



# Oregon

Kate Brown, Governor

## Department of Human Services

*Office of the Director*

500 Summer St. NE, E-15

Salem, OR 97301

Voice: 503-945-5600

Fax: 503-581-6198

May 28, 2020

The Honorable Representative Sanchez, Chair  
The Honorable Representative Ron Noble, Vice-Chair  
The Honorable Representative Anna Williams, Vice-Chair  
House Committee on Human Services  
900 Court Street NE  
Salem, OR 97301-4048



Re: Follow up questions and answers

### **DHS General**

*Q: What does DHS need most in order to respond to COVID-19?*

DHS is working with the Governor's Office to compile a list of needed statutory changes, once that list is approved/finalized it will be shared with the Chair of the House Committee on Human Services.

### **Food Security**

*Q: If there is another wave of COVID-19 cases, what have the organizations learned to improve the next round of responses?*

We are conducting a series of debriefs with the agency's COVID-19 Response Task Force and with district managers who oversee our local offices across the five program areas. The debriefs are providing important feedback which is being incorporated into reopening playbooks for DHS offices. The playbooks also are intended to help mitigate any issues that arise in communities or across the state, so there is a thoughtful, consistent response based on what we know today about COVID-19.

In addition, we've adjusted in real time when possible. For example, when we learned communities of color were disproportionately impacted by the Corona Virus, we began an outreach effort in partnership with African American community leaders. We also worked with OHA to create a Protecting Immigrant Families Fund to resource community-based organizations with demonstrated cultural and linguistic specialty to provide outreach and education.

*Q: What are the orgs focused on for the next 2-3 months?*

Though this question may be better suited for stakeholders, we will be focused on Phase 1 of re-opening, the roll out of the Integrated Eligibility ONE System, preparing for possible phase 2 of re-openings, and our budget.

**"Assisting People to Become Independent, Healthy and Safe"**

*Q: Do your employees / volunteers have enough PPE?*

Staff in positions that are conducive to telecommuting will continue to work remotely and we are still encouraging Oregonians to do their business by phone or online. Given that most of our staff are working remotely our districts are reporting that they are comfortable with their current level of PPE. Additionally, we have face coverings available and are making them available to districts.

*Q: Are any policy changes needed to make services more accessible to those who need them?*

We are continuing to evaluate changes and are closely monitoring plans to reopen in a phased approach and looking for signs of a possible second wave. Several federal waivers and newly funded programs like SNAP Emergency Allotments are contingent on a national and state declaration of emergency being in place.

### **Child Welfare**

*Q: If both parents are too sick to safely parent their children, what is DHS's response?*

In the situation described above we would work with the parents to explore alternative options for a child's care, such as a relative, or other options. If no other suitable option can be found, "substitute care" would be provided. This means an out-of-home placement directly supervised by the department or other agency, including placement in a foster family home, group home or other child caring institution or facility. All of this is done on a completely voluntary basis with no change to a parent's legal custody status and no legal dependency court involvement. This is not a change to practice and is outlined in our current rules and procedure.

*Q: Since we do expect a spike in reported cases when kids return to school, what is DHS doing to prepare / what plans are in place / are there any identified additional resources that the legislature might need to allocate?*

There are several process improvements being made at the Oregon Child Abuse Hotline (ORCAH) to efficiently and effectively manage current and future incoming calls and reports of child abuse. Improvements include:

- Stabilize workforce: All ORCAH staff vacancies will be hired and trained by mid-August. Staff will be trained remotely in preparation for the fall when call volume increases.
- Technology, in partnership with OIS/OR-Kids that provides a screening template that reduces the time it takes for screeners to complete a report.
- Divert non-abuse calls to 211 and local offices, opening up the phone lines so that screeners can be responsive to reports of child abuse.
- Update external website so that information flow and answers to questions can be addressed, to avoid unnecessary calls to the hotline or local office.
- Develop a strategy for targeted communication and outreach for mandatory reporters that includes the updated video, flyers, guides and training

We have also partnered with field leadership to target specific efforts on reducing the number of overdue assessments and create local strategies for managing the work of child safety assessments. We believe that these efforts will shore up our ability to respond if we do see an increased number of calls when children and young adults return to school buildings.

*Q: With reduced reporting from mandatory reporters, has DHS put any measures in place to increase reporting from categories of people who don't traditionally interact much with CW? Are there alternative paths through which DHS could hear more reports from non-mandatory reporters so the numbers are more accurate? Are there, e.g., outreach efforts to parents with split custody to help them identify signs of abuse? Other points of contact that could benefit from improved education and information about how to report?*

Child Welfare has continued to spread the message that child safety is still an essential function and suspected abuse should be reported. Resources have been developed and are available on the Child Welfare webpage to guide folks in the process. More information can be found at: <https://www.oregon.gov/DHS/CHILDREN/Pages/COVID-19.aspx>

For additional information please contact:

Soren Metzger  
Government Relations Manager  
DHS Government Relations Legislative Unit  
Soren.K.Metzger@state.or.us