

JUDICIAL BENCH CARD

Kinship in Demand Act (KIND Act, P.A. 103-1061)
Family Finding & Relative Engagement Requirements, Relative
Caregiver Certification, and Oversight Recommendations

ACLU Illinois

PURPOSE

The KIND Act strengthens Illinois' commitment to ensure meaningful family connections and placement of children with relatives by requiring DCFS to engage and support relatives. Additionally, the Act removes barriers to the permanency goal of guardianship, making this option more accessible for families and inclusive of their voices. The law went into effect on February 5, 2025, with some provisions going into effect on July 1, 2025. Courts play a critical oversight role to ensure DCFS is meeting its statutory obligations to identify, notify, and engage relatives in a timely and thorough manner, provide relatives due process, and avoid unnecessary delays in placement or permanency.

This bench card is a guide to compliance with state and federal law regarding family finding, relative engagement, relative care, and guardianship in child welfare proceedings.

KEY STATUTORY & REGULATORY REQUIREMENTS

1. Initial Identification & Notification

WITHIN 5 DAYS OF CHILD REMOVAL, DCFS MUST (SEE 89 ILL. ADM. CODE § 415.35(J)):

- Attempt to locate and interview each person named by the parents or child to determine the relative's interest and ability for placement or other support.
- When interviewing relatives, ask if the relative is aware of other relatives of the child who should be contacted.
- Identify and contact all adult relatives identified by the family, even when an initial placement has been made with a relative caregiver.
 - Notice shall **NOT** be sent to a relative for whom there is a known family violence or domestic violence related criminal conviction, indicated finding, or court finding of family or domestic violence. The permanency worker **MUST** obtain a copy of the conviction, indicated finding, or court finding and place it in the record.
- If the relative cannot be contacted, document the reason the relative could not be contacted.
- If a case worker is contacted by an unidentified relative, the case worker must meet with or call the relative to conduct an interview and determine how the relative is related to the child.
- If a sibling group is involved, the case worker must ask relatives how they are related to each of the siblings in care.
- All interviews must be documented in a contact note.

WITHIN 30 DAYS OF CHILD REMOVAL, DCFS MUST:

- Identify and exercise due diligence to locate all adult relatives unless the court grants an **exception** in accordance with Section 2-27.3 of the Juvenile Court Act of 1987 [705 ILCS 405]. Notice shall **NOT** be sent to a relative for whom there is a known family violence or domestic violence related criminal conviction, indicated finding, or court finding of family or domestic violence in accordance with 42 U.S.C. § 671(a)(29) and 89 Ill. Adm. Code § 415.35(k)(3). This is the **ONLY** legally permissible reason for not completing notice to relatives.
- Provide **written and oral notice** to all adult relatives of:
 - The child's removal
 - The availability of placement, visitation, and support
 - Adoption and certified guardianship assistance options
 - Health care coverage for children in care under the medical assistance program established under Article V of the Illinois Public Aid Code
 - The requirements for relative caregiver certification
 - Information about the kinship navigator program (anticipated 2028)

NOTE: If a parent's whereabouts or identity is not known at the time of the child's removal, DCFS must complete family finding and relative engagement efforts **within 30 days** of an unknown parent's identity being determined or a parent whose whereabouts were unknown being located.

2. Ongoing Family Finding & Relative Engagement

- DCFS must continue family finding efforts **throughout the case** until permanency is achieved. However, if DCFS believes that ongoing family finding and relative engagement efforts would be futile and no longer in the child's best interest, the Department shall document the basis of its determination, maintain the documentation in the child's case file, and inform the court of the reasons ongoing relative engagement should cease in accordance with 89 Ill. Adm. Code § 415.95(c). DCFS **cannot** discontinue these efforts **without the court's approval**, according to 705 ILCS 405/2-27.3(a)(3).
- **Ultimately, decisions regarding family finding are within the court's discretion and require its approval.**
- DCFS must **provide a report to the court no later than 45 days** after a child is placed in the Department's custody, and **with each case plan submitted to thereafter**, describing efforts to identify, locate, and engage relatives in a manner consistent with the child's best interest. The report should include:
 - A list of contacts made and the outcome of each contact
 - Which relatives have been evaluated as placement options
 - Diligent efforts taken by the Department to remove barriers to placement
 - The **manner** in which a relative or caregiver is engaged with the child, **such as:** in person visitation, virtual visitation, phone contact, supervising visitation with parents or siblings, transportation, respite care, and/or placement

