



NEW YORK CITY FAMILY COURT
Our Vision for the Future

NEW YORK CITY FAMILY COURT STRATEGIC PLANNING 2016

OUR MISSION

To protect the rights of families and children by ensuring the just and timely resolution of all matters brought before the court.

OUR VISION

The New York City Family Court is a strong, vibrant, independent, professionally run, due process-driven court, where there is respect for each and every individual appearing in and served by our court, as well as respect for each and every jurist and non-judicial court worker who serves in our busy courts. It is our expectation that all cases will be addressed fairly and expeditiously.

OUR CORE VALUES

- Respect for all persons with whom we interact
- Pride in our work
- Commitment to quality service
- Willingness to help others
- Fairness in our interactions with others
- Respect for and cooperation with our co-workers
- Integrity in our dealings with others

OUR PRIMARY OBJECTIVES

- Timely disposition of all cases
- Continuous trials
- Improved time to permanency for children in out-of-home care
- Adherence to the One Family, One Judge principle when appropriate
- Efficiency in all Family Court operations
- Promoting respect for all, litigants and court staff alike



December 4, 2015

To the Family Court Community:

In January 2015, the New York State legislature increased the number of statutory judgeships in the New York City Family Court for the first time in over twenty years. Nine additional judgeships were allocated to our court. This increase could not have happened without the support of the entire family court community and we are thankful for their advocacy in helping to effectuate this much-needed increase of judicial resources. Many thanks are also gratefully extended to all of my colleagues in family court for their input regarding the upcoming changes and whose commitment to the children and families who rely on our courts is unparalleled.

In anticipation of the allocation of the new judges, in the fall of 2014 we began planning for their arrival. As we considered the logistics of how many new judges would be assigned to each borough and the types of cases over which they would be presiding, it became clear that the infusion of new judicial resources gave us the opportunity to implement changes which would maximize the benefit these new judges brought to our courts. This presented us with the rare opportunity to examine how our court achieves its primary function of serving the community and what changes could be instituted to improve that function.

In order to include the wider family court community in these changes we requested input and insight not only from our judges, court managers, and other family court staff, but also from the advocates, agencies, attorneys for children and others who appear in our court with frequency. Taking into consideration all the suggestions that were presented to us, we developed several primary objectives which we believe will strengthen the realization of our vision, mission, and core values. The achievement of these goals will be an ongoing effort.

Our primary objectives are simple to state, but not easy to accomplish. Everyone in our family court community will need to provide feedback to help refine our goals and methods as we proceed, and to help maintain a sense of urgency and accountability for ourselves and for the entire extended community of attorneys and other professionals who serve the children and families of New York City. As we move forward over the coming year, we will welcome everyone's thoughts about how we can better serve the children and families of our city and how we can achieve the realization of our vision, mission and core values.

We hope that you will join us in this effort.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jeanette Ruiz".

Jeanette Ruiz
Administrative Judge, New York City Family Court



TIMELY DISPOSITION OF CASES

Families who come to family court are often in crisis and seeking relief. By treating each case with a sense of urgency and resolving each case in a timely manner, we can provide relief and help strengthen families.

STRATEGY

- Fast-track removal cases by using case differentiation and prioritization techniques.
- Set guidelines for the efficient disposition of each case type.
- Ensure that time certain scheduling is used for all case types.
- Prioritize the resolution of the longest-pending cases.

NEXT STEPS

- Review and monitor time to disposition and time certain usage for each case type.
- Review principles of case differentiation and techniques for calendar management with jurists.
- Work with jurists in each specialty to establish timelines for all case types.
- Identify and review backlogs in each county with a goal of addressing the longest pending cases.
- Explore the use of attorney teams dedicated to specific court parts as a way to improve case scheduling.



CONTINUOUS TRIALS

Conducting trials over a shortened period of time serves to reduce the stress and uncertainty families experience from not knowing the ultimate impact the case will have on the family. Continuous trials help reduce delays and hardship to the families the court serves.

STRATEGY

- Building on the success of the trial part in Queens County Family Court, create trial parts in the other counties.
- Where trial parts are not feasible, establish timeframes within which a trial once begun must be completed.
- Ensure that jurists in each specialty are aware of these timeframes.
- Adhere to statutory timeframes where they exist.

NEXT STEPS

- Work with jurists in each county to determine feasibility of a trial part.
- Review the outcomes of settlement conferences and revisit existing protocols as needed.
- Establish protocols for trial ready conferences to ensure that cases scheduled for trial are ready to proceed to trial.
- Identify need for trial coordinator responsible for scheduling trials.
- Develop a tracking system for cases referred to trial parts.
- Work with attorney groups to ensure coverage for cases assigned to trial parts.



