



**STOP LAPD SPYING COALITION**

# **ABOLISHING THE SURVEILLANCE OF FAMILIES**

**A Report on Understanding Harm, Surveillance,  
& Information Sharing in the Department of  
Children and Family Services  
in Los Angeles County**

**October 2020**

# PREFACE & CONTEXT

**“Working for real freedom, in which no one is under any form of control, surveillance, or threat of state punishment, means resisting not only incarceration but all of its interconnected manifestations.”** – Maya Schenwar and Victoria Law in *Prison By Any Other Name*

The Stop LAPD Spying Coalition is a volunteer-run grassroots organization rooted in the Skid Row community on the stolen Tongva territory known as Los Angeles. For nearly a decade, Stop LAPD Spying Coalition has been building power to dismantle LAPD surveillance, to fight for a world without policing, and to end mass criminalization. **Our work builds community power by understanding the Information Sharing Environment,<sup>1</sup> or “The Stalker State” as a large function of policing.** The Coalition is committed to examining the ways information sharing is key to understanding policing and surveillance. We know from critical research that “surveillance and data collection are deeply connected to diversion from public benefits, insecure housing, loss of job opportunities, and the policing and criminalization of our communities.”<sup>2</sup> **In order to strengthen our understanding of policing and its interconnectivity specifically with the public sector, this report examines the role of surveillance in the Department of Children and Family Services.**

We urge for a deep dive in understanding the role of criminalization and surveillance in the Department of Children and Family Services because the department functions at the intersection of saviorism towards children and the criminalization of low-income Black and brown parents. **Within the United States, the narrative of “family”-- specifically protecting white families and their property, is continually weaponized to create oppressive systems such as suburbanization/ghettoization<sup>3</sup>, militarization of local police departments<sup>4</sup>, U.S. imperialism<sup>5</sup>, and war.** Protecting white families and property drives how security is understood nationally. DCFS is a key actor in how child welfare rhetoric is used to deepen the surveillance of communities and extract information on families.

Written and researched in the context of global pandemic and uprisings, this report calls for abolishing the surveillance of families, mass criminalization, and the violent tearing apart of families by the state. The heightened demand for defunding police<sup>6</sup> and conversations on divest/invest<sup>7</sup> urge us to critically examine the ways city budgets disproportionately fund local police departments across the nation while massively underfunding systems such as healthcare, education, and social services. We find it imperative to recognize the ways public sector institutions use social services as means of data extraction in order to criminalize our communities. **The Department of Children and Family Services utilizes coercive data collection from families, data sharing across institutions, and predictive analytics with the same intent as police departments: to criminalize, incarcerate, and exile the most marginalized members of our community as a form of racial domination.** We hope this document can be an offering to think strategically towards our journey on abolishing policing.

<sup>1</sup> <https://stoplapdspying.org/information-sharing-environment-stalker-state-2/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.odbproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/ODB-Community-Report-7-24.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2015/07/white-flight-alive-and-well/399980>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.haymarketbooks.org/books/780-freedom-is-a-constant-struggle>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.jstor.org/stable/29768196>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/12/opinion/sunday/floyd-abolish-defund-police.html>

<sup>7</sup> <https://divest.nfg.org/>

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# INTRODUCTION & HISTORY

**Calls for reform suggesting the deployment of social workers instead of police in our communities overlook the past and present damage done by the child welfare system as co-conspiring with police.** The primary goal of this brief is to discuss the ways the Department of Children and Family Services is interconnected with police through data sharing, predictive analytics, and direct partnership. We see this brief as just the beginning of a larger endeavor in understanding the harm of the child welfare system on children and families.

## Historical Roots of Child Welfare in the United States

### Kidnapping Indigenous Children

The removal of indigenous children from their homes systematically began in 1800s through boarding schools, adoptions, and foster care. The creation of indigenous children's boarding schools began in 1819 in order to remove indigenous children from their families and strip them of their culture<sup>8</sup>. Federally funded and administered by Christian organizations, indigenous children were forcibly taken from their families and brought to boarding schools so they could become "civilized." Indigenous parents risked incarceration or withholding of food rations if they did not let their children attend. These boarding schools existed until the 1970s, in which the adoption and foster care system began to disproportionately remove indigenous children from their families. **Studies show that nearly 35% of all indigenous children were removed from their homes and put into foster care in the 1970s<sup>9</sup>.** Since then, federal laws such as Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978 were created in an attempt to address the harm indigenous children experience through the child welfare system.

### Punishing Black Parenthood and The Surveillance of Black Families

Our understanding of the systematic separation of Black children from their mothers cannot be divorced from its roots in chattel slavery. **Black women scholars have shown the history of how over 200 years of destruction of Black families and distrust of Black parenthood cannot be separated from the extremely high concentration of Black children in the foster care system today.**<sup>10111213</sup> Labelling Black mothers as unfit to parent or unworthy of children continues as the reasoning behind for the war on drugs<sup>14</sup>, the defunding of social services<sup>15</sup>, the womb-to-foster-care-pipeline<sup>16</sup>, and mass incarceration today. From its inception, the child welfare system has been more concerned with having families meet white social norms of family rather than protecting kids. It continues to reinforce racial stereotypes and state control over Black families.

