
**Changes and Trends in the Child Welfare Caseload in
North Carolina: December 2009**

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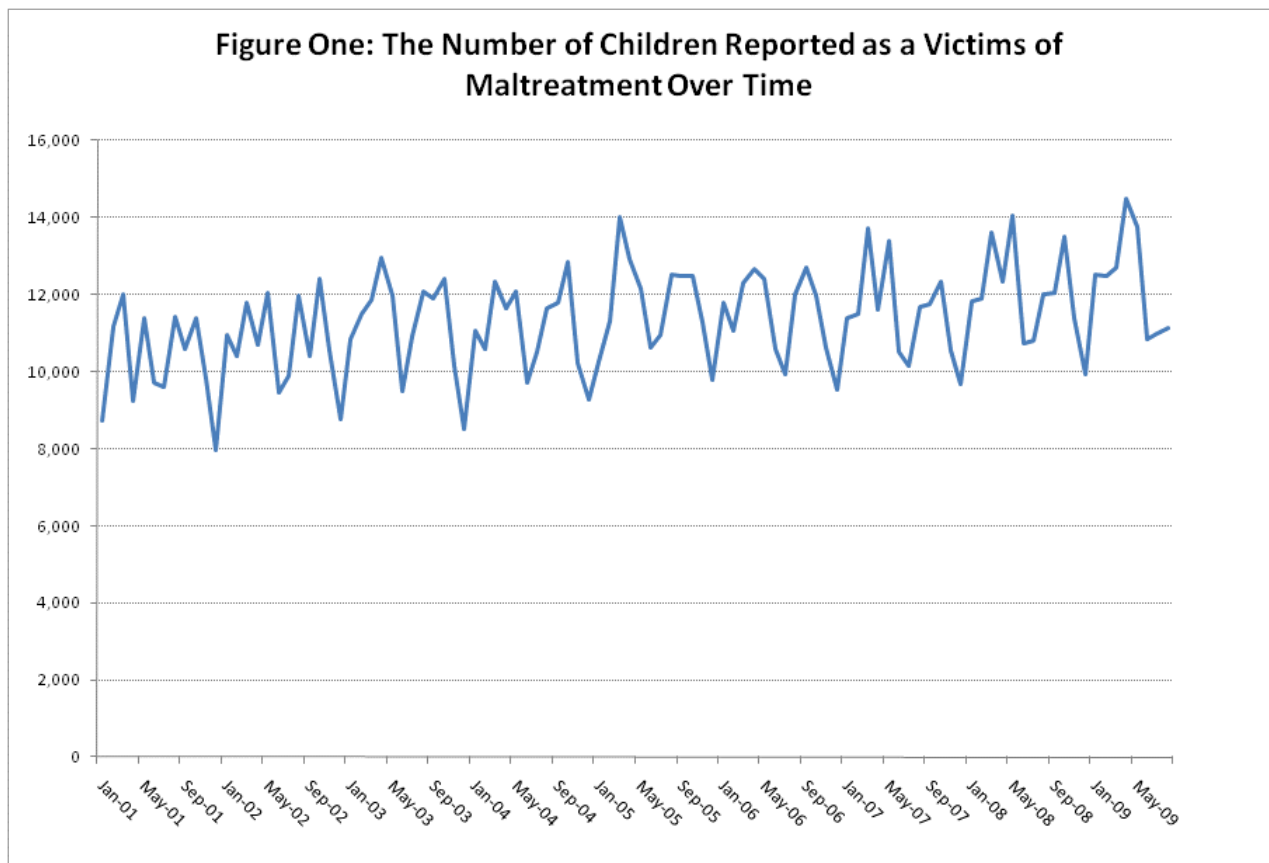
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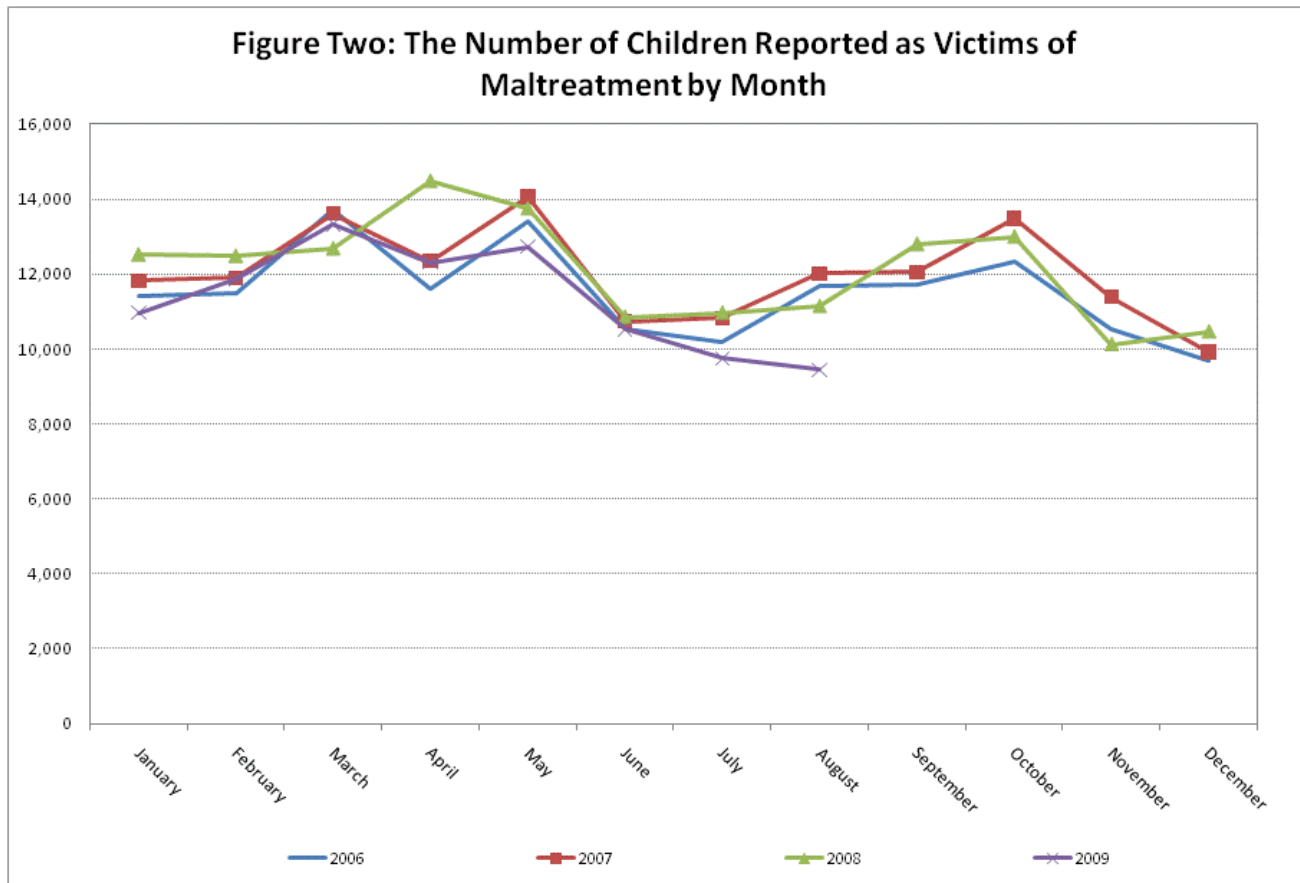
This report explores changes and trends in the Child Welfare caseload in North Carolina. This analysis is based on data extracted from the Services Information System (SIS) in mid-December 2009. These extracts are used to construct and maintain a longitudinal file that tracks the experiences of children and youth who have been involved with the child welfare system in North Carolina. The analysis explores changes in the number of children reported as victims of maltreatment, the number of those reports which are substantiated, and the number of children entering foster care. Long-term trends are also discussed.

