



Mandated Reporting to Community Supporting

*Communities Keeping Children Safe
and Families Together*

Welcome!

Mandated Reporting Advisory
Committee Members
and
Public Participants

December 18, 2025

POVERTY IMPACTS REPORTS

Here's what happens when we support,
instead of report, families facing
poverty

For every \$1,000 states spent per
person in poverty directly addressing
**financial stability, housing, and
access to child care and healthcare...**

↓
4.3% reporting
4% substantiations
2.1% foster care placements
7.7% fatalities



Agenda

- Welcome and Connections
- Debrief 12/3 Child Welfare Council meeting
- Creating a Narrative Shift
- The Integrated Focus Approach
- Public Comment
- Next Steps & Closing Remarks

Housekeeping

- MRAC Members: Name and MEMBER in zoom box, cameras on if possible
- Public Participants: Name in zoom box, cameras off, and mute on
- **Chat is open – We ask that Public Participants only use the chat during the Public Comment period at the end of the meeting**
- Host will put materials in the chat

Invitation to Create Necessary Space

Micky ScottBey Jones

Adapted from her work titled "Invitation to Create Brave Space"

What part of this invitation is resonating with you right now?



Together we will bravely create “necessary” space,
Because there is no such thing as a “safe space.”

We exist in the real world,
We all carry scars, and we have all caused wounds.

We seek to turn down the volume of the outside
world;
We amplify voices that fight to be heard elsewhere.
We call each other to more truth and love.
We have the right to start somewhere and continue
to grow;
We have the responsibility to examine what we think
we know.

We will not be perfect.
This space will not be perfect.
It will not always be what we wish it to be,
But it will be our necessary space together.
We will work on it side by side.

The Art of Conversation Behaviors



- We acknowledge one another as equals
- We stay curious about each other
- We recognize that we need each other's help to become better listeners
- We slow down so we have time to think and reflect
- We remember that conversation is a natural way humans think together
- We expect it to be messy at times
- We use “I feel”, “I believe”, or “In my experience” statements



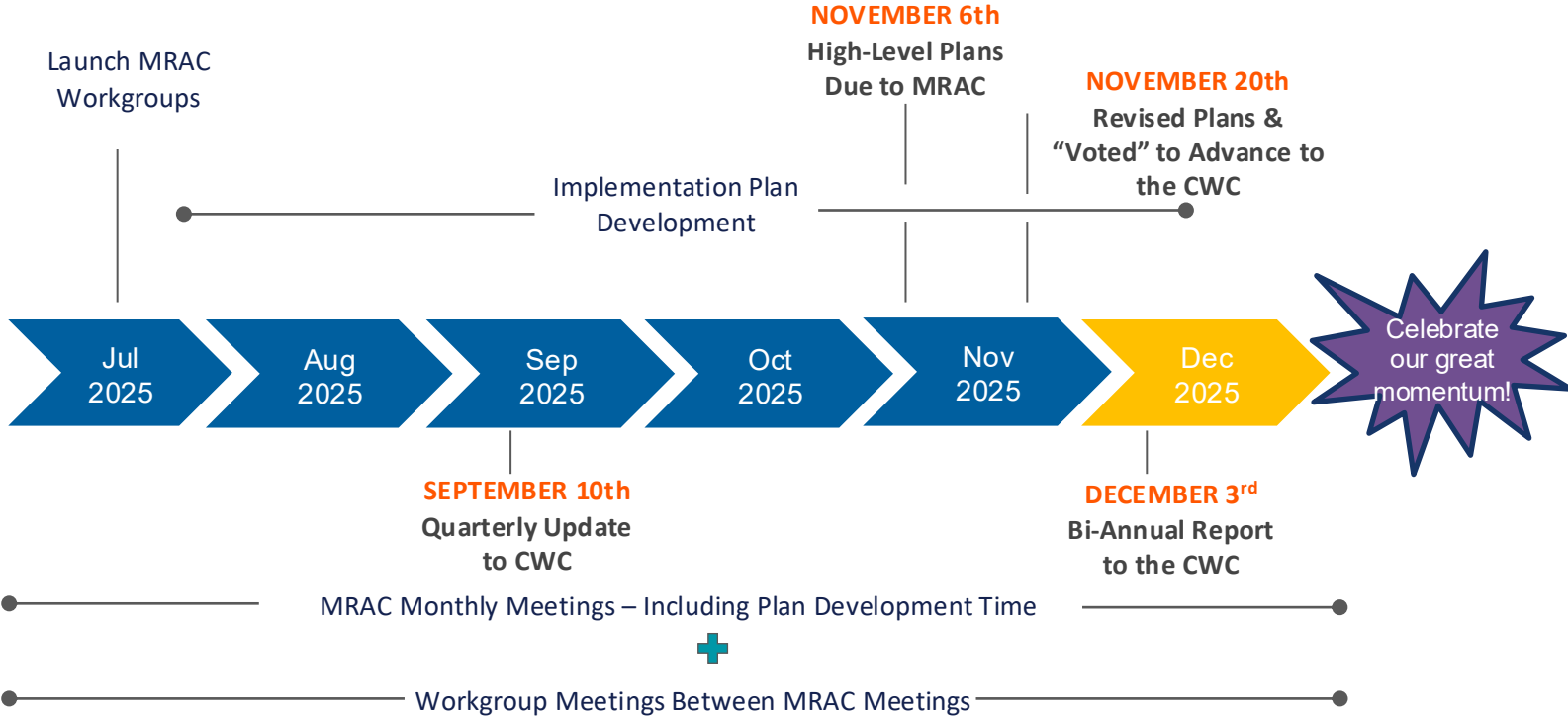
**Mandated Reporting to
Community Supporting**

