

## **THE 2007 NCCPR CALIFORNIA RATE-OF-REMOVAL INDEX**

*Released February 26, 2008*

For the past several years, NCCPR has published a rate-of-removal index which compares the propensity of *states* to adopt a “take-the-child-and-run” approach to child welfare. The index compares the number of children removed from their homes in each state during the most recent year for which data are available, to a Census Bureau estimate of the number of children living in poverty in that state. The result is the number of removals of children from their homes for every 1,000 impoverished children in that state.

But in 13 states, including California, individual counties run their own child welfare systems. Thanks to the Child Welfare Research Center at the University of California at Berkeley Center for Social Services Research (CSSR), which has compiled the relevant data and posted it online, it is possible to perform an even more detailed comparison for California. That’s because CSSR compiles not only the relevant foster care data but also data on two key indicators of child safety.

**The data show that some of the counties with the best child safety records are those which take, proportionately, the fewest children.**

### **THIS IS NOT THE “SNAPSHOT NUMBER”...**

The measure of a county’s foster care population usually seen in news accounts is the so-called “snapshot number” indicating the number of children in foster care in a county on one particular day each year. That is a very important number, but it is a less accurate measure of a county’s propensity to remove children.

A county may have a high snapshot number even if it takes away very few children, if it hangs on to those it takes for a very long time. (That is, in itself, a problem, but not a measure of the county’s propensity to take away children in the first place.) Conversely, a county can have a low snapshot number and still take away many children, if the state takes them for only a relatively short time. Thus, a county which takes away many children in January, but returns most of them by August will have a low number if the “snapshot” is taken in September. Also, a county which took away a great many children a decade or more ago and let them languish in foster care may have a low snapshot number now simply because those children are “aging out” of the system at 18 – hardly a testament to a system’s success.

### **...RATHER, THIS INDEX USES REMOVALS OVER THE COURSE OF A YEAR**

So instead of measuring the foster care population on any given day, the *NCCPR California Rate-of-Removal Index* relies on CSSR data listing the number of children removed at some point over the course of a given year.

### **HOW THE INDEX IS COMPILED**

As noted above, the source for data on removals is the Child Welfare Research Center at the University of California at Berkeley Center for Social Services Research. These data are available online here: <http://cssr.berkeley.edu/CWSCMSreports/>

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We could have simply compared the number of children removed to a county's total child population. But then all the counties with high rates-of-removal and high child poverty rates would complain that this was unfair because we didn't consider the single largest risk factor for actual abuse (not to mention the factor most often confused with "neglect") – poverty. So, in order to factor that in, and come closer to an apples-to-apples comparison, we compare removals in each county for the year ending June 30, 2007 (State Fiscal Year 2007, the most recent data available) to the number of *impoverished* children in that county, according to a Census Bureau estimate for 2005 – again, the most recent data available.

### RANKINGS

NCCPR's National *Rate-of-Removal Index* includes a ranking for each state. We did not try to do this for every California county. That's because some counties are so small that even tiny changes in the number of children removed could significantly change their rankings. For example, Sierra County has only about 108 impoverished children, according to the Census Bureau estimate, and the county took away a total of two children in SFY 2007.

So we've provided three charts below. The first two charts include rankings. They are limited to counties with at least 10,000 impoverished children. There are 26 such counties, but those counties include more than 90 percent of all California children taken from their families in SFY 2007. The third chart provides the data for every county, but does not include rankings.

### SAFETY DATA

As a group that believes strongly in family preservation, we feel that a high rate-of-removal almost always is a sign of a bad system. But a low rate-of-removal is not necessarily a sign of a good system. A low rate-of-removal can be accomplished either by embracing safe, proven programs to keep families together, or by ignoring children in real danger.

Fortunately, the California data offer clues about this as well.

There are two primary means for measuring how a child welfare system does in keeping children safe. Both are used by the federal government in evaluating state systems and both are now available from the CSSR database.

- One is to track how often, when maltreatment is substantiated, the child is maltreated again within six months.
- The other measure is foster-care "recidivism." That is, how often, when a child is returned home from foster care, must that child be placed in foster care again within 12 months. The data in this chart are for children who were returned home during the year ending June 30 2006, and returned to foster care sometime in the following 12 months.

