



STATE OF MICHIGAN
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES
LANSING

RICK SNYDER
GOVERNOR

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February 25, 2015

The Honorable Peter MacGregor, Chair
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on DHS
Michigan State Senate
Lansing, Michigan 48933

The Honorable Earl Poleski, Chair
House Appropriations Subcommittee on DHS
Michigan House of Representatives
Lansing, Michigan 48933

Dear Senator MacGregor and Representative Poleski:

This report is provided pursuant to the Department of Human Services' (DHS) Fiscal Year 2015 Appropriations Act, PA 252 of 2014, Article X, Section 501(2). This section requires that DHS submit a report describing the steps that will be taken to achieve the goal that not more than 27% of all children in foster care at any given time during the current fiscal year will have been in foster care for 24 months or more. The attached report describes the steps that will be taken by the department to achieve the specific goal established in this section.

If you have any questions, please contact Nancy Rostoni, Foster Care and MiTEAM Model manager, at (517) 388-3910.

Sincerely,

Susan Kangas
Chief Financial Officer

Attachment: FY 15 Boilerplate Report 501(2) Duration of Stay in Foster Care
cc: Senate and House Appropriations Subcommittees on DHS
Senate and House Fiscal Agencies
Senate and House Policy Offices
Senate and House Standing Committees on Families and Human Services

2014 Public Act 252

Section 501(2): Duration of Stay In Foster Care

Section 501(2) of Public Act 252 of 2014 requires the Department of Human Services (DHS) to report on the steps the department will take to ensure not more than 27% of all children in foster care at any given time during the current fiscal year have been in foster care for 24 months or more.

As of December 23, 2014, 32% of children in foster care have been in foster care 24 months or more.

It should be noted that Michigan has and continues to consistently satisfy the federal standard for children in care for long periods of time. While the department is constantly evaluating efforts and looking for new opportunities to provide timely permanency for children in foster care, the following initiatives are several of the primary strategies underway during this fiscal year to achieve the goal specified within this section.

Implementation of Strengthening Our Focus on Children and Families

During FY 2014, DHS began implementation of a collective set of strategies to implement long-term systemic reforms in Michigan's child welfare system. This set of strategies, the Strengthening Our Focus on Children and Families approach, includes three primary components: an enhanced trauma-informed MiTEAM (Michigan Teaming Engagement Assessment and Mentoring) practice model, an overarching continuous quality improvement approach, and development of a performance-based child welfare system.

DHS is moving forward with a belief that safety, permanency and well-being outcomes for children and families in Michigan will improve significantly through: 1) translating these three components to everyday practices in the field; 2) integrating them into one phased, integrated approach to implementation; and 3) relying on county and private agency leadership to drive implementation with support from the DHS Children's Services Administration (CSA). This will serve as a foundation for child welfare services to be delivered in an environment where there are clear expectations about the way in which services are delivered and the existence of an administrative teaming structure capable of assessing the systemic needs, and making adjustments to meet the needs of children and families.

These strategies began implementation in four champion counties (Kalamazoo, Lenawee, Mecosta/Osceola, and Kent) in FY 2014. The DHS and private agency staffs in these four counties have been instrumental in not only developing these strategies alongside children's services staff but are also the first to test the strategies in practice. The CSA and the child welfare staff in the implementing counties will assess the effectiveness of these efforts in the fall of 2015 in order to modify and improve the plan for implementation for the rest of the state. Lessons learned from the champion counties pilot will provide guidance to CSA for statewide implementation.

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Foster and Adoptive Parent Recruitment & Retention Efforts

A sufficient number and adequate array of licensed foster parents across the state is an essential element of a foster care system that is able to facilitate timely permanence for children in out-of-home care. Among the efforts to recruit and retain foster parents are:

- Partnership with faith- based communities.
- I CARE 365 Project Diligent Foster and Adoptive Parent Recruitment and Retention grant.
- Developing and monitoring Annual Adoptive and Foster Parent Retention and Recruitment Plans which identify local and statewide licensing goals and recruitment and retention efforts.
- Partnership with Michigan Association for Foster, Adoptive and Kinship Parents (MAFAK), Family Enrichment Center, Families on the Move, Adoptive Family Support Network, MSU Kinship Care Center and other foster parent led programs and organizations.
- Use of foster/adoptive parent navigators to provide technical assistance and support to prospective foster and adoptive parents in the licensing and adoption process.
- A two day conference was held in September 2014 for foster, adoptive and kinship parents to provide training and support to foster and adoptive parents.
- Four recruitment trainings were held for DHS and private agency licensing staff in October and November of 2014 to help them identify effective strategies to recruit foster and adoptive parents.

