

Racial Disproportionality in the Illinois Child Welfare System

FY2024 Report in Response to HB2914

Executive Summary



100 Trade Centre Dr.
Champaign, IL 61801
217-333-5837
www.cfrc.illinois.edu



School of Social Work

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

Racial Disproportionality in the Illinois Child Welfare System

FY2024 Report in Response to HB2914
Executive Summary

A REPORT BY THE

C H I L D R E N A N D F A M I L Y R E S E A R C H C E N T E R



School of Social Work

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

Tamara Fuller, Ph.D.

Amanda C. Kelley, Ph.D.

Martin Nieto, M.A.

Zainab Suntai, Ph.D.

Satomi Wakita, Ph.D.

The Children and Family Research Center is an independent research organization created jointly in 1996 by the School of Social Work at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services. The goal of the Center is to identify research needs, support research that is policy and practice relevant, and encourage and facilitate public child welfare research activities through collaborative relationships.

Funding for this work is provided by the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services. The views expressed herein should not be construed as representing the policy of the University of Illinois or the Department of Children and Family Services.

Any part of this report may be photocopied and distributed when appropriate credits are given. No part of this report, or the report in its entirety, may be sold for profit.

For questions about the content of the report contact:

Tamara Fuller at (217) 333-5837 or
t-fuller@illinois.edu

This report is available on our website: <http://www.cfr Illinois.edu>

CHILDREN AND FAMILY RESEARCH CENTER



School of Social Work

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

© 2024 Children and Family Research Center, School of Social Work,
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Executive Summary

Effective January 1, 2022, Illinois House Bill 2914 (HB2914) requires the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS, the Department) to submit an annual report regarding racial disproportionalities for children and families involved in the Illinois child welfare system. This report uses child welfare data from DCFS to examine racial disproportionalities in child welfare outcomes for Black, White, Latinx, and other racial/ethnic groups during FY2024 (July 1, 2023–June 30, 2024) at both the state and subregional levels. Racial disproportionality refers to the over- or under-representation of a racial or ethnic group in the child welfare system compared to that group’s representation in a relevant base population. In this report, it is measured as a Racial Disproportionality Index (RDI), and there are two different base populations used to calculate the RDI. For the indicators related to children involved in investigations, indicated investigations, investigations screened by the court, protective custodies, safety plans, and substitute care entries, the RDIs were calculated by dividing the percentage of children in a racial or ethnic group involved in those parts of an investigation by the percentage of children in that racial or ethnic group in the Illinois child population. For indicators related to children in substitute care, including children in different placement types, length of stay in care, and children who achieved family permanence through reunification, adoption, or guardianship, the RDIs were calculated by dividing the percentage of children in a racial or ethnic group involved in those parts of the child welfare system by the percentage of children in that racial or ethnic group in substitute care during the fiscal year. For both sets of RDI, values greater than 1.0 indicate over-representation, values equal or close to 1.0 indicate no disproportionality, and values less than 1.0 indicate under-representation.

Chapter 1 of this report describes the data and methods used to produce the findings, including definitions of race, ethnicity, and racial disproportionality. **Chapter 2** focuses on state-level findings, offering a comprehensive analysis of racial disproportionality across the investigation and substitute care outcomes. **Chapter 3** delves into subregion-level results, examining how these disproportionalities vary across different administrative regions within Illinois. Finally, **Chapter 4** summarizes the key findings and provides practical recommendations to address the identified areas of concern. The report centers on four child welfare outcomes: investigations, placement types, length of stay in substitute care, and family permanence. The following tables summarize the results for each of these outcomes.

Investigations

The investigation indicators assess racial disproportionality in investigations (screened-in reports), indicated investigations, investigations screened by the court, protective custodies, safety plans, and substitute care entries. At the state level, Black children were consistently over-represented across all stages of investigations, with an RDI of 2.11 for investigations, 2.30 for protective custodies, and 2.22 for substitute care entries. White children were proportionately represented and Latinx children were under-represented for all investigation indicators at the state level. When the investigation indicators were examined by the type of

maltreatment allegations, the amount of over-representation for Black children varies considerably, with the highest RDI for investigations involving lack of supervision/lock out (RDI = 2.61). Conversely, White and Latinx children were proportionately or under-represented in most categories. At the subregion level, the Aurora subregion showed the highest disproportionality for Black children in protective custodies (RDI = 4.15), followed by Rockford (RDI = 3.16) and Champaign (RDI = 2.87). Other subregions, such as Marion, displayed lower but still significant disproportionality (RDI = 1.96).

