

December 28, 2023

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

**ALL COUNTY LETTER NO. 23-110**

This All County Letter provides information to county child welfare and probate departments regarding new requirements around family finding policies and practices.



KIM JOHNSON  
DIRECTOR

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**DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES**  
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GAVIN NEWSOM  
GOVERNOR

December 28, 2023

ALL COUNTY LETTER NO. 23-110

TO: ALL COUNTY WELFARE DIRECTORS  
ALL CHIEF PROBATION OFFICERS  
ALL FOSTER CARE MANAGERS  
ALL FEDERALLY RECOGNIZED TRIBES  
ALL TITLE IV-E TRIBAL AGENCIES

SUBJECT: NEW REQUIREMENTS REGARDING FAMILY FINDING  
POLICIES AND PRACTICES

REFERENCE: [SENATE BILL 384 \(CHAPTER 811, STATUTES OF 2022\);](#)  
[ASSEMBLY BILL 179 \(CHAPTER 249, STATUTES OF 2022\);](#)  
[WELFARE AND INSTITUTIONS CODE \(WIC\) SECTIONS 309](#)  
[AND WIC Section 628; ALL COUNTY LETTER \(ACL\) 18-42, ACL](#)  
[23-46, ACL 23-12;](#)  
[ALL TRIBAL LEADER LETTER \(ATLL\) 23-03; COUNTY FISCAL](#)  
[LETTER \(CFL\) 22/23-49 AND CFL 22/23-52](#)

## **PURPOSE**

The purpose of this All County Letter (ACL) is to inform county child welfare agencies and probation departments of new requirements regarding each agency's existing or anticipated policies, practices, and implementation of family finding efforts whenever a child is under the jurisdiction of the juvenile court. This ACL provides instructions on how counties may notify the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) of their adopted family finding practices and how those practices have been implemented.

## **BACKGROUND**

Family Finding and Engagement (FFE) efforts are meant to enhance the long-term well-being of children and youth in care and are an important component of California's Continuum of Care Reform initiative to reduce the use of congregate care and to improve child welfare outcomes. The FFE is a comprehensive concept encompassing both the requirements for identifying, locating, and notifying the relatives of a child under

the care and custody of the juvenile court and the related efforts to foster life-long familial connections for children and youth in care. In addition to the statutorily required identification and notification of relatives, nonrelative extended family members, and extended family members of an Indian child (as defined by [Title 25 - Indians USCODE 1903](#)) for consideration of placement, counties are encouraged to concurrently use **FFE** to identify individuals who are not related to the child but who may be a support and serve as permanent connections to the child or youth throughout their life whenever feasible. This includes persons who are already a part of the child's life.

The **FFE** also supports the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) requirement of conducting inquiry with members of the child's family and extended family about whether the child is or may be an Indian child. Please refer to [ACL 23-46](#) for more information on ICWA inquiry.

### **NEW REQUIREMENTS**

[Senate Bill \(SB\) 384](#) amended [Welfare and Institutions Code \(WIC\) section 309\(e\)\(3\)](#) and [WIC section 628\(d\)\(3\)](#), requiring all county child welfare and probation departments to notify the CDSS of the following on or before January 1, 2024:

1. Whether the county agency has adopted certain suggested practices for family finding as described in [ACL 18-42](#) and whether the practice has been implemented through training, memoranda, manuals, or comparable documents.
2. If the county agency has not adopted one of the suggested practices for family finding, the county shall provide a copy to the CDSS of its family finding policies and practices in effect prior to January 1, 2022, as reflected in memoranda, handbooks, manuals, training manuals, or any other document.

A definition of "family finding" was codified at [WIC section 309\(e\)\(3\)\(B\)](#) and at [WIC section 628\(d\)\(3\)\(B\)](#) to mean the following:

"Conducting an investigation, including, but not limited to, through a computer-based search engine, to identify relatives and kin and to connect a child or youth, who may be disconnected from their parents, with those relatives and kin to provide family support and possible placement. If it is known or there is reason to know that the child is an Indian child, as defined by section 224.1, "family finding" also includes contacting the Indian child's tribe to identify relatives and kin."

The information required pursuant to [SB 384](#) can be submitted to the CDSS' Center for Excellence mailbox at: [Centerforexcellence@dss.ca.gov](mailto:Centerforexcellence@dss.ca.gov).

## **SUGGESTED PRACTICE**

When developing or implementing policies and procedures for FFE, the CDSS offers the following suggestions as steps that may contribute to the success of these efforts:

- Establish a kin-first culture.
- Center the child as a primary information source.
- Dedicate staff to conduct family finding.
- Dedicate staff to outreach and engage with Tribes.
- Follow-up and engagement.
- Utilize established FFE models.

Detailed guidance and information on suggested practice can be found in [ACL 18-42](#).

