

September 15, 2016

DEAR COUNTY DIRECTORS OF SOCIAL SERVICES

DEAR EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS OF ADOPTION CHILD PLACING AGENCIES

SUBJECT: ADOPTION PROMOTION PROGRAM FUND

The Division of Social Services announces the availability of the Adoption Promotion Program Fund to Departments of Social Services and licensed child placing agencies for SFY 2017. This fund has made it possible for hundreds of children who were living in foster care homes or institutions to be adopted into safe and secure homes.

PURPOSE: The purpose of the fund is to enhance and expand adoption programs, to secure permanent homes for hard to place children and to encourage partnerships between public and private agencies to achieve permanency for children in a timely manner by providing incentives for the adoption of special needs children. Participating agencies are compensated for adoption services that culminate in the finalization of an adoption of a child from foster care. These services, as defined below, are recruitment of adoptive families, pre-adoption training, post placement support and the facilitation of legal procedures resulting in the finalization of an adoption.

- **Recruitment** is the process of general recruiting, assessment and approval of families as prospective adoptive placement resources.
- **Pre-adoption training** is preparatory training for prospective adoptive families to provide knowledge and skills necessary for parenting children with special needs.
- **Post Placement Support** is defined as services provided by an adoption agency from the time that a child is placed in the home of his or her prospective adoptive parents and the time that that child's adoption is finalized in court. These services include support and referrals that are specific to ensuring the success of the adoption and go beyond the scope of the monthly mandated visits.
- **Facilitation of Legal Procedures** is the completion of the legal work necessary to finalize an adoption.

BASELINE: A county's baseline is determined by averaging the number of children who exited the foster care system by a decree of adoption during the last four years after discarding the year with the highest number of decrees of adoption.

Information for the baseline comes from the Child Placement and Payment System (CPPS) database. 5094's closed due to adoptions realized within the fiscal year will be counted towards the baseline. We believe this is the most accurate reflection of the total number of completed adoptions by county agencies.

It came to the attention of the Division that there were various discrepancies in the actual baseline numbers for the past several years. We have pulled reports from CPPS for the past four years and recalculated all 100 county Departments of Social Services baselines. Please review the baseline information (Attachment 1) and contact the Division of Social Services immediately if you have any questions.

County Departments of Social Services may apply for reimbursement of adoption services culminating in the issuance of a decree of adoption after exceeding their predetermined baseline **and** spending or encumbering previously received funds from the Adoption Promotion Program Fund.

Reimbursement requests for youth 13-18 years old and sibling groups of three or more placed together in the same home may be submitted for disbursement of funds, regardless of whether the agency has met their baseline. Previous reimbursements from the fund must have been spent or encumbered prior to the agency's first submission of request for payment.

FUNDING AMOUNTS: The payment levels for disbursement of the Adoption Promotion Program Fund for SFY 2017 are:

- \$7,200 per child for children 0-12 years old;
- \$12,000 per child for children 13-18 years old, and
- \$12,000 per child for sibling groups of three or more who are placed together at the same time in an adoptive home.

Payments are only made on behalf of children who have been determined eligible or potentially eligible for adoption assistance benefits. Children who meet the "potentially eligible" criteria for adoption assistance also qualify for consideration in determining the agency's baseline.

SHARING FUNDING: This program is designed to encourage partnerships between licensed child placing agencies and departments of social services in achieving permanency for children from the foster care system. The completion of the Adoption Services Agreement form (DSS-5113) <https://www2.ncdhhs.gov/info/olm/forms/dss/dss-5113-ia.pdf> is an essential part of the collaboration process. We ask that you follow the guidelines listed below as you are working together with other agencies.

- 100% reimbursement is paid to an agency only when that agency completes all four service areas: recruits, trains, provides post placement support to the prospective adoptive family and facilitates the completion of the legal paperwork to finalize the adoption.
- Partial payments are paid when agencies work together to complete an adoption.
- It is imperative that partnering agencies **mutually predetermine** each agency's responsibilities in the adoption process and the percentage of payment that each agency will request, if placement is shared, **PRIOR** to work being initiated and completed.
- Ideally, the Adoption Services Agreement will be signed by both agencies at the time an adoptive family is identified or selected for a specific child.
- The Adoption Services Agreement should be thought of as a contract for services.
- Agencies should only be reimbursed for services they have provided.

- Whether or not a county Department of Social Services has met their baseline **will not** be used as a determining factor in what percentage a partnering agency is reimbursed. **Previous letters have clearly indicated there are funding restrictions in place that indicate it is not permissible, when working in partnership with another agency, for one agency to claim full reimbursement even though the other agency is not eligible for payment from the Division.**
- The Adoption Services Agreement shall indicate services provided by each agency and be submitted with requests for reimbursement when two agencies work together to finalize an adoption. Each agency **must** mutually acknowledge the agreed upon financial arrangement by signing the Adoption Services Agreement.
- When determining whether the custodial agency or placing agency is to provide one of the four indicated services, only one agency can be checked for each service. Each service category is worth 25% reimbursement.

