

Administrative Office of the Courts

Interim Chief Justice Jill Pohlman
Utah Supreme Court
Chair, Utah Judicial Council

September 26, 2026

Ronald B. Gordon, Jr.
State Court Administrator
Neira Siaperas
Deputy State Court Administrator

VIA Electronic Delivery

Senator John D. Johnson, Chair
Child Welfare Legislative Oversight Panel
Utah State Senate Office
350 N. State Street, Suite 320
PO Box 145115
Salt Lake City, Utah 84114

Representative Christine F. Watkins, Chair Child
Welfare Legislative Oversight Panel Utah House of
Representatives Office
350 N. State Street, Suite 350
PO Box 145030
Salt Lake City, Utah 84114

Dear Senator Johnson and Representative Watkins:

The Juvenile Court submits this report on the timely occurrence of child welfare proceedings and the reasons for delay pursuant to [Utah Code Ann. § 36-33-103\(1\)\(c\)](#). The Court continues to enhance its automated resources to collect data and track compliance with the performance measures listed in statute. We appreciate this opportunity to share information with the panel and are pleased to report the positive work of the Juvenile Courts.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Daniel A. Meza Rincon".

Daniel A. Meza Rincon
Juvenile Court Administrator

cc: Senator Luz Escamilla w/encl.
Representative Cheryl K. Acton w/encl.
Representative Sandra Hollins w/encl.

Kami Orton w/encl.
Lisa Sorensen w/encl.
Tracey Fredman w/encl.

Child Welfare

Statutory Time Requirements Report

Fiscal Year 2026
(July 1, 2025-June 30, 2026)



Administrative Office of the Courts
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Salt Lake City, Utah 84114-0241 (801)
578-3800

I. Annual Reporting Requirements

Pursuant to [Utah Code Ann. § 36-33-103\(1\)\(c\)](#), the Child Welfare Legislative Oversight Panel is charged with receiving a report from the Administrative Office of the Courts prior to October 1 of each year. The report shall identify the cases not in compliance with the time limits established in Subsection [80-3-301\(1\)](#), regarding shelter hearings, Section [80-3-401](#), regarding pretrial and adjudication hearings, Section [80-3-402](#), regarding dispositional hearings, Section [80-3-406](#), regarding reunification services, and Section [80-3-409](#), regarding permanency hearings and petitions for termination, and the reasons for noncompliance.¹

II. Data

The data in this report consists of all new cases that entered the court system via a shelter hearing during FY 2026. (See Overview of Child Welfare Measures-July 1, 2025 to June 30, 2026 attached at page 8.) Included in this report are any cases that were previously active cases at some stage of the proceedings and had a subsequent hearing during FY 2026. Thus, the data represents a snapshot of all child welfare court proceedings during the one-year timeframe, rather than tracking each individual case from start to finish in a single report.

Shelter Hearings §80-3-301

- (1) *A juvenile court shall hold a shelter hearing to determine the temporary custody of a child within 72 hours, excluding weekends and holidays, after any one or all of the following occur:*
- (a) *removal of the child from the child's home by the division;*
 - (b) *placement of the child in protective custody;*
 - (c) *emergency placement under Subsection [80-2a-202\(5\)](#);*
 - (d) *as an alternative to removal of the child, a parent enters a domestic violence shelter at the request of the division; or*
 - (e) *a motion for expedited placement in temporary custody is filed under Section [80-3-203](#).*

There were 960 shelter hearings in FY 2026, and 958 shelter hearings or 100% occurred within the 72-hour requirement. Two cases were not compliant with this statutory requirement. The primary reason for noncompliance in this category was due to a lack of available court calendar time.

¹ [UCA §36-33-103\(1\)\(c\)](#)