*Communities Keeping Children Safe
and Families Together*

Land, Labor, and Trauma Acknowledgement



2025 Timeline





**Mandated Reporting to
Community Supporting**

*Communities Keeping Children Safe
and Families Together*

Debrief Child Welfare Council Presentation

The Purpose of the MRAC



**Mandated Reporting to
Community Supporting**

*Communities Keeping Children Safe
and Families Together*

The MRAC is not simply a committee tasked with carrying out recommendations. It is a statutorily mandated body with a clear charge: Ensure California's shift from mandated reporting to community supporting moves forward, and that it drives the measurable elimination of disparities in the child welfare system.

Presented

Semi-Annual Report with Implementation Strategy and Plan



Outcome

Secretary Johnson confirmed that the MRAC already exists under the CWC and PEI Committee—and in statute—and is empowered to move forward.

The Secretary decided a vote wasn't necessary and stated that the CWC looks forward to ongoing updates on implementation.

It was confirmed that the presentations to the CWC will be an opportunity for the members to ask questions and provide feedback to our work, as well as an ongoing opportunity to create connective tissue to related work across the state.

We received positive comments from many, and many comments from folks who felt hopeful because this is hard and complicated work, and they are seeing it being moved forward in a strategic and connected way.



**Mandated Reporting to
Community Supporting**

*Communities Keeping Children Safe
and Families Together*

Narrative Shift Key Messages



MESSAGING: MRAC FAQ

2025

RALLY

MESSAGING

What messaging is NOT...



- A script you have to use verbatim
- Something only comms people need to be familiar with
- One size fits all
- Overly complicated, technical, or filled with jargon
- Set in stone

MESSAGING

What messaging IS...



- About being clear on what we believe, and helping people see themselves in that belief
- The shared foundation for how we talk about an issue
- There to help us stay consistent and focus on our values
- Flexible, depending on your audience
- A wrapper for your personal story
- The foundation for all communications materials.
- For everyone to use

MESSAGING

What good messaging does...



Good messaging doesn't just inform. It moves people.

WHAT TO REMEMBER

- People make decisions based on feelings, not facts.
- Facts only land once people believe you share their values.
- We're not teaching policy, we're shaping belief.
- Clarity is power. If people can't repeat it, it doesn't work.
- Consistency builds trust. The more we say it, the truer it feels.