For a county to be considered to be doing relatively well, it should rank toward the bottom of the 26-county list in every category: rate-of-removal, reabuse, and foster-care recidivism. Broadly speaking, these are measures in which a county *shouldn't* rank #1.

The time frames for these data are significant in assessing the performance of counties. The key decisions affecting the reabuse figures in this table were made during the last six

months of 2006. The key decisions affecting foster care recidivism were made in the 12 months ending June 30, 2006.

## HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE RESULTS

**The data provide clear evidence that the claim that one must take large numbers of children from their parents in order to keep children safe is false. Indeed, counties with low rates of removal often did better on child safety measures than counties embracing a take-the-child-and-run approach.**

For example, San Francisco takes away children at a rate nearly 80 percent higher than the rate in Los Angeles. Yet Los Angeles does far better on safety measures.

Yes, there are counties with low rates of removal that do badly on the safety measures. But other counties, such as Monterey, take children at a very low rate, and score among the best on the safety measures. Riverside County, which takes proportionately more children than any other, does no better overall on safety than Los Angeles County. It is slightly better on one measure, and significantly worse on the other.

## CAVEATS

- The census bureau child poverty estimates represent the middle of a wide range. For example, when the Census Bureau says there are 338 impoverished children in Mono County, the Bureau means there could be anywhere from 260 to 417 such children in the county. That means the index should not be used to compare small counties and, even with larger counties, should not be used to draw conclusions about counties with similar rates. Rather, the index is a way to spot the outliers, those counties still wedded to a take-the-child-and-run approach to child welfare. And it is a way to compare counties with dramatically different approaches, such as Los Angeles and San Francisco, as noted above.

- This Index cannot be compared to our previous *California Rate of Removal Index*. That's because we've made some changes in methodology, and the CSSR database has dramatically improved.

--In the past, the CSSR database did not include entries into foster care lasting fewer than five days, so we could not include them in the Index. Those data now are available and are included here.

--Our previous index included entries into foster care from agencies other than child welfare. This index includes only entries within the control of the child welfare agency. While this generally makes very little difference – entries due to actions of non child welfare agencies account for only 8.3 percent of the statewide total - this still is important when attempting to compare a California county or the California statewide total to other states.

The federal government's database requires states to submit entries into care from all sources, not just the child welfare agency.

- The data in these charts don't reveal trends over time. A county that still has a relatively high number of removals but has been steadily and safely reducing them may be a

better “role model” than a county which removed relatively few children in FY 2007, but now is in the midst of a foster-care panic.

- One cannot say, based on these data, that county X “took Y percent of its poor children from their parents in SFY 2007.” That would be inaccurate because, while the overwhelming majority of children taken from their parents are poor, not all of them are. Thus, we are comparing a pool of children – those removed from their parents – which is mostly poor, to a general population that is entirely poor. One can say only that, for example, according to this index, in SFY 2007, authorities in Riverside County appeared more prone to resort to foster care than any of the other ranked counties.

#### **A NOTE ON THE CSSR DATABASE**

The CSSR database is an outstanding resource. We are aware of nothing in any other state that comes close to it, both in the wealth of available data and in its new form, ease of use. Users can find trend data all the way back to 1998, they can compare placements from all sources, not just child welfare agencies, and they have access to a great deal of detailed demographic data and data on placement settings.

The California Department of Social Services, the University of California at Berkeley Center for Social Services Research and the Stuart Foundation (which helps fund the project) are to be commended for creating the database, and especially for making so much information readily available to the general public.

