



SPECIAL TRANSMITTAL

SUBJECT: Voluntary Certification as a Specialized Setting

TO: Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts
Chief Juvenile Probation Officers
Child Residential Facilities
County Children and Youth Social Service Agencies
County Children and Youth Solicitors
Juvenile Court Judges' Commission
Pennsylvania Bar Association
Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency
Pennsylvania Court Appointed Special Advocates Association
Private Children and Youth Social Service Agencies

FROM: Jonathan Rubin 
Deputy Secretary for Children, Youth & Families

DATE: **AUGUST 17, 2020**

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this special transmittal is to release guidance to county and state officials, public and private children and youth social service agencies and stakeholders regarding the Department of Human Services (DHS) Office of Children, Youth and Families' (OCYF) timeframes associated with the voluntary certification application process for child residential facilities or Supervised Independent Living (SIL) programs that provide specialized services to:

- pregnant, expecting and parenting youth;
- youth who are transitioning to adulthood; or
- youth who are, or at risk of becoming, sex trafficking victims.

This transmittal does not replace existing bulletins, policy clarifications or other guidance related to the certification process.

BACKGROUND:

OCYF released [Bulletin](#) #3680-20-02, 3800-20-03, titled “Specialized Residential Settings for Children and Youth”, on February 14, 2020. The bulletin outlined the enhanced practice standards, including trauma-informed practices, required to qualify as a specialized setting and the application and approval procedures for child residential facilities or SIL programs requesting certification.

The bulletin provided the application timeframe for voluntary certification in State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2020-21 and referenced that additional application periods would be offered prior to the start of each subsequent state fiscal year.

DISCUSSION:

The timelines established for the voluntary certification process for SFY 2021-22 and beyond allow private agencies to engage in conversations with the potential contracting County Children and Youth Agencies (CCYAs) and Juvenile Probation Offices (JPOs) prior to the submission of the Needs-Based Plan and Budget (NBPB) on August 15th before the start of the SFY for which the certification is being requested. This step is critical as private agencies should gauge county agency interest in these services as part of the determination to pursue certification. In addition, private agencies may anticipate increased costs to meet the enhanced program standards. County agencies utilize the annual NBPB process to request reimbursement of allowable child welfare expenses so anticipated increases for private agencies should be considered at that time.

The following steps must be completed for a 55 Pa. Code Chapter 3800 licensed child residential facility or Chapter 3680 SIL program to be considered for certification as a specialized setting. All information is to be included as part of the letter of intent and application packet and submitted to ra-depsec@pa.gov so that the certification review can be assigned to the appropriate OCYF Regional Office.

Certification as a specialized setting is not applicable for Unlicensed Supervised Independent Living Program (U-SILP) sites.

1. **A letter of intent must be submitted by the legal entity no later than September 30th immediately prior to the SFY for which certification is requested.** The letter of intent must:
 - a. Specifically identify the facility name(s) and Certificate of Compliance number(s) for which application for certification of a specialized setting is being sought;
 - b. Identify the type of specialized setting(s) approval being sought for each facility referenced; and
 - c. Include copies of the current Certificate(s) of Compliance for each 55 Pa. Code Chapter 3800 child residential facility, including transitional living residential (TLR) programs or a Licensed-Supervised Independent Living Program (L-SILP) approved under Chapter 3680.

Confirmation of receipt of the letter of intent will be sent to the applicant agency within 10 business days by the assigned OCYF Regional Office.

2. **The complete application packet must be submitted by the legal entity between October 1 and November 30th immediately prior to the SFY for which the certification is requested.** The application packet should include:
 - A copy of the letter of intent (referenced above).
 - A Program Description and all corresponding policies and procedures as defined in the Program Standards outlined in Attachment A of the bulletin.
 - Any request for a “Waiver of Regulation”, specific to 55 Pa. Code Chapter 3800 or Chapter 3680, that that the agency, through its program development, may have identified as being needed in order to operationalize the program standards within its setting.

If it is the intent of the agency to designate a facility as a specialized setting that is not currently licensed as a child residential child residential/TLR or L-SILP program, provisions of Chapter 20 also apply. The agency will need to submit all the requirements outlined in Attachment C of the bulletin to obtain licensure.

The initial certification as a specialized setting must be aligned with the start of a SFY due to the budgetary and claiming implications, unless the certification is for a newly licensed program. This timeline will allow:

- Completion of the certification review process prior to the start of the SFY the certification takes effect;
- Agencies interested in pursuing voluntary certification to address any budgetary impacts as part of the precontractual budget documentation submission required under the Human Services Code. This process is outlined in a separate OCYF bulletin titled “Requirements for Reimbursement of Placement Services to Children in Substitute Care”; and
- Completion of contractual negotiations for specialized setting services prior to the start of the SFY the certification takes effect. All contracting practices and reimbursement processes to counties addressed in 55 Pa. Code Chapters 3140 and 3170 still apply.

The attached Readiness Assessment Checklist has been developed to inform and guide an agency’s self-assessment and implementation planning needs. Please note that this document is not required to be a part of the application submission.

Questions regarding the specialized settings certification process can be sent to: ra-PWFamilyFirst@pa.gov.

For Family First updates, please visit www.keepkidssafe.pa.gov or [subscribe](#) to Family First updates.

Attachment

Specialized Settings Readiness Assessment Checklist

Placement service providers should critically assess their ability to implement changes required for a specialized setting certification. The questions and considerations in this document may help inform and guide a provider’s self-assessment.

