

## Northstar Care for Children

### Northstar Care Commissioner Transitions Roll Out Plans, Additional Information & Local Agency Practice Considerations

Northstar Care  
for Children

SSIS Worker Mentors Meeting  
May 27, 2015

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1

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## Northstar Care for Children



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2

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## Presenters

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Northstar Care Lead

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Permanency Support Supervisor

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3

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**DHS Contacts**

**Policy Questions:** Charissa Jones at [charissa.jones@state.mn.us](mailto:charissa.jones@state.mn.us) or 651-431-4508  
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[northstar.care@state.mn.us](mailto:northstar.care@state.mn.us) or 651-431-4485

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SSIS Worker Mentor Meeting, May 27, 2015 4

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**Table of Contents**

1. Background
2. Roll-Out Plans
3. Organizing for Commissioner Transitions
4. Running RCA in the Meantime
5. Calculations of Increased Payments
6. Updated Numbers So Far
7. Contacts, Letters, Steps & Timelines
8. Common Problems to Avoid
9. Wrap-up

SSIS Worker Mentor Meeting, May 27, 2015 5

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---

**Table of Contents**

**NEXT** →

1. Background
2. Roll-Out Plans
3. Organizing for Commissioner Transitions
4. Running RCA in the Meantime
5. Calculations of Increased Payments
6. Updated Numbers So Far
7. Contacts, Letters, Steps & Timelines
8. Common Problems to Avoid
9. Wrap-up

SSIS Worker Mentor Meeting, May 27, 2015 6

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### Why Commissioner Transitions

Commissioner Transitions are:

- part of Northstar Care for Children;
- good for children and their families;
- helpful for budget targets; and
- central to getting to an all Northstar Care for Children world.



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7

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### Order of Transitions

- We will start with commissioner transitions from Relative Custody Assistance (RCA) to Northstar Kinship Assistance.
- A combination from all agencies:
  - Highest assessments
  - Oldest kids up to age 16
  - Youngest kids.



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8

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### Sibling Groups

- Children with the same relative custodian will be flagged.
- When possible, adjustments will be made so siblings can transition together.



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9

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### Benefit Amount After Transition

- A new level and monthly payment amount will be determined by DHS.
- A MAPCY is not needed to make this determination.
- Based on the **current RCA Worksheet** in SSIS for the child.
- For RCA to NKA, the total benefit amount will **increase by 30% or more.**



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10

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### Agency Role in RCA to NKA



- DHS always initiates each commissioner transition.
- DHS has to finish each commissioner transition.
- In between, the county involved has to do **five tasks...**

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11

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### 5 County Tasks in RCA to NKA

1. Verifications in SSIS.
2. Send county notification to relative custodian(s).
3. Receive and file the DHS notices to the relative custodians.
4. As of the transition date, stop RCA, stop MFIP, but continue MA.
5. Answer questions and complete the new Benefit Agreement and the W-9 form with the relative custodian(s). Send to state.

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12

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**Table of Contents**

**NEXT** →

1. Background
2. Roll-Out Plans
3. Organizing for Commissioner Transitions
4. Running RCA in the Meantime
5. Calculations of Increased Payments
6. Updated Numbers So Far
7. Contacts, Letters, Steps & Timelines
8. Common Problems to Avoid
9. Wrap-up

SSIS Worker Mentor Meeting, May 27, 2015 13

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**Roll-Out Plans**

- DHS plans to **slowly** add counties that do Commissioner Transitions.
- We started with four, and have added one county each month so far.
- It could take a **very long time** to get to your county.



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**Rolling Out Slowly – Troubleshooting**



- There are a number of reasons for rolling out slowly.
- Most importantly, we are troubleshooting problems as we go.
- We want to have the processes working pretty well before we engage all counties.

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### Rolling Out Slowly – SSIS

- Another reason is SSIS.
- Commissioner Transitions involves lots data going back-and-forth between the county and DHS databases.
- SSIS does not yet always function properly, and we want to debug it.



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16

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### Rolling Out Slowly – County Process



- So far, we've found it most effective to start a few counties at a time.
- That way Charissa can talk each county through the steps and follow-up with problems as they come up.
- We will keep doing that until the process works better and we can explain it better.

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17

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### Rolling Out Slowly – DHS Process

- We are also working out the internal process within DHS.
- DHS takes lots of steps for each new wave, and we have to track progress for each wave.
- Right now it's all very customized.
- Charissa is designing a process that she will eventually hand over to other staff to do on a more mass production basis.



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18

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### Rolling Out Slowly – Tribes



- Only counties added kids to RCA.
- Therefore, tribes can't do commissioner transitions, even for their own kids.
- Leech Lake and White Earth have asked DHS to postpone commissioner transitions for their kids until at least 2016.
- This will permit DHS and the two tribes to study whether there are any unintended consequences before proceeding.

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19

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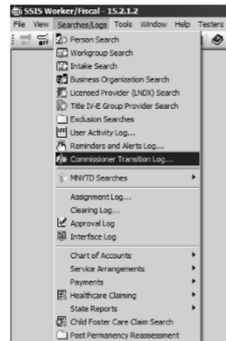
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### We'll Tell You When It's Time

- If we aren't working with your agency yet, then you don't need to monitor the Commissioner Transition Log in SSIS.
- You can find it under Searches/Logs.
- But it's empty.



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20

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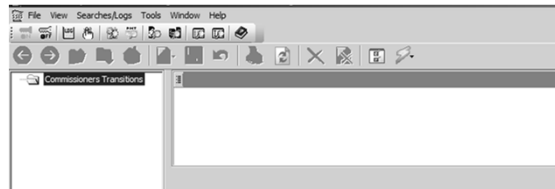
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### No Data



It's not very interesting with no kids in it.

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21

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### No Transition Log Until It's Time

- We will tell you the first time when it's time to look.
- We will also tell you each and every other time that it's now time to look.
- Every time.



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### We Will Reach Out to Your Agency



- DHS will deliberately reach out to your county when we are ready to initiate the first batch of your kids for commissioner transitions.
- We typically reach out to a director, supervisor, or both.
- If your agency wants to volunteer, let us know.

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### When We Get to You

- At that point, we'll ask your agency to designate a **Commissioner Transition Point Person**.
- Until then, we won't put **any** of your kids on the Commissioner Transition Log.
- Not even one!



SSIS Worker Mentor Meeting, May 27, 2015 24

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**Table of Contents**

1. Background
2. Roll-Out Plans
- NEXT** → 3. Organizing for Commissioner Transitions
4. Running RCA in the Meantime
5. Calculations of Increased Payments
6. Updated Numbers So Far
7. Contacts, Letters, Steps & Timelines
8. Common Problems to Avoid
9. Wrap-up

SSIS Worker Mentor Meeting, May 27, 2015 25

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**Organizing for Commissioner Transitions**

- If your county is already doing commissioner transitions, then you have already tried some experiments with organizing to do them well.
- If you haven't yet, you could start organizing now.
- Or you could wait until we contact you.
- **It's your choice.**



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**Four Organizing Points**

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**So far, we suggest four points:**

1. Select a capable Point Person to coordinate.
2. Decide who will be the contact(s) for the relative custodians when they have questions.
3. Establish tracking for the process and the documents.
4. Know who can turn off RCA, MFIP and SNAP Food Support.

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### Commissioner Transition Point Person

- The **Commissioner Transition Point Person** role can really help make commissioner transitions work well.
- This person is the primary contact with DHS.
- Also coordinates the county end of the process.
- Works to ensure that commissioner transitions go smoothly and promptly.



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28

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### Who Should be Point Person?

- The Commissioner Transition Point Person should be someone who works well with other people and can communicate, track, lead and coordinate the various activities.
- Counties have selected social service supervisors, fiscal supervisors, and experienced staff who have wide respect.



