



CHILD WELFARE POLICY UPDATE Differential Response System June 2013

What is a Differential Response System?

- A **Differential Response System** is an approach used by child protective agencies to have more than one way of responding to allegations of child abuse.
- Traditionally, all child protective assessments have included an investigation to determine if child abuse has occurred, followed by a decision regarding whether the name of the abuse perpetrator must be placed on an abuse registry. Even when assessments include analysis of child and family functioning and strengths, the emphasis on determining whether abuse occurred or not often overshadows assisting the family in meeting their unique needs, and may set the stage for an adversarial relationship between the family and the child protective agency.
- Under the **Differential Response System** planned by Iowa, Department of Human Services will have two options in handling accepted abuse referrals:
 - For Denial of Critical Care cases in which a child is not in imminent danger, the Department will evaluate the child's safety and conduct a family assessment which will not result in an abuse finding or placement of a perpetrator's name upon a registry, followed by voluntary services and supports as needed by the family.
 - All other types of abuse and those Denial of Critical Care cases in which a child is in imminent danger will be handled through the traditional path, which will include evaluation of the child's safety, assessment of the family, determination if abuse has occurred, and placement of the alleged perpetrator's name on the Registry in those cases required by Iowa Code to be registered.

Why is Iowa adopting a Differential Response System?

- Differential Response Systems are more family-friendly, flexible, and better able to engage and empower families in making changes to improve child well-being while still keeping children safe. Iowa's Governor and Legislature support this change:
 - In April 2012, Governor Branstad signed House File 2226, directing DHS to conduct a "comprehensive review to determine whether to recommend a differential response to child abuse reports when the initial report is received by the department."
 - In the 2013 legislative session, House File 590 was passed by the Iowa House and Senate with bipartisan support. The bill was signed into law by Governor Branstad on May 24, 2013.

<p>Have other states tried Differential Response Systems?</p> <p>How has that worked?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The federal Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) support the use of Differential Response Systems. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ To date, twenty-three states’ child protective systems include some form of Differential Response. Based on data available from those states, the following is known: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Child safety is not compromised – children are no less safe in states with a Differential Response System. ▪ Subsequent reporting of families for child abuse and neglect declined. ▪ Petitions filed in family court and out-of-home placements declined. ▪ Family engagement and family satisfaction increases. • Additional information about Differential Response Systems can be accessed at: www.differentialresponseiqic.org
<p>What will Iowa’s Differential Response System look like?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • While there are many details still to be addressed, the following has been established: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ As depicted in the chart on the following page, Iowa’s Differential Response System will have two discrete pathways to respond to accepted reports of child abuse: a Child Abuse Assessment pathway and a Family Assessment pathway. ○ Pathway assignment is dependent on the severity abuse alleged. ○ Safety is assessed in both pathways. ○ If a child is found to be unsafe, a case can move from the Family Assessment pathway to the Child Abuse Assessment pathway. ○ Assessments completed on the Family Assessment pathway will not result in a finding of abuse nor placement on the Central Abuse Registry.
<p>Who has been involved in planning Iowa’s Differential Response System?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In addition to the strong involvement of Iowa’s legislative leaders, a variety of stakeholders have been involved. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The Iowa Differential Response Workgroup created by House File 2226 included public and private representation from a variety of disciplines including child welfare, domestic violence, substance abuse, child advocacy, and the legal field. The group’s report and recommendation that a Differential Response System be codified and implemented can be found at <u>Differential Response Review, Summary of Charge – HF 2226, December 2012</u> . ○ National Resource Center for In Home Services. ○ Peer to peer consultation with states that have implemented Differential Response Systems.

What happens next?

- Now that House File 590 has passed, public and private partners have been identified for the following implementation workgroups:
 - Marketing and Communication
 - Performance Measures
 - Training
- Iowa DHS will implement Differential Response on January 1, 2014.
- Additional information will be provided to DHS staff and stakeholders on an ongoing basis.
- Information will be posted to the Department’s website:

<http://www.dhs.state.ia.us/Partners/PublicInformation/Newsroom/NewsReleases.html>

Iowa’s Differential Response System - Two Paths for Accepted Abuse Referrals