Table 1: General Considerations

Can the legal entity confirm that:	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Discussions of interest/need for specialized placement options with counties contracting for purchased services have occurred and support certification application/approval?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Approval to operate a specialized setting has been secured from the agency governing board (if applicable)?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Projected utilization data has been reviewed and factored into planning for specialized setting capacity?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Points of contact and communication channels between specialized settings and local law enforcement have been established to support ease in making and responding to program reporting requirements.
<input type="checkbox"/>	A crisis management plan identifying procedure to contact 911/law enforcement, on-call staff and respond to media outlets, in an emergency, has been developed and communicated to staff.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Discussion related to a sustainability of services has occurred to address cost/revenue start up considerations, staffing turnover history and local external/community considerations affecting program operations?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Approaches to staff recruitment have been developed and documented to ensure access to an appropriate and interested workforce?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Approaches to staff retention have been developed and documented to ensure maintenance of a well-trained and prepared workforce?
<input type="checkbox"/>	The trauma informed approach selected by the agency reflects SAMHSA’s principles?
<input type="checkbox"/>	The program descriptions(s) and related policies and procedures, as well as all program descriptive materials provided to children/youth and their families, all reflect trauma informed language and a consistent approach to service delivery?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Active outreach to create connections to community resources for health care, behavioral health care, aftercare supports, work and/or volunteer experiences for youth has occurred with positive connections made?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Sex trafficking treatment options, how interventions will be delivered, and community connections established, the teaming and referral process have all been addressed and are reflected in the program description?

Has the agency developed operating policies and procedures that address:	
<input type="checkbox"/>	An internal communications approach to ensure that all staff are made aware of changes/updates to individual service plans in a timely and effective manner?
<input type="checkbox"/>	A training calendar/plan, curriculum and identified trainers to meet regulatory requirements in addition to those specified for each specialized setting for both child/youth and staff?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Normalcy considerations reflecting both age and developmentally appropriate expectations?

Table 2: Financial Considerations

Are cost considerations related to an elevated level of quality care reflected in budget projections for the following areas?	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Modifications (if needed) to address the safety of the physical site?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Purchase/development of training curriculum for staff?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Purchase/development of training curriculum for children/youth?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Elevated staffing ratios salary/benefit costs (NA for Transition age youth/SIL settings)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Staff recruitment and retention costs?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Modifications of physical site to support individual room assignments if needed?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Any additional operating insurance costs?

Table 3: Programmatic Considerations

Are the program description, polices and operation protocols all coordinated to address:		Bulletin page #
<input type="checkbox"/>	Identification of an agency wide trauma-informed approach and how fidelity to model will be monitored?	3, 4, 7
<input type="checkbox"/>	Trauma-informed approach reflected in programming/policies and in services and treatment provided?	11, 12, 16
<input type="checkbox"/>	Enhanced efforts to address the safety, privacy and confidentiality of children?	7, 15, 16, 30

Are the program description, polices and operation protocols all coordinated to address:		Bulletin page #
<input type="checkbox"/>	Enhanced and meaningful family engagement/involvement?	7, 9
<input type="checkbox"/>	Designated point(s) of contact for the child/youth and their family?	9, 10, 12
<input type="checkbox"/>	Family time individualized normalcy considerations - timing, location, frequency and duration?	4, 5, 10
<input type="checkbox"/>	Required “check-in” process for visits longer than 48 hours?	10
<input type="checkbox"/>	Enhanced and meaningful opportunities for child/youth involvement in programming and planning?	7, 9
<input type="checkbox"/>	Meaningful teaming and discharge planning practices?	4, 9, 12
<input type="checkbox"/>	The process for reporting a child/youth as missing (Chapter 3800/federal requirements)?	9
<input type="checkbox"/>	Response to return of a child/youth to a facility after a “missing” episode?	9
<input type="checkbox"/>	Screening (training and process) and assessment process for sex trafficking experiences	14,15

Table 4: Additional Considerations

Physical Site:		Bulletin page #
<input type="checkbox"/>	On grounds/site family time/visitation policies/protocols?	4, 7
<input type="checkbox"/>	How access to and egress from the facility meets the safety needs of children/youth?	7
Youth Life-Skill Training and Development:		Bulletin page #
<input type="checkbox"/>	Child/youth is made aware of facility reporting requirements if their whereabouts are unknown?	9
<input type="checkbox"/>	Sex trafficking awareness training plan	4, 10
<input type="checkbox"/>	Youth friendly training curriculum, process and identification of trainers addressing all topics required for certification?	6

Staffing and Supervision of Children and Youth:		Bulletin page #
<input type="checkbox"/>	Defined functions of case manager	12
<input type="checkbox"/>	Plan to hire parent advocate/peer support specialist within 3 years	9
<input type="checkbox"/>	Process for documentation of sight and sound checks every 30 minutes	16

Table 5: Categorical Considerations

Pregnant, Expecting, and Parenting Youth:		Bulletin page #
<input type="checkbox"/>	Enhanced physical site and service planning considerations for health and safety of the infants/toddlers	16
<input type="checkbox"/>	Enhanced training for staff and youth focused on parenting, infant stimulation	20, 21
<input type="checkbox"/>	Enhanced practices to support meaningful engagement of the non-custodial parent; visitation	22, 23
<input type="checkbox"/>	Comprehensive pregnancy health care plan	17
<input type="checkbox"/>	Infant/toddler health and safety planning considerations – illnesses; medication administration	18, 19
<input type="checkbox"/>	Community connections and training related to adoption planning	22
<input type="checkbox"/>	Discharge planning for the infant/toddler	24
Youth Transitioning to Adulthood:		Bulletin page #
<input type="checkbox"/>	Self-administration of medications	25
<input type="checkbox"/>	Age and developmentally appropriate supervision, programming and safety planning reflecting	26, 27, 29
<input type="checkbox"/>	Admission considerations for older youth	27
<input type="checkbox"/>	Discharge planning considerations for older youth	28