

APRIL 3, 2024

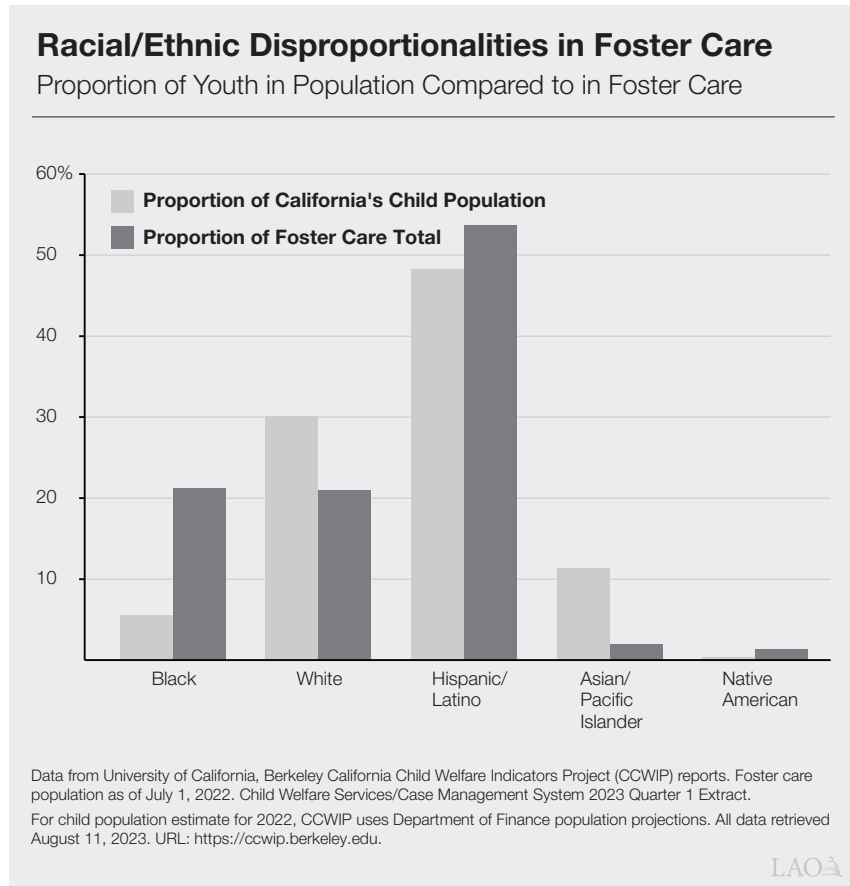
Update: Racial and Ethnic Disproportionalities and Disparities in California's Child Welfare System

PRESENTED TO: Assembly Budget Subcommittee No. 2 on
Human Services
Hon. Corey Jackson, Chair



LEGISLATIVE ANALYST'S OFFICE

Foster Youth Are Disproportionately Low Income, Black, and Native American



- The proportions of Black and Native American youth in foster care are around four times larger than the proportions of Black and Native American youth in California overall. The above figure displays aggregated state-level data; disproportionalities differ across counties.



