Child Welfare

ADMINISTRATIVE FUNCTIONS

This operating procedure describes various administrative functions related to Child Welfare activities.

BY DIRECTION OF THE SECRETARY:

(Signed original copy on file)

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Assistant Secretary for
Child Welfare

This operating procedure supersedes CFOP 170-16 dated August 19, 2016 and CFOP 175-77 dated September 1, 1999 (superseded by Chapter 6).

OPR: Office of Child Welfare

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Chapter 1

INTERNAL REVIEW OF VERIFIED FINDINGS

1-1. **Purpose.** This chapter describes the policies and procedures for conducting an internal review of a verified finding pursuant to the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act.

1-2. **Scope.** The policies and procedures described within this chapter apply to staff of the Department who conducts internal reviews of verified findings.

1-3. **Authority.** The Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) as amended 42 U.S.C. ss. 5106a(b)(2)(B)(xv)(II), provides authority to conduct internal reviews of verified findings. Section 39.202(7), Florida Statutes, provides authority to retain investigative reports with verified findings of maltreatment in FSFN until the youngest victim turns 30 years of age.

1-4. **Definitions.**

   a. **Caregiver Responsible.** An individual who is named as the responsible person in a child protective investigation with a verified finding.

   b. **Florida Safe Families Network (FSFN).** The Department’s Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (SACWIS). FSFN serves as the statewide electronic case record for all child abuse investigations and case management activities in Florida for the Department of Children and Families.

   c. **Internal Review.** A review conducted by the Department to ensure policy, rule and statute were followed when making a determination of a verified finding in a child protective investigation.

   d. **Verified Finding.** A finding made by the child protective investigator that a preponderance of credible evidence exists to support the allegations of abuse, neglect or abandonment.

1-5. **Internal Review Requirements.**

   a. Only the “caregiver responsible” may request an internal review.

   b. An internal review involves the examination of the information contained in FSFN, the hardcopy investigation file, other pertinent documents (if any are available) particular to the specific case such as police reports, and any documents provided by the requestor along with interviews of staff involved in the investigation, if they are still employed by the Department.

   c. The internal review will not reinvestigate the allegations, but will consider whether a preponderance of the evidence supports the verified finding based on the investigative process and information provided by the requestor.

   d. The internal review will be completed by the Regional Family and Community Services Director or his or her designee. The person completing the internal review must not have been involved in any stage of the investigation.

   e. The internal review shall be completed within 60 days of the request.

   f. The person completing the internal review has the authority to change a verified finding if the documentation does not support the finding.
1-6. **Internal Review Procedures.**

   a. If a Chapter 39 dependency proceeding is pending at the time of the request for an internal review, the internal review shall not be initiated until after the adjudicatory hearing.

   b. If a criminal investigation or criminal case is pending at the time of the request for an internal review, the internal review shall not be initiated until after the Law Enforcement investigation or State Attorney’s case is completed.

   c. An internal review may not be conducted on an investigative file past the Department’s retention schedule.

1-7. **Post Internal Review Activities.** If the verified finding(s) is/are changed as a result of the internal review, the supervisor of the child protective investigator that made the finding or a person designated by the Regional Family and Community Services Director will immediately:

   a. Ensure the investigative summary is updated and an addition is made to the chronological notes to explain that an internal review occurred, resulting in an update of the finding(s);

   b. Ensure the program office staff documents the decision on the appropriate screens in FSFN;

   c. Prepare an addendum to the investigative summary reflecting the changed finding(s) and send a copy to Children’s Legal Services attorney assigned to the case along with the case manager assigned to the case if there is an open dependency case involving the subject of the internal review; and,

   d. Review the case with the child protective investigator, supervisor and Program Administrator that made the finding, if appropriate, to discuss and document why the reviewer indicated that a preponderance of credible evidence did not exist and to discuss any changes in practice indicated by the internal review.
Chapter 2

ADMINISTRATIVE FINES AND OTHER PENALTIES FOR FALSE REPORTING OF ABUSE, NEGLECT, AND ABANDONMENT

(Draft Pending)
Chapter 3

MASTER TRUST FOR BENEFIT OF FAMILY SAFETY PROGRAM CLIENTS

(Draft Pending)
Chapter 4

STATE INSTITUTIONAL CLAIMS FOR DAMAGES CAUSED BY SHELTER OR FOSTER CHILD

(Draft Pending)
Chapter 5

EMPLOYEES INVOLVED IN REPORTS OF ABUSE, NEGLECT OR EXPLOITATION

5-1. **Purpose.** This chapter describes the processes to follow when department employees identified in paragraph 5-2 of this operating procedure (including other personnel services [OPS] positions) and community-based providers, contractors and subcontractors working with children or vulnerable adults (or the family or household members of any of these individuals) are the subject of a report of abuse, neglect or exploitation. The procedure is also designed to:

a. Preserve the integrity of the investigative process; and,

b. Afford employees, to the extent possible, the same confidentiality provided to any other citizen of Florida as provided for by Chapters 39 and 415, Florida Statutes (F.S.).

