



**RESEARCH  
IN ACTION**



MINNESOTA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY  
**Office of Justice Programs**

# **Missing and Murdered African American Women Task Force**

## **Final Report**

**December 2022**

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# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

## Task Force members

The Task Force membership was specified in the legislation and the Commissioner determined the appointees:

- Co-chair: Lakeisha Lee
- Co-chair: Dr. Deborah Mitchell, Aurora St. Anthony Neighborhood Development Corporation
- Rep. Ruth Richardson
- Rep. Lisa Demuth
- Sen. Bruce Anderson
- Sen. Mary Kunesh
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- Robert Small, Minnesota County Attorneys Association
- Artika Roller, Minnesota Coalition Against Sexual Assault
- Lisa Clemons, A Mother's Love

## Expert Consultants

Thank you to the experts that supported the year-long work:

- Kamisha Johnson from Amani Healing Services
- Dr. Lauren Martin from the University of Minnesota

Thank you to the Advocates for Human Rights Special Consultants to the United Nations on the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination

- Rosalyn Park, Director, Women's Human Rights Program
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Thank you to all the RIA staff that contributed to this work; this report would not have been possible without you!

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## Advisory Council members

The Advisory Council membership criteria was designed by Research in Action and the network of the organization and Task Force members was tapped to do outreach until a table was built:

- Angela Hooks
- Dominique Buffett
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- Lateesha Coleman
- Maddie Hodapp
- Savannah Nelson
- Symmieona Williams
- Tiffany Roberson

## Organizational Partners

Thank you to the organizations we partnered with to invite Black women and girls to shape change:

- The Zen Bin
- The Domestic Abuse Project
- Anna Marie's Alliance

## Interviewees

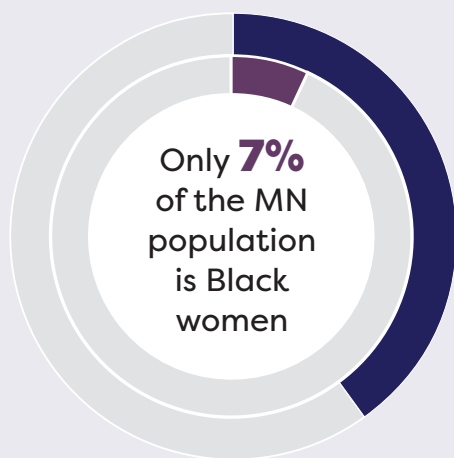
Thank you to those that we interviewed for sharing their time and expertise:

- 20 key informants engaged across interviews and focus groups to learn from their work in key agencies and institutions relevant to MMAAW
- 15 Black women and girls engaged across interviews and focus groups to learn from their lived experiences as survivors of interpersonal and systemic violence

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**Black women and girls are uniquely vulnerable and too easily erased from public discussions about missing and murdered people. Statistics paint a devastating picture of the magnitude of the issue: over 60,000 Black women and girls are missing in the United States, and Black women are more than twice as likely than their peers to be victims of homicide.**



but **40%** of domestic violence victims in Minnesota are Black women



Black women are nearly **3 times** more likely to be murdered than white women in Minnesota

**By creating the Missing and Murdered African American Women's Task Force in 2021, the Minnesota Legislature became the first U.S. state to dedicate resources to investigate and to consider the measures necessary to reduce and prevent violence against Black women and girls.**

The MMAAW Task Force was charged to examine and report on:

- Systemic causes of violence against African American women and girls
- Appropriate methods of tracking and collecting data
- Policies, practices, and institutions that assist in perpetuating violence against African American women and girls
- Measures necessary to address and reduce violence against African American women and girls
- Measures necessary to help victims, their families, and their communities.



# INTRODUCTION

Black women and girls are uniquely vulnerable and too easily erased from public discussions about missing and murdered people. Organizations such as the Black and Missing Foundation and media projects such as Our Black Girls, Crime Noir, Black Girl Gone, and Black Girl Missing are working to honor the stories of missing and murdered Black women, continuing a long history of Black women organizing to uplift struggles for equal rights and protection under the law when state institutions have failed to act.

Statistics paint a devastating picture of the magnitude of the issue of missing and murdered **African American women**. Estimates suggest that over 60,000 Black women and girls are missing in the United States, and Black women are more than twice as likely than their peers to be victims of homicide<sup>1</sup>. According to the National Crime Information Center (NCIC), in 2020, of the 268,884 girls and women reported missing, 90,333, or nearly 34 percent, were Black<sup>2</sup>, while Black girls and women make up only 15 percent of the U.S. female population. Nationally, cases involving Black girls and women stay open four times longer than other cases on average<sup>3</sup>. The thousands of Black women and girls missing include abductees, sex trafficking victims, and people fleeing abuse.

Nationally, Black women have the highest rates of death due to homicide among women (4.4. per 100,000 compared to 1.5 per 100,000 for white women). According to reports from Time's Up, 60 percent of Black women were subjected to coercive sexual contact by the time they turned 18<sup>4</sup>.

In Minnesota, the statistics are similarly grim: Black women are murdered at a rate 2.7 times higher than white women<sup>5</sup>. In 2020, 40 percent of domestic violence homicide victims were Black, while comprising less than 7 percent of Minnesota's population.

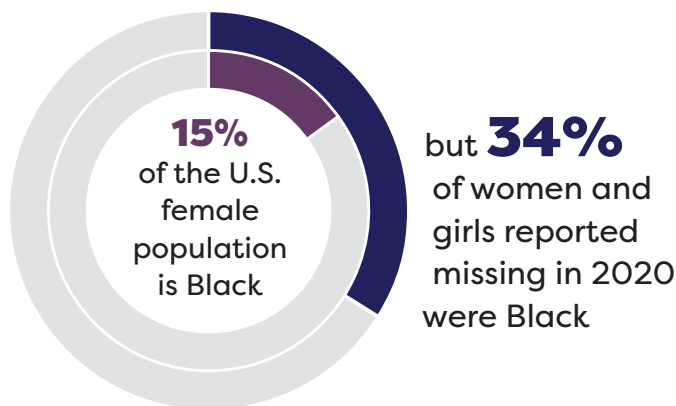
Understanding the roots of how and why Black women and girls are not as well protected from **violence** as white women and girls requires attention to both historical and present-day manifestations of interlocking systems of oppression such as racism and sexism.

## Re/defining terms

As we reclaim the power of research for impacted communities, we are also reimagining key terms. Recognizing the power of shared language and knowledge, we articulate key terms and concepts shaded in yellow in the text.

**African American:** Used interchangeably with "Black" in this report; refers to and includes all people who have self-identified as a member of the broader African diaspora

**Violence:** Encompasses and includes physical, emotional, mental, spiritual, and monetary violence. Our definition of "violence" goes beyond the physical aspect of violence, to the adverse conditions that inflict harm on individuals and groups. Economic, social, and psychological violence undermine wellbeing and reduce access to resources that help people recover from physically violent incidents. This broader definition of violence also illuminates the importance of acknowledging the roles that systems play in generating disparities in violence and healing.



**60,000**

Black women and girls are missing in the United States

# “You have to be bleeding to be heard.”

Lived Experience Interview  
Zen Bin 1

Reflection questions

▶ **Should Black women in Minnesota seeking assistance from local social service agencies, shelters, or law enforcement agencies feel that they can only receive support if they are in an extreme state of crisis?**

**What would it look like if Black women knew that they could seek support when they are in crisis without having to already be bleeding to prove they're in danger?**

# MISSING & MURDERED AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN (MMAAW) TASK FORCE

During the 2021 Legislative Session, the MMAAW Task Force was developed by the Minnesota Legislature (Laws of Minnesota 2021, 1st Spec. Sess. Chapter 11, Article 2, Section 50), led by the efforts of Rep. Ruth Richardson. By legislating this report and the MMAAW Task Force, the Minnesota Legislature is the first in the nation to dedicate time and resources to investigating this violence and consider the measures necessary to support Black women and girls, their families, and their communities.

## The MMAAW Task Force was tasked to examine and report on:

- **Systemic causes** of violence against African American women and girls
- Appropriate methods of tracking and collecting data
- Policies, practices, and institutions that assist in perpetuating violence against African American women and girls
- Measures necessary to address and reduce violence against African American women and girls
- Measures necessary to help victims, their families, and their communities

The Task Force was convened on November 29, 2021, by the Department of Public Safety (DPS) and Research in Action (RIA). The DPS contracted with RIA to conduct the research and prepare the final report on behalf of the Task Force. The RIA team and Task Force Co-Chairs Lakeisha Lee and Dr. Deborah Mitchell worked collaboratively with DPS to facilitate the Task Force and Advisory Council meetings.

This report summarizes the work of the Task Force and Advisory Council to address the above areas and provides recommendations based on the information gained from the Equity in Action process – including insight from nearly 50 interviews, in addition to a deep literature review and quantitative data analysis – to the Minnesota Legislature, state agencies, and other entities responsible for solving the MMAAW injustice in Minnesota and supporting Black women and girls.

## Re/defining terms

**System:** A network made up of individuals, organizations, and the culture(s) of those organizations that direct action, create rules, make decisions, and distribute power.

**Systemic change:** Confronting root causes of issues (rather than symptoms) by transforming structures, customs, mindsets, power dynamics, policies and rules. Communities and organizations have shared goals of solving the social problems they are impacted by. These groups collaborate and build collective power to advance systems change.

## About Research in Action

Research in Action is a Black queer female-led, multi-racial and gender-diverse social benefit corporation created to reclaim the power of research by centering community expertise and driving actionable solutions for racial justice. We disrupt traditional, top-down approaches to research and community engagement by putting community expertise first at every step – from naming the problem to identifying solutions.

Led by impacted-community members, we leverage and share our technical skills in research, evaluation and analysis; data innovation; strategy support; relationship and capacity building; and narrative shifting to advance concrete and actionable policy and practice solutions that lead to real and lasting change in our communities.

RIA utilizes the Equity in Action model to approach the successful execution of each project. Equity in Action intentionally rebalances power by creating new tables where impacted community members intentionally outnumber individuals with institutional or organizational rank so that community members are centered as essential experts and project leaders throughout any process. Our process centers community members in defining the issue, making sense of the data and deciding what should be done about it.

Our model is intentionally directed toward actionable outcomes that lead to tangible, real world changes – and cultivate community power and authentic, mutually beneficial relationships with partners after the project has ended.

At RIA, we are co-creating emergent methodologies as an act of discovery in collaboration with communities. Our approach combines elements of grounded theory and participatory action research frameworks. Our process is cyclical, iterative, and firmly non-extractive. We co-create methods with impacted communities in part to build awareness and understanding of how cultural beliefs and values differ between people participating in the project design. Understanding how culture informs our individual perspectives or ways of seeing the problem helps us collectively create shared values, which leads to a cohesive direction for co-creating methods. Additionally, we collaborate with communities to ensure the tools we develop are culturally accessible.

The multiple phases of our Equity in Action model are intentionally designed to intersect to ensure a core component to our approach: shared meaning-making. Shared meaning-making is an ongoing process to ensure consistent collaboration throughout the project lifecycle. We use our technical skills to:

- create space for all collaborators to develop a shared understanding of key language to describe the context and define the problem together
- ensure all collaborators recognize the specific gaps our research seeks to fill and the specific goals of the project
- at every step in the process, revisit our shared values and reassess our collective knowledge based on what we're learning to ensure our process results in concrete policies and practices most needed by impacted communities.

## Equity in Action Process Model

### 6) Identify Solutions & Next Steps

Based on the data and community input, we identify policies, practices and systems changes that will lead to concrete improvements in community members' lives – and shift relationships and power dynamics between the institutional partner and impacted community beyond the project.

### 5) Community Review & Action Planning

We make data understandable and clear so community members who haven't been part of the advisory council can make sense of what it means, identify where we have misunderstood or made mistakes, and surface multiple solutions.

### 4) Collect Data

We train advisory council members in data collection to work with the research team to connect with community members through a shared purpose to solve a common problem.



### 1) Assess the Landscape

We investigate with partners and community members the history and context that has led to the proposed project, honestly identifying institutional harms, pain points, and impacted partnerships. We define shared values, as well as stakeholder goals and interests.

### 2) Create Advisory Council

We create an advisory council made up of individuals who are personally impacted by a specific issue. Because they understand the issue better than anyone else, we elevate community members as project leaders in accurately identifying and solving the problems they experience.

### 3) Co-develop Approach

We support community members to use their expertise to describe the problem, design the process to understand it and develop tools to gather information.

**Shared meaning making** is iterative and ongoing throughout our process. We use our technical skills as researchers to 1) create space for all collaborators to develop a shared understanding of key language to describe the context and define the problem together, 2) ensure all collaborators recognize the specific gaps our research seeks to fill and the specific goals of the project, and 3) at every step in the process, revisit our shared values and reassess our collective knowledge based on what we're learning to ensure our process results in concrete policies and practices most needed by impacted communities.

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We resist the notion that **quantitative research** is more valid than **qualitative research**, which creates space for people to share their direct experiences through interviews and other engagements. We reject the false premise that if “you can’t measure it, it doesn’t exist,” because data requires grounded human context to guide and inform our collective analysis. We deliberately approach research with mixed methods, valuing quantitative and qualitative data equally.

We believe that data analysis and data collection overlap in the process of co-producing knowledge. Our general process involves:

- Collecting data from secondary sources, presenting the data to impacted communities, and holding space for impacted communities to determine the accuracy of the data and what existing data does and does not answer in relation to the research question.
- Conducting interviews and/or focus groups, completing initial analyses, and then presenting findings and recommendations to the community through a data walk. At a data walk, impacted communities provide feedback on initial findings and share their perspectives and ideas as they relate to the question.
- Gathering learnings from the data walk and involving them in the final analyses to develop final project deliverables.

### Re/defining terms

**Qualitative research:** Information that can not be counted, but data that can be observed and recorded through direct observation, one on one interviews, focus groups, and other methods.

**Quantitative research:** Information that is counted, measured and replicated to model or predict change or impact, often through charts or graphs.

**Lived experience:** First-hand, everyday experience living a particular reality; someone with lived experience is thus determined to be the expert, and as those closest to the problem, they are the closest to the solution.

We are discerning and intentional in creating mixed-method approaches that uproot racist presumptions and cultivate iterative processes that acknowledge **lived experience** as rigorous and actionable data and create power for and accountability with impacted communities.

## Missing & Murdered African American Women (MMAAW) Advisory Council

For too long, Black women and girls have been speaking and sharing their expertise, but they have not been heard. Issues related to the criminal justice system and its collateral consequences have been well documented by Research in Action through the 2019 Minnesota Trust Black Women and Girls Town Hall, and the 2020 Time of Reckoning forum.

By contracting with RIA, the state of Minnesota embraced a model of community engagement and participatory policymaking that institutional actors rarely invest in or commit to. The state also embraced RIA’s requirement that an MMAAW Advisory Council guide the process. This Advisory Council was made up of Black

women and girls that have experienced violence, abduction, and/or trafficking, and family members who have lost a loved one to this violence.

As the guiding body, the Advisory Council gave direction to the larger Task Force. As such, this process was deliberately designed to center the expertise and knowledge from Black women to help us better understand the causes of violence and to develop the practices and policies to increase community wellbeing and reduce harm. RIA supported the Task Force in lending its expertise and supporting the cultivation of consensus building among and between both bodies.

## Task Force and Advisory Council Group Processes

Research in Action utilized the Equity in Action model to design strategic Task Force and Advisory Council activities to maximize participation, partnership development, shared learning, and impact. Our discussions served to identify the context of MMAAW and gaps in our collective understandings of the response in our state. Our meetings centered the experiences of Black women and girls to co-develop the mixed-methods tools and make shared meaning of the findings.

In these ways, the Task Force and Advisory Council were integral to the framing and design of the data collection plan – and co-producing winnable policy and practice solutions aimed at protecting and supporting Black women and girls.

The Task Force met every other month for half-day meetings. Due to COVID-19, the first three meetings were held remotely. The subsequent Task Force meetings were hybrid. The Advisory Council met every month for 2-hour meetings. Meetings were primarily conducted via Zoom with two hybrid meetings to provide a chance for both the Task Force and Advisory Council to meet face to face. These hybrid sessions aimed to build rapport, make sense of new and existing data to inform RIA's data collection, and develop shared understanding and language as a collaborative.

There were strategic and critical points of overlap for the two groups once all data was collected. In September, October, and November the two groups met to process findings, create shared meaning for data analysis, and articulate recommendations.

## Timeline

The totality of violence Black women and girls have experienced cannot be addressed within the limited time and resources the Task Force and Advisory Council had to address it. The data collection process was hindered by the timeline, as outreach, conducting interviews and focus groups, and analyzing data had to happen within an aggressive timeframe.

In total RIA had only 12 months to complete the entirety of the work, which included:

- Convening the Task Force
- Building the Advisory Council
- Establishing rapport and trust between the Task Force, Advisory Council, and RIA
- Developing shared understanding of existing literature and identifying the gaps, building statewide partnerships
- Refining the research approach to respond to the scope of the charge
- Building distinct outreach efforts cross the state
- Executing data collection across multiple sites
- Receiving, coding and cleaning all data
- Holding space for Task Force and Advisory Council to wrestle with their goals, analysis and fostering understanding of the data
- Drafting each section of the report for feedback from the Task Force and Advisory Council
- Presenting data analysis to the community for feedback
- Finalizing recommendations in partnership with Task Force and Council
- Revising and producing the final draft of the report

As such, this report does not provide information to address the entire scope of MMAAW and violence against Black women and girls in Minnesota. The recommendations will not fully address these injustices either. It is going to take many years of intentional, community-led, and sustained efforts to change the systems, policies, and practices that contribute to MMAAW and violence against Black women and girls in Minnesota.

# STRUCTURE AND PROCESS

The Missing and Murdered African American Women’s Task Force was developed by the Minnesota Legislature in 2021 to investigate violence against Black women and girls and consider the measures necessary to support them, their families, and their communities.

The Minnesota Department of Public Safety convened the task force and contracted with Research in Action to conduct research and prepare the final report.

Black women and girls are uniquely vulnerable and often erased from public discussions about missing and murdered people. For years, impacted communities have been elevating this injustice and pushing for solutions – with little support from institutions of power.

In contrast to traditional top-down approaches, Research in Action convened a table of community experts with lived experience to co-create and guide the task force process.



In addition to task force, advisory council and interview participants, RIA invited a broader set of stakeholders and community members to review and contribute to the findings and report, as well.

