



# CONNECTIONS Tip Sheet

## Recording Essential Information

When a Child Enters Care Updated Sept 2020

When a child enters out-of-home care, there are a number of data elements which must be recorded in CONNECTIONS. As New York State strives to improve it's permanency outcomes for children and meet federal Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) standards, it becomes increasingly important that key information is recorded in CONNECTIONS in a timely and accurate way. When data entry is delayed, information on the number of children in care during a particular time period and the swiftness with which permanency is achieved becomes skewed.

New York, like all states, is also required to report adoption and foster care information to the federal government every six months through the **Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS)**. AFCARS information is used to identify trends, plan for needed services, establish funding priorities, conduct research and evaluation, maintain/update regulations and respond to requests for data about foster care and adoption. Reporting periods run October 1 through March 31 and April 1 through September 30. In New York, CONNECTIONS is the primary data source for federal reporting requirements.

AFCARS data is required for all children:

- ✓ in foster care for more than 24 hours or
- ✓ in OCFS custody and placed with a voluntary agency.

This tip sheet describes the information that must be either entered or verified for accuracy in CONNECTIONS when a child enters out-of-home care.

Regardless of who is responsible for entering the data, it is essential that it be entered in a timely way to meet regulatory requirements. This tip sheet is for caseworkers, supervisors and eligibility workers, all of whom have a role to play in ensuring the accurate and timely documentation of necessary information.

Throughout CONNECTIONS, AFCARS related fields are indicated by the \$ symbol.

\$ = AFCARS

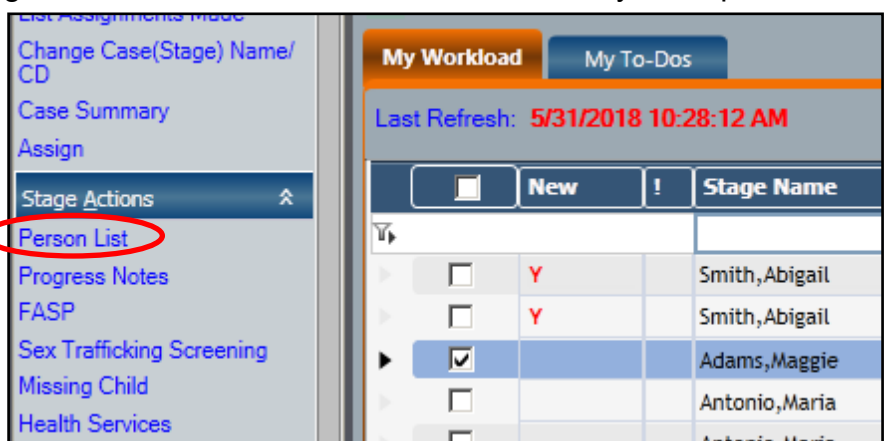
### Person Demographics

Person demographic information should be kept up-to-date at all times. Anyone with access to the Person List of any stage type via a workload can update Person Demographics.

When a child enters care, the existing information should be verified for accuracy and updated as needed.

#### Step-by-Step: Entering/Updating Demographic Information:

1. Select the stage on the workload.
2. Click the **Person List** link in the navigation pane.
3. Select a person from the Person Grid.



The Person Detail tab opens.

4. Enter/verify the required information as shown, below, for each child entering care.

The screenshot shows the 'Person Detail' tab in a software application. The 'Demographics' section contains the following fields: Sex (dropdown menu set to 'Male'), Marital (dropdown menu), Religion (dropdown menu), DOB (dropdown menu set to '03/30/2016'), and DOD (dropdown menu). There are checkboxes for 'Approx DOB' and 'Approx DOD'. The 'Address' section includes fields for Type (dropdown menu set to 'RS'), Street (text field '109 FAYETTE BLVD'), PO Box/Apt, Attn, City (dropdown menu 'SYRACUSE'), State (dropdown menu 'NY'), Zip (text field '13224-1127'), County (dropdown menu 'ONONDAGA'), and CD. The 'Phone' section includes Number (text field '(315) 555-2424'), Ext, and Type (dropdown menu 'RS').

**Sex**

**Marital Status** - is not an AFCARS element, but is required for the Save button to enable

**DOB** - cannot be Approximate

**Ethnicity**  
Check one or more checkboxes as applicable

**Race**  
Check one or more checkboxes as applicable

The screenshot shows the 'Ethnicity' and 'Race' selection form. The 'Ethnicity' dropdown menu is set to 'Not Reported'. Below it is a list of checkboxes for 'Hispanic or Latino Origin' including Central American, Caribbean, Cuban, Dominican, Mexican, North American, Puerto Rican, South American, and Other. To the right is a 'Race' dropdown menu with a list of checkboxes for various racial categories: Black or African American, Caribbean, Haitian, Native African, Other - Black or African American, Alaskan Native, American Indian, Asian, Chinese, Indian, and Other. At the bottom right are buttons for 'Search', 'Clear', 'Save & Close', 'Save', and 'Reset'.

## Tracked Child Detail Tabs

When a child enters care, a number of changes must be recorded on the tabs in the Tracked Child window.

1. On your workload, select the Family Services Stage (FSS).
2. Click the **Tracked Children** link in the navigation pane.

*The Tracked Children Detail window opens with the Program Choice/PPG tab displayed.*

The screenshot shows the 'Tracked Children' link highlighted in red in the left navigation pane. The main window displays the 'My Workload' tab with a table of child entries. The table has columns for checkboxes, 'New', and 'Stage Name'. The entry for 'Murray, Marsha' is selected.

## Tracked Child Detail - Program Choice/PPG

The entry of a child into care requires a change in Program Choice (PC) and Permanency Planning goal (PPG).

| Program Choice/PPG       |               |     |            |     |                   |                     |                  |  |
|--------------------------|---------------|-----|------------|-----|-------------------|---------------------|------------------|--|
| Placement Information    |               |     |            |     |                   |                     |                  |  |
|                          | Name          | Sex | DOB        | Age | PPG               | Program Choice 1    | Program Choice 2 |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Adams, Jamal  | M   | 02/22/2005 | 13  | Prevent Placement | Preventive Mandated |                  |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Adams, Evelyn | F   | 03/24/2010 | 8   | Return to Parent  | Preventive Mandated | Placement        |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Adams, Quincy | M   | 04/30/2016 | 2   | Prevent Placement | Preventive Mandated |                  |  |

### Step-by-Step: Adding a Program Choice of Placement:

1. Select the child from the Tracked Child Detail grid at the top of the window.

*The current Program Choice and PPG for that child display.*

2. Use the drop down menu in the Program Choice field to select **Placement**.

The screenshot shows the 'Program Choice' dropdown menu open, with 'Placement' selected. Other options include 'Protective' and 'Non-LDSS Custody - Relative/Resource Placement'.

*The Effective field pre-fills with the current date.*

3. Change the Effective date to the date the child entered care.

The screenshot shows the 'Program Choice' dropdown set to 'Placement' and the 'Effective' date field updated to 05/31/2018. An 'Add' button is visible at the bottom right.

*You cannot select a date earlier than the opening of the FSS or the last FASP approval.*

- Click the **Add** button.
- If a current PPG exists, click **Yes** to the message, "The addition of the Program choice will invalidate the active PPG. Continue?".
- Use the drop down menu in the **PPG** field to select the appropriate Permanency Planning Goal, and, if required, a **Sub Category**.

*The Effective field pre-fills with the current date. Adjust the date as needed to match the Program Choice Effective date.*

- Enter an Anticipated Date of Completion. This date will carry over to the Title Page of the Permanency Hearing Report (PHR).
- In the narrative field, explain why the change in PPG has occurred.
- Click the **Add** button.
- Click the **Save** button.

### Tracked Child Detail - Placement Information

The Placement Information tab enables once a Program Choice of Placement has been assigned to a child on the **Program Choice/PPG** tab of the **Tracked Children** window.

Placement Information should be completed when a child initially enters placement and updated whenever a child's placement changes.

#### Step-by-Step: Entering Placement Information:

- On the **Tracked Children Detail** window, click the **Placement Information** Tab.
- Select a child in the Tracked Child Detail.  
*The AFCARS Foster Care Information fields display.*
- Enter/update information to appropriately reflect the child's current placement.
- Click the **Save** or **Save & Close** button.