Foster Youth Are Disproportionately Low Income, Black, and Native American

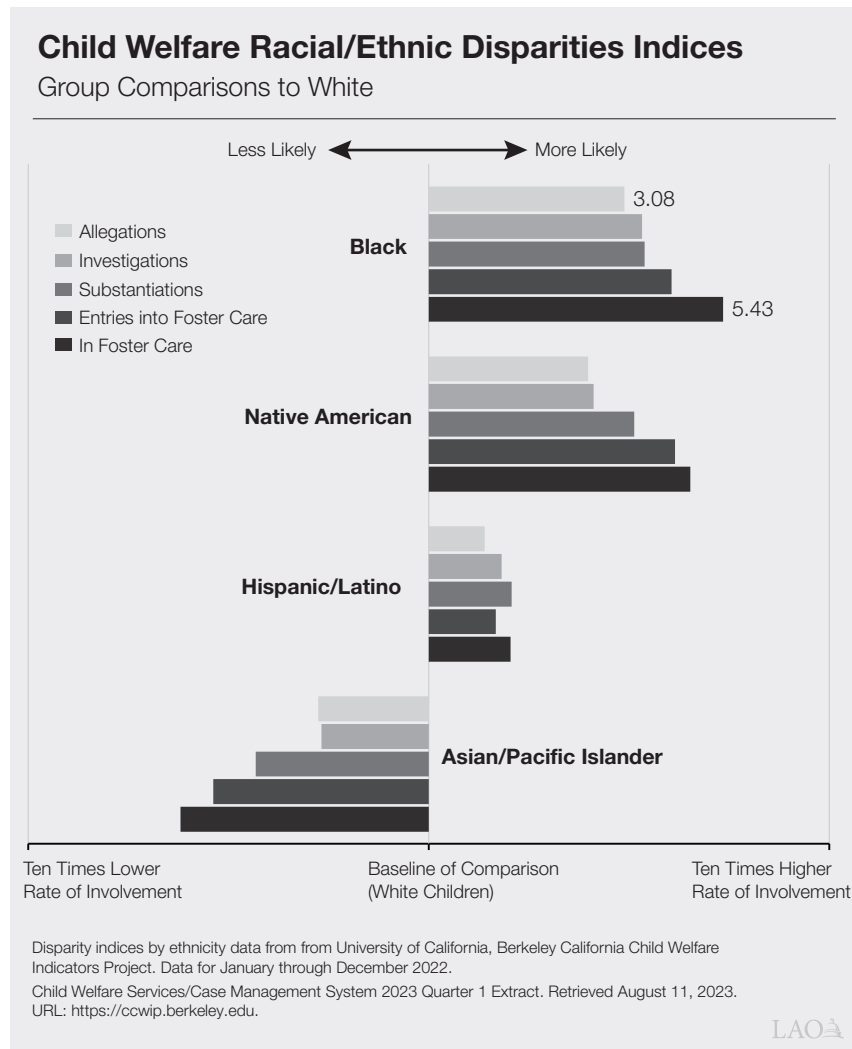
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- In addition, recent research¹ on cumulative child welfare system involvement of California’s 1999 birth cohort found nearly one in two Black and Native American children experienced some level of child welfare involvement by the time they turned 18 (compared to around 29 percent of Hispanic/Latino children, 22 percent of white children, and 13 percent of Asian/Pacific Islander children).
- This same research also found that California children with public insurance (Medi-Cal) experienced child welfare involvement at more than twice the rate of those with private insurance.

¹ Putnam-Hornstein, Emily et al. “Cumulative Rates of Child Protection Involvement and Terminations of Parental Rights in a California Birth Cohort, 1999–2017.” *American Journal of Public Health*, vol. 111, no. 6, June 2021, pp. 1157-1163. <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2021.306214>.



