



## **Human Trafficking of Children Annual Report**

Department of Children and Families  
Office of Child and Family Well-Being  
October 1, 2024

Shevaun L. Harris  
Secretary

Ron DeSantis  
Governor

## Background

Section 39.001(5), Florida Statutes (F.S.), establishes the following goals for the safety and treatment of sexually exploited children in the dependency system:

- Ensure sexually exploited children are safe.
- Provide for sexually exploited children as dependent children, rather than as delinquents in the criminal or juvenile justice system.
- Sever the bond between exploited children and traffickers, and reunite these children with their families or provide them with appropriate guardians; and
- Enable sexually exploited children to be willing and reliable witnesses in the prosecution of traffickers.

## Purpose

This report provides information as required in section 39.524(3), F.S., as follows:

- The prevalence of child commercial sexual exploitation (CSE) – the number of children verified as victims of CSE.
- The specialized services provided (residential and non-residential) and placement of such children.
- The number of children placed in safe houses and safe foster homes throughout the year.
- The criteria used to determine the placement of children.
- The number of children who were evaluated for placement.
- The number of children who were placed based upon the evaluation.
- The number of children who were not placed.
- The number of children who were referred to a safe house or safe foster home for whom placement was unavailable.
- The regions in which such placement was unavailable.
- The Florida Department of Children and Families (Department's) response to the findings and recommendations made by the Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability (OPPAGA).

The activities described within this report occurred between July 1, 2023, and June 30, 2024 (State Fiscal Year [SFY] 2023-24), unless otherwise noted.

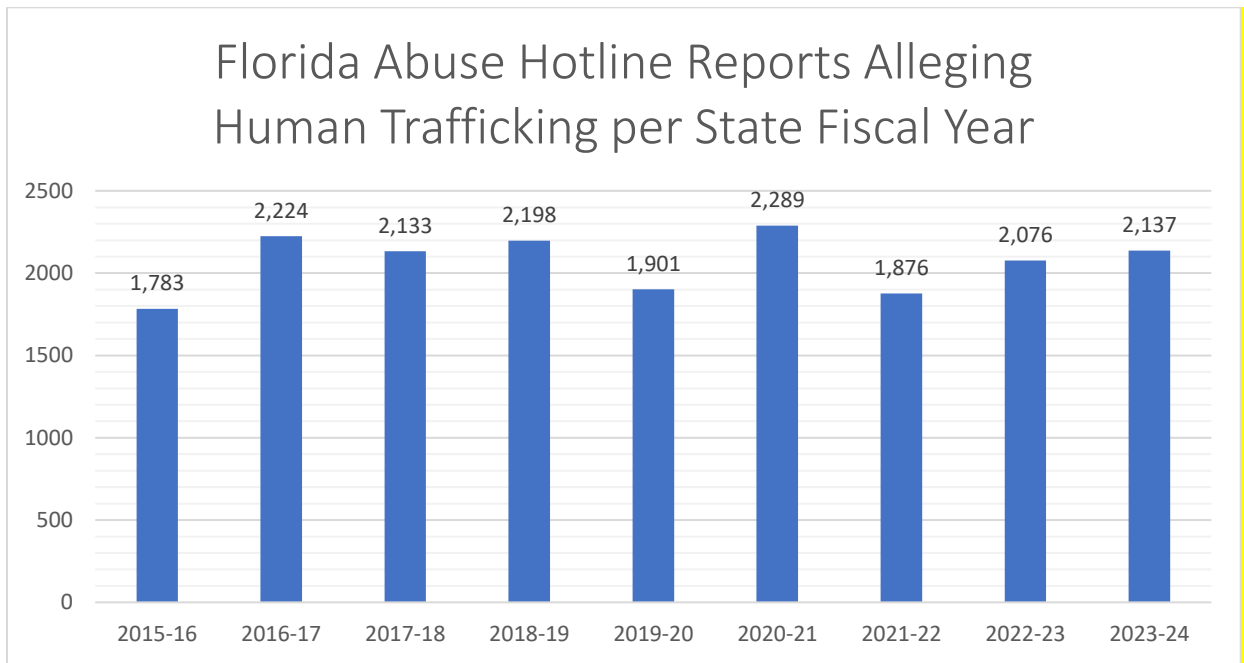
The Department tracked Human Trafficking allegations in two primary categories:

- *Human Trafficking – Commercial Sexual Exploitation of a Child (CSEC)*: This maltreatment type is used for cases in which the allegations involve commercial sexual exploitation of a child (e.g., adult entertainment clubs, escort services, prostitution, etc.). Investigative types for this category include *Caregiver*, *Other*, or *Institutional*. This distinction separates reports based on whether the alleged perpetrator is a parent, legal guardian, caregiver, unrelated adult, or appears to be an institution.
- *Human Trafficking – Labor*: This maltreatment type is used in cases in which the allegations involve issues associated with forced labor, slavery, or servitude that do not appear to be sexual in nature.

