



Date: December 20, 20022

To: Mary Jo Pankoke  
Family Caregiver Citizen Review Panel  
Nebraska Children and Families Foundation  
215 Centennial Mall South, Suite 200  
Lincoln, NE 68508

RE: Annual Report and Recommendations 2020-2021

Dear Family Caregiver Citizen Review Panel Members,

The Division of Children and Family Services (CFS) would like to thank the Citizen Review Panel (CRP) for your work over the last year. We reviewed the 2020-2021 Annual Report and appreciate your thoughtful recommendations. It is especially helpful to have different perspectives from community members in Schuyler.

The following recommendations were made by the Columbus Caregiver CRP:

- Work with state entities to provide affordable housing.
- Establish standards for which programs Nebraskans are eligible for
- Set clear standards for Mandatory Reporting
- Incorporate more lived experience

The lack of affordable housing is an issue that requires collaboration both within and outside of DHHS to address. Within the Children and Family Services Division, there are several programs to help support stable housing for families. This year, the Department convened a TANF (Temporary Assistance to Needy Families) workgroup to make recommendations on expanding support for families utilizing TANF funds. The workgroup has several individuals with lived experience. Housing resources was a topic of discussion during meetings this year. The workgroup continues to meet and has provided the CEO of DHHS with a final report and recommendations.

The Family Advocacy Unit (FAU) is working in partnership with Economic Assistance program staff to address the recommendation for eligibility programs. Eligibility for programs is based on the Nebraska state statute and federal guidelines. Many of these standards are not within the Department's ability to change at this time.

The recommendation on clarification for Mandatory Reporters is being addressed in partnership with the Nebraska Alliance of Child Advocacy Centers and Project Harmony. The Department is in the process of awarding additional grant funding to these two organizations with the goal of developing a statewide standardized curriculum on mandatory reporting and expanding the number of professionals trained in mandatory reporting. While this is focused on professionals,

community members will also benefit from the development of the training and will have access to additional mandatory reporter training resources as a result.

Regarding the recommendation on incorporating more lived experience, the Department has increased partnerships over the last year and prioritized shared decision-making power with people with lived experience. The FAU was created in June of 2022 to focus on and develop strategies and opportunities for the inclusion of lived expertise. The Department has several workgroups that incorporate lived experts' voices. The FAU seeks opportunities for lived experts in different capacities, working with community providers, the court system, and colleagues within DHHS programs.

The Department continues to seek out best practices and practical applications for the families we serve. We look forward to continued collaboration with the CRP.

Respectfully,



Stephanie Beasley  
Director, Division of Children and Family Services  
Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services