

**COMMENTS REGARDING THE JUNE 2008 REPORT OF THE WASHINGTON STATE RACIAL DISPROPORTIONALITY COMMITTEE**

Below are comments the Committee solicited and received through its Community Outreach efforts. Those efforts are fully outlined in the Plan for Remediation that can be found at <http://www.dshs.wa.gov/ca/pubs/disproportion.asp>. The comments have not been edited. And each comment received is included below. They are verbatim, and often reflect the high level of concern about the existence of racial disproportionality in the child welfare system. In some instances, the persons making the comments did not identify themselves. The vast majority of comments recommend some change in practice. Many of the issues raised in the comments were incorporated into the Committee's Plan for Remediation.

**COMMENTS REGARDING THE DATA?**

Data tells me that every Indian child that comes in the door is put in foster care. Once the referral happens, Indian children are placed. Services that are received by children in care are an issue. I get questions like, "Who are you? What is your title?" when I am trying to get services. Also, people need to know that we are not "less than" because we need the system. Not only a lack of services but the parity issue---Native foster home versus non-Native foster homes (differences in access and types of services received). Need to acknowledge this is an undercount of data. 1) Children in Tribal custody are not counted in this study. 2) There is a misrepresentation of some racial identity with some children. Uncomfortable with the relationship between single parent, poor families accessing the system and accessing services more (perceptions). Glad Tribal cases were not involved in this study because many Tribes are taking care of their own children and they would make the numbers look really good. Maybe the case is that white children need to stay in care longer. I would feel more comfortable if the Native children were in Native families for care. What percentages of kids are in Native care versus non-Native care? Split feathers issues. Get a "King County Coalition in each region. There is disproportionality within contracts to service providers---Who gets them? Why? How business interests and local politics keep these arrangement in place.  
– *from the ICW Sub-Committee Meeting.*

I think it would be good to include more recommendations than you anticipate taking on in 2009. In fact, I would be concerned if the report did not offer a number of recommendations for addressing disproportionality as we never know what will happen in the future! A plan that provides recommendations in the three key areas with an indication of which are high priority short term (on the agenda for the 2009 session), high priority long term, medium priority, etc. would, in my opinion, be great!

The continued lack of follow through by the department to follow state and federal Indian child welfare laws, policies and procedures. Hundreds of Indian professionals worked on these issues for the last 30 years and the department still continues to ignore federal and state mandates for placement of Indian children. -- *Social Service Professional*

The numbers that reflect the disproportionality of Indian children.

The solution may be worse than the problem in the case of Indian children. If termination of parental rights is used more often that means more Native children are cut off from their heritage and, possibly, tribal benefits. – *Member, Rg. 4 LICWAC*

Gangs are a big problem here and are composed of kids who want a feeling of belonging and a sense of having some control over their world. They have no vision for a meaningful future, no plans to work towards, no sense of a purpose greater than themselves. Poverty and hopelessness go hand in hand. We also have a major drug problem in our area which further derails a future for children. Added to this we have issues with illegal immigrants, American citizen children whose parents are gathered up and deported, leaving these children without their parents and dependent on others, even though they are Americans who should, as such, have an inalienable right to be raised by their own parents. Our high poverty level, illegal immigrant issues, coupled with gang influence inevitably leads to troubled families. – *SE WA Aging and Long Term Care*

My primary concern is that this is not new information but as these studies are done, the time they take to do become excuses not to fix things. Even with the studies and their documentation, no one is going to do anything to fix the REAL issues, because that would mean the system making REAL changes. I am concerned that this study will be an excuse to execute changes that benefit the system and have nothing to do with what really needs to happen. – *No identity provided*

