

**CASEY-CSSP ALLIANCE FOR RACIAL EQUITY IN CHILD
WELFARE:
POLICY RESPONSE TO THE GAO AUDIT ON
DISPROPORTIONALITY FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN CHILDREN IN
FOSTER CARE**

On July 30, 2007, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) released its report entitled, [African American Children In Foster Care: Additional HHS Assistance Needed to Help States Reduce the Proportion in Care-\(GAO -07-816\)](#). The report was requested in the fall of 2005 by New York Congressman Charles Rangel, House Ways and Means Committee.

The Casey-CSSP Alliance for Racial Equity in Child Welfare commends the GAO *for this timely report and* for acknowledging the positive work that is already taking place to address disproportionality in state and county child welfare systems. State and county systems must work in their own communities to address the problems of disproportionate representation, disparate treatment, and poor outcomes for African American children. Federal and state policies and solutions must support the efforts of these state and county systems to effect positive change.

The Alliance proposes several specific recommendations that align with and go beyond those actually offered by the GAO.

Recommendation # 1: Requires Congressional Action

- **Improve Child Welfare Financing to Promote Permanency** – Federal financing for child welfare should support programs and services that encourage lifelong family connections for children. This requires amending the federal financing structure to promote more family preservation and prevention efforts that keep children from entering into care and help increase safe reunification, guardianship care, kinship care, and post-permanency efforts. Congress should also increase flexibility under Title IV-E, to provide incentives for services for vulnerable families that include a broader range of support for permanent placements, and allow more access to services for relatives caring for their kin children.

Recommendation # 2: Requires Congressional Action

- **Provide Family-Strengthening and Prevention Services** –We know many families, regardless of their racial background, come to the attention of the child protection system due to poverty, mental health problems, substance abuse, domestic violence, and chronic family stress. By increasing public investments in strategies that support parents and strengthen families—such as child care services; job training, housing, financial literacy and other strategies to address poverty; mental health diagnosis and treatment; and substance abuse treatment—we can avoid unnecessary child removal for all families, and thereby reduce the odds that African-American children will experience foster care placement.

Recommendation # 3: Requires Executive Action

- **Implement Strength-Based Decision Making Approaches in All Systems That Serve Children and Families** - Federal resources should provide supports and incentives for approaches that improve the quality and racial equity of child welfare decisions, through proven practices such as team decision making, family group conferencing, and cultural education and training.

Recommendation # 4: Requires Executive Action:

- **Enhance the Capacity of Federally Funded Data Collection and Reporting Systems** – Identifying racial disparities in the experiences of families and children served by the child welfare system is essential. Annual state reports about the safety, permanence and well-being of children who have contact with the child welfare system should compare outcomes by race at each of the key decision points, including initial report, decision to remove a child from the birth family, movement from one foster home to another, reunification, placement with kin or adoption. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services should adapt the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) and the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS) to track outcomes for children in the child welfare system by race.

Recommendation # 5: Requires Executive Action

Report on Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Assessing State Child Welfare Systems - The Federal assessment of state performance—the Child and Family Service Review (CFSR) process—should determine the extent to which racial disparities and inequities continue to persist. Specifically, the Alliance recommends that the review process include performance measures that highlight state progress on reducing racial, ethnic and cultural disparities, and that capture the diverse range of intervention strategies appropriate for different groups and circumstances. While this portion of the Federal review process should not be tied to financial penalties, we should not miss this opportunity to evaluate, document and review progress in reducing racial disparities.

Recommendation # 6: Requires Executive Action

- **Increase Involvement of Families in the Development and Implementation of Child Welfare Policies and Practices** - Policies and resources should ensure more active participation of youth, birth parents and families in the decisions that shape their lives and the quality of life of their communities.

Recommendation # 7: Requires Executive Action

- **Expand Cultural Competence Training to Adequately Address Disproportionality and Disparate Outcomes** – All child welfare and child protective services staff and family/juvenile court personnel should receive training to become better prepared to work with culturally and racially diverse populations. This training will help to ensure fair treatment and equal access to quality services and programs.