



Larry Hogan, Governor

Boyd R. Rutherford, Lt. Governor

Arlene F. Lee, Executive Director

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*Governor's Office for Children*

**To: State Agency Stakeholders**

**From: Arlene Lee, Chair, Children's Cabinet, Executive Director, Governor's Office for Children**

**Re: Children's Cabinet Statement on Out of State Placements**

**Date: June 20, 2017**

*In the past year there has been increased attention by the Children's Cabinet on the number of children placed by state agencies in programs outside of the State of Maryland. We understand that change can be difficult, particularly in the absence of information. Therefore, on behalf of the Children's Cabinet, I wanted to share the reasons behind our intensified focus, the efforts currently underway, and our ultimate goals to better protect Maryland's children.*

**Our Goals:** When placement outside of home is necessary it is both in the best interests of children and youth – and the policy in Maryland – that children are placed as close to family as possible in the most appropriate placement with the services needed to meet their total plan of care. Protecting children is our ultimate goal, and we are committed to ensuring that every child or youth receive all the necessary support services possible given the trauma they have often endured before coming into the care and custody of the state.

**Current Efforts:** An interagency workgroup was formed this spring and is scheduled to make its first progress report to Governor Hogan by July 1, 2017, regarding its plans to (1) Assist with the return or diversion of out-of-state placements; (2) Develop in-state placement capacity to reduce the need for out-of-state placements; and, (3) Establish an interagency process for reviewing out-of-state placement recommendations and coordinating out-of-state placement monitoring.

The workgroup has been developing a plan with the Maryland provider community to return children who are currently in placements outside of the state and divert children for whom all in-state options appear to be have been exhausted. The timeline establishes benchmarks for placing children in appropriate placements as close to their communities and families as possible. These benchmarks are immediate (July 2017), near-term (September 2017) and longer-term (November 2017 and beyond). Over the next several months, we anticipate matching children on a case-by-case basis with new or newly available programs. The providers, the families, the caseworkers and the workgroup have collectively been identifying or developing in-state programs to address the needs of these children, which include behavioral health and developmental disabilities, and require specialized programs and services, such as treatment for sexually inappropriate behavior, significant staff monitoring for children with serious aggressive or self-injurious behavior, services for trafficking victims, or treatments for youth engaging in fire setting.

In addition to building additional capacity within the state, we will be working to reinforce the local planning process to assist interagency supports for children with complex needs. We believe that by strengthening

interagency services at the local level more children should be able to remain in their homes or near their families, thereby reducing the need for out-of-state placements.

**Recent Developments:** The recent increase in the number of children and youth placed in out-of-state residential programs is due to a convergence of several factors:

- Contract termination with a facility in Delaware: Due to numerous concerns raised regarding this Delaware residential program, DHR moved 29 youth over a period of three months in 2016. While most returned to Maryland programs, several were placed in other out-of-state facilities. This impacted the system of placements in two important ways; 1) capacity in Maryland programs was exhausted and 2) a facility was taken out of the list of options for future placements.
- Decline in use of large facilities: Starting in 2009, Maryland made a policy decision to reduce the use of group homes and Residential Treatment Centers in favor of strengthening families and building community resources. As a result, a number of congregate care programs closed from 2009-2016, largely due to maintaining service models that no longer matched children's needs or reflected changing policies.
- Recent program closures: Recently, two residential treatment centers were closed which caused a sudden strain on the system. Dozens of children required immediate relocation, which was difficult on the children and families and eliminated the remaining capacity in existing programs.

As a result of these factors there has been an overall reduction in residential program capacity in Maryland, leading to the recent increase in children placed out-of-state.

*The Children's Cabinet believes that it is in the best interests of children to be placed in Maryland and near their families. We are determined to work with families and the provider community to ensure that needs of children are being met by programs and services as close to their families as possible.*

*If you have questions about these efforts, please direct them to [Arlene.lee@maryland.gov](mailto:Arlene.lee@maryland.gov)*