



Dear Foster Parent,

April 15, 2020

Thank you for your continued diligence and patience as we navigate the COVID-19 pandemic together. These are difficult times for all of us, and your commitment to the health and well-being of the children/youth has never been more important. We will continue to support you in this time.

South Carolina is fully committed to reinvesting additional federal funding received due to COVID-19 in direct ways that support South Carolina children and families. To that end, we are announcing that foster parents will be receiving an additional \$90/month/child to support the needs of children and youth to begin the month of March 2020 and continuing throughout the Covid-19 emergency declaration period.

To be eligible for the emergency relief payment, the child in SC custody must have been in a home licensed by the South Carolina Department of Social Services or an out of state foster care provider (Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children), for the entire calendar month for which the additional funding is being received. Most family placement settings will be eligible for these payments. Payments will be made via paper check through the mail and will be paid in arrears beginning with March payments. Relief payments will continue for all full-month placements during the COVID-19 emergency declaration period. Checks should be received in the mail for eligible March placements within the next 10 business days.

We hope this temporary increase helps your family address emergent needs with children and young people being home from school and the many other ways the home or work order is likely affecting your family.

As the virus continues to spread and we are losing more South Carolinians, the home or work order is even more important. Even though the order allows essential outings, the Governor has asked to even minimize those trips-- for example sending just one person to the store if possible and limiting trips overall. If you need to get outside, please try to do so in areas where limited amounts of people will be. In order to assist with this objective as it relates to medical care, we have been providing foster parents with information for free MUSC telehealth screenings and the Select Health 24/7 nurse phone line, available for children in foster care with Select Health Medicaid.

As you know, DSS took steps to move away from in person visits as much as possible to limit exposure and travel and move toward virtual video alternatives whenever possible, and via phone when other options are unavailable. In these times of uncertainty, maintaining those visits and having your support to accomplish them is critical. These visits can help reduce trauma for children and youth in this crisis. If you or the biological family of the children in your care need support in making those visits happen, you can reach out to our staff. We are committed to reinstating in-person visits as soon as it is deemed safe to do so and assisting the court to get up and running. Family reunification, whenever it is safe to do so, is the foundation of South Carolina's child welfare system. Visits and connection are key to family reunification.

Courts, attorneys and parties began piloting and testing WebEx for these hearings and associated processes the week of April 6th and it is anticipated the practice will be rolled out state wide over the coming weeks. DSS has requested that adoption finalization hearings also move forward via video conference, teleconference, or consent order.

If you have questions, you can email fphelp@dss.sc.gov or call the line for foster parents and providers to address specific questions that may arise- (803-898-4174)

Foster families play an incredibly important role in our effort to provide safe, stable homes for children who for whatever reason cannot be with their natural families during this time, and we recognize and deeply appreciate the sacrifice South Carolina families are making to take care of children /youth who are in the custody of the state.

Mike Leach

Michael Leach, DSS State Director