

MARCH 9, 2022

# **Initial Analysis and Key Questions: Racial Disproportionalities and Disparities in California's Child Welfare System**

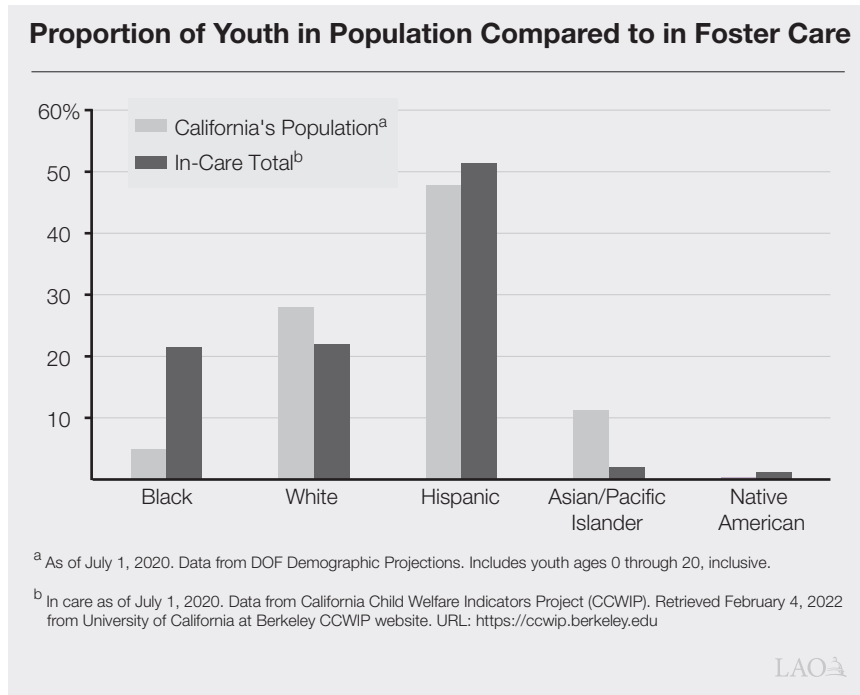
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PRESENTED TO: Assembly Budget Subcommittee No. 1  
On Health and Human Services  
Hon. Joaquin Arambula, Chair



LEGISLATIVE ANALYST'S OFFICE

# Foster Youth Are Disproportionately Low Income, Black, and Native American



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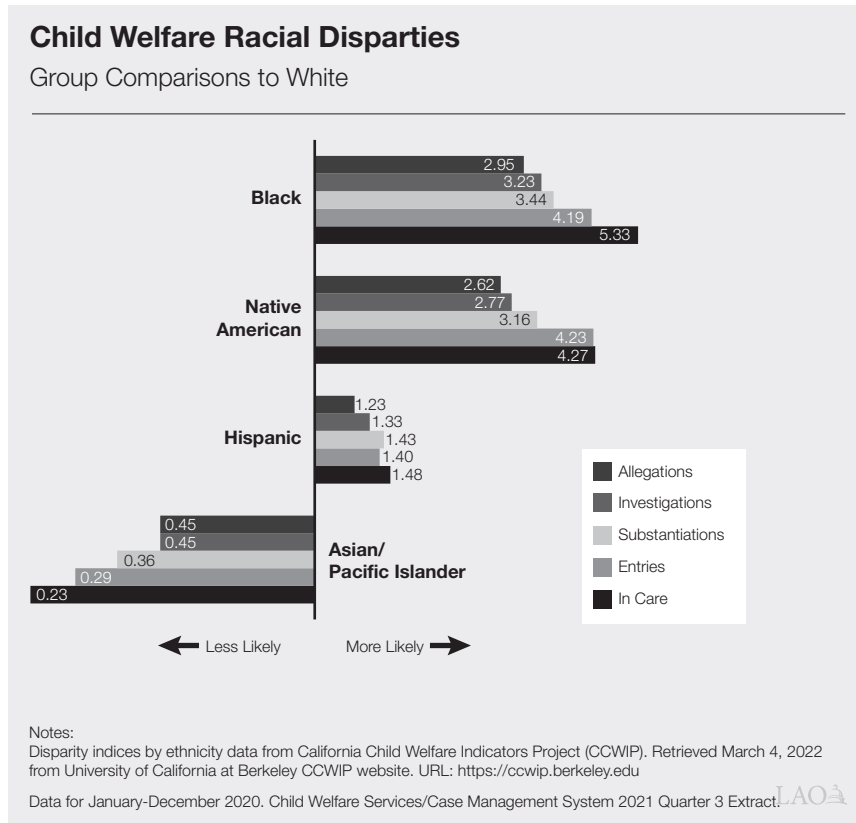
- The proportions of Black and Native American youth in foster care are around four times larger than the proportions of Black and Native American youth in California overall. The figure on the previous page displays aggregated state-level data; disproportionalities differ across counties.
- In addition, recent research<sup>a</sup> on cumulative child welfare involvement of California's 1999 birth cohort found nearly one in two Black and Native American children experienced some level of child welfare involvement by the time they turned 18 (compared to around 29 percent of Hispanic children, 22 percent of White children, and 13 percent of Asian/Pacific Islander children).
- This same research also found that California children with public insurance (Medi-Cal) experienced child welfare involvement at more than twice the rate of those with private insurance.

