 28.3 percent Black, and 15.6 percent other racial groups. White and Black children were overrepresented in foster care in 2023. White children accounted for 62.4 percent of entries, 64.8 percent of exits, and 58.8 percent of children in care at year-end. Black children accounted for 30.3 percent of entries, 26.9 percent of exits, and 33.8 percent of children in care at year-end. Hispanic children accounted for 7.2 percent of entries and 5.9 percent of exits, while children of two or more races represented 5.2 percent of entries and 7.0 percent of exits.

Table 5 provides a detailed look at exits from foster care in 2023. Of the 3,326 children who exited foster care, 61.7 percent were reunified with their family of origin, 22.2 percent exited through adoption, and 6.1 percent exited through guardianship. For children with a diagnosed disability, the reunification rate was lower (38.9 percent), while the adoption rate was higher (39.1 percent) compared to all children. Across all racial and ethnic groups, reunification remained the most common exit pathway in 2023. White children and children of two or more races had the highest adoption rates, while Black children had a higher rate of exit to guardianship and a lower adoption rate.

Table 5 shows the amount of time children spent in Alabama’s foster care system before existing via adoption or reunification in 2023. Nearly two-thirds of children who exited through reunification had spent less than one year in foster care, and an additional 23.4 percent were reunified within two years. The remaining 10.4 percent spent up to three, four, or more years in care before reunification. Among children adopted in 2023, only 1.9 percent had spent less than one year in care. Most adopted children spent one to two years (32.1 percent) or two to three years (32.7 percent) in care, although many spent three to four years or longer before adoption.

3. 2023 Cost Estimate

Child maltreatment imposes significant and long-lasting economic costs on Alabama. This report provides an updated estimate of the tangible lifetime cost associated with the state’s 2023 first-time substantiated victim cohort, reflecting the most recent data available. Building on earlier CBER studies from 2013 and 2018, this analysis offers a fresh assessment of the monetary impact of child abuse and neglect and highlights the continued burden these preventable harms place on children, families, and Alabama’s economy.

CBER estimates that the total cost of child maltreatment to the Alabama economy in 2023 is \$6.6 billion. This report presents the tangible cost of child maltreatment (or child abuse and neglect) to the Alabama economy and serves as an update to previous studies, which conservatively estimated that the cost of child maltreatment was \$3.7 billion in 2018 and \$2.7 billion in 2013. The analysis focuses exclusively on tangible costs for the substantiated first-time victim cohort; and therefore, does not include the substantial intangible impacts—pain, suffering, trauma, and long-term social consequences—experienced by victims, families, and communities. According to the National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect (NDACAN), seven primary forms of maltreatment are recognized: medical neglect, neglect, physical abuse, psychological maltreatment, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, and sex trafficking. Young adults who experienced maltreatment face markedly different life trajectories than their peers. They are more likely to encounter the criminal justice system with felony charges, become parents during adolescence, grow up in or transition into households with poverty or housing assistance, and rely on Medicaid. They are also more likely to be working and less likely to be enrolled in school between ages 18 and 22, reflecting disrupted educational pathways and earlier, less stable entry into the labor force.¹³

Since the last update to this report, several studies have attempted to estimate the economic burden of child maltreatment at the state level. Economists at the University of Tennessee estimated that the annual cost of child maltreatment in Tennessee ranges from \$3.33 to \$4.97 billion, based on 2018 victim data and conservative discount-rate assumptions—approaches the authors note likely understate the full economic burden.¹⁴ A study examining 71,156 child victims in California in 2017 estimated an economic burden of \$19.3 billion, employing an incidence-based framework with cost categories comparable to those used in this report.¹⁵ The Alaska Children’s Trust estimated a \$2.3 billion economic burden based on 3,319 victims in 2019 using the value per statistical life/quality-adjusted life-years (VSL/QALY) method.¹⁶ The Children’s Trust of South Carolina reports a substantially higher total economic impact of \$74.2 billion, including \$21.6 billion in labor income losses, although this estimate is based not on a single year’s incidence but on an estimated 2.6 million adults who experienced at least one adverse childhood experience (ACE) during childhood.¹⁷ For Alabama, Klika et al. (2020) estimated the lifetime economic burden of child maltreatment to be approximately \$10 billion for 12,158 substantiated cases and more than \$32 billion for 38,634 investigated cases, including 43 fatalities.¹⁸ Furthermore, it is estimated that

¹³ Ratcliff, S., Finlay, K., Papp, J., Kearns, M. C., Holditch Niolon, P., & Peterson, C. (2025). Adverse childhood experiences: Increased likelihood of socioeconomic disadvantages for young adults. *Health Affairs*, 44(1), 108–116.

<https://doi.org/10.1377/hlthaff.2024.00827>

¹⁴ Harris, M., & Pratt, E. (2023). The economic costs of child abuse and neglect in Tennessee. Boyd Center for Business and Economic Research Technical Report, The University of Tennessee, Knoxville. <https://haslam.utk.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/TCCY-REPORT-JUNE-2023.pdf>

¹⁵ Collier, P., Reid, L., Chait, V., & Albright, K. (2019). *The economics of child abuse: A study of California*. Safe & Sound. <https://safeandsound.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Safe-Sound-2019-CA-Report.pdf>

¹⁶ Klouda, N. (2022). *Economic costs of child abuse and neglect in Alaska in 2019*. Children’s Trust of Alaska. <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/61fef737004f564915c6b3cd/t/629f95163148e2471f9caf2d/1654625559280/Economic%20Cost%20of%20Child%20Abuse%20and%20Neglect.pdf>

¹⁷ Von Nessen, J. C. (2025). *Estimating the economic impact of child abuse and neglect in South Carolina*. University of South Carolina, prepared for Children’s Trust of South Carolina. <https://scchildren.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/Estimating-the-Economic-Impact-of-Child-Abuse-and-Neglect-in-South-Carolina.pdf>

¹⁸ Klika, J. B., Rosenzweig, J., & Merrick, M. (2020). Economic burden of known cases of child maltreatment from 2018 in each state. *Child & Adolescent Social Work Journal*, 37(3), 227–234. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10560-020-00665-5>

adults that experience at least one ACE had \$88,000 in annual medical spending, and \$2.4 million in medical spending and lost-healthy life years over their lifetime.¹⁹

Although these studies vary in scope and methodology, they consistently show that child maltreatment imposes multi-billion-dollar economic consequences. Estimating these costs, however, presents several methodological challenges. Tangible and intangible costs are conceptually distinct and cannot be combined, as intangible harms—such as pain, grief, and psychological trauma—do not correspond directly to monetary values and do not scale proportionally with the number of victims. Methods relying on survey-based valuations, including VSL and QALY approaches, may also reflect limited respondent information or context, introducing potential bias.

Another methodological consideration concerns the choice of which victim count to use. This report uses the number of first-time victims in the year of incidence, providing a consistent cohort for estimating lifetime costs and preventing double-counting across reports. While not all maltreatment events are reported, this approach yields a clear, incidence-based estimate of tangible economic costs. As a result, the estimates presented here reflect the tangible lifetime burden of Alabama’s 2023 first-time substantiated victim cohort and should be interpreted as conservative lower-bound estimates.

The 2023 cohort includes 9,194 first-time victims, 43 fatalities, 6,044 infants born at low birthweight (based on Alabama Department of Public Health Natality Query data),²⁰ and children incurring (i) child-welfare-related expenditures, (ii) police intervention costs, and (iii) medical costs not captured elsewhere. These categories represent the channels through which maltreatment generates significant long-term economic consequences.

Child maltreatment contributes to preventable infant mortality and low birthweight, chronic physical and mental health challenges,²¹ developmental delays,²² lower educational attainment,²³ reduced labor force productivity,²⁴ and increased violence.²⁵ To estimate these impacts, this report draws on the best available secondary data and primary data from the Healthcare Cost and Utilization Project (HCUP), sponsored by the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ). In addition, CBER compiled data

¹⁹ Peterson, C., Aslam, M. V., Niolon, P. H., Merrick, M. T., Simon, T. R., & Wang, J. (2023). Economic burden of health conditions associated with adverse childhood experiences among U.S. adults. *JAMA Network Open*, 6(12), e2346323. <https://doi.org/10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2023.46323>

²⁰ Alabama Department of Public Health. (n.d.). *Natality query system*. <https://dph1.adph.state.al.us/csc/vs/Query/Natality/NatalityQrySLT.htm>

²¹ Baldwin, J. R., Wang, B., Karwatowska, L., Schoeler, T., Tsaligopoulou, A., Munafò, M. R., & Pingault, J.-B. (2023). Childhood maltreatment and mental health problems: A systematic review and meta-analysis of quasi-experimental studies. *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 180(2), 117–126. <https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.ajp.20220174>

²² Perrigo, J. L., Berkovits, L. D., Cederbaum, J. A., Williams, M. E., & Hurlburt, M. S. (2018). Child abuse and neglect report rates for young children with developmental delays. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 83, 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2018.05.029>

²³ Ryan, J. P., Jacob, B. A., Gross, M., Perron, B. E., Moore, A., & Ferguson, S. (2018). Early exposure to child maltreatment and academic outcomes. *Child Maltreatment*, 23(4), 365–375. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077559518786815>

²⁴ Bunting, L., Davidson, G., McCartan, C., Hanratty, J., Bywaters, P., Mason, W., & Steils, N. (2018). The association between child maltreatment and adult poverty: A systematic review of longitudinal research. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 77, 121–133. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2017.12.022>

²⁵ Fitton, L., Yu, R., & Fazel, S. (2020). Childhood maltreatment and violent outcomes: A systematic review and meta-analysis of prospective studies. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, 21(4), 754–768. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1524838018795269>

from the Alabama Department of Labor, the Alabama Department of Youth Services, and the Alabama Department of Corrections.

The period covered in this report (2019–2023) coincides with the COVID-19 pandemic and a subsequent period of high rates of inflation, both of which affect the interpretation of trends in child maltreatment and associated economic costs.

