

Charles D. Baker
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Lieutenant Governor



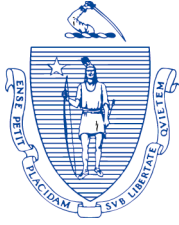
Marylou Sudders
Secretary

Linda S. Spears
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Legislative Report on Changes to Department Rules, Regulations, or Guidelines

November 2015





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LEGISLATIVE REPORT ON CHANGES TO
DEPARTMENT RULES, REGULATIONS, OR GUIDELINES

This document serves as the November 3, 2015 report regarding changes to rules, regulations or guidelines established during the previous fiscal year of July 1, 2014 through June 31, 2015 as required by line item 4800-0015 of Chapter 46 of the Acts of 2015 in that reads in part:

..., provided further, that not later than November 3, 2015, the department shall submit a report to the house and senate committees on ways and means and the joint committee on children, families and persons with disabilities that details any changes to rules, regulations or guidelines established by the department in the previous fiscal year to carry out its duties under chapter 119 of the General Laws, including, but not limited to: (I) criteria used to determine whether a child has been abused or neglected; (II) guidelines for removal of a child from the home; and (III) standards to determine what reasonable efforts are being made to keep a child in the home...

This legislative language asks for the Department to particularly comment on changes made to three specific areas of its duties under chapter 119:

(I) Criteria used to determine whether a child has been abused or neglected

During FY2015, the Department did not make changes to criteria used to determine whether a child has been abused or neglected.

(II) Guidelines for removal of a child from the home

During FY2015, the Department did not make changes to guidelines for removal of a child from the home.

(III) Standards to determine what reasonable efforts are being made to keep a child in the home

During FY2015, the Department did not make changes to standards to determine what reasonable efforts are being made to keep a child in the home.

The legislative mandate in Chapter 46 of the Acts of 2015 also asks the Department to not limit the report to those three areas but to discuss any other changes made to rules, regulations or guidelines that

impact its duties under Chapter 119. A short summary of those changes, in order of effective date, is below.

Education Policy for Children Birth through 22

Policy #97-002

Effective 9/2/2014

This comprehensive policy reflects changes to federal laws and Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education regulations enacted since the policy was first adopted. These changes include No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (PL 107-110), the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 (PL 110-351) and the federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Act of 2001(PL110-351).

One of the changes included broadening the Department's education practice focus to "cradle to career" –previous policy centered on practices related to compulsory school attendance years of ages 6 to 16 whereas the revised policy recognizes the importance of supporting educational needs and attainment for all Department-involved children from birth through higher education.

This new policy also recognizes the Department's role in the education of all DCF-involved children, not just those who enter Department Care or Custody as had been previous policy.

Trainings in this new policy were offered throughout the summer leading up to the effective date of September 2, 2014. The policy is also supported by several appendixes to provide additional guidance on implementation in area offices.

Background Records Check Policy

Policy #86-014

Policy effective 2/3/2015, requirement effective back to 7/1/2015

The "Background Records Check Policy" and related materials have been updated to reflect state law changes included in Chapter 165 of the Acts of 2014 that require a SORI check when licensing and reassessing a foster/pre-adoptive home; require re-fingerprinting foster/pre-adoptive parents during the 2 year re-licensing process; and institute an automatic disqualification for felony convictions of selected serious crimes, such as murder and sexual assault, and a five year disqualification for felony convictions of crimes involving physical assault, battery or a drug-related offense.

This policy became effective 2/3/2015; however, the requirements were effective back to 7/1/2014. This policy will be further amended to reflect new background record check requirements that are included in the Intake Policy announced on 11/17/2015.

Case Transfer Policy

Policy #85-001

Policy effective: 3/2/2015

This policy outlines the primary parameters for guiding case transfers that occur between offices as well as within the office to focus on the best interests of the child and the existing plan for meeting her/his needs for safety, permanency and well being.

