



**Government of the District of Columbia
Child and Family Services Agency**

**CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION AND TREATMENT
ACT
STATE PLAN**

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INTRODUCTION

The District of Columbia continues to use funds allocated under CAPTA to improve child protective services for individuals, families and communities. Services provided under CAPTA include referrals to mentoring, homemaker, daycare/childcare, emergency assistance and clinical treatment. These are the areas of greatest need identified for families at risk of entering or re-entering the foster care system. Under protective services, efforts are made to prevent removal and support family preservation.

Protective services are targeted to:

- improve the intake, assessment, screening and investigation of reports of abuse and neglect;
- enhance the child protection system through improvement of the risk and safety assessment tools and protocols; and,
- strengthen automation systems that support the child protective system and track reports of child abuse and neglect from intake through final disposition.

As defined by the *Improved Child Abuse Investigations Amendment Act of 2001*, a child may be abused or neglected who is born addicted or dependent on a controlled substance and must be referred to the CFSA Hotline for intervention services. One hundred percent of the referred mothers and their infants are visited by a CPS nurse (with or without the social worker) for the purpose of assessing the medical status, safety and well being of the infant in the home. Cases are opened in FACES.NET for on-going monitoring by a social worker and an on-going nurse.

A. PROGRAM AREAS SELECTED FOR IMPROVEMENT AND SERVICES TO BE PROVIDED

The District of Columbia use CAPTA funding to improve child protective services for individuals, families and communities. For the foreseeable future, CFSA will be focusing its ongoing efforts on improving the following italicized program areas set forth in Section 106(a) of CAPTA. Accompanying each program area heading is a summary of services funded in part with CAPTA dollars which are to be provided to individuals, families, or communities, either directly or through referrals aimed at preventing the occurrence of child abuse and neglect.

Intake, assessment, screening, and investigation of reports of abuse and neglect

CFSA's core service under CAPTA is the intake and investigation of abuse and neglect allegations. CFSA seeks to continually improve the entire "front door" of the child welfare system through continuous quality improvement, development and implementation of best case practices. The Agency has in place a series of quality improvement processes that help social workers maintain model case practice and perform timely and effective investigations.

The abuse and neglect hotline is the gateway to the child welfare system. It is the first point of contact for children who have been abused or neglected or may be at high risk of abuse or neglect. CPS hotline practice is supported by the [Hotline Policy](#), and accompanying [CFSA Hotline Practice Guide](#) both of which have been developed within the past three years. These documents work in tandem to provide CPS hotline workers with clear and uniform governance on how to appropriately receive, interview, refer, respond to, and document reports of abuse and neglect.

Over the past four years, CFSA has invested significant resources into the improvement, functioning, and strengthening of the safety net for at-risk children in the District. By example, the CFSA Hotline is currently comprised of state-of-the-art telecommunications technology that puts the District on par with the most modern systems in the country. This technology features a "wallboard" that displays real-time statistical and operational information to the Hotline staff, including the number of calls waiting, the

average wait time, and the average length of a Hotline report. It also enables staff to see whether or not multi-lingual operators are available to receive a non-English speaking call, should the need arise. Moreover, it has an expanded playback feature that allows workers to monitor their own calls for quality control purposes. They have access to any calls they have received within the prior 30 days, allowing them to revisit calls and reinforcing proper documentation of case-specific details for their assessments and subsequent referrals to investigators for follow-up.

The Hotline technology upgrade brought with it enhanced quality assurance capabilities. CPS supervisors and managers can now monitor calls in real time to assess compliance with customer service standards and effective interviewing protocols. Once weekly, the system also sends one call to each Hotline worker's supervisor so that they can come together, review the call, and discuss performance and outcomes related to it. In this regard, the Hotline promotes continuous quality improvement. In those instances where a Hotline report is screened and referred to a CPS investigator for a full investigation, CFSA practice is further supported by procedures outlines in the newly updated [*Investigations Policy*](#). Following the April 2011 update of the policy, CFSA promulgated a comprehensive step-by-step guide for conducting investigations. The CPS *Investigations Practice Operational Manual* (IPOM), which was finalized in May of 2011, is an easy-to-use reference tool for investigating child abuse and/or neglect allegations received by the Hotline. Designed specifically for the CPS social worker, the IPOM provides hands-on, step-by-step procedures for giving children the immediate attention they need for their safety and protection, followed by long-range planning for their permanency and well being. It also reinforces the following guiding principles of the CPS Administration:

