



**State of Florida
Department of Children and Families**

Ron DeSantis
Governor

Chad Poppell
Secretary

DATE: July 12, 2019

TO: Regional Managing Directors
Sheriff's Offices Conducting Child Protective Investigations
Community-Based Care Lead Agency CEOs
Florida Abuse Hotline Chiefs of Operations and Program Development

THROUGH: Patricia Babcock, Deputy Secretary *Patricia Babcock*

FROM: Patricia Medlock, Assistant Secretary for Child Welfare *PM*

SUBJECT: 'Get Ready' for FSFN Enhancements – Guardianship Assistance Program

PURPOSE: The purpose of this memorandum is to update all child welfare stakeholders on the status of the Florida Safe Families Network (FSFN) enhancements scheduled to be implemented on July 26, 2019 so final preparations can be made locally to "Get Ready" for the changes.

BACKGROUND: Florida's child welfare system has been under the Title IV-E Demonstration Waiver since 2006, allowing the state to forego certain provisions of the Title IV-E Social Security Act, yet still claim Title IV-E dollars. The Department of Children and Families (Department) uses much of this revenue to fund our unique Community-Based Care child welfare system. This waiver is set to expire on September 30, 2019 and the Department anticipates it will lose approximately 90 million dollars. Therefore, with the sun setting of the Title IV-E Demonstration Waiver, the Department has implemented the Path Forward initiative which includes various programs that will draw down additional funding to support the state's child welfare system.

Authorized by the Social Security Act, states have the option to receive federal Title IV-E reimbursement for payments and associated costs to relatives or fictive kin who assume legal guardianship of certain children for whom they have cared for while foster parents. Effective July 1, 2019, Florida has elected to participate in the federal Guardianship Assistance Program (GAP). The Guardianship Assistance Program is a Title IV-E funded program that will allow the state to draw down funds from the federal government. It is also a benefits program that is available to relatives and fictive kin who commit to caring for a child long term through permanent guardianship.

There is also an Extension of the Guardianship Assistance Program (E-GAP) that will be offered to families who signed their initial Guardianship Assistance Agreement (GAA) when the child they are caring for turned 16 or 17 years old. This extension of the program will allow these eligible children to continue receiving benefits until they turn 21 years old as long as they are enrolled in at least one of the qualifying activities (same qualifying activities as Extension of

1317 Winewood Boulevard, Tallahassee, Florida 32399-0700

Mission: Work in Partnership with Local Communities to Protect the Vulnerable, Promote Strong and Economically Self-Sufficient Families, and Advance Personal and Family Recovery and Resiliency

Maintenance Adoption Subsidy and Extended Foster Care [CFOP 170-15 Ch. 6](#) and [CFOP 170-15 Ch.7](#)).

For a High-Level Overview of the Guardianship Assistance Program including eligibility requirements and benefits, please see '[Highlights](#)' document.

In preparation for the enhancements to “go live” on July 26, 2019, there is a continuous effort to assess and achieve people readiness, system readiness, and the implementation of a support plan. The following is a status on our readiness assessment:

PEOPLE READINESS: On Target! – Statewide Train the trainer sessions have been completed and all Regions report that staff training plans are underway to finalize readiness activities prior to go-live.

SYSTEM READINESS: On Target! – The FSFN enhancements have been designed, developed, and User Acceptance Testing is currently in progress.

SUPPORT READINESS: On Target! – All policy updates have been finalized.
[CFOP 170-10 Ch.13 Guardianship Assistance Program \(Effective July 01, 2019\)](#)
[CFOP 170-10 Ch.14 Guardianship Assistance Program Eligibility](#)
[CFOP 170-15 Ch.8 Federal and State Funding Eligibility - Guardianship Assistance Program](#)
[CFOP 170-15 Ch.9 Federal and State Funding Eligibility - Extension of Guardianship Assistance Program](#)

A project website has been setup on the Center for Child Welfare's website to house all project related policy, training, FAQ, and FSFN documentation.
<http://centerforchildwelfare.fmhi.usf.edu/GAP.shtml>

For a more in-depth overview of the Guardianship Assistance Program, please watch the video below which includes a power point presentation:

[Training Video: 'Florida's New Guardianship Assistance Program' \(03/29/2019\)](#)
<http://centervideo.forest.usf.edu/video/center/guardassistprog/start.html>

Post-Deployment Support Readiness: On Target! –The Guardianship Assistance Program post-deployment support will include daily calls for the two weeks following deployment to evaluate and respond to any issues. The support team will include members from the Office of Child Welfare Policy and Practice team, Office of Information Technology Services team, IBM team, Regional Points of Contact, and Community-Based Care Lead Agency (CBC) Points of Contact.