Agencies are encouraged to have thoughtful conversations during the Adoption Services Agreement negotiation process. Below are some examples of specific tasks associated with each service area to help guide your conversations. Please know this is not an exhaustive list.

Recruitment of Family

- Family participated in general interest meeting, recruitment fair, etc., regarding becoming an adoptive parent.
- Agency completed screening interview to determine if family was appropriate for TIPS-MAPP.

Training of Family

- Agency provided TIPS-MAPP or equivalent training.
- Agency facilitated licensure process.
- Agency prepared PPA for family.

Placement Supervision

- Agency provided ongoing supervision and supportive services to the adoptive parent and child beyond mandated contact visits.
- Referrals were provided to ensure the success of the adoption.

Legal Paperwork

- Who facilitated the completion of the legal paperwork? (petition, child consent, affidavit of fees, information sharing, vital records, etc.)
- Consider which agency is gathering and completing the information rather than reviewing and submitting to the court.

FUNDING USES: Allowable expenditures include direct provision or purchase by contract of Adoption Promotion Services. Below you will find some examples of allowable services:

- Contracting with out-of-state agencies that are providing an adoptive family for a child.
- Facilitation of cross jurisdictional placements.
- Activities surrounding the recruitment, training, preparation, assessment and retention of adoptive parents.
- Completion of Pre-Placement Assessments.

- Services provided to the child and family to sustain the adoptive placement prior to finalization.
- Adoption preparation activities for youth. Some examples include: Adoption workshops, Adoption preparation camps such as Under One Sky, identify and utilize resources to assist the child in understanding their biological and cultural heritage, etc.
- Targeted child specific recruitment activities. Some examples include: Having professional photos taken for their NC Kids registration, creating an internal Gallery of waiting children, coordinating matching events, purchasing child specific recruitment materials.
- Create or update an adoption resource library.
- Purchase a billboard or banners to display the need for adoptive families in your community.
- Legal services to expedite the adoption process.
- Specialized assessments and subsequent recommended services for a child that would assist in locating and/or sustaining an identified adoptive placement. These services shall not be covered by any other funding source or medical insurance program such as Medicaid or private insurance.
- Social worker travel associated with the recruitment, assessment and training of adoptive parents, as well as post placement support.
- Local and national adoption conferences to enhance skills of adoption staff and adoptive families.

This is not an exhaustive list of examples for uses of these funds. We encourage agencies to network with other county agencies to gather ideas or partner together for recruitment and retention events.

Funds cannot be used to purchase automobiles for the county or to supplant the salaries of county workers. As you plan your activities, be mindful that these funds should not be treated as recurring. Funding amounts are not guaranteed from year to year and are dispersed on a first come first served basis.

PROCEDURE FOR REIMBURSEMENT:

County Departments of Social Services:

County DSS agencies may request payment from the Adoption Promotion Program Fund after July 1, 2016 once they have exceeded their baseline **or** when they have completed an adoption of a teen (age 13 or older) or a sibling group of three or more placed together at the same time in an adoptive home.

An agency does not have to wait to meet their baseline in order to submit a request for reimbursement for a teen or sibling group.

Please follow the steps below when requesting reimbursement from the Adoption Promotion Program Fund:

1. Submit the Adoption Promotion Program Fund Reimbursement Form (DSS-5320) <https://www2.ncdhs.gov/info/olm/forms/dss/DSS-5320-ia.pdf> listing all adoptions from foster care completed to date. **Children should always be listed in order of adoption decree date beginning July 1, 2016.** Decree dates are how it is determined when each county has exceeded their baseline and is eligible for reimbursement. (See example A)

