

## Fall Newsletter



### **Message from the President**

#### **Dr. Tasha Green Cruzat**

On Thursday, a former police officer went on a shooting and knifing rampage in Thailand that began at a daycare center and ended at his own home where he killed his family and himself. The gunman killed at least 36 people before taking his own life, 22 of whom were children at the daycare center.

According to police, the gunman was fired from the police force in June after being arrested with methamphetamine. Thailand's Prime Minister said that initial reports were that the former officer was having personal problems.

In September, a mentally ill woman allegedly pushed her three-year old nephew off Chicago's Navy Pier into Lake Michigan. She did not attempt to rescue the boy, and he eventually died. According to press reports, she was already on medication for mental health issues.

In the U.S., this is National Mental Illness Awareness Week. For the past few months, a portion of Children's Advocates for Change's work has been about meeting the mental health needs of our youth. One of the issues we reviewed was the stigma some youth feel about not only receiving treatment but just talking about mental health.

How many of us are walking around with anxiety, depression, or another mental health condition that we just refuse to talk to anyone about? Society doesn't always place as much importance on dealing with our mental health as it does with our physical health but there is no reason why that should be the case. There is no shame in talking to someone about your mental health. If a friend or relative is not immediately available, you can dial 9-8-8 on your phone to reach someone at the National Suicide and Crisis Lifeline.

As you'll read about below, we've got some recommendations about how to further address youth mental health needs. We hope the state of Illinois takes up these recommendations. However, the important thing is that we have the conversation about mental health.

Children's Advocates for Change (CAFC) held a Helen R. Weigle Policy Forum online in September looking at youth mental health needs. While schools are back to in-person learning, the impact of the physical isolation during remote learning, job losses and illnesses experienced by parents and caregivers, and family deaths due to COVID-19 has brought about increased levels of anxiety and depression for many young people. All of this came on top of other factors impacting youth mental health that include poverty, violence, and negative social media messages.



CAFC President Dr. Tasha Green Cruzat led a panel discussion with Daniel H. Gillison, Jr., Chief Executive Officer of the National Alliance on Mental Illness, Dr. Dana Weiner, Director of Illinois' Children's Behavioral Health Transformation Initiative, and Dr. Mashana Smith, Director of the Illinois REACH Initiative. You can view a recording of the forum [here](#).

CAFC has just released a [policy paper](#) that digs deeper into the topic. As part of this project, staff members Sarah Stolarski-Galla, Mitch Lifson, and Lillian Platten looked at the data on youth mental health and talked to state and national experts, school social workers, and students across the state.

The paper concludes with five recommendations for Illinois lawmakers to consider that include conducting regular mental health assessments for students, establishing and expanding school-based health resources with additional staff and telehealth, adopting a state child income tax credit, and enhancing mental health literacy training and/or mental health first aid programs for educators and parents through Illinois school districts.

### **Upcoming Policy Forums**

Future Helen R. Weigle Policy Forums will focus on:

- Maternal health disparities -The Illinois Department of Public Health has reported that between 2016 and 2017, Illinois Black women had a maternal morbidity rate more than twice that of non-Hispanic whites for Illinois delivery hospitalizations.
- Family economic supports -This forum will examine steps the Congress and the Illinois General Assembly can take to provide further economic relief to low- and moderate-income families.

Keep an eye out for upcoming registration information.

## Become Forum Sponsor

Our thanks to the Helen and Maurice Weigle Fund and the Ann and Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago for sponsoring our public policy forum on youth mental health needs.

Please contact us if you, your business, or an organization you are involved with would like to sponsor our upcoming policy forums. You can email us at [info@chldrensadvocates.org](mailto:info@chldrensadvocates.org) or call 312-361-0101. You can also find a [sponsorship form](#) on our website.

## Racial Impact Note Act Webinar

CAFC and the American Sustainable Business Network held a September webinar on Racial Impact Note Acts. CAFC President Dr. Tasha Green Cruzat and Illinois State Representative Camille Y. Lilly discussed Illinois' enactment of a state Racial Impact Note Act. You can view the webinar by clicking [here](#).



## Candidate questions

Early voting has started in Illinois. CAFC recognizes that many of the economic relief measures provided by the state of Illinois this year are temporary in nature. Yet, inflation continues to eat away at Illinois residents' purchasing power and the ability to pay for rent and basic household needs.

If you attend a community forum for legislative candidates, here are a few questions we'd urge you to pose to candidates for the Illinois legislature and statewide offices:

- Will you support the establishment of an Illinois child income tax credit?
- Will you support the establishment of an Illinois renter's income tax credit?
- Will you support raising the income-eligibility level for the state's Child Care Assistance Program?
- Will you support Illinois' effort to add funding annually for the evidence-based school funding formula so that all public schools reach an adequate funding level to meet the needs of their students?

## DeWitt Child Advocacy Award

Congratulations to CAFC President Dr. Tasha Green Cruzat on receiving the 2022 Bishop Jesse DeWitt Child Advocacy Award from United Voices for Children! During his lifetime as a United Methodist minister, Bishop DeWitt represented and spoke out for children, youth, and families who did not have a voice. One of his greatest passions was speaking out to educate and inform local churches about legislation and issues impacting the lives of children. This award recognizes others continuing that work. During United Voices for Children's recent "Raising Our Voices through Resources" event, Dr. Green Cruzat joined a [panel discussion](#) on the needs facing our youth.



September 15th - October 15th is National Hispanic Heritage Month, and we want to take the opportunity to recognize the work of CAFC Board Member Dr. Teresa Cordova. Dr. Cordova is the Director of the Great Cities Institute at the University of Illinois at Chicago. She is also a professor of Urban Planning and Policy at UIC's College of Urban Planning and Public Affairs.

Dr. Cordova publishes in the fields of Community Development and Latino Studies. Her work, in part, involves addressing issues of chronic and concentrated joblessness among young people and workforce development. That work also involves promoting investment in disinvested neighborhoods.

We thank Dr. Cordova and all the other CAFC Board Members for their efforts in furthering our mission to improve the well-being of all children.

### **Donate Today!**

We believe strongly in our independent advocacy on behalf of children within our state and across the country. Please join us today in our efforts with a contribution to CAFC. Just go to our [home page](#) and click on the "Donate" button. Every dollar is a step forward in seeing that all children thrive regardless of their race, ethnicity, or zip code.



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