

 VERMONT DEPARTMENT FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES Family Services Policy Manual		<h1>141</h1>
DRAFT POLICY – OUT FOR COMMENT		
Chapter:	Special Casework Issues	
Subject:	Emergency Staffing of a Child or Youth in DCF Custody Without a Placement	Page 1 of 11
Approved:	Aryka Radke, Deputy Commissioner	Effective: DRAFT

Purpose

To define the responsibilities of staff to ensure the bottom line business needs of the Family Services Division are met, which includes the care and supervision of children and youth in DCF custody.

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Related Policies

- Family Services [Policy 91](#): Kinship Care & Collaboration with Relatives
- Family Services [Policy 121](#): Notification of Changes for Children and Youth in DCF Custody
- Family Services [Policy 140](#): Standby and Call-In
- Family Services [Policy 150](#): Transportation of Children and Youth in DCF Custody
- Family Services [Policy 154](#): Children and Youth in DCF Custody Requiring Mental Health Screening, Mental Health Placement, or Psychiatric Hospitalization
- Family Services [Policy 250](#): Reporting and Responding to Staff Safety Threats
- Family Services [Policy 251](#): Staff Safety in Homes and the Community

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Related Protocols & Guidance Documents

[High End Staffing Resources SharePoint Page](#)

[HESOC Staffing Checklist](#)

[Duties & Responsibilities for Staffings](#)

[Summary of High End Staffing During Business Hours](#)

[Summary of High End Staffing After Hours](#)

[High-End Placement Meetings During Regular Business Hours Protocol](#)

[Staffing After Hours Protocol](#)

[Secure Sheriff Transport Request Protocol](#)

[Staff Safety Manager or Designee Checklist for High End Placement Meetings](#)

[Safety Tips for Transporting Children and Youth Checklist](#)

[Safety Tips for Staffing Children and Youth Checklist](#)

Introduction

All children and youth in DCF custody deserve access to safe, stable placements within their communities that meet their individual needs and support their permanency goals. Division leadership, staff, caregivers, programs, court partners, community partners, and advocates work tirelessly toward this effort every day of the year. Yet, despite this enduring commitment, some children and youth experience temporary emergency staffing until a licensed, appropriate placement can be identified. The provision of time-limited emergency staffings reflect extraordinary measures taken to ensure the continuity of operations and meeting the division’s mission.

This policy describes actions taken as a last resort. It is the exception to best practice, existing policies regarding foster care placements, and the typical operation of the division. Utilization of emergency staffing reflects a state of emergency where all other options have been considered. Emergency staffings are not a substitute for licensed placements. During emergency staffings, the focus and priority are meeting the youth’s basic needs (safety, supervision, shelter, food, water, clothing, sleep). Emergency staffings are generally not able to offer services, treatment, education, or peer and community engagement like a typical foster care placement would provide.

Definitions

Alternative or Alternate Staffing Site: A non-licensed/regulated substitute living space utilized by the division to temporarily house children and youth facing a placement crisis. The space is often leased from a contracted provider and is designed to care for children and youth short-term (24–72-hour basis). The space can be expected to provide the children and youth with their own bedroom, a kitchen equipped for basic

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meal preparation, bathing facilities, and a shared leisure area. These spaces vary in size, security features, and location across the state and are chosen in a way that best supports the child or youth’s individual needs and strengths.

Emergency Staffing: Temporary care ending as soon as possible and not to exceed 15 days of custodial care of children or youth by state employees and/or contractors in an alternative staffing site, unless approved by the Deputy Commissioner, due to the acute high end need of the child or youth and the lack of a safe, licensed placement setting.

High End System of Care (HESOC): A broad term which generally refers to the levels of care that serve youth where there is imminent concern for the safety of the youth, the community they belong to, or the professionals who support them. This is typically related to a history of trauma, high acuity mental health, significant behavioral concerns, significant intellectual or developmental challenges, or significant law abidance matters.

High End: A term often used to describe factors that are considered high-risk which could lead to potential staff safety, transportation, and/or placement concerns. The term “high end” is often used to describe a child or youth’s presentation or behaviors and the associated meeting or consultation to plan for safety. Examples include (but are not limited to):

- Children/youth who are exhibiting acute, generalized violence against people across settings or have committed an egregious violent offense involving the use of a weapon or serious physical harm/injury;
- Children/youth with sexually harmful behaviors towards others or a history of sexually reactive behaviors;
- Children/youth who are known or suspected victims of human trafficking;
- Children/youth appropriate for non-voluntary programs, or awaiting placement at or coming from a disrupted high-end placement;
- Children/youth with significant runaway behaviors;
- Children/youth with acute, significant substance use concerns; and/or
- Children/youth with significant mental health concerns or acute self-harm, self-injury, or suicidal ideation.

Please note: This policy recognizes that emergency staffings for children and youth without placements primarily occur for young people experiencing factors described above. This policy also acknowledges emergency staffing could occur for any child in DCF custody without a placement. No youth aged 19 or older will be staffed in any of the alternative settings across the state.

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Policy

This policy acknowledges the differences between children without placements who require staffings (guided by this policy), youth requiring mental health screening, mental health placement, or psychiatric hospitalization (addressed in [Policy 154](#)), and young people who are in hospital settings for medical treatment (addressed in [Policy 77](#)). If a youth in DCF custody is admitted in a hospital setting, the treating emergency department (ED) physician oversees the care of the youth, and division staff or our contracted partners are considered visitors even if our presence is required by the hospital, which is different than the context of this policy.

Required Consultation, Documentation, & Planning

All placement options (parents, kin, natural supports, emergency placement lists, and out-of-district homes) should be explored and exhausted prior to requesting a high end placement meeting.

Exploration of Kinship Placements

Continual efforts to explore kin and natural supports for the young person are required. Family Services [Policy 91](#) requires ongoing searches and identification of relatives throughout an ongoing case. Particularly relevant to this policy, [Policy 91](#) states:

When the child is going to experience a placement change, staff will review all relatives that have been identified, fictive kin and other connections, and when they were last contacted by the division. Additional considerations include:

- Could there be more relatives that have not yet been identified?
- Are there additional family finding efforts that could be done?
- Who in the family could provide more information?
- Who in the family has indicated they could not be a placement resource previously?

Relatives who previously indicated they could not be a placement resource should be contacted again to inform them of the impending placement change. Staff should inquire about whether their circumstances have changed to an extent that they might consider being a placement resource or offer support to the child as they transition to a new placement.

Emergency Foster Home Placement Lists & Out-of-District Resources

In situations where a young person may not have a placement, district staff should begin contacting all foster parents on the statewide emergency foster home list by 2:00 PM

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during business hours. This list is accessible to division staff in a shared folder (Y:\FSD\FSD All Share\Emergency Foster Parent List). Concurrently, staff are encouraged to contact resource coordinators from other districts in exploration of placement resources.

Support from the Specialized Services Unit (SSU)

Division staff shall inquire with the Specialized Services Unit (SSU) about crisis stabilization and residential level placement options prior to requesting a high-end placement meeting. It is acknowledged that the necessity of triaging crisis stabilization placement beds is often what may lead to a high-end placement disruption for youth.

High-End Placement Meetings

In situations where placement disruptions are imminent or placements have yet to be confirmed for a “high end” youth, division staff utilize consultation described in the [High-End Placement Meetings During Regular Business Hours Protocol](#). During this meeting/consultation, consideration is given to creative solutions for placement options. **Effort is made to avoid the need for emergency staffing, which is the last resort. No emergency staffing can occur without a high-end placement meeting.**

Division staff may request high end placement meetings by contacting the designated alias ([AHS - DCF FSD High End Meeting](#)) and scheduling a Teams meeting. An SBAR (*Situation, Background, Assessment, and Recommendations*) using the [High End Placement Meeting SBAR Template](#) is required for the consultation/meeting. While completing the SBAR, district staff should begin planning for a proposed staffing schedule, transportation needs, an approved phone call list, medical instructions and/or plans for medication refill(s), whether engagement in education or tutoring can occur during the staffing, and instructions related to outings and approved activities for the young person.

All steps outlined above (exploration of kin, emergency foster home list, support from the SSU) should be taken prior to scheduling a high-end placement meeting; though it is recognized that concurrent planning related to the imminent placement disruption will occur. The final decision for an emergency staffing to occur requires the approval of the assigned policy and operations manager or designee after all other placement options have been considered and the steps above have occurred. Protocols and checklists guiding this work are posted on [FSD's High End Staffing Resources SharePoint Page](#).

Even while an emergency staffing is occurring, ongoing concerted efforts must be made to obtain a more appropriate placement.

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Composition of Emergency Staffing Team

The staffing ratio and composition of the emergency staffing team is determined at the high-end placement meeting based on the child's risk factors, recent behaviors, individualized needs, and staff safety and security considerations. If law enforcement presence is indicated, the Staff Safety Team or designee will be responsible for the coordination.

If the division has any contractual resources or the Child and Adolescent Transitional Staffing Team (CATS) is available to assist with meeting the staffing need, those resources will be accessed and prioritized as appropriate to the unique situation. After this consideration, if more staffing is needed, the following order of steps are taken when considering the individuals who will support the staffing (being onsite at an alternative location, supervising the young person, ensuring basic needs and any special needs are met):

1. Organization and planning first occurs locally within the district office and team holding knowledge about the young person, their family, and any natural supports.
 - a. Someone from the district office team will have conversations with the youth about what is happening, what to expect, and answer any questions they may have.
 - b. When possible, it is encouraged that someone from the local team supports the process of coordinating the transport and identifying volunteers for the first shift, which ideally consists of individuals who are known to the youth (FSD staff, parents, other relatives, foster parents, respite providers, community providers, or natural supports).
2. In most instances, the division's designated HESOC staffing coordinator or their supervisor will be the person communicating to FSD about the staffing need. If the HESOC staffing coordinator is unavailable, a designee will be assigned during the high end placement meeting (often a district director or supervisor). An email to FSD will be sent describing the need for emergency staffing, seeking volunteers, and indicating an SBAR can be shared with individuals who are considering volunteering. Volunteers are filled into the schedule and slots in the order they respond.
 - a. In some instances, new staff who are still on original probation may possess the skills and interest in the high end staffing duty, and may do so with district director or designee level approval.
3. If the schedule cannot be filled by volunteers, the division will turn to employees on standby as articulated in [Policy 140](#) as required by the [Non-Management Contract](#) of the [Collective Bargaining Agreements](#). Utilizing workers on standby

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for emergency staffings may limit the division in responding to other child safety emergencies and may consist of utilizing family services workers on standby from neighboring districts.

- a. If a staffing occurs immediately following business hours, district directors are responsible for initiating standby.
 - b. At the discretion of the director of operations, FSD may increase the volume of staff on standby to address the business need of the division.
4. If standby resources are limited by other emergencies and division needs, the division will then turn to the least senior, qualified (employees who have satisfactorily completed the probationary period) staff within the division to respond.
- a. District directors are tasked to maintain a list of all employees within their district based on seniority and years of service. In the event of needing to call upon staff to respond to emergency staffings, district directors shall begin with the least senior, qualified staff.
 - b. District directors will go down this list inquiring about employees' availability to assist with the emergency staffing.
 - i. Employees are not obligated to answer their work phones outside of business hours unless on standby, so this coordination will need to occur during regular business hours.
 - ii. Employees may cite reasonable explanations as to why they are unavailable or cannot assist with the staffing. This should be documented, and the district director will move down the list.
 - iii. District directors may use their discretion as to why an employee may not be well suited for a staffing assignment based on other factors, professionally and personally. Again, this will be documented, and they will move down the list.

Searches

Upon arrival at the alternative staffing site, division staff shall assess the need to perform a search of the child or youth's person and/or belongings and personal property. Staff shall consider if there is a reasonable suspicion that the child or youth possesses items that may:

- endanger the health and well-being of the child or youth,
- endanger the safety and well-being of supervising staff, or
- disrupt the ability of staff to manage the safe care of the child or youth.

Items of concern include weapons or weaponizable objects, prescription and non-prescription medications, ingestible and illegal substances, electronic devices, and inappropriate media.

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An assessment of reasonable suspicion should include:

- an understanding of the youth’s history related to these types of items if available,
- the young person’s present emotional and behavioral state,
- the present circumstances or events leading to the need for staffing, and
- the report of prior searches given by the party delivering the child or youth to the alternative staffing site.

If staff determine there is a reasonable suspicion, they may perform an inventory search. This will include a thorough, tangible search of the child or youth's personal belongings and clothing not currently worn. The child or youth should be asked to remove outdoor clothing and shoes for the search. Staff may perform a visual search of the child or youth’s worn clothing and ask the child to assist by turning out pockets, etc. Staff shall not perform “pat searches,” “strip searches,” or otherwise make contact with the child or youth’s body. Searches may be performed at any time during placement at the alternative staffing site if there is cause for reasonable suspicion.

Any search will be conducted in the presence of the child or youth and by the same gender staff as the child or youth unless contraindicated and documented with explanation. It is strongly recommended that two staff be present. Staff interactions during this process shall be trauma informed and inclusive of the child or youth. Transparent explanation of the purpose of the search and solicited participation of the youth are advised.

