

# What Parents Say About...

## Supporting Families Rather Than Reporting Them Changing Mandated Reporting Policies and Practices

### INTRODUCTION

Parents all across the country are speaking out about how mandated reporting can cause trauma to children and families. Fear of mandated reporting is a barrier for many families to seek help. Inconsistency in reporting laws from state to state means that families may be treated differently based on where they live.

The Children's Trust Fund Alliance, in partnership with the Birth Parent Advisory Committee (BPAC) and Casey Family Programs, spearheaded the development of this issue brief focused on a new approach to supporting families whenever possible rather than reporting them. We also gathered more information from parents in the Alliance's Birth Parent National Network (BPNN) to help inform the call to action and recommendations in this issue brief. For more information about these two important parent groups, please see the last page of this document.

Our goal was to include the perspectives of parents with life experiences involving the child welfare system and the mandated reporting system. Through surveys and facilitated

conversations, we gathered parent feedback on how to reduce the numbers of families reported to child protective services for neglect or abuse allegations.

We developed this issue brief to elevate the voices of parents on this important and timely topic to better inform policymakers, child welfare leaders and other stakeholders about:

- Recognizing the harm families experience from an unnecessary child protective service report.
- Improving mandated reporting and child welfare laws, policies and practices so that fewer families are subjected to unwarranted investigations and so that fewer families become involved with the child welfare system.
- Shifting the focus of our child welfare systems from surveillance of families towards support of families.
- Changing the mandated reporting system to support parents and caregivers in accessing community resources and keeping children safely at home with their families whenever possible.

### What's inside

Introduction .....	1
What is Mandated Reporting? .....	2
The Challenges of Mandated Reporting .....	2
Parents Share Their Experiences About the CPS Investigation Process .....	4
Narrowing the Front Door of Child Welfare Systems .....	5
The Children's Trust Fund Alliance Implements the Protective Factors .....	5
Emerging Developments in State Laws .....	6
Making Reforms to Mandated Reporting Practices .....	8
Call to Action: Parent Recommendations to Improve Mandated Reporting Policies and Practices .....	10
Closing .....	11

*When reports are made to child protective services, we are subjecting families to experience the worst and sometimes most traumatic events of their lives. If services for parents are more easily accessible without court and child protective services (CPS) intervention, then parents can access the resources they need to make informed and healthy decisions about the direction of their families and their growth.*

**Breanna Campos, parent, Washington State**

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## What is Mandated Reporting?

*We need to overhaul our mandated reporting system and change it to supporting families rather than reporting them. Every state needs to look at their current law, policies and practices and make improvements in partnership with families.*

**Edwin Daye, parent, Iowa**

Mandated reporting is the legal requirement that professionals notify appropriate authorities about situations when children and certain other groups of vulnerable individuals are suspected of being abused or neglected. State laws addressing the abuse and neglect of children were passed in all 50 states following the 1962 amendments to the Social Security Act that required all states to include child protection in their child welfare systems.

Eighteen states require all people to report suspected child abuse or neglect.<sup>1</sup> Other states identify specific professionals as mandated reporters. Specific procedures are usually established for mandated reporters to make referrals to child protective services (CPS). Individuals designated as mandated reporters typically have frequent contact with children.

## The Challenges of Mandated Reporting

### Why an Over Reliance on Reporting Is Problematic

- Families who need support often get investigated – not supported.
- Families are reluctant to seek services for fear of being reported.
- The CPS system is overwhelmed due to unwarranted reports relating to poverty.

There needs to be more accountability for reporters who make calls out of spite or without gathering enough information. Mandated reporters often cause parents to lose trust in systems that are supposed to help.

**Kiri Hogue, parent, New York**

Across the country, mandated reporting laws are in place for professionals and community members who work with children and families, such as teachers, social workers, doctors, police officers and other child serving individuals, to make reports of suspected child abuse or neglect to appropriate government authorities. Mandated reporter requirements have expanded greatly during the past 40 years leading to significant increases in the numbers of reports made, as well as decreasing accuracy of the reports.

