



David A. Hansell
Commissioner

To: Foster Care Providers

From: Julie Farber

Date: May 8, 2020

Re: Foster Home Certification/Approval and Annual Reauthorization During COVID

Julie Farber, MSW
Deputy Commissioner
Division of Family
Permanency Services

150 William Street
18th Floor
New York, NY 10038

212-341-0981 tel
212-341-0926 fax

The Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) issued [New Foster Home Certification and Annual Reauthorization](#) guidance on April 10, 2020 which must be followed during the COVID-19 public health emergency. This memorandum is intended to provide additional information and clarification regarding the areas listed below. These instructions are effective only for the duration of the COVID-19 public health emergency.

Initial Certification Requirements:

Home Study/Safety Assessment

As stated in the OCFS COVID guidance, a home study must be conducted via an in-person visit as part of initial certification requirements. Agency staff should follow the instructions on safely conducting in-person contacts outlined in *Section I: Health and Safety* in the [ACS Emergency Guidance for Foster Care Providers dated April 16, 2020](#) to maintain the safety of the family and staff. As OCFS directs, appropriate precautions must be taken, which include social distancing; wearing gloves and a mask, if available; avoiding touching household items; and completing a physical check of the home, looking for any risks to a child's health and safety.

Initial Pre-Certification Training

The OCFS COVID-19 guidance states prospective foster parents must complete a minimum of 10 training hours via WebEx or a secure video-conferencing platform prior to certification.

In normal circumstances, ACS requires 30 hours of training prior to certification. Given the COVID-19 public health emergency, ACS is issuing the same guidance as OCFS, which, as noted above, allows foster parents to complete a minimum 10 hours of training prior to initial certification, during this COVID-19 public health emergency. These training hours must be completed using any of the of GPSII/ MAPP products or trainings found on the Foster/Adoptive Resource webpage, <https://www.hslnys.org/fosterparenttraining>.

Additionally, potential therapeutic foster parents can participate in training offered by Fostering Change for Children. It is acceptable to hold these trainings via WebEx or a secure videoconferencing virtual platform. The remaining training hours, depending on the curriculum, must be completed as soon as possible after the certification approval date. ACS' Workforce Institute has begun offering the *Deciding Together* module as a virtual training and will launch the *Caring for Your Own* module, as well as GPSII/MAPP and GPSII/Mini-MAPP agency trainings using a virtual platform shortly.

Criminal History Record Checks (CHRC)

Although Federal guidance was issued allowing name-based criminal background checks as an alternative until a fingerprint-based background check can be completed, this is not possible in New York at this time as OCFS has indicated that they are unable to process name based criminal background checks. As such, Criminal History Record Checks (CHRC), including fingerprints, must be completed for all prospective foster parents and all household members 18 years of age and older. There are many fingerprinting sites throughout New York City operating with reduced schedules and limited hours. Foster parent initial certification cannot be approved until the successful completion of the CHRC.

Medical

To reiterate what is stated in the OCFS COVID-19 guidance, medical statements can be submitted via email, mail, or facsimile. If the last physical was completed within the last year, the medical report can also be submitted to meet this requirement for the prospective foster parent. If an appointment is required by the physician, it can be done through a telehealth appointment in most cases.

Requirements for Approving Potential Emergency Foster Homes:

Home Study/Safety Assessment

As part of the process for approving relative or eligible nonrelative homes on an emergency basis foster care provider agencies must complete a home study and safety assessment via an in-person visit to meet placement requirements. Agency staff should follow the instructions on conducting in-person contacts outlined in *Section I: Health and Safety* in the [ACS Emergency Guidance for Foster Care Providers dated April 16, 2020](#).

Criminal History Record Checks (CHRC)

Although Federal guidance was issued allowing name-based criminal background checks to be utilized instead of fingerprints, this is not possible in New York at this time as OCFS has indicated that they are unable to process name based criminal background checks. As such, Criminal History Record Checks (CHRC), including fingerprints, must be completed for all relative and eligible nonrelatives approved on an emergency basis. There are many fingerprinting sites throughout New York City operating with reduced schedules and limited hours. All relative and eligible nonrelative foster homes approved on an emergency basis may continue to provide care for children placed with them until the completion of the CHRC process or unless the certification is revoked by an authorized agency. If the CHRC is not completed within 90 days, foster care agencies comply with the terms of 18 NYCRR §443.7(g), (h), and (i).

Medical

To reiterate what is stated in the OCFS COVID-19 guidance medical statements can be submitted via email, mail, or facsimile. If the last physical was completed within the last year, the medical report can also be submitted to meet this requirement. If an appointment is required by the physician, it can be done through a telehealth appointment in most cases.

Recertification Requirements:

The OCFS COVID-19 guidance provides instructions to follow in order to meet all annual reauthorization of foster homes requirements in accordance with 18 NYCRR 443.10(a).¹ The below clarifies ACS' expectation as it pertains to recertification training.

Recertification Training

While OCFS is not requiring annual recertification training during the COVID-19 public health emergency, ACS continues to require recertification training, with relaxed requirements as follows:

ACS requires foster parents to complete annual recertification training as described in the ACS Foster Care Quality Assurance Standards. Until further notice, due to the public health emergency caused by COVID-19, only during this public health emergency ACS' recertification training requirements have been relaxed and the following minimum recertification training guidelines must be met:

- Foster parents caring for children in regular Family Foster Care programs are required to complete a minimum of six hours of recertification training hours. Trainings can be accessed on the Foster/Adoptive Resource webpage, <https://www.hslcnys.org/fosterparenttraining>. It is acceptable to hold these trainings via WebEx or a secure videoconferencing virtual platform.
- Foster parents caring for children in a Treatment Family Foster Care or Special Medical and Developmental Disabilities program are required to complete a minimum of six hours of recertification training. Additionally, these foster parents must complete a minimum of six hours of child specific training hours for a minimum total of 12 hours. Trainings can be accessed on the Foster/Adoptive Resource webpage, <https://www.hslcnys.org/fosterparenttraining>. It is acceptable to hold these trainings via WebEx or a secure videoconferencing virtual platform.
- Foster parents caring for children receiving an exceptional payment must complete a minimum of six hours of recertification training. Additionally, these foster parents must complete a minimum of six hours of child specific training hours, for a minimum total of 12 hours. Trainings can be accessed on the Foster/Adoptive Resource webpage, <https://www.hslcnys.org/fosterparenttraining>. It is acceptable to hold these trainings via WebEx or a secure videoconferencing virtual platform.

Foster care agencies should document in the foster parent records the names of training and dates of the trainings completed by the foster parent.

If you have any questions about this memorandum, please contact [Ina Mendez](#).

¹ Please refer to <https://ocfs.ny.gov/main/news/2020/COVID-2020Apr10-Guidance-Foster-Parent-Cert-Reauth.pdf>, page 3 for more information on reauthorization requirements.