

DECLARATION OF EMERGENCY

Department of Children and Family Services Child Welfare

Foster Care (LAC 67:V.4101)

The Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), Child Welfare, has exercised the emergency provision of the Administrative Procedure Act, R.S. 49:953(B) to amend LAC 67:V, Subpart 5 Foster Care, Chapter 41 Guardianship Subsidy Program, Section 4101 Subsidizing Guardianship Arrangements for Children in Foster Care. This emergency rule shall be effective January 1, 2019, and shall remain in effect for a period of 120 days.

Pursuant to SEC. 473. [42 U.S.C. 673], amendment of §4101 of this code is necessary to ensure children in foster care in Louisiana are afforded the full benefits possible in achieving permanency through guardianship. Additionally, with regard to federal Public Law 115-123 enacted February 9, 2018, the benefits available through the guardianship subsidy are being expanded.

The department considers emergency action necessary to implement this opportunity for establishing more stable, permanent care options for children in foster care, and stabilizing situations where guardians of children who have exited foster care and achieved the legal age of majority can continue to receive support as long as the guardian continues to provide care for the child and the guardian remains responsible for financial support of the child, if the child meets the same eligibility criteria as children eligible for the department's extended foster care program.

Title 67

SOCIAL SERVICES

Part V. Child Welfare

Subpart 5. Foster Care

Chapter 41. Guardianship Subsidy Program

§4101. Subsidizing Guardianship Arrangements for Children in Foster Care

A. Overview of Program Purpose

1. The Subsidized Guardianship Program enables the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) to make payments to certified relative and fictive kin caregivers as well as certified caregivers with a significant familial bond with the child on behalf of a child who otherwise might not be able to achieve permanency outside of department custody because of special needs or other circumstances. Subsidy payments shall be limited to child(ren) for whom guardianship is indicated due to other more permanent options such as reunification with the parents, immediate unsubsidized custody to a relative or other caregiver, or adoption being determined unfeasible for the child. The guardianship subsidy applies only to a child(ren) for whom the DCFS holds legal custody, only to potential caregivers with whom the child has a significant familial bond; with whom it would be in the child's best interest to remain until the age of majority, and when the kinship placement provider or other caregiver with a significant familial bond becomes a certified foster caregiver according to the certification standards of the state, and, the child(ren) remains in the certified kinship placement or placement with the other caregiver with a significant familial bond for at least six consecutive months during the current foster care episode prior to entering the guardianship subsidy

arrangement. The guardianship subsidy also applies to successor guardian(s) who meet the following criteria:

a. the successor guardian is named in the guardianship subsidy agreement with DCFS;

b. the successor guardian and all adult household members have satisfactorily completed national fingerprint based criminal and child abuse/neglect background clearances; and

c. guardianship is transferred by a court to the successor guardian in accordance with *Louisiana Children's Code* articles 718 through 724.1.

2. The prospective guardianship family must meet basic foster care certification eligibility requirements or the successor guardianship criteria in all respects except for the ability to assume complete financial responsibility for the child's care.

3. An extended guardianship subsidy may be provided to the guardians or successor guardians of a child who initially received a guardianship subsidy from DCFS after achieving the age of 16, but prior to achieving the age of 18, when the guardian continues to provide care for the child and the guardian remains responsible for financial support of the child, if the child meets the same eligibility criteria as children eligible for the department's extended foster care program.

