

## DEPARTMENT POLICY

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<b>Approved By: Jennifer Ranji, Cabinet Secretary</b>	

### I. PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that communications from and about the Delaware Children’s Department are well coordinated, effectively managed and responsive to the diverse information needs of the public.

### II. POLICY GUIDELINES

It is the policy of the Delaware Children’s Department to:

**A. Provide the public with timely, accurate, clear, objective and complete information about its policies, programs, services and initiatives.** The government has a duty to inform the public of its policies and its priorities for the state. Information is necessary for Delawareans – individually or through representative groups - to participate actively and meaningfully in the democratic process. It is required for access to government programs and services. The public has a right to such information, except in cases where federal and state confidentiality statutes or security considerations, prohibit the sharing of such information in order to protect the vulnerable children and families that we serve.

**B. Ensure that Divisions of the Delaware Children’s Department are visible, accessible and accountable to the public they serve.** To be accessible and accountable, the Department and its divisions must be visible and recognizable wherever they are present. Clear identification allows the public to see the Department at work, to access its programs and services, and to assess its activities. When communicating whether during client meetings, via telephone, mail, email, the Internet or through print, broadcast and social media, – the Department must identify itself in a distinct, consistent way the public can recognize in all circumstances.

**C. Employ a variety of ways and means to communicate, and provide information in multiple formats to accommodate diverse needs.** Department information must be broadly accessible in accordance with all applicable laws. The needs of all Delawareans, whose perceptual or physical abilities and language skills are diverse, must be recognized and accommodated. Information must be available in multiple formats to ensure equal access (i.e.: the availability of hard copy forms for those who don’t have computer access to print and/or fill them out. Another option may be having forms in English and at least one other language). All means of communication – from traditional methods to new technologies – must be used to reach and communicate with Delawareans wherever they may reside. Modern technology requires the capacity to respond effectively over multiple channels in a 24-hour, global communications environment.

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**D. Identify and address communication needs and issues routinely in the development, implementation and evaluation of policies, programs, services and initiatives.** Communication enables the exchange of information Delawareans and their government relies upon for an effective partnership. Gathering and providing information of importance to the public, government and the democratic process requires professional tools and resources, and effective, accountable management. Internal and external communication requirements should be identified when planning, developing, managing or reviewing policies, programs, services or initiatives.

**E. Deliver prompt, courteous and responsive service that is sensitive to the needs and concerns of the public and respectful of individual rights.** Information services must be managed in a citizen-centered and client-focused manner that achieves results for Delawareans. Timely and convenient access to Department information and services must be available to the public. Each Division will maintain a policy to assure that the public is provided alternative phone and email contact information when staff are on leave, out sick, or a position is vacant. Access to information and privacy rights, as well as language rights, must be honored at all times. Delawareans value freedom, openness, security, caring and respect. It is important for the Department to communicate in a spirit that reflects those values.

**F. Encourage Department employees to communicate with the public about programs, services and initiatives they are familiar with and for which they have responsibility.** An open and democratic government implies that all employees have a role in communicating with the public while respecting the constitution and laws of Delaware. Department employees must respect privacy rights, confidentiality statutes, matters before the courts, national and state security, Cabinet confidences and responsibility. They serve the public interest best by communicating about programs, services and initiatives they help to administer, while treating sensitive information with the discretion it requires. Employees shall adhere to the guidelines outlined in the External Communications Procedures of this document for guidance regarding communication/interaction with the media and outside audiences.

**G. Safeguard Delawareans' trust and confidence in the integrity and impartiality of the Public Service of Delaware.** Delawareans value an independent, professional public service that treats individuals with respect, fairness and integrity. The value and reputation of the Department must be honored. Internal and external communication by Department employees is expected to be positive and professional in regard to other employees and fellow Divisions, and employees are expected to adhere to Policy 305 – Standards of Conduct. Department employees are also expected to provide information services in a non-partisan fashion as indicated in the State Supreme Court decision in *Sweeney v. DelDot regarding 29 Del. C. § 5954(b)* (No employee in the classified service shall engage in any political activity or solicit any political contribution, assessment or subscription during the employee's hours of employment or while engaged

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in the business of the State). Violation of this statute is considered a violation of Merit Rule 15.3.4

**H. Ensure all divisions of the Delaware Children’s Department work collaboratively to achieve coherent and effective communications with the public.** As a core activity and shared responsibility touching all aspects of policy and program administration, the communications function involves employees throughout the government working collaboratively. Coordination within, between and among divisions is imperative to ensure coherent and consistent communications. Such coordination is the responsibility of the Community Relations Coordinator (CRC); however, meeting internal and external communication needs efficiently and effectively, is a cooperative endeavor.

