

# ADMINISTRATIVE UPDATES

From the Office of Children, Youth and Families (OCYF)

Department of Human Services

## Upcoming Events: Promoting Educational Stability for Youth.

The Division of Policy continues to facilitate quarterly meetings with the county children and youth agencies (CCYAs) and regional office to provide technical assistance, promote collaboration, and highlight new initiatives and successes promoting educational stability for children involved with dependency court. Quarterly sessions also help to bridge communication gaps when identified and support [the roles and responsibilities](#) of CCYAs. For more information please visit, [pa.gov/en/agencies/dhs/resources/early-learning-child-care/education-stability-child-welfare-services.html](https://pa.gov/en/agencies/dhs/resources/early-learning-child-care/education-stability-child-welfare-services.html). To find an appropriate contact for questions related to the education of children served by CCYAs visit the [Foster Care Contact Directory \(center-school.org\)](#).

Starting July 8, 2024, and every Monday thereafter until August 12, 2024, OCYF will be promoting a 2024 'Back to School' Campaign. This year's campaign is a collaboration between OCYF, the American Bar Association Center on Children and the Law, the Center for Schools and Communities, and the Pennsylvania Department of Education, Bureau of Special Education. The campaign will assist CCYAs, providers and school personnel with resources, materials, and check-ins for the upcoming school year. Technical assistance trainings will also include topics such as governing laws, complex cases, special education and IEPs, as well as Chafee Education and Training Grant (ETG), FosterEd and Independent Living. All resources related to supporting educational stability can be found on the department's [Education Stability](#) webpage. For additional education resources visit [Education Stability for Children and Youth in Foster Care in Pennsylvania - Pennsylvania Foster Care \(pafostercare.org\)](#).

The 2024 Paving the Way to Educational Success Conference is scheduled for October 16-18, 2024 in King of Prussia, Pennsylvania. This conference is sponsored by the Pennsylvania Department of Education's Education for Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness (ECYEH) and Educational Stability for Children and Youth in

Foster Care programs and is held in collaboration with the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services and Center for Schools and Communities. This conference is a unique learning opportunity to support children and youth experiencing homelessness and students experiencing foster care. For more information related to this conference and additional events, go to visit Upcoming Events, located at [centerforschoolsandcommunities.org](https://centerforschoolsandcommunities.org), or join the email distribution list at [hsforms.com](https://hsforms.com).

## Final Rule, Designated Placement requirements under Titles IV-E and IV-B for LGBTQI+ children

On April 26, 2024, the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) issued a Final Rule on Designated Placement Requirements Under Titles IV-E and IV-B for LGBTQI+ children. The Final Rule dictates that IV-E/IV-B agencies ensure that all placements including those for LGBTQI+ children are free from harassment, mistreatment, and abuse. The IV-E/IV-B agencies must ensure there are Designated Placements available for all LGBTQI+ children in foster care who request or would benefit from such a placement, although nothing in the Final Rule requires or authorizes an IV-E/IV-B provider to qualify or serve as a Designated Provider.

These Designated Placements must be trained with the appropriate knowledge and skills to provide for the needs of the child's self-identified sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression to establish an environment that supports the child's LGBTQI+ status. Designated Placements must facilitate the child's access to age- or developmentally-appropriate resources, services, and activities that support their health and well-being.

Title IV-E/IV-B agencies must implement a process of notification of and request for Designated Placements which provides all children age 14 and over, and children under age 14 who have been removed from their home due to familial conflict about their sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression or sex characteristics, or have disclosed their LGBTQI+ status or identity, or is otherwise known to the agency, with an opportunity to express their needs and concerns

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and safeguards their privacy and confidentiality.

An LGBTQI+ child may request a Designated Placement or request that their current placement be offered services to become a Designated Placement. The notice must be provided in an age- or developmentally appropriate manner both verbally and in writing and must inform the child how they may request a Designated Placement, the process the IV-E/IV-B agency will respond to their request and information of the nonretaliation protections and the process by which a child may report a concern about retaliation.

The Final Rule indicates that training is required for all employees, including contractors and subcontractors, who have responsibility for placing children in foster care, making placement decisions, or providing services. Employees should be trained to implement the procedural requirements and are adequately prepared with the appropriate knowledge and skills to serve an LGBTQI+ child related to their sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression. Title IV-E/IV-B agencies must follow the requirements of this section beginning on October 1, 2026. OCYF will be issuing guidance in the form of a Bulletin related to this Final Rule.

### **Voluntary Resolution Agreement Between the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services and the Federal Office of Civil Rights**

In July 2023, the Department of Human Services (DHS) and the Federal Office of Civil Rights (OCR) entered into a Voluntary Resolution Agreement (VRA) to resolve a complaint filed alleging discrimination, specifically withholding participation in services, based on an Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) defined condition. DHS and by extension the OCYF receives federal funding including Foster Care Title IV-E and Social Services Block Grant from the Administration of Children and Families. As a recipient of federal financial assistance, DHS OCYF and its program offices including county children and youth agencies (CCYAs) and agencies with which they contract are obligated to comply with federal civil rights laws and is subject to Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and its implementing regulations. Section 504 prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability in all operations of any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance. Additionally, as a public entity providing state government services, DHS OCYF is obligated to comply with Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act and its implementing regulation. Title II prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability by state and local government agencies, including denying opportunities to benefit from services and failing to reasonably modify policies and procedures. By entering into the agreement DHS OCYF affirmed

that it will comply with all provisions of Section 504 and Title II of the ADA. To ensure compliance by DHS OCYF and the county children and youth agencies OCR outlined several requirements that apply to OCYF and the county children and youth agencies. To transmit these requirements to CCYAs OCYF has issued a series of Special Transmittals.

