



WASHINGTON STATE  
Department of  
Children, Youth, and Families



Report to the Washington State Legislature  
and Office of Financial Management

**HB 2008**  
*Caseload Forecast and Licensed Foster Home Capacity*

# CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY ..... 1

NEED FOR LICENSED FOSTER HOMES ..... 2

SUPPORT RESOURCES FOR PARENTS..... 5

BEST PRACTICE FRAMEWORK ..... 7

DEPARTMENT POLICIES AFFECTING RECRUITMENT & RETENTION ..... 8

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is prepared in compliance with House Bill 2008 (2018) Sec. 7 (1) (a-c), which requires the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF, or the Department) to “conduct a review of the most recent caseload forecast of children in foster care and the availability and capacity of licensed foster homes,” and submit to the Office of Financial Management and the appropriate policy and fiscal committees of the Legislature:

1. An analysis of the need for licensed foster homes;
2. A listing of the support resources available for parents in licensed foster homes; and
3. A review of Department policies that affect the recruitment and retention of licensed foster homes.

This report provides a broad overview of the need for and support of licensed foster homes in Washington.

### 1. The Need for Licensed Foster Homes

- a. Although the number of children/youth entering out-of-home placements each year has remained relatively steady, the number of children in out-of-home placements continues to increase each year, driven largely by a multi-year trend of fewer exits from care than entries into care.
- b. At the end of FY 2018, 9,298 children/youth in out-of-home care, and according to the [November Caseload Forecast](#), out-of-home placements are expected to grow by as much as five percent over the 2019-2021 biennium.
- c. Washington has one of the highest kinship care placement rates in the nation, with about 45 percent of all dependent children/youth in out-of-home care in kinship placements.
- d. The vast majority of Washington kinship care providers are unlicensed, and thus do not have access to the financial support of foster care maintenance payments.
- e. At the end of FY 2018, there were 5,109 licensed foster homes in the state. This represents a 3.1 percent increase over the 4,957 licensed foster homes in the state at the end of FY 2017.
- f. The greatest unmet need for suitable foster home placements is specifically related to homes that can safely provide support for children and youth who need more intense behavioral supports.

### 2. Support Resources Available for Licensed Foster Parents

- a. The Department administers numerous support resources available to foster parents, including those provided directly and those provided through contracted services. In addition, a variety of support resources are available for foster parents through other state agencies.
- b. In FY 2019, the Department is adopting a best practice framework for foster parent supports that will improve the delivery of supports to foster parents, as well as provide greater transparency in monitoring improvement.

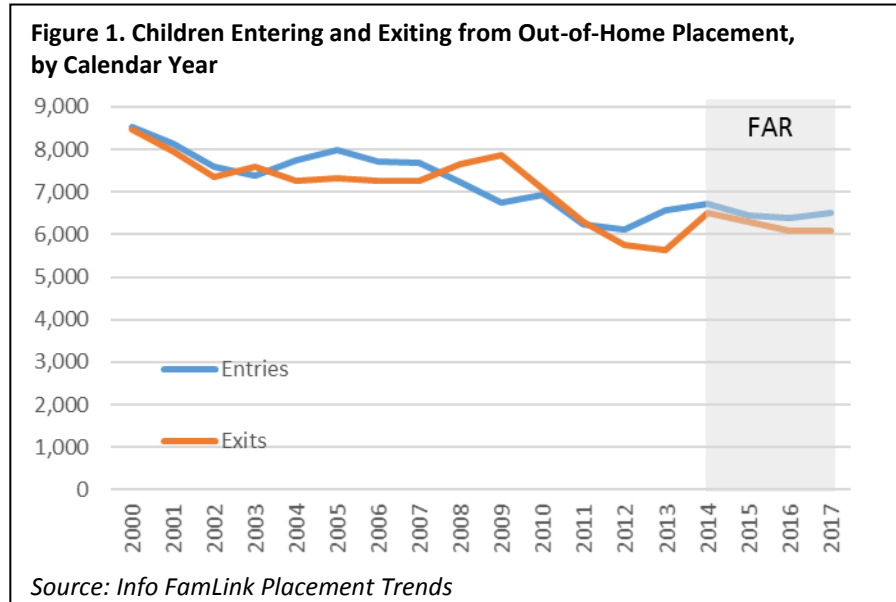
### 3. Department Policies Affecting the Recruitment and Retention of Licensed Foster Homes

- a. While Department policies related to the care of children in out-of-home care can directly and indirectly affect recruitment and retention of foster parents, the Department has identified twenty-four (24) child welfare policies that specifically address the Department’s work with foster parents.
- b. Details on these policies are included below along with feedback the Department has received from foster parents specific to these policies.

