

A release from the Casey-CSSP Alliance for Racial Equity

Press Conference Call Briefing: Tuesday, October 24, 2006, 1:00pm EDT

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**New study documents that African American families are treated differently,
compared to Caucasians, in the child welfare system**

MIAMI, FL -- African American children and youth are not only over-represented in the nation's child welfare systems, but are also subjected to poorer treatment within those systems than are their Caucasian counterparts, a new study released today has confirmed.

Despite data that show no difference in the rates of child abuse and neglect between races, African American families are more frequently reported for abuse and neglect of their children, and their children are more frequently removed from their homes, with damaging consequences. Once in foster care, the study found, African American children and youth receive fewer visits from caseworkers and less mental health services than do Caucasian children.

These and other findings are part of "Synthesis of Research on Disproportionality in Child Welfare: An Update," authored by Dr. Robert B. Hill for the Casey-CSSP Alliance for Racial Equity, and were released at the Annual Conference of the National Black Child Development Institute being held October 22-24 in Miami, Florida. The Alliance comprises all five Casey family foundations and organizations committed to improving the lives of the nation's most vulnerable children and families.

The study is the first comprehensive summary of past and recent data examining racial disproportionality (the percentages of minority children served versus the percentages occurring in the U.S. population) and disparities in treatment and services within the child welfare system. It gives credence to concerns long voiced by child welfare professionals.

Almost 37 % of the 500,000 children in foster care today are African American, yet they represent only 15% of the child population in the U.S. Only 46% of the children in foster care are white, while they represent a much larger 61% of the child population in the United States.

"This study gives new perspective on the challenges facing children and families of color. We know that removing children from their homes often is not the best option because it causes such trauma, both to the family and to the child." says Dr. Hill.

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“The stakes are high,” adds Khatib A.F. Waheed, senior fellow with the Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP) and spokesperson for the Alliance. “We know that children who currently are or have been in the child welfare system are at increased risk

of dropping out of school, suffering serious mental health problems, going to juvenile detention or prison, and abusing drugs and alcohol – outcomes that ultimately translate into significant costs to American taxpayers.”

The Alliance commissioned the report to shed light on the issue and offer solutions to communities, public officials and policymakers.

“The safety of the child must be the priority. When families are struck with a crisis, there must be immediate interventions,” says Dr. Hill. “However, it is equally important for children and families to get the support they need to prevent children from entering or returning to care outside of their homes.”

The Casey-CSSP Alliance for Racial Equity is currently working with community members in Guilford County, North Carolina; Ramsey County, Minnesota; King County, Washington; and Sioux City, Iowa to build upon promising practices in local child welfare systems to improve racial disparities. In these communities, race is openly discussed among child welfare caseworkers, administrators, community leaders, and policymakers, individuals who have experienced foster care, and parents whose children have been removed from their homes.

The study, entitled “Synthesis of Research on Disproportionality in Child Welfare: An Update,” was commissioned by the Casey-CSSP Alliance for Racial Equity, which is comprised of five Casey foundations and organizations committed to improving the welfare of children and families. Those foundations include: the Annie E. Casey Foundation including Casey Family Services; Casey Family Programs; the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative; The Marguerite Casey Foundation; and the Center for the Study of Social Policy. The Alliance, formed in 2004, is committed to reducing the number of children who unnecessarily are removed from their homes and providing the services children and their families need to prevent them from entering or returning to care outside of their homes.

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Links:

Casey Family Programs www.casey.org

Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative www.jimcaseyyouth.org

Annie E. Casey Foundation www.aecf.org

Casey Family Services www.cfs.org

Marguerite Casey Foundation www.caseygrants.org

Center for the Study of Social Policy www.cssp.org