TIMELY PERMANENCY FOR CHILDREN IN OUT-OF-HOME CARE

Foster care is a system designed to provide temporary care for children who need to be separated from their families for safety reasons. Recognizing that all children need to have a stable, permanent family and home, and that remaining in foster care for extended periods is not in their best interest, shortening the time New York City children stay in foster care is paramount.

STRATEGY

- Judges to preside over permanency hearings previously assigned to other jurists wherever case volume permits.
- Ensure jurists are aware of the median time it takes for children in out-of-home care to achieve permanency in their county.
- Treat with urgency any case in which a child has been removed from their home.
- Help lead the work with others in the child welfare community to find ways to improve permanency outcomes.
- Explore all permanency outcomes, including subsidized legal guardianship, (“KinGap”).

NEXT STEPS

- Establish guidelines and protocols for increasing the effectiveness of permanency hearings.
- Encourage jurists to state on the record at every permanency hearing the length of time children have been in care.
- Support the attendance and participation of youth in their permanency hearings.
- Participate in a Permanency Hearing Survey administered by the Office of Court Improvement to identify areas for improvement.
- Work to establish court protocols for KinGap and termination of parental rights (“TPR”) case processing, and review existing adoption case management protocols.
- Meet the needs of youth transitioning out of foster care by adopting youth transition planning court protocols.

ONE FAMILY ONE JUDGE

Having a case in family court can be a stressful experience. In order to better serve children and families, we strive to have all matters relating to the same family heard by the same jurist when it is appropriate.

STRATEGY

- For each specialty, the jurist assigned to a case will keep that case until completion. Subsequent matters will be referred back to the same jurist whenever possible.
- In the child protective (“CP”) specialty, judges assigned to any case where a child is removed will preside over the permanency hearings for that child as case volume permits.
- In cases where a youth is the subject of a child protective proceeding and charged as a juvenile delinquent, both cases will be heard by the same judge or will be coordinated among jurists.

NEXT STEPS

- Review case assignment procedures including orders of reference and create an intake system that assigns all of a family’s matters to the same judge where appropriate.
- Assign matters of short duration to judges not permanently assigned to the Family Court.
- Establish timeframes for assigning subsequent filings to the same jurist
- Implement the Crossover Youth Practice Model (“CYPM”) in each county.
- Establish scheduling procedures so that families with multiple cases have coordinated court appearances.



EFFICIENCY IN COURT OPERATIONS

In order to provide the highest standard of justice to the children and families we serve, the family court values and promotes professionalism in all aspects of the court's work. By operating efficient courthouses in all five boroughs of New York City, and utilizing the best technology available to our court, we are better equipped to meet the needs of children and families.

STRATEGY

- Ensure that administrative procedures currently in place are not needlessly delaying cases or causing litigants to come to court unnecessarily.
- Continue to expand the use of electronic court files.
- Ensure that court orders are distributed to parties as quickly as possible.
- Ensure quality assurance protocols are in place in each county.
- Provide ongoing training, including cross-training, to all personnel to enable staff to work in all specialties.

NEXT STEPS

- Review and assess efficiency of court processes from petition filing to issuance of court orders.
- Implement use of electronic signatures citywide on a rolling basis.
- Explore the use of technology to develop an electronic check-in system.
- Schedule periodic meetings with court staff to improve communication and provide training on new policies.
- Designate a quality control person in each county to provide ongoing review of court operations.

PROMOTING RESPECT FOR ALL

Respectful treatment of the children and families who come to our court can have an important impact on their confidence in the court process. Showing and receiving respect helps promote an environment of respect for everyone who appears and works in our courts.

STRATEGY

- Explore the use of Family Court greeters or navigators to assist litigants as they first enter the courthouse.
- Use Do-It-Yourself ("DIY") technology to enhance the petitioning process wherever possible.
- Greater use of time-certain appearances to help alleviate long lines at the magnetometers and reduce time spent in the waiting rooms.
- Review protocols for the dismissal of cases for failure to appear so that litigants who are not present for legitimate reasons do not have to re-file.
- Provide ongoing quality service training to all staff.

NEXT STEPS

- Identify more efficient ways to guide litigants through the Family Court.
- Review the court website to determine how it can be improved to help litigants.
- Perform a survey of unrepresented litigants to determine areas of concern.
- Reinstigate the court Management Training Program.
- Regularly monitor lines outside the petition room and review petition room procedures to reduce waiting time for filing.



LOOKING FORWARD

We are a family-focused court committed to addressing a wide range of issues involving children and families. We recognize that families who appear in our court may be experiencing a crisis. We strive to create a court environment that conveys respect and confidence.

To this end, we must maintain a sense of urgency in all of our work. This includes all aspects of our operations from the efficiency of our petition rooms to the disposition of our cases.

Above all, we remain a family-oriented court dedicated to our mission: to protect the rights of families and children by ensuring the just and timely resolution of all matters brought before the court.