3. Relative Placement Presumption

- A child **must** be placed with a relative **unless evidence demonstrates that such placement would be contrary to the child's best interests**. (See ILCS 405/2-10(2)).
- New best interest factors include (See P.A. 103-1601, 705 ILCS 405/1-3):
 - The child's wishes and long-term goals, including the child's wishes regarding available permanency options and the child's wishes regarding maintaining connections with parents, siblings, and other relatives (4.05(e))
 - The preferences of the persons available to care for the child, including willingness to provide permanency to the child, either through subsidized guardianship or through adoption (4.05(j))

THE KIND ACT: BY THE NUMBERS

WITHIN 5 DAYS of child removal, DCFS must:

Attempt to locate and interview each person named by the parents or child to determine the relative's interest and ability for placement or support.



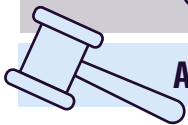
WITHIN 30 DAYS of child removal, DCFS must:

Identify and exercise due diligence to locate all adult relatives and fictive kin unless the court grants an exception.



WITHIN 45 DAYS of a child's placement in Department custody, DCFS must:

Provide a report to the court describing efforts to identify, locate, and engage relatives in a manner consistent with the child's best interest.



At ALL HEARINGS the court should follow up on family finding and relative engagement efforts.

PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR JUDICIAL OVERSIGHT

- Ensure **compliance with statutory deadlines** (30-day notification, initial family finding report filed with the court within 45 days, monitoring ongoing family finding at subsequent court hearings).
- Reinforce the **statutory presumption for relative placement** and **diligent efforts requirement** that DCFS reasonably assist prospective relative caregivers in preparing them to meet certification standards – ensuring relatives are not excluded as placement options due to administrative barriers or in conflict with the statutory obligations of the KIND Act.
- Ensure the **child's voice** is considered when evaluating placement and engagement.
 - If relative caregiver home certification is denied, and if age and developmentally appropriate, the placing worker must offer the child an opportunity to provide a statement to be included in the review if the child wishes. (89 Ill. Adm. Code § 415.45(a)(3)).
- **Confirm** that all relative **caregivers are receiving 100% of the payments** that they are entitled to. (89 Ill. Adm. Code § 415.120(a),(c)).
 - When a relative has been approved as a certified relative caregiver, they must receive the full established foster care maintenance payment rate (see 89 Ill. Adm. Code 356.30) for foster parents based on the number and ages of children placed in care.
 - Any relative homes providing care to a child placed by DCFS that are not a certified relative caregiver home or a licensed foster family home shall be eligible to receive payments from DCFS in an amount no less than 90% of the payments made to the licensed foster family homes and certified relative caregiver homes.
- Use the court's authority to **order further family finding efforts** when gaps are identified or a child's placement is disrupted.
- If delays in relative caregiver certification occur, order status updates and documentation of remedial steps.
- Consider **continuances or compliance orders** before changing a goal from return home to guardianship or adoption if DCFS has not met both elements of its statutory obligations required for such goal changes (i.e., discussed guardianship and adoption with parents, caregivers, and the child (if age and developmentally appropriate) **and** provided the court with the preferences of the parents, caregivers, and the child (if age and developmentally appropriate) about guardianship and adoption).
- Encourage **use of family meetings/child and family team meetings** to engage relatives.

BOTTOM LINE FOR JUDGES:

The KIND Act requires DCFS to prioritize relatives from the outset – not only for placement options, but also for maintaining and developing relationships with the child. Judicial inquiry, findings, and oversight are essential to ensure children remain appropriately connected to family whenever possible and to uphold the law's emphasis on family integrity. The judiciary also helps to ensure that those relatives receive the payments and supports they are entitled to by law.

