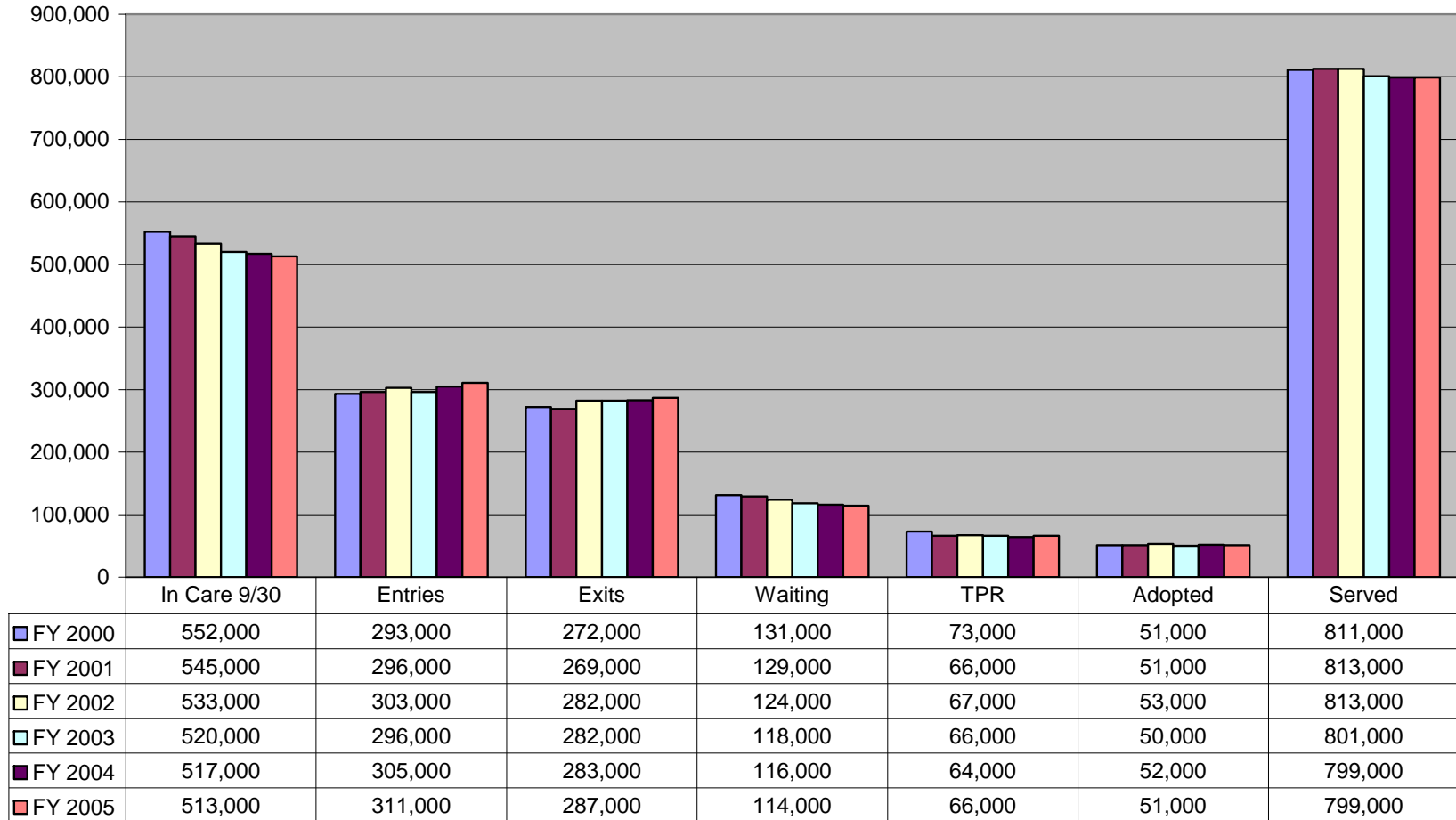


Trends in Foster Care and Adoption--FY 2000-FY 2005

(Based on data submitted by states as of August 2006)