### **III. EXTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS PROCEDURES**

DSCYF external communications may consist of but are not limited to:

news releases (print, audio or video), media interviews, newsletters, brochures, social media utilization, videos, the agency website, public awareness or media campaigns, recruitment activities, presentations, attendance at meetings (includes: stakeholder, partner, committee, or public), trade show handouts, other information/materials distributed outside of the organization, emails and phone conversations.

In order to ensure consistency of messaging through external sources or with external partners, there is a need to have an approval policy in place for some methods of communicating outside the Department.

The Office of the Secretary has designed the external communications process to allow the organization to achieve and maintain a consistent, accurate and informed flow of information. All external communications should be consistent with the DSCYF Communications Policy and any Long Range or Short-Term Strategic Plans, Emerging Issues Plans, and Action Plans that will be developed either by the Department, Divisions or the Office of Management and Budget (OMB).

The DSCYF Community Relations Coordinator (CRC) is the primary point of contact for all agency communications. Additionally, each Division has designated two individuals to be Media Liaisons (MLs) with the CRC. Staff in each Division shall be made aware who the designated liaisons are and will include them in any review of materials, media requests for visits or interviews, or projects by partners/stakeholders involving youth in care. The liaisons will coordinate activities and/or final responses with the CRC.

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Employees' external communications from and about DSCYF in their private capacity shall not suggest or imply in any way that they are acting in an official capacity as an employee or representative of DSCYF. Where the circumstances of an employee's external communications could create the impression that an employee is acting in an official capacity, the employee must clearly articulate and represent that the employee is speaking in the employee's private capacity, and that the employee is neither representing the State, DSCYF, or any agency nor do the views expressed necessarily represent the position of the State, DSCYF, or any agency.

**A. Development of Print and Media Materials, Branding and Media Campaigns.**

All materials developed (for external public distribution in print or distribution to print & broadcast media) must include the Department's name (**Delaware Children's Department, DE Children's Department** ~ informal or **Department of Services for Children, Youth and Their Families** ~ formal) or the name of the Division. The preference is, and when space permits, that the Department logo be included. Variations of the above mentioned phrases are not permitted.

Prior to publication and/or final development all materials should be reviewed first by Division Media Liaisons, and the Division Directors as the MLs deem appropriate, and finally by the Department's Community Relations Coordinator (CRC). (**Exceptions:** Division newsletters and conference programs/registration materials, powerpoint presentations and routine newspaper advertising for the recruitment of open positions by the Department's DMSS Human Resources unit do not need CRC approval. Division staff should check with their ML or Director's office to determine what level of approval is needed within the Division for those items if any.)

The CRC should be given as much lead time as possible to review materials prior to a deadline a Division may have. While review may be accomplished in a very short time frame, the CRC requires up to 7 working days to review and provide guidance of any print and or media materials. No external media campaigns will be finalized without review by the DSCYF Community Relations Coordinator and it is strongly encouraged that the CRC and Divisional ML are included at the beginning of the process. The purchase of any form of advertising (print, radio, television, internet, etc.) must be conducted in accordance with State Contracts established by OMB.

**Materials Produced by Contractors:** Any new materials (i.e., informational, instructional, or public awareness) produced as a result of a contract with the Department for the purposes of external communication, must attribute DSCYF or the Division as the funding source, unless either has waived that requirement. Any print materials, video or audio produced by a contractor that feature any youth in the Department's care must be reviewed and approved by the CRC before being publicly shared. The CRC reserves the right to require a review of any contractor materials, whether print, audio, video or internet prior to their distribution. Beyond these requirements, each Division shall put in

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writing (either via policy, procedure, contract language, MOU or other format acceptable to the Division) a process for determining what materials they wish to review and ensure contractors are aware of this process.

