



Children & Family Services

Adoption Redesign Summary – Interim Juvenile Justice Committee | March 19, 2024

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Adoption Statute and Rule

North Dakota Century Code (NDCC) 14-15 Revised Uniform Adoption Act

<https://ndlegis.gov/cencode/t14c15.pdf#nameddest=14-15-02>

North Dakota Century Code (NDCC) 50-12, Licensed Child Placing Agency

<https://ndlegis.gov/cencode/t50c12.pdf#nameddest=50-12-01>

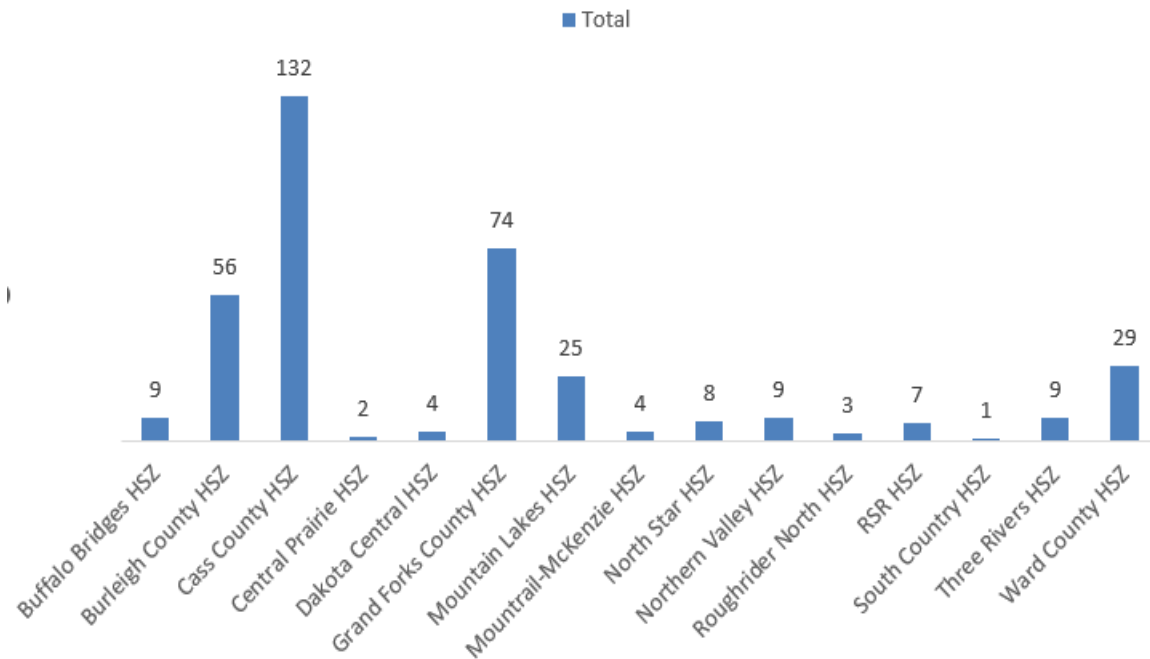
North Dakota Administrative Code (NDAC) 75-03-36

<https://ndlegis.gov/information/acdata/pdf/75-03-36.pdf>

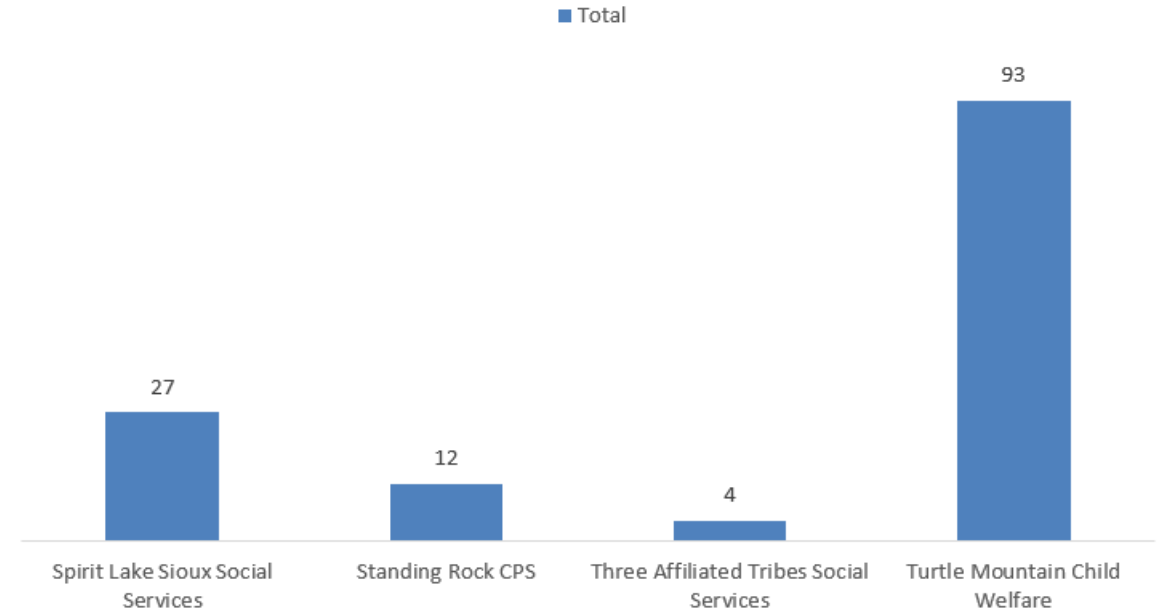
Policy for adoption services for children in foster care are developed and maintained by the contracted adoption provider in line with contract and state directive.

