



Learning from the Past

Using Child Welfare Data to Protect
Infants through Birth Match Programs



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USING CHILD WELFARE DATA TO PROTECT
INFANTS THROUGH BIRTH MATCH POLICIES

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MAY 2022

Road Map for presentation

- What is birth match?
- What is the rationale for birth match?
- How do states' programs differ?
- What do we know about the impact of birth match?
- Conclusions
- Recommendations





WHY: What is the rationale for birth match?

- Past behavior is often the best predictor of future behavior
- Research suggests that a prior CPS report is the best predictor of maltreatment death by age 5.
- CECANF recommended birth match as one strategy to identify children at high risk of maltreatment death and intervene to protect them.

Where?



What
triggered
the
adoption of
birth
match?

Michigan: death and severe beating of two babies in Detroit in one week

Minnesota??????

Maryland: started with Child Fatality Review, gained support from advocates and academics after child deaths

Texas: Child Fatality Review recommendation

Missouri: piece of larger reform bill that failed the year before

How was
birth
match
enacted?

Executive action:
Michigan, Texas

Legislation:
Minnesota,
Maryland,
Missouri

Differences between programs

Scope: Who is
matched

Scope:
Timeframes

Response to
matched families

Program Scope: Who is matched?

All states include parents with Termination of Parental Rights (often with some qualifications like it had to be involuntary or due to CAN)



Program Scope: Who else is matched

Maryland: Parents convicted of the murder, attempted murder, or manslaughter of a child

Texas: parents with a previous child fatality caused by abuse or neglect

Missouri: parents who pled guilty or have been found guilty of crimes against children

Michigan: parents who caused the death of a child due to CAN or were manually added to the match list because they committed serious maltreatment that did not lead to a TPR

Minnesota: all parents with an involuntary transfer of custody or determined to have committed "serious maltreatment"

Crimes Triggering Birth Match in Missouri

Rape, sodomy, child molestation, sexual misconduct, sexual abuse, and trafficking; first degree murder, second degree murder, voluntary manslaughter, involuntary manslaughter, promoting prostitution in the first degree; incest; female genital mutilation; sexual exploitation of a minor; promoting child pornography (first and second degree); Possession of child pornography; Furnishing pornographic materials to minors; Child used in sexual performance; Promoting sexual performance by a child

Birth match does not identify all newborns who are at risk

Those with fathers not listed on birth certificates

Children living with men who are not their fathers

Parents who lost rights or harmed children but are not recorded as having an official TPR

Program Scope: Timeframes

Texas: Two Years

Missouri: Ten
Years

Maryland: Ten
years

Minnesota:
unlimited (records
kept 10 years or til
subject turns 26)

Michigan:
Unlimited (from
1978)

Response to Matched Families

Michigan: Regular investigation (allegation of “threatened harm”)

Minnesota: Regular investigation (allegation of “threatened injury”)

Texas: Regular Investigation (allegation?)

Missouri: Newborn Crisis Assessment (type of investigation)

Maryland: assessed for safety, risks and needs

Maryland

“Assessment,” is less comprehensive than a regular investigation and the family can refuse to participate.

SW must call CPS if reason to believe child has been abused or neglected or is “at substantial risk of abuse or neglect,” if family refuses assessment or at any point in BM process

After assessing safety, the worker shall provide and refer the parents for “appropriate [voluntary] services.”

Missouri

Birth match referrals treated as non-child abuse/neglect referrals and receive a “Newborn Crisis Assessment.”

