



NATIONAL COALITION TO END CHILD ABUSE DEATHS

July 8, 2020

Our nation is, at long last, reckoning with the systemic racism and injustice which pervade our culture, with the "[original sin](#)" of slavery at its root. Racial injustice is reflected and reinforced in every facet of life from health care to law enforcement, to the child welfare system. The dual disproportionate impact of both the COVID-19 pandemic and the most recent instances of Black Americans being killed by police officers highlight how deep these inequities run. In the framework of the current pandemic, about 13% of the U.S. population are African American, but according to the [CDC](#), 22% of those with COVID-19, and 23% of those who have died from it, are Black. Within the law enforcement context, [Black men are about 2.5 times more likely](#) than white men to be killed by police.

An even more pronounced racial disparity is reflected in annual rates of child maltreatment fatalities. An estimated [1,770](#) children in the United States died in 2018 as a result of child abuse or neglect-- more than all children who die annually as a result of [childhood cancers combined](#). Black babies and children die from abuse and neglect at a rate [2.8 times greater](#) than that of white children. This racial disproportionality exists not only in fatality rates, but across the child welfare system. Black children are more likely to be reported to CPS, more likely to be removed from their homes, and less likely to receive supportive services and be reunified with their families than white children. One study reported that [53%](#) of all Black children will experience a child protective investigation.

This deadly disparity across systems is attributable in large part to the inequities resulting from ongoing systemic racism which continues to compromise educational opportunity and obstruct economic security, access to health care, housing and food for many African Americans—factors which often play a role for families involved with dependency cases. While the occurrence of physical and sexual abuse and serious neglect remains a reality for too many children, implicit and explicit racial biases by mandated reporters and other stakeholders have too often led to the child welfare system treating poverty as neglect. As calls to defund the police rise, some have called for the child welfare system to be [dismantled](#) as well, calling it out as another mechanism serving to surveil and destabilize Black families and other families of color. Indeed, as this long-overdue cultural shift occurs, it is critical for the child welfare system and all those who work in and around it to better balance our commitment to child safety with creating more equitable experiences and outcomes for children and families.

The National Coalition to End Child Abuse Deaths (NCECAD) works to advance law and policy to keep children safe and healthy and to implement the recommendations of the bipartisan Commission to Eliminate Child Abuse and Neglect Fatalities. (CECANF). The central finding of the CECANF was that child maltreatment deaths are preventable, and recommendations included a [slate of reforms](#) to prioritize child safety while reducing racial disproportionality in fatalities. Doing this work requires a multifaceted approach which includes strengthening our safety net, providing proactive supports and timely responses to children most at-risk now, working to improve and adequately invest in the spectrum of early intervention, and reimagining child protection as a shared multidisciplinary commitment designed to mitigate the role of CPS. The NCECAD is committed to eliminating child abuse and neglect fatalities while confronting and eliminating bias across an improved system of child protection that will support rather than punish families and keep more children alive.