That the data does not capture the true numbers of Native children in care as it does not reflect Tribal placements and kinship placements outside of child welfare. The current system (CAMIS) for tracking Indian children is in no way accurate as to the children currently involved with DCFS. Intake is not accurately contacting all Tribes of children in the required time frame once a referral is made. Therefore Tribes cannot actively participate at the early stages of the case to assist in keeping the children in the home and/or assist in reunification if the child is removed. It is my experience as a social worker with Native families for the last 15 years that guardianship placements have very little support from the system in terms of services. There is no case management by the Department, and the State of WA does not pay private agencies to provide this support to families. Given the extensive history of intergenerational trauma within Native American communities and families, it is unrealistic to assume that the family once a guardianship is established will no longer need or desire to have future services for the children in their care. This is especially true as Native children are often in placements with relatives as per the Indian Child Welfare Act. This lack of support causes at many times the guardianship to blow out and therefore the children come back into the child welfare system. At that point, the children are older and usually have more behavioral issues. That being said, those children are harder to place and a permanent plan more difficult to obtain. -- *Native Community Member, LICWAC Member*

I don't know how to raise the disproportionality issue to a court to get them to drop cases. – *Attorney at Juvenile Court, GAL*

Would like more detailed information on the geographic info. – *Social Service Provider*

That its old data, not divided by office, and it doesn't drill down to what type of referral. – *Mental Health Representative, Social Service Professional.*

Representation and services for the Hispanic population. Dependent children and their parents face barriers in reunification because of illegal immigration status. – *CASA/GAL*

**WHAT STRATEGIES SHOULD BE INCLUDED IN THE REMEDIATION PLAN:**

Education agencies and individuals on what it is and what strategies others have developed. – *Social Service Professional*

Permanency in 18 months or less is not culturally appropriate in some cases. We need to change our definition of permanency. WA has a large Native population and Tribes are cutting edge in the sovereignty arena. The slant of the legislation and the process thus far has not acknowledged this piece; it needs to be acknowledged. What is the Indian voice in WA State? What is the credence of the Tribes in WA State? This needs to be acknowledged. Confirms what we already know. We saw this in 1970, and tried to do something then. How do we make a difference now? Feels like remediation plans take a top down approach. Implementation efforts through CA alone have not made many strides. We need all systems at the table. The focus has never been on Natives, even though we are the most disproportionate. Maybe we should put our focus on preventive services to keep kids out of care. ICW Case Review findings should be in the report. Create a requirement for judges that hear Native cases to get training on the ICW Act (incorporate into their annual training requirements). People need to talk to each other and learn each other's "language." People are afraid to talk about race; thus we lack understanding of each other. Look at existing policies (some are really good and Tribal governments helped to craft them. See if they are being implemented effectively). Look at who is referring the children —law enforcement, schools, and health professionals. Provide appropriate training. All social workers should get NICWA training. Look at the retention rates of all workers. We tend to get them trained and then they leave. We need strong leadership. Implement a case weighting system. Need additional supports and more pilot projects to see what is effective for our population. Undoing Racism, Knowing Who You Are trainings----we need to start here. We need to get to the root of the problem. Once you get to the root with trainings, open dialogues, etc., kinship numbers should go up, exposed bias will allow for more conversation. -- *from the ICW Sub-Committee Meeting*

In terms of the three key areas, there are a few strategies I hope are included in some way as part of the recommendations:

- a. Re-examine the alternative response system being used in Minnesota that has led to fewer children being removed from home.
- b. Look at the VPAs and VSAs being done and determine how many families of color are offered these options. If not, why not?
- c. Institute benchmark hearings for children in care over 18 months or 2 years. These hearings would take place every 3 months.

