



# BTC Brief

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## NC invests little to prevent child abuse and ultimately pays a higher price

*Reports of child abuse and neglect have increased 29 percent over the past 19 years in NC, and it costs the state \$2 billion a year.*

BY LUIS TOLEDO and BRIAN KENNEDY

In North Carolina, the [number of reports](#) of child abuse and neglect has increased by 29 percent over the past 19 years at the same time that state and federal investments have held steady.<sup>1</sup> As [National Child Abuse Prevention Month](#)<sup>2</sup> comes to an end, it is worth reviewing the importance of our fiscal decisions on the goal of protecting each child from abuse and neglect. The long-term impact of child abuse—and Adverse Childhood Experiences—is far-reaching; without a commitment to prevention and to effective systems and support for treatment, the effects of childhood abuse can generate a host of lifetime personal and societal costs.

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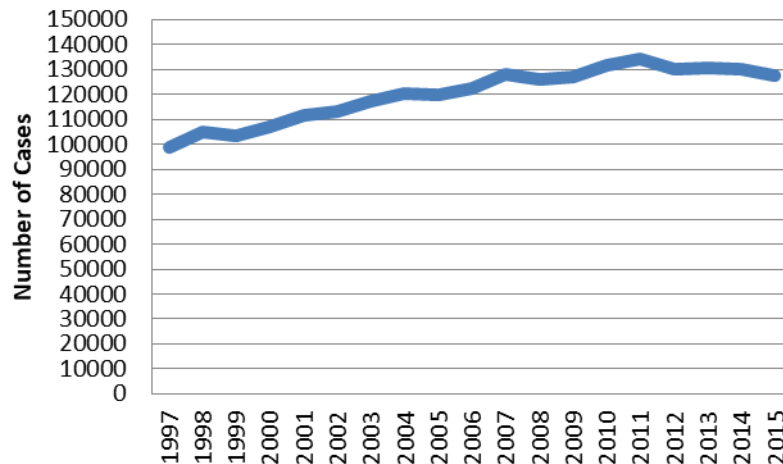
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**29% Increase in Investigated Reports of Abuse & Neglect in N.C. Over the Past 19 Years**

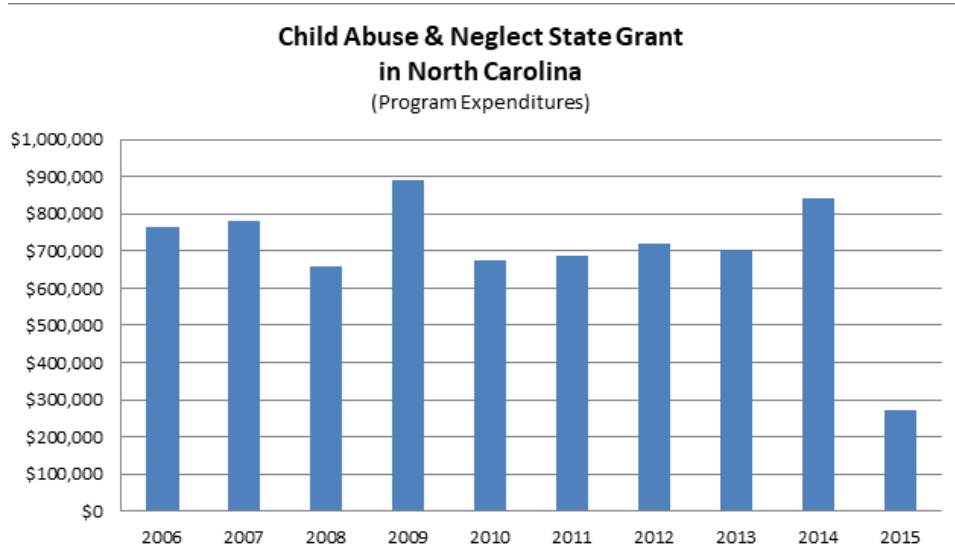


Child maltreatment [statistics](#) for North Carolina show<sup>3</sup>:

