YOUTH-IN-CARE **BILL OF RIGHTS**

The Illinois Department of Children and Family Services recognizes the following rights of children and youth in foster care. These rights are intended to guide the Department and its providers in the delivery of care and services to foster youth with the commitment to safety, permanency and well-being.

AS A CHILD OR YOUTH IN FOSTER CARE, I HAVE THE RIGHT:

TO BE AND TO FEEL SAFE:

- To be protected from physical, mental, sexual or emotional abuse;
- To have my physical boundaries respected and honored within safe, appropriate standards (i.e.: no forcing of hugs, hand-holding);
- A safe and appropriate sleeping arrangement;
- To never be locked in a room, building, or facility premises unless placed in a secure child care facility;
- To tell my caseworker, therapist, attorney, judge or the Department Advocacy Office when contact with someone is hurtful to me or inappropriate so that I can be protected without fear of retaliation; and
- To be placed in out-of-home care according to their gender identity, regardless of the gender or sex listed in their court or child welfare records.

TO ACHIEVE PERMANENCY AND MAINTAIN LIFELONG CONNECTIONS:

- To stay connected with family and others with whom I have a close and nurturing relationship, including relationships developed during my time in care where there are no concerns of safety or risk to me in continuing such relationships;
- A permanent family where I feel a sense of belonging;
- A safe, healthy, and comfortable home where I am treated with respect;
- To visit and contact my brothers and sisters, to be included in special and celebratory milestones of siblings (i.e. birthdays, holidays, graduations) and to have my siblings included in my special and celebratory milestones (unless prohibited by court order);
- To review the brochure, CFS 1050-95, *How to connect with your brothers and sisters,* annually during caseworker contact.
- To be supported in connecting or reconnecting with family when there are no safety threats presented to me in having such contact;
- To be supported in locating and connecting with individuals who may be part of my past and could support my permanency success now or in my future; and
- To emancipate from care if no other permanency path is possible and to exit care not only prepared for adult life, but also connected to individuals including family and non-related people who will be there for me in times of need.

TO BE WELL AND TO HAVE MY WELLBEING NEEDS MET:

- To receive medical, dental, vision and mental health services;
- To be free of the administration of medication or chemical substances unless authorized by a licensed prescriber;
- To receive adequate and healthy food that meets my dietary needs;
- To be provided appropriate clothing that fits and corresponds to a gender identity of my choice;
- To keep my belongings, including things I buy and gifts I receive no matter where I live-;
- To have storage space for personal use and to have privacy in storing my belongings;
- To attend religious services and activities of my choice;
- To be provided with age-appropriate educational opportunities and schooling to prepare me for adult life;
- To attend school and participate in school functions and activities (sporting events, schools dances, etc.);
- To be allowed the opportunity to participate in activities that interest me; including sports, art, music or extracurricular, cultural, and personal enrichment activities, consistent with my age and developmental level;
- To receive extra help and tutoring if I am struggling in school or an educational placement;
- To work and develop job skills at an age-appropriate level, consistent with state law;
- To maintain a bank account and manage personal income consistent with my age unless prohibited by law;
- To receive, save or spend an allowance;
- To receive a free annual credit report and help in resolving any inaccuracies;
- To receive and be supported in developing and keeping a Lifebook to help me explore and process my foster care journey, to help me hold onto cherished memories and stay connected with family and friends;
- To have social interactions with people outside of the foster care system, including teachers, church members, mentors, and friends;
- To make and to receive confidential telephone calls and send and receive unopened mail and electronic mail (unless prohibited by court order);
- To have access to a phone, and be afforded privacy if I want to make a hotline call;
- To be free from unreasonable searches of my personal belongings; and
- To be free from discrimination or harassment on the basis of actual or perceived race, ethnicity, ancestry, national origin, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, mental or physical disability, or HIV status.

TO BE INVOLVED AND INFORMED:

- To have fair and equal access to all available services, placement, treatment and benefits;
- To attend services and programs operated by the Department of Children and Family Services or any other appropriate agency that are intended to help current and former foster youth achieve self-sufficiency prior to and after leaving foster care;
- To be informed about where I can go for help;
- To be informed about how the child welfare system works;
- To contact my family members, (unless prohibited by court order) and to contact my social worker(s), attorney, foster youth advocates, mentors, and supporters, Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA), and probation officer;
- To attend court hearings and speak with my attorney and the judge;
- To have all of my juvenile court records remain confidential consistent with state law;
- To be involved in the development of my service plan and to have input as to the services and interventions that best meet my safety, permanency and wellbeing needs;
- To have a voice in the plan for my permanency and to express my wishes and concerns pertaining to my future, including where I wish to live and whether or not I wish to be adopted;
- To review my case plan and plan for my permanency minimally every 3 months but more frequently as I see the need or have questions about my permanency path;
- To have rules that are clear and fair and to have them explained to me from the beginning in any living environment;
- To have caregivers and child welfare personnel who have received sensitivity training and instruction on matters concerning race, ethnicity, nation origin, color, ancestry, religion, mental and physical disability, and HIV status;
- To have caregivers and child welfare personnel who have received instruction on cultural competency and sensitivity relating to and best practices for serving lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth in out-of-home-care;
- At 16 years of age or older, to have access to existing information regarding the educational options available, including but not limited to the coursework necessary for vocational and postsecondary educational programs and information regarding financial aid for postsecondary education;
- To have access to age appropriate, medically accurate information about reproductive health care, the prevention of unplanned pregnancy for myself and my partner;
- To have information on prevention and treatment of sexually transmitted infections/diseases at age 12 years or older;
- To receive information on eligibility to age 26 for Medicaid health care services;
- To contact the Department Advocacy Office or the Department Office of the Inspector General regarding violation of my rights and to speak with representatives of these offices confidentially without threat of retaliation for making a complaint; and
- To receive a copy of this Act form and have it fully explained by the Department of Children and Family Services or agency acting on behalf of the Department when the child or adult is placed in the care of the Department.

Illinois Department of DCFS Children & Family Services

1.800.252.2873 Abuse Hotline
1.800.232.3798 Advocacy Hotline
www.DCFS.Illinois.gov

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