STATE OF NEW JERSEY
DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

November 16, 2020 - NJ DCF to Distribute $2.2M in Direct Financial Assistance to Transition-Age Foster Youth

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Funds Will Offset Financial Hardship as a Result of COVID-19 Public Health Emergency

TRENTON – The New Jersey Department of Children and Families today announced the distribution of $2.2M in financial aid to transition-age youth involved in New Jersey's foster care system who have been economically impacted by the COVID-19 public health emergency. Nearly 1,200 qualifying young adults will receive a one-time payment of $1,850 to offset any economic hardship they may face as a result of the ongoing public health emergency.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, youth with child welfare and other system involvement may be at an increased risk of hardship such as homelessness, lack of transportation, decreased work hours or job opportunities, increased debt obligations and other challenging financial situations. Many of these youth lack intact family connections and are transitioning into adulthood without those support networks.

"COVID-19 has really challenged the young adults and families we serve as they navigate joblessness or lost or reduced wages, increased utility bills, and other unforeseen expenses," said NJ DCF Commissioner Christine Norbut Beyer. "For youth who transition from our foster care system without reliable family connections, those challenges can be absolutely crushing. By utilizing federal COVID assistance, we can ensure these youth receive the support to promote well-being and economic stability during and following the public health emergency."

The funding, made possible through Coronavirus Relief Funds (CRF) under the federal CARES Act, would assist approximately 1,188 young adults who are experiencing economic hardships exacerbated by COVID-19, including increased costs for PPE, transportation, technology for remote learning, or reliable housing. It can also help to bridge any gaps resulting from a loss of employment (full- or part-time) or employment opportunity, or inability to access services. In order to qualify for one-time funding, youth must be between the ages of 18 and 23, must be experiencing a COVID-19-related economic hardship, and must meet at least one of the following 3 criteria:

- Currently be in foster care through the DCF Division of Child Protection and Permanency (CP&P).
- Be former foster youth known to DCF and in need of direct assistance (specifically, youth participating in the NJ Foster Care Scholars program); or
- Be residing in a DCF-contracted youth supportive housing program.

"For children in foster care, our goal is for them to be reunited with their biological family and when that is not possible, to be adopted." said NJ DCF Assistant Commissioner for CP&P Carmen Diaz-Petti. "Unfortunately, there are times when neither of those outcomes are achieved, and young adults transition into adulthood without a permanent family connection. When that happens, the Division and Department are committed to making sure that young people are supported in early adulthood."

DCF will distribute the funds using existing electronic payment processes or through direct deposit to the youth's personal bank account. Additionally, five contracted DCF providers that already have processes in place to disburse funds to young adults will assist in the distribution. Earlier this week, Commissioner Beyer met with representatives of the five providers via a Zoom conference to brief them on the program and answer questions.

"By mobilizing our existing disbursement structure, we're hoping to get these funds out the door quickly, and in the hands of young adults who need the help," said Executive Director for the DCF Office of Adolescent Services Jessica Trombetta. "As a Department, we're grateful to our contracted service providers for assisting in this effort, to ensure that we're doing everything we can to support our young adults during an unprecedented and stressful time."

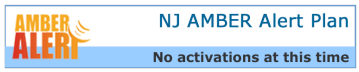
Commissioner Beyer noted that while DCF is committed to increasing permanency outcomes for youth connected to New Jersey's foster care system – through family reunification, the increased use of extended family or friends for temporary placements, and adoption – the Department has a charge to assist youth who exit the system without permanent connections.

During the pandemic, the Department has placed a moratorium on automatically closing youth at age 21 and offered youth to remain open beyond their 21st birthday, encouraging them to continue to receive assistance and services. The initial extension affected young adults turning 21 after March 1, 2020 and extending through December 31 of this year, with the possibility of further extensions into 2021. The Department is working on the creation of a smoother pathway for transition for all youth served in foster care moving forward. Earlier this year, DCF implemented a partnership with national non-profit Youth Villages to bring the LifeSet intervention of goal-oriented life skills training and healthy relationship coaching to the Garden State.

"There is no suitable replacement for the family connections we all depend on as we become independent, thriving young adults," said Commissioner Beyer. "NJ DCF has worked to reduce the number of out-of-home placements over the last several years, and we have one of the lowest placement rates in the nation. We've worked to increase our use of kinship placements when removal from the home is unavoidable, and we've worked to reunify families quickly when separation was the only safety intervention available. We're supporting more intact families, in their homes and communities now, than at any other time in the history of our state's child welfare system, and we're leading the way for the rest of the country to follow our example.

"Despite this progress, we still have youth who will exit foster care without strong, reliable family connections, amid a once-in-a-century public health crisis," added Commissioner Beyer. "When youth transition from foster care, whether during the COVID-19 emergency or during safer times, we have a moral obligation to help them develop sustainable, permanent, healthy connections and relationships. In New Jersey, no one goes it alone, and we stand by our transition-age and independent youth as they become safe, healthy, and connected."

Top ^



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