



Key Findings and Recommendations of the Michigan Race Equity Coalition



Michigan Race Equity Coalition:

Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice

May 21, 2014

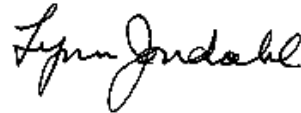
Acknowledgments

As co-chairs of the Michigan Race Equity Coalition in Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice (MREC), we have been privileged to work with a truly diverse group of leaders, united in the common goal of a child welfare system in which underlying causes of minority overrepresentation are examined and addressed. We believe this report positions Michigan to develop the state and local policies necessary to address minority overrepresentation in the child welfare system. We are grateful to Casey Family Programs, the State Court Administrative Office's Court Improvement Program, the Department of Human Services, and the Michigan Committee on Juvenile Justice - U.S. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention for their support.

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Justice Mary Beth Kelly



Lynn Jondahl

The Michigan Race Equity Coalition includes participants from:

- 3rd Circuit Court
- 6th Circuit Court
- 7th Circuit Court
- 10th Circuit Court
- Association for Children's Mental Health
- Bethany Christian Services
- Black Family Development
- Casey Family Programs
- Detroit Center for Family Advocacy
- Foster Care Review Board
- Genesee County DHS
- Homes for Black Children
- Ingham County Board of Commissioners
- Ingham County Sheriff's Office
- Kalamazoo County Prosecutor's Office
- Kent County DHS
- Michigan Indian Legal Services
- Michigan League for Public Policy
- Michigan Roundtable for Diversity and Inclusion
- Michigan State Police
- Michigan State University
- National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges
- Office of Children's Ombudsman
- Office of the Family Advocate
- Orchards Children's Services
- Pokagon Band of Potawatomi Indians
- South Eastern Michigan Indians, Inc.
- State Bar of Michigan
- University of Michigan
- Voices for Michigan's Children
- Washtenaw County Sheriff's Office
- Wayne County Department of Child and Family Services
- Wayne County DHS
- Wayne County Juvenile Detention Facility
- Lac Vieux Desert Tribe
- Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians
- Lutheran Child and Family Services of Michigan
- Macomb County DHS
- Michigan Attorney General's Office – Children and Youth Services Division
- Michigan CASA
- Michigan Council on Crime and Delinquency
- Michigan Department of Community Health
- Michigan Department of Human Services
- Michigan Federation for Children and Families

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Introduction

National and Michigan-specific studies have shown that minority children, especially African-American children, stay in the child welfare system longer and are far more likely to exit the system without reunifying with family, being adopted, or achieving some other type of permanency. Research also demonstrates that a child's placement in foster care correlates with a heightened risk of homelessness, unemployment, incarceration, substance abuse, and other negative outcomes. The disproportionate number of minority children within Michigan's child welfare system has lifelong consequences and the cost to our children, families, and the state if the current trends continue demands timely and comprehensive action.

To examine and implement strategies to address the root causes of minority overrepresentation, stakeholders formed the Michigan Race Equity Coalition. The coalition includes a cross section of Michigan's children and family services leadership, juvenile justice leadership, members of the judiciary, state and local officials, public and private agency leaders, educators, health and child welfare professionals, philanthropic leaders, and advocates for our state's children and their families. Our goal is for policymakers, civic leaders, and civil servants concerned about disproportionality in Michigan's child welfare and juvenile justice systems to act on the recommendations in this report.

Charge

The Race Equity Coalition is charged with implementing the following action steps:

1. Establish and convene a state-wide coordinating body to oversee efforts to reduce racial disproportionality in Michigan's child welfare and juvenile justice systems.
2. Participate in race equity training.
3. Review previously issued Michigan specific reports on child welfare and juvenile justice minority overrepresentation.
4. Identify key decision points in the child welfare system that contribute to disproportionality and learn about the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention's contact points for juvenile justice.
5. Create systems to collect state and local data at every decision point of contact that youth may have with the child welfare system to identify where disproportionalities exist and the causes of those disproportionalities. Create a better data collection method for dual wards that have contact with both child welfare and juvenile justice systems. Review juvenile justice data currently being collected by the Michigan Committee on Juvenile Justice.
6. Based on the previously issued Michigan reports, develop and implement plans to address racial disproportionalities that include measureable objectives for policy or practice change.
7. Review the evaluation results to determine the impact of implemented actions to reduce disproportionalities in the child welfare system.
8. Monitor and annually report findings and progress on efforts to reduce disproportionalities.
9. Identify possible private and public funding sources to create sustainable efforts.

