

**DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES**

744 P Street, Sacramento, California 95814



March 6, 2002

ALL COUNTY LETTER NO. 02-25

TO: ALL COUNTY WELFARE DIRECTORS  
ALL CHIEF PROBATION OFFICERS**REASON FOR THIS TRANSMITTAL**

- State Law Change
- Federal Law or Regulation Change
- Court Order
- Clarification Requested by One or More Counties
- Initiated by CDSS

SUBJECT: **SUPPORTIVE TRANSITIONAL EMANCIPATION PROGRAM**

REFERENCE: ALL COUNTY INFORMATION NOTICE I-93-01

This All County Letter (ACL) transmits information regarding Assembly Bill (AB) 427 (Chapter 125, Statutes of 2001) which created the Supportive Transitional Emancipation Program (STEP). Welfare and Institutions Code (WIC) Section 11403.1 provides that STEP be implemented by January 1, 2002. The bill permits the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) to implement the provisions through the ACL process with emergency regulations to follow. This program promotes self-sufficiency by providing an assistance payment to emancipated foster youth until their 21<sup>st</sup> birthday under specified circumstances and helps to support a vulnerable population at risk of homelessness, unemployment, welfare dependency and incarceration. Youth participating in the Kinship Guardianship Assistance Payment Program (Kin-GAP) are also eligible for STEP when they emancipate.

As part of AB 427 mandates, CDSS sought a Title IV-E State Plan amendment and a federal waiver for this program in order to secure Title IV-E funding, if available. In a response letter from the federal Department of Health and Human Services dated November 26, 2001 the Department has been advised that due to the Title IV-E federal age limitations, our waiver request could not be approved. Therefore, these federal funds are not available for STEP. The sharing ratio for the program is forty percent State funds and sixty percent county funds. Participation by counties is voluntary; counties who wish to participate should file a Letter of Intent with CDSS no later than April 1<sup>st</sup> of each year.

An Assistance Claim form and aid code are being developed by CDSS Fiscal Policy Bureau (FPB) and detailed costs claiming instructions will follow via County Fiscal Letter (CFL). The FPB is also developing State-only Eligibility and Transitional Independent Living Plan (TILP) Time Study codes for the administrative activities associated with STEP.

### Program Eligibility

STEP was designed with simple eligibility criteria set forth as follows:

- The applicant must be at least 18 and under 21 years of age in order to be eligible. Payment ceases on the day before the youth's 21<sup>st</sup> birthday.
- The applicant must have been in foster care on the day before the youth's 18<sup>th</sup> birthday.
- The applicant is eligible if in foster care by virtue of any of the following authorities for placement:
  1. Court dependency (and the youth was in a foster care placement)
  2. Court wardship (and the youth was in a foster care placement)
  3. Relinquishment or Termination of Parental Rights (and the youth was in a foster care placement)
  4. Voluntary Placement Agreement (and the youth was in a foster care placement)
  5. Non-related legal guardianship and received a State Aid to Families with Dependent Children-Foster Care (AFDC-FC) Payment, and
  6. Related legal guardianship and received a Kin-GAP Payment
- It is important to note that the funding source while the youth was in Foster Care does not affect the applicant's eligibility; so long as the applicant was in foster care under one of the authorities for placement identified above, the applicant is eligible. For example, an applicant who was a dependent/ward of the court and receiving a California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKs) payment, a Supplemental Security Income/State Supplementary Payment (SSI/SSP), or county only funding, may be eligible to participate in STEP.

### Transitional Independent Living Plan

A TILP must be developed for all participating youth and must include educational, vocational or any other activity that is consistent with the STEP guidelines. In addition, the youth must participate in the activities identified in the TILP. This information will be verified by the county worker and transmitted to the eligibility worker on a form which has been developed by the CDSS in consultation with the County Welfare Director's Association (CWDA), the California Youth Connection, and other interested parties. The form will be transmitted via a future notice.

### County Participation

Participating counties will serve only those youth that have emancipated (at 18 or 19) from their county Foster Care Program, Kin-GAP, or non-related legal guardian. The county will also maintain payment responsibility for the participating youth regardless of where the youth resides, as long as they remain a California resident. The STEP payment will be advanced to the youth unless the youth is in Transitional Housing Program Plus facility or remains with the care provider. In these situations the payment will be made to the care provider.

### Annual Redetermination

The TILP must be reviewed annually by the county. Once this review is complete, the county worker will forward a form (to be transmitted in a separate notice) to the eligibility worker, which indicates whether the youth continues to be eligible for STEP under an appropriate TILP activity. The eligibility worker will also verify that the youth continues to meet the age requirement.

### Optional Program

As WIC 11403.1(g)(1) provides, participation in STEP is at county option. However, once a county has chosen to participate, it may also choose to discontinue participation. Once a county decides to discontinue STEP, they must notify CDSS 90 days prior to the proposed termination date of the county program. If a county chooses to discontinue participating in STEP, that county must continue to serve those youth currently participating in STEP, consistent with provisions in his or her TILP, and until they age out of the program (at 21). The county would not be required to serve any new youth.

For more information on the eligibility requirements for this program, contact your county's Foster Care Eligibility Consultant at (916) 324-5809. For more information about TILP requirements and county participation in STEP, contact the Independent Living Program Policy Unit at (916) 324-5809. For claiming information on STEP, contact the Fiscal Policy Bureau at (916) 657-3440.

Sincerely,

SYLVIA PIZZINI  
Deputy Director  
Children and Family Services Division