# TIMELINE

- Nov '21** ● **Task Force Meeting** (project overview, shared values, roles)  
**Outreach to Advisory Council members**
- Dec '21** ● **Advisory Council Meeting** (project overview, shared values and definition of the problem)
- Jan '22** ● **Task Force Meeting** (introduce members and goals of advisory council, develop consensus)  
**Advisory Council Meeting** (explore history and national case studies, narrow focus on institutions and strategies)
- Feb '22** ● **Advisory Council Meeting** (identify gaps research aims to fill, final report vision, framework for literature review)
- March '22** ● **Task Force Meeting** (identify institutions/policies needing further exploration, discuss key informant interviews and draft root causes of violence document)  
**Advisory Council Meeting** (develop and refine research questions, finalize research plan)
- April '22** ● **Advisory Council Meeting** (define research methods, develop core interview questions)
- May '22** ● **Task Force Meeting** (present full data collection plan, discuss key informant interviews and potential recommendations)  
**Advisory Council Meeting** (review data collection plan, finalize data collection tools, conduct interview training)
- June '22** ● **Interviews with Key Informants**  
**Advisory Council Meeting** (make meaning of initial findings, share strategy for interviews with Black women and girls, discuss outreach strategy)
- July '22** ● **Interviews with Key Informants**  
**Interviews and focus groups with folks with Lived Experience**  
**Thematic data coding and data analysis**  
**Task Force + Advisory Council Joint Meeting** (discuss literature review, preliminary data analysis, MMAAW office)
- Aug '22** ● **Interviews and focus groups with folks with Lived Experience**  
**Thematic data coding and data analysis**
- Sept '22** ● **Task Force + Advisory Council Joint Meeting** (shared meaning making of key informant, lived experience data)  
**Report writing**
- Oct '22** ● **Report writing; draft report content sent to Advisory Council and Task Force for review**  
**Data walk:** Research collaborators and community members review findings and analysis, provide additional context and framing, reflect together on data, and narrow in on priorities moving forward
- Nov '22** ● **Task Force + Advisory Council Joint Meeting** (present recommendations for their comment)
- Dec '22** ● **Final Task Force + Advisory Council Joint Meeting**  
**Report submitted**

**“I have to take off from work to go downtown to this precinct and make this report. And then, while I’m down there I’m asked ‘Why did you wait so long to do this?’ And then I have to explain everything while also remembering that I am in a police station, so I can’t get angry.”**

Lived Experience Interview

Reflection questions

**What would we need to change about the culture of our local precincts in order for families to feel they will be heard and not misunderstood when they try to report a loved one missing?**

**What if they were greeted by a counselor on staff to support families who report a missing person?**

# RESEARCH METHODS

Beyond identifying relevant existing literature and pulling specific information from databases, Research in Action, the Task Force, and the Advisory Council collaboratively developed a robust data collection plan with one-on-one interviews and focus groups to talk to two groups of people: key informants and Black women and girls.

- **Key informants (KI):** Experts in key systems or sectors whose specialized knowledge related to Black women and girls experiencing violence, being murdered, or reported missing supports the development of recommendations for the legislature
- **Black women & girls with lived experience (LE):** Women and girls who have self-identified as a members of the broader African diaspora and have first-hand, everyday experience of violence

Throughout the initial meetings in late 2021 and early 2022, both groups identified the importance of gaining insights from individuals that provide direct services and supports to Black women and girls, in particular providers for those that have been sexually exploited, and experts that represent institutions that impact MMAAW, like law enforcement, the courts, and human services. The Task Force and Advisory Council both articulated very early in the data collection tool development process the importance of speaking with Black women and girls about their experiences in the state of Minnesota as well.

## Black Women and Girls with Lived Experience

The purpose of interviews and focus groups with Black women and girls was to learn from Black women and girls who have experienced violence by someone or by systems, institutions, or processes that were in place to help or support them in gaining access to vital information or resources, but were let down, denied, or felt ignored.

The Advisory Council members articulated very specific systems that impact them. This revealed a specific focus outside of understanding the systems, policies, and practices that impact MMAAW. This focus centered on institutions that historically police, track, and harm

Black women and girls, even at times into violence that leads to cases of MMAAW. These systems, initially identified by the Advisory Council, were housing, child protection, and education. The Task Force members overwhelmingly agreed but requested that the focus on child protection be expanded to child welfare systems to represent more experiences.

To ensure that we had shared language and understanding, the Advisory Council co-created a definitions for violence and a discussion of the many systems involved in MMAAW:

**We define violence as: physical, emotional, mental, spiritual, and monetary violence.**

This definition helps us to see that long before, and too often long after, someone experiences physical violence, adverse conditions inflict harm on individuals and groups. Economic, social, and psychological violence undermine wellbeing and reduce access to resources that help people recover from violent incidents. This broader definition of violence also illuminates the importance of acknowledging the role that systems play in generating disparities in violence and healing.

We discussed a range of systems, institutions, and processes that should help or support Black women and girls facing violence. These included: supportive or affordable housing, child welfare programming or processes, public, technical or vocational education, and social services among others.

Data collection with Black women and girls focused on changes needed to ensure institutions treat Black women and girls as humans with dignity and respect. The Task Force, RIA and Advisory Council members executed interviews and focus groups through partnerships with:

- The Zen Bin in North Minneapolis
- The Domestic Abuse Project in Minneapolis
- Anna Marie's Alliance in St. Cloud

## Key Informants from Relevant Sectors

The purpose of interviews and focus groups with key informants was to learn from experts in key systems or sectors identified by the Advisory Council and Task Force whose specialized knowledge related to Black women and girls experiencing violence, being murdered, or reported missing will support the development of recommendations for the Minnesota Legislature.

The sectors included:

- Service providers offering support to victims of domestic violence, sexual violence, and sexual exploitation, and the support services ranged from legal, housing, advocacy, health, and other supports
- Attorneys with experience working homicide and trafficking cases
- Law enforcement agents specializing in homicide, missing person, and trafficking cases
- Experts in the housing, education, and child welfare systems

RIA executed these interviews and focus groups from recommendations by the Task Force and Advisory Council about who to include. Some recommendations specified individuals within these systems, while other recommendations directed RIA to recruit participants from specific organizations.

## Data Limitations

The Task Force and Advisory Council have named the importance in making connections and developing partnerships to move this work from a report to actionable change, yet RIA experienced very real barriers in data collection outreach.

Research in Action reached out to many different organizations across the state, including across the Twin Cities metro area, in Duluth, and in St. Cloud, to connect with Black women and girls. However, experts at both tables discussed a crisis mentality that is consistent in many service providing spaces, particularly for domestic and sexual violence – resulting in minimal response despite numerous contacts. When RIA was able to connect with Black women and girls with lived experience, crises in real time and structural barriers led to non-responses, last-minute cancellations, or no-shows for interviews.

For our outreach in Duluth, specifically, we encountered an interesting tension point. We successfully contacted the Director of Human Rights that RIA worked with to convene a group of Black women community leaders working in transitional housing with youth, reentry programming, and local affinity group leader to discuss a partnership to ensure the voices of Black women and girls in Duluth were heard in the report. While each woman individually saw the value of the work we were doing, all the women in the room expressed deep concern about how the Duluth community would react to a project focused on MMAAW and their individual capacity to be stewards of the work on the ground. They expected hostility and some discomfort from their local community by centering the experiences of Black women and girls.

Because of time and other constraints, some data collection ideas were not executed to their full potential, including:

- focus groups with Black men and boys to hear what they would want to become the best allies they can to Black women and girls
- focus groups with law enforcement officers to understand their experiences working within departments with and without missing person units
- recruitment of more LGBTQIA participants

While our recruitment and outreach efforts resulted in interviews with 20 key informants and 15 Black women and girls with lived experience, all with a variety of expertise, experiences, and opinions of MMAAW and solutions, we recognize that the information within this report could vary from those we were not able to engage with for this project.

## Data analysis process

DeAnna Hoskins, President of Just Leadership, USA, reminds us: "Those who are directly impacted are closest to the problem and closest to the solution, but . . . have been farthest from resources and power." Black women and girls have been objects of policy and not agents of policymaking. Research in Action centers community expertise to correct this pattern and aligns with Black feminist frameworks for unveiling insights that can be overlooked when Black women are not centered as experts on their own lived experiences.

Centering those who have been most harmed or by the current system provides crucial knowledge to shed light on why policies and agencies created to protect women have not done so for Black women and girls. Therefore, our data analysis began with the Lived Experience interview data. Engaging in thematic analysis of the data provided by participants with lived experience first allowed us to analyze data provided by key informants to see where similarities and differences existed between the two groups

We were also mindful as we analyzed the data that nine of the 20 Key Informants are Black-identifying, eight of whom are Black women. As the following sections will show, in many places there is strong resonance between the Lived Experience data and the Black women Key Informant data.

## Researching a Known Problem

Early in this work, Task Force and Advisory Council members felt ambivalence about launching a task force to verify what has previously been documented in other reports as well as in their own community histories.

One Task Force member said: “We have a lot of research in our community... Especially in Minnesota we have research and the information about the disparities is there. I don’t see us moving that information to an actionable plan.”

In response, another said: “Research has been used as a weapon in Black and brown communities. One of the opportunities before us today is to turn this research model on its head and work with participatory community research... Not [just] focused on the data that’s already there but helping the community determine what we are focusing on. What are the policy steps that should be enacted? What can we do to put a structure in place? Then we can define action steps with the report.”

This tension existed throughout the work, with some feeling that this research had been done before and a report to the Legislature wasn’t enough, while others saw this as an opportunity to learn more about gaps the community is experiencing and find solutions. Some even felt the groups could be doing more to organize and advocate for change. Depending on the perspective of the Task Force or Advisory Council member, there were challenges with this work technically being tied to research and a final report.

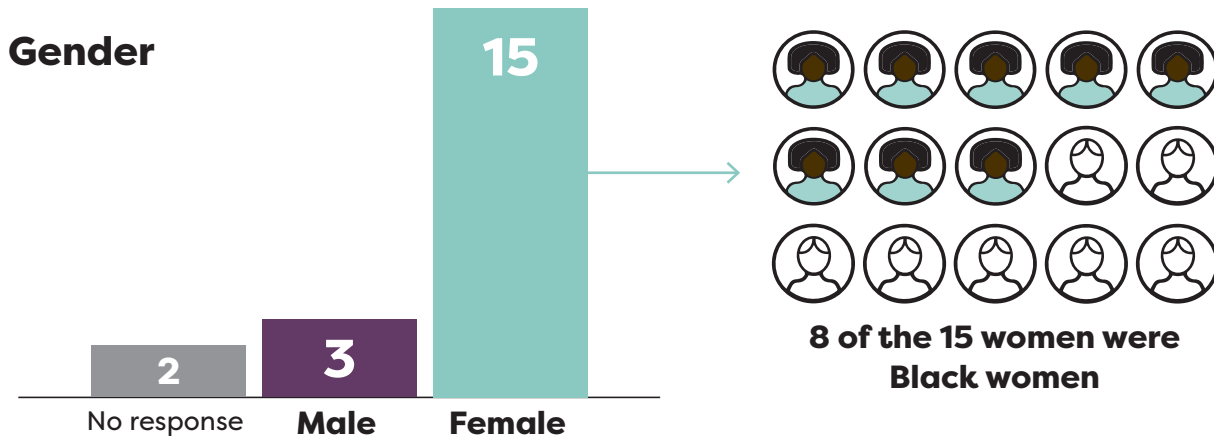
We approached researching a known problem that has been heavily quantified by incorporating qualitative methods such as key informant interviews and focus groups with people with lived experience to contextualize understandings that are not clear based on what numeric data illustrate.

We identified key constructs of interest and developed questions with impacted community members involved in the research design process. These questions are based on what impacted community members determine to be unanswered or unclear from existing quantitative data. Questions are typically open-ended and designed to promote brave and honest sharing of ideas and perspectives. Additionally, conversations with people from lived experience creates space for people most impacted by a problem to drive the solutions.

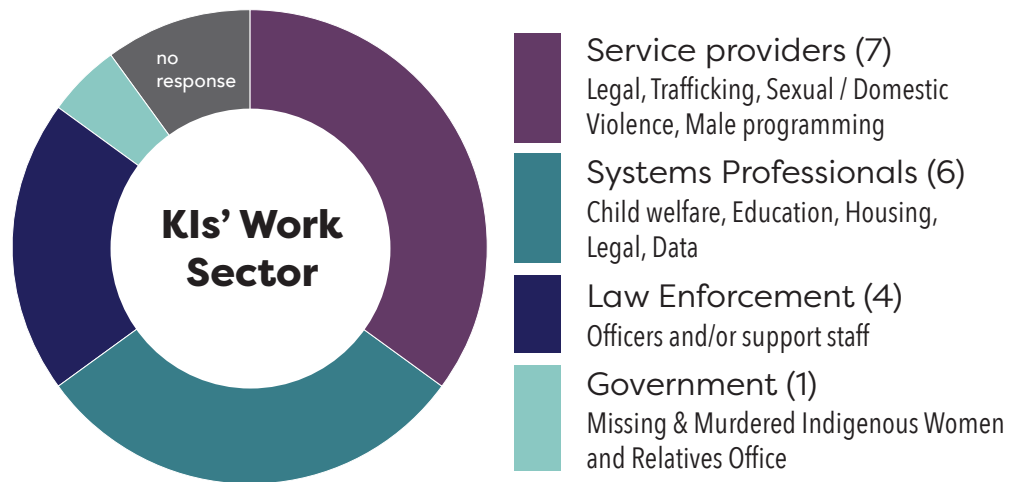
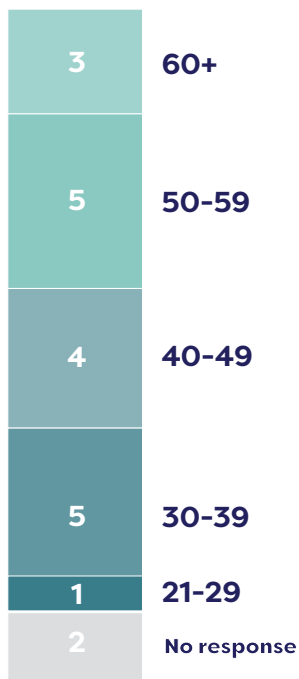
We sought subject matter saturation within a limited time frame not quantitative generalizability for the purpose of identifying key themes and pain points that we could develop tangible winnable policy and practice solutions around for action now guided by the legislature.



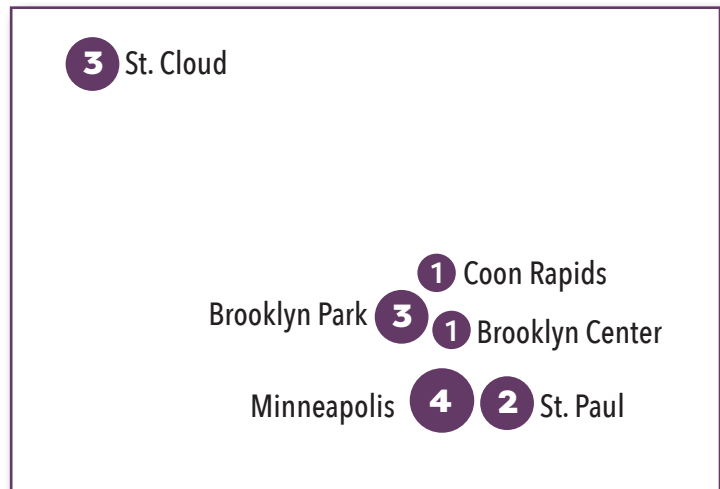
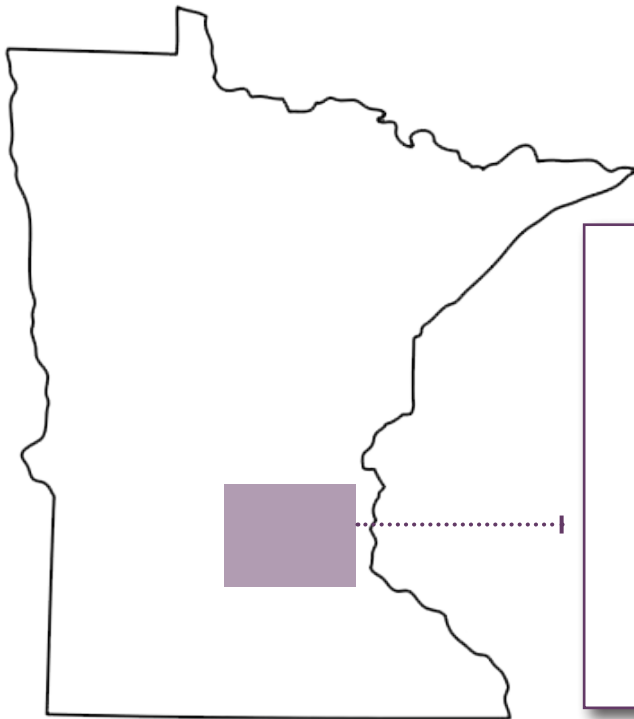
# KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS



### Age



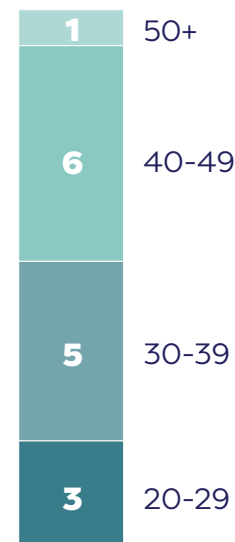
# LIVED EXPERIENCE INTERVIEWS



## Gender / LGBTQ?



## Age



# CHANGING THE NARRATIVE

## An Asset- versus Deficit-Based Approach

Using an asset-based approach, we co-developed the central research questions, interview/focus guides, and demographic data collection forms to disrupt traditional deficit based research approaches that assume Black women and girls are the problem or objects of study. An asset-based approach engages with Black women and girls first as valued members of their communities with the ability to identify solutions to their own problems.

For example, we incorporated different demographic questions into our initial intake and consent process to help our interviewees enter a mindset of articulating their own value and imagining what could be possible for their futures.

For instance, we asked our interviewees to personally describe themselves and how they believe other see them (top image). These descriptors show the multiple different aspects of our interviewees' identities and how they hold those identities close as they live their lives.

We also asked our interviewees what they do to practice self care (middle image). This was a deeply reflective question, and it often turned into a discussion about the mental and physical capacity needed to exist as a Black woman and how self care can be difficult to achieve.

And lastly, we asked our interviewees to discuss what brings them joy (bottom image) to imagine what kinds of things they prioritize in life and get them into a head space of joy and abundance.



