

<h1>ACF</h1> <p>Administration for Children and Families</p>	U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES Administration for Children and Families	
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	4. Key Words: Family First Prevention Services Act; National Model Foster Family Home Licensing Standards; Kin-Specific Foster Family Home Licensing Standards; Title IV-E of the Social Security Act; Final Rule; Licensing; Approval; Relative; Kinship; Foster Family Home; Foster Care Maintenance Payments	

INFORMATION MEMORANDUM

TO: State and Tribal Agencies Administering or Supervising the Administration of Title IV-E of the Social Security Act

SUBJECT: Updated National Model Foster Family Home Licensing Standards, Kin-Specific Foster Family Home Licensing Standards, and Updates to the Responsibilities and Recommendations for Licensing Agencies

LEGAL AND RELATED REFERENCES: Public Law (Pub. L.) 115-123

PURPOSE: To update the National Model Foster Family Home Licensing Standards to remove unnecessary administrative burden and clarify their intended application to non-kinship foster families as title IV-E agencies adopt kin-specific licensing standards.

BACKGROUND:

Legislative Context. The President signed the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018, Pub. L. 115-123 into law on February 9, 2018. Pub. L. 115-123 includes the Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) in Division E, Title VII. Section 50731 of the FFPSA directs the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to “identify reputable model licensing standards with respect to the licensing of foster family homes (as defined in section 472(c)(1) of the Social Security Act).” In response to this directive, the Children’s Bureau (CB) solicited comments through a Federal Register Notice ([83 FR 37495](#), August 1, 2018). After analyzing the comments, CB issued ACYF-CB-IM-19-01 [National Model Foster Family Home Licensing Standards \(National Model\)](#) on February 4, 2019.

Final Rule on Kin-Specific Foster Home Approval Standards. On September 28, 2023, the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) issued a final rule, Separate Licensing or

Approval Standards for Relative or Kinship Foster Family Homes ([88 FR 66700](#)) that revised the definition of “foster family home” to establish one set of foster family home licensing or approval standards for all relative or kinship foster family homes that are different from the set of standards used to license or approve all non-relative foster family homes.

INFORMATION:

The child welfare system suffers from too few foster homes relative to the number of foster kids. The most recent national estimate is that there are 57 licensed foster homes for every 100 foster kids (see [ACF Unveils New Initiative to Strengthen American Families – A Home For Every Child](#), November 24, 2025). To help achieve ACF’s goal of *A Home for Every Child*, states should, among other things, assess the barriers they place on current and prospective foster homes.

The National Model Foster Home Licensing Standards in Attachment A have been revised to streamline standards that we understand may be barriers to placement and licensure and that also may not promote safety (see [ACF Unveils New Initiative to Strengthen American Families – A Home For Every Child](#), November 24, 2025). CB retained the same eight categories as in the original National Model Standards, which cover the essential components of licensing a foster family home.

Section 471(a)(10) of the Act requires title IV-E agencies to develop plans that provide for the establishment and maintaining of standards for foster family homes and child care institutions. These standards must be reasonably in accord with related standards developed by national organizations, including standards related to admission policies, safety, sanitation, protection of civil rights, and permit the use of the reasonable prudent parent standard. Agencies should not add any requirements that would violate a prospective or current foster family’s sincerely held religious beliefs or moral convictions. As such, CB has not included any recommendations that would condition licensure on items that would violate religious beliefs or moral convictions.

In Attachment A, CB inserted Kin-Specific Standards as a second column when they differ from the non-relative Model Standards. Since the final rule on kin-specific foster home approval standards went into effect on November 27, 2023, more than 20 title IV-E agencies have been approved by ACF to operate kin-specific licensing.

Separate from updates to Model Standards, Attachment B also includes responsibilities and recommendations for licensing agencies, recognizing that slow processing times and unresponsiveness have served as an impediment to recruiting and retaining foster homes.

The updated final National Model Foster Family Home Licensing Standards and Kin-Specific Foster Family Home Licensing Standards are contained in Attachment A. Additional licensing agency responsibilities and practice recommendations are contained in Attachment B.

Title IV-E Plan Requirements: Title IV-E agencies are not required to submit any new

information in response to this IM. We encourage title IV-E agencies to update their non-kinship/non-relative foster family home licensing standards and adopt kin-specific standards in accordance with this IM, and if they choose to, they should follow the directions in [ACF-ACYF-CB-IM-24-10](#) for plan amendments.

