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**Georgia Department of Human Services**  
Aging Services | Child Support Services | Family & Children Services

April 29, 2024

**Child Welfare Services Manual Transmittal No. 2024-03**

**To:** County Departments of Family and Children Services  
DFCS District Directors  
DFCS Regional Directors  
State Office Staff

**From:** Candice L. Broce, Division Director <sup>CB</sup><sub>CB</sub>  
Georgia Division of Family and Children Services

**Re:** Child Welfare Policy Manual: Resource Development

**Purpose**

The purpose of this Child Welfare Services Manual Transmittal (CWSMT) is to announce updates to the following chapters of the Child Welfare Policy Manual: Chapter 10: Foster Care, Chapter 11 Adoption, Chapter 14 Resource Development, Chapter 19 Case Management, and Chapter 22: Kinship reflecting changes in resource development practices.

**Discussion**

The Georgia Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS) is responsible for the safety, permanency, and wellbeing of children served. DFCS recognizes that sound policies support the framework for providing effective child welfare services. To that end, DFCS continually reviews and makes responsive changes to the Child Welfare Policy Manual to assure continued alignment with federal and state laws, organizational changes, shifts in best practice, and socio-cultural factors affecting children and families served. The Child Welfare Policy Manual has been revised to:

1. Streamline the foster home approval and re-evaluation process.  
**NOTE:** This update discontinues Child Welfare Services County Letter (CWSCL) No. 2020-01 Foster Home Approval Term and Re-evaluation.
2. Incorporate provisions from the state legislation that authorizes foster parents to arrange occasional or short-term respite care for children placed in their home.  
**NOTE:** This update discontinues CWSCL No. 2020-03 Caregiver Arrangements for Occasional Short-term Babysitting of Children in Foster Care.

3. Update provisions to reduce the potential for conflicts of interest when DFCS employees and individuals with a business relationship with DFCS seek to serve as caregivers for children in an active child welfare case.
4. Consolidate the requirements related to the reasonable prudent parenting standard (RPPS).

## **Chapter 14: Resource Development**

### 14.0 Introduction to Resource Development

1. Adds that DFCS and Child Placing Agencies (CPAs) will adhere to the requirements of the Multiethnic Placement Act of 1994 as amended by the Interethnic Placement Act of 1996 (MEPA-IEPA).
2. Extends the foster home re-evaluation period from one year to two years.

### 14.1 Safety and Quality Standards

1. Clarifies that caregivers do not have to obtain a new physical examination as part of the foster home approval process if they are able to submit proof of a physical examination within the last 12 months.
2. Updates the requirement regarding disclosure of current mental health and/or substance abuse issues to include allowing the household members to sign an attestation if they report not having any current untreated mental health or substance abuse issues. When they are receiving treatment for either condition, a reference from the treating professional is required.
3. Allows an exemption to immunization requirements for caregivers and their household members when a sincere religious objection to immunization is expressed.
4. Recommends, instead of requiring, that caregivers for infants and children with special needs have current pertussis and influenza vaccines. Notes that caregivers with the current vaccines may be given preference when the agency makes placement decisions.
5. Notes that existing household members reaching 18 years of age must submit to a criminal history record checks and safety screening. This was relocated from policy 14.14 Resource Development: Family Evaluation Addendums.
6. Clarifies that a total of three references is required per family, not per person.
7. Moves practice guidance regarding firearm, animal, medication, water, fire, and motor vehicle safety to requirements.
8. Requires caregivers to sign an attestation that no smoking (including the use of e-cigarette products) will occur in the presence of children in foster care, within the foster home, or in any vehicle used to transport children in foster care.
9. Adds practice guidance pertaining to references.

### 14.5 Family Child Care and Personal Care Home Operation in Foster Homes

1. Changes the policy title from Family Daycare and Personal Care Home Operation in Foster Homes to Family Child Care and Personal Care Home Operations in Foster Homes.
2. Updates the policy format.

3. Removes the requirement to notify the licensing agency if a foster home is closed due to a policy violation.
4. Removes the procedures related to foster home capacity as this information is included in policy 14.1 Resource Development: Safety and Quality Standards (SQS).
5. Adds definitions for a Family Child Care Center and a Personal Care Home to practice guidance.

