

Janet T. Mills
Governor

Jeanne M. Lambrew, Ph.D.
Commissioner



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TTY: Dial 711 (Maine Relay)

MEMORANDUM

TO: Committee on Health and Human Services
FROM: Office of Child and Family Services
DATE: March 25, 2021
RE: Responding to questions re: LD 699

From the Department's perspective on whether the current contract is outside the Department, what would this bill look like if it's not already happening?

The current contract is awarded to Adoptive and Foster Families of Maine, which is outside of the Department (although the contract is administered by OCFS). Kinship navigator services as envisioned in this bill are already provided to families via AFFM's kinship program using both federal Kinship Navigator grant funding and other funding provide through the contract with AFFM. The decision to locate the kinship navigator program within an outside agency was made based on the recommendation of the legislatively convened Kinship Advisory Group, which specifically recommended that any navigator program developed be housed outside of the Department. In addition, AFFM have at least four staff within their kinship program and we do not believe that the work of those four staff could be completed by one Department employee.

Please provide the information Dr. Landry presented at the public hearing on kinship placements since 2008.

This information is included in the memo to this Committee on LD 396

Does the Department think this bill could assist the Department in providing support to family members?

We believe that the services are best provided as they are currently - by AFFM, an organization that has a preexisting infrastructure to provide these services to kinship caregivers (both formal and informal), as well as a reputation among families for providing various types of support. The activities outlined in the program proposed by this bill could not be accomplished by one staff person and would require a statewide team (like AFFM has built) to meet the needs of all kinship families. OCFS would also reiterate that the decision to house the kinship program outside of OCFS and the Department as a whole was made on the recommendation of the Legislature-convened Kinship Advisory Group.

Following the hearing, Rep. Stover also asked about American Rescue Plan Act funds and whether there is a requirement to have an identified kinship navigator.

To our knowledge, the ARPA does not require states to have an identified kinship navigator. However, it is worth noting that the CRRSA (Consolidated Appropriations Act) did address states' requirements on Kinship Navigator programs. Specifically, Maine was awarded continued Kinship Navigator (KN) Program funding (\$200,000) for the purposes of assisting

kinship caregivers in learning about, finding, and using program and services to meet the needs of the children they are raising and their own needs, and to promote effective partnerships among public and private agencies to ensure kinship caregiver families are served. Funds can be used to support children being cared for by kin while in a foster care or legal guardianship arrangement, children being cared for by kin and at risk of entering foster care, and children being cared for by kin outside of the child welfare system. The Act outlines temporary flexibilities during the timeframe of April 1, 2020-September 30, 2021 including a waiver of the evidence-based standard requirement. The agency must, however, provide an assurance that the Title IV-E Kinship Navigator Program will be, or is in the process of being, evaluated for the purpose of building an evidence base to later determine whether the program meets the Title IV-E evidence based standard requirements.

Maine intends to allocate the continued funding for the Kinship Navigator contract with AFFM, including the required evaluation component. In addition, Maine OCFS was recently invited and agreed to participate in a Cross-Site Collaboration on Kinship Navigator programs hosted by Casey Family Programs, Generations United, and the University of Washington.

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MEMORANDUM

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FROM: Office of Child and Family Services
DATE: March 25, 2021
RE: Responding to questions re: LD 396

Information on housing vouchers specific to families in an active child welfare case and homeless.

There is currently a collaboration between OCFS and Maine State Housing (known as the Family Unification Program or FUP) which provides housing vouchers to OCFS-identified families in the reunification process. There are a limited number of vouchers and generally vouchers do not become available until a family currently receiving a voucher transitions out of the program. This morning we were notified of 13 new FUP vouchers Maine State Housing has to offer and OCFS plans to immediately work to connect qualifying families with the program. Beyond FUP, child welfare staff encourage and support families in applying for a Housing Choice Voucher when housing is a barrier to child safety and/or reunification.

Sen. Baldacci asked about how to improve the visitation issue – lack of services for supervised visitation services.

