



New Mexico Children,
Youth & Families Department

FEBRUARY 2021 NEWSLETTER



DEAR READERS,

The 2021 New Mexico state legislative session is more than halfway through. CYFD is working hard to provide sound guidance to inform good decisions about various bills being considered by the House and Senate.

Navigating the session has been uniquely challenging without being able to walk the halls of the Roundhouse, make eye contact, shake hands, and talk with people face-to-face, but New Mexico's elected officials and public servants are adapting and using a range of tools to stay connected. "Infinite Zooms" may be the theme of the legislative session.

CYFD is working directly on three important bills this year, each tied to our strategic priorities. The State Indian Child Welfare Act (HB209/ SB278) will codify in state law important protections for Native American youth to help maintain their connections to their Tribal communities and heritage. The State ICWA bill was written by the Tribes for the Tribes and CYFD is proud to honor the will of New Mexico's 23 sovereign nations by supporting it.

The Support Out of Home Placements Bill (SB257) provides important supports and legal protections for youth on formal probation who live outside of their family homes and gives the ability to use federal funding to support these children and families. SB 257 closes an unintentional loophole in extended foster care in New Mexico that inequitably excluded these children.

Finally, CYFD's support of the Substitute Care Advisory Council Bill (SB242) reflects our commitment to increased transparency and accountability by clarifying responsibilities, relationships, and support for this valuable external oversight mechanism.

You can read more about these bills and other measures of CYFD's progress along the long road up as we continue to serve the families and children in New Mexico.

Brian Blalock

Cabinet Secretary

Children, Youth and Families Department

STATEWIDE INDIAN CHILD WELFARE ACT MOVES FORWARD IN COMMITTEES

Statewide ICWA (HB209/SB278), codifying the Federal Indian Child Welfare Act into New Mexico statute, has passed the House and continues to progress through the Senate committee process. New Mexico ICWA is a unique opportunity for the state to better support tribal families who enter the child welfare system and has been driven by tribes. Jacqueline Yalch of Isleta Pueblo and President of New Mexico Tribal Indian Child Welfare Consortium said, "The process has been welcoming, it's been a learning process and I think the respect is there for us to have these courageous conversations to identify the strengths and weaknesses within the state and tribes, but also to provide those recommendations on how we can make things work for tribal families." CYFD stands in full support of NM ICWA along with partners NMTIC, Coalition to Stop Violence Against Native Women, Bold Futures, and other ICWA experts.

BILL AIMS TO INCREASE SUPPORTS FOR YOUTH IN OUT OF HOME PLACEMENTS

SB257, Supports for Out-of-Home Placements (Padilla), is designed to increase services and funding for children regardless of their entry into CYFD's system. The bill will expand options available to youth alleged to be or adjudicated delinquent to include the homes of relatives or fictive kin, foster homes, group care settings, and other licensed child welfare facilities. It also provides a legal entitlement for youth to receive support and guaranteed housing to age 21 through the Fostering Connections program and guarantees Medicaid eligibility regardless of income or assets until age 26. The change to the Children's Code would also mandate transition independent living plans, eligibility for subsidized permanency, and allows for more court oversight and interventions. CYFD stands in support of SB 257 and providing more guaranteed supports to our youth in care. These changes are also supported by CYFD's judicial and advocacy partners.

EFFORTS TO STRENGTHEN INDEPENDENT OVERSIGHT OF CYFD

CYFD also stands in support of SB 242, Substitute Care Advisory Council (Kernan, Matthews) which would give the existing SCAC more authority over and access to information from CYFD. The proposed changes would strengthen protections against retaliation for those who bring concerns or grievances to the attention of the Council and provide specific exemptions around confidentiality statutes, allowing for more information to be reviewed by the SCAC that is currently confidential under the Children's Code. The SCAC provides independent oversight of CYFD and the department welcomes such oversight.

STRATEGIC PLAN PROGRESS

CYFD continues to make progress among its strategic priorities, including more appropriate placements, increased prevention, optimization of current data and resources, and improving staff training and retention.

- Kinship placements are already above the FY21 goal of achieving 35% of placements with kin. At the end of the 2nd quarter of FY21, 39.4% of children were placed with relative caregivers, up from 29.5% in 2018.
- 66.7% of tribal children involved in Protective Services Custody are now in an ICWA-preferred placement.
- Increases in wraparound and other high-intensity behavioral health services has allowed CYFD to bring all but approximately 25 children back to the state from out-of-state residential treatment centers (see graphic).
- Monthly worker-child visits in Federal Fiscal Year 2020 were at 97%, the highest percentage in recent history.
- 100% of youth involved in Fostering Connections are housed and have access to behavioral and physical health care.
- Turnover for Protective Services staff has dropped approximately 10 percent since 2019.
- In February, CYFD piloted a new supervisory framework training for employees.
- Drop-in, virtual trainings have been offered to all employees since the beginning of the pandemic.

OUT OF STATE PLACEMENTS FOR PROTECTIVE SERVICES

YEAR	NOVEMBER	DECEMBER
2018	61	60
2019	54	54
2020	27	25



We want to hear and amplify your voices.

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Why does ICWA matter to you and/or our Native communities?
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Please submit your story at www.nmstateicwa.org
If you have any questions or concerns, please let us know!
Together, we do more!

DEDICATED KINSHIP AND ADOPTION UNIT LAUNCHES

CYFD's Placement and Adoption Resources Bureau in Protective Services has launched a dedicated Kinship and Adoption Unit to provide more support for our staff, families, children and youth across the state. The new team will offer more information on kinship programs, conduct targeted case staffings to support guardianship and permanency options, and engage with staff, relative caregivers, parents, youth, and community partners to continue to build a strong network of support and services across the state for all kinship caregivers.

PLEASE CONTACT CYFD PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICER CLIFF W. GILMORE AT
CLIFF.GILMORE@STATE.NM.US WITH ANY QUESTIONS OR FEEDBACK.