The sheer number of families who are reported to child welfare agencies nationally is staggering. In 2021, child abuse hotlines received approximately 3,900,000 referrals of alleged maltreatment, 2,045,000 of those referrals became an investigated report, and only 600,000 (15.4%) of those reports were confirmed by child protective services as cases of maltreatment.<sup>2</sup>

Nationally, more than one in three (37.4%) of all children will be subject to a report prior to their 18th birthday according to the latest estimates by the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS). The numbers are even higher for Black families with 53% of Black families being subject to a CPS investigation prior to their child's 18th birthday. The vast majority of those reports will not be substantiated. These unwarranted reports make it more difficult to identify children in need of protection.<sup>3</sup>

The majority of these referrals to CPS hotlines are primarily reports on suspicion of neglect, impacting 7.8 million children. In many situations, neglect cases are connected to poverty, including a lack of childcare, housing, basic utilities, food, and medical and legal support. Some neglect situations involve children at risk of maltreatment due to a lack of services such as treatment for a caregiver's behavioral health condition, domestic violence, or substance use. All these problems may be addressed more effectively outside of the child welfare system.<sup>4</sup>

The Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) defines child abuse and neglect as any act or failure to act on the part of a parent or caretaker, which results in death, serious physical or emotional harm, sexual abuse or exploitation or an act or failure to act which presents an imminent risk of serious harm.<sup>5</sup>

There are conversations taking place nationally to distinguish parental neglect of children from poverty and also to ensure that the community and society-at-large share responsibility for meeting children's basic needs when the parents are unable to do so.

A study conducted in 2020 by Fong<sup>6</sup> showed that well-meaning mandated reporters may make referrals to CPS thinking they are helping families connect to services, but they may not realize that a report:

- Increases fear and trauma
- May scare families away from helpful systems
- Leads to ongoing surveillance

Because of these challenges, some families never get connected to services. Mandated reporters need additional guidance around situations requiring CPS intervention, and information and access to alternative community resources for support.

### **A research study conducted by Raz in 2020<sup>7</sup> found that:**

- More mandated reporting is not linked to better detection of maltreatment nor linked to better outcomes.
- Policies and trainings focus on increasing the number of reports, but do not focus on improving the accuracy of reports or strategies to reduce unwarranted reports.
- Low rates of substantiation for allegations indicates that over-reporting is occurring.
- People tend to use moral judgments when deciding whether to report.
- Reporting can be used as a form of over-surveillance of families and a major cause of racial disparities.

*Child protection workers responding to hotline calls should focus on understanding a family's situation thoroughly, distinguishing between issues related to poverty and those of neglect. When poverty is identified, it's crucial for workers to link families with available community resources.*

**Pasqueal Nguyen, parent, Louisiana**

*We can reduce some reports when families feel safe and reach out for help when they need it. And when a family asks for help, we need to look more at providing prevention resources rather than making a call to child welfare.*

**Nicole Holt, staff, California**

*From the perspective as a parent, the large number of unsubstantiated reports tells me that embedding prevention services in the community is critically important. So often parents involved with the system are issued "cookie cutter" plans and resources instead of their needs being met, which in turn results in re-entry/ re-involvement with child welfare.*

**Raven Sigure, parent, Louisiana**

## Parents Share their Experiences about the CPS Investigation Process

In 2022, the Children's Trust Fund Alliance staff and five parents, (parents from the BPAC and the Alliance's BPNN), joined with Annie E. Casey Foundation, Stand Together Foundation and Aviv Foundation to design and implement a participatory research project that explored the front end of the child welfare system. The goal of the project was to explore parent perspectives in their initial experiences with the child welfare system. The project involved gathering insights from parents, youth and other stakeholders about their experiences with the investigations process and services offered to prevent further involvement with the system.<sup>8</sup>

While the child welfare system has the potential to use the investigations process as an opportunity to connect struggling families to needed supports, there was a sense that the existing system focuses on investigations and seldom offers supports that may be needed by families.

Parents with a high level of expertise gained from their own lived experience were asked to conduct the interviews. They were able to connect with the parents being interviewed and provided a safe and non-judgmental space for the parents to be fully heard. The findings from the 100 interviews conducted with parents who had experienced an investigation showed that:

- Most parents recalled the investigation as a difficult and dehumanizing experience with little or no due process.
- Parents were acutely aware that the agency could take their children and fear of that outcome was a common theme in their stories.
- Many parents felt judged, and sensed that the investigative workers assumed they were guilty.
- Most parents found the process and the people lacking empathy or concern for parents and families.
- Few felt that investigative caseworkers tried to understand their family.
- Parents were rarely given services to prevent removal.

