



NJDCF Letter to Provider Agencies Regarding Changing Operations in Response to COVID-19

March 18, 2020

Dear provider partner,

The past few weeks have resulted in unprecedented changes for all of us in the State of New Jersey. The outbreak of the COVID-19 Novel Coronavirus in our communities has resulted in an ever-shifting landscape of information and regulation, and I appreciate your patience as we navigate these uncharted waters together. As I have been saying to staff, since the onset of the Coronavirus in the Garden State, it's as if the world turned upside down.

As you know, DCF is working to balance the safety and well-being of the children, youth, and families it serves in communities across the State with the safety and well-being of DCF's and provider agencies' employees during the current health crisis. We understand you are managing many of the same concerns in your own programs and agencies. As a Department, DCF knows the vital role that communication plays during such a crisis, and we recognize that some of our providers may be experiencing uncertainty as guidance from the department continues to be developed and deployed.

Today, I'm writing to share some information that was relayed to DCF employees via a tele-town hall held this morning in cooperation with the Communications Workers of America (CWA), our staff union representing caseworkers working through the Division of Child Protection and Permanency (DCP&P):

- DCF continues to be open for the children and families we serve throughout the State of New Jersey. Our work is too critical, and the mission too important, to shut down our operations.
- While we remain committed to supporting the children and families of New Jersey, we recognize that operational changes are required, to safeguard our own employees as well as our clients.
- In as many cases as we can, we will seek technology-enabled solutions that allow our caseworkers to connect with families remotely, and we will be empowering regional impact teams to continue to offer in-person supports with proper healthcare precautions in place.

- DCP&P Local Offices will remain open, with necessary staff in place to process paperwork and payments. Beginning tomorrow, all other DCP&P staff will begin working remotely, and we will begin to develop our capacity to engage impact teams for the highest-risk cases throughout New Jersey.

These changes to the DCP&P caseworker practice are intended to be responsive to ongoing State and federal guidance around COVID-19. We will share additional information soon, and I will be issuing an Administrative Order to establish the specific protocols that we will follow moving forward. These protocols will be evaluated at the end of 30 days to ensure that we are meeting our mission and ensuring the safety of our dedicated workforce.

Since Governor Murphy declared a State of Emergency on Monday, March 9th, DCF leadership has been working around the clock, finalizing our Continuity of Operations Plan, answering challenging questions from the field, responding to the shifting needs of our providers and fulfilling recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the state's Department of Health. We are so very grateful for your ongoing patience and partnership as we work to get through this crisis.

We are sensitive to the fact that these changes will significantly impact our contracted providers. Please know that our decision to provide remote support to New Jersey's families was not made lightly or without consideration for the impact that it may have on our network of dedicated service providers. We are currently working on a communication to providers that will be specific to your work and fiscal needs, as well as issues that are resulting because of the COVID-19 virus and changes to DCF practice.

I remain committed to regular communications with all of you, through emails, video messages, conference calls and more. Please know that I will be sending a more detailed communication shortly, detailing specific changes to our processes and protocols as they may impact your agencies.

Please know that I value our provider community and appreciate your cooperation as we forge this new and unprecedented path, together.

Thank you,

Christine
Christine Norbut Beyer, MSW
Commissioner, NJ Department of Children and Families