Children Waiting for Adoption in ND Foster Care by Zone and Tribal Nation

Total Number of Children with TPR by Human Service Zone

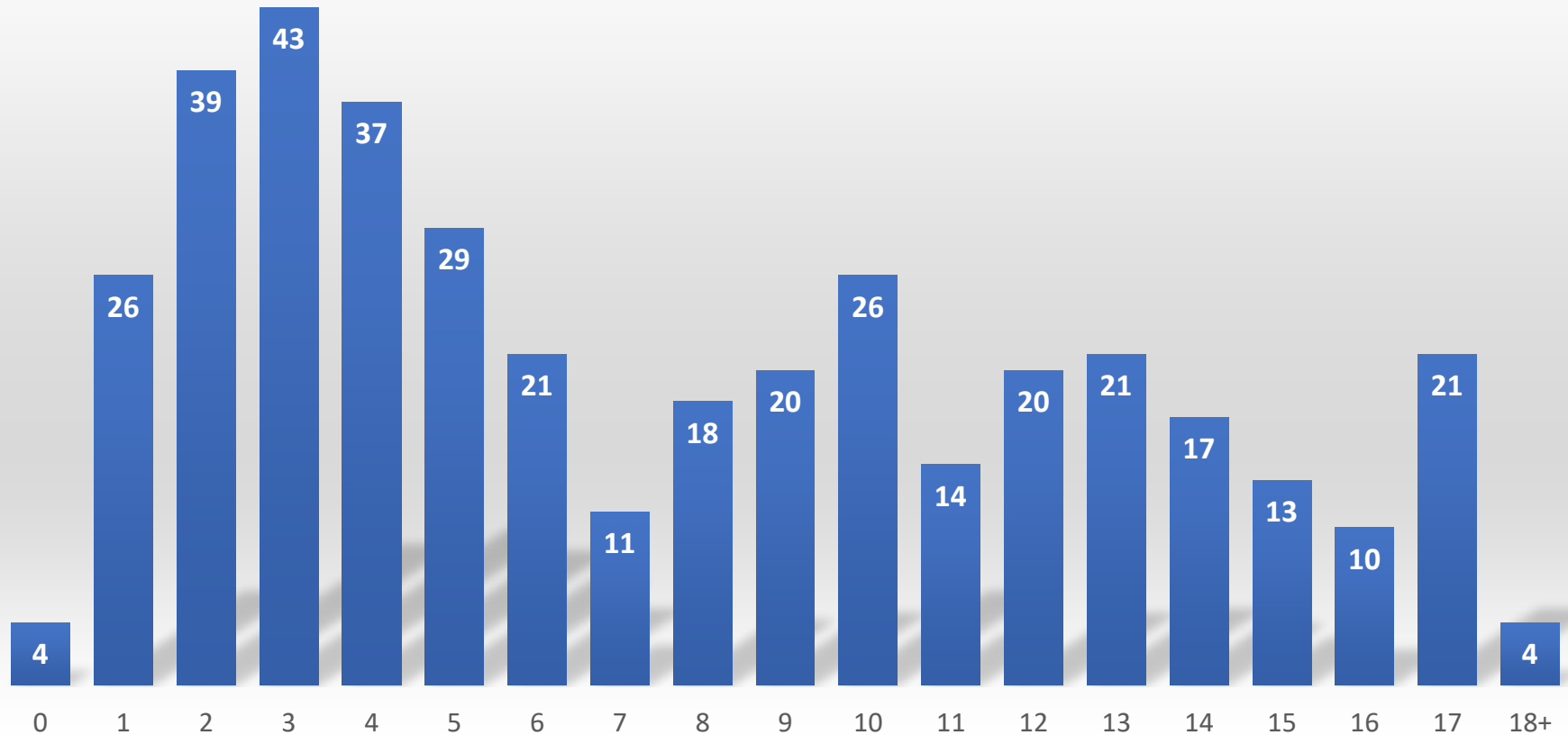


Total Number of Children with TPR by Tribal Nation



Parental rights have been terminated (TPR) for 394 children in ND foster care

Number of children with TPR by age



Historical Context for Adoption Redesign

North Dakota provides service to children in foster care who have a permanency plan of adoption.

