

scholarships and interacting with those young people. That kind of interaction fosters good police-community relationships.

Since this is gun antiviolence month, it was good for these young people to be around police officers who live in their neighborhood, went to their high schools, and care about them and their families. This interaction makes a difference. This is the new policing, and I thank the African American Police Officers League and members of the Houston Police Department for recognizing how we work with our children and how we inspire them.

Mr. Speaker, I thank AAPOL for their service.

DRAFT GOLDWATER RALLY SUCCESS

(Mr. WILSON of South Carolina asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. WILSON of South Carolina. Mr. Speaker, this summer marks the 60th anniversary of the historic National Draft Goldwater for President Rally in Washington.

According to The New York Times, supporters of U.S. Senator Barry Goldwater of Arizona assembled on July 4, 1963, with "more than 6,000 Goldwater backers from across the country filled the National Guard Armory here for a rally of the National Draft Goldwater Committee. They were predominantly a young crowd."

As a Teen Age Republican at the High School of Charleston, I was grateful to participate with 30 activists by bus from Columbia, South Carolina, led by Republican State Chairman Drake Edens, with former Democrat State Representative Floyd Spence.

Senator Goldwater's visionary call for "Why Not Victory" to promote democracy to defeat communism has been achieved with the liberation of dozens of countries across the world. Actor Ronald Reagan delivered the Goldwater campaign challenge of "A Time for Choosing," ultimately leading to his Presidency.

Mr. Speaker, this summer marks the 60th anniversary of the historic 'National Draft of Goldwater for President Rally' in Washington.

According to The New York Times, supporters of U.S. Senator Barry Goldwater of Arizona assembled on July 4, 1963, with "more than 6,000 Goldwater backers from across the country filled the National Guard Armory here for a rally of the National Draft Goldwater Committee. They were predominantly a young crowd." "The principal addresses were given by Republican Senators John G. Tower of Texas and Carl T. Curtis of Nebraska."

As a Teen Age Republican at the High School of Charleston, I was grateful to participate with 30 activists by bus from Columbia, South Carolina led by Republican State Chairman Drake Edens with former Democrat State Representative Floyd Spence, who was the first Democrat to switch parties and ultimately elected Chairman of the House Armed Services Committee.

Another Teen Age Republican was Rusty DePass of Rock Hill who helped an all-Democrat York County become virtually all Republican today.

On that day there were no Republican elected officials in South Carolina, but the Goldwater victory in South Carolina in 1964 began a political revolution. Now, Republicans have a super majority in the legislature, including all statewide officials such as Governor Henry McMaster, Lieutenant Governor Pamela Evette, Attorney General Alan Wilson, State Superintendent of Education Ellen Weaver, State Treasurer Curtis Loftis, and Secretary of State Mark Hammond, and six of seven members of Congress, along with very credible candidates for President, Ambassador Nikki Haley and Senator TIM SCOTT. His philosophy of limited government, expanded freedom, individual responsibility, and Peace Through Strength, has triumphed.

Senator Goldwater's visionary call for "Why Not Victory" to promote democracy to defeat communism has been achieved with the liberation of dozens of countries across the world. Actor Ronald Reagan delivered the Goldwater campaign challenge of a "Time for Choosing" ultimately leading to his presidency.

In conclusion, God Bless our troops who successfully protected America for 20 years, as the global war on terrorism continues moving from the Afghanistan safe haven to America with open Biden borders.

□ 1945

FOCUSING ON NATIONAL REUNIFICATION MONTH

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 9, 2023, the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. JACKSON) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. JACKSON of Illinois. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days to revise and extend their remarks and include any extraneous materials on the subject of this Special Order.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Illinois?

There was no objection.

Mr. JACKSON of Illinois. Mr. Speaker, it is with great honor that I rise today to coanchor this Congressional Black Caucus Special Order hour, along with my distinguished colleague, Representative SHEILA CHERFILUS-MCORMICK.

