

Moving from Why to How:

Parent Leaders' Perspectives on
the Movement for Child
Welfare Justice

ABOUT THE SHRIVER CENTER

The Shriver Center on Poverty Law fights for economic and racial justice. Over our 50-year history, we have secured hundreds of victories with and for people living in poverty in Illinois and across the country. Today, we litigate, shape policy, and train and convene multi-state networks of lawyers, community leaders, and activists nationwide. Together, we are building a future where all people have equal dignity, respect, and power under the law. Join the fight at **povertylaw.org**.

WHAT AND WHY



HOW

- The what: creating the conditions in which families and communities thrive
- Why parents impacted by this system must be at the center of reaching that goal
- Hear from parents about how
- Q & A
- Announcements

The system today

System's framing of its role

- Neutral, unbiased, “helping,” working for good of society
- Social workers, systems players may believe this, that system structure best serves children and families'
- Per this framing, little needs to change

Family advocates' framing

- Extension/parallel of criminal legal system
- Surveil, regulate, separate, punish particularly Black and Indigenous parents, families and communities, p/f/c experiencing poverty
- Per this framing, significant, substantive changes needed through intersectional lens and approach

National stats

- U.S. population: 12% Black
- Foster system: 20% Black children
- In 2017, 4.1 million reports were made, referring 7.5 million children into the system (approximately 1 in 10 U.S. children).
- State by state: <https://www.childtrends.org/publications/state-level-data-for-understanding-child-welfare-in-the-united-states>

Illinois stats –

	General population	Foster population
Cook County, IL	24% Black	70% Black
IL statewide	14% Black	44% Black

- FY 2018 – FY 2020, # IL children removed from homes annually increased 30%
 - 2019 increase (17%) 2nd highest in country
- # children removed annually reaching 21-year low nationwide, 21-year high in IL

System parallels

Criminal-legal system

- Surveillance of communities of color by law enforcement
- Alleged criminal activity → individual liberty removed through detention
- State decides (with info from law enforcement) whether to pursue case against individual
- Public defender defends person against case
- Case can settle by plea (power dynamics)
- After case over, system can trip up individual with sentencing, use of prior criminal history, etc.
 - Registries

Child welfare system

- Surveillance of communities of color by CPS/mandated reporters
- Alleged abuse/neglect activity → individual's child removed
- State decides (with information from CPS) whether to pursue case against parent
- Public defender defends parent against case
- Case for TPR can settle by stipulation, consent to adoption (power dynamics)
- After case over, system can trip up individual by using prior case history against parent
 - Registries

Family separation through history

1600s - 1800s

Chattel Slavery 1619 – 1865

For enslaved people, family separation was frequently a condition of their bondage.

Indian Boarding Schools 1860s – 1950s

Indian boarding schools were a project of white colonizers who wanted to destroy Indigenous cultures by "killing the Indian, saving the man." – Richard H. Pratt

Orphan Trains 1854 – 1929

Origin point for much of the contemporary foster system. 250,000 children on the east coast were sent west on trains, to be placed with other families. More than 40% of these children had living parents who were deemed unfit (often due to parent poverty and immigration status).

1900s

Indian Adoption Project 1958

A project devised by the U.S. government in response to poverty on reservations. The project sought to remove Indigenous youth from their families of origin and place them with non-Indigenous families.

War on Drugs rhetoric and legal scheme 1970s-1990s

- Controlled Substances Act 1970 – grouped drugs by perceived danger vs. medical benefits, beginnings of War on Drugs
- Anti-Drug Abuse Act 1986 – racialized prosecutions, crack to cocaine 100:1
- Violent Crime Control Act 1994—Expanded death penalty; 3-strikes policy → those in federal prisons for 3+ felonies to remain for life without parole

This history lives on

Indian Child Welfare Act 1978

Established federal minimum standards for removing Indigenous youth and placing them in homes that uphold cultural values and made provisions for working with tribal court systems. This was the U.S. government's first formal acknowledgment that separating Indigenous families was harmful.

Despite this, Indigenous youth were overrepresented in foster care 2.7x their prevalence in the general population in 2015.

2000s – present

U.S./Mexico border 2016 – Present

Trump administration's policy of separating undocumented migrant families plays into constructions of criminality and unfitness of parents of color. While Trump officially halted the policy in June 2018, ICE agents have continued separating families under a technicality that allows ICE to remove children if the border patrol agents deem a parent "unfit."

Much of War on Drugs legal scheme of the 1970s-90s remain in effect

MOVING FROM WHY TO HOW

Panelists:

Suzanne Sellers
Joyce McMillan
Tony Lawlor

Moderator:

Elena Thompson

MODERATOR: ELENA AKA NINA THOMPSON



Mission: to assist families with support and education needed to protect them from child welfare barriers and family separation, focusing particularly on keeping children with their parents

Founder of Nina's Ark and 7DLights, organizations she created to support her communities with supplies, homecooked meals, haircare, and other services

Advocates especially in Westside communities and has a deep commitment to supporting victims of domestic violence, those unjustly penalized by the child support system, and those whose lives have been impeded by incarceration

Volunteer organizer with the Westside Health Authority

PANELIST: JOYCE MCMILLAN



Mission: to remove systemic barriers in communities of color by bringing awareness to the racial disparities in systems where people of color are disproportionately affected.

