



CCAA
Commission on Court
Appointed Attorneys

AT-RISK YOUTH & FAMILY

PROJECT RESULTS



January 2026
www.in.gov/ccaa

PILOT PROJECT AUTHORIZATION



LEGISLATIVE ACTION

In the 2021 session, the General Assembly appropriated new At-Risk Youth & Family funding for fiscal years 2022 and 2023 to be used in targeted efforts to reduce Department of Child Services involvement and improve outcomes in Children in Need of Services, Termination of Parental Rights and Juvenile Delinquency Cases.

AT A GLANCE

- The Vigo County Social Worker/Parent Advocate Pilot resulted in a 70 day reduction in time out of home in CHINS cases. This is a savings of \$2,116.10 per case at current standard foster care rates for ages 5-13.
- The Marion County Early Intervention Team Pilot reduced juvenile detention at disposition from 21% to 3%. The most up to date cost for one day of juvenile detention in DOC facilities is \$383.42.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Vigo County Social Worker/Parent Advocate Pilot

- The public defender office was provided with social workers/parent advocates to work with their clients in Children In Need of Services (CHINS) cases
- These practitioners met with clients, attended Child-Family-Team Meetings, coordinated with attorneys and other court actors, facilitated community services for clients, and provided other support as needed
- For the cases in Vigo County that received this new service:
 - CHINS cases closed 65 days faster
 - In cases where children were removed from their home, they spent 70 less days outside of the home than cases without these services
 - 83% of cases with the new service ended in reunification vs. 73% of control cases
 - Only 9% of cases ended in adoption, guardianship, or a termination of parental rights versus 22% of cases when these services were not provided

Marion County Juvenile Early Intervention Team Pilot

- An Early Intervention Team (EIT) for juvenile delinquency cases was created, consisting of a dedicated attorney with support from a paralegal and a social worker
- The EIT initiated representation as early as possible, prior to the initial hearing, by meeting with clients and their families and preparing to advocate for the least restrictive options at the initial hearing
- Juvenile detention rates decreased at each stage of the case:
 - From 47% to 28% immediately following the initial hearing
 - From 23% to 7% at 20 days following the initial hearing
 - From 21% to 3% at disposition
- The rate of cases that did not result in a finding of delinquency or waiver to adult court increased to 48% from 43%
- There was only a negligible effect on the court's approval for the filing of a delinquency petition

INDIANA COMMISSION ON COURT APPOINTED ATTORNEYS YOUTH AND FAMILY PROJECT RESULTS

Torrin Liddell, Director of Research and Data Analytics, Indiana CCAA

Background: At-Risk Youth and Family Projects

Starting in 2021, the Commission began seeking pilot proposals to improve the status of Indiana's at-risk youth and families. Specifically, the proposals sought were required to improve Indiana's family and child welfare system and/or the juvenile delinquency system, or proactively prevent involvement with these systems. Seven (7) such programs have begun since the implementation of this program. We present results from two completed programs here, with additional programs to be included in future revisions as data collection and analysis completes.

Analysis Methods

All results presented here were analyzed using Bayesian statistical methods. Unless otherwise stated, all results described here were statistically credible. This means that when estimating the difference between the experimental program group and the control group, the 95% most-likely values exclude an effect size of zero.[1] For numeric variables (e.g., case length in days) a standard regression model was used. For binary variables (e.g., in detention or not in detention) a logistic regression model was used. All analyses included control variables like client demographics, as well as other program specific variables, in order to isolate and identify the direct effect of each program.

[1] For overview, see Kruschke, J. K. (2018). Rejecting or accepting parameter values in Bayesian estimation. *Advances in methods and practices in psychological science*, 1(2), 270-280.

VIGO COUNTY

SOCIAL WORKER/PARENT ADVOCATE PILOT

The Vigo County Social Worker/Parent Advocate Pilot program was proposed by the Vigo County Public Defender. This program provides additional social worker or parent advocate support to parents in child welfare cases. The program was funded by CCAA's At-Risk Youth and Family program and started early in 2022. The program provided social workers or parent advocates (referred to collectively here as "practitioners") to clients in Children In Need of Services (CHINS) cases. These practitioners met with clients, attended Child-Family-Team Meetings, coordinated with attorneys and other court actors, facilitated community services for clients, and provided other support as needed. The primary goals of this program were to reduce the time to permanency (the time it takes for a child to reach their permanent home) of CHINS cases and improve the case outcomes for clients in the program.