Empirical studies show that pandemic-related economic shocks — particularly parental job loss²⁶ and parental stress²⁷ — increased the risk of psychological maltreatment and physical abuse, even as opportunities for detection declined. Administrative and clinical evidence further demonstrates that reported cases fell sharply during the early months of the pandemic due to school closures²⁸ and reduced contact with mandated reporters.²⁹ At the same time, a clinical study documents increases in certain forms of maltreatment—such as neglect, emotional abuse, and sentinel injuries (i.e., non-accidental or unexplained injuries)—among children presenting to pediatric emergency departments.³⁰ Together, these findings suggest that observed declines in reported child maltreatment victims during the pandemic likely understate true incidence.

The Child Maltreatment 2023 report published by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services provides additional context for these patterns.³¹ States screened-in the largest number of child maltreatment referrals in FY 2019 and the lowest number in FY 2021, with many states citing the COVID-19 pandemic as a primary factor contributing to the decline in screened-in referrals. Although the number of screened-in referrals increased by FY 2023, it remained below FY 2019 levels in most states. In contrast, estimated total referrals nationally in FY 2023 were similar to FY 2019 levels. State-level changes in the number of identified victims between FY 2019 and FY 2023 ranged widely, with states attributing these differences to a combination of pandemic-related effects and changes in child welfare policy and practice.

In Alabama, child welfare screening protocols and investigation requirements remained unchanged during the COVID-19 pandemic. The state did not modify screening criteria, requirements for

²⁶ Lawson, M., Piel, M. H., & Simon, M. (2020). Child maltreatment during the COVID-19 pandemic: Consequences of parental job loss on psychological and physical abuse towards children. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 110(Pt. 2), 104709. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2020.104709>

²⁷ Wu, Q., & Xu, Y. (2020). Parenting stress and risk of child maltreatment during the COVID-19 pandemic: A family stress theory-informed perspective. *Developmental Child Welfare*, 2(3), 180–196. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2516103220967937>

²⁸ Rapoport, E., Reiser, H., Schoeman, E., & Adelman, A. (2021). Reporting of child maltreatment during the COVID-19 pandemic in New York City from 2015 to 2020. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 116(Pt. 2), 104719. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2020.104719>

²⁹ Thome, J. C., Gracey, K., Epstein, R. A., Cull, M. J., Kuhn, T., & Raman, R. (2024). Reporting of child maltreatment during the COVID-19 pandemic in a southern state in the United States. *Public Health Reports*, 140(1_suppl), 50S–60S. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00333549241245846>

³⁰ Sharma, S., Wong, D., Schomberg, J., Knudsen-Robbins, C., Gibbs, D., Berkowitz, C., & Heyming, T. (2021). COVID-19: Differences in sentinel injury and child abuse reporting during a pandemic. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 116(Pt. 2), 104990. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2021.104990>

³¹ U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children’s Bureau. (2025). *Child maltreatment 2023*. Available from <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/data-research/child-maltreatment>.

in-person investigations, or investigation completion timeframes in response to the pandemic. Furthermore, a policy change implemented in FY 2017 reduced the allowable timeframe for completing child abuse and neglect investigations from 90 days to 60 days, and this requirement remained in effect throughout the study period.³²

It is also important to note that inflationary pressures beginning in 2021 increased economic costs across multiple sectors central to child maltreatment-related expenditures, including healthcare and social services.³³ As a result, total economic costs may rise even when the number of identified victims declines. Accordingly, the cost estimates presented in this report should be interpreted in context of an unprecedented period of significant public health, economic, and systemic disruption.

Finally, this analysis employs an “additional cost” framework, calculating only the costs above those expected for children who have not experienced maltreatment. The sections that follow describe the cost components and methods used to estimate the total economic burden of child abuse and neglect in Alabama for 2023. Due to data limitations, the cost of early intervention services for developmental delays is not included in this report.

3.1. Low Birthweight

Low birthweight remains one of the most costly and visible consequences linked to prenatal maltreatment. In 2018, the additional medical costs associated with low birthweight were estimated at \$91.4 million. This estimate captured the heightened need for newborn hospitalization, rehospitalization within the first year, and other medical services required for infants born too small or too early. The per-infant cost was calculated by updating Noor and Caldwell’s (2005) estimate of \$54,510 (in 2002 dollars) using the July Consumer Price Index Medical Care Series (114.21) and the 2013 additional cost estimate of \$79,345, resulting in an updated 2018 cost of \$90,617.37 per low birthweight baby.³⁴ Applied to the 6,186 low birthweight births reported by the Alabama Department of Public Health (ADPH) in 2018—using the attribution rate applied at the time—this produced the \$91.4 million estimate.

More recent research provides the basis for updated cost estimates. Beam et al. (2020) found that low-birthweight infants incurred \$114,437 in healthcare spending in 2016, compared to \$6,743 for infants born at normal weight—an explicit cost difference of \$107,694 per low-birthweight baby.³⁵ Adjusting this difference using the July 2023 Medical Care CPI (104.59) yields a 2023 per-infant cost of \$112,641. Low birth weight is a significant risk factor of infant maltreatment.³⁶ However, few studies clearly quantify the

³² U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children’s Bureau. (2025). *Child maltreatment 2023*. Available from <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/data-research/child-maltreatment>. See Appendix D: State Commentary for Alabama, pages 127-128.

³³ Blanchard, O. J., & Bernanke, B. S. (2023). *What caused the U.S. pandemic-era inflation?* (NBER Working Paper No. 31417). National Bureau of Economic Research. <https://www.nber.org/papers/w31417>

³⁴ Noor, I. & Caldwell, R. A. (2005). The Cost of Child Abuse vs. Child Abuse Prevention: A Multi-year Follow-up in Michigan.

³⁵ Beam, A. L., Fried, I., Palmer, N., Agniel, D., Brat, G., Fox, K., Kohane, I., Sinaiko, A., Zupancic, J. A. F., & Armstrong, J. (2020). Estimates of healthcare spending for preterm and low-birthweight infants in a commercially insured population: 2008–2016. *Journal of Perinatology*, 40(7), 1091–1099. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41372-020-0635-z>

³⁶ Wu, S. S., Ma, C.-X., Carter, R. L., Ariet, M., Feaver, E. A., Resnick, M. B., & Roth, J. (2004). Risk factors for infant maltreatment: A population-based study. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 28(12), 1253–1264. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2004.07.005>

number of children who are born low birth weight due to maltreatment. One study does show that in a sample of 383 adolescent mothers, 35 had low birth weight infants, and 13 of those low-birth-weight infants, or 37.1 percent, had a “neglectful mother.”³⁷ Applying this estimate as a proxy to Alabama’s 6,044 low birthweight births in 2023 yields an estimated additional cost associated with low birthweight rises to \$252.6 million ($6,044 * 37.1\% * \$112,641 = \$252,577,618$). This increase reflects both rising medical care expenses and the continued prevalence of low birthweight among Alabama newborns.

3.2. Chronic Illness (Childhood Asthma)

The cost of chronic illness among maltreated children—using asthma as a proxy—was estimated to impose a \$23.7 million burden on the Alabama economy in 2018. The calculation used the Consumer Price Index Medical Care Series (CPI-MCS) July factor of 114.21 to update costs from 2013 and the CM2018 first-time maltreated child victims count of 10,043. Ideally, this cost component should reflect the difference in chronic illness occurrence between maltreated and non-maltreated children; however, the 30 percent rate is used here as an approximation,³⁸ allowing for the inclusion of other chronic illnesses beyond asthma.

For 2023, a similar calculation was conducted using the Consumer Price Index Medical Care Series (CPI-MCS) July factors of 128.68 (2013–2023) to update the 2013 average pediatric asthma cost of \$8,344 per child, which ranged from \$3,076 to \$13,612.³⁹ Applying these factors results in an estimated 2023 per child costs of \$3,958 (low estimate), \$10,737 (midpoint), and \$17,517 (high estimate) (calculated as cost $128.68/100$). Using the CM2023 first-time maltreated child victims count of 9,194, and assuming that 30 percent of maltreated children experience chronic illnesses,⁴⁰ the cost of chronic illness among maltreated children, using asthma as a proxy, was estimated to have an average \$29.6 million burden on Alabama’s economy in 2023. This estimate was derived as follows: $30\% * 9,194 * \$10,737 = \$29,614,793$, with the total cost range estimated between \$10.9 million (low estimate) and \$48.3 million (high estimate).

3.3. Childhood Mental Health Care

The cost of childhood mental health care attributable to child maltreatment in Alabama was estimated to range from \$13.5 million to \$26.9 million in 2018. These figures were calculated by updating 2013 cost estimates using the July Consumer Price Index Medical Care Series (CPI-MCS) factor of 114.21 and applying them to the 10,043 first-time maltreated child victims recorded in CM2018. Underlying these estimates is research from the National Institute of Justice showing that maltreated children are 25 to 50

³⁷ Bartlett, J. D., Raskin, M., Kotake, C., Nearing, K. D., & Easterbrooks, M. A. (2014). An ecological analysis of infant neglect by adolescent mothers. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 38(4), 723–734. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2013.11.011>

³⁸ Fromm, S. (2004). *Total estimated cost of child abuse and neglect in the United States. Perspectives on Youth*, Summer/Fall 2004.

³⁹ Nurmagambetov, T., Kuwahara, R., & Garbe, P. (2018). The economic burden of asthma in the United States, 2008–2013. *Annals of the American Thoracic Society*, 15(3), 348–356. <https://doi.org/10.1513/AnnalsATS.201703-259OC>

⁴⁰ Fromm, S. (2004). *Total estimated cost of child abuse and neglect in the United States. Perspectives on Youth*, Summer/Fall 2004.

percent more likely than non-maltreated children to need mental health care at an average cost of \$4,695 per child (in 2013 dollars).⁴¹

For 2023, the same method was applied, updating the 2018 values with the July CPI-MCS factor of 112.67 and applying them to the 9,194 first-time maltreated victims identified in CM2023. This produced the following estimates:

- Low-end: $\$13,463,098 * (112.67 / 100) * (9,194 / 10,043) = \$13,886,549$
- High-end: $\$26,926,195 * (112.67 / 100) * (9,194 / 10,043) = \$27,773,097$

The midpoint estimate for 2023 is \$20.8 million. As with the earlier analysis, the calculations assume—consistent with the previous report—that 25 to 50 percent of maltreated children require mental health treatment.

