



Establishment and Maintenance of Central Registries for Child Abuse Reports

Every State has procedures for maintaining records of child abuse and neglect. Most States maintain a central registry, which is a centralized database of child abuse and neglect investigation records. Approximately 40 States, the District of Columbia, American Samoa, Guam, and Puerto Rico require central registries in statute.¹ Registries in other

¹ The word *approximately* is used to stress the fact that States frequently amend their laws. This information is current only through October 2008. States that mandate a central registry in their statutes include Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Vermont, Virginia, and Wyoming.

Electronic copies of this publication may be downloaded at www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws_policies/statutes/centreg.cfm

To find statute information for a particular State, go to www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws_policies/state/index.cfm

To find information on all the States and territories, order a copy of the full-length PDF by calling 800.394.3366 or 703.385.7565, or download it at www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws_policies/statutes/centregall.pdf



Purpose of Central Registries

States, however, may be maintained as a matter of administrative or agency policy rather than statutory mandate and are beyond the scope of this publication.²

In approximately six States, the statutes do not authorize statewide, centralized registries.³ In these States, the individual State agencies that received the reports of suspected abuse or neglect are required to maintain these records. Four States, the Northern Mariana Islands, and the U.S. Virgin Islands do not address the issue of central registries in their statutes.⁴

Central registries and the systematic record keeping of child abuse and neglect reports serve to assist in the identification and protection of abused and neglected children. Central registry reports are typically used to aid social services agencies in the investigation, treatment, and prevention of child abuse cases and to maintain statistical information for staffing and funding purposes.

In many States, central registry records are used to screen persons who will be entrusted with the care of children. Approximately 30 States and the District of Columbia allow or require a check of central registry or department records for individuals applying to be child or youth care providers.⁵ Information is made available to employers in the child care business, schools, or health care industry. Most States also

² For information on State registries, see Chapter 4 of the April 2003 *National Study of Child Protective Services Systems and Reform Efforts: Review of State CPS Policy* by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, and Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children's Bureau: <http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/CPS-status03/state-policy03/chapter4.htm>

³ Colorado, Maine, Minnesota, Washington, West Virginia, and Wisconsin.

⁴ Kansas, Kentucky, New Mexico, and Ohio.

⁵ Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Oregon, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, South Dakota, Texas, Utah, Vermont, Virginia, Washington, and Wyoming. See Information Gateway's *Disclosure of Confidential Child Abuse and Neglect Records*: www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws_policies/statutes/confide.cfm

Content and Maintenance

require a check of central registry records as part of the background check for foster and adoptive parent applicants.⁶

The type of information contained in central registries and department records varies from State to State but usually includes the child's name and address; the name of the mother, father, or guardian; the name of any siblings; the nature of the harm to the child; the name of the alleged perpetrator(s); and the findings of any investigations. Some States maintain all investigated reports of abuse and neglect in their central registries, while others maintain only substantiated reports. Access to information maintained in registries and department records also varies among States.⁷ In addition, the length of time the information is held and the conditions for expunction vary from State to State.⁸

This publication is a product of the State Statutes Series prepared by Child Welfare Information Gateway. While every attempt has been made to be as complete as possible, additional information on these topics may be in other sections of a State's code as well as agency regulations, case law, and informal practices and procedures.

⁶ Alaska, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, the District of Columbia, Florida, Guam, Hawaii, Idaho, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Maine, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, South Dakota, Texas, Utah, Vermont, Virginia, Washington, West Virginia, Wisconsin, and Wyoming require central registry checks for foster parents. These States (except for California, Idaho, Missouri, Ohio, Rhode Island, and Vermont) also require the checks for adoptive parents, as do Arizona, Indiana, Louisiana, and New York. See Information Gateway's *Criminal Background Checks for Prospective Foster and Adoptive Parents*: www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws_policies/statutes/background.cfm

⁷ See Information Gateway's *Disclosure of Confidential Child Abuse and Neglect Records*: www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws_policies/statutes/confide.cfm

⁸ See Information Gateway's *Review and Expunction of Central Registries and Reporting Records*: www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws_policies/statutes/registry.cfm