**“My stomach hurt a lot when I was a kid but was told it was ‘attention seeking behavior.’ My case manager, when I was briefly in foster care, took me to the doctor... I lived with this pain for decades until doctors discovered parts of my intestine were dying. I had the whole thing removed. I had to advocate for myself.”**

Lived Experience  
Interview

Reflection  
questions

**What would a healthcare system that validated the experiences Black women and girls share about their health look and feel like? How might racial health disparities decrease as a result?**

## From Root Causes to Present Day Realities:

# LITERATURE REVIEW ON VIOLENCE AGAINST BLACK WOMEN AND GIRLS

This review of literature explains the historical roots of contemporary racial disparities that harm Black women and girls, with particular attention to the development of specific stereotypes that distort public perceptions of Black women and girls. This overview also defines the concept of intersectionality, which highlights how racism and sexism simultaneously produce unequal outcomes for Black women and girls.

Next, we provide a summary of research on four key areas that contribute to the vulnerability of Black women and girls to violence: work and wages, housing, health, and criminal justice. Looking at these systems with an intersectional lens makes clear how historical discrimination and harmful stereotypes shape conditions where Black women and girls are more vulnerable to violence.

## Root Causes of Violence Against Black Women and Girls

244 years of **slavery** \* legally sanctioned sexual **violence**, forced childbirth & family separation

\* 100 years of **Jim Crow**

law \* pervasive media and cultural **stereotypes** of

Black women as lazy, dangerous, and hyper-sexual

\* **lower wages**

and workplace discrimination

\* denied equal

**housing** opportunities \*

highest rates of **eviction**

\* biased **medical** treatment

\* higher rates of mother and infant **mortality** \* **adultification** of

Black girls \* students pushed out of school \* **criminalization**

of Black women \*

\* discrimination physical abuse

from **police** \*

viewing victims of violence as

**aggressors** \*

racial disparities in **criminal**

**charges**

and sentencing \*

**erasure** of missing and murdered Black women and girls





## Structural Racism: Rooted in Slavery

Racism in the United States is anchored in the practices, policies, legal and cultural regimes set in place by race-based slavery. During the colonial era and after the American Revolution, custom and law designated enslaved Black people as property with no human or civil rights, and all other Black people as non-citizens. The system of slavery also depended upon the specific exploitation and abuse of Black women in two ways: (1) as enslaved laborers, sharing that fate with enslaved Black men; and (2) as producers of future enslaved laborers. The law decreed that children of enslaved Black women would “follow the condition of the mother.” This incentivized white men to rape Black women and/or to force them into sexual relations with enslaved men to produce more slaves that could be worked or sold. Because they were considered property and had no legal rights, no court would consider it possible for a Black woman to be a victim of rape<sup>6</sup>.

Moreover, Black mothers and fathers had no rights to keep or protect their children; slaveholders could abuse enslaved children as they wished or sell them to make a profit. From their labor in the fields and houses, to their own children being sold away to white doctors using their bodies to experiment in gynecological surgery<sup>7</sup>, Black women’s lives and bodies were literally exploited in every way possible.

For the first two centuries of the American experiment, by law Black women were abused through forced labor, sexual violence, forced childbirth, and family separation. Under slavery, a Black woman’s value was determined by her future profitability, her ability to work, and her potential to bear children<sup>8</sup>. White exploitation of Black women’s bodies and labor was not just allowed by law, but also naturalized and reinforced by a large, expansive set of white supremacist theories, like eugenics, the “scientifically erroneous and immoral theory of ‘racial improvement’ and ‘planned breeding,’ which gained popularity during the early 20th century” and was taught and practiced by academics in fields from medicine to anthropology<sup>9</sup>. Multiple institutions – from education to health

**For the first two centuries of the American experiment, by law Black women were abused through forced labor, sexual violence, forced childbirth, and family separation.**

care to the criminal justice system – developed policies and practices based on these false beliefs, and these beliefs resonated with cultural stereotypes of Black women.



## Stereotypes and “controlling images” of Black women

The idea that Black people are natural inferiors and subordinates to white people was (and is) deeply interwoven into key foundational aspects of educational, governmental, medical, and socio-cultural documents, practices, and core beliefs. The systemic aspects of racism – slave codes, disenfranchisement, whites-only schools, etc. – were normalized by cultural beliefs. White supremacy holds that Black (and all other non-white peoples) are inferior to white people and are not fit to engage in society as full and equal citizens. Even in states where slavery was abolished and territories, like

Minnesota, where slavery was not legal, even free Black people did not enjoy the rights or privileges of white citizens, and anti-Black beliefs held sway.

Historians claimed Africa had no history or culture, and therefore only Europe had contributed to progress in art, science,

and governance. Scientists and doctors asserted that Black people had smaller brains, stronger muscles, and thicker skin, thus requiring brutally violent punishment and containment to prevent them from lashing out<sup>10</sup>. Slaves who tried to escape were said to be insane, victims of “drapetomania,” a disease caused by masters who were too lenient with the lash<sup>11</sup>.

The ideology of white supremacy also insisted Black women were not feminine in the way white women were. Patricia Hill Collins catalogs the main stereotypes of Black women<sup>12</sup> that emerged from slavery: the Jezebel, the Sapphire, the Mammy, and the Pickanninny. The Jezebel’s hypersexuality and lack of morals justified widespread sexual assaults; the Sapphire’s stubbornness,

loudness, and other lack of feminine refinement justified brutal physical work and punishment to keep her in line; the Mammy's unselfish devotion to the white family suggested she enjoyed being a subordinate and cared more about white children than her own; and the Pickaninny, a rowdy, stupid child, needed not education but whippings to learn how to work and know her place. Black women of any age were deemed unfeminine and inferior to white women, who were held up as exemplars of purity and motherhood deserving of men's respect and protection<sup>13</sup>.

The Civil War and end of slavery did not destroy the influence of white supremacy or dismantle these stereotypes; after a brief period of Reconstruction, Jim Crow law and vigilante violence cut short access to the ballot and education for the majority of African Americans, who still resided in former Confederate states<sup>14</sup>. Moreover, in the North, including Minnesota, racial segregation was the norm in education, employment, and housing<sup>15</sup>. At the same time, eugenicists were prominent in fields from medicine to sociology to anthropology, extending the reign of scientific racism in universities<sup>16</sup>. New popular culture forms like minstrel shows, film, radio, advertising, and comic books extended the reach and amplified circulation of racist stereotypes. Aunt Jemima sold pancakes; blackface performers grotesquely mocked Black people on stage and screen; and D.W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* glorified Ku Klux Klan violence against Black people in its climactic scenes<sup>17</sup>.

These harmful stereotypes and beliefs about dangerous, hyper-sexual, irresponsible, and lazy Black people continue to negatively impact Black women and girls' lives today. Black girls are often viewed as being more knowledgeable about sex and less in need of protection from predators as compared to their white peers<sup>18</sup>. This false belief can be traced as far back as slavery in the U.S., where slave owners justified their rape of enslaved women, oftentimes beginning when they were children, by claiming that Black women were Jezebels with insatiable sexual appetites.

**These stereotypes of Black women dehumanize and criminalize them as essentially corrupt and immoral: young Black women or girls who made their bodies sexually available (i.e., promiscuous), and mothers who reproduced a culture of dependency (i.e., crack babies).**

white-dominated research institutions and government officials have likewise pathologized Black women's workforce involvement with a combination of the Mammy and Sapphire stereotypes: the Matriarch. The Matriarch stereotype is a Black woman who cannot properly take care of her family because she works outside the home, thereby emasculating her husband and male children. The infamous Moynihan Report solidified this stereotype with its theory that overly independent Black women were the source of disproportionate levels of Black poverty because they weren't capable of creating nuclear families with male breadwinners. Policymakers used the Black matriarch theory to justify a raft of policies to restrict welfare provisions, deflecting attention from structural barriers to fair employment, wages, and education for Black people<sup>19</sup>.

Another updated stereotype that distorts the public's opinion of Black women is the "Welfare Queen." The Welfare Queen is lazy and promiscuous, and has multiple children not because she loves them, but to access public benefits. Popularized in the 1980s<sup>20</sup>, the Welfare Queen signified undeserving Black women getting rich on taxpayers' backs. The stereotype generates opposition to a wide range of public assistance programs, such as food and housing assistance<sup>21</sup>.

These stereotypes of Black women dehumanize and criminalize them as essentially corrupt and immoral: young Black women or girls who made their bodies sexually available (i.e., promiscuous), and mothers who reproduced a culture of dependency (i.e., crack babies). Policymakers regularly redeploy these stereotypes to argue against public assistance programs<sup>22</sup>.

Media and public policy narratives consistently ignore or downplay the many systemic barriers that exist for Black women to "pull themselves up by their bootstraps," the ideal that nuclear families and individuals should provide for themselves through hard work

alone.<sup>23</sup> However, as the sections on housing and work (below) demonstrate, both private sector and government entities actively undermine Black families' and individuals' ability to build the type of intergenerational wealth white families have gained to create a stable financial foundation.<sup>24</sup>

Though laws have changed over the decades, sociologist Manning Marable reminds us that "the deep structure of white prejudice, power, and privilege forming the undemocratic foundation of most human interactions has not fundamentally been altered."<sup>25</sup> Even after the major legal reforms that emerged from the 1950s and 1960s civil rights movement, the "deep structure" Marable references continues to impact the lives of all Black people across different systems and with different impacts based on other intersecting identities, such as gender.



## Intersectionality

Intersectionality, a concept first developed by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw,<sup>26</sup> is a crucial tool for understanding Black women and girls' experiences and the disparities around missing and murdered women and girls. Crenshaw and other Black feminist scholars demonstrated that analysis of race or gender alone is insufficient to explain and understand Black women's historical and contemporary struggles for equality. Instead, observers need to examine the ways race and gender, as well as class, sexuality, and other factors, operate simultaneously to shape social outcomes for different groups and individuals.

Intersectionality enables us to recognize the fact that perceived group membership can make people vulnerable to various forms of bias, yet because we are simultaneously members of many groups, our complex identities can shape the specific way we each experience that bias.<sup>27</sup>

Legal and policy frameworks which refer to the category "women and girls" can sometimes fail to account for the experiences and

barriers Black women and girls' face in society and the need for race-and gender-specific policies to dismantle those barriers. For example, Crenshaw discovered how, because laws referred to employment discrimination as either based in gender or race, Black woman employees who experienced job discrimination were "unseen" by the court system that insisted they make claims based on one characteristic, though their experiences were due to both their race and gender.<sup>28</sup>

When we look at the issue of MMAAW through an intersectional lens, we can see how race and gender operate simultaneously within systems, generating disparities between Black women and girls and their racially privileged white counterparts. These disparities leave Black women and girls more vulnerable to violence than white women and girls. Four systems that contribute significantly to that vulnerability are work, housing, health, and the criminal justice system.



## Work and Wages

Though Black women have historically worked outside of their homes at higher rates than white women, from the end of slavery to the present day they earn less and have fewer opportunities for advancement in the workplace than their white peers. This disparity arises from the exploitation and devaluation of Black women's labor that began in slavery, as described in the previous sections. Since then, Black women and men have struggled to access and participate in labor markets, where they are often expected to work twice as hard but earn much less than white workers.

Wage disparities for Black men and women, as well as lack of inherited wealth set the stage for historically high numbers of Black women in the labor force. By 1880, over 30 percent of married Black women and over 70 percent of single Black women worked

outside the home, compared to only 7 percent of married white women and 23 percent of single White women.<sup>29</sup> Until the 1960s, a majority of Black women worked in farm labor, domestic service, and

**Crenshaw and other Black feminist scholars demonstrated that analysis of race or gender alone is insufficient to explain and understand Black women's historical and contemporary struggles for equality.**



to a lesser extent, in the lowest paying industrial jobs. Black women have historically been limited to “Black women’s work” that paid less than that performed by white women.<sup>30</sup>

Between 1940 and 1960, technological changes and the Great Migration of African Americans into the Northern and Western regions of the country helped facilitate some Black women’s transition to growing and higher-paying, white-female-dominated occupations in health care, clerical work, and other service sectors.<sup>31</sup> New civil rights protections and federal enforcement of affirmative action between 1960 and 1980 resulted in further increases of Black women in clerical occupations, and expanded access to management, professional, and technical occupations. Even with this new access, however, consistent patterns of discrimination meant that Black women were still overrepresented in the lowest paying jobs and had median earnings 21 percent below white women’s.<sup>32</sup> Indeed, the Center for American Progress estimated that over the course of their careers, African American women lose more than \$950,000 to the wage gap.<sup>33</sup>

Beginning in the 1980s through 2000, progress slowed. While African American women increased their average levels of education and increased their numbers in managerial and professional occupations, many administrative support and service occupations became characterized by an over-representation of Black women.<sup>34</sup> Even Black women with university degrees tend to be concentrated in jobs that have below-average wages.<sup>35</sup> Since 2000, there has been little change in the reduction of occupational segregation. In 2016, on average, 56 percent of Black women would need to change occupations to achieve occupational equity with white men.<sup>36</sup>

*“Even controlling for education, Black women still earn less than their white male counterparts. Among those with a bachelor’s degree, Black women only earn 65 percent of what comparable white men do, for instance. And among people with advanced degrees, Black women earn 70 percent of what white men do. In fact, Black women with advanced degrees have median weekly earnings less than white men with only a bachelor’s degree.”<sup>37</sup>*

**The Center for American Progress estimated that over the course of their careers, African American women lose more than \$950,000 to the wage gap.**

The combination of race and sex discrimination results in the continued concentration of Black women in the lowest-paying occupations in the general labor market or in gender-segregated markets such as teaching, social work, and nursing. Research also demonstrates that pervasive wage penalties based on occupational racial and gender compositions are not rooted in differences in work quality or productivity, but rather in social norms and stereotypes.<sup>38</sup>

Occupational segregation by gender is significant in Minnesota, as state and national workforce development programs reinforce gender and race-based occupational segregation. The Women’s Foundation of Minnesota found that women are more likely to work in care and service-related occupations that are underpaid. Women account for over 75 percent of employment in healthcare, personal care, and service occupations, and more than 70 percent of employment in office and administrative support, education, and library occupations.<sup>39</sup> Occupational segregation results in lower wages for women in Minnesota with workers in female-dominated sectors earning \$18 per hour, while workers in male-

dominated sectors earn \$21 per hour. While one in five of Minnesota’s white women work in service jobs, more than one in three African American women work in service fields.<sup>40</sup>

According to the Center for Urban and Regional Affairs, though Black women today are carrying the largest economic weight in their communities, they have been impacted the most by the significant gaps between white and Black economic success. Although Black women across the nation and in Minnesota are growing small businesses faster than any of their peer groups, male or female, they are not retaining or expanding those businesses while often holding multiple forms of employment.<sup>41</sup> This means that Black women are denied opportunities to build savings and other forms of wealth that can be used in old age or passed down to future generations. The housing system exacerbates income and wealth inequality, and leads to negative intergenerational impacts on Black women and girls’ economic security.



## Housing

One of the legacies of labor exploitation and discrimination is less opportunity to build savings to pay for quality housing. Safe, affordable housing is one of the most important factors in quality of life and protection from violence. In the United States, homeownership is one of the main vehicles for individuals and families to accrue and pass down wealth, providing further stability across generations. However, Black individuals and families have been excluded from equal housing and property investment opportunities by segregation, discriminatory landlords, threats of violence, redlining, undervaluation, restrictive covenants, and predatory lending practices.<sup>42</sup> These practices were supported, tacitly and explicitly, by state and federal agencies.

The Federal Housing Administration (FHA) used redlining to mark Black-majority neighborhoods as “high risk” for federal-backed home loans. Between 1934 and 1962, “98 percent of federally backed FHA loans nationally went to white buyers.” This resulted in a system where both the private sector and government were actively subsidizing white homeownership while erecting “barriers to exclude Black households from the same opportunities.”<sup>43</sup> In the same vein, counties and states allowed deeds to list restrictive covenants that forbade white homeowners from selling property to Black or Jewish families. Thus, racist policies and practices severely limited the housing options for Black people regardless of income levels. A 2020 study by the Brookings Institute estimates that due to these and other practices of economic discrimination, “the net worth of a typical white family is nearly ten times greater than that of a Black family” today.<sup>44</sup>

Unjust housing policies and practices have had particularly devastating consequences for the safety and stability of Black households in Minnesota. Racial covenants were employed in Minnesota housing contracts since 1910 and persisted until they were decreed illegal in 1962. Beyond legal discrimination, white

homeowners and neighborhood associates used intimidation and violence to prevent and deter middle class Black buyers from purchasing homes. The case of the Lee family is the most infamous of these. In 1931, a mob of 4,000 white people organized to try to force the Lees from their home, sending a clear message to other Black homebuyers in the process.<sup>45</sup>

Though Minnesota has one of the nation’s highest overall homeownership rates, it is also home to the fourth largest disparity in BIPOC homeownership and the second largest income gap between Black and white households.<sup>46</sup> Furthermore, BIPOC households are almost twice as likely as white ones to be “cost-

burdened,” which is when a household pays more than 30 percent of its total income on housing costs, leaving less money for basic needs like food, medicine, and transportation.<sup>47</sup>

Despite reforms like the 1968 Fair Housing Act, studies and lawsuits reveal that realtors regularly steer Black homebuyers away from white-majority neighborhoods. Private lenders offer Black and Latinx mortgage applicants subprime and other risky loan

products even when their income and credit scores qualify for lower interest and federally backed loans.<sup>48</sup> Recent research reports emphasize that housing inequality harms future generations:

*“All of this matters because wealth confers benefits that go beyond those that come with family income. Wealth is a safety net that keeps life from being derailed by temporary setbacks and the loss of income... Family wealth allows people (especially young adults who have recently entered the labor force) to access housing and safe neighborhoods with good schools, thereby enhancing the prospects of their own children... In addition, the fact that intergenerational transfer of wealth is lightly taxed means that historical gaps persist over generations. Furthermore, inadequate investments in the public goods that facilitate economic mobility make it harder to erase past gaps.”<sup>49</sup>*

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These inequalities mean Black women and their families are more likely to experience greater economic hardship if they lose a job, have a health crisis, or try to help other family members get back on their feet.<sup>50</sup> Minnesota's State of the State's Housing 2019 report and the House Select Committee on Racial Justice noted that racial housing disparities "created severe and damaging impacts that disproportionately impact BIPOC Minnesotans."<sup>51</sup>

The picture is particularly bleak for lower income renters. Minnesota has a serious shortage of affordable housing for sale or rent. Government resources to subsidize rental housing have decreased, and enforcement of codes to prevent landlord abuse and evictions are inconsistent. Add to that the toxic combination of income inequality, skyrocketing rent prices, and lack of government enforcement of existing laws, and you have more people at risk of having to choose between housing, food, and health care.<sup>52</sup> Observers argue that Minnesota is in a housing crisis, "with fewer and fewer affordable options available, the demand continues to rise." At the same time, government resources to support renters, as well as shortages in resources like EBT and other financial programs exacerbate the crisis for low income households who are at risk of not being able to afford housing as well as rising food, health care, and transportation costs.<sup>53</sup>

Nationwide, Black and Latinx renters are at higher risk of eviction, and Black women experience the highest eviction rates. Pre-COVID 19, Black women were evicted at higher rates than other groups, with 1 in 5 Black female renters reporting that they have experienced eviction compared with 1 in 12 Hispanic/Latinx women and 1 in 15 white women.<sup>54</sup>

This pattern persists in Minnesota as well: "Nearly half of all evictions experienced by people living in Minnesota over the past three years occurred in just two zip codes where people of color comprise more than half of the population and individuals experience high rates of poverty. Furthermore, African Americans make up 39 percent of adults experiencing homelessness, but only five percent of adults statewide."<sup>55</sup>

The housing crisis has hit Black women especially hard. Research shows that women are evicted from their homes at an annual rate 16 percent higher than men. Eviction disparities are especially higher for Black women, who are evicted 36 percent more than Black men.<sup>56</sup> In Minnesota, homeownership disparities affect single-mother households from communities of color the most.

