

State of West Virginia Department of Human Services

Adoption Policy

Bureau for Social Services

Revised June 2025

Contents

SECTION 1 – INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW	1
1.1 Mission, Vision, and Values	1
1.2 Legal and Regulatory Basis	1
Federal Legislation	1
State Statute	2
Federal Supreme Court Decisions	2
1.3 Legal Authority for Adoptive Placement	2
1.4 General Definitions	2
SECTION 2 – PERMANENT PLACEMENT OPTIONS	4
2.1 Kinship/Relative to Adoptive Care	4
Grandparents’ Rights	4
Relative Adoption	5
Transfer of Custody	5
2.2 Adoption	5
SECTION 3 – TRANSFER OF CHILD PROTECTIVE/YOUTH SERVICES CASE TO ADOPTION	6
3.1 Transfer of Child Protective/Youth Services Case to Adoption Definitions	6
3.2 Termination of Parental Rights	6
3.3 Right to Appeal Termination	7
3.4 Adoption Specialist as Secondary Worker	7
Staffing	7
Transfer Plan	7
Mediation	8
3.5 CPS/Youth Services Actions Prior to Transfer	8
Adoption Ready Cases	8
Court and Other Legal Records	9
State Ward Record	9
Child’s Documents	9
3.6 Child Summary	10
3.7 Case Work Actions	10
3.8 Information Sharing Between Child Placing Agencies, Emergency Shelters, Group Care, and Residential Mental Health Treatment Facilities	10
3.9 Electronic Access for Child Placing Agencies for the Purpose of Adoption	10
SECTION 4 – RECRUITMENT OF AN ADOPTIVE HOME	11
4.1 Recruitment of Adoptive Home Definitions	11
4.2 Grandparents Rights	12
4.3 Adoption Resource Exchange	12
Identification of Children for the Adoption Resource Exchange	12
A Consent for Registration	13

Submission of Photographs to the ARE	13
Updating Photographs	13
Change of Information	13
Placing Holds	13
Internet Inquiries	14
4.4 Media Promotions	14
Adopt US Kids	14
Wendy's Wonderful Kids	14
4.5 Additional Options	14
Resources Known to the Child	14
Foster to Adopt	15
4.6 Legal Risk Placement	15
SECTION 5 - Adoption Preference and Preparation	15
5.1 Grandparent Preference	15
5.2 Pre-Placement Visitation	16
5.3 Travel Expenses for Interviews and Visits by Pre-Adoptive Parents	16
5.4 Moving to a Trial Adoption Placement	17
5.5 Adoption Placement Agreement	17
5.6 Discipline Policy Agreement	17
SECTION 6 – INTERSTATE COMPACT ON THE PLACEMENT OF CHILDREN (ICPC)	18
6.1 Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children Definitions	18
6.2 Out of State Placements	18
6.3 Referral Process/Documentation	18
Cover Letter	18
Required Documents	19
6.4 Education	20
6.5 Placement Notification	20
6.6 Worker Contact	20
Worker Actions	20
6.7 Supervision of Placement	21
Supervisory Reports	21
SECTION 7 – CASE MANAGEMENT	22
7.1 Case Management Definitions	22
7.2 Journey Placement Notebook	22
7.3 Life Book	22
7.4 Youth Identification Card Program	23
7.5 Reunification and Separation of Siblings	23
7.6 Sibling Visitation	23
Contacts with In-State Department Resource/Adoptive Homes	23

Contacts with Specialized Agency Homes	25
Contacts with Residential Treatment Homes	25
Contacts with Out-of-state Adoptive Homes	25
7.7 Continued Assessments/Case Plan/Hearings	26
Permanent Placement Reviews/Quarterly Status Review/Permanency Hearings	26
7.8 Permanency Placement Reviews	26
7.9 Multidisciplinary Treatment Team Meetings for Disrupted Placements	27
On-Going Multidisciplinary Treatment Team Meetings	28
7.10 Life Skills	29
7.11 Learning and Transition Plans	30
7.12 Socially Necessary Services	31
7.13 Services Offered - Foster Care	31
Services Offered – Adoption Preservation	32
Accessing the Services	32
Denied Provider	32
SECTION 8 – ADOPTION PROCESS	32
8.1 Adoption Process Definitions	32
8.2 Placement	33
Placement Day	33
Child’s Information/Possessions	33
8.3 Placement Support	33
Support Groups/Mentors	33
Initial Clothing Allowance	33
School Clothing Allowance	34
8.4 Requests for Release and Consent for Adoption	34
8.5 Application for Subsidy Adoption	34
8.6 Adoption Packet	34
Adoption Certificate	34
8.7 Filing of the Petition	35
8.8 Absent or Unknown Parent	35
8.9 Notice of Proceeding	35
8.10 Confidential Report to Judge	36
8.11 Adoption Hearing	36
8.12 Recording the Order and Birth Certificate	36
8.13 Notification to Child Support	37
SECTION 9 – ADOPTION SUBSIDY	37
9.1 Adoption Subsidy Definitions	37
9.2 Purpose	37
9.3 Eligibility	37

9.4 Subsidy Categories	39
Financial Subsidy	39
Medical Coverage	41
One-Time Non-Recurring Adoption Expenses	41
Conditional Subsidy	42
Interstate Compact on Medical Assistance (ICAMA)	42
Referral to Another State	42
Referral Received from Another State	42
9.5 Adoption Subsidy Agreement	43
Adoption Subsidy Agreement	43
Deferred Adoption Subsidy Agreement	43
9.6 Extended Medicaid Coverage	44
9.7 Chafee Education and Training Vouchers (ETV)	44
9.8 Social Security Income and Pension Benefits	45
9.9 Medley at Risk	45
9.10 Children with Special Health Care Needs Program	45
9.11 WV Vocational Rehabilitation	46
9.12 Reviews/Records	46
9.13 Appeals/Fair Hearing	46
9.14 Repayment of Adoption Subsidy	46
SECTION 10 – POST FINALIZATION	47
10.1 Post Finalization Definitions	47
10.2 Adoption Preservation Services	47
10.3 Archiving of State Ward Records	47
10.4 Non-identifying Information	48
10.5 Mutual Consent Adoption Registry	48
10.6 Adoption Dissolution	48
10.7 Adoptive Parent Death	49
10.8 Adoptive Parent Separation/Divorce	49
10.9 Grievance Process/Fair Hearings	49
10.10 Adoptive Parents Rights	49
10.11 Crime Victims Compensation Fund	50
SECTION 11 - NONDISCRIMINATION, GRIEVANCE PROCEDURE & DUE PROCESS STANDARDS, REASONABLE MODIFICATION POLICIES, AND CONFIDENTIALITY	50
11.1 Nondiscrimination	50
11.2 Non-Discriminatory Placement Protocol	51
11.3 Complaint Procedure and Due Process Standards	52
A: Complaints Based on Disability or other Forms of Discrimination	52
Procedure	52

11.4 Reasonable Modification Policy	54
A: Purpose	54
B: Policy	55
11.5 Limited English Proficiency	56
PROCEDURES:	57
APPENDIX A DoHS CIVIL RIGHTS DISCRIMINATION COMPLAINT FORM	59

SECTION 1 – INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

1.1 Mission, Vision, and Values

The Bureau for Social Services mission is to promote the safety, permanency, and well-being of children and vulnerable adults, supporting individuals to succeed and strengthening families. Our vision is for all West Virginia families to experience safe, stable, healthy lives and thrive in the care of a loving family and community. Our values include professionalism, integrity, excellence, relationships, and staff contributions.

1.2 Legal and Regulatory Basis

Federal Legislation

Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980 (P.L. 96-272)

The Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980 mandated states to promote permanency planning for all children in out-of-home care and for children at risk of removal from their homes. States were also required to make reasonable efforts to prevent the out-of-home placement of a child and to reunify children already removed from their homes.

Multi-Ethnic Placement Act (P. L. 103-382)

The Multi-Ethnic Placement Act (MEPA) prohibits a federally assisted agency from categorically denying the opportunity for any person to become an adoptive parent or foster parent solely on the basis of race, color, or national origin.

The Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 (P.L. 105-89)

The Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 was enacted to ensure that children's safety would be the paramount concern of all child welfare decision making and to promote the adoption of children who cannot return safely to their own homes. This law addresses:

- Concurrent planning, the simultaneous exploration of family reunification and other permanency options.
- Requires states to file for termination of parental rights once children have been in foster care for 15 of the most recent 22 months, except in certain allowable circumstances, and encourages states to expedite TPR in specific situations of severe harm inflicted on children.
- Mandates states to document efforts to find adoptive or other permanent placements for children, including placements with fit and willing relatives.
- Gives preference to when making placement decisions to adult relatives over nonrelative caregivers when relative caregivers meet all relevant state child protection standards.

Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act (P.L. 110-351)

The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act addresses:

- Extending federal foster care payments to 21 years old.
- Providing federal support to relatives caring for foster children.
- Increasing access to foster care and adoption services to Native American tribes.
- Improving the oversight of the health and education needs of children in foster care.

State Statute

The West Virginia Code Chapter 49 and Chapter 48 legislates a coordinated system of child welfare for the children of the state of West Virginia. This statute allows the department to accept custody of children and place them outside of their families of origin in order to protect and care for them. If parental rights have not been terminated, it is the responsibility of the department to help parents stay involved in their children's lives by exercising their remaining rights and responsibilities concerning their children. If parental rights have been terminated, it is the responsibility of the department to accept guardianship of children and consent to their adoption.

Federal Supreme Court Decisions

The Yokum decision determined states may not discriminate against kinship/relative caregivers in placement decisions in cases in which the state has custody of a child in foster care.

1.3 Legal Authority for Adoptive Placement

For the department to have the right to place a child for adoption and later to give formal consent to their adoption, the department must obtain legal guardianship of the child. Children can be committed to the guardianship of the state either through the voluntary relinquishment of the parental rights executed by the parents or by court order. Court rules will apply in the case of voluntary relinquishment by the court. Termination of parental rights (voluntary or court-ordered) represents the single most important decision in a child's life and must be subject to review by more than one representative of the department.

1.4 General Definitions

<i>Term</i>	<i>Definition</i>
Abandonment	Any conduct by the birth mother, legal father, determined father, outsider father, unknown father or putative father that demonstrates a settled purpose to forgo all duties and relinquish all parental claims to the child. See, W. Va. Code §48-22-102
Adoptee	A person who has been legally adopted in the state of West Virginia. See, W. Va. Code §48-23-201
Adoption	The judicial act of creating the relationship of parent and child where it did not exist previously. See, W. Va. Code §48-23-203
Adoptive parents	"Adoptive parents" or "adoptive mother" or "adoptive father" means those persons who, after adoption, are the mother and father of the child. See, W. Va. Code §48-22-103
Adult	A person who is eighteen years of age or more. See, W. Va. Code §48-23-204

Agency	A public or private entity, including the Department of Human Services, that is authorized by law to place children for adoption. See, W. Va. Code §48-22-104
Birth father	The biological father of the child. See, W. Va. Code §48-22-105
Birth mother	The biological mother of the child. See, W. Va. Code §48-22-10
Child placing agency	A child welfare agency organized for the purpose of placing children in private family homes for foster care or for adoption. The function of a child placing agency may include the investigation and certification of foster family homes and foster family group homes. The function of a child placing agency may also include the supervision of children who are 16 or 17 years of age and living in unlicensed residences. The agencies are responsible for training, completing home studies, approving, and supervising the homes and are licensed by the department.
Closed adoption	An adoption in which identifying information about the birth parents and adoptive parents is considered confidential and is not made available as a result of state law and/or court order.
Comprehensive Child Welfare Information System (CCWIS)	A statewide computerized case management system for all child welfare and adult service programs. This system is in compliance with Federal requirements for a Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System.
Consent	The voluntary surrender to an individual, not an agency, by a minor child's parent or guardian, for purposes of the child's adoption, of the rights of the parent or guardian with respect to the child, including the legal and physical custody of the child. See, W. Va. Code §48-22-108
Determined father	Before adoption, a person: (1) In whom paternity has been established pursuant to the provisions of article 24-101, et seq., and section 16-5-12, whether by adjudication or acknowledgment as set forth therein; or (2) who has been otherwise judicially determined to be the biological father of the child entitled to parental rights; or (3) who has asserted his paternity of the child in an action commenced pursuant to the provisions of article 24-101, et seq., that is pending at the time of the filing of the adoption petition. See, W. Va. Code §48-22-109
Guardian Ad Litem (GAL)	The court appointed attorney assigned to the child during the abuse and neglect proceedings. This person's responsibility to the child continues until permanency is achieved.

Multidisciplinary Treatment Team (MDT)	A group of professionals and paraprofessionals representing a variety of disciplines who interact and coordinate their efforts to identify, diagnose and treat specific cases of child abuse and neglect. Multidisciplinary teams may include, but are not limited to, medical, educational, child care and law-enforcement personnel, social workers, psychologists and psychiatrists. Their goal is to pool their respective skills in order to formulate accurate diagnoses and to provide comprehensive coordinated treatment with continuity and follow-up for both parents and children. See, W. Va. Code §49-1-207
Relinquishment	The voluntary surrender to an agency by a minor child's parent or guardian, for purposes of the child's adoption, of the rights of the parent or guardian with respect to the child, including the legal and physical custody of the child. See, W. Va. Code §48-22-115
State ward	A child who has had all parents' rights terminated either by legal action, relinquishment, or death.
Unknown father	A biological father whose identity the biological mother swears is unknown to her before adoption, pursuant to the provisions of section 22-502. See, W. Va. Code §48-22-117

SECTION 2 – PERMANENT PLACEMENT OPTIONS

2.1 Kinship/Relative to Adoptive Care

Placement with a fit and willing relative or kinship provider, in and of itself, does not necessarily provide a child in foster care with permanency. Every child in the custody of the department deserves to have a home that gives the child a sense of security and belonging while also providing the caretaker with the tools and resources necessary to meet that child's individual needs. Kinship care can provide a child with permanency as well as providing the relative with the financial, medical, and legal assistance necessary to raise the child to maturity through grandparents' rights, relative adoption, and transfer of custody.

Grandparents' Rights

When considering placement of a child for adoption, the department must first consider any known grandparent(s) to adopt the child. Once the grandparent or grandparents have been identified, the department will conduct a home study evaluation to determine whether the grandparent(s) are suitable foster/adoptive parents. If the grandparent(s) are found to be suitable foster/adoptive parents, the department shall offer placement of the child to the grandparent(s) prior to considering any other resource or adoptive placements. A circuit judge may determine the placement of a child for adoption by a grandparent or grandparents is in the best interest of the child without the grandparent or grandparents completing or passing a home study. See, [W. Va. Code §49-4-114\(3\)](#).

Relative Adoption

The relative caregiver may elect to adopt the child placed in their home. This option allows the relative caregiver to become the legal parent of the child and receive all the benefits of legal custody. The relative may also receive a monthly adoption subsidy to assist with the additional expense of caring for the child. Medical coverage that covers the child's physical and mental health care needs is also available to the relative caretaker who adopts the child. In addition, a non-recurring subsidy is available that covers up to \$2,000.00 of the non-recurring expenses that may include the legal expenses incurred by the relative in adopting the child.

Transfer of Custody

If the relative does not meet the requirements or is unwilling to become an adoptive parent, the department may elect to ask the court, at a dispositional hearing, to transfer legal custody of the child to the relative. This option does not provide the relative caregiver with any financial or medical support for the child. The relative may elect to receive TANF benefits for the child which also provides a medical card to cover the physical and mental health for the child. This transfer option may only be utilized under the following conditions:

- Reunification, adoption, and legal guardianship have been ruled out as possible permanency options for the child.
- The child welfare worker has explained all the benefits of adoption and legal guardianship to the relative caregiver who decides not to pursue these options.
- The relative caregiver cannot meet the requirements necessary to become an adoptive parent or legal guardian.
- The multidisciplinary treatment team and the court determine that this placement is in the best interest of the child and the relative can provide an appropriate and safe permanent home for the child.
- The child welfare worker will request that the court transfer custody of the child to the relative caretaker at the dispositional hearing.

2.2 Adoption

Adoption is a way of providing security for, and meeting the developmental needs of, a child by legally transferring ongoing parental responsibility for the child from the birth parents to adoptive parents. [W. Va. Code §49-2-101](#) gives the department the responsibility to provide child welfare services and to accept guardianship of children and consent to their adoption. For the department to have the right to place a child for adoption and later give formal consent to their adoption, the department must obtain legal guardianship of the child. This may occur through the termination of parental rights to the child either through a voluntary relinquishment or through a court order. The parental rights shall not be terminated if a child 14 years of age or older or otherwise of an age of discretion as determined by the court objects to such termination. The decision to pursue adoption as a permanency option should be made by the multidisciplinary treatment team which should include the child's child welfare worker, the supervisor, the private agency staff if any, the child, the child's resource caregivers, the adoption specialist and/or adoption supervisor, and the Guardian Ad Litem.

Within the child, youth, and family case plan, filed with the court prior to disposition, the child welfare worker must recommend adoption as the permanency plan for the child and detail the steps necessary to achieve permanency.

The multidisciplinary treatment team should also act as the permanent placement review committee to monitor the implementation of the permanency plan for the child and report on the progress and developments in the case every three months until the child's adoption is finalized.

If an order of sibling separation has not been previously entered and the child, youth, family case plan includes placement of a child separate from their siblings, the child welfare worker must secure a court order which finds that it is in the best interest of the child not to be placed in the same home as their sibling. The order must be documented on the legal actions screen in CCWIS.

If not already completed, the child's child welfare worker must complete the *Birth Parents' Background Information* form (SS-FC-12) and the *Birth and Medical History of the Child* form (SS-FC-12A) in CCWIS. The child welfare worker must also obtain a certified copy of the birth parent's birth certificates and death certificates, if applicable.

SECTION 3 – TRANSFER OF CHILD PROTECTIVE/YOUTH SERVICES CASE TO ADOPTION

3.1 Transfer of Child Protective/Youth Services Case to Adoption Definitions

The definitions used below are specific to this section and are a supplement to the general definition section.

<i>Term</i>	<i>Definition</i>
Adoption ready	A child who is placed in a family setting; has a permanency plan of adoption; and is legally free for adoption through death, relinquishment, or termination of parental rights of all known and unknown parents; and all required paperwork and documentation has been obtained according to the <i>Adoption Transfer Referral and Checklist Form</i> .
Legal Risk Placement	The placement of a child whose parents' rights have not yet been terminated with a family approved as both foster parents and adoptive parents.

3.2 Termination of Parental Rights

Permanent guardianship of a child applies when both parent's rights to a child have been terminated by the court or through a voluntary relinquishment. If the child's permanency plan is adoption, any pre-adoptive placement would be a legal risk placement until the terminated parents appeal period has expired.

If the termination of parental rights is via a court order, the court order shall specify all the parental rights to the child including the right to consent to adoption, marriage, visitation, etc. are to be transferred to the department. The court order will determine whether there is an obligation for the parents to continue payment of child support after termination. If the court order states child support is to continue, payments are to be made to the department until an adoption is consummated. The department will also attempt to collect any arrearage of child support accrued prior to termination.

When the court terminates parental rights and commits the child to the guardianship of the department, the child welfare worker will do the following:

- Initiate the permanency placement review process to review the child's case every three months.
- If the child's permanency goal is adoption, the child must be referred to the Mission WV Adoption Resource Exchange within 30 days.
- Develop a post-termination placement plan which is to be submitted to the court and to the multidisciplinary treatment team.

In accordance with state code, the district office will annually report to the court the status of all children for whom the department has been granted permanent guardianship who have not been adopted. The report, in letter form, is to be directed to the circuit court through the prosecuting attorney's office. The child's name, birth date, legal status, and placement status are to be reported. Any changes from the reporting for the previous year are also to be noted in the letter to the court.

3.3 Right to Appeal Termination

A court order terminating parental rights is effective from the date of the order. During the following 60 days, any of the involved parties may file a motion to appeal or to correct errors regarding the order. This appeal period may be extended by the court if necessary. Any placement made during this period is considered a legal risk placement. The Adoption Certificate must be submitted with the adoption packet indicating if an appeal has or has not been filed.

3.4 Adoption Specialist as Secondary Worker

Staffing

When the termination of parental rights of all parents, including unknown parents, or death has occurred a case will be staffed with the adoption unit. This staffing will determine the appropriateness of utilizing the adoption specialist as a secondary worker as well as the need to transfer the case to the adoption unit. It will outline the responsibilities of both the primary and the secondary workers following job description guidelines. This meeting will address missing information and decide which party is responsible to obtain such information. A timeframe will be determined for the case transfer to occur. The staffing as well as any exceptions must be clearly documented in CCWIS and agreed upon by both supervisors.

Transfer Plan

There may be some circumstances in which a case may not be appropriate for immediate transfer following the case staffing. Such circumstances can include but are not limited to completing missing

documentation, statutory follow-up by the child welfare worker, or obtaining necessary documents. If this occurs, up to an additional 30 days can be allotted for transfer with the development of a transfer plan by the child welfare supervisor, the child welfare worker, and the adoption supervisor. The transfer plan should address reasons for the delay as well as project timing for the transfer to occur in the future and should be documented. Cases are to be staffed with the adoption unit within 30 days of termination of parental rights, it should be documented in the CCWIS system and staffed and transferred as soon as possible.

It is not necessary for children to be accepted by the adoption unit for them to be placed on the Adoption Resource Exchange (ARE). Children in state guardianship who have a plan of adoption are required to be registered on the ARE within 30 days of identification as being in need of a resource/adoptive family.)

Mediation

If the adoption supervisor and the child welfare supervisor cannot reach an agreement in the staffing, the regional program manager, and the social service manager should both be enlisted to mediate and assist in making a decision.

3.5 CPS/Youth Services Actions Prior to Transfer

Adoption Ready Cases

A child must be adoption ready prior to a case being transferred to the adoption unit. Adoption ready means that a child who is placed in a family setting with the permanency plan of adoption and is legally free for adoption through death, or termination of all parental rights, including known and unknown parents. All required paperwork and documentation must be obtained as required by the *Adoption Resource Exchange Adoption Transfer Referral and Checklist form*. This form must be completed, emailed to Mission WV at bssare.wv.gov and all required documentation must be uploaded in CCWIS, as well as the completion of the state ward paper file, at the time of transfer to the adoption supervisor.

Adoption ready cases must be staffed with the adoption unit within 30 days of termination or relinquishment of parental rights for all known and unknown parents. In cases where there is an unknown parent where publication has been posted, termination of the parental rights of the unknown parent must occur before the case can be transferred to the adoption unit. In circumstances where a case cannot be immediately transferred at the time of staffing, up to an additional 30 days can be granted with a transfer plan in place. Refer to [Section 6.4](#) for more details about the transfer plan.

All motions to intervene must be resolved prior to the transfer. However, cases where appeals on termination of parental rights have been filed and a Supreme Court ruling is pending, the cases can and should be transferred to the adoption unit if all other requirements to transfer have been completed.

The following must be completed and up to date in CCWIS prior to transferring the case to the adoption unit:

- All contacts
- Legal action screens
- Education screens

- Placement screens
- MDT screens
- All required documentation uploaded
 - Termination orders or relinquishments
 - The completed 12 and 12A forms
 - Child summary
 - Birth certificates
 - Birth records

Children whose permanency plan is adoption, who are legally free for adoption through death or termination of parental rights of all known and unknown parents, but are placed in a non-family setting (e.g. residential facility), shall remain with the child welfare worker, with the adoption specialist as the secondary worker on the case. The adoption specialist will be invited to all MDTs and assist with updating necessary documentation.

Adoption should be recorded by the child welfare worker as the permanency goal in the child's written permanency plan and in CCWIS.

Court and Other Legal Records

The child welfare worker will obtain certified court orders sanctioning termination of parental rights (known, unknown, and deceased parents/guardians), certified documentation of relinquishment, sibling separation orders, and certified death certificate for any deceased parents.

State Ward Record

The child welfare worker will set up the state ward record in CCWIS and as a paper file. This will include contacts copied from the family record, updated court screens, and MDT records. The child welfare worker should also document the date of the last administrative review and import all applicable files into the CCWIS document upload.

Child's Documents

The child welfare worker will obtain/complete the following for the record:

- Original birth certificate or documentation of request.
- Social Security Card.
- FC 12 and 12A completed.
- Documented efforts to locate relatives.
- Status of any home studies requested.
- Medical records: EPSDT, psychological records, birth records, assessments, immunization records.
- School records, IEP's, etc.
- Complete child summary.
- AFCARS screen with no missing critical elements.
- IV-E determination completed in CCWIS and paper file.
- A certified petition and certified court ordered Termination of Parental Rights for all known and unknown persons having the right of parenting each child.

- Documentation of any referrals or applications made on behalf of a child for any services or benefits.

3.6 Child Summary

The child summary form can be produced in CCWIS and will contain identifying information on birth parents, family history, child's race/ethnicity, permanency plan, reason child is in care, current adjustment, previous placement history, reason out-of-state placement is required, child's special needs, goals and anticipated length of placement, and post-placement plans. (three copies) The information gathering should begin at the onset of the removal and continue throughout the life of the case. This form is an ongoing document, and every effort should be made to have the summary completed by the child welfare worker. However, this is not always possible due to delays in permanency and additional information arising once the adoption case is transferred to a child placing agency, making it necessary for child placing agency caseworkers to finalize the child summaries. The document should be updated by the ongoing child welfare workers on a frequent basis and throughout the duration of their involvement in the case. This document is to be provided to the adoptive family for their records up on placement or before the child's adoption is finalized. Under no circumstances should a foster, adoptive, or kinship/relative provider complete the child summary.

3.7 Case Work Actions

The child welfare supervisor will review all documentation before the transfer and arrange case staffing with the adoption supervisor. The adoption supervisor will review and staff cases with child welfare supervisor and worker and will assign each case to an adoption specialist. Prior to the actual transfer of a case to the adoption unit, the adoption specialist will attend multidisciplinary treatment team meetings when permanency options are being considered. After the transfer, the adoption specialist will have face-to-face contact with the child within 14 days of the transfer in order to begin the child's assessment.

3.8 Information Sharing Between Child Placing Agencies, Emergency Shelters, Group Care, and Residential Mental Health Treatment Facilities

Child placing agencies (CPA), emergency shelters, group care and residential mental health treatment facilities (RMHTF) may share and disclose confidential case information on behalf of a child in foster care with one another for the purpose of providing supportive information when referrals for placement are made. In some instances, referrals may be made between a CPA, emergency shelter, and group care facility or an RMHTF. However, the child welfare worker remains responsible for placement approval prior to the child being moved to the accepting placement, as well as notifying the MDT members and the court. All shared information between agencies and facilities will be treated as confidential and fall under the confidentiality provisions found in [W. Va. Code §49-5-101](#).

3.9 Electronic Access for Child Placing Agencies for the Purpose of Adoption

The [W. Va. Code §49-5-101](#) requires that the department make electronically available to child placing agencies and Mission WV Wendy's Wonderful Kids staff, documents that are necessary for the completion of adoptions. The following list of documents shall be made available to the child placing agencies through CCWIS:

- Adoptive Parent Placement Agreement (FC-48)
- Adoption subsidy agreement
- Release and consent for adoption
- Child summary
- All applicable and relevant court orders/documents that include but may not be limited to:
 - Parent termination, including unknown father
 - Sibling separation
 - Termination of an existing guardianship
 - Notification to grandparents
 - Petition of single parent adoption
 - Appeal documents
 - Removal order
 - Other relevant petitions and court orders
- Birth parent background information (FC-12)
- Birth and medical history of the child (FC-12a)
- Psychological assessments for family members
- Medical records for all family members
- Psychiatric records for the child
- Discharge summary/information
- Department family assessment (initial and ongoing assessments)
- Safety plans
- Child and Family Unified Case Plan

SECTION 4 – RECRUITMENT OF AN ADOPTIVE HOME

Child specific recruitment must be done for every child whose parent’s rights have been terminated and adoption is the child’s permanency plan.

4.1 Recruitment of Adoptive Home Definitions

<i>Term</i>	<i>Definition</i>
Adoption Resource Exchange	A website that provides adoption information to educate prospective adoptive parents and connects families with awaiting children.
Child Specific Recruitment	Recruitment strategy that focuses on recruiting or identifying foster, adoptive, and kinship families for individual children in foster care based on the individual child’s needs, interests, and connections.
Legal Risk Placement	The placement of a child whose parents’ rights have not yet been terminated with a family approved as both foster parents and adoptive parents.
Permanency Placement Review	The Permanency Placement Review Committee consists of members of the Multidisciplinary Treatment Team. The Permanency Placement Review

Committee	Committee monitors the implementation of the permanency plan for the child and reports on the progress and developments in the case every three months until the child's adoption is finalized.
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4.2 Grandparents Rights

Grandparents or relatives by blood or marriage will be given the opportunity to become a resource caregiver/adoptive parent unless they have been party to the abuse and neglect by action or inaction. Once grandparents who are interested in adopting the child have been identified, the department will conduct a complete home study of the grandparents and their home. Grandparents must meet all requirements to be a department certified relative provider/adoptive family in order to be considered for placement. (Grandparents residing out-of-state must be certified by a licensed social worker in that state.) If the department determines based on the home study evaluation that the grandparents would be suitable adoptive parents, it must offer the placement of the child to the grandparents prior to considering any other prospective foster/adoptive parents. (See also *Foster Care Policy and W. Va. Code 49-4-114*).

4.3 Adoption Resource Exchange

The department contracts with Mission West Virginia to manage the state adoption exchange known as MWV Adoption Resource Exchange (ARE). This program provides a way to exchange information statewide and with other states, about West Virginia children with special needs awaiting adoption. Mission WV hosts an internet listing of available West Virginia children on the Mission WV ARE web page Adoptachildwv.org. Children available for adoption are also listed on the national adoption site, www.adoptuskids.org. The photo listing will be available to the child placing agencies when they register on the website as a professional.

Identification of Children for the Adoption Resource Exchange

Most children in state custody whose permanency plan is adoption are required to be registered on the Adoption Resource Exchange (ARE) within 30 days of identifying their permanency plan as adoption. Children do not have to be registered with the ARE if there is a completed *Adoption Placement Agreement* with an existing adoptive family. Children will not be registered if their parent's rights have not been terminated, their permanency plan does not include adoption as the goal, or they are 12 years old or older and do not wish to be adopted or registered on the ARE.

Any children who have been previously registered on the ARE and withdrawn but are again legally free and adoption is their permanency plan, but do not have a completed *Adoption Placement Agreement* must be registered within 10 days of the changed status.

It is not necessary for children to be accepted by the adoption unit for them to be placed on the ARE.

Children 12 years of age and older should also have a completed MWV Media Consent form in their stateward record. Workers can find this form on the professional tab of the ARE website at www.Adoptachildwv.org. Please note this form should be reviewed with the child by the worker every six

months and any time a media opportunity is considered. The MWV worker can review the consent with the child with the child's worker or CPA caseworkers request and/or approval.

A Consent for Registration

The ARE referral form, *Child Data Form ARE-0602*, should be completed in CCWIS. All information on the referral form must be completed and a narrative of at least 110 words written for each child or sibling group. The child's worker may contact MWV if they would like assistance from ARE staff in completing this narrative. The worker must contact the MWV worker within 10 business days prior to the listing due date.

The child welfare worker will save the completed form to each child's document uploads in CCWIS. The child welfare worker will then notify the ARE via e-mail of the completed referral, including the child's name and CCWIS case number.

The ARE is responsible for transferring all information to the internet sites.

Submission of Photographs to the ARE

A good quality, digital or sharp, original, close-up picture must be taken as soon as the case is referred to the ARE. This photo may be mailed to the ARE (with identifying information written on the back) or downloaded digitally to the SSARE folder after being renamed with the child welfare worker's number, county number, child's last name, and sequence number. ARE should be notified of any downloads.

Please refer to the Mission WV guide for quality photos on the Professional tab of the Adoptachildwv.org. The DoHS worker can also request assistance with photos from Mission WV ARE staff.

Updating Photographs

Updates to the ARE with new photographs must be completed every six months in conjunction with the child's administrative review. The child welfare worker can also request assistance from Mission WV ARE with updated photos. Photographs for youth aged six and older can be updated annually at the Permanency Review hearing unless the youth requests an updated photograph at six months.

Change of Information

Mission WV ARE should be notified of any changes, including change in workers, within 15 working days of the change.

Placing Holds

Mission WV ARE must be notified via email at bssare@wv.gov for a child to be placed on hold status on the internet in either of the following instances:

- If a placement review committee meeting has been scheduled, the ARE should be notified five business days before the meeting.
- If the volume of responses is high and the worker chooses to limit additional inquiries.
- If inquiries are no longer to be accepted.
- An *Adoption Placement Agreement* has been signed.
- If a child is having pre-placement visits or placed for trial adoption.

When an adoption is finalized, or adoption is no longer the permanency plan, the ARE must be notified so the child may be withdrawn from the listing.

Internet Inquiries

When adoptive parents inquire about a specific child through the various internet sites or through the MWVARE Family Registration database, the ARE will notify the child's worker and the families child placing agency. The child's worker should respond to the inquiring family's worker within a reasonable time, but no later than 15 days from the date the inquiry was forwarded to the worker. Families should be notified if they are, **or** are **not** being considered for the Placement Review Committee. The worker should also notify the ARE by email of their decision. Families with approved home studies who are identified as appropriate for the child will be presented to the Placement Review Committee for consideration and a placement recommendation.

Home studies submitted from agencies other than the department must have been written by a licensed social worker, must be current (within one year) and must meet all requirements to be a certified adoptive home in the state of West Virginia.

4.4 Media Promotions

Adopt US Kids

In partnership with the Children's Bureau, the Administration for Child and Families, and the Advertising Council, Adopt US Kids launched a national ad campaign to encourage adults to adopt children who are in foster care. This multi-media advertising campaign which launched in the spring of 2004 is a five-year project. The television, radio, print and Internet public service announcements for this campaign were created and distributed by the Ad Council. Responses to these ads are being taken nationally by Adopt US Kids and relayed to Mission West Virginia for distribution to appropriate department offices for follow-up.

Wendy's Wonderful Kids

Mission WV is part of the national network formed by the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption to employ the Wendy's Wonderful Kids (WWK) program. The WWK program implements proactive, child-focused recruitment programs targeted exclusively on moving the longest-waiting children from foster care into adoptive families. Mission WV has on staff two recruiters who employ aggressive practices and proven tactics focused on finding the best home for a child through the starting points of familiar circles of family, friends, and neighbors, and then reaching out to the communities in which they live. [Section 3.8 of this policy states that the](#) Wendy's Wonderful Kids workers should have access and ability to review the child's DoHS record. They are also able to visit the children in care assigned to their caseload and therefore should be listed on facility visitation lists.

4.5 Additional Options

Resources Known to the Child

An excellent source of potential adoptive providers can be found with those people who have had or currently have contact with the child. Relatives, neighbors, teachers, counselors, church members,

previous foster parents, etc., who the child already knows, can often become the best providers for the child. It is important for the child welfare worker to consider these resources as well as those who may seem more apparent.

Foster to Adopt

The child's adoption specialist will discuss placement options with the resource/adoptive parent(s) within 30 days of the child becoming legally free for adoption and transferred to the adoption unit for placement. Unless the plan is for a relative placement, the resource parent has the right to be considered along with other appropriate homes for adoptive placement. If the resource parent has no interest in adoption or any other permanency option, the adoption specialist will obtain a written statement to that effect.

4.6 Legal Risk Placement

In some instances, it may be in the best interest of the child to be placed in a pre-adoptive situation pending the appeal of the termination of parental rights. Such placement is termed a legal risk placement or risk placement. The child may be placed with an approved resource caregiver/adoptive family with the understanding that, if and when the parents' rights are terminated, this family will become the adoptive family.

Legal risk placement may be considered under the following circumstances:

- The birth mother has voluntarily relinquished her parental rights, but the birth father is unknown or unavailable, publication is needed, or court action is needed to terminate his parental rights.
- An infant or young child has been abandoned and a petition for guardianship has been filed (the degree of risk in this situation may prove to be very high).
- Guardianship has been granted to the department without the consent of the birth parents and one or both parents are expected to appeal the termination of their parental rights.

The prospective adoptive family should be advised as to the risk involved and should be kept informed of any progress of the case through the legal system. If guardianship is not received and reunification with birth parents or extended family becomes the plan, foster care reunification procedures will apply.

If the risk placement has been for six months or more when all parental rights are terminated, and appeal periods have expired, the family may proceed immediately to petition for the adoption.

SECTION 5 - Adoption Preference and Preparation

5.1 Grandparent Preference

[W. Va. Code §49-4-114](#) provides for grandparent preference in determining adoptive placement for a child where parental rights have been terminated and also incorporates a best interests analysis within that determination by including the requirement that the department find that the grandparents would be suitable adoptive parents prior to granting custody to the grandparents. The statute contemplates that placement with grandparents is presumptively in the best interests of the child, and the preference

for grandparent placement may be overcome only where the record reviewed in its entirety establishes that such placement is not in the best interests of the child.

The WV Supreme Court of Appeals has clarified that such a preference is not an absolute directive to place children with their grandparents in all circumstances.

The court held the opinion that an integral part of the implementation of the grandparent preference, as with all decisions concerning minor children, is the best interests of the child. The WV Supreme Court has opined many times that the welfare of the infant is the polar star by which the discretion of the court is to be guided in making its award of legal custody. The WV Supreme Court has further stated that adoption by a child's grandparents is permitted only if such adoptive placement serves the child's best interests. If, upon a thorough review of the entire record, the circuit court believes that a grandparental adoption is not in the subject child's best interests, it is not obligated to prefer the grandparents over another, alternative placement that does serve the child's best interests. (*See Syl. pts. 4 & 5, Napoleon S. v. Walker, 217 W. Va. 254, 617 S.E.2d 801.*)

5.2 Pre-Placement Visitation

Whenever possible pre-placement visitation should occur prior to placing a child in an adoptive home. Pre-placement visitation provides a positive environment for parents and the child to get to know one another and requires preparation and planning. Ideally, all parties, including the child's resource caregivers, the adoptive parents, and the adoption specialist are involved in this planning.

- The first meeting should be held in a place where the child feels most comfortable. It is never an overnight visit. For subsequent visits, the adoption specialist should encourage the adoptive family to visit the resource home at different times of the day in order to observe the child in different activities and to learn their routines. The visits should increase in length to overnight.
- Pre-placement visits are not for the purpose of seeing whether the placement is going to work. Rather, they are to provide an opportunity for increasing familiarity and to begin the attachment process.
- Visits should generally take place in a two to three-week period. A longer visitation period may confuse the child by implying that the family has not really decided to adopt them. Proximity between the child's residence and the new family's home will, in part, determine the number and duration of visits. Other considerations are the child's needs and the extent to which the foster family and the adoptive family are willing to cooperate in a placement plan.
- A minimum visiting plan is as follows:
 - For long-distance placements, a minimum of one visit in the foster home.
 - One weekend visit to give the child an opportunity to spend several days in the new home.
 - One return visit to the foster home to say final good-byes is recommended.
 - In the case of interstate placement, the family is expected to come to West Virginia for the presentation of the child and part of the pre-placement and placement process.

5.3 Travel Expenses for Interviews and Visits by Pre-Adoptive Parents

If necessary, potential adoptive parents may be invited to attend a selection committee meeting or MDT to be interviewed for the placement of a particular child or children. Any invitation to attend a selection committee meeting should clearly inform a prospective parent that any travel will be done at their own expense and not at the expense of the department. If the family chooses to attend, they may do so at their own expense. This rule will apply to potential parents who are either in-state or out-of-state. If needed, after selection of an approved pre-adoptive parent, the department will assist with travel expenses for required pre-placement visits by the chosen parents.

As an alternative to in-person interviews with potential adoptive parents, other forms of communication such as conference telephone interviews, teleconferences, video presentations or telephone calls may be as effective and should be utilized.

5.4 Moving to a Trial Adoption Placement

The placement day is one of the most significant events in a child's life. Because of its importance, all parties to the placement must be clear as to the actual date the placement will occur and pre-placement visiting should not run into the placement without signaling a specific day or "moving-in day". Steps to help in the transition might include the following:

1. The resource caregivers should be assisted in saying their good-byes in a clear helpful manner.
2. The child should bring their clothing, favorite toys and other possessions which have meaning. The child's *Lifebook* must be hand carried by the adoption specialist to assure it does not get "lost" in the move.
3. When placing an older child, there should be a provision for ongoing contact with significant individuals in the previous placement (i.e. resource caregivers, adoption specialist, extended birth family). For some children, maintenance of such contact may continue throughout their lives.

5.5 Adoption Placement Agreement

On the day of placement, the adoption specialist will review the *Adoption Placement Agreement* with the family and clarify the mutual rights and responsibilities regarding the placement.

An *Adoption Placement Agreement* will be completed and signed in triplicate by the adoption specialist and the adoptive parents upon placement of the child in the adoptive home. One original is to be placed in the state ward record; one is to be included in the adoption assistance packet; and the third is to be given to the adoptive parents.

At the time of placement, the adoptive parents will be provided with an up-to-date *child summary*, a copy of school records, current medical information, and a non-identifying medical/social history of the birth family.

5.6 Discipline Policy Agreement

On the day of the placement, the adoption specialist will complete the *Discipline Policy Agreement* with the family. The *Discipline Policy Agreement* will be completed and signed in triplicate by the adoption

specialist and the adoptive parents upon placement of the child in the adoptive home. One original is to be placed in the state ward record, one is to be included in the adoption assistance packet and the third is to be given to the adoptive parents.

SECTION 6 – INTERSTATE COMPACT ON THE PLACEMENT OF CHILDREN (ICPC)

6.1 Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children Definitions

The definitions used below are specific to this section and are a supplement to the general definition section.

<i>Term</i>	<i>Definition</i>
Interstate Compact for the Placement of Children (ICPC)	An agreement that has been enacted into law by all 50 states in the United States and the District of Columbia, which controls the lawful movement of all children from one state to another from the purpose of placement.

6.2 Out of State Placements

Interstate Compact for the Placement of Children (ICPC) is a legal agreement between West Virginia and other states as outlined in [W. Va. Code §49-7-101](#) to regulate placement activities that occur between states. If a proposed placement is located outside the state of West Virginia, a referral through the ICPC is required. Complete ICPC referral packets must be forwarded, in triplicate, to the WV ICPC office for all types of proposed out of state placements including parental placements, kinship/relative placements, foster care, specialized foster care, group care residential care and adoptive placements.

All out of state placements of children in the custody of the department must be approved by the ICPC office of the receiving state prior to placement. Only the compact administrator in the receiving state is authorized to give approval for placement in their state. Any other approval source (i.e. court, probation officer, out of state facility) is not sufficient to meet the requirements specified in the state code.

Children should be placed out of state ONLY if one of the following conditions occurs:

- The child is placed with a parent or relative who lives out of state.
- The child is placed in a pre-adoptive placement.
- The child has a treatment need for which no service exists or can be created in a reasonable period of time in West Virginia.
- The out of state placement is in closer proximity to the child's home than a comparable in-state program.
- The child's current resource family moves out of state and the child's permanency plan indicates continued placement with this resource family.

6.3 Referral Process/Documentation

Cover Letter

This letter, on official letterhead stationery, will outline the following:

- Reason for out-of-state placement.
- Statement indicating the entity having legal custody of the child.
- Plans for meeting the cost of care in the receiving state.
- Permanency goal and brief statement of case plan.
- Child's Title IV-E eligibility.
- Name and address of person to be studied.

Required Documents

- *ICPC-100A*: Placement Request completed by the child's adoption specialist in CCWIS. This is the sending agency's formal written notice to the receiving state of its intention to make an interstate placement and a request for a finding as to whether the placement would or would not be contrary to the interests of the child. With most placements, it is also a formal request for a home study. Following review by the receiving state, this form becomes the official notification that the proposed placement may or may not be made (original and four copies are to be submitted to the ICPC worker)
- *ICPC-100B*: Placement Status-This form is used to confirm an approved placement has occurred, to indicate any changes in the placement, to showcase planning status, or to confirm termination of the ICPC contract (original and four copies are to be submitted to the ICPC worker).
- Court Orders: Indicating court has jurisdiction over the child, who has legal/physical custody, and termination of parental rights (three copies are to be submitted to the ICPC worker).
- *Child Summary*: This form can be produced in CCWIS and will contain identifying information on birth parents, family history, child's race/ethnicity, permanency plan, reason child is in care, current adjustment, previous placement history, reason out-of-state placement is required, child's special needs, goals and anticipated length of placement, and post-placement plans. (3 copies are to be submitted to the ICPC worker) The information gathering should begin at the onset of the removal and continue throughout the life of the case. This form is an ongoing document, and every effort should be made to have the summary completed by the DoHS child welfare worker. However, this is not always possible due to delays in permanency and additional information arising once the adoption case is transferred to a child placing agency, making it necessary for child placing agency caseworkers to finalize the child summaries. The document should be updated by the ongoing child welfare workers on a frequent basis and throughout the duration of their involvement in the case. This document is to be provided to the adoptive family for their records once permanency is achieved. Under no circumstances should a foster, adoptive, or kinship/relative provider complete the child summary.
- *Home Study*: Attach a current home study (within 12 months) if one is not being requested (three copies are to be submitted to the ICPC worker).
- *Medical/Financial Plan*: This consists of a statement describing how the child's need for food, clothing, shelter, medical care, and related maintenance will be met in the prospective

out-of-state placement and who will meet it. In accordance with [W. Va. Code §49-7-101](#), the sending agency is financially responsible for the maintenance of the child (three copies are to be submitted to the ICPC worker).

- *Statement of IV-E Eligibility* (Three copies are to be submitted to the ICPC worker).

6.4 Education

There are some state's Boards of Education that will not provide a free public education for a foster child in a pre-adoptive placement. They consider the child a resident of West Virginia and expect payment from West Virginia for the child's education. Arrangements must be made with the contract specialist for payment to the school system, so the child might attend a public school in the community of the pre-adoptive parent.

6.5 Placement Notification

The ICPC specialist will notify the adoption specialist of approval of a home. The child may not be placed in an out-of-state placement until the adoption specialist has received this notification.

6.6 Worker Contact

Regular contact between the child and the adoption specialist allows the child to have ample opportunity to express concerns, fears, problems with the placement, or other special issues. These meetings also provide the child's adoption specialist with an opportunity to directly assess the child's progress. The frequency and intensity of contacts between the child's adoption specialist, the child and the resource caregiver/adoptive family will be determined by the individual needs and problems of the child and their family.

Worker Actions

The child's adoption specialist is required to maintain contact with the child either by telephone or face-to-face to assure the placement is meeting the child's needs. During each visit, the adoption specialist will provide an opportunity to have time alone with the child to address any concerns or issues related to the child's needs or placement. (If the child is physically, emotionally, or developmentally unable to communicate, the adoption specialist may fulfill this requirement by discussing the child's progress with the caretaker.)

Requirements for the adoption specialist and child visits are as follows:

- The child's adoption specialist will have telephone or face-to-face contact with the child and resource/adoptive parent within 72 hours of placement to assess the child's adjustment to the placement.
- The child's adoption specialist is required to have continuing meaningful face-to-face contact with the child and resource caregivers/adoptive parents, at least once a month.
- The child's adoption specialist is expected to meet with the child during the worker's visits to the home. The adoption specialist will be required to visit the out-of-state resource/adoptive home at least once every three months. Out-of-state visits require the approval of the regional program manager. Out-of-state travel regulations apply.

- The child's adoption specialist will have face-to-face contact with the child's parents on a monthly basis while the child is in foster care or until parental rights are terminated, unless ordered by the court.
- The child's adoption specialist will have contact with the out-of-state agency staff at least once a month to assure monthly contacts are being made with the child and foster/adoptive parents or to assess and/or address any placement issues or concerns.
- In addition to the required, monthly contact with the child and the requirements for face-to-face contact with the child, the child's adoption specialist will utilize other opportunities, such as multidisciplinary treatment team meetings, individualized educational plan meetings, child and parent visits, etc., to meet individually with the child.
- The child's adoption specialist must document all contacts with the child, resource/adoptive parents, other agency staff and child's parents in CCWIS, in the contacts screen, within five working days of the contact being made. The documentation must contain the date and content of the contact. The child's adoption specialist must document all face-to-face contacts with the child, resource/adoptive parents, and any other person involved in the case within three business days of the contact being made.

There are circumstances that may require special attention or more frequent contacts with the child such as the following:

- The child has experienced separation or loss, needs medical care or hospitalization, has other disturbing experiences, or has social or school problems.
- There is going to be a transfer of the child's adoption specialist.
- There are new or additional problems in the child's biological family.
- A child has severe problems of maladjustment and difficult behavior.