3.4. Law Enforcement (Maltreatment-Related Interventions)

The total cost to law enforcement in Alabama attributable to child maltreatment interventions in 2023 is estimated at \$646,505. This estimate is derived by adjusting the 2018 cost of \$582,182 for inflation and by incorporating the national cost estimate that annual law enforcement expenditures related to child maltreatment total \$34,279,048 in 2012 dollars⁴²—an update of the National Institute of Justice’s earlier cost estimates for police service interventions across different types of child maltreatment.⁴³ The calculation also accounts for the relative size of the 2023 first-time maltreated child victim cohort. Specifically, the estimate applies to the July Consumer Price Index (CPI) factor of 121.30 and scales the cost by the ratio of first-time victims in 2023 to those in 2018 (i.e., $\$582,182 * (121.30 / 100) * 9,194 / 10,043 = \$646,505$). In addition, the estimate reflects Alabama’s child population proportion factor of 0.015549488 as a share of the total U.S. child population.

3.5. Other Childhood Medical Costs

CBER originally estimated other childhood medical costs related to child maltreatment at \$1,558,097 in 2013,⁴⁴ later updating that amount to \$2,472,114 for 2018.⁴⁵ These estimates were derived from Healthcare Cost and Utilization Project (HCUP) data, capturing medical encounters coded specifically for child abuse and maltreatment. To bring this category forward to 2023, the estimate is adjusted for medical inflation and for changes in the size of the first-time maltreated child victim cohort.

⁴¹ Miller, Ted R., Cohen, Mark A. & Wiersema, Brian. (1996). *Victim costs and consequences: A new look*. National Institute of Justice Research Report: 12-14.

⁴² Gelles, R., & Perlman, S. (2012). *Estimated annual cost of child abuse and neglect*. Chicago, IL.: Prevent Child Abuse America.

⁴³ Miller, Ted R., Cohen, Mark A. & Wiersema, Brian. (1996). *Victim costs and consequences: A new look*. National Institute of Justice Research Report: 12-14.

⁴⁴ Boschung, M., Kendrick, A., Addy, S., Bell, G., Ijaz, A., Riiman, V. (2015). *The cost of child maltreatment to the Alabama Economy in 2013*. Center for Business and Economic Research Technical Report, University of Alabama.

⁴⁵ Usdan, M., Kendrick, A., Addy, S., Ijaz, A., Black, N., Robichaux, S. (2021). *The cost of child maltreatment to the Alabama Economy in 2018*. Center for Business and Economic Research Technical Report, University of Alabama.

Applying the CPI-Medical Care Series factors of 128.68 (2013–2023), along with the updated cohort count of 9,194 first-time victims in 2023 compared to 10,043 in 2018, the resulting cost is approximately \$1.84 million. The calculation is the sum of the medical cost codes (\$1,558,151) in the HCUP associated with child maltreatment in 2013 adjusted for the medical inflation. The calculation is as follows: $\$1,558,151 * (128.68/100) * 9,194/10,043 = 1,835,595$. This results in an estimated per-victim cost of about \$199.65, though not all maltreated children will incur these specific medical expenses.

3.6. Special Education

National data show that maltreated children are significantly more likely to require special education services. Based on a nationally representative sample, approximately 25 percent of school-aged children (ages 6–17) who experienced maltreatment received special education services,⁴⁶ compared to 15 percent of all public school students in the United States in 2022–23 and 13 percent of Alabama students in the same year.⁴⁷ During this period, Alabama’s per pupil expenditure (from local, state, and federal sources) grew, in real dollars, from \$9,823 in 2018 to \$12,476 in FY 2023.⁴⁸ According to the Alabama Department of Education, the state spent \$891 million on special education services for 131,000 students with disabilities in the 2022–23 school year. These costs—covering teachers, specialized services, transportation, testing, and supplies—are in addition to general education expenditures. This represents an estimated per-pupil cost of \$19,278, or 54.5 percent higher, or a cost of \$6,802 additional expenditures, than for students without special education needs.⁴⁹

Looking ahead, Alabama’s RAISE Act (Renewing Alabama’s Investment in Student Excellence), enacted in 2025 and implemented beginning in FY 2026, will introduce a tiered funding structure for special education based on student need. The new framework assigns supplementary funding at 2 percent for Tier I, 10 percent for Tier II, and 75 percent for Tier III of the base per pupil funding factor.⁵⁰ Future editions of this report will incorporate this updated structure to more precisely estimate the cost of special education for maltreated children.

For the present analysis, we update the number of students who need special education services from the 2018 report. CBER presumes that the annual additional cost of special education is applied across twelve years of schooling. Using a higher special education need of 12 percent (25 percent minus Alabama’s 13 percent baseline) and the \$6,802 additional cost adjustment, the estimated total additional special education cost for Alabama’s 2023 first-time victim cohort is nearly \$90.0 million. This is calculated as follows: $9,194 * 12\% * \$6,802 * 12 = \$90,054,127$.

⁴⁶ Casanueva, C., Smith, K., Dolan, M., & Ringeisen, H. (2011). NSCAW II baseline report: Maltreatment.

⁴⁷ National Center for Education Statistics. (2024). *Students with disabilities*. U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences. Retrieved [date], from <https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/cgg>.

⁴⁸ Crain, T. P. (2023, May 9). Alabama K-12 spending barely keeping pace with inflation. *Alabama Daily News*. <https://aldailynews.com/alabama-k-12-spending-barely-keeping-pace-with-inflation/>

⁴⁹ Crain, T. P. (2024, December 9). Alabama’s special education funding: Rising needs, rising costs. *Alabama Daily News*. <https://aldailynews.com/alabamas-special-education-funding-rising-needs-rising-costs/>

⁵⁰ Barrett, A. (2025, July 1). Alabama’s new public school funding model could take years to show impact. *Alabama Reflector*. <https://alabamareflector.com/2025/07/01/alabamas-new-public-school-funding-model-could-take-years-to-show-impact/>

3.7. Juvenile Delinquency

Nearly three percent of maltreated children become formally involved in the juvenile justice system within six years, on average, of their initial referral to Child Protective Services.⁵¹ Nationally, the most expensive option for juvenile confinement costs an average of \$588 per day, or \$214,620 per year in 2020—an increase of 44.0 percent since 2014.⁵² Research also shows that about 27.4 percent of maltreated children engage in delinquent acts during adolescence, compared to 17.2 percent of children in the general population, yielding a difference of 10.0 percent.⁵³

In Alabama, the average cost of housing a juvenile offender in a secure facility is \$47,808, based on an average daily cost of \$332 and an average stay of 144 days (4.7 months). According to the Deputy Director for Administration at the Alabama Department of Youth Services, the daily cost ranges from \$169 to \$495, depending on the level of treatment required. The estimated average cost of \$47,808 per juvenile in Alabama (adjusted to 2023 dollars). The Alabama estimate reflects a midpoint within the reported daily cost range, which is consistent with where many individual cases are likely to fall. Using the \$47,808 average cost, the 10.0 percent differential in delinquency, and assuming no recidivism, the estimated cost of juvenile delinquency attributable to the 2023 first-time maltreated child victim cohort approximately \$44.0 million (i.e., $10\% * 9,194 * \$47,808 = \$43,954,675$).

3.8. Adult Criminality

The Alabama Department of Corrections (ADOC) FY2021 Annual Report documented 25,186 inmates in the jurisdictional population. The system-wide average daily cost of incarceration was \$82.64, and the average length of incarceration for an adult was 40 months (approximately 3.33 years). With a recidivism rate of 29.2 percent, these figures provide the basis for estimating the economic burden of adult criminality associated with child maltreatment.⁵⁴ Using the reported daily cost, the annual cost of incarceration per adult is \$30,164 (i.e., $\$82.64 \times 365$). Over the average 3.33-year incarceration period, this amounts to \$100,444.79 (i.e., $\$30,164 \times 3.33$). These estimates do not include costs associated with courts, policing, or other components of the criminal justice system and therefore represent only a portion of the total economic impact. To estimate the share of these costs attributable to child maltreatment, the analysis applies the 9.0 percent differential,⁵⁵ in adult offending associated with maltreatment and adjusts for the 29.16 percent recidivism rate. Applied to the 2023 first-time victim cohort of 9,194 children, the resulting FY2021 cost of adult criminality attributable to child maltreatment is approximately \$107.4 million (i.e., $9,194 \times 9\% \times (1 + 29.16\%) \times \$30,164 \times 3.33 = \$107,351,523.16$).

⁵¹ Vidal, S., Prince, D., Connell, C. et al. (2017). Maltreatment, family environment, and social risk factors: Determinants of the child welfare to juvenile justice transition among maltreated children and adolescents. *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 63:7-18.

⁵² Justice Policy Institute. 2020. Sticker Shock 2020: *The cost of youth incarceration*. http://www.justicepolicy.org/uploads/justicepolicy/documents/Sticker_Shock_2020.pdf

⁵³ Widom, C. S., & Maxfield, M. G. (2001). *An update on the "Cycle of Violence"*. National Institute of Justice Research in Brief, U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs.

⁵⁴ Alabama Department of Corrections. (2021). *Annual report: Fiscal year 2021*. <https://www.doc.state.al.us/StateReports.aspx>

⁵⁵ Widom, C. S., & Maxfield, M. G. (2001). *An update on the "Cycle of Violence"*. National Institute of Justice Research in Brief, U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs.

Because this cost estimate is reported in FY2021 dollars, CBER adjusted the cost for inflation using the July 2023 CPI factor of 119.74. After this adjustment, the final estimated cost to the Alabama economy is \$128.5 million (i.e., $\$107,351,523.16 \times 119.74/100$).

