



Fresno County
Department of Social Services Emergency
Preparedness and Disaster Response Plan
for Foster Care and Displaced Children

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Introduction

This plan specifies the disaster response policies and procedures to be implemented after a major emergency has been declared by the Fresno County Department of Social Services' Director or designee.

During major emergencies, the Department of Social Services (DSS) primary mission objectives are the following:

- Locate and continue services to all foster children in the Agency's care, with prioritized response to the most vulnerable clients, including medically fragile, disabled, and severely emotionally disturbed children.
- Ensure the safety and well-being of unaccompanied minors until they are connected with their parents or other family members.
- Preserve essential client records.
- Respond as appropriate to new child welfare referrals.
- Support the Department's County-wide disaster response roles.

1. Identification and location process of children who may be displaced

A primary concern of Fresno County Department of Social Services is to assure the safety and well-being of children in its care, and children otherwise known as “unaccompanied minors”, who may be left unsupervised as the result of a disaster.

Immediately prior to, during, or after a disaster, the status of children in the Department’s care will be determined via the telephone, a home call, and/or verbal or in person contact with emergency shelters. Social Workers will maintain and carry with them, when leaving their primary worksite, a current record of every child in their case load (CWS/CMS caseload reports and field worksheets), including; child’s name, address, telephone number, age, social security number, and contact information for birth parents, siblings, resource families, and other collaterals/providers.

In a major disaster, DSS will provide a variety of services for court dependent minors, and displaced minors, within the mandated care and shelter duties as they relate to the care and supervision of children. Upon request of the Emergency Operations Center, DSS will provide emergency child welfare services including:

- Assign staff to emergency shelters or relief programs to implement an information and location assistance program in coordination with the toll-free disaster contact number;
- Interview, identify and provide immediate care for displaced minor victims;
- Process requests from caregivers of court dependent minors for disaster assistance;
- Activate a phone tree to contact caregivers and birth parents (including out of county/state facilities) for/with care status updates and to relay information on court hearings, evacuation needs, etc.;
- Activate a disaster inquiry line “Warm Line” for court dependents (559) 262-4471;
- Perform other tasks relating to the care and safety of dependent minors.

Prioritized response to medically fragile children: Twenty-four hour response will be prioritized to pre-identified medically at-risk children.

Protecting and updating client records: The data extracts from Child Welfare System Case Management System (CWS/CMS) contain essential contact information. To help ensure the accessibility of the files during emergencies, these electronic files are also backed up on agency servers and the portable hard drives of key executive staff. If critical infrastructure is inaccessible and power is unavailable, disaster managers should use the agency laptop, a portable printer, and a car with a power inverter to access and print maps and rosters.

Identifying foster families in shelters: DSS will provide the Red Cross a list of our client names and their birthdates. Red Cross will then search their Disaster Victim Inquiry System and notify DSS about client matches. Once DSS identifies foster children staying at shelters, the DSS will contact them to verify their status and connect the family to available resources as necessary.

Managing disaster response: The nature of DSS response will depend on the location and scale of the disaster, time of day, and availability of staff. DSS will dedicate available staff and resources to disaster response as appropriate given the scale and type of event.

For a disaster that occurs during business hours, all staff is expected to immediately report to their supervisor or the available next higher ranking manager. Some DSS staff members may be released from duty to check on their families. Before dismissal, however, these workers will be given maps, client rosters, and an assignment to check on foster families that live close to them to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the foster children. This task should be accomplished within 24 hours. Workers will be expected report back to duty as instructed prior to dismissal.

In the case of a localized disaster, geographically organized location information of youth in open case in the SafeMeasures system can be accessed (Exhibit A).

2. Communications process with foster care providers

It is the Department's priority to make contact with, and respond to the needs of, resource families, birth parents, the children/youth in the Department's care, and unaccompanied minors, in the hours immediately following a disaster or other emergency.

The Foster Care Emergency toll-free line 1-877-533-KIDS (5437) established by the Department to provide emergency information in case of a major disaster will be activated/manned. This number is available as a direct line of communication between the Department and foster parents, non-relative extended family members (NREFM)s, relative caregivers, birth parents, group homes, foster family agencies, contract providers, and the children/youth placed in out of home care.

