

## Findings from the FY2022 Report on Racial Disproportionality in the Illinois Child Welfare System

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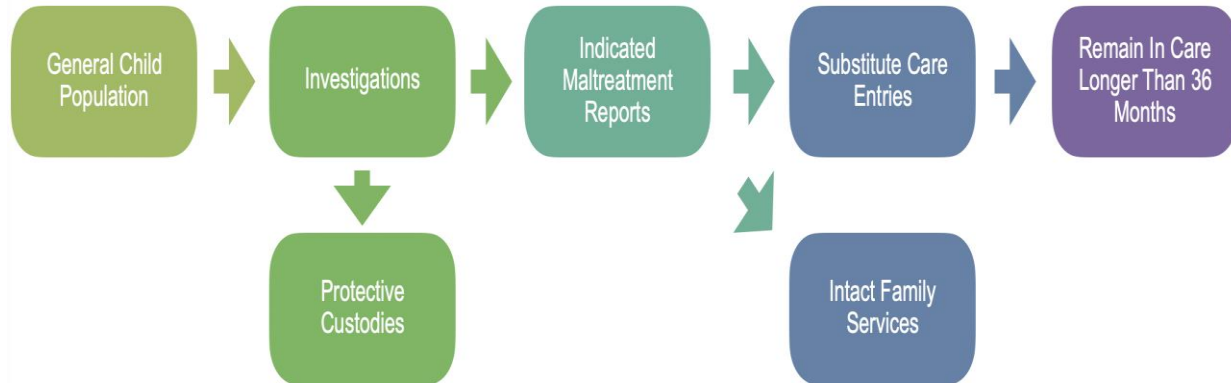
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The over-representation of Black children in the child welfare system is a concern both nationally and in Illinois. As part of the ongoing effort to monitor the performance of the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) under the *B.H. Consent Decree*, the Children and Family Research Center (CFRC) produces an annual report that examines racial disproportionality at six child welfare decision points (see Figure 1) including:

- 1) which children had allegations that were screened-in for *investigation* following a call to the child abuse and neglect hotline;
- 2) which children were taken into temporary *protective custody* during an investigation;
- 3) which maltreatment allegations in the investigation were *indicated*, which occurs when the investigator finds credible evidence that the alleged abuse or neglect occurred;
- 4) which children resided in families that were referred for and accepted home-based child welfare services known as *intact family services*;
- 5) which children were removed from their homes and entered substitute care; and
- 6) which children remained in substitute care for longer than 36 months without achieving a permanent family through reunification, adoption, or guardianship.

The report examines the amount of disproportionality over the past seven years at each decision point for Black, White, and Latinx children involved in the Illinois child welfare system. This research brief highlights four important findings from the FY2022 Racial Disproportionality Report about the over-representation of Black children in the Illinois child welfare system. For more detailed information about racial disproportionality at each decision point, including discussion of results for White and Latinx children, please refer to the full report (Fuller, Landa, Wakita, & Adams, 2022).

