

Racial and Ethnic Disparities in the Child Welfare System

Casey-CSSP Alliance Public Policy Working Group Recommendations for Federal Policy

Recommendation 1:

Congress should mandate that HHS produce an annual Report on Racial Equity in Child Welfare Performance.

HHS should be mandated to publish an annual **Report on Racial Equity in Child Welfare Performance** that tracks and reports on the extent to which racial and ethnic disproportionality and disparities exist in child welfare. The purpose of the **Report on Racial Equity in Child Welfare Performance** would be to provide a national summary as well as a state-by-state breakdown regarding the level of racial disproportionality and disparity in child welfare treatments, experiences, and outcomes.

Current Federal reports do not provide an analysis about the level of racial equity or inequity in child welfare systems treatment, experiences and outcomes, despite the fact that data collected by state child welfare agencies make it possible to do so.

Given the significant rates of disproportionality and disparity in child welfare, racial equity is an appropriate framework for holding child welfare leaders and local communities accountable, beginning with the reporting of maltreatment, decisions to accept and substantiate reports of maltreatment, and continuing through efforts to achieve permanency for children and youth entering foster care. Accurate monitoring of results at each stage of the child welfare system requires a fully longitudinal database that links reports of maltreatment with detailed data about the experiences of children placed in out-of-home care. This capability already exists in a number of states. As required by Federal SACWIS regulations, in fact, all states are collecting the data required for such analysis.

Recommendation 2:

The Federal Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) process should be modified to specifically assess racial disparities in outcomes for children and youth.

Ongoing assessment of racial equity in state child welfare systems should become part of the CFSR process. Congress should require that HHS incorporate an assessment of racial equity into the measurement framework for achieving “substantial conformity” on the six national performance standards. This can be accomplished by relying on the longitudinal data described in the first recommendation. In addition, the State self-assessment should explicitly examine factors associated with the racial disparities identified in the analysis recommended above.

Recommendation 3:

Congress should mandate that State Program Improvement Plans that are developed as a result of the CFSR process include evidence-based strategies to reduce racial disparities in treatment and outcomes.

Similar to a Congressional mandate, passed in 1988 under the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act to address disproportionate minority confinement within the Juvenile Justice System, States should be required to address racial disparities in their required Program Improvement Plans (PIPs) and as a condition of continued federal funding. Congress could also consider appropriating incentive funds to States that implement evidence-based strategies to address racial disparities as part of their PIPs.

Recommendation 4:

Encourage the use of discretionary funding from Child Welfare Research and Development Funds under Title IV-E, Title IV-B and CAPTA to establish demonstration grants using evidence based strategies to address disproportionality and disparities in 5-6 target sites.

To achieve this Congress would:

- Request that the Children's Bureau make the implementation of strategies to reduce racial disparities a research and demonstration priority in next fiscal year;
- Pass a resolution as part of the appropriations process that establishes this as a priority and designates funds for it; and
- Require HHS to encourage States to form public-private partnerships and to match federal appropriations set aside for these purposes.

Recommendation 5:

Members of the Congressional Black, Hispanic and Progressive Caucuses should request that the General Accounting Office conduct a study of disproportionality and disparity in child welfare in order to:

- Raise national awareness about the nature and extent of the problem;
- Identify structural factors contributing to disproportionately poor outcomes for African American and other children of color; and
- Identify promising strategies to improve racial equity in treatment and outcomes.