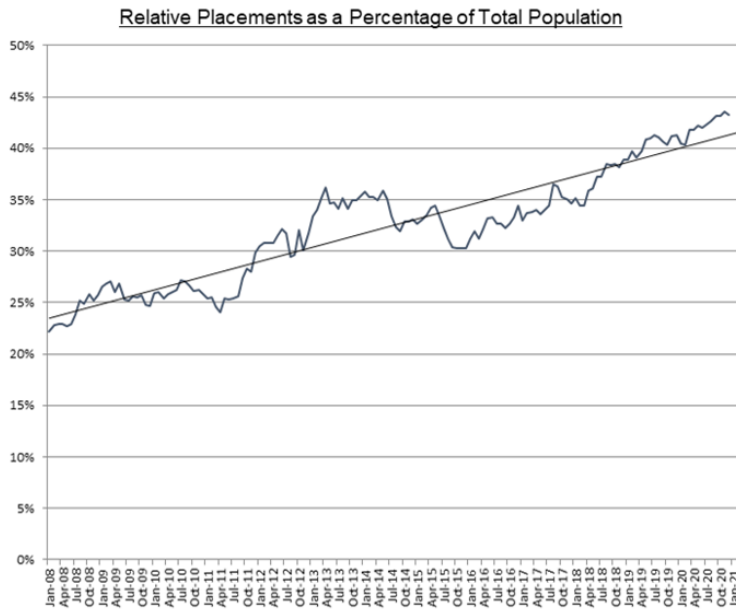
OCFS recently completed the RFP process for the supported visitation contracts. The RFP process was more time consuming than originally planned due to an appeal of the award from a provider who was not awarded a contract. During the transition period a significant amount of the work to ensure visits were properly supervised fell on child welfare staff, and OCFS sought to utilize other resources such as resource parents, family members, and virtual visits. At this time the new contracted providers are in place and are increasing service availability.

Sen. Baldacci also asked about the number of children in custody and statistics about placement of children with other family members.

22 *MRSA* §4003 (3-A) and (3-B) require that OCFS place children who are removed from the custody of their parents with an adult relative when possible, and with as many of the child's siblings as possible.

22 *MRSA* §4005-G outlines more specifically the Department's responsibilities regarding kinship and sibling placement.

Historical Data:

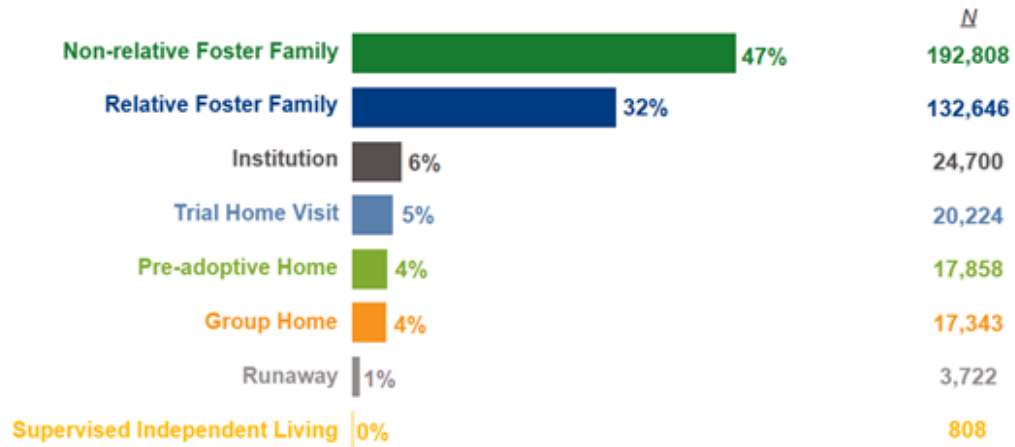


OCFS Policy - V. D-7. *Relative Placement and Kinship Care Including Fictive Kin* guides staff as they make decisions regarding placement of a child and states in the purpose section: *Relative placements provide children with familiarity, continuity, an understanding of their heritage, and a sense of belonging to their family, when their parents and/or caretakers are unable to provide for their safety and well-being.*

	Number of Children in Care	Number of Children Placed with Kin	Percentage of Children in Care Placed with Kin
January 2020	2,243	921	41%
February 2020	2,241	898	40%
March 2020	2,293	937	41%
April 2020	2,264	941	42%
May 2020	2,266	940	41%
June 2020	2,281	953	42%
July 2020	2,328	972	42%
August 2020	2,360	1,007	43%
September 2020	2,379	1,017	43%
October 2020	2,375	1,034	44%
November 2020	2,316	991	43%
December 2020	2,279	988	43%
January 2021	2,263	975	43%
February 2021	2,217	947	43%

National: Point-in-Time Placement Snapshot

Number of children and youth in care by most recent placement setting on September 30, 2019.
Note: Unknown or missing placement types not included.



Data from the [Capacity Building Center for States](#)

National data indicate that OCFS is exceeding the national average for children in kinship care as Maine had 2,191 children in care in October of 2019 and 41% (896) were placed with relatives