

Maryland Department of Human Services
May 2019
Social Services Administration Disaster Plan

The following information was prepared in support of the following Social Services Administration Disaster Plan objective:

Disaster Plan

Section 422(b)(16) of the Act requires that states have in place procedures explaining how the state programs assisted under title IV-B, subparts 1 and 2, and title IV-E, would respond to a disaster, in accordance with criteria established by the Secretary. These procedures, enumerated in section 422(b)(16)(A)-(E) of the Act, should describe how a state would:

- Identify, locate, and continue availability of services for children under state care or supervision who are displaced or adversely affected by a disaster;
- Respond, as appropriate, to new child welfare cases in areas adversely affected by a disaster, and provide services in those cases;
- Remain in communication with caseworkers and other essential child welfare personnel who are displaced because of a disaster;
- Preserve essential program records; and
- Coordinate services and share information with other states.

The State of Maryland has a robust disaster response operations plan which governs state response efforts during a disaster. Maryland Code of Maryland Regulations (COMAR) 01.01.2013.06 mandates the Maryland Emergency Management Agency (MEMA) to create a Maryland Emergency Preparedness Plan (MEPP). As part of this COMAR, MEMA has the authority to assign Maryland State Agencies with responsibilities to support the MEPP (COOP planning, Primary and Support roles in plans). The Maryland Department of Human Services (MD-DHS) is responsible for disaster 'mass care' services, including disaster sheltering, feeding, recovery casework and providing information for families separated as a result of the disaster event. Therefore, MD-DHS has built strong capabilities to remain operational during disaster events. For example, each local Department of Social Services has a dedicated liaison for the MD-DHS disaster response team who can assist with coordinating information and resources between the normal social services operations and scale-up resources required or available during a disaster response operation. Liaisons are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, to assist with resource needs during a disaster. Every local jurisdiction Department of Social Services provides representation to their local Emergency Operations Center, and is closely tied in to the disaster response network.

Maryland's Process to identify, locate, and continue availability of services for children under state care or supervision who are displaced or adversely affected by a disaster

During a disaster event, the Maryland Department of Human Services provides representation to the State Emergency Operations Center (SEOC). That representative has access to any known and relevant evacuation or damage assessment information. Additionally, the state uses 'WebEOC,' a cloud-based database that clearly indicates which counties are under evacuation orders. Similar processes are in place in the local jurisdictions. This process is practiced regularly, and needs no updates. If there is any concern that evacuations or disaster damage could impact children under

state care or supervision, the Maryland Department of Human Services can run two reports: RE881R In-State Emergency Contact Report and RE882R Out-of-State Emergency Contact Report. These reports provide human service workers with the necessary information to collect information on the whereabouts of the aforementioned children, or can use the reports to provide disaster-specific referral updates to the families. In an emergency, the MD-DHS Social Services Administration shall run the reports to identify any children in care that may be in place in the declared disaster area. To locate the child, the pre-assigned caseworker of the child is instructed to contact the provider for the child to confirm the safety of clients in the affected area or if necessary, assist in making arrangements to evacuate. If a child in the disaster is on runaway, the local authorities are notified so that when the child is located they can be secured by the local department or its representative in the case of an out-of-state placement. All providers of children are to have a documented disaster plan that shall be implemented in the event of a disaster. For example, a residential child care facility shall have a document pre-arranged agreement for an alternative placement if the primary facility housing for Maryland children is displaced. The provider shall secure the child's identification, case record, and an adequate supply of medication.

