



State of Florida  
Department of Children and Families

Rick Scott  
Governor

David E. Wilkins  
Secretary

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**DATE:** December 7, 2011

**TO:** Regional Directors

**THROUGH:** John Cooper, Assistant Secretary for Operations  
Drew Parker, General Counsel  
Jamie Self, Ed.D., Executive Director of Family and Community Services

**FROM:** Christie Ferris, Director of Child Welfare  
Kim Barrett, Director of the Florida Abuse Hotline

**SUBJECT:** Parent Needs Assistance Referrals  
**ACTION REQUESTED:** Disseminate to Child Welfare Staff  
**DUE DATE:** None

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**PURPOSE:** The purpose of this memorandum is to inform regions and child protection staff about changes to the Parent Needs Assistance (PNA) acceptance at the Florida Abuse Hotline.

**BACKGROUND:** Since 1998, the Department has implemented several policy requirements to address the needs of citizens and families who call the Florida Abuse Hotline with concerns about the welfare of children. Many times these concerns do not meet the threshold for the statutory requirements of a protective investigation. In 2010, the Child Maltreatment Index was revised to clarify Parent Needs Assistance Referrals as "Situations that do not statutorily meet the criteria for an abuse, abandonment, or neglect investigation report but the family may need services. The intent was to prevent future maltreatment by helping families or individuals through a family and/or community-centered approach before maltreatment occurs."

Chapter 39, Florida Statutes, is silent on "Parent Needs Assistance" referrals and the Department's General Counsel has opined that DCF does not currently have statutory authority to offer a differential response to reports received at the Florida Abuse Hotline that do not meet the threshold for a child abuse or neglect investigation.

Florida Administrative Code 65C-30.001(132) defines a "Special Condition Referral" as requests brought to the attention of the Department that require a response by a Department or the investigating sheriff. These requests do not constitute willful abuse, neglect or abandonment but they may result in new allegations of maltreatment and/or the need to shelter a child upon response. It further states that these Special Condition Referrals include situations when the caregiver is having difficulty caring for a child to the

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degree that it appears very likely that without intervention, abuse, neglect or abandonment will occur.

Effective January 1, 2012, the Florida Abuse Hotline will have fully implemented the changes to the PNA acceptance process to be consistent with Florida Administrative Code. PNA contacts will only be accepted when a parent or legal guardian calls the Florida Abuse Hotline stating they are having difficulty caring for a child to the degree that it appears very likely that without intervention, abuse, neglect or abandonment will occur.

The Florida Abuse Hotline will assess all other reports that present a significant elevated risk of child maltreatment and, if appropriate, accept the report for a child protective investigation. When a call does not meet the threshold for acceptance of a formal investigation or Special Conditions referral, but the facts of the call indicate the family may be in need of services, the caller will be provided local resource information.

**ACTION REQUIRED:** Please disseminate this memorandum to all Child Welfare staff, including Community-Based Care Lead Agencies, and Sheriffs'.

**CONTACT INFORMATION:** If you have any questions or need additional information please contact Lynne Dupuis at [lynne\\_dupuis@dcf.state.fl.us](mailto:lynne_dupuis@dcf.state.fl.us) or 850-717-4651 or Kim Barrett at [kim\\_barrett@dcf.state.fl.us](mailto:kim_barrett@dcf.state.fl.us) or 850-487-6149.

cc: Pete Digre, Deputy Secretary