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Photographs available upon request.

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***Ahead of State Assembly Hearing, Families, Advocates, and Mandated
Reporters Call for an End to New York's Harmful Mandatory
Reporting Policies***

(NEW YORK, NY) – Families, survivors of domestic violence, children's rights leaders, reproductive justice advocates, public defenders, and mandated reporters called for an end to the practice of mandatory reporting at a community rally before the New York State Assembly's Standing Committee on Children and Families and Subcommittee on Foster Care's Wednesday [hearing](#) on "The Child Welfare System and the Mandatory Reporting of Child Abuse or Maltreatment in New York State."

Mandatory reporting refers to the web of federal and state laws requiring community-based professionals to report suspected incidents of child maltreatment. Rather than fulfilling their stated goal of detecting child abuse, these laws unjustly target marginalized families and turn professionals – including doctors, nurses, social workers, teachers, and others – into the eyes and ears of the family policing system. Mandated reporting creates a system of surveillance that conflates symptoms of poverty and structural racism with child maltreatment. Under mandated reporting, Black, Latine, Indigenous, and low-income families live under the near constant threat of family separation.

The New York State Assembly hearing can be livestreamed [here](#).

“Who can parents turn to for support if everyone is required to report them? If we really want children to be ‘safe,’ then parents should be able to ask for support without fear of being reported,” said **Joyce McMillan, Founder of Just Making A Change for Families**. “Today, we are calling on New York State Assemblymembers to follow the lead of directly impacted families who are demanding the end of mandated reporting. Families thrive when they are supported, not surveilled.”

"Mandated reporting makes professionals lose their ability to collaborate with parents," said **Aaliya Ingram, Impacted Parent**. "The policy stops them from asking how we can come together as a team to collectively meet a family's needs and to make the best decisions for the child. Instead, they call in a report."

“As a mandated reporter, I have witnessed organizations push the mandated reporting agenda as a way to ‘check the boxes’ in the event they are questioned by their leadership, despite knowing the harm it causes. I have witnessed relationships between clients and social workers crumble, because clients no longer feel they can trust the same person that claims to support them, but whose phone call has led to the separation of their family,” said **Sejal Mehta, LMSW**. “Again, whose safety are we prioritizing? Is it children and families? Or is it the systems that profit from their separation?”

"What our community needs is culturally responsive support – not more policing and surveillance or demands that we talk and act like white middle-class mothers," said **Ericka Brewington, a client advocate with Neighborhood Defender Service of Harlem (NDS)**, who testified today as an impacted parent along with her NDS colleague **Shalonda Curtis-Hackett**. “My experience being investigated by ACS is backed up by the data: mandated reporting causes harm to children and their parents and it does not keep anyone in our community safe. The anxiety my daughter experiences today is deeply rooted in our family's experience of being investigated based on malicious and unsupported reports. Mandated reporting is the foundation

of the family policing system, and we believe that it – and all other systems based on white supremacy – should be abolished.”

“Mandated reporting has led to a ‘better safe than sorry’ approach that results in unnecessary family separation and cookie cutter services,” said **Teyora Graves-Ferrell, Parent Advocate Supervisor at the Center for Family Representation (CFR)**. “We know that family separation is responsible for generational trauma, especially in Black and Brown communities. In order to truly support families, parents must be able to access resources and support without fear of surveillance and punishment. Mandated reporting must end.”

"People justify the way that the system treats parents because they think that they do it to protect kids, but they don't do that either. I know that because I was a foster kid myself, and the system didn't help me then. They didn't care about me as a teenager in the system. I signed myself out of foster care as soon as my attorney told me that was an option," said **Alexis Warnic, Lived Expert**.

"I have been both a mandated reporter and a victim of mandated reporting—and as someone who has seen both sides, I can confidently say that mandated reporting needs to end," said **Angelica Charles, Impacted Parent and Health Care Worker**. "As a mandated reporter, I know that if I am accused of failing to make a report, I could be fired. But as someone who cares about my patients and who understands the harms of reporting, I have to ask: why would you force me to report them if I know ACS will only hurt them?"

“Mandated reporting has contributed heavily to generations of Black children being separated from their families,” said **Tanisha Grant, Executive Director of Parents Supporting Parents NY**. “As an impacted child from birth who is now 47 years old, you never get over not knowing your people. Family is a human right, no matter what the situation is every child deserves to know their heritage and origins story. Mandated reporting has been used as a powerful racist tool to separate families and it must end.”

"When you are a survivor of domestic violence, your choices are limited—and mandatory reporting escalates our pain to unbearable heights," said **Cassandra Gonzalez, Lived Expert and Advocate**. "Our government should be asking how they can help, how they can prevent the separation of families, and how they can best provide resources to help families through challenging times."

"This is a system that alienates all of your support systems and makes you afraid to seek help," said **Lindsay Reilly, Impacted Parent**. "As a parent whose family has been impacted by mandated reporting, I ask you to understand that looking for help can not mean that our children get taken away. We must end the practice of mandated reporting."

"Eliminating the mandate to report would mean creating a New York where helping professionals have the freedom and flexibility to do the work they trained for and want to do, where children seek out help without fear of being taken from their parents, where parents receive the resources they need for themselves and their families, and where the child welfare system can focus its resources on situations of abuse," said **Meredith Giovanelli, Policy Analyst at Children's Rights**.

"Mandatory reporting laws are a failed political experiment that have had a harmful impact on families, specifically low income Black and brown families, from their inception," says **Miriam Mack, Policy Director of the Bronx Defenders Family Defense Practice**. "These laws have failed to keep children safe from harm and create a dragnet of family policing that results in unnecessary surveillance and harmful family separation. Even worse, the existence of a mandate to report children drives families away from the same community based services and supports ostensibly created to support them. It is time for New York State to truly invest in and support families, child safety and community well-being and repeal these outdated and harmful laws."

"Rather than keeping children safe, mandated reporting laws encourage over-reporting, undermine trust between families and service professionals, and funnel children into a harmful family regulation system that criminalizes poverty and exacerbates racial disparities," said **Zachary Ahmed, senior policy counsel at the New York Civil Liberties Union**. "New York

must seek reforms to reduce over-reporting, restore trust between professionals and those they serve, and direct resources to families themselves.”

“Mandated reporting forces trusted community professionals like teachers and doctors to report families in need to a harmful and biased system of investigation and separation,” **said Nila Natarajan, Associate Director of Policy & Family Defense, Brooklyn Defender Services.**

“Alternative systems of support are being recognized, created, and proven to work. If we replace the mandate with more and better opportunities for professionals to provide resources, New York families will be safer and more supported.”

“Because of mandated reporting laws, doctors, social workers, and teachers – who should be part of the support system for people and communities – are instead deputized to monitor, report, and punish families. The war on drugs has been a major justification of punitive approaches that have distorted supportive spaces and upended people’s lives: We have seen how any parental drug use is used to justify invasive searches, family separation, and even termination of parental rights – despite a lack of evidence connecting drug use to the ability to care for children. It’s time to actually help people and communities by ending mandated reporting and providing accessible and voluntary health and support services,” **said Melissa Moore, Director of Civil Systems Reform, Drug Policy Alliance.**

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