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RESOURCE FAMILY OVERVIEW

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RESOURCE FAMILY OVERVIEW

1.1 Introduction

This guidance addresses the approval of all types of families who provide care for children in the foster care system. While terms such as "kinship foster parent", "foster parent," "adoptive parent," or "respite parent" indicate who a family is relative to a child's permanency plan, these are not discrete or mutually exclusive activities; rather they are a few of the many ways a family can serve as a resource to that child. In this guidance, all types of families foster, adoptive, and respite caregivers, as well as approved relatives, concurrent planning families, etc. are generally referred to as resource families. For simplicity in this document, all individuals seeking approval are referred to as "prospective resource families."

This chapter of guidance is in accordance with Virginia Administrative Code 22 VAC 40-211 and is divided into *five sections* that address *resource families, including kinship resource family approval, and non-relative resource family recruitment, approval and support*. This guidance also provides the local board of social services (LDSS) with specific required and recommended procedures and forms needed to carry out these regulatory standards. Requirements apply to adoptive families only until the final order of adoption is issued.

The approval processes as presented in this guidance are consistent with two significant approaches to working with *resource* families. Families are dually-approved as foster and adoptive families and the approval process is a mutual endeavor between the LDSS and the family requesting approval. These processes are consistent with Virginia's practice model. *Both relative and non-relative resource parents must meet the same approval requirements, as outlined in the table below.*

Comparison of Virginia's process for approving relative and non-relative resource families

Steps for approval	***Relatives***	***Non-relatives***
Recruit family	*Yes- Family Partnership Meeting (FPM)*	*Yes- Faster Families Highway*
Informational session	*Yes- individual Permanency Assessment Tool*	*Yes- in most cases, group orientation*

Physical Home Environment Checklist	*Yes- home visit*	*Yes- completed as part of MFA process*
Criminal State Name check on adults	*Yes-rule out if any barrier crimes (subject to relative exceptions listed in Virginia Code)*	*No (This check is not necessary because they must have the FBI criminal check completed prior to approval)*
OASIS search on adults	*Yes- rule out if any CPS findings*	*No (This check is not necessary because they must have the central registry check completed prior to approval)*
Kinship Foster Parent Waiver	*Yes- allows for immediate placement when the above steps are successful*	*No- must be fully approved before placement*
FBI criminal and sex offender registry checks (fingerprints) for all adults	*Yes- submitted within 72 hours of placement (subject to relative exceptions listed in Virginia Code)*	*Yes- submitted and returned with an eligible determination*
Central Registry check for all adults (for CPS)	*Yes- and for any states lived in within last 5 years*	*Yes- and for any states lived in within last 5 years- submitted and returned with an eligible determination*
DMV check	*Yes*	*Yes*
Sworn Statement	*Yes*	*Yes*
Three interviews- minimum	*Yes*	*Yes*
Mutual Family Assessment (MFA)	*Yes- waived for 6 months*	*Yes*
Physicals for care providers	*Yes- waived for 6 months*	*Yes*
TB screens for all household members	*Yes- waived for 6 months*	*Yes*

Pre-service training	*Yes- Traditions of Caring- waived for 6 months*	*Yes- PRIDE*
Certificate of Approval (COA)- 36 months	*Yes- issued when fingerprints and CPS checks are returned with an eligible determination*	*Yes- when all approval requirements are complete*

1.2 Legal basis

1.2.1. Federal law and regulation

Specific foster care and adoption home approval requirements are set forth in the following federal laws, many of which are incorporated into Title IV-E of the Social Security Act.

- P.L. 109-432 – Tax Relief and Health Care Act of 2006
- P.L. 110-351 – Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoption Incentives Act of 2008
- P.L. 109-288 – Child and Family Services Improvement Act of 2006
- P.L. 109-248 – Adam Walsh Child Protection and Safety Act of 2006
- P.L. 109-239 – Safe and Timely Interstate Placement of Foster Children Act of 2006
- P.L. 109-171 – Deficit Reduction Act of 2005
- P.L. 109-113 – Fair Access Foster Care Act of 2005
- Keeping Children and Families Safe Act of 2003
- Promoting Safe and Stable Families Amendments of 2001
- Strengthening Abuse and Neglect Courts Act of 2000
- Inter-Country Adoption Act of 2000
- Child Abuse Prevention and Enforcement Act, 2000
- Foster Care Independence Act of 1999
- Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997

- Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA), as Amended, 1996
- Interethnic Adoption Provisions (IEPA) of the Small Business Job Protection Act of 1996
- Multiethnic Placement Act (MEPA) of 1994
- P.L. 96-272 – The Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980
- Additional requirements are set forth in the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Title 45 - Public Welfare Chapter XIII - Office of Human Development Services
  - 45 CFR 1355 – General
  - 45 CFR 1356 – Requirements Applicable to Title IV-E
  - 45 CFR 1357 – Requirements Applicable to Title IV-B

1.2.2. State law and regulation

Specific state laws relevant to the approval of resource families are:

The Code of Virginia

- § 63.2-900 – Accepting children for placement in homes, facilities, etc., by local boards.
- § 63.2-901.1, Criminal history and central registry check for placements of children.
- § 63.2-1208 – Investigations; report to circuit court.
- § 63.2-1225 – Determination of appropriate home.
- § 63.2-1231 – Home study; meeting required; exception.
- § 63.2-1719 – Barrier crime, construction.
- § 63.2-1721 – Background check upon application for licensure or registration as child-welfare agency; background check of foster or adoptive parents approve by child-placing agencies and family day homes approved by family day systems; penalty.

- § 63.2-1722 – Revocation or denial of renewal based on background checks; failure to obtain background check.
- § 63.2-1723 – Child welfare agencies; criminal conviction and waiver.

The Administrative Code of Virginia, 22 VAC 40-211, Resource, Foster, and Adoptive Family Home Approval Standards.

1.3. Definitions

The following words and terms are defined in state regulation as identified below. When used in this chapter, they shall have the following meaning, unless the context clearly indicates otherwise:

Term	Definition
Adoptive Parent	Any *resource parent* selected and approved by a parent or a child placing agency for the placement of a child with the intent of adoption.
Adult	Any person 18 years of age or over.
Applicant	An individual or couple applying to be approved as a resource *parent*. *Also referred to as a prospective resource parent.*
Background Check	A criminal history record *check*, child abuse and neglect central registry check, and any other requirement as set forth in § 63.2-901.1 of the Code of Virginia.
Caregiver	Any individual having the responsibility of providing care for a child and includes the following: (i) parent or other person legally responsible for the child's care; (ii) any other person who has assumed caregiving responsibility by virtue of an agreement with the legally responsible person; (iii) person responsible by virtue of their position of conferred authority; or (iv) adult person residing in the home with the child.
Central Registry	A subset of the child abuse and neglect information system and the name index with identifying information on an individual named as an abuser and/or neglector in founded child abuse and/or neglect complaints or reports not currently under administrative appeal; maintained by the VDSS.
Certificate of Approval	*A certificate issued to the approved resource family confirming that requirements for approval have been met. As long as the parents and the home maintain approval compliance, the approval remains in effect for 36 months.*
Child	Any natural person less than 18 years of age.

Child-Placing Agency	Any person who places children *with* resource *parents*, adoptive *parents*, or *in* independent living arrangements pursuant to § 63.2-1819 of the Code of Virginia or a local board that places children *with* resource *parents* or adoptive *parents* pursuant to § 63.2900, 63.2-903 or 63.2-1221 of the Code of Virginia. Officers, employees, or agents of *Virginia*, or any locality acting within the scope of their authority as such, who serve as or maintain a child placing agency, shall not be required to be licensed.
Commissioner	The commissioner of the VDSS, their designee, or authorized representative.
Contingency Fund	A statewide insurance plan to supplement local board approved resource families' homeowner's policies to reimburse for certain damages or losses incurred due to *actions* of the child during placement with the family.
Corporal Punishment	Punishment administered through the intentional infliction of pain or discomfort to the body through actions such as, but not limited to, (i) striking, or hitting with any part of the body or with an implement; (ii) pinching, pulling, or shaking; or (iii) any similar action that normally inflicts pain or discomfort.
CRAFFT	An acronym for Consortium for Resource, Adoptive, and Foster Family Training. This contracted training service is available for prospective resource families to increase the pool of viable family-based placements. CRAFFT also delivers in-service training for currently approved families and conducts assessments specific to training needs of prospective resource families.
Department (VDSS)	The State Department of Social Services.
Dual Approval Process	A process that includes a study of the *family*, home, mutual selection, interviews, training, and background checks to be completed on all *prospective resource parents* to be considered for approval as a foster or adoptive parent.
Fictive Kin	*Persons not related to the child by birth, marriage, or adoption but who have an established, emotional tie to the child and/or their family, which was established before being considered a placement option for the child. These relationships will maintain the child's cultural values, family connections and support networks. When identifying fictive kin, consider whether the child/family considers them family. Fictive kin does not include relationships manufactured by and for the child welfare system (these persons may be developed as resource parents as a possible placement option after approval).*

Foster Parent	An approved *caregiver* who gives 24-hour family care, room and board, and services for children or youth committed or entrusted to a child-placing agency. *Primarily referred to as a resource parent.*
In-Service Training	The ongoing instruction received by *resource parents* after they complete their pre-service training.
Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC)	A uniform law that has been enacted by all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands that establishes orderly procedures for the interstate placement of children and sets responsibility for those involved in placing those children.
Kin First Policy	*An LDSS policy which outlines a process with LDSS leadership and supervisory oversight that ensures that children are placed with relatives when they come into care or when they change placements.*
Kinship *Resource* Parent	A relative or fictive kin who is approved by LDSS to provide 24-hour substitute family care to specific children with whom they have a relationship, room and board, and services for children and youth committed or entrusted to a child placing agency.
Kinship Pre-approval	The process of completing a Virginia State Police name search, a search of the CPS Central Registry through Child Welfare Information System to allow for immediate placement of a child with a kinship resource parent prior to initiating the approval process.
Local Department (LDSS)	The local department of social services of any county or city in *Virginia*.
Mutual Family Assessment Report	Contains narrative, checklist and other data as required for *resource family* approval. Historically, this has been called the "home study."
Normalcy	*Allowing children and youth in foster care to experience childhood and adolescence in ways similar to their peers who are not in foster care by empowering resource parents to use the reasonable and prudent parent standard as referenced in Public Law 113-183 when making decisions regarding extracurricular, enrichment, and social activities.*
Parent	The birth or adoptive parent of a child.
Pre-Service Training	The instruction received by *prospective resource parents* during the initial approval process.
Provider	A kinship, *resource*, foster, adoptive, or respite family.

Recruitment portal	*The Faster Families Highway online tool used for recruitment of non-relative resource parents to increase efficiency and support local recruitment efforts.*
Resource Family Consultant	The title of regional staff who work with the LDSS regarding the recruitment, development, and support of kinship and resource families. This work includes conducting assessments with agencies to determine their strengths, needs, and capacities regarding resource families.
Resource Parent	*A caregiver who is dually-approved to foster and adopt and provides 24-hour substitute, out-of-home family care, room and board, services for children or youth in foster care and is committed to support reunification. Resource families include individuals, couples, and families. A kinship resource parent is either related to the child or is fictive kin with a pre-existing relationship to the child who has been approved as a resource parent.*
Respite Care	The provision of temporary care for children *in foster care* on an emergency or planned basis for the purposes of providing placement stability, supporting the achievement of timely permanency, and promoting connections to relatives. *Respite care services must not exceed 14 consecutive days.*
Respite Parent	A *resource parent approved to provide* temporary care to children on an emergency or planned basis.
Revocation	The permanent cancellation or withdrawal of approval of a resource *family*.
Sworn Statement or Affirmation	The document each adult household member in a prospective resource family home completes to disclose whether the individual has a criminal conviction or is the subject of any pending criminal charges within or outside *Virginia* and whether the individual has been the subject of a founded complaint of child abuse or neglect within or outside *Virginia*. This document does not expire once completed.
Suspension	The temporary deferment or cancellation of an approved *resource family* that allows for reinstatement of the approval when circumstances causing the suspension are resolved.
Waiver	The allowance of non-compliance with a specific requirement for approval as a resource family. There are two types of

waivers: a Kinship Waiver, which is the same as a temporary waiver, and a Non-Safety Waiver, which is the same as a permanent waiver and requires an annual review.

1.4. *Required training*

The training required for Resource Family Program Family Service Specialists (FSS) and supervisors during the first six months of employment includes:

- *CWS4080W: Kinship Care in Virginia (pre-requisite: CWSE4060)*
- *CWS3103W: Mutual Family Assessment*
- *CWS3101W: Introduction to PRIDE Model*

1.5. Kin First Policy

Local departments of social services (LDSS) must prioritize family engagement and placing children who enter foster care with relatives. As a result, LDSS are expected to develop a written Kin First policy that outlines the process that they will undertake to ensure that family search and engagement is prioritized. The policy must include LDSS leadership and supervisory oversight to ensure consistency in family engagement efforts, which ensures that children are placed with relatives when they come into care or when they change placements. A Kin First policy ensures due diligence when identifying and assessing prospective kinship resource families and outlines FSS expectations and responsibilities as well as supervisory support and approval. More on Relative Search and Engagement is available in Chapter A. Section 2 Family Engagement Section 2.2 and 2.3 and Foster Care Guidance Section 6.6.

1.5.1. Exception reports

Effective January 1, 2025, anytime children and youth enter foster care and are not placed with a kinship resource parent or anytime children and youth in foster care experience a placement change that does not result in placement with a kinship resource parent or a trial home visit with a parent or prior custodian , the LDSS must submit an exception report *to VDSS within 72 hours of the placement. Exception reports outline all efforts to engage relatives and fictive kin, identify the barriers that prevent placement with a kinship resource parent and are signed by the LDSS director or designee prior to submission.*

Children and youth who enter foster care and are first placed in kinship placements experience fewer placement changes, spend less time in foster care, and are less likely to age out of foster care. The standard practice when placing children and youth who enter foster care should be first placement with kin. For those children and youth who enter care and are not first placed with family, exception reports ensure that concerted efforts are being made to identify and overcome barriers to kinship

placements. Ongoing, diligent efforts to assess and engage family members are an essential part of casework.

Exception reports will be monitored on an ongoing basis to ensure that VDSS and the LDSS are identifying and addressing any existing barriers to placement with kinship resource families when children cannot remain in or be returned to their parent(s)' home.

1.6. LDSS Resource Family Collaborations

LDSS are encouraged to develop collaborative partnerships to support family engagement, the approval and support of kinship resource parents, and ongoing recruitment, training, assessment, and development of non-relative resource parents. Such programs will:

- Promote Kin First practices within localities by prioritizing search, engagement, and approval of kinship *resource* parents.
- Ensure staff members are specifically devoted *to engaging kinship resource parents in the process of approval and sustain recruitment, training, and approval of non-relative resource parents.*
- Promote a shared understanding and awareness of available *resource* families approved by LDSS who are prepared to build relationships with the families of children and preserve the connections children have to their communities and natural support networks.
- Increase opportunities for collaborative data-driven recruitment efforts; and
- Create opportunities for specialized training and development of *resource* parents to better meet the needs of children in care.

As of July 1, 2023, LDSS are required to collaborate with neighboring LDSS to increase the availability of a local foster home placement for children in foster care (§ 63.2-900.) LDSS will meet this requirement by engaging in:

1.6.1. Collaborative Recruitment

LDSS must use the Faster Families Highway and have all non-relative recruited families enter through the recruitment portal so that all prospective resource families are visible to other LDSS (this does not apply to kinship resource families). LDSS are encouraged to collaborate on recruitment efforts (for information sessions, ads, events, etc.) to increase the pool of locally approved resource families in the region.

1.6.2. Collaborative Training

LDSS must share pre-service training schedules for kinship resource parents and non-relative resource parents with Regional Resource Family Consultants for a statewide calendar, which includes CRAFFT trainings, in order to enhance timely

training availability. LDSS must create a process for sharing training slots in training sessions with neighboring LDSS.

1.6.3. Collaborative Approval and/or Sharing

LDSS must indicate the approval of new resource families in the recruitment portal after the approval process is completed and maintain accurate resource records in the child welfare information system.

1.6.3.1. Lending and Borrowing an LDSS-approved resource family

Lending and borrowing LDSS-approved resource families enables LDSS to keep children in foster care in their communities, placed with siblings who are in the custody of neighboring LDSS or with resource families who can best meet their needs. Lending and borrowing resource homes is generally expected to be for child-specific placements. This collaboration is between LDSS.

1.6.3.2. Transferring an LDSS-approved resource family

Transferring a resource family's approval from one LDSS to another involves the resource parent's written request for the transfer of approval documents, including the original mutual family assessment from the originating LDSS. The background checks and/or the determination letters are not transferred to the receiving LDSS who must run new background checks. The receiving LDSS is then fully responsible for the maintenance of the resource family's approval and support after the point of transfer.

1.6.3.3 Transferring an approved resource family between LDSS and LCPA

Transferring a resource parent's approval between an LDSS and a licensed child placing agency (LCPA) is initiated by the resource parent's written request for the transfer of approval documents. The approval documents from the sending agency include the original mutual family assessment, addendums and any approval documents related to the most recent re-approval except background checks. The background checks and/or the determination letters are not transferred to the receiving agency who must run new background checks. The receiving LDSS would update the approval documentation to ensure that the transferring resource parent is able to meet the needs of local children in foster care and to allow the receiving LDSS to support the resource family.

1.6.4. *Collaborative Support*

LDSS must collaborate with neighboring LDSS to offer support to resource families so they may better meet the needs of children and youth in foster care and aid in retaining approved resource families. Working with other LDSS can involve shared support groups, in-service training, and forms or processes that make supporting resource families more effective and efficient. Collaborative support also involves engaging private providers to support kinship resource parents.

1.7 Consortium for Resource, Adoptive, and Foster Family Training (CRAFFT)

Regional CRAFFT Coordinators support LDSS efforts to recruit, train, approve and support kinship and non-relative resource parents. CRAFFT Coordinators may be engaged by LDSS to facilitate pre-service training for prospective kinship and non-relative resource parents as well as in-service trainings to approved kinship and non-relative resource parents. LDSS may access this support from CRAFFT Coordinators by contacting the Regional Resource Family Consultants.

1.8. Mutual Family Assessment Staff

Mutual Family Assessment (MFA) staff support LDSS efforts to facilitate the approval of kinship and non-relative resource parents. LDSS may access this support from MFA staff by contacting the Regional Resource Family Consultants.

1.9 Conflict of interest

Individuals who work for an LDSS *and their relatives* must not be approved to be *either* a kinship *or non-relative resource* parent by the LDSS for whom they are employed.The employee and relatives of the employee may be a kinship *or non-relative resource* parent for another LDSS or a child-placing agency, *but cannot serve as a foster parent for a child in the custody of the agency for whom they work*. In order to allow an employee or relative of the employee to be a kinship *or non-relative resource* parent for a child in the custody of the LDSS or child-placing agency for whom that individual works, the child's custody may be transferred to another LDSS. (See Foster Care Guidance Section 6.17.2) LDSS employees can also play other significant roles in the life of a child or youth – as advocates, mentors, etc.

- *Resource parents* who have met the requirements to be an approved childcare provider may provide childcare in their home for their child in foster care. However, Title IV-E federal funds may not be used to pay for the childcare service. The childcare provider may apply for childcare through Title IV-A childcare funds.

