DCF	COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS ~ DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES	
	Policy Name: Case Transfer Policy	
	Policy #: 85-001	**Approved by:**
	Effective Date: 09/07/1984	
	Revision Date(s): 07/01/1989, 07/12/2002, 03/02/2015	

CASE TRANSFER POLICY

INTRODUCTION

Transitions are a critical time for a family and the Department is committed to ensuring that the transfer of case responsibility puts children's safety first and is conducted in a timely, orderly and efficient manner. The goal of any case transfer, whether it occurs within or between offices, is to maintain focus on the best interests of the child and the existing plan for meeting her/his needs for safety, permanency and well-being. Throughout the transition from one Social Worker to another, the sending and receiving staff work in collaboration to minimize disruption in the delivery of services and any placement, as well as to provide ongoing casework and visits to children and families consistent with the Department's *Policy #86-011*, Ongoing Casework and Documentation Policy.

This policy outlines the primary parameters for guiding case transfers that occur between offices as well as within the office. It is meant to set expectations that apply broadly to most situations. Department case responsibility is generally determined by family location but other factors may become important in determining the office (or worker) to which a family is assigned, such as: location of custodial v. non-resident parent; changes in the child's permanency plan; and/or termination of parental rights. Collaboration and timely resolution of any conflicts between offices or within an office are central to a safe, efficient and effective case transfer and to maintaining focus on the child's best interests, including her/his need for educational stability and sustaining meaningful ties to parents, siblings, grandparents, other kin and service providers. This policy is not intended to preclude Directors of Areas from exercising clinical judgment in planning for the safety and best interest of children in circumstances not addressed herein. Professional consideration and facilitating timely, accessible local services for families are intended to be the hallmarks of this policy.

I. POLICY: GENERAL

An inter-office transfer will be initiated when a Social Worker assigned to a case verifies that a family has moved to an address falling within another office's service area. The Social Worker, Supervisor and Area Clinical Manager/designee of the sending and receiving offices complete a series of activities collaboratively. Case transfer is a 30 calendar day process that commences when the receiving office assigns a secondary Social Worker and concludes when the receiving office accepts primary case assignment responsibility. During that 30 calendar day case transfer period:

- Case assignment responsibility is shared.
- The sending office maintains primary case assignment responsibility, conducts visits with the family/young adult and child/youth at a frequency appropriate to assess the child(ren)'s safety but no less than monthly, and reviews and updates the electronic and physical case record to ensure that the family's case, demographic, contact and other family assessment information and Service (Action) Plan are up-to-date.
- The receiving office Area Clinical Manager/designee accepts case assignment responsibility, assigns secondary case responsibility to the new Supervisor and Social Worker who become informed about the family and how the needs of the child/youth/young adult for safety, permanency and well-being are being met.
- The sending and receiving office Social Workers and Supervisors complete a joint case conference (which may involve the Department Attorney) after which the Social Workers conduct a joint home visit to the family.
- The physical family record is sent or delivered to the receiving office.

- The Social Worker from the receiving office is assigned primary responsibility for the family/case.

A case transfer may not be initiated prior to the completion of a family assessment that has already begun.

NOTES RE: PROTECTIVE INTAKE CASES

If a new 51A report is received during the Case Transfer period, responsibility will be assigned pursuant to the Department's Policy #86-015*, Protective Intake Policy.*

When, during a 51B response (Investigation or Initial Assessment) that could result in a new case being opened with the family, it is determined that case responsibility falls within the service area of a different Area Office, the case will be assigned to the responsible Area Office at the end of the response as part of case assignment. This is not considered a case transfer.

Determining Case Assignment Responsibility

A. Responsibility Definition

The residence of the family determines responsibility for a case and the Area Office responsible for the city or town in which the family resides delivers services to the family.

B. Residence Definition

"Residence" is defined as the location of the family where the child resides or last custodial parent has resided at for at least 30 days with no clear plan for relocating. (See below in sub-section I-C for special considerations when children are in placement)

1. For homeless shelters, domestic violence shelters or substance abuse treatment facilities with familial housing components, residence is established if the facility:
   - Has been the family's residence for 30 days with intent to continue **AND**
   - Has a program duration of 6 or more months **AND**
   - Contact with facility verifies the family's intent to continue in residence.
2. For residences and shared residences, residency is established if:
   - Residence for 30 days with clear intent and ability to remain.

The Social Worker, in consultation with their Supervisor, may seek a specialized consultation in domestic violence or substance abuse in determining residence for families in such facilities.