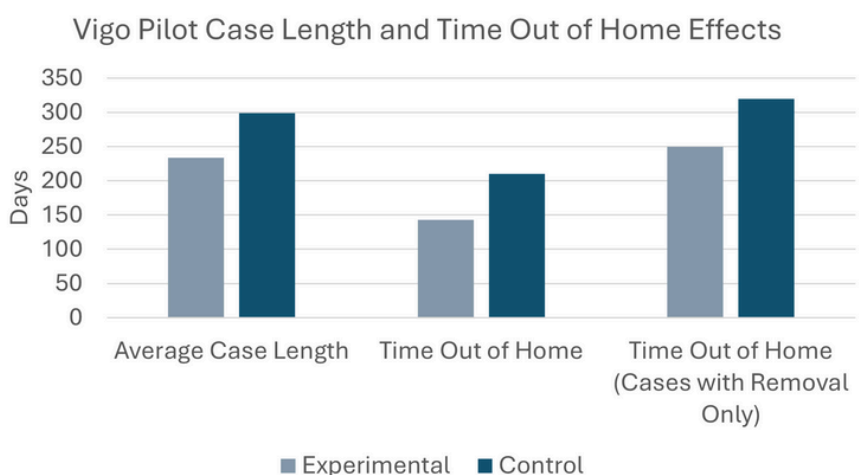
Program Evaluation

The evaluation of this program used a randomized controlled trial design. The results presented here include cases that closed by January 2025. Cases that were not assigned randomly (due to conflicts, capacity or other issues) and cases missing key data points were excluded. There were 311 cases that met these criteria and thus were included in the analyses described below. The key outcomes of interest were case length, time out of home (i.e., days with a child removed from the home by DCS), and case outcome.

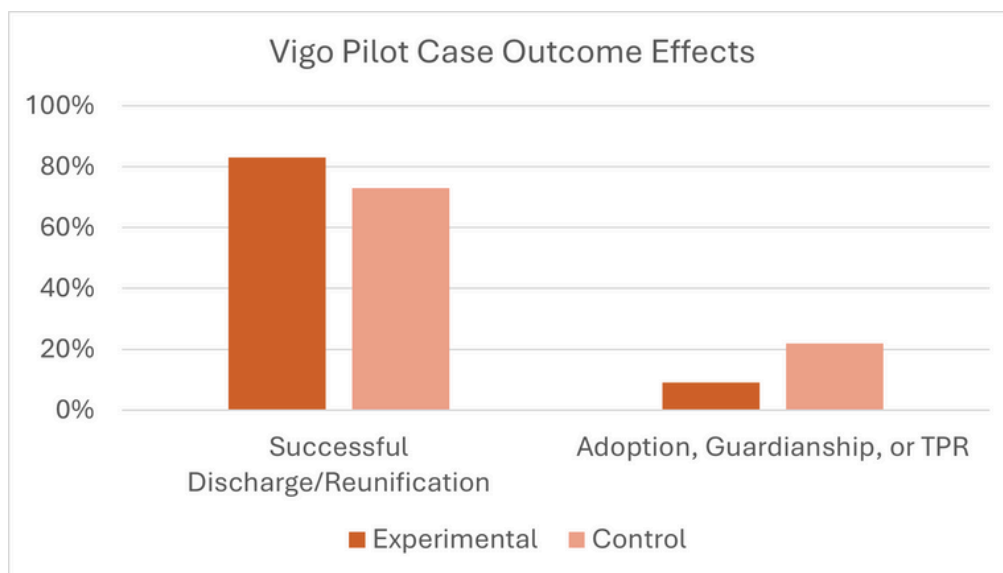
Case Length and Time Out of Home

The first primary goal of the Vigo pilot was to reduce the time it took for cases to resolve. A related measure was the amount of time cases spent with an active removal of at least one child from the home, which we refer to as Time Out of Home. Time Out of Home reductions can come from both reduction in overall case length, as well as reducing removal time during a case.

Cases in the experimental group had an average case length of 234 days, versus 299 for the control. Cases in the experimental group had an average Time Out of Home of 143 days, versus 210 for the control. If the analysis is limited to cases with any removal time, the average for the experimental group is 250 days, versus 320 days for the control.



