



DATA TALKS

A survey examining public awareness and perceptions of foster care in Massachusetts

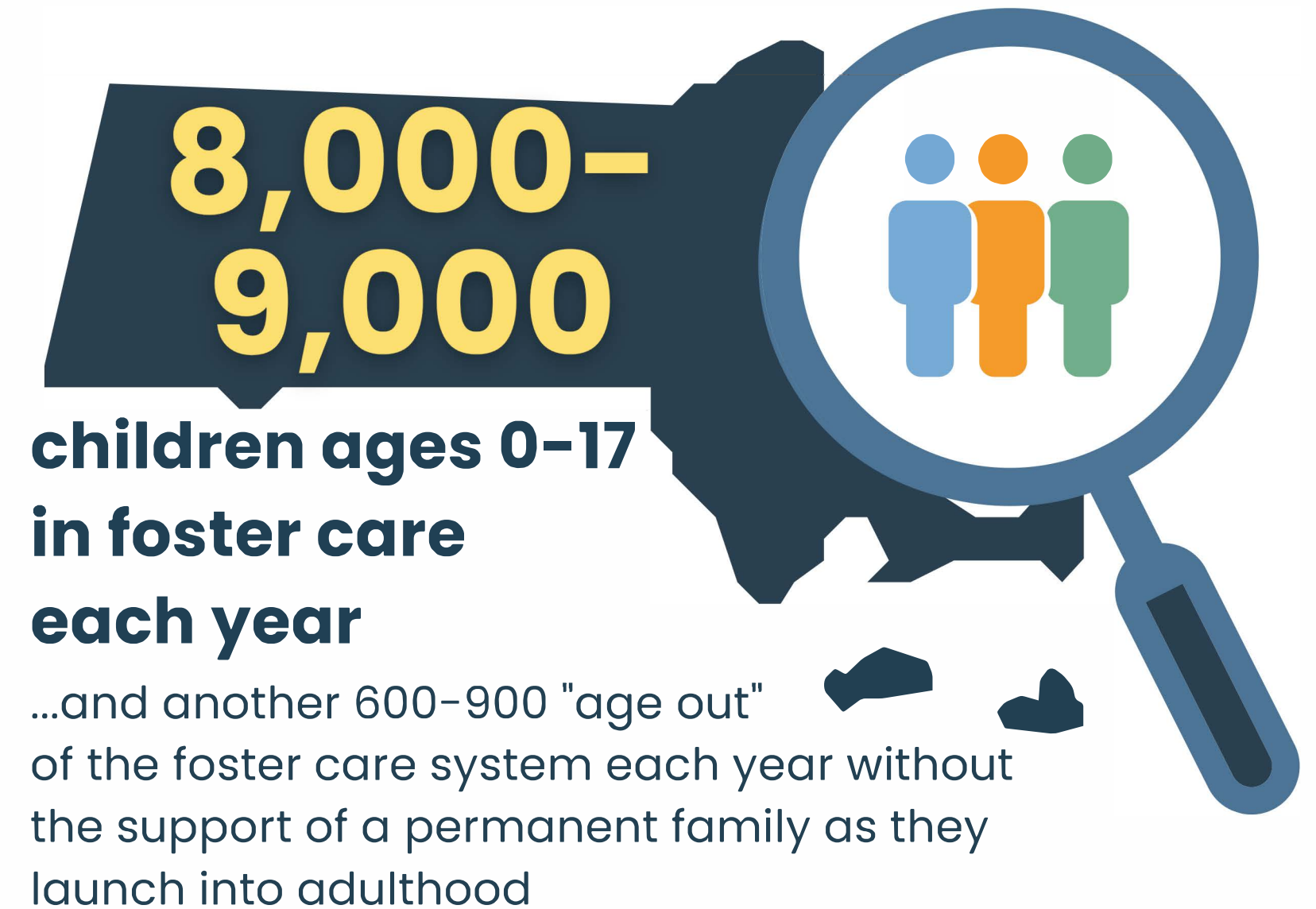
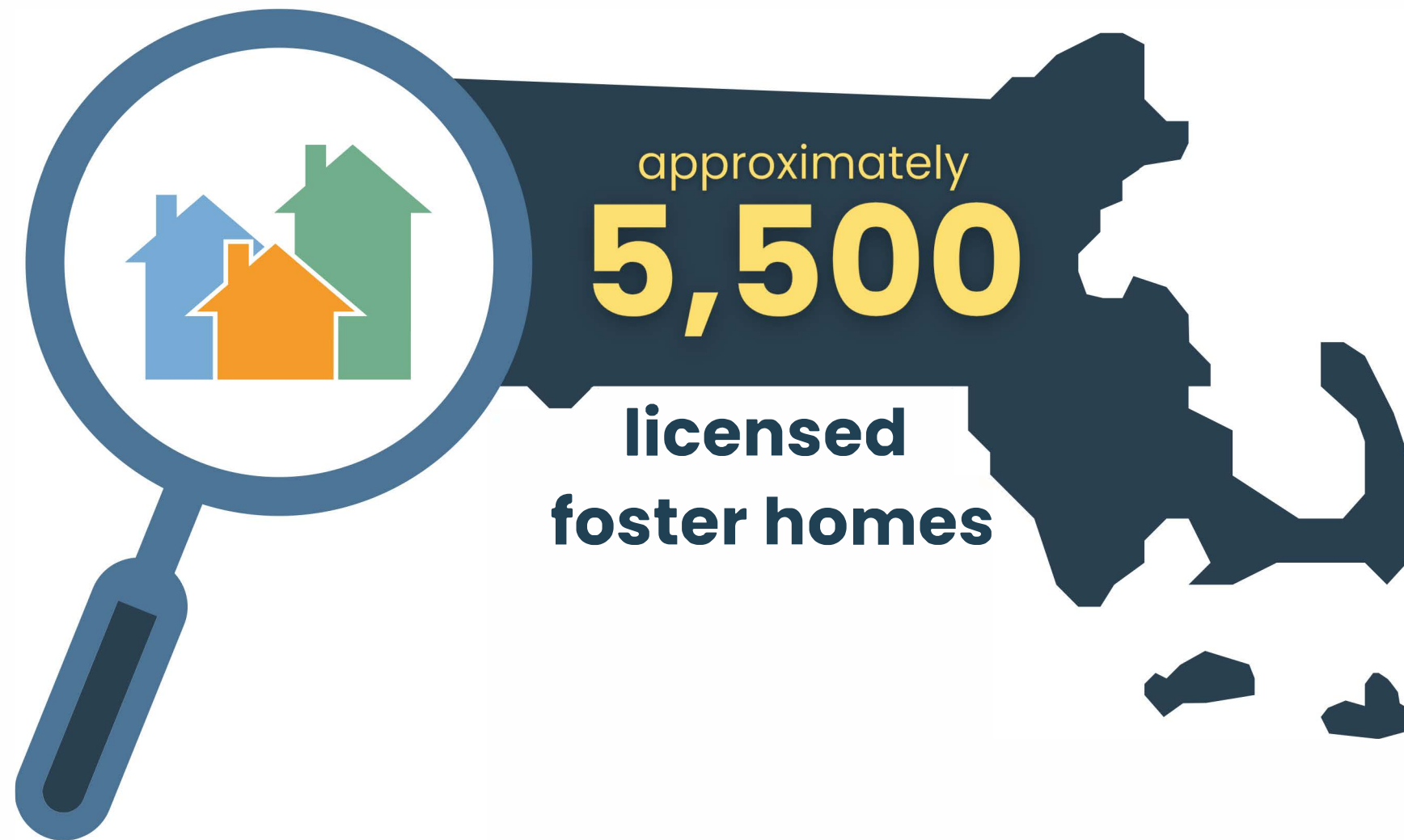