## NEED FOR LICENSED FOSTER HOMES

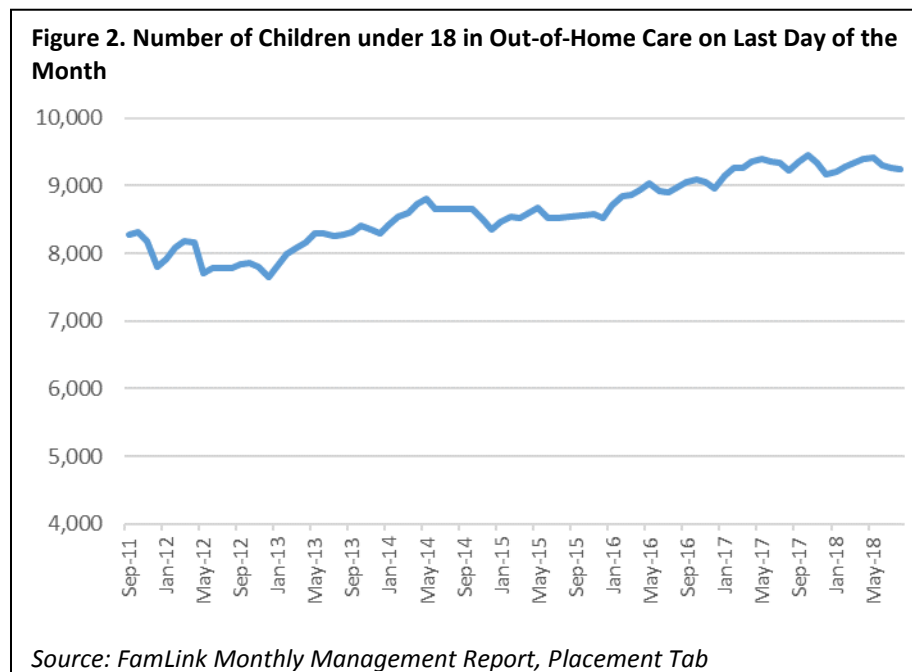
The number of children in out-of-home care continues to increase. Although the number of children entering placement has remained constant for the past few years, exits from care remain slightly lower than entries into care each year, resulting in more children needing care each year.

Figure 1 at right illustrates the relationship between entries into and exits from out-of-home placements each calendar year from 2000 through 2017 (CY 2018 not yet available). Since 2011, entries into care have exceeded exits from care, thus leading to an increased number of children/youth in placement each year.



Note that the state’s alternative response system, called Family Assessment Response, began implementation in 2014 and was implemented statewide by mid-2017. While implementation of FAR may have resulted in other positive outcomes for children and families, it has not resulted in substantial reduction in out-of-home placements statewide.

Figure 2 below illustrates the compounding effect of entries exceeding exits for multiple years, showing a steady increase in the number of children/youth in out-of-home placements.



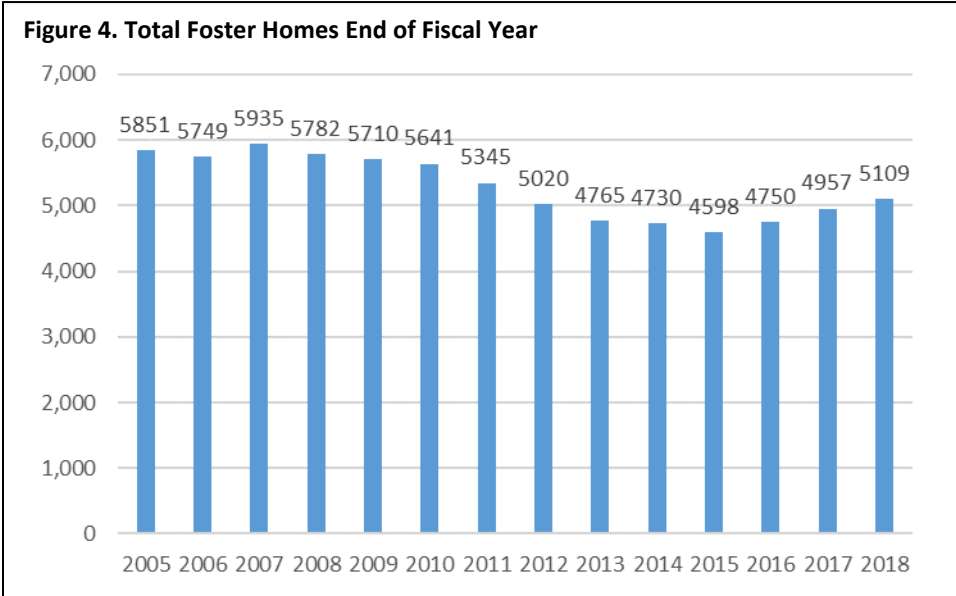
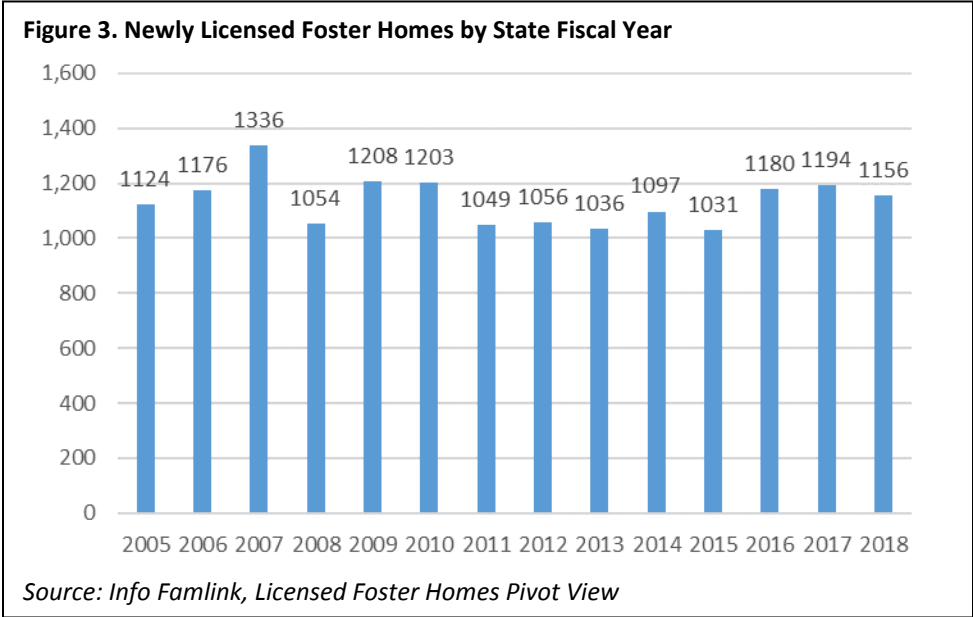
At the end of June 2018, 9,298 children/youth under 18 were in out-of-home care across the state.

