



**DEPARTMENT of CHILDREN and FAMILIES**  
*Making a Difference for Children, Families and Communities*



**MEMORANDUM**

**To:** All Staff

**From:** Joette Katz, Commissioner

**Date:** Wednesday, March 21, 2018

**Subject:** Commissioners Memo: Racial Justice Revisited

A few years ago I issued a Commissioner's memo acknowledging that racial biases permeate child welfare practice--from the front end beginning with the calls to the Careline, through the risk assessment tools we use at the investigation phase, to the track we select, services we offer, the success or lack thereof in the engagement and utilization of those services- and for whom, and finally to our decisions around which cases can close and which ones "we need to hang on to just a little bit longer." Additionally, policies and practices that support family preservation and integrity can have unintended fiscal consequences, and we need to be mindful of the disparities that, although well intentioned, we help perpetuate.

We know that sometimes we have unintentionally engaged in non-need based decisions-not because we were intentionally racist, but because we were oblivious. We are not alone and we do not operate in a vacuum. Reforming just child welfare and other service systems is inadequate to reverse the devastating consequences of neighborhood disadvantage that many of our families experience, but the fact that we at times have been merely complicit and not the primary factor doesn't excuse nor mitigate the damage that we caused at worst or helped to preserve at best.

Since then, we have morphed into an agency that asks the hard questions at nearly every opportunity. We ask them of ourselves and our providers. We have significantly increased awareness of the problem among the professional and local communities that serve our families, motivating others to carefully assess racial disparities in their communities and the reasons behind them. In partnership we are working together to intentionally address disparities as a strategy to improve outcomes for all children.

Improved data and data collection processes around race and ethnicity are essential for obtaining an accurate picture and for taking appropriate action to address disproportionality and disparities. Indeed, race needs to be part of the conversation in developing information systems and in developing data collection policies translating into improving services at each point of the child welfare continuum. We cannot allow our analysis and strategy to be muddled by an inadequate understanding of the dynamics of the problems we're trying to solve; nor should be get swept along into conclusions and proposed solutions that reflect insufficient consideration of all the available evidence, and less than rigorous assessment of the full range of plausible explanations and alternative strategies.

"Are we there yet"? Not by a long shot, and it's important to avoid being captured by our own rhetoric. But we are a different agency at a different point in time-solely because of all the work you've all done and the partnerships that you've forged. I have asked those in senior leadership to share with everyone the work they have promoted to nurture and sustain an environment in which employees, families and all of our partners feel safe to discuss the impacts of racism, power and privilege on agency practice and their personal lives. We will disseminate those accounts over the next few weeks. As I stated years ago, we recognize that becoming a racial justice organization is an ongoing process, and it is through the learning along the way that our culture will be strengthened and our workplace made more dynamic. We are on this journey together.

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