

MN Relative/Kin Licensing Reform Survey
Completed by County and Community-Based Licensors
Theme Summary September 2024

Response to: What issues have come up in a person's background check that have prevented you from licensing a relative who, based on your professional opinion, is a suitable placement option for the child?

The major themes about issues in background checks preventing licensing a relative who is otherwise a suitable placement option reflect a mix of procedural challenges, outdated disqualifications, and frustrations with the balance between child safety and providing relative placements.

- **Barriers from Past Charges:** There were instances where old charges (e.g., over 10 years old or committed in youth) created barriers to licensing, despite changes in behavior or circumstances. Some respondents expressed frustration that past offenses were still barriers despite rehabilitation or change. Several respondents mentioned past criminal charges or disqualifications, such as sexual assault, drug-related felonies, DWIs, or assault charges. Some charges were decades old, and others involved offenses committed in youth.
- **Delays and Process Issues:** Some respondents pointed out delays in the process, such as waiting for reconsideration or background study results, which slowed down licensing and permanency for children.
- **Background Study Reform:** Several respondents noted that the background study reform in 2022 had alleviated some of these issues, particularly regarding older or minor offenses. However, challenges with reconsiderations or non-DQ assessments were still noted.
- **Emotional and Practical Impact:** Respondents shared the emotional toll and practical challenges, such as financial strain, caused by disqualifications or delays in background check processes.
- **Concerns with Safety:** Some respondents expressed concerns about placing children with relatives despite background checks due to safety risks like domestic violence or other abuse, citing that these situations sometimes lead to further trauma for the child.

Response to: "Other" endorsed response for which part of the licensing process leads to the most delays.

The major themes leading to delays in the licensing process include:

- **Relatives' Lack of Urgency or Motivation:** Many respondents noted that relative applicants often delay completing necessary paperwork, training, and home studies due to a perceived lack of urgency, motivation, or feeling that they should not have to meet the same requirements as non-relatives.
- **Overwhelm and Barriers:** Relatives caring for children can be overwhelmed with their responsibilities, which leads to delays in completing licensing requirements. Additional barriers include limited free time, difficulty with paperwork, lack of access to technology, and mistrust of the system.
- **Logistics:** Other logistical challenges such as transportation, the need for home improvements, and access to fingerprinting locations with limited hours.

Noted: The following were also individual choices to select outside of the "other" category.

- **Paperwork and Training:** The volume of paperwork and required training were frequently cited as major sources of delay, with some families struggling to manage the time and effort involved in completing these tasks.
- **Background Studies and Out-of-State Checks:** Delays due to background studies, especially when relatives have lived out of state. Out-of-state background checks and resolving disqualifications can be time-consuming.
- **Home Study and Scheduling:** Scheduling home study visits was another common delay factor, as families often find it difficult to coordinate with licensors due to their busy schedules.

Response to: Examples of requirements that seem unnecessary for relatives/kin when “yes” endorsed by respondents

The major themes regarding unnecessary requirements for relatives/kin during the licensing process highlight a need for flexibility and relevance in the requirements for relatives/kin placements:

- Irrelevant or Redundant Training: Many respondents felt that some training topics, such as Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD), car seat training, SUIDS/AHT, normalcy and prudent parenting, and mandated reporter training, are unnecessary for relatives, especially when the topics are not directly relevant to the child in care or when the relatives already have experience caring for the child.
- Customizing Training to the Child's Needs: Several suggested that training should be tailored to the specific needs of the child being placed with the relatives, rather than requiring broad, one-size-fits-all training. Relatives may not need extensive training unless it directly pertains to the child's situation.
- Accessibility and Practicality: Relatives often struggle with accessing lengthy or online-only training, particularly in rural areas with limited internet access. There were suggestions to make training more accessible, concise, and realistic given their limited time and resources.
- Home Study Process: The extensive and invasive nature of the home study process was viewed as unnecessary for relatives who already have a close relationship with the child. Respondents suggested a streamlined version for relative placements, with less focus on gathering extensive information.
- Yearly Training Requirements: Some respondents questioned the necessity of requiring relatives to complete annual trainings, especially when they often repeat the same content, such as FASD training.
- References: Obtaining references was seen by some as not particularly useful since applicants tend to choose people who will give them positive feedback. There was a call to either eliminate or revise this part of the process.

Response to: Challenges and barriers that prevent relatives/kin from getting licensed that you believe should otherwise be licensed.

The major themes regarding challenges and barriers highlight both structural and personal barriers that complicate the licensing process for relatives and kin, even when they are otherwise suitable caregivers.

- Financial Barriers: Many respondents mentioned the costs associated with licensing, such as home safety modifications (e.g., egress windows, fire extinguishers, well water tests), smoke detectors, and fees for background checks or fire marshal inspections. Relatives often lack the financial means to cover these expenses, especially when caring for additional children.
- Home Safety and Structural Requirements: Licensing can be delayed or prevented due to issues related to home safety, such as failing fire marshal inspections or needing costly home modifications like window replacements or installing fireproof sheetrock. These requirements can be particularly challenging for renters, who may not have control over making the necessary changes.
- Training and Technology Access: Relatives face barriers accessing and completing required training, particularly in rural areas or due to lack of technology (e.g., internet access, computers). Some trainings are not mobile-friendly, and navigating online systems can be overwhelming for those with limited technological literacy.
- Background Study Delays: Extended background study processing times, especially for out-of-state checks or individuals with past criminal records, were cited as significant delays.
- Paperwork Overload: The volume of paperwork required for licensing can be daunting, particularly for relatives who are already overwhelmed with caring for children. Language barriers further complicate this issue for non-English speakers.
- Relatives' Lack of Understanding or Motivation: Some relatives do not understand why they need to go through the full licensing process to care for their own family members, leading to resistance, delays, or a

lack of urgency in completing tasks. Mistrust of the system and feeling overwhelmed by licensing requirements are common challenges.

