



JENNIFER M. GRANHOLM
GOVERNOR

STATE OF MICHIGAN
MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES
LANSING



MARIANNE UDOW
DIRECTOR

News Release

Contact: Maureen Sorbet (517) 373-7394

State Task Force Report advocates better services for “aging out” foster youth

October 2, 2006

LANSING -- A 21-step action plan – based on recommendations from foster youth – will improve health care, education, job opportunities and resources for young people aging out of foster care, according to a report released to the Michigan legislature today by the Michigan Department of Human Services (DHS).

About 450 youths in Michigan left foster care, or “aged out,” at 18 during 2005. These young adults are at greater risk for poverty, homelessness, unemployment and other negative outcomes. In January 2006, DHS director Marianne Udow and Supreme Court Justice Maura Corrigan convened a task force to evaluate existing services for foster youth and propose improvements.

“Many foster youth face a bleak future after they age out, as both national and state statistics demonstrate,” said Justice Maura Corrigan, who served on the national Pew Commission on Children in Foster Care. “Courts, public agencies and the private sector have to work together to give aging-out foster youth the opportunity for better lives. Separation of powers doesn’t mean anything to a child about to leave care.”

The 45-member task force, co-chaired by Udow and Corrigan, included current and former foster care youth, who co-chaired each task force subcommittee. Also represented were the Michigan departments of Labor & Economic Growth, Education, Community Health, Management & Budget, and Housing; private foster care agencies; state and national foundations; tribal councils; youth advocacy groups and associations of foster and adoptive parents.

“In 2005, our state foster youth advisory board put together a list of 15 priorities that we wanted the state to address on behalf of all foster youth,” said Mona Perdue, president of the Michigan Youth Opportunities Initiative Wayne County youth board. “We presented those priorities to the task force, and they became the starting point.”

The task force examined various challenges for foster youth: establishing permanent relationships, acquiring the education needed to achieve career goals, finding safe and affordable housing, getting and keeping family-supporting jobs, and having access to health care. The task force also learned from its youth members about how they overcame those challenges.

“There is a growing awareness among our state and community partners that it is a myth to assume a child of 18 is ready for independence,” Udow said. “The recommendations in this report show that by working together we can make a lasting difference for the foster youth in Michigan who, through no fault of their own, have been removed from their families and placed in our care.”

-MORE-

Among the 21 action items outlined in the report, organizations represented on the task force are taking the following steps:

- A youth-friendly web site with a wide range of information for foster youth.
- Automatic referral of foster youth to Michigan Works! Agencies youth programs.
- Expanded summer training and enrichment programs that place youth in part-time internships with employers who provide mentors and career-oriented jobs.
- Seamless Medicaid eligibility for foster youth to age 21.
- Voluntary extension of foster care beyond age 18.
- Expanded dental care coverage for current and former foster youth.
- Housing education, information and assistance for homeless foster youth.
- Student advocacy and educational planners statewide.
- An online student record database that will allow schools to immediately access student records from previous schools, when foster care placement changes mean school changes.
- Financial and other resources that support success in post-secondary education and training, including stipends for year-round housing.
- Access to critical documents such as birth certificates and Social Security cards.
- Permanency supports that use technology to find and connect youth with family members.
- Increased use of Individual Development Accounts (matched savings accounts) to help youth learn long-term savings habits.

As a result of the task force and other work of DHS and its partners, the National Governors Association (NGA) selected Michigan in July 2006 as one of six states to participate in its year-long Policy Academy on Youth Transitioning out of Foster Care. Udow leads the 10-person Michigan team and Corrigan is a member.

For a copy of the task force’s report, go to: http://www.michigan.gov/documents/dhs/DHS-Boilerplate-Task-Force-At-Risk-Youth_174099_7.pdf

For more information about the Department of Human Services, go to www.michigan.gov/dhs