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<sup>a</sup> Putnam-Hornstein, Emily et al. "Cumulative Rates of Child Protection Involvement and Terminations of Parental Rights in a California Birth Cohort, 1999–2017." *American Journal of Public Health*, vol. 111, no. 6, June 2021, pp. 1157-1163. <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2021.306214>.



# Disproportionalities Persist Throughout System



- Racial disproportionalities and disparities are present within initial allegations and persist at all levels of the system—becoming the most pronounced for youth in care.



# Policy Areas and Key Questions for Consideration

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Below, we provide some questions to consider for the four main policy areas we plan to explore further through our continued research and analysis in this area. Ultimately, we will need to weigh the trade-offs and the potential budgetary costs and savings of any policy options.

## Mandated Reporting

- The vast majority of maltreatment allegations come from mandated reporters, who are individuals working in certain professions who have regular contact with children and families. Mandated reporters are specified in statute, including teachers, medical professionals, law enforcement, child care workers, therapists and counselors, social workers, and more.
- **Key Questions:**
  - Do mandated reporters receive sufficient training, in particular implicit bias training?
  - Should all mandated reports go directly to the child welfare agency? Could some reports instead be referred to services or some other type of intervention—based on a mandated reporter’s professional judgment, experience, and specific state guidance and training?
  - How can the state ensure child safety is prioritized while reforming mandated reporting?

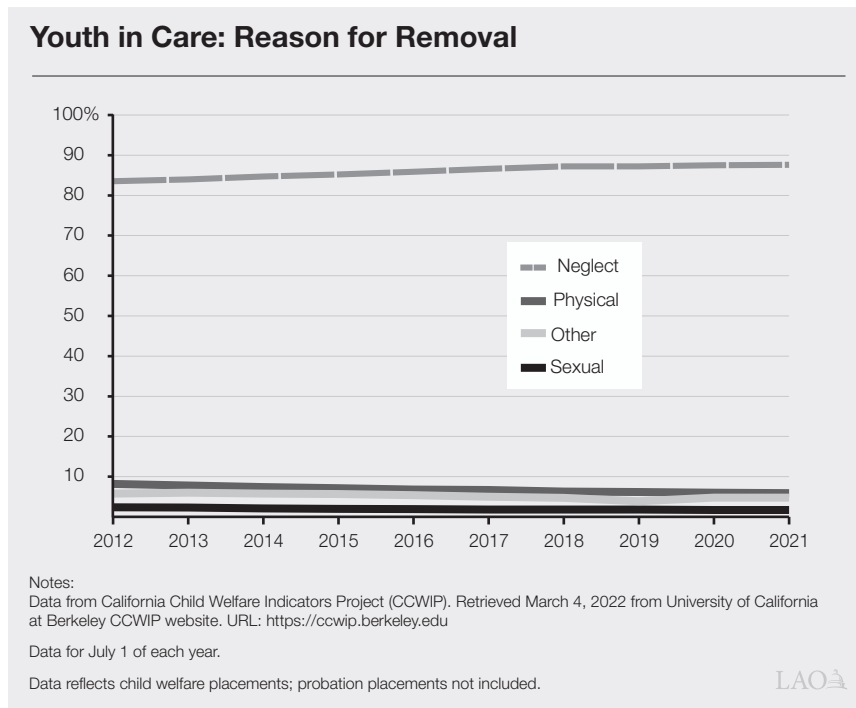


# Policy Areas and Key Questions for Consideration

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## Removals Due to Neglect: Definition and Data

- The reason cited for most removals is neglect, rather than physical or sexual abuse. As shown in the figure, over the past decade, more than 80 percent of youth in care at any time were removed due to neglect.



- However, data about the actual harm or risk to the child that underlies neglect allegations is not easily quantifiable.
- **Key Questions:**
  - Are there statutory changes or clarifications that should be made to the definition of neglect?
  - What data should the state collect to better understand the causes of neglect? Could this data inform future policy changes?



# Policy Areas and Key Questions for Consideration

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## Prevention Services

- Currently, most state and federal funding sources for programs and supports for parents/caregivers to help strengthen the family and remedy the underlying causes of maltreatment generally are linked to the child welfare system. (While recent federal legislation provides some expanded opportunities for states to claim federal dollars for prevention activities, funding is still somewhat constrained and California is in the very early stages of implementation.)
- **Key Questions:**
  - What supports could the Legislature consider to target disproportionately impacted communities *prior* to child welfare system involvement?

## Linking Vulnerable Families to Economic Supports

- Research finds that poverty and economic stressors create conditions in which child maltreatment is more likely to occur. In addition, the Legislature recently has shown some interest in providing income supports for child welfare involved families to help alleviate these economic stressors.
- Research also has found a relationship between increased state spending on public benefit programs and decreased child maltreatment. As such, considering overall spending on poverty alleviation and prevention could be a component of reducing child maltreatment.
- **Key Questions:**
  - How can the Legislature help ensure poverty alleviation programs and child welfare supports are complementary?
  - Which programs are most likely to contribute to a reduction in child maltreatment, and what are the budgetary implications?