- Please note that even if an agency has not met their baseline and they are only requesting reimbursement for a teen or sibling adoption, it is still necessary to list any and all adoptions completed thus far. (See example B)
 - If children have already been listed on one request for reimbursement, they do not need to be listed on any future requests for reimbursement. Only submit children one time. (See example C)
 - Payments are only made after a case is activated in the Child Placement and Payment System via DSS-5095 and the child's 5094 has been closed.
2. Submit the Adoption Services Agreement (DSS-5113) <https://www2.ncdhhs.gov/info/olm/forms/dss/dss-5113-ia.pdf> for any child where funding is to be shared with a private partner agency.
 - Each agency **must** sign the agreement.
 - Be sure that the child's name on the Adoption Services Agreement matches the child's name on the DSS-5320.
 3. County agencies that received payments from the Adoption Promotion Program Fund previously **must** provide an **Affidavit of Expenditures (Attachment 2)** documenting how previous monies received were used to enhance or expand their adoption services program before additional funds can be received for the current fiscal year. *Agencies must provide the Affidavit of Expenditures form with their first request for payment.*
 - Complete the Affidavit in its entirety by providing the total amount of money that was received, the fiscal year in which it was received and document specifically how the money **was used or will be used in its entirety before the end of SFY 2017** to enhance and/or expand adoption services for the agency.
 - Do not send supporting documentation of the expenses, however, understand that the Division can request copies of contracts and/or receipts to verify services at any time.
 4. Mail the Adoption Promotion Program Fund Request for Reimbursement form (DSS-5320), Adoption Services Agreements (DSS-5113) and the Affidavit of Expenditures (Attachment 2) to the Division.
 - **The deadline for requests for reimbursement is June 5, 2017 to allow sufficient time to process requests by the end of the state fiscal year.**
 - **Agencies may submit requests for reimbursement for adoptions completed in the month of June 2017 up until July 10, 2017.** No requests will be accepted or processed after that time.
 - Requests for payments should be sent to Kim Best at the following address (please note this is a new address):

Regular Mail

North Carolina Division of Social Services
 Adoption Promotion Program Fund
 2445 Mail Service Center
 Raleigh, North Carolina 27699-2445

FED-EX or UPS

North Carolina Division of Social Services
 Adoption Promotion Program Fund
 820 S. Boylan Avenue
 Raleigh, North Carolina 27699-2445

- For questions regarding the Adoption Promotion Program Fund, please contact Kim Best at (919) 527-6254 or kimberly.best@dhhs.nc.gov.

Private Contract Agencies:

The procedure for submitting adoption promotion payments by private, contract agencies in the 2016/2017 contract period has changed. Please carefully read and follow all the instructions below:

1. Agencies will no longer submit the "Reimbursement Transmittal".
2. Instead agencies will complete, sign and submit the "**DSS-1571 III**" each month (see attached example).
 - Agencies will type in their total payment each month in column "(2) Current Expenses" on line "23. Adoption Payments" on the tab for that month.
 - Ensure the person who prepares the report is different from the person who authorizes it. Sign in blue ink.
 - By the 10th of each month, send **ONE original** and **ONE copy** of the 1571.
 - Submit a 1571 *even if the agency has no payments* for that month.
3. Agencies will continue to fully complete & submit **one** "Adoption Promotion Program Fund Reimbursement Form" (DSS-5320) including all adoptions billed that month.
4. Agencies must also continue to submit **one** "Adoption Services Agreement" (DSS-5113) for every adoption. This must be fully completed and signed by the agency and the County DSS. If it is not signed by both parties, neither will get paid.
5. All of the above must be sent by **hard copy via mail or FedEx/UPS**. Confidential information regarding clients cannot be emailed.

Regular Mail:

NC Division of Social Services
Attn: Michelle Reines
2410 Mail Service Center
Raleigh, NC 27699-2410

Fed Ex or UPS:

NC Division of Social Services
Attn: Michelle Reines
820 S Boylan Ave, McBryde East
Raleigh, NC 27603

In addition, the quarterly Performance Status Report form has changed. Please see the attachment for the current form. This report is due October 10th, January 10th, April 10th and July 10th. The 4th quarter report will serve as the agency's end of year report. Questions or concerns regarding the Adoption Promotion Program Fund for contract agencies can be directed to Michelle Reines at (919)-527-6437 or michelle.reines@dhhs.nc.gov.

In an effort to provide additional guidance regarding the Adoption Promotion Program Fund, the Division has scheduled a Go To webinar on **Thursday, October 13, 2016 at 10:00 am**. We hope all county and private partner agencies will make every effort to attend. This will be a wonderful opportunity to have your questions answered and network regarding creative ways to enhance your adoption programs. Please remember that registration is required for Go To webinars. To register, click on the link provided: <https://attendee.gototraining.com/r/5210620065718721026> Once you register you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the training.

We encourage you to keep accurate records of the use of funds for auditing purposes. The purpose of the fund is to recognize and reward exceptional performance in adoption services. It is our expectation that all participating agencies adhere to best practice standards in providing these services. Failure to

adhere to best practice standards will result in an agency's ineligibility to continue to participate in the Fund.

The Division is committed to providing funding for this program and appreciates all of your efforts to provide safe, permanent homes for North Carolina's children.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Kevin Kelley". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'K'.

Kevin Kelley, MSW
Section Chief, Child Welfare Services

Attachments (7):

1. Adoption Promotion Fund SFY 2017 Baseline
2. Affidavit of Adoption Expenditures
3. DSS-5320 Example A
4. DSS-5320 Example B
5. DSS-5320 Example C
6. Performance Status Report Form
7. DSS-1571 Invoice Example