Today, parents and caregivers across the country are joining movements within their states to create a child and family well-being system and shift from mandated reporting to building a community-based approach to support families. This issue brief highlights some of the strategies underway to make improvements.

### To Improve the System

**Parents who participated in the study recommend better treatment, more transparency, greater effort to understand parents' circumstances and more access to preventive services.<sup>9</sup>**

#### Key Themes:

- 1 Provide parent mentors to support and advocate for families during the process**
- 2 Create parent advisory groups to inform policy and process improvements**
- 3 Expand training for social workers on topics related to trauma, parental engagement, cultural competence mental health and substance use**

*"I would like to see more cultural competency and communication. In an ideal world, allowing a man to be vulnerable, having a treatment plan for both parents, having intervention in place before a removal."*

*"They should come and explain what the expectations are for the timelines. At least give you some kind of map—this is how it would go, whether right or left—a map. If cases were set up from the get-go with transparency, there would be a lot less friction between parents and caseworkers."*

*"If it could be a more honest system and say, 'Hey, they are really struggling. What can we do to help them?' Not traumatize them or make them feel like the scum of the earth. Help them with a vehicle and a place to live."*

For more information about the research study, please visit the Alliance website at <https://ctfalliance.org/partnering-with-parents/bpnn/> to view the powerpoint and recording for the Alliance's Birth Parent National Network's (BPNN's) 9th Annual Virtual Convening, *Supporting Families at the Front End of the Child Welfare System* held in June 2023.

## Narrowing the Front Door of Child Welfare Systems

Many state laws do not provide specific details to define neglect, which contributes to unnecessary reports and child protective service (CPS) interventions. In a number of states, work is underway to revise legislation regarding what needs to be reported as neglect. The role, CPS agencies, as well as other agencies and community organizations, is also being reviewed to best address challenges faced by families.

In 2021, Casey Family Programs conducted a 50-state review and analysis of definitions of child abuse and neglect found in state statutes.<sup>10</sup> The purpose of the review was to explore whether the state definitions may contribute to widening the “front door” to child protective services through expanded reporting that leads to traumatizing investigations. Casey focused specifically on neglect definitions due to the higher number of neglect allegations reported to CPS agencies and the disproportionate impact of these definitions on families of color, families living in poverty, single-parent families and others. The review showed that state definitions of neglect vary widely from one another and from the federal Child Abuse Prevention Treatment Act (CAPTA) definition. Many state neglect definitions do not require showing serious harm or imminent risk of harm and may result in decisions that are influenced by personal preferences and bias. Also, many state statutes do not consider:

1. The parent or caregiver’s ability, culture, religious beliefs and resources
2. The child’s age and developmental needs

There is concern that reports based on neglect definitions may be contributing to unnecessary CPS interventions.<sup>11</sup>

When addressing mandated reporting, there are two common misperceptions of Child Protective Services (CPS):

1. That CPS addresses/acts on all concerns reported to it
2. That CPS is the agency responsible for connecting families to services, or is “the place to call to get families the resources that they need”

CPS has a defined process, based on state law, for screening reports and determining if an investigation is required.

The primary role of CPS is child protection – to investigate when children are unsafe because of child abuse and neglect, and to take protective measures when children are likely to be severely harmed by abuse or neglect in the foreseeable future. Because of CPS’s investigatory role, many families do not reach out to them for help and may be reluctant to use resources that are connected to CPS.

CPS is not responsible for investigating risks to child well-being other than abuse and neglect. It is the community, including educators, neighbors, medical professionals, service providers, and others that interact with children and families, who are responsible for supporting child well-being and providing concrete supports in times of need.

### Child Well-Being is a **SHARED** Responsibility<sup>12</sup>

**The primary role of CPS is child protection:** investigation of child abuse and neglect *after it is suspected to have already occurred.*

**You** are often the best messenger to connect families to supports that will *help prevent child abuse and neglect from happening.*

#### RESPONSIBLE PARTIES WHEN A CHILD IS:



## The Children’s Trust Fund Alliance Implements the Protective Factors

In addition to advocating for improvements in mandated reporting policies and practices, there is a growing emphasis on engaging everyone in prevention efforts. This involves identifying and responding to signs of stress in parents and caregivers, recognizing isolated families and children, and supporting those struggling with parent-child bonding. The Children’s Trust Fund Alliance plays a key role in educating and implementing the protective factors framework through its nationally recognized curriculum, *Bringing the Protective Factors Framework to Life in Your Work*. The framework highlights the importance of parental resilience, social connections, access to support during times of need, understanding of parenting and child development, and the social and emotional well-being of children. By focusing on these strengths inherent within families and communities, this framework offers a proactive approach to preventing child abuse and neglect. By integrating the protective factors framework, communities can foster resilience within families, leading to healthier outcomes for children and a reduced likelihood of maltreatment. This holistic approach to child well-being not only addresses immediate concerns but also lays the groundwork for long-term support and prevention efforts. The protective factors framework prioritizes early support for children and families.