The DSS staff will be deployed, and will coordinate deployment of Fresno County Mental Health staff, to designated American Red Cross (ARC) shelters to process initial intakes and registration of foster/NREFM/relative caregivers and the children in their care; birth parent and the children in their care; licensed providers and the children in their care, including daycares, and unaccompanied minors presented to the care and shelter site for care, and supervision. Managers will follow the process to identify and reunite unaccompanied minors with their parent/guardians also providing temporary placement, as needed.

After a disaster strikes, DSS will contact all of its foster care providers to ensure the safety and well-being of the foster children within their care. Prioritized contact will be given to foster homes with medically at-risk foster children, group home, and/or those located in the most heavily impacted disaster areas. Workers will first try to establish contact with foster families using phones if possible. If telecommunications are down or if after repeated attempts the family and its designated emergency contact are unreachable, then workers will make home visits to verify the status of the foster children.

Foster families evacuating the area will be instructed to notify DSS as soon as possible and provide information about where the family is evacuating to and how to contact them in the future. Group homes will also be instructed to communicate with DSS regarding the status of children in their care as soon as possible.

3. Evacuation procedures

DSS will defer to the Fresno County Department of Emergency Management and other public safety departments to issue evacuation orders. DSS does not have the authority, expertise, access to information, or infrastructure to execute evacuations.

Families relocating to other areas are required to send an email to the Agency's designated address or call the Hotline as soon as possible to update their contact information including address and phone numbers. If Hotline workers are unavailable, a voicemail system will provide instructions and allow the family to leave messages about how to contact them in the future.

4. Shelters

During a major emergency, DSS will process the intake of unaccompanied minors and provide emotional support, nourishment, medical assessment, and crisis intervention/mental health assessment as needed until the children are reunified or other placements are secured. If the influx of unaccompanied minors is excessive, DSS will work with shelter organizations such as the Fresno Rescue Mission and local community centers which have large capacity facilities.

5. Parental notification

Following a disaster, DSS will make reasonable efforts to contact the biological parents of the DSS foster children and provide information about the status of their children as it becomes available. However, the immediate priority will be secure the location and safety of children in care.

6. Continuity of services

During or after a disaster, DSS is not absolved from any of its State mandated child abuse referral responsibilities; however, Government Code 8567 does allow the Governor to make, amend, and rescind State regulations. If necessary, DSS may submit a request to the Governor through the county's Emergency Operations Center (EOC) to suspend appropriate State mandated child abuse referral responsibilities.

Following a disaster, DSS offices will likely be unable to meet all State and Federal regulations within mandated timeframes, and the courts may be temporarily closed and thus unable to issue orders and waivers needed by local DSS offices.

Immediately after a disaster, DSS will dedicate available resources as needed to continue all State and Federal mandated services. DSS will shift staff responsibilities as necessary to help maintain continuity of core services for the Agency's existing foster children and new referrals. Non-essential functions such as adoption services may be temporarily suspended as necessary.

7. Staff assignment process

All City and County employees are designated by both State and City law as "Disaster Service Workers". When the Mayor or the designated next in command declares an emergency, all public employees are obligated to serve as Disaster Service Workers and may be assigned to perform activities outside of their normal duties that promote the protection of public health and safety or the preservation of lives and property. DSS staff responsibilities may change as reasonable and necessary to help fulfill the Agency's City, State, and Federally mandated response roles. As per County policy, DSS staff will not be expected to perform disaster response duties that are unsafe or that they do not know how to perform.

Some DSS staff will have pre-designated immediate disaster response duties, such as staffing a shelter or conducting health and wellness checks on medically fragile foster children. These special assignments will supersede assignment to general Disaster Worker assignments.

8. Workload planning

Immediately following a disaster, ensuring the safety and well-being of the Agency's current foster children-especially the medically at-risk-and unaccompanied minors will be the highest priority. Otherwise, DSS will assign available staff as necessary to fulfill the agency's disaster response functions and maintain continuity of services to existing and new clients.