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



Discussion of "Trends" Chart

The foster care and adoption estimates in the graph above are current as of August 2006. The estimates for FY 2000 through FY 2002 are final. As states submit revised data and the Children's Bureau continues to refine its estimation strategy, estimates for FY 2003 through FY 2005 will be revised. Historically, revised estimates have resulted in an increase in the numbers of exits, particularly exits to adoption. Data for the most recent year in this chart are considered preliminary.

Reading from left to right, the data contained in the graph include the estimated number of children:

1. **In foster care on the last day of the federal fiscal year (September 30):** This is an estimated count of all the children in foster care **on the last day** of the year. An individual child is included in the count for each year for which he or she is in foster care on the last day.
2. **Entering care during the federal fiscal year:** This is an estimated count of all children who enter foster care **during** the year. An individual child is counted only once for each year, even if the child entered, exited and re-entered care during the year. If an individual child entered in one year and then exits and re-enters in a subsequent year, he or she is included in the count of entries for both years.
3. **Exiting care during the federal fiscal year:** This is an estimated count of all children who exited foster care **during** the year. An individual child is counted only once for each year, even if the child exited, re-entered and exited again during the year. If an individual child exits care in one year and then re-enters and exits again in a subsequent year, he or she is included in the count of exits for both years.
4. **Waiting to be adopted:** This is an estimated count of all children who are waiting to be adopted **on the last day** of the year. An individual child is included in the count for each year in which he or she is waiting to be adopted on the last day. There is no federal definition for children waiting to be adopted. For the purposes of this analysis, children waiting to be adopted include children with a goal of adoption and/or whose parental

rights have been terminated. Children whose parental rights have been terminated, who are 16 years old and older, and who have a goal of emancipation are excluded from the “waiting” population. An individual child is included in the count for each year that he or she has these characteristics on the last day of the year.

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

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

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

Ideally, the count in # 1 (in foster care on the last day of the year) plus the count in # 3 (exiting foster care during the fiscal year) should equal the count in # 7 (served). They are not equal in any year. However, since FY 2001, the difference has been between 1,000 and 2,000, or less than one tenth of one percent. Some of the difference can be attributed to estimation procedures and rounding. The remainder is generally the result of the under-reporting of foster care exits by some states.

The data show that the estimated number of children in foster care on the last day (September 30) of each federal fiscal year has decreased steadily from 552,000 in FY 2000 to 513,000 in FY 2005. After remaining relatively stable from FY 2000 through FY 2003, the number of children entering care increased in both FY 2004 and FY 2005. The estimated number of children exiting foster care increased between FY 2000 and FY 2005 from 272,000 to 287,000. Accounting for the number of exits and entries in FY 2005 results in a net increase of 1,000

children during FY 2005. However, the estimated number of children in foster care at the end of FY 2005 is 4,000 fewer than the number in care at the end of FY 2004. Based on extensive review of the data, the Children's Bureau is confident that the data depicted in the chart for entries into foster care and for children in care on the last day of the fiscal year accurately reflect national trends. However, the Children's Bureau continues to examine the data and explore programmatic issues to resolve the apparently conflicting trends.

The estimated number of children waiting to be adopted declined between FY 2000 and FY 2004 from 131,000 to 114,000. The estimated number of children whose parents have had their rights terminated shows no distinct pattern. Between FY 2000 and FY 2004 the number of children whose parental rights had been terminated ranged from 72,000 to 64,000. The estimated number of children adopted annually from FY 2000 through FY 2005 remained relatively constant at approximately 50,000. After having remained relatively stable from FY 2000 to FY 2002 at between 811,000 and 813,000, the number of children served declined in FY 2003 and FY 2005 to approximately 800,000.