As we commence this CBC Special Order hour, we will dedicate the next 60 minutes to National Reunification Month, focusing on a deeply concerning issue, the disproportionate separation of Black families by foster care and welfare services. This critical issue is not just of concern to the Congressional Black Caucus or Congress but a matter of significance for all Americans. Let us shed light on these unsettling realities and provide solutions and champion the reunification of families across our Nation.

Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentlewoman from Florida (Mrs. CHERFILUS-MCORMICK).

Mrs. CHERFILUS-MCORMICK. Mr. Speaker, I thank Representative JONATHAN JACKSON for yielding.

June marks National Reunification Month, allowing us to recognize the importance of keeping families together and the long-term benefits that come with stable family structures.

As we observe this month, we must find ways to support the growing number of Black children who have been unnecessarily placed in foster care systems. As elected leaders, we must ensure that this trend does not continue in earnest.

Although the share of Black children in foster care is lower than ever before, Black children are still drastically overrepresented in the child welfare system. Across the country, 20 percent of children entering foster care in fiscal year 2021 were Black, yet Black children represent just 14 percent of the general population.

In my home State of Florida, it takes an extra 5 days, on average, for Black children to exit out-of-home care when compared to their White counterparts. This has been the status quo for far too long. From 2005 to 2021, 1 out of 125 children who identify as Black have been in foster care at any given point in time. That pains me not only as a Black American but as a parent.

There are several factors behind these glaring statistics, but they stem in large part from a combination of historical trauma and structural and systemic racism. Families of color are more likely to live in communities marked by historic disinvestment. High poverty rates have been exacerbated by poor housing conditions, limited access to employment opportunities and healthy food, as well as other components that are critical to raising children.

Through no fault of their own, many Black families have found it difficult to meet basic family needs and raise their children in safe, stable homes.

Our Nation needs to course correct. Research shows that children have better outcomes in life when their own families safely nurture and care for them. When a child must be removed from their parents, it is profoundly distressing for the entire family.

This year marks the fifth anniversary of the passage of the Family First Prevention Services Act. This law changed how we look at child welfare, focusing on families as a whole. I also helped fund evidence-based, prevention-focused activities, like those that address mental health needs and in-home parent skill-based programs. As we celebrate its anniversary, we must continue to fund programs that keep our children out of foster care and provide parents with the support they need.

Mr. JACKSON of Illinois. Mr. Speaker, I thank Mrs. CHERFILUS-MCORMICK for her great words.

Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentlewoman from Wisconsin (Ms. MOORE).

Ms. MOORE of Wisconsin. Mr. Speaker, I thank Mr. JACKSON for yielding. I am so happy to be joining him and Representative SHEILA CHERFILUS-McCORMICK for this Congressional Black Caucus Special Order hour. Indeed, it is a special honor to talk about our children and what they need.

I am so proud to be a member of the Congressional Black Caucus. Not only am I a member of this esteemed body that is concerned about foster youth, but I am also a member of the Bipartisan Congressional Caucus on Foster Youth, and I serve in that caucus as one of the six bipartisan chairs.

I thank the CBC and its members who supported the Congressional Caucus on Foster Youth's Shadow Day this past June 14, last week. I thank all the Members of the House who took time to allow a former foster youth to join them in their day's activities as well as to hear from and learn from their shadows.

If you didn't have a foster youth this year, be sure that GWEN MOORE will be calling upon you next year to enjoy this important experience and feedback between the delegates and Members.

My fellow CBC members, in particular, demonstrated their commitment to this special community through graciously hosting a former foster youth in their office for 1 day and addressing the whole delegation and cohort of 30 former foster youth from across the country, representing 20 States, directly during the youth's townhall meeting.

I thank those CBC members who stepped up last week to host a shadow, including my Congressional Foster Youth Caucus co-chair, Representative SYDNEY KAMLAGER-DOVE; my Ways and Means Committee work fam subcommittee ranking member and long-time foster youth advocate, Representative DANNY DAVIS of Illinois; and others, including Representative EMANUEL CLEAVER, Representative TERRI SEWELL, Representative BOBBY SCOTT, Representative BARBARA LEE, Representative SHEILA JACKSON LEE, Representative SUMMER LEE, Representative SHEILA CHERFILUS-McCORMICK, and Representative SHONTEL BROWN.

Mr. Speaker, I will give a special shout-out to Representative MAXINE WATERS, who was busy with her committee and didn't actually take a shadow, but she met and spoke with one of the students that I shadowed and made his day. He was someone who was born in Los Angeles, and it made his day to meet the Honorable MAXINE WATERS.

We also went over to the Senate side and met with Senator BOOKER. My particular shadow, Theron, is someone who is a licensed therapist, and his experience in foster care is that it is easier to get in trouble and to come in contact with the juvenile justice system for doing nothing but being a foster youth. He wants to make sure that we put a focus on the juvenile justice sys-

tem with regard to its nexus with foster care.

We have to stop the foster care-to-prison pipeline, Mr. Speaker. These are things that our foster youth are telling us.

I represented two outstanding foster youth, Shay Grey Woods and Theron Ogedengbe. Just like all the foster youth that I have gotten to know and had the privilege to participate with during Shadow Day, including the late Dosha "DJay" Joi, I have been the student. I have learned from them. They have informed me about the kinds of legislative initiatives that need to occur and what we need to do.

Mr. Speaker, just let me say, these foster youth who come here every year are leaders. These are people who have somehow overcome the many barriers that foster youth experience, and they are able to be a voice to speak for them. We should not think that because we meet these brilliant, young, educated foster youth that there aren't thousands more of them who are falling through the cracks for want of our guidance and care.

It is a reminder. I remind you that behind all these statistics, there are real people and real stories that demonstrate their incredible resilience and hope that they have.

The reason that I am really proud of Shadow Day is because it elevates the voices of the over 377,000 children in out-of-home care as of the end of 2021.

Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, disproportionately, Black children are overrepresented in the child welfare system. In my own home State of Wisconsin, 28 percent of the youth in out-of-home placements were Black or African American, whereas African-American youth in Wisconsin only constitute 9 percent of the population. They are overrepresented by three times.

The data from the United States as a whole is similarly disproportionate, with 22 percent of children in the United States in out-of-home care being Black and only 14 percent of youth in the general population being African American.

When you say that you want to lift up National Reunification Month, it is something we need to lift up because we have all heard the old adage that you divide and conquer. This is our future workforce. These are our future builders, doctors, teachers, people who repair our roofs, and it is just about impossible to do that when they start out with so many adverse childhood experiences, like being separated from their birth parents, sometimes unnecessarily.

In a perfect world, no children would ever be separated. Of course, we understand that sometimes that is in the best interests of the children. Far too often, it is our policies under our child welfare system and our welfare system and our unwillingness to support parents where they are that are creating these out-of-home placements.

I want to talk about some very specific reasons that children are taken out of these homes, if you will bear with me.

Child neglect is the number one reason that children are taken out of these homes. No one wants children to be neglected. Not a single person in the United States Congress would want a child to be stuck in a home where they were being abused and neglected.

That is really an overstatement of what actually happens. What actually happens is there are a lot of people who have more month than money. If you come to June 26 and the resources for that household have dried up, with some of the most onerous policies that we have around who can get SNAP, also called food stamps, and when you think about parents living in situations where 48 percent of their income has to go for housing, and not necessarily good housing—houses with lead paint in them and lead pipes and vermin, and they are still paying almost half their income for housing, we see a situation where children can easily be loved yet neglected.

One of the things that I am going to do is reintroduce, as I have done for several cycles, the Family Poverty is Not Child Neglect Act. I want to reinforce the notion that these agencies should not be snatching kids out of their homes when providing maybe some SNAP or other resources to the family could preserve that family.

□ 2000

It is in the best interest of children to be at home if they can be. My bill would make it so much harder for these agencies to use poverty as a rationale to pulling families apart.

