

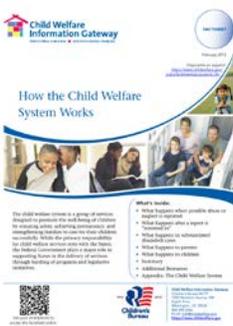
GETTING TO KNOW THE FOSTER CARE SYSTEM



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Note: The names for the local, state and federal offices responsible for foster care are many. They include Child Welfare, Children and Family Services, Family Services, among others. For purposes of this tool kit we will refer to the agency as simply Child Welfare. If necessary we will differentiate between County, State and Federal, but we will also use Child Welfare. You will need to find out the name your state/county uses.

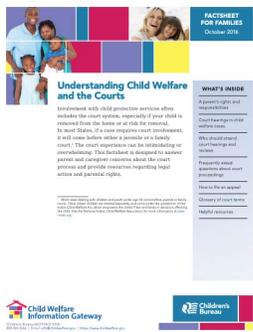
The Child Welfare system can be complicated and sometimes difficult to understand. Federal guidelines give direction to the foster care system in all fifty states, however, each state has its own set of guidelines and processes. The links below offer an overview of the Federal rules and processes and can connect you to government regulations and protocols in your state.



UNDERSTANDING CHILD WELFARE

To better understand the Foster Care System, a good place to start is the document produced by the Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) titled, Understanding the Child Welfare System. This gives a good overview of the process that is guided by the Federal government, including a flow chart.

Download a copy here: tinyurl.com/127-childwelfare



CHILD WELFARE INFORMATION GATEWAY (2011)

Understanding child welfare and the courts. Produced by the US Department of Health and Human Services, Children's Bureau.

View it here: tinyurl.com/127-cwandcourts

| State | Child Welfare Agency | Website |
|----------------|---|--|
| Alabama | Alabama Department of Human Resources | www.dhhs.alabama.gov |
| Alaska | Alaska Department of Social Services | www.dss.alaska.gov |
| Arizona | Arizona Department of Child Welfare | www.dcw.state.az.us |
| Arkansas | Arkansas Department of Human Services | www.dhs.gov |
| California | California Department of Social Services | www.cdss.ca.gov |
| Colorado | Colorado Department of Social Services | www.dss.state.co.us |
| Connecticut | Connecticut Department of Children and Families | www.ct.gov/dcf |
| Delaware | Delaware Department of Social Services | www.dss.de.gov |
| Florida | Florida Department of Children and Family Services | www.dcf.state.fl.us |
| Georgia | Georgia Department of Human Resources | www.dhr.ga.gov |
| Hawaii | Hawaii Department of Health | www.doh.hawaii.gov |
| Idaho | Idaho Department of Health and Welfare | www.idaho.gov |
| Illinois | Illinois Department of Children and Family Services | www.idcfs.state.il.us |
| Indiana | Indiana Department of Child Welfare Services | www.dcw.state.in.us |
| Iowa | Iowa Department of Human Services | www.dhs.gov |
| Kansas | Kansas Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services | www.dsr.state.ks.us |
| Kentucky | Kentucky Department of Social Services | www.dss.ky.gov |
| Louisiana | Louisiana Department of Children and Family Services | www.dcf.louisiana.gov |
| Maine | Maine Department of Health and Human Services | www.maine.gov/dhhs |
| Maryland | Maryland Department of Human Resources | www.dhr.state.md.us |
| Massachusetts | Massachusetts Department of Social Services | www.dss.state.ma.us |
| Michigan | Michigan Department of Human Services | www.dhs.state.mi.us |
| Minnesota | Minnesota Department of Human Services | www.dhs.gov |
| Mississippi | Mississippi Department of Human Services | www.dhs.gov |
| Missouri | Missouri Department of Social Services | www.dss.mo.gov |
| Montana | Montana Department of Social Services | www.dss.mt.gov |
| Nebraska | Nebraska Department of Social Services | www.dss.state.ne.us |
| Nevada | Nevada Department of Human Services | www.dhs.gov |
| New Hampshire | New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services | www.dhhs.nh.gov |
| New Jersey | New Jersey Department of Children and Families | www.dcf.state.nj.us |
| New Mexico | New Mexico Department of Human Services | www.dhs.gov |
| New York | New York State Office of Children and Family Services | www.dcf.state.ny.us |
| North Carolina | North Carolina Department of Social Services | www.dss.nc.gov |
| North Dakota | North Dakota Department of Social Services | www.dss.nd.gov |
| Ohio | Ohio Department of Children and Family Services | www.dcf.state.oh.us |
| Oklahoma | Oklahoma Department of Human Services | www.dhs.gov |
| Oregon | Oregon Department of Human Services | www.dhs.gov |
| Pennsylvania | Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare | www.dpw.state.pa.us |
| Rhode Island | Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families | www.dcyf.state.ri.us |
| South Carolina | South Carolina Department of Social Services | www.dss.sc.gov |
| South Dakota | South Dakota Department of Social Services | www.dss.sd.gov |
| Tennessee | Tennessee Department of Children's Services | www.dcs.tn.gov |
| Texas | Texas Department of Family and Protective Services | www.dfps.state.tx.us |
| Utah | Utah Department of Human Services | www.dhs.gov |
| Vermont | Vermont Department of Children, Youth and Families | www.dcyf.vermont.gov |
| Virginia | Virginia Department of Social Services | www.dss.virginia.gov |
| Washington | Washington Department of Social and Health Services | www.dshs.wa.gov |
| West Virginia | West Virginia Department of Social Services | www.dss.wv.gov |
| Wisconsin | Wisconsin Department of Children Services | www.dcs.wisconsin.gov |
| Wyoming | Wyoming Department of Social Services | www.dss.wy.gov |

FIFTY STATE CHARTBOOK ON FOSTER CARE

To start digging into how things are run in your state, Boston University provides a helpful tool. This site provides the name and website for your state's Child Welfare Agency, demographics, permanency outcomes and your state's key initiatives and innovative programs or practices in foster care.

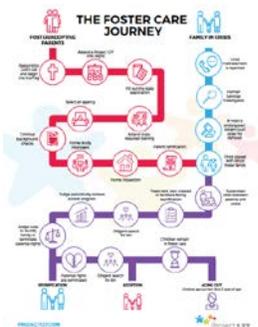
View it here: tinyurl.com/127-bufostercare



STATE ADOPTION AND FOSTER CARE INFORMATION

Learn about local rules and resources and find agencies in your area through Adopt US Kids.

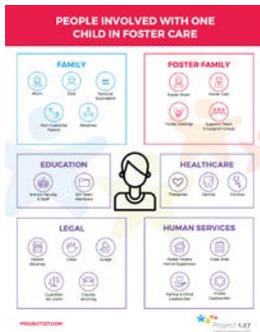
Visit their website: tinyurl.com/127-stateadoption



THE FOSTER CARE JOURNEY

The Journey gives a visual overview of the child welfare system, following the path of the foster family (in red), the biological family (in blue) and where the two connect (in purple). Again, this will differ from state to state. When planning how your church or organization will support foster families, the red portion indicates opportunities to support foster families through the licensing process and the purple section shows opportunities for support during the time a child is placed in their home. There are also opportunities to support birth families throughout the process.

Download the Journey here: tinyurl.com/127-journey



PEOPLE INVOLVED IN A CHILD WELFARE CASE

Again, there will be differences in all states, but this graph is a review of the many types of people involved with just one child in the foster care system. You may update this chart, and accompanying definitions, to fit your state and county.

Download the graph here: tinyurl.com/127-peopleinvolved

THE MANY NAMES OF CHILD WELFARE...

