

POLICY REGARDING THIRD PARTY INVESTIGATIONS

When Trumbull County Children Services receives a report of abuse and/or neglect involving a child that may create a conflict of interest between the Agency and an involved party, an independent third-party must be requested to perform an assessment/investigation. "Involved Party" includes, but is not necessarily limited to:

- (1) Any employee of an institution or facility that is licensed or certified by the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) or another state agency and supervised by the Agency;
- (2) A foster caregiver, pre-finalized adoptive parent, adoptive parent, relative, or kinship caregiver who is recommended, approved, or supervised by the Agency;
- (3) Any employee of the Agency as defined in Chapter 5153 of the Revised Code;
- (4) Any authorized person representing the Agency who provides services for payment or as a volunteer; or
- (5) A foster caregiver or an employee of an institution or facility licensed or certified by ODJFS and the alleged child victim is in the custody of, or receiving services from, the Agency that accepted the report.

The following is an overview of TCCS' procedures for conducting third-party investigations:

- (A) Within twenty-four hours of the identification of a conflict of interest, the Agency must request and document the assistance of an independent third-party. The existence of a conflict of interest, and all contact with all involved parties, must be documented in SACWIS

An appropriate third-party is a law enforcement agency or another PCSA (public child service agency). If the report of child abuse and/or neglect alleges a criminal offense, then the Agency shall request the assistance of law enforcement as the third-party. If the report does not allege criminal activity, then another PCSA may perform a third-party assessment/investigation. The Agency and the third-party PCSA will agree to participate in the assessment/investigation and will mutually agree upon the delegation of investigation responsibilities between the agencies.

Immediately following contact, or attempted contact, with any third party for purposes of an assessment/investigation under this policy, the Quality Assurance Department must be informed in writing (an email is acceptable). The QA department will assume oversight

responsibility of the procedures contained in this policy.

- (B) The Agency must contact the appropriate Licensing Supervisor from the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services no later than the next working day following the receipt of the report in order to share information regarding the report of abuse and/or neglect involving a conflict of interest situation.
- (C) A Third-Party Investigation does not relieve the Agency of its responsibility to ensure assessment/investigation activities are completed. For a Third-Party Investigation, the Agency is required to follow the same investigation procedures that are required for all investigations of child abuse and neglect. All third-party investigations must comply with Ohio Administrative Code §5101:2-36-04.

If there is no alleged criminal offense and law enforcement agencies and other PCSA agencies decline to perform a third-party assessment/investigation, then the Agency must perform the assessment/investigation. These circumstances (refusals) must be documented in the SACWIS case record. The Agency assessment/investigation will be performed by regular in-house assessment and investigation department personnel. Any in-house assessment/investigation, in lieu of a third-party assessment/investigation, must be reviewed and approved by the Agency's Quality Assurance Department-

- (D) The Agency has a clear responsibility to immediately protect all alleged child victim(s) and/or other children. As part of this responsibility, the Agency may elect to move the child/children to another substitute care setting. At the discretion of the Agency, any child involved in a possible conflict of interest situation may be placed in respite care during an investigation and remain there until the investigation is complete and/or there are no concerns of safety or risk.
- (E) The investigator(s) will determine the timing and location of the interviews of all of the involved parties. In most cases, the alleged child victim will be interviewed first, before any other involved party. This interview may occur without the involved party's knowledge and may occur at the school, at the Agency, or at some other neutral setting. This interview should be completed within twenty-four (24) hours of the report being screened in. The involved party(s) will be notified as soon as the third-party investigator(s) allow.

Within forty-five (45) days from when the Agency receives the report, the Agency must make a disposition in the case as to whether the abuse/neglect allegations are substantiated, indicated or unsubstantiated. The Agency may utilize an additional fifteen (15) days if the Agency is awaiting a report which contains the information necessary to make the case disposition. Once an official disposition to the investigation is rendered, the Caseworker(s) for the involved parties will notify the involved parties by telephone of the disposition.

- (F) No later than three (3) working days after the completion of the case disposition, the Agency will provide written notification to the involved parties and to the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services Licensing Specialist of the disposition of the abuse/neglect allegations.

NOTE: If a child in Trumbull County Children Services' custody is placed in the care of another public or private agency and there is a report of abuse and/or neglect involving that child the Agency will comply with the Third-Party Investigation procedures and protocols of that public or private agency.

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