These families are less likely to be living in a home they own and are therefore missing out on a key building block of wealth.

Eviction and other forms of housing instability can trigger a host of negative outcomes for parents and children. Eviction creates a legal record that can be used by landlords to reject future rental applications, further decreasing housing options and exposing evicted families to other scrutiny in the system. Eviction is associated with higher risk of high blood pressure, sexually transmitted diseases, depression, anxiety, exposure to violence, and higher mortality rates. For women specifically, "eviction is associated with physical and sexual assault, drug use, mental illness, and future housing precarity."<sup>57</sup> For these reasons, the Minnesota's Division of Child and Family Health's assessment of maternal and child wellbeing selected housing as a top funding priority to improve health outcomes, stating: "Housing is connected to every aspect of people's lives and is a critical factor in financial security, academic success, and health... Every person in Minnesota should have a safe, affordable place to live in a thriving community. But not all do."<sup>58</sup>



## Health

*"Across the lifespan and for all measures, Indigenous, Black, and Latinx Minnesotans experience the largest [health] disparities. While Minnesota is one of the healthiest states in the nation, at the same time it is home to some of the worst health disparities..."<sup>59</sup>*

Black women and girls of all incomes and educational backgrounds suffer worse health due to racism, biased treatment influenced by racial stereotypes, and the continued influence of scientific racism. Recent health research suggests that both experiences of racism as well as racist stereotypes held by health workers diminish Black women's health outcomes.<sup>60</sup> Even with consistent access to health care resources, Black women and girls are adversely impacted by the persistent stresses of living in a racist, sexist society. Research on allostatic load – defined as the "cumulative wear and tear on the body's systems owing to repeated adaptation to stressors" – shows exposure to racism (such as stereotyping, job discrimination, racist insults) results in health deterioration.<sup>61</sup> In other words, racism contributes to local and national racial disparities in health: Black people have higher rates of hypertension, high cholesterol, and type-2 diabetes, than white people. Black women – whether rich or poor – have the highest probability for high allostatic loads.<sup>62</sup>

In addition to the unhealthy effects of racism, environmental inequalities negatively impact Black health. Nationwide, Black people are more likely to live in adverse environmental conditions, such as proximity to contaminated industrial sites that have not been remediated or are in violation of orders to reduce toxic waste.<sup>63</sup> Black Minnesotans are more likely to live in environments with poor air quality; death due to asthma is four times higher for Black Minnesotans than white Minnesotans. And in the COVID-19 pandemic, Black and Latinx Minnesotans “have the highest age-adjusted rates of hospitalization.”<sup>64</sup>

Unfortunately, many of the medical staff responsible for intervening are often under the influence of the same racist stereotypes that emerged in the nineteenth century. Significant numbers of medical students and professionals still believe racist science myths that Black women’s bodies are stronger than white women’s bodies and less susceptible to pain.<sup>65</sup>

Other false beliefs include:

“Blacks’ skin is thicker than whites,” “Blacks’ nerve endings are less sensitive than whites,” and “Blacks have stronger immune systems than whites.” Medical staff under the influence of these beliefs often refuse to give Black patients adequate pain medication and make other poor judgment calls about treatment.

In its report on the status of upholding obligations set under the International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD), the United Nations declared that “The Government of the United States has failed to uphold its obligations to protect women and children of ethnic and racial minorities.” Extensive research shows that this failure starts in the healthcare system even before birth for Black women and girls.

Black women in the U.S. are three to four times more likely to die in childbirth, and twice as likely to suffer infant loss than white women.<sup>66</sup> Regardless of age, education, wealth or health care resources, Black women and their babies are dying at much higher rates than their white peers. Black women with PhDs are more likely to die during childbirth or have their infants die than white women with only a high school degree.<sup>67</sup> In Minnesota, the maternal mortality rate for Black

mothers is 2.3 times that of white mothers, and the infant mortality rate for Black babies is more than twice that of white infants.<sup>68</sup>

The Center for American Progress reviewed multiple studies and found that Black women and other women of color consistently report that they experience “bias and discrimination based on their race and gender in health care settings. . . feeling invisible or unheard when asking medical providers for help and when expressing issues with pain or discomfort during and after the birthing process.”<sup>69</sup> Doctors and nurses accuse Black women of being stubborn or difficult when they ask questions or ask for additional pain medication. The same

studies found correlations between racial biases of health care staff and lower quality of care for women of color. The report underscores that this bias extends even to Black infants who are seriously ill: White infants receive higher quality of care than infants of color.

These studies, along with the reported experiences of medical racism by high-status Black women like Serena Williams,<sup>70</sup> demonstrate how the stereotypes of the Jezebel

and Sapphire operate in the health system. As sociologist Tressie Mae Cottom summarizes, these stereotypes aren’t just found in the media: they are actively contributing to “the process of reproducing structural inequalities in our everyday lives. . . The prevalent perception of black women as unruly bodies and incompetent caretakers” degrades the quality-of-care physicians give Black women patients.<sup>71</sup>

For over a century, eugenicist doctors forcibly sterilized Black women and other women they saw as “overbreeding” inferior children or judged as incapable of motherhood.<sup>72</sup> In more recent decades, doctors, social workers, and judges have coerced Black women into being sterilized or using experimental chemical birth control like Norplant as conditions for obtaining social welfare benefits.<sup>73</sup> In her review of these policies, Elizabeth Jekanowski concluded that such policies – which continued through the 1990s and early 2000s – forced “Black women to choose between feeding their families and maintaining their own bodily autonomy. . . cruel examples of American politics denigrating Black women’s humanity.” Research and lived experiences continue to show that staff and professionals in a host of health care institutions continue to stereotype Black women as in need of external control.

**In Minnesota, the maternal mortality rate for Black mothers is 2.3 times that of white mothers, and the infant mortality rate for Black babies is more than twice that of white infants.**



## Criminal Justice System

As discussed earlier, the damaging history of stereotyping Black women and girls as defiant, angry, loud, and untrustworthy contributes to their criminalization. Black people in general are subjected to racial profiling across sectors, from police who disproportionately pull Black drivers over – and are less likely to find evidence of criminal acts<sup>74</sup> – to store employees who assume Black customers are more likely to shoplift,<sup>75</sup> the stereotype of Black criminality is deeply ingrained in the American mind.<sup>76</sup> This intense stereotyping means that Black women and girls are fully aware that if they report crimes to law enforcement or other sources, they are likely to be met with disbelief or disdain. Given that we know most sexual assaults and domestic violence incidents go unreported, regardless of race, it is imperative to see how the impact of negative stereotypes and histories of state violence deter Black women and girls from reporting crimes against them.

### School Pushout to Prison: Education and Criminalization of Black Girls

Studies suggest that the criminalization of Black women begins when they are girls in school. First, the school-to-prison pipeline tracks students from educational institutions through discipline, truancy, and arrest; a statistic that can be readily seen in Black girls being 10 times more likely to be suspended than white girls in Minnesota.<sup>77</sup> Then, it tracks them into the juvenile justice system. Insufficient mental health resources, teacher bias, and racially biased school policies all play a role in the increased discipline, suspension, and expulsion rates that Black girls experience in schools. The consequences of exclusion from school activities due to disciplinary actions can be severe, ranging from lower academic performance to early involvement with the criminal justice system.<sup>78</sup>

Black girls are suspended six times as often, and only 2 percent of white females are subjected to exclusionary suspensions compared to 12 percent of Black girls.<sup>79</sup> The incarceration rate for all girls is 43 per 100,000 girls (those between ages 10 and 17). However, the incarceration rate for Black girls is more than three times as likely as their white peers to be incarcerated (94 per 100,000).<sup>80</sup> In Minnesota, the statistics are similar: Black girls are more than three times as likely to be sent to the office than white peers, more than

seven times more likely to be given in-school suspension, and over five times more likely to get out of school suspension.<sup>81</sup>

Disproportionately high rates of discipline and incarceration for Black girls are connected to adultification: adults view Black girls as older than their white peers, and thus need less protection and support because they are perceived to be more independent and know more about adult topics.<sup>82</sup> Studies show that teachers and other adults perceive Black girls as less innocent and more adult-like than their white peers. Black girls sometimes get less attention than their male peers because they are perceived to be more socially mature and self-reliant.<sup>83</sup>

**Disproportionately high rates of discipline and incarceration for Black girls are connected to adultification: adults view Black girls as older than their white peers, and thus need less protection and support because they are perceived to be more independent and know more about adult topics.**

Given established discrepancies in law enforcement and juvenile court practices that disproportionately affect Black girls, the perception of Black girls as less innocent and more adult-like may contribute to more punitive exercise of discretion by those in positions of authority, greater use of force, and harsher penalties.<sup>84</sup>

When the priority is discipline over educational attainment, Black girls miss out on opportunities to be engaged in school and are set up to suffer future losses in income and health benefits associated with education. In addition, some see harsh disciplinary actions as anti-Black.<sup>85</sup> Black advocates and legal researchers have linked the adultification bias to their harsher treatment in school and by the criminal justice system.<sup>86</sup>

School pushout and other aspects of adultification of Black girls have implications in the criminal justice system and the issue of sexual exploitation. Not completing high school increases risk for abuse and violence as well as involvement with the criminal justice system. Because schools disproportionately push out Black girls, they are more likely to be exposed to these harms than their white peers. For example, from 2008 to 2013, over half of the Minneapolis Police Department reported cases of minor sex trafficking were African American and African-born girls, the highest percentage among all racial groups.<sup>87</sup> But this reporting does not necessarily mean that Black girls and women who are trafficked get the help and support they need from law enforcement.

## Sex Trafficking

U.S. law defines human trafficking as using force, fraud, or coercion to compel a person into commercial sex acts or labor against their will. The Action-Means-Purpose Model can help understand the definition used by federal law:

*"Human trafficking occurs when a perpetrator, often referred to as a trafficker, takes Action and then employs the Means of force, fraud, or coercion for the Purpose of compelling the victim to provide commercial sex acts or labor or services."<sup>88</sup>*

The State of Minnesota defines trafficking differently. It considers sex trafficking "by any means."<sup>89</sup>

Additionally, Minnesota passed the Safe Harbor for Sexually Exploited Youth Law which went into effect in August 2014. Before the Safe Harbor law, sexually exploited and trafficked youth could be considered criminals for trading sex. The Safe Harbor law treats sexually exploited youth as victims entitled to services and support. In 2016, the state legislature increased access to Safe Harbor services through age 24.

Even with such laws in place, Black women and girls experience higher rates of sexual exploitation. From the sexualization of Black women's bodies since slavery to the lasting stereotypes of Black women's hypersexuality,<sup>91</sup> it is clear why 40 percent of sex trafficking victims and survivors nationally are Black women.<sup>91</sup> While they make

up less than 15 percent of the U.S. population, in 2019, FBI statistics showed that 51 percent of all prostitution arrests for youth under age 18 are of Black youth. In Minnesota, at least 5,000 youth reported trading sex for something of value, such as shelter or money: 1.7 percent of those reporting traded sex were Black, African, or African American, and 1.3 percent were cisgender girls.<sup>92</sup>

The disproportionate rates result from intersecting factors that put Black women and girls at an increased vulnerability to sex trafficking. These factors include a history of sexual or physical abuse, homelessness, unstable housing, low socioeconomic status, and involvement in child welfare systems and criminal systems.<sup>93</sup> Because there is an overrepresentation of Black women and girls in these systems (i.e. Black women are five times more likely to be incarcerated than white women;<sup>94</sup> 23 percent of youth in foster care are Black<sup>95</sup> etc.), it means they are particularly at risk. While these disproportionate rates are indisputable, Black women and girls often go unnoticed as victims of sex trafficking. Instead, the focus on the sex trafficking victim is a young, white woman.<sup>96</sup>

**Because of stereotypes about Black criminality and Black women's hypersexuality, Black girls who are subjected to sexual exploitation are often labeled as offenders rather than victims.**

Research conducted on commercial sexual exploitation in Minnesota cites the sexual colonization, exploitation and abuse of women of color as reasons why race is a risk factor in sex trafficking in Minnesota.<sup>97</sup> There are a variety of social factors that raise the risk of women and girls being trafficked. These factors include racialized gender stereotypes of women of color. Such

stereotypes create and reinforce the belief that women of color are naturally suited for the sex trade, always available, and willing to provide sexual services.<sup>98</sup> These racialized gender stereotypes fuel sexual fetishes and the eroticization of women of color, contributing to the demand for them in sex trafficking. Sex buyers are predominantly white men, and some seek out Black women or American Indian women to fulfill their racist and violent fantasies.<sup>99</sup>

The historical constructions of Black girls as more adult, less innocent, and more sexually aware have shaped anti-trafficking law enforcement practices, meaning the practices functionally exclude Black girls from protection because enforcement agents do not see

them as true victims.<sup>100</sup> Ignoring the connection between racism and trafficking, especially for minors undermines Black youth's identity as sex trafficking victims.<sup>101</sup> Because of stereotypes about Black criminality and Black women's hypersexuality, Black girls who are subjected to sexual exploitation are often labeled as offenders rather than victims.<sup>102</sup> As a result, the factors that push Black girls into being vulnerable to sex trafficking and other criminal exploitation, like housing insecurity and school pushout, go ignored.

There is reason to believe law enforcement agents in Minnesota are operating under the influence of these stereotypes. A 2022 investigation into the City of Minneapolis and the Minneapolis Police Department by the Minnesota Department of Human Rights revealed that according to body worn camera footage and interviews with MPD officers and City leaders, some MPD officers and supervisors would use misogynistic language and rely on misogynistic stereotypes. In social media posts and messages, MPD officers used language to further racial stereotypes associated with Black people, especially Black women.<sup>103</sup>

This resonates with the history recounted earlier: throughout United States history, raping Black women was not a crime. Indeed, laws existed to prevent the prosecution of men who raped enslaved women.<sup>104</sup> White male civilians resented the social, economic, and political changes brought by the Civil War and used rape as an instrument of terror to regain and solidify power and privileges believed to be lost due to the abolition of slavery. This history contributes to the pattern of poor investigation of crimes against Black women, crimes that are sometimes ignored entirely – even when there is a potential serial murderer preying on Black women.<sup>105</sup>

Some studies estimate that for every Black woman who reports sexual assault, there are 15 others who do not, due to fears of additional harms from law enforcement, either to themselves or their community.<sup>106</sup> The historical record of Black women not being

viewed as victims and stereotypes of Black women as angry or hypersexual, as well as more recent patterns and evidence, suggest that many law enforcement and court officers still do not perceive Black women as credible victims.

## Police, Prosecutors and Courts

As explored earlier, for most of the history of the United States, the police and courts did not consider it a crime to rape a Black woman. Indeed, as non-citizens during slavery and second-class citizens in the century before the modern civil rights movement, Black women, men and children could not expect any recourse in the courts, particularly if their claim was against a white defendant. Additionally, deeply entrenched stereotypes of Black criminality

have and continue to warp views of Black victims, exposing them to harsh judgment by even those who are meant to investigate and prosecute cases on their behalf. Finally, segregated law schools and underfunded historically Black colleges and Universities (HBCUs) meant few Black people could aspire to the legal profession. Thus, to this day there are disproportionately fewer Black lawyers, judges, prosecutors, and other figures in the court system, meaning Black victims usually find themselves questioned by white lawyers, judges, and being

evaluated by majority white juries. This history, as well as media coverage of high-profile cases, such as Marissa Alexander's,<sup>107</sup> can make it difficult for Black women and girls to trust they will find advocates who will take their cases seriously when and if they report violent incidents or threats to their lives to authorities.

Studies of policing, prosecutions and sentencing reveal racial differences in how Black women victims are perceived and treated by police, and how their assailants are charged and sentenced by the courts.

**There are disproportionately fewer Black lawyers, judges, prosecutors, and other figures in the court system, meaning Black victims usually find themselves questioned by white lawyers, judges, and being evaluated by majority white juries.**

## Policing

Black women have reason to be wary of the police, even when they try to report domestic violence assaults. In their review of research on race and criminal justice system responses to sexual assault, Shaw and Lee summarize how prior studies find police were more likely to label victims of color as “uncooperative or otherwise disruptive to the investigation” which resulted in “fewer investigative steps being completed throughout the investigation.”<sup>108</sup>

As Amber Simmons’ research summarized: “Police officers, in particular, have a contentious history with Black women in America... Officers have a tendency to 1) not believe Black female victims of domestic violence, 2) think they are the aggressor in some way, or 3) refuse to help or report abuse of Black women when it is encountered.”<sup>109</sup>

Police are more likely to label Black women as “aggressors” during a domestic violence incident, subjecting Black women to mandatory arrest at higher rates than white women who call for help.<sup>110</sup> Changing some of the mandatory arrest provisions of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) would help alleviate some of the issue, but it would neither solve either the underlying problem of racial and gender stereotyping nor resolve the issue of police brutality against Black women.

## Police Violence against Black Women

Black women’s history of enslavement is the root of their interaction with the state and law enforcement agents.<sup>111</sup> The violence shows up in the modern context through police killings of Black women, interactions with law enforcement marked by violence, assault, and injury, unlawful arrests, and the conviction and incarceration of Black women for defending themselves against non-police violence.

More than 57% of Black women killed by police are unarmed, a higher percentage than any other racial group shot by police when unarmed.<sup>112</sup> Black men and women are racially profiled by police, resulting in higher rates of contact and potential exposure to harassment, brutality, and arrest. Racial and gender bias explains

heightened searches when stopped by the Minneapolis Police Department<sup>113</sup> and police violence against Black women. However, understanding the reality of Black women experiencing state violence is challenging due to the inadequacy of law enforcement data in the tracking of police killings, a lack of a readily available database outlining a complete list of Black women killed at the hands of police, or data collected on gender-based police violence.<sup>114</sup>

According to the Washington Post’s database of deadly police shootings, women account for less than 4 percent of fatal police shootings,<sup>115</sup> but almost 20 percent of the women fatally shot by

police are Black,<sup>116</sup> though Black women make up only 13 percent of the women population in the U.S. Since 2015, police have killed at least 51 Black women. Yet, only half of the Black women killed received national media attention in the 60 days surrounding their death. According to FiveThirtyEight’s analysis of media reports, the coverage was limited to five or fewer

**Police are more likely to label Black women as “aggressors” during a domestic violence incident, subjecting Black women to mandatory arrest at higher rates than white women who call for help.**

stories.<sup>117</sup> This lack of coverage of police killings of Black women is shocking and explained in part by research on news media coverage of Black people, which over-represents Black people as criminals.<sup>118</sup> These findings similarly reflect the results of a 2019 survey of Minnesota-based journalists, which suggested that the Minnesota news media tends to over-represent white Minnesotans in a positive light and over-represent Black Minnesotans in a negative light.<sup>119</sup>

Police killings of Black people often receive national media attention today due to the persistence of the #BlackLivesMatter movement. However, most of the attention focuses on police killings of Black men.<sup>120</sup> Black women throughout history have always been some of the most visible leaders fighting for civil rights and racial justice. However, they are too often the forgotten victims of police violence. While Black women are subject to both racism and sexism, their experiences are not given the same platform in comparison to Black men in anti-racist movements (e.g. Black Lives Matter) or to white women in anti-sexist movements (e.g. #MeToo).<sup>121</sup>



The African American Research Forum's report, *Say Her Name: Resisting Police Brutality Against Black Women*, analyzes Black women's experiences of police violence. The report's primary purpose is to mobilize around the stories of Black women who have lost their lives to police violence, hence the supporting #SayHerName campaign.<sup>122</sup> Black women and their specific experiences of police violence are often erased from demonstrations, discussions, and demands to broaden society's understanding of who is deserving of empathy and justice.<sup>123</sup>

### Prosecutors and Courts

When sexual assault crimes do lead to charges, studies find that prosecutorial action is uneven based on the race of the victim.<sup>124</sup> Other studies suggest that implicit biases of judges and prosecutors lead to charging disparities when victims are Black women: the strong, angry Black woman stereotype is the opposite of the prototype of the battered white woman, and so prosecutors and judges may not believe Black women were significantly harmed or deserving of full protection. As law professor Jeffrey Pokorak argues, this can lead to biases in charges that are lighter or dropped due to prosecutors not believing they have enough to convince a jury a Black woman was a real victim.<sup>125</sup> An implicit bias study conducted with over 100 trial judges across three jurisdictions found white judges had a strong pro-white bias.<sup>126</sup> Similarly, researchers at the Brandeis University Feminist Sexual Ethics Project found in their review of literature that prosecutors pursued fewer cases when a Black woman was the victim as in cases where a white woman was attacked.<sup>127</sup>

Even after death, studies suggest courts do not value victims of color as much as white victims:

According to a review of studies by Claire Kebodeaux, even when details of the crime are controlled for, the race and sex of victims matter in the sentencing of homicide cases. For example, in vehicular homicide cases, even with "all other variables being equal, a drunk driver who kills a black victim will receive a sentence 50 percent shorter than one who kills a white victim."<sup>128</sup>

### Missing White Woman Syndrome

While Black women are overrepresented as welfare queens and criminalized in news media, mainstream media provide an "overabundance of coverage ... dedicate[d] to missing person cases of white women." This overabundance of missing white women and

girls and the lack of coverage of missing people of color is referred to as "missing white woman syndrome."<sup>129</sup> In addition, there is empirical evidence to support the perception of demographic disparities in abduction news. For example, the media provide less coverage of missing Black people than other missing persons. When news outlets do pick up stories of missing Black people, the coverage is lower intensity than for white victims.<sup>130</sup>

Local news coverage disproportionately represents Black men and women as criminals, Black missing children are significantly underrepresented in news coverage compared to national statistics.<sup>131</sup> For example, only 19.5 percent of missing children cases covered in news media were cases of African-American victims, 33 percent of reported incidents involve missing Black children.<sup>132</sup>

The Missing White Woman Syndrome reflects and reinforces race and gender hierarchies that situate white women and girls as feminine, innocent, people who deserve and need protection.<sup>133</sup> Not only are there disproportionately more news stories of missing white women and girls, but also the tone of media coverage is different. Black women and girls are more likely to be blamed for purportedly putting themselves in harm's way, a type of victim blaming that

**Black women and girls are more likely to be blamed for purportedly putting themselves in harm's way, a type of victim blaming that positions them as less innocent and less worthy of rescue.**

positions them as less innocent and less worthy of rescue.<sup>134</sup> Racism and misogynoir (biases based on the intersection of race and gender) impact how society determines who is a victim and who deserves empathy.<sup>135</sup> The legacy of racist stereotypes and policies mean that missing Black women and girls are not humanized in the same way as their white counterparts.

Black women are also often invisible in their leadership and contributions to racial justice movements.<sup>136</sup> The absence of acknowledgment of Black women's leadership in supporting, creating, and leading these movements also reinforces the belief that Black women can't address these problems and do not require any specific attention when it comes to their victimization.

**“Get off my back, I’m trying. Instead of shunning me, offer me help. You tell me I better go do this, or do that and I have 2 days to do that, you know? And then I get everything done and you still won’t get off my back. I’m already broken. It was traumatic.”**

Lived Experience Interview

Reflection questions

▶ **How can professionals hold space for and give grace to Black women and girls who are experiencing trauma, even if they do not share the same cultural background or life experiences?**

**How might they grow as individual leaders in their field if they had the skills to comprehend the experiences of people who are not like them?**

# KEY FINDINGS FROM INTERVIEWS

## Alignment between Lived Experience & Key Informants

This section describes the ways Lived Experience and Key Informant interview data resonated with each other, albeit with different emphases and nuances.

Three major aligned themes emerged from our analysis:

- Hire people who care about and reflect the community
- Require training for professionals working in MMAAW-related domains
- Increase resources for the work, especially specific support for Black women and girls

There is agreement across Lived Experience (LE) and Key Informant (KI) data, but the ways these themes were communicated by the two groups contained subtle and stark differences. These differences are made clear when we center Black women and girls and compare their lived experiences of systems to the ways professionals in those systems explain the ways those systems work or don't work for Black women and girls.

### THREE MAJOR THEMES:



**Hire people who care about & reflect the community**



**Require training for professionals working in MMAAW-related domains**



**Increase resources for the work, especially specific support for Black women & girls**

## Theme 1: Hiring

Both the Lived Experience and Key Informant participants called for more Black practitioners and/or Black-led organizations to be hired across institutions. However, the LE data emphasizes how important it is for those people not just to be merely “diverse” or “representative” demographically, but also to have competencies and characteristics that convey trustworthiness, compassion, and willingness to listen to Black women and girls without judgment.

Lived Experience voices brought to light the problems of culture within the systems, how actors in those systems actually interact with Black women and girls and how they make them feel: factors that are at the core of why there is a trust problem. The competencies and characteristics LE and some KI spoke of are not inborn, but learned, which suggests a need for improved training and continuing education for new and existing staff.



**Lived Experience:**  
**Hire people who will treat us humanely**



**Key Informants:**  
**‘Mirror’ the community to build trust**



**Black Key Informants:**  
**Hire staff who won't stereotype Black women and girls**

## Lived Experience: Hire people who will treat us humanely

*LE ZEN BIN1<sup>134</sup>: You know I need somebody that looks like me and my daughter, you know, I wanna be able to go into a bank where I can guarantee it's owned by someone who looks like me and my daughter and treats, someone who could relate to what my life is like.*

Across the board LE and KI talked about hiring more staff that “reflect the community” or who are Black women themselves. The key difference in their discussion of hiring needs was that Lived Experience speakers brought to the fore the multiple harmful interactions they have had with staff. Staffers made them feel unwelcome, incompetent, or unworthy of help. In contrast, the Key Informants were more likely to speak generally about needing more diversity to be more representative of the Black community and to build trust with Black women and girls.

*LE-ZEN BIN 1: “You have to be bleeding to be heard.”*

*LE DAP1: After that ... these two lady officers showed up, and they said that they do follow up, some domestic violence review, and want to make sure you're okay, and make sure you're safe. So that only happened to me one time. But I loved it, I loved it because it made me feel safe, and maybe feel like you know somebody cared, you know? ... [And] that only happened one time. I just wondered, okay, what is going on? And then so at the court precinct [I learned] there's only one domestic abuse lady.*

*LE 13: It's about giving them resources and listening to them without looking down on them, because the next few minutes you'll walk away and then there's a negative comment [left] behind. [I]t's just totally disrespectful. And it's like, what do you do when you are in a situation like that? How do you— because not only have you been abused by your abuser, or whatever the situation may be, now you've been abused by a facility that's not genuinely caring... [D]id you honestly feel my pain when I was trying to express to you what I was going through?*

As they gave testimony to the ways they were treated, Black women and girls defined the qualities and competencies staff need to have. These qualities and competencies are in short supply in their experiences with systems. They want institutions to hire people who:

- Do not endorse or reinforce negative stereotypes of Black women
- Are not patronizing or pitying
- Are educated about Black women's struggles, Black history and community
- Have expertise in trauma and cultural competence
- Make Black women feel safe and cared for when they are in crisis
- Ask relevant questions about their needs rather than interrogating them
- Have a sense of accountability
- Listen to and trust survivors of violence

Lived experience data show that Black women and girls continue to be impacted by the racist, sexist, “controlling images” that portray them as incompetent mothers, oblivious to pain, angry and defiant. The prevailing prototype of a female victim is still based on the dominant framework for white femininity, and these women testify to the ways that dynamic continues to disadvantage them when they deal with staff. Black women and girls' experiences with systems and dominant social norms inspire distrust of the systems and individuals working within them.

*LE 5: There are stereotypes of us in the media. It tells us ‘you need to be this type of Black woman.’*

*LE ZEN BIN 1: I don't want no one's pity, but I want to be treated fairly and equal you know cause no matter what, I have no choice but I have to survive.*

Specifically, they do not trust that they will even be seen as needing help or deserving of help, let alone get the kind of help they need even if they are deemed worthy. Actors and processes in the system make them feel like they will not get help until it's too late.

*LE ZEN BIN 1: I feel that we have to really be in crisis to get assistance, to get the help that we need. Because without being in crisis, our needs aren't really handled like everyone else's.*

The interactions they have with system actors make them feel like their lives are not valued in the same way that other women are valued. They are made to feel like they aren't worth the time or money it takes to provide safe shelter, medical care, or that system actors are more concerned with processing payments or maximizing efficiency rather than repairing or preventing harm.

*LE DAP 1: We know insurance works to get [them] more money.*

They don't trust system actors to treat them with care or consistency, especially if they don't conform to expectations of likability.

*LE ZEN BIN 1: [U]nless you're like, really liked by some of the staff, all the resources weren't readily available to you, unless you knew the specific questions to ask.*

Lived experience with staffers who stereotyped, hurried, disrespected or criticized Black women and girls generated distrust and low expectations for assistance. These are the reasons LE participants recommended hiring both Black staff and better trained staff, the latter of which will be discussed in the training section of the findings.

### **Key Informants: 'Mirror' the community to build trust**

*KI08 (Service Provider–Trafficking):<sup>135</sup> Absolutely. It's important that we paint a portrait or be a mirror to the girls that we service, when they come into our program. So, it's important that they see somebody that looks like them.*

Though both groups advocated for hiring additional Black and BIPOC staff, Key Informants were more likely to discuss this need in general terms about the benefits of diversifying their organization or subcontractors working with their organization to build trust with Black women and girls.

When KIs called for more "diverse" hiring practices, some specifically suggested hiring more Black people as staff. Others spoke about contracting with Black-led organizations to ensure that Black women and girls were seen and served by folks who share

some of their experiences or background. A few suggested that Black community organizations would be more trusted or could be a "bridge" to state agencies that do not have trust of Black women and girls.

*KI16 (Child Welfare Professional): And you know we right now are revamping how we are hiring staff to support. You know the families that we work with, and you know, as I said, my team is very diverse, but not all teams, you know, that are serving the families in child protection with ongoing case management are diverse. And I think that Hennepin County does a very good job at being intentional about not just professional background or degrees, right? That our child protection, child welfare related, but lived experiences and other work experiences that support communities of color. And so I think we're more intentional about that. But really to have a workforce that looks like the people we are serving as something that we strive to do.*

Some provided examples of successful revisions to hiring practices and partnerships with Black or more diverse community organizations.

*KI15 (Child Welfare Professional): In Hennepin County, we have been working with Village Arms as well, and I think that is an amazing entity to bring in the cases that are with African American families. And so what we have, what I also think, that is very helpful to families, and what my supervisor has told me has been very helpful, is . . . for them to see somebody that looks like them to help them navigate this situation . . . Village Arms has been doing phenomenal work with our team. And we have even been asked to make sure we assign a Village Arms worker when it's an African American family.*

While the KIs acknowledged there is a lack of trust with Black women and girls, many were not able to explicitly articulate how their own role or agency might feed into that history of distrust. For example a KI from the law enforcement field talked about mistrust in this way:

*KI12 (Law Enforcement Office/Support): You know I've been asked over the years- how do we fix this? How do we fix mistrust? . . . I think a lot of it is communication: being able to have the conversations, the real conversations. Tell me what's not working. Tell me what is working. Tell me why you don't trust me sitting here?*

This remark is divorced from the historical context of institutional neglect and violence that Black women and girls and their allies have spoken out about for decades. The “real conversations” have happened in response to a variety of crises, most recently in the wake of the murder of George Floyd and dialogues about the state’s forced displacement of Black residents from Rondo in St. Paul, restrictive covenants in Minneapolis, and more. The passage also implies that the burden is on Black communities to explain their position, not on the state and its agents who have inflicted harm.

### **Black Key Informants: Hire staff who won’t stereotype Black women and girls**

Like their non-Black counterparts, Black women KIs suggested that having Black staffers would build trust and rapport with Black women and girls seeking services.

*K115 (Child Welfare Professional): We need more people going into the field so when these situations arise with families that they can get or request a Black or brown worker. If we just call a spade a spade, I have heard so many families say, ‘you know I got this white worker, and I don’t trust them,’ you know, and it’s just like if they had somebody that looked like them, they feel like they can identify with and established a really good rapport with, I think cases would go a little differently.*

One explained that part of their motivation to do the work was to be a familiar face for Black clients:

*K108 (Service Provider–Trafficking): “I’m dedicated to it because those are my people. Those are my people, and they need help, like, you know we’re dying. We’re missing . . . and if I can do anything to continue to be an advocate, I would do that and that’s what I’m doing right now.*

Additionally, Black women KIs shared concerns similar to the Lived Experience participants about the way Black women and girls are treated by staff members. Black women KIs described how they had heard about or witnessed Black women and girls be mistreated by staff.

*K115 (Child Welfare Professional): I have seen a lot of times [that] there is no cultural agility on the workers’ part. They will pick up on –specifically for Black girls and women– how they speak. . . . If they have a colorful way that they articulate their needs that seemed to [the worker to] be ‘aggressive, intimidating, non-compliant, defiant’ . . .*

*No, they’re just passionate, they’re hurt, they’re in survival they’re going through all the things. . . . If the [staff] don’t have the skill set to pick up on [how] this person is really hurting, or this person is really going through some other things, it’s not necessarily that they’re yelling at me it’s just the situation has made them passionate about what they have to say.*

K115’s comment identifies the continued problem of stereotyping Black women—even those who have been traumatized—as angry, loud, and potentially violent. This misperception drives misidentification of trauma and compromises staff members’ ability to accurately identify needs and services.

## Theme 2: Training

Learning from the perspectives and incidents described by Black women and girls with Lived Experience as well as certain Black women Key Informants, comprehensive training in areas like cultural competence, harm reduction, and trauma awareness are very needed across systems meant to serve victims of violence. On the lived experience side, Black women experiencing violence often experience more harm when they sought help. They identified that systems professionals did not understand or respect their experiences as Black women. This resonated with the data across the nine Key Informants who identify as Black women. They raised that a lack of trauma-informed training specific to Black culture and Black women is severely limiting how systems can support and protect Black women.

In contrast, many non-Black Key Informants could not speak to the specific barriers and racial stereotypes Black women and girls face. When asked about challenges within their profession that might cause or worsen disparities for Black women and girls, several identified needing to track Black women and girls better through quantitative data to better prevent violence. Others shifted



**Lived Experience:  
Train people to not  
re-traumatize us**



**Key Informants:  
Increase skills and  
streamline procedures**

responsibility by arguing that Black communities' distrust in law enforcement and other institutions is causing a lack of reporting and cooperation that, in their eyes, is needed to effectively prevent this problem.

Both groups identified that Black women and girls encounter multiple, disconnected agencies that expect them to know the procedure and have time to find the resources they need on their own. This resonated across the datasets when it came to systems professionals adultifying Black girls. Moreover, other Key Informants acknowledge more training is needed as well as a questioning of the efficacy of current training requirements.

### Lived Experience: Train people to not re-traumatize us

*LE 12: I think Caucasian women need to... be educated on black women and black society, and the things that we go through. Because it's not the same thing they go through.*

As with hiring, Lived Experience interviewees illustrated the need for comprehensive, ongoing training for staff by sharing stories of maltreatment. These incidents occurred across key sites and systems, from shelters to health care to police stations. Professionals in these agencies made the LE women feel that they are being punished and judged unfairly for not having information when they are hurting and vulnerable.

*LE ZEN BIN 1: Why do you keep on kicking at me? Get off my back, I'm trying. Instead of shunning me, offer me help, but you tell me 'I better go do this, do that, or do this, and I have two days to do that,' or I gotta go, you know? And then I need everything done and you still won't get off my back. I'm already broken. It was traumatic.*

Black women and girls' experiences reveal a set of expectations and assumptions held by people in the institutions and agencies that are supposed to help them when they face violence. Lived Experience interviewees explained how this "hidden curriculum" of knowledge and behavior, as well as negative stereotyping of Black women, led to frustrating and hurtful outcomes.

One woman recounted being given information for a shelter only to find out when she tried to get in that she was supposedly not eligible:

*LE DAP 1: 'Yes, we have it, but we can't give it to you because you live in this neighborhood.' I'm pretty sure there are people other races in my neighborhood that you guys are assisting, because I probably got this number from this person who is a different color with me. But then you know... 'What are you? Oh, African. American. Oh, yeah, We can't help you...'*

Similarly, a woman who tried to report a violent incident was given the third degree when she tried to make the report:

*LE 11: So when I finally was able to get on the phone with someone who was able to make record of this I was asked. Well, what took you so long? and he was like. If this happened on this day, why did you wait a week to report it? And I got super angry because well, for one I didn't wait a week. I waited until the next business day, and you guys gave me the runaround for a week. and secondly, even if I did wait, wait, wait, wait, wait a week. Why does that matter? So I just kind of felt unheard in that moment... And then, while I'm down there physically making the report... And then I have to explain everything while also remembering that I am in a police station, so I can't get angry.*

Another woman experienced the continued impact of scientific racism in the health care system when she was giving birth. A staff member didn't believe she needed pain intervention.

*LE 15: ...like hospitals, okay, because when it comes to pain, they feel like we don't have any... In the hospital that I originally was going to give birth, and this lady [on staff] she needs some mindfulness, racial bias training because she said some crazy comment.*

The experiences of Black women and girls illuminate a set of rigid expectations for victim behavior and emotional control, as well as having detailed knowledge of rules and regulations. When Black women and girls do not meet these demands to shape themselves to these expectations, they are made to feel less than other women. They specifically mentioned the need for people to have background knowledge in African American history and struggles, as well as knowledge of trauma-informed approaches.

*LE 11: Definitely more funding so they can hire more staff and train people, like trauma informed people.*

*LE ZEN BIN 1: I think everybody should have to take African American culture, rather than just the children of color...*

### **Key Informants: Increase skills and streamline procedures**

As with discussions of hiring, there was a difference between how non-Black Key Informants and Black KIs spoke about training. Non-Black KIs did not speak to the ways Black women and girls are treated in the systems where they work. Rather, they focused on the limitations set by statutes, and expressed hope that improved training and procedures would result in better outcomes for MMAAW. These KIs focused on how training could improve data collection or be infused into statutes and reformed procedures.

Some of the KIs focused on the need to know how to generate and use data more effectively. For example, one KI described problems with data that come from medical exams and autopsies when people aren't trained to ask additional questions or contact families:

*KI11 (Data Professional): In the area of sexual exploitation, for example, that data just... it's... the number of cases of sexual exploitation that we've identified through the hospital data is, at this point, underwhelming. We know there's more out there and it may even be recognized by clinicians but they're not documenting. And medical records can't document unless... I mean they can't code it unless it's been documented. And physicians may or may not be willing to find it... So there's several steps in that process, and at some point you begin to realize 'oh, just because we have a diagnosis and it shows up this often, that doesn't necessarily tell us a whole lot about how it's impacting our healthcare system... And there is a tool out there called the Retrospective Fatality Analysis, also been referred to a psychological autopsy, that involves interviewing the immediate family members and their indoor acquaintances to get a better understanding of why this person died... So this is a well adopted or... a highly regarded intervention... [and] I think it needs to be done with the murdered women. And I think we need to conduct fatality reviews... as we look at anything that's quote unquote accidental, suicidal, homicidal, or undetermined, in my mind, should be reviewed.*



*KI05 (Legal Professional): You know that's hard to say, because you know, we are getting better provisions like the Crime Victims Rights Act and there is, you know, consultation practices. There are notice provisions that are, and we take that really seriously.*

Key Informants made specific references to the types of training they believed would improve the skill set of staff and the experience of people seeking assistance, such as mental health awareness and trauma-informed trainings.

*KI12 (Law Enforcement Office/Support): So that the training, back to that aspect, is to make sure that we're always on the forefront of what is known. Mental health, we train fairly extensively, and mental health understanding why people may walk away, understanding what medications may make people react differently.*

*KI08 (Service Provider-Trafficking): That's how [organization] was, and so when leadership changed and when the structure of the program changed, we started to use a strength-based approach, trauma-informed, responsive, harm reduction. All those things. You know that they need versus you know versus the purity or a correctional side of things. - culturally-specific program serving primarily Black youth experiencing trafficking*

One KI, however, questioned whether training was actually having the intended impact, particularly in the field of law enforcement:

*KI10 (Data Professional): I...think there's still a lot of, I don't know if I want to use the word failure, or lack of willingness, to explore our implicit biases, or even our more obvious biases. I think that's a it's a hard thing to do, and then I think law enforcement gets more- the more they get confronted about it, the more defensive they can be. And so, I should be careful, because- but I'm retiring at the end of the year, so I can. I don't have to worry about what I say.*

Another brought up the need for more historical knowledge:

*KI01 (Service Provider-Sexual Violence/Domestic Violence): "Still, I think there's our if we don't acknowledge the history that goes to the present. We won't get to the roots we've got to acknowledge the history and be honest about that across the board and then decide, How do we want to repair that? How are we going to move forward with different policies that don't perpetuate harms?"*

Some Key Informants articulated that many domestic violence agencies and systems were shaped by white feminist-led organizations and individuals. They recognized that these structures and their rules and culture do not "match" well with the situations faced by Black women and girls, and implied training would be needed to unlearn habits and practices that would not serve the needs of a more diverse group of women.

*KI04 (Service Provider-Legal Advocate): "I would say the mainstream of advocacy, the white mainstream movement, that are women's movements, always wanted to set race aside and really focus on feminism and those kind of efforts. Not saying that feminism is not important, but I'm a Black feminist right so it's different my issues my concerns... the issues are just different.*

*KI01 (Service Provider-Sexual Violence/Domestic Violence): "One of the things that I have encouraged people to do is like really hold our funders accountable. They're like, 'say what?' And I'm like yeah, have conversations with them, let's hold them accountable in the sense that... our women of color are at greater risk. Yeah, most of your funding goes to protect and serve white women. Like, help me to understand that... So if Black women and Native women are becoming missed, murdered and raped then why do we --Why are we giving X amount of millions to that "mainstream" organization? I quite don't get that. Like, help me to understand.*

Black women KIs added that in addition to technical knowledge that might seem “universal” like mental health training, staff needed to specifically unlearn stereotypes about Black women and girls in order to build trust and do their jobs better.

*KI02 (Service Provider–Sexual Violence/Domestic Violence): “So I think, just almost like, how are we gonna resource things with no predetermined outcomes. And how do we build in? Because within that, I think we’re showing trust in black women girls, and often, of course, that’s not there’s so much distrust that is further extended to black women girls instead of trust and so I like to you know and hear this from people we serve, too. How can we start with trust? How can we get to shape and impact our lives, and that people will, you know, support our informed decisions?”*

Another of the KIs discussed the ways white-dominated stereotypes of female victimhood and deservingness work against Black women and girls.

*KI14 (Service Provider–Trafficking): And so, as the adults right now, we need to start changing the way, we view and think of black girls so that they can be seen more as demure and vulnerable and treated with urgency like their white counterparts.*

While this statement does call out the ways Black girls are de-feminized and adultified,<sup>136</sup> it also seems to suggest that if they were perceived to be younger or “demure,” then white staff would be motivated to serve them. However, this still puts the onus on a traumatized Black girl to act in accordance with racist, sexist norms of feminine behavior in order to be seen as worthy of help. This is not only unfair but contradicts what is known about how trauma is expressed by victims who have not processed what has happened. KI15 (Child Welfare Professional) made that connection:

*KI15 (Child Welfare Professional): I have seen a lot of times is when there is no cultural agility on the workers' parts they will pick up, on specifically Black girls and women, how they speak... If they have a colorful way that they articulate their needs that seemed to [the worker to] be ‘aggressive, intimidating, non-compliant, defiant’... No, they’re just passionate, they’re hurt, they’re in survival they’re going through all the things....If the [staff] don’t have the skill set*

*to pick up on [how]this person is really hurting, or this person is really going through some other things, it’s not necessarily that they’re yelling at me it’s just the situation has made them passionate about what they have to say.*

KI15’s comments resonate not only with research on trauma and behavior, but also with the research on white perceptions of Black women – even those who have not been traumatized – as angry, loud, and potentially violent. The “Angry Black Woman” stereotype has been attached not only to working class Black women, but celebrities like Serena Williams and former First Lady Michelle Obama. Another Black KI made similar connections between racial stereotypes and unequal treatment of Black women and girls:

*KI02 (Service Provider–Sexual Violence/Domestic Violence): You know that discrimination is a form of violence. So I think we think of black women girls we’re largely looked at as still less than or just ignore disregarded. So things weren’t designed by and for us and on top of that, there’s individual biases where it’s society’s basically condoning that we are disregarded and that gets baked into people’s thinking. I think it’s more about ‘we need to help save them from themselves’ as opposed to acknowledge the gifts.*

KI02’s comment underscores the deficit-orientation and stereotypes that drive many theories about poverty, violence, and crime, and how those theories shape policies and procedures. Thus, this KI is articulating that many actors within the system may not view Black women and girls as capable beings who can partner with them, share knowledge and ideas with them about how to find solutions. Instead, the Black women and girls are envisioned as vessels who need to be saved and re-shaped in the mold predetermined by the system.

Other KIs discussed how once one is more culturally aware and trauma informed, one is able to make better “judgment calls.” Every day, staff make subjective decisions in the moment that can have profound impacts on what happens to a girl, woman or her children. The Black KIs discussed how those subjective decisions are often shaped by stereotypes, negative expectations, and lack of relationship to Black families.

## Theme 3: Resources

*LE 11: I feel like a Minnesota, to me, that protects Black women and actually cares about our lives has a system in place for things like that. And it doesn't have to be like a random ... advocacy group or domestic violence [organization] that doesn't even have funding. But always, you know, there are a lot of these groups that barely have the funding but they're more effective than the police stations that have billions and billions of dollars of funding.*

Both Lived Experience and Key Informant data analysis reveals a strong, shared belief that more resources are needed to reduce the disproportionate harm suffered by Black women and girls. Black women and girls more often spoke about the need for more resources to prevent violence and harm, such as stable housing and educational programming. Key Informants were more focused on resources that would help them serve women and girls who had been harmed, such as better data collection or coordination amongst agencies.



### Lived Experience: Housing Stability, Education, and Direct Funding to Black Women Organizers



### Key Informants: Scarcity, Silos, Data and Distribution

Lived Experience participants called for resources to both address the socioeconomic conditions that make Black women and girls vulnerable to violence as well as resources to support them and their families in the wake of violence or to avoid violence altogether.

*LE 05: Social services don't really exist for single people. Price of living is too much, so I live with my brother. I wish there was universal healthcare, housing opportunities for the unhoused, rent caps, and no credit checks.*

## Lived Experience: Housing Stability, Education, & Direct Funding to Black Women Organizers

Housing was one of the main areas LE women named as contributing to their vulnerability to violence and barrier to accessing resources.

*LE09: I kept having to end my lease. Yeah, I can. Yeah. I kept moving from home. I kept getting off my lease like every 7 months, like I never had a regular stability house. Most people live in housing for 5 to 7 years, I am like sitting there raising their child. No, no, no moving, moving, moving. I mean moving all the time.*

*LE 04: Make housing affordable.*

Many women reflected that the education system lacked specific curriculum or staffers to provide information they and their children needed. For example, one of the women suggested schools provide resources to help both parents and children become more aware about mental health needs and warning signs.

*LE 15: I don't know, really. Yeah, kids will tell you that. And they would talk about their parents breaking up or them having to live somewhere else. So, it was just like, well, I should help the*

*parents because people complain about kids, but it's just like, who's raising the kids, to other parents, so, help the parents, and then the kids will thrive ...*

*Like a lot of the kids that I speak to because I've worked in schools, they would like to know about mental health. At least being able to identify, like, what the symptoms are and like, just having tools. So even if they can't afford it, just at some point during that educational experience that they get to learn more.*

Another woman talked about the need to educate folks about the signs of sexual abuse and to help youth understand the ways sex traffickers try to groom them.

*LE13: And it would be focused on teaching about red flags of sex trafficking, of rapes because all rapes are not just through sex trafficking. They could be from a family, friends that you know. And it can actually be same sex, right, but we don't teach that and we don't have that knowledge. So that's one thing that I wanna really put my focus on one sign out of here. I do want to put my focus on that.*

And, as indicated earlier in the training section, LE participants lamented the lack of African American history curriculum in schools, as well as the paltry number of Black teachers.

*LE 05: More Black teachers would be good. Also, have you noticed how cultural competency is taught by white people?*

When discussing what happens after they experienced threats or violence, LE participants spoke to the need for wholistic, one-stop services where professionals and advocates from a variety of fields would be available to them.

*LE 11-Places where people can go for clothes and food and education. And I'm sorry like protective classes like fighting classes and you know, teaching women how to defend themselves with weapons and without weapons and things of that nature. So definitely all the funding that we're giving to police to do nothing should be going to these organizations.*

Lived Experience participants emphasized how existing resources were over-taxed or out of reach, especially shelters, where not only lack of bed space but restrictions on whether children could accompany them made it difficult to get help.

*LE 04: For me, it's all about accessibility and availability. Programs are full, resources are used and exhausted. Don't reinvent the wheel, just recreate programs that work, particularly for families."*

*LE DAP 1: Yeah, when the stuff happened to me, you know, they give you numbers and stuff to connect to others. And you call these numbers, and oh, we are outside of the area. sure. Oh, we don't have this service in the area that you live in.*

Finally, they described how Black women and girls support each other in crises, often much better than systems do. These comments often included a call for direct funding and resources to go to grassroots initiatives so that women can organize mutual aid and secure spaces that fit their needs based on their shared experiences.

*LE 9: Here are women that are not as fortunate as us, and we'll be able to weren't able to get away and if they were able to get away. They weren't able to stay away. So I mean we gotta*

*continue to band together as women, of course, but I mean we gotta. We gotta feel like we have somebody on our side and the system doesn't always make us feel like that.*

*LE 13: And a lot of these ladies here have become my support group they're like my little sisters now, and I try to give them the knowledge and the wisdom that I have so that the next time it won't be a next time it'll be, hey? I see this red flag or I see, this is coming this way, because I feel like this. If a man loves you, he would not introduce you to drugs. You will not be a bitch... He's gonna treat you like the queen that you are.*

*LE 15: More resources towards the people, I know, like some of the stuff goes to roads and stuff, which is cool. But yeah, more affordable places to live, right? So affordable housing, community resources. Whether that's like a garden, so people grow their own food. [Or] being able to help businesses who help the community, right?*

Black women and girls suggested increased funding to community-centered programs that are at capacity and could do more if they had the resources. They recognized that many Black community organizations and Black survivors are doing the work and do not get the same level of resources that other agencies and nonprofits get. They want the state and other institutions to direct funding to folks who are embedded in community and trusted.

### **Key Informants: Scarcity, Silos, Data and Distribution**

Many KIs spoke in terms of resource scarcity and distribution. Some mentioned that they didn't have enough resources to get parts of the work done in ways that they felt would serve the issue of MMAAW. Others spoke to the lack of communication or coordination between agencies resulting in resources not getting to people that should receive them.

*K113 & K114 (Service Providers-Trafficking): You know there's a break in [communication between] those providers in those systems. And those agencies and elements don't always understand what Safe Harbor is and how it's supposed to work together...*

*K120 (Missing and Murdered Indigenous Relatives Office): Well, all the data is in silos and it's it we need to have it in a centralized location. So there's two different sets of data we have. There's the dashboard that's going to keep track of the progress that the office is making measurable. But then there's the law enforcement data and that information and then, having the tribal nations and have access to that data is challenging too. So trying to get those two different systems, and I don't know maybe they'll talk to each other. I don't know trying to figure that out is gonna be challenging, but it can be done. So how we're gonna do it*

Others surmised that lack of sufficient quantitative data or reporting made it more difficult to make a convincing case for resource allocation.

*K111 (Data Professional): There's an adage that we sometimes use in epidemiology: We say, 'you can't prevent what you can't count' and, you know, the foundation activity for whenever you think you need to engage and step and be programming in an effort is: you better have a you know, some kind of surveillance system in place so that you can count it. Otherwise you have no idea whether or not you're successful.*

In this same area of reporting and data, other KIs implied that not enough Black women and girls are reporting violence or missing relatives in order to make the system work for them.

*K109 (Law Enforcement Officer/Support): Get them entered. I mean that unfortunately that's the biggest hurdle, you know. How else would you enter them missing and get them reported? As simple as that... Someone's missing. Report it. If the family member doesn't do it, how do you know?*

*K109 (Law Enforcement Officer/Support): I don't know if the initial individual doesn't want to notify anybody because of whatever and it doesn't necessarily pertain to one or the other but you know sometimes they think you know, in my opinion, 'oh they have a warrant.' Well, I don't care about, like I mentioned, I don't care about the warrant. I care about that they're missing, you know, reported missing. So no those are*

*the things, I mean it's always I bring it back to you know If they're not reported you know, how do you know that they're missing? And so it all starts right there. Make the report. You know, make the report, and once that happens, then the rest of it starts to fall into place.*

This passage suggests that the act of reporting is sufficient to trigger services that will benefit Black women and girls. In theory, this may be true, but given the experiences recounted by LE participants, the act of reporting is neither simple nor devoid of threat. The interviewee also seems to assume that many Black people aren't reporting due to fear of outstanding warrants or past criminal behavior being used against them, not because they are wary or mistrustful of how they will be treated.

Some of the Black KIs, like the LE interviewees, spoke about how lack of housing and other spatial resources contributes to the vulnerability, and how staff often do not understand the contexts for Black women who seek safe housing, particularly their need to be close to family networks and their fear of having child protective services take their children.

*K116 (Child Welfare Professional): And just yeah, maybe even like the culturally specific shelters, resource centers, you know. There's just no access, you know... [and] with every program there's always like hoops to jump through. I wish there were like more drop-in centers for women experiencing domestic violence, or women experiencing some sort of violence, you know. To be able to have space for a couple of hours without having to, you know, share everything and be afraid that their kids are going to be removed... And... you know if a person is struggling in a domestic violence you know situation the answer that the court or the department often said you know tells or direct women to is well, 'why don't you go to a shelter' you know, and when they show that out there you know when women has their own home, or has a home that may not be suitable right in may that the department doesn't deem suitable. I think that is just super inconsiderate for anybody who doesn't live in the neighborhood, you know, in the family to give that directive.*

They also gave examples of the ways rules for shelters and other resources were not designed with Black women and their children in mind. This created forced choices and further harm for them and their children.