Human Trafficking – CSEC and Human Trafficking – Labor are the only maltreatments that do not require an alleged perpetrator to be a parent or caregiver to the child victim but rather, any person who is suspected of exploiting that child.

### Investigative Intakes

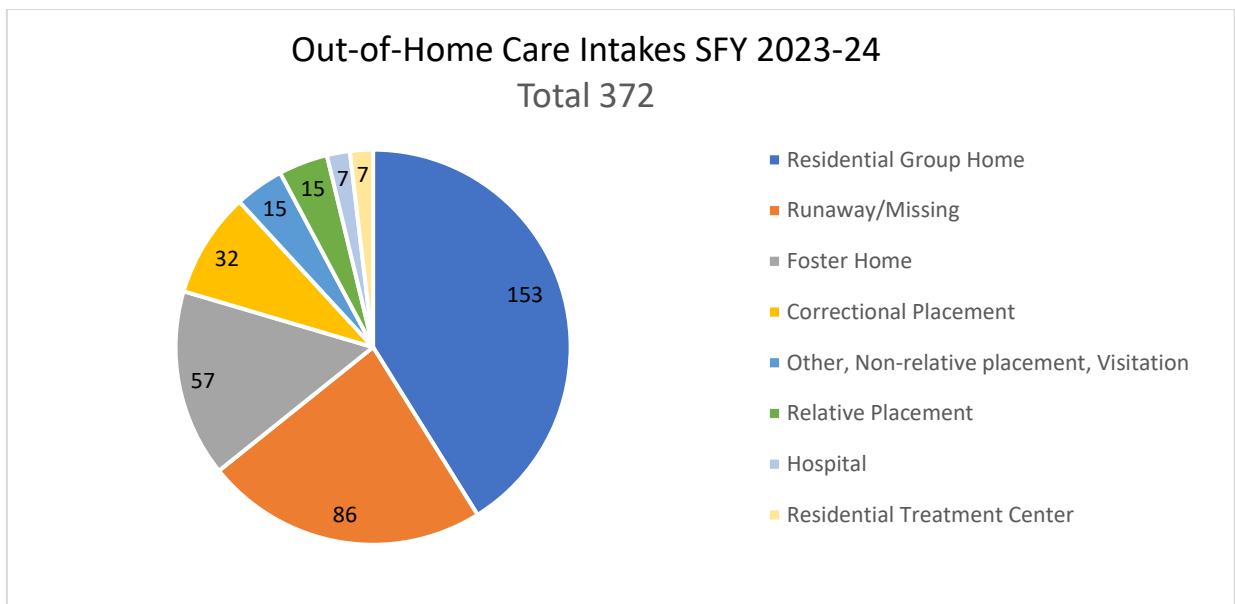
In SFY 2023-24, the total number of reports, initial and additional, accepted by the Florida Abuse Hotline (Hotline) alleging one of the human trafficking maltreatments was 2,137 involving 1,592 children. Of the 2,137 accepted reports, 1,965 (91.95%) were coded as CSEC and 172 (8.05%) reports were for Labor Trafficking. The chart below shows the trend in cases since SFY 2015-16.



In SFY 2023-24, of the 2,137 reports of human trafficking, 1,724 (80.67%) involved female alleged victims, while 375 (17.55%) involved male alleged victims. The remaining 38 reports (1.78%) listed gender as unknown or not specified. This distribution closely mirrors the pattern observed in the previous year.

Of the 2,137 reports, 1,765 reports (82.6%) listed children living at home with their parents or other caregiver, while 372 reports (17.4%) had children listed in out-of-home care at the time of intake. Of the 372 reports, 153 reports listed children living in residential group homes and 57 children living in a traditional foster home.

*These numbers dispute the widespread assumption that human trafficking mostly affects children in foster care.*



The county-level data reveals that Hillsborough County received the highest number of reports of human trafficking, with 220 reports, followed closely by Miami-Dade and Broward counties, each with 199 reports. Duval County received 148 reports, and Orange County reported 139 cases. The following chart shows the number of reports received by each region. As illustrated below, the highest number of reports for human trafficking (HT) maltreatment were received in the Suncoast Region (527) followed by the Central Region (452).

