




DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

Wes Moore, Governor · Aruna Miller, Lt. Governor · Rafael López, Secretary

Policy Number:	SSA/CW #25-06
Policy Title:	Critical Incident Notification Policy
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Approved By:	Dr. Alger M. Studstill, Jr.  Executive Director Social Services Administration
Revision Date(s):	September 18, 2025
Supersedes:	SSA/CW #22-02, Child Fatality/Serious Physical Injury/Critical Incident
Originating Office:	Office of Prevention and Child Safety Contact: Child.Safety@maryland.gov Child Maltreatment Program Administrator
Summary of Change:	Local Departments of Social Services (LDSS) <u>are no longer required to</u> : <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Notify the Department of Human Services (DHS) of screened out reports of maltreatment, report COVID, or children missing from placement.2. Submit a 1080 Notification Series Form for allegations of maltreatment involving children in out-of-home placement unless the allegations are "Provider Involved Maltreatment."
Required Actions:	LDSS must report critical incidents to key Department leaders.
Key Words:	Critical Incident, Child Fatality, Serious Physical Injury, Media Worthy Event
Related Federal Law	The Child Abuse and Prevention Act of 1974 , 42 U.S.C. §§ 5101-5108 (1974) 42 U.S.C. Ch. 7 § 622(b)(19) 45 CFR § 1357
Related State Laws	Md. Ann. Code, Hum. Servs. Art. § 1-201 Md. Ann. Code, Hum. Servs. Art. § 1-203 Md. Ann. Code, Fam. Law Art. § 5-701

	Md. Ann. Code, Fam. Law Art. § 5-706 Md. Ann. Code, Crim. Law Art. § 3-201
COMAR	COMAR 07.02.07.02 COMAR 07.02.07.06 COMAR 07.02.11.03 COMAR 07.02.11.04.B COMAR 07.02.11.23
State Plan Implications?	Yes

PURPOSE AND SUMMARY

This policy requires LDSS to notify DHS, the Social Services Administration (SSA), and in some cases the Office of Licensing and Monitoring (OLM) when a critical incident occurs due to:

1. alleged abuse or neglect of a child, or
2. provider-involved maltreatment, or
3. has come to the attention of the media and is a potentially media worthy event.

This policy redefines:

1. The definition of a critical incident.
2. The timelines and protocols for notification, and the information to be collected.
3. LDSS management of critical incident informational requests from the media, legislators, or other government officials.
4. SSA's responsibility for reviewing notifications of critical incidents and how SSA may support the LDSS in addressing critical incidents.

RELATED LAWS AND REGULATIONS

[The Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act of 1974, 42 U.S.C. §§ 5101-5108](#) established mandatory requirements for states to report incidents of child abuse and neglect. Among these data requirements, states must include the number of reports where a child was declared deceased as a result of abuse or neglect. States receiving federal funding for child welfare services must also submit a comprehensive five-year [Child and Family Services Plan and an Annual Progress and Services Report](#) detailing services to be provided and outcomes achieved, including those designed to increase the safety and well-being of children in out-of-home placements.

[COMAR 07.02.11.23](#) further directs the SSA and the LDSS regarding actions to take in the event of a child fatality or suspected abuse or neglect of a youth in a foster care placement. The [Human Services Article § 1-201](#) provides confidentiality requirements that prohibit disclosing information

except under specific circumstances.

DEFINITIONS

Child – an individual younger than [18 years old, or between 18 and 21 years](#) old if the court retains jurisdiction over the child and the individual meets eligibility requirements.

Child Fatality – the death of a child or youth due to alleged or known child abuse or neglect.

Critical Incident – abuse or neglect of a child or other serious incident involving a child that occurred in their home or in an out-of-home foster care placement. For the purposes of this policy, “critical incident” is a child fatality, serious physical injury, provider involved maltreatment, or a potentially media worthy event.

