

# New Jersey's Siblings' Bill of Rights Practice Considerations



On January 12, 2023, the New Jersey Siblings' Bill of Rights, that was drafted and advocated for by DCF's Youth Council, was enacted. The Bill provides children and youth in foster care specific rights designed to protect and strengthen their bond with siblings, and, where appropriate, to have their voice heard in permanency planning for their sibling

## HOW CAN YOU HELP PROMOTE AND STRENGTHEN SIBLING CONNECTIONS

### Placement Considerations

- Continue exploring placement with siblings
- When placement with siblings is not possible, siblings should be placed in the closest proximity possible and in the child's best interests
- Frequently re-evaluate any barriers to joint placement

### Visitation/Contact Considerations

- Continue to ensure on-going sibling visits
- Create a visitation schedule with siblings to ensure consistency
- Provide access to a phone number or computer that allows for unfettered virtual visits and phone contact between in person visits
- Ensure active involvement in the lives of their siblings: allow older siblings to help plan celebrations, birthdays, holidays, and other meaningful milestones
- Communicate the expectation of ongoing sibling contact post adoption finalization or transfer of permanent legal and physical custody to a caregiver
- Prohibit the denial of sibling contact (in person or virtual visits and/or phone calls) as behavioral consequence when residing in resource care or congregate care setting
- Provide updated contact information for all siblings at least annually: telephone number, address, and email unless there are best interest concerns

### Case Planning Considerations

- Allow participation in permanency planning decisions of their sibling(s) whenever appropriate (age, maturity, developmental level)
- Invite all siblings to participate in meetings where permanency planning will be discussed, such as 10- month Family Discussions and FTMs
- Support siblings in expressing their wishes around permanency planning through other forms of communication, such as letter writing, video recordings, texting, etc.
- Document siblings' permanency wishes and recommendations in the case record
- Share siblings' permanency wishes and recommendations with the court via the court report and attachments
- Invite older siblings to court hearings for younger siblings
- To be promptly informed about changes in sibling placements or permanency planning goals

**KEEPING SIBLINGS CONNECTED IS THE LAW**