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GAVIN NEWSOM  
GOVERNOR

September 5, 2019

ALL COUNTY WELFARE DIRECTORS LETTER

TO: ALL COUNTY WELFARE DIRECTORS  
CALIFORNIA FEDERALLY RECOGNIZED TRIBAL  
GOVERNMENTS

FROM: ALI SUTTON, Acting Deputy Director  
Family Engagement and Empowerment Division

SUBJECT: BRINGING FAMILIES HOME (BFH) PROGRAM

REFERENCE: [ASSEMBLY BILL \(AB\) 1603](#), CHAPTER 25, STATUTES OF 2016;  
[SENATE BILL \(SB\) 80](#), CHAPTER 27, STATUTES OF 2019; [AB 74](#),  
CHAPTER 23, STATUTES OF 2019; [WELFARE AND  
INSTITUTIONS CODE \(WIC\) SECTIONS 16523-16523.1](#).

The California State Budget for Fiscal Year (FY) 2019-20 appropriated \$24.4 million General Fund (one-time) to continue and expand the Bringing Families Home (BFH) Program. BFH is a state-funded program in which participating counties or tribes provide housing-related supports to eligible families experiencing homelessness within the child welfare system. The program requires a dollar-for-dollar county or tribal match and funds are available for expenditure from July 1, 2019 through June 30, 2022. The California Department of Social Services (CDSS) is seeking proposals from county child welfare agencies and tribes (also identified as applicants throughout this letter) interested in continuing or implementing a BFH Program. The CDSS encourages county and tribal partnerships and will give highest priority to joint applicants.

The BFH Program, created by Assembly Bill (AB) 1603 (Chapter 25, Statutes of 2016) and updated by [Senate Bill \(SB\) 80](#) (Chapter 29, Statutes 2019), aims to provide housing-related services to families receiving child welfare services, increase the number of families reunifying, and prevent foster care placement. Per [Welfare and Institutions Code \(WIC\) sections 16523-16523.1](#), county child welfare agencies and tribes operating BFH programs must use evidence-based housing models and practices, such as [Rapid Re-housing](#), [Supportive Housing](#), and/or subsidies to make rental housing affordable. Further, SB 1380 (Chapter 847, Statutes of 2016) requires

that all state-funded housing programs incorporate the core components of Housing First enumerated in WIC section 8255. Additionally, the BFH program requires collaboration and coordination with the greater homelessness response system, including participation in the local homeless Continuum of Care (CoC) and Coordinated Entry (CE) System. Funded programs should partner with their local child welfare agencies, social services, and juvenile dependency courts.

## **BRINGING FAMILIES HOME APPLICATION PROCESS**

County child welfare agencies and tribes must submit a complete application package, as described below and in Attachment One. Applicants should request sufficient funds to meet their need, while considering their capacity to utilize the funds and provide an acceptable dollar-for-dollar match through June 30, 2022.

The CDSS will evaluate program applications on a competitive basis according to the evaluation criteria specified in Attachment One. Applicants with the greatest ability to implement a successful BFH Program on or before July 1, 2020 will be prioritized for funding. Applicants will not be allocated funds exceeding their total funding request. Additionally, depending on the cumulative statewide request and the competitiveness of program applications, not all applicants are guaranteed funding, nor the entire amount of funding requested.

All funded programs will be required to operate their BFH Program pursuant to the conditions set forth by the CDSS, including but not limited to compliance with:

- Dollar-for-dollar match requirements, as specified in County Fiscal Letter (CFL) No. 17/18-79, CFL No. 18/19-25, and Attachment Six of this Letter;
- data collection and reporting requirements, including but not limited to monthly data report submissions and entering BFH data into the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS);
- Housing First;
- evaluation requirements, as requested by the CDSS, including completion of Data Use Agreements, as needed; and
- additional programmatic requirements, as described by the CDSS (additional information can be found in Attachment One).

## **Existing BFH Programs**

Applicants operating an existing BFH Program must submit the following (as described in Attachment One) by the date below:

- Certification, Budget, and Match (Attachment Two)
- Continuing Program Update Template (Attachment Three)
- Housing First Assessment (Attachment Five)
- Letters of support

### **New BFH Applicants**

Applicants seeking to implement a new BFH Program must submit the following (as described in Attachment One) by the date below:

- Certification, Budget, and Match (Attachment Two)
- New Program Description Template (Attachment Four)
- Housing First Assessment (Attachment Five)
- Letters of support

New applicants will have from the date of allocation through June 30, 2020 for program planning and implementation and are expected to be fully implemented and serving families by July 1, 2020. (See Attachment One for additional information regarding implementation timelines.)

### **Application Package Submission**

Application packages must be submitted electronically to the Housing and Homelessness Bureau at [housing@dss.ca.gov](mailto:housing@dss.ca.gov) by **5:00 P.M. October 31, 2019**. Late applications will not be accepted.

Following the publication of this letter, the CDSS will host a call for any interested counties and tribes. Please email [housing@dss.ca.gov](mailto:housing@dss.ca.gov) if you are interested and have not received an invitation for the call.

Program allocations will be announced in the winter of 2019.

The CDSS looks forward to partnering with counties and tribes to help reduce the incidence and risk of homelessness among families in the child welfare system. If you have any questions, please contact the Housing and Homelessness Bureau at (916) 651-5155 or at [housing@dss.ca.gov](mailto:housing@dss.ca.gov).

### **Attachments:**

- 1) Application Guidelines
- 2) Certification, Budget, and Match
- 3) Continuing Program Update Template
- 4) New Program Description Template
- 5) Housing First Assessment
- 6) Match Guidelines
- 7) References and Resources



## **BRINGING FAMILIES HOME PROGRAM: APPLICATION GUIDELINES**

### **A. PURPOSE, BACKGROUND, AND ELIGIBLE POPULATION**

The California Department of Social Services (CDSS) is seeking proposals from County Child Welfare Agencies and Tribes (also identified as applicants) interested in continuing or implementing a Bringing Families Home (BFH) Program. The program aims to provide housing-related services to families receiving child welfare services, increase the number of families reunifying, and prevent foster care placement.

The BFH Program is a three-year program, requiring a dollar-for-dollar county or tribal match. Funds are available from July 1, 2019 through June 30, 2022. Per [Welfare and Institutions Code \(WIC\) sections 16523-16523.1](#), funded programs must include evidence-based housing models (e.g., [Rapid Re-housing](#), [Supportive Housing](#), and/or subsidies to make rental housing affordable). Funded programs must incorporate the core components of Housing First enumerated in [WIC section 8255](#) and coordinate with the greater homelessness response system, including participation in the local homeless Continuum of Care (CoC) and Coordinated Entry (CE) System. Additionally, funded programs must follow all applicable federal and state law, including [WIC sections 16523-16523.1](#).

#### **I. Program Eligibility and Prioritization**

BFH funding may be used to assist families involved in the child welfare system who are experiencing homelessness, as defined in [WIC section 16523\(d\)](#) (see Attachment Seven). Funded programs should prioritize child welfare-involved families as follows:

- 1) Literally homeless families (i.e., those defined in subsections 2, 3, or 4 WIC section 16523(d)); and
- 2) An individual or family who will imminently lose their housing (i.e., those defined in subsections 5(A) through 5(C) WIC section 16523(d)).

Note: Effective July 1, 2019, this prioritization scheme has been revised from former guidance to better align with the broader homelessness response system.

### **B. APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS: EXISTING PROGRAMS**

Applicants operating an existing BFH Program must submit a complete program application package. BFH funds will be allocated on a competitive basis and applications will be evaluated using criteria developed by the CDSS, as described in part II of this section.

#### **I. Application Packaging Requirements for Existing Programs**

A complete application package for continuing BFH applicants includes:

- a) a signed Certification, Budget, and Match (Attachment Two);
- b) a completed Continuing Program Update Template (Attachment Three);
- c) a completed Housing First Assessment (Attachment Five); and
- d) Letters of support.

a. Certification, Budget, and Match (Attachment Two)

Applicants must submit a completed Director Certification, budget, and match source matrix. The program budget will be evaluated to determine how counties plan to utilize funds and determine their annual housing goals, as well as to confirm consistency with best practices (e.g., maximizing funding on direct services and maximizing funding on permanent housing costs) and the program plan. Additional information on housing best practices can be found in Attachment Seven. The match portion of the document will be reviewed by the CDSS to confirm that the applicant has appropriate and necessary match funds. Applications with missing or incomplete certifications, budgets or match documentation will be considered incomplete. Additional budget information will be requested at the time of program allocations; further details will be provided under separate cover.

Note: Counties operating an existing BFH Program must include their July 2019 planning allocation in their total budget outline.

b. Continuing Program Update Template (Attachment Three)

Applicants must complete the Continuing Program Update Template. The template covers the evaluation criteria listed below and will be used by the CDSS to assess applicants' program description. Per the template prompts, applicants will provide information about their planned program design, including areas for further development, plans for improvement in the new funding cycle, and lessons learned from previous program operation and how they will inform program improvements.

Note: [WIC section 16523.1\(c\)1](#), BFH must provide evidence-based housing interventions, including [Rapid Rehousing \(RRH\)](#), [Supportive Housing \(SH\)](#), and/or subsidies to make rental housing affordable, as appropriate. The CDSS encourages applicants to contract and partner with other entities to provide the necessary spectrum of housing interventions. If the applicant is only able to provide one housing intervention type directly through BFH, they should meaningfully connect BFH clients to other housing service providers to receive other housing intervention types, as appropriate (e.g., if the applicant can only provide RRH services in BFH yet it is determined that a family enrolled in BFH needs SH to successfully exit into housing, and the client voluntarily agrees to this housing, the applicant should meaningfully connect the family to another housing service provider such as the Housing Authority or Permanent Supportive Housing provider). The CDSS will provide technical assistance to applicants who face resource and/or programming constraints in their community. More information about evidence-based housing interventions, including RRH and SH, can be found in Attachment 7.

c. Housing First Assessment (Attachment Five)

As of July 1, 2019, Senate Bill (SB) 1380 (Chapter 847, Statutes of 2016) requires that all state-funded housing programs (including BFH) be operated in compliance with the core components of Housing First enumerated in [WIC section 8255](#).

The CDSS has developed a Housing First Assessment (Attachment Five) to support applicants in assessing their adherence to and adoption of Housing First. This tool was developed using: the Housing First core components in [WIC section 8255](#); the [United States Interagency Council on Homelessness \(USICH\) Housing First checklist](#); the [United States Department of Housing and Urban Development \(HUD\) Housing First Assessment Tool](#); and the Corporation for Supportive Housing (CSH) Housing First checklist distributed at prior learning forums.