### Targeting the Poor & Commodifying Children

The U.S. foster care system as we understand it today started in the early 1900s, in which a spike of unhoused children in New York City catalyzed non-profit organizations such as the "Children's Aid Society<sup>17</sup>" to take matters into their own hands in response. These organizations gathered and sent unhoused children in New York City to families in the Midwest and across the country through the "orphan train<sup>18</sup>" system in exchange for money. Many of these children were sent to be servants on farms or indentured house servants.

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2019/03/traumatic-legacy-indian-boarding-schools/584293/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.nicwa.org/about-icwa/>

<sup>10</sup> [http://sfonline.barnard.edu/unraveling-criminalizing-webs-building-police-free-futures/toward-the-abolition-of-the-foster-system/#footnote\\_16\\_4262](http://sfonline.barnard.edu/unraveling-criminalizing-webs-building-police-free-futures/toward-the-abolition-of-the-foster-system/#footnote_16_4262)

<sup>11</sup> <https://cap.law.harvard.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/robertsrd.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> <http://america.aljazeera.com/opinions/2015/7/the-legal-erasure-of-black-families.html>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.ucpress.edu/book/9780520268951/reproducing-race>

<sup>14</sup> <https://newjimmcrow.com/about>

<sup>15</sup> <https://nelsonssociology101.weebly.com/uploads/2/6/1/6/26165328/controlling.pdf>

<sup>16</sup> <https://academicworks.cuny.edu/clr/vol20/iss1/4/>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.casatravis.org/a-brief-history-of-foster-care-in-the-united-states>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.tpr.org/post/riders-orphan-train-preserves-unforgettable-stories-unwanted-children>

# UNDERSTANDING OUR FIGHT IN LOS ANGELES

Los Angeles County is home to the largest child welfare institution in the country, setting foundations for how other child welfare systems across the nation operate. Over 30,000 youth are in the care of the Department of Children and Family Services today. In 2019, over 150,000 children in LA County interacted with DCFS.<sup>19</sup> Families suspected of neglect and abuse are surveilled by social workers and police, who get unbridled discretion for unannounced visits and information extraction. Similar to the “See Something, Say Something” Department of Homeland Security program<sup>20</sup>, social workers extract information on the family from neighbors, teachers, and other community members in their case work-- deepening the culture of community members policing one another within our community.

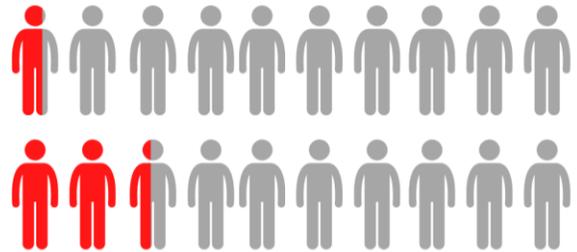
## The Surveillance of Low-Income Families in LA

Over 30% of interactions with DCFS are due to reports of neglect. Counts of neglect disproportionately punish parents who are low-income in our communities. Vague definitions of neglect, such as children who have “consistent hunger, poor hygiene, or are underweight” criminalize poverty<sup>21</sup>. As Los Angeles Unified School District’s school year of virtual learning begins, the DCFS system may target families who are unable to ensure their child has access to virtual learning<sup>22</sup> as a form of neglect. The current culture of virtual learning mandates a camera lens into each child’s home, increasing the surveillance of families as being constantly watched. At the same time, it is an especially dangerous moment for families who are a part of the 365,000 evictions<sup>23</sup> expected to happen due to the pandemic, increasing their risk of child-parent separation.

## The Surveillance of Black Families in LA

In 2019, 23.7% of youth under in the DCFS system were Black. Only 9% of the population of LA is Black, making the disproportionate presence of Black children in DCFS extremely high. Black parents do not abuse or neglect their children at higher rates than white parents. However, the bias and unbridled discretion of social workers and police reinforce the disproportionate separation between Black children and parents.

Only 9% of Los Angeles County’s population is Black...



but 23.7% of youth in the DCFS system are Black.

<sup>19</sup> <https://dcfs.lacounty.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Factsheet-CY-2019.pdf>

<sup>20</sup> [https://www.metro.net/news/simple\\_pr/see-something-say-something-campaign-launches-l/](https://www.metro.net/news/simple_pr/see-something-say-something-campaign-launches-l/)

<sup>21</sup> <https://dcfs.lacounty.gov/glossary/neglect/>

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.bostonglobe.com/2020/08/15/metro/your-childs-no-show-virtual-school-you-may-get-call-states-foster-care-agency/>

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2020-08-07/coronavirus-eviction-rent-housing-crisis-cliff-california-covid>

# “AUTOMATING” CHILD WELFARE

The parameters for understanding child welfare in Los Angeles are far too similar to **dated and racist “broken windows policing.”**

## Data-Driven Child Protection: DCFS is Invested in Prediction, Not Prevention<sup>24</sup>

As the LAPD unveils their most recent [Data-informed Community-Focused Policing<sup>25</sup>](#) strategy, the Office of Child Protection also shifted its work towards data-driven child protection. In this model, the Office of Child Protection utilizes racist, classist, and discriminatory algorithms to determine the risk of a family who interacts with DCFS of being re-reported for abuse, entering the foster care system, or dying at the hands of their caregivers. Private foundations and universities, specifically the University of Southern California, are the minds behind the predictive analytics. **The investment of these institutions in predicting harm in a family rather preventing harm illustrate their structural investment in criminalizing parents and separating children from their families.**