Data

This report focuses on a Relative Rate Index (RRI) for key decision points in the child welfare system for the state of Michigan and Saginaw County for calendar year 2013.

What is Relative Rate?

A relative rate compares the rate for a minority group to the rate of the majority (minority rate/white rate) to assess disproportionality. For example, if the investigation rate for Hispanic children in County A is 50 per 1,000 Hispanic children compared with 25 among every 1,000 white children, then the relative rate is 2: cases are being assigned for Hispanic children in County A at twice the rate of white children.

Why look at Relative Rate Data?

Relative rates measure how disproportionate a system is. Relative rate data provide standardization to the child welfare system in the area—the relative rate for children of color in Michigan is based on of the comparison with the rate for white children in Michigan’s child welfare system. It is thus the best single measurement of the extent of disproportionate minority contact in a jurisdiction.

Key 2013 State-Level Findings

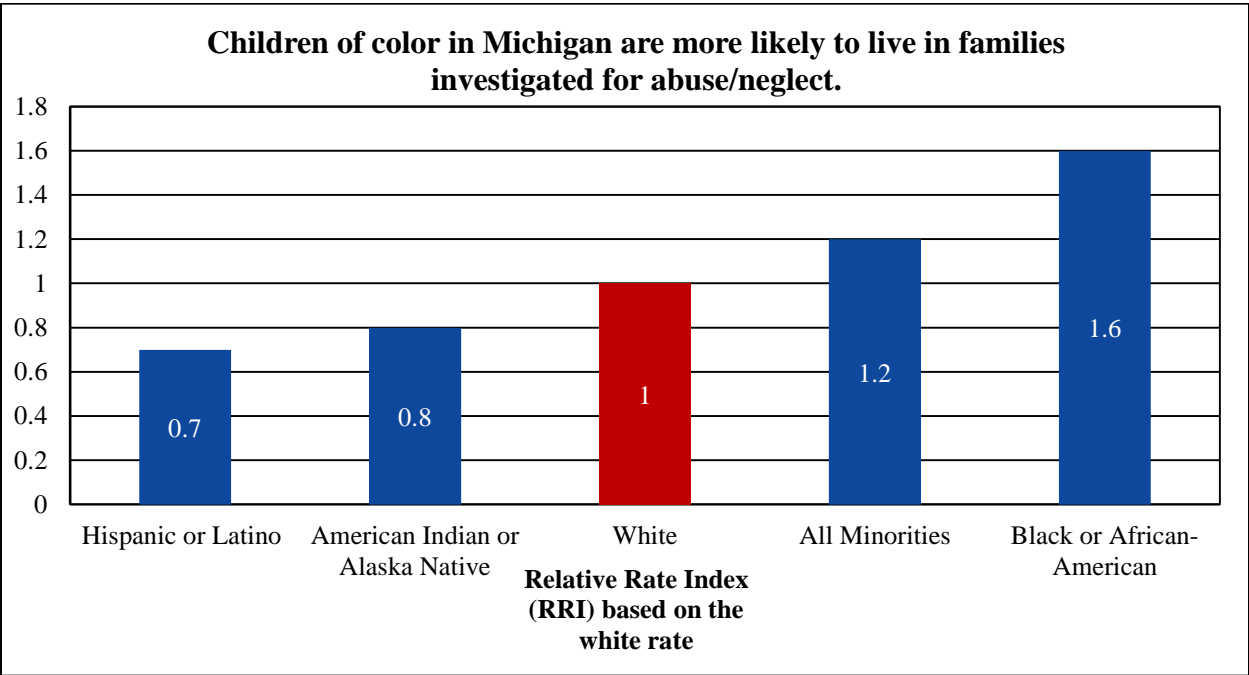


Figure 1

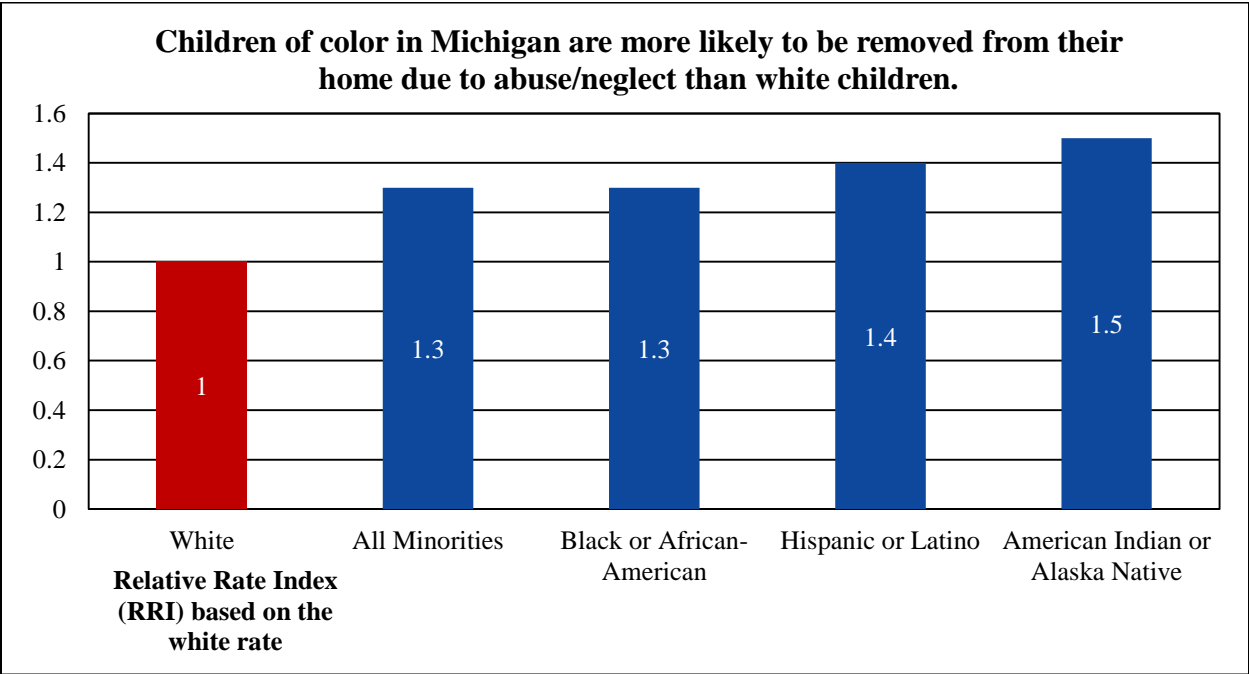


Figure 2

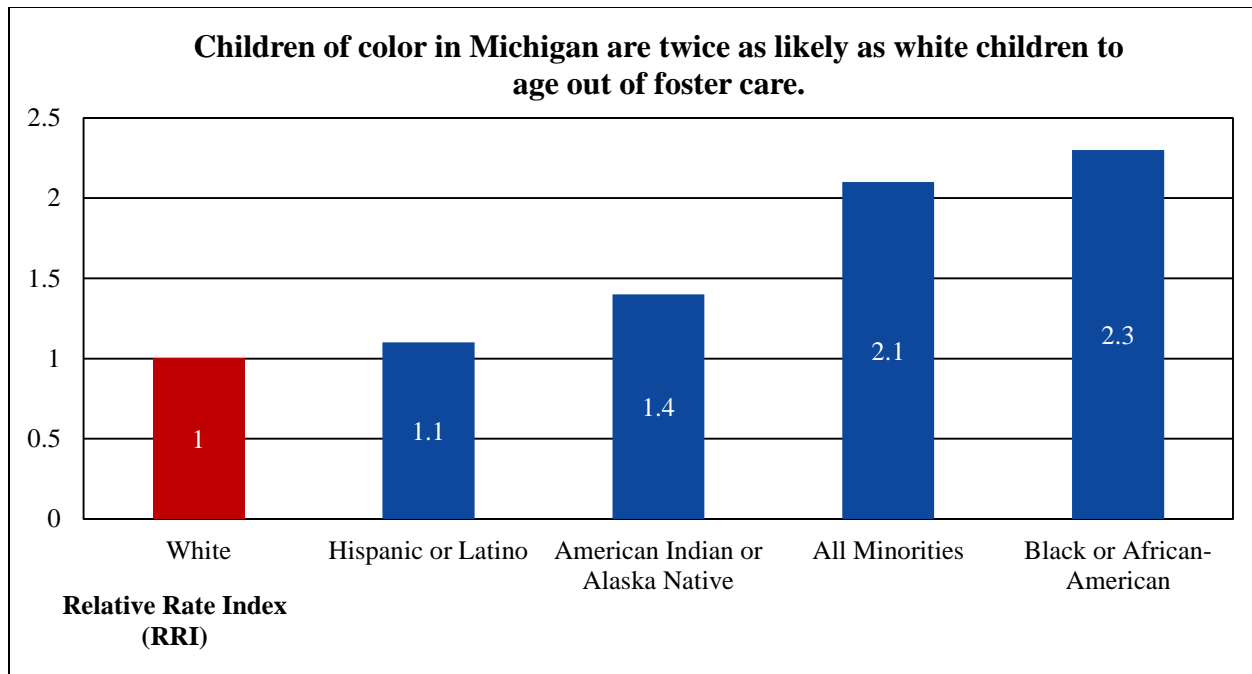


Figure 3

Key Recommendations

The Michigan Coalition for Race Equity in Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice (REC) initially convened in September 2011 and met through November 2013. These summary recommendations are the cumulative result of the REC's work. Additionally, some of the recommendations were acquired from previous Michigan race equity reports.

