



NORTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
DIVISION OF SOCIAL SERVICES

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DEAR COUNTY DIRECTORS OF SOCIAL SERVICES

SUBJECT: SOCIAL WORKER SAFETY

Earlier today we learned of a situation in Rockingham County that was very concerning as a social worker's safety was at risk. The social worker was not harmed, but this is an opportune time to reflect on the work we do. Social worker safety has always been a crucial component of child welfare practice because there is a risk for encounters with families to become confrontational. It is vital that we work with our employees to take all necessary precautions in protecting our staff, including:

- Strengthening the awareness of job-related safety precautions
- Teaching work-related and personal self-protection skills
- Broadening the understanding of law enforcement's role as it relates to child welfare
- Ensuring that social work staff use tools available to them to understand and mitigate potential safety risks.

One of the best ways to be prepared for critical situations is to assess for risk prior to engaging with the family. This includes knowing the history for all family members residing in the household, including any previous criminal charges, as well as the existing civil orders for protection. Much of this information can be gleaned from reviewing a thorough and completed Child Protective Services Intake Referral Form.

Additionally, all county child welfare staff are encouraged to complete criminal history checks on all adults who reside in a home using the Automated Criminal Infraction System (ACIS). This system gives county child welfare agencies the ability to conduct criminal records checks.

Those with access to the ACIS are also granted access to the Civil Case Processing System (VCAP). The VCAP system contains information on civil actions and is a tool for that proves helpful to check for domestic violence protective orders.

A recent addition to the cadre of available is Child Welfare Accessing Sensitive Safety Information through Secure Technology (CW ASSIST) gives county child welfare agencies access to data related to possible risk indicators that may be present in adults subject to a CPS investigation. In reviewing the situation from Rockingham County, the CWA system flagged an individual central to the investigation as being a person who we should "Approach with Caution" and may have a "Weapon."

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These flags in the CW Assist system are there to provide the county with cautionary information that provides a context for how a home or individuals might be initially engaged. The application can be accessed in offices using desktop or laptop computers, as well as on mobile devices, such as smart phones or tablets, while in the field.

If there is a known or perceived risk, know that law enforcement may be asked to accompany the child welfare staff. If at any time a county child welfare worker feels threatened, he or she should seek safety as soon as possible, by leaving the situation.

For more information about ensuring a social worker's well-being, please consult the policy manual at <https://www2.ncdhhs.gov/info/olm/manuals/dss/csm-60/man/CS1436.PDF>. If you have any questions about this information, please contact your Children's Program Representative.

Again, please know that personal safety for our employees is central to a healthy workforce.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'MB', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Michael A. Becketts, MSW, MS, MEd
Assistant Secretary for Human Services