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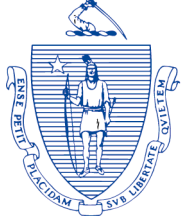
Linda S. Spears
Commissioner

Report on New or Updated Policies, Procedures and Guidelines at the Department of Children and Families

As Required by Chapter 138 of the Acts of 2015

February 2016





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**Report on New or Updated Policies, Procedures and Guidelines
as Required by Chapter 138 of the Acts of 2015**

This document serves as the January 4, 2016 report regarding Department of Children and Families required by chapter 138 of the acts of 2015:

SECTION 1. Item 1599-1100 as inserted by section 2A of chapter 119 of the acts of 2015, is hereby amended by striking the following date, "November 15, 2015" and inserting in place thereof, the following:- January 4, 2016.

SECTION 2. On or before January 4, 2016, the department of children and families shall report to the house and senate committees on ways and means and the joint committee on children, families and persons with disabilities on any new or updated policies, procedures and guidelines put into place at the department over the last year in order to provide systemic improvements that shall ensure the safety and well-being of children in the custody of the department and in-home placements and shall provide an update on the progress made in each area. The report shall include any performance benchmarks used to assess new or updated policies as well as any procedures the department will take to improve its evaluation of children suspected of abuse or neglect.

Part I. Overview

Over the past twelve months, the Department of Children and Families (DCF) has made significant progress in implementing new policies, procedures and guidelines focused on improving child safety. These changes build on the roadmap provided by the recommendations in the Child Welfare League of America's report from May 28, 2014. Authored by now DCF Commissioner Linda Spears, the Child Welfare League of America's report (CWLA) called for implementation of reforms over the course of three fiscal years. The changes over the past year also incorporate learning from case reviews of critical incidents.

A nationally recognized expert on child protection services, Commissioner Spears began implementing a number of reforms shortly after her arrival in February of 2015 including:

- Updating Background Record Check policies for foster homes;
- Implementing policies requiring photo documentation of all involved children when cases are transferred between social workers or local offices;
- New guidelines for social workers concerning in home visits.

Beginning in September, with the support of Governor Baker and Secretary Sudders and the partnership of SEIU Local 509, the Department embarked upon an ambitious plan for implementing systemic change within the agency. In September six initiatives were announced by the Governor that have at their core a focus on keeping children safe that have guided reform efforts within the Department:

1. Implementing a revised intake policy;
2. Implementing a new supervision policy;
3. Recruit, retain and support social workers;
4. Review of complex cases;
5. Reinstate Central MA regional office by 1/1/2016; and
6. Increase the number of safe foster homes/families.

To address these initiatives, the Department embarked on an ambitious systemic reform initiative that began with the formation of an Agency Improvement Leadership Team (AILT) comprised of staff from DCF, the Governor's Office and EHS supported by the management consulting firm ACCELARE. The AILT meets twice a week for two hours and follows a model called Agile and Scrum which has been developed by ACCELARE to support effective business processes. The new approach to developing and implementing change is unprecedented.

Agile and Scrum break seemingly overwhelming goals into smaller, more manageable objectives addressed over two week periods and allowing for intermediate, incremental success. It is the same model that supported systemic change initiatives within the MBTA, RMV, MassHealth Connector and now DCF.

As 2016 begins, the Department remains committed in addressing the systemic issues raised by the CWLA report and by findings from critical incidents that make absolutely clear that we must do much more to live up to the aspirations that we all have for the agency itself and especially for the children it works with.

Chapter 138 of the Acts of 2015 asks for the Department to provide updates on progress made in each of these new or updated policies, procedures and guidelines implemented in the last year as well as information regarding performance benchmarks used to assess these policies. The report that follows will move chronologically through the year discussing each policy, procedure or guideline and an update on progress made in the area.

Part II. Policies, Procedures and Guidelines

Background Records Check

Enclosure #1, Policy #86-014,

In February of 2015, DCF's Background Records Check Policy was updated to reflect state law changes included in Chapter 165 of the Acts of 2014.

As required in the law, this new Background Records check policy requires the Department to gather additional information about adults in the foster/pre-adoptive home at licensing and relicensing to ensure that decisions about the safety of placements are being made with more

information about the adults in the home. Per the CWLA's recommendation and language in the FY15 Budget, this policy also implements lifetime and 5 year bans on prospective foster and adoptive parents who have been convicted of specific felony offenses by a court of competent jurisdiction.

“update on the progress made in each area”

DCF continues to implement best practices in this area. On November 16, 2015, additional background record check requirements were included as part of the new Intake Policy and will be reflected in a revision to the policy.

Case Transfer Policy

Enclosure #2, Policy #85-001,

This policy comes out of the CWLA's recommendation to require face-to-face meetings among staff for case transfers within and between Area Offices and is based in learnings from the Jeremiah Oliver case. It 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 wellbeing.

“update on the progress made in each area”

The Department held trainings from January through March of 2015 with an effective date for the policy on March 2, 2015. Between March and October of 2015 576 case transfers have occurred following the case transfer policy. The 7 month average is 78 case transfers per month.

