

April 17, 2020

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ALL COUNTY INFORMATION NOTICE NO. I-32-20

This All County Information Notice (ACIN) provides information regarding temporary waivers and flexibilities related to issuing foster care verification to current and former foster youth to facilitate their ability to access cellphones, as eligible, through the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) iFoster pilot program during the Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) state of emergency.



KIM JOHNSON
DIRECTOR

STATE OF CALIFORNIA—HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES AGENCY
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES
744 P Street • Sacramento, CA 95814 • www.cdss.ca.gov



GAVIN NEWSOM
GOVERNOR

April 17, 2020

ALL COUNTY INFORMATION NOTICE NO. I-32-20

TO: ALL COUNTY CHILD WELFARE DIRECTORS
ALL CHIEF PROBATION OFFICERS
ALL INDEPENDENT LIVING PROGRAM MANAGERS
ALL INDEPENDENT LIVING PROGRAM COORDINATORS
ALL FOSTER CARE MANAGERS
ALL TITLE IV-E AGREEMENT TRIBES
ALL TRANSITIONAL HOUSING COORDINATORS
ALL COUNTY RFA AND ADOPTION PROGRAM MANAGERS
ALL LICENSED FOSTER FAMILY AGENCIES
ALL CHILDREN'S RESIDENTIAL PROGRAM STAFF
ALL CHILDREN'S RESIDENTIAL PROVIDERS
ALL CHILDREN'S RESIDENTIAL FACILITIES

SUBJECT: Verification Of Foster Care Status To Facilitate Foster Youth
Access To Cell Phones To Mitigate The Impacts Of COVID-19

REFERENCE: [GOVERNOR'S PROCLAMATION OF A STATE OF EMERGENCY, MARCH 4, 2020](#); [EXECUTIVE ORDER N-53-20](#); PROVISION OF CHILD WELFARE SERVICES DURING COVID-19 [ALL COUNTY LETTER \(ACL\) 20-25](#); WELFARE AND INSTITUTIONS CODE (WIC) SECTIONS [826.8](#) AND [827](#).

The purpose of this notice is to inform county child welfare agencies, Title IV-E Agreement tribes,¹ and probation departments of temporary expansions made to the foster care verification process to facilitate access for current foster youth² to needed technology through the Phones for Foster Youth Program.³ This will enable foster youth to continue their education through distance learning, attend case-related

¹ For the purpose of this notice, a Title IV-E Agreement tribe means those with an agreement pursuant to WIC section 10553.1

² For the purpose of this notice and eligibility for the iFoster pilot program, foster youth means a current or former foster youth between the ages of 13 and 26 who were in care on their 13th birthday or later and who currently reside in California.

³ California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) iFoster pilot program

meetings and court hearings, access telehealth services, maintain contact with their caseworkers, family, and friends, and contact the Office of the Foster Care Ombudsperson (OFCO) to raise any needed concerns, such as a violation of their rights,⁴ during the COVID-19 statute of emergency.

Pursuant to the authority in the Governor's April 17, 2020 Executive Order N-53-20 (EO N-53-20), the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) is providing the following temporary waivers and flexibilities related to issuing foster care verification to current and former foster youth for the purpose of accessing a program whose eligibility is tied to foster care status. Use of these waivers and flexibilities is subject to the Terms and Conditions set forth in this ACIN.

COVID-19 Impacts and Related Flexibilities

In accordance with California Department of Public Health physical distancing guidelines, the state is currently under a [stay at home order](#). This order has resulted in needs for distance learning and home schooling. These requirements also have limited the ability of county child welfare social workers, probation officers and service providers to conduct face-to-face visits with their clients, has increased the use of videoconferencing or telephone appearances in [court](#) and for other essential child welfare meetings, and, in some cases, has limited face-to-face visits for children with their families and other important individuals who provide support, stability, and a sense of normalcy for children in foster care.

Subject to the limitations set forth in [ACL 20-25](#), county social workers and probation officers may use alternative methods of contact with foster children and youth, which require the use of cellphones or related technology. The ability for eligible foster youth to obtain a cell phone will aid in conducting video and telephonic contact with their social worker or probation officer to assess the foster youth's safety and well-being and to assist the family in keeping their children safe. It will also enhance the ability of foster youth to engage in remote learning, telehealth services, and visitation with family, siblings, and for Indian children, their tribal social worker and tribal cultural and spiritual leaders. These and other important persons help maintain a foster youth's stability in foster care.

Phones for Foster Youth Program: Application and Verification Process

The iFoster and Boost Mobile 'Phones for Foster Youth' pilot program provides a free smartphone with unlimited voice and text, unlimited data with 20 gigabytes (GB) of high-speed data per month, and hotspot capability to current and former foster youth residing in California. Currently, to be eligible for this program, a person must be a current or

⁴ [Welfare and Institutions Code section 16001.9](#)

former foster youth between the ages of 13 and 26 who was in foster care on their 13th birthday or later and who resides in California. This pilot is part of a larger federal program and is administered by the CPUC. Social workers and probation officers are encouraged to inform eligible current and former foster youth about how to work with the OFCO and iFoster to obtain cell phones and cell phone service.

Application Process

In order to obtain a cell phone through the Phones for Foster Youth pilot program, youth must fill out an application and email the application to phone@ifoster.org or upload to their personal Digital Locker at www.ifoster.org, along with providing verification of their dependency or ward status and foster care placement (process for obtaining verification below). Youth who do not currently have email or internet access can contact the OFCO by telephone and the OFCO will help them with the application, linked [here](#).

The process for activation of phones is outlined in the [iFoster Frequently Asked Questions \(FAQs\)](#), which also addresses the ability to apply parental controls, suspension and reactivation of the service, and the iFoster digital literacy course.

Temporary Verification Process

Under existing law, CDSS may issue foster care verification for former dependents and wards for the purpose of accessing programs or services whose eligibility is tied to former foster care status. County child welfare agencies, Title IV-E Agreement tribes, and probation departments may provide verification directly to a current or former foster youth. However, to issue foster care verification for *current* dependents and wards to entities not entitled to the information under WIC section 827, a court order is required. As courts are handling only urgent and due process sensitive matters during this emergency, obtaining a court order would unnecessarily delay foster youth's access to cell phones.

Pursuant to EO N-53-20, CDSS may issue foster care verification to current dependents and wards for the purpose of the Phones for Foster Youth Program, and CDSS, county placing agencies, and Title IV-E tribes may additionally provide the verification directly to iFoster for purposes of the Program. County placing agencies and Title IV-E tribes may provide iFoster a complete list of foster youth eligible for the Program. The verification should be in writing and address only the information necessary to verify eligibility and enable iFoster to process requests. The verification from counties or tribes should be provided by fax, email, or U.S. mail.

The OFCO, within CDSS, serves as the foster care verification entity. Current or former foster youth may request a verification letter from the OFCO by calling the OFCO

hotline, toll free at 1-877-846-1602. Initial requests need to be received by telephone so that the OFCO may verify the youth's identity, ask any clarifying questions to find the youth's case on the CWS/CMS system, and, if necessary, help the youth to reach their county agency of jurisdiction.

Upon receipt of the request, the OFCO will conduct a review of the youth's case in the Child Welfare Services/Case Management System (CWS/CMS) database. If the database indicates that the requestor meets the eligibility requirements for an iFoster cell phone, the OFCO will provide the necessary verification. If information in the database does not provide the necessary information for the OFCO to verify the requester's eligibility for the Program, the youth will be connected to, or provided with contact information for, a person within their county agency who can assist them with the request.

All requests for a verification letter will be completed by OFCO as soon as feasibly possible, but in no case later than five (5) calendar days after the request is made. Completed verification letters will be provided to the youth, the county placing agency, applicable Title IV-E tribe(s), and iFoster by fax, email, or U.S. mail.

Effective Period of this Guidance

The EO N-53-20 foster care verification flexibilities, as outlined in this ACIN, shall expire on June 30, 2020, unless extended, and all prior statutory, regulatory, and written guidance requirements modified herein shall be reinstated.

If you have any questions, or need additional guidance regarding the information in this letter, contact the Office of Foster Care Ombudsperson at (877) 846-1602 or at fosteryouthhelp@dss.ca.gov.

Sincerely,

Original Document Signed By:

GREGORY E. ROSE
Deputy Director
Children and Family Services Division