OCYF and CCYAs have been working to meet the requirements set by the VRA. The first Special Transmittal, released on September 1, 2023, provided CCYAs with information on the development of a Notice of Nondiscrimination and the Grievance Procedure. The second Special Transmittal, released on December 21, 2023, provided CCYAs with information on the development and implementation of the county's Nondiscrimination Policy and Procedure. The third Special Transmittal, to be released in late April 2024, outlines requirements for staff training and verification of training. These training requirements extend to CCYAs and the agencies with which they contract. All staff involved in the provision of child welfare services to children and families must take the approved training, *Supporting Children and Families with Disabilities*, by July 31, 2024. OCYF worked in collaboration with the Pennsylvania Child Welfare Resource Center (CWRC) to create the *Supporting Children and Families with Disabilities* training. This training has been approved by the federal OCR and meets the requirements of the VRA. The training is now live in E-Learn for individuals to self-enroll. Contact [RA-PWOCYF-ADARESOURCE@PA.GOV](mailto:RA-PWOCYF-ADARESOURCE@PA.GOV) for more information related to the VRA.

### **Trauma Training Available for Child Welfare Professionals**

OCYF is pleased to announce the continuation of our partnership with the Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services in contracting with Lakeside Global Institute to provide Pennsylvania child welfare professionals with **FREE trauma training**. A child welfare professional includes anyone who serves children and families who live in Pennsylvania. This applies to professionals or organizations that work to improve the lives of children and families.

Interested in workshops? Visit [lakesidelink.com/training/lgi-trauma-workshops-2024/](https://lakesidelink.com/training/lgi-trauma-workshops-2024/).

Interested in the Intensive Courses? Visit [lakesidelink.com/training/course-registration-dhs-2024/](https://lakesidelink.com/training/course-registration-dhs-2024/).

Questions relating to any of these trainings shall be directed to Beth Hall at: [bethh@lakesidetraining.org](mailto:bethh@lakesidetraining.org)

### **OCYF Trauma Team**

The OCYF Trauma Team has begun the trauma-sensitive phase with the release of the online training, “Developing Trauma Sensitivity in Therapeutic Foster Care” in August of 2023. Since then, OCYF has begun to work toward the implementation of trauma-sensitive internally. Residential facilities can look forward to trauma-sensitive implementation beginning with the release of training on the Child Welfare Resource Centers E-learn Catalog in October 2024. A county foster care and adoption providers’ training will be released in 2025. OCYF Regional offices will begin to provide technical assistance on trauma-sensitive in 2025. Please direct any questions related to the work of the OCYF Trauma Team to the resource account at [RA-pwocyftrauma@pa.gov](mailto:RA-pwocyftrauma@pa.gov).

### **Parent Townhall Meeting**

The Child Welfare Resource Center (CWRC) hosted a Parent Townhall Meeting on March 26th in Reading, Pennsylvania. The purpose of the Parent Townhall was to engage parents with lived experience in Pennsylvania’s child welfare system and to learn about their views on the successes and areas for improvement within the system. Parents with prior involvement with children and you from Berks, Chester, Delaware, Lebanon, Lehigh, Montgomery, and Schuylkill counties were recruited for the event. CWRC plans to host Parent Townhall Meetings regionally across the state in 2024. When information is shared by CWRC about upcoming Parent Townhall Meetings, please spread the word about this opportunity. To learn more, contact Felicia Matriccino, Parent Ambassador at [PAParent@pitt.edu](mailto:PAParent@pitt.edu) or 717-605-0230.

### **Act 48 of 2023**

Act 48 of 2023, entitled “Giving Kinship Care Providers a Voice in Child Custody Proceedings” was signed by Governor Shapiro on December 14, 2023. Act 48 amends Title 42 (Judiciary and Judicial Procedure) to outline new requirements for the provision of timely notification of hearings to “potential kinship care resources.” The Act defines “potential kinship care resource” as an individual who meets the requirements to be an emergency caregiver and has expressed a willingness to be a kinship caregiver for a dependent child. Further, Act 48 requires the court to direct the county agency to provide the child’s potential kinship care resource with timely notice of the hearing; to provide a potential kinship care resource with the right to be heard during a scheduled hearing or at a separate dispositional hearing, but only as to the individual’s qualifications to provide kinship care;

and to render a decision, once a potential kinship care resource has had an opportunity to address the court, whether the potential kinship care resource may receive notice or participate in future hearings. Act 48 ensures that family and kinship care provider voices are heard, and additional kin supports and connections are identified and documented. All provisions of Act 48 took effect on February 12, 2024. OCYF will be releasing guidance related to Act 48 in a Special Transmittal.

### **National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD) Federal Review**

Pennsylvania participated in a modified NYTD Review by the Administration of Children and Families (ACF) on January 17-18, 2024. The modified review focused on the technical data reporting aspects of NYTD. This modified technical data review will allow Pennsylvania the opportunity to address identified technical challenges to better improve NYTD data collection. ACF will provide OCYF with their findings and recommendations to improve NYTD data collection. Additional information will be provided in the near future. Questions related to the NYTD Review can be directed to Teresa Musser at [temusser@pa.gov](mailto:temusser@pa.gov).

### **National Youth in Transition Database**

The National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD) collects information in the following areas: Baseline Population (every youth in foster care who reaches age 17), Served Population (any youth or young adult receiving independent living services regardless of age) and Follow-up Population (youth surveys at age 19 and 21 depending on Cohort period). Pennsylvania is currently in Cohort 4 for 21-year-old follow-up surveys. The 2024 B period began on April 1, 2024 and runs through September 30, 2024. Counties will have until October 15, 2024 to submit follow-up surveys and served population data. Counties can log onto [www.getnytdpa.org](http://www.getnytdpa.org) to enter their served and survey data. NYTD questions can be directed to Lindsey Glezen at [linglezen@pa.gov](mailto:linglezen@pa.gov) or 717-787-7056.

If you have new staff, need assistance with resetting your password, forgot your username, or have other technical assistance questions related to NYTD, please contact the NYTD Help Desk at 800-436-4105 or [getnytd@pcgus.com](http://getnytd@pcgus.com).

### **Chafee Education and Training Grant Programs**

The Pennsylvania Chafee Education and Training Grant (ETG) application and instructions for the 2024 – 2025 academic year are now available on PHEAA’s website at [Chafee Education and Training Grant Program \(pheaa.org\)](https://pheaa.org). The application deadline for the 2024-2025 academic year is January 31, 2025.

