

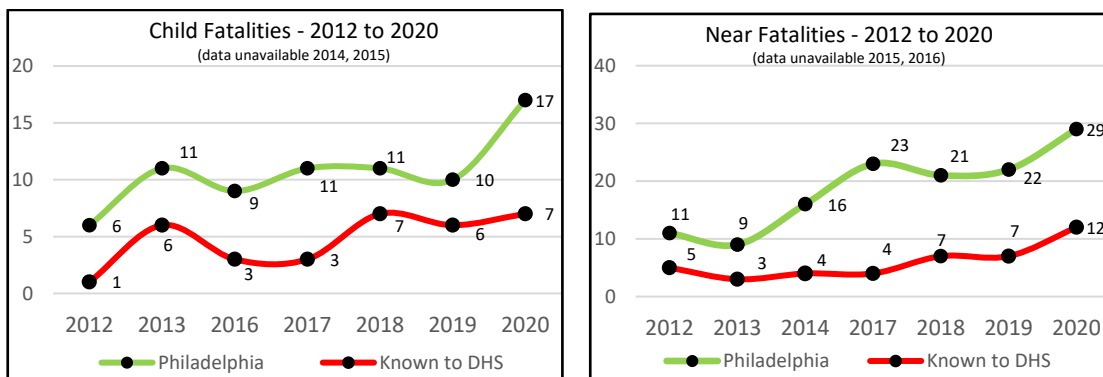
Alarming Trends Show More Children At Risk
Child Abuse is Taking More Lives of Children in Philadelphia
February 2, 2022

The stated purpose of Pennsylvania’s Child Welfare system is to “protect children from abuse, neglect, and enable children to remain safely in their homes.” To accomplish this goal, the commonwealth deploys state and federal funds to counties and entrusts them with the obligation to ensure the protection of every child from abuse and neglect. In Philadelphia, the Department of Human Services is expected to protect the lives of these at-risk children.

In 2006, the shocking account of a child who starved to death while in the care of the Philadelphia Department of Human Services sparked a top-to-bottom reform of the city’s child protection services. That system redesign, fittingly called Improving Outcomes for Children, devolved nearly all social work services to a network of privately-run agencies. The Department’s role shifted to oversight with the goal of ensuring rigorous compliance with best practices and improve the quality of the services for children at risk of abuse or neglect.

Despite this sweeping reform, three trends indicate the goals of this reform are far from being achieved:

1. The [number of children killed or nearly killed](#) by abuse in Philadelphia nearly tripled since the reforms began (2012 to 2020).
2. The number of city’s children who died as the result of child abuse and neglect in 2020 jumped by 40% compared to 2019 long after the reforms were fully implemented. More than 40% of these child deaths in 2020 involved a child that was either supposed to be protected by the Department’s services when they died or had been [under the Department’s care](#) in the sixteen months prior to their death.
3. Near fatalities also shot up by almost 32% in 2020. Forty one percent of the severely abused children in 2020 were in the care of the Department when the serious abuse happened or had been released from the [Department’s protection](#) in the sixteen months prior to their horrific abuse.



To be sure, statewide data also shows a pattern of rising child deaths or near deaths. Child abuse fatalities climbed by [43% and near deaths jumped by 24%](#) in 2020. National data indicates that school and child care closures and reduction in social worker access to families during COVID put more children at risk of abuse. Yet, despite the city’s radical redesign of child protective services, Philadelphia’s children are at even greater risk as evidenced by the shocking annual increase in the number of children killed or nearly fatally abused almost every year since the reforms were first rolled out in 2012.