Case Outcome



For this analysis, Case Outcome refers specifically to the way each case is discharged, as opposed to the more general category of outcomes, which could include outcomes throughout the case as well as collateral consequences not captured by the specific discharge type. There are many ways a case can end, and many of these categories are not possible to rank in terms of client favorability. Instead, we look at the rate of the generally most favorable outcomes and the generally least favorable outcomes. The generally most favorable outcome in our data collection scheme was a successful discharge with reunification, meaning that the case was discharged and the children were returned to the parents. The generally least favorable outcome was a Termination of Parental Rights (TPR). However, cases ending in TPR were so rare (0.6% of experimental, and 2% of control) that there was not sufficient statistical power to credibly demonstrate a difference on those cases alone. Therefore, we created a category for case outcomes that involved a long-term living situation outside of the home, consisting of the adoption, guardianship, and TPR outcomes.

Cases ended in a successful discharge with reunification in 83% of experimental cases, versus 73% of control cases. Conversely, 9% of experimental cases ended in adoption, guardianship, or TPR, compared with 22% of control cases.

Conclusion

The Vigo Social Worker/Parent Advocate Pilot program had strong positive effects on all three evaluation metrics identified at the outset of the program. These results were statistically credible and had effect sizes that were very impactful to the affected clients and to the functioning of the child welfare system.

MARION COUNTY EARLY INTERVENTION TEAM PILOT



The Marion County Early Intervention Team (EIT) Pilot proposal was submitted by the Marion County Public Defender Agency. This program created an Early Intervention Team for juvenile delinquency cases, consisting of a dedicated attorney with support from a paralegal and a social worker. The EIT represents juvenile delinquency clients primarily at the initial hearing. But importantly, the representation process started prior to this hearing by meeting with clients and their families and preparing to advocate for the least restrictive options at the initial hearing. The EIT also served as the primary intermediary between the client and other court actors, as well as community services. The primary goal of this program was to reduce the number of juvenile delinquency cases approved for filing and the number of youths in secure detention.

Program Evaluation

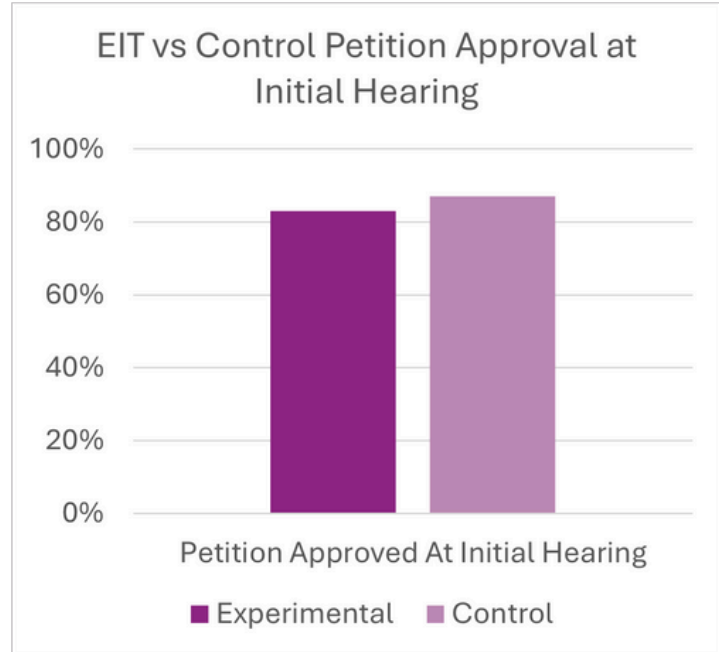
The EIT program was evaluated against a control sample composed of a pre-program group and a concurrent convenience sample. The pre-program group was composed of data collected in January, February, and part of March of 2022, prior to the implementation of the EIT in mid-March 2022. The concurrent convenience sample is composed of cases assigned after the implementation of the program where the EIT was unable to be assigned. This occurred when the EIT was not available for a particular initial hearing (due to scheduling or other reasons), or when the client already had an attorney at the Marion County Public Defender Agency. The pre-program and concurrent convenience samples were compared on the outcomes of interest, and no differences were found. Therefore, the results presented here compare the EIT clients to the clients that for any reason were not represented by the EIT.

Due to various personnel changes and some difficulty in hiring, the EIT had different team members throughout the program. The team always had an EIT attorney, who was usually assisted by a paralegal, and at various points also had an EIT case manager, an EIT social worker, or a non-EIT social worker who assisted in a limited capacity. Due to the small sample size of some of the team configurations, a systematic comparison was not possible. Therefore, in the results presented here, all these categories were considered as a single experimental EIT group.

