



Dept of Children, Youth, & Families
 2021-23 First Supplemental Budget Session
 Policy Level - CE - Caregiver Engagement Unit

Agency Recommendation Summary

The Department of Child, Youth and Families (DCYF) requests \$1,858,000 (\$1,505,000 GF-State) and 7.5 full time equivalent staff (FTE) in the 2022 Supplemental Budget for the statewide implementation of the Kinship Caregiver Engagement Unit (KCEU). Funding is requested to reduce the delay in legal permanency (adoption/guardianship) for children by partnering and engaging with families to help them complete the administrative tasks required by the home study process.

Program Recommendation Summary

010 - Children and Families Services

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090 - Program Support

The Department of Child, Youth and Families (DCYF) requests \$1,858,000 (\$1,505,000 GF-State) and 7.5 full time equivalent staff (FTE) in the 2022 Supplemental Budget for the statewide implementation of the Kinship Caregiver Engagement Unit (KCEU). Funding is requested to reduce the delay in legal permanency (adoption/guardianship) for children by partnering and engaging with families to help them complete the administrative tasks required by the home study process.

Fiscal Summary

Fiscal Summary <i>Dollars in Thousands</i>	Fiscal Years		Biennial	Fiscal Years		Biennial
	2022	2023	2021-23	2024	2025	2023-25
Staffing						
FTEs	0.0	15.0	7.5	15.0	15.0	15.0
Operating Expenditures						
Fund 001 - 1	\$0	\$1,244	\$1,244	\$1,244	\$1,244	\$2,488
Fund 001 - 2	\$0	\$353	\$353	\$353	\$353	\$706
Fund 001 - 1	\$0	\$261	\$261	\$261	\$261	\$522
Total Expenditures	\$0	\$1,858	\$1,858	\$1,858	\$1,858	\$3,716
Revenue						
001 - 0393	\$0	\$353	\$353	\$353	\$353	\$706
Total Revenue	\$0	\$353	\$353	\$353	\$353	\$706

Decision Package Description

In 2021 the legislature passed HB 1227, a bill “protecting the rights of families responding to allegations of abuse or neglect of a child.” Section 9 of that bill added an initial license category for kinship caregivers who want to pursue becoming licensed: “(i) If the court places with a relative or other suitable person, and that person has indicated a desire to become a licensed foster parent, the court shall order the department to commence an assessment of the home of such relative or other suitable person within days and thereafter issue an initial license as provided under RCW 74.15.120 for such relative or other suitable person, if qualified, as a foster parent.” The department then has 90 days to conduct the home study process for providing a full license to the family.

Implementing the KCEU statewide will aid the department in significantly reducing the time it takes to complete a home study, increase support and engagement with kinship caregivers, and it lays the foundation for the agency’s response to the new initial license requirement in HB 1227. While the initial license will give kinship providers the opportunity to begin receiving foster care maintenance payments sooner, it does not significantly improve the ease with which kin move through the home study and licensing process. Once the requirements of HB 1227 are in place, it will be more important than ever for the department to offer targeted, individualized support for kin in order to increase the speed and improve the outcomes of their licensing experience.

An initial decision package was included in the agency’s 2020 supplemental budget request to request funding for a specialized KCEU, funding

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the Caregiver Engagement Unit (CEU) that would assist all prospective caregivers applying for placement of foster children. These prospective caregivers included applicants applying for general foster care and unlicensed kinship foster placements. DCYF received 25% of the funding request in the 2020 supplemental budget which resulted in a need to adjust and scale down support to only kinship caregivers (instead of all prospective caregivers). DCYF also piloted this in Region 1 and Region 2. DCYF has found that engaging with kin caregivers requires a more personal connection and guidance to assist them through the home study process. The KCEU specialist utilizes their clinical skills and assessments to assist with barriers. During the first nine months of the pilot, there were 441 kinship applications. With 6 KCEU specialists in the two pilot regions, specialists were working with 8 kin families in a month. This has been manageable to meet the goals of KCEU. If this request is funded, consideration will be given to regions where there is a dense population and may need more KCEU specialists than other regions.

Provided the pilot has been successful in assisting kin families navigate the home study process and is contributing to improved timely processing of home studies, DCYF is requesting to provide funding for the statewide implementation of the Kinship KCEU.

The 2018 Federal Case Review indicated that the lack of timeliness of home studies was a major contributor to delayed permanency in 32% of cases. Lack of completed home studies was also identified across the Family and Juvenile Court Improvement Plan jurisdictions as a factor in delaying permanency. A home study is a state and federal licensing requirement for child foster homes outlined in RCW 26.33.190, RCW 74.15.040, and WAC, Chapter 110-148. Additionally, Title IV-E funding provides for federal reimbursement for a portion of the maintenance and administrative costs of foster care for children who meet specified federal eligibility requirements. Caregivers must be licensed in order for Washington State to qualify for this funding source.

DCYF's Licensing Division completes home studies for all caregivers who are caring for children in the custody of DCYF. The vast majority of home studies completed by DCYF are unified, meaning that the caregiver is assessed for placement as well as legal permanency (adoption or guardianship).

Home studies can be divided into two general categories: licensed and unlicensed. Kinship caregivers are not required to get a foster care license; however, there are benefits to licensing kinship caregivers when possible.

When a child is placed with an unlicensed kinship caregiver, DCYF policy currently requires caseworkers to refer the family to the Licensing Division within 30 days of the start of placement, in order for the home study process to begin.

The current home study business process is not meeting the demands of the placement efforts due to the following issues:

- The application and home study process is extensive due to the critical nature of providing safe, welcoming, and affirming care to vulnerable children and youth. For a kinship caregiver, this process may feel daunting and confusing because they didn't anticipate or plan on being a caregiver.
- Administrative and engagement tasks to support caregivers can take up to 35% of home study process time. This at times prevents the home study specialists to complete the home study tasks within the dedicated length of time.
- Additional staffing resources and structure to assist kinship caregivers in navigating the complexity of the licensing and the home study process is needed.

Presently, there are 382 pending applications for new state licensed home studies and 439 pending applications for unlicensed home studies. There are approximately 378 home study applications that need to be referred to the Licensing Division that have been defined by caregivers who have had children placed in their home by DCYF for at least 30 days. (Table 1 – Current Pending Applications).

Table 1 - Current Pending Applications

Initial engagement early on in the process is essential to the timeliness of the home study and permanency. The current performance goal is to complete home studies within 120 days. For the months of January through June 2019, the average number of days it took to complete licensed home studies was 153 days and 174.5 days for unlicensed home studies. The average is inclusive of all types of applications including licensed foster application, unlicensed kinship application, adoption application, and adoption update application. This data was collected prior to the pilot, therefore, all the work was completed by the assigned home study specialist.

Table 2.1 – Timeliness

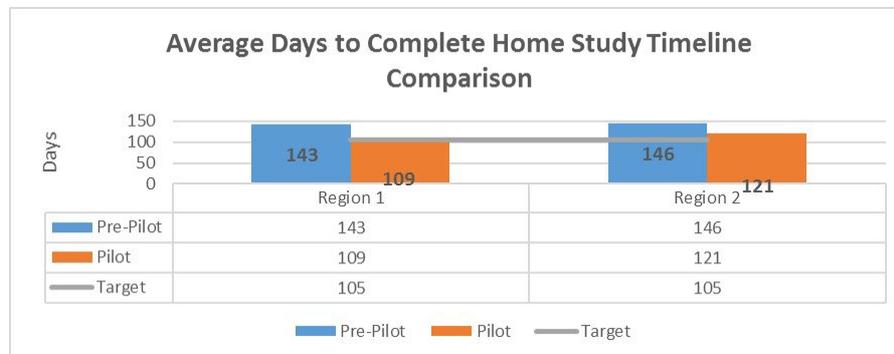
To improve the permanency rates, the DCYF Licensing Division is proposing the following solutions:

1. Adopt the pilot project for statewide implementation of the specialized Kinship KCEU (CEU, 15.0 FTEs) focusing on the pre-home study administrative part of the process, while refocusing existing licensing FTEs on conducting timely and high-quality home study assessments;
2. Differentiate the workloads and establish new performance measures: entry and engagement admin tasks will be completed within 45 business days 85% of time; and Home Study assessment tasks will be completed within 60 business days 85% of time.

