

Licensing Information and Overview Licensed Child-Placing Agencies (LCPA)

- **Licensing Requirements**

The *Code of Virginia* requires that private child-placing agencies be licensed by the Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS). In support of statutory requirements, licensing regulations and oversight are designed to assist agencies in providing appropriate, high quality services while reducing risk to those placed by the LCPA. The *Code of Virginia* makes it a misdemeanor to operate without first obtaining the required license. Each day of operating without the appropriate license constitutes a separate offense.

- **Application Process**

Before a license can be issued, the applicant must complete the department's pre-licensure training. The training includes a review of the applicable laws and regulations as well as the documents required for a complete application. *We suggest that applicants complete pre-licensure training prior to submitting the application.*

The length of time from application submission to issuance of the conditional (initial) license varies depending on the completeness of the application and the applicant's readiness for the initial site inspection. A complete application includes submitting all required attachments.

Once an application is submitted to the department, a licensing specialist reviews the application and will contact the applicant regarding any items missing or needing clarification. Once the application is complete, a licensing specialist schedules and conducts the initial site inspection. The licensing specialist's work is reviewed by the licensing administrator who makes the issuance decision. Submitting an application does not guarantee that a license will be issued.

- **Financial Assistance**

VDSS does not offer financial assistance to open new programs.

- **Comprehensive Services Act (CSA)**

The Comprehensive Services Act (CSA) is not the only funding source for children in foster care, but it is frequently not familiar to new applicants. The Comprehensive Services Act for at-risk youth and families governs the placement and funding for many of the children in need of placement. This law combined eight specific funding streams at the state level and put them under the control of local governments. A local Community Policy and Management Team (CPMT) approves the funding for children referred by the local Family Assessment and Planning Team (FAPT). If the funds are approved for a child's placement, the LCPA is reimbursed, usually on a monthly basis, after the child is in care.

The CSA pool is the funding stream of last resort and must be used on a child specific basis. This means that pool funds may be spent only when purchasing services for specific children and their families. For more information about CSA, please visit the website for the Office of Children's Services, www.csa.virginia.gov. More information on foster care, adoption, and independent living arrangements can be found on the VDSS website, www.dss.virginia.gov.

- **Role of the Licensing Specialist**

The specialist provides consultation and training to applicants to facilitate a LCPA becoming familiar with and complying with laws and regulations. Once licensed, the specialist conducts unannounced inspections to ensure compliance with laws and regulations and to investigate reports of violations. The licensing specialist represents VDSS and is given authority by the *Code of Virginia* to inspect, including interviews with employees and children in care.

- **Staffing**

During the application process, staff will likely be screened, hired and trained. Please pay close attention to both the education and experience requirements specified in the standards for LCPA. In smaller agencies, it is common to select staff to fulfill the duties of several positions listed in the standards. If the agency plans to staff in this manner, please ensure that the individual meets the education and experience requirements specified for each position to be covered. Pay close attention to the requirements specified in the standards for all staff positions.

- **Initial Site Inspection**

Prior to the decision to issue or deny a license, the licensing specialist will conduct an initial site inspection to review compliance with the standards. The initial site inspection, at the agency location specified on the application, is an announced inspection scheduled at a mutually convenient time. At the initial inspection, an agency typically cannot fully demonstrate compliance with many standards simply because it is not yet in operation. The licensing specialist will determine compliance with certain standards and the adequacy of planning to assure future compliance with all standards. Then the licensing specialist will conduct an exit interview and review all findings. A written summary and violation notice, if applicable, may be left at the agency at the conclusion of the inspection; if not, it will be sent promptly by mail.

- **Issuance of Initial License**

The applicant must provide a plan of correction, if violations are cited at the initial site inspection. The plan of correction must state the action that will be taken to correct any violations, give time frames for correction, and identify the person or position responsible for making the correction. Once the Licensing Specialist has accepted the plan of correction and verified that health and safety violations have been corrected, the Licensing Specialist will make a recommendation to the Licensing Administrator regarding issuance of a license. If a license is issued, new agencies receive a conditional license period of up to six months to allow time for the agency to demonstrate full compliance with all standards.

- **Placing Children**

An agency may not place children until after a license has been issued from the department. It is a misdemeanor to do so without a license.

- **Frequency of Licensing Inspections**

The *Code of Virginia* mandates that each licensed agency receive at least two inspections per calendar year.

Please contact the Child Welfare Unit to schedule pre-licensure orientation training or with questions about licensure of child-placing agencies. The contact information can be found on the VDSS website, www.dss.virginia.gov, under Contact Us/Licensing/ Licensing Offices-- Children's Programs.