



## REPORT FROM THE FAIRNESS AND EQUITY COMMITTEE

“RACIAL DISPROPORTIONALITY – THE OVERREPRESENTATION OF A RACIAL GROUP IN COMPARISON TO THEIR NUMBERS IN THE GENERAL SOCIETY – CONTINUES UNABATED IN VIRTUALLY EVERY SYSTEM AND INSTITUTION IN OUR COUNTRY”

Coalition to Overcome Racism:  
Dealing with Racial Disproportionality  
Santa Cruz Sentinel 7/11/10

*“WHEN SPIDER WEBS UNITE, THEY CAN TIE UP A LION”*

Ethiopian proverb

NOVEMBER 2010

## FORWARD

The Fairness and Equity Committee patterned its' work after the California Child Welfare Redesign effort, which started one of the original Fairness and Equity committees in California. Both Committees examined the issue of over-representation or disproportionality related to children and families of color, particularly African American and Native American families in our State and County.

A committed group of community individuals, Child Welfare Administrators, community providers, and other leaders came together to look at the issue of disproportionality as it exists in San Diego. San Diego, like other Counties and communities in California, has disproportionate numbers of African American children and Native American children in the Child Welfare System, which begs for examination and identification of ways to address this problem. This report clearly identifies the problem and begins to make recommendations for change.

Each of the committee members came to an appreciation of the depth of the problem as it exists in San Diego and the negative impact it has had on African American/Native American children and families and the need for reform. This National/State/local issue requires a closer examination of all of the contributing factors, which created this problem. Reforming our system to serve families of color in a healthy, strength-base manner will improve outcomes for children and families, reduce the numbers and length of stays in foster care, and provide children of color the opportunity to grow up in a healthy family they can call their own. Reforming and redesigning the work we do in protecting and caring for children is critical and important work we must do in San Diego, which leads to making changes to improve the lives of all San Diego's Children, including African American/Native children.

Additionally, each of the committee members worked tirelessly to bring new awareness, insight and the beginnings of change. This sobering report helps us all understand there is much work to be done and we are only at the beginning of our efforts. However, we are excited to see the work continue and some needed changes come to fruition. We also must acknowledge the hard work of Patricia Bevelyn, Karan Kolb, Antonia Torres, Kathy Jackson , Roseann Myers, and all of the other committee members as well as the agency commitment and support of County of San Diego Child Welfare Services, County of San Diego Juvenile Court, the Commission on Children, Youth and Families & Casey Family Programs. A special thanks goes to Lyn Angene for all of her writing and hard work.

Also, our communities recognize that we - the community - have a part and obligation to work with Child Welfare System in creating the change we all desire. The community can no longer be the observer on the sidelines; they must be champions of change and work with our public-serving systems to protect our children, strengthen our families, and allow them to obtain the safety, health, and the well being needed to be vibrant healthy children, families, and communities.

Daphyne Watson, Co-Chair, South Bay Community Services  
Jorge Cabrera, Co-Chair, Casey Family Programs

# FORWARD

With appreciation to the following Committee members who contributed their time and expertise to the work.

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Antonia Torres, County of San Diego, HHSA Child Welfare Services

Robert White, County of San Diego, HHSA Child Welfare Services

# FORWARD

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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**The problem** In San Diego County, Black children comprise a little over 4% of the child population but over 23% of the children in foster care. Native American children comprise less than 1% of the child population but 2% of those in foster care. Disproportionality occurs at every step in the process, from initial reports of maltreatment to entry into foster care. Black and Native American children stay in the system longer and have poorer outcomes. The problem is not unique to child welfare, but occurs in all child-serving systems.

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**Goals and objectives** The multi-agency Fairness and Equity Committee has served as a subcommittee of the Commission on Children, Youth and Families from 2005 to 2010 and has been working to address the issue. Key areas of focus and accomplishments include the following:

- (1) Resource development and oversight efforts have resulted in securing the support and participation of the top leaders in child-serving systems;
- (2) Social marketing has resulted in building collaborative partnerships with the Black and Native American community;
- (3) Training has increased knowledge of stakeholders and supported the development of a culturally competent workforce; and
- (4) A number of innovative programs have been implemented.

