

**Initial Application and Completion of the Foster Care and Adoption Home Study**

**SUMMIT COUNTY CHILDREN SERVICES**

<p><b>ORC:</b> 3107.031; 3107.032; 3107.10; 5103.03; 5103.0322; 5153.166</p> <p><b>OAC:</b> 5101:2-48-12; 5101:2-5-22; 5101:2-7-12; 5101:2-5-20; 5101:2-48-09; 5101:2-7-02</p> <p><b>USC:</b> 29 USC §794; Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990; 42 USC § 622</p> <p><b>CFR:</b> 45 CFR Part 84</p>	<p><b>ORIGINAL:</b> 6/19/18</p> <p><b>REVISIONS:</b> N/A</p> <p><b>RELATED FORM(S):</b> JFS 01691; JFS 01653; JFS 01681; JFS 01530; JFS 01200; JFS 01348; JFS 01673 and 01673-A</p> <p><b>RELATED PROCEDURE/POLICY(IES):</b> Caregiver Reasonable &amp; Prudent Parent Standard; Discipline &amp; Care; Foster Parent Training; Continuing Training, Extensions and Waivers; Termination, Revocation or Denial of a Foster Home Certificate</p>
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All Staff       Bargaining Unit       Non-Bargaining       Management

**POLICY:**

The application process is an opportunity for prospective foster and adoptive parents to learn about Summit County Children Services (SCCS) and the needs of the children in Agency custody. All individuals interested in becoming a licensed foster parent or jointly approved for foster care and adoption shall submit an Application for Child Placement in accordance with the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) rules.

SCCS shall conduct a family assessment of prospective foster and adoptive applicants that will include home visits, interviews of household members and information gathering to determine children best suited for placement with the prospective family.

**PROCEDURE:**

SCCS must complete home studies for families who are interested in becoming foster caregivers and foster-to-adopt parents. SCCS will not complete home studies for families interested in adoption only unless it is for a specific child in the permanent custody of SCCS or another public children services agency (PCSA). If requested, SCCS shall provide information and referral services to families interested in adoption only services.

If a foster care applicant decides during the home study process to also become approved for adoption, or if a child-specific adoptive applicant decides during the home

study process to also become a certified foster caregiver, the home study documentation and training completed up to that point may be utilized as long as the documentation or training has not expired upon completion of the home study. Applicants shall not be required to duplicate documentation as a result of a new application date.

SCCS shall review the application with the prospective applicant, and will assist in completing the application and securing all required documents. SCCS shall not accept an incomplete Application for Child Placement (JFS 01691) and shall not begin the home study process prior to receipt of the complete and accurate application. Applications submitted with knowingly false information or documentation shall be denied, and shall not be used to initiate a home study. The application must list the full legal name of each adult member of a couple residing in the home, a single person, or each co-parent residing in the home. SCCS shall not accept more than one application per household and shall not recommend certification of more than one foster home per household.

Participation in the application and home study process requires prospective foster/adoptive applicants to provide documentation of and be a minimum of 21 years of age for foster care and a minimum of 18 years of age for adoption, a resident of Summit County or contiguous counties or applying for placement of a child in the custody of SCCS and a legal resident of the United States. If SCCS has reason to believe that the applicant is not a legal resident of the United States, SCCS shall request the applicant to provide a copy of immigration documents issued by the Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement of the United States Department of Homeland Security allowing the person to reside in the United States. If immigration documents show that the person is a conditional permanent resident of the United States or that the person is not a permanent resident of the United States, the application shall not be considered for foster care unless the applicant is being considered for placement of a specific child and the person meets the definition of "kin" to the child.

Upon receipt of the completed application, SCCS will review, date and mark the application as "received" and will forward the application to the supervisor for assignment.

SCCS must commence the home study within 30 days of receiving the completed JFS 01691 by, at a minimum, scheduling an interview with the applicant or assuring the applicant is informed of the necessary materials required for the assessor to complete the home study. If SCCS determines that a home study cannot be initiated, SCCS must send written notification within fifteen 15 days to the applicant stating the reason for not initiating the home study and a description of the policy for requesting a review of the Agency's decision.

The foster care and adoption home study shall be conducted by a caseworker that is a trained Assessor as defined by the Ohio Revised Code.

The Agency must complete the home study within 180 days of the date SCCS received the application. If SCCS fails to commence or complete the home study as outlined above, SCCS shall document the reasons for failure to meet one or both of these requirements in the JFS 01673.

If SCCS initiates an adoptive home study with an applicant who resides in another county, SCCS must notify the PCSA in the county the applicant resides, in writing, within ten days of the initiation of the home study. The notification must include:

1. The applicant's name.
2. The applicant's address.
3. The applicant's telephone number.
4. The names and dates of birth of all household members at the time of the application.
5. A request for any relevant information, if known, including at a minimum:
  - a. Confirmation of household members as determined by a review of agency records
  - b. Information relating to any previous foster care or adoption applications and/or placements

The home study process consists of, but is not limited to, the following:

