

+-----+
| LOCAL COMMISSIONERS MEMORANDUM |
+-----+

Transmittal No: 90 LCM-12

Date: January 29, 1990

Division: Family and Children
Services

TO: Local District Commissioners

SUBJECT: State Central Register Update

ATTACHMENTS: There are no attachments to this LCM.

INTRODUCTION

This is the second in a series of Local Commissioners Memorandums intended to update Commissioners, Directors of Social Services and Directors of Child Protective Services on the status of various State Central Register activities.

This LCM focuses on the State Central Register's "Hotline" function.

It describes actual and anticipated call volume of the Hotline and the operational implications of such use. Information regarding the status of the "Mandated Reporter's" Hotline is shared, and suggestions made as to how local district activity can serve to enhance its performance.

The LCM describes, in detail, how the Register's County Lines Unit, established for the exclusive use of local districts, can be used more efficiently to handle transactions. Problem areas have been identified by SCR and local CPS staff. The guidelines which follow respond to the need for clarification as discussed with local staff on a regional basis in September.

SCR CALL VOLUME

Since November, 1989, and following the prominent child abuse fatality involving Lisa Steinberg, the SCR has received approximately 1,400 to 1,500

calls daily. The SCR experiences decreases in call volume whenever schools are out of session. Due to this lower volume of calls the SCR has attempted to answer all calls to the Hotline in a "live mode." This simply means once a child protective specialist answers the telephone call all of the information needed to register a report is taken at that time. With schools having reconvened, our call volume is once again rising. We do not believe we can answer all callers in a reasonable amount of time in the "live mode" once calls approach 1,500. As you know, in November, we re-instituted our method of receiving calls on the public hotline known as call screening. This means that an abbreviated interview is conducted to decide whether the non-mandated caller has a reportable situation. If they do, a callback slip is taken and the caller is told that the SCR will call them back within four (4) hours. They are also told to call us back if no one reaches them within that timeframe. The SCR has experienced no increases in staffing since January, 1988, although staffing increases are expected. Other remedies have been sought to improve access to the SCR for both the public and mandated hotlines. One of the steps was increasing the telecopy capabilities, in regards to mandated reporters and some local districts. The SCR is transmitting and receiving DSS-2221's from several local districts as well as from the five boroughs. There are also several select mandated reporter groups telecopying DSS-2221's to the SCR on a daily basis. Taking advantage of available technology has increased efficiency at the SCR and in effect, freed up personnel to respond to calls.

Steps are being taken to expand the Telecopy Unit by increasing the number of telecopy machines as well as increasing staff. When these steps are accomplished, there are additional mandated reporters and local districts waiting to start telecopy communications. We are now transmitting approximately 76% of the workload via telecopiers.

MANDATED REPORTERS

It has been twelve (12) months since the implementation of the "Mandated Express Hotline" (1-800-635-1522). Only individuals mandated by law to report suspected cases of child abuse and neglect may call in this matter.

It appears that the Hotline Express number has been given out to non-mandated reporters. In some cases, the number has been furnished by mandated reporters but in others, it has been released by local Departments of Social Services. The purpose of the legislation and the separate phone line is defeated when non-mandated reporters utilize the Hotline Express. Since calls are processed sequentially and reports taken immediately, it is important that this number be reserved exclusively for mandated reporters.

Please be certain that your staff understand the importance of keeping the Hotline Express reserved for and confidential to mandated reporters and continue in your efforts to educate mandated reporters in your district of the need for confidentiality of this matter.

Non-mandated reporters must continue to use the number published for the general public (1-800-342-3720). Non-mandated reporters calling in on the Hotline Express will not be serviced but instead directed to recontact the SCR using the general number.

COUNTY LINES TRANSACTIONS

The following addresses some of the common questions and problems encountered through the County Lines.

DSS-2223

We are noticing some common problems in the completion of DSS-2223's. These problems are: 1) checking multiple boxes in the "Type of Report" section of a single DSS-2223 and 2) checking one of the determination boxes ("Indicated or Unfounded") more than once in the life of a CPS case. This can lead Hotline staff to believe that a case is unfounded or closed when it should be open (or vice versa) and often results in the need for a number change.

Specific guidelines for completing DSS-2223's may be found in Chapter VIII, Sections G and K of the CPS Program Manual, but some important points to remember, when completing DSS-2223's are:

- The only time that more than one box should be checked in the "Type of Report" section of a DSS-2223 is when the case is being indicated and closed at the point of case determination (first ninety days).
- Checking "Unfounded," "Service Plan Complete" or "Service Plan Incomplete" as a "Type of Report" will close the SCR number + 0 in the system.
- A CPS case, or single number, may only be determined ("Indicated" or "Unfounded") once.
- If the case is open and indicated with the SCR, a subsequent report must be addressed on a separate DSS-2223 checked "Interim." The allegations may either be substantiated or unsubstantiated in the narrative portion of the DSS-2223. If you wish to close the case to the SCR after addressing the subsequent report, you need to send a separate DSS-2223 checked either "Service Plan Complete" or "Service Plan Incomplete." The forms should be sent to the SCR at the time to ensure that the "Interim" DSS-2223 is entered before the closing DSS 2223.
- If a DSS-2223 checked "Unfounded" has been sent to the SCR, you must request a new number to address any reports that were not covered by the unbounding.
- If you are addressing a series of reports at the end of the initial 90-day period and will be substantiating one or more of the reports and unsubstantiating the others, separate DSS-2223's must be completed. The DSS-2223 which addresses the unsubstantiated reports should be checked "Interim" and the one addressing the substantiated report(s) should be checked "Indicated." You may still indicate and close the case at

the point of determination, but the forms should be sent to the SCR at the same time to ensure that the Interim DSS-2223 is entered before the Indication/Closing DSS-2223.

