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Center *for the* Study *of* Social Policy
Ideas into Action

WHAT WE OWE YOUNG CHILDREN

An Anti-Racist Policy Platform for Early Childhood

Acknowledgements

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About CSSP

CSSP is a national, non-profit policy organization that connects community action, public system reform, and policy change. We work to achieve a racially, economically, and socially just society in which all children and families thrive. To do this, we translate ideas into action, promote public policies grounded in equity, support strong and inclusive communities, and advocate with and for all children and families marginalized by public policies and institutional practices.

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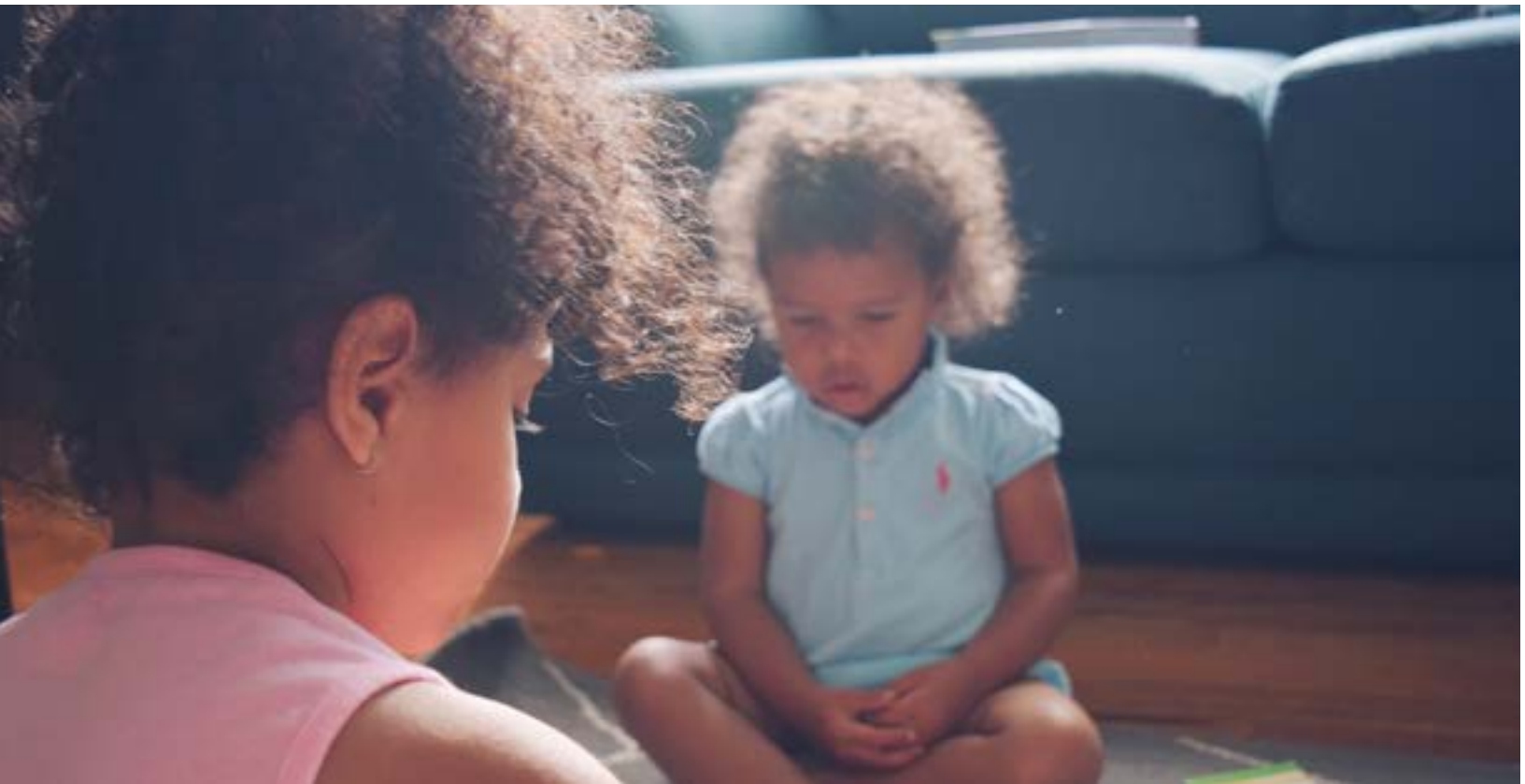
Foreward

Early childhood is a crucial period in the life course that impacts long-term child development and shapes the lives of families and communities. Early childhood development policies and practices entrenched in systemic racism contribute to the racial disparities that we see in outcomes ranging from education attainment, to health, to long-term employment opportunities. As founder and president of the National Birth Equity Collaborative, I advocate for policy change that will dismantle structural and institutional racism as the root of inequity. The ability for all people to thrive calls for anti-racist policies that span early childhood as well as the broader systems that impact outcomes. The policy agenda that follows provides an actionable path forward to redress structural racism as the root cause of inequities in early childhood outcomes. These recommendations are important steps toward achieving equity and liberation for Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) children and families.

Joia Crear-Perry, MD, FACOG
National Birth Equity Collaborative (NBEC) Founder & President



Introduction

Our collective future depends on the ability of young children to achieve their potential. Early childhood is a time of rapid brain development, physical growth, and learning—a sensitive period that lays the foundation for success well into adulthood.[1] Racism threatens young children's health and well-being by shaping the institutions and public policies that determine children's opportunities now and into the future.

