# NYS Task Force on Missing Women and Girls who are Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC)

Final Report

AUGUST 2026

**Task Force on Missing Women and Girls who are Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC)**

**Final Report To New York State**

# Governor Kathy Hochul and State Legislature

*Submitted Pursuant to Chapter 12 of the Laws of 2024*

Convened by the **Division of Criminal Justice Services** in conjunction with the **Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence.**

August 2026

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## Executive Summary

The New York State Task Force on Missing Women and Girls Who Are Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) was established by Chapter 12 of the Laws of 2024 and convened by the Division of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS) in conjunction with the Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence (OPDV). The BIPOC Task Force is composed of ten state agency designees and six additional members appointed by the Governor and legislative leaders and has been meeting since December 2024.

DCJS, on behalf of the BIPOC Task Force, commissioned a two-phase project by the New York State Youth Justice Institute (YJI) at the University at Albany, State University of New York (SUNY). Phase One of the project was a study (YJI study) — a comprehensive, trauma-informed, and culturally honoring investigation that included statewide listening sessions, in-depth interviews, quantitative data analysis, and a media review — and was presented to the BIPOC Task Force in April 2026 and is adopted as the BIPOC Task Force's findings. Phase Two will begin as this report is issued to support the BIPOC Task Force in adopting certain recommendations that reflect short-, medium-, and long-term priorities, incorporating study findings, associated research and analysis, and the feedback of individuals with lived experience and/or their families.

**The Problem.** National data indicates that Black, Indigenous, Asian, and other women and girls of color comprise a disproportionate number of the people who are missing in the United States.[1] In New York State, Black women and girls account for approximately 50.3% of all missingness episodes recorded statewide between 2005 and 2025[2] while comprising a substantially smaller share of New York State's female population. Ethnicity data, currently an optional field, is missing from 77% of missing persons reports.[3] When accounting for age, data shows that most juvenile cases — over 95% — are classified as "runaway,"[4] a label that assigns agency and removes institutional protection at precisely the moment when BIPOC girls are most vulnerable to exploitation.

Media coverage of missing BIPOC women and girls is demonstrably lower than coverage of missing White women and girls.[5] These disparities are not isolated failures; they result from structural and institutional conditions shaped by systemic racism, gender bias, poverty, generational trauma, housing instability, immigration vulnerability, and under-resourced safety nets.

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1 Youth Justice Institute at the University of Albany, A Study in Support of the NYS Governor's Task Force on Missing Women and Girls Who Are Black, Indigenous, or People of Color (BIPOC) (May 2026), p. 5.

2 YJI study, p. 37. The Division of Criminal Justice Services' Missing Persons Clearinghouse dataset covers missingness episodes, not unique individuals. Figures should be interpreted with caution given underreporting, racial misclassification, and missing ethnicity data. See appendix of this report for the full YJI study.

3 YJI study, p. 35.

4 YJI study, p. 37.

5 YJI study, p. 39.

Drawing from the findings of the YJI study, the BIPOC Task Force observes that there are multiple pathways to missingness, which are rooted in a history of exploitation of BIPOC women and girls. Many pathways are interconnected with forms of gender-based violence such as domestic violence and sexual violence; human trafficking; and involvement in the child welfare system. Missingness must be addressed through multiple response systems and utilize different approaches to reach the communities most impacted. The BIPOC Task Force emphasizes the need to broaden and strengthen the understanding of missingness, including its history and causes, when considering potential solutions.

The BIPOC Task Force therefore issues the following recommendations, organized by the six areas set forth in Chapter 12 of the Laws of 2024, followed by a seventh area addressing the infrastructure necessary to sustain this work:

## Recommendation Area I: Improve Cultural Responsiveness

1. Eliminate “runaway” and identify other potentially harmful terminology across law enforcement forms, training, and media communications given the adverse effect of such terminology.
2. Implement policies, procedures, and training that create change by improving culturally responsive care and attention in these cases.
3. Strengthen law enforcement training. Establish a model policy on the best practices for handling cases of missing BIPOC women and girls through the Municipal Police Training Council (MPTC).
4. Establish multi-sector, multi-agency case reviews to map pathways to missingness. Allow timely information exchange among stakeholders to develop recovery plans.
5. Develop judicial education programs, including on the misuse of the term “runaway” and providing judges with tools to make appropriate inquiries in the courtroom.

## Recommendation Area II: Enhance Community Awareness

1. Inform media practices by encouraging the development and adoption of best practices related to the reporting of missing BIPOC women and girls cases.
2. Invest in community-centered awareness as the primary outreach strategy, supported by partnerships with culturally specific organizations.
3. Implement a statewide public awareness campaign.
4. Expand NY-Alert outreach. Explore supplemental alert systems with careful attention to community concerns and lessons from other states.

## Recommendation Area III: Education and Training in BIPOC Communities

1. Incorporate missing BIPOC women and girls content into school curricula, professional training, and community education.

2. Center lived experience voices with meaningful compensation and decision-making influence on policy and program decisions to prevent missingness. Expand peer navigation and mentorship for BIPOC women and girls to increase education and support. Engage non-traditional community spaces for public outreach and education.

### Recommendation Area IV: Data Collection

1. Update demographic fields in missing persons reports, including making ethnicity mandatory and adding a non-binary sex option.
2. Add a missingness field to the human trafficking referral form.
3. Conduct further research on missingness within Indigenous communities.
4. Consider creating a, or expanding an existing, centralized database and dashboard for tracking missing BIPOC women and girls statewide.

### Recommendation Area V: Preventative Programming

1. Invest in Runaway[6] and Homeless Youth and Safe Harbour programs. Ensure prevention programming addresses coercive control and intimate partner dynamics.
2. Promote resources developed by state agencies and partners and continue Missing Child Rescue Operations.
3. Develop relevant, trauma-informed, and culturally grounded post-return support.
4. Support sustained investment in culturally specific organizations.

### Recommendation Area VI: Major Traffic Hubs, Highways, and Resource Extraction Sites

1. Conduct targeted missingness mapping research including further engagement with the Department of Transportation, the New York State Police, and other relevant stakeholders, survivor listening sessions, and improved location data collection.
2. Consider developing strategic partnerships with major transportation providers to raise awareness about missing BIPOC women and girls.

### Recommendation Area VII: Build Sustainable Infrastructure

1. Establish a continuing interagency working group as an interim bridge until a dedicated staffed unit or office is created; working group members then transition to an advisory role.
2. Establish a dedicated unit or office — with an institutional home to be determined by the Executive and Legislature — to implement recommendations and publish annual reports.

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[6] This report recommends that the term “runaway” be replaced, where possible, due to potential negative bias and stereotyping of missing youth. However, to the extent that existing systems and programs incorporate this nomenclature, this report uses the term “runaway” to reference such systems and programs.

3. Expand Missing Persons Clearinghouse's (MPC) family support capacity.
4. Broaden the scope of the Domestic Violence Fatality Review.
5. Engage Youth Justice Institute (YJI) for continued technical assistance.

## Background

Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) women and girls go missing and are murdered at disproportionately high rates and the systems designed to protect them all too often demonstrate a lack of concern, attention, and responsiveness in their cases. In response, Senator Lea Webb and Assemblymember Karines Reyes championed – and Governor Kathy Hochul supported – the effort to convene a task force that would make recommendations to improve how systems care for and support BIPOC women and girls who are missing.

Chapter 12 of the Laws of 2024 established the New York State Task Force on Missing Women and Girls who are Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) on January 26, 2024, hereinafter referred to as the BIPOC Task Force.[7]

The Division of Criminal Justice Services, in conjunction with the Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence, convened the BIPOC Task Force, which comprised representatives from the following governmental agencies:

- Division of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS)
- Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence (OPDV)
- Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS)
- New York State Police (NYSP)
- Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA)
- Department of Health (DOH)
- Office of Victim Services (OVS)
- Office of Mental Health (OMH)
- Department of Labor (DOL)
- Department of Transportation (DOT)

[7] The chapter amendment includes references to "murdered" BIPOC women and girls and to the "abduction" of BIPOC women and girls. However, the chapter amendment formally names the task force as the "task force on *missing* women and girls" who are BIPOC (emphasis added). Given the nomenclature, including in the funding appropriation, and the inconsistent references, the BIPOC Task Force and the commissioned study focused on missing BIPOC women and girls. As many murdered and/or abducted BIPOC women and girls also experience missingness, the BIPOC Task Force's report and the commissioned study are relevant to these communities.

