

Appendix E: Disaster Plan Update

The NC DSS Disaster Plan was submitted on June 30, 2019; it remains in effect.

NC Experienced one disaster since the last submission of the APSR, Hurricane Ian (September 28, 2022– October 4, 2022). An emergency declaration (FEMA–3586–EM– NC) was issued by the President for the State of North Carolina on September 29, 2022. This emergency order authorized assistance for emergency protective measures for all 100 counties of North Carolina and the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians. North Carolina activated its plan when notified of the impending storm. A major disaster declaration was ordered therefore only public assistance funds were provided. No disruption to families was identified and no changes to the plan were necessary.

COVID–19 Lessons Learned and Impact to the Disaster Plan

NC DSS identified several lessons learned from COVID –19 that are now included in the Disaster Plan. NC DSS asked for lessons learned from internal stakeholders. Those changes include adding language about the use of personal protective equipment and assessing the status of youth that may be affected by college campuses closing or other permanent situations closing. Language added to the Disaster Plan includes:

- In the event of a pandemic, child welfare workers are to wear masks and other personal protective equipment (PPE) as necessary and available during required home visits. Any video–based meetings or visits will be documented with explanations as to why they were carried out in this manner.
- In disasters which disrupt court schedules, child welfare agencies have an obligation to ascertain the status of youth in court jurisdiction or youth and young adults receiving foster care services that may be affected due to closures of college campuses or disruption to other placement situations.
- Any video–based meetings or visits will be documented with explanations as to why the visits were carried out in this manner.

Attached to this document is an overview of all the updates made in the Disaster Plan.

Disaster Plans, Disparities, and Underserved Populations

NC DSS aims to serve children, youth, and families who are affected by disasters.

NC DSS state staff participated in a training in SFY 2024 on diversity, equity, inclusion, and implicit bias. NC DSS leadership and staff plan to utilize new knowledge, skills, and information learned to make improvements for the upcoming Disaster Plan for 2025–2029.

NC DSW will look at data that needs to be gathered and/or analyzed to inform disparities, identify underserved populations, and address needs during a disaster.

NC Disaster Plan Changes

NC DSS updated our plan and resources for local agencies to enhance our disaster preparedness. Below is a summary of updates to the Disaster Plan made during the reporting period (SFY 2024).

NC DSS developed a Disaster Plan Checklist and attestation that the county plan being submitted to NCDSS contains all the required elements, the State Disaster Plan, a county disaster reporting tool, and a disaster tool kit full of resources for local child welfare agencies. The Checklist and tools resides in NC's Disaster Manual and are located on the NC DSS website at [Disaster Preparedness Resources — Policies and Manuals \(ncdhhs.gov\)](https://www.ncdhhs.gov/disaster-preparedness-resources-policies-and-manuals).

All sections of the Disaster Plan address preparation for a disaster through recovery.

Each section of the Disaster Plan was updated to include workers responsibilities to assessing the impact of the disaster on all families with open cases in child welfare from Intake through permanency planning (including residential settings in the state). Local DSS agencies have contracts in place for interpreting. If additional resources are needed due to the severity of the disaster NC DSS has a contract with providers to aid during the disaster period so that all families understand the resources being offered and can aid in communication to obtain needed resources. North Carolina's Governor's Office ensures communications are in English and in Spanish. Utilization of agencies working with non-English speaking populations are utilized during preparation and recovery.

The Disaster Plan includes the expectation around communication with caseworkers and other essential child welfare personnel displaced because of a disaster. Included is a formal channels for communications between local staff and county directors, and between county directors and NC DSS staff. Communications includes notification if there are modifications to service delivery. Modifications to service delivery must be communicated to the NCDSS Child Welfare Director or designee. If at any time a local child welfare agency is not able to effectively discharge any or all of its duty for child protection (including Intake, Assessment, In-Home Services, Permanency Planning, and Adoptions as defined in NCGS 108A) consequent to a disaster, the local child welfare agency director/designee must inform their NCDSS Regional Child Welfare Consultant. Local child welfare agencies, private child-placing agencies, and residential childcare facilities will provide information and instruction to foster home providers, relatives, group homes, and other parties to assist with evacuation and relocation as needed during an impending disaster or an emergency. These contacts will be tracked so the local child welfare agency can provide information to NC DSS. Local child welfare agencies must notify NC DSS of any children they have an open case on who died during a disaster.

Regional Child Welfare Consultants will request a status report, within 24 hours of the disaster onset, of identified children in DSS custody or in a placement in their county, who

may be impacted by the disaster. Regional Child Welfare Consultants will respond to individual local child welfare agency needs, as identified, through consultation and technical assistance.

When there is an impending disaster, agencies will designate one point of contact who will be responsible for providing status updates on children to the NC DSS ICPC office.

Local child welfare agencies will notify the NCDSS ICPC office of suspended and resumed placement of children through ICPC in disaster affected area. If local staff are unable to report to work at or must report to an alternative work location, staff will comply with their agencies disaster policy regarding reporting to alternative work locations.

NC DSS must have individualized disaster plans for all caregivers, resource families, and foster families that is considerate of cultural needs, identifies culturally appropriate resources, and alternative locations in the event of evacuation.

When a disaster is declared, counties affected will contact caregivers, foster, and kinship families via telephone or home visits to identify and locate children who are displaced and to assess and address client needs. Tools in the toolbox aid the staff in assessing how each family member is reacting to the disaster to identify what resources would be most helpful.

The Disaster Plan clarifies for counties that providing emergency response and essential services will be top priority in the event of a disaster. Priority will be given to reunification of children who have been separated from their caretaker because of the disaster. Reunification efforts will be initiated as soon as possible after the disaster. Reunification services will be managed by the local child welfare agency in conjunction with the American Red Cross and other local partners.