The Florida Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children Disaster Preparation and Response Plan

February 2007
INTRODUCTION

In May 2006 the Department of Children and Families published the Continuity of Operations (COOP) Plan. The plan establishes policy and guidance to ensure the execution of our mission-essential functions in various emergency situations, to include natural disasters, accidents, technological emergencies and military or terrorist related incidents. The COOP integrates the various programs under the department. Along with our integrated COOP plan, each community-based care lead agency has a disaster preparedness plan to address child welfare specific activities throughout the state in such emergency situations.

The Florida Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children Office (ICPC) is a unit of the Family Safety Program Office, headquartered in Tallahassee. The ICPC Office plays a key role during times of emergency. In our ever-mobile society, services are provided for many children for whom family members reside in other states. There are over a thousand Florida dependent children placed with parents, relatives and other caregivers in sister states at any given time, as well as over a thousand children placed in Florida who come to us from other state’s child welfare systems. The ICPC Office serves as the central point of contact for state-to-state communications regarding the welfare of these children.

The ICPC Disaster Preparation and Response Plan (DPRP) aims to provide case managers who have children in other states or who are providing services to children from other states a single point of contact for communications. The primary point of contact in the ICPC Office will be the ICPC Administrator.

ACTIVITIES

Not every emergency provides the opportunity to prepare prior to the event. There will have to be flexibility to deal with situations and requests for information for which we were not able to prepare. Taking lessons from previous emergency situations, such as the 2004 and 2005 hurricane seasons, common interstate activities for which the Florida ICPC Office holds primary responsibility include:

1. Daily monitoring of affected children and families as related to interstate situations.
2. Connecting affected families with local service providers as needed.
3. Working daily with our local and national points of contact in order to collect, centrally maintain and share, as appropriate, pertinent information regarding children and families receiving interstate services in cases of emergency. These activities include recording: initial location; relocation information (address, phone, expected length of stay); previously identified well-being needs, status and new needs (education, medical, shelter, transportation, prescriptions); need for services and community’s ability to provide; ability to communicate with supervising agency and family members; etc.
4. Responding to child welfare staff from other states who inquire regarding children’s status as Florida prepares for a known possible emergency event and after the event occurs.

5. Responding to inquiries from federal agencies, such as the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) and the Children’s Bureau, as Florida prepares for a known possible emergency event and after the event occurs.

6. If the event occurs in another state, The Florida ICPC Office will assist Florida child welfare staff in making inquiries as to the status of our children in that state.

7. Serving as a central point of contact in communications with national organizations providing assistance in locating children and reuniting families, such as the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children.

8. Broadcasting general updates to ICPC Central Offices throughout the nation as well as to our local points of contact.

9. Determining if there is need to and assisting in requesting waivers and flexibility in interpretation of federal requirements as appropriate.

10. Serving as the communications liaison between Florida and other states as either our dependent children relocate to another state or other state’s dependent children relocate to Florida, to include obtaining and transmitting needed documents and information such as custody orders, medical and educational records, and family and case history.

/local and national coordination

In order to streamline communications with the field, the ICPC Specialists in the zones will serve as the primary local point of contact. The Family Safety Program Office Director will direct all communications and correspondence by the Florida ICPC Office to and from the local points of contact. Because there are many possible emergency situations, it may be that a local ICPC Specialist is adversely affected by an emergency and not available to serve as our local point of contact. If this occurs, the Florida ICPC Office will identify the proper method for communicating with local staff, depending on the emergency, in consultation with executive management.

The Florida ICPC Office will work directly with central ICPC offices in other states to send and receive information and documents, as customary. If the central ICPC office in another state is unable to communicate, we will work with Office of Family Safety equivalent in that state as well as the American Public Human Services Association to identify alternate means of communication.

/relocation of families across state lines

During Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, we experienced the temporary and permanent relocation of many families that were being serviced by the child
welfare program of their respective home state. Currently, ICPC does not address emergency or disaster-related movement of dependent children. ICPC Administrators in states receiving these children worked together to review current law and identify avenues to allow the provision of services and supervision in such emergency situations. It was determined that these types of movements could receive immediate ICPC approval, services and supervision under Regulation 1.

Regulation 1 provides a notification and approval mechanism for situations in which a family caring for a dependent child in one state wishes or needs to move to another state. Regulation 1 allows for the dependent child to move with the family rather than having to wait in his or her home state while the family relocates and goes through the home study and approval process, which can often take months. Regulation 1 applies to all placements: parents, relatives, licensed care and adoptive settings.

It is of the utmost importance that states receiving these children notify the state of origin and request all documentation that can be obtained regarding the child’s medical, behavioral and educational history, reasons he or she came into care, family history, case plan, information on visitation allowances and limitations, contact information for siblings and other significant persons in the child’s life, etc. Evidence of the suitability of the current caregivers, particularly the home study, background checks and information on training and education provided should also be obtained as quickly as possible.