HopeWell

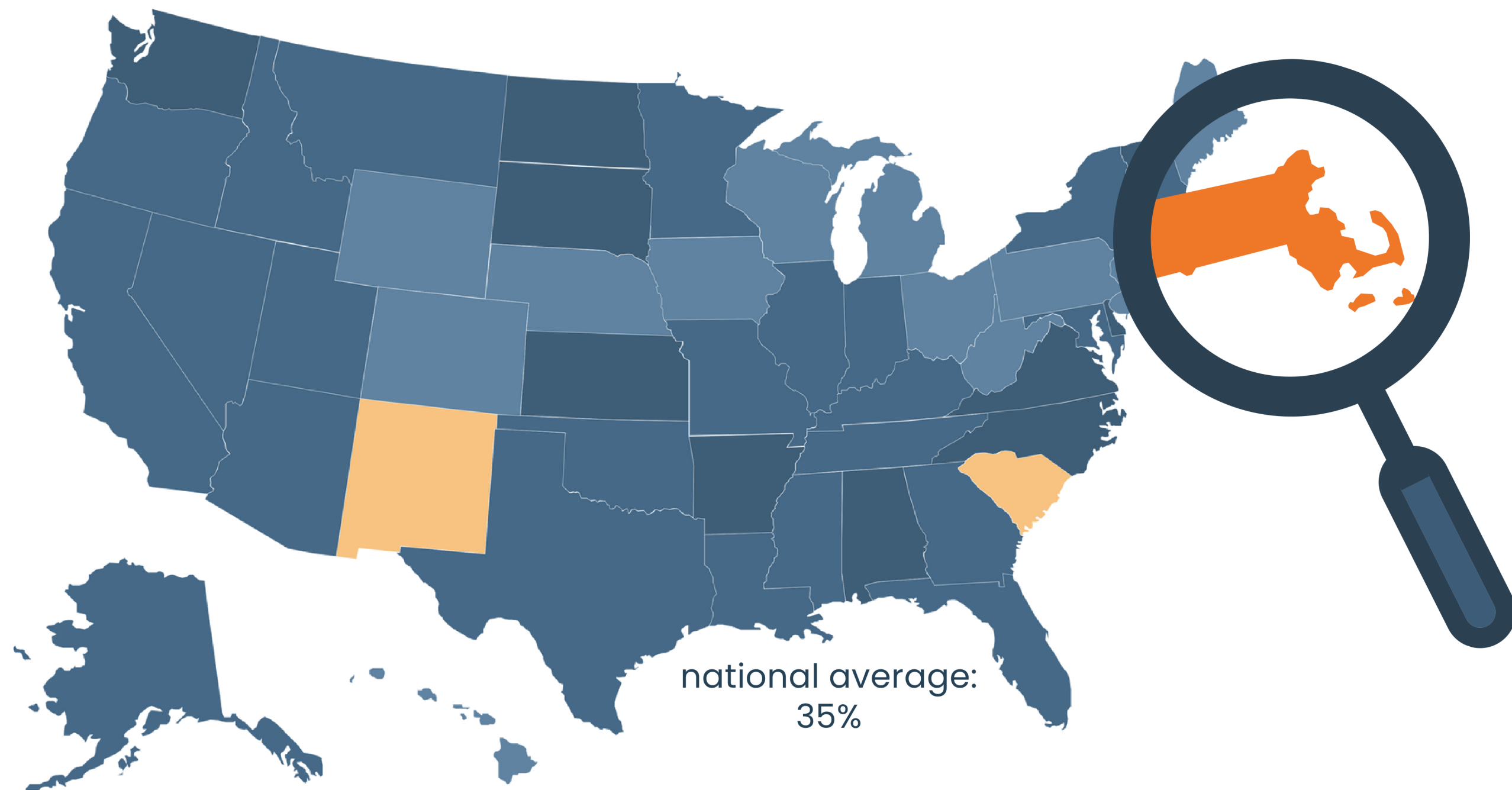
01

About Foster Care in Massachusetts

There is an urgent need for more foster parents in Massachusetts.



Children in foster care in Massachusetts experience less stability than children in other states.



47% have more than 2 foster care placement changes per year

...ranking Massachusetts 3rd from the bottom among all 50 states

The very nature of being in foster care can affect a child's education.

Moving from home-to-home and school-to-school is highly disruptive to learning.



MA students in foster care are about **2x less likely** to be "on track" in reading than their peers overall



The gap widens, making students in foster care **3x less likely** to be "on track" in reading



The gap widens to **nearly 5x** just — 12% of students in foster care are "on track" in reading



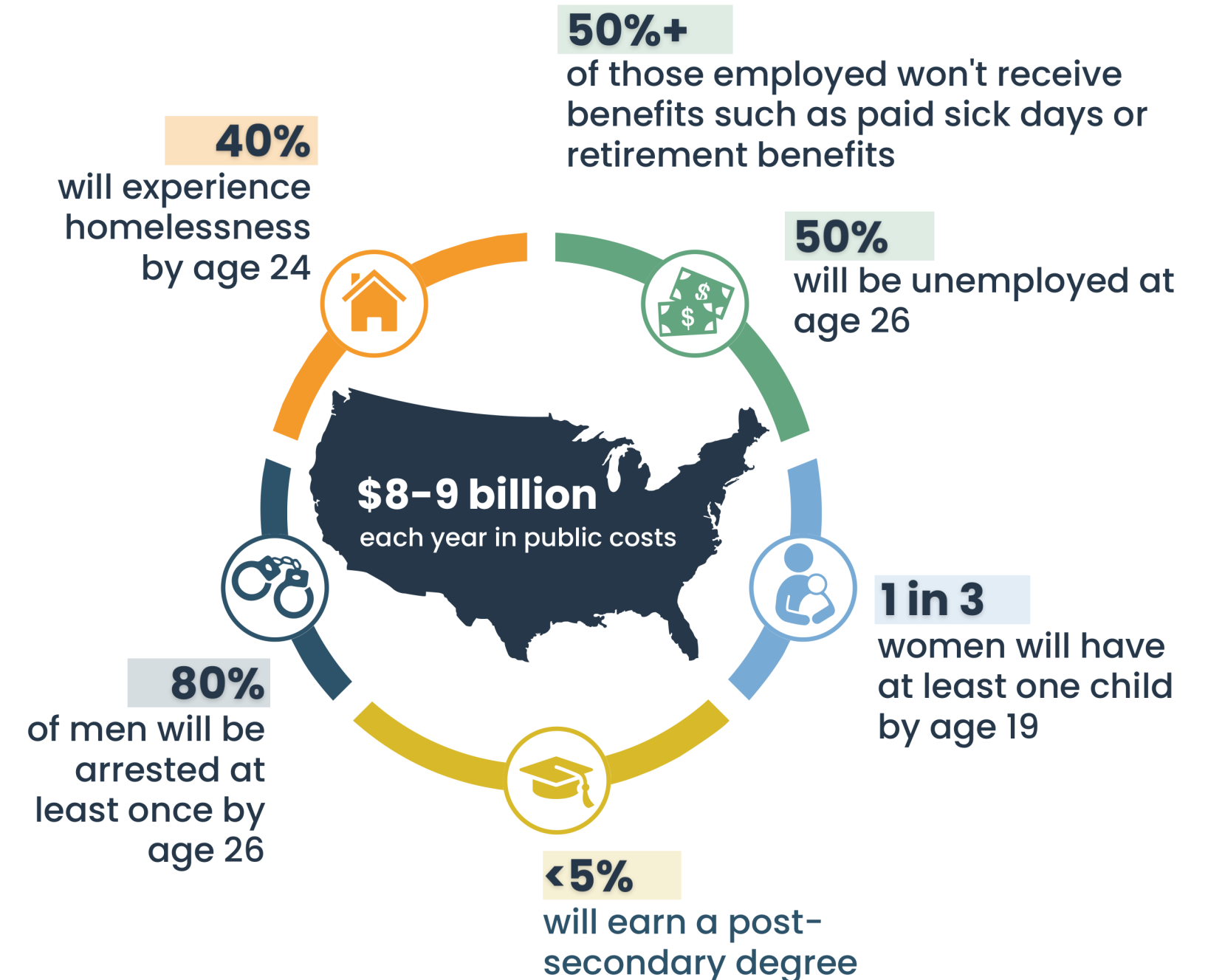
57% of MA students in foster care graduate from high school, compared to 90% of their peers overall

In many ways, foster care is an issue of overall community wellbeing.

The opportunity gaps that often come with experiencing foster care as a child can have lifelong and far-reaching effects.

In Massachusetts, the economic impact of these social costs on communities and taxpayers is estimated to be an additional **\$180– 270 million every year.**

Nationally, after "aging out" of foster care...



02

Survey Results: Key Takeaways

Note: Not all results will sum to 100% due to rounding.

The general public's perception of foster care in MA isn't great — but also isn't as negative as you might think.

- Very positive

Somewhat positive
- Somewhat negative

Very negative
- Heard of, but can't rate

Never heard of it

Preschool



Total positive

89%

Total negative

5%

Adoption



79%

10%

Foster Care



53%

37%

Juvenile Justice

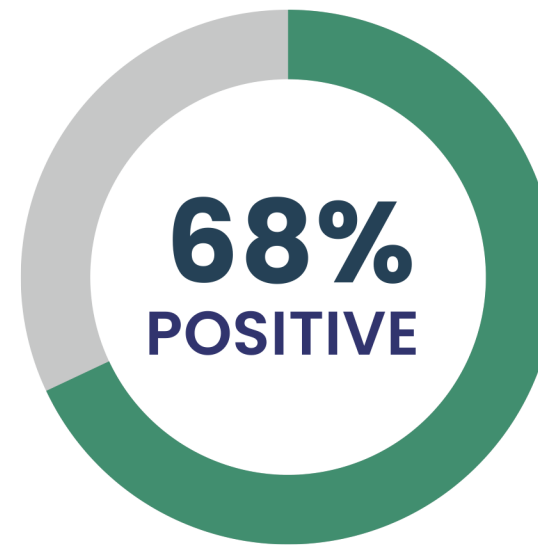


39%

36%

[1 OF 2] **People with closer proximity to the foster care system generally said they have positive experiences.**

People with personal connections to foster care have more positive experiences than other people assume.



- foster parents
- in foster care as a child
- both



asked to rate their personal experiences



people with no direct personal connection to foster care

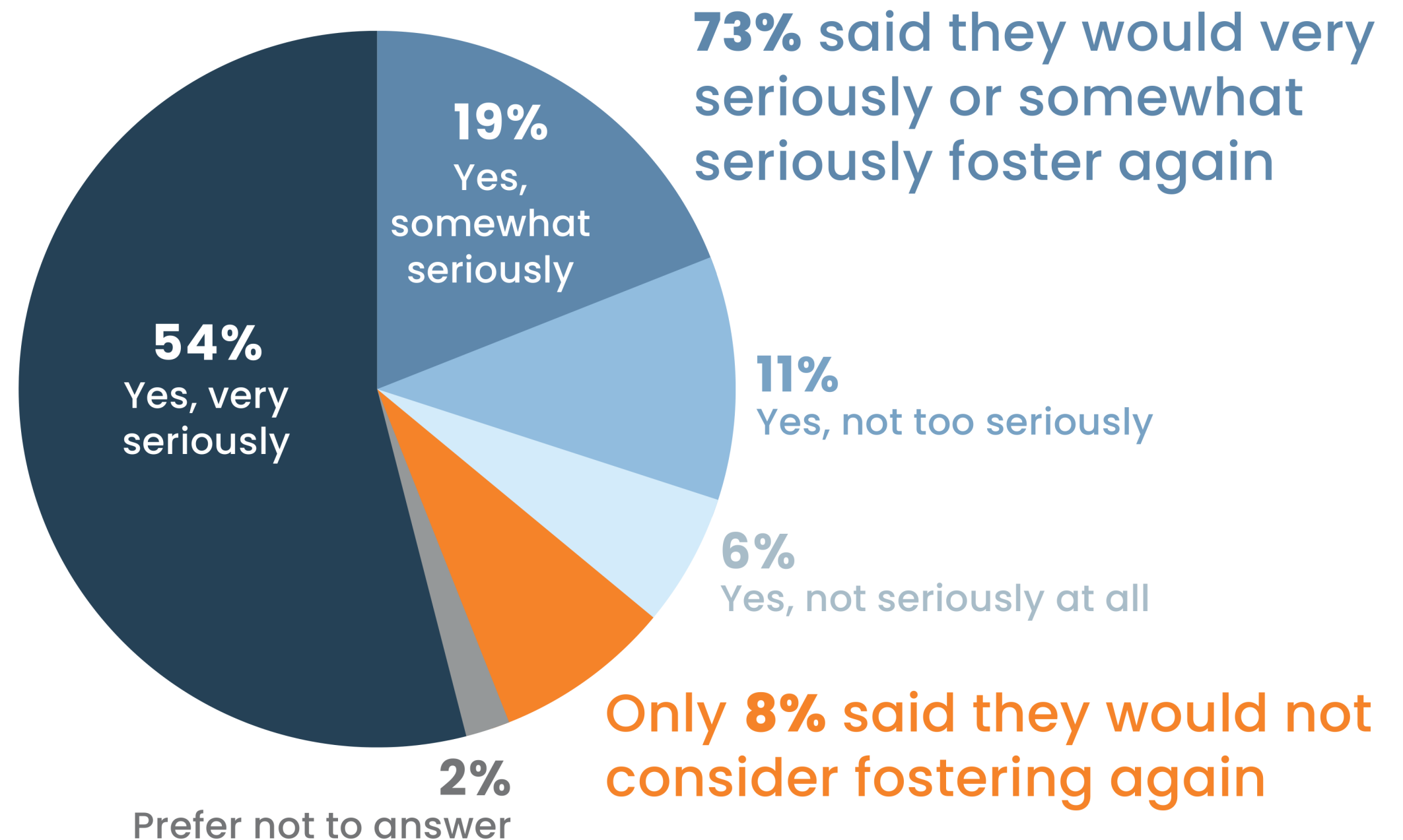


asked to rate what they thought **other** people's experiences with the foster care system were like

[2 OF 2] People with closer proximity to the foster care system generally said they have positive experiences.

There is evidence to suggest foster parents largely have positive experiences.

Those who had been foster parents before were asked if they would consider fostering another child.

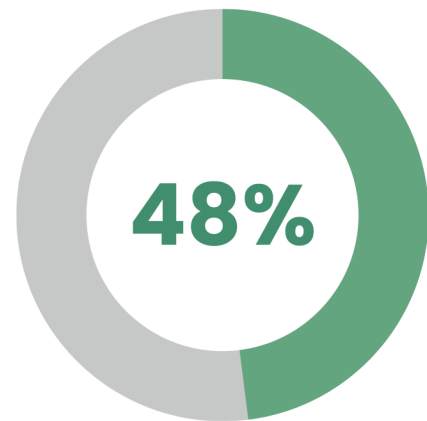


Note: The results shown here are from when this question was asked at the end of the survey.

[1 OF 2] There is a lack of widespread familiarity with foster care.

LESS THAN HALF

of MA residents surveyed could identify the correct definition of foster care



45% indicated they thought children are removed from their homes and placed into foster care for reasons that involve the **child's** behavior or the **child's** problems with the law.



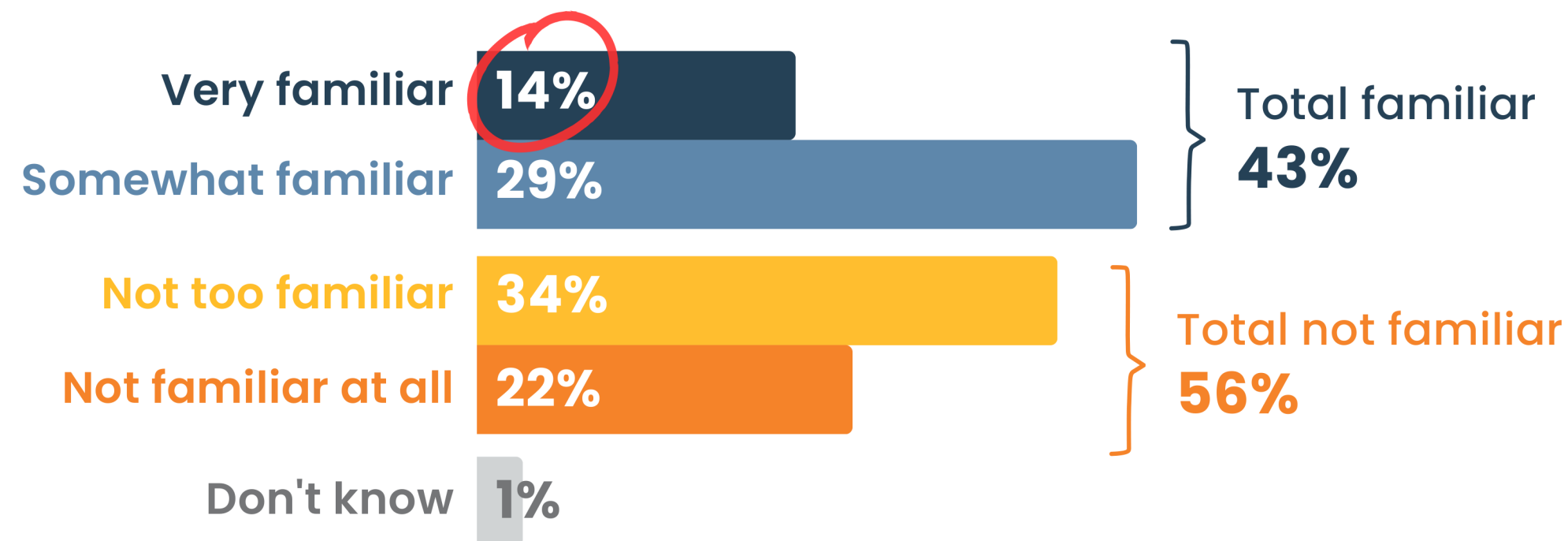
FACT CHECK:

Children enter foster care through no fault of their own. Children do **not** enter foster care because they have bad behavior, have committed crimes, or are dangerous. They enter foster care because **their parents** are unable to care for them at that point in time for reasons such as abuse or neglect.

[2 OF 2] There is a lack of widespread familiarity with foster care.



How familiar are you with the foster care system in your area?



The 14% of people who classified themselves as "very familiar" with foster care were the

least likely group to identify the correct definition.

LESS THAN HALF of respondents were aware that foster parents do not need to accept any child designated to them

Most MA residents surveyed have a positive impression of foster parents...but some don't.

