

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Department of Human Services Releases Guidance for Family First Providers

Harrisburg, PA – The Department of Human Services (DHS) this month released a bulletin with guidance and requirements for providers that wish to become a specialized child residential setting under the Family First Prevention Services Act.

“The Wolf Administration remains committed to protecting vulnerable populations across Pennsylvania, and the Family First Prevention Services Act will help strengthen Pennsylvania’s child welfare system in line with this goal,” said DHS Secretary Teresa Miller. “We want to be sure that every service we provide offers the necessary supports to meet children and families’ needs and help them on a path to safe, healthy lives. This certification process will help DHS ensure that specialized settings for children will be available, safe, and suitable.”

The Family First Prevention Services Act is a federal law that prioritizes keeping children with their families. It allows states to use federal payments for trauma-informed evidence-based prevention services to allow children who would otherwise be placed in foster care to stay with their parents or relatives. The implementation of this law, scheduled for October 1, 2020, aligns with the Wolf Administration’s goals of serving children safely with their families or family-like settings when necessary.

In the event placement outside the home becomes necessary, the law directs federal funding towards family-like settings or other specialized settings that are best suited to a child’s individual needs. Specialized settings are trauma-informed child residential facilities or supervised independent living programs specializing in providing care and treatment for children and youth with special circumstances, including:

- Pregnant, expecting, and parenting youth;
- Youth who are transitioning to adulthood; or
- Youth who are, or at risk of becoming, sex trafficking victims.

Specialized settings should offer programming for participants and training for staff tailored to the needs of children and youth with these special circumstances. Public and private children and youth social service agencies, providers and stakeholders that provide services to these populations are encouraged to request certification as a specialized setting.

The specialized settings emphasize a trauma-informed approach to care. This approach integrates knowledge and effects of trauma into policies, procedures, and practices while actively seeking to avoid re-traumatization. Trauma-informed care is informed by six principles: organizational safety, trustworthiness and transparency, peer support, collaboration and reciprocal relationships, empowerment among and between staff and participants, and cultural sensitivity. Standards of trauma-informed care are in line with recommendations made by the Council on Reform established by Governor Wolf’s Vulnerable Populations Executive Order and the Wolf Administration’s effort to make Pennsylvania a trauma-informed [state](#).

More information, the bulletin, and the certification approval process can be found [here](#). Applications to be considered a specialized setting must be submitted by March 15, 2020.

DHS' Office of Children, Youth, and Families is hosting webinars to review the bulletin and application process for child residential facilities or supervised independent living programs providing or planning to provide services to the above identified populations. Session opportunities are 9:30 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. on February 25 and 28. To register, email cwtpreg@pitt.edu.

Visit www.dhs.pa.gov or email ra-PWFamilyFirst@pa.gov for more information.

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