

Racial Disparities -The Ramsey County Children’s Services Review Panel (RCCSRP) is very concerned about the serious racial disparities that exist in the Child Protection Program in Minnesota. Decreasing this disparity was the stated goal when implementing the Family Assessment Model. This disproportionality has not improved despite the increased use of Family Assessment.

We respectfully recommend that the Task Force pay close attention to these issues and present specific recommendations for reducing racial disparity in the Child Protection program due to bias and unconscious bias and other factors, along with providing adequate funding to successfully address this issue.

Our Panel has reviewed data from previous disparity reports and feel that the data and the report itself is not easy to understand.

We respectfully recommend more transparency in reporting on this issue. Data should be presented clearly and there should be graphs that show the prior year’s data to track progress or the lack thereof.

In the 2013 Minnesota Child Welfare Disparities Report, on page 16, the report states that “For all children in reports of maltreatment by a family caretaker, 72 percent were assigned to Family Assessment response. White children were more likely to be in reports assigned to Family Assessment than children of other races.” Further, on page 17, the report states that: “Overall, 57 percent of cases assignment to Family Investigations were for reasons mandated by law. Children of color were all more likely than White children to be assigned to Family Investigation for discretionary reasons.” The issues have been identified and now action steps must be taken. The Panel also recommends that a separate Task Force be created to carefully examine the reason for the lack of progress in this state in reducing racial disparities. Action steps that are implemented should be accompanied by clear outcome measurements. The Panel respectfully requests that this Task Force explore the unconscious racial bias in how these discretionary assignments are determined and recommend a system wide retraining of reporters and social service staff to identify this unconscious bias. This training should be ongoing. In addition, more money should be available for services to families who are referred for Family Assessment in the areas of early intervention and prevention services. This must include a variety of culturally-informed services or “intentional resources”.

Funding-The state of Minnesota contributes about 14% to child welfare and this contribution is one of the lowest in the United States . We recommend an increase in the dollars the state contributes to the counties for Child Welfare Services.

Family Assessment - The Panel is supportive of the Family Assessment (FA) model but believes that the current evaluation of the program in Minnesota does not cohesively reflect how it is being implemented state-wide or county by county. We are concerned about the inability to judge the “success” of the program. Our focus has always been on child safety and child well-being. Ideally in FA, the family gets the services and assistance it needs and the approach is strength-based and non-punitive. Our Panel is data-driven and outcome-based and we favor accountability. Our Panel recommends that an exit interview and/or exit questionnaire be

administered to a family when the case is closed. This kind of information would be invaluable when considering changes or modifications to FA. As to the data available to evaluate FA, SSIS has limitations as to what kinds of data is available for Family Assessment. In addition, we question whether there are adequate resources (services and funding) to meet the needs of the large number of families assigned to FA. As we have stated before, we would recommend a comprehensive review of Family Assessment since we are currently relying on an evaluation done in 2006 .

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