

For Immediate Release  
June 26, 2020

Contact: Deborah Lopez  
Illinois DCFS  
312-937-0050

## **Illinois DCFS highlights affirming services for LGBTQI+ youth in care and staff during Pride Month**

CHICAGO – June is Pride Month, a time to recognize and celebrate the contributions of LGBTQI+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning and intersex) individuals throughout history. The Illinois Department of Children and Family Services is taking this time to highlight ways the department provides a safe and supportive place for LGBTQI+ staff and the youth and families served by the department.

“Pride Month is a time to celebrate our history of supporting pro-equality policies and practices at DCFS. It is also a time to recognize that we must do more. Our leadership team is deeply committed to ending the disparities LGBTQI+ youth in care experience and ensure that their civil rights are not an afterthought but central to ensuring their well-being,” said Illinois DCFS Acting Director Marc D. Smith. “We are striving to be a fully welcoming and affirming agency where all of our youth, caregivers and staff feel safe and supported. Pride Month is an opportunity to elevate the brave youth who have often been the leaders of change in child welfare. And to acknowledge and celebrate the extraordinary caregivers and staff who are committed to helping our youth achieve safety, permanency and well-being.”

Illinois DCFS partners with the Gender Development Program at Lurie Children’s Hospital of Chicago, Howard Brown Behavioral Health Services in Chicago and the Washington University Transgender Center at St. Louis Children’s Hospital to support the physical and mental health needs of youth in care who are transgender or gender non-conforming.

“Lurie Children’s Hospital provides comprehensive services to children and adolescents supporting their gender development, sexual identity and sexual health in a diverse and affirming care environment,” said Jennifer Leininger, M.Ed., associate director, community programs and initiatives at Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children’s Hospital of Chicago. “Our multidisciplinary and

holistic patient-centered approach ensures that patients receive exemplary physical and mental healthcare as well as connections to community resources which are critical for successful positive youth development.”

“Howard Brown Health is excited to work more closely with Illinois DCFS to ensure that young people who need affirming and knowledgeable LGBTQI+ healthcare are able to receive it,” said Addis Green, TGNC youth hormone navigator, Howard Brown Behavioral Health Services.

To promote an inclusive, affirming workplace, the department launched the LGBTQI+ Employee Resource Group in April 2020 as an avenue for LGBTQI+ staff statewide to network, support each other and share information about resources for LGBTQI+ youth and families.

The department has a strong history of advocating for and supporting LGBTQI+ youth. In 2003 Illinois DCFS became the first child welfare agency in the nation to develop an LGBTQI+ youth service policy. In 2017 the department enacted enhanced procedures to be followed when providing services to LGBTQI+ youth in care. The procedure includes mandatory training relating to LGBTQI+ youth in care and clarifies protections for transgender/gender expansive youth in care.

*About the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) Founded in 1964, DCFS is responsible for protecting children from abuse or neglect by responding to calls received on the Child Abuse Hotline, 1-800-25-ABUSE (1-800-252-2873). With the goal of keeping children safe, DCFS strengthens and supports families with a wide range of services. When keeping a child safe means removing them from the home, DCFS makes every effort to reunite them with their family. When the best interest of the child makes this impossible, DCFS is committed to pursuing adoption by loving families to provide children with a safe and permanent home. DCFS is also responsible for licensing and monitoring of all Illinois child welfare agencies.*

###