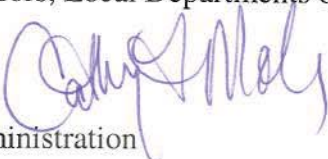


DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES
SOCIAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION
311 WEST SARATOGA STREET
BALTIMORE, MARYLAND 21201

DATE: October 1, 2008

POLICY # SSA 09-05

TO: Directors, Local Departments of Social Services
Assistant Directors, Local Departments of Social Services
Foster Care Supervisors, Local Departments of Social Services

FROM: Cathy F. Mols 
Executive Director
Social Services Administration

RE: Guidelines for Early Identification and Location of Custodial and
Non-Custodial Parents

PROGRAMS AFFECTED: Out-of-Home Care Services/Foster Care/Kinship Care/Adoption

ORIGINATING OFFICE: Children and Family Services

BACKGROUND: None

ACTION REQUIRED OF: All Local Departments

REQUIRED ACTION: Implement policy and procedures regarding Identification and
Location of Custodial and Non-Custodial Parents

ACTION DUE DATE: Immediate

CONTACT PERSON: Debbie Ramelmeier
Director of Child Welfare Policy and Practice
Social Services Administration
410-767-7506

Purpose

The purpose of this circular letter is to provide local department guidelines for the location of absent parents of a child in out-of-home care services. The guidelines include directives in working with local child support staff, suggested venues for searching, and proper contact of a located parent.

Background

The local department must document attempts to find absent parents. The search for absent parents is a joint effort by the Social Services Administration (SSA) and Child Support Enforcement Administration (CSEA) for all children committed to the local department of social services and placed in Out-of-Home Foster care/Kinship care. Where appropriate all steps will be taken to pursue both absent parents unless the court has terminated the legal rights of the parents, or there is documentation of that parent's death.

When a child enters Out of Home Care, the child welfare caseworker is responsible for gathering information on both parents and forwarding this information to child support. Within 30 days of CINA or Voluntary Placement, the caseworker will complete a DHR/SSA 903-FC along with the Caseplan 2 – Parent Information Sheet (both forms are available in CHESSIE) and forward the white copy of DHR/SSA 903-FC and the Caseplan 2 to the local Child Support Enforcement Office, or enter the information into CARES.

Since complete and accurate identifying information on the parents is not always available within this time period, the caseworker shall forward the information using an updated DHR/SSA 903-FC to Child Support (or update the information on CARES) as soon as possible after it is received.

Coordinated Efforts by Child Welfare and Child Support

In order to ensure that diligent searches are made for parents of every child in out-of-home care, child welfare and child support must be in contact on a regular basis at the local department level. Each local department and child support office has a contact person. The child support person ensures that child support orders are active. The child welfare worker and the child support worker must work together and continually share information on the child, parents, and family.

Any new information or changes in information gained during the life of the case by the child welfare caseworker on the parents, putative fathers or absent parents will also be forwarded as soon as possible to the child support worker using the DHR/SSA 903-FC and placed in CARES.

How to Gather Basic Information

The first step in locating absent parents is by gathering information from available family resource about the absent parent. A genogram must be developed for the family.

Within 7 working days of the child coming into care, the caseworker will gather all the information available regarding the parent. Crucial information includes:

- Full name (middle initial or middle name can be important)
- Accurate spelling of the name

- If the absent parent is the father, is he a Jr., Sr., II, or III
- Date of Birth
- Social Security Number
- Last known address
- Last known phone number
- Last known employer
- Last contact
- Names (and if possible phone numbers and addresses) of parents, relatives, friends of the absent parent
- Places the absent parent has been known to frequent

Most of this information will be obtained during the interview process with the child (when appropriate), relatives, and other interested persons in the life of the child. Interviews can be done by phone or in person. Family team decision meetings are also an excellent venue to collect such information. Caseworkers should be prepared to have questions answered about the above information and record all information in CHESSIE. Detailed questions may be required, and it may be necessary to interview a person more than one time to give them an opportunity to gather the information you are requesting. The caseworker should take the initiative to follow-up on every interview, and let the person know that should they obtain any additional information, the caseworker will be available.

