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Summary of Change:	This policy aligns Maryland's Semi-Independent Living Arrangement standards with federal and state guidance. It adds information specific to minors and kinship SILA settings.
Required Actions:	Completing a SILA application and agreement. Support youth in budgeting and independent life skills. Providing youth with appeal information if SILA is denied or terminated.
Key Words:	SILA subsidy, Kinship SILA, Minor youth SILA, Roommate, Cohabitation, Appeal Process
Related Federal Law	42 U.S.C., §677. John H. Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood
Related State Laws	Md. Code, General Provisions § 1-103
COMAR	COMAR Chapter 07.02.10 , COMAR 07.02.09.03
State Plan Implications?	No

Purpose And Summary

Semi-Independent Living Arrangements (SILA) offers youth ages 16 to 21 the opportunity to develop and practice independent living skills as they transition into adulthood. This policy updates the eligibility and application processes for a SILA placement; clarifies requirements for what constitutes a SILA and how questions related to roommates, cohabitation, youth under 18 in a SILA,, and terminating SILA's are to be managed. This policy ensures that youth receive equitable support and financial assistance consistent with the out-of-home (OOH) care maintenance payment structure.

Related Laws And Regulations

The John H. Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood codified at [42 U.S.C., §677](#) provides States with flexible funding for financial, housing, counseling, employment, education, and other appropriate support and services to former foster care recipients between 18 and 21.

[COMAR Chapter 07.02.10.](#) sets out the purpose of Youth Transitional Services, including eligibility criteria for youth to participate in a SILA transitional living opportunity, program requirements, assessment services, case planning requirements and benchmarks, service agreements and transition plans, independent living after-care services, funding, termination of services, and confidentiality.

Definitions

[Adult](#) - an individual at least 18 years old as it pertains to legal age and capacity.

[Child Juvenile and Adult Management System \(CJAMS\)](#) - the electronic system of record used for documenting all casework activities, placements, clinical assessments, and critical incidents.

[Critical Incident](#) – abuse or neglect of a child or youth or other serious incident involving a child that occurred in their home or in an out-of-home foster care placement. For the purposes of this policy, “critical incident” is a child fatality, serious physical injury, provider-involved maltreatment, or a potentially media-worthy event.

[Intimate Partner Violence \(IPV\)](#) - any abusive behavior in an intimate relationship used by one individual to gain or maintain power and control over another by physical, sexual, emotional, economic, or physical actions or threats.

[Kinship SILA](#) - a semi-independent living arrangement approved for youth aged 16 or older residing with a kinship caregiver.

[Local Department of Social Services](#) - a local department of social services

(LDSS) in a county, Baltimore City, or the Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services.

Minor - an individual under the age of 18 years.

Minor Youth SILA - a semi-independent living arrangement for youth under the age of 18.

Non-Compliance - occurs when the SILA youth does not meet the required expectations.

Out-of-Home Placement - a living arrangement for a child in care, including a resource home, kinship resource home, group care, or residential treatment care.

Representative Payee - an individual designated to manage the SILA subsidy or other benefits (e.g., SSI, SSA) on behalf of an emerging adult who is not yet capable of managing funds independently. The representative payee must be approved by the LDSS and documented in the CJAMS.

Semi-independent living - a subsidized living arrangement for youth 16 to 21 years old receiving youth transitional services.

Semi-Independent Living Arrangement - an apartment, boarder arrangement, or other living arrangement approved by the local department, except that a local department may not approve an arrangement for housing in a transient or emergency-type facility, such as a rescue mission, nonresidential hotel, motel, adult shelter, or tourist home.

SILA Subsidy - a monthly payment made to or on behalf of eligible youth to support essential living expenses (housing, food, transportation, etc).

Transitional Support Services - services provided to SILA participants to promote self-sufficiency, including but not limited to mentoring, workforce readiness, educational and mental health supports, and parenting classes.

Youth - means an individual aged 14 to 21 under the court's jurisdiction.

