

CHAPTER 121A**MANUAL OF REQUIREMENTS FOR
ADOPTION AGENCIES****Authority**

N.J.S.A. 9:3-37 et seq., 30:1A et seq. and 30:4C-4(b).

Source and Effective Date

R.1992 d.514, effective November 25, 1992.
See: 24 N.J.R. 3500(a), 24 N.J.R. 4552(a).

Executive Order No. 66(1978) Expiration Date

Chapter 121A, Manual of Requirements for Adoption Agencies, expires on November 25, 1997.

Chapter Historical Note

Chapter 121A, Manual of Standards for Adoption Agencies, became effective August 6, 1981 (operative October 1, 1981) as R.1981 d.298. See: 13 N.J.R. 99(a), 13 N.J.R. 516(a). Pursuant to Executive Order No. 66(1978), Chapter 121A was readopted by R.1986 d.324, effective July 14, 1986. See: 18 N.J.R. 1057(a), 18 N.J.R. 1609(a). Chapter 121A was repealed and new rules became effective December 7, 1987 as R.1987 d.505. See: 19 N.J.R. 1519(a), 19 N.J.R. 2288(a). Pursuant to Executive Order No. 66(1978), Chapter 121A was readopted with amendments by R.1992 d.514. See: Source and Effective Date.

See section level annotations for specific rulemaking activity.

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SUBCHAPTER 1. GENERAL PROVISIONS**10:121A-1.1 Scope**

This chapter constitutes comprehensive rules governing the certification of adoption agencies pursuant to the State Adoption Law (N.J.S.A. 9:3-37 et seq.).

Case Notes

Nonresidents may bring adoption actions and Superior Court has subject matter jurisdiction to grant them adoption. *Matter of Adoption of A Child by D.F.H.*, 230 N.J.Super. 445, 553 A.2d 866 (A.D.1989).

10:121A-1.2 Purpose

(a) The purpose of this chapter is to prevent the exploitation and to protect the health and well-being of children being served by adoption agencies, as well as to protect the legal rights of children and birth and adoptive parents by establishing standards of agency organization and administration, professional training, experience, practices and requirements relating to the responsibility of agencies providing adoption services in New Jersey.

(b) This chapter constitutes minimum baseline requirements to ensure that the basic programmatic and administrative needs of adoption agencies and the social service needs of the families and children they serve are met. Compliance with this chapter is necessary if an adoption agency is to open or operate, and no adoption agency is permitted to operate below the level of requirements specified in this chapter. This chapter is in no way intended to prohibit or prevent adoption agencies from going beyond the minimum requirements contained in these rules. The decision whether to exceed these requirements rests with each agency.

10:121A-1.3 Implementation and enforcement responsibility; information

The Bureau of Licensing of the New Jersey Division of Youth and Family Services (DYFS), Department of Human Services, shall be responsible for implementing and enforcing this chapter. For further information or technical assistance in understanding and/or complying with this chapter, please contact:

Bureau of Licensing
Division of Youth and Family Services
CN 717
Trenton, New Jersey 08625
(609) 292-8255

Amended by R.1991 d.6, effective January 7, 1991.
See: 22 N.J.R. 2674(b), 23 N.J.R. 99(b).
Updated agency address.

10:121A-1.4 Legal authority

(a) This chapter is promulgated pursuant to the State Adoption Law (N.J.S.A. 9:3-37 et seq.), N.J.S.A. 30:1A-1 et seq. and 30:4C-4(b).

(b) Under the State Adoption Law, all private and public adoption agencies, both within New Jersey and outside the State that are involved in the placement of children for adoption in New Jersey, must be certified by the New Jersey Department of Human Services in order to open and operate.

(c) In order to be eligible for a certificate of approval, an adoption agency shall demonstrate to the satisfaction of the Department of Human Services or its duly authorized agent, the Bureau of Licensing of the Division of Youth and Family Services, compliance with the requirements of the State Adoption Law and with the rules contained in this chapter, which constitute minimum requirements only.

(d) These rules shall not be applicable to the adoption of adults.

10:121A-1.5 Definitions

The following words and terms, when used in this chapter, shall have the indicated meanings:

“Adoptee” means a person who has been placed in an adoptive home and whose adoption has been legally finalized.

“Adoption agency” or “agency” means a Bureau-certified public or private non-profit corporation organized for all or part of its purpose to provide adoption services to children, adoptees, adoption applicants and birth and/or adoptive parents. Adoption services may include: pre-placement, home study placement, post-placement or post-adoption services or other related activities, including those requested by courts and other adoption agencies and organizations, whether or not the agencies and organizations are certified in New Jersey.

“Adoption applicant” means a prospective adoptive parent who has applied to adopt a child but who has not yet received a child for adoption placement.

“Adoption Complaint Investigation” means an investigation ordered by the court to determine the circumstances of a non-agency placement and to assess the suitability of the prospective adoptive parents. The investigation is conducted by a court appointed State-approved adoption agency in response to the filing of an adoption petition on behalf of the prospective adoptive parents.

“Adoptive parent” means a person with whom a child has been placed for adoption or who has adopted a child.

“Branch office” means a Bureau-certified adoption program that is a geographically separate but administratively dependent part of an agency.

“Bureau” means the Bureau of Licensing of the Division of Youth and Family Services, New Jersey Department of Human Services.

“Chapter” means the rules contained in the Manual of Requirements for Adoption Agencies, as specified in N.J.A.C. 10:121A-1.1 through 5.10.

“Child” means any person under 18 years of age.

“Custody” means the general right to exercise continuing control over the person of a child derived from court order or otherwise.

“Denial of a certificate” means the withholding by the Bureau of a certificate of approval for which an agency has applied, based on the agency’s failure or inability to comply with requirements of the State Adoption Law and/or of this chapter.

“Department” means the New Jersey Department of Human Services.

“Division” means the Division of Youth and Family Services of the New Jersey Department of Human Services.

“Executive director” or “administrator” means the person in a certified agency responsible for the overall administration and direction of the agency and its staff.

“Finalization” means the entry of a legal order of adoption issued by a court of competent jurisdiction, pursuant to N.J.S.A. 9:3-38 et seq.

“Foster care” means the temporary placement in an agency-approved private home of a child who is in the care or custody of an agency.

“Governing board” means the public or private body which has final legal responsibility for or authority over a certified adoption agency.

"Guardianship" means the right to exercise continuing control over the person or property or both of a child, including any specific right of control over an aspect of the child's upbringing derived from court order.

"Home study" means the agency's formal assessment of the capacity and readiness of prospective adoptive parents to adopt a child, including the agency's written report and recommendation.

"Identified adoption" means an adoption where the agency becomes involved in offering services to an expectant birth or legal parent(s) and/or a prospective adoptive parent(s) who are considering a plan whereby the child will be placed for adoption in the prospective adoptive parent's home.

"Independent adoption" means an adoption where the child is received in the adoptive home from a source other than a Bureau-certified agency. Subsequent to the placement, the court orders a State-certified adoption agency to conduct an Adoption Complaint Investigation (ACI) in order to investigate circumstances of the placement and to assess the adoptive home.

"Manual of Requirements for Adoption Agencies" or "Manual of Requirements" means the rules promulgated in this chapter, which constitute minimum requirements for adoption agencies placing children for adoption in New Jersey.

"Parent" means a birth parent or birth parents, including the natural father of a child born out of wedlock who has acknowledged the child or to whom the court has ordered notice to be given, or a parent or parents by adoption.

"Placement services" means any and all services offered by a certified agency to prospective adoptive children and families ranging from selection of a particular family for a particular child through the physical arrival of the child in the adoptive home.

"Post-adoption services" means any and all services offered by or through the auspices of an agency to any party involved in an adoption after finalization of the adoption.

"Post-placement services" means any and all services offered by or through the auspices of an agency to any member of an adoptive family from the placement of the child to finalization of the adoption.

"Pre-placement services" means any and all services offered by or through the auspices of an agency to birth parent(s) and child(ren) to evaluate and prepare them for an adoptive placement.

"Referring agency" means an agency or organization with whom a New Jersey-certified agency has a written agreement regarding the provision of adoption-related services in New Jersey.

"Regular certificate of approval" or "regular certificate" means a certificate in writing issued by the Bureau, which indicates full compliance of an agency with the requirements of this chapter.

"Revocation of a certificate" means a rescinding of an agency's current regular or temporary certificate to operate because of the agency's failure or refusal to comply with requirements of the State Adoption Law and/or of this chapter.

"Shall" denotes a requirement of this chapter that an adoption agency must meet to qualify for a certificate.

"Social worker" means a professional staff member of an agency who possesses the required qualifications specified in this chapter and who works directly with children, adoptees, birth and/or adoptive parents and other relevant individuals.

"Social work supervisor" means a staff member of an agency who possesses the qualifications specified in this chapter and who supervises the professional staff who work directly with children, adoptees, birth and/or adoptive parents and other relevant individuals.

"Staff member" means any person employed by or working for or with an agency on a regularly scheduled basis, whether for compensation or not. This shall include full-time, part-time, voluntary, substitute, contract or consulting personnel.

"Subsidy" means the financial or other material support provided directly or made available to an adoptive family to assist in the adoptive placement, legal expenses of adoption, and/or continuing care of a child placed for adoption.

"Surrender" means a voluntary relinquishment of all parental rights, generally for purposes of allowing a child to be adopted by a birth parent, prior adoptive parent, or other person or agency authorized to exercise such rights by law, court order or otherwise.

"Suspension of a certificate" means a temporary rescinding of an agency's current regular or temporary certificate of approval to operate. The suspended certificate may be reinstated by the Bureau upon the agency's compliance with requirements of the State Adoption Law and of this chapter.

"Temporary certificate of approval" or "Temporary certificate" means a certificate in writing issued by the Bureau for a limited period of time, pending full compliance by the agency with all requirements of this chapter.

"Termination of parental rights" means the transfer by an order of a court of competent jurisdiction of all rights of control and authority over a child from its birth parent(s) or prior adoptive parent(s) to an agency or other person.

Amended by R.1991 d.6, effective January 7, 1991.
See: 22 N.J.R. 2674(b), 23 N.J.R. 99(b).

Added definition: "Adoption Complaint Investigation."
Amended by R.1992 d.514, effective December 21, 1992.
See: 24 N.J.R. 3500(a), 24 N.J.R. 4552(a).

Stylistic changes.
Administrative Correction.
See: 25 N.J.R. 2591(a).
Administrative Correction.
See: 25 N.J.R. 2883(b).

10:121A-1.6 Compliance with State laws

(a) Any adoption agency whose principal office is located outside of this State shall be licensed, certified, or otherwise approved to operate in the state where the agency's principal office is located as a condition of applying for, securing and maintaining a certificate of approval in New Jersey.

(b) No certified adoption agency shall discriminate with regard to the provision of any adoption-related services on the basis of age, sex, race, national origin, religion, marital status or employment status with regard to the selection of adoptive parents for any child. However, these factors may be considered, pursuant to N.J.S.A. 9:30-40, in determining whether the best interests of a child would be served by a particular placement for adoption or by finalization of an adoption.