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**Lessons learned** Through its work over the past five years, the Committee has identified critical elements in addressing disproportionality. These are

1. Having a knowledgeable and highly aware workforce;
2. Building critical alliances with community partners, parents and youth;
3. Having Agency leadership committed to a sustained long-term effort; and
4. Garnering technical assistance/support from foundations with resources.

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**Recommendations** Recommendations for future efforts to address disproportionality include:

- Implement other promising programs such as Parent Peer Partners, Cultural Team Decision Making, and Cultural Brokers.
- Coordinate efforts of the Child Welfare System, Welfare to Work and Public Assistance Programs so that opportunities for prevention and/or reunification are maximized.
- Continue exploration of ways to strengthen services to families and expand partnerships with the community.
- Continue training of social workers and expand scope to include other stakeholders such as the Juvenile Court.
- Expand Project Save our Children to other regions.
- Expand the work to include Hispanic families, who are also experiencing disproportionality, and to other related systems.

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# STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

## The National Picture

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**The problem is pervasive** Disproportionality and disparate outcomes for children and families of color occur in a wide number of systems including juvenile justice, criminal justice, education, health care, mental health care and child welfare. This report focuses on the problem within the child welfare system, although it should be noted that disparities within one system often negatively affect experiences in others.

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**Disproportionality in child welfare** As early as 1963, Black and Native American children were over-represented in the child welfare system. Today, Black and Native American children are represented in foster care at twice their proportions in the census populations (Hill, 2006). By contrast, White and Asian children are underrepresented. Hill notes that “In sum, at the national level, Blacks and Native Americans are twice as likely to be investigated or substantiated than they are in the general child population, but they are two or three times more likely to be placed in foster care than they are in the general child population.”

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**The cause: theories** Despite an abundance of studies on the subject, the cause of disproportionality has not been determined. A number of theories have been put forth, each with their supporters. The most common ones are that (1) some ethnic groups experience more risk factors associated with maltreatment of children such as unemployment, teen parenthood and other stressors; (2) ethnic groups reside in communities with risk factors that make them more visible to surveillance from public authorities; and (3) ethnic groups are overrepresented as the result of decision-making processes of child welfare agencies, cultural insensitivity, biases, and institutional racism.

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**Cost of disparities** To the extent that children of color are placed in the foster care system while White or Asian children in similar circumstances are not, the impact is felt on many levels: fiscal, system resources, and personal outcomes for the youth. As examples, California spent about \$5.4 billion on child welfare services in 2008-2009, of which over one billion was for foster care support payments. Social workers carry caseloads of twice the recommended limit.

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**Strategies** Many states are tackling the issue of disproportionality with strategies that include legislative reform, partnering with the community and other stakeholders, increasing public awareness, human service workforce development, data-based decision making, and implementation of new programs or changes in practice.

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# STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

## The San Diego Picture

### Population compared to those in care

In 2009 there were 807,600 children ages 0 to 17 in the county. The following is based on the 770,546 with a known ethnicity. On July 1, 2009, there were 4,317 children ages 0-17 in foster care. However, the proportion in foster care varied greatly according to ethnicity:

1 out of 187 children living in the county were in foster care. By ethnicity:

1 out of 422 Asian/Pacific Islander children

1 out of 338 White children

1 out of 158 Hispanic children

1 out of 69 Native American children

1 out of 32 Black children

Because of these large variances, the ethnic makeup of the foster care population differs substantially from the child population in general as shown in the table below.

<b>Ethnic group</b>	<b>Ethnic Distribution of the Child Population in the County in 2009</b>	<b>Ethnic Distribution of those in Foster Care Point in time: 7/1/09</b>
White	44.4%	23.4%
Hispanic	41.9%	47.4%
Asian/Pacific Islander	8.8%	3.7%
Black	4.2%	23.4%
Native American	.8%	2.0%
Total	100%	100%

### Decision stages

The number and ethnicity of children in foster care represent an accumulation of primarily four decisions: reporting, substantiation of maltreatment, entry into foster care, and length of stay in care.

In San Diego, Black and Native American children are more likely to be reported, more likely to have the allegation substantiated, more likely to be placed in care, and stay in care longer than White children.

