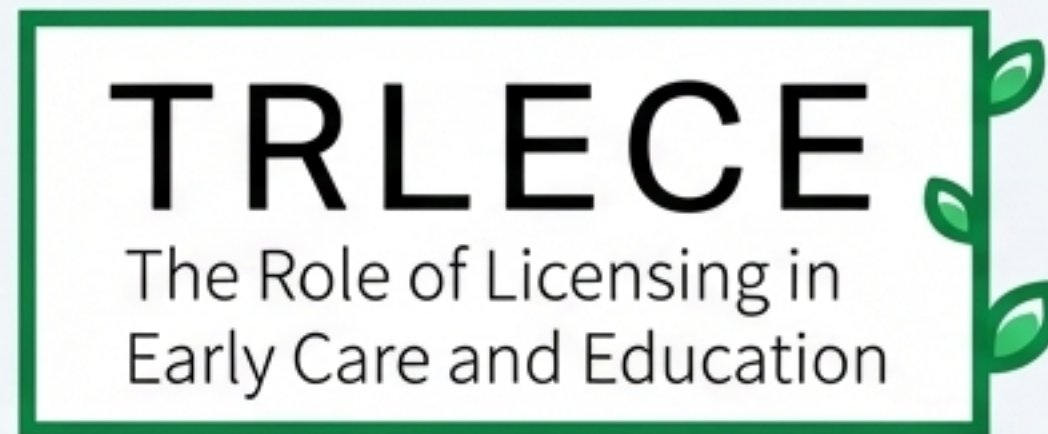


# Monitoring Practices in Child Care and Early Education

**A Data-Driven Look at How States  
Ensure Quality and Safety**



Based on findings from the 2017 Child Care Licensing Study.



# The Mandate for Monitoring: Ensuring Safe and Healthy Environments for Children

Child Care and Early Education (CCEE) licensing agencies establish and monitor regulations that programs must meet to operate legally. This oversight is crucial for child safety.

Beyond these federal minimums, states have **significant autonomy** in deciding how to monitor programs most effectively and efficiently with their limited resources.

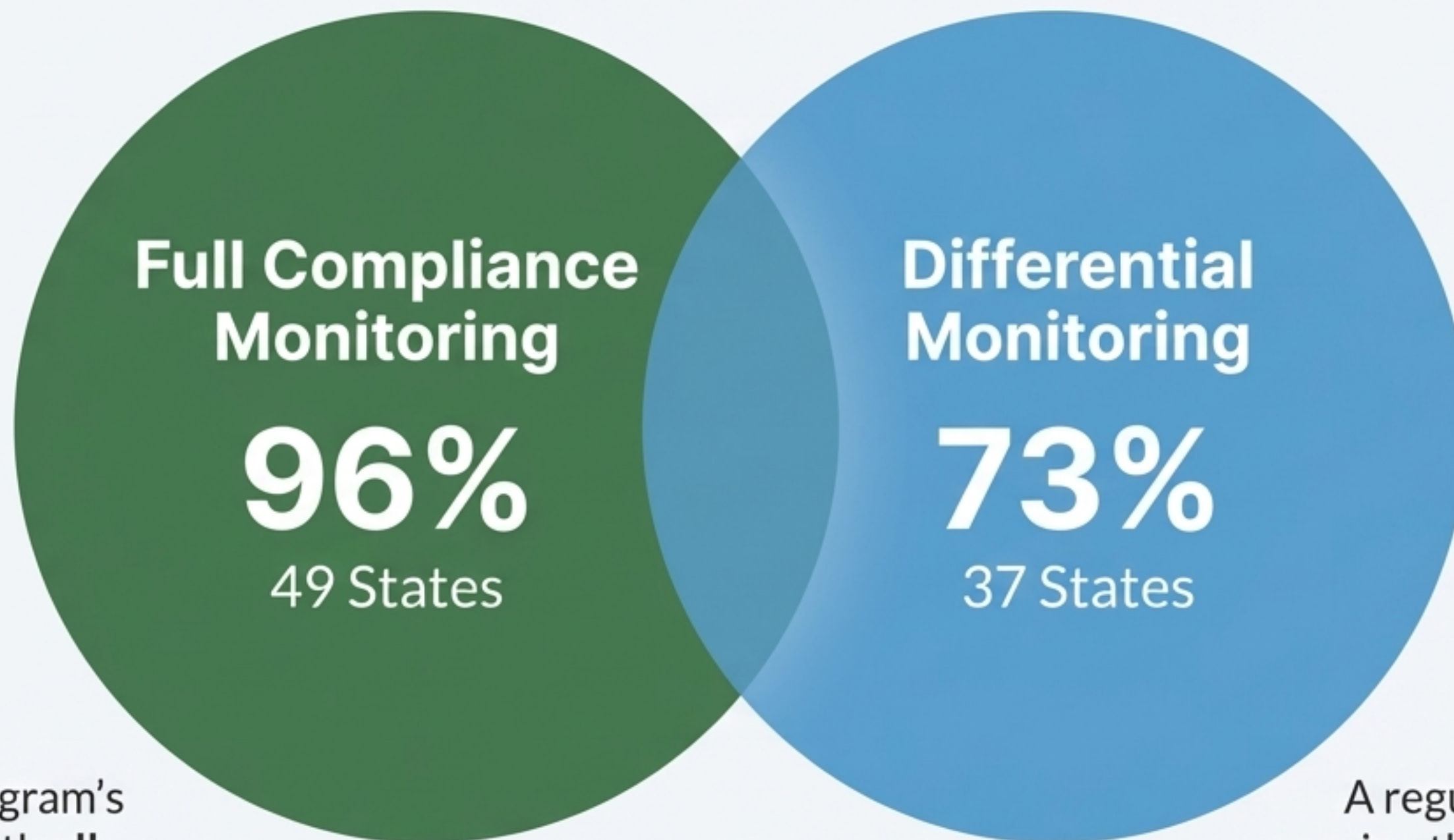
## The Federal Floor

The Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) sets minimum requirements for states, including:

- A **pre-licensure inspection** for licensed programs.
- At least **one annual unannounced inspection** for licensed programs.



# States Employ Two Core Approaches to Monitoring



Assessing a program's compliance with **all** licensing regulations on a set schedule.

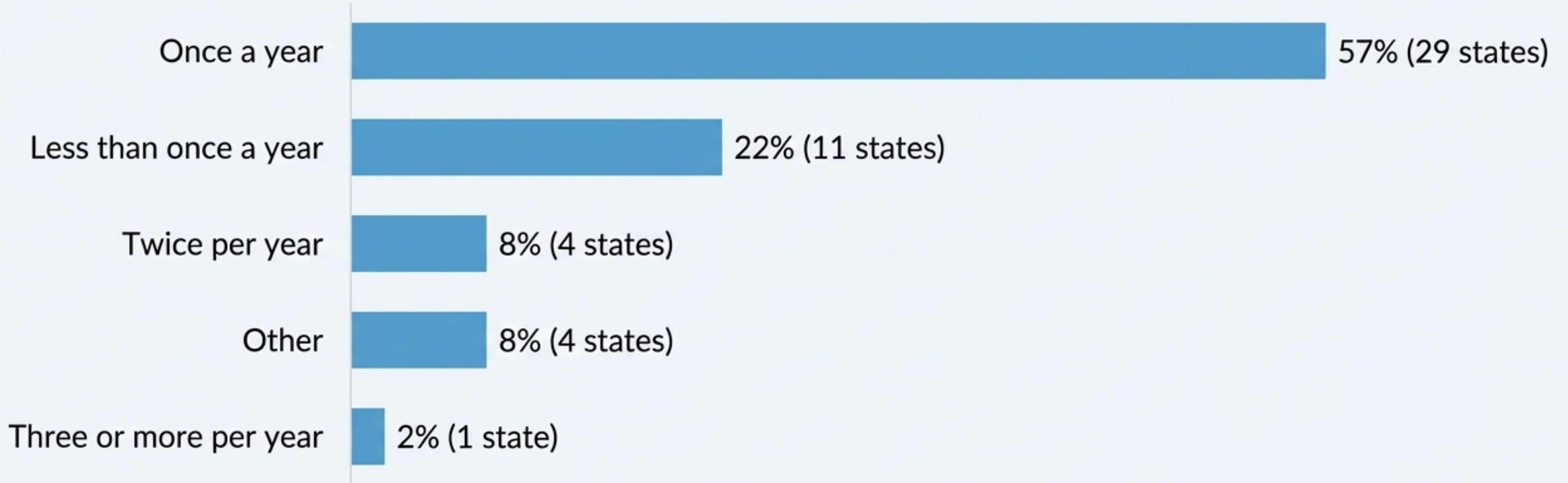
A regulatory method for varying the **depth or frequency** of monitoring based on specific factors, such as a program's compliance history.



