Overview:

Since 2016, The Department of Children, Youth & Families (DCYF) has been working to improve its foster care system. The Department's vision for Rhode Island's family-based foster care system includes a robust, diverse, and culturally appropriate array of services and foster families who can care for children and youth when they are not safe at home.

The DCYF has successfully renegotiated contracts with all its private foster care agencies. The core of renegotiation ensures all foster families will have access to the same level of services and supports, based on the needs of the child(ren) or youth in their care, so *all* foster families can be successful.

New private agency contracts began August 1, 2020.

Rates:

The foster board maintenance payment for children and youth who enter foster care on or after August 1, 2020 is determined by their tier score identified by their Level of Need (LON) assessment. (See chart below for rates.) A child with the highest needs is Tier Score 5 and a child with the lowest needs is a Tier Score 1. Most children and youth who are placed with foster families score at a 1, 2 or 3.

The goal of the LON assessment is to clearly identify what each child's needs are, what type of homes would be a best fit for their needs, and what services might be needed for that child. The LON assessment tool is the cornerstone of the foster care system.

TIER	0-3 YEARS OLD	4-11 YEARS OLD	12+ YEARS OLD
Tier 1	$24/day	$27/day	$28/day
Tier 2	$24/day	$27/day	$28/day
Tier 3	$45/day	$45/day	$45/day
Tier 4	$55/day	$55/day	$55/day
Tier 5	$65/day	$65/day	$65/day

Questions in this FAQ are related to new foster board maintenance rates.

What does "grandfathering" mean?

The Department of Children, Youth & Families is grandfathering foster board maintenance payments for families who are currently caring for a child in their home (prior to August 1, 2020). This means the rate a family is currently receiving will not change – unless the Level of Need Tier Score indicates the family could receive a *higher* rate under the new rate structure. Then, the family would see an increase. But, no one will receive a lower daily rate for a child currently in their care.

If my foster child goes home, then comes back to my care again, will the rate still be grandfathered?

No, grandfathered rates are authorized through the end of the current placement episode only. A placement episode is defined as the end of one placement and the start of another.

Are clothing allowances and other auxiliary payments also grandfathered?

Clothing allowances have not been grandfathered. Clothing allowances were issued very differently across Private Foster Care Agencies (PFCAs) and the Department. The amount and frequency were not the same for all foster families. In order to ensure foster families can access funds sooner than waiting to receive a separate clothing allowance, these dollars are included in the foster maintenance rate.

However, other auxiliary payments are now available to *all* families including mileage reimbursement for some transportation, and birthday and holiday stipends for each child in care. Previously, these payments were available to DCYF traditional and kinship families only.

What happens when there is an emergency and a child or youth enters foster care without any clothing or belongings? Sometimes foster families need to purchase clothing right away and cannot wait for a monthly stipend.

When children and youth are not safe at home, they sometimes enter foster care without advance notice. Emergency clothing vouchers are available exactly for this purpose. When foster families need to purchase clothing for a child or youth immediately, the DCYF primary caseworker can provide an emergency clothing voucher.

Additionally, The Village for RI Foster and Adoptive Families and Foster Forward are sometimes able to provide clothing for foster families in need.

What is the difference between Tier 1 and Tier 2, the rates are the same?

A Tier Score 1 identifies a child or youth whose Level of Need assessment doesn't indicate a level of care required beyond the needs of a typically developing child of their age. A Level of Need assessment if often referred to as "LON."

A Tier Score 2 indicates the LON assessment identified some mild needs above a Tier Score 1. However, it is not anticipated these needs would demand a level care intensely beyond the needs of a typically developing child of their age. But this tier score is used to identify needs that should be actively monitored for changes.

In this new rate system, if a child or youth is assigned a Tier Score 3 when they come into foster care, then over time they become a Tier Score 1, will my rate go down?

When child(ren) and youth come into care at a higher Tier Score it is hopeful their Tier Score will be reduced as a result of being in a stable placement and receiving the services and supports they need.

If this happens, a foster family's rate will *not* decrease because the Tier Score decreased. Foster families will continue to receive the original, higher foster board maintenance rate associated with the initial LON assessment.

Additionally, because it is expected needs could change over time, the LON assessment and Tier Score are reviewed regularly.

Can you help us understand what analysis went into the decision for the rate amount and each Tier?

Previously, payments to foster families varied greatly and were dependent on which PFCA a family was assigned or whether they were a DCYF foster family. The goal of the re-design is for *all* private foster care agencies, foster families, and children to receive the same payment and services based on the Level of Need (LON) tier score. The analysis included a review of current family stipends for DCYF traditional and kinship families, private agency families by agency, and national state comparisons.

Where did the structure for this plan come from? Are other states using?

The most recent comprehensive report on foster care reimbursement rates across the United States was published by Child Trends in 2012.[1] Using the data available, and compared to other states, Rhode Island needed to make a modest increase to rates for lower needs children and substantial increases for higher needs children.

Like the new rate structure for Rhode Island, many other states also vary rates based on age with higher reimbursement rates for older children and higher needs children.

According to the data in the 2012 report, foster care base rates ranged from $14.50–$28.24/per day. As of 2012, other New England states daily base rates[2] were averaging approximately $20 per child/per day.

How do Rhode Island's rates compare to neighboring states or other New England states?

Massachusetts' rates range between $25.01–$29.62/per day with a clothing allotment, birthday and holiday allowance which can add a total of $1050 annually when caring for a foster child 13+ years of age. When adjusting the daily rate to be inclusive of the clothing allowance, the average daily rate is $32.00/per day. Other expenses could be covered based on the needs of the child. Find out more at The Department of Children and Families Web site:
https://www.mass.gov/service-details/resources-for-foster-parents

New Hampshire's rates range from $21.84– $35.78/per day when families are providing specialized care for a teenage foster child. No additional clothing allowances are provided. Find out more at NH Department of Health and Human Services:
https://www.dhhs.nh.gov/dcyf/adoption/reimbursement.htm

For more information, please visit: http://www.dcyf.ri.gov/be-an-anchor/

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[1] https://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/Foster-Care-Payment-Rate-Report.pdf

[2] A base rate should be considered the standard reimbursement rate for a child without special needs. (A LON Tier Score 1 or 2.)