



State of New Jersey

PHILIP MURPHY
Governor

DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

SHEILA Y. OLIVER
Lt. Governor

CHRISTINE NORBUT BEYER, MSW
Commissioner

August 2, 2023

Dear Partner Provider(s):

As you may be aware, there is a new law in New Jersey that aims to strengthen the rights of siblings placed outside of their home. We write to inform you about the new law and how it may require changes to your agency policies and procedures.

The new law, known as the Sibling Bill of Rights, guarantees certain rights to siblings who are placed outside of their home, consistent with the health, safety and physical and psychological welfare of the child, and as appropriate to the individual circumstances of the child's physical or mental development. Some of the key provisions of the law include:

- To visit with the child's parents or legal guardian immediately after the child has been placed outside their home and on a regular basis thereafter, and to otherwise maintain contact with the child's parents or legal guardian, and to receive assistance from the applicable department to facilitate that contact, including the provision or arrangement of transportation as necessary;
- To visit with the child's sibling on a regular basis and to otherwise maintain contact with the child's sibling if the child was separated from his sibling upon placement outside his home, including the provision or arrangement of transportation as necessary AND
- To have access to a phone number or computer that allows for virtual visits between face-to-face visits or when face-to-face visits are not feasible;
- To be placed in the closest proximity possible to other siblings who are not in out-of-home placement or if placement together is not possible, when it is in the best interests of the child;
- To have the recommendations and wishes of the child and of each sibling who participates in the permanency planning decision documented in the case record and provided to the court;
- To know, or be made aware by DCF, of expectations for continued contact with the child's siblings after an adoption or transfer of custody, subject to the approval of the adoptive parents or caregiver;
- To be promptly informed about changes in sibling placements or permanency planning goals;
- To be actively involved in the lives of the child's siblings, e.g., birthdays, holidays, and other important milestones;

New Jersey is an Equal Opportunity Employer • Printed on Recycled Paper and Recyclable

- To not be denied sibling visits as a result of behavioral consequences when residing in a resource family home or congregate care setting; and
- To be provided updated contact information for all siblings at least annually, including a current telephone number, address, and email address, unless not in the best interests of one or more siblings.

As a NJ DCF Partner Provider, you play a critical role in ensuring that siblings in foster care or residential treatment are able to maintain their relationships with each other. This includes encouraging and enabling contact between siblings, advocating for siblings to be placed together whenever possible, and keeping siblings informed about each other's well-being.

DCF expects all providers who serve youth in foster care to:

- become familiar with the Sibling Bill of Rights
- Review and update all agency and program policies and procedures as necessary to support adherence to the law
- Educate youth about the Sibling Bill of Rights upon admission to services, including providing a written summary of the law as detailed in this letter and relevant agency and program policies and procedures;
- Make reasonable efforts to educate siblings about the Sibling Bill of Rights, including providing a written summary of the law as detailed in this letter and relevant agency and program policies and procedures and discussing it with the children in your care and their biological siblings, as appropriate.

Furthermore, we strongly encourage you to work closely with all DCF staff that support you to ensure that the needs of all siblings that you work with are being met.

Thank you for your ongoing commitment to ensuring all of our youth are safe, healthy and connected.

Sincerely,

Division of the Children's System of Care
NJ Department of Children and Families