

Children's Rights

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<https://www.childrensrights.org/racism-in-child-welfare-and-juvenile-justice-systems/>

Policy Issue Resources

Systemic racism has destroyed the lives of Black people in the United States for generations. The work we do every day must move us toward rebuilding the social, economic, commercial, and government policies and practices that have perpetuated racial inequality and injustice in our country.

Childrens Rights has long recognized and witnessed the damage that racism has done to Black children, and their families, at the hands of child welfare and juvenile justice systems that purportedly exist to protect and care for them.

A [seminal 2017 study](#) found that a shocking 53% of Black children in the U.S. will be investigated as potential victims of child abuse by age 18, as compared to 37% of all children. Once in the system, Black children also are more likely to languish in foster care, less likely to be reunified with their families, more likely to be placed in group care, age out in greater numbers, and become involved in the criminal legal system.

The pipeline that feeds youth in foster care and juvenile justice facilities into the adult criminal legal system has an especially harmful impact. As of [2015](#), Black youth were five times as likely as white youth to be detained or committed to juvenile justice facilities. In 2019, The Kansas City Star surveyed nearly 6,000 incarcerated people in 12 states. [1 in 4](#) responded that they had been in foster care.

Black children are separated from their families and placed in foster care at a far higher rate than white children, often repeatedly. In [2020](#), Black children accounted for 23% of the children in foster care, although they make up only 14% of the countrys children age 18 or younger. They are also more likely to be placed in a group home where they face additional trauma and abuse. In a devastating tragedy earlier this year, staff members restrained and killed a 16-year old Black child, [Cornelius Frederick](#), while being held in a for-profit foster care group home facility. Before he passed out from the restraint hold, Cornelius is reported to have yelled I cant breathe.

Have you previously been subjected to unfair and oppressive government tactics involving the surveillance, investigation and unnecessary removal of a Black child leading to the separation of a Black family? If so, [we want to hear your story](#).

Fighting Institutional Racism at the Front End of Child Welfare Systems: A Call to Action to End the Unjust, Unnecessary, and Disproportionate Removal of Black Children from their Families

Childrens Rights released a comprehensive report examining the history of institutional racism in child welfare systems and calling for steps to bring about meaningful and lasting change. [Fighting Institutional Racism at the Front End of Child Welfare Systems](#) provides nine strategies to stop the unjust, unnecessary, and disproportionate surveillance and removal of Black children from their families.

[Read more about the report on our blog](#)

In [Tennessee](#), Childrens Rights brought claims of racial discrimination against Black children in foster care and won specific reforms, including ensuring a pool of foster families that represents the racial makeup of children in the system, options for subsidized guardianship to keep extended families together, and tracking of outcomes by race.

In Atlanta, Childrens Rights won critical reforms for a foster care system that serves almost entirely (98%) Black children, including faster reunification, mandated health check-ups, improvement in high school graduation rates, and the closing of dangerous emergency shelters.

In Connecticut, we worked with the state to identify opportunities to rapidly reunify Black children in foster care with their families and helped demonstrate that Black children living predominantly with relatives while in foster care were measurably more likely to be successfully reunited within 12 months.

In 2020, Childrens Rights was awarded a grant to study and recommend new policies, funding opportunities, legislative reforms, and possible legal strategies for ending practices in the nations child abuse and neglect surveillance, investigation, and removal systems that reinforce structural racism, criminalize poverty and tear apart families of color. The same grant will fund a separate project to encourage states to rethink and end the continued inappropriate placement of children in congregate care in the wake of long known harms to youth who are unnecessarily institutionalized, the COVID-19 public health crisis, and the national movement to end systemic racism in government systems.

In 2021, Childrens Rights released an advocacy paper and call to action, [Fighting Institutional Racism at the Front End of Child Welfare Systems](#), which explores the racism inherent in child welfare systems and identifies actions to end inappropriate government intervention in the lives of Black children and families.

Dismantling structural racism in child-serving systems is a priority for Childrens Rights. We will apply a racial equity lens in all we do and work in partnership and solidarity with organizations throughout the country that are fighting on behalf of families of color and

advancing racial equity.

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