When possible, staff may request the assistance of law enforcement officers in necessary searches. Initially this will include determining if a law enforcement official has already searched the child or youth’s person and/or belongings, the results, and if the child or youth had access to other items since the search and their arrival to the alternative staffing site. If secure transportation is used and this has not occurred, and the officer is amenable, staff may request search by that officer in accordance with the officer's discretion and allowed procedures.

Staff shall document search decision making, process, and results.

Limits on the Duration of Emergency Staffings

Emergency staffings at alternative staffing sites should not exceed 15 days, unless under extreme circumstances and only with the approval of the Deputy Commissioner. This coincides with the 33 V.S.A. § 4905 limitation on children in foster care being placed for more than 15 consecutive days in non-licensed or approved placements. This resource is designed as a last resort to ensure the safety of children and youth in an exceptional

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placement crisis. Its use should end as soon as possible. To this end, staff utilizing this resource shall utilize daily huddles between district staff, assigned policy and operations managers, and the HESOC staffing coordinator; SBAR analyses prior to each meeting; and a weekly high end placement meeting to explore and document progress toward resolution.

Further, Deputy Commissioner or designee approval is required at day #4 and day #12 to extend utilization of the emergency staffing. The division’s designated HESOC staffing coordinator will provide support to district staff to flag these hard stops for consultation and approval. Rationale for extension with supporting SBAR shall be provided to the Deputy Commissioner by noon of each deadline day.

Incidents During Emergency Staffings

Following any incident at an alternative staffing site, a high end placement meeting will occur for the purposes of debriefing, supporting involved individuals, and planning for the youth. During this meeting, adjustments may be made to the plan, supports, or staffing ratio. Approval from leadership is needed to continue the staffing.

Incidents reported and the process of reporting shall conform to Family Services [Policy 250](#) (Reporting and Responding to Staff Safety Threats) and [Policy 264](#) (Responding to Incidents).

SSMIS Placement Coding Instructions & Notification of CHINS Parties

See the [SSMIS Database Manual](#) for instruction about data entry. Many district offices rely on admin staff for SSMIS data entry and have local protocols in place to support timely data entry. All out-of-home placements for children, even “free” placements, must be entered in SSMIS.

Further, see Appendix I for SSMIS payee/placement ID #s for alternate staffing locations. There are 10 police departments currently listed in SSMIS. If a police department or alternate site used for temporary staffing is not listed in SSMIS, staff must contact the division’s QA team at AHS.DCFSDQA@vermont.gov, who will coordinate with the Business Office Foster Care Unit to have coding created. The QA team will track and manage this list, and keep the [SSMIS Database Manual](#) up-to-date as needed.

Family Services [Policy 121](#) (Notification of Changes for Children and Youth in DCF Custody) is applicable to emergency staffing of a child or youth. The child’s parents and parties to the CHINS proceeding must be informed every time the child’s placement changes, including emergency staffings.

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Statewide Travel and Accommodations Related to Emergency Staffings

The division supports the safety and wellness of the workforce; therefore, it is strongly recommended that staff not work more than 16 consecutive hours.

With Deputy Commissioner or designee approval, a hotel room may be requested for division employees to accommodate staffings involving significant distance or long hours. After hours and on weekends, a supervisor within Centralized Intake and Emergency Services (CIES) will support staff with making the reservation. During business hours, designated central office staff (Amanda.Guyette@vermont.gov) will manage all reservations and correspondence with hotels.

Division employees may sleep during staffings at alternative sites when there are at least two staff present and the supervised child or youth is also asleep. Only one person is permitted to sleep at a time as the other person must be awake and available to support the child upon waking up. This general rule applies to division staff, contracted support, and other volunteers providing supervision at emergency staffings.

Appendix I: SSMIS High End System of Care (HESOC) Placement Coding Instructions for Alternate Staffing Sites

This appendix, [SSMIS High End System of Care \(HESOC\) Placement Coding Instructions for Alternate Staffing Sites](#), can also be accessed as a standalone document on [FSD's SharePoint Site](#).

Please note: Just because something is listed below does not mean it is an ongoing resource accessible to the division currently.

Payee ID	HESOC Substitute Care Provider (as displayed in SSMIS)
35	Barre City Police Department
59	Burlington Police Department
121	Journey to Recovery Community Cener
416	St Albans Police Department
690	Rest Stop (Windham County Sher)
720	Chelsea House
721	Lamoille County Yellow House
883	South Burlington Police Dept
884	Newport Police Department
885	Derby Police Department (VSP)
886	Essex Police Department
887	Bennington Police Department
888	Brattleboro Police Department
890	Winooski Police Department
30223346	Horizon – Seall Inc