10:121A-1.7 Eligibility for a certificate of approval

(a) Any public agency or private non-profit firm, partnership, corporation, association, or agency located within or outside the State of New Jersey that provides adoption services to families in New Jersey or to children from New Jersey, whether as part or all of its function, shall secure and maintain a certificate. Adoption services shall include any one or combination of the following:

1. Pre-placement services;
2. Home studies;
3. Placement services;
4. Post-placement services;
5. Post-adoption services;
6. Adoptive parent recruitment; and/or
7. Information services, unless these services are provided by social service agencies and educational institutions as part of general information on adoption as a family planning option.

(b) The following are not subject to certification requirements under the law:

1. Foster care programs, unless operated as a support to, or as an integral part of the agency's adoption program, as specified in N.J.A.C. 10:121A-1.5;
2. Self-help or support groups that operate independent of an agency and provide adoption-related information and/or supportive peer assistance to members;

3. Lawyers, law offices or legal services offices that provide only legal services as permitted under the law and court rules; and

4. Agencies, organizations or independent professionals that do not place children for adoption, but provide social work services, mental health, family services or similar services, to the general public, including adoptive families who may choose to use their services.

Amended by R.1992 d.514, effective December 21, 1992.
See: 24 N.J.R. 3500(a), 24 N.J.R. 4552(a).

Adoptive parent recruitment and information services added at (a)6 and 7.

10:121A-1.8 Inter-country adoption

(a) An agency providing services with reference to inter-country adoption shall comply with requirements of the Federal Immigration and Naturalization Act (P.L. 95-417) and any successor or amending legislation regarding the classification of an alien orphan child as an immediate relative for purposes of an immigration visa.

(b) The Bureau shall maintain a list of certified private adoption agencies that conduct home studies for the adoption of children from foreign countries, and shall make such a list available to interested persons upon request.

(c) Agencies performing inter-country adoptions shall comply with the record keeping requirements of the Manual of Requirements for Adoption Agencies, as specified in N.J.A.C. 10:121A-3.6(e).

Amended by R.1992 d.514, effective December 21, 1992.
See: 24 N.J.R. 3500(a), 24 N.J.R. 4552(a).
Stylistic changes.

SUBCHAPTER 2. CERTIFICATION PROCEDURES

10:121A-2.1 Application for a certificate of approval

(a) An organization interested in providing any kind of adoption service shall first secure a certificate of approval from the Bureau, pursuant to the requirements of the State Adoption Law and of this chapter. Operation of an adoption agency without a valid certificate, as required by law, constitutes a misdemeanor, pursuant to N.J.S.A. 9:3-39.

(b) The agency shall file a completed application for a new or renewed certificate with the Bureau at least 60 calendar days prior to the anticipated date of operation or the expiration of an agency's existing certificate.

(c) Applicants for a new certificate shall submit to the Bureau a written plan for the agency's operation that includes the following:

1. A statement of agency purpose, scope of adoption program and target groups to be served, program goals and objectives, description of services, and plans for coordination with other agencies and community resources;

2. A description of organizational structure, including the names of the board of directors and its committees, staff organization charts, number and qualifications of board members;

3. A list of all branch offices of the adoption agency, if any;

4. A list of personnel, including all present and expected staff members who have direct contact with clients, their qualifications and duties;

5. A budget and financial plan, including actual and/or projected statement of revenues and expenses, documentation of sufficient resources to support agency operations, general/comprehensive liability insurance coverage for agency operations, and a listing of fees for service;

6. A copy of the forms to be used by the agency, including applications, intake, case record, evaluation, financial and statistical report forms;

7. A copy of agency incorporation papers and proof of not-for-profit status;

8. A copy of the agency's non-discrimination policy, as specified in N.J.A.C. 10:121A-1.6(b), and approved by the agency's governing board;

9. A copy of an audit or financial statement, if requested by the Bureau; and

10. For agencies located outside of New Jersey, a copy of that agency's most current licensing or approval inspection report and the license or certificate that reflects the agency's licensing or approval status in that state and documentation that indicates that the agency has been in operation for at least two years.

(d) An agency applying for a renewal of a certificate of approval shall submit those items listed in (c)2, 3, 4 and 5 above, and 10 above, if applicable. An agency shall submit the item listed in (c)9 above upon request of the Bureau.

Amended by R.1992 d.514, effective December 21, 1992.
See: 24 N.J.R. 3500(a), 24 N.J.R. 4552(a).

Requirements for out-of-State agencies added at (c)10.

10:121A-2.2 Issuance of a certificate of approval

(a) The Bureau shall review the application for a certificate and shall conduct one or more field visits to in-State agencies and, at its discretion, conduct one or more field visits to out-of-State agencies to ensure that the agency is in compliance with all requirements of the State Adoption Law, N.J.S.A. 9:3-37 et seq., and of this chapter.

(b) After the Bureau conducts an initial inspection of a new agency and finds the agency to be in substantial compli-

ance with this chapter, the Bureau shall issue a temporary certificate of approval for a maximum of six months.

(c) The Bureau shall issue a regular certificate of approval to an agency that has achieved full compliance with requirements of the State Adoption Law and of this chapter.

(d) If the Bureau determines that the agency is in substantial compliance with, but does not meet all applicable requirements of the law and of this chapter, and provided that the extent of the agency's deviation from such requirements is not deemed by the Bureau to be detrimental to the families and children being served, the Bureau shall issue a temporary certificate.

1. When a temporary certificate is issued, the Bureau shall indicate in writing those requirements of this chapter that are currently not being met by the agency.

2. The Bureau shall issue a temporary certificate for a maximum period of six months.

3. The Bureau may renew the temporary certificate as often as it deems necessary, provided however, that the agency shall not operate pursuant to temporary certificates for more than a total of 12 months in any two-year certification period.

4. If the temporary certificate is in the appeal or enforcement process, the Bureau may extend the temporary certificate.

(e) Each certification period, which may include the issuance of one or more temporary certificates and/or one regular certificate, shall be two years.

1. In determining the expiration date of the first regular certificate of approval, the Bureau shall compute the two-year certification period from the date of issuance of the first temporary or regular certificate.

2. In determining the expiration date of a renewed regular certificate, the Bureau shall compute the two-year certification period from the date on which the agency's previous regular certificate expired. If, however, the agency has ceased to operate for a period of six months following the expiration date of its previous regular certificate, the Bureau shall compute the date of expiration from the date of issuance of a new certificate.

(f) The certificate of approval shall be issued to a particular adoption agency at a particular location and shall not be transferable.

(g) The agency shall display the certificate at all times in a location of prominence within the agency.

(h) No adoption agency shall make claims either in advertising or in any written or verbal announcement or presentation contrary to its certification status.

(i) The Bureau will not issue a certificate to an out-of-State agency unless the agency has received a license or approval from that state's authorized licensing or regulatory agency and has been in operation for at least two years.

Amended by R.1991 d.6, effective January 7, 1991.

See: 22 N.J.R. 2674(b), 23 N.J.R. 99(b).

In (a): added text, "... and, at its discretion ... to out-of-State agencies ...," and added N.J.S.A. citation.

Amended by R.1992 d.514, effective December 21, 1992.

See: 24 N.J.R. 3500(a), 24 N.J.R. 4552(a).

Six month temporary certificate provisions added at (b); out-of-State requirements added at (i).

10:121A-2.3 Denying, suspending, revoking or refusing to renew a certificate of approval

(a) The Bureau may deny, suspend, revoke or refuse to renew an adoption agency's certificate for good cause, including but not limited to the following:

1. Failure to comply with requirements of the State Adoption Law and of this chapter;
2. Violation(s) of the terms and conditions of a certificate;
3. Fraud or misrepresentation in obtaining a certificate or in the subsequent operation of the agency;
4. Refusal to furnish the Bureau with files, reports, records, or other information as required by this chapter;
5. Refusal to permit an authorized representative of the Division to gain access to the agency during normal operating hours. An authorized representative includes:
 - i. A representative of the Bureau;
 - ii. A representative of the Department for purposes of investigating allegations of child abuse or neglect;
 - iii. The Director of the Division or his designee;
 - iv. The Commissioner of the Department or his designee; and
 - v. Any person specifically authorized by statute;
6. Any activity, policy or conduct that adversely affects or is deemed by the Bureau to be detrimental to the families and children being served, including, but not limited to, violations of the requirements of N.J.S.A. 9:3-37 et seq., the State Adoption Law, N.J.S.A. 9:23-5 et seq., the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children, N.J.S.A. 9:6-8.9, 8.10, 8.13, and 8.14, State child abuse laws, and this chapter;
7. Failure of an out-of-State agency to maintain a license, approval or certificate in its own state; and
8. Failure to employ the necessary qualified professional staff, as specified in N.J.A.C. 10:121A-4.4.

(b) If an agency's certificate is suspended, the Bureau shall issue or reinstate the agency's certificate once the agency achieves compliance with the requirements of the State Adoption Law and of this chapter. In such a case, the Bureau shall not require the agency to submit a new application for a certificate unless such reapplication is expressly made a condition of the issuance or reinstatement of the certificate.

(c) The Bureau shall provide written notice to the agency if the agency's application for a certificate is being denied, if the agency's certificate is suspended or being revoked or if the agency's certificate is not being renewed. This notice shall specify the Bureau's reasons for such action.

(d) If the Bureau denies application for, revokes, or refuses to renew an agency's certificate of approval, and the reason(s) for the denial, revocation or refusal have been resolved, the agency may reapply to the Bureau for a certificate in order to secure a new certificate prior to resuming operations.

(e) The Bureau may impose conditions upon an agency's adoption services, and shall provide notice if an agency's certification will contain such conditions.

(f) Each certificate issued by the Bureau to an adoption agency remains the property of the State of New Jersey. If an agency's certificate is suspended or revoked, or upon the permanent closing of the agency, the agency shall return the certificate to the Bureau immediately.

Amended by R.1992 d.514, effective December 21, 1992.

See: 24 N.J.R. 3500(a), 24 N.J.R. 4552(a).

Conditions added at (a)6 and 8.

10:121A-2.4 Administrative hearings

(a) The Bureau shall afford the agency an opportunity to request an administrative hearing on any issue within this chapter and transfer the matter to the Office of Administrative Law as a contested case.

(b) Where the Bureau proposes to deny, suspend or revoke a certificate, or refuses to renew a certificate, the Bureau shall afford the applicant or agency written notice of an opportunity for an administrative hearing by certified or registered mail or in-person delivery.

1. The notice shall specify the facts and legal authority which form the basis of the proposed action, and shall require an answer requesting a hearing, if desired, within 10 working days of receipt of the notice.

2. If the agency fails to request a hearing within 10 working days of receipt of the notice, the Bureau shall take the proposed action immediately.

(c) The hearing shall be conducted pursuant to the Administrative Procedure Act (N.J.S.A. 52:14B-1 et seq. and N.J.S.A. 52:14F-1 et seq.) and the Uniform Administrative Procedure Rules as specified in N.J.A.C. 1:1-1 et seq.

10:121A-2.5 Court action

(a) The Division may institute a civil action in a court of competent jurisdiction for injunctive relief to enjoin the operation of an adoption agency for good cause, including but not limited to the following:

1. Any imminent dangers or hazards that threaten the health and safety of children and families served by the agency;
2. Repeated violations of the requirements of the State Adoption Law or of this chapter; or
3. Opening and operating an adoption agency without a certificate or without complying with the requirements of the State Adoption Law or of this chapter.