*TABLES BEGIN ON THE FOLLOWING PAGE*

**NCCPR CALIFORNIA RATE-OF-REMOVAL INDEX, LARGER COUNTIES**

<b>County</b>	<b>Impoverished Children, 2005</b>	<b>Entries into care, SFY 2007</b>	<b>Rate-of-removal</b>	<b>Rank</b>	<b>% of children reabused within 6 months</b>	<b>Rank</b>	<b>Foster care recidivism (%)</b>	<b>Rank</b>
Alameda	51,672	1,299	25.1	9	10.2	6	18.1	2
Butte	10,600	474	44.7	2	12.2	1	13.0	9
Contra Costa	28,165	771	27.4	8	5.4	24	12.9	11
Fresno	79,607	1,320	16.6	21	8.0	15	8.3	24
Imperial	12,783	428	33.5	6	8.6	10	24.6	1
Kern	64,618	1,944	30.1	7	8.2	13	11.1	15
Kings	10,090	241	23.9	11	8.1	14	15.0	5
Los Angeles	624,433	11,780	18.9	15	6.6	21	10.2	17
Madera	10,763	170	15.8	22	11.7	3	10.0	19
Merced	19,828	436	22.0	12	7.7	16	9.5	20
Monterey	21,517	286	13.3	24	4.2	26	8.2	25
Orange	90,936	1,938	21.3	14	6.4	22	10.1	18
Riverside	84,636	4,319	51.0	1	6.1	23	14.0	7
Sacramento	71,689	2,867	40.0	3	7.1	17	16.4	3
S. Bernardino	117,828	2,075	17.6	17	9.0	8	10.7	16
San Diego	116,761	2,861	24.5	10	6.9	19	8.9	21
San Francisco	15,809	532	33.7	5	12.2	1	15.8	4
San Joaquin	38,044	660	17.3	18	6.7	20	13.9	8
San Mateo	13,502	290	21.5	13	7.1	17	14.7	6
Santa Barbara	16,582	281	16.9	20	9.0	8	12.9	11
Santa Clara	44,369	1,693	38.2	4	8.6	10	12.5	13
Solano	13,593	245	18.0	16	10.7	5	11.3	14
Sonoma	11,738	199	17.0	19	11.5	4	8.5	23
Stanislaus	27,923	307	11.0	26	5.2	25	3.7	26
Tulare	41,831	588	14.1	23	8.5	12	8.8	22
Ventura	28,950	374	12.9	25	10.0	7	13.0	9
<b>STATE TOTAL</b>	<b>1,670,272</b>	<b>38,378</b>	<b>21.8</b>		<b>7.5</b>		<b>12.0</b>	

See following page for same data in rank order

**NCCPR CALIFORNIA RATE-OF-REMOVAL INDEX, LARGER COUNTIES,  
BY RANK**

<b>County</b>	<b>Impoverished Children, 2005</b>	<b>Entries into care, SFY 2007</b>	<b>Rate-of-removal</b>	<b>Rank</b>	<b>% of children reabused within 6 months</b>	<b>Rank</b>	<b>Foster care recidivism (%)</b>	<b>Rank</b>
Riverside	84,636	4,319	51.0	1	6.1	23	14.0	7
Butte	10,600	474	44.7	2	12.2	1	13.0	9
Sacramento	71,689	2,867	40.0	3	7.1	17	16.4	3
Santa Clara	44,369	1,693	38.2	4	8.6	10	12.5	13
San Francisco	15,809	532	33.7	5	12.2	1	15.8	4
Imperial	12,783	428	33.5	6	8.6	10	24.6	1
Kern	64,618	1,944	30.1	7	8.2	13	11.1	15
Contra Costa	28,165	771	27.4	8	5.4	24	12.9	11
Alameda	51,672	1,299	25.1	9	10.2	6	18.1	2
San Diego	116,761	2,861	24.5	10	6.9	19	8.9	21
Kings	10,090	241	23.9	11	8.1	14	15.0	5
Merced	19,828	436	22.0	12	7.7	16	9.5	20
San Mateo	13,502	290	21.5	13	7.1	17	14.7	6
Orange	90,936	1,938	21.3	14	6.4	22	10.1	18
Los Angeles	624,433	11,780	18.9	15	6.6	21	10.2	17
Solano	13,593	245	18.0	16	10.7	5	11.3	14
S. Bernardino	117,828	2,075	17.6	17	9.0	8	10.7	16
San Joaquin	38,044	660	17.3	18	6.7	20	13.9	8
Sonoma	11,738	199	17.0	19	11.5	4	8.5	23
Santa Barbara	16,582	281	16.9	20	9.0	8	12.9	11
Fresno	79,607	1,320	16.6	21	8.0	15	8.3	24
Madera	10,763	170	15.8	22	11.7	3	10.0	19
Tulare	41,831	588	14.1	23	8.5	12	8.8	22
Monterey	21,517	286	13.3	24	4.2	26	8.2	25
Ventura	28,950	374	12.9	25	10.0	7	13.0	9
Stanislaus	27,923	307	11.0	26	5.2	25	3.7	26
<b>STATE TOTAL</b>	<b>1,670,272</b>	<b>38,378</b>	<b>21.8</b>		<b>7.5</b>		<b>12.0</b>	