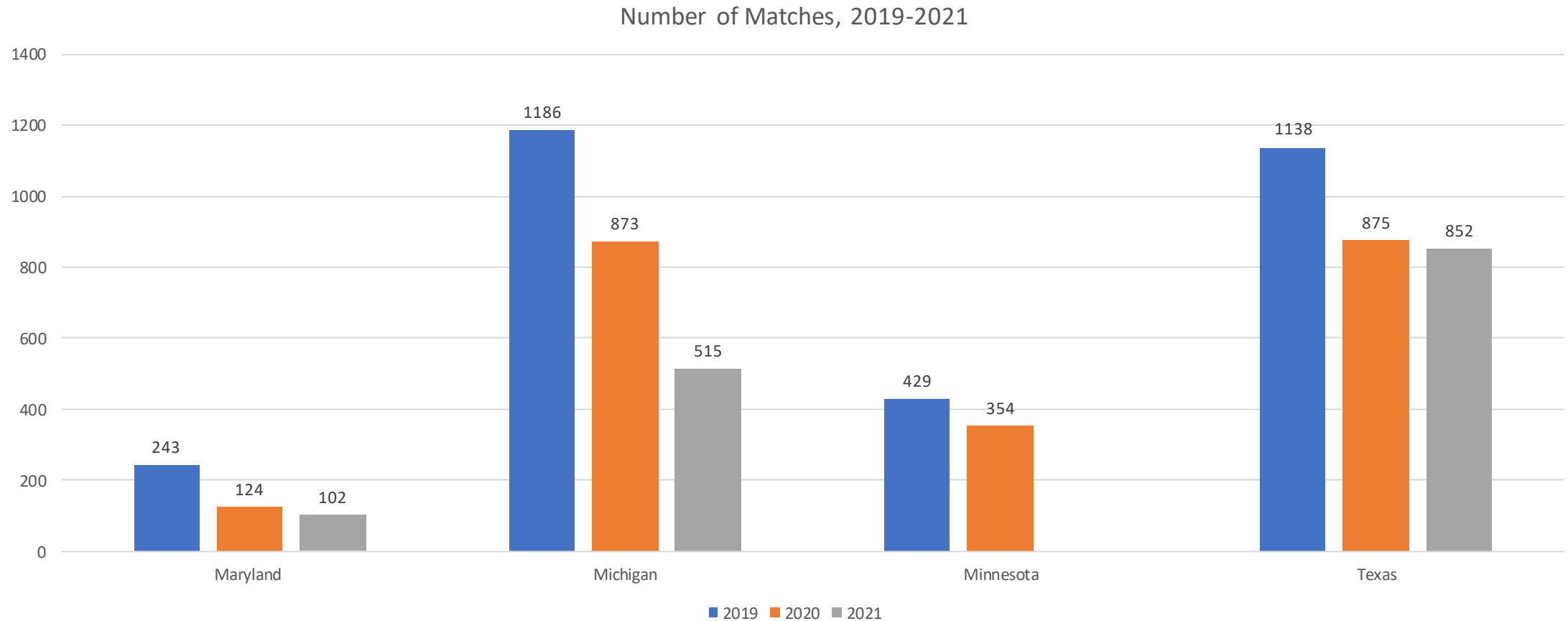
If no safety concerns are identified, parents can decline any services that are offered; if safety concerns are identified, social workers have the same choices as in a regular investigation.

What is the impact of Birth Match?



- None of the states, except Missouri, appear to analyze or report on birth match data
- States had no explanation for anomalies or trends in the data provided

BM identifying significant numbers of children but trends are puzzling



One third to two-thirds of matched infants (in 4 states) were already known to child welfare

33% to 45% of matched infants in MD, half in MI and MO, and two-thirds in TX, were already involved in a child welfare case

Signal is real: matched infants are more likely to be reported than other kids

BUT many infants born to parents with concerning records would not be reported without birth match

Percentage of matches (not already reported) receiving interventions due to birth match is low

MD: Only 4 of 89 families assigned to local offices for assessment in 2019 received services.

MI: Of 484 investigations due to birth match in FY 2019, 49 had a case opened for services and 24 had a removal

TX: Of 302 cases investigated due to birth match in 2019, 70 received in-home services and 28 had a removal

MO: 35 referrals due to birth match in first 13 months; 2 children were removed and one family agreed to home visiting.

Why the Low Numbers?

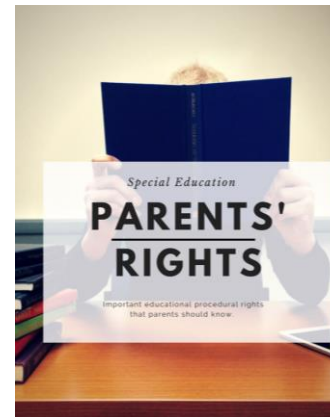
Bad idea? Birth match is not a good way to identify children at risk?

Bad implementation? Only Michigan has studied implementation, and their results suggest that implementation has been half-hearted.

Lack of interest in birth match among state officials, legislators, and advocates

- Little or no interest in birth match among state officials
- Even advocates have failed to follow up on implementation
- Current Zeitgeist not friendly to birth match

FAMILY
FIRST,
NO
MATTER
WHAT.



Conclusions

Birth match is supported by logic and generally by research but data are limited and of dubious accuracy

Assuming data are approximately accurate, birth match policies appear to be identifying significant numbers of children—many already identified and many not.

Percentage of matched infants and families receiving services seems surprisingly low suggesting implementation problems or lack of relevance of parents' history to current risk

Conclusions (continued)

Birth match leaves out many children whose parents have killed or seriously harmed previous children

Birth match is only as effective as the investigations, assessments, and services that result from it.

States and advocates have little interest, perhaps because current ideological climate is not favorable to birth match

Recommendations

States with birth match should collect the data needed to assess implementation and outcomes.

States with birth match should improve implementation; others should adopt it.

Birth match should explicitly include all parents who committed severe abuse or neglect but did not have a TPR or criminal charge.

States should consider matching all parents who had a child removed in the past.



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