# GOALS

## Fairness & Equity Committee; System Improvement Plan

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**Summary** San Diego has been formally addressing the issue of disproportionality in child welfare since 2005. The two main arenas in which goals have been set are the Fairness & Equity (F & E) Committee of the Commission on Children, Youth and Families and the Child Welfare Services' System Improvement Plan (SIP).

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**Fairness & Equity Committee** The Fairness & Equity Committee was formed in January 2005 to examine the issue of overrepresentation of persons of color in child-serving systems and to improve the well-being of these children and families. Members conducted strategic planning to set goals and develop a shared vision and purpose. The Committee selected the following key areas of focus: (1) Resource Development and Oversight; (2) Social Marketing; (3) Improved Practice through Training; (4) Innovative Program Strategies; and (5) Culturally Competent Workforce.

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**System Improvement Plan (SIP)** In 2004 the State of California initiated a work plan to better monitor the quality of services provided to maltreated children. To that end, each county is required to conduct a County Self-Assessment followed by a System-Improvement Plan (SIP). The first County Self-Assessment quantified substantial over-representation of Blacks and Native Americans in out-of-home care. Since then, Fairness and Equity/Agency Collaboration have been systemic factors included in the San Diego SIP. SIP goals were developed in concert with the Fairness & Equity Committee's purpose and five key focus areas as follows:

- Increase CWS staff and other stakeholders' awareness and knowledge of disproportionality in the CWS population, highlighting Black and Native American groups. (F & E focus area 2)
- Improve the practice of CWS staff and other stakeholders that may impact disproportionality of Blacks and Native Americans in the County's child welfare system. (F & E focus area 3 and 5)
- Utilize the County's Fairness and Equity Committee to provide input on the fairness and equity SIP activities and assess the impact on the County's disproportionality in its child welfare system. (F & E focus area 1)
- Reduce disproportionality. (F & E purpose)
- Implement Structured Decision Making. (F & E focus area 4)
- Participate in the California Disproportionality Project to reduce the disparate number of Black children represented in CWS. (F & E purpose)
- Increase collaboration with the Native American community around the issue of disproportionality. (F & E purpose and focus areas 2 and 5)

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# MILESTONES

## Focus Area 1: Resource Development and Oversight

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**Strategies** Strategies for this focus area included identifying representatives in the community to serve as cultural consultants to social workers, developing champions among the leadership of child-serving systems, identifying funding sources, providing oversight by serving in an advisory capacity to CWS, and data monitoring.

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**Milestones** Milestones include the following:

- Disproportionality is incorporated into the policy level of child-serving systems, including the Commission’s subcommittees, an Action Team of top leaders in the system as well as the community, and is one of the two key focus areas of the Blue Ribbon Commission.
- Casey Family Programs has consistently provided funds and technical assistance to support professional training, the California Disproportionality Project and the Family Finding Pilot project in San Diego’s Central Region. Other funding sources are needed in order to expand best practices.
- The Committee provided substantial input on the CWS System Improvement Plan, as noted on the previous page.
- The Committee reviews statistics provided by CWS that assist in monitoring progress. Quarterly system improvement meetings are held with the Tribal Child Welfare Community, where attendees review data trends and discuss strategies to improve outcomes.

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## Focus Area 2: Social Marketing

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**Strategies** Social marketing draws from successful techniques used by commercial marketers, but rather than limiting information dissemination to top-down, it includes listening to the needs and desires of the target audience and building programs from there. Strategies focused on facilitating the exchange of experiences and ideas between community members and professionals.

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**Milestones** Milestones include the following:

- The Committee produced a FACT SHEET that provides a synopsis of the issue at the local level.
- The Committee implemented community focus groups in the Central Region. These have developed into a kinship caregiver’s network.

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# MILESTONES

## Focus Area 2: Social Marketing, Continued

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### Milestones, continued

- In 2008, members of the Committee conducted outreach to the Native American community by holding a joint meeting at the Rincon Reservation. The Committee solicited input on the systemic problems that the tribes have in working with the child welfare system and collectively the two groups brainstormed possible solutions. These joint meetings are integrated into CWS, whereby CWS managers conduct quarterly system improvement meetings with the Tribal Child Welfare representatives. Most are held at one of the local reservations, which facilitate participation of the tribal community, parents and youth.
  - The Committee has formed a public-private partnership with community leaders and concerned citizens in the Black community. The primary focus of the group is to educate the community on the issue of disproportionality and its impact on the well-being and future of Black children and families. See Innovative Programs for more information.
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## Focus Areas 3 and 5: Training & Culturally Competent Workforce

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### Strategies

Training strategies included bringing in national experts, getting technical assistance from jurisdictions that had more experience in addressing the issue, participating in the California Disproportionality Project, researching best practices, revising the training curriculum for social workers, and providing information to families to facilitate engagement with the child welfare system.

