

Cabinet for Health and Family Services
Department for Community Based Services

2025- 2029 Disaster Plan

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Introduction

Kentucky's [Division of Emergency Management](#) maintains the plan for the state in the event a locality's resources are below those needed to respond to and recover from an emergency or disaster. The Division of Emergency Management works with partners to modify the disaster plan to ensure it informs local planning efforts and is updated in regular intervals. State and county plans for disasters and emergencies can be located through the following link: [Kentucky Emergency Management-Planning](#). Within the Cabinet for Health and Family Services (CHFS/cabinet), the Department for Public Health (DPH) takes the lead in the event of a state-declared emergency or disaster in Kentucky, or in response to a partner state's emergency or disaster ([Public Health and Medical Preparedness Program](#)). Both the Division of Emergency Management and DPH staff emergency operation centers during these times and engage the Department for Community Based Services (DCBS/department) for social services and financial assistance as needed. The Governor is granted broad statutory and constitutional authorities to respond to a disaster that exceeds the scope of local resources.

Identifying, Locating, and Ensuring the Availability of Services

To identify, locate, and ensure the continued availability of services for children under state care or supervision who are displaced or adversely affected by a disaster, the department has several options:

- An Emergency Preparedness Procedure is available in the department's standards of practice (SOP), [SOP 12.21 Emergency Preparedness](#). This SOP requires that a new foster/adoptive home applicant complete a CHFS Emergency Preparedness Plan. The plan includes the following: name, address, phone numbers and email; location of where the family would go in an evacuation, including both nearby area and a location out of the direct vicinity; emergency contact information for a family member or friend who would have knowledge of the family's location; and a list of essential items needed to continue providing for children in state's care.
- For children placed in private child-caring (PCC) agencies, the department maintains an updated emergency contact list for these agencies in case of an evacuation/emergency.
- Data and management reports can also be used in the event of an emergency. The Children in Placement report (TWS-W058) is generated on a weekly basis listing all kids in states' care, their placement, and placement address. Therefore, if an emergency happens in the eastern part of the state, another region can pull the TWS-W058 report to see which kids are placed in that part of the state in order to initiate contact.
- The department also has a contract with the Children's Review Program (CRP), who helps find placements for kids under state's care and maintains a data base with the child's name and placement. CRP can pull data on kids in a particular county/zip code which is beneficial in the event of a disaster in a particular area of the state.
- The department has nine service regions. Each region maintains an emergency action plan identifying points of contact within the service region whose addresses vary by county. In the event a disaster happens in one county, another point of contact in another county of the region is identified and has the authority to make decisions related to staff and client services.

The department engages with several diverse community-based agencies and other non-profit organizations. As key stakeholders, their collaboration with the department is essential in ensuring that each disaster response is culturally responsive.

Responding to New Child Welfare Cases in Areas Affected by a Disaster

The department maintains offices in each of Kentucky's 120 counties. In addition to the local office support, the department maintains the Central Intake Branch and a statewide child abuse hotline for the reporting of child maltreatment 24/7. These options for the reporting of child maltreatment offer the department flexibility in routing new child maltreatment reports by making a request through the Commonwealth Service Desk. Community partnerships, particularly law enforcement, ensure that new reports, information, and families or individuals in need are routed properly to the department during disasters or emergencies. The department will also migrate to a new statewide phone system for centralized intake within the next year. The phone system will have the capability to automatically re-routing calls when a particular area of the state is down or cannot receive calls. Calls will be re-routed to the closest zip code allowing caseworkers from other areas to receive and respond to reports of abuse/neglect.

Prior to disaster situations, department staff undergo specialized training aimed at employing an equity lens, drawing from lived experiences and past traumas, to better comprehend the unique cultural, physical, and emotional requirements of children. Continual evaluation of staff needs, in responding to such crises, is imperative. This ongoing assessment encompasses a spectrum of considerations, including cultural sensitivities, religious beliefs, and both physical and mental health concerns, all aimed at mitigating the risk of secondary trauma.

Communication with Caseworkers Displaced Because of a Disaster

The department has 153 local offices. Four are state owned and 149 have private leases. Each office has developed a contingency plan, inclusive of an alternative office location and staff contact information, in the event the office or its staff is adversely impacted by a disaster or an emergency. If business operations are limited by failed utility services, paper processes can be implemented, including eligibility and enrollment function's use of paper applications. As made evident in recent storms and flooding, staff typically utilize mobile technology, (e.g., laptops, cell phones, tablets) to maintain communications and continue service provision regardless of office access or temporary relocation. In case of a natural disaster, (e.g. tornado, fire, flood) the [KRS 56.805\(3\)](#) gives guidance for attaining a temporary office location. Once an emergency or disaster is declared, the department works with the Finance & Administration Cabinet's Property Management Branch to obtain a temporary office.

In January 2024, the Commonwealth of Kentucky implemented the use of an emergency notification system, Omnilert. This system allows for simultaneous emergency notifications to employees, based on work and home county, using:

- mobile device text messaging (SMS),
- email, and
- pop-up desktop workstation alerts.

Emergency notifications may include fire, tornado, bomb threats, active shooter events, and emergency/inclement weather closures. This messaging system enhances but does not replace the agency's current protocols, and will be used in conjunction with existing audiovisual systems, (i.e., wall mounted red boxes with strobe lights and intercom systems) installed within Executive Branch buildings.

All state employees have been automatically enrolled in this plan. Outside agencies such as local and state law enforcement and emergency management staff, also have access to this system.

Preservation of Essential Program Records

The department has developed a disaster recovery plan for the state's Comprehensive Child Welfare Information System (CCWIS), known in Kentucky as The Worker's Information SysTem (TWIST), which is tested regularly. The department maintains files in accordance with federal and state laws governing client confidentiality. Kentucky has implemented an electronic case filing process. However, should a fire and/or water damage impact any hardcopy records, the department will utilize record recovery resources, including those that can be purchased privately and those available through the Kentucky Department for Libraries and Archives. The Asset Management Branch will be consulted, as needed. They will assess the situation, contact State Risk Insurance, and make a claim. State Risk Insurance will contact a vendor to reclaim hard files.

Coordinating Services and Sharing Information With Other States

The department has maintained an understanding of the comprehensive disaster and emergency framework, developed current areas of focus, and provided input on the direction of initiatives through its strong partnerships and collaborations. The department provides representation and necessary contacts for statewide disaster/emergency preparedness groups and specialists, (e.g., Kentucky Community Crisis Response Board, Kentucky Health and Medical Preparedness Advisory Committee, Kentucky Division of Emergency Management, Emergency Management Specialist for the Administration for Children and Families (ACF)-Region IV, and Administrative Office of the Courts).

The department's efforts in serving specific vulnerable populations, is tracked through several systems such as TWIST and Worker Portal, with the specific intent of ensuring equitable distribution of resources. Advancement of equity in disaster response is at the forefront of each strategic planning session, in several agencies within the department. All data regarding equity is collected with the intent for information and data sharing with other state and federal agencies.