ECONOMIST IMPACT

Delaware

Estimations of the scale, scope and cost of child sexual abuse and exploitation (CSAE) in the United States are alarming.[1] The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that approximately one in four girls and one in 20 boys will experience sexual abuse during childhood in US,[2] while the estimated lifetime cost per child sexual abuse victim is $282,734 million.[3,4] The good news is that CSAE is preventable. A range of interventions have been identified to help prevent child abuse and sexual violence from occurring in the first place and to minimize the impacts on survivors and their families.[5,6,7]

Economist Impact's Out of the Shadows Index, supported by World Childhood Foundation USA, was designed to shine a spotlight on state action—and inaction—to address CSAE. The assessment includes more than 170 metrics aggregated into 22 indicators and grouped into four categories to gauge the extent to which states have introduced essential measures to prevent and respond to this pressing issue. It aims to be a tool to highlight areas for prioritization, drive change, and benchmark progress.

The following state profile was created as part of the second iteration of the Out of the Shadows Index (2024). For full findings and insights from the 2025 index, visit www.childhood-usa.org

2025 results

Score	Rank
56.3/100	11/51

Background indicators

Population (m)	1.03
Median household income (USD)	71,091
Poverty rate (% below poverty level)	12
Educational attainment (% with a bachelor's degree or higher)	34
Female representation in state government (%)	37
Investment in education per pupil (USD):	17,448

State overview (2024)

Delaware has demonstrated significant progress in its efforts to tackle CSAE, securing second place in the index overall and first on the Justice Process domain. In particular, the state has taken steps to create specialized and child-friendly response mechanisms. To further enhance these efforts, however, more focus should be placed on increasing prevention capacity and protecting the rights of survivors by passing a Sexual Assault Survivors' Bill of Rights.

State spotlights

Delaware was the first state in the US to ban child marriage, setting the minimum marriage age at 18 without exception in 2018.[8]

Delaware promotes the use of the child-friendly, trauma-informed services delivered by its Children's Advocacy Centers (CACs).[9] In particular, the state requires that all forensic interviews with children aged 3 to 12 and all suspected child victims of human trafficking be conducted at a CAC.[10]

Delaware's Special Victims Unit (SVU) is responsible for handling all felony-level, criminal child abuse cases, including all sexual abuse cases. Moreover, Delaware's Child Predator Task Force, sitting under the SVU, is charged with investigating and prosecuting "criminals who utilize the internet to prey on Delaware's children".

Delaware has eliminated the criminal and civil statute of limitations for all child sexual abuse crimes and claims.[11,12]

Priority areas for future focus

Strengthen the legal framework against sexual violence by:
- Requiring all marriage license applicants to provide official proof of their age; and by
- Adopting a clear and explicit statutory definition of sexual consent.[13]

Boost prevention capacity through the development of a statewide child sexual abuse prevention plan or strategy, encompassing in-person and online abuse. Actions should include:
- Enhancing the comprehensiveness of sex education, requiring that such instruction include information about contraception and be evidence-based, culturally appropriate and inclusive of *all* students;
- Requiring that instruction provided to students on personal body safety and sexual abuse include information about the risks of online or online-facilitated sexual exploitation or abuse; and by
- Enacting required, regular training on child sexual abuse and teen dating violence for employees and volunteers of youth-serving organizations beyond schools.[14]

Promote survivor-centered approaches by:
- Passing a Sexual Assault Survivors' Bill of Rights that grants victims specific rights related to their sexual assault evidence collection kit (eg, notification of testing results) and to have an advocate present during a sexual assault medical forensic examination; and by
- Explicitly allowing minors to consent to a sexual assault medical forensic examination and medical treatment in cases of alleged sexual abuse.

Promote a more rehabilitative approach for juvenile offenders by:
- Eliminating sex offender registration in all cases of youth adjudicated delinquent for a sexual offense in juvenile court; and by
- Prohibiting the use of phallometric assessments and polygraphs with juveniles.

