



# Background Checks for Kin Caregivers

March 6, 2023 - April 17, 2023

Resource Family Working Group  
May 18, 2023

## Goals

Understand the optimal process of conducting background checks on kin caregivers:

1. Identify best practices to improve the background check process.
2. Understand how to make the process less intimidating for kin caregivers.
3. Identify when kin caregivers become eligible for payment and how to expedite payments.

# Our team



**Hannah Herrington**

Product & Delivery  
Manager



**Shelly Ronen**

UX Researcher



**Sonya Silva**

UX Researcher



**Sarah Sullivan**

Subject Matter Expert



**Emily Wright-Moore**

Engagement Lead

---

# What we did

## Methods

**Interviews, desk research, ethnography:** to understand the background checks landscape.

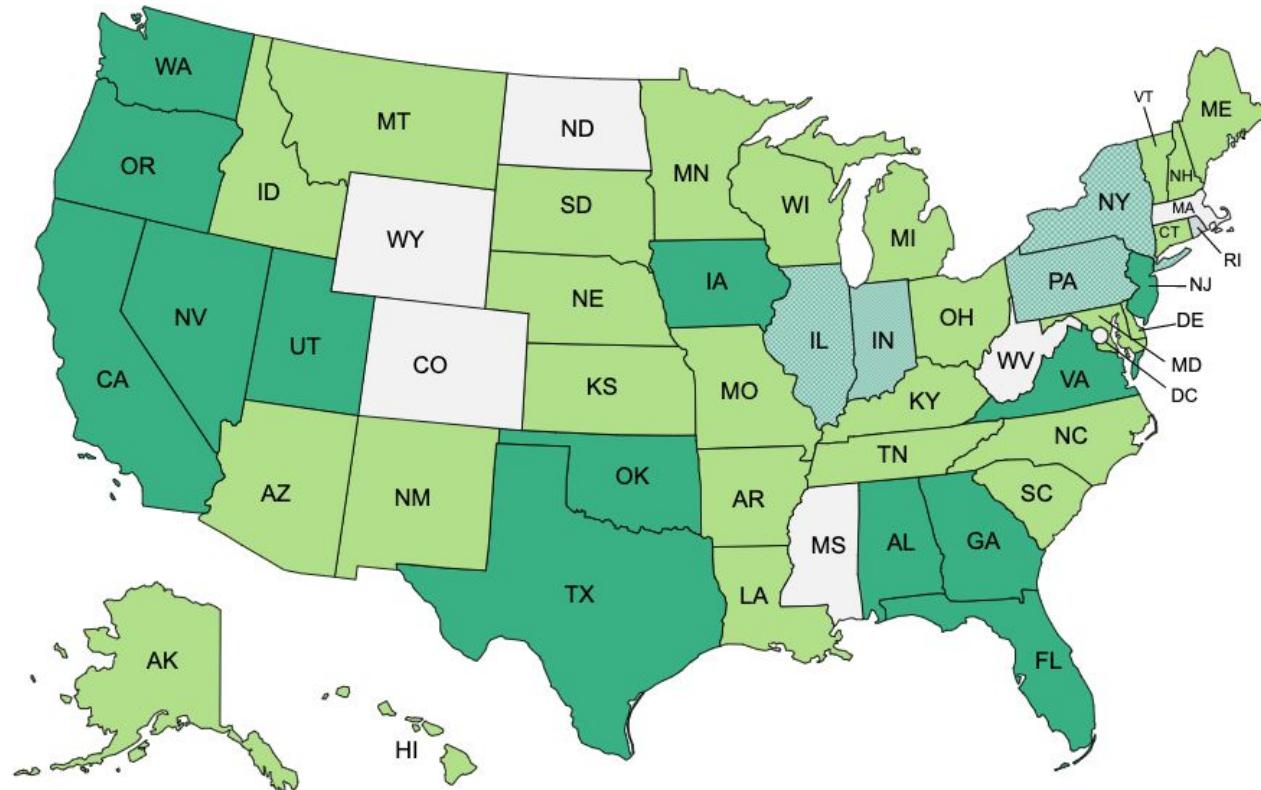
**45 deep dive conversations:** to capture state's and Tribal child welfare agencies' background check processes.

**97 kin survey responses:** to capture the experiences and suggestions of kin who have gone through background check processes around the country, and those who were deterred.

**9 kin interviews:** to deeply understand the pain points experienced by kin caregivers, and the consequences for their caregiving.