**B. Inviting High Level Officials to Participate in/Speak at Division Events**

When Divisions wish to invite high level government officials to speak as part of Agency events, present them with awards, or ask them to join a committee or working group, the Division shall inform the CRC prior to making the invitation in case the Office of the Secretary feels that it is more appropriate for it to extend the invitation. High level officials for the purpose of this section of the Policy include the Governor, Lt. Governor, and Attorney General. In particular when the Governor is confirmed to speak at an event, the Division Director’s office, ML, or event organizer will work with the CRC and provide background and direction for the Governor’s talking points.

**C. Media Inquiries/Interview Requests to DSCYF and Divisions**

DSCYF welcomes media inquiries and responds to them in an accurate, thorough and timely manner. Only the Community Relations Coordinator and the Cabinet Secretary are authorized to speak to the media on behalf of DSCYF and its Divisions’ policies, pending legislation or budgetary proposals. Understanding that those people within the Divisions know many of the operational details of their programs, Division Directors or staff may participate in interviews regarding Division programs and initiatives when authorized by the Community Relations Coordinator.

Once a media request for an interview or information is received by an employee, the employee must immediately notify the Division Director, Deputy Director, or their ML. They will in turn immediately contact the Community Relations Coordinator (CRC). The CRC will work with the division staff to determine who can best fulfill the request.

*Note:* In limited cases/specific situations staff may be authorized to speak to the media about their programs without prior authorization. An example of this would be if you are staffing a table at a community event/safety or health fair and are asked by a reporter what information you are distributing and why you thought that would be a good venue in which to distribute it. In this case it would be permissible for you to speak about that information without prior authorization. You must then notify your supervisor and/or Division’s ML that day that you were interviewed so that we may be on the lookout for the article. The ML will notify or share any relevant articles with the CRC.

**Confidentiality of Clients**

Federal and State Laws, as well as Department policy, require that all client information be kept confidential (please refer to Policy 205 (Confidentiality of Client Records). Therefore, DSCYF staff cannot confirm nor deny any child is in our care or accessing any

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of our services with any Division. Questions from media about cases in which the Department *might* be involved, must be forwarded to the CRC.

**EXCEPTION:** As stated in the federal Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act, public disclosure of the findings or information about a case of child abuse or neglect, which has resulted in a child fatality or near fatality, is permissible. Such disclosure must be cleared by and is at the discretion of the Division Director and/or Cabinet Secretary.

**Requests for Interviews Outside of Work**

Our employees enjoy their ability to exercise their right to Freedom of Speech on their own time. However, they should still be cautious about agreeing to media interviews that in any way could relate to the Department. Please be aware that such interviews may have the unintended result of violating a Department policy, and compromise a staff member’s employment status. If you have any questions about whether an interview request during personal time puts you in this category, please contact your supervisor, Division Media Liaison or the CRC.

**D. DSCYF Photo, Video and Interview Policies Regarding Youth**

DSCYF respects the confidentiality of its clients. This policy applies to all DSCYF staff, media, visitors, partners and contractors. The appropriate consents must be obtained before conducting any interviews, or taking any videos or photographs of youth in our custody that are not your own children if sharing any of the above with a public audience outside of the Department. The consent form can be found in Appendix A. Each Division shall have a written policy or procedure for obtaining the necessary consents, and shall communicate that policy with the CRC. Verbal consents may be deemed appropriate in a short time frame until written consents can be obtained.

**Photos or Videos:** If you are taking video or pictures of youth which will be shared publically and the children are not your own, the video or pictures must be taken from the neck down or from behind. Photographing or videotaping the face of a youth in DSCYF custody who is not your own child and whose image you intend to share publically or through educational materials with an audience outside of the Department, requires written permission from the biological parent(s)/relative caretaker or guardian, the child, appropriate DSCYF staff, and the CRC. Such requests should be made to Divisional MLs or the CRC who will work together to fulfill the request.

**Interviews:** Interviews (written, radio, TV, video, digital) with youth may be conducted after appropriate consents have been obtained as mentioned above. In cases where interviews do not identify the face or name of the child beyond the first name, or provide any other personally identifiable information, only the approval of the CRC and Division Director’s staff are needed.