Voting occurred anonymously through the use of transponders at the final meeting on November 15, 2013. An online Survey Monkey tool allowed anonymous voting for members who were unable to attend the final meeting. The recommendations represent the consensus of the coalition; a two-thirds majority vote was required for a recommendation to pass.

Oversight and Coordination

Form an advisory group of leaders reflecting key system stakeholders to convene twice each year to review progress on recommendations, discuss new developments, and facilitate continued coordination.

Data Improvement

The overarching recommendation, which was also echoed in prior Michigan reports, is that programming and systems change efforts should be data driven.

- Require individual race and ethnicity information in all relevant state information systems. As part of race data collection, individuals should be allowed to self-identify their race and ethnicity.

- Develop mechanisms for data quality and measurement and provide training for organizational staff responsible for input.
- Develop improved tracking for Native American/Alaskan Native children in Department of Human Services and court Data Management Systems. Provide training for Department of Human Services' case workers, courts and multiple systems to accurately identify and code information about children and families who are members of a federally recognized tribe. Improved data collection and tracking will ensure compliance with the federal Indian Child Welfare Act and the Michigan Indian Family Preservation Act.

Practice and Services Improvement

- Agencies should place emphasis on prevention and early-intervention, as well as expanded community-based services.
- Based on the REC Data Book figures, specific counties should be engaged as pilot site counties to reduce Disproportionate Minority Contact.
- The Department of Human Services should partner with the Department of Community Health to implement a strategy for measuring the well-being of each child entering and exiting the child welfare and juvenile justice systems and develop a plan for improving outcomes.

Funding

The overarching recommendation is to strategically direct more resources to support children in Michigan's communities.

- Support the recommendation in the 2009 Child Welfare Improvement Task Force Report to create a reinvestment fund to carry forward savings in state and private funding dedicated to serving children and families. Funds saved through prevention programs that keep children out of foster care and detention facilities, or reunification services that bring families together sooner, need to be earmarked for reinvestment in those communities and/or the child welfare and juvenile justice systems.
- Support funding from the Legislature to be used to enhance the child abuse/neglect prevention, family preservation and juvenile justice community treatment funds. Additional funds also could be allocated to Public Defenders' Offices, Legal Aid, the Detroit Center for Family Advocacy, Michigan Indian Legal Services and other organizations that provide services to low income parents involved in child protective proceedings and youth involved in juvenile justice proceedings.
- Recommend state funding for the Department of Human Services to maintain and update the REC Data Book.