3.9. Adult Mental Health and Health Care

Children who experience abuse or neglect often require more intensive general and mental health care as adults and, as a result, incur significantly higher lifetime health costs. It is estimated that women who experienced physical or sexual abuse in childhood had annual health care expenditures that were \$382 higher (in 2004 dollars) than those of women without a history of abuse.⁵⁶ Adjusted to 2023 dollars using the Consumer Price Index for Medical Care Services, this differential equal approximately \$785 annually per victim.

More recent national research reinforces these findings. Adults with adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) exhibit substantially higher health care utilization and spend 26.3 percent more on health care annually, compared to their adult peers who did not have any ACEs. Among the 157.6 million U.S. adults with ACEs, this amounted to an aggregate spending difference of \$292 billion in 2021, or an additional \$1,852.79 per person per year.⁵⁷ Using an estimated adult life span of 61.4 years (from age 17 to 78.4, according to CDC life expectancy data),⁵⁸ the resulting high-end lifetime health cost attributable to child maltreatment is \$113,761 per victim (i.e., $\$1,853 \times 61.4 = \$113,761$).

The low-end estimate is derived from the 2018 report and adjusted to 2023 dollars. Applying the 2023 CPI factor of 112.67, the estimated annual additional cost remains \$785 per victim, producing a lifetime cost of \$48,199 (i.e., $\$785 \times 61.4 = \$48,199$). Using Alabama's 2023 first-time child maltreatment victim cohort of 9,194 children, the total additional adult health care cost to the state's economy is estimated to range from \$443.1 million to \$1.046 billion, based on the low- and high-end lifetime cost estimates. To provide a conservative single estimate, the midpoint cost of \$80,980.09 per victim is applied, yielding an estimated \$744.5 million in lifetime health care costs associated with the 2023 first-time victim cohort (i.e., $9,194 \times \$80,980 = \$744,530,947$).

3.10. Adult Homelessness

Research consistently shows that childhood maltreatment significantly increases the risk of homelessness in adulthood. For example, homeless young adults were more likely to have run away from home (41.3% vs. 7.0%), been ordered out by parents (45.5% vs. 9.0%), experienced physical aggression (52.0% vs. 28.3%), or suffered sexual abuse (11.8% vs. 4.4%).⁵⁹ More recent evidence from longitudinal U.S.

⁵⁶ Bonomi, A., Anderson, M., Rivara, F., Cannon, E., Fishman, P., Carrell, D., Reid, R. J., Thompson, R. (2008). Health care utilization and costs associated with child abuse. *Journal of General Internal Medicine*, 23(3), 294-299.

⁵⁷ Selden, T. M., Bernard, D. M., Decker, S. L., & Fang, Z. (2024). Adverse childhood experiences: Health care utilization and expenditures in adulthood. *Health Affairs*, 43(8), 1117–1127. <https://doi.org/10.1377/hlthaff.2023.01271>

⁵⁸ Murphy, S. L., Kochanek, K. D., Xu, J. Q., & Arias, E. (2024). *Mortality in the United States, 2023* (NCHS Data Brief No. 521). National Center for Health Statistics. <https://doi.org/10.15620/cdc/170564>

⁵⁹ Shelton, K. H., Taylor, P. J., Bonner, A., & van den Bree, M. (2009). Risk factors for homelessness: Evidence from a population-based study. *Psychiatric Services*, 60(4), 465-472

studies shows that individuals with documented childhood maltreatment are approximately 2.0 times more likely to report ever being homeless (25.6% vs. 12.3%) and that maltreatment is associated with homelessness well into later adulthood.⁶⁰

In FY2023, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) allocated \$19,580,838 to Alabama's Continuum of Care (CoC) programs,⁶¹ serving 3,304 homeless individuals statewide.⁶² Dividing total funding by the number of individuals served yields an average cost per person of \$5,926, which includes emergency shelter, transitional housing, supportive services, and related administrative costs. Using the \$5,926 average cost on housing services, the estimated cost of adult homelessness attributable to the 2023 first-time maltreated child victim cohort is \$7.25 million (i.e., 13.3% * 9,194 * \$5,926 = \$7,246,325).

3.11. Low Worker Productivity (of Victims)

Child abuse and neglect have lasting economic consequences, particularly through their impact on lifetime productivity. Adults with documented histories of childhood maltreatment earn, on average, \$5,108 less per year in 2004 real dollars than their non-maltreated peers, a substantial earnings gap that persists across the life course.⁶³ More recent evidence underscores the magnitude of this loss, such that exposure to ACEs is associated with significant reductions in annual earnings. According to the study, adults with no ACE exposure earned \$15,289.60 in 2018 real dollars more per year than those with any ACEs; individuals with one to two ACEs earned \$14,570.13 less; and those with three or more ACEs earned \$17,404.46 less annually.⁶⁴ Because maltreated children are disproportionately represented among those with ACE exposure, these figures offer a reasonable benchmark for estimating the expected productivity loss attributable to child maltreatment.

Consistent with prior CBER reports, the productivity loss calculation uses Alabama's average work-life expectancy of 37 years.⁶⁵ Applying the conservative annual productivity loss estimate of \$15,289.60, and converting the cost for inflation in 2023 dollars ($\$18,546.75 = \$15,289.60 * 121.30/100$), the first-time child maltreatment victim cohort of 9,194 children is projected to incur a total lifetime productivity loss of \$6.3 billion (i.e., $9,194 * 37 * \$18,546.75 = \$6,309,196,322$).

⁶⁰ Widom, C. S., Courtney, K., & Do, H. H. (2024). Pathways to homelessness: Childhood maltreatment and psychiatric symptoms increase risk of homelessness. *The American Journal of Psychiatry*, 181(12), 1103–1111. <https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.ajp.20230649>

⁶¹ U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. (2024). *Continuum of Care (CoC) program award summary: Alabama (FY 2023)*. https://files.hudexchange.info/reports/published/CoC_AwardComp_State_AL_2023.pdf

⁶² U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. (2024). *FY 2023 Continuum of Care (CoC) homelessness population and subpopulation report: Alabama* [PDF]. https://files.hudexchange.info/reports/published/CoC_PopSub_State_AL_2023.pdf

⁶³ Currie, J., & Widom, C. S. (2010). Long-term consequences of child abuse and neglect on adult economic well-being. *Child Maltreatment*, 15(2), 111–120.

⁶⁴ Easton, S. D., & Sanzenbacher, G. T. (2024). *Adverse childhood experiences and long-term economic well-being: understanding mechanisms to explain group differences in net worth* (Boston College Working Paper No. 1066). Boston College, Department of Economics. <https://ideas.repec.org/p/boc/bocoec/1066.html>

⁶⁵ Gilbert, S. 2018. *Worklife Expectancy and Earning Capacity in Personal Injury Cases*. Unpublished manuscript, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale. At <https://www.aeaweb.org/conference/2019/preliminary/paper/Yi9E4T6k>.

3.12. Low Worker Productivity (due to Mortality)

In 2023, Alabama experienced 47 child fatalities resulting from abuse or neglect.⁶⁶ Beyond the profound human tragedy, these deaths also represent the permanent loss of future workers who would have contributed to the state's economy. Using the 2023 average annual wage in Alabama of \$50,730⁶⁷ and adjusting for the lower expected earnings associated with childhood maltreatment, the projected annual earnings for these children is conservatively estimated at \$32,183.⁶⁸⁻⁶⁹ This estimate is consistent with extant research, which calculated a comparable cost of approximately \$1.4 million per fatality in 2013 dollars.⁷⁰ Applying the Alabama-specific estimate to the 47 fatalities recorded in 2023 results in a total economic loss of \$56.0 million (i.e., $\$32,183 * 37 * 47 = \$55,966,237$). Therefore, the associated lifetime productivity loss is \$1,190,780 per person, assuming an average work-life expectancy of 37 years.

4. Concluding Comments

Child maltreatment imposes a profound and measurable economic burden on Alabama. In 2023, the tangible lifetime cost to the state is conservatively estimated at more than \$8.0 billion, reflecting only the substantiated first-time victim cohort. This estimate does not capture the substantial intangible and secondary costs borne by families, extended kin networks, and communities—costs that, while difficult to quantify, meaningfully deepen the economic impact.

A central driver of the state's economic loss is diminished workforce productivity. Lost productivity alone accounts for nearly \$6.4 billion, underscoring the direct connection between child wellbeing and Alabama's long-term economic growth, labor force stability, and competitiveness.

Despite the scale of these losses, the state invests modestly in prevention. Alabama's FY2023 budget for the Department of Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention/The Children's Trust Fund (CTF) totaled \$20.6 million. In contrast, the \$8.0 billion economic burden represents approximately 3.2 percent of Alabama's gross domestic product (GDP) of 248.3 billion in 2023. Applying this share to the state's \$16.6 billion in FY2023 net tax revenues yields an implied fiscal impact of \$535.9 million—26.0 times larger than CTF's annual budget.

⁶⁶ U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children's Bureau. (2025). *Child maltreatment 2023*. <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/data-research/child-maltreatment>

⁶⁷ Bureau of Labor Statistics, Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW). <http://data.bls.gov/cgi-bin/dsrv>

⁶⁸ Currie, J., & Widom, C. S. (2010). Long-term consequences of child abuse and neglect on adult economic well-being. *Child Maltreatment, 15*(2), 111–120.

⁶⁹ Gilbert, S. 2018. "Worklife Expectancy and Earning Capacity in Personal Injury Cases." *Unpublished manuscript, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale*. At <https://www.acaweb.org/conference/2019/preliminary/paper/Yi9E4T6k>.

⁷⁰ Fang, X., Brown, D. S., Florence, C. S., & Mercy, J. A. (2012). The economic burden of child maltreatment in the United States and implications for prevention. *Child Abuse & Neglect, 36*(2), 156–165.

Research demonstrates that state investments in child well-being,⁷¹ including child maltreatment prevention programs,⁷² generate strong positive returns, both through avoided future costs and through improved educational, health, and workforce outcomes. In this context, increased investment in Alabama’s Children Trust Fund is not only a social imperative, but also a sound economic strategy.