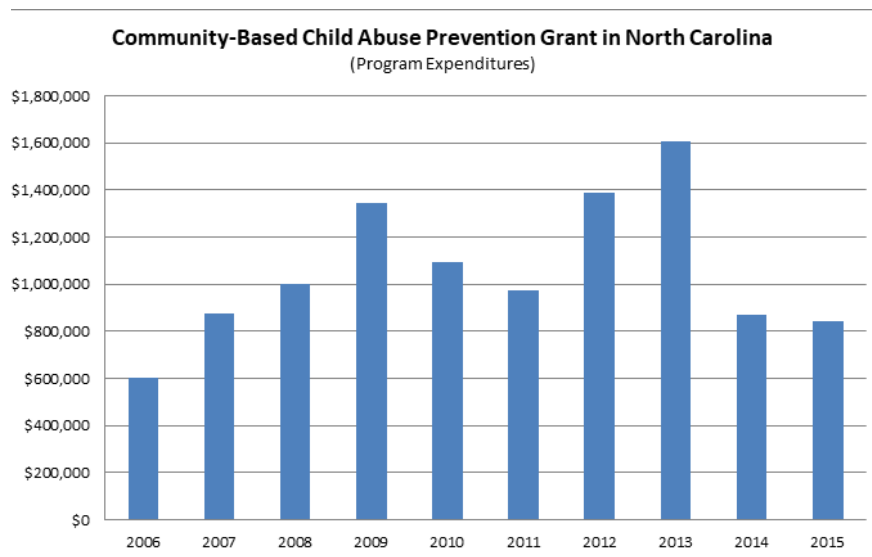
- 126,962 children with investigated reports of possible abuse and neglect in North Carolina from July 2015 to June 2016.<sup>4</sup>
- The three main maltreatment types for North Carolina child victims are neglect (54 percent), physical abuse (22 percent), and sexual abuse (20 percent).

- Girls make up 52 percent of child abuse victims (boys make up 48 percent).
- 5,727 was the average number of first-time child victims every year in North Carolina between 2011 and 2015.

Meanwhile, the estimated annual [nationwide cost of child abuse and neglect](#) is \$80 billion (2012 dollars).<sup>5</sup> North Carolina's estimated annual share: \$2.3 billion.



A serious investment upfront to prevent child abuse is not only a moral imperative, it is more cost-effective than making investments after the fact to treat its costlier effects. While Congress has annually appropriated between \$7.6 billion and \$8.7 billion in [federal support](#) dedicated to child welfare purposes, states bear the primary responsibility for ensuring the welfare of children and their families.<sup>6</sup> Over the past ten years, the amount of money North Carolina has received from two federal grants addressing this area has not increased, even though the number of child abuse incidents in North Carolina has.<sup>7</sup>



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Gov. Cooper's [recommended budget](#) included "\$19 million to improve child welfare case management practices and bolsters direct services for at-risk children and their families."<sup>8</sup> This type of investment is a step in the right direction, but much more remains to be done to move beyond fixing the system that serves children and families in crisis to preventing the abuse and neglect in the first place.

North Carolina's investment in the prevention of child abuse and neglect has been modest even as the state has underfunded the Child Protective Services system that intervenes in cases of neglect and abuse. The state appropriates funds for the prevention of child abuse and neglect through two main mechanisms: the sale of Kids First license plates and the North Carolina Children's Trust Fund.

The North Carolina Children's Trust Fund (NCCFT) was created in 1983 with the sole purpose of preventing child abuse. NCCFT was originally funded with NCGA appropriations as well as a portion of marriage certificate fees. From 1996 to 2005, state appropriations and marriage license fees created average annual revenue of \$652,402 for the fund – that's over \$800,000 in today's dollars.<sup>9</sup> In 2000, \$1.7 million was transferred out of the fund in order to help balance the state's budget.<sup>10</sup> Today, NCCTF continues to generate revenue from marriage license fees, Kids First license plate fees, as well as required matching fees from CBO grant recipients. Although a majority of the funding comes from marriage fees, a significant portion comes from service providers. For example, in 2012, NCCTF had a total allocation of \$503,820; of that, \$336,505 came from marriage license fees, \$26,400 from Kids First license plate fees, and the rest, \$140,915 came from local service providers.<sup>11</sup>

Prioritizing the end to child abuse and neglect is important, and it requires a greater state investment to ensure that every child is safe and their healthy development is supported in the home. This Child Abuse Prevention Month, North Carolina should ensure that the state is doing all that it can to protect children who have experienced abuse and neglect as well as invest in the evidence-based programming that prevents abuse and neglect in the first place.

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