Additional members were appointed by the Governor, the temporary president of the Senate, and the speaker of the Assembly:

- Detective Sergeant Karonienhawi Thompson, Saint Regis Mohawk Tribal Police;
- Dr. Dawn Rowe, Founding President and CEO of Girl VOW;
- The Honorable Kathie Davidson, Dean of the New York State Judicial Institute;
- Dr. Daniele Lyman-Torres, President and CEO of the Child Advocacy Center of Greater Rochester;
- Odis Guerrero, Legislative Consultant; and
- Kelly Diane Galloway, President and Founding Director of Project Mona's House.

The BIPOC Task Force owes much gratitude to the staff and designees of member agencies, including subject matter experts and administrative staff, as well as the advocates and community partners whose voices and expertise made this work possible. This report would not have been possible without their support.

## Support for the BIPOC Task Force

DCJS, on behalf of the BIPOC Task Force, commissioned the New York State Youth Justice Institute (YJI) at the University at Albany, State University of New York (SUNY) to support the BIPOC Task Force members in developing the legislatively required recommendations. After meeting with the BIPOC Task Force, YJI proposed a two-phased plan:

Phase One: Design and execute a study to inform the BIPOC Task Force that included the following activities: hosting listening sessions with families, advocates, and key stakeholders; identifying common themes from these conversations to highlight challenges and opportunities; producing a brief report on current systems (e.g., what data exists, where gaps remain, and what can be improved); and reviewing media coverage across New York State to examine patterns in visibility and reporting. This study was completed in March 2026 and presented to the BIPOC Task Force in April 2026.

Phase Two: Building on the activities of Phase One, YJI intends to support the BIPOC Task Force in issuing and adopting recommendations that reflect short-, medium-, and long-term priorities, incorporating study findings, associated research and analysis, and the feedback of individuals with lived experience and/or their families.

Due to the expansive nature of this issue and the limited timeframe, YJI focused on a subset of those who may be missing. Additionally, due to inconsistencies in the law that at times focused on missing BIPOC women and girls and at other times included murdered BIPOC women and girls, the YJI study did not fully explore the data surrounding murdered BIPOC women and girls. This report and recommendations contain additional context on the influence of gender-based violence on these issues, in acknowledgment that there are multiple pathways to missingness that must be considered to more fully understand the scope of the problem.

YJI conducted the study through a trauma-informed and culturally honoring lens, interviewing survivors, family members of survivors, lived-experience experts, system allies, practitioners, community advocates, and media scholars. In addition to interviews, listening sessions, consultations, and data collection, YJI established a Guiding Council of lived experts or family members of lived experts who directly reviewed the study.

The BIPOC Task Force is appreciative of the foundational work of the YJI, led by Executive Director Dr. Giza Lopes and her team including Dr. Alysha May, Dr. Toni Cela, and Dr. Subhajit Pal.

Phase Two of YJI's work is intended to support the BIPOC Task Force in adopting recommendations that reflect short-, medium-, and long-term priorities, incorporating study findings, associated research and analysis, and the feedback of individuals with lived experience and/or their families. The BIPOC Task Force anticipates that YJI will provide ongoing technical assistance through Phase Two in partnership with other relevant bodies to advance these recommendations toward implementation.

The BIPOC Task Force adopts the YJI study as its findings and issues the following additional context and accompanying recommendations. The full YJI study is attached as an Appendix to this report.

## Scope of the Problem

Before setting forth its recommendations, the BIPOC Task Force highlights several key findings from the YJI study that establish the urgency and scope of this issue in New York State and nationally:

- Black, Indigenous, Latina, Asian, and other women and girls of color go missing at disproportionately high rates across the United States and in New York State. Data from the National Crime Information Center indicate that in 2024, approximately 45% of new female missing-person entries nationally involved Black, Indigenous, and Asian females, despite these groups comprising only approximately 26% of the U.S. female population that year.[8]
- Data from DCJS' Missing Persons Clearinghouse (MPC) include 245,742 missingness episodes involving women and girls recorded statewide between 2005 and 2025. Approximately 50.3% of these episodes involved individuals coded as Black, while Black females comprise a substantially smaller share of New York State's female population.[9]
- The median age of missing individuals in the MPC's dataset is 16, and more than 80% of all reports involve individuals under 21.[10]

[8] YJI study, p. 5.
[9] YJI study, p. 37
[10] YJI study, p. 37.

These statistics may significantly understate the true scope of the problem. Ethnicity data, currently an optional field, is missing from 77% of the statewide missing persons reports, preventing meaningful analysis of the experiences of Latina women and girls and other ethnic communities.[11] Racial categories in the data system are inconsistently applied: Indigenous individuals are sometimes misclassified as "Unknown" or "White," and individuals from South Asian communities are sometimes misclassified as Native American.[12] Furthermore, community mistrust of law enforcement, particularly among immigrant, Indigenous, and other marginalized communities, means that many cases are never reported at all.

For example, approximately 95.6% of juvenile missing persons cases in New York State's data are classified as "runaway,"[13] a label that the BIPOC Task Force finds reduces urgency, distorts public understanding, and disproportionately harms BIPOC youth because the "runaway" label assigns agency (and therefore implies blame), and removes institutional protection at precisely the moment when BIPOC girls are most vulnerable to exploitation. Cases classified as "runaway" receive less investigative attention and media coverage, are less likely to be connected to services, and face slower institutional response. It also ignores why people leave their home environments in the first place.

In addition to the findings above, which are drawn from the YJI study, the BIPOC Task Force offers the following observations to add further nuance to what those findings reflect.

First, preventative measures and programming addressing the issue of missing BIPOC women and girls must account for age. As youth and young adults have different needs than older adults, implementation of recommendations and policies should be developmentally appropriate and tailored to specific age groups.

Second, it is important to understand that the disproportionate disappearance of BIPOC women and girls in New York State may reflect, in many cases, a broader gender-based violence pattern. Missingness and gender-based violence are not entirely separate phenomena: for many BIPOC women and girls, the conditions that place them at risk of going missing (e.g., coercive control by an intimate partner, recruitment into exploitation through a trusted relationship, flight from abuse) are the same conditions New York State has committed to addressing in the context of domestic violence and human trafficking. A BIPOC woman whose disappearance is misread as a voluntary departure, when she is in fact fleeing or being controlled, loses institutional protection at precisely the moment she most needs it. The BIPOC Task Force finds that New York State's response to missingness must be informed by this understanding of how missingness and gender-based violence are interconnected.

[11] YJI study, p. 35.
[12] YJI study, p. 36. See also YJI study, p. 16 ("Latine individuals are often categorized as White…").
[13] YJI study, p. 37.

Third, media coverage of missing BIPOC women and girls is also demonstrably lower and more adversely framed than coverage of missing White women and girls, a dynamic that both reflects and reinforces differential institutional responses.

The BIPOC Task Force finds that these disparities result from longstanding structural inequities including but not limited to systemic racism, gender bias, poverty, generational trauma, housing instability, immigration vulnerability, and under-resourced safety nets that shape every stage of the missing persons process, from initial reporting to investigation, media visibility, and institutional response. These structural inequities are not new phenomena. They are rooted in the United States of America's and New York State's history of colonization, slavery, racial exclusion, sexism, and discriminatory public policy that have shaped the lives of BIPOC communities and continue to influence vulnerability today, as demonstrated in the YJI study. Isolated procedural fixes will not close the disparity gap. Intentional structural reform, sustained community partnership, and ongoing accountability are required.