As a reminder, current ETG award recipients will automatically be enrolled for the next academic year and do not need to complete another ETG application. The ETG award amount cannot exceed the students cost of attendance.

Please contact PHEAA at 1-800-831-0797 with questions about the Chafee applications or a youth’s current application status. Questions regarding the ETG program can be directed to Lindsey Glezen at [linglezen@pa.gov](mailto:linglezen@pa.gov) or at 717-787-7056.

### **Fostering Independence Tuition Waiver Program**

The Fostering Independence through Education Program, known as FosterEd, requires Pennsylvania post-secondary institutions to award a waiver of tuition and mandatory fees for Pennsylvania resident youth who meet Chafee ETG eligibility requirements and have applied for all available federal and state grants. Tuition and mandatory fee waivers apply to public (state) colleges and universities, community colleges, private post-secondary institutions, and other eligible schools. Youth are eligible to receive the waivers for 5 years, which need not be consecutive, or until age 26.

All youth who apply for Chafee ETG are automatically evaluated for FosterEd. This is no separate application.

In addition to the waivers, each post-secondary institution must appoint a Point of Contact (POC) to assist youth with eligibility, technical assistance, and other resources that may be available to them on and off campus. County and private provider IL caseworkers/coordinators may be contacted by the POC to verify a youth’s eligibility. This is a critical step in assisting youth with verifying their eligibility when entering post-secondary education and financial aid packages being awarded.

Each post-secondary education institution is required to have their identified POC listed on their website. A list of POCs can be found on the Center for Schools and Communities website at [Foster Care Contact Directory \(center-school.org\)](https://center-school.org).

Additional information about the tuition waiver can be found at [PHEAA.org/FosterEd](https://pheaa.org/FosterEd).

Questions related to the FosterEd program can be directed to Lindsey Glezen at [linglezen@pa.gov](mailto:linglezen@pa.gov) or at 717-787-7056.

### **Credit Reports**

All CCYAs are required to run a credit check for all youth in foster care beginning at age 14 from each of the three Credit Bureaus as required by the Social Security Act §475 (5)(I) [Social Security Act §475 \(ssa.gov\)](https://ssa.gov). Each Credit Bureau has a specific contact person and process to ensure foster care youths’ credit history checks are completed appropriately. If you have questions regarding credit report history of foster care youth or are having issues obtaining a credit history from one of the Credit Bureaus, please contact Lindsey Glezen at [linglezen@pa.gov](mailto:linglezen@pa.gov) or 717-787-7056.

### **Act 118 of 2022**

Act 118 of 2022, signed by Governor Wolf on November 3, 2022, amends Title 67 (Public Welfare) and Title 42 (Judiciary and Judicial Procedure) to include provisions relating to family finding, Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (APPLA), transition planning and data collection. Act 118 requires county children and youth agencies (CCYAs) to submit data to the department when the court terminates jurisdiction of a child/youth, age 18 years of age or older. Data for a child/youth who returns to care after terminating court jurisdiction shall be reported to the department again following termination of court jurisdiction. As a reminder, Act 118 requires that specific information be submitted via each county’s DocuShare folder. Requirements related to the specific information that needs to be reported to the department are outlined within, OCYF Special Transmittal-Act 118 (APPLA) released on June 28, 2023. If you need a copy of the Special Transmittal, have questions or need assistance related to submitting your data, please contact Lindsey Glezen at [linglezen@pa.gov](mailto:linglezen@pa.gov) or 717-787-7056.

### **Act 131 of 2022**

The Office of Children, Youth and Families (OCYF) Bulletin #3700-23-01, entitled Implementation of Act 131 (Resource Family Legislation Act), repeal of Act 68 of 2005 (The Resource Family and Adoption Process Act), and repeal of Act 73 of 2005 (The Resource Family Care Act), was issued on June 28, 2023. Act 131 defines “resource family”, addresses the legal responsibilities of public and private children and youth agencies, and protects a resource family’s fair consideration as a permanent resource. Bulletin #3700-23-01

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provides clarification and direction to both public and private children and youth agencies regarding the implementation of Act 131. This Bulletin rescinds and replaces Bulletin 3700-08-01 Implementation of Act 68 of 2005 (The Resource Family and Adoption Act), Act 73 of 2005 (The Resource Family Care Act) and Act 76 of 2007.

### **Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)**

Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) issued guidance to school entities on August 30, 2023, regarding *Change in Age of Eligibility for Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)*. The communication informed school entities that effective no later than September 5, 2023, all students entitled to FAPE and the rights and procedural safeguards under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Chapter 14 of Title 22 of the Pennsylvania Code may remain enrolled in public school until they turn 22 years of age. This includes students who turned 21 and exited during or after the 2022-2023 school term.

PDE will be contacting students with disabilities who turned 21 and exited during or after the 2022-2023 school term. Local Education Agency (LEA) should also contact those students and provide them the option to re-enroll and access FAPE until their 22nd birthday.

#### *How does this apply to youth in care with County Children and Youth Agency (CCYA):*

If you have a student who is eligible under IDEA, they are entitled to FAPE until last day of the age of 21. If you have a student on or around the age of 21, contact education decision-makers and school entities regarding Individual Education Plan (IEP) re-evaluations and revisions, to ensure their plans reflect the new changes.

CCYAs and Independent Living (IL) workers are encouraged to coordinate IL services with a student's IEP transition planning team to maximize the benefit to the youth. Transition services within the IEP often overlap with service plans within IL services. The IEP and IL transition plan must include appropriate measurable post-secondary goals related to training, education, employment and, when appropriate, independent living skills. Both transition plans must be based on the student's needs and interests, and for IEPs, must be updated every year. Transition services can include instruction in using public transportation, budgeting, cooking, access to college preparation programming (including information on applications for Chafee Grants and other financial aid resources), high school and post-secondary vocational programming and linkages to OVR.

While FAPE under the IDEA does not include education beyond grade 12, there is a requirement

to continue to offer to develop and implement an IEP for eligible students with a disability who graduate from high school with a credential other than a regular high school diploma until the student has exceeded the age of eligibility for FAPE.