Collaboration with the Absent Parent Locator

All gathered information should be forwarded to your jurisdictional or regional Absent Parent Locator (APL). THE APL may be a child welfare or child support staff person. See attached Absent Parent Locator list for each jurisdiction or region. The caseworker should collaborate with the APL to conduct a search for the absent parent(s) based on the information gathered.

Suggested searches include:

- State Motor Vehicle Administration – give all information to staff, including full name, date of birth, or approximate age, if date of birth is not available.
- Local Department of Social Services – check all databases within the local department including CARES, Child Support, FIA, Housing, etc. to see if the absent parent(s) has received any benefits or referrals for a particular social services entity within the last 180 days.
- Juvenile Court – check to see if absent parent has been party to any court action within the last 180 days
- Maryland Department of Correction Inmate Locator
- Maryland Wage History
- Other Public Agencies – the local police department, local tax office, local utilities and payments
- Absent Parent’s family, friends, employers, co-workers – contact for any information on last known whereabouts
- Local telephone directory or 411 operators
- Federal Agencies – Social Security, Internal Revenue Service, Federal Bureau of Prison Inmate Locator
- Internet/Web – public records searches are available for most states, including inmate search sites such as Vinelink

- Family reunions, weddings, funerals, graduations, and other family gatherings

Contacting the Parent After Location

Once location information is obtained, the next step is making contact. If a telephone number is available, telephone contact should be attempted. If you call and are able to speak to the person, identify yourself and the reason you are calling. Do not attempt to give any legal advice. If you are unclear as to what constitutes legal advice, check with your county attorney. Remember to also respect the confidentiality of the other parent. If you are not able to speak with the person, leave a limited message on the voicemail. Identify yourself and the local department only. Do not go into the reasons for the call.

Always document your contacts. Send a certified letter and first class letter simultaneously for proof of attempt to locate and communicate with the absent parent. Enter the contact with the person or voice mail on the Contact Sheet in CHESSIE.

If you do not have a telephone number, then contact attempts may be made by mail. Certified and first class mail letters should be sent to any found addresses. If there is more than one listing for the same name, a letter should be sent to each listing. The letter should not disclose confidential information regarding the child, in case the party contacted is not the absent parent.

There will be instances where the information on the absent parent is limited, so a number of persons may be listed as the “possible” absent parent. For example, the absent parent may have a fairly common name such as John Smith, and the only birth date may be February 1978. The search results in 10 John Smiths born in February 1978. It is necessary to contact each John Smith to clarify which is the absent parent sought. Information regarding the reasons the local department is seeking the person should not be divulged when leaving a message or sending a letter, due to the possibility that the party contacted might not be the absent parent in question. The reason for the search should only be shared with the party in person. Whenever possible, efforts to establish paternity should be attempted for alleged fathers once contact has been made.

Information Sharing and Documentation

All information on the absent parent must be shared with your child support counterpart. This includes information from any search activities and information from actual contacts. Child support will also be sharing information obtained on absent parent(s) with the child welfare staff.

Maryland Statewide Absent Parent Locators

Allegany	Leslie Dillion	301-784-7278
Anne Arundel	Mark Allison	410-222-7825 x 3038
Baltimore Co.	Joshua Brusca	410-853-3149
Calvert	Amye Scrivener	443-550-6967
Caroline	Michelle Brooks	410-819-4455
Carroll	Melissa Seymour	410-386-4390
Cecil	Vickie Pugh	410-996-0160
Charles	Debbie Krueger	301-392-6747
Dorchester	Ella Stanley	410-901-4276
Frederick	Vicky Carswell	800-332-6347
Garrett	Phill Gillum	301-533-3011
Harford	Kathy Dow	410-836-4989
Howard	Judi Dickman &	410-872-8841
	Karyn Leins	410-872-8837
Kent	Robin Reed	800-332-6347
Montgomery	Edward Powell	240-777-4006
Prince George's	Donna Mercillott	301-909-2414
Queen Anne's	Theresa Morris	410-758-4347
St. Mary's	Sarah Mead	301-392-6715
Somerset	Charlie Balam	410-677-4211
Talbot	Lillian Kirby	410-770-4727
Washington	Becky Dick	bdick@dhr.stae.md.us
Wicomico	Tracey Davis	410-677-6876
Worcester	Cathy Shockley	410-677-6926
Baltimore City	Kathleen Valentine	443-423-5644