



Executive Summary

Data Analysis and Mapping Report

This report uses data obtained from the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) for Child Protective Services (CPS) involved families and children from 2018 to 2021 to demonstrate the urgent need for policymakers to collaborate and find better ways to support child and family well-being in Travis County.

The data evaluation was conducted in partnership with cross-sector providers, community, parents/caregivers, and youth with lived experience. This approach successfully co-created space to humanize interested parties, understand and meet community needs, and harness our collective strengths for greater impact.

This summary focuses on:

- Key findings of racial disproportionality in Travis County
- The impact of disproportionality on our community
- How we re-imagine child welfare locally

Child Welfare Race Equity Collaborative (CWREC)



Our Mission

With a focus on racial inequities within the child welfare system, we will confront and acknowledge the racial disparities in our community by building awareness, providing education, advocacy, and holding systems accountable for equitable practices and policies.



Strategy & Implementation

CWREC initiatives include re-imagining professional support for families in need, sustaining continued change, data collection, analysis, sharing and reporting to collectively identify gaps and co-design solutions.

"The impact of separating children from their families creates a much larger problem that isn't often considered by the Child Welfare System. The years of pain I endured as I struggled with finding my bio-brother... finally, after 40 years, that dream became my reality."

- Mosley Hobson, Former Foster Youth





Background

Black families in Travis County are much more likely than those of other races to be reported to the DFPS for possible child maltreatment. The disparity grows at each step of DFPS involvement, culminating in minors who are Black being 8 times more likely than those who are white to be separated from their families by DFPS in Travis County as of 2018. This rate is much higher than the statewide average, and the problem has continued in subsequent years. The Travis County Child Welfare Race Equity Collaborative (CWREC) was founded in 2018 in response to data from DFPS showing that Travis County had starkly disproportionate outcomes for Black families.

CWREC's mission is to confront the racial disparities in child welfare within our community by building awareness, providing education and advocacy, and holding systems accountable for equitable practices and policies using a data-driven approach. To help guide this work, we analyzed and mapped data regarding minors involved with the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) in Travis County from 2018-2021.

Disproportionality and Disparity Defined

Disproportionality is an over-representation or underrepresentation of a racial or ethnic group in the child welfare system compared with their percentage in the total population.

Disparity means that people of color experience system involvement at a higher rate than people who are non-Hispanic white.

In Travis County:

- 1) Black minors make up a much larger percentage of the Travis County child welfare cases than we would expect based on the overall percentage of the population who identify as Black or African American.
- 2) Disparities exist for all families of color in Travis County and are largest for Black families.
- 3) Travis County has some of the worst disproportionality and disparities in the State of Texas.

Key Findings in Travis County

- There has not been an sustained improvement in the high level of racial disparity of reports made to Texas DFPS from 2018 to 2021.
- Black minors remain 4 times more likely to have a report made to DFPS compared to white minors in Travis County.
- A report of possible maltreatment involving a Black family is 5 times more likely to be investigated* by DFPS compared to a report involving a white family.
- Black families receive Alternative Response† services less often than families of other races.
- Black families were still 6.5 times more likely than white ones to be separated‡ by DFPS in 2021. This disparity appeared to decrease in 2020, at the height of the COVID pandemic lock down, but then increased markedly in 2021, back to near-previous levels.
- Family separations in Travis County became more disproportionate for Hispanic families following the start of the COVID pandemic.
- There were geographic differences by race pertaining to a greater number of family separations by DFPS.
- Reports to DFPS are concentrated in certain zip code areas. High numbers of investigations occur in 78753, 78660, and 78744.
 - Interestingly, Black families living in Pflugerville (78660) are less likely to be separated compared to those in North Austin (78753) but there is a high degree of disparity in both areas.
 - Hispanic families in Southeast Austin zip codes (including 78744) experience high rates of investigations and family separations.
- Law enforcement and school personnel in Travis County made the most reports to DFPS, followed by medical professionals. Law enforcement reported families to DFPS at a rate 5.3 times higher for Black families than for white ones. School personnel reported Black families 3.7 times more often than white ones.

*Reports to DFPS may be investigated, "closed without investigation" or referred to Alternative Response services.

†Alternative Response connects families to community organizations and service providers. Working with families as equal partners in this way has been shown to help keep families together and avoid the need for foster care.

