

ALAMEDA COUNTY SOCIAL SERVICES AGENCY		Agency Procedure No.	REV.
CROSS REFERENCES: <b>None</b>	CONTACT REFERENCES: <u>NAME</u> <u>EXT.</u> SYLVIA SOUBLET 267-9434 Public Affairs Director	APPROVED BY:  Lori A. Cox, Agency Director	EFFECTIVE DATE: April 4, 2014  DISTRIBUTION CODE: All Staff
SUPERSEDES: <b>None</b>			

TITLE:

## MEDIA/COMMUNICATIONS POLICY

**Response to  
Inquiries for  
General  
Information**

General information, statistics, and social data not identifiable with any particular family or individual are subject to no restrictions.

Information that does not violate any confidentiality laws, regulations or departmental policies is considered public information. The SSA will make every effort to be responsive to inquiries for general information. All such inquires should be directed to the appropriate department or the Director of Public Affairs.

Examples of general information inquiries include:

- Data requests (refer to confidentiality section for exceptions)
- Program information
- Procedural information

**Public Records  
Requests**

The California Public Records Act is designed to give the public access to information in possession of public agencies. A request to review and/or obtain copies of public records may be made verbally or in writing, including electronic submissions.

A person need not give notice to inspect public records at the SSA's offices during normal working hours. If, however, the records requested are not readily accessible or if portions of the records must be redacted in order to protect exempt material, the SSA must be given a reasonable period of time to perform these functions.

When a copy of a public record is requested, the SSA has 10 business days to respond to a request for public records. Where necessary, because either the records or the personnel that need to be consulted regarding the records are not readily available, the SSA may, upon written notice to the requesters, give itself an additional 14 days to respond.

Departments receiving Public Records Act requests directly through US mail or electronically should forward the original request to the Agency Director and a copy to the Office of Public Affairs. The Director's Office will forward a copy of the request to County Counsel. Unless otherwise informed by the Agency Director, it is the responsibility of the Department of whom the information is requested to assemble all appropriate documents pertaining to the request. Designated department staff should consult with County Counsel prior to assembling and providing the requested documents.

**On-site Media  
Photography**

The media has a legal right to observe, photograph and record events and people in public places with prior approval from the Agency's Office of Public Affairs. Prior to allowing the

<p><b>Press Releases</b></p>	<p>media to record in any SSA office, all clients present shall be notified. It is the client's option to determine if they wish to be photographed or recorded. All appropriate client media releases must be signed prior to a photography session, on-camera or taped interview.</p> <p>Development and distribution of Agency and Department Press Releases, Media Advisories and Media Alerts are the responsibility of the Office Of Public Affairs. Department staff should not distribute media notifications. The Office of Public Affairs shall forward all such documents to the County's Public Information Office for review by the County Administrator and each member of the Alameda County Board of Supervisors. The SSA is not authorized to distribute such documents to the media without prior approval from the County Administrator and Board of Supervisors.</p>
<p><b>Confidentiality</b></p>	<p><u>Confidential Information: W&amp;IC 10850</u> (See Child Welfare section below for exceptions)  In order to protect applicants and recipients from identification, exploitation, or embarrassment, there are specific limitations on the release of information pertaining to an applicant and/or recipient of public assistance.</p> <p>This procedure applies to all records, lists, papers, files, and communications pertaining to applicants and/or recipients of public assistance.</p> <p><u>Client Consent:</u>  With client consent, confidential information may be released for specific purposes as long as it is within the terms of the client's release and consent. The following authorizations must be provided prior to the release of any confidential client information:</p> <p><b><i>Written Authorization:</i></b>  A written authorization shall be dated and shall expire one year from the date on which it is given, unless it is expressly limited to a shorter period, or revoked.</p> <p><b><i>Verbal Authorization:</i></b>  Verbal authorizations may be accepted in lieu of written authorization where the circumstances ensure that the applicant/ recipient has adequately identified him/herself to the County. A verbal authorization is temporary and should be followed up by a written authorization, which is to be placed in the case file.</p> <p><b><i>Information Exchange:</i></b>  County Counsel should be consulted on all matters that involve the exchange or sharing of any information with other entities, County departments or community agencies.</p> <p><u>Child Welfare W&amp;I 10850.4</u>  If there is a reasonable suspicion that a child fatality was caused by abuse or neglect the SSA shall release the following confidential case information to the inquiring party within 5 business days of learning that a fatality has occurred (upon request):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Age and gender of the child;</li> <li>• The date of the death;</li> <li>• Whether the child was in foster care or the home of parent or guardian; and</li> <li>• Whether an investigation is being conducted by law enforcement or Social Services.</li> </ul>

Upon completion of the child abuse or neglect investigation, the following documents shall be released by the SSA, including all of the documents previously identified. In cases where the child's death occurred while the child was living with the parent or guardian, the SSA should disclose all previous referrals of abuse or neglect while the child was living with the parent or guardian including the following:

- Emergency Response Referral Information Form (with reporting party information redacted);
- Emergency Response Notice of Referral Disposition Form; related to the abuse or neglect that caused the death of the child;
- Any cross reports completed by the SSA to law enforcement relating to the deceased child;
- All risk and safety assessments completed by SSA relating to the deceased child;
- All healthcare records of the deceased child, excluding mental health records, that are related to the child's death and previous injuries; and
- Copies of public reports about the person against whom the child abuse or neglect was substantiated.

In cases where the child death occurred while in foster care, in addition to all of the records previously listed, the SSA must provide the following records to the inquiring party (upon request):

- Status of foster parent license, if the information is in the case file.
- All reported licensing violations, including notices of action.
- All records related to training completed by the foster parent.

Documents pertaining to the fatality of a child in foster care shall be released within 10 days of the request or disposition of the investigation, whichever is later.

Any exceptions to this policy shall be made by the Agency Director or by the Office of Public Affairs with the authority of the Agency Director.

## Social Services Agency – Media Inquiry Record

*Please complete and return to the Office of Public Affairs.*

If a reporter or photographer calls or comes into your office, please notify your Manager and contact the Office of Public Affairs immediately at (510) 271-9100.

DATE \_\_\_\_\_ TIME \_\_\_\_\_

NAME \_\_\_\_\_ WORKER CODE \_\_\_\_\_  
(CALL TAKEN BY)

PHONE # \_\_\_\_\_ FAX# \_\_\_\_\_

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CALLER NAME \_\_\_\_\_ TITLE \_\_\_\_\_

ORGANIZATION/STATION \_\_\_\_\_

PHONE # \_\_\_\_\_ FAX # \_\_\_\_\_

E-MAIL \_\_\_\_\_

INFORMATION REQUESTED \_\_\_\_\_

ARRANGEMENTS \_\_\_\_\_

PERSON INTERVIEWED/REFERRED TO \_\_\_\_\_

DEADLINE \_\_\_\_\_

FOLLOW-UP \_\_\_\_\_

RETURN TO SSA DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS, A002  
OR FAX TO (510) 271-9120