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**To:** Foster Care Agencies  
**From:** Julie Farber, Deputy Commissioner, Family Permanency Services   
**Re:** Guidance pertaining to overnight visiting alternatives when families lack housing  
**Date:** May 8, 2018

This memorandum provides guidance to foster care agencies pertaining to resources for overnight visiting when parents do not have appropriate housing where overnight visits can take place. This guidance supports ACS' policy, [Determining the Least Restrictive Level of Supervision Needed During Visits for Families with Children in Foster Care](#), and [17-OCFS-ADM-14](#).

### **Background:**

Overnight visits (aka family time) can be an important step towards family reunification. ACS is committed to having all families experience quality family time and to having timely and lasting reunifications.

Lack of resources for overnight visits has been identified as a barrier to reunification in some cases. This issue can affect parents residing in shelters that do not allow children for overnight visits as well as parents residing in other types of housing that are unsuitable for overnight family time for various reasons.

Foster care agencies are responsible for facilitating these visits. **Lack of housing cannot be an impediment to visiting. Foster care agencies are responsible to identify alternative visiting locations when necessary.**

Foster care agencies must explore all possible options for overnight family time, including extended family and other community resources. It is understood that, in some cases, foster care agencies and parents are unable to identify feasible resources even after full exploration of all options. **In these instances, foster care agencies may use hotels for overnight visits, per the procedure outlined below.**

### **Guidance:**

At the outset of the case, agencies should be aware of the parents' housing situation and their network of family/other resources that may affect the progression of family time (and ultimately reunification.) Long before overnight visits are under consideration, agencies should identify whether lack of housing resources may pose a barrier to this family time that may be necessary for reunification.

Additionally, the agency should have clearly assessed that the family is ready for overnight family time and that this time is required for the family to achieve reunification. (For instance, older children and children only briefly in care might be able to reunify without overnight visits.) The goal is to have the fewest barriers to permanency that still promote safety.

Once a family is deemed ready for overnight family time and that this is necessary for reunification, the agency should conduct a full review of resources. These should include immediate and extended family members as well as foster parents (current or former), fictive kin and community connections, e.g. church w/ potential visiting space. Even if these resources are not available for discharge or more extensive visiting, they might serve as overnight visiting resources for a limited amount of time. If such resources are located, standard protocols apply so that they can serve in this capacity in a safe, appropriate manner.

If the assessment determines that the family does not have viable resources to host overnight family time –

- the agency must seek ACS approval for the use of a hotel to accommodate the visits;
- agencies may use only nationally recognized hotels with the specific hotel being of good quality, preferably offering families a homelike setting with options for food preparation;
- agencies must document that they have conducted a site visit to the identified hotel within the past 6 months;
- agencies should provide parents living in shelters with letters detailing planned overnight hotel visits so that they do not forfeit their shelter placement.

To request approval for utilization of a hotel for overnight family time, foster care agencies should complete the form accompanying this memo and submit it to their ACS Office of Shared Response liaison or ACS Senior Practice Consultant (SPC) who will process the request for approval. ACS will generally process its review within 5 business days.