

**Themes for Subcommittee Hearing on Race and Foster Care**  
**July 31, 2008**

- 1. There is no disputing there are disproportionate numbers of African American and Native American children in foster care.**
  - a. According to a GAO report citing HHS data, “a significantly greater proportion of African American children enter and remain in foster care than children of other races and ethnicities.”<sup>1</sup>
  
- 2. However, there is disagreement over whether this fact reflects disproportionate rates of maltreatment (which are strongly associated with high incidence of poverty and single parenthood), or cultural bias. Democrats claim mostly the latter.**
  - a. Democrats suggest children of all races suffer the same rate of maltreatment, yet wind up in foster care in disproportionate numbers due to cultural bias and other factors: “Higher rates of poverty, limited access to vital support services, racial bias, and difficulty recruiting prospective adoptive families for these children are often cited as the primary factors that contribute to the problem.”<sup>2</sup>
  - b. Basic facts dispute this claim.
    - i. Maltreatment rates are higher among African American children (19.8 per 1,000) compared to white children (10.7 per 1,000).<sup>3</sup>
    - ii. Black children also represent about twice the share of total child abuse and neglect fatalities as their share of the general child population.<sup>4</sup>
  - c. Survey data Democrats point to admit that children in poor households are 25 times more likely to experience maltreatment and children in single-parent households have an 80 percent greater risk of suffering abuse or neglect. African American children are far more likely to grow up in these types of households.
    - i. Overall 65 percent of African American children are raised in single parent households, versus 23 percent of White children.<sup>5</sup>
    - ii. Overall 35 percent of African American children are raised in poor households, versus 11 percent of White children.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> GAO-07-816.

<sup>2</sup> Advisory, from the Committee on Ways and Means, July 24, 2008.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.childstats.gov/AMERICASCHILDREN/tables/fam7a.asp>

<sup>4</sup> Child Maltreatment, 2006, Table 4-4 [http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/pubs/cm06/table4\\_4.htm](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/pubs/cm06/table4_4.htm)

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.kidscount.org/datacenter/compare\\_results.jsp?i=722](http://www.kidscount.org/datacenter/compare_results.jsp?i=722)

<sup>6</sup> [http://www.kidscount.org/datacenter/compare\\_results.jsp?i=191](http://www.kidscount.org/datacenter/compare_results.jsp?i=191)

**3. All this suggests additional steps are needed to address disproportionality, starting with more prevention of abuse and neglect before it occurs.**

- a. Efforts at prevention include marriage promotion, nurse home visitation, and more effective drug treatment.
- b. Other ways to shorten stays in foster care include more recruitment of adoptive parents so children don't unnecessarily linger in foster care.
- c. Fortunately, disproportionality in the rate of entry into foster care is already falling, as recent years have seen African American children comprise a *declining* share of those entering foster care.<sup>7</sup> This suggests the real factor driving remaining disproportionate numbers in foster care is the fact too many minority children are lingering too long in, or not exiting, foster care.

**4. The McDermott-Weller bill the House passed unanimously on June 24, 2008 includes a number of steps designed to address disproportionality:**

- a. Promoting kinship guardianship, which will remove thousands of African American children from the traditional foster care system by encouraging and supporting their care by relatives.
- b. Providing Federal IV-E funds to Native American tribes, ensuring that Native American children will be cared for without losing bonds to their communities, minimizing time spent in foster care. (The Republican witness will discuss this perspective.)
- c. Encouraging strengthened efforts by States to locate relatives who can care for children instead of their being placed in foster care with strangers.
- d. Requiring high school attendance for youth in foster care and encouraging efforts to keep children in the same school and community, improving educational outcomes and helping break the cycle of poverty and child maltreatment.

**5. States also have a variety of funds they can spend on prevention, treatment, and other efforts to keep children safely out of foster care.**

- a. These include Title XX Social Services block grant funds (\$1.7 billion in Federal funds per year), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families block grant funds (\$17 billion in Federal funds per year), Promoting Safe and Stable Families and Child Welfare Services funds (\$800 million in Federal funds per year), and other funds.

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<sup>7</sup> According to *Racial Disparity in Foster Care Admissions* (Fred Wulczyn, Chapin Hall Center for Children, September 2007), African American children fell (as a share of first admissions to foster care) from 40 percent in 2000 to 35 percent in 2005; conversely, White children rose from 44 percent to 49 percent of all first admissions to foster care (Table 2, p. 10).