

State of New Mexico

CHILDREN, YOUTH and FAMILIES DEPARTMENT

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CYFD Family,

I hope this note finds you as well as can be in these hard times. Your case worker should be giving you regular updates, but I wanted you to hear directly from leadership about what CYFD is doing during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In step with the New Mexico Supreme Court we have implemented video visits for court-ordered biological family visits until at least April 26, 2020 because of ongoing public health concerns from the virus being spread in the community.

We know this was likely heartbreaking for so many families working towards reunification. It was an incredibly difficult decision for the CYFD and the courts.

It is important to share--this decision was not made as a punishment to families who are currently separated. We made the decision only with the intent of stopping the spread of the virus and keeping as many New Mexicans as possible safe.

As stated in the New Mexico Supreme Court order, first preference in this time will be to conduct visits via video, with the second preference being a telephone visit. This Court ordered in-person visit suspension only applies to children in CYFD custody, and has no impact on private child custody matters.

Caseworker monthly home visits to children and to foster homes will also be done by video conference calls. This is to ensure that caseworkers can see the child. Thus, telephone calls will not be used to replace home visits.

The order does allow CYFD or the child's family to petition the court for in-person visits. This may happen in accordance with reasons outlined in the Letter to Caregivers dated 3.20.20 or for other reasons. Please reference that letter, here: <https://cyfd.org/docs/Letter to Caregivers 3 20 20.pdf>. District courts may approve such petition(s).

In-person visits between caseworkers and parents are temporarily suspended. These will be conducted either by telephone or by video conference.

We know phone and video visits cannot replace the connection possible during in person visits. To that end, CYFD will try to coordinate more frequent video and/or phone contacts during this time. We know not every family has phone or internet access to

make video calls possible. Please reach out to your caseworker if you are facing problems with this.

We are committed to reinstating in-person visits as soon as it is deemed safe to do so. Family reunification, whenever it is safe to do so, is the foundation of New Mexico's child welfare system. Visits and connection are key to family reunification.

Your case worker can also connect you to other resources in this time like: applying for unemployment and other benefits if your hours or job have been cut, food resources, mental health access and more. Many of our staff are now teleworking. However, our staff are still available to support you in this time.

We have also added a CYFD & COVID page to our website. There you can find a variety of resources that may be relevant to you.

If you or anyone in your household is struggling with stress, anxiety, or mental health issues in these times, you can call the The New Mexico Crisis Access Line (NMCAL). NMCAL free, open 24/7, and you do not have to be in crisis to access their services. You can talk to a trained professional right away and/or be referred to mental health providers that can help you via virtual scheduled visits. You can call 1-855-NMCRISIS (662-7474) for support.

Essential child welfare staff are still working in the field for child abuse investigations and more. Those that are still working in offices or facilities are following guidance from the Department of Health to prevent potential spread. Our buildings are closed to the public and will be sterilized before we reoccupy these offices.

CYFD has also been collaborating with other organizations to provide food to children, youth, and elders. We also working with our existing youth shelter and domestic violence shelter providers.

The COVID virus has brought additional stress and uncertainty for all of us and you may be feeling the effects more than others. CYFD is an organization that was built to respond to crisis, so please let us know how we can help you through this major crisis that is affecting us in so many ways.

Sincerely,



Brian Blalock