

October 10, 2024

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ALL COUNTY LETTER NO. 24-75

The purpose of this All County Letter is to announce changes to the Excellence in Family Finding, Engagement, and Support Program to allow counties without a full-time family -finding worker due to insufficient caseloads to request authorization from the California Department of Social Services to participate using a portion of a family-finding worker's time.



JENNIFER TROIA
ACTING DIRECTOR

CALIFORNIA HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES AGENCY
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES
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GAVIN NEWSOM
GOVERNOR

October 10, 2024

ALL COUNTY LETTER NO. 24-75

TO: ALL COUNTY WELFARE DIRECTORS
ALL CHIEF PROBATION OFFICERS

SUBJECT: **UPDATES TO THE EXCELLENCE IN FAMILY FINDING,
ENGAGEMENT AND SUPPORT PROGRAM**

REFERENCE: [WELFARE AND INSTITUTIONS CODE \(WIC\) SECTION 16546,](#)
[ASSEMBLY BILL \(AB\) 161 \(CHAPTER 46, STATUTES OF 2024\)](#)
[ALL COUNTY LETTER \(ACL\) NO. 23-12](#)
[COUNTY FISCAL LETTER \(CFL\) NO. 22/23-49,](#)
[CFL NO. 22/23-52;](#)
[ALL TRIBAL LEADER LETTER \(ATTL\) NO. 23-03](#)

PURPOSE

The purpose of this All County Letter (ACL) is to announce updates to the Excellence in Family Finding, Engagement, and Support (EFFES) Program. These changes enable counties that do not have a full-time family-finding worker due to insufficient caseloads to request authorization from the California Department of Social Services to participate by using a portion of a family-finding worker's time.

BACKGROUND

The Budget Act of 2022 appropriated \$150 million General Fund in one-time funding for specialized permanency work, including culturally responsive, family-centered, and trauma-informed family finding and engagement services. Services shall focus on establishing and maintaining permanent connections for foster children and youth with their relatives and extended family members. Counties who choose to participate in the program must opt in by June 30, 2025. After June 30, 2025, allocations from those counties and tribes that did not opt in by June 30, 2025, will be allocated to counties and tribes that did opt in. All funds must be expended by June 30, 2027.

NEW STATE LAW

[Assembly Bill \(AB\) 161 \(Chapter 46, Statutes of 2024\)](#), amended [Welfare and Institutions Code \(WIC\) section 16546.5](#) to allow counties with insufficient caseloads, to support a full-time family-finding worker, the ability to request departmental approval for funding a portion of a family-finding worker's time solely dedicated to family-finding activities. The WIC Section 16546.5(h) has been amended and reads:

(h)(1) Family-finding workers shall be assigned to family-finding responsibilities full time but may be employed by either the participating county or a nonprofit community-based organization with which the participating county has contracted for this purpose.

(2) Notwithstanding paragraph (1), a participating county or tribe without a family-finding worker assigned full time to family-finding responsibilities due to an insufficient caseload, as determined by the department, may submit a written request to the department for authorization to use funding to pay for the portion of a family-finding worker's time dedicated to family-finding activities. The request shall be submitted in a manner to be prescribed by the department and shall include, at a minimum, the following information:

(A) Caseload information to support the assertion of an insufficient caseload for the worker to be assigned full time to family-finding responsibilities.

(B) The proportion of the family-finding worker's time assigned to family-finding responsibilities.

An All-Tribal Leader Letter (ATLL) will be issued to inform Tribes that the change to WIC Section 16546.5(h) will not impact the Tribes' existing process for opting-in to the EFFES program. Detailed information for the EFFES program and current opt-in process for Tribes can be found in [ATLL No. 23-03](#).

COUNTIES WITH APPROVED EXCELLENCE IN FAMILY FINDING, ENGAGEMENT AND SUPPORT CERTIFICATION AND FUNDING PLANS

Counties that have approved certification and funding plans may update the family finding worker details via e-mail to the Center for Excellence at Centerforexcellence@dss.ca.gov.

Please note that resubmission of the full plan is not required. Counties will receive notification of approval within two weeks. The overall EFFES opt-in process remains the same, and detailed information can be found in [All County Letter \(ACL\) No. 23-12](#).

**COUNTIES NOT YET OPTED-IN TO EXCELLENCE IN FAMILY FINDING,
ENGAGEMENT, AND SUPPORT**

For counties that have not yet opted-in to the EFFES Program, the Certification and Funding Plan template has been updated to capture the required information (see Attachment A). The details should demonstrate why a full-time assignment to family-finding responsibilities is not feasible based on current caseload levels. The overall EFFES opt-in process remains unchanged, with detailed guidance available in ACL No. 23-12.