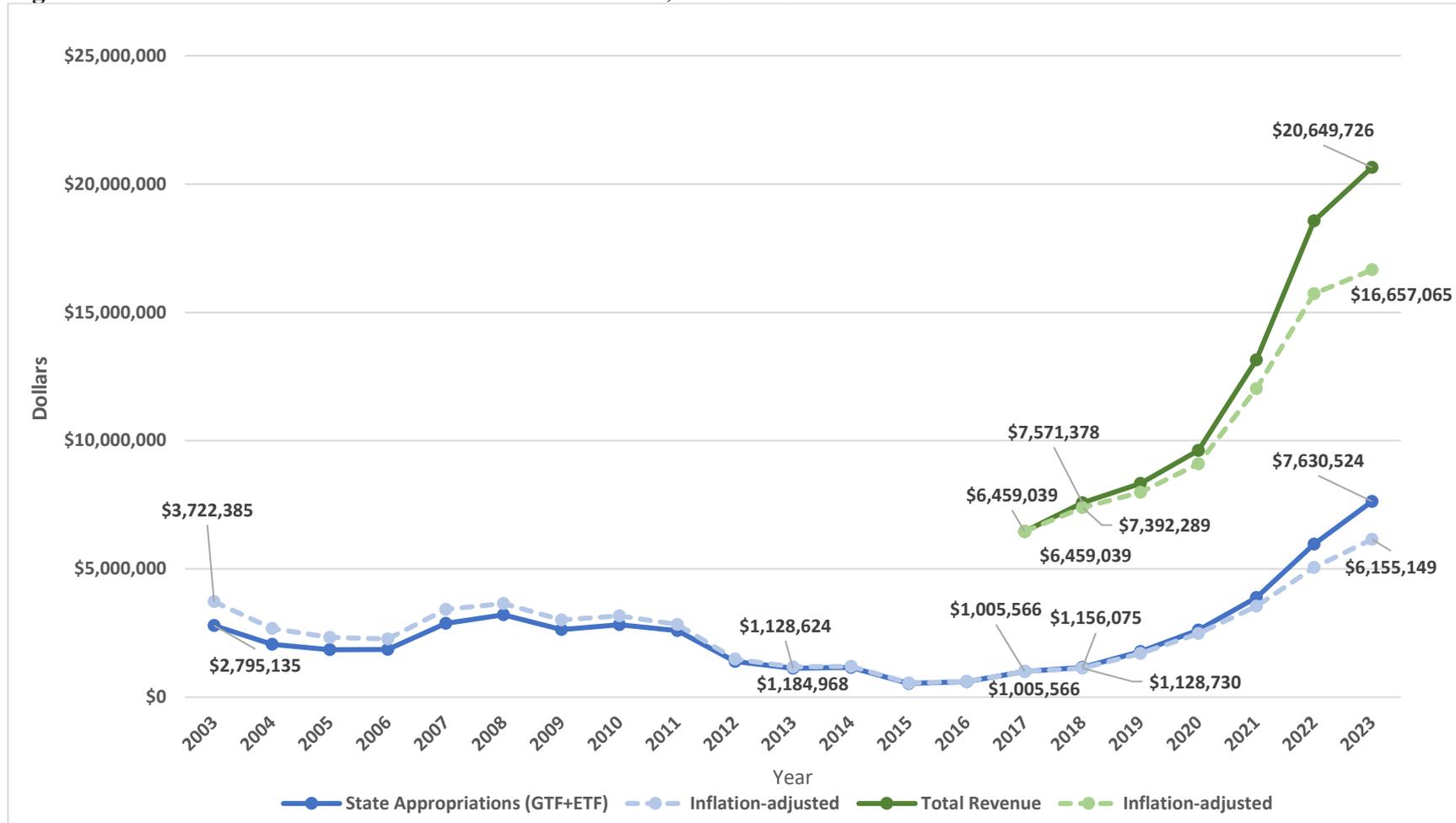
Strengthening prevention efforts would reduce long-term public expenditures, enhance workforce participation, and bolster the state’s capacity to meet its economic and demographic challenges. For these reasons, Alabama should strongly consider expanding its investment in child maltreatment prevention, recognizing that protecting children today strengthens the state’s economy for decades to come.

⁷¹ Collins, M. E., Hall, M., Chung, P. J., Bettenhausen, J. L., Keys, J. R., Bard, D., & Puls, H. T. (2024). Spending on public benefit programs and exposure to adverse childhood experiences. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 168 (Pt 1), 106717.

⁷² Puls, H. T., Hall, M., Anderst, J. D., Gurley, T., Perrin, J., & Chung, P. J. (2021). State spending on public benefit programs and child maltreatment. *Pediatrics*, 148(5), e2021050685. <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2021-050685>

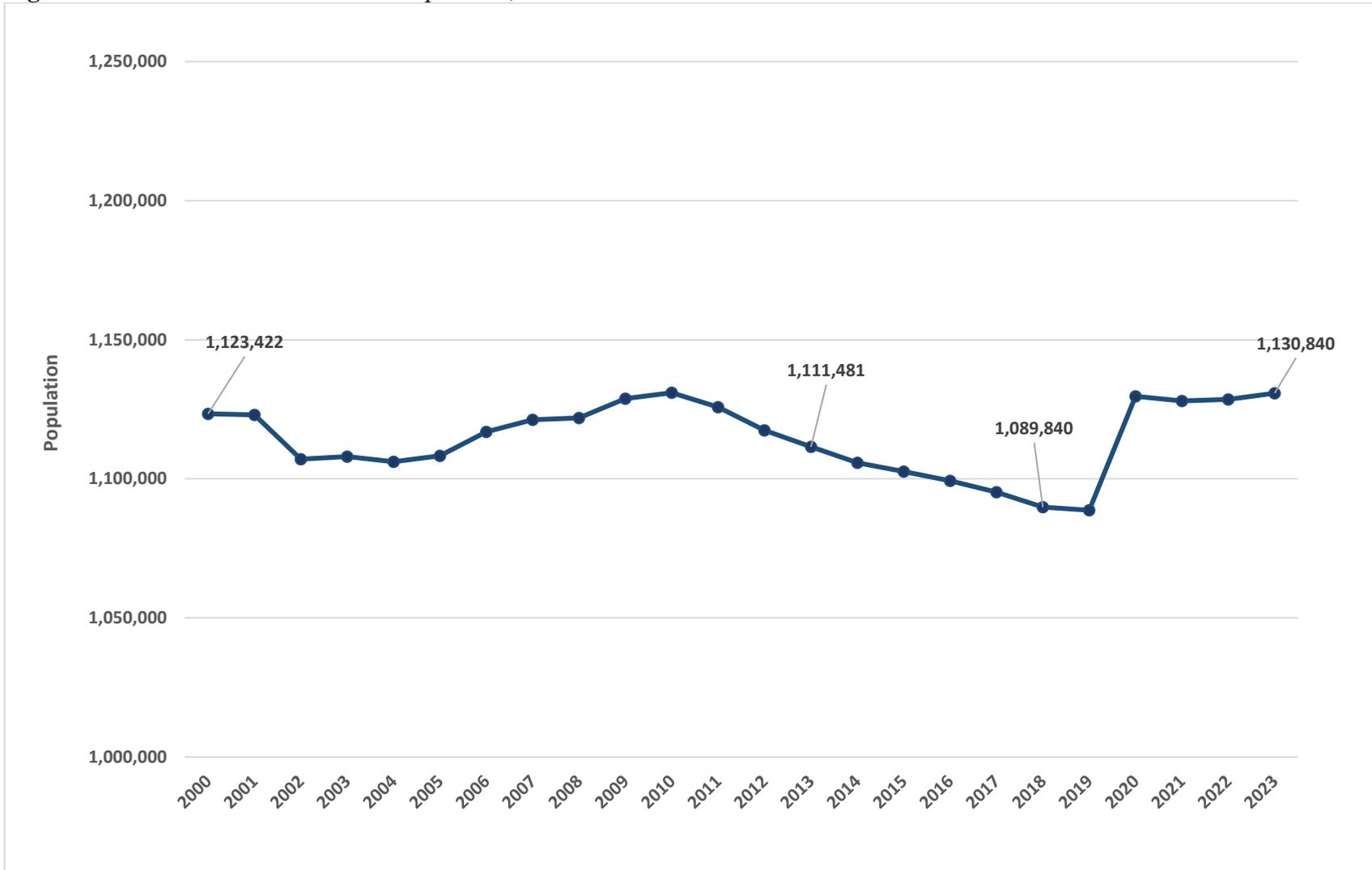
5. Appendix

Figure 1: Alabama’s Children’s Trust Fund Annual Revenue, 2003-2023



Source: Alabama Department of Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention and Alabama Department of Finance.

