

Round 4 Vision: Overview
Transcript: AYSHA SCHOMBURG, CB Associate Commissioner – 2-23-22

00:01:47 – 00:11:30

MS. AYSHA SCHOMBURG: Thank you, Linda. Can everybody hear me? Good. So thank you, everybody, for having me here. I'm so honored to have the opportunity to welcome you to today's presentation by the Children's Bureau on the next round of CFSRs.

Since I've joined the Children's Bureau in March, I've had the opportunity to talk with many of you. I've had the opportunity to have discussions with many jurisdictions across the country, all of you working to support and strengthen families so that they can provide for their children in ways that nurture healthy development and allow them to thrive.

I'm always impressed, and frankly humbled, by the work that you all are doing, by the services that you provide and by your commitment to children and families and to systemic change.

The CFSR [Child and Family Services Review] is one method that the federal government uses to observe how states and jurisdictions are using the Title IV-B and Title IV-E funding resources to provide services and to improve outcomes for children and families who become engaged in the child welfare system. And when I came on and I learned more about the CFSR, I thought that it was an opportunity really to advance equity for the communities that we serve.

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So most of you know by now, you may have heard me even talk about it in other rooms, President Biden signed on his first day in office an Executive Order on advancing racial equity and support for underserved communities. And this includes support for people of color, people who identify as LGBTQI+, people of religious minorities, people overly impacted by poverty, and otherwise historically underserved or marginalized. And I talk about this Executive Order all the time because it's really the basis for the work that we are doing at the Children's Bureau and also within ACF at large.

So what are we going to talk about? Now, this is not new to you. We talk about systemic biases and we talk about racism. All of you know what that is. We all know that within child welfare, there is persistent disproportionality and disparate outcomes, particularly for black and native children.

And so we have a responsibility, frankly, and an opportunity right now to do something about it. We have an opportunity to make an impact. And this is what I'm hoping that you all will join us in with respect to this next CFSR round.

This slide is really all about ACEs [Adverse Childhood Experiences] scores. I know that you know this as well. Adverse childhood experiences, children who have high adverse childhood experiences, are frankly more likely to be system involved, have children who are system involved.

And when I look at this slide, the first question I really wanted to ask folks was do you know your own ACEs score? And how are you thinking about using your position with a

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trauma-informed lens and addressing the potentially traumatic experiences that we know that our children have to endure?

So this is advancing equity within ACF. We wanted to say we at ACF, we at the Children's Bureau, are also doing the work, the equity work, the hard work. It's having the difficult conversations. It's turning the mirror on ourselves at the federal government and saying, you know what? Here are some of our policies that have exacerbated inequities and here's what we can do about them.

So at ACF, we launched an equity advisory group in May of last year. And I co-chair that with my colleague Gabrielle Newell. And we have representatives from all of our ACF offices where we started to engage in discussions about our own policies and what needs to change at the ACF level.

And then last month, we had each ACF office submit an equity action plan. So this is a plan with each office making a commitment to what they were going to do to address inequities within their policies and their programs. And I'm happy to say that all ACF offices have submitted such a plan and we are hoping to make parts of those plans public.

So yes, we are doing that work as well. The Children's Bureau, of course, submitted a plan. And I have recently talked about our overarching goals, our four priority goals. The first is about prevention. The second is about supporting kinship caregivers. The third is about how we support children and young people when they are in foster care. And the

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fourth is really about the workforce, right? We know that the workforce is struggling. We need to empower the workforce and we need to pay attention to what the workforce needs at this time. And so all of those goals though are grounded in pursuing equity and advancing equity for the children and families that we serve.

So the CFSR is really one avenue to advance our goals of racial equity, diversity, and inclusion, as we work to ensure that states are, of course, meeting the requirements under the Title IV-E and IV-B and establishing processes and practices that improve outcomes for children and families.

So just a few days ago, I sent a letter and some resources and guidelines that lay out our position, how the CFSR process provides numerous opportunities to intentionally examine and advance an agenda for racial equity and inclusion and support for underserved communities and the work that we do and within the CFSR process.

So here, advancing equity and inclusion is really also, again, talking about applying an equity lens in the CFSR from the statewide assessment to the Program Improvement Plan. It's essential that we accurately assess, identify, and address system-wide improvement needs. Advancing equity requires a systematic approach to identifying and understanding variation. And by that, I mean disproportionality and disparate outcomes and the experiences and outcomes of our underserved populations.

One of the things that I think about when I think about how to do this work, and that I talk to my other colleagues at ACF about, is a racial equity tool that I learned about. And the

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racial equity tool asks five questions. One, is there a diverse group of people making the decision? Two, how will the decision be perceived? Three, how will it affect racial minorities? And four, will the policy worsen or ignore disparities? And lastly, five, what changes would you make?

So when we're looking at our own policies and we're doing our own reviews, thinking about those questions has been helpful to us at the federal government in deciding what we need to change about what it is we're doing.

Of course, it requires an open and honest dialogue. It requires understanding the nature of intentional and unintentional biases. It requires being brave, not being afraid to talk about advancing racial equity, not being afraid to say those words, right? And hopefully, having a culture within our offices that supports this conversation and supports the direction that we're all headed in.

So this kind of goes to what I was just talking about. Is there diversity on your decision-making team? Does your office foster a culture of change and collaboration? We all begin our work in Round 4, CFSR, in August. So that's coming up. And though some of you have already started with establishing your plans for partner and stakeholder engagement, including Tribes, legal and judicial partners, as well as parents and young people with lived experience and foster and adoptive parents and relatives providing care.

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We want to make this point really clear, that it's really important that we engage experts with lived expertise or folks with lived experiences in this process. It's going to be vital to the way that we do the work moving forward within the CFSR.

So lastly, here are some opportunities for us to have a conversation. Here are some questions for you to consider. How can we be helpful? How can the Children's Bureau be helpful? How have you internally in your states started to work toward racial equity, inclusion, diversity, addressing disproportionality? What are some of the challenges that you've had? I really want to hear about those.

And what discussions have you had with experts with lived expertise, young people, families that have been impacted by the system? Is that something that you do normally? Or is it something that you might have to create a process for continuous feedback or consultation or proximity with the families that we serve? And what are some of the other issues regarding racial equity that would be helpful to talk about today?

So with that, I want to thank you all for having me, for listening to me. I'm here. I'm going off-camera, as per the protocol, and handing it over to Jennifer Haight. Thank you so much.

(END OF TRANSCRIPT)