I am looking for other ways to do it. I don't want to take up all the time, but I just want to mention a second reason that children are placed out of home, it is because of parental substance abuse.

Mr. JACKSON, I have known you and your family for a long time, so I know that you recall how substance abuse has become a real curse in this country. Drug affliction and addiction happens in every corner of the United States. How is it treated?

In some communities where there are fentanyl addictions, which are tragic; meth addictions, which are tragic; opioid addictions, which are tragic, we are proposing government interventions to help people. But when children of foster families become addicted, they are treated often like criminals and have their children taken from them instead of them being offered treatment.

So this year's theme for National Reunification Month is "We believe in the resiliency and strength of our families." If that is going to be our motto, Mr. JACKSON, we ought to do something to reinforce this strength and resilience and not just talk about it.

We need policies that match this audacious goal. Policies like the new exemption from SNAP time arbitrary and

harmful time limits in the Fiscal Responsibility Act for former foster youth up to age 24.

The White House has done a marvelous job, they estimated that as many as 50,000 youth who have aged out of foster care will now be exempt from onerous timelines which say that in the 3-year period you could only be eligible for SNAP for 3 months. In 3 years you can only get SNAP if you are an adult, but we have exempted foster youth from that provision because who do we know, Representative JACKSON, who is 18 or 19 on their own and can figure it out? I know I was still eating at home when I was 19.

I am so proud, again, of you and Mrs. CHERFILUS-MCCORMICK for spending this time to lift this up to our community and our constituents. I am inspired by your dedication and committed to working with you as we move forward.

I thank you for yielding to me, Mr. JACKSON.

Mr. JACKSON of Illinois. Mr. Speaker, I thank the Honorable GWEN MOORE from Wisconsin, who so eloquently and passionately articulated the plight of reunification and the challenges that lie before us.

Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. PAYNE).

Mr. PAYNE. Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleagues, the gentleman from Illinois and the gentlewoman from Florida, for their leadership in the Congressional Black Caucus Special Order hour this First Session of the 118th Congress.

They have demonstrated, even as freshmen, their leadership and breadth of knowledge of the issues that are important to the members of the Congressional Black Caucus. I thank both of them for their outstanding leadership.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to discuss June as National Reunification Month. It is a time to recognize the people who work daily to help families stay together. I know this issue personally.

Last Wednesday, I had the honor of hosting a young constituent from my district during Foster Youth Shadow Day. We spent the day discussing legislative process and I showed her around Congress. I was impressed with her questions and intelligence. She deserves to grow up in a loving and supportive household. She is one reason we must do more to help families stay together in healthy environments.

There are anywhere from 300,000 to 400,000 children in foster care nationwide. Yet too many children are removed from households before parents receive the services necessary to avoid such an action. This situation is worse in Black communities.

Black families are more likely to be investigated by child protective services and lose children than White families. Black children spend more time in foster care, and they are less likely to be reunified with their families.

Family reunification is better for these children overall. The youth that

shadowed me the other day talked about where her siblings were and that they weren't together. Even though she is not with them, she tries to keep track of them, being the eldest, and has worked to make sure that she stays in their lives.

Research shows that children have better outcomes in life when they grow up in families that nurture and care for them. There is hope for children in traumatic households before they even enter foster care. This year marks the 5th anniversary of the passage of the Family First Prevention Services Act.

This law made funding available for resources and activities to make families healthier and safer for children. These resources include programs to address mental health and substance abuse issues in the home. Also, these programs help fathers and mothers become better parents.

We need to identify families at risk sooner so we can implement these programs before child removal becomes necessary. We need to increase funding for more preventative services, such as home visits. Studies show that home visits lower the rate of child maltreatment, the leading cause of child removal. In addition, there are kin placements.

Right now there are 2.5 million children who are being raised by relatives or close family friends. Research has found that children staying with a relative or a friend have better behavior, mental health, and physical health than children in foster care. They are allowed to grow up in their culture and stay connected to their families. Children do best with their own families.

