

Racial Disproportionality in Child Welfare Task Force

Meeting Minutes
September 21, 2022

Meeting called to order 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, Cook County Public Guardian
Janet Barnes, Cook County Public Guardian
State Representative Chris Bos
Dagene Brown, Director, Office of Racial Equity Practice, DCFS
State Representative Lakesia Collins
Nora Collins-Mandeville, Director of systems Reform Policy, ACLU of IL
Ronald Davis, Parent Member directly impacted by the Child Welfare System
Heather Dorsey, Assistant Director of Courts, Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts
David Esposito, Executive Director at Supportive Housing Providers Assoc. of America
Clarissa Fourman, Former Youth-in-Care
Melissa Frydman, Director of Family Advocacy Clinic, U of I College of Law
State Representative Sonya Harper, Legislative Black Caucus
Lettie Hicks, Parents United for Change, Community Organizing and Family Issues, Former YIC
Carla Rogers, Proxy for State Senator Mattie Hunter
Cherie Kesler, Attorney at Law, Village of Savoy
Tina Lewis, Cook County Public Defender
State Representative Camille Lilly, Legislative Black Caucus
Kim McCullough-Starks, Healthcare and Family Services
State Senator Cristina Pacione-Zayas, Legislative Latino Caucus
Onie Riley, Former Youth-in-Care
Robert Rodemeyer, Cook County State's Attorney's Office
Bryan Samuels, Chapin Hall
State Senator Sally Turner

Public: Dr. Vanessa White, Consultant, Shriver Center on Poverty Law
Anita Weinberg, Director, ChildLaw Policy Institute, Loyola University
Kaitlyn Reis, Loyola University
Ashley Deckert, Illinois Collaboration on Youth
Simone Weil, Casey Family Case Programs

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

Roll Call:

Darnita Jackson took the roll.

Welcome by the Chairs

“Question of the Day” | Introductions by all Members.

Topics of Discussion:

- Overview of Open Meetings Act by Kara Hamilton.
 - Notifications of meetings and materials, agendas and minutes publicly posted – Public Notice
 - Appointees required to complete online Open Meetings Act training within 6 months of appointment
- Guiding Principles for the Work.
 - Able to create conditions where child welfare involvement is rare.
 - Families have access to what they need to feel supported and equipped.
 - Shared responsibility to achieve the best outcomes.
- Meeting Agreement – can be amended later.
- Overview of the Legislation – HB3821, Public Act 102-0506.
- Mission of the Task Force.
- Duties of the Task Force.
- Dr. Vanessa White presents:
 - Raw data on demographics of African-American children versus other races of children in the child welfare system relative to the population, definitions and information on measuring racial and ethnic disproportionality, Absolute RDI and Relative RDI, as well as percentages for investigated reports, protective custodies, indicated reports and substitute care entries by region from 2021 and 2022.
 - Discussed compounded impacts of other systems on the disproportionality of black children in care, ie, low socioeconomic status, unstable housing, education, jobs and income become generational issues that have impact over time. Criminal juvenile justice policies disproportionately affect blacks as well as multi-generational issues of historical mass incarceration of black men and women and issues around housing biases and racism.
 - Racialized nature of child welfare policies on black mothers.
- Statistics showing disproportionality but also steady decrease from 2014 to 2021. In 2010, black children made up 14% of the population and accounted for 56% of children in substitute care. In 2014 it was 44.5% and in 2021 it was 39.5%. Research shows substitute care for black children is much higher than other races or ethnicity.
- African American Family Commission Act tasked with addressing racial disproportionalities in all systems across the board and inquiries into whether it will be reestablished.
- Outcomes, Expectations and Timeline for Recommendations:
 - Legislative and Administrative policy recommendations are to be submitted to the General Assembly and the Governor by September 20, 2023.
 - Task Force will be dissolved, and the ACT repealed on January 1, 2024.
 - Co-Chairs will meet before January 1, 2024 to discuss implementation plan of recommendations.
- Update on Vacancies. There are 3 unappointed spots, 1 to be designated by the Governor and 2 parents that have been impacted by the child welfare system. Currently in search of a black mother who has been impacted by the child welfare system who is willing to participate.

Questions/Comments Noted for Further Discussion:

- Historical data is needed going back 10 years that shows the trend of the situation.
 - Data showing movement of the children that come into the system from first placement.
 - Data indicating the causes of involvement in the system for comparative analysis to identify biases within the screening system or racist trends that may be found among cases dealing with homelessness, substance misuse and/or mental health where there is more of an opportunity to apply discretion with regards to decision-making authority versus egregious cases.
 - Data related to why cases stay in the system for extended periods of time. Whether there are disparities in decision points around visitation between parents and children, the frequency of visitations and barriers to visitation.
- Consideration of family preservation.
- Changes around mandated reporting and the reporter's discretion specifically as it pertains to black, brown and biracial children.
- Consideration of other subject matter experts to participate in the work groups for the Task Force.

Action Items:

- Email LaTanya or Beverly with Meeting Agreement additions, suggestions, or recommendations.
- Will determine subcommittees to work on different aspects of the recommendations to bring forth and to review the data.
- Will review the data that was requested as a start to map out the path;
 - Identify the direction in which to begin based off the data;

- Identify groups moving forward to meet the criteria.
- May invite other groups/agencies/providers to present how they are addressing this issue, what was the data then and what is the data now.

Meeting Adjourned at 10:35AM