Washington has one of the highest kinship care placement rates among all states in the nation.

At the end of FY 2018, 45.2 percent of all children/youth under 18 in out-of-home care

**HOUSE BILL 2008 CASELOAD FORECAST AND LICENSED FOSTER HOME CAPACITY**

were placed with kin or relatives. In FY 2018, 1,156 new foster homes were licensed by DCYF’s Division of Licensed Resources (DLR) or by a private Child Placing Agency (CPA) in Washington.



Data from DLR shows continued slow growth in licensed foster homes since FY 2015.

As illustrated in Figure 4 at left, at the end of FY 2018 there were 5,109 licensed foster homes, an increase of 152 (3.1 percent) over the end of FY 2017.

Licensed capacity represents potential bed space for children in foster care. For example, a point in time count in October 2018 indicates there are 10,665 licensed beds in 5,071 foster homes, with 4,946 children/youth in licensed foster care.<sup>1</sup> In practice, some licensed foster homes are not actively providing foster care, and most that are providing care are under their licensed capacity. In addition to considering the number of children a foster home may be willing to accept at any given time, the Department and CPAs must match the child to a foster home that is willing, able, and supported to safely meet the child or youth’s needs. So while an examination of the number of licensed homes and potential licensed capacity may appear to indicate sufficient bed availability, there remains unmet need for suitable foster home

<sup>1</sup> Excluding unlicensed kinship placement homes and the children/youth in unlicensed homes.

placements for some subgroups of children and youth. For example, there may be ample homes who will serve children ages 5-7 years with minimal special needs; however, there may be a lack of homes for children in that same age range who are medically fragile, part of a large sibling group, or whose primary language is not English.

Table 1 below illustrates the ratio of licensed beds to children/youth in care. Statewide, in October 2018 there were 2.16 licensed beds per child in care. Although the Department has not identified any national or state standards for this ratio, the 2004 Braam Settlement Agreement with the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) identified a goal of two licensed beds per child or youth in care. In 2010, the former Children’s Administration met that goal when the ratio was 2.6.<sup>2</sup>

**Table 1. Ratio of Licensed Beds per Children/Youth in Care, by Region & Type**

	Reg 1	Reg 2	Reg 3	Reg 4	Reg 5	Reg 6	State
Foster Home	1.85	2.06	2.14	2.23	1.94	1.90	1.98
Private Agency Foster Home	2.22	2.44	2.44	2.90	2.38	2.53	2.49
Tribal Agency Foster Home						2.67	2.67
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1.92</b>	<b>2.15</b>	<b>2.24</b>	<b>2.54</b>	<b>2.22</b>	<b>2.03</b>	<b>2.16</b>

Source: Info FamLink, point in time count, October 2018

Children who need more intensive behavioral supports are perhaps the subgroup with the greatest unmet need for appropriate licensed placements. This is starkly illustrated in the crisis the Department is currently experiencing in the use of hotel stays. In FY 2018, the Department recorded 1,357 hotel stays for 255 children/youth under age 18 who were in either shelter care, dependency, or extended foster care status. Of children/youth who experienced a hotel stay in FY 2018:

- 41.2 percent were youth age 13-17;
- 21.2 percent age 9-12; 23.5 percent age 5-8; 7.5 percent under 5 years of age; and
- 6.7 percent were over age 17.

