DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES
SOCIAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION
311 WEST SARATOGA STREET
BALTIMORE, MARYLAND 21201

DATE:	April 1, 2016
POLICY #:	SSA-CW# 16-25
TO:	Directors, Local Department of Social Services Assistant Directors of Services
FROM:	Rebecca Jones Gaston, MSW Acting Executive Director Social Services Administration
RE:	Adoption and Guardianship Incentive Program
PROGRAM AFFECTED:	Out of Home Placement Services
ORIGINATION OFFICE:	Child Welfare Practice and Policy
ACTION REQUIRED:	All Local Departments of Social Services
REQUIRED ACTION:	Implementation of Adoption and Guardianship Incentive Funds
ACTION DUE DATE:	April 15, 2016
CONTACT PERSON:	Sean Bloodsworth, LCSW-C Program Manager, Out of Home Placement (410) 767-7912 sean.bloodsworth@maryland.gov

PURPOSE:
The purpose of this policy directive is to provide guidance to local departments of social services (LDSS) on the utilization of Adoption and Guardianship Incentive Payments awarded by the Department of Health and Human Services.

BACKGROUND:
The Adoption and Guardianship Incentive Program originally was created as part of the 1997 Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) and was revised with the passage of the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008. In September 2014, the President signed into law the Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act (P.L. 113-183). This law again reauthorized and revised the program. Key changes included the following: The program was renamed the "Adoption and Guardianship Incentive Payments" program. The program now recognizes improved performance in both adoptions and legal guardianship of children in foster care.

GOALS:
The goals are as follows:

- Assist in maintaining an adoption after finalization;
- Assist in maintaining custody/guardianship to a relative or non-relative after the child has exited care to the Guardianship Assistance Program (GAP);
- Facilitate stabilization of an adoptive placement prior to finalization;
- Facilitate stabilization of a relative or non-relative placement prior to the court granting custody/guardianship and exiting to GAP; and
- Recruit families for older children and children of any age who present challenges in identification of family resource for adoption.

DATA REQUIREMENTS FOR ADOPTION AND LEGAL GUARDIANSHIP INCENTIVE PAYMENTS:
Incentive funds earned by title IV-E agencies within a fiscal year (earning year) are paid to title IV-E agencies the subsequent fiscal year (award year). The Administration for Children and Families (ACF) will calculate incentive payments for each title IV-E agency based on the AFCARS data submitted by the title IV-E agency. In order for the ACF to complete these calculations the following AFCARS data must be entered into MDCHESSIE:

Foster Care (includes GAP)
Title IV-E agency (state-Maryland)
Report period ending date (the last month and year for the reporting period)
Record number (this is a sequential number which DHR/SSA uses to transmit data to the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS)
Child's date of birth (if the child was abandoned or the date of birth is otherwise unknown, enter an approximate date of birth)
Date of latest removal from home (month, day and year the child was removed from the home for the first time for purpose of placement in a foster care setting)
Date of discharge from foster care (month, day and year the child was discharged from foster care setting)
Reason for discharge: adoption or guardianship

Adoption
Title IV-E agency (state-Maryland)
Report period ending date (the last month and year for the reporting period)
Record number (this is a sequential number which DHR/SSA uses to transmit data to the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS)
State agency involvement (indicate whether the title IV-E agency had any involvement in this adoption)
Child's date of birth (if the child was abandoned or the date of birth is otherwise unknown, enter an approximate date of birth)
Date adoption legalized (date the court issued the final adoption decree)
Child was placed by: public agency
Adoption Assistance (complete adoption assistance agreement in MDCHESSIE)

Please be advised that some of these data elements are already captured and requires no action by the case worker. The following data elements are required to be entered by the case worker. Please ensure that these data elements are entered accurately and timely. These include:

Foster Care:
Child's date of birth
Date of latest removal from home
Date of discharge from foster care
Reason for discharge: adoption or guardianship

Adoption:
Child's date of birth
Date adoption legalized
Child was placed by: public agency
Adoption Assistance

FUNDING:
LDSS are to expend funds for the following services:

- Pre-adoptive finalization services to children in out-of-home placement. Pre-finalization direct client services may include provision of support that will facilitate inter-county adoptive placement and adoptive placements that are considered difficult.

- Pre-finalization child specific recruitment activities for children in out-of-home placement. Pre-finalization child specific recruitment services may include identifying potential adoptive families for children with a permanency plan of adoption through a variety of means including special photo listings, and other recruitment events such as matching events.

- Direct client services to those children that have an approved permanency plan of custody/guardianship to a relative or non-relative. Client services may include provision

of support that will facilitate the placement of the child in the relative or non-relative's home, which will lead to the relative or non-relative being granted custody/guardianship of the child, and receiving the Guardianship Assistance payments.

- Direct client post-adoption services to children adopted from out-of- home placement and their families. Post adoption services may include medical treatment, mental health services, respite care services, education services, camp, and other direct client services for which families need financial help to cover costs.

- Direct client services to children who have exited out-of-home placement and their families through custody/guardianship to a relative or non-relative, and are receiving Guardianship Assistance payments. Services may include medical treatment, mental health services, respite care services, education services, camp, and other direct client services for which families need financial help to cover costs.