C. Guidelines for Determining Residence

1. **Family's Residence:** Area Office responsibility for service provision to a case is determined by the residence of the family. Due to a variety of circumstances such as frequent moves, a custody arrangement, absence of parental or family involvement when a child is in placement or the child's "runaway" status, determining residence is not always a straightforward decision. The following criteria should be used ***as a guide in determining a family's residence***.
   a) In all cases which involve the provision of protective placement services to a child the determination of residence should center on the child and the child's parents/guardian's living situation.
   b) The parent who has physical custody of the child, or to whom the child is planned to be reunited with, is considered the primary caretaker unless there is joint custody.
   c) In joint custody situations, residence should be determined by the address of the parent where the child spends, or will spend, the majority of her/his time.
2. **Special Considerations When Child is in Placement; Parental Rights Have Been Terminated:** If a child has been in foster care or group care for an extended period of time and return home is contrary to the permanency plan, or if a child has no immediate or extended family member involved, or if a child's whereabouts are unknown (the child is described as missing from care for a period of longer than 45 days), then the case might best be serviced in the area where the child has meaningful ties. The following criteria should be used to ***determine where the child has meaningful ties***:

a) For those situations in which the child has lived with a relative or family friend for an extended period of time, then that area is considered the area of meaningful ties for the child.

b) For those situations in which the child has had an unstable living situation, but school and community involvement (e.g., church, sports) has been the most stable, consistent element in the child's life, then that area where the school is located is considered the area of meaningful ties for the child.

c) If the plan is that permanency for the child is to be achieved through adoption, guardianship or care with kin and a family resource has been identified, then the area where the family resource resides is considered the area of meaningful ties for the child. A group care facility or non-permanent foster home is not considered the child's residence unless the family resides in the area.

3. **Determination of Temporary Residence:** In some situations the client/family does not maintain a stable living arrangement. In these situations it is necessary to determine if the new residence is temporary or intended to be permanent.

   A residence is considered temporary when the residence is only 30-60 days in duration with the intent to return to permanent or last abode; or when the individual/family is homeless; or when the individual/family is living there only to address a short-term immediate need, such as:

   - admission to a hospital, shelter, rehabilitation or detoxification program or a diagnostic center or
   - living with friends or relatives due to homelessness where they cannot remain due to overcrowding, safety issues or subsidized housing regulations.

4. **Residence of Young Adult who Sustains or Re-Engages with the Department:** When she/he resides in Massachusetts and is re-engaging, she/he should be referred to the Area Office closest to where she/he is residing; when sustaining connection, her/his case may be transferred to that Area Office upon agreement by the Director of Areas of the sending and receiving offices.

   When she/he resides outside Massachusetts, the Area Office that makes the sustained connection decision retains case assignment responsibility; if she/he is seeking re-engagement, the Area Office that closed her/his case makes the reconnection determination and maintains case assignment responsibility. (See *Policy #2013-01*, Permanency Planning Policy)

II. PROCEDURES: PREPARATION FOR CASE TRANSFER/CASE TRANSFER ACTIVITIES

1. **Verify Change of Address.** The sending Social Worker verifies the family/young adult's new address. The preferred method is through a home visit to the new address. However, if an in-person visit is not feasible, (such as when the new address is significantly distant from the sending Area Office), verification may include:
   - After obtaining client's permission, contacting collateral sources who would be able to verify new address (DTA, school department, other agency); **OR**
   - Viewing a current utility bill, rent receipt, etc. in the family/young adult's name; **OR**
   - In the case of shared residence, obtaining a written statement from both parties verifying the residence of the client family for 30 calendar days and intent for the arrangement to continue.

2. **Discuss Proposed Transfer.** The Social Worker assigned to the case meets with his/her Supervisor to discuss a proposed transfer. If the Supervisor agrees that the family/young adult's case needs to be transferred, she/he informs the Area Clinical Manager (ACM)/designee of the proposed case transfer. The Social Worker/Supervisor meeting and ACM/designee verbal approval of the proposed transfer are documented in the electronic case record and address, at a minimum:
   - the reasons for the case transfer;
   - the date targeted for the formal case transfer, which will be 30 calendar days from the assignment of a secondary Social Worker;
   - how Social Worker-client visitation will be maintained during the transfer;
   - any potential changes in schools, early education, child care or health care providers; and

- any other case-specific issues that must be addressed such as notification of the Department Attorney, notification to the Area Lead Agency, Foster Care Review or Permanency Planning Conference arrangements (see below Procedures 6, 7 and 9 and Section IV, Procedures 1 and 2 and related policies).

When the case being transferred involves a child in Department placement, the child's placement should not change unless the sending and receiving Social Workers, Supervisors and ACM/designee determine that such a change in placement is in the best interest of the child and is consistent with the permanency plan for the child. If the child's placement is going to change, the offices should consider the timing of the placement change and take into consideration, in collaboration with the family and current school, whether it is in the student's best interest to continue to attend the school where she/he is currently enrolled, at least through the end of the school year.

3. **Sending Social Worker Maintains Primary Case Assignment Responsibility.** The sending Social worker maintains consistent and regular contact with the family and works collaboratively with the family to support their transition and plan for the upcoming case transfer.

4. **Sending Social Worker Updates the Case Record.** The sending Social Worker ensures that all information is current and up-to-date in the family's electronic case record and updates the Service (Action) Plan, if needed, to reflect current work with the family until she/he is no longer the primary worker.

   At a minimum, the record must include:

   - Up-to-date contract information , demographic data, including race and ethnicity, immigration and Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) status, marital status of child/youth/young adult and her/his parents, relationships of parents and sibling information, placement information and legal status information;
   - A current digital photo of the child who is in Department care or custody;
   - A current family assessment and signed Service (Action) Plan, or if unsigned, an explanation must be documented in the electronic case record;
   - Updates or any changes needed to service authorizations and/or referrals;
   - Current court mittimus or documentation which indicates a request for the mittimus has been made (if applicable)and
   - Completion of a Case Transfer Summary that includes the information identified in Appendix A.

5. **Inform Receiving Office; Assign Secondary Social Worker.** The Area Program Manager with responsibility for the assigned Social Worker of the ***sending office*** must contact the designated Area Program Manager of the receiving office to discuss the proposed transfer and projected date by which formal case transfer is expected to take place.

   The designated Area Program Manager of the ***receiving office*** should obtain sufficient information from the sending office designated Area Program Manager and the electronic case record to plan for case transfer to her/his Area Office and arrange for assignment of secondary case responsibility to a Social Worker, in accordance with the Department's case assignment policy. The case is jointly assigned to the sending and receiving Social Workers until the designated Area Program Managers arrange for primary case responsibility to be shifted to the receiving office Social Worker (i.e., formal case transfer).

   If agreement cannot be reached between the sending and receiving offices regarding the transfer of a case within 5 working days, the case must be brought to the attention of the Directors of Areas for both offices for resolution within 2 working days. If the Directors of Areas are unable to agree on the transfer, the case is to be immediately brought to the attention of the Regional Director(s) for decision within one working day.

6. **Review and Discuss Case Record, Plans for Case Conference and Joint Home Visit.** The receiving Supervisor reads the entire electronic case record upon assignment and schedules a meeting with Social Worker to occur within 10 working days after assignment of the case to the Supervisor. The Social Worker reads the case, preferably in advance of the meeting with the Supervisor.

Reading the entire electronic case record includes reading sufficient sections for the Supervisor and Social Worker to know: the family composition; the case history and current status; the current legal involvement, if any; an understanding of each child/youth/young adult's placement history and types of placements, when applicable; the current services, supports and family needs; at a minimum, all reports of abuse and/or neglect and any responses to those reports; the last family assessment; the past 2 Service (Action) Plans; the past 12 months of dictation, if applicable; any permanency reviews; the last Foster Care Review, when applicable; and Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANS) assessment, provider treatment plans and progress reviews from the prior year.

The Supervisor and Social Worker discuss the status of the case and any need to update case information; and the plans for the case conference with the sending Supervisor and Social Worker and the Social Workers' joint home visit with the family/young adult. The results of the discussion are documented in the electronic case record.

7. **Convene Case Conference.** The designated Area Program Managers arrange for a case conference to be held involving the sending Social Worker and Supervisor and receiving Social Worker and Supervisor. When distance or timing is a factor, the case conference may occur on the telephone or other remote electronic mechanism. Those attending the case conference discuss the current status of work with the family, including reasons for current involvement and the current focus of the Service (Action) Plan; reach agreement concerning the efforts needed to address the child/young adult's needs for safety, permanency and well-being; and complete plans for a joint home visit by the sending and receiving Social Workers.

   If a case is transferred within 2 months prior to a trial date, the assigned Department Attorney (and a Department Attorney for the receiving office, when necessary) should be involved in the case conference but absence of the Department Attorney(s) is not a reason to delay it.

8. **Meet with Family/Young Adult.** The sending Social Worker schedules a meeting with the receiving Social Worker and family/young adult. During the meeting, the Social Workers and family/young adult discuss and address:
   - current needs and strengths of the family/young adult to maintain/obtain the safety of the child(ren)/young adult;
   - reason(s) for the Department's continued involvement;
   - goals, tasks and services within the updated Service (Action) Plan and how these will be accomplished/delivered within the family/young adult's new community;
   - the services and support network the family/young adult will have or will be leaving behind in the transition; and
   - any new household members who will be residing with the family/young adult at the new location and whether or not they may be in a caregiving role for the child(ren) and/or pose any risks to family/young adult or worker safety.

   In some instances, a meeting or completion of all these activities with the family/young adult may not be feasible [such as when the situation presents danger to the Social Worker(s) or particular family members, the family/young adult has moved with no notice to a distant location or when repeated attempts by the Social Worker(s) to meet with the family/young adult have been unsuccessful]. Such a determination must be made by the Social Worker(s) in consultation with their Supervisor(s); the primary Social Worker or Supervisor must document the reasons for the determination in the electronic case record.

9. **Notify School, Service Providers, Area Lead Agency and Department Attorney.** Prior to the planned date of the formal case transfer, the sending Social Worker, in consultation with the Supervisor, notifies the school, service providers (including early education, child care and health care), in accordance with the Department's confidentiality requirements, and if the case is court-involved, the assigned Department Attorney, of the date the case is being transferred. She/he provides as much information as is available regarding whom to contact in the receiving office regarding the case. The designated transferring and receiving Area Program Mangers will ensure that their respective Area Lead Agencies are notified if services are being coordinated through the Lead.

If a case transfer is being considered within 6 weeks prior to a court hearing, the sending office must contact the assigned Department Attorney at least 4 weeks prior to the court date regarding the case transfer date and to determine if the sending Worker, or both the sending and receiving Workers, will be needed for the court hearing and who should prepare written material for the court hearing.

III. PROCEDURES: FORMAL TRANSFER OF CASE

1. **Complete Formal Case Transfer.** The Area Clinical Manager/designee gives the physical case record to the Records Management Assistant or the individual responsible for sending transferred records to prepare for transit to the receiving Area Office. The physical case record must be sent by mail or hand-delivered to the Records Management Assistant or the individual responsible for receiving transferred records in the receiving office.

   At the conclusion of the 30 calendar day period of joint case assignment, the designated receiving Area Program Manager accepts primary case assignment responsibility in the electronic case record electronically and arranges for the assignment of primary case responsibility to the receiving office Social Worker. The time between formal receipt of the case record and primary assignment to the new Social Worker should not exceed 5 working days. The sending Area Office will continue to make every effort to transfer a complete case record but "missing casework" is not grounds for refusal to accept a transfer.

2. **Review Physical Record; Acknowledge Receipt of Case.** The electronic case record will record the date and time of receipt of primary case assignment responsibility transfer. The designated Area Program Manager of the receiving office should review the contents of the physical and electronic case record to ensure the transfer procedures have been followed and case documentation is complete. The designated Area Program Manager of the receiving office acknowledges receipt of the physical case record to the Area Program Manager with responsibility for the assigned Social Worker in the sending office electronically and addresses any concerns or questions regarding the transfer. This must be completed by the end of the following working day.

   If the designated Area Program Manager of the receiving office determines that the case record is incomplete, or activities required prior to transfer have not been completed, ***the receiving office retains case assignment responsibility but the sending office remains responsible for providing any missing documentation in its entirety as soon as possible and no longer than 5 working days after being notified that essential information is missing.***

   The Area Clinical Manager/designee of the sending office is ultimately responsible to ensure that all required work is completed and sent to the receiving Area Office. For those cases involving disagreement, a plan is established to resolve areas of disagreement.

3. **Notify Family/Young Adult.** Within 5 working days after being assigned as the primary Social Worker, the receiving Social Worker notifies the family/young adult that the case has been formally transferred and assigned to her/him.

4. **Inform Family/Young Adult of Fair Hearing/Grievance Rights.** If applicable, inform the family/young adult of fair hearing rights that might have resulted from a change in the services provided as a result of the transfer of the case.

IV. PROCEDURES: AFTER FORMAL CASE TRANSFER

1. **Manage Foster Care Reviews.** ***If a case is transferred within 6 weeks prior to a Foster Care Review,*** the receiving office Social Worker, in consultation with the sending office Social Worker, has the responsibility to participate in the Foster Care Review.