Additionally, at least 94 percent of hotel stays were attributable to the need for behavioral or mental health supports and the lack of licensed capacity to provide those supports. Many of the adolescents experiencing hotel stays exhibit behaviors that are difficult to manage safely in a typical foster home and thus require congregate care options. For example, in examining the 580 hotel stays experienced by 105 dependent youth age 13-17 in FY 2018:

- 31.9 percent of the stays resulted when youth exited county detention centers or crisis residential centers;
- 18.3 percent occurred after being on the run;
- 14.7 percent occurred following a group home stay; and
- 12.4 percent resulted when youth exited hospitals.

<sup>2</sup> Braam Settlement Monitoring Report #10

## SUPPORT RESOURCES FOR CAREGIVERS

### FOSTER PARENTS AND UNLICENSED CAREGIVERS

The Department administers numerous support resources for foster parents including those provided directly and those provided through contracted services (see Table 2. Available List of Supports). In addition, a variety of support resources are available for foster parents through other state agencies, such as the Department of Social and Health Services and Health Care Authority.

<b>Provided directly by DCYF:</b>	Licensed Caregivers	Unlicensed Caregivers
Monthly foster care maintenance reimbursements <sup>3</sup>	X	
Increased maintenance reimbursements based on an assessment of the child's needs	X	
\$200 clothing voucher once per year, or as authorized	X	X
Mileage reimbursement for transporting children at state-approved mileage rate <sup>4</sup>	X	X
Foster Care Liability and Reimbursement Program <sup>5</sup>	X	X
Monthly social worker visits with child and caregiver	X	X
Monthly Caregiver Connection newsletter	X	X
Foster Parent Consultation (1624) Team quarterly meetings <sup>6</sup>	X	
<b>Provided through DCYF contracted services:</b>		
Ongoing caregiver training through the Alliance for Child Welfare Excellence	X	X
Support groups for foster parents <sup>7</sup>	X	X
Child care payments for working foster parents	X	X
Child Care Aware – child care resource and referral program	X	X
Foster, Retention, Intervention & Support Team (FIRST) and toll-free phone line 866-393-6186	X	
Foster Parent after-hours Support Phone Line: 866-363-4276	X	X

<sup>3</sup> Unlicensed caregivers may access TANF, the rates are significantly different to foster care maintenance payments which are unique to each individual child's age and needs. Whereas, TANF is a base rate with increases based on household size.

<sup>4</sup> for an array of transportation needs including but not limited to visits and other activities.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.dshs.wa.gov/sites/default/files/SESA/publications/documents/22-090.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> The legislation that created the 1624 meetings and established RCW 74.13.031(17) specifically addressed licensed foster parent membership. While the meetings sometimes address issues relevant to kinship care, there are no designated kinship caregiver members.

<sup>7</sup> Support groups are available for licensed and unlicensed caregivers

## HOUSE BILL 2008 CASELOAD FORECAST AND LICENSED FOSTER HOME CAPACITY

Foster parent recruitment and retention contractors <sup>8</sup>	X	X
Foster Care Retention Respite Program (2 days paid per month)	X	
Early learning programs (Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program [ECEAP], Early Support for Infants and Toddlers [ESIT])	Where slots are available	

In the 2017 annual report to the Legislature on foster and adoptive home placements<sup>9</sup>, the former Children’s Administration (CA) identified several reasons for foster license closure that are not within the control of the agency, such as a license closing due to completing an adoption, a family’s relocation, or changes in parental employment. The CA also identified reasons for license closures that are within the state agency’s purview to address, including overall frustration with the child welfare system and challenges in coping with child behavior. Finally, the CA identified a number of performance improvement activities around retention that continue as ongoing activities within DCYF, including continued process improvement related to the home study process, and collaboration with the Alliance for Child Welfare Excellence to identify and offer courses designed to assist foster parents in skill-building to better support children or youth with challenging behaviors.

DCYF licensors and home study writers spend a large part of their time reviewing the paperwork submitted by applicants to determine what is complete and what is still needed throughout the application process. The withdrawal rate for license applications is around 42 per month, compared to about 130 total applications received each month.<sup>10</sup> A potential contributing factor to this problem is the sheer volume of paperwork and the burden of having to send it back and forth for corrections and completions. The Department has **requested funding** to implement an online foster parent licensing portal that will allow applicants to more easily submit license application materials, monitor the progress of their application, and change or submit follow-up information through the portal. Based on results in other states where an online license portal has been implemented, the Department believes the availability of an online portal will increase satisfaction with the licensing process, reduce the time to licensure, support more targeted recruitment efforts to better meet the needs of children in care, and free up staff to complete home studies more quickly.

<sup>8</sup> Eastern Washington University’s Fostering Washington Program (Regions 1 & 2), and Olive Crest’s Fostering Together Program (Regions 3, 4, 5 & 6)

<sup>9</sup> Children’s Administration, Division of Program & Practice Improvement (2017). **Annual report to the Legislature: Foster and Adoptive Home Placement**, RCW 74.13.031(2).

<sup>10</sup> Average CY 2018, from InfoFamLink Foster Home Applications by Month count. Not including private agency foster homes.



