

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
Child and Family Services Agency



April 14, 2016

Damon King, Chair
Citizen's Review Panel
c/o Child Protection and Family Support

Dear Mr. King

Thank you for the Citizen Review Panel's dedicated work in the District of Columbia in the role to "evaluate the extent to which State and local child protection system agencies are effectively discharging their child protection responsibilities." Since 2013, the Citizen's Review Panel (CRP) engaged in a concentrated effort to research and identify concerns about youth who age out of the foster care system related to their readiness and the provision of aftercare services contracted with the Healthy Families/Thriving Community Collaboratives.

The CRP's Taskforce on Youth Aging Out referenced ten recommendations in the 2014 CRP Annual Report and added three in the 2015 CRP Annual Report. The 2014 and 2015 recommendations focused on improving aftercare for youth who age out of the foster care system. During the summer of 2015, the DC Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA) began an extensive deep dive into the needs of youth who will age out of the system. As a caveat, while youth who age out of the child welfare system are the focus, its CFSA's philosophy and practice that all youth should achieve permanency either through reunification, adoption or guardianship as opposed to aging out of foster care. However, for those youth who do age out of foster care, the system must provide a positive transition and services to support their needs during care and aftercare.

Following the Citizens Review Panel's research and recommendations, CFSA initiated a self-assessment and sought input from community stakeholders and youth to evaluate and improve aftercare services for young adults who age out of the child welfare system. Throughout the process, community-based partners—particularly the Children's Law Center, Citizen Review Panel, and Young Women's Project—augmented our efforts to analyze data and synthesize stakeholder input. These partners conducted research, submitted reports, and provided public testimony regarding the need to improve support for youth in foster care as they develop life skills and transition to independent adulthood. In addition to identifying ways to improve practice, CFSA also wanted to establish standard outcomes that reflected youth input as well as the collective expertise of professionals.

Throughout the year, CFSA gathered feedback from two forums and six additional meetings. In gathering and subsequently sharing input, we worked with stakeholder groups including:

- Attorneys for children and parents;
- Center for the Study of Social Policy, court-appointed monitor for the *LaShawn* lawsuit;
- CFSA executives, managers, and specialists working with older youth and community partners;
- Citizen Review Panel;
- D.C. Department of Behavioral Health;
- Healthy Families/Thriving Communities Collaboratives;
- Local advocacy organizations the Children's Law Center and Young Women's Project; and
- Youth currently and formerly in foster care.

Based on recommendations stemming from this work, two key improvement strategies were authorized in January 2016:

- Creation of a **revised aftercare program model** that will guide providers in serving young adults, ages 21 to 23, who age out of District foster care and
- Internal coordination at CFSA to establish a **transition-to-adulthood planning continuum** for youth ages 14 to 21 in foster care and young adults ages 21 to 23 who have exited care.

For a full report see the attached "Transition to Adulthood for Youth in Foster Care in the District of Columbia: A Summary of Information Gathering Activities, Recommendations, and Next Steps for Improvement". The report provides information about the Citizen Review Panel Recommendations. We waited to provide a response to the 2015 Citizen Review Panel Report following completion of the summary document for information on the comprehensive work to date.

We again appreciate your dedication and support to the children, youth and families in the District of Columbia.

Sincerely,



Raymond C. Davidson
Child and Family Services, Director