

Division of Safety and Permanence

DSP Numbered Memo Series 2025-23


Supersedes DCF Numbered Memos 2010-09; 2016-03;  
Supersedes DCF Licensing Memo 2011-11L;  
Supersedes DCF Information Memo 2018-08i

November 21<sup>st</sup>, 2025

To: DCF/DMCPS Administrator  
DCF Area Administrators  
Child Placing Agency Directors  
Child Welfare Agency Directors  
County Departments of Community Programs Directors  
County Departments of Human Services Directors  
County Departments of Social Services Directors  
Group Home Providers  
Private Child Placing Agencies  
Residential Care Center Providers  
Shelter Care Providers  
Tribal Chairpersons

From: John Elliott  
Administrator

Re: Wis. Admin. Code DCF 56 Foster Home Care for Children Revisions



## PURPOSE

This memo provides information related to the changes to Wis. Admin. Code DCF 56 Foster Home Care for Children, including a new licensing pathway for issuing a relative or like-kin foster care license. The updated version of Wis. Admin. Code DCF 56 will be effective December 1, 2025. This memo and revisions to Wis. Admin Code DCF 56 replaces directives and requirements outlined in the following memos:

- [2010-09 Funding Changes for Foster Care and Kinship Care](#) (Relatives and like-kin should not be licensed at Level 1 certification. Requirements for individuals receiving court-ordered kinship care to pursue foster care licensing still applies.)
- [2011-11 L New DCF 56 and Contact Requirements](#) (Contact requirements referenced in this memo are now under DCF 56.185 and the forms referenced are revised.)
- [2016-03 2015 WI Act 128: Reasonable and Prudent Parenting Standard](#) (RPPS requirements are revised, and publications attached to memo are obsolete.)
- [2018-08i Level 5 Exceptional Treatment Foster Home Guide to Certification and Placement](#) (Level 5 requirements have been revised.)

## BACKGROUND

Wis. Admin. Code s. DCF 56 was last revised in 2008. The [National Model Family Foster Home Licensing Standards](#) were developed in 2018 to guide state agencies on the minimum standards to license a family foster home under Title IV-E of the Social Security Act, to allow

flexibility to respond to individual foster home applicant circumstances, and to help ensure children in foster care live in safe homes. In 2023, the Administration for Children and Families published a [rule](#) allowing Title IV-E agencies to adopt separate licensing standards for relative or kinship foster applicants. Under IV-E statute, state licensing standards are required to be “reasonably in accord with recommended standards of national organizations” and to explain any deviations from these standards. A collection of national organizations developed [Kin-Specific Foster Home Approval Standards](#) for agencies to meet this requirement. In the updated version of Wis. Admin. Code DCF 56, DCF has sought to align Wisconsin’s licensing requirements with national standards whenever possible and to remove barriers to licensure and reduce workload for licensing agencies.

## **POLICY AND PROCEDURE REQUIREMENTS**

The Division of Milwaukee Child Protective Services, county agencies, and certified child placing agencies are required to follow Wis. Admin. Code DCF 56 when licensing foster homes in Wisconsin. This administrative rule outlines responsibilities of licensing, placing, and supervising agencies regarding foster children and foster parents. All licensing, placing, and supervising agencies should review the changes to [Wis. Admin. Code DCF 56](#).

### **Licensing Requirements that Apply to All Applicants**

Changes pursuant to Wis. Admin. Code DCF 56 that impact all applicants include the following:

- Revised minimum age for a foster parent to age 18.
- Created an additional responsibility of foster parents to engage in shared parenting with the foster child’s parent, guardian, or Indian custodian and including them in meetings and appointments.
- Eliminated licensing agency requirement to obtain information on applicant or household member’s discharge status from a branch of the U.S. armed forces.
- Eliminated quantitative measurement requirements of the physical environment of the foster home, space between beds, use of triple bunks, and crib slat sizing.
- Increased authority for licensing and supervising agencies to make decisions regarding the best sleeping arrangements for a foster child in a foster home.
- Added requirement for foster parents have an emergency plan that specifies where a foster child will shelter during a tornado warning.
- Updated requirements for firearm and other dangerous weapons to align with state and federal laws, clarified foster parents’ rights to carry a concealed handgun in the presence of a foster child if the foster parent has a license to carry a concealed weapon, and revised firearm safe storage requirements.
- Increased the maximum number of placements in a foster home to 6 children and allows licensing agencies to grant an exception to the total number of placements in a foster home to 8 to maintain a sibling connection, a parental connection, or an established meaningful relationship between a child and the foster parent. Exceptions may be sent to the department for more than 8 total placements to maintain a sibling connection, a parental connection, or an established meaningful relationship between a child and the foster parent.