Policy and Law Improvement

The overarching recommendations and observations echoed in other Michigan reports are that 1) measures taken to prevent children from ending up in the juvenile justice and child welfare system are cost-effective; and 2) children of color experience significantly worse outcomes in the juvenile justice and child welfare systems than do non-minority children.

- Michigan should direct resources to early-childhood community-based services in communities where disproportionality exists. Funding for these types of programs needs to be allocated by the Legislature to ensure specific amounts are designated and dedicated.
- Support the Juvenile Justice Vision 20/20 recommendation to pass a court rule requiring every court to report juvenile justice data to the State Court Administrative Office annually.
- Revise the Michigan Child Protection Law and the Juvenile Code to mirror current Department of Human Services' policy that defines child neglect to exclude "those situations solely attributable to poverty."

Training

- Engage in education and outreach to county boards and legislators about the importance of adequate staffing for data collection and reporting in child welfare and juvenile justice agencies. This would include data advocacy training for administrators and data analysts to encourage the use of data to improve outcomes for children and youth in the juvenile justice and child welfare systems.
- Provide training to child welfare workers and supervisors explaining the differences between poverty and neglect and include strategies for: 1) having conversations with families about their financial situations, 2) assessing the impact of poverty on child safety and threatened harm, and 3) alleviating poverty-related issues that cause stress for a family and lead to maltreatment and/or removal.
- Establish a cultural competency-cultural humility training curriculum to increase awareness of racial and ethnic identity development; teach the importance of youth in care developing and maintaining a racial/ethnic identity; clarify how one's own perceptions influence work with people from different cultures; and explore how to engage in courageous conversations around race and ethnicity.

