

**Procedures for Investigating Alleged Acts of Discrimination
In The Foster Care or Adoption Process
Effective February 1, 2005**

Trumbull County Children Services has established procedures for investigating alleged violations of the Multiethnic Placement Act of 1994 as amended by Section 1808 of the Small Business Job Protection Act of 1996, 42 U.S.C. 622(b)(9), 671(a)(18), 674(d) and 1996(b) (MEPA) and Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, 42 U.S.C. 2000d, et seq (Title VI), as they apply to the foster care and adoption process. These federal laws prohibit Trumbull County Children Services from developing and/or implementing policies, procedures or practices which serve to:

- Deny any person the opportunity to become a foster caregiver or an adoptive parent on the basis of race, color or national origin of that person, or of the child involved; or
- Delay or deny any placement of a child in foster care or for adoption on the basis of the race, color or national origin of the foster caregiver(s), of the adoptive parent(s) or of the child involved.

Permissible Actions:

MEPA and Title VI permit the following actions as they apply to the foster care or adoption process:

1. Asking about and honoring any initial or subsequent choices made by prospective foster or adoptive parents regarding what race, color, or national origin of child the prospective foster or adoptive parents will accept.
2. Honoring the decision of a child twelve years of age or older to not consent to an adoption when that decision has been approved by a court pursuant to section 3107.06 of the Ohio Revised Code.
3. Providing information and resources about fostering or adopting a child of another race, color or national origin to prospective foster or adoptive parents who request such information and making known to all families that such information and resources are available.
4. Considering the request of a birth parent(s) to place the child with a relative or non-relative identified by name.
5. Considering the race, color or national origin of the child as a possible factor in the placement decision when compelling reasons serve to justify that race, color or national origin need to be a factor in the placement decision pursuant to 5101:2-48-13 and 5101:2-42-18.1 of the Ohio Administrative Code. These rules permit consideration of race, color or national origin if an Individualized Child Assessment (JFS 01688) completed pursuant to these rules indicates the child has needs related to race, color or national origin that should be taken into account when placing the child. Even when the facts of a particular case allow consideration related to race, color, or national origin, this consideration shall not be the sole determining factor in the placement decision.

6. Promoting cultural awareness, including awareness of cultural and physical needs that may arise in the care of children of different races, ethnicities, and national origins as part of the training which is required of all applicants who seek to become foster or adoptive parents.
7. Documenting verbal comments, verbatim, or describing in detail any other indication made by a prospective foster or adoptive family member living in the household or any other person living in the household reflecting a negative perspective regarding the race, color or national origin of a child for whom the prospective foster or adoptive family has expressed an interest in fostering or adopting. The documentation shall indicate whether those comments were made before or after completion of the cultural diversity training which is required for all foster and adoptive applicants. Documentation shall be included in the family's homestudy, update, or an addendum to the homestudy or update prior to consideration of placement or a matching conference. A matching conference is the process of determining the most appropriate adoptive family for the child based on the child's special needs. The matching committee may consider the information in determining if the placement is in the child's best interests.

Prohibited Actions:

MEPA and Title VI prohibit the following actions as they apply to the foster care or adoption process:

1. Using the race, color or national origin of a prospective foster or adoptive parent to differentiate between placements.
2. Honoring the request of a birth parent(s) to place a child with prospective foster or adoptive parent(s) of a specific race, color or national origin, unless the birth parent(s) identifies a relative or non-relative by name and that person is found to meet all relevant state child protection standards, provided that the agency determines that the placement is in the best interests of the child.
3. Requiring a prospective foster or adoptive family to prepare or accept a transracial foster care or adoption plan.
4. Using "culture" or "ethnicity" as a proxy for race, color or national origin.
5. Delaying or denying placement of a child based upon the geographical location of the neighborhood of the prospective foster or adoptive family whenever geography is being used as a proxy for:
 - the racial or ethnic composition of the neighborhood;
 - the demographics of the neighborhood; or
 - the presence or lack of presence of a significant number of persons of a particular race, color, or national origin in the neighborhood or any similar purpose.
6. Requiring extra scrutiny, additional training, or greater cultural awareness of individuals who are prospective foster or adoptive parents of children of a different race, color or national origin than required of other prospective foster or adoptive parents.
7. Relying upon general or stereotypical assumptions about the needs of children of a particular race, color or national origin.

8. Relying upon general or stereotypical assumptions about the ability of prospective foster or adoptive parents of a particular race, color or national origin to care for or nurture the sense of identity of a child of another race, color, or national origin.
9. "Steering" prospective foster or adoptive parents away from parenting a child of another race, color, or national origin. "Steering" is any activity that attempts to discourage prospective foster or adoptive parents from parenting a child of a particular race, color or national origin.
10. Requiring an ongoing, foster care or adoption worker or contractor to justify a proposed placement for the reason that the race, color or national origin of the child is different from that of the family whom the worker is proposing as the child's foster caregiver or adoptive parent.

Complaint Procedure:

Any person who believes that Trumbull County Children Services, any other public or private Ohio adoption or foster care agency, or the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services has engaged in discriminatory acts, or initiated discriminatory policies or procedures, involving race color, or national origin in the foster care or adoptive process may file a complaint. In addition, anyone who believes that he or she was intimidated, threatened, coerced, discriminated against or otherwise retaliated against in some way because he or she made a complaint, testified, assisted or participated in any manner in an investigation related to alleged discrimination on the basis of race, color or national origin in the foster care or adoption process may also file a complaint. Individuals who may file a complaint include but are not limited to the following:

- a foster or adoptive parent or other member of a foster or adoptive family
- a prospective foster or adoptive parent or other family member
- an employee or former employee of Trumbull County Children Services or of any other Ohio adoption or foster care agency

Individuals who wish to file a complaint must complete the "Discrimination Complaint Form" (JFS 02333). This complaint may be filed with any of the following:

- Richard Tvaroch, Quality Assurance Supervisor/ MEPA Monitor
Trumbull County Children Services
2282 Reeves Road, N.E.
Warren, Ohio 44484
(330) 372-2010.
- Ohio Department of Job and Family Services
Bureau of Civil Rights
30 E. Broad Street, 37th floor
Columbus, OH 43266-0423
- Any other public or private Ohio foster care or adoption agency
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Office of the Chief Counsel, Region V
233 North Michigan Avenue, Suite 700
Chicago, Illinois 60601

A complaint may be filed within two years from the date of the occurrence of the alleged discriminatory act; or two years from the date upon which the complainant learned or should have know of the discriminatory act, policy, or practice.

If a complaint is filed with Trumbull County Children Services' MEPA Monitor or with any other public or private Ohio foster care or adoption agency, the MEPA Monitor or other public or private agency must forward the complaint within 3 business days to the Bureau of Civil Rights of ODJFS for investigation. Trumbull County Children Services , if subject of a complaint, may not initiate, conduct, or run concurrent investigations surrounding the complaint or take any further action regarding the complainant or the subject of the complaint until the issuance of the final investigation report by ODJFS, unless approved by ODJFS. Further, if subject to a complaint alleging discriminatory act, policy or practice, Trumbull County Children Services shall cooperate fully with ODJFS during the coarse of the investigation and shall submit any information requested by ODJFS no later than fourteen days from the date of the request, unless otherwise agreed upon.

ODJFS must complete the investigation within 90 days of receipt of the complaint, unless unusual circumstances prevent it from completing the investigation within that timeframe. ODJFS will provide a copy of the investigation report to the complainant and to the agency that is the subject of the complaint.

Prohibition on Retaliation:

Trumbull County Children Services' employees and contractors/providers may not intimidate, threaten, coerce, discriminate against or otherwise retaliate against any individual who makes a complaint, testifies, assists or participates in any manner in an investigation related to alleged discrimination on the basis of race, color or national origin in the foster care or adoption process.

Dissemination Procedures:

By March 1, 2005, Trumbull County Children Services shall provide written notice of the Agency's "Procedures for Investigating Alleged Acts of Discrimination in the Foster Care or Adoption Process" to all foster caregivers certified, or in the process of certification, and to all individuals who have approved adoptive homestudies, or who are participating in the adoptive homestudy process, on February 1, 2005. Effective February 1, 2005, all individuals inquiring about or applying to be a foster caregiver or adoptive parent shall receive a written copy of the Agency's "Procedures for Investigating Alleged Acts of Discrimination in the Foster Care or Adoption Process"" within 7 days of their initial contact with the Agency.

Additional Information:

Individuals who desire more information about MEPA and Title VI as related to the adoption and foster care process may contact:

- Richard Tvaroch, Quality Assurance Supervisor/ MEPA Monitor
Trumbull County Children Services
2282 Reeves Road, N.E.
Warren, Ohio 44484
(330) 372-2010.