That is why we must provide more resources to families to prevent children from being removed at all. Healthy families are better for children, and they are better for America.

As I stated, my colleague prior to me, the Honorable GWEN MOORE, has picked up the mantle from one of our great colleagues that has moved on to lead the metropolis of Los Angeles, KAREN BASS, who did an outstanding job with this program, the Foster Shadow Youth Day on Capitol Hill. She was an outstanding leader in that, and Ms. MOORE has picked it up and not lost a beat.

Mr. Speaker, it is an opportunity for us to do the best that we can to make sure that families stay unified and have a healthy outlook on life.

Mr. JACKSON of Illinois. Mr. Speaker, I thank the Honorable DONALD PAYNE, Jr., from the State of New Jersey for those eloquent words.

Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentlewoman from Florida (Mrs. CHERFILUS-MCCORMICK).

Mrs. CHERFILUS-MCCORMICK. Mr. Speaker, in honor of Caribbean American Heritage Month, I rise today to recognize Dr. Judith Joseph, who has helped shine a light on mental health issues and inspired countless others to seek support.

Dr. Joseph immigrated to the U.S. from Trinidad at the age of 4. After

growing up in a religious community, with a father as a pastor, Judith became interested in exploring the intersection of spirituality and science.

Today, she leads a team of 10 talented women at the Manhattan Behavioral Medicine, who are dedicated to developing and exploring novel treatments for mental health conditions such as depression, anxiety, and ADHD.

Dr. Joseph has shared her expertise with a wide audience, using social media as a positive vehicle for change in a digestible and accessible manner. I thank Dr. Joseph for her invaluable contribution to mental health research and education.

Mr. JACKSON of Illinois. Mr. Speaker, June is National Reunification Month, an important designation that remains unknown to many, but one that warrants wider understanding and greater attention. In the grand tapestry of life, one universal truth weaves its thread throughout—that none of us can journey far or aim high without some form of familial structure to ground us. Family, in its various forms and definitions, provides the anchors we all need.

As we turn our attention to the realities underscored by the data from fiscal year 2021, a stark and uncomfortable picture emerges that further emphasizes the urgency of the matter at hand.

□ 2015

Over the year, investigations of maltreatment involved a staggering 587,330 children in the United States.

Each of these represents a unique story, a child who has faced abuse or neglect severe enough that allegations of maltreatment were substantiated, and a life irrevocably scarred by these experiences.

Moreover, this vast number doesn't tell the complete story. Over 200,000 children were placed into the foster care system in that same year, a heart-rending reflection of the urgency and complexity of the issues that we confront. While these numbers are staggering on their own, the statistics take on an even darker shade when viewed through the lens of racial disparities.

The overrepresentation of African-American children in the foster care system is a disturbing trend that we can no longer ignore.

Despite representing only 14 percent of the general population, African-American children accounted for 20 percent of the children entering the foster care system in fiscal year 2021. This disproportionate representation extends to multiracial children as well, revealing a systemic bias that must be addressed.

In certain States, this disproportionality is even more pronounced, spotlighting a deeply rooted racial bias that is pervasive and detrimental. The repercussions of these disparities stretch far beyond the immediate impact, creating a ripple effect that touches every aspect of these children's lives, from their education and

mental health to their future economic opportunities.

Taking a broader perspective, if we look back over the span from 2005 to 2021, the data paints an even more troubling picture. During this period, an alarming one out of every 125 children identifying as Black or African American found themselves in foster care at any given point in time. This points to a deep-seated systemic issue that transcends temporal and geographical boundaries, further underscoring the urgent need for reform.

Mr. Speaker, I stand before you today not just as an elected Representative, but as a living testament to this profound truth. I am an embodiment of the power of familial support and a witness to the transformative impact it can have on a child's life. It is within the secure confines of a loving family that a child can break free from the constraints of financial, existential, and emotional insecurity, daring to dream bigger, reach higher, and grow more fully.

