Family Safety Program

Purpose
The Family Safety Program works in partnership with families, local communities, courts, tribes, and children themselves, when old enough, to ensure the safety, timely permanency and well-being of children.

Program Overview
The Family Safety Program Office supports, supervises, and develops policies and practices for dependent children and their families, whether adoptive, foster or biological. Services are directed toward the following goals (s. 409.145(1), F.S.):

- The prevention of separation of children from their families,
- The protection of children who are alleged to be dependent, or are dependent children, including provision of emergency and long-term alternate living arrangements,
- The reunification of families who have had children placed in foster homes or institutions,
- The permanent placement of children who cannot be reunited with their families for whom reunification would not be in the best interest of the child, and
- The transition to self-sufficiency for older children who continue to be in foster care as adolescents.

Leader in the nation in safely reducing out-of-home care
- The best place for a child to grow up is in caring and safe family.
  - Need to continue the use of flexible dollars under the Title IV-E Waiver to further create and maintain successful and innovative practices that improve family safety and stability so that a child can safely remain at home.
  - Continue to set and achieve high goals for the number of children adopted.
  - Relative care and guardianship options have grown.
- Ensuring that safety plans for children remaining with their families protect children from further harm.

Community-Based Care
Community-Based Care represents a comprehensive transformation of Florida’s child welfare system that combines outsourcing of foster care and related services to competent service agencies, with increased community ownership of service delivery and design. The Department works in partnership with local communities to strengthen the ability to support families and better protect our most vulnerable children. Services are provided by not for profit Lead Agencies that develop and manage comprehensive, community-based networks of providers who are equipped to deliver all services and supports to meet the needs of child victims and their families. While there is a strong desire to have local control and flexibility, there is also recognition that the state must ensure that child victims are provided with a quality system that offers both equal access to care and an equal level of protection, and that compliance with federal and state law is maintained. (Chapter 39, F.S.)

An innovation central to the success of Community-Based Care is the IV-E Waiver Demonstration Project, initiated in October 2006. The IV-E Waiver Demonstration project was granted by the Department of Health and Human Services to allow Florida to use federal foster care funds (historically appropriated by Congress only for foster care room and board payments) flexibly, for any necessary service or any child and family at risk of abuse, or served
by the child welfare system. This Waiver has allowed the State and its providers to safely reduce the number of children removed from their homes, and redirect IV-E funding to services that will strengthen and maintain families in their own homes. The Waiver was granted for a five-year period, and ends September 30, 2011. Florida has requested a five-year extension of this authority and is awaiting feedback from our federal partners.

**Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect**

Child abuse prevention initiatives are developed at the state level in collaboration with local community planning teams to identify public policy priorities that require local implementation. Funds are provided to contracted agencies to deliver parenting education, skill development, referral to community resources and risk reduction services. The array of family prevention services supported with state and federal funding are developed locally through needs assessment strategies unique to the area and population being served. (Chapter 39, F.S.)

Florida’s flexible Title IV-E funds have allowed the Department and its partner lead agencies to create a more responsive array of community-based services and supports for children and families typically funded using Title IV-B funds. Capped allocations of the waiver funds are co-mingled with Title IV-B funds to support child welfare practice, program, and system improvements that promote child safety, prevent removal from home, and expedite a permanent home for the child.

The strategic use of these funds has also allowed community-based lead agencies to implement individualized approaches that emphasize both family engagement and child-centered interventions. Examples of expanded services include: (1) Nurturing Parenting Programs, which incorporate parent and child services and education (e.g., infant massage, empathy skill-building, parenting skills); (2) crisis intervention services, such as mobile crisis response teams designed to de-escalate high-risk situations; (3) Family Team Conferencing to engage families in service planning; and (4) Family Finding programs to reduce children’s length of stay in out-of-home care.

