



Lived Experience Group Statement

Honorable Members of the Task Force,

Throughout our tenure on this task force, we have shifted our focus from mandated reporting to supporting our communities, embedding the principle of shared power with community members and those with lived experiences. This includes parents, youth, children, caregivers, relatives, teachers, social workers, and many others in dual roles. One thing has become abundantly clear: the crucial importance of including these diverse voices in shaping a system that values accountability and effective practices.

This accountability honors the hundreds of thousands of voices across our state who have contributed to defining what it truly means to listen—and to transform that listening into action. As members of the Lived Experience Subcommittee, we recognize that this paradigm shift is critical for airing out disparities in belief about the value of community engagement and the healing of families. Those resistant to acknowledging the systemic impacts of racism and harm are being rightfully phased out of this field, as they should be.

We strongly urge the Child Welfare Council and all integrated systems to honor the voices of those directly impacted by these issues. Please uplift and implement the Task Force recommendations with bravery and determination. Let us ensure that our voices are heard loud and proud, adhering to the principle that there should be "nothing about us, without us."

Recommendation on accountability, to the Mandated Reporting to Community Supporting Task Force: Implementation should be centralized at the state level, specifically within the California Department of Social Services (CDSS). This office will be crucial in maintaining the integrity of our commitment to equity and inclusion, particularly as it relates to those with lived experience. By positioning this work within CDSS, we want assurance the transition from mandated reporting to community support is embedded within a framework that prioritizes these values. CDSS is ideal as the Foster Care Ombudsman's office was uniquely positioned there. For the safety and equitable accountability for recommendations to the work of the Children's and Families Services Division of the Health and Human Services, Department of Social Services.



As for the implementation strategy, the Secretary of State should develop and implement a “good faith clause” and oversee in partnership with the CDSS, a 3–5-year plan to defer legal liabilities for mandated reporters. During this time mandated reporters are given the flexibility to not report and instead seek community engagement to support parents, children, and youth. This clause will facilitate a good faith effort in shifting our approach from mandatory reporting to community support. Under this new paradigm, mandated reporters will not face prosecution if they choose, in good faith clause, not to report but instead direct families towards community-based support. This shift should align with the implementation of the Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA), ensuring that our systems and practices support families holistically and preventatively, rather than punitively. With that, CDSS could support an ongoing task force which will be comprised of 50% of those paid participants with lived experience to support ongoing implementation and technical assistance.

Lived Experts Areas of Importance:

1. Defining Key Terms:

There is a consensus among various groups on the need to **clearly define what constitutes mandated reporting**. This involves delineating the circumstances under which reporting should occur, to minimize both underreporting and overreporting. It's essential that these definitions are widely understood by professionals in the field as well as the general public.

2. Legal and Liability Concerns:

- **Liability Concerns:** Address the liability issues surrounding forced reporting, ensuring that those obligated to report are protected. For a bold shift in practice, policy must step in with the aforementioned “good faith clause.”
- **Legislative Changes:** Advocate for legislative changes that provide clearer guidelines and protections for mandated reporters while under the “good faith clause.”
- **Implementation:** Public campaign for community partnership to support families debunking the idea that the “system” can better care for children. Truth telling campaign to help support identifying when system’s intervention is necessary.



3. Legal Definition of Neglect:

- Consideration must be given to how **racial biases and the needs of special populations** can affect perceptions and accusations of neglect. We recommend eliminating the legal definition of neglect. This will allow for a more comprehensive assessment of child welfare adjudication not based on a “catch all” category but facts defined in the welfare and institution codes which define child abuse.
- Address **fully funding community-based organizations** and resource centers to “fill the systems” concrete needs and financial gaps for prevention of entrance into the child welfare system due to “neglect.”

4. Curriculum and Training:

- **Uniting Families:** Highlight the benefits of keeping families united and the negative impacts of unnecessary separations.
- **Training Importance:** Stress the importance of thorough training for all stakeholders to ensure an accurate understanding and implementation of reporting requirements.

5. Research & Data:

- **Address the discrepancies in reporting** that disproportionately affect Black/African American, Indigenous, Latinx, and children and parents with disabilities of all spectrums compared to white communities. There is a critical need for ongoing research and data analysis to inform policy changes and ensure equity in reporting practices.
- The work of child welfare needs to be **transparent in the form of data, decision-making and real-time feedback** relating to injustices and disparities. And there needs to be alternative forms of research that are community led and family-involved.
- We need to be able to have an **ongoing and systematic government-and-community dialogue about the data**. There needs to be a process by which families and communities report the data that is harmful to them, and where there is engaged transparency with the data.



Mandated Reporting to Community Supporting Task Force

Communities Keeping Children Safe and Families Together

We put our hearts and collective lived experience into the recommendations. We know these areas are pivotal for ensuring that our shift from mandated reporting to community supporting is informed, equitable, and effective.

We ask you too, to open your hearts, be bold not only by considering the Task Force Recommendations, but by inviting more persons with lived expertise to join the tables where decisions are made. We know that including and uplifting the voices of those most impacted by mandated reporting and child welfare to leadership and at large positions, will continue to build the momentum we see propelling us toward our North Star of *Keeping children and families together, safe, well and strengthened by the resources they need to thrive.*

In gratitude and solidarity,

The Members of the Lived Experience Group of the Mandated Reporting to Community Supporting Task Force

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