

## 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; 5101:2-5-13</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> 06/19/2018</p> <p><b>REVISION/REVIEW:</b> 05/28/2021; 07/20/2022; 06/27/2023</p> <p><b>NEXT REVIEW:</b> 06/27/2028</p> <p><b>RELATED FORM(S):</b> JFS 01691; JFS 01653; JFS 01681; JFS 01530; JFS 01200; JFS 01348; JFS 01673 and 01673-A, JFS 01692; JFS 01315</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; Multi-Ethnic Placement Act (MEPA), Nondiscrimination Requirements, Individualized Child Assessment, and Home Study Procedures</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 SCCS custody. All individuals interested in becoming a licensed foster parent and approved for foster care and adoption shall submit an Application for Child Placement (JFS 01691) form in accordance with the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) rules.

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

### **PROCEDURE:**

Upon request of an application, SCCS must send prospective foster/adoptive parents an application packet within seven (7) days of receiving the request for the application. The

application packet includes information on how to access the rules associated with the foster care licensing process, which are contained in Chapters 5101:2-5 and 5101:2-7 of the Ohio Administrative Code, as well as other documents needed for the home study.

Once the application is received, the foster care supervisor reviews the application. If the application is incomplete, the application is sent back to the prospective foster/adoptive parent to complete. If the application is complete, the application is assigned to a foster home coordinator who will meet with the applicant, and if needed, assist the applicant(s) in completing the application, including signing the application and securing all required documents that were provided to the applicant in the application packet.

SCCS shall not accept an incomplete Application for Child Placement (JFS 01691) form, and shall not begin the home study process prior to receipt of the complete and accurate Application for Child Placement. Applications submitted with knowingly false information or documentation are denied and shall not be used to initiate a home study. An individual who submits an incomplete application will not have an opportunity for a hearing pursuant to Chapter 119 of the Revised Code.

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 meet the following home study requirements:

1. Be a minimum of 18 years of age.
2. A legal resident of the United States.
3. A resident of Summit County or contiguous counties or has placement of a child in SCCS custody.
4. Complete an Applicant Financial Statement (JFS 01681) form to show that the household has an income sufficient to meet the basic needs of the household, and previous bankruptcies have been discharged for at least six (6) months. To do so, applicants must provide:
  - a. Proof of income for the most recent tax year.
  - b. Proof of income for the household for a two-month period.
  - c. At least one utility bill for each utility necessary to maintain the household.
5. Complete a criminal record check (Local, BCI, FBI) with successful clearance for all adult household members (per OAC 5101:2-48-10 and 5101:2-7-02).
6. Complete a central registry search of all adult members of the household, including searches in all states where an adult member of the household has lived in the past five years.
7. Complete a check of the National Sex Offender Registry website for each applicant and adult household member.

8. Conduct a SACWIS search of all adult household members and create a summary of all allegations where abuse or neglect occurred. Upon licensure of the foster/adoptive home, the agency will use the summary to determine appropriate child placement into the home.
9. Provide medical statements (JFS 01653) that demonstrate that the applicant's general health status is adequate to provide foster care or adoption services. The statements must be signed by a licensed physician, physician assistant, clinical nurse specialist, certified nurse practitioner, or certified midwife. Medical statements are also required for all household members.
10. Provide any additional examination by a physician, psychologist or other licensed professional if the applicant has suffered a serious illness or injury in the past year or it is determined to be necessary by the agency to ensure safety, health or care of a child placed in the home.
11. Provide Immunization records for all household members.
  - a. Homes certified before June 1, 2020, do not have to comply with immunization requirements.
  - b. Homes certified on or after June 1, 2020:
    - i. All children who are household members are to be up to date on immunizations consistent with the recommendations of the American Academy of Pediatrics, the advisory committee on immunization practices (ACIP) of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the American Academy of Family Physicians, unless the immunization is contrary to the child's health as documented by a licensed health care professional or for reasons of conscience, including religious convictions.
    - ii. If a home is caring for infants and children with special medical needs, they are to have their annual influenza vaccine consistent with the recommendations of the ACIP, unless the immunization is contrary to the individual's health as documented by a licensed health care professional or for reasons of conscience, including religious convictions.
    - iii. All household members in a home caring for infants are to be up to date on the pertussis vaccine unless the immunization is contrary to the individual's health as documented by a licensed health care professional or for reasons of conscience, including religious convictions.
12. Obtain names and signed releases for three (3) personal references. One of the required references is to be from a relative and at least two references from non-relatives.
13. Obtain signed releases for agencies that previously certified the applicant as a foster caregiver.
14. Obtain a reference from all adult children of the applicant. If the adult children are unable or unwilling to provide a reference this shall be addressed during the home study process and documented on the home study.