Investigation Indicators—State (FY2024)			
	Black	White	Latinx
Investigations	2.11	0.84	0.80
Indicated investigations	2.07	0.86	0.80
Investigations screened by court	1.97	1.07	0.47
Protective custodies	2.30	0.96	0.46
Safety plans	2.11	0.97	0.54
Substitute care entries	2.22	1.00	0.42

Maltreatment Type Indicators—State (FY2024)								
	Risk of harm	Neglect	Env. neglect	Lack of supervision	Physical abuse	Sexual abuse	Emotional abuse	Substance exposure
Black								
Investigations	2.10	2.06	2.17	2.61	2.14	1.63	1.44	1.81
Indicated investigations	2.03	2.49	1.64	2.83	2.42	1.31	1.15	1.54
Investigations screened by court	1.94	2.49	1.78	2.73	2.19	1.30	-	1.32
White								
Investigations	0.84	0.91	0.98	0.74	0.82	0.93	1.06	1.08
Indicated investigations	0.86	0.85	1.20	0.68	0.76	0.92	1.22	1.16
Investigations screened by court	1.06	0.92	1.22	0.84	0.96	1.25	1.31	1.32
Latinx								
Investigations	0.80	0.71	0.52	0.70	0.83	0.93	0.72	0.55
Indicated investigations	0.81	0.55	0.41	0.69	0.78	1.18	0.59	0.55
Investigations screened by court	0.47	0.49	0.29	0.45	0.53	0.56	-	0.29

Note. If the number of children is 20 or fewer or the base population for calculating an RDI is less than 0.1%, the RDI is not reported.

Investigation Indicators—Subregion and Cook Region (FY2024)

	Aurora	Rockford	Champaign	Peoria	Springfield	East St. Louis	Marion	Cook
Black								
Investigations	3.04	2.45	2.45	2.34	2.35	2.05	2.13	1.98
Indicated investigations	3.11	2.60	2.74	2.60	2.60	2.17	2.22	1.98
Investigations screened by court	3.78	3.14	2.46	2.19	2.30	2.02	1.40	2.51
Protective custodies	4.15	3.16	2.87	2.58	2.19	2.38	1.96	2.69
Safety plans	3.67	2.65	2.50	2.58	2.42	2.02	1.92	2.33
Substitute care entries	3.86	3.25	2.70	2.34	2.26	2.23	2.01	2.76
White								
Investigations	0.71	0.85	0.81	0.86	0.86	0.74	0.93	0.48
Indicated investigations	0.62	0.81	0.77	0.81	0.82	0.71	0.92	0.44
Investigations screened by court	0.68	0.73	0.83	0.88	0.85	0.80	1.00	0.36
Protective custodies	0.65	0.76	0.76	0.82	0.83	0.70	0.92	0.37
Safety plans	0.69	0.84	0.83	0.83	0.81	0.78	0.94	0.41
Substitute care entries	0.69	0.76	0.79	0.87	0.83	0.73	0.92	0.38
Latinx								
Investigations	1.13	0.67	0.80	0.67	0.73	0.63	0.76	0.94
Indicated investigations	1.31	0.64	0.78	0.73	0.77	0.67	0.89	1.00
Investigations screened by court	1.06	0.51	0.53	0.70	1.03	-	0.50	0.78
Protective custodies	0.99	0.50	0.61	0.63	1.10	-	0.71	0.62
Safety plans	1.06	0.50	0.47	0.58	1.10	-	0.61	0.82
Substitute care entries	1.05	0.45	0.57	0.56	0.93	-	-	0.59

Note. If the number of children is 20 or fewer or the base population for calculating an RDI is less than 0.1%, the RDI is not reported.

Placement Types

The next set of indicators examined the types of foster care settings where children are placed. State-level findings revealed that Black children were slightly under-represented in kinship foster care (RDI = 0.95) but over-represented in specialized foster care (RDI = 1.28) and congregate care (RDI = 1.21). White and Latinx children were proportionately represented in most placement types, except congregate care, where they were under-represented. Subregion-level results showed great variability for children in all racial/ethnic groups.