## BEST PRACTICE FRAMEWORK

In FY 2019, the Department is adopting a best practice framework for caregiver supports to better identify and implement strategies aimed at improving the delivery of supports to caregivers and to provide greater transparency around these efforts.

Shortly after the merger of the CA and the Department of Early Learning, the new DCYF Office of Innovation, Alignment, and Accountability (OIAA) undertook a review of evidence-based and best practices in caregiver support systems. While the issues related to foster home recruitment and retention are acutely felt in our state, Washington is not alone among states experiencing such challenges. The search for an evidence-based or best practice framework was led by the OIAA in its role to lead and support reform efforts. Although the search revealed little in the way of frameworks or support systems that have been empirically tested, the OIAA did locate a handful of best practice frameworks recommended for use by child welfare agencies in building systems of supportive services for both kinship and foster caregivers.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation (AECF) framework described in the 2016 report “A Movement to Transform Foster Parenting”<sup>11</sup> contains components that appear to be common among best practice recommendations. This report elevates the critical role that foster parents and kinship caregivers play in the safety and well-being of children/youth in the child welfare system, and finds that a new approach to supporting caregivers is needed in order to provide greater stability for children/youth in out-of-home care. The framework presents the challenges in terms of the need for a focus on improved systems within child welfare agencies. This systemic approach, using a best practice framework such as that described in the AECF report, may be a productive tool to help move DCYF toward a better and more supportive relationship with the caregiver community, and improve outcomes for children and youth in care. More detail on the AECF framework may be found in the [DCYF report on foster parent complaints and concerns](#), required under HB 1661 Sec 104.

The AECF framework is structured around three main objectives: ensure quality caregiving for children, forge strong relationships between caseworkers with caregivers, and recruit and retain amazing caregivers. Using this best practice framework, DCYF will work with foster parents’ other caregivers, and staff to identify priorities and associated indicators of success around those priorities. The Department will share progress on the indicators of success to promote transparency in monitoring this very important work.

---

<sup>11</sup> The Annie E. Casey Foundation (2016). [A Movement to Transform Foster Parenting](#).

## DEPARTMENT POLICIES

### AFFECTING RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION OF LICENSED FOSTER HOMES

All Department policies related to the care of children who are placed in out-of-home care can directly or indirectly affect recruitment and retention of foster parents. High quality service delivery and effective communication strengthens the Department's work with foster parents.

The Annual Foster Parent Survey includes valuable information and comments from foster parents, shedding light on how DCYF supports and trains foster parents. Each year, well over 90 percent of foster parents randomly selected to participate in the survey complete the survey. Comments often address the support services tied to the agency's policies.

For the past 11 years, the statewide Foster Parent Consultation (1624) Team provides quarterly consultation opportunities with DCYF at both a regional and statewide level on policies and issues of importance to caregivers. When developing new policies, or as current policies are reviewed, the inclusion of foster parents as significant stakeholders will support retention of caregivers, especially experienced foster parents.

Research nationally points to the importance of foster parents themselves as effective recruiters, possibly even more so than agency staff who engage in recruitment. Foster parents who feel supported by the Department and who are happy, and well-trained in their role are more likely to share information with others about their experiences. When foster parents feel supported and appreciated, they are more likely to play a positive role in the recruitment process.

The Department has identified twenty-four (24) current child welfare policies that actively address the Department's work with foster parents:

#### 1. **5180. Foster Parent (Licensed Family Foster Home) Training**

Foster home license applicants must complete training prior to receiving their license to serve the specific behavioral and developmental challenges of children who enter out-of-home care. Pre-service training educates and prepares foster parents to work within the child welfare and the legal system.

- a. Orientation, completed online or in person by at least one licensee residing in the home.
- b. Caregiver Core Training (CCT), completed by at least one licensee residing in the home.
- c. First Aid/CPR training, completed by all licensees residing in the home.
- d. Training on HIV/blood-borne pathogens, completed by all licensees residing in the home.
- e. Licensed foster parents must complete caregiver continuing education as required every three years.

Data from the 2016 and 2017 Survey of Foster Parents<sup>12</sup> indicates that foster parents value preservice training. The availability of online training appears to have been a welcomed opportunity for foster families to complete these requirements. Periodic lack of class availability in local areas can be an impediment to recruitment when a family must wait for a required training class or travel a long distance to participate.

## 2. **5120. Licensing State Foster Homes**

DCYF licensing staff work with prospective foster parents to process their foster home license application in a manner that is culturally competent. Licensors must confirm that all requirements in chapter [WAC 110-148](#) are met before a foster home license is issued—and that the standards are maintained throughout the duration of the license.

## 3. **5100. Applying as a Foster Parent or Unlicensed Caregiver**

Applications for foster home licenses, adoption, relative care, and suitable others are submitted to local offices and processed by the DCYF Licensing Division staff to assess competence and suitability of potential caregivers for children in out-of-home care.

