

NEBRASKA

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DEPT. OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES



Jim Pillen, Governor

June 3, 2024

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

RE: Annual Report and Recommendations

Dear Project Everlast Citizen Review Panel Members,

The Division of Children and Family Services (CFS) would like to express our gratitude to the Citizen Review Panel (CRP) for your hard work over the past year. We have received the 2023 Annual Report and appreciate the CRP's dedication and continued effort.

CFS understands the importance of the CRP and highly values the opinions of young people. We have received the following recommendations:

- 1. Improving the documentation process by Children and Family Services Specialists to highlight youth strengths.**

CFS is committed to examining the language we use in assessments, court reports, and narratives to ensure a strength-based focus. CFS will discuss this recommendation with Service Area Administrators to share with their case teams.

- 2. Involve young people in mental health decisions and services.**

In May 2024, this specific recommendation was presented to the Statewide Healthcare Oversight Committee. Several suggestions were identified, including working with Medicaid Managed Care Organizations (MCO) to ensure that youth who are aging out of foster care are aware of the services and supports their MCO can provide as they enter adulthood. The recommendations also included reviewing procedures and educating youth on the importance of the Youth Court Questionnaire. This questionnaire allows youth to have a voice in court decision-making, including decisions related to their mental health. Additional training will be offered to Child and Family Services (CFS) Specialists on ways to engage youth including the Youth Court Questionnaire.

3. Ensuring the right to receive a notice before vacating a foster home for youth who are about to age out or have already reached the age of majority.

CFS recognizes the critical importance of housing stability for young adults who have aged out of foster care. This issue has been receiving increased attention at the state and national levels. A promising practice CFS initiated includes facilitating communication between field staff and policy staff to ensure that the transition process for youth leaving foster care meets both state and federal requirements and, most importantly, the needs of the youth. CFS has witnessed the challenges that arise when foster parents ask young adults to leave their homes. Unfortunately, DHHS has limited control over this situation as the living arrangement is between the young adult and the former foster home. Housing is a priority, and CFS will continue to prioritize proactive discussions with the youth and foster parents to determine housing options and develop a contingency plan.

We anticipate continued collaboration in the upcoming year. Thank you for your contributions on behalf of the children and families of Nebraska.

Sincerely,



Kathleen Stolz

Acting Director of Children and Family Services

Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services