DHS/SSA Leadership – are the DHS employee roles which must receive the initial notification of all critical incidents. This includes the: Secretary of DHS, Principal Deputy Secretary of DHS, DHS Chief of Staff, DHS Assistant Secretary of Programs, Executive Director of SSA, Principal Executive Director of SSA, SSA Chief of Staff, SSA Deputy Executive Director of Child & Family Well Being, SSA Program Directors of Prevention and Child Safety, Out-of-Home Care, and Well-Being, DHS Medical Director, and the Child Safety Program Manager. Additional employee roles may be added.

Kin – individuals related to the child through blood, marriage: adoption, tribal law or custom, or cultural custom or practice; or an individual who is unrelated to the child, but has a strong familial or significant bond with the child, or is a person identified by the child’s parent (also called “family by choice”).

Maltreatment – any type of child abuse or child neglect defined under [Maryland statute and regulation](#).

Media Worthy Event – an allegation of maltreatment reported to the LDSS that has generated or is likely to generate public attention, creating the potential for media coverage by news outlets, social media, and other forms of public communication.

Office of Licensing and Monitoring (OLM) – the DHS entity that licenses and monitors DHS-licensed Residential Child Care programs (RCC) and Child Placement Agencies (CPA) that provide care to children experiencing out-of-home placement in Maryland.

Provider-Involved Maltreatment – any alleged maltreatment where the alleged victim is a child in an out-of-home placement and the alleged maltreater is:

1. The child’s resource parent or kin provider.
2. An employee or resource parent of a child placement agency, group

home, or residential treatment center.

Out-of-Home Placement – the placement of a child into out-of-home care, kinship care, group care, or residential treatment care.

Rapid Response Review Team (RRRT) – a team that coordinates all information-gathering and case review activities at the local level when the LDSS receives a report of maltreatment that meets the definition of a Critical Incident.

Receipt of Report – the time at which the LDSS obtains sufficient information regarding a report of suspected child abuse or neglect that results in the LDSS making a decision as to what CPS or other response is appropriate.

Serious Physical Injury – any physical injury that:

1. Creates a substantial risk of death; or
2. Causes permanent or protracted serious disfigurement, such as:
 - 2.1. Loss of the function of any bodily member or [organ](#); or
 - 2.2. Impairment of the function of any bodily member or [organ](#). Included in the definition of serious physical injury is a “near fatality” when consistent with the above.

PROCEDURES AND TIMEFRAMES

1. LDSS Critical Incident Procedures

1.1. Receipt of a Report of a Critical Incident

Upon receipt of a report of maltreatment that also meets the definition of a critical incident (child fatality, a serious physical injury to a child, a provider-involved maltreatment, or a report that is considered media-worthy), the LDSS must:

- 1.1.1. Enter the report into CJAMS, and
- 1.1.2. Determine if the report is to be screened in for investigation of abuse or neglect according to the requirements in the [Md. Code Ann., Family Law Article § 5-706](#) and [COMAR 07.02.07.06.E. and G.](#)

1.2. Screened In Reports

- 1.2.1. The LDSS must notify DHS/SAA Leadership of screened in reports that meet the definition of critical incident when:
 - 1.2.1.1. The child or family who is the subject of the report has an open case with the LDSS, or
 - 1.2.1.2. The child or family had an open case with a LDSS in the previous twelve months.
- 1.2.2. The LDSS must notify DHS/SSA Leadership of the critical incident within two hours after the incident is reported to the LDSS.

1.3. Screened Out Reports

- 1.3.1. The LDSS does not need to notify DHS/SSA Leadership of the critical incident if the report of maltreatment is screened out.

1.4. Submitting the Initial Email Notification

- 1.4.1. The initial email notification of a critical incident must be sent by the Director or their designee within two hours of receiving the report.
- 1.4.2. Notification must be in one email and in the following format:
 - 1.4.2.1. Use the subject line “Critical Incident – Type of Incident – Alleged Victim Initials” (e.g. “Critical Incident – Serious physical Injury – JB”).
 - 1.4.2.2. Send the email through Virtru or another secure encryption to DHS/SSA Leadership at [DHS DL Critical Incident Initial Notice](#). (Copy and paste this email address into the “To” line of the email).
- 1.4.3. If the incident involves a child placed through a child-placing agency or other contracted placement provider, the initial email notification must also be sent to OLM by copying and pasting [DLOLM_INCIDENT_dhs@maryland.gov](#) into the “To” line of the email.