Photo Documentation Guidance

Enclosure #3

Supporting this new Case Transfer Policy is **Photo Documentation Guidance**. Within the Case Transfer Policy is a first time requirement that photos be taken as part of the Case Transfer Process to be included in the record. This guidance instructs on best practices to use when photos are taken. Photos may also be included in the record at other times, but it is currently only required during a case transfer. This is a step towards addressing the CWLA's recommendation that the Department require photos for all children who enter care and custody of the Department.

“update on the progress made in each area”

As of 12/18/2015, 2,204 photos have been uploaded into FamilyNet.

Intake Policy

Enclosure #4

Announced November 17, 2015, the Intake Policy is the front door for DCF concerning every abuse and neglect allegation. It sets the table for every decision DCF makes from that point forward.

The new policy for reviewing allegations of abuse and neglect includes among other things: a standardized assessment tool to determine if a child is at risk, requiring CORI checks on every case, mandating a review of every family member's history with DCF including parental capability and reviewing the number and type of 911 calls to the home.

“update on the progress made in each area”

Training of workers and supervisors in the impacted units has already begun. Revisions to IT systems will become effective in February 2016 so that iFamilyNet and FamilyNet reflect the requirements of the new policies.

“performance benchmarks used to assess new or updated policies”

Fidelity metrics are being finalized currently and will be supplied as a later addendum to this report.

Supervision Policy

Enclosure #5

Announced November 17, 2015,

As recommended by the CWLA's report, the supervision policy announced November 17, 2015, includes detailed, mandated steps on case review to ensure that workers receive the supervision and support necessary to work with all families especially those with complex circumstances.

“update on the progress made in each area”

The Department has moved to swiftly implement the new policy. Trainers and coaches to support fidelity to the policy in each of the 29 area offices are currently being trained. Staff will be required to complete online training in March with a first Supervision due to be scheduled within the month.

“performance benchmarks used to assess new or updated policies”

Fidelity metrics are being finalized currently and will be supplied as a later addendum to this report.

Part III. Non-Policy Changes

In addition to the five policies, procedures and guidelines outlined above there are several other key changes over the past year that have a systemic impact on the safety and well-being of children in the custody of the department. While not explicitly asked after in the legislation, these changes are part of the critical reforms that are improving child safety in the Department of Children and Families.

Central Region. As of January 1, 2016, the Central Regional office with their own regional management and staff has been reestablished. The addition of this fifth regional office and staff will increase the supervision for managers to provide clinical and decision-making guidance to staff and to ensure compliance with agency policies and procedures. The impacts will be felt not only in those four area office who will report to the newly reestablished Central Region

(Worcester West, Worcester East, North Central and South Central area offices) but also in those offices which will continue to report to the Western Regional Office (area offices)

Continuous Quality Improvement. With the support of the Governor and the Legislature, the Department has re-established a CQI office with the capacity for more robust data analysis of metrics. With the support of this unit, the department will be able to better assess how new policies are being implemented and, most importantly, how they are impacting child welfare and safety.

Foster Parent Approval. In October of 2016 the Department began engaging providers to help assess interested foster parents and perform the various steps in that approval process. With increased caseloads of children coming into the Department's custody, there is a great need for foster parents and this additional assistance is improving our ability to respond in a timely manner to those interested in working with the Department.

Medical Director and Medical Social Workers. During this past year the Department has filled the critically important role of Medical Director with Dr. Linda Sagor officially beginning her tenure in this role on January 1, 2016 after an announcement of her hire earlier this fall. Aside from the agency's understanding of the importance of this role, the Department was obligated to fill the position per FY15 budget language. The hiring of medical social workers is currently underway and will support the core functions of the medical director.

Social Work Licensure. 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 increased need.

As of February 2015, 62% of the Department's social workers were licensed. As of January 2016 89% of the 2,883 workers hold a license. This represents an increase of 44% in one year's time.

Staff Recruitment and Retention. Throughout this past year, the Department has been continually hiring new social workers for an increase in headcount of 76.5 social workers positions in calendar year 2015. To achieve this hiring, the Department has increased collaboration with the schools of social work throughout the Commonwealth. With the support of EHS, the Department has also piloted job fairs targeted to particular office needs.

The Department is also dually focused on filling management vacancies through usual attrition or ERIP. Thanks to the Governor's support, as of January 1, 2016, the Department has either posted or filled all vacancies created by the early retirement program, and has posted or filled 200 positions since September 11, 2015.

Technology. Launched in the summer of 2014, over 3,000 iPads have been distributed to social workers, supervisors and managers to allow for remote access of case information, more timely reporting, higher quality documentation and more efficient communication with clients, supervisors and staff.

In the assessment conducted of the program, an outside assessment found that 66% of social workers feel more efficient with the iPads, while 87% of supervisors feel that their social workers are more effective with the iPads. As noted by the CWLA "The truth is – most states aren't doing much beyond pilots... Massachusetts is a pioneer".

With the support of Secretary Sudders and Governor Baker, the Department has been able to build on this more mobile work platform and offer 3,000 cell phones to front line social workers in June of 2015. These have deepened our ability to improve our communication with clients, supervisors and managers and facilitate more rapid responses. The Department is continuing the improvements in this area and exploring abilities to reach all employees by text message in case of emergency and other tools.

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Enclosures:

1. Background Records Check Policy (Policy #86-014)
2. Case Transfer Policy (Policy #85-001)
3. Photo Documentation Guidance
4. Intake Policy
5. Supervision Policy