



## CHILD WELFARE

Around the country, the child welfare system disproportionately targets poor Black mothers. Washington, DC is no exception. For example, the DC Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA) reports that 82% of foster youth are Black ([CFSA Oversight pg 137](#)), compared with just [52% of the general youth population](#). Moreover, 47.4% of cases involve caregivers with disabilities ([Children's Bureau pg 48](#)).

Unfortunately, DC's Child and Family Services Agency does not collect or report data on the financial status of the families it monitors, or data about how many families receive public assistance. However, CFSA's breakdown of their cases by ward reveals that wards with the highest number of cases are also those with the highest concentrations of poverty:

The number of CPS investigations for child abuse and neglect by ward ([CFSA Oversight pg. 16](#))

Fiscal Year	Ward of Origin									Total Investigations
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Ward Unknown	
FY 21	247	56	101	367	542	387	945	1,444	110	4,199
FY 22	292	88	99	438	571	296	988	1,451	89	4,312

The number of investigations substantiated by ward ([CFSA Oversight pg. 16](#))

Fiscal Year	Ward of Origin									Total Investigations
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Ward Unknown	
FY 21	66	12	12	77	147	96	240	364	21	1,035
FY 22	56	20	23	86	130	51	238	359	17	980

[Percent of DC residents by ward living below 100% of the federal poverty level](#)

Years	Ward							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
2021	11.2	12.3	7.9	9.5	15.2	11.9	25.6	30.2
2022	11.7	12.4	7.6	8.7	15.6	11.3	23.8	27.7

Most CFSA cases—9 out of 10 ([Children’s Bureau pg 45](#))—involve some form of neglect. It is not surprising that poverty is conflated with neglect in DC’s child welfare system. Child neglect, defined by DC statute, includes harming the “health or welfare” of a child under 18 years of age and doing so through failing to accord them “adequate food, clothing, shelter, education or medical care (D.C. Code § 4-1341.01(3)).

Because poverty is a clear driver of involvement in the child welfare system, DC should address this issue by implementing guaranteed income. Research has already shown the value in this approach: [one study using data from the 1990 census](#) found that neighborhood poverty is positively associated with child maltreatment (especially child neglect), and [a 2016 study](#) found that concrete supports like cash assistance supported lower short-term recidivism in the child welfare system. [Multiple guaranteed income pilot programs around the country](#) are currently exploring the link between child welfare and cash assistance. In DC, Mother’s Outreach Network is currently operating Mother Up, a guaranteed income pilot program specifically for Black mothers with child welfare system involvement. These pilot programs are a great start, but only DC’s government can implement the change necessary: a permanent citywide guaranteed income.

Guaranteed income may sound like an expensive solution, but it is not an impossible one. In fact, CFSA consistently **underutilizes** the available monetary resources it does have to help families. As part of its annual budget, CFSA is allocated “flex funds,” which are discretionary funds the agency can provide to families in the child welfare system. [According to former Director Matthews](#), the existence of these funds are not made known to all by CFSA; instead, they are only available at the discretion of CFSA staff, on a case-by-case basis. However, CFSA consistently underspends its flex fund budget. In Fiscal Year 2022, for example, CFSA spent less than three quarters of its total \$1.3 million flex funds budget. In Fiscal Year 2021, CFSA spent **less than half** of its total \$1.3 million flex funds budget.

Child Welfare / Family Policing in Washington, DC  
DC Child and Family Services Agency Flex Funds Allocations & Spending, FY21 & FY22

Type	FY22 Allocated	FY22 Spent	FY22 Leftover	FY21 Allocated	FY21 Spent	FY21 Leftover
Child Care: Clothing	\$141,9182	\$83,8751	\$58,043	\$141,9183	\$97,5002	\$44,418
Child Care: Furniture	\$177,5832	\$128,0451	\$49,537	\$177,5833	\$126,2392	\$51,344
Child Care: Other Services	\$687,6782	\$550,5771	\$137,101	\$689,6783	\$114,9462	\$574,732
Emergency Funds	\$145,0002	\$63,3001	\$81,700	\$145,0003	\$79,2702	\$65,730
Food Vouchers	\$115,0002	\$90,6691	\$24,331	\$115,0003	\$38,3332	\$76,667
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$1,267,1792</b>	<b>\$916,4671</b>	<b>\$350,712</b>	<b>\$1,269,1793</b>	<b>\$456,2882</b>	<b>\$812,891</b>

Additionally, there is a clear disparity between the amount of money paid by the state to families living in poverty compared to those caring for foster children. In DC, foster families and institutions are paid a minimum of \$950 every month for each foster child in their care. Meanwhile, DC families receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) receive [a maximum of \\$471](#) for a child-only household of one child, and an additional \$119 - \$168 for each additional member of their household.

These figures demonstrate clearly that DC can and should provide more financial support to families living in poverty, through guaranteed income.

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