

# Duration of Stay in Foster Care

(FY 2021 Appropriation Act - Public Act 166 of 2020)

**March 1, 2021**

**Sec. 501.** (1) *A goal is established that not more than 25% of all children in foster care at any given time during the current fiscal year, if in the best interest of the child, will have been in foster care for 24 months or more.*

(2) ***By March 1 of the current fiscal year, the department shall provide to the senate and house appropriations subcommittees on the department budget, the senate and house fiscal agencies, the senate and house policy offices, and the state budget office a report describing the steps that will be taken to achieve the specific goal established in this section and on the percentage of children who currently are in foster care and who have been in foster care a total of 24 or more months.***



## **Section 501(2) PA 166 of 2020**

As of December 31, 2020, 34.5 percent of children in foster care have been in care 24 months or more. Michigan continues to exceed the federal standard for length of stay for children in care. The department continues to evaluate efforts and looks for new opportunities to provide timely permanency for children in foster care. The following initiatives are the primary strategies underway to achieve the goal specified within this section.

### **Strengthening Our Focus on Children and Families**

In Fiscal Year (FY) 2020, the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) continued to implement strategies to ensure long-term, systemic reforms in Michigan's child welfare system.

MDHHS continues to implement a statewide continuous quality improvement (CQI) process through the work of the Quality Improvement Council (QIC) and local CQI teams. Over the past year, local CQI teams established goals to reduce the number of children in residential placements, assess MiTEAM practice sustainability, and improve the frequency children are placed with relatives. Local efforts have identified best practices that are shared with the QIC. The QIC convenes leaders throughout the state to review data, discuss current activities, gathers best practices as identified by local CQI teams, and makes statewide decisions in critical outcome areas including permanency, safety, and well-being.

MDHHS continues implementation of a performance-based child welfare system. In partnership with private agency providers and other stakeholders, current efforts include foster care, and adoption contract outcome measures that are performance based and aligned with evidence based best practice; adoption contracts containing incentives for meeting performance objectives timely; implementation of the Kent County Performance Based Funding pilot; increased supportive visitation services, and implementation of Rapid Reunification Efforts.

At the conclusion of the second year of the Kent County Performance Based Funding pilot, the evaluation team noted children in Kent County who entered care after 10/1/2017, and exited, tended to stay fewer days in care on average. This difference in length of stay is statistically significant. In terms of the timing of exits to permanency, a higher percentage of children in Kent County who entered foster care after 10/1/2017 achieved permanency within six and 12 months of entering care relative to the comparison group (15.1% vs. 7.1%, 22.7% vs. 18.5%). For the majority of children who entered care after 10/1/2017, discharges were exits to reunification. Children in Kent County are significantly more likely to exit to reunification and significantly less likely to exit to adoption as compared with children in the comparison group.

In partnership with State Court Administrative Office, MDHHS implemented Rapid Reunification Efforts; a practice to reunify children with their parent(s) within 30-45 days from the time they are identified as eligible for reunification. A team approach including caseworkers, lawyers, and judges was used to ensure collective decision making occurred. Family specific plans were created to address barriers to reunification and plan for successful transition, and services were provided to support the family and ensure

## **Section 501(2) PA 166 of 2020**

safety. Of the 432 cases identified as meeting eligibility criteria, 69% achieved reunification.

### **Foster and Adoptive Parent Recruitment & Retention Efforts**

A sufficient number and adequate array of licensed foster parents across the state are essential to facilitate timely permanence for children in out-of-home care. Efforts to recruit and retain foster parents included:

- Partnership with faith and community organizations.
- Foster parent navigators.
- Adoptive parent navigators.
- An online conference was held in August 2020 for foster, adoptive and kinship parents to provide training and support to foster and adoptive parents.
- Six hours of training was provided to field staff around the topic of effective recruitment and retention planning.
- Partnership with the Capacity Building Center for States.
- Continuation of contracts to provide regional recruitment and training services throughout the state.
- Developed and implemented annual adoptive and foster parent retention and recruitment plans that identified local and state-wide licensing goals and recruitment and retention efforts.
- Partnership with Family Enrichment Center, Adoptive Family Support Network, Kids Belong, MSU Kinship Care Center, Fostering Forward of Michigan, The Muslim Foster Care Association, and other foster parent led programs and organizations.
- A new caregiver preservice training curriculum was developed and piloted. This curriculum will better prepare families for their roles as foster or adoptive parents.
- Surveys were sent to caregivers to capture caregiver needs and ensure caregivers had the supports needed to care for children placed with them.
- With the help of the Harvard Government Performance Lab, a Caregiver Support and Resource Plan was developed and is being piloted in Oakland and Wayne Counties. The goal of this plan is to assist caseworkers in the identification of needed supports and resources. This should help retain caregivers and avoid placement disruptions.
- Procurement of a statewide marketing campaign to raise awareness about the need for foster parents in Michigan.

### **Permanency Resource Monitors (PRMs)**

The PRMs are permanency experts for local child placing agencies and consult on complex cases that are experiencing barriers or a delay in achieving permanency. The PRMs raise awareness of the importance of establishing permanency for each child and youth in the child welfare system. The PRMs conduct trainings for the private agencies, MDHHS 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. The PRMs have knowledge of community resources and practice new approaches to planning for children who have been in care for extended periods of time. PRMs team with the

## **Section 501(2) PA 166 of 2020**

case managers to identify strategies to achieve permanency goals for children and youth. The PRMs are responsible for conducting special reviews regarding each child or youth awaiting reunification for over nine months, have a goal of adoption without an identified family at 3 months post termination, or with older youth who are working toward achieving specific permanency goals. During FY 2020, a group of PRMs were allocated to provide objective facilitation for family meetings to ensure staff and families were able to make key decisions together. The PRMs completed over 5,000 case reviews which consisted of contacts with supervisors, specialists, caregivers, youth, and others as well as in-depth review of case documentation. The PRMs tasked with facilitation did so for over 1,000 family meetings that include case workers, supervisors, caregivers, youth, extended family members, and others.

### **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 of the fiscal year, not less than 80% of the number of children with a goal of adoption who were legally free for adoption on September 30 of the previous fiscal year, shall have adoptions finalized.
- By September 30 of the fiscal year, not less than 80% of the number of children with a goal of adoption who were legally free for adoption on September 30 of the previous fiscal year, will have the adoption petition filed with the court.

### **Adoption Resource Consultants (ARCs)**

MDHHS contracts with Judson Center and Orchards Children's Services to provide ARC services state-wide. These specialized consultants review all cases following termination of parental rights when the child has a goal of adoption for more than one year and does not have an identified adoptive family. The ARCs have demonstrated adoption experience and have received training by national experts on adoption best practices. The ARCs review the individual recruitment plan for each child and determine if all 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 youth in their adoption planning. Intensive recruitment services are also provided through the ARC contracts. During FY 20, MDHHS entered a partnership with the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption, Wendy's Wonderful Kids program to provide training and support in the evidence-based child focused recruitment model.

### **Michigan Adoption Resource Exchange (MARE) Match Support Program**

The MARE Match Support program is a state-wide service for families who have been matched with a child from the MARE website and who are in the process of moving forward with an adoption. The MARE Match Support program has specialists who provide up to 90 days of services to families by providing them with referrals to support groups, educational training opportunities, and community resources. The specialists are a great support for the family throughout the adoption process.

## **Section 501(2) PA 166 of 2020**

### **MARE Waiting Family Forums**

To assist adoptive parents through the match process, the MARE Adoption Navigators host Waiting Family Forums across the state. Prospective adoptive parents learn what happens after they submit inquiries on the MARE website, find out what they can do to make the most of their wait time, learn ways to strengthen their inquiries, get tips on how to effectively advocate for their family, and meet other waiting families. Families who are approved to adopt and families who are in the process of completing their home study are all welcome to participate.