## Emerging Developments in State Laws

Below are some examples of states that are making revisions to their state child abuse and neglect laws as of the end of 2023 to narrow the front door.

Tamara Hunter, director of the Los Angeles County Commission for Children and Families, shared that through the Coalition work they learned that “over-reporting can actually create conditions in which a child is less safe because a family will isolate and not seek help when they need it.”

I live in Washington State where parents have helped advocate for HB 1227 - a new law that narrows the front door by excluding many poverty related issues as reasons for removal.

**Kimberly Mays, parent,  
Washington State**

*To increase keeping families together and to incur less trauma from investigations, mandatory reporting laws need to change to reflect how families can thrive with available resources.*

**Belinda Kjensrud, parent, Oregon**

- In **California**, a new law passed in 2022 prohibits reports to CPS for poverty-related reasons alone. Over the past two years, a coalition in Los Angeles County composed of child welfare officials, community activists including parents and caregivers, and researchers have been looking at mandated reporting concerns through a Mandated Supporting initiative. Los Angeles County advocates are reassessing the role of the mandated reporters because of “the child welfare system’s over-surveillance and harm to marginalized communities of color as a result of referrals from teachers, police officers and medical professionals.”<sup>13</sup>

The Los Angeles County Coalition has developed a plan that includes monitoring data trends for hotline calls, revising the training curriculum for mandated reporters, creating a new culture of mandated supporting to link families to community-based prevention services and changing the role that child welfare systems should play in helping families living in poverty. Tamara Hunter, director of the Los Angeles County Commission for Children and Families, shared that through the Coalition work they learned that “over-reporting can actually create conditions in which a child is less safe because a family will isolate and not seek help when they need it.”<sup>14</sup>

- In 2023, the **Washington State** Legislature implemented E2SHB 1227 - the *Keeping Families Together Act*. The act was designed to safely reduce the number of children placed into foster care, reduce racial disproportionality in the child welfare system and support relatives to take care of children when they must be placed out of home to protect their safety. The implementation of this act was based on recommendations from a workgroup that was convened by the Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) and composed of child welfare system partners and multiple stakeholders including parents impacted by the system. DCYF incorporated many of these recommendations into key projects focusing on prevention and supporting families and staff. Some of the changes included:

- Requiring the court to weigh the harm of removal.
- Requiring the court to consider if participation in services would prevent the need for removal. If so, should the parent agree to services at the Shelter Care Hearing, the court shall place the child with the parent.
- Requiring the court to place with a relative or other suitable person unless placement into foster care is necessary because no relative can provide for the “basic safety” of the child.
- Requiring DCYF provide financial support when children are placed with relatives or suitable persons.

Early data show that the new law is having its intended effect of reducing the number of children removed from their homes and placed into foster care. DCYF has seen a 30% reduction in the number of children coming into care between July 1, 2023, and September 30, 2023, compared to the same period in 2022.<sup>15</sup>

- In November 2023, the **Minnesota** Department of Human Services developed Revised Minnesota Child Maltreatment Intake, Screening and Response Path Guidelines (DHS-5144 <https://www.dhs.state.mn.us/main/groups/publications/documents/pub/mndhs-064481.pdf>). These guidelines were developed by the department in consultation with their Intake, Screening and Response Path Guidelines Work Group members, county partners and multiple stakeholders. The purpose of the guidelines is to:
  - Provide direction for local child welfare and tribal agency staff
  - Promote statewide consistency in definition and practice
  - Inform the public about the types of child safety concerns that should be reported

Families and communities are best served when child maltreatment screening guidelines are clearly understood and readily available. Local welfare agency staff can contact Rapid Consultation for technical assistance to help guide decision-making in challenging case situations, such as: screening, safety planning, maltreatment determinations and case planning.<sup>16</sup>

