

Family Regulation and Separation are not Support.

As an agency that has spent nearly 20 years advocating for more than 10,000 Black and Brown parents whose children are at risk of being placed in foster care, we believe that this moment is a time to recognize that it is not just our policing system that denigrates and destroys the lives of people of color. Our “child welfare” system--which controls the foster care system and the teenage incarceration system, and disproportionately surveils, separates and punishes poor Black and Brown families is also in dire need of reform and re-imagination. For a system that purports to serve the ‘best interests’ of children, we instead see a “family regulation” system, as observed by the scholar Dorothy Roberts, that harms and traumatizes children and youth and too often leaves them worse off, with higher rates of mental illness, adult incarceration, homelessness and every other ill that disproportionately impacts Black and Brown families.¹ Like policing, it has been built on a history that protests around the country are calling on us to reckon with.

For more than two centuries, Black children were taken from their families and sold into slavery. Starting in the 19th century up until 1929, Native American children were taken from their families, put on “orphan trains” and sent to foster homes or boarding schools. In the summer of 2019, the world watched in horror as hundreds of Latinx children were separated from their parents to be caged at the border in pursuit of a racist anti-immigration policy. Despite New York City being 42% white, in 2019, 93% of our clients were Black or Brown or people of color. Once a family becomes involved in the system it can take years to end the accompanying government surveillance and regulation. While CFR offers parents and youth tremendous legal, social work and parent mentor support, and prevent separation 50% of the time, we will continue to push against a system that is historically rooted in racism and oppression by:

- *Changing our language:* in our advocacy, we will join Roberts and other advocates and begin to call the system what it is, especially when it penalizes Black and Brown families—“family regulation,” or “family police system;”
- *Continuing to call on the City to stop putting children in foster care because of poverty:* every day, we see parents charged and punished because they have unstable housing, can’t afford child care or find services; we see youth incarcerated because their parents can’t afford to lose work to come to court with them;
- *Continuing to advocate for funding to support a system of ‘early defense’* that will give parents access to legal counsel and social work support during investigations: white, well-resourced parents can afford to hire an attorney during an investigation--poor Black and Brown parents cannot. Child welfare workers are in many ways more powerful and less accountable than police: they are not required to inform the families they investigate why they are being investigated or inform them of their rights; workers can search their homes, strip-search their children, and speak with their neighbors, without a court order. When parents object to any of this, they are often threatened with family separation.

¹ Dorothy Roberts. June 16 2020. Chronicle for Social Change @ <https://chronicleofsocialchange.org/child-welfare-2/abolishing-policing-also-means-abolishing-family-regulation/44480>

These are not hollow threats. Workers can unilaterally remove children if they decide the child is at risk of imminent harm before even getting approval from the court;

- *Calling on the System to Reimagine and Reinvest:* The City invests millions of dollars in racist regulation of poor Black and Brown families. It pays foster families to provide daily necessities to care for children, including access to child care and respite services. But Black and Brown parents can rarely access these same services without the surveillance and exposure of a child welfare case. The City needs to invest in community supports that parents can access directly. At CFR, we know parents are the experts in their families' safety and wellbeing. Invest in the experts.

Black and Brown Families Matter. Family Regulation and Separation are not Support. We stand with advocates who name that the only way to truly address the racism of the system is to abolish it. Until that is practical, we call for dismantling the parts of the system that are most harmful to our Black and Brown clients. We imagine a system designed not to punish and separate families, but to support them so they can remain together.

Join Us.