
**Government of the District of Columbia
Child and Family Services Agency**



**Hearing
“B22-097, the “Foster Parent Pre-Service Training
Regulation Amendment Act of 2017”**

Testimony of
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Council of the District of Columbia
Committee on Human Services
Brienne Nadeau, Chair

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John A. Wilson Building
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Good afternoon, Chairwoman Nadeau, Councilmembers, and staff. I am Brandynicole Brooks, program administrator for the Child Welfare Training Academy (CWTA) at the Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA). Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the proposed Foster Parent Pre-Service Training Amendment Act of 2017.

Child welfare cannot function without two essential groups: social workers and foster parents. It is critical to ensure that both have the training they need to understand and manage the unique issues and situations they will face in doing child welfare work. CFSA has worked hard to ensure that the pre-service training we provide to foster parent candidates adequately prepares them for their role. Our current training offerings are robust and already address the topics listed in the proposed legislation. In addition, channels are available for foster parents (and others) to suggest or request additional training topics without the need for a legislative mandate.

Child Welfare Training Academy

Within CFSA, the Child Welfare Training Academy (CWTA) provides pre-service and in-service training for social workers and foster parents. The District Department of Human Services Board of Social Work has approved CWTA as a continuing education provider. We are composed of eight full-time trainers who are social workers by trade. Each year, CWTA develops an annual training plan that outlines training offerings. This document is the foundation of the training focus for the year. It ensures that CWTA addresses current trends in foster care while incorporating feedback from the previous year's training evaluations.

A unique characteristic of CWTA is our ability to develop training sessions in-house that speak to the specific needs of District children and youth in foster care. We routinely update the training curriculum based on CFSA's continuous quality improvement processes and direct feedback from our foster parents and community partners. One example is the recent request from a foster parent who is in the midst of a transracial adoption for training on black skin and hair care. In response, CWTA is developing a training session that discusses the nuances of transracial fostering and adopting. As part of that development, we are seeking a community partner who can provide a hands-on segment of the training.

This is just one example of CWTA's openness to suggestions and requests to meet foster parent needs. Foster parents have the opportunity to submit their requests in writing directly to CWTA or to me. Following each training session, participants complete a course evaluation that solicits feedback on that specific training and suggestions for future training topics. Quarterly, we provide *theSOURCE*, our newsletter about training specifically for foster parents. We disseminate it both via email and postal mail, and the newsletter routinely invites foster parents to send course suggestions and feedback to CWTA. CWTA also has an open line of communication with foster parent groups such as the Foster and Adoptive Parent Advocacy Center (FAPAC), DC Metropolitan Foster and Adoptive Parent Association (DCMFAPA), and CFSA's internal Foster Parent Advisory Council.

Foster Parent Pre-Service Training

Potential foster parents must complete a minimum of 40 hours of pre-service training as part of the requirements to obtain a license. Then, they must complete 30 hours of in-service training every two years to maintain their license. CFSA has pre- and in-service training sessions for foster parents that cover all the topics listed in the proposed legislation and more.

Regarding pre-service training, most child welfare agencies use one of two standardized courses:

- The “**Trauma Informed Partnering for Safety and Permanence-Model Approach to Partnerships in Parenting,**” known as **TIPS-MAPP**, is a product of the Children’s Alliance of Kansas, Inc.
- “**Parent Resource for Information, Development, and Education,**” or **PRIDE**, comes from the California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse for Child Welfare.

CFSA currently uses the TIPS-MAPP model, a comprehensive program that highlights child welfare staff and foster parents working as a service team. The goal is to preserve or rebuild the family around the long-term welfare of the child. This requires the service team to form a partnership, or positive alliance, with the birth parents. As TIPS-MAPP frames it, this partnership seeks to support the birth parents in their parental roles and status, focused on the welfare of the child.

