



Michigan Child Welfare Improvement Task Force

Improving the safe, fair, and equitable treatment of all Michigan's children and families.



Task Force Membership

Chairs:

- Hon. Gregory C. Pittman, Chief Circuit and Probate Court Judge Muskegon County
- Michael Williams, Executive Director of Orchard's Childrens' Services

Members include:

- ▶ Chief Justice Elizabeth Clement
- ▶ Hon. Cami Fraser, Delaware Tribe of Indians Judge
- ▶ Michigan State Representative Luke Meerman
- ▶ Michigan State Representative Stephanie Young
- ▶ Private Agency Partners
- ▶ Persons with lived experience

Child Welfare Improvement Task Force

Charge Statement

Purpose: Time-limited task force to provide legislative, policy, and practice recommendations to MDHHS on:

- Redesigning a front-end response to allegations of abuse and neglect that is free from bias and distinguishes between crisis and a need for family services and support.
- Reducing racial disparities in child welfare outcomes by:
 - Increased use of supported, safe kinship care
 - Improved access to community mental health services
 - Elimination of improper placements in residential settings



Working Kinship Care Action Plan

Problem Statement: Children are entering foster care when they could be placed safely with relatives or fictive kin
Recommendation: Increase specialized services and supports for relative and fictive kin caregivers

Goals

Create a kinship first culture.

Increase number of children in kinship care placements.

Remove barriers to safe placement with kin.

Enhance awareness, training, licensing, and support of/for kinship placements.

Strategies

✓ Establish baseline data

✓ Track and share data

✓ Propose to Legislature:
(1) Family Finding Pilot
(2) Kinship Advisory Council Enhancement

🏛️ Advise policy, protocol, regulation, and statute changes

📄 Review licensing regulations and protocols

👤 Inform staff, GALs, and judges on revisions

Monitoring Indicators

Identify priorities

Track use of licensed fictive kin

Track youth placed with relatives within 7-30 days

Gather and receive feedback from participants

Track staff, GALs, and judges trained

Data dashboard and reporting

Desired Outcomes

Increase number of relative placements within 7-30 days of removal.

Increase the proportion of Black, Native, and Latinx children in relative homes.

Current State: Kinship Care in Michigan

Like many states, MI counties vary in the % of children placed with kin, and in racial/ethnic disparities in placement. Future monitoring will address variation.

January 2022:

- 9,991 Michigan children were in out-of-home placements (foster care), among whom 52.9% were placed with family members (kin).

October 2022:

- 9,578 Michigan children were in out-of-home placements (foster care), among whom 53.4% were placed with family members (kin).

Disparity:

- In MI's Business Service Center 3 (Muskegon), that number is 46.1% of the total children placed and 31.6% of Black/African American children (Oct 22).

Legislative Request Update:

Family Finding Pilot & Kinship Advisory Council (KAC)

The Request

Total 1 Year Funding Request: \$606,240

- Pilot a **Family Finding Pilot** in Muskegon County.
 - This approach centers around a concerted family search effort and engagement process.
 - Muskegon will serve as the first MI site in which staff are trained in the effort; monitoring will determine whether the effort is associated with an increase in the proportion of kinship placements.
- The KAC advises on issues related to kinship, including identification, licensing, and the needs of kinship caregivers and children in their care. We recommend the following **support for the KAC**:
 - A dedicated, full-time position to staff the KAC to assist in developing plans and means for decision making, data analysis, and related efforts to inform and monitor related initiatives.
 - Consult with national experts and conduct a kinship service gap analysis.
 - Outreach and education events (conference, public awareness campaign) to raise awareness of kinship care statewide.

Expected Outcomes

Family Finding Pilot	Kinship Advisory Council
Output #1: Increased in the number prospective family members identified per child	Output #1: Increased statewide participation in kinship advisory council (# members participating)
Output #2: Develop strategy to reliably measure well-being.	Output #2: Kinship service gap analysis (report)
Outcome #1: Increase in # and % of kinship placements, overall and within racial subgroups (Black, Latinx, Indigenous, and Multi-racial Families)	Output #3: Products of public awareness campaign to increase awareness of/opportunity for kinship care
Outcome #2: Higher placement stability will occur among children placed with kin.	Outcome #1: Increased public awareness of kinship as an option.
Outcome #3: Sustained kinship placements will result in higher child well-being.	Outcome #2: Increased access to tailored supports among kinship providers (in response to gap analysis)

Family Finding Pilot

MDHHS will pilot a **Family Finding Pilot** in Muskegon County.

This approach centers around a concerted family search effort and engagement process.

Muskegon will serve as the first MI site in which staff are trained in the effort; monitoring will determine whether the effort is associated with an increase in the proportion of kinship placements.