- Quality & Competence
- Excellence
- Accountability
- Efficiency
- Timeliness

The updated policies and the newly published IPOM work in concert to address all practice expectations and process requirements associated with investigations, and to provide social workers with the roadmap and tools to perform timely and effective investigations.

In collaboration with CFSA's court monitor, CFSA has also enhanced the quality assurance practices around investigations through an updated tool for reviewing investigation practices and outcomes. CFSA also continues to utilize the 18-Day Review Meeting, whereby any investigation that has been open for at least 18 days goes through a collaborative review among CPS managers and the General Counsel. This review provides an opportunity to present the CPS investigator with recommendations for completion and safe closure of the investigation.

Additionally, every month two open CPS investigations are selected for a team review and evaluation by the assigned CPS supervisor and program managers, along with representatives from other divisions within the Agency (e.g., legal, training, policy, and ongoing services) to participate in the CPS Grand Rounds. Staff members from the Quality Assurance (QA) division in addition to CPS staff read all existing FACES documentation on the investigation and complete a structured tool which addresses both compliance (e.g., timeframes for contact and completion of safety assessments) and best practice issues (e.g., consideration of prior history and evidence of supervisory direction).

Since January 2009, the Agency has made subtle changes to the areas of focus for Grand Rounds to enhance their meaningfulness and utility. Originally, investigations selected for review had been closed within 30 days of the Grand Rounds. At present, the selection process is limited to open investigations, with a focus on those open approximately 15 days at the time of review. This ensures the provision of timely feedback to supervisors and program managers, and allows the process to have an impact on

investigations in “real time”. In FY 2011, CFSA additionally updated the Grand Rounds review process to focus on the Agency’s investigations practice with respect to families with prior agency involvement.

Case Management, including Ongoing Case Monitoring, and Delivery of Services and Treatment Provided to Children and their Families

During every investigation, CFSA’s CPS investigators perform comprehensive risk and safety assessments of the families they visit. While the core intent of each assessment is to ensure that an appropriate plan is in place to protect every child’s safety, these assessments are also strength-based tools that identify service needs for all members of the family. The District has a robust cadre of services for family support and family preservation, and it is during the investigation process that linkages to such services are often made. Toward that end, CPS investigators assess family strengths and needs and provide access and referrals to family support services such as mentoring, housing assistance, homemaker assistance, daycare and childcare, tutoring, emergency assistance, mental health services, crisis intervention, and clinical treatment.

In instances where, during the course of an investigation, a home removal is necessary, a licensed nurse practitioner and licensed medical assistant from CFSA’s in-house Healthy Horizons Assessment Center (HHAC) identify the medical needs of children and youth at the time of their placement into care. HHAC nurses also provide initial placement health screenings for children and youth entering out-of-home care. When re-entry into care or when a placement change is unavoidable, HHAC nurses will also provide the initial health screening, as well as the more comprehensive health screening within 30 days of entry into foster care.

Children and families determined to be at low-to-moderate risk for child maltreatment don’t require direct Agency intervention and case management and are therefore referred to CFSA’s community-based, contracted partners, the Health Families Thriving Community Collaboratives (Collaboratives). The Collaboratives, which are strategically located in six neighborhoods in the District that have large numbers of families who enter the child welfare system, provide the following Family Support Services to families in their catchment areas:

- Emergency assistance
- Crisis intervention
- Information and referral
- Homemaker services
- Financial guidance and skill building
- Employment counseling
- Housing referrals
- Parenting education and training
- Family Group Conferencing (FGC)
- Fatherhood engagement
- Case Management Services

Again, the entire CFSA/Collaborative partnership is intended to strengthen families by enhancing the prevention and family preservation supports that are available to the District’s children and families in their own neighborhoods and communities.