1. Verification that the applicant has completed all of the pre-placement training required within the eighteen (18) month period immediately prior to the date the agency recommends the foster home for certification. SCCS shall provide each foster/adoptive home pre-placement training on the Administrative Code rules and SCCS's policies and procedures including the Caregiver Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard and Discipline and Care.
2. Completion of at least one face-to-face interview with the prospective foster/adoptive applicant(s) and all household members over the age of four in the applicant's home.
3. A criminal record check conducted for all adult members of the home and any other persons as required by ODJFS. The criminal records check shall include a local police/sheriff's check as well as a Bureau of Criminal Identification and Investigation (BCII) check and a Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) check.
4. SCCS shall request a central registry of abuse and neglect search from any state in which the applicant or other adult household member has resided within the five years immediately prior to application. The search results shall be placed in the applicant's file. SCCS reserves the right to refuse to place children in homes with a history of indicated or substantiated cases of child abuse or neglect.
5. SCCS shall conduct a search of SACWIS for each applicant and each adult household member of the applicant's home to determine the suitability of the applicant to provide foster care or adoption services.
6. Three (3) satisfactory personal reference statements from persons not related to or residing with the applicant(s). The applicant and all household members must sign a release of information so any other agency, organization or employer with which the applicant was previously certified/approved or provided care and supervision of children can be contacted as a reference. SCCS shall also contact all adult children of the applicant to provide a reference.

7. Medical Statement for Foster Caregiver/Adoptive Applicant and all Household Members (JFS 01653) that indicate the applicant(s) and household members are free from any physical, emotional, or mental condition that would endanger children or impair the ability of the household members to care for a foster or adopted child. JFS 01653 must be completed by a licensed physician, physician assistant, clinical nurse specialist, certified nurse practitioner, or certified nurse midwife within twelve (12) months prior to approval/initial recommendation for certification. Any written documentation of the physical examination must be completed by the individual who conducted the examination.
8. Verification of income sufficient to meet the basic needs of the household and to make timely payment of shelter costs, utility bills, and other debts. To show this, the applicant(s) shall provide:
  - a. A completed Applicant Financial Statement (JFS 01681).
  - b. Proof of income for the household for the most recent tax year prior to the date of application.
  - c. Proof of income for the household for a two month period.
  - d. At least one utility bill for each utility necessary to maintain the household dated no more than 6 months prior to recommendation for certification/approval
  - e. Previous bankruptcies have been discharged for at least six (6) months.
9. SCCS must complete the Large Family Assessment (JFS 01530) at the time of the home study when:
  - a. A family has a total of five or more children residing in the home at the time of the home study, including foster children and children in kinship care, or
  - b. A family will have a total of five or more children residing in the home based upon the number of children residing in the home at the time of the home study, including foster children and children in kinship care, and the number of children the family will be approved to adopt.
10. A completed Fire Inspection Report for Homes or Residential Facilities Certified by ODJFS (JFS 01200) or other form used for a local or state fire inspection certifying that the applicant's home is free from conditions hazardous to the safety of children. The fire inspection must be completed within twelve (12) months prior to approval/initial recommendation for certification.
11. A well water test, if required, by an approved Ohio water testing laboratory that verifies the home has a steady supply of safe drinking water.
12. A safety inspection of the home conducted by the caseworker and documented on the Safety Audit (JFS 01348) no more than 6 months prior to recommendation for certification/approval.
13. A copy of a marriage certificate or other verification of current marriage and/or a copy of divorce decree(s) or other verification of divorces.

14. The applicant must complete and sign the Child Characteristics Checklist for Foster Care and/or Adoption (JFS 01673-A) which indicates the acceptable characteristics of the child the applicant is requesting. The JFS 01673-A must be attached to the Assessment for Child Placement form (JFS 01673).
15. Completion of other assessments and reports as deemed necessary to ensure a safe home environment.

The determination of the specific number, age and sex of children to be placed in a particular foster home is a joint responsibility between the caregiver and the caseworker based on the SCCS assessment of the caregiver's capability and physical facilities.

SCCS may request additional documentation such as a mental health, substance abuse or a parenting evaluation and an additional criminal record checks if needed, to determine the suitability of the applicant prior to approval or denial of the foster home certification or adoptive home approval.

Failure by the prospective foster/adoptive family to provide any required documentation within the assessment time frames as outlined in this procedure, or to comply with any steps necessary to complete the assessment, could result in returning the application as incomplete or a denial of the certification/approval.

Upon completion of the assessment including the 01673 and all supporting documentation, the caseworker shall recommend the home for certification/approval. The recommendation for foster home certification shall be routed to ODFJS in SACWIS. Upon approval by ODJFS, SCCS shall generate the foster home certificate. The recommendation for adoption approval shall be routed to the supervisor in SACWIS. Upon approval, SCCS will mail the applicant an approval letter.

The applicant(s) must be notified by letter of the approval or denial of the home study within ten (10) days after the home study is approved or denied. Approval for foster/adoptive placement notifications shall include:

1. The date of approval and expiration
2. Whether certified as a foster home.
3. Whether jointly approved for adoption and certified as a foster home.
4. A description of the type of child(ren) the applicant is approved to foster/adopt.
5. Information about the update/recertification process, if applicable.

Denial for foster/adoptive placement notifications must include:

1. A detailed explanation of the reason for denial which sets forth all of the reasons upon which the denial was based.
2. A description of procedures for an agency review.

SCCS does not discriminate in approving or disapproving a home study on the basis of disability in violation of 29 USC §794; Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990.

As prohibited by the Multiethnic Placement Act of 1994 (MEPA), SCCS may not deny any person the opportunity to become a foster caregiver on the basis of race, color, or national origin of the person, or of any foster child or children involved.

In the event that SCCS contracts an outside service provider to perform any of the processes listed above, the contracted provider shall abide by this policy.