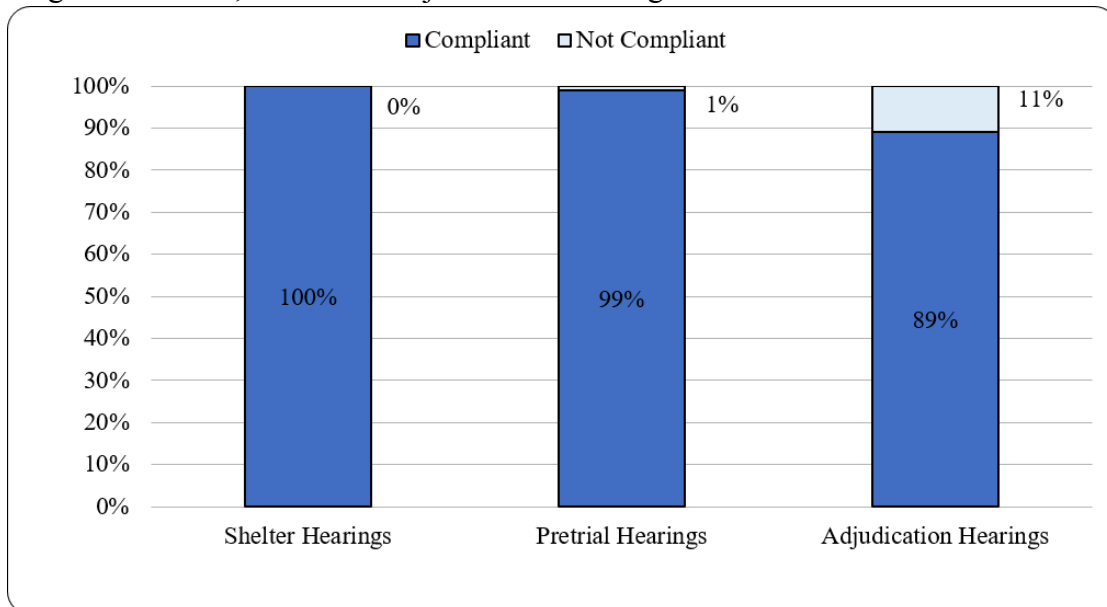
Pretrial and Adjudication Hearings §80-3-401

- (1) (a) Upon the filing of an abuse, neglect, or dependency petition, the clerk of the juvenile court shall set the pretrial hearing on the petition within 15 calendar days after the later of:
 - (i) the day on which the shelter hearing is held; or
 - (ii) the day on which the abuse, neglect, or dependency petition is filed.(b) The pretrial hearing may be continued upon motion of any party for good cause shown as described in [Utah Rules of Juvenile Procedure, Rule 54](#).
- (2) The final adjudication hearing shall be held no later than 60 calendar days after the later of:
 - (a) the day on which the shelter hearing is held; or
 - (b) the day on which the abuse, neglect, or dependency petition is filed.

There were 1,038 pretrial hearings in FY 2026, and 1,026 or 99% occurred within the 15-day requirement. Of the cases that were not compliant, the most common reason for delay was stipulation of the parties.

There were 963 adjudication hearings in FY 2026, and 855 or 89% were held within the required time frame of 60 calendar days after the later of the day on which the shelter hearing was held or the day on which the petition was filed. The top reason for noncompliance in this category was stipulation of the parties.

Figure 1. Shelter, Pretrial & Adjudication Hearings.



Dispositional Hearings §80-3-402

- (3) *The dispositional hearing may be held on the same date as the adjudication hearing, but shall be held no later than 30 calendar days after the day on which the adjudication hearing is held.*

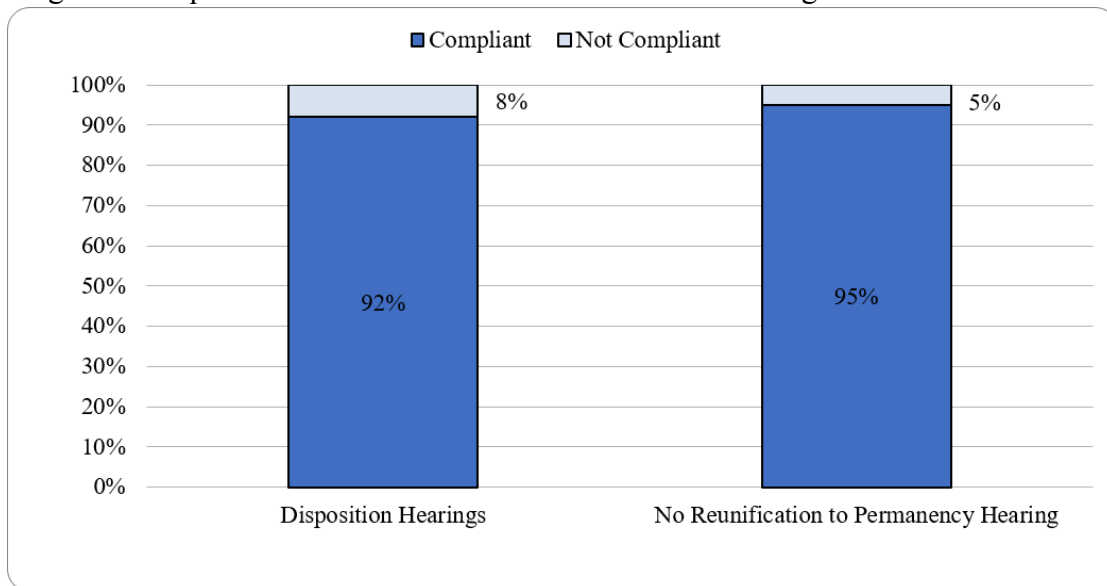
There were 935 dispositional hearings in FY 2026, and 864 or 92% occurred within the 30-day requirement.² Reasons for noncompliance on all remaining cases were largely due to stipulation of the parties, counsel made request/unavailable, and a lack of available court calendar time.