10:121A-2.6 Complaints

(a) Whenever the Bureau receives a report questioning the certification status or compliance of an adoption agency with requirements of the State Adoption Law or alleging violations of this chapter by the agency, the Bureau shall investigate the allegation within 10 working days to determine whether the complaint is substantiated.

(b) The Bureau shall notify the complainant and the agency in writing of the results of the complaint investigation within 15 working days after the report of the Bureau's investigation has been finalized. Such notification shall include the results of the investigation, pursuant to the State Public Records Act (N.J.S.A. 27:1A-1 et seq.), commonly known as the State Right to Know Law, except that any information not permitted to be disclosed under the Child Abuse and Neglect Law (N.J.S.A. 9:6-8 et seq.) or other law prohibiting such disclosure shall be withheld.

(c) Any individual filing a complaint may do so anonymously. If the complainant reveals his or her identity, the name of the complainant, together with a description of the complaint and its status, shall be included in the Bureau's records and shall be available for public review upon completion of the investigation by the Bureau, pursuant to the State Public Records Law, except that any information not permitted to be disclosed pursuant to the Child Abuse and Neglect Law shall be withheld.

(d) The Bureau shall consider complaints or other notifications regarding an agency's adoption practices in a state other than New Jersey in reviewing that agency's adoption practices, if such complaints have implications for the agency's service in New Jersey.

(e) No agency shall discriminate against a person because of the filing of a complaint under this section.

(f) The agency shall cooperate with the Division's investigations whenever such complaint investigations are conducted.

10:121A-2.7 Public access to Bureau records

(a) The Bureau shall make its adoption agency certification files available for examination during regular business hours by any person and shall supervise any person examining its files on the adoption agency.

(b) The Bureau shall make the following items in the files open to public review:

1. Applications for certificates and related materials documentation;
2. Copies of temporary and regular certificates;
3. Correspondence between the Bureau and the agency or other parties in matters pertaining to the Bureau's review, inspection, or certification of the agency;
4. Program evaluation, inspection, and violation reports where applicable, reflecting results of Bureau inspections and/or reinspections of the agency;
5. Forms and other standard documents used to collect routine data on the agency and its program as part of its record of compliance with the Manual of Requirements;
6. Enforcement letters from the Bureau requiring abatement of violations of the Manual of Requirements;
7. Correspondence to the adoption agency from the Attorney General;
8. Chronological lists of events about the agency on compliance and/or enforcement matters;
9. Completed complaint investigation reports, except for child abuse and/or neglect investigations or other information restricted by the requirements of the State Adoption Law or any other State laws; and
10. Any other documents, materials, reports and/or correspondence that would normally be included as part of the public record.

(c) The Bureau shall keep confidential and not part of the public record the following:

1. Records, reports, or correspondence that pertain to child abuse and/or neglect investigations involving children placed or supervised by the agency that are restricted from public access under the requirements of the Child Abuse and Neglect Law;
2. Records, reports, correspondence or forms containing names and/or any other identifying information pertaining to children, birth parent(s), or adoptive parent(s) that are restricted from public access under the sealed records requirements of the State Adoption Law;

3. Confidential information with regard to specific agency personnel;

4. Any items that deal with reports of complaint investigations that are still in progress;

5. Memoranda and other internal correspondence between and among public agencies, including internal communication between the Division and the Attorney General, except as otherwise provided by law; and

6. Other material required by law to be maintained as confidential.

(d) Bureau records shall be available for public inspection at the Bureau office during regular business hours. Copies of these records shall be available for purchase in accordance with the public records copy fee schedule set forth at N.J.S.A. 47:1A-2.

Amended by R.1992 d.514, effective December 21, 1992.

See: 24 N.J.R. 3500(a), 24 N.J.R. 4552(a).

Stylistic changes.

Administrative Correction.

See: 25 N.J.R. 2591(a).

SUBCHAPTER 3. ADMINISTRATION

10:121A-3.1 Governing board requirements for private agencies

(a) Each private agency shall have a governing board which shall have the authority to:

1. Set overall policy for the agency; and
2. Ensure the financial viability of the agency.

(b) The governing board shall establish policies pertaining but not limited to:

1. Program and services to clients;
2. Personnel recruitment, selection, training and performance evaluation; and
3. Fiscal operations, including budget and resource development and fund raising;

(c) The governing board shall delegate responsibility for day-to-day operations to an executive director or administrator and shall clearly delineate in writing the respective duties of the governing board and of the executive director or administrator.

(d) The governing board shall have written provisions guiding its composition, including provisions for representation of a variety of community interests and for time-limited terms of office for board members.

(e) The governing board shall meet at least every six months and make records of attendance and minutes of each meeting available for inspection by the Bureau.

(f) The governing board shall have a written policy covering conflict of interest, which shall include the following provisions:

1. Board members shall serve without compensation or other material benefit, except that board members may be reimbursed for actual expenses, as determined by the board.

2. The agency shall not use any business that is owned or operated by a board member or in which a board member has a financial interest and shall not use the services of a board member unless the board can document that the goods or services were obtained at a competitive price.

3. Board members seeking adoption services from the agency shall either take a leave of absence from the board or serve as a non-voting member during the period(s) when such services are received. This requirement shall also apply when a person from a Board member's immediate family seeks agency adoption services.

4. The agency shall not require clients to use the consultant services of a board member or of a board member's family.

5. A board member shall not use a board position for personal benefit or for the benefit of relatives, family or friends who are seeking adoption services from the board member's agency.

6. Agency personnel and members of their families shall not serve as voting members of the board.

(g) The board shall oversee the transfer of clients and services and preserve records, as specified in N.J.A.C. 10:121A-3.5(e), whenever an agency terminates its adoption program.

Amended by R.1992 d.514, effective December 21, 1992.

See: 24 N.J.R. 3500(a), 24 N.J.R. 4552(a).

Agency staff and family members prohibited from serving on Agency Board.

10:121A-3.2 Advisory board requirements for public agencies

(a) Any public agency shall have an advisory board or advisory council that is representative of a variety of interests and points of view in the communities where the agency provides services. The advisory board shall:

1. Keep informed of and make recommendations regarding the operational policies and practices of the agency;

2. Provide advice to the agency on matters of policy, planning, program evaluation and practice;

3. Periodically review aspects of the agency's adoption operation;

4. Meet at least annually and make records of attendance and minutes of each meeting available for inspection by the Bureau; and

5. Adhere to the standards for private agency governing boards, as specified in N.J.A.C. 10:121A-3.1(d) through (f).

10:121A-3.3 Legal responsibilities

(a) An agency shall be authorized to place children for adoption, accept relinquishment of parental rights, receive custody and/or guardianship of a child and have the right to consent to adoption. An agency that takes custody or guardianship of the child shall also be legally responsible for the child under care or guardianship until the adoption is finalized or until the child's custody and care or guardianship is transferred to another certified agency or person.

(b) When an agency transfers a child, the agency shall document the reasons for such action in the case record and shall verify that the second agency to which the child is being transferred is licensed, certified, or approved in the state where it is based.

(c) A New Jersey-certified agency may provide services for an out-of-state agency only if:

1. The New Jersey-certified agency verifies that the out-of-State agency is licensed, certified or approved in the state where the agency's principal office is located and is a non-profit agency if it places children in New Jersey for adoption;

2. Both agencies execute a written cooperative agreement that has been approved by the Bureau; and

3. Both agencies develop a written plan that:

i. Defines financial and social work responsibilities before, during and after the placement of each child; and

ii. States that the out-of-state agency shall be financially responsible for any child placed in New Jersey until and unless the child's adoption has been finalized or the child has reached the age of majority or been removed from New Jersey. This requirement shall not affect an out-of-State agency's responsibility for providing subsidy payments to the child subsequent to finalization of the adoption or to the child's reaching the age of majority; or an out-of-State agency's voluntary agreement to assume financial responsibility after finalization of the adoption or until the child's reaching the age of majority.

Amended by R.1992 d.514, effective December 21, 1992.

See: 24 N.J.R. 3500(a), 24 N.J.R. 4552(a).

Non-profit status required at (c)1.

Case Notes

Adoption agency is legally responsible for a child until adoption is completed or custody and care of child is transferred to another agency or person; agency action in removing child from home of prospective parents during six month supervisory period affirmed. In re: J.P., 198 N.J.Super. 166, 486 A.2d 907 (App.Div.1985).

10:121A-3.4 Information to parents and adoption applicants

(a) The agency shall provide the birth parents and adoptive applicants with a written statement or pamphlet indicating certain parental and agency rights and responsibilities, as specified in N.J.A.C. 10:121A-3.4(b).

(b) The written statement or pamphlet shall contain the following information:

1. That the agency is required to be certified by the Bureau of Licensing of the New Jersey Division of Youth and Family Services pursuant to the State Adoption Law (N.J.S.A. 9:3-37 et seq.);

2. That the agency is required by law to comply with all applicable requirements of this chapter.

3. That the agency shall make a current copy of the Manual of Requirements for Adoption Agencies available for review by the parents of children served by the agency;

4. That any parents who believe or suspect that the agency is in violation of any requirements of the Manual of Requirements for Adoption Agencies may report such alleged violations to the Bureau of Licensing;

5. That any parent may secure a copy of the Manual of Requirements for Adoption Agencies by contacting the Bureau of Licensing, Division of Youth and Family Services and that the Bureau will charge a nominal fee for the manual, in keeping with Department policy;

6. That when so requested by parents of children served by the agency, the agency shall make available for review the Bureau's certification records and any Inspection or Violation Reports on the agency, except for those records prohibited from disclosure, pursuant to the State Child Abuse and Neglect Law (N.J.S.A. 9:6-8.10(a)) and to any other laws prohibiting such disclosure.

7. That any person who has reasonable cause to believe that a child being served by the agency has been and/or is subjected to any form of child abuse or neglect or exploitation by any person, whether working at the agency or not, shall report such allegations to the Division of Youth and Family Services Office of Child Abuse Control toll-free hotline (currently 1-800-792-8610 in New Jersey and (609) 292-8799 out-of-state), pursuant to the State Child Abuse and Neglect Law (N.J.S.A. 9:6-8.1 et seq.). Such reports may be made anonymously;

8. That parents may secure information about child abuse and neglect by contacting the Office of Community Education, Division of Youth and Family Services; and

9. That the agency shall cooperate with the adoptive parents and/or the attorney retained by the adoptive parents in providing all financial information needed for the finalization report, pursuant to the State Adoption Law (N.J.S.A. 9:3-37 et seq.).

(c) When a child has been identified by the agency as having a handicapping condition or suspected handicapping condition and services have not been arranged, the agency shall inform the parent(s) of their child's right to special educational and medical services and shall refer the parent(s) to:

1. The toll-free telephone number of the New Jersey Department of Education, Regional Curriculum Services Unit (currently 1-800-322-8174 in New Jersey and (908) 390-6030 out-of-state) for a possible comprehensive evaluation and individual service plan for the child; and

2. The New Jersey Department of Health, Division of Local and Community Health Services, Special Child Health Services Program (currently (609) 292-5676) for a possible comprehensive medical evaluation for the child.

Amended by R.1992 d.514, effective December 21, 1992.

See: 24 N.J.R. 3500(a), 24 N.J.R. 4552(a).

Stylistic changes.

Administrative Correction.

See: 25 N.J.R. 2883(b).

