

Regarding: SB24-200, Equity, Diversity, & Inclusion in Child Welfare

Position: Support

On behalf of: Soul 2 Soul Sisters and Elephant Circle

Thank you Chair and members of the committee. My name is Lauren Smith and I am the Black Civic Engagement and Policy Manager for Soul 2 Soul Sisters and Elephant Circle. I am writing on behalf of my organizations to express our support for SB24-200, Equity, Diversity, & Inclusion in Child Welfare.

Our organizations advocate for reproductive justice, especially for people of color, especially for Black communities. At Elephant Circle, we directly support families who experience CPS intervention shortly after birth, interrupting the crucial bonding time - many of these families experience discrimination as they navigate the system. Interacting with these systems is terrifying and traumatic for any family - regardless of the outcome of this interaction.

Reproductive justice looks like ensuring that every person has the right to parent, the right not to parent, and the right to raise their family in a safe and healthy environment. The disproportionate intervention and separation of Black families is a reproductive justice crisis. In the US, 53% of Black children's homes are investigated by child welfare officials - and the majority of child removals result from poverty interpreted as neglect. For Black children in Colorado, the disparities grow deeper with each layer of the child welfare system. They are more likely than other children to be the subject of calls to the child abuse and neglect hotline. County child protection caseworkers are more likely to determine that reports about Black children require further investigation and to find that abuse or neglect occurred. Black children are more likely to leave their parents and go to foster families or residential placements.

We know that there are disparities in the welfare system, and a lot needs to be done to address this. We need systems that prioritize keeping families together and address the root causes that lead to CPS intervention. In order to continue identifying and creating targeted solutions to address disparities, we need policies like SB200, that will close the gaps in data collection for those involved or working in the system. We support improving equity within child welfare systems, particularly when solutions are designed with impacted community members at the table.

Please vote yes on SB24-200. Thank you.



OFFICE OF RESPONDENT PARENTS' COUNSEL

4/29/24

Dear Members of the House Health and Human Services Committee:

I am writing on behalf of the Office of Respondent Parents' Counsel (ORPC) in strong support of Senate Bill 24-200. The ORPC provides high-quality interdisciplinary legal representation for parents in crisis who have been separated from their children in dependency and neglect cases. We appreciate the work of the sponsors and counties in incorporating the feedback of many important voices in this bill.

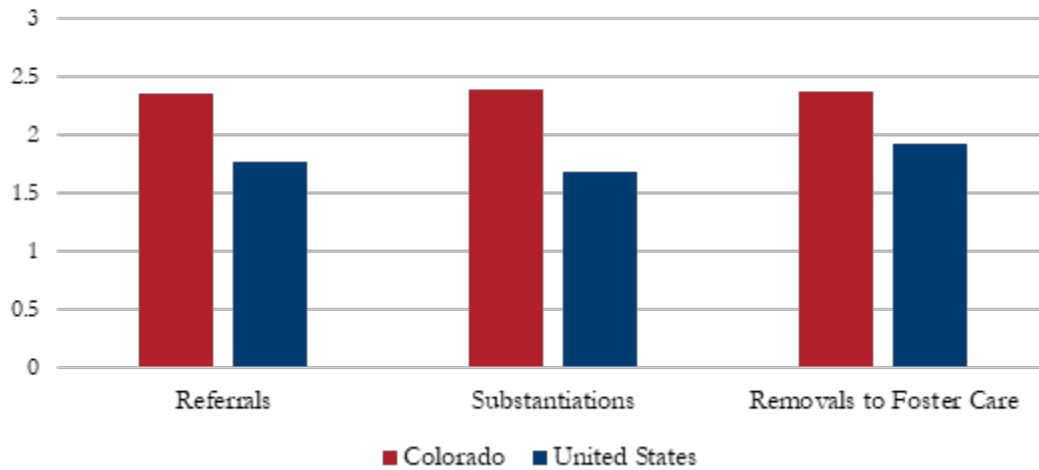
The Administration on Children, Youth, and Families recently wrote that the child welfare system, “like many other ‘people serving’ systems, is responsible for many structural barriers and racial biases that have contributed to family dysfunction, separation, and destruction under the guise of safety and well-being . . . Once families most impacted by racial disparities come to the attention of the child welfare system, they are often embarking on a seemingly continuous journey of surveillance, interruption, removal, and for many, eventual break down, leading to lasting adverse outcomes impacting generations.”

