



**State of Florida
Department of Children and Families**

Ron DeSantis
Governor

Chad Poppel
Secretary

DATE: November 10, 2020
TO: Regional Managing Directors
Community-Based Care Lead Agency CEOs
THROUGH: Patricia Babcock, Deputy Secretary *Patricia Babcock*
FROM: Patricia Medlock, Assistant Secretary for Child Welfare *Pat Medlock*
Robert Anderson, Assistant Secretary for Operations *Robert H. Anderson*
SUBJECT: CFOP 170-12, Chapter 3, Adoption Applicant Review Committee

PURPOSE: The purpose of this memorandum is to provide notification that CFOP 170-12, Adoption, has been updated with the addition of Chapter 3, Adoption Applicant Review Committee (AARC).

BACKGROUND: In May 2019, the Department initiated a work group to develop policies surrounding the AARC process. The work group included representation from each DCF Regional Family Safety Program Office and the Community-Based Care Lead Agencies. The work group concluded in October 2019, achieving the goal of establishing policy recommendations for the AARC process.

An AARC is designed to provide consultation and assistance on child-specific home studies pursuant to Rule 65C-16.005(9)(a), Florida Administrative Code. The new chapter outlines the process and composition of an AARC.

Additionally, time frames regarding the decision-making process for Regional Family Safety Program Office staff are outlined in this new chapter to aid in achieving permanency timely.

Lastly, the new chapter outlines the requirement for Regional Managing Directors (RMDs) to review and provide a final decision for all recommended denials by the AARC. RMDs will be required to complete the Department approved Regional Managing Director's Adoption Competency Training. This training provides education on the psychological, best practices, and phases of adoption. Further information will be provided to the RMDs regarding the training; until that time, the RMDs have the authority to make final decisions regarding the approval or denial of an application to adopt.

ACTION REQUIRED: Please share this memorandum and the new CFOP 170-12, Chapter 3, with all appropriate staff in the regions, circuits, Community-Based Care Lead Agencies, and case management organizations.

1317 Winewood Boulevard, Tallahassee, Florida 32399-0700

Mission: Work in Partnership with Local Communities to Protect the Vulnerable, Promote Strong and Economically Self-Sufficient Families, and Advance Personal and Family Recovery and Resiliency

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CONTACT INFORMATION: If you have questions or need clarification regarding this memorandum, please contact Valerie Proctor, Statewide Adoption Policy & Program Specialist at Valerie.Proctor@myflfamilies.com or 850-717-4673.

cc: Regional Family and Community Services Directors
Sheriff Offices Conducting Child Protective Investigations
Center for Child Welfare

Chapter 3

ADOPTION APPLICANT REVIEW COMMITTEE

3-1. Purpose. The Adoption Applicant Review Committee (AARC) is designed to provide consultation and assistance on child-specific home studies in which the child welfare professional is recommending a denial or an adoption case that presents challenging issues.

3-2. Definitions.

a. "Adoption Applicant Review Committee Member" is an individual who has completed the required prerequisites, provides consultation on cases as prescribed in Rule 65C-16.005(9)(a), Florida Administrative Code (F.A.C.), and aids in determining the final recommendation submitted to the department.

b. "Adoption Applicant Review Committee Chair" is an Adoption Applicant Review Committee Member designated by the Community-Based Care Lead Agency (CBC), who has completed the required adoption prerequisites, that will prepare and facilitate the AARC, and complete the final recommended report to be provided to the department.

c. "Adoption Applicant Review Committee Participant" is an individual who has specific knowledge of the child and/or the prospective adoptive parents that would be beneficial for Adoption Applicant Review Committee Members to hear.

d. "Adoption Competency Training" is a department approved in-depth training that provides child welfare professionals and clinicians the necessary skills when working with children and families in the area of adoption.

3-3. Adoption Applicant Review Committee Members and Participants.

a. CBCs must ensure that an AARC consists of a minimum of five individuals who meet the following prerequisites:

(1) Have completed the department's approved Adoption Competency Training.

(2) Have no personal or current professional relationship to any of the children or prospective families being reviewed.

b. The AARC Members shall consist of at least one representative each from the CBC, the sub-contracted case management agency who has jurisdiction of the case (if applicable), and a department representative. All individuals must meet AARC member requirements.

(1) A CBC AARC Member must be an individual with final decision-making authority.

(2) The representative from the sub-contracted case management agency cannot directly supervise the adoption case manager whose case is being reviewed.

c. AARC participants that should be encouraged to attend the meeting should include, but not limited to, the following:

(1) Dependency Case Manager(s) and Supervisor;

(2) Guardian ad Litem;

(3) Licensed Mental Health Counselor; and,

(4) Individual(s) who have been involved in the child's case.

d. Applicant(s) who have retained private counsel may request for their attorney to attend the AARC as a participant. Upon notification of the private counsel attendance at the AARC, the CBC or designee must notify Children's Legal Services or equivalent.