Substitute Care Placement Type Indicators—State (FY2024)			
	Black	White	Latinx
Kinship foster care	0.95	1.04	1.03
Traditional foster care	1.02	0.96	0.99
Specialized foster care	1.28	0.76	1.01
Congregate care	1.21	0.87	0.79

Substitute Care Placement Type Indicators—Subregion and Cook Region (FY2024)								
	Aurora	Rockford	Champaign	Peoria	Springfield	East St. Louis	Marion	Cook
Black								
Kinship foster care	1.01	1.02	1.03	0.99	0.99	1.01	0.90	0.97
Traditional foster care	0.94	0.97	1.01	1.17	1.13	0.94	1.05	1.01
Specialized foster care	1.14	0.99	0.97	0.94	1.06	1.22	1.27	1.07
Congregate care	1.12	1.19	1.01	1.30	0.98	1.27	-	1.10
White								
Kinship foster care	0.98	1.01	1.00	1.01	1.01	1.01	1.01	0.95
Traditional foster care	1.00	0.96	1.00	0.90	0.90	0.98	0.98	1.27
Specialized foster care	0.98	0.85	0.99	1.00	1.02	0.84	1.00	0.90
Congregate care	1.13	0.93	0.95	0.94	1.02	0.77	1.02	0.84
Latinx								
Kinship foster care	1.03	0.95	1.04	1.08	1.03	1.00	0.90	1.13
Traditional foster care	1.07	1.13	0.79	0.88	-	1.30	1.69	0.83
Specialized foster care	0.82	1.49	-	-	-	-	-	0.78
Congregate care	0.64	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.76

Note. If the number of children is 20 or fewer or the base population for calculating an RDI is less than 0.1%, the RDI is not reported.

Length of Stay in Substitute Care

The length-of-stay indicators measure the amount of time children spend in substitute care before achieving permanence. At the state level, Black children were under-represented among children who remained in care for less than four years and over-represented among children who remained in care for 60 months or more (RDI = 1.34). Conversely, White children were over-represented among those exiting care within shorter timeframes, such as less than 12 months (RDI = 1.10) and under-represented among those who remained in care 60 months or more (RDI = 0.70). Subregion-level results varied substantially, and the numbers of children in care for 60 or more months were too small to compute RDI in many subregions.

Length of Time in Substitute Care Indicators—State (FY2024)			
	Black	White	Latinx
< 12 months	0.84	1.10	0.99
12-23 months	0.75	1.21	0.98
24-35 months	0.72	1.16	1.27
36-47 months	0.86	1.15	0.93
48-59 months	1.03	1.03	0.89
60 or more months	1.34	0.70	1.06

Length of Time in Substitute Care Indicators—Subregion and Cook Region (FY2024)								
	Aurora	Rockford	Champaign	Peoria	Springfield	East St. Louis	Marion	Cook
Black								
< 12 months	1.14	0.78	0.83	1.02	1.03	0.94	-	1.07
12-23 months	0.64	0.77	1.01	1.09	1.29	-	-	0.83
24-35 months	0.60	0.96	0.85	0.99	-	0.83	-	0.80
36-47 months	0.92	1.29	1.28	0.69	0.92	0.57	1.27	0.89
48-59 months	1.72	-	1.00	1.08	-	0.93	-	0.99
60 or more months	1.18	-	-	-	-	1.03	-	1.07
White								
< 12 months	0.84	0.88	1.11	0.98	0.97	1.09	0.92	-
12-23 months	1.37	1.20	1.06	1.06	0.95	1.23	1.03	1.47
24-35 months	1.33	1.15	0.94	1.01	1.06	1.10	1.03	-
36-47 months	0.92	0.85	0.92	1.12	1.06	1.33	0.99	1.49
48-59 months	-	1.19	1.07	1.00	1.03	1.08	1.10	-
60 or more months	0.87	-	1.01	1.21	0.83	0.87	1.03	0.77

	Aurora	Rockford	Champaign	Peoria	Springfield	East St. Louis	Marion	Cook
Latinx								
< 12 months	0.96	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
12-23 months	1.04	-	-	-	-	-	-	1.21
24-35 months	1.10	-	-	-	-	-	-	1.61
36-47 months	1.15	-	-	-	-	-	-	1.20
48-59 months	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.95
60 or more months	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.81

Note. If the number of children is 20 or fewer or the base population for calculating an RDI is less than 0.1%, the RDI is not reported.

Family Permanence

The permanency indicators assess the likelihood of children exiting substitute care through reunification, adoption, or guardianship. State-level results showed that Black children were under-represented in achieving permanence through reunification (RDI = 0.87), adoption (RDI = 0.85), and all three types of permanence combined (RDI = 0.89), and over-represented in guardianships (RDI = 1.14). Black children were under-represented in reunifications and adoptions in some subregions and proportionately represented in others. In contrast, White children were over-represented in adoptions across most subregions.