#### 14.6 Recruitment and Retention

1. Updates the policy format.
2. Removes the following requirements related to specific recruitment efforts on the regional and county level.
  - a. Diligently recruit and retain foster and adoptive parents through ongoing recruitment and retention efforts.
  - b. Submit an annual recruitment and retention plan to the Foster Care Services Director's Office to document their planned activities for the upcoming year that support the statewide plan. It shall be submitted by the date established annually by the Foster Care Services Director.
  - c. Direct target recruitment for adoptive parents toward families who wish to adopt children who meet the state's definition of special needs, and for specific children for whom adoptive homes are needed.
3. Removes forms and tools related to adoption specific recruitments efforts.

#### 14.7 Inquiries and Information Sessions

1. Adds an additional telephone number for making inquiries.
2. Reduces the timeframe for contacting prospective foster and adoptive parents following an inquiry from three business days to one business day.
3. Prioritizes the use of email to send information to prospective caregivers.

#### 14.8 Pre-service Training

1. Updates the policy format.
2. Imports content related to pre-service training topics from policy 14.1 Resource Development: Safety and Quality Standards (SQS).
3. Incorporates SAFE Home Study terminology.

#### 14.9 Continued Parent Development (CPD)

1. Removes the limitations on how CPD hours are obtained (i.e., five hours through in-person interaction and maximum of three hours through personal growth activities).
2. Expands the timeframe for newly approved families to begin CPD hours from 60 days to 90 days of their approval date.
3. Revises the chart in practice guidance to illustrate the number of CPD hours required of caregivers during the initial year of approval.

#### 14.10 Initial Family Evaluation

1. Changes terminology. Refers to the Initial Family Evaluation as the “Structured Analysis Family Evaluation (SAFE) Home Study.”
2. Removes requirements that are contained in policy 14.1 Resource Development: Safety and Quality Standards (SRS).
3. Updates procedures to allow DFCS to accept documentation of a physical exam on a health care provider’s form with information comparable to the Prospective Foster or Adoptive Parent Medical Evaluation Report.
4. Reduces the timeframe for the final approval authority to review and make the approval decision from within five to within three business days.
5. Adds a procedure for RD staff to meet with the SAFE Supervisor to review the results of the safety screenings and criminal records checks before proceeding with the home study process.
6. Revises procedures for assessing the physical environment, including:
  - a. Taking pictures of the home environment (interior and exterior), including the sleeping areas proposed for the children.
  - b. When there is a well on the property, instead of obtaining a copy of an approved well inspection to confirm compliance with Georgia water well standards, allow applicants to complete an attestation affirming continued maintenance of the well and that they will promptly inform DFCS of any issues that arise.
  - c. When there is a septic tank on the property, instead of obtaining a copy of the approved inspection of the septic tank to confirm compliance standards, allow applicants to complete an attestation affirming the septic tank meets the standards and that they will promptly inform DFCS of any issues that arise.
7. Reduces the timeframe for a SAFE Home Study Practitioner (HSP) to acknowledge receipt of a referral for completion of a SAFE Home Study from within 72 hours to within one business day.
8. Reduces the timeframe for a HSP to schedule the introductory home visit with prospective caregivers from within five to within three business days of receipt of the referral. Also, reduces the timeframe for conducting the introductory home visit from ten calendar days to no later than five calendar days after receipt of the referral.
9. Reduces the timeframe for providing written notice to applicants of the final approval decision from within five to within one business day of the decision.
10. Reduces the timeframe for conducting the home visit with newly approved caregivers to review and sign the Caregiver Child Safety Agreement from within seven calendar days to within three calendar days of approval.

#### 14.13 Family Re-evaluation

1. Removes requirements that are already contained in policy 14.1 Resource Development: Safety and Quality Standards (SQS).
2. Changes terminology. Refers to the Family Re-evaluation as the “SAFE Update.”
3. Requires the SAFE Update to be completed every two years instead of annually.

