* **CB COVID-19 Resource page**: <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/resource/covid-19-resources>
* **New Webpage on Funds Available Through the Supporting Foster Youth and Families Through the Pandemic Act** <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/news/youth-families-through-pandemic-act>
* **CB Capacity Building Center for States:** [**https://capacity.childwelfare.gov/states/**](https://capacity.childwelfare.gov/states/)
  + **Liaison Jeremy Harvey** [**jeremy.harvey@icf.com**](mailto:jeremy.harvey@icf.com)
  + <https://cbexpress.acf.hhs.gov/index.cfm?event=website.viewArticles&issueid=225&sectionid=1&articleid=5795> The Supporting Foster Youth and Families Through the Pandemic Act (P.L. 116-260) was signed into law on December 27, 2020, to provide state, tribal, and county child welfare agencies with time-limited resources to respond to the needs of youth and young adults under the age of 27 who spent time in foster care after the age of 14. These pandemic relief funds are aimed at helping these young people with mortgage or rent payments, utility bills, car loans, groceries, and other basic needs.
  + To spread the word about this new funding opportunity, Child Welfare Information Gateway created a webpage that provides additional information for youth and professionals. The webpage features information on eligibility as well as pertinent information on the law itself, including a link to the Children's Bureau's Information Memorandum (IM-21-05) that outlines the changes to the John H. Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood and education and training voucher supplemental funding, minimum age limitations in eligibility for assistance, programmatic flexibilities, and more. In addition, the webpage also links to a recording of the Children's Bureau's webinar on the new law that was held on January 7, 2021. The recording for the webinar is available on the webpage and through the CB Express article.
  + Although not within the Children’s Bureau but important to note, on March 11, 2021, the president signed a $1.9 trillion emergency relief bill - the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) - aimed at providing economic relief to the nation’s families, workers and businesses. Including, child care grants to be awarded on a formula basis to states, territories, and tribes for two types of child care funding:
  + $24 billion in Child Care Stabilization Grants
  + $15 billion in supplemental Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) monies
* CB’s Center for States has hosted a variety of peer events in the past few months, including a few that have specifically referenced COVID relief flexibilities and resources that may be used for prevention-focused efforts.
  + An event for the Kinship Navigator peer group on March 3, 2021 focused on supporting states’ capacity to evaluation kinship navigator programs. The event referenced the Consolidated Appropriations Act (CAA), and the temporary flexibility it provides for these requirements. The revised requirements of the Act were reviewed.
  + A series of peer events for the Chafee/ETV peer group was launched on March 10, 2021 focused on supporting state capacity to serve and meet the needs of older youth, young adults, and their families leveraging the flexibilities and resources provided by CAA.  The requirements of specific Division X provisions were reviewed during the first event. Discussions continue to be facilitated around implementation of the requirements and opportunities to serve vulnerable populations, including pregnant and parenting youth.
* Over the past 6 months HHS/ACF/CB communication, information, and guidance related to COVID relief has been sent out to a variety of peer groups and listservs (including those focused specifically and generally on prevention planning and FFPSA):
* Flexibility to allow programs and services to be adapted to a virtual environment ([11/2020 Dear Colleague Letter](file:///C:\Users\32219\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Windows\INetCache\Content.Outlook\8WXLXZM3\Children's%20Bureau%20-%20Letter%20to%20Child%20Welfare%20Leaders%20-%20Virtual%20Adaptation%20of%20Evidence-Based%20Practices.pdf))
* ACYF-CB-IM-21-05 and ACYF-CB-PI-21-04 on Supporting Foster Youth and Families Through the Pandemic Act describes key flexibilities and supplemental funding including those related to:
  + Temporary increase of federal reimbursement rate from 50 to 100% for the IV-E Prevention Program
  + Temporary requirements for title IV-E agencies to allow youth over age 18 to remain in or re-enter foster care and suspension of the age and education/employment requirements for title IV-E foster care maintenance payments for youth;
  + Additional funding and flexibilities provided under the John H. Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood (Chafee program) and Education and Training Vouchers (ETV) Program;
  + Supplemental funding for the MaryLee Allen Promoting Safe and Stable Families Program;
  + Supplemental funding for the Court Improvement Program;
  + Temporary enhanced funding for the title IV-E Prevention Services Program; and
  + Adjustments to baselines used to calculate Funding Certainty Grants authorized by the Family First Transition Act

On March 18, 2020, CB issued a letter to the field on:

• Announcing a modification to the monthly caseworker visit policy, allowing for videoconferencing in certain circumstances (see amended Child Welfare Policy Manual §7.3 #8).

