



State of Florida
Department of Children and Families

Charlie Crist
Governor

George H. Sheldon
Secretary

DATE: September 10, 2009

TO: Regional Directors

THROUGH: Mary Cagle, Director, Children's Legal Services
Pete Digre, Assistant Secretary for Operations
David L. Fairbanks, Assistant Secretary for Programs

FROM: Alan Abramowitz, State Director, Office of Family Safety

SUBJECT: Modification to *Some Indicators* Findings of Child Maltreatment

PURPOSE: This memorandum outlines modification to *Some Indicators* findings of child maltreatment for statewide implementation for Family Safety staff. A memo pertaining to Adult Protective Services will be sent separately.

BACKGROUND: The issue of investigative findings has been a topic of debate for a number of years and over the course of several administrations. Experienced and knowledgeable personnel from both the Department and contracted agencies have held different points of view on the classification of findings of child maltreatment. The feedback obtained from all stakeholders has been fully considered. After thoughtful review of the information and feedback presented, I am pleased to announce that critical elements of the two major positions have been integrated into a solid plan for improving our work with families.

The Family Safety Program Office thoroughly explored the value of retaining, modifying or eliminating the *Some Indicator* maltreatment finding. The final integrated approach will be to modify the descriptor from *Some Indicators* to *Not Substantiated*.

This approach aligns with the Family Centered Practice Model by reducing the stigma to families involved with the Department while continuing to recognize concerns about established risk factors. The use of more neutral terminology will help reduce the family's concern over how the report is being closed and redirect their focus to working with child protection staff to identify a course of action leading to more positive outcomes.

This approach also aligns with the Governor's plain language initiative. The clear terminology will reduce the confusion to families when reviewing findings of a report. This will help build stronger relationships with the families we serve through clear communication.

1317 Winewood Boulevard, Tallahassee, Florida 32399-0700

Mission: Protect the Vulnerable, Promote Strong and Economically Self-Sufficient Families, and Advance Personal and Family Recovery and Resiliency

The *Not Substantiated* finding definition will remain the same:

“When there is credible evidence, which does not meet the standard of being a preponderance, to support that the specific injury, harm or threatened harm was the result of abuse or neglect”.

Additional guidance will be incorporated into the allegation matrix that clarifies the legal standard for preponderance of evidence. This focus on the evidentiary standard will require more substantial levels of credible evidence when using the *Not Substantiated* finding. A focused application of the *Not Substantiated* finding will ultimately lead to a reduction in use aligning Florida with other multi-finding states and significantly increasing the importance of the finding as a risk and safety indicator in identification of service needs.

The change from *Some Indicators* to *Not Substantiated* will take effect with the roll-out of the Florida Safe Families Network (FSFN) Release 2c. Both the Allegation Matrix in Children and Families Operating Procedure 175-28 and Administrative Rule 65C-29 are currently being updated to memorialize the changes in language. It is expected that both the Allegation Matrix and Rule will be updated within the next few months.

A web-based informational presentation on the change will be made available to all staff prior to the release of FSFN 2c. Further information on this training will be forth coming.

REQUIRED ACTION: Please disseminate this memo to all internal and external staff that may be impacted by this change to maltreatment findings language. Please ensure that all Family Safety staff are aware of this change prior to FSFN Release 2c. This information should be widespread and shared with all child protection and child welfare staff as well as our colleagues in child care, adult programs, etc.

CONTACT INFORMATION: Should you have any questions, please contact either John Harper at 850-922-3862 or via e-mail at john_harper@dcf.state.fl.us, or Chris Compton at 850-443-6646 or via e-mail at chris_compton@dcf.state.fl.us.

cc: Circuit Administrators
CBC CEOs
Sheriff's Offices
Robert Anderson, State Director, Adult Protective Services
Walt Cook, Director, Hotline