## Project AURA Predictive Analytics

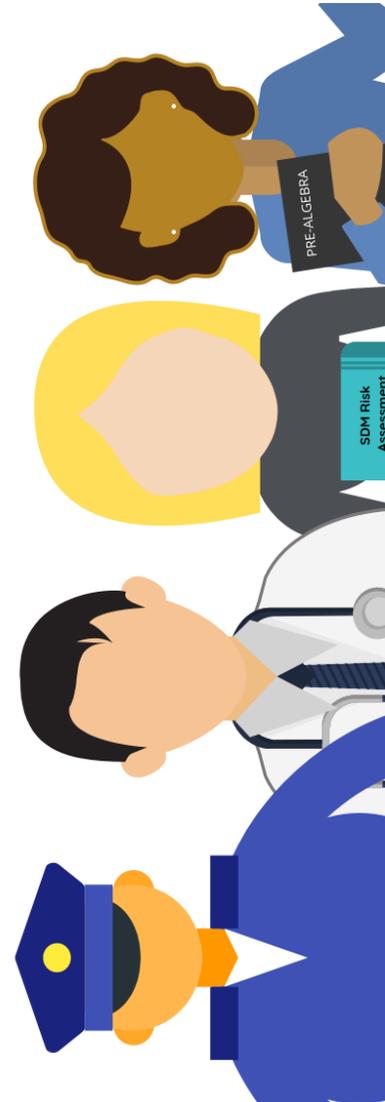
In 2016, DCFS ran their first predictive analytics program called Project Approach to Understanding Risk Assessment (AURA)<sup>26</sup>. Project AURA, initially created as a decision-making tool by private company called SAS in a multi-million dollar contract, was meant to be used by social workers to predict the outcomes of a child who is reported as neglected or abused. AURA was tested on cases from 2011-2012, and found to have a 95% false positive rate<sup>27</sup> of a child dying at the hands of their family. Shortly thereafter, AURA was removed as a decision-making tool. Instead, DCFS turned to the Standard Decision Making Tool.

## Standard Decision Making Tool Predictive Analytics

Currently, the [Standard Decision Making Tool<sup>28</sup>](#) created by [USC Children’s Data Network<sup>29</sup>](#) and private/public partners in a multi-million dollar contract, is used to help guide social workers in their assessments of risk for a child. The suite of tools includes screening and path-decision tools, a safety assessment, a risk assessment, a family strengths-and-needs assessment, a reunification re-assessment, and a risk re-assessment.

Some of the most discriminatory aspects of the SDM are the blatant ableism, classism, and racism in the tool. In regard to Safety and Risk Assessment:

- **Safety Assessment** evaluates the imminent danger or harm to a child by considering the presence of factors such as safety threats and household strengths. It states the following increase the risk of abuse in the home:
  - Child has mental health issues or a disability and thus "unable to protect themselves."



<sup>24</sup>[http://ocp.lacounty.gov/Portals/OCP/PDF/Reports%20and%20Communication/OCP%20Background/Blue%20Ribbon%20Commission%20Final%20Report%20\(04-18-2014\).pdf.pdf?ver=2018-10-24-083549-867](http://ocp.lacounty.gov/Portals/OCP/PDF/Reports%20and%20Communication/OCP%20Background/Blue%20Ribbon%20Commission%20Final%20Report%20(04-18-2014).pdf.pdf?ver=2018-10-24-083549-867)

<sup>25</sup><http://lapd-assets.lapdonline.org/assets/pdf/data-informed-guidebook%20042020.pdf>

<sup>26</sup>[https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B291mw\\_hLAJsQ3JhclBOS2R1VHc/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B291mw_hLAJsQ3JhclBOS2R1VHc/view)

<sup>27</sup><https://imprintnews.org/featured/uncharted-waters-data-analytics-and-child-protection-in-los-angeles/10867>

<sup>28</sup>[https://ca.sdmdata.org/Definitions/RA/family\\_char\\_dfn](https://ca.sdmdata.org/Definitions/RA/family_char_dfn)

<sup>29</sup><https://www.datanetwork.org/research/assessing-childrens-risk-using-administrative-records-a-proof-of-concept-predictive-risk-modeling-prm-project/>

- Domestic violence
  - Parent with history of abuse/neglect
  - Substance use
  - Criminal History
- **Risk Assessment** evaluates the likelihood of a family being re-referred to the child welfare system within the next 12 to 18 months by considering factors such as prior DCFS investigations, the current investigation, and family characteristics. It also states the following increase the risk of abuse in the home:
    - Broken windows
    - Criminal history
    - Roaches
    - Exposed wires in the home

Safety and Risk Assessment tools in the SDM model are far too reminiscent of racist broken windows policing. **While researchers state the SDM does not take race into consideration, we know that Black and brown families are more often low-income and more often criminalized in Los Angeles—ultimately making predictive analytic tools deeply biased and invasive.** These tools reflect the criminalization of poverty, racial bias, and lack of cultural awareness for understanding abuse and neglect across class, culture, ability, and race. **100% of DCFS social workers we interviewed stated that the SDM tool is biased in understanding how abuse or neglect shows up in low-income communities of color.**