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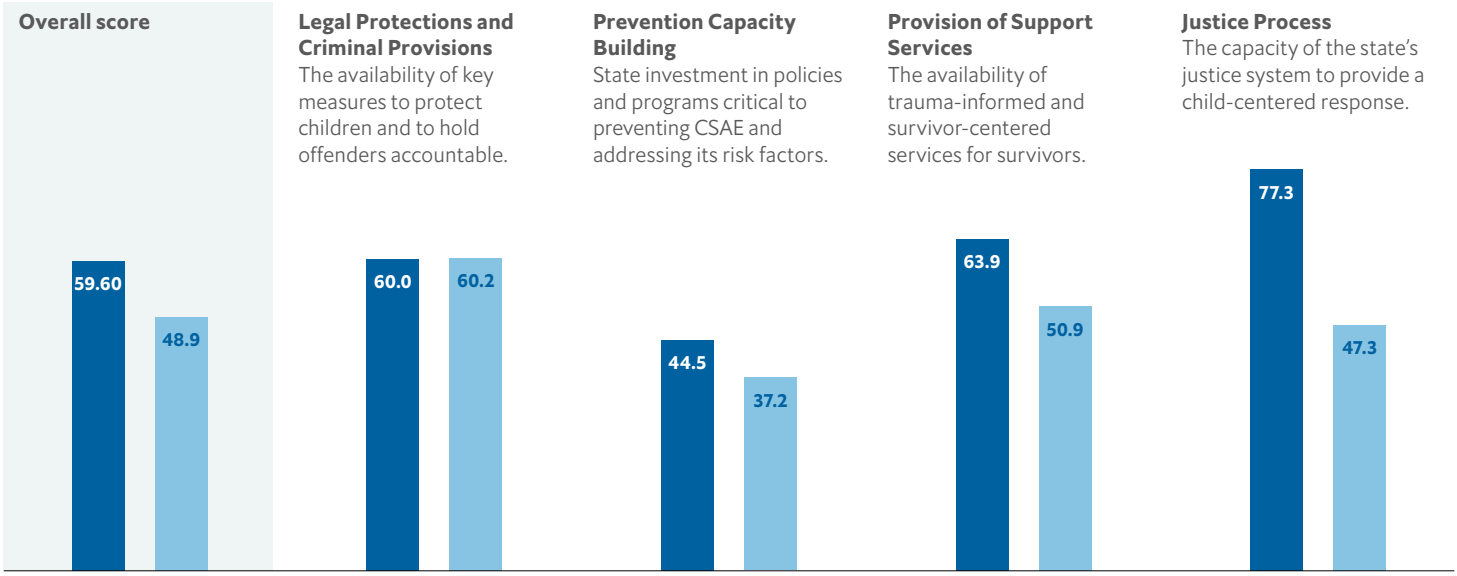
The United States Out of the Shadows Index: Delaware

Index scores (2024)

Delaware 28-state average



Issue spotlights[15] (2024)

Creating protective environments		
Mandated sex education and HIV/STI instruction	Sex ed / HIV/STI instruction	◐
Comprehensiveness of sex education and HIV/STI instruction (if/when provided)[16]	Scale of comprehensiveness	1/7
Mandated sexual abuse prevention and awareness education	Yes / no	●
Mandated online sexual abuse prevention and awareness education	Yes / no	○
Required school dating violence policies	Yes / no	●
Required training on child sexual abuse (CSA) for educators	Yes / no	●
Required training on CSA for youth-serving organization employees	Yes / no	○
Educator code of ethics: appropriate teacher/ student boundaries	Yes / no	●
Addressing risk and protective factors		
Statewide child sexual abuse prevention plan	Yes / no	○
Child marriage laws	18 without exception / required proof of age	◐
Mandated parental leave	Yes / no	○
Non-discrimination statutory protections[17]	Protection for sexual orientation / gender identity	◑
Legislated minimum wage above the low-income threshold	Yes / no	○
Income-eligible children with access to early head start	%	8.8
Eligible children under age 3 served in evidence-based home-visiting programs	%	9.5
Regular collection of prevalence data on child sexual abuse	Yes / no	○