I am happy to be involved in any way that would be of help. Thanks! --*Laurie*

Train staff and give the incentives to stay put in their positions

The plan should be for DSHS, Childrens Administration to require Region and Area Administrators to convene local groups (use the King County model) to develop local plans for addressing this issue. Is is my opinion that it can be corrected only on the local level. – *Cowlitz Tribe*

Hire additional social workers in the ICW units so more services can be provided to prevent removal from a child's home. The ICW Act mandates "active efforts" be provided which justifies the additional workers. Use Third Party Guardianship as a measurement of successful resolution in addition to adoption for Native American children. Relative guardianships provide the long term stability without the termination of a child's ties to his or her tribal ancestry. – *Member, Rg. 4 LICWAC*

Of course funding for this is the most important need. We need more people on board who have concerns about our children and their safety and well being. And then, when safety and basic needs are met, these children need equal access to education and training so that they can choose to break the cycle. – *Samish Tribe*

Funding should not be allocated based on census data on the total population but rather on the data that shows areas of highest usage of children's services and highest levels of poverty. Using this sort of data will better direct the dollars towards those who need it most and help. Kids and families need hope. They need a vision for the future that gives them a challenge they can rise to meet. Programs that involve work that kids can do that gives them a taste of genuine success and enables them to see themselves as a part of a meaningful team with a future should be a priority.—*SE WA Aging and Long Term Care*

Honestly listening to the children, parents and foster parents, making changes that reflect those issues, and doing that in a way that does not involve retribution to the family. I am invited (asked, begged etc) to be on committees, to give comments, be honest you folks always say. When I do, it generally is followed by retribution. When we two years ago had to have the ombudsman's office intervene on a case, they had to go into that office two or three times to get the caseworker to stop her reign of terror against us, we had to have three lawyers, and still she continued. Her supervisor was supporting her in this. No one would believe a lowly foster home that the worker might lie to cover her own tracks. Well, no one but the CASA, her lawyer, the birth parent and her lawyer, the therapist, and gratefully the ombudsman's office, and eventually the judge. When the ombudsman's office showed that their investigation proved she was (and in their letter to me they clearly indicated that DCFS administration also was) "treating your home in a biased manner", only then did she slow down her attack. I was only one of many homes that worker and supervisor had falsely attacked. The administrations response to this situation? Give her an award for "best social worker of the year", the supervisor was promoted to Area Manager and the worker was promoted to Supervisor. These people destroyed families so they wouldn't have to have a large caseload, put children in group homes when foster homes were available, sent children home to families that were not ready for them. When the homes heard about this, how do you think it made us feel? How do you think it made the children who were being attacked feel? And the birth parents who had stood up to her? I was first invited to be on your disproportion committee, then uninvited because one of the members was an administrator I had filed a

complaint (founded as “biased” by the ombudsman’s office) against and my being there might make him uncomfortable.

This region 4 has been wrought with racism and discrimination for a long time now, families are not treated with respect, not the birth families or the foster homes or the relative care givers. The problem works to the administrations benefit as the native foster homes drop off because of being attacked and abused there is no where to put the children, and that becomes their excuse for institutionalizing children or pushing adoptions. The system claims they want permanent plans for the children to “stabilize” their lives. What they really want are guardianships and adoptions that are not supported financially so it costs them less money. Many high need children were forced into unsupported guardianships that now are falling apart. The workers in that unit have maybe 60 cases because guardianships are “permanent and stable”, but in reality to dump those cases they blackmailed folks into signing them saying sign this or lose the child, and now they fall apart and there is no help from the social workers as they are overloaded.

I listen to long term social workers, some of the best I have known in my over thirty years as a foster parent, and they want to quit. They see the system continuing and increasing their institutionalized racism toward and abuse of native children and families and don’t want to be part of it. If those few really good caseworkers leave, it won’t be long before those good foster homes leave too. We know who those workers are that were awful and therefore got promoted, and we are not going to work with them. You can’t put that on the families either, saying if we really cared for the children we would work with these racist workers. We can’t work with them, for the protection of the children already in our homes. You actually already know the issues, and this questionnaire is just another stall tactic and excuse not to make the changes you need to make to address this issue. Foster homes that speak out will be like mine; all of a sudden your payments are not approved. Children in your home don’t get the services they need. False allegations are against you. It’s actually just an insult to get this request for the same old information. – *No identity provided*

Review the Solution Based Case Management that is currently being implemented within the Children’s Administration to determine its effectiveness with Native American families and tribes. There has been no research at this time to support that this type of service is effective with Native families. Bring in models which have been researched with Native American families and implement them system wide. Training and support for implementing active efforts for children involved in child welfare as per the Indian Child Welfare Act. Training system wide regarding contacting Tribes at all stages of the Child Welfare system. Undoing Racism Training to be implemented throughout all State systems who work with all families/children of color. Also provide this training to Tribal Staff and key community persons. -- *LICWAC Member*

Assistance for families with daycare needs. Families that are just above the poverty level but don’t qualify for funds.