## States represented

-  Deep dives
  -  Kin feedback
  -  Deep dives and kin feedback
  -  No data



## Deliverables

1. **Federal register comment:** Analyzed data to support the case for kin-specific licensing or approval standards.
2. **Process maps:** Visualizations of the current background check process and an ideal process. Displays pain points and integrates promising practices.
3. **Kin caregiver profiles:** Documented anonymized profiles to highlight individual challenges with getting a background check.

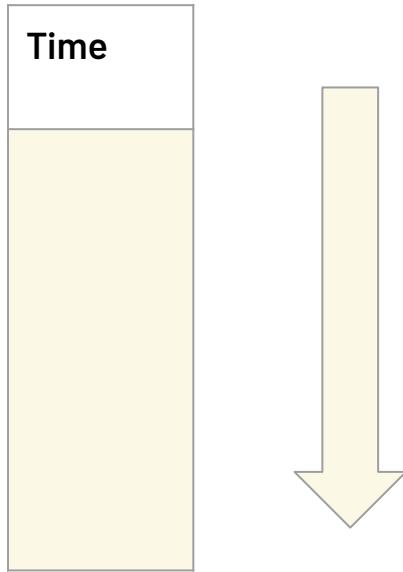
---

# Process maps

The current process map visualizes steps to getting background checks, highlighting pain points and opportunities for improvement.