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It's important to remember that although parents or children may not object to interviews, video or photo opportunities, it is the Department's duty to help clients consider the possible negative consequences of being identified in the media as a youth in the Department's care.

**E. Reporting Possible Media Exposure/Media Alerts**

Each division is required to contact their respective ML and the CRC of incidents that are likely to be picked up by the media involving children or youth currently in our care, a DSCYF employee, foster care/adoption parent, contracted service provider or child care provider.

Process: A Media Alert form is available for use in Appendix B. Initial reporting staff should complete as much of the information as they can at the moment, and then notify their ML and/or Division Director's office via email or phone (depending on the seriousness of the situation and specific guidance in any existing Division policy). Notification should occur as soon as possible but no later than 24 hours of learning of the incident. The Director's Office or ML should notify the CRC immediately after receipt of the media alert, forward the initial draft and work to update any incomplete information.

**If it is an emergency situation (i.e. security threat, child death, or murder/attempted murder by youth in care) the Secretary should be notified by the Division Director immediately along with the CRC.**

Institutional Abuse (IA) reports that have been accepted for investigation and Serious Injury (SI) reports may fall into this category. Notification charts by the IA unit and those required to complete SI reports, must include the CRC and the Division's ML. The Media Alert form may be used by either IA or SI reporters if they desire. SI's that include child death, child near death, or suicides should also be accompanied by a media alert.

The Department is always excited to learn of positive news stories regarding our employees that occur outside the work environment. We encourage staff interviewed for such positive stories notify their Division Director's office or ML so we can be on the lookout for them.

**F. DSCYF News Releases**

DSCYF issues many different forms of news releases to help keep Delawareans and others aware of the activities and accomplishments of the Department and its Divisions. Only the Community Relations Coordinator is authorized to issue a press release on behalf of the Department or its Divisions unless permission has been granted otherwise. The CRC will work with MLs and/or the Director's Office on releases relevant to their Division.

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Print news releases are the most common. Font size should be Times Roman in 12- point type. As much as possible, press releases should not be more than one page.

All news releases must contain the DSCYF boilerplate language at the end:

The Children’s Department provides services to children who have been abused, neglected, are dependent, have mental health or substance problems, and/or have been adjudicated delinquent by the Courts, as well as prevention services targeted toward all youth. For more information, please visit [www.kids.delaware.gov](http://www.kids.delaware.gov).

Contractors should coordinate with Division MLs and the Community Relations Coordinator on media releases involving the Agency. DSCYF will issue the release unless otherwise approved. Outside partners who wish to include the DSCYF in their news releases, are encouraged to work cooperatively with Divisional MLs and the CRC so that any support needed can be provided in a timely manner.

#### **G. Media Requests to Visit DSCYF Facilities**

All requests for media to visit a DSCYF facility must be approved in advance by the CRC and Division Director, or ML. The Department welcomes visits from the media as long as it does not violate client confidentiality. No member of the media will be granted access to a DSCYF facility without prior approval and an escort by the CRC or person designated by the CRC, ML or appropriate Division Director.

#### **H. DSCYF Web Standards**

Internet Presence Guidelines - Web sites either fully or partially funded by DSCYF are considered external communications and must be consistent with the Communications Procedures and approval processes. Every effort should be made to utilize the existing Web sites as a means to publish information on the Internet instead of creating new Web sites and domain names.

The Community Relations Coordinator has the responsibility of ensuring that DSCYF’s internet presence is as clear and concentrated as possible and that information is up to date and not duplicated unnecessarily. All DSCYF sites will maintain a common look and feel across all divisions as per Department of Technology Information (DTI) and Government Information Center (GIC) guidelines.

#### **Website Updates/Maintenance**

It is important that all the information available to the public online is current and up-to-date. Each Division is expected to review and update materials online at least every six months, though changes can be requested at any time. Each Division is responsible for identifying staff that are approved to communicate desired website changes to the CRC. Updates, changes or additions to the website must have appropriate Division level approvals before sending them to the CRC. Once the CRC receives a request to change, update or add information to the website and has approved the request, he/she will forward the requested change(s) to the DSCYF webmasters with cc to the Division

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contact that request has been approved. The timeline for website modification is within five business days of CRC approval.

