

COVID-19 TARGETED STRATEGIES FOR CHILD WELFARE

May 11, 2020

Due to school closures, foster group care and shelter care providers have incurred additional costs associated with caring for youth when they would normally be at school or on home visits. Foster parents with children who test positive for COVID-19 incur additional costs to provide appropriate care for the children in their homes. The Department of Human Services (DHS) is committed to assisting with the increased costs associated with the public health emergency. The federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act provided additional funds to the State of Iowa to prevent, prepare for and respond to the pandemic. DHS has developed a thoughtful plan to support group and shelter care providers, as well as foster parents.

COVID-19 IMPACT

As of March 2020, there were 5,791 children and youth in foster care.

- ▶ DHS provided guidance to minimize the number of in-person contacts between caseworkers and the families they serve. This guidance impacts the ability of many parents to have in-person family interactions with their children.
- ▶ The majority of biological parents whose children are in foster care are participating in community-based mental health and/or substance use treatment. Many of these services have also shifted to virtual platforms in order to maintain social distancing guidelines.

Also as of March 2020, approximately 430 youth were in group care and 160 youth were in shelter.

- ▶ Group care and shelter providers are required to maintain specific staff-to-youth ratios. Because youth are no longer leaving campus to physically attend school and because youth cannot go on home visits, these residential providers have been required to increase the number of staff hours needed to maintain licensing ratios.

During this same time period, there were 1,700 children placed in foster homes.

- ▶ Children who are positive for COVID-19 will have increased supervision and support needs, transportation costs for testing or medical appointments, and deep cleaning of the home following the exposure.

FUNDING

The CARES Act provided Iowa with an allocation \$476,722 in discretionary funding for child welfare services.

These funds must be used to prevent, prepare for and respond to coronavirus, consistent with the regulatory requirements under Title IV-B, Subpart 1 of the federal Social Security Act.

- ▶ Federal guidance provided in the award notice gives flexibility to ensure the funds are used to support the well-being, permanency and stability of children who are in, or at risk of entering, foster care.

Per the CARES Act, the supplemental funds must be obligated by the end of federal fiscal year 2021 and liquidated by December 31, 2021.

CONSIDERATIONS

In developing this plan, DHS used information from internal data systems and research from other states, and also engaged in conversations with the child welfare provider community.

DHS tailored this plan to address immediate financial concerns associated with the provision of residential services and address the impact of reducing in-person contacts with parents and children.

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TARGETED STRATEGIES FOR CHILD WELFARE

STRATEGY	PURPOSE	TIMEFRAME	PROJECTED COST
Pay group and shelter providers a supplemental daily rate.	Supports residential providers in covering the additional staffing costs due to a higher volume of youth being on campus.	Provide a one-time payment (\$12.50) to each residential provider according to the number of school days canceled (50) and the number of beds (618) contracted by DHS.	\$386,250
Provide technology grants to providers who give direct support to parents and children who are in foster care or at risk of foster care placement.	Supports recipients of services in meeting with their treatment providers, such as substance use and mental health, and to provide a mechanism for facilitating visits with children and youth when in-person visits are not available.	Implement in June.	\$55,000
Provide a one-time \$500 payment to foster parents who have a child placed in their home who is directly impacted by COVID-19.	Provides an additional mechanism to support foster parents in caring for children who have a confirmed diagnosis of COVID-19.	Financial stipends will be made available immediately.	\$35,000*
			\$476,250

* DHS does not have a data-driven approach to accurately predict the volume of children in foster care who may test positive for COVID-19. The assumption used in this projection is approximately 4% of children could meet the medical criteria.