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KINSHIP RESOURCE FAMILY APPROVAL

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2.1. Discovery of Relatives

The local departments of social services (LDSS) should prioritize placing children who enter foster care with relatives and fictive kin upon removal or at any point when it is determined to be in the child's best interest. The discovery of relatives for children in foster care is about maintaining and developing connections which may or may not involve placement options at the time of discovery. More about Relative search and engagement may be found in Chapter A. Practice Foundations, Section 2 and Foster Care Guidance 2.5. FUSION has Kin First Resources available.

For those relatives and fictive kin who become kinship resource parents, the approval standards are the same as they are for non-relative resource parents; however, the use of immediate placement through the kinship waiver impacts the order in which elements of the approval process are completed. This section of guidance acknowledges those differences and ensures that processes that are unique to kinship (such as the Permanency Assessment Tool) are located together in the same section as information regarding the approval process for kinship resource parents. What follows is guidance that contains all the necessary information around the processes required for assessing and approving kinship resource parents.

2.2. Relative Notification of the Kinship Approval Process

Whenever a relative or fictive kin expresses interest in becoming a kinship resource parent, the LDSS must provide the relative or fictive kin with the Kinship Foster Parent Approval Process Letter found on FUSION within 15 calendar days. *A copy of the letter should be maintained in the child's file. The Kinship Care Brochure can assist the relative or fictive kin in exploring options related to caring for their children in foster care. Notifying interested relatives is also required for cases that involve ICPC.*

2.3. Assessing a Prospective Kinship Resource Parent

2.3.1. Permanency Assessment Tool (PAT)

The LDSS must use the Permanency Assessment Tool (PAT) when a relative or fictive kin expresses interest in becoming an approved kinship resource parent. *The LDSS must use the PAT to ensure (1) uniform and consistent strengths-based assessments of kinship families that facilitate an understanding of how reunification and permanency must be supported, (2) an understanding of the approval process, and (3) the supports necessary to make placement possible and sustainable*. The LDSS must use this tool to conduct and document the assessment of prospective

kinship *resource* parents. The LDSS must maintain the completed PAT in the child's foster care *file*. During the assessment, the LDSS should ensure the following:

- The child feels safe with the prospective kinship *resource* parent and the prospective kinship *resource* parent has the capacity to meet the physical and emotional needs of the child.
- The prospective kinship *resource* parent conveys a commitment to complete and maintain approval as a kinship *resource* parent, as well as a commitment to supporting reunification and permanency.

Information gathered by the PAT may be integrated later into the kinship Mutual Family Assessment and elaborated upon. Prospective kinship parents should not be ruled out solely based on the verbal reporting of a potential barrier crime. If a prospective kinship resource parent or any adult household member acknowledges the presence of a potential barrier crime, the LDSS should still run a Virginia State Police criminal background check to officially determine whether a barrier crime is present. If a barrier crime appears to be present, the LDSS must request that the prospective kinship *resource* parent or adult household member submit fingerprints to the state-approved vendor to determine eligibility prior to proceeding with placement and completing all approval requirements. The *LDSS* shall assist relatives and fictive kin with meeting approval requirements by identifying barriers, utilizing waivers, and offering support *and services. Many funding sources are available to support or address barriers to successful placements with kin, such as the Children's Services Act and Promoting Safe & Stable Families.*

2.3.2. The decision to approve or deny

The decision to approve or deny a prospective kinship resource parent needs to be based on what is in the child's best interest in relation to safety, permanency, and well-being. Any decision to deny the approval of a kinship resource parent should be made only after the exploration of all necessary supports that would make the placement possible. Kinship resource parents do not need to meet all standards as established by the regulation and be approved by the LDSS prior to placement of a child in the home. Approval may be achieved by the *prospective kinship resource parents* meeting all standards or by meeting most standards and having a waiver granted for one or more standards. *If the prospective kinship resource parent is able to meet a child's needs, but would not meet approval standards, consider using the State-funded Kinship Subsidy Screening Tool.*

2.3.3. When not to approve as kinship resource parents

Non-custodial birth parents are not required to become approved kinship resource parents to have their child placed with them. Such a placement is a trial home visit. See Foster Care guidance 8.6.5. Placements with kin who were prior custodians in

the removal home, which were determined to be contrary to the welfare of the child, are considered trial home visits and do not require the kinship resource family approval process.

2.3.4. Role of a Kinship Resource Parent

Kinship resource families should never be viewed as an alternative to children's parents, but instead, they must clearly understand their role in supporting family reunification. *The role of kinship resource families is to help children in care maintain a sense of belonging by keeping them connected to their families and cultures.* In making decisions regarding placement, preference should be given to relatives and fictive kin as *resource parents*, so long as they can meet approval requirements as outlined in 2.3.8.3. The LDSS shall assist relatives and fictive kin with meeting approval requirements by identifying barriers, utilizing waivers, and offering support.

2.3.5. Notification of Denial & Appeal for Prospective Kinship Resource Parent

If it is determined by the LDSS that it is not in the child's best interest to be placed with the prospective kinship *resource* parent following the completion of the Permanency Assessment Tool, the LDSS must provide the relative with the Notification of Denial and Appeal Letter by mail within *14 calendar* days of the denial. *The LDSS must also send the Regional Resource Family Consultant a copy of the denial letter. It is recommended that a copy of this letter be maintained in the child's file.* The Notification of Denial and Appeal letter must contain the following:

- A clear and specific explanation of the reason for the denial.

A statement that such denial is appealable to the Commissioner of the Virginia Department of Social Services should the relative choose to appeal.

- Information regarding the procedure for filing such an appeal including contact information for the Office of Appeals & Fair Hearings.

If the relative chooses to appeal the denial, they must contact the Office of Appeals & Fair Hearings in writing by US mail or email and disclose their intent to appeal within 30 *calendar* days of the postmarked date on the Notification of Denial and Appeal letter. Upon being made aware of the relative's intent to appeal the decision of the LDSS, a hearing must be conducted by the Office of Appeals & Fair Hearings as soon as practicable, and a decision rendered in no more than 90 *calendar* days. *The Office of Appeals & Fair Hearings will either uphold the denial or overturn the denial. If the denial is overturned, the LDSS will have 14 calendar days to reassess the relative and either provide, in writing, a clear and specific explanation for the reason for denial which is consistent with guidance OR to approve the relative as a kinship resource parent, so long as all approval requirements are completed timely, pursuant to law and policy.*

2.3.6. Timing of Background Checks

When criminal and central registry checks are completed as part of a relative assessment ahead of a child being placed with the kinship resource parent, the checks must be resubmitted if the date of completion is greater than 120 days from the expected approval start date on the Certificate of Approval (COA).

2.3.7. Assessing Kinship Capacity

When assessing a prospective kinship resource parent's capacity, the best interest of the child must be the determining factor. Use the Permanency Assessment Tool to review the needs of the child and prospective kinship resource family. The assessment of capacity is based on living space, the needs of other children receiving full-time care in the home, and the prospective kinship resource parent's ability to provide adequate physical and emotional care while maintaining family stability. LDSS may not let arbitrary space requirements prevent the approval of an appropriate and safe family who can maintain family connections. The LDSS must review how the family's established natural supports will be engaged and if other supports will need to be engaged. For example, if the LDSS determines that capacity limits should be exceeded in order to allow siblings to remain together or to care for a specific child, the LDSS should note the reasons in the kinship mutual family assessment document, document the plan to support capacity in the Kinship MFA and follow through with support to build and maintain capacity. The LDSS needs to develop an awareness of implicit biases prior to engaging and assessing prospective kinship resource families.

2.3.8. Other Criteria (4.1.)

2.3.8.1 Anti-discrimination for approving kinship resource parents (4.1.1.)

According to federal statute, the LDSS must not deny to any person the opportunity to become a kinship resource parent on the basis of race, color, nationality, state of residence, religion, age, disability, political belief, sex or sexual orientation.

2.3.8.2. Age requirements (4.1.2.)

Kinship resource parents must be at least 18 years of age. The age of the prospective *kinship resource parent* is one of many considerations in the decision to approve an individual to foster or adopt.

2.3.8.3. Marital status (4.1.3.)

Only individuals or married couples may be approved as *kinship resource parents*. Unmarried/cohabitating couples may be approved with one individual

approved and identified on the Certificate of Approval and the other person listed as a household member or adult caregiver.

When prospective kinship resource parents are married, but not dwelling in the same home and do not expect to dwell in the same home, complete the Married with Separate Dwellings form instead of completing criminal and central registry checks for an absent spouse. Should the absent spouse reenter the household, background checks and all other requirements for kinship resource parent approval must be completed for that spouse for the family to remain in compliance with approval standards.

This issue will need to be revisited in detail should the prospective kinship resource parent consider adoption while still legally married without the legal spouse participating in the approval process as a kinship resource parent. As discussed in Adoption Guidance, under Finalizing the Adoption only "a married couple or an unmarried individual shall be eligible to receive placement of a child for purposes of adoption". § 63.2-1225

2.3.8.4. Maximum Number of Children (4.1.4.)

The number of children in foster care in the kinship resource parent's home shall not exceed six (6) unless:

- To allow the child of a parenting youth in foster care to remain with the parenting youth.
- To allow siblings to remain together.
- To allow a child with an established meaningful relationship with the family to remain with the family.
- To allow a family with special training or skills to provide care to a child who has a severe disability.

2.4. Requirements to Initiate Placement with a Kinship Resource Parent

When kin or fictive kin are identified and assessed to be an appropriate placement for a child in foster care, the LDSS must make a visit to the home prior to or on the day of placement to ensure safety of the home environment and complete the Physical Home Environment Checklist. All adult household members must submit to a Virginia State Police Name search and a search of the CPS Central Registry through Child Welfare Information System prior to placement of the child. When the presence of barrier crimes or CPS findings are ruled out, the child may be placed immediately, and the *kinship resource parent* will meet Kinship Pre-approval criteria.

2.4.1. Physical Home Environment (4.5.1.)

The physical environment of the home must be assessed both in terms of the physical space (e.g., adequate furnishings, heat, ventilation, etc.) as well as the kinship resource parent's attitude toward, and ability to provide for the child's need for space and privacy and separate sleeping arrangements. Documentation of an assessment of the home environment should include the Physical Home Environment Checklist.

Initially, kinship resource parents may not have had the time or opportunity to prepare their home to accommodate additional children. As such, there may be requirements on the Physical Home Environment Checklist that kinship resource parents do not automatically meet. Non-safety waivers may be used, where applicable, and LDSS should assist kinship resource parents in accessing community resources and/or funding to obtain the necessary supplies, such as medication lock boxes, appropriate storage for guns, etc.

If the kinship resource parent does not have sufficient bed space for a child or sibling group, the LDSS should utilize available funding to purchase necessary bedding supplies to make the placement possible.

The following areas must be assessed, as appropriate, during interviews at the *kinship* resource parent's home.

2.4.1.1. Physical comfort (4.5.1.1.)

- The *kinship resource parent* must be able to provide safe, comfortable sleeping furnishings.
- All rooms used by the child must be heated in winter, *cooled in hot weather*, dry, and well ventilated.
- Rooms and study space used by the child must have adequate lighting.

2.4.1.2. Space and furnishings (4.5.1.2.)

The home must have sufficient appropriate space and furnishings for each child receiving care in the home, including:

- Space to keep clothing and other personal belongings.
- Accessible basin and toilet facilities.

- Space for recreational activities.

2.4.1.3. Sleeping space (4.5.1.3.)

- Sleeping space must be provided on the first floor of the home for a child unable to use stairs unassisted, other than a child who can easily be carried.
- Multiple children sharing a bedroom must each have adequate space including closet and storage space. Bedrooms must have adequate square footage for each child to have personal space.
- Children over the age of two (2) years must not share a bed.
- Children over the age of two (2) must not share a bedroom with an adult unless the LDSS approves a plan to allow the child to sleep in the adult's bedroom due to documented needs, disabilities, or other specified conditions.
- Children of any age must not share a bed with an adult.
- Children of the opposite sex over the age of three (3) must not sleep in the same room.
- Children under age seven (7) or children with significant and documented cognitive or physical disabilities must not use the top bunk of bunk beds.

2.4.1.4. Phone access (4.5.1.4.)

The kinship resource parent and children must have access to a working phone in the home. This may be a cell phone; however, *if the kinship resource parent does not wish for others to have access to their cell phone, an additional working phone must be available. The optional Phone Requirement form may be utilized to assist the kinship resource parent in deciding which option will work best.*

2.4.1.5. Home safety requirements (4.5.1.5.)

2.4.1.5.1. Emergency Preparedness plan (4.5.1.5.1.)

Kinship resource parents need to develop Emergency Plans that help protect their families and also provide communication information for use in emergency situations. *This form should be provided to the kinship resource parent at placement and completed*

as soon as possible prior to the six-month period allowed by the Kinship Waiver. State regulation 22 VAC 40 21170 requires a plan that includes, but is not limited to fire and natural disasters. It also requires the plan to include:

- How the kinship resource parent plans to maintain the safety and meet the needs of the child in their home during a disaster.
- How the kinship resource parent will evacuate the home, if necessary, during a disaster.
- How the kinship resource parent will relocate in the event of a large-scale evacuation.
- The requirement to notify the LDSS of where they are relocating and contact information in the event of evacuation.

The LDSS FSS should encourage the kinship resource parent to review the appropriate sections of the Emergency Plans form with the children who are old enough to understand. The Emergency Plans form should be posted in a location that is accessible to the children.

Suggestions for information the kinship resource parents should include in the plan are:

- The phone number of the LDSS.
- The phone number of a close neighbor or relative who could come to the home quickly.
- Plans for having emergency food, water, and batteries for flashlights and radios.
- The location and contact information for friends or relatives they may go to in an emergency or evacuation.

The LDSS will keep a copy of all sections of this plan in the kinship resource parent's file.

2.4.1.5.2. Fire Safety (4.5.1.5.2.)

The kinship resource parent must permit a fire inspection of the home by appropriate authorities if conditions indicate a need and/or the LDSS requests such an inspection.

- Every home must have an operable smoke detector, the specific requirements of which must be coordinated through the local fire marshal. If a locality does not have a local fire marshal, the state fire marshal must be contacted.

2.4.1.5.3. Weapons (4.5.1.5.3.)

Possession of any weapons, including firearms, in the home must comply with federal and state laws and local ordinances. The kinship resource parent must store any firearms and other weapons (e.g., BB guns, air guns, etc.) in a locked closet or cabinet, with the activated safety mechanisms. Ammunition must be stored in a separate and locked area. The key or combination to the locked closet or cabinet must be maintained out of the reach of all children in the home.

2.4.1.5.4. Pets (4.5.1.5.4.)

Kinship resource parents must ensure that household pets are not a health or safety hazard in accordance with state laws and local ordinances, and the LDSS must request verification of kinship resource parent compliance.

Pets must be vaccinated in accordance with state and federal law against diseases that can transmit to humans, including rabies.

2.4.1.5.5. Other (4.5.1.5.5.)

- The home and grounds must be free from litter and debris and present no hazard to the safety of the child receiving care.

- Kinship resource parents must keep cleaning supplies and other toxic substances stored away from food and locked, as appropriate. Medications must be out of reach of children and locked as appropriate. Medications must be stored separately from food, except those medicines that require refrigeration.

- Every home must contain basic first aid supplies.

- Drinking water is always available to children.
- *Homes with swimming pools, hot tubs, or spas should follow the safety guidelines outlined in the optional Water Safety Agreement form.*
- The LDSS may require other safety-related checks or verifications as deemed necessary (e.g., well water tests, electrical safety, home structure stability).

2.4.1.6. Non-safety Waivers

To obtain a non-safety waiver, LDSS complete all requested information on the *non-safety* Waiver Request form and submit the form electronically to the Regional Resource Family Consultant. The LDSS must maintain the *non-safety* waiver documentation in the prospective kinship resource parent's file. If granted, the LDSS will conduct an annual review of the waiver.

No waivers will be granted that would compromise safety-related standards, *are contrary to* requirements set by law (such as barrier crimes or a search of the Child Welfare Information System) or that if granted, would violate federal or state law or any local ordinances.

If a kinship resource parent is granted a non-safety waiver and is in compliance with all other requirements of this guidance, the kinship resource parent *remains* approved.

While some non-safety waivers are permanent in nature, others may only be active for a set period. In this case, documentation that the *non-safety* waiver is no longer applicable must be kept in the kinship resource parent's file. Annual reviews are not necessary when a *non-safety* waiver is no longer necessary.

2.4.2. Requirements Immediately following placement with a Kinship Resource Parent

Within 72 hours of placing a child in the home, *the kinship resource parent(s)* and all other adult household members must present themselves for fingerprinting with the approved vendor. The LDSS must submit the required request for search of the CPS Central Registry and release of information form to the State Office of Background Investigations for processing.

The first few days of an unexpected placement can be chaotic and filled with many mandated appointments for both the kinship resource parent(s) and child(ren) in their

care. To ensure that the kinship resource parents and adult household members are successful in completing fingerprints, the LDSS should take an active role and assist those individuals in making all appointments. Ways of supporting the kinship resource parent in completing the appointment include but are not limited to:

- *Offering to set up the appointment for any kinship resource parents who may find the process confusing or not have access to the necessary electronic equipment to arrange it.*
- *Actively tracking and following up with the kinship resource parent regarding the completion of fingerprints.*
- *Helping with transportation to the appointment.*

2.4.2.1. Required Background Checks (4.4.)

Background checks are required for all prospective kinship *and non-relative resource* parents and every adult household member 18 years of age or older who reside in the home. Required background checks consist of a national criminal *background* check, a Child Protective Services (CPS) Central Registry search, and a search of the Sex Offender Registry, which is included in the national criminal *background* check. *The Certificate of Approval (COA) cannot be issued for kinship resource parents until the results of all background checks have been received and are clear.* Prospective kinship resource parents with barrier crimes as set forth in the Code of Virginia, § 63.2.1719 cannot be approved as a kinship resource parent unless they meet one of the exceptions outlined in the above Code section. These requirements are not subject to a waiver. Other adults residing in the home with a barrier crime also preclude approval of the home.

Results of these checks must be maintained in the file of the kinship resource parent and in no other place (including any form of archiving or electronic storage). Criminal records cannot be shared with any person other than the specific subject of the search. Eligibility letters from OBI may *not* be shared when transferring resource home approval between LDSS.

While background checks for kinship resource parents are typically initiated at placement, the expectation remains that the national criminal background check and the central registry check are done no more than 120 days prior to issuance of the COA. If any checks were done in advance of placement such that they were completed more than 120 days prior to the projected issuance of the COA, the LDSS must re-do any checks that risk falling outside of the 120-day window.

2.4.2.1.1. Sworn Statement or Affirmation (4.4.1.)

A sworn statement or affirmation form is required disclosing whether or not the individual has a criminal conviction or is the subject of any pending criminal charges within or outside the Commonwealth and whether or not the individual has been the subject of a founded complaint of child abuse or neglect within or outside the Commonwealth. *This statement indicates if the adult has lived in other states within the prior five years, thus requiring additional central registry checks from those states.* A sworn *statement* must be completed during the initial approval process and does not expire.

The following background checks expire 36 months from the date of verification for all approvals occurring after 1/1/2020.

2.4.2.1.2. National criminal background check (4.4.2.)

Prospective kinship resource parents are required to be fingerprinted and complete all requirements outlined by the VDSS approved vendor, FieldPrint. All identifying information and prints will be electronically sent to the Virginia State Police (VSP), the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI), and Office of Background Investigations (OBI). OBI staff will screen criminal history results received from the VSP and the FBI in order to provide the requesting LDSS a determination of eligibility on the individual being searched. For detailed information on how to complete the fingerprint-based criminal background check, *reference this FieldPrint instruction sheet.*

2.4.2.1.2.1. "Unable to Determine" letters (4.4.2.1.)