**Child Protective Investigations**

Florida’s Abuse Hotline is the single entry point for receiving and screening allegations of abuse, neglect, and abandonment for reports that meet the requirements for protective investigations. Trained and certified child protective investigators conduct in-home and on-site interviews of children, parents, and other family and non-family members who can provide details about a child’s living situation. Child protective investigators confirm or rule out child endangerment through safety assessment processes that enable decision-making to either close a case as an unfounded allegation, provide voluntary our court-ordered protective services in the home, or seek judicial authority for removal of a child. Currently the Department of Children and Families protective investigation staff conducts protective investigations, except in seven counties (Citrus, Hillsborough, Pinellas, Broward, Pasco, Manatee, and Seminole) where Sheriff’s offices are provided the funds to conduct them. (Chapter 39, F.S.; F.A.C. 65C-29)

**In-Home Services/Supervision**

Some child protective investigations where maltreatment has been verified indicate that removal of a child is not necessary as long as services can be provided in the home without compromising the safety and welfare of the child. Under such circumstances, funds are provided to contracted agencies to provide case management and oversight of referrals to community resources. Services offered include crisis counseling, parenting education and therapeutic counseling or treatment. If a family is under court-ordered monitoring of in-home services, the case remains open for a minimum of six months and a judge determines closure.
If a family is not under the supervision of the court, the length of time that the case remains open is determined between the family and the caseworker. (Chapters 39 and 409, F.S.; F.A.C. 65C-30)

**Out-of-Home Care Services/Supervision**

Children who have been removed from the custody of their parents due to a court-ordered finding of abuse, neglect or abandonment are placed in either licensed foster care or with a judicially reviewed and approved relative. In exceptional circumstances, non-relatives can also provide a home for the child. Families whose child is placed in out-of-home care will have a court ordered case plan which serves as the lynch-pin upon which parents and providers work jointly to accomplish the goal of permanency and safety for a child – that goal typically being reunification with a parent. The average time between removal and reunification is generally one year. State and federal law requires the judicial establishment of a permanency goal for a child to be announced in court no later than one year from removal. During the provision of services, parents are referred to treatment and other court ordered services and counselors provide monthly monitoring of the child in their alternative placement. Case managers also ensure regular parent-child contact, unless it is not permitted by the court. (Chapters 39 and 409, F.S.; F.A.C. 65C-28)

**Independent Living Services for Youth Ages 13-17**

All foster youth ages 13 and older are eligible for independent living services, regardless of physical or developmental disabilities. Federal and state funds are provided to contracted agencies for case management to youth to make the transition to self-sufficiency as young adults. Caseworkers partner with foster care parents and providers to assist youth in becoming increasingly independent and responsible by improving socialization skills, employment-related skills, and daily living skills. Individualized case plans are developed and reviewed by the court at six month intervals. (s.409.1451, F.S.; Chapter 30 F.S.; F.A.C.65C-31)

The current program is being re-designed and there will be administrative code and law revisions in 2010 and 2011.

- Many children turning 18 and leaving foster care are not ready to be on their own, like many 18-year-olds not in care.
- Ensure that the redesign plans are cost-neutral.
  - Policy analysis will inform cost and revenue projections.
  - Proposed payment rates will assure cost neutrality.

**Transition Services to Young Adults Formerly in Foster Care Ages 18-22**

A combination of state and federal dollars are provided to contracted agencies to assist young adults who have been in foster care to pursue and obtain educational goals, become gainfully employed, and transition successfully to self-sufficiency. Services may include financial, housing, counseling, employment, education through programs such as Transitional Support Services, Aftercare Support Services, Tuition and fee exemptions, and Medicaid. (ss. 409.1451, F.S.; F.A.C. 65C-31).

**Adoption Placement/Supervision/Finalization**

Children are not eligible for adoption unless parental rights have been terminated by the court. Florida has had recent success in placing children eligible for adoption in forever homes. Funds are provided to contracted agencies to recruit and place children for adoption and to support these placements through counseling and information and referral. The need for pre and post-adoption support programs are determined through an assessment based on the prospective
adoptive parents as well as the child. Adoptive parents obtain training that sensitizes them to the unique needs of children who, due to their experience of abuse and neglect, present challenges that require a specialized parent skill set. Currently, Florida currently leads the nation in the number and timeliness of foster children who find permanent, adoptive homes (Chapters 39 and 63, F. S.; F.A.C. 65C-16)

Family Foster Home Licensing and Monitoring
Funds are provided to contracted agencies to ensure standards for health, safety, and well-being are met to achieve permanency for children. This includes conducting home studies on the various placement settings and conducting background screening of all individuals in caretaker roles. The licensure provisions for single homes for children in out of home care include annual compliance reviews of licensure requirements, as well as monthly on-site visits by caseworkers to provide necessary supports and services, and to monitor the care of the child. However, family foster homes need re-licensure only once every three years. (Chapters 39 and 409, F. S.; F.A.C. 65C-13)

Child Placing Agency and Child Caring Agency (Group Home) Licensing and Monitoring
State law requires that all child placing agency providers be monitored and licensed by the Department. Funds are provided to contracted agencies to ensure standards are met for health, safety, and well-being of children. State statute was amended during the 2010 legislative session to eliminate duplication of administrative monitoring of provider agencies that are monitored by a nationally accredited organization to once every three years, and for administrative monitoring to be conducted jointly by state agencies that contract with the provider agency, e.g., DCF, DJJ, APD, DOH and AHCA. For those provider agencies not nationally accredited, there can be only one joint administrative monitoring per year. For purposes of annual licensure of child placing agency providers under the Department of Children and Families the law now allows the Department to license only one location (generally the headquarters). The administrative monitoring can occur only once every three years In addition, (Chapters 39 and 409, F. S.; F.A.C. 65C-15)

Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC)
The Interstate Compact is in all 50 states, the District of Columbia and the U.S. Virgin Islands. The ICPC operates via a binding contract between 52 member jurisdictions and establishes uniform legal and administrative procedures governing the safe and timely interstate placement of children. National data reported by the American Public Human Services Association in 2006 indicates that interstate placements comprise nearly 5.5 percent of all out-of-home residential arrangements, affecting about 43,000 children a year. Of these, about 61% of children placed in other states were placed with families who became permanent. In May 2010, the ICPC was moved to the office of the Assistant Secretary of Operations. Florida’s ICPC was the first state to automate much of its work.

Training to Child Welfare Staff
The Department is committed to its role of providing technical assistance and training to enable all public child welfare services staff to meet child welfare education and training requirements, per Florida Statutes, subsection 402.40. The key elements of Florida’s training program for child welfare personnel include pre-service and certification programs, in-service and advanced training programs, clinical supervision training, field-based coaching, professional development, technological enhancements to maximize performance, university and college partnerships, and recruitment and retention programs.
Through the annual Dependency Summit over the past 4 years, nearly 400 workshops were provided to over 6,000 individuals working on behalf of Florida’s children and families, including judges, attorneys, youth, foster and adoptive parents, case managers, counselors, law enforcement, protective investigators, community-based care agency staff, and subcontracted providers.

Quality Assurance

471(a)(22) of the Social Security Act, 45 CFR 1355.34(c)(3), and 45 CFR 1357.15(u) require that states have a quality assurance system in child welfare. A regional model provides for uniform performance standards; on-going assessment of progress towards meeting state and federal expectations for child safety, permanency, and well-being; quarterly reviews of a random sample of 100 cases per Community-Based Care lead agency per year; the capacity to take immediate action as critical issues are identified; regional discretion to select additional special populations or topics for review; and placeholders for the Secretary of the Department to mandate statewide special reviews in a program component of his/her choice during the fiscal year.

Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (SACWIS)

The federal government requires each state to have a fully automated database for tracking casework performance and outcomes. The Florida Safe Families Network (FSFN) is Florida's SACWIS system. FSFN is the Department's official system of record for documenting child protective investigation and child welfare casework statewide, from the initial reporting of abuse and neglect, to foster care and adoptions case management and permanency planning.

Child and Family Services Review and Florida’s Quality Improvement Plan

Every four or five years, the Children’s Bureau of the Department of Health and Human Services conducts a Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) in each state to assess compliance with a wide range of federal standards on child safety, permanency and well-being. Florida was first reviewed in 2001, and again in 2008. The resulting report required a corrective action plan, which Florida terms the “Quality improvement Plan, or QIP.” The Department has successfully completed the majority of actions required, and performance on safety, permanency and well-being measures has improved to the point where the QIP should be completed this fiscal year. This is a very significant accomplishment, as millions in federal funding hinge on satisfactory performance as determined by the CFSR Review.