15. The applicant must inform SCCS if the applicant has had a license revoked in the past five (5) years.
16. Obtain an inspection of the prospective foster home by a state certified fire safety inspector or the state fire marshal's office using the Fire Inspection Report for Homes or Residential Facilities Certified by ODJFS (JFS 1200) form, or other form used for a local or state fire inspection.
  - a. The costs related to the fire inspection are the responsibility of the applicant/caregiver.
  - b. The approval must have occurred within twelve months prior to the initial recommendation for certification.
17. Document that the residence satisfactorily meets all safety standards by completing the Safety Audit (JFS 1348).

SCCS must commence the home study within 30 days of receiving the completed JFS 1691 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 adoption assessor as defined by the Ohio Revised Code.

SCCS must complete the home study within 180 days of the date SCCS receives 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 requirements in the home study document, JFS 0167.

If SCCS initiates a foster care and/or 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 (10) 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. The age and any special needs of the prospective adoptive child.
6. 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.

In addition to what is listed above, the home study process consists of, but is not limited

to, the following:

1. Verification that the applicant(s) completed all 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 based on his or her age and level of development.
3. 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.
4. 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.
5. 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.
6. 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.
7. A safety inspection of the home conducted by the caseworker and documented on the Safety Audit (JFS 01348) no more than six (6) months prior to recommendation for certification/approval.
8. 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.
9. The applicant(s) 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).

10. 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 applicant(s) and the caseworker based on the SCCS assessment of the caregiver's applicant(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(s) prior to approval or denial of the foster home certification and/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 initial certification/approval.

Waivers shall be considered on a case-by-case basis for kinship caregivers who have an approved kinship assessment and are foster care applicants. Waivers shall only be considered when the request is for a non-safety issue. The granting of a waiver of any requirement imposed by Chapters 5101:2-5, 5101:2-7, 5101:2-39 and 5101:2-42 of the Administrative Code is a discretionary act of the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) based upon documentation as to why the agency or foster care and or adoptive applicant is not in compliance. The refusal of ODJFS to grant a waiver in whole or in part shall be final and shall not be construed as creating any rights to a hearing under Chapter 119 of the Revised Code.

The following non-safety requirements may be submitted to ODJFS for a waiver based on the assessment of the kinship caregiver's individual circumstances:

1. Physical Exam/Medical Statement for applicant(s).
2. Medical Statements for other household members.
3. Background checks-do not have to be completed again if already completed for a currently approved Kinship home assessment, the assessor must recheck the criminal background checks that indicate a history to ensure the victim of a convicted crime was not a minor.
4. References
5. Adult child references
6. Foster Caregiver Preplacement Training (5101:2-5-33)
7. Must not deprive other residents of a bed.
8. Bedroom can accommodate more than 4 children.
9. Separate space and/or room for belongings
10. Bedroom does not require pass through of another room
11. Bedroom has floor to ceiling walls
12. Bedroom is comparable to other children in the home
13. Children cannot share a bedroom with opposite sex
14. Children cannot share a bedroom with an adult if the child is over one year old.
15. Child must have a permanent bed
16. Additional Requirements for Treatment Foster Care and Caregiver
17. Additional Requirements for Medically Fragile

Upon completion of the home study assessment including the JFS 01673 and all supporting documentation, the caseworker shall recommend the home for certification/approval. The recommendation for foster home certification shall be routed to ODJFS in SACWIS. Upon approval by ODJFS, SCCS shall generate the foster home certificate. The recommendation for adoption approval is completed by the supervisor in SACWIS. Upon approval, SCCS will provide the applicant(s) a copy of their foster care license and or adoption 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 is recorded on the JFS 01315 form, Notification of Denial of Initial Certification, Recertification or Revocation of a Foster Home Certificate and 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.

The foster care license and adoption approval is valid for two years. A foster home can only be certified/licensed by one recommending agency at a time. The foster home certificate/license is only valid for the address on the certificate/license. A kinship foster care license where waivers have been approved, are child specific to the kinship placements for which the home became licensed.

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.

SCCS does not accept applications (JFS 01691 Application for Child Placement) and complete home studies for families interested in adoption only unless it is for a specific child in the permanent custody of SCCS and where the child is already placed in the family's home, or as requested by another public children services agency (PCSA). If an application is requested for adoption only, SCCS shall provide information and referral services to families interested in adoption only services.

SCCS does not accept applications (JFS 01691 Application for Child Placement) and complete home studies for families interested in child specific foster care and/or adoption unless it is for a child who is already placed as a kinship placement with the family and where the kinship family has an approved kinship assessment.

Kinship caregivers who become licensed foster parents for children placed in their home

where waivers were granted as part of the licensing process are only permitted to be a licensed kinship foster home for those specific children placed in the kinship home. If the kinship foster home chooses to become a traditional family foster home, all waivers will need to be rectified and a recommendation for approval is sent to ODJFS through SACWIS. If the kinship foster home intends to adopt the children placed in their home, a JFS 1692 Application to Adopt a Foster Child is completed, and any applicable waivers need to be rectified prior to recommendation for approval.

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.

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.