When LDSS receive an "Unable to Determine" response from OBI, the FSS responsible for approval should contact OBI at backgrounds@dss.virginia.gov to identify which conviction was in question. The LDSS should then follow up with the adult this ruling applies to for more information to determine if the conviction in question qualifies as a barrier crime. Before the LDSS may make a determination, the worker must document the details related to the conviction in question which indicate that the adult meets approval standards along with a signature and date from the individual. The LDSS must also obtain verifying documentation to support the report of the prospective resource parent. Once the LDSS makes a determination, the worker must document the determination and proceed with approval or ineligibility based on the verified details.

2.4.2.1.3. Central Registry of abuse and neglect (4.4.3.)

The LDSS shall submit a Search of the Central Registry and Release of Information Form to OBI to search the Virginia CPS Central Registry for each prospective kinship resource parent and adult household member over the age of 18 years, no more than 120 days prior to the prospective kinship resource parent being approved as a *kinship resource parent*.

If a prospective kinship resource parent or household member has resided in another state within the preceding five years a check of that state's child abuse and neglect registry is required. The Other States Request for Search of the CPS Central Registry is available on Fusion for reference. LDSS agencies must not approve individuals with a founded complaint of child abuse as a kinship resource parent or adult household member. Out of state searches of the child abuse and neglect registry should be completed only at the time of initial approval and do not expire. *Out of country searches are not necessary as part of approval.*

2.4.2.1.4. Department of Motor Vehicles Check (4.4.4.)

A Department of Motor Vehicle (DMV) driver *background* check must be obtained for the prospective kinship resource parent(s) as well as all others in the home who may be transporting the child. A Virginia driving record must be obtained if the individual holds a Virginia driver's license. If the individual holds an out-of-state driver's license, the out-of-state driving *background check* must be obtained. While there is no specific standard for a "satisfactory" DMV driver *background* check, results of this check should be considered in concert with other information gained in the Mutual Family Assessment process.

Local governments have access to DMV *background checks* free of charge in accordance with § 46.2-208 of the Code of Virginia. *The LDSS should utilize this to obtain DMV background checks for kinship resource parents and should not expect kinship resource parents to obtain their own DMV background checks.* The information available includes convictions, accidents, driver's license suspensions or revocations, and other information that may be needed by the local government to carry out its official function. Most LDSS have established agreements with DMV to allow *background check* access; however, for more information on this process contact the DMV or access www.dmvnow.com.

2.4.2.2. Supporting New Placements (5.3.)

Providing a high level of information and support at both the early and ongoing stages of placement is critical for both the family and the LDSS to meet a child's needs.

Ensuring kinship resource parents understand what is expected of them is critical in ensuring their success. Upon placement, kinship foster parents should be provided with clear expectations around required paperwork, what to expect regarding completion of the MFA, and any deadlines for paperwork and appointments. For those children placed with kin using the kinship waiver, the LDSS should closely monitor and provide assistance with any barriers to completion of the waiver to ensure the placement can be maintained.

Individuals who are approved as kinship resource parents must be provided with the following information:

- LDSS contact information, including but not limited to, FSS name and phone number and after-hours contact information.
- Contact information including who the child may or may not have contact with and what type of contact is allowed (e.g., supervised visitation; phone contact; email; etc.).
- Information regarding the child's medical history and needs including allergies, immunizations, current medical treatment, the child's doctor's names, health insurance, and contact information and, when applicable, the child's medication.
- Educational information including provisions for getting the child to school and, if applicable, the plan for enrolling the child in a new school.
- The LDSS's plan for immediate follow-up regarding the child, including but not limited to, next FSS visit to the home; school enrollment; medical follow-up; visitation between the child and family members including siblings.
- A review of and signing the Foster Care Agreement: Code of Ethics/Mutual Responsibility Agreement.
- A review and signing of the confidentiality agreement, including a discussion of the meaning of confidentiality.

- A discussion of the prohibition against the use of corporal punishment under any circumstances. Corporal punishment must be defined, and the caregiver must agree to refrain from all such methods of discipline. The Corporal Punishment Agreement must also be signed.

- The expectation and process for obtaining full approval as a kinship resource parent and the next steps the LDSS will take to support the caregiver's decision to pursue full approval.

2.4.2.3. Kinship Resource Parent Waiver

To allow children to be placed with kinship resource parents when they are identified, kinship waivers must be granted for pre-service training, completion of a mutual family assessment, tuberculosis assessment, screening or tests and physical examinations for a period of 6 months. *Kinship waivers are not to be used to cover lapses in approval for kinship resource parents or to transfer approvals of resource parents between agencies.* If all the standards of approval are not met within 6 months, the *home approval will be suspended until all approval requirements are met*. *There is no time extension for the kinship waiver.*

For ICPC cases in Virginia, kinship waivers can be utilized on a case-by-case basis. When a sending state requests that Virginia assess a relative based in Virginia, the LDSS should consult with the Virginia ICPC office to decide whether the waiver can be utilized for that particular child.

Non-safety waivers related to standards for the home of a kinship resource parent, as referenced in Resource Family guidance Section 2.4.1., may be granted to kinship resource parents and should be reviewed annually. The process of obtaining a *non-safety* waiver is outlined in Resource Family guidance Section 2.4.1.6.

To obtain a kinship waiver the LDSS must submit the waiver to their regional consultant ***within 72 hours of placement.*** *A waiver must be in place before the Certificate of Approval (COA) can be issued for kinship families who have not yet completed all the standards of approval. The waiver allows for children to be placed immediately with kinship resource parents. CSA funds should be utilized immediately to cover placement costs.*

The LDSS should issue a COA effective on the date of last receipt of the criminal records and central registry checks. At this time, if applicable, title IV-E funding eligibility is established and goes into effect the date that the COA was issued. For more information on IV-E funds and the kinship waiver, please reference the Title IV-E Manual.

2.5. Approval of a Kinship Resource Parent

2.5.1. Additional Documents to Be Completed at Placement (4.5.2.4.10.)

The following additional documents should be completed immediately upon placement:

- Foster Care Agreement: Code of Ethics and Mutual Responsibility
- Financial Agreement

Upon placement, the kinship resource parents and any other adult caregivers in the home must be provided with the following documents. At least one kinship resource parent should be available to sign at placement. If not all kinship resource parents or adult caregivers are available at placement to sign, the LDSS should collect the remaining signatures as soon as possible.

- Discipline Agreement
- Confidentiality Agreement
- Foster Parent Bill of Rights

2.5.1.1. Agreements (4.5.2.4.10.)

The LDSS FSS must discuss the following mandatory agreements with the kinship resource parent:

- Discipline Agreement
- Confidentiality Agreement
- Foster Care Agreement: Code of Ethics and Mutual Responsibility
- Adoptive Placement Agreement (for adoptive placements only)
- Foster Parent Bill of Rights
- Financial Agreement

The content of these documents is reviewed, and prior to the prospective kinship resource parents' approval, they must agree to abide by the values and requirements as specified in these agreements. All prospective kinship resource parents sign the Discipline and Confidentiality Agreements and the Foster Parent Bill of Rights. The Foster Home Agreement: Code of Ethics and Mutual Responsibilities must be signed upon the placement of a child in the home. *The Adoptive Placement Agreement is signed only upon the placement*

of a child in the home for the purpose of adoption (see Section 1.4. on approval process requirements).

The following agreements must be discussed with and, when noted, signed by the prospective kinship resource parent as soon as possible during the interview process.

2.5.1.1.1. Confidentiality Agreement (4.5.2.4.10.1.)

The LDSS must have the prospective kinship resource parent *and any other adult caregivers in the home* sign a Confidentiality Agreement. The LDSS FSS must discuss confidentiality requirements with the prospective kinship resource parent and ensure the prospective kinship resource parent understands the need to keep confidential all information regarding the child, their family, and the circumstances that resulted in the child coming into care. A copy of the signed agreement must be provided to the prospective kinship resource parent.

2.5.1.1.2. Discipline Agreement (4.5.2.4.10.2.)

The LDSS must have the prospective kinship resource parent *and any other adult caregivers in the home* sign a Discipline Agreement. This provides an opportunity to discuss the prospective kinship resource parent's approach to discipline and attitude towards, and beliefs about, the use of corporal punishment with children. The LDSS must clearly communicate that no form of corporal punishment as defined in Section 1.3. of this manual ("Definitions") may be used for any reason. The range of possible actions the LDSS may take because of the use of corporal punishment (e.g., additional training on discipline; anger management for the kinship resource parent; suspension of the approval of the home; removal of the child from the home) must also be discussed.

2.5.1.1.3. Foster Parent Bill of Rights and Dispute Process (4.5.2.4.10.3.)

The purpose of the Foster Parent Bill of Rights, as authorized by Virginia Code § 63.2-902 and established pursuant to Virginia Administrative Code 22VAC40-211, is to ensure collaboration, communication, access and transparency between LDSS, licensed child placing agencies (LCPA) and resource parents. LDSS must share the Foster Parent Bill of Rights with all kinship resource parents and maintain a signed copy in the family file.

Kinship resource parents have a right to file a complaint regarding alleged violations of collaboration, communication, access, and transparency between the LDSS and the kinship resource parents.

Prior to filing a formal complaint, the kinship resource parent must contact the FSS assigned to the resource family and provide a description of the alleged violation. For LDSS-approved homes, this would be the Resource FSS assigned to the kinship resource family. For LCPA approved homes, this would be the Foster Care FSS for the child in foster care. The FSS shall respond within five business days and explain any corrective action to be taken in response to the kinship resource parent's complaint. If the kinship resource parent and FSS are unable to informally resolve the complaint, the kinship resource parent may file a written complaint through the dispute resolution process with the foster care supervisor or designee. The supervisor shall respond to the complaint within five business days with the findings regarding the alleged violation and any correction action that will be taken.

If the *kinship* resource parent disagrees with the supervisor's response, the *kinship* resource parent may appeal the resolution to the local director by filing a written notice of appeal. The appeal shall include a description of the alleged violation, and a copy of the foster care supervisor's report. The director shall hold a meeting with all the parties within seven business days to determine the validity of the alleged violation and the appropriateness of the response from the FSS and supervisor. A summary of the meeting shall be documented by the FSS after approval by the foster care supervisor. The director shall issue written documentation of findings to all parties, and when applicable, recommendations for corrective actions.

This dispute resolution process does not apply to a complaint related to the denial or failure of an LDSS to act upon an individual's claim for benefits. Complaints related to a claim for benefits shall be appealable pursuant to federal law (42 USC § 671(a)(12)) and state law (22VAC40-201-115 (22VAC40-201-115).

Kinship resource parents may call 833-TELL 2FC (833-835-5232) to reach the Virginia Division of Family Services for disputes at any point in the dispute process. As per § 2.2-445, *kinship resource* parents must also be notified and directed to the website for the Office of the Children's Ombudsman.

2.5.1.1.4. Foster Care Agreement/Adoptive Placement Agreement (4.5.2.4.10.4.)

The Foster Care Agreement: Code of Ethics and Mutual Responsibilities Form is required to be signed whenever a child is placed in a kinship resource parent's home. *The Adoptive Placement Agreement is not signed during the kinship resource parent approval process but should be reviewed with the prospective kinship resource parent if the purpose of the placement is adoption.*

2.5.1.1.5. Financial Agreement (4.5.2.4.10.5.)

The Financial Agreement must be signed and dated for the date that the child was placed in the home of the kinship resource parent. As outlined in Section 18.2 of the Foster Care Manual, if this is the child's first placement or they are discharging to kin from residential, the LDSS must pay the emergency maintenance rate to the kinship resource parents and schedule a VEMAT within 60 days. At signing, the LDSS should explain the VEMAT process to the kinship resource parent and ensure they are aware that the total stipend amount is subject to change.

2.5.2. Documenting approval (4.5.3.2.)

2.5.2.1. Certificate of Approvals for a Kinship Resource Parent

Certificates of Approval (COA) for kinship resource parents undergoing the Kinship Waiver process are child specific and the LDSS may only approve them for the child(ren) placed with them under the waiver. For relatives who may be providing relative respite, ensure that all children's names who might be in the home for respite are listed in "Other Specifics" on the kinship resource families COA.

For those kinship families utilizing a kinship waiver, a certificate of approval may be issued upon receipt of the results of background checks that indicate "eligible" for all adult household members and the results of CPS Central Registry searches for all household members that are absent of CPS findings. *For relatives with out-of-state Central Registry checks, the COA can be issued while the results of the out-of-state checks are pending so long as in-state checks are completed and received indicating that all adults are eligible.* Until a certificate of approval is issued, Children's Services Act funding must be utilized for placement costs. Title IV-E funding eligibility begins on the date in which the certificate of approval is issued.

For those kinship resource families who are approved without utilizing the waiver process, please see 4.5.3.3. Certificate of Approval for more information on approval dates.

2.5.2.1.1. Approval period (4.5.3.3.1.)

Certificates of Approval (COAs) are issued for periods of 36 months and are valid for 36 months or until the background check expires (36 months from the day of verification), whichever occurs first. *For kinship resource families being re-approved, the LDSS should keep track of the approval date to ensure that their checks are renewed in a timely manner and their COA does not lapse.*

When children are placed with kinship resource parents, kinship waivers may be obtained as outlined in *Section 2.4.2.3.* to allow for immediate placement of children in the home. The effective date of the certificate of approval for *kinship* resource parents is the date *when all background checks for the kinship resource parents and all adult household members have been received.* The results of background checks indicating eligibility for all adult household members must be obtained prior to signing a Certificate of Approval. The date of approval must be documented on the Certificate of Approval. A copy of the Certificate must be maintained in the kinship resource parent's file.

Only individuals or married couples may be approved as kinship resource parents. Unmarried/cohabitating couples may be approved with one individual approved and identified on the Certificate of Approval and the other person listed as a household member or adult caregiver.

For information on re-approval see 2.5.7.2.

2.5.2.2. Checklist for Initial Provider Approval (4.5.3.2.2.)

Not all information obtained during an assessment needs to be written into the narrative report. LDSS are required to complete the Checklist for Initial Provider Approval.

Once completed, this form, attached to the completed narrative report, constitutes the completed Mutual Assessment Family Report.

Upon initial approval of kinship resource parents utilizing the Kinship Waiver, the LDSS must upload the Checklist for Initial Provider Approval to COMPASS. The COA should be uploaded to COMPASS upon completion along with the remaining elements of the approval process.

2.5.2.3. Notification to the Kinship Resource Parent (4.5.3.3.4.)

Once approved, kinship resource parents are to be given a Certificate of Approval specifying the following:

- Type of approval (dually approved as a kinship resource parent or respite provider).
- Date when the approval became effective and the date when the approval will end.
    - The effective date cannot be any earlier than the date on which any of the items required to approve the home was received.
- The approval period cannot exceed 36 months.
- Specifications or limitations of the approval (e.g., number/types of children).
- The signature and title of the individual approving the home and the supervisor's signature and title.

NOTE: A Certificate of Approval cannot be issued unless all required documents are received. A copy of the Certificate must be filed with the prospective kinship resource parent's file.

If the approval process results in the LDSS's denial of the application, the *LDSS must provide the relative with the* Notification of Denial & Appeal Letter. *A copy of the letter must be kept in the prospective kinship resource parent's file and provided to the Regional Resource Family Consultant for the LDSS. It is recommended that a copy of this letter be placed in the child's file.*

2.5.3. Pre-service Training for a Kinship Resource Parent

2.5.3.1 Core Competencies (4.2.2.)

As part of the approval process for kinship resource families, the LDSS must address core competencies (4.2.2) with the kinship resource family. The LDSS should work with the kinship family to address any gaps in their ability to demonstrate core competencies.

2.5.3.2. Supplemental Training (4.2.3.)

The following content areas are to be included in the pre-service training of applicants:

- The Children's Services Practice Model and Implication for Practice.
- Virginia's Family Partnership Meetings: The Purpose and Process.
- Rate structuring and the kinship resource parent's role in the process.

- The Foster Home Agreement: Code of Ethics and Mutual Responsibilities.
- The Adoptive Home Placement Agreement.
- Standards of Care for Continued Approval (see Section 2.5.6.1.1).
- Shaken Baby Information.

2.5.3.2.1. Mandated Reporter training (4.2.3.1.)

The Code of Virginia identifies those persons who are mandated reporters. These persons must report suspected child abuse or neglect that they become aware of in their professional or official capacity.

Effective July 1, 2012, kinship and non-relative resource parents, and respite providers are considered mandated reporters due to their association with a public organization that is responsible for the care, custody and control of children as referenced in § 63.2-1509 A.

Mandated reporter training and other resources for mandated reporters are available online from the Virginia Department of Social Services

Kinship resource parents may complete CWS 5692 - Recognizing & Reporting Child Abuse & Neglect as part of their pre-service training.

2.5.4. Mutual Family Assessment for a Kinship Resource Parent

2.5.4.1. Mutual Family Assessment (4.5.2.)

A Mutual Family Assessment (MFA) is a process that includes both a study of the physical home as well as the prospective kinship resource parent(s). It is mutual in that while the LDSS maintains final authority on the decision to approve or not approve, the assessment is done with families rather than to families.

For relatives who have had children placed through the kinship waiver process, an initial assessment via the Permanency Assessment Tool would have already been completed to determine capacity and their ability to serve as a kinship resource parent. For these relatives, the Mutual Family Assessment is not meant to determine whether they should foster or not since that decision has already been made. Instead, the MFA should be used to further identify what strengths the family brings to the table, and where there are areas to support the family. The goal is to ensure the LDSS has all information necessary to support the placement and ensure the success of relatives and caregivers. It also helps family members realistically assess their own capacities and areas where they may need support. A mutually respectful process between the FSS,

potential kin caregiver, the birth parents and extended family, as well as the children, is essential to conducting a culturally responsive and realistic assessment of the kin caregiver.

A thorough assessment integrates pre-service training topics into the home visits to maximize opportunities for developing and documenting a family's competence in meeting the special needs of children in care.

Training and home visits are primary sources for assessment, while also drawing information from sources such as references, background checks, etc.

Each prospective kinship *and non-relative resource parent* must be encouraged to participate in an open and honest assessment of their strengths in fostering or adopting, as well as their needs for support.

If the process of completing the Mutual Family Assessment alters the decision of the LDSS to approve the home and the kinship approval is denied, the LDSS must provide the relative with the Notification of Denial and Appeal Letter by mail within *14 calendar* days of the denial.

2.5.4.1.1. Purpose of the Kinship Mutual Family Assessment

As part of the approval process, the LDSS must conduct a family assessment. This family assessment must address all elements required by regulation and be documented by a combination of narrative and must be signed and dated by the individual completing the assessment and the director of the LDSS or their designee. The information contained in the Mutual Family Assessment must consist of demographic information including:

- Age of prospective kinship resource parent.
- Marital status and history.
- Family composition and history.
- List of LDSS individuals involved in completing the assessment process and their roles.
- Information indicating that the kinship resource parent has been given and understands the standards for sleeping space and maintaining a safe environment as listed in Section 2.4.1.

2.5.4.1.2. Assessing the prospective kinship resource parent's knowledge, abilities, attitudes, relationships, and capacity to foster (4.5.2.2.)