The KCEU pilot began in October 2020 to explore if a specialized unit providing early support and engagement to kinship caregivers would improve timeliness and successful permanency for children. Each KCEU specialist assists kinship caregivers with the home study application and provides information on licensing and resources to stabilize their growing family. The goal of the pilot is to decrease the amount of time, confusion, and stress that it can take to complete a home study, in order to increase foster care licensing for kinship caregivers.

An assessment of home study completion timeframes in Regions 1 and 2 shows the pilot project improved timeliness by an average of 20.45% within the first nine months of the project. This includes 23.8% in Region 1 and 17.1% in Region 2. Likewise, the KCEU Specialist completed the application process with the kinship caregivers on an average of 41.45 days, below the projected 60 calendar days. The early data from the limited pilot shows that the KCEU is effective. By implementing it in all regions, DCYF anticipates to achieve these same results statewide with all home studies completed within 60 business days of the completed application assignment, 85% of the time.

Table 2.2 – Timeliness in CEU pilot program from Oct 1, 2020-June 30, 2021. The average is inclusive of only kinship applications which includes licensed kinship and unlicensed kinships applications. Interstate Compact of Placement of Children was also included in the data collection with the exclusion of ICPC Adoption update requests.



Currently 45% of children are placed in kinship care, of those placed, approximately 12% are licensed kinships. One of the goals of the KCEU is to increase licensure for kinship caregivers. Most kinship caregivers are unaware of the resources that are available to them should they apply for foster care licensure. The KCEU specialists provided support, information, and resources to kinship caregivers so that obtaining a foster care license is less daunting and more attainable.

During the nine-month pilot program, CEU also tracked the number of licensed kinship caregivers and compared it to the previous year.

Licensed Kinship Caregivers							
Region	Licensed Kin	Total Kin	% Oct 2019-June 2020		Licensed Kin	Total Kin	% Oct 2020 - June 2021
1	52	216	24%		19	60	32%
2	22	114	19%		9	31	30%
					<i>*Regions 1 and 2 Oct 2020-June 2021: includes only providers who went through CEU</i> <i>Pulled from application tracking logs, R1 & R2 on 7/20/21</i>		

Note: The KCEU pilot began in October 2020; therefore, incoming applications would not have yielded a completed home study for the first couple of months of the pilot due to the length of time it takes to complete a home study. DCYF expects the rate of licensed kinship providers will continue to increase as the pilot continues.

DCYF requests 15.0 FTEs to implement the Kinship KCEU in all six of DCYF regions to support kinship caregivers with the home study and licensing process. Additionally, the request to implement statewide will provide equity to all kinship caregivers by providing support for kinship caregivers at the earliest onset of placement. There would be guidance to foster care licensing, kinship resources (to include financial support, education and trainings), and engagement support to assist kinship caregivers in navigating through the home study process. By implementing early engagement, it allows the agency to assess the family on their individual needs and support children remaining with kin caregivers

Assumptions and Calculations

Expansion, Reduction, Elimination or Alteration of a current program or service:

DCYF is requesting to expand the KCEU, currently piloted in Region 1 and Region 2, to a statewide implementation in all six regions.

Detailed Assumptions and Calculations:

This request is for 15.0 FTE's to implement a statewide KCEU to all six regions. Included in this request is \$1,533,000 for salaries and benefits, \$27,000 for goods and services, \$36,000 for travel expenses and \$262,000 of the agency's indirect costs. This funding is requested as ongoing funding.

Workforce Assumptions:

DCYF requests 15.0 FTEs to implement the Kinship KCEU in all six of DCYF's regions.

There will be 3.0 Kinship KCEU Supervisors to manage the process and supervise the specialists. Each supervisor will manage two regions. There is a need for 1.0 administrative support staff to support the statewide implementation and 1.0 administrator over this team. The remaining 8.0 FTE's will be caregiver engagement specialists for KCEU that will support kinship caregivers with the home study and licensing process.

This aligns with the pilot project's staffing allocations. The pilot consisted of existing FTE's to allocate 1 KCEU supervisor and 6 KCEU specialists covering Regions 1 and 2.

During the pilot's timeframe from October 1, 2020-June 30, 2021, the KCEU received 441 home study inquiries. The KCEU specialists provided exemplary customer service to assist families with the administrative process. Based on required training, the specialists are prepared to work with families from diverse cultures and communities by demonstrating cultural humility and competency.

