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**ABA addresses bias and racism in medical reporting of Black and Indigenous children**

CHICAGO, March 17, 2023 — The American Bar Association [Center on Children and the Law](#) is leading a new initiative to address overreporting by medical professionals of Black and Indigenous children to the child welfare system. A March 21 kickoff meeting will bring together an interdisciplinary group of national experts to launch the initiative's work.

"This initiative's potentially transformative work reflects the need for interdisciplinary approaches to complex problems that unnecessarily entangle families in the court system," said ABA President Deborah Enix-Ross.

When children are brought to a doctor or emergency room for childhood medical care, the current system of mandated reporting raises the risk that Black and Indigenous parents will be overreported to child welfare agencies for suspected abuse and neglect. Research shows:

- By the age of 18, over 50% of Black and Indigenous children will be the subject of a CPS investigation.
- Injuries experienced by Black children are nine times more likely to be reported to Child Protective Services as potential child abuse than injuries experienced by white children despite evidence showing child abuse and neglect occur at equal rates across races.
- Race-based reports lead to a disproportionate number of Black and Indigenous children entering foster care.
- Race-based overreporting by healthcare professionals results in distrust of the medical profession and failure to seek needed care.

With funding from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, the initiative aims to mitigate bias and racism in overreporting by healthcare professionals through a layered, multisystem intervention. The proposed intervention will include: 1) a medical standard of care supplement addressing bias and racism, 2) medical school strategies addressing bias and racism, and 3) tools to lessen the imbalance of power between medical, child welfare, and judicial professionals when questioning biased reporting.

The kickoff meeting will convene the initiative's National Advisory Board for the first time. The board will be critical in shaping the development and implementation of the proposed interventions. Members of the National Advisory Board include legal, health care, child welfare, public health, and medical school leaders as well as experts in race equity, evaluation, lived experience, and authentic community engagement. See the initiative's [website](#) for a complete list of board members and their backgrounds.

The initiative, which is expected to last five years, will be rolled out in three phases. Phase One, the current phase, includes forming a team to guide the change process, reviewing the literature and existing evidence base on racism and bias in mandatory reporting at the medical, child welfare, and legal decision points, collecting national and local data, and developing the interventions. Phase Two will involve

implementing and evaluating the interventions. In Phase Three, the initiative will share the evaluation results and focus on interventions and strategies for racial healing. Throughout this work, the initiative seeks to address individual and systemic racism and shift how racism and other forms of oppression affect Black and Indigenous families in the child welfare system.

The Center on Children and the Law promotes access to justice for children and families. Our team of attorneys and core staff work on a diverse portfolio of national, regional and local projects in the children's law field throughout the country. Center projects are unified by two complementary goals: improving legal representation and improving the legal systems that impact children and families.

**The ABA is the largest voluntary association of lawyers in the world. As the national voice of the legal profession, the ABA works to improve the administration of justice, promotes programs that assist lawyers and judges in their work, accredits law schools, provides continuing legal education, and works to build public understanding around the world of the importance of the rule of law. View our [privacy statement](#) online. Follow the latest ABA news at [www.americanbar.org/news](http://www.americanbar.org/news) and on Twitter [@ABANews](#).**

The W.K. Kellogg Foundation (WKKF), founded in 1930 as an independent, private foundation by breakfast cereal innovator and entrepreneur Will Keith Kellogg, is among the largest philanthropic foundations in the United States. Guided by the belief that all children should have an equal opportunity to thrive, WKKF works with communities to create conditions for vulnerable children so they can realize their full potential in school, work and life.

The Kellogg Foundation is based in Battle Creek, Michigan, and works throughout the United States and internationally, as well as with sovereign tribes. Special attention is paid to priority places where there are high concentrations of poverty and where children face significant barriers to success. WKKF priority places in the U.S. are in Michigan, Mississippi, New Mexico and New Orleans; and internationally, are in Mexico and Haiti. For more information, visit [www.wkkf.org](http://www.wkkf.org).