Separately on April 6, 2020, CB issued resources for virtual visits.

• Reminding states of existing potential flexibilities available to adjust Child and Family Services Review Program Improvement Plans (PIPs), such as renegotiating the terms and conditions of PIPs and extensions of PIP deadlines.

• Postponing title IV-E reviews.

• Reminding agencies to follow the guidance of state and local public health officials with respect to conducting investigations at this time, including whether caseworkers should initiate in-person contact.

• Reminding agencies that delays in conducting periodic reviews and permanency hearings will not affect the child’s eligibility for title IV-E foster care.

On April 1, 2020, CB issued a letter to the field on updates to two formula grant opportunities:

• Extending the deadline for submission of Kinship Navigator Funding applications by four weeks until May 1, 2020.

• Not requiring a separate application for Family First Prevention Services Act Transition Grants funding.

ACYF-CB-IM-20-05, issued on April 6, 2020, announced to the field that P.L. 116-127 provides a temporary increase in the Federal Medical Assistance Percentage (FMAP) rate that is used in determining the Federal share of expenditures for assistance payments under title IV-E.

On April 10, 2020, CB issued a letter to the field postponing Title IV-E Foster Care Eligibility Reviews (IV-E Reviews) and National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD) Reviews.

On April 17, 2020, CB issued a letter to the field on:

• The availability of federal funding and other resources to assist with the purchase of cell phones and plans to facilitate and maintain contact, and

• The purchase of personal protective equipment (PPE) as an allowable cost.

Letters to child welfare leaders and governors were also sent on this date, encouraging them to work with public health officials to obtain PPE for child welfare workers.

ACYF-CB-PI-20-11, issued June 8, 2020, provides guidance to agencies administering title IV-B, subpart 1 of the Act (the Stephanie Tubbs Jones Child Welfare Services Program) on the supplemental fiscal year (FY) 2020 funding provided under P.L. 116-136 the CARES Act. The PI provides information on the allowable use of the funding and actions states, territories and tribes must take to report on planned and actual use of the funds.

On April 15, 2020, CB issued a letter to the field allowing agencies flexibility in meeting:

• Fingerprint-based criminal records checks (CRC) of national crime information databases (NCID) (§471(a)(20)(A), (C), and (D) of the Social Security Act (the Act)) o Flexibility: Conduct all available name-based criminal background checks for prospective foster parents, adoptive parents, legal guardians, and adults working in child care institutions, and complete the fingerprint-based checks of NCID as soon as it can safely do so, in situations where only name-based checks were completed.

• Caseworker visit in the child’s residence (50% of visits, applies to states only) (§424(f)(2)(A) of the Act) o Flexibility: Count caseworker visits conducted by of video conferencing as “in the child’s residence” for meeting the requirement.

On May 11, 2020, CB issued ACYF-CB-PI-20-10 allowing agencies flexibilities in the following:

• Title IV-E Eligibility for Youth Age 18 and Older: Simplified Process o Flexibility: A simplified process for opting to provide title IV-E assistance to youth age 18 and older, by submitting Attachments A and B to the PI, instead of submitting a title IV-E plan amendment (§475(8)(B) of the Act). If the agency will continue to provide extended title IV-E assistance after the end of the major disaster, it must submit a title IV-E plan amendment.

• Title IV-E Assistance for Youth Age 18 and Older: Education and Employment Conditions o Flexibility: Title IV-E agencies may modify the requirement for older youth to meet education or employment conditions for youth who are unable to fulfill this requirement as a direct result of the pandemic (§475(8)(B)(iv) of the Act).

• Accreditation and Reaccreditation of Qualified Residential Treatment Programs (QRTPs) o Flexibility: If conditions related to the COVID-19 pandemic prevent a facility from completing its accreditation or reaccreditation as a QRTP, allow title IV-E agency claiming for title IV-E expenses on behalf of an otherwise eligible child who is placed in the QRTP only during the time the requirement is unable to be met as a result of the major disaster (§472(k)(4)(G) of the Act).

* Accreditation or reaccreditation must resume once the major disaster is over, and it is practicable to do so.
* The facility must meet all other statutory requirements, including that the QRTP is licensed or approved and title IV-E agencies must meet additional case planning and court approval requirements for a child to be eligible for title IV-E foster care maintenance payments while placed in a QRTP (§§472(k)(3)-(4) and 475A(c) of the Act).