## Historical Context and Present-Day Impacts

BIPOC Task Force members emphasized that it is critical for any examination of the present-day disproportionate rate of missing BIPOC women and girls to acknowledge the history of and relationship between exploitation, missingness, and BIPOC communities, women, and girls.

- The relationship between New York State and Tribal Nations, specifically, includes a long history of land dispossession, forced displacement, policies aimed at disrupting Indigenous governance and cultural continuity, and sexual abuse of Native women by non-indigenous perpetrators. The intergenerational effects of these policies and actions continue to shape relationships with government institutions, law enforcement, and other systems intended to provide protection and administer justice.
- Black women and girls have also been part of New York's history since the colonial era, when enslaved Africans were brought to New Amsterdam. Black women experienced particular forms of exploitation, violence, and family separation under slavery, which continued following the abolition of slavery.[14] Stereotypes developed during these periods, portraying Black women as less vulnerable, less credible, or less deserving of protection, have shaped institutional responses to the victimization of Black women within policing, courts, social services, and media coverage for generations.[15]
- Asian American communities in New York developed in the context of federal exclusion laws and widespread discrimination that targeted Asian immigrants, and particularly Asian women, shaping patterns of isolation, economic exploitation, and legal exclusion that affected generations of families in New York. Stereotypes portraying Asian women as submissive, hypersexualized, or perpetually foreign continue to affect institutional

[14] Cook Bell, K. (2021). Running from bondage: Enslaved women and their remarkable fight for freedom in Revolutionary America. Cambridge University Press.

[15] Pilgrim, D. (2002, July; edited 2024). The Jezebel stereotype. Jim Crow Museum of Racist Memorabilia, Ferris State University.

perceptions and responses to victimization, while the “model minority” myth has often obscured poverty, immigration vulnerability, and unmet service needs within many Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander (AANHPI) communities that can contribute to missingness.[16]

- New York’s Latina, AANHPI, Caribbean, and immigrant communities also experienced forms of exclusion and institutional harm that continue to shape vulnerability today. Language barriers, immigration status concerns, and lack of culturally responsive services can further isolate survivors and families from systems intended to support them.

The effects of this history continue to shape present-day outcomes for BIPOC women and girls in New York. Across these communities, the BIPOC Task Force identifies several interconnected present-day impacts of this history:

First, distrust of government systems and law enforcement remains a significant barrier to engagement, rooted in generations of unequal treatment, over-policing, family separation, discrimination, and institutional neglect, especially for BIPOC women and girls who have survived gender-based violence, resulting in some cases being unreported.[17]

Second, data systems frequently fail to accurately capture the experiences of BIPOC women and girls, which may include gender-based violence, due to underreporting and incomplete or misclassified ethnicity data.

Third, longstanding stereotypes about BIPOC communities, women, and girls developed over many generations, are based in discrimination, racism, and sexism, and continue to shape institutional responses to violence against them.

Fourth, the BIPOC Task Force notes the intersection of child abuse, child exploitation, and missing episodes. It is likely that BIPOC youth are overrepresented in the child welfare system. Further research and data collection from social services agencies would clarify the scope of BIPOC girls in the child welfare system and solidify the connection between missingness and involvement in the child welfare system. The modern-day impacts of institutionalized harms to BIPOC youth cannot be understated and must be addressed.

Researchers and advocates such as Dr. Beth Richie[18] and many Black feminist, Indigenous feminist, and survivor-led movements have further documented how gender-based violence against women and girls of color is often inseparable from broader systems of structural inequality, criminalization, and violence, which are themselves shaped by long histories of exploitation. Missingness and vulnerability among BIPOC women and girls must therefore be

[16] Barrero, I. (2023). The harms of the hypersexualization of East Asian women in Western culture. Gender in Geopolitics Institute.; Harvard Law School Center on the Legal Profession. (2018, November/December). The model minority myth. The Practice.

[17] Cox, K. (2024, June 15). Black Americans’ mistrust of the criminal justice system. Pew Research Center; and Widra, E. (2024, December 19). Despite fewer people experiencing police contact, racial disparities in arrests, police misconduct, and police use of force continue. Prison Policy Initiative.

[18] Richie, B. E. (2012). Arrested justice: Black women, violence, and America’s prison nation. NYU Press.

addressed across multiple response systems, including the public safety, gender-based violence, and child welfare response systems, none of which alone is sufficient:

Many pathways associated with missingness, including domestic violence, sexual violence, coercive control, and family violence, may be interconnected forms and consequences of gender-based violence. Other pathways, such as trafficking, housing instability, poverty, child welfare involvement, and juvenile justice system contact may also result from or coincide with gender-based violence. In totality, many of these pathways are intrinsically connected to longstanding patterns of discrimination, disinvestment, colonization, segregation, and exclusion that have disproportionately affected BIPOC communities across generations.

Consideration of multiple pathways to missingness is necessary to fully understand the scope of the problem. For example, addressing the missingness crisis requires explicit acknowledgment that intimate partners are frequently the source of the danger, which is not adequately addressed by "runaway" or "stranger danger" scenarios that often mark default institutional response.

## BIPOC Task Force Findings and Recommendations

### Recommendation Area I: Improve Cultural Responsiveness and Alleviate a Lack of Care and Concern for Missing and Murdered BIPOC Women and Girls

#### *1. Eliminate the Term "Runaway" and Identify Other Potentially Harmful Terminology*

New York State should work toward eliminating terms that illustrate a misunderstanding of the issue. For example, the term "runaway," as it relates to missing persons, or "uncooperative," as it relates to people who may be reluctant to engage with the legal system due to prior real or perceived harms, carry potentially negative connotations that reduce urgency and visibility. The elimination of these adverse terms shifts the focus to the precipitating factors that cause people to leave their home environments. While some BIPOC women and girls may initially leave their home environments to seek safety or supports elsewhere, this does not render them any less vulnerable to exploitation, human trafficking, or abuse during their "missingness" experience or episode. It also ignores why people leave their home environments in the first place. The misleading narrative created by the term "runaway" can hinder the timely mobilization of resources and personnel.

The BIPOC Task Force recommends that law enforcement agencies be trained on the potential misuse of the term "runaway," and that law enforcement forms be amended to reflect a shift toward neutral terminology. Terms such as "missing person," "missing woman," or "missing child" should be used instead.[19] It is noted that some governmental entities have already started

[19] Terminology should respect different gender identities by avoiding assumptions, actively listening (where applicable), and using language that affirms an individual's identity.

to shift from using this terminology internally, including the DCJS MPC and the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS).

### *2. Implement Policies, Procedures, and Training that Create Change*

The BIPOC Task Force recommends that law enforcement and judicial training materials and/or curricula, be periodically reviewed and updated to highlight the issue of missing BIPOC women and girls. The review should assess the effectiveness, cultural responsiveness, and consistent implementation of training regarding these cases, with special attention paid to trauma-informed, culturally sensitive, and age and developmentally appropriate approaches that improve community relations and trust. Training must be designed to increase cultural responsiveness: the first step of which is acknowledging and understanding the historical context of missingness in BIPOC communities as it relates to systemic discrimination and racism, the connection between gender-based violence and other pathways and missingness, as well as other intersectional dynamics, and the social forces that cause women and girls to go missing or to be murdered, including the disproportionate impact on BIPOC communities.

Applicable training and relevant policies and procedures on missing BIPOC women and girls should strive to identify and, as able, address the role of intimate partner exploitation and coercive control as pathways to missingness, broadening beyond the existing typical default framework for responding to missing persons cases, which has historically been designed around scenarios of stranger abduction or voluntary departure.

