



2009 Legislative Session Review

Summary

Our priorities were preservation of the Washington state Racial Disproportionality Advisory Committee and securing funding for one of the recommendations of the RDAC remediation plan released in summer 2008.

We achieved both. [Senate Bill 5882](#) directed the Washington State Institute for Public Policy to evaluate whether current Department of Social and Health Services practices intended to reduce disproportionate representation of African-American, Native American, and Latino children in the state's child welfare system in fact do so. The final budget included \$77,000 for the research by WSIPP. We also succeeded in preserving RDAC.

Background

National research, including a 2004 Urban Institute study, indicate that there is no higher incidence of abuse and neglect in African-American and Native-American families than in white families. Studies have also found that rates of addiction, a frequent factor in removal of children from the home, are the same across races. Yet children of color—particularly Native-American and African-American children—enter Washington's child welfare system at higher rates and stay in the system longer than do their white counterparts.

A 2008 study by RDAC of children referred to Washington's Child Protective Services in 2004, whose cases were tracked through 2007, determined that racial disproportionality in the child welfare system exists state-wide and begins with the decision of whether to refer a child to CPS.

Native-American children were three times as likely to be referred to CPS as were white children, black children nearly twice as likely. Native American and black children were more frequently removed from their home and they stayed in out-of-home care longer than white children.



Ruth Schubert

What happened

In reaction to the state's budget crisis, legislators introduced bills to eliminate many boards and commissions, including RDAC. The Children's Alliance fought back with community mobilization and found legislators to champion preserving RDAC. The bills died and RDAC was preserved.

Senate Bill 5882, sponsored by Sen. Claudia Kauffman and championed in the House by Rep. Eric Pettigrew, was passed and signed by the Governor. It directs the Washington State

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Institute for Public Policy to do an analysis of current practices by DSHS' Children's Administration to determine whether these promising practices do in fact reduce racial disproportionality. The analysis will be completed by September 1, 2010.

Impact

It is traumatic for a community when disproportionately large numbers of its children are represented in the foster care system. Identifying that inequity and the practices that lead to it are the first steps toward reducing it, while keeping children safe. These steps will now be taken, thanks to the preservation of RDAC and

House Bill 5882's provision for WSIPP's research.

Next steps

A representative of the Children's Alliance will continue to serve on RDAC and we will monitor the research from WSIPP. We will also continue to advocate for policies and investments that improve outcomes for children of color.

Resources

Report on Racial Disproportionality in Washington's Child Welfare System:
<http://www.dshs.wa.gov/ca/pubs/disproportionReport.asp>



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