

Department of Health and Human Services

OFFICE OF  
INSPECTOR GENERAL

STATE PRACTICES IN USING RELATIVES  
FOR FOSTER CARE



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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## PURPOSE

The purpose of this study is to provide detailed information on how each State uses, reviews, and supports foster homes provided by relatives of those children in the legal custody of State child welfare agencies. It describes the experience and policies of the fifty States and the District of Columbia concerning the use, approval, monitoring, and social service and financial support of extended family members in the child welfare system. It also summarizes the legal arrangements available to relatives who assume permanent care for these children.

## BACKGROUND

The practice of placing children for whom the State is legally responsible with extended family members is not a new one. Child welfare agencies have long used "specific" foster homes drawn from families' informal support networks to care for children in their legal custody.<sup>1</sup> In such placements, adults with biological or emotional ties to children were approved to care for only those particular children. Standards for approving these homes were less formal, if not less stringent, and services and financial support were based on individual case assessments rather than entitlement through policy.

Clear policy and anecdotal evidence indicates, however, such placements were considered a last resort in many State child welfare systems and were actively discouraged in others. Certainly the use of "specific" foster homes was considered less within the limits of agency policies than more traditional placements with foster parents having no previous relationship to the child. For example, in some States, children placed with relatives, whatever their legal status vis-a-vis the State child welfare agency, were frequently considered the responsibility of the Assistance Payments staff who often supervised Aid to Families with Dependent Children payments to the relatives. The role of these placements in the child welfare system was rarely clear in either policy or practice. Their limited numbers allowed public policy makers to avoid developing clear, consistent policies in this area.

As indicated in our companion report,<sup>2</sup> most States have experienced increases in the proportion of children in foster care placed with extended family members over the last decade. Largely as a result of State attempts to implement the requirements of the

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<sup>1</sup> Lewis, Robert and Mark Fraser, "Blending Formal and Informal Networks in Foster Care," Children and Youth Services Review, vol. 9, pp. 153-69, 1987.

<sup>2</sup> "Using Relatives for Foster Care," OEI-06-90-02390, June 1992.

Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980 (P.L. 96-272) and the Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978 (P.L. 95-608), child welfare staff began to look more frequently to relatives as a source of temporary care for children in the custody of their agencies. Further, lack of adequate numbers of more traditional foster parents has forced States to examine many "new" options for substitute care. Among these are placements with relatives, either as regular foster homes or under specialized care arrangements.

Relative foster-care placements have increased faster than the ability of regulatory processes to address their unique characteristics. Additionally, litigation concerning relative foster parents' rights in some States has resulted in more formal policy requirements for parts of the foster-care process, while leaving related processes largely unregulated.

Without fully developed policy support for staff and administrative decision-making concerning such placements, State child-welfare agencies have been coping with growing proportions of children cared for by relatives in the last several years. The dilemma of most State agencies now is how to regulate this relative foster-care arrangement so as to offer adequate protection and support to the children for whom they are responsible, while avoiding requirements that undermine the goals of extended family care or of other family support and services programs.

Many States now are attempting to develop policies that address the issues raised by relative foster-care placements. Review of how different States have addressed regulatory and practice questions may be helpful to States involved in policy development or examination.

## **SCOPE**

The focus of our research was children, in the legal custody of the States' primary child and family service agencies, who were placed with individuals related to them by blood or law. The study was limited to State legislation, policies, other legal constraints, and data from agency information systems.

## **METHODOLOGY**

In order to describe States' legal frameworks for using relative foster-care parents and to determine current official practice, we conducted telephone interviews with public foster-care officials in each of the fifty States and the District of Columbia (hereafter referred to as a State). In the interviews, we discussed with these officials the laws, policies, and procedures of the chief child welfare agencies in each State regarding use, monitoring and support of relative foster-care providers. We also requested copies of written materials on unique aspects of programs.

From these interviews, we developed draft summaries of State policies in terms of use, approval and monitoring, financial and other support services and permanency options. We submitted these summaries to State agency administrators for their review and verification. When there were serious discrepancies between the information from the original interview and the State-corrected summary, we contacted administrators by telephone to resolve the differences. Because there is so little formal policy in this area, some agency requirements and practices could not be fully determined. States from which agency staff did not submit verification or corrections are printed in the report in *italics*.

## **SUMMARY OF STATE POLICIES AND PRACTICES**

Most States have policies requiring staff to explore foster care by relatives as a potential temporary placement. Over half of States go further than this and require staff to consider relatives as the most preferable placement for children in foster care. Two States have policies that discourage State assumption of legal custody for children who can be cared for by relatives, preferring that the relatives themselves assume custody of the children.

The proportion of children in the custody of State child welfare agencies placed with relatives has increased demonstrably in 18 States, and was perceived by administrators to have increased in an additional 17 States. The reasons for these increases varied enormously among the states, but the following three were the most frequently reported:

- State policies that encourage placements with relatives;
- the shortage of more traditional foster family homes; and
- litigation which has brought large numbers of previously established placements with relatives into regular State foster-care program statistics.

Twenty States license, or approve as licensable, all or most relative foster homes. The remaining States may license some relative foster homes, but use less formal and less stringent review mechanisms for some or all relatives' homes. In these States the licensing status of the home is frequently related either to the relatives' desire to secure foster-care maintenance payments (for which licensing is usually a prerequisite) or to relatives' willingness to meet certain State licensing requirements.

In all but two States, licensing (or approval) is a requirement for receipt of foster-care payments. Some States add additional requirements. Nine States reimburse relatives only if the placement is eligible for Federal foster-care funds, i.e., only if the home is licensed, the child was eligible for Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) while living with his/her parents, and legal custody requirements have been met. In all States, most children in the custody of the State child welfare agency are covered by medical assistance programs. Exclusions from social services, when they exist, usually are related to the licensing status of the relatives' homes rather than directly to the relationship to the child.

All States allow adoption by relatives, and will consider such adoptive arrangements for adoption subsidies. All but two States allow guardianship or permanent legal custody to transfer to relatives; but in four States the courts so rarely grant guardianship, that State agency personnel do not consider it a realistic option. Family members who secure custody of related children lose foster-care payments, but five offer subsidies to assist relatives in assuming guardianship for children. In some States, continuing care by a relative is recognized as a permanent foster-care outcome which results in diminished agency and court intervention in the placement. In all but two States, however, children who must remain in the legal custody of State child welfare agencies and the physical care of relatives are considered in long-term or continuing foster care.

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# SUMMARY OF STATE PROFILES

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The table on page 3 summarizes State policies and practices in five main areas: the State's policy concerning the use of relatives, the documented or perceived trend in the proportion of children placed with relatives, the mechanism for approving homes as safe and adequate, requirements for receipt of full foster-care maintenance, and available permanency options. Below is important information for reading the table.

- ▶ The five-year trend in the proportion of children placed with relatives is described for all States. For some States, determination of the direction of the trend was based upon data system reports of the actual number of children in relative placements. In other States, because data for the five years could not be retrieved, trend descriptions are based upon estimates of State foster care administrators. Trends based on data are indicated by a solid circle (•); trends based upon administrators' estimates are indicated by open circles (○). States in which administrators could not provide data or estimates are identified by question marks (???).
- ▶ States which license only relatives who wish to care for non-related children in addition to extended family members are not considered as licensing relatives. The licensing categories are defined as follows:
  - **Licensing** - a process defined in policy through which State child welfare agencies review specific characteristics of individuals and their homes, attest that the individuals can provide a safe and secure home for children in foster care and therefore can have official permission to provide foster care. States may call this process licensing, certification, or approval.
  - **Approval** - a process defined in policy which attests that a home meets most or all licensing criteria but falls short of routine licensure/certification; grants limited permission to provide foster care only to a specific child or children.
  - **Formal Review** - a process defined in policy or official procedures which determines the safety and suitability of potential relative foster family homes. Homes are assessed using certain pre-defined standards which are more flexible than licensing criteria.
  - **Unspecified Review** - a process not officially defined for assessing the general safety and suitability of relative foster family homes.
- ▶ **Required for support (REQ'D FOR SUPPORT)** in the table refers to characteristics of foster care placements which official State policies require in order for relative foster parents to receive foster care maintenance payments. The foster care maintenance payments may be solely State-provided or, when placements are licensed and meet all other Title IV-E requirements, may have some level of Federal Financial Participation. In most States, relatives not receiving foster care maintenance payments may be eligible for AFDC on behalf of children in their care. The chart does not present requirements for receiving such income support assistance.
- ▶ **Guardianship** refers to guardianship by the relative. This category also includes the transfer of temporary or permanent legal custody to the relative.
- ▶ **Long-term foster care** includes continued recognized foster care by the relative and permanent foster care as a legally recognized foster-care permanent planning outcome.

**Readers are cautioned that State policies and practices vary widely. Please refer to an individual State's profile for information on how that State operates its specific programs.**

## SUMMARY OF STATE PRACTICES IN RELATIVE FOSTER CARE

POLICY ON USE OF RELATIVES	5-YEAR TREND			APPROVAL PROCESS			REQ'D FOR SUPPORT			PERMANENCY PLAN OPTIONS						
	Preferred	Occasional Routine	Discouraged	Increased	Decreased	Stable	Licensed	Formal Approved	Unspecified Review	None	4-E Licensed	All Supported Eligible	Long-Term Adoption	Guardianship	Subsidized Guardianship F/C	
STATES																
Alabama	●					○	●	●			●			●	●	●
Alaska	●					○	●	●			●			●	●	●
Arizona		●				○	●	●			●			●	●	●
Arkansas				●			●	●			●			●	●	●
California	●						●	●		●	●			●	●	●
Colorado		●				○	●	●			●	●		●	●	●
Connecticut		●					●	●			●			●	●	●
Delaware	●					○	●	●		●	●			●	●	●
District of Columbia		●				○				●	●			●	●	●
Florida				●		○	●	●			●			●	●	●
Georgia	●						●	●		●	●			●	●	●
Hawaii		●				○	●	●			●	●		●	●	●
Idaho	●					○	●	●			●			●	●	●
Illinois	●						●	●			●			●	●	●
Indiana	●						●	●		●	●			●	●	●
Iowa	●					○	●	●		●	●			●	●	●
Kansas		●					●	●			●			●	●	●
Kentucky		●				○	●	●		●	●			●	●	●
Louisiana	●						●	●		●	●			●	●	●
Maine			●				●	●			●	●		●	●	●
Maryland	●						●	●		●	●			●	●	●
Massachusetts		●					●	●			●		●	●	●	●
Michigan	●					●	●	●			●			●	●	●
Minnesota	●						●	●		●	●			●	●	●
Mississippi	●					○	●	●		●	●			●	●	●
Missouri	●						●	●			●	●		●	●	●
Montana			●			○	●	●			●			●	●	●
Nebraska	●						●	●		●	●			●	●	●
Nevada	●						●	●			●			●	●	●
New Hampshire		●					●	●			●			●	●	●
New Jersey	●					○	●	●			●	●		●	●	●
New Mexico	●					●	●	●			●			●	●	●
New York	●						●	●			●			●	●	●
North Carolina	●					?	?	?		●	●			●	●	●
North Dakota	●					○	●	●		●	●			●	●	●
Ohio	●						●	●			●			●	●	●
Oklahoma			●			○	●	●		●	●			●	●	●
Oregon	●						●	●		●	●			●	●	●
Pennsylvania		●				○	●	●			●			●	●	●
Rhode Island	●						●	●			●		●	●	●	●
South Carolina		●				○	●	●			●			●	●	●
South Dakota		●				○	●	●			●			●	●	●
Tennessee	●					○	●	●			●			●	●	●
Texas			●				●	●		●	●			●	●	●
Utah		●				?	?	?		●	●			●	●	●
Vermont	●						●	●			●			●	●	●
Virginia		●					●	●			●			●	●	●
Washington	●						●	●			●	●		●	●	●
West Virginia			●			○	●	●		●	●			●	●	●
Wisconsin		●				○	●	●			●			●	●	●
Wyoming	●					○	●	●		●	●			●	●	●

# STATE PROFILES

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## ALABAMA

Children in the custody of the State Department of Human Resources routinely are provided foster care by relatives. State policy requires staff to give first consideration to relatives when foster care is needed for children. This requirement has been a part of State policy since 1980. There are no situations defined by regulation that automatically preclude consideration of relative placements for children.

State data include only those children in approved relative foster homes. The incidence of such placements has shown a slight decline over the past five fiscal years; State administrators were unable to provide reasons for this decline.

### Approval and Monitoring of Relative Foster Homes

The State approves foster family homes for receiving children in the custody of the State. Relative homes can be approved. Approval requirements are the same as those for non-relatives' homes: the relatives' homes must meet basic health, safety, and space standards; and, relatives must be capable of providing care and protection for the child as demonstrated through a psychosocial assessment, references, and criminal and protective service records checks. The relatives also must participate in basic foster-parent training; ongoing training is encouraged.

Children also may be placed in the homes of relatives who are not approved. These homes are reviewed. These relatives are not required to submit health documents, complete a criminal records check, or attend training. The homes are assessed in terms of stability, health and safety, and the ability of the relative to meet the needs of the child.

The decision to seek approved status usually is made by the relatives. Administrators believed most relative foster homes were approved.

Foster-care staff must visit all approved foster homes (both relatives and non-relatives) every 90 days. Staff must visit children in approved homes every six months, although in practice children are seen monthly or more frequently. The Department of Human Resources routinely does not provide specialized training to staff concerning supervision of relative foster-care placements.

### Financial and Other Support Services for Relative Foster Parents

Relatives who provide foster care receive foster-care maintenance payments if the related foster home is approved. Any child in the custody of the State child welfare agency is

eligible for medical and dental benefits. Relatives are not excluded from any social services which the State makes available to non-related foster parents.

### Permanency Options

Children with permanent plans calling for them to remain with relatives may be adopted by relatives, with State support continuing only if the child is eligible for subsidized adoption. Children may be considered in permanent foster care with the State agency continuing to support and monitor placements. Finally, children may be placed in the permanent custody of relatives with the State agency relinquishing all rights and responsibilities for the child.

