



Memo in Support for Legislation Establishing a Black Youth Suicide Prevention Task Force S3408 (Brouk)

In the wake of a nine-year-old Black girl being physically restrained and pepper-sprayed by police in Rochester while suffering from a mental health crisis, we are confronted by the failure of our mental health system for children. The injustices visited upon this girl and her family require a system-wide response that includes a deep inquiry into experiences of Black children. The stakes could not be higher. Suicide is the second leading cause of death among youth aged 15 to 19 years old in New York State, with Black and Latinx children, in particular, having the highest rates of adolescent suicide attempts. The precarity of Black children's lives, the stress of the COVID-19 pandemic in their communities, and the events in Rochester make it clear that we need legislation to establish a Black Youth Suicide Prevention Task Force to evaluate and improve mental health supports for New York's Black children. This is why we support the proposal set forth in bill number S3408.

CDF has a unique approach to improving conditions for children, combining research, public education, policy development, community organizing, and advocacy. A recognized authority in the endeavor to protect children and strengthen families, CDF serves as a resource and partner for children, families, and organizations throughout New York State. We leverage our national influence to eliminate race and gender inequities in the areas of early childhood, education, health, housing, child welfare, and youth justice. Therefore, we call for the passage of this bill to help center the needs of vulnerable children and support their mental health.

With over half of children in New York with a mental or behavioral condition not receiving necessary treatment, it is essential that we improve our systems to serve Black children and help them thrive. This legislation is especially timely now, considering the detrimental impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has on the mental health of young people across the State, especially children of color. We support this legislation because we believe that it will help create meaningful solutions to support the needs of Black youth.

For more information concerning the bill, please contact: Julia L. Davis, Esq. Director of Youth Justice & Child Welfare, Children's Defense Fund-NY, jdavis@childrensdefense.org.