

**DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES
SOCIAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION
311 WEST SARATOGA STREET
BALTIMORE, MARYLAND 21201**

DATE: March 2, 2015

POLICY #: SSA-CW # 15-23

TO: Directors, Local Departments of Social Services
Assistant Directors, Services

FROM: Deborah Ramelmeier, Acting Executive Director
Social Services Administration

RE: Relative Notification of Child Entering Out-of-Home
Placement

PROGRAM AFFECTED: Out-of-Home Placement

ORGINATING OFFICE: Out-of-Home Placement

ACTION REQUIRED: Implement Policy and Procedure

ACTION DUE: March 16, 2015

CONTACT PERSON: Jill Taylor, Program Manager
Out of Home Placement
410-767-7695
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PURPOSE:

The purpose of this policy is to provide guidelines to the Local Departments of Social Services (LDSS) on providing written notification to relatives within 30 days of a child entering out-of-home placement.

BACKGROUND:

The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008, required that notification be sent to all adult relatives of a child placed in State custody. This notification must be sent to the relatives within 30 days of removal of the child.

The Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act, Public Law 113-183, was signed into law on September 29, 2014. This law requires the State to expand the current policy to include providing notice within 30 days of removal and placement into foster care to all adult relatives and parents with legal custody of siblings.

ACTION:

Prior to removal of a child from their parent or legal guardian, the LDSS shall make every effort to divert a child from placement into foster care by placing a child with relatives. In some incidences, removal is due to an emergency event/situation and planning cannot occur prior to placement into foster care. In these situations, the LDSS shall gather the names of all relatives and siblings from:

- Parent;
- Child;
- MD CHESSIE;
- Child Support;
- FIA and CARES;
- Internet/Web search;
- Family Finding; and
- Parent Locator.

Gathering names is an on-going process and is not a onetime conversation. Within 30 days of a child entering foster care the LDSS, must provide written notification to **all adult relatives including parents with legal custody of siblings**. The definition of sibling is a child that shares at least one parent with another child through blood relation or adoption. Even if parental rights have been terminated or the parents are deceased the children are still considered to be siblings. The LDSS shall not notify relatives when a history of domestic violence is known to the LDSS, in which the safety of the child and/or relative is at risk.

This notification must inform the relatives that the child was removed from the parent(s) or legal guardian(s). The notification must indicate that the relative has the option to be a placement resource, mentor or visiting resource, or to participate in family meetings and permanency planning for the child(ren). The notification must include the link to the DHR

web page http://www.dhr.state.md.us/blog/?page_id=3232 that outlines the requirements for becoming a foster family. The notification must also include the right for the relative to participate in the Guardianship Assistance Program. The notification link to the DHR web <http://www.dhr.state.md.us/blog/?p=156> outlines the requirements. The notification must also include the opportunities that the relative would miss if they choose not to respond, such as not being considered a placement option, not being able to participate in the permanency planning for the child, and not being a visiting or mentor resource. The written notification shall be scanned and saved in the MD CHESSIE file cabinet and documented in a contact note.

Attached is a sample letter that must be sent to adult relatives and parents with legal custody of siblings upon removal of a child and placement into foster care.

SAMPLE LETTER
Name of LDSS
Street Address
City, State, Zip Code

Relative Notification of Child Entering Out-of-Home Placement

Date: _____

Re: _____
(Name of Child(ren))

Dear (Mr. Ms. Mrs.) _____:

Your name was provided to the (jurisdiction) Department of Social Services as a relative of the above-referenced child(ren). We wish to notify you that the child(ren) has/have been removed from the custody of his/her parent or legal guardian. If you wish to be considered as a placement resource, you must contact the caseworker, (caseworker's name) at (telephone number) immediately to discuss options available. These services include: participating in the care and placement of the child; becoming a foster parent for the child; and/or participated in the Guardianship Assistance Program. For additional information about qualifications and requirements to become a foster parent, please visit our website at http://www.dhr.state.md.us/blog/?page_id=3232 and for the Guardianship Assistance Program <http://www.dhr.state.md.us/blog/?p=156>.

If you do not wish to be considered as a placement resource but can suggest another relative, we would appreciate your assistance. If you choose not to respond, the Department of Social Services will move forward with another plan for this child. This may mean you forego your opportunity to have your home considered as a placement option, or the chance to become a mentor or visiting resource, or to participate in family meetings and permanency planning for the child(ren). If we do not hear from you by (insert date) the Department of Social Services will move forward in developing a permanency plan on behalf of the child(ren).

Sincerely,

Caseworker