

Keeping African American families whole

Across Minnesota, inequitable representation and disparate outcomes persist for African American children in child protection systems.

African American children are more likely to experience out-of-home placement, with 5.5 times more removals from the home compared to white children in Hennepin County, and are 4.9 times more likely than white children to have a parent with parental rights terminated. This disparity comes at a significant cost to African American child well-being and family stability, as well as a financial cost. The average marginal cost for out-of-home placement in Minnesota is \$28,290, with additional costs for steps in other phases of the child welfare process¹.

When our work has created or perpetuated inequity, we recognize it is our responsibility to change course. Hennepin County has supported the goals of the proposed African American Family Preservation Act since the bill was introduced in 2019. We have begun a pilot program that works towards these shared goals, as aligned with Hennepin County board direction and organizational strategy in three areas:

- **Child well-being transformation**

Hennepin County continues to transform county services and supports for children and families, especially within the child welfare system, as we build a system that proactively supports child well-being. In late 2019, a settlement agreement to a federal class action lawsuit naming Hennepin County and the Minnesota Department of Human Services was finalized, possible due to the hard work already underway to transform our system.

- **Disparity reduction**

Hennepin County's disparity reduction strategy focuses on improving outcomes for residents of color in the education, employment, health, housing, income, justice and transportation domains.

- **Racism as a public health crisis**

Hennepin County Board resolution 20-0242 declares racism a public health crisis. The resolution directs the county to advocate for policies to improve health outcomes for communities of color, support initiatives to dismantle systemic racism and seek partnerships with local groups with track records of confronting racism.

Finding safe solutions to keep African American families whole

Pilot program: Family liaisons with Village Arms

With the Minneapolis organization Village Arms, we are piloting a family liaison program to deliver culturally specific services to African American families involved with child protection.

Family liaisons are part of the African American community in Hennepin County, and build trust and connection with families based on that shared identity. Working in partnership with child protection social workers, family liaisons bring a cultural lens to the work.

For families, liaisons help explain the child protection system and process, so families better understand what is happening and what the possible outcomes mean for their children. Liaisons also promote the family's ideas and proposed solutions, and help families engage successfully. The pilot includes cases open for family assessment, family investigation, and ongoing case management.

In addition, liaisons work with families to help social workers build a more complete picture of a family's network of support. Identifying these relatives and kin helps us more broadly involve and surround families with the people who care about them and their children's well-being the most.

This pilot is one approach to several provisions of the African American Family Preservation Act, which aims to protect the best interest of African American children and promote stability of African American families.

Mission and measuring success

Mission and vision

The pilot seeks to keep African American families whole by facilitating unbiased, equitable, and culturally specific service delivery. We envision African American children thriving within their own families, community, and culture.

Goals and evaluation

- Safely reduce the disproportionate number of African American children removed from home or re-entering foster care
- Increase frequency and timeliness of reunification for African American children
- Increase the number of African American children placed with non-custodial parents or relatives when out of home placement is the only viable safety option
- Reduce the number of repeat maltreatment determinations for African American children and decrease the number of African American cases opened for child protection case management

To evaluate the pilot, we are measuring outcomes using SSIS data, manual tracking, and family surveys.

Timeline and milestones

- Three-year pilot, 2020-2023
- Family liaisons hired third quarter 2020
- Case assignment began fourth quarter 2020

¹ Minnesota Management and Budget. (2018). *Child Welfare Inventory and Benefit-Cost Analysis*. Retrieved from <https://mn.gov/mmb-stat/results-first/child-welfare-report.pdf>