**Figure 1. Child Welfare Decision Points**



### *Defining and Measuring Racial Disproportionality*

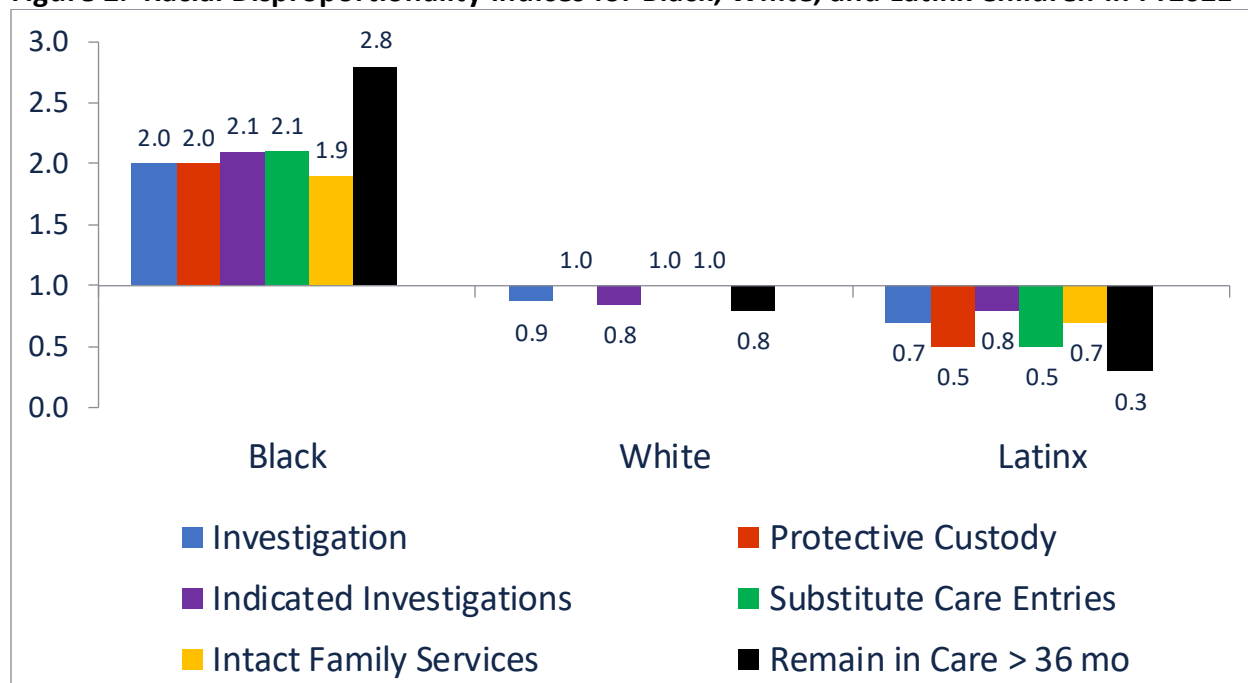
Racial disproportionality is defined as the over- or under-representation of a racial group in the child welfare system compared to their representation in a relevant base population. In the annual report, it is represented by the Racial Disproportionality Index (RDI), which is calculated by dividing the percentage of children in a racial or ethnic group involved in some part of the child welfare system by their percentage in the general child population. RDI values greater than 1.0 indicate over-representation. For example, an RDI of 2.0 means that children in that group are represented at twice the rate at a decision point as they are in the child population. RDI values less than 1.0 indicate under-representation; thus, an RDI of 0.5 means that children are represented half as much at that decision point as they are in the population. RDI values equal or close to 1.0 indicate no disproportionality; children in that group are represented at rates that are proportionate to their representation in the population. RDI are displayed in figures throughout this brief to show the differences between racial/ethnic groups. Since an RDI of 1.0 indicates no disproportionality, 1.0 is set as the baseline in the figures. Values above the baseline indicate over-representation, while values below the baseline indicate under-representation. In both instances, the length of the bar in the figure corresponds to the amount of disproportionality.

### *Finding 1: Black children are over-represented at every child welfare decision point in Illinois*

Figure 2 shows the RDI for the three racial/ethnic groups at each of the six child welfare decision points in FY2021. For Black children, the RDIs for investigations, protective custodies, indicated investigations, substitute care entries, and intact family service case openings were equal or close to 2. This means that the percentages of Black children involved in each of these parts of the child welfare system were two times more than the percentage of Black children in the Illinois population. The RDI for Black children at the last decision point—children who remained in substitute care for more than 36 months—was 2.8 in FY2021. This RDI means that

the percentage of Black children who remained in care longer than 36 months was almost three times the percentage of Black children in the general child population.

**Figure 2. Racial Disproportionality Indices for Black, White, and Latinx Children in FY2021**



***Finding 2: Most, but not all, of the over-representation of Black children in the Illinois child welfare system is introduced at the hotline***

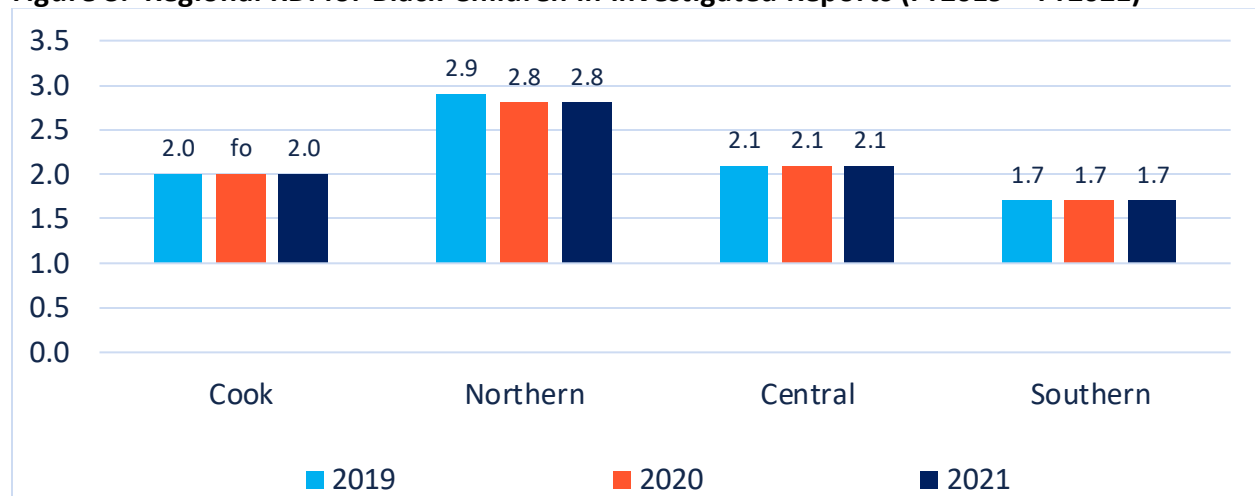
The results in Figure 2 clearly show that Black children were over-represented at each decision point in the Illinois child welfare system, and this over-representation began at the first decision point that was examined in the report (hotline calls that are screened in to become investigations). There is an additional decision that comes before the decision to screen-in a hotline call for investigation—the decision that professionals and others make when they initiate a call to the Department’s hotline to report suspected child abuse or neglect. The CFRC does not have access to data on calls to the hotline, but unpublished analyses completed by DCFS have shown that the RDI for Black children for hotline intakes was 2.0 in FY2021. This means that Black children are also over-represented among children reported for abuse and neglect in Illinois, which is something that DCFS has no control over.

Once the over-representation for Black children is introduced at the first decision point, whether it is hotline intakes or investigations, the degree of over-representation stayed at about the same level through subsequent decision points including protective custodies, indicated investigations, substitute care entries, and intact family service case openings. However, the over-representation of Black children increased substantially at the final decision point that was examined—children who stay in substitute care longer than 3 years.

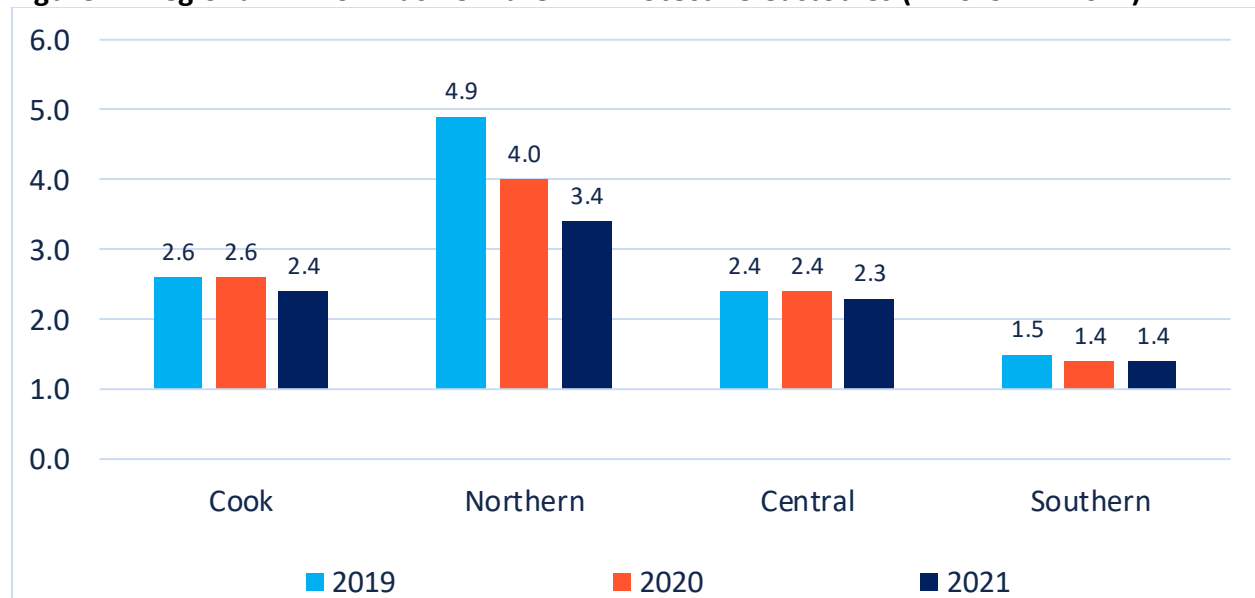
### ***Finding 3: Large regional differences exist in the RDI for Black children at each decision point***

The annual racial disproportionality report also examined RDIs at the DCFS regional level. Regional analyses showed a consistent pattern of results at all six of the child welfare decisions points: the degree of over-representation of Black children was greatest in the Northern region and smallest in the Southern region. The following figures show the RDI in each region over the past three fiscal years for investigated reports (Figure 3), protective custodies (Figure 4), indicated reports (Figure 5), entries into substitute care (Figure 6), intact family case openings (Figure 7), and remaining in care longer than 36 months (Figure 8).

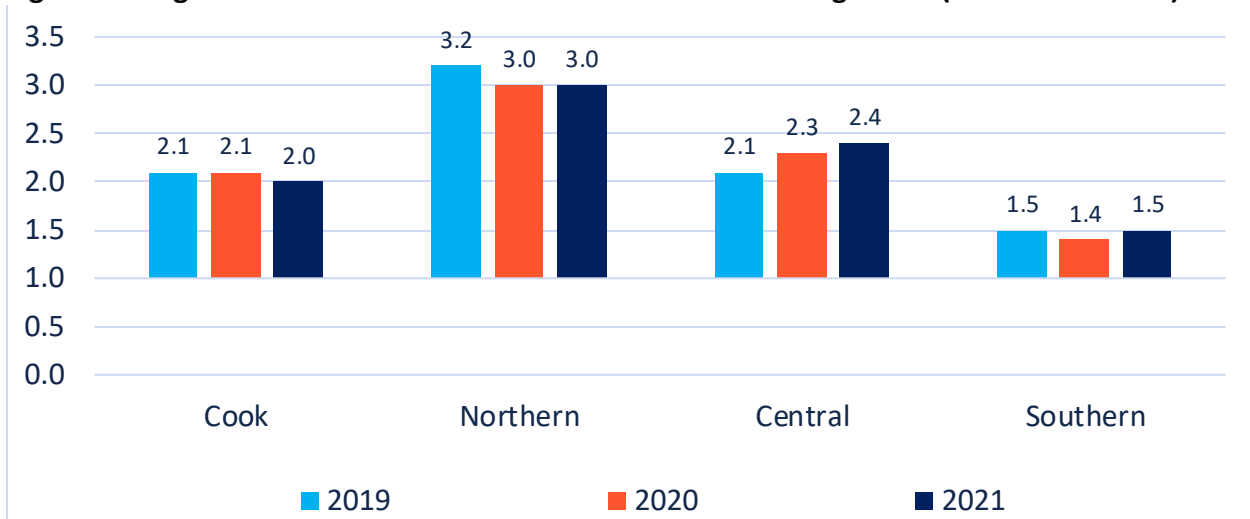
**Figure 3. Regional RDI for Black Children in Investigated Reports (FY2019 – FY2021)**



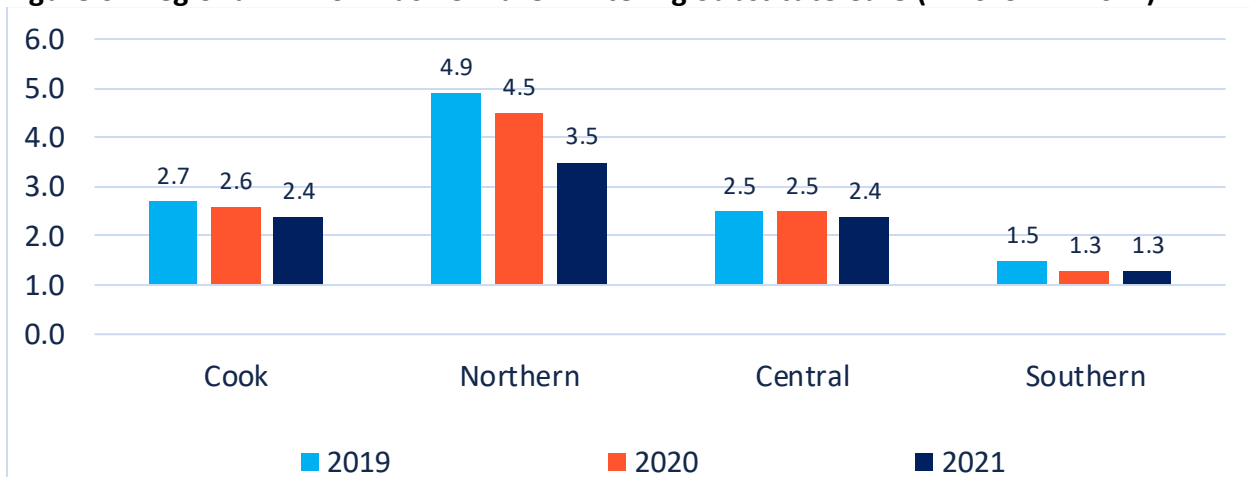
**Figure 4. Regional RDI for Black Children in Protective Custodies (FY2019 – FY2021)**



