

Q&A

Philadelphia Department of Human Services Performance-Based Contracting

Q. What's new in foster care in Philadelphia?

A. Foster care services in Philadelphia are being redesigned to promote better outcomes for children and their families. The Philadelphia Department of Human Services (DHS) has adopted Performance-Based Contracting (PBC) as a tool to realign foster care services with the goals of safety, permanency, and well-being.

Q. How is performance-based contracting different from what was used before?

A. DHS believes that performance-based contracting will improve foster care services by increasing the permanency and stability expectations placed on provider agencies in exchange for increasing the resources and flexibility given to them to meet the new expectations. Under PBC, DHS will contract with providers to meet specific permanency goals according to the size of the agency caseload. Agencies that meet or exceed these performance expectations will receive financial and practical benefits, while agencies that fall short of the contractual expectations will be subject to financial disincentives. Unlike the previous system, in which providers received no incentives for high performance, PBC will reward providers who successfully move children to permanency.

Q. Why PBC for Foster Care?

A. Compliance with federal permanency timelines including the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) is part of the DHS agenda, along with interest in improving practice for children and families. PBC promotes permanency for children in foster care by setting explicit performance expectations and providing a structure to achieve those expectations. In this incentive-based model, outcomes for children are contractually linked to financial payments.

Q. What are the goals of PBC?

A. DHS goals for the initiative include more families safely reunified; more children who cannot return home adopted or placed in subsidized permanent legal custody; increased placement stability; and relief of pressure on some parts of the system to allow increased focus on others, such as prevention and placement diversion.

Q. Who will be affected?

A. All foster care agencies with caseloads of 50 or more children are participating in this new system which was launched in March 2003 after a year-long design process. Possible future developments include PBC for services to children in their own homes (SCOH) and residential care.

Q. Is there a roadmap for the new model?

A. DHS and the provider agencies created a detailed "Roles and Responsibilities" document to clarify who does what and when. A dispute resolution process is being used to ensure timely resolution of disputes related to permanency goals. All components are well-documented and may be reviewed by advocates.

Do you have questions about children's law, practice or services? Call Child Advocates for consultation with a Staff Attorney or Social Worker, or drop us a line. We'll be happy to answer your question and feature the issue in a future edition of ADVOKIDS. Thanks!

Adapted from Fact Sheet, "Philadelphia Department of Human Services Performance Based Contracting, General Foster Care" published January 2003 by the Philadelphia Department of Human Services. Consult with Child Advocates for more information or concerns about PBC in your case.

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