## **I. SOCIAL MEDIA**

**This portion of the Communications Policy is intended to be temporary in anticipation of a more detailed social media policy being developed. Once staff is notified of the new Social Media Policy, the requirements of that policy will take precedence over this portion of the Communications policy.**

Posting to the Department’s social media accounts is the sole responsibility of the Community Relations Coordinator unless he/she has authorized any other staff member to do so on their behalf. No new Departmental or Divisional social media accounts may be created without the approval of the CRC. Any new accounts created will be done in cooperation with GIC per the State’s Social Media Policy implemented by DTI. Any staff member who posts their opinion on the Department’s social media accounts must be clear that the opinions expressed are their own and not those of the Department or Division.

### **Personal Social Media Sites That May Affect DSCYF Business**

Staff members may individually have their own social media accounts. While a great venue for communicating with friends and family, some may be unaware of the hidden dangers of what is shared publicly. It is not the Department’s intention to limit in any way what an individual chooses to share via their personal social media accounts. However, please be aware that if staff establishes a social relationship with clients through personal social media accounts such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and others, it may constitute a violation of DSCYF Policy 305 – Standards of Conduct. For the purposes of this section, ‘social relationship’ means to engage in ongoing, non-work related dialogue. Additionally, it may constitute a breach of privacy or violate other policy and law if confidential, client or case information is shared on any social media site. Refer to appropriate DSCYF policies to determine if this is the case. Any staff that still has questions should contact his/her supervisor and or HR representative.

## **IV. FAILURE TO COMPLY:**

Failure to comply with any portion of this policy may result in disciplinary action up to and including dismissal, or other appropriate action. Legal action also may be taken for violations of applicable regulations and laws.

# Appendix A

## CONSENT FORM FOR STATEMENTS AND PHOTOGRAPH(S)

I hereby grant permission, and authorize the Department of Services for Children, Youth and Their Families (DSCYF) and the media to take, use and publish my photograph, or a photograph(s) of my minor children; to take, use and publish a video of me or my minor children; and/or to take, use and publish statements by me and/or my minor children for public relations and news media purposes (including newspaper, television or radio stories, documentaries, advertising, reports, Internet websites, displays in state offices or training videos). Additionally I grant permission and authorize DSCYF and the media to share, use or publish any artwork, video or special project completed by me or my minor children for public relations and news media purposes as indicated above.

I will not hold liable, and I release and discharge the Department of Services for Children, Youth and Their Families, the State of Delaware, any of its employees (individually or officially), the photographer/videographer or the media from liability in equity or in law on account of the taking, the use of, or the publication of my photograph, photograph(s) of my minor children, videos or statements in its publications.

I waive any right that I may have to inspect or approve the photograph(s), video(s) or other copy that may be used in and published. I acknowledge that I have read this form and fully understand it.

**Youth's Name (please print):** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Parent's Name (if youth is under 18) Printed and signed:**

\_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Purpose of photographs/videos/statements:**

Printed & Signed

Name of appropriate DSCYF to grant permission: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Division ML: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Community Relations Coordinator \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix B

### Media Alert Form

**(Fill out all relevant sections that apply to you depending on the nature of the incident – not all may apply)**

Staff Member Making Initial Notification \_\_\_\_\_

Division \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Incident \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Notification \_\_\_\_\_

Has Incident Already Been Reported in Media (where?) \_\_\_\_\_

Does this involve a child death (if so contact Director's office immediately) \_\_\_\_\_

Does this involve:

- Employee
- Youth in Care: \_\_\_\_DFS \_\_\_\_YRS \_\_\_\_PBHS
- Former Youth in Care \_\_\_\_ DFS \_\_\_\_YRS \_\_\_\_PBHS
- Contracted Service Provider
- Foster Parent
- Adoptive Parent
- Child Care Provider

Summary of Incident:

Does youth or family have prior history with any Division? If so, describe briefly – narrative format:

Have you checked for any history with Divisions other than yours? If not, please check FACTS system and include.

If Child Care Provider – Licensing History, enrollment details/capacity, and current status:  
(Contact OCCL for details):

If Foster or Adoptive Parent – Provide their service history and any prior issues:

If employee – provide employment status, Title, hire date, time with Dept. and Division:

Please include any other relevant details: