



February 14, 2014

Nettie Anderson-Burrs, Chairperson
Citizens Review Board for Children
1100 Eastern Blvd
Baltimore, MD 21221

Dear Ms. Anderson-Burrs:

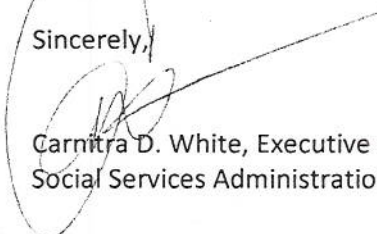
As you are aware, the Citizens Review Board for Children (CRBC) prepares an annual report providing details on the reviews done by local boards. The Department of Human Resources utilizes the report, in concert with the quarterly reports, to assess adherence to current policies, identify gaps in policy and provide feedback to LDSS management. I wanted to take this opportunity to let you know of the policy work being done that addresses recommendations resulting from reviews completed during SFY13.

The importance of providing adequate service planning to youth aging out of our system, ensuring concurrent planning and educational stability was highlighted throughout the year. The importance of placing children with relatives and revisiting adoption plans was also listed as a way to improve our service delivery to youth and families. DHR's Place Matters initiative (in place since 2007) has increased the numbers of children placed in family settings, including relatives, and within their home jurisdictions. DHR continues to work closely with the Developmental Disabilities Administration (DDA) and the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DHMH) to ensure adequate services are in place as youth exit foster care, especially for youth who require supportive services from DDA or DHMH. We continue to implement "Ready by 21", which focuses on preparing youth in 5 life domains to ensure that they are self sufficient when they exit the foster care system. In FY13, we initiated a pilot program with AIRS to provide transitional housing supports to youth exiting foster care. We continue to utilize transitional planning with our youth beginning at age 14. We are continuing our roll out of Youth Matters across the state which focuses on youth engagement and involvement in service planning.

I have some concerns about the findings, recommendations and plans of the Local Child Protection Panels. Although the report details the results, it does not indicate the number of case reviews the results are based upon. It is also unclear whether the results include jurisdictions other than Allegany County and Baltimore City. It appears that there is a need for additional training for panel participants on current child welfare policy. One of the recommendations is that the LDSS should ensure that background clearances are conducted on adult family members before a child is reunified. This is contrary to state law and regulations as there is no requirement that the families being reunified have either CPS or criminal background checks completed, nor can reunification be prevented just because a family member has a positive clearance. We do complete these background clearances for kinship or foster parents as required by regulation.

DHR will continue to utilize the feedback provided by the CRBC to inform practice and policy development. I am confident that the work we are doing at the central and local level will have a positive impact on cases reviewed by your volunteers. I look forward to our continued collaboration as we strive to meet the goals of safety, permanence and wellbeing for every youth in our system.

Sincerely,


Carnitra D. White, Executive Director
Social Services Administration

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