## **ALASKA**

Children in the custody of the Department of Health and Social Services routinely are provided foster care by relatives. State policy demands staff undertake a search for relatives when a child enters care and consider relatives as the first alternative for foster-care placement. This requirement became part of State policy prior to 1976. There are no situations defined by regulation that automatically preclude consideration of relative placements for children.

Placements with relatives routinely are not identified in the State data system, but administrators state the number of such placements has risen slightly over the last five years largely as a result of increased worker awareness of the importance of kinship ties.

### Approval and Monitoring of Relative Foster Homes

The State licenses foster family homes for receiving children. Relative foster homes can be licensed based upon the same criteria as non-relatives' homes: the relatives' homes must meet basic health, safety, and space standards; and, relatives must be capable of providing care and protection for the child as demonstrated through a psychosocial assessment and review of references. To be licensed, relatives also must participate in foster-parent orientation and ongoing training. Requirements are not rigid, however, and those which are not perceived to affect the safety of the child can be waived when there is an alternative method for meeting the intent of the requirements.

Children also may be placed in unlicensed homes. These homes are reviewed. Staff review the stability, health and safety of the homes and conduct psychosocial assessments of the families. These assessments are generally comparable to those conducted for licensing homes.

The decision to seek licensed status usually is made by the relatives, based upon their need for foster-care maintenance payments. Administrators could not provide information concerning the proportion of licensed relative foster homes to unlicensed relative foster homes.

Monitoring of all foster homes is case-dependent. The Department of Health and Social Services has no specific policies or training concerning supervision of relative foster homes.

### Financial and Other Support Services for Relative Foster Parents

Relatives who provide foster care receive foster-care maintenance payments if the foster home is licensed. Any child in the custody of the State child welfare agency is eligible for medical and dental benefits. Relatives are not excluded from any social services which the State makes available to non-related foster parents.

### Permanency Options

Permanent care by a relative is a permanency goal in the State. Children with permanent plans calling for them to remain with relatives may be adopted by the relatives with State support continuing if the children are eligible for subsidized adoption. Courts may grant relatives guardianship of the children and, if the children are considered "hard to place," the guardianship may be subsidized by the Department of Health and Social Services. Finally, children may remain in permanent foster care with relatives, with the State continuing to supervise and (if licensed) support these placements.

## **ARIZONA**

The Administration for Children, Youth and Families places children in its care in relative foster homes. Prior to 1990, the agency had to seek special approval from the Juvenile Courts in order to place with relatives. Now the agency can assess the family situations and determine if children should be placed in these homes. Additionally, the agency frequently arranges for temporary care of a child by a relative while the parents, who retain custody of the child, receive treatment. There are no situations defined by regulation that automatically preclude consideration of relative placements for children.

Until July, 1991, the State data system separately identified children placed with unlicensed relatives, but placements in licensed relative homes were not distinguished from other licensed placements. Administrators state the number of relative placements has risen over the last five years largely as a result of less stringent court requirements for making such placements.

### Approval and Monitoring of Relative Foster Homes

The State licenses foster family homes for receiving children in the custody of the State. Relative foster homes can be licensed if they meet the same standards as non-relatives' homes: the relatives' homes must meet basic health, safety, and space standards; and, relatives must be capable of providing care and protection for the child as demonstrated through the licensing process, references, and criminal and protective service record checks. To be licensed, the relatives also must participate in foster-parent orientation and ongoing training. Requirements cannot be waived.

Children also may be placed in unlicensed relative homes. These homes are screened by foster-care staff who check the home to ensure its safety and conduct criminal and central registry record checks. Relatives must agree to protect the safety of the child and cooperate with plans for parental visitation.

The decision to seek licensed status usually is made by the relatives. Administrators could not provide information concerning the proportion of licensed relative foster homes to unlicensed relative foster homes.

Child protective and/or case management staff must visit children in all foster homes (with relatives and non-relatives) every 30 days. The agency routinely does not provide specialized training concerning supervision of relative foster-care placements.

### Financial and Other Support Services for Relative Foster Parents

Licensed relatives receive the same level of financial benefits as any licensed foster parent. Unlicensed relatives are eligible upon request to receive daily clothing and personal allowances and other special allowances. Such special allowances may include assistance for education expenses, graduation expenses, summer school tuition and fees, camp fees, and diaper expenses. Children in the custody of the State and placed with relatives are eligible for medical and dental benefits. Relatives are not excluded from any social services which the State makes available to non-related foster parents.

### Permanency Options

Children with permanent plans calling for them to remain with relatives may be adopted by relatives, with State support continuing only if the children are eligible for subsidized adoption. The court may grant guardianship to relatives, and the Administration for Children, Youth and Families would discontinue foster-care monitoring and reimbursement. Children may stay in long-term foster care with the State agency continuing to support and monitor the placement until the children reach 16 and a permanent plan of Independent Living is indicated.

## **ARKANSAS**

The Department of Human Services will place children in its care with relatives, but only if the staff have exhausted all other possibilities. The agency does have responsibility for a significant number of "out-of-home protective service cases." In these situations, the agency has supervision and service responsibility for a child in the care of a relative as a result of a court order, but custody remains with the parent or temporarily with the relative.

The incidence of relative foster-care placements has shown a slight increase over the past five fiscal years. State administrators stated this increase was largely due to greater acceptance of the practice by the State office of the agency.

### Approval and Monitoring of Relative Foster Homes

The Department of Human Services certifies foster family homes for receiving children in the custody of the State. Relative foster homes must be certified based upon the same criteria as non-relatives' homes: the relatives' homes must meet basic health, safety, and space standards; and, relatives must be capable of providing care and protection for the child as demonstrated through a psychosocial assessment and review of references. The relatives also must participate in foster-parent orientation. Requirements such as length of marriage and age, as well as the source of homes' water supply can be waived.

Foster-care staff must visit all children and foster parents every 30 days. The Department of Human Services does not provide special training concerning supervision of relative foster homes.

### Financial and Other Support Services for Relative Foster Parents

All relatives receive foster-care maintenance payments since the criteria for such payments is that the home be certified. All children in foster care are eligible for Medicaid unless a child is covered by private insurance or has independent resources. Relative foster homes are eligible for the same social services as non-relative foster homes.

### Permanency Options

Children with permanent plans calling for them to remain with relatives may be adopted by relatives, with State support continuing only if the children are eligible for adoption subsidies. The relative may petition for guardianship for the child, or may be granted permanent custody of the child. In both of the latter situations, Department of Human Service's assistance to the child and foster family ceases unless the court orders the agency to provide further social services.

## **CALIFORNIA**

Children in the custody of the County Welfare Departments routinely are provided foster care by relatives. State policy requires that staff consider relatives as the first alternative for foster-care placement. This requirement has been a part of State policy since 1982. There are no situations defined by regulation that automatically preclude consideration of relative placements for children.

The incidence of relative foster home placements has increased greatly over the past five fiscal years; State administrators cited the increased number of drug-affected children entering the foster-care system and the growing demand for foster homes as the most significant reasons for the increase.

### Approval and Monitoring of Relative Foster Homes

In general, relative foster homes are exempt from licensing. Relatives' circumstances and background are reviewed by county social services staff. There are no official work standards for completing these reviews.

Foster-care staff must visit all children in foster homes every 30 days unless a child has no problems caused or aggravated by the placement, the placement is stable, or the child is placed with a relative. Staff must visit children in excepted placements, including children in relative foster homes, on a quarterly basis. The Department of Social Services routinely does not provide specialized training concerning supervision of relative foster-care placements.

### Financial and Other Support Services for Relative Foster Parents

Relatives who provide foster care may receive federally reimbursed foster-care maintenance payments for children eligible for payments under the Federal foster-care program. Relatives are not eligible to receive reimbursement under any State programs. Any child in the custody of the State child welfare agency is eligible for medical and dental benefits. Licensed relatives are not systematically excluded from any social services which the State makes available to non-related foster parents, but county offices may decide to limit some services.

### Permanency Options

Children with permanent plans calling for them to remain with relatives may be adopted by relatives, with State support continuing only if the children are eligible for subsidized adoption. The court may approve a permanent plan of long-term foster care for children, with agency supervision and judicial monitoring continuing until these children reach emancipation.



The relative may be appointed as guardian for the child and become solely responsible for the child, or the relative may be named guardian with the child remaining the dependent of the court. In either case, non-related individuals who assume guardianship for children may be eligible for continued financial subsidies for the children's needs; relatives are excluded from this program. This exclusion may soon be challenged in Federal District Court through a suit against the City of San Francisco.

## **COLORADO**

Children in the custody of the Department of Social Services routinely are provided foster care by relatives. The State has had policies in place for several years specifically addressing relative placements and encouraging staff to consider such placements for all children. While some counties may have policies precluding placement of some children with relatives, State regulations contain no such limitations.

State data systems could not accurately provide information on the number of children placed with relatives for the years surveyed. Current data are available. If the relative does not receive foster-care reimbursement, the child does not appear on the State's largely financial Foster Care Information System. Identification of the placement as a "relative foster care placement" depends upon entering two classification codes in the Child Tracking System (a separate system), so under counting of this population is likely. Administrators reported that the number of foster children placed with relatives appears to be growing, largely due to increased emphasis in the Department on the importance of maintaining kinship ties.

### Approval and Monitoring of Relative Foster Homes

Counties certify foster family homes for receiving children in the custody of the State. Relative foster homes can be certified based upon the same criteria as non-relatives' homes: the relatives' homes must meet basic health, safety, and space standards; and, the relatives must be capable of providing care and protection for the child as demonstrated through a psychosocial assessment, references, and criminal and protective service record checks. To be certified, the relatives also must participate in foster-parent orientation and ongoing training. The Department may waive some requirements as a result of an appeal by the relative.

If relatives' homes are not certified, the foster-care arrangement is referred to as a relative placement. Counties study the relatives' circumstances and background. There are no official standards, however, for completing these studies. Each county determines its own standards for ensuring the safety of relatives' homes.

The decision to seek licensed status usually is made by the relatives, and usually centers upon whether the relative has or intends to have other children placed in his/her home. Therefore, few relative foster homes are certified.

If the relative's home is a certified foster home, the child and foster parents are visited at least every thirty days. Uncertified placements with relatives are monitored by the child's social worker on a case-specific schedule. For purposes of supervision, uncertified relative placements are treated much the same as protective service cases in which children remain in their own home. Generally, the Department does not provide specialized training to staff concerning supervision of relative foster-care placements.

#### Financial and Other Support Services for Relative Foster Parents

Relatives who provide foster care receive foster-care maintenance payments if the foster home is certified and children are otherwise eligible for Federal Title IV-E reimbursement. Any children in foster care under Title IV-E or children receiving SSI are eligible for medical and dental benefits. Other children in foster care must meet Medicaid eligibility requirements in order to obtain coverage through public programs.

Relatives are not excluded from any social services which the State makes available to non-related foster parents. In some cases, relatives may receive funds or services through a State program "Placement Alternatives," available in some counties, to enable children to remain in less restrictive settings.

#### Permanency Options

Children with permanent plans calling for them to remain with relatives may be adopted by relatives, with State support continuing only if the children are eligible for subsidized adoption. The court may approve a permanent plan of long-term foster care for children, with agency supervision and judicial monitoring continuing until these children reach emancipation.

The relative may be appointed guardian for the child and become solely responsible for the child, or the relative may be named guardian but legal custody remains with Department of Social Services. If the Department remains legally responsible for the child, foster-care payments may continue if these were available before the assumption of guardianship by the relative. The transfer of guardianship and legal custody to the relative is considered a permanent home, and court supervision may end.

## CONNECTICUT

Children in the custody of the Department of Children and Youth Services routinely are provided foster care by relatives. Since 1988, the State has had policies in place specifically addressing relative placements and encouraging staff to consider such placements for all children.

The proportion of children placed in relative foster care has shown a slight increase over the past five fiscal years. Administrators attribute this increase to greater awareness among staff of the importance of maintaining kinship ties and to the lack an adequate pool of foster homes.

### Approval and Monitoring of Relative Foster Homes

The Department licenses foster parents for receiving children in the custody of the State. Relative foster homes must be licensed based upon the same criteria as non-relatives' homes: the relatives' homes must meet basic health, safety, and space standards; and, relatives must be capable of providing care and protection for the child as demonstrated through a psychosocial assessment, a review of references, and record checks. The relatives also must participate in foster-parent training. Departmental regulations allow for provisional approval of foster homes for up to 45 days while home studies are completed. Relative foster homes are more likely to receive such provisional licensure.

Foster-care staff determine an appropriate schedule for visiting each foster home on a case-by-case basis. Because of their stability, relative foster homes generally are visited less frequently than those headed by non-relatives. The Department does not provide specific training on supervision of relative foster-care placements.

### Financial and Other Support Services for Relative Foster Parents

All relatives are eligible to receive foster-care maintenance payments since the criteria for such payments is that the home be licensed. All children in foster care are eligible for Medicaid unless the child is covered by private insurance or has independent resources. Relative foster homes are eligible for the same social services as non-relative foster homes.

### Permanency Options

Children with permanent plans calling for them to remain with relatives may be adopted by relatives, with State support continuing only if the children are eligible for adoption subsidies. The Department or the relative may petition for guardianship for the child with the Department's assistance to the child and foster family ceasing once guardianship is awarded to the relative.

Children may remain in long-term foster care with relatives. In such cases, the Department of Children and Youth Services and the courts continue to supervise the foster-care placement.

## **DELAWARE**

Children in the custody of the Division of Child Protective Services routinely are provided foster care by relatives. State policy demands staff consider relatives and close family friends as the first alternative for foster-care placement. This requirement has been a part of State policy since the early 1980s. There are no situations defined by regulation that automatically preclude consideration of relative placements for children.

State data concerning children in relative foster-care placements are only available since 1989, and include most but not all children placed with relatives or family friends. A few kinship placements neither are monitored nor supported; therefore, the children involved are not included in the Department's data base. Administrators stated that the number of placements with relatives has remained relatively stable over the last five years.

### Approval and Monitoring of Relative Foster Homes

The State approves foster family homes for receiving children in the custody of the State. Most relative foster homes are approved based upon the same criteria as non-relatives' homes: the relatives' homes must meet basic health, safety, and space standards; and, relatives must be capable of providing care and protection for the child as demonstrated through a mutual assessment process which is part of pre-service preparation, a review of references, and a criminal background check. The Department does waive some requirements on a case-by-case basis.