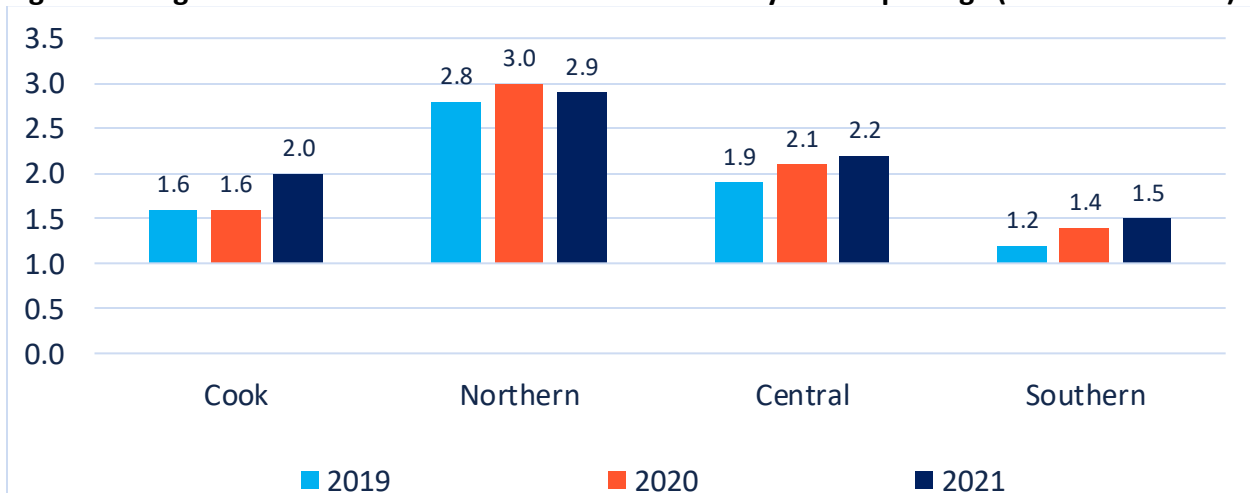
**Figure 5. Regional RDI for Black Children in Indicated Investigations (FY2019 – FY2021)**



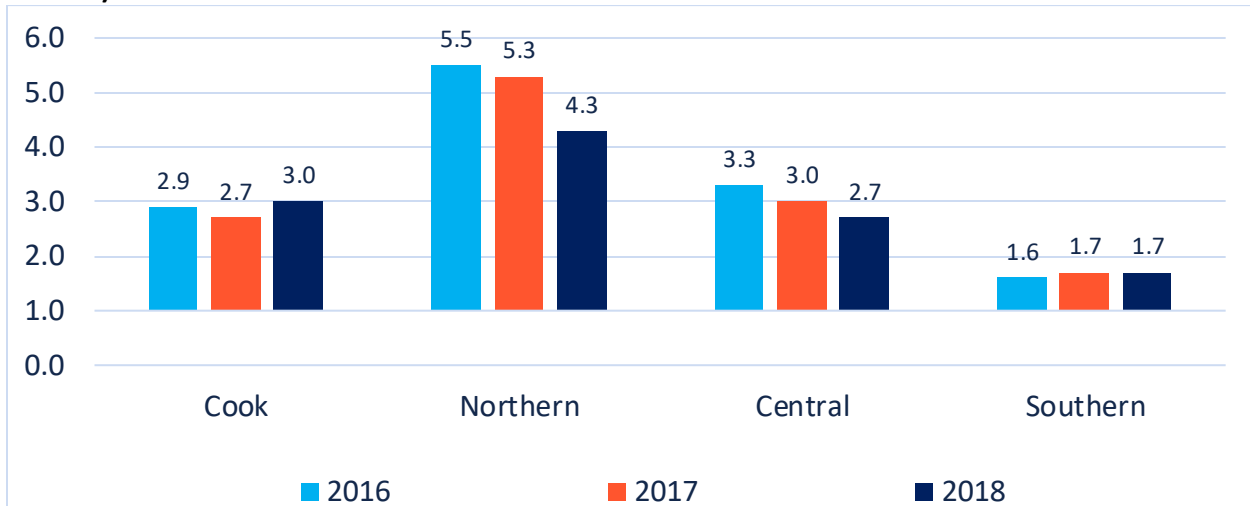
**Figure 6. Regional RDI for Black Children Entering Substitute Care (FY2019 – FY2021)**



