

Prior law provided certain incentives for certain children who are in the custody of the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) to be placed with adoptive parents once the biological rights of the parents have been terminated.

New law enacts the "Louisiana Has Faith in Families Act" and lists the following legislative findings:

- (1) It is in the best interest of a foster child who is adoption eligible to be placed in a permanent adopted family as soon as is practicable.
- (2) The state has an interest in decreasing the delays in finalizing adoptions in order to facilitate permanent adoption and family cohesion.

New law provides incentives to facilitate the recruitment of new families for children who have been adopted from the custody of the state and meet eligibility requirements.

New law requires DCFS to make every effort to declare every child in its custody eligible for certain adoption assistance or subsidy.

New law retains prior law provisions authorizing DCFS to develop and implement a program for subsidizing the adoption of children with special needs and to make payments to adoptive parents of a child or, in the case of the subsequent death of the adoptive parents prior to the child's reaching the age of majority, to the duly designated tutor or guardian of the child, on behalf of a child placed for adoption if all of the following conditions are met:

- (1) The child, because of physical or mental condition, ethnic background, age, membership in a sibling group, or other serious impediments or special needs, is considered a child that is difficult to place for adoption and the department has made reasonable attempts to place such child for adoption to no avail.
- (2) The adoptive family, tutor, or guardian is capable of providing the permanent family relationship needed by the child in all respects other than financial, and the needs of the child are beyond the economic ability and resources of the family, tutor, or guardian.

New law retains prior law that payments in subsidy of an adoption may include but are not limited to the maintenance costs, medical and surgical expenses, and other costs incidental to the care, training, and education of the child, including special medical costs for any child in connection with any physical or mental condition which existed prior to the date of the initial judgment of adoption.

Provides that the amount of payments may vary, depending upon the needs of the child and the adoptive parents, tutor, or guardian, but in any event shall not exceed 100% of the cost of providing foster care for the child. Provides that payments for medical, surgical, psychiatric, and other special costs and services not exceed the amount the department would pay if it were to provide or secure them as guardian of the child.

New law retains prior law provisions requiring termination of payments to the parents, tutor, or guardian when the adoptive child becomes 18 years old.

New law retains prior law provisions requiring that eligibility for payments in subsidy of adoption be determined and approved by DCFS prior to the completion of the adoption proceeding and that thereafter they be redetermined at least annually, except in cases where the child is eligible for funding pursuant to Title IV, Part E of the Social Security Act, then the redetermination is to be made at least every five years.

New law retains prior law that requires that adoptive parents who are residents of the state, and who are eligible to adopt a child residing in Louisiana and to receive subsidy payments, or the designated tutor or guardian, remain eligible to receive payments, regardless of whether or not the adoptive parents, tutor, or guardian subsequently become residents of another state, except in cases where the other state meets all of the following criteria:

- (1) Has a subsidized adoption program that is available to the former Louisiana residents, parents, tutors, or guardians for the particular Louisiana child to be adopted.
- (2) Is a party to the Interstate Compact on Adoption and Medical Assistance.

New law retains prior law requiring that adoptive parents who are residents of other states, and who are eligible to adopt a child residing in Louisiana, or the designated tutor or guardian residing in another state, be eligible for a subsidy under the same conditions as Louisiana residents, except in cases where the other state meets all of the following criteria:

- (1) Has a subsidized adoption program that is available to the Louisiana nonresident parents, tutors, or guardians for the particular Louisiana child to be adopted.
- (2) Is a party to the Interstate Compact on Adoption and Medical Assistance.

New law retains prior law which requires that subsidized payments include cases involving children in the custody of the department and children determined to be entitled to benefits pursuant to federal laws, rules, or regulations.

Prior law authorized DCFS to adopt, promulgate, and enforce necessary rules and regulations to implement prior law in accordance with the APA. New law requires that DCFS adopt, promulgate, and enforce these rules and regulations.

