

VIRGINIA’S ADOPTION HOME STUDY PROCESS

Draft Recommendations for Public Comment

FINDING #1 – THE MUTUAL FAMILY ASSESSMENT TEMPLATE IS THE PREFERRED FORMAT FOR USE IN APPROVING PROVIDER FAMILIES. LOCAL DEPARTMENTS OF SOCIAL SERVICES THAT CHOOSE TO USE ANOTHER FORMAT FOR THEIR NARRATIVE REPORT MUST CLEARLY ADDRESS EACH OF THE CATEGORIES IDENTIFIED IN THE PREFERRED TEMPLATE.

Recommendation 1

(Option 1): Introduce a bill to mandate the Mutual Family Assessment home study and addendum developed by the Virginia Department of Social Services as a uniform home study format for statewide use **among local departments of social services**. Provide flexibility to allow the Virginia Department of Social Services to update this format in the future when necessary.

(Option 2): Introduce a bill to mandate the Mutual Family Assessment home study and addendum developed by the Virginia Department of Social Services as a uniform home study format for statewide use **among local departments of social services and licensed child placing agencies**. Provide flexibility to allow the Virginia Department of Social Services to update this format in the future when necessary.

FINDING #2 – THERE IS NO STATEWIDE DATABASE OF CURRENT FOSTER FAMILIES, AND AGENCIES ARE UNABLE TO VERIFY IF AN APPLICANT HAS PREVIOUSLY APPLIED TO BE A RESOURCE FAMILY.

Recommendation 1

Support the Virginia Department of Social Services in its acquisition and implementation of a new comprehensive child welfare computer system. Ensure the ability of a case worker to make an intake query to see if applicant family has previously applied to be an adoptive, foster, resource, respite family at another agency.

FINDING #3 – PARENTS HAVE TWO RIGHTS OF APPEAL IN CERTAIN DOMESTIC RELATIONS CASES INCLUDING TERMINATION OF PARENTAL RIGHTS.

Recommendation 1

Request the Virginia Bar Association’s Virginia Family Law Coalition study the implications of the removal of the right to appeal, to Circuit Court from Juvenile and Domestic Relations District Court, certain cases involving termination of parental rights.

As part of this study, look to the concept of having Juvenile and Domestic Relations District Courts become courts of record for matters involving child custody and termination of parental rights. This could be accomplished by requiring court reporters be present in these specific proceedings with appeals going directly to the Virginia Court of Appeals.

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FINDING #4 – FOSTER CARE-TO-ADOPTION IS VITAL IN PROMOTING THE GOAL OF PERMANENCY.

Recommendation 1

Support a messaging campaign at the Virginia Department of Social Services that promotes adoption through foster care.

FINDING #5 – BARRIERS DURING THE ADOPTION PLACEMENT TIMEFRAME INCLUDE THE HOME STUDY APPROVAL PROCESS AND MATCHING FAMILIES WITH YOUTH.

Recommendation 1

Request the Virginia Department of Social Services to investigate the feasibility of implementing a reciprocity process for sharing home studies that will allow local departments of social services and licensed child placing agencies to give access to completed home studies to applicant families and encourage acceptance amongst agencies. The Virginia Department of Social Services shall report findings and recommendations to the Commission on Youth prior to the 2018 General Assembly Session.

FINDING #6 – ADOPTION SAVINGS FUNDS ARE BEING USED TO ASSIST LOCAL DEPARTMENTS OF SOCIAL SERVICES IN COMPLETING THE FOSTER CARE AND ADOPTION HOME STUDY PROCESS.

Recommendation 1

Support the Virginia Department of Social Services efforts related to the hiring of regional home study specialists whose role is to assist local departments of social services by completing the foster care and adoption home study process.