Figure 2: Trends in Alabama’s Child Population, 2000-2023



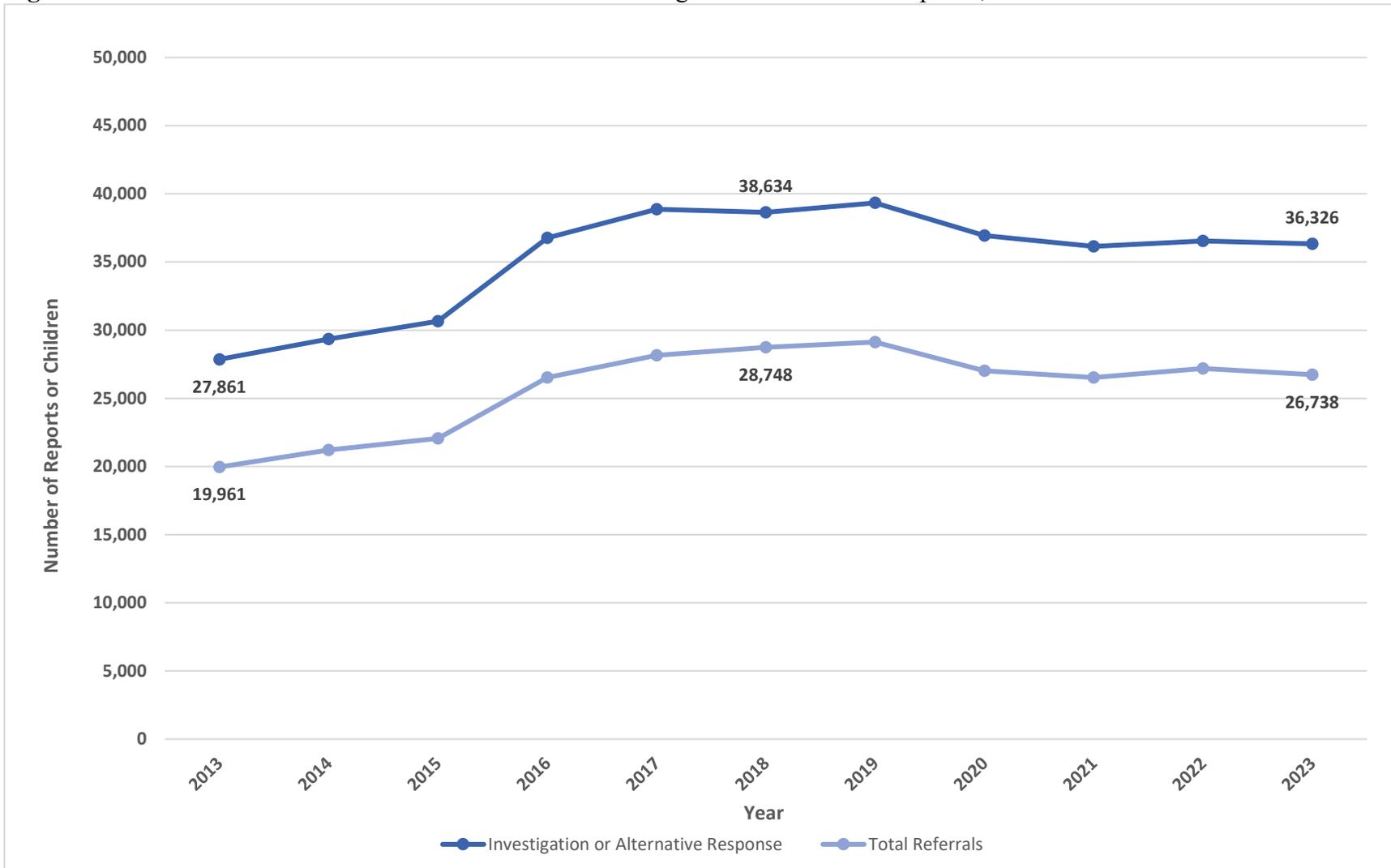
Source: *Child Maltreatment Reports*, U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children’s Bureau

Table 1: Trends in child maltreatment in Alabama, 2013, 2018, and 2023

	2013	2018	2023
<u>Child Maltreatment Reports</u>			
Screened-In	19,715	28,121	26,397
Screened-Out	246	627	341
Total Referrals	19,961	28,748	26,738
<u>Children Who Received an Investigation or Alternative Response by Disposition</u>			
Investigation and Alternative Response	27,861	38,634	36,326
Substantiated	9,013	12,506	11,935
Unsubstantiated	19,518	28,257	26,056
Closed with no finding	1,024	1,537	1,501
Unknown or <i>Other</i>	50	79	94
Total Children (duplicate count)	29,605	42,379	39,586
<u>Child Protective Services Workforce</u>			
Intake and Screening Workers	84	85	87
Investigation and Alternative Response Workers	496	490	435
Total Child Protective Workforce	580	575	522
<u>Child Protective Services Caseload</u>			
Completed Reports with a Disposition	19,715	28,121	26,837
Completed Reports per Investigator	40	57	62
<u>Prenatal Substance Exposure</u>			
Screen-in IPSE	--	533	507
Screen-out IPSE	--	3	5
Total IPSE	--	536	512
Plan of Safe Care	--	188	241
Referred to Appropriate Services	--	316	398
<u>Prevention Services by Funding Source</u>			
Est. Total Child Recipients (duplicate)	66,492	111,374	79,747
Child Abuse and Neglect State Grant	61,950	707	1,077
Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention Grants	2,117	12,880	2,597
Promoting Safe and Stable Families	2,425	81,822	62,755
Social Services Block Grant	--	15,966	13,318
Other Funding Sources	--	--	--
<u>Children in Foster Care</u>			
Served	7,322	9,561	9,132
In Foster Care at Year-End	4,435	5,930	5,974
Entered Foster Care	3,041	4,075	3,710
Exited Foster Care	2,888	3,631	3,276

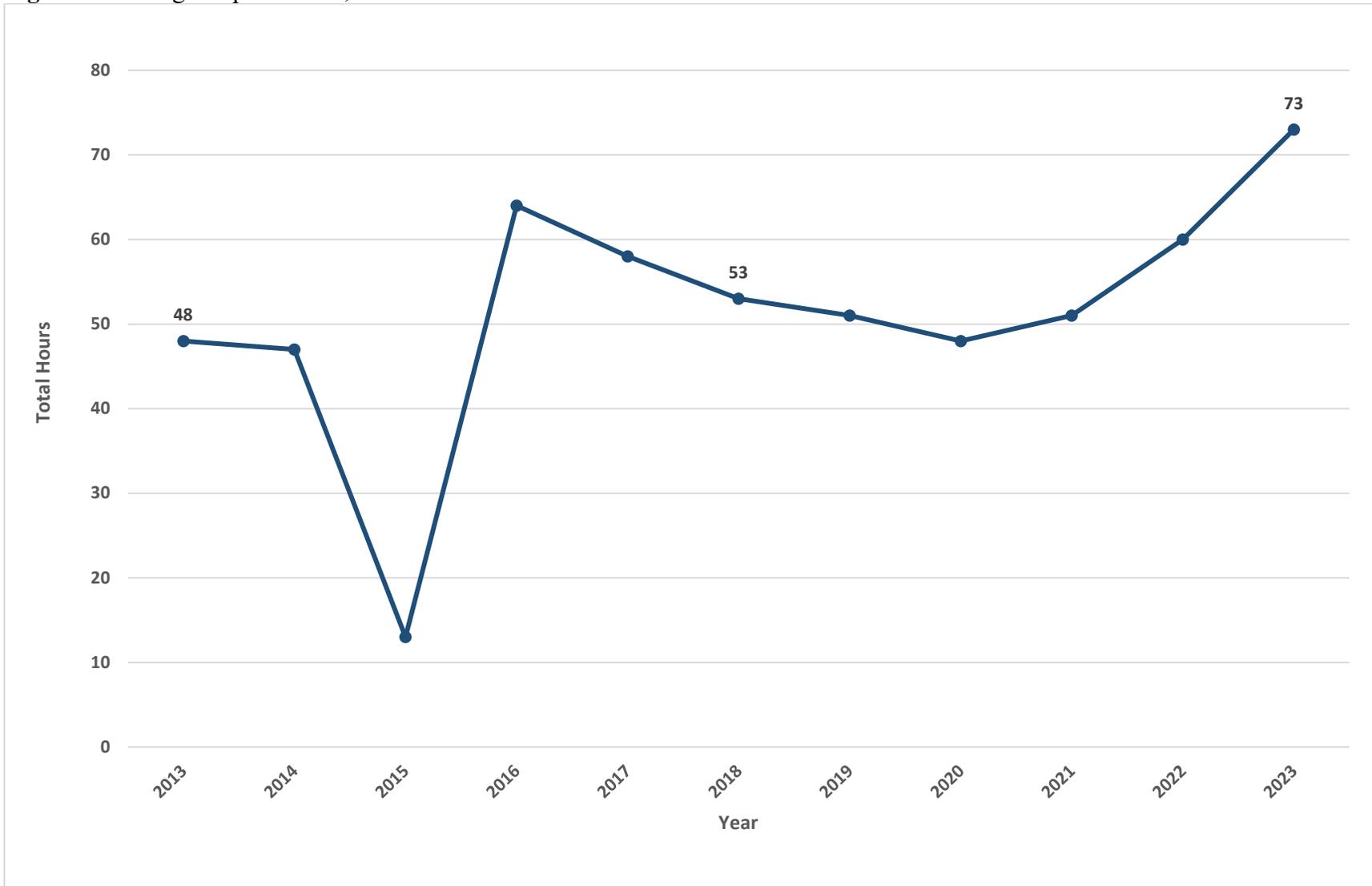
Source: *Child Maltreatment Reports*, U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children's Bureau and *Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS)*, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Children's Bureau

Figure 3: Children in Alabama who received a referral or investigation or alternative response, 2013-2023



