



April 14, 2025

Lincoln Arneal  
Nebraska Parent and Caregiver Citizen Review Panel  
Nebraska Children and Families Foundation  
215 Centennial Mall South, Suite 200  
Lincoln, NE 68508

RE: Annual Report and Recommendations 2023-2024

Dear Parent and Caregiver Citizen Review Panel Members,

We want to thank all Parent and Caregiver Citizen Review Panel (CRP) members for their valuable time and effort in recommending that the Nebraska child welfare system promote safety, well-being, and permanency for children and families.

The Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) has reviewed the recommendations and responded below.

## 1. Financial Literacy for Foster Parents

***-Financial literacy training is needed to assist foster parents with budgeting for their increased expenses.***

DHHS is committed to providing stable and supportive foster placements, prioritizing children's well-being. DHHS ensures that youth in care have their needs met while fostering a sense of belonging. Home studies are completed for prospective foster parents, assessing their financial obligations, income, and budgeting to ensure responsible use of state stipends. The stipend amount depends on the child's age, needs, and required services, with flexibility for adjustments based on unforeseen changes. DHHS and the foster care agencies provide oversight to ensure children's needs are met, offering additional resources and referrals for expanded support. Although financial literacy is not a required training for foster parents, it could be provided or resources identified to assist if identified as a need for the home.

## 2. Offer Mental Health Support and Check-ins to Foster Families

***-Mental health supports, family therapy, and a supportive environment can prevent burnout, help with transitions when a child enters or leaves the home, and help maintain placements.***

DHHS recognizes the importance of mental health support for both foster parents and children. Fostering can be emotionally challenging, considering the trauma children may have

experienced. DHHS partners with service providers to offer critical support, including family therapy, play therapy, and crisis intervention, to help manage stress and prevent burnout.

Case Managers meet with foster parents at a minimum monthly, and these visits include conversations about the needs of the foster child in their home and the support the foster parents may need. DHHS Foster Care Resource Development staff or Agency Supported Foster Care staff also visit the foster homes to discuss respite, placement stability, and resources. Respite provides foster parents with necessary breaks to help prevent burnout. DHHS may offer additional services like Intensive Family Preservation (IFP) in the foster home to address behavioral or mental health challenges. Permanency Specialists train and coach foster parents to enhance daily routines and interactions. Our goal is to foster strong, collaborative relationships supporting the well-being of foster children and their caregivers, ensuring a nurturing environment for all.

DHHS contracts with the National Foster and Adoptive Parent Association (NFAPA), whose goal is to increase information, resources, and support for Nebraska resource families. NFAPA provides training and support groups that all foster parents can access.

### **3. Vacation Time and Workload for Case Managers**

***-Implement strategies to better support case managers in managing their workloads and utilizing their vacation time efficiently to prevent burnout.***

DHHS supports its case managers by fostering a positive work environment with substantial benefits, vacation time, and flexible hours to help employees maintain a healthy work-life balance. Supervisors regularly meet with case managers to build relationships and address caseload challenges. Supervisors work with staff to help identify coverage, and many teams plan out their leave time together to ensure they are available to cover for each other. Case managers are afforded the ability to flex time to attend youth events when they can. DHHS also offers the Calm app and an Employee Assistance Program, providing access to mental health services and resources for better well-being. After a traumatic work-related event, case managers are offered the Restoring Resiliency Response (RRR) program. The RRR program aims to address work-related traumatic stress through debriefing sessions and promoting coping skills. We are committed to continuously improving how we manage caseloads and time-off challenges to support our case managers.

Sincerely,

*Alyssa Bish*

Dr. Alyssa Bish  
Director of Children and Family Services  
Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services