



Letter to KCV, dated 24th April 2020

Department of Health and Human Services

CHILD PROTECTION PRACTICE CHANGES

Dear Anne,

I am writing to advise you of two changes to child protection practice that are being brought about as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Firstly, the Andrews Government has recently introduced new legislation that temporarily modifies the application of the law of Victoria in certain respects for the purpose of responding to the COVID-19 pandemic.

For the purposes of child protection's practice, the relevant amendments relate to suspending any requirements regarding bail justice hearings. This means that during the current health emergency child protection practitioners will not be bringing applications relating to the placing of children into emergency care before bail justices. Rather, when a child is taken into emergency care the matter will be taken to the Children's Court on the next working day.

These changes permit the adoption of measures that will reduce person-to-person contacts and disease transmission of COVID-19.

Secondly, clear direction is being given to the child protection workforce that the COVID-19 pandemic constitutes an exceptional circumstance for the purpose of permanency objectives, and any impact on progress towards family reunification needs to be considered. The department recognises that because of the Chief Health Officer's directions in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the capacity to make progress with changes needed to enable safe reunification is likely to be impacted. To prevent children and families

being disadvantaged, the department is advising the child protection workforce to consider the following matters when determining whether to hold family reunification as the permanency objective:

- whether the parents have demonstrated that they have made all reasonable attempts to access services;
- where a relevant service has been accessible, including by alternative means, whether parents have engaged to the extent practicable with the service, and demonstrated progress towards addressing relevant protective concerns;
- whether the service provider considers that the parents' progress was impeded by the COVID-19 epidemic;
- whether the parents or child contracted COVID-19 and how this affected progress towards addressing relevant protective concerns;
- whether the absence of face to face contact between the child and parents adversely impeded progress towards reunification.

Should you have any queries in relation to the matters raised in this correspondence, please contact Shane Wilson, Assistant Director, Child Protection and Care on 9096 6189 or Shane.D.Wilson@dhhs.vic.gov.au to discuss.

Yours sincerely,

Argiri Alisandratos

Deputy Secretary

Children, Families, Communities and Disability Division