Procedures And Timeframes

1. Eligibility for SILA

A youth may be eligible to participate in a SILA if they meet the following requirements:

- 1.1. are between the ages of 16 and 21 years old, and are committed to a LDSS;
- 1.2. are continually enrolled in high school, GED, or a postsecondary program,
- 1.3. or engaged in workforce development or vocational training, or is working at least 80 hours per month;

- 1.4. agree to the requirements of the SILA service agreement;
- 1.5. need help in transitioning to self-sufficiency; and
- 1.6. are capable of contributing to the cost of the semi-independent living arrangement through:
 - 1.6.1. earned income from employment; or
 - 1.6.2. unearned income including scholarships, stipends, grants, work-study arrangements, Social Security Disability Income (SSDI) , Social Security Supplemental Income (SSI) or survivor's benefits, or any combination of such income.
 - 1.6.2.1. Youth are not required to have a savings account to be eligible for SILA, but the LDSS should support them in establishing a savings account whenever possible.
- 1.7. If a youth with a documented disability in living skills (including physical disability, mental health, pregnant youth, etc.) is unable to be enrolled in school or work full-time, they are still eligible for SILA with appropriate supports and accommodations in place to support their participation in the SILA program to the best of their ability. Supports and accommodations must be documented in the youth's transition plan and may include:
 - 1.7.1. supported employment;
 - 1.7.2. vocational training; and
 - 1.7.3. employment accommodations for mental health needs.

2. SILA Application Process

- 2.1. Youth must complete, sign, and submit an [Application for SILA](#) to their caseworker. The caseworker must support the youth in completing the application.
 - 2.1.1. A budget is required for the application. The budget plan should prioritize essential recurring costs associated with living independently.
 - 2.1.1.1. SILA candidates should be provided the opportunity to participate in a financial literacy class and develop a budget plan as part of their Youth Transition Plan (YTP).
 - 2.1.2. Youth should include in their budget items that the SILA stipend can be used to obtain: Housing (rent, utilities, and household supplies), Food, Transportation, Clothing, Recreation, Education, and workforce-related expenses, Other approved needs (childcare, cell phone, internet access, health and wellness supports, etc).
- 2.2. Within 5 business days of the submission of the SILA Application, the caseworker must request a Family Team Decision Meeting (FTDM) to discuss the proposed SILA. A SILA request triggers an FTDM due to either a change of placement or a youth transitional plan.
- 2.3. The caseworker and the youth must bring supporting documentation to the FTDM. The caseworker must inform the youth of the documentation they must bring to the FTDM meeting.
 - 2.3.1. The caseworker must provide any documentation that they have,

- such as SSI Documentation.
- 2.3.2. The youth must bring a copy of a lease or a sample lease from the housing company or landlord, as well as income verification (e.g., at least two consecutive pay stubs or education scholarship documentation).
- 2.4. The amount of the SILA stipend is determined by the youth, caseworker, and FTDM participants, and must account for the youth's expenses and contributions. The LDSS ensures that the stipend and the youth's income cover monthly expenses.
- 2.5. The LDSS must approve the youth's identified housing before approving the Application for SILA. Approval requires the caseworker to visit the proposed housing with the youth to walk through the residence to ensure it is safe and appropriate.
 - 2.5.1. The caseworker must complete the [SILA Fire Safety and Home-health Assessment](#) during the visit to the proposed apartment or home to identify any issues.
- 2.6. Once the SILA application and housing have been approved, the LDSS must review the [SILA Agreement](#) with the youth and obtain their signature. This must occur before the youth moves in and receives their first SILA payment.
 - 2.6.1. The SILA Agreement must specify the allotted amount for the youth's monthly stipend. Stipends can be revised if income or needs change.
- 2.7. The LDSS must ensure that the youth has appropriate luggage and the caseworker may assist with moving the youth and their belongings.
- 2.8. Within 5 business days of the youth taking occupancy, the caseworker must conduct an in-person home visit and complete a [Safe-C OHP](#).
 - 2.8.1. The day the youth takes occupancy is day one.
- 2.9. If the SILA application is denied, the youth must be informed of the reasons for the denial and of their right to appeal the decision. A copy of page 1 of the Service Agreement must be given to the youth. See Section 8, Appeal Process for further information.

3. Approved and Prohibited SILA Residences:

Approved SILA residences include apartments, shared housing, college dormitories, or other living arrangements approved by the LDSS as safe and appropriate.