Children also may be placed in unapproved relative foster homes. These homes are reviewed and monitored by the staff providing services to the children and families. There are no standards in policy for such reviews.

The decision to become approved foster parents usually is made by the relatives. About 25% of all relative foster homes are approved.

Foster-care staff must visit all children and foster parents every 30 days. The Division of Child Protective Services does not provide special training concerning supervision specific to relative foster homes.

### Financial and Other Support Services for Relative Foster Parents

Relatives who provide foster care receive foster-care maintenance payments if the foster home is approved. Most are referred to the Division of Social Services to apply for AFDC. Any child in the custody of the State child welfare agency is eligible for medical and dental benefits. Relatives are not excluded from any social services which the State makes available to non-related foster parents, and may even receive special funding for extraordinary service needs.

### Permanency Options

Children with permanent plans calling for them to remain with relatives may be adopted by relatives, with State support continuing only if the children are eligible for subsidized adoption. Children may be considered in long-term foster care with the State agency continuing to support and monitor placements, or children may be placed in the permanent custody of relatives with the State agency relinquishing all rights and responsibilities for the child.

## **DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA**

Children in the custody of the Department of Social Services routinely are provided foster care by relatives. Policy allows staff to consider interested relatives for "special foster care" placement. This allowance has been a part of State policy since before 1980. There are no situations defined by regulation that automatically preclude consideration of relative placements for children.

Administrators were unable to provide data on the number of children placed with relatives, but did indicate that use of relatives as foster parents has been relatively stable over the last five years.

### Approval and Monitoring of Relative Foster Homes

Relatives who provide foster care to children in the custody of the Department are not licensed. These homes are considered "specialized foster homes." These foster homes are subject to informal review by children's workers and, if safe, the relatives may care only for the specified related children. The standards for these reviews are not specified in policy.

Foster-care staff must visit all children and foster parents or special foster homes every 30 days. The Department of Human Services does not provide special training concerning supervision of relative foster homes.

## Financial and Other Support Services for Relative Foster Parents

Relatives who provide foster care receive foster-care maintenance payments if they request such assistance. Any child in the custody of the State child welfare agency is eligible for medical and dental benefits. Relatives are not excluded from any social services which the State makes available to non-related foster parents.

## Permanency Options

Children with permanent plans calling for them to remain with relatives may be adopted by relatives with State support continuing only if the children are eligible for subsidized adoption. Children may be considered in permanent foster care with the Department continuing to support and monitor placements. The relatives may secure guardianship of the child with the agency relinquishing all rights and responsibilities for the child, or the courts may order "third-party" custody to the relative with the Department continuing to provide supervision and services to the relatives or child.

## **FLORIDA<sup>3</sup>**

*The Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services discourages relative foster-care placements. The Department prefers that interested relatives assume custody directly for children. The Department does provide social services, but not financial, support to relatives with custody of children who might otherwise be in the care of the State. This approach to using relatives has been part of State policy since the early 1980s. There are no situations defined by regulation, however, that automatically preclude consideration of relative placements for children.*

*Foster-care placements with relatives are indistinguishable from other foster-care placements in the Department's data system, and children in the custody of relatives are not in foster care. Administrators did indicate that relative placements have increased slightly over the last five years. This increase appeared to be associated with greater relative demands for financial assistance which can only be obtained if the child is in foster care.*

## Approval and Monitoring of Relative Foster Homes

*The State approves foster family homes for receiving children in the custody of the State. Relative foster homes must be approved based upon the same criteria as non-relatives'*

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<sup>3</sup> Italics indicate State staff did not respond to our written request to verify interview information reported here.

*homes: the relatives' homes must meet basic health, safety, and space standards; and, the relatives must be capable of providing care and protection for the child as demonstrated through a psychosocial assessment, references, and criminal and protective service records checks. To be approved, the relatives also must participate in foster-parent orientation and ongoing training.*

*Foster-care staff must visit all children in foster care and foster parents every 30 days. If a relative assumes temporary custody of a child, the Department supervises the home for six months on an as-needed basis. The Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services does not provide special training concerning supervision of relative foster homes or relative custody arrangements.*

#### *Financial and Other Support Services for Relative Foster Parents*

*Relatives who provide foster care receive foster-care maintenance payments if the foster home is licensed. Any child in the custody of the State child welfare agency is eligible for medical and dental benefits. Relative foster parents are not excluded from any social services which the State makes available to non-related foster parents.*

#### *Permanency Options*

*Children with permanent plans calling for them to remain with relatives may be adopted by relatives with State support continuing only if the children are eligible for subsidized adoption. Children may be considered in permanent foster care with the State agency continuing to support and monitor placements. The Department prefers relatives to assume temporary custody or guardianship of children in their care with the State agency relinquishing all rights and responsibilities for the child after six months.*

## **GEORGIA**

Children in the custody of the Department of Human Resources routinely are provided foster care by relatives. State policy demands staff consider relatives as the first alternative for foster-care placement. This requirement has been a part of State policy prior to 1980. There are no situations defined by regulation that automatically preclude consideration of relative placements for children.

The number of children placed with relatives remained relatively stable throughout the 1980s but increased significantly in 1990. Administrators were not certain why such an increase took place.

### Approval and Monitoring of Relative Foster Homes

The State approves foster family homes for receiving children in the custody of the State. Some relative foster homes are approved based upon the same criteria as non-relatives' homes: the relatives' homes must meet basic health, safety, and space standards; and, the relatives must be capable of providing care and protection for the child as demonstrated through a psychosocial assessment, references, and criminal and protective service records checks. To be approved, the relatives also must participate in foster-parent orientation and ongoing training. Department staff may waive some standards.

Children also may be placed in unapproved relative foster homes, or free homes. The relatives' homes are evaluated by foster-care staff and, generally, must meet the same standards as approved homes. Training requirements are waived.

The decision to seek licensed status usually is made by the relatives. Most relatives do not seek approval.

Foster-care staff must visit all children and foster parents every 30 days. The Department does not provide special training concerning supervision of relative foster homes.

### Financial and Other Support Services for Relative Foster Parents

Relatives who provide foster care receive foster-care maintenance payments if the foster home is approved. Any child in the custody of the Department of Human Resources is eligible for medical and dental benefits. Relatives are not excluded from any social services which the State makes available to non-related foster parents, although there may be some differences in individual counties' delivery of services.

### Permanency Options

Children with permanent plans calling for them to remain with relatives may be adopted by relatives with State support continuing only if the children are eligible for subsidized adoption. Children may be considered in permanent foster care with the State agency continuing to support and monitor placements on a less intense basis. Assumption of guardianship by the relative is possible, but is a little used option. More frequently, the courts transfer temporary custody to the relative from the Department.



## **HAWAII**

Children in the custody of the Department of Human Services routinely are considered for placement with relatives. State policy demands staff to place children in the least restrictive, most family-like environment possible. There are no situations defined by regulation that automatically preclude consideration of relative placements for children.

The Department's data system could not separately retrieve all relative foster homes for the period in question, but administrators indicated there had been a slight increase in the incidence of such placements over the last five years.

### Approval and Monitoring of Relative Foster Homes

The State certifies foster family homes for receiving children in the custody of the State. Relative foster homes must be certified based upon the same criteria as non-relatives' homes, unless the home is limited to one specific child. The relatives' homes must meet basic health, safety, and space standards; and, the relatives must be capable of providing care and protection for the child as demonstrated through a psychosocial assessment, references, and criminal and protective service records checks. Relatives are encouraged to participate in foster-parent orientation. If the home is a "specified home," the Department may waive certification standards on a case-by-case basis.

### Financial and Other Support Services for Relative Foster Parents

Relatives who provide foster care receive foster-care maintenance payments if the foster home is certified, and the child is eligible for Title IV-E foster-care payments. Any child in the custody of the State child welfare agency is eligible for medical and dental benefits. Relatives are not excluded from any social services which the State makes available to non-related foster parents.

### Permanency Options

Permanent care by a relative is a permanency goal in the State. Children with permanent plans calling for them to remain with relatives may be adopted by the relatives with State support continuing only if the children are eligible for subsidized adoption. Courts may grant relatives guardianship of the children, and the guardianship may be subsidized by the Department Human Services. Finally, the child may remain in permanent foster care with the relative, with the State continuing to supervise and support the placement.

## **IDAHO<sup>4</sup>**

*Children in the custody of the Department of Health and Welfare routinely are provided foster care by relatives. State policy demands staff consider relatives as the first alternative for foster-care placement. This requirement has been a part of State policy since 1985. There are no situations defined by regulation that automatically preclude consideration of relative placements for children.*

*The Department cannot specifically identify all relative foster homes. Administrators indicated there had been a slight increase in the incidence of such placements over the last five years, largely due to increasing focus within the Department on the importance of preserving family ties for children in foster care.*

### *Approval and Monitoring of Relative Foster Homes*

*The Department of Health and Welfare licenses foster family homes for receiving children in the custody of the State. Relative foster homes must be licensed based upon the same licensing guidelines as non-relatives' homes: the relatives' home must meet basic health, safety, and space standards; and, relatives must be capable of providing care and protection for the child as demonstrated through a psychosocial assessment and a review of references. Training is not required unless the child is a special needs child. Departmental guidelines provide some flexibility, and waivers are allowed if positive features of the home mitigate deficiencies.*

*Foster-care staff must visit all children and foster parents, regardless of the relationship, at least every 30 days, or as a case requires. The Department of Health and Welfare does not provide special training concerning supervision of relative foster homes.*

### *Financial and Other Support Services for Relative Foster Parents*

*Licensed relatives who provide foster care receive foster-care maintenance payments. Any child in the custody of the State child welfare agency is eligible for medical and dental benefits. Relatives are not excluded from any social services which the State makes available to non-related foster parents, but all support services are based on a needs assessment.*

### *Permanency Options*

*Permanent care by a relative is a permanency goal in the State. Children with permanent plans calling for them to remain with relatives may be adopted by the relatives with State support continuing only if the children are eligible for subsidized adoption. Courts may*

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<sup>4</sup> Italics indicate State staff did not respond to our written request to verify interview information reported here.

*grant relatives guardianship of the children. Finally, the child may remain in permanent foster care with the relative, with the Department continuing to supervise and support the placement.*

## **ILLINOIS**

Children in the custody of the Department of Children and Family Services routinely are provided foster care by relatives. Department policy since 1976 and the findings in several court decisions in the late 1980s require staff to conduct a thorough search for relatives when children enter foster care, and to place children with relatives when reasonable to do so.

The number of children placed with relatives has increased greatly over the last five years. Administrators cited several factors influencing this increase: legislative and judicial mandates that have reiterated the preference for such placements, a shortage of foster homes has caused staff to do a more thorough job in locating relatives, and children placed with relatives in the State generally remain in foster care longer than children placed with non-relatives, and the numbers show the cumulative effect of this phenomenon.

### Approval and Monitoring of Relative Foster Homes

The State licenses foster family homes for receiving children in the custody of the State. Relative foster-homes are approved based upon the same criteria used for licensing non-relatives' homes, although some standards may be waived in the approval process. The relatives' homes must meet basic health, safety, and space standards; and, relatives must be capable of providing care and protection for the child as demonstrated through a psychosocial assessment, references, and criminal and protective service records checks. Relatives are encouraged to participate in foster-parent orientation, but are not required to attend.

All children in foster care must be visited every 30 days. The Department does not provide training that specifically addresses supervision of relative foster-care homes.

### Financial and Other Support Services for Relative Foster Parents

Relatives who provide foster care receive foster-care maintenance payments if the foster home is certified or approved. Any child in the custody of the State child welfare agency is eligible for Medicaid coverage. Relatives are not excluded from any social services which the State makes available to non-related foster parents.

## Permanency Options

Permanent care by a relative is a permanency goal in the State. Children with permanent plans calling for them to remain with relatives may be adopted by relatives with State support continuing only if the children are eligible for subsidized adoption. Courts may grant relatives guardianship of the children; the guardianship may be financially supported by the Department of Children and Family Services. Finally, the child may remain in permanent foster care with the relative, with the State and the courts continuing to supervise and support the placement.

## **INDIANA**

When children in the custody of the Family and Social Service Administration require out-of-home placement, staff routinely make efforts to place them with relatives. State policy requires staff to consider relatives as the first alternative for foster-care placement. This requirement has been a part of State policy since 1986, and was evident in some counties' policies and practices prior to that time. There are no situations defined by regulation that automatically preclude consideration of relative placements for children.

The incidence of relative foster home placements has increased greatly over the last five fiscal years. Administrators cited two factors as the most significant contributors to this increase: 1) prior to 1984, foster-care policy was made in the counties, and many counties' policies actively discouraged measures which included children living with relatives as part of the foster-care system; and, 2) State training in 1986 actively encouraged staff to seek relatives to care for children in the custody of the State.

### Approval and Monitoring of Relative Foster Homes

The State licenses foster family homes for receiving children in the custody of the State. A few relative foster homes are licensed based upon the same criteria as non-relatives' homes: the relatives' homes must meet basic health, safety, and space standards; and, the relatives must be capable of providing care and protection for the child as demonstrated through a psychosocial assessment, references, and a signed criminal history statement. To be licensed, relatives also must participate in foster-parent orientation and ongoing training.

Most relative foster homes are not licensed. These homes are approved at the County level rather than licensed by the State. The standards are similar to those for licensing, but regulations do not specify specific minimums, and training is not required.

The decision to seek licensed status usually is made by the relatives. Administrators indicated relatives usually are licensed only if they wish to provide foster care to non-related children as well as their own family members.

Foster-care staff must visit all foster homes (with relatives and non-relatives) every 60 days. The Department does not provide ongoing training specifically focused on supervising relative foster-care placements.

#### Financial and Other Support Services for Relative Foster Parents

Relatives who provide foster care receive foster-care maintenance payments if the foster home is licensed or approved and if the family seeks such support. Children in the custody of the State child welfare agency and who were eligible for AFDC prior to entering foster care are eligible for medical and dental benefits. Relatives are not excluded from any social services which the State makes available to non-related foster parents.

#### Permanency Options

Ideally, children with permanent plans calling for them to remain with relatives are adopted by relatives, with State support continuing only if the children are eligible for county or Title IV-E adoption subsidies. The courts may grant guardianship to the relatives, or may order joint guardianship to the relatives and the county. Only in the latter situation can the Department continue assistance to the relatives and children. Children may be considered in permanent foster care with the State agency continuing to support and monitor placements.

## **IOWA**

Children in the custody of the Department of Human Services routinely are provided foster care by relatives. State policy demands staff consider relatives as the first alternative for foster-care placement. This requirement has been a part of State policy since 1986. There are no situations defined by regulation that automatically preclude consideration of relative placements for children.

The Department cannot specifically identify relative foster homes, but administrators indicated the number of such placements has remained relatively stable over the last five years.

#### Approval and Monitoring of Relative Foster Homes

The State licenses foster family homes for receiving children in the custody of the State. Relative foster homes can be licensed based upon the same criteria as non-relatives' homes: the relatives' homes must meet basic health, safety, and space standards; and, the relatives must be capable of providing care and protection for the child as demonstrated through a psychosocial assessment, references, and criminal and protective service records checks. In order to be licensed, relatives must participate in foster-parent training.

Department policy does allow provisional licensing for up to ninety days until the relative completes the licensing application process.

Children also may be placed with relatives who are not licensed foster parents. While the agency has no formal review process required by law or rule prior to placing children in such situations, the staff usually conduct a home study.

The decision to seek licensed status is made by the relatives, usually based upon families' financial needs. Administrators could not provide information concerning the proportion of licensed relative foster homes to unlicensed relative homes where children are placed.

Foster-care staff must visit all children and foster parents based upon the needs of individual children, but at least every 30 days. The Department of Human Services does not provide special training concerning supervision of relative foster homes.

#### Financial and Other Support Services for Relative Foster Parents

Relatives who provide foster care receive foster-care maintenance payments if the foster home is licensed and the relative requests assistance. Any child in the custody of the State child welfare agency is eligible for medical and dental benefits. Relatives are not excluded from any social services which the State makes available to non-related foster parents.

#### Permanency Options

Children with permanent plans calling for them to remain with relatives may be adopted by relatives, with State support continuing only if the children are eligible for subsidized adoption. Alternatively, relatives may seek guardianship for children and end State supervision and assistance. Only if no other permanent option is available, children may be classified as being in long-term foster care with the State agency continuing to support and monitor placements.

## **KANSAS**

Children in the custody of the Department of Social Services routinely are provided foster care by relatives. State practice is to look to relatives as a placement resource. There are no situations defined by regulation that automatically preclude consideration of relative placements for children, but court orders may direct the agency to place, or not place, children with relatives. State statute requires legal notice to grandparents or other significant relatives whenever transfer of custody occurs.

The number of relative placements has risen slightly over the last five years, but administrators were uncertain of the cause for the increase.

### Approval and Monitoring of Relative Foster Homes

The State licenses foster family homes for receiving children in the custody of the State. Relative foster homes are approved as meeting the standards promulgated by the Department of Health and Environment. The relatives' homes must meet basic health, safety, and space standards; and, relatives must be capable of providing care and protection for the child as demonstrated through a psychosocial assessment, references, and criminal and protective service records checks. To be approved, the relatives also must participate in foster-parent orientation. Certain non-essential qualifications such as age, income, and space or beds available, may be waived in the approval process.

Foster-care staff must visit all children and foster parents every 90 to 180 days. The Department of Social Services does not provide special training concerning supervision of relative foster homes.

### Financial and Other Support Services for Relative Foster Parents

Although a distinction is made in State policy between those receiving foster-care maintenance through Federal funds and those receiving reimbursement through State funds, all relatives who provide foster care receive foster-care maintenance payments if the foster home is approved as meeting licensing standards. Any child in the custody of the State child welfare agency is eligible for a Kansas Medicaid Plan medical card which covers medical costs. Relatives are eligible for social services which the State makes available to non-related foster parents.

### Permanency Options

Children with permanent plans calling for them to remain with relatives may be adopted by relatives with State support if the children are "special needs" children as defined by policy. Children may be considered in long-term foster care with relatives if that is the long-term plan for children and if the families enter into a long-term contract with the Department. Rarely do relatives seek guardianship for children.

## **KENTUCKY**

Children in the custody of the Department of Social Services routinely are provided foster care by relatives. State policy demands staff consider relatives in making foster-care placements. This requirement was included in State policy before 1980.

Relatives are not considered as possible foster-care providers for children who are placed in the custody of the Department in order to find an adoptive home, or when there is evidence of intergenerational abuse.

The Department could not provide a count of relative foster homes, but administrators indicated there had been a slight increase in the number of such placements over the last five years.

### Approval and Monitoring of Relative Foster Homes

The State approves foster family homes for receiving children in the custody of the State. The Department may approve relative foster homes based upon the same criteria as non-relatives' homes: the relatives' homes must meet basic health, safety, and space standards; and, relatives must be capable of providing care and protection for the child as demonstrated through a psychosocial assessment, references, and criminal and protective service records checks. To be approved, relatives also must participate in foster-parent training programs. The Department can waive age and length of marriage criteria, and requirements for pre-service training.

The Department also may place children in relative foster homes that are not approved. Children's social workers must review these homes and develop a description of the home for the case record. There are no formal standards for such reviews.

The relatives or the Department may decide if the relatives should seek approval as foster parents. Administrators could not provide information concerning the proportion of licensed relative foster homes to unlicensed relative foster homes.

Foster-care staff must visit all foster homes every 30 days. The Department does not offer special training on supervising relative foster-care placement.

### Financial and Other Support Services for Relative Foster Parents

Relatives who provide foster care receive foster-care maintenance payments if the foster home is approved. Any child in the custody of the State child welfare agency is eligible for medical and dental benefits. Relatives are not excluded from any social services which the State makes available to non-related foster parents.



## Permanency Options

Children with permanent plans calling for them to remain with relatives may be adopted by relatives, with State support continuing only if the children are eligible for subsidized adoption. Children may be considered in permanent foster care with the State agency continuing to support and monitor placements, or children may be placed in the permanent custody of relatives with the State agency relinquishing all rights and responsibilities for the children.

### *LOUISIANA*<sup>5</sup>

*Children in the custody of the Department of Social Services routinely are provided foster care by relatives. State policy demands staff consider relatives as the first alternative for foster-care placement. There are no situations defined by regulation that automatically preclude consideration of relative placements for children.*

*The Department's data system does not isolate placements with relatives, but administrators indicated that the number of such placements has decreased slightly over the last five years. Relative foster-care placements increased some years ago after intensive Statewide training concerning kinship and foster care, but once such training ended, the number of new relative placements dropped significantly.*

#### Approval and Monitoring of Relative Foster Homes

*The Department approves foster family homes for receiving children in the custody of the State. Relative foster homes are approved based upon the same criteria as non-relatives' homes: the relatives' homes must meet basic health, safety, and space standards; and, relatives must be capable of providing care and protection for the child as demonstrated through a psychosocial assessment, references, and criminal and protective service records checks. To be approved, the relatives also must participate in foster-parent orientation and ongoing training.*

*Children also may be placed in unapproved "relative placements." These homes are studied by the children's social workers to ensure they meet the basic health and safety needs of the children.*

*Relatives usually seek approval if they wish to care for other non-related children. Therefore, few are approved.*

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<sup>5</sup> Italics indicate State staff did not respond to our written request to verify interview information reported here.

*Foster-care staff must visit all foster home every 30 days. The Department does not provide training concerning supervision of relative foster homes.*

#### *Financial and Other Support Services for Relative Foster Parents*

*Relatives who provide foster care receive foster-care maintenance payments if the foster home is approved. Any child in the custody of the State child welfare agency is eligible for medical and dental benefits. Relatives are not excluded from any social services which the State makes available to non-related foster parents.*

#### *Permanency Options*

*Children with permanent plans calling for them to remain with relatives may be adopted by relatives, with State support continuing only if the children are eligible for subsidized adoption. This option is rarely used by relatives, however. Children may be considered in long-term foster care, with the State agency continuing to support and monitor placements, or children may be placed in the permanent custody of relatives with the State agency relinquishing all rights and responsibilities for the child. This latter option frequently is the goal for children who come into care while already in the home of the relative.*

## **MAINE**

The Department of Human Services occasionally places children in its custody with relatives, but with caution. State policy does not give automatic preference to relatives. Children are placed with relatives only when assessment of the relatives and their relationships with the children's parents indicate they are capable of protecting and meeting the needs of the children and they will participate cooperatively in plans reunify children with their parents or to have a permanent family. There are no situations defined by regulation, however, that automatically preclude consideration of relative foster-care placements for children.

The number of relative foster-care placements has remained relatively stable over the last five years.

#### Approval and Monitoring of Relative Foster Homes

The State licenses foster family homes for receiving children in the custody of the State. Most relative foster homes are approved based upon the same criteria used for licensing non-relatives' homes: the relatives' homes must meet basic health, safety, and space standards; and, relatives must be capable of providing care and protection for the child as demonstrated through a psychosocial assessment, references, and criminal and protective service records checks. To be approved, the relatives also must participate in foster-

parent, pre-service training. The training requirement may be waived, as may other standards, if the home contains compensatory features or strengths.

Children also may be placed with relatives who do not meet licensing standards. Foster-care staff complete basic studies of the relatives' homes. Most relative foster homes are approved as meeting licensing standards. The Department only places children in the homes of relatives who cannot meet licensing standards, if the home is evaluated as the best placement for the child.

Foster-care staff must visit all children in the Department's care or custody at least every 180 days.

#### Financial and Other Support Services for Relative Foster Parents

All relatives who provide foster care receive foster-care maintenance payments on the same basis as non-related foster parents. Any child in the custody of the State child welfare agency is eligible for medical and dental benefits. Relatives are not excluded from any social services which the State makes available to non-related foster parents.

#### Permanency Options

Children with permanent plans for adoption may be adopted by relatives who meet minimal standards for approval for adoption. State support continues only if the child is eligible for subsidized adoption. Children may be considered in long-term foster care with the State agency continuing to support and monitor placements, or children may be placed in the custody of relatives with the State agency relinquishing all rights and responsibilities for the child.

## **MARYLAND**

Children in the custody of the Department of Human Resources routinely are provided care by relatives. State policy demands staff consider relatives as the first alternative for placement. A program specifically designed to provide services to children placed with relatives was established in 1983. There are no situations defined by regulation that automatically preclude consideration of relative placements for children.

The data concerning children placed with relatives are divided between two different programs: the Extended Family Services Program and the Foster Care Program. Both programs show increases in the number of children placed with relatives over the last five years. The Extended Family Services program has shown quite large increases during this period. Administrators attribute this increase to increased attention in the Department to kinship placements, and to rapidly rising need to place children.

### Approval and Monitoring of Relative Foster Homes

The State licenses foster family homes for receiving children in the custody of the State. Relative foster homes can be licensed based upon the same criteria as non-relatives' homes: the relatives' homes must meet basic health, safety, and space standards; and, relatives must be capable of providing care and protection for the child as demonstrated through a psychosocial assessment, references, and criminal and protective service records checks. To be approved, the relatives also must participate in foster-parent orientation and ongoing training.

Children also may be placed in Extended Family Placements which are not licensed as foster homes. Social services staff complete a health and sanitation inventory on these homes, check criminal background and protective services records, and assess family functioning and the relatives' ability to provide a safe nurturing environment for the child.

The decision to seek licensed status is made by the relatives. Approximately ten percent of all relative foster homes are licensed.

Foster-care staff must visit children in licensed foster homes every 30 days and children in Extended Family Placement every 60 days. The Department does provide training on the requirements surrounding Extended Family Placements.

### Financial and Other Support Services for Relative Foster Parents

Relatives receive foster-care maintenance payments if the foster home is licensed as a foster home. Any child in the custody of the State child welfare agency is eligible for medical and dental benefits. Relatives providing licensed foster care are eligible for all services available to other licensed foster parents. Families served by the Extended Family Services Program receive the same services required by law and regulation for foster care. The exception is day care for which extended family placement participants are a priority, but they must meet a needs test.

### Permanency Options

Children with permanent plans calling for them to remain with relatives include custody and guardianship to the relative, adoption and long-term foster care. When relatives assume guardianship, the State's legal responsibility for the child is rescinded, but services may be provided on a voluntary basis. If the relative adopts the child, the Department may provide an adoption subsidy if the child was in licensed foster care and met eligibility requirements. Children in long-term foster care continue to receive the services and protections of regular foster care.

## **MASSACHUSETTS<sup>6</sup>**

*Children in the custody of the Department of Social Services routinely are provided foster care by relatives. State policy has made special note of such foster homes since the early 1980s. There are no situations defined by regulation that automatically preclude consideration of relative placements for children.*

*The number of such placements has risen somewhat in the last five years. Administrators indicated that increased Departmental emphasis on the importance of maintaining family ties has resulted in the increased use of relatives.*

### *Approval and Monitoring of Relative Foster Homes*

*The State approves foster family homes for receiving children in the custody of the State. Relative foster homes are approved based upon the same criteria as non-relatives' homes: the relatives' homes must meet basic health, safety, and space standards; and, relatives must be capable of providing care and protection for the child as demonstrated through a psychosocial assessment, references, and criminal and protective service records checks. To secure general approval, the relatives must participate in foster-parent orientation and ongoing training. When relative foster homes are approved only for specific children, the Department waives training as well some requirements that are not essential to the health and safety of the children placed.*

*Foster-care staff must visit all foster homes every 30 days. Home finding staff also annually re-evaluate all but specific foster homes. The Department does not provide special training concerning supervision of relative foster homes.*

### *Financial and Other Support Services for Relative Foster Parents*

*Relatives who provide foster care can receive foster-care maintenance payments or a combination of AFDC grants brought to the same level as foster-care maintenance through State funding. Any child in the custody of the State child welfare agency is eligible for medical and dental benefits. Relatives are not excluded from any social services which the State makes available to non-related foster parents, but a respite exchange available through the State organization for foster parents is not available to specific placements.*

### *Permanency Options*

*Children with permanent plans calling for them to remain with relatives may be adopted by relatives, with State support continuing only if the children are eligible for subsidized*

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<sup>6</sup> Italics indicate State staff did not respond to our written request to verify interview information reported here.