Figure One illustrates the changes in the number of reports of maltreatment over time. (Specific monthly numbers can be found in Appendix A, Table One.) As the figure indicates, the number of reports of maltreatment received monthly has increased slightly over time. The number of children reported rose from 11,182 in February 2001 to 11,483 in February 2003. By February 2005 the number of reports had fallen slightly to 11,332 before rising to 11,493 in



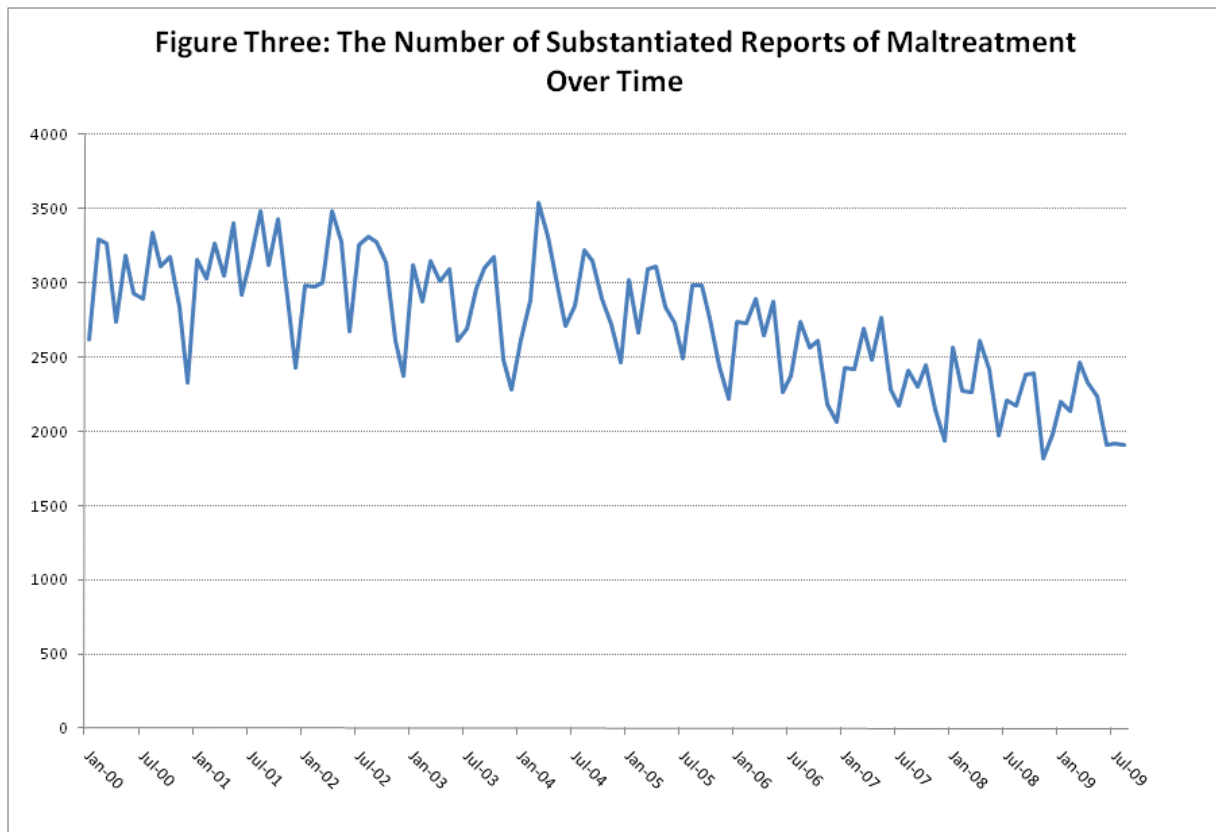
February 2007. By February 2009, the number of reports had risen to 12,487. The reports tracked in Figure One do not provide a unique count of children per year. There are a number of instances in which a child may have more than one report investigated within a calendar year. Also, there are some instances where two separate investigations—as indicated by date of case decision on the DSS-5104 form—about an individual child are concluded within a calendar month. Instances where there are separate allegations of maltreatment for an individual child—as indicated by the form identification number—with the same case decision date are collapsed into a single report. Also, state policies require that when a report of maltreatment is received, all children living in the home must be assessed as a possible victim of maltreatment. As a result, the number of children reported as victims of maltreatment could fluctuate based upon the size of families involved, even as the number of reports remains steady.