One of the key innovations is the establishment of a 30 calendar day joint “Case Transfer Period” of shared case assignment that starts after a family’s move is confirmed and the receiving office is notified and accepts “secondary” case assignment. This period includes a joint conference and home visit with the family. Also included in this process is a requirement for the sending social worker to ensure that all information is up to date in the electronic case record which will include a current digital photo of the child(ren) who is in the Department care or custody.

The policy is further supported by an appendix detailing minimum information to be compiled when transitioning a case and the Photo Documentation Guidance

Photo Documentation Guidance

3/19/2015

This guidance directs that photographs may be taken by the Department for two distinct purposes, to document observations of the presence or absence of child abuse and or neglect and to maintain a current photograph that identifies the physical appearance of youth who enter or remain in Department care or custody, and instructs on best practices to use when photos are taken.

Field Guide for Social Workers

April 2015

This field guide provides guidance for preparing for, conducting and documenting visits with children/youth and families with open cases. It also includes a section on the important role of supervision. Emphasizing the importance of respectful, trauma informed, culturally competent, strengths based and collaborative work, the guide reinforces the priority of safety and well-being of the children in the family and safety of the worker engaging with the family.

While the focus is on home visits, the principles, approaches and tips presented here can also be applied to in person contacts that occur in other settings (ie foster homes, congregate care settings, etc).

Welcome Baby Tip Sheet

May 2015

This revised tip sheet is offered in conjunction with a “Welcome Baby Bag” to provide tips and tools for workers to talk with parents and caregivers about their new baby. These bags were first offered to families in the Spring of 2014. To date, 4,000 welcome baby bags have been distributed to the 29 DCF area offices across the state.

A range of topics are supported by the items in the bag and the conversation prompts for workers listed on the tip sheet including: safe sleep, child-proofing a home, bathing, soothing and bonding and organization of important information.

Printed materials provided in the bag are available in several languages to support the families that the Department serves. Support for these resources comes from federal funding.

Social Work Licensure Law

Effective 7/1/2015

The Department continues to engage with stakeholders including SEIU Local 509 and NASW around the statutory requirement included in Chapter 165 of the Acts of 2014 that all DCF direct service social workers hold a social work license by July 1, 2015 and participate in 30 hours of professional development training annually and remains committed in its efforts to ensure that all required social workers attain licensure.

Supports for workers seeking licensure include providing trainings at each of the 29 area offices as well as paying for the required fees for both the social work license application and the exam registration for eligible social workers. The Massachusetts Child Welfare Institute has increased course offerings and worked with partners at the Human Resources Division as well as contracted service providers, the Bridge Training Institute and the Center for Professional Innovation, to meet the need.

LGBTQ Toolkit: A Guide for Working with Youth and Families

Summer 2015

Adapted from a model toolkit created by the Child Welfare League of America and Lambda Legal, the LGBTQ Toolkit includes 13 separate handouts to be used with different “target” populations separately or in various combinations.

This guide provides social workers, families, community connected residential treatment and youth themselves with information and resources. It reinforces that DCF does not tolerate homophobia or transphobia, in the same way it does not tolerate racism.

The Department continues to develop policies, guidelines and regulations that further our work to establish the safety, permanency and well-being of the Commonwealth's children by stabilizing and

preserving families, providing quality temporary alternative care when necessary, safely reunifying families, and when necessary and appropriate, creating new families through kinship, guardianship or adoption.

Enclosures:

Education Policy for Children Birth through 22 (Policy #97-002)

Summary of Changes to Education Policy for Children Birth through 22

Background Records Check Policy (Policy #86-014)

Background Records Check Outcome Chart

Case Transfer Policy (Policy #85-001)

Summary of Revised Case Transfer Policy

Photo Documentation Guidance

A Field Guide for Social Workers

Welcome Baby Tip Sheet

LGBTQ Toolkit: A Guide for Working with Youth and Families