CHART WITH DATA FOR ALL COUNTIES ON FOLLOWING PAGE

## NCCPR CALIFORNIA RATE-OF-REMOVAL INDEX, ALL COUNTIES

County	Impoverished Children, 2005	Entries into care, SFY 2007	Rate-of-removal	% of children reabused within 6 months	Foster care recidivism (%)
Alameda	51,672	1,299	25.1	10.2	18.1
Alpine	53	0	0	0	0
Amador	888	45	50.7	5.5	0
Butte	10,600	474	44.7	12.2	13
Calaveras	1,250	41	32.8	5.4	9.4
Colusa	1,183	42	35.5	0	16
Contra Costa	28,165	771	27.4	5.4	12.9
Del Norte	1,808	93	51.4	10.4	25
El Dorado	3,484	171	49.1	8.2	26.7
Fresno	79,607	1,320	16.6	8.0	8.3
Glenn	1,902	83	43.6	8.2	3.7
Humboldt	5,451	151	27.7	12.3	13.6
Imperial	12,783	428	33.5	8.6	24.6
Inyo	646	9	13.9	7.9	0
Kern	64,618	1,944	30.1	8.2	11.1
Kings	10,090	241	23.9	8.1	15
Lake	3,864	84	21.7	4.4	13.6
Lassen	1,302	46	35.3	3.4	7.7
Los Angeles	624,433	11,780	18.9	6.6	10.2
Madera	10,763	170	15.8	11.7	10
Marin	3,767	53	14.1	16.8	14.8
Mariposa	606	24	39.6	6.7	26.7
Mendocino	4,812	206	42.8	11.6	25.9
Merced	19,828	436	22.0	7.7	9.5
Modoc	580	29	50.0	52.6	27.3
Mono	338	1	3.0	0	0
Monterey	21,517	286	13.3	4.2	8.2
Napa	3,011	48	15.9	2.0	12.9
Nevada	2,005	68	33.9	24.5	10.3
Orange	90,936	1,938	21.3	6.4	10.1
Placer	5,166	313	60.6	10.1	9.3
Plumas	690	54	78.3	7.9	30
Riverside	84,636	4,319	51.0	6.1	14
Sacramento	71,689	2,867	40.0	7.1	16.4
San Benito	2,217	60	27.1	18.7	2.5
S. Bernardino	117,828	2,075	17.6	9.0	10.7
San Diego	116,761	2,861	24.5	6.9	8.9
San Francisco	15,809	532	33.7	12.2	15.8
San Joaquin	38,044	660	17.3	6.7	13.9
S. Luis Obispo	7,151	228	31.9	3.4	19.5
San Mateo	13,502	290	21.5	7.1	14.7
Santa Barbara	16,582	281	16.9	9.0	12.9
Santa Clara	44,369	1,693	38.2	8.6	12.5
Santa Cruz	8,555	248	29.0	6.7	8.9

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Shasta	8,509	357	42.0	4.8	11.4
Sierra	108	2	18.5	0	0
Siskiyou	2,584	49	19.0	2.8	6.9
Solano	13,593	245	18.0	10.7	11.3
Sonoma	11,738	199	17.0	11.5	8.5
Stanislaus	27,923	307	11.0	5.2	3.7
Sutter	3,636	123	33.8	7.6	8.5
Tehama	4,069	186	45.7	8.6	17.1
Trinity	676	24	35.5	7.7	17.6
Tulare	41,831	588	14.1	8.5	8.8
Tuolumne	1,735	53	30.5	9.2	11.8
Ventura	28,950	374	12.9	10.0	13
Yolo	6,481	265	40.9	11.7	19.4
Yuba	4,969	155	31.2	14.3	23.7
<b>STATE TOTAL</b>	<b>1,761,755</b>	<b>41,689</b>	<b>23.6</b>	<b>7.5</b>	<b>12.0</b>

Sources:

- All data on entries into care and child safety: Child Welfare Research Center at the University of California at Berkeley Center for Social Services Research, *CMS/CWS Dynamic Report System*, available online at: <http://cssr.berkeley.edu/CWSCMSreports/>
- Impoverished child population: Bureau of the Census, *Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates*, available online at <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/saipe/>

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