Figure One also indicates that there is variation from month to month in the number of children reported. That variation is further illustrated in Figure Two which shows the pattern of



the number of reports received each month by year from January 2006 through August 2009. As the figure indicates, the number of reports received generally peaks around May, then falls in June and July before beginning a slight rise through October. The number of reports then declines through December. One purpose of this figure is to gauge whether there has been a rise in the number of reports received corresponding to the downturn in the state's economy. The figure does not suggest that there has been a recent increase in the number of reports, although the number of reports received in April 2008 was higher than that for previous years. The number of reports received in May 2008 was slightly lower than that for May 2007. In 2009, the number of reports received each month generally has been lower than that for the three prior years. The figure also suggests that there is a decline in the number of reports from June 2009 through August 2009. The number of reports for those months may increase as SIS administrative files are updated.

Figure Three illustrates the number of children whose reports of maltreatment were substantiated. A report is considered substantiated if it has a finding of abuse, neglect, abuse and neglect, dependency, or services needed. It does not include instances where the finding was services provided, child protective services no longer needed. As the figure indicates, the number of children whose report was substantiated has declined over time, from around 3,000 per month in 2000 to around 2,225 per month in 2009. The decline generally corresponds to the implementation of the Multiple Response System (MRS), which resulted in an increase in the number of instances where services were provided to the child or the child's family but were no longer needed when the investigation was completed. Under MRS, investigations of reports of maltreatment can follow one of two tracks: investigative or family assessment. The investigative track is similar in most respects to the way maltreatment reports were handled prior to the implementation of MRS. The family assessment track, on the other hand, allows and encourages the provision of services to families that would build on their strengths and eliminate the risk of harm to their children. MRS was implemented as a pilot program in ten counties in 2001. In 2003, 42 additional counties began applying MRS policies. MRS was expanded statewide in January 2006. The apparent decline in maltreatment substantiations also could be associated with an increase in the number of instances where the finding is services provided, child protective services no longer needed.



Counties have some flexibility in whether to use the investigative or the family assessment track. According to policy¹, the choice of response should be based on the approach that best provides for the child’s safety, permanence, and well being. State policies require that all reports of abuse follow the investigative track. In addition, the policies require that certain reports of neglect—such as those involving a child fatality or where there is medical neglect of a disabled infant—follow the investigative track as well. For other neglect or dependency reports, county departments of social services may use the family assessment response. The family assessments incorporate System of Care (SOC) principles such as involving the family in decisions, developing an individualized plan which builds on the family’s strengths, fostering

¹ The policies for investigations are found in Volume 1: Children’s Services, Chapter VIII: Child Protective Services, of the NC-DSS Family Services Manual available at <http://info.dhhs.state.nc.us/olm/manuals/dss/csm-60/man/>.

interagency collaboration to address the family's needs, and developing culturally appropriate responses.

Just as the tracks differ in their approach, the findings differ as well. Under the investigative track, there are findings for abuse, neglect, or dependency. In contrast, the findings for reports handled through the family assessment track are services needed; services recommended; services provided, child protective services no longer needed; and services not recommended. The finding of services needed is made when there are questions about the frequency and severity of maltreatment, current safety issues, if there is a risk of harm in the future, or if the child is in need of protective services. The finding of services provided, child protective services no longer needed is used if, during the assessment, a determination was made that the threat to the child's safety or the risk of future harm were great enough to require the provision of involuntary services, but the problems were addressed and services no longer required at the end of the assessment period.

The changes in the type of maltreatment found over time are shown in Figure Four. In addition to the types presented in Figure Three (i.e., abuse, neglect, abuse and neglect, dependency, and services needed), this figure contains the count of children whose maltreatment investigation found that services were provided to the child or family during the protective services investigation but that child protective services are no longer needed. As the figure indicates, there has been a decline in the number of children found to be victims of neglect. This decline corresponds with an increase in the number of children for whom the investigation into the maltreatment concluded that services were needed. In mid-2006, there was also an increase in the number of maltreatment investigations that concluded that as the result of the services provided during the protective services investigation, no additional services were needed. In addition to the decrease in the number of instances where children and youth were found to be victims of neglect, there is a slight decrease over time in the number of children who were found to be to be victims of abuse.

