

DHS Opens Up Adoption Assistance to Additional Population of Adopted Children

Children in foster care often have specialized needs due to the neglect and abuse they experienced in their early lives. A child who meets the state's definition of "special needs" is eligible for financial and medical assistance as they exit foster care and enter an adoptive placement. This assistance enables families to meet their children's basic and extraordinary needs.

Federal statute (42 U.S.C. 673) allows each state to set its own definition of a child with special needs. The federal statute lists the following characteristics that tend to make it harder to find a permanent family for a child: ethnic background, age, membership in a minority of sibling group, presence of factors such as medical conditions or physical, mental, or emotional disabilities. Hawaii's statute defines a child with special needs as having at least one of the following needs or circumstances: 1) age, 2) race or ethnic background, 3) member of a sibling group of two or more children adopted together, 4) physical or mental disability, 5) emotional disturbance, and/or 6) high risk of developing a physical or mental disease.

Hawaii recently (January 1, 2007) implemented a procedure to allow a child at high risk of a medical, physical, behavioral/emotional condition or handicap to qualify as a "child with special needs." This means the child will qualify for adoption assistance as long as other eligibility requirements are met. According to DHS, a child at "high risk" is defined as a foster child with harm and/or threatened harm confirmed by DHS and who is under DHS placement responsibility at the time of adoption.

This change will apply to all new adoptions and for adopted children with a "deferred Adoption Assistance agreement" in place who is still under age 18 on January 1, 2007. Adoption Assistance payments may continue until the child reaches age 18 or until age 21 if the child is determined by DHS to have a mental or physical handicap that warrants continued assistance pursuant to HAR §17-944.1-13.

If you believe your child meets the definition of a high risk child (a child with harm or threatened harm confirmed by DHS and is under DHS placement responsibility at the time of adoption) and you would like to obtain Adoption Assistance payments for your child, DHS asks that you complete the Adoption Assistance Agreement application for each qualified child. You may obtain a copy of the form from the social worker who assisted you with your adoption or the permanency social worker assigned to your case.

For more detailed information about Hawaii's adoption assistance program, visit the state profile at <http://www.nacac.org/stateprofiles/hawaii.html>.

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