## Tracked Child Detail - Removal Information

Program Choice/PPG

Placement Information

Associate Worker

**Removal Information**

Essential Documents

The Removal Information tab enables once a Program Choice of Placement has been assigned to a child on the **Program Choice/PPG tab** of the **Tracked Children** window. Information must be entered each time a child is placed or re-placed in foster care.

### Step-by-Step: Entering Removal Information:

1. On the **Tracked Children Detail** window, click the **Removal Information** tab.
2. Select a child in the Tracked Child Detail grid.  
*If there have been no previous removals, blank Removal Information fields for that child display.*  
If the child has been previously removed, click the **New** button to display blank Removal Information fields.
3. Enter the Date of Physical Removal, the Type of Legal Event Associated with Removal and one or more Conditions Associated with Child's Removal, as appropriate.

Activity Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Next Permanency Hearing Date Certain: \_\_\_\_\_

Removal Information

History of Removals:

| Inv | Removal Date | Legal Event | Date Saved |
|-----|--------------|-------------|------------|
|     |              |             |            |

Count = 0

Date of Physical Removal: 05/03/2018 \*

Type of Legal Event Associated with Removal: Article 10 Abuse/Neglect \*\$

Invalid

Condition Associated with Child's Removal

- Death of Parent(s)
- Drug Abuse (Child)
- Drug Abuse (Parent)
- Inadequate Housing
- Incarceration of Parent(s)
- Neglect
- Physical Abuse
- Relinquishment
- Sexual Abuse

New

4. Click the **Save** or **Save & Close** button.



If a child has been hospitalized or placed in detention, prior to entering an out of home placement, the Removal Date will be the same as the Date of Placement (M910 date).

See the CONNECTIONS Tip Sheet, *Recording AFCARS Removal Information*, for detailed information on correctly coding various removal scenarios.

Once saved, Removal Information forms part of an ongoing history and cannot be deleted. To correct information that was entered incorrectly:

1. Highlight the incorrect entry.
2. Check the **Invalid** checkbox.
3. Click the **Save** button

Date of Physical Removal: 05/03/2018 \*

Type of Legal Event Associated with Removal: Article 10 Abuse/Neglect \*\$

Invalid

- Click the **New** button to clear the fields.
- Enter the correct Removal Information.

### Assigning Roles and Associating Workers

- Click the **Save** or **Save & Close** button.



**If the child is placed with a voluntary agency, it is important to assign the agency a role in the stage as soon as possible so they can immediately begin documenting their work with the child and family.**

Delays in role assignments result in delayed Family Assessment and Service Plans (FASPs), late progress notes, delays in health information entry and inaccurate Casework Contact data.

Voluntary agency workers can be assigned the following roles:

- The **Case Worker** completes specific work within the FASP and may be responsible for a specific child, multiple children or no children in the Family Services Stage (FSS). There can be multiple Case Workers assigned to an FSS.
- The **Case Planner** is primarily responsible for coordinating and evaluating services to the family, as well as periodically completing and submitting the FASP in a timely fashion. The Case Planner reviews the work of all other workers who have contributed to the FASP and accepts or revises that information accordingly. They may refer the child and family to service providers, as needed. There can be only one Case Planner assigned to an FSS. If there is no assigned Case Planner, the Case Manager assumes the responsibilities of the Case Planner.

Roles in a stage can, and frequently do, change over the life of the case. For upstate counties, the district generally retains the role of Case Planner if multiple agencies are providing services to a single family.

If a Voluntary Agency worker is to be assigned the role of Case Worker and will be contributing to the FASP, they should be associated to the child(ren) with whom they will be working. This allows the associated worker to complete the Child Strengths, Needs and Risks scales in the FASP for the associated child.

#### **Step-by-Step: Associating a Worker to a Child:**

- On the **Tracked Children Detail** window, click the **Associate Worker** tab.



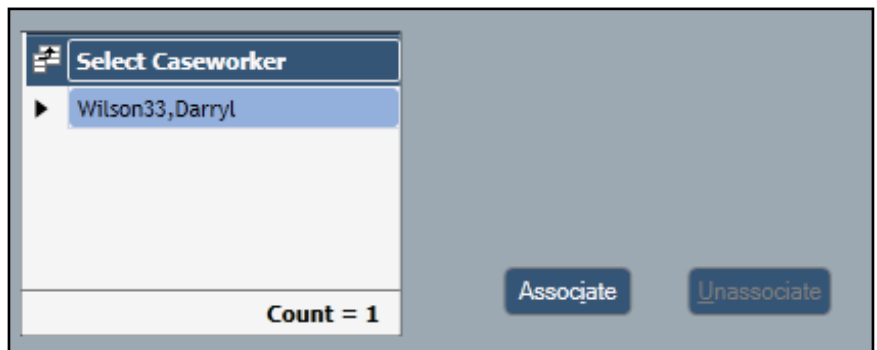
- Select a child in the Tracked Child Detail grid.