9. Alternative locations for operations

DSS operations are conducted at multiple sites in addition to the Agency's administrative offices at 2011 Fresno Street, 2135 Fresno Street, 1404 L. Street, 4499 East Kings Canyon Road, and the West Fresno Regional Center at Edison Plaza. Following a disaster, DSS employees will be expected to report to their normal worksite or designated staging area unless instructed otherwise. If a facility is inaccessible, the Director's office will instruct those workers on an alternative location to report to, dismiss them, or direct those with the ability to do so telecommute.

Some workers may be assigned to a temporary office in order to 1) assist with disaster response for foster children placed out of county, or 2) perform regular work or other disaster response duties if their primary worksite is inaccessible.

10. Orientation and on-going training

A disaster training module will be incorporated into the training provided to all new DSS employees.

11. New child welfare investigation process

New child welfare investigations will be conducted in accordance with State and Federal law. However, under extreme circumstances DSS may seek permission from the court to extend some State and Federal mandated deadlines.

During or after a disaster, each Program Manager or designee shall ensure that all Emergency Response Child Abuse Referrals are investigated. In some situations, it may be necessary to retain a skeleton crew or to shift staff to another facility in order to respond to emergency referrals.

12. Implementation process for new services

After a disaster, DSS will request the court to activate disaster court procedures. Feasible timeframes will be established to allow for the generation of court reports, and court appearances. All existing standards for new service provision, except as added, amended, or rescinded by the Governor, remain in effect during a disaster or other emergency.

13. Communication protocols

Staff communication protocols: As discussed in Section 1, if a disaster occurs during business hours, workers should report to their supervisor or senior manager for instructions.

For disasters occurring during non-business hours, DSS managers and supervisors will activate the phone tree and contact staff to check on their status and provide work instructions. DSS staff will also make reasonable efforts to contact their supervisors or other appropriate managers. If communications are down or attempts are unsuccessful, workers should listen to the designated radio stations for instructions.

Communication with the media: The Director will provide information to the public media.

14. Contracted services

Once the Foster Care Emergency Toll-Free Line is activated, contracted providers are instructed to contact this number after taking steps to secure their family. Should children be at their place of business or otherwise in their care receiving services, the contractor will contact the children's caregivers. They will make arrangements for reuniting the children and caregivers or assist in arranging medical care, as needed.

DSS' essential program records are primarily stored in the statewide database Child Welfare System Case Management System, otherwise known as CWS/CMS. The CWS/CMS server maintenance is managed by the State's vendor, IBM Global Services. IBM is contractually bound to the State to provide extensive Disaster Recovery services in the event of emergencies. The services include, but are not limited to, providing access to Fresno County data through Sacramento.

As an extra layer of data protection, DSS also backs up Fresno County caseload extracts from CWS/CMS data on DSS servers and portable hard drives of key executive staff. Laptops using an alternative power source are downloaded with the CWS/CMS application and remote access capability and are provided to child welfare assistant and program directors.

Disaster Criteria E - Coordinated services and share information with other states:

The case carrying social worker is responsible for contacting caregivers outside the county and state, to determine children's safety and well being.

The California Department of Social Services will be responsible for coordinating services and sharing information with other states.



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SUBJECT: PLACEMENT UNIT DISASTER PLAN

EFFECTIVE: MAY 2010

LAST ADOPTED: MAY 2010

I. GENERAL STATEMENT

In September 2006, Congress passed the Child and Family Services Improvement Act of 2006 (Public Law (PL) 109-288). PL 109-288 amended Part B of Title IV of the Social Security Act to reauthorize the Promoting Safe and Stable Families Program. Among other changes, PL 109-288 established requirements for states on disaster planning in child welfare under Section 6 (a) (16).

California Department of Social Services All County Letter (ACL) 07-30 establishes that counties are required to incorporate the new federal requirements within their local child welfare plans, and be operational. Minors in the probation system must also be included in the plan.

2. PURPOSE

This policy and procedure guide outlines the process to ensure that all minors in care are accounted for in the time of a disaster. During a major disaster or emergency the primary concern of the **Fresno County Probation Department** will be as follows:

- a) To assure the safety and well-being of placement minors in its care, custody, and control pursuant to WIC 727(a) who may be unsupervised or in an unsafe residence or care facility as the result of a disaster.
- b) Locate and continue services to placement minors in the department's care, with prioritization of response to minors in specialized care medically fragile, disabled (CRVC), and severely emotionally disturbed minors.
- c) Preserve minors' records and case information.
- d) Maintain public safety, when considering alternative placement options.
- e) Support the County and City's disaster response roles.
- f) Work collaboratively with the Department of Social Services to coordinate efforts and ensure that all minors in probation foster care placements have the same access to services (shelter, aide, financial assistance) as dependant youth during a time of emergency/disaster.

3. IDENTIFICATION AND LOCATION OF CHILDREN WHO MAY BE DISPLACED

Prior to, during, or after a disaster, the status of minors subject to a placement Court order pursuant to WIC 727(a) (under the care, custody and control of the Probation Department) will be determined by telephone, a home call, and/or verbal or in person contact with emergency shelters.

Deputy Probation Officers will maintain a current record of every child on their caseload through the Juvenile Automation System (JAS) caseload reports and field face sheets. This information will include the minimum: the child's name, address, telephone number, age, social security number, photograph, marks/scars or tattoos and contact information for birth parents, siblings, relatives, and other collaterals/providers.

In a major disaster, upon the request of the Emergency Operations Center, Probation will provide a response and assistance if a youth determined to be a Probation Foster Youth pursuant to WIC 727(a) are housed in the shelter and in need of services:

a) ***Prioritized response to medically fragile children.*** A twenty-four hour or "when safe" response will be prioritized to pre-identified medically at-risk needs minors

b) ***Protecting and updating client records.*** The data contained in the Juvenile Automation System (JAS) is essential contact information. Every effort will be made to use the JAS system for data retrieval and entry. In addition, JAS has a web-based database called SHARENET that can be accessed through the internet (web-based) without accessing a County of Fresno Computer. This system can also thumbnail and target key areas to help ensure the accessibility of the files during emergencies; these electronic files are also backed up on agency servers and the portable hard drives of key executive staff. If critical infrastructure is inaccessible and power is unavailable, disaster managers should use the agency laptop, a portable printer, and a car with a power inverter to access and print maps and rosters.

A written or "paper copy" list of all active probation foster care cases with names, addresses, phone numbers, and other case information will be kept with the placement manager and at the JJC (Juvenile Hall) booking office.

Identifying foster families in shelters. Probation will provide the Red Cross a list of our probationer names and their birthdates. Red Cross will then search their Disaster Victim Inquiry System and notify Probation about probationer matches. Once Probation identifies foster children staying at shelters, Probation will contact them to verify their status and connect the family to available resources as necessary.

Managing disaster response. The nature of Probation response will depend on the location and scale of the disaster, time of day, and availability of staff. The agency will dedicate available staff and resources to disaster response as appropriate given the scale and type of event.

For a disaster that occurs during business hours, all staff are expected to immediately report to their supervisor/manager or the available next higher ranking manager, following the chain of command. Some Probation staff members may be released from duty to check on their families. Before dismissal, however, these officers will be given maps, client rosters, and an assignment to check on foster families that live close to them to ensure the safety and well-being of the foster children. This task should be accomplished within 24 hours. Officers will be expected to report back to duty as instructed prior to dismissal.

4. COMMUNICATION PROCESS WITH THE FOSTER CARE PROVIDERS:

Central notice for Probation: For all inquiries regarding the status of probation foster youth after regular business hours, the Juvenile Justice Campus (559-495-3602) will be the central notification center for status or case information.

Probation will attempt to make contact with, and respond to the needs of, resource families, birth parents, and the children/youth under Probation's care following a disaster or other emergency.

In addition the Foster Care Emergency toll-free line 1-877-533-KIDS (5437) established by the Department to provide emergency information in case of a major disaster will be activated/manned is a secondary resource. This number is available as a direct line of communication between the Department and foster parents, non-relative extended family members (NREFM), relative caregivers, birth parents, group homes, foster family agencies, contract providers, and the children/youth placed in out of home care. Probation will assist with identifying which youth are under probation supervision.