Disproportionalities and Disparities Persist Throughout System

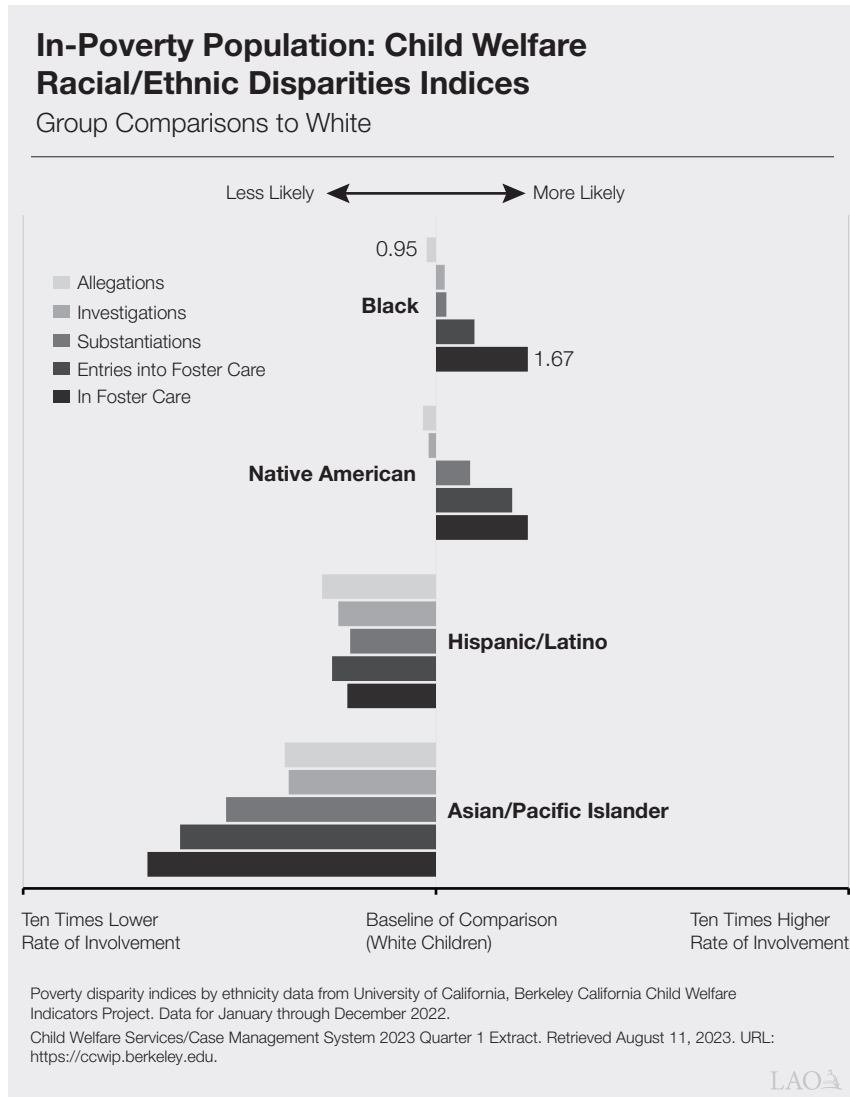


- Racial and ethnic disproportionalities and disparities are present within initial allegations and persist at all levels of the system—becoming the most pronounced for youth in care.



Disproportionalities and Disparities Persist Throughout System

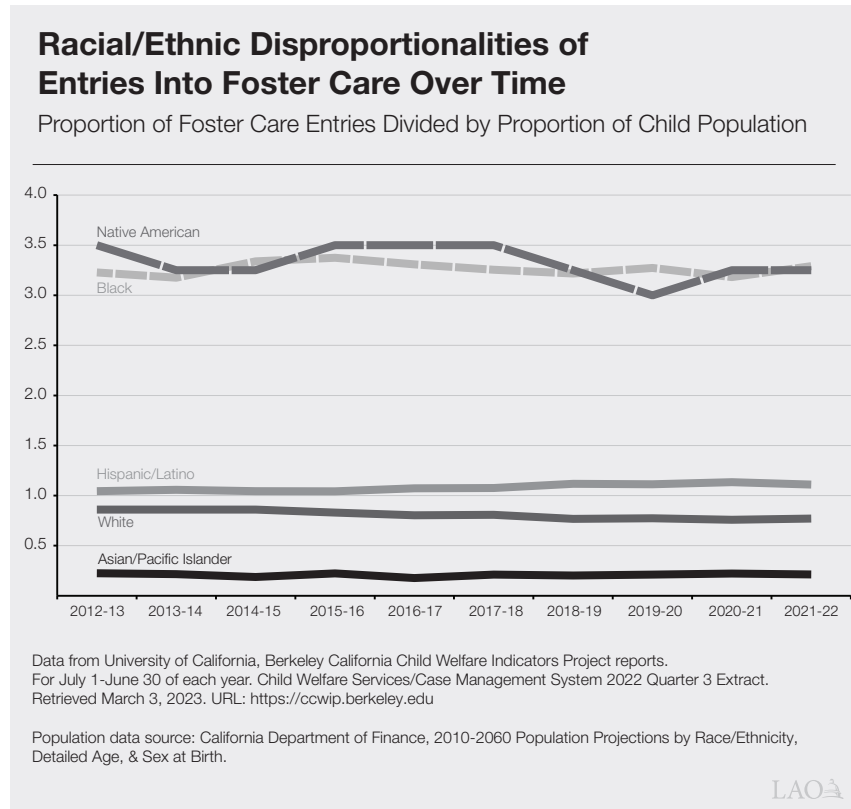
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- When accounting for poverty, disparities are diminished, although Black and Native American youth are still more likely than all other racial/ethnic groups to enter into and be in care. In addition, when accounting for poverty, Hispanic/Latino children are less likely, relative to white children, to become involved with the child welfare system.