1.5. Multiple LDSS Involvement

- 1.5.1. If multiple LDSS are involved, the LDSS receiving the report of maltreatment will be the lead.
- 1.5.2. The lead LDSS must determine if the maltreatment report meets the criteria for an investigation.
- 1.5.3. If the report is screened in for an investigation, the lead LDSS must further determine if the maltreatment meets criteria for a critical incident.
- 1.5.4. If it is a critical incident, the lead LDSS must:
 - 1.5.4.1. Send the initial email notification.
 - 1.5.4.2. Include the LDSS where the child resides in the initial email notification; OR
 - 1.5.4.3. Include the LDSS with guardianship or temporary care in the initial email notification when the child is in a guardianship or temporary care of another LDSS (i.e., a Voluntary Placement Agreement exists).
 - 1.5.4.4. Schedule and conduct the RRRT meeting and complete all subsequent RRRT-related notifications in CJAMS; and
 - 1.5.4.5. Add Baltimore City DSS to the initial email notification if the child is in their guardianship or temporary care. Copy and paste [dlbcdss_incident_dhs@maryland.gov](#) into the “To” line of the email.

1.6. Content of the Initial Notification Email

- 1.6.1. The Director or their designee, must download and complete the [Critical Incident Notification Reporting Form](#).
- 1.6.2. Once completed, the form must be copied into the body of the email and sent to DHS, SSA, and OLM (when applicable) for all critical incidents.

2. Briefing the Office of the Secretary

- 2.1. A critical incident that involves the maltreatment of a youth that is in the care of the Department must have a briefing scheduled within 72-hours of when the initial notification email was sent by the LDSS Director or their designee.
- 2.2. The LDSS Director or their designate must contact the DHS Secretary's Executive Assistant who will schedule the briefing.
- 2.3. The briefing must include representatives from the Office of the Secretary, SSA Executive Director, LDSS Director, and the DHS Communications Director.
- 2.4. The LDSS Director or their designee will provide the following information during the briefing:
 - 2.4.1. **What happened:** overview of the youth and their involvement with the Department and details of the critical incident
 - 2.4.2. **What we know:** what information has been obtained as of the time of the briefing; any history with the alleged maltreater; any history with the facility (if applicable); any law enforcement involvement; and any media involvement.
 - 2.4.3. **What we are doing:** what are the LDSS next steps and who does LDSS need to make contact with; are there any contractual actions needed by SSA, etc.
- 2.5. At the conclusion of the investigation, the LDSS Director or their designee shall request the DHS Secretary's Executive Assistant schedule a follow-up briefing to discuss the disposition of the case and any action that has been taken.

3. The Rapid Response Review (RRRT) Team Meeting

- 3.1. The LDSS must conduct a RRRT meeting for all critical incidents that are reported to DHS/SSA Leadership.
- 3.2. The RRRT must review all DHS Administration's services (e.g., Child Support, Family Investment, and Social Services) available to the child, family members, and other persons involved.
- 3.3. When the alleged maltreatment occurs in a home-based setting, the RRRT must discuss and document how to protect any children in the home and alleviate stressors on all family members, including, as appropriate, referring family members to other DHS Administrations for services.
- 3.4. The RRRT meeting must be held by the close of business on the next business day after receiving the report of maltreatment.
- 3.5. Day one is the day of the RRRT meeting.
- 3.6. When more than one jurisdiction is involved, the lead LDSS will schedule and conduct the RRRT meeting.
 - 3.6.1. The Assistant Director or their designee will lead the RRRT.
 - 3.6.2. Based on the circumstances and when appropriate, it is mandatory for the LDSS to invite other representatives to the RRRT meeting.