WE EXPECT TO SEE

- Swift completion of trials.
- Speedy resolution of cases.
- Critical decisions about permanency being made early in the life of a case.
- The use of a wider array of permanency outcomes.
- Fewer cases involving more than one jurist.
- Less reliance on physical files and greater reliance on electronic casefiles.
- Greater use of improved case management methods.
- Greater number of time certain appearances.
- An improved court experience for litigants.



HOW WILL WE MEASURE OUR PROGRESS?

Our court will hold itself accountable for implementing the plan by monitoring the following data:

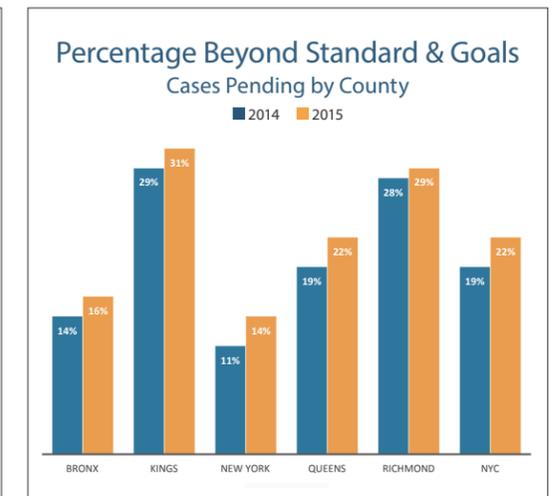
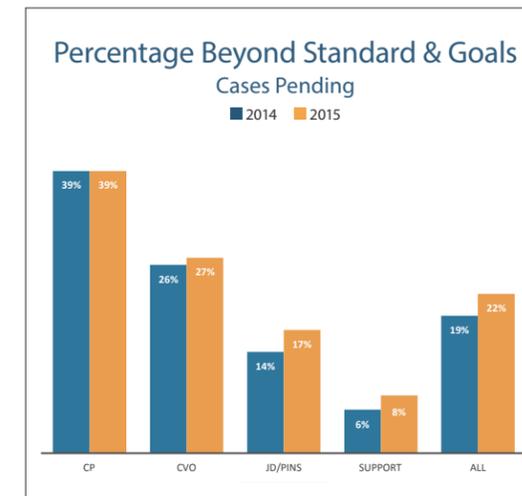
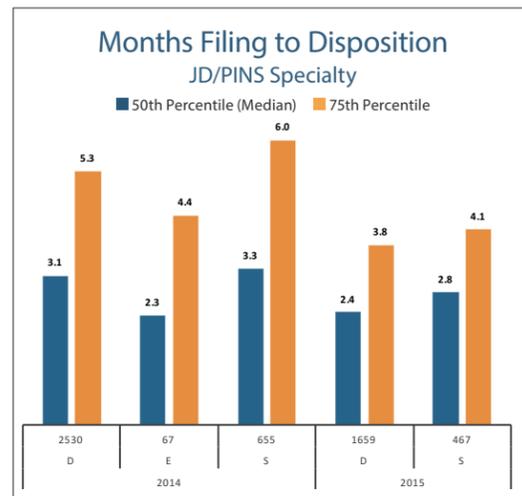
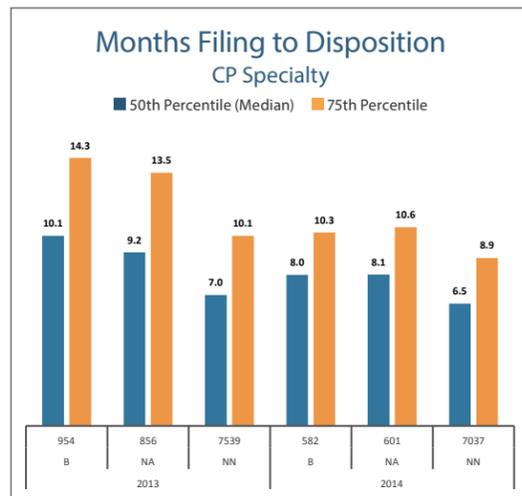
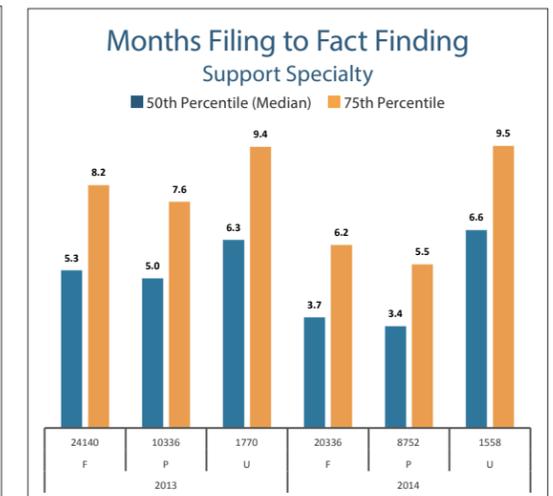
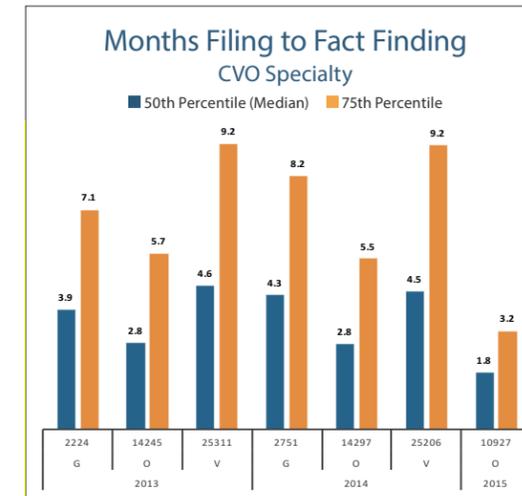
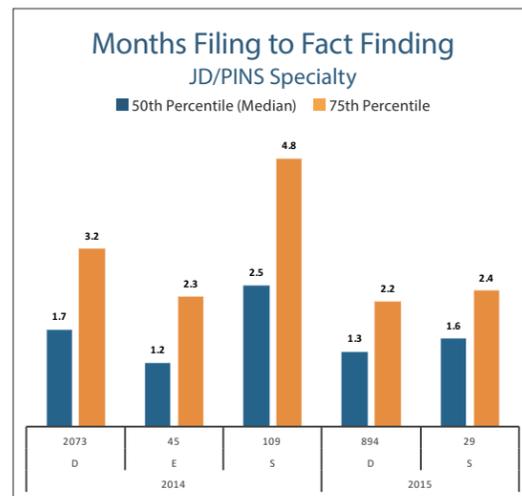
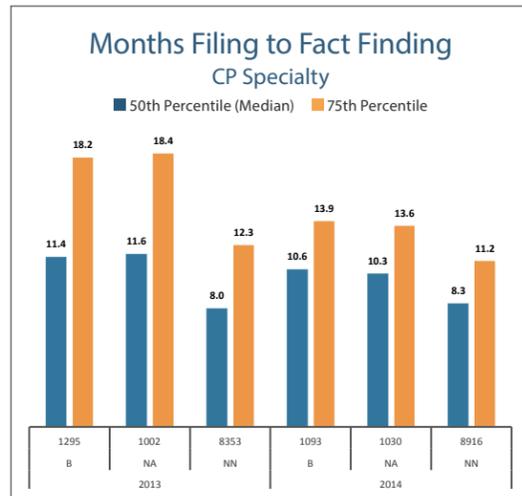