Evidence of how racism harms young children and their families can be found in every facet of life. The United States has the highest infant and maternal mortality rates among comparable wealthy countries, with mortality rates for Black and Indigenous women and their children three to four times those of White women and their children, because the health care system provides Black women and other women of color lower quality care at every turn.[2] More than 10 million children—including one in four Black children and one in five Latinx children—are growing up in families with incomes so low that they fall below the official poverty line because of policies that systematically undervalue work, particularly of women and people of color, and fail to provide families the compensation and working conditions they need.[3] Children's health and well-being are jeopardized every day by air pollution, mold, lead, and other toxins, because policymakers have created racially and economically segregated communities where they have concentrated predatory industries and environmental hazards.[4] Children are separated from their families and traumatized because public systems are designed to surveil and punish people of color—from immigration enforcement, to policing and juvenile and adult justice, to the child welfare system.[5]

As a nation, we have failed to confront what families of color have long known: our institutions have systematically disadvantaged and threatened families of color, from our nation's founding. The legacy of slavery, colonization, genocide, and immigrant exclusion shapes contemporary policies and institutions, and new policies too often widen inequality and threaten the well-being of Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Asian, and other immigrant families and families of color.

In order to prosper together, we must deliver on what we owe young children for past injustices. And we must ensure that all young children and their families have the opportunity to be healthy and happy, participate fully in society, and pursue their goals. Doing so requires understanding the root causes of contemporary inequities and developing anti-racist family and early childhood policies that ensure all young children have what they need to grow and thrive.[6]

Anti-racist early childhood policy is policy that is designed explicitly to:

Redress past injustices. Anti-racist policymaking examines the drivers of present-day inequities, and seeks to undo and redress the harm caused by racist policies that have systematically disadvantaged children and families of color throughout our nation's history. White supremacy thrives on ahistorical thinking. Anti-racist policy recognizes how racism, and anti-Black and anti-Indigenous racism in particular, have shaped policies and practices historically, and continues to shape all our experiences. Taking action to right historical wrongs is necessary in order to ensure that all young children have the opportunity to achieve their potential, and can grow up knowing that they and their peers belong in this nation.

Meet the needs of children and families of color. Anti-racist policy centers children and families of color, to ensure that they benefit directly from the policy. Policies that are purported to be "color-blind" have all too frequently been designed to benefit White children and families, and harm children and families of color directly and indirectly.[7] Anti-racist policymaking must be race-conscious, explicitly considering how policies impact Black, Indigenous, and other children, families, and communities of color, to ensure that the policies do not harm some racial and ethnic groups while benefiting others. For policies to effectively support children and families of color, they must recognize how race and ethnicity intersect with class, ability, sexual orientation, and gender identity to shape people's experiences.[8] And families must be included in the policymaking process so that they can help shape solutions that meet their expressed needs. The goal should be to develop anti-racist policies that are deliberately designed to meet the needs of all children and families of color, in their diversity and variety of experience, so that in the end, all families receive the supports they need.

Support the whole family. Anti-racist early childhood policy is also family policy, recognizing that children grow up as part of families, and therefore policy initiatives must support the whole family. Supporting the whole family is especially critical for young children, as they are at a developmental stage when their everyday lives center on the foundational relationships they are forming with their family—and not, as will be true later in their lives, their school, neighborhood, or peer group.[9] In the past, public policy has too often been siloed, and policies intended to support children have failed to address the larger struggles their families face. Policy has even actively undermined families in the name of protecting children—as we see with the child welfare system, which disproportionately threatens and separates Black and Indigenous children from their loved ones.[10] Anti-racist policy must be designed to support and strengthen the whole family and ensure family economic security, so that families can thrive together. This requires supporting not just parents and siblings but also grandparents and other caregivers and loved ones who constitute a child's family. It requires affirming children and families, building on their strengths, honoring and deepening their social connections, and connecting them to the basic supports they need.[11]

Serve all children and families in need. Anti-racist early childhood policy supports all children and families in need. In the past, policies that have artificially divided families between those who are "deserving" and those who are "undeserving"—providing services only to those considered deserving—have consistently buttressed White supremacy by leaving children and families of color without access to services and supports—or with access to services and supports that do not work for them, and sometimes actively do them harm.[12] Narrowly targeting policies according to income and familial or behavioral characteristics has resulted in a social safety net with gaping holes, which are designed to let families of color fall through. Universal or near-universal programs are often necessary to ensure that children of color and their families are not excluded from programs. These broad-based programs must be designed with children and families of color at the center, to ensure that these programs are in fact meeting their needs, and that children and families of color receive the full intended benefits.[13]

The road to overcome entrenched White supremacy is long. This anti-racist early childhood policy platform offers a vision for the future, outlining 10 policy priorities that set the course for reimagining and transforming the way we support children and families. This agenda includes concrete policy changes that could be enacted now to benefit the health and well-being of children and families and also long-term and more ambitious ideas to ensure children and families are valued, included, and belong. If some of these policies seem radical, it is only because we are currently so far from providing young children and their families the basic supports they need. Together, these policies lay the foundation for a more equitable future for young children and their families, and a more prosperous future for us all.

Anti-Racist Policy Agenda

1. Reparations

Racism has threated families of different races and ethnicities over the long course of U.S. history, but the systemic oppression of Black and Indigenous Americans stands apart for its endurance over time—from colonization, genocide, and slavery, to the repeated efforts to erase Indigenous peoples and cultures and subjugate Black people. We can never fully atone for these horrors and their long-lasting impacts, but we can take meaningful action to demonstrate a different level of commitment to building a nation in which all children are and feel valued and included.

Publicly acknowledging and taking responsibility for the way that federal policy has directly harmed and systematically subordinated Black and Indigenous peoples is the first step to ensuring that all children can grow up feeling recognized and included. For children of all races and ethnicities it is important that they know this country's history, and see that this country has taken steps to redress past wrongs, so that they can see themselves and their peers as part of the nation's future. There must be ongoing public education that recognizes the role that federal policy has played in perpetuating White supremacy. Then concrete action must be taken to begin to redress these wrongs. In order to redress past wrongs the federal government should:

- Recognize tribal sovereignty and uphold its trust and treaty obligations, which it has repeatedly violated. Among other things, this would require fully funding housing, health, and education services that the United States has an obligation to fund as a result of its trust responsibility.[14]
- Provide reparations for Black people whose ancestors were enslaved, and who continue to be harmed by systemic racism. Reparations for Black families should be conceived as a two-fold commitment. First, there should be a meaningful cash endowment to Black families who have been denied the ability to accumulate assets and wealth for generations. Advocates of reparations have called for a cash endowment that closes the average Black-White wealth gap.[15] This endowment must be accompanied by a second commitment: to root out the systemic racism that continues to limit Black families' income and ability to build wealth.[16] This requires multifaceted action across institutions and public systems, including eliminating discrimination in the labor and housing markets, rooting out predatory financial practices, remedying disparities in access to a quality education and to social supports, ending mass incarceration, and abolishing systems that oppress Black families and limit their ability to pursue their self-determined goals. Without this commitment to dismantling systemic racism, the benefit of a cash endowment for Black families will be fleeting, as the institutions that have extracted the wealth of Black families will continue to do so. There must be accountability to this second commitment, to ensure that meaningful and ongoing action is taken to redress systemic racism now and into the future.

2. Permanent Legal Status for All Immigrant Families

To ensure that all young children can achieve their potential, all children and their families must be formally included in the United States. Today, an estimated five million children are growing up in mixed-status families, where at least one parent is undocumented. Young children in mixed-status families are less likely to have access to early care and education, and more likely to live in families that struggle to make ends meet.[17] Immigration enforcement threatens their health and well-being, as families avoid health care and basic services that support children's development for fear of coming into contact with immigration officials. Children's mental health suffers as they live in constant fear that they may one day be separated from a loved one.[18] Black and Latinx families are disproportionately threatened by immigration enforcement, while Black, Latinx, and Asian immigrants are harmed by policies that limit the ability of immigrants of color to obtain legal status.[19] Permanent legal status is a precondition for economic, physical, and emotional well-being. In order to ensure that all families can participate fully in the nation they call home:

- All children and families currently living in the United States must be granted immediate permanent legal status, so that, over time, they can become citizens of the United States.
- Policymakers must reimagine the immigration system, transforming both immigration law and practice so that it protects and promotes the well-being of children and families, ensures that family members are able to reunite with loved ones, and prevents the development of a large population without formal legal status in the future.[20]

3. A National Child Allowance

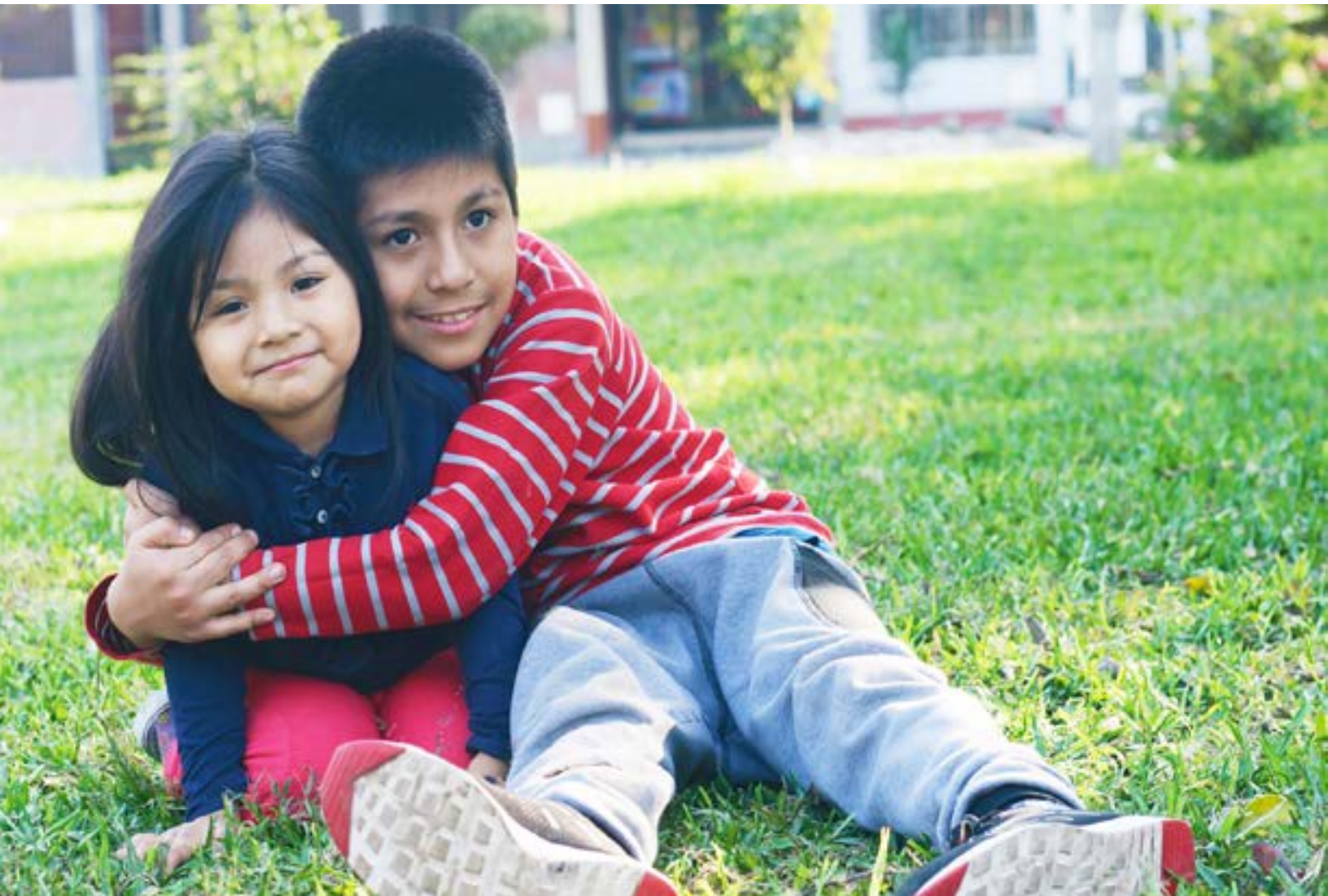
All children and families need adequate income, and this is especially important in children's earliest years for ensuring families' security, stability, and well-being.[21] But many families with young children, particularly Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and immigrant families, struggle to make ends meet. One reason is that decades of policy decisions driven by White racial resentment has resulted in a safety net that devolves important decisions to states, who then discriminate against families of color; ties basic supports to work, thereby limiting support for families who face labor market discrimination; and explicitly excludes many immigrant families.[22] In a nation as wealthy as the United States, all children and families should be guaranteed a reliable income floor. We need a national child allowance. Most other advanced, industrial countries have a version of a child allowance, or a universal or near-universal cash grant that is delivered throughout the year to families with children based on the number of children in the household.[23] Researchers have estimated that a U.S. child allowance would significantly reduce child poverty overall, and particularly benefit Black and Latinx children and families.[24]

