March 16, 2020

DHS Takes Measures to Protect Team Members, Mitigate Spread, While Ensuring Continued Services to Iowans

(Des Moines, Iowa) – The Iowa Department of Human Services (DHS) has been working on multiple contingency plans to mitigate the COVID-19 pandemic. DHS is gearing up to implement telework options for many on our team. As DHS has not historically promoted telework, we've moved quickly to mobilize this option and begin deploying in waves today based on risk and the nature of the team member's work. Supervisors and IT support will reach out to team members to notify them of next steps and timing.

Much of our team members provide direct care support. We are working to further equip our social workers with tools to keep them safe. DHS created a supervisor toolkit, which we will update regularly as events unfold. For those at our facilities we've increased screening, suspended in-person visitation and are putting in place additional cleaning and sanitation. We will continue to provide options such as FaceTime and Skype for family members and guardians who wish to see and speak with their loved ones.

For those who need to be in the office to do their work, we've increased cleaning and sanitation. We are also exploring childcare options for our team in the event of further or prolonged school closures.

Those We Serve
The Department is working to ensure access to essential services while reducing our footprint at local offices to protect our team members and those we serve. We encourage the public to call ahead before visiting local offices for assistance by phone or visit www.dhs.iowa.gov for more information on the services we provide.

We are putting policies in place to ensure continued access to childcare during this emergency time. We understand that childcare plays a key role in supporting our state's ability to continue essential functions – at the State level, within the healthcare system and for other critical infrastructure.

Financial Assistance for Child Care:

- We will begin paying childcare providers, who receive childcare assistance (CCA), based on enrollment, not based on attendance, to ensure providers have a stable source of income.
- We are also exploring ways to ramp-up childcare capacity, including expedited licensing, alternative site locations, and funding flexibilities.
- We will use Child Care Development Funds (CCDF) for Quality to provide ongoing financial assistance to providers to meet standards for health and safety, including additional cleaning measures, both preventative and responsive to illness.

Child Care Operational Assistance:

- DHS' childcare inspection and regulatory functions are shifting to a role of providing technical assistance focused on hygiene and sanitation. This also increases agility of DHS staff to move resources to respond to the emerging needs of the State.
- The Department of Corrections is producing additional sanitizer and, at DHS' request, has prioritized childcare settings to receive these resources.

In addition to ensuring access to childcare, we are putting strategies in place to protect Iowa's children:

- We know that emergency events like this may cause significant stress on families and requires a continued focus on child protective services.
- We are developing strategies to identify children who may be at particular risk during this stressful time.
- We are also providing our social workers tools to be more mobile and to adapt as the situation unfolds.
- We are equipping our social workers with screening questions to avoid potential exposure to children and our staff.

As the event continues to unfold, we anticipate an increased need to access social assistance programs. We are evaluating cash, food and medical assistance benefit packages to ensure Iowans have access to essential supports. We will share additional information in the coming days and weeks. We are all going to have to do our part to protect ourselves, and those around us.

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