- 3.6.2.1. For example: from SSA, the Child Safety Team and/or Out-of-Home Team, the Director of OLM (if the incident occurred in a licensed out-of-home placement), staff from other LDSS who have had prior contact with the child, and representatives of the local jurisdictions Family Investment and Child Support Divisions.
- 3.6.3. The LDSS must attempt to hold the RRRT meeting at a time when all representatives can attend. Invitations to representatives identified in “3.6.2.1.” above are mandatory.
- 3.6.4. Participation by all invited DHS administration partners is not required for the meeting to proceed at the scheduled time.
- 3.6.5. The [RRRT Meeting Summary Form](#) must be used for all meetings and to ensure all applicable areas of the critical incident are discussed and documented.
 - 3.6.5.1. The LDSS must review all items in the form.
 - 3.6.5.2. If an item does not apply or the information is unknown, “N/A” or “Unknown” may be entered for that item.
- 3.6.6. Within five calendar days after the meeting, the [RRRT Meeting Summary Form](#) must be uploaded into CJAMS and categorized as “1080 Notification Series > Rapid Response Review Team Minutes”.

4. Submitting the 1080 A-C “Child Fatality/Serious Physical Injury/Critical Incident Report” Series Form

- 4.1. The [1080 A-C “Child Fatality/Serious Physical Injury/Critical Incident Report” Series form](#) documents on-going information gathered regarding the report of a critical incident.
- 4.2. The LDSS must submit the 1080 A-C Sections for all screened in reports meeting critical incident criteria as described in 4.3 to 4.5.

4.3. Submitting the 1080-A

- 4.3.1. Day one is the day the report of maltreatment is received by the LDSS.
- 4.3.2. Within four business days of receiving the report of maltreatment, the LDSS must:
 - 4.3.2.1. Complete the 1080 Section A and submit the entire 1080 Form Series A-C (with only section A completed) to SSA.
 - 4.3.2.2. The 1080-A must be signed by the Director or their designee.
 - 4.3.2.3. The 1080-A must be sent in a single email that includes each of the following email distribution lists as applicable:
 - 4.3.2.3.1. SSA Leadership: [DHS DL Critical Incident 1080_ABC](#),
 - 4.3.2.3.2. OLM: DLOLM_Incident_dhs@maryland.gov, and
 - 4.3.2.3.3. Baltimore City DSS: dlbcdss_incident_dhs@maryland.gov.

4.4. Submitting the 1080-B

- 4.4.1. Day one is the day a report of maltreatment is received by the LDSS.
- 4.4.2. Within 30 calendar days of receiving the report of maltreatment, the LDSS must complete the 1080-B Interim Report and submit the entire 1080 Form Series A-C (with sections A and B completed) to SSA.
 - 4.4.2.1. The 1080-B must be signed by the Director or their designee.
 - 4.4.2.2. The LDSS sends the 1080-B in a single email that includes the following email distribution lists as applicable:
 - 4.4.2.2.1. SSA Leadership: [DHS DL Critical Incident 1080_ABC](#),
 - 4.4.2.2.2. OLM: DLOLM_Incident_dhs@maryland.gov, and
 - 4.4.2.2.3. Baltimore City DSS: dlbcdss_incident_dhs@maryland.gov.

4.5. Submitting the 1080-C

- 4.5.1. Day one is the day the report of maltreatment is received.
- 4.5.2. Within 60 calendar days of receiving the report of maltreatment, the LDSS must complete the 1080-C Final Report Section and submit the entire 1080 Form Series A-C (with sections A-C completed) to SSA.
 - 4.5.2.1. The 1080-C must be signed by the Director or their designee.
 - 4.5.2.2. The LDSS must submit the 1080-C in a single email that includes the following email distribution lists as applicable:
 - 4.5.2.2.1. SSA Leadership: [DHS DL Critical Incident 1080_ABC](#),
 - 4.5.2.2.2. OLM: DLOLM_Incident_dhs@maryland.gov, and
 - 4.5.2.2.3. Baltimore City DSS: dlbcdss_incident_dhs@maryland.gov.

5. Media and Government Officials Requests for Information

- 5.1. The DHS Office of Communications is the official point of contact between all DHS/LDSS offices and any media or government officials inquiries regarding a critical incident.
- 5.2. The Director or their designee are responsible for coordinating with the DHS Office of Communications.
- 5.3. The Office of Government Affairs must also be notified when an inquiry comes from any government official.