Narrative documentation must include information from the interviews, references, observations, and other available information, and must be used to assess and document the prospective kinship resource parent's skills to foster and/or adopt. *Much of this information may have been gathered while completing the Permanency Assessment Tool. That information can be used and expanded upon to ensure the LDSS has all necessary information to support the kinship resource parent.* Decisions to approve may also be based on information gained through discussions, recommendations, etc. and should assess that the prospective kinship resource parent:

- Is knowledgeable about the necessary care for children and is physically and mentally capable of providing the necessary care for children.
- Can articulate a reasonable process for managing emergencies and ensuring the adequate care, safety, and protection of children.
- Expresses attitudes that demonstrate the capacity to love and nurture a child born to someone else.
- *Understands the role of kinship resource parent and parenting style for children with loss and trauma.*
- Values children's birth family and other significant relationships.
- Expresses appropriate motivation to foster or adopt.
- Shows stability in all household relationships.
- Has the financial resource to provide for current and ongoing household needs.

2.5.4.1.3. Making the most of interviews (4.5.2.3.)

- Connect visits to the family's pre-service training, to allow for give-and take of information that helps inform mutual decision-making.

- Approach visits from the perspective that assessment is truly mutual—just as the VDSS must assess the family's ability to support children and families, so should the family assess the VDSS's ability to support them in this endeavor.

- Observe interactions among household members, looking for the strengths and/or challenges individuals have in sustaining their current family relationships.

- Have conversations with all family members in the home, focusing on how fostering/adopting will impact the current family system.

- Carefully and thoroughly examine the family's expectations of children in foster care, and how realistic these are.

- Use opportunities to stress the importance of maintaining children's connections, and explore prospective kinship resource parents' attitudes, skills, and willingness to support these connections.

2.5.4.1.3.1. On-going Kinship resource parent Training expectation (4.5.2.3.1.)

The LDSS FSS also explains training requirements and the concept of competencies necessary for foster and adoptive parenting. Kinship r*esource parents benefit from on-going development through support and in-service training to address gaps in understanding and help them meet the needs of children in their care. During the approval process, the LDSS should encourage kinship resource parents to be active participants in their own development. See Resource Family Guidance Section 5 for more information on supporting resource families.*

2.5.4.1.3.2. Changes in the household (4.5.2.3.2.)

An addendum to the MFA should be completed when there are changes in the household. These changes include: a change in address, household members leaving the home, additional household members in the home, minor household members turning 18 and requiring background checks, changes in marital status for the kinship resource parent, and any significant changes in health or finances. The LDSS should inform the kinship resource parents which changes

in circumstances require addendums in order to maintain compliance in approval.

2.5.4.1.4. Supporting documentation (4.5.2.4.)

2.5.4.1.4.1. Kinship resource parent application (4.5.2.4.1.)

The Application For Department-Approved Provider Form must be used by all individuals who are becoming kinship resource parents. The form provides basic information needed to begin the process of approval and eliminates obtaining such information during the interviews.

This form must be completed for kinship resource parents. However, if the kinship waiver is being utilized, the form can be completed while the child is placed and the waiver is being completed. The LDSS does not need to require that prospective kinship resource parents complete the application ahead of placement.

The LDSS must obtain at least three (3) references from persons who have knowledge of each prospective kinship resource parent's character and applicable experience with children and caregiving of others. At least one (1) reference per person must be from a non-relative. If a single reference addresses the skills and abilities of both prospective kinship resource parents, it may count as one of the three references for each. The state approved Reference Request Form is acceptable as reference documentation as well as references conducted via telephone and documented in the file.

2.5.4.1.4.3. Physical exams (4.5.2.4.3.)

The prospective kinship resource parent(s) submit the results of a physical examination conducted by a licensed health care professional, administered within 12 months prior to the kinship resource parent's approval. These results must include comments regarding the person's mental and/or physical condition or abilities, such as they relate to caring for a child in the foster care system. A Physical Examination Form is available for use.

For those kinship resource parents who have not had a physical completed within the last 12 months, this should be scheduled as soon as possible within the six-month waiver process to allow time to address any barriers related to doctor availability, scheduling and/or insurance.

2.5.4.1.4.4. TB risk assessments (4.5.2.4.4.)

All household members who come in contact with the child must submit to a tuberculosis screening and/or test, in compliance with current VDH requirements. For most individuals, a TB risk assessment should be sufficient. Information regarding the TB risk assessment form is found on the Virginia Department of Health website. If risk factors or TB symptoms are present, a TB test may be required. The Center on Disease Control offers more information on Testing for Tuberculosis Infection and Disease.

2.5.4.1.4.5. Verification of marriage and divorce (4.5.2.4.7.)

During a meeting with the kinship resource parent(s), the FSS must visually verify all documents that give proof of the kinship resource parent(s)' marriage(s) or divorce(s). This requirement is documented on the Checklist for Initial Provider Approval .

2.5.4.1.4.6. Federal W-9 (4.5.2.4.8.)

The LDSS should obtain a W-9 from the kinship resource parent prior to or immediately upon placement to ensure that the monthly maintenance and/or enhanced maintenance can begin promptly.

2.5.4.1.4.7. Financial/employment history (4.5.2.4.9.)

2.5.4.1.4.7.1. Income verification (4.5.2.4.9.1.)

The LDSS FSS must verify the kinship resource parent has income sufficient to meet the basic needs of the household. Requesting credit checks may have an adverse effect on the prospective kinship resource parent's credit history and are discouraged. Prospective kinship resource parents are not required to be employed so long as there is sufficient income to meet the needs of the family. Where there is no employment, agencies should carefully examine the source and reliability of any other income or resources in establishing whether there is sufficient income to meet the needs of the family. Financial or employment history information that may be used to assess income sufficiency may include:

- Recent pay stubs.
- Tax documents (e.g., W-2s).

- Verification of any assistance received (SSI, food stamps, public assistance, etc.).
- Utility bills (with payment history).
- Deployment information (military).
- Rental lease, public housing agreement, or mortgage statement.
- Bank statements.

2.5.4.1.4.7.2. Assets and resources (4.5.2.4.9.2.)

Assets and resources include any other sources of income (e.g., real estate), estate holdings, monetary gifts or bonuses, or any public assistance. There is no general restriction on the receipt of public assistance for resource families.

2.5.4.1.4.7.3. Debts and obligations (4.5.2.4.9.3.)

Debts may include aggregate amounts owed to credit cards, student loans, car leases/loans, etc., as well as individual amounts owed for home/rental, home maintenance.

2.5.5. Kinship Resource Parent File (4.5.4.)

2.5.5.1. Establishing a Kinship Resource Parent file (4.5.4.1.)

A kinship resource parent file should be established at the time *the Permanency Assessment is completed and the decision has been made to place with that kinship resource parent. The Application for Department Approved Provider is part of that file.*

Although the Child Welfare Information System is the official case record, all forms, letters, and other original hard copy documents (as referenced in this guidance) must be retained in the paper kinship resource parent file. The Initial Checklist for Provider Approval can help organize the file.

2.5.5.2. Child Welfare Information System record (4.5.4.2.)

The Resource Section of Child Welfare Information System is the electronic file that captures information on kinship resource parent homes and other resources. Information on the household applying to be a kinship resource parent should be updated in the Child Welfare Information System as the family assessment and approval process moves forward.

It is important to search the Child Welfare Information System Resource Directory prior to opening a new record in Child Welfare Information System to prevent duplication. The Child Welfare Information System Help section has several topics such as "Search for a Resource" and "Open a New Resource" which aid when completing the screens. Contact VCCC at 1 (866) 6378482 for additional assistance in entering resource homes into Child Welfare Information System.

2.5.5.3. Maintenance of the file (4.5.4.3.)

Any changes in the kinship resource parent family that require new documents (e.g., criminal background search for a new adult in the home) or re-approval documents must be retained in the paper file and information updated in the Child Welfare Information System as needed.

Kinship resource parent files may be disposed of in a way that protects confidential information after five years have elapsed from the date the file was closed.

2.5.6. Maintaining Kinship Approval (4.5.5.)

2.5.6.1. Standards of care for continued approval (4.5.5.1.)

LDSS are required to engage in ongoing discussion with and supervision of kinship resource parents. The "Standards of Care for Continued Approval" as described below are first discussed during the assessment to ensure kinship resource parents are knowledgeable of what is expected of them once a child is placed in their home. The "Standards" should be part of the ongoing dialogue with kinship resource parents. The *LDSS* should discuss and monitor how the kinship resource parent meets these standards. Several of the "Standards" noted below also require the *LDSS* to document compliance on the Checklist for Family Re-Approval.

- The kinship resource parent must provide care that does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, sex, national origin, age,

religion, political beliefs, sexual orientation, disability, or family status.

- The kinship resource parent must ensure the child receives meals and snacks appropriate to their daily nutritional needs. The child must receive a special diet if prescribed by a licensed health care kinship resource parent, or designee, or in accordance with religious or ethnic requirements or other special needs.

- The kinship resource parent must ensure that they can be responsive to mental health or medical needs of the child.

- The kinship resource parent must establish rules that encourage desired behavior and discourage undesired behavior. The kinship resource parent must not use corporal punishment or give permission to others to do so and must sign an agreement to this effect.

- The kinship resource parent must provide clean and seasonally clothing appropriate for the age and size of the child.

- If a kinship resource parent transports the child, the kinship resource parent must have a valid driver's license and automobile liability insurance. These will be checked at approval and re-approval, but verification may be required at any time deemed necessary.

- The vehicle used to transport the child must have a valid registration and inspection sticker.

- Kinship resource parents and any other adults who transport children must use functioning child-restraint devices in accordance with requirements of Virginia law. See Section 10.6.1.2 of the Foster Care Manual and the following link for additional information. Virginia's Child Passenger Safety Laws

2.5.6.2 Monitoring Efforts (4.5.5.2.)

The LDSS, must visit the home of the kinship resource parent as often as necessary, but at least quarterly, to provide support to and monitor the performance of the *kinship resource parent* and must document these visits in the *kinship resource* file. *For kinship resource parents, these quarterly visits should begin as soon as the child is placed, or as soon as the kinship resource parent is approved, whichever occurs first.*

- When a child is placed in the home, these visits may coincide with the monthly visits to the child and be completed by the same LDSS FSS.
- If there is no child placed in the home, the quarterly visit may be replaced by telephone contact.

2.5.7. Addendums (4.5.6.)

All necessary addendums should be documented in the kinship resource parent file and updated in the Child Welfare Information System.

2.5.7.1. When an Addendum is Needed (4.5.6.1.)

Kinship resource parents should inform the LDSS as soon as possible but no later than 45 days **before** a significant change occurs in the household composition or circumstances, including but not limited to:

- A child turning 18 years of age.
- A new adult entering the household.
- A household member leaving the household.
- A change in marital status of a kinship resource parent.
- A significant change in health status of a kinship resource parent.
- A change of address (a move).
- A substantial change to the residence (such as *a tree falling on the house or a remodel that impacts stability or functioning of the household*).
- Any changes that may impact the health or safety of a child placed in the home such as recent arrests or pending charges of a kinship resource parent or adult household member.
- Any decline in a kinship resource parent's physical or mental health which directly impacts the kinship resource parent's ability to care for a child in foster care should be reported immediately but no later than seven (7) days from the time of occurrence.
- A child is being adopted and an Adoption Supplement is necessary. See Adoption Guidance, section 3.4.4 for details when completing an Adoption Supplement.

2.5.7.1.1. Background Checks for New Adult Household Members (4.5.5.2.2.)

For any new adult entering the home, background checks must be conducted, consisting of a *criminal background check*, a CPS Central Registry search, and a search of the Sex Offender Registry, which is included in the *criminal background check*. The Registry may be accessed on the Virginia State Police website. If the new adult in the home has resided in another state within the previous five (5) years, they must also have a CPS Central Registry search run in those states in which they resided. If the adult will be transporting the child, a DMV check is required.

In instances where it is not reasonable to complete all the background checks prior to the new adult entering the household, **at minimum**, a written statement of affirmation disclosing any criminal and child abuse and neglect history in Virginia and any other state of residence within the past five (5) years, satisfactory findings on a Central Registry search, and a Virginia criminal name check must be completed.

The new household member must schedule themselves for fingerprinting and the LDSS must submit to a Search of the Central Registry and Release of Information Form, to the State Office of Background Investigations for processing **within 3 days**.

Within **60** days of any person in the home becoming 18 years old, the results of background checks must be obtained by the LDSS, consisting of a *criminal background* check, a CPS Central Registry search, and a search of the Sex Offender Registry, which is included in the *criminal background* check. A written Sworn Statement or affirmation disclosing any criminal and child abuse and neglect history in Virginia and any other state of residence within the past **five (5)** years must be completed when the individual becomes 18. If the 18-year-old will be transporting the child, a DMV check is required.

Any individual participating in the Fostering Futures program, which allows LDSS to continue to provide foster care services to individuals who are 18 years of age or older but have not reached 21 years of age, who is placed in a resource home must be subject to the background check requirements. The results of such background check must be used for the sole purpose of determining whether other children should be placed or remain in the same resource home as the individual subject to the background check. The results of the

background check must not be used to terminate or suspend the approval of the resource home.

2.5.7.2. Re-approval (4.6.)

The approval period for a kinship resource parent is 36 months. Re-approvals are due **no later than three (3) years** from the begin date of the previous certificate of approval. *To ensure the COA does not expire while a child is placed with their kinship resource family, the LDSS should start the re-approval process, including the initiation of new background checks, at least 90 days but no more than 120 days prior to the background checks expiring.* LDSS are required to complete all required documents including new background checks as outlined in. 2.5.7.4.1.

2.5.7.2.1. Checklist for Re-approval (4.6.1.)

LDSS are required to complete the Checklist for Family Re-approval. The LDSS should upload the completed checklist, in addition to the updated Certificate of Approval and Physical Home Environment Checklist, to COMPASS and place copies in the kinship resource parent file. Once completed, the forms attached to the completed re-approval addendum constitute the completed re-approval package.

2.5.7.3. Interview Requirements (4.6.2.)

During the re-approval process, the LDSS FSS must conduct a minimum of one (1) interview with the kinship resource parent(s) in their home. FSSs are to use the visit to conduct a review and update the Mutual Family Assessment.

The LDSS FSS must conduct a review of the previous home approval information with the kinship resource parents. By reviewing the information with the kinship resource parent, the FSS and kinship resource parent can identify and discuss any changes in the kinship resource parent's situation that may affect the approval of the home, such as the number and types of children for which the kinship resource parent will be approved.

For the renewal of a child-specific Certificate of Approval, the re-approval interview should include a discussion of the kinship resource parent's ability to provide care for the child and any areas in which they need support to continue providing care for the child. If the permanency goal is no longer Return Home or if the case is approaching a goal change, the LDSS should conduct a review of permanency options with the kinship resource parent, if appropriate.

2.5.7.3.1. Written Addendum (4.6.2.1.)

The LDSS FSS must update the Mutual Family Assessment Report through a written Re-approval Addendum, documenting the decision to reapprove the *kinship resource parent*. The addendum includes any new information the FSS has obtained and considered in deciding to re-approve the kinship resource parent: (i.e., new additions to the household, changes to the home, changes in marital status, or updates to capacity). The Re-approval Addendum to the Mutual Family Assessment must indicate that the *below* requirements were met. When applicable, any *supporting documents* received during the re-approval process (e.g., TB screening, training verification) are to be included in the *resource parent's* file.

This narrative must address all requirements for re-approval as outlined in this guidance and contain documentation from interviews and submitted forms and must be signed and dated by the FSS completing the addendum and the director of the LDSS or their designee.

2.5.7.4. Addendum Supporting Documentation (4.6.2.2.)

2.5.7.4.1. Background checks (4.6.2.2.1.)

All adults in the home should already have had a national background check of criminal records completed and reflected on the Checklist for Initial Provider Approval. For re-approval**,** a Virginia criminal name check, CPS Central Registry search are required. Completed background checks must be dated within the 36 months since the date of the most recent central registry finding and the most recent criminal *background* check report. *A national criminal background check with fingerprinting must be completed if prior criminal checks expired or the Certificate of Approval (COA) lapses. Background checks dates need to be dated within 120 days of the COA start date.* A sworn statement or affirmation does not expire and does not need to be completed at re-approval.

2.5.7.4.2. Transportation (4.6.2.2.2.)

The kinship resource parent and other adults expected to transport children must show evidence of a valid driver's license, a valid motor vehicle inspection, and proof of automobile insurance. *DMV record checks must also be completed with every approval and re-approval.*

2.5.7.4.3. Agreements (4.6.2.2.3.)

LDSS must review and complete new the Confidentiality and the Discipline Agreements. A copy of the forms must be given to the kinship resource parent.

2.5.7.4.4. Physical Home Environment Checklist (4.6.2.2.4.)

As part of the re-approval process, the LDSS should conduct a walkthrough of the home and complete the corresponding Physical Home Environment Checklist.

2.5.7.4.5. TB Risk Assessments (4.6.2.2.5.)

Household members must obtain and provide to the LDSS the results of a new TB Risk Assessment or TB Screening form as documentation of the absence of tuberculosis in a communicable form.

2.5.7.4.6. In-service training (4.6.2.2.6.)

All in-service training must be documented in the kinship resource parent's file, as well as any additional training that is needed.

2.5.7.5. Subsequent Certificate of Approvals (4.6.2.3.)

A new Certificate of Approval (COA) is needed at re-approval and an updated COA should be issued when there are changes to any of the information that is listed on the COA, such as:

- *A change in residence;*
- *A change in the legal name of the kinship resource parent(s);*
- *A change in marital status of the kinship resource parent(s); or*
- *Additional children in the home for a child specific COA.*

The COA should be updated to reflect the change in information, but the dates of approval should remain the same.

2.5.7.5.1. Lapses in Certificate of Approvals and/or Background Checks (4.6.2.3.1)

Anytime background checks expire or a Certificate of Approval (COA) lapses, fingerprints must be completed, and a new COA issued. In these situations, a Virginia State Police name search is insufficient.

When a new COA is needed due to expired background checks or a lapse in background checks, a new re-approval checklist must also be completed and all elements on the checklist must be current before the COA can be issued. This includes ensuring that the TB test was completed within 12 months of the new COA.

Example 1: Initial fingerprints were received on May 6th, 2021. These fingerprints are valid for 36 months, which means they will expire on May 6th, 2024. If the agency responsible for the home does not conduct a name search for reapproval until May 25th, 2024, then the home is out of compliance. As a result, it is necessary to conduct fingerprint searches before issuing the re-approval COA and using IV-E funds.

Example 2: The COA was initially issued on May 20, 2021, with an expiration date of May 20, 2024. If the agency completes the reapproval process on June 5, 2024, fingerprint searches must be completed due to the COA expiring prior to the reapproval being completed. A fingerprint search for all adult household members must be completed within 120 days of the reapproval COA. In this situation, a name search is no longer sufficient, even if it was conducted before the fingerprints expired, as the COA has now lapsed.

2.5.7.6. Notification of Kinship Resource Parent (4.6.2.4.)

If the kinship resource parent is re-approved, they are to be provided with a new Certificate of Approval specifying the following:

- Type of approval (dual).
- Date when the approval became effective and the date when the approval expires.

  The effective date of the re-approval certificate should be no later than the expiration date of the previous certificate. The home is not eligible for re-approval if all required documents are not received by the end date of the previous certificate of approval.

- The signature, *date,* and title of the FSS approving the home and the supervisor.

If the re-approval process results in the LDSS's denial of the approval, the LDSS must notify the kinship resource parent in writing of its decision. A copy of the letter must be filed in the kinship resource parent's file.

