

## **OVERREPRESENTED IN PLACEMENT, UNDER-RECOGNIZED IN REFORM: BLACK GROUPS AND CRARR REACT TO THE LAURENT COMMISSION REPORT**

### **For Immediate Release**

**Montreal, May 5, 2021** – Due to the overrepresentation of Black children and families in Quebec's youth protection system (DYP), the Quebec Government must take measures to ensure that Black communities play a central role in any reforms that come following the release of the Laurent Commission's final report on the DYP.

This is the key message delivered by several community organizations serving English-speaking and French-speaking Black families and youth and CRARR at a press conference held today.

The 550-page report, released two days ago, found that Black children are significantly overrepresented in the DYP. Some data are disturbing: although Black children in Montreal represent only 15% of the overall population, they constitute 30% of children evaluated by the DYP. It also noted that Black children are twice more susceptible than other children to be the subject of a retained report, to be taken from their families over the course of an evaluation and to require intervention by the DYP.

However, while these community organizations laud the Laurent Commission for devoting specific chapters to Indigenous, ethnocultural and English-speaking communities, and for recognizing children's cultural needs, it deplors the lumping of Black children and families in with newcomers and other ethnocultural groups, leaving many specific needs of Black children and families inadequately addressed.

"The unfortunate reality is that Black children are overrepresented in the system but underrepresented in official actions and decision-making roles in youth protection agencies," said Côte-des-Neiges Black Community Association Executive Director Tiffany Callender.

"The recommendations are in line with many that have come before, but it's time to move forward with more specificity. We must ensure that the implementation process is crafted by qualified parties with the necessary lived experience and expertise" she added.

For McGill University professor Dr. Alicia Boatswain-Kyte, the Laurent Commission Report hits several marks but misses the one for Black children who have been overrepresented in Quebec's child welfare system for 40 years:

"The failure to acknowledge the reality of systemic racism while simultaneously reducing Black experiences of social injustice to individual challenges of 'adaptation' and 'acculturation' is at the root of the problem. Ignoring this reality perpetuates the historic legacy of racism against Black children, their families, and communities," she said.

In addition to the failure to recognize the Black communities' distinct needs, the report avoids the words "systemic racism", leading to concerns that the root causes of the overrepresentation of Black and other racialized children will be overlooked in upcoming reforms.

"If the Government wants to correct the wrongs in our youth protection system, it must acknowledge systemic anti-Black bias and barriers within the youth protection and education systems, which the report has mentioned, albeit superficially," said Jamaica Association of Montreal Vice President Sharon Nelson.

According to data in the report, for the anglophone Black community, the numbers are even more jarring. Despite making up a mere 9% of Montreal's population, English-speaking Black children constitute 24% of children receiving services from the DYP.

"Despite these data about Black anglophone children, English-speaking organizations serving these communities, especially in areas such as the West-Island and Lasalle are woefully underfunded" said the Coordinator of the Lasalle Multicultural Resource Center, Auvril Edwards. "We are doubly disadvantaged, and require double recognition and double resources for community-based solutions" she added.

Just like our anglophone colleagues, we ask the Government of Quebec to ensure that organizations in our community working for the well-being of young people and families have the necessary recognition and access to adequate resources to strengthen the system and make the DYP more inclusive and equitable", said the Coordinator of the Regroupement des intervenants et intervenantes d'origine haïtienne, D-yana Bommier.

To add to the Commission's recommendations, these community organizations put forward several solutions they hope the Government will adopt:

1. Recognize systemic anti-Black racism in the youth protection and criminal justice systems, and economic disadvantages as the root causes of disproportionate placement of Black children;
2. Create a distinct and dedicated structure within the new DYP system and the future office of the Commissioner for Children's rights, that will focus on Black children and families in order to better address their distinct needs;
3. Guarantee adequate funding to community organizations serving Black children and families, particularly English-speaking organizations;
4. Hire more Black managers and social service professionals in all positions of the youth protection and criminal justice systems, and appoint more Black judges to the Youth Court.

CRARR Executive Director Fo Niemi also stresses the need to more effectively address racial profiling in education and youth protection, since the Quebec Human Rights and Youth Rights Commission has often failed to tackle these issues despite its dual mandate in the last 25 years.

"We need to end and even sanction the widespread practice among school authorities to report Black and other racialized students to youth protection for everything and anything," he added, noting that the Laurent Commission report found that schools often reports Black children to DYP.

The organizations will continue to push for official recognition of Black community needs in the different reform measures being set in place by the Quebec Government.

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