10:121A-3.5 Reporting requirements

(a) The agency shall orally notify the Office of Child Abuse Control (currently 1-800-792-8610 in New Jersey and (609) 292-8799 out-of-state) immediately whenever there is any allegation received by the agency or other reasonable cause to believe that a child under the supervision or care of the agency has been or is being abused or neglected by any person, pursuant to the State Child Abuse and Neglect Law (N.J.S.A. 9:6-8.9, 8.10, 8.13, and 8.14).

1. The agency shall notify the Bureau of these allegations as well as of any other allegations that were made by other parties and came to the agency's attention.

2. The Division shall make copies of the child abuse law and information about the law available, upon request, to the Community Education Office of the Division of Youth and Family Services.

(b) The agency shall notify the Bureau orally of any of the following changes or events within 24 hours after the agency learns of their occurrence and shall submit written notification to the Bureau within five working days:

1. Unanticipated permanent or temporary closing of the agency or any part thereof;

2. Any criminal convictions of any staff member involved in the agency's adoption program excluding minor traffic violations;

3. Legal action against the agency or a staff member which involves the operation of the agency or any child under the care of the agency, excluding any legal actions unrelated to agency business;

4. Damage to agency facilities which substantially disrupts the program or the agency's accessibility to clients; or

5. Knowledge of any child placement by any other party which the agency has reason to believe is not permitted by law or by this chapter.

(c) The agency shall notify the Bureau in writing at least 30 calendar days prior to any of the following proposed changes and events, if known:

1. Any plans to reorganize the adoption program that would involve changes in target populations, geographic area, services or eligibility, and the reasons for the changes;

2. Any change in the name, location, executive director or administrator of the agency; or

3. Any change in the majority of the membership of the governing board within a calendar year.

(d) The agency shall notify the Bureau in writing 90 calendar days prior to the date when the agency decided to suspend or cease operations of the agency's adoption program.

(e) The agency shall make the following arrangements once a decision to cease its adoption program has been made:

1. Transfer the care and custody of any children in the supervision of the agency to another Bureau-certified agency;

2. Transfer responsibility for any other clients, such as adoptive and/or birth parents in the adoption program to another Bureau-certified agency;

3. Notify the Bureau of the successor agency within 60 calendar days of closing;

4. Transfer all closed adoption records to a successor private agency certified by the Bureau. The closing agency shall ensure that such transfers of closed adoption records are implemented within five years after the agency's adoption program ceases to operate;

5. Send to all current adoption clients, including birth parents, adoptive applicants and adoptive parents as well as adult adoptees and relevant agencies with whom the agency is currently working, a letter explaining its decision to cease operation of its adoption program; and

6. Return its certificate to the Bureau.

10:121A-3.6 Agency records

(a) The agency shall ensure that the following general requirements are met:

1. The agency shall keep all records on file at the agency but may store files that are not currently active in a secure facility, with confidential files under lock and key, provided that the records can be accessed in a reasonable amount of time, if needed.

2. The agency shall make all records available for inspection by authorized representatives, as specified in N.J.A.C. 10:121A-2.3(a)5.

3. The agency shall ensure that all entries in the child, adoptive family, birth family and personnel records indicate the name of the individual making the entry, the date of the entry, and that all entries are signed by that individual.

4. The agency shall maintain the confidentiality of all information in all client case records, including those of the child, birth parents, foster parents, adoptive parents and adult adoptees, except by court order, or as specified in this chapter, or by written consent of the specific party.

i. Staff members or persons associated with or working in cooperation with the agency shall not disclose or knowingly permit the disclosure of any identifying information concerning the child, birth parents, foster parents, adoptive parents or adult adoptees to any unauthorized person(s). Authorized persons are:

(1) Division representatives involved in child abuse and/or neglect investigations, otherwise authorized by statute;

(2) Bureau representatives or designees engaged in review activities related to certifications;

(3) Staff members of other agencies acting within the scope of their employment;

(4) Representatives of adoption agencies or the social welfare or law enforcement agencies exchanging information regarding individuals in the care or legal custody of one of the agencies; and

(5) Persons named in court orders for this purpose.

ii. The agency may disclose identifying information to bona fide researchers who have received permission from the Division Director, subject to any restrictions and/or limitations set by the Division Director, and who agree to maintain the confidentiality of the child, birth parents, foster parents, adoptive parents and/or adult adoptees.

iii. The agency shall disclose or permit the disclosure of non-identifying information to the child, adult adoptee, birth parents, foster parents and adoptive parents after verifying the identity of the person making the request.

iv. An agency shall supply full information as permitted by these rules to any party involved in an adoption upon request.

v. The agency shall not give the adoptive parents the names of the birth parents even though the adoptive parents may have learned of the identity of the birth parents before or while the plan for adoption was made.

(b) The agency shall develop, maintain and make available to clients and to the public, upon their request, a written description of its policies and procedures for the following:

1. Eligibility for and provision of services;

2. Contents and maintenance of case records, including confidentiality and access;

3. Client grievances;

4. Rights and responsibilities of the agency and of clients for providing information, access to records, providing services, and payment of fees;

5. Relationship(s) with the courts pertaining to termination of parental rights, custody and guardianship; and

6. Relationship(s) with referring agencies.

(c) The agency shall establish and maintain statistical information on adoption services and shall submit this statistical information to the Bureau on standardized forms provided by the Bureau within 45 calendar days following receipt of the request for such information.

(d) An agency shall maintain case records for each child served and for his or her birth family for 99 years. Certified agencies that work with referring agencies shall make efforts to obtain background information for birth family and child records. These records shall include:

1. Identifying information on the child, including: name according to birth certificate, aliases if any, birthdate, birthplace, sex, race, social security number, national origin, religion, height, weight, color of hair and eyes, identifying marks or any other significant physical characteristics;

2. The name, address, telephone number, birthdate, birthplace, social security number, marital status, race, national origin, religion, and any social, psychological, educational or vocational background information on the birth parent(s), including the putative father or legal guardian(s), if relevant;

3. Name, address, telephone number of a birth family member, or relative to contact in case of emergency;

4. Date of placement and finalization of the adoption;

5. The names, birthdates, and locations of the child's siblings, if any. If the child has siblings, the record shall

also include the reason(s) that the sibling(s) were not placed in the same adoptive home;

6. Social, psychological, developmental, educational circumstances including school reports and medical history of the child and copies of any professional recommendations, evaluations, or treatment, including the Adoption Medical Information Form pursuant to N.J.S.A. 9:3-41.1(b), or any other required form issued by the Bureau, and a complete medical history of the birth family;

7. Legal documents pertinent to legal custody and guardianship, including birth records, court reports, proof of voluntary relinquishment or termination of parental rights or their equivalent, documentation of custody or guardianship transferred from one certified agency to another or from an official of the United States or any foreign country with authority to place such child for adoption;

8. All written agreements with parents, guardians, legal custodians, or cooperating agencies including but not limited to consent for foster placement and authorization for necessary medical or surgical care and service and financial agreements;

9. Summary reports of social services with the child and birth family, including possible alternatives to adoption, including pre- and/or post-natal care for the birth mother, temporary care for the birth mother and/or child, reasons for adoption as the plan of choice, and birth parent preferences, if any, regarding characteristics of the adoptive family;

10. Summary of how any child placed for adoption has been prepared for the adoption, including, for children 10 years of age or older, a full description of the child's involvement in the process of adoption planning, and preference regarding characteristics of the adoptive family or documentation of the reason(s) for not consulting the child; and

11. Record of the birth family's contact with the agency after adoptive placement, including updated addresses and telephone numbers.

(e) Foreign adoption records for birth family and child shall include:

1. A list of illnesses and diseases endemic to the child's country of origin and specific infectious diseases to which the child may have been exposed;

2. A description of the child's living arrangements prior to placement, and a record of the child's adjustment to such arrangements; and

3. The specific plan for transportation of the child to the adoptive home.

(f) The agency shall maintain records of home studies of adoptive applicants, who have had a child placed for adoption, for 99 years. These records shall include:

1. Information about the prospective adoptive parent(s) and family, including: name, address, sex, race, birthdate, religion, nationality and citizenship, social security number, educational background, occupation and income, marital status and year of marriage and divorce, if applicable;

2. Information on other members of the immediate family, their names, sex, birthdates, relationship, and addresses, if different from above;

3. Copies of signed service plans and financial agreements;

4. Characteristics of child desired: age range, sex, racial or ethnic background, social, psychological, physical, developmental, educational circumstances acceptable to the family, including any specific limits to the extent of special conditions acceptable to the adoptive family;

5. Summary documents of the adoption home study of the family which shall be signed and dated by both the social worker who conducted the study and social work supervisor, including any autobiographical or other self-assessment material provided by the family, the basis for the decision to accept or reject the family or to impose any qualifying conditions, an indication that the decision was made jointly by the social worker and social work supervisor, and a record that the family was informed in writing of the decision within 30 calendar days of the last contact with the family;

6. All references, medical reports, and any background checks, including police and fingerprinting checks, and any other verifications or correspondence used by the agency for the study and evaluation of the adoptive family; and

7. A record of each child being placed in the adoptive home, including the full name, date of placement, supervisory reports covering the child's and family's adjustment, summary report of placement and recommendation, date and place of finalization, record of any contact with the agency after finalization, including updated addresses and telephone numbers.

(g) The agency shall maintain on file records for each foster family used by the agency in support of the agency's adoption service.

1. These records shall be maintained for the following:

i. Placements that were made before termination of the legal parents' rights; and

ii. Temporary care between intended permanent adoptive placements.

2. Such records shall include documentation that the requirements specified in N.J.A.C. 10:121A-5.5(b) were met. Where a foster family is also the adoptive family, the adoptive family records shall include the content specified in (f) above.

(h) The agency shall maintain the following administrative records in its files:

1. Current copies of all written materials required for certification, as specified in N.J.A.C. 10:121A-2.1(c) and (d). When there are changes or modifications in the agency's policies and procedures, the written materials shall reflect such changes;

2. A current copy of the Manual of Requirements for Adoption Agencies;

3. Copies of other licenses, certificates, accreditations or evaluations of agency operations, program, and facilities;

4. Copies of board meeting minutes; and

5. Copies of general and comprehensive insurance coverage.

(i) An agency shall maintain the following financial records:

1. An annual budget indicating projected revenues and expenses for its adoption program;

2. Policies and procedures governing fees for service, along with fee ranges, if any; and

3. Actual fees paid by clients to or through the agency in connection with adoption services.

(j) The agency shall maintain personnel records on all agency personnel, including paid staff members employed by the agency, paid consultants who provide contracted services and volunteers and students who have direct contact with clients.

1. The personnel record shall include the following information for each staff member:

i. Name, address, and telephone number;

ii. Resume, or application form, including qualifications, work experience and at least two references;

iii. A listing of any criminal convictions, excluding minor traffic violations;

iv. Annual evaluations of job performance;

v. A description of any adoption-related training/development received;

vi. Dates of employment and separation and reason(s) for leaving; and

vii. Description or statement of amount of time the employee works.

2. The agency shall maintain a personnel record for at least three years following the staff member's separation from the agency.

3. State-operated agencies shall follow policies and guidelines established by the Department and the Division for personnel information of paid consultants in lieu of the information specified in (j)1 and 2 above.

Amended by R.1992 d.514, effective December 21, 1992.

See: 24 N.J.R. 3500(a), 24 N.J.R. 4552(a).

All entries to be signed and dated.

