

# Advisory Commission on Reducing the Disproportionate Representation of African American Children in Foster Care

Meeting Minutes  
December 14, 2022

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**Meeting called to order by Chair at 1:05 PM:** Tim Snowden, Statewide Chief Deputy Director Permanency and Intact Services, DCFS

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**Members in attendance:** Dagené Brown, Director, Office of Racial Equity Practice, DCFS  
Latonia Byrd-Williamson, Dept of Juvenile Justice  
Heidi Clark, Dept of Public Health  
Abby Dompke, IL Capital Development Board  
Tiana McCall, Dept of Commerce & Economic Opportunity  
Erica Weatherspoon, proxy for Margarita Mendoza, Dept of Corrections  
Gail Augle, proxy for Dr. Charles Montorio-Archer, One Hope United  
Denice Murray, Adjunct Instructor University of Chicago, Crown Family School of Social Work  
LaTasha Roberson-Guifarro, Lutheran Child and Family Services of Illinois  
Michelle Shaver, IL Board of Higher Education  
Rachel Turner, Public Member  
Dr. Leslie Ward, State Board of Education Janelle Washington, IL Community College Board  
Janell Washington, IL Community College Board

**Members not in attendance:** Tanya Ford, Department of Healthcare and Family Services  
State Representative Mary Flowers  
Dr. Tamara Fuller, Director, Children and Family Research Center, University of IL at Urbana  
State Senator Napoleon Harris  
Pam Hudson, IL Dept of Human Rights  
LaTanya Law, Dept of Human Services  
State Representative Tony McCombie  
Dana O'Leary, Dept of Labor  
Chrystal Wofford, Dept of Aging

**Public:** None

**DCFS:** Kara Hamilton, Associate Deputy Director, External Communication & Advisory Groups  
Susan Barker, Deputy General Counsel – Central Region  
Faith Seals, Deputy General Counsel – Cook Region  
Darnita Jackson, Administrative Assistant, Office of Legislative Affairs

## Welcome & Roll Call:

Chair Tim Snowden welcomed members. Darnita Jackson took the roll and determined that a quorum was present.

### **Approval of Minutes:**

The minutes were reviewed. Michelle Shaver entered a motion to approve the meeting minutes dated November 17, 2022. Tiana McCall seconded the motion. The minutes were approved by unanimous consent.

### **Opening Statements and Agenda Overview:**

Chair Tim Snowden thanked members for joining and reported the following:

- 26 members comprised of both the Advisory Commission and the Racial Disproportionality Task Force participated in the DCFS 101 Informational Sessions held in November and December. The informational session provided basic information about DCFS, its structure and services and was conducted to provide Members an opportunity to ask questions and become more informed. Additional 101 sessions will be provided upon member request.
- DCFS representation was added to the Legal System and Its Impact to Youth-in-Care and External Resources and Services to Address Disproportionality Subcommittees to include Faith Seals, Deputy General Counsel – Cook Region, Susan Barker, Deputy General Counsel – Central Region and Tracey King, Chief of Staff, respectively to provide additional support and information as needed.

Chair Tim Snowden outlined the day's agenda and meeting structure to include Subcommittee report-outs to the whole group on their internal discussions, questions and next steps followed by whole group discussions with opportunities to ask questions and/or make suggestions. Dagené Brown will provide the bi-monthly update on the Racial Disproportionality in Child Welfare Task Force.