2.6. Suspending or revoking Kinship Resource Parent approval (4.7.)

Actions by the kinship resource parent or changes in the kinship resource parent's situation may require the LDSS to take action that results in the suspension or revocation of a kinship resource parent's approval. Kinship resource parents who do not maintain compliance with the standards of approval as outlined in this guidance must have their approval either temporarily suspended or completely revoked. Frequent contact with the kinship resource parent and visits to the home by an LDSS FSS are the major mechanisms for determining maintenance of standards. *To avoid the risk that the child(ren) would experience a disruption, due to the suspension or revocation of a kinship resource parent's approval, the LDSS should utilize ongoing contact and home visits to support the kinship resource parent and pro-actively address any concerns that could be rectified.* If there are concerns regarding the kinship resource parents' ability to maintain the safety and well-being of a child, the LDSS has the authority to change the placement.

Pursuant to *§ 63.2-900.1,* if a child has been living with a kinship resource parent for six consecutive months and the kinship parent continues to meet approval standards, the child shall not be removed from the physical custody of the kinship resource parents, unless the exceptions outlined in code are met.

2.6.1. Suspensions of Approvals (4.7.1.)

Suspensions may occur when a change in the circumstances of the kinship resource parent results in the kinship resource parent's temporary inability to meet standards (e.g., individuals living in the home with barrier crimes that would jeopardize the safety of the child(ren); safety concerns regarding the physical structure of the home). The LDSS may suspend a kinship resource parent's approval when the kinship resource parent cannot temporarily maintain full approval through corrective measures or issuance of a waiver, and all agree that a violation of the standards for approval can be resolved.

If a kinship resource parent has received a founded disposition of child abuse or neglect after being granted approval, the LDSS must suspend the kinship resource parent's approval. In situations where the founded disposition is under appeal, the kinship resource parent's approval must be suspended until the appeal process is completed.

Suspensions mean the kinship resource parent is no longer approved for the placement of children, and therefore, no child may reside in the home until the suspension is lifted. Reinstating approval requires resolution of the circumstances that caused the suspension and must be documented in the addendum to the kinship resource parent's file. Any child placed with a kinship resource parent at the time approval is suspended must be immediately removed. No other children may be placed with the kinship resource parent during the period of suspension. A

suspension does not change the approval period and, *as such, the dates of the COA remain the same during the suspension period*.

2.6.2. Revocation of Approvals (4.7.2.)

The LDSS may revoke a kinship resource parent's approval when conditions in the home or actions of the kinship resource parent are a threat to the safety, permanency, or well-being of a child placed in the home. The LDSS must revoke a kinship resource parent's approval when:

- A kinship resource parent has been convicted of a barrier crime as defined by Virginia Code.
- A kinship resource parent does not comply with approval standards (unless a waiver has been obtained).
- A kinship resource parent whose approval has been suspended does not correct the conditions that led to the suspension.

The LDSS may also revoke a kinship resource parent's approval when other conditions result in the determination that the kinship resource parent is not or cannot provide a safe, stable, and nurturing home for children. Decisions to revoke and the factors that lead to such a decision must be documented in the kinship resource parent's file and discussed with the kinship resource parent. A kinship resource parent whose approval has been revoked and who subsequently wants to seek approval must submit a new application.

See dispute process in Section 2.5.1.1.3.

2.7. Support of a Kinship Resource Parent

2.7.1. Provide information about services and supports

Kinship resource parents may have no knowledge of the resources and services available to support them in caring for their kin. Kinship resource parents may also harbor fear that if they ask for help, they will be viewed as unable to care for the children placed with them. To facilitate the support of kinship resource parents the LDSS should be upfront about the services available and should encourage kinship resource parents to seek support where needed. This includes but is not limited to:

- *Any support groups the LDSS has available or to which they refer non-relative resource parents.*

- *Access to internet resources and support groups, such as those provided through GrandFamilies.*
- *An explanation of the FAPT process, including the role of the LDSS in referring the child and family for services and the expectation that kinship resource parents have an active voice in planning for services for the children in their care.*
- *The right to services to address safety concerns for children placed with kinship resource parents. Safety services can be concrete items such as purchasing child locks, or they can be a service such as childcare or respite.*
- *Automatic eligibility for Head Start and Early Head Start for youth in foster care who meet program age requirements, regardless of family income.*
- *Referral to Kinship Navigator Programs for families whose localities provide this service. Based on the locality, these programs offer support to families inside and outside the child welfare system in navigating access to benefits and services.*

2.7.2. Provide information about permanency options and financial supports

LDSS should be transparent with prospective and current kinship resource parents around the permanency options for foster children and the financial support available with each permanency option. The Kinship Care Brochure should be provided to prospective kinship resource parents for their review and the differences between all permanency options should be discussed with an emphasis on the importance of the primary goal for all children in foster care being return home.

The level of financial support and the access to resources is an important factor in determining which placement and permanency option is the best for a child and their family. As such, the differences in financial supports should be reviewed with kinship resource parents prior to permanency placement decisions being made.

For relatives and fictive kin whose kin have not entered foster care, a review of the options includes an explanation of eligibility for TANF child-only and Relative Maintenance Support Payment compared with ongoing foster care maintenance payments. For kinship resource parents or prospective kinship parents of children approaching permanency in foster care the LDSS should outline the differences between KinGAP, State Funded Kinship Subsidy and Adoption Subsidy.

2.7.3. Utilizing Kin to Support a Kinship Resource Parent

A child's family network extends beyond just the relatives or fictive kin serving as kinship resource parents. Every effort should be made to include the extended network in the foster child's life, both to maintain their family connections and to provide ongoing support for kinship resource parents. This benefits the child and the kinship resource parent and reduces strain on the LDSS.

Relatives who cannot volunteer for placement may be unsure of how to offer help. Ongoing family engagement should include conversations with family about other ways they can support the child and the kin caring for the child. The LDSS should utilize an FPM to create concrete steps around support. In circumstances where multiple relatives volunteered to serve as placement, consider pivoting to a discussion of ways those relatives can be involved.

The following are examples of ways that relatives and fictive kin can support children and their kinship resource parents:

- *Providing financial assistance to the relative caregiver such as signing the child up for summer camp, contributing to the cost of daycare, and purchasing birthday presents.*
- *Providing transportation to and from appointments.*
- *Providing respite care for the child instead of placing the child with strangers for respite.*
- *Providing babysitting or care for children not in daycare or school.*
- *Providing meals to the kinship resource parent.*

3

RESOURCE FAMILY RECRUITMENT

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3

RESOURCE FAMILY RECRUITMENT

3.1. Kinship Resource Family Recruitment

Recruiting prospective kinship resource parents for children entering foster care provides the best outcomes for children and reduces the trauma associated with entering foster care. Children who are already in foster care need prospective kinship resource parents recruited to support concurrent goals of Relative Placement. More on Relative Search and Engagement is available in Chapter A. Section 2 Family Engagement Guidance Sections 2.2 and 2.3 and Foster Care Guidance Section 6.6.

Experienced kinship resource parents may decide to continue fostering after successfully fostering a relative child. Their lived experience as a relative can translate to greater ease and compassion when supporting connections with a child's family. If the kinship resource parent is interested in becoming a non-relative resource parent, discuss a possible conversion of approval with the kinship resource parents. This discussion ensures they understand the differences in expectations and levels of support when serving as a non-relative resource parent versus a kinship resource parent.

3.2. Recruitment Overview

Resource families are needed to better provide children who enter foster care with opportunities to remain connected to their families and home communities. This connection supports reunification efforts. To assist with the increase of resource families and provide a more streamlined recruitment process, the Foster Families Highway (FFH) for Recruitment was established to connect prospective resource families to LDSS across Virginia. The FFH creates an efficient process for recruiting, engaging, and selecting families who meet the needs of children and families involved in foster care. LDSS are expected to direct all inquiries to either their FFH portal or the VDSS portal and incorporate the portal's URL into their recruitment marketing materials.

Through training and careful assessment, *LDSS* should identify and approve those families who demonstrate a clear understanding of their role in supporting relationships between children and their parents. Kinship and *non-relative resource* families should never be viewed as an alternative to children's families, but instead, they must clearly understand their role in supporting family reunification. In making decisions regarding placement, preference should be given to relatives and fictive kin as *resource* parents, so long as they can meet approval requirements as outlined in Resource Family Guidance Sections 2.3.8.3. and 4.1.3. The LDSS shall assist relatives and fictive kin with meeting approval requirements by identifying barriers, utilizing *kinship and non-safety* waivers, and offering support. All *resource parents* should complete training and be carefully assessed to ensure that they can

meet the physical, behavioral, and emotional needs of children who enter foster care in Virginia. *It is important to remember that after recruitment comes development. Recruiting a diverse pool of prospective resource families allows for a wider range of development leading to the curation of families better qualified to meet the unique needs of children and youth in foster care.*

3.3. Recruiting a Resource Family

3.3.1. Strategies for Recruiting

- *Identify* the profiles of those children for whom the LDSS most needs resource families.

- Conduct utilization studies of *currently approved* and underutilized resource families *to address gaps in fostering profiles needed. Review* the in-service training needed *to develop* existing resource parents *to expand their fostering profiles and better meet the needs of local children in foster care*. Their expressed needs for training and support, and their overall level of satisfaction should be collected and regularly used to inform both recruitment and retention activities.

- Focus on strengthening the LDSS's capacity for assessment and training of resource families prior to engaging in recruitment. *Consider collaborating with neighboring LDSS (see Resource Family Guidance Section 1.6.1) and/or utilize CRAFFT and Mutual Family Assessment staff to meet training and approval needs (see Resource Family Guidance Section 1.7 and 1.8).*

- Utilize data to determine priorities for targeted recruitment of new families and drive recruitment *messaging on the recruitment portal and elsewhere*.

- Support of current *resource* families is the most effective overall retention and recruitment strategy (*See Resource Family Guidance Section 5*).

3.3.2. Balancing Recruitment types

A balanced recruitment plan incorporates a majority of targeted and child-specific recruitment, with a nominal amount of general recruitment.

- Conduct a minimal amount of general recruitment (e.g., 10%) which typically serves as community education and creates an awareness of the foster care system and who it serves. Use data to inform prospective *resource* families of the number, types, and needs of the children in foster care.

- Targeted recruitment should be used to develop a diverse pool of *non-relative* resource families who can receive and nurture children and youth as the LDSS works to establish permanence. Utilize targeted recruitment for the community at-large, focusing on those populations whose characteristics match with the needs of the children currently in care *and in need of family placements*.

- Child-specific recruitment is child-focused, exploring existing connections through relative and fictive kin discovery primarily. The amount of child-specific recruitment needed is dependent upon *the family placement needs of the* population of children in care, and is most effective for certain populations:

    - Youth who have lingered in care for more than two years.

    - Large sibling groups

    - Children with exceptional needs or circumstances

    - All children and youth with TPR for whom permanence is not yet established.

In a proactive *child welfare* system, child-specific recruitment is a natural extension of the diligent searches that have been conducted throughout the life of a case for the purpose of establishing supports for the families *of youth*, and/or maintaining connections for the child.

3.3.3. Faster Families Highway

The Faster Families Highway (FFH) for Recruitment provides LDSS with a streamlined, efficient, and strategic way of increasing their pool of locally approved resource families. FFH enables LDSS to recruit, identify and select prospective resource families who have the potential to meet the needs of children in foster care. LDSS should log into their FFH accounts weekly to review profiles of prospective resource families. Engaging with families may include an interview, providing information on the approval process, inviting them to an information session or requesting that the family complete an initial questionnaire.

Upon identification of a prospective resource family, LDSS are encouraged to mark the family as recruited by going to Manage Recruitment in the OffRamp of its FFH account. This action removes the prospective resource family from the pool of families available for general recruitment by other LDSS and ties the family to the LDSS that engaged the family. Recruiting families on the portal who reside outside the LDSS county/city may occur after the family has been available on the portal for

recruitment for two weeks or if the LDSS where the family resides has communicated that they do not intend to recruit the prospective resource family. Once the recruit button has been selected, the family moves to the Manage Families/In Process list.

LDSS may remove a family from its In Process List of Families at any time if the LDSS determines that the family should no longer move forward with approval. By choosing the "Dismiss" button on a family from its In Process List on FFH, the family becomes available to neighboring LDSS for recruitment. Prior to dismissing the prospective resource family, the LDSS staff informs the family in writing that they will no longer be working together and includes the reason for dismissal. Only prospective resource families with non-negotiable offenses will be removed from the recruitment portal system by informing the Regional Resource Family consultant.

When a member of a state or federally recognized tribe self-identifies on the recruitment portal, the Regional Resource Family consultant will contact the LDSS in the locality where the family resides and copy the VDSS Liaison to the tribes.

The recruitment portal is not intended for use by kinship or fictive kin resource families. When families enter the portal and identify specific children to foster, the Regional Resource Family consultant and the FFH staff will work together to connect the prospective resource family with the LDSS who has custody of the children.

3.3.3.1 Designate a Point of Contact

Each LDSS should designate a point of contact (POC) at the LDSS who is responsible for responding to inquiries.

- *The POC must have a FFH account that will give them access to all leads within the recruitment portal. The POC should participate in ongoing FFH training and utilize the Toolkit for Localities to maximize effectiveness of FFH and to be aware of updates.*
- *The POC communicates with all LDSS staff on how to send prospective resource families to the FFH portal.*
- *For information on how to create an account to access FFH, please contact support@adoption-share.com.*

3.4. *Communication plan for inquiries*

Each LDSS needs to anticipate a flow for inquiries and develop a communication plan based on staffing roles and inquiry needs.

- *Each LDSS should establish an FFH OnRamp with LDSS-specific branded recruitment messaging and direct all inquiries to the LDSS FFH OnRamp. They should embed OnRamp links on their LDSS website and all brochures to direct prospective resource parents onto the recruitment portal. For information on how to create an FFH OnRamp with LDSS-specific branded recruitment messaging, contact support@adoption-share.com.*

- *Use the LDSS-specific landing page to educate families who will begin an inquiry about any needs specific to the community for targeted recruitment communication.*

- *Consider establishing an inquiry-only email address and/or phone number for efficient and direct communication.*

- Activities such as managing the initial phone call *or email*, information packets, and information sessions are extensions of recruitment.

- A welcoming, "screen in" approach is more effective than the traditional "screen out" practice (which turns away many viable families who could be developed and reinforces a negative community image of DSS).

- *Utilizing the FFH recruitment portal is an efficient way to track, engage and follow up with prospective resource families.* Tracking prospective *resource* families *through FFH* minimizes "application drift," ensures that inquiry documentation is obtained, and provides the opportunity for follow-up with families for quality assurance.

3.4.1. Information sessions

Regularly scheduled information sessions are better attended than sporadic scheduling. *Information sessions are an opportunity to engage prospective resource families, address specific concerns by the prospective resource families and educate them in greater detail about what is involved in becoming a resource parent. Information sessions are an early opportunity to reinforce their role as a support and not a substitute for a child's family.*

3.4.2. *Offering alternatives to fostering children*

All recruitment plans should include other *local* service *opportunities* for those individuals who are not a good fit *for becoming a resource parent* such as mentoring, *tutoring,* or volunteering *in schools or afterschool/summer programs*.

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RESOURCE FAMILY APPROVAL

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RESOURCE FAMILY APPROVAL

For guidance on kinship resource parent approval, see Resource Family guidance section 2. Through training and careful assessment, LDSS should identify and approve those families who demonstrate a clear understanding of their role in supporting relationships between children and their parents. Kinship and *non-relative resource* families should never be viewed as an alternative to children's families, but instead, they must clearly understand their role in supporting family reunification. In making decisions regarding placement, preference should be given to relatives and fictive kin as ***resource parents***, so long as they can meet approval requirements as outlined in *Resource Family Guidance Section* 4.1.4. All *resource parents*, including adoptive families, should complete training and be carefully assessed to ensure that they have the ability to meet the physical, behavioral and emotional needs of children who enter foster care in Virginia.

4.1. Other Criteria (2.3.8.)

4.1.1. Anti-discrimination for approving *resource parents*

According to federal statute, the LDSS may not deny to any person the opportunity to become a *resource* parent on the basis of race, color, nationality, state of residence, religion, age, disability, political belief, sex or sexual orientation.

4.1.2. Age requirements (2.3.8.2.)

Resource parents must be at least 18 years of age. The age of the *prospective resource parent* is one of many considerations in the decision to approve an individual to foster, adopt or provide respite care.

4.1.3. Marital status (2.3.8.3.)

Only individuals or married couples may be approved as *resource parents*. Unmarried/cohabitating couples may be approved with one individual approved and identified on the Certificate of Approval and the other person listed as a household member or adult caregiver.

When prospective resource parents are married, but not dwelling in the same home and do not expect to dwell in the same home, complete the Married with Separate Dwellings *form in place of completed criminal and central registry checks for an absent spouse. Should the absent spouse reenter the household, background*

checks and all other requirements for resource parent approval must be completed for that spouse to remain in compliance with approval standards.

This issue will need to be revisited in detail should the prospective resource parent consider adoption while still legally married without the legal spouse participating in the approval process as a resource parent. As discussed in Adoption Guidance, under Finalizing the Adoption only "a married couple or an unmarried individual shall be eligible to receive placement of a child for purposes of adoption". § 63.2-1225

4.1.4. Maximum Number of Children (2.3.8.4.)

The number of children in foster care in the *resource parent*'s home shall not exceed six (6) unless:

- To allow the child of a parenting youth in foster care to remain with the parenting youth.
- To allow siblings to remain together.
- To allow a child with an established meaningful relationship with the family to remain with the family.
- To allow a family with special training or skills to provide care to a child who has a severe disability.

4.2. Pre-service training

4.2.1. Training curriculum

The LDSS must ensure that pre-service training is provided for *resource parents*, using a VDSS-approved curriculum, and completion of the training must be documented in the *resource parent*'s file. Each *resource parent* must satisfy the pre-service training requirements. Certain curricula have been verified to meet the required competencies: Parent Resources for Information, Development and Education (PRIDE), Model Approach to Partnerships in Parenting (MAPP), and Parents as Tender Healers (PATH). The Department supports PRIDE as the preferred curriculum. **All other curricula must be approved by the VDSS to satisfy the pre-service requirement.**

- If a curriculum has been approved for Title IV-E Pass-Through Training, this is the VDSS's approval.

To obtain approval for a curriculum other than those listed above; an LDSS should submit a copy of the curriculum (outlines, handouts, etc.) to the Regional Resource Family Consultant.

- The curriculum will either be approved, returned with recommendations (for addressing any missing competencies), or rejected.

4.2.2. Core competencies (2.5.3.1.)

Pre-service training must address, but not be limited to, the following core competencies:

- Factors that contribute to neglect, emotional maltreatment, physical abuse, and sexual abuse, and the effects thereof.
- *Factors associated with the delay in the development of children and factors that affect bonding and attachment.*
- Stages of human growth and development (not required for respite *resource parents*).
- Concept of permanence for children and selection of the permanency goal (not required for respite *resource parents*).
- Reunification as the primary child welfare goal; the process and experience of reunification.
- Importance of visits and other contacts in strengthening relationships between the child and their family, including their siblings.
- Legal and social processes and implications of adoption (not required for respite *resource parents*).
- Support of older youth's transition to independent living (not required for respite *resource parents*).
- The professional team's role in supporting the transition to permanency and preventing unplanned placement disruptions.
- Relationship between child welfare laws, the LDSS's mandates, and how the LDSS carries out its mandates (not required for respite *resource parents*).
- Purpose of service planning (not required for respite *resource parents*).
- Impact of multiple placements on a child's development.

