

Permanency Care Assistance The Fostering Connections Act

In October 2008, the *Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act* became law. Things kinship caregivers should know about this law include:

- DFPS must tell relatives when related children are removed from their homes and placed in state care.
- DFPS must tell relatives they may apply to become a foster parent if related children have been removed. DFPS must tell them about other options regarding placement and ways to support the child while in placement.
- Monthly financial assistance is available to help kinship foster parents who sign an agreement with DFPS and subsequently take permanent, legal custody of the child. This is called the *Permanency Care Assistance (PCA)* program.

Foster Home Verification for Kinship Caregivers

Any prospective or current kinship caregiver can pursue foster home verification, if they are interested in supporting a child in DFPS conservatorship who is placed in their care, regardless of the child's case plan. However, foster care placements are *meant to be a temporary arrangement until the permanency plan can be achieved for the child.*

What is Permanency Care Assistance?

The Permanency Care Assistance (PCA) program was created to help children and youth who could not be reunited with their parents or adopted. It will give an extra permanent option for children and youth who might otherwise grow up in foster care. This program requires that relatives and close family friends become the child's verified foster parents for at least 6 months, along with other requirements (see below) before they sign a PCA agreement and the court grants them Permanent Managing Conservatorship. The benefits include monthly financial assistance and health care assistance to help raise the child to adulthood.

Older Youth and Permanency Care Assistance

For youth who are between the ages of 16 and 18 when Permanency Care Assistance (PCA) agreements are signed, the relative or fictive kin who then take legal custody of these youth can continue to receive PCA support until the youth turns 21 years of age, so long as certain educational and/or employment eligibility requirements are met by the youth. Youth in this category can also apply for educational training vouchers (ETVs) for vocational or college pursuits, by contacting regional PAL staff.

College Tuition Waiver

Children and youth who leave DFPS care on or after September 1, 2009 when someone other than the parents are given legal custody of them are eligible for college tuition waivers at a state supported higher education institution. Requests and questions should be routed to the regional PAL staff.

What are the eligibility requirements for Permanency Care Assistance?

To be eligible to sign a Permanency Care Assistance (PCA) agreement with DFPS and receive PCA benefits, kinship families must first become verified as foster families and serve as such for the subject child for at least six consecutive months prior to the transfer of PMC.

In addition:

- DFPS must determine that reunification and adoption are not appropriate permanency options for the child.
- The child must demonstrate a strong attachment to the kinship caregiver.
- The kinship caregiver must have a strong commitment to caring permanently for the child.
- Older youth must be consulted about the PCA plan.
- The caregiver must negotiate, sign, and abide by a PCA agreement, which takes effect on the date that PMC is transferred.
- The child must be in the temporary or permanent managing conservatorship of DFPS on the day before PMC is transferred.
- Subsequent to signing the PCA agreement, the kinship caregiver must be named in court as the permanent managing conservator for the child.

Assuming all the requirements above are met, PCA payments can begin the first of the month following the month in which PMC is transferred to the kinship caregiver. If the agreement is not signed prior to the transfer of PMC, eligibility is lost permanently.

What is the amount of the foster care reimbursement payment?

Kinship caregivers who are verified as a foster home receive the same daily foster care reimbursement payment as non-relative foster parents, depending on the child's service level.

What is the amount of the Permanency Care Assistance monthly payment?

For Permanency Care Assistance payments, the maximum monthly payment amount depends upon the child's authorized service level (ASL) at the time the permanency care agreement is signed. The PCA payment ceiling for a child whose service level is Basic Care is \$400 per month; the payment ceiling for a child whose service level is Moderate, Specialized or Intense is \$545 per month. These payments are similar to adoption assistance payments.

What about SSA Benefits and Child Support?

While kinship families serve as foster parents, they receive a monthly foster care payment from DFPS. If the child in the kinship family's care receives Social Security Administration (SSA) benefits or if child support monies have been court ordered, DFPS receives and uses these funds to offset the cost of the child's foster care payments. The kinship family will receive the foster care payments in lieu of the child's SSA benefits or child support they may have previously received from DFPS.

When the court gives legal custody (permanent managing conservatorship or PMC) to the kinship family and PCA benefits begin, the kinship family would have to apply with the SSA to become the representative payee of the child's SSA benefits and arrangements would have to be made for the kinship family to receive any child support payments that have been court ordered.

Kinship Foster Home Verification Requirements

The foster home verification process requires that kinship caregivers are able to successfully complete the verification process, which requires extensive criminal and child protective services background checks, as well as the requirement that kinship caregivers pass minimum standards required for foster home verification.

Below are some things the kinship caregiver should ask her or himself in order to decide if foster home verification is the right path:

- Are you at least 21 years old and a responsible mature adult?
- Do you have steady income?
- Will you complete an application with the help of CPS staff?
- Will you share information about your background and lifestyle through a home screening?
- Will you provide references from relatives and friends?
- If you're married or divorced, can you show proof?
- If you're married, are both spouses willing to become foster parents?

- Do you have a high school diploma or a GED, or can you pass a test that includes basic reading, writing and math?
- Can you agree to a home screening which includes interviews with everyone who lives in your home?
- Will you and all people in your house, age 14 and older, submit to a criminal history and a child abuse and neglect history check?
- Will you submit fingerprints for FBI criminal history check for all adults, 18 years and older, in your house?
- Will you attend 25 to 35 hours of training to learn about abuse and neglect and how it affects children?

Other things to consider:

- Do you have enough sleeping space?
- Will you agree not to use physical discipline?
- Will your home likely pass fire, health, and safety inspections?
- Are your pets vaccinated or are you willing to get them vaccinated?
- Will you learn CPR and first aid and become certified?
- Will you be screened for tuberculosis (TB)? Will the people in your house be screened for TB?

If you said yes to these questions, you may be eligible to become verified to be a foster parent. Questions or concerns about the foster home verification process can be directed to DFPS FAD staff or to a private child-placing agency.

A list of Child Placing Agencies can be found online, here:

http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/PCS/Residential_Contracts/active_contracts.asp#CPA

Additional Information:

Fostering Connections Internet Site:

http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/Child_Protection/About_Child_Protective_Services/fostering_connections.asp

Questions can be directed to Fosteringconnections@dfps.state.tx.us