

Coronavirus Q&A Webinar #3 with DCFS Acting Director Marc Smith

Video Recording (March 30, 2020): <https://vimeo.com/402354157>

DCFS Acting Director Marc Smith:

Good afternoon to all of our DCFS and private agencies partners, and residential and child welfare system. We appreciate you joining us this afternoon for our quick overview of some of the work that we're doing and to answer some of your questions. As we get started, I want to reinforce my appreciation for everybody in our entire system for their perseverance and dedication to the safety of the children and families that we serve. I have nothing but immense pride in the work that we're doing and the way that we're all going about accomplishing this work. I've had the opportunity to talk to a number of leaders from different organizations across the state and without any hesitation, everyone has been very supportive to the work that we're doing and nothing but encouraging around the idea that everybody who works for them are totally dedicated to the safety of children and families that we serve.

As people are asking questions about how we're making decisions and the work that we're doing I want to make it perfectly clear that we are making every decision that we can make around the idea of safety. Safety for our staff, safety for the children and families that we serve. The idea is that we want to ensure that the most vulnerable of our children – children who are subject of investigations, who are home with their parents, and in intact family situations – continue to feel the presence of DCFS and child welfare system as a support in their homes. It is really critical at times like these that we maintain the mantle of child safety, that we consistently think about our work to ensure that our kids and families are safe. The level of support that we give cannot be underestimated during times like these and I appreciate the fact that so many of us, even during these very challenging times, take the understanding that we need to ensure that we're present to make sure our kids and families are safe.

As we're doing this work, it's our situation within the system to make sure that our staff are safe. And so, we're happy that we've been able to progress in obtaining and providing some personal safety equipment. We've been able to get gloves and get those dispensed out through the population. And we're very happy about that. **As masks are starting to come into our system, we are absolutely going to be sharing those not only with the staff at DCFS who are tasked go out to homes, but our partners in the private sector and in the residential sector, as well.** As we get supplies and cleaning supplies, we really want to make sure that those are out there to ensure as much safety for our staff and the people doing this hard work. Safety is our absolute number one priority. And we absolutely appreciate everybody's dedication to that fact.

Over the past few days, Illinois has seen a sharp increase in the number of confirmed COVID-19 tests across the state. There are now more than 4,500 positive cases and 65 deaths in Illinois. Half of the counties in the state have at least one confirmed case. Every coroner in the state is being impacted. This is not an urban problem or a Chicago problem, but a challenge we all are dealing with.

This is particularly true for those who are working in child welfare. The youth we serve come from all walks of life, and often have complex medical conditions.

On Sunday, the Governor announced the tragic death of an infant due to COVID-19. This was the first confirmed death of an infant due to COVID-19 in the United States. It serves as a reminder to all of us that while the elderly are disproportionately at risk, even the young the population we all serve, are at risk. Keeping our staff safe while carrying out our mission to protect the health and well-being of children has never been easy. But today, the challenges are unprecedented. But I am deeply committed to working together with each of you to address these challenges that are facing us all. In order to keep staff safe while serving the children we are tasked with protecting.

(Key Updates)

We have made a number of modifications to our in-person visitation for caseworkers, monitors and visitation between our parents and children. **Whenever possible, we are encouraging video and phone contact in place of in person contact.** DCFS is also doing everything we can to ensure our staff and yours have the safety gear they need to be safe. **In the past two weeks we have distributed over 300,000 gloves across the state to both DCFS and private agency staff.** Last week we received our first supply of mask and we immediately made those masks available to the DCFS staff and residential providers that had acute needs. **We are getting in additional shipments of masks this week and will immediately distribute those masks to both DCFS and private agency staff.** We are continuing to request new supplies from the state and to work with our vendors to secure additional safety equipment. We expect to receive more supplies in the weeks ahead.

Lastly, we know you have expressed concerns about the financial impact that this health crisis is having on your organizations. **On Friday, we announced two key ways that we are addressing this issue. Effective March 16 through April 9, and to be extended as necessary, DCFS will be providing additional financial support to residential providers to ensure the adequate staffing ratios are maintained while you've remained out of school during this regular school year. The additional funding will amount to a 20% increase to the non-Medicaid portion of your daily rate.** I will send out a memo in the next few days with more details on this.

To our partners providing foster care and intact services: DCFS will make a one-time payment to help address the safety needs staff providing essential In-Home Services to ensure the safety of children. These funds may be spent in a flexible manner for program expenses related to COVID-19. This includes, but is not limited to: personal protective equipment, preventive cleaning cost, medical cleaning costs, or overtime costs as they relate to staff needing to be quarantined, to name a few. Please look for this memo in the next few days with more details about this payment as well.

In addition, we continue to receive many questions from you and your staff that we are answering daily on the DCFS website. Please check the website frequently for answers to those questions for updates and guidance from DCFS to you and your team. The outpouring of support over the last few weeks, for many of you have been inspiring and grateful to all of you, organizations and to the staff that fight with us.

The truth is, we have a long way to go. But together, we'll get through this. Thank you, everyone. Andi, I'll turn it over to you.

ICOY CEO Andrea Durbin

Thank you so much, Mark. I really appreciate the clarification. And we'll certainly look for the memos. ICOY will post them in our [Google Drive](#) containing COVID-19 updates/resources and send them out as soon as they are received, so please continue to check our Google Drive. Mark, will these memos also be posted to the DCFS homepage and the Dnet?

Smith

Yes, everybody, please go to the DCFS homepage and do that on a regular basis. All of our [DCFS updates are posted on the COVID-19 link](#). And there's a lot of information that we continue to update and make sure that will help us as best we can do this crisis. We appreciate everybody's patience and flexibility as we work through this.

If you can't find the answer to your question, use the bit.ly/COVID19-Questions. You can log your questions there and ICOY will send those to DCFS almost daily. Thank you, everybody. **We'll have this call again on [Monday, April 6 at 4pm](#).**

If you have additional field-specific questions for DCFS around coronavirus, please [submit them here](#).

DCFS will hold a standing listen-only webinar every Monday at 4 pm to address submitted questions and deliver updates. The next webinar will be on **Monday, April 6 at 4 pm. [You can register for that here](#).**