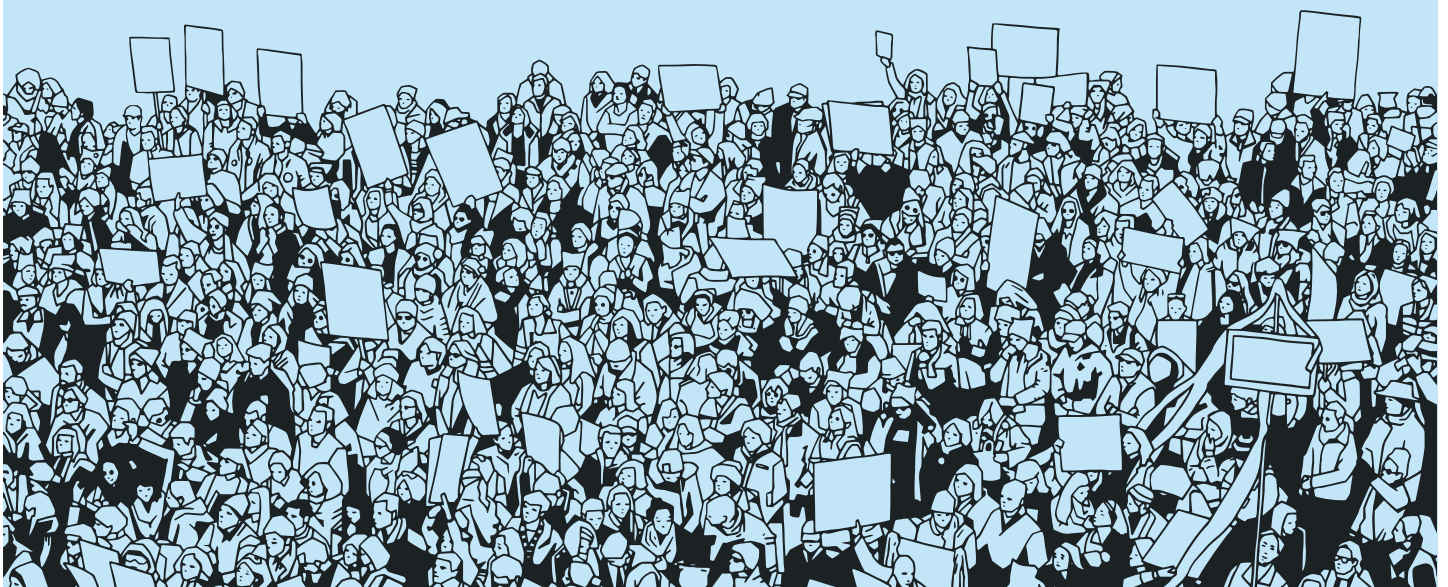


Standing Up Against Racist Brutality is Child Protection

One year ago, NACC issued a statement condemning racist violence, police brutality, and the killings of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and others. What we did not know then was that 16-year-old Cornelius Fredericks had just been killed after throwing a sandwich in a Michigan residential facility run by Sequel Youth and Family Services. Cornelius, a child in the care and custody of the state after losing his parents, was pinned to the floor of a cafeteria for 12 minutes by seven men, while boys heard him cry: "I can't breathe." He died on May 1st, 2020 — the start of Foster Care Awareness Month. As we entered Foster Care Awareness Month this year Ma'Khia Bryant was fatally shot by a police officer in a moment of trauma when what she needed was help, support, and safety.

NACC seeks to continue raising awareness about the brutality experienced by far too many young people after entering a system that was supposed to protect them. We speak out against all forms of violence, especially against young people removed from their own families and homes. Children deserve unconditional protection: a chance to grow up in their own families, to learn, and to grow into adulthood. Too often, youth impacted by foster care report receiving conditional support and punitive measures: Foster parents may decide they are no longer a "good fit" in their homes; schools may dismiss developmentally appropriate cries for help and instead use them as grounds for expulsion; and facilities may use medication and restraints in response to the manifestation of untreated trauma.

This well-worn path leads to the criminalization of youth in foster care, particularly for Black youth. When youth in foster care are moved from a family-like setting to congregate care, they are more likely to be arrested. A recent Annie E. Casey Foundation survey found the detention of Black youth during



the COVID-19 pandemic reached an all-time high, while that of white youth was the second lowest recorded in a year.

"I've had guns pointed at me so many times, that could have been me. That was me." NACC has heard this from young people who have experienced foster care. Research demonstrates Black boys and girls are perceived more like adults — their Blackness is weaponized against them to deny their very childhood across sectors: schools, child welfare, and the juvenile legal systems. A [2017 study, "Girlhood Interrupted: The Erasure of Black Girl's Childhood,"](#) showed that Black girls face an adultification bias from as young as five years old, which results in greater punishment and brutality across their lifetimes. Adultification bias can cause child welfare professionals to [view](#) children as more threatening and less deserving of care. As a community, we must stand up against the adultification and criminalization of Black boys and girls.

"Don't just be sad about it," current and former foster youth urge us, "do something about it." We must show the world that Black Lives Matter beyond memorabilia and trendy email signatures. Our country and its systems need [true crisis interventions](#) that do not result in execution and preventable incarceration. Advocates can make a difference in their practice and communities. After the death of Cornelius Fredericks, youth justice advocates fought to shut down for-profit Sequel Youth and Family Services facilities. [Because of their advocacy, six facilities are no longer run by Sequel,](#) and five states have ended contracts with the company. Individual attorneys also filed motions demanding the removal of clients from Sequel facilities. These are all steps towards justice.

NACC continues to commit itself to learning, confronting racism, and combating the adultification of Black, Latinx, and Indigenous youth. We have urged attorneys to [lean into discomfort and disruption](#) and provided resources to attorneys to help keep children [with their families and out of institutions](#). This summer, NACC will begin the process of re-examining our mission and vision statements and policy priorities to continue an explicit and intentional focus on race equity and racial justice. We invite you to continue this journey with us and amplify your advocacy to protect the lives of Black children. This we know: there can be no children's justice without racial justice. ■

NACC prepared this statement in partnership with NACC National Youth Advisory Board members and extends a special thanks to Ivory Bennett for her significant contributions.

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