OUR AUDIENCES

PRIMARY AUDIENCE



SECONDARY AUDIENCE: GENERAL PUBLIC/TARGETED REGIONAL COMMUNITIES

CORE MESSAGES

IMPORTANCE OF FAMILIES FOR CHILD SAFETY

Overreporting

The Alternative

Families are our greatest asset in ensuring that children are safe. Years of data and evidence show that children have better outcomes when they grow up with their family, yet we continue to separate families at an alarming rate that results in immediate trauma and lifelong impacts. Our current system isn't working, and we have the tools to end that harmful cycle and ensure families have what they need to thrive together. When families have the support they need, children are safer. And when children are safer, communities are safer - in the near- and long-term.

Our current system is less effective because too many families are being reported, with only a few allegations being legitimate. Even for trained professionals, when the net is cast indiscriminately it doesn't just catch what's needed — it entangles families unnecessarily, causing harm while distracting from true cases of danger. Only 1 in 10 of allegations are substantiated, which means the other 9 need to be successfully filtered out. Reporting by default creates additional hurdles for the professionals trying to keep children safe.

Right now, our system doesn't encourage reporters to engage with the families they're reporting, when they're often in the best position to assess what kind of support the family needs. Instead of defaulting to a report, we want reporters to consider the community support and programs that might be able to address the family's needs, such as California's network of Family Resource Centers. CPS is not a catch-all solution to the challenges families face, and in many cases community-based support programs are a better fit to address their needs. Programs that specifically address issues like poverty, mental health, substance abuse, and domestic violence are critical in helping families remain stable and safe.

CORE MESSAGES

Importance of families for child safety

OVERREPORTING

The Alternative

Families are our greatest asset in ensuring that children are safe. Years of data and evidence show that children have better outcomes when they grow up with their family, yet we continue to separate families at an alarming rate that results in immediate trauma and lifelong impacts. Our current system isn't working, and we have the tools to end that harmful cycle and ensure families have what they need to thrive together. When families have the support they need, children are safer. And when children are safer, communities are safer - in the near- and long-term.

Our current system is less effective because too many families are being reported, with only a few allegations being legitimate. Even for trained professionals, when the net is cast indiscriminately it doesn't just catch what's needed — it entangles families unnecessarily, causing harm while distracting from true cases of danger. Only 1 in 10 of allegations are substantiated, which means the other 9 need to be successfully filtered out. Reporting by default creates additional hurdles for the professionals trying to keep children safe.

Right now, our system doesn't encourage reporters to engage with the families they're reporting, when they're often in the best position to assess what kind of support the family needs. Instead of defaulting to a report, we want reporters to consider the community support and programs that might be able to address the family's needs, such as California's network of Family Resource Centers. CPS is not a catch-all solution to the challenges families face, and in many cases community-based support programs are a better fit to address their needs. Programs that specifically address issues like poverty, mental health, substance abuse, and domestic violence are critical in helping families remain stable and safe.

CORE MESSAGES

Importance of families for child safety

Overreporting

THE ALTERNATIVE

Families are our greatest asset in ensuring that children are safe. Years of data and evidence show that children have better outcomes when they grow up with their family, yet we continue to separate families at an alarming rate that results in immediate trauma and lifelong impacts. Our current system isn't working, and we have the tools to end that harmful cycle and ensure families have what they need to thrive together. When families have the support they need, children are safer. And when children are safer, communities are safer - in the near- and long-term.

Our current system is less effective because too many families are being reported, with only a few allegations being legitimate. Even for trained professionals, when the net is cast indiscriminately it doesn't just catch what's needed — it entangles families unnecessarily, causing harm while distracting from true cases of danger. Only 1 in 10 of allegations are substantiated, which means the other 9 need to be successfully filtered out. Reporting by default creates additional hurdles for the professionals trying to keep children safe.

Right now, our system doesn't encourage reporters to engage with the families they're reporting, when they're often in the best position to assess what kind of support the family needs. Instead of defaulting to a report, we want reporters to consider the community support and programs that might be able to address the family's needs, such as California's network of Family Resource Centers. CPS is not a catch-all solution to the challenges families face, and in many cases community-based support programs are a better fit to address their needs. Programs that specifically address issues like poverty, mental health, substance abuse, and domestic violence are critical in helping families remain stable and safe.

