



## Understanding Eligibility for Federal Foster Care Benefits

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**The Federal Rule:** For a foster child to be eligible for **federal** foster care benefits, the child must be removed from a home that would have met the eligibility criteria for the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program as it existed in 1996.

**The income standards in 1996:** In 1996, income limit for a family of 3 to qualify for AFDC was \$723. By contrast, the income limit for the **same** family to qualify for cash assistance today is \$1,169. That means a child can be removed from a parent who is poor enough to receive CalWORKs (welfare) benefits and STILL not qualify for federal foster care benefits

#### Facts regarding federal eligibility:

Federal test has **nothing** to do with the needs of the child or the needs of the family where the child is placed.

Federal eligibility is a **one-time determination** done at the time that the child is removed from the parents' home. If the child is federally ineligible at the time of removal, the child remains ineligible for federal foster care benefits for the whole time the child is in foster care, regardless of where they are placed. Federal eligibility does **not depend on the type** of placement. A youth who is federally ineligible in a relative's home, is also federally ineligible in a group home.

- Eligibility for federal foster care benefits is not related to meeting federal home approval (ASFA) standards. A relative in California who meets the same federal home approval standards required for non-relative foster parents is still denied foster care benefits if the child is not federally eligible

**Example:** Molly is 15 years old and was removed from home due to abuse and neglect. At the time of the removal, Molly was living in the home of her mother, who was working part-time and earning \$1,200 a month.

**When Molly is placed into foster care, will she be eligible for federal foster care benefits?** No. Molly will not be eligible for federal foster care benefits because she was removed from a home that does not meet the 1996 eligibility criteria for AFDC benefits. This means Molly will not be eligible for federal foster care benefits regardless of where Molly is placed.

**What benefit will Molly receive if placed with her grandmother?** Because California does not pay state-funded foster care benefits for children placed with relatives, if Molly is placed with a relative, she will only be eligible to receive a CalWORKs benefit of \$351 per month (maximum).

**What benefit will Molly receive if placed in a non-relative foster home?** California pays state-funded foster care benefits to non-relative foster parents and group homes, for children who are not eligible for federal foster care benefits. If Molly is placed in a non-relative foster home, she will receive state- foster care benefits of at least \$820 a month, or more if she has special needs.