---

# Current process map



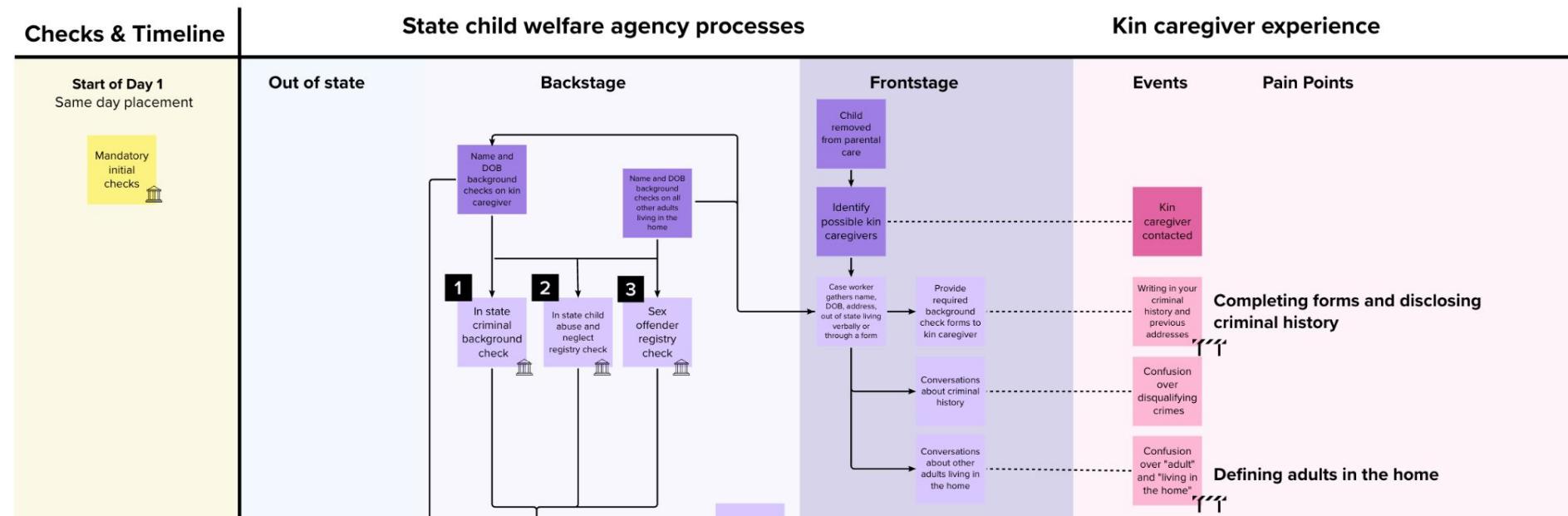
# Current process map

Time	Agency processes	
	Backstage	Frontstage

## Current process map

Time	Agency processes		Caregiver experience
	Backstage	Frontstage	

# Current process map



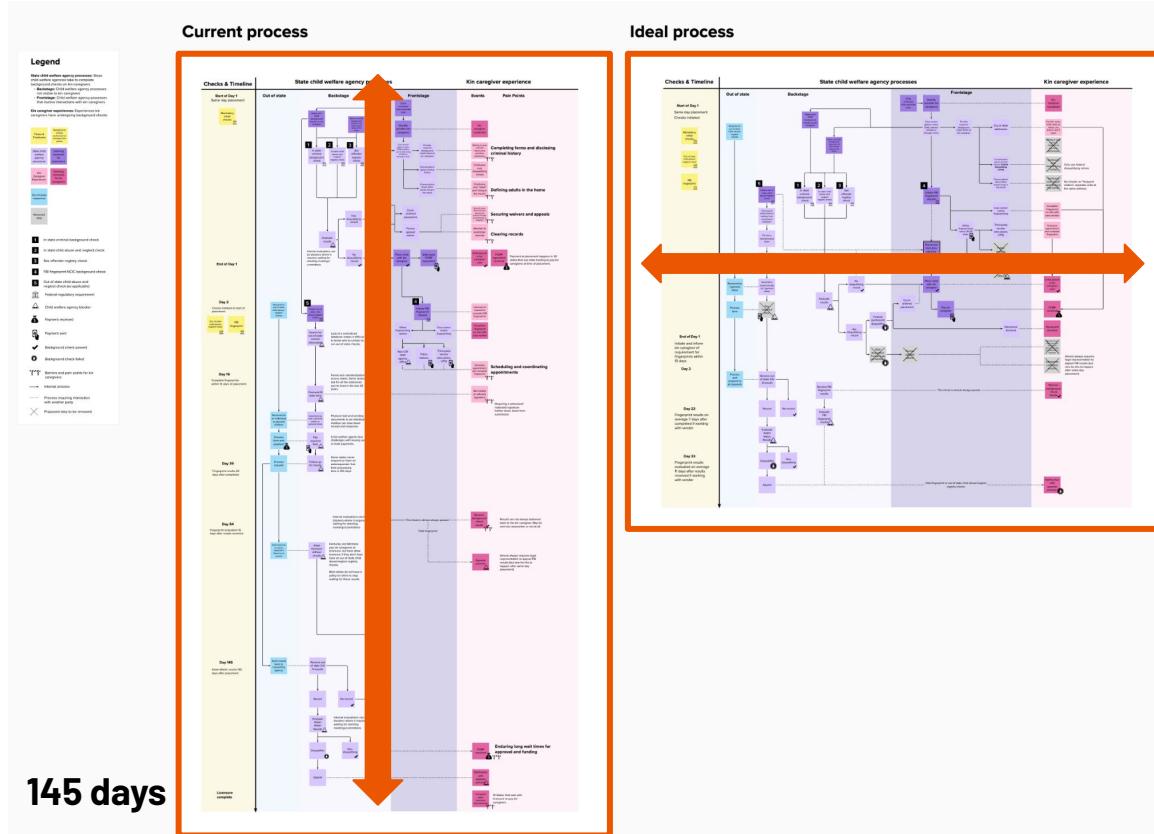
## Problems with current process

- Mandatory steps are initiated at different points in the placement
- ~145 days to complete all checks
- Title VI-E funding often delayed based on waiting for checks
- Slow downs caused by checking for state disqualifiers

## Ideal background check process

- All mandatory checks initiated on day 1 of a placement
- Payment available on day 1 once all checks are initiated
- FBI fingerprinting within 15 days of placement through mobile devices in child welfare offices, or dense third party vendors
- Limit disqualifying crimes to the federal list

# Current vs. Ideal Processes



---

# Pain points

## Pain points

1. Completing forms and disclosing criminal history
2. Defining adults in the home
3. Securing waiver and appeals
4. Clearing records
5. Scheduling and coordinating appointments
6. Enduring long wait times for approval and funding

# 1. Completing forms and disclosing criminal history



So like let's say you got pulled over for reckless driving in 2021. But then you got found guilty in like 2022. So it goes on your record as 2022. **But if you write down 2021, the background check unit actually adds that information to your criminal history.** So now it looks like you have two instead of just one because they trust that you know what's going on with your history. And they want to capture all of your history."

---

Kin caregiver from Washington

## 1. Completing forms and disclosing criminal history

- Few people have an accurate record of their own criminal history
- Writing down criminal history on a form is confusing, intimidating, and can lead to duplicate information held by the child welfare agency
- It's unclear to kin caregivers what crimes are disqualifying

## 2. Defining adults in the home



There have been situations where we have had a relative who lived in a Tribal apartment building, where **they [the state child welfare agency] wouldn't place with that relative because everybody in the apartment building would have to pass a background check.** I know for a fact, they're not going to do that in town [off-reservation]. They don't require everybody [living in an apartment building] to go in and take a background check."