### **Subcommittee Report-outs:**

- Members of the Legal System and Its Impact to Youth-in-Care Subcommittee were not present and/or were unable to report-out.
- LaTasha Roberson-Guifarro reported the External Resources and Services to Address Disproportionality Subcommittee met prior to this meeting and included Tracey King as the appointed DCFS representation as well as Darnita Jackson. The Subcommittee focused on identifying the existing resources, gaps in resources and opportunities for development of resources. Using the key decision points outlined in the CFRC FY22 Racial Disproportionality Report as the framework, the Subcommittee has identified the following key areas of focus for further exploration:
  - Services commonly recommended and/or needed to include service plan recommendations when families enter the child welfare system as well as services that are needed for children and families currently involved with the system. Consideration to also include services that can be beneficial for stability and prevention of repeat maltreatment as families exit the system.
  - Existing services for children presently and what can be learned from those to be considered broadly outside of what DCFS provides and include community and wrap services. More information is needed on this including the Children 360 project. The Children 360 project focuses on equity of resources, allows for mapping of resources, data can be disaggregated by race and poverty levels and will be launched in March, 2023.
    - More information is needed with regards to DHS, 211 and 998 Health and Human Services Hotlines and the services/resources commonly requested with consideration given to mental health emergencies in a treatment model.
    - More information is needed from DCFS with regards to Extended Family Support, Intact Family Services and Child Welfare Referrals to include why these cases are coming in, what kinds of preventable measures can be taken or what services are people requesting when they enter the system to be implemented on the forefront before involvement. Further discussion to include identifying ways to make services/resources known and accessible.
  - Wrap services and community responsibility to identify areas that could be tapped into or learned from as gaps and/or opportunities are identified.

#### Next Steps Identified as:

- Subcommittee to meet again on January 9, 2023 at 9am.
- Discussions around the definition of neglect and its alignment with poverty stemming from FY21 data that 66% of calls were made for neglect. Consideration to include information shared during the Family First symposium regarding different ways to view neglect.
- Obtain data from EFS and IFS regarding the reasons people are asking for services.
- Connect with DHS partners and other community-based providers.
- Michelle Shaver reported data was requested from the IL Board of Higher Education regarding issues and services needed by students who do not reach completion; however, this information had not yet been received.

#### Data Requests Identified as:

- Data on the trending concerns that are reported to the Child Abuse Hotline.
- FY22 data on the demographics of the callers into the Child Abuse Hotline, stemming from review of FY21 data indicating 66% of calls are generated from Human Service professionals. For purposes of resource development and professional development for reporters to the Child Abuse Hotline or those individuals whom have an impact on the key decision points outlined in FY2022 Racial Disproportionality Report.
- Disaggregated data on African-American families and the reasons for indicated findings and youth entering substitute care.
- Data on the presenting issues that bring white families into care and how long white families presenting the same issues as African-American families stay involved, to be broken down by region. What are the major presenting issues that bring youth into care by race?
  - **Noted for awareness:** Dagené Brown will seek approval to present the Children 360 model to the Commission.
  - Dagené reported Children 360 helps to identify disparities across the state and areas where resources are lacking for purposes of determining deficits as well as areas where resources need to be built all aligning with how youth come into care based upon the allegations.
  - Dagené further provided an example reporting there were 7 buckets identified for services including mental health and substance abuse services indicating there were only two facilities within a specific community that provided services in contrast with the Northern region which currently has facilities representative of all 7 identified service buckets including 34 mental health facilities and 24 substance abuse organizations.
- Data on the reports and recommendations from various committees including the African American Family Commission to be used as a tool and/or reference and for incorporated into the Commission's work. Denice Murray will send a list of reports and recommendation needed for review.
  - Tim referenced the recent report on guardianship.
  - Dagené made reference to the African American Family Commission in that most of the recommendations were not specific to DCFS as well as the Differential Response Committee that is no longer active however the CWAC Racial Equity Subcommittee derivative is overseen by Dagené. Dagené will provide reports and/or recommendations that are supportive of the Commission's work.

#### Discussion Items:

- Q: Do the numbers vary based on region? Is there any data that says the disproportionality looks differently from one region to the next significantly? What role does inherent or intrinsic bias play in terms of how maltreatment is applied or defined?

