

The ACCOUNTABILITY DIALOGUES



Summary of Recommendations and Policy Solutions to Help Families Thrive

In the Fall of 2021, Futures Without Violence, Latinos United for Peace and Equity, The National Center on Violence Against Black Women (Ujima, Inc.), and Women Transforming Families, a project of Ujima, came together with survivors of domestic violence who were impacted by the child welfare system, along with state, tribal, and federal policymakers in the *Accountability Dialogues*. The Accountability Dialogues created a platform that elevated the voices of survivors and provided an opportunity for survivors, policymakers, advocates, and judges to listen to one another and advance policy solutions that would prevent further injustice to adult and child survivors of domestic violence. These recommendations and policy solutions offer a new framework: work diligently with care and compassion, and without bias, to keep families together; robustly support survivors and their children, in their community and with the resources and supports that they have identified, to meet their family's needs; and invest in communities and culturally responsive, community-based organizations to help families thrive.

Summary of Recommendations for the Children's Bureau

1. Issue an Information Memorandum that provides guidance to state child welfare agencies on domestic violence (DV) practice and policy to advance their knowledge and commitment to effective and safe approaches to DV, including a clear statement that DV, in and of itself, is not child abuse and neglect.
2. Issue an Information Memorandum that recommends that states invest in families, communities, culturally responsive community programs and provide direct financial and other needed supports for families, kinship caregivers, and fictive (close family or friend) caregivers.
3. Integrate gender into the equity focus for Child and Family Service Reviews to advance the Biden Administration's commitment to an intersectional approach to responding to gender-based violence.¹
4. Increase federal resources to serve Native American children and families and rural children and families, who are disproportionately impacted by the child welfare system.
5. Convene and engage survivors and survivor-led organizations to define *active efforts*,² and require state child welfare agencies to document active efforts at all phases of each DV case.
6. Create a Task Force to review the role and scope of mandated reporting nationally and address how best to:
 - ensure that Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) and state mandated reporting practices keep children safe in their families and communities;
 - transition from mandating reporting to a mandated supporting model.
7. Foster innovation and cultivate collaboration at the state and local levels to co-design a new Family Assistance Pathway for families so that they can obtain services and supports without involving child welfare systems.
8. On an annual basis, host a convening to share ideas, identify problems, promote promising practices, and develop policies on how to strengthen families, reduce poverty, and transform the child welfare system into a child and family well-being system.

1. National Strategy on Gender Equity and Equality, The White House, pg. 8. See also: the [Gender Strategy Report](#).

2. Active efforts is defined in federal regulations and involves tribal children and families. 25 C.F.R. Section 23.2. <https://www.law.cornell.edu/cfr/text/25/23.2>.

Summary of Recommendations for the White House Gender Policy Council

1. Host roundtables and listening sessions to highlight and share innovative policies and practices that improve the health and well-being of women, children, families, and communities, including innovative poverty reduction and family violence prevention strategies and effective measures for eliminating bias in the child welfare system.
2. Advance gender equity and equality by recommending that the Children's Bureau:
 - Issue an Information Memorandum to states on domestic violence (DV) and child welfare;
 - Integrate gender into the equity focus for child and family services reviews;
 - Increase federal funds to Native American and rural children and families;
 - Establish active efforts as the standard in all DV/child welfare cases;
 - Assemble a task force on mandated reporting;
 - Foster innovation and collaboration to create a Family Assistance Pathway for families;
 - Host a convening to co-design a child and family well-being system.

Summary of Recommendations for Congress

1. Expand the scope and the prevention funding available under the Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) to allow states to use federal funds to provide economic and community supports for families, collaborate with domestic violence (DV) programs, co-design a new Family Assistance Pathway with and for families, and support innovative, community-based solutions.
2. Increase federal resources to serve Native American children and families and rural children and families, who are disproportionately impacted by the child welfare system.
3. Pass legislation and generously appropriate federal funds that help families achieve safety and economic security through a permanent, monthly, fully refundable Child Tax Credit along with a robust childcare, healthcare, housing, transportation, and family leave package. Increase accessibility and benefit levels for all federal social safety net programs.

Summary of Recommendations for the Judiciary and Family Courts

1. Educate judges on domestic violence (DV) in child abuse and neglect proceedings, including:
 - The impact of children's exposure to violence;
 - The importance of preserving the child's relationship to a protective parent;
 - The array of supports that mitigate exposure to violence;
 - Promising practices for abuser interventions;
 - The influences of poverty, race, and substance use on families in need of support.
2. Ensure that judges' actions and demeanor reflect a comprehensive understanding of DV in child abuse and neglect proceedings to enhance children's resilience and safeguard their access to a non-abusive parent.
3. Encourage judges to use their leadership position to convene stakeholders to improve the policies, practices, and responses to families involved with the court, legal, and child welfare systems and to build a more just and equitable family and child well-being system.

Summary of Recommendations for States, Tribes, Territories, and Child Welfare Agencies

1. Support and robustly invest in prevention strategies to improve family well-being.
2. Establish community accountability processes for child welfare agencies.
3. Fund and co-design with impacted families a new Family Assistance Pathway for families to obtain services and supports outside the child welfare system.
4. Fund and provide access to affordable or free, quality mental health and behavioral health services in communities, and strengthen partnerships with state Medicaid agencies.
5. Narrow the definition of neglect to state clearly and acknowledge that poverty and domestic violence (DV) do not, in and of themselves, constitute neglect.
6. Modify or create differential response pathways to respond to DV situations that present an imminent threat to safety and those that do not.
7. Engage survivors and survivor-led organizations to define active efforts, and require child welfare agencies to document active efforts at all phases of each DV case.
8. Cultivate a working partnership between child welfare offices and DV coalitions to develop DV practice and policy. Utilize state resources to support a cadre of domestic partner advocates in child welfare offices.

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