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Human Services announces next steps in processing fingerprint-based criminal background checks more quickly

BISMARCK, N.D. – The North Dakota Department of Human Services will launch a new simplified criminal background check authorization form and enhanced website content on Aug. 1 as part of its work to continue reducing the time it takes to process fingerprint-based criminal background checks.

Three criminal background check authorization forms have been consolidated into one simplified form (SFN 829) eliminating duplicative processes. Applicants will be required to type their information into the new online form, which will reduce the number of applications returned because of unreadable handwriting. Applicants can electronically sign the new form and print a copy to bring with them when they go to be fingerprinted.

“A tremendous amount of time and collaboration with stakeholders went into the design of this new form,” said Tara Reed, with the department’s Criminal Background Check Unit (CBCU). “The main goal was to make it more user-friendly, so we receive complete criminal background check applications on the front end, which decreases the processing time.”

The department will also upload new website content specific to the CBCU at www.nd.gov/dhs/services/childfamily/cbcu/index.html. Criminal background check applicants will find links to forms, fingerprinting locations, FAQs and other important information. Applicants who are required to complete out-of-state forms for their criminal background checks will find authorization forms and instructions on how to complete the forms from 49 states and the District of Columbia.

Reed said that by having this information in one easy-to-access place, it will help expedite the criminal background check process even more for applicants.

The department completes criminal background checks for multiple children and family service areas. These include foster care licensing, employment in licensed foster care facilities, child care licensing and employment in licensed or regulated child care settings, adoption including employment by licensed child placement agencies, guardianship, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Kinship Care and relative care placements.

“Over the past eight months, progress has been made in creating efficiencies to reduce the turnaround time of criminal background checks,” Reed said. “We are really excited about the new simplified form and comprehensive website content and we are hopeful North Dakotans will benefit greatly from our efforts.”

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The department implemented other efficiencies earlier this year that have reduced the criminal background check turnaround time. These include implementing a simplified background check result memo and collaborating with the North Dakota Bureau of Criminal Investigation (BCI) to securely pick up criminal records daily, which eliminated about six days of unnecessary handling of records. The department also hired a full-time temporary office assistant to support the CBCU.

The department's priority on reducing processing time of criminal background checks will have the greatest impact on licensed and regulated child care providers. Starting Oct. 1, 2019, the department will re-implement a federal background check requirement to comply with federal regulations on provisional employment. The state's waiver expires Sept. 30.

The federal requirement 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.

In late June, the department mailed about 1,800 letters to licensed and regulated child care providers about the new simplified form and enhanced CBCU website content. The letter also reminded them about the re-implementation of the federal background check requirement on Oct. 1.

In calendar year 2018, the CBCU completed about 7,000 background checks, of which about 67 percent related to licensed or regulated child care providers.

The new simplified form, SFN 829, along with additional CBCU information, will be available July 25 online at www.nd.gov/dhs/services/childfamily/cbcu/index.html.

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