Reflections & Discussion

- How well does this align with how you are currently talking about the work with others?
- What are you saying that may be different, or that is building on this messaging?

REBUTTAL MESSAGES

Poll Questions & Discussion

POLL QUESTIONS

- QUESTION 1: Which of the FAQs/Rebuttal Messages do you hear the most?
- QUESTION 2: Which of these FAQs are you most nervous about getting from someone because it is hard to answer?

FAQ #1

We have professionals who are trained on using well-designed tools to determine if a child is safe. Why would we not report, and just let those professionals make the decision?



Even for trained professionals, when the net is cast indiscriminately it doesn't just catch what's needed — it entangles families unnecessarily, causing harm while distracting from true cases of danger. On top of that, even professionals don't get things right all the time. Only 11% of allegations are substantiated, which means the other 89% needs to be successfully filtered out.

The problem with reporting by default is that it creates additional hurdles for the professionals trying to keep children safe. It also disproportionately impacts Black and brown families, who are the subject of reports at higher rates.

We have to be mindful that every report can have consequences for the family involved, and have a lasting impact on the children's wellbeing and their communities — whether or not an intervention is actually needed.

We also have to remember that the time and resources spent on families who were reported erroneously are diverted from the children who are in actual need of urgent help. **By moving away from mandates and being more precise in our reporting, we are more efficient and effective at keeping kids safe.**

FAQ #2 & #3

Could reducing mandatory reporting lead to more cases of child abuse or neglect being missed?



Could reducing mandated reporting lead to more child fatalities?

What we've learned over the past two decades indicates this approach will save lives and keep children safe.

A study conducted over the course of 13 years highlights that child deaths happen at a higher rate in foster care compared to the general populations. **In many cases, the safest place for a child is with their family.**

Under mandated reporting models, the volume of reports makes it impossible for CPS to correctly assess every report. By narrowing the reporting criteria, agencies can devote more attention to each case. In the last 5 years alone we've seen a 40% drop in child fatalities, in part by changing how we define "neglect" so it is less often confused with poverty, and adjusting reports accordingly.

We've also seen that coupling this approach with programs that support families is an effective way to reduce child fatalities. For every \$1000 spent per person living in poverty, we saw an almost 8% decline in child fatalities.

We see this as another step in the right direction where we're able to more effectively help children in need, while getting resources to families who might be struggling and need other kinds of support.

FAQ #4

You are saying that nearly 50% of reports are determined to be for general neglect, and that general neglect is often confused with poverty. How will poverty be clearly and consistently distinguished from neglect in ways that are fair, transparent, and legally sound?



Nearly half of reports are for general neglect, but almost 80% of those reports are not substantiated by CPS. General neglect accounts for a significant amount of the total unsubstantiated reports.

We're working to make sure reporters understand where the perception of general neglect may be tied to poverty. A lack of housing, food, or clean clothes does not necessarily indicate neglect from a parent, but rather shows their need to have consistent access to those resources.

In the last 5 years alone, we've seen a 40% drop in child fatalities, in part by redefining neglect so it is less often confused with poverty, and adjusting reports accordingly.

As we get better at making the distinction between poverty and neglect, we can ensure families receive support that actually meets their needs, instead of subjecting them to the continued stress and trauma of CPS investigations on top of it all.

FAQ #5

General neglect often has other “issues” associated with the report— substance abuse, mental illness, domestic violence. If families aren’t brought in the child protective system, how will those other issues be addressed to keep the child safe?



It’s important that families have avenues to receive support outside of the child protection system. **CPS is not a catch-all solution to the challenges families face, and in many cases community-based support programs are a better fit to address their needs.**

Programs like [*add examples of support programs that address substance abuse, mental illness, and domestic violence*] are effective at addressing the root problem and keeping children safe.

We want to empower reporters to instead refer families to programs like these where they can get the kind of tailored support they need.

FAQ #6

How will professionals be protected from legal or licensure consequences if they choose to support rather than report a family?