A grim reality, however, casts a long shadow over our Nation—the practice of unnecessary family separations. This is not a side issue or a minor concern, but a grave matter that demands serious attention and conscious action from each of us.

The current system as it stands is marred by prejudice and arbitrariness, permitting the removal of children from their families without the absolute justification of immediate harm. This is a practice that we must challenge, question, and ultimately transform.

The era must come to an end when social workers and others were permitted to pass judgment on a family's worthiness based on race, economic status, or cultural and religious beliefs. A family's integrity should not be a matter for prejudiced scrutiny but respected as the bedrock of our society.

It is crucial to emphatically state that Black children, like all children, need the nurturing care of their parents. They need to experience life's joys and challenges within the safety net of their own families, enriching their identity and strengthening their roots.

There exists a blatant contradiction when some claim to champion the cause of families while simultaneously supporting policies that splinter their very familial structures.

How can one profess commitment to family values while advocating for policies that fundamentally undermine the very foundation of families?

Every family, regardless of their race, ethnicity, or geographical origin, has an undeniable right to raise their children in an environment free from undue governmental interference and unwarranted judgment from uninvested bureaucrats. Be they Black, Hispanic, indigenous, Asian, from the Appalachia, or from the South Side of Chicago, every family deserves this opportunity.

Perhaps it is time to look inward and address the root issues that plague our society. If we ensured a living wage for our workers, would we not see a reduction in the number of children entering the foster care system?

If we treated the root causes of addiction, would we not see fewer children that would need to be separated from their families?

Moreover, if we could cease making assumptions based on racial stereotypes about families different from our very own view, we might prevent the stigmatization of countless children. We might stop reducing them to mere cogs in the machinery of systemic racism and bigotry and instead acknowledge their individuality, their potential, and their dreams.

Today, I implore each and every one of us and you to present this to the House and to lend your ears to the voices that often go unheard. Listen to the stories of children and young people in the foster care system, their struggles, their hopes, and their dreams. Remember the dedicated caretakers who selflessly serve these children. Children who have been placed in the foster care system, for reasons reckless or legitimate, must never be rendered invisible or forgotten.

We must always remember that their lives matter. Their dreams are of critical importance to the tapestry of our future. Their spiritual, psychological, and emotional well-being is an essential cornerstone of the America we aspire to become.

A child living with criticism—we have heard—learns to condemn. A child exposed to hostility learns to fight. A child steeped in shame learns guilt. However, if we raise a child in an environment filled with encouragement, fairness, and approval, then they learn to be confident, just, and to love themselves.

Our government's paramount responsibility is to the welfare of our children. This responsibility outweighs any issues of national security or economic superiority. It is the heart and soul of representative government. Our constituents did not elect us to represent their vested interests but to defend and advance policies that secure a brighter and better future for their children.

Nobody sent us here to indulge in meaningless squabbles. We were not elected to be rulers of insignificant territories. We were chosen to represent their hopes and dreams and to make the task of raising and keeping families together easier.

As we recently celebrated Juneteenth, we remember what formerly enslaved Africans did after their emancipation. History bears witness that they walked great distances in search of family members who had been sold away and taken from them. They traversed the length and breadth of the South, driven by an indomitable spirit and an unwavering resolve to reunite their families. This is the spirit we should embody as we observe National Reunification Month.

The Congressional Black Caucus members will not stand by and watch families be torn apart in America again. No child should be thrust into a system unless they are in immediate danger. This is our pledge, and this is our solemn promise.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to acknowledge the life of my grandmother, Gertrude Brown, who was a foster child who was orphaned at the age of 14. I represent her indomitable spirit.

Mr. Speaker, I yield to the honorable gentlewoman from Florida (Mrs. CHERFILUS-McCORMICK).

Mrs. CHERFILUS-McCORMICK. Mr. Speaker, I thank my co-chair, Representative JONATHAN JACKSON, for yielding.

Mr. Speaker, in honor of Caribbean American Heritage Month, I rise today to recognize Phyllisia Ross, whose prowess as a musician has allowed her to create unique music that reflects her Caribbean heritage. Since the age of 3, Ross has developed her craft of singing and playing the piano. In 2006, Ross graduated from the world-renowned A.W. Dreyfoos School of the Arts in West Palm Beach, Florida.

Throughout her career, she has been able to incorporate several styles of genres in her music, ranging from classical to R&B, as well as world music in several languages. Her hit single "Konsa" is emblematic of her unique talents, paying homage to her Haitian roots in its kompa production style.

Ross has brought her music around the globe—everywhere from the Ivory Coast to Jamaica—touching audiences worldwide. In addition, Ross also runs and operates her own independent music production company and has helped mentor young artists.

I am proud to represent Ross and her extensive artistic contributions to the Caribbean community and to the United States.

Mr. JACKSON of Illinois. Mr. Speaker, I thank the Honorable SHEILA CHERFILUS-McCORMICK for her remarks.

Mr. Speaker, you have heard from my distinguished colleagues about family reunification.

I thank the Congressional Black Caucus chairman, Mr. STEVE HORSFORD. I thank the Honorable GWEN MOORE. I thank the Honorable DONALD PAYNE, Jr. I thank my honorable colleagues who joined us today on all issues of great importance to the Congressional Black Caucus, our constituents, Congress, and all Americans tonight.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Mr. Speaker, June 2023 marks National Reunification Month, honoring those who work tirelessly to keep families together across the nation.

Here we are, recognizing the individuals and continuing initiatives that support keeping families together.

The topic for this year's reunification is "Shifting Power and Reconnecting Families All Year Long."

The three important themes during Reunification Month include:

1. The fact that we should celebrate parents and children who have successfully reunited and understand how challenging an accomplishment it may be.

2. Celebrate child welfare professionals, kin caregivers, and resource families who helped make reunification a reality for parents and children. And lastly . . .

3. Inspire parents and professionals who are currently involved in child welfare to see that Reunification Matters and Reunification Happens.

It is also a good time to commit once more to supporting, enhancing, and intensifying these initiatives all year long.

By definition, the child welfare system is a collection of programs and services aimed at optimizing children's well-being by ensuring their safety, establishing durability, and aiding their families.

The operation and provision of child welfare services may vary from state to state, but all states are accountable for adhering to federal and state laws.

And yet, the stress of involvement in the child welfare system and foster care placement instability can contribute to or exacerbate mental health problems, and a child's unmet physical and mental health requirements have been related to placement instability.

I want to acknowledge that there are too many, particularly Black and African American children, unnecessarily taken from their homes and placed in foster care.

Not only are child protective agencies more likely to investigate Black homes, remove their children, and place them in foster care, but Black children are prone to spend more time in foster care and are less likely to be reunified with their families.

Research tells us that Black children are less likely to be reunified than White and Hispanic children, older children are less likely to be reunified and children with health or mental health issues are less likely to be reunited.

In addition, more than 200,000 kids entered foster care, and 587,330 of those cases of maltreatment or neglect have been documented nationwide.

Every child deserves a village of support.

In Houston, there are well over 2,000 children currently in the foster care system.

Texas alone response times the hotline to report child abuse, neglect, or exploitation, increased by half a minute, with callers waiting on hold an average of 5.2 minutes, since the January 2022 report.

Furthermore, research on kinship care has indicated that children placed with relatives have better behavior, mental health, and well-being than children placed in non-relative foster care, and that children placed with family have higher placement stability.

Older foster youth have the same needs as younger children for a safe and loving family that will support them into maturity.

It is extremely unfair that youth who age out of foster care are more likely to encounter homelessness, unemployment, early parenthood, and substance abuse. That is why I congratulate the Hay Center for using Federal Block grant funds to build housing for aged out youth with wraparound services in Houston.

The needs, experiences, and voices of children and youth in foster care as well as their families and caretakers need to be lifted.

Everyone has a part to play in making communities and families stronger and lowering the need for foster care in a secure manner.