- Catholic Charities ND (CCND) manages the adoption program contract. Program is referred to as Adults Adopting Special Kids (AASK).
- The AASK program serves North Dakota children in foster care under the custody of a public agency (Human Service Zone, Division of Juvenile Services (DJS) or Tribal Nation).

Since August 2022, Children and Family Services has been facilitating discussions with AASK and the Children and Family Services Licensing Unit to better streamline foster care and adoption home study efforts.



Legislative Session 2023

In January 2023 bills were presented to the ND legislative body highlighting a need to offer efficiencies for foster care providers who are later asked or identified to adopt a child from foster care.

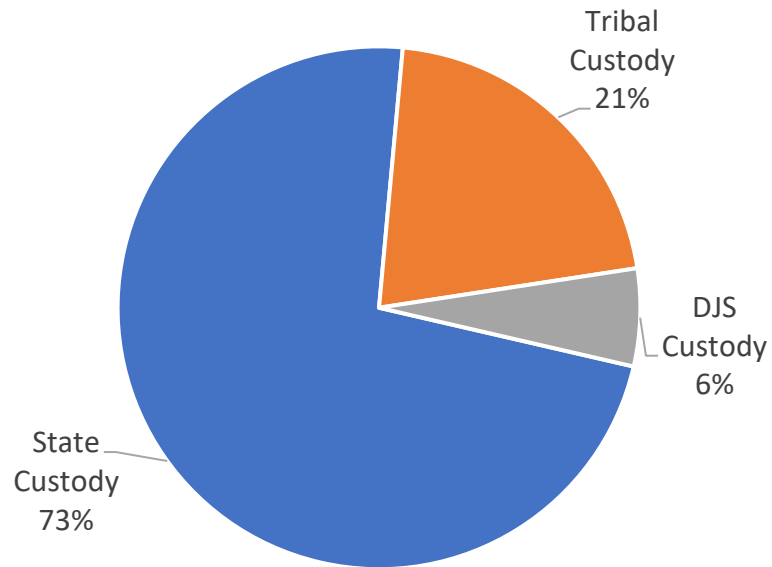
ND Legislature passed SB 2080 which provided:

- that the child placing agency (adoption program) would obtain and consider the foster care study of an applicant who is also a licensed, certified, or approved family foster home for children,
- that an adoptive home is presumed suitable to adopt if the prospective adoptive parent is continuously licensed, certified, or approved as a family foster home for children for more than one year without a correction order, fiscal sanction or license revocation,
- the human service zone or licensed child placement agency will give preference to a licensed foster care provider for adoptive placement, if a fit and willing relative cannot be located and the placement would not result in siblings being placed in separate homes,
- for a legislative management study,
- and it expressed the intent of the legislative assembly that the department undertake adoption redesign, with a report of its findings to legislative management.

In August 2023, HHS assembled a formal adoption redesign process with proposed changes to go live February 1, 2024.

SFY 2023 Adoption Data

AASK Finalized Adoptions
Total 232



- Statewide, the average time from termination of parental rights to finalization of the adoption was 14 months. The range within this average was from a low of 6.6 months to a high of 39 months.
- The average time from adoptive placement to finalization was 2.2 months.
- During this same time period, AASK worked with:
 - 315 families in varying stages of the adoption process, and
 - a total of 861 children in varying stages of the adoption process.
 - Post Adopt served over 533 families during this time,
 - hosted 46 family/ child events,
 - held 49 support groups and
 - hosted 9 parent education groups.

Redesign Process

The theory of constraints (**TOC**) model was used to identify barriers and inefficiencies in the adoption process for children in foster care. We determined to look at the process from the point the child's team identified adoption as a case plan goal through finalization of an adoption.

Our Primary Customer was identified as "Children in need of protection who have a permanency goal that includes adoption".

Our Goal: Timely and safe adoption finalization with a permanent family.

Cadence: the Redesign larger workgroup met regularly from August 2023, with various sub-committee meetings happening concurrently. Post implementation meetings will occur monthly until further notice.

Four **workstreams** were identified to address specific constraints and propose solutions. The slides following will detail their work.

- Termination of parental rights/ legal issues
- Relative search/ active efforts
- Referral paperwork process/ custodial team meeting
- Adoption home study/ foster care licensing

Our **system** ambitious **target** is for adoption finalization to occur within 60 days of termination of parental rights in 80% of cases. This will require effort of all involved in the foster care and adoption process throughout the child's time in foster care, with adherence to the newly implemented processes and protocols.

Implementation February 1, 2024 , with ongoing efforts and adjustments as indicated.

Workgroup changes effective February 1, 2024

TPR Workgroup:

1. Created a standardized template for TPR promoting consistency across the state and for ease of training.
2. Created a supervisor guide for discussion with case worker about readiness to move toward TPR and adoption.

Relative Search and Active Efforts Workgroup:

Policy Updates focusing on standardized frequency, messaging and methods of data storage.

1. Child Welfare Practice Model 607-05
2. In-Home Case Management 610-05
3. Permanency Planning 624-05
4. Child Protection Services 640-01

Resources:

1. Example of letter to send to relatives.
2. Example of script to use when contacting relatives by phone, text or social media.

Training, Communication and Workflow:

1. Redesign Team will develop a master Communication and Training Plan
2. Example of a KanBan board that can be used by Case Workers when a child is in custody.

Workgroup changes: Home Study / Assessment Workgroup

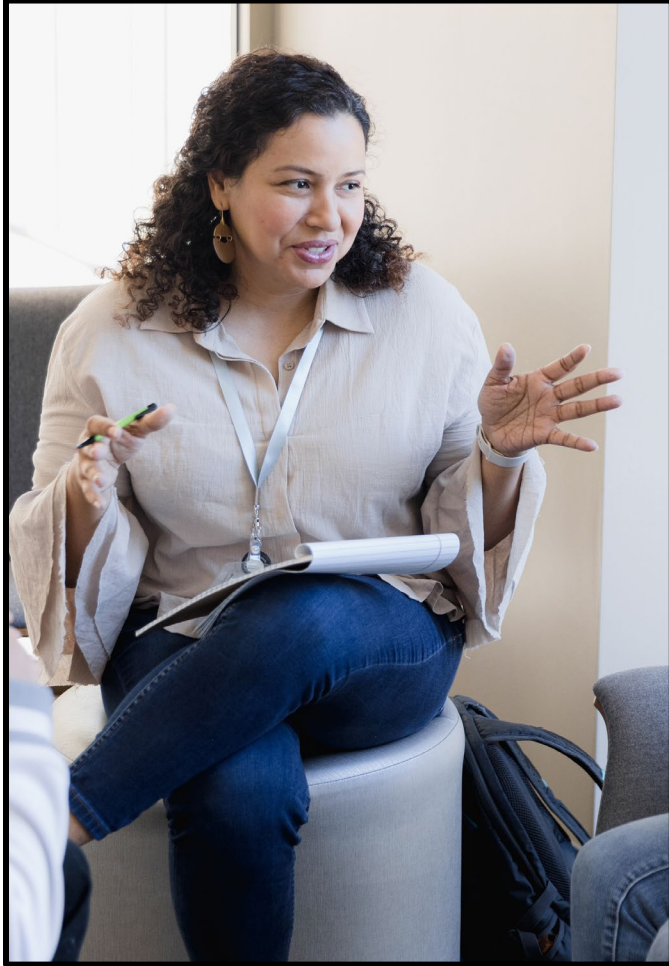
AASK and CFS Licensing Unit have created a process flow that will allow for the provider to go through the licensing standards first, leaving only supplemental information for AASK to collect and assess, and vice versa.

1. Adoption forms for parents have been reduced and collated into one form and an informational handbook.
2. Adoption background checks will be free to adoptive parents.
3. Reduction in number of home visits from 4 to 2 to accommodate the supplemental needs only.
4. Reference requirements have been reduced and now require 2 non-familial and all adult children.
5. Abbreviated training for relative providers.
6. AASK will receive copy of foster care licensing study and will complete their adoption assessment based on that information plus additional required adoption specific information.

Workgroup changes: Referral Process / Custodial Team Workgroup

1. AASK invited to CFTM when goal of adoption is added (3 months earlier than currently).
2. Once adoption is added as a goal, CM has 7 days to send the AASK referral.
3. AASK is given authorization to obtain needed records immediately upon referral through SharePoint (goal is to have this in effect by April 1 – requiring HSZ's to have these files migrated to SharePoint by that time)
4. After AASK referral, AASK Authorization form, and current court order (found on SharePoint) is received, AASK immediately begins requesting needed records.
5. Updated PCPA and supplemental forms.
6. Exploring other web-based forms.
7. One referral document for the HSZ or tribe when adoption added to goal
8. AASK Authorization form – one form provides AASK authorization to obtain needed records from all providers.

Positive Impacts



North Dakota case managers will experience:

- Streamlined process for referrals to AASK
- Less paperwork
- Paperless/Electronic access to child files
- Increased collaboration between custodians and AASK
- Earlier Involvement of AASK in CFTMs

North Dakota adoptive families will experience:

- Less paperwork – more streamlined approach
- FC licensing study will be made available to AASK
- Acceptance of abbreviated PRIDE
- No CBCU processing fee
- Less home visits
- Change in reference requirements

Questions?



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