Probation staff will coordinate deployment with DSS to designated American Red Cross (ARC) shelters to process initial intakes and registration of foster/NREFM/relative caregivers and the children in their care; birth parent and the children in their care; licensed providers and the children in their care. The Placement Manager(s) will follow the process to identify and reunite unaccompanied minors with their parent/guardians also providing temporary placement, as needed.

After a disaster strikes, Probation will contact all of its foster care providers to ensure the safety and well-being of the foster children within their care. Prioritized contact will be given to foster homes with medically at-risk foster children, group home, and/or those located in the most heavily impacted disaster areas. Probation will first try to establish contact with foster families using phones if possible. If telecommunications are down or if after repeated attempts the family and its designated emergency contact are unreachable, then officers will make home visits to verify the status of the foster children.

Foster families evacuating the area will be instructed to notify Probation as soon as possible and provide information about where the family is evacuating to and how to contact them in the future. Group homes will also be instructed to communicate with Probation regarding the status of children in their care as soon as possible.

When it becomes necessary to relocate a minor/child from an unsafe living situation due to a natural disaster, Probation will consider the following alternatives:

A) The Officer shall assess the appropriateness of the parent, guardian, or available family members as an alternative safe plan of care. Each situation is unique and will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. If an alternative plan is being considered, the officer shall check all residents living in the home by doing the following:

1. Check APS/JAS for probation status and performance (As a last resort if the officer is unable to obtain the necessary information, they are to contact an institution supervisor for assistance).
2. Check with dispatch for warrants, parole status, valid CDL (if applicable).
3. Call State Parole if applicable and if they are available.
4. Check DA STAR (As a last resort if the officer is unable to obtain the necessary information, they are to contact an institution supervisor for assistance).
5. The officer shall contact DSS to see if any alternative safe plan of care meets DSS guidelines for the minor(s) to be placed with a willing relative or friend. When DSS is requested to respond to the scene, a referral is generated within their system.
6. Check Megan's Law.

B) If the plan is deemed inappropriate or there is no other appropriate relative or friend to care for the minor(s), the officer shall place a WIC 777 hold on the minor. The minor/child will be booked in the Juvenile Justice Campus (Juvenile Hall) for their own safety/protection.

C) At any time during the process, the Officer may contact a Supervisor/PSM for consultation and advice regarding the incident. When there is a disagreement between the Officer and the Social Worker concerning the need for a minor(s) removal, the Officer shall call their Supervisor/PSM.

5. EVACUATION PROCEDURES

Probation will defer to the Fresno County Department of Emergency Management and other public safety departments to issue evacuation orders. Probation does not have the authority, expertise, access to information, or infrastructure to execute evacuations.

Families relocating to other areas are required to send an email to the Agency's designated address or call the Probation Department or Juvenile Justice Campus as soon as possible to update their contact information including address and phone numbers.

6. PARENTAL NOTIFICATION

Following a disaster, Probation will make reasonable efforts to contact the biological parents of the probation foster children and provide information about the status of their children as it becomes available. However, the immediate priority will be a secured location and safety of children in care.

7. CONTINUITY OF SERVICES

During or after a disaster, Probation is not absolved from any of its State mandated responsibilities; however, Government Code 8567 does allow the Governor to make, amend, and rescind State regulations. If necessary, Probation may submit a request to the Governor through the county's Emergency Operations Center (EOC) to suspend appropriate State mandated responsibilities.

Following a disaster, Probation will likely be unable to meet all State and Federal regulations within mandated timeframes, and the Courts may be temporarily closed and thus unable to issue orders and waivers needed by Probation.

Immediately after a disaster, Probation will dedicate available resources as needed to continue all State and Federal mandated services. Probation may shift staff responsibilities as necessary to help maintain continuity of core services for the departments existing foster children.

