

The Honorable Alex Lee  
Chair, Assembly Human Services Committee  
Hon. Committee Members  
1020 N Street, Room 124  
Sacramento, CA 95817

RE: AB 601 (Jackson) – Support as Amended

Dear Chair Lee and Honorable Committee Members:

On behalf of the undersigned organizations, we want to express our support for AB 601 (Jackson), as amended, a bill that aims to address the over-reporting and over surveillance of Black/African American and Native American/Indigenous children and families in our Child Welfare System. We thank and applaud Assembly Member Jackson for his leadership in recognizing the critical need for reform of California's Mandated Reporting System and championing policy initiatives to address this need.

Black/African American and Native American/Indigenous children are significantly more likely to be reported for allegations of abuse and neglect, despite the vast majority of those allegations being unfounded or unsubstantiated. A recent study showed that half of Black children, as well as half of Native American children, experienced an investigation at some point during their childhood, compared to nearly a quarter of white children.<sup>1</sup> California is no exception, a recent report by the Legislative Analyst's Office explains that of children born in 1999 in California, approximately 50% of Black and Indigenous children will have some level of child welfare involvement by the age of 18, and children on Medi-Cal are more than twice as likely to experience child welfare involvement than children with private health insurance.<sup>2</sup>

The majority of the calls that come into the Child Protection Hotline are for the catch all category of neglect, including cases of poverty, lack of resources and domestic violence. In the current system, nearly 90 percent of all child abuse and neglect allegations are unsubstantiated. In 2023, of the 433,817 children and youth reported to Child Protective Services, 49,463 were determined to need the services. Leaving 384,354 children and youth exposed to the trauma of a report, and possibly an investigation, with the likely result of no additional supports or services that strengthen families.

Unnecessary reporting is harmful to children, families and communities. It breaks trust, produces feelings of shame and anger, and pushes families away from the help they need instead of inviting them to move toward a community that has support available for them.

California's system of Mandatory Reporting -at best, identifies children experiencing true safety concerns- however, at its worst, it begins a journey of systemic harm and intrusion that Black and Tribal Families disproportionately shoulder.

We believe AB 601 represents an important first step in transforming the system by establishing a universal training curriculum for all mandated reporters. Under current law, there is no consistent and standard training for mandated reporters, nor is there a legal requirement that all mandated reporters receive training of any kind. Required and standardized training will help ensure that there is more precision in reporting, so families are not inappropriately and unnecessarily subjected to an intrusive and traumatizing system.

AB 601 also establishes the Mandated Reporting Advisory Committee (MRAC) which will help continue the important work generated by the Mandated Reporting to Community Supporting Task Force. It will ensure the ongoing transformation of mandated reporting and ensure that disparities in the Child Welfare system are eliminated.

We believe that California can do better by children and families and that AB 601 helps move us closer to a reality in which children and families are together, safe, and strengthened by the resources they need to thrive.

For these reasons, we are pleased to support AB 601 (Jackson) and respectfully request your support for the amended bill.

Sincerely,

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