

THE PHILADELPHIA DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

CHILDREN AND YOUTH DIVISION

Emergency Placement Prevention and Family Reunification Fund Protocol for Accessing Funds

REVISED EFFECTIVE: November 17, 2009

I. Introduction

Families at times are separated or reunification is delayed because they lack the concrete resources to make the changes required to keep children safe. In the past, the cost of the inability to respond to the needs of families has been high, causing the emotional trauma of loss and separation, as well as the needless fiscal costs of maintaining children in care. The Emergency Child Placement Prevention and Family Reunification Fund provides social work staff with a critical resource to help families. Unlike other funds, this fund is easily accessible to both public and private agency staff and successful use of this will require close collaboration between DHS and the provider agencies. This fund is not simply an emergency fund, but a fund to be used strategically **to advance three critical child welfare outcomes:**

- Keep children safely in their homes
- Reunite children with their families in a timely manner
- Achieve permanency through adoption or permanent legal custodianship by DHS paid caregivers

Additionally, it can address true emergencies because of its administration through Public Health Management Corporation (PHMC), which will facilitate a check within five days of PHMC's receipt of a **completed and approved** request as long as resources are available.

II. The Purpose of the Fund

The CYD Emergency Child Placement Prevention and Family Reunification Fund has been established to prevent placement of children in out-of-home care, to achieve reunification or achieve permanency through one-time or short-term emergency support. This fund should be the resource of last resort after all other sources of funds have been exhausted or found not available. Use of this fund is one step in the reasonable efforts requirement, and as such, a copy of the approved request must be kept in the DHS and provider case files. Because this fund has three very specific goals, the outcomes of the fund's use are carefully tracked.

III. The Beneficiaries of the Fund

Families/children for which DHS is in the process of conducting an investigation or assessment or who have been accepted for service are eligible beneficiaries of the fund. Specifically, fund recipients include:

- Parents/caregivers with their children
- Parents/caregivers seeking return of their children
- DHS paid caregivers assuming permanent responsibility for children (adoption and permanent legal custodianships)

IV. Summary of Allowable Expenses

Allowable expenses include emergency expenses for: housing; home repairs; certain services and items (see allowable expense list at the end of this document for details). For emergency items DHS and Provider Agency social workers are encouraged to use discount and second hand stores. In most instances families are limited to one request per year. Exceptions to the monetary and time limits **may be granted** with the approval of the Commissioner or her designee. After payment, it is the social worker's responsibility to regularly review the family's budget and the payment of the bills so that problems can be quickly resolved.

There are two types of expenses with varying limits:

- **Household Expenses:**
Emergency household expenses are family driven (i.e., costs associated with maintaining a household where children are living or are to be reunited) should not exceed \$1500 if there is reasonable proof that the household is sustainable with its current resources after the request is granted.
- **Child Expenses:**
Child Expenses: These expenses are associated with child specific needs should not exceed \$250 per child.

V. Roles and Responsibilities

Administrative Responsibility for the Funds: Public Health Management Corporation (PHMC) is responsible for the administration of the Funds.

Authority to Release Funds: DHS or the Provider Agency must identify an Administrator who will act as a gatekeeper for the funds. The Administrator is the primary person with whom PHMC will communicate regarding requests for funds and is responsible for assuring that the funds requested directly coincide with the immediate needs of the family as well as verifying that funds requested are in accordance with allowable expenses listed at the end of this document.

VI. Protocol to Release Funds

PLEASE NOTE: Agency staff that complete applications are not to give out PHMC Emergency Fund staff contact information to the vendors or clients. All communication regarding applications should be between the agency Administrator representing the client and the PHMC Emergency Fund staff.

(1) Family Social Worker:

Whoever identifies the emergency (it could be the caregiver, child's teacher, clergy, etc.) starts the process by contacting the family's social worker. The social worker could either be at DHS or a Provider Agency.