Excellent report. Worry that report findings will be dismissed or minimized. Infusing “undoing racism”, knowing who you are; diversity discussions into regular work. Integration of remediation plan with other systems besides child welfare. – *Parent, Social Service Professional*

Develop a protocol for dependent families and children who need support services and have

illegal immigration issues. – *CASA/GAL*

**ADDITIONAL/OTHER:**

This is a serious problem and needs a serious response. Organizing the response at the local level needs to be funded. It will not work to have this as an additional assignment to an existing position! The solutions and generated at the local level will likely require funding as well. – *Cowlitz Tribe*

In the Native American community family of origin is important throughout generations. By terminating parental rights, a child may lose that important identity. A permanent plan that ensures the child maintain his or her cultural and, if possible, family ties is essential. – *Member Rg 4. LICWAC*

It seems to me that there is too much concern for the parents rather than the children's needs. I have seen many children moving back and forth from foster care to their parents and back to foster care, giving the parents yet another chance to change and become more responsible. It seems to me that the children are suffering for this. As time goes by, they are getting older and older, still waiting for their parents to become ready to be parents. And in the mean time, they are experiencing things in the home that are damaging to them and loosing the opportunity to experience the good. – *Samish Tribe*

Many minorities in our area have a strong sense of familial obligation. We have a disproportionately high number of minority relatives raising their non-biological children, keeping them out of foster care. But in foster care, these children would have more options for services and funds for school clothes and supplies, school activity fees, and various other needs that help them not to feel so left out or behind other children. Kinship caregivers, whether or not they are minorities, often struggle to put food on the table and shelter over their heads. Surely there is some way these kin grandparents can receive some compensation, even if it is less than foster parents receive. Children raised by kin caregivers are less likely to have many of the social problems than children in foster care. Therefore the cost to society is less for children raised by kin. It makes good sense to create a mechanism by which kin caregivers can receive monthly assistance with the sometimes horrendous costs they face. My suggestion would be to put some of the schools of social work to work on developing such a mechanism. – *SE WA Aging and Long Term Care*

Follow the icw laws already in place. Have a way to gather this information where there really is not a chance of retribution against the social workers, homes and children. Have a system where retribution is not tolerated (and please don't think you already have that system). And don't attack those of us that tell you the truth and not the "company line" answers you were looking for. Then have the courage to really make the changes that are needed, not just convenient and comfortable.

You don't need a three year task force, you need changes now, actually years ago. How many children did we lose while you took the time for the disproportion committee report? How many more will we lose while you do this entire questionnaire process? We don't mind the process if it would REALLY effect change but don't like the implication that we are somehow being listened to when we aren't. Or at least be honest and admit that it is just another delay tactic to justify more expensive administration that we don't need so you don't have to pay for more social workers and services to children that we do

need. God forbid you actually listen to us (the native population, not just the local tribal administrations). DCFS has become much like the BIA; you think you know what is better for us than we know ourselves. You are offended by our answers that don't match your perceptions. The DCFS way of dealing with this was by getting rid of most of the native homes and then having built that reputation not being able to replace them. How many of you would be capable of living by the licensing standards you set for the foster homes? And last but not least, NEVER ask a question that you don't really want the answer to. – *No identity provided*