### *3. Law Enforcement*

Law enforcement officers should be familiar with procedural steps to follow when a person goes missing, with particular attention paid to how processes may diverge for minors and adults. Such procedures should also address what to do following a positive outcome (e.g., a safe return of a missing individual), such as sharing available resources with located BIPOC women and girls and their families. The BIPOC Task Force recommends that law enforcement agencies explore policies and procedures regarding cold cases, including the length of time before cases are categorized as cold and communication channels with families and loved ones. Law enforcement training and/or internal policies should also address media relations for those in the agency responsible for media communications, recognizing that law enforcement agencies are often the primary source of information for media outlets and have a responsibility to communicate equitably about missing BIPOC women and girls cases. Training should also address the role of intimate partner dynamics and coercive control as recognized pathways to missingness, so that law enforcement can recognize situations where a disappearance that initially presents as voluntary may in fact reflect exploitation or flight from a controlling relationship.

The BIPOC Task Force further recommends that law enforcement agencies work in coordination with trained community advocates who can serve as liaisons between families and law enforcement. These advocates can support families in navigating the investigative process, accessing services, and staying informed about the status of their loved one’s case, leveraging

existing networks of advocacy organizations with demonstrated experience supporting missing BIPOC women and girls.

The BIPOC Task Force recommends that the Municipal Police Training Council (MPTC), using DCJS administrative support with assistance from OPDV, OCFS, and other relevant stakeholders, develop and adopt a model policy on missing BIPOC women and girls, similar in structure and intent to the Human Trafficking Model Policy approved by the MPTC in March 2021. As with the human trafficking model policy, the missing BIPOC women and girls model policy should be non-binding but serve as a statewide guide that law enforcement agencies of any size can adopt and customize to their regional needs.

The model policy could address the classification and identification of missing BIPOC women and girls, including the role of intimate partner dynamics and coercive control as recognized pathways to missingness; trauma-informed and culturally responsive interview and intake practices; protocols for coordination with the MPC, social services, and community advocates; procedures following the location of a missing individual; considerations based on the age of the missing person; and guidance on equitable media communications. The model policy development process should also consider whether to include a voluntary baseline capacity assessment, allowing agencies to evaluate their current structures, designated staffing, training history, and family-facing resources as a practical starting point for adoption and a benchmark for measuring progress over time. Such an assessment could further inform conversations about law enforcement agency accreditation standards as they potentially relate to missing BIPOC women and girls cases. Development of the model policy should include meaningful input from lived experience experts, community advocates, and the agencies represented on the BIPOC Task Force, as appropriate.

### *4. Case Reviews*

Coordinated community responses (CCR) utilized in the anti-gender-based violence movement offer a helpful framework for multiagency collaboration. For example, many communities have created CCRs or formalized processes like Domestic Violence High-Risk Teams (DVHRT) or Response Teams (DVRT), Sexual Assault Response Teams (SART), or similarly situated Multi-Disciplinary Teams (MDT) in cases of suspected child abuse or maltreatment. New York State is committed to supporting these coordinated efforts as demonstrated by Governor Hochul's significant financial investment in initiatives such as DCJS' Statewide Targeted Reductions in Intimate Partner Violence (STRIVE) and the five counties that are working with OPDV in a pilot program designed to expand and improve CCR efforts.

Using lessons learned from the CCR framework, and as different agencies and databases may collect varied pieces of information, New York State should consider developing a process through which agencies that directly investigate, respond to, assist, or support missing BIPOC women and girls can engage in multi-sector, multi-agency reviews of past cases to learn from experience and to expedite and enhance the response to current cases. This process should include the confidential sharing of relevant information among such agencies to identify the systems with which each missing BIPOC woman and girl engaged prior to, during, and after their missingness episode. This "Missingness Mapping" review process would illuminate less-

recognized pathways that may disproportionately impact BIPOC women and girls, including pathways involving intimate partner violence, coercive control, and domestic abuse, examining patterns (such as location data), demographics, timelines, and outcomes to create opportunities for support, prevention, and intervention in future cases.

The BIPOC Task Force notes that New York State's existing Domestic Violence Fatality Review process, established under Executive Law § 575(10), provides a model for how multi-agency case reviews can be structured to promote accountability and learning, particularly to the extent that murdered and/or abducted BIPOC women and girls may also experience missingness. According to OPDV, there was an average of 62 intimate partner violence-related homicides outside New York City between 2020 and 2023, and approximately half of the victims were Black, Hispanic, or "other." Additionally, the New York City Domestic Violence Fatality Review Committee 2025 Annual Report indicates that Black individuals accounted for 50.9% of the domestic violence homicide victims between 2015 and 2024. However, not all murdered BIPOC women and girls experience missingness, and vice versa. Therefore, the case review process recommended here should complement, not duplicate, that work and should be clearly delineated to avoid overlap.

Additionally, at the discretion of the Legislature and Executive, the "Missingness Mapping" process could be bifurcated for missing BIPOC women and girls, accounting for their age. MDTs are an established mechanism to examine critical issues pertaining to youth. Pursuant to Social Services Law § 423(6), MDTs are convened for the purpose of investigating reports of suspected child abuse or maltreatment. OCFS, or an approved local or regional child fatality review team, also prepares and issues child fatality reports under Social Services Law § 20(5)(a). These processes can also act as models or be leveraged in missing BIPOC girls cases.

Lastly, as the timely receipt of information is crucial to solving open cases, the BIPOC Task Force recommends that there be a process to facilitate information sharing among relevant stakeholders, such as schools, local social services districts and their providers, and law enforcement agencies, to rapidly develop recovery plans that are responsive to the needs of the missing individual and their family.

### *5. Judiciary*

New York State judges, particularly those who sit in criminal court and family court, may preside over cases involving missing BIPOC women and girls. The BIPOC Task Force recommends policies and procedures be evaluated to identify areas of improvement that could be made using the lessons learned in the YJI study and these recommendations. The BIPOC Task Force further recommends that an educational program be developed providing judges with practical tools for how to consider these cases. This training should highlight the importance of proper terminology, address concerns about the use of the term "runaway," and outline the impact that label has on BIPOC women and girls in both the media and the courtroom. The program should also educate judges on what "missingness" means, how to look for signs of missingness, and how to make appropriate inquiries in the courtroom.

Additionally, it would be impactful for judges to hear directly from BIPOC women and girls with lived experiences. The judiciary has held similar programs in the past, such as the March 2026 Second Annual Second Chance Summit and the plenary session from the 2026 New Judges Seminar, in which judges heard directly from young women impacted by the juvenile justice system. A lived experience program for judges would not only elevate lived experience voices but also provide them with a meaningful seat at the table, bringing together the community and court system.

Lastly, the BIPOC Task Force recommends that an informational program, such as a "lunch-and-learn," be created or expanded to highlight the connection between human trafficking and missing women and children, providing judges with tools for identifying potential human trafficking in their courtrooms.

## Recommendation Area II: Enhance Community Awareness of the Severity of the Number of BIPOC Women and Girls Who Are Missing and Murdered, Including the Creation of a Statewide Public Awareness Campaign

### *1. Media*

Through appropriate channels, the state should encourage media companies and outlets to develop and adopt best practices in their reporting on missing persons cases, including with respect to the potential misuse of the term "runaway." Media outlets should strive to provide equitable coverage of missing persons cases, including elevating stories of missing BIPOC women and girls where appropriate, to increase public awareness and aid in law enforcement investigations. Media companies and outlets should be sensitive to the way in which language and framing can influence public opinion and narratives. Media reports on missing BIPOC women and girls should strive to include relevant details with input from law enforcement agencies and affected family members and loved ones.

The YJI study finds that newsroom "gatekeeping" practices, lack of diversity in newsroom ownership and staff, reliance on law enforcement as the primary source of information, and financial incentives for high-click stories collectively shape which cases receive public attention and which remain invisible. The BIPOC Task Force encourages media organizations to examine these structural factors and to invest in training for journalists on equitable, trauma-informed reporting on missing BIPOC women and girls.

### *2. Community-Centered Awareness Efforts*

The BIPOC Task Force recommends that New York State invest in community-centered awareness as the primary public outreach strategy related to the missingness crisis affecting BIPOC women and girls. While statewide campaigns can help raise general public visibility, the most effective outreach in the communities most impacted by this crisis must be grounded in trusted relationships, cultural responsiveness, language access, and locally tailored engagement strategies developed by and for the communities they are intended to reach.