### **Family First Prevention Services Act**

The Office of Children Youth and Families has added Family First-related content to the Keep Kids Safe website. For information about Pennsylvania-specific Family First information check out [pa.gov/en/agencies/dhs/resources/keep-kids-safe/family-first.html](https://pa.gov/en/agencies/dhs/resources/keep-kids-safe/family-first.html)

For email PA Family First email updates, please subscribe at [listserv.dhs.pa.gov](https://listserv.dhs.pa.gov).

### **Pennsylvania Permanency Barriers Initiatives – American Bar Association (ABA)**

The ABA's Center on Children and the Law Permanency Barriers Project is actively seeking new projects or technical assistance counties.

Technical assistance can range from one training to a few months of engagement. Please reach out if you would like to discuss the ways in which we may be of assistance. Areas in which the ABA is available to help include:

- Improving collaboration and communication between CYS, court, attorneys, and local providers
- How to create a true kin-first culture in your county
- Implementing a race equity lens to child welfare work
- Achieving relational and legal permanence for older youth
- Implementing effective concurrent planning
- Conducting a successful testifying workshop for caseworkers

For more information on Permanency Barriers technical assistance please see:

[PA Permanency Project \(americanbar.org\)](https://pa.permanencyproject.org) or contact Heidi Redlich Epstein at [Heidi.epstein@americanbar.org](mailto:Heidi.epstein@americanbar.org).

### **Pennsylvania State Resource Family Association (PSRFA)**

PSRFA began as a small group in 1974. Since then, they have grown to support children and families involved with foster care, adoption, and kinship care along with local foster parent associations and

agencies who care for the children they serve throughout the state. PSRFA are supporters of legislation and advocacy for family resource care and provides training and education for those seeking guidance. They are a fantastic resource for children and families in these scenarios.

You can learn more about the PSRFA at [psrfa.org](http://psrfa.org).

### **CWEL and CWEB Programs**

#### *Child Welfare Education for Leadership (CWEL)*

The CWEL Program strengthens Pennsylvania public child welfare services by providing graduate level educational opportunities for current public child welfare professionals at 13 partner graduate schools. Counties approve students for either full-time or part-time participation; all students accepted into the program receive tuition and fees at the in-state rate, reimbursement for books, and other benefits. Full-time students are also granted an educational leave from their jobs and their county employers receive reimbursement for the student's salary and benefits. Upon graduation, a work commitment at their county agency is required. This Spring and Summer, 69 students will graduate from their master's degree programs and will return to their agencies well-prepared to enhance the quality of services provided to the children and families of Pennsylvania who become involved with the public child welfare system.

Additional information is available at: [socialwork.pitt.edu/researchtraining/child-welfare-programs/child-welfare-education-leadership-cwel](http://socialwork.pitt.edu/researchtraining/child-welfare-programs/child-welfare-education-leadership-cwel).

#### *Child Welfare Education for Baccalaureates (CWEB)*

Attention Independent Living Professionals! Are you an Independent Living Professional working with young people who want to give back? Are they interested in a career as a child welfare professional? Encourage youth to consider a degree in Social Work and share the benefits of the CWEL Program with them. Social Work majors at our 15 CWEL partner schools are encouraged to apply in their junior year of study. Deadlines are April 30<sup>th</sup> and November 15<sup>th</sup> each year.

Students accepted into the program receive tuition and fees at the in-state rate for their senior year, fellowship payments during their internship, a bonus upon graduation, and more. CWEL students complete an internship at a public child welfare agency and begin their Foundations training. Upon graduation, a one-year work commitment in a Pennsylvania public child welfare agency is required. This Spring and Summer, 27 students will graduate and begin their careers as caseworkers in one of our PA county child welfare

agencies. For more information about the CWEL Program, visit [socialwork.pitt.edu/researchtraining/child-welfare-programs/child-welfare-education-baccalaureates](http://socialwork.pitt.edu/researchtraining/child-welfare-programs/child-welfare-education-baccalaureates).

The CWEL and CWEL Teams are available to provide presentations to County Commissioners, Advisory Boards, Agency Leadership Teams, Agency Staff Members, and Independent Living Programs. For more information and to schedule a presentation, please contact Laura Borish, CWEL Agency Coordinator at [lbb14@pitt.edu](mailto:lbb14@pitt.edu) or 412-334-9122.

### **Pennsylvania Kinship Navigator Program, KinConnector**

The PA KinConnector Program offers kinship caregivers and professionals who work with kinship caregivers support, guidance, training and resources. Please provide kinship caregivers with information about PA KinConnector. The PA KinConnector website is [Kinconnector.org](http://Kinconnector.org) and the helpline can be reached at 866-546-2111.

The website includes a comprehensive, guided search feature of resources in the following topic areas: childcare, clothing, financial assistance, food, legal, medical, school, and support groups. Also available on the website are training opportunities for both professionals and kinship caregivers, printable resources, a podcast series called "Kindred Voices," and a virtual Support Group called "Kindred Spirits."

OCYF encourages all county and provider agencies to connect to PA KinConnector and learn more about the services offered, provide new community resource information for website inclusion and to establish partnerships for program growth across the state. Any questions regarding this program can be directed to Diane Michel at [dmichel@pa.gov](mailto:dmichel@pa.gov) or 717-705-2911.

### **Accurint**

Accurint is an online search tool available to every county throughout the state. It is able to assist with family finding efforts, contact information, criminal checks and identifying individuals for any type of family engagement meeting. Each county must have a county employee who is designated as their Accurint administrator. Administrators can be Accurint users or non-users. Non-user administrators do not count toward the county's allotment of users. Counties may have more than one Accurint administrator. If you or your staff would like training on the Accurint software, please contact Accurint Education Consultant, Bill News, at [William.News@lexisnexisrisk.com](mailto:William.News@lexisnexisrisk.com) or 215-285-7108.

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Additionally, you can look up trainings on the National Training Calendar ([risk.lexisnexis.com/learning-center](http://risk.lexisnexis.com/learning-center)). If you have any questions about Accurint or to set up a non-user administrator account, please contact Jessica Andrews-Slagel at [jandrewssl@pa.gov](mailto:jandrewssl@pa.gov) or 717-787-2726.