*adoption. The relatives may secure legal guardianship for the child and, based upon the court order, the Department of Social Services may continue some support for the family.*

## **MICHIGAN**

Children in the custody of the Department of Social Services routinely are provided foster care by relatives. State policy demands staff consider relatives as the first alternative for foster-care placement. This requirement has been a part of State policy since the early 1980s and was reaffirmed in 1986. There are no situations defined by regulation that automatically preclude consideration of relative placements for children.

The number of relative foster-care placements has remained relatively stable over the last five years.

### Approval and Monitoring of Relative Foster Homes

The State licenses foster family homes for receiving children in the custody of the State. Relative foster homes can be licensed based upon similar criteria to those used to license non-relatives' homes: the relatives' homes must meet basic health and safety standards; and, relatives must be capable of providing care and protection for the child as demonstrated through a psychosocial assessment, references, and criminal and protective service records checks. To be licensed, the relatives also must participate in foster-parent orientation and ongoing training.

Children also may be placed in unlicensed relative foster homes. These homes are assessed by children's social workers to ensure that the relatives can provide adequate care and protection for the child.

The decision to seek licensed status is made by the relative. If the relative or home does not meet licensing standards, staff will arrange for assessment. Administrators estimate that between 1/3 to 1/2 of relative foster homes are licensed.

Foster-care staff must visit all children and foster parents every 30 days. The supervisory requirement is identical for both the licensed relative and non-licensed relative setting. The Department of Social Services does not provide special training concerning supervision of relative foster homes.

### Financial and Other Support Services for Relative Foster Parents

Relatives who provide foster care receive foster-care maintenance payments if the foster home is licensed. Children in licensed relative foster-care homes are eligible for medical and dental benefits. If the court maintains jurisdiction and the relatives are not licensed,

the child is eligible for AFDC benefits and related medical insurance. The relative must apply for these benefits on behalf of the child, however. Eligibility for supportive services for both the child and the provider may vary between the two types of relative placement settings. Licensing is required in order for the relatives to use day care and respite care resources.

### Permanency Options

Children with permanent plans calling for them to remain with relatives may be adopted by relatives, with State support continuing only if the children are eligible for subsidized adoption. Children may be considered in permanent foster care with the State agency continuing to support and monitor placements as long as the courts maintain jurisdiction. Children may be placed in the permanent custody of relatives with the State agency relinquishing all rights and responsibilities for the child (i.e., guardianship status).

## **MINNESOTA**

Children in the custody of the Department of Human Services routinely are provided foster care by relatives. State policy demands staff consider relatives as the first alternative for foster-care placement. This requirement has been a part of State policy since 1983, and has gained increased attention through Heritage Preservation legislation in the State. There are no situations defined by regulation that automatically preclude consideration of relative placements for children.

The incidence of relative foster home placements has increased greatly over the last five fiscal years. Administrators explained the Department has reached a point at which relatives are the common first consideration for placing children.

### Approval and Monitoring of Relative Foster Homes

The State licenses foster family homes for receiving children in the custody of the State. Relative foster homes can be licensed based upon the same criteria as non-relatives' homes: the relatives' homes must meet basic health, safety, and space standards; and, the relatives must be capable of providing care and protection for the child as demonstrated through a psychosocial assessment, references, and criminal and protective service records checks.

Children also may be placed in unlicensed relative foster homes. These homes are approved for specific children. Standards vary by county, and range from requirements and processes similar to licensing to the standards used for determining safety in protective service situations.

Administrators could not provide information concerning the proportion of licensed relative foster homes to specific foster homes, nor are the criteria clear for determining if homes should be licensed.

Foster-care staff must visit all children and foster parents every 15 days for the first three months after children enter the homes. Thereafter, visits are required every 30 days. The Department of Human Services does not provide special training concerning supervision of relative foster homes.

#### Financial and Other Support Services for Relative Foster Parents

Whether or not a relative receives foster-care reimbursement largely depends upon whether the relative needs or wants such assistance and upon county policies. Any child in the custody of the Department for thirty days is eligible for medical and dental benefits. Counties individually control eligibility for social services and some may limit relatives' access to some services.

#### Permanency Options

Children with permanent plans calling for them to remain with relatives may be adopted by relatives, with State support continuing only if the children are eligible for subsidized adoption. Children may be considered in permanent foster care with the State agency continuing to support and monitor placements, but without court supervision. Children may be placed in the permanent custody of relatives with the State agency relinquishing all rights and responsibilities for the child.

### **MISSISSIPPI**

Children in the custody of the Department of Human Services routinely are provided foster care by relatives. State policy demands staff consider relatives as the first alternative for foster-care placement. This requirement has been a part of State policy since 1982. There are no situations defined by regulation that automatically preclude consideration of relative placements for children.

Although no statistics are available, administrators believe the number of relative foster-care placements has risen slightly over the last five years largely because a shortage of foster homes has forced workers to search harder for relatives to care for children.

#### Approval and Monitoring of Relative Foster Homes

The State licenses foster family homes for receiving children in the custody of the State. Relative foster homes can be licensed based upon the same criteria as non-relatives'



homes: the relatives' homes must meet basic health, safety, and space standards; and, relatives must be capable of providing care and protection for the child as demonstrated through a psychosocial assessment, references, and criminal and protective service records checks. Home finding staff may request an exception to criteria not related to the health and safety of the child.

Children also may be placed in unlicensed relative foster homes. These homes are reviewed more informally; relatives do not necessarily have to submit to background or reference checks, nor must they attend training.

Staff are required to inform relatives of the option of having their homes licensed, but the decision to seek licensed status usually is made by the relatives. Administrators could not provide information concerning the proportion of licensed relative foster homes to unlicensed relative foster homes.

Staff must visit all children in the Department's custody at least every 30 days. The Department does not provide special training concerning supervision of relative foster-care homes.

#### Financial and Other Support Services for Relative Foster Parents

Relatives who provide foster care receive foster-care maintenance payments if the foster home is licensed. Any child in the custody of the State child welfare agency is eligible for medical and dental benefits. Non-licensed relatives are excluded from many social services which the State makes available to licensed foster parents.

#### Permanency Options

Children with permanent plans calling for them to remain with relatives and who are freed for adoption may be adopted by the relative. State support continues only if the child is eligible for subsidized adoption. Children may enter formalized foster care with the State agency continuing to support and monitor placements on a reduced basis.

## MISSOURI

Children in the custody of the Department of Social Services routinely are provided foster care by relatives. State policy demands staff consider relatives as the first alternative for foster-care placement. This requirement has been a part of State policy since 1980. There are no situations defined by regulation that automatically preclude consideration of relative placements for children.

The number of relative foster-care placements has remained relatively stable over the last five years.

### Approval and Monitoring of Relative Foster Homes

The State licenses foster family homes for receiving children in the custody of the State. Relative foster homes can be certified based upon a similar process to that employed for non-relatives' homes: the relatives' homes must meet basic health, safety, and space standards; and, relatives must be capable of providing care and protection for the child as demonstrated through a social assessment, references, and criminal and protective service records checks. Pre-service training is waived, and smoke detectors and fire extinguishers are not required.

The decision to seek licensed status usually is made by the relatives. Relatives rarely seek licensed status.

Foster-care staff must visit all children and foster parents every 30 days. The Department of Social Services does not provide special training concerning supervision of relative foster homes.

### Financial and Other Support Services for Relative Foster Parents

Relatives who provide foster care receive foster-care maintenance payments if the children were eligible for AFDC prior to entering foster care. Approximately 60% of the children in the care of relatives are covered by foster-care maintenance payments. Any child in the custody of the State child welfare agency is eligible for medical and dental benefits. Relatives are not excluded from any social services which the State makes available to non-related foster parents.

### Permanency Options

Children with permanent plans calling for them to remain with relatives may be adopted by relatives, with State support continuing only if the children are eligible for subsidized adoption. Children may be considered in permanent foster care with the State agency continuing to support and monitor placements. Relatives may seek guardianship for children through the courts. Once custody transfers to the relative foster-care services and benefits are withdrawn unless there is an identified need for after-care services.

## **MONTANA<sup>7</sup>**

*The Department of Family Services occasionally places children in its care in relative foster homes. Such placements have been allowed in policy since 1986. Earlier, the State had a policy against such placements. There are no situations defined by regulation that automatically preclude consideration of relative placements for children, but routine procedures stress the need for caution in sexual abuse situations and situations in which the child has been removed from very violent situations.*

*State data do not separately identify children in relative foster homes. Administrators indicated there had been a slight increase in the number of relative placements largely as a result of improvements in the Department's Indian Child Welfare Act implementation.*

### *Approval and Monitoring of Relative Foster Homes*

*The State licenses all foster family homes for receiving children in the custody of the State. Relative foster homes are licensed based upon the same criteria as non-relatives' homes: the relatives' homes must meet basic health, safety, and space standards; and, relatives must be capable of providing care and protection for the child as demonstrated through a psychosocial assessment, references, and criminal and protective service records checks. To be approved, the relatives also must participate in foster-parent orientation and ongoing training.*

*Foster-care staff must visit all children and foster parents every 30 days. The Department of Family Services does not provide special training concerning supervision of relative foster homes.*

### *Financial and Other Support Services for Relative Foster Parents*

*All relatives who provide foster care receive foster-care maintenance payments. Any child in the custody of the State child welfare agency is eligible for medical and dental benefits. Relatives are not excluded from any social services which the State makes available to non-related foster parents.*

### *Permanency Options*

*Children with permanent plans calling for them to remain with relatives may be adopted by relatives, with State support continuing only if the children are eligible for subsidized adoption. Children may be considered in permanent foster care with the State agency continuing to support and monitor placements.*

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<sup>7</sup> Italics indicate State staff did not respond to our written request to verify interview information reported here.

## NEBRASKA

Children in the custody of the Department of Social Services routinely are provided foster care by relatives. State policy requires staff to consider relatives as the first alternative for foster-care placement. This requirement has been a part of State policy since the early 1980s. There are no situations defined by regulation that automatically preclude consideration of relative placements for children.

The Department experienced an increase in relative foster-care placements in the late 1980s, but since 1990 the number of such placements has remained relatively stable. Administrators point to the increased emphasis on the value of maintaining family ties, and to the shortage of other foster homes as factors in the increased use of relative foster homes.

### Approval and Monitoring of Relative Foster Homes

The State licenses foster family homes for receiving children in the custody of the State. If relatives can meet licensing requirements, they can be licensed. Relatives who cannot meet licensing requirements must be approved in order to receive specific children. The approval process includes a home study and a background check to ensure the general safety of the children placed in the home. Training requirements are waived for relatives, although they are encouraged to participate.

Foster-care staff must visit all children and foster parents every 30 days. The Department of Social Services does not provide special training concerning supervision of relative foster homes.

### Financial and Other Support Services for Relative Foster Parents

Relatives who provide foster care receive foster-care maintenance payments if the relative accepts such payments. Any child in the custody of the State child welfare agency is eligible for medical and dental benefits. Relatives are not excluded from any social services which the State makes available to non-related foster parents.

### Permanency Options

Children with permanent plans calling for them to remain with relatives may be adopted by relatives, with State support continuing only if the children are eligible for subsidized adoption. Children may be considered in permanent foster care with the State agency continuing to support and monitor placements. Relatives may seek guardianship for children through the courts. Once custody transfers to the relative, foster-care services and benefits are withdrawn unless the family qualifies for State-provided subsidized guardianship or AFDC relative payee.

## NEVADA

Children in the custody of the Department of Human Resources routinely are provided foster care by relatives. State policy demands staff consider relatives as the first alternative for foster-care placement. This requirement was included in State policy prior to 1980. There are no situations defined by regulation that automatically preclude consideration of relative placements for children.

The number of relative foster-care placements has increased somewhat over the last five years, largely because of increased worker acceptance of relatives as a viable resource in helping families.

### Approval and Monitoring of Relative Foster Homes

The State licenses foster family homes for receiving children in the custody of the State. Most relative foster homes are licensed based upon the same criteria as non-relatives' homes: the relatives' homes must meet basic health, safety, and space standards; and, relatives must be capable of providing care and protection for the child as demonstrated through a psychosocial assessment, references, and criminal and protective service records checks. To be licensed, the relatives also must participate in foster-parent orientation and ongoing training. If relatives refuse to participate in training, children may still be placed with them, but the home is not licensed. Some homes may be licensed without home studies because of specific orders of the court at the custody hearing.

Staff must visit non-relative foster homes every 60 days, but is not required to meet this schedule for relative foster-care homes. Department of Human Services does not provide special training concerning supervision of relative foster homes.

### Financial and Other Support Services for Relative Foster Parents

Relatives who provide foster care are eligible for foster-care maintenance payments if the foster home is licensed or meets licensing criteria. Any child in the custody of the State child welfare agency is eligible for medical and dental benefits. Relatives are not excluded from any social services which the State makes available to non-related foster parents.

### Permanency Options

Children with permanent plans calling for them to remain with relatives may be adopted by relatives, with State support continuing only if the children are eligible for subsidized adoption. Children may be considered in permanent foster care with the State agency continuing to support and monitor placements but at a much lower level. Relatives may seek guardianship for children through the courts. Once custody transfers to the relative, foster-care services and benefits are withdrawn.

## **NEW HAMPSHIRE**

Children in the custody of the Division of Children and Youth Services routinely are provided foster care by relatives. There are no situations defined by regulation that automatically preclude consideration of relative placements for children.

The number of relative foster-care placements has increased over the last five years largely as a result of increased staff awareness of the importance of kinship ties.

### Approval and Monitoring of Relative Foster Homes

The Division licenses foster family homes for receiving children in the custody of the State, but, in general, relative foster homes are not licensed. Child protection social workers and juvenile services officers study family relationships and basic safety issues and must submit their evaluations to the courts for approval, but the agency has no formal policy for reviewing relative foster-care homes.

Foster-care staff must visit all children and foster parents every 30 days. The Division of Children and Youth Services does not provide special training concerning supervision of relative foster homes.