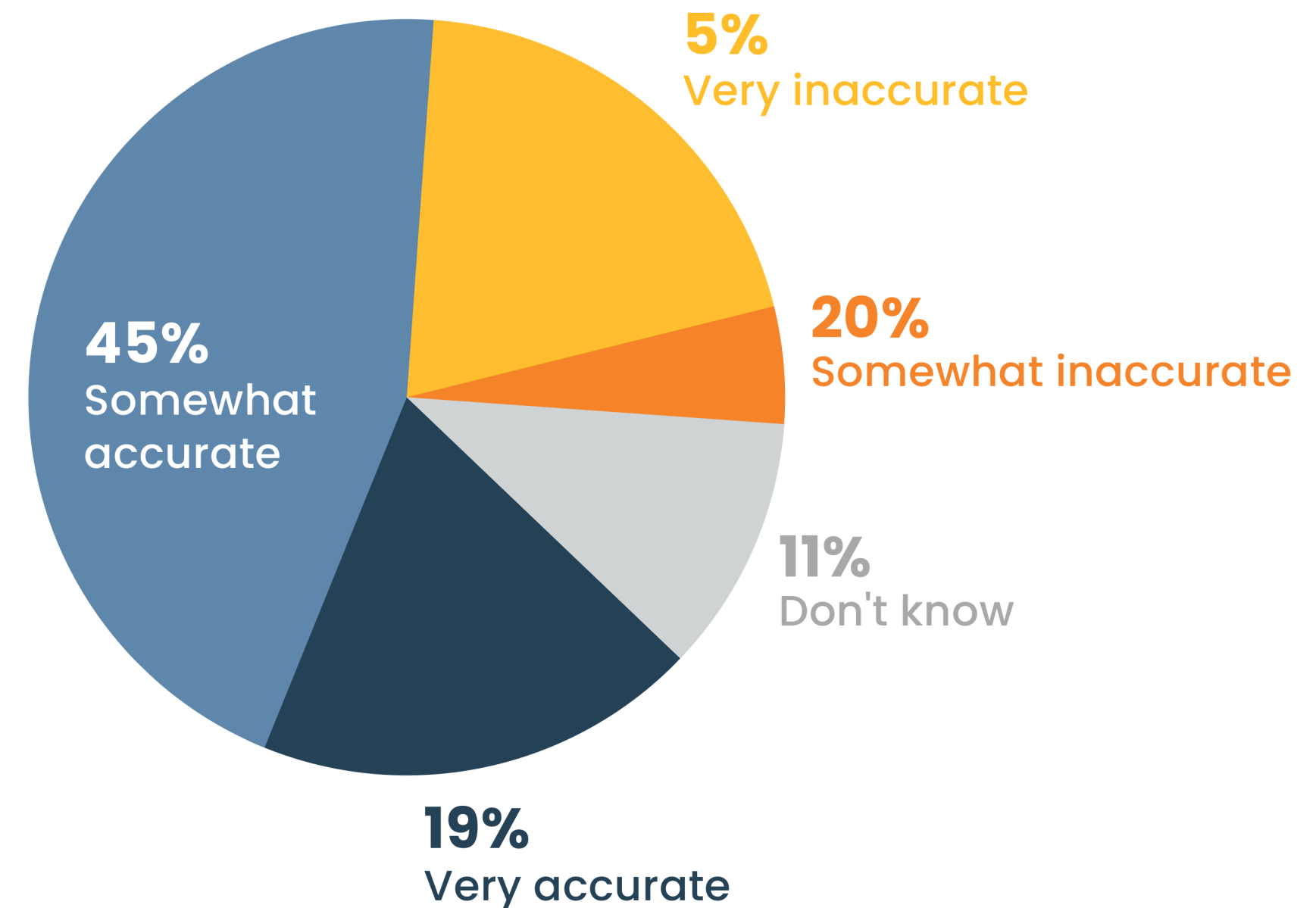


Foster parents usually have the best interests of children at heart.



1 IN 4

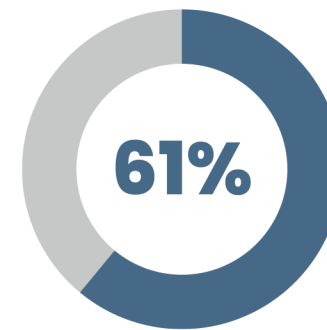
said this statement is either very or somewhat inaccurate



Most MA residents surveyed believe in the potential of children experiencing foster care...but some don't.

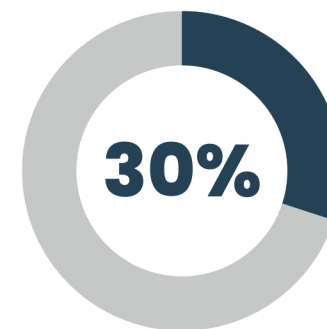


Children and youth in foster care can't achieve the same level of success as their peers because they've gone through too much.



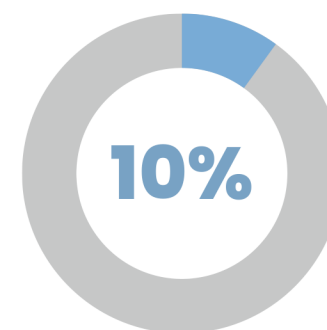
61% of respondents said this statement is very or somewhat inaccurate

meaning they believe kids experiencing foster care **CAN** achieve the same level of success as their peers



30% ...but nearly 1 in 3 said the statement is very or somewhat accurate

meaning they believe kids experiencing foster care **CANNOT** achieve the same level of success as their peers



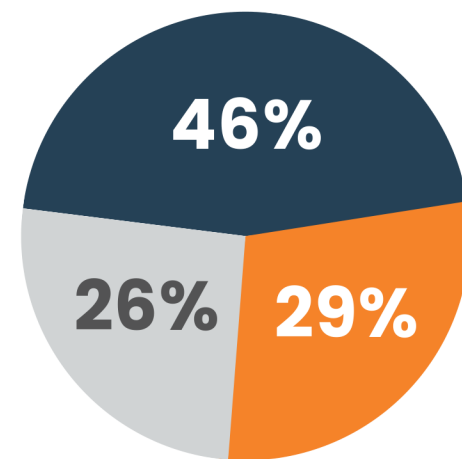
10% didn't know

[1 OF 2] **There was a lean toward perceiving that children from Black and Latino families are disproportionately affected by the foster care system, with and without racism being mentioned as a cause.**

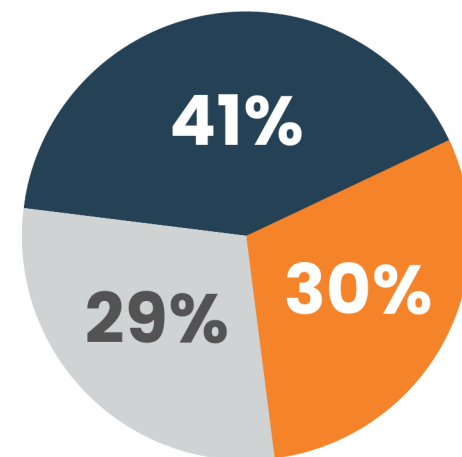
● Total accurate

● Total inaccurate

● Don't know



Children from Black and Latino families are more likely to be removed from their homes and enter foster care.



Children from Black and Latino families are more likely to be removed from their homes and enter foster care **due to racism or bias in the foster care system.**

Note: Results shown don't sum to 100% due to rounding. Total accurate is a combination of "very accurate" and "somewhat accurate," and total inaccurate combines "very inaccurate" and "somewhat inaccurate."

[2 OF 2] **There was a lean toward perceiving that children from Black and Latino families are disproportionately affected by the foster care system, with and without racism being mentioned as a cause.**



FACT CHECK:

Black and Latino children are **over-represented** in MA's child welfare and foster care systems.

MORE THAN
2X MORE LIKELY

- ✓ to have a case opened due to reported abuse or neglect
- ✓ to be removed from their home

28%
children in MA who are Black or Latino

48%
children in MA's **foster care system** who are Black or Latino



FACT CHECK:

Black and Latino children experience further **inequities** while in foster care compared to white children.



less likely to be placed with kin



longer time spent in foster care



less placement stability

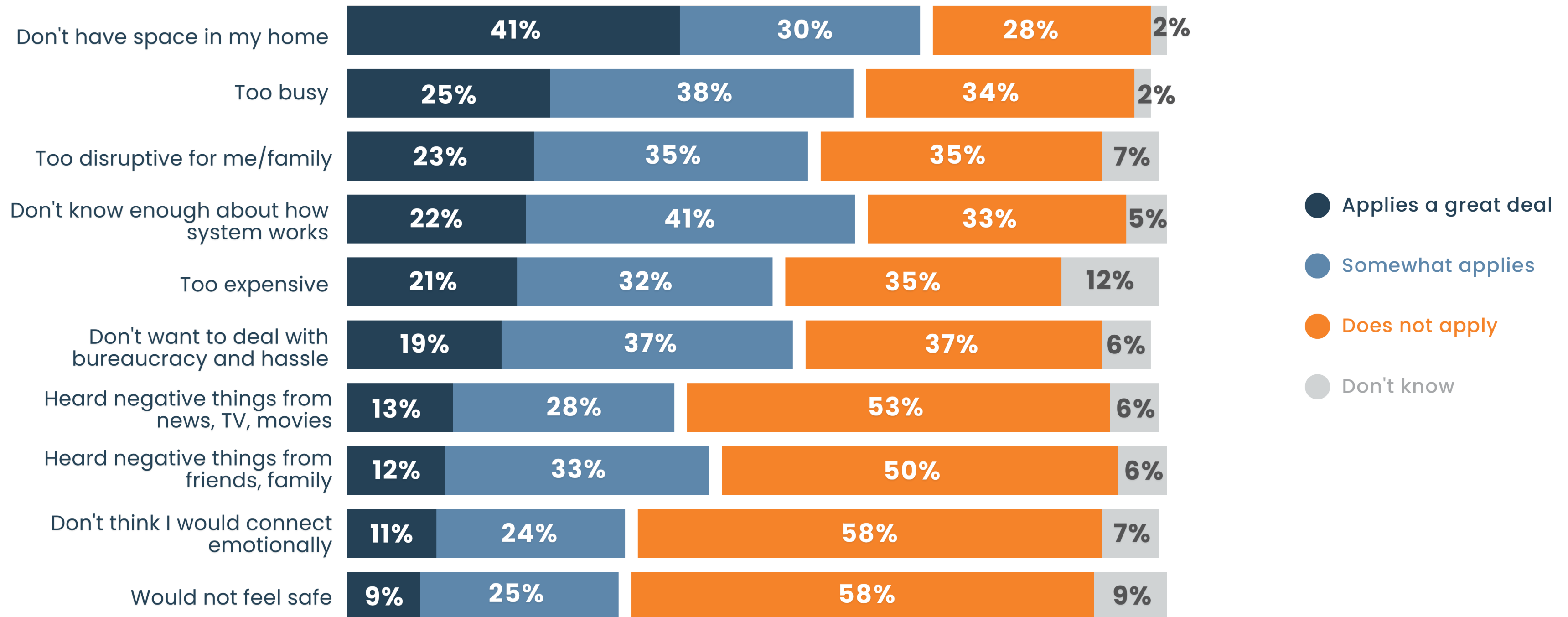


less likely to reunify with bio family



more likely to age out of foster care

[1 OF 2] **For most people surveyed, the main barriers to fostering are a mix of logistical factors and lack of information.**

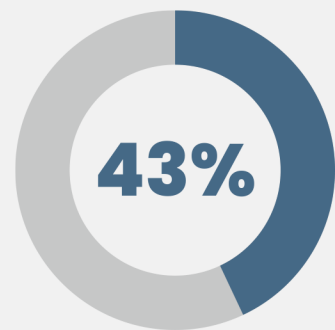


[2 OF 2] For most people surveyed, the main barriers to fostering are a mix of logistical factors and lack of information.