3-4. General Requirements.

a. Each CBC must establish a minimum of two days in a month when AARCs will be held in their service area(s). These dates should be shared with the sub-contracted agency and all other pertinent stakeholders.

b. AARC staffings must be held timely and meet the standard time frame outlined in Rule 65C-16.005(9), F.A.C.

c. When the need for an AARC has been determined, the Request for Review by Adoption Applicant Review Committee (form CF-FSP 5448, available in DCF Forms) must be completed by the adoption case manager and provided to the AARC Chair.

d. The adoption case manager must ensure the following available items are submitted with the Request for AARC Review:

(1) Initial adoption home study and most recent adoption addendum home study;

(2) Initial foster care licensing home study and most recent addendum (if the applicant has been previously licensed, also provide the initial home study);

(3) Foster parent Corrective Action Plans and referrals (if applicable);

(4) Background screenings (if the AARC is a result of a background related matter include arrest information);

(5) Current Child Study;

(6) Termination of Parental Rights Order;

(7) Most recent court order(s) that address placement and visitation; and,

(8) Any medical, mental health, behavioral, or educational assessments for the child and prospective adoptive parent (if applicable).

e. The Request for AARC Review and documents must be provided to the AARC members no less than seven business days before the AARC convenes.

f. AARC members are responsible for reviewing documentation prior to the staffing. If additional information is needed, then the request for such documentation needs to occur prior to the date of the staffing.

g. The adoption case manager shall notify the prospective adoptive parent about the need for an AARC and their right to be present at the staffing no less than seven business days before the AARC convenes.

3-5. Procedure.

a. The AARC chair is responsible to ensure each AARC member understands their role and responsibilities regarding their participation on the committee.

(1) The AARC members are to take into consideration the nature of each case to ensure the best interest of the child is met as outlined in Rule 65C-16.002, F.A.C.

(2) AARC members are to discuss and make a recommendation regarding the prospective adoptive parent's ability to meet the short-term and long-term needs of the child.

b. The AARC chair is responsible to ensure each AARC participant understands their role and responsibilities regarding their presence at the AARC.

(1) Participant(s) must be able to speak to the short-term and long-term needs of the child;

(2) Participant(s) must present information of the knowledge, skills, and abilities of the prospective adoptive parent to meet the short-term and long-term needs of the child;

(3) Participant(s) must be able to respond to clarifying questions from AARC members; and,

(4) Participant(s) may be asked to exit the meeting space to allow for additional discussion among the AARC members.

c. Each AARC member must complete the Adoption Applicant Review Committee Recommendation (form CF-FSP 5449, available in DCF Forms) that makes one or more of the following recommendations:

(1) The recommended approval of a prospective adoptive parent's application and/or home study with a written justification;

(2) The recommended denial of a prospective adoptive parent's application and/or home study with a written justification; or,

(3) Additional follow up items needed before providing a final recommendation.

d. The AARC or designee must document the reason for the AARC, individuals present, and a summary of the staffing in the meetings module in FSFN.

e. The AARC chair or designee must upload any relevant documents that were reviewed by the AARC members in the meetings module in FSFN.

f. The AARC chair is responsible for providing a written report regarding the overall recommendation of the AARC to the Region Family Safety Program Office for recommended denials within ten business days of the committee's decision.

g. When the final decision regarding the prospective adoptive parent determines the outcome of an adoption home study, the adoption case manager shall update the adoption home study to reflect the decision.

3-6. Regional Department Review and Outcome Approval.

- a. The Regional Managing Director (RMD) will be responsible for the review of all recommended denials submitted by the AARC Chair to the department.
- b. The RMD must meet the following requirements prior to reviewing the recommendations of the AARC:
 - (1) Have completed the department approved Adoption Competency Training for Regional Managing Directors; and,
 - (2) Have no personal or current professional relationship to any of the children or prospective families being reviewed.
- c. The RMD shall review the information that was considered when the AARC made their recommendation and may consider additional relevant information about the child or prospective adoptive parent.
- d. The RMD must provide written correspondence to the AARC Chair regarding the final decision of approval or denial of an applicant within fifteen business days from receipt of the recommendation.
- e. If additional information is requested by the RMD regarding the child or prospective families being reviewed, the RMD will have ten business days after receipt of the information to provide a final decision of approval or denial to the AARC Chair.

3-7. Out of County Supervision (OCS) and Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC).

- a. If the need for an AARC exists and the prospective adoptive parent does not reside in the county of jurisdiction or the state where the court has jurisdiction, the CBC with jurisdiction of the case must hold the AARC.
- b. The OCS or ICPC adoption case manager, the supervisor, and other individuals who have on-going involvement with the child and/or prospective adoptive parent must be invited to participate in the staffing.
- c. For OCS cases, when the final decision is made regarding the prospective adoptive parent determines the outcome of an adoption home study, the OCS courtesy worker shall update the outcome of the adoption home study to reflect the final decision of the department.
- d. An updated adoption home study with the updated recommendations must be provided through the normal OCS process to the sending county.