B. Types of Subsidy Payments. The child may be subsidized for the following services up to age 18.

1. Maintenance. The maintenance subsidy includes basic living expenses such as board, room, clothing, spending money, and ordinary medical costs. The maintenance subsidy may be ongoing until the child reaches age 18, but must be renewed on a yearly basis. The maintenance subsidy may be renewed on the child's eighteenth birthday and extended up to age 21 if the guardian continues to provide care for the child and the guardian remains responsible for financial support of the child, if the child meets the same eligibility criteria as children eligible for the department's extended foster care program. This extended maintenance subsidy must be reviewed quarterly and may be renewed annually as long as the child continues to meet the same eligibility criteria as children eligible for the department's extended foster care program. This renewal will be dependent upon the child remaining in the care of the guardian or successor guardian with whom the subsidy agreement was established. The amount of payment shall not exceed 80 percent of the state's regular foster care board rate based on the monthly flat rate payments of the regular foster care board rate for the corresponding age group. Monthly maintenance payments shall not be based on subsidized foster care arrangements such as specialized foster care, alternate family care, or therapeutic foster care. Changes in the maintenance subsidy rate routinely only occur once a year and the adjustment is typically made at the time of the subsidy renewal, or due to a change in the child's age. Adjustments to the maintenance subsidy rate may also occur due to availability of funds, legislative changes or adjustments to the regular foster care board rate.

2. Special Board Rate. Foster parents entering into a guardianship agreement for a foster child for whom a special board rate was received during the foster care episode may request up to a maximum of \$240 which is 80 percent of the special board rate amount of \$300. This is only provided if the care and needs of the child in the guardianship

arrangement warrant this same special board rate. The special board rate subsidy may be renewed on the child's eighteenth birthday and extended up to age 21 if the guardian continues to provide care for the child and the guardian remains responsible for financial support of the child, if the child meets the same eligibility criteria as children eligible for the department's extended foster care program. An extended special board subsidy for a child ages 18 to 21 must be reviewed quarterly and may be renewed annually as long as the child continues to meet the same eligibility criteria as children eligible for the department's extended foster care program. The continued need for the special board rate shall be reviewed at the time of the quarterly reviews. The review shall consist of a determination of whether the same level of specialized care by the guardian, for which the special board rate was being provided at the time of the initial subsidy agreement, continues to be necessary to meet the child's needs. Any reduction in the level of care required by the guardian or successor guardian should result in a decrease in the amount of special board rate compensation to the guardian.

3. Special Services

a. The special services subsidy is time limited and in some cases may be a one-time payment. It is the special assistance given to handle an anticipated expense when no other family or community resource is available. If needed, it can be offered in addition to the maintenance and special board rate subsidy. The special services subsidy must be established as a part of the initial guardianship subsidy agreement, and may not be provided or renegotiated based on any circumstances which develop or issues identified after that point. Special services subsidies include the following types of needs:

i. special medical costs deemed medically necessary for the daily functioning of the child for any condition existing prior to the date of the initial judgment establishing guardianship with the kinship caregiver or other caregiver with a significant familial bond and not covered by Medicaid or other insurance;

ii. ongoing therapeutic treatment costs to complete current therapy and future treatment costs on a time limited basis up to 18 years of age or for the duration of an extended subsidy for any eligible child, as department resources allow, related to the abuse/neglect received by the child and impacting the child's capacity to function effectively as part of the child's educational, family or social environment. This does not include the cost of residential care or psychiatric hospitalization, nor does it include therapeutic intervention for the sole purpose of providing behavior management assistance to the guardian;

iii. legal and court costs to the potential guardian family up to \$1000 for children who are not title IV-E eligible and up to \$2000 for children who are title IV-E eligible for establishing the guardianship arrangement. This service is only available for costs distinct and separate from the routine costs of the child in need of care proceedings to provide for costs to the potential guardian in establishing the guardianship arrangement. This legal and/or court fee will be provided as a non-reoccurring, one-time payment for each guardianship episode.

b. Medicaid Eligibility. The child remains eligible for Medicaid coverage up to 18 years of age when entering a guardianship subsidy arrangement from foster care. This coverage will be eligible utilizing title IV-E federal benefits

if the child was title IV-E eligible at the time of the subsidy arrangement. For children not eligible for title IV-E, this coverage will be provided through title XIX federal benefits or state general funds. For a Louisiana child who is placed out of state in a potential guardianship placement or who moves to another state after the establishment of a guardianship subsidy, if the child is eligible for title IV-E guardianship subsidy payments, the child is also categorically eligible for Medicaid in the state in which the child resides whether that state participates in the title IV-E Guardianship Subsidy Assistance Program or not.

c. Chaffee Foster Care Independent Living Skills Training and Education Training Voucher Eligibility. The child is eligible for consideration for participation in the Chaffee foster care independent living skills training and for education training vouchers if the child initially enters a guardianship arrangement from foster care (not a successor guardianship) after reaching 16 years of age, as long as the child meets any other program eligibility requirements.

