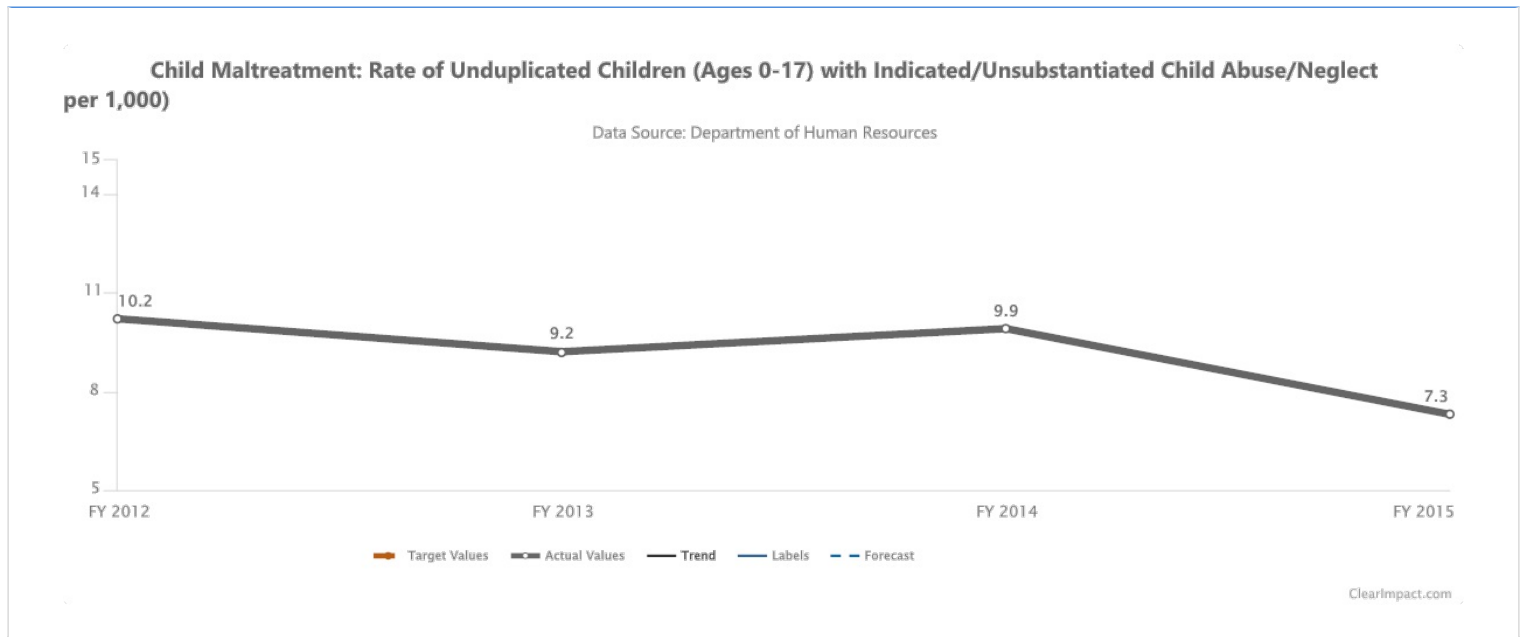


## R Communities are Safe for Children, Youth and Families (Statewide)

### I Child Maltreatment: Rate of Unduplicated Children (Ages 0-17) with Indicated/Unsubstantiated Child Abuse/Neglect Findings (per 1,000)



### Story Behind the Curve

This indicator measures the extent to which children experience reported abuse or neglect. Child abuse and neglect can result in mild to severe physical injuries, and in some instances, death. Victims of child abuse and neglect are also susceptible to possible attachment disorders, mental health issues, developmental delays, educational challenges, and behavioral problems. Identifying families and children at risk for abuse or neglect, addressing these risk areas, and ensuring safety for children are essential to protecting children from harm. According to the [Child Welfare Outcomes Report, 2010-2013](#), the national child maltreatment rate was 9.1 in Federal FY13. Although Maryland's rate has fluctuated between 9.9 and 9.2 in previous years, the State FY2015 rate (7.3) is significantly lower than the national rate; the main reason for that is the full implementation of Alternative Response in FY2015.

### What Works

To strengthen the Department of Human Resources' work with families, and in accordance with new State law, the Department of Human Resources completed the implementation of the [Alternative Response](#) Initiative in State FY2014 in all 24 jurisdictions. Alternative Response is Maryland's new approach for managing low-risk reports of child abuse and neglect that will result in safer children, stronger families and significantly fewer indicated and unsubstantiated findings. Under Alternative Response, the definitions of abuse and neglect are unchanged and the total number of cases accepted for intervention by Child Protective Services is not expected to change. Once a case is accepted, however, it is assigned to one of two tracks: Investigative Response or Alternative Response. Higher-risk reports, including cases involving serious physical abuse or sexual abuse, will continue to be referred to the Investigative Response track and will be handled the same way they have been in the past, resulting in a formal finding.

Low-risk reports of maltreatment will be assessed through Alternative Response. Local staff have taken into consideration key factors including: the type of maltreatment, the level of risk of harm or endangerment to any child in the home, and the family's history of involvement with the agency. Alternative Response cases do not result in a finding of maltreatment, and services to help reduce the family's risk of maltreatment are provided in both Alternative Response and Investigative Response approaches. As Alternative Response has been successfully implemented in Maryland, (see the [Final Program Evaluation Report](#), September 2015), the rate of maltreatment has dropped substantially lower than the national rate of findings per 1,000 children under 18. It is anticipated that the State FY2016 rate will continue to remain lower, as 38% of screened-in reports are being referred to Alternative Response, and no findings are made in these cases.

Maryland's child welfare initiatives over the years continue to focus on safely reducing the number of children in out-of-home care while strengthening families. Maryland's Family-Centered Practice model is a central component of the Department of Human Resource's [Place Matters](#) initiative, and of the local Departments of Social Services' work with families. Workers develop individualized service plans based on comprehensive assessments of the families' strengths and needs, with goals of increasing families' capacities to protect their children. Family Involvement Meetings are also used to engage families in service plan development, especially when safety/risk issues are severe enough that a child may be removed from the home. These meetings, and other Family-Centered Practice approaches, strengthen families by bringing additional resources to families and helping children stay with their families of origin or relatives.

Maryland has also begun [Families Blossom](#), the State's opportunity to enhance its current system by building on the strengths of its current initiatives to create a trauma-informed system of care, increase the utilization of evidence based practices, enhance parental substance abuse services, strengthen partnerships and collaboration, and enhance continuous quality improvement processes. Families Blossom, Maryland's Title IV-E (foster care funding) Waiver, enables flexibility in funding child welfare services allowed by the federal government. Through Families Blossom, Maryland is providing supports and services to strengthen families who are at-risk of maltreatment and/or entry into foster care so that children are safe, healthy, happy, and able to grow and thrive.

Child Protective Services (CPS) investigations are ruled "indicated" where credible evidence is not satisfactorily refuted, or "unsubstantiated" where insufficient evidence is found to support a finding as either indicated or ruled out