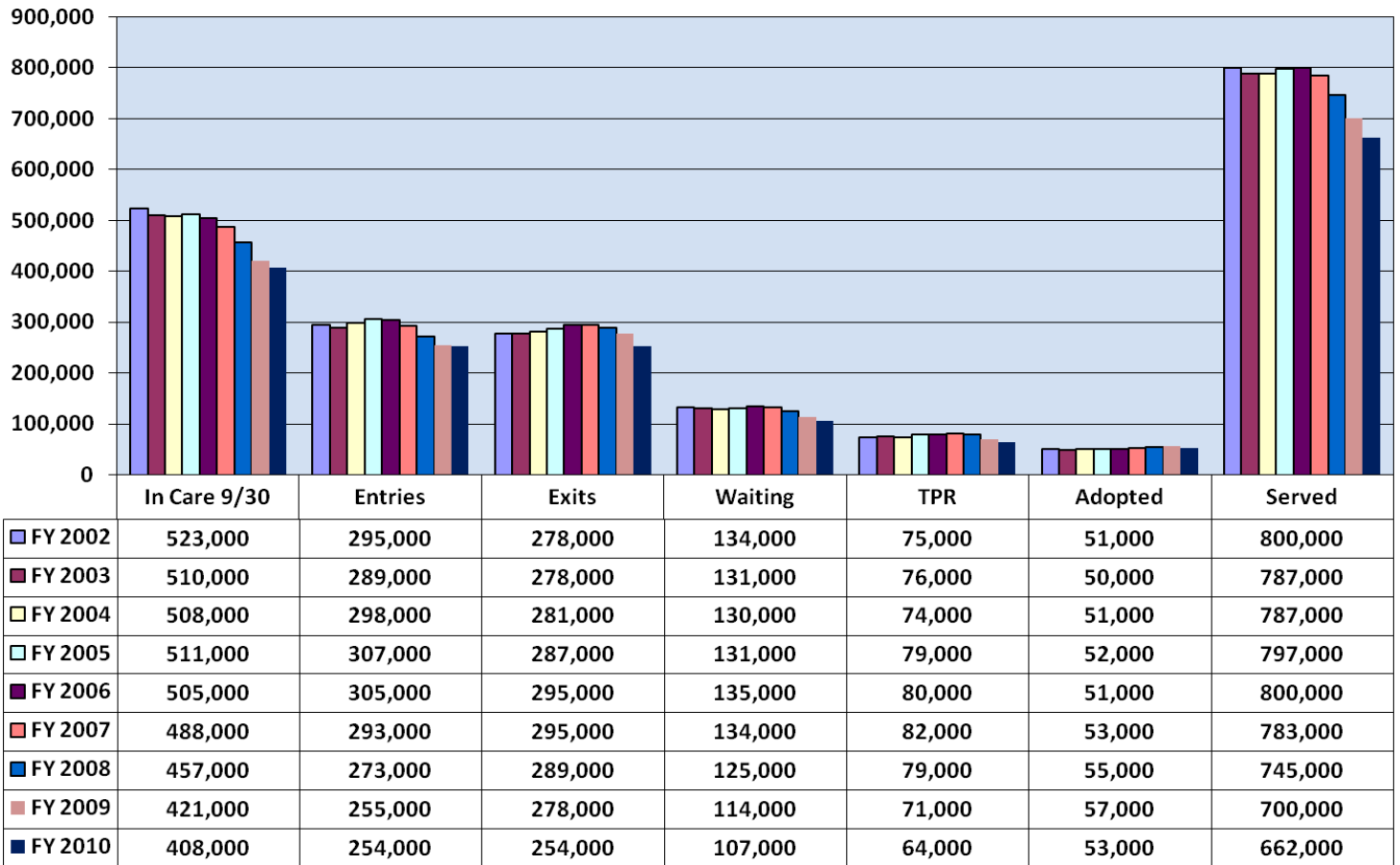


**Trends in Foster Care and Adoption—FY 2002-FY 2010**  
**(Based on data submitted by states as of June, 2011)**

Source: AFCARS data, U.S. Children's Bureau, Administration for Children, Youth and Families



**Discussion of Trends Chart**

This chart includes data submitted to the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) by States, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico by June 15, 2011.

Please note that, for all of the years shown, some of the data may differ from that shown in earlier versions of this chart. This is due to the fact that some States have resubmitted their AFCARS data after addressing data quality issues.

FFY = Federal Fiscal Year (October 1 through September 30)

**Sub-population Definitions**

1. **In Care 9/30:** This is an estimated count of all the children in foster care **on the last day** of the FFY. An individual child is included in the count for each year for which he or she is in foster care on the last day.

2. **Entries:** This is an estimated count of all children who entered foster care **during** the FFY. An individual child is counted only once for each year, even if the child entered, exited and reentered care during the year. The most recent date of removal from home is used to determine whether the child entered foster care during the period. If an individual child entered in one year and then exits and re-enters in a subsequent year, he or she is included in the count of entries for both years.

3. **Exits:** This is an estimated count of all children who exited foster care during the FFY **at the end of their most recent foster care episode**. An individual child is counted only once for each year, even if the child exited, re-entered and exited again during the year. The most recent date of discharge (from foster care) is the one counted. If an individual child exited care in one year and then re-enters and exits again in a subsequent year, he or she is included in the count of exits for both years.