**Figure 7. Regional RDI for Black Children in Intact Family Case Openings (FY2019 – FY2021)**



**Figure 8. Regional RDI for Black Children Remaining in Care More than 36 Months (FY2019 – FY2021)**

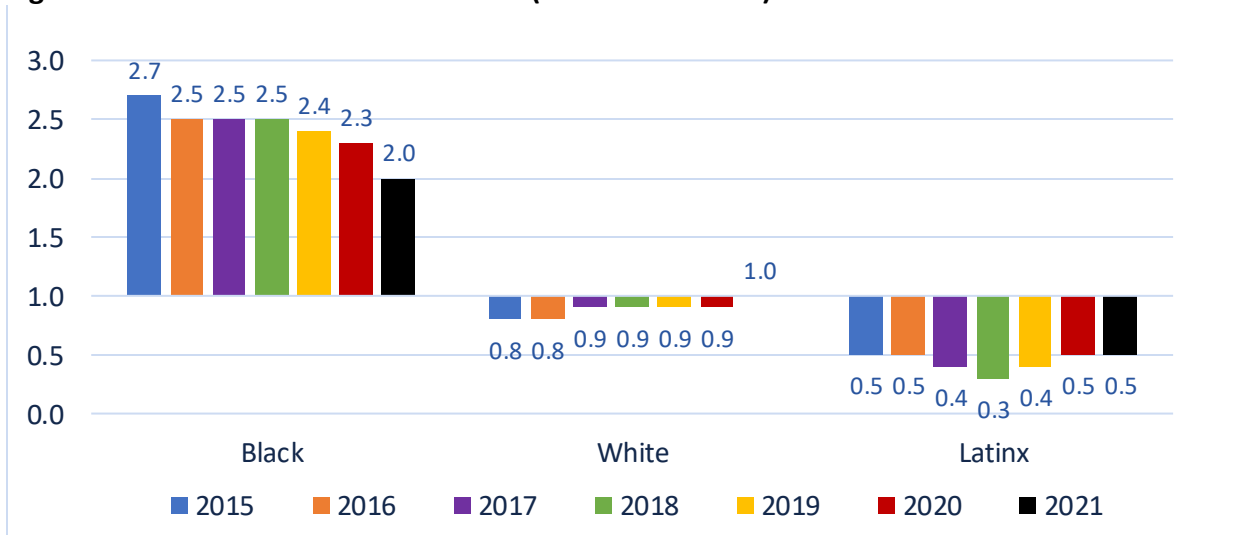


Note: This indicator examined children who entered substitute care in FY2016-FY2018 and remained in care at the end of FY2019-FY2021.

