



ASSEMBLY MEMBER
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DISTRICT 51



Assembly Bill 656: Equity in Childhood Intervention

SUMMARY

AB 656 addresses racial disparities in the child welfare system by utilizing a *blind removal* strategy that redacts information from the case summary, in order to eliminate implicit bias in the decision-making process determining whether children are removed from their parents' home.

BACKGROUND AND PROBLEM

Racial disproportionality and disparity have been longstanding issues within the child welfare system and the continued overrepresentation of children of color in the foster care system is troubling. These issues persist despite increased awareness and research on racial inequities in the child welfare system. Eliminating the racial disproportionality and disparities in child welfare must begin long before a maltreatment allegation is made. Far too many low-income families of color come to the attention of child welfare agencies because of their socioeconomic status and through their interactions with social service providers. Because socioeconomic status and child welfare involvement are highly correlated, many attribute disproportionality and disparity in the system to high levels of poverty among certain communities of color.

Families from racial and ethnic minority populations are disproportionately represented nationwide in the child welfare system. In

California alone, Black children account for 21.7% of children in foster care, while comprising only 5.4% of the overall child population. Native American children comprise 1.3% of children in foster care, but total 0.4% of the child population.¹ There are also racial disparities at various decision points in the child welfare continuum. Cases involving Latinx children were brought into the child welfare system more quickly, with less time devoted to assessment from the time of referral to the time of substantiation.² Research has further demonstrated that children of color are less likely than white children to exit foster care through reunification, adoption, and legal guardianship.³

The majority of children that are displaced from their home are removed due to neglect rather than forms of abuse. The State of California defines neglect as "failing to provide adequate food, clothing, shelter, medical care or supervision." When children are removed from their parent(s) care because of alleged neglect that stems from conditions related to poverty, children are harmed and exposed to trauma that could have ultimately been prevented if the system prioritized support and not family separation. A child welfare system should not see poverty as failure nor punish and tear families apart for it, instead the system should focus on partnering with parents,

¹ KidsData

² Church, Gross & Baldwin, 2005

³ Tilbury and Thoburn, "Using Racial Disproportionality and Disparity Indicators."

empowering families, and working to keep them together.

SOLUTION

AB 656 requires the State Department of Social Services to establish a *blind removal* pilot project in counties that choose to participate. In order to reduce the potential for implicit bias, during and only at the time of the removal decision-making process the following information will be redacted:

1. Name of the child and parent(s)
2. Gender of the child and parent(s)
3. Race/Ethnicity of the child and parent(s)
4. Sexual orientation of the child and parent(s)
5. Address of the child and parent(s)
6. Birth order of the child and parent(s)
7. Religious affiliations of the child and parent(s)
8. Political affiliations of the child and parent(s)
9. Marital status of the child's parents
10. Income of the of the child's parent(s)
11. Education level of the child's parent(s)
12. Prior investigation of the of the child's parent(s) for child abuse or neglect that was found unsubstantiated.

The removal of such information during the deliberation process of removing a child from their home will shift the focus solely to the evidence of the case, family strengths, relevant history, and most importantly the parent's ability to protect the child.

SUPPORT

Children's Law Center of California
(Co-sponsor)
Los Angeles Dependency Lawyers
(Co-sponsor)
Parenting for Liberation (Co-sponsor)

Parent Voices Action (Co-sponsor)
The Women's Foundation of California,
Women's Policy Institute (Co-sponsor)

OPPOSITION

None received.

STAFF CONTACT

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