In addition, Hennepin County is providing technical assistance to local organizations to help reduce disparities and avoid unnecessary mandated reports. The county is offering a new and innovative personalized six-month program for organizations in Hennepin County that involves four steps:

1. Review an agency's reporting trends
  2. Conduct a two-hour workshop focused on the reporting process
  3. Create shared goals through community partnerships
  4. Review data six months post-training with consultation offered as needed<sup>17</sup>
- In **Texas** in September 2023, legislation (H.B. 63) took effect that eliminates anonymous reports of suspected child maltreatment. In addition, H.B. 730 requires child welfare caseworkers to notify parents accused of abuse or neglect of their legal rights, such as their right to an attorney and their right to refuse to answer questions. During an investigation H.B. 1087 requires investigators to document all reasonable efforts they made to keep the child with the family in court affidavits. In 2021, Texas passed H.B. 567 that bars their child welfare agency from removing children in non-emergencies. The bill also established a new definition of child neglect that changes the definition of neglect from "a substantial risk" of harm to "an immediate danger to the child's physical health or safety."

Texas advocates also worked with policymakers to create House Bill 1667 that focused on including alternatives to mandated reporting such as making referrals to community-based prevention or family preservation services. They added an implementation study that would be the foundation for seeking funding to support this work. Although it did not pass during their most recent legislative session, it is likely that this bill will be refiled and passed in 2025.<sup>18</sup>

Other states are considering changes in their laws that address different aspects of mandatory reporting. Some examples of these changes are related to professions that should be included or excluded, training requirements and penalties. These states are: Arizona, Colorado, Connecticut, Hawaii, Mississippi, Nebraska, and Oklahoma.

*When Child Protective Services staff have support with difficult cases and help in making decisions that support the family first, we see families and communities thrive and become stable.*

**Teresa Nord, parent, Minnesota**

*It is encouraging that Texas is actively working to change the definition of neglect. This change will allow families to seek and receive necessary supports to help families and not encounter the restrictive and extreme punishments that come with a report against them. It is my hope that Texas will make me proud by passing change that will allow for mandatory supporting of families to create better outcomes for children and families, by creating access to community supports to gird a family up during difficult times. Mandatory reporting creates change, but mandatory supporting will create avenues for parents, caregivers, policy makers, and agency staff to work together to develop alternatives to mandated reporting like making referrals to community based prevention services, which will create a more positive change for families. There is a saying that "everything is bigger in Texas", let our progress in establishing mandatory supporting prove this.*

**Paula Bibbs-Samuel, parent, Texas**

*We need to educate mandated reporters about child welfare, the trauma a call makes on a family - making sure they truly understand what the child welfare system is there for - understanding poverty is not neglect, and making sure they are aware of what resources are in their area.*

**Nicole Holt, staff, California**

## Making Reforms to Mandated Reporting Practices

Today our new mantra is: you do not have to report a family to support a family.

**Gail Geohagen-Pratt, Deputy Commissioner, New York State Office of Children and Family Services**

If a family just needs help, such as access to childcare assistance, mental health counseling, or concrete resources ... there are ways to provide that support without making a call that will lead to a child welfare investigation.

**Jess Dannhauser, New York ACS Commissioner**

In addition to making revisions to laws, some states are looking at improving the training curricula for mandated reporters, developing new tools and resources and promoting a new culture of mandated supporting to help link families to community-based services when possible.

Below are some examples of state reforms as of the end of 2023:

- Parents and other advocates in **New York State** and across the nation have identified mandated reporting as a major cause of racial disparities in foster care and unnecessary investigations. The state's Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS), which runs training for all mandated reporters, updated its baseline training to include sections on how mandated reporters can be swayed by implicit bias, and the potential harms of child welfare investigations for families. The training includes a "decision-making tree" to help educators work through their options when they suspect abuse or neglect.<sup>19</sup>

New York City officials at the Administration of Children's Services (ACS) also introduced a "prevention support hotline" that educators can call for help getting resources to families in need.<sup>20</sup> According to Gail Geohagen-Pratt, deputy commissioner, New York State's Office of Children and Family Services, "Today our new mantra is: you do not have to report a family to support a family."<sup>21</sup> New York ACS Commissioner, Jess Dannhauser stated that, "If a family just needs help, such as access to childcare assistance, mental health counseling, or concrete resources ... there are ways to provide that support without making a call that will lead to a child welfare investigation."<sup>22</sup>