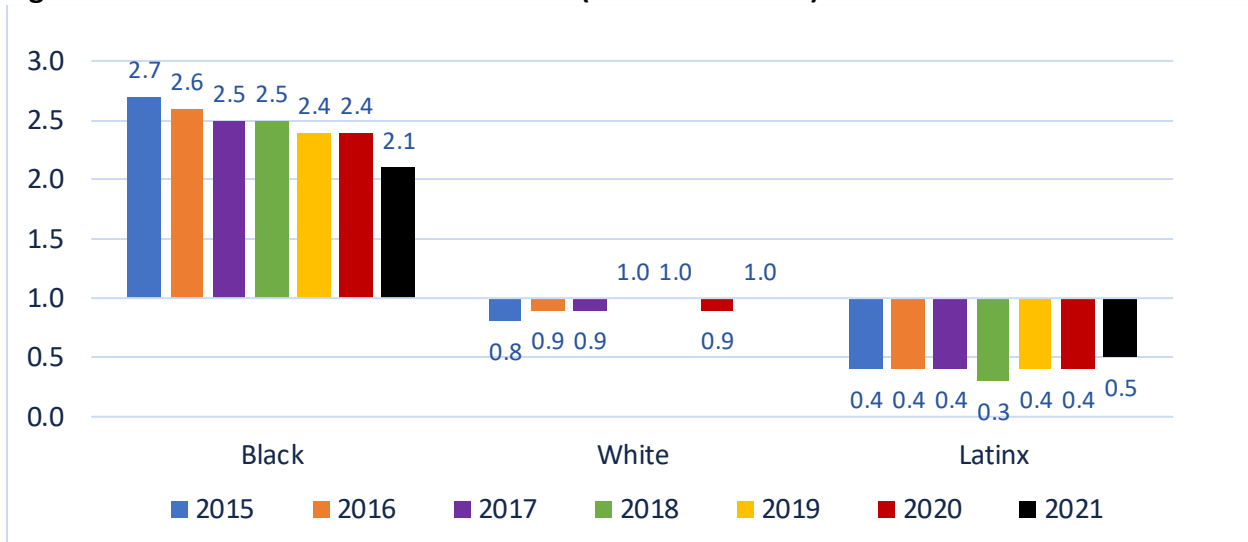
***Finding 4: Over-representation of Black children has been decreasing over the past few years at some decision points***

The annual disproportionality report contains information on the RDI at each decision point over the past seven fiscal years so that changes over time can be observed. The results in the FY2022 report show that the amount of over-representation for Black children has been steadily decreasing at two decision points—protective custodies (Figure 9) and substitute care entries (Figure 10). Although Black children were still over-represented at both decision points in FY2021, the amount of disproportionality has decreased.

**Figure 9. RDI for Protective Custodies (FY2015 – FY2021)**



**Figure 10. RDI for Substitute Care Entries (FY2015 – FY2021)**



## Conclusions and Recommendations

Serious concerns about the over-representation of Black children in the Illinois child welfare system have led to urgent calls to action to address the issue. In order to develop effective interventions, reliable and ongoing data about racial disproportionality are needed that provide administrators and policymakers with information about which segments of the system are most critically impacted. As part of our ongoing work of monitoring the performance of the Illinois Department of Children and Families Services under the *B.H.* Consent Decree, the Children and Family Research Center produces an annual report that measures racial disproportionality over time at both the regional and state level. This brief highlighted key findings from the FY2022 report related to the disproportionality among Black children in the Illinois child welfare system and suggests some areas where additional study and intervention are needed.

The findings showed that Black children were over-represented at each child welfare decision point examined. However, the over-representation of Black children was introduced when calls were made to the child abuse and neglect hotline. A closer examination is needed of the over-representation of Black children among hotline calls, including information about calls made from different types of reporters (teachers, law enforcement, and medical staff), the types of maltreatment reported by each group, and whether these reports are indicated. In addition, more information is needed about the types of formal and informal training that mandated reporters receive on identifying and reporting child abuse and neglect. This information will help target the development of specific interventions aimed at improving maltreatment reporting and reducing the over-representation of Black families among hotline calls.

Although some of the over-representation of Black children in the child welfare system was introduced when families were reported and remained at a similar level for the other child welfare decision points, a substantial increase in disproportionality was observed for Black

children who remained in substitute care for more than three years (RDI = 2.8 in FY2021). Other data from the FY2022 *B.H.* Monitoring Report confirm that Black children have longer median lengths of stay in substitute care compared to all other racial/ethnic groups (see Children and Family Research Center, 2022). Additional study is recommended to gain a better understanding of the family, caseworker, system, and policy factors that are contributing to the long stays in substitute care among Black children. This study should incorporate the perspectives of Black families who have been involved in the child welfare system.

### **Recommended Citation**

Fuller, T., Landa, C., Wakita, S. & Adams, K. (2022). *Findings from the FY2022 Report on Racial Disproportionality in the Illinois Child Welfare System*. Urbana, IL: Children and Family Research Center, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

### **Acknowledgements**

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### **Related Publications**

Children and Family Research Center. (2022). *Conditions of Children in or at Risk of Foster Care in Illinois: FY2022 Monitoring Report of the BH Consent Decree*. Urbana, IL: Children and Family Research Center, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Fuller, T., Landa, C., Wakita, S. & Adams, K. (2022). *Racial Disproportionality in the Illinois Child Welfare System: FY2022 Report*. Urbana, IL: Children and Family Research Center, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.