JUDICIAL CHECKLISTS: What to Ask During Hearings

RELEVANT CITATIONS:

- 705 ILCS 405/2-27.1; 705 ILCS 405/1-2(1) (legislative intent).
- 89 Ill. Adm. Code 415; Public Act 103-1061 (Kinship in Demand Act).
- Federal: Fostering Connections Act (42 U.S.C. § 671(a)(29)).

1. Shelter Care Hearing

- If the child has not been placed with a relative, has DCFS **produced evidence** as to the **reasonable efforts** that were made to place the child in the home of a relative **OR** the reasons why no efforts reasonably could be made to place the child in the home of a relative, consistent with the best interests of the child?
- Has each parent (if available) been asked to identify all adult relatives during this hearing?
- If the court is placing the child in the temporary custody of DCFS, has DCFS engaged in **initial family finding** and **relative engagement** efforts?
- Has the **child's voice and preference** regarding relative placement been heard (if age and developmentally appropriate)?

2. All Subsequent Hearings to Shelter Care Hearings, including Permanency Hearings

At all subsequent hearings to the shelter care hearing (including permanency hearings), the court should consider the following questions when reviewing compliance with family finding, placement, certification, and other relative supports.

Each case may require a variation of the questions below based on the specific facts and status of the case, but these should all be considered when relevant.

A. FAMILY FINDING & RELATIVE ENGAGEMENT

- What new **family finding efforts** have been made **since the last hearing**? Has DCFS documented continued diligent efforts to **identify, notify, and engage relatives**? Has DCFS completed **the 45-day report**?
- Which relatives have been contacted, and what was their response?
 - Notice shall **NOT** be sent to a relative for whom there is a known family violence or domestic violence related criminal conviction, indicated finding, or court finding of family or domestic violence in accordance with 42 U.S.C. § 671(a)(29) and 89 Ill. Adm. Code § 415.35(k)(3). All other adult relatives **MUST** be provided **oral AND written** notification of their rights and options.
- Has the agency used **multiple search approaches** (case files, databases, family networks, social media, parent interviews, child input)?
- Are relatives being offered **opportunities to be involved** (placement, support, visitation, services) and is DCFS continuing to engage with relatives on an ongoing basis, including when case circumstances change?
 - If relatives were denied from visitation and/or placement, did DCFS provide written notice as required by law stating clear reasons (safety, capacity, willingness) for denial? Did the relatives request a **Decision Review** (higher level internal review)? If so, what was the outcome?

At permanency hearings ONLY, the court must address specific requirements pursuant to the amendments made by the KIND Act. The following questions provide assistance in addressing those requirements.

- Has the agency provided a **written description** of its **ongoing family finding** and **relative engagement** efforts since its most recent report to the court to plan for the emotional and legal permanency of the child?
- If the child is not currently in a placement likely to achieve permanency, is there an identified and willing potential permanent caregiver for the child? If so, what is the potential permanent caregiver’s **intent** regarding guardianship and adoption?
- Has the agency documented continued **reasonable efforts toward permanency by identifying, notifying, and engaging relatives**?
 - The court must review DCFS’ Ongoing Family Finding and Relative Engagement plan. If the court finds that the plan is not in the child’s best interest, the court shall enter specific factual findings and order DCFS to modify the plan consistent with the court’s findings.