Key 2012 Saginaw County Findings¹

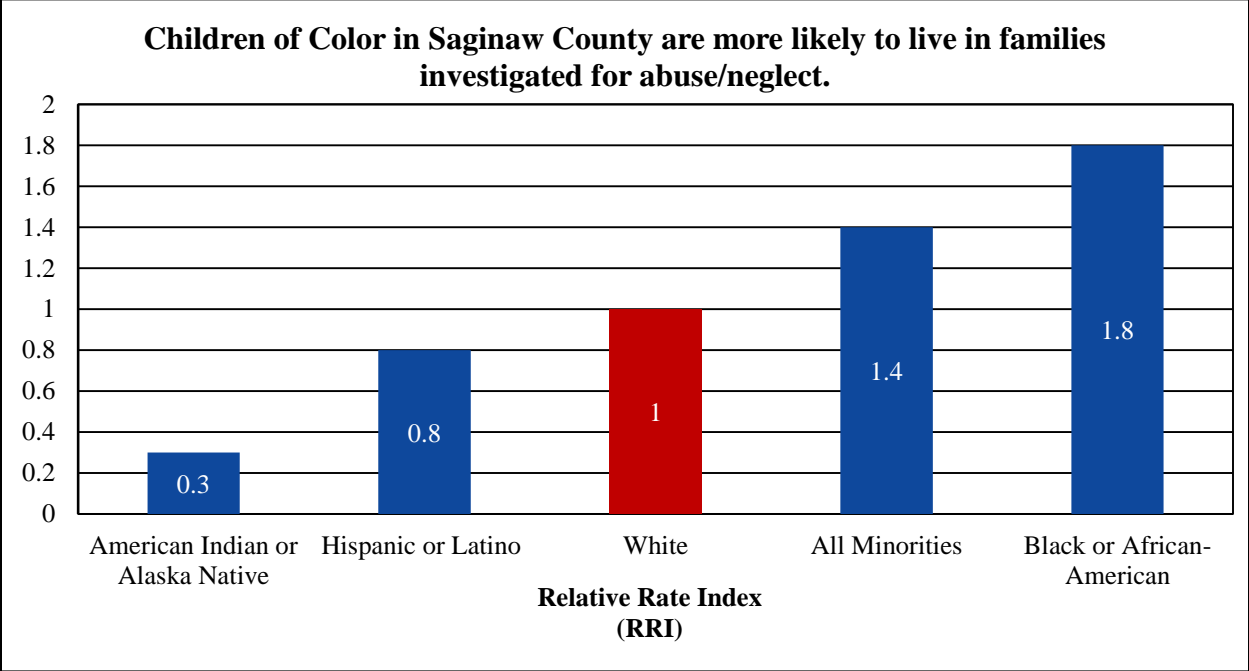


Figure 4

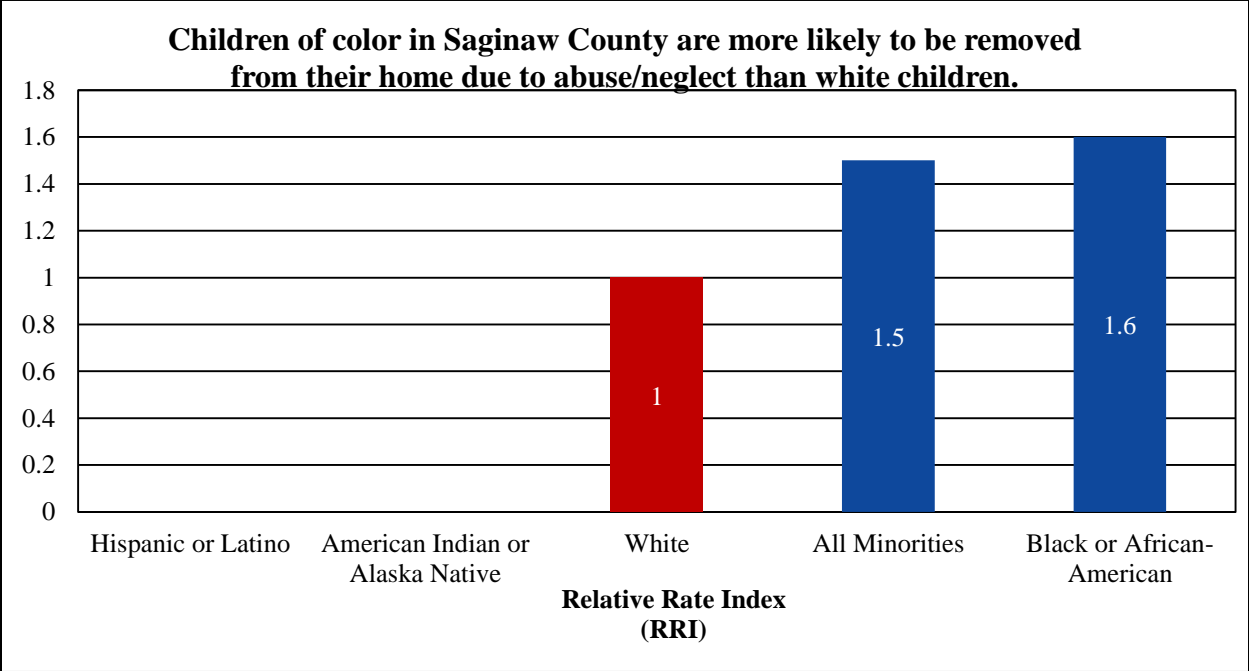


Figure 5

¹ There was an insufficient number of cases to compute an RRI for “American Indian or Alaskan Native” and “Hispanic or Latino” Children Placed Out of Home.

Preliminary Recommendations

The Saginaw County Disproportionate Minority Contact (DMC) Steering Team has also developed several recommendations to reduce DMC in Saginaw County. The recommendations call for a multi-pronged approach in three areas:

Training

- Accurate identification of potential child abuse/neglect for professionals who are mandated to report
- Effective police interactions with youth
- Cultural competency

Programming

- Implement parent support partner programs
- Expand “Strengthening Families”
- Increase diversion programming in juvenile justice

Systems Change

- Expand implementation of “Team Decision Making”
- Establish use of objective risk and needs assessment