*K115 (Child Welfare Professional): Another thing that is a disservice to African-American mothers, well all mothers, but what I have seen in my professional experiences is that if the mother has a male child over the age of 14 he can't go to the shelters with them. So then that leaves for the children, the young youth, the little young teenagers to be then put on the streets. And then we wonder why there's so much community violence. They can't even go to the shelters with their moms. And then to take it even further, just because of my experience. I've seen a case like this right where the family went into the shelter. The young man then started to sell candy at school to make money so he can find somewhere to sleep for the night and got suspended from school because he was selling things during school hours. So I'm like, he's not selling drugs!*

*K119 (Housing Professional): "There's just a really poor narrative on housing that people live where it's affordable. That's not true. People live where their community is and a lot of times people are just like, why can't you just move? You can't just move because your cousins are there, your grandma's there,*

*your daycare is there, your mosque is there, your church is there, your synagogue is there, your business is there, everything is there. And so when prices continue to increase or like these top-down models get pushed on communities, it's not super insightful or wise."*

Some Black KIs urged that more resources be allocated to Black-led organizations and Black women and girls themselves.

*K102 (Service Provider–Sexual Violence/Domestic Violence): "So one thing often [comes up] with black women and girls [that] we'll just spend time talking about is: "Hey– Give us the resources, and we will figure this out without these predetermined outcomes." And so I think [sure] come together and get to co-create those spaces. But they're often not well-resourced..."*

*K113 (Service Provider–Trafficking): But again, you know, we have so many other community resources to provide [for] a lot of the other ethnicities and races. But the ones that are needed for. A black community isn't there. So that would be my first and foremost recommendation is to provide funds and to identify those in the community who are already doing it. So we can have a greater light shown on those who are able to connect with [Black women and girls]."*

## Issues Specific to Lived Experience or Key Informants

In this section, we first present two issues that emerged only from the KI dataset that provide important context for challenges professionals face. Next, we summarize comments from Lived Experience data regarding police interactions specifically to provide context for some of the recommendations that follow.



### Lived Experience: Do the Police and Courts Help Keep Me Safe?



### Key Informants: Limited by Current Data, Policies, & Laws

#### Key Informants: Limited by Current Data, Policies, and Laws

Many of the KIs described the need for either access to or generation of different data sets to:

- help them assess the scope of MMAAW
- share information with speed and ease
- identify and track cases
- collaborate across departments

Data needs were mentioned specifically for epidemiology for violent crimes (as in the examples above in the Training section), missing persons reporting, homicide reporting, and to be used by a potential MMAAW Office. For instance, an epidemiologist spoke to sexual exploitation data.

*KI11 (Data Professional): The data is challenging... hospital data, even death certificate data, this is administrative data. This is not research data. It's not the same quality as research data, it's a mile wide. It covers the whole State of Minnesota. But sometimes it's only an inch deep. You can't drill it very far before it begins losing some of its integrity and we begin to question what we really have...*

*[For example] Sexual exploitation is very challenging to describe using data... we have very little dedicated funding for some of that work, which is important because that's where a lot of the missing individuals end up is working as being sexually exploited number one, and then may also be trafficked.*

*KI10 (Data Professional): So even when we would want to follow up on something, we were never even sure who to reach out to, because [if] they don't have that missing person unit, it might take us a while to get down you know, juvenile, or you know, kids who are missing that were part of a custody [situation], just would be in their family and children's unit.*

Some KIs also called for consideration of culturally-specific and community/public-oriented approaches to data on MMAAW. Other KIs spoke of their struggles when it came to policies and practices such as those related to Safe Harbor, AMBER Alerts, and Violence Against Women Act (VAWA). They described frustrations with differences across jurisdictions, departments, and variances in knowledge about procedure, eligibility, and so on.

*KI01 (Service Provider–Sexual Violence/Domestic Violence) The things that are in VAWA, you know, a lot of white women decided not to listen to black women, and went down the track of like, "No, this is what VAWA should include," and what that led to was mass incarceration... Moving, taking the funding and throwing it in the Department of Justice that has, has not helped things at all.*

*KI13 (Service Provider–Trafficking): You know, when you speak to folks who are higher up within the world, you know I've heard them admit themselves: Safe Harbor just needs to be, you know, it needs to be rewritten. It's antiquated when it comes to [the] implementation of it. That's one thing. [...And] getting that 354 page binder of Safe Harbor, sitting through the 22 hours of videos that you're supposed to watch?*

*Minnesota State Representative Ruth Richardson: [T]here's been a number of young black girls that have gone missing in the last month and none of them have gotten Amber Alert. . . But one of the things that we're talking through, because I, you know, just understanding like the amber alert requirements, I was asking at the Federal Level: how often the notes are being reviewed . . . But it goes directly to what you're talking about, because it's like we need something on the State level, so that when we have these situations, that there is actually something in place, and something that isn't as highly subjective as the Amber Alert system, because the Amber Alert system lets the department kind of figure out, "Well, do I think this person's in danger do I think this person needs an Amber Alert. So within the space people are making sort of these highly subjective [decisions] like, "Well, you get Amber alert, but you don't". Yeah, and discretion is where the disparity is breeding.*

Though these issues are specific to internal operations of agencies and organizations that serve Black women and girls, the problems of coordination and shared knowledge resonate with the “run around” issues that emerged in the Lived Experience data. These concerns also shed light on the ways frustrations caused by friction in the system could contribute to staff burnout and turnover.

### **Lived Experience: Do the Police and Courts Help Keep Me Safe?**

Many of the Lived Experience interviews included descriptions of what happened when they tried to get help from police or press charges against an attacker. When these came up, the Black women and girls raised:

- wanting to be treated fairly by police and not criminalized
- wanting police to follow through when they report violence, in their view, use the laws available to reduce harm/keep abuser from harming them further
- lamenting the lack of police trained in supporting gender violence victims

*LE 13: The police mainly now take the man's side, basically, if this is domestic, and he hasn't hurt you or you have not hurt him. It's like – 'Well, you guys try to figure it out.' But if my life is, if I feel like I'm being threatened, and my life is in jeopardy, you want me to stay?*

Interviewees felt police and prosecutors didn't really care about what happened to them and perhaps didn't use all the legal tools at their disposal to stop an abuser.

*LE DAP 1: And this is not one story—on so many of the occasions he was given the opportunity to plea on the lower count. Why, why is that? Why do we have to go through trying times to get back on our feet? I have to learn how to walk, how to write. . . I still have numbness in some parts of my face. I have cuts and bruises. . . .*

*But you have his license plate number. You have his address. Why are you not knocking on his door, arresting him, taking him to the jail for a few nights to get him to understand 'Okay leave this woman alone!' So yeah, that's why a lot of us end up coming up missing. Because our system, the police officers, they're just not concerned.*

*LE 10: You know and it doesn't help when you're calling the police and you're saying, "Hey, I have a restraining order on a person that's following me at this moment, and I have a concealed [gun permit], and I'm carrying and I'm afraid. And still be told- "Well, until he makes physical contact with you, it's nothing that we can do."*

The Lived Experience participants also noted that seeking help exposes them to other potential harm because when system workers or police file reports or “observe” things in the home, they may make assumptions that will impact their children, or frame them as violent if they engage in self-defense.

*LE 10: My first instinct is going to be to protect myself for my child. Then we have to think—we're left thinking about our future, [wondering] if we're going to be taken away from our child because we had to stop this person.*



These fears of additional harm to self and family are not unfounded. There are many recent and historical cases of Black women being denied benefit of the doubt that they were in danger, like Marissa Alexander. Though she was living in Florida, a “stand your ground” state, Ms. Alexander was arrested and jailed for firing a warning shot into the air to deter her attacker. As mentioned in the literature review, Black women who report domestic violence are more likely to be arrested than their white counterparts. For Black mothers, calling the police raises the stakes significantly for either arrest or to have their conduct and/or home to be evaluated as unfit for children, thereby exposing them to potential removal.

Finally, some LE participants suggested that more resources currently directed to police should be re-directed to Black women and their communities to address the roots of vulnerability and violence in a community-centered way rather than within a criminal justice frame. These participants were also critical of community outreach efforts by police, saying they felt the police don't show they feel a sense of being accountable to Black communities when they participate in outreach events.

*LE 11: And to me it looks like and I know this might be a little too radical, but it looks like- No police. Because the things that I don't think people realize that the police are here to protect companies. Not necessarily to protect citizens. All of us have expressed pretty much that that's what it is... But always, you know, there a lot of these groups barely have the funding but they're more, you know. They're more effective than the police stations that have billions and billions of dollars of funding. So to me that's what that looks like.*

*LE DAP 1: The police need some serious work here, like, they need some serious training. They don't hear-- they don't care at all. I went with the Open Center [to a police community forum] and we spoke to the representative. And a police[man] was there, and we brought up questions and suggestions, and he said nothing. Yeah. Yeah. you know, you have so many people complaining. There are [valid] community points... We had all these people complaining. And how about you, you know, doing X Y and Z to them? You get here to represent the [police] force and you don't [say] one word? ... It's just a norm. It's like 'check the box!'*

**“You gotta go to 15 places to get help. Well, by the time you get to your fifth place to get some help, you’re exhausted, you have nothing else to gain.”**

Lived Experience Interview

Reflection questions

▶ **“The social service run around” is a phrase coined in the *Illusion of Choice: Eviction and Profit in North Minneapolis* report. The run around is a dehumanizing process that tenants experiencing evictions face when trying to access county emergency assistance resources, and the onerous process of collecting the forms, paperwork, and permissions at different places, all within a limited time and scarce information and help from county agencies.**

**What would it look like if our human service systems were created and designed by people with lived experience? How might the processes and the types of support offered to community members look and feel different?**

# RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations were developed from the data analysis and facilitated discussion sessions with the Task Force and Advisory Council. These recommendations are proposed to address disparities and harms Black women and girls experience in systems that are meant to protect them from violence or support them and their families in the wake of violence. In the appendix (page 68), we highlight the work of previous task forces and reports submitted to the State of Minnesota that are in accord with our report's findings and recommendations.



**Establish a Missing and Murdered African American Women (MMAAW) Office**



**Create and fund specific spaces and resources to serve Black women and girls**



**Develop effective, culturally appropriate, anti-racist trainings and professional education for systems professionals**



**Hire more African American staff and create incentives for current Black and people of color staff to stay and grow in the profession**



**Implement better coordination across agencies to increase accessibility of services and responsiveness**



**Identify and implement better pathways to both emergency and long-term housing**



## ESTABLISH A MISSING AND MURDERED AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN OFFICE

We strongly recommend that Black women and girls with lived experience are always central partners in the design of the MMAAW Office and Black women are hired to establish, implement, and evaluate the effectiveness of its work. As the earlier sections of the report illustrate, the issues driving disparities and harms that make Black women and girls more vulnerable to violence are complex with deep historical roots. Therefore, we want to recognize and emphasize that one office on its own cannot be responsible for and solve all of the intertwined social, structural, and individual-level problems that contribute to disproportionate harm to Black women and girls.

Members of the Task Force and Council, as well as the data analysis, raised concerns about where to house an MMAAW, particularly given the history of harm and distrust with law enforcement and perceived and actual imbalances between funding for reactive law enforcement efforts versus proactive, preventative community-centered efforts to reduce violence against Black women and girls.

### Recommendations for possible functions and scope of MMAAW Office:

The Task Force and Advisory Council expressed significant concerns about ensuring adequate staffing and resources to make the work of the office feasible.

Some of the staffing minimums discussed included: initial staffing consisting of at least a director, coordinator, victims specialist, two training coordinators, and clerical staff.

Budget considerations included: a start up fund, funding to partner with Black-led organizations to design and implement trainings, grant funds to distribute to community organizations, and funds for continued community-centered research on impacts.

Search and partner with grantmaking organizations willing to create grant opportunities to distribute funds to Black women-led community organizations and new initiatives. Ensure that grantee partners distribute those funds to Black women and girl-led/approved vendors, initiatives, etc.

Develop effective training and protocols co-designed by Black women and girls to be later mandated for use by local counties, law enforcement, public health professionals, shelters, human service providers, and affordable housing administrators.

Monitor implementation of effective training protocols and professional development for staff in MMAAW related state agencies and/or state contractors.

Work with Safe Harbor, the Bureau of Criminal Apprehension, local law enforcement, and shelters to develop a coordination strategy.

Monitor, evaluate efforts to improve coordination of services across agencies.

Report and provide future recommendations to the legislature annually based on internal evaluation results from training and coordination assessment work.



## ESTABLISH A MISSING AND MURDERED AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN OFFICE

With oversight from the Office of Justice Programs at the Minnesota Department of Public Safety, it is recommended that the physical location of the office should be in a community space to increase community trust and to ensure the development of community partnership and empowerment.

### Recommendations continued:

Develop and administer culturally informed trauma practices co-developed by Black women and girls in all housing shelters and service delivery organizations throughout the state.

Work with an outside research firm with relevant background to support the tracking of data on MMAAW, and develop tools/supports to evaluate whether recommendations result in decreases in harm and identifying next steps for further improvement.

- Staffing should include data specialist or research consultant to build tracking and reporting infrastructure
- Utilize mixed-methods approaches to evaluate, monitor, and communicate in consultation with community

Work to create a public dashboard to identify wraparound services and/or direct people to advocates and/or service centers. Requires the creation of statewide partnerships.

Assess need for a hotline and establish a help line if relevant to fill a gap. Publicize the hotline/helpline with PSAs and other media presence and hire adequate staff to support the hotline/helpline.

Create an Advisory Council similar to that created in conjunction with the MMAAW Task Force to provide oversight from women with lived experience on proposed legislation and design of the MMAAW Office.



## CREATE AND FUND SPECIFIC SPACES AND RESOURCES TO SERVE BLACK WOMEN AND

The review of literature and data analysis reveal significant gaps in access to and services for Black women and girls who are victims of violence, seek to deter or escape violence, or seek other social supports that serve to reduce vulnerability to violence. Black women and girls themselves have ideas based on lived experience and intergenerational knowledge that can be applied to generate better protections and support for themselves, if resources were available.

Direct funds to address disparities faced by Black women and girls who have experienced or are experiencing homelessness, violence or systemic neglect.

Direct funds to increase or create specific housing that specializes in supporting Black women and girls within their communities that does not concentrate poverty, but provide opportunity and access if desired.



## HIRE AND RETAIN AFRICAN AMERICAN STAFF

Data from Key Informants overall emphasized hiring more people who reflect the experiences of Black women and girls, but we also note that retention of existing Black staff is key to avoid a “revolving door” situation. Black women Key Informants relayed how taxing their experiences within systems are, which can lead to burnout and departure for other

Review and re-imagine minimum requirements for jobs. For example, college degree requirements are often barriers to Black women applicants, even if their lived experience and other forms of knowledge would make them excellent staff to work on issues related to MMAAW. As the experiences and suggestions of Black women and girls illustrate, having staff whose experiences overlap or resonate with theirs is very important to survivors.

Create means for African American applicants with Lived Experience and community knowledge have accelerated pathways to credentialing for those jobs where such credentials are essential to providing services or leadership and/or other forms of professional development.

To address burnout and turnover of Black professionals, provide specific training and retention support for Black, Indigenous and people of color staff to:

- highlight and encourage pathways to advancement/leadership
- acknowledge they are also harmed by systemic racism
- provide resources to repair harm and incentivize staying in the profession



## DEVELOP EFFECTIVE, CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE, ANTI-RACIST TRAININGS &

The data speak clearly to the need for better, consistent training for professionals who work with Black women and girls to build trust and repair historical harms. Training should be relevant to the specific area of service or professional field, and periodic to build skills and respond to emergent issues.

Develop comprehensive and ongoing anti-racist trainings and education for system professionals, including staff in K-12 schools. Content for these trainings should include: culturally-informed trauma awareness; asset-based, survivor centered approaches to serving Black women and girls; anti-racist training with intersectional awareness

Customized examples and approaches specific to the history of the field's impact on Black women and girls, particularly the types of harm Black women and girls have suffered, for example:

- Training for hospital staff to not (re)traumatize Black women and unlearn medical racism that leads to undertreatment of pain or denial or pain medication to Black women due to stereotypes about hyper-strength, or predilection to addiction.
- Training for K-12 school staff to end adultification of Black girls and identify signs of trauma and curriculum development for students to help identify red flags for trafficking, develop skills around mental health, and comprehensive sexual health education that includes discussions of coercion and other forms of relationship violence.
- Training for government staff to interact respectfully and productively with Lived Experience visiting speakers, consultants, expert testimony sessions, including paying adequate compensation for Lived Experience experts.

Create plans to effectively communicate training opportunities widely. Ensure supervisors are creating appropriate schedules for training and professional development opportunities to improve outcomes for MMAAW related issues.

When contracting with trainers, the state should aim to work with firms that affirm or facilitate: survivor- or lived experience-led training; design and leadership by Black women and girls; and pathways for women with lived experience to design and lead training.

Given large inequities in state contracts, develop pathways for Black-led organizations and trainers to become training contractors.

Broadly market opportunities for new vendors, particularly Black and POC vendors, to bid for upcoming training contracts.

Provide fair compensation for Black trainers, Lived Experience contributors, and firms. Provide access to care and trauma-informed support for lived experience contributors/trainers.

Include time and funding to evaluate the impact and effectiveness of training to assess whether the learnings and skills are being implemented and create the desired change. Plans for training and evaluation should be reviewed by MMAAW office to assess fidelity and alignment with the mission and goals of MMAAW.



## DESIGN AND SUPPORT BETTER COORDINATION ACROSS AGENCIES

Coordinating across the many agencies and offices that relate to issues of MMAAW is key to reducing the frustrations, fears, and roadblocks Black women and girls experience as well as to provide better support and increase effectiveness of professionals who have to navigate a wide variety of systems with different sets of rules and expectations.

Develop plans to provide a range of services in spaces that serve survivors of violence, such as shelters and health clinics, that meets the range of needs to fully serve survivors and/or families of victims. Coordinate systems of referrals to other services so that the burden is not on survivors or victims' families to do the legwork. Systems coordination should reflect at least three levels: direct services, agencies with grantees, and the MMAAW Office.

Create a new statewide missing persons database for law enforcement to access and require local jurisdictions to regularly update entries (suggested time frame: every 72 hours).

Allow survivors to file police reports without visiting police stations. Improve communications plans so it is clear to survivors where they currently have the option to make a report from a shelter, hospital, or other agency. Ensure staff inform survivors they have that option where it is currently available.

