

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

UPDATED November 27, 2006\*

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 removals of children 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.**

### **THESE CALIFORNIA DATA AND FEDERAL DATA ARE *NOT* COMPARABLE.**

These California data cannot be compared to data from other states, however. That’s because CSSR’s main data tables exclude children removed from their parents if they are returned home within four days. (These data are available only by calling up detailed information for each county, one county at a time). In contrast, the federal government counts it as a removal if the child is out of the home for 24 hours. The federal government is right – you can be sure it counts to the child undergoing the trauma of removal.

And the difference is significant. For this, and perhaps other reasons involving definitions, the CSSR methodology excludes about one-fifth of child removals statewide. So it is worth remembering, when looking at these data, that, **on average, counties are taking 20 percent more children over the course of the year than these numbers reveal.**

### **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 serious problem, but not a measure of the county’s propensity to take away children in the first place). Conversely, a state can have a low snapshot number and still take away many children, but take them for only a very short period of time. Thus, a county which takes away many children in January, but

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returns most of them by August will have a low number if the “snapshot” is taken in September. (And, as noted above, if counties have an extreme propensity for churning children through the system, removing and returning large numbers of children within four days, that won’t show up in the main CSSR data tables either). 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. (Again, unfortunately, these data exclude removals of four days or fewer).

### **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/>

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 to the number of impoverished children in each county, according to the 2000 Census. (In comparing states, we are able to use more recent data, the Census Bureau’s Current Population Survey, Annual Demographic Survey, but these data are not available online at the county level. Thus, the child poverty data are older than would be optimal).

We then compare the CSSR data on the number of times children are removed from their parents in each county to the census data on the number of people under age 18 in that county who are living in poverty.

### **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, Inyo County has only 705 impoverished children, and the county took away a total of eight children in 2005.

So we’ve provided three charts below. The third provides the data for every county, but does not include rankings. The first two charts include rankings. They are limited to counties with at least 10,000 impoverished children. There are 24 such counties, but those counties include more than 88 percent of all California children taken from their families in 2005.

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While the list is almost the same as the top 24 in total population, there are some differences. Sonoma, Placer, and Marin Counties do not make this list, though they are among the top 24 in total population. (Placer County, for example, though 23<sup>rd</sup> most populous has only 4,317 impoverished children. Had Placer been ranked however, it would have ranked #1 in child removal – with a rate more than triple the state average. So it is worth asking why this county takes away such an astoundingly high proportion of its children.)

Conversely, Butte County (27<sup>th</sup> in total population) Imperial County (31<sup>st</sup>) Madera County (35<sup>th</sup>) Merced County (26<sup>th</sup>) are on the ranked list because of their relatively high number of impoverished children.

### **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.

- One is to track how often, when maltreatment is substantiated, the child is maltreated again, typically within six months. The CSSR database includes these figures for each county for every year since 1998. The charts below present these data for the year ending June 30, 2005, the most recent for which six-month data are available. That means these data are six months older than the other measures, which are available for the year ending December 31, 2005. (In our first *California Rate-of-Removal Index* we used reabuse data over 12 months instead of six. But those data are older, and the federal government uses the six month measure, so we have switched to it here.)

- 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. Ideally, this would be during a specified time, such as in the 12 months after return. That’s the timeframe used by the federal government. The most recent CSSR summary charts provide these data only for recidivism at any time during the life of the child. This means these data cannot be compared to data from other states, compiled by the federal government. (Though CSSR also has 12-month recidivism data they are available only through mid-2004).

Thus, for a county to be considered to be doing relatively well, it should rank toward the bottom of the 24-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.

## 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 nearly double the rate of 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 outcomes. 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.

## OTHER CAVEATS

- 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 2005, but now is in the midst of a foster-care panic. Trend data are available at the CSSR site.

- One cannot say, based on these data, that county X "took Y percent of its poor children from their parents in 2005." 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 2005, authorities in Riverside County appeared more prone to resort to foster care than any of the other ranked counties, and Placer County appeared more prone to take away children than any other county in California.

\*The definition of the reabuse measure was clarified on May 3, 2007

*TABLES BEGIN ON THE FOLLOWING PAGE*

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

(For the same data in rank order see following page)

