

# FINAL

## 2014 SUPPLEMENTAL BUDGET

### INCREASING HOME STUDIES

Request	FY14	FY15	13-15
FTE	0	20.0	10.0
GF-State	\$0	\$1,517,000	\$1,517,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$0</b>	<b>\$1,970,000</b>	<b>\$1,970,000</b>

#### DECISION PACKAGE SUMMARY

The Children's Administration requests additional staff to address the backlog in completing home studies necessary for foster and adoptive placements. By funding this request, CA is expected to increase the number of completed home studies allowing for the quicker placement of children in appropriate foster and adoptive homes. Completing adoptive home studies is a critical component of achieving permanency for the legally free children in the foster care system.

#### PROBLEM STATEMENT

CA originally piloted a unified home study in Region 5 and then implemented it statewide in 2004. There was varied degree of success in each region. From the beginning it was clear that the unified home study was more time intensive. In 2006, CA eliminated the unified home study due to the need to redirect staff statewide for social work activities. In 2011, CA again implemented a unified home study approach, not only for adoptive and foster families, but unlicensed relatives as well.

The unified home study has the potential of speeding up adoptions if the child's foster home becomes his or her adoptive placement. However, the home study is now more detailed, which should result in safer placements and better long term matches for children, but takes more staff resources to complete. Currently, CA has approximately 1,600 legally free children, many of whom are simply awaiting their adoptive home study to be completed before achieving permanency. CA has consolidated home studies under the Division of Licensed Resources and each worker is currently able to complete somewhere between one and three home studies a month. This backlog is also creating a delay in licensing of new foster homes creating shortages in all parts of the state, except King County.

The unified home study is a more comprehensive assessment, with additional requirements on the licensor and applicant that increase workload. The following are increased responsibilities accompanying the Unified Home Study:

- Additional documents must be completed by the applicant concerning marital history and finances that require review and possible follow up by the licensor. Licensors must collaborate with applicants to obtain divorce decrees, including older divorce decrees, and decrees from other states.
- The applicant must complete a medical checkup and have his/her physician complete documentation as to suitability as a permanent resource. This step requires review and possible follow up by the licensor.

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- All adult children of the applicant must be located and interviewed or diligent efforts to locate must be documented.
- Three in-person contacts with the applicants are required, including separate interviews with applicants in a two-parent family. Previous requirements allowed one contact.
- Further conversation and exploration of the five core concepts of permanency with applicants is a new requirement.
- Unified home study details all the above in the home study, resulting in a more lengthy written assessment.

In addition to the change in requirements, there has been a substantial increase in collaboration with adoption and foster care workers concerning suitability of homes for particular children. Home study workers are often asked to participate in Family Team Decision-Making staffings, where the family, social workers, and other interested parties gather to decide on placement decisions for a particular case. Home study workers are also occasionally summoned into court to testify to the unified home study process or detail regarding particular assessments or applicants. DLR continues to improve performance in the area of home studies by focusing workers on particular types of studies (adoption vs. foster care), creating performance expectations, and improving the referral processes. Process improvements will continue but the need for additional staff is clear.

#### PROPOSED SOLUTION

CA proposes to hire 20 FTEs beginning July 1, 2014 to conduct home studies.

#### EXPECTED RESULTS

The 20 FTEs are expected to increase the number of completed home studies by 40-60 each month. This will ease the shortage of licensed foster homes that CA is currently experiencing. In addition, legally free children will be able to move from the foster care system to an adoptive placement. This achieves the important goal of permanency for children and decreases the cost of that child to the state.

This request supports Results Washington Goal 4 of Healthy and Safe Communities. Funding this request will result in a decrease in the percentage of children in out-of-home placement for more than five years.

#### STAKEHOLDER IMPACT

Foster and adoptive parents, as well as advocates for children in the foster care system, should support this investment.