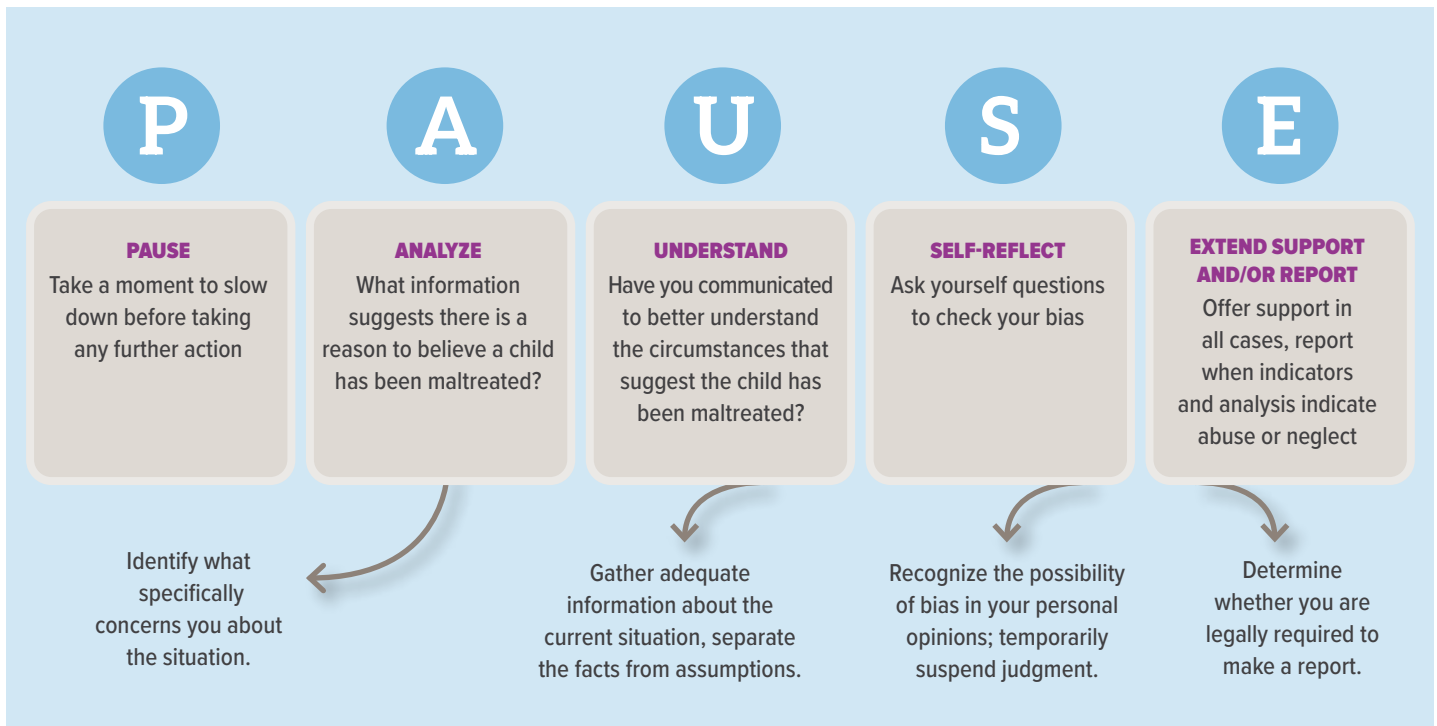
- **Los Angeles County, California** is developing a tool that could help mandated reporters make more accurate, consistent and equitable reporting decisions about families who have issues that should be elevated to the child welfare system and families who may just need help through community-based resources. Los Angeles County plans to have a service navigator connected to the tool. The navigator may be part of a community-based Family Resource Center.<sup>23</sup>
- **Prevent Child Abuse America Chapters in Arizona, Kentucky, New Jersey and West Virginia** are implementing "LEAN on Me," an initiative focused on helping community members learn how they can support families through Listening, Empathy, Affirmation and Non-Judgment. Participants in community workshops learn how to engage families who may need support, find resources for families, and gain tools to better understand the differences between poverty and neglect in order to reduce unwarranted reports to CPS.<sup>24</sup>