- a. DCYF is prohibited from denying any person the opportunity to become a foster or adoptive parent on the following basis: race, creed, color, national origin, gender, honorably discharged veteran or military status, sexual orientation, or the presence of any sensory, mental, or physical disability or the use of a trained dog guide or service animal.
- b. All applicants seeking to care for children in DCYF care and custody must have an approved family home study.
- c. All licensing applicants must complete required training as noted above in [5180. Foster Parent Training](#).
- f. Applicants seeking a foster home license must meet the licensing regulations specified in [WAC 110-148](#).

Foster parents shared that the licensing system can be cumbersome and lengthy, but acknowledge the importance of fully reviewing the competence of prospective applicants.<sup>13</sup>

## 4. **5130. Regional Licensing**

Regional licensing staff assess, license, and monitors services provided to children in out-of-home care by group care facilities (GCF) and private child-placing agencies (CPA). Families are allowed to choose licensure either through the Licensing Division of DCYF or through a CPA, whichever best meets their family's needs.

## 5. **4510. Respite for Licensed Foster Parents, Unlicensed Relative Caregivers, and Other Suitable Persons.**

Respite services play an important role in preventing placement disruption. These services are available for licensed foster parents and other caregivers with placement of children in DCYF or tribal custody. Three types of respite are available:

<sup>12</sup> [2016 Foster Parent Survey: DSHS Foster Parents Speak](#); [2017 Foster Parent Survey: DSHS Foster Parents Speak](#)

<sup>13</sup> Feedback from Children's Administration value stream mapping of foster parent recruitment, training, and licensing processes completed in 2017.

- a. Retention Respite
- b. Child-Specific Respite
- c. Exchange Respite

Responses from foster parents 2016 and 2017 Survey of Foster Parents,<sup>14</sup> as well as feedback received from Foster Parent Consultation (1624) Teams, indicate that foster parents appreciate assistance in arranging for respite care when requested. An insufficient number of respite foster parents are available to meet the actual need and requests of foster parents and this can lead to frustration for foster parents when their requests for respite care do not receive timely responses.

#### 6. **1710. Shared Planning Meetings**

Shared planning meetings engage parents, youth, caregivers, relatives, fictive kin, natural supports, and others in the development of a plan that prioritizes child safety and meets the support and service needs of parents, children, and caregivers. These meetings provide an opportunity for information to be shared, case plans to be developed, and decisions made that will support the safety, permanency, and well-being of children. Foster parents are listed as participants on the Guide to Shared Planning Meetings DSHS 22-1688 and must be invited to shared planning meetings.

If foster parents are not able to attend, they may provide comments to the meeting facilitator. Foster parents have shared concerns through the Foster Parent Consultation (1624) process that they do not always receive timely notice of these meetings.

#### 7. **1720. Family Team Decision Making Meetings**

Family Team Decision Making (FTDM) meetings are one type of shared planning meeting that engages the family and others who are involved with the family to participate in critical decisions regarding the removal of child(ren) from their home, placement stabilization, and reunification or placement into a permanent home. The DCYF Practice Guide around Shared Decision Making indicates that foster parents must be invited to FTDM meetings.<sup>15</sup>

#### 8. **5400. Childcare**

DCYF staff may authorize childcare for eligible children to ensure safe, quality child care is available to meet the needs of children in out-of-home care, and promote safety, permanency, and well-being.

Childcare is an essential service to working foster parents. Foster parents have shared through the Foster Parent Consultation (1624) process that often they are not able to find available child care—especially for infants, young children, and children with challenging behaviors—that will accept the state subsidy rate. Lack of available child care can limit foster parents' ability to accept placements, and continues to be a priority concern of the 1624 consultation group. DCYF, in response, has submitted a [Decision Package](#) to fund a pilot with a focus to increase infant/toddler child care access.

<sup>14</sup> 2016 Foster Parent Survey: DSHS Foster Parents Speak; 2017 Foster Parent Survey: DSHS Foster Parents Speak

<sup>15</sup> Practice and Procedures Guide, Appendix D: Shared Decision Making

**9. Foster Parent Shared Leave Pool**

Allows any state employee to voluntarily donate leave to be used by any eligible state employee licensed as a foster parent pursuant to RCW 74.15.040 and who is caring for a foster child or is preparing to care for a foster child in their home. Currently, more than \$9,500 in shared leave is available in this fund and four state employee foster parents have utilized these benefits.

**10. 4532. Therapeutic or Treatment Foster Care**

Therapeutic or treatment foster homes are those licensed foster families that have been trained to care for children with intensive needs who cannot be served in a family home without specialized treatment and expertise. These foster parents have specialized skills in managing the behaviors exhibited by children who need more intensive supports. Treatment foster homes have a pre-determined, designated intensive "package" of services that are delivered to every child placed in the home. Therapeutic foster care is provided directly through DCYF licensed foster homes and by contract or agreement with other child placing agencies.

Foster parents have indicated that more licensed treatment foster homes would help support children and youth in care who have more intense behavioral or emotional challenges and would support foster parent retention.