B. RELATIVE CAREGIVER SUPPORT, PLACEMENT, AND CERTIFICATION

- Has the Department **considered a placement change to a relative if a relative option is available**?
- Has DCFS assessed **support needs of relative caregivers** (training, financial supports, caseworker contact, respite)?
 - All certified relative caregivers must receive orientation in a manner and location that is convenient for them. However, any issues with or delay in orientation **CANNOT** delay certification. (89 Ill. Adm. Code § 415.60).
 - Residents of certified relative caregiver homes must be provided with orientation opportunities, but are **NOT required and CANNOT cause a delay** in the certification process for certified relative caregiver homes. (89 Ill. Adm. Code § 415.60(g), 225 ILCS 10/3.4(e)).
- Has DCFS made **diligent efforts** as defined by Rule 415 to help remove barriers to placement with a relative, such as home adjustments or needed childcare equipment? (See ILCS 505/5(l-1)).
 - The Department is obligated to ensure that prospective relative caregivers are provided reasonable assistance to correct deficiencies or address issues to enable the relative to meet conditions for certification where possible. (89 Ill. Adm. Code § 415.115(a)(2), (b)).
 - “Diligent efforts” means conscientious attempts to accomplish all aspects of intervention with respect to thoroughness, timelines, availability, and responsiveness. (89 Ill. Adm. Code § 415.35).
 - Diligent efforts in the context of family finding and relative engagement **may include**, but are not limited to, interviewing the child’s parents, interviewing the child if age and developmentally appropriate, interviewing identified relatives regarding other relatives not yet identified, conducting computer-based searches, and assessing the relative for certification. (Id.)
- Does the placement promote the child’s **culture, community, and continuity of family ties and relationships**? (See best new interest factors: P.A. 103-1601, 705 ILCS 405/1-3).
 - The child’s wishes and long-term goals, including the child’s wishes regarding available permanency options and the child’s wishes regarding maintaining connections with parents, siblings, and other relatives (4.05(e))
 - The preferences of the persons available to care for the child, including willingness to provide permanency to the child, either through subsidized guardianship or through adoption (4.05(j))
- What is the **status of relative caregiver certification** for current or pending relative placements? Has DCFS completed necessary background checks and home assessments? If certification is delayed, what documented “good cause” exists?
- Have the **certification** and **Decision Review** processes been explained to relatives?
- If relatives are currently caring for a child, are they **receiving the payments** they are entitled to from DCFS?

C. PERMANENCY GOALS: ADOPTION OR GUARDIANSHIP

If the hearing considers the goal of adoption or guardianship, the following questions must be addressed:

- Is the **permanency goal** consistent with family connections (guardianship, adoption)?
- Has **guardianship** been fully explained to caregivers as an option when reunification is not viable?
 - DCFS is **required to discuss adoption and guardianship** options with caregivers and the court must ensure the Department has met this obligation, even in the cases pursuing expedited termination of parental rights. (P.A. 103-1061, ILCS 405/2-28 2(D)(i)-(v)).
- Have the differences between **guardianship** and **adoption** been explained to caregivers, parents (as appropriate), and children (as age and developmentally appropriate) as required when the goal of guardianship or adoption is being considered? What is the **preference** of the **caregiver, parents, and child**: guardianship or adoption?

Quick Reference: Statutes & Rules

- 705 ILCS 405/1-2, 1-3, 2-10, 2-22, 2-27, 2-27.1, 2-28
- 20 ILCS 505/7(b), 7.4
- P.A. 103-1061 (Kinship in Demand Act)
- 89 Ill. Adm. Code 415
- 42 U.S.C. § 671(a)(29) (Fostering Connections)

Statutes Amended by the KIND Act:

- Sections 1-3, 1-5, 2-10, 2-13, 2-21, 2-22, 2-23, 2-27, 2-28, 2-28.1 and 5-745 of the Juvenile Court Act of 1987 (and adding Section 2-27.3)
- Sections 2.05, 2.17, 4, 4.3, 5, 7.3, and 7.4 of the Child Care Act of 1969 (and adding Sections 2.36, 2.37, 2.38, 2.39, 2.40 and 3.4)
- Sections 4d, 5, 6a, 7, and 7.3 of the Children and Family Services Act (and adding Sections 46 and 55)
- Sections 4.1 and 15.1 of the Adoption Act

BOTTOM LINE FOR JUDGES:

Judges are the gatekeepers of ensuring family integrity. Every hearing should include inquiry into family finding, relative engagement, and support for relatives as a pathway to permanency.

If you'd like to discuss your courtroom experiences, share insights or suggestions, or ask questions about the KIND Act, please reach out to us at kind@aclu-il.org.

This document contains general information about the law. It is not legal advice. It is offered as a resource to help you generally. If you have questions, please reach out to us.