

Introduction

Ohio counties have faced several natural disasters and operational emergencies in past years, including flooding, tornadoes, and even a massive power outage that impacted multiple states. Being prepared for unplanned and sometimes catastrophic interruptions in business operations is critical for agencies providing basic health and safety services to children and families, as these agencies are often the first point of contact for displaced community members seeking assistance. Agencies must be supportive of the development of emergency preparedness plan for child care providers; and the safety and needs of children and their parents or legal guardians when separated due to disaster and significant numbers of children have become separated from parents/legal guardian.

In Ohio, direct services for child protection, e.g., assessment/investigation, foster care and in-home supportive services to children and families, are provided by county public children services agencies (PCSAs). In addition, the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) licenses private child placing agencies (PCPAs); group homes; children's residential centers (CRCs); and private non-custodial agencies (PNAs) to provide substitute care and adoption services. ODJFS has statutory responsibility to promulgate rules via the Ohio Administrative Code (OAC) and provide oversight of PCSAs, PCPAs, group homes, CRCs and PNAs to ensure rule compliance. The activities conducted by ODJFS with direct impact on the child protective services (CPS) system's clients include: processing Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC) paperwork; conducting searches of the Central Registry in compliance with the Adam Walsh Act and to assist other states' CPS agencies with assessment/investigation activities; operating the Putative Father registry; and providing technical assistance to agencies and customer service for the general public via the Office for Families and Children (OFC) Help Desk.

Section 422(b)(16)(A)-(E) of the Social Security Act requires that states' disaster preparedness and recovery plans (henceforth, disaster plans) do all of the following:

- *Identify, locate and continue availability of services for children under state care or supervision who are displaced or adversely affected by a disaster;*
- *Respond to new child welfare cases in areas adversely affected by a disaster, and provide services in those cases;*
- *Remain in communication with caseworkers and other essential child welfare personnel who are displaced because of a disaster; and*
- *Coordinate services and share information with other states.*

As a state supervised, county administered child protective services (CPS) system, planning for disaster response and recovery in Ohio occurs at both the state and county levels. Plans to ensure continuity of critical direct child protection services interrupted by an emergency or disaster are developed by PCSAs in collaboration with their local stakeholders and service providers. Private agencies holding custody of children placed in substitute care; CRCs and group homes with children in placement; and PNAs supervising licensed substitute care providers are also required to develop disaster plans to ensure continuity of services for children and families. Through OAC rule 5101:2-5-13.1, *Disaster Preparedness Plan Requirements*, ODJFS requires each agency

under its purview to have specific policies in place related to agency operations, personnel practices, provision of services, etc. This rule also requires public and private agencies to develop a county and/or agency specific disaster plan in cooperation with key stakeholders and service providers (e.g., caregivers, families, other agencies, courts, shelters).

Locating missing children and reuniting minors with their parent/guardian will be a priority. The most effective method to reunite children is to provide efficient and coordinated family reunification program with a goal to deliver reunification services and support to survivors and their families. The agency that has the lead for reunification of children (depending on where the disaster occurs) will coordinate its efforts and requests for resources (such as the National Emergency Child Locator Center) with the lead agency coordination overall reunification operations. Reunification support teams may be assembled to assess reunification needs and to support multi-agency coordination, information sharing and other reunification operations.

Areas that must be addressed in an agency's disaster preparedness plan include, roles and responsibilities of organizations and agencies that partner for this plan. The plan is intended to be scalable to meet the requirements of varying levels of need and response and include, but are not limited to:

- Identification of essential personnel needed for the operation of the agency.
- Alternative physical work location (provisions for temporary work sites).
- Communication plan for agency staff, substitute caregivers, and other critical team members – with or without e-mail, internet, SACWIS or telephone access.
- Identification of essential work activities that must continue in order to ensure child safety and support caregivers, youth and service providers.
- Procedures for handling new reports of child maltreatment.
- Procedures for tracking clients and substitute caregivers (with or without SACWIS or other technical systems in place).
- Continuity of services to families receiving in-home supportive services.
- Continuity of services to children in substitute care and kinship care placements.
- Maintenance and security of agency records not included in SACWIS including soft copies stored in other software applications and hard copies.
- Maintenance and security of court records for child protective services cases and PCPA adoption court records.
- Coordination of services with law enforcement, hospitals/medical providers, appropriate agencies, voluntary organizations, and the private sector to understand and define respective reunification roles, responsibilities, capabilities, capacity of their jurisdictions or other disaster response agencies:
 - o Children in agency custody.
 - o Children with no known or available parent, guardian or custodian.
- Clearly identify roles and responsibilities for agencies and organizations that are responsible for the temporary care of children (educational, child care, medical, foster care, juvenile justice, and recreational facilities) will be established prior to the need to activate this plan.

- Working with emergency shelters:
 - Staff training in disaster preparedness.
 - Coordination of services for children and families in emergency shelters (physical location; shared responsibilities).
 - Working with volunteers.
- Protocols to share information among agencies/organizations and neighboring counties providing reunification services will have been developed through MOUs.
- Coordinate and facilitate multi-agency family reunification response operations.

Plans developed by PCPAs, PNAs, CRCs and group homes must address, at a minimum:

- Identification of essential personnel needed for the operation of the agency.
- Identification of an alternative physical work location including provisions for temporary work sites.
- Communication plan for agency staff, substitute caregivers, facility staff (if applicable) and other critical team members.
- Identification of essential work activities that must continue in order to ensure child safety and support caregivers, facility staff (if applicable), youth and service providers.
- Procedures for tracking clients and substitute caregivers.
- Continuity of services to children in substitute care.
- Maintenance and security of agency records.

Much of the work of public and private agencies providing direct services is dependent upon or supported by state procedures and systems. Because of this, ODJFS must have disaster recovery strategies in place that are specific to ODJFS, and concurrently have protocols and procedures in place to assist and support agencies' disaster plans. The disaster recovery strategies to support public and private agencies providing child welfare services are outlined in this document under the following headings:

- *Continuity of required ODJFS activities.*
- *Maintenance of children services records that are included in SACWIS.*
- *Physical work location for state CPS program staff.*
- *Essential OFC operations.*
- *Continuity of services and/or provision of services for children placed out of or into Ohio as a result of a natural disaster (Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children - ICPC).*
- *Intrastate/interstate communication system.*
- *Media communication plans.*

Continuity of Required ODJFS Activities

ODJFS internal policy IPP10101, *Information Hotline and RPX Notifier for Emergency Communications* was revised on June 1, 2015 to inform ODJFS employees about emergency communications policies and procedures regarding the dissemination of information related to weather and non-weather-related emergencies and/or declared disasters. The policy applies to all

staff employed by ODJFS and includes provisions for communicating essential information to ODJFS staff and contractors in order to maintain Business Continuity within ODJFS facilities or in support of ODJFS service delivery.

ODJFS Central Office, located primarily in Columbus, Ohio, has multiple work sites that can be utilized in the event that a specific work location is inaccessible. Staff working in regionally located field offices have the ability to work from home and/or Central Office work sites should the need arise.

Maintenance of Children Services Records That Are Included in SACWIS

Ohio completed full implementation of the statewide automated child welfare information system (SACWIS) in 2008. Since that time, information previously maintained in accordance with internal local agency procedures and available solely through agency hard copy files and computer systems has been housed in a computer system operated and maintained by ODJFS. As a result, ODJFS has responsibility for ensuring continued availability of case record and provider information housed in the SACWIS; as well as ensuring the PCSAs are able to enter new referrals and document the assessment/investigation activities on new child maltreatment reports.

Ohio's SACWIS application is web-based, and therefore, accessible from any location via the internet. Currently, the Ohio SACWIS production system resides in a secure facility called the State of Ohio Computer Center (i.e., The SOCC). This facility offers the system 24x7x365 on-site security and a 24-hour battery-based back up and a 72-hour diesel-based backup. There are redundant network connections to the building as well as 24x7x365 support staff on-site.

From a systems perspective, the production environment is architected for high-availability with server clusters housing the presentation, business, and database tiers of the application. Each of these tiers is horizontally scalable and offers failover within the respective clusters. The database tiers are segregated into a processing and a data tier with the processing tiers running in the cluster and the data residing on a storage area network.

There is a secondary live backup of data to a read-only instance within the storage area network that could be used in case of emergency. The data from the storage area network is backed up to disk with a daily incremental backup and a monthly backup. These disk backups are stored offsite in a secured location and a reasonable distance from the SOCC.

Physical Work Location for State CPS Program Staff

The OFC Senior Management Team has identified its role in maintaining essential functions during an emergency business interruption. Staff has been designated as essential and non-essential based on the anticipated need for continuity or immediate resumption of the job tasks performed. It is understood that staff in some units may need to be temporarily re-assigned to different work responsibilities in order to resume or maintain operation of essential functions following an emergency business interruption.

The ODJFS internal e-mail application is accessible via the internet. OFC has developed a phone tree comprised of all employees with primary and emergency contact information. If staff cannot report to their assigned physical work locations, OFC Senior Management will initiate use of the OFC phone tree; and issue “all-staff” e-mails as appropriate.

Essential OFC Operations

A plan for continuity of internal and external communications following a disaster or other emergency has also been developed by OFC administration. In the event of an emergency business interruption, OFC has identified the following work activities as essential functions:

- Provision of telephone technical assistance to counties and private agencies (all Bureaus in their areas of expertise);
- Investigations of foster care facilities;
- Payment of reimbursement claims from counties and private agencies and processing of adoption assistance payments;
- Processing ICPC cases, and Central Registry and Putative Father requests;
- Processing public information and legislative requests.

Licensed foster homes, group homes, CRCs, and adoptive homes with current placements (i.e., adoption is not yet finalized) that relocate or experience a change in household composition as a result of a disaster, are subject to an assessment of their compliance with the site and safety requirements outlined in OAC rule. The recommending agency (public or private) is responsible for conducting the site and safety assessments, however, there may be certain requirements that ODJFS would adjust (e.g., time frames) in order to assist with continuity of services and prevent placement disruptions.

Foster homes, adoptive homes and residential facilities with current placements that experience a change in household composition or relocate as a result of a disaster or other emergency are subject to a re-assessment of their compliance with OAC rule requirements (particularly, occupancy, sleeping arrangements, site and safety requirements, and staffing, if applicable). If the foster or adoptive home becomes uninhabitable for any reason, OAC rules require that the caregiver notify the recommending agency (PCSA, PCPA or PNA) and any agency which has placed a child in the home, of the situation within twenty-four hours. The recommending agency (public or private) is then responsible for assessing the caregiver’s continued compliance with licensing rules. Again, ODJFS may have to work with an agency to adjust certain requirements for a limited time period in order to support the agency’s efforts to ensure continuity of services to children in care and prevent placement disruptions.

Pursuant to OAC rule 5101:2-9-07 *Emergency planning and preparedness*, residential facilities, e.g., group homes and CRCs, are required to develop and implement a set of written procedures for staff and residents to follow in emergencies and disasters. These procedures must be developed in consultation with, and approved by, a local or state fire inspector, and include specific instructions and procedures for the evacuation of buildings, the assignment of staff during emergencies, and a contingency plan for the care of residents who have been evacuated. If the

residential facility cares for children who are physically or emotionally handicapped, the facility emergency procedures must also include specific instructions as to the evacuation of these children.

Processing of Central Registry (CR) and Putative Father Registry (PFR) searches are essential OFC functions, each with an identified downtime tolerance of two to five days. Databases and spreadsheets used for tracking CR requests are primarily stored on a shared network drive. The

PFR database is a web-based application. CR requests are submitted via e-mail, fax, U.S. mail or delivery service. PFR registrations and search requests may be entered by individuals using the on-line system or sent to ODJFS via U.S. mail. Information submitted by U.S. mail, delivery service or fax is entered into the appropriate database on the date of receipt. As a result, damage to hard copy files and documentation does not automatically equate to loss of the information needed to process the search requests. SACWIS access is required to conduct CR searches. With internet access, work for both programs can be resumed or maintained using paper forms, fax, mail, e-mail and telephone; and can be completed at an alternative work location.

