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**Adoption Promotion Program Criteria and Guidelines**

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**I. PURPOSE**

The purpose of the Adoption Promotion Program (APP) is to enhance and expand adoption programs, to secure permanent homes for children in foster care with special needs who are harder to place, and to encourage partnerships between public and private agencies to achieve permanency for children in a timely manner. In accordance with NCGS 108A-50.2, criteria and guidelines for the awarding of funds to licensed public and private adoption agencies upon the adoption of children in foster care as described in NCGA 108A-50 are outlined below.

**II. ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA**

**Children**

To be eligible for funds, a child must be determined eligible or potentially eligible for adoption assistance benefits. Criteria for Adoption Assistance eligibility include:

- (a) The child is six years of age or older;
  - (b) The child is two years of age or older and a member of a minority race or ethnic group;
  - (c) The child is a member of a sibling group of three or more children to be placed in the same adoptive home;
  - (d) The child is a member of a sibling group of two children to be placed in the same adoptive home, in which the sibling meets at least one of the other factors or conditions, with the exception of (i) at risk for a diagnosis;
  - (e) The child has a medically diagnosed disability which substantially limits one or more major life activity, requires professional treatment, assistance in self-care, or the purchase of special equipment;
  - (f) The child is diagnosed by a qualified professional to have a psychiatric condition which impairs the child's mental, intellectual, or social functioning, and for which the child requires professional services;
  - (g) The child is diagnosed by a qualified professional to have a behavioral or emotional disorder characterized by inappropriate behavior which deviates substantially from behavior appropriate to the child's age or significantly interferes with child's intellectual, social and personal adjustment;
  - (h) The child is diagnosed to have an intellectual/developmental disability by a qualified professional;
  - (i) The child is at risk for a diagnosis described above in items e through h, due to prenatal exposure to toxins, a history of abuse or serious neglect, or genetic history.
- Note: if the child qualifies only under this criterion, the child must be placed in the potential category where they will receive Medicaid, but will receive a zero-amount monthly payment until a diagnosis is made;

- (j) The child meets all of the medical and disability requirements for Supplemental Security Income (SSI);
- (k) The child cannot or should not be returned to the home of his/her parents; and reasonable, but unsuccessful efforts to place the child for adoption with appropriate adoptive parent(s) without providing adoption assistance have been made, except when it would not be in the best interest of the child to make this effort.

### **Agency**

To be eligible to receive funding under the APP, agencies must be licensed as a public or private adoption agency under the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services. All 100 County Departments of Social Services are licensed public adoption agencies. Private child placing agencies must be licensed specifically for adoptions.

## **III. FUNDING FOR COUNTY CHILD WELFARE AGENCIES**

**BASELINE:** The Federal Baseline Methodology is used to establish county baselines for SFY 2018-2019. The federal baseline is determined by considering the number of adoptions that occurred over the past three years and the number of children in foster care. The rate is established by dividing the number of adoptions completed in one year by the number of children in foster care the preceding year. The lesser of the base rate for the previous year or the average rate for the previous three fiscal years is then multiplied by the number of foster children in foster care the previous fiscal year. This gives a county its baseline for the current fiscal year.

Data for the baseline calculations comes from the Child Placement and Payment System (CPPS) database and NC FAST. DSS-5094's closed due to adoptions realized within the fiscal year are counted towards the baseline. Please review the baseline information (Attachment 1) and contact the Division of Social Services immediately if there are questions.

**YEAR-END DISTRIBUTION:** County child welfare agencies will receive a one-time, year-end funding allocation. County agencies will receive a proportional share of the total statewide funding available to all counties based upon the sum of two factors:

1. The total number of adoptions completed, regardless of age, that **exceed** federal adoption baseline targets for each county.
2. The total number of adoptions completed for children 13 years and older or sibling groups of 3 or more placed together for adoption, **that fall under the federal baseline.**

#### **Examples:**

The statewide total number of adoptions above baseline + adoptions of children 13 years and older or sibling groups of 3 or more under baseline = **300**

#### **Example 1:**

IF: County A's total sum of adoptions above baseline and adoptions of children 13 years and older or sibling groups of 3 or more under baseline = **30**

THEN: County A would receive **\$320,000** [30 (county adoptions) / 300 (statewide adoptions) x \$3,200,000] at the end of the fiscal year.

**Example 2:**

IF: County B did not meet their baseline, but completed **5** adoptions (2 children ages 13 or older and a sibling group of 3 children)

THEN: County B would receive **\$53,120** [5 (county adoptions) / 300 (statewide adoptions) x \$3,200,000] at the end of the fiscal year.

**IV. FUNDING FOR PRIVATE CHILD PLACING AGENCIES**

Private child placing agencies will be issued contract agreements annually from the Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Social Services for the provision of services under the Adoption Promotion Program. The APP is now operating as a “fee for service” program that pays participating private child placing agencies a predetermined amount for specific services completed in the facilitation of an adoption.

Pursuant to NCGS § 108A-50.2, the Division of Social Services may reallocate any unspent funds to other participating private child placing agencies.

**V. SERVICE AREAS**

Below are the services that the private and county agencies agree will be provided by the private agency for this purpose. The services eligible for payment are defined below to provide role clarity.

**Adoptive Family Readiness**

Adoptive Family Readiness is defined as the work completed by licensing agencies to recruit potential adoptive families and deliver preparatory training that provides the foundational knowledge and skills for parenting children with special needs. Licensing agencies guide prospective families through the decision-making process and evaluate a family’s ability to meet the needs of children in foster care. This includes but is not limited to: individual and joint interviews with family members, assessment of strengths and needs through the 12 skills For Successful Foster and Adoptive Parenting, completion and approval of a Pre-Placement Assessment, and additional training as identified and provided by the family’s licensing agency through the assessment process.