We asked DCFS social workers:

**“Do you think the Standard Decision Making Tool is unbiased?”**

**DCFS Social Workers said...**

*“...children of color get removed the most, particularly our young boys, because **there’s bias around what the behavior represents, there’s not an understanding of what trauma looks like in our community** and how our families and children are impacted by trauma.”*

*“Poverty doesn’t equal abuse... however, these communities have more interaction with law enforcement, and as a society **we need to work on how we view poverty and the rights parents have to their children.**”*

*“.. **DCFS is trying to make it [SDM] work for everyone and it doesn’t. It just can’t. I don’t think you can make the tool they give us a general thing... and so much is still in our [social worker’s] discretion if we use it.**”*

### **Artificial Intelligence: Child Protection Hotline in Los Angeles**

In an interview by the DCFS Hotline Division Chief<sup>30</sup>, he states there are 18 systems that keep track of all the information gathered from the hotline. In addition, Amazon Webservices holds all the data gathered in one place. Artificial intelligence on the hotline picks up key words like “selling” and “child” are flagged by the artificial intelligence system<sup>31</sup>.

<sup>30</sup> [http://m.policy.dcfslacounty.gov/Src/Content/Immigration\\_Options.htm](http://m.policy.dcfslacounty.gov/Src/Content/Immigration_Options.htm) (1:44:44)

<sup>31</sup> [http://m.policy.dcfslacounty.gov/Src/Content/Immigration\\_Options.htm](http://m.policy.dcfslacounty.gov/Src/Content/Immigration_Options.htm) (1:46:06)

# DATA SHARING & REPORTING SYSTEMS

Databases are often understood as a passive form of information gathering, however, they function just as insidiously as predictive policing<sup>32</sup>. In the list below, consider how several of the databases overlap and group specific kinds of data, such as criminal history and receiving welfare benefits, in one database. This effectively criminalizes low-income families even before any calls to DCFS. All of these databases build a digital footprint as if these families have already committed a crime, having serious consequences on their livelihood if they rely on public welfare benefits to make ends meet. Families who are suspected of abuse or neglect have all of their information loaded onto local, county, state, and national databases. These databases are developed by private companies for millions of dollars and put on storage clouds like Amazon Web Services<sup>33</sup>. The visual map on the next page illustrates the ecology of policing and surveillance. These databases function as anchors in the surveillance carried out in a collective effort by county agencies, LAPD, federal agencies, non-profits, carceral institutions, and universities.

## List of Databases and Reporting Systems<sup>34</sup> (visual chart on next page):

**Live Scan and California Law Enforcement Telecommunications System (CLETS):** Live-Scan reveals a criminal history record based upon the submission of the subjects' fingerprints to the DOJ. These clearances can confirm the identity of a subject and give the subject's history of arrests and convictions.

**Child Abuse Central Index (CACI):** a database of information about child abuse investigations that have occurred in California; reports all confirmed instances of abuse directly to the Department of Justice.

**Child Welfare Services/Case Management System (CWS/CMS):** social workers get state-wide access to all cases, tracking of children receiving DCFS services, any reports of alleged abuse, neglect, or exploitation

**Family and Children's Index (FCI):** a registry to identify children and families who are "at risk of child abuse and neglect," and who have had relevant contacts with public agencies: Los Angeles Sheriff's Department (LASD), Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), Department of Public Social Services (DPSS), Probation Department, Department of Mental Health (DMH), Office of the District Attorney (DA), Department of Health Services (DHS), Chief Executive Officer (CEO)

**Juvenile Automated Index (JAI):** database to determine if a child age 14 through 17 years has ever been a ward or dependent of the court/has criminal history.

**Los Angeles Eligibility Automated Determination Evaluation and Reporting System (LEADER):** a system developed by DPSS, a check of this database can reveal if a family is currently receiving public assistance and the last known address and the identity of family members.

**Out of State Child Abuse/Neglect Registry:** California child abuse and neglect registry

**Welfare Case Management Information System (WCMIS):** Los Angeles County's welfare case identification and indexing system. DCFS uses WCMIS to record the eligibility status for all welfare and Children's Services applicants and recipients and to assign state identification numbers to DCFS cases and referrals.

**County-Wide Master Data Management System<sup>35</sup> (CWMDM):** shares data on individuals who interact with Department of Children and Family Services, Department of Mental Health, and Department of Health Services in one database.

**Child Abuse Reporting Electronic System (CARES)<sup>36</sup>:** is a child abuse and neglect reporting system used by all mandated reporters. This includes DCFS staff, school personnel, law enforcement personnel, probation, medical professionals, and mental health clinicians.

**Electronic Suspected Child Abuse Report System (E-SCARS)<sup>37</sup>:** is a child abuse and neglect data reporting system specific to LAPD officers

**National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS)<sup>38</sup>:** is a national reporting system where all cases of child abuse and neglect data are recorded.