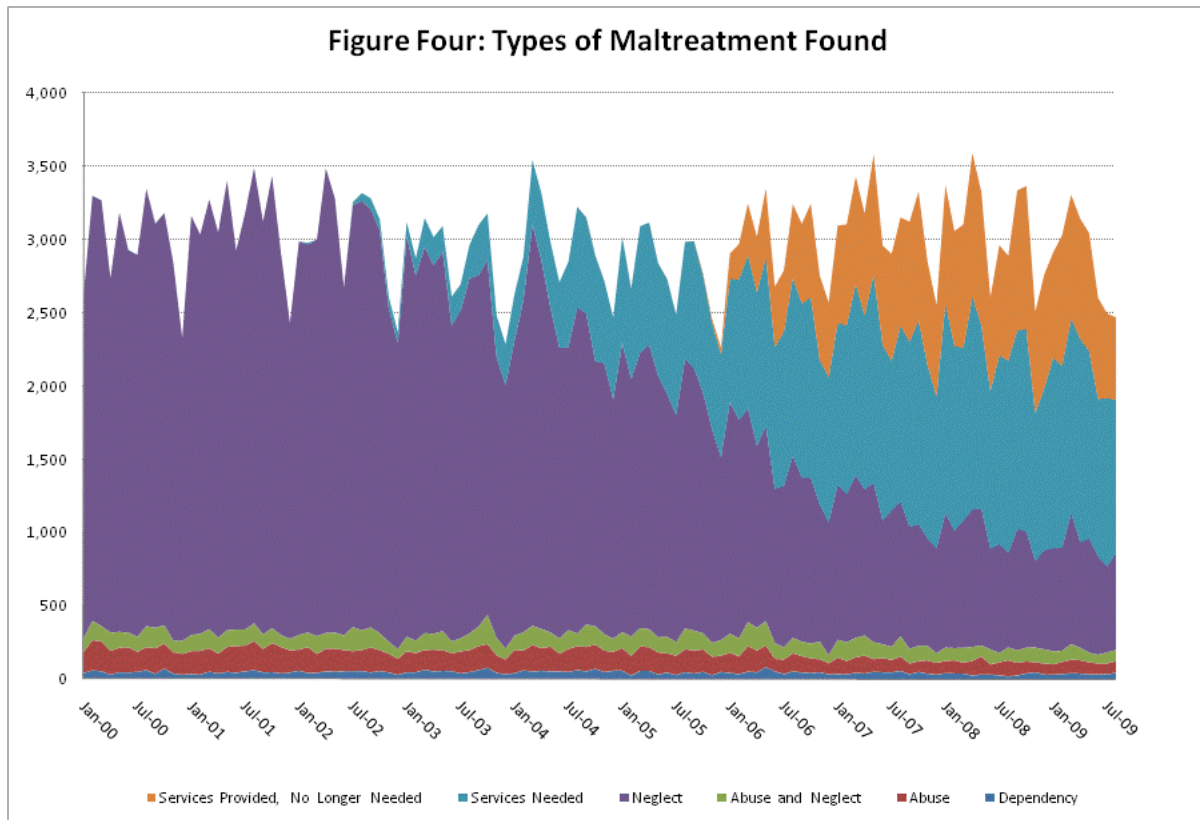


Figure Five illustrates findings from the investigation of maltreatment reports. These findings have changed over time. As the figure indicates, while there has been a decrease in the findings of abuse, neglect, abuse and neglect, and dependency, there has also been a decrease in the number of unsubstantiations. This decline in unsubstantiations is likely due to a decrease in the number of investigations routed through the investigative track. That notion is further supported by the increase in the number of findings of services not recommended, an outcome of the family assessment track. Figure Five also shows an increasing number of findings of services recommended. The increase reflects the growth of MRS. Even after the expansion of MRS statewide in 2006, the number of findings of services recommended has continued to grow. As Figure Four suggested earlier, the monthly sum of findings of abuse; neglect; abuse and neglect; dependency; services needed; and services provided, protective services no longer needed, has remained fairly steady over time. With the expansion of MRS, there appears to have been an

increase in the number of families and children recommended for services above the number of children determined to be victims of maltreatment.