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29

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### Not a Security Role but a Coordinator



- The Commissioner Transition Point Person is **not** a separate security role in SSIS.
- There's only one SSIS security role, and you'll want the Point Person and several others to have it.
- The Commissioner Transition Point Person needs to be able to coordinate activities **across** the agency.
- The Point Person touches base with those involved on the county side and makes sure that things are moving forward.

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30

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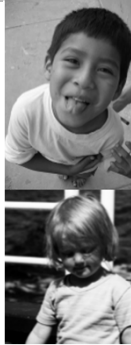
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### Coordinates with Everybody

#### Coordinates with:

- Applicable social workers and case aides
- Child's financial worker (MFIP & SNAP)
- Accounting/fiscal
- Those handling the annual RCA affidavits and updating RCA Worksheets
- Those overseeing RCA payments
- Possibly others
- Whoever is involved with how you have previously divided up the work for an RCA case and how you plan to approach commissioner transitions.



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31

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### Ensures Commissioner Transitions Flow

- Assuming that there's more than one person involved, the Point Person ensures that the process flows from one staff member to another, hand-offs take place, questions get handled, problems get solved, and so forth.
- The Point Person will be able to see the "big picture" of this process and how it's working within the agency.
- They will be a terrific source of feedback to you and to us.



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32

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### Point 2: Contact Person

#### 2. Decide who will be the contact(s) for the relative custodians when they have questions.

- The letters that go out will list a county contact.
- This is who the relative custodians contact for getting the new Benefit Agreement.
- It's also the person they'll ask their questions.
- You pick this person during each verification from a drop-down menu of people who have the Commissioner Transition **security role** in SSIS.
- It **could** be the Point Person, but might not be.

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33

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### Who Makes a Good Contact Person?

- The best contact people are good at customer service, can explain what's going on, and are good at getting back to people.
- So far, most counties have designated a social worker or case aide.
- But it could be a financial worker or someone from fiscal.
- It's the skill set that's important, not their unit.



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34

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### One Contact Person or More?

- You can have **one** staffer do all the contact work, or divide the work up among two or more.
- Even if you have only one, who is their back-up for when they aren't available?
- It's probably best if the contact person handles the Benefit Agreement and the W-9 form, but someone else who works closely with the contact person could do those tasks.



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35

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### Point 3: Tracking

#### 3. Establish tracking for the process and the documents.

- We'll go through the steps later on (or look at the Job Aid when you get it).
- You'll need to work out how to track the process and the documents involved.



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36

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### Point 4: Ending MFIP and SNAP

#### 4. Know who can turn off RCA, MFIP and SNAP Food Support.

- Effective with the transition date, RCA, MFIP and SNAP are ended (but MA continues).
- The Commissioner Transition Point Person needs to know who does this.
- It could be one or two different people.
- They should confirm with the Point Person before giving notification and terminating RCA, MFIP and SNAP.

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37

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### Formal Team?



- It may be useful to get all the staff involved together to set up the process.
- Once it's set up, it's not clear yet whether it's important to have a formal team around commissioner transitions.

- The Point Person may find that helpful, or it may be too much.

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38

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### Table of Contents

1. Background
2. Roll-Out Plans
3. Organizing for Commissioner Transitions
- 4. Running RCA in the Meantime**
5. Calculations of Increased Payments
6. Updated Numbers So Far
7. Contacts, Letters, Steps & Timelines
8. Common Problems to Avoid
9. Wrap-up



SSIS Worker Mentor Meeting, May 27, 2015

39

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### Running RCA in the Meantime

- There are 2000 kids on RCA.
- **Most** of them will remain on RCA for a long time.
- **Many** will turn 16 before we can do a commissioner transition with them.
- (Remember: no commissioner transitions once they turn 16.)
- What should you do to run RCA in the meantime?



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40

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### Affidavits and Worksheets



#### The key tasks are:

- Do annual affidavits.
- Update RCA Worksheets in SSIS as needed (at least annually and the **three significant birthdays** – when turning 6, 12, or 15).
- Keep track of the relative custodian’s mailing address.

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41

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### No Payments, Yet Still on RCA

- Sometimes the RCA Worksheet yields a **monthly RCA payment of zero**.
- Yet the child is still on RCA.
- Keep up with the annual affidavits.
- Next year, they might get a payment.
- And if there is a commissioner transition, they might get a payment.
- Northstar Kinship Assistance doesn’t use as many income offsets (next).

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42

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### Table of Contents

1. Background
2. Roll-Out Plans
3. Organizing for Commissioner Transitions
4. Running RCA in the Meantime
5. Calculations of Increased Payments
6. Updated Numbers So Far
7. Contacts, Letters, Steps & Timelines
8. Common Problems to Avoid
9. Wrap-up

SSIS Worker Mentor Meeting, May 27, 2015 43

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### Calculations of Increased Payments



- Through a commissioner transition, the monthly payment **always** increases.
- At a minimum it increases by 30%.
- It often increases more than 30%.

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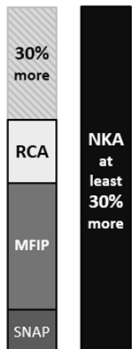
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### More Total Benefit



**RCA benefits typically include:**

- RCA payment itself
- MFIP benefit
- SNAP food support
- We aim the Northstar Kinship Assistance monthly payment to be **at least 30% higher** than the total of the previous benefit.

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### Child Income Offsets are Different

- RCA tracks **lots** of child income offsets.
- It reduces the benefits based on all of them.
- Northstar Kinship Assistance makes reductions for **far fewer** income sources.



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46

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### Fewer Child Income Offsets

**Northstar Kinship Assistance pays attention to only four child income offsets:**

- RSDI (Retirement Survivor's Disability Insurance)
- Veteran's Benefits
- Railroad Retirement Benefits
- Black Lung Benefits



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47

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### SSI is Special



- Supplemental Security Income (SSI) is also considered child income.
- However, the Social Security Administration typically treats **Northstar Care as an income offset for SSI**, not the other way around.

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48

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### Based on the RCA Worksheet

- DHS bases the new figure on the current **RCA Worksheet** in SSIS at the time we initiate that specific transition.
- That's another reason it's important to keep the RCA Worksheet up-to-date.
- Once DHS initiates a transition, changing the RCA Worksheet has **no effect** on the new benefit.
- After that, the relative custodians need to work through DHS on changes in child income offsets, reassessments, and so forth.



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### Two Rates in Northstar Care Permanency

You may recall that Northstar Kinship Assistance (and Northstar Adoption Assistance) have **two rates**:

- **Full Rate** (School Entry Rate) is the same as foster care.
- **Alternate Rate** (Pre-School Entry Rate) is half of foster care.
- Even the Alternate Rate is generally much higher than what the kids would have gotten under RCA or legacy Adoption Assistance.

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### Lean Toward the Alternate Rate



- Statute specifies that for commissioner transitions, DHS should use the Alternate Rate (half of foster care) unless that would be inappropriately low.
- So if the Alternate Rate can easily provide a 30% or more increase, then we use the Alternate Rate.
- If not, then we use the Full Rate.

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### Usually the Alternate Rate

- In practice, that means that **nearly all** RCA to Northstar Kinship Assistance commissioner transitions **use the Alternate Rate** (half of foster care).
- There is always a 30% or more increase.



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52

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### Reassessment Limitation



- A year or more after transition, the relative custodian may request a MAPCY reassessment.
- By guaranteeing an initial increase of 30% or more, the potential for an increase through a reassessment is reduced.
- That's particularly true when the Alternate Rate is involved.

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53

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### DHS Sends a Letter

- After the county has done the required verifications and sent the initial letter, DHS sends a longer letter to the relative custodian(s).
- That includes a Commissioner Transition Worksheet that shows the RCA benefits compared to the Northstar Kinship Assistance.
- We send a copy to the county.



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54

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### Counties Participating As of May

As of May 2015, these seven counties have had children identified to transition:

- Aitkin
- Carver
- Cass
- Dakota
- Hennepin
- Scott
- Washington



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64

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### Updated Numbers So Far

- **85** children had the status of **Transition Identified** by DHS
- **56** children have had the status **Transition Verified** by counties
- **48** children have or had the status **Transition Initiated** by DHS
- **27** children with the status **Transition Completed** by DHS



SSIS Worker Mentor Meeting, May 27, 2015

65

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### Table of Contents

1. Background
2. Roll-Out Plans
3. Organizing for Commissioner Transitions
4. Running RCA in the Meantime
5. Calculations of Increased Payments
6. Updated Numbers So Far
7. Contacts, Letters, Steps & Timelines
8. Common Problems to Avoid
9. Wrap-up



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66

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**How Do I Know to Move On**

- DHS will send an email to the **Commissioner Transition Point Person** and let them know that children have been identified.
- Our goal is to send the notice by the 15<sup>th</sup> of the month.
- That is when to check the Commissioner Transitions Log.
- If you see names on the log prior to the 15<sup>th</sup> of the month, you can proceed with completing verifications.

SSIS Worker Mentor Meeting, May 27, 2015 67

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**5 County Tasks in RCA to NKA**

1. Verifications in SSIS.
2. Send county notification to relative custodian(s).
3. Receive and file the DHS notices to the relative custodians.
4. As of the transition date, stop RCA, stop MFIP, but continue MA.
5. Answer questions and complete the new Benefit Agreement and the W-9 form with the relative custodian(s). Send to state.

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**Steps for Each Commissioner Transition**

**The following slides outline the steps to complete a Commissioner Transition.**

**NEXTSTEP**

SSIS Worker Mentor Meeting, May 27, 2015 69

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### Step 1 - DHS Notification to County

- DHS notifies the designated Commissioner Transition Point Person by email that children have been selected to transition.
- The notice provides additional information such as how to get started, a deadline to complete verifications.



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70

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### Step 2 - County Staff Monitors Commissioners Transitions Log

- Agency staffer monitors Commissioner Transition Log after receiving notification.
- On the log, children have a status of "Transition Identified" and "Estimated Transition Date."



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71

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### Step 3 - Select Commissioner Transitions Log and Completes Verification



- Agency completes verification in the Commissioner Transition Log.
- Verification must be completed **by the date provided in the email.**

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72

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### Step 4 - Select New Commissioner Transition and Complete All Items



- Select the child in the Treeview and expand their Person node.
- Select the Permanency folder.
- Access the Action menu and select **New Commissioner Transition**
- Complete all items in the Verification screen

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### Step 5 - DHS Receives Notification – Transition Date is Fixed

**After the commissioner transition verification is completed by the agency:**

- DHS is notified by SSIS
- DHS sends out its notice (Step 7)
- The **transition date is fixed.**



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### Step 6 - County Completes Letter to Custodian

- Agency staff completes the Commissioner Transition Letter from County – Notification to Relative Custodian. This informs the custodian about Commissioner Transitions and tells them they will receive a letter from DHS.
- This letter can be accessed from the Commissioner Transition Log; it is a person document.



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### Step 7 - DHS Sends Notice to Caregiver

- About 90 days prior to the transition date, DHS will send a notice to the relative custodian(s).
- This letter will contain information about the commissioner transition for the relative custodian.



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79

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### Step - 8 DHS Copies County on Notice Sent

- DHS will send a copy of the letter to the to the agency staff listed in the commissioner transition verification letter.



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80

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### Step 9 - County Ends RCA Payments

- The county should end Relative Custody Assistance (RCA), MFIP, and SNAP one day prior to the transition date (but continue MA).
- Ending RCA payments can be done only after staff complete the Commissioner Transition Verification.



