

## Child Welfare

The number of children in the Arkansas foster care system has grown during the COVID-19 pandemic. At the end of State Fiscal Year 2021, the number of children in foster care was 4,854. It has been difficult for children and families to receive services during the pandemic, leaving children in the foster care system longer. The state has also been shorthanded when family service workers have been out with COVID. Although the number of children in foster care has begun to decrease, with 4,657 children as of Dec. 2021, the effects of the pandemic on an already overburdened system will be felt for a long time.

The Family First Prevention Services Act of 2018, a landmark piece of federal legislation, places an emphasis on keeping children safely with their families when possible because entering foster care can be traumatizing for many children. It also places an emphasis on placing children with relatives, so that a child can maintain a connection with their family. And if children do have to enter foster care, it encourages children to be placed in the most

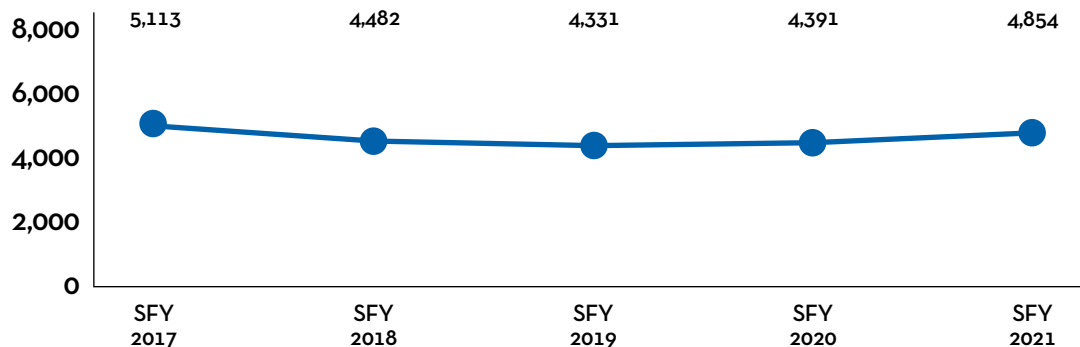
family like setting such as a family foster home and discourages using group care for children by limiting funds for group care settings.

## What to Ask Candidates

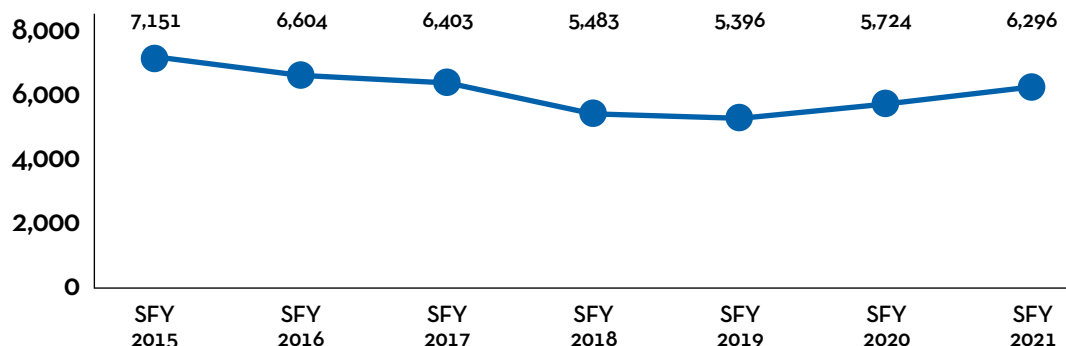
- What are your thoughts on the role that the state government can play in making sure that children are in safe and nurturing homes?
- How can state government help provide services so that children can remain safely in their home without entering foster care?
- For those children who do enter foster care, how can state government help them and their families receive the services they need so that they do not remain for a long period of time?

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### Number of Children in Foster Care at end of SFY 2021



### Number of Children in in-home services\* through protective services cases at end of SFY 2021



\*Children remain in their home and receive services

Source: Annual Report Card, State Fiscal Year 2021, Produced for Arkansas Department of Human Services Division of Children and Family Services, by Evident Change