10:121A-3.7 Office facilities

(a) The agency facilities shall provide privacy for interviewing and be located within easy access to the public.

(b) The agency shall provide storage space for equipment and furnishings needed to carry out the activities of the adoption program.

(c) The agency shall have a telephone whose number is listed in the public telephone directory.

Case Notes

Good cause requirement for adoptive adult to obtain information regarding natural parents. *Backes v. Catholic Family & Community Services*, 210 N.J.Super. 186, 509 A.2d 283 (Ch.Div.1984).

SUBCHAPTER 4. PERSONNEL

10:121A-4.1 General requirements

(a) An agency shall have one social worker for every 35 children under its care or supervision.

(b) An agency shall have at least three full-time staff members or their equivalents in part-time staff members.

1. An agency shall have one executive director or administrator.

2. The executive director or administrator shall not serve as the social work supervisor.

Amended by R.1992 d.514, effective December 21, 1992.

See: 24 N.J.R. 3500(a), 24 N.J.R. 4552(a).

Staff requirements increased to three full-time or equivalent; director prohibited from serving as social work supervisor.

10:121A-4.2 Personnel policies

(a) The agency shall require all applicants for employment to disclose criminal convictions in writing. Evidence of conviction of a crime, in itself, shall not automatically preclude an individual from working in the agency and shall not automatically result in the removal or termination of a director or staff member from his or her position or job. Such determinations shall be made on a case by case basis, in keeping with the provisions of the State Rehabilitated

Convicted Offenders Act (N.J.S.A. 2A:168A-1 et seq.), which provides that a person convicted of a crime may not be disqualified or discriminated against by a licensing authority unless the conviction relates adversely to the occupation, trade, vocation, profession or business for which a license is sought. The agency shall maintain all disclosures on file.

(b) The agency shall develop and maintain on file current written personnel policies and make them available to all staff members. The personnel policies shall be reviewed annually and updated every three years by the agency and include:

1. Criteria and procedures for the assignment, supervision, annual performance evaluation, promotion, suspension or dismissal of a staff member;
2. Job specifications outlining the qualifications, duties and accountability for every category of staff member;
3. Procedures for handling staff member complaints or grievances; and
4. Provisions for responding to any staff member misconduct that constitutes criminal or unethical and/or unprofessional behavior.

(c) The agency shall ensure that any staff member or consultant that utilizes the title or designation of social worker, licensed clinical social worker, licensed social worker, certified social worker, medical social worker, social work technician or any other title or designation which includes the words social worker or social work, or any abbreviations such as SW, LCSW, LSW, CSW or SWT, is certified or licensed pursuant to N.J.S.A. 45:15BB-1 et seq., the Social Workers Licensing Act of 1991.

(d) All new in-State agencies prior to receiving a temporary or regular certificate shall ensure that social work staff and social work supervisors are certified or licensed pursuant to (c) above.

(e) All new out-of-State agencies shall ensure that social work staff and social work supervisors are certified or licensed pursuant to that state's laws or requirements, if applicable.

(f) An existing in-State agency shall ensure that staff members who function as social workers or social work supervisors and can meet the educational and experiential requirements to be licensed or certified, but are not currently licensed or certified, obtain the appropriate license or certificate within the time frames prescribed by N.J.S.A. 45:15BB-1 et seq.

(g) An in-State agency may require existing staff members who function as social workers or social work supervisors and who do not currently meet the educational and experiential requirements to be licensed or certified pursuant to (c) above, to obtain the appropriate certificate or license as a condition of continued employment; or it may retain such staff members in the same capacity so long as these staff members are not utilizing titles specified in (c) above.

(h) Existing in-State agencies shall ensure that all new staff members that are hired for the positions of social worker and social work supervisor are licensed or certified pursuant to (c) above.

Amended by R.1992 d.514, effective December 21, 1992.

See: 24 N.J.R. 3500(a), 24 N.J.R. 4552(a).

Applicable in-State or out-of-State social work licensing required.

10:121A-4.3 Staff development

(a) The agency shall provide orientation for all new staff members regarding the general administrative, personnel, fiscal and program policies, procedures, and practices of the agency.

(b) The agency shall prepare and maintain on file a written staff development program plan. The plan shall specify major content areas to be covered and agency policy regarding requirements for staff development.

1. The agency shall provide at least eight hours of adoption-related training per year to each professional staff member.

2. The agency shall make staff members aware of specific requirements of the State Adoption Law and of this chapter that affect the performance of their duties.

3. The agency shall make staff members aware of the Child Abuse and Neglect Law and shall provide for the training of its staff members in reporting procedures under this law.

10:121A-4.4 Staff qualifications and duties

(a) The executive director or administrator shall work for the agency on a full-time basis (at least 30 hours per week) and have the qualifications and responsibilities as specified below.

1. The executive director or administrator of the agency shall:

- i. Have a bachelor's degree from an accredited college or university and three years of professional experience in the human services field, two years of which shall have been in a supervisory or administrative position; or

ii. Have a master's or doctorate degree from an accredited graduate school in business or public administration or in one of the areas of study in the human services field and two years of professional experience in the human services field; or

iii. For public agencies, meet the New Jersey State Department of Personnel requirements for the title used for the function of executive director or administrator of the agency.

2. The executive director or administrator shall be responsible for:

i. Developing, implementing and maintaining policy and procedures for program and fiscal operation;

ii. Ensuring that the agency achieves and maintains compliance with the requirements of this chapter;

iii. Employing, evaluating and discharging staff members, in accordance with the agency's established personnel policies as specified in N.J.A.C. 10:121A-4.2;

iv. Establishing and supervising working relationships with other social service agencies within the community; and

v. Maintaining current social services records and statistics, as specified in N.J.A.C. 10:121A-3.6(c).

(b) The social work supervisor shall work for the agency on a full-time basis (at least 30 hours per week) and have the qualifications and responsibilities as specified below.

1. A social work supervisor shall:

i. Have a bachelor's degree from an accredited college or university and four years of professional experience in services to children and families, two years of which shall be in adoption services; or

ii. Have a master's degree in social work or other human services field from an accredited college or university and a minimum of two years of professional experience in services to children and families, one year of which shall be in adoption services; or

iii. For public agencies, meet the New Jersey State Department of Personnel requirements for the title.

2. The social work supervisor shall be responsible for:

i. The supervision, management, training, and evaluation of all social work staff members, students, and consultants;

ii. The supervision of volunteers whose work involves direct contact with clients;

iii. The approval of all decisions regarding family and child eligibility for service, maternity and child care, transportation and placement arrangements, finalization, and any other changes in the child's legal status; and

iv. The implementation of the agency's adoption program(s) and services, and recommendations regarding changes to the program.

(c) A social worker shall work for the agency on a full-time basis (at least 30 hours per week) and have the qualifications and responsibilities as specified below. The agency may choose to utilize part-time staff members in lieu of one full-time staff member, provided that these staff have the qualifications and responsibilities as specified in (c)1 and 2 below.

1. A social worker shall:

i. Have a bachelor's degree from an accredited college or university and one year of professional experience in the human services field; or

ii. Have a master's degree in social work or in a related human services field from an accredited college or university; or

iii. For public agencies, meet the New Jersey State Department of Personnel requirements for the title.

2. A social worker shall be responsible for:

i. The maintenance of up-to-date case records;

ii. The preparation of home studies for adoptive applicants;

iii. The preparation of other case reports as required by the courts, cooperating agencies, or this chapter; and

iv. Direct service provision of any pre-placement, placement, post-placement, or post-adoption services, delivered to children, birth parents, foster parents, adult adoptees, or related parties within the scope of the agency's approved program.

(d) An agency shall arrange for staff members and/or consultants to provide medical, legal, psychiatric, psychological or other professional services to birth parents, children and adoptive parents whose home studies have been approved by the agency.

1. All staff members and/or consultants shall meet the licensing, certification, or practice requirements established for their respective professions in the states in which they practice.

2. The agency shall not require clients to use medical, legal, psychological, psychiatric or other consultants used by the agency. The agency may use consultants and/or persons selected by agency clients.

(e) The agency shall employ secretarial and other support staff to perform reception, clerical, recordkeeping, bookkeeping and related services necessary to comply with the requirements of this chapter.

(f) Agencies that utilize students for field placements shall have a written plan for using their services.

1. This plan shall describe what services the student is responsible for and what arrangement the agency has for supervising the students.

2. The agency shall give a copy of this plan to each student and his or her school and to the supervising staff members.

(g) An agency may utilize the services of volunteers provided that the agency:

1. Ensures that any volunteer who has direct contact with clients works under the supervision of a professional staff member and does not provide counseling services or make social work decisions unless the volunteer has the qualifications of a social worker, as specified in (c) above.

2. Prepares and maintains on file a written plan and job description for each category of volunteer who has direct contact with clients; and

3. Provides orientation and training to volunteers, as specified in N.J.A.C. 10:121A-4.3(a).

Amended by R.1992 d.514, effective December 21, 1992.

See: 24 N.J.R. 3500(a), 24 N.J.R. 4552(a).

Hours of work and experience requirements added at (a) through (c).

SUBCHAPTER 5. SERVICES

10:121A-5.1 Scope of service

(a) An agency shall provide any or all of the following phases of adoption service:

1. Pre-placement services;
2. Home study services;
3. Placement services;
4. Post-placement services; or
5. Post-adoption services.

(b) An agency that provides a limited range of adoption services shall arrange for other services upon request of the clients.

(c) An agency shall comply with those sections of this subchapter that apply to the phases of adoption service that the agency has chosen to provide.

10:121A-5.2 General requirements

(a) An agency shall maintain on file and make available to its clients information on known resources in the community which may be of use to adoptive parents, birth parents, children and adult adoptees.

(b) Before services are provided, an agency shall make available to its adult clients the following:

1. A written description of its current adoption program, including information on the agency's services, the adoption process, including the availability of subsidy for special needs children, and other major referring agencies with whom the agency works; and

2. A verbal explanation of and a written agreement with the agency, describing specific services to be provided, fees to be charged, and rights and responsibilities of both parties.

(c) An agency that plans to place a child with an out-of-state family or to receive a child from out of state for placement within the State of New Jersey shall notify the Interstate Services Units of the Division and shall comply with regulations governing child placement in the other state, where applicable.

(d) An agency shall comply with the requirements of the Federal Indian Child Welfare Act (P.L. 95-608) for placement of Native American children.

(e) An agency that is unable to locate an appropriate adoptive family within 60 calendar days of the date the child was legally freed for adoption shall:

1. Refer the child to the New Jersey Adoption Resource Exchange, or any successor Statewide exchange; and

2. Refer the child to an interstate or national adoption exchange.

(f) An agency may refer a child to any adoption exchange(s) earlier than is required under (e) above.

(g) An agency that has a special needs child in its care for whom the plan is adoption shall document in the child's record its efforts to develop an adoptive placement.

(h) An agency shall ensure access to its services by persons who are physically disabled or handicapped.

10:121A-5.3 Fees and fiscal practices

(a) The agency shall not consider the clients' willingness to donate money, goods or services or to participate in agency fund-raising efforts in determining their eligibility for services.

(b) The agency shall provide equal access to services to all eligible clients without regard to actual or potential donations of money, goods, time or efforts.

(c) The agency shall prepare and maintain on file a written schedule of all fees charged and provide a copy of the schedule to an agency client before service delivery begins.