To be included in the analysis, a case had to be closed and entered by the end of 2024. There were 681 such cases, though specific analyses exclude some data points that do not have the required fields recorded.

Petition Approval at Initial Hearing

One of the primary goals of the EIT was to reduce the number of delinquency petitions that were approved for filing at the initial hearing. If a petition is not approved for filing, the case is essentially over at the initial hearing. If a petition is approved for filing, the case continues as normal. While the numeric value was lower in the EIT group (83%) versus the control group (87%), this effect was small and was not statistically credible. The changes implemented by the program were not sufficient to strongly influence judicial decision-making regarding approval of delinquency petitions.

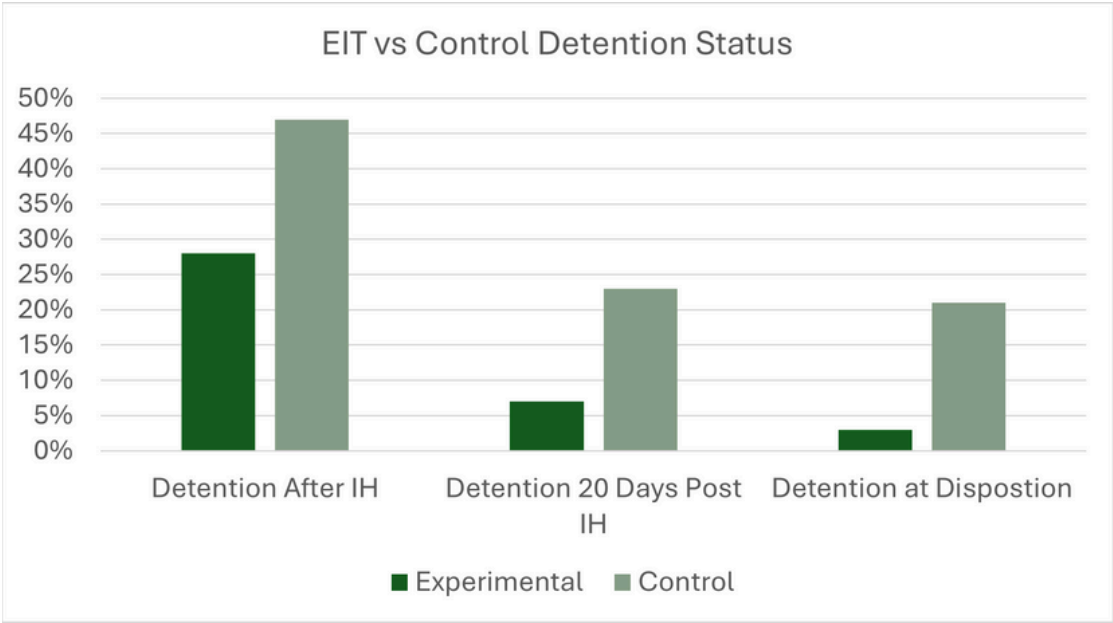


Detention

Detention status was recorded at three time-points: immediately following the initial hearing, 20 court days following the initial hearing, and at case disposition. We evaluated the effect of EIT representation at each of these three points. Detention was measured as one of only two categories: “detained” and “not detained.” A client that is treated as “not detained” might still have some kind of supervision (e.g., probation at disposition), but only their status in or out of secure detention matters for this measure.