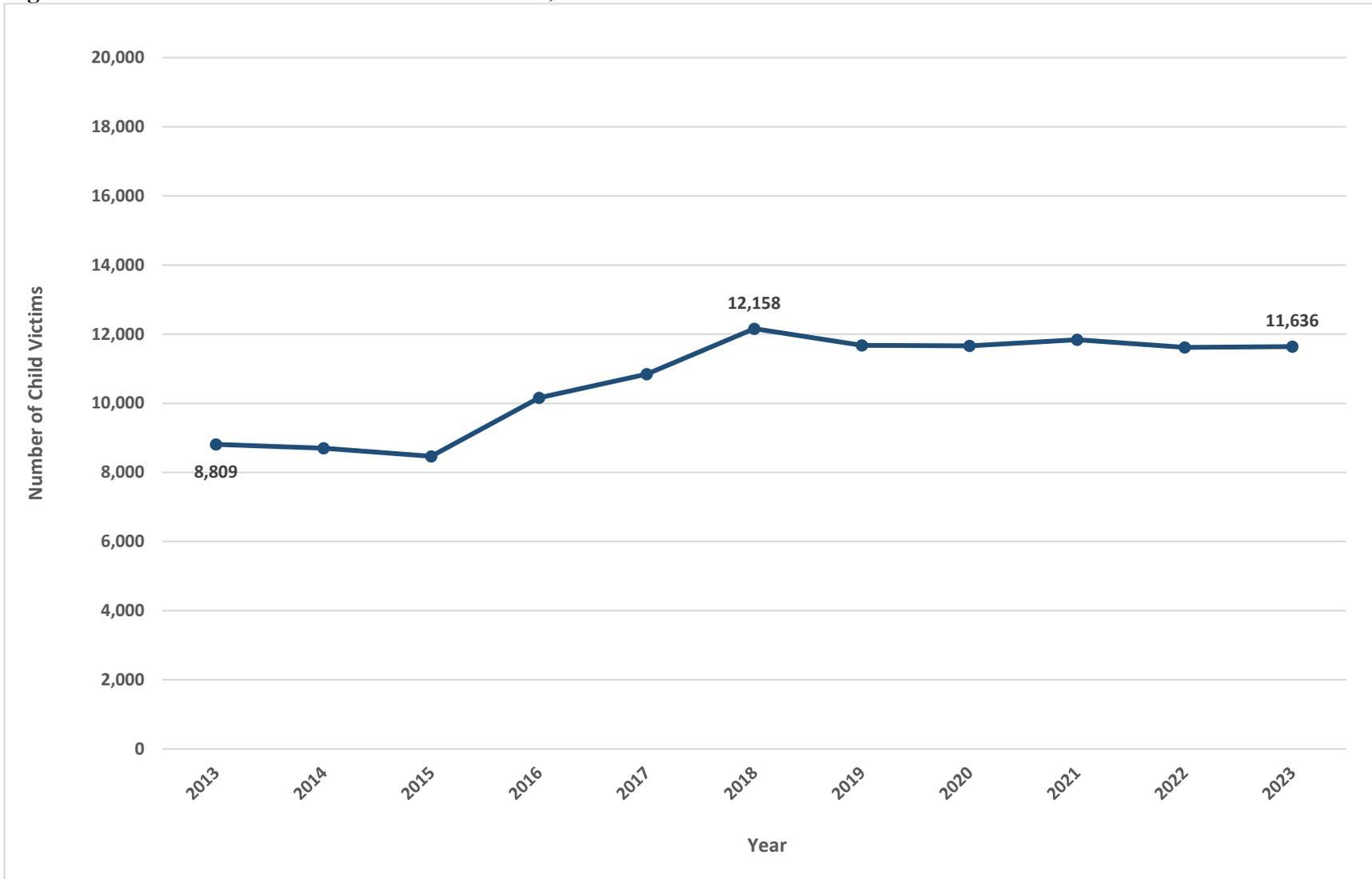
Source: *Child Maltreatment Reports*, U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children's Bureau

Figure 4: Average response time, 2013-2023



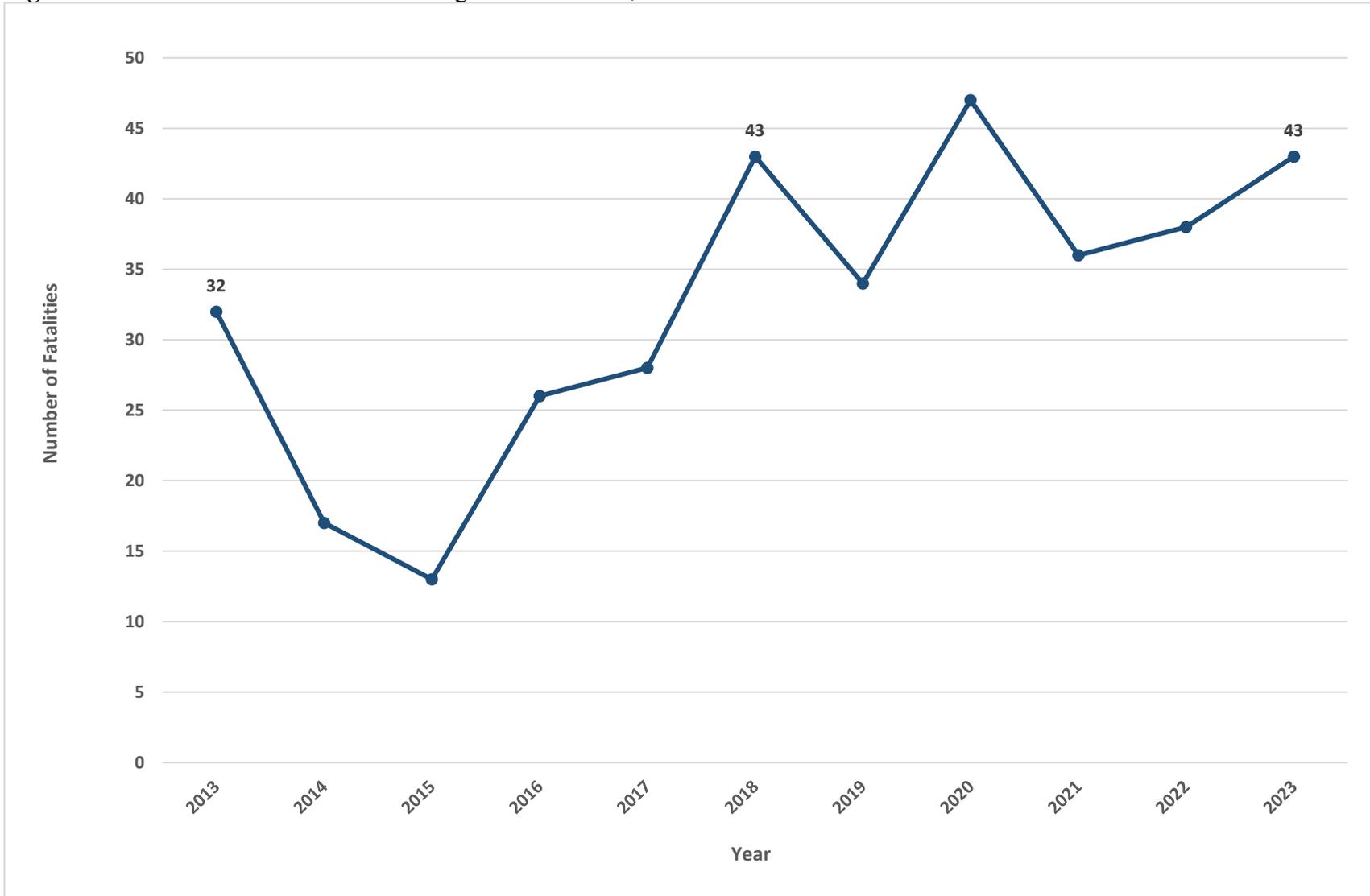
Source: *Child Maltreatment Reports*, U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children's Bureau

Figure 5: Number of foster care children in Alabama, 2013-2023



Source: *Child Maltreatment Reports*, U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children's Bureau

Figure 6: Fatalities due to child abuse or neglect in Alabama, 2013-2023



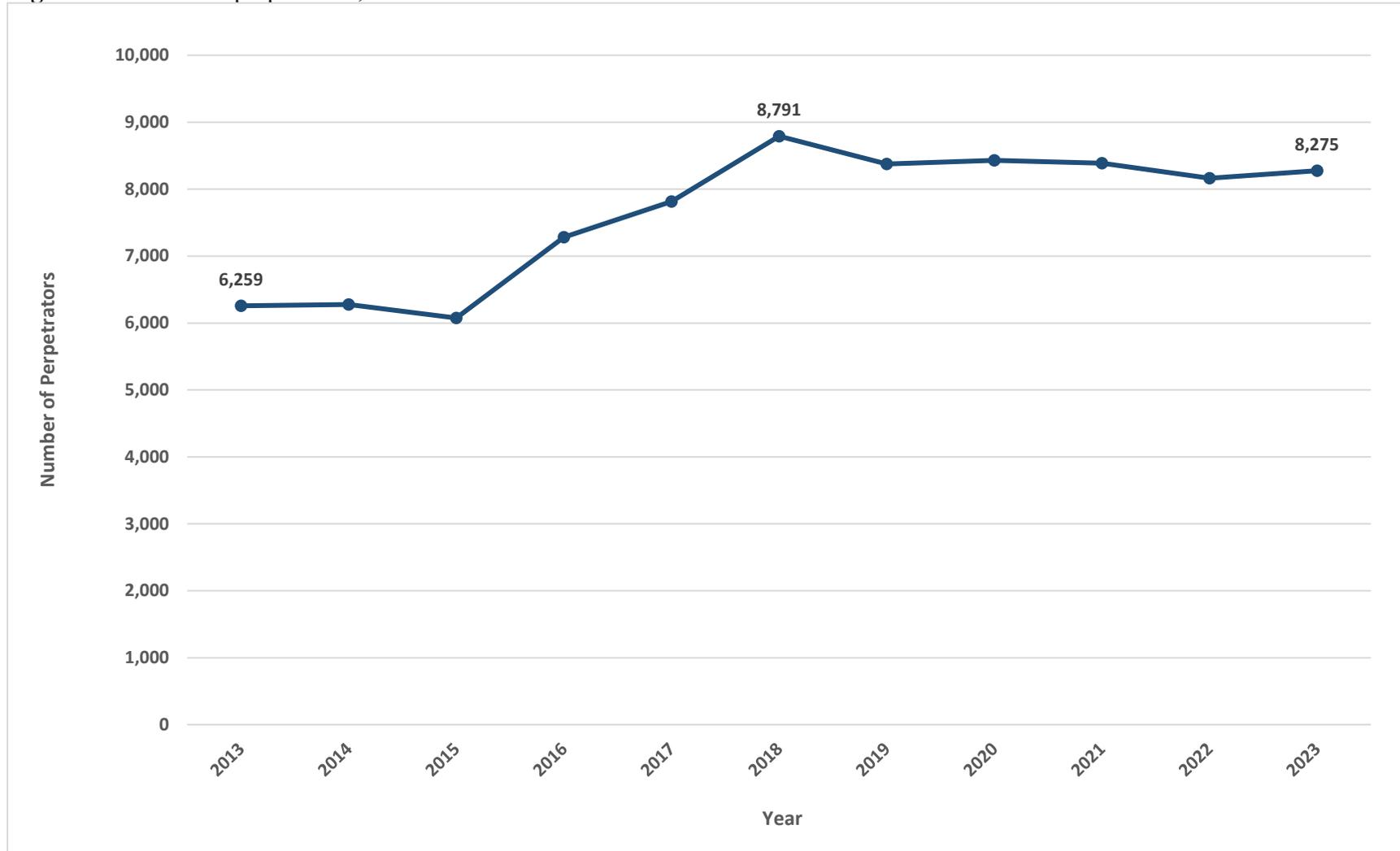
Source: *Child Maltreatment Reports*, U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children's Bureau

