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Illinois DCFS enhances training and resources to support LGBTQI+ youth in care; calls for Illinoisans to become foster parents to LGBTQI+ youth during Pride Month

CHICAGO – June is Pride Month and the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) is enhancing training and services to ensure LGBTQI+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning and intersex) youth in care are protected and supported; and calling on Illinoisans to provide welcoming, affirming and loving homes for LGBTQI+ youth in care by becoming licensed foster parents.

“Our mission is clear: to build a child welfare system in Illinois that protects children and supports families in crisis,” said DCFS Director Marc D. Smith. “I am deeply committed to ensuring all the youth in our care, including those who are LGBTQI+, feel safe and loved; and our staff and foster families have the tools they need to provide affirming and informed care.”

Like all young people, LGBTQI+ youth deserve to grow up in safe, loving and caring homes. In addition to the circumstances that brought them into care, LGBTQI+ youth in care face additional challenges, including homophobia, transphobia and the constant need to assess their communities, schools, social networks and foster families to decide whether to disclose their LGBTQI+ identity, when to do so and to whom.

“Studies have shown that approximately 30% of youth in care nationwide identify as LGBTQI+, and many youth come into care when they are rejected by their families after making their sexual orientation or gender identity known,” said DCFS Chief of LGBTQI+ Services Marla Courts. “LGBTQI+ youth are more at risk of becoming homeless than their peers and they need welcoming, affirming and supportive families to care and advocate for them.”

To meet the needs of LGBTQI+ youth in care, the department is working diligently to expand its network of gender-affirming therapists, service providers, health care professionals, agencies and organizations across the state.

LGBTQI+ youth in care, foster and adoptive parents and child welfare staff may call the department's LGBTQI+ Helpline (855-814-8421) for assistance and answers to questions about their rights, available services and resources and upcoming training opportunities.

To help ensure youth are receiving the best care in the safest, most comfortable environment, the department will launch enhanced required LGBTQI+ training for staff, private agency partners and foster caregivers this summer. The new training builds upon an initial Human Rights Campaign LGBTQI+ webinar training that has been completed by approximately 4,500 DCFS and private agency staff and supervisors to date.

To learn more about becoming a licensed foster parent, fill out the online interest form on the DCFS website: <https://www2.illinois.gov/dcfs>. Click on Loving Homes, then click on [Become a Foster or Adoptive Parent](#).

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 safe, loving and permanent homes for children through adoption or guardianship. DCFS is also responsible for licensing and monitoring of all Illinois child welfare agencies.

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