(d) The agency shall prepare and maintain on file a written description of its policies and procedures for the setting, collecting, waiver, non-payment and refunding of fees, along with guidelines for exceptions to these policies and procedures.

1. No agency shall withhold finalization of a placement or adoption solely for non-payment of fees.

2. The agency shall make refunds to an eligible client no more than 30 calendar days after receipt of a written request for such refunds from an agency client.

10:121A-5.4 Services to birth parents

(a) An agency shall accept the surrender of a child only after determining that the birth parents or legal guardians are not acting under duress.

1. The agency shall not require the prospective birth parents to sign a statement committing them to any definite plan for the unborn child in order to obtain services.

2. The agency shall not require the birth parent to surrender a child for adoption in order to receive medical services, maternity or residential care, or any other agency service.

i. An adoption agency that directly provides residential facility care, foster home care and/or maternity services to clients shall ensure that such facilities and/or homes meet applicable state licensing, certification or approval requirements.

(b) The agency shall give the father the opportunity to sign a surrender, a denial of paternity or otherwise exercise parental rights to the child pursuant to N.J.S.A. 9:3-45. The agency shall not discourage the birth mother from identifying the father.

(c) Before taking a surrender, the agency shall document that the birth parents were:

1. Provided at least three face-to-face counseling sessions by qualified social work staff on separate days and that the birth parents were:

i. Offered counseling that fully explores alternative plans for the child, including but not limited to temporary foster care, day care and care by relatives;

ii. Informed that only legal parents or legal guardians have the right to custody and control of their child and to surrender their child for adoption;

iii. Prepared, along with the child, for surrender and separation;

iv. Referred to other community resources when the agency cannot provide needed services;

v. Informed that the agency may contact them in the future if the adult adoptee or adoptive family or emancipated minor requests information or wishes to meet the birth parents;

vi. Advised that they may sign a written agreement at any time indicating their willingness to be contacted and/or to provide information if requested by the adoptee or adoptive family; and

vii. Asked to update and submit to the agency their address(es) and/or any significant medical information required on the Medical Information Form, so that the medical information could be shared with the adoptive family and/or the adult adoptee.

2. Requested to sign a statement that indicates that the agency explained the information in (c)1 above to them; or

3. Requested to sign a statement when they refuse to participate in the counseling sessions.

(d) The agency shall ensure that the birth parents understand the terms of the surrender and realize that the agency will assume custody and will have the right to consent to adoption of the child, pursuant to N.J.S.A. 9:3-41 and N.J.S.A. 30:4c-23.

1. The agency shall ensure that the full terms of this understanding are delineated in writing, signed and dated by the birth parent(s) and agency and maintained on file.

2. The agency shall ensure that the surrendering parent(s) is given the opportunity to state any preferences that he and/or she may have affecting the selection of adoptive parent(s).

3. The agency shall not permit any such preferences to interfere with the agency's authority and responsibility to act in the best interests of the child in selecting adoptive parents or with the agency's obligation not to discriminate in the selection of adoptive parents, as specified in N.J.A.C. 10:121A-1.6(b).

4. The agency shall not take a surrender before the child is 72 hours old.

5. The agency shall document that birth parents who cannot read English fully understood the meaning of surrender.

6. The agency shall not delay returning a child to a birth parent(s) who decided not to surrender solely because the parent(s) is unable to pay medical and/or other fees.

(e) The agency shall request the court to terminate parental rights where state law provides grounds for termination of parental rights and there is reason to believe that termination of parental rights is necessary for the protection of the child.

(f) The agency shall provide at least one in-person contact with birth parents who request counseling after the child is freed for adoption.

(g) An agency that becomes involved in handling an identified adoption shall ensure that:

1. The birth parents have been offered counseling and alternatives to adoption, as specified in (c) and (d) above;

2. The prospective adoptive parents have met the agency's requirements for other adoptive parents through the home study process, as specified in N.J.A.C. 10:121A-5.6;

3. Neither the birth parents nor the prospective adoptive parents are bound to a proposed placement until after the completion of (g)1 and 2 above;

4. Both the birth parents and the adoptive parents have signed an agreement with the agency specifying the terms and conditions of the proposed placement and the rights and responsibilities of each party; and

5. The child and adoptive parents have received placement services, as specified in N.J.A.C. 10:121A-5.7, and post-placement services, as specified in N.J.A.C. 10:121A-5.8.

(h) An agency that provides services or payments on behalf of a birth mother who is considering adoption services for her born or unborn child(ren) to assist her in meeting the expenses associated with the birth or illness of the child shall comply with all the appropriate provisions of N.J.S.A. 9:3-37 et seq., the State Adoption Law.

(i) An agency that provides services or payments for medical or hospital care shall ensure that the birth mother receives such medical or hospital care from:

1. The agency's own staff of licensed medical or health care professionals;

2. A state-approved or state-licensed hospital, health care facility or medical clinic; or

3. A private physician licensed to practice in the state where his or her practice is located.

(j) An agency shall not make any cash payments for medical or hospital care unless all public and private medical insurance benefits to which the birth mother is entitled have been exhausted for such care, except that:

1. An agency may make cash payments for medical or hospital care when all public and private medical insurance benefits to which the birth mother is entitled have not been exhausted, if:

- i. There are compelling reasons why the birth mother cannot utilize such medical insurance benefits and the agency can adequately document these reasons in the case record; and

- ii. The birth mother signs a statement attesting to these reasons.

2. When the birth mother chooses not to utilize all public and private medical insurance benefits to which she is entitled and the agency determines to make cash payments for that birth mother, the agency shall notify the Bureau in writing within 15 calendar days explaining the reason(s) why they are making cash payments for her medical care.

(k) An agency may provide payment to a medical facility, hospital, physician or birth mother for medical bills previously incurred by the birth mother prior to her involvement with the agency for medical services that were associated with her pregnancy or birth of her child. An agency shall provide payment in these instances only when the birth mother provides written documentation that these medical services were provided.

(l) An agency that arranges for, provides directly, finances or subsidizes the costs of medical expenses, as specified in (i) through (k) above, of a birth mother shall comply with all of the following:

1. The agency shall maintain in a file a written policy that governs payments for medical or hospital care on behalf of birth mothers.

- i. A copy of this policy shall be given to each birth mother and prospective adoptive couple at the time of initial inquiry or application; and

- ii. The birth mother shall be advised in writing, that any services or payments that she may be granted will be made to her without regard to her present or future decision to surrender her child(ren) for adoption and that the agency will not require or request reimbursement from her for such services and/or payments.

2. Unless the birth mother terminates her relationship with the agency, the agency shall notify the birth mother in writing at least 30 calendar days prior to the date of its last services or payments for medical or hospital care that services and/or payments will be terminated by the 30th calendar day following the birth of the child or after the 30th calendar day following the signed release for termination of parental rights for whom adoption services were sought. The agency shall also notify the birth mother in writing within 30 days when the agency documents that the need for such services or payments no longer exists.

3. The agency shall maintain in its case files any receipts, cancelled checks and/or invoices or photocopies of such receipts, cancelled checks and/or invoices as a record of all cash payments that were made on behalf of the birth mother. The agency may utilize a case ledger to record this information provided that copies or actual receipts, cancelled checks and/or invoices are made available to the Bureau upon request.

Amended by R.1992 d.514, effective December 21, 1992.
See: 24 N.J.R. 3500(a), 24 N.J.R. 4552(a).

Services to birth parents added at (c); medical expense provisions for birth mother and adoptee added at (h) through (l).
Administrative Correction.
See: 25 N.J.R. 2883(b).

Case Notes

Surrogate parenting contract's provision for termination of mother's parental rights violated laws requiring proof of parental unfitness or abandonment before termination of parental rights is ordered or adoption is granted. *Matter of Baby M*, 109 N.J. 396, 537 A.2d 1227 (1988), on remand 225 N.J.Super. 267, 542 A.2d 52.

Adoption statute would be construed to allow surrender of parental rights only after birth of child. *Matter of Baby M*, 109 N.J. 396, 537 A.2d 1227 (1988), on remand 225 N.J.Super. 267, 542 A.2d 52.

Surrogate parenting contract violated laws making surrender of custody and consent to adoption revocable in private placement adoptions. *Matter of Baby M*, 109 N.J. 396, 537 A.2d 1227 (1988), on remand 225 N.J.Super. 267, 542 A.2d 52.

Surrogate parenting contract violated policy that rights of natural parents are equal concerning their child, with father's right being no greater than mother's, violated policies governing consent to surrender of child, and violated policy of concern for best interests of child. *Matter of Baby M*, 109 N.J. 396, 537 A.2d 1227 (1988), on remand 225 N.J.Super. 267, 542 A.2d 52.

Adoption of child through private placement disfavored in New Jersey. *Matter of Baby M*, 109 N.J. 396, 537 A.2d 1227 (1988), on remand 225 N.J.Super. 267, 542 A.2d 52.

Only irrevocable consent to surrender of parental rights is the one explicitly provided for by statute. *Matter of Baby M*, 109 N.J. 396, 537 A.2d 1227 (1988), on remand 225 N.J.Super. 267, 542 A.2d 52.

10:121A-5.5 Pre-placement services to the child

(a) The agency shall complete a comprehensive study for each child evaluated for adoption. The study shall include:

1. A medical examination of the child at birth or at the time when the agency assumed custody and again within 30 calendar days before placement in an adoptive home to determine the child's health and any factors that may interfere with normal development;
2. Information to the extent available about the child's birth family to determine hereditary factors or pathology that may affect the child's normal development and potentialities as required on forms developed by the Commissioner of the Department of Human Services, pursuant to N.J.S.A. 9:3-41.1(b);
3. Information on previous placements, if applicable;
4. Any specialized evaluations for a physically and/or mentally handicapped child to help better understand the child's strengths and limitations;
5. The child's involvement in the adoption or documentation of the reason(s) for not involving the child; and
6. A careful evaluation of the advisability, in terms of best interest, and feasibility of placing the child together with full or half-siblings whose permanency goal is also adoption or who may have been placed for adoption previously. The agency shall document, in the case record of the child for whom adoption is currently being

planned, any contraindicators and/or barriers to the co-placement of siblings, regardless of when they became legally free for adoption.

(b) The agency shall provide foster care services, as necessary, to ensure the health and safety of children who are waiting for legal clearance and/or adoptive placement.

1. The agency shall establish written criteria by which foster parent applicants are eligible to apply to the agency to provide foster care for a child.

i. The agency shall ensure that the criteria apply equally to all applicants.

ii. The agency shall make the criteria available to the Bureau, to all prospective foster parent applicants and, upon request, to any person.

2. Before approving foster parents, the agency shall ensure that foster parents:

i. Submit written reports of medical examinations conducted within the past calendar year for all household members. These reports shall indicate that all household members are free of communicable diseases or other medical impediments to the placement of foster children in the home;

ii. Submit a physician's written statement attesting that the foster parents' health status is such that they are physically capable of providing foster care services;

iii. Submit three written references that shall be stored in the foster family's record; and

iv. Allow the agency to conduct a home visit so that the agency can prepare a written assessment before the home is used.

3. Before a child is placed in an approved foster home, the agency shall ensure that the foster parent(s) signed an agreement that specifies the terms and conditions of service and financial remuneration.

4. If a foster home has not been used for a year, the agency shall update the evaluation of the home before placing a child.