Founder, JMacForFamilies & Parent Legislative Action Network

Leads child welfare advocacy at Sinergia Inc.

Member: West Harlem Democrats, NYC County Committee, Advisory Committee of Center for NYC Affairs at the New School

Board Member: Families Together NYS, Women's Prison Association (WPA), Movement for Family Power

Co-chair W134th Community Assoc.

Has testified for City Council at City Hall, made many media appearances, and frequently lectures at institutions, including Columbia U, NYU, CUNY Law, Cornell U, Harlem Hospital, & others.

PANELIST: SUZANNE SELLERS



ED of Families Organizing for Child Welfare Justice, whose **mission** is to advocate for family unification and systemic change

longtime child welfare reform advocate, public policy expert and sought-after speaker and presenter

Has done grassroots advocacy at State and federal levels, spoken nationally on the need for child welfare reform, guest lectured at a college, and provided expertise on several national and regional working groups and committees

Has been featured in many print, televised, and radio publications and programs, including the Pulitzer Prize winning NYT Op Ed “A Woman’s Rights, Part 4: Slandering the Unborn”.

MBA from DePaul, Master of Public Policy from U of Chicago, and MA in Theological Studies from Trinity Int’l U

PANELIST: TONY LAWLOR



Mission: mentoring and helping young people overcome barriers that prevent them from reaching their full potential

CEO Lawlor Consulting, which supports many nonprofits

co-founder & board member of Revitalize Black Chicago; Family Justice Resource Center, which advocates against wrongful abuse allegations by DCFS, and Int'l Parent Advocacy Network, where he is working on a training program

Bachelor's from U of I, Master's in evangelism & leadership from Wheaton, certified Advancing Youth Development trainer, member of American Evaluation Association, Jr. Board Member for True Mentors.

Has led many city and state initiatives for youth in foster care, including through DCFS' Statewide Youth Advisory Board

Author of You Can Make It Too! (2017)

Favorite quote: "life is 10% of what happens and 90% of how you react to it."

Announcements



**Families Organizing
for Child Welfare Justice**

SAVE THE DATE!

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 10, 2020

VIRTUAL TOWN HALL

**Shriver
Center on
Poverty
Law**



Westside Health Authority Community Re-Entry Support Center

5417 W. Division Chicago, IL 60651

773-786-0226

Intake is Monday thru Friday at 9:00 am and 11:30 am. PLEASE ARRIVE ON TIME TO ENSURE THAT YOU RECEIVE SERVICES.

Please bring a current state ID / drivers license and a social security card. Please call beforehand and let us know if you do not have these documents, as we may be able to help you attain them.

On-Site Services

Case Management
Job Readiness, Placement and Resume Building
Computer Lab
CTA Second Chance Program
Overcomers Group (Thursdays 2pm - 4pm)
Birth Certificate (Must have been born in Chicago)
ID Replacement (Illinois Only)
Clothing
Hygiene Kits
Job Club (2nd and 4th Friday - 12pm to 1pm)
Free Haircuts (Thursdays - Limit 7 people - 2pm to 4pm)
Furniture Donations
Legal Aid Chicago (expungement/sealings, foreclosures, domestic violence/sexual assault, SNAP/TANF/medicaid & unemployment wage claims)

Referral Services

Mentoring & Counseling
Housing
Food Pantries
Vocational Training
Legal Assistance
Healthcare (Dental and Vision Care)
Computer Literacy
Family Reunification
ESL Programs
SNAP Benefits (Assistance with the application process)
GED Program - Malcom X College



For economic and racial justice



PARTNER WITH US

We need your help to support wrongly accused parents and advocate for child welfare reform. Please email us at info@famjustice.org if you are interested in:

- Inviting FJRC leadership to speak at community events
- Sharing ideas for addressing the policies and practices that lead to wrongful allegations

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International Parent Advocacy Network

IPAN aims to increase the power of parents impacted by child protective systems. We **support parents and organizations** that mobilize against **excessive surveillance** and **family separation** through state care and adoption. IPAN works to empower parents around the world, so that their **voices** are **heard** and their **rights protected**.

<https://www.parentadvocacy.net/>

For economic and racial justice

Save the Dates for the rest of the Spotlight on the Foster System webinar series...

Webinar #2 — Mandated Reporting and the Foster System

- Friday, November 13, 2020, 11am cst – 12:30pm cst

Webinar #3 — Intersection: Criminal Legal System and the Foster System

- Wednesday, December 9, 2020, 11am cst – 12:30pm cst

Webinar #4 — Intersection: Health and the Foster System

- January 2021

Thank you! To learn more...

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<http://jmacforfamilies.com/>

Tony Lawlor
<https://www.lawlorconsultinggroup.com/> -- also on
FB & LinkedIn
<https://www.famjustice.org/> -- also on FB



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