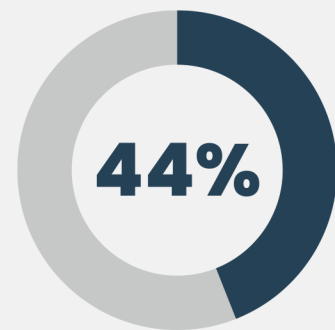
Space at home was identified as the top obstacle for everyone overall. It was also the top obstacle regardless of family status.



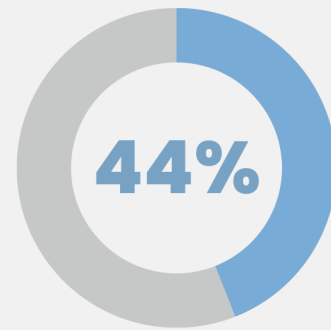
Applies a great deal



Young children at home



Adult children at home



Do not have children



Concerns about the **children themselves** were the least likely to be seen as obstacles.

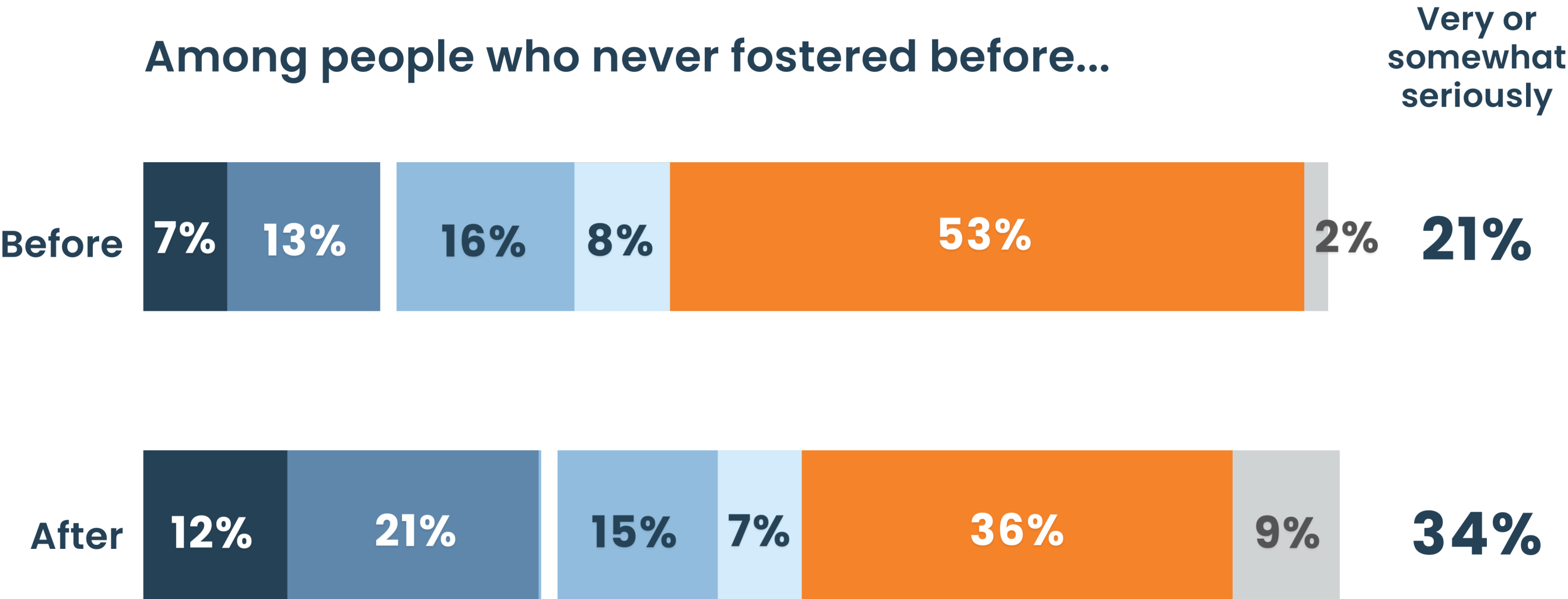
Among people who had **very or somewhat seriously considered fostering**, the top obstacles were...

- ✓ Don't have enough space in my home
- ✓ Too busy
- ✓ Don't know enough about how system works
- ✓ Heard negative things (both options)
- ✓ Don't want to deal with bureaucracy and hassle

Interest in fostering jumped by **more than 60%** once respondents were given more information.

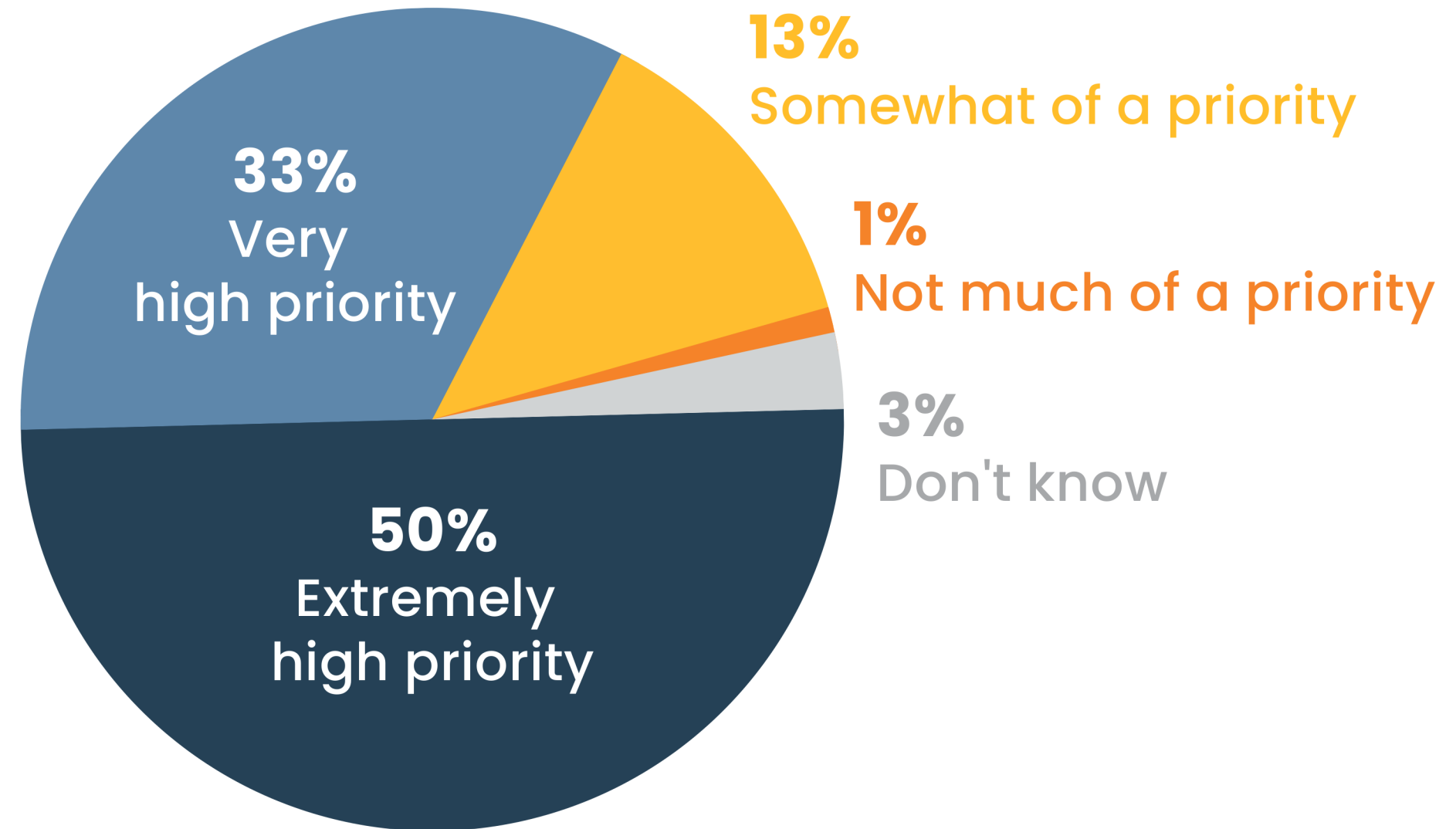
During the survey, we provided some education about foster care and dispelled common misconceptions.