(c) The agency shall give foster parents a telephone number to contact in case of emergency.

(d) The pre-placement services shall be recorded in the child's record, as specified in N.J.A.C. 10:121A-3.6(d).

10:121A-5.6 Home study services

(a) Throughout the home study, the agency shall provide social work services to help applicants decide if adoption is the best plan for them.

(b) The agency shall establish and maintain on file written criteria by which adoptive applicants are eligible to apply to the agency to adopt a child.

1. The agency shall ensure that the criteria apply equally to all applicants.

2. The agency shall make the criteria available to the Bureau, to all prospective adoptive applicants and, upon request, to any person.

(c) The agency shall ensure that the adoptive applicants:

1. Have attained the age of 18 years and be at least ten years older than the child being adopted. If the applicant is not 10 years older than the child to be adopted, the agency may petition the court to waive the requirement; and

2. Have the capacity to meet the child's physical and emotional needs.

(d) The agency shall also ask applicants to report any history of child abuse or neglect or any criminal record, excluding minor traffic violations. Agencies working with applicants who have a history of abuse, neglect or criminal conviction shall give careful consideration to whether their past conduct would pose a threat to the safety and/or security of a child placed for adoption, pursuant to N.J.S.A. 2A:16A et seq.

(e) The agency shall advise the applicants of the home study process, including the length of time involved. The home study process shall include the following:

1. At least three in-person contacts that are held on separate days to conduct joint and individual interviews with married applicants. Individual interviews with spouses may be counted as separate in-person contacts. Home study groups may be utilized and counted as one separate in-person contact with married applicants provided that:

i. No more than 10 adoptive parents per each group facilitator are in the group;

ii. The person facilitating the group meets the education and experience requirements for the social worker as specified in N.J.A.C. 10:121A-4.4(c); and

iii. The person facilitating the group maintains a record/notes of the discussions that occurred during group;

2. At least one in-person contact to conduct joint and individual interviews with all members of the applicant's household. These contacts may be held on the same day as the contacts for the married applicants;

3. At least one visit to the residence of the applicant(s);

4. A review of the applicant's current job reference(s):

i. If the applicant states that a request for a current job reference will jeopardize the applicant's employment status, the agency shall obtain a reference from a previous employer.

ii. If a previous employer is not available, the agency shall obtain a reference from an appropriate alternative such as a former teacher or the applicant's supervisor of a volunteer activity; and

5. A review of three personal references from persons unrelated to the applicant(s):

i. The agency shall obtain at least one reference who has known the applicant for five years.

ii. The agency shall obtain at least one reference from a neighbor of the applicant(s).

(f) The agency shall obtain information on the applicants. Such information shall include but not be limited to:

1. Identifying information such as: name, address, age, occupation, citizenship, race and ethnic background, education, social security number, religion (if any), and children in the home;

2. A description of each adoptive applicant's awareness and sensitivity to special issues that adopted children need to resolve, including the child's identity, attitudes toward birth parents and circumstances of the child's availability for adoption;

3. The family's recognition of the importance of and the family's plans for helping the child accept being adopted. For parents planning to adopt a child whose racial or cultural background is different from theirs, the home study shall include an assessment of the parent's awareness of, sensitivity to, and plans for dealing with those differences within their own family and in the community;

4. Applicants' interests, hobbies, child caring skills, strengths and weaknesses and how they see themselves and each other;

5. Philosophies on child rearing, discipline, parental roles, experience with children;

6. Emotional stability and maturity of the applicant(s), including understanding of and ability to cope with problems, stress, frustration, crisis, separation and loss, capacity to give and receive affection, and ability to distinguish between their needs and those of the child;

7. State of their marital relationship, decision making, communication, roles in the family and how they handle differences of opinion, if relevant;

8. The attitudes of other members of the family and of significant other persons involved with the family towards the adoption, description of them as individuals and how they interact as a family, and adjustment of other children in the family;

9. Each parent's family life history that includes: childhood experiences, what their home life was like, their parents' method of discipline and handling problems, their family ties, current family relationships and relatives' attitudes towards adoption;

10. Each parent's agreement that corporal punishment, including hitting and shaking, as well as abusive language and ridicule are unacceptable means of discipline;

11. Written medical reports on each applicant and all other persons living in the home that include health, results of laboratory tests or X-rays if ordered by the physician, and the physician's recommendation on the applicant's health status as it relates to the applicant's capacity to be an adoptive parent;

12. Verifications of present or previous marriage(s) and divorces of each adoptive applicants, including deaths of former spouses when there was no divorce;

13. Disclosure of any history of child abuse or neglect or of any criminal conviction, excluding minor traffic offenses;

14. Location and description of physical environment of the residence and neighborhood;

15. Statement of income and financial resources, and a description of the applicant's capacity to manage finances;

16. A description of the type(s) of children the adoptive applicants can accept, including age range, racial or ethnic background, sex, sibling groups, and physical, social, emotional, or developmental disabilities in the child;

17. A description of any birth family background problems, such as medical or hereditary problems, incest, mental illness, or drug use; and

18. A description of the applicant's capacity to make viable child care arrangements while the applicant(s) is employed, if relevant.

(g) After the home study has been conducted, the social worker who conducted the study and the social work supervisor shall co-sign a letter to the adoptive parents or otherwise indicate in writing that the approval or rejection decision was made jointly.

1. The agency shall make the approval or rejection decision after carefully assessing all the information obtained during the home study.

2. The agency shall inform the applicant(s) of its decision in writing within 30 calendar days after the last contact with the applicant(s).

i. When an applicant is approved, the agency shall recommend to the applicant the type(s) of child(ren) who can best adjust to the family and to whom the family can best adjust. When the agency's recommen-

dation of the type(s) of child(ren) to be considered for adoption is different from the applicant's initial preference for a certain type(s) of child(ren), the agency shall document in the adoptive family record the results of the discussion between the social worker and the applicant on this point.

ii. When the applicant pursues a child(ren) different from the type(s) of child(ren) recommended by the agency, the agency shall reevaluate the home study to determine if the applicant can be approved for the type of child he or she is seeking.

iii. When an applicant is not accepted, the agency shall:

(1) Explain to the applicant the reason(s) that a child cannot be placed with the family;

(2) Offer the applicant at least one in-person contact to help the applicant adjust to the agency's decision; and

(3) Provide the applicant information, both verbally and in writing, of the agency's grievance procedure.

(h) Upon receipt of a written request from adoptive applicants who have undergone a home study for an inter-country adoption, the agency shall forward to the applicants the home study within 30 calendar days of the request.

(i) For applicants who have been studied, approved and placed on a waiting list for longer than 18 months from the time their home study was approved, the agency shall update the home study before a child is placed into the home. The updated home study shall include:

1. One or more interviews with all members of the applicants' household; and

2. Medical reports within the past year for all members of the applicants' household.

(j) For applicants who are being considered for adoption of one or more additional children, the agency shall:

1. Update the home study as specified in (i)1 and 2 above; and

2. Evaluate the adjustment status of the previously placed child(ren) with the family.

Amended by R.1992 d.514, effective December 21, 1992.

See: 24 N.J.R. 3500(a), 24 N.J.R. 4552(a).

In-person contacts to occur on separate days; group contacts permitted; medical records required of all residents of adoptive home; reevaluations required for those seeking child different from agency recommendation.

Administrative Correction.

See: 25 N.J.R. 2883(b).

Case Notes

Adoption procedure; agency action in removing child from home of prospective parents during six month supervisory period affirmed. In re: J.P., 198 N.J.Super. 166, 486 A.2d 907 (App.Div.1985).

10:121A-5.7 Placement services

(a) The agency shall have responsibility for the selection of approved adoptive parents for a child upon successful completion of a home study as specified in N.J.A.C. 10:121A-5.6.

1. The agency shall not place a child for adoption before documenting in the child's record the reason(s) for placing the child with the adoptive family.

2. The agency shall document in the child's record efforts to place siblings together in the same adoptive home; if a child is not to be placed together with siblings who are also legally free or who were adopted previously, the agency shall document in the child's record at the time of placement the reasons that co-placement was not in the child's interest or the factors that made co-placement unfeasible.

3. The agency shall give the adoptive parent(s) a written explanation of their rights and responsibilities regarding the child during the supervision period. Such information shall include, but not be limited to, areas of medical care, financial responsibilities, travel outside the state and any areas where the law requires the consent of a parent or guardian.

4. In instances where an agency that is not certified by the Bureau is involved with a Bureau-certified agency, both agencies shall share information and reach a mutual decision on each adoptive placement.

5. The agency shall not disqualify any adoptive parent(s) rejected for a particular child from being considered for the adoption of another child, unless basic conflicts about adoption and/or parenting style are revealed, or the adoptive parent(s) are unable to accept the children who are available for adoption through the agency.

(b) The agency shall provide the following information to adoptive parent(s):

1. A written history of the child, including developmental and medical history and reason(s) for surrendering the child. If the child has special needs, the agency shall provide the applicant(s) with an assessment of the child's long-term needs, along with written information about the availability of subsidy and a list of community resources that provide services to address the child's needs;

2. An explanation that the adoptee may ultimately wish to seek information contained in the permanent record concerning his or her birth family and may in the future attempt to contact the birth family; and

3. An explanation that the agency may contact the adoptive parent in the future to convey updated information about the adoptee's birth family.

(c) The agency shall comply with the following escort and/or transportation requirements:

1. An agency engaged in transporting children for adoption shall ensure that adoptive parents or other escorts who accompany children from a referring agency to their adoptive families are informed of the child's medical needs;

2. An agency that provides or arranges for escort transportation service for children as part of its adoption program shall ensure that no child is left unattended during any portion of the trip to the adoptive family, unless the agency documents in the child's record that the child is physically and emotionally capable of traveling independently;

3. Persons providing children's escort services for an agency shall have a written statement from the agency describing their respective authority and responsibilities and shall carry proper identification, including their name and the agency's name while performing their duties.

i. The agency shall provide escorts with emergency information, names, telephone numbers and appropriate medical supplies and shall arrange for the safe and expeditious transfer of children to their adoptive parent(s) upon arrival.

ii. The agency shall require proof of identification by any person accepting temporary or permanent responsibility for the child's arrival; and

4. The agency shall document the escort and/or transportation plan in the child's record.

Amended by R.1992 d.514, effective December 21, 1992.

See: 24 N.J.R. 3500(a), 24 N.J.R. 4552(a).

"Approved" adoptive parents specified.

10:121A-5.8 Post-placement services

(a) For non-foster parent agency placements, the agency shall:

1. Visit the home within 14 calendar days of the adoptive placement and document in the child's record that:

i. The child's background information was reviewed with the adoptive parent(s);

ii. The adoptive parent(s) and child were given reassurance that their feelings, worries and joys are natural and understandable;

iii. School age children have an educational plan, pursuant to N.J.S.A. 30:4c-26(c) and N.J.S.A. 18A:7B-12(a); and

iv. Working parent(s) have made child care arrangements.

