

Comparing Existing Legal Permanency Pathways to Proposed SOUL Family Option

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REUNIFICATION		LEGAL GUARDIANSHIP		SOUL FAMILY		ADOPTION
Description	Young person leaves foster care and returns home permanently to their birth parents or legal guardians.	One or more adults share temporary legal decision-making authority until the youth reaches the age of majority. Birth parents retain some legal rights.	Young person may choose one or more trusted adult(s) as their legal caregiver(s) and maintains legal ties with their birth family. A broader support network of caring adults is also recognized.	Young person's adoptive parents hold all rights, responsibilities and decision-making authority. Birth parents' rights and legal ties to siblings and extended family are terminated.		
Legal relationships last throughout a young person's lifetime	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES	
Young person maintains legal ties with birth parents, siblings and other family members	YES	YES		YES	NO	
Young person is primarily responsible for choosing legal caregiver(s) ¹	NO	NO		YES	NO	
Recognizes a network of caring adult relationships in addition to legal caregiver(s) and birth family	NO	NO		YES	NO	
Enables the transfer of inheritance rights	YES	NO		YES	YES	
Supported by ongoing financial, educational, medical and other benefits	NO	YES		YES	YES	
Available to young people of any age ²	YES	YES		NO	YES	

1 While most states require young people to consent to legal guardianship and adoption beginning at age 12 or 13, SOUL Family allows young people to designate one or more adults they choose to become their legal caregivers with the approval of the court.

2 SOUL Family is proposed as a permanency option for young people ages 16 and older.