



The Kid Angle

Kid-focused news from First Focus on Children

How to create equity for our Black children

February 17, 2022

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At First Focus we often say children are “last and least” when it comes to federal budget and policy decisions. But America’s Black children are often last, least and lost in the shuffle.

The theme of this Black History Month is Black Resistance. For decades, Black families and communities have resisted the systems and policies that work against their children. This month, we honor their resistance by highlighting the policies that inflict harm on Black children and the solutions to put those policies in the past.

In the United States, Black babies are [twice as likely to die as their white counterparts](#). Black children experience poverty at [nearly three times the rate of white children](#). And in today’s America, [suicide attempts are rising faster for Black children](#) than for any other racial or ethnic group. Below are a few examples of how the system — and the laws and regulations that sustain it — marginalizes these children and the ways that Congress and federal policies can address these wrongs.

Health Care: Before the COVID-19 pandemic, 5.9% of all Black children lacked health insurance, among the highest rate in the nation. Pandemic-era legislation [squeezed that number down to 4.3%, the biggest gain of any racial or ethnic group](#). But [research from First Focus on Children](#) and our partners finds that nearly 7 million children will lose their Medicaid coverage in the next few months as these emergency measures unwind, and 1.4 million of them will be Black. Black children will experience coverage loss at twice the rate — 6% — of white children. In the end, [13% of all Black children in the United States are expected to lose coverage](#).

- **The Fix:** *The omnibus funding bill passed in December requires states to mitigate coverage losses and to implement accountability measures. As outlined in our fact sheet [Medicaid Unwinding: How to Protect Children from Losing Coverage](#), the state and federal governments must strictly adhere to these requirements — and make sure they are applied equitably.*





Maternal and Infant mortality: The United States is [one of only three countries in the world with rising rates of maternal death](#). The other two are Afghanistan and Sudan. **And Black women and babies bear the brunt of this statistic.** Black women are nearly four times more likely to die from pregnancy-related complications — regardless of their wealth, education or other socio-economic factors. [A Black woman with a college degree is more likely to die from giving birth than a white woman without a high school diploma.](#)

- **The Fix:** Require states to provide 12 months of postpartum Medicaid coverage, as 30 states and the District of Columbia already have. Pass the [Black Maternal Health Omnibus Act of 2021](#), a collection of [12 bills](#) in the 117th Congress that begin to address some of these structural issues. **First Focus Campaign for Children** and more than 250 other organizations endorsed the Omnibus and are working to have it reintroduced in the 118th. [First Focus Campaign for Children and partners also succeeded in having the 117th Congress reauthorize the Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting \(MIECHV\) Program](#), which provides home visiting services to young families that improve maternal and infant mortality outcomes. The measure also requires new funding, new data collection disaggregated by race and ethnicity and other measures that will help improve equity within MIECHV.

Foster Care: Implicit racial biases consistently undercut the child welfare system's professed goal of stabilizing families and result in [a disproportionate number of Black and brown children trapped in the system](#). On any given day, roughly [427,000 U.S. children are in foster care](#). Roughly [23% of these children are Black](#), although Black children make up just 14% of all U.S. children. [More than half of all Black children — 53% — will experience a child welfare investigation](#) versus just 23% of white children. And [one out of every 10 Black children](#) investigated will be removed from their home and placed in foster care. Black girls fare the worst in this system. They make up 23% of all girls in foster care, but [36% of those who experience 10 or more placements](#).

- **The Fix:** Transform the child welfare system from one that regulates families to one that takes an anti-racist approach to family integrity and child safety. [First Focus on Children's Child Welfare and Racial Equity Collaborative](#) brings together more than a dozen organizations under the leadership of lived experts to achieve this goal.



Education: Racism hurts Black children across institutions, [including \(and especially\) in school](#), starting when they are babies. Studies show that Black toddlers are expelled and suspended from preschool [twice as often as their non-Black peers](#). This early exclusion drives [lower test scores](#), [higher dropout rates](#), and increased rates of [juvenile justice system involvement](#), essentially [sweeping these babies into the taxpayer-supported preschool-to-prison pipeline](#). While Black children are far less likely to have mental health professionals available at school, they are more likely to have police officers on campus, a situation that puts them in far more jeopardy than their non-Black peers. Black students were subjected to [more than 80% of the incidents of police violence](#) studied in a recent report that analyzed nearly 300 incidents over a decade. Once again, this violence [disproportionately impacts Black girls](#), who are four times more likely than their white counterparts to be arrested, according to the report.

- **The Fix:** Pass legislation introduced in previous Congresses, such as the [Counseling Not Criminalization Act \(S. 4360/H.R. 7848, 116th\)](#) which would “make schools police-free and replace Student Resource Officers (SROs) with counselors and social workers,” and the [Ending PUSHOUT Act \(H.R. 5325, 117th\)](#) which opposes the systematic disenfranchisement of Black girls and girls of color in schools. Some scholars also recommend reclaiming the federal role in education, discussed in [First Focus on Children’s report Big Ideas 2023](#).



Immigration: Our broader immigration system has a [legacy of anti-Black racism](#). Because of over policing in their communities, [Black immigrants disproportionately face longer detention, higher costs of bond, and greater risk of deportation](#). Black people make up 7% of non-citizens in the United States, but account for [20% of those facing deportation on criminal grounds](#), despite evidence that all racial groups commit crimes at similar rates. During the COVID-19 pandemic, nearly half of all families in detention were Haitian, and U.S. citizen newborns of Haitian parents at the border were [returned](#) to Mexico without birth certificates, likely leaving them stateless. The Biden Administration [accelerated expulsions and deportations to Haiti](#) despite the political and safety crisis there, and [Haitians have been subjected to cruel treatment by border agents](#).

- **The Fix:** [Enact border policies that protect and support all children equally](#).

Today in the U.S., lawmakers can't even seem to agree on whether we should teach children about these inequities (Exhibit A: [Florida and AP African American Studies, plus earlier examples](#)). We are pleased that the Biden Administration has recognized the need for change with [yesterday's Executive Order to further racial equity](#) and hope that meaningful measures will follow. Those who care about children — all children — must continue to surface these inequities and work to eliminate them in federal budget and policy decisions.

For more information on advancing racial equity for children, please see the following materials:

- [How Congress can reduce economic hardship and stabilize families now](#)
- [Reimagining TANF using the “Black Women Best” Framework](#)
- [U.S. Child Poverty in 2021](#)
- [Child Impact Statements](#) and how to use them



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