<sup>32</sup> <https://slate.com/technology/2020/09/its-time-for-a-reckoning-about-criminal-intelligence-databases.html>

<sup>33</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-DvE784VhCk&list=PL5V4myqy5EOjOwk5XPMVMmF\\_oKYpDiO\\_&index=6](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-DvE784VhCk&list=PL5V4myqy5EOjOwk5XPMVMmF_oKYpDiO_&index=6)

(interview with DCFS Division Chief of Child Protection Hotline)

<sup>34</sup> <http://m.policy.dcfslacounty.gov/Src/Content/Clearances.htm>

<sup>35</sup> <http://file.lacounty.gov/SDSInter/bos/supdocs/95186.pdf> Sharing/Board%20Letter%20for%20Data-Sharing%20Portal%20Money%20Shift%20(05-02-2017).pdf?ver=2018-10-24-074158-490

<sup>36</sup> <https://mandreptla.org/cars.web/>

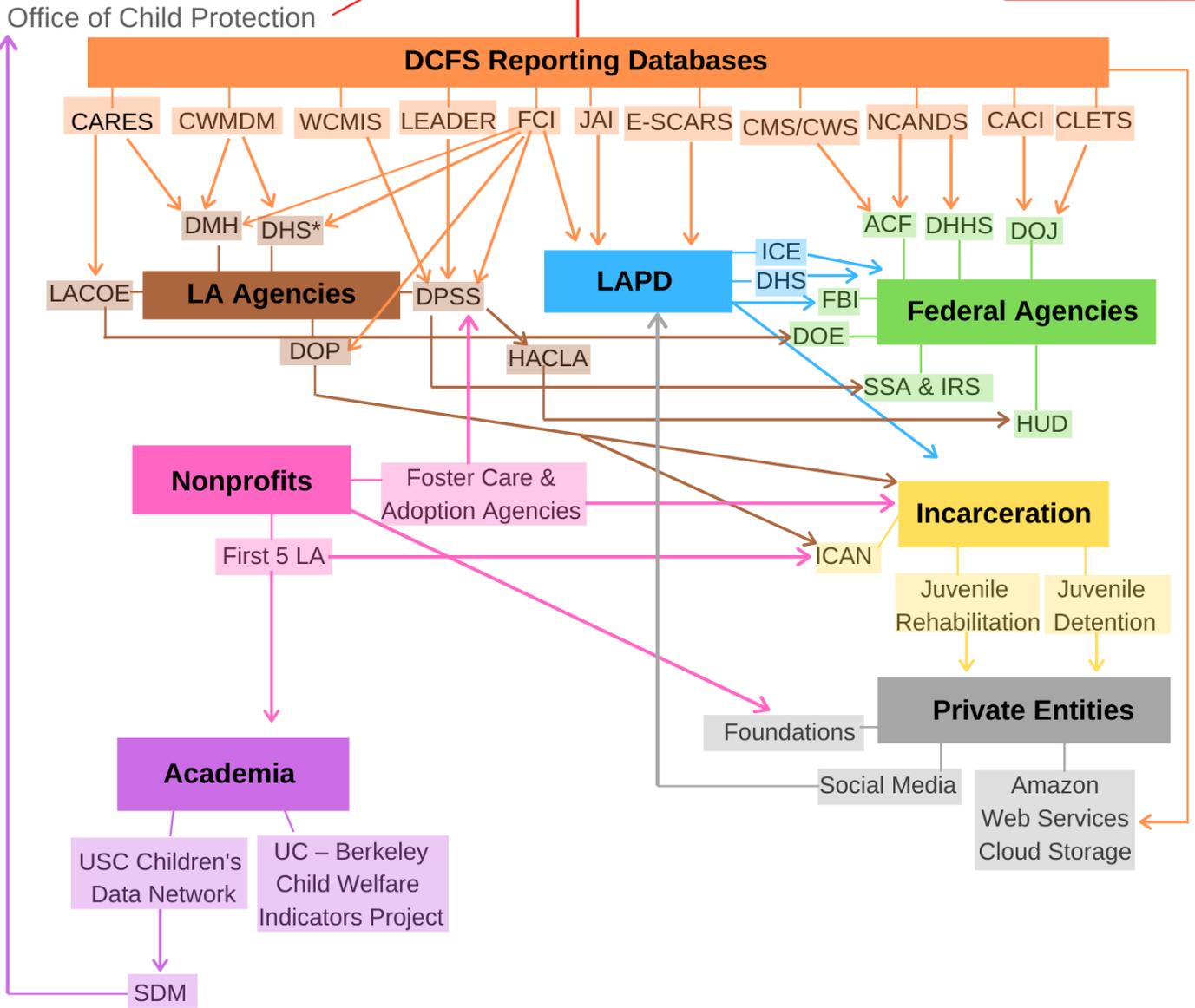
<sup>37</sup> [http://ocp.lacounty.gov/Portals/OCP/PDF/Reports%20and%20Communication/OCP%20Background/Blue%20Ribbon%20Commission%20Final%20Report%20\(04-18-2014\).pdf.pdf?ver=2018-10-24-083549-867](http://ocp.lacounty.gov/Portals/OCP/PDF/Reports%20and%20Communication/OCP%20Background/Blue%20Ribbon%20Commission%20Final%20Report%20(04-18-2014).pdf.pdf?ver=2018-10-24-083549-867) (page 15)

<sup>38</sup> <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/research-data-technology/reporting-systems/ncands>

# Information Sharing Environment Department of Children and Family Services



Created and researched by: RS



## Acronyms Key

CWMDM – Countywide Master Data Management System  
 CWS/CMS – Child Welfare Services / Case Management System  
 E-SCARS – Electronic Suspected Child Abuse Report System  
 CARES – Child Abuse Reporting Electronic System  
 LACOE – LA County Office of Education  
 DOP – Department of Probation  
 DHS\* – Department of Health Services (in relation to DMH and CWMDM)  
 DMH – Department of Mental Health Services  
 ICAN - Inter-Agency Council on Child Abuse and Neglect  
 ACF – Administration for Children and Families  
 JAI - Juvenile Automated Index  
 FCI - Family and Children's Index  
 CACI - Child Abuse Central Index  
 CLETS - Live Scan and California Law Enforcement Telecommunications

DOE – U.S. Department of Education  
 FBI – Federal Bureau of Investigations  
 SSA – U.S. Social Security Administration  
 IRS – U.S. Internal Revenue Service  
 DHS – Department of Homeland Security (in relation to ICE)  
 ICE – Immigration Customs Enforcement  
 DPSS – Department of Public and Social Services  
 DHHS – U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
 SDM – Structured Decision Making Tool  
 NCANDS - National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System  
 WCMIS - Welfare Case Management Information System  
 LEADER - Los Angeles Eligibility Automated Determination Evaluation and Reporting System  
 DA - District Attorney  
 HACLA - Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles

# DCFS & CARCERAL INSTITUTIONS

While Los Angeles County's DCFS claims to not share any information with ICE on the immigration status of a family, their reporting systems prove they indirectly supply this information through collaboration with police. **The DCFS system is still entwined with Department of Probation, juvenile detention/rehabilitation, and family separation.**

## ICAN and the Criminal Justice System

The [Inter-Agency Council on Child Abuse and Neglect](#) (ICAN) is a partnership between DCFS, The LA County Sheriff's Department, LA County District Attorney, LA Community Child Abuse Councils, and First 5 LA. The presence of ICAN strengthens information sharing connections between the criminal justice system and DCFS, supporting many of the databases that link criminal history and child abuse/neglect into one database.

## Family Separation at the Border and Detention

Family separation at the border and family detention cannot be excluded from the conversation of child welfare in this country. Family separation and detention systems by Immigration Customs Enforcement and Department of Homeland Security not only separated families, but failed to create the infrastructure to re-unify families. Since 2018, undocumented migrant children under the age of 18 were put under the provision of Department of Health and Human Services, which dispersed them across the Office of Refugee Resettlement and "different care programs"<sup>39</sup> such as a family sponsor or new guardian. In 2018, when 1,475 detained children went missing, it was DHHS lost contact with the individuals who were supposed to look after these children and still have no idea of their whereabouts<sup>40</sup>.

### **Children's living circumstances after a parent's detention or deportation are often uncertain.**

According to DCFS, there is no direct information sharing between DCFS and the Department of Homeland Security and Immigration Customs Enforcement. However, these systems are interlinked via reporting systems and databases. The lack of coordination between child welfare and immigration enforcement actually creates a barrier for children to reunify with parents. After a parents' deportation or detention, children might<sup>41</sup>:

- Return to their parents' country of origin.
- Children might stay in the United States with relatives or family friends, sometimes awaiting parents who plan to re-enter the United States.
- Sometimes children whose parents have been arrested or deported end up in state child welfare systems.

## Child Welfare After Parent Immigrant Detention or Parent Deportation

Once in the child welfare system, children may be not be able to from reunify with parents because of<sup>42</sup>:

- the lack of coordination between the immigration and child welfare systems
- a parents' inability to attend their child's court hearings
- biases or misinterpretations of agency policy lead staff to resist returning children to undocumented parents, to parents who do not speak English, and to parents living outside the United States.
- The federal 1997 Adoption and Safe Families Act states must file a petition to terminate parental rights on behalf of any child who has been in foster care for 15 of the most recent 22 months, with few exceptions. Since parents are often incarcerated or in detention for significantly longer than 15 months, their imprisonment means they risk losing their children forever.

<sup>39</sup> <https://www.splcenter.org/news/2020/06/17/family-separation-under-trump-administration-timeline>

<sup>40</sup> <https://www.vox.com/2018/5/29/17405404/missing-migrant-children-trump>

<sup>41</sup> <https://cssp.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/CSSP-Entangled-Roots.pdf>

<sup>42</sup> <https://cssp.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/CSSP-Entangled-Roots.pdf>

# CHILD WELFARE AND GENERATING PROFIT WITH SOCIAL SERVICES BENEFITS, ADOPTIONS & FOSTER CARE

Los Angeles County’s Department of Children and Family Services receives over \$2.3 billion in funding<sup>43</sup>. But this is only one aspect of how money moves through the child welfare system. Private partnerships with juvenile detention and rehabilitation centers, private foundations, universities, and nonprofits that administer adoptions/foster care make up a huge fraction of money that goes into the Los Angeles child welfare system. **Here are only a couple of the aspects and incentives that drive profits in the child welfare system:**

## Incentives to Criminalize Youth: DPSS and Foster Care

Department of Social Services, Department of Children and Family Services, and Social Security Administration systems are interlinked due to the benefits foster parents receive as temporary guardians of children. Through the LA Resource Family Application<sup>44</sup>, foster guardians apply for financial assistance and cash benefits. Additional benefits<sup>45</sup>, through Intensive Services Foster Care Funding give up to \$2,505/month per child if the child exhibits behaviors such as gang activity, substance abuse, mental health disorders, history of property damage, sex offenses, fire setting, or psychiatric hospitalization. **These factors may incentivize foster parents to criminalize youth for their behavior in order to receive additional benefits from the system.**