2. **Plan and Attend Permanency Planning Conference, When Required.** When a Permanency Planning Conference (PPC), as required by the Permanency Planning Policy, is either overdue or due within 6 weeks prior to the case transfer, the sending office must make the arrangements for the PPC, confer with the family/young adult and participate in the conference with the receiving office Social Worker. (See *Policy #2013-01*, Permanency Planning Policy)

3. **Complete Review of Case Record.** Upon receipt of the physical case record, the receiving Supervisor and Social Worker will complete reading of the case record, in particular external or internal evaluations of family members, education records, medical records and any other documents that

would assist in an understanding of the parental capacity to keep their child(ren) safe and meet their needs for well-being and permanency.

V. PROCEDURES: INTRA-OFFICE CASE TRANSFERS

NOTE: When possible, the timing and procedures for intra-office case transfers should parallel those above for inter-office case transfers, although a period of overlapping case assignment is rarely needed and often is not feasible. At a minimum, the following procedures apply.

1. **Prepare the Case Record, Including a Case Transfer Summary.** The sending Social Worker (or Supervisor in the absence of the Social Worker) updates the case record and compiles a Case Transfer Summary that includes the information identified in Appendix A – Case Transfer Summary Checklist.
2. **Receiving Supervisor and Social Worker Read the Case Record.** The receiving Supervisor reads the entire case record within 3 working days after assignment; the receiving Social Worker reads the entire case record within 5 working days after assignment.
3. **Sending and Receiving Social Workers and/or Supervisors Meet.** To discuss:
   - family composition, including who lives in the home and non-resident parents, siblings and other kin;
   - case history and current status of the family's involvement with the Department, including date and circumstances of case opening, significant events, last home visit and scheduling needs, information from most recent assessment or Foster Care Review, reasons for current involvement and case planning considerations, current service (Action) plan;
   - current legal status of each consumer child, including next court date and names and contact information for the Department, child's and parent attorneys and guardian ad litem, as applicable;
   - overview of any placement, including plans for parent/child, sibling and grandparent visitation;
   - current services and supports, including any service needs that should be immediately addressed and any critical medical needs of the children; and
   - any specific transfer considerations such as family or worker safety, communication, upcoming events, including but not limited to Permanency Planning Conferences and Foster Care Reviews.
4. **Sending and Receiving Social Workers and/or Supervisors Complete Joint Home Visit with the Family.** A joint visit, preferably in the home, is scheduled to introduce the new Social Worker and share expectations, unless because of safety or unavailability of either the workers or the family, a visit is not possible or advisable.

Appendix A

CASE TRANSFER SUMMARY

A Case Transfer Summary is compiled from existing information within the case record and includes, at a minimum:

Type of Information	Specifics to be Addressed
Family Composition	• Names, relationships and dates of birth of all household members • Current address (i.e., after case transfer) and contact information • Name, contact information and relationship (including efforts to locate and involve, as applicable) of non-resident parent(s), sibling(s), grandparent(s) and other significant kin
Case History and Current Status	• Date of last home visit • Date case opened and reason(s) why • Significant events since case opened (including 51As/outcomes) • Date of family assessment and most recent Foster Care Review • Reason(s) for/goal(s) of current involvement
Current Legal Involvement, If Any	• Legal status of each child consumer • Date of next court hearing, type and place (as applicable) • Names and contact information for (as applicable): – Department Attorney – Child(ren)'s attorney(s) – Parent(s)' attorney(s) – Guardian ad litem
Placement Overview, When Applicable	• Child(ren)/young adult's current placement(s) [name(s), type of provider(s), address(es) and contact information]
Current Services, Supports and Needs	• Services being provided and why, including provider name(s), contact information and upcoming appointments • Service needs that should be addressed immediately • Medication(s) child(ren) is taking • Existing critical medical conditions, e.g., HIV, allergies • Names and contact information for: – Child(ren)/young adult's physician – Child(ren)'s school and/or child care provider – Child(ren)/young adult's therapist, if applicable – Parent(s)/caregiver(s)' therapist, if applicable – Other important supports/collaterals/contacts, including young adult's employer and/or vocational program
Transfer Considerations	• Immediate concerns or special circumstances related to family member or worker safety • Tasks that need immediate attention • Factors/recommendations to be considered in case assignment (e.g. language, male/female worker) • Family/young adult's knowledge of transfer, expectations and reactions