



STATE OF MICHIGAN
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES
LANSING

RICK SNYDER
GOVERNOR

MAURA D. CORRIGAN
DIRECTOR

May 17, 2012

The Honorable Bruce Caswell, Chair
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on DHS
Michigan State Senate
Lansing, Michigan 48933

The Honorable David Agema, Chair
House Appropriations Subcommittee on DHS
Michigan House of Representatives
Lansing, Michigan 48933

Dear Senator Caswell and Representative Agema:

Section 501 of the 2011 Public Act 63 requires the Department of Human Services (DHS) to report on the steps taken to ensure not more than 35% 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. The department has provided the attached report describing the steps that will be taken to achieve the specific goal established in this section.

If you have any questions regarding the attached report, please contact Suzanne Stiles Burke, director, Bureau of Child Welfare, at (517) 241-8606.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Susan Kangas".

Susan Kangas
Chief Financial Officer

Enclosures

cc: Senate and House Appropriations Subcommittees on DHS
Senate and House Fiscal Agencies
State Budget Office

2011 Public Act 63

Section 501

Section 501 of the 2011 Public Act 63 requires the Department of Human Services (DHS) to report on the steps taken to ensure not more than 35% 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 12/31/11, 30.5% of children in foster care have been in care 24 months or more.

The following action steps have been taken by the department and will continue throughout the current fiscal year to achieve the goal specified within this section:

Implementation of a Child Welfare Practice Model (MiTEAM)

MiTEAM is Michigan's guide for how child welfare staff, children, families, stakeholders, and community partners work together to achieve outcomes that focus on safety, permanency, and well-being of children and their families. MiTEAM aligns with the agency's mission, values, and principles and incorporates the following practice skills: teaming, engagement, assessment, and mentoring. Ultimately it is expected that implementation of the MiTEAM model will improve Michigan's Child Welfare Services overall, demonstrated by improved outcomes, including but not limited to the following areas:

- Parent, child, youth, and caregiver involvement in case planning.
- Adequately assessing and addressing the service needs.
- Timeliness to permanency.
- Child safety at home or in foster care.
- Placement stability.
- Improved lifelong connections for children and youth.
- Enhanced caseworker job satisfaction and stability.

Statewide training has already begun for child welfare staff in the MiTEAM practice model, and the initial round of training will be completed by the end of 2012.

Foster and Adoptive Parent Recruitment & Retention Efforts

A sufficient number and 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.
- Use of Annual Adoptive and Foster Parent Retention and Recruitment Plans, both local and statewide efforts.

2011 Public Act 63 Section 501

- Partnership with Michigan Association for Foster, Adoptive and Kinship Parents (MAFAK).
- Foster/Adoptive Parent Navigators.

Permanency Resource Managers (PRMs)

The PRMs are considered the permanency experts in counties and are asked to consult on complex cases that are experiencing barriers or a delay in achieving permanency. The Permanency Resource Managers (PRMs) continue to raise awareness of the importance of establishing permanency for each child and youth in the foster care system. The PRMs have established themselves as experts with knowledge of community resources and new approaches to planning for children who have been in the system for extended periods. They push relentlessly for permanency while working in tandem with the case managers to identify new strategies and approaches to achieve permanency for children and youth. The PRMs continue to provide training for supervisors and caseworkers on the permanency goal approval procedures and the guardianship approval process as needed. The PRMs conduct trainings for the private agencies, DHS staff, residential staff and other stakeholders in the areas of diligent relative search, case file mining, how to determine an appropriate permanency goal, and the Guardianship Assistance Program (GAP). The PRMs are responsible for conducting special reviews on each foster child awaiting reunification or other permanency for more than one year.

Permanency Forums

In 2008, Justice Maura D. Corrigan and Department of Human Services Director Ismael Ahmed commenced an Adoption Forum 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 was to help the children in these counties who each had a goal of adoption and an identified adoptive parent, yet had 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 in these 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 had three overarching goals:

- Give these children, whom the system had allowed to languish in foster care, the permanence they deserved.

2011 Public Act 63 Section 501

- Improve Michigan's adoption outcomes in advance of the upcoming Child and Family Services Review.
- Develop best practice strategies to share with the rest of the state.

These forums continue as expanded "Permanency Forums", in recognition that 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 set a new standard of collaboration; under the guidance of strong judicial leadership, stakeholders reached across the branches of government and the boundaries of various occupations to address the needs of foster children. They meet annually to discuss the administrative and judicial barriers that are delaying the process. This collaboration produces solutions and those solutions produce better outcomes for children. Two Permanency Forums will be held in FY2012: one in April (Mt. Pleasant, MI) and another in September (Jackson, MI).

Modified Adoption Contracts

More than 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, 2012, 70% of adoptions for children with a goal of adoption on September 30, 2011 shall be finalized.
- By September 30, 2013, 77% of adoptions for children with a goal of adoption on September 30, 2012 shall be finalized.

Project 340

Project 340 is a collaboration that began in September 2011 between Orchards Children's Services (Adoption Resource Consultants- ARCs), Judson Center (Michigan Adoption Resource Exchange – MARE), and DHS (Permanency Resources Managers – PRMs).

This project is committed to finding homes for the 340 permanent wards identified at that time as not having an identified adoptive home. Project 340 found that the following activities were most beneficial in finding permanent homes for foster youth:

2011 Public Act 63 Section 501

- Extreme Recruitment – use private investigators and social media to connect the youth to their most significant past relationship in order to identify an appropriate adoptive resource.
- Using 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.

More than one-third of the identified youth in this group have found permanency since the inception of this project in September 2011.

Adoption Resource Consultants (ARCs)

DHS has entered into a contract with Orchards Children's Services to provide Adoption Resource Consultants (ARCs) in Genesee, Macomb, Oakland and Wayne counties. These specialized consultants review all post-termination of parental rights cases when the child has a goal of adoption for more than six months and does not have an identified adoptive family. Permanency Resource Managers (PRMs) assess cases to determine if sufficient progress has been made toward adoption or if the case would benefit from additional adoption-specific assistance from an ARC. If the decision is made to assign an ARC, the PRM will assist in the case transition. ARCs have demonstrated adoption experience and have received training by national experts on adoption best practices. The ARCs will review the individual recruitment plan for each child and determine if all possible efforts to achieve adoption have been completed. They will work with the assigned staff to expand recruitment efforts, locate extended family members who may be appropriate for adoptive placement, and involve the youth in their adoption planning.