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STATE OF MICHIGAN
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES
LANSING

MARIANNE UDOW
DIRECTOR

June 6, 2006

The Honorable Bill Hardiman, Chair
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on DHS
Michigan State Senate
Lansing, Michigan 48933

The Honorable Rick Shaffer, Chair
House Appropriations Subcommittee on DHS
Michigan House of Representatives
Lansing, Michigan 48933

Dear Senator Hardiman and Representative Shaffer:

Section 548(4) of 2005 Public Act 147 requires us to report to you on the task force to study the disproportionate representation of African-American and other children of color in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems of Michigan. The Report from the Michigan Advisory Committee on the Overrepresentation of Children of Color in Child Welfare is attached. It was issued on March 21, 2006.

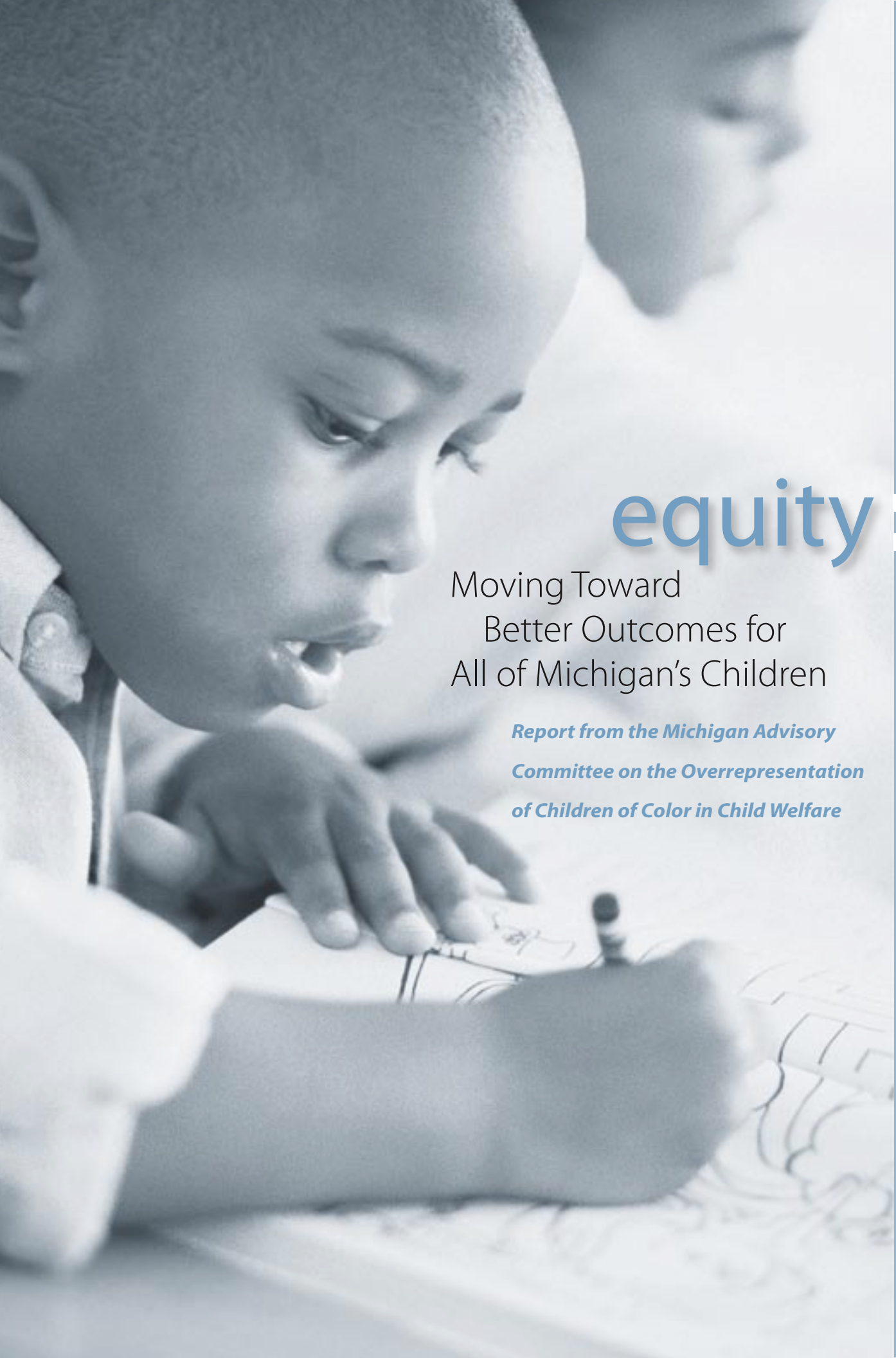
If you have any questions, please contact John Sorbet, chief administrative officer, at 517-373-7787.

Sincerely,

Marianne Udow

Marianne Udow

C: Senate and House Appropriations Subcommittees on DHS
Senate and House Fiscal Agencies
Senate and House Policy Offices
State Budget Director



equity

Moving Toward Better Outcomes for All of Michigan's Children

Report from the Michigan Advisory Committee on the Overrepresentation of Children of Color in Child Welfare

Michigan Advisory Committee on the Overrepresentation of Children of Color in Child Welfare

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Funding provided by:

Annie E. Casey Foundation and The Skillman Foundation

STATE OF MICHIGAN
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES
LANSING

JENNIFER M. GRANHOLM
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DIRCTOR

March 21, 2006

Members of the Legislature:

This report complies with the legislative mandate included in the Michigan Department of Human Services budget bill for FY 2005. Budget boilerplate required the department to convene a task force to study the disproportionate representation of African American and other children of color in the child abuse and neglect and juvenile justice systems in Michigan.

In response to that mandate we convened an advisory committee in 2004 to develop an understanding of the overrepresentation of African American and Native American children in Michigan's child welfare and juvenile justice systems. While we knew overrepresentation was of concern, both the data and information from more than 600 persons convinced us that this is a serious issue in each of Michigan's counties. Our advisors agreed that we needed to initiate strategies and target recommendations for change so that in the future, outcomes for children are not determined by the color of one's skin.

What we learned through our consultative process is that at every point along the child welfare continuum, African American and Native American children and families are represented in numbers that exceed their relative proportion of the population. Rates of substantiated maltreatment, entry into out-of-home care, and length of stay are higher for children of color than for their white counterparts while family reunification and exit rates are lower.

We believe the time is right to initiate changes that will improve outcomes for children and families of color. We know it will require bold action, innovative leadership and resources to make a lasting difference. We ask you to join us in a spirit of cooperation to begin this task. Your leadership is critical to moving this agenda forward.

This report provides background, a blueprint and specific recommendations for action. We look forward to working with you on this critical issue.

Respectfully submitted,

Carol Goss, Co-Chair
CEO & President, Skillman Foundation

Marianne Udow, Co-Chair
Director, Department of Human Services

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First in the heart is the dream

Then the mind starts seeking a way…

The eyes see there materials for building.

See the difficulties, too, and the obstacles.

The mind seeks a way to overcome

these obstacles.

The hand seeks tools to cut the wood,

To till the soil, and harness the power

of the waters.

Then the hand seeks other hands to help,

A community of hands to help—

Thus the dream becomes not one

man's dream alone,

But a community dream.

Not my dream alone, but our dream,

Not my world alone,

But your world and my world,

Belonging to the hands who build.

—From "Freedom's Plow," by Langston Hughes

executive summary

Why Is It Important to Address Overrepresentation in Michigan's Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice Systems?