Enhancing the General Child Protective System by Developing, Improving, and Implementing Risk and Safety Assessment Tools and Protocols, including the Use of Differential Response (DR)

Under the Agency’s evidence-based model of delivering child protective services, CPS social workers make efforts to prevent removal and support family preservation through the Family Risk Assessment tool. This tool, which identifies a family’s low, moderate, and high or intensive risk factors, helps the

social worker determine the likelihood that a child may or may not be abused or maltreated in the future. The tool is part of a suite of tools taken from the Structured Decision Making (SDM) assessment approach employed by CFSA and private agency social workers at various points throughout the life of a child welfare case. The empirical results of the tool support the social worker's clinical judgment in his/her decision of whether to open an ongoing case or refer the family to a Collaborative, or to close an investigation with no further services.

In July 2011, the Family Risk Assessment will also be the fulcrum of implementation of the DR model. DR will allow all appropriately screened-in cases of certain allegations to be deflected from the investigative system, while connecting families to necessary services. These allegations include, singly or in combination:

- Caretaker is unwilling (or unable) to provide care for a youth 13 years or older and the parent has not been arrested
- Inadequate Shelter
- Inadequate Food
- Inadequate Clothing
- Inadequate Physical Care
- Educational Neglect
- Newborn Positive Toxicology

For Hotline reports in which the above-cited allegations are indicated, investigative social workers perform a Family Risk Assessment to confirm the appropriateness of the DR-based Family Assessment pathway. The Family Assessment pathway is appropriate when a neglect referral indicates that the child is safe but the family still presents with issues that require further assessment. At this point, the social worker will assess the family and work to get the needed support and services. A key facet of this approach is that these reports are not substantiated and the names of alleged maltreaters are not entered into the Child Protection Register. This is particularly important to the family because current entries into the Register are maintained for life and may seriously impact an individual's ability to gain employment. Instead, family engagement is the primary vehicle to mitigating the family's risk factors and protecting the focal children against further contact and involvement with the child welfare system while families are simultaneously offered voluntary services.

B. TRAINING

CFSA's Child Welfare Training Academy (CWTA) offers comprehensive pre-service and in-service trainings for CFSA and private agency social workers, as well as foster parents. The Training Plan, which is attached to this report, contains a comprehensive overview of the Agency's mission and its approach to training. In addition, the attached Plan includes a course-by-course description of all trainings offered across various child welfare disciplines.

In terms of training requirements, new workers receive the required 80 hours of pre-service training through a combination of classroom sessions alongside on-the-job training that takes place in specifically-assigned training units. New supervisors receive a minimum of 40 hours of pre-service training within three months of assuming supervisory responsibility. Previously-hired workers receive annually a minimum of five full training days (or a minimum of 30 hours) of structured in-service training that is geared toward professional development and specific core and advanced competencies. Supervisors and administrators also receive an annual minimum of 24 hours of structured in-service training.

The CWTA has also developed CPS-related training that is designed expressly to address forensic interviewing skill development, documentation, and critical thinking in child welfare assessment for all CPS supervisors and social workers, including the following curricular subject matter:

- CPS supervisors receive specialized training on how to become effective leaders in a child welfare setting, and how to effectively support and mentor subordinates. Training also prepares supervisors to assist staff in managing time and setting priorities throughout an investigation.
- Staff members from the Hotline and the investigations units receive specialized training on practice techniques and technical tools that are integral to CPS functions, such as de-escalation techniques and crisis management, which allow them to extract crucial details and case information from callers who may be in the midst of an emotional moment.
- Investigators receive training in interviewing skills, assessing underlying conditions, and determining the most appropriate level of intervention. Additionally, CFSA trains investigators and supervisors on structured decision-making tools for use at critical points in a case.

The CWTA has also revised CPS training to include introduction to and professional mastery of DR. As noted, DR is an exciting step forward for CFSA as it will add another evidenced-based best practice to the growing array of innovative approaches for serving the District’s vulnerable children and families. In FY 2011, CFSA began hiring social workers for its homogenous DR unit, which will focus exclusively on families assessed with low-to-moderate risk. Pilot implementation is scheduled to begin in July 2011.