- Tim advised this information was requested internally and will be prepared by region and by race. Dagené reported there is data specific to each region on disproportionality per the various decision points that are captured. Information to be provided before next meeting.
  - Q: What are some of the recommendations that have come from Racial Disparities Committees over time? How has the work of other committees been infused in the Department's planning for services? A: Tim provided information on the Department's planning for services as follows:
    - Building the support network for youth in care particularly trauma treatment and increasing community-based services that currently exist within the department specifically with the Intensive Placement Stabilization services.
    - Internal discussions surrounding the usage of Norman services and ways to enhance the policy with investigative staff.
    - The initiation of the State-wide call for proposals to support community-based placements as well as to increase in-treatment foster care of which there are currently 4 pilot proposals up for program review and vetting.
    - The creation of individualized ways to support reunification and/or support permanency via usage of available flex funds. There is also a refocus around reunification from the Department and the Private Sector partners in that awareness and expectations around it with the families.
  - Q: Have we identified other state agencies that can be leveraged and potentially could be supportive?
    - LaTasha advised that the External Resources Subcommittee was considering all the agencies that touch children and families in the different ways in which they are impacted.
  - **Noted for further discussion:** Denice proposed consideration be given to establishing a universal identifier number for families who are involved with more than one State agency to have the ability to see, connect and better coordinate services. The number would flag all other state agencies working with the family for purposes of determining unique connectivity that can be brought to a youth or parent involved with the Department to enhance reunification, prevention, income levels, training and/or education. Consideration will also need to be given to the technology used to collect, enter and share the information in a timely productive manner.
    - Dagené provided information on the Data Governance and Organization to Support Equity and Racial Justice Act which has similar criteria in the way in which data is collected that includes 11 state agencies including DCFS, the Department of Aging, DJJ, HFS and DHS. Dagené will look into whether there is the ability to include an identifier method and report back to the Commission.
    - Noted from Chat: Heidi Clark – Public Health wouldn't have as many overlaps with DCFS, but we do overlap with other agencies, especially DHS and HFS and I would be happy to push on our end. There have been discussions at IDPH for a universal identifier at least since 2016, likely before.
  - **Noted for awareness:** Denice expressed a concern about redundancy, the duplicative efforts from both groups, the ability for cross collaboration as well as information sharing.
    - Dagené provides bi-monthly updates to the Commission regarding the work of the Racial Disproportionality Task Force. The Task Force is charged with addressing racial disproportionality in a holistic manner, has an end date and are to submit their recommendations to the General Assembly in December, 2023. Next steps to include an invitation to the Task Force Chairs to attend a future Commission meeting for discussion, collaboration and comparison of works.
- Dagené reported the Legislative Impact to African American Families Subcommittee discussed the Department's previous efforts, ongoing initiatives and other Commissions' recommendations of which a break-down was provided to subcommittee members prior to today's meeting for review and further discussion.

Next Steps Identified as:

- Schedule internal meeting to discuss the break-down of initiatives sent previously, recommendations and additional questions to be submitted by Denice Murray before the next Commission meeting scheduled for January 19, 2023.
- Dagené will acquire requested data items in preparation for the Subcommittee meeting.

- Dagené will identify someone from the DCFS Legislative Affairs staff to serve on the Subcommittee.

Discussion Items:

- Broad consideration to be given to amendments to existing legislation or new legislation that could be enacted as per the Commission's charges and objectives.
- The commencement of the 103rd General Assembly session in January, 2023 and the potentiality of newly proposed legislation that will be brought forth presents an opportunity for the Commission to be responsive with recommended enhancements to address disproportionality and support African American families.
- Collaboration with the legislative staff from all the State agencies working within the Commission would prove beneficial for a broader holistic approach to addressing the issues.
- **Noted for further discussion:** Reference HB5835 introduced by Rep. La Shawn Ford which amends ANCRA removing from the definition of "neglected child" and changes the language around substance exposed infants as it is impactful to African American families. Collaboration with other groups reviewing this and other legislation of this type would be beneficial to the Commission for discussions around positive and prohibitive factors as well as risk aversions as it relates to mandated reporters.
- Chair Tim Snowden reported the DCFS Services to Impact Prevention and Reduce the Length of Stay in Foster Care Subcommittee met prior to the Commission meeting and discussed the key decision points outlined in the CFRC FY22 Racial Disproportionality Report as it relates to the impact on reunification from intake. Tim provided information on the Department's new and current initiatives to enhance prevention and limit length of stay. The Subcommittee identified the following key areas of focus for further exploration:
  - The minimal parenting standard and supports as well as the requirements placed upon families to have children returned home, categorized within the case planning stages to include the current culture of the court systems and within the field with investigators as it relates to reunification.
    - **Noted as a future resource:** The CWAC Subcommittee and their work to establish what the minimal parenting standard should be to help guide the field and legal staff and develop the core requirements for agreement as well as determinations of the root causes and providing supports and services to help mitigate risk going forward.
    - **Noted as a future resource:** The SAFE Practice Model, currently being developed by the Department, implements the safety assessment component and provides a framework for reunification which may be used as an approach to change the culture of the court systems with regards to reunification.
  - Results from the Private Agency survey conducted by the Department in December which focused on reunification and increasing guardianship to gain insight into barriers. Opportunities to survey impacted families for input on barriers and supports that are needed.
  - There were questions about reviewing details of the allegation system as it relates to intake.
  - Enhanced housing supports has been identified as potential recommendation and is a need.
  - Norman services discussed as well.