- 3.1. All SILA residences must have a lease or housing agreement.
- 3.2. When a youth lives in a house or apartment for their SILA residence, the residence must pass the [SILA Fire Safety and Home Health Assessment](#).
- 3.3. When a youth lives in a college dormitory, no Fire Safety and Home Health Assessment is required since college dormitories are already inspected and approved by the State.
 - 3.3.1. The caseworker must, however, verify the approved campus housing and document this approval in CJAMS.
- 3.4. A SILA residence must not include temporary, unsafe, or transient

- housing such as;
- 3.4.1. a shelter designated to meet the needs of a youth who has run away or who is homeless;
 - 3.4.2. an office building or other nonresidential environment; and
 - 3.4.3. transient or emergency-type facilities such as a rescue mission, nonresidential hotel, motel, adult shelter, or tourist home are not to be approved

4. Roommates

A youth may live with a roommate/housemate and still receive a monthly SILA stipend as long as the SILA stipend will pay only the youth's portion of the housing cost. The roommate does not have to be another youth in out-of-home care. The caseworker must discuss housing arrangements with the youth to ensure the roommate has no concerning history that would put the youth at risk.

5. Cohabitation

Youth over the age of 18 may cohabitate with their significant other as long as the other party is able and willing to pay their share of the bills. The caseworker must discuss cohabitation arrangements with the youth to ensure the significant other has no concerning history that would put the youth at risk. The youth shall be in a stable relationship free of any history of intimate partner violence.

6. Minor Youth SILA ages 16-17

While Federal and State law allow youth aged 16 and older to participate in SILA, only adults are eligible to enter into legal contracts such as leases or rental agreements. For minors, there will be additional requirements regarding background clearances, safety measures, and support and supervision to ensure their successful transition to adulthood. Therefore, the only appropriate SILA housing types for youth age 16-17 are:

- 6.1. College or vocational housing.
- 6.2. Kinship SILA arrangements.
- 6.3. Other living arrangements approved by the local department.

7. Kinship SILA Arrangements

A youth aged 16 or older may reside in a kinship home under a SILA if the youth meets the SILA eligibility criteria and wishes to develop independent life skills, while remaining with kin.

- 7.1. The youth must complete the SILA application;
- 7.2. For a youth that is age 16-17, the kin caregiver must agree to meet the licensed kinship caregiver requirements and pass the Kinship Caregiver and Home Assessment as indicated in [SSA/CW 24-06 Kinship Care Licensing Standards](#);
 - 7.2.1. State and Federal background clearances are required for all adults in the home who are 18 years of age or older. No adult residing in the home may have a felony conviction for:

- 7.2.2. Child abuse or neglect; spousal abuse; a crime against a child or children, including child pornography;
- 7.2.3. a crime of violence as enumerated in Md. Ann. Code, Crim. Law Art. § 14-101, including rape, sexual assault, or homicide, but not including other physical assault or battery;
- 7.2.4. Human trafficking; or
- 7.2.5. A felony conviction within the prior 5 years, involving physical assault, battery, or a drug-related offense.
- 7.2.6. An annual licensing review is required of the kinship caregiver and must be completed prior to the expiration date of the current license.
- 7.3. For all youth, a signed SILA agreement is completed by the LDSS, the youth, and the kin caregiver, outlining rent contributions, household responsibilities, and supervision expectations.
- 7.4. The kin caregiver's home must meet the same safety standards as other SILA placements and the caseworker must document that the standards are met in the [SILA Fire Safety and Home Health Assessment](#).

8. Appeal Process

Youth have the right to appeal the LDSS decision to deny the SILA stipend. The youth is entitled to request an administrative hearing under [COMAR 07.01.04.03](#), and has up to 90 days to do so. The denial will not be final until the hearing process concludes. The LDSS may need to participate in the administrative hearing process.

9. SILA Service Agreement

The [SILA Service Agreement](#), which must be reviewed and signed by the youth, the caseworker, and the supervisor, prior to initiating the SILA subsidy. The SILA service agreement includes statements specifying the LDSS and youth's financial contributions and if the youth fails to comply with the terms of the service agreement that the LDSS will stop the subsidy.

