



August 19, 2022

Brent Ruehlow, Co-Coordinator  
Laura Wagner, Co-Coordinator  
Jefferson County Citizen Review Panel  
Jefferson County Human Services Department  
1541 Annex Road  
Jefferson, WI 53549

Dear Mr. Ruehlow & Ms. Wagner:

Thank you for your timely submission of the Jefferson County Citizen Review Panel's report in compliance with the Federal Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA). This letter fulfills the citizen review panel annual report response requirements set forth in CAPTA.

The Citizen Review Panel 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 panel would like to see more support for "like kin" providers in an effort to keep children with familiar faces. Specifically, funding and support as we see with traditional foster parents.**

Relatives and like-kin providers are vital to caring for children safely in their communities. DCF appreciates and recognizes the importance of placing children with relatives or like-kin individuals who know and love them if in-home safety planning is not possible. DCF is committed to supporting and elevating relative and like-kin family members who open their homes to children, often at very short notice or an unspecified amount of time. Research supports children have better outcomes when placed with people they know and who know them. Kinship Care is also an important component of DCF's [Putting Families First](#) initiative. More specifically, one strategic objective identified is increasing support for relatives and like-kin providers.

DCF has also heard from multiple stakeholders that the kinship care definition of "relative" for the purpose of receiving kinship care payments (s. 48.57) can create challenges in certain situations. While the definition is in statute and cannot be changed without legislative amendment, DCF is looking at what

can be done within the parameters of state and federal law. DCF is committed to the continuing evaluation of our state's relative definition for inequities and to explore ways to improve the application of and support to relatives and like-kin caregivers. For example, there were recent amendments to DCF 58 to increase access to long-term kinship programs for Tribes across Wisconsin. These amendments took effect on July 1, 2022.

Additionally, an increase in kinship care rates was included in the Governor's 2021-2023 biennial budget. This increase raised the monthly rates for kinship providers from \$254 per month to \$300 per month. While there is more to be done to ensure relatives and like-kin providers have the support needed, this was an important step. Like-kin are often recognized by children and their families and an informal extension of family, thereby considering these relationships to be included in the family structure. DCF will continue to elevate this important philosophical orientation when evaluating and implementing policy and practice.

**2. The panel asked about additional support for local group homes as to avoid residential placements and the use of out of state providers.**

DCF appreciates the panel's commitment to keeping children in their local communities and in the least restrictive setting possible. DCF licenses more than 60 group homes across the state of Wisconsin. Improving Wisconsin's group care system is one of DCF's four key priorities to Putting Families First. DCF has engaged with providers to elevate the quality of group care through trauma-informed, child-centric, and treatment-oriented approaches. Group homes are an important component of Wisconsin's system, and DCF has several initiatives underway to increase support to group home and other congregate care providers.

- The federal Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) mandated Qualified Residential Treatment Program (QRTP) certification for federal reimbursement. QRTP requires participating group care providers to elevate their standards of care. DCF has supported providers in achieving QRTP certification through technical assistance and daily rate adjustments to offset the increased costs associated with providing quality care.
- DCF has partnered with the Praed Foundation to assess the current landscape of congregate care and to develop tools and targeted efforts aimed at elevating the quality of congregate care in Wisconsin. Additionally, DCF has partnered with the Wisconsin Child Welfare Professional Development System (WCWPDS) to offer training to

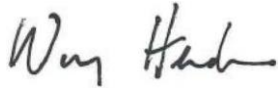
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congregate care staff. Curriculum planning and development are currently underway.

Further, in addition to its regulatory duties, the Child Welfare Licensing Section within the department's Bureau of Permanence and Out-of-Home Care (BPOHC) has made concerted efforts to take on a more supportive role with providers to offer guidance and promote continuous quality improvement in group care.

DCF continues to acknowledge and appreciate the continued efforts put forth by the Jefferson County Citizen Review Panel for their continued advocacy. Thank you for the time, energy, and commitment you have made to improve services for Wisconsin children and their families.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Wendy Henderson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Wendy Henderson  
Division Administrator