



State of Florida
Department of Children and Families

Charlie Crist
Governor

George H. Sheldon
Secretary

DATE: June 1, 2009

TO: Regional Directors

THROUGH: John Cooper, Acting Assistant Secretary for Operations
David L. Fairbanks, Assistant Secretary for Programs

FROM: Alan Abramowitz, State Director, Office of Family Safety

SUBJECT: Elimination of the Statewide Requirement for Red Flag Protocol

PURPOSE: This memorandum rescinds the mandatory use of the statewide Red Flag Protocol requirements which were initially put in place in 2004. Given the risk factors in each particular situation, cases with high risk and safety elements will continue to be the focus of review by experienced staff throughout the life of the case through use of a multidisciplinary approach to working with families.

BACKGROUND: On February 17, 2009 a memo was disseminated to Regional Directors and Circuit Administrators asking for feedback on the Family Safety Program Office's recommendation to eliminate the Red Flag Protocol.

The memo outlined the background history of the Red Flag Protocol and the rationale for such a recommendation. The February 17, 2009 memo is attached for historical reference.

There were twenty-one coordinated responses representing each of the six Regions, Sheriff's Offices and Community Based Care agencies. The majority of responses were in support of the Program Office's recommendation.

CURRENT SITUATION: Since the initial implementation of the Red Flag Protocol requirements, the Department has implemented several measures to ensure review and assessment of risk and safety factors.

In July, 2007, Florida implemented a new Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (SACWIS) known as the Florida Safe Families Network (FSFN). This new system incorporated an automated child safety assessment with supervisory review and second party review capabilities. This enhanced system allows for timely review and tracking of a worker's assessment of safety factors, the overall safety assessment, and safety actions taken by the protective investigator. Upon completion, the system automatically generates email notification to investigators, supervisors, and second party reviewers that the review

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is complete to allow for timely feedback as to additional actions needed. This enhanced automated system captures all items on the red flag screening checklist and allows for immediate notification of review and recommended course of action.

In addition, in March 2007 the Department implemented a credentialing process for managers conducting second party reviews. This process includes a set of mandatory criteria or prerequisites that a reviewer needs to have met in order to be qualified to conduct second party reviews.

Finally, as a result of the Ludwig Quality Assurance review, the Secretary directed that "each Circuit will ensure that critical cases are staffed through a multidisciplinary staffing at the appropriate level given the risk factors involved".

Continuing to mandate the use of the Red Flag Protocol since the implementation of FSFN impedes time management and loss of productivity in the identification and assessment of these cases.

ACTION REQUIRED: Effective immediately the statewide requirements for the Red Flag Protocol have been rescinded.

Please disseminate this memorandum to all staff impacted within the Department, Sheriff's Offices and Community Based Care agencies.

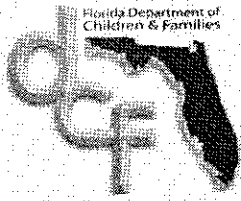
Staff shall continue to ensure that all child and parental risk and safety factors are thoroughly reviewed and considered in the process of decision-making throughout the life of the case. This review may include a multidisciplinary staffing as determined by the CPI supervisor, second party reviewer or case management staff based upon the individual specifics of the information obtained.

This memo does not restrict Regional Directors or Circuit Administrators from making additional requirements for case review.

CONTACT INFORMATION: Should you have any questions, please contact Chris Compton at 850-443-6646, or via e-mail at chris_compton@dcf.state.fl.us.

Attachment

cc: Community Based Care CEOs
Circuit Administrators
Sheriff's Offices



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DATE: February 17, 2009

TO: Regional Directors and Circuit Administrators

THRU: John Cooper, Acting Assistant Secretary for Operations *John Cooper*
David Fairbanks, Assistant Secretary for Programs *David Fairbanks*

FROM: Alan Abramowitz, Director of Office of Family Safety

SUBJECT: Red Flag Protocol / Second Party Review Process Review: Comments requested by 2-27-09

PURPOSE: The purpose of this memo is to obtain your feedback on our recommendation to integrate the Red Flag Protocol and Second Party Review Process while ensuring cases with high risk and safety issues continue to be the focus of review by experienced staff throughout the life of the case.

Please disseminate this broadly to Circuit Administrators, Sheriff's Office, Community-Based Care CEOs and others as appropriate. Comments should be sent directly to Chris Compton (contact information listed below) no later than February 27, 2009. After comments are received and analyzed, a memo will be disseminated to you about next steps. This memo will not restrict Regional Directors or Circuit Administrators from making additional requirements for case review.

BACKGROUND: In 1997 Florida implemented an early warning system review that was designed to detect "as early as possible, cases not handled appropriately, as well as potential patterns of policy violations, including lack of adequate supervisory oversight" on cases with elevated risk factors.

This early warning system evolved into what is known today as the Department's Second Party Review process. The current Second Party Review process is an administrative review performed by a higher level staff person than the investigator's immediate supervisor as necessitated by high risk and safety factors. The purpose of the review is to examine the decision(s) of the supervisor and validate their recommended course of action or determine the need for additional action.

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In December 2004 the Department implemented the High Risk Tracking and Review System. The system was modeled after the State of Oregon's High Risk Tracking System, titled the same, and was intended to identify and provide enhanced monitoring and tracking of the highest risk cases that DCF, Sheriff's Departments, and CBCs serve.

There have been subsequent modifications to Florida's original tracking system, the last being in late 2006. This is known as the Red Flag Protocol with the purpose "to ensure that all child and parental risk and safety factors are thoroughly reviewed and considered in the process of decision-making at all critical case planning junctures, from investigation through permanency."

In July 2007, Florida implemented a new Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (SACWIS) known as the Florida Safe Families Network (FSFN). This new system incorporated an automated child safety assessment with built in supervisory review and Second Party Review capabilities. This enhanced system allows for timely review and tracking of a worker's assessment of child vulnerability, signs of present danger, protective capacities of the family, the overall safety assessment and the safety actions taken by the protective investigator. Upon completion, the system automatically generates email notification to investigators, supervisors, and second party reviewers that the review is complete to allow for timely feedback as to additional actions needed. This enhanced automated system captures all items on the red flag screening checklist and allows for immediate notification of review and recommended course of action. The Department also implemented a credentialing process for managers conducting second party reviews in March 2007. This process included a set of mandatory criteria or prerequisites that a reviewer needed to have met in order to be qualified to conduct second party reviews.

CURRENT ISSUE: The first major consideration is to determine the value of the Red Flag Protocol in light of the Second Party Review process/FSFN documentation. Past efforts to identify, assess, and track high risk cases through refinement of the Red Flag Protocol have resulted in limited success. One unintended consequence was the duplication of effort now required to document the same information in two places – in the FSFN Safety Assessment and on the Red Flag Screening Checklist. Attachment I is an outline of the Red Flag Protocol compared with the Second Party Review process, which is supported through the requirements contained in FSFN. The parallel policies incorporating and strengthening the Red Flag Protocol are highlighted in green.

Florida's original High Risk Tracking and Review System and Oregon's model are very similar. One notable exception, however, is that Oregon did not have a similar second party review process as Florida, so the High Risk Tracking system did not result in duplication of effort for their staff. Since the implementation of FSFN, continuing to mandate the use of the Red Flag Protocol impedes time management and results in a loss of productivity.

The Red Flag Protocol is a paper process which lends itself to a wide variation in implementation across Circuits and Regions. Using a paper process makes it difficult at

best to continually track parental and risk factors in real time. It is essential that the documentation occur in FSFN, the official system of record, since it is the accessible and available resource for review by all entities in the child protection system.

A second major consideration is the current Second Party Review requirement and the need to allow supervisors and managers discretionary authority to override automated, system generated reviews after safety threats and risk factors have been addressed and/or mitigated. On average, approximately 40% of all reports received for investigation require a Second Party Review. Current administrative rule dictates that a subsequent Second Party Review be completed prior to case closure without differentiation between those reports where elevated risk and safety factors remain and those in which the identified safety threats have been adequately addressed during the initial review. In the latter circumstances, these follow-up reviews unnecessarily burden managers already pressed for time.

RECOMMENDATION: The Family Safety Program Office recommends elimination of the Red Flag Protocol. Second Party Review functionality in FSFN already provides for a seamless review and assessment of elevated risk and safety issues. Discontinuing use of the Red Flag Screening Protocol will enhance safety outcomes and be more than offset by supervisors placing added emphasis on narrative summaries describing and summarizing specific 'Implications for Child Safety' related to the 'Present Danger', 'Child Vulnerability', and 'Protective Capacities' safety factors contained in the FSFN safety assessment.

