

# Poverty & Child Welfare Involvement

The link between poverty and child welfare is clear.



73%  
of the allegations reported to DCF are for suspected neglect

87%  
of supported allegations are for neglect

Across the nation, families facing poverty are disproportionately touched by the child welfare system.



of families investigated by child protective services have incomes below 200% of the federal poverty line

→ \$49,720 for a family of 3 (in 2023)



the increased likelihood a family living below the poverty line has a report of child maltreatment substantiated

\* Counties with more families below the poverty line have higher rates of child maltreatment investigations — and the opposite is true in more affluent counties.

# WHAT RESEARCH TELLS US ABOUT THE PROBLEM

## Living in poverty impedes parents' ability to provide for their children.

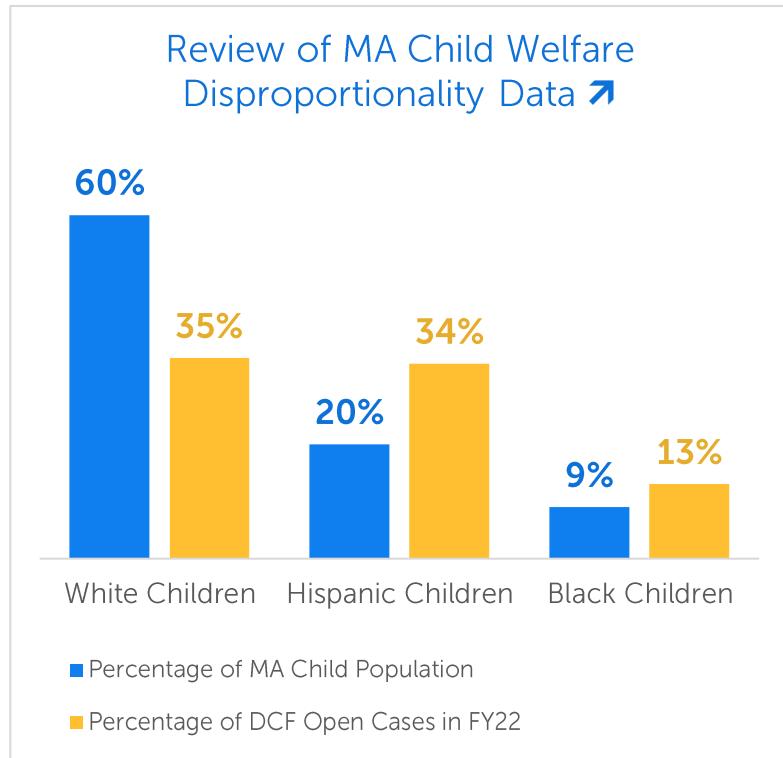
Many caregivers experiencing [poverty](#) are forced to choose between using their constrained resources to maintain their home, buy food, or pay for essential utilities, such as power and water. Material hardships are associated with [child welfare involvement](#) beyond caregiver psychological distress and parenting factors — and the association between maltreatment and individual factors (such as substance abuse or mental health) is reduced after accounting for poverty. **Simply put, poverty alone is the driving factor.**

## Economic hardships increase family stress and instability.

The [family stress model](#) demonstrates the connection between unmet economic needs and psychological distress, increased conflict and hostility, less responsive parenting, and higher risk for child welfare involvement. Family stress can be significantly alleviated through concrete economic support. A [large body of research](#) on guaranteed income programs and other substantial economic support has found positive impacts on child and parent mental health, child well-being, educational attainment, and parental substance use and psychiatric health.

## Families of color are disproportionately impacted.

Structural racism and decades of disinvestment in communities of color, including here in the Commonwealth, has resulted in many families of color lacking the resources and supports their children need to thrive. Families and children of color are [overrepresented](#) in our child welfare system. Systemic racism leads to families of color being subjected to oversurveillance and disproportionate punishment for poverty.

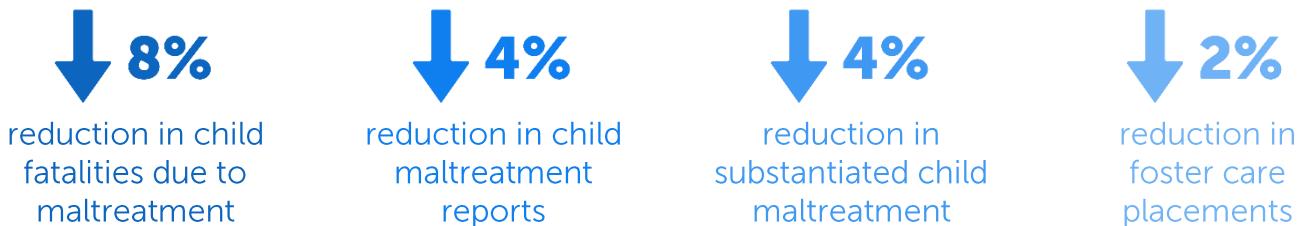


# WHAT RESEARCH TELLS US ABOUT THE SOLUTION

## Start with investment in Massachusetts families.

The research is overwhelming — when safety net programs are underfunded or restricted, the result is children from low-income families entering the child welfare system. Conversely, investment in, and availability/accessibility of sufficient public benefits significantly reduce involvement in the child welfare system. Examples include: cash assistance, housing assistance, childcare assistance, refundable Earned Income Tax Credits, and medical assistance programs.

For every \$1,000 spent by states on benefits per person living in poverty, we see:



In the long run, **every additional 13.3%** states invest annually in public benefit programs results in a **3x reduction in maltreatment-related costs** — meaning that \$46.5 billion invested nationally could save up to \$153 billion in long-term costs.

Increased access to **economic support** is associated with decreased risk of physical abuse and neglect and decreased involvement in the child welfare system.

- ✓ Data on the expanded **Child Tax Credit** (which delivered six monthly payments to families in 2021) showed a reduction in child poverty, food insufficiency, financial stress, and other hardships.
- ✓ Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) caseload increases are associated with **significant reductions** in the number of children experiencing neglect, as well as foster care placements.

## Focus on decreasing poverty as part of a strategy for addressing disparities and disproportionalities within the child welfare system.

National **research** shows that increasing household income could reduce child welfare involvement by 11% to 20% annually, resulting in more than 385,000 fewer families investigated each year. The impacts of implementing anti-poverty efforts are particularly significant for Black and Hispanic/Latino children:

- ✓ 19% to 29% reduction in investigations involving Black children
- ✓ 13% to 24% reduction in investigations involving Hispanic/Latino children

# WHAT HAS BEEN PROPOSED THIS LEGISLATIVE SESSION IN MASSACHUSETTS



## An Act to Lift Kids Out of Deep Poverty

↗ H.144 / ↗ S.75

Raises the amount of the Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children (TAFDC) benefit available to very low-income families.

## Governor Healey's Child & Family Tax Credit

\$600 per child under age 13 (or dependent adult), regardless of income and number of eligible dependents. The credit would increase with inflation in future years.

**Let's shift to more meaningful and concrete support for children and families living in poverty — and let's build reliable, evidence-informed infrastructure to improve the wellbeing of children across our communities.**

