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Washington and Oregon sign agreement to ensure faster safe placements for children in border counties

The Washington State Department of Social and Health Services and Oregon Department of Human Services have entered into a new agreement to expedite the placement of children in state care in identified counties along the Washington/Oregon border, which will improve placement stability with caregivers the child knows. Washington State Department of Social and Health Services Secretary Susan N. Dreyfus and Oregon State Department of Human Services Director Dr. Bruce Goldberg signed this historic agreement in Portland, Oregon.

"We are excited to be part of this innovative agreement, the first of its kind in the Pacific Northwest, and one of only a few similar agreements nationwide," said Washington DSHS Secretary Dreyfus. "This agreement will allow for the three counties in Oregon and two counties in Washington that encompass the highest population border area to safely serve more children more quickly."

This Border Agreement allows for safe placement of children in homes with relatives or others with whom the children have healthy, positive relationships in as few as seven days. Otherwise, rules governing Interstate Placement can hold up a child's placement for up to 90 days. Placing

children quickly with caregivers who are known to them helps reduce the trauma and uncertainty of out-of-home placement.

"The goal is to quickly and safely keep children together with their families if they can't be safely with their parents," said Erinn Kelley-Siel, Director of Oregon DHS Children, Adults and Families, during a press conference Monday at the Oregon State Office Building. "Relatives are always at the top the list when searching for a temporary home for a child."

The Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children allows child welfare agencies in one state to consider safe and appropriate placements in other states, and to request that qualified social workers in the placement state provide courtesy supervision of the placement.

The Border Agreement specifically provides the opportunity for children residing in Clark and Cowlitz Counties in Washington and Clackamas, Multnomah and Washington Counties in Oregon to be provisionally placed into identified homes while social workers proceed with all necessary interstate compact requirements. Prospective caregivers must still undergo background checks prior to child placement.

Along the Washington/Oregon Border, particularly around the Portland/Vancouver metropolitan areas, families often live in one state while engaging in daily life activities in the other. Children often have family members and friends on both sides of the border.

The two states are piloting the project for 75 children in each respective state, for a total of 150 children in the first year, and will assess whether placement stability for children under the Border Agreement improves due to expedited placement.



PHOTO: Washington DSHS Secretary Susan N. Dreyfus and Oregon DHS Director Dr. Bruce Goldberg shake hands following the signing of the Border Agreement.

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