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January 23, 2010

Dear foster family,

After careful thought and consideration, Hamilton County is making changes to its child welfare system, including foster care. Faced with ongoing budget challenges and the need to provide more support and services to foster families with dwindling resources, the agency has decided to take advantage of the region's extensive, experienced private foster care networks. We are asking all of our foster care homes to transition to a private network by April 1.

This change will directly affect your home if you wish to continue as a foster care provider -- and we hope you will. We greatly appreciate the work our foster families do, and we see this as an opportunity to provide you with additional resources that will help you carry out your mission. Job and Family Services will continue to maintain approved adoption families and approve new applications for adoption. If you are currently approved for both foster care and adoption you must transfer your foster care license. However, your adoption homestudy will remain active with HCJFS. We will continue to supervise your home and consider you for available children.

Effective immediately, if you do not have children in your home, we will discontinue support activities and placements until you transition to a private network. In order to assist in your research, a list of providers is available on our Web site, [www.hcjfs.org](http://www.hcjfs.org). Please choose one that fits your needs, notify us and apply to the network for certification. We have enclosed a notification form that must be returned by Feb. 5.

If you choose not to continue in foster care, we have enclosed a form for you to fill out and return by Feb. 5. We do recognize that we have many homes that have not had placements for some time and may use this as an opportunity to transition out of foster care. We will continue to consider our adoptive homes for match with an available child, but if you are interested in foster-to-adopt or a legal-risk placement, you must transfer your license to one of our network homes to be considered for placement of a foster child, even if the ultimate objective is adoption.

If you do have a foster child placed in your home right now, we ask that you initiate the transfer of your license to a private network at this time. Although the child's placement worker will continue to monitor the placement, we now need to discontinue the assignment of a foster care support worker to your home. We will work with you to make your transition as smooth as possible. Someone from HCJFS will contact you soon with more information. This change will not affect children in your home. They will remain in your home as you transition to a new agency. Please research the private networks, choose one that fits your needs, complete the enclosed notification form, and apply for a transfer to the network you chose as soon as possible.



Also effective immediately, we are no longer taking applications or certifying foster homes. We are asking all new applicants to align with a private agency. However, if your certification expires in the next six months, we will work with you to recertify, which will help to support the transfer of your license to a network. Our re-certifier will contact you to begin this process as your recertification due date approaches.

This change is based on a need to shift and target our resources as effectively as possible; it has nothing to do with the valuable service you provide or the relationship we have shared. We sincerely appreciate the work you do. In fact, we believe you will benefit from this move because private networks have smaller caseloads and can provide more individualized attention. They have greater resources and can provide more support. Many pay higher rates, also.

This is not a radical move for Hamilton County. More than three quarters of the foster children in our care live in private-network homes. Children – who increasingly come into the child welfare system with complicated needs -- receive advanced, “therapeutic care” in network foster homes.

Families may have to undergo additional training or perform additional duties to meet the requirements of certain new providers. Providers have different philosophies, different levels of support, different pay different rates and different requirements for certification. Please choose the right fit for you.

For those who need more information, we have inserted a list of providers and will place one on our Web site, [www.hcjfs.org](http://www.hcjfs.org). We also plan an upcoming forum where you can meet with providers. We will provide more information on that through our Web site. You may also call Margie Weaver, section chief over Foster Care, at 946-1666 with questions.

Thank you for your patience as we make this transition in the way we do business, and thank you for your service to our children and this community. We could not achieve our mission of protecting the children of Hamilton County without your help. You are making a positive difference in the lives of these children and in this community.

We look forward to hearing from you as soon as possible. We must have an answer by April 1.

Sincerely,



Moira Weir  
Director  
Hamilton County Department of Job and Family Services