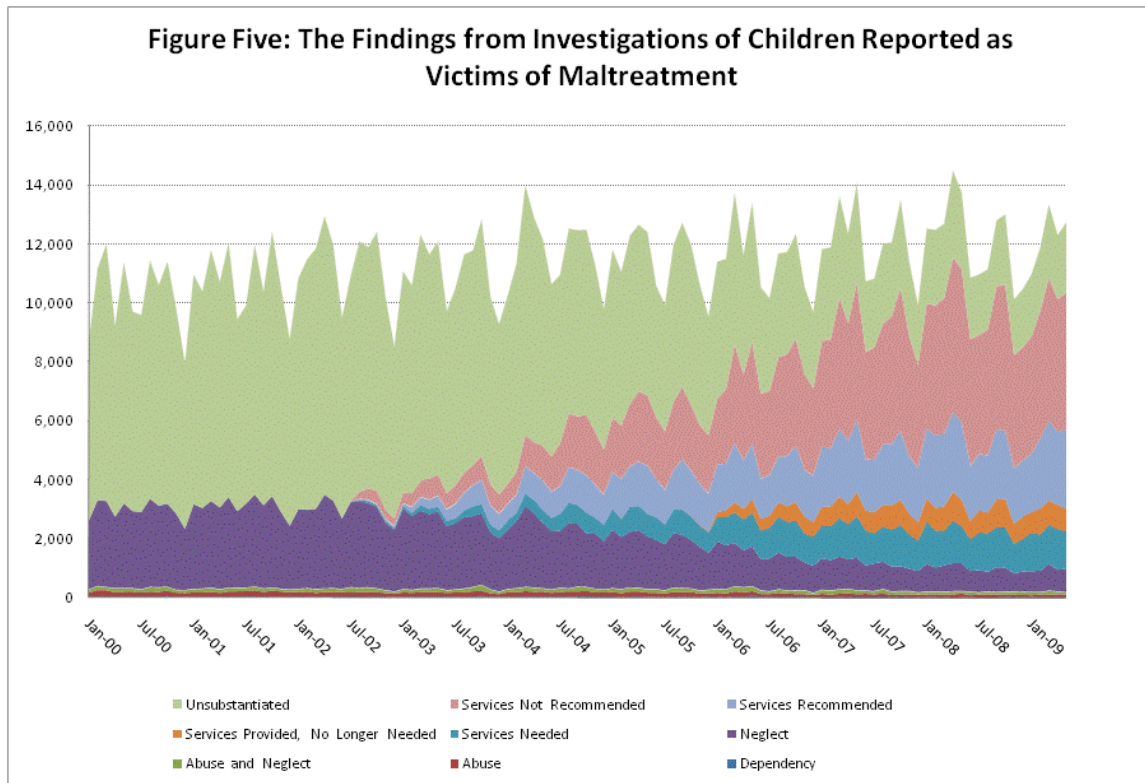
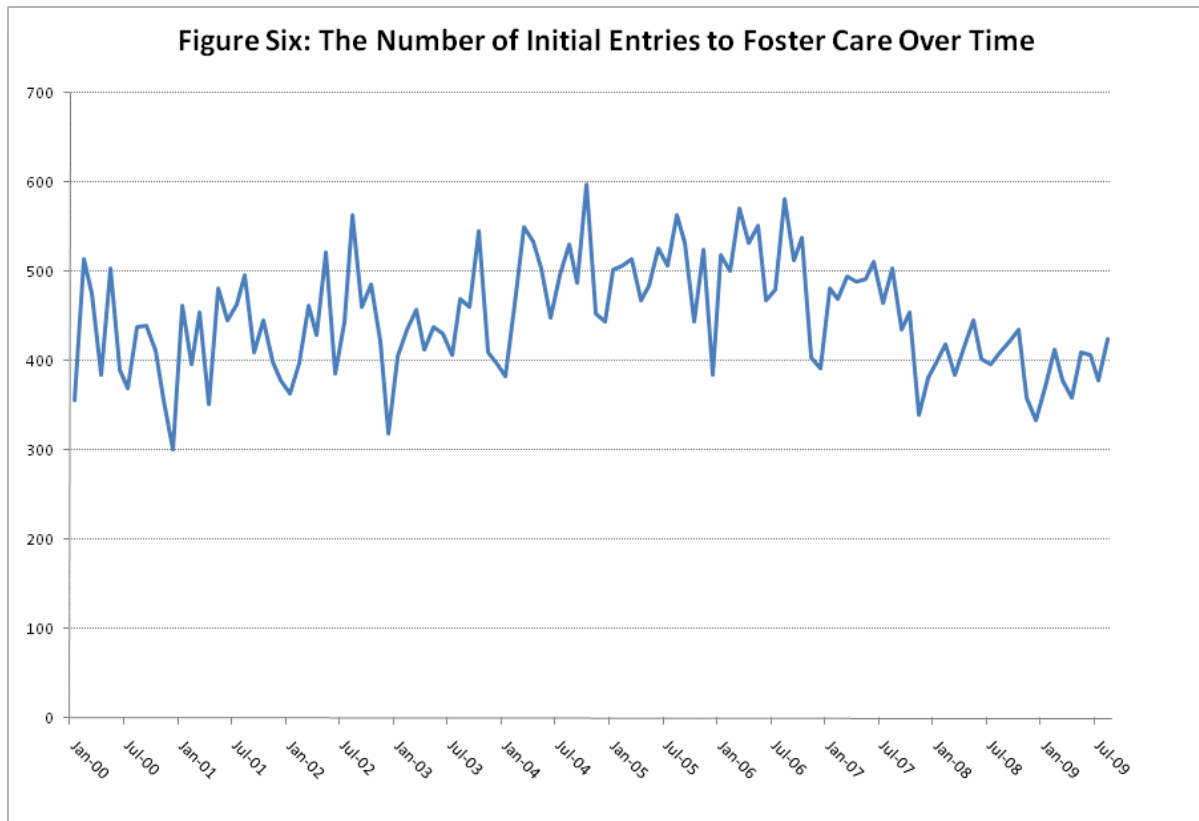


