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Michigan continues progress in meeting child welfare commitments ***Update on achievements delivered in federal court***

LANSING, Mich. – Michigan continued its significant progress in better protecting children during the early stages of a new agreement that sets the state on the path to exiting federal court oversight of its child welfare system.

The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services was in U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Michigan today to update Judge Nancy G. Edmunds on the progress that's been made.

In February 2016, Edmunds approved the Implementation, Sustainability and Exit Plan that scaled down the requirements for exiting federal court oversight from nearly 240 to 71. Today's appearance was MDHHS's first opportunity to report in court on its progress since the new agreement went into effect. The report covered the period of January 2016 through June 2016.

Among the improvements during that time period, MDHHS:

- Met four of five federal requirements related to ensuring children who enter foster care transition home or to permanent caregivers, making those requirements eligible to exit federal court oversight.
- Met a requirement for beginning investigations of child abuse or neglect within the timeframes required by state law.
- Met a requirement to take steps ensuring school-aged children attend school within five days of foster care placement or following any placement change.

"When Judge Edmunds approved the exit plan 16 months ago, we were pleased because this demonstrated the great progress Michigan had made for our children and because it gave us the opportunity to devote even more resources to prioritize the most important child safety and well-being outcomes," said MDHHS Director Nick Lyon. "The latest monitoring report shows that we made significant strides in the early months under the new agreement. We have made further improvements since June 2016 that don't show up in this report."

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The exit plan took the place of the Modified Settlement Agreement approved in 2011 that came after a lawsuit filed by the advocacy group Children's Rights in 2006.

"Everyone involved should be very proud of what's been accomplished," the judge said today, referring to improvements Michigan has made in finding permanent homes for children in foster care more quickly.

Through years of successful reform efforts by Gov. Rick Snyder's administration, Michigan has improved services to the 13,000 children in the state's foster care system who have been removed from their homes due to abuse or neglect.

MDHHS's goal is to exit from federal court monitoring within the next couple of years.

While the reform has been ongoing for more than 6 years, the creation of MDHHS in the 2015 merger of the former Michigan Departments of Community Health and Human Services has led to further progress.

For example, an expansion of the department's CareConnect360 data-sharing project makes medical histories and care information about children in foster care more accessible to their caseworkers. That allows for better and more coordinated care for children and will help MDHHS comply with federal court requirements related to access to health and dental care for children in foster care.

Dr. Herman McCall, who in April succeeded Steve Yager as executive director of the Children's Services Agency, said the department is well-positioned to continue its progress in meeting the federal targets.

"MDHHS has top-notch leadership in place to work with our outstanding child welfare staff members who are working on behalf of families in Michigan," said McCall, who has 30 years of experience providing services to children and families. "That paves the way for Michigan to maintain momentum by continuing to do what's best for children so that they will be safe."

To view the latest federal court monitor report, the full Implementation, Sustainability and Exit Plan, earlier reports and the original Modified Settlement Agreement, visit www.michigan.gov/ChildWelfareAgreement.

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