This year commemorates the fifth anniversary of the Family First Prevention Services Act's passage.

I am astounded that the passage of this law, that emphasis on the child alone was replaced with one that included the family as well.

Family First made financing available for a variety of authorized evidence-based prevention-focused programs, such as those to address mental health issues, substance use disorders, and to offer parental skills-building.

Family First prevention plans have been filed by 45 states including Texas and 4 tribes to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and several have already started putting them into practice.

The COVID-19 pandemic brought to light the need for more innovative ways, like telehealth, to provide mental health services to children, youth, and their caretakers.

Several state child welfare agencies are co-designing techniques to design with individuals and communities rather than for them. This method elevates the voices and experiences of adolescents, parents, relatives, and foster parents.

The Harris County Plan of Safe Care Steering Committee is a cross-sector group of organizations from academia, child welfare, healthcare, justice, public safety, and substance use disorder prevention treatment.

The Texas Department of Family and Protective Services operates a "Treatment Foster Family Care" program to stabilize children at risk of placement in a congregate care setting or psychiatric hospital who experience emotional, behavioral, or mental health difficulties.

Transforming the child welfare system will require the development of new policies, practices, and infrastructures that prioritize prevention and the well-being of children and families.

As well as meaningful participation of those with lived experience in all stages of reform planning, development, and implementation.

Many people find the process of receiving assistance to be unnecessarily difficult.

Not to mention the overwhelmingly horrifying number of children who are placed in unlicensed homes.

It is illegal to place children overnight in unlicensed facilities, but because of mounting demand, children are sleeping in such places anyway.

The harm to foster children goes beyond loneliness and missed meals.

It saddens me to know foster children have been subjected to physical and sexual abuse in these temporary placements.

Children have gone missing while in state care and some have been groomed for sexual trafficking.

CPS workers—trained for case management, not therapeutic care—have their hands tied in how to respond.

We are talking about traumatized children who have been subjected to abuse and neglect.

Children who are now being housed in temporary residential treatment centers or temporary group homes under the supervision of CPS staff.

Placement into foster care is a significant and traumatic experience in the life of a child, and for their family.

That is why we need to work to support and strengthen families and prevent unnecessary removals of children from their homes.

Too often, the perspectives of children, youth, and families, have been silenced in debates about how communities may improve their approach to child and family well-being.

We should all believe in hope.

Hope is the belief by a family that despite the challenges they face, the strength and support of neighbors and others in the community will help them to overcome and thrive.

Childhood should be some of the most beautiful moments of your life.

No one person young or old should endure what many of our nation's people are experiencing.

No child left behind means exactly that.

Our children are the future, the past and most importantly the present.

Do not take your focus off of the important and what some may deem "touchy" subjects, because they are the most pivotal in the end.

They are all of our children and every one of us is needed to safeguard and protect them.

As co-chair of the Children's Caucus, I encourage all of us to continue to dig deeper, love more and reach out to children in need.

As Members of Congress, it is our duty to do even more to ensure all safeguards are in place and to uphold laws, and to create or amend laws where needed.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. JACKSON of Illinois. Mr. Speaker, I move that the House do now adjourn.

The motion was agreed to; accordingly (at 8 o'clock and 24 minutes p.m.), under its previous order, the House adjourned until tomorrow, Wednesday, June 21, 2023, at 10 a.m. for morning-hour debate.

EXECUTIVE COMMUNICATIONS, ETC.

Under clause 2 of rule XIV, executive communications were taken from the Speaker's table and referred as follows:

EC-1269. A letter from the Assistant Secretary for Legislation, Department of Health and Human Services, transmitting the Department's fourteenth Annual Report to Congress on the Prevention and Reduction of Underage Drinking for 2022, pursuant to 42 U.S.C. 290bb-25b(c)(1)(F); Public Law 109-422, Sec. 2; (120 Stat. 2892); to the Committee on Energy and Commerce.

EC-1270. A letter from the Assistant General Counsel for Legislation, Regulation, and Energy Efficiency, Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy, Department