

Commonwealth of Kentucky

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SENATOR JULIE RAQUE ADAMS
MAJORITY CAUCUS CHAIR

April 28, 2023

Cabinet for Health and Family Services
Office of the Secretary
Attn: Mr. Eric Friedlander, Secretary
275 E. Main St 5W-A
Frankfort, KY 40621

Re: Child Welfare Services

Dear Secretary Friedlander:

I am writing to express my concerns regarding the impact that decisions made by the Cabinet are having on our children in foster care and in need of mental health services. I am particularly alarmed by the number of children being placed out of state for care due to the inadequate capacity of psychiatric residential treatment facility (PRTF) beds in our Commonwealth, as well as the Cabinet's recent decision to reduce the Medicaid reimbursement rates for behavioral health service organizations (BHSO). Both of these license categories provide critical mental health services – especially within the child welfare system.

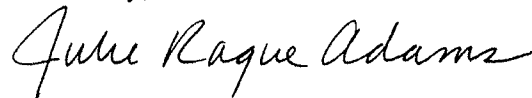
Thank you for sharing my passion for ensuring that our most vulnerable children receive the care, support, and services they deserve within our Commonwealth. I very much appreciate our collaboration on these efforts over the years. This is why I am dismayed by a recent report suggesting that the Cabinet is having difficulty with finding appropriate placements for some of our foster children within our Commonwealth. It is unacceptable for our children to stay overnight in a social worker's office, emergency room, or be sent out of state due to a lack of access to a PRTF or private child caring agency. Not only is this practice detrimental to the interest of the child, it is far more expensive. Children who are placed out of state may not be covered by Kentucky Medicaid, which ultimately diverts additional resources from the Department for Community Based Services to cover the exceptional rates required to provide care to the child.

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I am also troubled with the Cabinet's decision to cut Medicaid reimbursement rates for individual therapy provided by BHSOs. At a time when we are experiencing an increased need for mental health providers and therapists due to the increase demand for youth mental health services, I am unable to understand how this decision will improve services, access, and outcomes for our youth. While the Cabinet's administrative regulation establishing BHSO rates is based upon a percentage of the Medicare physician fee schedule, nothing prohibits Medicaid from re-evaluating this rate structure and filing an amendment to its own regulations as appropriate.

The Cabinet has demonstrated its ability to move swiftly on the issues it prioritizes, as evidenced by the new round of emergency administrative regulations expanding vision, dental, and hearing Medicaid services. In this regard, I urge the Cabinet to move just as swiftly in addressing the concerns raised in this letter. Thank you for your attention to these concerns and I look forward to receiving and reviewing the Cabinet's action plan.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Julie Raque Adams". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Julie Raque Adams
Majority Caucus Chair