



STATE OF MICHIGAN

GRETCHEN WHITMER
GOVERNOR

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
LANSING

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MDHHS outlines improvements in protecting children in state's care

LANSING, Mich. – The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) today shared an update on the transformation it has made to the child welfare system that has resulted in improved safety for children and families since the inception of a federal lawsuit.

MDHHS appeared virtually in U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Michigan for the latest update, which has been tracking progress since a 2008 settlement agreement following a 2006 lawsuit.

"I am delighted with the progress that has been made since we adopted the (corrective action plan) last April," said Judge Nancy G. Edmunds. "I think the state has taken huge steps under (MDHHS) Director (Elizabeth) Hertel. Congratulations are in order for sure," Judge Edmunds said, adding that more work needs to be done to address issues mentioned by federal monitors.

Specifically, the department emphasized in court how child safety has improved through the increased monitoring of and investment in congregate care facilities where foster and juvenile justice youth are placed. The update came [nine months after MDHHS and federal court monitors unveiled new strategies](#) to target 14 areas in the child welfare and juvenile justice system as part of a corrective action plan.

"We maintain our steadfast focus on ensuring the safety of all youth receiving treatment in congregate care facilities through intensive improvements in oversight of the facilities where our children are placed," Hertel said. "I am proud of the work we do and the improvements we have made as we continue to work toward excellence in our child welfare system."

Recent MDHHS actions that are producing results include:

- Efforts to provide a wider array of placements to better meet the needs of each child – particularly for youth who need specialized treatment such as intensive behavioral health services. Budget funding signed by Gov. Gretchen Whitmer for the current fiscal year invests additional dollars in the child welfare system. These include:

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- \$25 million in lump sum payments to congregate care facilities – also known as child-caring institutions – that commit to provide services to children in fiscal year 2023.
- Rate increases for child-caring institutions averaging 5% for abuse and neglect programs and 12% for juvenile justice programs, which includes a \$2 per hour direct wage increase for staff at the facilities.
- A 20% increase in rates paid to foster parents, independent living providers, relatives, and adoptive parents and guardians.
- Improved oversight of congregate care facilities for youth.
- A student loan repayment program to help address a shortage of workers in the behavioral health field that has limited options available for children with mental health needs, including those in foster care and the juvenile justice systems.

Demetrius Starling, executive director of the MDHHS Children’s Services Agency, outlined the department’s recent efforts to reduce maltreatment of youth who are under the state’s care and supervision.

“We continue to make system-wide improvements to ensure child safety by preventing maltreatment in care,” Starling said. “We have worked closely with the federal court monitors in reviewing maltreatment in care cases.”

While MDHHS emphasized the recent improvements, also today federal court monitors released a progress report for the six months ending Dec. 31, 2021. The report showed MDHHS exceeded federal standards by keeping caseload levels lower than required – allowing workers to spend more time helping each child and family.

For Children’s Protective Services investigation workers, 99.5% met the federal court standard of handling no more than 12 cases at a time. And 96.5% of licensing workers met or exceeded the standard of overseeing no more than 30 licensed foster homes or homes pending licensing.

To view the latest federal court monitor report and other information, go to www.michigan.gov/ChildWelfareAgreement.

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