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Human Services continues work towards reducing turnaround time of criminal background checks for licensed and regulated child care providers

BISMARCK, N.D. – The North Dakota Department of Human Services announced today it has created several efficiencies and has reduced the time it takes to process fingerprint-based criminal background checks for new employees of licensed and regulated child care providers.

These efficiencies are a result of a time-limited waiver the department received from the federal Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Children and Families in November 2018. The waiver allows new employees hired by licensed and regulated child care providers to begin work under direct supervision before their criminal background checks are complete.

"Over the past five months, an internal team took a close look at our current background check process and pinpointed areas where we could make adjustments to reduce turnaround time and the number of incomplete applications while still ensuring safe environments for children," said Tara Reed, with the department's Criminal Background Check Unit (CBCU).

Currently, all licensed and regulated child care providers and their staff and adult household members are required to complete two department forms to authorize a background check. Starting July 1, 2019, they will use a new single simplified authorization form. Applicants will be required to type their information in the online form, which will reduce the number of returned applications because of illegible handwriting. They will also have the option of signing their form electronically.

"Through team work, we simplified this form making it more user-friendly, so we receive complete background check applications on the front end decreasing processing time," Reed said. "We also created a peer review group that included county child care licensors, regional early childhood services staff and licensed child care providers who shared valuable feedback on the simplified form."

The department also collaborated with the North Dakota Bureau of Criminal Investigation (BCI) and began a daily secure pickup of criminal records, eliminating about six days of unnecessary records handling. Other efficiencies include a simplified background check results memo, and the hiring of a full-time temporary office assistant to support the CBCU.

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Amanda Carlson, the department's early childhood services administrator said, "The efficiencies and streamlined processes that are reducing the fingerprint-based criminal background check processing time are important to the work force needs of providers especially as we approach the expiration of our federal waiver."

On Oct. 1, 2019, the department will re-implement a federal background check requirement to comply with federal regulations which states new employees of a licensed or regulated child care provider cannot begin work until the department receives and reviews their in-state BCI or their national Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) criminal history records. New employees can then begin working under direct supervision if their initial record shows no convictions that would disqualify them from working with children. They can begin full unrestricted employment only after their entire background check is complete, which may include receiving records from each state the applicant has lived in during the past five years.

Reed said licensed and regulated child care providers can expect to receive multiple correspondence from the department about the new simplified authorization form and future efficiencies to the criminal background check process.

The efficiencies will also benefit other programs and areas that require criminal background checks. The department completes fingerprint-based background checks for foster care licensing, employment in licensed foster care facilities, adoption including employment in licensed child placement agencies, guardianship, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Kindship Care and relative care placements.

In calendar year 2018, the CBCU completed about 7,000 background checks, of which about 67 percent related to early childhood services.

North Dakota has about 1,700 licensed and regulated child care providers.

Department background check information for child care providers is available online at www.nd.gov/dhs/services/childcare/bkg-check.html.

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