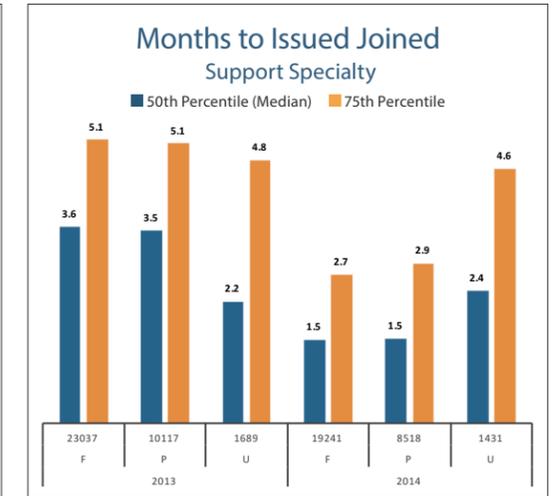
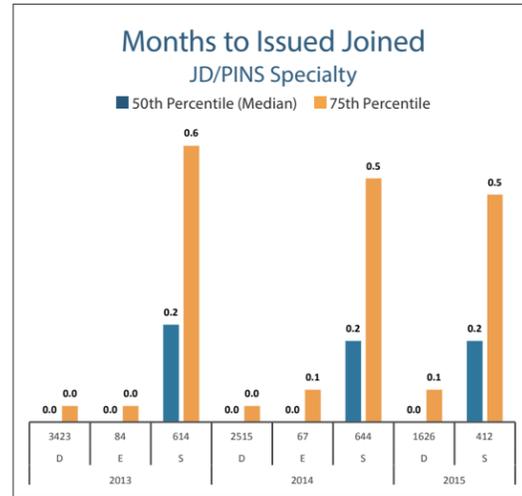
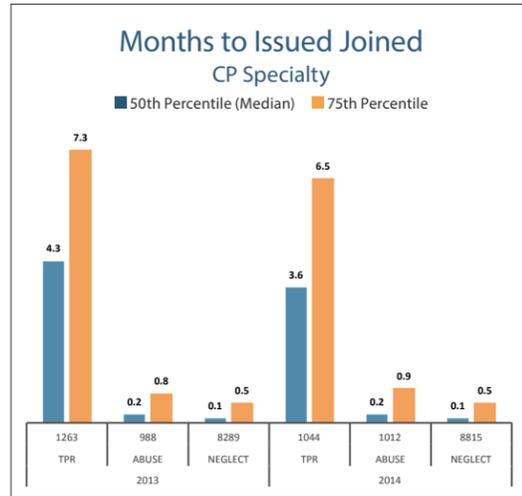
- Time to disposition across all specialties: neglect/abuse, termination of parental rights, custody/visitation, family offense, delinquency, and child support and paternity cases.
- Duration of trials, including number of trial days and time elapsed from commencement to conclusion.
- Number and percent of cases pending beyond Standards and Goals.
- Time from filing to first appearance.
- Time to issue joined on all case types.
- Number of cases scheduled for a time certain appearance.
- Percentage of children achieving permanency within 3 years.
- Percentage of children achieving permanency through each of the various permanency options: reunification, KinGap, adoption, placement with a fit and willing relative, and another planned permanent living arrangement (“APPLA”).