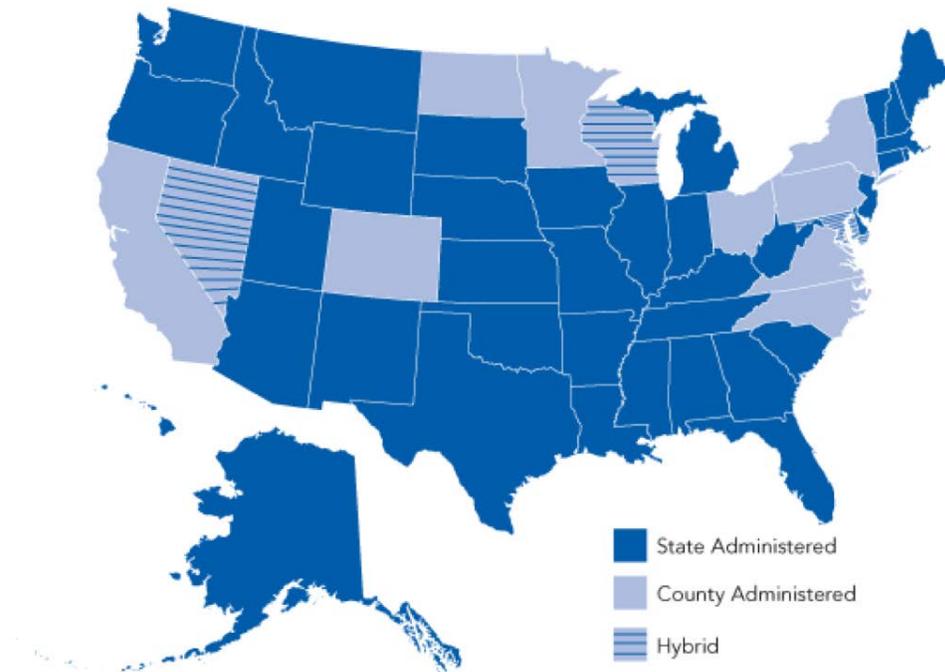
- Child Protective Services
- Social Services
- Family and Child Services
- Department of Children and Families
- Department of Social Services
- Department of Human Services
- Department of Child Safety
- Center for Child Welfare

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENT TYPES OF FOSTER CARE SYSTEMS AND WHAT SYSTEM IS USED IN MY STATE?

According to the Child Welfare Information Gateway there are three different types of systems used to manage child welfare in the United States. The two most common are State administered and County administered. The Child Welfare Information Gateway also identifies several as a 'hybrid' system, where both the county and the state are involved.¹

The map below, provided by the Child Welfare Information Gateway (2018), can help you identify your state system. The configuration of the administrative structure of each State, as presented in the map below, is based on data provided by the Children's Bureau as of August 2017, supplemented by information in States' Child and Family Services Plans



¹ Citation: Child Welfare Information Gateway. (2018). State vs. county administration of child welfare services. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Children's Bureau.

Some states and counties have privatized systems. Privatized systems are unique in the way you navigate with them. Refer to Boston college guide for more information. We strongly encourage you to gather more information about your state and general child welfare service delivery or key Federal legislation addressing child abuse and neglect, directly through the Child Welfare Information Gateway.

- [State vs. County Child Welfare Administration of Services: tinyurl.com/127-childwelfareservices](https://tinyurl.com/127-childwelfareservices)
- [About CAPTA - A Legislative History: tinyurl.com/127-childwelfarecapta](https://tinyurl.com/127-childwelfarecapta)
- [How the Child Welfare System Works: tinyurl.com/127-childwelfaresystem](https://tinyurl.com/127-childwelfaresystem)



WHO LICENSES FOSTER FAMILIES AND WHAT DOES THE PROCESS INVOLVE?

In most states foster families can be licensed or certified by the county/state child welfare agency and sometimes those homes can be licensed/certified by a Child Placement Agency (sometimes referred to as a Child Placing Agency or CPA). Although it can vary from state to state, generally speaking families must complete training (on specific topics and for a specific number of hours), have a home inspection, complete a background check on all adults living in the home, and complete a home study or social study. This home study usually involves multiple structured interviews with the parents, both together as a couple and separately, and some degree of interviews with the children, both those living in the home and any adult children not living in the home. This process can take anywhere from three to nine months to complete, depending on state standards and caseloads.



WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A CHILD PLACEMENT AGENCY AND CHILD WELFARE?

A Child Placement Agency (sometimes referred to as a Child Placing Agency or CPA) is an agency that is usually authorized by the state in which they operate, to license or certify foster or adoptive families.

The County or State Child Welfare agency, on behalf of the county or state government, is the entity that is authorized to request temporary custody of a child, in order to remove the child from his/her home for their own safety. If the courts grant the custody request, then the county/state child welfare agency must place the child with kin, or when that's not possible, in a licensed or certified foster home. Sometimes those homes have been licensed/certified by the county/state agency and sometimes those homes have been licensed/certified by a Child Placement Agency (CPA).

A Child Placement Agency (CPA) doesn't have any authority to remove a child from their home or make decisions as to if or when the child is returned home. The CPA only provides licensed/certified homes for the children, when the state/county agency doesn't have enough homes or homes able to meet the specific needs of the child.

In state's where the child welfare system is privatized, CPAs are contracted by the state to fulfill placement and supervision functions.

Again, this is different in every state so please contact your state/county child welfare agency for specifics in your state.