C. Exploration of Guardianship Resources

1. Before a child is determined by the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) as eligible for a guardianship subsidy, it must be determined the child cannot be reunited with the parents, and resources for adoptive placement must be explored by the child's worker. If the kinship family or other caretakers with a significant familial bond with the child and with whom the child is placed refuses to adopt the child or is unable to be certified as an adoptive family, the department has to show efforts to achieve the more permanent case goal of adoption for the child and demonstrate the benefits of maintaining the child in the placement in a guardianship arrangement as opposed to ongoing efforts in pursuing adoption or any other long term permanency arrangement. It is also necessary for the child's worker to discuss plans for a guardianship arrangement with the child and document the outcome of that discussion with the child, including agreement with that plan by any child 14 years of age up to 18 years of age. Lack of agreement by any child 14 years of age up to 18 years of age should be an ongoing topic of counseling regarding the benefits of the arrangement between the worker and the child, until a permanency option is achieved for the child or until the child attains 18 years of age.

2. Whenever an eligible child in the custody of DCFS is legally placed based on the interstate compact on the placement of children guidelines with a certified kinship caregiver or other certified caretaker with a significant familial bond with the child in another state, the family shall be eligible for a guardianship subsidy under the same conditions as Louisiana residents.

D. Eligibility Criteria

1. The DCFS, Guardianship Subsidy Program, will determine the appropriateness of subsidy benefits, the type of subsidy, and, the level of the subsidy. An agreement form between the DCFS and the prospective guardianship parent(s), with clearly delineated terms, including designation of a successor guardian, if desired, must be signed prior to the granting of the final decree for guardianship. This agreement will be reviewed on an annual basis thereafter by the DCFS to insure ongoing eligibility. Any extended guardianship subsidy for a child who has attained 18 years of age must be reviewed quarterly to ascertain ongoing eligibility.

2. Subsidy payments shall be limited to a child(ren) for whom guardianship is indicated due to other more permanent options such as reunification with the parents, or adoption being determined unfeasible for or not in the best interests of the child. The exception would be any child who has been receiving a subsidy payment and enters a successor guardianship. A more permanent option for placement is not required as these children do not re-enter state custody.

3. The guardianship subsidy applies only to a child(ren) for whom the DCFS holds legal custody, only to potential caregivers with whom the child has an established familial or emotional relationship which it is deemed to be in the child's best interest to continue, and when the kinship placement provider or other caregiver with a significant familial bond with the child becomes a certified foster caregiver according to the certification standards of the State, and, the child(ren) remains in the certified kinship/caregiver placement for at least six consecutive months during the current foster care episode prior to entering the guardianship subsidy arrangement. The exception would be children entering a successor guardianship. There is no requirement for the child to be in DCFS custody, to be with a caregiver with an established relationship, for certification of the caregiver, nor for a child to be placed with the successor guardian for any length of time prior to entering the guardianship subsidy arrangement.