**11. 4526. Licensed Foster Care and Licensed Kinship Care: Placement and Support**

DCYF workers place children with a foster parent only if a licensed or unlicensed kinship caregiver or suitable adult is not available. The policy requires caseworkers to:

- a. Provide timely notice of Court hearings and Share Information with Out-of-Home Caregivers per policy
- b. Notify caregivers of:
  - The date of court hearings
  - The opportunity to provide a caregiver report to the court before the hearing
  - Their right to attend and be heard at court hearings

Feedback from the Foster Parent Annual Surveys and the Foster Parent Consultation (1624) Team meetings indicate that foster parents appreciate the information and support services case workers make available for the child's placement in their home, related to:

- a. Known information about a child's background at or before placement
- b. Timely authorizing and closing of foster care payments and other authorized reimbursements
- c. Returning phone messages and emails timely
- d. Clothing vouchers for the child
- e. Connecting foster parents with their local recruitment and retention liaisons or peer mentors for support and greater access to community resources
- f. Receiving reimbursement for mileage accrued in transporting the child and to receive transportation services for the child
- g. Providing visitation supervision for the child and his or her parents

- h. Access to concrete goods when needed
- i. Allowing foster parents to make decisions for the children in their care under the Prudent Parent Guidelines

### 12. **4420. Monthly Health and Safety Visits with Children and Caregivers**

Monthly health and safety visits must be conducted by the assigned DCYF worker or another qualified DCYF staff. Children must receive private, individual face-to-face health and safety visits every calendar month. The majority of health and safety visits must occur in the home where the child resides. If the assigned CA worker must visit the child in another location, the CA worker must document the reason and benefit gained. Caregivers also must receive face-to-face monthly visits with the caseworker. Visits with children and caregivers may occur during the same monthly visit. Location of the monthly caregiver visit may vary.

Foster parents have expressed concern that there appears to be no requirement to notify the foster parent if the worker is seeing the child for the monthly visit at another location. When the child is seen at another location for the health and safety visit, sometimes workers are not able to personally meet with the foster parent that month.

### 13. **4265. Foster Care Rate Assessment**

DCYF uses a standardized assessment tool, known as the foster care rate assessment, to determine the rate that will be reimbursed to a licensed caregiver on behalf of a child. The rate is based on the needs of the child and the licensed caregiver's abilities and time required to meet the child's needs in accordance with [WAC 110-50-0480](#).

Through the Foster Parent Consultation (1624) Team meetings, foster parents have expressed that the increased rate assessment helps the foster parent to meet the needs of children with more challenging behaviors or medical conditions.

### 14. **4254. Parent, Child, Sibling, and Relative Visits**

Visitation plans are developed in consultation with the parent, youth (if age 14 or older), and the out-of-home caregiver. Written visit plans must be provided to the parent and the dependency court. Visits are vital in maintaining family connections and can improve the safety, permanency, and well-being of children in out-of-home care. Visits should be consistent and frequent with the proper level of supervision to ensure child safety. Visitation plans should be developed timely and include visits in the least restrictive setting based on risk factors, existing danger, safety threats, and protective factors.

Foster parents are strong supporters of family visits. Through the Foster Parent Consultation (1624) Team meetings, they have expressed concern that this policy does not require that the caregiver receive a copy of the visit plan. Visit schedules can change or be altered periodically and coordination and communication with the foster parent and all parties is critical to ensure successful visits for the child and family, with minimal disruption to the foster family's schedule. Two notable concerns DCYF has heard consistently raised by foster parents also include foster parents' role in transport and issues with car seats. To address the issue, the Departments

Parent-Child Visitation (PCV) contract will require that all providers' complete hands on car seat training prior to transporting dependent children. If the provider shows up to transport the child without the required car seat or restrains, the foster parent can request the visit to be rescheduled and contact assigned caseworker to inform them of the situation.

#### **15. 5190. Property Damage Reimbursement and Foster Parent Liability Plan**

Within available funds and subject to such conditions and limitations as the Department may establish, the Department shall reimburse foster parents for property damaged caused by foster children in their care. [WAC 110-50-1020](#), sets \$5,000 as the limitation of coverage. DCYF considers exceptions to this limit and grants them, and the Department will continue to review if this is a sufficient amount of coverage.

The Foster Parent Liability Plan provides a mechanism for financial relief for foster parents who incur liability from third party personal injury and property damages caused by the foster parent in their role as foster parent or their foster or respite care children. For example, if a foster child caused water damage in a foster parent's home, the caregiver could seek reimbursement for the repair or cleaning costs. Costs must be substantiated for the Department to reimburse.

#### **16. 4670. Permanency Planning Hearings**

The juvenile court makes a determination regarding the future status of the child by the 12th month of placement. The caseworker must notify the child's foster parent(s) or kinship caregiver(s) of the date and location of permanency planning hearings pertaining to the child.