INQUIRIES TO: Children’s Bureau Regional Program Managers

/s/

Alex Adams
Assistant Secretary

Attachments:

- Attachment A – National Model Foster Family Home Licensing Standards and Kin-Specific Foster Family Home Licensing Standards
- Attachment B – Licensing Agency Responsibilities

Disclaimer: IMs provide information or recommendations to states, tribes, grantees, and others on a variety of child welfare issues. IMs do not establish requirements or supersede existing laws or official guidance.

Attachment A – National Model Foster Family Home Licensing Standards and Kin-Specific Foster Family Home Licensing Standards

	Non-Relatives	Relatives/Kin
Foster Family Home Eligibility – Threshold Requirements	Applicants must be age 18 or older. Applicants must be able to communicate with the child, the title IV-E agency, health care providers, and other service providers.	
	Applicants must have income or resources to make timely payments for shelter, food, utility costs, clothing, and other household expenses prior to the addition of a child or children in foster care.	The model definition for who may qualify for kin-specific licensing is: “Individuals related to a child by blood, marriage, tribal custom, and/ or adoption and other individuals who have an emotionally significant relationship with the child or the child’s parents or other family members (often referred to as ‘fictive kin’).”
Foster Family Home Eligibility – Physical and Mental Health	All adults living in the home must disclose current physical limitations, mental health and/or substance abuse issues, and any health conditions or needs that might limit their ability to care for the children. a. Adults living in the home are defined as: “any relative or non-relative age 18 or over who regularly lives, shares common areas, and sleeps in a home. An individual who is living, sharing common areas, and sleeping in a home temporarily for more than two consecutive weeks is considered an adult living in the home.” b. In some situations, there may be an adult who is currently not in the home, such as an adult child away at school, or a family member away on deployment or working. Agencies have discretion to license the family now and update the license when this adult returns, just as they would update the license if a new adult begins to live in the home later.	

	Non-Relatives	Relatives/Kin
<p>Foster Family Home Eligibility – Background Checks</p>	<p>Applicants must submit to fingerprint-based criminal record and child abuse and neglect registry checks as required in section 471(a)(20) of the Social Security Act (the Act).</p> <p>All adults living in an applicants’ home seeking licensure by a Tribe must submit to fingerprint-based criminal record and child abuse and neglect registry checks as required by the Indian Child Protection and Family Violence Prevention Act, 25 U.S.C. § 3207(d)(2).</p> <p>Agencies must conduct a name-based state/local/Tribal criminal background check and sex offender registry check of the applicants and other adults living in the home.</p> <p>Agencies are discouraged from automatically disqualifying applicants on the basis of a criminal history beyond the federal list of automatically disqualifying felony convictions in section 471(a)(20) of the Act.</p> <p>If an applicant or an adult living in the home was convicted for a crime other than those included in section 471(a)(20) of the Act, the agency should consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The type of crime ● The amount of time that has passed since the crime ● The age at the time of conviction ● The seriousness of the crime ● Evidence of rehabilitation since conviction (may include completion of treatment, court-ordered classes, community service, character references) ● The total number and types of crimes, and ages at the time they were committed ● The role the individual plans to have with the child 	<p>Agencies are encouraged to use the Kin-Specific Foster Home Approval Standards template form to holistically evaluate candidates’ histories relative to the child(ren) in question.</p>

	Non-Relatives	Relatives/Kin
Foster Family Home Eligibility – Home Study	<p>Applicants must have completed an agency home study, which should include the following elements:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. At least one scheduled on-site visit to assess the home to ensure that it meets the state, tribal and/or local standards applicable to the safety and care of the home. b. At least one scheduled interview for each adult living in the home to assess the family’s capacity to meet the needs of a child or children in foster care. c. The title IV-E agency has discretion on whether to interview or observe each adult living in the home based on his or her age and development. 	<p>Agencies are encouraged to use the Kin Caregiver Assessment template provided as part of the Kin-Specific Foster Family Home Licensing Standards</p> <p>The Kin Caregiver Assessment includes discussion questions focused on the kin caregiver’s ability to meet the needs of the child(ren).</p>
Foster Family Home Health and Safety – Living Space & Condition of the Home	<p>The home must have:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. An adequate supply of safe water for drinking and bathing (which could include bottled water); b. Properly operating kitchen facilities with a sink, refrigerator, and cooking equipment; c. At least one toilet, sink, and tub or shower in properly operating condition; d. Heating and/or cooling that is appropriate for the geographic region. This may include: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. Ceiling and floor fans, portable or window A/C units, swamp cooler ii. Using open doors or windows to create cross-ventilation iii. Kerosene and propane heaters, space heater iv. Wood-burning stoves e. Access to electricity and/or lighting, based on the children’s needs. For example, a child with medical needs may require specific electricity for medication storage or a CPAP. f. Be free from rodents and insect infestation. 	

