

Positive trends seen in foster care statistics

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The late Washington County Judge Mark Mascara would be proud of a new study that shows the number of children living in foster care and entering the system has significantly dropped over the past year.

Mascara, who died this year, took his job as juvenile dependency judge in the county very seriously. He was asked by the state Supreme Court to sit on the Pennsylvania Children's Roundtable Initiative, where he had input on materials that will play an important part in efforts to reduce the amount of time that dependent children spend in temporary placements such as foster care and expedite their return to permanent homes.

On Tuesday, a reported released by the Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children said the state is making significant progress in safely reducing the number of children living in foster care. According to the report, almost 90 percent of counties reduced their foster care placement over the past year, resulting in a nearly 12 percent drop in children living in foster care and more than 16 percent in children entering the system.

Washington and Greene counties were among those reporting decreases.

Washington County's foster care rate dropped to 11.3 percent in 2010, down from 12.6 percent in 2009. Meanwhile, the county's exit-to-permanency rate for children increased from 85 percent last year to 91 percent in 2010.

Greene County's foster care rate dropped from 9.6 percent in 2009 to 8.9 percent this year.

Statewide, there are 10,293 children in foster care. In 2009, the number was 12,307.

The report also said there was negligible change in substantiated reports of repeat child abuse, and re-entry into foster care also declined.

"Pennsylvania's child-welfare system serves some of the most vulnerable children and families in our communities," said Joan L. Benso, president of Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children. "It is critically important that we continue to monitor the performance of this essential safety net, but commendable steps have been taken to fulfill our goals of safely reducing the number of children in foster care and creating safe, stable, permanent family connections for all children." Copyright Observer Publishing Co.