Foster parents frequently participate in the permanent planning hearing either in person, or by providing a caregiver's report to the court. Feedback received through the annual Foster Parent Surveys and the Foster Parent Consultation (1624) Team Meetings indicate that foster parents appreciate when the social worker provides advance notice of these court hearings.

#### **17. 4305. Permanent and Concurrent Planning**

Permanency planning starts at first contact with the family and continues until a permanency goal is achieved. DCYF uses concurrent planning; a strategy in which child welfare caseworkers plan for reunification while also working toward another permanency planning option. Foster parents are included in planning meetings regarding the child.

Feedback received through the Foster Parent Consultation (1624) Team Meetings indicates that foster parents are frequently concerned about the length of time it takes for some children to achieve their permanent plan—return home, adoption, guardianship, or non-parental custody.

#### **18. 5150. Licensing Investigations**

Licensing complaints are investigated by the Division of Licensed Resources (DLR) to determine if a violation of licensing regulations has occurred in a licensed facility. When

violations are found, DLR takes steps to remedy the violation and to maintain future compliance.

Licensing investigations in general are difficult for foster families. Feedback received via the Foster Parent Surveys in 2016 and 2017, as well as through the Foster Parent Consultation (1624) Team meetings indicate that foster parents appreciate when licensing staff handle this work thoroughly and with sensitivity when working with foster parents to investigate or remedy a licensing violation.

#### 19. **46110. Complaint Resolution**

DCYF management consistently aims to resolve complaints at the lowest possible level within the organization and includes affected staff in exploration and resolution of issues.

As provided in [WAC 110-09-0040](#) and [RCW 74.13.045](#), after making a reasonable effort to resolve a complaint with a social worker or licensor, complainants may contact the DCYF Constituent Relations office to request assistance.

Foster parents appreciate the ability to discuss case specific concerns with Constituent Relations staff. Foster parents who have participated the Foster Parent Consultation (1624) Team meetings have indicated they are seeking an alternative, non-department funded process to create an unbiased point of contact for foster parents related to concerns about communication, respect, and concerns of retaliation.

#### 20. **43022. Outside Communication for Children in Out-of-Home Care**

Children in out-of-home care must have reasonable access to uncensored communication with parents, relatives, and other people important to the child. This policy provides support to foster parents by informing caregivers about social media/networking website utilization, including what information can and cannot be shared about children in out-of-home care.

Foster parents appreciate the guidance on allowing communication for the child and in guiding foster parents on appropriate/safe social media utilization for children placed in their home. Foster parents have provided feedback through the Foster Parent Consultation (1624) Team meetings that when this policy is not consistently communicated by staff, or when there is a lack of availability to equipment or services (such as a cellphone purchase and a data plan) it is frustrating to foster parents.

#### 21. **Caregiver Guidelines for Foster Childhood Activities**

##### **RCW 74.13.710 Out-of-home care—Childhood activities—Prudent parent standard.**

Foster parents are allowed to make decisions about normal child activities under the [reasonable and prudent parenting standards](#) (see [Caregiver Guidelines For Foster Childhood Activities](#)).

Feedback received through the Foster Parent Consultation (1624) Team meetings indicates foster parents appreciate the ability to make prudent decisions any parent makes for a child



in their care. They are concerned when the policy and guidelines are interpreted inconsistently across DCYF staff.

## **22. 4260. Placement Moves**

This policy provides direction to DCYF staff about children in out-of-home care, including deciding when it is necessary for a child to move to a different out-of-home placement, and notifying current caregivers about a child's prospective move.

Feedback from the Foster Parent Annual Surveys, as well as from the Foster Parent Consultation (1624) Team meetings indicate that foster parents appreciate timely notification when possible and according to policy. This allows them to participate in the transition planning for the child and in preparing their own family for the child's pending move.

## **23. 4537. Clothing Allowance for Children in Out-Of-Home Care**

This policy assists foster parents by providing for the essential clothing needs of children entering care, and can help provide (additional) funds for an exceptional need not met through the standard clothing allowance in the foster care monthly payment.

Feedback from the 2016 and 2017 Foster Parent Annual Surveys, as well as from the Foster Parent Consultation (1624) Team meetings indicate foster parents very much appreciate the support in obtaining needed clothing when a child is initially placed in care, moved to their home without adequate clothing, or when an unanticipated growth spurt occurs. Foster parents experience frustration when social work staff does not consistently apply the policy and guidance which can result in approval delays.

## **24. 5800. Travel and Transportation**

Foster parents may claim reimbursable mileage for transporting children to parent or sibling visits, medical, dental, counseling, or other appointments that meet the needs specified in the case plan for the child. Reimbursement rates [WAC 110-50-0670](#) are defined by the Office of Financial Management.

Foster parents actively utilize the Caregiver Monthly Mileage form to record travel they complete on behalf of children placed in their home. Feedback from the 2016 and 2017 Foster Parent Annual Survey, as well as from the Foster Parent Consultation (1624) Team meetings indicate foster parents appreciate receiving reimbursements for transportation. Lengthy delays in processing reimbursements is a concern shared by caregivers and Department staff; and addressed as they arise.