- Types of and response to loss, and the factors that influence the experience of separation, loss, and placement (not required for respite *resource parents*).
- *Cultural awareness and sensitivity.*
- Preparing a child for family visits and helping them manage their feelings in response to family contacts.
- Developmentally appropriate, effective, and nonphysical disciplinary techniques.
- Promoting a child's sense of identity, history, culture, and values.
- Respecting a child's connection to their family, previous *resource* families, and/or adoptive families.
- Being nonjudgmental in caring for the child, working with their family, and collaborating with other members of the team.
- Roles, rights, and responsibilities of *resource* parents (not required for respite *resource parents*).
- Maintaining a home and community environment that promotes safety and well-being.

4.2.3. Supplemental Training (2.5.3.2.)

The following content areas are to be included in the pre-service training of *prospective resource parents*:

- The Children's Services Practice Model and Implication for Practice.
- Virginia's Family Partnership Meetings: The Purpose and Process.
- Rate structuring and the *resource parent*'s role in the process.
- The Foster Home Agreement: Code of Ethics and Mutual Responsibilities.
- The Adoptive Home Placement Agreement.
- Standards of Care for Continued Approval (see Section 4.5.5.1.1.).
- Shaken Baby Information.

Any additional LDSS requirements.

4.2.3.1. Mandated Reporter training (2.5.3.2.1.)

The Code of Virginia identifies those persons who are mandated reporters. These persons must report suspected child abuse or neglect that they become aware of in their professional or official capacity.

Effective July 1, 2012, *resource parents*, and respite *resource parents* are considered mandated reporters due to their association with a public organization that is responsible for the care, custody and control of children as referenced in § 63.2-1509 A.

Mandated reporter training and other resources for mandated reporters are available from the Virginia Department of Social Services at (https://www.dss.virginia.gov/abuse/mr.cgi).

Resource parents may complete CWS 5692 - Recognizing & Reporting Child Abuse & Neglect as part of their pre-service training.

4.2.4. Prior training considerations

Resource parents who have previously completed *resource* parent training are not exempt from meeting training requirements; however, an LDSS has several options when considering the family for approval. For *resource parents* who can provide verification that they 1) completed a *resource parent* course within the last five years, or 2) completed the training more than 5 years ago AND have completed ongoing additional training which addressed competency areas, then the LDSS may consult their Regional Resource Family Consultant to determine how best to proceed based on the three options outlined below:

- Utilize the Pre-Service Competency Checklist to affirm that these competencies have been observed over the course of the *resource parent's* experience with the LDSS. This checklist should be maintained in the *resource parent*'s file to indicate compliance with the pre-service standard.

- Conduct one-on-one training to address areas lacking sufficient competence.

- Request that the *resource parent* complete pre-service training.

Resource parents whose previous training is accepted as meeting Virginia's requirements for pre-service training must still be provided with training on the additional training areas under Section 1.7.2.3. and Section 1.7.2.4. above. This training must be documented in the Mutual Family Assessment .

4.3. Role of a Resource Parent

Through training and careful assessment, LDSS should identify and approve those *prospective resource parents* who demonstrate a clear understanding of their role in supporting relationships between children and their parents. Kinship and *non-relative resource parents* should never be viewed as an alternative to children's families, but instead, they must clearly understand their role in supporting family reunification. All *resource parents*, including adoptive *parents*, should complete training and be carefully assessed to ensure that they *can* meet the physical, behavioral, and emotional needs of children who enter foster care in Virginia.

The following standards must be met for LDSS to approve a *resource parent*:

- Background Checks for all adult household members
- Pre-service training using a VDSS approved curriculum
- Completion of a Mutual Family Assessment
- Physical examination of approved *resource parents* and tuberculosis screening or tests for all household members

4.4. Required Background Checks (2.4.2.1.)

Background checks are required for all prospective *resource* parents and every adult household member 18 years of age or older who reside in the home. Required background checks consist of a national criminal *background* check, a Child Protective Services (CPS) Central Registry search, and a search of the Sex Offender Registry, which is included in the national criminal *background* check. *Prospective resource parents* cannot be approved as *resource parents* until the results of all background checks have been received. *Prospective resource parents* with barrier crimes as set forth in the Code of Virginia, § 63.2.1719 cannot be approved as a *resource parent* unless they meet one of the exceptions outlined in the above Code section. These requirements are not subject to a waiver. Other adults residing in the home with a barrier crime also preclude approval of the home. The *criminal and central registry* background checks expire 36 months from the date of verification for all approvals occurring after 1/1/2020.

Results of these checks must be maintained in the file of the *resource parent* and in no other place (including any form of archiving or electronic storage). Criminal *background checks* cannot be shared with any person other than the specific subject of the search. Eligibility letters from OBI may *not* be shared when transferring foster home approval between LDSSs.

Background checks must be completed within 120 days of issuing the Certificate of Approval. Background checks for non-relative resource parents are typically initiated near the end of the approval process. If background checks were completed much earlier in the process due to a concern and need to rule out any potential barrier crimes, background checks may need to be redone to issue the COA within 120 days of background check clearance.

4.4.1. Sworn Statement or Affirmation (2.4.2.1.1.)

A sworn statement or affirmation form is required disclosing whether or not the individual has a criminal conviction or is the subject of any pending criminal charges within or outside the Commonwealth and whether or not the individual has been the subject of a founded complaint of child abuse or neglect within or outside the Commonwealth. *The statement/form indicates if the adult has lived in other states within the previous five years, which would require additional central registry checks from those states.* A sworn *statement* must be completed during the initial approval process and does not expire.

4.4.2. National criminal background check (2.4.2.1.2.)

Prospective resource parents are required to be fingerprinted and complete all requirements outlined by the VDSS approved vendor, FieldPrint. All identifying information and prints will be electronically sent to the Virginia State Police (VSP), the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI), and Office of Background Investigations (OBI). OBI staff will screen criminal history results received from the VSP and the FBI in order to provide the requesting LDSS a determination of eligibility on the individual being searched. For detailed information on how to complete the fingerprint-based criminal background check, *reference this FieldPrint instruction sheet.*

4.4.2.1. "Unable to Determine" letters (2.4.2.1.2.1.)

When LDSS receive an "Unable to Determine" response from OBI, the FSS responsible for approval should contact OBI at backgrounds@dss.virginia.gov *to identify which adult and conviction was in question then follow up with the adult for more information. The FSS may also use the Barrier Crime Determination Guide to determine if the conviction in question qualifies as a barrier crime. The FSS must document the details related to the conviction in question which indicate that the adult meets approval standards along with a signature and date from the adult before the LDSS may make a determination. The LDSS must also obtain verifying documentation to support the report of the prospective resource parent. The FSS must document the determination and proceed with approval or ineligibility based on the verified details.*

4.4.3. Central Registry of abuse and neglect (2.4.2.1.3.)

The LDSS shall submit a Search of the Central Registry and Release of Information Form to OBI to search the Virginia CPS Central Registry *or use the CRS Provider Portal* for each *prospective resource parent* and adult household member over the age of 18 years, no more than 120 days prior to the *prospective resource parent* being approved.

If a *prospective resource parent* or household member has resided in another state within the preceding five years a check of that state's child abuse and neglect registry is required. LDSS must not approve individuals with a founded complaint of child abuse as a *resource* parent or adult household member. *The Adam Walsh State Contacts and Procedures for Child Abuse Registry Checks may be helpful.* Out of state searches of the child abuse and neglect registry should be completed only at the time of initial approval and do not expire. *Out of country searches are not necessary as part of approval.*

4.4.4. Department of Motor Vehicles Check (2.4.2.1.4)

A Department of Motor Vehicle (DMV) driver *background* check must be obtained for the *prospective resource parent* as well as all others in the home who may be transporting the child. A Virginia driving *background check* must be obtained if the individual holds a Virginia driver's license. If the individual holds an out-of-state driver's license, the out-of-state driving *background check* must be obtained. While there is no specific standard for a "satisfactory" DMV driver *background* check, results of this check should be considered in concert with other information gained in the Mutual Family Assessment process.

Local governments have access to DMV *background checks* free of charge in accordance with § 46.2-208 of the Code of Virginia. *The LDSS should utilize this to obtain DMV background checks for resource parents and should not expect resource parents to obtain their own DMV background checks.* The information available includes convictions, accidents, driver's license suspensions or revocations, and other information that may be needed by the local government to carry out its official function. Most LDSS have established agreements with DMV to allow *background checks* access; however, for more information on this process contact the DMV or access www.dmvnow.com.

4.5. Initial approval

All LDSS approved *resource parents* must meet minimal standards, as outlined below. *Resource parents* may be dually approved to eliminate the need for a second approval, if adoption by a foster parent is determined to be in the best interest of the child(ren) in foster care. However, foster parents may be required to meet additional legal requirements. Please see: § 63.2-1225. Determination of appropriate home.

If at any point in the process, the decision is made either by the LDSS or family to discontinue the process, the LDSS must notify the *prospective resource parent* in writing as to the reason why the approval process was stopped. The letter should be issued to document the reason the approval process stopped so that everything is documented in the case should the family resume interest in the future. This includes kinship families regardless of the stage or whose decision it was to stop the approval process. A copy of this notice must be filed in the *prospective resource parent's* file.

4.5.1. Physical Home Environment (2.4.1.)

The physical environment of the home must be assessed both in terms of the physical space (e.g., adequate furnishings, heat, ventilation, etc.) as well as the *prospective resource parent's* attitude toward, and ability to provide for the child's need for space and privacy and separate sleeping arrangements. Documentation of an assessment of the home environment should include the Physical Home Environment Checklist. The following areas must be assessed, as appropriate, in the course of interviews at the *prospective resource parent's* home.

4.5.1.1. Physical comfort (2.4.1.1.)

- The *prospective resource parent* must be able to provide safe, comfortable sleeping furnishings.
- All rooms used by the child must be heated in winter, *cooled in hot weather*, dry, and well ventilated.
- Rooms and study space used by the child must have adequate lighting.

4.5.1.2. Space and furnishings (2.4.1.2.)

The home must have sufficient appropriate space and furnishings for each child receiving care in the home, including:

- Space to keep clothing and other personal belongings.
- Accessible basin and toilet facilities.
- Space for recreational activities.

4.5.1.3. Sleeping space (2.4.1.3.)

- Sleeping space must be provided on the first floor of the home for a child unable to use stairs unassisted, other than a child who can easily be carried.

- Multiple children sharing a bedroom must each have adequate space including closet and storage space. Bedrooms must have adequate square footage for each child to have personal space.
- Children over the age of two (2) years must not share a bed.
- Children over the age of two (2) must not share a bedroom with an adult unless the LDSS approves a plan to allow the child to sleep in the adult's bedroom due to documented needs, disabilities, or other specified conditions.
- Children of any age must not share a bed with an adult.
- Children of the opposite sex over the age of three (3) must not sleep in the same room.
- Children under age seven (7) or children with significant and documented cognitive or physical disabilities must not use the top bunk of bunk beds.

4.5.1.4. Phone access (2.4.1.4.)

The *resource parent* and children must have access to a working phone in the home. This may be a cell phone; *however, if the resource parent does not wish for others to have access to their cell phone, an additional working phone must be available. The optional Phone Requirement form may be utilized to assist the resource parent in deciding which option will work best.*

4.5.1.5. Home safety requirements (2.4.1.5.)

4.5.1.5.1. Emergency Preparedness plan (2.4.1.5.1.)

Resource parents need to develop Emergency Plans, that help protect their families and also provide communication information for use in emergency situations. State regulation 22 VAC 40 21170 requires a plan that includes, but is not limited to fire and natural disasters. It also requires the plan to include:

- How the *resource parent* plans to maintain the safety and meet the needs of the child in their home during a disaster.
- How the *resource parent* will evacuate the home, if necessary, during a disaster.
- How the *resource parent* will relocate in the event of a large-scale evacuation.

- The requirement to notify the LDSS of where they are relocating and contact information in the event of evacuation.

The LDSS FSS should encourage the *resource parent* to review the appropriate sections of the Emergency Plans form with the children who are old enough to understand. The Emergency Plans form should be posted in a location that is accessible to the children.

Suggestions for information the *resource parents* should include in the plan are:

- The phone number of the LDSS.
- The phone number of a close neighbor or relative who could come to the home quickly.
- Plans for having emergency food, water, and batteries for flashlights and radios.
- The location and contact information for friends or relatives they may go to in an emergency or evacuation.

The LDSS will keep a copy of all sections of this plan in the *resource parent*'s file.

4.5.1.5.2. Fire Safety (2.4.1.5.2.)

The *resource parent* must permit a fire inspection of the home by appropriate authorities if conditions indicate a need and/or the LDSS requests such an inspection.

- Every home must have an operable smoke detector, the specific requirements of which must be coordinated through the local fire marshal. If a locality does not have a local fire marshal, the state fire marshal must be contacted.

4.5.1.5.3. Weapons (2.4.1.5.3.)

Possession of any weapons, including firearms, in the home must comply with federal and state laws and local ordinances. The *resource parent* must store any firearms and other weapons (e.g., BB guns, air guns, etc.) in a locked closet or cabinet, with the activated safety mechanisms. Ammunition must be stored in a separate and locked area. The key or combination to the locked closet or cabinet must be maintained out of the reach of all children in the home.

4.5.1.5.4. Pets (2.4.1.5.4.)

Resource parents must ensure that household pets are not a health or safety hazard in accordance with state laws and local ordinances, and the LDSS must request verification of *resource parent* compliance.

Pets must be vaccinated in accordance with state and federal law against diseases that can transmit to humans, including rabies.

4.5.1.5.5. Other (2.4.1.5.5.)

- The home and grounds must be free from litter and debris and present no hazard to the safety of the child receiving care.
- *Resource parents* must keep cleaning supplies and other toxic substances stored away from food and locked, as appropriate. Medications must be out of reach of children and locked as appropriate. Medications must be stored separately from food, except those medicines that require refrigeration.
- Every home must contain basic first aid supplies.
- Drinking water is always available to children.
- *Homes with swimming pools, hot tubs, or spas should follow the safety guidelines outlined in the optional Water Safety Agreement form.*
- The LDSS may require other safety-related checks or verifications as deemed necessary (e.g., well water tests, electrical safety, home structure stability).

4.5.2. Mutual Family Assessment (2.5.4.1.)

A Mutual Family Assessment is a process that includes both a study of the physical home as well as the prospective *resource parent*. It is mutual in that while the LDSS maintains final authority on the decision to approve or not approve, the assessment is done with families rather than to families. Prospective *resource parents* are empowered to assess themselves as *prospective resource parents* and to determine if the role of *resource parent* is right for them. A thorough assessment integrates pre-service training topics into the home visits to maximize opportunities for developing and documenting a family's competence in meeting the *unique* needs of children in care.

Training, *interviews,* and home visits are primary sources for assessment, while also drawing information from sources such as references, background checks, etc.

Each prospective *resource parent* must be encouraged to participate in an open and honest assessment of their strengths in fostering or adopting, as well as their needs for support. Their strengths and needs must be utilized in making a match with the needs of a specific child to be placed.

As a result of this process, the final decision to approve the *resource parents* must reflect the family's perceived ability and willingness to foster *and/*or adopt as well as the LDSS's assessment of the family.

4.5.2.1. Purpose of the Mutual Family Assessment (2.5.4.1.1.)

As part of the approval process, the LDSS must conduct a family assessment. This family assessment must address all elements required by guidance and signed and dated by the individual completing the assessment and the director of the LDSS or their designee. The information contained in the Mutual Family Assessment must consist of demographic information including:

- Age of *prospective resource parent*
- Marital status and history
- Family composition and history
- List of LDSS individuals involved in completing the assessment process and their roles.
- Information indicating that the *resource parent* has been given and understands the standards for sleeping space and maintaining a safe environment as listed in Resource Family Guidance Section 4.5.1.

4.5.2.2. Assessing the *prospective resource parent*'s knowledge, abilities, attitudes, relationships, and capacity to foster (2.5.4.1.2.)

Narrative documentation must include information from the interviews, references, observations, and other available information, and must be used to assess and document the *prospective resource parent*'s skills to foster and/or adopt. Decisions to approve may also be based on information gained through discussions, recommendations, etc. and should assess that the *prospective resource parent*:

- Is knowledgeable about the necessary care for children and is physically and mentally capable of providing the necessary care for children.

- Can articulate a reasonable process for managing emergencies and ensuring the adequate care, safety, and protection of children.
- Expresses attitudes that demonstrate the capacity to love and nurture a child born to someone else.
- *Understands their role as a resource parent and is aware of how to parent children with loss and trauma.*
- Values children's families and other significant relationships.
- Expresses appropriate motivation to foster or adopt.
- Shows stability in all household relationships.
- Has the financial resource to provide for current and ongoing household needs.

4.5.2.3. Making the most of interviews (2.5.4.1.3.)

- Connect visits to the *resource parent's* pre-service training, to allow for give and take of information that helps inform mutual decision-making.
- Approach visits from the perspective that assessment is truly mutual—just as the LDSS must assess the family's ability to support children and families, so should the family assess the LDSS's ability to support them in this endeavor.
- Observe interactions among household members, looking for the strengths and/or challenges individuals have in sustaining their current family relationships.
- Have conversations with all family members in the home, focusing on how fostering/adopting will impact the current family system.
- Carefully and thoroughly examine the family's expectations of children in foster care, and how realistic these are.
- Use opportunities to stress the importance of maintaining children's connections, and explore *prospective resource parent's* attitudes, skills, and willingness to support these connections.

4.5.2.3.1. On-going Resource Parent Training expectation (2.5.4.1.3.1.)

The LDSS FSS also explains training requirements and the concept of competencies necessary for foster and adoptive parenting. *Resource parents benefit from on-going development through support and in-service training to address gaps in their understanding and their abilities to meet the needs of children placed with them. During the approval process, the LDSS should encourage prospective resource parents to be active participants in their own development. See Resource Family Guidance Section 5 for more information on supporting resource families.*

4.5.2.3.2. Changes in the household (2.5.4.1.3.2.)

A Change in Circumstances addendum should be completed when there are changes in the household, which include: a change in address, household members leaving the home, additional household members in the home, minor household members turning 18 and requiring background checks, changes in marital status for the resource parent, or any other significant changes in health or finances. The LDSS should inform the resource parents which changes in circumstances require addendums to maintain compliance in approval. See Resource Family Guidance Section 4.5.6.

4.5.2.4. Supporting documentation (2.5.4.1.4.)

4.5.2.4.1. Resource Parent application (2.5.4.1.4.1.)

Upon receipt of a completed *resource parent* application, the LDSS is responsible for ensuring the initiation of the approval process. The Application For Department-Approved Provider form must be used by all individuals who are requesting to become LDSS-approved *resource parents*. The form provides basic information needed to begin the process of approval and eliminates obtaining such information during the interviews.

4.5.2.4.2. References (2.5.4.1.4.2.)

The LDSS must obtain at least three (3) references from persons who have knowledge of each *prospective resource parent's* character and applicable experience with children and caregiving of others. At least one (1) reference per person must be from a non-relative. If a single reference addresses the skills and abilities of both *prospective resource parents*, it may count as one of the three references for each. The state

approved Reference Request form is acceptable as reference documentation as well as references conducted via telephone and documented in the file. *Consider using a similar reference process for adult children who do not live in the home regarding their experience with their parents as caregivers.*

4.5.2.4.3. Physical exams (2.5.4.1.4.3.)

The *prospective resource parent* and other adult caregivers residing in the home must submit the results of a physical examination, conducted by a licensed health care professional, administered within *13* months prior to the *prospective resource parent's* approval. These results must include comments regarding the person's mental and/or physical condition or abilities, such as they relate to caring for a child in the foster care system. A Physical Examination Form is available for use.