ELIGIBILITY

A. Eligible children are:
   a. Foster children with a permanency plan of adoption for whom identification of adoptive families has been difficult, in particular older youth and children with very challenging special needs;
   b. Foster children with a permanency plan of adoption to whom families living in other counties or states have been tentatively identified but who need additional funding to facilitate inter-jurisdictional placements;
   c. Children in adoptive placements considered difficult;
   d. Children who have been adopted and are in need of direct client services;
   e. Foster children with a permanency plan of custody/guardianship to a relative or non-relative, that have challenging special needs and financial assistance to the relative or non-relative could help facilitate the placement; and
   f. Children who have exited Out of Home Placement through custody/guardianship to a relative or non-relative are in the Guardianship Assistance Program (GAP) and are in need of direct client services.

B. Eligible families are:
   a. For pre-adoptive finalization services, adoptive families who have been identified as placement resources for foster children with a permanency plan of adoption but who have not yet finalized their adoptions;
   b. For post-adoptive services, adoptive families who have adopted children for whom the Maryland local departments of social service had responsibility prior to their adoptions. The families must have completed the adoption through court finalization.
   c. Relatives or non-relatives that have been identified as a placement resource for children with a permanency plan of custody/guardianship to a relative or non-relative.
   d. Relatives or non-relatives that have been awarded custody/guardianship of a child for whom the Maryland local departments of social service had responsibility prior to custody/guardianship being awarded to the relative or non-relative, and are now in the Guardianship Assistance Program (GAP).

Please note that in order for a relative or non-relative to be eligible for funding, they must be receiving a Guardianship Assistance payment from Maryland.

REQUEST FOR FUNDING:
An LDSS must obtain approval from SSA to expend funds. A request must be submitted in writing to SSA and must contain the following information:

Name of child
DOB of Child
MDCHESSIE Child Client ID
Name of pre-adoptive/adoptive parents (if applicable)
Name of legal guardians (if applicable)
Identified Permanency Plan
Amount of funding requested
Reason for funding request/services

The Social Services Administration will respond to your request in writing, approving or denying the request. Please note that SSA will be in contact with the LDSS 45 days after the funding has been approved. The purpose of this contact will be to acquire information on the results of the services provided to the family.

For post-adoption services or for families receiving Guardianship Assistance payments, the family must request services on behalf of the child from the local department of social services for the county jurisdiction in which the family resides. Baltimore City residents must request services from Baltimore City DSS. Families who live in other states must request services from the local department that had responsibility for the child prior to the adoption being finalized, or before custody/guardianship was awarded by the court to the relative or non-relative, and monitors the Guardianship Assistance payment for the family.

PAYMENT FOR SERVICES:
All payments are to be made outside of MD CHESSIE as the Adoption and Guardianship Incentive funds are not found in MD CHESSIE. The funding code for direct services for children in families is **PCA B2340**. In submitting the payment to the local department finance office, the caseworker will attach a screen shot of the completed Service log entry for agency provided services, and a copy of the SSA approval memo.

MD CHESSIE:
1. Children in Out-of-Home Placement
   Document the use of Incentive funds for services for children with a permanency plan of adoption or custody/guardianship to a relative or non-relative with an out-of-home program assignment. When submitting the payment to the local department Finance Officer, include a copy of the SSA approval memo.
   a. Create a Service Log for Agency Provided services. Identify the Service Category and note the specific Type of Service that was provided to the child.
   b. Documentation should also be done in the Case Contact section of the Service Case.
      - Under Type of Contact choose: File Cabinet Case

- For Contact Reason choose: Placement coordination
- In the Comments field: note specific information about the reason for the funding request.

c. Scan the SSA approval Memo and put in the MDCHESSIE case level File Cabinet.

2. Post Adoption Services

Document the use of incentive funds for services for children that have been adopted from a Maryland local department of social services. When submitting the payment to the local department Finance Officer, include a copy of the SSA approval memo.

a. Request that a referral be created for Post Adoption Services. The Casehead will be the adoptive parent. The referral should include both adoptive parents, if applicable, and the adoptive child(ren) for whom the services are being requested. The case should be accepted with a program assignment of In Home Services/Family Preservation – Services to Families with Children-Intake.
b. Create a Service Log for Agency Provided services. Identify the Service Category and note the specific Type of Service that was provided to the child.
c. Documentation should also be done in the Case Contact section of the Service Case.
    - Under Type of contact choose: File cabinet Caser
    - For Contact Reason choose: Post Placement
    - In the Comments field: note specific information about the reason for the funding request
d. Scan the SSA approval Memo and put in the MDCHESSIE case level File Cabinet

3. Guardianship Assistance Program

Document the use of incentive funds for services for children that have exited Maryland foster care through the Guardianship Assistance Program (GAP). When submitting the payment to the local department Finance Officer, include a copy of the SSA approval memo.

a. Create a Service Log for Agency Provided services. Identify the Service Category and note the specific Type of Service that was provided to the child.
b. Documentation should also be done in the Case Contact section of the Service Case.
    - Under Type of Contact choose: File Cabinet Case
    - For Contact Reason choose: Placement coordination
    - In the Comments field: note specific information about the reason for the funding request.
c. Scan the SSA approval Memo and put in the MDCHESSIE case level File Cabinet.

This documentation must be completed for accounting and auditing purposes.