**Family Post Placement Support**

Post Placement Support (family) is defined as supportive services provided to the family by the family’s licensing agency from the time that a child is placed in the family’s home through the time the child’s adoption is finalized. These services include but are not limited to: one-on-one consultations with the family, facilitating supportive decision-making, adoption preparation activities, and support and referrals that are specific to the family’s needs while ensuring the success of the adoption.

### **Child Post Placement Support**

Post Placement Support (child) is defined as supportive services provided to the child once the child is placed in a home for the purpose of adoption. It is the hands-on social work provided to ensure a child is secure in their placement. This work goes beyond the monthly mandated visits and referral for services required by the county child welfare agency. It includes activities that prepare the child for the next steps in their adoption journey, such as completing their life book or life story. Additionally, when children understand they are not returning home, it may trigger a variety of emotions and behaviors. Working individually with the child through feelings of grief and loss, abandonment, and attachment to support the child in their placement is crucial. This includes but is not limited to: the use of workbooks, teaching techniques from various practice models, and the use of books or drawings to engage the child in conversation about how they are feeling about adoption. This work is typically done by the child's county child welfare agency adoption worker with whom they have a relationship. However, some county child welfare agencies may find that the child placing agency may be better equipped to provide this service. If the county child welfare agency requests the child placing agency to assist in these activities, the child placing agency will receive payment for this category.

### **Legal Services**

Legal services are defined as the completion of legal paperwork necessary to finalize an adoption. The responsibility of completing the required documentation to facilitate the legal proceedings surrounding an adoption lies with the county child welfare agency. However, if the county child welfare agency requests a private child placing agency to complete **any portion** of the legal paperwork and/or file the adoption, the child placing agency will receive payment for the legal services category.

## **VI. PRIVATE CHILD PLACING AGENCY SERVICE RATES**

The eligible service areas and corresponding payment amounts for each eligible service are identified below.

Service Area	Children 0-12	Teens and Sibling Groups of 3+
Adoptive Family Readiness	\$4,000	\$7,000
Post-Placement Support (Family)	\$1,250	\$2,000
Post-Placement Support (Child)	\$1,250	\$2,000
Completion of Legal Procedures	\$1,500	\$2,500
Total	\$8,000	\$13,500

## VII. ADOPTION SERVICES AGREEMENTS

When a private child placing agency and a county child welfare agency partner to finalize an adoption, an Adoption Services Agreement (DSS-5113-Revised) must be developed and signed by both agencies. The Adoption Services Agreement reflects the specific services performed by the private child placing agency. Under the new program model, agencies are no longer negotiating or competing for funding.

The county child welfare agencies will be paid through proportional distribution at the end of the year using a baseline methodology. The extent to which a county child welfare agency has or has not met its baseline will not be used to determine the services for which private child placing agencies will be paid. Private child placing agencies will only be paid for the individual services provided and that which are agreed upon with the county child welfare agency.

The assumption is that generally “adoptive family readiness” and “post-placement support for families” will be provided by the private child placing agencies; “post placement support for children” and “legal services” will be provided by counties. However, this will not be the case for all adoptions, and the private child placing agencies and county child welfare agencies may agree that the private child placing agency will provide all four services at any time and in any service agreement.

## VIII. PAYMENT PROCEDURES

### Private Child Placing Agencies

Contracted child placing agencies must submit requests for payments by the 10<sup>th</sup> of each month. **Requests for payments must be emailed to [app.contracts@dhhs.nc.gov](mailto:app.contracts@dhhs.nc.gov).** Documents containing confidential information must be sent password protected or via encryption. The following documents are required:

1. Monthly APP Invoice.
  - a. A signed invoice (pdf) must be submitted even if no payment is requested.
  - b. Please send only **one (1) copy** of the signed invoice.
  - c. The pdf invoice document must fit on one page.
  - d. Each invoice should be emailed as a separate document.
  - e. Please **do not specifically password protect** the invoice. There is no confidential information contained in that document.
2. The Contract Agency Monthly Reporting Form (DSS-5320A).
  - a. You must submit this even if there are no adoptions. Type “NO ADOPTIONS COMPLETED” on the first line for that month.
  - b. This should be emailed password protected as a separate document.
3. The Adoption Services Agreement (DSS- 5113) for each child listed on the DSS-5320A.
  - a. You may submit all ASAs in one document.
  - b. The document must be password protected.

## County Child Welfare Agencies

County child welfare agencies will receive a one-time, year-end allocation of funding as outlined in Section III.

County child welfare agencies will no longer be required to attest to having expended prior year's adoption incentive funding in order to receive APP funding.

### To receive payment:

1. Submit the DSS-5320 Adoption Promotion Program Fund/DSS Adoption Reporting workbook.
  - a. Submit via email on September 10<sup>th</sup>, December 10<sup>th</sup>, March 10<sup>th</sup>, and no later than **June 3rd**.
  - b. Year-end workbooks must be received **no later than June 3<sup>rd</sup>**. All data is required to calculate the proportional distribution payments.
  - c. If no adoptions are completed in a month, document "NO ADOPTIONS COMPLETED" on the first line for that month.
  - d. Complete **all** sections for each child.
  - e. The workbook must be sent password protected and/or via encrypted email as it contains confidential information.
  - f. Workbooks are emailed to [app.contracts@dhhs.nc.gov](mailto:app.contracts@dhhs.nc.gov).
2. Agencies must properly close out the child's 5094 using the code for Adoption and open the 5095 for adoption assistance benefits.