It is also recommended that Florida Administrative Rule on the Second Party Review process be revised to allow discretion on subsequent Second Party Reviews when the facts of the case determine there is no longer elevated risk or safety issues. Highly qualified, credentialed reviewers are in the best position to determine whether further review is warranted prior to closure. This discretion will require changes to FSFN to allow functionality to align with rule. A current cost estimate has been submitted to CGI to determine the amount needed for implementation.

This recommendation does not restrict regional directors or circuit administrators from making additional requirements for case review.

CONTACT INFORMATION: Should you have any questions, please contact Chris Compton at 850-443-6646, or via e-mail at chris_compton@dcf.state.fl.us.

Attachment



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Attachment 1

Duplication between the Red Flag Protocol and Second Party Review Process

At the onset of each investigation the Child Protective Investigator (CPI) is required to complete the Red Flag Screening Checklist to “ensure *concurrency* with the completion of the initial Child Safety Assessment CSA, so that all safety and risk factors are appropriately considered during the initial screening process”. This is a paper checklist completed separately from the automated Child Safety Assessment in FSFN. The paper checklist is to determine if an investigation shall be preliminarily designated as Red Flag based upon identified safety and risk factors.

Release 1 of Florida’s new Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (SACWIS) known as the Florida Safe Families Network (FSFN) occurred on July 26, 2007. With the introduction of FSFN came a more comprehensive child safety assessment that guides the Child Protective Investigator (CPI) in their safety determination by considering 32 safety factors relative to signs of present danger, child vulnerability, and protective capacities. These 32 factors encompass similar constructs considered on the Red Flag Screening Checklist.

Upon identification and concurrence as Red Flag, the supervisor will schedule an initial Red Flag Review that must occur within *five days* of designation.

The 2nd Party Review, an administrative review of the automated assessment tool which is performed by a higher level staff person than the investigators’ immediate supervisor, is completed within *72 hours* from reviewer’s receipt of the automated assessment tool.

The initial review involves the CPI, their supervisor, the ongoing services worker (if there is an open services case) and an OPA/POA/2nd Party Reviewer or designated authority for the Sheriff’s Office conducting investigations.

The 2nd party review involves feedback from the CPI, their supervisor and an OPA/POA/2nd Party Reviewer designee (“a higher level staff person than the investigators immediate supervisor”). CPIs are required to notify/contact the child’s services worker upon receipt of an investigation involving a child in out-of-home care. In addition, FSFN automatically sends an email notification to the case manager when an intake is received that contains any subjects that are also the subject of an open services cases (both in-home and out-of-home).

Based upon the discussion of the presenting issues a determination is made as to the final Red Flag designation of the investigation. A Red Flag report shall have a safety plan in

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place and be staffed with Children's Legal Services (CLS) to determine legal sufficiency to file a petition for dependency.

The purpose of currently conducting the initial child safety assessment within forty-eight hours from the time the first child victim is seen is to determine whether a safety plan is necessary. This decision is validated by a supervisory review. A Second Party Review is completed when necessitated by high risk and safety factors identified during completion of the automated child safety assessment. Children's Legal Services (CLS) is contacted anytime during the course of the investigation when safety issues are identified and subsequent court action may be indicated.

Ongoing Red Flag Case Reviews are to occur at critical junctures/decision-making points for the purpose of facilitating sound decision-making for cases with a Red Flag designation. Red Flag cases are to continue to be reviewed at either critical junctures/decision points or every six months until the designation is no longer warranted or until it has been determined that identified safety threats have been resolved and/or mitigated.

During the course of the investigation Florida Administrative Rule 65C-29.003(6)(e) is very clear on when the Child Safety Assessment in FSFN shall be updated and re-submitted for supervisory and 2nd party review during similar instances consistent with the "critical junctures" in the Red Flag Protocol. When a child is sheltered, similar reviews are being completed during the requirements for an early services intervention staffing, multi-disciplinary staffing, monthly home visits by the services worker and judicial review. A safety plan is required to be updated when critical events occur throughout the case.

In summary, FSFN is the official system of record for investigations and case management and provides the capacity to electronically document case work and compliance with Florida Statutes and Administrative Code. This capability to quickly and continually document and monitor risk and safety issues throughout the life of an investigation makes the need for additional paper tracking systems obsolete.