

Center for California Studies

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FACULTY RESEARCH FELLOWS PROGRAM

Racial disparities in child welfare systems: Does blind-removal hold promise for helping California address overrepresentation of certain groups of children among child removal cases?

Request for proposals

The Center for California Studies at Sac State has received a grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to support policy research on topics related to reducing income and wealth inequality. The following RFP is part of a series intended to inform policy solutions to income and wealth inequality; the series is partially funded through the grant from the Gates Foundation.

Project Title:

Racial disparities in child welfare systems: Does blind-removal hold promise for helping California address overrepresentation of certain groups of children among child removal cases?

Background

In recent years, policy makers in California and other parts of the country have focused on racial disparities in the effects of state and local policies and programs. Lawmakers' focus on the discriminatory effects of criminal justice policies is well-known, but other issue areas have also featured in the examination of racial disparities, including health, education, and human services programs. As policy-makers work to identify the root cause of these disparities, they have renewed a focus on the role of implicit bias, or the concept that people hold negative nonconscious feelings and others that are different from their conscious attitudes.ⁱ The 2003 publication of "Unequal Treatment: Confronting Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Health Care" by the Institute of Medicine, included findings on the role of bias in unequal treatment, with evidence that "stereotyping, biases and uncertainty on the part of healthcare providers can all contribute to unequal treatment."ⁱⁱ

The overrepresentation of children of color, most significantly African American, Latinx, and Native American children, within child welfare systems has been documented for decades. While overrepresentation of especially African-American children instances of child abuse allegations

ⁱ Tori DeAngelia, Tori. "How does implicit bias by physicians affect patients' health care?" *American Psychological Association*, March 2019, Vol 50, No. 3.

ⁱⁱ Brian D. Smedley, Adrienne Y. Stith and Alan R. Nelson, editors. *Unequal Treatment: Confronting Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Health Care*. National Academic Press: Washington, D.C. 2003, 1

is alarming,ⁱⁱⁱ policy-makers have focused especially on the issue of overrepresentation of African-American and other children of color among instances where a child is removed from the care of their family and placed into the foster care system. The forced separation of children from their parents is a source of significant life-long trauma and is associated with a higher risk of negative economic, social and health-related outcomes. Thus, the focus on the overrepresentation of children of color among cases of child removal is of particular interest to policy makers. As expressed by one researcher, “Even in cases where some form of intervention is necessary to ensure child safety, the negative outcomes associated with foster care can serve to further disadvantage Black youth who must navigate a society characterized by systemic inequality and structural racism.”^{iv} Thus, foster care as an intervention is of more consequence as compared to other forms of interventions (e.g., TANF) in which children of color may be overrepresented, and therefore overrepresentation of children of color and especially Black families in the foster care system is worthy of the attention of policy makers.

Two recent examples of local attempts to address the role of implicit bias in disproportionality in child removal instances are in New York and Los Angeles. Nassau County, New York, was awarded a Disproportionate Minority Representation Grant from the state’s Office of Family Services. The county used the funds to implement a blind removal process in which all demographic and neighborhood information are removed from the decision-making process about whether to remove a child from their family home. The results of the pilot project resulted in a dramatic reduction in removals among black families. Of note, in 2010, black children made up 55.5 percent of the cases of child removal in Nassau County. Five years later their percentage had dropped to 29 percent.^v The success of this pilot led to adoption at a state-wide level.^{vi} In Los Angeles County, African-American children make up 7% of all children in the county, yet represent 25% of children removed from their homes. Last year, Los Angeles County supervisors voted in favor of testing Nassau County’s “blind removal” program at a local Department of Children and Family Services office.^{vii}^{viii}

Some state policy-makers in California have attempted to address the racial disparities among child removal instances through proposed legislation. AB 656 (Carrillo and McCarty) was

ⁱⁱⁱ Putnam-Hornstein, “Racial Disproportionality in the Child Welfare System: Disproportionate Need or Systemic Bias,” Powerpoint presentation presented at the John Burton Foundation Child Welfare Policy Briefing, November 20, 2008, Fresno, California. : [Microsoft PowerPoint - Racial Disparity Presentation jbf.ppt \(berkeley.edu\)](#)

^{iv} Alan Dettlaff and Reiko Boyd “Racial Disproportionality and Disparities in the Child Welfare System: Why Do they Exist, and What can Be Done to Address Them?” *Annals of the American Academy*, 2020-11, Vol.692 (1), p.253-274.