Reunification Services §80-3-406

- (3)(c) *If, at any time, the juvenile court determines that reunification is no longer a minor's primary permanency plan, the juvenile court shall conduct a permanency hearing in accordance with Section [80-3-409](#) on or before the earlier of:*
- (i) *30 days after the day on which the juvenile court makes the determination described in this Subsection [\(3\)\(c\)](#); or*
 - (ii) *the day on which the provision of reunification services, described in Section [80-3-409](#), ends.*

There were 232 cases in which the court terminated reunification services, and permanency proceedings were conducted within 30 days of that decision in 220 or 95% of those cases. The most frequent reason for noncompliance was stipulation of the parties.

Figure 2. Disposition & Termination of Reunification Hearings.



² In many cases, dispositional orders are entered at the adjudication hearing.

Permanency Hearings §80-3-409

(1) (a) If reunification services are ordered under Section [80-3-406](#), with regard to a minor who is in the custody of the division, the juvenile court shall hold a permanency hearing no later than 12 months after the day on which the minor is initially removed from the minor's home.

There were 718 cases in which reunification services were ordered in FY 2026, and 681 or 95% of those cases had a permanency hearing within 12 months of removal. The most frequently cited reasons for noncompliance were due to the stipulation of parties and a lack of available court calendar time.

Petitions for Termination §80-3-409

(10)(a) If the final plan for the minor is to proceed toward termination of parental rights, the petition for termination of parental rights shall be filed, and a pretrial held, within 45 calendar days after the day on which the permanency hearing is held.

There were 216 cases in which the final plan was to proceed toward termination of parental rights in FY 2026, and 176 or 81% of those petitions were filed and a pre-trial held within 45 calendar days of when the permanency hearing was held.

The requirements of Utah Code [§80-3-409](#) combine matters that require action from the division and from the court. Specifically, the court sets a termination of parental rights pretrial hearing if the child's permanency goal is changed to adoption but must rely on the Office of the Attorney General filing a timely petition for termination on behalf of the division.

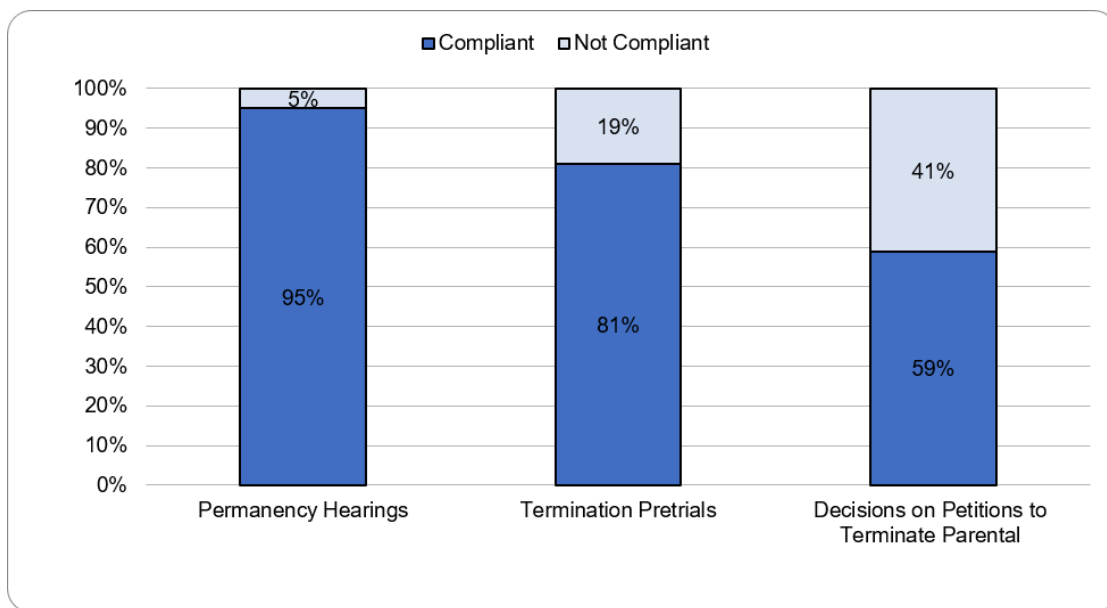
While there are multiple reasons for delay at this stage of the proceeding, the most common reasons were petitions being filed late and parties failing to appear/unable to locate. Delay can be due, in part, to a general reluctance to petition for termination of parental rights unless a child is already placed in a home likely to result in adoption. Delay may also result from the state's inability to locate one or both parents for service of the petition, or when paternity questions are unresolved.