All household members who come in contact with the child must submit to a tuberculosis screening and/or test, in compliance with current VDH requirements. For most individuals, a TB risk assessment should be sufficient. Information regarding the TB risk assessment form is found on the Virginia Department of Health website. If risk factors or TB symptoms are present, a TB test may be required. The Center on Disease Control offers more information on Testing for Tuberculosis Infection and Disease.

4.5.2.4.5. Prior experience

The LDSS FSS must confirm if a *prospective resource parent* previously applied to, or was approved, denied, and or closed by any other LDSS or licensed child-placing agency through the Application for Department Approved Provider and Child Welfare Information System. The LDSS must have the *prospective resource parent* sign a request to release information for the other agency to obtain information about previous applications and performance and must use that information in considering approval of the *prospective resource parent*.

4.5.2.4.7. Verification of marriage and divorce (2.5.4.1.4.5.)

During a meeting with the *prospective resource parent*, the FSS must visually verify all documents that give proof of the *prospective resource parent* marriage(s) or divorce(s). This requirement is documented on the Checklist for Initial Provider Approval.

4.5.2.4.8. Federal W-9 (2.5.4.1.4.6.)

The LDSS should obtain a W-9 from the resource parent prior to or immediately upon placement to ensure that the monthly maintenance and/or enhanced maintenance payment can start as soon as possible.

4.5.2.4.9. Financial/employment history (2.5.4.1.4.7.)

4.5.2.4.9.1. Income verification (2.5.4.1.4.7.1.)

The LDSS FSS must verify the *prospective resource parent* has income sufficient to meet the basic needs of the household. Requesting credit checks may have an adverse effect on the *prospective resource parent's* credit history and are discouraged. *Prospective resource parents* are not required to be employed so long as there is sufficient income to meet the needs of the family. Where there is no employment, LDSS should carefully examine the source and reliability of any other income or resources in establishing whether there is sufficient income to meet the needs of the family. Financial or employment history information that may be used to assess income sufficiency may include:

- Recent pay stubs.
- Tax documents (e.g., W-2s).
- Verification of any assistance received (SSI, food stamps, public assistance, etc.).
- Utility bills (with payment history).
- Deployment information (military).
- Rental lease, public housing agreement, or mortgage statement.
- Bank statements.

4.5.2.4.9.2. Assets and resources (2.5.4.1.4.7.2.)

Assets and resources include any other sources of income (e.g., real estate), estate holdings, monetary gifts or bonuses, or any public assistance. There is no general restriction on the receipt of public assistance for resource families.

Income requirements should be documented on the Provider Approval Budget. Income requirements are not applicable to *prospective resource parents* who are approved solely as respite *resource parents*.

4.5.2.4.9.3. Debts and obligations (2.5.4.1.4.7.3.)

Debts may include aggregate amounts owed to credit cards, student loans, car leases/loans, etc., as well as individual amounts owed for home/rental, home maintenance.

4.5.2.4.10. Agreements (2.5.1.1.)

The LDSS FSS must discuss the following mandatory agreements with the *prospective resource parent*:

- Discipline Agreement
- Confidentiality Agreement
- Foster Parent Bill of Rights
- Foster Care Agreement: Code of Ethics and Mutual Responsibility (for discussion purposes only *at time of approval*)
- Adoptive Placement Agreement (for discussion purposes only *at time of approval*)

The content of these documents is reviewed, and prior to the *prospective resource parent's* approval, they must agree to abide by the values and requirements as specified in these agreements. All *prospective resource parents* sign the Discipline and Confidentiality Agreements and the Foster Parent Bill of Rights. The Foster Home Agreement: Code of Ethics and Mutual Responsibilities must be signed upon the placement of a child in the home. The Adoptive Placement Agreement is signed only upon the placement of a child in the home for the purpose of adoption.

The following agreements must be discussed with and, when noted, signed by the *prospective resource parent* during the interview process.

4.5.2.4.10.1. Confidentiality Agreement (2.5.1.1.1.)

The LDSS must have the *prospective resource parent and any other adult caregivers in the home* sign a Confidentiality Agreement. The

LDSS FSS must discuss confidentiality requirements with the *prospective resource parent* and ensure *they* understand the need to keep confidential all information regarding the child, their family, and the circumstances that resulted in the child coming into care. A copy of the signed agreement must be provided to the *prospective resource parent*.

4.5.2.4.10.2. Discipline Agreement (2.5.1.1.2.)

The LDSS must have the *prospective resource parent and any other adult caregivers in the home* sign a Discipline Agreement. This provides an opportunity to discuss the *prospective resource parent's* approach to discipline and attitude towards, and beliefs about, the use of corporal punishment with children. The LDSS must clearly communicate that no form of corporal punishment as defined in Resource Family Guidance Section 1.3 may be used for any reason. The range of possible actions the LDSS may take as a result of the use of corporal punishment (e.g., additional training on discipline; anger management for the *prospective resource parent*; suspension of the approval of the home; removal of the child from the home) must also be discussed.

4.5.2.4.10.3. Foster Parent Bill of Rights and Dispute Process (2.5.1.1.3.)

The purpose of the Foster Parent Bill of Rights, as authorized by Virginia Code § 63.2-902 and established pursuant to Virginia Administrative Code 22VAC40-211, is to ensure collaboration, communication, access and transparency between LDSS, licensed child placing agencies (LCPA) and *resource* parents. LDSS must share the Foster Parent Bill of Rights with all approved *resource* parents and maintain a signed copy in the *resource parent* file.

Resource parents have a right to file a complaint regarding alleged violations of collaboration, communication, access, and transparency between the local boards and LCPAs and the *resource* parents.

Prior to filing a formal complaint, the *resource* parent must contact the FSS assigned to the resource family and provide a description of the alleged violation. For LDSS-approved homes, this would be the Resource FSS assigned to the home. For LCPA approved homes, this would be the Foster Care FSS for the child in foster care. The FSS shall respond within five business days and explain any

corrective action to be taken in response to the *resource* parent's complaint. If the *resource* parent and FSS are unable to informally resolve the complaint, the *resource* parent may file a written complaint through the dispute resolution process with the foster care supervisor or designee. The supervisor shall respond to the complaint within five business days with the findings regarding the alleged violation and any correction action that will be taken.

If the *resource* parent disagrees with the supervisor's response, the *resource* parent may appeal the resolution to the local director by filing a written notice of appeal. The appeal shall include a description of the alleged violation, and a copy of the foster care supervisor's report. The director shall hold a meeting with all the parties within seven business days to determine the validity of the alleged violation and the appropriateness of the response from the FSS and supervisor. A summary of the meeting shall be documented by the FSS after approval by the foster care supervisor. The director shall issue written documentation of findings to all parties, and when applicable, recommendations for corrective actions.

This dispute resolution process does not apply to a complaint related to the denial or failure of an LDSS to act upon an individual's claim for benefits. Complaints related to a claim for benefits shall be appealable pursuant to federal law (42 USC § 671(a)(12))and state law (22VAC40-201-115).

Resource Parents may call 833-TELL 2FC (833-835-5232) to reach the Virginia Division of Family Services for disputes at any point in the dispute process. As per § 2.2-445, *resource* parents must also be notified and directed to the website for the Office of the Children's Ombudsman.

4.5.2.4.10.4. Foster Care Agreement/Adoptive Placement Agreement (2.5.1.1.4.)

The Foster Care Agreement: Code of Ethics and Mutual Responsibilities Form is required to be signed whenever a child is placed in a *resource parent*'s home except when the placement is solely for the purpose of adoption. *The Adoptive Placement Agreement is not signed during the resource parent approval process but should be reviewed with the resource parent if the purpose of the placement is adoption.*

4.5.3. Approval

4.5.3.1. The decision to approve or deny (2.3.2.)

When discussing approval with a resource parent as part of the mutual decision process, the LDSS should consider the resource parent's motivation, capacity, parenting skills and ability to meet the core competencies and whether those could be better developed to meet the needs of children in their care. The LDSS should address concerns directly with the resource parent and offer resources to support them in developing their ability to meet the needs of the children. The decision is mutual in that while the LDSS maintains final authority on the decision to approve or not approve, the prospective resource family will decide if they are able and willing to be a resource for children in care. If at any point in the process, the decision is made either by the LDSS or family to discontinue the process *or deny approval*, see Resource Family guidance Section 4.5.

Except when children are placed with kinship *resource* parents, *prospective resource parents* must meet all standards as established by the regulation and be approved by the LDSS prior to placement of a child in the home. Approval may be achieved by the *prospective resource parent* meeting all standards or by meeting most standards and having a waiver granted for one or more standards.

4.5.3.2. Documenting approval (2.5.2.)

4.5.3.2.1. Format of approval narrative

The LDSS must document the Mutual Family Assessment process through a narrative report that addresses specific information obtained during the approval process. The minimum required areas to be contained in the narrative are outlined in the preferred template discussed below.

The Mutual Family Assessment Report is the preferred format for use in approving *prospective resource parents*. LDSS that choose to use another format for their narrative report must clearly address each of the categories in the preferred template.

4.5.3.2.2. Checklist for Initial Provider Approval (2.5.2.2.)

Not all information obtained during an assessment needs to be written into the narrative report. LDSS are required to complete the Checklist for Initial Provider Approval.

Once completed, this form, attached to the completed narrative report, constitutes the completed Mutual Family Assessment Report.

Upon initial approval of resource parents, the LDSS should upload the Checklist for Initial Provider Approval into COMPASS. The Certificate of Approval and the remainder of all other elements of the approval process should be uploaded to COMPASS upon completion.

4.5.3.3.3. Certificate of Approval (2.5.2.1.)

Certificates of Approval are issued for periods of 36 months and are valid for 36 months or until the background check expires (36 months from the day of clearance), whichever occurs first. *Keep track of approval date to ensure that for those resource parents being re-approved, their checks are reissued in a timely manner and their COA does not lapse.*

To approve a *resource* parent, all elements of approval must be met. See *Section 2: Kinship, which outlines all elements of kinship resource parent approval.* The effective date of the certificate of approval for *non-relative resource* parents is the date the Mutual Family Assessment is signed by the supervisor. The results of background checks indicating eligibility for all adult household members must be obtained prior to signing a Certificate of Approval. The date of approval must be documented on the Certificate of Approval. A copy of the Certificate must be maintained in the *resource parent*'s file.

Only individuals or married couples may be *identified on the COA as resource parents*. See Resource Family guidance 4.1.3.

4.5.3.3.4. Notification to the Resource Parent (2.5.2.3.)

Once approved, *resource parents* are to be given a Certificate of Approval specifying the following:

- Type of approval (dually-approved as a resource *parent* or respite *resource parent*).
- Date when the approval became effective and the date when the approval will end.
  - The effective date cannot be any earlier than the date on which any of the items required to approve the *resource family* was received
  - The approval period cannot exceed 36 months. (Example, March 30, 2023- March 30, 2026)
- Specifications or limitations of the approval (e.g., number/*gender/ages* of children).

- The signature, *date* and title of the individual approving the home and the supervisor's signature, *date,* and title.

NOTE: A Certificate of Approval cannot be issued unless all required documents are received. A copy of the Certificate must be filed with the *prospective resource parent's file*.

If at any point in the process, the decision is made either by the LDSS or family to discontinue the process *or deny approval*, , the LDSS must notify the *prospective resource parent* in writing as to the reason why the approval process was stopped. See Resource Family guidance Section 4.5.

4.5.4. Resource Parent File (2.5.5.)

4.5.4.1. Establishing a Resource Parent file (2.5.5.1.)

A *resource parent* file should be established at the time a formal application is received. The application should be on VDSS-approved forms Application for Department Approved Provider; alternatively, other forms/letterhead may be used if all required components are addressed.

Although the Child Welfare Information System is the official case *file*, all forms, letters, and other original hard copy documents (as referenced in this guidance) must be retained in the paper *resource parent* file. The Checklist for Initial Provider Approval can help organize the file.

4.5.4.2. Child Welfare Information System record (2.5.5.2.)

The Resource Section of Child Welfare Information System is the electronic file that captures information on *resource parents* and other resources. Information on the household applying to be a *resource parent* should be updated in the Child Welfare Information System as the *resource* family assessment and approval process moves forward.

It is important to search the Child Welfare Information System Resource Directory prior to opening a new record in Child Welfare Information System to prevent duplication. The Child Welfare Information System Help section has several topics such as "Search for a Resource" and "Open a New Resource" which aid when completing the screens. *LDSS are responsible for entering homes (LDSS Home, LCPA Homes, ICPC Homes, etc.) and VDSS is responsible for entering all other Resources Categories/Types. If a VDSS-entered resource is needed, but it is not in the Child Welfare Information System, a VCCC ticket must be submitted by contacting VCCC at (866) 637-*

8482 or email vccc@vita.virginia.gov for additional assistance in entering resource homes into Child Welfare Information System.

4.5.4.3. Maintenance of the file (2.5.5.3.)

Any changes in the *resource* family that require new documents (e.g., criminal background search for a new adult in the home) or re-approval documents must be retained in the paper file and information updated in the Child Welfare Information System as needed.

Resource family files may be disposed of in a way that protects confidential information so long as five years have elapsed since the file was closed.

4.5.5. Maintaining Approval (2.5.6.)

4.5.5.1. Standards of care for continued approval (2.5.6.1.)

LDSS are required to engage in ongoing discussion with and supervision of *resource parents*. The "Standards of Care for Continued Approval" as described below are first discussed during the assessment to ensure *resource parents* are knowledgeable of what is expected of them once a child is placed in their home. The "Standards" should be part of the ongoing dialogue with *resource parents*. FSS should discuss and monitor how the *resource parent* meets these standards. Several of the "Standards" noted below also require the LDSS FSS to document compliance on the Checklist for Family Re-Approval.

- The *resource parent* must provide care that does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, sex, national origin, age, religion, political beliefs, sexual orientation, disability, or family status.

- The *resource parent* must ensure the child receives meals and snacks appropriate to their daily nutritional needs. The child must receive a special diet if prescribed by a licensed health care provider, or designee, or in accordance with religious or ethnic requirements or other special needs.

- The *resource parent* must ensure that they can be responsive to the mental health or medical needs of the child.

- The *resource parent* must establish rules that encourage desired behavior and discourage undesired behavior. The *resource parent* must not use corporal punishment or give permission to others to do so and must sign an agreement to this effect.

- The *resource parent* must provide clean and seasonal clothing appropriate for the age and size of the child.

- If a *resource parent* transports the child, the *resource parent* must have a valid driver's license and automobile liability insurance. These will be checked at approval and re-approval, but verification may be required at any time deemed necessary.

- The vehicle used to transport the child must have a valid registration and inspection sticker.

- *Resource parents* and any other adults who transport children must use functioning child-restraint devices in accordance with requirements of Virginia law. See Section 10.6.1.2 of the Foster Care Manual and the following link for additional information. Virginia's Child Passenger Safety Laws

4.5.5.2. Monitoring Efforts (2.5.6.2.)

LDSS are required to monitor *resource parents* as follows:

If monitoring efforts indicate that significant changes in the household composition or circumstances of the *resource parent* have occurred and would impact the conditions of approval, a *Change in Circumstance Addendum* must be completed and included with the Mutual Family Assessment and appropriate action taken. Such action may include a plan to correct any deficits noted, suspension of the *resource parent's* approval, or revocation of the *resource parent's* approval. *See Resource Family Guidance Section 5. for support and resource family development.*

4.5.5.2.1. Required Visits

The FSS must visit the home of the approved *resource parent* as often as necessary, but at least quarterly, to provide support to and monitor the performance of the *resource parent* and must document these visits in the *resource parent file*.

- When a child is placed in the home, these visits may coincide with the monthly visits to the child and be completed by the same LDSS FSS.

- If there is no child placed in the home, the quarterly visit may be replaced by phone contact.

4.5.6. Addendums (2.5.7.)

Addendums are used to update the original Mutual Family Assessment and to ensure that the resource family approval maintains compliance with approval requirements. Changes in circumstances that necessitate an addendum are documented on the Changes of Circumstances Addendum form and are listed below. All necessary addendums to the Mutual Family Assessment should be documented in the resource parent file and updated in the Child Welfare Information System.

4.5.6.1. When an Addendum is needed (2.5.7.1.)

Resource parents should inform the LDSS as soon as possible but no later than 45 days **before** a significant change occurs in the household composition or circumstances, including but not limited to:

- A child turning 18 years of age
- A new child or adult entering the household
- A household member leaving the household
- A change in marital status of a *resource parent*
- A change of address (a move)
- A substantial change to the residence (such as *a tree falling on the house or a remodel that impacts stability or functioning of the household*)
- Any changes that may impact the health or safety of a child placed in the home such as recent arrests or pending charges of a *resource parent* or adult household member.
- Any significant change or decline in a *resource parent's* physical or mental health which directly impacts the *resource parent's* ability to care for a child in foster care should be reported immediately but no later than seven (7) days from the time of occurrence.
- A child is being adopted and an Adoption Supplement is necessary. See Adoption Guidance, section 3.4.4 for details when completing an Adoption Supplement.

4.5.6.1.1. Background Checks for New Adult Household Members (2.5.7.1.1.)

For any new adult entering the home, background checks must be conducted, consisting of a national criminal background check *which*

includes a search of the Sex Offender Registry, and a CPS Central Registry search. The Registry may be accessed on the Virginia State Police website. If the new adult in the home has resided in another state within the previous five (5) years, they must also have a CPS Central Registry search run in those states in which they resided. If the adult will be transporting the child, a DMV check is required.

In instances where it is not reasonable to complete all the background checks prior to the new adult entering the household, **at minimum**, a written *Sworn* statement or affirmation disclosing any criminal and child abuse and neglect history in Virginia and any other state of residence within the past five (5) years, satisfactory findings on a Central Registry search, and a Virginia criminal name check must be completed.

The new household member must schedule themselves for fingerprinting and the LDSS must submit to a Search of the Central Registry and Release of Information Form, to the State Office of Background Investigations for processing **within 3 days**.

Within **60** days of a person in the home becoming 18 years old, the results of background checks must be obtained by the local department, consisting of a national criminal background check *which includes* a search of the Sex Offender Registry, and a CPS Central Registry search. A written Sworn Statement or affirmation disclosing any criminal and child abuse and neglect history in Virginia and any other state of residence within the past **five (5)** years must be completed when the individual becomes 18. If the 18-year-old will be transporting the child, a DMV check is required.

Any individual participating in the Fostering Futures program, which allows LDSS to continue to provide foster care services to individuals who are 18 years of age or older but have not reached 21 years of age, who is placed *with* a *resource family* must be subject to the background check requirements. The results of such background check must be used for the sole purpose of determining whether other children should be placed or remain *with* the same *resource family* as the individual subject to the background check. The results of the background check must not be used to terminate or suspend the approval of the *resource family*.

4.6. Re-approval (2.5.7.2.)

The approval period for a *resource parent* is 36 months. Re-approvals are due **no later than three (3) years** from the begin date of the previous certificate of approval. *To ensure the COA does not expire while a child is placed with a resource family, the LDSS should start*

the re-approval process, including the initiation of new background checks, at least 90 days but no more than 120 days prior to the background checks expiring. Revisit Resource Family Guidance, Section 4.5.5.1. for Standards of care for continued approval. Suggested steps in this process are available on FUSION.