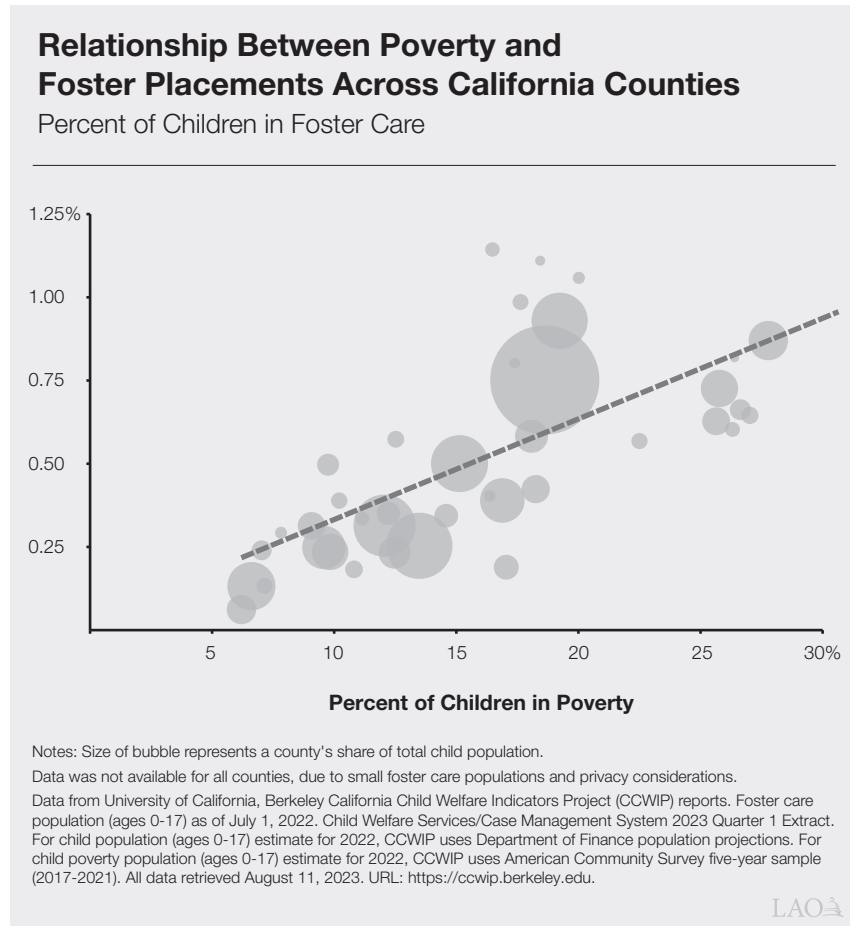
Disproportionalities and Disparities Have Persisted Over Time



- Racial/ethnic disproportionalities and disparities have not changed significantly over the past decade.



Child Welfare System Involvement and Poverty Are Strongly Correlated



- Throughout all levels of the child welfare system, families experiencing poverty are more likely to come to the attention of and be impacted by the child welfare system. For example, across California, foster placements by county increase as the rate of poverty increases, as shown in the figure above.



Child Welfare System Involvement and Poverty Are Strongly Correlated

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- The majority of California families involved with the child welfare system are experiencing poverty.
 - More than half (53 percent, estimate for 2023-24) of child welfare system-involved families in California meet 1996 Aid to Families with Dependent Children eligibility requirements. This roughly equates to earnings of under \$1,000 per month for a family of four.
 - Nationally, researchers estimate around 85 percent of families involved with the child welfare system have incomes below 200 percent of the federal poverty level, which is around \$5,000 a month for a family of four in 2023.
- These data reflect a substantial body of research finding that poverty and related factors are known risks that increase the likelihood of child maltreatment. Therefore, the fact that lower-income families are more likely to become involved with the child welfare system is not surprising and to a large extent reflects differences in exposure to risks.



Research Finds Concrete Supports Can Reduce Risks of Child Maltreatment

Programs and Policies Associated With Reducing the Risk of Child Maltreatment



Cash Aid



Minimum Wage



Tax Credits



Child Care Subsidies



Nutrition Assistance



Supportive Housing



Child Support Payments

Note: This is an illustrative list and does not represent all types of programs and studies that have found a relationship between economic and concrete supports and child maltreatment.

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- A growing body of research finds that increasing direct economic supports (such as the Earned Income Tax Credit and general cash assistance) is associated with a significant reduction in child maltreatment. Other concrete supports (such as housing assistance and food assistance) similarly are associated with significant reductions in maltreatment.
- One recent study looked broadly at the relationship between state spending on anti-poverty programs and child maltreatment. Specifically, this research examined total public benefits spending in all 50 states in 2010-2017, and found an increase of \$1,000 in public assistance spending per person living in poverty was associated with more than a 4 percent reduction in child maltreatment allegations, 2 percent reduction in foster care placements, and nearly 8 percent reduction in child fatalities.