### **Mandated Reporter Training**

Pennsylvania Family Support Alliance (PFSA) offers virtual and in-person, three-hour, Mandated Reporter Trainings (MRT) at no cost to mandated reporters in Pennsylvania. PFSA also offers trainings with Spanish translators, American Sign Language and Certified Deaf Interpreter translations.

Trainings include, "Recognizing and Reporting Child Abuse" which meets all the requirements for training on recognizing and reporting child abuse, as well as "Responding to Disclosures of Child Abuse" and "Recognizing and Responding to Child Abuse and Neglect", for mandated reporters who have taken Mandated Reporter Training before and need to take it again. The "Responding to Disclosures of Child Abuse" training is designed to help participants respond to disclosures of child abuse in a way that is sensitive and supportive to the child, but without tainting the child's memory. The "Recognizing and Responding to Child Abuse and Neglect", helps participants recognize the signs of neglect, determine when and how to make a referral, and increase understanding of General Protective Services and agency procedures.

PFSA also offers a specialized Residential Care Facility Training (RCFT) for mandated reporters who are employed by organizations and agencies licensed under Title 55, Chapter 3800, Child Residential and Day Treatment Facilities. The RCFT Program provides information to appropriately identify recordable, reportable and suspected child abuse incidents, as well as information about documentation, minimal facts interviewing and development and implementation of plans of supervision for staff who are under investigation of suspected child abuse.

All trainings utilize a child abuse recognition and reporting training curriculum approved by DHS in consultation with the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) as well as approved by the Department of State (DOS) for persons requiring continuing education credit toward licensure or certification. Additional information and training dates can be found on the PSFA website at [pafsa.org](http://pafsa.org). For questions or to schedule a specific session for your organization, please email PFSA at [training@pa-fsa.org](mailto:training@pa-fsa.org).

The Pennsylvania Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics (PA-AAP) offers Mandated Reporter Trainings, specifically for Primary Care

Physicians (and their staff), Hospitals, Emergency Medical Services and School Nurses, through their Suspected Child Abuse and Neglect (SCAN) program. To schedule in-person or virtual training for medical professionals, contact PA-AAP at [scan@paaap.org](mailto:scan@paaap.org) or call 866-823-7226.

### **SWAN/IL Google Groups**

There are over 1,100 current members of the SWAN/IL ListServ through Google Groups. This is a great way to share confidential information across the network to seek colleague's advice and announce upcoming events. Anyone wishing to join the group must be an employee of a county children and youth agency, SWAN affiliate agency or IL provider. If interested, please contact Isabel Madrigal at [imadrigal@diakon-swan.org](mailto:imadrigal@diakon-swan.org) or 717-558-1223.

### **Interstate Compact Unit**

The PA Interstate Unit does not have the ability to process USPS, FedEx, or UPS "paper mail". When providing any case documents to the Interstate Unit, please use the unit's Resource Accounts, fax, or the Interstate/County DocuShare collection. Case documents include request packets, completed Interstate Compact for the Placement of Children (ICPC) home studies, 100Bs, supervisory reports, Interstate Compact on Adoption and Medical Assistance (ICAMA) documents, etc.

Resource Accounts:

[RA-PA-ICPC@pa.gov](mailto:RA-PA-ICPC@pa.gov) for ICPC cases

[RA-PA-ICAMA@pa.gov](mailto:RA-PA-ICAMA@pa.gov) for ICAMA cases

Interstate Unit Fax Number:

717-425-5562

In a runaway situation, email Amanda Behe at [abehe@pa.gov](mailto:abehe@pa.gov) or Natalie (Primak) Mwaniki at [nmwaniki@pa.gov](mailto:nmwaniki@pa.gov).

### **Clearance Verification Unit**

Childline's Clearance Verification Unit (CVU) provides eligible individuals with the following three clearances: Child Abuse History Clearance, FBI Fingerprint Clearance and National Sex Offenders Registry (NSOR). The Pennsylvania (PA) Child Abuse History clearance can be submitted and paid for online through the Child Welfare Information Solution (CWIS) self-service portal at [compass.state.pa.us/cwis/public/home](http://compass.state.pa.us/cwis/public/home). Applicants are able to view and print their results online.

CVU will also accept PA Child Abuse History Clearance applications in paper format for anyone who may not have access to

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the internet. Results for paper application are mailed to the appropriate address noted on the form and within 14 days from the date that application is received in CVU.

The Commonwealth's vendor for digital fingerprinting is IDEMIA (also referred to as Identogo or MorphoTrust). The fingerprint-based background check is a multi-step process. For general questions about FBI clearances, please contact the FBI Background Check Unit at 1-877-371-5422. For IDEMIA registration, processing, or billing questions, please contact IDEMIA/Identogo at 1-844-321-2101. To register online go to [www.Indentogo.com](http://www.Indentogo.com) or call 1-844-321-2101 and listen to the options menu.

CVU is responsible for processing out-of-state clearances for resource parents, including adoptive and foster parents when a resource parent has resided outside of Pennsylvania within the past five years. Prospective foster and adoptive parents required to obtain an Out-of-State Child Abuse clearance are **no longer required** to submit the clearance to ChildLine for interpretation **IF** the clearance shows *no result (or no record)*. Out-of-State Child Abuse clearances with **ANY** result or record, **are required** to be submitted to ChildLine for interpretation.

Visit [pa.gov/en/agencies/dhs/resources/keep-kids-safe.html](http://pa.gov/en/agencies/dhs/resources/keep-kids-safe.html) for additional information regarding the clearance or call us at 877-371-5422.

**Office of Children, Youth and Families (OCYF)**

P.O. Box 2675  
Harrisburg, PA 17105-2675  
717-787-3984  
[www.dhs.pa.gov](http://www.dhs.pa.gov)

**Save The Date**

48<sup>th</sup> Annual PSRFA Conference  
Celebrating 50 Years of Families Helping Families  
September 26-27, 2024

If you have any further questions, you can contact the PSRFA office at 1-800-951-5151 or email [dkinard@psrfa.org](mailto:dkinard@psrfa.org) or [kiramper@psrfa.org](mailto:kiramper@psrfa.org).