Next Steps Identified as:

- Discussions around the process and activities associated with the key decision points for purposes of determining what could be enhanced, amended or deleted to support reunification, prevention efforts and lessening the length of stay.
- Presentation on the SAFE Practice Model.

Data Requests Identified as:

- Data on the length of stay by race and region, with the Cook region being of special interest, of which this information for all regions will be provided to the whole group.
- An analysis or process map beginning with the legal process, with special interest in the Cook County Court systems, and the impact to the length of stay for African American children. To include data on the length of time to disposition, the court's days of operation, etc.
- An analysis on the amount of Norman funding usage by race as this is a key support for families with regards to prevention and reunification.
- The actual Implicit Bias training taken by staff as well as data on the numbers before and after the training for purposes of determining whether it had an impact to be broken down by region.
- Data on the identification of needed services and when they are received or delivered to families.
- Data on the SAFE Practice Model.

Discussion Items:

- Q: How is the minimal parenting standard defined and is it free of racial biases? Are minimal parenting standards impacted by economics? Minimal parenting standards can be subjective in nature with abusive behaviors by parents being easier to identify.
- Q: How does racial bias impact reunification and how and when services are delivered? Does the Department ensure individuals on the front-end responsible for the initial investigation have had training in racial bias prior to them starting this type of work? Racial bias significantly impacts the decisions on the front end in deciding to remove children from the home dependent upon certain areas of the State.
  - Dagené reported the Implicit Bias training was rolled out for all DCFS staff and Private agencies in July, 2021 and is now required as on-board training. Additionally, the ability to monitor the practice and application of the training as it relates to cultural sensitivity in dealing with families of color needs to come from a supervisory standpoint, i.e., model supervision practice, of which is the goal of the Office of Racial Equity. Dagené further reported that the Department is working to build a model that would allow for the retrieval of drilled-down data to identify regions needing intervention and support with regards to disproportionality and will put a team together to establish parameters for addressing.

Update on Racial Disproportionality in Child Welfare Task Force:

- Dagené reported the Task Force referred to the data and key decision points outlined in the CFRC FY22 Racial Disproportionality Report and identified 4 areas for focus and subsequently formed four Subcommittees based upon these areas to include (1) Investigated/Screened-in Maltreatment Reports, (2) Protective Custodies, (3) Indicated Reports to include Substitute Care and Intact Family Services and (4) Timely Exits from Substitute Care. The Task Force brings in individuals from the Department to discuss the challenges, the Subcommittee review the data and then determines recommendations to be reported out to the larger group. Some recommendations have been established informally and may can be shared with the Commission at a future meeting.

**Public Comment:**

There were no members from the public present.

**Next Steps/Action Items:**

- Invite the Racial Disproportionality Task Force Chairs to attend a future meeting.
- Provide Members with a break-down on the SAFE Practice Model, presentation to follow during a future meeting.
- Additional data requests and/or questions to be sent to Darnita Jackson.
- Subcommittee meetings to be conducted outside and in-between meetings of the Commission.

- Subcommittees to consider the decision points/findings outlined during Dr. Fuller's presentation to determine ways in which to positively influence.
- Subcommittees to develop 3 to 5 concrete, measurable, impactful recommendations to move forward on within the next 8 months.
- Commission to identify 8 to 12 State-wide recommendations for change and support.

**Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 2:24 PM.