- Yes, very seriously
- Yes, somewhat seriously
- Yes, but not too seriously
- Yes, but not seriously at all
- No, not considered
- Prefer not to answer



[1 OF 2] **There is widespread consensus around the importance of prioritizing improvements to programs and systems to help young people in foster care.**

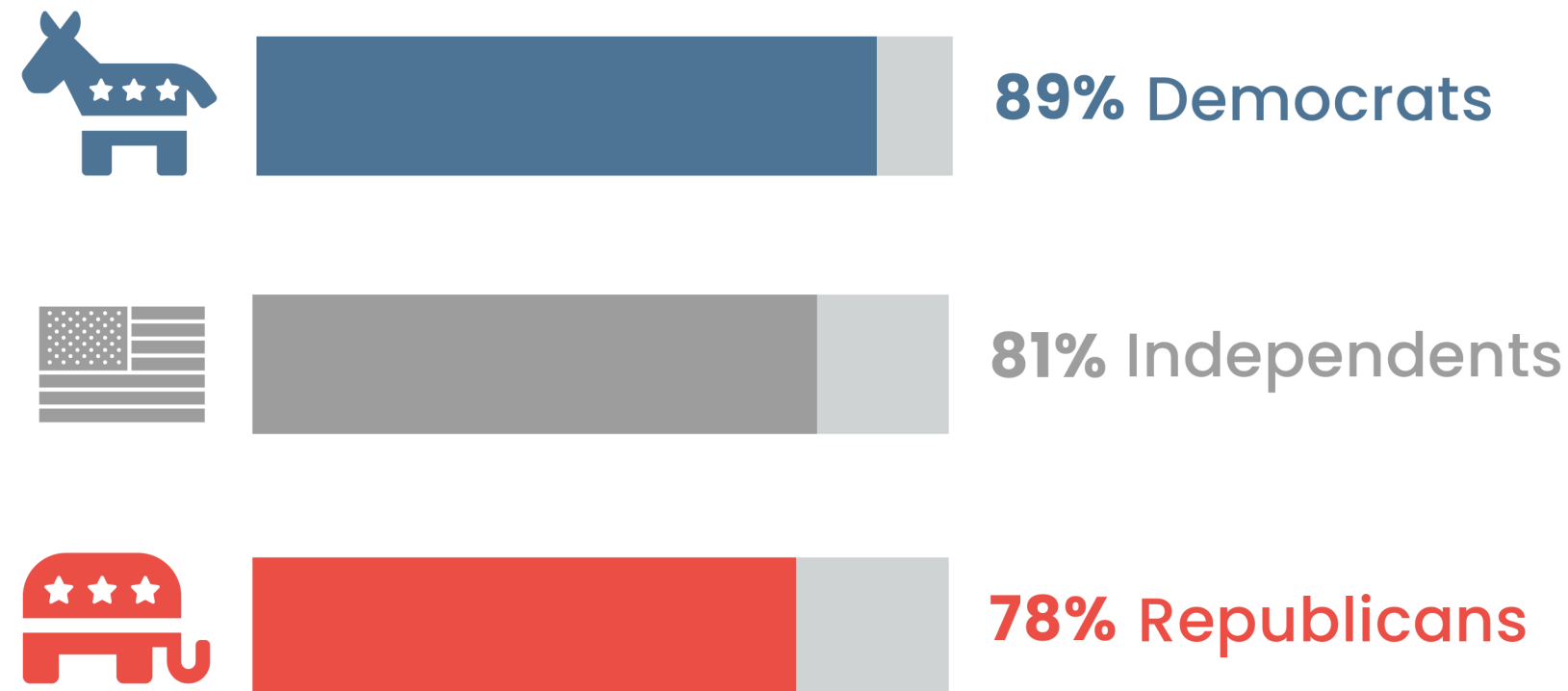
Overall, 83% of those surveyed said foster care is an extremely high or very high priority.



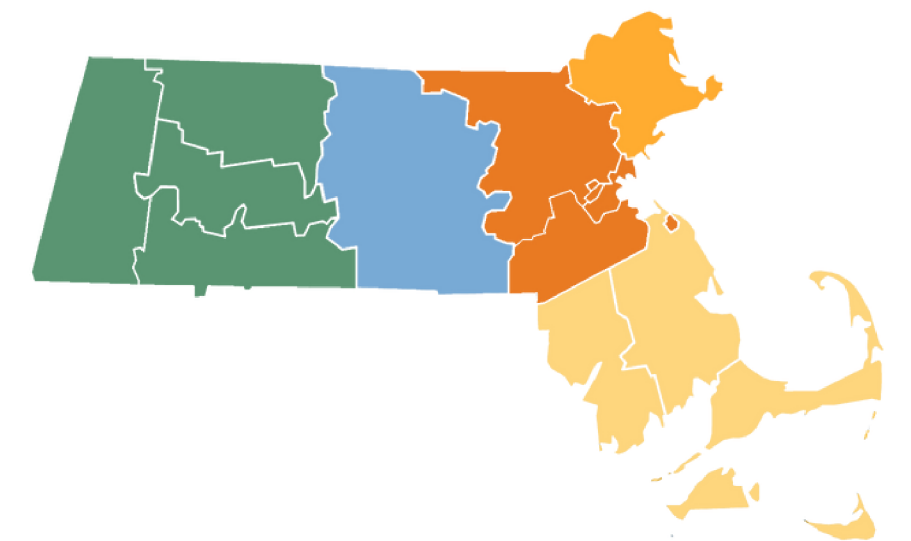
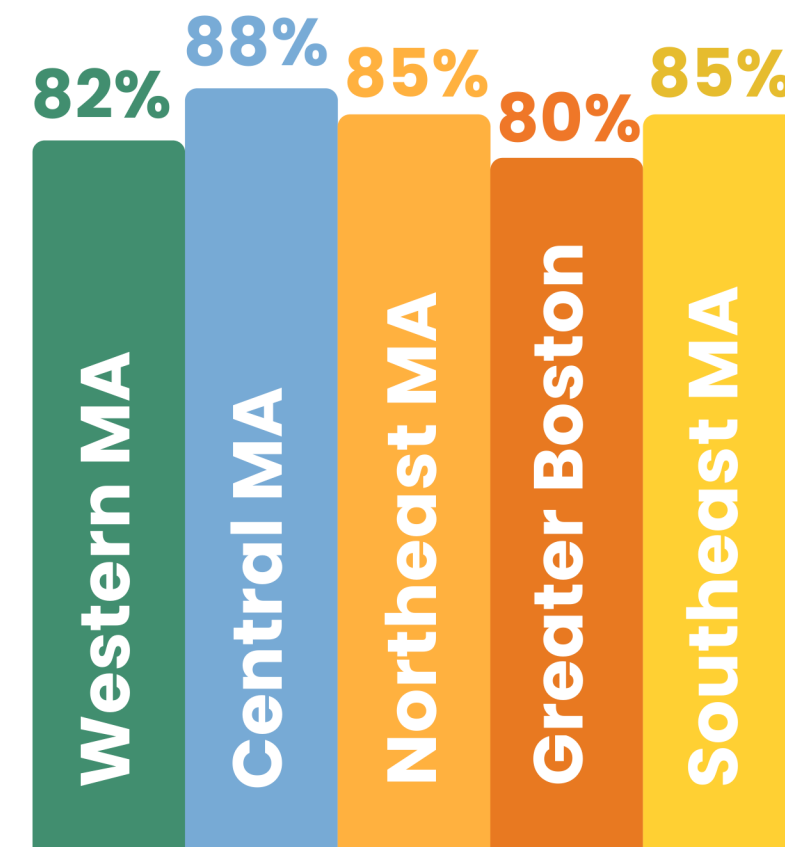
[2 OF 2] **There is widespread consensus around the importance of prioritizing improvements to programs and systems to help young people in foster care.**

There is strong bipartisan agreement.

% of who said foster care is an extremely high or very high priority



And broad geographic consensus.

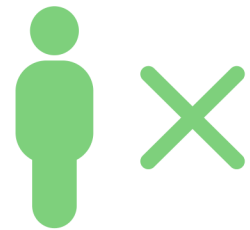


03

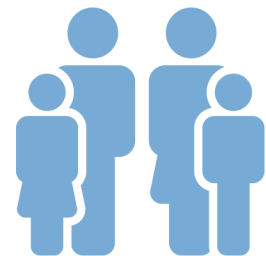
In Their Own Words

In an open-ended question, survey participants were asked to share, in their own words, why they haven't seriously considered fostering a child...

Some of the themes that emerged include...



don't like or want
kids



family dynamics /
already have kids



lack of
space



lack of
time



lack of
money



health / mental
health issues



too old



concerns about
not being a good
fit



concerns about
the child



concerns about
the system



lack of
information



just never thought
about it before

I'm not financially wealthy enough to do it.



After raising 2 boys, I'm not sure I have the energy for more children.



I've never been exposed to anyone in the system or even the system itself.



I haven't considered fostering too seriously because the steps to do seem too intensive and overbearing to me. It seems like they make it almost impossible to qualify you.



I don't have a large enough home for a child.



I'm nervous with the way the world is today.



I have a hard time taking care of myself, let alone someone else.



Because you never know what type of kid you'll receive in your household.



Too old, too many health conditions.



I work 2 jobs, so it would be hard to help a child. If I didn't work 2 jobs, I probably would because I don't mind. I like to help.



I am getting too old and don't believe I have the patience for someone else's kid.



The fear of the unknown or fear of failure



We were evaluating all options for having children, but ended up having our own child instead of fostering.



I have a lot on my plate already.



I'm worried about how the child would fit in with my family.



I know people and family who have fostered children and heard a lot of bad stories.



Unfortunately, I don't believe that I have enough space. But I don't really know the requirements.



I'm not where I want to be in life. Therefore, I wouldn't want to be selfish and take on a blessing and not be able to give them everything.



Because I am a single person, I am not sure if I would be accepted as a foster parent.



I can barely afford to support myself and the 2 dogs I have. I don't have the time or resources to take care of children, as much as I love them. I do work with a lot of kids who have been in foster care.



Because I have a criminal record.



I have never heard anything good about the process.



Honestly, I prefer to lead a simple life without drama.



I don't think I'm emotionally available enough to give a child the love they deserve.



I don't want to foster right now because I think it would be hard on my small children. They would have a hard time understanding.



My life is an active one. I'm never home long enough to provide proper care.



I do not have experience of proper training to take care of a child / to become a foster parent.



My family didn't support it. I was happy to take on and help a child...my husband and kids, not so much.



I have no interest in raising someone else's child.



The kids and families are usually traumatized and need so much support. I can't yet. I'm dealing with the wounds that cause me to be in foster care myself.



I'm homeless with no home.



While I have a lot of love to give, physical issues would make it difficult.



The system seems awful and foster parents are often left without support and are also subjected to too much scrutiny, rules, and regulations.



Feeling too old to do it now. Also, I have repairs to do before they may allow a child in our home.



