

Department of Human Services

House Committee on Human Services and Housing Informational Hearing: Foster Home Certification

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May 9, 2017



Standards for Certification of Foster Parents and Relative Caregivers and Approval of Potential Adoptive Resources

- **Oregon Revised Statutes**

418.625 through 418.648

418.205 through 418.327

- **Oregon Administrative Rules**

413-200-0260 through 413-200-0396

413-215-0301 through 413-215-0396



Who Can Apply?

Oregon welcomes and supports all families equally. Families of every race, culture, and ethnicity are needed to help children grow with a strong sense of racial and cultural identity. Applicants are considered regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, religion or sexual orientation.

- You can be single, married, or domestic partners
- You can live in a house or apartment, but the home must have adequate space, including space for safe and appropriate sleeping arrangements, *for each member of the household.*
- You can work inside or outside the home
- You must be at least 21 years of age or older (There are individual circumstances, requiring management approval which may allow a relative applicant between the ages of 18 and 20 to be certified as a relative foster parent.)
- You must have sufficient income to support your family
- You must be able to physically care for a child
- You must pass a child abuse and criminal background check (*Applicants with criminal history will be evaluated on a case by case basis. Consideration will be given in light of the overall context of the offense.*)

The Application Process

After deciding to pursue becoming a foster parent or relative caregiver individuals must:

- Complete an application
- Provide at least four personal references
- Authorize and participate in a criminal history review
- Authorize and participate in a child abuse background check review
- Participate in a SAFE (Structured Analysis Family Evaluation) home study.
- Allow the department the opportunity to interview all members of your household including your children.
- Allow the department to conduct a home and environment safety check of your home and property.
- Attend Foundations training for caregivers
- If the Department denies an application or revokes a current certificate of approval the applicant or certified family has the opportunity for a contested case hearing through an Oregon Administrative Law Judge.

Structured Analysis and Family Evaluation S.A.F.E.

SAFE is a structured home study methodology that allows child welfare agencies to effectively and systematically evaluate prospective families for foster and adoptive placement. Using research-based tools and processes, SAFE allows even the most novice Home Study Practitioner to do a thorough job evaluating prospective families. The SAFE Desk Guide provides a uniformity of evaluation which is fair to all Applicants as well as a tool of clinical support to Home Study Practitioners.

- The SAFE home study is a comprehensive assessment of you and your ability to provide for the health, safety and wellbeing for children who may be placed in your home.
- The process begins with a series of interviews, home visits, completing questionnaires, and candid conversations with the department Certification staff person.
- Meeting and talking with your children and others who may also live in your home,
- SAFE includes a home safety/fire inspections and sometimes medical information from your doctor.

Child Abuse History

- Certification standards require Oregon child abuse background checks for each applicant and each adult living in the home before the Department issues a certificate of approval.
- Applicants must disclose their history regarding Child Abuse history in Oregon or any other state or country.
- Child abuse background checks are required for all adults living in the home, and respite care providers.
- Out-of-state and out-of-country child abuse background checks may be requested in which the applicants, adults and respite providers have resided in the previous five years.
- Any history is analyzed and considered in the overall analysis of the applicant(s).

*Federal regulations require Child Abuse history checks including out of state in the prior five-years.

Criminal History Background Check

- 413-120-0440 (1)(a) When a family applies to be certified as a *relative caregiver* or *foster parent*, the Department must conduct a *criminal records check* on each applicant and any person who is identified as an *other person in the household*.
 - Oregon criminal records obtained from OSP's Law Enforcement Data System (LEDS)
 - National Federal Bureau of Investigations; fingerprint based check
- Federal regulations identifies a list of criminal history that will automatically disqualify or potentially disqualify an applicant.
- The Department has identified these Oregon crimes and are listed under;
 - OAR 413-120-0450 Disqualifying and Potentially Disqualifying Criminal Convictions
- The Department has also identified Arrest history that must be taken into consideration.
 - OAR 413-120-0455 Potentially Disqualifying Arrests
- Applicants have an opportunity to appeal the criminal history through Oregon State Police and Federal Bureau of Investigations.

Fitness Determination

The Department must determine the fitness of individuals who have been convicted of crimes, or who have been arrested for but not convicted for certain crimes, to be relative caregivers or foster parents.

