STATE OF MICHIGAN
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES
LANSING

JENNIFER M. GRANHOLM
GOVERNOR

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August 29, 2007

Members of the Michigan Legislature:

As you will recall, the Michigan Department of Human Services (DHS) budget bill for FY 2006 required DHS to convene an interdepartmental task force on services to at-risk youth transitioning to adulthood. The task force was directed to:

- Assess current services for at-risk youths.
- Determine the extent to which DHS programs and services are coordinated with those of other state departments and agencies.
- Identify ways to better coordinate services.
- Identify potential resources and services in the public and private sectors.
- Develop a plan to ensure that all current public and private resources and services are effectively organized and available.
- Recommend improvements to services.

The 45-member task force, which we co-chaired, was advised by current and former foster youths. The task force issued its Report to the Legislature in September 2006. As a result of the state youth policy board's *Voice: discussing issues and concerns of Michigan foster youth* and the work of the task force, Michigan was invited to be one of six states to participate in the National Governors Association Policy Academy on Transitioning Youth. The work of the task force members and their dedicated staff continues.

In spite of Michigan's current budget challenges, we believe we have made significant progress on many of the priorities identified by foster youths and task force members. During the last year, we have expanded the network of caring adults who understand the serious issues faced by current and former foster youths. Public understanding is growing in communities around the state that we all share the responsibility to help support these young people for whom we, the citizens of Michigan, have become parent.

This is our report card on that progress. While significant, much of this progress will take time to positively impact outcomes for these youths, and there is much more work to be done. Michigan's foster youths cannot afford to have the work stop here.

Marianne Udow, Director
Michigan Department of Human Services

Honorable Maura Corrigan, Justice
Michigan Supreme Court

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INTERDEPARTMENTAL TASK FORCE ON SERVICES TO AT-RISK YOUTH TRANSITIONING TO ADULTHOOD

Report Card on Progress and Challenges
August 2007

Initiatives
Implementation Accomplished

- **Youth-friendly web site:** The first priority identified by youth and adult task force members was a foster youth-friendly web site. The web site, www.michigan.gov/fyit, was developed based on youth input and ideas and went on-line in June 2007. It includes information for youth on: finding a place to live; how to look for a job, how to dress appropriately and important interview tips; key points when purchasing a used car and buying insurance; opening a bank account; deciding between a debit card, credit card or ATM card; finding financial aid resources for college; health information including substance abuse and pregnancy prevention, parenting tips, mental health and disabilities; links to other agencies and relevant websites; and inexpensive entertainment options in their local area..

- **Continuous Medicaid coverage:** The Department of Community Health (DCH) received approval from Medicaid to add language to the state's Chafee Plan creating eligibility for 18-21 year old former foster youths. DHS and DCH databases will be linked in 2008 to make Medicaid coverage seamless.

- **Homeless youth initiative:** The Michigan State Housing Development Authority (MSHDA) awarded grants totaling $3 million to fund nine homeless youth projects serving 55 counties. The funding provides rental assistance and supportive services over a two-year period for homeless youths aged 18-24. MSHDA anticipates that 250-300 youths will be served, and will provide quarterly reports on how many former foster youths access the services beginning October 2007.

- **Wayne County housing resource center:** MSHDA awarded a $500,000 grant in December 2006, and DHS has provided a staff person to work with the youth. The two-year pilot will provide referrals, housing information, supportive services and rent subsidies for 50-60 former foster youths in Wayne County.

- **STEP summer training and employment programs:** In the summer of 2007, the Department of Labor and Economic Growth (DLEG) placed a priority on enrolling foster youths in Michigan Works! Agency summer youth jobs programs in Detroit and Benton Harbor. They provided 51 foster youths in Detroit and 12 in Benton Harbor with paid work experience and work-based learning activities integrated with classroom instruction. In addition, Wayne County DHS placed 22 foster youths in a paid internship program, which included a weeklong orientation on job preparation and retention skills, and employer-provided mentors.

- **Tuition waivers and higher education supports:** In April 2007, the Michigan Campus Compact, a membership organization of 43 public and private colleges, co-hosted an educational summit with DHS, the Michigan Supreme Court and the Department of Education (DOE). Regional summits that include colleges, DHS and private agency foster care staff began in June with a meeting at Madonna College in southeast Michigan. The next regional meeting is scheduled in October at Western Michigan University. An estimated 30 post-secondary institutions have participated and many are planning to offer special scholarships, mentoring and year-round housing for former foster youths.

Chafee Educational Training Vouchers (ETVs): In January 2006, DHS contracted with a private agency to manage ETVs, including increased marketing to caseworkers, financial aid officers, high school counselors, foster parents, court staff, guardians *ad litem*, and foster youths. As a result, all of the available funds for the ETVs was distributed to youths in 2007.

- **Michigan Youth Opportunities Initiative:** In December 2002, DHS began the grant-funded Michigan Youth Opportunities Initiative, a major national effort to improve outcomes for youth transitioning from foster care. Although grant funds are phasing out and will end by 2010, DHS has committed to expand the initiative statewide. The initiative began with two youth boards in 11 counties, and in FY 2007 has expanded to include 19 youth boards in 29 counties, comprised of and led by 200 youths. As of May 2007, the 587 youths enrolled in the program had saved almost $450,000 in Individual Development Accounts (matched savings accounts) and made 220 asset purchases matched by $100,000. In September 2007, the state youth board expects to release *Voices Two* – their second list of priorities needing to be addressed by state agencies and the courts.

