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SOCIAL SERVICES COUNTY LETTER No. 2011-03

TO: County Departments of Family and Children's Services
DFCS Regional Directors
State Office Staff

FROM: Rachelle Carnesale, Division Director *RJL*
Division of Family and Children's Services

RE: FOSTER/ADOPTIVE HOME APPROVAL PROCESS

PURPOSE

The purpose of this Social Services County Letter is to provide an overview of the key changes to the foster home approval process in an effort to ensure the safety and well being of children placed in foster care, while maintaining full compliance with approval and federal IV-E requirements. The changes include the following:

1. The elimination of the Temporary Approval category for Foster and Adoptive homes.
2. Changes to the 5-Year medical requirement for foster parents.
3. Compliance with criminal records check and medical requirements for foster/adoptive homes at re-evaluation, for new adult household members and existing household members who turn 18 years old.

DISCUSSION

The Department of Family and Children Services (DFCS) is responsible for ensuring the ongoing safety and well being of the children entrusted to our care. This responsibility includes the assurance that caregivers selected to partner in the care of our children have the capacity to ensure they are protected and provide for their well being. Therefore, DFCS and caregivers alike must remain vigilant in maintaining foster/adoptive homes that are in full compliance with approval requirements, especially as they relate to the protection and care of the children we serve.

IMPLEMENTATION

The following changes to the foster home approval process are effective May 1, 2011:

1. The category of Temporary Approvals for Foster and Adoptive homes has been eliminated. If there are any foster/adoptive homes in Georgia SHINES with a Status of Temporary Approval, please update the foster/adoptive home Status immediately.
2. The 5-Year medical requirement and annual medical statement for foster parents at re-evaluation, are now **only** required in the following circumstances:
 - a. The foster parent (s) has a diagnosed health condition. **NOTE:** The diagnosed

health condition must have the potential to impact the foster parents' ability to care for the child.

- i. The Form 36 must be used to document the 5-Year medical requirement.
 - ii. The annual medical statement from the foster parents' physician is also required.
 - b. At any time the Permanency or Resource Development (RD) Case Manager assess the need for the foster parent to provide documentation of their physical and emotional ability to care for the child (ren).
 - i. The Form 36 must be used to document this requirement at the initial request by the Case Manager and every five years thereafter, when there are diagnosed health concerns identified from the medical evaluation.
 - ii. The annual medical statement from the foster parents' physician is also required if there are diagnosed health concerns identified from the medical evaluation.
3. The following information is required for a foster/adoptive home to remain in full compliance with approval requirements:
 - a. All criminal records check and medicals associated with the re-evaluation must be received by the due date of the re-evaluation. This will ensure consistency in tracking and monitoring foster home compliance with approval requirements.
 - i. Criminal records check are considered timely if conducted within the 90 calendar days prior to the re-evaluation due date.
 - b. Criminal records check and medical reports on all new adult household members must be received within 30 calendar days of DFCS being notified.
 - i. Documentation for the medical of all new adult household members includes a medical statement from a physician and a TB test.
 - ii. Any changes in the household composition must be documented in Georgia SHINES immediately.
 - c. Criminal records check and a medical statement for all current household members who turn 18 years of age must be received within 30 calendar days of the youth's 18th birthday.
 - i. Documentation for the medical of all new adult household members includes a medical statement from a physician and a TB test.

NOTE: A TB test is no longer needed for 16 year old household members
4. The following outlines the new foster/adoptive home approval process when criminal records check and medicals are not received as outlined in section 3 above:
 - a. If the required criminal records check and/or medical are not received by the due date of events outlined above in 3a-c.
 - i. The RD Case Manager will update the foster/adoptive home status in Georgia SHINES to one of the new 30-day grace status types. This will give the foster parent time to provide requested information.
 - ii. Georgia SHINES will place the foster/adoptive home on hold for additional placements while in one of the 30 day grace status types.

- iii. The RD Case Manager must provide written notification to the foster parent regarding the current status of the foster home, including home closure if non-compliance with submission of required information.
- b. If the required criminal records check and/or medical are not received by the 31st day, the foster/adoptive home will become unapproved.
 - i. The RD Supervisor will receive a TASK in Georgia SHINES to approve the new home status of unapproved.
 - ii. The RD Case Manager must provide written notification to the the foster parent regarding the current status of the foster/adoptive home and home closure if the home is non-compliant with requirements.
 - iii. Georgia SHINES will also automatically alert the State Office that the home is in unapproved status. The state office will follow up with the county regarding the reason the home has been unapproved.
 - iv. Georgia SHINES will also alert Rev-Max of the status of the foster home.
 - v. The RD and Permanency Case Manager and their respective Supervisors must conduct a staffing to:
 - 1. Develop a transition plan for the current foster children in the home to move to another placement, should the foster/adoptive home remain non-compliant with submission of criminal records check and/or medical.
 - 2. Discuss barriers and develop an action plan to assist the foster parents' with submission of required information.
- c. The RD Case Manager must initiate a policy waiver for approval by the Regional Director, if the RD Case Manager and Supervisor determine that there are extenuating circumstances which may delay the foster/adoptive home with submission of required information beyond the 60th day.
 - i. Extenuating circumstances includes the following: unreadable fingerprints; foster parent or spouse is out of the state or country; spouse is on military duty; etc.
 - ii. The policy waiver is generated in Georgia SHINES by the RD Case Manager and submitted to the RD Supervisor for approval. The RD Supervisor then submits the waiver to any other Approver in their chain of command.
 - iii. The Regional Director will provide the final approval in Georgia SHINES.
- d. If the criminal records check and/or medical is not received by the 60th day:
 - i. A policy waiver approved by the Regional Director must be in place to allow the foster/adoptive home an additional 30 calendar days to submit required information.
 - ii. If a policy waiver is not approved by the Regional Director by the 60th day the foster/adoptive home must be immediately closed.
- e. If the Foster/adoptive home (with an approved waiver) is not in full compliance with submission of the criminal records check and/or medical by the 90th day, the home must be immediately closed.