

We should build systems based on trust, respect, and dignity, and eradicate policies that create harm. Benefits should offer help and support instead of fear and punishments.

Addressing Community Harm Caused By Fraud Investigations

The Office of Fraud and Accountability (OFA) was created as a cost-savings effort after the Great Recession.

- OFA was created in 2011 *at the same time benefits were being cut* - to investigate and prevent fraud from happening within benefits programs
- Federal law requires every state to address fraud within public benefits
 - This requirement comes from racist and sexist stereotypes about fraud, which are rooted in mistrust, deeply harmful, and not based in reality

OFA's Process is unnecessarily invasive and intimidating.

1. OFA gets referrals (usually from benefits program caseworkers)
2. **All** referrals must be investigated. OFA sends investigators to people's homes, children's schools, neighborhoods, workplaces, etc.
3. This investigation process can end with no findings, result in benefit terminations, or be assessed "overpayments".

Many clients opt to leave benefits, regardless of investigation findings.

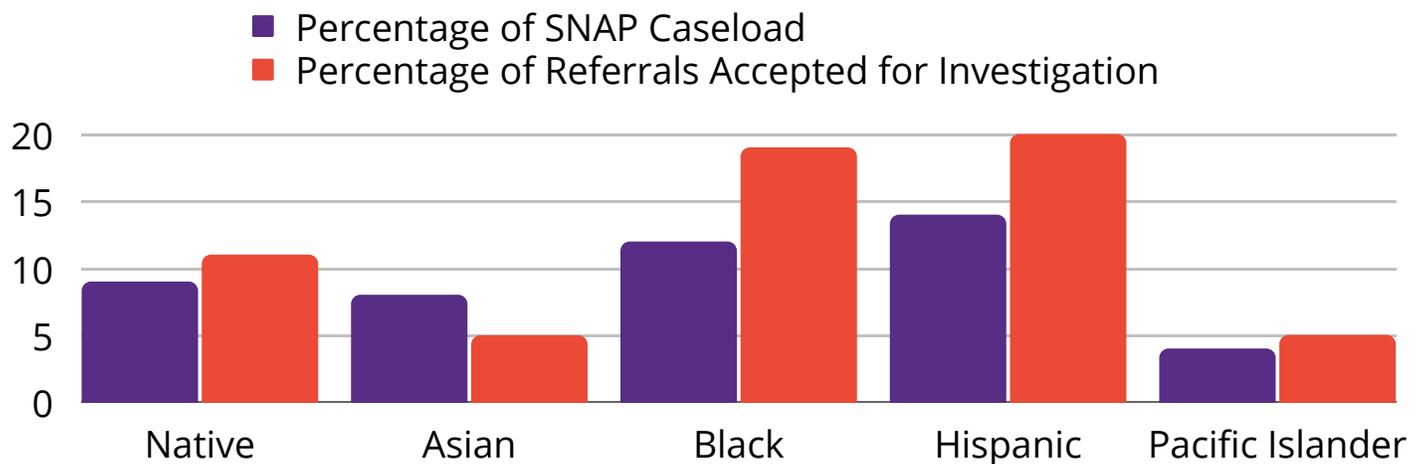
Cases taken to hearing often don't stand up in court. Official findings of "fraud" are often reversed, but the community harm is lasting.

Community members feel targeted for investigations because of their race and language.

- "Families of color are being overly targeted for fraud investigations"
- "The investigation was so invasive that I chose to get off TANF even though I still needed the help. It's not worth it at all."
- "If you make a mistake DSHS will investigate you and kick you off instead of helping you... Especially if you don't speak English"

OFA has confirmed that you are more likely to be investigated if you are Black, Hispanic, Native, Pacific Islander, or a Spanish speaker

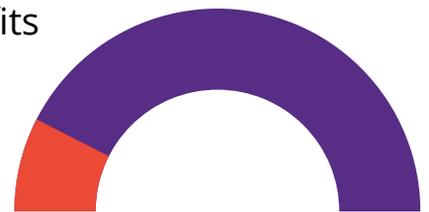
Disproportionality in OFA Investigations: July 2017-June 2022



- OFA has also confirmed that you're more likely to get a referral from PWA, Childcare, or TANF: All programs with higher concentrations of BIPOC

OFA is not fiscally sound.

- In 5 out of the last 10 years, OFA spent more money than they "recuperated"
- Most of what OFA counts as recuperated dollars are actually "cost avoidance" – i.e. money that the state didn't pay to families in need of benefits
- Actual dollars recuperated through OFA's efforts only account for about 15% of what they spend.



The cost of these investigations on people is impossible to calculate. Even if OFA made the state money, their tactics are harmful and would still require immediate change.

OFA investigations do not hold up at administrative hearings.

- When clients are able to challenge investigations, they most often prevail.
- Even once clients are found innocent, most choose not to stay on benefits regardless of their continued need.

Immediate budgetary change is needed to prevent ongoing harm to communities of color.

- Future statutory changes are needed to restructure this system to prevent future harm and racist outcomes