



Jess Dannhauser To: **Foster Care Providers**
Commissioner From: **Julie Farber**
Date: February 24, 2022
Julie Farber, MSW Re: **Foster Home Certification/Approval and Annual Reauthorization During**
Deputy Commissioner **COVID-19 Pandemic**
Division of Family
Permanency Services

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The Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) issued a COVID-19 Guidance for Foster Parent Certification and Reauthorization by Local Districts of Social Services (LDSS) and Voluntary Agencies (VA) memo on February 4, 2022 which remains effective until April 16, 2022, unless explicitly stated otherwise in that document or any forthcoming guidance. This memorandum is intended to provide additional information, further clarification and requirements. It is an update to the memo issued by ACS on May 8, 2020 found [here](#).

I. Initial Certification Requirements:

Home Study/Safety Assessment

As stated in the OCFS COVID guidance, an initial home study must be conducted via an in-person visit as part of initial certification requirements. Agency staff should follow the instructions on safely conducting in-person visits outlined in [ACS Emergency Guidance for Foster Care Providers: Casework Contacts, Family Time, and Family Team Conferences](#) to maintain the safety of the family and staff. As OCFS directs, appropriate precautions must be taken while completing a physical check of the home and looking for any risks to a child’s health and safety, which include social distancing; wearing gloves and a mask, if available; avoiding touching household items when possible; y.

Initial Pre-Certification Training

In normal circumstances, ACS requires 30 hours of training prior to certification. Given the COVID-19 public health emergency, ACS is requiring foster parents to complete a minimum 10 hours of training prior to initial certification. The remaining training hours must be completed as soon as possible after the certification approval date. Please note the following:

- Pre-certification training must include any of the Group Preparation and Selection II/Model Approach to Partnerships in Parenting (GPSII/MAPP) products or trainings found on the Foster/Adoptive Resource webpage, <https://www.hslcnys.org/fosterparenttraining>.
- Additionally, potential therapeutic foster parents can participate in training offered by Fostering Change for Children.
- It is acceptable to hold these trainings via Zoom, WebEx or a secure videoconferencing virtual platform.

- CPR and First Aid training may be completed online.

Criminal History Record Checks (CHRC)

Criminal History Record Checks (CHRC), including fingerprints, must be completed for all prospective foster parents and all household members 18 years of age and older. Foster parent initial certification or approval cannot be finalized until the successful completion of the CHRC.

Medical

If the prospective foster parent has had a physical completed within the last year, the medical report can be submitted to meet this requirement. If an appointment is required by the physician, it can be done through a telehealth appointment in most cases. Medical statements can be submitted via password-protected email, mail, or facsimile.

II. Requirements for Approving Potential Emergency Foster Homes:

Home Study/Safety Assessment

As part of the process for approving relative or eligible nonrelative (“kin”) homes on an emergency basis, the foster care provider agency must complete a home study and safety assessment via an in-person visit to meet certification requirements. Agency staff should follow the instructions on conducting in-person contacts outlined in the [ACS EMERGENCY GUIDANCE FOR FOSTER CARE PROVIDERS](#).

Criminal History Record Checks (CHRC)

Criminal History Record Checks (CHRC), including fingerprints, must be completed for all relative and eligible nonrelatives approved on an emergency basis. All relative and eligible nonrelative foster homes approved on an emergency basis may continue to provide care for children placed with them until the completion of the CHRC process or unless the certification is revoked by an authorized agency. If the CHRC is not completed within 90 days, foster care agencies must comply with the terms of 18 NYCRR §443.7(g), (h), and (i).

Medical

If the relative or eligible nonrelative prospective foster parent has had a physical completed within the last year, the medical report can be submitted to meet this requirement. If an appointment is required by the physician, it can be done through a telehealth appointment in most cases. Medical statements can be submitted via password-protected email, mail, or facsimile.

Recertification Requirements:

The OCFS Memo dated February 4, 2022 provides instructions to follow in order to meet all annual reauthorization of foster homes requirements in accordance with 18 NYCRR §443.10(a) including:

- Complete a *written evaluation* of the home and foster family using the Annual Reauthorization Assessment and Determination (OCFS-5183L) form.

