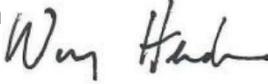


To: DCF/DMCPS Administrator
DCF Area Administrators
Child Placing Agency Directors
Child Welfare Agency Directors
County Departments of Community Programs Directors
County Departments of Human Services Directors
County Departments of Social Services Directors
Group Home Providers
Tribal Social Service/Indian Child Welfare Directors
Private Child Placing Agencies
Residential Care Center Providers
Shelter Care Providers
Tribal Chairpersons

From: Wendy Henderson
Administrator 

Re: **Extension of County Child Welfare Agency Options to Support Foster Youth Impacted by the COVID-19 Health Crisis**

PURPOSE

This Informational Memo builds upon the Department of Children and Families' (DCF) guidance in [DCF Informational Memo 2021-12i](#) regarding Division X of the 2021 Consolidated Appropriations Act: Supporting Foster Youth and Families Through the Pandemic. Specifically, this memo extends anticipated stimulus funding availability for counties through September 30, 2022.

BACKGROUND

In December 2020, Congress passed the Consolidated Appropriations Act. Division X, the Supporting Foster Youth and Families Through the Pandemic Act, includes provisions regarding supports for foster youth and families. These provisions included specific requirements, flexibilities, and stimulus funding to support states' administration of the Chafee program during the COVID-19 public health crisis and in response to its disproportionate impact on young people in foster care. As noted in Informational Memo 2021-12i, in April 2021, DCF elected to use its additional funding to support several program partners serving qualifying youth. These include Transition Resource Agencies, counties, tribes, and other youth-serving partners providing additional independent living (IL) supports for youth. Due to the continued availability of funds, DCF is extending county access to this additional funding through September 30, 2022.

INFORMATION SUMMARY

For youth to receive supports using funds from the Supporting Foster Youth and Families through the Pandemic Act, they must be eligible for IL services. Full eligibility is described in [DCF's Independent Living Eligibility guide](#). In summary:

- Youth receiving supports while still in an out-of-home care placement are to be served by their county/tribe. They must be at least 14 years old and be in a court-ordered qualifying placement for a minimum of six months OR be 17.5 years old or older and be in a court-

ordered qualifying placement for any amount of time on or after that age.

- Youth receiving housing supports from their county/tribe for a limited time after exiting an out-of-home care placement and/or broader IL services from a Transition Resource Agency must have exited care in a way that qualifies them for continued IL services following time in care. This includes entering court-ordered Chapter 48.977 guardianship or being adopted after 16th birthday following time in a court-ordered out-of-home care placement or exiting a qualifying court-ordered placement at age 18 or older (“aged out”).

As outlined in the May 7, 2020, [Youth Aging Out of Care policy guidance](#) (updated April 26, 2021), for youth who are living in a foster home, county child welfare agencies are encouraged to work with the youth, the foster family, and the licensing agency to determine whether the youth may be able to voluntarily remain in the home after aging out until alternative housing is available (e.g., until beginning college, or due to delays in finding an apartment during the pandemic). The DCF Exceptions Panel will be as flexible as possible on any foster care licensing exceptions necessary to allow the youth to remain in the home as a household member.

Using the increased Chafee funding made available through the Supporting Foster Youth and Families through the Pandemic Act, DCF will provide additional funding to counties to assist in transitioning youth from out-of-home care placement to regional independent living services. These **funds may be used** for:

1. **The cost of one-time payments to support maintaining youth in their previous placement home (“placement stability”)** following the same process outlined in [Informational Memo 2020-19i](#) (Funding to Support Youth Aging Out of Care During COVID-19).
 - DCF will reimburse payments for youth who aged out of care or will age out of care between April 2021 and the discontinuation of funding availability (described below).
 - DCF recommends that counties make placement stability payments for no more than three months following the youth’s exit from care, after which time the youth is transitioned to the TRA for IL services, including housing supports and services. DCF may provide approvals for more than three months on a case-by-case basis.
 - Payments made to support the youth remaining in the home of their most recent placement should be no more than the previous monthly foster care rate.
 - Youth remaining in their previous placement home with this support after their out-of-home care placement order ends remain eligible for other TRA-provided services and supports, including direct payments for youth who qualify, and counties shall continue to facilitate transition of youth to TRA services.

Counties must use the one-time payment mechanism in eWiSACWIS to provide payment when youth are continuing to live in their previous placement home or with another individual supported by the county. Directions for entering COVID-19 one-time placement stability payments can be found in the User Guide: [Creating a COVID-Youth Aging Out One-Time Payment](#).

eWiSACWIS COVID-19 Placement Stability Payment Process

- a) County enters placement stability payment in eWiSACWIS
- b) County emails Shannon.Braden@wisconsin.gov to receive approval for placement stability payment
 - Include Child ID and Provider ID in placement approval request

- c) eWISACWIS electronic payment file is available to counties the 3rd business day of the month following payment entry Families receive county payment within 1-2 business days (varies by county)
- d) County receives DCF reimbursement via SPARC line 3620 within 1-2 business days

DCF will reimburse 100% of placement stability costs that were entered into eWISACWIS per the process above. DCF will provide reimbursement via SPARC Contract Code 3620. For this cost category, counties do not need to enter anything into the SPARC portal; DCF staff will complete expense entry.

2. **Costs for independent living-related services and supports for youth while still in an out-of-home care placement.** These may include:

- o Driver's education, driver licensing, and insurance costs (not to exceed \$4,000 per youth).
- o Transportation costs (such as bus passes or gas cards) needed for education, employment, and transition to adulthood activities.
- o Costs such as laptops, cell phones, books, or other supplies.
- o Other resources to benefit youth as they transition to adulthood.

Counties should use SPARC Code 3621 to enter costs related to independent living-related services and supports for eligible youth still in care. Counties are strongly encouraged to enter costs monthly, as reimbursements may not be made once funding is no longer available.

Counties may not use funds for any of the following:

- Costs for placement in court-ordered out-of-home care, including any costs qualifying for IV-E maintenance payments.
- Services or support for youth who are no longer in out-of-home placement, except for payments that allow the youth to remain in the home of their previous placement as described above. Other supports and services for youth who have aged out of care will be the responsibility of the TRA.
- Supplanting or replacing funding from any other source. Staffing costs are only eligible if they are new expenses incurred specifically for this purpose.

DCF encourages County Child Welfare Agency (CWA) partners considering using these funds to consult <https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/independent-living-faq>.

The Department will provide an amendment to the state/county contract for the increased costs for payments issued as outlined above. Counties are encouraged to sign the contract amendment as quickly as possible. Payments cannot be issued until the amendment is signed.

Individual county contracts will not include a specified reimbursement amount due to the anticipated variability of expenses across counties. The Department expects to have funding available through September 30, 2022. The Department will closely monitor expenditure of funds and notify counties if these expenses are no longer eligible for reimbursement prior to September 30, 2022. Federal rules for stimulus funding require that the grant be liquidated no later than 90 days after the end of the September award period. After the 90-day deadline, even for expenses that would have been eligible for reimbursement, DCF will not have access to the federal funds to do so. For this reason, it is particularly important that counties submit costs in

a timely manner, as DCF cannot guarantee reimbursement for expenses submitted late.

CENTRAL OFFICE CONTACT: Independent Living Coordinator
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(608) 422-6990
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Section Manager
Bureau of Permanence and Out-of-Home Care
Out-of-Home Care Section
(920) 785-7829

MEMO WEB SITE: <https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/cwportal/policy>