### Financial and Other Support Services for Relative Foster Parents

Relatives who provide foster care do not receive general foster-care maintenance payments unless the foster home is licensed. Any child in the custody of the State child welfare agency is eligible for medical and dental benefits. Relatives, because they are not licensed, do not belong to the State foster-care association. Respite-care services and liability insurance are available only to licensed foster parents; therefore, most relatives do not have access to these services. Relatives are not excluded from any social services which the State makes available to non-related foster parents.

### Permanency Options

Children with permanent plans calling for them to remain with relatives who have been freed for adoption may be adopted by the relative. State support continues only if the child is eligible for subsidized adoption. Relatives may seek guardianship for children through the courts. Once guardianship transfers to the relative, foster-care services and benefits are withdrawn.

## **NEW JERSEY**

State policy requires that staff conduct a comprehensive search for all known relatives to assess the appropriateness of their providing a home for a child. This has been part of State policy since 1981. There are no regulations that automatically preclude consideration of relative placements for children.

At the time of the initial interview, the Department's data system could not separately identify all children placed with relatives. (Current reporting from the State indicates the Department can now provide such information.) Administrators stated, however, the number of such placements seemed to have risen slightly over the last five years largely as a result of the increasing seriousness of the problems faced by the children coming into care.

### Approval and Monitoring of Relative Foster Homes

Children placed with relatives by the Division of Youth and Family Services may be considered 1) in a regular approved foster home, in which the relatives are approved as meeting the same standards as non-related foster-care providers, or 2) a free home, in which the agency made an individual assessment and determined the relative's ability to appropriately care for the child.

Caregivers may directly apply to be regular foster parents for related children only when the Division places children in the homes of relatives, or children are placed with the relatives as the result of litigation initiated by the Division, and the children were AFDC recipients in the home from which they were removed.

The Division has another category of substitute care called para-foster care. This is an income maintenance program for children placed by someone other than the Division. Relative caregivers are eligible for para-foster parent consideration only when lack of documentation of the relationship or too distant a relationship makes the relatives ineligible for AFDC payments on behalf of the children. Para-foster standards are not as stringent as those for regular foster-care approval. Once approved as a para-foster parent, a relative may apply and become a regular foster parent if all standards are met. Relative foster-care providers are about equally distributed among the three programs.

Casework staff visit all children according to a schedule specified in the plan for the child. The caseworker and supervisor establish the visitation schedule based upon the needs of the child and caregiver.

### Financial and Other Support Services for Relative Foster Parents

Relatives who provide foster care receive foster-care maintenance payments only if the foster home is approved. Para-foster parents receive payments comparable to AFDC for a family size of one. Any child in the custody of the State child welfare agency is eligible

for medical and dental benefits. Relatives are not excluded from any social services which the State makes available to non-related foster parents.

### Permanency Options

For some children, some form of long-term care by relatives may be the permanent plan. Children with permanent plans calling for them to remain with relatives may be adopted by relatives, with State support continuing only if the children are eligible for subsidized adoption. Children may be considered in long-term foster care with the State agency continuing to support and monitor placements based on the needs of the family and child.

## **NEW MEXICO**

Children in the custody of the Department of Human Services routinely are provided foster care by relatives. State policy demands staff consider relatives as the first alternative for foster-care placement. This requirement was added to State policy before 1980. There are no situations defined by regulation that automatically preclude consideration of relative placements for children.

The number of relative foster-care placements has remained relatively stable over the last five years, largely because of the increased pressure to find homes for the children entering foster care.

### Approval and Monitoring of Relative Foster Homes

The State licenses foster family homes for receiving children in the custody of the State. Relative foster homes must be licensed as well, but the child may be placed before the licensing is completed. Relatives' homes must meet basic health and safety standards, although the space and physical conditions requirements may be lower. The relatives must be capable of providing care and protection for the child as demonstrated through a social work assessment, references, and criminal and protective service records checks. To be licensed, the relatives also must participate in foster-parent orientation and ongoing training.

Relatives can sign a conditional substitute care agreement. This agreement allows relatives to assume care of children without a license but binds the relative to complete the licensing process within four months.

Social workers must visit all children and foster parents every 30 days. The Human Services Department does not provide special training concerning supervision of relative foster homes as distinct from other foster homes.



### Financial and Other Support Services for Relative Foster Parents

Most relatives who provide foster care receive foster-care maintenance payments. All are eligible for foster-care reimbursement, but some families decline such support. Any child in the custody of the State child welfare agency is eligible for medical and dental benefits. Relatives are not excluded from any social services which the State makes available to non-related foster parents.

### Permanency Options

Children with permanent plans calling for them to remain with relatives may be adopted by relatives, with State support continuing only if the children are eligible for subsidized adoption. Relatives may seek guardianship for children through the courts. Once custody transfers to the relative foster-care services and benefits are withdrawn.

## **NEW YORK**

Children in the custody of the Department of Social Services routinely are provided foster care by relatives. State policy demands staff consider relatives as the first alternative for foster-care placement. This requirement has been a part of State law since 1987. There are no situations defined by regulation that automatically preclude consideration of relative placements for children.

The number of children placed with relatives has risen greatly over the last five years. Administrators attribute the rapid rise in such placements to two factors: a State Supreme Court case brought in 1986 (Eugene F. v. Gross) that resulted in State action incorporating relatives in the traditional foster-care system; and the passage of legislation demanding that staff considered relatives when placing children in foster homes.

### Approval and Monitoring of Relative Foster Homes

The State licenses foster family homes for receiving children in the custody of the State. Relative foster homes can be licensed based upon standards the same criteria used for non-relatives' homes: the relatives' homes must meet basic health and safety standards; and, relatives must be capable of providing care and protection for the child as demonstrated through a psychosocial assessment, references, and criminal and protective service records checks. To be licensed, the relatives also must participate in foster-parent orientation and ongoing training.

Children also may be placed in approved relative foster homes. These homes are reviewed based upon the same criteria used for licensed homes but the Department can waive space

and physical facility standards and age requirements. The decision to seek licensed status usually is made by the relatives. Administrators stated that most relatives are approved.

Foster-care staff must visit children monthly or quarterly depending on whether children are in placement for child problems or parental problems. The Department of Social Services is developing a training curriculum for working with relative foster-care providers.

#### Financial and Other Support Services for Relative Foster Parents

Relatives who provide foster care receive foster-care maintenance payments. Any child in the custody of the State child welfare agency is eligible for medical and dental benefits unless the child is covered by private insurance. Relatives are not excluded from any social services which the State makes available to non-related foster parents.

#### Permanency Options

Children with permanent plans calling for them to remain with relatives may be adopted by relatives, with State support continuing only if the children are eligible for subsidized adoption. Children may be considered in permanent foster care with the State agency continuing to support and monitor placements. The courts may grant relatives direct custody or guardianship (a stronger legal relationship) of the children. While relatives who obtain direct custody of children may be eligible for continued social services, they do not receive foster-care maintenance payments for care of the child.

### **NORTH CAROLINA**

Children in the custody of the Department of Human Resources routinely are provided foster care by relatives. State policy states a preference for relative foster-care placements where appropriate. There are no situations defined by regulation that automatically preclude consideration of relative placements for children.

The Department's data system did not separately identify children placed with relatives until 1990, and administrators were uncertain of whether use of relative foster homes had undergone significant change over the last five years.

#### Approval and Monitoring of Relative Foster Homes

The county agencies license foster family homes for receiving children in the custody of the State. Relative foster homes can be licensed based upon the same criteria as non-relatives' homes: the relatives' homes must meet basic health, safety, and space standards; and, relatives must be capable of providing care and protection for the child as demonstrated through a psychosocial assessment and reference checks. Waivers can be

granted for space, age, and marital status. Children also may be placed in unlicensed relative foster homes; counties determine what standards should be applicable.

Relatives' homes are licensed if the relatives want to be licensed and if the home can meet licensing criteria. The Department cannot license foster parents who cannot meet basic health and safety standards. Court orders concerning custody of children may stipulate particular licensing arrangements. Less than three percent of relatives' homes are licensed.

Foster-care staff must visit all licensed foster homes every 90 days; there are no policy guidelines for unlicensed homes. Staff do not receive specialized training concerning supervision of relative foster homes.

#### Financial and Other Support Services for Relative Foster Parents

Relatives who provide foster care receive foster-care maintenance payments if the foster home is licensed. Any Title IV-E eligible child is eligible for medical and dental benefits. For children who are not Title IV-E eligible, staff must make a determination of their eligibility for Medicaid. Relatives are not excluded from any social services which the Department makes available to non-related foster parents.

#### Permanency Options

Children with permanent plans calling for them to remain with relatives may be adopted by relatives, with State support continuing only if the children are eligible for subsidized adoption. Children may be considered in permanent foster care with the Department continuing to support and monitor placements; judicial reviews may be discontinued at the discretion of the courts. Relatives may seek guardianship or temporary custody for children through the courts. Once custody transfers to the relative, foster-care services and benefits are withdrawn.

## **NORTH DAKOTA<sup>8</sup>**

*The Department Human Services routinely arranges for foster care provided by relatives for children in the custody of the County supervisors. State policy demands staff consider relatives as the first alternative for foster-care placement. This requirement has been a part of State policy for most of the history of the Department.*

*The Department's data system cannot separately identify children placed with relatives. Administrators stated, however, the number of relative foster-care placements has remained relatively stable.*

### *Approval and Monitoring of Relative Foster Homes*

*The State licenses foster family homes for receiving children in the custody of the State. Relative foster homes can be licensed based upon the same criteria as non-relatives' homes: the relatives' homes must meet basic health, safety, and space standards; and, relatives must be capable of providing care and protection for the child as demonstrated through a psychosocial assessment, references, and criminal and protective service records checks. To be approved, the relatives also must participate in foster-parent orientation and ongoing training. Children also may be placed in unlicensed relative foster homes. These homes are reviewed at the county level, and each county determines its own methods and standards for conducting these reviews.*

*The decision to seek licensed status usually is made by the relatives. Administrators could not provide information concerning the proportion of licensed relative foster homes to unlicensed relative foster homes.*

*Foster-care staff must visit all children and foster parents every 30 days. The Department of Human Services does not provide special training concerning supervision of relative foster homes.*

### *Financial and Other Support Services for Relative Foster Parents*

*Relatives who provide foster care receive foster-care maintenance payments if the foster home is licensed. Financially eligible children in the custody of the Department receive medical and dental benefits. Relatives are not excluded from any social services which the State makes available to non-related foster parents.*

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<sup>8</sup> Italics indicate State staff did not respond to our written request to verify interview information reported here.

### Permanency Options

*Children with permanent plans calling for them to remain with relatives may be adopted by relatives, with State support continuing only if the children are eligible for subsidized adoption. Children may be considered in permanent foster care with the State agency continuing to support and monitor placements, or their long-term custody may be transferred to a special Casey Foundation Family Program for intensive services and monitoring. Relatives may seek guardianship for children through the courts. Once custody transfers to the relative foster-care services and benefits are withdrawn. Because of the complexity of the guardianship process, relatives rarely pursue this option.*

## **OHIO**

Children in the custody of the Public Children's Services Agencies (PCSAs) routinely are provided foster care by relatives. State policy requires staff to investigate having relatives assume care for children as an alternative to foster care and, if children do come into the custody of the PCSAs, it requires staff to consider relatives as the first alternative for foster-care placement. This requirement has been a part of State policy since 1987.

The number of children placed in relative foster homes has risen greatly in the last five years. Administrators stated this increase was the result of the passage of the State statute requiring Departmental focus on these types of placements. Administrators also note there has been a significant increase in the number of children in the custody of relatives for whom the Department has supervisory responsibility as a result of court orders.

### Approval and Monitoring of Relative Foster Homes

The Department of Human Services certifies foster family homes for receiving children in the custody of the PCSAs. Relative foster homes can be certified based upon the same criteria as non-relatives' homes: the relatives' homes must meet basic health, safety, and space standards; and, relatives must be capable of providing care and protection for the child as demonstrated through a psychosocial assessment, references, and criminal and protective service records checks. To be certified, the relatives also must participate in foster-parent orientation and ongoing training.

Children also may be placed in approved relative homes. These homes must meet the same basic standards as licensed foster homes, but waivers of non-essential criteria are more likely.

PCSAs determine if a relative home should be certified. Administrators could not provide information concerning the proportion of certified relative foster homes to approved relative homes, but they believed the number of certified homes to be quite small.

Foster-care staff must visit all children and foster parents every four weeks. The Department of Human Services does not provide special training concerning supervision of relative homes.

#### Financial and Other Support Services for Relative Foster Parents

Relatives who provide foster care receive foster-care maintenance payments if the home is certified. All children in the custody of the PCSAs are eligible for medical and dental benefits. Relatives are not excluded from any social services which the State makes available to non-related foster parents.

#### Permanency Options

Permanent care by a relative is a permanency goal in the State. Children with permanent plans calling for them to remain with relatives may be adopted by relatives with State support continuing only if the children are eligible for subsidized adoption. Courts may grant relatives guardianship or legal custody of children. Finally, children may remain in permanent foster care with the relative, with the State continuing to supervise and (if licensed) support these placements.

### **OKLAHOMA**

The Department of Human Services occasionally places children in its custody in relative foster-care homes. Only children in paid relative foster homes and some Native American children in supervised relative foster homes are included in the State's foster-care data base. Based upon a partial count, administrators noted that the number of relative foster-care placements has risen greatly, particularly in the urban areas of the State.

#### Approval and Monitoring of Relative Foster Homes

The State licenses foster family homes for receiving children in the custody of the State. Relative foster homes can be licensed based upon the same criteria as non-relatives' homes: the relatives' homes must meet basic health, safety, and space standards; and, relatives must be capable of providing care and protection for the child as demonstrated through a psychosocial assessment, references, and criminal and protective service records checks. To be licensed, the relatives also must participate in foster-parent orientation and ongoing training.

Children also may be placed in unlicensed relative homes. For these homes, the county agencies conduct their own home studies with standards similar to licensing standards.

The decision to seek licensed status usually is made by the relatives. Administrators could not provide information concerning the proportion of licensed relative foster homes to unlicensed relative foster homes. Foster-care payment records would indicate that about 25% of the homes are licensed.