Maryland takes many additional pro-active actions to continue services during and following a disaster:

- During any serious threat of a power outage or destructive disaster, MD-DHS and other state agencies complete the vulnerable population facility survey. During this survey, MD-DHS disaster response workers reach out to all facilities licensed by MD-DHS to ensure they have a direct point of contact available 24/7 to report any loss of utilities or other facility issues. If there are any problems at these facilities, the disaster response worker can work with the local or state Emergency Operations Center to ensure priority response services when possible and appropriate. This process has been in place and practiced during numerous events since 2012. The MD-DHS Office of Licensing and Monitoring provides updated lists of MD-DHS licensed facilities to disaster response staff annually, and as requested during potential events. No updates are necessary.
- MD-DHS, and each local Department of Social Services, has a Continuity of Operations Plan which provides information to support the reconstitution of staff and facilities following a disaster. These plans are collected by MEMA every few years. These plans include back-up locations for facilities and information on how to scale-up staff during a staffing shortage. These plans are currently being updated statewide, and will be finalized during June of 2019. The anticipated changes to these plans will be updated contact lists and succession plans, based on staffing changes.
- MD-DHS also regularly participates in the Emergency Management Assistance Compact (EMAC) which allows for the provision of staffing resources from other states. MD-DHS sends human service workers on EMAC missions every few years, most recently during 2017 when staff was sent to Texas following a hurricane. Several processes were updated at that time, including the preparation of a Standard Operating Procedure for deployment, and staff specifically identified and trained to complete EMAC paperwork. MD-DHS is participating in a statewide committee to improve EMAC capabilities in Maryland. No additional plan updates are necessary at this time.
- All MD-DHS staff members are required to take Emergency Preparedness Training, which emphasizes personal and household preparedness information. The expectation for staff is that they are part of disaster response efforts, will be required to return to work to provide services following a disaster event. This training has been mandatory for all staff for the past ten years, with a high level of compliance. The training is updated regularly, and as necessary, based on the most currently available disaster information. The most recent change in this process was that, as of March 2019, the training staff is now being invited to staff orientations to ensure new staff is signed up for training as quickly as possible.
- MD-DHS has equipment available, including phones, tablets and laptops, to assist workers who need to work from remote locations following a disaster. The equipment is tested

monthly to ensure operability. As necessary, additional icons and applications are added to the equipment. Equipment is deployed regularly to assist local jurisdictions during disasters or COOP events. MD-DHS Information Technology workers have been providing additional testing on equipment printing capabilities as recently as this month. No additionally necessary updates have been identified at this time.

Respond, as appropriate, to new child welfare cases in areas adversely affected by a disaster, and provide services in those cases;

MD-DHS/LDSS workers are prepared to provide intake services and response in a variety of locations during and following a disaster:

- MD-DHS is the state lead for mass care services, including disaster sheltering. Out of the 24 local jurisdictions in Maryland, 21 of the jurisdictions use the Local Department of Social Services (LDSS) as the lead agency for sheltering. The LDSS workers are already on-site, or can be immediately called to disaster shelters to provide services. This practice is used regularly in Maryland, most recently during Hurricane Florence in 2018, when Maryland opened a shelter to support out-of-state evacuees from Hurricane Florence. The shelter was run by MD-DHS staff, and when a child welfare need was identified, MD-DHS staff easily knows the process for calling child welfare workers and was able to contact a professional child welfare worker within minutes of the need being identified.
- MD-DHS is a primary service provider, and sometimes the manager, of service centers opened for following disasters. Representatives from MD-DHS and the LDSS offices are onsite and prepared to assist any children with needs. In every recent disaster in Maryland, MD-DHS and LDSS staff have been present at service centers. As recently as 2019, Maryland has identified as a 'Joint-Option' state during Individual Assistance declarations with FEMA. This provides Maryland with more control and opportunities to influence the disaster service centers. The Disaster Service Center Standard Operating Procedure for FEMA Individual Assistance Declarations was updated during 2019. No additional plan updates are required at this time.
- During a disaster, MD-DHS has the capability to provide a statewide, 24/7 services referral hotline that is widely publicized in public information efforts. The hotline also has email capabilities. If an LDSS is closed, or if someone has any concerns or needs any services related to child welfare, this hotline can quickly direct them to appropriate services or disaster-specific information and resources. This hotline coordinates with, and operates as an additional resource to the regularly available MD-DHS hotline, 211 services, and other referral services already available in Maryland. This hotline has been activated at least eight times since 2014, and plans are updated as necessary during the after-action process following disaster events. There is also a COOP facility prepared to provide hotline services.
- The MD-DHS COOP plans ensure that additional facilities to provide services are pre-identified. MD-DHS also has multiple facility contracts for shelter space at local colleges and universities, which could be re-allocated for other MD-DHS services if sheltering were no longer necessary, and additional facility space for services were necessary. Facility walk-throughs are completed annually. No additional updates are required.
- If additional transportation services for workers were necessary to provide services, transportation can be requested through the state and local emergency operations centers.