We are experiencing problems with delinquent DSS-2223's and case transfers. Some districts are put in the position of being unable to close a case to the SCR because they did not receive the necessary DSS-2223's from the original district when a case was transferred to them and the original district never sent the forms to the SCR. To prevent this from happening in the future, we will begin requiring that the record be up to date before we will process a transfer. This is effective March 1, 1990. In lieu of the transfer, we will assign secondary responsibility to the new district pending receipt of the forms at the SCR. Districts with telecopy capabilities may send their outstanding forms to the SCR when contacted for the transfer.

PRIMARY/SECONDARY RESPONSIBILITY

We receive a number of questions about the responsibilities of districts in primary/secondary, and sometimes tertiary situations. Primary/secondary responsibilities are defined in Chapter VIII, Section J of the CPS Program Manual. The only difference between primary, secondary and tertiary responsibility is that the district with primary responsibility is responsible for sending the DSS-2200 series forms to the SCR. In primary/secondary situations, we expect the districts to talk to each other and work out their roles and responsibilities. If districts are unable to agree, we will intercede, but only after the districts have made every effort to resolve their differences through their supervisory chains.

Problems with primary/secondary responsibility often enter into number changes. When a district is assigned primary responsibility because SCR records are showing that the case is open and active in that district, the district is not relieved of its responsibility by informing the SCR that their case has been closed or unfounded and requesting a new number. The district is expected to contact the secondary district to inform them of the status of their case and, to do whatever is necessary on the case until they have been relieved of responsibility by the SCR through the number change. County Line staff will ask for the name of a contact person in the secondary district before processing the number change.

TRANSFERS

If a caseworker has a transfer request pending with the SCR and will be leaving the office, he or she can expedite the process by leaving the information with someone else. For routine transfers, County Line staff will be looking for determinations on all oral reports sixty days old or older. They will also want to know: the names, dates of birth and ethnicity of all subjects and other persons named in the report; the name of the contact person in the receiving district; the reason for the transfer, including the reason why the case must remain open for Child Protective Services; and the status of any court activity or children in care. The SCR will require the transferring district to retain secondary responsibility with the transfer if there is an open court case in their district or a child in care for protective reasons.

Our criteria for transferring case responsibility are as follows: the transferring district must have discussed the case with the receiving district; there must be a reason for the case to remain open; there must be a means of locating the family in the new district; and there must be determinations on all oral reports 60 days old or older. We will not withdraw a transfer because the information that we obtained from the transferring district proves to be untrue. Sometimes misunderstandings will develop between districts. When this occurs, we expect the districts to try to resolve their differences through their supervisory chains. We will intercede only when this proves to be unsuccessful.

We are often asked if it is necessary for a district to accept a transfer. It is necessary in primary/secondary situations, but not in others. A transfer involves a change in primary responsibility. Because districts must work out their roles and responsibilities in primary/secondary situations, the secondary district must have agreed to assume primary responsibility or responsibility for the paperwork in order for the transfer to take place. In situations where a family has moved to a new district and there are no protective issues in the original district, this need to work out roles and responsibilities does not exist. As a result, we will process the transfer as long as the transfer criteria have been met.

CONTACTING THE COUNTY LINE

Routine requests for County Line changes may be called into the County Line answering machines or, for districts with telecopy capabilities, faxed directly to the County Lines. The former County Line phone number which is now used for districts to receive reports after hours (1-800-342-3015) is not operational between the hours of 8:00 a.m. and 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday. In an emergency (i.e., a report was transmitted in error, there is a need for a child to be seen in another district), the County Line Unit may be reached directly by dialing (518) 474-7323. This is a single line coming into the Unit and because the Unit cannot handle a high volume of calls, we ask that you use this number only in emergencies. Please do not fax urgent messages to the County Lines. Also, please do not call the County Line answering machines repeatedly with the same message. County Lines receive between 1,300 and 2,000 requests for changes each month and, depending upon the volume, may not be able to respond to your request right away. If you have not heard from us, you may check on the status of your request by leaving this message on the answering machine. This will help us to organize our work more effectively and serve you better.

SCR DATABASE

I am asking for your assistance in encouraging your staff to update the SCR database.

Intake staff rely heavily on name spellings, birth dates and addresses to make correct cross reference matches. When information on the database is missing or incorrect then cross reference is incomplete and incorrect numbering can occur. Correction activities to rectify incorrect numbering are labor intensive for both SCR and local district staff. Numbering mistakes could also cause critical assignment mistakes and jeopardize a local district's ability to respond appropriately to a given report.

Date January 29, 1990

Trans. No. 90 LCM-12

Page No. 6

Our clearance process depends heavily on matching persons through family composition, birth dates and case addresses.

The courts, law enforcement and child care agencies all place importance on clearance information when making critical decisions about children's present and future health and safety. For these reasons, it becomes extremely important that your staff update and correct the data file through the use of the DSS-2221B whenever they obtain information that is new or different.

Please share this letter with Directors of Services and Directors of Child Protective Services.

If you have any questions on topics covered in this letter, please contact Ms. Patricia M. O'Donnell, Assistant Director at (518) 474-2291.

Sanford R. Berman, Director
State Central Register
Division of Family and Children
Services