6.7 Supervision of Placement

The adoption specialist will indicate on the ICPC 100A what type of supervisory services are requested. It is usually the public social service agency which will be asked to provide supervision following an approved home study and subsequent placement. If other options are to be used, the adoption specialist will place an X in the appropriate box:

1. Request receiving state to arrange supervision: This applies if West Virginia cannot supervise and does not have a contractual or other agreement with a pre-determined agency to provide these services.
2. Another agency agreed to supervise: Mark this box if WV has received the formal agreement of a pre-determined supervisory agency. This is most likely to be marked in agency adoptive placements in which an agency in the receiving state has provided an adoptive home study and will provide ongoing services to the adoptive family.

In this situation, the adoption specialist must contact OSS, Division of Contracts, Grants and Agreements, Contract Specialist for Out of State/Adoption in order to arrange the supervision contract and payment for this service prior to the child entering any trial placement.

1. Sending agency to supervise: Mark this box if it is logistically feasible, it is the best-case plan, and the receiving state has granted the department's permission to provide services in the state.

Supervisory Reports

This section of the ICPC 100A should be completed even though placement may not be a certainty. The worker must indicate the desired frequency of receiving progress reports. The most common is Quarterly. The adoption specialist will select "Other" if another time frame is requested—such as monthly or annually (time frame should be indicated).

SECTION 7 – CASE MANAGEMENT

7.1 Case Management Definitions

The definitions used below are specific to this section and are a supplement to the general definition section.

<i>Term</i>	<i>Definition</i>
Journey Placement Notebook	A mechanism for information to be maintained for children in foster care regarding their placement, medical and mental health history, behavioral observation report, and personal belongings and follows them through reunification or another permanency option.
Life Book	A book that contains photographs, drawings, anecdotal stories about the child, their friends, family, and community, and other memorabilia to maintain connections to the life history of children in foster care.
Socially Necessary Services (SNS)	Services provided to children and families designed for prevention and intervention, which are necessary for the child's safety, permanency, and well-being, but are not Medicaid covered services.

7.2 Journey Placement Notebook

A child/youth *journey placement notebook* is given by the child welfare worker to the resource caregiver/pre-adoptive parent of each child in care. It is to be kept in a secure place by the provider until the child is returned home or moved to another placement. The *journey placement notebook* is to stay with the child and will contain information about the child such as the *foster care plan*, *child summary*, *birth and medical history*, *child's case plan*, clothing inventory, medical and educational contact information, etc. The notebook also contains blank *Out-of-Home Observation Reports* to be completed monthly by the resource parent and provided to the MDT. The provider may also use this notebook to document any changes in medications or treatment, list important addresses and phone numbers, prepare for appointments, and file health history information.

7.3 Life Book

A life book is a family album that must be started for all foster children coming into placement. It is a combination of a photo album and a scrap book that chronicles events and memories in the child's life. If the child does not have one, the resource caregiver/adoptive parent must purchase one. The child welfare worker should attempt to obtain pictures and information about the child's milestones. (i.e. age when they lost their first tooth, when they began walking, talking, etc.)

The resource caregiver/adoptive parents should keep this book up to date by adding photographs, drawings, awards, report cards, etc. If a child is moved, it is imperative that the child welfare worker assure their life book is hand carried to the new placement.

7.4 Youth Identification Card Program

When children enter the foster care program, we do not always have an updated photo of the child. The youth identification card program can provide an identification card for every child who enters the system from two years old to fifteen years. The identification will follow the child throughout their stay in the foster care system and may be utilized to track a child who may become missing. This card can be renewed every two years.

7.5 Reunification and Separation of Siblings

[W. Va. Code §49-4-111](#) requires the department to place siblings together when placing a child in foster care who also has siblings in care or previously adopted. Siblings are defined by [W. Va. Code §49-1-204](#) as "Children who have at least one biological parent in common or who have been legally adopted by the same parents or parent." When a child is placed into foster care or becomes eligible for adoption and a sibling or siblings have previously been placed in foster care or have been adopted, the department shall notify the resource caregiver/adoptive parents of the previously placed siblings of the child's availability for resource/adoptive placement to determine if the resource caregivers/adoptive parents are desirous of seeking a resource/adoption arrangement of the child. (Provided that the department may petition the court to waive notification to the resource caregivers or adoptive parents of the child's siblings. This waiver may be granted upon a showing of compelling circumstances.)

In some circumstances, children in foster care may need to be placed separately from their siblings who are also in care or have been previously adopted. This may occur when one sibling is a danger to their siblings or when a large group is being removed from their home and a placement resource, to allow all the children to be placed together, is not available. If a child's case plan includes placement of the child separately from their sibling, the child welfare worker must secure a court order which finds that it is in the child's best interest not to be placed in the same home as their sibling. This order must be documented on the legal actions screen in CCWIS.

7.6 Sibling Visitation

The child welfare worker is responsible for ensuring the visitation plan is followed. The child welfare worker will provide a copy of the visitation plan to the child's resource caregivers/adoptive parents. These parents should provide routine transportation for visitation, if possible. If transportation is a hardship for the resource caregiver/adoptive parent, the child welfare worker will provide the

transportation to enable the visit to occur. The child welfare worker will document the visitation plan in CCWIS on the case plan screen.

Contacts with In-State Department Resource/Adoptive Homes

Regular contact between the child and the adoption specialist allows the child to have ample opportunity to express concerns, fears, problems with the placement, or other special issues. These meetings also provide the child welfare worker with an opportunity to directly assess the child's progress. The frequency and intensity of contacts between the child welfare worker, the child and the resource caregiver(s)/adoptive parent(s) will be determined by the individual needs and problems of the child and their family. The period of post placement services extends from the date the *SS-ADP-48* is signed to the finalization of the adoption.

Worker Actions

The child welfare worker is required to maintain contact with the child either by telephone or face-to-face to assure the placement is meeting the child's needs. During each visit, the child welfare worker will provide an opportunity for time alone with the child to address any concerns or issues related to the child's needs or placement. (If the child is physically, emotionally, or developmentally unable to communicate, the child welfare worker may fulfill this requirement by discussing the child's progress with the caregiver.)

Requirements for the child welfare worker and child visits are as follows:

- The child welfare worker will have face-to-face contact with the child and caregiver at the resource home within 72 hours of placement to assess the child's adjustment to the placement.
- The child welfare worker is required to conduct face-to-face contact with the child and caregiver, in the resource/adoptive home, at least once a month. A minimum of six face-to-face visits will be made during the post placement period. The six face-to-face visits coincides with the requirement that the child must be placed in the home for six consecutive months before the child can be adopted by the family. Visits must be made monthly to span a six-month period. The visits made by the previous child welfare worker, prior to the transfer to the adoption unit, can be considered as part of the six face-to-face visit requirement, however the adoption specialist must make two of the required visits to the adoptive home prior to the adoption hearing. At least three of the face-to-face visits will occur in the home.
- In addition to the required, monthly, in-home visits, the child welfare worker will utilize other opportunities, such as multidisciplinary treatment team meetings, Individualized Educational Plan meetings, child, and parent visits, etc., to meet individually with the child.
- The child welfare worker must document all contacts with the child, resource caregiver/adoptive parents, and child's parents in CCWIS, in the contacts screen, within three working days of the contact being made. The documentation must contain the date and content of the contact. The child welfare worker must document all face-to-face contacts with the child, resource caregiver/adoptive parents, and any other person involved in the case within three business days of the contact being made.

There are circumstances that may require special attention or more frequent contacts with the child such as the following:

- The child has experienced separation or loss, needs medical care or hospitalization, has other disturbing experiences, or has social or school problems.
- There is going to be a transfer of the child's child welfare worker.
- There are new or additional problems in the child's biological family.
- A child has severe problems of maladjustment and difficult behavior.

Contacts with Specialized Agency Homes

The above standards will be followed with specialized agency homes with the following exceptions:

- The specialized agency staff worker (Instead of the adoption specialist) will be required to have face-to-face contact with the child and caregiver, at the resource home, within 72 hours of placement to assess the child's adjustment to the placement.
- The child welfare worker will have meaningful contact with the child and the caregiver either by telephone or face-to-face at least once a month. The child welfare worker must have face-to-face contact with the child and caregiver, at the resource home, at least once every three months. It is highly recommended that face-to-face contact be made more frequently for those children placed within the district. The child welfare worker must document all face-to-face contacts with the child and caretaker within three business days of the contact being made.
- The child welfare worker will have contact with the specialized foster care agency staff at least once a month to assure that bi-monthly contacts are occurring with the child and caregiver and to assess and/or address any placement issues or concerns.

Contacts with Residential Treatment Homes

Regular contact with a child in a residential home will follow the same standards as those for a child in an in-state department adoptive home with the following exceptions:

- The majority of contacts between the child and the child welfare worker will be made at the residential treatment facility.
- The child welfare worker will have telephone or face-to-face contact with the child and provider, at the facility, within 72 hours of placement to assess the child's adjustment to the placement.
- The child welfare worker will have meaningful contact with the child either by telephone or face-to-face, at the facility, at least once a month. The child welfare worker must have to face contact with the child and the caregiver, at the facility, at least every three months. It is highly recommended that face-to-face contact be made more frequently for those children placed within the district. The child welfare worker must document all face-to-face contacts with the child within three business days of the contact being made.
- The child welfare worker will also have contact with the group/residential care agency staff at least once a month to assess and/or address any placement issues or concerns.

Contacts with Out-of-state Adoptive Homes

The child welfare worker will be expected to maintain the same standards for contacts as with in-state department homes with the following exceptions:

- The child welfare worker will have telephone or face-to-face contact with the child and provider within 72 hours of placement to assess the child's adjustment to the placement.
- The child welfare worker will have meaningful contact with the child and provider either by telephone or face-to-face at least once a month. The child welfare worker must have face-to-face contact with the child and caregiver at the resource/adoptive home at least once every three months. The child welfare worker must document face-to-face contact with the child and provider within three business days of the contact being made.
- Out of state visits require the approval of the regional director and out of state travel regulations apply.
- The child welfare worker will have contact with any out of state agency staff involved in the case at least once a month to assure that monthly contacts are being made with the child and provider to assess/or address any placement issues or concerns.

7.7 Continued Assessments/Case Plan/Hearings

Continual assessments are an integral part of foster care and resource/adoption placements. Statute requires that the status of each child be reviewed to determine:

- The continuing need for placement
- The continuing appropriateness of the placement,
- Compliance with the case plan, and
- A likely date by which the child may achieve permanency.

Throughout the casework process and the court proceedings, the child, youth and family case plan may change. Modifications should be made in CCWIS, saved to the CCWIS document upload and distributed to all members of the MDT and filed with the court as appropriate.

In the case of a child whose permanency plan is adoption, documentation must be made of the steps being taken to find a permanent living arrangement including child specific recruitment efforts.

Permanent Placement Reviews/Quarterly Status Review/Permanency Hearings

[W. Va. Code 49-4-608](#) directs the need for and content of permanency hearings and permanent placement reviews.

[W .Va. Code 49-4-110](#) states that for those youth who remain in foster care, either as a result of a juvenile proceeding or of a child abuse and neglect proceeding, the circuit court along with the MDT shall conduct a quarterly status review.

(Workers must refer to *Foster Care Policy* for full description as well as workers responsibilities regarding *Permanency Hearings, Permanent Placement Reviews and Quarterly Status Reviews*).

7.8 Permanency Placement Reviews

When the court terminates parental rights and commits the child to the guardianship of the department, the child welfare worker will initiate the permanency placement review process. If the child's permanency plan is adoption:

- The child's case must be transferred to the adoption unit within 30 days of the receipt of the court order of the final termination of parental rights.
- The child must be referred to the Adoption Resource Exchange within 30 days of termination of both parents for inclusion on the state's adoption web page and for statewide child specific recruitment programs.
- The child welfare worker must develop the post-termination placement plan and submit it to the court, Guardian Ad Litem, and all multidisciplinary treatment team members. This plan must be submitted within 90 days of the date of the hearing at which parental rights were terminated. This plan must describe the department's progress toward arranging an adoptive home or other permanent placement; a schedule and description of the steps necessary to place the child in an adoptive home; a discussion of any special barriers preventing placement of the child for adoption or other permanent placement and how they can be overcome; and a discussion of whether an adoption subsidy is needed and if so, the likely amount and type of subsidy required.
- An updated post-termination placement plan must be prepared and submitted prior to each permanent placement review conference.
- The court must submit an order determining whether permanent placement has been achieved. This order must also verify the hearing meets the judicial review requirements if a judicial review has not been conducted within the preceding 12 months.
- If the permanent plan has not been achieved within 18 months of the child entering foster care, the child welfare worker must present to the court the reasons for the delay in achieving the child's permanency plan and request that the court find on the record whether or not extraordinary reasons were sufficient to justify the delay in permanency.
- If a child is removed from a permanent placement, the permanent placement review process must be initiated. The child welfare worker will promptly report the change in the child's circumstances to the court, prosecuting attorney, and Guardian ad Litem and request that the court schedule a permanent placement review conference within two months of the child's removal.
- The adoption specialist must document the court review in CCWIS on the legal actions screens including whether a finding of reasonable efforts to finalize the permanency plan for the child was obtained.

7.9 Multidisciplinary Treatment Team Meetings for Disrupted Placements

A child's placement may disrupt during the child's stay in foster care or a resource/adoptive placement due to many different factors such as the child's behavior problems, the facility not being able to meet the child's needs, the resource parent requesting the removal of the child, or the resource home being closed due to noncompliance issues. When a disruption occurs, the child is often moved around due to a lack of planning for an appropriate placement. The multidisciplinary treatment team (MDT) must play a vital role when a child experiences a disruption from a placement. It is important for child welfare workers to understand that convening an MDT as soon as possible to determine the best possible placement for the child is in the child's best interest and will result in fewer disruptions in the future for the child.

Worker Actions

- When a disruption occurs or is about to occur, the MDT must be convened within seven business days of the disruption or the notification that the placement is going to disrupt.
- The MDT must be provided with the most current assessments completed on the child and family, any information concerning the disruption, possible placement resources for the child, and any other information that could assist the MDT in planning for the child.
- The MDT will determine the need for further assessments or reassessment for the child and family, any changes that need to be made to the child, youth, and family case plan and an appropriate placement for the child.
- The MDT will follow the format for ongoing MDTs in relation to confidentiality statement, review and revision of the child, youth and family case plan, reporting to the court, documentation of the MDT's report and scheduling future meetings.

On-Going Multidisciplinary Treatment Team Meetings

Multidisciplinary treatment teams must continue to meet on a continuous basis until permanency has been achieved for the child. (Finalized adoption, guardianship, re-unification, emancipation). State statute requires the court to hold regular judicial reviews at least once every 90 days to review the child's case plan with the MDT in attendance. This will require the MDT to also meet at least once every 90 days prior to the court hearing. The department worker is responsible for chairing and convening all ongoing MDTs.

The membership of the team should include the following:

- The child or family's department case manager department.
- The child's parents or guardians.
- Any co-petitioners.
- Custodial relatives of the child.
- Foster or pre-adoptive parents.
- Any attorney representing an adult respondent or other member of the treatment team.
- The child's counsel or the guardian ad litem.
- The prosecuting attorney or their designee.
- A case manager from the managed care organization (MCO) or designee.
- A member of the Child Advocacy Center when the child has been processed through the child advocacy center program or programs or it is otherwise appropriate that a member of the child advocacy center participate.
- Any court appointed special advocate assigned to a case.
- Any other person entitled to notice or the right to be heard.
- An appropriate school official.
- Any other person or agency representative who may assist in providing recommendations for the particular needs of the child and pre-adoptive family.

The child may participate in the MDT meetings if the child's participation is deemed appropriate by the multidisciplinary treatment team. Unless otherwise ordered by the court, a party whose parental rights

have been terminated and their attorney shall not be given notice of a multidisciplinary treatment team meeting and does not have the right to participate in any treatment team meeting.

The MDT must be held within the family's county of residence to assure the input from team membership and the family's involvement. Special attention should be placed on engaging the family and the resource parents in the MDT process.

Worker Actions

- MDT meetings must be held at least once every 90 days to review and revise, if needed, the child, youth, and family case plan until permanency has been achieved for the child. Following this review, a written report of the results is to be provided to the court. This will be the document used to review the case at the permanency placement review hearings and judicial review.
- The members of the MDT must be properly notified in writing at least 15 days prior to the MDT meeting, by printing the *Notification of MDT letters* from CCWIS. Special attention must be given to the family's involvement in the MDT process. The family must be encouraged to participate in the MDT meetings.
- All MDT participants must sign a confidentiality statement at each meeting. The department child welfare worker will maintain an MDT signature sheet in the case record.