Permanency Resource Monitors

The Permanency Resource Monitors (PRM) are considered the permanency experts in counties and consult on complex cases that are experiencing barriers or a delay in achieving permanency. PRMs continue to raise awareness of the importance of establishing permanency for each child and youth in the child welfare system. PRMs have established themselves as experts with knowledge of community resources and new approaches to planning for children who have been in care for extended periods. They push relentlessly for permanency while working in tandem with the case managers to identify new strategies to achieve permanency for children and youth. PRMs are responsible for conducting special reviews on each foster child awaiting reunification or permanent placement for over one year. In addition, PRMs began to offer consultation at initial placement to work toward making the best placement that can provide safety as well as permanency. From July 2013 to June 2014, PRMs made over 16,000 contacts with supervisors, specialists, caregivers, youth, and others that assisted with breaking down barriers to achieve permanency goals for 39% of the temporary court wards and permanent wards whose permanency plans had been in progress for over one year. PRMs conduct trainings for the private agencies, DHS staff, residential staff, foster parents, and other stakeholders in the areas of diligent relative search, case file mining, how to determine an appropriate permanency goal, permanency goal approval procedures, and the guardianship approval process.

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Permanency Forums

Several years ago, permanency forums were established for counties with the largest adoption dockets to identify barriers to adoption for children in Michigan and suggest solutions to those barriers. The primary goal is to help the children in these counties who each have a goal of adoption and an identified adoptive parent, yet have been waiting for more than a year for the adoption to be finalized.

Each county was asked to assemble a cross disciplinary team to identify barriers to adoption, and find solutions, for specific cases. Recommended team members included the family division judge assigned to adoptions, the county DHS director, a lawyer guardian ad litem (L-GAL), a DHS and/or private agency caseworker or supervisor, an attorney who represents parents, a court-appointed special advocate, and any other key individuals in the county.

This project has three overarching goals:

- Give these children, where parental rights have been terminated, the permanence they deserve.
- Improve Michigan's adoption outcomes to come into compliance with federal standards required by the Child and Family Services Review.
- Develop best practice strategies to share with the rest of the state.

These permanency forums have been expanded to recognize different approaches to permanency (guardianship, for example) may exist, and the focus now includes all foster children awaiting permanency, not just those with a goal of adoption. Speakers share innovative practices developed and the results achieved using them. These forums are open to all counties across the state and set a new standard of collaboration under the guidance of strong judicial leadership, stakeholders outreach across the branches of government and the boundaries of various occupations to address the needs of foster children and to discuss the administrative and judicial barriers that are delaying the process. This collaboration produces solutions and those solutions produce better outcomes for children. Permanency forums were held on April 3, 2014, and October 16, 2014, and another one is scheduled for June 18, 2015.

Performance-Based Adoption Contracts

Over 90% of child welfare adoptions in Michigan are completed by contracted private adoption agencies.

Adoption Performance Outcomes per current contracts:

- Fewer than 5% of placements for adoption will end in disruption.
- Fewer than 5% of finalized adoptions will end in dissolution.
- By September 30, 2015, not less than 80% of children with a goal of adoption who are legally free for adoption on September 30, 2014, shall have adoptions finalized.

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- By September 30, 2015, not less than 80% of the number of children with a goal of adoption who are legally free for adoption on September 30, 2014, will have the adoption petition filed with the court.

Project 340

The Michigan Adoption Resource Exchange (MARE) is the primary vehicle used by the department to match children who are available for adoption with families. In addition to that resource, Project 340 was created in September 2011 as a collaborative effort between DHS, MARE and Adoption Resource Consultants (ARC) to find homes for the hardest to place children.

Project 340 found that the following activities were most beneficial in locating permanent homes for foster youth:

- Extreme Recruitment – utilize private investigators and social media to connect the youth to their most significant past relationship in order to identify an appropriate adoptive resource.
- Utilizing clinical staff to identify barriers and assist with removing them.
- Adoption Navigators – Adoptive parents who assist prospective families through the adoption process.
- Diligent Relative Search.

Eighty-six percent of youth in this group have either achieved permanency or are in the process of achieving permanency through adoption or a more appropriate permanency goal. The department continues to work through this project to provide permanency for the remaining 14% of youth involved.

Adoption Resource Consultants

DHS continues to contract with Orchards Children's Services to provide Adoption Resource Consultants (ARC) services statewide. These specialized consultants review all post-termination of parental rights cases when the child has a goal of adoption for more than one year and does not have an identified adoptive family. ARCs have demonstrated adoption experience and have received training by national experts on adoption best practices. ARCs review the individual recruitment plan for each child and determine if all possible efforts to achieve adoption have been completed. They work with the assigned staff to expand recruitment efforts, locate extended family members that may be appropriate for adoptive placement, and involve the youth in their adoption planning.