• Provisional Licensure for Foster Family Homes o Flexibility: Allow claiming of title IV-E reimbursement on behalf of an otherwise eligible child who is placed in a foster family home that is provisionally or conditionally approved or licensed, if the declared major disaster precludes full completion of the licensing process (§472(c)(1)(A)(i) of the Act).

Agency must complete any remaining licensing requirements as soon as it is safe to do so, in accordance with state and local health authorities, and must ensure that the foster family home is safe for children.

The title IV-E agency must complete as many of the requirements for licensure as practicable, taking into account local requirements related to physical/social distancing guidelines and shelter in place orders.

On November 20, 2020, CB issued a letter to the field for flexibility related to the title IV-E prevention program, allowing programs and services to be adapted to a virtual environment to provide needed support during this crisis. Thus, during the major disaster period, CB will allow title IV-E agencies to adapt programs and services that have been approved as part of the title IV-E agency’s Title IV-E Prevention Services Program Plan to a virtual environment (if, absent the modification, such programs and services would not be available to families) to allow for children and families to receive necessary services without interruption and within public health guidelines.

**Best Practice Guidance**

On March 12, 2020, CB issued a letter to the field urging all child welfare agencies to immediately contact all youth and young adults in colleges or in other settings who may need assistance finding and securing housing while their college or university is closed and reminding them up to 30 percent of a state’s or tribe’s annual allotment under the Chafee Foster Care

Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood may be used to provide room and board assistance to eligible youth.

On March 27, 2020, CB issued a letter to child welfare legal and judicial leaders on how best to balance child-safety related statutory requirements against public-health mandates, such as being flexible in conducting court hearings, to avoid prolonged or indefinite delays in delivering services and postponements of judicial oversight.

On April 14, 2020, CB issued a letter to Chief Justices and State Court Administrators encouraging court leaders to engage Court Improvement Programs (CIPs) in assisting dependency courts to respond to Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19).

On April 16, 2020, the Capacity Building Center for Courts issued best practices and other recommendations for remote or virtual court hearings in child welfare cases for dependency courts.

On April 27, 2020, CB issued a letter to the field on areas of existing flexibility under title IV-E:

• Authority to establish a rate structure to provide an enhanced title IV-E foster care maintenance payment (FCMP) rate for children who have tested positive for COVID-19.

• Modify foster home licensing standards.

• Temporary absences from foster care may not impact a child’s title IV-E eligibility if certain conditions are met.

• Re-entry into foster care after age 18.

• Agencies may claim for any allowable title IV-E administrative costs associated with hazard pay for child welfare caseworkers.

Option to provide Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood Program (Chafee Program) services until age 23.

On May 15, 2020, CB issued suggestions related to Child and Family Service Reviews state-conducted case reviews that will help agencies maintain their oversight capacity and stay connected in a remote-work environment.

On May 26, 2020, CB issued a letter to the field on:

• Encourage states and tribes to review and revise your policies and procedures to allow youth to re-enter the extended foster care program if they exited, to extend foster care to youth from other states/service areas, and reach out to every youth who the agency believes may be eligible for extended foster care, whether or not they are currently residing in your state or service area.

• Making use of all placements types, such as supervised independent living.

• Urging agencies to reach out to those youth who are pregnant or parenting, ensuring these young families have resources.

On May 28, 2020, CB issued a joint letter with Health Resources and Services Administration encourages family support, maternal and child health, and early childhood programs to promote family strengthening and prevention strategies via virtual, electronic, telephonic, or other safe means during the COVID-19 pandemic.

On June 23, 2020, CB issued a letter to the field on:

• Concerns related to filing petitions to terminate a parent’s rights (TPR) when services have not been available.

• Highlighting service delivery strategies.

• Highlight challenges that adoptive families may face during the pandemic.

On July 28, 2020, CB partnered the CDC to conduct a webinar on Child Welfare Worker Safety in the time of COVID: CDC Recommendations for In-Person Interactions with Families.

On November 18, 2020, CB issued a letter to the field highlighting themes from twelve roundtable discussions with youth who are or were in foster care from across the country. The Child Welfare Information Gateway also has information for youth, child welfare professionals, and other adults on engaging youth authentically, continuously, and effectively (generally and in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic and public health emergency).

On December 4, 2020, CB issued a letter to the field encouraging agencies and courts to continue working together to ensure judicial hearings and reviews proceed and critical judicial oversight occurs in child welfare proceedings during the COVID-19 pandemic.