




**STATE OF WASHINGTON**  
**DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN, YOUTH, AND FAMILIES**  
1500 Jefferson Street, SE • P.O. Box 40975 • Olympia WA 98504-0975

**POLICY MEMO**

June 27, 2023

TO: Child Welfare Employees

FROM: Natalie Green, Assistant Secretary 

RE: Changes to [4250. Placement Out-of-Home and Conditions for Return Home](#) policy

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2023

SUNSET REVIEW DATE: July 1, 2024

**Purpose**

The purpose of this memo is to provide guidance to Child Welfare (CW) employees on the updated policy and procedure requirements to align with [House Bill \(HB\) 1227: Keeping Families Together Act](#).

This policy is under full review for further revisions, but the following changes will take effect July 1, 2023:

**New Procedural Requirements**

Decision to place in Out-of-Home Care

When caseworkers are considering out-of-home placement, they must:

- Contact the tribe if there is reason to know children are or may be Indian children, per [Indian Child Welfare \(ICW\) Child Protective Services for Indian Children](#).
- Use the safety framework to identify if a child is unsafe with the inability to safety plan. If the analysis indicates you are unable to safety plan with an unsafe child, this would indicate removal is necessary.
  - If removal is necessary to prevent imminent physical harm due to child abuse or neglect (CA/N), including that which results from sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, or a pattern of severe neglect refer to the updated [Dependency Petition Process](#) policy memo.
- Follow the [Hospital Holds](#) policy memo, if a physician or the administrator of a hospital or similar institution believes detaining the child or youth on a hospital hold is necessary to prevent imminent physical harm due to CA/N, if released to their parent or guardian.

Placement in Out-of-Home Care

Caseworkers must complete the following when children and youth are placed in out-of-home care following protective custody or pursuant to a pick-up order:

- [Diligent efforts](#) to notify both parents and guardians of a removal as soon as possible, even if they were not living with them prior to placement.
- [Reasonable efforts](#) to assess the parent or guardian that was not residing with the children or youth at the time of removal to determine their ability to care for the child or youth.
- Follow the [ICW Policies and Procedures](#) when there is reason to know the children are or may be Indian children.

## Placement Settings

Prior to placing a child or youth, caseworkers must:

- Identify relatives and suitable person placements immediately when children or youth are placed in out-of-home care, with relatives or suitable persons being the preferred placement.
- Make out-of-home placement decisions for the child or youth prior to the establishment of dependency in the least disruptive and most family like setting while following the [Kinship Care: Searching for, placing with, and Supporting Relatives and Suitable Other Persons and Placements with Unlicensed Relatives or Suitable Persons](#) policy memo.
- Make out-of-home placement decisions following the establishment of dependency based on the best interest of the children or youth while considering giving great weight to the parent or guardian and child or youth placement preference. This includes:
  - Licensed or unlicensed relatives or suitable persons.
  - Licensed foster parents.
  - Licensed group care facilities.
- Follow these policies:
  - [Background Checks](#) prior to placing with relatives or suitable persons.
  - [ICW Child Placement Preferences and Relative Search](#) when there is reason to know the children are or may be Indian children.
  - [DCYF 6.04 Administrative Supporting LGBTQIA+ Individuals](#) when making placements for children or youth that are exploring or identify as LGBTQIA+.
  - [Safety Assessment](#) and the corresponding memo.
- Place children and youth with:
  - Relatives or suitable persons when suitable, competent, and available.
  - Licensed foster caregivers only if an approved relative or suitable person placement:
    - is not identified by a parent or caregiver and none are available; or
    - if placement in foster care is necessary to prevent imminent physical harm to the child due to child abuse or neglect, including sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, or a pattern of severe neglect because there is not a relative or suitable person capable of ensuring the child's basic safety; or
    - if placement with a relative or suitable person would hinder efforts at reunification.
  - Continue making efforts to place children and youth with relatives or suitable persons throughout the life of the case.
  - Placement settings that provide stability, are the least restrictive placement setting for the child or youth, are the most family-like setting that meets the child's needs and are least likely to result in placement moves.
  - Contact previous caregivers if children or youth return to out-of-home care if there are no relatives or suitable persons suitable, competent, or available for placement.

## Relatives, Suitable Persons, and Foster Care Placements

Caseworkers must:

- Follow the memos for:
  - [Kinship Care: Searching for, Placing with, and Supporting Relatives and Suitable Other Persons and Placements with Unlicensed Relatives and Suitable Persons](#)
  - [Safety Assessment](#)
- Respond to all interested relatives and document in FamLink within seven calendar days of receiving the Relative Search Unit (RSU) relative search results. Caseworkers must

initiate and continue searches for relatives and suitable persons throughout the life of the case regardless of when the Relative Search Results come back.

- Review Relative Search Outcomes tab monthly when children or youth are not placed with a relative or experiencing placement instability.
- Request an additional relative search for children and youth when the following are met:
  - The child or youth remains in foster care, and it has been more than 12 months since a previous search was completed.
  - All interested relatives have been assessed and it has been determined they are not placement options.
  - The child or youth is legally-free and not placed with relatives.
- Relative search requests may include biological relatives (excluding biological parents) of adopted children or youth when a signed consent is received from either the:
  - Adoptive parents
  - Adopted youth aged 12 years or older and their attorney
- Caseworkers may discontinue searching for relatives for the purpose of placement only when children or youth are placed with relative caregivers.

### **Questions**

If you have any questions, please contact Paula McJohnson, Engagement Program Manager, at [paula.mcjohnson@dcyf.wa.gov](mailto:paula.mcjohnson@dcyf.wa.gov) or 360-790-7151.

Cc: Brenda Villarreal