New law retains prior law requiring that any agreement by DCFS to subsidize the adoption of a child eligible for the subsidy, which results in a final decree of adoption of the child by adoptive parents or the designated tutor or guardian of the child who is relying on the availability of the subsidy at the time of the final decree of adoption, constitutes a contractual obligation on the part of the state in favor of the adoptive parents, tutor, or guardian, to the extent that the parents, tutor, or guardian remain eligible for the subsidy under the laws which were in effect on the date of the final decree of adoption. Provides that this obligation ceases when the adoptive child reaches the age of majority.

Prior law provided that changes in the child's condition or changes in the income of the adoptive parents, where the condition or income formed the basis for the subsidy, shall be cause for modifying the subsidy agreement in accordance with the laws and regulations prevailing at the time of the final decree of adoption.

New law authorizes the adoptive parents to be awarded a one-time payment to cover non-recurring expenses of the adoption, such as attorney fees and court costs, which are directly related to the legal adoption of a child with special needs, in an amount to be approved by DCFS.

New law requires that any child in the custody of DCFS who is eligible for adoption and is placed in an approved adoptive home is to be eligible for dependant coverage pursuant to the prospective adoptive parents' health insurance policy as a dependent. Provides that any additional costs for the child are to be added to the adoptive parents' health insurance policy and shall not be paid for by DCFS. Provides the adoptive parents may qualify for premium assistance.

New law provides that any child who is in the custody of DCFS or has been adopted from the custody of DCFS shall be qualified for Medicaid if the child meets the guidelines set forth in present law regarding The Louisiana Children and Youth Health Insurance Program. Provides that any child in the custody of DCFS who is Medicaid eligible, is eligible for adoption, and has been placed in an approved prospective adoptive home or has been adopted from the custody of the department, shall be considered eligible for premium assistance for employer sponsored insurance.

New law requires that a child in custody of DCFS shall be allowed to remain enrolled in the public school in which the child was enrolled at the time he entered foster care for the duration of the child's stay in the custody of the state or until he completes the highest grade offered at the school, if DCFS determines that remaining in that school is in the best interest of the child.

Requires that a child in the custody of DCFS is eligible to attend a school in the school district or parish of the foster care placement. Requires that a child in the custody of the

department be given preference in enrollment in the same manner as children already receiving a preference to attend a charter school.

New law provides that if a child in the custody of DCFS and is placed with foster parents who have other children living in the home who already attend a nonpublic or parochial school, then the foster child may attend the same nonpublic or parochial school if DCFS finds it is in the best interest of the child, and if the child meets the admission requirements of the nonpublic or parochial school. Provides that DCFS shall not be directly responsible for paying for the expenses associated with that education.

New law provides that if a child is in the custody of DCFS and placed with foster parents who have other children in the home who are participants in an approved home study program, DCFS may approve the placement of the foster child in an approved home study program if it finds it is in the best interest of the child. Requires that the home study programs approved by the Department of Education to educate foster children offer a sustained curriculum of quality at least equal to that offered by public schools at the same grade level.

New law requires that the Department of Education provide DCFS, upon request, verification that a home study program in which a foster child is participating in has been approved and requires the foster parent to provide DCFS appropriate documentation, including but not limited to copies of standardized tests, to substantiate that the child is progressing on grade level and at a rate equal to one grade level for each year in the program.

New law provides that in order to shorten the waiting time for finalizing the adoption when the child is eligible for adoption and has been in foster care with the prospective adoptive parents, any necessary waiting period as required by law shall be applied retroactively. Requires that any additional home study required by law may be waived by the court if the adoptive parents have been the foster parents of the child for the required six month time period.

New law provides whenever a child has been placed in the custody of DCFS and the child is eligible for adoption, the prospective adoptive parents may file an adoption proceeding in the court which terminated the parental rights and requires that the case be allotted to the judge who presided over the termination proceedings. Authorizes the court to order the approval of the adoptive placement *ex parte* without the need for a hearing where the prospective adoptive parents were previously approved by DCFS as foster parents for the child.

Effective upon signature of the governor (May 31, 2013).

(Adds Ch. C. Arts. 1279.1 - 1279.7; repeals R.S. 46:1790-1794)