- The social worker, after an assessment and before applying, must conclude either that the child is at imminent risk of being placed and payment of the emergency expense will prevent immediate placement or an additional placement, or the child's goal is reunification/permanency and the payment of the emergency expense will accelerate reunification/permanency and there are no other funding sources.
- The social worker needs to identify specifically which other funding sources were sought and exhausted. In addition, the social worker must conclude that payment of the expense is necessary to achieve the goal of the child and family's case plan and that it is unlikely that the need for payment of the expense will reoccur in the future.
- The social worker must get an accurate and thorough picture of the family's income and expenses and detail that on the request form so that the expense(s): can be justified; and will sustain the household.
- The social worker must document an explanation as to why/how an arrearage or bill delinquency occurred and how the household will be sustainable after an arrearage is reduced or paid off.
- The applying social worker, whether DHS or Provider, must communicate with her/his counterpart regarding appropriateness of the request. This agreement is to be documented on the form.

(2) Supportive Documentation of the Emergency Expense

The caregiver must show verification of the expense requested. If a bill from a vendor is not directed to the caregiver of the child, or to the child's expense, then the application needs to explain the relationship between the caregiver/child and the person identified on the documented bill. (As an example, if the bill is for past due electricity and a cancellation notice is to the person with whom the caregiver is living, there is sufficient connection. For repairs, the documentation needs to show who is responsible for payment and if different than the caregiver, how the person is connected to the caregiver).

(3) Family Social Worker's Supervisor:

The social worker's supervisor must review the request and confirm that the application is complete and that supporting documentation is both accurate and present. Once approved, the social worker's supervisor forwards the request to the DHS administrator or provider agency administrator responsible for overseeing the fund.

(4) DHS or Provider Agency Administrator:

If the administrator reviews the application for completeness, verifies that funds requested are in accordance with allowable expense list (found at the end of this document) and approves and signs the request, s/he forwards the complete application (with all supporting documentation) to PHMC for processing. To ensure communication and avoid duplication, the provider agency administrator must fax a copy of the approved request to the DHS social worker; additionally DHS must fax a copy of the approved request to the provider agency social worker.

(5) PHMC payment to Vendor:

- All payments by PHMC under this Fund shall be made to a vendor and not to the caregiver or social worker.
- Payments will be made according to the Allowable Expenditures and Acceptable Verification list attached.
- Payments can be distributed three ways by noting the following codes on page two of the application:
 - **MV (Mail to Vendor)** - request payments mailed directly to the vendor.
 - No payments to utilities will be mailed to the vendor as the checks, which were attached to bills in the past, have been incorrectly applied the accounts or cashed and not applied to an account.
 - No payments for repair work will be mailed to the vendor. Requests for repairs will be cut in two checks for the total amount. The first check is the deposit and should be given to the vendor in order to start work. The second check is to be held by the Social Worker and given to the vendor upon completion of the work quoted.
 - **MA (Mail to Administrator)** - request payments mailed directly to the Administrator; and finally, on a limited basis for extreme emergencies;
 - **PU (Pick up at PHMC)** - request payment to be picked up at PHMC.

All checks to landlords must be either (1) picked up by the Administrator or (2) mailed by PHMC to the Administrator for him/her to hand deliver to the landlord in order to confirm that the client still resides (or plans to reside) at the residence. PHMC will make arrangements with Administrators concerning the pickup of checks.

When clarification is needed for an application, this clarification must be received by PHMC within 30 days of the original application submission date or application may be made Inactive and a new application must be submitted.

VII. Fund Outcome Measures:

Tracking the outcomes is important to ensure that the funds are used strategically. DHS, through PHMC, will follow up on selected applications for use of the funds. **Each administrator responsible for approving the use of the fund will be expected to know the outcomes and why the application achieved or did not achieve its intended purpose.**

DHS, through PHMC as the administrator of the fund, will track the following performance measures to see whether the payment under this Fund achieves the intended purpose:

- Within 3 months of payment of the fund:
 - Whether the child/children went into out-of-home placement;
 - Whether the child remained in placement within;
 - If the case was closed; and
 - If the identified child was adopted or had his/her caregiver assume legal custody.