Reducing the cost of services for young adults aging out of foster care by providing a more effective transition to adulthood

- By taking advantage of the Fostering Connections federal legislation and extending foster care to young adults, Florida will be able to draw down federal funds and provide additional services to those children who opt to stay in foster care beyond their 18th birthday.
- Young adults seeking their high school diploma or equivalent would receive continued case management and live in a supervised setting, while receiving a smaller stipend than with the current program.
- Developing rules that will address quarterly reviews of self-sufficiency plans and guidelines to evaluate the youths’ educational progress and assess continued eligibility for the type and level of support being provided.
- The percentage of youth with serious emotional disturbances who transition from the children’s mental health system to the adult mental health system is low, due in part to focus of the adult mental health system on individuals with severe and persistent mental illnesses.
Successful transition requires a comprehensive approach to assessing and addressing the needs of youth across multiple domains. It requires the collaboration of the various systems and agencies such as mental health, substance abuse, employment, housing and education.

The Department’s children’s and adult mental health staff, in partnership with youth, parents, and providers are working to identify effective transition practices, resources, and services that support effective and timely transition between the children’s and adult mental health systems.

During Fiscal Year 2009-2010, the Orange County Youth and Family Services Division and the Miami-Dade Wraparound Project were both awarded a Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) System of Care grant. The Orange County grant site is targeting children birth to 21 and the Miami site is targeting youth 14 – 21 with co-occurring mental health and substance abuse needs.

Comprehensive redesign of child welfare and independent living

- Implementing the Fostering Connections Act
  - Providing the option for teens to stay in foster care until age 21 if they are pursuing a high school diploma or post-secondary education.
  - For those young adults pursuing post secondary schooling, financial support will continue until age 23.
  - Create additional options to independent living stipends by giving youth a home with permanent guardians who can receive financial support.
  - Teach financial management and other skills to youth that they must demonstrate in order to receive stipend.
  - Extend the Title IV-E Waiver for additional years.
  - Florida has a unique waiver to permit more flexible use of federal funds. The state has requested a five year extension.

Functions

The Family Safety Program Office is the central repository expected to have programmatic knowledge for services that support safe and stable families, provide protection and permanent families to children and monitor the well-being of children. In order to maintain the funding that supports these services, the program office engages in activities and develops products that support statewide execution of and compliance with federal and state law. The program office also recognizes, shares and promotes quality care and services by working closing with Community-Based Care agencies. Key products are rules and standards of care, technical assistance and training tools, and plans for targeted initiatives. It is essential that all activities and products are the result of collaboration with a wide array of internal and external customer groups at the local, regional, state and national levels. In particular, Community-Based Care lead agencies must be consulted and included early and often in any project, product or activity.

Federally Mandated Reports

<p>| Annual Progress Services Report (comprehensive for all program areas IV-B and IV-E) | Disaster Funding Plan | Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) | Title IV-E Foster Care and Adoption State Plan |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect (NCANDS)</th>
<th>Five Year Child and Family Services Plan</th>
<th>Community-Based Grants for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (CBCAP) FFY annual final report</th>
<th>Annual State Child Access and Visitation (SAV) federal grant report</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Annual Statistical Report for Temporary Assistance to Needy Families</td>
<td>Title IVE Waiver Demonstration Evaluation Report</td>
<td>Criminal Justice Act (Dependency Summit and other related activities))</td>
<td>National Youth in Transition (IL) (Reports begin May, 2011)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**State Legislatively-Mandated Reports**

1. One Church/One Child - s.409.1755(3)(b)5 - 9/1
2. Revenue Maximization - s.409.017(3)(g) - 1/1
3. Number of False Reports of Child Abuse, Abandonment or Neglect Referred to Law Enforcement - s.39.205(4) - 3/30
4. Oversight Activities for Outcome Measures for CBCs (Independent Living) - s.409.1451(g) - 1/31
5. Independent Living Services Advisory Council (ILSAC) Annual Report and DCF Response - s.409.1451(7)(b) - 1/1
6. Progress on Providing Access to Judges and Magistrates to Information in the Florida Safe Families Network (FSFN) - 2/1
8. Sheriffs’ annual performance peer reviewer report s. 39.3065(3)(d), F.S.