The BIPOC Task Force therefore recommends that the state support sustained partnerships with culturally specific organizations across New York State to design and deliver community-based awareness efforts that reflect the experiences, needs, and priorities of the communities they serve. Outreach strategies should be flexible and allow organizations to determine the most effective messages, languages, messengers, and methods of engagement for their communities, with the state providing funding, technical assistance, information, and coordination support rather than relying on a single statewide model. Community-centered awareness efforts should recognize the distinct experiences of Black, Indigenous, Latina, immigrant, AANHPI, and other impacted communities, including differences in language access, cultural norms, immigration concerns, geographic location, and historical relationships with government systems.

Since trust is critical to effective outreach, the BIPOC Task Force recommends prioritizing trusted community messengers and community-based settings as the primary vehicles for engagement. Outreach may include partnerships with peer navigators, advocates, faith leaders, community health workers, survivors, and culturally specific organizations, as well as engagement in places where community members already gather, such as community centers, schools, health clinics, salons, barbershops, houses of worship, and neighborhood businesses. Community-centered awareness efforts should provide accessible information about warning signs of exploitation and abuse, healthy relationships, available services and supports, how to report a missing person, and how individuals and families can seek help.

### *3. Statewide Public Awareness Campaign*

To support and reinforce community-centered efforts — and consistent with the legislative mandate in Chapter 12 of the Laws of 2024 — the BIPOC Task Force recommends that New York State implement a statewide public awareness campaign, to complement community-centered awareness, to increase general public understanding of the missingness crisis affecting BIPOC women and girls. The campaign should include non-blaming information regarding the pathways to missingness; the services available to interrupt those pathways; and primary prevention efforts to decrease and eliminate such pathways.

A statewide campaign could be advertised on billboards and in public areas; educational institutions and other institutions throughout New York State; and transportation areas such as trains, buses, and shuttles, including New York City subways and centrally located stations with heavy foot traffic and commuter transfers. Efforts should be made to collaborate with local partners, especially in communities where BIPOC women and girls are at a heightened risk, to identify which types of materials and locations will have the greatest impact.

Partnerships with social media companies may also help spread outreach to parents, caregivers, and youth regarding vulnerabilities, risk factors, and preventive education. Short-form educational videos and consistent hashtags are recommended to facilitate content absorption and sharing. To the extent that BIPOC women and girls are at risk of online sexual exploitation and grooming, the public awareness campaign should emphasize online safety and healthy relationships rather than focusing solely on “stranger danger” and abduction scenarios.

Unstable immigration status or lack of documentation is an additional layer of vulnerability for missing BIPOC women and girls and their families. BIPOC communities may include members who demonstrate limited English proficiency, lack community support due to isolation and cultural gaps, are fearful of law enforcement or other governmental entities, and may not be aware of their legal protections. New York State already requires certain governmental communications to be provided in multiple languages, therefore any statewide public awareness campaign should meet and, where possible, exceed those requirements, ensuring content is delivered through the forms of media most relevant to each impacted community.

Improved data collection through the Missingness Mapping process may be beneficial to designing this campaign over time. Missingness pathways in one community may not resonate as much in another, so further research may help the state implement more effective, targeted outreach.

### *4. Public Safety Alerts*

Currently, New Yorkers can subscribe for free to NY-Alert to receive critical information and emergency alerts in their area. The MPC publishes missing persons alerts via NY-Alert. It is recommended that NY-Alert be included in outreach materials regarding missing BIPOC women and girls to raise awareness about this important tool.

The BIPOC Task Force recommends that New York State explore dedicated supplemental alert systems for missing Indigenous and Black individuals — similar to Feather Alerts and Ebony Alerts that have been enacted in other states, including California. The intent behind such systems is to ensure that cases of missing BIPOC women and girls receive the public attention and institutional urgency that the existing AMBER Alert framework may fail to provide.

At the same time, the experience of implementing these systems in California has been more complicated than their advocates hoped, and New York State must consider that experience before proceeding. Community response to the Ebony Alert in California was divided: many members of the Black community raised concerns that a racially designated alert risks signaling to a racially conditioned public that these cases carry less urgency rather than more, and that race-specific activation criteria create additional law enforcement discretion that may not be neutral given documented patterns of bias.[20] The Feather Alert experience raised concerns about law enforcement agencies denying activation requests in ways that tribal leaders described as continuing institutional erasure.[21]

[20] NPR, “In a first, California’s ‘Ebony Alert’ will help find missing Black people,” Oct. 15, 2023, https://www.npr.org/2023/10/15/1205950946/in-a-first-californias-ebony-alert-will-help-track-down-missing-black-people.

[21] Los Angeles Times, “Tribal leaders cite problems with California’s Feather Alert for Native people who go missing,” Jan. 29, 2024, https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2024-01-29/california-feather-alert-tribal-leaders-warn-problems.

California has since amended its law to address some of these concerns.[22] The BIPOC Task Force also recognizes that the creation of additional alert systems carries operational challenges for law enforcement: specifically, difficulties in determining which alert to activate when a missing individual qualifies for more than one system or when race or ethnicity is not yet known. The BIPOC Task Force accordingly recommends that New York State proactively review the full implementation record, including documented community concerns, of supplemental alert systems in California and other states before determining whether and how to proceed. Any such system developed in New York must be designed in genuine partnership with the communities it is intended to serve, the name and framework must reflect those communities' own judgment about what would increase urgency rather than diminish it, and the activation criteria must be designed to minimize law enforcement discretion rather than replicate existing disparities.

More broadly, New York State should consider forming and utilizing relationships with third-party platforms and technologies that allow the public to receive timely information regarding missing BIPOC women and girls cases, consistent with best practices implemented in other municipalities. Any such partnerships should be carefully evaluated to ensure reliability and equitable access.

## Recommendation Area III: Provide BIPOC Communities with Education and Training on the Prevention, Protection, and Protocols Relating to Missing BIPOC Women and Girls, Including as it Relates to Social Media

### *1. Incorporating Content Into School Curricula, Professional Training, and Community Education*

New York State has mechanisms through which educational and preventive programming is delivered to youth, such as through the Safe Harbour program[23] and implementation of Erin's Law[24] in schools. The BIPOC Task Force recommends that information regarding missing BIPOC women and girls be included in school curricula and/or professional training, including as it relates to healthy relationships, intimate partner dynamics, coercive control and exploitation, abuse, and trafficking; Internet and social media safety; and personal safety. Incorporating feedback and buy-in from stakeholders such as the New York State Education Department, local social services districts, county probation, child welfare agencies, and other entities involved in the education, care, and/or protection of BIPOC women and girls will aid in the development of the curriculum, especially in disproportionately impacted communities.

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[22] The Feather Alert, created by California Assembly Bill 1314 and effective January 1, 2023, was amended in 2024 by AB 1863 and AB 2348. See California Highway Patrol, Feather Alert, https://www.chp.ca.gov/news-alerts/alerts/Feather-Alert. The Ebony Alert, created by SB 673 and effective January 1, 2024, was subsequently amended by AB 173. See California Highway Patrol, Ebony Alert, https://www.chp.ca.gov/news-alerts/alerts/Ebony-Alert.

[23] See https://ocfs.ny.gov/programs/human-trafficking/safe-harbour.php.

[24] See https://www.nysed.gov/standards-instruction/erins-law.

Education on missing BIPOC women and girls can also be incorporated into other training areas, such as trainings on human trafficking and gender-based violence. For example, OPDV's technology-facilitated gender-based violence and public awareness campaigns can be expanded to include missing and/or murdered BIPOC women and girls.

### *2. Centering and Compensating Lived Experience Expertise*

The YJI study consistently finds that survivors, family members, and community advocates hold essential, irreplaceable knowledge about risk, safety, and system failures. This is knowledge that is not visible in administrative data and that cannot be replicated by institutional actors. Yet these individuals are routinely only engaged superficially, meaning their stories are collected, but their insights do not shape decisions or program design. A step toward changing this practice is demonstrated by OPDV's Survivor Listening Sessions, which have engaged individuals most impacted by gender-based violence since 2021, compensating participants for their time and expertise. These listening sessions can serve as a model for how state agencies can genuinely center lived experience.

