Linthicum, MD (February 22, 2023) – The National Adoption Association (NAA) has received a $500,000.00 grant from the Walmart Foundation to promote the importance of Black family connections through a new program, The Ujima Black Family Program.

The Ujima Black Family Program regularly convenes 50 Black leaders from across the United States with decision-making authority in the child welfare process to learn from experts in implementation science and racial equity and design solutions to maintain Black family connections in their systems. With a kick-off Think Tank scheduled for May 2023 in Washington, DC, this program will immerse Black leaders in the foster and adoption communities in trainings and opportunities that build their personal consciousness, professional network, and system's capacity to divert and deflect Black youth at the highest risk of aging out of foster care towards their full potential instead of prison. In the end, the Ujima Black Family Program participants will make both systems-level and adaptive changes to improve outcomes for Black children and youth who are most disproportionately represented in the US foster care system.

According to the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) FY2020 data, the number of children in foster care has decreased. However, Black children continue to be disproportionately represented within the population. Of those children and youth who need to find a guardian or adoptive parent, twenty-two percent are Black. Furthermore, there is an explicit or implicit refusal or dismissal of Black families as possible caregivers to their kin or non-relatives who are in foster care. The false narrative that "Black families do not adopt" stymies outreach to Black parents and allows real or perceived barriers to be reinforced, while Black children experience foster care drift, moving from foster home to foster home and exit foster care without a connection to their culture. When Black children are not adopted or reunited with their relatives, they age-out of the foster care system.

Black youth who age-out of foster care are overrepresented in the criminal justice system. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, close to one-fifth of the prison population in the US is comprised of former foster children. According to the Sentencing Project, nearly 70% of youth who exit foster care as legal adults are arrested at least once by age 26.
“Nothing is more important than family. Yet systems separate Black children from their families and culture at an alarming rate and disproportionately so. For decades we have not been able to move the needle on this vexing issue due to the deeply embedded institutional racism that exists in all our systems. The Ujima Black Family Program is a new approach that we hope leads to new results! The leaders who join us on this journey will be equipped with access to experts in racial equity, implementation science and a peer network to confidently make the necessary changes within their systems to maintain Black family connections and prevent our children from experiencing these poor outcomes,” said Kamilah Bunn, Chief Executive Officer of the National Adoption Association.

“The Walmart.org Center for Racial Equity is focused on creating systems change by addressing the root causes that contribute to Black Americans being disproportionately more likely to be incarcerated,” said Dr. Marvin Carr, Director of the Walmart.org Center for Racial Equity. "The Ujima Family program will help build networks and deepen practices that support foster youth, a group that too frequently ends up in the justice system.”

The program will be evaluated by Dr. Jessica Pryce, Assistant Professor at Florida State University. For over 10 years, she has been involved at multiple angles of child welfare (direct practice, teaching + training & policy and research). Dr. Pryce currently sits on the Florida Dependency Court Improvement Panel, alongside judges and advocates who are working towards a more trauma informed approach within the judicial system.

For more information about the Ujima Black Family Program visit www.adoptnaa.org/ujima.

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**National Adoption Association (NAA)**

As a 40-year-old non-profit organization, NAA maintains a strong and well-respected reputation within the child welfare industry and is seen as a national leader and disseminator of best and inclusive practices in adoption. NAA provides valuable continuing education and credentialing services to more than 500 child welfare professionals at public and private child welfare agencies each year. NAA’s racial equity programs transform systems to address the root causes that create barriers to family connections for children and youth particularly those who are overrepresented – Black, Indigenous and Hispanic youth with an intersectional lens those who are also LGBTQIA+. All NAA’s work is focused on increasing permanency outcomes for children in foster care who wait the longest for permanency. For the past twenty years, NAA has operated AdoptUSKids through a cooperative agreement with the Children’s Bureau. Together NAA and the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption launched I-CARE in 2018, a national workforce development program to promote careers in adoption. NAA is the only national association focused exclusively on supporting the educational needs of those in the adoption profession and future professionals - masters and bachelors level social work students.

**About the Walmart.org Center for Racial Equity**

The Walmart.org Center for Racial Equity was founded in 2020 by Walmart and the Walmart Foundation through a $100 million commitment over five years to address the drivers of
systemic racism in society and accelerate change. The center’s initiatives fund research, advocacy, innovation of practices and tools, stakeholder convening and non-profit capacity building with a focus on four systems: finance, health, education and criminal justice. The mission of the center is to complement and extend the societal impact of Walmart business initiatives to advance racial equity within these four systems, and its work extends the overarching philanthropic work of Walmart.org. To learn more, visit Center for Racial Equity.

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