

Act 55: Family Finding and Kinship Care

What is Act 55?

This law requires county children and youth agencies to search for and identify extended relatives and kin who may be willing to support children and families entering the child welfare system:

Family finding shall be conducted when the child is accepted for services and at least annually thereafter, until the child's involvement with the county agency is terminated or one of the following criteria about the child is met:

- The child has been adjudicated dependent and a court has made a specific determination that continued family finding no longer serves the best interests of the child or is a threat to the child's safety.
- The child is not under the jurisdiction of a court and the county agency has determined that continued family finding is a threat to the child's safety. A determination that continued family finding is a safety threat to the child must be based on credible information about a specific safety threat, and the county agency shall document the reasons for its determination.
- The child is in a preadoptive placement, and court proceedings to adopt the child have been commenced.

A county agency shall resume family finding for a child if:

- The child is under the jurisdiction of a court, and the court determines that resuming family finding is best suited to the safety, protection and physical, mental and moral welfare of the child and does not pose a threat to the child's safety; **or**
- The child is not under the jurisdiction of a court, and the county agency determines that resuming family finding serves the best interest of the child and does not pose a threat to the child's safety.

Act 55: Family Finding and Kinship Care (continued)

Why was Act 55 passed?

- Ensure that family finding occurs on an ongoing basis for all children entering the child welfare system.
- Identify and build positive connections between the child and the child's relatives and kin.
- Support the engagement of relatives and kin in children and youth social service planning and delivery.
- Create a network of extended family support to assist in remedying the concerns that led the child to be involved with the county agency.

How does Act 55 define “family finding”?

"Family finding" is defined as “ongoing diligent efforts between a county agency, or its contracted providers, and relatives and kin to:

- Search for and identify adult relatives and kin and engage them in children and youth social service planning and delivery.
- Gain commitment from relatives and kin to support a child or parent receiving children and youth social services.”

Act 55: Family Finding and Kinship Care (continued)

Benefits of Family Finding and Kinship Care:

- Increased information for informed decision making.
- Increased stability of placement with children in home of relative/kin.
- Increased safety as more relatives/kin involved means more eyes on the child/situation.
- Increased resources of informal supports for families, i.e. visitation.
- Increased connections for older youth.
- Increased paternal family connections.
- Decreased trauma for child and family.
- Decreased parental isolation.
- Decreased likelihood of a relative who wants custody of the child showing up at the last minute (such as in termination of parental rights).
- Decreased vicarious trauma for child welfare professionals and judges.