# Full Compliance Inspections are the National Standard

In 2017, 96% of states (49) conducted at least one full compliance inspection, monitoring all regulations.

**Frequency of Full Compliance Inspections (N=49 states)**



*\*Data for child care centers. Findings are similar for family and group child care homes.*



# What is Differential Monitoring?

## A Strategy for Targeted Oversight

Differential monitoring is an umbrella term for varying the frequency or depth of inspections. Instead of a one-size-fits-all approach, it allows agencies to tailor monitoring based on a track record (e.g., number, severity, or repetition of violations).

### Why States Use Differential Monitoring:



**Increase Focus:** Target monitoring resources on CCEE programs with a history of low compliance.



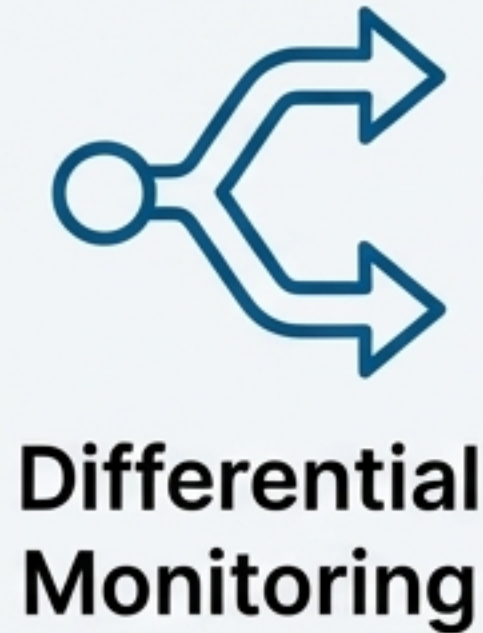
**Recognize Quality:** Acknowledge and reduce the burden on programs with a history of strong compliance.



**Improve Efficiency:** Use limited staff resources more effectively, allowing more time for technical assistance and provider support.



# The Two Levers of Differential Monitoring



## Varying the Depth of Inspections

69%

**Method:** Using abbreviated inspections to monitor a selected subset of regulations rather than all of them.

The most common strategy, used by 35 states.