4. Extends the timeframe for using the family re-evaluation process to assess previously approved caregivers who request to return to service from within three years to within five years of a voluntary closure.
5. Reduces the timeframe to notify caregivers of their approval status from within five to within one business day of the approval decision.
6. Changes the timeframe for caregivers to report to DFCS arrests and 911 calls to their home from the next business day following the occurrence to the next calendar day following the occurrence.
7. Requires criminal records checks to be conducted on foster parents at least every four years instead of every five years.
8. Removes the requirement for caregivers to complete medical evaluations every five years.

#### 14.14 Family Evaluation Addendums

1. Changes terminology. Refers to the Family Re-evaluation as the “SAFE Update” and refers to the written family evaluation as the “SAFE Home Study Report.”
2. Updates requirements regarding changes in family circumstances for which an addendum is applicable.
  - a. Removes: employment or financial status, household member reach 18 years of age, and changes in household composition
  - b. Adds: new household members

#### 14.15 Household Approval Status

1. Expands the term for granting Full Approval and Full Approval-Special status from no longer than 12 months to no longer than twenty-four (24) months at a time.
2. Changes the timeframe for updating a caregiver’s household approval status in Georgia SHINES from immediately, but no later than two business days to within one business day of a status change.

#### 14.16 Working with Caregivers

1. Updates the policy format. Replaces the terminology “annual re-evaluations” with “SAFE Updates.”
2. Removes the requirements related to RPPS as they are contained in policy 10.14 Foster Care: Promoting Normalcy for Children in Foster Care.
3. Requires quarterly visits to foster homes include an assessment of the physical home environment to confirm that it is safe and appropriate to meet the needs of each child placed in the home.

#### 14.17 Foster Parent Bill of Rights and Grievance Procedure

1. Adds the email address for the caregiver ombudsman.
2. Updates the address for the State DFCS Division Director.
3. Adds a timeframe for DFCS to acknowledge receipt of the Step One and Step Two grievance via the Notification of Receipt within three business days of receipt.
4. Changes the timeframe for the County Office to provide a written decision regarding the foster parent’s grievance, from within 10 business days of the County

Office's receipt of the grievance to within 10 business days of County Office's acknowledgement of the receipt of the grievance.

5. Changes the timeframe for the foster parent to submit a Step Two grievance if the complaint is not satisfactorily resolved in Step One from within 15 business days of the County Office's receipt of the grievance to within 15 business days of County Office's acknowledgement of the receipt of the grievance.
6. Changes the timeframe for the Division Director to provide a written decision regarding the foster parent's grievance, from within 15 business days of receipt of the grievance to within 15 business days of the acknowledgement of the receipt of the grievance.

#### 14.18 Supervision of Children

1. Adds to the Codes/References section O.C.G.A. § 49-5-8.1.
2. Allows foster parents to select and arrange for unreimbursed occasional or short-term respite care for children placed in their home, using the RPPS.
3. Defines occasional, short-term, and extended respite care:
  - a. 'Occasional' means once per week or less on varying days and not exceeding twice per month.
  - b. 'Short-term' means up to 72 consecutive hours, or for longer periods of time.
  - c. 'Extended' means short-term respite care for longer than 72 consecutive hours.
4. Adds requirements and procedures for foster parents to document the use of the short-term respite care (up to 72 consecutive hours).
5. Adds requirements and procedures for the use of (unreimbursed) extended respite care to include:
  - a. Advance written notice (at least 72 hours is recommended) from the foster parents of their intent to use extended respite care to the DFCS. Email is preferred.
  - b. An assessment of the extended respite caregiver to determine their suitability to provide temporary care for the child(ren).
  - c. Written approval (email preferred) from DFCS.
  - d. Notes that the regional director or designee will coordinate the approval for extended respite care if the foster parent requests extended respite care for children from multiple counties or regions.
6. Provides an exception that an assessment is not required for a foster parent to provide (unreimbursed) extended respite care for another foster parent.
7. Requires caregivers to provide substitute caregivers with the following prior to leaving a child in their care:
  - a. Information about the child's emotional, behavioral, medical, and physical condition, if any, necessary to provide care for the child.
  - b. Any medication that should be administered during the supervision period.
  - c. Emergency contact information that is valid for the duration of the supervision period.
8. Updates practice guidance regarding substitute caregivers.