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81

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### Step - 10 County Contact Custodian

- DHS recommends that the Agency contact the relative custodian(s) and offer to meet with them to provide information on Commissioner Transitions.
- When possible, meeting in person is recommended so questions get answered, documents get completed and mailed to DHS.



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82

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### Step 11 - County Provides 3 Documents

The agency provides the following documentation to the relative(s):

- Commissioner Transition – Benefit Agreement Cover Letter
- Commissioner Transition Benefit Agreement – RCA to NKA
- Substitute Form W-9



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83

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### County Completes Benefit Agreement

- From the Person Documents folder, select **Create New CT Benefit Agreement**.
- *Information from the verifications auto-fills into the new benefit agreement.*
- Complete fields on the **Set up** tab.
- Select and review the **RTF Document** tab and **Save**.
- Select Action menu and **Print**.

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84

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**Unusual Situations Noted When  
Completing Verifications**

There are times when information about a child is discovered while completing verifications. **Contact Charissa.**

For example: The child is not residing in the home of the relative custodian.

- If an unusual circumstance is identified **contact Charissa** prior to completing the verification.
- If you forget to contact before the verification is completed you should still **contact Charissa.**

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88

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**7 Letters**

- There are **seven** letters total that DHS may need to send to the relative custodian notifying them that the child has been selected to transition.
- The county worker receives a copy of each letter sent to the relative custodian along with a memo from DHS.
- **Letters continue to be mailed** until the signed Benefit Agreement is received at DHS.

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89

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**Relative Custodian Calls the County**

- The contact person named in the letter (the name entered during verification) may receive a call from the relative custodian to inquire about the letters.
- They may have questions such as what is a commissioner transition, why is this happening, what do I need to do, why am I still receiving letters.
- The contact person should be prepared to discuss the letters.

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90

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**Table of Contents**

1. Background
2. Roll-Out Plans
3. Organizing for Commissioner Transitions
4. Running RCA in the Meantime
5. Calculations of Increased Payments
6. Updated Numbers So Far
7. Contacts, Letters, Steps & Timelines
8. Common Problems to Avoid
9. Wrap-up

 **NEXT**

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**Common Problems**

- Technical Problems – You may encounter problems with SSIS. We call these bugs. They are different for every county. Improvements after you complete the first verifications.
- Address – Be sure to **verify the address** of the relative custodian.
- Security Role – Make sure people completing the work are assigned the security role.

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**Common Problems - Continued**

- Successors – Relative custodians can name successors in the benefit agreement. If they provide the name of a successor, be sure:
  - The name successors are all adults
  - To include the date of birth and/or social security number plus the address of the successor.
- Signature page of benefit agreement - Make sure the relative custodians sign and date the page. Do not sign the space that says Signature of Commissioner’s Designated Agent.

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### More Common Problems - Continued

- RCA worksheets – There have been times when staff have discontinued completing worksheets as the amount was \$0 the prior year. RCA worksheets should continue to be completed even when the amount is \$0.
- Relative custodians request to have child transitioned – DHS uses a formula to decide which children will transition next. Neither county staff, nor tribal staff, nor relative custodians make this decision. Volunteering or wanting not to transition makes no difference.

SSIS Worker Mentor Meeting, May 27, 2015

94

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### Table of Contents

1. Background
2. Roll-Out Plans
3. Organizing for Commissioner Transitions
4. Running RCA in the Meantime
5. Calculations of Increased Payments
6. Updated Numbers So Far
7. Contacts, Letters, Steps & Timelines
8. Common Problems to Avoid
9. Wrap-up



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95

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### Wrap-Up



- Unless your county is already doing commissioner transitions, rest easy.
- We will formally contact your county before starting them with your kids.
- Let us know if your agency wants to volunteer to start.
- If you run into problems, contact Charissa.

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96

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**Questions**

- If you aren't able to get your questions answered now, please send them in.



- Send questions to:  
**northstar.care@state.mn.us**

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**The End**



**Northstar Care  
for Children**

SSIS Worker Mentor Meeting, May 27, 2015

98

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