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### Milestones

Milestones include the following:

- The Committee has periodically brought in national experts to provide training to the Committee and other stakeholders.
  - The Committee implemented a number of recommendations from King County, Washington, which provided valuable technical assistance. A few of these include: (1) move from dialogue to action, (2) reach out to all who are committed to the work without regard to title/position, and (3) begin educating the community.
  - The Committee researched programs that have been effective in addressing disproportionality in other jurisdictions.
  - An extensive amount of training has been provided to social workers and all CWS training curriculum was updated to address disproportionality. Training has also been provided on family engagement techniques with families from other cultures and other related topics.
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# MILESTONES

## Focus Areas 3 and 5: Training & Culturally Competent Workforce, Continued

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### Milestones, continued

Milestones include the following:

- With support from the Committee, San Diego Child Welfare Services successfully applied to be included in the California Disproportionality Project (CDP). The Project provided a forum for counties to come together and focus on the issue of disproportionality. San Diego was one of ten counties invited to participate and the only county that sent two teams focused on two different community ethnic groups.
  - Education efforts have extended to include parents as well. CWS developed a booklet and DVD entitled “A Parent’s Guide to Child Welfare Services and the Juvenile Court: Indian Child Welfare Version” to help Native American parents understand the legal process involved in the child welfare system.
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## Focus Area 4: Innovative Programs

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### Strategies

This focus area involved strategies for initiating new policies and practices.

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### Milestones

- “Universal service” strategies are based on the premise that improvement in services to all families will result in better outcomes for children and families of color since some of the services most valuable to minority families are often critical for the success of all families. CWS has implemented six such programs, including (1) Structured Decision Making (SDM); (2) Team Decision Making (TDM); (3) the Choice Program; (4) Incredible Families; (5) Peer Parent Support Group; and (6) Signs of Safety.
- Five of the changes were designed specifically for Native American families: (1) Prevention Caseworkers; (2) Family Unity & Nurturing Meetings; (3) Child Protection Team; (4) Child Assessment Center; and (5) Club 7.
- Two changes were designed specifically for the Black community. One of these was a review of cases where Black foster youth are expected to age out of the system to determine if an alternative plan can be identified. The second was the Central Region Pilot program to implement Family Finding.
- Note: The Cultural Broker Program is in the exploratory stage of development and is expected to be implemented early in 2011.

Each of these programs is discussed more fully in the extended report.

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# APPROACHES BY OTHER JURISDICTIONS

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**Overview** The Committee reviewed a large number of approaches taken in other jurisdictions and identified these four as having particular promise.

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**Cultural Broker Model** The Cultural Brokering program has been successful in reducing disproportionality in Fresno and is one of the programs that is expected to be implemented in San Diego in 2011. The cultural broker is someone in the community who can serve as the “go-between” between people of a certain culture and an agency or institution. Ideally, the cultural broker is of the same culture as the family or at least has an extensive knowledge of the family’s culture.

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**Harlem Children’s Zone (HCZ)** The Harlem Children’s Zone is a strategy that emphasizes family engagement and comprehensive, neighborhood-based intensive services to prevent foster care placement. Programs include initial assessment in the home, truancy prevention, family development that works closely with the schools and provides after school, evening and weekend programming for children and families, combining substance abuse services with family strengthening, short-term crisis intervention and home-based supportive counseling combined with recreational enrichment programs.

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**Texas statewide model** “Senate Bill 6, passed by the 79th Texas Legislature, 2005, and signed by Governor Rick Perry, laid the foundation for comprehensive reform of Child Protective Services (CPS) in Texas. One aspect of that reform is addressing issues of disproportionality or overrepresentation of a particular race or ethnicity within CPS. Since the legislation’s passage, the state has analyzed data related to enforcement actions, reviewed policies and procedures in each CPS program, and developed and implemented programs to remedy disparities.”