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> g. Pets at the home are safe to be around (that is, do not pose a health or safety threat). h. Outdoor space(s) that children will have access to are safe, based on their age and development. Consider swimming pools and hot tubs, bodies of water like lakes and rivers, street traffic, railroad tracks, farm animals and equipment, trampolines, and wells. Prudent parenting standards apply here: families should be expected to exercise good judgment about safety and supervision, though agencies may provide specific supports, such as baby gates, when needed. i. Home and surrounding areas are free from any other safety hazards that children have access to, such as overflowing garbage, uncontained pet waste, mold, peeling lead paint, or excessive debris. j. Tools and hazardous materials are stored out of reach of children based on age, history, and ability of children. This may include power or yard tools, saws, axes, and knives; cleaning supplies, pesticides, and gasoline; alcohol, and tobacco. This requirement is not meant to preclude a child from access to cleaning supplies or yard tools to complete developmentally-appropriate chores. k. Prescription and over-the-counter medications (including vitamins, herbal remedies, and pet medications) are stored out of reach of children, except for children who take their own medication, or who have emergency medication, like an EpiPen or inhaler. l. Firearms, weapons, and ammunition stored locked, and inaccessible to children. m. The family (including children) has access to a working phone or way to call for help in an emergency. This includes cell phones, landlines, Wi-Fi calling, and shortwave radios. 	
Foster Family Home Capacity	<p>The total number of children in foster care in a foster family home must not exceed six consistent with section 472(c)(1)(A)(ii)(III) of the Act. Per section 472(c)(1)(B) of the Act, the number of foster children cared for in a foster family home may exceed this numerical limitation at the option of the title IV-E agency for any of the following reasons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. To allow a parenting youth in foster care to remain with the child of the parenting youth; b. To allow siblings to remain together; c. To allow a child with an established meaningful relationship with the family to remain with the family; and 	

	Non-Relatives	Relatives/Kin
	d. To allow a family with special training or skills to provide care to a child who has a severe disability.	
Foster Family Home Sleeping Arrangements	<p>Applicants must provide a safe sleeping space including sleeping supplies, such as a mattress and linens, for each individual child, as appropriate for the child’s needs and age and similar to other household members.</p> <p>A child under 12 months of age in an individual crib may share a room used as a sleeping space with the foster parent. Foster parents must not bed-share with infants. A child under 12 months of age may sleep in a bassinet, crib, pack and play, Native American baby board, or a baby box.</p>	
	<p>A child over the age of 5 must not share a room used as a sleeping space with a child of the opposite sex.</p>	<p>Consider flexibility for those who have limited living space. Rooms other than bedrooms can be sleeping spaces. If using a common space for sleep, ensure the child has space for privacy.</p> <p>Children who are relatives may share a bed (if over age 1) or a room used as a sleeping space with the children’s consent and with agency approval. Consider factoring in the age and sex of the children. Ask children (without caregiver present) what they are comfortable with for room and sleeping arrangements. For a child with past sexual trauma or sexualized behaviors, it is especially important that they have their own sleeping space.</p>
Foster Family Home Emergency Preparedness, Fire Safety, and Evacuation Plans	<p>The applicant’s home must meet the following fire safety requirements:</p> <p>a. At least one exit (a door or window) from each child’s</p>	

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	<p>sleeping space that is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Unblocked ii. Large enough for a child to get through iii. An exit to the outside <ul style="list-style-type: none"> b. Have at least one smoke detector on each floor; c. Have at least one carbon monoxide detector, if the home has a gas appliance (boiler, furnace, stove, dryer, water heater), propane space heater, fireplace, wood stove, or attached garage; d. Have at least one operable fire extinguisher that is easy to get to; e. Be free of obvious fire hazards, such as exposed wires or electrical outlets, flammable materials within 3 feet of a fire source (like a space heater or wood stove), or multiple extension cords connected together; f. Maintain first aid supplies. <p>Applicants must commit to practicing an evacuation drill, in case of a fire or natural disaster, with the children within the first month of placement.</p>	
Transportation	<p>Applicants must be able to transport the children to medical appointments, activities, and other appointments. Reliable transportation can include a personal vehicle, public transportation, access to someone else’s vehicle, and/or a plan for others to support in transportation.</p>	
Training	<p>Applicants must complete pre-licensing training on the following topics: rights, roles, responsibilities and expectations of foster parents; agency structure, purpose, policies, and services; laws and regulations; the impact of childhood trauma; managing child behaviors; first aid (including cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) for the ages of the children in placement) and medication administration; and the importance of maintaining meaningful connections</p>	<p>No training is required for licensure, though agencies are encouraged to provide relevant training for caregivers on an ongoing and accessible basis after licensure (e.g., at convenient times and locations, with options for transportation and/or childcare).</p>

	Non-Relatives	Relatives/Kin
	<p>between the child and parents, including regular visitation. Foster parents must participate in ongoing training to receive instruction to support their parental roles and ensure the parent is up to date with agency requirements. Further, this training may also include child-specific training and/or may address issues relevant to the general population of children in foster care.</p>	
Foster Parent Assurances	<p>Applicants must agree to comply with their roles and responsibilities as discussed with the title IV-E agency once a child is placed in their care. The title IV-E agency must require assurances including:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Applicants will not use corporal or degrading punishment. b. Applicants will not use any illegal substances, abuse alcohol by consuming it in excess amounts, or abuse legal prescription and/or nonprescription drugs by consuming them in excess amounts or using them contrary to as indicated. c. Applicants and their guests will not smoke in the foster family home, in any vehicle used to transport the child, or in the presence of the child in foster care, except as part of a cultural or religious ceremony. d. Applicants will adhere to the title IV-E agency's reasonable and prudent parent standard per section 472(c)(1)(A)(ii)(I) of the Act. 	

Attachment B: Licensing Agency Responsibilities

a. The licensing agency shall cover reasonable expenses, when necessary, to ensure homes meet the foster home licensing standards, including the home health and safety requirements, such as providing a smoke detector, car seat, and/or fire extinguisher, especially for kin placements and high-priority non-kin homes.

b. The licensing agency is encouraged to establish procedures to fast-track:

(i) Applicants who have a successful track record of serving as a foster home in other states as defined by maintaining a license in good standing.

(ii) Applicants who are reactivating a previous license if that previous license was relinquished in good standing, and the applicant attests to maintaining conformity with the standards established by the licensing agency.

(iii) Applications from licensed kin caregivers in good standing to become general licensed foster homes.

(iv) Applicants who meet an adverse placement score need, defined as a home that can accommodate a large sibling group, speaks a needed language, and/or is located in a community with too few available homes.

(v) Kin interested in being licensed, if kin-specific licensing standards do not yet exist in that jurisdiction.

c. The licensing agency is encouraged to establish procedures to issue a license within 90 days of completed application for non-relatives (with a goal of 60 days for fast-tracked candidates) and within 7 days of placement for kin (with the goal of completing licensure on the same day as placement).

d. Out-of-state child abuse and neglect checks are currently the longest step in licensing families, especially those who have recently moved across state lines. Agencies are encouraged to seek technical assistance if their average response time exceeds one week.

To improve response times, agencies are strongly encouraged to adopt the model "[Out-of-State Child Abuse/Neglect Registry Check Form](#)" template, and to streamline fulfillment of out-of-state child abuse and neglect registry check requests by:

- Not charging a fee
- Not requiring a separate permission form, but rather accepting attestation from the requesting jurisdiction that they have consent on file

- Accepting and fulfilling requests electronically
- Not requiring a witnessed or notarized signature
- Not requesting any more information than what is absolutely required to conduct this step
- Using a general inbox / address for receiving requests (instead of one individual)