



June 23, 2025

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 2024 Annual Report and truly appreciate the CRP's dedication and ongoing efforts.

CFS recognizes the vital role of the CRP and highly values the opinions of young people. We have reviewed the following recommendations:

1. Making the Youth Court Questionnaire mandatory.

CFS is committed to exploring the implementation of a Standard Work Instruction to emphasize the importance of providing the Youth Court Questionnaire to children and youth. We agree that these young individuals can offer valuable firsthand information about their lives and circumstances, which is essential for thoughtful decision-making and improved outcomes for youth and families.

2. Logging, analyzing, and sharing data on Deaf and Disabled youth.

CFS recognizes the critical importance of identifying children and youth with disabilities. To facilitate this, we use a data tracking system called NFOCUS. Through NFOCUS, we collect demographic information on every child and youth involved with CFS, including whether they have a disability such as hearing, visual, physical, mental, or behavioral impairments. The complexity of NFOCUS allows us to document individual disability information and automatically transfer it to placement referrals, which is essential for meeting the needs of these children and youth.

CFS collaborates closely with public schools, medical providers, Medicaid, Managed Care Organizations, and Assistive Technology Support programs to ensure that children and youth can access necessary accommodations and specialized devices. Additionally, CFS has contracts with various interpreters and coordinates with the Nebraska Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing.

CFS can effectively track disability data. For example, we have included data below that specifically addresses the Panel's interest in information regarding deaf and hearing-impaired children.

Calendar year	Number of Children with an Identified Hearing Impairment
2023	13
2024	11
2025 (year to date)	4

3. Addressing the needs of foster youth seeking employment and income security.

CFS would agree that in today's world, access to a youth's vital records is crucial for their preparation for adulthood. At age 14, each youth in custody of the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and in out-of-home placement must have a Transitional Living Plan. This plan outlines the youth's goals, such as obtaining employment, opening a checking account, and acquiring a driver's license. Once a goal is identified, strategies are developed for goal achievement or overcoming a barrier. Common strategies involve providing the youth with their vital documents. Having these types of goals in the youth's Transitional Plan encourages ongoing conversations about their progress and discussions around any obstacles they may face.

Additionally, the Transitional Living Plan requires documentation of when the youth received their vital documents, signed the Foster Care Youth Bill of Rights, and when they received their vital documents. The Foster Care Youth Bill of Rights outlines their rights to vital records, which must be presented to them at least every six months. To validate the importance of providing vital documents while in foster care, CFS established a Standard Work Instruction in April 2021 that guides CFS Specialists in assisting youth aged 14 and older in the custody of DHHS to obtain identification cards or driver's licenses. To acquire these, the youth must have a certified birth certificate and their Social Security number verification.

When a youth gains employment, their earnings are not considered when determining the foster care amount, and they are not expected to contribute to their own basic needs. To enhance financial literacy, CFS will refer youth interested in learning more about managing their finances. When a child receives funding from Social Security and is in the custody of DHHS, DHHS will request to become the payee. Under Nebraska State Statute 43-907, DHHS is required to save the first \$1000 that is received for the youth, and it can requested to be used directly for the youth.

Thank you for your continued partnership. We look forward to collaborating to implement these recommendations.

Sincerely,



Kathleen Stolz
Deputy Director of Children and Family Services
Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services