Nationwide, more than half of all Black children in America will be subject to a child welfare investigation before turning 18 – an experience they are *twice as likely* as White children to have.

Colorado has similar racial disproportionalities in its child welfare system. A recent study calculated a “racial disproportionality index (RDI)” across the United States. The RDI was calculated for Black children based on the proportion of children who received a report of child abuse or neglect, a substantiated investigation, or removals to foster care. An RDI greater than 1.0 reflected a disproportionate representation. Disproportionalities existed in every state, but Colorado exceeded the national average and was in the second highest category of states. The national average RDI for Black children was 1.78 for referrals, 1.68 for substantiated cases, and 1.92 for removals. Colorado had an RDI for Black children of 2.35 for referrals, 2.39 for substantiation, and 2.37 for removals.

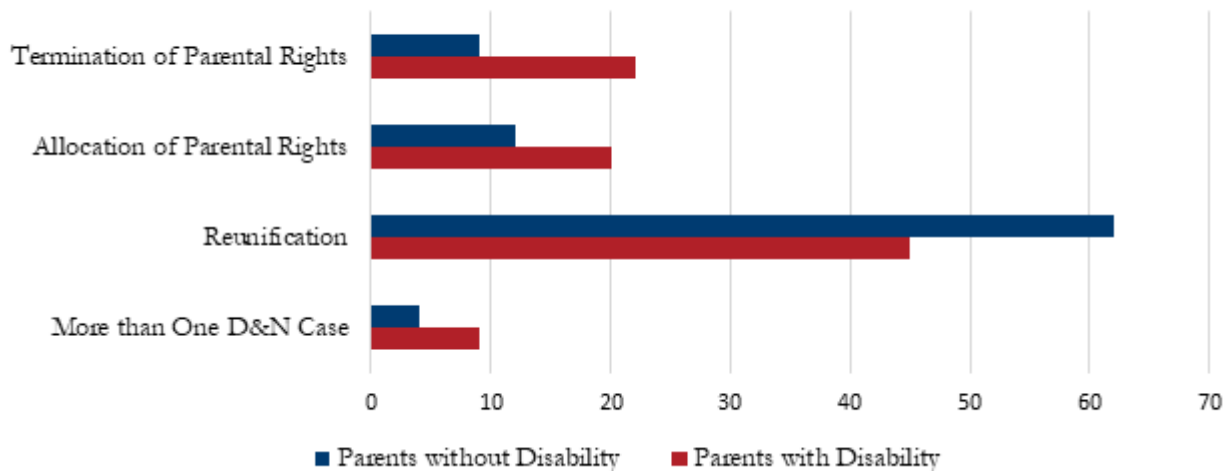


Racial Disproportionality Index for Black Children Colorado vs. United States



Disparities in the child welfare system are not limited to racial disparities. More than half of parents who are subject to dependency and neglect proceedings in Colorado have a disability. While most nondisabled parents and their children reunify, less than half of disabled parents with a child welfare case in our state reunify with their children, and over one quarter of parents with disabilities have their rights terminated.

Disparities in Outcomes for Parents with and without Disability



Even disparities are not distributed equally, as the data shows that disability and outcome disparities are greater for non-White parents than for White parents. For example, non-White parents with a disability are 2.4 times more likely than non-White parents without a disability to have their parental rights terminated. This is in



OFFICE OF RESPONDENT PARENTS' COUNSEL

comparison to White parents with a disability, who are only 2.2 times more likely than White parents without a disability to lose their parental rights.