Each year, approximately 160,000 of the state's children—over 6 out of every 100 children—are living in families that are investigated by the Department of Human Services for potential child abuse or neglect. From those investigations, nearly 30,000 children are found to be victims of child maltreatment, and at any point in time, approximately 20,000 children are in foster care in Michigan. Although African American children represent slightly less than 18 percent of all children in the state, more than half of the children in out-of-home care are African American, or one of every 50 African American children in the state.

African American and Native American children are more likely to be under state supervision, and once there, they generally fare worse than other children. Even though there is no evidence that they are abused or neglected more than other children, children of color are more likely to be pulled into Michigan's child protection system, and to be placed in out-of-home care. Once under state supervision, children of color are less likely to be reunited with their parents and spend more time in out-of-home care. For too many children there is a "slippery slope" leading from children's protective services to juvenile detention—even prison. Overrepresentation in the protective services system helps feed disparities in juvenile justice.

The high stakes for children in foster care are most apparent when youths make the transition from state supervision to independence. More than one-half of the young people leaving foster care have diagnosed mental health disorders, one in five has been homeless at some point, half have not completed high school, and one-third lives below the poverty level.

In the last decade, the share of preschool aged children from racial or ethnic minority groups in Michigan rose from one in five to almost one in three. These shifting demographics necessitate a similar shift in state policies to ensure that all children have the opportunity to grow up in strong families and communities. Pronounced disparities in the state's child welfare system will have repercussions—both human and fiscal—throughout the state and must be addressed.

For too many African American children there is a "slippery slope" leading from children's protective services to juvenile detention—even prison.

How Can We Move Toward Equity?

1. Disparities must be openly discussed and aggressively addressed, with systems established to create accountability for their elimination. Before we can fix overrepresentation in the state's child welfare system, we must be willing to acknowledge it openly, and make a commitment to change.
2. We must build on what we already know, collaborate at the state and local levels, and integrate current effective services and approaches. The solutions cannot be found within a single state department or within state government alone.
3. Michigan should initially target its limited resources on the must vulnerable families, and on communities with the most pronounced overrepresentation of children of color in child welfare.
4. Children of color and their families need better access to culturally proficient, community-based supports and services. The blurred line between poverty and neglect must be addressed. To ensure that children of color are not removed from their homes unnecessarily or disproportionately, it will be important to establish a range of community services that fit the real needs of families.
5. The Department of Human Services and private agency providers must increase their capacity to reduce disparities through culturally proficient policies and practices. Because African American parents are no more likely than others to mistreat their children, and poverty rates are not enough to explain disparities, it follows that somewhere in the child welfare decision-making process families of color are treated differently, resulting in their overrepresentation.
6. We need to reach out more aggressively to communities, mandated reporters, the courts and the public to address issues of race, diversity and accountability. More must be done to educate the public, community leaders, mandated child abuse and neglect reporters and the media.
7. We need to strengthen the range of placement options, with a focus on relative caregivers. Placements with relatives can be beneficial for children and families by helping children maintain a connection to their communities, their cultural and religious heritage and their traditions.
8. Families and youths must be included in all decision-making. Stakeholders affirmed the importance of addressing the culture of child welfare practices to ensure mutual respect, and to guarantee that families and youths have a voice in the decision-making processes that so dramatically affect them.

Recommendations

1. **Identify and Target Funding**
   The Department of Human Services (DHS) should identify all potential state and federal funding sources, using them as flexibly as is permissible under state and federal law to ensure that culturally proficient, home- and community-based services are available to keep children with their birth families whenever safety can be assured.
2. **Maximize Title IV-E Administrative Funding**
   The DHS should examine the current utilization of Title IV-E administrative dollars to ensure that Michigan is drawing down all federal dollars for which it is eligible, and use any additional funds that are identified for initiatives to improve culturally proficient practices by DHS and private child welfare agency staff.
3. **Pursue a Title IV-E Waiver to Expand Services to Families**
   The DHS should seek a federal Title IV-E waiver to expand innovative prevention and family support programs, allowing Michigan to more effectively serve families and avoid unnecessary out-of-home placements.
4. **Review the Impact of all Policies, Programs and Procedures on Families and Children of Color**
   The DHS should contract for an external review of its child welfare policies, procedures, programs and contracts to determine if they disadvantage children, youths and families of color.
5. **Ensure Culturally Proficient Practices**
   The DHS should develop and enforce policies and practices that create a culture of inclusion, embrace diversity, and engage families and communities of color.
6. **Engage Families as Partners**
   The DHS should adopt policies and practices that require DHS and private agency child welfare staff to actively engage families, and document that families are partners at each critical decision point in the child welfare system.
7. **Address Families' Basic Needs**
   The Michigan Legislature should appropriate the resources needed to strengthen community-based services, and expand the number of DHS eligibility and family independence specialists. The DHS should use those resources to enable child welfare workers to partner with community leaders and other DHS staff to address the basic needs of families and prevent unnecessary out-of-home placements.
8. **Focus Resources on the Most Vulnerable Families**
   The state should focus its resources on the most vulnerable families, including teen parents; parents with physical, mental health or substance abuse problems; and relative caregivers.
9. **Build Community Support for Reducing Overrepresentation**
   The DHS should build community support for addressing overrepresentation in Michigan's child welfare system by engaging community partners in efforts to raise public awareness of the impact of disparities.
10. **Monitor the State's Progress in Reducing Overrepresentation**
    The DHS should establish a committee with representation from the public and private sectors for the purposes of monitoring and assessing the state's progress in reducing the overrepresentation of children of color in Michigan's child welfare system, and informing public policy.
11. **Ensure Local Accountability**
    Local DHS offices and private child welfare agencies should establish work groups to implement new culturally proficient policies and practices, and to develop the data, information-gathering and reporting tools needed to track the impact of race and ethnicity.

moving toward better outcomes

The FY 2005 budget for the Department of Human Services included a new mandate to address the ongoing and nationally pervasive problem of the overrepresentation of children of color in Michigan's child welfare system. Specifically, section 548 of P.A. 344 of 2004, the FY 2005 budget for the Michigan Department of Human Services (DHS), included the following[1]:

- DHS was required to convene an advisory committee to study the disproportionate representation of African American and other children of color in Michigan's child welfare and juvenile justice systems.
- Advisory committee members were to be drawn from both the public and private sectors, and were to include legislators and experts in social work, law, psychology and child welfare.
- The advisory committee was required to examine the overrepresentation of children of color at each stage of the process, beginning at the point of entry into the system.
- By December 31, 2005, DHS was required to report its findings and recommendations to the appropriations and standing committees with jurisdiction over human and family services issues.

Embracing the Mandate

The unique legislative mandate to address racial and ethnic disparities in Michigan's child welfare system was initially pushed by child advocates, including Michigan's Children, the state's multi-issue, independent child advocacy organization. Key leaders in both the public and private sectors quickly and enthusiastically embraced the initiative. The Department, under the leadership of Director Marianne Udow, took a leadership role. Senator Bill Hardiman, the Chair of the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee for The Department, became a legislative champion. Legislators from both sides of the aisle endorsed budget language establishing an advisory committee to address overrepresentation. Finally, two major foundations, the Detroit-based Skillman Foundation and the Annie E. Casey Foundation, provided the resources, expertise and leadership needed to move the advisory committee forward.

**Child welfare is defined as abuse, neglect, protective services and juvenile justice systems.*

Key leaders in both the public and private sectors quickly and enthusiastically embraced the mandate to address racial and ethnic disparities…

Broadening the Debate

In the summer of 2004, the Michigan advisory committee on the Overrepresentation of Children of Color in Child Welfare was established. The advisory committee was co-chaired by DHS Director Marianne Udow and Carol Goss, CEO and President of the Skillman Foundation. Also committed to the effort were 41 advisors representing the courts, public and private child and family services providers, the clergy, civil rights leaders, the legislature and other policymakers, police, prosecutors, defense attorneys, universities, juvenile justice leaders, advocates, parents and foster youth.

Under the direction of the co-chairs, the advisory committee began an extensive fact finding and consultative process. Over a one-year period, the advisory committee reached out to gather as much information as possible about the antecedents and outcomes of overrepresentation in Michigan's protective services and juvenile justice systems.

As part of this fact finding and consultive process, the advisory committee opted to:

Analyze available national and state data

The advisory committee examined existing national and state data on the over-representation of children of color in child welfare, including county-level data on disproportionality.

Consult with state and national experts

In addition to relying on the expertise of advisory committee members, the committee consulted with a number of national experts, including:

- Dr. Robert Hill, Senior Researcher with Westat, and a national expert on disproportionality in child welfare.
- Dr. Dorothy E. Roberts, Professor at Northwestern University Law School, and author of *Shattered Bonds: The Color of Child Welfare.*
- Patricia Rideout, Lead Technical Assistant to the Family to Family Initiative, Annie E. Casey Foundation.
- Dr. Carol Spigner, Professor, University of Pennsylvania School of Social Work.
- Susan Taylor Batten, Senior Associate, Annie E. Casey Foundation.

Hold focus groups and public hearings around the state

To ensure a voice for all stakeholders in the state's child welfare system, the advisory committee held 40 focus groups for front-line staff, supervisors, and community stakeholders, as well as three tribal focus groups and two public hearings. A total of 610 people participated, offering more than 2,300 comments and responses. This extensive information gathering and consultative process was a critical component of the advisory committee's work, and reflects the seriousness with which the DHS and the advisory committee approached this effort.

Why It's Important To Address Overrepresentation In Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice

Each year, approximately 160,000 of the state's children—over 6 out of every 100 children—are living in families that are investigated by the DHS for potential child abuse or neglect. From those investigations, nearly 30,000 children are found to be victims of child maltreatment, and at any point in time, approximately 20,000 children are in foster care in Michigan. Although African American children represent slightly less than 18 percent of all children in the state, more than half of the children in out-of-home care in Michigan are African American, or one of every 50 African American children in the state.

Children in Foster Care in Michigan by Race (2003)

	Total Children		Foster Care	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
White	1,832,802	72.1%	7,444	38.8%
African American	445,734	17.5%	10,223	53.2%
American Indian/Alaskan Native	14,770	0.6%	194	1.0%
Asian	54,094	2.1%	78	0.4%
Multi-Racial	64,623	2.5%	547	2.8%
Hispanic	130,836	5.1%	680	3.5%
Other	625	0.0%	39	0.2%
	2,543,484	100.0%	19,205	100.0%

Source: Children's Services Management Info System, CY—093, and Kids Count analysis of 2003 Census population estimates.

For these vulnerable children, the stakes are very high. While placement in foster care is often necessary and even lifesaving, there are negative effects on children. Children who are removed from their homes face enormous changes and challenges. They are often permanently separated from their parents, siblings, friends and neighbors. They may be moved to new homes, communities and schools. These changes create a deep and incalculable sense of loss in children, a loss that is repeated if children are moved from placement to placement, as many are.

The high stakes for children in foster care are most apparent when youths make the transition from state supervision to independence. Interviews with foster care "alumni" have shown that more than one-half have diagnosed mental health disorders, one in five has been homeless at some point, and one-third lives below the poverty level and has no health insurance. Foster children are more likely to have been transient during their school years, with two of every three having experienced seven or more school changes, often affecting their educational progress and achievement. Consequently, nationally only half of the children who have aged out of foster care (54%) have completed high school.[2]

Michigan's child welfare system is integrally linked to its juvenile justice system. In one study, delinquency rates for children between the ages of 10 and 16 years who had been the victims of child abuse or neglect were 47 percent higher than other youths, and delinquency rates rose if children had experienced multiple out-of-home placements.[3] For too many children there is a "slippery slope" leading from children's protective services to juvenile detention or even prison. Overrepresentation in the protective services system helps to feed disparities in juvenile justice.

In every county in Michigan, African American and other children of color are more likely to be entangled in the child welfare system. Children of color are overrepresented in the state's protective services and juvenile justice systems, and are disproportionately removed from their homes and placed in foster care, juvenile detention facilities or adult prisons.

Not only are African American and Native American children more likely to be under state supervision, once there, they generally fare worse than other children. For example, children of color:

- are more likely to be removed from their homes;
- are less likely to be reunited with their parents;
- are more likely to be in multiple out-of-home placements;
- spend more time in care; and
- are more likely to be adjudicated in the juvenile justice system, be placed in a residential treatment facility, or be waived to adult courts.

In the last decade, the share of preschool aged children from racial or ethnic minority groups in Michigan rose from one in five to almost one in three. These shifting demographics necessitate a similar shift in state policies to ensure that all children have the opportunity to grow up in strong families and communities. Pronounced disparities in the state's child welfare system will have repercussions—both human and fiscal—throughout the state and must be addressed.

What We Know About Overrepresentation in Michigan's Child Welfare System

Defining Overrepresentation

The term "overrepresentation" refers to both racial disproportionality and racial disparity.

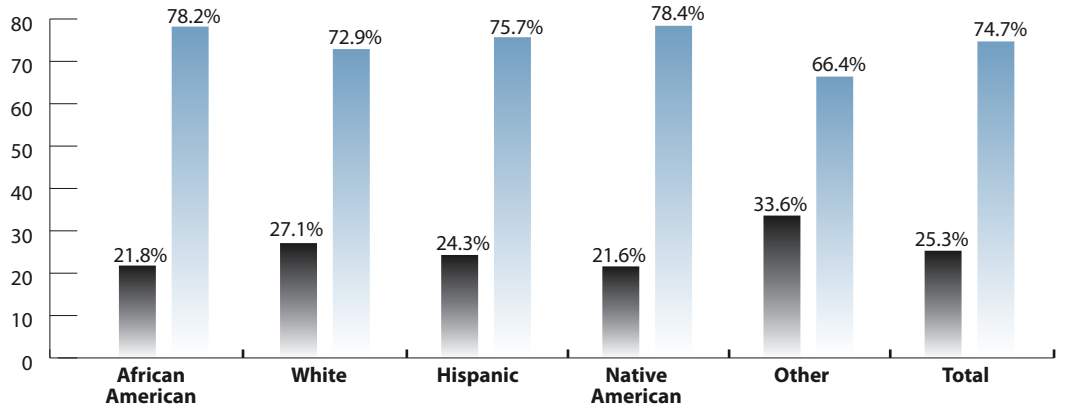
- **Racial disproportionality** is defined as a situation when the percentage of children of color in the child welfare system does not reflect their share of the total population. For example, while African American children make up nearly 18 percent of the total child population in Michigan, they represent one-half of the children in foster care, resulting in a statewide disproportionality rate of nearly 3.
- **Racial disparities** occur when the rate of disproportionality of one racial/ethnic group exceeds that of a comparison group.

The Scope of the Problem: Overrepresentation in Protective Services and Foster Care

Children are overrepresented in child welfare across the United States. In forty-six states, the proportion of African American children in foster care is more than two times the proportion of African American children in the state. One national study ranked states based on their overrepresentation rates, which ranged from 1.56 in Louisiana to 5.48 in Wisconsin. Michigan, with a rate of 2.97 is ranked as a state with a high rate—above the national average of 2.43.[4]

The overrepresentation of children of color can result from differences at various points in the child welfare system, including the entry point (e.g. referrals for suspected child abuse and neglect or delinquency), the investigation and substantiation process, placement decisions, decisions regarding reunification and the termination of parental rights, and the types of services provided or available.

Child Abuse and Neglect by Race / Ethnicity (Michigan 2004)



Entry into the child welfare system

African American children are more likely to be reported to protective services for suspected child abuse and neglect. National studies have shown that African American families are more likely to be reported to child welfare authorities than white families for equally severe injuries to their children.[5] This is true even though all three waves of the national incidence study by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services concluded that there are no racial differences in the incidence of child maltreatment.[6]

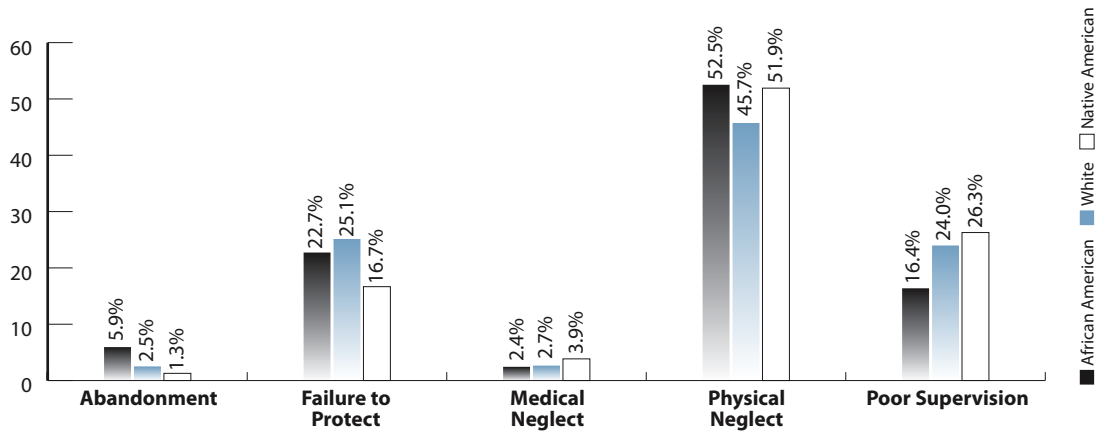
Investigations and substantiations

Although there is no consistent evidence that African American families are more likely to be investigated for suspected child abuse and neglect than other families referred to protective services, their cases are more likely to be substantiated.[7] Of concern is the greater likelihood that African American, Native American and Hispanic children will be drawn into the child protection system because of neglect, much of which could be related to poverty and the inability of families to provide for their children's basic needs, including shelter, heat and food. African American children are more likely to enter the child welfare system because of neglect, and a greater percentage of that neglect is "physical neglect," which is defined as the failure to provide children with the food, clothing or shelter necessary to sustain their life or health.

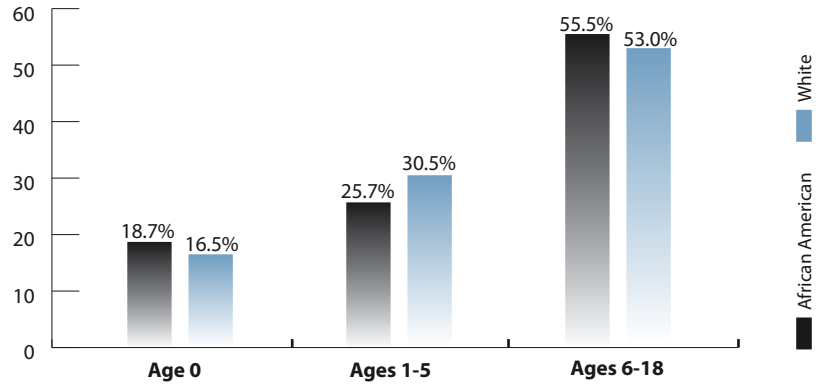
Placement decisions

Racial disparities are most pronounced in decisions to remove children from their homes. Statewide, African American children are nearly three times more likely to be placed in foster care than white children. Disproportionality rates vary by county. In the counties with more than 150 children in foster care, rates range from 8.03 in St. Clair County to 1.69 in Wayne County.

Types of Substantiated Neglect by Race (Michigan 2004)



Age at Placement for Michigan Children Entering Care (2004)

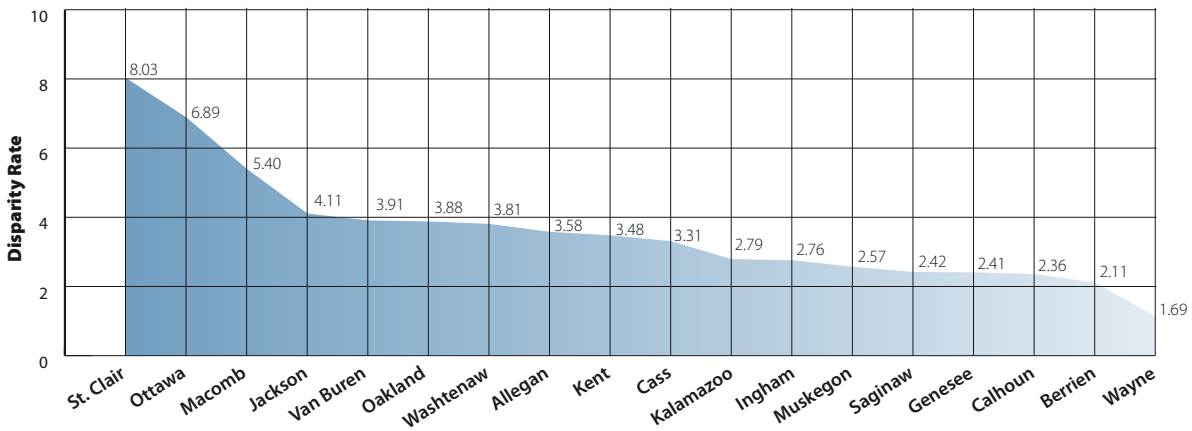


The types of placements for children removed from their homes vary by race. For example, African American children are somewhat more likely than white children to be placed with relatives when first entering state care. Of all Michigan children in kinship care on September 30, 2002, 33.2 percent were white, 59.7 percent were African American, 3.2 percent were Hispanic, and less than 1 percent were Native American or Alaskan Natives.[8]