Note: The department child welfare worker must print the list of MDT participants from Merge Forms to use as the confidentiality statement until the form has been revised. This form can be modified to add additional team members as they participate in the MDT process.

- The child's foster parents or provider will provide a quarterly "*Out-of-Home Observation Report*" to the MDT which must include a report on the progress of the child, any changes in the child's case, an evaluation of the services provided to the child and their family, the status of the child's health and education, and any other relevant information for each month the child has been in placement with the provider. Resource parents must be encouraged to participate in MDT meetings.
- Home finding staff should be invited to the treatment team meetings to assist the team with placement decisions.
- Adoption staff must be made a member of the MDT when termination of parental rights (TPR) has occurred, and the child is available for adoption. Adoption specialist's should be invited to attend treatment team meetings when discussing adoption for a child prior to TPR to assist the team with the adoption process.
- The MDT meeting should also be used to meet other necessary case review requirements such as the administrative review.
- The child welfare worker will enter the MDT information into the MDT CCWIS screen.

The child welfare worker must always apply the multidisciplinary team policy in conjunction with the court rules of procedure for child abuse and neglect proceedings and all other applicable foster care, child protective services, and youth services policies.

7.10 Life Skills

Foster care or pre-adoptive care is a transitional living arrangement. For those children, the department has the responsibility to help them develop into self-sufficient adults. For all foster children over the age 14, the child welfare worker or adoption specialist is responsible for assessing the child's potential for eventual independence. Once the assessment has been completed, the child welfare worker must develop an appropriate plan for securing and providing necessary services to assist each youth to achieve independence. Continuous reviewing and modifying of this plan may be necessary until the child achieves their permanency goal.

7.11 Learning and Transition Plans

The transition/learning plan are guides that the youth and the youth's child welfare worker will use to determine the needed elements for the development of the life skills curriculum and the youth's transition to adulthood. An individual transition/learning plan may be based on selected learning goals and related expectations as the youth transitions to adulthood. The youth, in conjunction with the child welfare worker, must develop their own transition/learning plans.

The transition/learning plan is used to document the selected learning goals and activities the youth's child welfare worker and/or provider will use during life skill learning sessions and as the youth transitions to adulthood. Once completed the transition/learning plan will provide documentation of all the youth's planned life skill instructions. Life skills instructions may be completed one-on-one or in a group and will be documented on the learning and transition plans. The transition/learning plan should indicate whether the life skill instruction was provided in a group setting or on a one-on-one basis.

Transition planning is a vital part of the youth's case plan. The plan should be developed as soon as the youth completes a *Life Skill Assessment* but must be completed within the first 30 days of the youth turning 14. The plan must be specific for the youth and contain information that will assist the youth in their successful transition to adulthood.

The youth's child welfare worker and the youth will update or revise the transition/learning plan at least every 90 days, prior to the youth turning 18 years old.

The plan must be personalized by the youth and must contain as much detailed information as the youth decides to incorporate into the plan.

The plan must contain the following specific information:

- Housing options and services.
- Education plans and services.
- Employment services.
- Health insurance options.
- Local opportunities for mentoring.
- Workforce supports.
- Information concerning consumer credit report checks.
- Continuing support services.
- Health care directives and how to complete an "advance directive", when requested.

- Any other information that the youth deems important.

The youth's child welfare worker must incorporate the learning/transition plan into the "Unified Child or Family Case Plan" for CPS or the Youth Services Family or Child Case Plan for Youth Services.

7.12 Socially Necessary Services

Socially necessary services are interventions that are necessary to improve relationships and social functioning with the goals of preserving the individual's tenure in the community or the integrity of the family.

An Administrative Service Organization (ASO) is an agency that is contracted to provide administrative services to enforce the purchaser's policies. The Administrative Service Organization will:

- Develop Utilization Management Guidelines for social necessary services provided by the Bureau for Social Services for family foster care, family preservation and reunification, family support, and adoption services.
- Require prior authorization to obtain these services thus assuring children and families will receive the right service, for the right amount and in the right place.
- Provide a consistent service array and reimbursement to all regions.
- Assure consistent application of BSS policies in service delivery and payment.
- Identify service gaps and availability.

The manual of socially necessary services is titled [Utilization Management Guidelines](#). This manual contains all the information about the services available to the clients and is organized into two parts: Child Protective Services and Youth Services. The manual is available for download by opening the link above.

The Utilization Management Guidelines offers the following data on each service provider:

- Definition - Describes the service in detail and what the service should accomplish.
- Target Population.
- Initial Authorization - Describes the service in detail and what the service should accomplish.
- Admission Criteria - Describes the conditions that must be present for a client to be eligible for a service.
- Continuing Stay Criteria - Describes under what conditions a service would end.
- Service Exclusions - Describes what services could preclude another service being offered.
- Clinical Exclusions - Considers the severity of the clinical picture that may preclude using.
- Documentation - Describes what paperwork needs to be a part of the permanent case record.
- Credentials - Describes what qualifications are needed for the staff providing the service.

7.13 Services Offered - Foster Care

Services begin after a child is removed from the home and placed in family foster care or residential care. Services for foster or pre-adoptive children include the following:

- Adult Life Skills
- General Parenting

- Individualized Parenting
- Family Crisis Response
- Emergency Respite
- Daily Respite
- Tutoring
- Transportation Services
- Lodging and Meals
- Supervised Visitation
- Intensive Therapeutic Recreation Experience
- Home Studies (In-state and Out-of-State)

Services Offered – Adoption Preservation

Adoption Preservation services include the following:

- Case management services
- Family crisis response
- Crisis respite
- Individualized parenting
- Public transportation
- Private transportation
- Lodging
- Meals
- Agency transportation

Accessing the Services

The adoptive family will contact the county department office to request services. The child welfare worker will refer the family for an assessment. The results of the assessment will recommend services needed for the family.

Denied Provider

If a denied provider disagrees with this determination, he may appeal via a multi-step process: Any appeal would first be reviewed by an ASO care manager. If the denial is upheld by the manager, it would next be reviewed by the ASO Internal Review process. After denial by this review, the provider may appeal to the department review committee and finally request a fair hearing.

SECTION 8 – ADOPTION PROCESS

8.1 Adoption Process Definitions

The definitions used below are specific to this section and are a supplement to the general definition section.

<i>Term</i>	<i>Definition</i>
Adoption Certificate	A certificate that must be presented to any person or the attorney of any

	person petitioning to adopt a child or children when parental rights have been terminated under chapter 49 of WV State Code. The certificate shall contain information required by Chapter 48 of WV State Code. (W. Va. Code §48-22-502)
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8.2 Placement

Placement Day

The day a trial adoption placement begins, the *Adoption Placement Agreement* and the *Discipline Policy Agreement* will be signed and dated. A copy of the agreement will be given to the adoptive parents.

Prior to placement, the adoptive parent should be given a current *child summary*, medical information, and non-identifying birth parent medical information, *Birth and Medical History of Child and Birth Parent Background information*- (merge forms).

The adoption specialist will exit the child from any foster care placement and enter them into the adoptive record. This will generate an adoption subsidy payment and a medical card.

Child's Information/Possessions

The child's *life book*, *journey notebook*, clothing and personal belongings must follow the child into the placement.

8.3 Placement Support

Support Groups/Mentors

It is important for resource caregivers/adoptive families to be supported in their efforts to provide care and nurture the children placed in their homes. One way to do this is through regular contact between department staff and the resource caregivers/adoptive parents. In addition, there are other opportunities that home finding staff and the adoption specialist should pursue to provide support for families.

1. Local foster parent associations provide members with an opportunity to interact with others who may be encountering similar experiences. These meetings often function as support groups, training opportunities, recreational activities, etc.
2. For new resource caregivers/adopt parents who may need more direct assistance and support than that provided by the local foster parents association, or in areas where there is no foster parent association, the adoption specialist with help of the home finding specialist should identify an established foster/adoptive family to mentor the new family. Mentoring by an established resource caregiver/adoptive family to mentor the new family. Mentoring by an established resource caregiver/adoptive family provides guidance, support, and direction to new foster/adoptive parents through the many obstacles and difficult situations that may occur.

Initial Clothing Allowance

All children must have an adequate basic wardrobe for all seasons and routine functions. If a child does not have an adequate basic wardrobe at the time of placement, items of clothing may be purchased by

the resource caregivers/adoptive parents, relative or agency using a clothing allowance. (*See foster care policy for more information about the initial clothing assessment and allowance.*)

8.4 Requests for Release and Consent for Adoption

For a child who is in the custody of the department to be adopted, the department must consent to the adoption. The petition for adoption must be accompanied by the *Release and Consent for Adoption* at the time of filing. The consent cannot be granted until the child to be adopted has lived with the adoptive parents for a period of five months and the required child welfare worker visits have been made and documented. The adoption specialist will prepare, in triplicate, the *Release and Consent for Adoption* and forward it to the regional director or designee to be signed and notarized.

One original will be retained in the child's adoptive paper file. The second original will be given to the adoptive parents' attorney. The third original will be included in the information packet to be sent to the adoption program specialist at the Bureau for Social Services.

8.5 Application for Subsidy Adoption

The *Application for Subsidy Adoption* is an agreement negotiated between the adoptive parent(s) and the department which defines the type of adoption assistance the adoptive parents are eligible to receive for the child. This agreement must be entered into prior to the finalization of the adoption.

8.6 Adoption Packet

The adoption specialist will prepare a complete adoption court packet to be given to the adoptive parent's attorney. This packet will contain everything needed to complete the adoption including the following:

- One certified copy of the court order(s) terminating parental rights for all persons identified as having such rights or a certified copy of the *Death Certificate* for a birth parent who died prior to termination of rights. If the parent relinquished rights, the packet will contain a notarized copy of the child's *placement agreement* giving custody to the department or a notarized copy of the child's relinquishment with the court order ratifying this relinquishment.
- Certified copy of the child's birth certificate.
- One certified *sibling separation court order* and/or any court orders relating to grandparents or other relatives' rights.
- One original home study and any updates.
- One original *child summary*.
- Original signed *Adoption Subsidy Agreement* and any modifications or addendums.
- One original signed and notarized *Release and Consent for Adoption*.
- Adoption Certificate.

Adoption Certificate

When parental rights have been terminated, a certificate containing specific information is required for the adoption packet. Adoption specialists shall complete the certificate after termination and appeal

dates have expired. See, [W. Va. Code §49-4-117](#). Information that must be documented on the *Adoption Certificate* includes:

- The child's name.
- Legal parents and termination dates.
- The final order or orders terminating the parental rights of the child's birth parents have either:
 - Been affirmed on appeal and a mandate has been entered; or,
 - Not been appealed and the time for filing of an appeal of the order(s).
- Dates for expiration of timing of filing for appeal.
- Date of completion of the certificate and signature of the adoption specialist.
- Name(s) of adoptive parent(s) and adoption attorney.

8.7 Filing of the Petition

The adoptive family must obtain an attorney to file the petition for adoption. Under no circumstances, is an adoption specialist to give recommendations or advice on hiring an adoption attorney. Once an attorney is hired by the family, the adoption petition may be filed by the attorney for the adoptive parents at any time after the adoptive placement has been determined and all consents or relinquishments that can be obtained have been executed. The hearing on the petition may be held only after the child has lived with the adoptive parent or parents for a period of six months, proper notice of the petition has been given and all necessary consents or relinquishments have been executed and submitted or the rights of all nonconsenting birth parents have otherwise been terminated. The adoption petition may be filed in either the county where the adoptive parent or parents reside or in the same county as the original abuse and neglect proceeding regarding the minor child.

8.8 Absent or Unknown Parent

In the case of an unknown father, the court will consider all evidence and determine whether the father can be identified. This consideration will be accomplished as soon as practicable after filing of the petition, but no later than 60 days before the final hearing on the adoption petition.

If the court identifies a father, then notice of the proceeding for adoption must be served on the father.

If the court decides the father is unknown, it may decide whether or not to order the publication of a notice in a newspaper in order to notify the father.

8.9 Notice of Proceeding

Unless waived, notice of a proceeding for adoption must be served within twenty days after the petition is filed upon:

- Any person whose consent is required ([W. Va. Code 48-22-301](#)). Notice does not have to be served on a parent/guardian whose status has been terminated.
- Anyone claiming to be the father of the child and whose paternity is pending.
- Anyone other than the petitioner who has legal or physical custody of or visitation rights with the child under an existing court order.
- The spouse of the petitioner if the spouse is not part of the petition.

- A grandparent of the child if the grandparent's child is a deceased parent of the child and the deceased parent had not consented or relinquished or been terminated prior to death.
- Anyone the court feels can provide relevant information that the court wants to hear.

The notice will inform these recipients that their parental rights, if any, may be terminated in the proceeding and that they may appear and defend these rights within the required time after service.

8.10 Confidential Report to Judge

The adoption specialist will prepare a confidential report to be submitted to the judge prior to the hearing. This report will contain written information about the child, the home, and will also consist of the adoption specialist's opinion of whether the family should be approved to adopt the child.

8.11 Adoption Hearing

The adoption specialist will attend the adoption hearing and be prepared to respond to questions or a request for information from the presiding judge. At the conclusion of the hearing, the adoption specialist must request a certified copy of the adoption order.

At the final hearing, the judge will examine the petitioners to assure they are of good moral character, have respectable standing in the community, are able to properly maintain and educate the child, and that the best interests of the child would be promoted by the adoption. The judge will then make an order of the facts and the name by which the child will be known. He will declare that from the date of the order, the rights, duties, privileges and relations, previously existing between the child and anyone with previous parental rights, will end. He will also declare the rights, duties, privileges and relations between the children and their parent or parents by adoption shall be the same, including the rights of inheritance, as if the child had been born to the adoptive parents.

8.12 Recording the Order and Birth Certificate

The adoption order shall be recorded in the office of the clerk of the circuit court in a sealed file. Non-identifying information shall be provided to the adoptive parents or an adult adoptee by submitting a request to the clerk of the court. Either birth parent may submit additional social, medical, or genetic history for the adoptee. This information will be placed in the court file by the clerk who will also notify the court. The court will then transmit all non-identifying medical, social, or genetic information to the adoptive parents or adult adoptee.

Immediately upon the entry of the adoption order, the court shall have delivered to the state registrar of vital statistics a certificate under the seal of the court showing:

- The date and place of birth of the child.
- The name of the mother of the child, if known and the name of the legal or determined father of the child, if known.
- The name by which the child has previously been known.
- The names and addresses of the adopting parents.
- The name by which the child is to be known; and
- Any other information required by Vital Statistics.

Upon receipt of the certificate, the registrar of vital statistics shall issue and deliver by mail to the adopting parents at their last-known address and to the clerk of the county commission of the county in which the order was entered a birth certificate. The name of the child shown on this certificate shall be the name given them by the order of adoption. The clerk will record the birth certificate.

8.13 Notification to Child Support

After consummation of the adoption, the adoption specialist will notify the child support unit of the finalization in order to stop accrual of child support obligations.

SECTION 9 – ADOPTION SUBSIDY

9.1 Adoption Subsidy Definitions

The definitions used below are specific to this section and are a supplement to the general definition section.

<i>Term</i>	<i>Definition</i>
Adoption subsidy agreement	A written contract between the department and the prospective adoptive parent(s).
Conditional subsidy	Also referred to as Deferred Subsidy . Adoptive families with deferred subsidy agreements have the option of negotiating payments in the future, should the child's needs or family's circumstances warrant a monetary subsidy.
Non-recurring expenses	A one time payment that will be made for non-recurring adoption expenses incurred by or on behalf of the adoptive parents in connection with the adoption of a child with special needs, directly through the state/tribal agency or through another public or nonprofit private agency, in the amount not to exceed two-thousand dollars (\$2,000) per child per adoption episode.

9.2 Purpose

The purpose of the adoption assistance program is to provide medical coverage and financial assistance on behalf of special needs children in order for adoptive families of any economic level to properly care for them. These services are designed to supplement rather than replace the resources of the adoptive family and community.

9.3 Eligibility

Adoption assistance payments may be made to parents to adopt a child with special needs. In order to qualify for an adoption subsidy, a child must be a West Virginia resident in the guardianship of the department or a private licensed adoption agency. According to [W. Va. Code §49-4-112](#), children are considered in a special circumstance (special needs) because one or more of the following conditions inhibit their adoption:

- They have a physical or mental disability.
- They are emotionally disturbed.
- They are older children.
- They are a part of a sibling group.
- They are a member of a racial or ethnic minority.

