

## BENCH CARD

### Enhancing Successful Outcomes for LGBTQ Youth in the Dependency System

#### Make Your Courtroom a Safe Space:

- Ensure your courtroom appears inclusive by use of visual indicators (posters, "Safe Space" sign, Hate Free Zone sticker, pamphlets for open and affirming youth programs with other materials made available to the public)
- Set the tone and expectation that "all are welcome here"
- Use and require others to use inclusive and respectful language, including calling youth by preferred names and preferred pronouns
- Use gender-neutral language if inquiring about a youth's personal life ("partner" or "significant other" rather than presuming an interest in a particular gender based on assumptions)
- Perceive gender expression as expression, not as defiance
- Think about how to respect LGBTQ youth and their needs, and how to ensure their needs are addressed in this system without "outing" them to others. This can be challenging, and judicial officers should learn from each other

#### Ensure Equitable Treatment of LGBTQ Youth:

- Insist the Department treat youth in an affirming, supportive manner as part of "reasonable efforts"
- Avoid double standards or judgment in regard to sexually active LGBTQ youth and heterosexual youth
- Inquire as to culturally appropriate and competent social workers and service providers
- Insist the Department contract with LGBTQ-appropriate service providers
- Be aware of LGBTQ resources in your jurisdiction; be aware of service providers who are not inclined to support LGBTQ youth
- Be prepared to address issues for transgender youth, including requests for court-permitted gender affirmation treatment and transgender-friendly medical care

### Placement Issues:

- Include inquiries about acceptance and support of youth in placement as part of the court's "health, safety, and welfare" review
- Inquire as to the basis for "placement disruption;" insist the Department seek culturally competent placement options
- Be aware of religion-based placement services and placements; inquire as to whether they are open and affirming of LGBTQ youth as part of cultural competency

### Permanency Issues:

- If parents have trouble supporting their LGBTQ child, include culturally appropriate family therapy, attendance at culturally-appropriate support groups; solicit information from the youth's perspective
- Require true progress on acceptance by parents prior to return home
- Ensure adoption resources utilized are LGBTQ culturally competent
- Consider following the youth's lead in identification of potential suitable adult or relative placements for permanency, even if adoption is not a possible plan
- Insist the Independent Living Services providers utilized by the Department are supportive and affirming of LGBTQ youth