Overall, we must address the systemic racism in the Child Welfare System and other state institutions. If we do not, we will continue the pattern of disproportionality. It will not matter what models or programs are in place if there are workers and institutions who do not value the people themselves. We must also look at the impact of historical trauma on our families and children. This is clearly apparent in the work we do with our foster children and those clients who are victims of sexual assault and domestic violence. Families are often replaying the trauma known to them historically through their family and their people. Families cannot make lasting changes without the understanding of historical trauma. In addition, there are still many workers I have worked with over the last 15 years who see Indian families as drunks and addicts who are dirty and don't take care of their children. This view often seems to be held in regard to reservations as well. There is a reluctance to contact Tribes, even when mandated by law, because the Tribe might want the children returned to their homelands. We must implement fully the notifications of all Tribes where a child has connection. We must fully understand and acknowledge Tribal sovereignty. In doing so, we must enforce the Indian Child Welfare Act to the fullest degree of the law in all policies and procedures. This means to look at the intent of the elders who created the law itself. It was to ensure that our Indian children and families were given the services needed to remedy why a family became involved in the child welfare system. We are here 30 years later and no further ahead. We must look to the elders about their vision in putting together the act, and follow through with it. Our children are our future Tribal leaders. We must ensure that they are well educated so that we can have strong Tribal leaders and communities. --  
*Native Community Member, LICWAC Member*

Explore the number of racial disproportionality in child fatalities with CPS history. –  
*CASA/GAL*

### **SERVICES USED & COMMENTS:**

Relative care was observed by me re co worker who has been foster parent for her granddaughter. The child is nearly grown now but has had excellent care, has been able to be in touch with her birth mother. Her life has been good she is a good student and has good self image and plans for her future. I believe she would not have any of these things if she had not been with her grandmother and grandfather throughout her life. – *Samish Tribe*

I am both a foster home and a relative caregiver; I work with a select few social workers now, and am happy with their services. I think they could do a much better job if DCFS would trust their judgment in making decisions for the children. Too many decisions for services are made without concern for the youth. We had a plan for a program for the kids here, approved all the way up to the Area Manager; it was cancelled because the fiduciary office didn't like it. They are not social workers, don't know the kids or their therapists, but have the main decision making power for case plans. How crazy is that??

When I bring FAS/drug effected/sexually abused children to a ceremony, DCFS calls it a “family vacation” and won’t provide mileage for it. I don’t really know what a vacation is because we never go on them, but do you really think being out in the bush with 5 or 6 high level need kids for a month is a vacation??? If it is such a “vacation”, why don’t you join us next time? Why is the fiduciary office making therapeutic decisions like this anyway, against the recommendation of the licensed therapist and the DCFS social worker?

Why are cultural healings called a “vacation” but surgery called a “medical need”? You don’t suppose DCFS has no respect for the part of ICW where they talk about cultural involvement for the children? Or did you just want us to bring them to a pow-wow once a year, or read them a good book about Indians? – *No identity provided*

I am the Foster Care Program Administrator for United Indians. Our program works with all of the services listed above except for adoption programs. Although we do not provide direct case management to our families, we work with our families regarding the services listed above. As a Native American community member, I have personally referred family and friends to foster care, relative care services, daycare, CPS referrals and home based services. Our family services program often works with clients who work within systems regarding the need for adequate housing, domestic violence issues and sexual assault. Helpful: The services have been helpful to the degree that they were able to connect with our families and children. Often what I find is the lack of respect of Native families and programs is very prevalent throughout the services. State workers who work with our program seem to be more rigid about our Native family’s compliance with rules and policies. This makes those of us working in our communities job that much more difficult. Because we are the ones who have to navigate systems with our clients to get their needs met. I often refer to myself in my work and personal life as an interpreter between the Native community and the non-Native community. The programs and services provided in working with our community often don’t fit with the traditional norms, values and cultures of Native people. We therefore do not feel the services apply to us or our families and are less likely to engage. --  
*Native Community Member, LICWAC Member*

Foster care, relative care, residential care, visitation, IFPS, Adoption; these services are very valuable to our children and families in our community. – *CASA/GAL*