

Wisconsin Subsidized Guardianship Program

The Subsidized Guardianship Program is part of a comprehensive Guardianship Permanency Initiative to improve permanency outcomes for children in out-of-home care by promoting the use of permanent legal guardianship as a permanency option. While guardianship has long existed as a permanency outcome for children, the lack of ongoing payments to guardians to care for children once permanency has been achieved has limited the effectiveness of guardianship as a permanency outcome and results in foster care cases remaining open longer than necessary to continue payments to the caretakers.

The Subsidized Guardianship program will be operated under a federal Title IV-E waiver to provide ongoing payments to persons becoming legal guardians of children in foster care, similar to the adoption assistance program for children who are adopted. The target population for the Subsidized Guardianship program is children placed with relatives licensed as foster parents. The subsidized guardianship program will make guardianship more feasible as a permanency outcome and improve the permanency options available for children placed with relatives.

The comprehensive Guardianship Permanency Initiative is based on the following principles:

- Improving permanency outcomes for children and families through more effective permanency planning that is family-focused.
- Promoting the use of relatives as foster care placement resources.
- Ensuring the safety and well being of children through permanent placements with caring adults whom will raise the children to adulthood.
- Providing services to families in ways that address the needs of children but minimizes the public child welfare involvement in the lives of families.
- Operating the subsidized guardianship program in a manner similar to the adoption assistance program.

The federal waiver request was initial submitted in September 2002 and resubmitted in January 2004. State enabling legislation to clarify the use of guardianship as a permanency option and establish the subsidized guardianship program is also necessary. Legislation was introduced in the 2004 legislative session, but not acted upon, and will be re-introduced in the 2005 legislative session. Implementation of the Subsidized Guardianship program is planned for July 2005, assuming timely approval of the state enabling legislation.

The subsidized guardianship program under the federal waiver will be implemented initially in Milwaukee County by the Bureau of Milwaukee Child Welfare. Approximately 750 children in Milwaukee over the five-year period of the waiver are expected to receive Subsidized Guardianship payments. The waiver request includes the potential to expand the program to the rest of the state. As a condition of the federal waiver, the guardianship program must be cost neutral and an independent program evaluation will be conducted.