EXCELLENCE IN FAMILY FINDING, ENGAGEMENT, AND SUPPORT PROGRAM

As a reminder, the EFFES Program funding must be used for specialized permanency services and supports that augment existing funding. The EFFES funds may not supplant funds for existing family finding and engagement programs; however, counties may use funds to expand their existing programs. For more information on the county match, availability, and allowable use of funds, see [County Fiscal Letter \(CFL\) No. 22/23-49](#). For administrative claiming instructions for costs associated with the EFFES Program, see [CFL No. 22/23-52](#).

If you have any questions or need additional guidance regarding the information in this letter, contact the Kin-Centric Compass Unit at CenterforExcellence@dss.ca.gov. For fiscal related questions, please contact the Fiscal Policy and Analysis Bureau at Fiscal.Systems@dss.ca.gov.

Sincerely,

Original Document Signed By

ANGIE SCHWARTZ
Deputy Director
Children and Family Services Division

Attachment

cc: All Federally Recognized Tribes in California

EXCELLENCE IN FAMILY FINDING, ENGAGEMENT, AND SUPPORT PROGRAM
WRITTEN CERTIFICATION AND FUNDING PLAN

_____, 2024
California Department of Social Services
Attention: Family Permanency and Support Services Branch

Director Troia:

The purpose of this notice is to inform the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) that _____ County [Child Welfare Agency/Probation Department] has reviewed the information provided in the attached All County Letter (ACL), and elects to **opt into** the Excellence in Family Finding, Engagement, and Support (EFFES) program. _____ County [Child Welfare Agency/Probation Department] agrees to the conditions set forth in the ACL, including but not limited to, adhering to funding requirements, allowable activities, and the data collection and reporting requirements. _____ County [Child Welfare Agency/Probation Department] certifies that the county [Child Welfare Agency/Probation Department] currently utilizes or will utilize dedicated family finding workers who have experience or training in family finding strategies and practices, and whose exclusive responsibilities will be family finding, engagement and support. Family finding workers may be employed by either the participating county [Child Welfare Agency/Probation Department] or a contracted nonprofit community-based organization.

Signature(s) of Child Welfare Director/Chief Probation Officer
or Authorized Representatives

Date

CDSS will accept electronic signatures in lieu of traditional manual signatures. Counties that choose to opt into the EFFES Program are required to submit a written plan addressing the questions on the following page. Only one written funding plan is needed if the county's child welfare agency and probation department choose to opt into the EFFES program together, but both agencies will need to sign off on the submission to provide the necessary certification.

Counties may begin accessing funds upon notification from CDSS that the county's written plan has been approved and will include the date of approval. Please submit completed plans to: centerforexcellence@dss.ca.gov.

1. Allocated funds must be used for specialized permanency work, including culturally responsive, family-centered, and trauma-informed family finding and engagement services.

Please explain the following:

- A. How does the county intend to use the funds?
- B. What activities will the funds be used for? Funded activities shall include any or all of the following items. Please describe the county's plan for any chosen funded activities below.

- I. Training of staff on family finding and engagement practices and models.

Describe your county's plan for training of staff here.

- II. Staffing and tools to identify, locate, and engage persons related to the child by blood or marriage, identification, and engagement of other family-like relationships, and in the case of an Indian child, to make active efforts to engage with the tribe to determine the child's extended family members, as defined in [Welfare and Institution Code \(WIC\) section 224.1](#). This may include use of internet and social media tools, genograms, database searches, and other technological tools to support family finding.

Describe your county's plan for identifying, locating, and engaging related persons here.

- III. Pursuant to [WIC section 16546.5\(h\)\(2\)](#), if your county is not able to assign a family-finding worker full-time due to insufficient caseloads, please provide detailed caseload information below and an explanation of the proportion of the family-finding worker's time that will be assigned to family-finding responsibilities. The information should clearly demonstrate why a full-time family-finding worker is not feasible.

Please include caseload information here.

- IV. Outreach and engagement of the child and family team members and all other current and prior service providers, case managers, and other connections to the foster child, to identify and engage possible family and family-like connections.

Describe your county's plan for outreach and engagement of child and family team members and other current and prior case-related providers and persons here.

- V. Plan development and case management for the child, family, and family-like connections to identify and address any barriers to establishing or reestablishing positive, loving, and supportive relationships.

Describe your county's plan for plan development and case management for familial connections here and addressing barriers to permanent connections here.

- VI. Implementation of model programs, strategies, or promising practices identified by CDSS following required consultation.

Please describe the family finding models, programs, strategies, or promising practice the county intends to implement.

2. Please explain how the county will provide the required match of local funds, which may include in-kind contributions of services or other resources.

Please include local match details here.