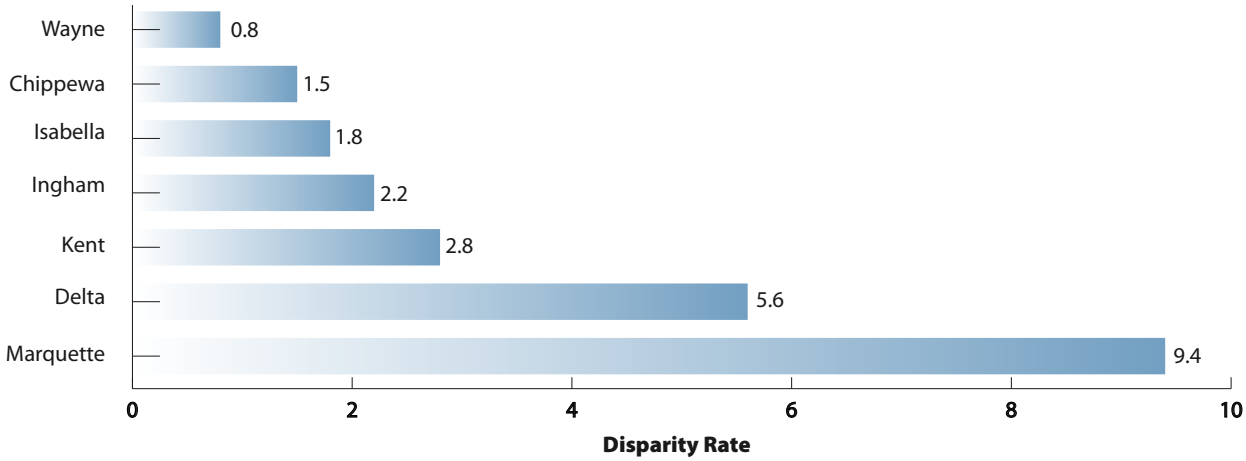
African American infants are more likely than white infants to enter foster care shortly after birth. Nearly 19 percent of all African American children removed from their homes in Michigan are under the age of one, compared to 16.5 percent of white infants. This is significant because children who enter foster care as infants tend to stay in care longer. One study found that the median duration of a first foster care placement in Michigan is 17.7 months for a child placed while under the age of one, compared to 11.6 months for children first removed from the home at one to two years of age, and 11 months for children ages three to five. The same study found that overall, African American children in Michigan were more likely to stay in care longer than white children—13.4 months for the first out-of-home placement for African American children compared to 10.3 months for white children.[9]

There is some evidence that African American newborns are more likely to enter foster care because of decisions made by health professionals to test for drug exposure, as well as to refer positive results to protective services for investigation. One study found that of 715 pregnant women screened for drugs at their first prenatal visit, positive results were obtained at nearly the same rate for African American and white women. After delivery, however, hospitals were 10 times more likely to inform child protection authorities about African American women who tested positive for drugs than white women.[10]

African American Disproportionality Rates (December 2004)



Native American Disproportionality Rates (December 2004)



Native American placements

Native American children are also disproportionately represented in foster care in many Michigan counties. In 1978, Congress passed the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA), a statute that recognizes the unique history and political standing of Native Americans, as well as the problem of the systematic removal of Native American children from their homes. The ICWA applies to foster care placements, the termination of parental rights, pre-adoption placements and adoptions. Congress moved to protect the rights of Native American children and their families in response to not only the high number of children being removed, but also the fact that 85 to 90 percent were being placed outside their tribes and cultures.

The Department of Human Services has formed a partnership with Michigan's 12 federally recognized tribes, the state historic tribes, Native American organizations, the federal government and other community and state organizations to address the unique needs of Native American families.

The partnership has established seven goals for the coming five years:

1. To strengthen and monitor policy, procedure and practice to ensure compliance with the ICWA.
2. To identify funding sources for pilot projects both on and off the Reservations.
3. To improve communications and partnering with Tribes and public and private agencies focused on providing services to the Native American community.
4. To recruit more Native American foster care, kinship care or guardianship homes.
5. To identify the needs of the child welfare and delinquent youth population and determine ways to better meet their unique needs while preserving culture and heritage.
6. To identify and work to remediate family issues such as substance abuse or mental health concerns that are barriers for family stability or reunification.
7. To identify, strengthen and encourage human service educational opportunities for Native American people.

Reunification and termination of parental rights

African American children in out-of-home care tend to stay there longer, and are less likely to be reunified with their parents. Nationwide, less than half (47%) of African American children leave foster care by being reunified with their parents, compared to 56 percent of white children leaving care. African American children in care are more likely than their white peers to leave through adoption or placement with another relative.[11] Because children are less likely to be reunified with their birth families (the quickest route out of foster care), and because of the longer time frame associated with the termination of parental rights and the finalization of adoption, African American children suffer much longer lengths of stay in foster care.

How Children Leave Foster Care: United States

	African American	Native American, Alaska Native	Hispanic*	White
Reunification	47%	56%	59%	56%
Live with relative	13%	8%	9%	11%
Adoption	20%	14%	17%	16%
Guardianship	4%	6%	4%	4%
Emancipation	10%	5%	6%	7%
Other	7%	11%	6%	6%

**Hispanic children can be of any race; all race categories exclude children of Hispanic ethnicity.*

Source: Congressional Research Service

Access to services

There is abundant evidence that children and families of color face more barriers in accessing a variety of services. They are more likely to be uninsured, and even when insured, children from racial and ethnic minorities tend to have less access to health care and receive lower quality care than non-minorities.[12] Persons from racial and ethnic minority groups have less access to mental health services, and often receive poor quality mental health care.[13] Too many children are entering the juvenile and criminal justice systems when they could be more effectively served by the mental health system.[14] Of particular concern is the insufficiency of prevention, family support and family preservation services.

The Scope of the Problem: Overrepresentation in the State's Juvenile Justice and Corrections Systems

As children move further into the child welfare system, overrepresentation based on race and ethnicity continues and even intensifies. Children of color are overrepresented in both the DHS juvenile justice and the adult corrections systems. They are more likely to be arrested and placed in residential treatment or detention facilities supervised by DHS. More than 300 youths are also waived from the juvenile court to the adult corrections system each year.

African American youths represent approximately 18 percent of all Michigan youths ages 10 to 17, but they account for 34 percent of the total number of youths in publicly operated treatment and detention facilities.[15] This overrepresentation in the number of juveniles supervised by the state persists despite evidence that African American youths commit delinquent acts at much the same rate as their white peers.[16]

One of the areas of greatest disparity is in arrests and detentions of African American youths for drug offenses. National and state surveys show that African American youths are less likely than other youths to use many illicit drugs. Nonetheless, they are twice as likely to be arrested for drug offenses, and represent nearly half of all youths incarcerated for drug offenses in the juvenile system.[17]

Youths Waived to MDOC or Placed in DHS Residential Placement By Minority Status, Selected Counties (August 2004)

County	% Youths Ages 10-17 Non-White	% of Waived Youths Non-White	% of DHS Residential Non-White
Berrien	26.7%	65.5%	60.0%
Calhoun	20.4%	5.0%	53.3%
Genesee	30.7%	77.8%	44.6%
Ingham	27.0%	72.7%	57.1%
Jackson	11.9%	50.0%	31.8%
Kalamazoo	20.2%	100.0%	40.0%
Kent	20.7%	70.0%	45.8%
Macomb	8.8%	60.0%	15.2%
Muskegon	22.8%	83.3%	0.0%
Oakland	19.9%	83.3%	50.0%
Ottawa	9.9%	50.0%	15.8%
Saginaw	32.2%	79.3%	64.0%
St. Clair	6.5%	0.0%	13.0%
Van Buren	15.7%	0.0%	23.3%
Washtenaw	24.5%	100.0%	77.8%
Wayne	55.1%	84.3%	81.8%

Population data from 2000 Census, MDOC from CMIS data extract; DHS from DHS Web Intelligence System

Overrepresentation of youths of color is found in Michigan's residential facilities across the state, with some counties placing youths at more than three times the rate that would be expected given their percentage of the total population. A recent study of disproportionate minority contact in Michigan's juvenile justice system found that African American youths ages 10 to 16 are the most overrepresented minority group in the Michigan justice system at a rate of 2 to 1. African Americans experience disproportionate contact at all stages of the juvenile justice system, while Hispanic, Asian and Native American youths experience disproportionality later within the system (typically post-trial).[18]

African American youths were overrepresented at many stages in the juvenile justice system. They were:

- 88 percent more likely than whites to be arrested;
- 50 percent more likely to be referred to juvenile court;
- 97 percent less likely to be placed in a diversion program;
- 2.6 times more likely to be placed in secure detention;
- 65 percent more likely to have a petition filed by the prosecuting attorney;
- 38 percent more likely to be found guilty of a delinquent offense in the Family Division of Circuit Court;
- 54 percent less likely to receive probation; and
- 4.2 times more likely to be incarcerated in a secure correctional facility.