To improve the effectiveness of the system and make children safer, we're encouraging the CA Department of Social Services to implement a two-year pilot that provides mandated reporters with immunity from liability when there is a decision making process that indicates the child's safety is not at risk and a report is not required.

The Mandated Reporting Advisory Committee supports this pilot, and will closely track its outcomes and effects to determine a long-term recommendation.

FAQ #7

Will this reform create inconsistent practices across California's 58 counties, leading to unequal protections for children?



Our goal is to standardize practices across the 58 counties, where there is currently significant inconsistency.

Part of the reason we see disproportionate reports due to race, ethnicity, and income is because of the lack of standardized training on child abuse and neglect referrals statewide. We want to make sure all reporters are adequately trained to understand effective reporting under current law, and what other referral pathways exist to support families.

This foundation at the state level will create consistency at the county level, along with improving safety for children, families, and communities.

FAQ #8

Will mandated reporters receive adequate training to make appropriate decisions under a new, more nuanced support-based system?



Our goal is to standardize practices across all reporters, where there is currently significant inconsistency.

Part of the reason we see disproportionate reports due to race, ethnicity, and income is because of the lack of standardized training on child abuse and neglect referrals statewide. **We want to make sure all reporters are adequately trained to understand effective reporting under current law, and what other referral pathways exist to support families.**

FAQ #9

How do mandated reporters connect families to community resources and supports if they decide not to report?



Right now, our system doesn't encourage reporters to engage with the families they're reporting, when in fact they might be in the best position to assess what kind of support the family needs.

Instead of defaulting to a report, we want reporters to consider the community pathways and programs that might be able to address the family's needs. A large part of this is educating everyone on what those pathways and programs are, so there's greater awareness of the resources available.

Our goal is to foster a greater sense of trust between systems and the communities they work with. We know this supportive approach, grounded in human connection, allows families to get the help they need and thrive together.

FAQ #10

Are there enough resources—funding, staffing, services—to support families at the scale this reform envisions? Could families fall between the cracks?



It's important to recognize that every family needs something different, and that might not be resources from CPS. Our goal is to get a better understanding of what families actually need, and connect them with the corresponding support.

To make sure every family receives what they need, we're making sure reporters can identify the difference between financial hardship and neglect, and **refer families to the program or resource that's right for them.**

FAQ #11

If a child is harmed under the new system, will it reduce public trust in child protective services and reform efforts more broadly?



Safety is our number one priority, but it's impossible to avoid tragic incidents altogether. **We must invest in what we know improves safety, and that's consistent connections and relationships, especially with family.**

The status quo is not the answer. There is a higher rate of deaths for children in foster care compared to the general population, and children are still harmed under the current system. Yet the public continues to report families when they have suspicions of abuse or neglect. **We want to make that system more intentional so CPS can focus on helping the children who are at higher risk, while other families are redirected to other community resources and support.** At the end of the day, we know that keeping more families together means safer children and communities.

Co-Creating an Integrated Focus Approach

- Additional history and background on AB 2085
- Gauge alignment on an Integrated Focus Approach, starting with AB 2085
- How would the MRAC implement an Integrated Focus Approach
 - Goals
 - Timeline and Milestones
 - Success metrics
 - Structure of MRAC and Workgroup meetings

Public Comment



- Raise your virtual hand
- Come off mute. Turn on your camera if you like
- Maximum of 2 minutes for comment which will go on public record
- You can put comments in the chat that will go on the record
- No response will be provided

Next Steps



**Mandated Reporting to
Community Supporting**

*Communities Keeping Children Safe
and Families Together*

- Next MRAC meeting is **Thursday, January 15th**
- Meetings are set for 2026 January to June—See chat for dates and please accept the calendar invites
- Continue to work between meetings. Meet at least once as a Workgroup – your PM will follow-up to support setting a meeting and agenda
- **January music selection... Community Pathways, Data?** 🎵🎵🎵
- Most importantly, have a wonderful holiday ❤️



**Mandated Reporting to
Community Supporting**

*Communities Keeping Children Safe
and Families Together*

Thank you!

