

Racial Disproportionality in Child Welfare Task Force

Meeting Minutes
January 18, 2023

Meeting called to order at 9:02AM by: LaTanya Jackson Wilson, Co-Chair, Vice President of Advocacy, Shriver Center on Poverty Law
Beverly Jones, Co-Chair, Vice President and Chief Operating Officer, Lutheran Child and Family Services of IL

Members in attendance: Mareema Ali, Office of the Inspector General, DCFS
Janet Barnes, Cook County Public Guardian
Sara Block, Ascend Justice
Dagené Brown, Director, Office of Racial Equity Practice
Nora Collins-Mandeville, Director of Systems Reform Policy, ACLU of IL
Ronald Davis, Parent Member
Heather Dorsey, Assistant Director of Courts, Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts
David Esposito, Supportive Housing Providers Association of IL
Melissa Frydman, Director of Family Advocacy Clinic, U of I College of Law
Lettie Hicks, Parents United for Change, Community Organizing and Family Issues
Carla Rogers, Proxy for State Senator Mattie Hunter
Patricia Holling, Proxy for LaTanya Law, Dept of Human Services
Tina Lewis, Cook County Public Defender
Kim McCullough-Starks, Director, Healthcare and Family Services
State Senator Christina Pacione-Zayas, IL Legislative Latino Caucus
Robert Rodemeyer, Cook County State's Attorney's Office
Bryan Samuels, Chapin Hall
Barb Frobish, Proxy for State Senator Sally Turner

Members not present: Paris Bateman, State's Attorney Office
State Representative Lakesia Collins
Clarissa Fourman, Former Youth Member
State Representative Angelica Guerrero-Cuellar, IL Legislative Latino Caucus
State Representative Sonya Harper
Cherie Kesler, Attorney, Village of Savoy-SBDC
State Representative Camille Lilly
Onie Riley, Former Youth Member

Public: Dr. Tamara Fuller, Director, Children and Family Research Center, University of IL at Urbana
Kaitlyn Edicola
Dr. Vanessa White, Consultant, Shriver Center on Poverty Law
Ashley Deckert, Illinois Collaboration on Youth
Paula Roa
Leah Yaris

DCFS: Levonda Harris, Assistant to the DCFS Statewide Office of Racial Equity Practice
Kara Hamilton, Associate Deputy Director, External Communication & Advisory Groups
Darnita Jackson, Administrative Assistant, Office of Legislative Affairs

Welcome & Roll Call:

Co-Chair LaTanya Jackson Wilson welcomed Members and presented the “Opening Question”. Darnita Jackson took the roll. It was determined that a quorum was present.

Approval of Minutes:

David Esposito entered a motion to approve the minutes from the meeting on December 14, 2022. Beverly Jones seconded the motion. The minutes were approved by unanimous consent.

Agenda Item 1 – FY2022 Monitoring Report of the B.H. Consent Decree Presentation:

Co-Chair Beverly Jones introduced Dr. Tamara Fuller, Director of the Children and Family Research Center (CFRC) at the School of Social Work at the University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign.

Dr. Fuller presented “Highlights from FY2022 Monitoring Report of the B.H. Consent Decree” published in July 2022. Dr. Fuller’s presentation focused on the following chapters:

- Child Safety – recurrence among children with substantiated reports, while in Intact Family cases, who do not receive services as well as those that occur while children are in substitute care.
- Continuity, Stability & Length of time in Care – the experiences of children once they are placed into substitute care:
 - initial type of placements – kinship foster homes, traditional foster homes, specialized foster homes, emergency shelters, group homes
 - placement stability
 - children who run away from substitute care
 - the length of time in substitute care
- Legal Permanence – Reunification, Adoption, Guardianship
 - the stability of the permanency – how many children re-enter care after being reunified, adopted or achieved guardianship
 - children achieving guardianship
 - children who age out of the system without achieving legal permanence
- Racial/Ethnic Disproportionality in the IL Child Welfare System from the following decision points:
 - Which children are screened-in for investigations via the Hotline.
 - Which children are taken into protective custody during the investigation.
 - Which investigations are indicated.
 - Which children are removed from the home and enter Substitute Care including which children remain in Substitute Care longer than 36 months.
 - Which children received Intact Family Services.
- Dr. Fuller emphasized 4 key findings regarding disproportionality as follows:
 - Finding #1 – Black children are over-represented at every decision point in the IL Child Welfare System when compared to their representation in the IL child population.
 - Finding #2 – There are large regional differences in the degree to which Black children are over-represented in the IL child welfare system.
 - Finding #3 – Most, but not all, of the overrepresentation of Black children in the IL Child Welfare System is introduced at the Hotline. CFRC does not have access to Hotline data; however, per DCFS, the absolute value for Hotline intakes is about 2.0 for Black children in FY2021 meaning Black children are overrepresented in who gets reported to the Hotline.
 - Finding #4 – The amount of disproportionality has been decreasing over the last 7 years for some decision points. At the last decision point there is an increase in the amount of disproportionality in that black children have longer lengths of stay in substitute care longer than 3 years.
- Dr. Fuller reported the next B.H. Monitoring Report will be published in June, 2023.

Questions/Comments Noted for Further Discussion:

- What does the Department do in terms of sibling placement when a facility only takes children of a certain age?
- A request was made for a data analysis by Dr. Fuller and CFRC with regards to sibling placements comparing kinship foster placements and traditional placements disaggregated by race.
- Additional clarity was requested as to how the guardianship numbers were measured within the report which the length of time to guardianship is based on when children enter substitute care through to the date the legal guardianship is transferred. Comments made that guardianship is statutorily discouraged in Illinois and available only in relative placements as well as other practice issues with regards to kin having to obtain guardianship.
 - Dr. Fuller recommends the Task Force review Dr. Ted Cross' findings from the recent study about guardianship and the factors that lead to low guardianship rates and/or have Dr. Ted Cross present his findings to the Task Force.
- There are two factors in application within the court system, particularly for Cook County, that rule guardianship out as a permanency goal option:
 - The Juvenile Court Act specifically states that a judge cannot enter a goal of guardianship until the goal of either return home or adoption has been ruled out despite recently enacted legislation.
 - Illinois does not permit guardianships for certain age groups in non-relative homes.
- There is something within the system that creates variability, with regards to white and black children after the first decision point i.e., which children are screened-in for investigations via the Hotline, that creates stability for blacks across the entire continuum that seems to be distinct and suggest that there is a different effect occurring by race, ethnicity once you actually enter the system.
 - Anyone can call the Hotline, the question is what is the process for deciding to accept it as a report or not and are the criteria the same for all children. What is the decision-making like when a call comes into the Hotline? What gets accepted and not accepted is important as well.
 - Dr. Fuller stated CFRC did a report on the Hotline and the criteria for accepting a call is the same and is defined by statute.
 - Is it tracked what calls are taken as information only versus what calls lead to an actual investigation? Has the racial disproportionality been looked at in this aspect?
 - Data requested on the categories of mandated reporters that result in investigations to include a breakout of whether those mandated reporters are calling on neglect allegations or abuse allegations.

Questions/Data Requests/Comments from Chat noted for further discussion:

- We should take a closer look at lengths of stay across all DCFS regions for African Americans using RDI-like approach.
- Finding 2 begins to capture the relationship between race and lengths of stay across all regions.
- Screening in at the hotline is a DCFS decision though.
- The decision to make it an investigation or a CWS happens when that hotline call is made to SCR; CSW referral that is.
- That DCFS receives more calls regarding Black children. That is the meaning I understand from what Ms. Fuller stated.
- It's not just screened in criteria, it's also the professions that are required to be mandated reporters and how that intersects with oversurveillance, meaning, one intervention point is removing mandated reporting
- Isn't this where the bias-removal pilot project comes into play?
- Data request on breakdown by categories of mandate reporters that result in a finding?
- Access <https://www.cfr Illinois.edu/> to view the Children and Family Research Center's website and latest publications
- Access <https://www.cfr Illinois.edu/data-center.php> to view the CFRC Data Center