## Understanding Adoption and Foster Care as an Industry

The chart on this page illustrates how top-grossing non-profit foster care and adoption agencies in the City of LA are in a multi-million dollar industry. This chart does not include county-wide agencies. While some of these organizations provide services for foster youth, such as transitional housing, others work specifically on administering adoptions or function like group homes. Additionally, **the disturbing realities of adopt costs vary deeply across race and gender**. Reports show that Black babies cost \$18,000 to adopt, while bi-racial children cost \$24,000 and white babies cost \$35,000 to adopt<sup>46</sup>.

## Adoption & the Commodification of Children

While the scope of this report is Los Angeles, it is important to note that **adoption and foster care on national and global scales is deeply corrupt**. The fetishization of children from other countries, the nonconsensual removal of children from their families, and the ways in which adopting families have preference for what the adoptee looks like all too closely parallel human trafficking. Intercountry Adoption spikes from nations that the United States is in conflict with, such as “Operation Babylift”<sup>47</sup> during the Vietnam War or spikes in adoptions from El Salvador in the 1980s,<sup>48</sup> make adoption a global human trafficking issue driven by U.S. imperialism. Studies show the ability for transnational and transracial adoptees to adjust or have healthy attachments in their adult life is very difficult<sup>49</sup>. Many adoptees speak out about the insidious saviorism in their adoption narrative<sup>50</sup>

Non-Profit Organization	Total Gross Receipts
Guardians of Love	\$5,548,130
Children’s Bureau of Southern California	\$51,025,177
Vista Del Mar Child and Family Services	\$43,504,766
Extraordinary Families	\$3,980,184
Nuevo Amanecer Latino Childrens Services	\$12,093,012
Aviva Family and Children's Services	\$19,544,313
Optimist Boys Home and Ranch	\$27,285,026
Institute for Black Parenting	\$2,133,612
Dangerfield Institute of Urban Problems	\$4,569,748
<b>Total: \$169,683,968</b>	

2019-2020 Gross Receipts of Top 9 Non-profit Adoption and Foster Care Agencies in Los Angeles, CA (Source: Guidestar, created and researched by RS)

<sup>43</sup> <https://www.bsa.ca.gov/reports/2018-126/introduction.html>

<sup>44</sup> <https://dcfs.lacounty.gov/caregivers/resource-family-financial-assistance/>

<sup>45</sup> [https://dcfs.lacounty.gov/caregivers/resource-family-financial-assistance/#Additional\\_Funding](https://dcfs.lacounty.gov/caregivers/resource-family-financial-assistance/#Additional_Funding)

<sup>46</sup> <https://www.npr.org/2013/06/27/195967886/six-words-black-babies-cost-less-to-adopt>

<sup>47</sup> <https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/people/article/3030533/us-operation-baby-lift-orphans-are-still-seeking-their-vietnamese>

<sup>48</sup> <https://www.seattleglobalist.com/2015/04/02/salvadoran-disappeared-children/34675>

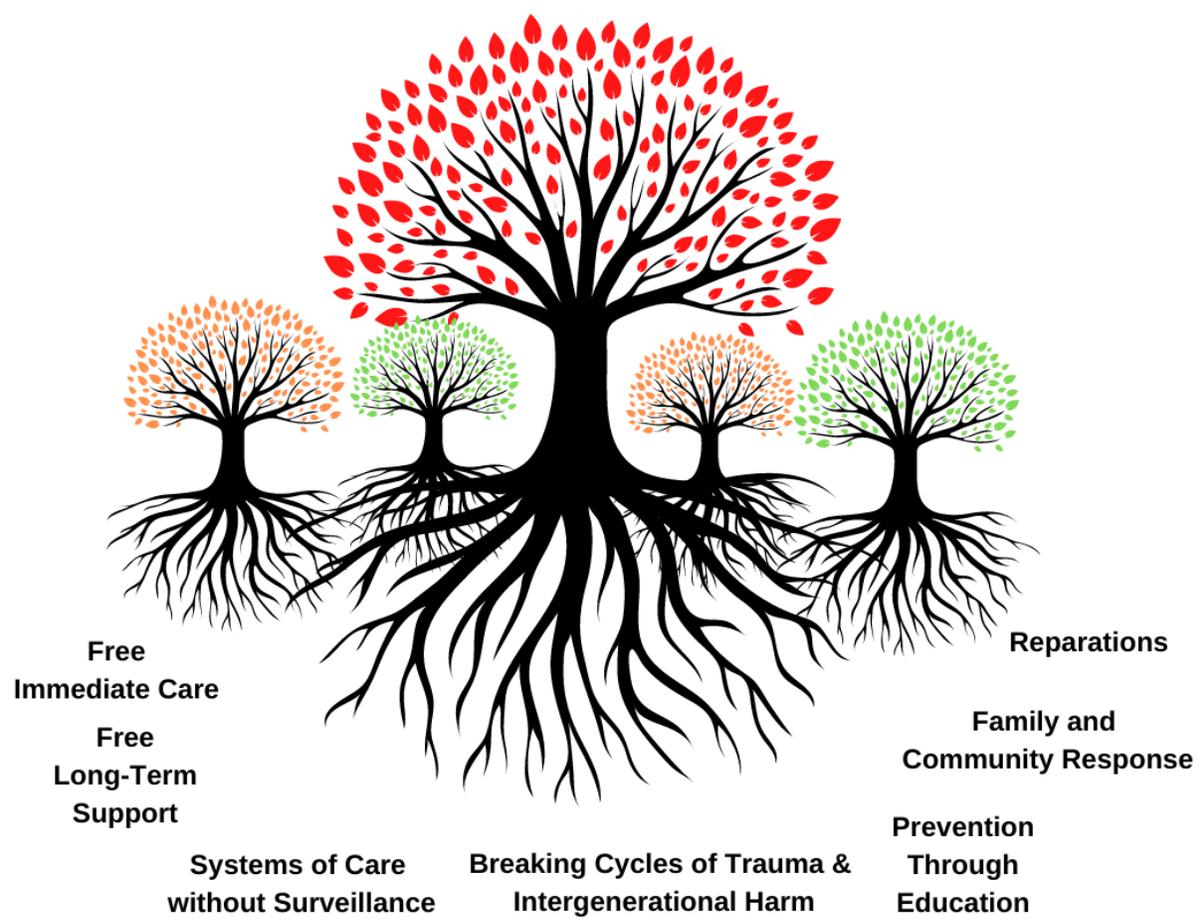
<sup>49</sup> [https://adopta.hr/images/pdf/the\\_primal\\_wound.pdf](https://adopta.hr/images/pdf/the_primal_wound.pdf)

