

Human Rights Watch

Children's Rights

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/05/20/new-york-committee-investigate-states-child-welfare-system>

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Impacted Parents, Advocates Speak on Racial Disparities, Harm to Black Families

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A New York State committee voted today to investigate racial disparities in the states child welfare system. The investigation could help document troubling and persistent inequities and recommend measures to remedy them.

A group of impacted parents and advocates spoke to the [New York Advisory Committee](#) to the [US Commission on Civil Rights](#) and described how Black, Indigenous, and other people of color, especially those living in poverty, are disproportionately investigated for allegations of maltreatment by the states child welfare system, causing serious harm, including at times the forcible separation of children from their families. Joyce McMillan, an impacted parent and founder of [JMacForFamilies](#), spoke to the committee about the systemic breaking of family bonds and loss of culture, and loss of family tradition caused by forcible family separation.

At the meeting, I submitted a public comment on behalf of Human Rights Watch in support of the proposal. I described our research over the last eight months on the child welfare system, both nationally and in New York.

Our research has involved interviews with dozens of directly impacted caregivers, along with advocates and other experts. It also includes extensive data analysis and reviews of secondary sources. We identified serious human rights concerns in the child welfare system.

[Nearly every three minutes](#), a child in New York State experiences a child welfare investigation. Our research shows investigations can be highly stressful and even traumatic for children, involving disruptions from school, intrusive questioning, and even strip searches to check for signs of abuse. [Seventy percent](#) of those investigated are found not to have experienced maltreatment at home.

Removing a child from their parents care, even for a short period of time, is a drastic measure that can cause profound harm. The New York State Bar Association recently found the states child welfare system to be [replete with systemic racism](#). In 2019, Black children made up 15 percent of New Yorks child population but [more than 40 percent](#) of children in the states foster system, which places children separated from their families in temporary homes.

Angela Burton, one of the advocates who spoke out in support of the investigation, told the committee: There must be a public accounting and reckoning of how current government policies, processes, and practices disrupt and destroy intact, viable Black families. Todays vote in favor of an investigation means that public reckoning will begin.

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