8. STAFF ASSIGNMENT PROCESS

All City and County employees are designated by both State and City law as "Disaster Service Workers". When the Mayor or the designated next in command declares an emergency, all public employees are obligated to serve as Disaster Service Workers and may be assigned to perform activities outside of their normal duties that promote the protection of public health and safety or the preservation of lives and property. Probation staff responsibilities may change as reasonable and necessary to help fulfill the Agency's City, State, and Federally mandated response roles. As per County policy, Probation staff will not be expected to perform disaster response duties that are unsafe or that they do not know how to perform.

Some Probation staff will have pre-designated immediate disaster response duties, such as staffing the Juvenile Justice Campus or being on stand-by. These special assignments will supersede assignment to general Disaster Worker assignments.

9. WORKLOAD PLANNING

Immediately following a disaster, the department's highest priority will be to ensure the safety and well-being of current foster children, especially the medically at-risk. Otherwise, Probation will assign available staff as necessary to fulfill the agency's disaster response functions and maintain continuity of services to existing and new clients.

10. ALTERNATIVE LOCATIONS OF OPERATIONS

Probation operations are conducted at multiple sites in addition to the Agency's administrative offices at 1100 Van Ness Ave # 804, 890 South Tenth Street, 2212 N. Winery, Suite #122, and 3333 E American Avenue (Juvenile Justice Campus). Following a disaster, Probation employees will be expected to report to their normal worksite or designated staging area unless instructed otherwise. If a facility is inaccessible, the Chief's office will instruct those workers to an alternative location to report to, dismiss them, or direct those with the ability to perform alternative work options.

Some probation staff may be assigned to a temporary office in order to 1) assist with disaster response for foster children placed out of county, or 2) perform regular work or other disaster response duties if their primary worksite is inaccessible.

11. TRAINING

A disaster training module will be incorporated into the training provided to all new placement officers.

12. IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS FOR COURT

After a disaster, Probation will request the Court to activate disaster Court procedures. Feasible timeframes will be established to allow for the generation of court reports, and court appearances. All existing standards for new service provision, except as added, amended, or rescinded by the Governor, remain in effect during a disaster or other emergency.

13. COMMUNICATION PROTOCOLS

Staff communication protocols: If a disaster occurs during business hours, Officers/ Probation staff should report to their Manager or Director for instructions.

For disasters occurring during non-business hours, Probation Managers and Directors will activate notification protocols via chain of command and contact staff to check on their status and provide work instructions. Probation staff will also make reasonable efforts to contact their appropriate managers. If communications are down or attempts are unsuccessful, Officers should listen to the designated emergency law enforcement radio or public radio stations for instructions.

Communication with the media: The Chief Probation Officer will provide information to the public media, per Department Policy.

Disaster Criteria E - Coordinated services and share information with other states:

The case carrying officer is responsible for contacting caregivers outside the county and state to determine children's safety and well being.

The California Department of Social Services will be responsible for coordinating services and sharing information with other states.

14. Reporting Requirements

If a minor(s) is placed with another person (i.e. alternative safe plan of care), the officer shall prepare an incident report within three business days or as soon as feasible. All other reporting requirements shall follow the above timelines.

The report shall contain the following information:

1. Name of parent(s)/guardian(s), DOB, age, height, weight, address, color of hair and eyes.
2. Name of minor(s), DOB, age, height, weight, address, color of hair and eyes.
3. Name of person(s) with whom the minor(s) is placed, DOB, age, height, weight, address, color of hair and eyes (applies only if a minor(s) was placed with a relative or friend).
4. Location.
5. Time when the WIC 777 hold was placed (time when the officer pulls the report from JAS/APS).
6. Officers involved.
7. Circumstances involved in the incident.
8. Name of DSS Social Worker if applicable.
9. Other people at the scene.
10. A chronological entry in JAS will also be required to capture the event.

Once the report has been completed by the Officer, it will be forwarded to a Supervisor/PSM for their approval, and then to the appropriate Division Director. Additionally, the Officer will forward a copy of the report to the appropriate Probation office support staff (for CMS/CWS entry). A copy of the report shall be placed and scanned in the probation file, in the event staff is required to appear in Court.