



State of Florida
Department of Children and Families

Rick Scott
Governor

David E. Wilkins
Secretary

DATE: September 4, 2012

TO: Regional Managing Directors

THROUGH: Pete Digre, Assistant Deputy Secretary for Operations
Elisa Cramer, Director, Family and Community Services

FROM: Patricia Armstrong, LCSW, Director, Office of Child Welfare
For PetH

SUBJECT: Foster Care Investigations and Foster Care Referrals

Thank you for your tremendous support of our meeting on this topic in Orlando, August 14! Over 100 staff and foster parents attended. The conversation was very productive and efforts are underway to produce results from the day's discussion and recommendations for practice/policy improvements.

PURPOSE: The purpose of this memorandum is to provide a high level summary of the improvement needs and next steps. In addition, existing policy governing foster care referrals is included for immediate implementation.

BACKGROUND: On June 23, 2012, Secretary Wilkins held a press conference announcing the Fostering Florida's Future Initiative (<http://www.fosteringflorida.com/>). The primary goal is to recruit and support foster families to provide quality parenting for children in our care. On August 14, a group of foster parents, investigators, and licensing staff met to discuss improvements to the practices of responding to foster care referrals and conducting abuse investigations of foster parents.

At the conclusion of the August 14 meeting, Assistant Deputy Secretary for Operations, Pete Digre closed the meeting. A brief summary of next steps follows. He remarked that we need more structure and uniformity in our practice. A specialized unit at the Hotline should be explored. Investigative staff resources should be used for reports of abuse/neglect and licensing staff resources should be used for foster care referrals. A workgroup will be formed to make recommendations for policy/practice changes. Finally, the results of this meeting must encourage and support normalcy for children in our care.

1317 Winewood Boulevard, Tallahassee, Florida 32399-0700

Mission: Protect the Vulnerable, Promote Strong and Economically Self-Sufficient Families, and Advance Personal and Family Recovery and Resiliency

Memo – Foster Parent Investigations and Referrals

September 4, 2012

Page 2

The workgroup's charges are to make recommendations for:

- Implementing an appeals process for verified findings
- Reviewing best practices for implementation statewide
- Establishing protocols for communication with foster parents during the process
- Determining the appropriate level of discretion for time, place, manner of investigations of involving foster parents
- Training staff and parents about the policy/practice changes

An issue arose regarding the use of investigative staff to respond to foster care referrals. The group discussed several reasons for discontinuing this practice including rule that requires licensing staff to respond. Florida Administrative Code 65C-29.006 provides direction on managing foster care referrals.

ACTION REQUESTED: Effective immediately, foster care referrals must be handled by community-based care licensing staff in accordance with code. Although the code allows for an exception during weekends and holidays, all community-based care lead agencies have on call staff who should be designated to handle these referrals and the regions must ensure this process is in place. Since these are not child protective investigations we must limit the involvement of CPIs. The response to these referrals impacts our foster parents and is added workload for child protective investigators.

CONTACT INFORMATION: If you have any questions or for additional information, please contact Eleese Davis at Eleese_Davis@dcf.state.fl.us or 850-717-4650 or Charles Scherer at Charles_Scherer@dcf.state.fl.us or (850) 228-9715.

Thanks again. This work will result in a better experience for children in our custody and the families that care for them.

cc: Community-Based Care Lead Agencies
Sheriffs' Offices
Florida State Foster Adoptive Parent Association