*We need to provide more training to mandated reporters and community partners. The training needs to cover topics specifically related to certain demographics and populations to better understand the impact of racial and ethnic bias. We need to provide cultural competency training to better understand the traditions and practices of the community served so children are not being removed based on "poverty" or cultural norms that might not be recognized by others.*

**Nicole Holt, advocate, California**



## Thinking Critically with the P.A.U.S.E. Framework



- In **Florida**, the Department of Children and Families incorporates the P.A.U.S.E. framework (Pause, Analyze, Understand, Self-Reflect, Extend Support and/or Report) to train its staff to think critically when there is a suspicion of child abuse or neglect. This framework is an important part of shifting the mindset of mandated reporters from reporting to actually engaging with families and talking with them about their needs.<sup>25</sup>

The P.A.U.S.E. framework allows you to slow down and analyze the situation and get a better understanding of the challenges that a family is dealing with. When you talk with the parents, you have the opportunity to determine whether providing additional support and resources would prevent the need for removal of children from their families.

**Christina Romero, parent, Florida**

*We can reduce the numbers of families who are reported to child welfare by collaborating with policymakers, community leaders and those who work with families to eliminate racism, inequity, discrimination and biases.*

**Kimberly Nabarro, BPAC member, Hawaii**

*...Mandated reporters need a support hotline where they can call and get guidance on how to help families instead of having an investigation conducted.*

**Anonymous Parent**

# Call to Action

## Parent Recommendations to Improve Mandated Reporting Policies and Practices

Join us in this **Call to Action**: Support families rather than report them! Bring these recommendations to your policymakers, child welfare leaders and community stakeholders to improve mandated reporting policies and practices.

- 1. Review** your state's mandated reporting laws and consider taking action to make changes to reduce the entry of low-income families, indigenous, Black, Native American and Latinx families into the child welfare system.
- 2. Encourage** your state to narrow the "front door" of child protection service agencies by revising laws and regulations that are fear-based and penalize families. For example, this would include removing poverty from being considered neglect. Making this distinction would encourage service providers to provide the family with concrete supports rather than making a report to child protective services. This change would also allow the child welfare system to focus on children at greatest risk of harm.
- 3. Expand** availability of community supports for families (e.g., warmline, parent mentor program, housing, food, clothing, support groups, family resource centers, etc.). Encourage and allow those who are mandated reporters to better support families, when possible, by connecting them to trauma-informed community services that are accessible, and do not have long waiting lists. Community-based prevention services and resources include those offered by family resource centers and other resources funded by state children's trust funds.
- 4. Create** a community advisory group that includes parents and other key stakeholders to help inform policymakers and community leaders about needed improvements in mandated reporting policies and processes, including increased availability and use of community-based supports.

*My concern with mandatory reporting is that it largely absolves the community of any sense of duty to help. We teach and ingrain this need to report but not support. Right now we have an opportunity to strengthen supports developed and delivered by communities themselves.*

Timothy Phipps, parent, Oregon

- 5. Develop** a parent mentor program that provides support and resources to families prior to challenges becoming more serious so that a report needs to be made. If a report is made, the parent mentor can also support and advocate for the family.
- 6. Promote** change in practices used by mandated reporters. For example, the reporter may:
  - Seek to determine if there is a risk of imminent harm to the child.
  - If not, the reporter may explore how to support the child within their family even if the reporter has some concerns. Questions to consider include:
    - Does the family have the resources to provide the care and protection they want to provide?
    - What strengths exist within the caregiving family's situation?
    - What are this family's priorities for their child, and how can we support them in a culturally appropriate and respectful way?<sup>26</sup>
- 7. Encourage** states/counties/jurisdictions to update their mandatory reporting training to guide mandated reporters in determining which situations warrant reporting and which indicate more support is needed for the family. Training should be profession specific, discuss the harms to families of inaccurate reporting, explain the ways in which poverty is not neglect, and outline ways to connect families to non-punitive resources when there is not a safety risk.
- 8. Expand** research on the efficacy of new training programs for mandated reporters to help them better support families and to reduce the reports for issues that are related to poverty and lack of resources.
- 9. Develop** and promote new messages that help professionals reduce reports to child protective services and increase the use of community-based support for keeping children and families together.
- 10. Implement** policy and practice changes relating to how calls are processed when they are made to the child protective services hotline.

