



For Immediate Release: May 19, 2017

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RACIAL INEQUITIES PERSIST IN CALIFORNIA'S DELIVERY OF SERVICES TO CHILDREN WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

New Report Shows Dramatic Disparities in Funding by Agencies Serving Mostly Black and Latino Clients

Los Angeles (May 18, 2017) – Five years after the L.A. Times published an explosive exposé revealing stark racial differences in services for children with autism through California's Department of Developmental Services (DDS), a new report confirms there has been little progress in closing the service delivery gap. Additionally, the report sheds new light on staggering disparities in funding for service agencies that serve primarily Black and Latino clientele. The report was written by the public interest law firm Public Counsel with funding support from the Lucile Packard Foundation for Children's Health.

“A child's ethnicity, geography, or language spoken at home, should not influence the services they receive from the state of California to treat developmental disabilities,” said Martha Matthews, director of Public Counsel's Children Right's Project. “Yet California's byzantine system of service delivery ensures the most disadvantaged families get the least amount of support.”

The new report shows that among the state's 21 service agencies – called “regional centers” – that are charged with providing services and supports to children with developmental disabilities, there is a relationship between the percentage of Black and Latino clientele and the amount of services these agencies annually authorize for their clients:

- The 10 regional centers that serve majority Black and Latino clients on average authorize **\$3,887 less per client** when compared to the 11 regional centers that serve majority white and Asian clients (*\$15,238 vs. \$19,125 respectively*).
- The five regional centers that have the highest percentage of Black and Latino clients, on average authorize **\$6,738 less per client** when compared to the five regional centers with the highest percentage of white and Asian clients (*\$14,081 vs. \$20,819 respectively*).
- A client at the South Central L.A. Regional Center (91% Black and Latino) receives on average nearly **\$8,000 less** in approved services annually than a child at the Westside Regional Center in Los Angeles (55% Black and Latino).

The L.A. Times exposé, published in late 2011, prompted former State Senator Darrell Steinberg to create a “Task Force on Equity and Diversity,” which took input from more than 50 experts, and in 2013 published a comprehensive report identifying dozens of recommendations for reducing racial disparities in the DDS system. However, most of these reforms were never implemented.

“Despite the calls for reform by California leaders five years ago, there has been little change in how DDS and the regional centers fundamentally operate,” said report author and senior staff attorney at Public Counsel, Brian Capra. “Our organization works closely with families, and we see regularly how

this system discriminates against Black and Latino clients. We need real reform now. These families cannot wait another five years.”

Some within the DDS system have suggested that racial disparities in funding allocation are due to “cultural differences” – with white families more willing to place their children in expensive out-of-home living arrangements. Public Counsel’s report addressed that argument by solely examining services approved for children served in their family homes.

The report found alarming racial disparities persisted among children ages 3-21 living at home:

- **19 of the 21 regional centers authorize less spending proportionately on Latino children than their white counterparts**
- At the Lanterman Regional Center in L.A. County – which serves a broad geographic area from Hollywood to Pasadena -- Latino children received on average **\$3,375 less** per year in authorized services than white children (*\$5,562 vs. \$8,937 respectively*)
- At L.A.’s Westside Regional Center, the disparity in annual funding was more stark – Latino children received on average **\$4,700 less** in authorized services than white children (\$10,126 vs. \$14,835) while Black children fared only slightly better receiving **\$2,626 less** than their white counterparts; Asian children received **\$2,555 less** than whites.

“This report confirms what many people have known for years, this system is broken,” said Matthews. “It is long past time for a total overhaul of how funding and services are delivered. Services should be allocated based on client needs, and not influenced by irrelevant factors such as race and language.”

Public Counsel has partnered with the non-profit organization, Special Needs Network to co-sponsor a bill authored by Assemblymember Sebastian Ridley-Thomas, AB 1610. The bill would create a task force to develop a new budget and allocation methodology for services based on client need.

Additionally AB 1610 would restore non-medical therapies, social recreational services, and respite supports that were suspended in 2009 due to budget constraints – an action that was supposed to only be temporary until a new budget and allocation model for services was developed, which never happened. Advocates point to data that shows Latino, Black and Asian families used these suspended services in higher numbers than White families and therefore were especially harmed by the cuts.

“We’re calling on our elected officials to step up and take action,” said Capra. “Assemblymember Ridley-Thomas’s bill, AB 1610, gets the process of meaningful reform started, and will deliver immediate results by making valued services once again accessible to minority families. This problem is so deep and pervasive, that tinkering around the edges won’t make a difference. We need leadership from our elected officials to fix broken promises and put an end to the flawed funding formula that is helping to drive these disparities.”

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