2. For children under five years of age, the agency shall:

- i. Conduct bi-monthly home visits after the first visit for at least six months, except when the adoption is delayed past the six month supervisory period because the court has a backlog of cases. In these instances, the agency may conduct office visits on a quarterly basis instead of home visits until the adoption has been finalized.
 - ii. Document in the child's record that all members of the adoptive family's household were interviewed during the placement supervision period; and
 - iii. Document in the child's record that the following issues were discussed:
 - (1) How the presence of the child changed marital and/or sibling relationships and how the child and extended family view each other;
 - (2) What role each family member has assumed regarding child care and discipline; and
 - (3) How parents cope with demands of a crying infant and/or a child who "tests" the placement and how the family reacts to these episodes including any feelings of insecurity about doing the "right" thing.
3. For children age five or older, the agency shall:
- i. Conduct monthly home visits during the minimum supervisory six-month period, and then bi-monthly home or office visits until the adoption is finalized, if the court has a backlog of cases;
 - ii. Document in the child's record that the child was interviewed privately about his feelings about the adoption at each supervisory visit; and
 - iii. Document that the following issues were discussed:
 - (1) How the presence of the child changed marital and/or sibling relationships and how the child and extended family view each other;
 - (2) What role each family member has assumed regarding child care and discipline;
 - (3) How the child "tests" the placement and how the family reacts to these episodes, including any feelings of insecurity about doing the "right" thing;
 - (4) How the family perceives the child's sense of identity and the need to fill in gaps in the child's history; and
 - (5) How the child has adjusted to the school environment.
- (b) The agency shall ensure that consents are not signed before the completion of the six month supervision, as specified in (a)2i above, unless the child's placement has been at least six months and the agency ensures the completion of the fourth supervision visit as scheduled.
- (c) In providing services as part of an Adoption Complaint Investigation:
1. The agency shall schedule a home visit no later than two weeks after receiving written notification from the court.
 - i. If the agency is unsuccessful in contacting the adoptive family in order to schedule a home visit within 14 days of receipt of the court's notification, the agency shall implement the following actions to schedule the home visit during the next 14-day period:
 - (1) Repeated telephone calls to the family's home and to the adult family members' place(s) of employment; and
 - (2) Transmittal of a certified letter to the family's home or to the adult family members' place(s) of employment.
 - ii. If the agency is unsuccessful in contacting the family during the second 14-day period, the agency shall send a letter or other written transmittal to the court that had directed the home study, explaining the agency's repeated attempts to contact the family to schedule the home visit and asking the court for direction on how to proceed.
 - iii. The agency shall document and maintain on file in the child's record each attempt that it made to contact the family, as specified in i and ii above.
 2. The agency shall conduct a home visit no later than 14 days after scheduling it with the adoptive parents; if the visit cannot take place within 14 days of being scheduled, the agency shall document the reason for not meeting this time frame.
 3. The agency shall include in the court-requested preliminary report documentation of the agency's efforts in contacting the adoptive parents and birth parents in order to assure a complete understanding regarding the circumstances of the placement of the child in the adoptive parent's home.
 4. The agency's responsibility for the preliminary hearing is completed when the court receives the written report from such agency. The agency may elect to provide additional services to the adoptive family, if specified in the report.
 5. The agency shall provide the adoptive parents with a copy of any report that contains material or recommendations adverse to the adoption.
 6. After the agency is appointed by the court to oversee the welfare of the child prior to the final hearing to recommend whether or not the adoption should be finalized, the agency shall:
 - i. Schedule and conduct a home visit as specified in (c)1 and 2 above; and

ii. Submit its final written report to the court.

7. The agency shall conduct bi-monthly visits thereafter until the adoption is finalized.

8. As an exception to (c)7 above, the agency may discontinue these bi-monthly visits after the final report has been submitted to the court, when:

i. The adoption is delayed due to a custody dispute; or

ii. The court has a backlog of cases resulting in a delay in the adoption being finalized.

(d) If a child under two years of age is in an adoptive home for more than one year without the adoption being finalized, the agency shall document to the Bureau in writing the reason(s) that the adoption has not been finalized. Such information shall be provided no later than 30 calendar days after the one-year adoptive placement supervision period has ended.

(e) If a child over two years of age is in an adoptive home for more than two years without the adoption being finalized, the agency shall document to the Bureau in writing the reason(s) that the adoption has not been finalized. Such information shall be provided no later than 30 calendar days after the two-year adoptive placement supervision period has ended.

(f) The agency shall remove the child only if his or her security and well-being are impaired or his or her needs are no longer served by the adoptive placement.

(g) The adoptive parents may request the removal of the child if they decide that they no longer want to adopt the child.

(h) The Division may remove a child where there is reason to believe that the child has been abused or neglected and that the continued placement with the adoptive family poses a serious or irremediable risk to the child pursuant to N.J.S.A. 9:6-8.9, 8.10, 8.13 and 8.14.

(i) When a child is removed from an adoptive placement, the agency shall:

1. Place the child in another adoptive home or make other suitable living arrangements for the child;

2. Document how the child was assisted with separation;

3. Offer counseling consisting of at least two in-person contacts with the former adoptive parents; and

4. Offer supervision and/or consultation to the social worker responsible for the child removed from the adoptive home.

(j) The agency shall cooperate with the adoptive parents and/or the attorney, if any, retained by the adoptive parents to finalize the adoption.

1. The agency shall provide all information and documents needed to finalize the adoption pursuant to State Adoption Law (N.J.S.A. 9:3-37 et seq.) and shall file a written report to the court at least five calendar days before the hearing. This information shall include:

i. The name and age of each adoptive parent and the relationship, if any, of each adoptive parent to the child to be adopted;

ii. The name, age and birthplace of the child to be adopted, and whether any or all of this information is unknown to the adoptive parents;

iii. The certified agency or other source from which the adoptive parents received the child to be adopted;

iv. The circumstances surrounding the surrender of the child to the agency;

v. The results of the agency's evaluation of the child and of the adoptive parent(s), including a description of the care being received by the child and the adjustment of the child and parent(s) as members of a family, and a summary statement of the agency's recommendation to the court regarding finalization;

vi. A full description of all property belonging to the child to be adopted;

vii. The name by which the child to be adopted will be known; and

viii. An itemized statement of any and all fees and costs paid by the adoptive parents to an approved agency in connection with the adoption. Such costs shall include but not be limited to expenses related to any of the following:

(1) Birth of the child, including pre- and post-natal medical, hospital or foster care received by the mother or child;

(2) Application and home study costs;

(3) Pre-adoptive care of the child, whether in foster, group, residential or institutional care;

(4) Costs related to the child's placement, including transportation and escort costs;

(5) Costs related to post-placement supervision; and

(6) Finalization costs and other associated legal expenses.

2. If the agency's report to the court contains any material findings or recommendations adverse to the adoptive parent(s), the agency shall serve a copy of the report to the adoptive parent(s) at least five working days before the hearing.

3. The agency shall solicit and consider the child's wishes concerning adoption.

4. The agency shall ensure that any child who is age 10 or older is present at the finalization hearing unless the child's presence is waived by the court.

Amended by R.1991 d.6, effective January 7, 1991.

See: 22 N.J.R. 2674(b), 23 N.J.R. 99(b).

In (c): revised text adding new (c)1i-iii, deleting and replacing (c)2-4 with new (c)2-8. New text clarifies and expands requirements that adoption agencies must follow when conducting an "Adoption Complaint Investigation."

Amended by R.1992 d.514, effective December 21, 1992.

See: 24 N.J.R. 3500(a), 24 N.J.R. 4552(a).

Home visit schedule at (a)2i revised to accommodate court backlogs; (b) deleted and new (b) added, regarding signature of consents; explanation required of agency if adoption not completed within two years after placement.

10:121A-5.9 Post-adoption services

(a) After the child has been legally adopted, the agency shall provide the opportunity for the clients to return voluntarily to the agency for services relating to adoption only after verifying the identity of the person making the request.

(b) An agency shall provide the following post-adoption services:

1. Storing updated information provided by the birth parent(s), adoptee or adoptive parent(s) with the medical information form, as specified in N.J.A.C. 10:121A-3.6(d)6;

2. Upon request and if available, adoptive parents, birth parents and adult adoptees shall be provided with written information on the non-identifying characteristics and background of the adoptee and the adoptee's birth family. This information shall include, but not be limited to:

- i. Age or date of birth;
- ii. Circumstances surrounding the placement;
- iii. Religion;
- iv. Education;
- v. Nationality/ethnic background;
- vi. Employment history;
- vii. Medical history; and
- viii. Talents or hobbies.

3. Information about and referral to community resources, such as other counseling services, support groups, adoption registries, or sources of personal information that may be useful to adoptees, birth parents, or adoptive parents, or their relatives.

(c) An agency may counsel members of the birth family, adoptive family, or minor and adult adoptees in the following situations:

1. When there is continued interest in background information about any other party involved in the adoption; or

2. When any party involved in the adoption is having difficulty in personal and/or social adjustment to the extent that it is related to the adoption.

Amended by R.1992 d.514, effective December 21, 1992.

See: 24 N.J.R. 3500(a), 24 N.J.R. 4552(a).

Information to be provided specified further at (b)2.

10:121A-5.10 Searches

(a) An agency that conducts searches on behalf of adult adoptees, birth parents when the adopted child is 18 years of age or older, or adoptive parents when the child is under 18 years of age, shall establish a written policy that outlines the procedures regarding confidentiality as specified in N.J.A.C. 10:121A-3.6(a)1 through 4 and the extent to which searches are conducted. This policy shall also include a fee schedule for conducting the search and time frames for completing a search.

(b) A search shall include, but not be limited to:

1. A review of the agency record for background information on the birth or adoptive family, including:

- i. The last known address;
- ii. Names of the male/female members;
- iii. Social Security numbers;
- iv. Occupations and addresses of places of employment;
- v. Military services, if known;
- vi. Clubs or union affiliations, if known;
- vii. Names of schools and/or colleges that were attended, if known; and
- viii. Dates and places of marriages and deaths.

(c) When the information in the agency record is sufficient to complete a search, the search shall also include:

1. A review of current telephone books on a State-wide basis, and a review of previously published telephone books on a Statewide basis, if accessible, or utilization of a telephone information service provided that the adult adoptee, birth parents or adoptive parents agree to such a service;

2. Sending a "blind" letter to the Social Security Administration for subsequent mailing to family members;

3. Contacting military, union, employment and/or club affiliation;

4. Contacting high school or college alumni offices;

5. Contacting professional licensing boards;

6. Contacting the church where the adopted child was christened/baptized;

7. Contacting the local post office to check old addresses;

8. Contacting cemeteries, when the records indicate a deceased family member;

9. Contacting the local library or town hall to check on voter registration information;

10. Checking tax or real estate records; and

11. Sending letters to the last known addresses of all family members.

(d) The agency shall document and maintain on file all the aspects of a search as specified in (b) and (c) above that were undertaken on behalf of the adult adoptees, birth parents or adoptive parents.

(e) The agency shall provide a handbook or pamphlet to each adult adoptee, birth parent and adoptive parent that outlines the range of services that may be included in a search, the confidentiality rights/responsibilities of all parties that are involved in the search and the costs associated with the search.

New Rule, R.1992 d.514, effective December 21, 1992.

See: 24 N.J.R. 3500(a), 24 N.J.R. 4552(a).

Amended by R.1993 d.532, effective November 1, 1993.

See: 25 N.J.R. 3415(a), 25 N.J.R. 4932(a).

Case Notes

Good cause requirement for adoptive adult to obtain information regarding natural parents. *Backes v. Catholic Family & Community Services*, 210 N.J.Super. 186, 509 A.2d 283 (Ch.Div.1984).