In order to ensure it benefits children of color, a child allowance should:

- Be federally administered, with benefit levels set nationally so that all children are guaranteed a degree of economic security that does not vary based on the predilections of state and local politicians, system administrators, or caseworkers.
- Provide a regular—monthly or bi-weekly—per-child benefit that meaningfully helps families cover the additional costs of raising a child, including the high costs families confront when their children are young, and then again as their children approach adolescence.[25]
- Support all families with children, regardless of immigration status, employment status or other behavioral characteristics.[26]

4. Paid Caregiving and Medical Leave for All

The intensive caregiving that young children demand is not possible without paid leave, so parents and other family members can take time off from work in the paid labor force or from looking for a job to provide care for their family and to care for their own well-being. But many families do not



have access to paid leave. Families of color are especially likely to be denied access to paid leave because the United States does not have a national policy of paid family and medical leave.[27] We need a national policy of paid leave that provides a financial cushion so that parents can bond with a new child, and people can care for themselves or a family member with a serious illness. To effectively reach families with the lowest incomes, young parents, and families of color, the policy must not be limited to those currently in the wage labor force. To reach all families who need it, a national paid leave program should:

- Be designed as a linked social-insurance and public assistance program, where caregivers engaged in market labor can access paid leave through the social insurance program, and those who are not engaged in market labor can access paid leave through the public assistance program. This program design ensures that individuals who do not qualify for the social insurance program still have access to financial support when they experience a qualifying event.
- Recognize families as they define themselves, offer full wage replacement for the lowest paid workers, and provide a meaningful minimum benefit for all caregivers, whether through the social insurance or public assistance program.[28]

5. A Healthy Housing Guarantee

Healthy, stable, affordable housing is critical to child and family health and well-being.[29] However, every year millions of families with children struggle to pay rent, and face the risk of overcrowding, unhealthy living environments, frequent moves, eviction, and even homelessness. Housing insecurity and instability is associated with particularly poor outcomes for young children—including lower educational attainment and increased foster care placement—and young children are especially vulnerable to the environmental toxins, pests, allergens, and pollution that are too often found in and around existing housing.[30] Children and families of color are members of strong, resilient communities, but they are significantly more likely to experience housing insecurity and unhealthy housing because of decades of policy decisions that have pushed Black, Latinx, and Indigenous families into segregated communities where industries have been allowed to pollute the air they breathe, the water they drink, and the land they inhabit; where housing conditions are poor; where access to healthy food, clean open spaces, and reliable public transportation is limited; and where too many families cannot afford even the inadequate housing available because of employment discrimination and other systemic barriers to economic security.[31]

Housing assistance has been shown to not only improve families' financial circumstances, allowing them to spend more on their children's education and health care, but also to reduce the frequency of children's school moves, and reduce children's exposures to toxins such as lead. But three out of four families who are eligible for housing assistance do not receive it.[32] Because policymakers have actively created these housing and neighborhood conditions that threaten young children, we have an obligation to fix them.[33] We owe young children, and all children and families, a healthy housing guarantee.

A healthy housing guarantee would:

- Guarantee all families with low incomes a housing voucher. This voucher would cover the costs of rent for healthy housing, in safe and thriving neighborhoods that provide access to clean air, strong schools, and employment opportunities for parents and caregivers. The voucher would be accompanied by housing counseling and other services to help families of color, who often face systematic housing discrimination and roadblocks to using vouchers, find healthy housing in the neighborhoods they prefer.[34]
- Include large-scale federal investment to 1) preserve and expand the supply of healthy, permanent, affordable housing, that will withstand the forces of gentrification and displacement to ensure better outcomes for families with low incomes and families of color and 2) improve the environment of communities of color and lower income communities that bear the burden of decades of targeted, and state-sanctioned, environmental pollution.[35]
- Strengthen fair housing and environmental regulations so that jurisdictions are required to actively dismantle residential segregation and invest in historically under-resourced communities, and private actors are prohibited from continuing policies that result in racially segregated, over-polluted communities.[36]

