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Marylou Sudders
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Linda S. Spears
Commissioner

Annual Report on Changes to Rules, Regulations, or Guidelines

As Required by Chapter 47 of the Acts of 2017

January 2018

Massachusetts Department of Children & Families





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

This document fulfills the requirement of line item 4800-0015 of Chapter 47 of the Acts of 2017 requiring the Department of Children and Families (DCF) to report on:

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;

Changes to Three Enumerated Areas

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

During FY2017, 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 FY2017, 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 FY2017, the Department did not make changes to standards to determine what reasonable efforts are being made to keep a child in the home.

Other Changes

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. A short summary of changes for FY 2017 is below and the relevant policies are also attached to this report.

Policy Regarding Missing or Absent Children in Department Care or Custody

Policy # 2016-002

Effective Date: 9/26/2016

The new *Policy Regarding Missing or Absent Children in Department Care or Custody* establishes clearly defined direction and timelines for notifying authorities and initiating search processes when a child in DCF care or custody is identified as missing (whereabouts unknown) or absent (whereabouts known, but away from approved placement). The policy also addresses procedures for returning the missing or absent child as quickly as possible to DCF-approved placement.

The Policy also provides guidance for when DCF staff locates a child who is missing or absent from another state or jurisdiction.

Family Assessment and Action Planning Policy

Policy #2017-01

Effective Date: 2/6/2017

The new *Family Assessment and Action Planning Policy* prioritizes child safety and engaging family members in identifying their strengths and needs for two important and related purposes:

1. determining whether DCF must remain involved with the family to safeguard child safety and well-being;
2. when DCF must stay involved, developing a plan to supporting the family in strengthening their capacity to meet the safety, permanency and well-being needs of each child.

The policy also guides work with young adults who have sustained or re-engaged a connection with DCF to support their preparation for successful adulthood. The policy provides for a comprehensive assessment of parental capacities using protective and risk factors related to child safety, permanency and well-being and includes guidance for addressing substance use/misuse, domestic violence, mental/behavioral health challenges and domestic violence. DCF's iFamilyNet information system was extensively reworked to support documentation of the assessment information, and to align the family's areas of need to specific activities in the Action Plan.

Policy for Referrals to the District Attorney and Local Law Enforcement Authority

Policy # 85-012

Revision Date: 2/6/2017

The new *Policy for Referrals to the District Attorney and Local Law Enforcement Authority* was re-named to better outline when referrals to the local law enforcement authority and the District Attorney are required. The revised policy also reflects changes that were made to the Protective Intake Policy (Policy #86-015), including:

- an expanded list of reasons for mandatory referrals to the District Attorney (DA) and local law enforcement authority (LLEA);
- an emphasis on immediate notification to the DA and LLEA;
- clarification about coordination and collaboration with the DA's office, especially when a child may be a victim of human trafficking or exploitation.

In addition, the revised policy elaborates on the membership, coordination and purpose of the Multi-Disciplinary Service Team.

Enclosures:

1. Policy Regarding Missing or Absent Children in Department Care or Custody
(Policy # 2016-002)
2. Family Assessment and Action Planning Policy (Policy #2017-01)
3. Policy for Referrals to the District Attorney and Local Law Enforcement Authority
(Policy # 85-012)