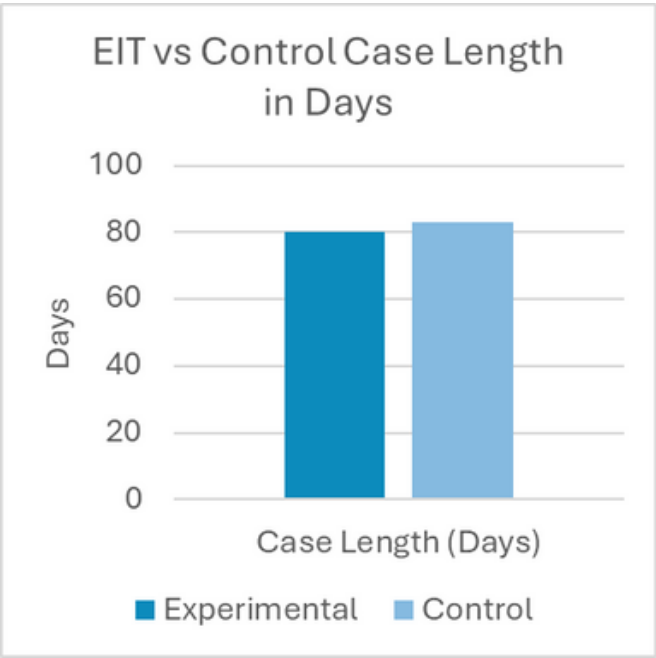
The observed effect of the EIT on detention was large at all three time points, with the size of the effect compounding over the course of the case. Immediately following the initial hearing, the detention rate in the EIT group decreased by 40% (from 47% to 28%) relative to the control group. At 20 days following the initial hearing the detention rate decreased by 70% (from 23% to 7%). At disposition, the detention rate decreased by 86% (from 21% to 3%). These results provide strong evidence that the EIT decreased detention rates for clients throughout the life of the case.

Detention continued



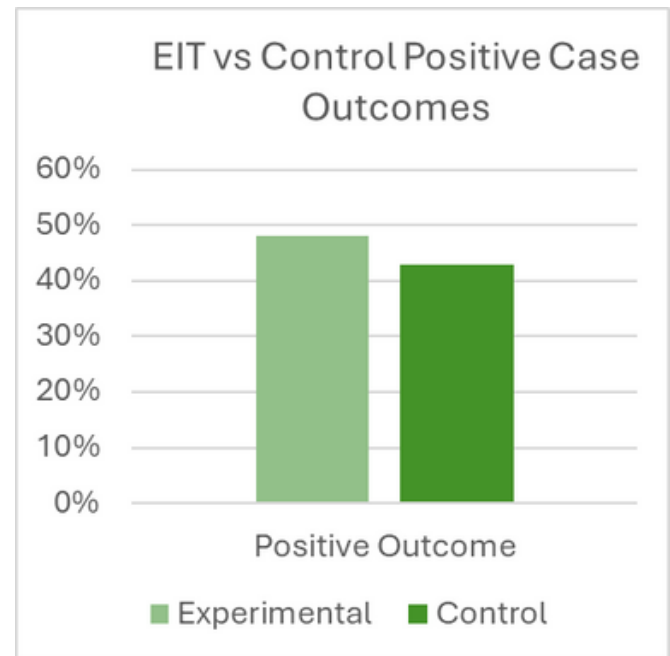
Case Length

While not a primary goal of the program, reduction of case length was a secondary area of interest when evaluating the program. Case length was measured in days from the date of the initial hearing through the date of disposition. As in the case of petition approval rate, the numeric value was lower in the EIT group (80 days) versus the control group (83 days), but the effect was small and was not statistically credible. The presence of the EIT at the initial hearing did not strongly influence overall case length.



Case Outcome

The final evaluation area we investigated was overall case outcome. The measure of case outcomes was specifically operationalized as the occurrence of positive case outcomes. A positive outcome was defined as any outcome that did not lead to an adjudication of delinquency (whether by plea or trial) or a waiver to adult court. Non-positive outcomes could potentially still be favorable (e.g., a favorable plea relative to other outcomes) but these favorable-but-still-adjudicated outcomes are not included in the positive outcome measure. The difference in positive outcome rates between the EIT group (48%) and the control group (43%) was small but statistically credible. Despite the involvement of the EIT only occurring early in the case, this involvement had enough downstream effects to make a meaningful but small increase in positive case outcomes.



Summary

The Marion County EIT Pilot program was intended to reduce the number of juvenile delinquency cases approved for filing and the number of youths in secure detention. While the EIT did not successfully impact the rate of delinquency petitions approved for filing, the very large impact on detention justifies the existence of the program both in terms of benefit to clients and potential cost savings for the juvenile delinquency system. The modest downstream effects of the program on case outcomes provides additional evidence for the benefits of the program. Taken together, these results confirm the success of the Marion County EIT Pilot.

PILOT PROJECTS AROUND THE STATE

The Commission has partnered with five counties and Child Advocates to implement pilot projects for a total of seven projects.

System Navigator

Vigo, Monroe, and Gibson Counties

Provide social workers, case workers, or other DCS system experts to parents and their public defenders in CHINS and TPR cases.