*A list of assigned workers displays.*

- Select the worker you wish to associate with the selected child.

Only one worker may be associated with a particular child, but the same worker can be associated to multiple children.

- Click the **Associate** button.



5. Click the **Save & Close** or **Save** button.

Should situations change and a worker need to be unassociated from a child,

1. On the **Associate Child** tab of the **Tracked Child** window, select the child from the grid.
2. Click the **Unassociate** button.
3. Click the **Save & Close** or **Save** button.



If a child is placed with a voluntary agency that will be

### Assigning Health Responsibility



responsible for documenting health information, the agency should be designated as responsible as soon as their role in the stage is assigned.



See the CONNECTIONS Tip Sheet, *Health Module: Designating Health Responsibility* for access rules and a complete description of the steps necessary to designate an agency as responsible.

### Health Services Window - Clinical Diagnosis

A number of AFCARS Elements are derived from information entered as Clinical Diagnoses in the Health Services window. Qualifying AFCARS diagnoses include Intellectual Disability, Visual and Hearing Impairments, Physical Disabilities, Emotional Disturbance, Mental Health diagnoses and Other Medically Diagnosed Conditions Requiring Special Care.

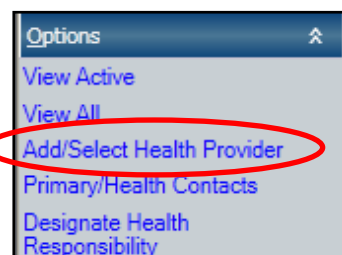
#### **Step-by-Step: Entering a Clinical Diagnosis (from your Workload):**

1. With the Family Services Stage selected, click the **Health Services** link in the navigation pane.
2. Click the **OK** button on the Health Services disclaimer.
3. From the grid, select the child for whom you wish to enter a diagnosis.
4. Select the **Clinical Appointments** tab.

The screenshot shows a software interface. On the left is a 'Stage Actions' navigation pane with a list of links: Person List, Progress Notes, FASP, Sex Trafficking Screening, Missing Child, Health Services (circled in red), Service Plan Review, and Permanency. On the right is a table with columns for checkboxes, 'New', an exclamation mark, and 'Stage Name'. The table contains five rows of data:

|                                     |  | New | ! | Stage Name     |
|-------------------------------------|--|-----|---|----------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/>            |  | Y   |   | Smith, Abigail |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            |  | Y   |   | Smith, Abigail |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |  |     |   | Adams, Maggie  |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            |  |     |   | Antonio, Maria |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            |  |     |   | Antonio, Maria |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            |  |     |   | Brown, Sherry  |

5. If you wish to indicate a Health Provider for an appointment, you must enter/verify the



Provider **before** entering the Clinical Appointment. Click the **Add/Select Health Provider** link in the navigation pane to enter provider information. Once saved, provider information is available for all members of the stage, not just the child for whom it was entered.

6. Select the Domain Type, Appointment Type and Appointment Date.


More than one domain may be selected at a time. If multi-selected, the resulting diagnosis list will include choices appropriate to all the chosen domains.

Choosing the Physical/Medical Domain will require an answer to the question, “Are the child’s immunizations up to date?”.

7. Click the appropriate checkbox(es) to indicate the diagnosis.

The screenshot shows a software interface for appointment details. It features two main columns of checkboxes. The left column, titled 'Domain Type', includes options for Dental, Developmental, Mental Health, Physical/Medical (which is checked), and Substance Abuse. The right column, titled 'Appointment Type', includes options for Diagnosis at Intake, Emergency Care, Follow-up, Initial Assessment, Reassessment, Sick child, and Well child. To the right of these columns are several input fields: an 'Appointment Date' field with a dropdown arrow, an 'Invalid' checkbox, a 'Health Provider' text field, and a question 'Are the child's immunizations up to date?' with radio buttons for 'Yes' and 'No'.