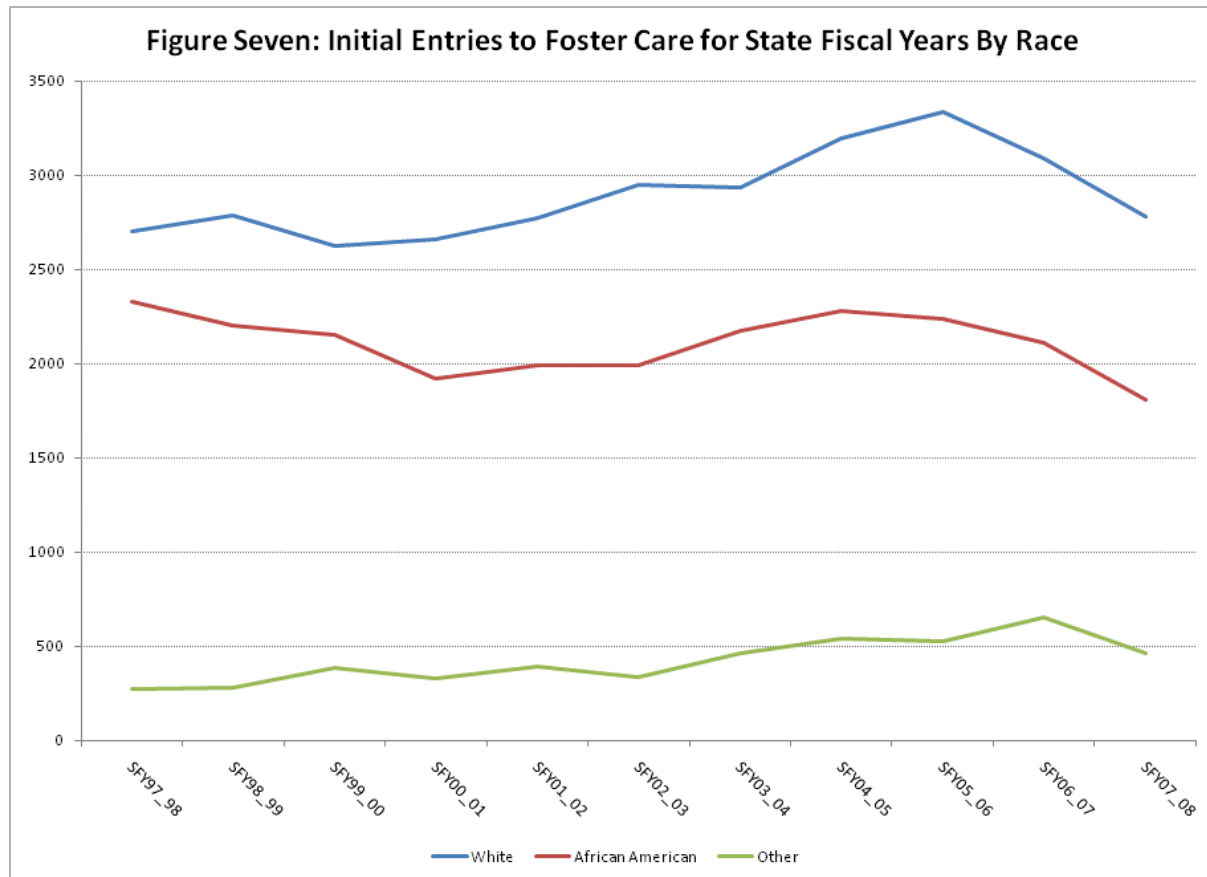
Figure Six reports the number of children entering foster care for the first time since January 2000. According to the figure, the number of children entering foster care generally ranged between 400 and 500 per month between 2000 and 2004. There appears to have been a slight increase between 2005 and 2007, when the number of children entering care centered around 500 per month. In mid 2007, the number entering each month began to fall and has ranged between a high of 503 children in August 2007 to a low of 333 in December 2008. The reason for these fluctuations is not clear. The figure indicates there is month-to-month as well as seasonal variation. The number of children entering foster care for the first time tends to reach a low point in December. In December 2000, only 301 children entered foster care for the first time. In December 2002, 318 children entered care for the first time. In 2005, 384 children entered care for the first time. In December 2008, 334 entered care for the first time. Also, according to the chart, October seems to be associated with a large number of children entering

care for the first time. In October 2004, 598 entered foster care. That compares with 545 entering care for the first time in October 2003 and 538 entering care for the first time in October 2006.



The decline in initial entries to care is not consistent across all groups. Figure Seven illustrates the changes in the initial entries to foster care for state fiscal years by race. State fiscal years (SFYs), instead of month, are used in order to smooth the lines. As the figure indicates, in SFY 1997-1998, there were 2,699 white children who entered care for the first time, compared with 2,327 African American children and 274 children with other racial classifications. The number of white children entering care rose to 2,946 in SFY 2003-2004 and continued climbing to 3,333 in 2005-2006 before falling. In SFY 2007-2008, there were 2,781 white children who entered care for the first time, 82 more than in SFY 1997-1998. The number of African American children entering care for the first time fell to 1,923 in SFY 2000-2001 before rising to 2,278 in SFY 2004-2005. After that, the number of African American children entering care for the first time began to fall, declining over the next three years to 1,809 in SFY 2007-2008. That

number is 518 less than the number of African American children who entered care in SFY 1997-1998.



The number of children with other racial classifications who entered care for the first time has risen gradually over time. In SFY 1999-2000, there were 382 children with other racial classifications who entered care for the first time. That number increased to 394 in SFY 2001-2002. By SFY 2004-2005, that number had increased to 539. In SFY 2006-2007, the number had climbed to 649. The number of children who entered care for the first time in SFY 2007-2008 with a racial classification other than white or African American declined to 459, 185 more than for SFY 1997-1998.

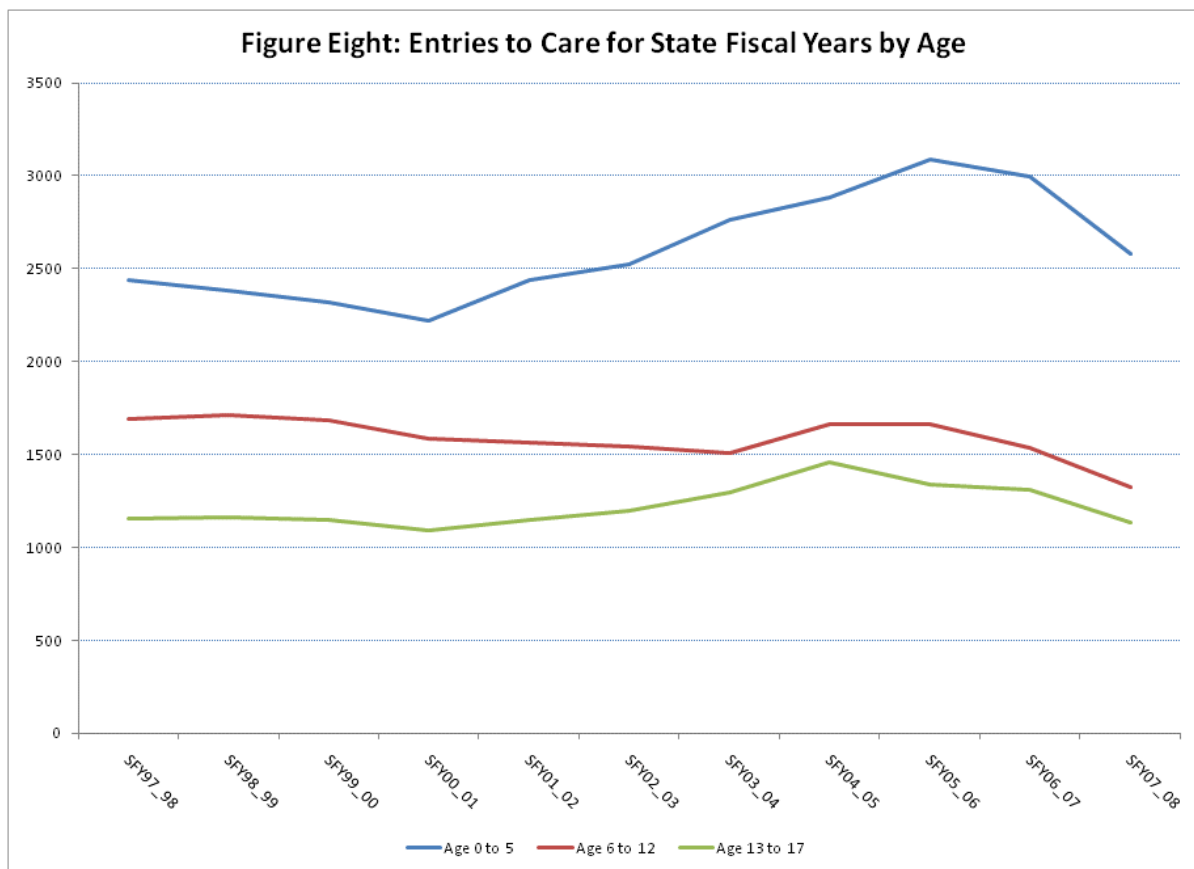
North Carolina uses 64 mutually exclusive codes to classify race and ethnicity. There are 32 racial classifications such as White, Black, Asian, American Indian or Alaskan Native, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, White/Black, White/American Indian, Black/American Indian or Alaskan Native, White/Black/Asian, and Black/American Indian or Alaskan

