



Safe Children, Stable Families, Supportive Communities

October 1, 2018

Kathleen McHugh
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Administration for Children and Families
Director, Policy Division
330 C Street SW
Washington, D.C. 20024

Re: Notice for Public Comment
Decisions for the Proposed Model Family Foster Home Licensing Standards
FR Document 2018-37495

Dear Ms. McHugh:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on decisions related to the proposed model family foster home licensing standards in accordance with the Family First Prevention Services Act of 2018 (FFPSA). The Public Children Services Association of Ohio (PCSAO) is a member-driven association of Ohio's county public children services agencies that advocates for and promotes child protection program excellence and sound public policy for safe children, stable families, and supportive communities. We appreciate the opportunity to provide comments related to this critical component of the Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA).

Ohio has a shortage of licensed foster caregivers, which means that a significant number of children in care are placed outside their home county, far from their homes, families and support systems. PCSAO appreciates that the intent of the model family foster home licensing standards is to be broad and flexible enough to respond to individual circumstances and jurisdictions and to help ensure that children in out-of-home care are in safe and appropriate homes. This balance will support efforts to recruit, train and support more foster caregivers in our state.

III. Summary of the Proposed National Model Foster Care Licensing Standards

Paragraph (A)(a)(iii). *Applicants must be able to communicate with the child in the child's own language and applicants must be able to communicate with the Title IV-E agency, health care providers, and other service providers.* PCSAO supports this standard but acknowledges that this can be challenging at times in parts of the state that lack diversity.

Paragraph (B)(b)(iv). *Weapons and ammunition (separately) stored, locked, unloaded, and inaccessible to children.* Title 18—Crimes and Criminal Procedure, Part 1, Chapter 44, 18 USC 926C, allows an individual who is a qualified retired law enforcement officer, and who is carrying required identification, to carry a concealed firearm. Like some other states, Ohio allows eligible residents age 21 and over to obtain a concealed firearm permit, often known as CCW (carrying a concealed weapon). Given that some foster

caregivers are likely to have a CCW permit through one of the provisions noted above, it would be helpful to have additional federal guidance for when foster caregivers have a CCW permit.

Paragraph (C). Foster Home Capacity. The Total Number of Children in foster care in a family foster home must not exceed six (6) consistent with section 472(c)(1)(A)(ii)(III) of the Act. Per section 472(c)(1)(B) of the Act, the number of foster children cared for in a foster family home may exceed this numerical limitation at the option of the title IV-E agency for any of the following reasons: a. To allow a parenting youth in foster care to remain with the child of the parenting youth, b. To allow siblings to stay together, c. To allow a child with an established meaningful relationship with the family to remain with the family, or d. To allow a family with special training or skills to provide care to a child who has a severe disability.

We are concerned that, as written, this model standard focuses on the total number of children in foster care in a family foster home, rather than the total number of children in the home. In other words, this model standard does not account for any children of their own the foster parent may have. PCSAO believes that the foster home capacity model standard should more closely align with the National Association for Regulatory Administration (NARA) model standard for capacity. In addition, consideration should be given to specific limits for the number of young children in the home (under age 2 and under age 5), as well as for the number of children with disabilities or special needs.

Paragraph (F). Transportation. Applicants must ensure that the family has reliable, legal and safe transportation with safety restraints, as appropriate for the child. Reliable transportation would include a properly maintained vehicle or access to reliable public transportation, if one is owned; legal transportation would include having a valid driving license, insurance and registration as appropriate and safe transportation would include safety restraints and only adults in the home having a driving record in good standing transport the child.

PCSAO is concerned that this model standard is too restrictive by allowing “only adults in the home having a driving record in good standing transport the child.” This excludes other adult family members who do not live in the home with driving records in good standing as well as 16- and 17-year-olds who live in the home and have driving records in good standing from transporting a foster child. In addition, this model standard does not account for foster caregivers who live in rural areas or communities without access to public transportation, do not own a properly maintained vehicle, but do have a plan for providing safe, reliable transportation through family or non-relative supports.

We suggest that the model standard provide more flexibility to accommodate the reasonable and prudent parent standard, while requiring that state and local laws are followed.

Paragraph (G) (a). Training. Applicants must complete pre-licensing training on the following topics: legal rights, roles, responsibilities and expectations of foster parents; agency structure, purpose, policies, and services; laws and regulations; the impact of childhood trauma; managing child behaviors; first aid (including cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) for the ages of children in placement) and medication administration; and the importance of maintaining meaningful connections between child and parents, including regular visitation. Foster parents must participate in ongoing training to receive instruction to support their parental roles and ensure the parent is up to date with agency requirements. Further, this training may also include child-specific training and/or may address issues relevant to the general population of children in foster care.

Please provide more guidance on what is meant by “medication administration” in this section.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments. As the association of Ohio’s county public children services agencies, PCSAO is actively working to ensure that Ohio can recruit, retain and support more foster caregivers. The model family foster home licensing standards can provide a common basis for Ohio to partner with the federal government to achieve this goal.

If you have any questions or require further information, please feel free to contact me at 614-224-5802 or angela@pcsao.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Angela Sausser". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Angela Sausser, MSW, MA, LSW
Executive Director