The timely completion of a home study removes one of the biggest barriers to achieving permanency for children. The pilot has also shown that redistributing approximately 36% of the entry and engagement tasks and receiving automated referrals, enables licensors and home study writers to focus on timely completion of home studies. By implementing the KCEU statewide, DCYF anticipates all home studies to be completed within 60 business days of the completed application assignment, 85% of the time.

How is your proposal impacting equity in the state?

Kinship caregivers agree to care for the kinship child(ren) as an alternative to having the child placed in a foster home. Many kinship caregivers are unprepared financially for this sudden growth in their family and are unprepared for the significant requirements, such as participating in the home study process, following court-ordered services, providing Family Time visitations, etc.

Studies have shown kin placements minimize the trauma associated with home removals, while simultaneously increasing the child(ren)'s likelihood of remaining connected to siblings, families of origin, and community. All of which improves the child(ren)'s overall well-being. When compared to children in non-relative foster care, children in kinship care have been found to experience fewer behavioral and mental health challenges, lower rates of re-abuse, and less placement disruption. (Casey Family Programs, 2020 <https://www.casey.org/adapting-home-studies-for-kin/>). An agency goal is for kinship care to become the norm, with programs like KCEU furthering that goal.

Strategic and Performance Outcomes

Strategic Framework:

One resilience outcome goal area is “Children and youth are supported by healthy relationships with adults.” The timely completion of a home study ensures that children and youth are in supportive, long-term placements, where they can grow and maintain healthy relationships. If reunification cannot occur, permanency is essential to a child’s lifelong development.

Another resilience outcome goal is “Parents and caregivers are supported to meet the needs of children and youth.” Implementation of KCEU will support caregivers so they are able to complete the home study process while meeting the needs of the children and youth who may be, or are already, placed in their care.

The KCEU pilot program has shown that the timeliness of home study completion in Regions 1 and 2 have improved timelines by an average of 20.45 percent within the first nine months.

Performance Outcomes:

Performance outcomes

It is expected that the KCEU will:

- Increase initial engagement process at the earliest onset of placement.
- Increase licensed kinship providers, measured by data regarding licensed providers.
- Improve timeliness, measured by days from complete application assignment to completion of the home study. Home studies will not delay permanency for children, measured by case reviews.

During the pilot program from October 1, 2020-June 30, 2021, pilot data shows:

- The KCEU Specialist completed the application process with the kin caregivers on an average of 41.45 days, below the projected 60 calendar days.
- The timeliness of completion also improved from 163 days to 113.94 from receipt of home study application to home study completion.

Statewide implementation of the KCEU is expected to complete all applications for home studies within 45 business days, 85% of the time. Furthermore, statewide implementation is anticipated to complete all home studies within 60 business days from the completed application date. The KCEU pilot has shown production rates organically increase from the direct focus on timeliness as a key performance goal.

Other Collateral Connections

Puget Sound Recovery:

Not Applicable

State Workforce Impacts:

Not Applicable

Intergovernmental:

The KCEU will partner with tribal social services and Child Placing Agency’s, follow the applicable intergovernmental agreements, and memorandums of understanding.

Legal or Administrative Mandates:

Not Applicable

Stakeholder Response:

Community stakeholders including but not limited to kinship caregivers, Kinship Care Oversight Committee, and Child Welfare Advisory Committee are in support of the proposal. Kinship caregivers will be impacted and will have benefits from additional support and guidance from the specialized KCEU. They will be supported at the earliest onset of placement, provided resources to stabilize their growing family, and assistance in navigating the licensing process to obtain additional financial subsidies.

Changes from Current Law:

Not Applicable

State Facilities Impacts:

Not Applicable

IT Addendum

Does this Decision Package include funding for any IT-related costs, including hardware, software, (including cloud-based services), contracts or IT staff?

No

Objects of Expenditure

Objects of Expenditure <i>Dollars in Thousands</i>	Fiscal Years		Biennial	Fiscal Years		Biennial
	2022	2023	2021-23	2024	2025	2023-25
Obj. A	\$0	\$1,105	\$1,105	\$1,105	\$1,105	\$2,210
Obj. B	\$0	\$429	\$429	\$429	\$429	\$858
Obj. E	\$0	\$27	\$27	\$27	\$27	\$54
Obj. G	\$0	\$36	\$36	\$36	\$36	\$72
Obj. T	\$0	\$261	\$261	\$261	\$261	\$522

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