




October 23, 2020

Child Welfare Services County Letter No. 2020-03

To: County Departments of Family and Children Services
DFCS District Directors
DFCS Regional Directors
State Office Staff

From: Tom C. Rawlings, Division Director 
Georgia Division of Family and Children Services

Re: 2020-State Legislation: Caregiver Arrangements for Occasional Short-term Babysitting of Children in Foster Care

Purpose

The purpose of this Child Welfare Services County Letter (CWSCL) is to announce changes to the Reasonable and Prudent Parenting Standard (RPPS) related to occasional short-term babysitting of children in foster care resulting from state legislation (House Bill 912) effective July 1, 2020. The following are definitions within the legislation that impact the RPPS.

1. Caregivers are defined as foster parents with whom a child in foster care has been placed.
2. Occasional is defined as once per week or less on varying days, and not exceeding twice per month.
3. Short-term is defined as no more than 72 consecutive hours.

Discussion

The Georgia Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS) is responsible for the safety, permanency, and wellbeing of children served. The goal of the RPPS is to offer children and youth in foster care as “normal” a childhood experience as possible. DFCS works in partnership with foster parents to accomplish this goal. Within that partnership, foster parents are empowered to make typical parenting decisions without having to obtain administrative approvals from DFCS or a Child Placing Agency (CPA).

Previously, the RPPS required caregivers to notify DFCS/CPA prior to children in DFCS custody participating in overnight activities exceeding two nights. However, the passage of House Bill 912 now authorizes caregivers to arrange occasional short-term babysitting for children placed in their home for up to 72 consecutive hours as long as certain other requirements are met. Caregivers may exercise this authority for purposes such as medical or other health care appointments, grocery or other shopping, personal grooming

appointments, special occasions, foster parent training classes, school related meetings, business meetings, adult social gatherings, or an occasional evening event out.

Safety is always paramount so caregivers must ensure that their caretaking decisions support all aspects of a child's safety (i.e. physically and emotionally), including when selecting and arranging for babysitters. Babysitters must be at least 18 years of age and able to provide the appropriate level of care for each child left under their supervision. Caregivers shall make all reasonable efforts to provide babysitters with the following before leaving a child for occasional short-term babysitting:

1. Any information about the child's emotional, behavioral, medical and physical condition necessary to provide care for such child during the short-term babysitting period;
2. Any medication that should be administered to such child in foster care during the short-term babysitting period; and
3. Emergency contact information that is valid for the duration of the short-term babysitting period.

Lastly, caregivers must notify DFCS/CPA (verbally or in writing) prior to a child in DFCS custody being left under the care and supervision of a babysitter for more than 72 consecutive hours. The notice shall identify who will be serving as the babysitter, where the babysitting will occur (e.g. in the foster home), and when the babysitting period will begin and end. This basic information is needed to monitor compliance with the 72-hour timeframe and for emergency preparedness. Regardless of how the notice is received, it must be documented in the case record. Please note that this change has no impact on DFCS policy regarding paid respite care.

Implementation

This CWSCL is available on the Online Directives Information System (ODIS) at <http://odis.dhs.ga.gov/>. Regional and County Leadership shall provide opportunities for staff to review and discuss the updated policy to ensure implementation. Please refer to policy [1.3 Administration Access, Distribution and Review of Child Welfare Policies](#) for the applicable requirements and procedures for policy review.

Please direct questions regarding this policy release to the Field Program Specialist in your region. Regional staff shall submit questions to the Policy and Regulations Unit at PPPDUnit@dhs.ga.gov.