**From the SWAN Prime Contract**

*Diakon-SWAN, LLC/Voce*

**SWAN Portal Version 3.0 Implementation**

The SWAN prime contractor has completed its initial design of the SWAN Portal Version 3.0. This achievement was made possible with the valuable input, feedback, and testing/piloting from affiliate and county agencies. The new design will include all features of the existing system as well as enhancements. Implementation will occur in July.

Post-implementation, the SWAN prime contractor will work to immediately resolve any issues interrupting core functionality, if any present. Afterwards, the focus will switch to additional enhancements and features.

If you would like to preview the SWAN Portal Version 3.0, a drop-in session is offered at this Summer Statewide Meeting. The session is scheduled in the Ebony Room on June 18 from 4-6 pm and June 19 from 11:30 am-1 pm.

If you are unable to attend the drop-in session but would like to schedule a consultation, or if you are having questions about the utility, contact your SWAN regional technical assistant.

**State Fiscal Year 2023-24 Referrals**

As we near the end of state fiscal year (SFY) 2023-2024, some needs-based budget (NBB) dollars are not yet spent. Counties should continue to make referrals for children and families who need services. Affiliates are also encouraged to continue to submit family profile, family matching, and family matching extension service referrals as well.

For referrals to be applied to the SFY 2023-24 NBB, referrals must be submitted to the SWAN prime contractor **by 11:59 pm on or before Sunday, June 30**. Any referral received after this cut-off time will be held and processed in SFY 2024-25. Processing of SFY 2024-25 referrals is expected to begin on Wednesday, July 10.

If your county has exhausted its SWAN SFY 2023-24 NBB dollars, do not stop referring. DHS has authorized the reallocation of funds among counties so the use of these dollars can be maximized. The SWAN prime contractor will continue to process referrals received for SFY 2023-24 until the NBB dollars are exhausted.



### **Affiliate Agreement and SWAN Subcontract Extensions**

DHS/OCYF issued a three-month extension to the SWAN prime contract. The contract extension term begins July 1, 2024 and continues until September 30, 2024. Accordingly, Diakon-SWAN, LLC is extending the Purchase of Service Affiliate Agreements and Subcontractor Agreements for the same contract term.

### **Training Staff Update**

The SWAN prime contractor's training division is thrilled to introduce Training Specialist **Kayla Donahue**. Kayla joined Voce in March and comes with 13 years of experience developing and delivering trainings in both the corporate and non-profit settings. She has worked in public school classroom settings and technical training, as well as direct services in Allegheny County, where she took the lead on training initiatives for both in-home support and internal staff. Kayla is also the proud mother of three boys aged seven, four and two. Please welcome Kayla when you see her at the conference!

### **SWAN LSI Program on Track for Another Strong Finish to State Fiscal Year 2023-2024**

As SFY 2023-24 draws to a close, SWAN LSI paralegals have kept pace in addressing barriers to permanency for Pennsylvania children in foster care. From July 2023 through April 2024, LSI paralegals performed activities for 24,578 unique children. Among those activities were 15,521 diligent searches (9,023 unique children) to locate missing parents and kinship resources, which is vital to family engagement.

LSI paralegal activity is an integral component of the juvenile court system in counties across the Commonwealth. From July 2023 through April 2024, LSI paralegals performed 85,459 juvenile court-related activities, including preparing 36,892 legal documents and attending 18,667 court hearings. Reasons for court attendance range from drafting outcome orders in CPCMS to providing case support in the courtroom for both county solicitors and caseworkers. LSI paralegals' courtroom participation is essential to moving cases forward and ensuring that statutorily required timelines are met.

When a child's permanency goal is changed to adoption, SWAN LSI paralegals' activities help ensure a positive outcome is achieved. From July 2023 through April 2024, LSI paralegals prepared 3,072 TPR petitions as well as 671 adoption-related documents (438 unique children).

Despite challenges in the ever-changing child welfare legal landscape, SWAN LSI paralegals continue to perform at a high level. Moving into a new state fiscal year, SWAN LSI embraces its ongoing partnership with CCYAs working together to achieve positive outcomes for Pennsylvania children and families.

### **Units of Service Referral Rates Show Continued Focus on Older Youth**

During SFY 2023-24, SWAN regional and program technical assistants supported over 70 affiliate agencies across Pennsylvania. From July 2023 to May 2024, affiliates invoiced or received payment for 3,892 child units of service. Notably, 29% (1,148) of these services were referred for older youth aged 13 to 21. Additionally, 61% of older youth received one unit of service while 39% received two or more.

Over the past two state fiscal years, the most referred service for older youth was Child Profile units, comprising 34% of referrals in FY 2023 and 39% in FY 2024. The Child Profile provides a summary of the child's life history, current functioning and special needs. This profile is shared with resource, kinship, custodial or adoptive families to help them understand the child's background and existing relationships. The increasing referral rate for Child Profile units underscores their importance in supporting older youth. Similarly, referrals for the Child Profile Addendum, completed one or two years after the original Child Profile, increased from 12% in FY 2023 to 15% in FY 2024. The Child Profile unit is a cornerstone of successful permanency, greatly supporting the formation of lasting connections.

### **Why the Additional Information Section of the CY130 Is So Important**

In January 2019, PAE began **requiring** a narrative in the CY130 Additional Information section, as it had been optional before that point. When a family seeking more information about a Waiting Child contacts the SWAN Helpline, this information is shared with them, verbatim, as written. This information helps families decide whether to move forward.

PAE is starting to seek clarification between what is expressed as a requirement versus a preference. This helps to "rule families in" rather than "rule families out." For example, if an agency says the family being sought has a mother and father, is that an absolute requirement or a preference? What if a single parent has other family members who can help fill the role of the other parent? Potential matches shouldn't drop interest because

*Continued on p. 10*

they do not fit what is perceived as a requirement rather than a flexible preference.

The prime contractor will be hosting a *Zoom In On Practice* meeting on August 27, 2024 which will focus on the Additional Information section and this change in particular. For more information about SWAN trainings, visit <https://diakon-swan.org/swan/events/upcoming/>.