Family Permanence Indicators—State (FY2024)			
	Black	White	Latinx
Achieved permanence	0.89	1.08	1.03
Achieved permanence through reunification	0.87	1.06	1.16
Achieved permanence through adoption	0.85	1.16	0.86
Achieved permanence through guardianship	1.14	0.91	0.98

Family Permanence Indicators—Subregion and Cook Region (FY2024)								
	Aurora	Rockford	Champaign	Peoria	Springfield	East St. Louis	Marion	Cook
Black								
Achieved permanence	0.93	0.95	0.98	0.94	1.01	0.78	0.99	0.95
Permanence through reunification	1.02	0.81	1.05	1.09	1.05	0.72	1.14	0.87
Permanence through adoption	0.71	1.08	0.87	0.74	1.00	0.73	0.85	1.03
Permanence through guardianship	1.02	-	-	1.03	-	1.23	-	0.99

	Aurora	Rockford	Champaign	Peoria	Springfield	East St. Louis	Marion	Cook
White								
Achieved permanence	1.05	1.03	1.02	1.05	1.00	1.13	1.01	1.10
Permanence through reunification	1.01	0.99	0.98	1.00	0.96	1.18	0.97	1.01
Permanence through adoption	1.11	1.05	1.09	1.13	1.03	1.15	1.05	1.09
Permanence through guardianship	1.14	-	-	1.03	1.11	0.82	1.07	1.32
Latinx								
Achieved permanence	1.01	0.96	0.91	0.95	1.51	1.11	-	1.07
Permanence through reunification	0.99	1.28	1.14	0.83	-	-	-	1.38
Permanence through adoption	1.18	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.83
Permanence through guardianship	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.79

Note. If the number of children is 20 or fewer or the base population for calculating an RDI is less than 0.1%, the RDI is not reported.

Summary and Recommendations

The results of the FY2024 Racial Disproportionality Report in Response to HB2914 highlight several key areas of concern with regard to the over-representation of Black children in the Illinois child welfare system. Black children were over-represented at every investigation decision point including screened-in investigations, indicated investigations, protective custodies, court screenings, safety plans, and entries into substitute care. The RDIs for Black children for each of these investigation indicators were 2.0 or greater, with the largest RDI at the protective custody decision (RDI = 2.30). When the RDIs for Black children in specific types of investigations were examined, the largest RDI was for investigations related to lack of supervision/lock out (RDI = 2.61 in FY2024) and the smallest RDI were for investigations of emotional abuse (RDI = 1.44) and sexual abuse/human trafficking (RDI = 1.63).

Examination of the RDIs for the substitute care indicators identified other areas of concern. The first area is the use of restrictive placement types (e.g., congregate care). Black children were slightly under-represented in kinship foster care placements (RDI = 0.95) and over-represented in specialized foster care and congregate care placements (RDI = 1.28 and RDI = 1.21, respectively). Another concern is that Black children continued to be disproportionately represented among those with lengthy stays in substitute care before exiting the system. In FY2024, Black children were under-represented among children who remain in care less than 12 months and 12–47 months before exiting and were over-represented among children who

remained in care 60 months or more (RDI = 1.34). Finally, Black children were under-represented among those who exited substitute care through reunification (RDI = 0.87), adoption (RDI = 0.85), and all types of permanencies combined (RDI = 0.89). It should be noted that White children were over-represented in each of these permanency indicators in FY2024.

The final chapter of this report highlights recommendations to address inequities in the Illinois child welfare system, including continued support and evaluation of the Bias-Free Child Removal Pilot Program to reduce over-representation of Black children in protective custodies and substitute care entries. Further study is recommended to understand the high rates of investigations for lack of supervision among Black children and to identify preventive strategies. Black children's disproportionate placement in congregate care and their prolonged stays in substitute care (five years or more) should be addressed through the use of existing predictive risk models and comprehensive studies that prioritize Black families' perspectives. Efforts to improve family reunification rates should be guided by Illinois-specific data and national best practices. Finally, the Department should prioritize the collection and analysis of additional data on child well-being, including educational, health, and housing metrics to fully address the scope of disproportionality across the system. Through deliberate and strategic actions, Illinois can lead the nation in creating a more just and equitable child welfare system. For detailed findings and methodology, please refer to the full chapters and appendices.