- Eliminated provisions limiting the number of foster children in a foster home with a Level 3 to 5 certification and limiting the number of foster children who are under 2 years of age in a foster home.
- Clarified foster parent allowed use of video or audio monitoring inside the foster home.
- Revised authorization for hair care services that would significantly change the style, cut, or color of the foster child's hair, now requiring permission from the foster child's parent, guardian, legal custodian, or Indian custodian. Foster parents can authorize hair care services needed to maintain the style, cut, and color of the foster child's hair. A child over the age of 12 can make their own decisions about their hair without obtaining permission from their parent, guardian, legal custodian, or Indian custodian.
- Created provision permitting licensing agencies to grant exception to approve the use of unregulated childcare providers for a foster child.
- Updated qualifications for Level 5 foster parent and program staff.
- Eliminated option to use agency curriculum for preplacement training.
- Eliminated the qualification requirements for a child welfare professional for foster homes with a Level 3 to 5 certification.
- Created a limit of 28 consecutive days for a foster child to be in respite (or fewer days if elected by the licensing agency).

Licensing agencies should pay particular attention to changes to the physical environment requirements in Wis. Admin. Code DCF §§ 56.07, 56.072, and 56.076.

### Relative and Like-Kin Licensing Requirements

In alignment with the Administration for Children and Families' 2023 rule change and standards of national organizations, DCF has created separate licensing requirements for relatives and like-kin to expedite the timeframe for licensing and provide equitable financial support. Specifically, Wis. Admin. Code DCF 56.25 now provides separate licensing requirements for relative and like-kin, including the additions, modifications, and exemptions to the nonrelative sections of rule (Wis. Admin. Code DCF §§ 56.01 - 56.24).

A licensing agency must follow these separate licensing requirements when licensing a relative or like-kin caregiver including:

Component	Relative and Like-Kin	Nonrelative
Application	<a href="#">Relative and Like-Kin Foster Home Application</a> (DCF-F-5863)	Agency-specific
Foster Home Licensing Checklist	<a href="#">Relative and Like-Kin Foster Home Licensing Checklist</a> (DCF-F-5887)	<a href="#">Nonrelative Child Foster Home Licensing Checklist</a> (DCF-F-CFS0787)
Standardized Assessment Tool	<a href="#">Relative and Like-Kin Licensing Assessment</a> (DCF-F-5864)	<a href="#">Multipurpose Home Study Report</a> (DCF-F-2402A) and <a href="#">Multipurpose Home Study Update/Recertification</a> (DCF-F-2623A)
Initiate Required Background Checks	Within 5 working days	Within 10 working days

Licensing Decision (Issue License or Deny Application)	Within 10 working days after receiving all necessary information	Within 60 working days after receiving all necessary information
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There are requirements in Wis. Admin. Code DCF 56 that relatives and like-kin are exempt from (DCF-P-5928). This includes but is not limited to many of the physical environment and documentation requirements to be provided to the licensing agency for an initial license or license renewal. In addition, relatives and like-kin may seek a waiver of homeowner's or renter's liability insurance from the licensing agency by attesting that the applicant's insurance policy was canceled or that payment of the premium for the required insurance would cause them undue financial hardship.

The State of Wisconsin follows a [Levels of Care System](#) to ensure children in out of home care are placed in settings that match the caregiver's knowledge, skill, and experience. Under the updated version of Wis. Admin. Code DCF 56, relatives and like-kin are required to be licensed at a certification of Level 2 through 5. A relative or like-kin should not be licensed at a Level 1. Under the updated rule, Level 1 applies to nonrelative foster parents who have not completed training requirements to maintain a Level 2 certification. Relative and like-kin caregivers will initially be certified as a Level 2 foster home and may be eligible to be licensed at a certification Level of 3 through 5 if the licensing agency licenses homes at the level of care sought and the caregiver chooses to adhere to the additional qualification and training requirements associated with the certification level. The [Levels of Care Desk Guide](#) (DCF-P-5609) has more information about the qualifications, training, and experience required for each certification level.