Foster-care staff must visit all paid foster homes every 30 days. Staff must visit children in other homes based upon family services policies which are similar to foster-care policies. The Department does not provide specialized training on supervising relative foster homes, but does give policy guidance for monitoring paid or unpaid placements.

#### Financial and Other Support Services for Relative Foster Parents

Relatives who provide foster care receive foster-care maintenance payments if the foster home is licensed. Any child in the custody of the State child welfare agency is eligible for medical and dental benefits. Relatives are not excluded from any social services which the State makes available to non-related foster parents.

#### Permanency Options

Permanent care by a relative is a permanency goal in the State. Children with permanent plans calling for them to remain with relatives may be adopted by relatives with State support continuing only if the children are eligible for subsidized adoption. Courts may grant relatives guardianship of the children. Finally, children may remain in permanent foster care with the relative, with the State continuing to supervise the home on a less frequent basis and, if licensed, financially support the placement.

### **OREGON<sup>9</sup>**

*Children in the custody of the Department of Human Resources routinely are provided foster care by relatives. State policy demands staff consider relatives as the first alternative for foster-care placement. This requirement has been a part of State policy since the early 1980s. There are no situations defined by regulation that automatically preclude consideration of relative placements for children.*

*The number of children placed with relatives, particularly in non-paid relative placements, has increased greatly over the last five years. Administrators stated the rise was due to increased emphasis on relative foster homes in agency practice standards and policy.*

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<sup>9</sup> Italics indicate State staff did not respond to our written request to verify interview information reported here.

### Approval and Monitoring of Relative Foster Homes

*The State certifies foster family homes for receiving children in the custody of the State. Relative foster homes can be certified based upon the same criteria as non-relatives' homes: the relatives' homes must meet basic health, safety, and space standards; and, relatives must be capable of providing care and protection for the child as demonstrated through a psychosocial assessment, references, and criminal and protective service records checks. To be certified, the relatives also must participate in foster-parent, pre-service training.*

*Children also may be placed in uncertified relative foster homes. Local foster-care staff check these homes for basic safety, and may check relatives through the Department's back records.*

*The Department accepts applications for licensing only from relative foster parents who will care for children who are eligible for Federal Title IV-E funding (i.e., prior to entering the Department's custody, the children were not living in the home and were eligible for AFDC).*

*Foster-care staff must visit all children and foster parents every 30 days. The Department of Human Resources does not provide special training concerning supervision of relative foster homes.*

### Financial and Other Support Services for Relative Foster Parents

*Relatives who provide foster care receive foster-care maintenance payments if the foster home is certified and the children are eligible for Title IV-E foster-care funds (Lipscomb v. Simmons, now before the Federal Circuit Court of Appeals challenges Oregon's exclusion of non-IV-E eligible children placed with relatives from State foster-care funding.). Children in certified relative homes are eligible for medical and dental benefits. Non-certified relatives are excluded from some social services which the State makes available to non-related foster parents, and are not covered by Foster Care Liability Insurance.*

### Permanency Options

*Children with permanent plans calling for them to remain with relatives may be adopted by relatives, with State support continuing only if the children are eligible for subsidized adoption. Children may be considered in permanent foster care with the State agency continuing to support certified placements. Relatives may seek guardianship for children through the courts. Once custody transfers to the relative, foster-care services and benefits are withdrawn.*



## **PENNSYLVANIA**

Children in the custody of the Office of Children, Youth, and Families routinely are provided foster care by relatives in most counties of the State. A State Bulletin distributed in 1982 encouraged staff to search for and use relatives as foster parents for children when appropriate.

The agency's data system cannot separately identify children placed in relative foster-care homes. Administrators stated, however, that the number of children placed with relatives seems to have increased somewhat over the last five years, particularly in urban areas. They attribute this increase to two factors: the growing number of drug-addicted newborns being raised by grandparents, and the increased emphasis on extended family ties within the Office for Children, Youth and Families.

### Approval and Monitoring of Relative Foster Homes

Counties license foster family homes for receiving children in the custody of the counties, including relative foster homes. The criteria for licensing relatives' homes are the same criteria as for non-relatives' homes: the relatives' homes must meet basic health, safety, and space standards; and, relatives must be capable of providing care and protection for children as demonstrated through a psychosocial assessment. To be approved, the relatives also must participate in foster-parent orientation and ongoing training.

Foster-care staff must visit all children and foster parents on a schedule developed as part of the case plans. The Office of Children, Youth, and Families does not provide special training concerning supervision of relative foster homes.

### Financial and Other Support Services for Relative Foster Parents

Relatives who provide foster care receive foster-care maintenance payments. Any child in the custody of the county agencies is eligible for medical and dental benefits. Relatives are not excluded from any social services which the State makes available to non-related foster parents.

### Permanency Options

Children with permanent plans calling for them to remain with relatives may be adopted by relatives, with State support continuing only if the children are eligible for subsidized adoption. Children may be considered in permanent foster care with the county agencies continuing to support and monitor placements. The counties may implement permanent plans for children called "Placement in the Home of a Relative." In this arrangement, the agencies place children in the homes of relatives, offers intensive services, and, then when the placement is stable, transfers temporary custody to the relative and withdraws supervision and financial assistance from the family.

## **RHODE ISLAND**

Children in the custody of the Department for Children, Youth and Families routinely are provided foster care by relatives. A court decision in the early 1980s required the Department look first to relatives as a source of care for children. There are no situations defined by regulation that automatically preclude consideration of relative placements for children.

The number of relative foster-care placements has increased over the past five fiscal years. Administrators cited the success of Department efforts to educate staff about the importance of maintaining kinship ties as a major factor behind the increase.

### Approval and Monitoring of Relative Foster Homes

The Department licenses foster family homes for receiving children in the custody of the State. All relative foster homes must be certified based upon similar criteria to those applied in licensing non-relatives' homes: the relatives' homes must meet basic health, safety, and space standards; and, relatives must be capable of providing care and protection for children as demonstrated through psychosocial assessments, references, and criminal and protective service records checks. Unlike non-related foster parents, relatives are not required to participate in foster-parent orientation and ongoing training. Relative foster homes are recertified biennially.

Relatives usually seek full licensed status only if they wish to care for other, non-related children.

Direct services staff must visit all children and foster parents based upon individual case plans. The Department of Children, Youth, and Families does not provide special training concerning supervision of relative foster homes.

### Financial and Other Support Services for Relative Foster Parents

All relatives who provide foster care and want reimbursement receive foster-care maintenance payments. Any child in the custody of the State child welfare agency is eligible for medical and dental benefits. Relatives are not excluded from any social services which the State makes available to non-related foster parents.

### Permanency Options

Children with permanent plans calling for them to remain with relatives and for whom parental rights have been terminated may be adopted by the relative. State support continues only if the child is eligible for subsidized adoption. Children may be considered

in permanent foster care with the State agency continuing to support and monitor placements.

## **SOUTH CAROLINA**

Children in the custody of the Department of Social Services routinely are provided foster care by relatives. Since the 1970s, State policy has allowed staff to consider relatives when arranging foster-care placements. There are no situations defined by regulation that automatically preclude consideration of relative placements for children but protective services caseworkers and foster-care caseworkers must confer on whether relatives should be explored.

The Department's data system does not separately identify children placed in relative foster homes. Administrators indicated, however, that the number of children placed with relatives has risen slightly, partially due to shortages of traditional, non-related foster homes.

### Approval and Monitoring of Relative Foster Homes

The State licenses foster family homes for receiving children in the custody of the State. Relative foster homes can be licensed based upon the same criteria as non-relatives' homes: the relatives' homes must meet basic health, safety, and space standards; and, relatives must be capable of providing care and protection for children as demonstrated through psychosocial assessments, references, and criminal and protective service records checks. To be licensed, the relatives also must participate in foster-parent orientation and ongoing training.

Relatives also may care for children by obtaining an "certificate of approval," which allows them to care only for specific related children. The approval process for obtaining the certificate is similar to the licensing evaluation except that these relatives are not required to obtain a medical reference nor must they participate in Departmental training.

The decision to seek licensed status usually is made by the relatives. Fewer than five percent of relatives seek a certificate of approval rather than a license.

Foster-care staff must visit all children in out of home care every 30 days. The Department of Social Services does not provide special training concerning supervision of relative foster homes.

### Financial and Other Support Services for Relative Foster Parents

Relatives who provide foster care receive foster-care maintenance payments if the foster home is licensed. With few exceptions, children in out of home care are eligible for medical and dental benefits through Medicaid. Relatives are not excluded from any social services which the State makes available to non-related foster parents.

### Permanency Options

Children with permanent plans calling for them to remain with relatives may be adopted by relatives, with State support continuing only if the children are eligible for subsidized adoption. Children may be considered in permanent foster care with the Department continuing to support and monitor placements. Relatives may seek legal custody for children through the courts. Once custody transfers to the relative foster-care services and benefits are withdrawn.

## **SOUTH DAKOTA**

Children in the custody of the Department of Social Services routinely are provided foster care by relatives. As a result of the Indian Child Welfare Act passed in 1978, the Department has emphasized the importance of maintaining kinship ties when placing Native American children in foster care. There are no situations defined by regulation that automatically preclude consideration of relative placements for children, but indications of any abuse should cause staff to proceed cautiously in placing children.

Until 1990, the Department's data system could not separately identify children placed with relatives. Administrators indicated, however, that the number of children placed with relatives had grown, particularly in reservation areas, over the last five years. They attributed the increase to the greater awareness of Indian Child Welfare Act requirements and to recognition among staff of the importance of family connections.

### Approval and Monitoring of Relative Foster Homes

The State licenses foster family homes for receiving children in the custody of the State. Relative foster homes can be licensed based upon the same criteria as non-relatives' homes: the relatives' homes must meet basic health, safety, and space standards; and, relatives must be capable of providing care and protection for the child as demonstrated through a psychosocial assessment, references, and criminal and protective service records checks; and the relatives must participate in foster-parent orientation and ongoing training.

Children also may be placed in unlicensed relative foster homes. The Department must evaluate these homes for health and safety problems, insure there are no reports concerning

the relatives in the State's Protective Services Central Registry, and secure court approval for the placement.

In general, only relatives who want to care for non-related children apply for licensing. Therefore, administrators indicated, there are few licensed relative foster homes.

Foster-care staff must visit all children and foster parents every 30 days. The Department of Social Services does not provide special training concerning supervision of relative foster homes.

#### Financial and Other Support Services for Relative Foster Parents

Relatives who provide foster care receive foster-care maintenance payments if the foster home is licensed. Any child in the custody of the State child welfare agency is eligible for medical and dental benefits. Relatives are not excluded from any social services which the State makes available to non-related foster parents.

#### Permanency Options

Children with permanent plans calling for them to remain with relatives may be adopted by relatives, with State support continuing if the children are eligible for subsidized adoption. Children may be considered in permanent foster care with the State agency continuing to support, if the relative is licensed, and monitor placements. Relatives may seek guardianship for children through the courts. Once custody transfers to relatives, they may receive a subsidy from the State to assist in the care of the children.

#### ***TENNESSEE<sup>10</sup>***

*Children in the custody of the Department of Human Services routinely are provided foster care by relatives. State policy demands staff consider relatives as the first alternative for foster-care placement. There are no situations defined by regulation that automatically preclude consideration of relative placements for children.*

*The Department's data system cannot separately identify children placed in relative foster-care homes. Administrators indicated the number of such placements had increased over the past five years, largely because of policy and training emphasis on placing children in the "least restrictive environment" was beginning to take hold.*

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<sup>10</sup> Italics indicate State staff did not respond to our written request to verify interview information reported here.

### Approval and Monitoring of Relative Foster Homes

*The State approves foster family homes for receiving children in the custody of the State. Relative foster homes can be approved based upon the same criteria as non-relatives' homes: the relatives' homes must meet basic health, safety, and space standards; and, relatives must be capable of providing care and protection for the child as demonstrated through a psychosocial assessment, references, and criminal and protective service records checks. To be approved, the relatives also must participate in foster-parent orientation. Children also may be placed in unapproved relative foster homes. These homes undergo a risk assessment, and the relatives' backgrounds are checked against police computers.*

*The decision to seek licensed status usually is made by the relatives. Administrators could not provide information concerning the proportion of approved relative foster homes to unapproved relative foster homes.*

*Foster-care staff must visit all approved foster homes every 30 days. Staff must visit children in unapproved homes on a regular schedule determined by the casework plan for the case.*

### Financial and Other Support Services for Relative Foster Parents

*Relatives who provide foster care receive foster-care maintenance payments if the foster home is approved. In 1989, legislation to facilitate relative placements encouraged the Department to provide financial assistance to relatives if there are economic barriers to placing children with family members. Any child in the custody of the Department is eligible for Federal or State medical and dental benefits. Relatives are not excluded from any social services which the State makes available to non-related foster parents.*

### Permanency Options

*Children with permanent plans calling for them to remain with relatives may be adopted by relatives, with State support continuing only if the children are eligible for subsidized adoption. Children may be considered in permanent foster care with relatives if no other option is possible. The Department continues to monitor permanent foster-care placements on a quarterly basis and to provide assistance if it was previously available.*

## **TEXAS**

The Department of Human Services occasionally places children for whom it has conservatorship with relatives. There are no situations defined by regulation that automatically preclude consideration of relative placements for children.

The number of children placed with relatives has remained relatively stable over the last five years.

### Approval and Monitoring of Relative Foster Homes

There are two means of studying relative foster homes for placement of children: certification as a foster home, or a relative home study. The Department certifies foster family homes for receiving children in the custody of the State. Relative foster homes can be certified based upon the same criteria as non-relatives' homes: the relatives' homes must meet basic health, safety, and space standards; and, relatives must be capable of providing care and protection for the children as demonstrated through psychosocial assessments, references, and criminal and protective service records checks. To be certified, the relatives also must participate in foster-parent training. The Department may allow variances for some standards, but this rarely happens. Few relative placements are certified.

Children usually are placed in uncertified relative foster homes. These homes are reviewed by field staff through a home study and reference checks.

Department staff determine whether relatives should apply for certification based upon the financial needs of the family. Administrators could identify only 12 certified relative foster homes.