Continuity of Services and/or Provision of Services for Children Placed Out Of or Into Ohio as a Result of a Natural Disaster (Interstate Compact on The Placement of Children – ICPC)

As an OFC function directly impacting the safety and timeliness of children's placements, ICPC operations will be a primary focus for business resumption activities following a disaster or other emergency. OFC program staff has identified a recovery time objective (downtime tolerance) for ICPC of two to five days.

Work tasks associated with processing ICPC cases are completed within the SACWIS application. While the work can continue on paper, if the SACWIS application is unavailable, efficiency and timeliness will be negatively impacted. Paper files including the correspondence with other states are maintained at the office location for a brief period after the case is closed, and then they are sent to the ODJFS records warehouse to be digitally imaged onto CD. Consequently, copies of written communication maintained in the active hard copy files would need to be obtained from the involved agencies should Central Office facilities be destroyed or become inaccessible to staff.

The ICPC program can utilize paper forms to resume or maintain operations. Therefore, the program can function at an alternative work site with phone, fax, mail service, computers or laptops, and internet access.

Intrastate/Interstate Communication System

The OFC Help Desk will continue to serve as the centralized point of contact for the general public, as well as public and private agencies seeking technical assistance or guidance following a disaster or other emergency business interruption. The Help Desk staff is able to respond to inquiries and provide assistance for all programs within OFC; and collaborates with staff from all of the various OFC Bureaus as needed.

Daily Help Desk functions will be essential in the event of a disaster or other emergency business interruption, and the recovery time objective has been identified as less than four hours. Operational needs for continuity of Help Desk functions are phone, fax, e-mail, computers or laptops, and internet access. Work can be conducted at alternative sites. It is likely that staff from other programs would be temporarily re-assigned to the Help Desk to assist with anticipated workload increases following a disaster or other emergency.

The OFC Help Desk is accessible by phone (1-866-886-3537, Option 4) or e-mail at: (HELP-DESK-OFC@odjfs.state.oh.us).

Media Communication Plans

In response to a disaster situation, ODJFS Office of Communications would be responsible for identifying the most appropriate method of releasing information to the media. Communications works directly with the management team of the affected Offices to determine the information and details that will be released.

Pursuant to ODJFS Internal Policy and Procedure (IPP) #11001 *Office of Communications and Responsibilities*:

1. All media requests must be referred to the Office of Communications. Even though various ODJFS program areas may occasionally receive media requests, they must refer all media requests to the Office of Communications so that the Office of Communications can respond to the request appropriately.
2. The Office of Communications is responsible for the accurate dissemination of information to the media and will respond to all media requests in a timely manner. The Office of Communications also will determine how best to provide the information requested (for example, in person, via telephone or by email).
3. Unless approved by the Deputy Director of Communications or the ODJFS Director, only staff whose specific job duties include responding to the media will respond to media requests. This includes responding in writing, verbally, electronically, by mail or in any other form. No information will be provided to any local, state and/or national media outlets or to representatives of such outlets without permission from the ODJFS Deputy Director of Communications or the ODJFS Director, unless it falls within the responding person's stated job duties.

Disaster Plan Utilization

Ohio agencies have not reported any incidents of business interruptions that required utilization of disaster plan strategies. There have been minor business interruptions within individual OFC office locations due to short term facility issues (e.g., power outages) since the development of the 2015-2019 Disaster Plan. However, there was no need to implement the disaster protocols to resume operations or recover system information. Phone trees and other communication plans were utilized and found to be both sufficient and effective as currently designed. As a result, there have been no substantive changes to the 2020-2024 Disaster Plan.