Training requirements are also different for relatives and like-kin foster parents. For a Level 2 certification, only one foster parent is required to complete 6 hours of pre-placement training within 6 months of licensure. Relatives and like-kin foster parents are not required to complete initial licensing or ongoing training at Level 2 certification but are encouraged to attend the relative-specific training courses in the Nurturing Connections curriculum. For a Level 3 or 4 certification, only one foster parent is required to complete the pre-placement, initial licensing, and ongoing training requirements associated with that level of care. If a relative or like-kin caregiver wants to pursue Level 5 certification, all foster parents are required to meet the specific components of operating a Level 5 foster home, which includes pre-placement, initial licensing, and ongoing training. The [Level 5 Foster Home Guide to Certification and Placement](#) has more information about Level 5 certification.

The creation of separate licensing requirements does not change the statutory and administrative rule requirement that relative and like-kin who apply for court-ordered kinship care must also pursue foster care licensure. A [Relative Caregiver Licensing Decision](#) can be completed if the relative or like-kin applicant cannot be licensed, which allows continuation of the kinship care payment. The department created a new publication, [Payment Options in Brief](#) (DCF-P-5907) for child welfare agencies to explain to relative and like-kin caregivers the differences between court-ordered placement options for children in out-of-home care and the assistance that accompanies each option.

## eWiSACWIS DOCUMENTATION

eWiSACWIS enhancements are included in the October 2025 eWiSACWIS release to support Wis. Admin. Code DCF 56 changes. Enhancements include the following:

- Modification to the license application type to appropriately reflect the addition of relative and like-kin options.
- Modification to the license withdrawal, denial, revocation, and non-renewal reasons to accurately document the reason for these licensing actions.
- Updates to warning message pop-ups to inform licensors when a required background check has not been uploaded as an image under the provider tab in eWiSACWIS.
- Updates to the out-of-home placement creation section to appropriately reflect if a foster home type is a relative, like-kin, or nonrelative placement setting and remove the checkbox indicating that the placement setting is like-kin.
- Creation of a place for licensing agencies to upload completed Foster Home Licensing Checklists as an image under the provider tab in eWiSACWIS.
- Combining of the previously separate floor plan and fire evacuation plan into one spot for licensing agencies to upload the required evacuation plans as an image under the provider tab in eWiSACWIS.

Effective December 1, 2025, Wis. Admin. Code s. DCF 56 references within eWiSACWIS will be reflective of the rule revisions.

## ACTION SUMMARY

The department is partnering with the Wisconsin Child Welfare Professional Development System (WCWPDS) to facilitate training sessions for current licensing professionals and their supervisors to learn, understand, and implement the changes to Wis. Admin. Code DCF 56. Licensing professionals and supervisors will be able to access the 1-hour, web-based prerequisite training by searching “Implementing DCF 56: Pre-Work” in [PDS Online](#). After completing the required prerequisite, licensing professionals and supervisors will be able to register for an “Implementing DCF 56” training session in [PDS Online](#). All training sessions will be 3.5 hours and held virtually via the Zoom platform.

All Wis. Admin. Code DCF 56 related forms and publications have been revised and published on the [DCF Forms & Publication website](#). All related DCF websites have been revised to include updated information pertinent to the revised Wis. Admin. Code DCF 56.

For more information or questions, please contact the following:

REGIONAL OFFICE CONTACT: DCF Area Administrator  
CENTRAL OFFICE CONTACT: Out-of-Home Care Section  
Bureau of Permanence and Out-of-Home Care  
Division of Safety and Permanence  
[DCF DSP General Foster Care@wisconsin.gov](mailto:DCFDSPGeneralFosterCare@wisconsin.gov)

MEMO WEB SITE: <https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/cwportal/policy>

Attachments [DCF 56 Foster Home Care for Children](#) (DCF-P-PFS0131)