- **Adoption for older youths:** In April 2007, DHS revised contracts with private foster care placing agencies to provide performance-based pay for increasing adoptions of older youths that have been waiting longest for a permanent home. In collaboration with the Michigan Adoption Resource Exchange (MARE), DHS has developed a statewide adoption oversight committee (AOC) to review barriers to permanency in the current system, identify best practices and track success of the contract revisions. The AOC is comprised of public and private adoption providers, adoptive family support groups, adoptive parents and youth and other related professionals. The AOC has been meeting since March 2007 and, through its various subcommittees, is making recommendations for changes in legislation, policy and the delivery of adoption services.

- **Automatic referral of foster care youths to Michigan Works! Agencies (MWAs):** DLEG successfully sought a $500,000 federal grant for "Shared Youth Vision" pilots to integrate education and employment services targeted to current and former foster youths. A grant implementation team has been developed and includes DHS participation. A kick-off event for the pilot and the Shared Youth Vision initiative will be held in Southeast Michigan.

- **Education planners:** The Washtenaw Superintendents' Association has developed policy guidelines for improving educational outcomes of youth transitioning out of foster care. Working through locally-appointed foster care education liaisons who are supported by the Washtenaw Intermediate School District, schools will ensure these students are afforded the opportunity to stay in their school of origin, provided transportation to the school of origin, allowed to immediately enroll in school and supported to stay on track academically. The intermediate school district expects to serve 50-75 students a year. This pilot will be presented to other intermediate school districts as a promising practice model to follow.

- **Access to critical documents:** DHS policy is in place that requires a caseworker to make sure each youth has received a certified copy of his or her birth certificate, a social security card and state-issued photo ID. In northern Michigan, Family-to-Family staff are conducting permanency meetings for every child, at least one year prior to aging out. The objective is to ensure 100 percent of youths aging out of foster care will have all necessary documents.

Initiatives Beginning Implementation

- **Healthy behaviors education:** DCH, with assistance from foster youths, has identified key content and links to add to the foster youth website. Local MYOI youth board coordinators are enlisting community partners to provide classes on healthy cooking, disease prevention, drug and alcohol addiction, smoking, teen pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases, and safe dating relationships. A curriculum is being developed and education requirements will be added to DHS structured independent living contracts.

- **Housing education and information:** Key information and links have been added to the foster youth website. MSHDA has developed a curriculum outline with clear lessons and topics, and DHS training staff will develop the program. Youth will be trained as trainers and the first classes will be piloted in Detroit and Traverse City.

- **Automatic enrollment in Tuition Incentive Program (TIP):** TIP is available to all Michigan youths who have been Medicaid eligible for 24 months during a 36-month period. Enrollment of foster youth will be part of the permanency planning meetings conducted for each youth. A required element of the meeting will be a determination of TIP eligibility and completion of the form. In addition, a query of Medicaid data has been requested to determine how best to collect information confirming when foster youth meet eligibility. Enrollment will occur at the earliest date possible.

- **Mentors for foster youths:** A partnership is being developed between DHS and Michigan State University Extension to develop and implement a model for transition coaches using tools such as the web-based Ansell Casey Life Skills Assessment, beginning in the northern region (Grand Traverse and surrounding counties) where mentoring programs for other youth are currently established. It is anticipated that 15 VISTA volunteers will be assigned to assist in developing and implementing this project. In addition, Spectrum Children's Services has developed a program in Wayne County to recruit and train mentors, match them with foster youths, and host fun mentor/mentee activities to support the relationships.

- **Permanent connections to caring adults:** DHS, with technical assistance from the Annie E. Casey Foundation's Center for Effective Child Welfare Practice, and the National Resource Center for Transitioning Youth, is developing a Circle of Support model of service that will bring together a team of people identified by the youth, find those important family members or other significant adults with whom the youth has lost contact, and re-build relationships that can lead to a permanent legal connection. Training on the use of technology for family-finding will be introduced to DHS workers in September at the SCAO conference. Eight Michigan counties will begin piloting the model in FY 2008. The goal is that no foster youth will leave care without a permanent connection to at least one caring adult.

- **Student Advocacy Center:** Educational advocacy models, such as the Student Advocacy Center in Washtenaw County, provide individual education planning, link students with tutors, and ensure the youth's needs are met to successfully complete high school. A plan to expand the current Student Advocacy Center model has been developed. A meeting is pending to pursue funding, determine timelines and plan for implementation.

- **Access to a driver's license:** Although DHS cannot address the issue of increased rates of auto insurance faced by families who provide foster care to a teen driver, the department is committed to making sure every foster youth will either have a driver's license, or have completed the requirements to get a license before he or she ages out of care. In some counties this includes recruiting community volunteers who will accompany youths while they complete their practice driving hours. The department is also informing

workers and foster parents that federal Chafee Foster Care Independence Act dollars can be used to cover the cost of driver training classes.

- **Extension of foster care beyond age 18:** DHS has developed policy that recommends foster care workers request a voluntary extension of foster care for all court wards that are in school or working until age 20. The Child Welfare Institute has added information to new worker training to focus on the need for extending care. Further education of judges, court staff and guardians *ad litem* is needed. Legislation is needed to allow youths to voluntarily return to care after their case has been closed. State and federal funding is needed in order to implement.

- **Access to dental care:** Utilization and cost data for 16-18 year old foster youths are being used as the basis for a proposal to Blue Cross/Blue Shield and Delta Dental to expand services to all foster children. These data will also be used to estimate the costs of providing dental insurance to former foster youths aged 18-25.

- **Single record student database:** The DOE has designed a single record student database that would allow student records to be accessed through an online database. While this would benefit all Michigan students, it is especially important to foster youths who face delays in enrollment every time a change in foster placement means a change in school placement. The student transcript module is being built, but DOE needs approximately $2 million to support activation and full input of student records.