In any case where the child meets the requirements of section 473(a)(2) of the Social Security Act, the State/Tribe may make adoption assistance payments to adoptive parents, directly through the State/Tribal agency or through another public or nonprofit private agency, in amounts so determined through an adoption subsidy agreement:

- a. the State/Tribe has determined, pursuant to established criteria, that the child cannot or should not be returned to the home of their parents; and
- b. Either:
 - The State/Tribe has determined that there exists with respect to the child a specific factor or condition such as:
 - Physical or mental disability.
 - They are emotionally disturbed.
 - They are an older child (Per WV DoHS Policy age eight or older).
 - They are part of a sibling group.
 - They are a member of a racial or ethnic minority.
 - They have a combination of these conditions and because of which it is reasonable to conclude that the child cannot be placed with adoptive parents without providing adoption assistance under this section and medical assistance under title XIX.
 - The child meets all medical or disability requirements of title XVI with respect to eligibility for supplemental security income benefits.
 - Reasonable efforts to place a child without a subsidy as described in this section shall not be required if it is in the best interest of the child because such factors as the existence of significant emotional ties have developed between the child and the prospective adoptive parent while in foster care.

In the case of a child who is an applicable child for the fiscal year as defined in 473(e) of the Act, adoption assistance payments may be made if the child has been determined by the State/Tribe pursuant to section 473(c) of the Act to be a child with special needs and:

- a. The time of the initiation of adoption proceedings the child was in the care of a public or licensed private child placement agency or Tribal agency pursuant to:
 - An involuntary removal or the child from the home in accordance with a judicial determination to the effect that continuation in the home would be contrary to the welfare of the child; or
 - A voluntary placement agreement or voluntary relinquishment.

- b. Meets all medical or disability requirements of Title XVI with respect to eligibility for supplemental security income benefits; or
- c. Was residing in foster family home or child care institution with the child's minor parent, and the child's minor parent was in such a foster family home or child care institution pursuant to:
 - i. an involuntary removal of the child from the home in accordance with the judicial determination to the effect that continuation in the home would be contrary to the welfare of the child; or
 - ii. a voluntary placement agreement or voluntary relinquishment.
- d. Has been determined by the State or Tribe, pursuant to subsection 473(c)(2), to be a child with special needs.

In the case of a child who is an applicable child for the fiscal year as so defined in 473(e) of the Act, the child will be treated as meeting the requirements to receive adoption assistance payments if the child:

- a. meets the requirements of 473(a)(2)(A)(ii) (II) of the Act; and
- b. is determined eligible for adoption assistance payments under this part with respect to a prior adoption (or who would have been determined eligible for such payments had the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 been in effect at the time that such determination would have been made; and
- c. is available for adoption because the prior adoption has been dissolved and the parental rights of the adoptive parents have been terminated or because the child's adoptive parents have died.

9.4 Subsidy Categories

Financial Subsidy

A monthly maintenance payment no less than \$790.00 per child will be paid to department adoptive parents of children with special needs. Effective December 1, 2020 the following rates based on age are in effect:

Age Range	Daily Subsidy Amount	Month Subsidy Amount
0-5	\$26.00	\$790.00
6-12	\$28.00	\$851.00
13-21	\$31.00	\$942.00

Adoptive parents who provided foster care for the adoptive child prior to adoption through the department or a child placing agency will receive no less than \$790.00 unless a rate increase is approved. Subsidy rate increases will only be considered on a case-by-case basis and will require a waiver from the director of social services or designee. Adoptive parents must contact the office of Children and Adult Services if they are seeking adjustments to post adoption subsidy payments. Subsidy increases are only

considered in circumstances when a special needs child has extraordinary medical expenses that are not covered by Medicaid, the family's insurance, and the child is not eligible for IDD waiver, or is on the waitlist. In determining eligibility for the adoption assistance payments, there is no income eligibility requirement (means test) for the adoptive parents.

In the event a child receiving a monthly subsidy receives any federally funded, statutory or other support benefits the federally funded monthly amount is to be reduced by the amount of the subsidy.

The adoptive parents are required to inform the state/tribal agency of circumstances that would make them ineligible for adoption assistance payments or eligible for adoption assistance payments in a different amount. Payments are terminated when the state determines that:

- The child has reached 18 years of age, unless the department determines that the child has a special need which warrants the continuation of assistance or is continuing their education, or actively engaging in employment.
- The child has reached 21 years of age.
- The adoptive parent or legal guardian is no longer supporting the child by performing actions to maintain a familial bond with the child.

The department shall provide assistance in the form of subsidies or other services to parents who are found and approved for adoption of a child certified as eligible for subsidy by the department, but before the final decree of adoption is entered, there shall be a written agreement between the family entering into the subsidized adoption and the department. Adoption subsidies in individual cases may commence with the adoption placement and will vary with the needs of the child as well as the availability of other resources to meet the child's needs. The subsidy may be for services, or for money payments, for a limited period, or for a long term, or for any combination of the foregoing. The specific financial terms of the subsidy shall be included in the agreement between the department and the adoptive parents. The amount of the subsidy may in no case exceed that which would be allowable from time to time for such a child under foster family care or, in the case of a special service, the reasonable fee for the service rendered. The amount of the financial subsidy must be specified in the *Adoption Subsidy Agreement*. The subsidy may be paid on a monthly basis until the child is age 18 or the child is emancipated. The adoptive parent may request approval from the department to extend the subsidy beyond the child's 18th birthday if the child meets one of the following criteria;

- The child is completing secondary education or a program leading to an equivalent credential.
- The child is enrolled in an institution which provides post-secondary or vocational education.
- The child is participating in a program or activity designed to promote, or remove barriers to employment.
- The child is employed for at least 80 hours per month.
- The child is incapable of doing any of the above-described activities due to a medical condition.

The adoption subsidy may be adjusted periodically with the concurrence of the adoptive parents to reflect changing circumstances. A letter of request must be accompanied by documentation of school enrollment and sent to the Bureau for Social Services, Children and Adult Services, 350 Capitol Street, Room B18, Charleston, WV 25301, attention: Adoption Assistance Program Specialist.

Medical Coverage

The department shall provide either Medicaid or other health insurance coverage for any special needs child for whom there is an adoption or legal guardianship subsidy agreement who the department determines cannot be placed without medical assistance. In West Virginia, this service is provided regardless of IV-E eligibility. Where possible, the adoptive parent must add the child to their private health insurance after the adoption.

Medicaid is available regardless of the state of residence and most states have a Medicaid agreement of reciprocity through ICAMA. If the child moves to a state that does not have a reciprocity agreement, the adoptive parent will continue to receive a West Virginia Medicaid card and must locate providers who are willing to become West Virginia Medicaid providers. If the adoptive parent is unable to locate willing providers, requests for reimbursement will be considered on a case-by-case basis by the state office.

One-Time Non-Recurring Adoption Expenses

Payments will be made for non-recurring adoption expenses incurred by or on behalf of the adoptive parents in connection with the adoption of a child with special needs, directly through the state/tribal agency or through another public or nonprofit private agency, in the amount not to exceed \$2,000 per child per adoption episode. This payment is available regardless of the child being eligible for adoption subsidy. The adoptive parent may make an application for non-recurring adoption expenses at any time prior to the finalization of the adoption of a special needs child. The following criteria must be met for the special needs child to qualify:

- The child cannot be returned to the home of their parents because:
 - The parents have signed voluntary consents or relinquishments for adoption.
 - Parental rights have been terminated through court action.
 - The parents are deceased.
 - A combination of the above.
- The department was unable to find a placement for the child without assistance because the child is:
 - A member of a minority or ethnic group.
 - Over the age of eight.
 - A member of a sibling group needing placement together.
 - Has mental, physical, or emotional handicaps.
- Reasonable efforts have been made to place the child without providing assistance with no success as required by the [Social Security Act 473\(1\)\(c\)\(A\)&\(B\) and 473\(2\)\(d\)\(A\)\(B\)&\(C\)](#).
- The reasonable efforts are specific to special needs requirements as listed above in paragraph

If the child is receiving adoption assistance from another state, the state paying the assistance is responsible for reimbursement of non-recurring costs. The rules and laws of that state will determine eligibility.

A child who is not eligible for ongoing adoption assistance and for whom non-recurring expenses are paid, is not eligible for Title XIX (Medicaid).

In order to receive reimbursement, the adoptive parent must forward to the department the following documents:

- A copy of the adoption petition.
- A certified copy of the final order.
- Copies of the bills, receipts, or invoices reflecting the allowable costs incurred by the adoptive parent.

The agreement may recognize and provide for direct payment by the department of attorney's fees to an attorney representing the adoptive parent or legal guardian. Any such payment for attorney's fees shall be made directly to the attorney representing the adoptive parents or legal guardians. In order to be set up for direct payment, the attorney has to complete and submit a W-9 form to the department. If the adoption hearing takes place in another state, the department will send the attorney payment to the adoptive parent(s). It is the responsibility of the adoptive parent(s) to forward the payment to the attorney that represented them through the adoption. The adoption assistance program specialist at the state office will enter a demand payment within 14 days of receipt.

Conditional Subsidy

If the child qualifies for assistance at the time of the adoption, but the adoptive parents elect not to receive part or all the assistance, the family must sign the refusal clause of the *Adoption Subsidy Agreement*. This clause allows for reapplication for assistance, in the future, if needed by the child.

Interstate Compact on Medical Assistance (ICAMA)

The Interstate Compact on Medical Assistance (ICAMA) is the mechanism by which Medicaid is provided on an interstate basis to IV-E and non-IV-E children. It assures reciprocity of Medicaid coverage to a IV-E child residing in member states. A member state must choose a Cobra option as part of the state plan in order to provide Medicaid or adoption assistance to non-IV-E children.

Referral to Another State

When a potential adoptive family resides in another state, a referral to the ICAMA administrator must be made by the adoption assistance program specialist for the child to receive Medicaid in the state of residence. Once the adoption subsidy agreement is in effect, the ICAMA Administrator will complete one ICAMA Referral Form 601 for the child/children being adopted. (Sibling groups require one form only). A copy of the initial adoption subsidy agreement is attached to the 601 form. A copy of the adoption order and re-determination of IV-E eligibility may also be included. This ICAMA packet is sent to the ICAMA Administrator in the receiving state by the WV ICAMA Administrator.

An ICAMA Form 602 will be sent by the WV ICAMA Administrator to the adoptive parents to notify them of the referral.

An ICAMA Form 603 will be used by the WV ICAMA Administrator to notify the other state of any change in case status or address.

Referral Received from Another State

The WV administrator will receive the ICAMA 601 referral form with a copy of the initial agreement and the adoption order if the adoption has been consummated. The resource development unit (RDU)

specialist will determine WV Medicaid eligibility and process the medical card for IV-E eligible children and for non-IV-E children who are receiving assistance from another state.

The RDU specialist will open a CCWIS case for eligible children and notify the adoptive parent, the sending state, and the WV ICAMA Administrator of the case approval and date of eligibility.

9.5 Adoption Subsidy Agreement

The department will enter into one of two types of written contracts with any family who is adopting a child in the department's custody: an *Adoption Subsidy Agreement* (for children who are eligible as "special needs" for a financial subsidy) or a *Deferred Adoption Subsidy Agreement* (for children who are not currently eligible but who may become eligible in the future).

The *Adoption Subsidy Agreement* outlines specific requirements and responsibilities of the adoptive parent(s) and DoHS. The monthly subsidy is used to provide for the needs of the child through age 18, and up to age 21, in circumstances where the youth qualifies to receive a continued subsidy. The subsidy is considered a supplement to the adoptive family income for the purpose of assisting with food, clothing, shelter, educational services, and other expenses for the child. The Bureau for Social Services does **not** agree to pay any additional amount above the agreed upon financial assistance outlined in section B of the agreement, including post-adoptive childcare.

Adoption Subsidy Agreement

An *Adoption Subsidy Agreement* is a written contract between the department and the prospective adoptive parent(s). It must specify the following:

- A statement that the child is a "special needs child".
- The duration of the agreement.
- The nature and amount of adoption assistance payments.
- An explanation and duration of any additional services or assistance to be provided by the department.
- A statement defining the nature and amount of any non-recurring expenses.
- Assurance the agreement will remain in effect regardless of the child's state of residence.
- An explanation of the review process.
- Instructions specifying when and how the department should be notified of any changes in the needs of the child.
- Conditions under which the adoption assistance may be terminated.
- An explanation of the fair hearing process.
- This agreement must be dated and signed by the adoptive parents and the adoption program manager.

Once in effect, this agreement can be terminated only under the following circumstances:

- The child has attained 18 years of age (unless the department determines that the child has a special need which warrants the continuation of assistance or is continuing their education, or actively engaging in employment).
- The child has obtained 21 years of age.
- The adoptive parent or legal guardian is no longer supporting the child by performing actions to maintain a familial bond with the child.

Deferred Adoption Subsidy Agreement

A *Deferred Adoption Subsidy Agreement* allows the adoptive parent who is not presently requesting assistance or who is not approved for assistance to receive assistance in the future if the child should develop a condition directly related to the birth parents' history or congenital in nature. In order to qualify for this deferral, there must be factors in the child's background or birth parent's histories that could predispose the child to future special needs. The parent must request the deferral prior to the adoption finalization.

If a condition develops in the child, the adoptive parent may submit a written request with medical documentation to the Bureau for Social Services to activate the child's adoption assistance. Medicaid, cash assistance, and/or a conditional subsidy may be requested. Any assistance will not be retroactive; rather, it will become effective when the child's eligibility for special needs assistance has been established.

9.6 Extended Medicaid Coverage

All children up to the age of 21, who come into the custody of the department and are placed in foster care, may be eligible for continued Medicaid coverage upon discharge from a foster care placement. (This includes department foster homes, therapeutic foster homes, specialized family care (Medley), group residential, psychiatric hospitals, psychiatric treatment facilities, medical hospitals, trial adoptive homes, transitional living, emergency shelter care, family emergency shelter care, and schools for children with special needs.)

A child's eligibility for extended Medicaid is initially determined by time of placement and continues for twelve months, whether or not they remain in placement. Eligibility is re-determined annually on the placement anniversary. A child must be in custody for the coverage to be extended.

At discharge, the adoption specialist will document the child's address in CCWIS and exit the child from placement. CCWIS will automatically generate a Notification of Extended Medicaid Coverage letter which is to be signed in duplicate by the parent/child/guardian. This form indicates that this coverage is free for children exiting foster care and that the parent must notify the department of any changes in living arrangements or resources. One copy of this letter will be maintained in the child's record; the other copy will be given to the parents/child/guardian. If the parents refuse this coverage, the adoption specialist must document the refusal in CCWIS under the medical insurance screen.

The department will automatically notify the parent prior to the end of the coverage period and termination of coverage. The parents have the right to appeal any decision.

9.7 Chafee Education and Training Vouchers (ETV)

As a result of Congressional legislation that re-authorized the Independent Living Program, re-titled Chafee Foster Care Independence Program, funding has been made available to states to assist with the costs of higher education or vocational training for youth who were adopted from foster care after the age of 16 years, youth who have aged out of foster care, and youth who are placed in guardianship. Youth who meet any of these criteria are eligible to receive educational assistance up to \$5,000 per calendar year. This money may be used to cover the costs of attending college or vocational training, including all expenses related to a course of study such as computers, special clothing, shoes or boots, books, housing transportation, etc.

The child's adoption specialist must, when completing the *Adoption Subsidy Agreement* for a child over the age of 16 years, specify the child's right to this educational assistance (to the degree funds continue to be able) in an addendum to the *Adoption Subsidy Agreement*. This addendum must be signed by the adoptive parents and the regional director or designee.

The adopted child may apply for this assistance at any time prior to their 23rd birthday. The ETV funding will continue to be available until age 26 for youth who are enrolled and making satisfactory progress in an educational or vocational program on their 23rd birthday. The adoption assistance program specialist must review and approve the request, determine if a new vendor number is needed and, if so, obtain the W9 and request the Bureau's Division of Administrative Services open the new vendor in CCWIS. The adoption assistance program specialist is also responsible for obtaining the youth's education plan, for obtaining and approving invoices for payment, and for forwarding those invoices to the Bureau's Division of Administration for payment processing. The adoption assistance program specialist will provide the Chafee program manager the name of the individuals and the amount of all payments and approvals.