The BIPOC Task Force recommends that education, training, and prevention programming be developed with, not merely informed by, people with lived experience. This means:

- Providing meaningful compensation to lived experience experts for their time, expertise, and emotional labor when they are engaged in program development, review, or delivery;
- Assigning lived experience experts genuine decision-making authority in program design, not merely advisory or consultative roles; and
- Sustaining these relationships over time rather than engaging lived experience experts on a one-time basis.

The voices of lived experience experts should be elevated in all educational and preventive programming. BIPOC communities, and BIPOC women and girls in particular, can provide a unique perspective on content that is both culturally sensitive and informed, including as to language, framing, and terminology. Whether through the Guiding Council convened by the YJI or other means, training and education should be tailored and relevant to BIPOC communities.

Peer navigation and mentorship should be offered and available, especially to BIPOC girls and young adults, across different systems such as education, child welfare, runaway[25] and homeless youth, and juvenile justice. BIPOC women and girls who have prior experience in these systems can be credible messengers and peer advisers and offer support to at-risk individuals.

Lastly, community-based organizations may be able to provide education around women, girls, and youth at risk for exploitation and abuse. Consideration should be given to spaces such as nail salons, massage parlors, barbershops, movie theaters, houses of worship, and other relevant locations in BIPOC communities where at-risk individuals may be present. These

[25] See footnote 6.

locations, which may be “non-traditional” for outreach purposes but central to the communities, may be opportunities for connection between allies and BIPOC women and girls and their families.

## Recommendation Area IV: Develop Strategies to Collect Statistics, Demographics, Surveys, Oral Histories, and Data Analysis

### *1. Law Enforcement Data*

The YJI study revealed that the data collected on missing women and girls is incomplete, making it difficult to identify, analyze, and respond to data trends. The BIPOC Task Force therefore recommends that the demographic collection fields that law enforcement agencies use when documenting a missing persons entry be updated. Specific updates could include but not be limited to:

- Expanding and clarifying race codes to be more inclusive and consistent in their application;
- Making ethnicity data a mandatory, rather than optional, field;
- Adding a non-binary or gender-diverse option to the sex field, so that gender-diverse individuals are accurately captured in missing persons data;[26]
- Making edits to the “missing from care” field, so that data is more accurately captured for youth placed in foster care;
- Adding a “missing from location type” section to help identify patterns related to where individuals went missing; and
- Adding a required “date located” field when law enforcement agencies cancel a missing persons report, to ensure that outcomes are captured in the data.

Following these updates, a training campaign should be implemented for law enforcement and communications centers that enter missing persons reports. Staff should be trained to address any new fields, and the policies and protocols of local law enforcement agencies should be updated to reflect these changes, minimizing data entry errors and oversight. Collecting this data more comprehensively and holistically would also likely promote a more culturally-inclusive response to these cases and issues.

Additionally, the BIPOC Task Force recommends the consideration of more regular outcome review and potential reporting by state and municipal law enforcement agencies on their

[26] The BIPOC Task Force’s enacting legislation does not clarify whether the term “women and girls” is intended to encompass individuals who identify as women and girls, including transgender and gender-diverse individuals, or whether it refers to recorded sex alone. Future legislation and initiatives, including the collection and reporting of data, should explicitly include gender-diverse individuals. An inclusive approach to collecting and reporting gender-related data would allow New York State to better understand how overlapping axes of identity (such as race, gender identity or expression, sex, and age) may contribute to missingness.

respective responses to missing BIPOC women and girls cases, which could include: the number of missing persons reports filed involving BIPOC women and girls, disaggregated by race, ethnicity, age, and classification; analysis of the rate at which cases are classified as "runaway" or equivalent terminology following the adoption of recommended neutral terminology; response actions and times from initial report to investigative action, disaggregated by race and ethnicity of the missing individual; and the number of cases in which a community advocate liaison or other external entity was engaged.

While the BIPOC Task Force recognizes that outcome reporting alone may not produce change, more frequent review and information-sharing would likely yield a clearer, fuller picture of how institutional practice is improving and where more additional intervention or support may be needed.

### *2. Human Trafficking Data*

Currently, law enforcement agencies, including district attorney's offices, and established social and legal services providers can submit referrals on behalf of human trafficking survivors to DCJS and the Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA). The BIPOC Task Force recommends that a field related to current or prior missingness be added to the human trafficking referral form, to be answered by the referral source to the best of their ability. Additionally, the data collected from this field should be incorporated into the annual report of the New York State Interagency Task Force on Human Trafficking.

Similarly, agencies and facilities that conduct risk assessments, such as for human trafficking, are encouraged to enhance their screening by including a field related to missingness. This change would allow the state to capture more accurate data regarding the intersection of missingness and human trafficking.

### *3. Indigenous Communities Data*

Further research should be conducted on missing women and girls cases within Indigenous communities in New York State, considering the unique sovereignty and culture of each Tribal Nation. As stated in the YJI study, "New York State's dataset provided by the MPC shows high levels of missing demographic information (especially ethnicity)," and Subject Matter Experts report racial misclassifications on missing persons data. Data entry practices may impact data reliability and contribute to the likely "undercounting" of specific populations, including Indigenous women and girls.[27] Engagement with Tribal Nations and urban Indigenous communities must be grounded in government-to-government respect and honor cultural traditions.

### *4. Centralized Database and Dashboard*

New York State should consider steps necessary to create a centralized database repository and dashboard for the tracking of missing BIPOC women and girls statewide, or to expand (e.g., add additional, appropriate fields) to an existing database, potentially in partnership with higher

[27] YJI study, p. 8.

education institutions. This dashboard could be updated on a regular basis, providing information regarding the scope and patterns of missingness in New York State. Data directly from social service agencies, including information on the rate of BIPOC women and girls in the care of social services who go missing, should be considered for inclusion, in addition to law enforcement data, to better capture pathways to missingness that occur outside of formal law enforcement reporting. Legislation enacting this recommendation should delineate the scope of any database: whether it should contain cases of missing BIPOC women and girls, murdered BIPOC women and girls, or missing BIPOC women and girls who are subsequently found to have been murdered.

## Recommendation Area V: Recommend Preventative Programming and Ideas to Advance the Safety of BIPOC Women and Girls, Including Policies that Address Overlapping Forms of Oppression

Pathways to missingness identified through case review processes and further research can inform targeted preventive programming in BIPOC communities. Potential pathways include human trafficking, youth who are missing from care, gender-based violence (e.g., intimate partner violence, coercive control, and domestic abuse), and other systems and actors who exploit and/or cause BIPOC women and girls to become missing. Preventive programming should aim to provide education on these pathways, including but not limited to explaining how intimate partner relationships and missingness are related, highlighting warning signs of coercive control in intimate partner relationships, and supporting BIPOC women and girls who may be experiencing coercive relationships that could lead to missingness. Programs should also aim to connect participants to available resources where appropriate, including protective orders, domestic violence services, legal protections regardless of immigration status, and more, so that they are effectively supported.

### *1. Runaway and Homeless Youth and Safe Harbour Programs*

New York State should invest in systems that serve vulnerable youth, including Runaway[28] and Homeless Youth (RHY) and Safe Harbour programs, as these programs support youth who are most at risk for going missing.

OCFS supports unstably-housed youth, including youth who might be reported missing, by licensing, monitoring, and funding emergency and longer-term residential RHY programs, as well as approving non-residential services. RHY services are grounded in a positive youth development framework[29] and provide a safe place for youth to build resiliency, healthy relationships, and reunification with loved ones or a pathway to stable housing. Expanded support for RHY services would help to create additional bed space for BIPOC young women and girls, improve training and retention of RHY program staff, and fund opportunities for skill-building, transition, and independence for this vulnerable population.

[28] See footnote 6.
[29] See https://ocfs.ny.gov/programs/youth/ya-services/policy.php.