#### 14.20 Discipline and Behavior Management

1. Updates the policy format.

#### 14.24 Inter-County and Inter-Agency Partnerships

1. Updates the policy format. Incorporates SAFE terminology (e.g., SAFE Home Study, SAFE Update).

#### 14.25 Staff Restrictions on Being Caregivers

1. Discontinues this policy section as content related to staff restrictions on being caregivers is in the new policy section 19.07 Case Management: Avoiding Conflicts of Interest when Approving Caregivers.

#### 14.26 Reasonable and Prudent Parenting Standard

1. Discontinues this policy section as content related to RPPS is in the new policy section 10.14 Foster Care: Promoting Normalcy for Children in Foster Care and policy 14.18 Resource Development: Supervision of Children.

### **Chapter 10: Foster Care**

#### 10.14 Promoting Normalcy for Children in Foster Care

1. This new policy section replaces policy 10.14 Foster Care: Social and Cultural Enrichment and policy 14.26 Resource Development: Reasonable and Prudent Parenting Standard pertaining to promoting normalcy for children.
2. Updates that written authorization must be obtained from parents (if termination of parental rights has not occurred) and/or the Juvenile court before a child in DFCS custody travels outside of the State of the Georgia or the United States. Previously, the DFCS County Director could authorize such travel if the child was in the permanent custody of DFCS.

### **Chapter 11: Adoption**

#### 11.6 Foster Parent Adoption Consideration Evaluation

1. Updates procedures for completing the Foster Parent Adoption Consideration Evaluation to include obtaining a new National Crime Information Center (NCIC) criminal records checks on all adults in the prospective adoptive family home.

### **Chapter 19: Case Management**

#### 19.7 Avoiding Conflicts of Interest When Approving Caregivers

1. This new policy section replaces policy 14.25 Resource Development: Staff Restrictions on Being Caregivers and expands the scope to include all child welfare program areas.
2. Indicates that the policy applies to DFCS employees as well as individuals who have a business relationship with DFCS and provides a list of such individuals.
3. Allows DFCS employees and individuals who have a business relationship with DFCS to serve as temporary caregivers (e.g., voluntary kinship caregiver, foster care kinship caregivers, foster parent) for children involved in an active child welfare case when they are relatives or fictive kin of the children. Authorization of

the caregiver arrangement must be obtained from the applicable supervising authority or the Division Director.

4. Restricts DFCS employees who work in a child welfare program area from serving as temporary caregivers for children involved in an active child welfare case when they are not relatives or fictive kin of the children. Exceptions may be granted by the Division Director.
5. Requires all case management activities related to cases involving DFCS employees (in a caregiving role) be transferred to a DFCS county office or region outside of the employees' area of responsibility as assigned by the Regional Director.

### 19.8 Criminal Records Checks

1. Adds a procedure to upload the results of a name-based criminal records check into Georgia SHINES External Documentation using the document class "GCIC Name Search."
2. Requires a NCIC criminal records check for unreimbursed extended respite caregivers.
3. Requires criminal records checks to be completed on foster parents at least every four years instead of every five years.
4. Adds a procedure to upload the results of a fingerprint-based criminal records check into Georgia SHINES External Documentation using the document class "Criminal Records Summary."
5. Removes procedures for the OIG Electronic Fingerprint Technician (EFT).
6. Clarifies that applicants must sign the Live Scan application at the time the criminal records check is conducted by the EFT.
7. Updates the requirement for Security Awareness Training. It must now be completed annually rather than every two years.
8. Clarifies that DFCS may not allow applicants to view the results of a criminal records check. Applicants must contact the GBI to obtain a copy.
9. Removes obsolete procedures and practice guidance related to contacting the Office of Inspector General (OIG) to obtain criminal records checks after hours. OIG has discontinued Afterhours Emergency Placement Criminal Background Checks.
10. Removes the OIG - Background Investigations Unit Emergency On-Call Policy from the Forms and Tools section.
11. Removes obsolete practice guidance regarding Georgia Applicant Processing Services (GAPS), which is no longer being utilized.