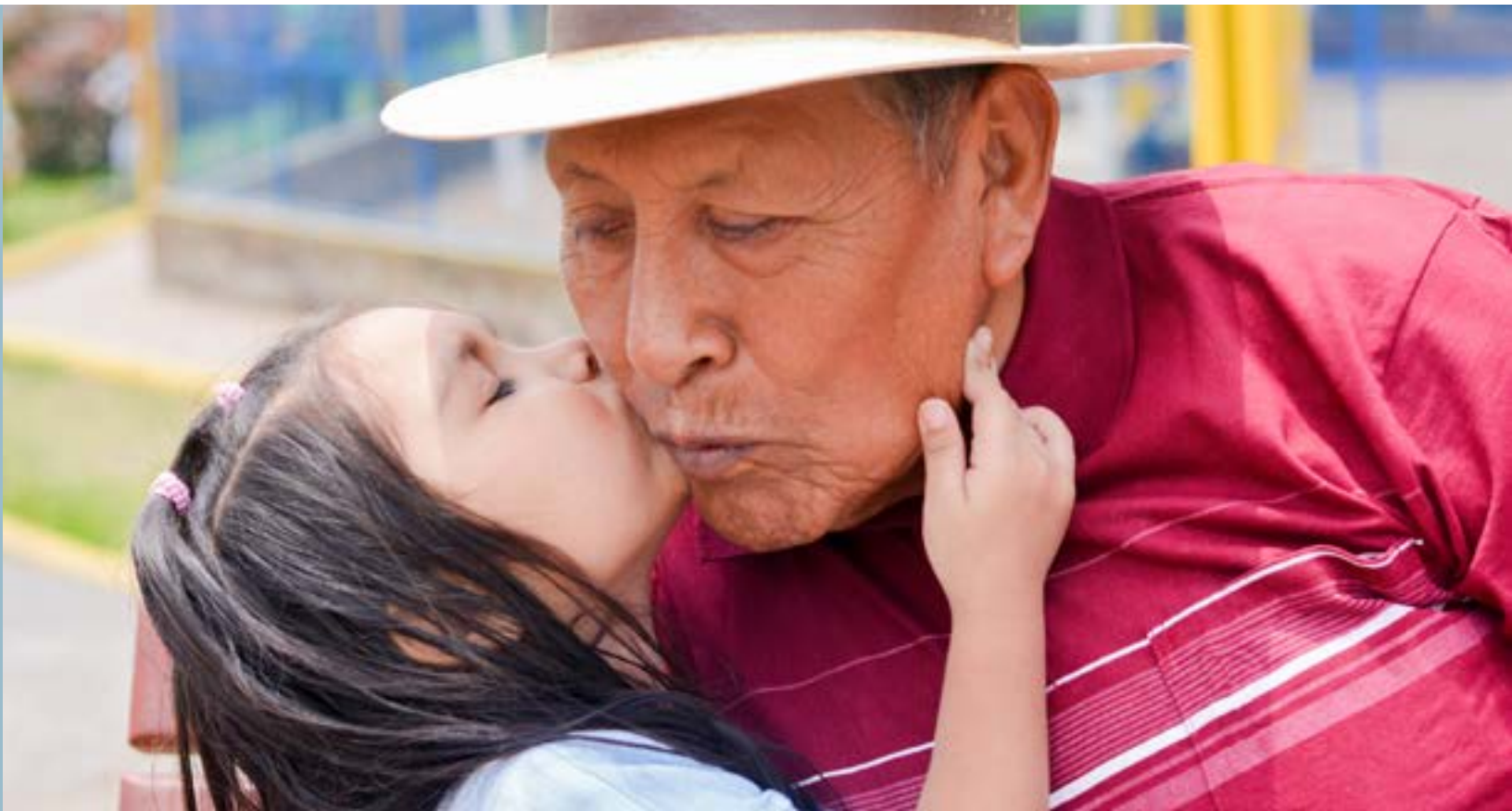
6. Child Care and Early Learning for All

High quality, affordable, and culturally relevant child care and early learning, from infancy through school-age, should be recognized as a public good.[37] High quality child care can promote children's physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development, laying the foundation for lifelong growth and learning.[38] It also allows parents to work or go to school, enables critical respite and stress reduction for those juggling multiple responsibilities, and improves the health and well-being of the entire family.[39] The United States, however, places the burden of paying for child care on the families who are least able to afford it, which results in care that is inaccessible, and too often of low quality.[40] Families of color and immigrant families are among those who are most likely to have difficulty finding high quality, affordable child care. In some families, older siblings are put in the position of becoming caregivers for their younger siblings, hampering their own growth and learning. When enrolled in child care and early education, children of color may not receive an education that affirms their identities, and they are more likely to be suspended or expelled from programs, and thereby denied early learning opportunities entirely.[41] All families should be guaranteed access to quality, affordable child care and early education, in the setting that works best for them. Early care and education occurs along a continuum, from home-based care provided by a family, friend, or neighbor to center-based care to pre-school in the traditional public school system, and different settings will work better for different children and families at different times. A reimagined child care system that supports families and ensures that all children—including children of color—are ready for school would:[42]

- Guarantee that early care and education is affordable. Early care and education should be free for families with low incomes, and affordable for families with higher incomes, so that costs are capped at a reasonable percentage of their income.
- Ensure that access to early care and education is available to all who want it, in the setting

families most prefer, during the hours that they need care. This requires significant investment both in center-based care and in home-based care provided by a family, friend, or neighbor, which is the most culturally connected and commonly used care for many families, and also the most accessible for shift workers and parents who work non-traditional hours. Access should not be conditioned on the work status of parents or any other factor, because child care is not just important as a work support, but also critical for fostering children's development and ensuring families have the predictable and stable care and support they need at all times.[43]

- Pay early educators a living wage. Child care providers, who are almost exclusively women and disproportionately women of color, earn on average of $10.72 an hour.[44] The critical work that they do should be adequately compensated, with workplace standards and paid benefits, so they can provide for their own families and afford quality care for their own children.[45]
- Provide high quality care, in every setting. Traditional definitions of quality care often overlook the value of the culturally affirming, nurturing care that families themselves prize. Early educators should be provided resources so that they can meet the developmental needs of each child, and help children understand themselves and their communities, including support to: develop programming and curricula so that they can address the needs of children from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds;[46] support young children in developing positive racial and gender identities; and implement positive, developmentally appropriate discipline practices.[47]
- Engage families, responding to parental feedback and promoting the protective factors that mitigate families' risk and promote child well-being—including connecting families to the resources and concrete supports they need; helping families build social connections and resilience; and working with families so that all caregivers in children's lives have a shared understanding of child development.[48]



7. Living Wages for People Who Provide Care

Parents and caregivers are at the very center of young children's everyday lives, and the work they do inside and outside of the home must be properly valued for young children and their families to thrive. Unfortunately, the United States has historically undervalued care work, which has traditionally been performed for low or no pay by women, and women of color in particular.[49] Today, parents and caregivers in the paid labor force—both those who provide care professionally, and those who do not—too often earn poverty wages, and employment discrimination, a low federal minimum wage, and lack of worker power pushes down the wages of people of color and women of color in particular.[50] The critically important care work that parents and caregivers provide their own young children is often entirely uncompensated. Parents and caregivers who quit their paid employment or take time off to raise their young children, reduce their hours so that they can pick children up from school, or leave the workforce entirely to support a child with special needs, provide valuable support to children, and to society as a whole. They provide this care work at significant cost to themselves, which is particularly problematic for caregivers in families with low incomes and other family caregivers, including grandparents and others, who step in to help raise children often with limited resources of their own. For children to thrive, the caregivers in their lives must be properly compensated for the care work they do at home, as well as the care and other work they do outside of the home. This requires taking action across sectors. Policymakers should:

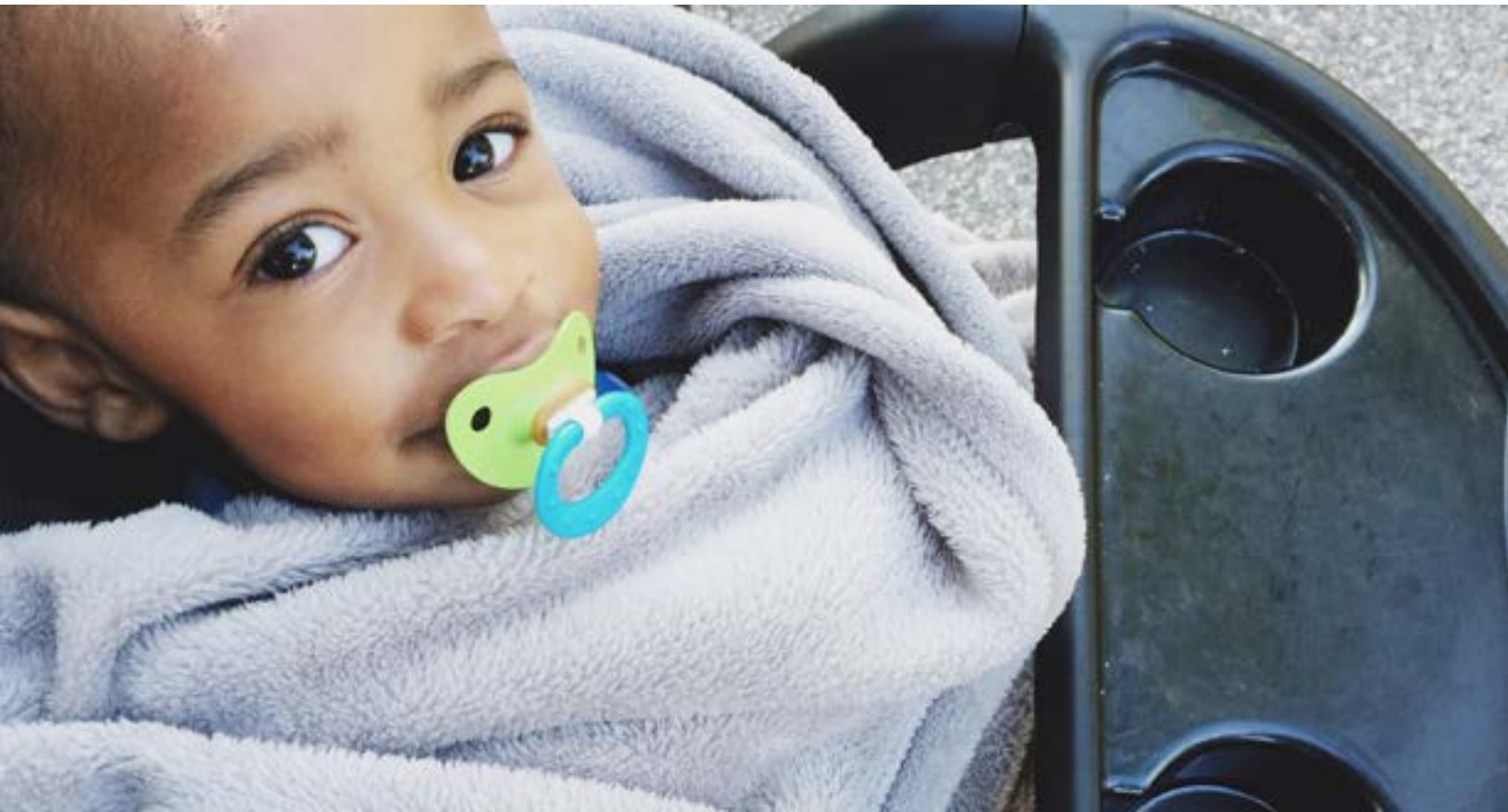
- Raise the federal minimum wage for all workers to at least $15 an hour.[51]
- Strengthen labor law to build worker power.[52]
- Guarantee a living wage for child care providers and other care workers in the paid labor force.
- Compensate parents and caregivers for the care work they do for their own families and loved ones—especially the kin who so often struggle to support the children in their care.[53]

8. Home Visiting and Community-Based Family Supports, Reimagined

Home visiting programs are one of a number of community-based family services that connect families with nurses, social workers, and others who can connect parents to services and supports in the community, educate them about child development and strategies to enhance school readiness, and promote positive parent-child interactions. Home visiting programs in particular, which are voluntary and free, have been shown to improve outcomes for young children and their parents, with notable benefits for Black children and families.[54] However, only a fraction of expectant families or families with a child under six have access to home visiting.[55] Immigrant families are notably underserved by home visiting, and service providers report that immigrant families are sometimes hesitant to take advantage of the program for fear of the immigration consequences.[56] Other families of color sometimes fear that home visitors will report them to the child welfare system, and take their children away—a particularly relevant fear in Black and

