



To: The Honorable Maura Healey, Governor
The Honorable Maria Mossaides, Child Advocate
The Honorable Michael Rodrigues, Chair, Senate Committee on Ways and Means
The Honorable Aaron Michlewitz, Chair, House Committee on Ways and Means
The Honorable Lydia Edwards, Senate Chair, Committee on the Judiciary
The Honorable Michael Day, House Chair, Committee on the Judiciary
The Honorable Robyn Kennedy, Senate Chair, Committee on Children, Families and Persons with Disabilities
The Honorable Jay Livingstone, House Chair, Committee on Children, Families and Persons with Disabilities
The Honorable Michael Hurley, Clerk of the Senate
The Honorable Timothy Carroll, Clerk of the House

From: Jennifer Franco, Massachusetts District Attorneys Association

Date: April 8, 2026

Re: **Report on the Status of Child Abuse and Neglect Cases (G.L. c. 12, § 20D)**

As required by G.L. c. 12, § 20D¹, the Massachusetts District Attorneys Association (MDAA) submits the following information relative to child abuse and neglect cases that have been referred for criminal prosecution to the eleven District Attorneys during FY2025. The Department of Children and Families, which is mandated to report certain categories of child abuse and neglect to the District Attorneys, pursuant to G.L. c. 119, § 51A, is the primary source of child abuse and neglect referrals to the District Attorneys. However, the District Attorneys also receive a significant number of reports from the police, directly from victims, and from the victims' families.

The number of criminal prosecutions initiated by the District Attorneys does not reflect the tremendous workload of pre-charge investigations involved in reviewing these sensitive and complex cases.

Please note that MDAA is reporting referrals as the number of new cases reported or referred to the District Attorneys during FY2025; all other information relates to child abuse and neglect cases reported or referred to the District Attorneys in any year. Child abuse and neglect cases, from initial referral to final disposition, can take several years to resolve.

¹ G.L. c. 12, § 20D: The executive director [of the Massachusetts District Attorneys Association] shall annually report on the status of child abuse and neglect cases that have been referred for criminal prosecution, including the number prosecuted, the results of those prosecutions, the principal reason for decisions not to prosecute, and what resources would have assisted in those investigations and prosecutions. The report shall be filed with the clerks of the senate and the house, the senate and house committees on ways and means, the joint committee on children, families and persons with disabilities, the joint committee on the judiciary, the child advocate, and the governor.

Abuse/Neglect Referrals (Per Child)	13,431
Referrals Closed without Prosecution	8,227
Criminal Cases Initiated (Per Defendant)	2,496
Criminal Cases Disposed with Conviction	1,120
Criminal Cases Disposed without Conviction	1,117

The District Attorneys report the following as the principal reasons for the decision not to prosecute:

- Insufficient evidence/disclosure
- Family/victim unsupportive/unwilling to go forward
- Lack of jurisdiction
- Family is Probate Court-involved leading to concerns of coaching
- Invoke marital rights
- Not in best interests of victim/family
- Offender under the age of 12
- No crime alleged/neglect referral
- Victim not competent or emotionally unable to participate
- Statute of Limitations has run

The District Attorneys believe that each agency utilizes all available resources to serve victims, their families, and the public during the healing process and the resolution of these difficult cases. However, the District Attorneys report that the following resources would have assisted in these investigations and prosecutions:

Additional funding for community support agencies to address the collateral consequences following physical and sexual abuse, including (a) resources in multiple languages and immediate access to a live person who can provide information and not simply translate; and (b) better access to civil legal assistance to address housing, protective orders, immigration issues, Rule 17 record requests, Title IX and school safety issues.

Identification of “anonymous” callers. While there is no need to identify them in the 51A, it would be helpful to be able to follow up on their veracity and basis of knowledge.
Accurate contact information on 51As.

More urgency with technology cases (CSAM, online exploitation/harassment) for preservation orders.

More resources for law enforcement to increase staffing, provide training, acquire equipment needed to access technology/digital evidence and to allow officers to focus on investigations instead of a myriad of other responsibilities.

Dream wish list of an internal SVU investigative unit with dedicated ADAs, victim-witness advocates, detectives, DCF investigators and clinicians.