County	Impoverished Children (1)	Entries into care (2)	Re-entries into care (2)	Recidivism rate/rank (3)	Total removed (2)	Rate of Removal (per thousand impoverished children)/rank (2)	%Reabuse of children /rank (4)
Alameda	48,221	853	296	25.8%/03	1,149	23.8/07	9.3/12
Butte	11,547	351	95	21.3%/12	446	38.6/02	9.8/10
Contra Costa	25,104	534	181	25.3%/04	715	28.5/05	5.2/24
Fresno	80,504	555	93	14.4%/21	648	8.0/23	9.9/09
Imperial	12,769	136	52	27.7%/01	188	14.7/19	9.7/11
Kern	58,213	917	277	23.2%/08	1,194	20.5/09	11.6/03
Los Angeles	640,145	8,760	1,754	16.7%/16	10,514	16.4/17	7.7/17
Madera	10,333	152	20	11.6%/23	172	16.6/16	11.5/04
Merced	20,423	323	62	16.1%/18	385	18.9/12	12.1/01
Monterey	19,775	219	24	9.9%/24	243	12.3/21	5.3/23
Orange	102,002	1,327	231	14.8%/20	1,558	15.3/18	7.0/19
Riverside	87,083	2,794	666	19.2%/15	3,460	39.7/01	6.6/20
Sacramento	67,728	1,763	675	27.7%/01	2,438	36.0/03	10.6/05
S. Bernardino	113,695	1,663	469	22.0%/11	2,132	18.8/13	10.6/05
San Diego	119,704	2,059	378	15.5%/19	2,437	20.4/10	8.1/16
San Francisco	15,443	323	104	24.4%/05	427	27.7/06	9.0/13
San Joaquin	41,186	647	187	22.4%/05	834	20.2/11	10.5/07
San Mateo	10,285	166	51	23.5%/06	217	21.1/08	8.4/15
Santa Barbara	16,319	238	38	13.8%/22	276	16.9/15	11.8/02
Santa Clara	36,548	888	240	21.3%/12	1,128	30.9/04	7.5/18
Solano	11,852	173	45	20.6%/14	218	18.4/14	6.5/21
Stanislaus	28,547	168	51	23.3%/07	219	7.7/24	10.2/08
Tulare	40,271	486	94	16.2%/17	580	14.4/20	5.7/22
Ventura	25,407	201	57	22.1%/10	258	10.2/22	8.9/14
<b>Lg. County total</b>	<b>1,643,104</b>	<b>25,694</b>	<b>6,138</b>	<b>19.3%</b>	<b>31,834</b>	<b>19.4</b>	<b>n/a</b>
<b>California total</b>	<b>1,757,100</b>	<b>29,005</b>	<b>7,028</b>	<b>19.5%</b>	<b>36,033</b>	<b>20.5</b>	<b>8.7</b>

- (1) 2000 Census
- (2) Calendar year 2005
- (3) At any time through December 31, 2005
- (4) Year ending June 30, 2005

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

<b>County</b>	<b>Impoverished Children</b>	<b>Entries into care</b>	<b>Re-entries into care</b>	<b>Recidivism rate/rank</b>	<b>Total removed</b>	<b>Rate of Removal (per thousand impoverished children)/rank</b>	<b>%Reabuse of children/rank</b>
Riverside	87,083	2,794	666	19.2%/15	3,460	39.7/01	6.6/20
Butte	11,547	351	95	21.3%/12	446	38.6/02	9.8/10
Sacramento	67,728	1,763	675	27.7%/01	2,438	36.0/03	10.6/05
Santa Clara	36,548	888	240	21.3%/12	1,128	30.9/04	7.5/18
Contra Costa	25,104	534	181	25.3%/04	715	28.5/05	5.2/24
San Francisco	15,443	323	104	24.4%/05	427	27.7/06	9.0/13
Alameda	48,221	853	296	25.8%/03	1,149	23.8/07	9.3/12
San Mateo	10,285	166	51	23.5%/06	217	21.1/08	8.4/15
Kern	58,213	917	277	23.2%/08	1,194	20.5/09	11.6/03
<b>State Average</b>						<b>20.5/--</b>	
San Diego	119,704	2,059	378	15.5%/19	2,437	20.4/10	8.1/16
San Joaquin	41,186	647	187	22.4%/05	834	20.2/11	10.5/07
<b>Large County Average</b>						<b>19.4/--</b>	
Merced	20,423	323	62	16.1%/18	385	18.9/12	12.1/01
Solano	11,852	173	45	20.6%/14	218	18.4/14	6.5/21
Santa Barbara	16,319	238	38	13.8%/22	276	16.9/15	11.8/02
Madera	10,333	152	20	11.6%/23	172	16.6/16	11.5/04
Los Angeles	640,145	8,760	1,754	16.7%/16	10,514	16.4/17	7.7/17
Orange	102,002	1,327	231	14.8%/20	1,558	15.3/18	7.0/19
Imperial	12,769	136	52	27.7%/01	188	14.7/19	9.7/11
Tulare	40,271	486	94	16.2%/17	580	14.4/20	5.7/22
Monterey	19,775	219	24	9.9%/24	243	12.3/21	5.3/23
Ventura	25,407	201	57	22.1%/10	258	10.2/22	8.9/14
Fresno	80,504	555	93	14.4%/21	648	8.0/23	9.9/09
Stanislaus	28,547	168	51	23.3%/07	219	7.7/24	10.2/08

- (1) 2000 Census
- (2) Calendar year 2005
- (3) At any time through December 31, 2005
- (4) Year ending June 30, 2005

