

Circuit bests state

By Johnny Edwards | Staff Writer

Wednesday, September 10, 2008

5 COMMENTS

PRINT

SHARE

Compared with the rest of the state, the three-county Augusta Judicial Circuit takes good care of its abused and neglected children for the most part, statistics presented Tuesday to judges and child welfare workers showed.

morning headlines

Get *The Chronicle* delivered daily to your e-mail inbox, customized just for you.

[Sign up for free](#)

But the data revealed weaknesses, such as taking too long to get children adopted and the percentage of Richmond County children victimized again after Department of Family and Children Services intervention.

"Clearly Augusta (Judicial Circuit) is doing a lot of good things for their kids," said Beth Locker, deputy project director for the Georgia Supreme Court's Committee on Justice for Children. "Are

they doing enough? Probably not."

Ms. Locker presented the figures at the Justice for Children Summit, attended by juvenile court judges, child welfare workers and law enforcement officers. Her numbers come from the nonprofit group Fostering Court Improvement, which compiles information reported by child welfare offices to the federal Department of Health and Human Services.

In most categories, the circuit including Richmond, Columbia and Burke counties does as well as or better than the state as a whole. In a measure indicating courts' and DFCS' judgement, of all children removed from homes between April 2007 and March 2008, only 4.6 percent, or 13 children, had been taken out of foster care within the past year, as opposed to an 8.5 percent statewide rate. Of those removed in the Augusta circuit, 8.5 percent, or 24 children, had been in foster care at any point previously, compared with 16.4 percent statewide.

But Ms. Locker said the circuit's timeliness in seeing children adopted needs improvement. In the 12 months ending March 31, Georgia's median length between a child's removal to adoption was 33.4 months. Richmond County's median was 38.4 months, and Columbia County's median was 85.5 months.

In 2005, the most recent year for which the data are available, the state's rate of child abuse victims re-victimized was 6.4 percent. Richmond County's rate was 8.2 percent.

"The data only tells you the numbers," said Richmond County DFCS Director Andre Chambers. "The data doesn't tell you what's happening behind that. Strategies have to be built on that.

"We have a lot more work we need to do," he said.