---

Child welfare agent for a Tribal Nation

## 2. Defining adults in the home

- It is unclear who is considered a household member in the case of frequent visitors or where there are multiple units at the same address
- There is confusion over what age a household member needs a background check
- This can cause strain in kin relationships and supports

### 3. Securing waivers and appeals



I have my own background, I have a founded finding. So most people who have a founded finding, have to get that remedied before a child can be placed with them. So my grandchild was placed with me, and what happens is that you have to do an administrative waiver, right? And that's the whole deal, right? **You've got to do background checks. You've got to give statements for everything that you've done. You've got to get people to sign off for you. You've got to do this 40 page deal.**"

---

Kin caregiver from Washington

### 3. Securing waivers and appeals

- Needing a waiver or to appeal background check results prolongs the time to placement or payment for kin caregivers
- Delayed placement comes with the risk of harm by keeping or removing child from care with a kin caregiver

## 4. Clearing records



I have an issue in my background, from CPS from when I was a kid. They weren't going to be able to get the process of the paperwork to clear that out before the date and it needed to be decided where the kids were going to be. And so that's when we decided well we'll just circumvent that and go for legal guardianship because they don't have that same process. **And so the difference is that it doesn't automatically kick any of those services into gear like it would if it was in foster care.**"

---

Kin caregiver from Utah

## 4. Clearing records

- Having a record limits the legal options and financial supports available to maintain placement with their kin
- Clearing non-criminal CPS records has many administrative hurdles

# 5. Scheduling and coordinating appointments



Over time, different departments within the County HHSA requested fingerprints and **wouldn't accept my fingerprint results from their own internal departments**, even though sometimes they had been done within a prior month's time."

---

Kin caregiver from California

## 5. Scheduling and coordinating appointments

- Kin caregivers get confused by repeating checks and a lack of integration and communication between departments
- Distance and availability of staff at fingerprinting sites can make it difficult to access appointments while juggling childcare and work

## 6. Enduring long wait times for approval and funding



I'm not saying to cut corners, but the fact that **they could have started the background check process and the certification process so much earlier** is something that I will feel angry about forever."

---

Kin caregiver from Pennsylvania

## 6. Enduring long wait times for approval and funding

- Lengthy time waiting for results creates anxiety for kin caregivers
- Waiting times for results delays essential funding and payments for the unplanned expense of caregiving

---

# Promising practices

## Promising practices

1. Less punitive mentality
2. Flexibility on scheduling and payments
3. Accepting affidavits
4. Sharing results with applicants

# Less punitive mentality



But if you know why the person is here because it's a family member, we should really just be looking for basics, your basic safety stuff and like what's happening right now in your life. **I think we could throw anything I would say over five years. Ignore it. What is happening now?"**

---

Interviewee, kin caregiver and social worker, Washington

## Less punitive mentality

- Kin caregivers agree we need safety checks for children and youth
- But they felt it was unfair and intimidating to review history from many years ago
- Kin need clear explanations of what is disqualifying
- Agencies should recognize that people have the ability to change

# Flexibility on scheduling and payments



There were some forms, and then we needed to do the fingerprinting which we eventually found we could get done at the **local UPS, but only during certain hours because apparently only certain staff knew how to use it.** We had to pay something for that, I don't remember if they did or didn't reimburse us, I forget."

---

Interviewee, kin caregiver, Pennsylvania

## Flexible scheduling and payments

- Scheduling should be flexible and locations plentiful
- Mobile devices operated by child welfare staff could make processing simultaneous with initial application
- Third party vendors and mobile fingerprinting solutions offered more flexible options for kinship caregivers
- Upfront payments to third-parties can be a barrier

# Accepting affidavits



We don't even require the criminal check to be completed prior to the same day check. **They take a signed affidavit saying that the person has no disqualifying crimes, and then it is the state's job to verify this.** For kin and fictive kin."

