

5-524.

The Administration shall provide child welfare services to a child and the child's parent or guardian:

(1) to assist in preventing the necessity of placing the child outside of the child's home;

(2) to reunite the child with the child's parent or guardian after the child has been placed in foster care; or

(3) if the child has been placed in foster care and cannot return to the child's parent or guardian, to develop and implement an alternative permanent plan for the child.

5-525.

(a) The Administration shall establish a program of foster care for minor children:

(1) who are placed in the custody of a local department, for a period of not more than 6 months, by a parent or legal guardian under a written agreement voluntarily entered into with the local department; or

(2) who are abused, abandoned, neglected, or dependent, if a juvenile court:

(i) has determined that continued residence in the child's home is contrary to the child's welfare; and

(ii) has committed the child to the custody or guardianship of a local department.

(b) (1) The local department shall provide 24-hour a day care and supportive services for a child who is committed to its custody or guardianship in a licensed or approved foster family home, group home, or child care institution on a short-term basis, while the local department develops and implements a permanency plan that is in the best interests of the child.

(2) (i) A child may not be committed to the custody or guardianship of a local department and placed in foster care solely because the child's parent or guardian lacks shelter.

(ii) The [Administration] LOCAL DEPARTMENT shall make appropriate referrals to emergency shelter services and other services for the homeless family with a child which lacks shelter.

(c) In developing a permanency plan that is in the best interests of a child under foster care, the local department shall consider the following, in descending order of priority: