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Audrey Martin

[AMartin@legal-aid.org](mailto:AMartin@legal-aid.org)

**\*\*\*FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE\*\*\***

***Ahead of Assembly Hearing on New York’s Central Register of Child Abuse and Maltreatment, Legal Aid Calls for Sweeping Reforms***

***Attorneys Demand Increased Transparency, the Passage of Key Related Legislation and Other Needed Measures***

(ALBANY, NY) - The Legal Aid Society, ahead of today’s New York State Assembly [hearing](#) on the statewide register of child abuse and maltreatment, released a list of key reforms that lawmakers must prioritize to increase transparency surrounding the State Central Register (SCR), as well as the passage of key legislation and other needed measures to limit invasive, harmful, and needless child welfare investigations.

Far too many children in New York are investigated by Child Protective Services annually. In New York City alone, the numbers are shocking. Nearly 100,000 children a year are investigated, including intrusive home visits, interviews, strip searches, school visits, etc., and only 22.5 percent of those investigations result in a substantiated finding. Tragically, Black and Latine children are grossly overrepresented in child welfare investigations.

The gatekeeper for all investigations in New York is the SCR, which screens all allegations of child maltreatment throughout the state. New York’s SCR screens out a far lower percentage of calls than other states, subjecting children to unnecessarily harmful and intrusive investigations.

To remedy this problem, Legal Aid strongly recommends that:

1. the New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) improve SCR Training and Screening Tools;
2. OCFS increase transparency surrounding the SCR, including disclosure of screening and training materials and regular publication of data;

3. New York explore a second level of review for screened-in calls;
4. New York eliminate mandated reporting;
5. New York enact the Anti-Harassment in Reporting Act (A2478/S902 in 2023-24 session);
6. New York enact the Family Miranda Rights Act (A1980/S901 in 2023-24 session);
7. New York enact the Informed Consent Act (A109/S320 in 2023-24 session);
8. New York enact the Child and Family Wellbeing Fund (A2801 in 2023-24 session) and/or increase funding for primary supportive services; and
9. the New York Legislature continue its oversight of the SCR.

“As advocates, we have moved toward naming the child ‘welfare’ system for what it truly is: a family regulation system, separating and controlling poor people and predominantly Black and Latine families,” said **Melissa Friedman, Attorney-In-Charge of Legal Strategy and Training with the Juvenile Rights Practice at The Legal Aid Society**. “The SCR and related mandatory reporting laws play a large role in needlessly widening the front door of this harmful and invasive system. New York must immediately enact reforms that truly protect and support the needs of children of color and their families, and we implore Albany to do exactly that.”

“Hotline callers rely on the SCR to determine whether their concerns justify a child welfare investigation under state law. Yet New York's SCR is passing on far more reports than most states. With 1 in 10 children in many of New York City’s Black and Latino neighborhoods experiencing a child welfare investigation each year, the legislature must act with urgency to bring SCR practice into line with state law,” said **Nora McCarthy, Director of the NYC Family Policy Project**.

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*The Legal Aid Society exists for one simple yet powerful reason: to ensure that New Yorkers are not denied their right to equal justice because of poverty. For nearly 150 years, we have protected, defended, and advocated for those who have struggled in silence for far too long. Every day, in every borough, The Legal Aid Society changes the lives of our clients and helps improve our communities. [www.legalaidnyc.org](http://www.legalaidnyc.org)*