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STATE OF MICHIGAN
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES
LANSING

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

The Honorable Peter MacGregor, Chair
House Appropriations Subcommittee on DHS
Michigan House of Representatives
Lansing, Michigan 48933

Dear Senator Caswell and Representative MacGregor:

This report is provided pursuant to the Department of Human Services' (DHS) Fiscal Year 2014 Appropriations Act, PA 59 of 2013, Article X, Section 501. This section requires that DHS submit a report describing the steps taken to achieve the specific goal established in this section that not more than 31% of children in foster care at any given time during the current fiscal year will have been in foster care for 24 months or more.

As of April 24, 2014, 24.3% 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 maintain the goal specified within this section:

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.
- Use of annual adoptive and foster parent retention and recruitment plans, both local and statewide efforts.
- Partnership with Michigan Association for Foster, Adoptive and Kinship Parents (MAFAK) and other foster parent associations.
- Use of foster/adoptive parent navigators.

Permanency Resource Monitors (PRMs)

The PRMs are considered the permanency experts and are asked to 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 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 provide training for supervisors and caseworkers regarding the permanency goal approval procedures and the guardianship approval process as needed. The PRMs conduct trainings for DHS, private agencies, residential staff and other stakeholders in the areas of diligent relative search, case file mining, and how to determine an appropriate permanency goal. The PRMs are responsible for conducting special reviews on each foster child awaiting reunification or adoption for over one year.

Permanency Forums

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, in these cases. Recommended team members included the family division judge assigned to adoptions, the county DHS director, Community Mental Health 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, whom the system had allowed to continue in foster care, the permanence of an adoptive family.
- Improve Michigan's adoption outcomes in advance of the Child and Family Services Review.
- Develop best practice strategies to share with the rest of the state.

These expanded permanency forums continue in recognition that different approaches to permanency (guardianship and reunification, for example) may exist, and the focus 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, stakeholder outreach 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 permanency process. This collaboration produces solutions and those solutions produce better outcomes for children. A permanency forum was held April 3, 2014 and another is scheduled for October 16, 2014.

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, 2014, 90% of adoptions for children with a goal of adoption on September 30, 2013, shall be finalized.

Adoption Resource Consultants (ARCs)

DHS has a contract with Orchards Children's Services to provide Adoption Resource Consultants (ARCs) 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. Permanency Resource Monitors (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 review the individual recruitment plan for each child and determine if all possible efforts to achieve adoption have been completed. They work with 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.

Michigan Adoption Resource Exchange (MARE)

DHS contracts with the Judson Center to manage the MARE for the State of Michigan. MARE is an information and referral service for prospective adoptive parents interested in adopting children with "special needs" and for adoption workers seeking homes for these children.

The goal of the Michigan Adoption Resource Exchange is to raise public awareness about children who are in need of a permanent home, and to recruit families who will adopt them. MARE's mission/service philosophy is based on creating seamless information and marketing system that leads to increased adoptions in Michigan. Youth who are available for adoption through the foster care system have often experienced past trauma and abuse and many times have special emotional, educational, mental health or physical needs.

Since June 2013, a new format and design of MARE has streamlined reporting and information sharing for Michigan's waiting youth, their adoption workers and waiting families. A new worker dashboard system allows workers the ability to report data in real time, with simple web-based forms and uploading of scanned documents. The ease of the new electronic reporting system allows workers more time to focus on face-to-face contacts with their youth and assessing potential families. The worker dashboard system also created an instantaneous notification system for inquiries placed by families. The notification immediately connects the families' adoption worker with the child's adoption worker, allowing potential matches to be

assessed and pursued in a more efficient manner. Families are able to report and track their information within their electronic family profile. The home study profile contains their inquiry history, worker information, and approval information. The new design has received the attention of other states looking to refresh their outdated websites for waiting children and families.

If you have any questions, please contact Stacie Bladen, Children's Services acting deputy director, at (517) 335-3475.

Sincerely,



Susan Kangas
Chief Financial Officer

cc: Senate and House Appropriations Subcommittee on DHS
Senate and House Fiscal Agencies
Senate and House Policy Offices
Senate and House Standing Committees on Families and Human Services