^v Jessica Pryce, “The Case for Race-Blind Foster Care Removal Decisions.” *Imprint News* Opinion, 1/13/2020, [The Case for Race-Blind Foster Care Removal Decisions \(imprintnews.org\)](#)

^{vi} Casey Family Programs, “Strategy Brief: Transforming Child Welfare Systems,” April 8, 2021. [Blind Removals Process – Casey Family Programs](#)

^{vii} Our Weekly LA, “Supervisors Vote to Try Child Welfare ‘Blind Removal’ Project,” August 5, 2021. [Supervisors vote to try child welfare ‘Blind Removal’ project - Our Weekly](#)

^{viii} Jaclyn Cosgrove, “Why are Black Children Removed from Homes at High Rate: L.A. to study Blind Removal Pilot.” *Los Angeles Times*, July 4, 2021. [L.A. to study why Black kids are removed from homes at high rate - Los Angeles Times \(latimes.com\)](#)

introduced last year and would have required the state to develop a 3-year pilot program, utilizing a blind removal process, to address racial disparities in the child welfare system. It did not progress to the committee hearing stage and is no longer active. ix Another bill by the same author, AB 2665 (Carillo), would create a similar pilot program and establish a working group to guide the development and evaluation of the pilot. This bill is currently under consideration by the California State Assembly. x The issue of racial disparities was also recently discussed by the Assembly Budget Subcommittee on Education. xi

Purpose of Research

This research is intended to aid state policymakers in addressing overall inequities in the child removal process. The research should summarize and synthesize existing research and make recommendations. The research questions to answer are:

- Is there racial/ethnic disproportionality among child removal decisions? To what extent and for which racial/ethnic groups? Are there geographic differences within California?
- Where have blind removal policies (where a decision to remove a child from their family is made without information on the child's race/ethnicity and zip code) been tested or implemented in the country? What have the results of those policies? Did they result in less disproportionality (i.e., for African-American, Latinx, and Native American children, who tend to be overrepresented among child removal cases)? What evidence is there of short-and long-term impacts on the children affected and the systems serving them? What do we know about successes, failures and lessons learned from these programs?
- If there are racial/ethnic inequities in child removal cases, could blind removal policies be a potential solution for California? If so, how should they be implemented?

Deliverables and Timelines

1. Participate in a planning call with legislative requesters and Center for California Studies staff, prior to beginning the project.
2. Provide preliminary drafts of the following to the Center for California Studies by August 15: a report and a two-page summary of findings and recommendations
3. Respond to any comments or questions about the draft and provide a final report and two-page summary to the Center for California Studies by September 30.
4. If requested, present research in Sacramento by the end of 2022, on a date mutually agreeable to both the researchers and the Faculty Research Fellows Program award recipient. (The Center can cover travel costs for faculty doing the presentation.)

^{ix} California Legislative Bill Search, [leginfo.legislature.ca.gov](https://leginfo.ca.gov/); [Bill Text - AB-656 Child welfare system: racial disparities. \(ca.gov\)](#)

^x California Legislative Bill Search, [leginfo.legislature.ca.gov](https://leginfo.ca.gov/); [Bill Text - AB-2665 Child welfare system: racial disparities. \(ca.gov\)](#)

^{xi} Legislative Analyst's Office, "Initial Analysis and Key Questions: Racial Disproportionalities and Disparities in California's Child Welfare System," Presented to Assembly Budget Subcommittee No. 1 On Health and Human Services Hon. Joaquin Arambula, Chair, March 9, 2022. [Initial Analysis and Key Questions: Racial Disproportionalities and Disparities in California's Child Welfare System](#)

Budget

\$20,000 This amount includes any indirect costs charged by the recipient's institution, as well as travel costs and all other costs (except for travel costs related to the presentation, which will be covered by the Center for California Studies).

Who May Apply

Faculty and staff at any California State University campus may submit proposals. Preference is given to principal investigators who are full-time faculty or staff, but part-time faculty may also apply. Part-time faculty and CSU students may also be included as secondary investigators and assistants.

How to Apply

Proposals are due May 27, 2022. Submit proposal by email (in a single Word document or PDF file) to Leonor Ehling, Executive Director, Center for California Studies, at leonor.ehling@csus.edu. Include "FRPR Gates proposal – Blind removal" in the subject line. Notification of awards will occur by June 3, 2022.

Proposal should be no longer than five single spaced pages (excluding a list of cited works, curriculum vitae, and evidence of approval from applicant's campus office of research). The proposal should include the following:

1. An introductory statement that demonstrates an understanding of the subject matter.
2. Explanation of the research design including the methods of analysis and source of data, if applicable.
3. A timeline for completing the project in the allotted period.
4. A proposed budget including the portion to be devoted to faculty time and travel to Sacramento for presentation of the research.
5. Description of the researcher's (s') qualifications for performing the study.
6. Telephone numbers and e-mail addresses for the principal researcher (s).
7. A resume or vitae for each person funded under the project.
8. Approval by the principle investigator's campus office of research and sponsored programs, in conformance with Chancellor's Office Executive Order Number 890 [EO 890 - Administration of Grants and Contracts in Support of Sponsored Programs \(csusm.edu\)](http://www.csus.edu/center/center-california-studies/EO_890_-_Administration_of_Grants_and_Contracts_in_Support_of_Sponsored_Programs_(csusm.edu))

Questions about this RFP may be directed to:

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