As an attachment to this testimony, I have included an overview of the 10 sessions of the TIPS-MAPP training. I do want to highlight some specific sessions that address topics of concern in the proposed legislation:

- Session 2 addresses childhood development and well-being, specifically focusing on helping premature and/or drug-exposed infants to attach and develop; parenting children exposed to the HIV virus or suffering from Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder; and parenting youth who identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, or Transgender.
- Session 6 examines the importance of helping children in care to maintain and build on their identity, self-concept, and connections. This session addresses identity and culture and the importance of maintaining cultural connections for children in care.
- Session 7 discusses family reunification as the primary case planning goal and defines the role of foster parents in supporting youth to successfully transition out of foster care.

Title 29 Chapter 60 of the DC Municipal Regulations lists 13 specific areas that foster parent pre-service training must cover. The proposed legislation adds requirements to cover:

- “Religious differences and cultural competency regarding the LGBTQ community, including training to raise awareness of the unique health and social service needs of LGBTQ foster children;” and

- “Information about the prevalence in foster care and unique needs of children who are at greater risk of aging out of care without being adopted, such as older children, children in sibling groups, children of racial or ethnic minorities, LGBTQ children, and foster children with mental or physical disabilities.”

The TIPS-MAPP pre-service training that CFSA has used for over a decade covers all of these general topics. We also cover those specific to the District (such as CFSA’s foster parent licensing process and the role of the Family Court) through local supplementary information as part of the pre-service training.

Foster Parent In-Service Training

Pre-service training is essential to give new foster parents the basic knowledge and skills they will need to guide, nurture, and serve children and youth in their care. At the same time, it is only the beginning of ongoing knowledge and skill building as the foster parent grows and matures in the work.

Once a CFSA foster parent completes pre-service training and gets a license, he or she then has the requirement to complete a minimum of 15 hours of in-service training annually. This training can occur in-person or via CWTA-approved online training sessions. CWTA offers nearly 30 in-service training sessions, with foster parents able to self-select some topics while also having to complete others that we mandate. Mandated training includes:

- Understanding Human Trafficking in Child Welfare,
- Working Effectively with LGBTQ Youth, and
- Trauma-Informed Caregiving.

Other in-service training sessions that speak directly to the proposed legislation include:

- Understanding Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders and
- Engaging with Older Youth in Care.

Discussions of cultural awareness are woven throughout the CWTA pre-service and in-service curriculum and tied to the topics of each specific course.

Through the CWTA Resource Parent In-Service Training Coordinator, foster parents are regularly engaged in their learning and development. The Coordinator informs foster parents of current in-service training offerings while also ensuring they complete the mandated training.

In the coming weeks, CWTA will launch our fully redesigned individualized training and development plan. It will give foster parents the opportunity to identify what they see as their strengths and challenges in fostering CFSA children and youth. Then, we will offer specific training sessions to foster parents that align with their identified challenge areas.

Conclusion

CFSA understands how critical it is to give prospective foster parents a solid foundation of basic knowledge and skills. They must be prepared to participate as part of the service team, to provide

the nurturing and support that can mean all the difference to a child or youth, and to face and resolve issues that may arise with children in their care. The pre-service training CFSA uses is one of two nationally recognized models, which we supplement with additional information specific to District child welfare.

While pre-service training is critical, we also believe it is crucial for foster parents to continue to learn as they foster. To support that, we offer a wide array of in-service training courses annually that addresses significant topics, some that foster parents can choose and others that we require them to take. We communicate regularly with foster parents about training options. We also solicit their requests and feedback and use that valuable input to inform our decisions about upcoming training.

We have built a robust and responsive foster parent training program beyond what is already required by Title 29 Chapter 60 of the DCMR. We fully intend to continue improving the program and have business processes in place to ensure quality pre-service and in-service training. Current pre-service training routinely addresses topics included in the proposed legislation. While we understand and appreciate the intent of the legislation, we believe it unnecessary in light of the work we are already doing.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify and for your continuing concern for the children and youth CFSA services. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.