### **More About Language in Recruitment Materials**

In the spring *Administrative Updates*, information regarding referring to adolescents as “teens” or “teenagers” instead of identifying them as “boys” or “girls” was discussed.

Similarly, it is important to make sure the language used when describing a child’s legal status is honoring as well. It used to be common to say that they were “legally free for adoption” or were “not legally free.” However, the PAE team has moved towards technically correct language to state whether parental rights have been terminated.

Workers may receive gentle feedback from a PAE coordinator suggesting changes to language in a public narrative for the Waiting Child listings ([pa.gov/en/agencies/dhs/resources/adopt-pa-kids.html](https://pa.gov/en/agencies/dhs/resources/adopt-pa-kids.html)) or on a flyer shared on the SWAN/IL Google Group. The shared goal is to ensure that youth (and families) are always presented and characterized respectfully and accurately; every word chosen matters and can make a positive difference in their lives.

### **SWAN Post-permanency Services Respite**

Respite services are available to Pennsylvania families who have adopted, are providing permanent legal custodianship or are formal kinship families. Respite provides a scheduled time apart that allows the parents and the child a time to relax and rejuvenate. A family member, a formal respite provider such as a foster family, a drop-off center or a camp are examples of respite providers. For more information, contact your Post-permanency technical assistant or your regional technical assistant.

A SWAN Units of Service meeting is scheduled for July 30, 2024. Updated Respite Guidelines and the new Case Advocacy benchmarks will be addressed. For details about this meeting, check [diakon-swan.org/swan/events/upcoming/](https://diakon-swan.org/swan/events/upcoming/). For questions about respite services, contact a SWAN Post-permanency technical assistant.

### **Post-permanency Reminders**

Here are a few reminders for affiliates who provide Post-permanency services:

The Support Group unit of service is a six-month-long unit of service. Short-term groups may be offered, but it may take one or more short-term groups to provide families with six months of support groups.

Continue to fill in purchase service amounts for any respite funds provided to families.

*Zoom in on Practice: Back to Basics* trainings will be offered from 10 – 11:30 am on the following dates:

- July 11 – Assessment
- July 18 – Case Advocacy
- July 25 – Respite
- August 1 – Support Group
- Assessment Tools trainings will be offered on the following dates:
  - September 9: 10:00 am – 12:00 pm
  - September 12: 9:00 am – 12:00 pm
  - September 19: 10:00 am – 12:00 pm

For more information about upcoming SWAN trainings, visit [diakon-swan.org/swan/events/upcoming/](https://diakon-swan.org/swan/events/upcoming/).

### **National Adoption Month is Five Months Away!**

November’s National Adoption Month is just a few short months away. During National Adoption Month, the network celebrates permanency through adoption, enhances awareness about the need for permanent families and hosts matching events to promote opportunities for children to experience the belongingness, security and love of a forever family. The SWAN prime contractor has two resources to help plan National Adoption Month events: *Adoption Day Events: A Planner’s Guide* and *Adoption Awareness and Matching Events: Planning for Success*. Both guides are housed in the SWAN Permanency Toolkit ([swantoolkit.org](https://swantoolkit.org)).

Last year the network hosted over fifty National Adoption Month events through the support of DHS/OCYF Adoption Awareness grants. Let’s make this another wonderful year of celebrating permanency for our kids!

### **Incarceration Resource Manual**

Over six years ago, SWAN LSI released the original *SWAN LSI Incarceration Resource Manual (IRM)* to help address the impact of parental incarceration on children in the child welfare system. The IRM was developed as a comprehensive tool for child welfare professionals to use for case planning with incarcerated parents and as a resource to support the county agencies' efforts to engage with these parties. The information contained within can be applied in many ways to strengthen the child-parent connection, such as supporting:

- Contact between the incarcerated parent and child by detailing guidelines and nuances regarding written and telephone communication.
- Parent-child visitation by providing details on visitation schedules or video visitation.
- Permanency by listing services available to the incarcerated parent and re-entry information.

The *IRM* fourth edition is available in the SWAN Permanency Toolkit: [swantoolkit.org/toolkit/09-lsi-legal-services/swan-lsi-incarceration-resource-manual/](http://swantoolkit.org/toolkit/09-lsi-legal-services/swan-lsi-incarceration-resource-manual/)

The committee will begin work on the fifth edition of the manual soon. If you have any updates about county prison policies or procedures, email [lsi-irmupdates@diakon-swan.org](mailto:lsi-irmupdates@diakon-swan.org).

### **SWAN LSI Diligent Search Services**

SWAN LSI paralegals have provided diligent search on behalf of Pennsylvania's children for over two decades. In doing so, paralegals have become experts on the search process while expanding search activities. SWAN LSIPs can support searches for:

- Missing parents;
- Fostering Connections (within 30-days of a child entering care);
- Connections for older youth;
- Locating connections for involvement with FGDM;
- Child Specific Recruitment or OCMI referrals;
- Family connections when a case is accepted for service and annually thereafter; and
- Compliance with the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA).

Nearly every child in care will benefit from diligent search activities at some point in their case.

The *Diligent Search Packet, 9<sup>th</sup> edition*, is the go-to resource for anyone conducting a search and is available on the SWAN Permanency Toolkit: [swantoolkit.org/toolkit/09-lsi-legal-services/diligent-search/](http://swantoolkit.org/toolkit/09-lsi-legal-services/diligent-search/).

If you have any questions about SWAN LSI diligent search services or to request a Diligent Search training, please contact your county's SWAN LSI coordinator.

#### **SWAN Prime Contract**

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[www.diakon-swan.org](http://www.diakon-swan.org)  
[www.dhs.pa.gov/AdoptPAkids](http://www.dhs.pa.gov/AdoptPAkids)



**From the PA Child Welfare Resource Center (CWRC)  
Independent Living (IL) Project  
University of Pittsburgh**

**Older Youth Retreat**

The Older Youth Retreat will be held at the University of Pittsburgh, Johnstown Campus July 29 – August 2, 2024. Registration information was sent to county-identified IL Coordinators and remains open until June 28, 2024. Additional information can be found at [www.payab.pitt.edu/ILRetreat.htm](http://www.payab.pitt.edu/ILRetreat.htm). Please feel free to contact Meghan O'Hare, [meo43@pitt.edu](mailto:meo43@pitt.edu) with any questions regarding the event.