Building trauma-informed systems		
Statute defining CACs in line with national standards[18]	Yes / no	○
Statute requiring the use of CACs in suspected CSA cases, where available	Yes / no	●
State funding for CACs: general revenue and special revenue	General revenue / special revenue	◐
Mandated training for child protective services investigators[19]	Child sexual abuse / trauma	◑
Mandated training for law enforcement	Child sexual abuse / trauma	◑
Mandated training for prosecutors	Child sexual abuse / trauma	◐
Preventing retraumatization in court: testifying by alternative means in CSA cases	Younger children / all minors	◐
Preventing retraumatization in court: hearsay exception in CSA cases	Younger children / all minors	◐
Supporting justice and healing		
Medical care following sexual abuse: minors' authority to consent	Yes / no	○
Medical care following sexual abuse: right to an advocate	Yes / no	○
Rape kit reform	Some reform / full reform	◐
Criminal statute of limitations: full elimination for all CSA crimes	Yes / no	●
Civil statute of limitations: full elimination for all CSA claims	Yes / no	●
Revival or window law for expired civil claims	Yes / no	●
Crime Victims Compensation eligibility: extended filing period for survivors of CSA[20]	Yes / no	●
Crime Victims Compensation eligibility: alternatives to police reports for survivors of CSA[21]	Yes / no	●

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Endnotes:

1. The index and profile may refer to specific forms of child maltreatment or sexual violence (eg, child sexual abuse or child sexual exploitation) to distinguish between findings or areas of research.
2. https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/childsexualabuse/fastfact.html#:~:text=Many%20children%20wait%20to%20report,States%20experience%20child%20sexual%20abuse
3. $282,734 is the average lifetime cost for female victims of non-fatal child sexual abuse (CSA). For male victims, it is approximately $74,691 (although this lower estimate is likely influenced by the insufficient data available on productivity losses). The lifetime cost for victims of fatal CSA per female and male victim was estimated, on average, to be $1,128,334 and $1,482,933, respectively. All estimates pertain to the year 2015.
4. https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/29533869/#:~:text=Estimating%2020%20new%20cases%20of,%241%2C482%2C933%2C%20respectively%2C%20and%20the%20average
5. https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/CAN-Prevention-Resource_508.pdf
6. https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/SV-Prevention-Resource_508.pdf
7. https://www.togetherforgirls.org/en/resources/what-works-to-prevent-sexual-violence-against-children-evidence-review
8. 13 DE Code Ann. § 123(a)
9. Children's Advocacy Centers (CACs) are organizations located throughout the US that help facilitate a multidisciplinary and child-centered response to CSAE. CACs bring together several of the key actors—law enforcement, child protective services investigators, medical and mental health professionals, forensic interviewers, victim advocates, and more—under one roof, helping to minimize the number of times a child has to be interviewed and offering critical therapeutic and other support to children and their families.
10. 16 DE Code Ann. § 906(d)(6)
11. 10 DE Code Ann. § 8145(a)
12. 11 DE Code Ann.§ 205(e)
13. This definition should include reference to consent being "freely" or "voluntarily" given.
14. Currently, school district employees are required to receive four hours of training every three years to raise awareness of issues regarding personal body safety, child abuse, child safety, and adult sexual misconduct in schools (14 DE Code Ann. §§ 4162 and 4163). No similar requirement exists, however, for employees of youth-serving organizations beyond schools.
15. The research for the 2024 index was conducted between March and September 2023. As such, the findings reflect the most recent available data at the time the research was completed.
16. "Comprehensiveness" is assessed based on the following standards: whether the state has a law or statewide rules, regulations or standards with the force of law requiring that sex education and HIV/STI instruction be evidence-based, medically accurate, culturally appropriate and inclusive of all students, and whether related courses are required to include information about contraception and consent.
17. This figure indicates whether statewide laws or policies explicitly prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and/or gender identity in all of the following areas: employment, housing, and education.
18. "National standards" refers to the National Children's Alliance's National Standards of Accreditation.
19. These indicators consider whether the state mandates specialized training for child protective services investigators, law enforcement, and prosecutors on CSA and/or trauma at regular intervals (eg, every two years). A separate indicator assesses basic training requirements for mandated reporters in the state more broadly.
20. This indicator considers whether state law establishing eligibility for the state's Crime Victim Compensation Programs provides an explicit time frame exception that is applicable to survivors of CSA (eg, minor victims of crime have up to the age of 21 to file a claim).
21. This indicator assesses whether state law establishing eligibility for the state's Crime Victim Compensation Programs provides alternatives to making a police report for survivors of CSA (such as reports made to child protective services, a sexual assault counselor, or a CAC employee; a restraining or civil protection order granted to the victim; or records from a sexual assault forensic examination). Limited, time bound, or vague exceptions to this requirement were not considered.

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