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Governor Scott Walker
Secretary Eloise Anderson

Division of Safety and Permanence

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Ashley Stokes, Co-chairperson
Desiree Parker, Co-chairperson
Wisconsin Youth Advisory Council
Office of Youth Services
Division of Safety and Permanence
201 E. Washington Avenue
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Madison, WI 53708-8916

Dear Ms. Stokes and Ms. Parker:

Thank you for your timely submission of the 2015 Youth Advisory Council Citizen Review Panel report. This letter responds to the citizen review panel annual report requirement in the Federal Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA).

The Youth Advisory Council submitted two recommendations to improve child protection services at the state level. A brief summarized statement of each recommendation and the Department of Children and Families (DCF), Division of Safety and Permanence (DSP) response follows:

1. *The YAC recommends expanding state funding for post-secondary education beyond the DCF Scholarship and beyond current eligibility, up to age 26.*

The Department of Children and Families recognizes and understands the importance of foster youth's ability to access and succeed in their postsecondary education endeavors. Education helps youth thrive personally and professionally and have a purposeful, fulfilling, and self-sufficient adult life.

Due to the requirements of the federal Education and Training Voucher program, there are limits on the availability of the DCF Scholarship program. However, it is important to note that former foster youth can claim independent status on their Free Application for Student Aid (FAFSA), which makes it more likely that students of any age can receive the federal and state financial aid they need to attend postsecondary education and training at little to no cost. However, timeliness for completing these applications is critical. DCF is working diligently to inform high school personnel, postsecondary

institutions, foster parents, service providers and youth themselves to encourage getting assistance in applying for admission and financial aid on a timely basis, specifically, early in the senior year of high school and thereafter, each spring for the following fall semester.

A number of post-secondary institutions in Wisconsin have created scholarship programs specifically for former foster youth. Northeast Wisconsin Technical College and UW-Stout established specialized support for former foster youth. Marian University has created a scholarship for former foster youth. DCF will continue discussions with higher education institutions on ways they can provide greater financial support

As the Department develops its budget proposal for the next biennial budget we will take into consideration the Youth Advisory Council proposal to expand state funding for post-secondary scholarships for former youth.

2. *The YAC recommends DCF develop transitional housing programs throughout the state of Wisconsin to help all youth who leave out-of-home care transition to successful independence.*

In 2014 DCF created a policy encouraging Supervised Independent Living Placements for any youth ages 17 to 21 placed in out-of-home care. DCF continues to provide technical assistance to child welfare agencies exploring placement options for older youth. DCF also initiated the PATHS pilot project, a housing first initiative that stresses housing as the key to successful education, health and well-being and employment. The two-year pilot project revealed successful outcomes that we hope to have duplicated in other parts of the state within the next few years. In 2015, DCF provided Homeless and Runaway funding to an agency in each of the seven, Office of Youth Services Regions. Agencies have the flexibility to use the funding for transitional housing programming to meet the needs of youth in their community. DCF continues to explore best practices for transitional living programs and models for implementation to share with agencies.

Thank you for your dedication and efforts on behalf of Wisconsin children and families. I hope you find this information helpful in response to your recommendations.

Sincerely,



Fredi-Ellen Bove
Division Administrator

CC: Christine Lenske, Independent Living Coordinator