<b>Region</b>	<b>Human Trafficking - CSEC</b>	<b>Human Trafficking - Labor</b>	<b>Grand Total</b>
Suncoast	491	36	527
Central	422	30	452
Northeast	349	34	383
Southeast	290	44	334
Northwest	233	9	242
Southern	180	19	199
<b>Totals</b>	<b>1,965</b>	<b>172</b>	<b>2,137</b>

**Investigative Findings**

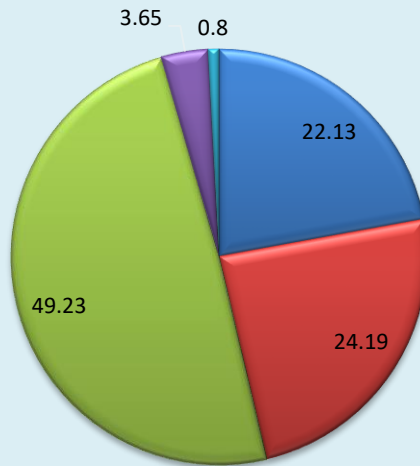
Out of the 2,137 reports of human trafficking in SFY 2023-24, 473 reports (22.13%) were closed as verified. Additionally, 78 cases (3.65%) were still open and had not yet been closed with findings when the data was compiled in July 2024. The rate of verification for CSEC was 22.5%, with 443 out of 1,965 cases being verified. This verification rate is almost identical to the previous year's rate of 22.4%.

For Labor Trafficking, the verification rate increased from 11.68% in SFY 2022-23 to 17.44% in SFY 2023-24 (30 report verifications out of 172 total reports in SFY 2023-24). This trend reflects the growing public awareness about labor exploitation of minors while the number of verified cases stays relatively constant. Other cases investigated by the Department find instances of labor exploitation or violations of child labor regulations, but these findings do not meet the definition of minor labor trafficking.

In SFY 2023-24, there were 27 verified male survivors of CSEC and 10 male survivors of Labor Trafficking. During the same period, 286 females were verified as survivors of CSEC, and 7 females were verified survivors of Labor Trafficking.

The chart below depicts the outcome of human trafficking investigations conducted for fiscal year 2023-24. These numbers do not vary significantly from fiscal year 2022-23.

## Investigative Findings SFY2023-24



■ Verified   
 ■ Not Substantiated   
 ■ No Indicator   
 ■ Still Open   
 ■ Closed: No Findings

**Verified:** Sufficient evidence shows harm or threat of harm due to abuse, abandonment, or neglect.

**Not Substantiated:** Some evidence exists, but not enough to confirm harm resulted from abuse, abandonment, or neglect.

**No Indicators:** No evidence was found to support the allegations.

**Still Open:** Investigation remained open at the time of the report

**Closed - No Finding:** Case closed due to duplication, inability to locate the child, lack of jurisdiction, or unfounded report.

## Safe Houses and Safe Foster Home Capacity and Placement

### *Safe Home and Safe Therapeutic Foster Home Capacity*

Specialized residential placements currently exist in the Central, Suncoast, Southeast, Southern, and Northeast Regions. The Department’s Human Trafficking Unit meets with all specialized CSEC residential providers on a quarterly basis to discuss issues and provide technical support.

During SFY 2023-24, the number of available safe houses increased from 33 to 43. This expansion included the addition of a Tier 2 safe house by a new provider in the Southern Region and a new Tier 1 home by an existing provider in the Central Region. This brings the total number of providers to six, with eight homes across the state. Two more Tier 2 homes are expected to open in the second half of 2024 with 17 additional beds.

As of July 2024, there were eight safe therapeutic foster homes within the Citrus Helping Adolescents Negatively Impacted by Commercial Exploitation (CHANCE) Program, a treatment program operated by Citrus Health Network. CHANCE is implemented in Miami-Dade and Broward counties, addressing the unique mental and

behavioral health needs of youth who have been commercially sexually exploited. The CHANCE program is expanding to build additional therapeutic foster home capacity.

Additionally, Devereux Florida, through its DELTA Foster Home Program, has 12 safe foster homes located in the Suncoast, Central, Southern, Southeast, and Northeast Regions. Devereux continues to provide training for foster families statewide and collaborates with the Community-Based Care Lead Agencies in the state to develop safe foster homes. The Safe Foster Home model serves both male and female child victims of human trafficking.