Annual Budget	
Two full time family finding staff	246,000
One supervisor dedicating 40% of their time to supervising two family finding staff	\$61,600
Seneca Family Search Service	\$5,640
Total Annual Budget	\$313,240

Kinship Advisory Council (KAC)

The KAC advises the MDHHS on issues related to kinship, including identification, licensing, and the needs of kinship caregivers and children in their care. We recommend the following support for the KAC:

Annual Budget	
One full time Kinship Advisory Council Coordinator	\$140,000
Kinship Awareness Conference	\$50,000
Kinship Awareness Month Activities	\$23,000
Consult with National Experts	\$20,000
Conduct a Kinship Service Gap Analysis	\$60,000
Total Annual Budget	\$293,000

- A dedicated, full-time position to staff the KAC to assist in developing plans and means for decision making, data analysis, and related efforts to inform and monitor related initiatives.
- Consult with national experts and conduct a kinship service gap analysis.
- Outreach and education events (conference, public awareness campaign) to raise awareness of kinship care statewide.

Rationale for Increasing Prevalence of Kinship Care

- Kinship care: Foster care placement with relatives
- Ample research evidence demonstrates significant benefits of kinship care (over placement with strangers):
 - Enhanced placement stability
 - Positive identity formation
 - Better behavioral outcomes
 - Preservation of sibling ties
 - Higher HS graduation rates
- In addition, Kinship placements that offer a range of supports for children and kin are more likely to be stable and successful.

Barriers

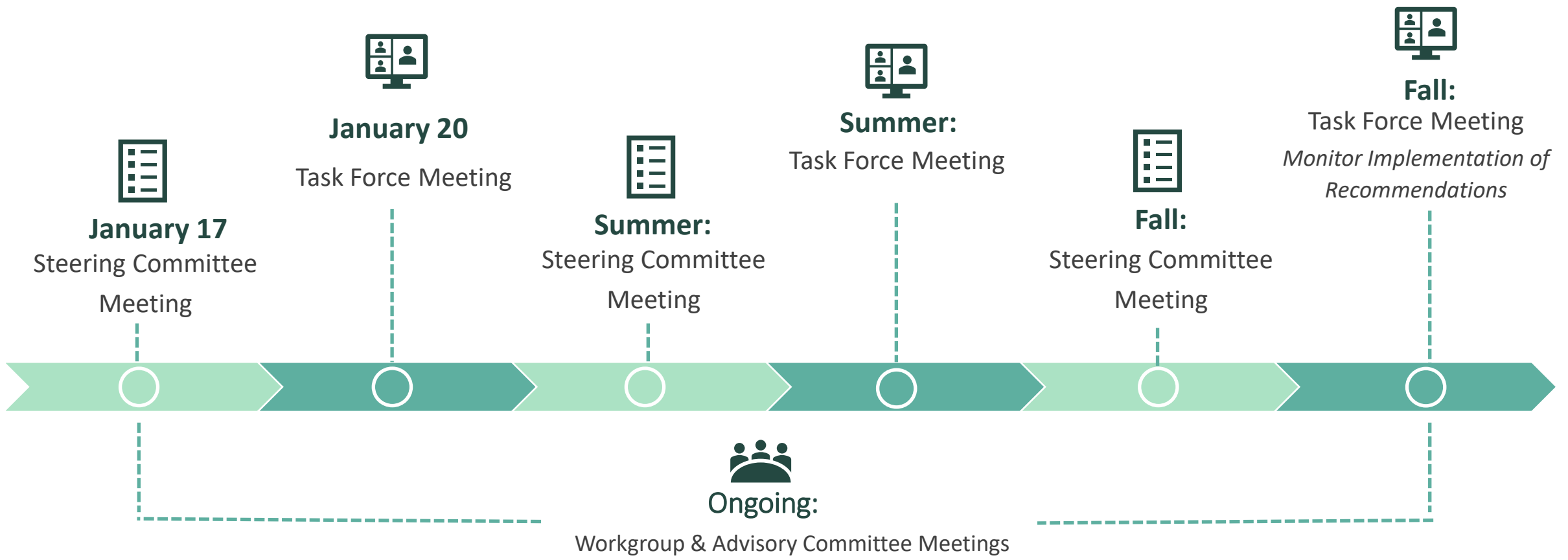
- Kin cannot care for family unless they know about imminent placements.
- Kin may believe they lack the resources and supports to take in their relative.
- Requirements are unclear; processes required can be long, burdensome, and intrusive.
- Reluctance among families of color to invite the authorities into their homes and; historical experiences with child welfare and law enforcement can lead to mistrust and fear of unintended consequences.

Facilitators

States with high kinship placement use a range of strategies:

- Move to kin-preference policies at the legislative, regulatory, and agency levels
- Modify practices to prioritize relative placements and reduce administrative burden to kin
- Engage in concerted efforts to locate kin and promote kinship care (technological solutions)
- Create a culture of kinship, employing family finding initiatives, and assign dedicated kinship staff

2023 Task Force Timeline





Q&A

<https://michigancwtf.org/>

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INTRODUCTION

A Task Force was convened in Fall 2020, headed by Demetrius Starling, executive director of the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services' Children's Services Agency (MDHHS CSA), to address the over-representation of children of color in the foster care system in Michigan. Children of color enter foster care at higher rates, and stay in care longer, than their white peers.

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