8. Click the **Add** Button.
9. Click the **Save** or **Save & Close** button.

 ***For AFCARS reporting purposes, a child must have either (1) a qualifying AFCARS diagnosis or (2) a diagnosis of “Well Child” entered in the Physical/Medical domain. This must be entered with an appointment type of Initial, Reassessment or Well Child. Note that “Well child” appears both as a diagnosis AND an appointment type. Thus, a child may have a Well child appointment that results in a diagnosis of “Well Child”.***

## Education

OCFS Education policy requires the recording of education information for all children in foster care and recommends, as a best practice, that it be recorded for all children removed under Article 10 of the Family Court Act and placed in the direct custody of a relative or other suitable person.

- Education information should be recorded in the Education window as early in the academic school year as possible, but no later than October 1.
- If a change (such as a school transfer) occurs during the school year, the change should be recorded at the time of the change as a new entry.
- The National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD) requires entry of school information for the full academic year. It may therefore be necessary to enter school information that pre-dates a child’s entry into foster care or into a specific placement program, back to the beginning of the school year.
- NYTD also requires that a grade be entered for each foster child. If a child is in an ungraded program, it is necessary to choose the closest applicable grade.

### **Step-by-Step: Entering Education Information (from your Workload):**

1. Select the stage on which education information needs to be entered.
2. Click the **Education** link in the navigation pane.
3. In the Education window grid, select the child for whom education information is to be entered.
4. Click the **New** button.



Case Name: Collins, Kristy Case Initiation Date: 04/24/2009 WMS Case #: S720050

Child List

| Name              | Sex | DOB        | Age | Person ID | F/C | Grade Level | Student ID |
|-------------------|-----|------------|-----|-----------|-----|-------------|------------|
| Collins, Kimberly | F   | 08/16/2009 | 8   | 17200226  | Y   |             |            |
| Collins, Tyler    | M   | 03/30/2016 | 2   | 17200227  | Y   |             |            |

Count = 3

History Grid

| Case ID    | Stage ID | Stage Type | Academic Year | Effective Date | School Name | Grade Level | IEP Date | IEP | School Contact Person | Contact Number | District/Region of Origin | Date Updated | Updated By |
|------------|----------|------------|---------------|----------------|-------------|-------------|----------|-----|-----------------------|----------------|---------------------------|--------------|------------|
| <b>New</b> |          |            |               |                |             |             |          |     |                       |                |                           |              |            |

Count = 0

New

- Complete all information.
- Click the **Save & Close** or the **Save** button.

### Complete a FASP or Plan Amendment

When a child enters care, the reasonable efforts made to avoid placement, location of the child, continuity of environment, continuity of culture (for Native American children), visitation plans, and any changes in the service plan must be documented. Typically, this is done in a Family Assessment and Service Plan (FASP) or, if a FASP is not available for launch, in a Plan Amendment.

**Before** launching a Plan Amendment or a FASP:

- Verify that the Program Choice has been updated. If the Program Choice is not correct, the FASP/Plan Amendment will not contain the correct modules.
  - If the FASP has been launched with an incorrect Program Choice, correct the Program Choice on the Tracked Children window. This will update the FASP contents, however, modules that have been started will not be deletable, even if they are no longer required under the new Program Choice.

Status Selection

Status Changes

- Preventive Services Started
- Preventive Services Ended
- Other Status Change

**Reminder:**

Status Selection

Status Changes

- Case Closed to CPS
- Child Discharged to Adult Residential Care
- Child Moved From One Foster Care Setting to Case Open to CPS
- Adolescent Discharged to Independent Living
- Child Entering/Reentering Foster Care
- Child Discharged to Home, Relative or Other C
- Visitation Plan Changed
- Other Status Change

Before a FASP can be submitted for approval, a Sex Trafficking Screening must be completed for each child and the results documented in the Sex Trafficking Screening window in CONNECTIONS.

## Activities Window

When a child enters care, it is important to verify that an Activities track is open and to enter the appropriate legal and movement codes in a timely and accurate manner. The code indicating a child has entered care (M910) is the basis of many of the data reports regarding children in placement, such as the Foster Care Roster, Missing Casework Contacts and Non-Reimbursable (NR) reports. Delayed entry of Activities codes for children entering care, being absent from care, returning from absences, entering or returning from a Trial discharge and being discharged from care impacts the accuracy of many of our important measures.