These measures will be analyzed in the context of the total number of court filings, as well as the number of removals in CP cases, for a complete picture of how our court is working to better serve the children and families of New York City. This will enable us to quantify our progress. Each county will track its progress towards achieving the goals of continuous trials, timely disposition of cases, and improved time to permanency for children in out-of-home care. Toward that end, training has been implemented to build the capacity of staff in each county to understand and report on their local data.

Only by compiling accurate data over the long term can we understand the effect our strategic plan is having, intelligently evaluate our progress, and make fully-informed decisions about how to guide these efforts toward greater success.

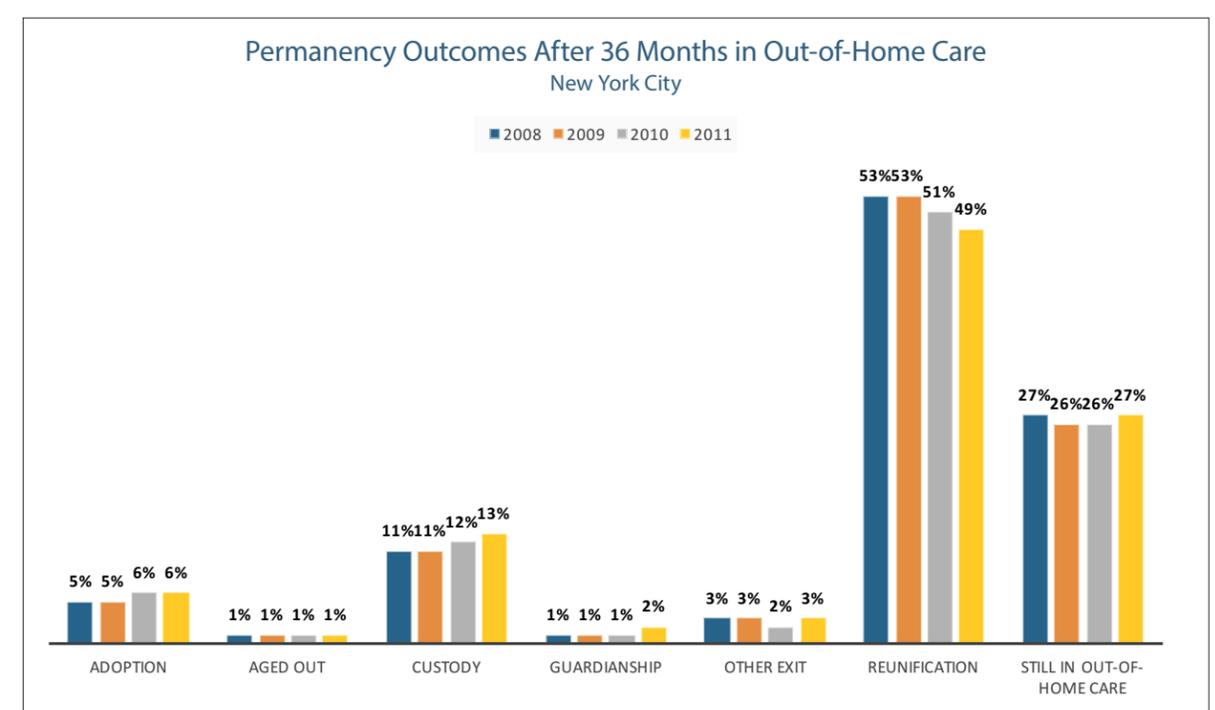
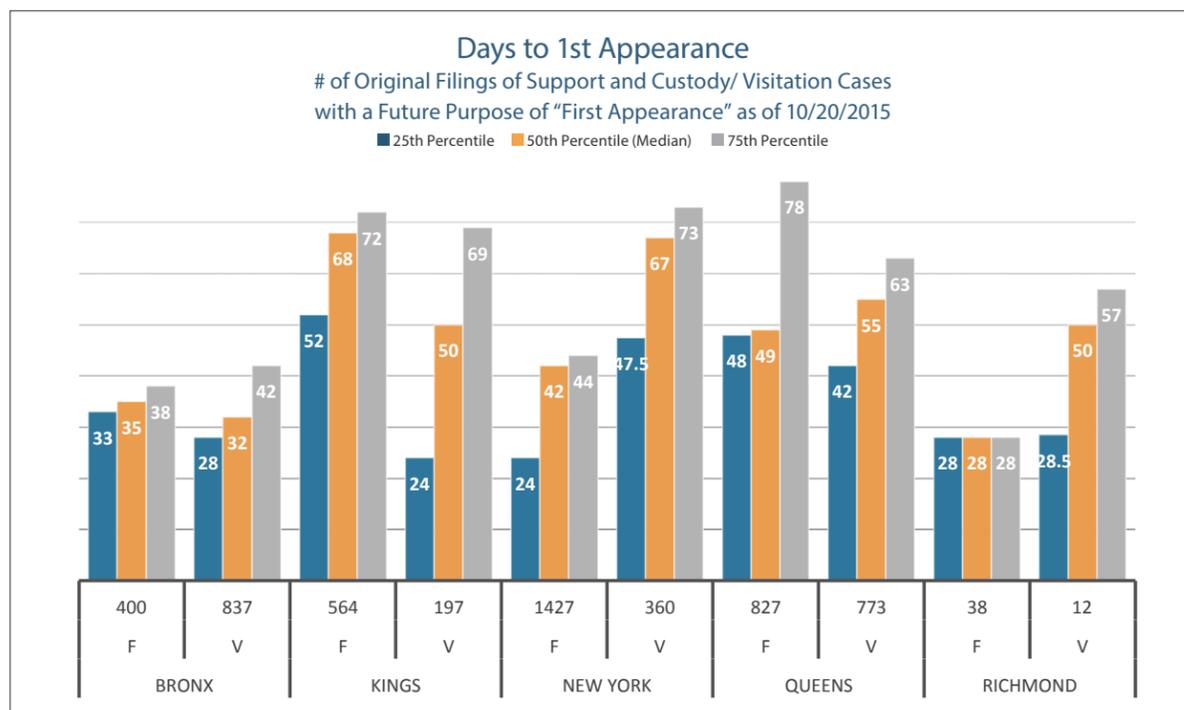
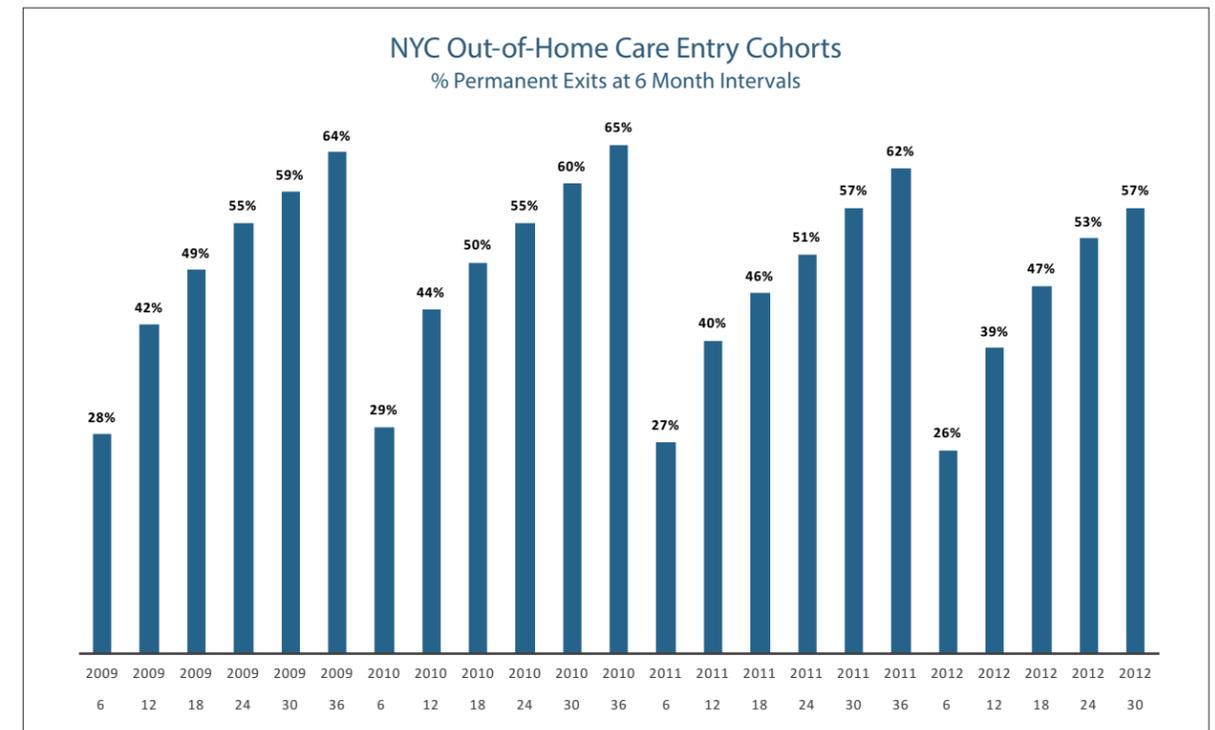
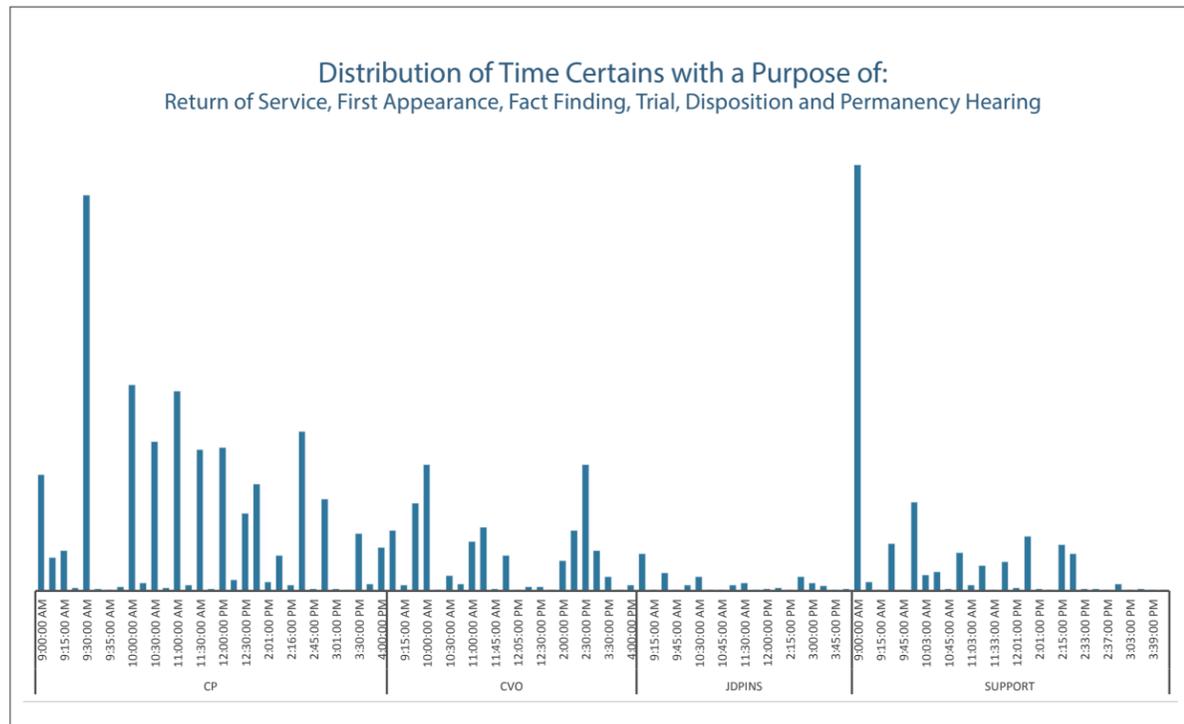
NYC BASELINE DATA – CASE PROCESSING TIME