### ***Safe Home Placement***

Upon identification of a child as a victim of CSEC, the child is assessed to determine the most appropriate placement. The current mechanism for assessment of placement is through a multi-disciplinary staffing and the use of the Level of Care Placement Tool. The Level of Care Placement Tool considers factors that help determine the most appropriate placement for a youth including runaway history, foster care history, current involvement with a gang and/or trafficker, current substance use, behavioral and psychiatric history, positive support systems, location considerations such as court involvement, and readiness to receive services. Youth with high-level needs, such as substance abuse or mental health treatment, often require a higher level of targeted care such as a substance abuse treatment facility or a residential treatment center. Youth with a good support system at home may be best served with specialized community-based wrap-around services. A safe house may be a good fit for CSEC youth who may need a structured living environment and are ready to receive services.

SFY 2023-24 data reported by Lead Agencies across the state show that a total of 392 youth were evaluated for placement in a safe house or a safe foster home. Of these 392 youth, 115 children were recommended for such placement. Of 115 youth recommended for a safe house or a safe foster home placement, 36 (31.3%) were placed based on their evaluation. The Suncoast Region Lead Agencies reported the highest number of youth (11) placed in the safe house or safe foster home. An additional 79 youths were not placed in a safe house or safe foster home, as they needed to be placed in a substance abuse treatment program, mental health facility, or were placed in commitment programs administered by the Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ).

There were 19 youth not placed in a safe house due to their runaway status. In some cases, a youth may still be placed in a safe house or safe foster home after recovery from a runaway episode, upon discharge from a juvenile justice facility, or upon discharge from a higher-level mental health facility. Many of these youth are referred to specialized nonresidential services in the community to address their needs as a victim of CSEC.

In SFY 2023-24, 49 youth were referred to a safe house or safe foster home and declined placement. It is important to note that going to a safe house program is voluntary and youth must consent to their placement.

Although the number of identified child survivors of human trafficking is higher than the number of beds available in safe houses, beds may not always be filled. Decisions to place each child are based on the existing make-up of current safe house residents and the individual's specific needs. The complexity of the residents' needs may limit the number of youth a safe home accepts at any given time. Occasionally, there is a decision to stagger new placements into a home temporarily to ensure adequate assimilation of new youth into the program and maintain consistent and stable staff engagement with the existing youth. Each facility has its own intake and assessment process and ultimately determines the appropriateness of a child for a specific placement.

Youth who are not in the custody of the Department ("community youth") are placed in safe houses if their individual circumstances require that level of placement and services. Data trends reflect that 30% of safe house residents are community youth. It is also important to note that not all verified survivors require the level of care provided at a safe house. Some survivors may be more appropriately served in their own homes with community-based wrap-around services, while others may need a higher level of care.

### **Other Specialized Services (Non-Residential)**

The State of Florida offers an array of community-based supports for survivors of human trafficking. Community-based services are a crucial part of the continuum of specialized services that are available to CSEC youth. Community-based services can serve a youth that has a stable and supportive living environment, does not want to go to a safe house, or does not need the level of care that a safe foster home, safe house, or residential treatment center provide. Typically, these services include therapy, specialized case management or advocacy, and other services to meet the individualized needs of that youth.

Providing substance abuse treatment often becomes a priority when a need is identified. Going through substance abuse treatment allows a youth to be in a more stable state prior to receiving services targeted toward human trafficking recovery. A safe house placement would not be an appropriate placement for a youth who struggles with severe substance abuse or needs detox; therefore, it is critical that substance abuse treatment providers are trained on CSEC and able to serve the needs of this population. The Department continues its efforts to identify other programs serving substance-dependent youth and offers training to any provider serving this population.

There are several service programs that were highlighted this past year during the Services and Resources Committee, chaired by Secretary Harris, that provide a robust



teaming model approach to serving minor survivors of human trafficking. These models provide clinical, case management, and peer mentor components that the minor and their families need to heal.

During this past year, the Human Trafficking team and the Department's Licensing team partnered with adult house providers and other subject matter experts to create the adult safe house administrative rule that will enable certification of adult safe houses. Rulemaking is in process with plans to finalize in the fall of 2024.

## **Expenditures for Human Trafficking**

The Florida Legislature has appropriated \$3 million in recurring funds through the General Appropriations Act to serve the needs of youth who were survivors of sexual exploitation, adjudicated dependent, or the subject of an open investigation due to allegations of abuse, neglect, or exploitation. As directed by the legislature, the funds are provided to the Community-Based Care Lead Agencies for costs associated with placement and services for sexually exploited youth. The Lead Agencies reported expenditures totaling \$3,445,378.12 for CSEC services during SFY 2023-24. Of the payments reported for CSEC services, the average annual cost of care for an individual survivor was \$33,778.22.