### 19.9 Safety Screenings

1. Adds requirements and procedures to conduct safety screenings on substitute caregivers providing extended respite care.
2. Updates the requirement for safety screening at re-evaluation of foster or adoptive parents to include screening the databases of the Board of Pardons and Parole and the Department of Corrections Offender Query.
3. Updates the Safety Screening Matrix in practice guidance.



## **Chapter 22: Kinship**

### **22.4 Kinship Foster Home Evaluation**

1. Changes terminology. Refers to the Initial Family Evaluation as the “Structured Analysis Family Evaluation (SAFE) Home Study.”
2. Removes requirements that are contained in policy 14.1 Resource Development: Safety and Quality Standards (SQS).
3. Updates procedures to allow DFCS to accept documentation of a physical exam on a health care provider’s form with information comparable to the Prospective Foster or Adoptive Parent Medical Evaluation Report.
4. Reduces the timeframe for the final approval authority to review and make the approval decision from within five to within three business days.
5. Adds a procedure for RD staff to meet with the SAFE Supervisor to review the results of the safety screenings and criminal records checks before proceeding with the home study process.
6. Revises procedures for assessing the physical environment, including:
  - a. Taking pictures of the home environment (interior and exterior), including the sleeping areas proposed for the children.
  - b. When there is a well on the property, instead of obtaining a copy of an approved well inspection to confirm compliance with Georgia water well standards, allow applicants to complete an attestation affirming continued maintenance of the well and that they will promptly inform DFCS of any issues that arise.
  - c. When there is a septic tank on the property, instead of obtaining a copy of the approved inspection of the septic tank to confirm compliance standards, allow applicants to complete an attestation affirming the septic tank meets the standards and that they will promptly inform DFCS of any issues that arise.
7. Reduces the timeframe for a SAFE Home Study Practitioner (HSP) to acknowledge receipt of a referral for completion of a SAFE Home Study from within 72 hours to within one business day.
8. Reduces the timeframe for a HSP to schedule the introductory home visit with prospective caregivers from within five to within three business days of receipt of the referral. Also, reduces the timeframe for conducting the introductory home visit from ten calendar days to no later than five calendar days after receipt of the referral.
9. Reduces the timeframe for providing written notice to applicants of the final approval decision from within five to within one business day of the decision.
10. Reduces the timeframe for conducting the home visit with newly approved caregivers to review and sign the Caregiver Child Safety Agreement from within seven calendar days to within three calendar days of approval.

### **22.5 Kinship Foster Home Re-evaluation**

1. Changes terminology. Refers to the Family Re-evaluation as the “SAFE Update.”
2. Requires the SAFE Update to be completed every two years instead of annually.

3. Extends the timeframe for using the SAFE Update process to assess previously approved caregivers who request to return to service from within three years to within five years of a voluntary closure.
4. Requires criminal records checks to be conducted on foster parents at least every four years instead of every five years.
5. Removes the requirement for caregivers to complete medical evaluations every five years.
6. Reduces the timeframe to notify caregivers of their approval status from within five to within one business day of the approval decision.
7. Changes the timeframe for caregivers to report to DFCS arrests and 911 calls to their home from the next business day following the occurrence to the next calendar day following the occurrence.

### **Forms and Tools**

1. **The following brochures have been revised and are available for print via the DHS Forms Portal:**
  - a. Child Protective Services Investigations Caregiver's Guide (English and Spanish) – Previously titled “A Caregiver's Guide to a Child Protective Services (CPS) Investigation”
  - b. Family Support Services Caregiver's Guide (English and Spanish)
2. **The following have been revised to enhance experience and adaptability:**
  - a. Adoption Assistance Treatment Professional Report
  - b. Caregiver Child Safety Agreement (English and Spanish)
  - c. Caregiver Home Inspection Safety and Compliance Checklist
  - d. Caregiver Placement Preferences
  - e. Child Life History Referral Form and Documentation Checklist
  - f. Child Specific Recruitment Plan
  - g. Confidentiality and Privacy Standards Agreement
  - h. Credit Report Request For Youth In Foster Care
  - i. Individualized Assessment Tool for Prospective & Existing Caregivers
  - j. Intimate Partner Violence (Domestic Violence) Guidelines & Protocol
  - k. Financial Statement for Resource Parenting (English and Spanish)
  - l. Foster Parent Grievance Notification – County Director (English and Spanish)
  - m. Foster Parent Grievance Notification - State Division Director (English and Spanish)
  - n. Foster Parent Grievance Notification - State Mediation Committee (English and Spanish)
  - o. Medical Evaluation Report - Additional Household Member
  - p. Medical Evaluation Report – Caregiver Update
  - q. Medical Evaluation Report – Prospective Caregiver
  - r. Notification of Receipt - Step One Grievance (English and Spanish)
  - s. Notification of Receipt - Step Two Grievance (English and Spanish)
  - t. Post Adoption Services / Adoption Assistance Benefits Handout (English and Spanish)