## Varying the Frequency of Inspections

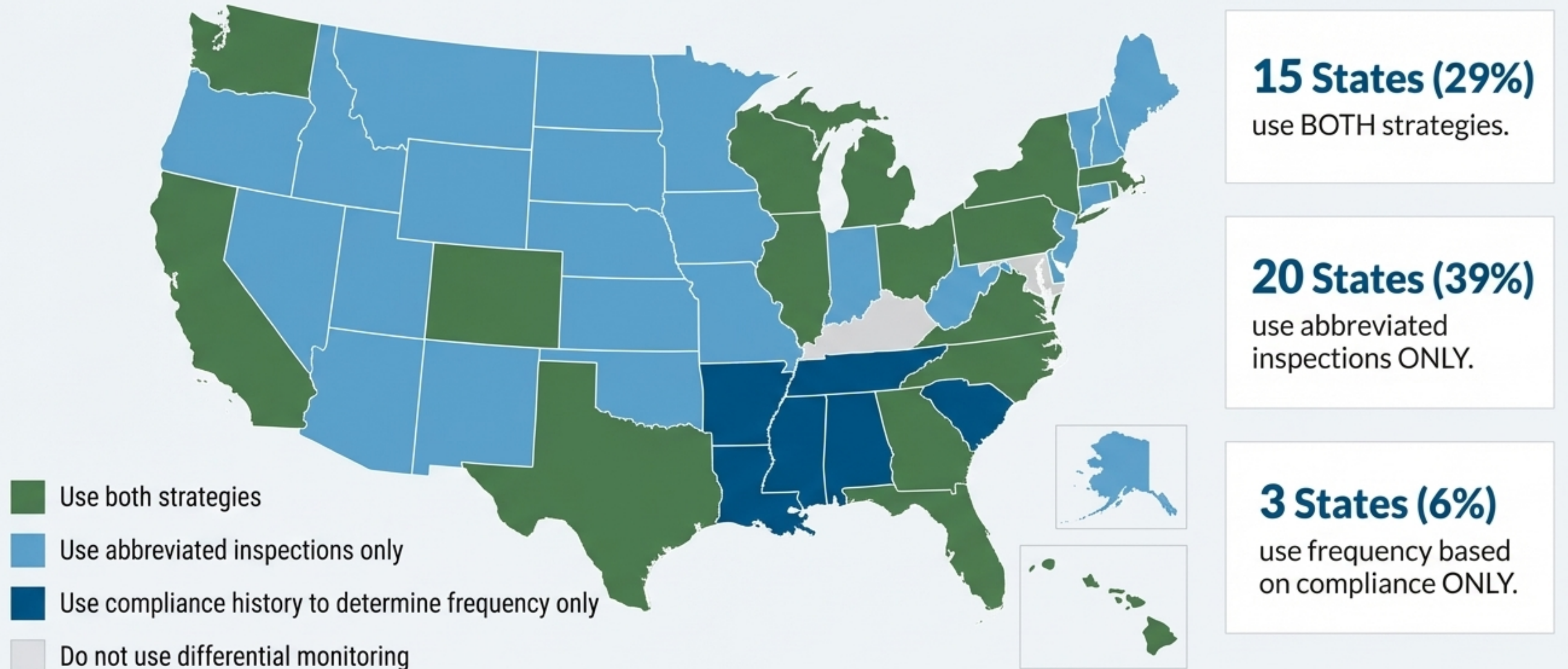
33%

**Method:** Using a program's compliance history to determine how often it is inspected (e.g., less frequently for high performers, more for low performers).

Used by 17 states.



# Three-Quarters of States Use a Differentiated Approach to Monitoring





# How States Select Regulations for Abbreviated Inspections

States that use abbreviated inspections employ one or more data-informed methods to select the subset of regulations to monitor.

## Consensus Approach



**60%**

A group of experts agrees on the regulations most critical to include in all inspections.

(21 of 35 states)  
use this approach.

## Risk Assessment Approach



**49%**

Identifies regulations that, if violated, place children at the greatest risk of injury or death.

(17 of 35 states)  
use this approach.

## Key Indicators Approach



**29%**

Employs a statistical methodology to select a subset of regulations that best predicts overall compliance.

(10 of 35 states)  
use this approach.

*\*Respondents were allowed to select more than one response; therefore, percentages will not sum to 100%.*



# Methodologies in Action: State Case Studies

## Georgia's Risk Assessment



- **Process:** Designated **74 of 456** licensing regulations as “core rules.”
- **Inputs:** Selection was informed by research literature, focus groups with CCEE directors and staff, and licensing agency expertise.
- **Outcome:** Compliance on core rules impacts eligibility for Georgia's QRIS and Pre-K programs.

