

State of New Mexico

CHILDREN, YOUTH and FAMILIES DEPARTMENT

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March 27, 2020

Dear Caregiver,

I hope this note finds you and your families as well as can be. CYFD is working as a team more than ever before to meet the health and safety needs of children, youth, and families in our state. We appreciate your continued patience, diligence, and collaboration as we navigate the ongoing COVID-19 outbreak.

In step with the New Mexico Supreme Court today, CYFD will be suspending in-person biological family visits for 30 days because of public health concerns related to the spread of COVID-19.

Biological family visits **will** continue. Per the New Mexico Supreme Court order, the first preference for visitation will be via video, with the second preference being a telephone visit. It is our intent to coordinate **more** frequent video and/or phone contacts to help reduce the potential trauma of children not seeing their biological families for 30 days or more. *This Court ordered in-person visit suspension only applies to children in CYFD custody and has no impact on private child custody matters.*

This was one of the most difficult and painful decisions we as a Department have had to make and we have been working closely with the courts and Department of Health to balance the rights of parents with the health and safety of our children.

We will continue to conduct caseworker monthly home visits to children and to foster homes by video conference calls whenever technology allows and it is safe to do so. We will be utilizing phone visits as a way to check in with the child and family but will also take necessary steps to ensure we can visually check in with the child, in line with our federal requirements.

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.

With schools now officially closed for the remainder of the school year, your families will play a vital role in the lives of children and youth. The Department is here to support you in any way we can, so please call on us to share your needs. We have appreciated the honest feedback we have received from you and are constantly reassessing policies and procedures to best adapt to the ongoing crisis.

Your commitment to meeting the physical and emotional needs of our children has never been more important. 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.

As always, if you have questions or concerns, please contact your Caseworker. Should you need more support, please direct your inquiry to your County Office Manager. You can also always utilize CYFD's dedicated Constituent Affairs Specialist, Kaitlyn Eichers, by calling her at (505) 771-5911 or emailing Kaitlyn.Eichers@State.NM.US

If you are interested in reading the order from the Supreme Court, you can find it at: <https://bit.ly/33Yh0gQ>.

If you would like to read our joint press release with the Supreme Court, you can find it at: <https://bit.ly/39IYIML>.

Sincerely,

Brian Blalock