

Mothers and children in Philadelphia don't need more hearings on child separation; we need action!!!

Implement the 2022 Recommendations of the City Council Special Committee on Child Separation!

Freeze DHS funding until it complies!

Open Letter to City Councilmembers:

We are writing regarding the unanimous City Council vote to hold hearings on the Department of Human Services (DHS). This vote was a response to the scathing [Inquirer's series](#) by Steve Volk and Julie Christie with damning revelations of DHS and its contractors' abuse, dysfunction, corruption, racism, neglect and failure to protect children, even leading to death. While we appreciate your effort to respond to this, **we do not agree the next step should be hearings unless they are geared specifically toward the implementation of the City Council's Special Committee on Child Separation's 2022 Recommendations.**

Background: Hundreds of mothers and families testified at 2019 City Council hearings about unjust removal of their children and damage done to them and children when they were torn apart. They exposed the targeting of Black single mother families and other discrimination – 65% of children taken are Black. This led to the unanimous formation of the City Council Special Committee on Child Separation led by City Councilmembers David Oh and Cindy Bass which issued [groundbreaking recommendations](#) in 2022.

Among some of the key recommendations*:

- **Poverty is not neglect**
 - ✓ "Neglect shall be removed from state law defining child abuse for CPS investigation" (p. 12).
 - ✓ "Any family condition that can be remedied through the provision of concrete help, including but not limited to, direct cash assistance, food, clothing, housing assistance and/or childcare, shall not constitute neglect and shall not be cause for a CPS or GPS investigation" (p. 12).
- **Open Family Court**
 - ✓ 43% of children in foster care live in states with open family courts and no harms reported.
 - ✓ Opening court will "expose improper practices" (p. 36).
- **No removals because of drug use**
 - ✓ "Drug use per se is not child abuse or neglect" and "immediately moving to ... take away children because of drug use, without evidence that the drug use is harming the child, is one more way in which children are needlessly traumatized by family policing. (p. 23).
- **No removals because of domestic violence**
 - ✓ "When children are removed because a parent, usually the mother, "allowed" children to witness a husband or boyfriend attacking her, the emotional trauma for the child is far worse. This leads to a situation where mothers are reluctant to report abuse. The situation is exacerbated because abusers are aware of this and take advantage of it" (p. 5)

These are the best recommendations we have seen from any City government but, as you know, they have never been implemented.

We urgently need City Council to freeze DHS funding until it complies with the recommendations, that is:

- its dollars are going to families to prevent removals or hasten reunification, not to agencies to remove children (this and the two below would provide the concrete help to implement "poverty is not neglect")
- it has stopped taking children's SSI, TANF, Social Security, tax credits and child support
- it is providing housing to domestic violence survivors and their children rather than removing their children
- it is actively supporting efforts to open Family Court
- it is putting into place capacity tests based on evidence - a drug test is not a parenting test

Other key recommendations that should be supported and implemented:

- abolish mandatory reporting
- provide high quality legal representation to all families
- require lawyers to fight for the expressed wishes of the child, not their view of the best interests of the child
- due process before inclusion on child abuse registry and protection from unfounded reports.

We also call on City Council to:

1) actively support [Resolution No. 25008000](#) for the expanded federal Child Tax Credit passed by City Council. An April press conference at City Hall featuring City Councilmember Rue Landau and Representative Dwight Evans along with representatives of our groups, outlined the features we want in an expanded CTC: fully refundable and available to those without income or with low income; paid monthly at a higher amount, and available to those with ITINs

2) actively support other cash assistance for mothers/caregivers which recognize the work of caregiving, support the bond between mother and child, reduce child separation, enable us to leave domestic violence...:

- Earned Income Tax Credits to mothers/unpaid caregivers as well as low-income students (Worker Relief and Credit Reform Act by Rep Gwen Moore);
- higher TANF benefits, which have not been raised since the 1990s;
- a guaranteed care income paid monthly to mothers/caregivers

3) actively oppose work requirements as a condition for receiving tax credits, SNAP, TANF, Medicaid, or other benefits that help keep families out of the system. **Mothers and unpaid caregivers are already working!!**

This is how to transform the lives of thousands of families living in the poorest large City in the country – especially for those of us who are Black single mothers, have a disability or a disabled child, are low income, and/or have suffered domestic violence, who are the most targeted. Despite a reduction in the number of children being taken, Philadelphia STILL removes more children than any other US city of its size.

We have been campaigning for these changes for nearly two decades and leafleting monthly since 2023 outside Family Court or DHS calling for the recommendations to be implemented. We are from the area codes of 19119, 19129, 19144, 19141, 19128, 19140, & 19123 and more. **This is an issue which affects us all.**

While hundreds of families no doubt want to testify and have their stories heard, we suggest these vital testimonies be arranged to support the 2022 recommendations, not to bypass them by coming up with an alternative set of recommendations that most likely would be less thorough, less groundbreaking, and less effective in helping families.

It is time to act boldly. Given what we have achieved already, hearings are not actions that make children safer – they are a stalling technique. We can do better for our children and families. **Enact the 2022 recommendations now!**

Signed: Give Us Back Our Children with Every Mother is a Working Mother Network; Global Women's Strike (GWS); Injustice Reform Network; Payday men's network; Peace, Justice, Sustainability, NOW; Purple House Project; Social Welfare Action Alliance; Social Workers ending Poverty Together; Support Not Separation; Welfare Warriors; Women of Color/GWS. Individuals: Breanna Uhl, Joanna Lack, Scott Gilson, Vanette Jordan.

* Unfortunately, the report of the Special Committee does not mention the problem of children being removed from their families because of disabilities, or call for the end of Termination of Parental Rights. These should be added.

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