NYC BASELINE DATA – CASE PROCESSING TIME



NYC BASELINE DATA: CASE SCHEDULING

NYC BASELINE DATA: PERMANENCY OUTCOMES



Case Processing Time Data: UCMS Case Processing Data Extracts by specialty Q3 2015; Permanency Data: Office of Court Improvement Court Metrics Q3 2015; Scheduling Data: Future Calendared Appearances Report 10/20/2015.



COUNTY PLAN HIGHLIGHTS

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BRONX COUNTY

- In the CP specialty, all permanency hearings are held before judges. Judges hold those hearings frequently and issue detailed and specific orders to expedite permanency for children. Further, judges will give priority to children removed from their home and will hold the first court conference wherein the judge will outline their expectations for the timely resolution of the case.
- An infant project has been developed in one child protective part for children aged 0-3. A clinician has been hired through a grant obtained via the Center for Court Innovation. The parties, all counsel, caseworkers, social workers and the clinician meet regularly and referrals are made for intensive and targeted services. Cases are also seen by the judge frequently and a report is provided to the court as to participation in and compliance with services. The goal is to reunify or maintain children with families or move toward kinship guardianship or adoption more expeditiously.
- In the Custody, Visitation, Family Offense (“CVO”) specialty, a trial term protocol has been developed and implemented. Each CVO judge has a designated trial term for one month on a rotating basis to hear and complete trials and hearings on their assigned cases. He or she also has a partner judge to cover emergency cases and motions during the trial term month. The plan is to expand the trial term concept to the CVO court attorney referees and then to other specialties.

KINGS COUNTY

- The CP specialty has been restructured to include a designated intake part, assignment parts and trial parts. To expedite cases where a child is placed in out-of-home care specific removal parts have been created. Trial parts will hear both JD and CP cases.
- To improve permanency outcomes for youth a designated APPLA part has been created to address the needs of children transitioning out of foster care.
- The CVO specialty has been restructured. A judicial hearing officer (“JHO”) and court attorney referee will share intake responsibilities.
- A CVO Special Purpose Part (“SPP”) has been designated to hear specific, discrete matters such as warrants, willfulness hearings, stand-alone family offense cases involving minors, and other short matters.

NEW YORK COUNTY

- The CVO specialty will focus on addressing the longest pending cases.
- In the CP and CVO specialties case management protocols are being developed to include time frames for each aspect of the proceedings.
- Child Support intake is being restructured to improve efficiency and develop case management protocols.
- A new court part has been designated to handle Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (“SIJS”) cases. This part will include staff able to make needed referrals for social services.

QUEENS COUNTY

- Operation of the trial parts has been resumed to expedite time to disposition and to provide continuous trials for all CP, CVO and JD/PINS cases.
- CVO jurists will work to develop a best practices model for handling cases in the specialty.
- In the CVO specialty, a review of the filing of supplemental petitions will be conducted to help improve the coordination and case management of cases with multiple filings.

RICHMOND COUNTY

- The addition of a new judge has allowed the redistribution of the longest pending CVO cases.
- To achieve continuous trials in the CVO specialty, a review of various case management tools, including case conferencing protocols and the use of block scheduling, is underway.
- Richmond County will work with the county CP Collaborative to identify areas where permanency timelines can be improved.

NEW YORK CITY FAMILY COURT: *A Vision for Our Future*

By the end of the year 2015, the New York City Family Court will have experienced the most extensive turnover of jurists in recent memory. This includes the departure of 19 experienced jurists and the addition of 23 new jurists, including the 9 new Family Court judgeships allocated to us at the beginning of the year. This year of great change gave rise to a unique opportunity for review and re-evaluation that resulted in our strategic planning efforts.

Citywide strategic plans with county specific components have been developed and are being implemented. In 2016, we expect to fully implement and refine the work we have done and will continue to engage the various attorney groups and agencies who work in our court to determine how even more robust improvement to our practices can be achieved.

This is a work in progress. The year ahead will be one of continued planning, measured implementation, and continuous evaluation. We invite and encourage all who work or practice in New York City Family Court to join with us in this endeavor to better serve the children and families of New York City.

WITH GRATITUDE

for their unwavering support to the Family Court

Honorable Jonathan Lippman, *Chief Judge of the State of New York*

Honorable Lawrence K. Marks, *Chief Administrative Judge*

Honorable Fern A. Fisher, *Deputy Chief Administrative Judge within New York City*

A SPECIAL THANK YOU

to the **Honorable Edwina Richardson-Mendelson**, *Administrative Judge Emeritus*, whose commitment to the New York City Family Court inspired the creation of this strategic plan.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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CITYWIDE

Honorable Jeanette Ruiz
Administrative Judge

George Cafasso
Chief Clerk

Michael McLoughlin
1st Deputy Chief Clerk

Major Michael P. Demarco
Court Security

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Honorable Carol R. Sherman
Supervising Judge

Mike Williams
Clerk of Court

Captain Kevin Hanzich
Court Security

KINGS COUNTY

Honorable Amanda E. White
Supervising Judge

Robert Ratanski
Clerk of Court

Captain John Posillipo
Court Security

Captain Robert Ramirez
Court Security

NEW YORK COUNTY

Honorable Douglas E. Hoffman
Supervising Judge

Evelyn Hasanoeddin
Clerk of Court

Captain Robert Miglino
Court Security

QUEENS COUNTY

Honorable Carol A. Stokinger
Supervising Judge

Vaunda Harris Strachan
Clerk of Court

Captain Fred Beneri
Court Security

Captain Patrick Kelly
Court Security

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Supervising Judge

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