

April 6, 2020

Leyda Garcia-Greenawalt
Chapter President
Foster Care Alumni of America Illinois Chapter
il.chapter@fostercarealumni.org

Dear Miss Garcia-Greenawalt:

I want to thank you for your letter and your efforts to ensure that youth in transition are provided services and resources necessary to maintain their safety and health during this difficult time. The Foster Care Alumni of America Illinois Chapter continues to be a partner in our commitment to better support older youth as they transition out of our care. I share the same compassion and empathy for the struggles older youth are experiencing as they transition into the next phase of life during this unprecedented crisis.

In response to the COVID-19 outbreak, we are making a number of exceptions to practice and policy, as well as bolstering our normal practices to address the elevated needs of youth in transition. Some of those changes include:

- DCFS is extending services to youth who have aged out of care within the last six months, allowing them to receive services through the end of June 2020. DCFS has partnered with the statewide Family Advocacy Centers (FACs) to establish a well-being check on all youth who have aged out in the last six months. These youth will be contacted at their last known phone number and/or email address to offer assistance on an individual basis.
- To the extent that any licensing provisions would be violated by permitting a 21-year-old to remain in their current placement, DCFS is committed to ensuring that licensees are permitted to continue to care for youth who reach the age of 21 during the Gubernatorial Disaster Proclamation.
- Currently, DCFS may extend services for a youth beyond the age of 21. Requirements that a request for assistance be made 60 days prior to a youth's 21st birthday and that an extension only be made for 30 days will be waived for youth currently on extensions, and for future requests for extensions, during the Gubernatorial Disaster Proclamation.
- DCFS will provide assistance to youth who left care at age 18 or later and who request such assistance prior to their 21st birthday. DCFS intends to reach out to all youth currently under age

21 who have left care in the last two years to do a well-being check at their last known contact. DCFS will continue to work directly with the courts to facilitate automatic eligibility for youth between ages 18 and 21 during the crisis, since court access is severely restricted at this time.

- Eligibility for some housing assistance programs (Family Unification Program [FUP] vouchers) require that a youth's court case close prior to the youth's 21st birthday. Because courts will not be entering these orders during the crisis, the Department will advocate that this requirement for eligibility for FUP housing vouchers be waived during the crisis, so that the failure to close a case will not prevent assistance.
- All tasks for eligibility of "emancipation funds," intended to assist the youth with setting up an independent household, that youth cannot participate in because of the COVID-19 crisis will be waived and caseworkers will discuss financial planning individually with youth.
- DCFS will continue to ensure that the State takes full advantage of federal funding available through the John H. Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood.

Thank you again for your continued partnership and communication with the Department. I will continue to reach out on issues impacting older youth in care and foster care alumni in the months ahead.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Marc D. Smith".

Marc D. Smith
Acting Director of Illinois Department of Children and Family Services