6. DHS Office of Communications – Coordinated Response

- 6.1. To ensure confidentiality and a coordinated child fatality or near-fatality response to media or elected officials inquiries, LDSS

staff who receive media and/or governmental requests for information must:

- 6.1.1. Not provide any information to the requester, including whether or not a critical incident occurred. LDSS staff asked for such information must inform the requester that the inquiry will be directed to the DHS Office of Communications.
- 6.1.2. Direct all inquiries to the LDSS Director or their designee.
- 6.2. The LDSS Director or their designee must send the written request for information to the DHS Office of Communications. Individuals verbally requesting information should be directed to the [DHS Public Records Portal](#) to document and submit their request.
- 6.3. The DHS Office of Communications will:
 - 6.3.1. Coordinate all further actions on the request through the [DHS Public Records Portal](#).
 - 6.3.2. Contact the requestor to:
 - 6.3.2.1. Share the [DHS Public Records Portal](#) website address, (i.e., <https://marylanddhs.nextrequest.com>), and
 - 6.3.2.2. request they submit their request through the portal, and
 - 6.3.3. Provide the response to the requester.

7. SSA Child Maltreatment Fatality Review Process

- 7.1. The SSA Fatality and Critical Incident Review process is designed to understand factors that led to a child's death or other harm to children in an effort to prevent such occurrences in the future.
- 7.2. Information from the SSA fatality review may be used to enhance policy, provide LDSS training or consultation, and assist the LDSS in providing secondary trauma services to employees.
- 7.3. The SSA Fatality and Critical Review process is collaborative and as such, the LDSS is a critical partner in the review.
- 7.4. SSA must conduct a review of screened in child fatalities where abuse/neglect has been determined to be a contributing factor, and the child currently has an open case or had an open case within the previous 12 months.
 - 7.4.1. SSA will schedule all fatality reviews to include:
 - 7.4.1.1. the LDSS Director and Assistant Director of Services or their designee,
 - 7.4.1.2. other DHS agency staff who have had contact with the family including additional LDSS if more than one LDSS has information about or is involved in a child fatality; and
 - 7.4.1.3. other involved persons as documented in CJAMS.
 - 7.4.2. SSA must share their final summary of a critical incident review with the involved LDSS including the Director(s) and the Assistant Director(s) of Services, the DHS Secretary, and Principal Deputy Secretary.

8. SSA Provider-Involved Maltreatment Review Process

- 8.1. SSA may conduct reviews of any case where abuse/neglect of a child by an out-of-home placement provider is suspected.
 - 8.1.1. These reviews are held at the discretion of the SSA, and may be requested by the LDSS.
- 8.2. SSA determines whether cases will be reviewed based on the documentation submitted by the LDSS.
- 8.3. SSA may require participation by additional LDSS if more than one LDSS has information about or is involved in a critical incident.
- 8.4. Any LDSS may request a review of a case by contacting the SSA out-of-home unit.
- 8.5. SSA must include the LDSS in all review processes involving critical incidents.
- 8.6. The LDSS Director(s) and Assistant Director(s) or their designee must participate in all review meetings.
- 8.7. SSA must share their final summary of the review with the involved LDSS.

9. SSA Technical Assistance and Support to the LDSS

- 9.1. SSA staff must provide reasonable assistance to the LDSS, including:
 - 9.1.1. Policy and process review and clarification during any phase of the incident/investigation.
 - 9.1.2. Participation during a RRRT or other review of a case.
 - 9.1.3. Identifying facilitators or providers of service for secondary trauma support for LDSS staff.
 - 9.1.4. When available, SSA will provide monetary support for secondary trauma services, initial training, and continuing education for staff.

DOCUMENTATION

The “*Forms and Attachments*” section below specifies the forms that must be used to document and report critical incidents. Every form must be uploaded into CJAMS according to the directions in this policy.

FORMS AND ATTACHMENTS

[Critical Incident Notification Reporting Form](#)

[Initial Child Fatality/Serious Physical Injury/Critical Incident Report \(1080 A-C Series Form\)](#)

[RRRT Meeting Information Summary Form](#)