Native American youths were overrepresented at later stages in the juvenile justice pathway. They were:

- 77 percent less likely to receive probation; and
- 80 percent more likely to be confined in a correctional facility.

Conclusions and themes that provide the foundation for recommendations.

a blueprint for change

The causes of overrepresentation are complex, multi-layered, and not completely understood. Among the elements viewed as contributing to overrepresentation are poverty and disproportionate need, policies and practices at various stages of the decision-making process that have a differential impact on children of color, inequities in access to needed and culturally competent services, the failure to support extended families as they care for their children, public confusion about the distinction between poverty and neglect, and the failure to include families and youths in decision-making.

The extensive research, consultation and public input gathered by Michigan's Advisory Committee on the Overrepresentation of Child of Color in Child Welfare resulted in several conclusions and themes that provide the foundation for more specific recommendations.

1. Disparities must be openly discussed and aggressively addressed, with systems established to create accountability for their elimination.

For many of the more than 600 participants in the consultative process, it was a unique or even first opportunity to talk openly about the difficult topic of racial and ethnic equity for the children under the state's jurisdiction. Before we can fix overrepresentation in the state's child welfare system, we must be willing to acknowledge it openly, and make a commitment to change.

It is also important to establish tools to keep the state and communities accountable. We still lack sufficient information to thoroughly understand the roots of overrepresentation, or the data to help the state and communities establish outcome measures and monitor whether practice, policy, and systemic changes are resulting in improvements.

2. We must build on what we already know, collaborate at the state and local levels, and integrate current effective services and approaches.

The problem of overrepresentation in child welfare is not new, and there are a number of initiatives underway in Michigan that can complement the work of the advisory committee and provide a foundation for needed changes. The problem of overrepresentation in child welfare is multi-dimensional and systemic, so the solutions cannot be found within a single state department or within state government alone. There will need to be collaboration at the state and local levels, involving state and local policymakers; public and private frontline workers and supervisors; law enforcement; prosecutors; the courts; community mental health professionals; faith-based organizations; African American, tribal and other community leaders; and parents and youths themselves.

3. Michigan should initially target its limited resources on the most vulnerable families, and on communities with the most pronounced overrepresentation of children of color in child welfare.

While overrepresentation is a statewide problem that will require statewide solutions, it is important to focus limited resources on the communities with the most significant problems. By focusing attention and resources on a smaller number of communities, Michigan can develop better information on the causes of overrepresentation, create local coalitions that can reach out to the minority community, and determine which services and supports would help prevent the entry of children of color into child welfare systems.

4. Children of color and their families need better access to culturally proficient, community-based supports and services.

There are many economic and systemic factors that can influence the likelihood that children of color will enter the child welfare system. For example, while research has shown no direct link between race and the incidence of maltreatment, children living in poverty are at a higher risk of child abuse and neglect, and poverty rates are much higher for children of color in Michigan. One of every three African American children in Michigan lives below the federal poverty line, compared to fewer than one in ten white children.

In a national study, children from families earning less than $15,000 per year were 16 to 44 times more likely to be identified as maltreated. Child neglect, as opposed to child abuse, is most strongly associated with poverty.[19] That low-income children should come to the attention of the child welfare system is not a surprise. Because of their heavier reliance on public assistance and community services, low-income families may be more visible in the community, and more likely to be reported to protective services. However, the blurred line between poverty and neglect must be addressed, in part because it can contribute to the overrepresentation of children of color in the state's child welfare system.

It is well documented that there are inequities in access to services in many communities. Children of color are more likely to be born to mothers who received late or no prenatal care, and are more likely to be born low-weight and subsequently suffer developmental delays or lifelong chronic illnesses. They are more likely to attend under-resourced schools, and face difficulties entering the work force and supporting their families. These inequities help feed disparities in the child welfare system.

To ensure that children of color are not removed from their homes unnecessarily or disproportionately, it will be important to establish a range of community services that fit the real needs of families. These services include basic needs such as housing, heating, emergency assistance, job training, and child care. Families also need equal access to basic health, mental health and substance abuse services. Of special concern in the effort to support African American and Native American families is access to prevention, family preservation and support services, as well as reunification services.

5. The Department of Human Services and private agency child welfare providers must increase their capacity to reduce disparities through culturally proficient policies and practices.

Because repeated research has shown that African American parents are no more likely than others to mistreat their children and poverty rates are not enough to explain disparities, it follows that somewhere in the child welfare decision-making process—referrals, investigations, substantiations, placement decisions and access to services—families of color are treated differently, resulting in their overrepresentation.

Feedback to the advisory committee through focus groups and public testimony made it clear that a range of DHS and partner agencies (courts, prosecutors, private agency providers) policies and practices must be examined and restructured. While additional training on cultural proficiency is critical, it is clear that more than training will be needed to produce the type of cultural shift needed to reduce overrepresentation. The policies and practices of the DHS and private agency providers should be comprehensively assessed, placing the magnifying glass on unintended consequences for, or differential impact on, families and children of color. Included in the review should be the cultural sensitivity of decision-making tools used by workers, the linkages between child welfare programs and income assistance programs, the adequacy and nature of training and supervision, and the diversity of staffing at all levels.

6. We need to reach out more aggressively to communities, mandated reporters, the courts and the public to address issues of race, diversity and accountability.

The major stakeholders involved in the child welfare system recognized the need to ensure that there is a clearer understanding of what constitutes child abuse and neglect, of available community services, and of the need to report suspected maltreatment. Among the strategies suggested were community education, media awareness and expanded training for mandated protective services reporters.

7. We need to strengthen the range of placement options, with a focus on relative caregivers.

Michigan, like most states, is increasingly turning to relatives when children must be placed outside their homes. The number of children in out-of-home care placed with unlicensed relatives increased 75 percent between 1995 and 2004, rising from 3,680 to 6,442. In Wayne County, in just four years (fiscal years 2001-2004), the number of children entering relative placements as initial placements rose over 350 percent, from 203 children to 935.[20]

Because nationwide kinship placements are more common for African American children, policies related to kinship providers can have a disproportionate effect. Placements with relatives or "fictive" kin can be beneficial for children and families. Kinship care can be less traumatic and disruptive for children, helping them maintain more consistent contact with both birth parents and siblings, with whom they are more likely to be placed.[21] Kinship care also helps children maintain connections to their communities, their cultural and religious heritage, and their traditions.

While federal law and state policies now require states to give preference to relatives when children must be removed from their homes, states have considerable flexibility in how they license and support kinship care providers. In 1979, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that states must provide the same Title IV-E foster care payments to relatives caring for children as licensed foster parents, if kin meet state foster care licensing standards. Waivers of licensing standards can only be issued on a case-by-case basis. In Michigan, kinship care providers are generally not licensed, and therefore receive a much lower subsidy to assist in the care of children placed in their homes. Kinship care providers in Michigan receive that portion of the monthly Family Independence Program (FIP) grant that represents the needs of the child only, or $137 per month. In contrast, licensed foster care providers receive approximately $14 daily (for children through age 12), or nearly $400 monthly.