Decisions on Petitions to Terminate Parental Rights §80-3-409

(13)(c) The juvenile court shall make a decision on a petition for termination of parental rights within 18 months after the day on which the minor is initially removed from the minor's home.

There were 101 decisions to terminate parental rights in FY 2026, and 60 or 59% of those decisions were made within 18 months from removal. Data from our case management system attribute most noncompliance with the 18-month standard to stipulation of the parties and petitions filed late. Noncompliance may also be attributed to statutorily permitted extensions when a parent has substantially complied with a child and family plan, reunification is likely within a 90-day period and it is in the best interest of the child.³ Up to two 90-day continuances of reunification services following the 12-month permanency hearing are allowed⁴ and in cases in which a second 90-day extension is granted, timelines will frequently be pushed beyond the 18-month time limit set forth in Subsection [80-3-409\(13\)\(c\)](#).

Figure 3. Permanency & Termination Measures



³³ [UCA §80-3-409\(7\)](#)

⁴ [UCA §80-3-409\(7\)\(c\)](#)

III. Reasons for Delay and Delay Reduction Strategies

The CARE child welfare timeline reporting system allows clerks to document the reasons for non-compliant cases in which a hearing is not timely held. The most frequently cited reasons for delay in FY 2026 involved stipulated agreements of the parties (57%), petition filed late (18%), and a lack of available court calendar time (6%).

The Juvenile Court continues to manage the need to grant appropriate continuances ([URJP 54](#)) against compliance with statutory timeframes. This involves a delicate balance between applying time standards and the overarching need to provide for the safety, well-being and permanency of court involved children.

The Juvenile Court engages in a process of continuous quality improvement in measuring and reporting compliance data. To improve performance, the Board of Juvenile Court Judges generally reviews child welfare timeline data biannually to monitor progress with statutory compliance. Similar reviews occur at the local level throughout the year. The Juvenile Court has fully implemented electronic filing of court documents pursuant to [Rule 4-901](#) of the Code of Judicial Administration. The availability of electronic case records improves accuracy of record keeping and data quality. The Court continues to work to improve data entry, data quality, and reporting to more effectively identify, track, and address cases not in compliance with statutory timelines.

IV. Conclusions

The Administrative Office of the Courts thanks the Panel for this opportunity to report and share information on the efforts of Utah's Juvenile Court to ensure timely permanency for children. As always, legislative representatives are welcome to observe child protection proceedings to gain a better understanding of the child welfare process. The Juvenile Court encourages all legislators to take advantage of this opportunity to observe juvenile court practice firsthand. Please contact Daniel A. Meza Rincon, Juvenile Court Administrator, or Melissa Kennedy, Deputy Juvenile Court Administrator, to facilitate court observation or supply any additional information that the Panel may require.

Category	Statutory Deadline	Incident Count	Compliant	Not Compliant	Percent Compliant	Percent Compliant within 15 Days After Benchmark	Percent Compliant within 30 Days After Benchmark
Shelter Hearing	3 days	960	958	2	100%	100%	100%
Pretrial Hearings	15 days	1,038	1,026	12	99%	100%	100%
Adjudication Hearings	60 days	963	855	108	89%	93%	95%
Disposition Hearings	30 days	935	864	71	92%	99%	100%
No Reunification to Permanency Hearing	30 days	232	220	12	95%	96%	97%
Permanency Hearing	12 months	718	681	37	95%	97%	98%
Termination Pretrial	45 days	216	176	40	81%	86%	87%
Decision on Petition to Terminate	18 months	101	60	41	59%	64%	65%

Overview of Child Welfare Measures—July 1, 2025 to June 30, 2026
[Last run date: September 25, 2026]