10. SILA Stipends

SILA participants must receive a monthly SILA subsidy up to the amount of the monthly care stipend paid to resource parents for youth age 12 and older, as outlined in [SSA/CW #19-16 Guidelines for Foster Care Board Rate and Expenditures](#).

- 10.1. Payments are made directly to the youth, unless a representative payee is warranted due to their financial management capacity.
- 10.2. SILA subsidies may be adjusted for verified changes in income or living circumstances.
- 10.3. The LDSS must not suspend or reduce the stipend as a punishment or discipline of the youth.
- 10.4. [SILA Stipend Schedule](#)
The LDSS must determine the payment schedule and ensure payments are made on time in coordination with their local finance office.
- 10.4.1. The stipend must begin on or before the date the youth moves

- into the approved living arrangement, but cannot overlap with payments made if the youth resided in another paid placement.
- 10.4.2. A youth residing in a paid placement (e.g., licensed kinship home, resource home, group home, RTC, or IL program) must begin to receive a monthly SILA stipend on the day the youth begins to reside in the SILA.
 - 10.4.3. Before beginning payments, a SILA Application and a budget sheet must be completed and approved. The [SILA Payment Tipsheet](#) outlines the SILA payment process in CJAMS.
 - 10.4.4. Use the applicable budget codes for the monthly care stipend:
 - 10.4.4.1. **5117 – IV-E Eligible Youth ages 18-21 years**
 - 10.4.4.2. **5118 – Non IV-E Eligible Youth ages 16-21 years**
 - 10.5. SILA Stipend Expiration

During the final YTP meeting, the caseworker must document a conversation with the youth explaining when the SILA stipend will end, and the youth's financial plans thereafter.

11. Chafee and Flex Funds

A youth receiving a SILA stipend remains eligible for flex funds for individual goods and services related to the youth's transitional plan, such as education, employment, housing stability and well-being. The LDSS may use Chafee funds or flex funds to purchase necessary items and moving expenses for the youth. Chafee and flex fund expenditures must be documented in CJAMS.

12. Monitoring and Supervision

SILA's are an OOH placement, and youth approved for a SILA are in the care of the LDSS. Therefore, the LDSS must provide all services for which each youth is eligible. Caseworkers are tasked with ensuring the youth's safety and well-being by adhering to sound casework practices. Key responsibilities include:

- 12.1. meeting with the youth on a monthly basis to assess the youth's over-all functioning and needs;
- 12.2. discussing service and transition plan goals with the youth and keeping such plans current;
- 12.3. attending all scheduled court hearings and ensuring the youth is aware of and plans to attend hearings as well;
- 12.4. tracking the youth's medical and dental needs and ensuring that required physical health care is occurring; and
- 12.5. encouraging the youth to maintain eligibility for the SILA stipend by:
 - 12.5.1. meeting with the assigned caseworker as scheduled;
 - 12.5.2. continued compliance with the SILA Service Agreement;
 - 12.5.3. using SILA funds as agreed upon and following a budget;
 - 12.5.4. engaging in work, education, or training activities as agreed upon; and
 - 12.5.5. Allowing the caseworker access to the approved residence for required visits.

- 12.6. The caseworker should schedule the required monthly face-to-face visits around the time the youth is due to receive their SILA stipend to monitor whether the youth is paying rent and other necessary bills. Youth should be encouraged to track their income and expenditures throughout the month to review with their caseworker.
 - 12.6.1. If the caseworker discovers at any point that the youth is not paying rent and utilities, the caseworker must meet with the youth to discuss budgeting and money management difficulties and assist the youth in forming a plan to ensure their bills are paid.
- 12.7. If a caseworker observes signs of intimate personal violence (IPV) or a SILA youth communicates to any LDSS staff that IPV is occurring in the home or they are a participant in a relationship that involves IPV, the LDSS must follow the guidance in [SSA #24-03 Intimate Partner Violence - Lethality Assessment](#).
- 12.8. For youth under 18 placed in a kinship SILA, the kin caregiver acts as a placement resource and must comply with provider safety and reporting standards. If a critical incident occurs in the residence, the LDSS must follow the procedures and timeframes as outlined in [SSA-CW #25-06 Critical Incident Notification Policy](#)

