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**STATEMENT ON THE DEATH OF MA'KHIA BRYANT
From The Center for Healthy Families and The Commission on
Black Girls**

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Columbus—April 23, 2021—It is late afternoon on a residential street in southeast Columbus. A 911 call. A dispatch of Columbus Police. In the end, a teenage Black girl has died. It is with sadness and deep regret that we witness the unfolding of the events of yet another fatal officer-involved incident. We, like so many others, mourn the tragic death of Ma'Khia Bryant.

For now, this is all we know. Body-cam footage and eyewitness reports document only one aspect of her story. What we do know is, there is more to this narrative. What is it about this painful event that grieves differently?

As community leaders as well as women, citizens, and residents, the question before us all is who serves and protects our Black girls?

Our young Black girls experience household dysfunction, abuse, and neglect now and as they grow into adulthood. Decades of research link Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) to increased risk of chronic disease and behavioral challenges (e.g., obesity, autoimmune disease, depression, and alcoholism). These findings were consistent with results from a self-reported survey on the quality of life for Black girls, administered by a local research team and authored by Patricia Lyons, Ph.D., and JoAnna Williamson, Ph.D., in the Report on the Quality of Life for Black Girls in Columbus, Ohio (2020).

The perils of high violence exposure, educational discrimination and increasing health risks do not bode well for the quality of life in their growing-up years, nor for their lives as young women. Visit <https://www.centerforhealthyfamilies.org> to view the report.

The Center for Healthy Families is a 501(c) (3) nonprofit organization.

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They are also plagued by the bias of “adultification” – an insidious form of prejudice in which children of minority groups, such as African American girls, are treated as being more mature than they actually are by a reasonable social standard of development. In studies, African American girls have reported being treated unfairly, such as their true ages were disbelieved when they told authority figures like police officers, and they faced greater consequences in school for misbehavior while white girls doing the same acts would have their young ages taken into account.

As concerned adults, we must protect and defend their innocence, opposing the forces that deny them their childhoods.

The Center for Healthy Families works to help pregnant and parenting teens move forward to build healthy lives and form healthy relationships. From this effort, in conjunction with the work of the City of Columbus Commission on Black Girls, we are intentional about enabling organizations throughout central Ohio to ensure opportunities and prosperous futures for Black girls ages 11 to 22 despite the challenges they face.

This incident is, for us and for our community, a call to action. The mantle is placed upon us collectively to consider the multitude of factors that may have led to this tragedy.

The collective work belongs to all of us -- to build resilient families, to support youth who are becoming parents, and to advocate to improve the quality of life of Black girls. The result is critical to shaping their lives and the lives of their children, our community’s legacy.

We must ask: is this an acceptable quality of life for Black girls? For any girl?

There is no more ‘tomorrow’. We will not change the future unless we address it today. Unite with us as we work diligently to improve the opportunities for young Black girls to grow up safe, strong, confident, and have healthy lives filled with caring and compassion.

Tell us you want to get involved. We extend an open invitation to join The Center for Healthy Families and the Commission on Black Girls in our ongoing efforts. Together, we will build a plan—starting in the City of Columbus—to change the world for all our girls.

We are inspired by the words of United States Vice President Kamala Harris: *I was raised to be an independent woman, not the victim of anything.*

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