Colorado is, unfortunately, consistent with national child welfare trends, including the fact that disparities are heightened by race and disability.

This bill is a start. We do need more accurate data, and we need more training. For example, the Office of Respondent Parents' Counsel is the only statewide office collecting data on parents with disabilities – that needs to change. This bill, along with HB 24-1046 that this committee previously heard, will start to make that change. We need to make structural changes to the system to stop the disproportionate referral, investigation and removal of children from of parents of color and parents with disabilities. We are hopeful that this bill will be the start of discussions about the necessary structural changes that need to occur based on the data we already have and the data we will gain, which have consistently showed a serious problem with racism and ableism that impacts parents, families, and children.

We look forward to our conversations with each of you on these issues and the other complex challenges facing our state as we work towards a system that better supports families.

Best regards,

Melanie Jordan

Policy Director, Office of Respondent Parents' Counsel

House Health & Human Services

04/29/2024 01:30 PM

SB24-200 Equity, Diversity, & Inclusion in Child Welfare

Typed Text of Testimony Submitted

Name, Position, Representing	Typed Text of Testimony
<p>Ashley Chase For Office of the Child's Representative</p>	<p>Hello Members of the House Health and Human Services Committee, my name is Ashley Chase and I am submitting this written testimony for the Office of the Child's Representative (OCR), the state agency that oversees attorneys who represent children and youth, or their best interests, in every dependency and neglect case across the state.</p> <p>OCR is here in support of this bill as diversity, equity, inclusion and justice are key components of our agency's Mission and Values and we are committed to improving inequities and seeking justice in child welfare and justices systems.</p> <p>If we had any criticism of the bill it is that it doesn't do enough. However, in order to do the right things you need to have good information and this bill provides an important starting block from which we can continue to make needed changes.</p> <p>As a member of the Mandatory Reporting Taskforce I appreciate the collaboration this bill requires as it is going to be crucial to address how families come into the system if we are to make any headway on this issue.</p> <p>OCR asks for your support of this important bill.</p>
<p>Paul Gamino For Larimer County Human Services</p>	<p>Thank you members of the House Health and Human Services committee for the opportunity to submit written testimony. My name is Paul Gamiño, I am a Social Caseworker Manager for the Larimer County Department of Human Services. I manage a team of intake and ongoing child protection caseworkers and am also a member of our Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging workgroup within Larimer County. Additionally, I'm a Queer Latino that works within the Child Welfare system with a unique vantage point when it comes to how I view equity in Child Welfare.</p>

	<p>On behalf of Larimer County Human Services, I write in support of Senate Bill 24-200 Child Welfare Equity. In Larimer we recognize that disproportionality and disparity exists in our work and have made concerted efforts to address those issues through our EDI workgroups. We recognize a need for our workforce to become more culturally competent when working with the disparate community. This is especially important when there are cultural differences between the caseworker and the families they are serving. There also exists a non-intentional systematic power differential between Child Welfare agencies and the disparate community that needs to be addressed wherein they feel that their voice is minimized or unheard. Our hope is that there can be a statewide level of change by infusing Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Belonging training into the State Child Welfare Academy training curriculum that helps staff across all counties to increase their awareness of important cultural aspects when working with disparate families and train them in developing strategies to minimize the perception of that power differential to ensure that the unique voice of each family is valued, heard, and understood.</p> <p>When our work is done with a high level of cultural competency, we are able to recognize unique cultural strengths and increase collaboration with families that helps us to construct the least restrictive plans with them to keep their children safe and prevent them from being driven further into our system.</p> <p>Thank you for your consideration and for the opportunity to share the work in Larimer County. We kindly ask for you to vote yes on Senate Bill 24-200 so that we can take a first step in creating a more equitable child welfare system in Colorado.</p>
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