## **RESOURCES**

[Assembly Bill \(AB\) 179 \(Chapter 249, Statutes of 2022\)](#) created the Excellence in Family Finding, Engagement, and Support (EFFES) Program which provides \$150 million in one-time funding to counties and participating Tribes for specialized permanency work, including culturally responsive, family-centered, and trauma-informed family finding and engagement services. Services are focused on establishing and maintaining permanent connections for foster children with their relatives, extended family members, and other family-like relationships. Counties may elect to participate in the EFFES Program by submitting a Certification and Funding plan to the CDSS by June 30, 2025. For additional information on the EFFES Program requirements, please refer to [ACL 23-12](#). For claiming instructions and allocation information, please refer to [County Fiscal Letter \(CFL\) 22/23-49](#) and [CFL 22/23-52](#). For an overview of key requirements for interested Tribes, please see [All Tribal Leader Letter 23-03](#).

Additionally, AB 179 appropriated \$750,000 in ongoing funding to launch the Center for Excellence in Family Finding, Engagement and Support. (CFE). The CDSS contracted with University of California, Davis to launch the CFE, which provides state-wide culturally relevant training and technical assistance to county child welfare and probation departments, participating Tribes, and foster care providers to enhance their practices, policies, and efforts for family finding, support, and engagement. This can increase placements and connections with relatives when reunification cannot occur, and which, when done in partnership with Tribes, promotes the stability and security of Indian children and the best interest of the Indian child. For more information on the CFE services, training, technical assistance, etc., please see [ACL 23-12](#) and the [Center for Excellence website](#).

The creation of the CFE and the training, technical assistance, and support it will offer will be in alignment with the Integrated Core Practice Model (ICPM). The vision of the CFE is based on the values of the ICPM and include an emphasis on family driven and youth guided practices, community driven supports and culturally and linguistically competent trainings and technical support, all provided through a trauma aware lens. If you would like more information on ICPM please see the [CDSS ICPM Home Page](#).

### **CLAIMING FOR FUNDS**

A Claiming County Fiscal Letter will be forthcoming.

### **CONTACT**

If you have any questions or need additional guidance regarding the information in this letter, contact the Permanency Policy Bureau at (916) 657-1851 or the Center for Excellence mailbox at [Centerforexcellence@dss.ca.gov](mailto:Centerforexcellence@dss.ca.gov).

Sincerely,

***Original Document Signed By***

ANGIE SCHWARTZ  
Deputy Director  
Children And Family Services Division

Attachment

### County Child Welfare SB 384 Reporting Form

Please Submit this form to the CDSS' Center for Excellence at  
[Centerforexcellence@dss.ca.gov](mailto:Centerforexcellence@dss.ca.gov).

County Name:

County Contact:

Title:

Phone:

Email:

[Senate Bill \(SB\) 384 \(Chapter 811, Statutes of 2022\)](#) amended [Welfare and Institutions Code \(WIC\) section 309\(e\)\(3\)](#) and [WIC section 628\(d\)\(3\)](#), requiring all county child welfare and probation departments to notify the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) of the following on or before January 1, 2024:

1. Whether the county agency has adopted ***certain suggested practices*** for family finding as described in [All County Letter \(ACL\) 18-42](#) and whether the practice has been implemented through training, memoranda, manuals, or comparable documents.
2. If the county agency has not adopted one of the suggested practices for family finding, the county shall provide a copy to the CDSS of its family finding policies and practices in effect prior to January 1, 2022, as reflected in memoranda, handbooks, manuals, training manuals, or any other document.

☐ Our County has adopted certain suggested practices for family finding as described in ACL 18-42. (Check all that apply):

- ☐ Children are the primary source of information.
- ☐ Use of specialized software/technologies for family finding.
- ☐ Dedicated family finding staff doing ONLY family finding work.
- ☐ Dedicated family finding staff who may also have other duties.
- ☐ Follow-up and engagement with kin and NREFMs to cultivate connections.
- ☐ Use of a proprietary model of family finding (i.e., Wendy's Wonderful Kids, 30 Days to Family, 3-5-7 Model etc.).
  - ☐ If yes, please list the model:
- ☐ Use of an independent or other county-adapted "model".
  - ☐ If so, please list the model:

Has the practice been implemented? Yes ☐ No ☐

How is your county supporting implementation of any of the suggested practices?  
(Check all that apply):

- ☐ Training
- ☐ Memorandum or other instructions sent to staff

- ☐ Use of a manual
- ☐ Local policy
- ☐ Other (describe):
- ☐ Our county has not implemented any of the suggested practices.  
*If you check-mark this box, then attach/send any family finding policies and practices in effect prior to January 1, 2022, as reflected in memoranda, handbooks, manuals, training manuals, or any other document to the email address above.*

-----CDSS Comments (below this line) -----

Form Received by:

Date received:

Completed/Met Requirements of SB 384? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Comments: