



## Memorandum

**Date:** January 18, 2022

**To:** Senator Jim Abeler, Chair, Senate Human Services Reform Finance and Policy Committee  
Senator John Hoffman, Minority Lead, Human Services Reform Finance and Policy Committee  
Representative Jennifer Schultz, Chair, Human Services Finance and Policy Committee  
Representative Tony Albright, Minority Lead, Human Services Finance and Policy Committee

**From:** Tikki Brown, Assistant Commissioner, Children and Family Services

### RE: Family Foster Care Licensing Application Software

This memorandum responds to a direction to the Commissioner of Human Services to provide information to the Health and Human Services committee chairs regarding the availability and cost for online software for foster parent applications and recruiting.<sup>1</sup>

#### Background

There were 13,442 children who experienced one or more days in out-of-home care during 2020. Some of these children were placed in group residential settings or another non-family setting. However, 89.5 percent spent some time in either relative or non-relative foster homes. In 2020, 50 percent of children in care spent at least some time in relative family foster care. The number of children who need to be placed in foster care can exceed the availability of licensed family foster care homes. The federal Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) has limited financial reimbursements for placement of eligible children in group residential or other non-family settings. Instead, The FFPSA encourages states to place an even greater emphasis than they already do on ensuring that children in need of foster care are placed in family settings. Accordingly, there is a need for additional families to be licensed to care for Minnesota's children.

When a child needs foster home placement, county social service agencies are required to first consider relatives. It is in the child's best interest to be placed with a relative and research has demonstrated that children who are placed with relatives have better outcomes, including improved stability and child well-being. However, when relative placement occurs, it is usually the case that the relative has not previously been licensed for foster care. To ensure a child's safety, the relative must complete the foster care licensing process. An inability to complete the licensing process in a timely fashion creates safety concerns and can delay permanency when a child is unable to reunify with their primary caregiver.

Presently, prospective foster parents seeking licensure are required to search for agencies, then place a phone call or send an email, and wait. If the wait period is too lengthy, some people will give up on the process. Most licensing agency practice is sequential, and there are wait times and/or required steps at each step that lengthen the licensing application process. For prospective foster parents, keeping track

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<sup>1</sup> See [Laws of Minnesota 2021, Chapter 7, Art. 14, § 17](#), and see text below.

of documents and otherwise knowing where they are in the process is confusing, and in many instances frustrating.

The time it takes to become licensed to provide foster care can have an impact on the timely achievement of permanency when reunification is not possible. Delays in this process impact the child and caregiver, and ongoing case management and court reviews can increase the burden on agencies. In addition, delays in licensure impact when agencies can begin receiving federal reimbursement for a share of foster care placement costs.

Obtaining online foster care licensing application and recruitment software could ensure the availability of licensed foster parents, increase the availability of licensed relative and kin caregivers, and match a foster parent's specialized skills to a child's individual needs, which in turn can improve outcomes for children.

## Direction to the Commissioner of Human Services

Recognizing the need to increase the number of licensed foster care families, particularly relatives and kin of children needing placement, legislators enacted the following instruction for the Department of Human Services (Department) during the 2021 legislative session:

### **DIRECTION TO THE COMMISSIONER OF HUMAN SERVICES; FOSTER FAMILY RECRUITMENT AND LICENSING TECHNOLOGY REQUEST FOR INFORMATION.**

The commissioner of human services shall publish a request for information to identify available technology to support foster family recruitment and training through an online portal for potential foster families to apply for licensure online, including the potential costs for implementing the technology. The technology shall enable relative families of foster youth to apply online and receive real-time support through the online application software; offer content in multiple languages; enable tracking of users' ethnic identity to identify potential gaps in recruitment and to ensure racial equity in serving foster families; and recognize Tribal government sovereignty over data control and recruiting and licensing of families to support children in their community. By January 15, 2022, the commissioner shall report to the chairs and ranking minority members of the legislative committees with jurisdiction over human services on responses received in response to the request for information. (See 2021 1st Special Session, Ch. 7, Art. 14, § 17.)

This memorandum provides an overview of the responses received to the Request for Information (RFI) in aggregate, not a description of each response. That detailed information is best understood by reviewing the RFI responses. The responses are large data files. If you would like to review the responses, please contact Jennifer Sommerfeld ([jennifer.sommerfeld@state.mn.us](mailto:jennifer.sommerfeld@state.mn.us)) to make a request. She will send them to you in multiple emails.

The legislative instruction does not ask the Department to make recommendations. However, the Department acknowledges that a state investment in an online foster care licensing application would provide significant benefits to children and families in the child protection system, as well as counties, tribes, and private licensing agencies.

## Agency's Request for Information

The legislation required the Request for Information (RFI) to include questions regarding a business' available technology to support foster family recruitment and training through an online portal for potential foster families to apply for licensure online. In addition to describing their available technology, the legislation specified the RFI should seek information on:

- What the potential costs are for implementing the technology
- Whether the technology enables relative families of foster youth to apply online
- Whether applicants receive real-time support through the online application software
- Whether the technology offers content in multiple languages
- Whether the technology enables tracking of users' ethnic identity
- Whether the technology recognizes Tribal government sovereignty over data control and recruiting and licensing of families to support children in their community

The Department developed an RFI that built on the legislative requirements by asking potential responders to provide information on a variety of technology functions, and how they would address user friendliness, accessibility, and the ability to someday integrate their technology into existing DHS child welfare and licensing IT systems. Responders were not required to address all issues raised in the RFI, and the information included in responses varied.

The RFI is attached for your review.

## Responses to the RFI

The Department received 13 responses to the RFI (in alphabetical order):

Accenture	Binti	{b} Bresatech
CITI	Deltek	ENoble Child
GI solutions	Granicus	IBM
Mastech/Servos	RedMane	Tyler Technologies
Visual Vault		

As noted on page 2, if you would like to review the responses, please contact Jennifer Sommerfeld ([jennifer.sommerfeld@state.mn.us](mailto:jennifer.sommerfeld@state.mn.us)) to make a request. She will send them to you in multiple emails due to data size.

## Summary of Responses

The instruction from the legislature was to seek information only. The Department was not charged with seeking proposals that address all program preferences or provide formal bids. The Department's review of the responses has helped develop an understanding of the wide range of potential technology platforms available for an online foster care licensing application.

Here are some high-level takeaways from the Department's review of responses:

- ***Does the responder have existing technology to provide a portal for online foster care applications?***

Some responders indicated they have existing software intended for the purpose of online foster care applications and other child welfare uses that can be customized for Minnesota's specific needs. Some responders indicated they have existing technology platforms that would be used as a base for developing an online application that is customized to Minnesota's specific needs. Responders also provided various information about their technology, including, but not limited to, whether: documents can be uploaded and stored; the applicant can use a smartphone in addition to a computer; and the applicant can save an application in progress and return to it later.

While the RFI did not specifically ask about the ability to have application screens or other information provided in languages other than English, it is assumed that in many cases customization will ensure multi-language access.

Should funding be appropriated for the agency to issue an RFP seeking a vendor to establish an online foster care application process, the agency would develop an RFP that requests specific details about how a provider's technology will ensure user-friendliness for applicants, including applications in languages other than English.

- ***What is the potential cost for implementing the technology and what is the methodology used to determine cost?***

Most responses did not provide estimated costs. Some providers explained costs are determined by the state's specific needs and desires for how the program will work, and what level of technical support is desired. Of those responses that provided costs or cost methodology, it appears common to have one-time start-up costs, as well as annual costs for licensing and/or maintenance. Of the cost estimates provided, the start-up cost range is broad – from \$350,000 up to \$2 million – depending upon the customization needs of the state. Similarly, annual costs are variable and may be set based upon the number of users, or a flat annual licensing cost. For example, one responder charges an annual flat fee of approximately \$900,000 for statewide use, and another charges an annual licensing fee of \$300 per user.

- ***Does the responder provide technical assistance to the Department, local agencies, and prospective foster parents in their use of the system as well as start-up and ongoing support?***

Responses that addressed technology support primarily focused on these supports for state, local and private agencies using the technology, although there were responses that addressed support for applicants.

Should funding be appropriated for the Department to request bids or proposals to develop an online licensing application software for use by prospective foster parents, the Department recommends seeking a technology that ensures applicants will have access to technical assistance in use of the program.

- ***Does the technology capture points of data for purposes of tracking applications, references, completion of training requirements, etc.?***

Most responses indicated they have data tracking and storage features that could be customized to capture needed demographic data and licensing process information, as well as upload documents for references or other purposes.

## Conclusion

Responses to the RFI indicate that there are multiple entities that appear reasonably available to provide Minnesota with an online foster care licensing application process should funding be appropriated for this purpose, with a vendor selected through an RFP or Request for Bid process.

## Contact Information

If you have any questions about the information provided in this review of RFI responses, please contact:

Jennifer Sommerfeld  
Director of Legislative and External Affairs  
Children and Family Services  
Minnesota Department of Human Services  
[jennifer.sommerfeld@state.mn.us](mailto:jennifer.sommerfeld@state.mn.us)



## Minnesota Department of Human Services Child Safety and Permanency Division

Request for Information about currently available and functioning online foster care application and licensure programs available for use by tribal, county, and private child placing agencies, in their efforts to recruit and license prospective foster parents, who are seeking to provide child foster care. The department is looking for a solution that will work for the entire state.

**Date of Publication in *SWIFT*:** June 7, 2021

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Statement: This information is available in accessible formats for people with disabilities by calling 651-431-3612 or by using your preferred relay service. For other information on disability rights and protections, contact the agency's Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) coordinator.

**Minnesota's Commitment to Diversity and Inclusion.** The State of Minnesota is committed to diversity and inclusion in its public procurement process. The goal is to ensure that those providing goods and services to the State are representative of our Minnesota communities and include businesses owned by minorities, women, veterans, and those with substantial physical disabilities. Creating broader opportunities for historically under-represented groups provides for additional options and greater competition in the marketplace, creates stronger relationships and engagement within our communities, and fosters economic development and equality.

To further this commitment, the Department of Administration operates a program for Minnesota-based small businesses owned by minorities, women, veterans, and those with substantial physical disabilities. For additional information on this program, or to determine eligibility, please call 651-296-2600 or go to [www.mmd.admin.state.mn.us/mn02001.htm](http://www.mmd.admin.state.mn.us/mn02001.htm).

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## A. KEY DATES AND SUBMISSION INSTRUCTIONS

<b>RFI posted on:</b>	June 7, 2021
<b>Questions about this RFI should be submitted no later than:</b>	June 17, 2021
<b>Submit questions about this RFI to:</b>	Marvin Davis, Deputy Division Director, Child Safety and Permanency Division
<b>Who may respond?</b>	All interested stakeholders are welcome to respond to this RFI.
<b>Submit your RFI response by 4:00PM on:</b>	June 21, 2021
<b>Format:</b>	Submit an electronic copy of RFI response to: marvin.e.davis@state.mn.us  Responses must be no longer than 40 pages.
<b>Other instructions:</b>	None



## B. Objective of RFI:

The Minnesota Department of Human Services, Child Safety and Permanency Division (Department) seeks to identify and obtain information for development, design, planning, and a competitive contracting process. THIS IS NOT A REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL (RFP). The department may or may not issue an RFP in the future that relates to this RFI.

## C. Background and Overview of issue:

Presently, prospective foster parents seeking licensure are required to search for agencies, then place a phone call or send an email, and wait. Frequently it happens, that after too lengthy a wait period people will give up. Most licensing agency's practice is sequential, at each step of the licensing process there are wait times and or required steps that significantly lengthens the licensing application process. For prospective foster parents, keeping track of documents and otherwise knowing where they are in the process is confusing, and in many instances frustrating. Frequently, those seeking licensure are relatives who have agreed to take a niece, nephew, or grandchild on an emergency placement. Generally, relative caregivers need additional time and attention to complete the process. Timely licensure has an impact towards the timely achievement of alternative permanency where reunification is not possible, these delays impact the child, caregiver and the agency by continued case management and court reviews. In addition, delays in licensure impacts when agencies can begin receiving federal reimbursement for a share of those placement costs.