- Virtual visitation using technology that allows the agency staff to examine the inside of the home is allowed when an in-person visit to the foster home cannot be conducted due to quarantine or illness related to COVID-19. Reasons for a virtual evaluation must be documented in CONNECTIONS.
- *Evaluate* the care provided to children in the home and the working relationship of the children with foster parents.
 - Assessment should be done in person whenever possible. However, a virtual assessment, due to COVID-19, may be done as long as the children are able and willing to communicate using video-conferencing.
 - The reason and justification for the virtual conference must be documented in CONNECTIONS and noting the child's age, maturity, proficiency with technology used, etc.
- *Interviews* with Foster Parents can also be virtual. The interview should include a review of the Safety Review Form (OCFS-5183E) and Foster Parent Agreement with Authorized Agencies (OCFS-5183J). Conversation with the children's case planner should also take place verifying the last in-person home visit and conditions of home. All such communications must be documented in CONNECTIONS along with the reason and justification for holding a virtual interview.
- *A written medical statement* from a physician about the foster family and additional family members' health.
 - If the foster parent or any household member cannot obtain an updated medical it must be documented in CONNECTIONS in the *FAD* stage in the *FA Home Person Detail* window. A universal date of 5/1/2022 can be used as a placeholder until the medical documentation is obtained.
 - Everyone granted this extension must provide updated medicals on or before April 16, 2022. CONNECTIONS Implementation Specialist can assist with updating date in FAD.
- *The completion of criminal history record check(s) for all adults who have moved into the home or turned 18 since initial certification.*
- *Review of the written evaluation* by the supervisor is required before the certification or approval is renewed. Once the written evaluation has been completed and reviewed by the supervisor:
 - The foster care agency staff may conduct a review of the evaluation via telephone, WebEx or Zoom or other virtual method that allows simultaneous engagement between the worker and the foster parents.
 - Email or text may only be used to schedule and confirm the date of the review, as well as to gather FP's comments regarding the review. All interactions and the manner in which they took place should be documented in detail in the system of record.
 - The email or text with the foster parent may serve as confirmation of the review if a signature cannot be obtained from the foster parent prior to the expiration of the certification or approval. The foster care agency staff must obtain the foster

parent(s) signature on the completed OCFS-5183L as soon as reasonably practicable, but no later than April 16, 2022.

Recertification Training

While OCFS is only requiring annual recertification training during the COVID-19 public health emergency for foster parents providing foster care for children eligible for special or exceptional maintenance payments, ACS continues to require annual recertification training for all foster parents as described in the ACS Foster Care Quality Assurance Standards. However, due to the public health emergency caused by COVID-19, some aspects of ACS' recertification training requirements have been relaxed and the following minimum recertification training guidelines must be met:

- Foster parents caring for children in regular Family Foster Care programs are required to complete a minimum of six hours of recertification training hours. Trainings can be accessed on the Foster/Adoptive Resource webpage, <https://www.hslcnys.org/fosterparenttraining>. It is acceptable to hold these trainings via WebEx or a secure videoconferencing virtual platform.
- Foster parents caring for children in a Treatment Family Foster Care or Special Medical and Developmental Disabilities program are required to complete a minimum of six hours of recertification training. Additionally, these foster parents must complete a minimum of six hours of training specific to the needs of the child(ren) placed in their care for a minimum total of 12 hours. Trainings can be accessed on the Foster/Adoptive Resource webpage, <https://www.hslcnys.org/fosterparenttraining>. It is acceptable to hold these trainings via WebEx or a secure videoconferencing virtual platform.
- Foster parents caring for children receiving an exceptional payment must complete a minimum of six hours of recertification training. Additionally, these foster parents must complete a minimum of six hours of training specific to the needs of the child(ren) placed in their care, for a minimum total of 12 hours. Trainings can be accessed on the Foster/Adoptive Resource webpage, <https://www.hslcnys.org/fosterparenttraining>. It is acceptable to hold these trainings via WebEx or a secure videoconferencing virtual platform.

Foster care agencies should document in the foster parent records the names and dates of the trainings completed by the foster parent.

If you have any questions about this memorandum, please contact [Ina Mendez](#).