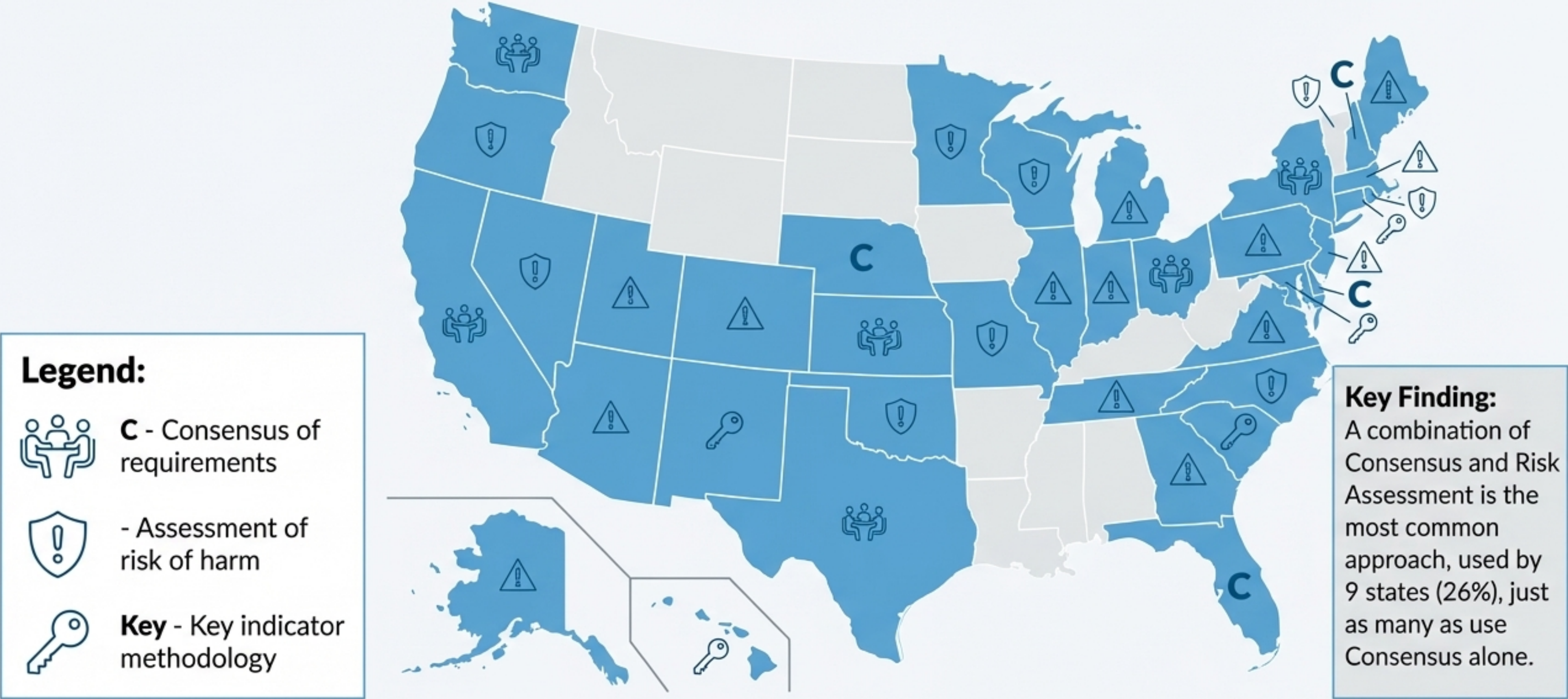
## Michigan's Key Indicators



- **Process:** Conducted a statistical analysis of **3,826 inspections** to identify the subset of regulations that best predict compliance with all rules.
- **Outcome:** The analysis identified **~26 key indicators** that best predicted membership in high-compliance (top 25%) and low-compliance (bottom 25%) groups.



# Mapping the Methodologies for Abbreviated Inspections





# The Safety Net: When to Switch Back to Full Compliance



Efficiency is balanced with accountability. Most states using abbreviated inspections have a policy to revert to a full inspection if problems are identified.

## 66%

of states

(23 of 35) using abbreviated inspections have a policy on when to **switch to full compliance visits**.

### Case Study: Florida's Policy



- **Eligibility:** Programs must have no serious violations for two consecutive years to qualify for an abbreviated inspection.
- **Trigger:** If **any violations** are found during the abbreviated inspection, the program is no longer eligible and must complete a full compliance inspection.



# Consistent Trends Across All Licensed Program Types

The monitoring strategies and trends presented for Child Care Centers (CCC) are highly similar for Family Child Care Homes (FCCH) and Group Child Care Homes (GCCH).

Monitoring Strategies by Program Type (2017)

Metric	Child Care Centers (N=51)	Family Child Care Homes (N=44)	Group Child Care Homes (N=38)
Use Full Compliance Monitoring	96%	95%	97%
Use Differential Monitoring	73%	77%	76%
Use Abbreviated Inspections	69%	72%	71%
Use Compliance History for Frequency	33%	36%	29%



CCC



FCCH



GCCH



# Key Takeaways on the State of Licensing Monitoring

- 1 A DUAL APPROACH IS THE NORM.**  
While nearly all states (96%) conduct traditional full compliance inspections, a vast majority (75%) also leverage differential monitoring to enhance efficiency and target resources.
- 2 DEPTH IS VARIED MORE OFTEN THAN FREQUENCY.**  
Varying inspection depth via abbreviated inspections (used by 69% of states) is more than twice as common as varying inspection frequency based on compliance history (33%).
- 3 A SPECTRUM OF DATA-DRIVEN METHODS IS USED.**  
States use a range of methods—from expert consensus (60%) and risk assessment (49%) to statistical key indicators (29%)—to intelligently focus their abbreviated monitoring efforts.
- 4 SYSTEMS INCLUDE A SAFETY NET.**  
Two-thirds of states using abbreviated inspections have policies to revert to full compliance monitoring when violations are found, balancing efficiency with accountability.



# About This Research

## Project Name:

This brief was produced by The Role of Licensing in Early Care and Education (TRLECE) project.

## Funding:

Funded by the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE), Administration for Children and Families (ACF), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

## Data Source:

All findings are based on an analysis of the 2017 Child Care Licensing Study.

## Full Report Citation:

Miranda, B., Ekyalongo, Y., Franchett, A., & Maxwell, K. (2022). *Monitoring Practices Used in Child Care and Early Education Licensing*. OPRE Report #2022-137. Washington, DC: OPRE, ACF, U.S. DHHS.