In New York State, the Safe Harbour for Exploited Children Act (Safe Harbour) went into effect in 2010. The statute defines the term "sexually exploited child" and requires every local social services district to ensure that a short-term safe house or another placement be available to assist sexually exploited children, to the extent that funds are available. Expanded support for Safe Harbour programs would allow local social services districts to more adequately meet the needs of sexually exploited children and increase educational and preventive training for youth, families, and professionals, including front-line staff in law enforcement agencies, medical institutions, and schools.

BIPOC young women and girls served by RHY and Safe Harbour programs may face multiple overlapping forms of oppression, such as generational trauma; poverty; and discrimination based on age, sex, gender identity or expression, LGBTQ+ status, race, ethnicity, or other characteristics. Given these overlapping forms of oppression, preventative RHY and Safe Harbour programming should address coercive control and intimate partner dynamics. Providing this population with a stable and safe housing environment where they can receive assessments for immediate needs and responsive services may help to reduce the likelihood of future missing episodes and exploitation.

### *2. Resources Developed by State Agencies and Partners*

In past years, a number of state agencies, including some represented on the BIPOC Task Force, collaborated with local, state, and federal partners, to begin examining the issue of youth who go missing five or more times. Members of the group included DCJS, OPDV, OCFS, the New York State Police (NYSP), the Office of Victim Services, the National Child Protection Task Force, the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, and many others. The group was paused after creating publications for professionals and members of the public. The BIPOC Task Force recommends that these guides be publicized and disseminated to youth, caregivers, and professionals who work with missing BIPOC women and girls and/or their families. These guides are available at OCFS' webpage and should be made available at locations such as local social services districts, law enforcement offices, schools, libraries, and community centers.

Special consideration should be given to the pilot program currently operating in Buffalo, New York, through a partnership between the Scott Bieler Child Advocacy Center at BestSelf and the Buffalo Police Department, with support from the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo. This pilot is designed to serve missing youth under the age of 18 by coordinating assessments, interventions, and service referrals across systems. For youth already involved with child welfare, behavioral health, juvenile justice, or other service systems, the program seeks to improve coordination and continuity of care. For youth not previously connected to services, the program provides an opportunity to identify unmet needs, address underlying risk factors, and implement interventions intended to reduce the likelihood of future missing episodes. As an emerging model, the pilot program provides a learning opportunity for New York State to identify promising practices and current gaps in delivering services to missing BIPOC girls.

The MPC and OCFS have conducted three Missing Child Rescue Operations across the state to date, in collaboration with local, state, and federal partners, nonprofit and community

organizations, and many others. The BIPOC Task Force recommends that the MPC and OCFS continue to provide technical assistance, facilitate access to information and resources, and conduct operations when appropriate and feasible.

### *3. Post-Return and Post-Recovery Support*

The experience of families and individuals who have been reunited with a missing loved one makes clear that the crisis does not end at the moment of return. Families need financial, spiritual, emotional, and practical support to navigate the aftermath of missingness — and returned individuals themselves often face ongoing trauma, system involvement, and vulnerability to further exploitation. Post-return services should assess the factors that led a BIPOC woman or girl to go missing in the first place, including intimate partner dynamics and coercive control, and provide the individual with relevant supports and resources, such as access to victim advocacy, safety planning, and legal assistance.

The BIPOC Task Force recommends that New York State develop or expand trauma-informed, culturally grounded support services for returned missing individuals and their families. These services should:

- Be available to families from the moment a missing individual is found, not only during the active missing episode;
- Address the full range of needs — mental health, housing, legal services, financial support, and community connection — rather than narrowly focusing on immediate physical safety;
- Be culturally responsive and accessible in the languages of the communities served; and
- Draw on the expertise of lived experience experts and community-based organizations with demonstrated relationships with BIPOC communities.

Recovery is an ongoing process. Reuniting is the beginning, not the end.

### *4. Supporting Culturally Specific Organizations*

Throughout New York State, culturally specific gender-based violence organizations and organizations dedicated to the safety of BIPOC women and girls have carried out this work for years, often decades, frequently without sustained and proportionate investment. These organizations are trusted in communities where state systems are not, provide services in languages and cultural contexts government agencies cannot, and hold community expertise that is essential to an effective response.

The BIPOC Task Force recommends the consideration of a dedicated, sustained funding stream for culturally specific organizations whose primary mission is the safety, advocacy, and recovery of BIPOC women and girls in New York State. This investment should be structural rather than supplemental, multi-year in duration, and directed toward organizations serving communities experiencing the highest rates of missingness and the greatest historical exclusion from state funding opportunities.

## Recommendation Area VI: Identify Major Traffic Hubs, Highways, and Resource Extraction Sites That Lead to or Are Responsible for the Facilitation of the Abduction of Women and Girls Who Are BIPOC

### *1. Missingness Mapping Research*

While abduction ("stranger danger") may be prevalent in some cases, the evidence gathered through the YJI study suggests it is likely not the primary driver of missingness. Many missing BIPOC women and girls leave their home environments voluntarily — or are recruited or groomed to do so — and may face exploitation during their missing episode. Understanding the full landscape of missingness therefore requires moving beyond a narrow focus on abduction toward a broader understanding of the structural and environmental conditions that create vulnerability.

The BIPOC Task Force recommends that further research be conducted on "Missingness Mapping" to identify major traffic hubs, highways, and resource extraction sites that lead to or facilitate missingness for BIPOC women and girls. This research should include:

- Additional targeted conversations with the Department of Transportation, the NYSP, and other relevant agencies regarding transportation corridors and hubs;
- Survivor listening sessions that center the voices of those who have experienced missingness and can speak to locations and contexts of vulnerability; and
- Improved data collection and entry regarding the location from which individuals went missing, which currently captures only a missing-from address and last known address.

This research will also help to address a broader question: where in New York State's infrastructure are BIPOC women and girls most at risk, and what interventions, from law enforcement presence to community outreach to physical infrastructure changes, can reduce that risk?

### *2. Strategic Partnerships with Transportation Providers*

Grounded by this research, New York State should consider developing partnerships with airlines, rail systems, bus companies, and other major transportation providers to help raise awareness about missing BIPOC women and girls through appropriate channels, such as digital kiosks and other public-facing systems.

## Recommendation Area VII: Build Sustainable Infrastructure to Support Long-Term Progress

Chapter 12 of the Laws of 2024 directed the BIPOC Task Force to provide recommendations on the six topics listed above, but the BIPOC Task Force identified a need to add a seventh recommendation: build a sustainable infrastructure to support long-term progress. The BIPOC Task Force finds — and the YJI study confirms through its review of other state task forces — that task forces alone cannot solve a multi-generational problem. States that have made the most enduring progress on issues of missing and/or murdered women and girls of color have

done so by creating permanent institutional structures that formalize commitments, clarify responsibilities, ensure accountability, and sustain the work beyond any single task force's lifespan. The BIPOC Task Force accordingly recommends the following.

### *1. A Continuing Interagency Working Group*

The BIPOC Task Force recommends that an interagency working group on missing BIPOC women and girls continue to convene in the near term, drawing on the membership and established relationships of the BIPOC Task Force. The working group should serve as an interim coordination mechanism until a dedicated unit or office — as described below — with appropriate staffing, funding, and mandate can be established. The working group should be charged with:

- Serving as a standing coordination mechanism for issues related to missing BIPOC women and girls across state government, in coordination with existing working groups, such as the New York State Interagency Task Force on Human Trafficking, ensuring that no single agency works in isolation and that gaps are identified and addressed on an ongoing basis;
- Documenting the intersection between missingness and human trafficking in coordination with the New York State Interagency Task Force on Human Trafficking, while maintaining a distinct focus on the full spectrum of missingness that extends beyond trafficking-related cases;
- Providing guidance and input to the dedicated unit or office once it is established, with members of the working group serving on its advisory board or otherwise contributing in meaningful ways;
- Ensuring that the Guiding Council of lived experience experts, established through the YJI study, continues to inform and advise the working group's activities, with appropriate compensation and genuine decision-making influence rather than a consultative role; and
- Engaging the YJI to provide ongoing technical assistance to support short-, medium-, and long-term priorities until YJI's resources under its agreement with the state are exhausted.