<sup>50</sup> <https://www.npr.org/2018/10/13/657201204/code-switch-transracial-adoptees-on-their-racial-identity-and-sense-of-self>

# IMAGINING ALTERNATIVES TO DCFS & THE CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM

Creating new systems of care for children’s healing and accountability to harm is essential to building resilient communities where we no longer rely on the Department of Children and Family Services to surveil, police, and tear apart families in our communities. Through interviews with DCFS-impacted parents and children as well as DCFS social workers, we imagined what we need for creating alternatives to the current child welfare system. **These suggestions are rooted in imagination and guided by conversations with interviewees.** We know in order to have a just, practical response to harm against children we need to remain rooted in the needs of survivors as we completely reimagine, unlearn, and heal from the economic, material, structural, and spiritual violence done to our family members.

## REGENERATIVE RESPONSES TO HARM AGAINST YOUTH



Inspired by the work of [Ignacio Rivera and Aredvi Azad](#) in "Police Can't Save Children from Sex Abuse But We Must"

## Reparations

We believe it is necessary to remain rooted in imagining a better system while also understanding that a thorough reckoning with the U.S. empire's occupation of stolen indigenous lands, economies built off of slavery, and debt are still necessary before we can build a system that adequately responds to harm. Systemic accountability must happen through giving back the land and paying Black and indigenous families for the intergenerational harm they've experienced and continue to experience.

## Services without Surveillance

How can we begin to imagine a world where people are granted the rights of food, dignified housing, education, and jobs without the constant tracking and monitoring we see in our current social services sector?

## Free Immediate Care

What would it look like for children to receive the immediate mental and physical healthcare they need?

## Free Long-Term Support

One of the key ways to support survivors of harm, abuse, or neglect is continued support over the long term. The commitment to transform harm and heal are long-term and survivor-centered.

## Breaking Cycles of Trauma and Intergenerational Harm

The cycles of abuse and neglect present within families are rooted in intergenerational cycles of trauma. How can we build this, intergenerationally and collectively?

## Prevention through Education

In addition to breaking cycles of trauma, preventing harm by educating children and parents about their bodies, choice, and consent is necessary. Teaching parents who may not know about phases of child development may help them as they navigate birthing and parenting.

## Family and Community Support Teams

What if we lived in a world where each child gets a village support system with both blood relatives and kin in their community, such as neighbors, teachers, counselors, siblings, parents, extended family, and family friends? Each support team has consistent meetings to connect solely on how they can support an individual child in their growth.

*The problem with DCFS is the services we give to parents, like parenting classes, are often designated by the judge and their gavel. **Let's reframe giving people services outside of punishment and stigma.** – DCFS Social Worker #1*

*“Let's say a kid grandparent needs the foster parent funds to pay for the child's needs. **Why should they have to let a social worker have access to their home, their family, their life, in order to be able to pay their rent?**”*

*“**Families are caught in a trauma cycle** where [being poor] or having a history with DCFS dictates the future of their family's case.” – DCFS Social Worker #3*

*“We need to understand the **abuse, neglect, and harm are understood differently across cultures.**” – DCFS former social worker*

*“What if we lived in a world **where each child could have a community and family response [support] team** that checked in with them at school? – DCFS Social Worker #2*

## FURTHER RESEARCH

We see this document's as primary focus as understanding data sharing and predictive analytics within the Department of Children and Family Services. This is just the start to the Coalition's endeavor in understanding the experiences of harm done to our community by child welfare institutions. Focus on the experiences of families and children within DCFS is needed for further research. Additionally, a deeper dive into the DCFS budget is also needed in order to understand more clearly the ways partnership with carceral institutions and schools works within the system.