Foster-care staff must visit all children in conservatorship every 30 days. The Department of Human Services does not provide special training concerning supervision of relative foster homes on a statewide basis.

### Financial and Other Support Services for Relative Foster Parents

Relatives who are certified foster parents receive foster-care maintenance payments. Children in the custody of the State child welfare agency who receive care in licensed or certified foster homes are usually eligible for other foster-care assistance benefits including Medicaid and Early Periodic Screening Detection and Treatment (EPSDT). The ability to provide supportive services is determined on a local level.

### Permanency Options

Children with permanency plans calling for them to remain with relatives may be adopted by relatives, with State support continuing only if the children are eligible for subsidized

adoption. Relatives may seek to assume managing conservatorship for children through the courts. Once custody transfers to the relative, foster-care services and benefits are withdrawn. In exceptional situations, children may be considered in permanent foster care with the relative. The Department and the courts continue to support and monitor placements.

## **UTAH**

Children in the custody of the Department of Human Services or for whom the Department exercises guardianship routinely are provided foster care by relatives.

The Department's data system cannot separately identify all children placed in relative foster-care homes. Administrators were unable to estimate what the trend in use of relative homes had been over the last five years.

### Approval and Monitoring of Relative Foster Homes

The State licenses foster family homes for receiving children in the custody of the State. Relative foster homes must be licensed based upon the same criteria as non-relatives' homes: the relatives' homes must meet basic health, safety, and space standards; and, relatives must be capable of providing care and protection for the children as demonstrated through a psychosocial assessments, references, and criminal and protective service records checks. The relatives may participate in foster-parent training. Space standards and training can be waived.

Foster-care staff must visit all children and foster parents every 30 days. The Department of Human Services does not provide special training concerning supervision of relative foster homes.

### Financial and Other Support Services for Relative Foster Parents

Almost all relatives who provide foster care receive foster-care maintenance. A few relatives decline foster-care payments. Any child in the custody of the State child welfare agency is eligible for medical and dental benefits. Relatives are not excluded from any social services which the State makes available to non-related foster parents.

### Permanency Options

Children with permanent plans calling for them to remain with relatives may be adopted by relatives, with State support continuing only if the children are eligible for subsidized adoption. Children may be considered in long-term foster care with the State agency continuing to support and monitor placements. Relatives may seek guardianship for



children through the courts. Once custody transfers to the relative foster-care services and benefits may be withdrawn. Adolescents who are 16 years old or older sometimes have as a permanent plan independent living. In some cases, the adolescents may receive Independent Living transition assistance while boarding in the homes of relatives.

## **VERMONT**

Children in the custody of the Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services routinely are provided foster care by relatives. The Department encourages staff to investigate placements that maintain family ties. There are no situations defined by regulation that automatically preclude consideration of relative placements for children.

The number of foster-care placements with relatives has remained relatively stable over the past five years.

### Approval and Monitoring of Relative Foster Homes

The State licenses foster family homes for receiving children in the custody of the State. Relative foster homes can be licensed based upon the same criteria as non-relatives' homes: the relatives' homes must meet basic health, safety, and space standards; and, relatives must be capable of providing care and protection for the children as demonstrated through psychosocial assessments, references, and criminal and protective service records checks. To be licensed, the relatives also must participate in foster-parent training.

Children also may be placed in unlicensed relative foster homes. Foster-care staff conduct a home study to ensure the premises are free of danger, evaluate the relatives' ability to care for the children, and secure agreements from the relatives that they will cooperate with the Department in caring for the children.

The decision to seek licensed status usually is made by the relatives. Administrators could not provide the number of licensed relative foster homes, but indicated that more than half of relative foster-care parents were licensed.

Foster-care staff must visit all children and foster parents on a schedule specified in the case plan. The Department of Human Services does not provide special training concerning supervision of relative foster homes.

### Financial and Other Support Services for Relative Foster Parents

Relatives who provide foster care receive foster-care maintenance payments if the foster homes are licensed; approved relatives can receive provisional foster-care maintenance payments. Any child in the custody of the State child welfare agency is eligible for

medical and dental benefits. Relatives are not excluded from any social services which the State makes available to non-related foster parents, but unlicensed relatives cannot belong to the State Foster Care Association. Thus, they lose the benefit of that organization's programs.

### Permanency Options

Children with permanent plans calling for them to remain with relatives may be adopted by relatives, with State support continuing only if the children are eligible for subsidized adoption. Children may be considered in permanent foster care with the Department continuing to support and monitor placements. Relatives may seek guardianship for children through the courts. If relatives are named guardians for children and custody transfers to the relatives, foster-care services and benefits are withdrawn. The Department, however, does sometimes retain legal custody even if relatives are named as guardians for children. In this case, Departmental support can continue.

## **VIRGINIA**

Children in the custody of the Department of Social Services routinely are provided foster care by relatives. State policy since 1980 has identified placement with relatives as a placement goal. There are no situations defined by regulation that automatically preclude consideration of relative placements for children.

The number of children placed with relatives has remained relatively stable over the last five years.

### Approval and Monitoring of Relative Foster Homes

The State licenses foster family homes for receiving children in the custody of the State. All relative foster homes must be licensed, except for short-term placements during which relatives need only secure 30-day approvals. Relatives' homes are licensed based upon the same criteria as non-relatives' homes: the relatives' homes must meet basic health, safety, and space standards; and, relatives must be capable of providing care and protection for the children as demonstrated through psychosocial assessments, references, and criminal and protective service records checks. Relatives may participate in foster-parent training when it is offered by the agency.

Foster-care staff must visit all children and foster parents every 90 days. The Department of Social Services does not provide special training concerning supervision of relative foster homes.

## Financial and Other Support Services for Relative Foster Parents

Relatives who provide foster care receive foster-care maintenance payments if the foster home is fully licensed and the relative wants such assistance. Any child in the custody of the State child welfare agency is eligible for medical and dental benefits. Relatives are not excluded from any social services which the Department makes available to non-related foster parents.

## Permanency Options

Children with permanent plans calling for them to remain with relatives may be adopted by relatives, with State support continuing only if the children are eligible for subsidized adoption. The courts may order that children be placed in the permanent care of relatives which may end Departmental support and monitoring of placements. Finally, the courts might order that the children be placed in permanent foster care with the relative. Under such an order, the Department reduces monitoring of the placement but support continues.

## **WASHINGTON**

Children in the custody of the Division of Children and Family Services routinely are provided foster care by relatives. Placing children with relatives has always been a priority in agency policies. There are no situations defined by regulation that automatically preclude consideration of relative placements for children, but staff are cautioned particularly in abuse situations to assess the possibility that the pattern of abuse is intergenerational.

The number of children placed with relatives cannot be readily determined from the existing State data system, but a system the agency has recently implemented will identify such placements. Administrators stated that the number of placements with relatives has remained relatively stable.

## Approval and Monitoring of Relative Foster Homes

The State licenses foster family homes for receiving children in the custody of the State. Some relative foster homes are licensed, based upon the same criteria as non-relatives' homes: the relatives' homes must meet basic health, safety, and space standards; and, relatives must be capable of providing care and protection for the children as demonstrated through psychosocial assessments, references, and criminal and protective service records checks. The Division of Children and Family Services offers licensing only to those individuals who care for IV-E eligible children.

Most relative foster homes are not licensed. Staff complete a detailed home study and background checks for unlicensed relative foster homes.

Foster-care staff must visit all children every 30 days. Exceptions can be made to this schedule with supervisory approval after dependency is established. The Department of Social Services does not provide special training concerning supervision of relative foster homes.

#### Financial and Other Support Services for Relative Foster Parents

Licensed relatives who provide foster care to Title IV-E eligible children receive foster-care maintenance payments. All children in the care of the Division are eligible for medical and dental benefits. Those relatives who are not licensed are not eligible for respite-care or clothing vouchers on behalf of children.

#### Permanency Options

Children with permanent plans calling for them to remain with relatives and for whom parental rights have been terminated may be adopted by the relative. State support continues only if the child is eligible for subsidized adoption. The courts may order children placed in long-term foster care with the relative. The agency continues to support and monitor long-term foster care placements. The courts may grant guardianship to the relatives; this action ends agency involvement with the family.

### **WEST VIRGINIA**

The Office of Social Services occasionally places children in its custody in relative foster-care homes. Since 1980, one of the terms of a foster-care consent decree has required the agency to use relatives, if available, for emergency placements for children. There are no situations defined by regulation that automatically preclude consideration of relative placements for children.

The Office of Social Services data base does not separately identify children in relative foster-care placements. Administrators stated, however, that the number of children placed with relatives had risen somewhat over the last five years, largely as a result of the decrease in the pool of available non-related foster homes.

#### Approval and Monitoring of Relative Foster Homes

The State licenses foster family homes for receiving children in the custody of the State. Relative foster homes can be licensed based upon the same criteria as non-relatives' homes: the relatives' homes must meet basic health, safety, and space standards; and,

relatives must be capable of providing care and protection for the children as demonstrated through psychosocial and medical assessments. To be approved, the relatives also must participate in foster-parent orientation and agree to abide by Department policies and decisions.

The agency also may place children in unlicensed relative foster homes. There are no formal procedures for review of these homes.

The decision to seek licensed status usually is made by the relative based upon their need for financial reimbursement and their willingness to submit to State policies. Less than half of all relative foster homes are licensed.

Foster-care staff must visit all non-relative foster homes every 30 days. Staff must visit children in relative foster homes more frequently than non-relative homes for the first 90 days. After the placement has stabilized, foster-care staff visit the home less frequently than the 30-day requirement.

#### Financial and Other Support Services for Relative Foster Parents

Relatives who provide foster care receive foster-care maintenance payments if the foster home is licensed and if, prior to coming into the custody of the Office of Social Services, the child was eligible for Aid to Families with Dependent Children and was not living with the relative. Any child in the custody of the State child welfare agency is eligible for medical and dental benefits. Relatives are not excluded from any social services which the State makes available to non-related foster parents.

#### Permanency Options

Children with permanent plans calling for them to remain with relatives may be adopted by relatives, with State support continuing only if the children are eligible for subsidized adoption. The courts may order children placed in permanent foster care with the relative. The agency continues to support and monitor permanent foster-care placements.

## **WISCONSIN<sup>11</sup>**

*Children in the custody of the Bureau of Children, Youth and Families routinely are provided foster care by relatives. There are no situations defined by regulation that automatically preclude consideration of relative placements for children.*

*The Bureau's data system cannot separately identify all placements with relative. Administrators stated, however, the number of children placed with relatives has remained relatively stable over the last five years.*

### *Approval and Monitoring of Relative Foster Homes*

*The State licenses foster family homes for receiving children in the custody of the State. All relative foster homes must be licensed based upon the same criteria as non-relatives' homes: the relatives' homes must meet basic health, safety, and space standards; and, relatives must be capable of providing care and protection for the children as demonstrated through a psychosocial assessment. The Bureau may waive requirements if relatives cannot meet them.*

*The individual counties determine their own standards for visiting foster homes. The Bureau of Children, Youth and Family Services does not provide special training concerning supervision of relative foster homes.*

### *Financial and Other Support Services for Relative Foster Parents*

*Relatives who provide foster care receive foster-care maintenance payments if the foster home is licensed and the family wants such reimbursement. Any child in the custody of the State child welfare agency is eligible for medical and dental benefits. Relatives are not excluded from any social services which the State makes available to non-related foster parents.*

### *Permanency Options*

*Children with permanent plans calling for them to remain with relatives may be adopted by relatives, with State support continuing only if the children are eligible for subsidized adoption. If the Bureau successfully petitions to terminate parental rights, but has no adoptive homes for children, the children are considered in sustaining care. The Bureau continues supporting and monitoring the placement. The court may approve moving children into long-term foster care with the relatives. The agency continues to support and monitor (on a reduced schedule) long-term, foster-care placements. Relatives may seek*

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<sup>11</sup> Italics indicate State staff did not respond to our written request to verify interview information reported here.

*guardianship for children through the courts. Once custody transfers to the relative foster-care services and benefits are withdrawn.*

## WYOMING

Children in the custody of the Division of Public Assistance and Social Services routinely are provided foster care by relatives. The Division also contracts with tribal authorities for placement of Native American children, and most of these placements are with relative foster-care providers. State policy demands staff consider relatives as the first alternative for foster-care placement. This requirement has been a part of State policy since 1985.

The Division cannot identify relative foster-care placements, particularly for Native American children, but administrators stated that the number of such placements had risen greatly over the last five years. They cited child protective training focusing on the importance of maintaining children's family ties, and the formation of agency policy in this area as the reasons for the sharp rise in relative placements.

### Approval and Monitoring of Relative Foster Homes

The Division licenses foster family homes for receiving children in the custody of the State. Relative foster homes can be licensed based upon the same criteria as non-relatives' homes: the relatives' homes must meet basic health and safety standards; and, relatives must be capable of providing care and protection for the children as demonstrated through psychosocial assessments, references, and limited criminal and records checks. Foster-care licensing criteria may be waived, but the standards usually do not present a barrier to relative placements.

Children also may be placed in unlicensed relative foster homes. These homes are reviewed only for conditions that might jeopardize the health and safety of the children placed there.

The decision to seek licensed status usually is made by the relatives, but judges' rulings on the custody of children often order the Division to license relatives. Administrators could not provide information concerning the proportion of licensed relative foster homes to unlicensed relative foster homes, but they stated that most were licensed.

Foster-care staff must visit all children and foster parents every 30 days. The Department of Human Services does not provide special training concerning supervision of relative foster homes.

### Financial and Other Support Services for Relative Foster Parents

Relatives who provide foster care receive foster-care maintenance payments if the foster home is licensed and the relative requires such assistance. Any child in the custody of the State child welfare agency is eligible for medical and dental benefits. Relatives are not excluded from any social services which the State makes available to non-related foster parents.

### Permanency Options

Children with permanent plans calling for them to remain with relatives may be adopted by relatives, with State support continuing only if the children are eligible for subsidized adoption. Children may be considered in permanent foster care with the State agency continuing to support and monitor placements. Relatives may seek guardianship for children through the courts. Once custody transfers to the relative, foster-care services and benefits are withdrawn.