---

Interviewee, child welfare agency staff, South Carolina

## Accepting affidavits

- Waiting for check results delays approvals and funding
- So shifting to accepting affidavits shortens wait times
- This shifts responsibility off the kin caregiver

# Sharing results with applicants



Yeah, you get [something] that's like a little driver's license, [showing] I passed this wonderful FBI clearance. **So you can reuse it. So for our licensed families who also wanted to go volunteer to school or become a teacher.**"

---

Interviewee, child welfare agency staff, Arizona

## Sharing results with applicants

- Delivering results to applicants gives them a chance to check if they want to proceed, especially if paired with clearer information about what could be disqualifying
- Allowing applicants to reuse clearances for other purposes empowers them to get more involved in the lives of those they care for

## Key takeaways

- Initiate all mandatory processes for background checks on Day 1
- Issue payment once all checks have been initiated
- Take fingerprints with mobile devices, or use third party vendors to offer more flexible schedule options
- Limit disqualifiers to crimes on the federal list
- Emphasize what is going on in the caregivers' life now, versus what happened in the past
- Share background check results with kin caregivers



Ask us anything!

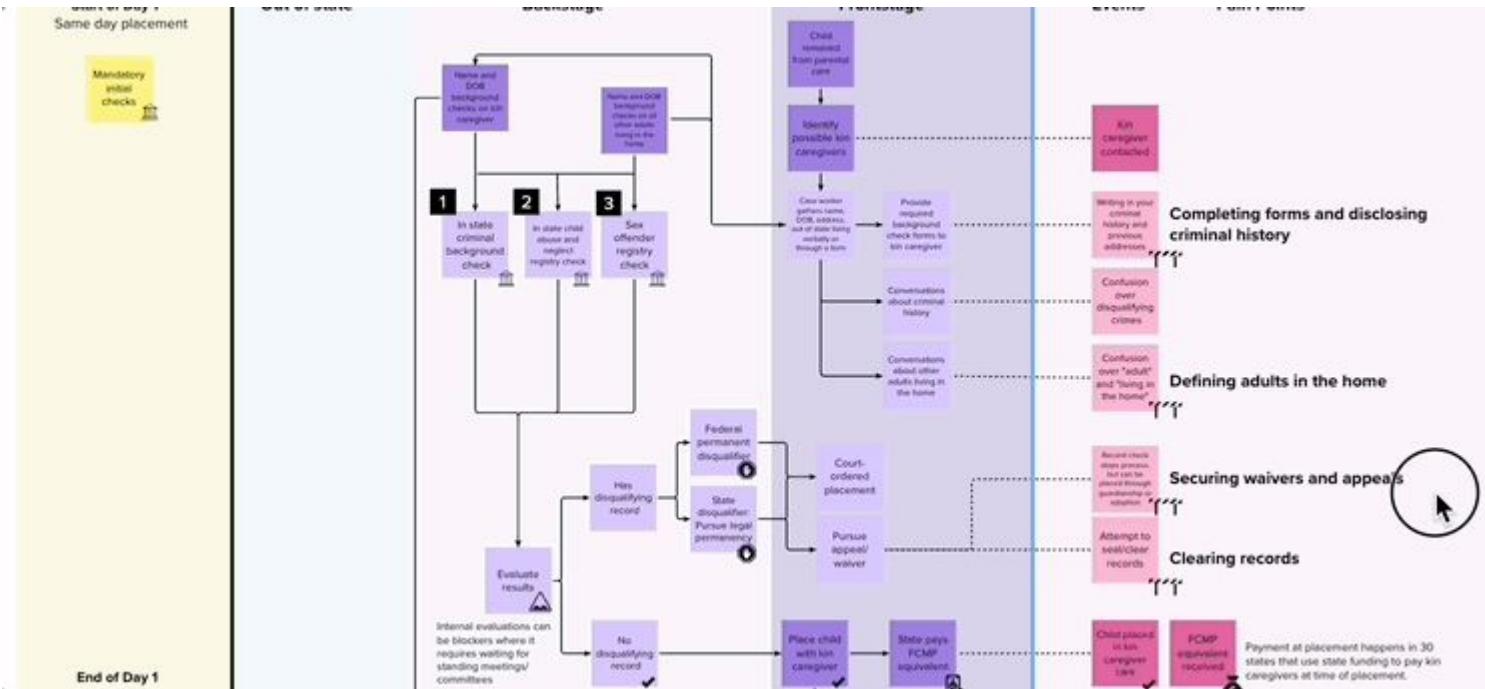
[bloom-bgc@bloomworks.digital](mailto:bloom-bgc@bloomworks.digital)



# Thank you!



# Current process map



## In sum,

- Where mandatory steps are initiated gradually - **ideally, process all checks initiated on day 1**
- Where it takes ~145 days to complete all checks - **ideally, process, payment available once all checks initiated**
- Where fingerprinting is difficult and slow - **ideally, take prints with mobile devices, or third party vendors**
- Where state disqualifiers slow down the checks - **ideally, limit disqualifiers to federal list**