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Kent Co. pilot project designed to improve outcomes for children in foster care

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The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services is announcing a pilot project in Kent County that will support innovation and provide greater incentives for foster care and adoption service providers to meet outcomes that benefit children and families. (Courtesy: MGN Online)

LANSING, Mich. (NEWSCHANNEL 3) — The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services is announcing a pilot project in Kent County that will support innovation and provide greater incentives for foster care and adoption service providers to meet outcomes that benefit children and families.

On October 1, MDHHS will kick off a five-year performance-based funding pilot for its child welfare system in Kent County. The performance-based funding model will pay the West Michigan Partnership for Children a semi-annual case rate that will allow the agency to be innovative in creating services that meet the needs of children and families.

The amount of the case rate decreases as a child remains in care longer, providing incentives for protecting the child's safety and well-being and finding a permanent home for the child more quickly – either through reunification with the family if that's safe, or through finding a loving adoptive home. That's in contrast to Michigan's existing funding model, which pays providers a per-diem rate based on how many days a child is in care.

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Other examples of outcomes being incentivized through performance-based funding are placing children in the least-restrictive setting – such as by placing a child with a relative if possible to achieve the most family-like foster care setting – and maintaining stability with the child's permanent placement.

“Performance-based funding will reinforce positive outcomes for children and allow us to reinvest savings into the Kent County child welfare system to pay for continued improvements,” said MDHHS Director Nick Lyon. “For example, savings that result from children safely returning home from foster care more quickly can be reinvested in developing services to support the community in preventing other children from entering foster care due to abuse or neglect.”

Both public and private foster care and adoption agencies in Kent County will be subject to the same consistent performance indicators and outcomes in

delivering services. Providers in Kent County are Bethany Christian Services, Catholic Charities of West Michigan, D.A. Blodgett-St. Johns, Samaritas and Wellspring Lutheran Services. There are close to 900 children in foster care in Kent County.

The performance-based funding model is not intended to reduce child welfare costs, but to use resources more effectively to help children and families.

A third-party independent evaluation of the pilot will be conducted to assess outcomes and cost effectiveness. Once the pilot is completed, MDHHS will review the results and determine next steps.

The Michigan Legislature in 2013 initiated plans to develop a child welfare performance-based funding model. In 2014, a task force released a report that indicated the model was feasible. MDHHS selected Kent County as the location to pilot performance-based funding and other improvements.

For more information, go to the MDHHS performance-based child welfare system [webpage](#).