Native/Asian. For each of these 32 racial classifications, the child is classified as either Non Hispanic or Latino or Hispanic or Latino. In the analysis shown in Figure Seven, the Non Hispanic or Latino and the Hispanic or Latino categories were added together. There is wide variation in the number of children in each category. Some of the racial categories are large. For example, there were 2,756 White Non Hispanic or Latino children and 332 White Hispanic or Latino children (for a total of 3,088) who entered care for the first time in SFY 2006-2007. Others are very small. For example, there was only one child classified as Hispanic or Latino White/Black/Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander who entered foster care between SFY 1999-2000 and SFY 2007-2008. Racial classifications other than White and Black are collapsed into the Other category in Figure Seven.

While many of the classifications contained in the Other category contain a small number of children, some have increased over time. For example, there were 65 children classified as White/Black Non Hispanic or Latino who entered care for the first time in SFY 1999-2000. By SFY 2004-2005, that number had grown to 176. During the same time period, the number of White/Black Hispanic or Latino children who entered foster care for the first time tripled from 7 in SFY 1999-2000 to 21 in SFY 2004-2005. Also, during that same time period, the number of American Indian or Alaskan Native Non Hispanic or Latino children fell from 198 in SFY 1999-2000 to 117 in SFY 2004-2005. The number of American Indian or Alaskan Native Hispanic or Latino children changed from 6 in SFY 1999-2000 to 19 in SFY 2003-2004 before falling to 5 in SFY 2004-2005. Most of the growth in the Other category shown in Figure Seven is due to an increase in the number of children who are members of more than one racial group.

Figure Eight shows the change in initial entries to care by age. As the figure reports, there were 2,438 children ages zero to five who entered foster care for the first time in SFY 1997-1998. That number fell to 2,220 in SFY 2000-2001 before rising to 2,761 in SFY 2003-2004. The number continued to climb to 3,089 in SFY 2005-2006 before falling to 2,581 in SFY 2007-2008. Though there has been a slight decline in recent years, the number of children who entered care for the first time in SFY 2007-2008 is still 143 higher than the number who entered care for the first time in SFY 1997-1998. The figure also shows that 1,693 children ages six to 12 entered care for the first time in SFY 1997-1998. That number fell by more than 100 to 1,587 by SFY

2000-2001. It continued to fall to 1,507 in SFY 2003-2004 before increasing to 1,664 in SFY 2005-2006. Since then, the number has declined over time to 1,325 in SFY 2007-2008, 368 fewer children than in SFY 1997-1998. Also, according to the figure, the number of children ages 13 to 17 who entered care for the first time has declined slightly over time. In SFY 1997-1998, there were 1,154 children in this older age group who entered care for the first time. That number climbed to 1,457 in SFY 2004-2005 before falling to 1,136 in SFY 2007-2008, 18 fewer than entered care for the first time in SFY 1997-1998.



Summary

Since 2000, there has been a gradual increase in the monthly number of children with reports of maltreatment. In comparing patterns across months for the last several years, there does not appear to have been a sharp increase associated with the current economic downturn. There has been a gradual decrease in the number of reports that are classified as substantiations. That decrease is not as apparent when MRS assessments with a finding of services provided,

services no longer needed are included. Also, following the implementation of MRS, there has been a gradual decrease in the combined number of assessments with a finding of unsubstantiated or services not recommended. There has been an increase in the number of cases with an MRS finding of services recommended.

There has also been variation in the number of children and youth entering foster care for the first time. The number of children entering care each month increased slightly between 2005 and 2007. Since 2007, the number of children entering care for the first time each month has fallen and has ranged between 503 in August 2007 and 334 in December 2008.

The decline in the entries to care has not been consistent across all groups. The number of African American children who entered care for the first time has declined by 518 between SFY 1997-1998 and SFY 2007-2008. At the same time, the number of white children who entered care for the first time over that time period increased by 82. The number of children with other racial classifications also increased—by 185—during that time period.