Remain in communication with caseworkers and other essential child welfare personnel who are displaced because of a disaster;

MD-DHS and LDSS offices have rapid-recall lists as part of our COOP plans. These lists include personal/work cell phone numbers and home/work email information. COOP plans are currently being updated, and will be completed by June of 2019.

Most workers have cell phones. As mentioned above, additional cell phones are available during disasters to improve the likelihood of productive communication. Many workers are emergency essential, and would at least be checking in with supervisors to report their locations following a disaster. MD-DHS could also utilize the statewide hotline, if necessary, to track worker locations, however, this would likely most easily be done at the supervisory level of the LDSS. MD-DHS has a disaster database – CERTS – which can be used for people tracking during a disaster. The CERTS database is regularly updated, and currently planned updates include a field to identify communication needs for constituents. This field could be used, if necessary, to also track staff communication needs if we were using the database for staff tracking services.

Maryland's Process To preserve essential program records

MD-DHS has a 'Business Continuity Plan' that is updated regularly to support our digital data records. This plan includes clear instructions for processes used to respond during a disaster. As part of this plan, recovery systems testing is completed annually. MD-DHS data systems are hosted across multiple data centers in three different states. All systems are backed-up daily. This plan is updated regularly by MD-DHS Information Technology staff. Caseworkers are also encouraged to keep paper case records.

Coordinate services and share information with other states.

Maryland works collaboratively with out of state departments of social services, and social service providers, if there is any concern that evacuations or disaster damage could impact children in out-of-state placements. The Maryland Department of Human Services and the local counter parts can run the 'RE882R Out-of-State Emergency Contact Report.' This report provide human service workers with the necessary information to contact the local social services administration, or the local provider, to collect information on the whereabouts of children in out of state care, or can use the report to provide disaster-specific referral updates to the families. In an emergency, the MD-DHS Social Services Administration shall run the reports to identify any children in care that may be in place in the declared disaster area. To locate the child, the pre-assigned caseworker of the child is instructed to contact the provider for the child to confirm the safety of clients in the affected area. If a child in the disaster area is on runaway, the local authorities are notified so that when the child is located they can be secured by the local department or its representative in the case of an out-of-state placement. All providers of children are to have a documented disaster plan that shall be implemented in the event of a disaster. For example, a residential child care facility shall have a document pre-arranged agreement for an alternative placement if the primary facility housing for Maryland children is displaced. The provider shall secure the child's identification, case record, and an adequate supply of medication.

Additionally, the Maryland Department of Human Services Office of Emergency Operations staff has 24/7 contact information for most state's disaster mass care liaison, which can be used if other forms of communication are not accessible. The Maryland Department of Human Services Office of Emergency

Operations can also use the resources available as part of the State Emergency Operation Center (SEOC) to contact out-of-state providers if there are regional communication issues.

Closing

MD-DHS currently has robust disaster response capabilities. Because of the multiple duties assigned to the state during the disaster response process, staff throughout the entire department is accustomed to working during and after a disaster. Disaster response capabilities are constantly being re-assessed, and preparations are made on an on-going basis. The safety of children, and other vulnerable populations in Maryland, are the critical focus of all planning efforts. Maryland works regularly with over 30 agencies, including non-governmental agencies, during the preparedness phase of disaster response to ensure processes remain in place for our residents to receive necessary services as quickly as possible following a disaster.