Review and revise coordination mechanisms and communications between Safe Harbor, State Missing Persons Clearinghouse, and local law enforcement.

Increase training for law enforcement on missing person requirements.

- Coordinate with the Minnesota County Attorneys Association and other organizations to make MMAAW a required topic of coordinated training for prosecutors and judges.
- Amend Minnesota Statute 13.822 to include MMAAW as a related topic in the 40 hours of required training for sexual assault advocates. Ensure that community-based organizations are involved in providing the training.
- Coordinate with the Minnesota Legislature and the Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST) Board to change law enforcement officer licensing requirements to include training on MMAAW.
- Coordinate with relevant professional and continuing education programs (law enforcement, law and legal, healthcare, social work, teaching) in colleges and universities in Minnesota to add MMAAW to curriculum.

Coordinate with the MMAAW Office to design or implement specific training and education for interagency coordination about MMAAW.

Allow for digitization of personal documents of clients to lower the burden to receive services so they can be easily accessed while maintaining privacy protections across systems.

Coordinate with the MMAAW Office to expedite survivors/victims and their families' access to police reports and other pertinent records.





## ENACT POLICIES / REFORMS TO MAKE EMERGENCY AND LONG-TERM HOUSING

This recommendation reiterates findings and recommendations from the Minnesota *State of the State's Housing Report*, as well as the report of the Select Committee on Racial Justice: Black women and girls are among the most severely impacted by the housing crisis. Therefore, efforts to increase short term and permanent affordable housing options is a necessity to reduce Black women and girls' vulnerability to violence.

Re-emphasizing a previous recommendation, create funding for Black and/or BIPOC specific shelters and emergency safe houses.

Review and remove prohibitory eligibility restrictions for existing shelters – such as geographic residency, age of children, etc.– to make them more accessible to Black women, and their families.

Create housing policies and practices that cater to and accept non-traditional family structures outside the “nuclear family.”

Create shelter spaces where older children (18-21 years old) or vulnerable family members of any gender identity can stay with their parent or caregiver.

Remove barriers such as credit reports, prior address, and landlord refusal to rent to domestic violence (DV) victims. Enact better regulation of Violence Against Woman Act processes, which would prevent landlords from such discrimination. Hold landlords accountable through these regulatory actions.

Within the MMAAW Office, create a housing-specific program and community advisory board in partnership with the Minnesota Housing Finance Agency in order to revamp affordable housing through community collaboration.

Within the MMAAW Office, revamp and redesign home-ownership programs (like Tree Trust) that prioritizes Black homeowners and gives buyers 100 percent ownership of land and property.

**“For me, it’s all about accessibility and availability. Programs are full, resources are used and exhausted. Don’t reinvent the wheel, just recreate programs that work, particularly for families.”**

Lived Experience Interview

Reflection questions

**How might our social service systems, shelters, and law enforcement agencies invest in equitable evaluation and community centered annual reporting that is inclusive and reflective of the community’s definition of success?**

**How might our institutions show up differently if they believed they were beholden to impacted communities, not the board, the elected official, or the agency leadership?**

## ENDNOTES

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9. "Fact Sheet: Eugenics and Scientific Racism." NIH National Human Genome Research Institute, accessed September 14, 2022, <https://www.genome.gov/about-genomics/fact-sheets/Eugenics-and-Scientific-Racism>
10. See Angela Sani's summary of 18th and 19th century race 'science' and how many of the ideas established in those centuries reverberate to this day in her book *Superior: The Return of Race Science* (New York: Penguin/Random House, 2019). See also Harvard University Library's online resource "Confronting Anti-Black Racism: Scientific Racism." <https://library.harvard.edu/confronting-anti-black-racism/scientific-racism>
11. The head of the Louisiana State Medical Convention, Dr. Samuel Cartwright, articulated the pathology of this disease in an address in 1849, and published a treatise on it in 1851. "Treatment" for the disease was harsh punishment. A sample of Dr. Cartwright's treatise is available on the PBS "Africans in America" web exhibit: <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part4/4h3106t.html>
12. Patricia Hill Collins calls these stereotypes "controlling images." See Chapter Four, "Mammies, Matriarchs, and other Controlling Images," in her book *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York: Routledge, 1991).
13. See bell hooks, *Ain't I A Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (Boston: South End Press, 1981); Angela Davis, *Women Race and Class and Women, Culture and Politics* (New York: Random House, 1989); and Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*. For historical review of how the press treated Black women victims of sexual violence as non-victims, see Estelle B. Freedman, "'Crimes Which Startle and Horrify': Gender, Age, and the Racialization of Sexual Violence in

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15. See William Green's books *A Peculiar Imbalance: The Fall and Rise of Racial Inequality in Minnesota, 1837-1869* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007) and *Degrees of Freedom: The Origins of Civil Rights in Minnesota, 1865-1912* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015) for extensive histories of Black Minnesotans' fight for equal rights and civil treatment since the establishment of the Minnesota territory.

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[ronald\\_reagan\\_made\\_her\\_a\\_notorious\\_american\\_villain.html](http://ronald_reagan_made_her_a_notorious_american_villain.html) Levin explains how, in a campaign speech, Ronald Reagan shared the story of the welfare fraud case of Linda Taylor: "In Chicago, they found a woman who holds the record. She used 80 names, 30 addresses, 15 telephone numbers to collect food stamps, Social Security, veterans' benefits for four nonexistent deceased veteran husbands, as well as welfare. Her tax-free cash income alone has been running \$150,000 a year." Though this was clearly an exceptionally rare case of extreme fraud, it became enmeshed with already existing stereotypes about Black women as bad mothers, prone to bad behavior and excessive, gaudy spending.

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138. To protect the anonymity of the Key Informants, quotations are listed with their unique ID numbers and the professional category that best describes their work. The professional categories are: Service Provider-Trafficking, Service Provider-Sexual Violence/

Domestic Violence, Service Provider-Legal Advocate, Legal Professional, Law Enforcement Officer/Support, Data Professional, Child Welfare Professional, Education Professional, Housing Professional, and Missing and Murdered Indigenous Relatives Office.

139. Adultification is viewing Black girls and children as older than they are, systematically forcing them into adult roles, procedures, and punishments before they are adults. Oftentimes, authorities do not see Black girls as children, even when they are experiencing violence, including sex trafficking and abuse.

## Previous Task Forces and Reports

In this appendix, we highlight the work of previous task forces and reports submitted to the State of Minnesota that are in accord with our report's findings and recommendations. We highlight three recent reports: The House Select Committee on Racial Justice (Select Committee); the Parallel Report Pertaining to the Rights of Women and Girls of Color on US Compliance with the International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD Report); and the Safe Harbor for All Report (Safe Harbor).

### Recommendation I: Resources for Black women and girls

Many of the recommendations from the House Select Committee on Racial Justice Report to the Legislature speak to existing and new ways funding and contracts could be directed to: initiatives created by Black women and girls; community organizations trusted by Black women; support Black women entrepreneurs, healers, and others who want to scale up efforts to serve Black women and girls who survive violence. These include:

- Enforce Chapter 16C and require 15 percent of all public contracting to BIPOC businesses, 32 percent workforce goals on all public contracting\*
  - Streamline the bidding process, redesign the request for proposal process, and establish processes to break down artificial barriers to small and minority-owned businesses. Unbundling larger projects and contracts into multiple packages for more participation. Remove unnecessary contract specifications\*
  - Leverage bank deposits – compact with financial institutions accepting public deposits to increase loans in low-income areas and to partner with BIPOC organizations serving businesses to help bring capital and capacity to BIPOC businesses\*
  - Establish a \$1 billion BIPOC Capital Fund and identify a dedicated revenue stream that will fund BIPOC activities that build the economic development infrastructure needed for wealth creation, which includes and not limited to:
    - Grants
    - Equity
    - Loans
    - Technical assistance
    - Cultural malls, corridors, destinations, districts
    - Capacity development of organizations serving BIPOC businesses and workers
  - Establish a \$25 million loan guarantee program backed by existing assets, to support bank lending to BIPOC businesses and development projects (for two tracks, businesses with less than \$250,000 sales/revenue and greater than \$250,000 in sales/revenue)\*
- Fund career pathways and opportunity skills/ occupation pathways to help low-income BIPOC workers increase their earnings and skills
  - Invest in the Women of Color Opportunity Act
  - Allocate community resources to support community engagement before the state commits to development projects that impact respective communities on the front end and throughout the life cycle of projects
  - Provide grants for community-based organizations where DHS would contract with community-based agencies who serve Black children and families to provide community-specified services for family preservation, relative care engagement, and reunification services

The CERD Report also recognized the need to center the experiences and knowledge of Black women and girls in the development and implementation of new services, and resource allocation:

- Provide culturally-specific support and resources for marginalized women and children that is either led by or developed in consultation with the groups that directly serve these populations and best understand their needs.
- Expand efforts to identify vulnerable and at-risk women and children and consult with those adults and organizations who serve them to best understand and address their needs.

Likewise, the Safe Harbor Report valued diversifying the ranks of those who provide services and ensuring adequate funding for those services:

- Fund grantees at a level that allows them to meet Safe Harbor's needs.
- Improve the diversity within the Safe Harbor Network and provision of services.

\* Denotes a recommendation that requires no new funding, according to the Select Committee on Racial Justice Report.

## Recommendations II and III: Training and Hiring

Our recommendations on training and hiring resonate with suggestions from the Select Committee, CERD, and Safe Harbor Reports:

### From the Select Committee:

- Mandate training for teachers, paraprofessionals, and administrators in anti-racist, culturally responsive, trauma-informed, and restorative practices
- For districts with the most significant racial disparities, build protections for Teachers of Color and Indigenous teachers to improve retention rates
- Fund the hiring of school support professionals in order to meet recommended staff-to-student ratios for school counselors, social workers, behavior specialists, psychologists, and nurses
- The Dignity in Pregnancy and Childbirth Act would implement anti-racism training associated with the leading causes of preventable deaths. The act would also expand the Maternal Mortality Review Committee to include morbidity and expand membership to include surviving family members or individuals that experienced maternal morbidity. Develop a request for proposal program for medical schools and nursing schools to increase training on disparities in maternal and infant mortality and morbidity
- Mental Health Consultation Pilot for Mandated Reporters: a school-based mental health consultation pilot for mandated reporters. The purpose is to provide mental health rapid consultation for mandated reporters to ensure reports of child maltreatment are made based on statutory requirements rather than biases
- Strengthen legal representation for removal—require a description of actual agency efforts, including an agency's assessment of a child safety and alternative family or kin-based arrangements, as part of a court order for removal
- Develop a BIPOC family mentorship program where communities with the greatest disparity in out-of-home placement have access to representative family mentors to support them in navigating the child protection process

- Eliminate the use of race-based medicine in medical school curriculum and medical practice
- Increase doula reimbursement rates and invest in recruiting and retaining doulas from BIPOC communities
- Ensure policies allow doulas to be present with pregnant and postpartum women at all medical visits and procedures if desired by the mother

### From the CERD Report

- Enact legislative measures to ensure all women have access to culturally competent health services.
- Develop, following comprehensive studies and consultations with affected populations, culturally appropriate training and reforms of relevant academic policies to address discrimination against Black girls in terms of school punishments, self-expression, and other policies.
- Provide training to law enforcement and other professionals to ensure cases are properly identified and labeled as "missing persons."
- Conduct culturally appropriate and gender-sensitive training for media and encourage the expansion of media coverage of cases of missing and murdered Black and Indigenous women and children
- Provide ongoing and culturally specific training for those working with families, in consultation with or led by members of the Black and Indigenous communities and organizations that serve these communities.

### From the Safe Harbor Report

- Provide consistent and mandatory trainings for everyone who works with sex trafficked and exploited youth.
- Develop cross-sector trainings, agreements and protocols.

## Recommendation IV: Coordination

The CERD and Safe Harbor Reports also identify coordination, resources, and awareness raising as key for increasing the safety of Black women and girls:

### From CERD:

- Ensure law enforcement agencies have adequate resources for dedicated missing persons units, including for Black and Native women and children.
- Enact legislation to better coordinate investigations and prosecution of cases between state, federal, and tribal jurisdictions.

### From SAFE HARBOR:

- Increase awareness of Safe Harbor and the services it provides.
- Develop cross-sector trainings, agreements and protocols.
- Implement Safe Harbor for All, a strategic plan to expand Safe Harbor to all adult victims and survivors of sex trafficking and exploitation.

## Recommendation V: Housing

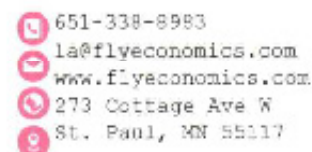
Many of our recommendations on housing support overlap with suggested actions from both the House Select Committee on Racial Justice Report and the CERD report on MMAAW.

### From the Select Committee:

- 5 percent of funds in the State investment portfolio should be invested in BIPOC real estate development projects such as mixed-use developments and affordable housing projects
- Allocate low-income tax credit (LIHTC) and housing funds from federal and other sources to BIPOC-led affordable housing and homeownership projects
- Increase home improvement support for both owner-occupied homes and rental properties
- Provide attorneys for public housing eviction actions
- Implement a security deposit cap for so tenants will be required to pay no more than a single month's rent as a security deposit
- Develop uniform screening criteria guidelines for applicants related to rental, criminal, and credit history
- Create a just cause policy for termination of tenancy
- Develop an advance notice of sale policy for rental properties

### From the CERD Report

- Ensure effective implementation of the Fair Housing Act and support ongoing monitoring of its implementation to ensure it is applied without discrimination or with discriminatory impact.
- Provide adequate funding for organizations specializing in providing housing and other resources to survivor victims and marginalized women and children.



Dear Legislative Leaders, & Commissioner of Public Safety John Harrington,

The Minnesota Task Force Missing and Murdered African American Women acknowledge and address the historic, persistent, and human rights violations and abuses found within our state. With bipartisan support, signed into action by Governor Walz in 2021, this first in the Nation initiative, Task Force is intent on addressing the systemic causes behind the historic violence against African American women and girls. This report to the Minnesota Legislature, which reflects the collective work of 13 Task Force members and 8 community advisory board members, calls for complete legislative and social changes with resources to remedy the crisis that has shattered African American communities across our state and this country for far too long.

This report to the Minnesota Legislature includes solutions that aim to reduce and end violence against African American Women & Girls, in Minnesota. It serves as a road map for the Commissioner of Public Safety, other state agencies, and organizations that provide legal, social, and other public services throughout Minnesota. Information presented in this report reflects the truths of everyday black women living & thriving here in Minnesota, survivors of violence, family members, community members, government agencies, lawmakers, advocates, and experts. It was compiled a year of public hearings, community dialogues, interviews with experts, and evidence gathering activities. It delivers 6 overarching recommendations for systemic and community change directed at government, institutions, social service providers, industries, and all Minnesotans.

The proposed recommendations recognize and consider the multigenerational and intergenerational trauma and marginalization of African American communities in the form of poverty; insecure housing and homelessness; and barriers to education, employment, health & emergency care, as well as appropriate culturally responsive support. This report identifies and addresses coordination across agencies to increase accessibility of services and responsiveness. We begin the path to reform with recognizing that the historic violence against Indigenous communities is more than a criminal justice/public safety issue. It reiterates the importance of community, state, and county relationships, and the necessity for data sharing in terms of accessibility, accountability, and uniformity. The report also addresses the need to provide more help and resources to African American women, girls, and their families who are at most risk of being murdered or experiencing violence and exploitation; these individuals are often significantly involved with child welfare, criminal justice, and other systems that therefore have an opportunity to help.

This historic report would not have been possible if not for the devotion, perseverance, and guidance of Kathryn Weeks and Rebecca Rabb from the Department of Public Safety; Dr. Brittany Lewis, and her colleagues from Research in Action including Dr. Catherine Squares, Healer Kamisha Johnson of Amani Healing Services & Carolyn Szczepanski, independent consultants. As well as the Community partnerships that includes RIA Partners; Dr. Lauren Martin from U of M Research, The Advocates for Human Rights, The Zen Bin, The Domestic Abuse Project, Anna Marie's Alliance, The Brittany Clardy Foundation, The Women's Foundation of Minnesota, and MNCASA. And with sincere everlasting gratitude for the participation of all our Committee Chairs and Advisory board Community experts as well. As Chair of the Minnesota MMAAW Task Force, I uphold that the Minnesota Legislature, Governor Walz and Lt. Governor Flanagan, the Commissioner of Public Safety, and all pertaining governmental agencies continue to collaborate and address this issue with a good heart to warrant the successful implementation of the recommendations found within this report.

Respectfully,

Lakeisha Lee,  
The Brittany Clardy Foundation Co- Founder  
MMAAW Task Force Chair

# MINNESOTA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY



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and Gambling  
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Marshal

## Office of the Commissioner

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Dear Gov. Tim Walz, Lt. Gov. Peggy Flanagan and Minnesota Legislators:

The Department of Public Safety is pleased to submit the Missing and Murdered African American Women (MMAAW) report for your review. This report is compiled and published in accordance with Minnesota Session Laws First Spec. Sess., Chapter 11, Article 2, Section 50.

The Minnesota Legislature led by Rep. Ruth Richardson developed the MMAAW Task Force during the 2021 legislative session to examine and report on a number of issues, including:

- Systemic causes of violence against African American women and girls.
- Policies, practices and institutions that perpetuate this violence.
- Measures needed to address violence against African American women and girls.
- Measures needed to help victims, their families and their communities.
- Appropriate methods of tracking and collecting data.

The task force found that African American women and girls are subjected to high rates of kidnapping and abduction, sexual and domestic abuse, and sex trafficking due to a history of patriarchy and structural racism. African American women and girls are also almost three times more likely to be murdered than their white peers. Even though African American women and girls comprise only 7 percent of Minnesota's population, they represent 40 percent of domestic violence victims.

Minnesota has the opportunity to create a legacy of meaningful change for our African American women and girls. The task force's recommendations will serve as a starting point for that change, including:

- Funding housing and other spaces and resources to serve African American women and girls.
- Developing effective culturally appropriate trainings and professional education for professionals including peace officers, prosecutors and victim services representatives.
- Recruiting and hiring more African American staff including peace officers, prosecutors, and victim services representatives.
- Establishing an office to support missing and murdered African American women and girls.

With commitment and investment towards implementation of these and other task force recommendations, we can truly impact lives of African American women and girls for generations.

Sincerely,

John Harrington  
Commissioner, Minnesota Department of Public Safety

EQUAL OPPORTUNITY EMPLOYER