- u. Safety and Quality Standards Acknowledgement
- 3. The following have been added:**
- a. Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement Agreement (English and Spanish)
  - b. Caregiver Child Safety Agreement - Adult Household Member (English and Spanish)
  - c. Caregiver Feedback Survey (English and Spanish)
  - d. Caregiver Reference and List Form (English and Spanish)
  - e. Confidentiality and Privacy Standards Agreement (Spanish)
  - f. Foster, Adoptive & Kinship Caregiver Re-evaluation Instructions - Adult Household Member (English and Spanish)
  - g. Foster, Adoptive & Kinship Caregiver Re-evaluation Instructions - Caregiver(s) (English and Spanish)
  - h. Prospective Caregiver Application & Instructions (English and Spanish)
  - i. Prospective Caregiver Onboarding Pathway – Adult Household Member Packet (English and Spanish)
  - j. Prospective Caregiver Onboarding Pathway – Prospective Caregiver (s) Packet (English and Spanish)
  - k. Safety and Quality Standards Acknowledgment (Spanish)
  - l. Unreimbursed Substitute In-Home/Out-of-Home Caregivers (English and Spanish)
- 4. The following have been discontinued:**
- a. Caregiver Prior Agency Reference Form
  - b. Caregiver Reference List
  - c. Foster or Adoptive Caregiver Annual Re-evaluation Instructions - Adult Household Member
  - d. Foster or Adoptive Caregiver Annual Re-evaluation Instructions -Primary Caregiver
  - e. Foster or Adoptive Caregiver Annual Re-evaluation Instructions - Secondary Caregiver
  - f. Instructions for signing Caregiver Forms in Adobe Acrobat
  - g. Long-Term Foster Care Agreement
  - h. Office of Inspector General -Background Investigations Unit Emergency On-Call Policy
  - i. Primary Caregiver Feedback Survey
  - j. Prospective Caregiver Application
  - k. Prospective Caregiver Application – Instructions
  - l. Prospective Caregiver Onboarding Pathway - Additional Household Member Instructions
  - m. Prospective Caregiver Initial Onboarding Instructions
  - n. Prospective Caregiver Onboarding Pathway – Secondary Caregiver Packet
  - o. Prospective Caregiver Onboarding Pathway – Supplemental Verifications Checklist
  - p. Reasonable Modifications and Communication Assistance Request Form for Persons with Disabilities

- q. Secondary Caregiver Feedback Survey
- r. Unreimbursement Routine Substitute In-Home/Out-of-Home Caregivers
- s. Unreimbursement Routine Substitute In-Home/Out-of-Home Caregivers - Instructions
- t. Women's Treatment & Recovery Services Brochure

### **Implementation**

This policy update is effective upon the release of this manual transmittal and is available on the Online Directives Information System (ODIS) at <http://odis.dhs.ga.gov/>. Regional and County Leadership shall provide opportunities for staff to review and discuss the updated policy to ensure implementation. Please refer to policy 1.1 [Administration: Access, Distribution and Review of Child Welfare Policies](#) for the applicable requirements and procedures for policy review.

Please direct questions regarding this policy release to the Field Program Specialists in your region. Regional staff shall submit questions to the Policy and Regulations Unit at [PPPUnit@dhs.ga.gov](mailto:PPPUnit@dhs.ga.gov).