**Older Youth Training and Resources**

There are several sources of information and training related to older youth maintained by the Child Welfare Resource Center that are free and available to all of you.

- PA Child Welfare Resource Center website: [pacwrc.pitt.edu](http://pacwrc.pitt.edu) (Including webinars for older youth: [pacwrc.pitt.edu/webinars](http://pacwrc.pitt.edu/webinars))
- Making Informed Decisions with Older Youth: Youth who have experienced foster care on or after the age of 14 have access to many supports and services into young adulthood. When working with older youth and assisting them in making crucial decisions about their future, we want to ensure their team has considered everything related to education, health insurance, support services, and access to housing. [MakingInformedDecisions.pdf \(pitt.edu\)](#)

**PA Youth Advisory Board (YAB)**

The PA YAB continues to work diligently to ensure they are providing youth and staff across Pennsylvania with new and relevant resources. All resources can be found on the YAB website at [payab.pit.edu](http://payab.pit.edu). Recent YAB projects include:

Know Your Rights Quick Reference Guide: This guide highlights the key rights that youth from the Youth Advisory Board consider essential for youth to be aware of. Understanding their rights is a crucial aspect of advocating for themselves. Familiarity with their rights enhances their knowledge of the system and empowers youth to advocate for themselves more effectively.

Protecting Crowns: Black and brown youth, when removed from their homes, can be placed into environments where their culture is not reflected. These placements may be in rural areas without access to hair products and salons catering to textured hair. This guide is a resource intended to

assist families, workers, and even youth to care for and protect their crown. This initiative is part of YAB's broader efforts to support and empower youth in foster care by providing them with essential resources to advocate for their rights and well-being. The guide aims to educate caregivers and youth about proper hair care techniques, products, and routines that respect and celebrate the cultural significance of hair in their communities. The goal is to ensure that youth in care feel confident and proud of their appearance, which can significantly impact their self-esteem and overall well-being. This project aligns with YAB's mission to create positive change in the substitute care system through education, advocacy, and partnership. It highlights the importance of cultural competence in caregiving and the role of personal identity in the holistic development of young people in foster care.

The Teen Success Agreement: This is a youth-developed written agreement that outlines the age-appropriate activities, responsibilities and life skills for youth ages 13-21 in the child welfare system, and how the caregiver and agency will support those goals. The plan also outlines the house rules and rewards and consequences for different behaviors. The youth, caregiver and provider agency should meet every six months to discuss, complete and update this form.

The YAB Blast Newsletter: This newsletter contains updates, announcements, and resources relevant to foster youth and alumni. These seasonal blasts cover topics such as upcoming events, changes in policies or programs affecting foster youth, educational opportunities, success stories, and advocacy initiatives. They serve as a means of communication to keep key players informed and engaged, providing valuable information and support to the foster youth community in Pennsylvania.

In addition to the above, the YAB is actively cultivating new projects. One initiative involves developing a recommended stipend policy aimed at providing equitable financial resources to all youth. Additionally, YAB is working on creating a guide specifically tailored for caseworkers on how to engage in conversations with Black and Brown youth. These efforts demonstrate YAB's commitment to fostering equity and inclusivity while advocating for the needs and well-being of all youth in Pennsylvania.

**PA Child Welfare Resource Center (CWRC)**  
403 E. Winding Hill Road  
Mechanicsburg, PA 17055  
717-795-9048  
[www.payab.pitt.edu](http://www.payab.pitt.edu)

# ABA Permanency Barriers Project

*A project of the American Bar Association, Center on Children and the Law*

The ABA Permanency Barriers Project works with you to reduce the time children spend in foster care before achieving permanency.

## Principles

1. Permanency begins on Day 1.
2. Small steps add up to change.
3. Full stakeholder engagement is key to realize and maintain system reform.

## Project Approach

### 1 Focus on System Change

ABA staff help local stakeholders develop individualized county action plans. The action plans are based on a thorough assessment of needs, which includes:

- Case file review
- Court observation
- Data analysis
- Focus groups with stakeholders

### 2 County-Driven, County-Owned

Each jurisdiction encounters unique challenges. We form a county Advisory Board and issue-based subcommittees made up of lead decisionmakers, including:

- Child welfare agency administrators and staff
- Behavioral health providers
- Juvenile and family court judges
- School administrators
- Agency, parent, and children's attorneys
- Others, as identified by county

### 3 ABA as Neutral Facilitator and Strategic Partner

ABA staff are on site monthly working to develop and implement reforms.

- Our attorneys bring extensive firsthand knowledge and national perspective to guide your county.
- We ensure all stakeholders join the effort as equal partners.
- We focus on system barriers and engagement between the legal and nonlegal communities at both the county and state level.
- We provide individualized attention, which can include refining court and agency procedures, providing legal analysis, and conducting trainings.

### 4 Improved Outcomes

At the end of this two-year project, you will see:

- More efficient and effective pathways to permanency for every case;
- A reduction of time in foster care for children in your county; and
- Improved communication, network building, and stakeholder collaboration.

## Measurable Results

At the end of the two-year project each county receives a final project report that summarizes results and provides recommendations to sustain system change. To date, the project has:

- ✓ served **55** different counties in **four** states,
- ✓ reduced the time children spend in foster care in all four states by an average of **nine months**,
- ✓ realized a positive impact on more than **3,000** children,
- ✓ saved counties and states over **\$30 million** in foster care costs.

## Targeted Technical Assistance

As an alternative to the two-year model, we provide targeted technical assistance on permanency matters through on-site trainings, developing local protocols, facilitating meetings, and other solutions to address local challenges. ABA technical assistance can range from a one-day training to a multi-month engagement.

## Get Started Today

The ABA Permanency Barriers Project can work with your county to promote permanency for children in foster care.

**For more information, contact:**  
Heidi Redlich Epstein, 202-662-1725  
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