Breakout Sessions Began at 11:11AM

Breakout Sessions Ended at 11:41AM

Subcommittee Report-Outs:

- Robert Rodemeyer reported the Investigated Screened-In Maltreatment Reports Subcommittee began discussions around the data presented by Dr. Fuller as it relates to the 50-week number for kids in care and the experiences of families during that time to begin to strategize ways in which to give families more agency representation during this

time span. The subcommittee discussed the child and family team meetings and moving away from the current visitation model to be more inclusive of family time. Additionally, ways to promote fictive kin and relative foster care to create environments that enable parents to assume the day-to-day functioning and tasks using the child and family team meetings to coordinate these efforts and opportunities. The subcommittee believes this in turn will be more indicative of the safety to return home and the risk factors involved which will lead to more informed decisions in terms of permanence. Shifting resources to providing parents the opportunity to reassume care, take back parenting responsibility will lead to more informed decisions and alleviate concerns within the court system quicker.

- Dagené Brown made a comment regarding the hour allotted for parental visitation versus the time-frame to be reunified and whether there are opportunities to use this time more effectively and allow the parents to do something in the parental role, i.e. doctor's visit allowing the parents to engage their children for more than one hour a month as it could lead to reunifying families faster.
- Dagené reported the Protective Custodies Subcommittee discussed the data that black kids are twice as likely to be reported to the Hotline versus how they move through the child welfare system. The subcommittee discussed the apparent trend down in disproportionality over past years and why this is occurring. One potential recommendation is connecting racial equity practices and principles to the Department's CQI process to allow for the ability to collect the data and communicate what the effective practices are with other offices in other regions. Dagené commented this is also an ongoing initiative of the Office of Racial Equity as the data is not currently captured and broken down by office. The subcommittee also proposes revising and revamping the Mandated Reporter training as a recommendation with the understanding that disproportionality happens from the onset with the decision to make a report to the Hotline.
- Dr. Vanessa White reported the Indicated Reports Subcommittee discussed the data with regards to placement and the opportunity to do more with relative or kinship placements and are still in need of the data previously requested.
 - Carla Rogers made a comment with regards to the data presented today reflecting most youth are placed in kinship care which conflicts with data previously presented that children were not being placed in kinship care as the first course of action.
 - Dagené commented that most of the Department's youth-in-care are placed in kinship care as there are not that many foster care placements available. Dagené will provide clarity during a future meeting.

Recommendations to Date:

- Connecting racial equity practices and principles to the Department's CQI process to allow for the ability to collect the data and communicate what the effective practices are with other offices in other regions.
- Revising and revamping the Mandated Reporter training with the understanding that disproportionality happens from the onset with the decision to make a report to the Hotline.

Public Comment:

Ashley Deckert reiterated the comment from Bryan Samuels in that there seems to be variability in terms of the decision points moving through the system for black children adding that while the data and the relative RDI indicating there is limited disproportionality, this does not mean there isn't any and this should be considered when the decisions are made internally to not contribute to that. Additionally New York is connecting directly with the people within their communities that make the most child maltreatment reports, i.e., teachers, law enforcement, medical professionals to determine ways in which to support them in helping families as opposed to reporting them. Proposes a similar strategy within the State, regionally or by county as a way to engage mandated reporters. Proposes improving the mandated reporter training to include thoughtful measures about who and how the report is made highlighting there is bias in how families referred to the Hotline.

Public Comments from Chat:

Ashley Deckert: Just for clarification, does the report identify who is the perpetrator of the maltreatment while youth is in care? is this generally the foster parent/kin caregiver...etc. or is it generally the bio parent?

- Things to consider to impact hotline level data: 1. Improve mandated reporter training 2. Blind removals at the hotline level
- Not at the hotline level, bias free removal happens at the decision to remove a child or not that is where the demographics are removed, not before then however.

Action Items/Next Steps:

- Email the Co-chairs with suggestions, questions and/or additional comments.
- Email Darnita Jackson or Dagené Brown with additional data requests.
- Breakout sessions will occur every meeting going forward.

Meeting Adjournment:

The meeting was adjourned at 12:02PM.

Next Meeting Scheduled for February 15, 2023.