I want to be able to foster children with a future partner, so it would be something I'll consider later when I'm married.



I don't think I'm the right person for that job. Foster parenting requires a lot of patience.



**I can hardly afford myself.
Why would I do that to a
child?**



**I have a dog. She is a mix— lab/pit. She
is a sweet, kind rescue. I would be
happy to open my home, but when I
looked into it, I saw that because
she is a pit bull type dog my
family would not be welcomed to
foster.**



**I have concerns about being able
to provide for the child. Not only
financially, but also emotionally. I
would want to be there for the
child, but I don't know if I can
commit 100%.**



**I never wanted children. There's
too much time required to care
and it's too expensive in this day
and age. I never married and
kids today need a 2-parent
family to survive.**



**I only have 3 bedrooms and
already have 2 children.**



**Mental illness in my life
would prevent me.**



**I don't think that I'm a
positive influence. I think I'm
a good person, but not
good enough to foster a
child.**



**I have my own children and pets. I
need to make sure they are safe.
Foster kids have gone through a
traumatic experience and I can't
have my children exposed to
the negative effects of that.**



**I'm afraid of connecting deeply
and forming a true parental bond
and connection, and then the
child having to go back to
their birth family.**



I think I am too old. Plus, it is only me in the house due to the fact that my husband has passed away. I don't think I would qualify.



My concern would be the behavior of the child and interaction with their parents.



I don't know enough about the process. In addition, my family and I travel. Would we able to take the child out of state?



I'm new to recovery and focusing on taking care of myself.



I would like to help a child and think I'm well-suited to provide a safe, loving foster home. But I'm concerned that the requirements of my work wouldn't allow me adequate time for the child.



Financial hardships would get in the way.



I don't want the trouble it could bring.



I would not consider it because of the negative association that the foster family is in it for the money and the difficulty COVID has made it to engage in safe activities with other people outside of our safe circle.



I have 2 children of my own and bringing in another child might be a lot or too overwhelming, especially if it's a child that needs extra support. I would love to do it at some point in my life because there are so many kids that need a safe home.



It's hard to raise a child with trauma and past negative experiences and certainly not fair to try and fail and send them back to the system.



Years ago, my wife and I considered becoming foster parents. We knew other gay couples who fostered, but they were only given babies/children with illnesses or serious behavioral issues. It seemed that gay parents were only for extreme cases, so we did not pursue.



I struggle too much with my own kids.



It never really seemed like the right time.



I'm hesitant to consider it just based on previous word-of-mouth experiences from others.



I don't know enough about the kid's situation. And taking responsibility is a huge deal, such as who pays for everything, etc.



Our house is not big enough for foster care. But if that was to ever change, then we would consider it.



I've just been busy with everyday life and I don't think I have the time that is needed.



I haven't really thought about it since I have 2 kids of my own. I have worked as a social worker and had bad experiences feeling supported by my employers to do my job, so I don't expect to have adequate support from agencies when fostering a child.



I did not consider it seriously because my birth son has Aspergers, so I thought it might be a positive experience for him to have someone as a brother or sister, but I wouldn't want to use this foster child for any reason other than to better their own life.



I work too much and am trying to save for the future. I'm paying for taxes and dealing with the rising cost of living each and every day.



Because my own kids are in foster care.



I'm a single male in his 40s and can't foster children because the law doesn't allow single men to foster children.



I've just never really thought about it.



It'd be heartbreaking for me to say goodbye. I would want to see it through and make sure they are living a good life.



Age is a factor. Both my wife and I are retirement age.



I worry about introducing developmentally inappropriate issues to my children.



I like the concept, but fear reality may be too hard.



04


Additional Information



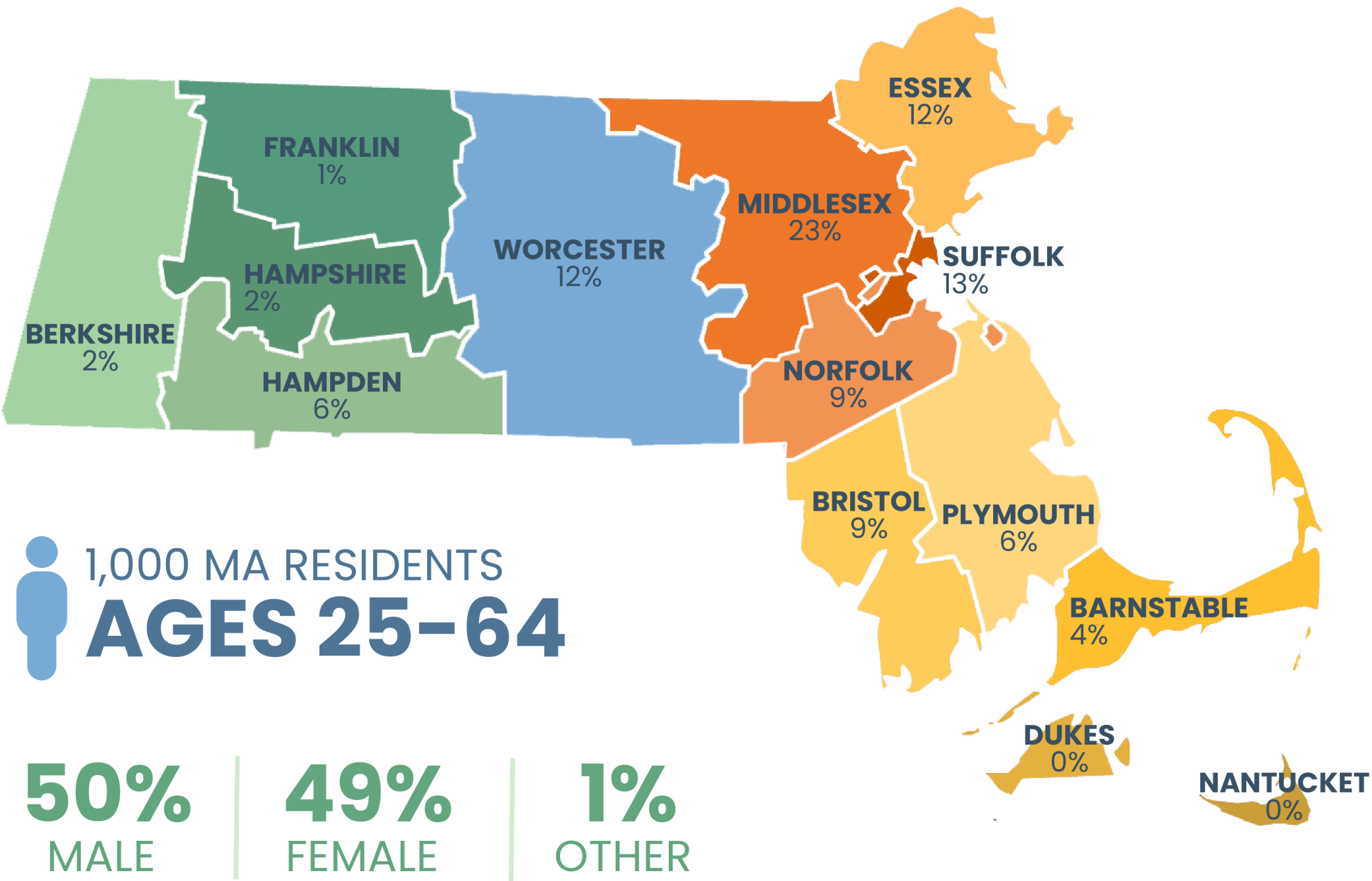
About This Survey

This statewide survey was conducted online during Spring 2023 by Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz & Associates (FM3), an independent public research company.

The purpose of the survey was to gauge public understanding and perceptions of foster care, including considerations about becoming a foster parent.

 The margin of error for this survey is 3.1% at the 95% confidence level.

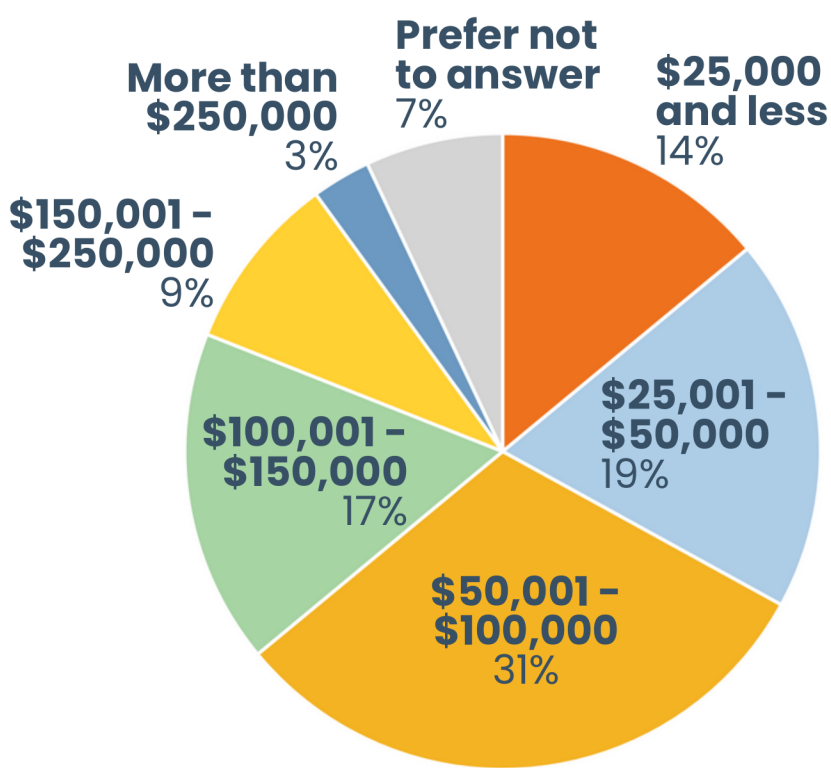
Note: The age of survey participants was evenly distributed.



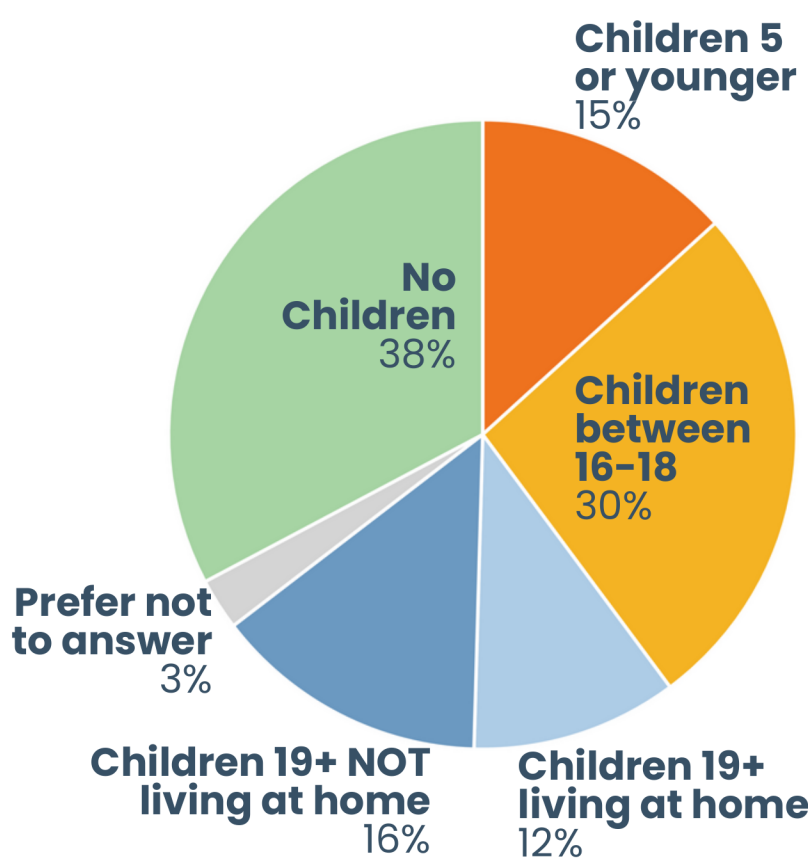


Survey demographics were designed to be reasonably similar to state demographics overall.

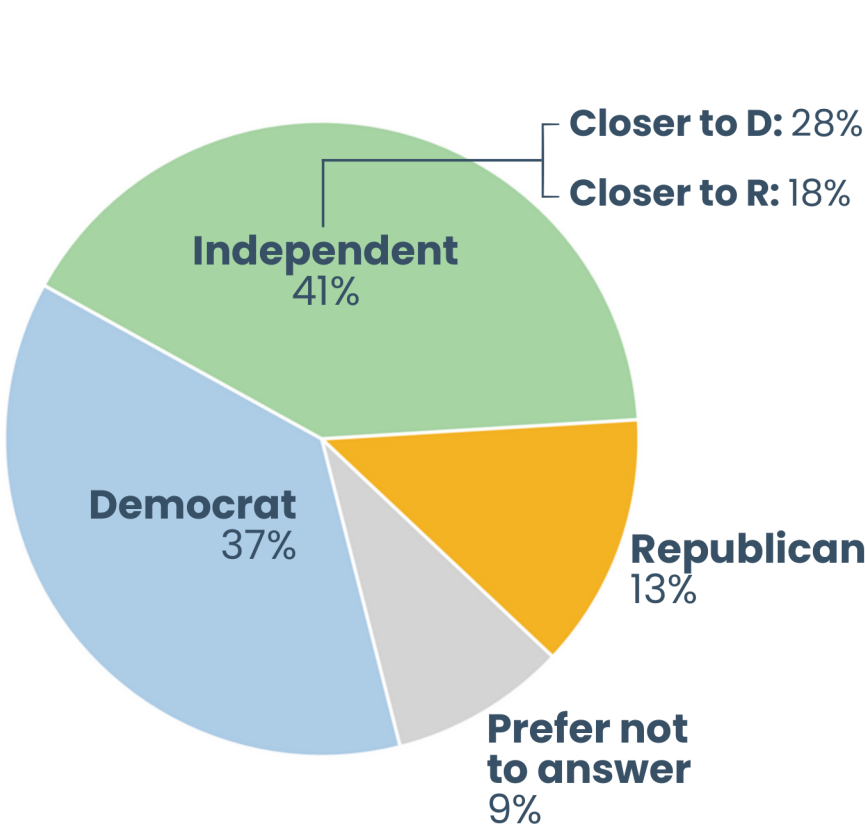
Household **Income**



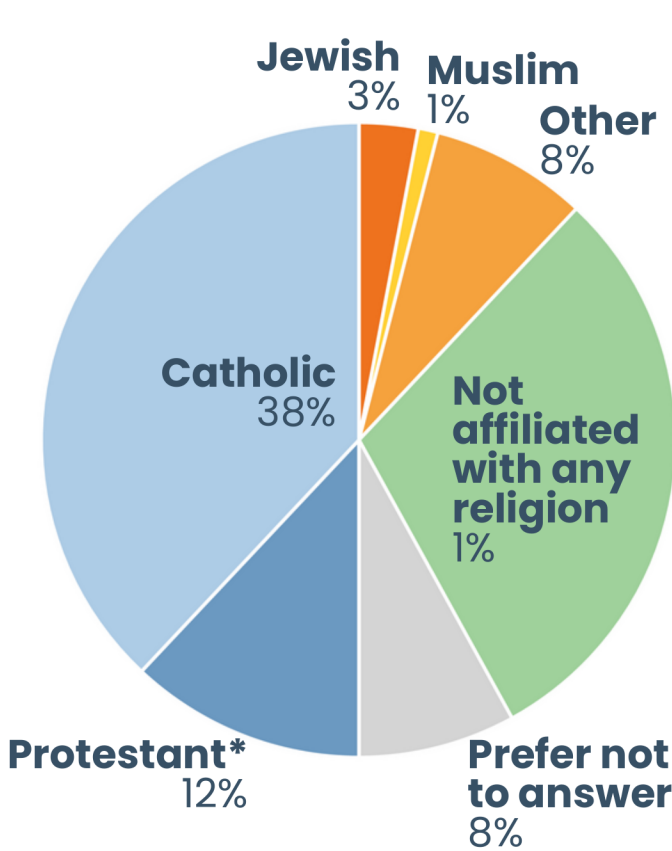
Family Situation



Political Party



Religious Affiliation



Note: Of the 12% of respondents who identified as Protestant, 6% described themselves as a Protestant affiliated with a born-again or evangelical denomination, while the other 6% described themselves as a Protestant not affiliated with either of those two denominations.

We envision a future where every child who is placed into foster care in Massachusetts has the safe, loving foster home they need to grow and thrive.



About **HopeWell**

HopeWell is a nonprofit social services agency, serving the entire state of Massachusetts. Each year, we work to support, empower, and uplift more than 1,500 children, families, and individuals.

For six decades, we have aimed to be leaders in care and a force for good.





See more about our mission and our programs [here](#).

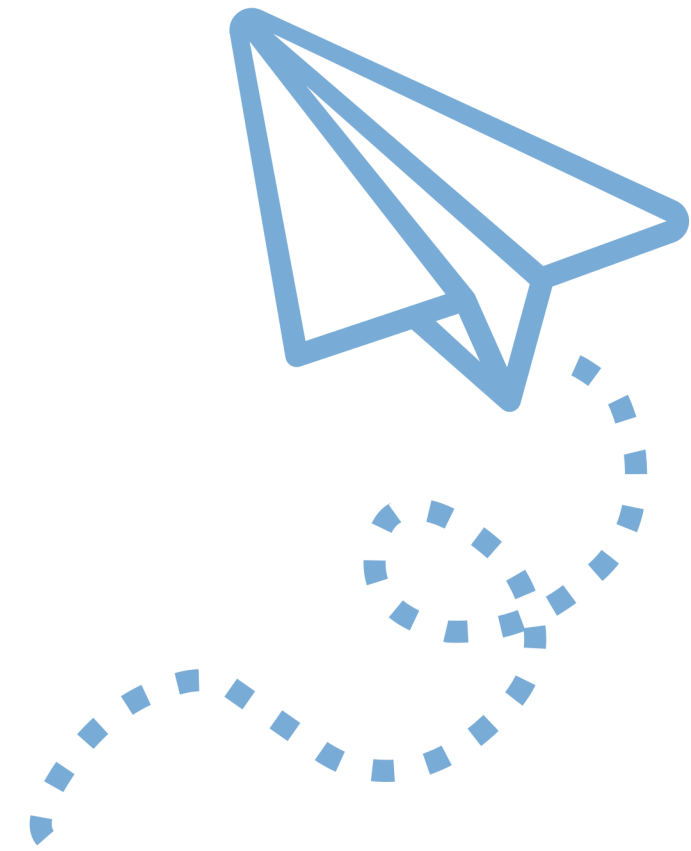


About **Foster Hope MA**

Massachusetts needs more foster parents. As the largest nonprofit provider of foster care in the state, HopeWell is leading this charge. Foster Hope MA is our public campaign to:

-  Raise awareness about the need for loving foster homes.
-  Encourage more people to become foster parents.

CONTACT



To connect with us about this survey, please contact
Torrie Mekos, Director of Communications at tmekos@hopewellinc.org