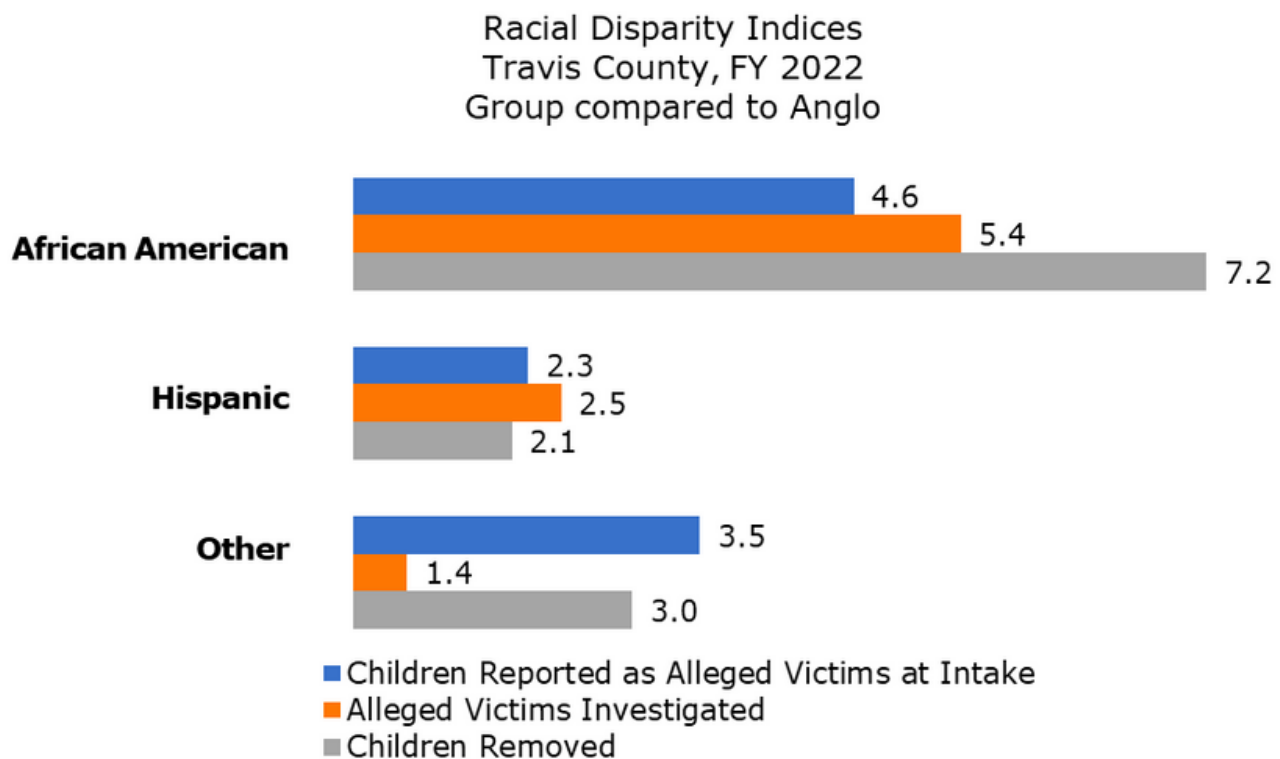
‡The final step of DFPS involvement for some families is family separation, with minors placed into foster care or other placement. This process inflicts trauma on all involved.

The Impact of Disproportionality

Why is disproportionality a problem?

While the stated goal of the child welfare system is to prevent further harm, involvement in the system also creates institutional harm to families. This harm is exacerbated when families are separated and when connections with family are disrupted.

The current system is reactive and punitive in nature, emphasizing mandatory reporting instead of fostering familial support and connection to community resources. This has resulted in the child welfare system becoming more aligned with a “policing” or law enforcement role than one of social service. Further, data indicate that the punitive nature of this system has disproportionately impacted families of color.



https://www.dfps.state.tx.us/About_DFPS/Reports_and_Presentations/Rider_Reports/documents/2021/2021-10-01_Rider_33_Report.pdf

"All of my dad's siblings were separated from each other and my indigenous grandmother. I could not understand the tension in my family when a cousin called someone else grandma until I learned about what the child welfare system did to our lineage. We are still healing and meeting family today, 40+ years later." - Anonymous

Re-Imagining Child Welfare: Shifting the strategy...

Where do we go from here?

The Child Welfare Re-imagined pilot program was founded to enhance the partnership between DFPS, the Travis County child welfare courts, and the community to actualize a child welfare system that highlights the voices of our youth and families impacted by CPS. This collaborative model works to prevent the separation of youth from their families and to provide support to caregivers. This collaborative model prioritizes the community impacted by the child welfare system, potentially nurturing more sustained and substantial progress and healthier communities in comparison to those of a privatized model (i.e., "community-based care") in the State of Texas. We envision a trauma-informed, community-centered, empirically driven, and culturally responsive child welfare system built on the foundation of collaboration and shared power.

We believe the child welfare system must be re-imagined and co-designed with the communities that are disproportionately harmed by the system, to better serve all residents of Travis County and the State of Texas. Recent years have brought improved recognition of the need to shift focus and resources from response to prevention. The Foundations to Thrive report identifies some of the existing assets in Travis County upon which stronger and more resilient systems of support may be built. However, these critical changes have been slow to be adopted and actualized. There is still much work to be done. Continued evaluation of disproportionality is key to the identification of target areas of intervention and subsequent evaluation of progress, with simultaneous attention focused on the elimination of disproportionality in Travis County. This may involve but is not limited to the identification of geographic areas most impacted, the disaggregation of disproportionality data by type of maltreatment, stage of CPS involvement, and the monitoring of incident report sources.



"There is no amount of therapy that could have made as much of a positive impact on my 15-year-old son as reconnecting with his extended birth family."

-Adoptive mom living in Travis County