National studies have shown that kinship care providers are generally older, less financially stable, and in poorer health than licensed foster care providers.[22] Many are grandparents living on limited incomes, or even receiving public assistance. The children that they are caring for often have special physical, emotional or behavioral problems that make the job even more difficult. As Michigan continues to move to a child welfare system with a much greater reliance on relative placements, it will be important to develop the types of financial and non-financial supports that will make those placements safe, stable and nurturing.

8. Families and youths must be included in all decision-making.

Stakeholders affirmed the importance of addressing the culture of the DHS and its contracted agencies to ensure respect between consumers and those providing services, and to ensure that families and youths have a voice in the decision-making processes that so dramatically affect them. Since 2000, DHS has been expanding Family to Family, an initiative to reform the child welfare system by encouraging team decision-making with both birth and foster families; active community partnerships; neighborhood-based recruitment, retention, training and support of foster parents; and self evaluation and data-driven decision-making. Family to Family, an initiative that is expected to be statewide in 2007, holds great promise in future efforts to reduce the overrepresentation of children of color in child welfare.

recommendations

1. Identify and Target Funding

The Department of Human Services (DHS) should identify all potential state and federal funding sources, using them as flexibly as is permissible under state and federal law to ensure that culturally proficient, home- and community-based services are available to keep children with their birth families whenever safety can be assured. (See Appendix B)

- Title IV-E (foster care maintenance payments)
- Title IV-B, subparts 1 & 2 (Foster care, Adoption and Safe Families Act)
- Child Care Fund
- Title XX (Social Security Act)
- TANF (Temporary Assistance to Needy Families)
- Medicaid
- State Emergency Funding
- CAPTA (Child Abuse Prevention Treatment Act)
- FCAN (Federal Child Abuse, Neglect)
- CSBG (Community Services Block Grant)
- CSPP (Child Safety and Permanency Plans)
- CPPC (Child Protection Community Partners)
- OJDP (Office of Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention)

TIMELINE: By October 1, 2006

LEAD RESPONSIBILITY: Department of Human Services and other key State Departments

2. Maximize Title IV-E Administrative Funding

The DHS should examine the current utilization of Title IV-E administrative dollars to ensure that Michigan is drawing down all federal funds for which it is eligible, and use any additional funds that are identified for initiatives to improve culturally proficient practices by DHS and private child welfare agency staff.

Title IV-E funds can be used for foster care-related administrative and training costs, including licensing, case planning, management, supervision of foster care placements and other related services. Title IV-E administrative dollars are matched at a favorable rate, with every dollar of state funding leveraging three dollars in federal funding.

If Michigan is able to draw down additional federal Title IV-E administrative dollars, the enhanced funding could be used to train and support staff in culturally proficient practices.

Timeline: **As soon as possible.**

Lead Responsibility: **Department of Human Services and Department of Management and Budget**

3. Pursue a Title IV-E Waiver to Expand Services to Families

The DHS should seek a federal Title IV-E waiver to expand innovative prevention and family support programs, allowing Michigan to more effectively serve families and avoid unnecessary out-of-home placements.

A Title IV-E federal waiver, if approved, would allow DHS to use federal funding currently available only for foster care maintenance payments for innovative services to protect children, strengthen and preserve families, and promote permanency. Possible services which could be part of a federal waiver request include, but are not limited to:

- Assisted guardianship
- Kinship care
- Intensive family services such as Families First and family reunification
- Tribal family services
- Services for caregivers with substance abuse problems
- Services for families with medically fragile children

Timeline: **March 2006**

Lead Responsibility: **Department of Human Services with interdepartmental and external partners.**

4. Review the Impact of All Policies, Programs and Procedures on Children and Families of Color

The DHS should contract for an external review of its child welfare policies, procedures, programs and contracts to determine if they disadvantage children, youths and families of color.

This comprehensive review would help identify the strengths of current programs, policies and procedures in addressing the needs of families of color, as well as clarify specific changes needed to reduce overrepresentation.

Timeline: **Funding secured by June 2006. Process initiated by January 2007.**

Lead Responsibility: **Department of Human Services**

5. Ensure Culturally Proficient Practices

The DHS should develop and enforce policies and practices that create a culture of inclusion, embrace diversity, and engage families and communities of color.

The DHS should ensure that all DHS and private agency child welfare staff deliver services to families in ways that are respectful and supportive of cultural, linguistic, ethnic, religious and spiritual differences. To that end, the training provided to child welfare staff and private agency providers should be redesigned to require a focus on culturally proficient practices by employees at all levels, and to reinforce strength-based, family-centered practices as an alternative to unnecessary out-of-home placements. Birth families, foster families, foster care youths and youths of color should be part of the team to redesign DHS training. In addition, DHS should actively engage schools of social work and criminal justice in Michigan to develop seminars, classes and forums on racial disparities in child welfare.

While training is one tool for addressing disparities, it will be important to also ensure that the priority given culturally proficient services for families is communicated to policymakers, other state partners, DHS management and staff, private child welfare agencies and other community partners.

Timeline: **Initiated by July 2006**

Lead Responsibility: **Department of Human Services with private agency providers.**

6. Engage Families as Partners

The DHS should adopt policies and practices that require DHS and private agency child welfare staff to actively engage families, and document that families are partners at each critical decision point in the child welfare system.

The following should be required through policy and DHS contracts:

- Family involvement in decision-making
  - —during intake, assessment, service planning and delivery
  - —regarding reunification, permanency options, case closure
  - —regarding permanency supports
  - —during and regarding placement(s)
- Efforts to build the capacity of family members to advocate on their own behalf in all decisions related to their involvement in the child welfare system.
- Information for families related to:
  - —DHS's assessment of child safety and family capacity
  - —DHS's commitment to continuity of family, community and tribal relationships
  - —the consequences of DHS interventions
  - —the availability of DHS community-based services and supports
  - —the rights, responsibilities and expectations of parents, children and youths in DHS's care
  - —the rights, responsibilities and expectations of DHS

7. Address the Basic Needs of Families

The Michigan Legislature should appropriate the resources needed to strengthen community-based services, and expand the number of DHS eligibility and family independence specialists (ES/FIS). The DHS should use those resources to enable child welfare workers to partner with community leaders and other DHS staff to address the basic needs of families and prevent unnecessary out-of-home placements.

Given the often indistinct line between poverty and physical neglect, DHS ES/FIS staff funded through the TANF program should be included as part of the child welfare team. All ES/FIS staff serving families with open child welfare cases should be included in all Team Decision Making (TDM) meetings. Given already high caseloads for ES/FIS staff, additional staffing would be required.

In addition, policies should be developed to ensure that unnecessary removals due to economic barriers are reduced, and child welfare staff should have better access to concrete, flexible and emergency needs funds and services that could help keep families intact.

Timeline: **Funding request for FY 2008**

Lead Responsibility: **Department of Human Services and Michigan Legislature**

8. Focus Resources on the Most Vulnerable Families

The state should focus its resources on the most vulnerable families, including teen parents; parents with physical, mental health or substance abuse problems; and relative caregivers.

Expanded services for the state's most vulnerable families should be a priority. The vulnerable populations include but are not limited to:

- Teen fathers and mothers
- Relative caregivers, including grandparents
- Fictive kin and informal caregivers
- Parents of children with emotional and/or medical needs
- Physically, mentally and developmentally challenged parents
- Foster children who become parents while still in care
- Parents with substance abuse problems

Timeline: **Ongoing**

Lead Responsibility: **Department of Human Services in partnership with private agency providers.**

9. Build Community Support for Reducing Overrepresentation

The DHS should build community support for addressing overrepresentation in Michigan's child welfare system by engaging community partners in efforts to raise public awareness of the impact of disparities.

The DHS should work with community partners to launch an information and publicity campaign that can help build awareness of the impact of racial and ethnic disparities in Michigan's child welfare system, and expand public support for community-based alternatives to out-of-home placements. Special emphasis should be given to communicating with the courts, mandated child abuse and neglect reporters, communities of faith, educational systems, and business and neighborhood leaders. External funding should be sought to fund the campaign.

Timeline: **June 2006**

Lead Responsibility: **Department of Human Services with key community partners**

10. Monitor the State's Progress in Reducing Overrepresentation

The DHS should establish a committee with representation from the public and private sectors for the purposes of monitoring and assessing the state's progress in reducing the overrepresentation of children of color in Michigan's child welfare system, and informing public policy.

The committee should meet at least twice annually. To ensure autonomy and continuity, funding should be sought to hire staff external to the DHS. The members of the committee should be nominated by the co-chairs of the current Advisory Committee on the Overrepresentation of Children of Color in Child Welfare. The committee should include representatives from birth and foster families, youths, tribes, DHS staff, private agency providers, faith communities, law enforcement, courts, universities, community leaders, education, the Governor's Children's Cabinet, foundations and others, and should be geographically diverse.

The committee, where appropriate, should provide advice to the DHS, the Michigan Legislature and others on related policies, budgets, program design and contracts. The committee should be provided the data, information and other tools needed to assess progress in reducing overrepresentation, including a means for evaluating racial inequities in decision-making, and documenting that families have been included in decisions related to child removal, placement changes, and case and permanency plans.

Timeline: **To convene no later than September 2006**

Lead Responsibility: **Department of Human Services**

11. Ensure Local Accountability

Local DHS offices and private agencies should establish work groups to implement new culturally proficient policies and practices, and to develop the data, information-gathering and reporting tools needed to track the impact of race and ethnicity in Michigan's child welfare system.

The DHS should establish a work group that includes lead program and field staff, and has as its goal the following:

- Initiating a priority service request for the Department of Information Technology (DIT) for the data and tools necessary to assess progress on reducing disparities in child welfare.
- Educating DHS and private agency child welfare staff about the factors leading to the unnecessary removal of African American and Native American children from their families; safe alternatives to removal; and the value of prevention, early intervention and family support services.
- Using data to establish baselines, assess progress and determine customer satisfaction.

Timeline: **Data request to DIT by June 2006. Customer satisfaction tool by September 2006. Completed by April 2007.**

Lead Responsibility: **Department of Human Services with private child welfare agencies.**

appendix A

Budget Boilerplate Related to Overrepresentation Task Force

Public Act No. 147 of 2005, Sec. 548.

(1) The director of the department shall convene a task force to study the disproportionate representation of African-American and other children of color in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems of this state. The department shall collaborate with private sector entities to develop a methodology for the task force to follow in conducting the study and to seek public or private funding for the task force. At a minimum, the task force shall examine the level of involvement of African-American and other children of color at each stage in the systems, including the points of entry and each point at which a treatment decision is made and the outcomes for children exiting the systems.

(2) The task force convened under subsection (1) shall consist of experts in social work, law, child welfare, psychology, or related fields, and shall be appointed as follows:

(a) Two members appointed by the senate majority leader.

(b) Two members appointed by the speaker of the house.

(c) Three members appointed by the governor, including a representative of the department.

(3) The task force created under subsection (1) shall report to the department on the results of the study required by subsection (1) and make administrative and legislative recommendations for appropriate program services to reduce existing disparities and bias in the systems and improve the long-term outcomes for children of color who are served by the systems.

(4) By December 31, 2005, the department shall report the results of the study received under subsection (3) to the senate and house of representatives appropriations subcommittees on the family independence agency, the senate and house of representatives standing committees with jurisdiction over families and human services issues, the senate and house fiscal agencies and policy offices, and the state budget office.

appendix B

DHS Child Welfare Funding Sources

Title IV B: Foster Care and Adoption Assistance
Provides for foster care maintenance payments, adoption assistance payments, related foster care and adoption administrative and training expenditures, and independent living services.

Title IV B, sub part 1: Child Welfare Services
Establishes, extends and strengthens child welfare services.

Title IV B, sub part 2: Promoting Safe and Stable Families
Enables states to develop, expand, and operate coordinated programs of community-based family support services, family preservation services, time-limited family reunification services, and adoption promotion and support services.

CAPTA (Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act)
Provides federal funding to states in support of prevention, assessment, investigation, prosecution, and treatment activities and also provides grants to public agencies and nonprofit organizations for demonstration programs and projects.

TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families)
Provides assistance and work opportunities to needy families by granting states the federal funds and wide flexibility to develop and implement their own welfare programs.

FCAN (Federal Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention grants)
Assists states in improving the child protective services system. Originally authorized under CAPTA.

Child Care Fund
Reimburses counties for the state's share of the cost of care and treatment of delinquent, neglected and abused children.

Title XX: Social Services Block Grant
Funds states, territories, and insular areas for the provision of social services directed toward achieving economic self-sufficiency; preventing or remedying neglect, abuse, or the exploitation of children and adults; preventing or reducing inappropriate institutionalization; and securing referral for institutional care, where appropriate.

State Emergency Funds
Provides state funds to prevent serious harm to individuals and families by helping them obtain safe, decent and affordable shelter and other essentials when they face an emergency due to factors or conditions beyond their control.

OJJDP (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention)
Provides funding to states, territories, localities, and private organizations, including faith-based institutions, through formula and block grants, and discretionary grants.

CPCP (Child Protection/Community Partners)
Provides state funding for prevention services, with a target population of children and families referred to CPS within the previous 18 months.

CSBG (Community Services Block Grant)
Provides states, and federal- and state-recognized Native American tribes, with funds to provide a range of services to address the needs of low income individuals, and to ameliorate the causes and conditions of poverty.

footnotes

[1] The budget boilerplate language is available in Appendix A on page 23.

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[12] "Closing the Gap: Addressing Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities Among Michigan's Children," Michigan's Children (October 2004).

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[18] Post. L., Hagstrom, J., Heraux, C., Meyer, E., and Tanaka, K. March 17, 2005. "Measuring Disproportionate Minority Contact in the Juvenile Justice System: An Examination of the Michigan Relative Rate Index". University Outreach & Engagement, Michigan State University.

[19] Rodenborg, N. 2004. "Services to African American Children in Poverty: Institutional Discrimination in Child Welfare?" Journal of Poverty. Vol. 8, No. 3.

[20] Initial Entries for Wayne County, FY 2006 Executive Budget Children's Services Programs, prepared by the Department of Human Services for presentation to the Senate Appropriations Human Services Subcommittee (March 2005).

[21] Geen, R. Winter 2004. "The Evolution of Kinship Care Policy and Practice." Children, Families, and Foster Care, The Future of Children, Vol. 14 - No. 1.

[22] Geen R. Winter 2004.

The blueprint and recommendations detailed in this report can lead to better outcomes for children in the child welfare system, especially children of color.

The time has come for bold action and innovative leadership to ensure that all children have a more equitable and just future. We need the support of all of our partners and colleagues to speak up and work together to make the changes that will lead to an improved, culturally proficient child welfare system. It is hoped that the recommendations in this report are accepted as a statement of our collective commitment to Michigan's most vulnerable families and children.

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