

The Commission on Disproportionality in Youth Services, which was established by the Indiana General Assembly in 2007, recently began work on developing an implementation plan to evaluate and address disproportionate representation of youth of color in child caring systems in Indiana. The Child Welfare System is an area that the commissioners have been specifically charged to address, in addition to three other areas, juvenile justice, education and mental health.

Why? Disproportionality is referred to as the situation where a racial or ethnic group is represented within a human service system (i.e. child welfare, juvenile justice, etc.) at a rate that is not proportionate to their representation in the general population. This can lead to either over-representation or under-representation. National research shows that Black children are overrepresented at every point in child welfare – from reports and investigations to termination of parental rights. This is the situation in spite of other research which states that Black children are no more likely to be abused or neglected - however, they are much more likely to be placed in out-of-home care while White children receive services in their own homes.

Child welfare is designed to protect children and provide the services that will help vulnerable children reach their full potential. Although progress is being made in child welfare in general, children of color lag behind their counterparts in many areas. The commission is set up to evaluate disproportionality and disparities in Indiana. Preliminary Indiana data shows:

- Indiana is one of 16 states with extreme disproportionality of Black children in child welfare<sup>1</sup>.
- Black youth are free for adoption but linger in foster care. While only 10% of the State child population, Black youth make up 37% of those waiting to be adopted<sup>2</sup>.
- Black, Native American and Latino youth are being underserved in services such as counseling and/or psychotherapy and are overrepresented in Juvenile Justice and in special education programs<sup>3</sup>.

To understand these and other factors, the Commission is taking a thorough look at the Child Welfare data, by race and ethnicity, to determine the extent of the situation. In addition, laws, policies and practices, funding, cultural competency training and other aspects of child welfare are being analyzed to make appropriate recommendations that will insure that every child in Indiana has the best opportunity to thrive.

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<sup>1</sup> Hill, R. (2004). Overrepresentation of children of color in foster care in 2000. *Race Matters Consortium*.

<sup>2</sup> Department of Child Services, Indiana. (2006). End of FY 2005 Report.

<sup>3</sup> National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect. (1996). *National study of the incidence and severity of child abuse and neglect*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.