- 413-120-0457 Weighing Test (1) Circumstances regarding the nature of potentially disqualifying convictions and conditions, including but not limited to:
 - (a) The details of the incidents that led to potentially disqualifying convictions, arrests, or other disqualifying conditions.
 - (b) The age of the *subject individual* at the time of the incidents that led to potentially disqualifying convictions, arrests, or other disqualifying conditions.
 - (c) The passage of time since the incidents that led to potentially disqualifying convictions, arrests, or other disqualifying conditions.
 - (d) The facts that support the convictions, arrests, or potentially disqualifying conditions.
 - (e) Whether or not the *subject individual* was charged with or indicted for a crime related to a potentially disqualifying arrest.
 - (f) The disposition of any charge or indictment related to a potentially disqualifying arrest.
 - (g) Consideration of state and federal laws, including regulations and rules which address crimes or conditions that potentially disqualify a person from being a *relative caregiver, foster parent, adoptive resource, or an other person in the household.*

Length of time

Types of Foster Family Certification

- **Certificate of Approval** : Traditional, someone from the community stepping forward. Duration is two-years.
- **Child-Specific Certificate of Approval** : A relative, someone known to the child or their family who is recruited by the family or the department to foster a specific child. Duration is two-years.
- **Temporary Certification of Approval** : Utilized primarily for the Child-Specific Certificate of Approval in order to have a child placed in a short period of time. Duration is up to 180 days in order to complete the full process.

Foster Family Certification Process

- Expedited Process to complete a Child-Specific Certificate of Approval may be as quick as the same day to a few days based on the family and needs of the child being consider for placement.
- Oregon Administrative Rules allow for up to 180 days to complete a full certification. The department strives for a shorter period of time.

Foster Home Certification Staff

- Foster Home Certifier is a department employee. They are responsible for six-core functions;
 - **Recruitment;** responding to inquiry's, providing information and general soliciting of information into the community.
 - **Retention;** follow-up with foster parent, answering questions, providing or referring to resources by the department or community, activities/event
 - **Assessment & Certification;** assessing applicants and current providers as an ongoing function, completing SAFE, data entry, placement support plans, home visits,
 - **Training;** delivering Orientation and Foundations Curriculum, assisting in referral to contracted trainers, organizing and providing training space
 - **Support;** ongoing phone/in-person meetings, guidance and referral for services, supports, navigation of system (DHS, Courts, CASA, CRB, Mental Health, etc..)
 - **Placement Matching;** interface with caseworker with placement needs, assessing staffings, identify and locate placement resource.

Number of Certification Staff

Department of Human Services includes Foster Home Certification within the classification of Social Service Specialist 1 which is similar to a Caseworker position.

2015-17 position authority for Social Service Specialist is 1,412.02 full-time employees. If fully funded based on workload the SSS1 positions would include 1,606.72 FTE.

Foster Home Certification makes up 11.02% of all SSS1 positions to a current allocation of 143 FTE statewide.

- This equates to approximately 27 families per foster home certifier in the state.

If the department was funded at the 100% of the identified workload this would add an additional 35 FTE positions to the Certification program.

Challenges

A healthy and successful Foster Parent community is predicated on an adequate supply of skilled, well trained and supported foster families who often recruit others to the fostering community.

1. All efforts toward this goal must first start with **Retention** of the families currently caring for children.
 - Respect for the families by DHS, the larger system partners such as Courts, attorneys, Legislature, Media, and the community.
 - Foster Parents must be a critical and active member of the child's team in planning, and supporting the child/youth.
 - Resources and supports for the child and fostering family to be successful.
2. **Recruitment** of additional families to care for children; relatives and non-relatives. How can communities come together to build a caregiving model within their own community.
3. Adequate **Staffing** levels in order to provide a level of assessment and support for the caregiving families.

Opportunities

Community Develop Models

- Every Child
- Growing Resources and Alliances through Collaborative Efforts; G.R.A.C.E.
- Foster Parent Night Out

Innovative and Evidenced based models;

Thank you to the 2015-17 legislature who provided funding to develop two-foster care pilot programs the department is currently working in four counties with two different models.

- KEEP: KEEP is an evidence-based support and skill enhancement education program for foster and kinship parents of children and teens (KEEP SAFE). The program supports foster families by promoting child well-being and preventing placement breakdowns.
- Maple Star; Re-inventing a foster care training, support and design through Collaborative Problem Solving, Trauma Informed Care, Coaching/mentoring, Respite

Despite what any statistics may say or labels may insinuate, your community is fighting for you so that you can do great things.

*With love; Your Foster Mom
Brooke*