13. Addressing Non-Compliance

A youth's non-compliance with the SILA agreement does not automatically terminate the SILA. The LDSS should work with the youth in an attempt to resolve the issues through supportive interventions, including but not limited to:

- 13.1. facilitating an FTDM to identify areas of non-compliance, barriers to compliance from all participants' perspectives, and support services needed, including how the LDSS will assist the youth in resolving challenges to compliance;
 - 13.1.1. invite the youth's support team to the FTDM, which should include the youth's attorney, ILC and any permanent supports.
- 13.2. making necessary referrals to help the youth meet the agreement's expectation;
- 13.3. developing a corrective action plan with the youth's input and their agreement, that includes a clear timeline for achieving compliance (recommend 30-day periods); and
- 13.4. Providing the youth with a written document detailing the conditions of the corrective action plan.

14. Terminating a SILA

If a youth fails to make progress in meeting the goals of the corrective action plan within the timeline in the corrective action plan, the LDSS may, but is not required to, terminate the SILA stipend. If the LDSS decides to terminate the SILA stipend, the LDSS must provide a written 30 day notice to the youth and their attorney of the stipend's end date and the intent to move the youth to an alternative out-of-home placement.

- 14.1. If the youth is in a Kinship SILA and the kin placement remains available, the kin provider can begin receiving the monthly care stipend.
 - 14.1.1. If the youth is 18 or older and refuses to move to another approved out-of-home placement, the caseworker should discuss possible consequences of this decision with the youth including:
 - 14.1.1.1. the youth's responsibility for assuming all costs of rent and utilities independently since all SILA financial support will end;
 - 14.1.1.2. the potential for eviction and homelessness, should the youth not be able to keep up with rent and utility bills and the long-term impact of eviction on their ability to secure housing in the future, obtain credit, buy a car, and secure employment; and
 - 14.1.1.3. the LDSS' option to request the Court allow the LDSS to close the youth's foster care case due to non-compliance, resulting in no services being available to the youth.
 - 14.1.2. If the youth becomes compliant with the SILA eligibility requirements and wants to reapply, they can do so by resubmitting a SILA application.

DOCUMENTATION

The caseworker must document all contacts, home visits, SAFE-C OHPs in CJAMS, and documents must be uploaded in the Documents tab as described in Table A below.

TABLE A: Documentation Requirements

Documentation Needed	Timeframe for Entering Documentation	Where to Document
The youth's readiness for SILA	Within 5 business days of face-to-face contact	Contact note
SILA Application	Within 30 days	Documents tab under the Person
Monthly Budget	Ongoing - As budget changes	Documents tab under the Person
Proof of income/employment/education	Within 30 days of FTDM Meeting	Documents tab under the Person
SILA service agreement	Within 30 days of the signed agreement	Documents tab under the Person
Copy of the lease	Within 30 days	Documents tab

agreement		under the Person
Home health and safety report	Within 30 days	Documents tab under the Person
Living Arrangement - changes to "SILA - own home/apartment" while in SILA	Within 1 business day of change.	Placement: Living Arrangement
Appeal Information (including written documentation received from the Administrative Hearing Judge)	Within 30 days	Documents tab under the Person
Notification letter of termination of a SILA	Within 30 days	Documents tab under the Person

FORMS AND ATTACHMENTS

[SILA Application](#)

[SILA Service Agreement](#)

[SILA Fire Safety and Home-health Assessment](#)

[Budget Templates](#)

[SILA Guide - Is SILA Right For Me?](#)

[Free Financial Education Classes](#)

[Roommate Vetting](#)

[CJAMS How to Guide - SILA](#)

[CJAMS How to Guide - Home Health Report](#)

[CJAMS How to Guide - SAFE-C OHP](#)

[CJAMS How to Guide - SILA Payment Tipsheet](#)

Related Policies

[SSA #24-03 Intimate Partner Violence - Lethality Assessment](#)

[SSA/CW 24-06 Kinship Care Licensing Standards](#)

[SSA-CW #25-06 Critical Incident Notification Policy](#)