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December 10, 2020

Commissioner Sheila Poole  
Office of Children and Family Services  
52 Washington Street  
Rensselaer, NY 12144

Dear Commissioner Poole,

CHAMPS-NY is a statewide coalition of advocates and providers working for policy and practice change to support children, families, and caregivers in child welfare. **As such, we implore you to extend the Protocols for Supporting Young Adults Aging Out of Care During the COVID-19 Pandemic for Local Departments of Social Services into 2021.** This pandemic continues to present unique challenges for older youth who are still in foster care and who have already "aged out" of care; now is not the time to leave them without support. It is essential for their health and well-being that New York State provides youth in its care and custody a safe home in which to weather the pandemic.

As you are well aware, during the best of times, children who "age out" of foster care do not perform as well as their peers in the most fundamental aspects of adult life. The statistics are well documented and overwhelming; when youth are discharged without the foundation of family, they face instability in housing, income, and employment. A November report from the Children's Bureau at the Administration for Children and Families also points to the importance of youth remaining connected to supports during the pandemic.

We applaud your office for releasing these protocols on aging out of care in July, joining nine other states that did so in the spring. These protocols are an important first step, providing immediate, vital support for some youth in care. When coupled with S.8834/A.10581, a bill awaiting Governor Cuomo's signature that would authorize youth who have already aged out of foster care to return to care without waiting for court approval during the COVID-19 state of emergency, these protocols will provide a stronger safety net for transition age youth. In the middle of a global health pandemic, when safe, stable homes and families are key to both individual and public health, no young person should be forced to leave foster care without a

family simply because they turn 21.

**We urge you to continue your support of transition-age youth by extending the Protocols into 2021 and supporting S.8834/A.10581.**

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

The CHAMPS-NY Campaign