

1.15 News Media Relations for DCS Regional Offices and a Youth Development Center	
Application: To All Department of Children's Services Employees	
Authority: TCA 37-5-101, 37-5-102, 37-5-105(3), 37-5-106	Standards: None
Commissioner:	Date:
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Glossary: None	

Policy Statement:

The Department of Children's Services (DCS) shall permit representatives of the news media limited access to offices and a Youth Development Center (YDC) subject to restrictions as outlined in this policy.

Purpose:

To provide guidelines for DCS employees when there is a need to interact with the public and media.

Procedures:

A. Public information program

This policy and the local procedures submitted to central office from all DCS regional offices and a YDC serve as the Public Information Program.

B. Information available to the media

1. Authorization required

The DCS Communications Director (CD) must be notified during and after working hours and his/her authorization obtained before any statement confirming information may be released to the media.

2. News releases

News releases must be disseminated only through the CD or by advance approval from the CD.

C. Contact with the media

1. Limits of contact

The CD or authorized designee is the only DCS employees authorized to interact with the media.

2. Report of contact

Any DCS employee other than the CD who talks with the news media must immediately report such contact to the appropriate Executive Director and the DCS CD.

3. Evaluation of contact requests

- a)** Requests for media contact are evaluated by the CD on a case-by-case basis depending on the right or need to know.
- b)** Approved media contact with a particular youth in a Youth Development Center (YDC) must not disturb or threaten the progress the youth has made in the program.

D. Approval from DCS CD for regional offices

- 1. Each Regional Administrator (RA)/Juvenile Justice (JJ) Statewide Director notifies the appropriate Executive Director and receives approval from the DCS CD of the designated contact person(s) in each office.
- 2. The RA/JJ Statewide Director identifies areas in the DCS regional offices that are accessible to media representatives and submits it in writing to the DCS CD.

E. YDC Procedures

- 1. The Superintendent serves as the designated employee authorized to speak to the media on behalf of a YDC. The Superintendent is the spokesperson during crisis situations and coverage of special events. In the absence of the Superintendent, the JJ Executive Director designates another employee to serve as spokesman.
- 2. A YDC provides written notification to the JJ Executive Director and CD of the designated contact person(s) for a YDC. This list of contacts is maintained by the CD.
- 3. The Administration Building is the designated area accessible to media representatives.
- 4. Media access is only allowed during normal business hours (Monday-Friday 8:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.) with the prior authorization of the Superintendent. The JJ Executive Director and DCS CD are notified prior to access being granted. Precautions are

taken to ensure programs and services for the youth are not jeopardized by the presence of the media.

5. Authorization is obtained before any statement confirming information is released to the media. All media requests for information concerning a YDC are routed to the Superintendent who then contacts the JJ Executive Director and DCS CD (regardless of information being protected by privacy laws or freedom of information laws).
6. When contacted by the news media regarding specific youth, no identifying information is released.
7. Employees immediately report to the Superintendent any incident or situation in which they are involved or are aware of that could result in media attention or negative publicity to a YDC and/or Department. The Superintendent notifies the JJ Executive Director and DCS CD of any incident at a YDC that is likely to draw attention of news media.
8. Employees must immediately report any media contact to the Superintendent who then notifies the JJ Executive Director and DCS CD.
9. News releases for community interest stories are prepared at a YDC and sent to the JJ Executive Director and DCS CD for approval. Once approval is received, the news release is sent to the local newspapers for publication.
10. The Superintendent is responsible for the following regarding YDC tours requested by the media:
 - a) Evaluates all requests on a case-by-case basis to determine if the tour is appropriate;
 - b) Reports all requests to the DCS CD; and c) Designates an employee to conduct the tour.

F. Child/Youth interviews

1. Determination

Requests for interviews are evaluated on a case-by-case basis. Interviews are not granted if they are deemed to be detrimental to the child/youth.

2. Rights of children/youth

Interviews are voluntary. The child/youth has the right to refuse to be interviewed, photographed, or recorded by the media.

3. Release by parent(s)/guardian

- a) If the media requests to interview, record, or photograph a child/youth in DCS custody, the assigned FSW/JSW or YDC case worker obtains a release form ***CS-0559, Authorization for Release of Information of HIPAA Protected Health Information TO and FROM the Department of Children's Services and***

- Notification of Release.** The release must be signed by the child/youth and the parent(s) or guardian of the child/youth prior to allowing the child/youth to be interviewed, recorded, or photographed.
- b) If a youth is over the age of eighteen (18) and in state custody, the parental consent is not required and the youth may consent and sign the release.
 - c) If parental consent is required and if the parents or guardians are not known or their addresses are unknown and cannot be located, the RA/JJ Statewide Director, YDC Superintendent or their designees may, at their discretion with the approval of the appropriate Executive Director, authorize the release of information.
 - d) In all other circumstances, parental permission must be in writing and is necessary in order for any media interview or release of information.
4. If a parent or guardian objects to the interview or photograph released through the media, the RA/JJ Statewide Director, YDC Superintendent or their designees will not have any discretion and any information and photographs from the interview must not be released.
 5. The appropriate section on form ***CS-0559, Authorization for Release of Information and HIPAA Protected Health Information TO and FROM the Department of Children's Services and Notification of Release***, is signed if there are objections to the interview or photographs for release to the media.
 6. Maintain all signed releases in the child/youth's case file.

G. Interviews with employees

1. Voluntary

Personal interviews with staff members are granted on a voluntary basis.

2. Approval required

Any staff member wishing to grant an interview regarding DCS must obtain approval in advance from the appropriate Executive Director and the CD.

H. Policy violations

Violation of this policy may be subject to appropriate disciplinary action up to and including termination.

Forms:

[***CS-0559, Authorization for Release of Information and HIPAA Protected Health Information TO and FROM the Department of Children's Services and Notification of Release***](#)

Collateral Documents:

None