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**Courts Catalyzing Change** The National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (NCJFCJ) has undertaken a project called Courts Catalyzing Change: Achieving Equity and Fairness in Foster Care Initiative (CCC) which is funded by Casey Family Programs and supported by the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Prevention.

The program brings together judicial officers and other system experts to set a national agenda for court-based training, research and reform initiatives to reduce the disproportionate representation of children of color in the dependency court system. One of the tools includes a Benchcard<sup>®</sup> to serve as a checklist of key inquiries, analyses and decisions.

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# LESSONS LEARNED

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**General lessons** With respect to the Casey Family Programs' Breakthrough Series Collaborative on Reducing Disproportionality and Disparities for Children and Families of Color in the Child Welfare System noted earlier, all counties learned the importance of: having a knowledgeable and highly aware workforce; building critical alliances with community partners; Agency leadership committed to a sustained long-term effort at reduction; and garnering technical assistance, support, and strong leadership from foundations with resources like Casey Family Programs.

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**San Diego participants**

Lessons learned with respect to the Central Region/Family Finding pilot project included the following:

Children were pleased to know that they had family members not previously discovered and most were interested in reconnecting with family. However, the older children were sometimes reluctant to establish a relationship; they were unsure that they could trust the "newfound" family who they felt should have been involved in their life when they first entered the system. Therefore, it is best to connect the child with the family as early in the process as possible, preferably at the time of removal.

Substitute care providers sometimes perceived it as an effort to disrupt placements. They need to be more fully engaged in helping children connect with relatives and see themselves as a partner in the process.

Families learned that children are not lost forever and that there was an opportunity for them to reconnect with a family member. Parental engagement needs to include the paternal side as well as the maternal side; otherwise, a valuable resource to the child can be lost.

When social workers were supportive, they were able to anticipate the initial "no" or resistance on the part of the substitute care provider and youth and were more willing to work through it; teamed effectively with the contractor on moving the process along; and recognized that the work did not stop at the finding of family and that follow-up is critical.

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**Team 7<sup>th</sup> Generation**

Lessons learned with respect to the 7<sup>th</sup> Generation Team include:

Participation by the Native American youth, who proved to be leaders, was critical; their passion and enthusiasm were contagious.

The best result was the opportunity for the various Indian, community and county entities to better understand each other, which in turn leads to respect for what each can bring to a collaborative effort.

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## RECOMMENDATIONS

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**Implement other promising practices**

Implement other promising practices such as Parent Peer Partners, Cultural Team Decision Making and Cultural Brokers. The Cultural Broker Program was described in the section on Approaches by Other Jurisdictions. The San Diego Action Team is in the planning stages for implementing this program, with intended start-up in early 2011.

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**Coordinate with other programs**

Coordinate efforts of the Child Welfare System, Welfare to Work and Public Assistance Programs. As noted earlier, poverty is a high risk factor for child abuse and neglect. It is critical that these programs work in concert with each other to maximize opportunities for prevention and/or reunification.

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**Improve family support efforts**

Parents whose children are in foster care are required to engage in services to resolve the safety issues that resulted in removal. One of the tasks of the Commission committees will be to assess the degree of match between where services are needed and where they are located. This effort should be expanded to include an examination of services beyond the Commission's three focus areas.

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**Expand community involvement**

Project Save our Children involves the community in the issue of disproportionality in the Central Region. It is recommended that this strategy be expanded to all Regions.

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**Continue training and expand scope**

Continue training of social workers in disproportionality and expand education efforts to include more stakeholders, one of which is the San Diego Juvenile Court. .

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**Expand ethnicities targeted**

Ten years ago Hispanic children were under-represented in the foster care system but that is no longer the case. The data for 2009 show that Hispanic children are over-represented. This ethnic group should now be included in the work.

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**Address all systems**

San Diego County has been conducting work for several years on the issue of disproportionality with respect to both the dependency and juvenile justice systems. Efforts are also underway in the mental health system and the Commission on Children, Youth and Families has committed to addressing disproportionality in each of the three focus areas for the upcoming two calendar years. It is recommended that the Commission continue to support efforts to address disproportionality in all systems that fall within the scope of the Commission's scope of responsibility. For a discussion of how systems impact related systems, see the extended report.

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