Table 2: Child victims of maltreatment in Alabama, 2013, 2018, and 2023

	2013	2018	2023
<u>Child Victims</u>			
First-Time Victims	7,232	10,043	9,194
Victim more than once	1,577	2,115	2,442
Total Child Victims	8,809	12,158	11,636
<u>Victims by Age</u>			
Infants (0-12 months)	1,144	2,025	2,013
Toddler (1 & 2 years old)	1,149	1,604	1,468
Late Childhood (3 & 4 years old)	1,153	1,383	1,342
Early adolescence (5-12 years old)	3,395	4,668	4,193
Late adolescence (13-17 years old)	1,943	2,423	2,547
Unborn, Unknown, and 18-21	25	55	73
<u>Victims by Sex</u>			
Male	45.2%	46.1%	45.8%
Female	54.7%	53.9%	54.1%
Unknown	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%
<u>Victims by Race and Ethnicity</u>			
African-American	2,310	3,483	3,665
American Indian or Alaska Native	8	18	17
Asian	14	14	24
Hispanic	358	468	690
Multiple Race	306	384	308
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	2	8	0
White	5,172	7,632	6,805
Unknown	639	151	127
<u>Maltreatment Type</u>			
Medical Neglect Only	--	39	40
Neglect Only	3,383	3,810	3,698
Other Only	--	--	--
Physical Abuse Only	4,473	5,103	5,041
Psychological Maltreatment Only	32	22	7
Sexual Abuse Only	1,793	1,778	1,613
Sex Trafficking Only	--	1	6
Unknown Only	--	--	--
Multiple Maltreatment Types	--	1,405	1,530
Total Unique Victims	8,809	12,158	--
Total Duplicate Victims	9,681	--	11,935
<u>Perpetrators by Relationship to Victims</u>			
Parent	7,153	6,253	5,950
Child Daycare Provider	2	24	33
Foster Parent	13	10	14
Friend and Neighbor	29	164	109
Group Home & Residential Facility Staff	2	10	13
Legal Guardian	43	27	26
Multiple Relationships		423	385
Other	172	647	549
Other Professional	7	11	19
Relative	556	730	695
Unmarried Partner of Parent	122	293	297
Unknown	1,857	199	185
Total Perpetrators	9,956	8,791	8,275

Source: *Child Maltreatment Reports*, U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children's Bureau

Figure 7: Number of perpetrators, 2013-2023



Source: *Child Maltreatment Reports*, U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children's Bureau

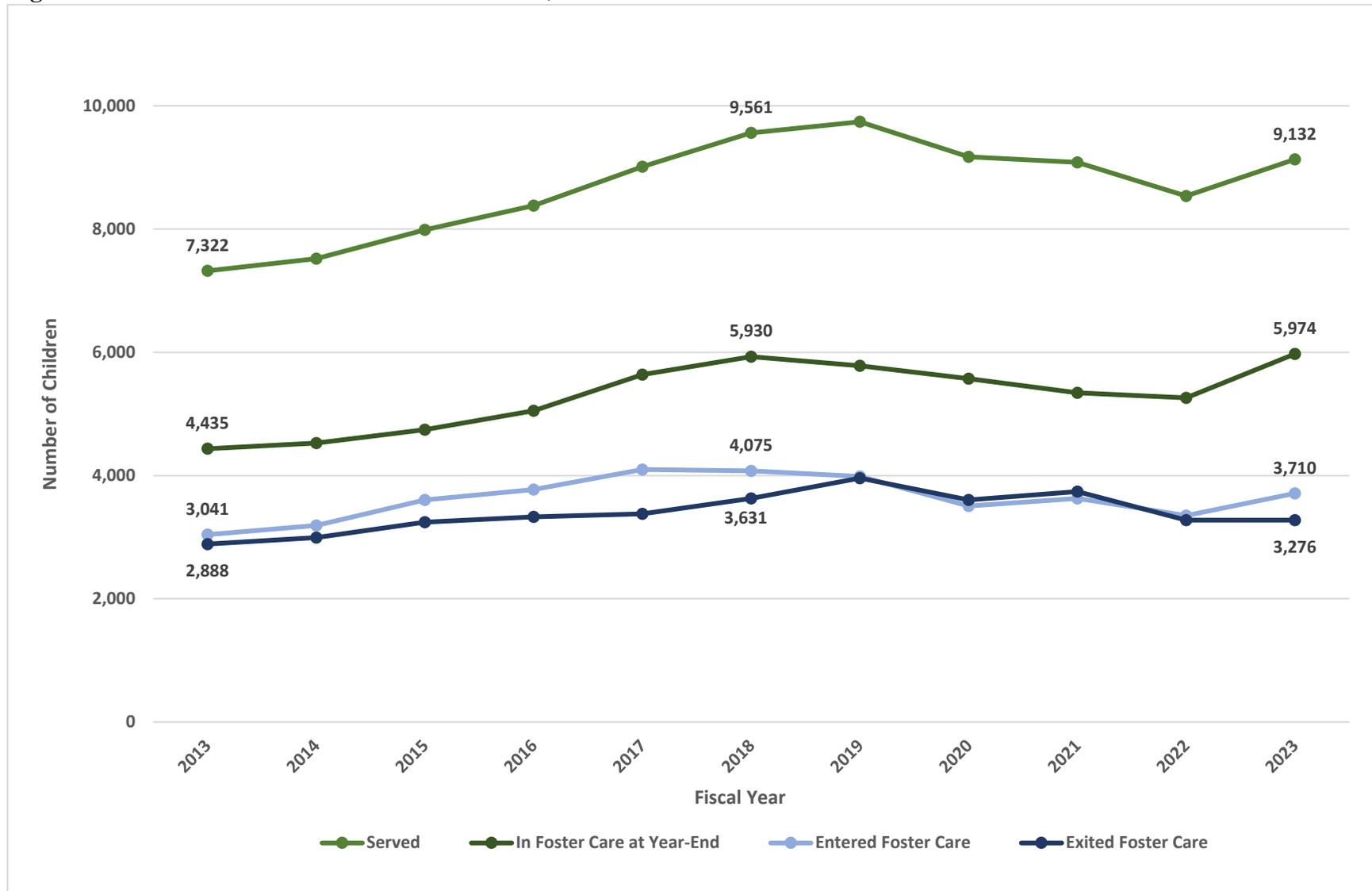
Table 3: Reasons for entering foster care in Alabama, 2023

	Percentage of Entries
Parental substance abuse	46.6
Neglect	26.2
Physical abuse	17.0
Inadequate housing	14.3
Other*	10.3
Inability to cope	8.4
Child behavior problem	6.7
Parental incarceration	6.4
Sexual abuse	4.8
Abandonment	4.1

* Other entry reasons include drug or alcohol abuse by the child, child's disability, relinquishment, and parental death.

Source: *Child Welfare Outcomes Report Data for Alabama*, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Children's Bureau

Figure 8: Number of foster care children in Alabama, 2013-2023



Source: *Child Maltreatment Reports*, U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children’s Bureau

Table 4: The demographics of children in foster care in Alabama, 2023

	In Foster Care on Last Day of FY	Entered	Exited	Awaiting Adoption
Total Number of Children	5,828	3,685	3,326	1,573
<u>Percentage by Age</u>				
Infants (0-12 months) (%)	7.8	19.5	6.2	4.0
Toddler (1 & 2 years old) (%)	15.3	13.5	17.6	19.8
Late Childhood (3 & 4 years old) (%)	11.2	11.5	12.6	12.3
Early adolescence (5-12 years old) (%)	33.7	33.8	33.8	40.5
Late adolescence (13-17 years old) (%)	24.7	21.2	19.9	23.4
Unborn, Unknown, and 18-21 (%)	7.5	0.3	8.4	--
<u>Percentage by Race and Ethnicity</u>				
White (non-Hispanic) (%)	58.8	62.4	64.8	62.5
Black (non-Hispanic) (%)	33.8	30.3	26.9	30.6
Hispanic (of any race) (%)	6.7	7.2	5.9	6.9
Two or More Races (%)	6.0	5.2	7.0	6.0
Asian (%)	0.3	0.4	0.2	0.2
Native Hawaiian / Other Pacific Islander (%)	0.2	0.3	0.2	0.1
Alaska Native / American Indian (%)	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1

Source: *Child Welfare Outcomes Report Data for Alabama*, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Children's Bureau

Table 5: Exits of children from foster care in Alabama, 2023

	Adoption (%)	Guardianship (%)	Reunification (%)	Other (%)	Missing data (%)	Total Number
All Children	22.2	6.1	61.7	9.7	0.3	3,326
Children with a Diagnosed Disability	39.1	3.6	38.9	17.4	0.9	632
<u>By Race and Ethnicity</u>						
White	23.6	4.5	63.4	8.2	0.2	2,001
Black	19.5	9.1	59.3	12.0	0.1	886
Hispanic	15.9	6.7	62.1	14.4	1.0	195
Two or More Races	26.8	7.6	54.5	10.7	0.4	224
Asian	14.3	0.0	71.4	14.3	0.0	7
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0
American Indian or Alaska Native	0.0	0.0	66.7	33.3	0.0	3

Source: *Child Welfare Outcomes Report Data for Alabama*, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Children's Bureau

Table 6: Length of time to exit Alabama’s foster care system to adoption or reunification, 2023

	Time to Reunification	Time to Adoption
Total Children	2,052	738
Less than 12 mos. (%)	66.2	1.9
At least 12 mos., but less than 24 mos. (%)	23.4	32.1
At least 24 mos., but less than 36 mos. (%)	6.9	32.7
At least 36 mos., but less than 48 mos. (%)	2.2	16.5
48 or more mos. (%)	1.4	16.8

Source: *Child Welfare Outcomes Report Data for Alabama*, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Children’s Bureau