4.6.1. Checklist for Re-approval (2.5.7.2.1.)

LDSS are required to complete the Checklist for Family Re-approval. The LDSS should upload the completed checklist in addition to the updated Certificate of Approval and Physical Home Environment Checklist to COMPASS and place copies in the resource parent file. Once completed, these forms and the completed re-approval addendum constitute the complete re-approval package.

4.6.2 Interview Requirements (2.5.7.3.)

During the re-approval process, the LDSS FSS must conduct a minimum of one (1) interview with the *resource parent* in their home. FSS are to use the visit to conduct a review and update the Mutual Family Assessment. *The FSS should assess the resource parent's willingness and ability to continue to meet the needs of children in care, develop their skill set, and expand their fostering profile to better meet the local need for resource families.*

The LDSS FSS must conduct a review of the previous home approval information with the *resource parents*. By reviewing the information with the *resource parent*, the FSS and *resource parent* can identify and discuss any changes in the *resource parent's* situation that may affect the approval of the home, such as the number and *needs* of children for which the *resource parent* will be approved.

4.6.2.1 Written Addendum (2.5.7.3.1.)

The LDSS FSS must update the Mutual Family Assessment through a written Re-approval Addendum, documenting the decision to re-approve the *resource parent*. The addendum includes any new information the FSS has obtained and considered in deciding to re-approve the *resource parent*: (i.e., new additions to the household, changes to the home, changes in marital status, or updates to capacity). The Re-approval Addendum to the Mutual Family Assessment must indicate that the *below* requirements were met. When applicable, any *supporting documents* received during the re-approval process (e.g., TB screening, training verification) are to be included in the *resource parent's* file.

This narrative must address all requirements for re-approval as outlined in this guidance and contain documentation from interviews and submitted forms and must be signed and dated by the FSS completing the addendum and the director of the LDSS or their designee.

4.6.2.2. Addendum Supporting Documentation (2.5.7.4.)

4.6.2.2.1. Background checks (2.5.7.4.1.)

All adults in the home should already have had a national criminal background check completed and reflected on the Checklist for Initial Provider Approval. For re-approval, a Virginia criminal name check and CPS Central Registry search are required. Completed background checks must be dated within the 36 months since the date of the most recent central registry finding and the most recent criminal *background* check report. *A national criminal background check with fingerprinting must be completed if prior criminal checks expired. Background checks dates need to be dated within 120 days of the Certificate of Approval start date. A national criminal background check with fingerprinting must be completed if prior criminal checks expired or the Certificate of Approval (COA) lapses.* A sworn statement or affirmation does not expire and does not need to be completed at re-approval.

4.6.2.2.2. Transportation (2.5.7.4.2.)

The *resource parent* and other adults expected to transport children must show evidence of a valid driver's license, a valid motor vehicle inspection, and proof of automobile insurance. *DMV background checks must also be completed with every approval and re-approval.*

4.6.2.2.3. Agreements (2.5.7.4.3.)

LDSS must review and complete new the Confidentiality and the Discipline Agreements. A copy of the forms must be given to the *resource parent*.

4.6.2.2.4. Physical Home Environment Checklist (2.5.7.4.4.)

As part of the re-approval process, the LDSS should conduct a walkthrough of the home and complete the corresponding Physical Home Environment Checklist.

4.6.2.2.5. TB Risk Assessments (2.5.7.4.5.)

All household members must obtain and provide to the LDSS the results of a new TB Risk Assessment or TB Screening form as documentation of the absence of tuberculosis in a communicable form.

4.6.2.2.6. In-service training (2.5.7.4.6.)

All in-service training must be documented in the *resource parent's* file, as well as any additional training that is needed.

4.6.2.3. Subsequent Certificate of Approvals (2.5.7.5.)

In addition to the new Certificate of Approval (COA) that is needed at re-approval, an updated COA should be issued when there are changes to any of the information that is listed on the COA such as:

- *A change in residence*
- *A change in legal name of the resource parent*
- *A change in marital status of the resource parent*

The COA should be updated to reflect the change in information, but the dates of approval should remain the same.

2.5.7.5.1. Lapses in Certificate of Approvals and/or Background Checks (4.6.2.3.1)

Anytime background checks expire or a Certificate of Approval (COA) lapses, fingerprints must be completed and a new COA issued. In these situations, a Virginia State Police name search is insufficient.

When a new COA is needed due to expired background checks or a lapse in background checks, a new re-approval checklist must be completed and all elements on the checklist must be current before the COA can be issued. This includes ensuring that the TB test was completed within 12 months of the new COA.

Example 1: Initial fingerprints were received on May 6th, 2021. These fingerprints are valid for 36 months, which means they will expire on May 6th, 2024. If the agency responsible for the home does not conduct a name search for reapproval until May 25th, 2024, then the home is out of compliance. As a result, it is necessary to conduct fingerprint searches before issuing the re-approval COA and using IV-E funds.

Example 2: The COA was initially issued on May 20, 2021, with an expiration date of May 20, 2024. If the agency completes the reapproval process on June 5, 2024, fingerprint searches must be completed due to the COA expiring prior to the reapproval being completed. A fingerprint search for all adult household members must be completed within 120 days of the reapproval COA. In this situation, a name search

is no longer sufficient, even if it was conducted before the fingerprints expired, as the COA has now lapsed.

4.6.2.4. Notification of Resource Parent (2.5.7.6.)

If the *resource parent* is re-approved, they are to be provided with a new Certificate of Approval specifying the following:

- Type of approval (dual or respite).
- Date when the approval became effective and the date when the approval expires.

  The effective date of the re-approval certificate should be no later than the expiration date of the previous certificate. The home is not eligible for re-approval if all required documents are not received by the end date of the previous certificate of approval.

- The signature, *date,* and title of the FSS approving the home and the supervisor.

If the re-approval process results in the LDSS's denial of the approval, the LDSS must notify the *resource parent* in writing of its decision. A copy of the letter must be filed in the *resource parent's* file.

4.7. Suspending or revoking Resource Parent approval (2.6.)

Actions by the *resource parent* or changes in the *resource parent's* situation may require the LDSS to take action that results in the suspension or revocation of a *resource parent's* approval. *Resource parents* who do not maintain compliance with the standards of approval as outlined in this guidance must have their approval either temporarily suspended or completely revoked. If the re-approval process results in the LDSS's decision to suspend or revoke the *resource parent's* approval, the LDSS must notify the *resource parent* in writing of its decision. A copy of the notification letter must be placed in the *resource parent's* file.

Frequent contact with the *resource parent* and visits to the home by an LDSS FSS are the major mechanisms for determining maintenance of standards. If there are concerns regarding the *resource parent's* ability to maintain the safety and well-being of a child, the LDSS has the authority to change the placement.

4.7.1. Suspensions of Approvals (2.6.1.)

Suspensions may occur when a change in the circumstances of the *resource parent* results in the *resource parent's* temporary inability to meet standards (e.g., individuals living in the home with barrier crimes that would jeopardize the safety of

the child(ren); safety concerns regarding the physical structure of the home). The LDSS may suspend a *resource parent's* approval when the *resource parent* cannot temporarily maintain full approval through corrective measures, and all agree that a violation of the standards for approval can be resolved.

If a *resource parent* has received a founded disposition of child abuse or neglect after being granted approval, the LDSS must suspend the *resource parent's* approval. In situations where the founded disposition is under appeal, the *resource parent's* approval must be suspended until the appeal process is completed.

Suspensions mean the *resource parent* is no longer approved for the placement of children, and therefore, no child may reside in the home until the suspension is lifted. Reinstating approval requires resolution of the circumstances that caused the suspension and must be documented in the addendum to the *resource parent's* file. Any child placed with a *resource parent* at the time approval is suspended must be immediately removed. No other children may be placed with the *resource parent* during the period of suspension. A suspension does not change the approval period.

4.7.2. Revocation of Approvals (2.6.2.)

The LDSS may revoke a *resource parent's* approval when conditions in the home or actions of the *resource parent* are a threat to the safety, permanency, or well-being of a child placed in the home. The LDSS must revoke a *resource parent's* approval when:

- A *resource parent* has been convicted of a barrier crime as defined by Virginia Code.
- A *resource parent* does not comply with approval standards (unless a waiver has been obtained).
- A *resource parent* whose approval has been suspended does not correct the conditions that led to the suspension.

The LDSS may also revoke a *resource parent's* approval when other conditions result in the determination that the *resource parent* is not or cannot provide a safe, stable, and nurturing home for children. Decisions to revoke and the factors that lead to such a decision must be documented in the *resource parent's* file and discussed with the *resource parent*. A *resource parent* whose approval has been revoked and who subsequently wants to seek approval must submit a new application.

4.8. Respite Approval

4.8.1. Respite Approval Process

- **Dual Approval:** *Resource parents* with full, dual approval may also provide respite care except in cases of kinship *resource* parents who are dually-approved for specific children.

- **Respite Approval Only:** *Resource parents* approved for respite only must satisfy all requirements for dual approval except for:

  - Of the 21 pre-service training core competencies required for approved *resource parents*, only 13 specific core competencies are required for respite-only *resource parents* (see Section 4.2.2.).

  - Provision of financial information.

- **Re-approval of Respite R*esource Parents*:** LDSS should follow requirements for re-approval for respite *resource parents* as spelled out in Sections 4.5.4, 4.5.5. and 4.5.6.

- **In-service Training:** The LDSS must provide opportunities annually for in-service training *such as utilizing CRAFFT and Foster Parent College*. See In-service Training in Resource Family Guidance Section 5.

4.9. Right to Grieve

4.9.1. Allowable Grievances

See dispute process in Resource Family Guidance Section 4.5.2.4.10.3.

4.9.1.1. Approval grievances

For initial approval or re-approval, the *resource parent* must have the right to dispute the actions of the LDSS to the LDSS on issues related to become a *resource parent*. See dispute process in Resource Family Guidance Section 4.5.2.4.10.3.

4.9.1.2. Child placement grievances

Decisions on the placement of a specific child with a *resource parent* are not subject to grievance. The LDSS shall have the final authority to determine appropriate placement for children pursuant to § 16.1-278.2 of the Code of Virginia. Decisions regarding final adoptive placements are made by the circuit court pursuant to Chapter 12 (§ 63.2-1200 et seq.) of Title 63.2 of the Code of Virginia.

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RESOURCE FAMILY SUPPORT

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RESOURCE FAMILY SUPPORT

5.1. Basic Principles for Support

- Resource families provide a service that LDSS cannot; therefore, they should be treated with respect and valued as members of the child's permanency team (see Foster Parent Bill of Rights and Dispute Process- Resource Family Guidance Sections 2.5.1.1.3. and 4.5.2.4.10.3).

- Because children in foster care *have lived experiences that result in behavioral, educational, medical, mental health or social needs*, the *resource* families caring for them must have the services and supports that will enable them to provide the *best possible* care for children while maintaining connections to their families.

- Support and retention of currently approved *resource* families is the single most effective recruitment strategy.

- Data regarding the utilization of resource families, their expressed needs for training and support, and their overall level of satisfaction should be collected and regularly used to inform both recruitment and retention activities.

5.2. Valuing Resource Families

As the providers of the child's daily care, resource parents possess a unique perspective and should be regarded as persons with expertise about the child. They should be treated as valued members of the child's permanency team as reflected in the Foster Parent Bill of Rights.

- Communication is a fundamental component of teamwork with resource families, requiring prompt efforts and a high level of overall customer service.

- Providing timely notification of court hearings, team meetings, visits, etc. allows families to plan schedules and prepare accordingly, and displays a fundamental level of respect for the family.

- Supporting and responding to the needs of resource families in a timely manner, including providing ongoing training and linking them to community resources demonstrates the resource family's value. *It also contributes to placement stability because the resource families are better able to meet the needs of the children placed with them.*

- Ensuring that training and support activities are driven by *resource* family *stated and unstated* needs and incorporates a variety of topics *values them.* Utilizing CRAFFT to bolster support and retention of existing families *increases LDSS capacity*.

- *Collaborating with neighboring LDSS to offer a variety of supports and in-service trainings, including resource family support groups, increases LDSS capacity and the effectiveness of resource family support.*

- Utilizing an ongoing process to gather information about the needs of resource families and their overall satisfaction level regarding their relationship with the LDSS *ensures that resource families know that they are valued and have a voice*.

- Recognizing and acknowledging resource families for their expertise and service *throughout the year and in a variety of ways demonstrates their value*.

5.3. Supporting *New* Placements

Providing a high level of information and support at both the early and ongoing stages of placement is critical for both the *resource* family and the LDSS to meet a child's needs.

The very first placement a *resource* family experiences after approval should be given extra time and responsiveness to assist the family in putting their training into practice. *The resource family needs support in* making the needed adjustments to their home and schedule to meet the child's needs, preparing for, responding to their own children's needs during this transition, and beginning the early work of maintaining the connection between the child and *their* family.

Individuals who are approved as kinship resource parents must be provided with the following information *by the time of placement*:

- LDSS contact information, including but not limited to, Family Services Specialist name and phone number and after-hours contact information.

- Contact information including who the child may or may not have contact with and what type of contact is allowed (e.g., supervised visitation; phone contact; email; etc.).

- Information regarding the child's medical history and needs including allergies, immunizations, current medical treatment, the child's doctors' names, health insurance, and contact information and, when applicable, the child's medication.

- Educational information including provisions for getting the child to school and, if applicable, the plan for enrolling the child in a new school *or childcare, if needed*.

- The LDSS's plan for immediate follow-up regarding the child, including but not limited to, next Family Services Specialist visit to the home; school enrollment; medical follow-up; visitation between the child and family members including siblings.

A review of and signing the Foster Care Agreement: Code of Ethics/Mutual Responsibility Agreement *and for kinship resource parents, the* Foster Parent Bill of Rights and Dispute Process.

- A review and signing of the confidentiality agreement, including a discussion of the meaning of confidentiality.

- A discussion of the prohibition against the use of corporal punishment under any circumstances. Corporal punishment must be defined, and resource parents must agree to refrain from all such methods of discipline. The *Discipline Agreement* must also be signed.

- The expectation and process for obtaining full approval as a *kinship resource parent* and the next steps the LDSS will take to support their decision to pursue full approval.

5.4. Supporting connection with child's family and reunification

The LDSS should create opportunities for resource families and the child's family to develop ongoing relationships in service of safety, permanency, and well-being for children in care. This relationship should be regarded as a priority, facilitated by the LDSS, and valued by the child's permanency team.

All relevant information about the child (and where appropriate, the parents) should be shared with resource parents caring for that child; without it, they are unable to meet the child's needs, and this inability undermines placement stability.

5.4.1. Lifebooks

A lifebook is a scrapbook-like creation that records a child's life, how they entered foster care, their experiences with different families, and their feelings along the way. This book records the love shared by their families, their resource families, and other natural supports who pass through their lives. Lifebooks are especially important for children who are unable to remain connected to their families. For more information about how lifebooks support a sense of identification, belonging, and connection see Foster Care Guidance Sections 4.14 and 9.5.3)

5.5. Respite

Respite care is a placement resource designed to provide relief to families caring for children by providing short-term substitute care for children.

5.5.1 Purpose of Respite

The purpose of respite care for *resource parents* is to reduce foster home disruption and provide a stable foster care placement for the child. See Foster Care Guidance Section 10.5. When appropriate, planned, or emergency respite should be used to provide resource families with opportunities to take care of themselves and nurture marital and family relationships. *Respite is used to preserve the placement stability. LDSS should support resource parents in exercising the reasonable and prudent standard in decisions regarding respite and placement stability..* Respite placements may be used when a *resource* family emergency arises, in the event of an illness, to provide the *resource parent* with time to spend with immediate family members and friends, or for *resource parents* to have some time to themselves. It may also be used to provide respite to support the needs of a child who is transitioning to an adoptive placement or stepping down from a more restrictive placement (i.e., congregate care setting) to a *resource family* or to the home of a relative through regularly scheduled visits. Such visits may help evaluate appropriate matching of the child with the prospective family and ultimately reduce the number of placement disruptions. Relative respite care is a viable tool to help maintain vital family connections that are important in establishing and maintaining permanency. Relative respite care also may increase the possibility of relative adoption or custody of the child by relatives.

Individuals with whom a child may spend time socially (e.g., overnight stays with a friend, church camp, etc.) are not subject to approval as respite *resource parents*.

Respite Care Services information is available on FUSION.

5.6. Contingency fund

In cases where a child in foster *care's behavioral needs result in extensive damage* to the *property* of the resource family, the LDSS should explore the use of the Contingency Fund to reimburse the resource parent for associated expenses.

5.7. Post placement review

LDSS should provide ongoing support and training to resource families to support the development of knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary to meet the needs of children in foster care. At the conclusion of placements, LDSS should engage resource families in self-assessment to review the strengths and areas of skill development and should use this to create a family development plan. Family development plans should outline the responsibilities of both the resource parent(s) and LDSS to address mutually agreed upon areas of need, to include resources and in-service training, and any follow up needed. These reviews and development plans may be incorporated into the next re-approval process. See Resource Family Guidance Section 4.6.

5.8. VEMAT

For children in foster care, the purpose of the Virginia Enhanced Maintenance Assessment Tool (VEMAT) is to assess the child's behavioral, emotional, and physical/personal care needs to determine if an enhanced maintenance payment is necessary to ensure the safety and well-being of the child. Regular and frequent contact with the resource parent is an opportunity to discuss children's needs, concerns the resource parent may have related to the child, and ways to identify and use the child's strengths to improve behavior. These visits should serve as opportunities to provide support, training and for the FSS to proactively consider what the child and resource parent may need to ensure the child's safety, maintain the placement, and improve the child's overall wellbeing. For more information about the VEMAT, see Foster Care Guidance Section 18.2.

5.9. In-service Training

The LDSS should engage with the resource parent on the challenges of fostering and connect them to training which will support their development and help them to better meet the needs of children placed with them. Understanding the impact of trauma on development and behavior is an important topic for in-service training for resource parents.

The LDSS must provide opportunities for training on an annual basis.

- *Resource* families should be surveyed no less than annually to determine training needs.
- Bolster LDSS offerings of in-service training by utilizing CRAFFT *(See Resource Family Guidance Section 1.7)* and collaborating with neighboring LDSS to conduct trainings.
- When *resource families* wish to receive credit for training conducted outside of social services (i.e., through a local school, at a state conference), the LDSS should request information about the content (through an outline, handouts, etc.) as well as verification of attendance (certificate, training roster, etc.). Those LDSS that use Title IV-E funds to support the costs of such trainings must submit the training information in advance of the training to the State office for approval. To access Title IV-E submission and funding information go to Instructions for Title IV-E Funding and Title IV-E Training Pass through Grant.

5.9.1. Training needs

Training must be relevant to the needs of children and families and may be structured to include multiple types of training modalities and resources (for example, online resource parent training courses *such as the* use *of Foster Parent College*, seminars, and conferences). *LDSS should support resource families by*

setting up Foster Parent College accounts at initial approval and direct them to in-service training courses to support their development, as needed.

While the number of hours is not specified, *areas of need should be identified through the creation of individualized family development plans through post-placement reviews.* No more than half of the in-service training hours should be obtained utilizing self-paced training methodologies (e.g., online courses, self-study books, etc.). *In-service training recommended as a result of post-placement reviews and family development plans should be reflected in re-approval addendums (See Resource Family Guidance, Section 4.6)*

If a child's foster care goal changes to adoption, the resource parent is required to receive adoption training within six months of the goal change and finalization.