Recruitment activities across the state are uneven and occur with less coordination where the department is currently without an effective means of taking a lead role in this capacity. The Federal Multi-Ethnic and Interethnic Adoption Provision Act (MEPA-IEPA) requires states to provide diligent recruitment of a diverse pool of racial and ethnic foster and adoptive families that are reflective of the children in care. Given the overrepresentation of American Indian, African American, and children of two or more races, that requirement needs to include a means of general and targeted recruitment. In addition, with the Families First Prevention Services Act, it is now increasingly important all states increase the number of family foster homes for children as opposed to the frequently used congregate care settings.

## D. Information Requested:

In your response, please provide answers to one or more, or all, of the questions listed below. You may also provide additional information that you think will be helpful to department staff for program development, design, planning, and RFP design. To the extent possible, responses to the questions below should incorporate research evidence and/or specific examples.

The department is seeking to improve the process of foster care recruitment and licensing of prospective child foster care providers. In Minnesota, the current process of becoming a licensed foster parent is a paper process that varies by county. Considering the different capacity abilities of rural and urban counties; availability of licensing agencies; finger printing locations, differing agency requirements are all examples of the complexities of the foster care recruitment and licensing processes. We believe an online program will streamline and expedite recruitment and licensing activities; and will improve the applicant's experience.

Because of this, the department is interested in learning about businesses that provide:

- A current, existing, functioning, user friendly online program capable of interfacing with a state's Comprehensive Child Welfare information System (CCWIS), and child foster care licensing information system to support creating an expedient paperless application and licensing process.
- A program that provides the ability to allow for customization with respect to use of licensing application documents required by the department, while allowing for additional specialization to accommodate differing needs at the local agency level, while it:
  - maintains all required documentation; and
  - provides information about the licensing requirements.
- A program that allows for a prospective provider to use a smartphone to complete required documents.
- Accessible in a format that allows partial completion and saving of information.
- Allows the prospective provider to upload documents (certificates of training completed).
- Visible to applicants so they can monitor progress through the approval process online
- A program that provides technical assistance to the department, local agencies, and prospective foster parents in their use of the system, as well as:
  - Start up and ongoing support.
- The ability for a prospective provider to choose the agency they wish to license them from a drop down menu, and that agency receives their notice or application, and:
  - Tracks the amount of time to contact by their chosen agency.
- A program that captures:
  - When the prospective foster parent begins the application process;
  - When the agency of their choosing establishes contact with them; and
  - Links to required training:
    - Trainings completed
  - The results of background studies;
  - Contact information for licensing agency staff;
  - Process to send personal references;
  - When the license is granted and when the license will expire;
  - Case management activities;
  - When children enter or leave placement with the provider; and
  - Other useful metrics to provide for continuous quality improvement.

The department is requesting Responders to outline their cost methodology, and provide information on existing contracts with state or local agencies, and the length of services provided in this manner.

#### E. Requesting Additional Information or Demonstration:

Responders may be asked to provide additional information or in-person demonstrations. No Responder will be *required* to provide additional information or demonstrations. Department staff, however, is unlikely to ask every Responder to provide further information or demonstrations.

## F. Disclaimer:

1. By responding to the RFI, Responder acknowledges that it has read, understands, and agrees with all content in section F.
2. Responses to the RFI will not be returned to the Responder.
3. This RFI is being issued to obtain information only and is not intended to result in contracts with any Responder. This RFI, and responses to it, does not in any way obligate the department to issue an RFP, award a contract or complete any project, including this one. The department reserves the right to cancel this RFI if it is considered to be in its best interest.
4. Responders are solely responsible for all costs and expenses associated with the preparation and submission of a response to this RFI.
5. Responding to this RFI is completely voluntary. Responders will not be excluded from eligibility to participate in any potential future related requests for proposals (RFPs) based on a Responder's decision to respond to this RFI or the content of its response(s) to this RFI. Additionally, responses to this RFI will not provide any advantage to any Responder in any potential future Requests for Proposal, if any occur.
6. All responses to this RFI are public, according to Minnesota Statutes § 13.03, subd. 1, unless otherwise defined by Minnesota Statutes, section 13.37 as "Trade Secrets." Responses should **not contain** any information that is trade secret or proprietary in nature.
7. As applied by the department to this RFI, a statement by a Responder that submitted data is copyrighted or otherwise protected does not prevent public access to the data contained in the response.
8. The department may use any or all information in a response for any purpose.