5-2. **Scope.** This chapter applies to employees of the Office of Child Welfare (CW), Adult Protective Services (APS), Substance Abuse and Mental Health (SAMH) and community-based providers, contractors and subcontractors working with children or vulnerable adults.

5-3. **Access to Restricted and Confidential Information.**

a. Access to reports of abuse, neglect or exploitation in the Florida Safe Families Network (FSFN) or any other supporting or ancillary computer programs or records containing the identities of those employees listed in paragraph 5-2 above (or their family or household members) shall be limited to only individuals with a legitimate business need. A legitimate business need to access records involving employees and their family or household members is established for the child or adult protective investigator conducting the investigation, supervisors responsible for approving the investigator’s work, and managers responsible for placing affected staff on administrative leave or assigning the employee to administrative, non-client contact duties.

b. All department employees and community-based providers, contractors and subcontractors working with children or vulnerable adults are statutorily bound to abide by the laws of confidentiality in ss. 39.202 and 415.107, F.S. All employees:

   (1) Must protect the individual’s right to privacy by safeguarding the confidentiality of the information received or accessed when acting in a professional capacity, and shall not share information received about one employee with any other person not having a legitimate business need;

   (2) Are not authorized to access the Florida Safe Families Network (FSFN) or any other supporting or ancillary computer programs or records for personal reasons, including reviewing reports in which the individual or a family or household member of the employee is a subject of the report; and,

   (3) Shall immediately exit any report as soon as the employee becomes aware that the report involves a family or household member, or a co-worker as a subject of the report, or the individual themselves. Any employee inadvertently obtaining access to unrestricted, but confidential information shall immediately notify their supervisor of the situation.

c. When a report involves alleged abuse, neglect or exploitation by a department employee, community-based provider, contractor or subcontractor (or a family or household member of any of these individuals is a subject of a report), the caller shall immediately inform the Hotline counselor that the report involves an employee with access to FSFN and the employee’s access to the report needs to be restricted.
d. All Hotline staff shall make reports involving members of their own families to a Hotline supervisor.

e. At any point an individual has reason to believe that the Hotline did not restrict access to a report involving a department employee, community-based provider, contractor or subcontractor or a family of household member of any of these individuals at the time of the report intake, the individual shall immediately report these concerns to the OCW or APS program office at Headquarters.

5-4. Report Processing and Required Notifications.

a. The Hotline shall accept reports that meet statutory criteria for maltreatment while the employee was acting in an official capacity (i.e., in the professional performance of their work duties) or while the employee is off-duty (i.e., in the role of a caregiver in their own home or as an “Other Person Responsible for a Child’s Welfare”) as defined in Florida Statute.

b. Hotline supervisors or their designee shall notify the appropriate manager or designee upon the acceptance of a report:

   (1) For OCW and APS department employees, community-based providers, contractors and subcontractors working with children and vulnerable adults, the employee’s Regional Managing Director or designee shall be notified.

   (2) For SAMH department employees, community-based providers, contractors and subcontractors working in substance abuse or mental health treatment facilities, the Assistant Secretary for Substance Abuse and Mental Health or designee, the Director or designee of State Mental Health Treatment Facilities, and the applicable Hospital Administrator shall be notified.

c. The Hotline supervisor shall also send an email notification to the following individuals:

   (1) Hotline Director;

   (2) Hotline Deputy Director;

   (3) Circuit or Regional Program Administrator of initial county assignment;

   (4) Circuit or Regional Program Administrator of reassignment county (if different from initial county assignment);

   (5) Assistant Secretary for Substance Abuse and Mental Health (for reports involving personnel at Substance Abuse or Mental Health treatment facilities); and,

   (6) APS Statewide Program Director.

d. The email shall contain the following information:

   (1) Intake number;

   (2) Name of person who reassigned the report (if applicable);

   (3) County of reassignment (if applicable);

   (4) Individual who received reassigned report (if applicable);

   (5) Date and time of reassignment; and,
(6) Reason for special handling.