TRAIN THE TRAINER INFORMATION: Four train the trainer sessions have been completed: two in Kissimmee, one in Tampa, and one in Saint Augustine. All training materials are available on the project's website
<http://centerforchildwelfare.fmhi.usf.edu/GAP.shtml>

ACTION REQUESTED: It is time to **Get Ready** for the Guardianship Assistance Program to go-live on July 26, 2019. Please continue to execute all readiness plans to ensure our workforce is ready for the upcoming FSFN changes.

CONTACT INFORMATION: If you have questions about the Guardianship Assistance Program, please contact Teanna Houston, Statewide Foster Home Licensing Specialist at Teanna.Houston@myflfamilies.com. If you have FSFN questions, please contact Jeanette.Betancourt@myflfamilies.com. If you have any questions regarding local readiness efforts, please contact your regional champion below.

Regional Champions:

Northwest Region – Regina Pleas – Regina.Pleas@myflfamilies.com
Northeast Region – Rebecca Robinson – Rebecca.Robinson@myflfamilies.com
Central Region – Candace Cox – Candace.Cox@myflfamilies.com
Suncoast Region – Rebecca Dorsey – Rebecca.Dorsey@myflfamilies.com
Southeast Region – Mark Holsapfel – Mark.Holsapfel@myflfamilies.com
Southern Region – Sonia DeEscobar – Sonia.DeEscobar@myflfamilies.com

Attachment: '*Highlights*' of the Guardianship Assistance Program (GAP) and (EGAP)

cc: Regional Family and Community Services Directors
Scott Stewart, Assistant Secretary for Operations
Center for Child Welfare
FSFN Consultant Network

'Highlights' of the Guardianship Assistance Program (GAP) and (EGAP)

When will GAP go into effect in FSFN? The new FSFN functionality will go live on July 26, 2019.

Guardianship Assistance Program Overview:

- A Title IV-E benefits program that is available to guardians who commit to caring for a child long term through permanent guardianship.
- Offers financial assistance and other services, such as Medicaid, to the children and their relatives.
- Strengthens permanency for children discharged to permanent guardianship.

Eligibility Requirements:

- Child must be placed with a licensed relative or fictive kin (Level I) and be eligible to receive foster care board payments for at least 6 consecutive months.
 - Please note, GAP is **not** Levels of Licensure. Being licensed is a requirement to be eligible for GAP, but any caregiver can get licensed and never reach eligibility criteria for GAP. After licensure, a child may be reunified with the parents or adopted.
- The Permanent Guardianship Case Plan must include the required language (Ch.39.6225 – 10(a-g)).
- The caregiver must enter into a Guardianship Assistance Agreement for the child prior to the court discharging the child to Permanent Guardianship.

Guardianship Assistance Program (GAP) Eligibility Overview



Child is placed with a relative or fictive kin.



Child is eligible for foster care board payments with relative/fictive kin for at least 6 consecutive months.



Case plan includes required language.



Guardian enters into a Guardianship Assistance Agreement for the child.



Court discharges the child with the guardian at permanent guardianship.

'Highlights' of the Guardianship Assistance Program (GAP) and (EGAP)

Available Caregiver Benefits:

- Monthly payment of \$333 for support of the child.
- Medicaid benefits until 18 years of age (or 21 if eligible for Extension of Guardianship Assistance Program).
- Tuition and fee exemption.
- Available for children living out of state.
- One-time payment to assist with costs of establishing permanent guardianship (\$2,000 nonrecurring).



Extension of Guardianship Assistance Program (EGAP) Overview:

- Available to caregiver who entered into an initial Guardianship Assistance Agreement (GAA) for a 16- or 17-year-old child.
- Available until 21 if the child participates in at least one or more qualifying activities (same qualifying activities as the Extension of Maintenance Adoption Subsidy and Extended Foster Care).
- Allows CBC lead agencies to provide additional support to relatives.