9.8 Social Security Income and Pension Benefits

If there is a possibility the child might qualify for SSI, the adoption specialist must work with the Health Check and the Social Security office to secure benefits prior to the filing of the petition for adoption. Continued eligibility after adoption will depend on the adoptive parents' income; however, establishing this SSI eligibility will qualify the child for adoption assistance IV-E eligibility and help the child reestablish the benefit, if needed, as an adult.

If one or both birth parents are deceased, the adoption specialist must explore the possibility of dependent benefits from such pensions as Social Security, Veterans Administration, Railroad Retirement, Black Lung, United Mine Workers, etc. Once established, the child will continue to be eligible for these benefits once adopted.

9.9 Medley at Risk

If the child meets the criteria of a Medley at Risk child due to severe intellectual disability or a combination of intellectual disability and a mental illness or an incapacitating physical disability, the adoption specialist should refer the child to the Medley program during the trial adoption period. Some of these services may be available after adoption.

The child could also be eligible for either a Medicaid personal care service or Title XIX waiver service and family support. These programs offer the adoptive parents ongoing service such as case management, personal care, in-home nursing level care, respite, medical equipment, home modification, etc.

9.10 Children with Special Health Care Needs Program

If the child has a congenital defect, the adoption specialist must work with the EPSDT provider for referral to the Children with Special Health Care Needs Program. This program provides specialized, medical and surgical coverage, nutritional supplements, braces, orthopedic shoes, etc. Once approved, the child will remain eligible for these services after adoption until age 21.

9.11 WV Vocational Rehabilitation

If a child, age 16 or above, has a physical or mental disability, they should be referred to the West Virginia Division of Rehabilitation Services by their public-school counselor. (This includes children diagnosed with ADHD.)

9.12 Reviews/Records

Reviews will be conducted periodically by the adoption assistance program specialist located in the State office. All final adoption records and state ward records will be archived in the State office.

9.13 Appeals/Fair Hearing

Adoptive parents or prospective adoptive parents may appeal any decision that affects their adoption subsidy. If the family's request is denied or if the subsidy is discontinued for any reason other than required by law the family may request a hearing in the county of their choice. This request must be in writing to the Bureau for Social Services and received within 90 days of the denial for adoption assistance.

If a request for adoption preservation services is denied, it will be the service provider's responsibility to appeal this decision. If the denial continues to be upheld by the department review committee, the adoptive parent may then request a fair hearing to review their request for services.

9.14 Repayment of Adoption Subsidy

The [W. Va. Code §49-4-112](#) states that adoptive parents and legal guardians who receive subsidy payments shall keep the department informed of circumstances which would make them ineligible for payment. If adoptive parents fail to notify the department of a change of circumstances that makes them ineligible for subsidy payment, adoptive parents are responsible for repaying the department for the adoption subsidy they received while ineligible. To see circumstances that make adoptive parents ineligible for subsidy payment refer to *9.5 Adoption Subsidy Agreement* of this policy.

If the department determines that the adoptive parent(s) is no longer eligible to receive adoption subsidy payments and/or has received overpayment, the department will mail a certified written notification to the adoptive parent(s). The written notification should include the end date of the adoption subsidy, the amount of subsidy the parents are to repay to the department, and a request for

the adoptive parent(s) to contact the department to discuss the matter and arrive at a plan for repaying the amount of subsidy owed to the department.

In situations when a case is transferred to the adoption unit prior to the kinship/relative caregiver becoming certified, the adoption specialist must ensure that TANF payments are stopped once the kinship/relative caregiver becomes certified to avoid overpayment.

SECTION 10 – POST FINALIZATION

10.1 Post Finalization Definitions

The definitions used below are specific to this section and are a supplement to the general definition section.

<i>Term</i>	<i>Definition</i>
Crime Victim's Compensation Fund	A special revenue fund within the state Treasury established by the Crime Victims Compensation Act, created by the West Virginia Legislature, which can be utilized for victims of crimes (including minors in civil abuse and neglect cases) for payment of expenses attributed to or caused by their victimization. See, W. Va. Code §14-2A-11a Refer to <i>Foster Care Policy</i> .
Dissolution	A process in which the legal relationship between the adoptive parents and the child is severed, either voluntarily or involuntarily, after the adoption is legally finalized.
Disruption	An occurrence that results in the decision by the pre-adoptive parent or mutually by the child and pre-adoptive parent that the placement will not continue, or the adoption will not be consummated.

10.2 Adoption Preservation Services

Adoption preservation services will be offered to families of post-finalized adoptive children from department foster care, from private adoptions and international adoptions in order to preserve an adoption that may be at risk of disruption or dissolution. Services are offered through the ASO system.

In addition to services offered through the ASO, many counties also offer Foster/Adopt Support Groups and pairing of new adoptive families with more tenured families for support and advice.

10.3 Archiving of State Ward Records

The Bureau for Social Services, Adoption Unit shall be responsible for the archiving of the state ward records of children who have been adopted from foster care. Upon finalization, the adoption specialist will have all material filed in the child's state ward record and will forward it to the adoption assistance

program specialist for archiving for 99 years. The adoption assistance program specialist will be responsible for maintaining a cross reference archive index of adoption cases.

The Bureau for Social Services maintains an adoptive file on all children who receive adoption assistance until the child reaches the age of twenty-one, at which time the record will be forwarded to be filed with State Ward records.

10.4 Non-identifying Information

During the adoptive process, the adoption specialist will provide the adoptive parent with all non-identifying information known to the department regarding the social, medical, or genetic history of the child and the birth family. The adoptive parent or the adult adoptee may submit a request to the BSS or to the clerk of the circuit court to solicit copies of non-identifying information contained in the state ward record or in the sealed adoptive court record. Either birth parent may also submit additional social, medical, or genetic history for the adoptee. This information will be placed in the adoptive file and shared with the adoptive parents upon receipt or with the adult adoptee upon request.

10.5 Mutual Consent Adoption Registry

The purpose of this registry is to provide a centralized location wherein birth parents and the adult adoptee may register their willingness to have their identity and whereabouts disclosed and to provide for the disclosure of such information provided each individual voluntarily registers. The information placed in the child's adoptive record will only be available upon request of an eligible person after the child and all siblings in an adoptive placement have reached the age of eighteen or upon court order for good cause shown.

The adoption record shall be added to the archived state ward record upon the closure of the CCWIS case after their twenty-first birthday.

The initial registration request may be via phone or letter to the Mutual Consent Registry, Bureau for Social Services, Children & Adult Services, 350 Capitol Street, Room 691, Charleston, WV 25301. Telephone: 304.558.7980.

Upon receipt of request, BSS staff will forward a Registry Inquiry Form to be completed by the applicant with notarized signature and returned with proof of the applicant's identity (photo ID and birth certificate and social security card). A file will be maintained on each registrant for a period of 10 years.

Upon registering, the applicant will participate in not less than one hour of counseling with a social worker or social service worker employed by the department's registry. If a birth parent or adult adoptee resides outside the state, the department will obtain counseling from a social worker employed by a licensed agency in that state.

10.6 Adoption Dissolution

In the event of an adoption dissolution due to a child being removed from their adoptive home or due to the adoptive parent relinquishing their rights to the child, any party with knowledge of a dissolution, as well as the agency receiving custody of the child, shall promptly report the matter to the circuit court of origin, the department, and the child's counsel. The court must schedule a permanency hearing within

60 days of the report of disruption. The department shall convene an MDT meeting within 30 days of the receipt of notice of permanent placement disruption. Notice will be given to appropriate parties and those entitled to notice and the right to be heard. In the case of a disrupted adoption, the child will receive adoption subsidy and medical coverage when the child is readopted.

10.7 Adoptive Parent Death

In the event an adoptive parent becomes deceased and the adoptive parent made previous arrangements through a legally binding document, such as a will, for their children to be readopted, the newly identified adoptive parent is not required to complete a home study, an APS/CPS background check, criminal history check, or attend foster/resource parent training classes. Due to adoption subsidy being non-transferable, the subsequent adoptive parent must complete an application for non-recurring assistance and enter into a new *Adoption Subsidy Agreement* prior to the re-adoption becoming final. Per W. Va. Code §48-22-501, the child must reside with the subsequent adoptive for a period of six months. The subsequent adoptive parent will not receive adoption subsidy or medical coverage during the six months prior to the child being readopted. The subsequent adoptive parent has the option of applying for a Medicaid card and other benefits through the department's Bureau for Family Assistance as well as Social Security. If the subsequent caregiver does not wish to adopt, the adoption subsidy is not transferable and will not be transferred to the subsequent caregiver.

In the event an adoptive parent becomes deceased and did not identify an alternate caregiver to adopt the children in a legally binding document such as a will, the department will require that any subsequent caregiver who wishes to adopt the children have a criminal history and an APS/CPS background check.

10.8 Adoptive Parent Separation/Divorce

If adoptive parents obtain a legal separation or divorce, the custodial parent shall promptly report the matter to the department. The custodial parent can contact the department by phone at (304) 352-4429 or by email at adoptionssubsidy@wv.gov. The department will request documentation in the form of a court order from the divorce proceedings or child custody proceedings. The family court order should address and name the custodial parent. Adoption subsidy and the medical card shall follow the child which may include splitting the subsidy 50/50 if joint custody is ordered. In addition to the court order, the custodial parent will complete and return a signed W-9 form to the department.

10.9 Grievance Process/Fair Hearings

The adoptive parents may appeal the agency's decisions to reduce, change, or terminate adoption assistance in accordance with rules and procedures of the state's fair hearing and appeal process.

10.10 Adoptive Parents Rights

Once an adoption is finalized, any previous parent or guardian is no longer entitled to parental rights over the child. Adoptive parents have the same rights and privileges concerning the adopted child that biological parents have. This includes the right to make decisions concerning the care, custody, and control of the child. An adoptive parent merely allowing a child to be around a former parent or caregiver that was prohibited from having contact with the child in a prior court order is not grounds for

a finding of abuse and neglect. There must be evidence of a safety threat or that maltreatment is occurring as a result of an adoptive parent's decision(s).

There are circumstances that do affect the rights of adoptive parents. These include:

- When a child is adopted, any pre-existing order granting a grandparent visitation with that child is rendered void unless the adoptive parent is a relative of the child in which case the visitation order will remain in effect.
- Any orders granting a child the right to visitation with their siblings remain in effect post-adoption.

10.11 Crime Victims Compensation Fund

A child or youth who is identified in a civil abuse and neglect case may be entitled to benefits from the Crime Victim's Compensation Fund. (*For additional information, see Foster Care Policy and [W. Va. Code §14-2A-11a.](#)*)

The department may share information with the West Virginia Crime Victims Compensation Fund ([W. Va. Code §49-5-101](#)), to review allegations of injurious conduct committed against a child with child welfare involvement and, if appropriate, to make a determination for award of benefits to the victims. (For further information on when and how the Crime Victims Compensation Fund should be utilized see *Foster Care Policy*.)

SECTION 11 - NONDISCRIMINATION, GRIEVANCE PROCEDURE & DUE PROCESS STANDARDS, REASONABLE MODIFICATION POLICIES, AND CONFIDENTIALITY

11.1 Nondiscrimination

As a recipient of Federal financial assistance, the Bureau for Social Services (BSS) does not exclude, deny benefits to, or otherwise discriminate against any person on the ground of race, color, national origin, disability, age, sex, religion or creed in admission to, participation in, or receipt of the services and benefits under any of its programs and activities, whether carried out by BSS directly or through a contractor or any other entity with which BSS arranges to carry out its programs and activities.

This statement is in accordance with the provisions of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (nondiscrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin) ("Title VI"), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (nondiscrimination on the basis of disability) ("Section 504"), the Age Discrimination Act of 1975 (nondiscrimination on the basis of age) ("Age Act"), regulations of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services issued pursuant to these three statutes at Title 45 Code of Federal Regulations Parts 80, 84, and 91.

The Bureau for Social Services shall not retaliate against, intimidate, threaten, coerce, or discriminate against any individual for the purpose of interfering with any right or privilege secured by Title VI, Section 504 or the Age Act, or because she or he has made a complaint, testified, assisted, or participated in any manner in an investigation, proceeding, or hearing.

In addition, BSS will make all reasonable modifications to policies and programs to ensure that people with disabilities have an equal opportunity to enjoy all BSS programs, services, and activities. For example, individuals with service animals are welcomed in the Department of Human Services, BSS, offices even where pets are generally prohibited.

In case of questions, or to request an auxiliary aid or service for effective communication, or a modification of policies or procedures to participate in a BSS program, service, or activity, please contact:

Children and Adult Services
Section 504/ADA Coordinator
350 Capitol St. Rm 691
Charleston, WV 25301
(304) 352-4429

11.2 Non-Discriminatory Placement Protocol

The department ensures that all parties involved in child welfare programs have equal opportunities. All potential placement providers for children and youth, are afforded equal opportunities, free from discrimination and protected under the [Americans with Disabilities Act](#) (ADA). The department will not deny a potential placement provider the benefit of its services, programs, or activities due to a disability. Under the American's with Disabilities Act it defines a person with a disability as:

"An individual with a disability is defined by the ADA as a person who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, a person who has a history or record of such an impairment, or a person who is perceived by others as having such an impairment."

The ADA does not specifically name all the impairments that are covered. The ADA does not allow a person to be discriminated against due to a disability in employment, state and local government activities, public transportation accommodations, telecommunication relay services, fair housing, air carrier access, voting accessibility or education. Examples of disabilities include physical disabilities which require auxiliary aides and mental health issues. Those persons with substance use disorders, including opioid use disorder, currently participating in a treatment option such as Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT), are also covered by the ADA. Participation in a MAT program is not considered the illegal use of drugs. Qualifying MAT programs are defined in [W. Va. Code §16-5Y-1](#), et seq. The ADA also addresses the civil rights of institutionalized people and architectural barriers that impact people with disabilities.

When making diligent efforts to locate and secure appropriate placement for foster children and youths, a worker cannot discriminate against a potential placement based upon a person with a disability according to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Title II. The department shall determine if the potential placement for the child represents a direct threat to the safety of the child. Safety threat decisions will be based on assessment of the individual and the needs of the child, as the safety of the child always remains at the forefront of the determination of the best interest of a child, when placing a child in anyone's home. This determination cannot be based on generalizations or stereotypes of individuals.

If a provider protected under the ADA is identified as an appropriate and best interest placement for a foster child they may, at some point, require services specific to their disability in order to preserve the placement. In such situations, consideration for services must be given if it is in the best interest of the child to preserve the placement. Any specific auxiliary aids or services should be determined by the child welfare worker at no cost to the provider and should be considered on a case-by-case basis.

11.3 Complaint Procedure and Due Process Standards

A: Complaints Based on Disability or other Forms of Discrimination

It is the policy of the State of West Virginia Department of Human Services (DoHS), not to discriminate on the basis of on the basis of race, color, national origin, disability, age, sex, religion, or creed. DoHS has adopted an internal complaint procedure providing for prompt, equitable resolution of complaints alleging discrimination. Laws and Regulations, 28 C.F.R. Part 35 and 45 C.F.R. Part 84, may be examined by visiting <https://www.ada.gov/reg3a.html>. Additional laws and regulations protecting individuals from discrimination in child welfare programs and activities may be examined by visiting the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services website at <https://www.hhs.gov/civil-rights/for-individuals/special-topics/adoption/index.html>.

Any person who believes someone has been subjected to discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, disability, age, sex, religion, or creed may file a complaint under this procedure. It is against the law for the Bureau for Social Services, (including employees, contracted providers, or other BSS representative,) to retaliate in any way against anyone who files a complaint or cooperates in the investigation of a complaint.

Procedure

Complaints due to alleged discriminatory actions must be submitted to the Department of Human Services, Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO)/Civil Rights Officer within sixty (60) calendar days of the date the person filing the complaint becomes aware of the alleged discriminatory action.

The complainant may make a complaint in person, by telephone, by mail, or by email. To file the complaint by mail or email, a Civil Rights Discrimination Complaint Form, IG-CR-3 (See Appendix A) must be completed and mailed or emailed to the West Virginia Office of Shared Administration, Office of Human Resources Management, EEO/Civil Rights Officer, One Davis Square, Suite 400, Charleston, WV 25301 or email at OSACivilRights@WV.Gov. If the complainant requires assistance completing the IG-CR-3 form, they may request assistance from the department. The complaint must state the problem or action alleged to be discriminatory and the remedy or relief sought. The complainant may also contact the WV DoHS, EEO/Civil Rights Officer, for more information.

West Virginia Office Of Shared Administration
Office of Human Resources Management
EEO/Civil Rights Officer
One Davis Square, Suite 400, Charleston, WV 25301
OSACivilRights@WV.Gov

The EEO/Civil Rights Officer shall conduct an investigation of the complaint. This investigation may be informal, but it must be thorough, affording all interested persons an opportunity to submit evidence relevant to the complaint. The EEO/Civil Rights Officer will maintain the files and records of Bureau for Social Services relating to such complaints. To the extent possible, and in accordance with applicable law, the EEO/Civil Rights Officer will take appropriate steps to preserve the confidentiality of files and records relating to complaints and will share them only with those who have a need to know.

The EEO/Civil Rights Officer shall issue a written decision on the complaint, based on the preponderance of the evidence, no later than thirty (30) calendar days after its filing, including a notice to complainant of their right to pursue further administrative or legal remedies. If the EEO/Civil Rights Officer documents exigent circumstances requiring additional time to issue a decision, the EEO/Civil Rights Officer will notify the complainant and advise them of their right to pursue further administrative or legal remedies at that time while the decision is pending. The person filing the complaint may appeal the decision of the EEO/Civil Rights Officer by writing to the Director of Human Resources within fifteen (15) calendar days of receiving the EEO/Civil Rights Officer's decision. The Director of Human Resources shall issue a written decision in response to the appeal no later than thirty (30) calendar days after its filing.

The person filing the complaint retains the right to file a grievance with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office for Civil Rights, regardless of the decision made by the State of West Virginia Department of Human Services.

The availability and use of this procedure does not prevent a person from pursuing other legal or administrative remedies, including filing a complaint of discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, disability, age, sex, religion or creed in court or with the US Department of Health and Human Services, Office for Civil Rights. A person can file a complaint of discrimination electronically through the Office for Civil Rights Complaint portal at: <https://ocrportal.hhs.gov/ocr/smartscreen/main.jsf> or by mail or by phone at:

U.S. Department of Health & Human Services
Office for Civil Rights
200 Independence Ave., S.W.
Room 509F HHH Bldg.
Washington, D.C. 20201
800-368-1019 (voice) 800-537-7697 (TDD)
OCRComplaint@hhs.gov

For complaints to the Office for Civil Rights, complaint forms are available at: <https://www.hhs.gov/ocr/complaints/index.html>. Complaints shall be filed within one hundred and eighty (180) calendar days of the date of the alleged discrimination.

The Bureau for Social Services will make appropriate arrangements to ensure that individuals with disabilities and individuals with Limited English Proficiency are provided auxiliary aids and services or language assistance services, respectively, if needed, to participate in this process. Such arrangements may include, but are not limited to, providing qualified interpreters, providing recorded material for individuals with low vision, or assuring a barrier-free location for the proceedings. The EEO/Civil Rights Officer will be responsible for such arrangements.

B: Grievances Regarding the Adoption Specialist or Casework Process

At any time that the Bureau for Social Services is involved with a client, the client (adult or child), or the counsel for the child has a right to express a concern about the manner in which they are treated, including the services they are or are not permitted to receive.

Whenever a parent, child or counsel for the parent or child has a complaint about Adoption or expresses dissatisfaction with Adoption the worker will:

- Explain to the client the reasons for the action taken or the position of the BSS which may have resulted in the dissatisfaction of the client.
- If the situation cannot be resolved, explain to the client their right to a meeting with the supervisor.
- Assist in arranging for a meeting with the supervisor.

The supervisor will:

- Review all reports, records, and documentation relevant to the situation.
- Determine whether all actions taken were within the boundaries of the law, policies, and guidelines for practice.
- Meet with the client.
- If the problem cannot be resolved, provide the client with the form “Client and Provider Hearing Request”, SS-28.
- Assist the client with completing the SS-28, if requested.
- Submit the form immediately to the Chairman, State Board of Review, DoHS, Building 6, Capitol Complex, Charleston, WV 25305.

For more information on Grievance Procedures for Social Services please see Common Chapters Manual, Chapter 700, and Subpart B or see W. Va. Code §29A-5-1.

Note: Some issues such as the decisions of the Circuit Court cannot be addressed through the Grievance Process. Concerns about or dissatisfactions with the decisions of the court including any approved case plan must be addressed through the appropriate legal channels.

11.4 Reasonable Modification Policy

A: Purpose

In accordance with the requirements of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Section 504) and Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA), the Bureau for Social Services shall not discriminate against qualified individuals with disabilities on the basis of disability in its services, programs, or activities. The BSS shall make reasonable modifications in adoption program policies, practices, or procedures when the modifications are necessary to avoid discrimination on the basis of disability, unless BSS can demonstrate that making the modifications would fundamentally alter the nature of the service, program, or activity.

B: Policy

DoHS is prohibited from establishing policies and practices that categorically limit or exclude qualified individuals with disabilities from participating in the BSS adoption program.

The Bureau for Social Services will not exclude any individual with a disability from the full and equal enjoyment of its services, programs, or activities, unless the individual poses a direct threat to the health or safety of themselves or others, that cannot be mitigated by reasonable modifications of policies, practices, or procedures, or by the provision of auxiliary aids or services.

The Bureau for Social Services is prohibited from making Adoption program application and retention decisions based on unfounded stereotypes about what individuals with disabilities can do, or how much assistance they may require. The BSS will conduct individualized assessments of qualified individuals with disabilities before making Adoption application and retention decisions.

The Bureau for Social Services may ask for information necessary to determine whether an applicant or participant who has requested a reasonable modification has a disability-related need for the modification, when the individual's disability and need for the modification are not readily apparent or known. BSS will confidentially maintain the medical records or other health information of Adoption program applicants and participants.

The Bureau for Social Services upon request, will make reasonable modifications for qualified adoption program applicants or participants with disabilities unless BSS can demonstrate that making the modifications would fundamentally alter the nature of the service, program, or activity. Individuals do not need to reference Section 504 or Title II or use terms of art such as “reasonable modification” in order to make a request. Further, BSS staff are obligated to offer such reasonable accommodations upon the identification of a qualifying disability or to an individual with Limited English Proficiency.

BSS must consider, on a case-by-case basis, individual requests for reasonable modifications in its adoption program, including, but not limited to, requests for substitute caregivers, respite caregivers, more frequent support from a case worker, additional classroom and/or online training, mentorship with an experienced foster/adoptive parent, note takers, and other auxiliary aids and services. When auxiliary aids or language interpretation services to ensure effective communication for individuals with hearing, vision, speech impairments, or Limited English Proficiency (LEP) are needed, they shall be provided to the participant at no additional costs. The department evaluates individuals on a case-by-case basis to provide auxiliary aids and services as necessary to obtain effective communication. This would include but not be limited to:

- Services and devices such as qualified interpreters, assistive listening devices, note takers, and written materials for individuals with hearing impairments.
- And qualified readers, taped texts, and Brailled or large print materials for individuals with vision impairments.
- Access to language and interpretation services.

For more information on obtaining auxiliary aids, contact:

Center for Excellence in Disabilities (CED)

959 Hartman Run Road

Morgantown, WV 26505

Phone: 304-293-4692.

Toll Free: (888) 829-9426

TTY: (800) 518-1448

For language translation and interpretation services Adoption Specialists may Contact 911 Interpreters or the Section 504/ADA Coordinator (see also section 14.5 Limited English Proficiency). To contact 911 Interpreters, utilize the information below:

911 Interpreters Inc.

1-855-670-2500

BSS Code: 16233

When requesting language translation services directly through 911 Interpreters, staff must report the accommodation to the Section 504/ADA Coordinator by completing the Reasonable Accommodation Reporting Form.

The Bureau for Social Services will not place a surcharge on a particular qualified individual with a disability or any group of qualified individuals with disabilities to cover the cost of measures, such as the provision of auxiliary aids and services or program accessibility, that are necessary to provide nondiscriminatory treatment required by Title II of the ADA and Section 504.

To address any violations of this Reasonable Modification Policy, consult the Bureau for Social Services Grievance Procedure. To request reasonable modifications, or if you have questions, please contact:

Children and Adult Services

Section 504/ADA Coordinator

350 Capitol St. Rm 691

Charleston, WV 25301

(304) 352-4429

OSACivilRights@WV.Gov (email)

Staff who make reasonable accommodations for an individual must be reported to the Section 504/ADA Coordinator utilizing the *Reasonable Accommodation Reporting Form*.

11.5 Limited English Proficiency

The Bureau for Social Services (BSS) will take reasonable steps to ensure that persons with Limited English Proficiency (LEP) have meaningful access and an equal opportunity to participate in our services, activities, programs, and other benefits. The policy of BSS is to ensure meaningful communication with LEP clients and their authorized representatives involving their case. The policy also provides for communication of information contained in vital documents, including but not limited to, information release consents, service plans, etc. All interpreters, translators and other aids needed to comply with this policy shall be provided without cost to the person being served, and clients and their families will

be informed of the availability of such assistance free of charge. Language assistance will be provided through use of contracted vendors, technology, or telephonic interpretation services. All staff will be provided notice of this policy and procedure, and staff that may have direct contact with LEP individuals will be trained in the effective use of an interpreter and the effective use of technology including telephonic interpretation services. The Bureau for Social Services will conduct a regular review of the language access needs of our population, as well as update and monitor the implementation of this policy and these procedures, as necessary.

PROCEDURES:

1. IDENTIFYING LEP PERSONS AND THEIR LANGUAGE

The Bureau for Social Services will promptly identify the language and communication needs of the LEP person. If necessary, staff will use a language identification card (or “I speak cards,” available online at www.lep.gov or posters to determine the language. In addition, when records are kept of past interactions with clients or family members, the language used to communicate with the LEP person will be included as part of the record.

2. OBTAINING A QUALIFIED INTERPRETER

911 Interpreters Inc. has agreed to provide qualified interpreter services. The agency’s telephone number is 1-855-670-2500 (BSS Code: 16233). Interpretation services are available 24 hours a day. Some LEP persons may prefer or request to use a family member or friend as an interpreter. However, family members or friends of the LEP person will not be used as interpreters unless specifically requested by that individual and after the LEP person has understood that an offer of an interpreter at no charge to the person has been made by the facility. Such an offer and the response will be documented in the person’s file. If the LEP person chooses to use a family member or friend as an interpreter, issues of competency of interpretation, confidentiality, privacy, and conflict of interest will be considered. If the family member or friend is not competent or appropriate for any of these reasons, BSS will provide qualified interpreter services to the LEP person free of charge. Children and other clients will not be used to interpret, in order to ensure confidentiality of information and accurate communication.

3. PROVIDING WRITTEN TRANSLATIONS

When translation of vital documents is needed, BSS will submit documents for translation to 911 Translators Inc. or the Section 504/ADA Coordinator. BSS will generally provide language services in accordance with the following guidelines:

(a) BSS will provide written translations of vital documents for each eligible LEP language group that constitutes five percent or 1,000, whichever is less, of the population of persons eligible to be served or likely to be affected or encountered. Translation of other documents, if needed, can be provided orally; or

(b) If there are fewer than 50 persons in a language group that reaches the five percent threshold in (a), BSS will not translate vital written materials but will provide written notice in the primary language of

the LEP language group of the right to receive competent oral interpretation of those written materials, free of cost.

Additionally, when making a determination as to what languages services will be provided, BSS may consider the following factors: (1) the number and or proportion of LEP persons eligible to be served or likely to be encountered by the program or grantee; (2) the frequency with which LEP individuals come in contact with the program; (3) the nature and importance of the program, activity, or service provided by the program to people's lives; and (4) the resources available to the grantee/recipient and costs.

Documents being submitted for translation will be in final, approved form with updated and accurate information. Staff who utilize 911 Translators must report the utilization using the *Reasonable Modification Reporting Form* to the Section 504/ADA Coordinator.

4. PROVIDING NOTICE TO LEP PERSONS

The Bureau for Social Services will inform LEP persons of the availability of language assistance, free of charge, by providing written notice in languages LEP persons will understand. At a minimum, notices and signs will be posted and provided in DoHS office lobbies and waiting areas. Notification will also be provided through one or more of the following: outreach documents and program brochures.

5. MONITORING LANGUAGE NEEDS AND IMPLEMENTATION

On an ongoing basis, BSS will assess changes in demographics, types of services or other needs that may require reevaluation of this policy and its procedures. In addition, BSS will regularly assess the efficacy of these procedures, including but not limited to mechanisms for securing interpreter services, equipment used for the delivery of language assistance, complaints filed by LEP persons, feedback from clients and community organizations,

APPENDIX A DoHS CIVIL RIGHTS DISCRIMINATION COMPLAINT FORM

Civil Rights Discrimination Complaint Form

Complainant First Name		Complainant Last Name
Home Phone <i>(include area code)</i>		Work Phone <i>(include area code)</i>
Street Address		City
State	Zip Code	Email <i>(if available)</i>

Is this complaint being completed by someone other than the complainant? ☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, please provide your information below:

First Name	Last Name	Telephone Number <i>(include area code)</i>
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The complainant feels they have been discriminated against on the basis of:

☐ Race/Color/National Origin ☐ Religion/Creed ☐ Disability ☐ Age ☐ Sex

☐ Other *(please specify):*

Who or what bureau within the State of West Virginia Department of Human Services is believed to have been discriminatory?

Name/Bureau/Office		
Street Address	City	County
Zip Code	Telephone	

Date(s) discriminatory action is believed to have occurred:

Which program(s) is the complainant alleging the discriminatory action took place in?

☐ Child Welfare (includes CPS, Youth Services, Foster Care, Adoption, Homefinding, and Legal Guardianship) ☐ Adult Welfare (includes APS, Guardianship, Health Care Surrogate, Residential Services Request to Receive and Request to Provide) ☐ Low Income Energy Assistance Program (LIEAP)

☐ Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) ☐ School Clothing Voucher ☐ Indigent Burial

Complaints involving the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) must be sent directly to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. See below for more information

Describe briefly what happened. How and why does the complainant believe they have been discriminated against? What is the relief or remedy sought by the complainant?

(Attach additional pages as needed.)

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Please sign and date this form. If submitting by email, you may type your name and date. Your email will represent your signature.

Signature	Date(mm/dd/yyyy)
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The State of West Virginia Department of Human Services shall not retaliate against, intimidate, threaten, coerce, or discriminate against any individual for the purpose of interfering with any right or privilege secured by Title VI, Section 504 or the Age Act, or because she or he has made a complaint, testified, assisted, or participated in any manner in an investigation, proceeding, or hearing.

EEO/Civil Rights Officer shall conduct an investigation of the complaint. This investigation may be informal, but it must be thorough, affording all interested persons an opportunity to submit evidence relevant to the complaint. EEO/Civil Rights Officer will maintain the files and records of the department relating to such grievances. The EEO/Civil Rights Officer shall issue a written decision on the complaint no later than thirty (30) calendar days after its filing, unless the Coordinator documents exigent circumstances requiring additional time to issue a decision. To submit this complaint or request additional information, please contact:

West Virginia Office Of Shared Administration
Office of Human Resources Management
EEO/Civil Rights Officer
One Davis Square, Suite 400, Charleston, WV 25301
(304) 558-3313 (voice)
(304) 558-6051 (fax)
OSACivilRights@WV.Gov email

The person filing the grievance retains the right to file a grievance with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office for Civil Rights, regardless of the decision made by the State of West Virginia Department of Human Services. The availability and use of this grievance procedure does not prevent a person from filing a private lawsuit in Federal court or a complaint of discrimination on the basis of being a member of a protected class, with the:

U.S. Department of Health & Human Services
200 Independence Ave., S.W.
Room 509F HHS Bldg.
Washington, D.C. 20201
800-368-1019 (voice)
202-619-3818 (fax)

800-537-7697 (TDD)

OCRComplaint@hhs.gov (email)

The complaint form may be found at <https://www.hhs.gov/ocr/complaints/index.html>

For SNAP complaints, please contact the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

The USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, can be found online at: <https://www.ocio.usda.gov/document/ad-3027>, or at any USDA office. To request a copy of the complaint form, call (866) 632-9992. Submit your completed form by mail, email, or fax to:

U.S. Department of Agriculture

Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights

1400 Independence Avenue, SW Washington, D.C. 20250-9410

(866) 632-9992 (telephone)

(202) 690-7442 (fax)

program.intake@usda.gov (email)