5-5. Management Responsibilities.

a. The appropriate Circuit, Regional or Headquarters manager shall review the report immediately upon receipt.

b. In all cases where the affected employee is the alleged perpetrator of the maltreatment, the employee must be removed from customer contact while the investigation is being conducted and management systems must designate the report as a restricted case or remove the security clearance that allows the individual access into FSFN by close of business the next working day. Legal counsel, human resources and the Office of Inspector General shall be involved as appropriate.

5-6. Investigative Unit/Circuit and Regional Responsibilities.

a. Each Regional Managing Director or designee shall be readily available to receive “special handling” reports or provide a chain of command available to Hotline staff when not available to receive reports.

b. To maintain confidentiality, provide an objective assessment, and avoid the appearance of impropriety, the Circuit or Regional Program Administrator or Program Manager shall determine if the report needs to be reassigned to a different region or county.

c. If during the course of an investigation, it is learned that an employee meets the involvement criteria set forth in this chapter but it was not known at the on-set, the circuit shall implement the procedures of this chapter immediately.

d. If during the course of the investigation, the employee’s role in the report changes, the appropriate circuit, regional or headquarters office supervisory chain of command shall be so informed.

e. Investigative activities shall be expedited to ensure a timely but thorough investigation.

f. The decision regarding when or if an employee may return to assigned duties shall be made at the discretion of the appropriate regional or headquarters office manager or their designee, or Hospital Administrator or their designee, with input from human resources, legal counsel and the assigned protective investigator and supervisor, as appropriate.

g. Region or headquarters office managers shall periodically request management systems to audit special handling cases and report any inappropriate access of the report prior to and after report closure.
Chapter 6

TCA/HARDSHIP EXEMPTION – SUBSTITUTE CARE REVIEW

6-1. **Purpose.** This chapter sets out the department’s response to a review of a family’s situation when the end of the eligibility period for temporary cash assistance has been reached.

6-2. **Scope.** This chapter is applicable to all regional/circuit Family Safety and Economic Self-Sufficiency (ESS) staff.

6-3. **Authority.** A review for a hardship extension for minor children in a participating family that has reached the end of eligibility is authorized pursuant to section 414.105(1)(e), Florida Statutes (F.S.).

6-4. **Definitions.**

   a. **TCA.** “Temporary Cash Assistance” program. The goal of the program is to emphasize work, self-sufficiency and personal responsibility. The program strives to meet the transitional needs of program participants who need short-term assistance by providing time limited cash assistance to meet some immediate need while moving from welfare to work.

   b. **Hardship Exemption.** A hardship exemption is defined as extraordinary barriers that potentially qualify a participant to receive an exemption to the TCA requirements. Criteria for hardship exemptions include the following:

      (1) Diligent participation in activities, combined with extraordinary barriers to employment, including the conditions that may result in an exemption to work requirements.

      (2) Diligent participation in activities and a need by teen parents for an exemption in order to have 24 months of eligibility after receiving a high school diploma or its equivalent.

      (3) Diligent participation in activities, combined with inability to find employment.

      (4) Significant barriers to employment, combined with a need for additional time.

      (5) A review and recommendation from Family Safety staff for an extension of assistance for a minor child of the participating family, based on the determination that the termination of cash assistance would be likely to result in the child being placed into emergency shelter or foster care.

6-5. **Requirements.**

   a. Family Safety staff will be responsible for reviewing and assessing the risk of a child being placed into emergency shelter or foster care as a result of the termination of the family’s temporary cash assistance.

   b. The department’s public assistance specialists and Welfare Transition Program contracted case managers (local CareerSource Agencies) will use statutory criteria to recommend participants for a hardship exemption. If the participant was denied an exemption, a Substitute Care Review will be requested.

   c. The review will be conveyed through each region’s Economic Self-Sufficiency program office to the region’s Family Safety program office. The review will involve three elements:

d. Family Safety will conduct the assessments in cases in which a child may require continuation of cash assistance. The assessment consists of the following:

(1) Review of child maltreatment history.

(2) Review of provider history.

(3) Documentation of extended family/support system.

(4) Consultation with respective family support or case management staff who may currently be working with the family.

e. Family Safety staff will review these factors and will provide a recommendation whether or not to continue cash assistance for the child through a protective payee.