CFSA has also fully implemented its online training program <http://dc.mandatedreporter.org> in order to reach and provide information and education to public servants, child care workers, and interested community members and residents throughout the District. CFSA has heavily promoted use of this training since 2009 both for mandated reporters and for community members because the Agency relies heavily on reports to the Hotline to protect children and youth who may need help. As successful and far-reaching as the online mandated reporter training has proven itself to be, CFSA and its District partners determined that it could still be improved even further by adding a personal community-based component. As a result, CFSA staff volunteers participated in a “Train the Trainer” program beginning in FY2011. Face-to-face trainings are now delivered to interested residents, professionals, and community groups throughout the District.

C. POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

CFSA has developed its online policy manual to support all domains and practice areas throughout the child welfare continuum. The manual is updated by the Agency’s Policy Unit whenever new policy initiatives are implemented or when current policies are revised. The following Agency policies are among those that govern practice and encourage the appropriate involvement of families in decision-making pertaining to children:

- [Investigations](#)
- [In-Home Services](#)
- [Out-of-Home Services](#)
- [Family Team Meetings](#)
- [Permanency Planning](#)
- [Establishing the Goal of APPLA](#)
- [Visitation](#)
- [Engaging Incarcerated Parents](#)
- [Educational Services](#)

CFSA also augments Agency policy through the publication of administrative issuances (AI), practice guides, and quick reference guides (QRG). The following sample includes those that also promote family engagement and involvement in decision making:

- [In-Home Practice Guide](#)
- [Out-of-Home Practice Guide](#)

- [AI on Case Planning for Children with a Goal of Guardianship](#)
- [AI on Educational Stability](#)
- [AI on the Partnership for Community-Based Services \(PCBS\)](#)
- [QRG on Case Planning for Children with a Goal of Guardianship](#)
- [QRG on Educational Stability for Children in Foster Care](#)
- [QRG on Family Team Meetings](#)
- [QRG on Notification of Adult Relatives that a Child has been Removed](#)
- [QRG on Visitation](#)

As part of its Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) Program Improvement Plan (PIP), CFSA developed (or enhanced existing) formal guidance for social workers on how to assess and interface with clients dealing with domestic violence and/or substance abuse issues. Specialist positions in CFSA's Office of Clinical Practice deal specifically with domestic violence and substance abuse. These specialists are experts in their fields and consult with social workers to provide support in working with families affected by these issues. They also maintain resource connections throughout the DC metropolitan area so as to quickly refer clients in need of services and particular interventions. The following policy documents provide formal Agency guidance on such matters:

- [AI on Domestic Violence Referrals](#)
- [AI on Ongoing Assessment for Domestic Violence](#)
- [AI on Healthcare Coordination](#)
- [AI on Substance Abuse Treatment](#)
- [QRG on Domestic Violence](#)

Policies and procedures regarding CFSA's DR model remain under development and will be provided when completed.

D. SUBSTANTIVE CHANGES IN STATE LAW

There have been no substantive changes in District law that impact the District's eligibility for the CAPTA State Grant.

E. ANNUAL REPORT OF CITIZEN REVIEW PANEL

The District's Citizen Review Panel (CRP) will be completing its annual report and submitting it CFSA. CFSA will forward it under separate cover. CFSA has included its most recent correspondence with the CRP regarding the FY 2010 APSR as well as the CRP's 2010 Annual Report attachments to this submission.

F. CRIMINAL BACKGROUND CHECKS OF PROSPECTIVE FOSTER/ADOPTIVE PARENTS

CFSA continues to comply with the requirements of the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA), with CAPTA, and with the Adam Walsh requirement to perform initial and ongoing criminal background checks of prospective foster and adoptive parents. CFSA ensures that all prospective foster and adoptive parents meet background check requirements. In addition, the assigned social worker secures authorizations from the applicant as well as from each adult member of the household to obtain the appropriate clearances. Another important process has been expedited since FY 2008 when CFSA gained the capacity to gather LiveScan fingerprints images on-site at the Agency. This capacity has greatly increased efficiencies and timeliness in the background checking process.

