

# BEYOND BLIND REMOVAL

Color Consciousness and Anti-Racism in Los Angeles County Child Welfare

**BLIND REMOVAL AIMS TO REDUCE RACIAL DISPROPORTIONALITY BY REMOVING RACIAL DEMOGRAPHICS FROM THE REMOVAL DECISION-MAKING PROCESS AFTER AN INVESTIGATION OF ALLEGED CHILD ABUSE OR NEGLECT.**

On July 13, 2021, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors passed a motion authored by Supervisor Holly J. Mitchell to pilot blind removal. Supervisor Mitchell stated, **“This pilot and this whole conversation may be uncomfortable for some.** However, from my perspective, the data compels us to seek out every practice that will help us guard against bias and, ultimately, the overrepresentation of children of color in our child welfare system.

**“IN ACHIEVING FUNDAMENTAL CHANGE, WE HAVE TO DO WHAT WE’VE NEVER DONE BEFORE TO ACHIEVE RESULTS WE’VE NEVER EXPERIENCED.”**

— Los Angeles County Supervisor Holly J. Mitchell

**Family separation dates back to the extensive period of slavery, from 1619 to 1865.** Many Black families continue to feel the threat of separation today vis-a-vis the child welfare system.

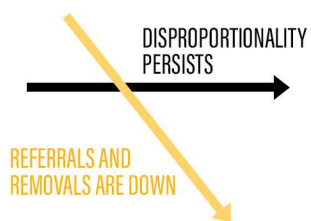
Consider the **history, context, and intersectionality** of the child welfare system and its impact on communities and families of color. This system and its professionals are often acting in response to the **persistent consequences of racial injustice and structural inequality.**

## COMMUNITY CONCERNS ABOUT BLIND REMOVAL

- Color blindness perpetuates existing racial inequities.
- LA County’s diverse workforce renders blind removal unnecessary.
- Child safety
- Limited protection for tribal families
- Existing ERDD work could be compromised by blind removal.

## FINDINGS

Study findings describe blind removal implementation in two DCFS regional offices, West Los Angeles (West LA) and Compton-Carson.



- Implementing blind removal revealed how race plays a role in decision making. The structure of blind removal coupled with increased awareness of race in decision making catalyzed practice changes.
- Descriptive analyses of administrative data demonstrate that Child Protection Hotline referrals to both offices declined over a five-year three-month period but racial disproportionality persisted, particularly for Black children and their families.
- Parallel analyses showed that fewer children were removed from their families by each office over the same period, yet racial disproportionality persisted with Black children overrepresented in removals in both offices and Latinx children overrepresented in the West LA office during most quarters.



# RECOMMENDATIONS

We reiterate many of the recommended and overdue reforms outlined in the 2021 Path to Racial Equity report authored by Alliance for Children's Rights.

## 1. *Promote Upstream Enhancements Targeting the Root Cause*

- Among the reforms needed, the **upstream nature of change is emphasized**. Indeed, the existing child welfare system acts in response to systemic racism and significant breakdowns in social safety nets across healthcare, mental health, public health, childcare, education, and the economy.
- **Mandatory supporting presents significant opportunities for reform**. Evaluation of the effort across Los Angeles County and throughout California is therefore recommended.
- Future evaluation should further **assess the root cause of disproportionality**. Moreover, assessment of these issues would be enhanced by improved data collection, organization, and utilization within DCFS.

## 2. *Dedicate Resources to Cultural Transformation*

- **Racial equity for families demands a cultural transformation across every level of DCFS**.
- Training must go beyond simply informing staff about racial injustice and bias; it must facilitate opportunities for staff at every level, from leadership to the line, to gain a deeper understanding of systemic racism and personal biases, and then apply what staff members learn to practice.
- **Normalize discussions about race**.

## 3. *Implement Widespread Evaluation of Existing and Prospective Racial Equity Efforts*

- DCFS has implemented various efforts (ERDD, 4DX) to address racial injustices in child welfare. We know little about these efforts and why they do or do not work. **Deeper analysis of these efforts is recommended**, especially where other reforms around mandatory reporting and child safety are concerned.
- In 2019, DCFS formed the Office of Equity. Given the scope of issues concerning racial equity, **external support for the ongoing development and evaluation of the Office of Equity's impact is advised**.
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Going forward, evaluation of the foregoing efforts should **engage members from impacted communities**.

Disproportionality remains a prominent feature of the Los Angeles County child welfare system. This reality is exacerbated by the countless disproportionate harms impacting Black individuals, families and communities across this country due to systemic racism and intersectional harms. By implementing the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors' directive to pilot blind removal, DCFS took novel and bold steps to document its internal processes and chart a new course for Black families involved with the child welfare system. These efforts build on past and present efforts, such as ERDD and SAFE Reductions (4DX), in addition to mandatory supporting and the Anti-Racism, Diversity, and Inclusion (ARDI) Initiative in LA County.

I THINK BLIND  
REMOVAL DOES  
POINT OUT THE  
FACT THAT WE  
ARE BIASED  
TOWARD BLACK  
PARENTS.

— Case Reviewer

WE'VE MADE  
GREAT STRIDES,  
BUT WE STILL  
HAVE A LOT OF  
WORK TO DO.

— Case Reviewer

THERE IS MORE WORK TO BE DONE. IT DEMANDS COLOR CONSCIOUSNESS AND THE COLLECTIVE WILLINGNESS TO OPERATE AN ANTI-RACIST CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM THAT IS CULTURALLY TRANSFORMED THROUGH COLOSSAL SHIFTS IN PRACTICE AND IN POLICY. IN CLOSING, THE WORK REQUIRES THAT WE COLLECT THE LESSONS LEARNED HEREIN AND CONTINUE TO MAKE CHANGES THAT GO WELL **BEYOND BLIND REMOVAL**.