## IN CLOSING...

*Changing policies and practices related to mandated reporting is critically needed and timely. We also have to focus on building an effective system that weaves together mandated reporters who are well-trained and understand the complexity of family needs, helplines to respond to immediate needs and to link families to services, and community resources that work together to create a web of support for families. Building community capacity to help families stay strong will be most effective when teams of parents, community stakeholders and policymakers work side-by-side in the planning, implementation and evaluation of this system.*

**Teresa Rafael, Executive Director, Children's Trust Fund Alliance**

We hope that this issue brief will lead to improvements in mandated reporting policies and practices and the increased availability of timely supports for families. Some action steps are listed below:

- Develop laws and policies that provide support for families without a child welfare referral.
- Ensure that poverty is viewed as an issue that is separate from neglect. Poverty is not neglect, and child welfare agencies are not the appropriate agencies to receive referrals related to poverty.
- Increase awareness and wide-spread knowledge about community resources and state and federal programs that support families.
- Revise the screening process used by child welfare staff when processing calls to the CPS hotline so that calls related to unmet needs are referred to community services and not to investigation.
- Build the capacity of mandated reporters so that they can provide alternative pathways of support for families and decrease unwarranted reports to CPS.
- Ensure the culture of family-serving systems is non-punitive and supportive to families who seek help.

*As a parent who has experienced having my children removed by the child welfare system without any prevention efforts, I strongly support this call to action to help improve mandated reporting policies and practices. I believe this will give families the opportunity to receive the support they deserve rather than just having their kids taken. It gives me hope that they will receive support in ways that are not only healing but nurturing as well.*

**Jody R., parent, California**

*Child Protective Services workers need to know that all families are not the same and they need to start meeting these families where they are and not where they think they should be.*

**Edwin Daye, parent, Iowa**

*Supporting families means everything. We have to support families more and report less. Reporting doesn't solve the issues.*

**Anonymous Parent**

*...A lot of people believe that when they call child welfare they are helping the family get connected with supportive services, and that simply is not what happens. Train mandated reporters about supportive services that they can offer instead of calling abuse/neglect hotlines.*

**Anonymous Parent**

*I think it is important for reporters to ask if fathers have the resources and supports they need to care for their children. In every child's story, a father's role is the unwavering foundation of love and guidance.*

**Churmell Mitchell, parent, Alabama**

## NOTES

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## Children's Trust Fund Alliance

Children's Trust Fund Alliance (Alliance) is a membership organization that provides support to state children's trust and prevention funds and strengthens their efforts to prevent child maltreatment. The Alliance members invest millions of dollars each year in prevention strategies for families. The Alliance also works with national partners, state organizations, parents, federal agencies and others to impact policies, practices, systems changes and trainings. Through the Alliance National Parent Partnership Council (ANPPC), the Birth Parent National

Network (BPNN) and other networks, the Alliance has elevated the voice of parents and others with valuable life experience in overcoming challenges and strengthening their families. The Alliance has built a network of more than 2,000 certified trainers who use its nationally recognized curriculum to help families build protective factors and help communities provide safe and caring environments for children and families.

[www.ctfalliance.org](http://www.ctfalliance.org)

## Birth Parent Advisory Committee (BPAC)

The Birth Parent Advisory Committee (BPAC) is a select group of parents from across the country that have a range of expertise and personal experiences within the child welfare system. They serve as strategic partners with Casey Family Programs and the Alliance. The BPAC members serve in a variety of leadership

roles such as parent mentors, policy advocates, grassroots organizers and organizational administrators. They use their advocacy skills to ensure that the voices of parents are heard in the development of policies and practices that affect families.

## Alliance's Birth Parent National Network (BPNN)

The Alliance's Birth Parent National Network (BPNN) is a national platform for birth parents to work in partnership with organizations and policymakers to share their life experiences and make recommendations to improve policies and practices that impact children and families. The goal of the BPNN is to strengthen and support families and improve outcomes for families at risk or involved with the child welfare system. Our growing network includes hundreds of parent and organizational

members. If you wish to make a difference locally, in your state or at the national level, join the BPNN. To learn more about this dynamic national network visit the BPNN website: [ctfalliance.org/partnering-with-parents/bpnn](http://ctfalliance.org/partnering-with-parents/bpnn)

To join the BPNN, submit your membership application to: [ctfalliance.org/partnering-with-parents/bpnn](http://ctfalliance.org/partnering-with-parents/bpnn)

For questions, please email us at [info@ctfalliance.org](mailto:info@ctfalliance.org)



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