

**Cuyahoga County Division of Children and Family Services
(CCDCFS)
Policy Statement**

Policy Chapter: Management
Policy Number: 10.06.02
Policy Name: Media Representation/Public Information Requests

Original Effective Date: 03/01/1999
Revision Date(s): 04/15/2004
Current Revision Date: 07/01/2016
Approved By: Thomas D. Pristow

PURPOSE: To guide employees of the Cuyahoga County Division of Children and Family Services (CCDCFS) in their interactions with the public and with representatives of the media and to ensure that any information released has been approved by the Director (or designee) and is in accordance with the policies and goals of DCFS.

SCOPE: This policy applies to all employees of CCDCFS.

POLICY

- I. DCFS shall respond to requests for information factually, thoroughly, and in a timely manner, while protecting the confidentiality of children, families, and any other individual involved in a case in accordance with state and federal law and with the PROCEDURES outlined below.
- II. As a public agency, DCFS is governed by Ohio's Open Meetings Law, commonly referred to as the Sunshine Law (O.R.C. Section 121.22), and we abide by the rules contained therein.

PROCEDURES

- I. All requests for information coming into DCFS from the MEDIA shall be forwarded to DCFS' Deputy of Communications, the Director (or designee), and Cuyahoga County Director of Communications. ONLY the Director (or designee) may authorize the release of information to the media.
 - A. Any employee contacted by the media must politely forward the call and/or refer the caller to DCFS' Deputy of Communications, the Director, or Cuyahoga County Director of Communications. DCFS' Deputy of Communications or Cuyahoga County Director of Communications will handle the media inquiry.
 - B. The staff person who is contacted by the media, and where media coverage has already occurred or may be imminent, must complete

(as thoroughly as possible) a **Critical Incident Form** and forward it immediately to their supervisor and to the Deputy of Communications and the Director (or designee) (see Policy 7.02.01 Timely Reporting of Alerts and Critical Incidents).

Outside Normal Business Hours:

1. The staff person who receives the call/contact must complete the **Critical Incident Form** and forward it to their supervisor, DCFS' Deputy of Communications, the Director (or designee), and the Cuyahoga County Director of Communications within four (4) hours.
 2. The staff person receiving the call/contact may forward the Critical Incident Form to the Cuyahoga County Director of Communications at (216) 698-2521.
- C. All communications between DCFS employees and the media that pertain to agency business **MUST** receive **PRIOR** approval from the Director (or designee).
- D. All communication that pertain to confidential, case-related matters are governed by the Ohio Administrative Code (Section 5101:2-33-21) (see Policy 7.04.01 Sharing and Dissemination of Confidential Client Information).

II. **Dissemination of POSITIVE Information:**

- A. All DCFS employees and or contracted caregivers are encouraged to bring positive stories to the attention of the Deputy of Communications and Director (or designee).
- B. No DCFS employee shall communicate a story, even a positive one, directly to the media, without approval from the Deputy of Communications and Director (or designee).
- C. At regular intervals, positive stories are shared with the media to illustrate the agency's accomplishments, to educate the community about the agency's mission, and to encourage recognition of the agency's dedicated staff.

III. **(Non-Media) Public Information Requests:**

- A. Requests for information from the (non-media) public, which does not pertain to client-specific information, is forwarded to the Public Records Manager for a response. The public records manager forwards their response to the Office of the Director (or designee) and ensures that the request is recorded in the Public Records Request Log, as described in Cuyahoga County Code Section 106.05 (Public Records Requests).

1. Such requests must be handled in a timely manner, as possible; but, if the information is not quickly available, the public records manager must politely request more sufficient time to prepare an accurate response.
 2. If the public records manager staff person has any questions about how to respond to a public request for information, s/he must contact his//her supervisor.
- B. Outside normal business hours, the staff person who receives a request for information from the public (non-media) which does not pertain to client-specific information must forward it to DCFS' Community Relations Unit so that the request can be forwarded to the appropriate staff for a response during normal business hours.
- C. DCFS requires that all requests for information **must be in writing**.

IV. Department Representation:

- A. All formal communication on behalf of DCFS, written and/or verbal, with the County Executive, County Council members, elected officials and community leaders must be filtered through the Director (or designee) ONLY, except that as a matter of practicality, many communications between a direct services' senior manager or supervisor whose unit is geographically assigned to a particular neighborhood and community leaders within that neighborhood may take place directly.
- B. All agency events must be approved by the Director and any information regarding those events must be forwarded to the County Executive and County Council members.
- C. All requests for speakers from DCFS, to speak as representatives of DCFS, must be forwarded to the Deputy of Communications and Office of the Director (for coordination) (see Policy 10.06.01 Speakers Bureau).

V. Photography, Tape Recordings, Television Cameras:

- A. All requests for making arrangements for photographs, audio, or video recordings, of any kind, involving children or members of their family (or foster family) must be forwarded to the Director (or designee) for approval.
1. If the child is in permanent custody, prior approval must be obtained from the Director (or designee).
 2. If the child is in temporary custody, prior approval must be obtained from *both* the parent or guardian *and* the Director (or designee) (see Policy 7.05.02 Child Involvement in DCFS Publicity Activities).

VI. Media Access to Agency Buildings:

- A. Members of the media, including reporters, photographers or videographers shall be permitted access only to the “public” areas of any DCFS buildings.
 - 1. At the Jane Edna Hunter Building and Old Brooklyn Neighborhood Family Service Center, the “public” area is defined as the 1st floor lobby and waiting area and the men’s and ladies’ restrooms by the front reception desk.
 - 2. With the approval of the Director or designee, media access to non-public areas may be allowed, but the person(s) must be escorted at all times.
 - 3. At Quincy Place and Fatima Neighborhood Family Service Centers, access to public areas is at the discretion of the management company/owner of those buildings.

SEE ALSO:

Ohio Revised Code

Section 121.22

Ohio Administrative Code

Section 5101:2-33-21

Cuyahoga County Code

Section 106.05

Cuyahoga County Division of Children and Family Services Policies and Procedure Manual

Policy 7.02.01 Timely Reporting of Alerts and Critical Incidents

Policy 7.02.02 Death of a Child

Policy 7.04.01 Sharing and Dissemination of Confidential Client Information

Policy 7.05.02 Child Involvement in DCFS Publicity Activities

Policy 10.02.01 Maintenance of a Safe Work Environment – Emergency Situations

FORM:

Critical Incident Form