Indigenous communities, who are over-surveilled by the child welfare system. Home visiting and community-based family supports must be reimagined and brought to scale so that they are truly accessible to and meets the needs of all families who want it. In addition to current evidence-based models, this requires experimenting with new ways of serving families. There should be large-scale federal investment to:

- Ensure that community-based family services including home visiting remain voluntary, and do not surveil and channel families into intervening systems such as child welfare.[57]
- Offer services virtually or at other locations convenient to families, so that parents can connect to services and supports in trusted locations and they do not have to let a helper into their home if they are uncomfortable doing so. Family support and home visiting staff need to work with the whole family if the family chooses, not just the young child and parents, so that the visitor can also help older children and other family members navigate systems and services.
- Employ a diverse front-line workforce with a range of formal training and life experiences, who reflect the diversity of the families and communities being served. Front-line workers who are members of the communities they serve are best positioned to build trust and work productively with families. The goal should be to develop a workforce of trusted advisors to help families understand and navigate the opportunities and resources in their communities, as well as to advocate with them.
- Fund, expand, and sustain programs designed by and for communities of color. For example, with funding from the Maternal, Infant, and Childhood Home Visiting Program as well as significant private investment, Washington State funds several community-designed programs and services, including Family Spirit, a culturally-tailored home visiting model designed with tribal communities, and the Outreach Doula program, which links trained doulas with families in the same communities.[58]



9. Health Care for All

All children need access to quality health care in order to grow and thrive. This is true for parents and family members as well, as quality health care enables them to maintain their health, receive the care they need, and have the energy and resources to raise the children they love.[59] Our health care system, however, systematically excludes children and families of color through prohibitively expensive care, eligibility restrictions on subsidized health insurance, and care that is not attentive to their needs. At times, health care providers actively threaten the health and well-being of families of color, such as when they police and over-report Black families to child welfare, reducing families' trust in the health care system as a whole. One of the results of these systemic inequities is the United States' high rates of infant and maternal mortality, driven by the horrifyingly high rates of infant and maternal mortality for Black, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, and American Indian or Alaska Native women and their children.[60]

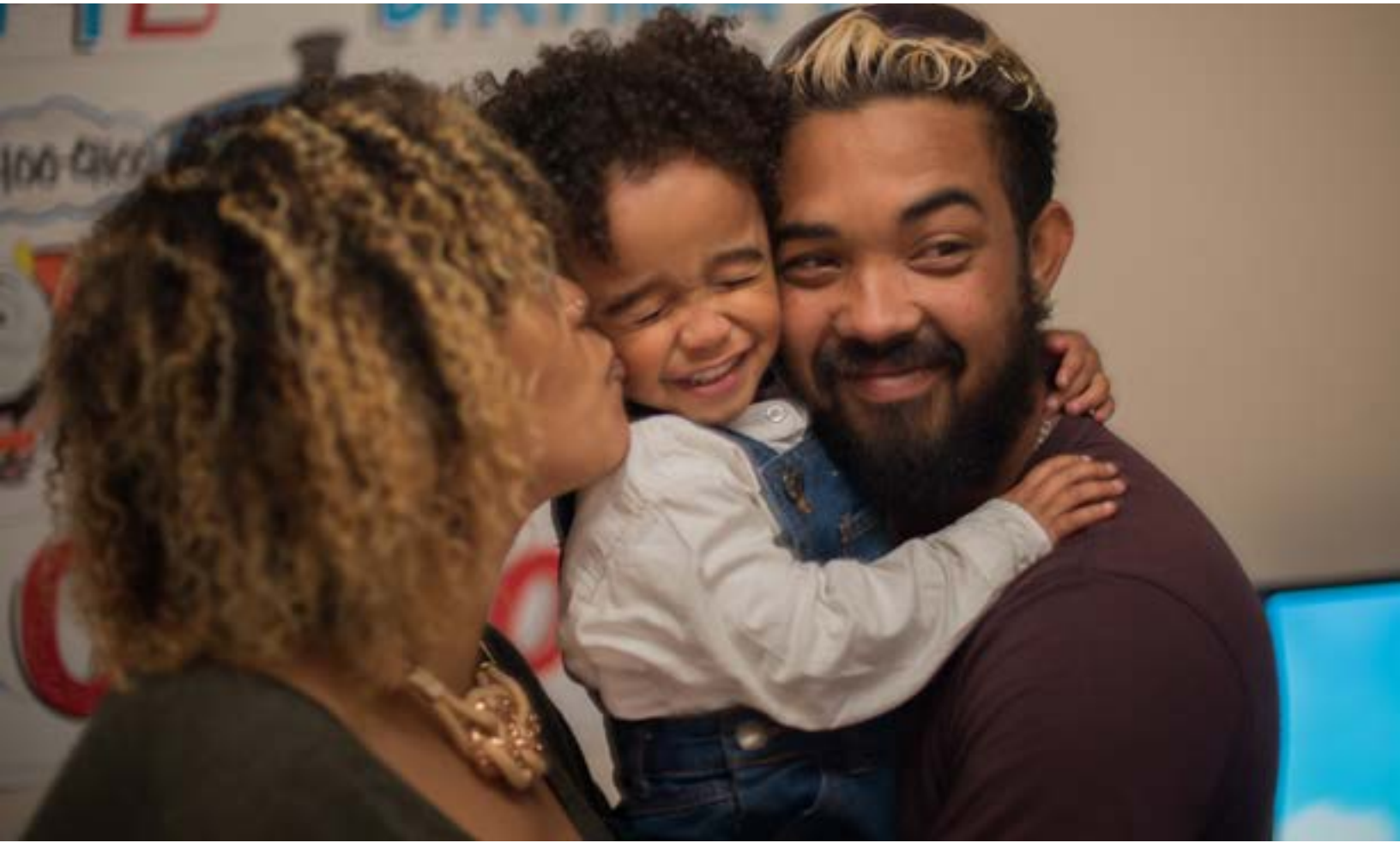
We need to reimagine the health care system so that it addresses the full-range of families' physical and emotional health needs by providing access to timely preventative care, integrating behavioral health into the model of care, addressing racism and other structural and social determinants of health, and partnering with families through strengths-based, relational care that respects families' knowledge and expertise. In order to transform the health care system and ensure children and families can access the quality care they need, policymakers should:

- Develop a comprehensive health insurance program that is: 1) available to all children and families—regardless of immigration status, employment status, zip code, or income level; 2) accepted by a wide range of age-appropriate doctors, specialists, sub-specialists, community health workers, and institutions offering high quality care, and 3) is either entirely free to families or has strict limits on out-of-pocket costs so that care is affordable and does not leave families with insurmountable debts. Currently, Medicaid, the primary public health insurance program for people with low incomes, and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), are most effective at providing comprehensive coverage that is truly affordable to families with the lowest incomes. We can and must build on Medicaid and CHIP to develop a health insurance program that is affordable to all families and allows them to access high-quality care.[61]
- Expand and train a diverse, interdisciplinary health care workforce. The reproductive justice movement has shown the value of Black providers, including midwives, doulas, and lactation consultants, in caring for Black women and children, and the real improvements in health outcomes that can result.[62] We must not only train the existing workforce to work more effectively with people of color and to repair the harm they have caused, but we must expand and change the health care workforce. An expanded workforce should include people of a variety of disciplinary backgrounds—from community health workers, to doulas, to social workers, to public health practitioners—who can help families navigate the health care system and also provide care directly to families. People of color should be hired to work at every level in the health care field, so that families can receive care that works for them culturally, in their own language, in a setting and with practitioners with whom they feel comfortable.[63]

10. Access to Justice for All

Access to justice is critical to child, youth, and family well-being, but in the United States it is systematically unequal. Only 10 percent of families facing eviction are represented by a lawyer, compared to 90 percent of landlords and management companies who appear before housing court.[64] Parents who have become involved in the child welfare system can face the termination of their parental rights without legal representation.[65] Immigrant workers experience endemic wage theft by their employers that often goes uncontested.[66] For families with lower incomes, the cost of legal representation is often prohibitive, and without resources or supports they may not be aware of their rights and the remedies that are available to them. For Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and other immigrant families and families of color, the experience of discrimination in the justice system itself—such as the targeting of Black and Latinx communities for court-imposed fines and fees for traffic violations and similar infractions—can lead families to avoid seeking legal recourse. Families may also, and justifiably, fear interacting with new bureaucracies because of experiences of discrimination, surveillance, and exclusion in other public systems.[67] The result is a legal system that systematically benefits wealthy and White people, and systematically disadvantages families living in poverty and families of color.[68] Systemic reform is necessary to ensure equal justice for all.

One critical component of systemic reform is guaranteeing all families who need it access to legal advice and support. An estimated 86 percent of families with low incomes who face a civil justice



problem—ranging from wage theft, to eviction, to debt collection, to domestic violence, to child welfare disputes—do so with inadequate or no legal help.[69] Immigrant families in civil deportation proceedings and other legal proceedings that can determine their ability to keep their families together also often face court without a lawyer.[70] While defendants in criminal proceedings have a right to counsel, people in most civil proceedings do not—even though those cases can have similar or even more serious implications for families' health and well-being. Civil legal services help address the inequality built into the legal system by providing free, direct representation to families with lower incomes and—in some contexts—spurring systemic reforms to address the root causes of the problems that brought families to a legal services provider in the first place. The public interest law community has a long track record of fighting for racial and economic justice, improving all families' access to basic supports, and exposing and addressing the many forms of discrimination that families of color experience in their lives.[71] Legal services organizations have promoted the health and well-being of families with young children in particular through multi-disciplinary interventions such as DULCE (Developmental Understanding and Legal Collaboration for Everyone), a pediatrics-based innovation that brings together a community health worker called a Family Specialist, a legal partner, a medical provider, an early childhood systems representative, and others to support families with infants around the social determinants of health. The evidence base for DULCE is growing, including positive impacts for immigrant families.[72] Currently, legal services organizations do not have the resources to serve most families in need, and they are sometimes unable to represent immigrant families and others because of restrictions placed on federal funding for legal services.[73] In order to guarantee equal access to justice, the federal government should:

- Invest meaningfully in civil legal services to ensure no one who qualifies for legal services is turned away, while expanding income eligibility and lifting restrictions on who can be served with federal funding for legal services, so that every family with a civil legal need in the U.S. can secure representation.
- Support cross-sector partnerships such as medical-legal partnerships and multidisciplinary teaming so that the families with civil legal needs are not only connected legal supports but also to the other supports and services that they need to thrive together.[74]

Conclusion

It is imperative that we reimagine how policy addresses the needs of families, so that all young children have the opportunities they need to thrive. Implementing these anti-racist policies that focus on children in their early years and their families would be a significant step in the right direction. Together, they begin to redress the systemic racism that has shaped our institutions and harmed children and families of color for generations. And they help ensure that all children are guaranteed economic security and well-being, can grow and develop in a society that demonstrates that they matter and belong, and have the opportunities to pursue their self-determined goals. Enacting these policies would require a radical shift in our thinking, a clear, shared commitment to supporting young children and families, and significant public investment. But it is an investment in our country's future—to build a country that is worthy of the promise of all its young children.

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realized. In addition, currently, if a family is connected to home visiting through the child welfare system, with Family First Prevention Services Act funding, the service may not be voluntary from a child welfare perspective. In this situation it is critical that the home visiting program and the child welfare agency be clear about their respective roles and responsibilities, and that home visiting should not provide oversight for a families' child welfare case.

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