**FLORIDA ADMINISTRATIVE CODE (RULES)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>65C-9</th>
<th>Alien Children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>65C-13</td>
<td>Substitute Care of Children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>65C-14</td>
<td>Group Care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>65C-15</td>
<td>Child-Placing Agencies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>65C-16</td>
<td>Adoptions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>65C-17</td>
<td>Master Trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>65C-19</td>
<td>Certification of Public Agency Funds as Title IV-E Match (Local Match Process)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>65C-27</td>
<td>Suitability Assessments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>65C-28</td>
<td>Out-of-Home Care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>65C-29</td>
<td>Protective Investigations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>65C-31</td>
<td>Services to Young Adults Formerly in the Custody of the Department</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>65C-32</td>
<td>Parenting Course for Divorcing Parents in the State of Florida</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>65C-33</td>
<td>Child Welfare Training and Certification (in progress)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>65C-34</td>
<td>Missing Children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>65C-35</td>
<td>Psychotropic Medications</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Advisory Committees

The Florida Task Force on Children’s Justice (CJA)
Florida has been a recipient of the Children’s Justice Act Grant since 1997 and has continuously maintained a multidisciplinary task force since the initial award. The Task Force priorities were established based on demonstrated needs. Projects or pilots have been developed to explore options or best practices to improve overall performance within the child welfare continuum of care.

Independent Living Advisory Council
The Independent Living Advisory Council reviews and makes recommendations concerning the implementation and operation of the independent living transition services. (ss. 409.1451(7), F.S.)

The Task Force on Fostering Success
The Task Force on Fostering Success (Task Force) was established in July 2007 to examine child protection issues recommended administrative, policy, legislative, education, and training efforts to be undertaken to ensure the safety of Florida’s children.

Florida Child Abuse Death Review Committee
This citizens’ committee was established by the Florida Legislature in 1999, under s. 383.402, Florida Statutes. The committee uses an 18-member state panel and locally developed multi-disciplinary teams to conduct detailed reviews of the facts and circumstances surrounding child abuse and neglect deaths in which a verified report of abuse or neglect is accepted by the Florida Abuse Hotline.

Community Alliances
The Community Alliances are the central point for broad-based community input and interagency coordination. With support of the statute, the Department shall establish a Community Alliance of Stakeholders, community leaders, client representatives, and funders of human services in each county to provide a focal point for community participation and governance of community-based services. (ss. 20.19(6), F.S.)

Partnerships
Under the three major accomplishments for the Child Welfare system it will become obvious that the Department has not accomplished them without ongoing multiple and strong partnerships at every level.

Briefly, the Family Safety Program works in partnership with the following departments and agencies:

- The Office of Adoption and Child Abuse Prevention within the Executive Office of the Governor. Members of the Inter-program Task Force for Child Abuse Prevention are awaiting direction from the Office of Child Abuse Prevention to provide direction on next steps for the work already completed and plans for future efforts to protect Florida’s children who may be endanger of Abuse, Abandonment, or Neglect.

- The Office of State Court Administration (OSCA) provides Guardians ad Litem who act as advocates for dependent children and their families The Office of Court Improvement also works jointly with the Department to ensure training of judges, child welfare practitioners and administrators.
• Children’s Legal Services (CLS) is the prosecution arm of the dependency system. Children’s Legal Services represents the State of Florida, by and through the Department of Children and Families, to ensure the health and safety of children and the integrity of families. The State of Florida has the responsibility of protecting children who have been abused, abandoned and/or neglected by their parents.

• The Department of Juvenile Justice to ensure interagency communication, proper planning, continued advocacy and care follow children who move from the child welfare system to the delinquency system. Also, to ensure the proper and efficient administration of Medicaid and the Title IV-E program and an agreement for referral and coordination of jointly served youth in comprehensive residential group care.

• The Department of Education and the Agency for Workforce Innovation to ensure the secure exchange of confidential and other data necessary for the parties to comply with the requirements of various federal and state mandates and to improve outcomes in education and employment opportunities for children under the care of the Department.

• The Department of Health to work collaboratively in the best interests of mutual clients with respect to planning, development, and implementation of common issues to ensure good health outcomes for children, through development of legislation, rules, programs, services, grants, protocols, curricula and standards.

• The Agency for Health Care Administration for the secure exchange of confidential information to ensure adequate physical and behavioral health care for the children served by the child welfare system.

• The Department contracts with 22 Community-Based Care Lead Agencies for child welfare services.

• Intradepartmental program offices of General Counsel, domestic violence, substance abuse and mental health, and program operations.