The Child Protection Register (CPR), Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) and Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) clearances are also checked, as well as the CPR clearance of any jurisdiction in which each person has lived during the previous five years. The Armed Services Register is also used for any person with a military background. Procedural guidelines are outlined in the CFSA's Business Process for Criminal Records Checks (2004), as well as the drafted Business Process for Licensing Foster Homes (2006). The DC ASFA also mandates that CFSA's case-planning process include a discussion of the safety and appropriateness of the facility or foster family home in which the child is to be placed.

Beyond the criminal background investigations, CFSA performs a two-tiered physical safety assessment to address the appropriateness of the physical environment of the home in which a foster child is to be placed. The home-study is an objective assessment of the home's compliance with the District's safety-related foster home licensing regulations. All prospective foster homes undergo this assessment and the level of compliance is determined uniformly.

G. CAPTA ANNUAL STATE DATA REPORT

Pursuant to CAPTA, CPS personnel responsible for intake, screening, assessment, and investigation of child abuse and neglect reports are required to meet the following minimum educational requirements and qualifications established by the District:

- Master's Degree in Social Work from a school accredited by the Council of Social Work Education.
- DC Graduate or Independent Social Worker License
- Valid driver's license
- At least one year of specialized experience to equip the applicant with the particular knowledge, skills, and abilities to perform successfully the duties of the position, including:
 - Thorough knowledge of the child welfare field to provide social work services for individuals and families.
 - Knowledge of related psychiatric, psychological and medical practices used in the evaluation and treatment of children and families, to serve as an effective member of the multi-disciplinary treatment team.
 - Thorough knowledge of human behavior dynamics; sensitivity to cultural diversity, age, and religious differences affecting child rearing, family and kinship patterns; attitudes about illness and medical care; and communication patterns. This knowledge is specific to the staff member's ability to conduct home visits or investigations, develop case plans, and to provide counseling.
 - Knowledge of pertinent resources, legal status, and related policies and procedures as they affect children and families.
 - Ability to communicate effectively orally and in writing.

At present, all social workers currently employed by CFSA meet the educational requirements and qualifications established by the District. Nonetheless, CFSA operates on a grade/step promotional system, and approximately 10% of all CPS social workers have an Independent Clinical Social Worker License (LICSW) in addition to meeting the qualifications above.

Training requirements for CFSA social workers, including CPS workers, are enumerated in Section B. above.

With respect to the CPS organizational structure, the CPS administrator oversees the three program divisions. Each division falls under the purview of a program manager, under whom there are six to eight social worker units. CFSA's current breakdown of CPS social worker units is as follows:

- Ten Traditional Investigation Units – these homogenous units are made up of MSW-level staff members who are responsible for investigating Hotline-screened reports of abuse or neglect.

- One Special Abuse Unit – the homogenous Special Abuse Unit is made up of MSW-level staff members who investigate child fatalities, sexual abuse of children of all ages, and allegations of severe physical abuse of children under the age of five.
- One Institutional Unit – the homogenous Institutional Unit is made up of MSW-level staff members who investigate allegations of neglect and/or abuse (including some allegations of sexual abuse) reported in foster homes, congregate care or residential hospital facilities, boarding schools, daycare facilities or homes, and “New Beginnings”, which is a juvenile detention facility in Laurel, MD that falls under the jurisdiction of DYRS.
- One Hotline Unit – the homogenous Hotline unit is made up of MSW, MA, and BSW-level staff members who are responsible for taking reports of abuse and neglect over the CFSA Hotline.
- Four After-Hours Units – these are heterogeneous units comprised of Hotline workers and investigators (all MSW-level staff), who take reports and conduct investigations after normal business hours.
- One Family Assessment Unit – the homogenous Family Assessment Unit is responsible for implementing CFSA’s new DR model. The staff members work with families who are screened by the Hotline as low-to-moderate risk families.

The caseload of each worker conducting investigations of reports of abuse and/or neglect does not exceed the standard of 12 open cases, and no individual investigator has a caseload greater than 15 cases at any time.