There has also been a decrease in the number of elementary school aged children who entered care for the first time between SFY 1997-1998 and SFY 2007-2008. The number of children ages six to 12 entering care has declined by 368—from 1,693 to 1,325—during that period. The number of older children entering care for the first time during that time period also declined, but by a much smaller number. In SFY 1997-1998, there were 1,154 children ages 13 to 17 who entered care for the first time. That number declined by 18, to 1,136, in SFY 2007-2008. At the same time, the number of pre-school aged children who entered care for the first time increased during that period. In SFY 1997-1998, there were 2,438 children ages zero to five who entered care for the first time. That number grew by 143 to 2,581 in SFY 2007-2008.

Appendix A

Table One:
The Number of Children Reported As
Maltreated

Month	Number of Children Reported
Jan-00	8,711
Feb-00	11,182
Mar-00	11,992
Apr-00	9,225
May-00	11,373
Jun-00	9,714
Jul-00	9,590
Aug-00	11,439
Sep-00	10,601
Oct-00	11,400
Nov-00	9,808
Dec-00	7,956
Jan-01	10,956
Feb-01	10,394
Mar-01	11,785
Apr-01	10,713
May-01	12,037
Jun-01	9,453
Jul-01	9,911
Aug-01	11,982
Sep-01	10,392
Oct-01	12,416
Nov-01	10,547
Dec-01	8,775
Jan-02	10,830
Feb-02	11,483
Mar-02	11,849
Apr-02	12,942
May-02	11,963
Jun-02	9,500
Jul-02	10,918
Aug-02	12,096

Sep-02	11,900
Oct-02	12,412
Nov-02	10,165
Dec-02	8,515
Jan-03	11,078
Feb-03	10,600
Mar-03	12,325
Apr-03	11,646
May-03	12,092
Jun-03	9,722
Jul-03	10,504
Aug-03	11,645
Sep-03	11,787
Oct-03	12,848
Nov-03	10,214
Dec-03	9,287
Jan-04	10,269
Feb-04	11,332
Mar-04	14,000
Apr-04	12,905
May-04	12,169
Jun-04	10,636
Jul-04	10,960
Aug-04	12,525
Sep-04	12,477
Oct-04	12,483
Nov-04	11,293
Dec-04	9,794
Jan-05	11,807
Feb-05	11,061
Mar-05	12,295
Apr-05	12,655
May-05	12,415
Jun-05	10,578
Jul-05	9,940
Aug-05	11,994
Sep-05	12,718

Oct-05	11,972
Nov-05	10,623
Dec-05	9,534
Jan-06	11,404
Feb-06	11,493
Mar-06	13,729
Apr-07	11,617
May-07	13,403
Jun-07	10,526
Jul-07	10,168
Aug-07	11,680
Sep-07	11,738
Oct-07	12,332
Nov-07	10,546
Dec-07	9,690
Jan-08	11,827
Feb-08	11,895
Mar-08	13,617
Apr-08	12,347
May-08	14,064
Jun-08	10,740
Jul-08	10,824
Aug-08	12,019
Sep-08	12,057
Oct-08	13,492
Nov-08	11,392
Dec-08	9,921
Jan-09	12,524
Feb-09	12,487
Mar-09	12,688
Apr-09	14,491
May-09	13,761
Jun-09	10,527
Jul-09	9,758
Aug-09	9,446

Table Two:
The Number of Substantiations

Month	Number of Children with a Substantiated Report
Jan-00	2,618
Feb-00	3,296
Mar-00	3,266
Apr-00	2,734
May-00	3,181
Jun-00	2,929
Jul-00	2,893
Aug-00	3,343
Sep-00	3,110
Oct-00	3,178
Nov-00	2,840
Dec-00	2,325
Jan-01	3,158
Feb-01	3,032
Mar-01	3,271
Apr-01	3,047
May-01	3,399
Jun-01	2,924
Jul-01	3,178
Aug-01	3,486
Sep-01	3,120
Oct-01	3,432
Nov-01	2,899
Dec-01	2,428
Jan-02	2,985
Feb-02	2,977
Mar-02	2,999
Apr-02	3,484
May-02	3,279
Jun-02	2,671
Jul-02	3,253
Aug-02	3,316
Sep-02	3,280
Oct-02	3,136
Nov-02	2,609

Dec-02	2,370
Jan-03	3,118
Feb-03	2,871
Mar-03	3,144
Apr-03	3,015
May-03	3,091
Jun-03	2,611
Jul-03	2,693
Aug-03	2,964
Sep-03	3,098
Oct-03	3,177
Nov-03	2,484
Dec-03	2,286
Jan-04	2,624
Feb-04	2,881
Mar-04	3,541
Apr-04	3,312
May-04	2,985
Jun-04	2,709
Jul-04	2,847
Aug-04	3,222
Sep-04	3,148
Oct-04	2,889
Nov-04	2,718
Dec-04	2,469
Jan-05	3,017
Feb-05	2,664
Mar-05	3,090
Apr-05	3,114
May-05	2,838
Jun-05	2,730
Jul-05	2,488
Aug-05	2,984
Sep-05	2,988
Oct-05	2,756
Nov-05	2,436
Dec-05	2,219
Jan-06	2,734
Feb-06	2,730
Mar-06	2,894

Apr-06	2,643
May-06	2,878
Jun-06	2,268
Jul-06	2,372
Aug-06	2,740
Sep-06	2,565
Oct-06	2,608
Nov-06	2,179
Dec-06	2,064
Jan-07	2,432
Feb-07	2,418
Mar-07	2,697
Apr-07	2,484
May-07	2,762
Jun-07	2,283
Jul-07	2,173
Aug-07	2,413
Sep-07	2,304
Oct-07	2,451
Nov-07	2,146
Dec-07	1,933
Jan-08	2,568
Feb-08	2,276
Mar-08	2,263
Apr-08	2,611
May-08	2,417
Jun-09	1,969
Jul-09	2,211
Aug-09	2,175