



St. Johns County Board of County Commissioners

Health and Human Services | Community Based Care Division

Permanency for Children Receiving Services

Effective Date: 6/3/24	Aligns with: CFOP 170, Ch 39, FAC 65C, The Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997, SB 664	Operating Guideline: OP-OG03
Supersedes: Policy titled "Permanency & Changes in Legal Case Plan Goal" dated 12/17/17	Applicable to: FIP Staff/Providers	Pages: 1 of 4

Purpose

Family Integrity Program (FIP) is dedicated to the focus on permanence for children in care. This means carefully considering and monitoring the legal case plan goal of the child as changes in the child's circumstances and the parents' case plan compliance warrant, legally changing that goal when it appears to be in the best interest of the child to do so.

Definitions

- Staffing refers to any formal/informal meeting in which the case plan goal, case plan compliance and/or child/family circumstances are discussed.
- Children Legal Services (CLS) refers to any entity providing legal services for the CBC
- "Concurrent planning" means establishing a permanency goal in a case plan that uses reasonable efforts to reunify the child with the parent, while at the same time establishing another goal that must be one of the following options:
 - (a) Adoption when a petition for termination of parental rights has been filed or will be filed;
 - (b) Permanent guardianship of a dependent child under s. 39.6221;
 - (c) Permanent placement with a fit and willing relative under s. 39.6231; or
 - (d) Placement in another planned permanent living arrangement under s. 39.6241.

Procedure

- a. Legal goals and progress toward meeting that goal, i.e., compliance with case plan goals, will be monitored throughout the life of a case.

- b. The case plan must be signed by all parties, except that the signature of a child may be waived if the child is not of an age or capacity to participate in the case-planning process.
- c. The Dependency Case Manager will assess for Conditions for Return at every staffing and hearing and on an on-going basis throughout the life of the case.
- d. A Progress Update shall be used to assess the parent(s) protective capacities, home environment, and backgrounds for reunification.
 - i. Within 10 business days of starting a Progress Update to reunify, the Dependency Case Manager will update local criminal history checks, including required fingerprint submission for any household members 18 years of age or older.
- e. When a decision is made not to return a child home, the case record contains an explanation and justification for the selection of an alternate method of achieving permanence and evidence of the efforts at family reunification.
 - i. Prior to approving case plan modifications, supervisors should determine whether there is a genuine concurrent plan that is being actively pursued and sustained in the event behavior change is not likely in a timely way.
 - ii. The Dependency Case Manager will have on going communication with the caregivers regarding services and benefits available to children and families with the goal of permanent guardianship.
- f. Permanence for the child, as required by statute, should be achieved in as short a period as possible for accomplishing its provisions, and no later than 12 months after the child(ren) being sheltered or case plan acceptance whichever occurs sooner.
 - i. Pursuant to FAC 65C-30.012 and Ch 39.8055, If a request to the court for an extension of the case plan beyond 12 months is made, the Case Management Team working closely with CLS, must be able to provide documentation from the case record that it is a). Reasonable to expect that the goal of reunification will be achieved within 12 months of initial removal or b). that there is a compelling reason for not filing a petition for Termination of Parental Rights.

Concurrent Planning

- a) Factors that must be considered for establishing a concurrent goal include the history of child welfare involvement, severity of any mental health diagnosis, severity of substance abuse/misuse, pattern of violence, significant criminal and/or incarceration history,

severity of abuse or neglect on the child, level of parental engagement with the child and quality of parent's support system.

- i. Every case involving a child in an out-of-home placement shall be evaluated to determine if concurrent case planning is appropriate.
 - ii. The DCM will discuss the option for concurrent planning and assess the above noted factors in a consultation with their supervisor in determining the need for concurrent planning and appropriate goal selection. Documentation of the consult and decision will be recorded in the child(ren)'s FSFN case record.
- b) When establishing a concurrent goal, all permanency options, including expectations, available supports and required timelines must be shared.
 - c) When a goal other than reunification is considered, the parents must be provided information about alternative permanency options.
 - d) When recommending a concurrent goal at a permanency hearing, the new case plan reflecting the concurrent tasks should be filed before the permanency hearing. If the case plan is not filed before the hearing and the concurrent goal is approved by the court, the new case plan must be filed no later than 10 calendar days after the hearing.

Permanency Staffings

- a. Permanency staffings shall occur prior to permanency hearings so information shared at the staffing can become part of the Judicial Review Social Studies Report (JRSSR).
 - a. The first permanency staffing must occur 4 months after shelter or case initiation, with ongoing staffings occurring at 7 months and again at 11 months depending until permanence has been achieved.
- b. Permanency staffings will be scheduled by the FIP Program Manager or designee and that schedule will be published for all parties, including but not limited to parents, attorneys, the Case Management Providers, Guardian Ad Litem, Foster Parents, Caregivers, etc. It is the responsibility of the Case Manager to notify all parties of the date/time of the staffing at least 7 days in advance of the staffing. Upon notification the Case Manager will provide all parties with a feedback form for completion if unable to attend.
- c. At the permanency staffing, progress toward the legal goal is discussed to determine progress toward achieving a permanent plan and whether services described in the plan are being provided. The appropriateness of concurrent goals shall be evaluated at each permanency staffing.

- d. Critical dialog with the parents occurs during staffings which clarify for parents the need for parents to remain on task with case plan compliance or face the possibility that other permanency options will be considered.
- e. Changes to the case plan are recommended in this venue which will more effectively move a child toward permanency within the required statutory time frames. Follow up actions from the staffing shall be documented and placed in the child's file.

Change in Permanency Goal

- a. A change of goal may be considered in the natural course of working a case when it appears that such a change will move a child toward permanency in a more effective way.
- b. CLS will enter into dialog with Case Management and to come to consensus about the change in goal. CLS will provide critical information to Case Management about whether the change in goal can be legally accomplished and when.
- c. Finding consensus for the goal change with CLS, Case Management will prepare appropriate legal documentation for submission to the court for approval.
- d. As required by the Adoption and Safe Families Act, an individual child review for child(ren) in care 12 months or more will be held as scheduled by CLS, to support filing for Termination of Parental Rights.

Conflict Resolution

If disagreements arise, any conflict resolution should start at the line level of staff. If no resolution can be obtained at that level, the next level of management would become involved. Continued conflict would work its way up the chain of command. In the event an agreement cannot be reached, the issue will be brought before a standing resolution board comprised of representatives from FIP leadership, Child Legal Services, and the Department of Children and Families as appropriate.