4. **Waiting:** This is an estimated count of all children who are waiting to be adopted **on the last day** of the FFY. An individual child is included in the count for each year in which he or she is waiting to be adopted on the last day. There is no Federal definition for children waiting to be adopted. For the purposes of this analysis, children waiting to be adopted include children with a goal of adoption and/or whose parental rights have been terminated. The “waiting” population excludes children whose parents' rights have been terminated, who are 16 years old and older, and who have a goal of emancipation. An individual child is included in the count for each year that he or she has these characteristics on the last day of the year.

5. **TPR (Termination of Parental Rights):** This is an estimated count of all children in care **on the last day** of the FFY whose parental rights have been terminated and who are waiting for adoption. An individual child who has these characteristics on the last day of the year is counted only once for that year.

6. **Adopted:** This is an estimated count of all children adopted with public child welfare agency involvement **during the FFY**. An individual child is counted only once for each year, even if (in rare cases) the child was adopted multiple times during the year. In cases when an individual child is adopted in one year and then adopted again in a subsequent year, he or she is included in the count of adoptions for both years.

7. **Served:** This is an estimated count of all children who were in the public foster care system **during the FFY**. This number is the sum of two mutually exclusive groups of children: the children who are already in care on the first day of the fiscal year (as of October 1) and the children who enter foster care during the year. An individual child is counted only once for each year.

## Technical Discussion

Even though the number of children served is calculated by summing the children in care on the first day of the year plus the entries into foster during the year, another way of counting the number of children served is by adding the number of children in foster care on the last day of the year to the number of exits from foster care during the FFY. We compared the numbers derived from both approaches, and they are equal in FFY 2006, FFY 2008 and FFY 2010, but there is less than a one percent discrepancy in the other years. Most of these differences can be attributed to rounding.

Because the number of entries exceeds the number of exits from FFY 2002 to FFY 2006, we would expect that the number of children/youth in care as of September 30<sup>th</sup> would have increased during this period. This, however, did not occur, as the number of children in care actually declined. The primary contributing factor to this phenomenon is that, in the AFCARS database, each child is counted only once and the information included on the child in the database is from their most recent foster care episode. However, there are some children who were in foster care on the first day of the year but exited and re-entered during the year one or more times prior to entering their most recent foster care episode. In addition, they remained in foster care through the last day of the fiscal year (September 30) in their most recent foster care episode. In these circumstances, the exit associated with their “in care” status on the first day of the year is not counted, even though it occurred during the fiscal year. We estimate the number of these uncounted exits to be approximately 6,000 per year.

There is also a data quality issue that has had an impact on the number of exits. AFCARS data are submitted every six months and cover a six-month period. Sometimes a child who is reported during one six-month period does not appear in the next period, and there is no record that the child exited. Reviews of these cases have shown that the majority are situations in which the child actually exited, but the exit was not reported to AFCARS. However, because the actual number of these “dropped” exits cannot be calculated, they have not been accounted for in the exit count. As this issue has been brought to the attention of States, the quality of the data has improved dramatically and the number of dropped cases has decreased. For instance, the number of these dropped cases has declined from around 8,000 in FY 2006 to about 3,000 in FY 2007 and FY2008, and about 4,000 in FY 2009. Therefore, these dropped cases constitute less than 2

percent of the reported discharges in the three most recent years. Please note that dropped cases are not counted in any of these counts.

## **Data Discussion**

**Children in Foster Care on September 30th:** The data show a substantial decline in the number of children in foster care on the last day of each federal fiscal year (September 30) between FY 2002 and FY 2010, with a small exception in FY2005. A similar pattern is seen in the total number of children served during these years. The number of children served declined from 800,000 in FY 2002 to 662,000 in FY 2010).

**Entries into and Exits from Foster Care:** In FY 2005, the number of entries into foster care reached its highest point to date with 307,000 entries reported that year. Since that time, however, the number of entries has declined to 254,000 in FY 2010, the lowest number since AFCARS data have been reported. The number of exits, which increased between FY 2002 (278,000) and FY 2006 (295,000), declined to 254,000 in FY 2010, excluding children who exited but re-entered during the same year and children whose discharge dates were missing from the file (see technical discussion above). Between FY 2007 and FY 2009, the number of exits were greater than the number of entries into foster care, and in FY 2010 the numbers entering and exiting care were almost the same.

**Children Waiting to be Adopted:** Since FY 2006, the number of children waiting to be adopted has been declining (from 135,000 in FY 2006 to 107,000 in FY 2010). The number of waiting children whose parental rights had been terminated as of the last day of the year increased from 74,000 in FY 2004 to 82,000 in FY 2007. The number then declined in FY 2008 to 79,000 and is down to 64,000 in FY 2010. However, the percentage of children waiting to be adopted whose children whose parental rights had been terminated has stayed relatively stable, fluctuating around 60% each year.

**Children Adopted:** Between FY 2002 and FY 2006, the number of adoptions remained relatively flat, ranging between 50,000 and 52,000. We saw an increase from 51,000 in FY 2006 to 57,000 in FY 2009, but then a decrease to 53,000 in FY 2010. Note that although the number declined in FY 2010, the proportion of adoptions to all exits from foster care was the same as in FY 2009 (21%).