*CHART WITH DATA FOR ALL COUNTIES ON FOLLOWING PAGE*

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

County	Impoverished Children	Entries into care	Re-entries into care	Recidivism rate (%)	Total removed	Rate of Removal (per thousand impoverished children)	% reabuse of children
Alameda	48,221	853	296	25.8%	1,149	23.8	9.3
Alpine	78	3	0	0.0%	3	38.5	22.2
Amador	969	18	6	25.0%	24	24.8	2.8
Butte	11,547	351	95	21.3%	446	38.6	9.8
Calaveras	1,462	41	15	26.8%	56	38.3	6.0
Colusa	1,168	41	11	21.2%	52	44.5	7.9
Contra Costa	25,104	534	181	25.3%	715	28.5	5.2
Del Norte	1,818	56	27	32.5%	83	45.7	18.6
El Dorado	3,209	121	36	22.9%	157	48.9	6.6
Fresno	80,504	555	93	14.4%	648	8.0	9.9
Glenn	2,116	38	11	22.4%	49	23.2	13.0
Humboldt	6,618	123	33	21.2%	156	23.6	8.8
Imperial	12,769	136	52	27.7%	188	14.7	9.7
Inyo	705	8	0	0.0%	8	11.3	28
Kern	58,213	917	277	23.2%	1,194	20.5	11.6
Kings	9,705	166	58	25.9%	224	23.1	12.4
Lake	3,202	56	19	25.3%	75	23.4	4
Lassen	1,204	29	26	47.3%	55	45.7	8.9
L.A.	640,145	8,760	1,754	16.7%	10,514	16.4	7.7
Madera	10,333	152	20	11.6%	172	16.6	11.5
Marin	3,714	35	21	37.5%	56	15.1	7.7
Mariposa	624	12	10	45.5%	22	35.3	14.3
Mendocino	4,775	125	44	26.0%	169	35.4	15.7
Merced	20,423	323	62	16.1%	385	18.9	12.1
Modoc	710	8	6	42.9%	14	19.7	7.7
Mono	365	2	2	50.0%	4	11.0	0
Monterey	19,775	219	24	9.9%	243	12.3	5.3
Napa	3,321	42	8	16.0%	50	15.1	6.4
Nevada	2,166	58	19	24.7%	77	35.5	11.4
Orange	102,002	1,327	231	14.8%	1,558	15.3	7.0
Placer	4,317	191	61	24.2%	252	58.4	11.2
Plumas	801	19	9	32.1%	28	35.0	16.7
Riverside	87,083	2,794	666	19.2%	3,460	39.7	6.6
Sacramento	67,728	1,763	675	27.7%	2,438	36.0	10.6
San Benito	2,014	53	16	23.2%	69	34.3	17.3
S. Bernardino	113,695	1,663	469	22.0%	2,132	18.8	10.6
San Diego	119,704	2,059	378	15.5%	2,437	20.4	8.1
San Francisco	15,443	323	104	24.4%	427	27.7	9.0
San Joaquin	41,186	647	187	22.4%	834	20.2	10.5

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S. Luis Obispo	6,212	195	45	18.8%	240	38.6	12.8
San Mateo	10,285	166	51	23.5%	217	21.1	8.4
Santa Barbara	16,319	238	38	13.8%	276	16.9	11.8
Santa Clara	36,548	888	240	21.3%	1,128	30.9	7.5
Santa Cruz	7,871	208	33	13.7%	241	30.6	11.2
Shasta	9,082	217	63	22.5%	280	30.8	7.0
Sierra	122	2	0	0.0%	2	16.4	0
Siskiyou	2,825	73	18	19.8%	91	32.2	12.0
Solano	11,852	173	45	20.6%	218	18.4	6.5
Sonoma	9,762	137	12	8.1%	149	15.3	7.3
Stanislaus	28,547	168	51	23.3%	219	7.7	10.2
Sutter	4,818	58	13	18.3%	71	14.7	2.2
Tehama	3,670	136	24	15.0%	160	43.6	12.9
Trinity	771	12	9	42.9%	21	27.2	10.3
Tulare	40,271	486	94	16.2%	580	14.4	5.7
Tuolumne	1,864	65	26	28.6%	91	48.8	12.7
Ventura	25,407	201	57	22.1%	258	10.2	8.9
Yolo	6,900	193	51	20.9%	244	35.4	9.2
Yuba	5,038	84	33	28.2%	117	23.2	13.0
Missing data	0	684	123	15.2%	807		0
<b>State Total</b>	<b>1,757,100</b>	<b>29,005</b>	<b>7,028</b>	<b>19.5%</b>	<b>36,033</b>	<b>20.5</b>	<b>8.7</b>

Sources: Impoverished child population: 2000 Census via [www.kidscount.org](http://www.kidscount.org)  
 Child removal and safety data: University of California at Berkeley Center for Social Services Research, available online here: <http://cssr.berkeley.edu/CWSCMSreports/>  
 Calculations and rankings done by NCCPR