Washington County

Provide social workers, case workers, or other DCS system experts to parents and their public defenders in CHINS, TPR and juvenile delinquency cases.

Early Intervention

Marion County

Provides a multidisciplinary team to clients in juvenile delinquency cases as early as possible, before the initial hearing.

Medical/Legal Partnership

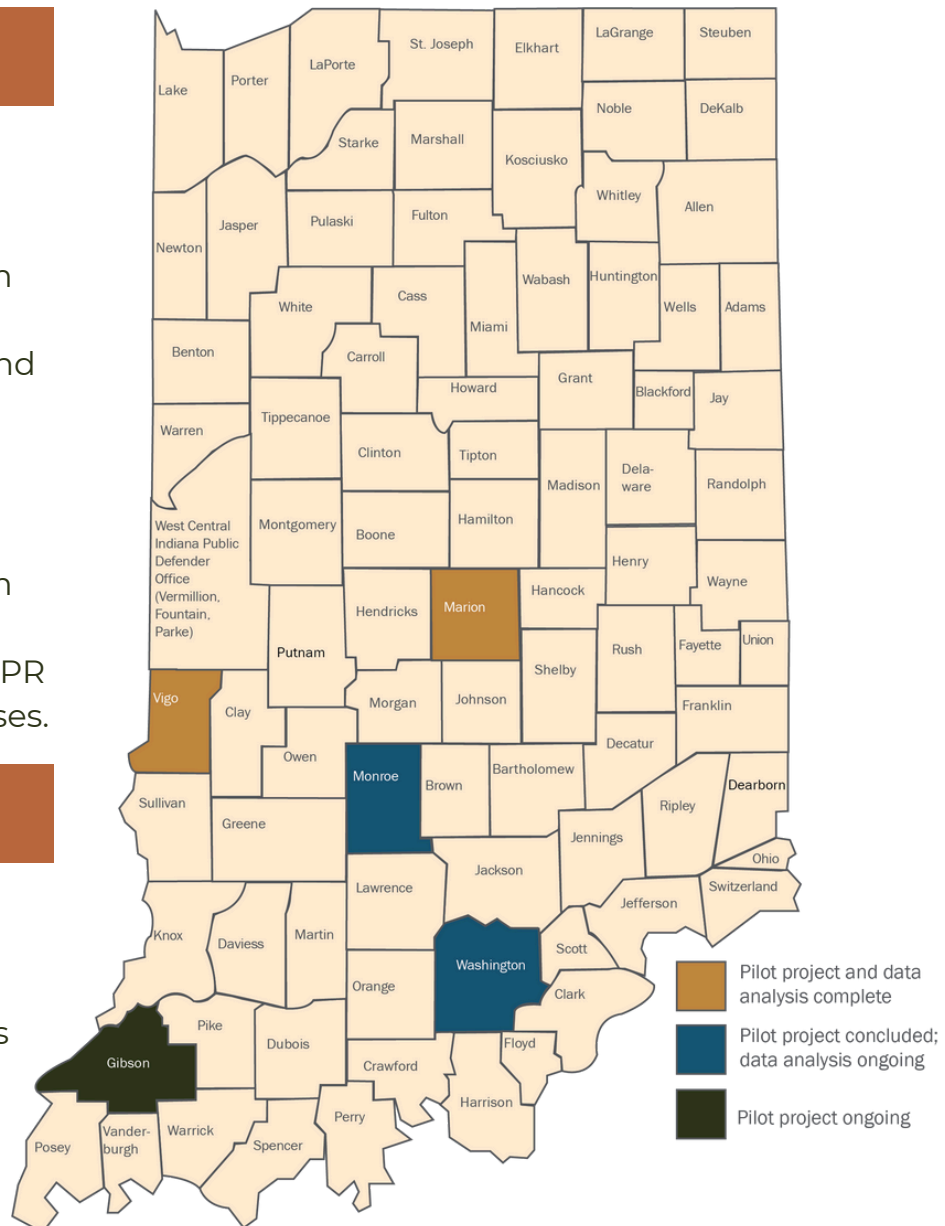
Child Advocates/Riley Hospital for Children

Provides a social worker-attorney team to support at-risk parents.

Mediation

Child Advocates

Provides mediators in both CHINS and TPR cases in Marion and surrounding counties.



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CONTACT CCAA



information@ccaa.in.gov



101 W Ohio St, Suite 1800
Indianapolis, IN 46204



www.in.gov/ccaa
