

August 7, 2020

Dear Kinship and Foster Families,

Your continued support of children in foster care continues to amaze and encourage me. The generosity and commitment to open your homes and meet the needs of children throughout the pandemic has been unwavering and despite the challenges this has created, you continue to serve Arizona's children in so many ways. Thank you for all you continue to do.

Public health information indicates Arizona has seen good progress over the last 4 weeks through the latest mitigation actions implemented throughout the state. As positivity rates return to single digit figures, I am also pleased to share that the in-person safety guidelines supporting child contacts and visitation have been successful. Of the 14,200 children in foster care, as of today, only 159 (1.1%) children have tested positive for COVID-19 and 9 are currently positive. Of these children none have been serious cases and none have required hospitalization. This is a testament of the hard work of caregivers, families, providers and staff adhering to the established guidelines.

The public health crisis has necessitated constant review of the guidelines, directives and exceptions that have been put in place to support individuals during this very trying time. As we prepare to release the latest updates, we are mindful of the need for caregivers, families, providers and staff to plan in advance, especially given the differences this year returning to school. We are also mindful of the constant need to weigh all decisions against our mission: *Engage children and families to ensure safety, strengthen families and achieve permanency.*

In-person visitation between children and parents is critical to ensure children have the greatest opportunity to find permanency through reunification. For those children and parents who have not had in-person visits, this has been exceptionally difficult. The current directive permitting exceptions to in-person visitation is set to expire on August 17<sup>th</sup> at which time visits will return to in-person.

We do understand though that there are still situations that warrant exception to in-person visits, which are limited to those children who are immunocompromised or have underlying health conditions, those children residing in homes with high risk individuals, and/or if someone involved in the case is positive with COVID-19. For those cases where these situations exist, birth parents and caregivers may request an exception to in-person visits through 9/30 by contacting the Department at 1-877-543-7633 Option 3, or directly communicate with your assigned DCS Specialist. It is also important that you develop a plan to continue shared parenting with the family and return to in-person, by that date. If you need assistance please reach out to your licensing specialist or the warmline and someone will be happy to help you develop this transition plan.

Supporting in-person visitation is one of, if not the most critical activities in helping reunify families. Supporting this is a priority as is the health and well-being of all those who support the child welfare system. Thank you for everything you are doing to support children and families during this

Page 2

challenging time. I am so grateful to all of you, caregivers who rise to the call every day to ensure that children and families are thriving and safe in our community. You are true heroes.

Sincerely,

Mike Faust  
Director