

## Written Testimony

Madam Chair and Members of the Colorado Senate Committee on Health and Human Services:

I am Michelle Davis, Assistant Professor and Director of Justice, Equity, Diversity & Inclusion at the Kempe Center at the University of Colorado. This written testimony is on behalf of the Kempe Foundation in support of Colorado Senate Bill 200. While I express my own views, and do not claim to represent those of the University of Colorado, my opinions come from over twenty-five years of working as a therapist, coach, trainer, consultant, and leader in the field of child abuse and neglect.

We know that racism and bias are constructs deeply embedded in systems, cultures, and individual behaviors. The task of dismantling these toxic constructs and ushering in positive transformation across child and family serving systems does not have a quick fix. We must leverage all our knowledge, tools and skills together, and create relationships with the children and families we are meant to serve.

I commend the county agencies and CDHS for their initiative in addressing such a complex issue. I believe this legislation is coming from caring professionals who want to do better for every child and family in Colorado. This means we must accept the responsibility of caring for and serving our most vulnerable children and families in a just and equitable way.

Throughout my career, I've witnessed enumerable iterations of culture and bias training, and programmatic practice initiatives that sought to reduce disproportionality and disparities in the child welfare system. While there has been some progress, disproportionality and disparities persist, directly or indirectly impacting the care and well-being of all children involved in an overwhelmed system. Every day that we fail to substantively address this issue is another day we have failed a child, most likely a child of color, in need. I urge you to support this important bill.

This bill calls for more robust data-gathering to better understand the challenges that exist in the current system, and enhanced training and professional development to adequately prepare our workforce for this effort. As much as I appreciate our county and state partners for their commitment to this bill, it is only a first step in a long journey. The depth of change required means that we must focus on both individual bias and systemic policy and practice. They are interconnected.

I look forward to partnership opportunities that:

- Collaboratively develop, test, and evaluate the effectiveness of innovative personal/professional development strategies, policies, and practices intended to reduce disproportionality and disparities in county agencies.
- Utilize transformative approaches and models, such as equity coaching for our workforce, to provide services to families in a way that is effective and sustainable. Building on the scientific principles of belief and behavior change, the Center's [RQ-Race Intelligence Coaching Program™](#) (RQ) is an equity coaching program specifically designed for experiential learning. It focuses on behavioral changes that are iterative,

tested and modified over time to produce transformation. RQ uses a tailored approach that allows for continuous monitoring of progress, support, and accountability; creating a more relevant and effective personal and professional learning experience for the workforce, while transforming the organization as a whole. Research has shown that equity coaching significantly improves personal performance and leadership skills, and directly impacts the operational performance of organizations, producing a 500% to 700% return on investment<sup>1</sup>.

- Engage in intentional relationship building and capacity development, in partnership with affected families to identify strengths, challenges and natural supportive resources that build stronger communities and keep children safe.. To do this, we must redesign our relationship with families by asking them what “service” means for them and listening to what they say. <sup>2</sup>
- Unless there are sustained efforts, continuous support and mechanisms to facilitate behavioral change, people and systems will revert to established patterns that we already know are problematic. To foster equity for children and families, and more effectively address disproportionalities and disparities; county leaders must commit to broader systemic changes, such as revising existing policies and practices, and combining workforce training with personal and professional development.

Thank you to this committee for your work on behalf of children and families, and for your support of Senate Bill 200.

Sincerely,

Michelle Davis, M.S. LPC, PCC

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<sup>1</sup> <https://donfrericks.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Return-on-Investment-ROI-for-Executive-Coaching-Web.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> [Strong Communities](#)