***These Protocols will be reviewed and revised if necessary.
If the fund does not achieve its intended purpose, it will be discontinued.***

Please send all completed applications to the following address:
Rich Kirschner
Public Health Management Corporation
Emergency Child Placement Prevention/Family Reunification Fund
260 S. Broad Street, 18th Floor
Philadelphia, PA 19102

**DHS EMERGENCY CHILD PLACEMENT PREVENTION AND FAMILY REUNIFICATION FUND
ALLOWABLE HOUSE HOLD EXPENDITURES AND ACCEPTABLE DOCUMENTATION**

(1) Rent for long-term lease and/or Rent arrears

- Copy of Lease (must be at least a one year agreement)
 - Copy of Housing Inspection License --
(*No Housing Inspection License is needed if request is Section 8 or outside the City of Philadelphia*)
 - Letter from Landlord/owner notifying of arrears amount
- *** If start date for the Lease began one month or more prior to receipt of EF Application, the Social Worker must confirm with the Landlord that the property is still available and verify this confirmation in writing (via e-mail or hard copy) to the EF Administrators.
- *** If the letter from the Landlord is over 1 month old, the Social Worker must confirm with the Landlord that the family has not been evicted and verify this confirmation in writing (via e-mail or hard copy) to the EF Administrators.
- Letter signed by the Caregiver stating how the difference will be paid if the request is greater than the allowable amount.
 - Security Deposit and rent for a long term lease limits are between \$1500 (for a family with a single child) to a maximum of \$2500 for a family with three or more children.

(2) Mortgage Arrears

- Copy of current mortgage bill.
- Letter signed by the Caregiver stating how the difference will be paid if the request is greater than the allowable amount.

(3) Utility deposits/arrears

- Copy of current utility bill for amounts being requested.
- Relationship to the parent/caregiver if owner of property or name on utility bill is different than parent/caregiver.
- **Documentation of payment agreement for utility arrears from Utility Company or a Letter from Utility Company stating why an Agreement will not be given.**
- Letter signed by the Caregiver stating how the difference will be paid if the request is greater than the allowable amount.

(4) Plumbing/roofing/electrical/heating/window /banisters/locks/doors; one time cleaning or junk disposal; or pest control (6 months max)

- Must show proof of ownership and relationship as noted above.
- Copy of Contractor's License
- Must submit bill or quote for equipment and services to be performed. Include company's tax ID number or social security number if payment is to be made to an individual performing the repair.
- A 2nd quote and License if the expense is over \$ 900.
- A 3rd quote and License if the expense is over \$1,500.
- Letter signed by the Caregiver stating how the difference will be paid if the request is greater than the allowable amount.

Note: All quotes **must be itemized** so that non-emergency items can be identified and deducted from essential repairs

(5) Refrigerator (\$450 maximum)

- Copy of quote from the vendor
- Letter signed by the Caregiver stating how the difference will be paid if the request is greater than the allowable amount.

**DHS EMERGENCY CHILD PLACEMENT PREVENTION AND FAMILY REUNIFICATION FUND
ALLOWABLE CHILD EXPENDITURES AND ACCEPTABLE DOCUMENTATION**

(1) Babysitting/Respite service; or short term therapeutic supports

- Bill/quote that describes services to be performed along with number of hours and hourly rate charged.
- Emergency Child Line Clearance required for babysitters and respite providers.
- Company's tax ID number or individual's social security number.
- Letter signed by the Caregiver stating how the difference will be paid if the request is greater than the allowable amount.

(2) Clothing expenditures

- Layaway document describing the items to be purchased.
- Letter signed by the Caregiver stating how the difference will be paid if the request is greater than the allowable amount.

(3) Beds (\$250 Maximum per bed, twin beds and bunk beds only)

- Copy of quote from the vendor.
- Letter signed by the Caregiver stating how the difference will be paid if the request is greater than the allowable amount.

OTHER EMERGENCY EXPENSES:

This category can be used for any emergency expenses that are not listed on the application but are considered necessary to achieve one of the listed outcomes. The DHS Commissioner or Designee must approve applications with "other" items. The review process is rapid, and should not prevent potential applicants from submitting creative, appropriate requests on behalf of the families with whom they work. **Please note, all payments are to be made directly to the specified vendor. A letter from the sending Agency must be submitted explaining the nature of the Emergency as well as all appropriate supporting documentation.**