## **Annual Summary of Activities**

The Department has maintained its commitment to improving the identification and service provision for populations affected by human trafficking through various enhancement projects while maintaining the existing service array. This year, DCF made significant organizational changes by creating the Office of Community Services. This new office consolidates offices and programs dedicated to special populations under one division that includes the Adult Protective Services program, the Office on Homelessness, the Office of Domestic Violence, the Human Trafficking program, and Hope Florida. By centralizing these programs, the Department is able to provide a more coordinated and efficient approach to service delivery, enabling streamlined communication and resource allocation. This structure allows staff to respond more swiftly and effectively to the needs of individuals and families.

The Department also launched the electronic version of the Human Trafficking Screening Tool for children suspected of being victims of human trafficking. This will enable the collection of more reliable data to validate the tool and analyze outcomes for victims and survivors. In addition, the Department created a toolkit for parents and caregivers, accessible through the Department's website for Human Trafficking Awareness Month. This toolkit informs caregivers of the warning signs of human trafficking victimization and how to recognize and protect their children from exploitation.

The Human Trafficking team collaborated with statewide Independent Living (IL) services, which supports young adults transitioning out of foster care by providing

resources and guidance to help them achieve self-sufficiency, to better support human trafficking survivors who are current or former foster care youth. This collaboration addresses unique challenges these overlapping populations may face, such as lack of stable housing and resources. The initiative focuses on increasing eligibility awareness, providing advocacy, and ensuring comprehensive support by integrating efforts with IL services. This collaboration additionally aims to improve knowledge of IL benefits and transitional planning among housing providers through workshops, with an emphasis on Extended Foster Care eligibility and IL program benefits, as well as improve youth voice and engagement in the prevention and identification of human trafficking. The Department is committed to fully incorporating youth perspectives into policy and practice through the Youth Services Committee, statewide conferences, and a youth advocacy group.

The Department's Human Trafficking team expanded in August 2024 by establishing a Human Trafficking Coordinator position in every region. These coordinators assist field staff as subject matter experts, track cases, and help with placement needs and capacity. The Department also added a full-time specialist position to support training needs throughout the state, a data specialist to capture data that drives policy and practice, and a policy specialist to ensure Florida's approach to preventing and serving survivors remains the best in the nation. These new positions significantly strengthen our response and prevention efforts to human trafficking across the state.

Human trafficking awareness and special topics training under SFY 2022-23 continued in SFY 2023-24, with over 270 combined hours completed by Department staff and professionals in law enforcement, hospitality, healthcare, and community partners. Department continues its collaboration with partner agencies (Department of Health, DJJ, Department of Education, Agency for Persons with Disabilities, Attorney General's Office, Florida Department of Law Enforcement) to provide training to staff, improve identification of victims, identify at-risk youth and adults, and other priorities identified in the State Health Improvement Plan (SHIP).

### **The Department's response to the findings and recommendations made by the Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability.**

Section 39.524(3), F.S., requires the Department to respond to the findings and recommendations presented by OPPAGA in its annual study on commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC). The following response addresses OPPAGA's specific findings and recommendations.

- *The Department of Children and Families should continue efforts to expand Tier 1 safe houses and enhance placement capacity.*

The Department has made significant progress in expanding safe housing options for children who are victims of commercial sexual exploitation. In April 2024, Florida's first

Tier 1 safe house was successfully licensed in the Central Region, with a capacity to house six children. Additionally, the Department is actively collaborating with provider networks and lead agencies to educate staff about this new licensure option, recruit new providers, and review existing providers across the care continuum, including at-risk youth, traditional group homes, and the foster care network. These efforts aim to assess the current level of care provided and to gauge interest in transitioning to higher levels of care, such as Tier 1.

- *The Department of Children and Families should work with the Baker Act Reporting Center to improve involuntary commitment data for CSE-verified youth.*

The Baker Act Reporting Center remains dedicated to the ongoing collection of involuntary placement orders from the court on behalf of the Department and remains dedicated to the process of transitioning to an electronic data submission system. This transition will enable more streamlined and timely reporting. Moving forward, the Department will collaborate closely with the Baker Act Reporting Center to refine and improve data collection specifically for CSE-verified youth within this new electronic framework.