The BIPOC Task Force recommends that the Executive through executive action, or Legislature through legislation, continue the interagency working group until a dedicated unit or office is established, funded, and fully operational. At that point, the working group may transition to an advisory role, with its members serving on the advisory board of the new unit or office or providing guidance in other meaningful ways.

### *2. A Dedicated Unit or Office*

The BIPOC Task Force recognizes that a working group may not be well suited to centralize or sustain this work over the long term. A dedicated, staffed unit or office — the appropriate institutional home of which should be determined by the Executive, in consultation with the Legislature, given existing agency mandates and capacities — is necessary to implement the recommendations in this report on a sustainable and permanent basis. This unit or office should be charged with:

- Tracking and reporting on the implementation of the recommendations in this report, with an annual public report to the Governor and Legislature on the status of each recommendation;
- Coordinating prevention and intervention efforts across state agencies and with community-based partners;
- Supporting the implementation of these recommendations within and across agencies;
- Maintaining the statewide resource directory and family support functions described below; and
- Ensuring that this work has a permanent institutional home that is not dependent on any single administration or funding cycle.

The BIPOC Task Force recommends that the Executive through executive action, or Legislature through legislation, establish the dedicated unit or office as a permanent body, providing a clear statutory mandate, dedicated funding, and public accountability mechanisms that ensure its continuity.

The BIPOC Task Force further recommends that the dedicated unit or office include a Survivor Voices Advisory Council — a formally structured advisory body comprising individuals with lived experience of missingness and gender-based violence, including survivors, family members, and representatives of community organizations with sustained relationships in impacted communities. Council members should be compensated for their expertise and should hold meaningful advisory influence over policy development, program design, and public communications, where appropriate. This Council should build upon the Guiding Council established through the YJI study and could be supported through the YJI's Phase Two technical assistance as it transitions to a permanent structure.

### *3. Expand the Missing Persons Clearinghouse's Family Support Capacity*

The MPC already serves as a critical resource for families of missing individuals: it maintains a 24-hour hotline, assists law enforcement agencies investigating missing persons cases, publicizes cases through NY-Alert and social media, coordinates Missing Child Rescue Operations statewide, and provides community education programs upon request. Building on this existing infrastructure, the BIPOC Task Force recommends that the Executive and Legislature consider the steps necessary, including any administrative or legislative action that may be required, to expand the MPC's capacity and mandate in partnership with OCFS, OPDV, local social services districts, and community-based organizations, to more robustly support families and returned individuals throughout the full arc of a missingness experience.

Potential areas of expanded work for the MPC and its partners to consider include:

- Developing a dedicated family liaison function, providing families of missing BIPOC women and girls with a consistent point of contact who can help them navigate across law enforcement and social services systems;
- Creating and maintaining a statewide, publicly accessible directory of organizations, including nonprofit, community-based, and advocacy organizations, that can provide support

to families of missing individuals, to returned individuals, and to communities affected by missingness;

- Strengthening coordination between the MPC and local social services districts to ensure that families and returned individuals are promptly connected with post-return support services, including mental health, housing, and legal services, after a missing individual is located; and
- Expanding community education programming specifically focused on missing BIPOC women and girls, delivered in partnership with community-based organizations across the state and in multiple languages.

The BIPOC Task Force recognizes that expanding the MPC's capacity in these areas will require investment and that the scope and sequencing of any expansion should be guided by the dedicated unit or office in consultation with families, lived experience experts, and community partners.

### *4. Broaden New York's Domestic Violence Fatality Reviews*

The BIPOC Task Force recommends that the Executive and Legislature consider whether the existing Domestic Violence Fatality Review process should be expanded to include cases involving BIPOC women and girls who were reported missing and subsequently found murdered, so that the analytical rigor of that process can illuminate system failures in the full arc of missingness-connected deaths.

The Domestic Violence Fatality Review process provides the state with one of its most rigorous tools for understanding how and where systems fail victims of domestic violence, through conducting confidential, multi-agency case analyses. The findings laid out in this report indicate similar analytical rigor is needed for consideration of cases involving BIPOC women and girls who are murdered or whose deaths are connected to a period of missingness, which may likely be connected to experiences of gender-based violence and coercive control.

Therefore, the Domestic Violence Fatality Review Team's mandate should have its scope considered to extend beyond deaths and near-deaths resulting from domestic violence to encompass other forms of gender-based violence, expressly the review of cases in which a BIPOC woman or girl was reported missing and subsequently found to have been murdered, or whose death is connected to a period of missingness. This expansion would allow the state to learn more about the landscape of gender-based violence fatalities, including the murders of missing women and girls that are connected to gender-based violence, and to identify the system failures across law enforcement, social services, health care, and other institutions that may have preceded those deaths.

This expansion would not replace the multi-sector, multi-agency processes contemplated elsewhere in this report for addressing missingness episodes more broadly. Rather, it would extend the existing Fatality Review infrastructure, which includes multi-agency membership and the confidentiality protections needed for rigorous case-specific analysis, to encompass fatalities

that the Fatality Review Team currently does not reach. The two processes are complementary and should be coordinated to avoid duplication.

### *5. YJI Phase Two Technical Assistance*

The BIPOC Task Force recommends that the YJI continue its work through Phase Two of the commissioned project, providing ongoing technical assistance to support the translation of certain recommendations into concrete actions. Phase Two activities may include:

- Support for the interagency working group and, once established, the dedicated unit or office as they develop their structure, protocols, and priorities, including creating protocols for ongoing case review and connecting with community partners;
- Continued engagement with the Guiding Council of lived experience experts, ensuring that Phase Two work remains grounded in the expertise of those closest to the issue; and
- Assistance to the dedicated unit or office in developing a structured implementation framework that establishes timelines, responsible parties, and accountability mechanisms for each recommendation in this report, depending on the timing and availability of resources.

The BIPOC Task Force emphasizes that this work is not finished at the submission of this report. It is only the beginning. The recommendations above require action, resources, and sustained commitment from New York State.

## Conclusion

The New York State Task Force on Missing Women and Girls Who Are Black, Indigenous, and People of Color was established because Black, Indigenous, Latina, Asian, and other women and girls of color have been going missing at disproportionate rates in New York State and across the nation, and because the systems responsible for finding them and keeping them safe have too often failed them. This report reflects the work of the BIPOC Task Force, the rigor and commitment of the Youth Justice Institute, the insights of subject matter experts from across state government, and above all the knowledge and courage of the survivors, family members, and community advocates who shared their experiences to make this report possible.

The BIPOC Task Force finds that the disparities documented in this report are not accidental. They result from structural and institutional conditions, ranging from systemic racism, gender bias, and poverty to housing instability and under-resourced safety nets, that require intentional reform. This report is a call to action, requiring sustained commitment to effect positive change.

The BIPOC Task Force recommends that New York State move forward on integrating this work into existing spaces where possible, such as creating additional data reporting fields for missing persons reports and human trafficking referrals, as discussed in this report, while also recognizing that many of the recommendations contained herein will require further investment in resources and personnel. Toward that end, the BIPOC Task Force requests that the Executive and Legislature consider establishing an interagency working group and a dedicated

staffed unit or office to carry this work forward while YJI's Phase Two continued engagement and technical assistance help advance implementation, accountability, and the centering of lived experience expertise in all aspects of this work.

New York State is committed to raising awareness, engaging in strategic partnerships, and performing impactful work to support missing women and girls who are BIPOC and their families and communities. The recommendations in this report provide an initial roadmap for that life-changing and life-saving work.

# Appendix: Youth Justice Institute at the University at Albany, A Study in Support of the NYS Governor's Task Force on Missing Women & Girls Who Are Black, Indigenous, or People of Color (BIPOC), Final Report May 2026