April 29, 2020

The Honorable Michael Parson
Governor
State of Missouri

The Honorable Dave Schatz
President pro Tempore
Missouri State Senate

The Honorable Elijah Haar
Speaker of the House
Missouri State House of Representatives

Dear Governor Parson, President pro Tempore Schatz and Speaker Haar,

There are 14,000 Missouri children in foster care, removed from their homes to keep them safe from abuse and neglect. Missouri’s foster care system is fortunate to have a dedicated community of caregivers, 50% of whom are relatives, but COVID-19 is threatening the fabric of this community, putting children and caregivers at risk. We need your help.

Children in foster care rely on Missouri to ensure their economic, emotional and educational well-being. More than 11,500 are in foster homes and approximately 1,500 are in residential treatment. Many foster parents have been laid off from or lost their jobs, and relative foster families are twice as likely to be living in poverty than their non-relative counterparts. Resource families and community-based providers, alike, are experiencing increased costs due to school closures. Those families who have essential workers are facing increased childcare. All families are experiencing increased food costs. Campus based care providers have had to add staff for direct care due to school closures, and are also experiencing increased technological service, cleaning, food, and other employment costs due to COVID-19. Older youth are losing housing and food, as they lose their jobs or have hours reduced. Your support is imperative.

We have provided a summary of COVID-19 policy recommendations that help ensure the safety and well-being of Missouri’s children in foster care and their caregivers. The undersigned organizations urge Missouri’s Administration and Legislature to adopt the recommendations as part of our COVID-19 response and relief efforts.:

1. **Provide emergency financial relief to caregivers and youth impacted by COVID-19.**
   - Increase foster home rates by $240 per month per child or youth for six months, effective March 16, 2020.
   - Increase residential treatment rates by $35 per day per child for six months, effective March 16, 2020.
   - For youth who are aging out of foster care, extend eligibility to all services connected to foster care status through December 31, 2020.
• Extend outreach to older youth helping those who have lost jobs or had hours reduced connect to unemployment benefits.
• Equip caregivers with PPEs at no cost.

2. **Ensure stability of foster placements for youth aging out of care**
   • Continue to pay foster parents through December 31, 2020, for youth who have aged out of care but still live with the foster parents.
   • Ensure foster homes serving youth aging out of care continue to have access to all supports and resources available to them prior to the youth aging out while the youth is living in the home, through December 31, 2020.

3. **Support older youth and young adults experiencing homelessness**
   • Allocate funding to Missouri’s Continuums of Care to go to runaway and homeless youth programs to address the immediate needs of youth who are at risk of being homeless or experiencing homelessness.

This is our collective plea to you. Obviously, the above does not this does not reflect the entirety of need each undersigned organization is addressing, and some are individually communicating with you to more completely describe their experience. Thank you for all you do to serve and protect our most vulnerable Missourians. Your continued support and leadership are vital in these most uncertain times.

Warm regards,

Melanie Scheetz, Executive Director
Foster and Adoptive Care Coalition

Lori Ross, CEO and President
Foster Adopt Connect

Craig Stevenson, Dir. Policy and Advocacy
KidsWin Missouri

Mary Chant, CEO
Missouri Coalition of Children’s Agencies

Marcia Hazelhorst, Executive Director
Missouri Juvenile Justice Association