



public catalyst group

111 Mulberry Street THB Newark, NJ 07102 | PO Box 1099 Marlton, NJ 08053  
www.pcg4change.com | 908-655-5350 | pcginfo@pcg4change.com

July 11, 2009

Ismael Ahmed  
Director  
Michigan Department of Human Services  
P.O. Box 30037  
235 S. Grand Ave.  
Lansing, Michigan 48909

Marcia Lowry, Esq.  
Children's Rights  
330 7th Ave # 4  
New York, NY 10001-5010

Dear Director Ahmed and Ms. Lowry:

As a component of the Settlement Agreement between the State of Michigan and Children's Rights, Plaintiffs' Counsel, in *Dwayne B. v. Granholm*, the Michigan Department of Human Services ("DHS") in collaboration with the Michigan State University Child Welfare Resource Center conducted the Michigan Child Welfare Needs Assessment ("Needs Assessment"), attached, pursuant to Section IX of the Agreement. As the parties agreed, the Needs Assessment evaluated the need for additional services and placements, including the need for family preservation services, foster and adoptive placements, wraparound services, reunification services, and medical, dental and mental health services for children in foster care throughout Michigan, as well as the need for funds. The parties have agreed that a second Needs Assessment shall be conducted two years after the conclusion of the first Needs Assessment. The second Needs Assessment will include, in addition to the scope described above, a specific review and recommendation as to whether the additional treatment foster home beds created under the Settlement Agreement are sufficient to meet the needs of children in foster care.

The parties have agreed that DHS shall make available additional funds of at least \$4 million in FY10 to develop the additional services and placements identified by the first Needs Assessment, and further additional funds of at least \$4 million to develop the additional services and placements identified by the second Needs Assessment.

The Needs Assessment was forwarded to the Monitoring Team and the parties by May 15, 2009, as required. The parties have agreed that the Monitoring Team, after receiving comments from the Plaintiffs, shall issue this final document containing our findings and

recommendations with respect to additional services and placements to be created, and a timeline for their development.

The Monitoring Team, following consultation with the parties, has determined to endorse the conclusions contained within the Needs Assessment. Because, however, the Needs Assessment is sweeping in scope, it is important at this early stage of the State's reform efforts to focus our findings and investment recommendations on service needs that will advance the change processes that are already underway.

1. The Needs Assessment concludes that post permanency and youth transition services are insufficient to fully meet the needs of Michigan's families and children. During the past year, DHS articulated principles and expectations for its practice with older youth in care through the Service Delivery Model for Older Youth in Foster Care. The document emphasizes the unique needs of adolescents and it affirms their need for safety, permanence and well-being. Based on the Needs Assessment and the Monitoring Team's independent review, the Monitoring Team finds that there are significant service gaps that interfere with the child welfare system's ability to perform consistently in a fashion that matches DHS' own expectations for its work with older youth in transition from foster care. As an example, DHS committed in the Settlement Agreement to refer youth without an identified housing situation at the time of emancipation from foster care to the Michigan State Housing Development Authority (MSHDA) for rental assistance and services. But MSHDA has no additional resources earmarked for exiting foster youth, so the referrals are not impactful. Indeed, numerous focus groups cited within the Needs Assessment "expressed a need for affordable, suitable housing for transitioning youth." Therefore, the Monitoring Team recommends that DHS invest \$1.5 million in FY10 in new, independent, transitional and trans-permanent housing for exiting foster youth in the Designated Counties. Such programs should be funded and operational by February 1, 2010.
2. The Needs Assessment identified concerns that DHS does not have an adequate continuum of services to step children and youth down from residential care settings and safely return them to their families, or place them with new forever families in their communities. This lack of sustaining in-home supports and other services can lead to elongated placements in residential settings for youth, too many of whom exit without achieving permanency. Indeed, one of the Needs Assessment's central findings is that "services are needed in Michigan that are effective in supporting children in placement and their caregivers, and that promote timely reunification and permanency." The parties have agreed upon a series of authorizing protocols that will require high-level DHS approval before a young person can remain in residential care for longer than 6 and 12 months. In addition, DHS has made a significant number of important commitments in the Settlement Agreement designed to achieve permanence for youth in care. The Monitoring Team recommends DHS invest \$1.5 million in services designed to support families and youth stepping down from residential care, including flexible funds, in-home supports and step-down levels of care, in the Designated Counties. As a result of this investment, the Monitoring Team expects DHS should be able to reduce the number of youth placed in residential care settings in the Designated Counties. An allocation plan and budget for these new services is due to the

Monitoring Team by September 30, 2009, and such services shall be available by January 1, 2010, unless otherwise agreed upon by the Monitoring Team.

3. The Needs Assessment observes the child welfare system suffers from an overall lack of adequate services to match the needs of children and families in Michigan. The Needs Assessment concludes that “prevention and preservation services are needed in Michigan that are effective in supporting families and reducing the need for removal from the home.” A shortage of accessible family preservation services was cited by the Needs Assessment as a common concern among key stakeholders. The Monitoring Team recommends DHS invest an additional \$1 million in new family preservation services in the Designated Counties. An allocation plan and budget for these new services is due to the Monitoring Team by September 30, 2009, and such programs should be funded and operational by February 1, 2010.

Many children and youth in Michigan could benefit enormously from these new investments, further advancing the State’s ambitious reform goals to achieve a system that consistently ensures safety, permanence and well-being for vulnerable children and youth.

Sincerely,

Kevin M. Ryan

Cc: Judge Nancy Edmunds