

# Policy Position: Racial Justice

eliminating racism  
empowering women

**ywca**

west central michigan

## What We Believe

YWCA is committed to ensuring that everyone is afforded equal opportunity and equal protection under the law. Too often, however, stereotypes, biases, and racial power dynamics are embedded in our laws and public policies. They are also reflected in the use of racial profiling, heightened surveillance tactics, targeted enforcement strategies, and other practices that increase policing of certain racial and ethnic communities and criminalize people of color. While 2020 underscored inequities in the justice system, racial inequities are also embedded in the laws, policies, and practices of our nation's education systems, public health, and other systems of government.

Such inequities and the systems that perpetuate them are embedded in both Michigan's history and its current policies and practices at the local and state level. This plays a significant role in outcomes for and barriers to health, wealth, and safety for communities of color in Michigan, especially for Black, Latinx, and Indigenous women and girls. A lack of access to equitable education and the criminalization of youth of color hinder the ability of youth to remain in school in the short term and can result in decreased access to quality healthcare, lower lifetime earnings, and limit one's ability to secure housing in the future. Women across the U.S. have been found to experience increased rates of use of force and violence from law enforcement; yet, recent data shows that Black women in particular experience higher rates of force during police-initiated stops than women of any other race.

From immigration to carceral systems, incidents of state-based gendered racial violence remain a priority for the YWCA West Central Michigan. The unique experiences of women and girls of color underscore the importance of expedited action by policymakers at all levels to implement and advance racial justice and safety. Reform efforts must expand gendered narratives to recognize and address the racialized violence that women and girls of color continue to experience.

## What We Know

- In 2019, the Michigan Commission on Civil Rights (MDCR) officially opened an investigation into the Grand Rapids Police Department (GRPD) regarding 23 complaints of discrimination, police intimidation, disrespect, and racial profiling [1].
- Michigan State Police (MSP) recorded race/origin information for all traffic stops from 2017-2019 and found that the percentage of Black motorists stopped increased from 17.36% in 2017 to 20.54% in 2019 [2].

- Michigan ranks within the top ten states for the highest rates of suspensions for students with disabilities, "with Black students having disabilities being suspended at a rate of 26.8%" [3].
- Black women and girls also account for 33% of all women shot to death by police, even though they only make up 13% of the female population in the U.S. [4].
- Excessive force was used more frequently against all women and girls of color, as well as lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and gender-nonconforming women of color [5].
- As a result of educational inequities in Michigan schools, approximately 80% of Black students and 67% of Latinx students are not proficient in English/Language Arts by the end of third grade [6].
- Roughly one-quarter of all murders of Indigenous peoples in Michigan between 1999 and 2017 went unreported to the FBI, according to a study from the Murder Accountability Project [7].

## What We Support

At the federal, state, and local levels, the YWCA West Central Michigan seeks to educate, advocate, and urges policymakers to

- Enact laws and reforms that hold police accountable and work to end the discriminatory practice in law enforcement, like the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act.
- Enact End Racial and Religious Profiling Act.
- Eliminate school discipline disparities, enhance school climate, and protecting the rights of all students through federal legislation and state-wide initiatives, like the S.A.F.E. Student Act.
- Address laws, policies, and practices that do not safeguard people of color from police violence.

*Adopted by YWCA West Central Michigan Board of Directors  
in February 2021*

[1] Hicks, J. P. (7 May 2017). "State to Officially Probe Grand Rapids Police for Discrimination." MLive. Retrieved from <https://www.mlive.com/news/grand-rapids/2019/05/state-to-officially-probe-grand-rapids-police-for-discrimination.html>

[2] Traffic Stop Data (2019). *Michigan State Police: Public Information*. Retrieved from [https://www.michigan.gov/msp/0,4643,7-123-1586\\_101168-534265--,00.html](https://www.michigan.gov/msp/0,4643,7-123-1586_101168-534265--,00.html)

[3] Losen, D. J., & Gillespie, J., (August 2012)., *Opportunities suspended: The disparate impact of disciplinary exclusion from school*. The Civil Rights Project., Retrieved from [civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/](http://civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/)

[4] Librescro, L. (23 June 2015). *Being Arrested Is Nearly Twice As Deadly For African-Americans As Whites*. Retrieved from <https://fivethirtyeight.com/datalab/being-arrested-is-nearly-twice-as-deadly-for-africanamericans-as-whites/>.

[5] (2017) We Deserve Safety: Ending the Criminalization of Women & Girls of Color., YWCA., Retrieved from [https://www.ywca.org/wp-content/uploads/CriminalizationGWOC\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.ywca.org/wp-content/uploads/CriminalizationGWOC_FINAL.pdf)

[6] 8. Sorenson, P. (October 2018,). "Race, Place and Policy matter in education." Michigan League for Public Policy., Retrieved from [mlpp.org/race-place-and-policy-matter-in-education-2018/](http://mlpp.org/race-place-and-policy-matter-in-education-2018/)

[7] Murder Accountability Project (14 March 2019) "Half of Native American Homicides are Unreported" Retrieved from [file:///C:/Users/Azaya/Downloads/MAPNatAmerRelease%20\(1\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/Azaya/Downloads/MAPNatAmerRelease%20(1).pdf)