4. A family is considered eligible for participation in the Guardianship Subsidy Program if they are related to the child or family of the child through blood or marriage or if there exists a fictive kin relationship, which is defined as a relationship with those individuals connected to an individual child or the family of that child through bonds of affection, concern, obligation, and/or responsibility prior to the child's original entry into the custody of the state, and the individual(s) are considered by the child or family to hold the same level of relationship with the child or family as those individuals related by blood or marriage. The exception would be an individual considered for the successor guardianship named by the guardian in the guardianship subsidy agreement with DCFS. Additionally, a family is eligible for participation in the Guardianship Subsidy Program if they have a "significant familial bond" with the child. This term is used to describe individuals with whom the child has a very close affinity who may or may not have been known to the child or his/her family prior to foster care entry. It is also intended to convey the importance of the relationship to the well-being of the child in maintaining a connection into the future. The child demonstrates this bond through a strong attachment to the caregiver. A family with whom the child shares a significant familial bond could potentially include foster parents who are unable or unwilling to establish an adoptive relationship with the child in spite of DCFS efforts to overcome barriers to adoption, yet who are willing to commit to long term permanency through guardianship for the child. This is demonstrated by non-related family who have a significant and positive relationship with the child and who have a strong commitment to caring permanently for the child.

E. Effects of Deaths of Guardians on Guardianship Subsidy

1. When a child has been placed in an approved guardianship placement with a guardianship subsidy agreement in effect and the guardian dies prior to the child reaching the age of majority, the child's eligibility for a

guardianship subsidy shall not be affected if a successor guardian was named in the original guardianship subsidy agreement. The child may remain in the care of a duly designated tutor/guardian as established by the guardian family prior to their death, without further involvement of the department. If the "duly designated" tutor/guardian requires financial assistance to maintain the care of the child and the individual was named in the guardianship subsidy agreement as a successor guardian, it is not necessary for the child to return to state custody and those individuals to become certified foster parents. Successor guardians named in the original guardianship subsidy agreement who take over financial responsibility for a child for whom the original guardians have been receiving an extended guardianship subsidy and the original guardians have died may receive the extended guardianship subsidy as well as long as the child continues to meet eligibility requirements up to the child achieving age 21.

2. If no successor guardian was named in the guardianship subsidy agreement, any individual otherwise legally designated as a tutor/guardian for the child and requiring financial assistance to sustain the care of the child would have to return the child to state custody and those individuals would have to become certified foster parents. Adoption of the child by the family should be explored as well, since adoption is a more permanent relationship for the child and family. If the family and home are determined to be safe for the care of the child through assessment of the home environment, fingerprint based criminal records clearance, and child abuse/neglect clearances, the child may remain in the care of the family while they are certified.

3. Where a guardianship subsidy agreement is in effect and the guardians both die prior to the child reaching the age of majority, the subsidy agreement will end. The child may remain in the care of a duly designated tutor/guardian as established by the family prior to their death, without further involvement of the department.

4.a. If the designated tutor/guardian requires financial assistance to maintain the care of the child, it will be necessary for the child to return to state custody and those individuals to become certified as foster parents and provide care to the child six consecutive months after certification and prior to entering into a guardianship subsidy agreement with the department. During the process of becoming certified as foster parents the family may continue to provide care to the child, as long as they are determined to be safe caregivers through a minimum of:

- i. department assessment of the home environment;
- ii. national fingerprint based criminal records clearances on all adults in the home; and
- iii. child abuse/neglect clearances on all adults in the home.

b. Adoption of the child by the family will be explored by the department as well. There can be no financial support of the child by the child welfare agency while being cared for by the family until such family has been certified, other than incidental expenditures routinely reimbursed to other non-certified caregivers of children in foster care. Each guardianship arrangement is considered a new episode. Therefore, the department may provide legal and court costs to support the establishment of this new legal guardianship arrangement between the potential guardian and the child up to \$1000 for children who are not title IV-E

eligible and up to \$2000 for children who are title IV-E eligible. No legal or court costs are provided for any guardianship arrangement established on or after the child's eighteenth birthday.

AUTHORITY NOTE: Promulgated in accordance with SEC. 473. [42 U.S.C. 673], and P.L. 115-123.

HISTORICAL NOTE: Promulgated by the Department of Social Services, Office of Community Services, LR 36:552 (March 2010), amended by the Department of Children and Family Services, Division of Programs, Child Welfare Section, LR 41:2308 (November 2015), amended by the Department of Children and Family Services, Child Welfare, LR 45:

Marketa Garner Walters
Secretary

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