



JENNIFER M. GRANHOLM
GOVERNOR

STATE OF MICHIGAN
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES
LANSING



ISMAEL AHMED
DIRECTOR

August 18, 2009

The Honorable Bill Hardiman, Chair
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on DHS
State Capitol
Lansing, Michigan 48933

The Honorable Dudley Spade, Chair
House Appropriations Subcommittee on DHS
State Capitol
Lansing, Michigan 48933

Dear Senator Hardiman and Representative Spade:

Section 532(3) of P.A. 248 (Enrolled House Bill No. 5814) requires the Department of Human Services (DHS) to report on the plan to license relatives of foster children as foster care providers to ensure consistent high standards of care for those foster children.

Licensing relative caregivers continues as a priority for DHS. Referrals to private child placing agencies continue to be made to facilitate licensure of unlicensed relative caregivers.

On March 11, 2009, DHS released the attached memorandum to field staff to clarify the placement of a child with an unlicensed relative if the relative refused to pursue licensure. Placement with an unlicensed relative may be made if the home assessment and safety clearances are appropriate, the placement is in the child's best interest, the benefits of licensure are explained and the relative obtains an approved waiver to forgo licensure.

In addition, the memorandum outlined a phased in review and referral process to address the Relative Caregiver Backlog Cohort. The first group of relative caregivers identified for review and referral for licensure included relative caregivers caring for temporary court wards who are title IV-E eligible.

As of March 31, 2009, a minimum of 2,352 relative caregivers were contacted regarding licensure. Of that number 62% expressed interest in becoming licensed, 30% declined licensure and 8% have no response indicated. Between March 2008 and April 2009, 386 relative-only licenses were issued.

If you have any questions about the attached material, please contact Suzanne Stiles Burke, director, Bureau of Child Welfare at (517) 335-6158.

Sincerely,

Ismael Ahmed

c: Senate and House Appropriations Subcommittees on DHS
Senate and House Committees on Family and Human Services
Senate and House Fiscal Agencies and Policy Offices
State Budget Director



STATE OF MICHIGAN

**Department
of Human
Services**

Memorandum

**Field Operations Administration
Children's Services Administration**

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**L-09-026-CW
Child Welfare**

To: County Directors
District Managers
Urban Child Welfare Directors

Date: March 11, 2009

From: Terry A. Salacina, Acting Director, Field Operations Administration
Kathryne A. O'Grady, Director, Children's Services Administration

Subject: Relative Licensing

Response Due: None

Licensing relatives continues as a priority for the Department of Human Services (DHS). The significant role of extended families in caring for children and the need for consistent standards in assessing the safety of a home that will care for a child in the state foster care system must be balanced when making placement decisions.

The direction provided in [L-Letter 08-131](#) (revised 10/08) indicated that children may not be placed in a relative home unless the relative is willing and able to be licensed as a foster family home and signs the Relative Agreement for Placement and Licensure (DHS-972). In rare instances, when a relative meets all the requirements for placement and is able to be licensed but refuses to agree to be licensed (despite hearing about the benefits of licensure), placement with an unlicensed relative may be made **only** if:

- Home assessment and safety check are appropriate.
- Placement with the relative is in the child's best interest.
- Benefits of licensure are explained.
- Relative signs a waiver refusing licensure.

The placement will count against the 10% exception for unlicensed relative homes allowed under the settlement agreement in *Dwayne B v Granholm, et al.*

Relative Placement Determination at Removal

When children must be removed from their home and placed in out-of-home care, preference must be given to placement with a relative if the relative family:

- Meets the requirements in the Initial Relative Safety Screen, DHS-588 (revised 2/09).
- Meets the needs of the child.
- Keeps siblings together.
- Lives in close geographic proximity to where the child was living at the time of removal, unless it is in the best interest of the child to be placed with a relative in another location.

Prior to placement of a child with an unlicensed relative, a basic safety assessment must be completed utilizing the Initial Relative Safety Screen, DHS-588. Upon placement, the relative must receive a copy of Relative Caregiver Resources & Responsibilities, DHS-Pub-457. The same requirements apply to a child who was initially placed in an unrelated foster home and a relative comes forward for placement. As explained below, a home study must be completed of all relative caregivers' homes within 30 days of placement, regardless of whether the relative agrees to be licensed or not.

Child Welfare Funding Specialists (CWFS) should assist in completing the initial safety assessment for potential relative caregiver placements and facilitating the licensing process. If a possible relative placement is identified before or at the time of removal a CWFS should:

- Conduct background clearances (SWSS-CPS, Central Registry and I-Chat) on all members of the household and print results of clearances.
- Contact the identified relative to discuss licensure.
- Conduct the initial home assessment and complete the Initial Relative Safety Screen (DHS-588) for each potential relative placement.
- Conduct a SWSS-FAJ search for the child and print placement list (if any).
- Provide Initial Relative Safety Screen (with results of background clearances attached) and placement list (if any) to CPS with recommendations regarding placement.
- If the relative indicates an interest in pursuing licensure, forward the DHS-588 to a Placement Agency Foster Care (PAFC) provider to facilitate licensure.
- Notify the CPS worker or assigned foster care worker of the agency licensing the family. If a relative is identified for placement after removal but **within 30 days** of case transfer to foster care, a CWFS should:
- Complete the Initial Relative Safety Screen (DHS-588) and home study outline (consult with the assigned foster care worker during home study process).
- If the relative is appropriate and interested in pursuing licensure, send the DHS-588 and home study to a Placement Agency Foster Care (PAFC) provider for licensure.

Foster Care Worker Activities

Within 10 days of case assignment to a foster care worker, the assigned foster care worker must discuss licensure with a relative caregiver and complete the Foster Home Licensing for Relative Caregivers, DHS-972 (revised 2/09). The relative is required to sign and indicate if they are interested in pursuing licensing or wish to waive licensure.

If the relative is interested in pursuing licensure, the Referral to a Placement Agency Foster Care Provider (PAFC) or DHS Certification Worker process and PAFC provider/DHS certification worker activities outlined in L-letter 08-131 (revised) shall be followed.

If the relative wishes to forgo licensure, the assigned foster care worker completes the Relative Caregiver Licensing Waiver, DHS-875 (revised 02/09) with the caregiver. The assigned foster care worker forwards the DHS-875 and DHS-972 to supervision for signature. The assigned foster care supervisor then forwards the DHS-875 and DHS-972 to the County Administrator of Children's Services or Children's Services Field Manager for final signature. Once all signatures are obtained, the DHS-875 and DHS-972 are filed in the child's case record. A relative caregiver must re-sign the DHS-875 annually. A copy of each DHS-875 must also be sent to the Relative Licensing Coordinator in Central Office.

Use of the DHS-197 to Complete the 30-day Home Assessment for Children Entering Care On or After 10/1/08

In L-letter 08-131 (revised), it was noted that the Home Study Outline, DHS-197 was under review and should not be used for relative placement or licensing. It has been determined that

the DHS-197 is to be utilized for the required 30-day home assessment for children placed with unlicensed relative caregivers on or after 10/1/08. It is the responsibility of the assigned foster care worker to ensure the assessment is completed. If the family has been referred to a PAFC provider to facilitate licensure, the assigned foster care worker can coordinate with the certification worker to complete the 30-day assessment. The incentive payment for PAFC providers to license relative caregivers is being revised to compensate the agency for the completion of the 30-day home assessment. The assigned foster care worker must have continued contact with the certification worker to ensure the relative caregiver(s) is available to the certification worker for assessment. If the certification worker completes the 30-day home assessment, the certification worker will provide the assessment to the assigned foster care worker. The assigned foster care worker will provide the 30-day home assessment to the court. The information gathered from this 30-day home assessment can be incorporated into the Initial Foster Home/Adoption Evaluation (BCAL-3130).

If the certification worker completes the 30-day home assessment and does not recommend the relative caregiver for continued placement, the certification worker must immediately notify the assigned foster care worker. The assigned foster care worker must schedule a meeting with the supervisor and certification worker to review the findings and make a determination as to the appropriateness of the relative's home.

Indian Children

The requirement of relative licensing is optional for children who are Indian Children as defined by the Indian Child Welfare Act. The Indian Child Welfare Act's placement priorities still apply. Refer to Native American Affairs policy manual item, Placement Priorities for Indian Children, NAA 215.

Relative Caregiver Backlog Cohort

As of September 30, 2008, there were 6,079 children residing in approximately 3,800 unlicensed relative caregiver homes. Pursuant to the Settlement Agreement with Children's Rights, by September 30, 2009, a review of at least 50% (1,900) of the Relative Caregiver Backlog Cohort shall be completed, and all homes reviewed shall be duly licensed as foster care providers or specially waived from licensure, **consistent with the 10% allowance for unlicensed relative homes**. Additionally, by September 30, 2010, 100% of the Relative Caregiver Backlog Cohort shall be reviewed and duly licensed as foster family providers or waived from licensure, **consistent with the 10% allowance for unlicensed relative homes**. To address the Relative Caregiver Backlog Cohort of unlicensed relative caregivers by the dates noted above, the cohort shall be prioritized in the following manner:

- 1st Cohort- Relative caregivers caring for temporary court wards who are IV-E eligible.
- 2nd Cohort- Relative caregivers caring for temporary court wards.
- 3rd Cohort- Relative caregivers caring for state wards who are IV-E eligible.
- 4th Cohort- Relative caregivers caring for state wards who are funded by State Ward Board and Care.

Review and Referral Process

By 3/30/09, the county shall identify the first cohort identified above to refer the relative caregiver for licensure or obtain a waiver to forgo licensure. If the relative caregiver wishes to pursue licensure, the assigned foster care worker shall follow the referral process to a certification worker outlined in L-letter 08-131 (revised).

By 6/30/09, the county shall identify the children in the second cohort identified above to refer the relative caregiver for licensure or obtain a waiver to forgo licensure.

By 9/30/09, the county shall identify the children in the third cohort identified above to refer the relative caregiver for licensure or obtain a waiver to forgo licensure.

By 12/30/09, the county shall identify the children in the fourth cohort identified above to refer the relative caregiver for licensure or obtain a waiver to forgo licensure.

A Central Office impact team has been established to meet with a sample of local county DHS and PAFC providers to gather information and assess successes and barriers of the current relative licensing process.

Number and Status of Previous L-Letters Issued on the Same Subject: L-08-131 (revised)

Contact Office: Foster Care Program Office

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Distribution: Children's Services Managers and Staff

Obsolete Date: 01/01/2010

c: Executive Staff
Wayne County Administration Directors
Cynthia Maritato
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