**Any worker with a role in the FSS can view Activities information.**

### Step-by-Step: Verifying Activities Information:

1. From your workload, select the stage for which you wish to view Activities.

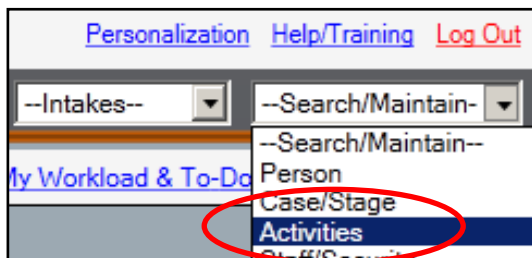
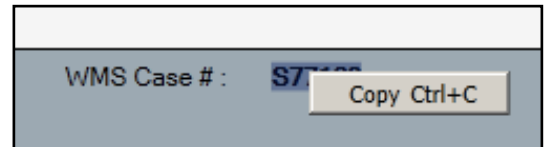
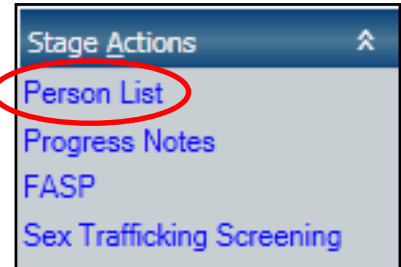
2. Click the **Person List** link in the navigation pane.

*The Person List display with the WMS Case # in the upper right.*

3. Highlight, then right click on the WMS Case #.

*The Copy command displays*

4. Click the **Copy** Command.



5. Select **Activities** from the Search-Maintain drop down menu.

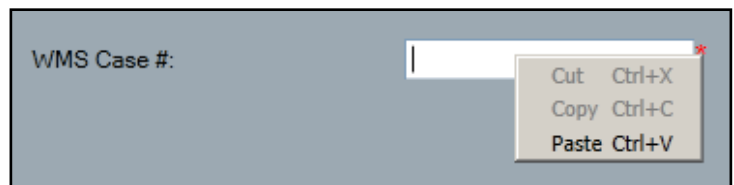
6. Right click in the WMS Case # field of the Activities window and select the **Paste** command.

7. Click the **Search** button.

*The list of all persons on the WMS case displays.*

8. Select the child whose Activities you wish to view.

*The Person Detail tab for the child displays.*



9. Click the Activities tab to view the child's history of recorded activities

A screenshot of the 'Activities' tab in the software. It shows a table with columns for Date, Activity, and Event. The table contains four rows of data.

| Date       | Activity | Event                                     |
|------------|----------|---|
| 02/21/2018 | Goal     | G100 - NEW PERM. GOAL - RETURN TO PARENTS |
| 02/20/2018 | Special  | S200 - CHILDS LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY         |
| 02/20/2018 | Movement | M910 - CHILD PLACED                       |
| 02/20/2018 | Legal    | L700 - REMOVAL                            |

If the child entering care has previously been determined to be a candidate for foster care, the code ending candidacy (S420) must be entered in Activities.



See the CONNECTIONS tip sheet, *Documenting Determinations for Foster Care Candidacy*, for complete instructions on entering candidacy information.



While all workers with a role in an FSS can view Activities information, only those with the proper security can enter it. Upstate, only LDSS workers may do so. Be sure to follow local protocols to keep the information updated and accurate in the Activities window.

## Resources

- CONNECTIONS Job Aids and Tip Sheets:  
<http://ocfs.state.nyenet/connect/jobaided/jobaided.asp>
- CONNECTIONS Regional Implementation Staff:  
<http://ocfs.state.nyenet/connect/contact.asp>
- CONNECTIONS Application Help Mailbox:  
[ocfs.sm.conn\\_app@ocfs.ny.gov](mailto:ocfs.sm.conn_app@ocfs.ny.gov)  
(NOTE: address contains an underline)

*A Helpdesk ticket is now required before sending requests to the Triage Unit. This can be acquired by emailing **FixIt@its.ny.gov**.*

ITS Enterprise Service Desk  
1-844-891-1786