- **Childcare and Time Constraints:** Lack of access to childcare and the time required to meet licensing standards (e.g., attending multiple meetings, completing lengthy trainings). Many are already balancing work and caregiving responsibilities, making it difficult to complete licensing tasks.
- **Prior CPS Involvement or Criminal Records:** Past involvement with CPS or criminal records can be barriers, even when the individual is otherwise considered a suitable caregiver. In some cases, disqualifications persist despite rehabilitation or changes in behavior.
- **Mistrust and Overwhelm:** Relatives can be overwhelmed by the additional responsibility of caring for children, which can lead to delays in licensing. There is also a mistrust of the child welfare system, making the process feel more difficult and frustrating for families.

Response to: What services/supports for relatives have been helpful in mitigating some of these challenges?

The major themes regarding services and supports highlight the importance of financial assistance, practical help, technology access, and personalized guidance in mitigating the challenges:

- **Financial Assistance:** Providing funds to cover home safety checklist items (e.g., smoke detectors, fire extinguishers), home modifications (e.g., egress windows, fireproofing), and other necessary expenses like pet vaccinations, water tests, and car seat training has been a significant support for relatives. Grants, reimbursement, and upfront provisions of these items were frequently mentioned as essential in easing the financial burden.
- **Technology Access and Training Support:** Laptops, iPads, and DVDs for completing online trainings were helpful, especially for those with limited technological access. Agencies have also supported relatives by offering one-on-one training, virtual options, and assisting with setting up technology for online tasks, particularly in rural areas.
- **Hands-on Support:** Frequent visits, constant follow-up, and assistance with paperwork were critical in helping relatives navigate the process. Some agencies provided social worker or licenser assistance in completing forms and guiding relatives through the requirements, making the process more manageable and personalized.
- **Respite and Childcare:** Arranging and paying for childcare, as well as offering respite care options, helped relatives manage the demands of fostering and licensing. This support was particularly useful for those juggling work and caregiving responsibilities.
- **Flexible Scheduling and Personalized Support:** Agencies that accommodated families with flexible scheduling for visits, evening or early morning meetings, and individual guidance through the process saw success in helping relatives complete the licensing process. Personalized, in-person support was seen as essential, especially for those unfamiliar with the requirements.
- **Community and Nonprofit Resources:** Some agencies partnered with local nonprofits or community organizations to provide financial help, items for home safety, and resources for licensing requirements. These collaborations were especially helpful in rural areas with limited local resources.
- **Training Modifications and Variances:** Offering variances for certain trainings (e.g., car seat, non-required trainings) and reducing unnecessary training hours was noted as helpful. In some cases, agencies provided simplified or localized training options that were more accessible.
- **Kinship Grants and Resource Kits:** The use of kinship grants or resource kits (including first aid kits, fire extinguishers, safety tools) to cover licensing needs was beneficial in reducing financial and logistical barriers.
- **Collaboration and Communication:** Effective communication between licensors, social workers, and relatives was key in ensuring a smoother process. Agencies emphasized teamwork and building trust with relatives, offering regular reminders and support to complete tasks.

Response to: There is different access for county licensors than community-based licensors, including SSIS and MGA. How are these helpful resources in licensing relatives/kin? (if applicable to your experience).

The major themes regarding the different access to county licensors versus community-based licensors and the utility of systems like SSIS (Social Service Information System) and MGA (Minnesota Government Access) is about the access county licensors have with critical tools for background screening, case tracking, and early identification of potential barriers, while community-based licensing agencies face significant challenges due to limited access to these systems. Improved information sharing and broader access to these systems for all licensors could streamline the licensing process and ensure more equitable support for relative placements.

- Access Disparities Between Counties and Community-based licensing agencies
*Challenge: Community-based licensing agencies often lack access to SSIS and MGA, creating barriers in obtaining critical information, such as out-of-home placement plans (OHPP), criminal history, and child protection records.
- Importance of SSIS and MGA for Background Checks
*Challenge: Community-based licensing agencies without access to SSIS/MGA must rely on self-reported information, public lookup tools, or incomplete records from county agencies, which may delay the licensing process or lead to missed issues.
- Facilitating Early Screening and Transparency
*Benefit: County licensors use SSIS and MGA to prescreen relative placements and identify potential barriers (e.g., past criminal charges, child protection concerns) early in the process. This helps agencies engage in open conversations with families and address potential issues upfront, preventing delays or unforeseen problems later in the process.
- Communication and Collaboration Challenges
*Challenge: Community-based licensing agencies face barriers due to limited information sharing from counties. Lack of access to case notes, legal history, or background details from these systems makes it harder for private licensors to support families effectively.
- Efficiency in Decision-Making and Case Management
*Benefit: For county licensors, SSIS and MGA are helpful in ensuring that placements are appropriate by providing access to comprehensive case histories, which can inform decision-making during the licensing process. These systems also help track the status of child protection cases and monitor ongoing progress, allowing better coordination between different parties involved in a child's care.