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Division of Safety and Permanence

To whom it may concern,

Wisconsin Department of Children and Families has been made aware of the closing of public and private colleges and universities in light of COVID-19. While these measures have the full support of the Department, we encourage intentionality to ensure the burden caused by such closures does not fall on some of Wisconsin's most vulnerable students. Youth formerly in foster care often rely on residence halls as their permanent address. For many, there are no safe alternatives, making the closures of residence halls a housing crisis for former foster youth.

Whenever possible, we encourage our educational partners to consult with their campus colleagues serving former foster youth ([Foster Youth to College Contacts](#), TRIO programs, Multicultural Student Services, Dean of Students, etc.) when making decisions that could have profound impact on the population, and to consider the following:

1. If residence halls close entirely, students who rely on the residence halls as their permanent address may lack safe, stable, affordable housing options, at a time where others are also concerned about shortages of basic necessities. What we've heard from youth experiencing housing insecurity in the past is the more secure a family is, the more flexible and willing to "step up" they are. If much of the general population is grappling with resource scarcity, those willing to help may be few and far between.
2. If dining halls are closed while campuses are closed, there is the potential for significant food insecurity for students from foster care. Those living in residence halls, including students from foster care **do not** qualify for FoodShare, and may not have anticipated/budgeted for needing to prepare their meals independently. Students may not be able to access food despite having funds available in their campus dining plan.
3. If students from foster care are left without housing options and resort to sleeping in vehicles, garages, etc. Wi-Fi and internet access to complete coursework will likely be an issue, particularly if cafes and other places students typically go to access free Wi-Fi are closed.
4. Those reliant on work-study jobs could also be impacted financially if not given options to complete projects remotely.
5. Students from foster care who are parenting may be looking at needing childcare to complete coursework remotely. To meet Wisconsin Shares eligibility, they need to be working at least 20 hours per month while attending college which could be a difficult requirement to meet if their employer or work study job is shut down.

Who students from foster care can contact for assistance: Wisconsin Department of Children and Families contracts with regional Transition Resource Agencies (TRAs) to provide independent living services and supports to young adults 18 and older (up to 21 in most cases) who have aged out of foster care, were adopted after the age of 16, or placed in court-ordered guardianship after the age of 16. These agencies can assist eligible youth in finding short-term housing, as well as connect youth with community resources to access healthcare, childcare, and food. For contact information for the regional TRA in your area, please visit: <https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/youthservices/college>